

*An Economic Commentary
on the Bible*



Gary North

*An Economic Commentary
on the Bible*

A multi-volume exposition

GARY NORTH

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SOVEREIGNTY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

VOLUME 1

Other Books by Gary North

- An Economic Commentary on the Bible, 31 vols. (1982–2012)
Marx's Religion of Revolution (1968, 1989)
An Introduction to Christian Economics (1973)
Puritan Economic Experiments (1974, 1988)
Successful Investing in an Age of Envy (1981)
Government by Emergency (1983)
Backward, Christian Soldiers? (1984)
75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won't Ask (1984)
Coined Freedom (1984)
Unconditional Surrender (1980, 2010)
Conspiracy: A Biblical View (1986)
Honest Money (1986)
Unholy Spirits (1986, 1994)
Dominion and Common Grace (1987)
Inherit the Earth (1987)
Liberating Planet Earth (1987)
Healer of the Nations (1987)
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Christian Reconstruction (1991), with Gary DeMar
The Coase Theorem (1992)
Salvation Through Inflation (1993)
Rapture Fever (1993)
Tithing and the Church (1994)
Crossed Fingers (1996)
The Covenantal Tithe (2011)

SOVEREIGNTY AND DOMINION

An Economic Commentary on Genesis

Volume 1

Gary North

Sovereignty and Dominion

An Economic Commentary on Genesis

Formerly: *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*

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This book is dedicated to
Ken Ham
who is extending the work of
Henry Morris and John Whitcomb.

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PREFACE

You hold in your hand, or see on your screen, the first volume of a ?? volume set—?? volumes, if I complete the summary volume. This set, *An Economic Commentary on the Bible*, is one long book. I would call it a fat book. Add another four volumes of appendixes. It took me 37 years to write it.

A. Fat Books and Social Change

I hold to what I call the fat book theory of social transformation. Most of the major turning points in Western history have had fat books at their center. The Bible is certainly a fat book. Augustine's *City of God* is a fat book, and by adhering to the biblical worldview, it restructured Western civilization's concept of history.¹ Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* is a fat book, and it gave the medieval West the crucial synthesis of scholastic philosophy, an intellectual tradition still defended by a handful of Roman Catholic conservatives and (implicitly, at least) by most contemporary Protestant fundamentalist philosophers. John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is a fat book, and it structured a large segment of Reformation theology.

Christians have not been the only social transformationists who have written fat books that have changed Western civilization. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a fat book, and you just about have to take his *Critique of Practical Reason* as its companion volume. This set restructured modern philosophy, and in the twentieth century, theology (by way of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner).² William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* is a four-volume fat book, yet it was read by just about every lawyer in the British colonies after 1765. *The Federalist* is fat. (Of course, it had its greatest initial effect as a series of newspaper articles, 1787–88, during the debate over

1. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), ch. 9.

2. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1947).

the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, which gives us some comparative indication of the recent effects of humanist public school programs to achieve universal literacy in the United States. Try to get the average American newspaper reader to read, digest, and comment on *The Federalist*.)

A decade after Blackstone's *Commentaries* came Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, a fat book. Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* is a fat book; if you include the two posthumous volumes, it is a very fat book. If you include his posthumous multi-volume *Theories of Surplus Value*, it is positively obese.

All these fat books have sat on library shelves and have intimidated people, generation after generation. A handful of influential people actually went to the effort to read them, subsequently believed them, and then wrote more books in terms of them.

B. Exceptions to the Rule

There are exceptions to my fat book theory. Machiavelli's *The Prince* is a thin book. So is his *Discourses*. John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* is a thin book. Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* is thin. So is Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* is a short book. So is F. A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*.

Then there are medium-sized books. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* is a medium-size book, and it launched the long tradition of social contract political theory. The first edition of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was a medium-sized book. John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* is a medium-sized book.

Thin and medium-sized books have their rightful place in initiating social transformations. But to maintain such a transformation, there had better be some fat back-up books on the shelf. "What should we do now?" the initially victorious revolutionaries inescapably ask. Fat books provide answers. More than this: *if fat books with believable answers are not already on the shelf, there will not be a successful social transformation*. Men will not draw others into their revolutionary cause unless the potential recruits become persuaded that the promoters have answers to specific real-world problems—problems that contemporary society is not dealing with successfully.

Producing a true revolution requires the support of many kinds of printed materials, from pamphlets to thick, technical volumes. These

days, it also requires online videos. Those activists who are in the midst of a revolution seldom have time to think through every aspect of the changes which their slogans and actions are producing, but the revolution's leaders need to know that the basic theoretical work has been done, that workable, principled, and consistent answers to specific historical problems are in reserve, and that after the dust settles, the heirs of the revolution will be able steadily to restructure society in ways that are consistent with the ideals of the revolution. This faith has been misplaced on many past occasions, the obvious example being Communists' faith in Marx's *Das Kapital*. Its economic theory was wrong. It could not be applied successfully in any Communist nation without destroying the productivity of that economy. But it was necessary that at least the first volume of *Das Kapital* was on the shelves of the revolutionaries (the three subsequent volumes were not published in the lifetime of either Marx or Engels). Its very presence gave confidence to those who were launching the Communist revolution. The book was fat and unreadable, but that was an advantage: men's faith in Marx's solutions was not shattered by ever having read it.

The wise social strategist writes fat books and thin books and books in between, not knowing which will work. Augustine and Aquinas wrote all sorts of books. So did Kant, whose brief *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* first proposed the idea of galactic evolution. Darwin kept fattening up *Origin*, and then added *The Descent of Man*. Marx co-authored the *Communist Manifesto*, plus endless journalism pieces, some of which constituted books. He also was in partnership with Frederick Engels, who was smart enough to extract and separately publish *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* from the still-born *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*. Lenin wrote materials of all sizes, decade after decade. I, too, have written my share of thin and medium-sized books. (Well, mostly the latter.)

C. Why So Fat?

This series is fat, but not unreadable. The volumes may reside in many hard disk drives for many years, but those who use them will be able to find specific answers to real-world economic problems—answers that are self-consciously structured in terms of the revealed word of God. If my answers were not detailed, if my logic were not spelled out, and if my sources were not cited in full, then this book could no more serve as a reliable guide to economic reconstruction

than some fat polemical tract published by the Maryknoll Order or written by a sociology professor at Wheaton College.

This is a reference work, not a catechism. It tries to accomplish a great deal: exegete verses, describe how they applied in the Old Testament era, explain why some should be applied today, and offer examples of how they might be applied in practice. It is large because I want it to serve for many years (preferably centuries) as one of the key reference works on specific applications of biblical law in economics and jurisprudence.

In some ways, I wish I could imitate Moses Maimonides, the late-twelfth-century Jewish scholar. In defending the style of the enormous output of his life's literary work (he was also a full-time physician to the Sultan in Cairo), including his monumental 14-volume *Code* (the *Mishneh Torah*), he wrote: "All our works are concise and to the point. We have no intention of writing bulky books nor of spending time on that which is useless. Hence when we explain anything, we explain only what is necessary and only in the measure required to understand it, and whatever we write is in summary form. . . . Were I able to condense the entire Talmud into a single chapter, I would not do so in two."³ The problem with his concise style is this: when we go to his *Code* (which is not a detailed commentary, despite its huge length), time and again we cannot follow his reasoning. It is not simply because we are gentiles living many centuries later; learned contemporary rabbinical correspondents expressed this same dissatisfaction to him.⁴ It takes considerable explanation, plus running debates in footnotes, to clarify scholarly points. Better to write a long book that can be digested in a series of bite-sized portions than a highly condensed book that takes enormous intellectual energy and vast background knowledge in order to decipher.

I had to make the books long in order to make them coherent. Highly condensed writing is too difficult to read, too easy to skip over key parts in some argument, and therefore too easy to misinterpret.

3. Cited in Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 45.

4. See, for example, his lengthy reply to Rabbi Phinehas ben Meshullam, judge in Alexandria: *ibid.*, pp. 30–37. Twersky cited Rabbi Joseph Karo, the sixteenth-century scholar and Kabbalist: "The generations that followed him could not understand his works well . . . for the source of every decision is concealed from them. . . ." Twersky then remarked: "To this day [1980], the quest for *Mishneh Torah* sources in unknown Midrashim and Geonic responsa, variant readings, etc., continues unabated as one of the main forms of Rabbinic scholarship." *Ibid.*, p. 106.

On the other hand, long, involved arguments are difficult to follow and remember. Therefore, I have broken up long arguments into manageable portions by adopting a liberal use of subsections and sub-subsections, plus summaries at the end of each chapter. I strongly recommend that whenever you see a bold-faced subhead, you should pay attention to it; the same goes for the italicized sub-subheads. They are there to help you get through each argument, as well as for convenient reviewing.

Conclusion

This set is supposed to be consumed in bite-sized portions; I have therefore done my best to make every mouthful both tasty and nourishing. To keep readers in their chairs and turning the pages of this book, I have done my best to put useful information on every page. There is no fluff. The extended footnotes are also filled with all sorts of choice tidbits that would otherwise be quite difficult to locate. I also use footnotes for running debates that do not belong in the main text, or to settle scores with my critics. Footnotes can be fun!

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BIBLE

... of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh (Eccl. 12:12b).

The same thing is true of making many online videos.—Gary North

This is the first volume in a multi-volume economic commentary on the Bible. The Bible is filled with material that relates to economics in the broad sense, meaning political economy, as it was called in the nineteenth century, or moral philosophy, as it was called in the eighteenth century. My intention for this commentary is to lay the intellectual foundations for a comprehensive restructuring of all of social sciences in terms of biblical revelation.

I wrote this commentary as the exegetically mandatory preliminary exercise in my attempt to answer this question: **Is there a uniquely biblical economic theory?** I knew that until I did this exegetical groundwork, I could not legitimately expect to be able to answer this question accurately. I wrote it mainly for myself. I needed to know.

There are ?? other volumes in this series. Why should you read this one, let alone the other ???

If you are a pastor in search of material to write a sermon on a passage in this commentary, you have come to the right place. Commentaries survive longer than other Christian books. There is always a pastor in need of sermon material. Pastors will read individual chapters.

What if you are not a pastor? Why should you read one or more volumes? Do you want to know correct answers for one or more of the following questions?

What does the Bible teach about economics?

Why is biblical economic theory necessary to understand the world correctly?

Why is biblical economic theory necessary to understand the Bible correctly?

Why does the Bible spend so much space on economics?

How should a Christian society operate economically?

What does God want you to do with your wealth?

Why do you think you do not have much wealth when you really do?

What do you owe God?

What can you legitimately expect from God?

How should you decide what to do with your life?

Is learning answers to one or more of these questions worth the time and money it will take you to read ?? volumes? That depends on your priorities.

If your answer is “no,” what about the time it will take you to view several hundred online 3-minute videos: conclusions only? In other words, you will take my word for all of it—no proof required. No?

I suggest another compromise: view the 3-minute videos, plus an equal number of 15-minute videos. No?

What about MP3 audio files instead of videos? Fill in drive time with my commentaries.

I am doing whatever I can to make the effort pay for you. It will take a lot of work for me to produce the audio/video presentations. It has already taken a lot of work to produce the books.

A. Judicial Continuity and Discontinuity

In studying the laws of Moses, the Christian commentator needs a hermeneutic: a principle of biblical interpretation. He needs this above all: a way to determine which laws were annulled by Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension, and which were not. When I completed my four-volume commentary on Leviticus, I came to this conclusion (in the Conclusion). There were four separate categories of law in the Mosaic code.

1. Land laws (Israel)
2. Seed laws (families/tribes)
3. Priestly laws

4. Cross-boundary laws

Only the fourth category extends into the New Covenant. I have done my best to classify every economic law in terms of this four-fold system.

So, I have asked these two questions:

1. How was a law supposed to apply under the Old Testament?
2. How is it supposed to be applied under the New Testament, if at all?

I begin each exegetical chapter with this: identifying the theocentric focus of the passage. God is central. Man is not. We should begin with what God expects and why—not with what man expects and why.

To build an exegetically based alternative to my commentaries and my final presentation of Christian economics, my critics will have to do a great deal of work. I do not expect any of them to do this. They will have to suggest an alternative. As the old saying goes, “you can’t beat something with nothing.” But what is their “something” likely to be? So far, there is none.

Does this mean that I regard all previous attempts to make a case for Christian economics as incomplete? Yes. As more hopeful than exegetical? Yes. As premature? Yes. As misguided? No.

B. The Background of This Project

I became a Christian in July of 1959 at the age of 17. By the end of my freshman year in college a year later, I had decided that the academic field of economics should be studied in terms of the Bible. I was becoming aware of the fact that there was no explicitly Bible-based body of material available on the topic of Christian economics. I did not imagine then that I would have to write the intellectual foundations of this required body of material. I kept looking. By the age of 20, I knew that I would have to write it. I did not know that I would also have to raise the funds to publish it, except for what I paid for out of my own pocket. My adult life has been devoted to this task.

Almost from the day that I announced this project in the early 1970s, I have been asked the same question: “Are you saying that there is a uniquely Christian economics, different from secular economics?” My answer has been simple, “yes.” Yet my answer goes beyond even a simple “yes.” Following the presuppositional methodology of Cor-

nelius Van Til, I am saying that *there is no economics except Christian economics*. I am not simply arguing that Christian economists should develop a better approach to economics, both theoretical and practical. Rather, I am saying that Christian economists are required to work out the biblical principles of the only reliable economics there can ever be, revelational economics.

If Christians in any academic field say merely that we have a better approach, an approach that is superior to others, but nevertheless one among many, then we have misunderstood the comprehensive claims of God on our thinking. Every thought, every action, every conceivable aspect of human life must be subdued by biblical principles. *There are no neutral zones outside of God's providence and God's law-order*. There are no testing areas for God's word. There is only His truth and man's error.

This is not to say that secular economists have discovered nothing that is true. What they claim to have discovered may very well be true, but when such a conclusion is true, then the secular economists have come to that conclusion by using borrowed (stolen) premises. Whatever the economist says that is fully consistent with his methodological presupposition of intellectual neutrality, or cosmic impersonalism, or any other form of God-denying humanism, cannot possibly be true. Conversely, anything that he says that is true cannot be fully consistent with his self-proclaimed neutrality, cosmic impersonalism, or other God-denying or God-limiting presuppositions.

I have been told repeatedly that there is no such thing as a uniquely Christian economics. I have been told this by atheists with Ph.D.s in economics. I have been told this by Christians with Ph.D.s in economics. I have been told this by pietistic, emotionalistic, antinomian Christians without the foggiest notion of economics. After a while, I grew tired of being told this, so I decided that what needed to be written is a comprehensive book on Christian economics. That book had never been written. There are books, including my *Introduction to Christian Economics* (1973), that have begun to explore a few aspects of Christian economics, but there is no comprehensive treatise along the lines of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) or Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action* (1949). There are smaller books that claim to be defending Christian economics, but which actually defend free market economics or Keynesian economics by means of a few biblical quotations.

Before someone writes a comprehensive treatise on Christian eco-

nomics, he needs a systematic commentary on the Bible that deals with the Bible as a guide for economic reasoning and practice. But why bother? Because if we do not know what the Bible has to say about economics, then we are “flying blind” when we begin to construct elaborate economic theories in the name of the Bible. In 1973 I decided to devote myself to the production of an economic commentary on the Bible as a preliminary study which, I hoped, would lead to the writing of a treatise on Christian economics.

I hope that readers will begin to grasp the magnitude of the task I set for myself after they have finished my commentary on Genesis. There should be no question in anyone’s mind that the Bible has a lot to say about economics. They still may not be convinced that there is a uniquely Christian economics, but there should be no question of the large quantity of data for economics which the Bible presents to us.

I began this commentary in the spring of 1973: Genesis 1:1. It took until the latter part of 1999 for me to finish the first draft of my economic commentary on the Pentateuch: the first five books.

My first published book was *Marx’s Religion of Revolution* (1968), a critical analysis of Marx’s thought, including his economics. I understood early that the war for the minds of men in the twentieth century was primarily between Communism and Christianity, and that this war involved every area of life. It is a war no longer in progress. Communism lost—indeed, lost in the most spectacular collapse in intellectual and institutional history. I have said before that the evidence of this collapse could be seen in the discount book bins in used book stores. Books on Marx, Marxism, and Communism were sold in the early 1990s for \$1. There was no more market. When the Berlin Wall was torn down in 1989 by Germans on both sides of the wall, the handwriting was on the wall for Communism. On December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union’s leaders killed it in the collapse of the largest empire in history. Not a shot was fired. Nothing like this had ever been seen in recorded history. The bad guys lost, and lost spectacularly in full public view. It was magnificent—by far the greatest event of my lifetime.

Marx’s Religion of Revolution appeared four years before I was awarded my doctorate in 1972. My second book, *An Introduction to Christian Economics*, was published in the spring of 1973. It was a collection of essays, many of which were rewritten versions of essays that had appeared in *The Freeman* from 1967 onward. I knew it was insufficient at the time. So, at about the time that *Introduction to Christian Economics* was published, I decided to begin a detailed exegetical com-

mentary of the economic teachings of the Bible. This was my wife's suggestion. It seemed foolish to attempt to write a textbook in Christian economics, let alone a treatise along the lines of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, without first laying exegetical foundations that clearly establish exactly what the Bible says about economics. Otherwise, the project would be a form of baptized humanism, because economic theory is methodologically atheistic, and has been ever since the late seventeenth century.¹

The world does not need another half-baked defense of capitalism that is supported by a handful of disconnected Bible verses. Such books are far too easy for Christian political liberals to dismiss. I argue that capitalism necessarily results when the whole counsel of God is preached, believed, and obeyed by any society. The standard rhetorical response of humanist-educated Christian political liberals to my assertion is this: "Proof-texting! Proof-texting!" This is their code word for "this is getting too close for comfort ethically and politically." I therefore realized by age 31 that writing an economic commentary on the Bible would become my lifetime project, and that I would probably never write the Christian version of *Wealth of Nations*. Today, I think I may complete that task. I have completed the preliminary exegesis: ?? volumes of exegesis and appendixes.

I completed a preliminary outline of my economic commentary on the Pentateuch in 1980, when I finished the last of my monthly columns on the Pentateuch in the Chalcedon Foundation's *Chalcedon Report*. I did not realize that the final version of Exodus would require the publication of six volumes. I did not realize that the necessary appendixes would become as long and as involved as they became. These include the visible appendixes at the end of each volume, but there were others. *Dominion and Common Grace* (1987) is a study of the relationship between biblical law and historical progress. *Is the World Running Down?* (1988) is a study of the physical science concept of entropy and its supposed importance in social theory. Then there were *Political Polytheism* (1989) and *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990). These four books started out as appendixes to *Tools of Dominion*, my commentary on Exodus 21–35, which was published in 1990. I have decided to publish *Tools of Dominion* in this set in three separate

1. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics: English Economic Thought, 1660–1776* (London: Routledge, [1963] 2003). This book was first published by M.I.T. Press and, two years later, by Anchor, in an inexpensive paperback edition.

volumes.²

In 1977, I decided to devote ten hours per week, 50 weeks per year, until I reached age 70, to writing and publishing this commentary. I completed the first draft in 2009 at the age of 67. I did not originally believe that I would complete the project by age 70. With respect to the final draft, which will include video presentations of every chapter, I may finish by age 73. To meet this deadline, I must hustle.

C. Theological Schizophrenia

Most Bible-believing fundamentalists generally agree with the bulk of the economic conclusions in my writings. They may object to my theonomic, postmillennial theology, but not my economics. Instinctively, they are favorable to economic freedom. They are philosophical nominalists and methodological individualists, so they tend to agree with a social philosophy that emphasizes decentralized institutional arrangements rather than state-imposed solutions to economic problems.

On the other hand, my economic conclusions receive considerable criticism from neo-evangelical and even Calvinistic theologians, whose secular graduate school training has left many of them with unmistakable socialistic scars. These tenured scholars believe in state-supported higher education and state-supported everything else (except churches). They are not socialists or collectivists, they insist repeatedly, but somehow they can always be found recommending additional government welfare spending.³ Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977) was a best-selling example of this sort of thinking.⁴ Douglas Vickers' *Economics and Man* (1976) was a worst-selling example. The more academically respectable the college or seminary, the more politically liberal (statist) its faculty tends to be.⁵

The neo-evangelicals therefore disagree with both my theology

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*, 6 vols. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 3.

3. Joel McDurmon, *God versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009), Pt. 2.

4. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977). For a line-by-line refutation, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1996). (<http://bit.ly/dcproductive>)

5. James Davidson Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 165–80. Cf. "What Theologians Believe," *This World*, I (Summer 1980).

and my economic conclusions. At least these neo-evangelical defenders of the state clearly perceive that my free market economic conclusions flow directly and inescapably from my theonomic theology; they reject both my theology and my conclusions.⁶

Fundamentalists are far less likely to acknowledge the consistency of my theology and my economics, since they want to avoid having to follow my economic conclusions back to my theology. They imply (though never quite state) that my economic conclusions somehow are not an integral aspect of my theonomic theology, that there is some unstated and unexplained discontinuity between what I believe about biblical law and what I conclude about economics. Fundamentalists find nothing objectionable in this supposed dualism between my theology and my economics, because they also insist on maintaining a similar dualism, namely, a radical distinction between politics and theology. They maintain this dualism—intellectual schizophrenia—because of their insistence on a radical discontinuity between Old Testament law and New Testament ethics.⁷

This commentary series is a direct assault against two religions: the power religion and the escape religion.⁸ We can find both varieties of these rival yet cooperating religions in every religion, including the religion of humanism. I am coming in the name of dominion religion, the religion presented first in Genesis 1:26–28.

I am coming in the name of an idea: *comprehensive redemption*.⁹ In every area of life that has been affected by the Fall of man and by original sin, the gospel of Christ liberates people from sin. Wherever sin reigns, there the gospel calls people to repent: to turn around. By liberating individuals from sin, the gospel liberates institutions and cultures from sin. To deny this—as Christian escape religionists do—you must

6. See the three essays by my critics in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984). This \$5.95 book was selling well when it was mysteriously pulled off the market by InterVarsity in 1985. It sold all copies to the Institute for Christian economics for 25 cents each, plus postage. The editor wrote to me in amazement; the book had been selling well. I like to think that my article and my three responses to the other authors were the cause of InterVarsity's decision to kill the book. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

7. Gary North, "The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right," *Christianity and Civilization*, I (1982). (<http://bit.ly/TheologyCR>)

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1: *Representation and Dominion* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1985] 2012).

9. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C; "The Theology of Comprehensive Redemption." (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

assume that drunks will remain drunks after conversion, that wife-beaters will remain wife-beaters, and that God does not care one way or the other. The Apostle Paul rejected this view of Christianity (I Tim. 1:9–10).¹⁰ So do I.

D. A Christian Worldview

In this, the second decade of the twenty-first century, we have seen many attempts to label this or that perspective as Christian. What we have yet to see is detailed exegetical work proving the case. We hear about “the Christian worldview.” What we do not see is *specific biblical content* that identifies such a worldview as uniquely Christian, meaning uniquely based on the Bible. *Saying that a worldview is Christian does not make it so.*

Once we claim to have such a worldview, it is time to begin applying it to the world around us. He who says that there is such a worldview, one which Christians have no obligation before God and man to implement, is like a man who sees himself in a mirror and then goes away, forgetting what he has just seen (James 1:24). Such a person is the hearer of the word, not a doer (James 1:22–23).

To say there is a Christian view of anything is to call for Christian reconstruction. The only model adequate for such a restructuring, both intellectually and objectively, is the biblical covenant model. Christian scholars must self-consciously adopt methodological covenantalism as their epistemological foundation. Neither philosophical nominalism (individualist and subjectivist) nor realism (collectivist and objectivist¹¹) can serve as consistent, reliable foundations of human thought, including economics.

My economic commentary can serve as a model for how other academic disciplines can and should be restructured. We need similar commentaries in many other fields.

E. Biblical Covenantalism

The doctrine of the covenant is basic to a proper understanding of the Bible. I accept R. J. Rushdoony’s assertion: “Infallibility is an incapable concept and fact; it is the locale of infallibility which is in question. The canon or rule of life and faith is either from God or from

10. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 1.

11. I do not mean objectivist in the sense that the novelist Ayn Rand meant it.

man. It is either the canon of covenant law, or it is the canon of man's word as law."¹² *It is either biblical law or humanistic law. It is either the biblical covenant or a humanistic covenant.*

By identifying the covenant as the heart of the battle between humanism and Christianity, Rushdoony challenged the modern church to deal with the biblical covenant and adopt it as the key to understanding. The Bible itself, he correctly argued, is a covenant document. Either we adopt the canon of covenant law as our guiding principle of interpretation, or the canon of man's word as law. There is no third option, no neutral ground of confidence. He wrote:

The Bible, in fact, is divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New (or renewed) Testament, witnessing to the two great stages of covenant history. The Bible as a whole is God's covenant word or law, His declaration of the history and nature of His covenant.

A covenant book is thus a canonical book: it is the rule of faith, its law. The books of the Bible are canonical because they are covenantal: they are law because they are covenantal. If our view of the covenant is antinomian, then we have neither a covenant nor a canon, only a book for vaguely spiritual and moral counsel. It is then not in essence an infallible word.

While Scripture has many words, it is in essence one word, and is so spoken of in Deuteronomy 4:2. With the close of the canon, the words now stop (Rev. 22:18–19), and the one, unified word remains. Judgment is promised in Revelation 22:18–19 to all who add or detract from the one word, because an altered covenant law is no longer the law itself but a human substitute for law.¹³

F. "Covenant" Defined

What is the biblical covenant? In 1982, when the first edition of my commentary on Genesis, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, was published, I could not have answered this question clearly. While Calvinists have long proclaimed their devotion to covenant theology, the covenant had never been defined clearly in Calvinist literature.

12. R. J. Rushdoony, *Infallibility: An Inescapable Concept* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1978), p. 26. Reprinted in Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1994), I, p. 23.

13. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, I, pp. 22–23. See Ray Sutton, "The Inescapability of a Master Principle," *Covenant Renewal*, I (June 1987). (<http://bit.ly/SuttonMP>)

There had been a preliminary attempt by Meredith G. Kline of Westminster Seminary to apply to the Mosaic covenant the insights of George Mendenhall regarding the treaty structure of ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. Kline's book did not apply the Mosaic covenant to the New Covenant.¹⁴ On the contrary, his book and his theology were hostile to any such attempt.¹⁵ It was not until the fall of 1985 that Pastor Ray Sutton discovered the specific five-point model of the biblical covenant as it applies throughout all of the Bible. He developed this thesis while recovering from a serious burn. He presented it in final form in *That You May Prosper* (1987). I helped him edit *That You May Prosper*. My Institute for Christian Economics published it.¹⁶ I regard this insight as the most important theological breakthrough in Protestant history.

This sounds excessive, I know. Here is why I say it. Protestantism's revolt against Roman Catholicism has always rested on judicial theology. It began when Luther publicly rejected the legal authority of the Pope to sell indulgences that would free sinners from God's final negative sanctions. He later denied the legitimacy of the Pope's act of excommunication against him. He and his followers had a rival concept of biblical sanctions: ecclesiastical oaths and sacraments. The Protestant Reformation was, above all, *a revolt against the existing system of institutional sanctions*. Sutton identified *sanctions* as point four of the biblical covenant model. The Reformation was grounded judicially on a specific covenant theology—one whose adherents believed was worth the risk of going to the stake to uphold.

Because of the then-undeveloped nature of Protestant covenant theology, the Reformers did not offer a unified, well-developed covenantal-judicial case for their separation from Rome. Rome understood the fundamental judicial issue far better than the Protestants did: *the judicial limits of personal submission to oath-bound ecclesiastical and civil authorities*.¹⁷ It was a debate over the legitimacy of the institution-

14. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963).

15. Meredith G. Kline, "The Intrusion and the Decalogue," *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 152–71.

16. I started the ICE in 1975. I shut it down in December 2001. With the advent of the World Wide Web and print on demand technology, it was no longer necessary for me to raise funds to publish this commentary series and other materials.

17. Roman Catholic leaders from the beginning pointed to Luther's marriage to an ex-nun as the mark of his broken vow of celibacy, which they regarded as representative of his movement. E. Michael Jones, a Roman Catholic historian and social analyst, blamed Luther for modernism. The origin of Protestant Reformation was mostly

al sanctions that had been inherent in the original oaths. This issue has never been settled to the satisfaction of the rival groups.

The Bible presents a unique covenant theology that is comprehensively judicial. Without covenant theology, there is no biblical way to extend Christianity into the realms outside the Christian family and the church. The kingdom of God would then become judicially indistinguishable from any other organized attempt by men to exercise dominion apart from God and His Bible-revealed laws.

The doctrine of God's absolutely sovereign grace that Luther¹⁸ and Calvin preached can be found in Augustine and other medieval theologians. Such is not the case with Sutton's discovery of the five-point covenant model. Others had seen that there is a five-point structure, but nobody had identified accurately what all of the five points are, or how they relate to the New Testament. Sutton's discussion and defense of his covenant model can be found in his book, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (1987). Here is Sutton's model.

1. Transcendence/immanence (presence)
2. Hierarchy/authority/representation
3. Ethics/dominion/kingdom
4. Oath/judgment/sanctions
5. Succession/inheritance/continuity

The acronym in English is **THEOS**, the Greek word for God.

This is a simple model. First, God announces His holy name. He is the absolute sovereign over the universe as its Creator. He is transcendent over, meaning *distinct from*, His creation, yet He is also immanent in, meaning *present with*, this creation. He is neither a deistic God that is so distant from the creation that He cannot sustain it and judge it continually, nor is He a pantheistic God that is so immersed in the creation that He cannot sustain it and judge it continually. He is the Creator; therefore He is the Sustainer and Judge of the universe.

Second, God delegates to men authority over the creation. *Men are His stewards*. They report to Him. He controls the universe, yet He also delegates authority to men to exercise dominion over the creation. Each of God's covenants is marked by a hierarchical chain of command: a bottom-up appeals court structure, not a top-down bureaucracy.

Third, God calls men to exercise dominion. *The tool of dominion*

about sex, he argued. The leaders wanted to get married. Jones, *Degenerate Moderns: Sex and Misbehavior* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), pp. 243–51.

18. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525).

is God's Bible-revealed law. He judges men in terms of their conformity to the terms of the covenant, biblical law. Without law, there can be no covenant.

Fourth, God judges the performance of men. He executes judgment. This judgment is two-fold: *blessing and cursing*. There is always equal ultimacy chronologically of both blessing and cursing, extending beyond the resurrection: the resurrected New Heaven and New Earth and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). The sign of this judgment is the oath, technically called a *self-maledictory oath*. The oath-taker calls down the curses of God if he breaks the terms of the covenant. In His grace, God has called down mankind's well-deserved curses on His son, which is why Christ had to die on the cross.

Fifth, there is an inheritance. This is the basis of *historic continuity*. In His grace, God did not destroy Adam and Eve in history on the day that they sinned. He executed judgment, but they did not die physically. He graciously granted physical life to them on the judicial basis of Christ's future sacrificial offering at Calvary. To inherit God's blessings, men must be adopted by grace back into God's family (John 1:12). To refuse the offer of ethical adoption is to remain in the family of God's *disinherited son*, Adam, and to be cut out of God's inheritance in eternity (Acts 17:26).

To make this easier for people to understand, I revamped these five points in my Publisher's Preface to Sutton's book. I asked five questions.

1. Who's in charge here?
2. To whom do I report?
3. What are the rules?
4. What do I get if for obeying or disobeying?
5. Does this outfit have a future?

This entire commentary series is an extension of Sutton's presentation of the five points of the biblical covenant model. Without the integrating principle of the biblical covenant model, this commentary would be seriously deficient.

For any scholar who intends to reconstruct his academic discipline in terms of the Bible, I suggest beginning with *That You May Prosper* and the 2010 edition of my 1980 book, *Unconditional Surrender*. Of course, it would not hurt to read all 31 volumes in this series, but the investment of time would be considerable. Better to start on your reconstruction project and read these after your first draft is complete,

assuming you have sufficient time. If my experience is typical, you won't, unless you are young.

G. Five Covenants

There are five, and *only* five covenants in the Bible: the general dominion covenant, plus personal, family, church, and civil covenants. Each of the covenants two through five corresponds to an agency of government. Each has an oath attached to it, either implicit or explicit. Each has all five points of the biblical covenant.

First, there is the dominion covenant. *Mankind's very definition is in terms of the dominion covenant of Genesis 1:26–28.* Man is made in God's image, and he is to exercise dominion in God's name. There is no escape from this aspect of man's being. It extends beyond the resurrection in the resurrected New Heaven and New Earth, and it thwarts covenant-breakers in the lake of fire eternally (Rev. 20:14–15).

This covenant was first revealed to man in the garden. There is *transcendence*: God is the Creator, and He assigned the dominion task to mankind. God was *present* in the garden to teach man the basics (naming the animals). There was *hierarchy*, for God placed Adam under Him and over the creation. There was *law*, and it was manifested in the garden by a forbidden tree. There was an *implicit oath*: violate it, God promised, and the curse is inevitable; obey it, and blessings are assured. There was *continuity*—the promise of eternal life—alongside of *discontinuity*: the promise of death the day that man rebels. The dominion covenant is the most fundamental covenant. The dominion covenant governs the other four: personal, family, church, and civil. *Mankind is defined in terms of the dominion covenant—not in terms of family, church, or state.*

Second, there is the *individual covenant*. God made His covenant with Adam as an individual, not only as the representative of mankind. God brings judgment on individuals (Luke 16). Individuals suffer the consequences of their actions, both in history and eternity.

Third, there is the *family covenant*. It, too, has all five points of the covenant.¹⁹ God is sovereign over it. There is hierarchy: husbands over wives, parents over children. It has specific laws governing it. It is sealed with a public oath (marriage vow). It involves inheritance and continuity. Personal oaths are called vows. They are referred to in

19. Ray R. Sutton, *Who Owns the Family? God or the State?* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/rswotf>)

Numbers 30. Women are allowed to take them, and are required by God to adhere to them, but only if the male head of household, the father or the husband, approves within 24 hours (v. 3–8). Widows and divorced women, as heads of their households, may take vows without permission of a man (v. 9). Even though this is a personal oath, we see hierarchy illustrated by this requirement. The individual is under God, and is held accountable directly by God. Most women have to get permission, but are then held directly accountable by God.

Fourth, there is the *church covenant*. God is sovereign over it, and specially present in the sacraments. It has a system of hierarchical authority. Specific laws govern it. There is a baptismal oath, either explicit (adults) or representative (parents in the name of infants). There is continuity: membership and ordination of officers.

Fifth, there is the *civil covenant*. God ordains it and governs it. There is hierarchy: a court system. There are civil laws revealed by God. There are oaths: implicit (citizenship) and explicit (magistrates). There is continuity: elections, constitutional amending process, judicial precedents, etc.

God's five covenants establish the judicial basis of the personal relationship between God and man. *There can be no relationship between God and man apart from a covenant.* This is the overarching definitional covenant, the dominion covenant. Genesis 1:26–28 is truly a covenant: it establishes the judicial basis of the relationship between God and man. God the sovereign Creator (point one) created mankind to serve as His representatives over the creation (point two), commanding mankind to be fruitful and multiply (point five) and exercise dominion (point three). Mankind as a species is defined by God in terms of this dominion covenant, or what is sometimes called the cultural mandate. This covenant governs all four God-mandated governments: individual, family, church, and civil.

The five books of Moses (the Pentateuch) are themselves presented in the same order as the biblical covenant model. This is a very important piece of evidence in favor of the five-point biblical covenant model. Those scholars who reject Sutton's thesis need to present an alternative model, one that fits the Pentateuch better, and one that also fits the Ten Commandments better, since they are also structured in terms of the five-point model: 1–5 and 6–10.²⁰

Critics of this model need to understand an old political aphorism:

20. North, *Authority and Dominion*: Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion*, Preface.

“You can’t beat something with nothing.” It is not enough to mumble that “Sutton’s book tries to prove too much” or “There are lots of different models in the Bible.” There are indeed lots of biblical models, and *all of them are to be understood in terms of the Trinity, the doctrine of creation out of nothing, and the biblical covenant model*. We begin and end all biblical studies with God and with the God-man relationship: Trinity, creation, and covenant.

H. The Pentateuch’s Five-Point Covenant Structure

Genesis clearly is a book dealing with God’s transcendence. Transcendence is point one of the biblical covenant model.²¹ The opening words of Genesis affirm God as Creator, testifying to God’s absolute transcendence, the foundation of the Creator-creature distinction: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). But biblical transcendence also involves immanence: *the presence of God with His people*. God speaks with Adam, and judges Adam and Eve when He returns to the garden. He speaks to Cain, Noah, and Abraham. He establishes a covenant with Abraham and promises to be with Abraham and Abraham’s heirs forever (Gen. 17:7).

Exodus calls the Ten Commandments “the book of the covenant” (Ex. 24:7). God establishes His authority over the Israelites by delivering them out of Egypt. He also establishes the hierarchical principle of *representation*. Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant model.²² The principle of representation is manifested with God’s call to Moses out of the burning bush, telling him to go before Pharaoh as His representative. God delivers the Israelites from Egypt, and then He meets with Moses, their representative, at Sinai. In Exodus 18, Moses establishes a hierarchical civil appeals court system, whereupon God meets with Moses as Israel’s representative and delivers His covenant law. The Book of Exodus is a book about rival kings and rival kingdoms, God vs. Pharaoh. Men had to subordinate themselves either to God or Satan through their covenantal representatives.

The Book of Exodus is divided into five sections: the intervention of God into history to deliver His people (Ex. 1–7); the establishment

21. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

22. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. North, ch. 1.

of Israel's judicial hierarchy (Ex. 18); the giving of the law (Ex. 20–31); the judgment of Israel after the golden calf incident (Ex. 32); and the building of the tabernacle, which they carried with them into Canaan (Ex. 35–40).

Leviticus is the book that records the establishing of Israel's ritual and moral boundaries.²³ It is therefore about dominion, for boundaries in the Bible are always associated with dominion. The third point of the biblical covenant deals with boundaries. The third commandment deals with the prohibition of the misuse of God's name—a boundary²⁴—and its implications: obscenity, false oaths, and incantations (magical power), thereby affirming dominion through ethics,²⁵ and the eighth commandment parallels the third.²⁶ “Thou shalt not steal” is a command regarding ownership boundaries. The eighth commandment indicates that the concept of boundaries is basic to economic ethics, the third point of the covenant. Gordon Wenham commented on Leviticus' place in the Old Testament's covenant treaty structure: “(3) The centerpiece of every treaty was the stipulations section. In collections of law, such as Hammurabi's, the laws formed the central section. The same holds for the biblical collections of law. In the treaties a basic stipulation of total fidelity to the suzerain may be distinguished from the more detailed stipulations covering specific problems. In this terminology ‘Be holy’ could be described as the basic stipulation of Leviticus. The other laws explain what this means in different situations.”²⁷

God sets apart His people and their worship. He makes them holy—set apart. He places ritual boundaries around them. *The Open Bible* commented: “Leviticus centers around the concept of the holiness of God, and how an unholy people can acceptably approach Him and then remain in continued fellowship. The way to God is only through blood sacrifice, and the walk with God is only through obedience to His laws.”²⁸ The issue is *sanctification*, and this requires *boundaries*: “The Israelites serve a holy God who requires them to be holy as well. To be holy means to be ‘set apart’ or ‘separated.’ They are to be *separ-*

23. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

24. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 3.

25. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 3.

26. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 8.

27. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 30.

28. *The Open Bible, Expanded Edition* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 95.

ated from other nations unto God. In Leviticus, the idea of holiness appears eighty seven times, sometimes indicating ceremonial holiness (ritual requirements), and at other times moral holiness (purity of life)."²⁹ As R. K. Harrison wrote, the first 15 chapters deal with sacrificial principles and procedures relating to the removal of sin. "The last eleven chapters emphasize ethics, morality and holiness. The unifying theme of the book is the insistent emphasis upon God's holiness, coupled with the demand that the Israelites shall exemplify this spiritual attribute in their own lives."³⁰ Holiness means *separation from the heathen*.³¹ It means *boundaries*.

Leviticus is divided into five sections: the five sacrifices, which follow the five-point model (Lev. 1–7); the priestly, hierarchical cleansing of God's house (Lev. 8–16); laws of separation (Lev. 17–22); covenant renewal festivals (Lev. 23–24); inheritance (Lev. 25–27).

Numbers is the book of God's judgment against Israel in the wilderness.³² Judgment is point four of the biblical covenant model.³³ God judged them when they refused to accept the testimony of Joshua and Caleb regarding the vulnerability of Canaan to invasion (Num. 14). They rebelled against Him, and He punished them all by delaying their entry into Canaan until they were all dead, except Joshua and Caleb. "Numbers records the failure of Israel to believe in the promise of God and the resulting judgment of wandering in the wilderness for forty years."³⁴

Israel as a nation is in its infancy at the outset of this book, only thirteen months after the exodus from Egypt. In Numbers, the book of divine discipline, it becomes necessary for the nation to go through the painful process of testing and maturation. God must teach His people the consequences of irresponsible decisions. The forty years of wilderness experience transforms them from a rabble of ex-slaves into a nation ready to take the Promised Land. Numbers begins with the old generation (1:1–10:10), moves through a tragic transitional period (10:11–25:18), and ends with the new generation (26:36) at the

29. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

30. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity, Press, 1980), p. 14.

31. Jacob Milgrom, "The Biblical Diet Laws As an Ethical System: Food and Faith," *Interpretation*, XVII (1963), p. 295.

32. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012).

33. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 4.

34. *Open Bible*, p. 127.

doorway to the land of Canaan.³⁵

Deuteronomy is the book of the inheritance, point five of the biblical covenant model.³⁶ “It is addressed to the new generation destined to possess the land of promise—those who survived the forty years of wilderness wandering.”³⁷ The children of the generation of the exodus renew their covenant with God and inherit Canaan on this basis. Moses blesses the tribes (Deut. 33), a traditional sign of inheritance in the Old Testament (Gen. 27; 49). Moses dies outside the land, but before he dies, God allows him to look from Mt. Nebo into the promised land (Deut. 34:4). He sees the inheritance. The book closes with the elevation of Joshua to leadership, the transitional event (Deut. 34:9–12).

Deuteronomy is divided into five sections: God’s transcendence (Deut. 1:1–5); hierarchy (Deut. 1:6–4:49); ethics (Deut. 5–16); sanctions (Deut. 27–30); continuity (Deut. 31–34).

Thus, the Pentateuch is itself revelatory of the structure of God’s covenant. My economic commentary on the Pentateuch is therefore a commentary on a covenant. I call it the dominion covenant, for it is the God-given, God-required assignment to mankind to exercise dominion and subdue the earth that defines mankind’s task as the only creature who images God the Creator.

I. The Decline of Christian Casuistry

It is a sad social commentary on Christian intellectual life that no Bible commentary like this has ever been attempted (as far as I have been able to determine). In fact, it is sad that key men in every academic discipline have not long been writing commentaries in their fields. These should have been begun at least 400 years ago, and certainly 300 years ago. Ironically, it was in the late-seventeenth century that Christian casuistry—the application of biblical principles to daily life—began to decline. That was also the century in which hypothetically neutral economics began to be promulgated, an intellectual innovation described by William Letwin in his book, *Origins of Scientific Economics*. The fact that it took until 1982 to get into print an economic commentary on just one book of the Bible is a testimony to the systematic, conscious retreat from the world of scholarship and practical wisdom on the part of those who call themselves Christians.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

36. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 5.

37. *Open Bible*, p. 171.

Why haven't Christian economists written numerous economic commentaries on the Bible, at least one each century, and preferably one each generation? Has it been that Christian scholars have been suffering from an *intellectual illusion*, namely, that there is *a zone of neutral scholarship* that provides Christians with all the data and logic they need, even though the work is being produced by men who believe that there is no God, and if there were, it could not be the God which the Bible presents?

Consider the implications of the statement, "There is no such thing as a distinctly Christian economics [psychology, political theory, education, etc.]." First, God has not spoken to His people with respect to how they should think and live. He remains silent, providing them with no ethical guidelines. He does not answer His people when they ask Him, "How shall we then live?"

Second, the Bible is not a comprehensive book. The "whole counsel of God" is simply the call to repentance. But, in specific terms, the Bible does not tell us, "Repentance from what?" The Bible is a book aimed at the heart of man, but the heart has no communication with the mind in areas outside of church policy, evangelism, and family life.

Third, the Bible gives the world over to Satan and his rebellious hordes. Not only have they stolen something from God, but God has given this world to them. At the least, they possess it by default, since God has not established guidelines. He does not really own the world, even though He says that He does (Ps. 50:10–12). God has not established rules for lawful stewardship and administration of His property. Satan and his followers have broken no laws of economics, for there are no laws of economics. Or, if there really are such laws, they are common to every culture, and we do not need the Bible to tell us what they are. Again, we are back to the premise of neutrality.

Fourth, there are no specifically biblical standards that we can use in constructing the kingdom of God. Those Christians who argue that there is no such thing as Christian economics also have a tendency to deny that there is now, or ever will be, a visible kingdom of God on earth, unless Jesus Christ rules it directly by means of standards that He never revealed in His ministry, but which He will reveal to Christians after He returns. Until He returns, we are off the hook; we have no kingdom-building guidelines or responsibilities. So, the rules of the kingdom are indeterminate today.

Fifth, the tradition established by the prophets when they confronted the rulers of their age in the name of God, telling them that they

had violated specific biblical laws, is abrogated today. What, then, are we to say about the social message of the prophets today? Why, nothing, obviously. There is nothing to say, because they never really spoke to concrete social sins themselves, or, if they did, we are under grace, not law, socially speaking.

This means, socially speaking, that we are under Moloch, Mammon, or one of the other gods of rebellion, but the critics never mention this. When it comes to topics social, they are sociable: unwilling to “make waves” for the rulers of our day. Undoubtedly, they are not prophets.

If you do not like any or all of these implications, then you must do one of two things. First, prove to yourself that the implications do not follow from the statement, “There is no such thing as a distinctly Christian economics [psychology, political theory, education, etc.]” Second, if you find that these implications do follow from the premise, then you must abandon the premise. If you abandon the premise, then you owe it to yourself, before God, to start learning more about a distinctly Christian economics, psychology, or whatever. Then, once you learn you must begin to apply what you have learned to your spheres of influence.

J. *Sola Scriptura*: Yes or No?

A comprehensive gospel challenges the kingdom of autonomous man in every area of life. It challenges the idea of ethical neutrality. It affirms that neutrality is a myth.

A comprehensive biblical re-structuring of every academic discipline and every social order is therefore mandatory for those who say they believe the Protestant affirmation, *sola Scriptura*: Bible only. A lot of Protestants have proclaimed *sola Scriptura*. The claim is not believable until they also put the affirmation into practice by a comprehensive exegetical and methodological reconstruction of the academic disciplines.

In the past, those who have affirmed *sola Scriptura* have defended their lack of such a reconstruction by affirming another doctrine: *the doctrine of the two historical kingdoms*. They say that there is a *kingdom of regenerate souls*, and there is also a *kingdom of civilization*: politics, economics, science, technology, and culture—all theologically neutral, at least in theory. These kingdoms are legitimately separate, we are assured, yet Christians must live in both kingdoms. More than

this: Christians have a moral obligation before God to submit to the prevailing kingdom of man, under which jurisdiction they live, refraining from any attempt to reform this kingdom in order to make conform to the standards of biblical law. To seek such a reform would be theocratic, they say. It would be triumphalist, they say. Both are bad, they say. So, they affirm the legitimacy of the opposite of biblical theocracy: *humanist theocracy*. Yet they resent having anyone point out this inescapable logical conclusion of their position. They reply: "Humanism need not be theocratic. It can be ethically neutral." (Do you believe this?) They also affirm the opposite of triumphalism: *defeatism*. But they resent being called defeatist. They seek a stalemate for Jesus in history.³⁸ Problem: neither Christ nor Satan will settle for a stalemate in history. Each seeks victory.

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? (Matt. 12:25–26).

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad (Matt. 12:28–30).

Clear, isn't it? But defenders of the two-kingdoms theology refuse to admit the obvious. *There is no neutrality*. (Do you believe this?)

Liberal theologians can and do accept this idea of the two kingdoms. *Scriptura* for the liberal becomes whatever an individual thinks it is. The individual is sovereign. The most famous theologian who affirmed this dualism was Karl Barth.³⁹ I reject Barthianism. But, in rejecting Barthianism, I also reject the two-kingdoms view that undergirds Barthianism. I suggest that you do, too.

This commentary will undermine my future critics' public declarations that my economic theories are not biblical. Why? Because the critic will not spend the enormous amount of time necessary to read

38. Gary North, "The Stalemate Mentality," in Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), ch. 11. (<http://bit.ly/gnsoldiers>)

39. Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962).

all of this series. He will therefore not be able to say honestly that he has read the entire set and can therefore explain why my conclusions are incorrect. Furthermore, no other Christian economist will have produced anything comparable to this series. So, the critics will have to justify their not bothering to read my commentaries, and also justify the absence of any comparable series by someone holding a rival viewpoint. But how? They will have to settle for arguing that my hermeneutic—my principle of biblical interpretation—is wrong, so that they do not have to read my series nor point to an alternative series of commentaries. This argument will pressure them to affirm their own hermeneutic, namely, that the Old Testament has been completely replaced judicially by the New Testament. Given such a view, there is no judicial continuity for society, Old to New.

If this hermeneutic of judicial discontinuity is true, then there is no New Testament biblical law against bestiality by single men or women. Why not? Because there is no New Testament injunction against bestiality. The theologians of the two-kingdoms do not want to deal with this inescapable implication of a comprehensive rejection of the Mosaic law. I do not let them forget it.⁴⁰ Neither should you. Ask the person who affirms the two-kingdoms view how he would justify a civil law against bestiality in a society in which it is legally acceptable. Remember: he cannot legitimately cite the Mosaic law and its required civil sanction.

I suggest that you think “legalized bestiality” whenever you hear the phrase “two kingdoms.”

K. No Visible Market . . . Yet

As an author, I advise an aspiring author to decide before he writes one word exactly what his intended market is. He should mentally imagine a representative individual of this market. He should write for this person. He must not write for a committee.

This economic commentary series appears on the surface to be a product without a market. There are three potential groups that might read one or more volumes: economists, pastors, and laymen.

Economists are generally atheists or agnostics, and have been ever since the early nineteenth century. They have overwhelmingly been epistemological atheists, meaning that when it comes to questions of

40. Gary North, *75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won't Ask* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), ch. 26. (<http://bit.ly/gn75bq>)

human knowledge, God and His revelation are irrelevant by definition. This goes back to the late seventeenth century. Therefore, it is unlikely that they will buy any of these books, read one, believe it, or assign it to their students.

Pastors are not likely to read a commentary that is explicitly economic in focus. They might read a chapter on a verse they intend to preach from, but not the entire series. They barely have enough time to read their denominational magazines, let alone serious books on economics. They are not geared to this sort of commentary, especially since this sort of commentary has not been published in the past. In any case, a series like this will force them to rethink much of what they learned in seminary, and few professional people well-established in their field will rethink that field's premises and implications.

Laymen may be interested, but if they believe what this series tells them, they will probably find that what their pastors and friends say about the foundations of economics does not correspond to what they have learned here. That means trouble for them, since pastors and professional businessmen will always be able to challenge their academic competence. The alternative is to remain silent in the face of blatant errors announced by the experts.

Where, then, is the market? This series will be too religious for economists, and too economic for pastors. It will be too difficult for laymen who are not used to reading carefully. Then who are the likely readers? *A remnant*. I mean those Christians who are convinced that there are serious problems with the modern economies of the world. I also mean those who are convinced that there are biblical alternatives to the collapsing secular humanism of our era. I write for those who are convinced that there had better be a distinctly Christian economics, and not baptized Marxism, baptized Keynesianism, or baptized Friedmanism, let alone the unbaptized varieties. This is not a large audience, but as economic conditions get worse as the present economy hits a mountain of debt in the form of political promises, the audience will grow. I will use brief online videos as the hooks.

Conclusion

Biblical covenant theology is inescapably dominion theology. God has placed on His people the moral requirement of transforming the

world through the preaching of the gospel. He has also given mankind the tools of dominion, His laws.⁴¹

One of my goals for this multi-volume commentary to make it crystal clear that *my theology and my economic conclusions are an unbreakable unit*. If Christians are to make a consistent biblical case for economic freedom, they must make it in terms of the Pentateuch. There is no other way to make a Christian case for economic freedom.

It does no good to appeal exclusively to the writings of humanists to establish the epistemological and ethical foundation for economic freedom, because all humanist thought is inherently self-contradictory. Humanism's dualisms—between subject and object, unity and plurality, determinism and freedom, reason and intuition, phenomenal and noumenal, thought and action—confound the humanists in their impossible goal of bringing coherent explanations to the world. If Christ and the Bible are not acceptable to humanists as the foundations of social institutions, then so much the worse for humanists.

This series is a commentary. It should be useful for those biblical scholars who are simply trying to exegete a passage for its inherent meaning, and not just for those who are seeking strictly economic information. I discovered early in my research on this topic that conventional commentaries are almost devoid of economic insight, and for some verses, the economic ignorance of the writers has proved a stumbling block. They have missed the point entirely in a few cases—not simply the economic aspects of a particular verse, but the major point of the verse (when the point happens to be primarily economic).

Note to the reader

Throughout this commentary series, I have avoided emphasizing any material in direct citations. If an italicized word or phrase appears inside the quotation marks, then the original author made this decision. The only changes I have made are the very occasional use of brackets to define an author's use of an obscure word.

Additional note: In earlier printings of this commentary, I capitalized the word "State"—civil government in general—in order to distinguish it from those regional entities in the United States, "states." I have not done so in this edition of these books.

—January 2012

41. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion*.

INTRODUCTION

SOVEREIGNTY AND DOMINION

The first edition of this book appeared in 1982. It was titled, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*. A second edition appeared in 1987. In between, my thinking had been clarified by Ray Sutton's book on the five-point biblical covenant model, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, which I helped him edit, beginning in 1985, and which my Institute for Christian Economics published in 1987.¹

I have decided to re-title this volume to reflect point one of the biblical covenant model: *sovereignty*. God created the world out of nothing and sustains it providentially. He is therefore sovereign over His creation. I have also decided to re-issue the three original volumes on Exodus as a five-volume set with one title: *Authority and Dominion*.

A. Covenantal Economics in Genesis 1–2

The Book of Genesis is the first book in the Pentateuch. It corresponds to point one of the biblical covenant model. What is the biblical covenant model, and how does it manifest itself in the Book of Genesis? We see this relationship best in the first two chapters of Genesis.

1. Transcendence/Immanence (Presence)/Sovereignty

Chapter 1 of Genesis deals with cosmic personalism. This is based on the Creator-creature distinction. God is wholly distinct from His creation. It shares no common being. There is no "chain of being" between God and man. This is the continuing theme of Sutton's *That You May Prosper*, and it is crucial. The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (the bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Christ) is based on a chain-of-being doctrine. So is natural law theory. In contrast to this view is that of the Reformed faith: the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

covenantal connections between man and God, God and the sacraments, man's law and God's law. God is transcendent to the sacraments, yet present in them covenantally, meaning judicially. The covenant is basic to the proper understanding of creation, and the doctrine of creation is basic to the covenant. Any downplaying of the doctrine of God's creation of the universe out of nothing in six literal 24-hour days is an implicit attack on the covenant. It is not a coincidence that Darwinism denied the creation and also denied any covenantal system of personal responsibility of man under God. This is why Darwinism swept the world: nineteenth-century men wanted to escape their sense of covenantal responsibility before God.

2. *Hierarchy/Covenant/Authority/Representation*

God established a covenant with Adam, who judicially represented all mankind. Neither Adam nor Eve existed when God announced this covenant (Gen. 1:26). God therefore made this covenant *representatively*. He did so in plural voice: "let us make man." This was the beginning of the dominion covenant. In every biblical covenant, there is a hierarchy: God over man. In this covenant, this hierarchy is announced in verse 26. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Man is made in the image of God. Man is *representative* of God in history.

I agree entirely with Rushdoony on this point: "The second characteristic of Biblical law is that it is a treaty or covenant."² Man has been placed by God over the creation. In Chapter 2 of this book, we see that the sun, moon, and stars were created after the earth and the plants were. They were created to serve the needs of man, primarily as chronological devices. This hierarchy is basic to the covenant structure: *under God and over the creation*. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that crawleth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26).³ This was repeated to Noah after the flood (Gen. 9:1–3).

Representatives of modern, pietistic, Protestant fundamentalism have denied that this covenant involves hierarchy over the world. They have done so in a self-conscious attempt to justify their retreat from

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 7.

3. Chapter 3.

personal responsibility for the general culture. They have made an implicit alliance with power-seeking humanists who seek to exercise dominion.⁴ They argue that, while men do get to exercise dominion over nature, there is no element of social hierarchy in these verses. This is theological nonsense. God placed Adam over his wife, and the two parents over their children. He places church officers over congregation members, and civil magistrates over citizens and local residents. *There can be no dominion over nature without human hierarchies.* The question, then, is: Whose covenant law will rule these hierarchies, man's or God's?

Throughout European history, we have seen similar doctrines of a world without hierarchy. In the early radical religious revolutionary movements that swept over late-medieval and early modern Europe, the sects' leaders initially preached total equality. Then, step by inevitable step, they imposed radical totalitarian hierarchy, usually with plurality of wives, but only for the leaders.⁵ They began in the name of radical individualism, and ended in radical hierarchy.

There is no escape from hierarchy. Hierarchy is a covenantal reality. It is never a question of "hierarchy vs. no hierarchy." It is always a question of *whose* hierarchy. Those who preach a world without hierarchy, meaning a world without dominion by covenant, are either seeking to confuse their victims, or else they are incredibly naive accomplices of the power-seekers who do not want God's covenantal hierarchy. Follow their doctrine of "no hierarchy" at your own risk.

3. Ethics/Law

Every covenant has a law. The dominion covenant's law relates to the exercise of dominion over the creation. It appears in Genesis 1:26b. "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

Rushdoony was correct when he wrote: "The third characteristic of the Biblical law or covenant is that it constitutes a plan for dominion under God. God called Adam to exercise dominion in terms of

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), pp. 2–5.

5. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary messianism in medieval and Reformation Europe and its bearing on modern totalitarian movements*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1957] 1961).

God's revelation, God's law (Gen. 1:26ff.; 2:15–17). This same calling, after the fall, was required of the godly line, and in Noah it was formally renewed (Gen. 9:1–17).⁶

Chapter 4 of *Sovereignty and Dominion* outlines the basics of God's command to mankind, "subdue the earth." This is not some afterthought on God's part. It is basic to man's very being. Men are commanded by God to subdue the earth. Thus, obedience requires dominion. Dominion also requires obedience: God's work done in God's way. *Whenever man rebels against God, he becomes a destroyer rather than a subduer.* The difference between subduing nature and exploiting nature is ethics: conformity to God's law. Thus, I write in the middle of the chapter: "... man's fundamental tool of dominion is the moral law of God." The connection between ethics and dominion cannot be broken.

4. Oath/Judgment/Sanctions/Causation

Genesis 1 says that God evaluated His work at the end of each day. Chapter 5 of this book deals with rendering judgment. It discusses value theory in economics. Is value objective or subjective? This is the question that has baffled economists for two centuries. The biblical answer is that value is both objective and subjective in God. God declares what is good and bad. Men are to think God's thoughts after Him as creatures. They are to render godly judgment as His delegated agents. Thus, rendering judgment in history is basic to man's calling before God.⁷

Genesis 2:2–3 speaks of God as having rested after the week of creation. Chapter 6 of this book deals with the sabbath rest idea. Rest for man is a positive sanction. In the Ten Commandments, this comes as the fourth commandment. In Part 2 of *Authority and Dominion*,⁸ I discuss this commandment under point four of the biblical covenant: "Sabbath and Dominion." By resting in God's sovereignty, man can achieve rest. He acknowledges his position as God's subordinate agent. God will honor His covenant, and bring blessings to those who obey Him. Therefore, resting one day in seven is a covenantal acknowledgment that God is sovereign, not man.

6. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 8.

7. See Appendix E: "Witnesses and Judges."

8. Titled *The Sinai Strategy* originally (1986).

5. Succession/Inheritance/Continuity/Kingdom

Genesis 2:11–12 refers to gold. Gold has been used as money down through the ages. Chapter 7 of this book deals with the concept of money. *There is no more fundamental aspect of money than continuity over time.* Any commodity that is perceived to be valuable over long periods in the past can become a candidate for an economy's money. People will be willing to consider the use of such a commodity as a means of exchange and "storehouse of value," meaning a valuable thing to store. As I wrote in my study of the biblical basis of money: "In short, money is the most marketable commodity. It is marketable because people expect it to be valuable in the future."⁹

The covenant is the judicial ordering principle in the Bible, even reflected in the names Old Covenant and New Covenant (Heb. 8:13). We take communion under the authority of God's covenant (I Cor. 11). Sinners take communion under Satan's covenant (I Cor. 10:20–21). We eat the tree of life or the forbidden tree. Covenant is an inescapable concept. There is no escape from covenants. The question is: *Which* covenant?

B. Another Ordering Principle?

It has been argued that it is illegitimate to search for a single ordering principle in the Bible. This is a predictable comment from someone who has a rival ordering principle that he is quietly importing to his work. Anyone who hears such a critical remark against the use of the covenant as an interpretive model should consider the words of Rushdoony: "The canon or rule of life and faith is either from God or from man. It is either the canon of covenant law, or it is the canon of man's word as law."¹⁰ There are other ordering principles, often related to numbers: three, seven, ten, twelve. There are ordering principles of relationships: father and child, creation-Fall-redemption, and so forth. But the fundamental principle is the covenant. This was how God announced the advent of man (Gen. 1:26–28). *All other ordering principles are subordinate to the covenant.*

There are also many ordering principles in philosophy, but only

9. Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1986), p. 20. (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>)

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *Infallibility: An Inescapable Concept* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1978), p. 26. Reprinted in Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1994), p. 23.

one is crucial in the discussion of the relationship between God and man: the covenant. The only other alternatives are philosophical realism (Aquinas) or philosophical nominalism (Ockham), and they have proven to be dead ends from the day they were offered as valid alternatives to covenantalism. Anyone who argues that there is some other system of interpretation besides the covenant is either a realist or a nominalist. The Christian should not accept either alternative. Rushdoony told us why not: “Nominalism ends by dissolving the world into an endless sea of unrelated and meaningless facts or particulars, whereas Realism progressively denies the validity of particulars, of the many, and absorbs them into an undifferentiated and shoreless ocean of being. At either end, definition, meaning, and truth disappear; at one end total relativism and anarchy, and, at the other, total authoritarianism.”¹¹

C. Epistemology

There are four chapters in this book that may prove difficult going for the average reader. These four chapters are the most important ones in the field of epistemology, meaning “What do we know, and how can we know it?” These are: Chapter 2, Chapter 5, Appendix A, and Appendix B. Chapter 5 deals with the crucial question of objective value theory vs. subjective value theory. This makes for difficult reading, but what I demonstrate in this chapter is that there can be no such thing as *applied* secular economics. The secular economists cannot, given their own presuppositions, handle the problems of economic value, nor can modern, subjectivist economists legitimately assert that economic statistics have any meaning. The modern economist ignores the implications of his own value theory, going on about his intellectual or financial business as if everything were all right. Everything is not all right. Humanist economics is bankrupt.

There is only Christian economics. If you ask the members of any school of economics—Marxist, Keynesian, inductivist-empirical, deductivist-logical—to show you why members of a rival school have no sound basis for what they are writing, the critics can prove it. I argued in a 1976 essay that modern economics, given its own philosophical starting points, cannot deal with the mind-universe gap, the *a priori* vs. *a posteriori* dilemma, the logic-intuition contradiction, and the law-

11. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1971] 2007), p. 15.

freedom problem.¹² There, I was dealing with economic theory. What I demonstrate—or, better yet, what I allow modern economists to demonstrate for me—in Chapter 5, is this: *applied secular economics is as epistemologically barren as theoretical secular economics*. This may not prove the existence of a uniquely Christian economics, but it does prove that modern secular economics cannot possibly be valid, given the explicit presuppositions of modern economics.

Conclusion

In this book, I begin with God's covenant, not humanism's covenant. I argue for methodological covenantalism, as opposed to humanism's methodological individualism (anarchism)—nominalism—or methodological holism (socialism)—realism. I begin with God's revelation, not human speculation. I begin with Genesis, not Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) or John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936) or Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action* (1949) or Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* (1961). This may bother economists, but so what? I do not expect economists to read an economic commentary on the Book of Genesis.

12. Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition" in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976).

1

COSMIC PERSONALISM

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1).

The theocentric principle here is God as the Creator. From the point of view of economics, this is God as the *cosmic Owner*. It corresponds to point one of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Creation and Personalism

The opening words of the Bible present us with the most important principle of human knowledge: God created the universe. He created it out of nothing, by the power of His word: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb. 11:3). Again, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth” (Ps. 33:6). God created the universe by fiat, meaning by the power of His command. Speaking of the Second Person of the Trinity, Paul wrote:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:15–17).

The Revised Standard Version (RSV) translates this latter phrase, “all things are held together in him,” and the Berkeley Version concurs: “. . . and in him all things hold together.” Through God, the Cre-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1 (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

ator, all things are *sustained*. The doctrine of *creation* is directly linked to the doctrine of *providence*.

From beginning to end, the created world bears the mark of God's handiwork. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). God did not create a self-sustaining universe that is now left to operate in terms of autonomous laws of nature. The universe is not a giant mechanism, like a clock, which God created and wound up at the beginning of time. Ours is not a mechanistic world, nor is it an autonomous biological entity, growing according to some genetic code of the cosmos. Ours is a world which is actively sustained by God on a full-time basis (Job 38–41). All creation is inescapably personal and theocentric. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead. . ." (Rom. 1:20).

If the universe is inescapably personal, then there can be no phenomenon or event in the creation that is independent from God. No phenomenon can be said to exist apart from God's all-inclusive plan for the ages. There is no uninterpreted "brute factuality." Nothing in the universe is autonomous, an English word derived from two Greek words that are transliterated *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law). Nothing in the creation generates its own conditions of existence, including the law structure under which something operates or is operated upon. Every fact in the universe, from beginning to end, is exhaustively interpreted by God in terms of His being, plan, and power.²

B. God Is the Cosmic Owner

The starting point of Christian economics—and every other field of thought—is the doctrine of creation. This doctrine establishes that God is the only creator. *Because God is the only creator, He is the original owner.* We read in the Psalms that the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10). This does not mean that the cattle on the hill 1,001 belong to somebody else. God owns the cattle,

2. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), p. 28. "All facts of history are what they are ultimately because of what God intends and makes them to be. Even that which is accomplished in human history through the instrumentality of men still happens by virtue of the plan of God. God tells the stars by their names. He identifies by complete description. He knows exhaustively. He knows exhaustively because he controls completely."

and God owns the hills.³

Because God is the original owner of all things, *He has a legal claim on the output of all creation*. Because God owns the raw materials and the capital, He owns the output of this capital. The entire universe provides the raw materials of productivity.

The theological justification for an economic commentary on the Bible is based on the opening lines of Genesis. God created the world. It is now governed, and has always been governed, by His personal power and purpose. The world is sustained by God. Our world is *providential*. It reflects His orderly being. Our world is therefore *coherent*, and it is man's responsibility, as a species, to discover the providential regularities of the universe, including man's own being, and then use this knowledge in the tasks of subduing the earth to the glory of God.

After Adam rebelled representatively on behalf of mankind, both he and nature were cursed by God. Neither man nor nature was ever normative, but after the Fall and the curses, it is even more erroneous to claim that man or nature is normative. *God's word alone is normative*. It alone can provide the necessary correction to man's rebellious mind and supply the necessary presuppositions of intelligent, God-honoring understanding. This is why we need to study the Bible if we are to discover the truths of economics, or any other academic or professional discipline. The Bible informs us of the limits of man's speculative fancies concerning economics (or anything else). Man has great power under God. He also has definite limits. The Bible reveals both the potential of man and the limits placed on man by his creaturehood, as well as by man's rebellious Fall into sin and the curses placed on the human race by God as a result of this rebellion.

C. Biblical Personalism

Cornelius Van Til, the twentieth-century Christian philosopher and theologian, put the issue forcefully:

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

3. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

ation. We may characterize this whole situation by saying that the creation of God is a revelation of God. God revealed himself in nature, and God also revealed himself in the mind of man. Thus it is impossible for the mind of man to function except in an atmosphere of revelation. And every thought of man when it functioned normally in this atmosphere of revelation would express the truth as laid in the creation of God.⁴

Man's mind has not functioned properly, as originally designed and intended by God, ever since the day of his ethical rebellion against God in Eden. Nevertheless, man still knows some things, despite the twistings and misinterpretations provided by his own rebellious imagination. He knows enough to condemn himself before God on the day of judgment (Rom. 1:18–20). He knows enough to work and progress in his labors. He knows enough to make some sense of his environment. Men have amassed remarkable quantities of information; nevertheless, man's mind is not determinative, nor was it determinative before Adam's rebellion. God's mind is determinative. *Neither man nor nature is normative.*

God's exhaustive knowledge of Himself and the creation is normative. Because man is made in the image of God, and because man is fully responsible before God, man's mind is capable of apprehending an underlying bedrock of truth. It is man's responsibility to seek out this truth, to the extent appropriate to a creature serving as God's subordinate. We cannot attain perfect, exhaustive knowledge, because such comprehensive knowledge belongs to God alone, but we can attain true knowledge. Therefore, concluded Van Til:

For the Christian system, knowledge consists in understanding the relation of any fact to God as revealed in Scripture. I know a fact truly to the extent that I understand the exact relation such a fact sustains to the plan of God. It is the plan of God that gives any fact meaning in terms of the plan of God. The whole meaning of any fact is exhausted by its position in and relation to the plan of God. This implies that every fact is related to every other fact. God's plan is a unit. And it is this unity of the plan of God, founded as it is in the very being of God, that gives the unity that we look for between all the finite facts. If one should maintain that one fact can be fully understood without reference to all other facts, he is as much antithetic as when he should maintain that one fact can be understood

4. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, Vol. II of the series, *In Defense of the Faith* (Den Dulk Foundation, 1969), p. 1.

without reference to God.⁵

No fact (datum) of the universe is independent of God and His plan. No man can assert his own autonomy and then legitimately claim to know anything exhaustively, for to know anything exhaustively requires that the knower understand everything exhaustively. Any fact (datum) in the universe may conceivably have some influence on any other fact. This is why Christians must assert that *all truth is exhaustively interrelated in God's single system of interpretation*. It is God, and God alone, who possesses this exhaustive system of interpretation.

The quest for exhaustive knowledge is demonic. It tempts man to surpass the limits of his creaturely status. It is the lure of Satan, namely, to become "as God." This is why we need God's revelation of Himself in the Bible to achieve accurate, though not exhaustive, knowledge of His creation. *The Bible provides the necessary corrective information, an interpretative context for studying and understanding the creation.* The Bible's revelation keeps us from "going off the deep end" in endless speculation about the inconceivable—inconceivable for man, that is.

Modern man may choose to believe in some version of cosmic impersonalism in preference to a belief in God's cosmic personalism. Nevertheless, the Bible tells that this is an impossible choice to make. The warfare in the Bible is not between God's personalism and the creation's impersonalism, but between God and Satan. *This supernatural conflict is inescapably personal.* Men worship a true God or a false god, but they worship personal beings. There is no escape from the personalism of every choice, however much men seek to impersonalize the universe (generally as a stepping stone to re-personalizing it by asserting the sovereignty of man).⁶ We find modern psychologists, especially those in the behaviorist camp, grimly and fanatically depersonalizing even man, the chooser, making him just another product in a strictly impersonal, cause-and-effect universe. But the effort is in vain. Men will spend eternity with Satan or God, either in the lake of fire—specifically prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt. 25:41)—or in the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21).

Cosmic impersonalism is a myth. We never choose between cosmic personalism and cosmic impersonalism; it is merely a question of *whose* cosmic personalism: God's or Satan's. Eve was tempted by a per-

5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

6. See Appendix A.

son who was represented by a serpent. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by a person (Matt. 4).⁷ Cosmic impersonalism is a satanic delusion, a convenient way to mystify men. Men choose to believe in something other than God, and from Satan's viewpoint, anything else will do just fine. The result is the same: man's destruction, the alienation of man from God, in whose image he was created. Satan is content to stay in the background, when necessary. He is content to be devilish; publicity for publicity's sake is not his style. The darkness suits him fine.

Perhaps the most perceptive analysis of this aspect of Satan's temptation is found in C. S. Lewis' fictional account of a senior devil's advice to a junior devil. Screwtape, the senior devil, gives this advice in *The Screwtape Letters*, Chapter 7 (written during World War II).

Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism, and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics. At least, not yet. I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalise and mythologise their science to such an extent that what is, in effect, a belief in us (though not under that name) will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in the Enemy. The "Life Force," the worship of sex, and some aspects of Psychoanalysis may here prove useful. If once we can produce our perfect work—the Materialist Magician, the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls 'Forces' while denying the existence of "spirits"—then the end of the war will be in sight.

The Bible's doctrine of cosmic purpose is in opposition to all forms of Darwinism. Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection was self-consciously opposed to all varieties of cosmic purpose prior to the appearance of man. There is purpose in the universe. God is in charge of this purpose, and He directed this purpose toward mankind, who is made in His image (v. 26).

This may sound like needless theoretical speculation, but it applies to our daily affairs. The Bible tells us that man, as the image of God, is placed in authority over the earth. I will discuss this in greater detail in my comments on Genesis 1:26.⁸ For now, the important thing to un-

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), chaps. 1–3.

8. Chapter 3.

derstand is that *man is so important that the entire universe centers around him*. When I say that it centers around him, I refer to cosmic purpose. Of that which was created, man is the center. He is the center because he is the image of God. He is responsible to God, and the universe is responsible to mankind.

D. Modern Science's Impersonalism

The doctrine of creation in its biblical form therefore denies one of the most cherished doctrines of the modern world, namely, the doctrine of cosmic impersonalism. This doctrine asserts that all life is the product of impersonal, self-generated, random forces of nature. *Cosmic impersonalism is the heart and soul of the modern doctrine of evolution*, which asserts that evolution operates through the process of natural selection. Undergirding the concept of natural selection is the idea of randomness.

1. Mutations

The idea of evolution is not new; in fact, it was the universal belief of ancient societies, with the exception of the Hebrews. Ancient paganism held a concept of a deity or deities that struggled with the primeval chaos (randomness) in order to produce a somewhat orderly, partially controlled universe—one that is constantly threatened by either too much law or a breakdown of order.⁹ It was Darwin's contribution to the modern world to have convinced men that evolution occurs through random changes in living creatures. The interaction

9. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 60, 72–73, 91–93; Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), ch. 12; Eliade (ed.), *From Primitives to Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), ch. 2. Eliade demonstrated that creation myths other than the Hebrew version were marked by a belief that God either struggled with an existing matter to form the world, or the world stemmed from some aspect of the god's being, usually from his anatomy. Only the Hebrews proclaimed an absolute distinction between creature and Creator, i.e., two separate types of being, as Van Til pointed out: "All forms of heresy, those of the early church and those of modern times, spring from this confusion of God with the world. All of them, in some manner and to some extent substitute the idea of man's participation in God for that of his creation by God." Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1959), p. 122. On the Mesopotamian evolutionary creation myths, see Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," in Henri Frankfort, *et al.*, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, [1951] 1964), pp. 187–89, 214–16. See also R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1971] 2007), ch. 3.

between a deterministic external environment governed by strict cause and effect, and species that survive or perish on the basis of random mutations in their genes is the mechanism of evolutionary progress. This is natural selection. The deterministic universe, itself the product of random materialistic forces, brought forth life, and living creatures developed through the uncontrollable random mutations of their genes and the interaction of the biological results of these mutations with the environmental changes external to each species. In its original formulation, Darwinism presented a world that is governed by random variation; randomness begetting randomness in a sea of randomness, yet governed entirely by the universally valid and totally unbreakable iron law of natural selection.

Peter Medawar and his wife Jean, two prominent biological scientists, stated the case very plainly in their book, *The Life Science* (1977), and in the intellectual magazine, *Harper's*. The opening words of the *Harper's* extract from the book are illuminating: "Not so very many years ago people talked about 'God and the physi-cists,' but today the geneticists have elbowed their way to the footlights, and a great change has come about in relations between science and religion: the physi-cists were in the main very well disposed towards God, but the geneti-cists are not. It is upon the notion of randomness that geneticists have based their case against a benevolent or malevolent deity and against there being any overall purpose or design in nature."¹⁰ The "god of the physicists," however, had also been a god of randomness, lurking in the shadows of the "as yet-unknown," moving instantly away from any "light" thrown on events by rationalism's laws of physical science. This god was Kant's god of the hypothetical "noumenal" realm—a mental construct who cannot influence the external events of nature. So, Medawar and his wife abandoned such a god as being unnecessary, which indeed such a god is. They forthrightly accepted the new god of creation, *randomness*, giving him all due respect, honor, and glory. Purpose and design, the intolerable evils of Christian theology, must be banished from the kingdom of randomness, at least until man appears on the scene.

2. A Purposeless Universe

Cosmic impersonalism is a way of banishing personal responsibil-

10. Peter and Jean Medawar, "Revising the Facts of Life," *Harper's* (Feb. 1977), p. 41.

ity from the universe. It enables men to ignore the possibility of final judgment in terms of a fixed set of ethical standards. It allows men to ignore the possibility of eternal punishment. It allows man to reinterpret all facts according to his purposes and ideals, both intellectual and moral. Man becomes the determiner and interpreter of the universe. Understandably, secular man prefers not to interpret the universe in terms of God's categories. He much prefers to live in the hypothetically random universe posited by modern humanism—a universe that is slowly grinding to inevitable extinction (the second law of thermodynamics, entropy).¹¹ Perhaps the most eloquent statement of what this means was written by Bertrand Russell, the influential British philosopher-mathematician. The world of modern science, he wrote, is “more purposeless, more void of meaning” than the world outlined by Mephistopheles to Dr. Faustus. The modern world has no meaning.

Amid such a world, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home. That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.¹²

As Russell grew older, he became even more pessimistic, more thoroughly consistent with his presuppositions concerning man and the universe. He saw through the glib theologians who had adopted some version of evolution and had then attempted to integrate it into their religious framework. What foolishness, Russell concluded. “Why the Creator should have preferred to reach His goal by a process, instead of going straight to it, these modern theologians do not tell us.” But this is only part of their problem.

11. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

12. Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man's Worship” (1903). (<http://bit.ly/brfreeman>)

There is another and a graver objection to any theology based on evolution. In the 'sixties and 'seventies, when the vogue of the doctrine was new, progress was accepted as a law of the world. Were we not growing richer year by year, and enjoying budget surpluses in spite of diminished taxation? Was not our machinery the wonder of the world, and our parliamentary government a model for the imitation of enlightened foreigners? And could anyone doubt that progress would go on indefinitely? Science and mechanical ingenuity, which had produced it, could surely be trusted to go on producing it ever more abundantly. In such a world, evolution seemed only a generalization of everyday life. But even then, to the more reflective, another side was apparent. The same laws which produce growth also produce decay. Some day, the sun will grow cold, and life on the earth will cease. The whole epoch of animals and plants is only an interlude between ages that were too hot and ages that will be too cold. There is no law of cosmic progress, but only an oscillation upward and downward, with a slow trend downward on the balance owing to the diffusion of energy. This, at least, is what science at present regards as most probable, and in our disillusioned generation it is easy to believe. From evolution, so far as our present knowledge shows, no ultimately optimistic philosophy can be validly inferred.¹³

Humanism is pessimistic. It offers no cosmic hope.

E. The “Impersonal” Free Market

It is quite common for economists to speak of the impersonalism of the market process. By this, the academic economist means that the free market's processes are virtually independent of the will or plans of any single market participant. One man's influence is normally infinitesimal from the point of view of the overall free market system. The market is understood as an impersonal mechanism in the sense that it is the product of millions of human decisions and actions at any point in time. People enter into voluntary exchanges with one another, and the results of their activities have far-reaching implications when considered as a whole. F. A. Hayek went so far as to describe this attitude toward the market—an attitude that he shared, and which he defended more eloquently than any other social philosopher of the twentieth century—as “an attitude of humility toward the impersonal and anonymous social processes by which individuals help to create things

13. Bertrand Russell, “Evolution,” in *Religion and Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1935] 1972), pp. 80–81.

greater than they know. . . .”¹⁴ This “impersonal and anonymous” social process is supposed to be a reliable source of continuing economic benefits and continuing personal freedom.

Biblically speaking, this view of the free market is incorrect. While the free market’s processes may appear to be impersonal from the point of view of the individual observer, the market is not impersonal from the point of view of God, the omniscient observer. The Christian economist must assert from the beginning that *this supposed impersonalism of the market process* must never be understood to be a *process autonomous from God*. The operations of the market, like the operations of the atom, are ultimately guided by and upheld by God. In fact, the strongest philosophical and theological argument in favor of the free market is that it thwarts the attempt of power-seeking men to attempt to imitate God by centralizing the economic planning system through the civil government, thereby directing the lives of other citizens in terms of the goals of some elite central planning board. *The free market decentralizes economic power, thereby limiting the quest for personal power*. It has as one of its most important functions a definite religious purpose: *to restrict men in their attempt to play God*.

No one has been more eloquent in the presentation of the free market as an institution that decentralizes power than Hayek. His best-selling book, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), which was condensed and published in the mass-circulation magazine, *Reader’s Digest*, in 1945, stated the case for the free market in terms of the limitation of political power.¹⁵ What Hayek and other secular defenders of the free market have failed to understand is this: it is precisely because the market is not impersonal with respect to God and His law-order that it can be said to be impersonal with respect to the plans and actions of any single participant.

The market as a human institution has a definite role to play in limiting the illegitimate quest for total power, which is an inescapable aspect of all centrally planned economies, because central economic planning requires the use of political coercion in order to allocate goods and services in a world of scarce resources. It is not a coincidence that the free market serves this purpose, for it has not evolved as the exclusive product of human action—action that did not have the

14. F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 8. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIEO>)

15. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944). The April 1945 reprint from *Reader’s Digest* is here: <http://bit.ly/HayekRoadRD>.

creation of a free market economy and free market institutions as a goal. The market is not the product of human choices that, with respect to the advent of the free market and the numerous social requirements of a free market order, were utterly random historically. Just because no human planning agency ever designed the free market does not prove the free market was undesigned.¹⁶ Men did not design a free market to fit their needs for social, economic, and political order, but this in no way implies (as the socialists, Marxists, and central planners in general assert) that the market does not fit men's needs for social, economic, and political order. The free market social order has a whole series of purposes for man because it is a direct outgrowth of the application of fundamental moral and economic principles that were established by God to meet the needs of responsible human agents. The free market is a part of God's comprehensive social law-order.

Conclusion

The Creator-creature distinction is the beginning of wisdom. It is the first point of the biblical covenant: *the transcendence of God*. This doctrine must undergird the science of economics, and also every other science. *God is absolutely sovereign over the creation*. The creation is therefore personal. Any discussion of the free market as an impersonal process or institution must always be qualified by the doctrine of cos-

16. The continuing theme in the writings of Hayek is the concept promoted by the eighteenth-century Scottish rationalists, especially Adam Ferguson, that society is the product of human action—the multiple actions of individuals—but not of human design. As in the case of Charles Darwin, the Scottish rationalists were seeking an explanation of the operations of the world apart from continual appeals to the thoughts, plans, and miracles of a transcendent designing God. Hayek argued for this position in numerous works: “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” *American Economic Review*, XXXV (Sept. 1945); reprinted in *Individualism and Economic Order*, ch. 4; *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, Vol. I: *Rules of Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), chaps. 1, 2; *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), chaps. 5, 6, 11; “The Three Sources of Human Values: A Postscript to Law, Legislation and Liberty,” the Hobhouse Lecture given at the London School of Economics (May 17, 1978), reprinted in *Literature of Liberty*, II (April–June 1979), pp. 63–64. For an extremely perceptive critique of Hayek's evolutionistic epistemology, see Eugene F. Miller, “Hayek's Critique of Reason,” *Modern Age* (Fall 1976), <http://bit.ly/emhcr>. See also John N. Gray, “F. A. Hayek on Liberty and Tradition,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, IV (Spring 1980), <http://bit.ly/jgholat>. Arthur M. Diamond, Jr., “F. A. Hayek on Constructivism and Ethics,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, IV (Fall 1980), <http://bit.ly/adhocae>. The best critical discussion of Hayek is John Gray, *Hayek on Liberty* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984). Finally, see Appendix B, “The Evolutionists' Defense of the Market.”

mic personalism. God, not man, is sovereign. Man is fully responsible to God.

2

PURPOSE, ORDER, AND SOVEREIGNTY

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also (Gen. 1:14–16).

The theocentric principle here is God as the Creator. This corresponds to point one of the biblical covenant model.¹ But this passage establishes a cosmic hierarchy: God > man > the cosmos. The stars, the sun, and the moon were made for man to be able to judge the seasons. The cosmic hierarchy of majesty—stars to sun, sun to moon, moon to earth—is a *purposeful order* in which *man is the beneficiary*. His purposes are the reason for the cosmos. This places God at the center and man—God’s image—just below Him. This corresponds to point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy/authority/representation.² It raises the issue of responsibility.

A. The Irreconcilable War Over Sequence

These verses do not seem to be related to the topic of economics in any way. Yet, in terms of their importance for human thought in general, and economic science in particular, they cannot be overestimated. They are second in importance only to Genesis 1:1 in the field of cosmology. Because of this, modern secular science is at war with the plain teaching of these verses. These verses are far more difficult to allegorize than Genesis 1:1. Their sequence is too specific. Their per-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstypm>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

spective is too concrete. Scientists who might be willing to shrug their shoulders at Genesis 1:1, as if the words were harmless poetic relics of the past, would groan in horror if someone suggested that these verses must be taken literally.

1. Cosmic Chronology

The chronological sequence of God's creation of the heavenly bodies is an affront to all forms of cosmic evolution. We are told that the stars, sun, and moon were created on the fourth day, which was the day following the creation of living plants. There is no possible way that this chronological sequence can be integrated into an evolutionary time frame's sequence of historical events.

It is unfortunate that respectable Bible commentators have compromised the explicit language of Scripture by arguing that the stars, moon, and sun were created on the same day that the earth was, but that they did not have any specific function with respect to the earth prior to the fourth (possibly non-literal) day. Nevertheless, the Bible affirms that God created light by the power of his word. This supernatural light separated day from night. Only on the fourth day were specific bodies created to provide light and to separate day from night. One commentator has argued that the sun existed on the first day, but God concealed it by means of some sort of veil, which He then removed on day four.³ That a Christian scholar seeking acceptance by the humanist academic elite should invent such a fantasy to explain the plain words of Genesis 1 is indicative of just how far from the text modern Christians have wandered, especially university-certified, university-screened, and university-employed Christian scholars. Why should we tamper with the plain teaching of the Bible in this fashion? Are we naive enough to believe that if Christians push back the creation of the stars to the first day, making them co-temporal with the earth, modern evolutionists in the fields of astronomy and cosmology are going to think Christianity might just be plausible after all? Are we supposed to buy a little academic respectability by means of this sort of exegesis?

Modern science holds that the earth is a relatively late development, possibly only five billion years old, in a universe at least 13 bil-

3. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), pp. 48–49. Kidner did not explain what this “veil” may have been.

lion years old.⁴ What good do we think we will accomplish by ignoring the words of Genesis 1 and arguing for the creation of the sun and stars on the first day, inventing a hypothetical veil or cloud cover to provide an explanation of why the Bible speaks of the sun, moon, and stars as being created on the fourth day? If we are inevitably going to be looked at as fools for holding to biblical revelation, which is unquestionably the case (I Cor. 1:19–21), then why not at least be consistent, straightforward, more offensive fools—fools thoroughly committed to this foolish revelational faith, fools untarnished by the pseudo-wisdom of the world?

Would anyone have bothered to invent a veil or cloud cover for the sun, moon, and stars on days one through three, had he not been confronted with some version of evolution, which he then decided to conform to, at least partially, in order not to appear unrespectable?⁵ Let us side with biblical language and cease our pathetic, unrealizable quest for academic respectability within the world of secular humanistic scholarship.

It does no good whatsoever to create such exegetical diversions in an attempt to make the Bible's account sound more reasonable, meaning more scientific, meaning more evolutionary. There are several reasons for this. *First*, modern astronomers argue that the solar system and the earth are relatively recent phenomena when compared to the age of the universe. Astronomers generally have come to some agreement about the limits of chronology, given the fact that many of them adopted the "big bang" theory of cosmology. Sometime in the distant past, between 10 billion and 15 billion years ago, an original hypercondensed matter-energy exploded, thereby creating the universe.⁶ The

4. The estimate on Wikipedia, as of 2010, was in the range of 13.7 billion years. See "Universe."

5. As an example of just such a naive compromise, see the quotation from Edwyn Bevan's essay, "The Religious Value of Myths in the Old Testament," cited favorably by Kidner (p. 55): "The stages of which the earth comes to be what it is cannot indeed be precisely fitted to the account which modern science would give of the process, but in principle they seem to anticipate the modern scientific account by a remarkable flash of imagination, which a Christian may also call inspiration." For a detailed account of the depressing history of such Christian misreadings of (and compromises with) evolutionary chronologies, see Appendix C, "Cosmologies in Conflict: Creation vs. Evolution."

6. Gerald J. Whitrow, "The Role of Time in Chronology," in Wolfgang Yourgrau and Allen D. Breck (eds.), *Cosmology, History, and Theology* (New York: Plenum Press, 1977), pp. 175–76. He accepted the 10 billion to 15 billion estimate: p. 176. Carl Sagan, the best-selling astronomer from Cornell University, where he was Director of Planetary Studies, accepted the "big bang" theory and the 15 billion years figure: *The*

solar system and the earth came much later, approximately 4.6 billion years ago.⁷ Modern secular science would have to reject any suggestion that the sun, moon, and stars were created on the same day that the earth was created.

2. *Cosmic Evolution*

Second, when it comes to questions of ultimate origins, the scientists are not agreed among themselves anyway. Toulmin and Goodfield wrote:

... over these cosmological theories there is nothing like the same kind of agreement among astronomers that exists over theories of stellar evolution. In cosmology, the chief protagonists take up standpoints which are sharply opposed, and even—as at present formulated—irreconcilable. Some see the astronomical evidence as supporting a belief that the entire universe began at an initial moment in time about 10,000 million years ago, through a cataclysmic Creation, by which time and matter came into existence together, once and for all. Others believe that the cosmos has had an unlimited existence in time, and its average state and appearance have always been similar to what they are today. This uniformity-throughout-eternity is even presented at times as a necessary axiom of all scientific thought about cosmology—a rational presupposition, to which any acceptable account of the universe must conform. A third party has adopted yet another point of view. The cosmos has neither had an initial Creation, nor displayed an eternal changelessness: instead, it has passed through a recurring cycle of similar changes, oscillating between two extremes, with an overall period of perhaps 100,000 million years.⁸

This last viewpoint is analogous to the pagan concept of recurring historical cycles, and modern Hinduism still holds to it.⁹ In fact, as

Dragons of Eden (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), p. 13. For a 10 billion estimate, see also Clive Kilminster, *The Nature of the Universe* (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 151. George B. Field holds to the 10 billion figure, in William C. Saslaw and Kenneth C. Jacobs (eds.), *The Emerging Universe* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1972), p. 146. The citations could be multiplied.

7. The 4.6 billion years figure is cited by Field, in Saslaw and Jacobs (eds.), *Emerging Universe*, p. 145, and by Harvard astronomer, Fred Whipple, *Earth, Moon, and Planets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 244. The 4 billion to 5 billion years estimate is quite conventional.

8. Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1966), p. 255.

9. Cf. Swami Nikhilananda, "Hinduism and the Idea of Evolution," in *A Book that Shook the World* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), pp. 48–60. The

Toulmin and Goodfield argued, all three cosmologies go back to Greek speculation. “Details apart, the general resemblances between twentieth-century cosmology and its ancestors are no mere coincidence. Rather, they prompt one to look for an equally general motive. Is it, for instance, the case that, when evidence about the remote past is too slender for an empirical reconstruction of earlier history, the human intellect for want of anything better falls back naturally on these a priori patterns of theory?”¹⁰ In other words, the cosmologists simply are uncertain about the origin of the cosmos.

Hannes Alfven, the 1970 Nobel Prize winner in physics, stated the case even more bluntly. Alfven was an opponent of the “big bang” theory of cosmology.

Since the Big-Bang hypothesis is unacceptable, the question arises of what other hypothesis we should place in its stead. The answer is simple and straightforward: none! The Big-Bang conjecture is a myth, a wonderful myth maybe, which deserves a place of honor in the columbarium which already contains the Indian myth of a cyclic Universe, the Chinese cosmic egg, the Biblical myth of creation in six days, the Ptolemaic cosmological myth, and many others. It will always be admired for its beauty and it will always have a number of believers, just as the millennia-old myths. But nothing is gained if we try to place another myth in the place which the Big-Bang myth occupies now, not even if this new myth is adorned with still more beautiful mathematical formulas.¹¹

The best that a scientist can do is to guess about the state of the universe a billion years ago, and “the chance that this guess is realistic is negligible. If he takes this guess as the starting point for a theory, this is unlikely to be a scientific theory but very likely will be a myth. . . . To try to write a grand cosmic drama leads necessarily to myth.”¹² If he was correct—and I think he was correct—then why should orthodox Christians try to rewrite the story of the six-day creation in order to make it seem a bit more respectable, slightly more in conformity to the latest secular version of the three archetypal cosmic myths concerning origins that happens to be popular at the time?

book in question was Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859).

10. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, p. 258.

11. Hannes Alfven, “Cosmology: Myth or Science?” in Yourgrau and Breck (eds.), *Cosmology, History, and Theology*, pp. 12–13.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

B. Teleology

The *third*, and by far the most important reason why it is useless and counterproductive to modify the plain teaching of Genesis 1 concerning the sequence of creation, is that *the heart of modern science's opposition to this account is not the chronology as such*. The reason why modern science has adopted the ancient Greek accounts of cosmology—not the details, of course, but the basic outlines—is that modern scientists, like the ancient Greeks, are attempting to escape from the concept of God-ordained purpose. *What is most offensive to modern science is the idea of cosmological purpose prior to the evolutionary advent of man.*

The heart of the Bible's account of the creation is God and His purposeful word, while the heart of modern evolution is the denial of purpose, whichever of the secular cosmologies a man decides to accept. Apparently this fact has not been understood by those conservative Bible expositors who have chosen to rewrite Genesis 1. We must bear in mind that it was Darwin's insistence on the unplanned, purposeless nature of geological and biological change that won him instant success in the world of secular humanism. Darwin denied all the old arguments for divine purpose as a cause of the orderliness of nature. Natural order proves no such thing, he insisted; natural selection of randomly produced biological changes, not supernatural design, accounts for nature's orderliness. Evolutionary scientists accepted Darwin's denial of cosmic purpose long before there was any idea that the universe might be 13 billion years old. The heart of the Darwinian intellectual revolution was not evolution. *The heart of the Darwinian intellectual revolution was Darwin's explanation of un-designed order.* It was his denial of final purpose, of the universe's ends-orientation, of *teleology*.

Teleology has served Christian apologists ever since the days of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) as a major pillar of the five supposedly irrefutable proofs of God. Teleological arguments assert that the order of the universe reflects the orderly God who created it. Not only does this order reflect God, as Paul had argued (Rom. 1:18–20), it supposedly also demonstrates logically that such a God must exist. The universe can only be explained in terms of supernatural design. William Paley, writing in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, convinced the majority of his English and American audiences of the

logic of the argument from design.¹³

Consider the perspective of a book produced by faculty members of Princeton University in 1945 for students enrolled in a course on American civilization. This was published five years later by Yale University Press. It is indicative of the outlook of the best universities in the United States, then and today. It is a description of pre-Darwin explanations of nature's regularities, which Christian theologians and social thinkers accepted in the name of the Bible.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, orthodox Protestant Christian thinkers, both in England and in America, absorbed the Deist argument in its rationalistic aspects by harmonizing natural religion with revelation. The one was found to strengthen and confirm the other. . . . Out of this fusion of natural and revealed religion came one of the great arguments for the support of the orthodox faith. This was the doctrine of design. Just as Paley's famous watch bore its own testimony to the activity of the watch-maker, so the universe in all of its marvelous detail sang the praises of its Creator. In an age in which theories of natural law came to permeate social thought, and in which the achievements of applied science were already lending prestige to a rationalistic and materialistic view of things, the argument from design became one of the most useful and widely used defenses for Christianity. Natural religion must of course be supplemented by revealed religion, for each plumbed distinctly incommensurable dimensions. Nevertheless, natural law, as then conceived, was, like the revealed word of God, fixed, absolute, and immutable. The one was clearly apprehended by the intelligence, and the other by the study of Holy Writ.¹⁴

The concept of a mechanistic, self-sufficient system of natural law had not been recognized as a threat to Christian orthodoxy—a denial of cosmic personalism. Nineteenth-century Christians did not recognize the danger of constructing a systematic theology that rested simultaneously on a biblical pillar and a pillar of secular autonomy. The logic of design seemed so sure, so unanswerable. How else could men explain the extraordinary “fit” among all the parts of creation? Does not such an integrated, coherent environment demand men's faith in a cosmic Designer? And is not this Designer the God of the Bible? If the universe was *designed*, then it has a *purpose* assigned to it by God.

13. See Appendix A: “From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty.”

14. Stow Persons, “Evolution and Theology in America,” in Persons (ed.), *Evolutionary Thought in America* (New York: George Braziller, 1956), pp. 422–23. This was first published in 1950 by Yale University Press.

Even the ungodly must acknowledge the logic from design, Christian defenders of the faith insisted. The logic seemed inescapable: order implies design; design implies a Designer; a Designer implies purpose. What could be more logical? Christian apologists gave little or no thought to the intellectual vulnerability of this two-pillar defense. What if the secular pillar collapsed?

1. *Darwin's Challenge*

Darwin destroyed the claim of teleologists that no other secular explanation can suffice to explain the orderliness of nature. Not all of his early followers fully understood this point. One who did was Karl Marx, who hailed Darwin's achievement: "Darwin's book is very important and serves me as a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history. . . . Despite all its deficiencies, not only is the deathblow dealt here for the first time to 'teleology' in the natural sciences but their rational meaning is empirically explained." Marx wrote these words in 1861, a little over one year after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.¹⁵ (Marx knew little about biology; he praised the crackpot racist Pierre Tremaux.)¹⁶

Darwin's correspondence over the years reveals a few sentences in which some degree of unspecified and impersonal final causation might be admitted, but he never openly embraced a full-fledged teleology, nor is there any primary source evidence documenting his supposed death-bed conversion to Christianity.¹⁷ (These stories of death-bed conversions of famous skeptics have plagued both orthodox Christian historians and the outraged families of skeptics for well over a century. So common were these unsubstantiated rumors of death-bed conversions in the late nineteenth century, that the atheistic National Secular Society in Britain felt compelled to publish extensive obituaries of its members in order to forestall these predictable rumors.¹⁸)

15. Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels (Jan. 16, 1861), in *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, ed. Dona Torr (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 125.

16. Nathaniel Weyl, *Karl Marx: Racist* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1979), p. 72.

17. For an example of a repetition of the myth of Darwin's late conversion to Christianity, see Francis Nigel Lee, *The Central Significance of Culture* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), p. 44. Lee cited as his source a book by H. Enoch, *Evolution or Creation?* (London: Evangelical Press, 1968), pp. 166–67. Enoch, in turn, cited a 1916 article in the *Bombay Guardian* (March 25, 1916). In 1916, Darwin had been dead for 34 years.

18. On late-nineteenth-century "death-bed conversions," see Susan Budd, "The

There is no question that Genesis 1:14–16 states clearly that the stars, sun, and moon have a specific purpose. They were created on the fourth day to replace the supernatural light that had governed night and day for the first three days. They were created to give light and to separate day from night, as well as to serve as means of identifying the seasons. *This is the heart of the conflict between secular science and biblical revelation.* The Bible clearly states that the universe is theocentric, for God created it. This means, in turn, that the earth, as the home of man, the image of God, is the center of the universe, for it is the center of God's concern, the place where His Son was to live and die and rise again. This does not necessarily mean that the earth is the spatial center of the universe, if indeed it is possible to conceive of the spatial center of the universe. There are some indications that identifying a spatial center is not mentally possible for man.¹⁹ It does mean that the earth is the center of God's interest and plan, and the fact that it was created prior to the heavenly bodies should be sufficient to prove the point. The heavenly orbs were designed by God to serve man and the other living creatures. This is the *purpose* of the heavenly bodies.

Modern secular science, from Darwin to the present, has as its operating presupposition this premise: all causation is autonomous in nature, and no causation is purposive—until the advent of man. The origin of order must be sought in purposeless randomness—the basis of unbreakable scientific law in the nineteenth century, and the acknowledged sovereign in the twentieth—and not in God's purpose and design. To quote the Medawars' statement once again: "It is upon the notion of randomness that geneticists have based their case against a benevolent or malevolent deity and against there being any overall

Loss of Faith in England: Reasons for Unbelief among Members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850–1950," *Past and Present*, No. 36 (April 1967), pp. 107, 116ff. Wrote Budd: "It was so widely believed that an Atheist would not die without having repented, that less than thirty hours after [Charles] Bradlaugh's death his daughter began to receive inquiries asking if it were true that he had recanted" (p. 118). Bradlaugh was the founder of the National Secular Society. Rushdoony called attention to this phenomenon of rumors of death-bed conversions in the *Chalcedon Newsletter* 34 (June 17, 1968). He cited such stories regarding Horace Greeley, the newspaper publisher in America's Civil War period, Charles Darwin, and Martin Luther King, Jr., the American Negro leader of the 1950s and 1960s. Reprinted in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1991), pp. 638–40.

19. See Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1957] 1976).

purpose or design in nature.”²⁰ The Medawars have spoken not simply for geneticists, but for the whole of modern science.

2. *Randomness and Sovereignty*

To overcome the logic of Paley, late-nineteenth-century scientists took the first crucial step: to ascribe the origin of perceived order to random change. *This hypothesis was the major intellectual revolution of the nineteenth century.* The importance of this scientific presupposition cannot be overestimated: it served to free secular science from critics, potential and actual, who might have succeeded in redirecting the work of scientists along biblical lines. But there was a more fundamental aspect of this affirmation of randomness: *to shove God out of the universe, once and for all.* Man wanted to escape the threat of control by a supernatural Creator.

Once that step had been taken, scientists took a second step: to assert the *sovereignty of man*. Since there is no cosmic purpose in the universe, secularists concluded, man is left free to make his autonomous decisions in terms of his own autonomous plans. *Man becomes the source of cosmic purpose.* The purposeless forces of random evolutionary change have at long last produced a new, purposeful sovereign—man—and man now asserts his sovereignty over creation. He takes control, by means of science, over the formerly purposeless laws of evolutionary development. *The universe needs a god, and man is now this god.*

The concept of an order that developed, but which was not transcendently designed, appeared first in the social sciences, especially in the writings of the Scottish rationalists, most notably the two Adams, Ferguson and Smith. These two mid-eighteenth-century social theorists were attempting to explain the rationality of the market economy in terms of human actions that had never been intended to produce the market order. The market was explained as the product of human action, but not of human design. The evolutionary nature of this explanation should be clear: society is the product of spontaneous forces that are not controlled by any overall purpose of a personal authority. F. A. Hayek, the twentieth-century economist and social philosopher, devoted the bulk of his later academic career to a comprehensive consideration of the implications of this explanation of social de-

20. Peter and Jane Medawar, “Revising the Facts of Life,” *Harper’s* (Feb. 1977), p. 41.

velopment.²¹ *Social evolutionary theory preceded biological evolutionary theory by a century.* Darwin and Wallace invented the idea of evolution through natural selection after reading Thomas Malthus, the parson economist who pessimistically predicted that population growth would continually outrun man's ability to increase agricultural production.²² Even the concept of "the survival of the fittest" was coined originally by a social philosopher, Herbert Spencer, a Smithian defender of the unhampered free market.²³

The question arose early in post-Darwinian science: Now that man has appeared, can the random processes of nature be left alone to work out their endless non-destiny? Or should man begin to redirect the forces of evolution? Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, became the founder of eugenics, the idea of genetic planning.²⁴ In the United States, an early founder of sociology, Lester F. Ward, concluded that the unhampered free market cannot be trusted to produce humane ends, any more than the unhampered forces of nature can be relied upon to promote the purposes of humanity. He began to publish his opinions in the early 1880s, and he was ignored; by the early 1900s, his ideas had overthrown the arguments of the free market Social Darwinists (primarily Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner).²⁵ The formerly autonomous and spontaneous forces of the free market must now be redirected by social and economic planners. Predictably, the

21. F. A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *American Economic Review*, XXXV (Sept. 1945); reprinted in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIEO>)

22. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith [1959] 1967), p. 66; Loren Eiseley, *Darwin's Century* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1958] 1961), pp. 181–82, 331–32. Cf. R. M. Young, "Malthus and the Evolutionists," *Past and Present*, No. 43 (1969), pp. 109–45.

23. Darwin attributed the phrase to Herbert Spencer in the 5th edition of *Origin of Species* (1868), chap. III (Modern Library edition: p. 52). This was the first time Darwin used the phrase. Spencer first used it in his 1852 essay, "A Theory of Population, deduced from the General Law of Fertility." Cf. J. D. Y. Peel, Herbert Spencer: *The Evolution of a Sociologist* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 137–38.

24. Galton's most influential book was *Hereditary Genius* (1869). Cf. D. W. Forrest, Francis Galton: *The Life and Work of a Victorian Genius* (New York: Taplinger, 1974). For a highly critical assessment of Galton and eugenics, see Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York: Knopf, 1977), pp. 100–4.

25. Lester Frank Ward, *Dynamic Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton, 1883), 2 vols. (<http://bit.ly/WardDS1>, <http://bit.ly/WardDS2>). For a discussion of Ward's importance, see Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), ch. 4. See below, Appendix A:N.

biologists picked up the lead of the new social scientists; they also wanted to be sure that evolution would henceforth be purposeful.

C. Purpose

The importance of Genesis 1:14–16 for economic theory, as with all other theories about man and the universe, is the assertion of design and purpose. All of the creation has its purpose in terms of the plan of God. That plan sets man at the pinnacle of the cosmos. Thus, the order of the universe is not the product of an unexplainable cosmic explosion of an original matter-energy. Life is not the random product of random inanimate forces. The development of the market order also is not the product of purely and exclusively random human forces. *The universe is infused with purpose because of the cosmic personalism of the entire creation. Man's attempt to shove God out of the universe leads inevitably to the assertion of man's sovereignty over the processes of evolution.* Similarly, man's attempt to explain the orderliness of human institutional arrangements—the development of language, the development of the family, the development of the state (“social contract”), the development of orderly markets, etc.—also leads to the assertion that man, meaning an elite, must take control of the spontaneous forces of economic development. In both instances—human biological evolution and human social development—those humanists who have argued for the continuing viability of random, unplanned, undirected, and undesigned processes have encountered increasingly successful academic opposition from the more consistent humanists.

Covenant-breakers refuse to live under the dominion of randomness. Yet they also refuse to live with the idea of a sovereign personal God. Therefore, they have adopted the only intellectual alternative: *dominion by elite planners*. We have seen that men who are determined (meaning self-willed) to escape the dominion of both a caring but sovereign personal God and an uncaring but hypothetically sovereign impersonal random process have chosen to accept the slavery of elitist planning, at least in theory. In practice, they generally try to thwart the plans of the planners in cases where those plans are inconvenient for them.

Purpose is inescapably linked to personal sovereignty. Men of the second half of the nineteenth century who prided themselves in their defense of autonomous natural science's autonomous natural universe were attempting to banish God's sovereignty by banishing the concept

of transcendent cosmic purpose. The result was the creation of an intellectual monstrosity which almost no one has been willing to accept. Men usually desire purpose, which means that they desire a purposeful, personal sovereign. A new sovereign was brought forth: planning mankind, which meant, in the twentieth century, a planning elite. Humanism created a philosophy of sovereign purpose, and it thereby helped to bring us the necessary concomitant of such a philosophy: the bureaucratic cage.²⁶

A few traditional humanists, whose intellectual roots are still in the nineteenth century, attempted to revive the fading faith in the acceptability and even beneficial nature of decentralized purposefulness. They continued to quote favorably Adam Ferguson's eighteenth-century observation that human institutions are the products of human action—decentralized, individualistic planning—but not of human design. The economic theories of virtually all defenders of free market economics, but especially the theoretical framework of the so-called Austrian School—Ludwig von Mises, F. A. Hayek, Israel Kirzner, Murray Rothbard—have been constructed in terms of this eighteenth-century cosmology.

Despite the cogent economic arguments of these men, the modern world has systematically refused to take these arguments seriously. Men want to believe in a concept of immanent cosmic purpose, and this means a concept of a coherent, competent, order-producing planner. Men refuse to believe that successful social and economic coordination that is beneficial for all or most of the members of society can be the product of uncoordinated human actions that are somehow coordinated through a system of private property and freely fluctuating prices. They cling religiously to the concept of personal design. *Most men want to live in a universe with meaning and purpose, but this requires the concept of predestination.* As Rushdoony wrote: "The only alternative to the doctrine of predestination is the assertion of the reign of total chance, of meaningless and brute factuality. The real issue is what kind of predestination we shall have, predestination by God or predestination by man?"²⁷ In other words, it is never a question of predestination or no predestination. It is always a question of *whose*

26. Gary North, "Max Weber: Rationalism, Irrationalism, and the Bureaucratic Cage," in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976).

27. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1969] 2000), p. 6.

predestination.

Modern men have rejected the concept of predestination by God. They have been forced to locate some other predestinator: random evolutionary development, market forces, environmental determinism, the forces of production, the cunning of history, sexual sublimation, the will to power, hidden conspiracies, or the central planning agency. In all cases, the predestinating power is seen as part of the creation. *Men become subservient to some aspect of the creation.* Human responsibility is therefore not the opposite of predestination, but rather the obverse of it. Again, the real question is the source of the predestination. To whom will man become responsible?

D. Biblical Responsibility

The doctrine of biblical responsibility is very important to biblical economics. Paul's injunction to "work out your own salvation [salvation which is yours] with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12b)²⁸ is crucially important. It points to the locus of responsibility in the individual. The biblical methodology is *methodological covenantalism*, not methodological holism or methodological individualism. All social, political, and economic analyses must begin with the assumption that the basis of order in society is a personal relationship between God and individual men, and between God and responsible collective groups. *Cosmic personalism is the basis of social order*—the observed regularities in the affairs of men.²⁹ These regularities are not exclusively the product of acting men, nor are they exclusively the product of collective action. They are in no way the product of purely random forces or purely deterministic impersonal forces (holism). But there is no question that *individual responses to God's commands* are central to the understanding of the various covenants of God, including the dominion covenant. So, the individualistic approach of the classical economists and the neo-classical economists (pre-Keynesian) is not without merit. But classical economics could not survive the onslaught of Darwinism. Rushdoony's analysis is correct.

Classical liberalism is based on this Enlightenment faith, as is modern libertarianism and conservatism. Nature has, inherent within itself, its own processes and laws which govern reality. Hence, man's

28. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 19.

29. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1968] 1998).

attitude is one of *laissez-faire*; there must be no interference with nature's laws and controls. Planning was thus transferred from God to nature. Darwinism destroyed this faith in nature. The process of nature was now portrayed, not as a perfect working of law, but as a blind, unconscious energy working profligately to express itself. In the struggle for survival, the fittest survive by virtue of their own adaptations, not because of natural law. Nature produces many "mistakes" which fail to survive and become extinct species and fossils. The destiny of the universe is extinction as its energy runs down. All of this served to shatter the older faith in nature. Nature as an agency of predestination was gone. It became increasingly evident to naturalistic thinkers that man must control his own evolution and also control the evolution of plant and animal life. Moreover, man must create and control his own social order, so that total statism, total socialism, is "scientific socialism," that is, socialism which recognizes that man cannot exist without predestination and therefore provides for the control of process, for total planning and predestination, by the elite men.³⁰

The modern heirs of classical liberalism, being Darwinians, have been unable to counter successfully this drift into central planning, despite their cogent arguments in favor of individual responsibility and the free market as an agency of coordination. *Men want cosmic personalism*, and if the God of the Bible is excluded, by definition, by modern humanism, then the god of the planning state will have to suffice. The god of the market is too impersonal, too devoid of cosmic purpose, too theoretical, and unable to guarantee its man-benefiting sovereign power, to impress most Darwinian and post-Darwinian seekers after coherence.

E. Providence and Government

Biblical economics acknowledges the existence of coordinating institutions in human society other than the civil government. The family, the church, the voluntary association, the profit-seeking business, and other local, decentralized structures all provide social order. Government is not simply civil government. *Self-government is far more crucial than civil government.*

Within society, the institution of the free market—private property rights, legitimate profits and losses, open entry to the market, and freely fluctuating prices—can provide a remarkable system of social

30. Rushdoony, *Biblical Philosophy of History*, p. 7.

cooperation. The impressive defense of the market as an agency of coordination of individual plans—notably, the defense produced by the Austrian School of economists—has to be accepted. But the process is not autonomous. There are constants that the consistent Darwinian cannot admit, such as the constancy of human nature, the constancy of biblical law, and the constancy of God's personal judgment. The intellectual defense of the market must be made in terms of the laws of cause and effect. Cause-and-effect relationships are the product of God's providence—His sustaining hand, in direct government, planning the secondary causes of men's actions, and judging men according to His law. The free market must not be defended by means of Darwinian logic.

This intellectual defense has proven ineffectual in thwarting the far more consistent arguments of those Darwinians who assert the necessity of gaining direct control, through centralized planning, of a supposedly random, meaningless, purposeless, directionless, and above all, *mindless* process of natural selection—a process that in no way guarantees the survival of humanity, let alone its prosperity. Such a random process of development cannot guarantee humanism's goal: man's place in the universe as the source of cosmic personalism. The proper way to defend the validity of market processes is therefore not by means of the assertion of the sovereign autonomy of market forces, but by means of the opposite assertion: the non-autonomy of market processes, under God. Market processes require an ethical defense, not simply a pragmatic defense based on economic efficiency or the absolute sovereignty of individual men over their voluntary exchanges.³¹

Conclusion

The triumph of Darwinism cannot be understood without an awareness of the fundamental premise of Darwin: the absence of any cosmic purpose in the universe *prior to the evolution of man*. Darwinian evolution is the religion of modern humanism: the denial of cosmic purpose apart from mankind. The Darwinist maintains that all historical events apart from man and man's influence must be understood as products of impersonal forces: a combination of random chance and unbreakable natural law. There was no future-orientation in the development of the universe. Thus, Darwinism is at war with Christianity, for the Bible teaches that God is sovereign, that the universe was cre-

31. See Appendix B, "The Evolutionists' Defense of the Market."

ated by God, that its meaning and purpose are understood only in relation to God's decree, and that man is God's delegated covenantal agent on earth.

This is the second point of the biblical covenant: the doctrine of *hierarchy*. Man serves God, and the universe serves God through serving man. The cause-and-effect relationships in the original creation were future-oriented, earth-oriented, and man-oriented. God created the stars, sun, and moon for man. The earth is older than the heavens. This is what the Bible teaches, and it is an offense against anti-biblical religion.

3

THE STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLE

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26).

The theocentric issue here is hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant model.¹ Man was created specifically as God's representative agent on earth. God established His dominion covenant with mankind in Genesis 1:26. This established a *cosmic hierarchy*: God > man > nature. *Every covenant is hierarchical*. This dominion covenant corresponds to point two of the biblical covenant model.² God established this covenant before the creation of Adam and Eve (v. 27). God therefore established this covenant *authoritatively and representatively*. He did not ask Adam for permission. He did not ask Adam if the terms of the covenant were satisfactory to him (vv. 27–28).

A. A System of Representation

Man cannot be properly understood apart from the two facts revealed by Genesis 1:26. *First*, man is made in God's image. He is therefore the capstone of all creation. Though for the present, he is made "a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5) in terms of knowledge and power, man will ultimately judge the angels (I Cor. 6:3). The lawfulness of capital punishment (execution) is based on the fact that a murderer has struck out against this image of God (Gen. 9:6).³ *Second*, mankind

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Sutton, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

3. A discussion of capital punishment is found in Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five

is to seek dominion over all the creation. Presumably, the fact of man as God's image-bearer gives him this right and responsibility of dominion. The two statements are placed together in Genesis 1:26. *It is man's position as God's image-bearer that is fundamental*, not the fact of his lawful dominion over nature.⁴

It is improper to elevate "man, the supervisor over nature" above "man, the image-bearer of God." This is the enormous heresy of numerous humanistic thinkers, including traditional magicians, Enlightenment philosophers, post-Darwinian scientists and social planners, and Marxists. *It is only because man is under God as God's image-bearer that he possesses limited sovereignty over nature*. On the other hand, it is also illegitimate to ignore or deny the dominion covenant when you accept the principle of man, the image-bearer. God has specified that the purpose of man is to honor God by exercising dominion as His image-bearer over the creation.

Genesis 1:26 reveals that God established the dominion covenant *representatively*: point two of the biblical covenant model.⁵ Genesis 1:27 reveals that Adam was created after God had established His covenant with mankind. We know from Genesis 2 that Eve was created only after Adam had completed his first assignment: naming the animals. So, Genesis 1:27 has to refer to God's declaration of the terms of the dominion covenant to Adam, who acted judicially as the representative of his not-yet-created wife, just as God had acted representatively for the not-yet-created Adam. *Adam and Eve then served as the representative judicial agents of their not-yet-born heirs*. This is why there is original sin. Paul wrote:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come (Rom. 5:12–14).

There is a chronological aspect of representation, just as there is a hierarchical aspect. God was *superior* to Adam and Eve, and He was also *earlier* than they were. He spoke judicially on behalf of Adam and

Press, [1986] 2012), ch. 26.

4. Francis Nigel Lee, *The Origin and Destiny of Man* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), p. 41.

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

Eve. Adam was superior to Eve, and he was also earlier than she was. He spoke judicially on behalf of God to Eve. This is why Eve knew that it was illegal for her to eat the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:3). Adam had told her. Adam and Eve were superior to their children, and they were also earlier than they were. They acted judicially on behalf of their heirs. *That which was earlier in time was authoritative.* It was representative.

The law of the covenant was revealed to them after they had been granted life. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Here is the pattern: *first life, then blessing.* Life is a gift from God. So is capital. “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat” (Gen. 1:29). This leads to a conclusion: *grace precedes law.* It also leads to another conclusion: *there is no grace without law.* The law in question was the law of stewardship.

B. Stewards Under God

Stewardship is hierarchical. A steward manages the property of an owner. He owes an honest account of his stewardship. This relationship is one of *indebtedness*. The owner deserves a return on his investment.

God is the cosmic Owner because He is the Creator. He sustains the universe. Christian economics affirms Jesus Christ as the heir of God the Father. He is the heir because God delegated to Him the sovereignty over the acts of creation. The Apostle Paul identified the Son as the Creator.

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:12–17).

The Epistle to the Hebrews identified the incarnate Son as the Creator and the Sustainer.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Heb. 1:1–4).

He who sits at the right hand of God is Jesus Christ. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). This identification of a second Person involved in the original creation goes back to the words of God: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Gen. 1:26a).

C. A Positive Rate of Return

The owner expects a positive rate of return on his investment. The steward’s task is to provide this. He does this by means of the *productivity of the assets* transferred to him by the owner. There is to be a *surplus* out of which the owner is paid. In the case of Adam, this initial asset base included Adam’s mental abilities. God required him to name the animals of the garden as his first assignment (Gen. 2:19–20). This was an intellectual task: classification and assessment. It did not involve the use of physical assets.

Grace is commonly defined as an unearned and unmerited gift from God. Then was the creation of Adam an act of grace? If God required Adam to work as His representative agent, producing a positive rate of return for God, how can we legitimately speak of life as a gift? Only by affirming *service to God as a gift*. Adam was a servant. We could just as accurately call him a slave. He was not his own man. This is another way of saying that he was not autonomous. He was under God’s authority in a covenant that didn’t need his assent to be valid. Although God did not inform him of this, God required him to assent to this covenant sacramentally by eating from the tree of life. We know this because the tree of life will be in the midst of the final revelation of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2).

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14).

By saying that Adam was not his own man, we affirm that God did not serve Adam. *There is an inescapable covenantal hierarchy, and man is not on top.* Neither is Satan. Neither is any aspect of the creation. So, Adam had to serve God. The creation also serves God by serving man.

God did not need Adam. There is no indication in the Bible that God is in any way dependent on His creation. He is transcendent over it. He created it out of nothing. He spoke it into existence. He sustains it providentially. There is nothing that He gets from mankind that He did not provide to mankind. The creation does not make Him more God than He was before the creation. The creation does not fill a void in God's being.⁶

This leads to one of the riddles of biblical theology. God blessed Adam. Yet Adam is to bless God. God needed nothing. He was glorious before the creation. Yet the creation testifies to God's majesty. Paul wrote: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:20–21). He who was infinitely glorious before the creation receives honor in return. Where does this extra honor come from? Cornelius Van Til called this the *full-bucket paradox*. If a bucket is full, how can anyone pour in more water? Does the additional water add to the bucket's supply? No. Yet the water is poured in. This is one of the fundamental paradoxes of the Bible. Van Til went so far as to say this: "This point lies at the bottom of every paradox of antinomy."⁷ What is the nature of this paradox? This: *his-*

6. The medieval mystic and heretic Meister Eckhart (1260–1327) argued that God needed man. Eckhart was a pantheist. For an English language bibliography relating to Eckhart, go here: <http://bit.ly/EckhartBibliography>.

7. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Nutley, New Jersey: P & R, [1955] 2008), p. 68.

tory has meaning. It adds something that was not there before. *Yet God is infinite.*

In terms of economic theory, we say that Adam was required to add value to the creation. Nevertheless, the creation was perfect. It had no flaws. God pronounced it good (Gen. 1:31).⁸ How can anyone add value to perfection? This is the full-bucket paradox in economic theory.⁹

Jesus' parable of the talents indicates that God will demand a final accounting of His servants, and that men are required to show a positive rate of return. They will receive their eternal rewards or punishments in terms of their net return in history (Matt 25:14–30).¹⁰ Yet all of whatever people produce of benefit is the result of God's gifts. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).¹¹ So, whatever man offers up to God has come down to him from God.

D. Grace and Law

Grace precedes law. Life and raw materials were gifts to Adam and Eve as individuals and as founders of humanity, so they are gifts also to us. As with Adam, we also come into this world in debt to God. We leave this world and enter the next in permanent debt to God. The Bible teaches that we remain in debt all of our lives . . . to infinity and beyond. We are required by God to increase our net worth, thereby increasing His net worth. Yet He owns everything. How does man increase the net worth of a God who owns everything? This is the full-bucket paradox as it applies to economics, both in theory and practice.

We are required by God to add value to His creation, just as Adam was required to dress the garden. We never can repay God. We remain unprofitable servants. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable ser-

8. Chapter 5.

9. The same antinomies are found in all areas of life. Consider cosmology. Modern big bang cosmology insists that the universe is expanding. Yet we also say that the universe is infinite. Best put, *Toy Story's* Buzz Lightyear declares, "To infinity and beyond!" Buzz is a first-rate modern cosmologist.

10. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

11. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 32.

vants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).¹²

Grace is not deserved. It also is not cost-free. Christianity rests on the concept of a *representative judicial atonement*. This atonement had a high price: the perfect life, undeserved death, bodily resurrection, and bodily ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of God in heaven.

Even before the Fall, grace was not free. There was a price to be paid: *stewardship*. Adam served God. God did not serve Adam. God gave Adam raw materials, but these materials had a purpose: to enable Adam to exercise dominion representatively for God. God required Adam's service. He also imposed a *system of accounting*. God would evaluate Adam's performance. Adam's performance went deeply negative at the Fall. Added to the normal rate of return that God expected from His sin-free stewards was a payment for sin. That payment could be made only representatively by someone who possessed sufficient standing with God: His Son.

Grace is *free* in the sense of *undeserved by the recipient*. It was never free in the sense of cost-free. This is because Adam served God. God did not serve Adam. Adam answered to God. God did not answer to Adam.

At least one small American Presbyterian denomination has explicitly denied the post-Fall legitimacy of the dominion covenant (also referred to as the cultural mandate), thereby ignoring the explicit reconfirmation of this covenant by God with Noah (Gen. 9:1–2).¹³ Prior to 1980, virtually all twentieth-century fundamentalism and pietism by implication and practice denied the existence of such a covenant. The idea that men are responsible, as faithful servants of God, to bring the whole world under the rule of God's law, is repulsive to the vast majority of professing Christians. Rushdoony accurately identified two philosophical justifications for this retreat from responsibility: manicheanism and neoplatonism. Manicheanism is the idea that the creation is somehow innately sinful, and that the attributes of the flesh, especially power, are evil.¹⁴ Neoplatonism holds that "matter" is some-

12. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 41.

13. I refer to the Bible Presbyterian Church. Cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 723–24.

14. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1970] 1995), p. 175. Cf. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1968] 2001), pp. 134, 250.

how inferior to “spirit,” and thus unimportant.¹⁵

Conclusion

God made man in terms of a covenant: the dominion covenant. The third point of the biblical covenant is ethics: obedience to God as the means of man’s dominion over the earth. *Ethics and dominion are inescapably related in the biblical covenant structure.*

Because man rebelled against God, his dominion assignment has become more twisted. Man apart from God is a rebel, a murderer, a destroyer. Only God’s grace can begin to restore mankind to obedience to God. God’s grace is therefore the basis of mankind’s dominion and power.¹⁶

Mankind cannot escape the dominion covenant. He can pervert it, fight it, and publicly abandon it, but he cannot escape it. Man is defined in terms of it in history. Only in hell and the lake of fire does man’s ability to fulfill it disappear—a sense of eternal loss for covenant-breakers. People are either under God ethically, or else under the creation, Satan, other men, or the supposedly impersonal forces of nature. *Those who are passive toward God can exercise long-term dominion over nature.* Those who are active rebels against God become the slaves of nature. But there is no escape from the terms of the dominion covenant.

15. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Flight from Humanity: A Study of the Effect of Neoplatonism on Christianity* (Vallecito, California: Chalcedon, [1973] 2008).

16. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

4

GRACE PRECEDES LAW, BUT INCLUDES LAW

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:27–28).

The theocentric principle here is God as the Law-giver. This corresponds to point three of the biblical covenant model: ethics/ law.¹ Man is made in God's image. He is under God in the same way that a field grade officer is under his commanding general. He is to abide by his Commander's instructions, and he is to "do it by the book," which in this case is the law-order revealed to man verbally and through the creation ordinances.

God gave Adam an assignment: to subdue the earth. This is the positive injunction of the dominion covenant. *Every biblical covenant has at least one positive injunction.*² There was a ritual manifestation of this law in the dominion covenant: eating from the tree of life. *Every covenant also has at least one negative injunction.*³ In this case, it was avoiding a specific tree. That tree was off-limits. There was a legal boundary around it. There was a fearful negative sanction attached to

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Personal covenant: believe in the redemptive work of Christ. Marriage covenant: be fruitful and multiply. Church covenant: disciple the nations. Civil covenant: enforce justice.

3. Individual covenant: do not blaspheme the Holy Ghost (Matt. 12:31). Marriage covenant: do not commit adultery. Church covenant: do not preach a false gospel (Gal. 1:6–7). Civil covenant: do not accept bribes.

it: death. Adam could not serve as a faithful steward if he violated this boundary. By violating it, he would ritually declare his independence from God. He would renounce his stewardship for God. *The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a representative manifestation of God's original ownership.*

The first chapter of Genesis proclaims the absolute sovereignty of God the Creator. As the Creator, God must be honored by all the creation, for He is Lord over all (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:10). For man to honor God, he must have respect for God's law-order. Man was created specifically as God's representative on earth. Man is made in God's image. He is under God in the same way that a military man is under his commanding officer.

A. Subduing the Earth

Christianity is a religion of *self-conscious activity*. This is true because it is a religion demanding *ethical passivity*. With respect to God, the source of all ethical standards, man is to be wholly passive. The sin of Adam and Eve was their attempt to become ethically determinative. They sought a zone of pure autonomy, where they could test the word of God. They accepted the devil's idea that they might not surely die on the day they ate of the forbidden fruit. They had been assigned a passive role in relation to God; they were to think His thoughts after Him, in a creaturely fashion. Then they were to extend God's authority over all the earth. *Passivity before God* was to lead directly to *active dominion*. They were assigned the task of subduing the earth.

God assigned a task to the first humans. They were to subdue the earth, an indication that the natural world, while unquestionably good in itself (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), is incomplete. It requires active administration. The natural world was not to be considered normative even before the curse of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19).⁴ God's law is normative, and man, as the image-bearer of God, is to exercise dominion in terms of God's law.

This is not to say that there is no such thing as natural law. *There is a fundamental orderliness to the processes of the universe.* The sun, moon, and stars possess a regularity that serves the purposes of man and, in a subordinate fashion, the living creatures of the earth (Gen. 1:14–18).⁵ The animals reproduce according to the laws imposed by

4. Chapter 12.

5. Chapter 2.

God (Gen. 1:21, 24–25). *Natural law can never mean autonomous law.* It can never mean law that is a product of an autonomously existing natural order (or disorder). All “laws of nature” (regularities) are inescapably personalistic. This is simply one application of the doctrine of cosmic personalism.

Adam was to honor the created laws of God that governed the natural realm. He was also to respect the laws revealed directly to him by God, or perceived by Adam because of his position as God’s image-bearer. The point is this: *his knowledge of God’s law was his tool of dominion.* As a creature, he was under law, but as God’s image-bearer, he was able to use his knowledge of law to become *subordinately active* under God and subdue the earth.

There is no question that rebellious man, who has asserted his independence from God as a self-proclaimed active and autonomous agent, has frequently become a destroyer. Nature has suffered at his hands. Unrestrained by biblical law or a sense of responsibility, rebellious men have subdued the earth for their own glory and profit, and the result has been the disruption of the earth. We are told, for example, that the reason why the Israelites had to be carried off into captivity for 70 years was that they had refused to honor the law of God by giving the land its sabbath rest every seventh year. In their absence for seven decades, the land would have its lawful rest (II Chron. 36:21; Jer. 50:34). This rest allowed the land’s natural restorative processes to replenish its fertility. Nevertheless, the land was not to be wholly free from man’s dominion. The leaders and mighty men of valor, the craftsmen and smiths—in short, those worth carrying off—were forced out of the land. “None remained,” the Bible says, “save the poorest sort of the people of the land” (II Kings 24:14b). Those who could barely exercise dominion stayed; the land was not deserted entirely. Only in the rare case of the total and irreversible judgment of God against a city was the land to be left to the rule of nature (Jer. 50:39). This was understood as the ultimate social curse.

Yet there is another possibility for rebellious man: an attempted retreat from the responsibilities of ecological dominion. The idea of ecological romantics, Eastern mystics, and numerous primitive cultures is that man must live “in harmony with nature.” Man must conform himself to the laws of nature. Of course, it is difficult to determine which laws apply in specific instances, but the idea of the overall sovereignty or normativity of the natural order is paramount in these cosmological systems. Man is nothing more than one small part of an

autonomous natural process, but a force for evil when he allows his powers to take control of nature. Rather than seeing man as the agent of dominion over nature, these systems place man under the dominion of nature. Rebellious man, in short, *actively defied God* by abandoning his responsibilities under the dominion covenant, and, in doing so, he eventually becomes essentially *passive before nature* or *passive before the state*.

The Christian acknowledges that man has become a rebellious destroyer. We know that the whole creation groans to be delivered from “the bondage of corruption” (Rom. 8:21).⁶ The earth is under a curse because of man. But Christians are “saved by hope” (Rom. 8:24), a hope in God’s redemption, not in hope of some hypothetical return to a natural paradise. Man is indeed a destroyer, an ethical rebel who seeks release from the comprehensive requirements of God’s law-order. Nevertheless, “man the destroyer” is not the result of “man the controller,” he is the product of “man the ethical rebel.” It is not man’s dominion over the earth that is illegitimate, but rather man’s attempt to dominate the earth apart from God’s control over man. *The only foundation of man’s right to dominion is his conformity to the requirements of God.* Captains who rebel against generals can expect their corporals to be insubordinate. Our polluted regions of the earth are rebelling against man’s rebellious, lawless rulership, not against rulership as such.

In a widely quoted and reprinted 1967 essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crises,” medieval historian Lynn White, Jr., argued that the Christian concept of man’s dominion over nature brought the pollution crisis to the West. White’s remarkable familiarity with the history of medieval technology in the West restrained him to the extent that he had to admit that certain key advances in technology were due primarily to differing environmental and geographical circumstances. But his underlying view was the heart of the essay’s popularity with the ecological romantics of the 1960s and 1970s: “By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.”⁷ The fact that paganism, even in its radically animistic forms, can result in societies

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

7. Lynn T. White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* (10 March 1967); reprinted in Garrett de Bell (ed.), *The Environmental Handbook* (New York: Ballentine, 1970), p. 21.

that pollute the earth, was not mentioned by White. His conclusion: "Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man."⁸ On the contrary, the Christian axiom is rather that all creation is to serve God, the Creator. Yet he admitted that it was primarily in the mid-nineteenth century that the fusion of science (theory) and technology (practice) finally created the industrial society that is now polluting and destroying nature. In short, this process can be dated from the period in which Darwinian speculation, radical atheism, and unbounded confidence in the autonomous forces of secular progress came into ascendancy in Western Europe and, a generation later, in the United States.

A fine but neglected answer to White appeared in the conservative magazine, *National Review* in late 1974. The author, R. V. Young, Jr., dissected his arguments, showing how it was not Christianity but the materialists who were the designers and engineers of the modern industrial system. His conclusion is significant.

In every instance the pattern is the same: secularization leads to the apotheosis of material "progress," and old traditions of piety and reverence—the sense of man's limitations and obligations—crumble. In Christianity, as in most religions of the world, pride—the attempt to transcend the conditions of mortal life and become as a god—is the fundamental sin, and the corresponding virtue is humility. What is usually called the "environmental" or ecologic crisis is really only one aspect of the pervasive moral and cultural crisis of our time, and the cause of this crisis is pride. For too long we have believed that no bounds need be placed on human ambition and desire, but now it has been discovered that even scientific technology, the instrument of modern man's intended self-deification, must bow to the finitude of reality.⁹

In short, it is the arrogance of autonomous man, who has inherited the products of a Christian vision of dominion through adherence to law, but who no longer acknowledges the sovereignty of the God who establishes the law-order which transfers power to man, that has created the pollution crisis. It was not the fault of Christianity, which always regarded the earth as capital wealth entrusted to man as something to be treated with deference. Man is a steward in the Christian

8. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

9. R. V. Young, Jr., "Christianity and Ecology," *National Review* (Dec. 20, 1974), p. 1479.

view, not an owner of the earth (Ps. 24:1).¹⁰ The secularists denied God and transferred God's sovereignty to man. "Man the steward" became "man the autonomous owner," and modern ecological devastation began in earnest.

Man is to subdue the earth, not destroy it. Man is to replenish it, care for it, use it to God's glory. This permits him to benefit from the fruits of the land, for he is made in God's image. When man tries to appropriate the fruits of the earth apart from the restraining law of God, then he can expect results that are costly to him. *We live in a universe of personalistic law, and the moral law of God is more fundamental than the natural regularities of the created realm.* Moral law is primary, and God has built into His world a kind of "negative feedback." When men consistently and systematically violate the moral law of God in a certain area of life, external events—seemingly unrelated to the moral realm—begin to place restraints on the rebels.

The best example in Scripture is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Men rebelled against God through their father, Adam (Rom. 5). Adam ate of the tree. The whole creation was cursed as a result. God's word predicted the penalty of death, but the serpent implied that God's word could not be trusted. How could any "neutral" scientist have predicted any cause-and-effect relationship between the eating of a particular fruit and the cursing of the universe? But that supernaturally controlled cause-and-effect relationship was there. Ours is a universe of cosmic personalism. God respects His word more than He respects the external regularities of the creation (II Peter 3:4–7).

Because of this, *man's fundamental tool of dominion is the moral law of God.* Secondly, natural law—nature's external regularities—can be discovered by man, and serves as a tool of dominion—a dominion assignment that is subordinate to the moral law. Without the tool of God's moral law, which restrains man (for he is a creature under law), his power-granting knowledge of natural law makes him a destroyer. He is granted his knowledge of the external world because he is made in the image of God, and because he is under the terms of God's dominion covenant. He is required by God to use his knowledge of nature's external regularities to subdue the earth, not to destroy it. Without the restraining effects of moral law, man becomes suicidal. "All they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36b). The earth and its man-serving resources are ravaged by self-proclaimed autonomous

10. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

man. The intellectual inheritance of the *idea of progress* and *natural law as a tool of dominion*—both of which are explicitly and uniquely biblical ideas—becomes a loaded gun, or something worse, in the hands of rebellious man.

B. The Inescapable Covenant

We should understand that this covenant is not simply ethical in its form. The command to exercise dominion is not simply a “take it or leave it” variety of command. The covenant is announced to man in the 28th verse, but in verse 26, God’s own self-counsel establishes dominion as the very function of human nature. Man *must* exercise dominion. It is part of his nature to do so. The suppression of this aspect of human personality is part of an overall attempt to suppress the image of God. It is an act of ethical rebellion. Ultimately, suicide is the only means of escape from this covenant. Man must exercise dominion as he goes about his daily tasks. Even the hermit, who is not part of the economy’s division of labor—the ultimate social means of dominion used by man—must plant, or hunt, or search for berries. He displaces other life. The animals fear him and give him deference, a feature of life that was part of God’s reaffirmation of the renewed dominion covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:2). *For man to live is to exercise dominion*. Only in hell, or afterward, in the lake of fire, can man at last escape the responsibilities of the dominion covenant. He can never escape their consequences.

Sin, however, is not limited to the attempted rejections of the dominion covenant. It is also very much in evidence in the attempts of self-proclaimed autonomous men to exercise humanistic dominion apart from God or God’s law-order. As Rushdoony commented: “As a result of the fall, however, man’s urge to dominion is now a perverted one, no longer an exercise of power under God and to His glory, but a desire to be God. This was precisely the temptation of Satan, that every man should be his own god, deciding for himself what constitutes right and wrong (Gen. 3:5). The ultimacy of man in both law and power was asserted.”¹¹

C. The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century was the most thoroughly secularized and

11. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 448.

humanistic one in the history of the post-Roman Empire West. It was also the century of totalitarian tyranny and total warfare, where over 100 million people had violently perished by 1970.¹²

Fundamentalists in the twentieth century repeatedly accused dominion-oriented Christians of being in the same camp as the theological and political liberals. The so-called Social Gospel movement, which arose in the late nineteenth century, was strongly in favor of social action, economic redistribution, and the elevation of the powers of the civil government, especially the national government. Social action, meaning political action, was subsequently equated by fundamentalists with the Social Gospel movement. Historically, the argument is inaccurate; if anything, the liberal theologians of, say, 1870–1970, were *imitating* an older tradition of theological orthodoxy, especially the tradition of early New England Puritanism and early nineteenth-century Presbyterianism, both northern and southern.¹³ The Social Gospel was a secularized reconstruction of the optimistic, activist, decentralist, conservative Protestant tradition in the United States. The defenders of the Social Gospel, in effect if not in theory, removed the sovereignty of God and the validity of God's revealed law-order, and then substituted a new god, the state, with its relativistic law-order.

The twentieth century witnessed the steady erosion of social and cultural confidence among both American fundamentalists and Western liberal theologians. The First World War transformed liberal theo-

12. Gil Elliot, *Twentieth Century Book of the Dead* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 1. Elliot's figures vastly underestimate the murders by Communist China, 1948–70: two million as opposed to as many as 60 million. Also, he did not count abortions, which by the late 1970s were running in the 35 to 55 million range, per year, world-wide. As Elliot said, "To set such a figure [100 million man-made deaths] against a scale of violence in previous times involves the difficulties of comparing like periods and of allowing for population increase. However, every attempt to do so shows the twentieth century to be incomparably the more violent period" (p. 1). His estimate of 100 million was too low. At least that many died under Communism: see Stephane Courtois (ed.), *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1997] 1999).

13. On the optimism of pre-Civil War Southern Presbyterians, see Jack P. Maddex, "From Theocracy to Spirituality: The Southern Presbyterian Reversal on Church and State," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, LIV (1976), pp. 438–57. See also James B. Jordan, "A Survey of Southern Presbyterian Millennial Views Before 1930," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Winter 1976–77), pp. 106–21. In the North, the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, the most influential of the orthodox Presbyterian seminaries, was noted for its postmillennial optimism: Archibald Alexander, A. A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield.

logy. Optimism began to go out of the movement.¹⁴ It revived again during the Second World War, flickered on through the brief tenure (1961–63) of President John F. Kennedy, and then steadily died out during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 had a great deal to do with this, for he had been a symbol. Around the world, he had been perceived as the representative of can-do moderate political liberalism. His successor, Lyndon Johnson, was the very incarnation of political liberalism, but he left the office in 1969 a political failure because of his escalation of Kennedy's legacy—no bigger than a man's hand—of the Vietnam War. A growing number of liberal theologians came to accept Protestant fundamentalism's pessimism concerning the possibility of successful efforts to reconstruct society in terms of Christian presuppositions. Rushdoony was correct when he stated, "Liberals, neo-orthodox, existentialists and others have renounced the idea of power as an illusion or a temptation, and the possession of power as an evil. The result has been to accentuate the drift to totalitarian power."¹⁵ Pessimism undermines resistance to power and evil.

Power renounced is not power diminished; it is merely power transferred. What is needed to resist centralized political power—the kingdom of man incarnate—is a reassertion of the total sovereignty of God. Then, as a direct consequence, power must be redistributed widely, away from central governments and into the hands of local political bodies, churches, voluntary institutions of all kinds. The Bible affirms the legitimacy of power. It places all power in the hands of Jesus Christ: (Matt. 28:18). Then it directs Christians to go forth, preaching the gospel and discipling nations, teaching them to observe "all things whatsoever" Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20).¹⁶ "All things," as Greg Bahnsen's study, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977),

14. A classic statement of the pessimism of the theological liberals is Walter Marshall Horton, *Realistic Theology* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1934). An extract of this book appears in William R. Hutchison (ed.), *American Protestant Thought: The Liberal Era* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1968), pp. 190–96. Reinhold Niebuhr is the archetype of the shift from optimism to pessimism, and he is the focus of the book by Donald Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919–1941* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, [1960] 1973). [I took his course in American social history in 1962.] See also Robert T. Handy, "American Religious Depression, 1925–1935," *Church History*, XXIX (1960), pp. 3–16.

15. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 448.

16. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

demonstrates forcefully, includes the whole of biblical law.¹⁷ What we call the Great Commission of Christ to His church (Matt. 28:18–20)¹⁸ is a reaffirmation of the dominion covenant, taking into account the progress of redemptive history.

Conclusion

Adam entered this world in debt to God. God had provided him with raw materials and a mind that was able to understand the regularities of nature. Adam was the recipient of God's grace. This was not lawless grace. Adam was under a covenant that demanded performance. He was to subdue the earth.

The idea that an individual is autonomous is preposterous. Every person is under the dominion covenant. Every person is the genetic heir of his parents. Every person is the recipient of benefits from the social institutions that sustain life. There is no benefit received apart from final judgment. Every person will give an account of his life. Grace precedes law, but it is never without law.

17. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1984), p. 448.

18. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/kggreatcom>)

5

ECONOMIC VALUE: OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day (Gen. 1:31).

The theocentric principle here is God as the cosmic Judge. This corresponds to point four of the biblical covenant model: judgment.¹

The first chapter of Genesis repeats the phrase “and God saw that it was good” five times (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), in addition to the final summation in verse 31. God’s creative acts were evaluated by God and found to be good. They reflected His own goodness and the absolute correspondence between His plan, His standards of judgment, His fiat word, and the results of His word: the creation. *The creation was good because it was the product of God’s sovereign plan.* God therefore imputed positive value to His creation, for He created it perfect. It was completely in conformity to His decree. *The doctrine of imputation lies at the heart of the doctrine of creation.* The creation was good because God created it good and because God said it was good. It was good *objectively*, because of its inherent conformity to God’s decree. It was good *subjectively*, because God announced its perfection, indicating its conformity to His standards. *The Creator is also the Imputer.* God’s original subjective standards—meaning personal, not relative—served as the sole standard of the creation itself. Once created, God—the infallible, subjective Evaluator—announced that in no way did the creation deviate from His standards.

Prior to his ethical rebellion, man was consistently able to think God’s thoughts after Him in a creaturely, human fashion. Man had

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

language from the beginning. He had the power to relate mental constructs to the external realm of creation. He was assigned the task of naming (classifying) the animals (Gen. 2:19) and dressing the garden (Gen. 2:15), indicating his ability to fulfill God's requirement that he establish dominion over the creation. In both tasks, human judgment was crucial. This judgment was to be in conformity to the standards set forth by God, both verbally (Luke 4:4)² and indirectly through the creation itself (Rom. 1:19). In short, man had the power of evaluating or *imputing value* to aspects of the creation, because he had been created in the image of God. He had the power to impute value accurately because he was not yet in rebellion against the standards of God. He was assigned the task of exercising dominion over the earth according to God's command and in terms of God's law. This meant that man must *use judgment* in designing plans of action. He must *act purposefully* in terms of God's standards.

A. The Great Debate

The problem of value is central to the science of economics. Is value determined objectively or subjectively? Is the value of some scarce economic resource inherent in that resource, or is it derived from the evaluations of acting men? In short, *is value intrinsic or imputed?* This debate has raged within the economics profession for several centuries.

It is generally regarded as the essence of the "marginalist" intellectual revolution of the early 1870s that value must be understood as strictly subjectively determined. Acting men impute value to scarce economic resources that have no inherent or intrinsic value. All value is subjective; no value is objective, meaning intrinsic. F. A. Hayek argued that "it is probably no exaggeration to say that every important advance in economic theory during the last hundred years was a further step in the consistent application of subjectivism."³

Classical economics began with Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 and extended to the work of John Stuart Mill, just prior to simultaneous and independent discoveries of "marginalism" by Jevons (England), Menger (Austria), and Walras (Switzerland) in the early

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

3. F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, [1952] 1955), p. 31. Reprinted by Liberty Press, 1979.

1870s. Classical economics defended competing explanations concerning the source of all value. Smith held both the labor theory of value and a cost-of-production theory of price. He also believed that supply and demand determine prices, and that the “natural price” of any scarce resource is based on the labor that it takes to make it, or the cost of all resource inputs. The competition of supply and demand will produce a price which fluctuates around the “natural price.” The labor theory of value and the cost-of-production theory of price are incompatible. This is explained in most of the standard histories of economic thought. Gide and Rist put it bluntly: “They remain juxtaposed in the *Wealth of Nations* because he never made up his mind which to adopt. As a result his work is full of contradictions which it would be futile to try to reconcile.”⁴ How supply and demand are related either to the labor theory or cost-of-production theory was also impossible to demonstrate. Almost a century later, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill brought the classical period to a close; neither of them was able to reconcile the formation of prices on a market with either the labor theory of value or a cost-of-production theory.⁵

The heart of the debate over intrinsic (fixed) value can be seen in the problem that bothered all of the classical economists, the so-called *diamond-water paradox*. Why is it that something so essential to life, water, is so cheap, while diamonds, things merely ornamental, are so very expensive? If intrinsic value has any meaning, shouldn't water be more valuable than diamonds? Furthermore, why do the prices of diamonds change? How do diamonds conform to the labor theory of value? If human effort is the source of all value, why is it that a diamond, which is discovered accidentally, is so valuable? Smith, in his lectures of 1762–63, noted the problem and answered by means of the logic of supply and demand: “It is only an account of the plenty of water that it is so cheap as to be got for the lifting; and on account of the scarcity of diamonds (for their real use seems not yet to be discovered) that they are so dear.”⁶ Smith did not include these lines in the *Wealth*

4. Charles Gide and Charles Rist, *A History of Economic Doctrines* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co. 1948), p. 95.

5. For the classic critique of Marx's economics, see Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, “The Unresolved Contradiction in the Marxian Economic System” (1896), in *The Shorter Classics of Böhm-Bawerk* (South Holland, Illinois: Libertarian Press, 1962). This is a modern version of the book, *Karl Marx and the Close of His System*. See also my section in Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gnmr0r>)

6. Cited by H. M. Robertson and W. L. Taylor, “Adam Smith's Approach to the

of Nations; instead, he turned to other explanations of price which misled economists for a century.

The marginalists, or subjectivists, had an answer to this age-old problem. The question is not the *total utility* of "water in general" versus "diamonds in general." The question is rather what a given quantity of water will exchange for on the open market versus one diamond. What we find is this: men do not trade indeterminate aggregates. They trade discrete units or quantities. If a particular quantity of water is interchangeable with an equal quantity of water anywhere else in an economy, and the same is true of diamonds, then the "last drop" of water will be worth just slightly—"marginally"—less than the "next to the last drop." Similarly, the last diamond will be worth only slightly less than the next to the last diamond. But since there are so few diamonds available and such a strong demand for them, that last diamond—the one being exchanged in any given transaction—will command considerable quantities of other scarce resources. On the other hand, that final unit of water, given the huge quantities of water available for sale, will not command a high price. Thus, it is the value of the *marginal unit*—the one given up by the seller and bought by the buyer—that determines the exchange value of all other similar units being offered for sale in the market. It is not "general value" that determines the price of a specific unit of any commodity or service, but the *marginal* value of the *least* valuable unit offered for sale.

It should also be noted that a glass of fresh water on Lake Michigan (or an unpolluted fresh-water lake) will not command a high price, while a glass of water in the desert may. The transportation costs of getting fresh water to a man in a desert are high. He must bid a high price to induce someone to make the effort. We must not speak of "water in general." Supply and demand explain market prices; they determine what people will actually pay for a particular resource. An abundant resource will result in low prices for each specific unit of that resource, since the *final use* (least heavily demanded use) which will be served by that resource will be *well down on the scale of men's values*. The higher uses (more strongly demanded uses) will already have been served by other available units of the resource in question. Therefore, the price of every unit offered for sale can be no higher than the

Theory of Value," *Economic Journal*, LXVII (1957); reprinted in Joseph J. Spengler and William R. Allen (eds.), *Essays in Economic Thought* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1960), p. 292.

highest price offered for the final unit.⁷ When you buy an alarm clock at the supermarket, you will find that each one costs \$6.98, or whatever. They are interchangeable, and if one unit were to cost \$17.50, while another was selling for \$6.98, no one would spend \$17.50 to get an identical clock (assuming everyone really believes the clocks are identical). The value of the *final* good, or *marginal* good, determines the value of each of them being offered for sale (disregarding transportation costs and information costs).

This explanation of market pricing created an intellectual revolution in the field of economics. The late nineteenth century saw the advent of this explanation and its triumph among academic economists by 1900. Menger, Jevons, and Walras buried the arguments for intrinsic value as the basis of market value. As one observer has put it: "If people value it, it has value; if people don't value it, it doesn't have value; and there is no 'intrinsic' about it."⁸ Value is therefore *imputed by acting men. This act of imputation is the foundation of the subjective theory of value.*

Men wish to achieve their goals with the minimum expenditure of scarce resources possible. They prefer giving up less to buy a good than giving up more. They want to buy cheap and sell dear. This goal has led to the development of the free market. The market permits people to *impute their own personal value* to a multitude of scarce resources, depending upon their knowledge, goals, and available resources. The market enables them to make judgments through *a system of competitive bidding*. Men compete for specific quantities of specific goods and services. They offer specific prices. This competition leads to the establishment of market prices for specific units of scarce resources. The market price of a resource is therefore the product of a multitude of subjective imputations of value; it is established through competitive bidding. Market prices are therefore the products of a *grand auction process*, in which buyers and potential buyers compete against each other for specific quantities of a particular resource, while sellers compete against potential sellers in order to sell to the highest bidding buyers. *A market price is therefore an objective result of competitive subjective valuations.*

7. This assumes that buyers have knowledge of all the sellers' prices, which is not a realistic assumption, but which comes close to the operations of a mass-production economy in which advertising and other forms of price information are available.

8. The statement was made in a speech I heard in 1967. It was delivered by the then-Member of Parliament, Enoch Powell.

Let us consider an example that illustrates some of the implications of this view. We might call it the *Bible-pornography paradox*. The Bible is the very word of God and infinitely precious to mankind. Yet, in a perverse culture, it is quite likely that a capitalist could earn far more income by selling pornographic literature than by selling Bibles. The market does not evaluate the Bible in general versus pornography in general. The market only informs us about the comparative price of a specific Bible and a specific pornographic item. Furthermore, the culture may be made up of rebellious people who are determined to work out their own damnations without fear or trembling. They impute value to pornographic materials, and little or no value to Bibles. The market will reflect this phenomenon in an objective manner. It will reflect it in the profit-and-loss statements of publishers. Those who meet market demand will prosper, while those who do not meet it will falter or go bankrupt. The profits and losses will be a result of the subjective valuations of acting men, who make decisions in terms of their values. Christian literature must be subsidized, while pornography produces income.

The humanistic, relativistic economist looks at these facts and can conclude that in a specific market, pornography is more valuable at the margin than Bibles are. He says that he is making no ethical value judgment when he says this; he is only reporting the objective results of multiple subjective valuations on the market. But, because he allows no concept of objective value to enter his economic analysis—not consciously, at least—he is unable to take a stand against the market except by means of stating his *personal opinion* that Bibles are better than pornographic materials. However, the market supposedly must be left alone to have its way, since one man's opinion must not be allowed to thwart the operations of the market process. His relativism leads to an objective result: the spread of pornography through price competition, thereby lowering the costs of achieving damnation and cultural disintegration.

The biblical explanation is different. The Bible affirms that men do have the power to impute economic value. It also affirms that there are absolute, objective standards of value. In fact, it is because of these standards that all coherence in the universe can be said to exist. The creation reflects these standards, revealing the God who created all things (Rom. 1:19). The Bible reveals these standards verbally. Therefore, *all human imputation goes on within a framework of God's absolute, objective standards*. God imputes good and evil in terms of His

own standards, and this imputation provides the only reliable standard of evaluation. The facts are what God determines and imputes, not what the market determines and imputes, or some socialist planning board determines and imputes. The accuracy of each man's individual act of imputation stands or falls in terms of its correspondence to God's act of imputation. We live in a universe of cosmic personalism.⁹

B. Economic Value: Objective and Subjective

What we must say is this: *a* Bible has no intrinsic (fixed) market value, but *the* Bible has intrinsic (ultimate) value. Everything has intrinsic value or intrinsic evil or some mixture, depending upon God's sovereign act of imputation in terms of His absolute standards and His plan for history. But the free market need not reflect this intrinsic value or intrinsic evil. *The free market is the arena of competing human imputations*, an arena in which men work out their salvation or damnation (Phil. 2:12).¹⁰ The fact that an economist, as a self-proclaimed neutral scientist, denies that there can be such a thing as intrinsic economic value, means only that he is using the free market as the sole source of explanation. There is no intrinsic value concept in contemporary non-Marxist economic thought, because prices change, men's evaluations change, and no hypothesis of God has any scientific meaning for the humanistic economist. As Ludwig von Mises once put it: "We may leave aside the genuine dogmas such as Creation, Incarnation, the Trinity, as they have no direct bearing on the problems of interhuman relations."¹¹

It would seem, then, that modern economics, by focusing exclusively on pragmatic goals and thus proximate utility, has erased all traces of the pre-modern idea of intrinsic value or objective value. Yet this is wholly a delusion. In terms of the actual practice of economists, objective value theory has never been stronger. The reason for this is the increasing reliance of economists on *statistical aggregates*, both for the purposes of economic forecasting and planning and for the purposes of formulating theory itself. Macroeconomics, econometrics, and modern input-output analysis rely heavily on the premise that

9. Chapter 1.

10. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

11. Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation. of Social and Economic Evolution* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 1985), p. 46. The book was first published by Yale University Press in 1957. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTAH>)

economic value and statistical aggregates are intertwined. In other words, when we say that “the economy” has “grown” at three percent per annum for several years, we think we are saying something significant about human welfare, meaning individual well-being. We think we are saying something more than the mere cataloguing of numbers. We think, in other words, that *subjective valuation and objective historical-statistical data are linked*. We think we have somehow captured subjective value in statistical aggregates. But if we cling fervently to the theory of subjective value, we will have to give up completely the idea that economic statistics are in any real sense meaningful indicators of the human condition. In other words, the old doctrine of objective value theory is being smuggled into the world of modern economic thought through the back door of statistical aggregation.

C. The Failure of Utilitarian Economics

Let us consider for a moment the famous “law of diminishing utility.” In the post-classical form, the economists have argued along the following lines. As an individual receives more and more units of monetary income (other things being equal, such as the purchasing power of the monetary unit), he allocates the additional money to uses that are progressively lower on his value scale (scale of priorities). He may buy food with his first dollar, shelter with his second dollar, clothing with his third, entertainment with his fourth, and so on. Each new dollar is less valuable to him than the previous one, for he has already satisfied his more crucial needs. So far, so good. But a group of English economists, generally called welfare economists, began around 1900 to use this economic law in a unique way. They argued that because each additional dollar (or pound sterling) in a rich man’s income is worth less to him than an additional dollar in a poor man’s income, the civil government can increase total social utility by taking the rich man’s dollar and giving it to the poor man, assuming basic productivity is not reduced because of this transfer. The rich man puts little value on his final dollar, while the poor man puts great value on his, since he has so few. With the new program of wealth redistribution, these welfare economists concluded, the growth of total social welfare has been increased.

The conceptual problem in welfare economics is related to the familiar problem faced by philosophers: the human pin cushion. Perhaps some sadist enjoys sticking pins into people. He receives exquisite

pleasure from seeing people jump in response to the pin-sticking. In most instances, those who have been stuck with the pins resent it. The experience is painful. Question: Does the pleasure received by the sadist offset the pain experienced by the victims? If there were a means of measuring pleasure and pain, and we discovered that the pleasure received in a particular instance of pin-sticking really was greater than the pain received by the victim, could we devise a social policy in terms of "aggregate pleasure"? Will *all* instances of pin-sticking by this sadist offset the pain experienced by the victims? Will *all* instances of *all* pin-sticking sadists offset the pain experienced by all future victims? Even if "aggregate social pleasure" were thus always made positive, should lawmakers enact legislation permitting universal pin-sticking? Should the rights of the victims be sacrificed for the pleasure of the sadists?

I assume that most people recognize the hypothetical nature of the problem. We have no such measure of pleasure. We cannot "weigh" the pleasure received by sadists against the pain received by their victims. This is also the theoretical problem for economists. In this case, the problem is far from hypothetical. Evaluating corporate costs and benefits is the basis of all state planning.

We might state the problem in a different way. What about the pleasure of the sadists? If the civil government intervenes, making pin-sticking illegal, haven't the interests of the sadists been sacrificed to the interests of the potential victims? By prohibiting pin-sticking, hasn't the civil government infringed on the rights of the pin-stickers? The legislators are trapped. *Someone's interests must be infringed upon.* If the civil government does nothing, the victims' interests are sacrificed. If the authorities ratify this set of conditions by legalizing pin-sticking, the victims' interests are sacrificed. On the other hand, if the civil government makes pin-sticking illegal, this will sacrifice the interests of the pin-stickers. The law cannot be neutral. Somebody wins and somebody else loses, whatever the civil government does, even if it does nothing.

The welfare economists were working with a similar problem. The Western legal tradition has long respected the rights of private property. Private individuals have not been permitted to steal from others, even if the thief is poorer than the victim. But what if the politicians act as agents of the poor? What if they do the stealing? Have we not drawn perilously close to a social order that is based on legal pin-sticking? Hasn't the state become the agent of the sadists? The analogy is strained, since rich people may voluntarily give to the poor, whereas

only masochists are likely to give pin-sticking sadists the opportunity to amuse themselves by acts of violence. But the philosophical problem is the same: *Do we have a means of measuring pleasure and pain, utility and disutility?* Can we make valid conclusions concerning “aggregate social utility”? This was the conceptual problem which faced (and still faces) economists and policy-makers.

The welfare economists tackled the problem *in the name of science*. They were been content to rely on “common sense” arguments concerning equity or fair play. They did not call for state intervention simply in the name of morality, or traditional charity, or some other non-scientific standard. They had called for the politicians to pass legislation taking money from the rich and giving it to the poor, but in the name of science. The law of diminishing utility supposedly proved the case—a fully scientific case—for statist wealth redistribution.

1. Robbins vs. Harrod

It took over three decades for any economist to come up with a definitive answer—theoretical answer—to this argument. Lionel Robbins, who had been greatly influenced as a young man by Mises, was equal to the task. In his now-classic book, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1932), Robbins shattered the scientific validity of the older welfare economics scheme. The law of diminishing marginal utility holds up quite well for a particular individual, Robbins argued, but it cannot be applied to two or more individuals. The fact that one person prefers choice A to choice B is economically significant, but this does not tell us *how much more* he prefers A to B. We cannot measure the difference; we have no yardstick to measure subjective utility. Similarly, as economic scientists, we cannot say that the satisfaction (marginal utility) gained by the rich man is less (or more, or the same) than the satisfaction gained by the poor man when each of them receives one more dollar of income. We cannot measure the subjective loss of satisfaction when the rich man has his dollar removed by the state’s authorities, and we cannot measure the increase in satisfaction accruing to the poor man who receives the confiscated dollar. As Robbins wrote: “Introspection does not enable A to measure what is going on in B’s mind, nor B to measure what is going on in A’s. There is no way of comparing the satisfactions of different people.”¹²

12. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martins, 1935), p. 140. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

The politician may think he knows, or voters may think they can make such estimations, but the economist must assert that, from a scientific point of view, no such comparison is possible.

Robbins' book remains one of the classics in the methodology of economics. Yet its implications are devastating for modern economics. It was attacked by R. F. Harrod in his presidential address before Section F of the British Association, the economics organization, and reprinted in the *Economic Journal* in September of 1938. Harrod was concerned about the implications of Robbins' book for applied economics, specifically the formulation of economic policy. On what grounds could an economist who follows Robbins' epistemology ever be able to give advice to anyone concerning the appropriateness of any given economic action? Harrod wrote:

It may be urged that the economist hereby goes outside his proper "scientific" field. This point is strongly urged by Professor Robbins. Whether the n th unit of X has greater or less utility than the m th of Y to a given individual may be made the subject of a test. He can be given the choice. But there are no scientific means of deciding whether the n th of X has greater utility to individual P than the m th of Y has to another individual Q . The choice can never be put. This implies that we cannot in fact decide whether two pence have more utility to a millionaire than a beggar. We may have a shrewd suspicion. But this, we are told, is "unscientific," for lack of a test.¹³

But what answer could Harrod provide? Only that economics really isn't very much of a science after all. "This objection would be very weighty if economics itself were a mature and exact science. Yet in fact its achievements outside a limited field are so beset on every side by matters which only admit of conjecture that it is possibly rather ridiculous for an economist to take such a high line."¹⁴ Harrod then abandoned the whole idea of scientific logic and epistemology. He appealed to "common sense" in order to justify the scientific economist in making value judgments and policy decisions in the name of scientific rigor. "Can we afford to reject this very clear finding of common sense? Of course, great caution must be exercised in not pushing the matter too far. Since the evidence is vague, we must not go farther than a very clear mandate from common sense allows."¹⁵ This, how-

13. R. F. Harrod, "Scope and Method of Economics," *Economic Journal*, XLVIII (1938), p. 396.

14. *Idem.*

15. *Idem.*

ever, does not answer the problem. Whose common sense is he talking about? The socialist's? The Keynesian's? (Keynes was the editor of the *Economic Journal* when Harrod's article was published, and Harrod was Keynes' biographer after Keynes died in 1946.) Harrod's "common sense" is simply an admission of intellectual and epistemological bankruptcy.

Harrod understood the threat that Robbins' book posed and would continue to pose to applied economics. "If the incomparability of utility to different individuals is strictly pressed, not only are the prescriptions of the welfare school ruled out, but all prescriptions whatever. The economist as an adviser is completely stultified, and, unless his speculations be regarded as of paramount aesthetic value, he had better be suppressed completely. No; some sort of postulate of equality has to be assumed."¹⁶ This *postulate of psychological equality* asserts that men are sufficiently alike, so that the final dollar of income to the millionaire is worth so little on his value scale, and it would be worth so much to the poor man, that the state can increase social welfare by confiscating at least a percentage of that final dollar of income to the millionaire and transferring it to the poor man. Also implied, of course, is that the millionaire's moral outrage at the state is either irrelevant or offset by the approval of the poor man. Nevertheless, we must be careful when we apply this postulate of psychological equality. "But it should be carefully framed and used with great caution, always subject to the proviso 'unless the contrary can be shown.'"¹⁷

The problem is, *the contrary cannot be shown*, precisely because the postulate of psychological equality is not itself capable of proof. Scientifically, we cannot prove either equality of psychic income or inequality. Robbins was correct; we simply cannot, as economic scientists, make such comparisons. Yet we must, if we are to make any kind of policy recommendation, or even add up a column of figures, if we assert that the total is meaningful from an economic point of view.

In the December, 1938 issue of the *Economic Journal*, Robbins capitulated to Harrod. He accepted the "postulate of equality," which supposedly allows us to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. He did not demonstrate how his acceptance of his postulate was conformable to his previous denial of the possibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. He simply wanted to retain the role of the economist-as-policy-advisor. As he wrote:

16. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

17. *Idem.*

My own attitude toward problems of political action has always been one of what I might call provisional utilitarianism. I am far from thinking that thorough-going utilitarianism à la Bentham is an ultimate solution of any of the major problems of social philosophy. But I have always felt that, as a first approximation in handling questions relating to the lives and actions of large masses of people, the approach which counts each man as one, and, on that assumption, asks which way lies the greatest happiness, is less likely to lead one astray than any of the absolute systems. I do not believe, and I never have believed, that in fact men are necessarily equal or should always be judged as such. But I do believe that, in most cases, political calculations which do not treat them as if they were equal are morally revolting.¹⁸

He did not believe men are necessarily equal. He thought that “as a first approximation” the “provisional utilitarian” position of the greatest good for the greatest number is useful. But we must not accept “absolute systems.” Bentham’s utilitarianism—a consistent philosophy of applied economics, and one based on the universal acceptability of the postulate of psychological equality—is not “an ultimate solution of any of the major problems of social philosophy.” What Robbins admitted was that, in remaining a defender of applied economics, he had to abandon any claim of scientific rigor and epistemological consistency. He had to abandon economic science as he had defined it in his book.

Then how should the economic scientist make policy recommendations? By coming to the policy committee as a scientist, but then admitting, if pressed, that he can make no suggestions as a scientist. His scientific credentials get him invited to the meeting, but if he is honest, he really cannot use them in making policy recommendations. Robbins cited William S. Jevons, one of the founders of modern, subjectivist economics, in his own defense. Jevons abandoned any attempt to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.

I see no means whereby such comparison can be accomplished. Every mind is inscrutable to every other mind and no common denominator of feeling is possible. Would it not be better, I asked myself, quite frankly to acknowledge that the postulate of equal capacity for satisfaction *came from outside*, that it rested upon ethical principle rather than upon scientific demonstration, that it was not a judgment of fact in the scientific sense, but rather a judgment of

18. Lionel Robbins, “Interpersonal Comparisons of Utility: A Comment,” *Economic Journal*, XLVIII (1938), p. 635.

value—perhaps, even, in the last analysis, an act of will? Ought it not to be made clear, for instance, that theories of public finance which went beyond tracing the effects of given measures on prices, quantities produced and such-like measurable magnitudes, and which attempted to sum social gain or loss, were not, strictly speaking, economic science?¹⁹

Well put, Professor Jevons! Then what of the necessary intellectual conclusion, that the economic scientist can, on the basis of his secular methodology, say nothing concerning policy? “But I confess that at first I found the implications very hard to swallow. For it meant, as Mr. Harrod has rightly insisted, that economics as a science could say nothing by way of prescription. It could say whether a certain course of action could lead to a desired end. It could judge the consistency of different policies. But, in itself, it passed no verdict of good or bad. It was not possible to say that economic science showed that free trade was justifiable, that inequality should be mitigated, that the income tax should be graduated, and so forth.”²⁰ But Robbins could not bear this logically necessary conclusion. “Further thought, however, convinced me that this was irrational.”²¹ Why was it irrational? Because economists have always known that their prescriptions “were conditional upon the acceptance of norms lying outside economics. . . . Why should one be frightened, I asked, of taking a stand on judgments which are not scientific, if they relate to matters outside the world of science?”²²

In other words, because economists have always known they were not really being scientific when they made policy recommendations, it is therefore irrational to worry about making policy recommendations. Because economists have never been able to make scientific policy recommendations, economists should not stop making policy recommendations now. “In the past, it seemed to me, a failure to recognize the arbitrary element in certain of the findings of traditional Political Economy had been conducive to too facile a use of these findings in framing prescriptions for action.”²³ However, he made his position clear: “I was not at all desirous of preventing economists from giving prescriptions.”²⁴ We must still make the assumption of the postulate of psychological equality among men. “I think that the assumption of

19. *Ibid.*, p. 637.

20. *Idem.*

21. *Idem.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 638.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 639.

24. *Idem.*

equality comes from the outside, and that its justification is more ethical than scientific. But we all agree that it is fitting that such assumptions should be made and their implications explored with the aid of the economist's technique."²⁵

2. *Taking in Each Other's Washing*²⁶

The responsibility for formulating the postulate of psychological equality is therefore pushed into the camp of the philosophers: specifically, the ethicists. Then, once we assume that they have proven the validity of the postulate, it can be imported and used as the epistemological foundation of applied economics.

The problem with this strategy is that the specialists in ethics are faced with precisely the same philosophical paradoxes, and they have not come to any agreement about the resolution of the problem of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. This is the *incommensurability problem* in hedonism and utilitarianism. Pleasures and pains cannot be quantified, even by the individual. There is an ordinal scale (*this* is more pleasurable than *that*), but no cardinal scale (*this* is *exactly this much* more pleasurable than *that*). McIntyre's comment on John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism applies equally well to Robbins: "Mill's whole tenor of thought is that of a utilitarian who cannot avoid any of the difficulties which this doctrine raises, but who cannot conceive of abandoning his doctrine either."²⁷ What was Mill's philosophical difficulty? Wrote McIntyre: "... trying to bring all the objects and goals of human desire under a single concept, that of pleasure, and trying to show them as all commensurable with each other in a single scale of evaluation."²⁸ Modern economists do not solve this commensurability problem by substituting the word "utility" for "pleasure."

Robbins was not some amateur philosopher who could legitimately call upon the ethical theorists to solve his problem. His problem was the same one that had baffled ethical theorists for many years. Richard Brendt's article in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on "Hedonism" even turns to the economists as examples of the continuing de-

25. *Ibid.*, p. 641.

26. The phrase is Cornelius Van Til's. It refers to rival philosophers who rely on each other's logic in order to maintain their own positions. Cornelius Van Til, *Who Do You Say That I Am?* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1975), "Platonic Idealism."

27. Alasdair McIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 235.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

bate over whether “we can know nothing about the mental states of other persons, since there is no way of observing them directly. . . .”²⁹ Professor Smart put the matter quite well:

The fact that the ordinary man thinks that he can weigh up probabilities in making prudential decisions does not mean that there is really no sense in what he is doing. What utilitarianism badly needs, in order to make its theoretical foundations secure, is some method according to which numerical probabilities, even approximate ones, could in theory, though not necessarily always in practice, be assigned to any imagined future event. . . . But until we have an adequate theory of objective probability, utilitarianism is not on a secure theoretical basis.³⁰

Keynes’ teacher and fellow homosexual, the philosopher G. E. Moore, put it more graphically when he wrote concerning the summing up of individual pleasures in a social aggregate:

It involves our saying that, for instance, the state of mind of a drunkard, when he is intensely pleased with breaking crockery, is just as valuable in itself—just as well worth having—as that of a man who is fully realizing all that is exquisite in the tragedy of King Lear, provided only the mere quantity of pleasure in both cases is the same. Such instances might be multiplied indefinitely, and it seems to me that they constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of the view that intrinsic value is always in proportion to quantity of pleasure. Of course, here again, the question is quite incapable of proof either way.³¹

But if it is quite incapable of proof for the ethicists, then there is nothing for the economists to import from this source that can serve as the foundation for the necessary assumption of the postulate of psychological equality among men. The economics of secular humanism must make unprovable assumptions about mankind in order to operate—assumptions that cannot legitimately be made, according to the logic of secular humanism, but must and will be made by policy-

29. Richard B. Brandt, “Hedonism,” in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), III, p. 434.

30. J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams (eds.), *Utilitarianism: for and against* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 40–41.

31. G. E. Moore, “Multiple Intrinsic Goods,” (editor’s title) in Wilfrid Sellars and John Hospers (eds.), *Readings in Ethical Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), p. 387. The selection is taken from Moore’s book, *Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).

makers.

Mark A. Lutz, an economist, and Kenneth Lux, a psychologist, attacked methodological individualism and laissez-faire economics by challenging the presuppositions of the individualists in the field of epistemology. They were methodological collectivists, and they believed that the state can and should reorder economic priorities in terms of collective needs. They grasped the fact that it is illegitimate to use Robbins' arguments against welfare economics to criticize only collectivists' policies, if Robbins' arguments are not simultaneously used to criticize all policy decisions, and indeed, all economic aggregates. They wrote:

In the absence of any way to measure utility directly, the most reasonable thing to do is to assume equal utility scales across people, which in effect means equal capacity for satisfaction. In fact, it is hard to see how any other assumption makes sense. And this assumption is precisely what economics adopted in order to be able to add up different individuals' incomes, and assume it was adding up utility or value. Within the confines of marginal utility theory, this is the assumption that allows us to use aggregate statistics, such as GNP. Without the assumption of additivity of utility, by adding income, there would be no basis for comparing GNP figures from one country to another, or even within the same country from year to year. This is the kind of assumption neoclassicals had to invoke whenever they made a case for the social benefits of any kind of economic policy, such as free trade or laissez-faire. Proceeding from the same basis, the conclusion that equalizing the distribution of income and wealth was beneficial appeared to be inescapable.³²

The authors were correct about *the necessity of the assumption of comparability of subjective utilities* for making policy decisions and comparing economic aggregates. This, however, does not answer Robbins' original point: *economists cannot possibly make such an assumption as economists*. Therefore, we must abandon scientific logic, they concluded, just as both Harrod and Robbins concluded. We must appeal to that most priceless of all rare commodities, common sense. They did not accept Robbins' original logic. They, like Harrod, did not find it convincing. Why not? Not because they can fault its coherence, but because *they do not like its policy implications*. "Once the economist accepts that there is an ordering of importance of needs, the ques-

32. Mark A. Lutz and Kenneth Lux, *The Challenge of Humanistic Economics* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Benjamin/Cummings, 1979), pp. 83–84.

tion of differences in needs between people is relatively unessential, and we feel that the economist must accept that there is an ordering of needs among people. To do otherwise is to, once again, fly in the face of common sense.”³³ But what is this ordering principle? It is human life. “The more necessary for life, or life supporting a particular good, service, or experience is, the more important it is. It is as simple as that. An economics that has no theoretical way of making a distinction between the importance of supplying water and the importance of supplying tobacco hardly seems relevant to a living organism, let alone a human development.”³⁴ If we find that Americans have sufficient income to smoke (or that some Americans do), and we find that nomads in the North African Sahel area need water, what must be our conclusion? Obviously, the state should take away income from the tobacco-smoking (or chewing or snuffing) Americans, and drill water wells for African nomads.³⁵ Another conclusion defies the economics of egalitarian redistribution. Any other system of economic analysis defies “common sense.” While the authors were not quite this radical in their conclusions—almost, but not quite—the direction in which their logic would carry international society is clear enough. To quote them, “It is as simple as that.”

Once the secular humanistic economist acknowledges the fact—and for finite minds, it is a fact—that he cannot, as a scientist, measure subjective utility, and that he therefore cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, *most of what we know as modern economics disintegrates*. Like an acid, the argument systematically and relentlessly erodes the philosophical, intellectual, and moral foundations of every economic doctrine that it touches, and it touches virtually every aspect of applied economics. It is the inescapable conclusion of all subjective value theory, yet it undermines the economics based—supposedly based—exclusively on the idea of subjective utility.

If there is only subjective value, then these values, unlike objective prices, cannot be compared. This is the thrust of Robbins’ argument. It is as impossible to measure subjective utility as it is to measure hate, love, or any other human emotion. A person can *order* his preferences, but he cannot *measure* them. No yardstick is available.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

34. *Idem.*

35. This was done. The policy led to an ecological catastrophe in the Sahel region of Africa. Claire Sterling, “The Making of a Sub-Saharan Wasteland,” *The Atlantic* (May 1974).

D. Comparing Statistical Aggregates

This being the case, the logic of subjective utility leads to some very unorthodox conclusions. For example, consider the possibility of nuclear war. Assume that war breaks out in Europe. All of France is destroyed, except for one man, who happens to love French wine more than anything on earth, and one enormous vat of his most loved wine. So large is this supply that he will be able to spend the remainder of his days consuming all he wants of this wine—the attainment of his lifelong dream. On the other hand, the United States is untouched by the war. All of its cities are intact; all of its capital structure is intact. Using the law of subjective value, with its corollary prohibiting the interpersonal comparison of subjective utilities, the fully consistent economist cannot say whether the Frenchman's capital is greater or less than the capital structure of the entire United States. Who is richer? We cannot say. We cannot legitimately, scientifically, economically compare the subjective utilities of over 300 million U. S. citizens and that single ecstatic Frenchman. *Subjective utilities, being subjective, cannot be added up like a column of figures.* The economist may intuitively know that the United States has more capital and wealth than "France," meaning that one happy Frenchman, but he cannot prove it using the laws of modern subjective economics.

Readers may think that this a frivolous example. It is anything but frivolous. A debate over its implications took place at a 1974 conference of Austrian School economists held at South Royalton, Vermont. Israel Kirzner, who took his Ph.D. under Mises, defended the idea that economists, as scientists, cannot state whether or not "France" has more capital and wealth than "the United States," because all such aggregates are fictions, and we cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Murray Rothbard, on the other hand, challenged this view as nonsensical. Of course the United States would be richer under such conditions. In short, Rothbard took the "common sense" position, while Kirzner remained true to the logic of subjective value theory.

It should be clear that Rothbard is correct. The United States would unquestionably be richer than France in the example. Yet our knowledge of this obvious truth cannot be proven, or even consistently defended, in terms of the subjectivist axiology (value theory) of modern economics. Kirzner's position is the systematic one.

We have to conclude that the problems associated with the inter-

personal comparisons of subjective utility are presently unsolvable in some instances. The logic of the subjectivist position leads directly to intellectual dead-ends, or “nonsense.” As with purely objective explanations of value, the purely subjective explanations are equally contradictory in certain instances. The antinomies (contradictions) in the reasoning of self-proclaimed autonomous man are inescapable. No one can make intelligent, consistent, systematic judgments in every area of life by means of some hypothetically logical, hypothetically rational, hypothetically consistent version of pure autonomous thought and value. Each philosophical system disintegrates because of the contradictions of its own presuppositions and applications.

Kirzner discussed the theory of capital at some length in his book, *An Essay on Capital* (1966). He asked very pointed questions concerning capital per head in various nations. He also provided some unique answers. He wrote: “Is it really without meaning to say that the capital per head in country A is greater than in country B? Is it meaningless to attempt to explain the higher productivity of labor in country A by reference to the larger quantity of capital combined with each man-hour of labor? It is indeed difficult to deny that we, in fact, use aggregate concepts of capital in this manner; what is the meaning to be attached to such concepts, and how do they relate to the ‘individualistic’ concept of capital that has been adopted for the purpose of this essay?”³⁶ The consistency with which Kirzner answered his questions is unprecedented.

Careful reflection on the matter will, it is believed, reveal that the aggregate concept of capital, the “quantity of capital available to an economy as a whole,” is, for a market economy, a wholly artificial construct useful for making certain judgments concerning the progress and performance of the economy. When using this construct one is in fact viewing the economy in its entirety [entirety] as if it were not a market economy but instead a completely centralized economy over which the observer himself has absolute control and responsibility. . . . One is thus not merging the plans of all the individual capital owners who participate in the market economy, one is conceptually replacing these plans by a single master plan that one imagines to be relevant to the economy as a whole, and against which one gauges the performance of the economy as a whole.³⁷

We must ask Kirzner, how is it that such a “wholly artificial con-

36. Israel Kirzner, *An Essay on Capital* (New York: Augustus Kelley, 1966), p. 120.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 120–21.

struct” that imagines that the economy is one vast outworking of a single economic plan—in contrast to the operations of the free market, with its multiple plans—should be “useful for making certain judgments concerning the progress and performance of the economy”? Why should such an artificial construct be deemed intellectually defensible? Why should it be useful? Why should defenders of the logic of the free market be forced to rely on a wholly artificial construct in order to make judgments in the area of applied economics? Is applied economics really applied economics? Is it not rather applied common sense? But must common sense be our only source of such judgments, when common sense apparently relies on the holism or collectivism of such a mental construct? Isn’t this artificial construct wholly in opposition to the presuppositions of free market economics, and in conflict with the methodological individualism of subjective value theory?

Kirzner actually identified this as a “holistic capital concept.” He spelled out the assumptions of such a holistic capital concept:

The truth is that the aggregate concept of capital has meaning only on assumptions according to which all parts of the capital stock are completely integrated with one another. Each piece of capital equipment in the stock is assumed to have been constructed as part of the same central plan which led to the rest of the stock. Each capital good has its part to play; no two capital goods have a function which precludes the full utilization as planned, of the other. But these conditions can exist in a market economy (in which planning is decentralized) only in the state of equilibrium [a technical concept which hypothesizes perfect foreknowledge on the part of everyone in the economy, a concept which Kirzner himself denies can ever be applied to the real world—G.N.]. The essential function of the market is, after all, to bring individual plans which do not mesh, into greater mutual coordination. So that it turns out that the aggregate concept of capital presupposes conditions that are not only violated in the real world, but which assume away some of the major problems which it is the task of a market theory of capital to elucidate.³⁸

Kirzner understood the implications of radical subjectivism in economics far better than the majority of his professional peers. He saw that in order to make accurate, meaningful comparisons of capital stocks, we must assume the existence of *a comprehensive, omniscient, integrated plan* that is made in advance and then executed perfectly by *an omniscient planning agent*. Yet this is precisely what the logic of the

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–22.

free market denies to man or any group of men. What, then, are we supposed to give up? Are we supposed to abandon our wholly common practice of comparing the value of capital stocks in different nations, or under different economic systems? Are we therefore supposed to cease comparing the output-per-unit-of-resource-input under socialism with output under capitalism? Are we supposed to abandon the impressive argument—impressive to common sense, anyway—that the high output of laborers who live in capitalist nations is due to the far higher investment in *capital per capita* in capitalist nations, compared to the low output and low per capita investment in socialist countries? These arguments rest on the “wholly artificial construct” of aggregate capital value, which is quite obviously based on a concept of *objective economic value*. On the other hand, must we abandon the key presupposition of modern free-market economics, namely, the concept of *methodological individualism*, which has as a corollary the idea of subjective economic value? Must we abandon the arguments of free market economists against the Marxists, who still cling to one version of objective value, namely, the labor theory of value—the very heart of classical economics’ value theory, against which modern economists, from Menger, Jevons, and Walras to the present, have reacted?

Modern economics thus faces a true intellectual dilemma. Economists may choose not to recognize it, but it is there nonetheless. The subjectivists have all accepted the use of statistical aggregates to one extent or another, even the supposedly “pure subjectivists” in the Austrian camp.³⁹ Yet their epistemology of methodological individualism categorically denies the possibility of meaning for such aggregates. *There can be no interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, so the aggregates are economically meaningless.*

Free market economists deny the logic of the single, unified economic plan. Yet all of them (except Kirzner) eventually point to the

39. See, for example, the statement by Gerald P. O'Driscoll, Jr. and Sudha R. Shenoy: “However, after 1945, the problem turned around completely and became that of gently (and later, more rapidly) rising prices. In eleven major developed countries, prices declined hardly at all, and when they did, it was only for a couple of years during the early fifties. Prices remained stable for some years in several of these countries, but these periods of relative price stability were outnumbered by years of rising prices, so that in effect prices have been rising more or less steadily ever since the end of World War II.” O'Driscoll and Shenoy, “Inflation, Recession, and Stagflation,” in Edwin G. Dolan (ed.), *The Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1976), pp. 186–87. Any discussion of rising prices involves the use of statistical aggregates, specifically, index numbers.

statistical results of socialism—the economy of the hypothetically unified economic plan—and the *statistical results of capitalism*—the economy built on the presupposition that there can be no coherent, systematic, unified economic plan—and conclude that the statistical results demonstrate the superiority in practice of capitalism. But the whole concept of “statistical results” requires the existence of *objective, measurable economic value*, and methodological individualism categorically denies the existence of objective, measurable economic value.

Equally ironic is the fact that defenders of socialist and Marxist economies, who affirm the validity of central economic planning, who deny methodological individualism, and who thereby affirm the existence of objective economic value and meaningful economic statistics, constantly deny the meaningfulness of their economies’ inferior economic performance, as measured by statistics. Such statistical measurements, they tend to argue, do not measure the “real” welfare provided to citizens of a particular socialist commonwealth. In other words, the aggregate statistical data are not “true” indicators of individual economic welfare inside socialist economies. There is something “extra” received daily by socialist citizens that is intensely valuable to them, but which somehow does not appear in the statistical data. The data therefore are insufficient to reveal the full benefits to the “whole man” under socialism.

What we find, then, is that the methodological individualists, whose intellectual presupposition denies the possibility of statistical aggregation, enjoy using statistics to criticize their socialistic opponents. The socialists, who are methodological collectivists (holists), are constantly seeking to deny the meaningfulness of embarrassing economic statistics, despite the fact that the very possibility of socialist planning requires the planning authorities to collect, interpret, and efficiently use economic statistics in the central planning process.

Then what is the solution to these intellectual dilemmas? How can we affirm man’s ability to make use of statistical aggregates, and at the same time keep our economics from drifting into the paradoxes of objective value theory, where “water” is supposed to be more valuable than “diamonds”? And how can we reconcile the fact that something objectively good, like the Bible, is worth less in a particular market than pornographic materials? Are there biblical answers to these apparently unanswerable intellectual problems?

E. A Biblical Solution

The Bible affirms man's ability to impute value, for man is made in the image of God, and God imputes value to His creation. The Bible affirms that there are absolute standards, meaning objective standards. Man is to think God's thoughts after Him. God created the universe in terms of His eternal, comprehensive plan. He sustains it, moment by moment. He is absolutely sovereign over it. No aspect of creation is outside His comprehensive knowledge and absolute control. Therefore, the mind of God integrates all facts and judges all facts in terms of His perfect plan.

Men cannot make absolute, comprehensive value imputations, since men are creatures. But as limited creatures they can make value imputations that are valid in God's eyes, and before the rebellion of man in the garden, this is what man did. Each man still makes these value imputations, and man, as a creature responsible to God, cannot escape the revelation and restraint of God. Men do make value imputations. They live and act in terms of God's laws, either as rebels or faithful men. As living creatures, they must deal with the universe as it objectively exists, if they wish to succeed. They must interpret the information they receive from the universe through their senses, and they must interpret correctly—meaning objectively, meaning in terms of God's law-order for His universe—if they are to remain successful. Thus, their subjective interpretations are supposed to conform to the objective standards that God requires for man, who is made in His image.

There is an overall economic plan in God's mind. This forces men, to some degree, to conform themselves to this plan and to adjust their plans in terms of it. We can therefore say along with Kirzner that *in order to make assessments of comparative wealth, there must be a single, integrated plan.* Furthermore, unlike Kirzner, we can say that such a plan exists. As creatures made in God's image, we can make at least reasonable, useful estimations of the value of capital or other goods, even though we could not do so legitimately if all value were exclusively subjective, as if there were no overall plan of God.

Economists are generally self-consciously atheistic in their presuppositions. Man, and man alone, supposedly does the imputing of value. Yet, at the same time, economists use such mental aggregate constructs as "capital," "income," "national income," and "productivity." None of these mental constructs is valid, given the logic of modern

subjectivism, yet the economists use them constantly. Professor Mises, an important figure in the development of modern subjectivism, and perhaps the most important figure if we are to believe the assessment of his more famous disciple, F. A. Hayek,⁴⁰ argued throughout his career against the validity of all aggregates in economics, yet when he attempted to explain the productivity of workers under capitalism, he used the concept of per capita capital investment: “What constitutes the greater wealth of a capitalistic society as against the smaller wealth of a noncapitalistic society is the fact that the available supply of capital goods is greater in the former than in the latter. What has improved the wage earners’ standard of living is the fact that the capital equipment per head of the men eager to earn wages increased.”⁴¹

If one adheres to a subjective theory of value, how is it possible to divide actual machines by actual workers? Kirzner explicitly denied that such a procedure is legitimate, unless it is confined to a single worker and his equipment.⁴² Can we measure capital in terms of money? Mises seemed to think so, but how could he? The purchasing power of money is constantly changing, as Mises’ book *The Theory of Money and Credit* (1912) explains so brilliantly. You can construct a price index, of course, to measure the rise and fall of prices, but we are then back to a statistical aggregate, which Mises explicitly rejected.⁴³ Furthermore, money invested in capital may well be malinvested, such as in the years preceding a depression, another insight developed by Mises.⁴⁴ The capital value really may be zero or less—a looming loss—under such conditions.

Given the logic of subjective value theory, how can one speak of increasing per capita wealth, increasing per capita output, or per capita anything else? How can we legitimately compare the economic output of a socialist nation with a capitalist one? What is a “nation”? How can

40. Hayek, *Counter-Revolution of Science*, p. 210, footnote 25.

41. Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 89. (<http://bit.ly/MisesAnti>) Cf. Mises, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1922] 1951), p. 459. (<http://bit.ly/MisesSoc>)

42. Kirzner, *Essay on Capital*, pp. 105–7. (<http://bit.ly/Mises1922>)

43. Mises did admit some minor validity to a price index as an historical tool, although it is not clear why such an index should be valid in retrospect: *The Theory of Money and Credit* (Irvington, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, [1912] 1971), pp. 187–90. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>) For his general critique of statistical aggregates, see *Human Action* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. XVI, sec. 5. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

44. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XX, sec. 6.

we accurately *individuate* the units being compared? How can we measure any change over time? How can we measure anything without a *fixed measuring device*, something which is explicitly denied by the logic of subjective value theory? In short, how can the defenders of capitalism legitimately use any aggregate statistics to prove their case? As economists, they must remain as silent as a Zen Buddhist master. They never do, of course.

Kirzner, however, came close to the ideal of silence. He said that capital estimates are valid only when made by individual entrepreneurs concerning the *estimated* present and future values of their own capital stock. Presumably, an entrepreneur could make estimates of his rivals' stocks, but only in terms of the effects of their stocks on the value of his. Kirzner was forthright: "Individual forward-looking measurement is both possible and feasible, because the problem of possibly inconsistent plans does not arise. An individual evaluates each component of his capital stock in terms of the plans he has in mind; he may have to take care to avoid possible inconsistencies, but in appraising his measurement of his capital we may assume that he has successfully integrated his own plans."⁴⁵ Yet this assumption cannot possibly be made by an outsider. How can we know anything about whether or not he has integrated his plans? He may be a madman. He may be misforecasting the state of the free market and the value of his capital. The free market may make hash of his plans. He is not omniscient, even in his own limited sphere of influence. Where is the standard of measurement? Where is the objective reference point? The market? But the market is supposedly purely the product of multiple plans, many of them mutually contradictory (one man bets that wheat prices will rise, while another plans in terms of a fall in wheat prices). As Kirzner has shown, we cannot make assessments of capital value by aggregating market prices for capital goods.⁴⁶ So how does the individual evaluate the value of his capital? By use of the market, Mises has stated so clearly: without a market, no such evaluation is possible, a fact argued by Mises as early as 1920,⁴⁷ and one which he once immodestly claimed "is certainly the most important discovery made by economic

45. Kirzner, "The Theory of Capital," in Dolan (ed.), *Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics*, p. 142. (<http://bit.ly/KirznerToC>)

46. Kirzner, *Essay on Capital*, pp. 120ff.

47. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth," (1920), in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963). (<http://mises.org/econcalc.asp>)

theory.”⁴⁸ Mises clearly stated that in human affairs, “The truth is that there are only variables and no constants.”⁴⁹

Is it surprising, then, that his disciple Kirzner should throw out Mises’ inconsistently held idea that there is some meaning to the words “per capita capital”? As Kirzner concluded: “Underlying statements that compare the quantity of capital in one country with that in another is a convenient and relatively harmless fiction.”⁵⁰ He politely dismissed Mises’ argument by means of Mises’ other arguments. Yet he was too polite; such a comparison is more than a harmless fiction. In terms of the logic of subjective economics, it is nothing short of a subterfuge, a sleight-of-hand deception to be used by capitalism’s defenders to dismiss the arguments of their socialist opponents. Most capitalists point to capitalism’s productivity as a major defense of capitalism, yet the logic of modern economics denies that such a conclusion can be reached using the logic of subjective value theory. Consistent subjectivism denies the validity of all such comparisons.

Hayek stated that “every important advance in economic theory during the last hundred years was a further step in the consistent application of subjectivism.”⁵¹ He wrote those words in 1952. It would seem that we have reached the end of the road, or at least a major fork in the road, for subjectivism. It, too, has run directly into the implications of its own presuppositions. *Pure subjectivism makes lonely solipsists of us all*, with no way for us to test our generalizations or compare the products of our hands, let alone the products of billions of other human beings. When Mises wrote that “the macroeconomic concept of national income is a mere political slogan devoid of any cognitive value,”⁵² he simultaneously denied the validity of all statistical comparisons of the productivity of nations, including his own comparisons.

All of this may seem like academic hair-splitting, as indeed it is. All scholarship, all intelligent pursuit of truth, eventually gets involved in hair-splitting. But the point I am trying to make is not merely technical; it is fundamental. Purely “objective” theories of value produce incongruous conclusions, so the promoters of such theories have always

48. Mises, *Epistemological Problems in Economics*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1933] 2003), p. 166. (<http://bit.ly/MisesEPE>)

49. Mises, *Theory and History*, p. 12.

50. Kirzner, “Theory of Capital,” p. 142.

51. Hayek, *Counter-Revolution of Science*, p. 31.

52. Mises, *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1962), p. 87. (<http://bit.ly/MisesUFES>)

returned to the market forces of supply and demand to explain prices. But the market's evaluation of price and value is not stable, since conditions change. It is therefore not an objective source of value. On the other hand, subjective value theory's success in explaining the way in which the market operates has not overcome the inherent contradictions of radical subjectivism. *Economic theory in a purely subjectivist mold cannot legitimately say anything about aggregates.* It cannot make comparisons about wealth over time, or wealth across borders. Neither system of value theory can survive by itself, and the proponents of each theory borrow liberally from the methodology and conclusions of the other.

Conclusion

Point four of God's covenant structure is *judgment*, or *sanctions*. God evaluates His creation continually in terms of His purposes, decree, and covenant requirements. Men are made in God's image, so we necessarily must judge in history. The Bible says that redeemed mankind will judge the angels (I Cor. 6:3). Life for the covenant-keeper is a training ground for rendering better judgments.⁵³ In the field of economics, this means that men can and must impute value to scarce economic resources. As creatures made in the image of God, we can impute value to economic goods. We can trade with others at discrete prices. These prices are the product of competitive bargaining among acting men. We can record such prices. We can also make rough estimates of *aggregates of these prices*, and make rough estimates of the *meaning* attached to such aggregates by other acting men.

The *constant factor* in market imputations over time is therefore the *image of God in men*, as far as our assessment of other people's imputation of meaning is concerned. The ultimate constant is God's evaluation of worth and His plan. There is objective value in the universe, and men, to one degree or another, must conform themselves to, or react against, this standard of value. Mises was correct in his attempt to compare the wealth and output of socialist and capitalist nations, just as Rothbard was correct in concluding that the capital of the United States would be worth more than one vat of French wine. But the accuracy of their conclusions is in sharp contrast to their presuppositions concerning subjective value theory.

The Bible invites us to make such comparisons. We are specifically

53. See Appendix E: "Witnesses and Judges."

told that the economic productivity of a godly society will be greater than the long-run productivity of rebellious societies (Deut. 8:11–18; Ezek. 36). We are able to make such estimates because there really is a single, consistent, comprehensive plan, and a single Planner who has made economic assessments in terms of an omniscient plan. All capital belongs to the ultimate Planner (Ps. 50:10).⁵⁴ The forward-looking plan is God's (Isa. 45:1–8). God knows all things, and some of these things are revealed to us, though not all of them (Deut. 29:29). We can make rough estimates of economic and statistical aggregates, because there is an integrated plan, and because we are made in the image of the Planner.

Because there is an imputing, planning, creative, sovereign God, there can also be an imputing, planning, derivatively creative mankind. Because there is objective value based on the acts of creation and imputation by God, there can be a science of applied economics, and not just solipsistic, subjectivist economic theory that is divorced from all statistical aggregations. There is *objective value*, which is based on the *Creator's value standards* and the *unity of God's comprehensive plan*. There are *subjective values* believed and held among men because *each man is a responsible person before God*.

This leads to a uniquely biblical principle of economic science. *The image of God in men is the metaphysical foundation of economic thought and action*. Without this basis for our knowledge and valuation, there could be no consistent, rational science of economics.⁵⁵

The heart of man's problem is not metaphysics, meaning the reality of man's being and the underlying foundation of existence. *Man's problem is ethics*: obedience to God. The closer that men come to obeying the terms of God's covenant, the closer their judgments will conform to the God-created reality. Men are given the ability to make judgments. As rebels, they make poor, inaccurate judgments. They do not meet God's standards. These inaccurate judgments (preferences) are reflected in market pricing and profitability.

Ethical rebellion eventually produces intellectual chaos. Men reject the creation as it truly is because it reflects God (Rom. 1:18–22). Their eyes are then darkened. Marxist, socialist, and Keynesian economics are inaccurate precisely to the degree that they reject God's assessment of ethical cause and effect in man's environment. The breakdown of

54. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

55. See Appendix B, "The Evolutionists' Defense of the Market."

modern economic thought is the result of the covenant-denying pre-suppositions of the economists. Economies that are constructed in terms of these ethically rebellious theories suffer painful consequences. Mises called planned economies “planned chaos.” He was correct.

6

GOD'S WEEK AND MAN'S WEEK

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God had created and made (Gen. 2:1–3).

The theocentric principle here is the judgment of God. He assessed His work: completed. Then He rested: a positive sanction from Himself to Himself. This is point four of the biblical covenant model: sanctions.¹

This is an exceedingly controversial theological topic. It has important implications for modern business practices: the sabbath. A full consideration of its business implications must be deferred until the exegesis of Exodus 20:8–11.² At this point, it is more important to consider the sabbath in relation to Adam and his dominion responsibilities.

A. Judgment

We are told that, at the end of the sixth day, God saw everything that He had made, and that it was very good (Gen. 1:31). The whole creation was without a flaw. By “whole creation,” I mean the earth, the inhabitants of the earth, and the physical celestial bodies. We are not explicitly informed about the condition of the angelic host. We are not

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*, 6 vols. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

told that Satan had fallen, along with his followers, although some Christian expositors have assumed that this event had already taken place prior to the sixth day, perhaps even before the creation of the earth in Genesis 1:1.³ But we know that the physical creation was perfect and complete with respect to its component parts. It was not fully developed historically, but it was complete as far as God's original creative activity was concerned. Man, however, had not yet begun his full-scale dominion assignment.

Adam had not participated in the acts of creation. He had been wholly passive in the creation of Eve, providing his rib. He had been active in a preliminary assignment, though dependent: the naming of the animals (Gen. 2:20). A recapitulation of his efforts on the sixth day is provided in Genesis 2. His wife was given to him only after he had fulfilled the original assignment, a subject which will be considered in greater detail in the exegesis of Genesis 2:20–23.⁴ He had to complete this one task before he was given his wife. He had become aware of his need for a helper especially designed by God to complement his efforts. He needed to recognize the economic potential of the division of labor. God announced that it is not good for a man to live alone (Gen. 2:18). He then brought the animals to Adam for naming (classification), which Adam did (2:20). Adam received empirical evidence of the incompleteness of the human species. The animals were in male-female pairs. Adam, at that stage, was alone. He worked alone. Something was missing. God had announced Adam's incompleteness be-

3. Because we are not told specifically about the creation of the angelic host, we can only speculate about the time, or pre-time, of their creation. But since the angels are often associated with the stars (Jud. 5:20; Dan. 8:10; Matt. 29:29; Jude 13; Rev. 1:20; 3:1; 6:13; 8:12, etc.), and the stars were created on the fourth day, it is reasonable to assume that this was the day of the creation of the angels, whose purposes include the worship of God and service to man. If this is the case, then the rebellion of the satanic host probably occurred on the morning of the first sabbath, just prior to man's rebellion. We are certainly not told in the Bible of any function of the angels that necessarily pre-dated the creation of the physical universe. Their close association with man's purposes points to their inclusion in the week of the creation. Satan believed that he could inherit Adam's lawful inheritance if he could successfully place Adam beneath him covenantally. If Adam would subordinate himself to Satan's covenant, then Satan could exercise control over everything that God had assigned to Adam as part of the dominion covenant. Satan was successful in his attempt. Only when Jesus came to reclaim the lost inheritance as the "second Adam" did Satan's title to the world require a second temptation. He tempted Jesus to worship him, and promised him the world (Matt. 4:9). Jesus rebuked the devil, died and rose again, and willed the reclaimed inheritance to His people. See Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

4. Chapter 10.

forehand, and Adam could see it. He needed help. He needed a helper.

Adam and Eve rested on the seventh day of the creation. They had not worked as a team yet, but they were nevertheless the recipients of a day of rest. God's first week was complete. Adam and Eve saw the tail end of that original week. They knew that God's week involved a day of rest on the final day.

B. Life and Rest

This raises an important point. The first full day of life for mankind was a day of rest, a sabbath. The seventh day was God's day of rest, or cessation from His creation work. Man had seen part of the sixth day. Adam had worked briefly as a kind of apprentice under God's immediate supervision. God had brought the animals to Adam. But the seventh day for God's creation week was the first full day for mankind. It was a day of rest.

Man's week was therefore fundamentally different from God's week. God's week was wholly the product of God's creative acts. It ended with God's resting from His acts of creation. Man's week, on the other hand, *began* with rest. Man was wholly dependent on God. Man was not originally creative. Man could not legitimately claim to be the source of his environment, the source of meaning, the source of power, or the source of any aspect of the creation. Man began where God left off. *Man was not originally creative; he was subordinate and re-creative.*

How would man regard the day *following* the sabbath? Would he view it as the second day of man's week, a day of re-creative activity which followed a day of rest? Or would he view it as the first day of man's week, a day of man's original and autonomous creative activity? In other words, would man view his week as subordinate to God, beginning on God's seventh day, the day of rest? Or would he view his week as if he himself were God, launching a new program of creation, just as God had launched a week earlier?

The eighth day was to have been Adam's second day of the week, covenant man's week. By acknowledging his total dependence on God as a creature, and by acknowledging that his week began with a day of rest, Adam would have proclaimed his status as a covenant-keeper. The day following the seventh day of God's original week was to begin

man's workweek.⁵ Man had to begin work on that eighth day.⁶ The question was: Would man begin as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker? Man's ethical status before God would determine whether man would regard the eighth day (the day following God's sabbath) as his second day of the week or his first. Would he regard the day of rest as the *foundation* of man's week or the *culmination*? It had been the *culmination* of God's original week. Would Adam attempt to assert his own autonomy, as if he were God, and announce the inauguration of autonomous man's week by regarding the seventh day as man's first workday of the week?

C. Rebellion and Negative Sanctions

The question arises: How soon did man rebel? This is a speculative question. We have no explicit revelation. We can make intelligent guesses based on the testimony of the Bible, but we are not told for certain. What I am offering here as a possible answer, it must be understood, is only speculation on my part.

Adam and Eve probably sinned on the first sabbath day. There are

5. Adam's labor on the sixth day constituted a partial fulfillment of the dominion assignment. Eve was not present yet. Because the dominion covenant was made between God and mankind as a species—"and let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26a)—Adam was working as the representative head of the family. The naming of the animals should not be considered as the equivalent of the full-scale dominion assignment, for man was still an apprentice. He was being taught a lesson concerning his incomplete status. God brought the animals to Adam (Gen. 2:19), indicating the preliminary status of his efforts. He was not yet fully on his own as a spatially (or ethically, or metaphysically) independent agent. God was still close to him in a way which was not the case when the serpent approached the pair. The apprenticeship stage was followed by his time in the garden as a training camp. This, in turn, was to have been followed by the spread of mankind across the face of the earth. Man did not remain in the garden long. If my thesis is correct, he was there less than one full working day. God came before them in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8a), and this could have been the morning rather than the evening. I believe that it was more likely the evening than the morning. They were expelled from the garden as the day was ending—a day of judgment.

6. The concept of the eighth day goes back to the earliest writings of the church fathers. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, which may have been written as early as 100 A.D., summarized God's words regarding the sabbath: "Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but that is which I have made [namely this,] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world." Epistle XV, in Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1885] 1979), I, p. 147. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, written in the mid-second century, spoke of the Christian sabbath: "For the first day after the Sabbath, remaining the first of all the days, is called, however, the eighth, according to the number of all the days of the cycle, and [yet] remains the first." *Dialogue*, XLI, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I, p. 215.

reasons for this conclusion. They were told that on the day that they sinned, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was prohibited. It was "off limits." They were to subdue the earth to God's glory, but they were initially to labor with this prohibition in front of them. It constituted a limit on what they were allowed to do.

Man is not a static being. He develops. He learns. That was why God put Adam and Eve in the garden. They were to learn about the tasks of dominion in a beautiful setting, so that they could eventually venture out into the world to subdue it. The longer that Adam and Eve continued as faithful stewards to God, the more ingrained the habits of obedience would become. That, of course, is what a training camp is supposed to teach new apprentices or recruits. The longer that they continued as obedient servants, the more difficult it would have been for them to break the pattern of obedience. Clearly, the sooner that Satan lured them into open rebellion, the easier it would be for him. It would be easier to tempt them successfully, and it would be easier to replace any habits of obedience with habits of disobedience. The biblical principle is stated in Proverbs: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (22:6). If this is a general rule for the fallen sons of fallen man, how much more true of sinless Adam and Eve?

Second, not only is man a developing being, but he is a mortal being. If sin must be visited with death, then they would need the mercy of God the moment they transgressed if they were not to die physically that very day. There could be no period of suspended judgment on God's part. They would either receive mercy that day, or they would die that day. In short, they would need a substitutionary sacrifice.

What do we know of God's sacrificial system? We know that all male children in Israel had to be circumcised. This ritual had to be performed on newborn male infants on the eighth day (Lev. 12:3). Furthermore, the sacrifice of the firstborn male animals of Israel also had to be made on the eighth day (Ex. 22:30). The mother of the animal could keep it for seven days; she lost it forever on the eighth. The mother of the Hebrew boy could cuddle him as he had been born for seven days; on the eighth day, he was taken from her and physically marred. There was sorrow for mothers in Israel. God reminded them of their sinfulness, and of the sin of their mother, Eve. They were reminded graphically of the blood that has to be shed for the remission of sins (Heb. 9:22).

The ultimate sacrifice, of course, was Jesus Christ, whose blood was shed for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28). He rose on the first day of the week, the day after the Hebrew sabbath, the day of rest. He inaugurated the restored week, the new beginning. The Christian sabbath is the first day of the week, the new beginning. The Christian sabbath is the first day of the week, for our rest is in principle established. Christ has overcome the world. No longer do we proclaim autonomous man's week. Christ, the perfect human, has re-established redeemed man's week. The day of rest for man is the first day of the week, the eighth day. Man now has a covering for his original transgression.

Christians should understand that the eighth day is a day of rest for us because the seventh was the day of Adam's sin. Adam announced by his self-proclaimed autonomous action in eating the forbidden fruit that he would be as God, that he would inaugurate man's week: six days of labor followed by a day of rest. His week would imitate God's original week, for he was imitating God.

He thought he needed no rest as a creature; he could begin as an originally creative being. The seventh day ought to be his first day of the week, a day of original, autonomous work. He could then rest at the end of the week, as God had rested, when his work was finished. He would complete his own work, announce its perfection, and then rest, just as God had done. He did not begin with rest, nor did he begin with a perfect environment provided to him by God, Adam proclaimed. He began his week by means of his own labor, and to prove his full independence, he began with a violation of God's covenant.

God, in effect, "rubbed man's nose" in his own rebellion. God established the six-and-one pattern as a requirement for man, until the day of redemption came in history. Covenant-keeping man in the Old Testament era would begin work on the seventh day, and his rest could come only at the end of his labors. Man's life would be a life of labor, not beginning with a day of rest, but promising rest only at the end of man's days. Man's rest, even for a covenanted man, would come only at the end. The six days of labor symbolized man's rebellious week, a week begun autonomously, denying the reality of that first full day of rest which prepared man for his week of service. Man turned his back on that first sabbath; God then did the same for man. "Your rest will come at the end of your days, after death has cut you off in the midst of your days." The six-and-one framework was a blessing, for it promised covenant man eventual rest, but it was also a curse: it

delayed man's day of rest. Man wanted to be as God, resting at the end of his week of labor. God allowed him to achieve his goal, but only through grace: rest at the end of man's week (life).

Man announced that he, autonomously, would begin his creation week on the seventh day. God's curse on Adam was that his work would henceforth be burdened. Man wanted to demonstrate his own creativity. God showed him how limited he was as a creature, making him struggle with the creation. Man had received a completed, perfect creation as God's gift. It awaited him for the eighth day of history, his second day of the week. Adam spurned the gift, choosing to regard himself as the creator. The cursed earth now serves as a testimony to man of the difficulties of creation, even in an environment that had been completed by God.

Adam's first full day of life was also his first day of sin and judgment. What he failed to see was that his *life* and his *rest* were linked. By denying the validity of his rest, he denied the foundation of his life. God cursed man. Every man who is not given life is also not given rest. He shall have no rest in eternity, for autonomous man is not the source of life, nor can he complete his work and take his own day of rest. Regenerate men will receive rest, and therefore eternal life, but only after their days of earthly life are over. The *promised day of rest* at the end of the week was a *promised day of redemption* at the end of time. Covenant men were to understand from the six-and-one framework that the day of redemption was in the future. It should have been clear to them that once the day of the Lord (the Lord's day) was revealed in history, the original standard for man's week would then be re-established: one and six.

God honors His plan of history. Man can never escape the testimony of his rebellion. He rebelled and died spiritually on the seventh day. He needs hope in a new life (resurrection) on the eighth day. Christ's resurrection on the eighth day gives covenantally faithful men this hope. They must regard this day as their new day of life. Because of Adam's sin in history, covenant man cannot ever return to the seventh day as his first day of the week (first full day of life). He fell. His day of life depends on Jesus Christ. Therefore, his day of rest is now the eighth day of the week, resurrection day, or the Lord's day. This begins redeemed man's week.

D. A New Day of Rest for a New Humanity

By establishing the first day of the week as the day of rest, Christ and the church assert the new humanity. Redeemed man begins on a new foundation. No longer is he autonomous. No longer does he claim to be able to create a new heaven and a new earth by means of his own autonomous labor. As long as men attempt to imitate God, beginning their week in terms of their own strength, they are doomed to failure. Men must rest on Christ's sacrifice, and in hope of the resurrection, Christ's firstfruits offering. On the day following the sabbath at the end of Passover week, the Israelites offered a firstfruits offering (Lev. 23:10–11). On that day, when the sheaf offering was waved, a lamb was sacrificed (Lev. 23:12). Paul refers to "Christ the firstfruits" (I Cor. 15:23). This firstfruits offering was therefore made on the eighth day. The hope in "Christ the firstfruits" is redeemed man's hope for the resurrection: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (I Cor. 15:22–23). Redeemed man's hope is focused on the meaning of the eighth day. Adam died on God's seventh day, the self-proclaimed first day of fallen man's week; Christ arose on the eighth day, the God-proclaimed first day of man's week.

1. The Temptation

Why the eighth day? The Bible points to the sin of man on Adam's proclaimed first day of his week of creation, or better put, on the first day of man's first week of fully responsible dominion. The first week had been God's week exclusively. He rested on the seventh day. He removed Himself from the physical presence of Adam and Eve. It was their first full day of life. Adam had served as an apprentice the previous day, but on the seventh day, he and his wife received their independence. God would see how they would handle temptation. They did not handle it well. They sinned. He returned to judge them in the evening. This is why the sabbath is "the day of the Lord," meaning judgment day. (The church recognizes this in the sacrament of the communion meal, which is preceded by self-judgment.)

Adam also should have rested and judged, just as God did. As God's delegated representative, Adam should have killed Satan's representative agent, the serpent, at the time of the temptation. He could

then have waited for God to return to render judgment on this act.⁷ Having condemned the serpent, he and Eve could then have had a communion meal with God (as the church does covenantally: Lord's Supper) at the tree of life. Instead, they had communion at the forbidden tree—a satanic communion, like the one forbidden by Paul in I Corinthians 10:20–21.

Adam rebelled against God. The serpent had told Eve that on the day the two of them ate of the forbidden fruit, they would become as gods (Gen. 3:5). What had they both learned about God's activity? They knew that He had created the world in six days. They had not been present at the creation, but they had seen part of the sixth day of the week. They could begin their first week as subordinates to God or as imitation gods. They could rest, and the next day begin to work under the authority of God, or they could attempt to establish themselves as sovereign creators apart from God and in rebellion against God. By resting on that seventh day, waiting one day to begin work, they could begin the dominion assignment in the second week of the earth's history, clearly derivative in their authority. On the other hand, by rebelling they could declare a new creation, a new beginning, as autonomous creators. They could declare "man's week" as an alternative to, and a program superior to, God's week. Would man begin the full-scale tasks of dominion by acknowledging his secondary importance in the second week, or would he deny the relevance of the week that had preceded "man's week"?

If he chose to become the new god, he would have to act fast. In fact, his first act would have to be an act of rebellion, in order to establish man's first day of sovereign lordship over his new creation. For the serpent to make an effective case for rebellion, he would have had to approach Eve on the morning of the seventh day, the first day of man's week. To interrupt man's labors mid-week would have meant that man had labored for part of his first week under God's sovereign authority. Obviously, at least part of the week would have been visibly God's week, not man's. So, Satan probably began his temptation on the morning of the seventh day.

2. A Day of Rest

Totally sovereign over history, resting assured, God rested the seventh day. Autonomous man cannot rest in confidence that his labors

7. See Appendix E, "Witnesses and Judges."

will be successful. He dares not “waste” time. He cannot afford to waste any resource as precious as time. Covenant man can rest on God’s sabbath, for he knows that God is sovereign, and that he, as God’s obedient subordinate, possesses the grace of God. His work will persevere. He can enjoy the day of rest because he knows that every week is God’s week. The law of God is his tool of dominion, and he knows that the law of God is in conformity to the operations of the world. He does not have to labor seven days a week in order for God to bless his efforts as dominion man. He is subordinate to God, so he can be confident as a dominion man over God’s creation. Covenant man enjoys his rest.

Autonomous man’s week never ends. The eighth day is like the sixth day, and the seventh day is like the second day. The week is never-ending, and the work is never-ending. Man’s week is not a week at all; it is a life of frantic labor, for man must establish his dominion over foreign territory—God’s creation—in terms of antinomian rebellion. Biblical law is man’s tool of dominion, so the task becomes an ever-greater burden as rebellious man departs more and more from God’s revealed law-order. There is no day of rest—psychological, confident rest—in man’s week. Covenant-breaking man cannot enjoy his rest as a zero-cost blessing.

Satan wanted to make man his slave. He wanted to drive his new slave unmercifully, just as the Pharaoh of the oppression wanted the Hebrews to serve as slaves, and the Pharaoh of the exodus did with his Hebrew slaves (Ex. 5:5–14). God wants servants; Satan wants slaves. God wants men to prosper and rest; Satan wants men to fail and bleed at their labors. God’s week gives covenant man confidence in his own labors, for it gives him a day of rest. Satan’s week—for man’s week apart from God is Satan’s week, ethically—is a week without confidence or rest.

Man sinned, and he sinned early. He did not taste the fruits of righteousness for eons before he rebelled. He went straight to the forbidden fruit, in a rebellious assertion of his own autonomy. He was not content with the glorious rest he had been offered. He had been offered a taste of the fruits of labor, a rest without a week of human labor preceding it. God had shown him what lay ahead, if only he would conform his heart and his labor to Him. Like a dessert before the meat and potatoes, God had offered Adam and Eve the blessing of godly rest. In the face of this, they turned their backs on God and declared man’s week. They converted man’s day of rest into a day of

seeming economic loss, for man would henceforth be faced with alternative costs. For every hour he remained at rest, man would lose the income that an hour's labor might have produced.

Outside the covenant, man can no longer count on the fixed relationship between God's law and God's blessings. Outside the covenant, rebellious man can no longer rest assured that his rest will have its reward. In man's week, men are faced with a decision: steal time from God's sabbath rest, but increase their short-run income; or forfeit short-run income on the day of rest, but reap the rewards of faithfulness that God promises to His covenantally faithful people. Had Adam not rebelled, he would not have acknowledged the validity of this choice. He would have rested, confident that he was not stealing from God, and confident that he was not forfeiting any income that he might otherwise have earned. He would have known the fruits of righteousness. His day of rest would never have appeared to him as an expense, but as a blessing from God. In God's week, the day of rest is an unmitigated blessing, a cost-free blessing, not a day for agonizing over the costs of resting (the forfeited economic benefits of working). When Adam declared man's week, he robbed himself of a blessing he might have experienced: a day of rest that is free of charge.

E. Life, Sabbath, Dominion

While the one-six and six-one patterns are those that we associate with a week, we should also recognize the *life-sabbath-dominion* pattern of three days. Adam was created on the sixth day. He served briefly as an apprentice under God, getting a taste of the nature of God's dominion assignment. He should have rested the next day, his first full day of life. This can also be understood as the second of three days. The third day, he was to have begun his work. He was to have begun as a covenant-keeper. His dominion assignment would have brought fulfillment to him, for his work was to have been meaningful and blessed by God. The second day, given this three-day framework, he rebelled. But his life was to have been marked by the initial three-day pattern: preliminary labor as an immediate subordinate to God, rest the next day, and dominion labor as God's agent on the third day. In short, *life, sabbath, dominion*.

We see this same pattern in Christ's work of redemption. On the day before the Pharisees' sabbath, He was taken to the cross and executed, suffering for the sake of His people. He had served throughout

His life as a suffering servant of God, and this act of sacrifice on the final day of His pre-resurrection life was the essence of His redemptive work on earth. The next day, His body rested in the tomb. This was the sabbath day.

Christ's sabbath rest was spent in the presence of God. He told the thief on the cross, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). His earthly body rested in the tomb, but His disembodied soul had fellowship with God for the entire sabbath. *Perfect rest and perfect fellowship: here is the heart of the sabbath.* Christ, because of His death, fulfilled perfectly the terms of the sabbath. The third day, he rose from the dead. He had been cut off in His prime; now He lived again, ready to inaugurate the dominion phase of His life through the church, His body (I Cor. 12:12–20). All power was given to Him (Matt. 28:18).⁸ The day after the sabbath, therefore, was the third day, yet it was also the eighth day, the first day of redeemed man's new week. So we see a fusion: third day, eighth day, and first day. Christ's resurrection re-established the pattern of Adam's life that had been God's original requirement: a day of life, a full day of rest, and a day of dominion under God. Our new life in Christ is celebrated now on the first day of the week.

Because Christ's new life is imparted to His people through regeneration, we can serve as dominion men, in time and on earth. Our sabbath is now (Heb. 4:1–11), so we can rest spiritually, but at the same time, we are exercising our dominion responsibilities. We are dominion-minded because we have the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16). He has conquered Satan, so we in principle have conquered. We have the down payment (earnest) of our inheritance in Christ (Eph. 1:14). This means that we have a down payment on our future era of sabbath rest, which is also an era of total dominion. We work now, yet we also rest now. Our rest is not perfect, nor is our dominion perfect, but as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we learn the meaning of both rest and dominion.

Conclusion

The foundation of dominion under Christ is rest in Christ. The basis of our new life in Christ is His resurrection. He rose on the third day after His life ended, thereby covering the sin of Adam, who re-

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

belled the day after he had been given life, assuming my previous argumentation is correct concerning the day of Adam's Fall. Christ calls us to rest on the first day because God wants us to acknowledge ritually that the basis of dominion is our commitment to God, who provides everything for us, including life, before our dominion assignment even begins. We begin with rest, as Adam was supposed to have done. We view the *day of true life* as our sabbath day, our *day of confident rest in Christ*, which can be seen as the eighth day and also as our first day of the week, redeemed man's week.

Adam announced his autonomy when he inaugurated man's week. It began with work, but it was Adam's autonomous, rebellious work. Prior to the coming of Christ, God made His people adhere to a sabbath plan: rest on the seventh day. Their rest was always before them at the end of the week. God was telling them graphically that their ultimate rest in Him was also being delayed. Then came Jesus Christ. His resurrection on the first day of the week, the day after the Passover sabbath, the eighth day, brought God's promised rest to His adopted sons. Their rest is now assured. The proof of this rest is Jesus Christ. He came in history, so the promised rest is, in principle, manifested in the past. We celebrate our rest on the first day of the week now. Christians announce their reliance on Christ's work by resting on the first (eighth) day of the week. They no longer claim autonomy. They, as the former sons of the first Adam, no longer declare their creative independence by working the first day of the week, as Adam did. Redeemed man's week begins with rest, in full assurance that God's providence will sustain him and prosper him. Unredeemed man's week begins with labor. The Jews hope for the promised future rest, and they still celebrate the seventh day sabbath. The pagans, unless influenced by Jews or Christians, or unless influenced by the Islamic imitation of both "religions of the Book," which celebrates its rest on the sixth day (Friday), still cling to their autonomy, still drive themselves mercilessly. Autonomous man's week is a full seven days, and autonomous man will never achieve rest.

THE VALUE OF GOLD

And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone (Gen. 2:12).

The theocentric principle here is the doctrine of God's imputation: rendering judgment. This is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model: judgment.¹

In describing the land of Havilah, Moses singles out its supplies of precious metal and stones. (Some think bdellium was a plant or plant byproduct.) This is the sole reference to inanimate objects prior to the rebellion of man that specifies their unique quality. Moses understood that the people of his day would comprehend the value of a land that possessed jewels and gold. Man's place of original responsibility was a splendid land, and the presence of fine gold was one of its marks of splendor. God's generosity to man was immediately apparent to anyone reading or hearing Moses' account of Adam's environment.

Precious metals and jewelry have been regarded as basic wealth objects for as long as man has left records. Gold has been a form of money for as far back as we can investigate. Its brilliance, durability, malleability, and universal respect as a metal of continuing value have made it a unique economic resource. Its scarcity in relation to the high value men place on the ownership of the metal (high marginal utility) has made gold a universal currency. Gold is something worth owning. Even Adam in the garden could be regarded in retrospect as blessed, Moses made it clear—all the more reason to condemn Adam's ethical rebellion. In a perfect creation, which God had announced as being good, gold and jewels were something special.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. Gold as Money

Gold is the universal money. Wherever men truck and barter, they respect gold as a means of exchange. Why? What is money, and why should gold serve as its universal archetype? Money is simply *the most marketable commodity*.² To one extent or another, money must have the following characteristics: *divisibility, durability, transportability, easy recognizability, and scarcity in relation to its demand* (high marginal utility). Many objects have functioned as money in the history of man. Cattle, precious metals, salt, shells, and even women have served as units of account. (Divisibility has always been a problem with women; half a woman is worse than none at all.) Money must serve as a unit of common account. It is often referred to as a “store of value,” although the terminology is misleading, since it has overtones of fixed objective value apart from value-imputing men operating in competitive markets. We might better say that *money is a valuable thing to store*. Most important, *money has historic value*. It was valuable yesterday, or perhaps centuries ago, and traders can assume that a particular form of money will therefore be valuable in the future. This *continuity of value over time* is paramount in establishing a particular commodity as an acceptable monetary unit.

There is a theoretical problem with this analysis. If money is valuable as money today because it was valuable as money yesterday, how can we explain the origin of money? This was a problem answered by Mises’ “regression theorem” in his 1912 book, *The Theory of Money and Credit*. At some point in the history of a particular monetary unit,

2. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1912] 1953), p. 32. (<http://Mises.org/books/tmc.pdf>) Mises wrote in 1949: “In the marketability of the various commodities and services there prevail considerable differences. . . . It is these differences in the marketability of the various commodities and services which created indirect exchange. A man who at the instant cannot acquire what he wants to get for the conduct of his own household or business, or who does not yet know what kind of goods he will need in the uncertain future, comes nearer to his ultimate goal if he exchanges a less marketable good for a more marketable one. It may also happen that the physical properties of the merchandise he wants to give away (as, for instance, its perishability or the costs incurred by its storage or similar circumstances) impel him to wait no longer. Sometimes he may be prompted to hurry in giving away the good concerned because he is afraid of a deterioration of its market value. In all such cases he improves his own situation in acquiring a more marketable good, even if this good is not suitable to satisfy directly any of his own needs. . . . Money is a medium of exchange. It is the most marketable good which people acquire because they want to offer it in later acts of interpersonal exchange.” Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press 1949), p. 398. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

it must have been valuable for its other properties. Perhaps its beauty was central. Possibly it was used as an ornament or as a sacred object. Acting men must have imputed value to the metal or other object for reasons other than its previous service as a means of exchange. Mises' argument is plausible, but it is still a form of "conjectural history." We can only speculate concerning the origins of money.

What we *do* know is that God calls attention to the special position of gold and the precious stones of Havilah. He expects men to recognize the special nature of His gift to mankind of assets that are almost universally recognized as valuable. Their beauty in men's eyes—an indication of universal standards of beauty among men—and their scarcity (high marginal utility) in relation to this universal demand for beautiful jewels or gold ornaments result in the creation of what appears to be an objective value for gold and jewels. This is the closest that we should come to attributing "objective" or "intrinsic" value to gold, silver, or some other universally recognized form of money. The almost universal acceptability of gold in voluntary exchanges between men has produced historic value of such long standing for the metal, that men speak of gold's intrinsic value. But this supposed "intrinsic value of gold" is better understood as an *almost intrinsic desire to own gold among mankind*. Even so, this desire is never a fixed emotion, irrespective of time and place. There is no fixed market value for gold, no "innate price" of gold. Gold is not a universal fixed economic reference point for all market exchanges. However, God provided high quality gold for Adam, and Adam and his heirs were (and are) expected to recognize God's generosity in this regard. The gift of gold was a fine one indeed. It still is.

The use of gold and silver as ornaments is a fact recorded by the Bible. *Strong's Concordance* lists three columns of fine-print entries of verses that refer to silver, and three and a half that refer to gold. Unquestionably, the Bible records the long history of both metals as primary forms of wealth. "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2). Gold and silver were convenient units of account because they could be weighed in terms of a standard unit of weight, the shekel (Gen. 24:22). King Asa paid out the gold and silver of Judah's treasury to Benhadad as tribute money (I Kings 15:18). The fact that this payment was perfectly acceptable to Benhadad indicated how universal these metals were in exchange.

How valuable is gold? When making an estimation of the incomparable value of God's judgments, David use gold as a representative

standard of comparison, albeit a dim approximation. But gold is the highest earthly standard by which we can compare God's judgments (Ps. 19:9–10). Gold is desirable; how much more desirable is the righteous judgment of God! This same comparison is used repeatedly by biblical writers (Ps. 119:72, 127; Prov. 3:14; 8:10, 19; 16:16; etc.). Even the New Jerusalem, God's final and most glorious physical gift to redeemed mankind, is referred to as pure gold (Rev. 21:18). From the garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, gold is wealth.

B. Monopoly and Dross

It is when men as citizens or government officials tamper with the gold and silver content of the currency that disaster results. When men's hearts are dross, they risk the production of dross currency and dross consumer goods (Isa. 1:22).³ Kings have practiced this monetary deception for as long as there have been kings. They pour less expensive (base) metals into the silver or gold used to cast ingots or coins. They substitute paper notes or checks or computer entries on magnetic tapes for the precious metals, and then they multiply the notes, checks, or computer entries. Money multiplies, prices rise, and the redistribution of wealth through deception increases. The civil government fosters fraud, either directly (debasement, printing press money) or indirectly (central and commercial banking). When the authorities of the civil government stamp a coin or bill with a seal testifying that a particular quantity and fineness of a precious metal is contained in a coin (or a specific quantity of this metal is on reserve for immediate exchange of the paper note), and subsequently debase the coinage or print more bills than there is metal on reserve, they thereby act fraudulently. They first create a monopoly of money issue, and then they misuse this government monopoly. They spend the fiat money into circulation, buying the market's scarce economic resources. The state thereby increases its consumption by levying the "invisible tax" of monetary inflation.

The monopoly of money is fraught with danger for all but the most alert private citizens and the beneficiaries of state favors. The authorities cannot long resist the temptation of levying the invisible tax of price inflation. It is true that Byzantium was blessed with a stable gold

3. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

coinage for over 700 years, but this was unique in man's history.⁴

This is why inflation of the money supply has been a feature of human history from the beginning of our records. Governments cheat. Honest civil governments are not the creators of money; they are, at most, the certifiers of money. This is why the Bible again and again warns about the sin of fraudulent weights and measures.⁵ This is linked to justice (Lev. 19:33–37;⁶ Deut. 25:13–16⁷). When Jeremiah bought the field from his kinsman, he “subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances” (Jer. 32:10). The money in this case was 17 shekels of silver (Jer. 32:9). The *debasement of the currency* is nothing less than *tampering with the weights and measures*, whether done by private coin clippers, counterfeiters, or state officials.

The abolition of the gold standard in the twentieth century during and after World War I led directly to universal inflation, revolution, and boom-bust trade cycles in the same historic period. There is no escape from the moral laws of God, whether or not hired professional economists recognize such a moral order's existence. The gold coin or silver coin standard, or multiple coin standard of freely exchangeable currencies, is the direct result of biblical law.

The abolition of honest weights and measures through the creation of fractional reserve banking, printing press money, coin debasement, or coin clipping, must inevitably result in unpleasant social and economic repercussions. When someone issues a receipt for metal of a certain fineness and weight, he must have just exactly that on reserve. To issue more warehouse receipts (bank notes) than there is metal on reserve is nothing less than tampering with the scales, for the results are identical to coin debasement. It is the same sin; it must result in the same judgment. We live in a universe that is personal and governed by moral law. Economic crises are the built-in self-regulating devices—built into man and the creation—that restrain men in the pursuit of evil. Dishonest weights, dishonest money, dishonest authorities, and dishonest cultures go together.

4. “Byzantine Coinage,” *Wikipedia*.

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 468–72.

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

Conclusion

Though the Roman Empire is dust today, its gold and silver coins still can be exchanged for scarce economic resources. The Caesars have been in their graves for millennia, their authority long defunct, but the coins bearing their likenesses can still buy goods and services. Men impute value to precious metals long after men have ceased imputing value to a political regime. Precious metal currencies outlast civil governments. Gold can be money. Silver can be money. So it has been since the beginning of recorded history, and so it shall be at the end.

The gold of Havilah was good. It was high quality gold. It was desirable gold. But, most of all, it was not easily counterfeitable gold, especially by lawless civil governments.⁸ This is more than we can say about banknotes, credit cards, and unbacked fiat currencies.

8. Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>)

8

SUBORDINATION AND FULFILLMENT

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep [guard] it (Gen. 2:15).

The theocentric principle here is subordination, point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy.¹

A. No Autonomy

Cosmic personalism affirms that all things have their being and meaning in terms of the person and plan of God (Acts 17:28). It absolutely denies the possibility of autonomy—self-sufficiency—for any aspect of the universe. All the creation is subordinate to God. There is also a hierarchy within this created order. Man is under God; nature is under man.

The world was created good. God had already affirmed the goodness of the creation when He assigned the tasks of dominion to man. Despite its God-derived and God-proclaimed goodness, nature was not fully developed. The earth's surface was not yet under man's dominion. God created a garden eastward in Eden as a place of initial testing and training for man. Adam was not yet ready for the full task of worldwide dominion. He was ready to learn, however.

The earth was never designed to be autonomous. Neither was the garden. Though the creation was able to function without man's immediate presence, it could not achieve its full flowering apart from man. This is equally true in the post-Fall era. The natural world needs guidance and care from man, especially covenantally faithful man. For nature to flower, it must be subordinate. *Nature is fundamentally*

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

passive, despite the active competition of the species within the framework of nature's law-order. Nature was designed; it has a goal; God has a purpose for it. Natural processes are not fully self-correcting, for without man's care, nature cannot independently achieve its purpose. The so-called balance of nature is insufficient to produce a developed, mature nature. Nature apart from man is God-sustained and God-restrained. Under covenantal dominion, cursed nature's restraints on mankind are progressively lifted.

Nature was allowed to operate briefly without man for five days. Man was allowed to operate briefly without woman for less than one day. Neither could be fully comfortable without its complement. Nature needed subordination under man. Man needed subordination under God. Man was unable to achieve the fullness of dominion alone. *Dominion requires a division of labor*, so he received his helper fit for him. The familiar phrase "helpmeet" has distorted the meaning of the original words. Eve was a helper "meet" or *fit* for Adam. She was the product of design. Adam knew he could not perform his tasks efficiently without another person to assist him. Like nature, he had been created good but incomplete. He knew from the very beginning that he was not self-sufficient.

B. Man's Calling

God assigned Adam an initial task to be completed by himself. He was to name the animals of the field and the birds. This meant that he had to classify them, intellectually integrating their functions into an overall design. The "many" were to be arranged in terms of the "one," meaning the plan of God as perceived and interpreted by Adam, God's image. We are not told whether this classification involved all the beasts of the earth, or whether it was limited to the field of the garden. If it involved all animals, the task is barely conceivable in retrospect. We cannot imagine how such a task could have been completed by one individual in a few hours. Even if the assignment involved only the beasts and birds of the garden, it would have been an awesome task. Yet Adam completed it in a few hours. His mind, prior to the Fall, was efficient beyond anything we can imagine. Modern man, with the aid of enormous capital, the division of labor, and the modern computer, has only begun to match the skills of the first man in the garden.

Adam worked before he married. His definition of himself was set in reference to his subordination to God and the dominion covenant.

Man's work is fundamental to his very being. Eve was given to him within the framework of his calling or vocation before God. The family has its meaning in terms of the dominion covenant. The individual family is influenced overwhelmingly by the particular calling of the husband. Wives are to be selected in terms of the man's calling. They are to help their husbands fulfill their callings (Prov. 31:12, 23, 27).² By departing from this interpretation of the meaning of marriage, we find that religions, cultures, and individual families have neglected their callings before God, and the tasks of dominion have not been achieved in a systematically biblical manner. The family structure has been designed for a purpose, and by neglecting the husband's calling as the central feature of the family, rebellious men have compromised the family.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil also testified to the impossibility of autonomy. It was a visible and constant reminder of man's subordination to God and his total dependence on God for his power and knowledge. *Knowledge is a prerequisite of power.* God set a tree before them that promised a special form of knowledge to man. Then He declared the tree "off limits." They could not enjoy its fruit. They had to acknowledge a zone of knowledge, and therefore power, which was ethically forbidden. They had to live in terms of a *seeming imperfection* in their very being. They were told that they and the creation were good, yet they were forbidden access to the tree. They had to work out their task of dominion in a cooperative effort, as man and wife, and as a family before God. Were they imperfect metaphysically? Was some fundamental aspect of their being, their humanity, lacking? God said no. They were perfect as beings, though they had a life-long task of dominion and celebration before them. They were perfect as creatures, but they were not autonomous. The tree reminded them of their necessary dependence on God, for there was knowledge which was closed to them as metaphysically complete, ethically perfect humans. Their authority would always be derivative.

They were not to eat of the tree. To do so meant that they were dissatisfied with their position as subordinate, dependent creatures. To do so meant that they believed they could capture forbidden knowledge and therefore forbidden power. The serpent recognized this in his tempting words, that they would become as gods (Gen. 3:5). In effect, they would be criticizing God for the imperfection of His creat-

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

ive acts. He had left them *metaphysically incomplete*, they would be asserting, devoid of a crucial aspect of "true humanity." Therefore, to eat of the tree, they had to proclaim that as autonomous beings they could decide for themselves to capture their "full humanity" by an act of ethical rebellion. They would determine for themselves whether or not they would die, although God had promised them that they would. As sovereign experimenters, they would test the word of God. But it would not really be a test, for by eating of the tree, they were already asserting that God's word could not possibly be what God said it was, namely, absolutely authoritative. To test God's word meant that the testing agents already had denied the absolutely authoritative nature of God's revelation. By assuming that God's word could be tested, they would be asserting that chance, not God's word, is authoritative. It *might* be that they would not die. Therefore, it had to be that God's word is not sovereign. Chance, not God, is therefore the sovereign of the universe, and man might overcome impersonal chance or impersonal fate by gaining sufficient knowledge. The first step towards *total knowledge* would be the quest for a specifically *forbidden form of knowledge*.

Would God test man's capacities in the garden? Then man would test God's word in the garden. Who was dominant? Who was subordinate? Would man find his fulfillment in terms of his God, his wife, and the dominion covenant? Or would God find *His* fulfillment in terms of man, man's plans, man's tests? *The tree was a symbol of the real test, which was ethical, not intellectual or metaphysical.* Adam could learn the tasks of dominion as a subordinate. Or Adam could attempt to become autonomous, a self-directed sovereign who might achieve total dominion over the creation through the exercise of his own autonomous knowledge and power. He could find fulfillment in terms of subordination under God and dominion over nature, or else he could attempt to find fulfillment in terms of a struggle against God, nature, and chance, with chance as the present reigning sovereign, under which God also operates and tries to make His word authoritative. *The tree stood as a symbol of man's ethical and metaphysical subordination as a created being.* Ultimately, Adam could not test his metaphysical position, for God made him what he was. The tree was a test of his ethical position before God.

C. Training for Dominion

God gave Adam almost free rein in the garden. Only one pathway was forbidden. Adam was supposed to have learned the skills of dominion in the garden, and from there he and his family were to have gone out as dominion-exercising subordinates under God. He was not supposed to stay in the garden forever. The garden was a training ground, a place that God had declared good but incomplete (undeveloped). Adam's task was to bring the earth under control for the glory of God and in terms of God's law-order. His special task was to make nature fulfilled as well as good. In doing so, he would become complete, as a creature who had fulfilled his God-appointed purposes. ("Completion" refers to historical fulfillment, not an advance in "being.")

It is not generally understood by Christians that *paradise*, as represented by the garden or heaven, is *impermanent*. Adam was to use the beauty of the garden as a temporary resting place, a place of joy, almost in the same way that Western cultures regard the honeymoon. It was a place of learning and training. Like the honeymoon, the garden experience was to serve as a preliminary blessing which would lead to fulfillment in dominion. Marriage, not the honeymoon, is central to dominion, just as the world, not the garden, was to have been the focus of Adam's concern. But Adam wanted paradise on other terms. He wanted instant knowledge, not the progressive knowledge that is the fruit of dominion, first in the garden and subsequently in the whole earth. He wanted a "higher consciousness" apart from the labor of dominion. He wanted special knowledge, instant knowledge, not the knowledge of experience as a subordinate. His eyes turned to the tree in the midst of the garden, rather than outward toward the world, which would remain unfulfilled apart from his active dominion. He subsequently abandoned his calling under God. Rather than spread the zone of paradise from the garden to the world, turning the world into a paradise, he decided to choose instant illumination through a prohibited action in defiance of God.

As Adam discovered to his consternation, God would not allow him to abandon his calling, for this calling is central to all humanity. He was cast into the world prior to the completion of his training. He was still responsible before God. He still had to exercise dominion. Nature deserves its fulfillment. Adam would not be allowed to abandon nature. He could not remain in the garden, that most pleasant of

training camps, seeking higher consciousness. He had to work. So do his heirs.

Conclusion

God will achieve His goals. Man will achieve dominion over nature. Nature will become fully fulfilled (Rom. 8:19–22).³ But the long process of dominion is now cursed. Having failed in our pain-free training, we are now forced to learn painfully “on the job.” This was not the case in the garden. Adam rejected pain-free training.

It is a mistake for Christians to focus their long-term hope on the joys of heaven. Heaven is paradise (Luke 23:43; II Cor. 12:4). It, too, serves as a training ground. It is a good place, but it is not our final resting place, any more than the garden was intended to be our final resting place. It is an “intermediate” state. We are still to exercise dominion over the earth. Like the garden was before the Fall, heaven is a place which, like the garden was before the Fall, is essentially unfulfilled. Men in heaven are separated from their eternal bodies (I Cor. 15:35–55). They cry out constantly: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10). The focus of their concern, even in heaven, is the earth. It is to be our concern as well. *We are required to extend the paradise of heaven to the earth.* Heaven has replaced the paradise of the garden. Each was designed to be temporary. Our goal is heaven on earth, to be completed after the final judgment; we are to dwell in the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21:1). Revelation 22:2 describes a developed paradise: the fulfilled city. Ours should be the same concern which was supposed to have been Adam’s concern in the garden, the initial paradise. *The dominion covenant is eternal.*

Because of Adam’s transgression, we are receiving our training in time and on a cursed earth. We are supposed to be improving our skills of dominion. We are working out the terms of the dominion covenant, but we labor under a curse. Our work has meaning, both now and in eternity. We will receive our rewards in heaven (I Cor. 3),⁴ but these are not our sole and final rewards. Heaven’s rewards are like mil-

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

4. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

itary medals or the prizes of the athletic field (I Cor. 9:24;⁵ Phil. 3:14⁶). They are things worth competing for, again and again, if long life permits. Heaven's rewards are a legitimate goal of human action. But these rewards are the starting point, like Adam's successful classifying of the animals. Heaven's rewards are given in response to a preliminary task well done. They are our graduation diplomas, which we will receive on judgment day (Rev. 20). *Then we will go forth into the world to work.* Men and the created realm will at last find completion, ethically speaking, under the sovereignty of God. The curses on man, man's labors, and nature will be permanently removed (Rev. 22:3). With ethical perfection as the foundation, the creation will be subdued and cared for, throughout eternity. The battle with nature will be over at last. The labor over nature will never end.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

6. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 21.

9

THE MEANING OF OWNERSHIP

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him (Gen. 2:15–18).

The theocentric issue here is God’s ownership of the creation. His ownership is an extension of His creation of the world. This, in turn, is an aspect of His *absolute sovereignty*: point one of the biblical covenant model.¹ He owns everything because He made everything. Nothing exists that He did not make. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col 1:16–17). He therefore possesses the legal authority and metaphysical power to exclude every created thing from access to any aspect of the creation: *boundaries*, point three of the biblical covenant model.² He has the right to enforce these boundaries by threat of violence: *sanctions*, point four.³

God had established original legal title to the creation by creating it. He altered the environment by adding to it, day by day. The proof of His legal claim of ownership was the very existence of the environment. He worked His claim for six days. Then he leased it to Adam

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Sutton, ch. 3; North, ch. 3.

3. Sutton, ch. 4; North, ch. 4.

and Adam's heirs. The lease agreement had specific stipulations. It also had an initial zone of testing: the garden.

A. Inclusion and Exclusion

God delegated subordinate ownership by this declaration to Adam. He told Adam that Adam possessed the right to use any tree of the garden for his own personal use. He included Adam in His own heritage. This heritage included the tree of life. But one tree was off limits: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If Adam ate of this tree, God warned, he would die. This is the ultimate negative sanction. The full extent of its negativity was not revealed until the ministry of Jesus, who announced the doctrine of hell (Luke 16) and the doctrine of the final bodily resurrection from the dead, followed by the eternal lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15).

God had the right of exclusion. By this, I mean the moral authority, the legal authority, and the physical ability to exclude others from the use of designated property. Put another way, there was no higher authority to appeal to who would or could intervene on behalf of the excluded person. The Owner had the right to lay down the law.

The law of exclusion accompanies the law of inclusion. The owner possesses the authority to use the property as he sees fit. God possesses this absolute authority because of His office as Creator. He therefore had the authority to transfer to Adam the right to eat from every tree of the garden. He created Adam and placed him inside the boundaries of the garden. He thereby included Adam. He did so as Adam's master. Adam had lawful access to the trees of the garden as God's representative agent: *hierarchy*, point two of the biblical covenant model.⁴

So, Adam was included in the garden, but only on the basis of his subordination to God. The mark of this subordination was God's declared boundary around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam had lawful access to every tree but one. His lawful access to everything minus one was dependent on his non-access to that one exception.

Adam's obedience to God was defined in two ways. One was positive: to keep and dress the garden. The other was negative: his refusal to eat from the forbidden tree until instructed otherwise by God. To defend the garden meant that he possessed God-designated authority to

4. Sutton, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

exclude or include any other creature. God would support him in this task. In what way? As the final Judge. This is what God did with the serpent. When Eve refused to exclude the serpent, and Adam refused to intervene to exclude it, God returned and pronounced judgment on the serpent. The mark of their joint rebellion—Eve, Adam, and the serpent—was the violation of the boundary around the designated tree.

B. Inheritance

God did not inform Adam of the existence of God's grace. After the sin of man, God showed His grace to Adam and Eve by not executing them. He granted a promise to Eve. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:15–16). This was a promise of *inheritance*: point five of the biblical covenant model.⁵ This was not clear to Adam in God's original establishment of the boundary around the tree.

God also extended His boundary of exclusion. He set an angel with a flaming sword at the entry into the garden. This made the tree of life off-limits.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:22–24).

The tree of life had not been excluded before man's Fall. Adam and Eve could have attained eternal life by going to the tree of life at any time and eating from it. They could have done this immediately. They refused. The lure of the forbidden tree was too great. To be as God: that was the thing! To gain access to forbidden knowledge: that was the thing! They did not believe that God really would impose the sanction of death on them.

Instead of going immediately to the tree of life, they sowed fig

5. Sutton, ch. 5; North, ch. 5.

leaves for themselves. God was temporarily absent. He was not present to defend the tree of life. It seemed as though they might be able to thwart God's threat of death. All they needed to do was make a run for the tree of life. But God knew them well. They would waste precious time sowing coverings for themselves. They would work to overcome their own shame.

After God covered them with animal skins and expelled them from the garden, He extended the boundary of exclusion. He knew that men would seek to attain eternal life on their own authority. They would return to the scene of the crime. They would attempt to gain access to the tree of life, eating their way out of the death sentence that God had announced: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). God took away what He had granted in His grace on Adam's first partial day of life. The Lord gave, and the Lord took away. Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).

There would be life extension: time to bear children. There was also a boundary placed on life extension: death. The symbol of this boundary was the angel's sword. There was grace in life extension, yet also curses: the woman's pain in childbirth, the man's burdened labor, and the expectation of death. There was also grace in their exclusion from the garden: no access to the tree of life, which would not have removed their sin, only their curse of physical death. They would henceforth not be able to imprison themselves in the bondage of sin forever. As God would reveal later, there is deliverance from the bondage of sin through a substitutionary atonement.

C. Property Management

What God did with the forbidden tree, Adam was to have done with the garden. God placed a barrier of ownership around it. Adam was to defend this boundary. He refused. He did not exclude the serpent or kill it. Because of Adam's sin, God placed a barrier around the garden. He sent Adam into the newly cursed wilderness. But, in sending Adam out into the world, God gave Adam a huge boundary: the entire world, except for the garden. God had limited Adam's initial assignment: to dress and defend the garden. After man's sin, God vastly extended Adam's area of responsibility: the whole world.

This had been God's plan from the beginning: to subdue the whole

earth (Gen. 1:28). Adam was given a limited area of responsibility initially: the garden. He was given time to test his skills of management. Because of his premature grabbing of the robes of authority—eating from a tree to make him like God—God tossed him out of the garden. His zone of responsibility was extended in one day. He would henceforth gain on-the-job training in a world brought under the curse imposed on Adam.

Adam would now have to manage property. He had a model: his initial experience in the garden. God had limited Adam's initial zone of responsibility. This limited zone was marked by two boundaries: the garden and the tree. Adam was to protect this enclosed area from invaders. He was to improve it. Only after he had gained skills of administration was he to expend his zone of responsibility. God had thrust him out prematurely, because Adam had grabbed the robes of authority prematurely. He had stolen God's property. God removed him from God's other property as a punishment, but also as a blessing: greater responsibility. *For covenant-keepers, extending one's zone of responsibility is a blessing.* It is a mark of maturity.

The pattern of ownership is found the garden: responsibility, work, protection/defense, and expansion. We are to secure our legal claim to property by *working the claim*, in the language of mining in the American West during the gold rush era of the mid-nineteenth century. A miner proved his claim to the authorities by identifying the signs of the extraction of dirt or some other alteration of the land related to the extraction of ore. He could not lay claim—establish legal title—merely by saying that a large tract of land belonged to him. He had to be able to point to a changed environment that his labor or capital had effected.

By establishing an original legal claim, an environment-transforming laborer establishes his right to exclude others from the property inside specified legal boundaries. He establishes a right to future extraction. This legal claim extends through time. Adam possessed such a title in the garden. He forfeited this title when he violated the Owner's property line.

As a delegated owner, Adam was to extend his authority over an ever-wider area of responsibility. Through his children, he was to extend his authority. They would extend dominion under his fatherhood, just as he extended dominion under God's fatherhood. They would conquer in Adam's name, just as Adam was to have conquered in God's name. *But the conquest was to be based on labor inside a bound-*

ary of responsibility. The marks of this boundary were the marks of land transformation. He was to alter the land. This meant that he was given authority by God to alter the land. The limits of his ownership were established by the limits of his ability to transform the land's value by altering the physical environment.

This is land management. The same principle of property management applies to the products of land and labor over time: *capital*. The individual establishes ownership by changing the environment in a physically measurable way. God had declared, "Let there be," and there was. Physical nature responded to God's word. Man is not God. His fiat word—"let there be"—does not change the environment. He does not establish ownership by mere declaration. He must alter the physical environment in order to establish an original property right.

D. Transfer of Ownership

God transferred ownership to Adam. In doing this, He transferred responsibility. Adam would henceforth have to manage the property on God's behalf.

This transfer of property became biologically mandatory for Adam after the Fall. God cursed mankind with death. Each person is eventually removed from the scene. This mandates the transfer of ownership. A dead man cannot exercise responsible authority over the property. So, he must establish the legal terms of this transfer before he dies. If he refuses to do this, then society does it through custom or civil law. The state enforces some terms of transfer. The boundaries of the property are marked by responsibility. *There are no boundaries without responsibility.* Stewardship under God's ultimate ownership is inescapable.

The owner can legally transfer the property before he dies. He can divest himself of the responsibilities associated with ownership. Attached to every piece of property are liabilities. Stewardship of God's property is inescapable. There is no way to separate stewardship from ownership. *There is no way to make property autonomous.* Property is inescapably accompanied by legal responsibility. God enforces this arrangement.

Conclusion

God put Adam in the garden. He included Adam. He placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. He excluded

Adam from this tree. God, as the cosmic Owner, includes and excludes all those under His authority. He has the original property right. The twin marks of this right are inclusion and exclusion.

Man is made in God's image. He possesses property rights as a steward under God. He represents God. He establishes a property right by altering previously unoccupied and unowned land. He adds labor to this land, altering it further. He maintains his property through labor. He becomes responsible for it. If he does not defend it and improve it, God transfers ownership to others. Man's mortality guarantees such a transfer.

10

THE GOD-DESIGNED HARMONY OF INTERESTS

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (Gen. 2:18–23).

A. Marriage and Labor

The theocentric principle here is God's positive sanction of marriage. It followed the original assignment of work. First, men are supposed to work. Then they are to get married. God announced that Adam needed a helper fit for him. This is what the King James English means: *help meet*. Immediately after announcing that this is what Adam needed, God gave Adam a second assignment. Not only was Adam to dress and keep the garden, he had to name the animals of the garden.

God brought the animals to Adam for him to name. This was a huge task. We are not told how long it took. There are a lot of animals in a garden, especially if we consider insects. Adam was not simply to name them to make them pass. He was not to name one animal Joe and another animal Fred. By *naming* something, Adam was *defining* it.

He was assessing its role. In other words, he was classifying the animals.

The animals came in male-female pairs. In contrast, there was no woman for Adam. Adam was reminded, species by species, that he was alone. Each of the animals was a functioning male-female unit. Mankind was not. God used this exercise to teach Adam about the need for a male-female unit. This task was not peripheral to his life. It was part of a training program that would help him in leading a family.

First, God said that Adam needed a helper. Second, God assigned Adam the task of naming the animals. Third, God again announced that Adam was in need of a helper. There was a sequence to this revelation. Not until Adam had completed the task of naming the animals did God provide a helper for him. This means that *Adam's work came before Adam's wife*. The implications of this position are crucial for a proper understanding of mankind.

Even before Adam was created, God announced that male and female human beings would serve as his agents in history. They would serve as stewards of his property. They would exercise dominion over the entire earth (Gen. 1:26).¹ This was a family project. But in the sequence of establishing man's dominion, God did not initially give Adam a wife. The other creatures did have male-female pairs. The human race did not. There was no functioning division of labor for Adam in naming the animals. He had to do it by himself. He had no assistant. He saw that the animals were functioning male-female units, but the human race was not.

B. The Head of the Household

There has to be a head of the household. This person represents the family and its members before God. He represents God to members of his family. Adam was the head of the initial household, which is obvious when we consider that there was no other member of the household. Adam completed the initial task, which was an aspect of dressing and guarding the garden. He had his work cut out for him.

Adam knew from the beginning that the human race was different from the other animals. He completed his initial task by himself. The other animals were pairs from the beginning. He was going to be in a position of leadership in the family. His wife would be given to him in terms of his need for an assistant. He would be primary; she would be

1. Chapter 3.

secondary. She would be *functionally subordinate* to him. This did not mean that she would be ethically inferior.

Paul says that Eve sinned through ignorance, while Adam sinned knowingly. “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:13–14). This was a fundamental sexual distinction in the Fall of mankind.

Eve was given to Adam as an assistant. She was part of the dominion process, but she had a subordinate role to play. Adam was primary, because Adam had primary responsibility before God. God spoke to Adam. He did not speak to Eve until after the Fall. Adam had already completed work before he was given a wife. The wife was to serve him as his helper.

When we recognize that *the purpose of marriage is to extend the kingdom of God in history*, we begin to understand the primary meaning of marriage. It was not simply procreation. The animals procreated; Adam named the animals before he was given a wife. The human race was different from the animals.

There is a *hierarchy of decision-making in the human race* that does not exist to a comparable degree among the animals. There is a division of labor among the animals, but the idea of a masculine-dominated division of labor, in which the wife supports the man and makes his work more efficient, is not universal among animals.

Even when the wife is the primary wage-earner, she remains functionally subordinate to her husband. *He holds this office by a judicial grant from God.* He does not hold on the basis of the amount of money he earns in relation to the amount of money she earns. He is the head of the household by God’s decree, not by his earning power.

In most situations, the husband is the primary wage-earner. He earns more money than his wife does, and he is in the labor force longer than his wife is. The wife must take time out to spend with the children. The husband, by the original task given to him, must concentrate on his work.

When a man marries for reasons other than to get support and assistance from a wife who will be committed to him and therefore to his work, he disrupts the marital pattern which began in Eden. Adam had to work in order to be ready for a wife. His wife was given to him only after he had completed his initial task. He had received his assignment from God. He was to dress and keep the garden. Then he had been given a secondary task: to classify the animals. He knew what he was sup-

posed to do before he was given a wife who would help him achieve his goals. Her goals would be subordinate to his goals.

Eve had no say in the matter, because she was created specifically to serve her husband. But women in general are to follow her pattern. They must see their marital tasks as assisting their husbands.

C. Extending God's Kingdom in History

Adam had demonstrated his competence by naming the animals, his first completed assignment. He had begun to work out the commandments of God. By engaging in specific labor, he had begun to extend his control over the creation, thereby beginning the historical fulfillment of his own nature. He was asserting his legitimate, subordinate sovereignty over the creation. Only after he had demonstrated skills in his calling was he provided with a wife. The husband's calling is therefore basic to marriage. It is supposed to be *antecedent* to marriage.

This point cannot be overstressed. The animals were simultaneously created male and female from the beginning. Sexual reproduction and the multiplication of each kind's numbers were the product of the male-female division. But Adam was created before the woman. The assignment of cultural dominion was given to a representative head of the family of man, even before there was an historically existing family. *The heart of man's being is not his sexuality; it is his calling before God.* He is fundamentally different from the animals. Where sexuality is made the foundation of marriage, rather than calling, cultural development will be retarded. The male-female relationship, in the case of mankind, is not based on the fact of biological reproduction; it is not, in some evolutionary sense, the product of competitive biological pairings of previously existing species. Animals and humans are to multiply (Gen. 1:22, 28); man is uniquely assigned the tasks of dominion. The male-female relationship among human beings is based on the prior planning of God and His specific call to the first man, Adam. God called Adam to a series of tasks; only when he had completed one assignment did God present him with his wife and assistant, Eve. Marriage was originally intended to be grounded in the dominion covenant, not in the mutual attraction of men and women, and not even on the need of human beings to reproduce. *Marriage is intended to be subordinate to the dominion covenant.* Marriage finds its purpose within the dominion covenant. This is the distinguishing feature of human sexual pairings, in comparison to animal pairings.

Marriage has numerous subordinate purposes: the lawful extension of the race, mutual comfort, personal development of its members, the provision of cultural stability, social welfare functions (including education), sexual fulfillment, and capital accumulation. Nevertheless, the Genesis account gives us the central focus of marriage: *the division of labor*. Eve was provided as “an help meet” for Adam, meaning *an assistant specially designed to complement his skills*. God designed Eve to fit Adam’s needs in his tasks of dominion. This means that God assumed that the harmony of human interests is compatible with, and inescapable from, the *hierarchy of the creation order* (I Cor. 11).² God is sovereign over all things; man is under God and sovereign over his wife (and children); the family of man is sovereign over the creation. Prior to the Fall of man, this hierarchy was in no way contradictory to the ultimate harmony of interests in the creation. Adam’s very nature as a creature required the presence of a subordinate assistant; without her, his tasks, and therefore his very being, could not be fulfilled. As Paul put it: “For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (I Cor. 11:8–9). But there is unity as well as hierarchy: “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God” (I Cor. 11:11–12). A *mutuality of dependence* biologically and especially in terms of the division of labor, is affirmed by Paul. It is significant that Paul’s comments appear within his discussion of the division of labor within the church (I Cor. 11–12).³

The hierarchy of authority in the creation cannot be evaded. There can never be anything approaching total equality. The *ideology of equality* is inevitably nothing more than the substitution of *a different form of inequality* for an existing one. Consider the lure of equality given to Eve by the serpent. “Ye shall be as gods, knowing [determining] good and evil” (Gen. 3:5b). Yet this was not what the serpent believed. By promising them equality before God, the serpent was asking them to worship him as superior to God. After all, whose word was truly authoritative? Was it not the serpent’s? They should disobey the explicit command of a sovereign God, confident that they would be protected from death by the sovereign word of the serpent. They would then be-

2. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 14.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

come *ethically subordinate to Satan*.

It is instructive to observe the response of Adam and Eve to God's questions. God came first to Adam, whom He had placed in authority over the woman. Adam immediately blamed his wife. He had deferred to her authority in the matter of deciding whether or not to eat the forbidden fruit. He had been commanded to exercise authority over her, and with her, over the creation. Clearly his sin was to reverse the order of God's designed hierarchy in the name of achieving equality with God. Then God came to the woman. Why had she done such a thing? Immediately, she blamed the serpent. She, who was supposed to be a co-servant with her husband over all creation, had instead worshipped a part of the creation. She had accepted as sovereign the word of a creature—a rebellious creature at that. She had inverted the hierarchy. She had worshipped the serpent and then had asserted dominion over her husband. And when caught in their rebellion, both she and Adam had blamed the environment for their condition: Adam blamed the woman God had given to him; Eve blamed the serpent. God's environment, they seemed to argue, was in some way to blame for their condition. Though He had declared it perfect, it had nevertheless brought them to this disaster.⁴ In the quest for equality, they had only affirmed an inverted pyramid of authority; seeking to be gods, they decided that they might safely test the word of the Creator.

A society that pursues equality as a goal will of necessity destroy the harmony of interests, for that harmony of interests was created within a framework of *hierarchy*. Women are designed to be functionally subordinate to men in marriage. This in no way implies that women are ethically inferior to men in marriage. *It is the error of egalitarian humanism to equate functional subordination and ethical inferiority*. Where there is a hierarchy of wealth, power, or knowledge, some humanist can be found who will call for the total reconstruction of society and the creation of an undefined social egalitarianism. The harmony of interests among men and women is assumed to be operable only where all signs of inequality are smashed. The Bible affirms the opposite. The harmony of interests throughout human society, and even the entire creation, can be attained only within a theocentric and hierarchical framework.

4. R. J. Rushdoony, "The Society of Satan," *Christian Economics* (1964), reprinted in *Biblical Economics Today*, II (Oct./Nov. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/rjrsos>)

D. The Division of Labor

The division of labor is required by God for the effective extension by man of the dominion covenant. The first human couple provide archetypes of the division of labor system. *First*, they were both *fully human*. As image-bearers of God, they had comparable goals and interests, compatible talents and responsibilities. This shared humanity made cooperation possible. *Second*, they were *inherently different*. These differences are by nature and design fully productive. Each had a different perspective, since each was a biologically separate creature with different tasks to fulfill within the hierarchy of responsibility. Eve was designed to fit Adam biologically and in terms of his tasks. The “biological fit” was less important than the “help fit for him,” and far less important than the “biological fit” of females to males in other species. Eve was like a missing piece in a cosmic puzzle: the final piece that brought the potential for harmony and a sense of wholeness to the creation. (The next-to-last piece was Adam’s naming of the animals.) Her innate difference complemented his gifts; together, they would more efficiently extend the dominion covenant. What he lacked, she provided, and vice versa.

The division of labor rests on two fundamental facts of nature. *First*, the *innate differences among human beings*. They have different desires, different skills, and different roles to play in the cosmic plan. *Second*, there are *differences of geography*. Different areas offer different raw materials, different weather patterns, and different problems to those who would extract wealth from the environment. Therefore, Adam and Eve were designed to be different. Cloning—the endless reproduction of identical members of a species through genetic manipulation—is hostile to the principle of the God-ordained division of labor. It limits the variety of a species within the created bounds placed on each “kind.” Each man or woman is supposed to contribute unique efforts to the historical process of dominion. *The multiplicity of skills and contributions is to be ordered through competition and cooperation*. Each person is therefore a “help fit” for others, given the harmony of interests; the archetype of this God-designed fitting process is the creation of Eve.

Each person has specific personal obligations before God and society. There is a day of judgment (Rev. 20). Nevertheless, all men are told to cooperate. They have *collective responsibilities* in various social organizations precisely because of the *wholeness of God’s original design*.

This design fitted Eve to Adam, yet it preceded her creation in time. Human beings are *specifically designed to cooperate within the dominion covenant* (Gen. 1:26).⁵ This design is not the product of planning human beings, nor is it the product of a randomly evolving universe.

E. Free Market or Collectivist Monopoly

The biblical doctrine of the harmony of interests is not the same as the version that has been used in the past by humanists in their defense of the free market. Actually, modern defenders of the market do not use such an argument, although socialists and Marxists sometimes attribute such an argument to them. A few economists of the nineteenth century, most notably the pamphleteer Frédéric Bastiat, argued along these lines, but not many economists have since then.⁶ The willingness of free market economists to recognize the innate *disharmony* of interests has led them to extol the benefits of the market as a system of coordination.

Wilhelm Röpke responded to the intellectual attacks on free market economists by those who would discredit market competition. Market economists in the tradition of nineteenth-century liberalism are not naive about the disharmony of interests, Röpke argued.

Such attacks conveniently ignore the fact that it is the liberal economic philosophy which recognizes the latent disharmony between consumer and producer and which sees in competition the means of mitigating this disharmony and thus of safeguarding consumers' interests. Piquantly enough, the enemies of competition answer this argument by saying that it was liberalism, after all, which developed the doctrine of the harmony of economic interests. Thus we find the real advocates of disharmony engaging with high glee in the task of obstructing those who seek to mitigate the evil by ridiculing them as naive adherents of outworn doctrines of "harmony." *But our economic system can remain viable only if this disharmony is redressed by effective and continuous competition.*⁷

Röpke concerned himself with the problems of society, not just with the more narrow sphere of economics. He was convinced that it is naive and misleading to base one's defense of the market on the hy-

5. Chapter 3.

6. Cf. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *A History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 500. Most surveys of the history of economic thought, if they even mention the topic, devote most of their pages to a consideration of Bastiat.

7. Wilhelm Röpke, *Economics of the Free Society* (Chicago: Regnery, 1963), p. 69.

pothetical ability of the market to cleanse itself of all fraud, monopoly, and coercion. He did not believe that the market economy is, in his words, “a self-dependent cosmos” or a truly “natural order.”⁸ Producers want the highest prices possible for their goods or services, while the buyers want the lowest prices. There is a *disharmony of interests* apart from the mediating influence of the competitive free market, he concluded. Beware of those seeking monopolistic power. But the easiest way to achieve monopoly, he knew, is to gain the assistance of the civil government. If you wish to release the underlying disharmony of interests, he said, all you need to do is unleash the monopolistic powers of the civil government.

What he described as the enemy of the harmony of interests—the enemy of a market-produced, competition-produced harmony of interests—is precisely the statist system that has been constructed by those who ridicule the market’s form of competition and the idea of a competition-produced harmony of interests. They say that they want to produce true harmony by means of state intervention into the economy. What, in fact, does such intervention produce in the real world? The twentieth century witnessed such intervention firsthand.

An economic system where each group entrenches itself more and more in a monopolist stronghold, abusing the power of the state for its special purposes, where prices and wages lose their mobility except in an upward direction, where no one wants to adhere to the reliable rules of the market any more, and where consequently nobody knows any longer whether tomorrow a new whim of the legislation will not upset all calculations, an economic system in which everyone wants to live exclusively at the expense of the community and in which the state’s budget finally comes to devour half the national income: a system of this kind is not only bound to become unprofitable and thus bound to intensify the scramble for the reduced total profit, but it will moreover in the end suffer a complete breakdown. This is usually called the crisis of capitalism and is used as an occasion for new and revolutionary interventions which complete the ruin and corruption and finally present us with the inexorable choice of either returning to a reasonable and ethical market system or of plunging into the collectivist adventure.⁹

What happens to us if we make the wrong choice? Do we find that

8. Wilhelm Röpke, *Civitas Humana* (London: Hodge, 1948), p. 49.

9. Wilhelm Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (London: Hodge, [1942] 1950), p. 130. (<http://bit.ly/wrscoot>)

we have been successful in reducing the disharmony of interests under collectivism? Will we at last find our harmony of interests?

On the contrary, there they conflict even more violently than ever before, laboriously and for an uncertain period curbed by the authority of the state, within which the struggle for power and influence fluctuates by means of bribery, intrigues and executions. It is obvious that a question of ethics cannot be solved mechanically by a change of organization, and if society, the state, legislation, the courts and politics have so far been unable to make the competitive system work, why should we believe that they will be able to cope with the infinitely more difficult task of a collectivist system?¹⁰

Will we find the harmonization of interests under collectivism? F. A. Hayek provided some answers in "Why the Worst Get on Top," a chapter in his *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). One answer is that there will be few opportunities to harmonize human interests, precisely because control of the scarce economic resources available to members of the society must be lodged at the very top of the hierarchy. The least-common-denominator principle reigns, since it is impossible for a political organization to integrate the hopes and plans of large numbers of people, especially people whose educations have provided them with widely divergent tastes, plans, and goals.¹¹ The party must appeal to the primitive instincts held by the masses—especially negative instincts, such as vengeance against a hated minority.¹²

Once you admit that the individual is merely a means to serve the ends of the higher entity called society or the nation, most of these features of totalitarian regimes which horrify us follow of necessity. From the collectivist standpoint intolerance and brutal suppression of dissent, the complete disregard of the life and happiness of the individual, are essential and unavoidable consequences of the basic premise, and the collectivist can admit this and at the same time claim that his system is superior to the one in which the 'selfish' interests of the individual are allowed to obstruct the full realization of the ends the community pursues.¹³

What kind of person functions well in such a regime? Not the person who is best suited to production within a competitive free market.

10. *Idem*.

11. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), p. 138.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Or certainly not with the same outcome of his actions, even if the same person could perform well under both systems. The restraining hand of market competition—open entry for his rivals to meet the needs of customers—is now strictly political in nature. And in a centralized regime, this is not much restraint.

To be a useful assistant in the running of a totalitarian state, it is not enough that a man should be prepared to accept specious justification of vile deeds; he must himself be prepared actively to break every moral rule he has ever known if this seems necessary to achieve the end set for him. Since it is the supreme leader who alone determines the ends, his instruments must have no moral convictions of their own. They must, above all, be unreservedly committed to the person of the leader; but next to this most important thing is that they should be completely unprincipled and literally capable of anything. They must have no ideals of their own which they want to realize; no ideas about right and wrong which might interfere with the intentions of the leader.¹⁴

The more powerful the state, and the more concentrated the control of economic resources available to state administrators, the more opportunities there are for economic control through monopolistic economic manipulation. So, the more ruthless people will be those who satisfy their quest for power. The bigger the stakes, the more likely that least moral, most unscrupulous people will claw their way to the top. Why, then, should we expect to see the flourishing of the harmony of interests in a socialistic society in which central power is enormously strengthened by the fact that the administration of scarce economic resources is monopolized through public ownership of the means of production? Why should we expect to see the peacemakers succeed in attaining supremacy in a political order in which the quest for total power is the obvious inducement to enter the political process?

Conclusion

The harmony of interests is unquestionably a biblical standard. It is that social standard that existed in Eden, exists for the institutional church (I Cor. 12:12–17),¹⁵ exists now in heaven, and shall exist in the

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–1.

15. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 15.

New Heavens and New Earth (Isa. 65:17–25).¹⁶ The entrance of sin into the world disrupted this world, but God has provided institutions that restrain such disharmony. The free market is one of these institutional arrangements that promote cooperation, even among those who do not agree on first principles. Class warfare, which is the ideological foundation of Marxism and the modern trade union movement, is foreign to biblical standards of morality. All things are reconciled in Christ (Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:11–16; James 2:1–9), including the supposed eternal struggle between classes.

The opening words of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) are familiar to most students of the history of socialism: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggles."¹⁷ Marx never did succeed in defining just what a class is. He never completed the third volume of *Das Kapital*, the last three paragraphs of which are devoted to the consideration of this crucial topic: "What constitutes a class?"¹⁸ But even if he had succeeded in accurately defining "class," within the framework of his own work, he would have been incorrect. The history of all societies is not class warfare, but *ethical warfare against a sovereign God*, and the working out of men's salvation and damnation over time. The history of mankind is the history of the extension of the dominion covenant. *History is theocentric, not humanistic*. Bloody warfare of man against man began with Cain and Abel; the origin of such warfare is man's ethical rebellion against God. As James put it: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of the lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1).

Redemption eventually will triumph over rebellion, and the harmony of interests shall be restored. It is man's task to extend the kingdom of God on earth, and to begin to reduce the effects of the sin-based disharmony of interests. This extension of God's kingdom serves as the down payment (earnest) of that future and final restoration of the full harmony of interests. Until then, all that we can hope to accomplish is to minimize the disharmony of interests by extending the rule of biblical law, which provides the social framework of the har-

16. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 16.

17. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Marx-Engels Selected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), I, p.34.

18. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co. Co-operative, 1909), III, *The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, p. 1031.

mony of interests.¹⁹

The free market is, in the realm of economics, the most important institutional arrangement that has resulted from the application of biblical law to society. This is why we must affirm that *free market economics is biblical economics*, and why all forms of socialism or collectivism are the products of anti-biblical economics. This is why the free market order is an important institutional means of reducing the disharmony of interests by encouraging people voluntarily to *mesh their individual plans* by means of private property, freely fluctuating prices, and profit-and-loss statements.

19. It is important to understand that the division of labor within the family was designed to extend men's dominion over nature. The family unit was to be broken with each generation, even before the Fall of man. Speaking of marriage, Adam said: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). The harmony of the family before the Fall was never to be intended to keep sons and daughters in the same immediate household. They were to leave, to bring the whole earth under dominion. After the Fall this pattern became even more important for the preservation of both harmony and dominion. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Massachusetts town of Sudbury was split between the older generation, which wanted to control access to common lands in the town, and younger men, who wanted freedom. Eventually, the younger men simply walked out of town, moved a few miles away, and established the town of Marlborough. This was the dominion aspect of the nuclear family in action. (See Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* [Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1963]). Isaac did not live with Abraham; Jacob did not live with Isaac. The so-called nuclear family of the Christian West is the biblical standard. The hierarchical patriarchy of Central European cultures, where sons remain under the immediate jurisdiction of the father, or grandfather, even to the point of dwelling under the same roof, is a non-biblical alternative to the nuclear family—an alternative that reduces harmony and geographical dominion. It is the nuclear family, not the clan order of classical civilization and other cultures, which is sociologically normative. It is also interesting to note that when immigrants from Central European cultures settle in Western Europe or North America, the patriarchal family orders are abandoned within a generation or two. They simply cannot compete with the biblical family pattern. Young men who are not compelled to put up with patriarchal authoritarianism choose the nuclear family. And on this point, their wives are in total agreement. They prefer to be subordinate to one man, not two, plus another woman. It is difficult to serve two (or more) masters. The nuclear family provides maximum harmony.

11

COSTS, CHOICES, AND TESTS

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:6).

The theocentric principle here is ethics: point three of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Eve's Assumptions

Eve had already made a series of crucial assumptions about the nature of reality before she offered the fruit to her husband. She had already renounced the system of interpretation that God had given to her husband. God's revelation of Himself and the creation no longer impressed Adam and Eve. They decided to test the validity of God's word against the validity of the serpent's. In fact, they had already decided that God's revelation could not possibly be true, since He said that His word is true, and that they would be punished for sure if they ate of the tree. God had revealed an all-or-nothing universe, for it did not permit them the option of eating the fruit without punishment. They concluded that this all-or-nothing proposition could not possibly be true, for if it were true, they would surely perish. By affirming the hypothetical possibility that they might not perish, they were simultaneously affirming that God's denial of such a possibility had to be false. There was simply no possibility that they could eat of the fruit and retain the status quo ante. Everything would change. They hoped things would change for the better. They miscalculated. Eve was de-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

ceived. Adam was self-conscious. "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (I Tim. 2:14).

This was the sin of pretended autonomy. Van Til described the epistemological implications of this better than anyone else.

When Satan tempted Adam and Eve in paradise he sought to make them believe that man's self-consciousness was ultimate rather than derivative and God-dependent. He argued, as it were, that it was of the nature of self-consciousness to make itself the final reference point of all predication. He argued, as it were, that God had no control over all that might come forth in the process of time. That is to say, he argued, in effect, that as any form of self-consciousness must assume its own ultimacy, so it must also admit its own limitation in the fact that much that happens is under no control at all. Thus Satan argued, as it were, that man's consciousness of time and of time's products in history, is, if intelligible at all, intelligible in some measure independently of God.²

This is the essence of all modern humanism. It is basic to economic theory, and has been ever since the late seventeenth century.³ Van Til elaborated:

Adam and Eve were true theists at the first. They took God's interpretation of themselves and of the animals for granted as the true interpretation. Then came the tempter. He presented to Eve another, that is, an antitheistic theory of reality, and asked her to be the judge as to which was the more reasonable for her to accept. And the acceptance of this position of judge constituted the fall of man. That acceptance put the mind of man on an equality with the mind of God. That acceptance also put the mind of the devil on an equality with God. Before Eve could listen to the tempter she had to take for granted that the devil was perhaps a person who knew as much about reality as God knew about it. Before Eve could listen to the tempter, she had to take it for granted that she herself might be such an one as to make it reasonable for her to make a final decision between claims and counter-claims that involved the entire future of her existence. That is, Eve was obliged to postulate an ultimate epistemological pluralism and contingency before she could even proceed to consider the proposition made to her by the devil. Or, otherwise expressed, Eve was compelled to assume the equal ultimacy of the minds of God, of the devil, and of herself. And this surely excluded the exclus-

2. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R, [1955] 2008), p. 115.

3. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1963).

ive ultimacy of God. This therefore was a denial of God's absolute-ness epistemologically. Thus neutrality was based upon negation. Neutrality is negation.

This negation was bound to issue in a new affirmation of the supremacy of the human mind over the divine mind. Eve did not ask God, let alone her husband, to decide the issue placed before her. When there are claims and counter-claims someone must assume the role of absolute ultimacy. Eve was definitely placed before an "either or" alternative. Of course she would have denied this if you had told her so at the time. She would have resented being placed before any such alternative. She naturally thought that the issue was not irrevocable, but that she could experiment with the Satanic attitude for a while, and if it did not seem to work she could turn back to her old position of theism again. She thought that evil or sin was at the worst a stepping-stone to higher things, and that she could do all the stepping herself. In all this she was quite wrong. Whether she liked it or not she was, as a matter of fact, standing before an exclusive alternative. Only an action proceeding from the bosom of the eternal could place her on the right track again. It was God who had to reinterpret her deed and place it in its true setting in the universe. And this reinterpretation by God was a reversal of the interpretation given by man. Man had to be brought back to God. This in itself is proof sufficient that the decision on the part of man was antitheistic and not merely nontheistic.⁴

B. Subjective Value

All value is subjective, meaning personal. This does not mean that no value is ever objective. When we speak of subjective valuation, we simply mean "economic valuation made by a person." God is a personal being. He imputed value to His creation, calling it good, thereby confirming the goodness of His handiwork. The creation was not good in itself, meaning autonomously good or intrinsically good, irrespective of God's work and evaluation.⁵ God, not the creation, is sovereign. His word is determinative.

Man, as the image-bearer of God, also imputes value to the creation. He can impute value to the word of God itself. Man determines for himself the value of the choices he must make. This does not make his choices objectively correct. He can and does deviate from God's

4. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R, 1969), ch. 2, Pt. 1: "Neutrality."

5. Chapter 5.

standards of value. God, being omniscient, knows exactly how much a person should give up in order to gain some item or achieve some goal. Men, being rebellious and unwilling to adhere to the law of God, frequently pay too much or try to pay too little for the things they pursue in life. They are unable to impute value according to the warning given by Jesus: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).⁶ If they cannot correctly value this key transaction in terms of its cost-effectiveness, how can they make accurate judgments concerning the true value of any other transaction? Yet they are required by God to do so.

Man imputes value to anything in terms of *a hierarchy of values*. He makes choices in terms of this set of priorities. Is it worth giving up *this* in order to attain *that*? It depends upon one's value scale. This value scale is constantly shifting, because tastes change, external conditions change, and men's first principles sometimes change. *Every value scale is connected to some concept of authority*. This is preferred to *that* because of the perceived correctness of one's value scale. The very idea of *correctness* implies the concept of *authority*. So, man makes his choices within the framework of some sort of authority structure. Choice requires basic standards of preference, and standards imply authority, meaning a source of ultimate sovereignty. Man never finds himself in a position of choosing in terms of one authority or no authority; it is always a question of *which* authority. Rushdoony stated this forcefully: "For a man to live successfully, he must have an ultimate standing ground; *every philosophy is authoritarian*, in that, while it may attack savagely all other doctrines of authority, it does so from the vantage point of a new authority. This new authority is a basic pretheoretical presupposition which is in totality religious and which rests on a particular concept of infallibility. Every man has his platform from which he speaks. To affirm that foundation without qualification is an inescapable requirement of human thought."⁷

Adam and Eve made a religious decision. For Adam, who was probably standing with Eve throughout the discussion as Genesis 3:6 makes clear, it involved the decision not to exercise marital leadership, not to step in and interrupt the proceedings; his wife made the initial

6. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

7. R. J. Rushdoony, *Infallibility: An Inescapable Concept* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1978), p. 4. Reprinted in Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1994), I, pp. 3–4.

decision, and he followed her lead.

Their decision was also an economic decision. It involved: a choice between two alternatives (eating vs. not eating); an assessment of expected future returns (tasty meal vs. numerous other possible tasty meals); an assessment of time requirements (instant special knowledge vs. conventional accumulated knowledge over time); and an evaluation of expected future costs (death vs. burdens of newly attained special knowledge). Obviously, they bore extremely heavy risks; in fact, they bore absolutely certain penalties. It was a no-win decision, unless God's grace might intervene to give them life. They did not accurately assess the true extent of these risks because they did not impute absolute infallibility to God's word. In fact, they valued God's word so little that they defied Him and ate. This indicates that they must have assumed that their risk was almost infinitesimal, for with the threatened penalty so awful, they must have radically discounted the possibility of that penalty's being imposed.

Eve valued the risk inversely to her valuation of the serpent's word: trusting his word, she discounted the risk while overestimating his promise that they would become as gods. In other words, *she made a disastrous error in forecasting*. She estimated the future cost of eating as being far lower than God had said, and she then made a terrible choice. She, Adam, and their heirs have paid the price ever since. Only because of God's common grace have men escaped the full penalty, in time and on earth, of their rebellion; and only because of special grace have some escaped the eternal penalty beyond the grave.⁸ The price was high.

C. Whose Communion Feast?

How little did Adam and Eve value God's word? We can get some idea by reflecting on what they could have done but neglected to do before they went to the forbidden fruit. God had placed two crucially important trees in the garden: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). The tree of life was open to them prior to their rebellion. They could have gone to that tree, eaten its fruit, and then gone to the forbidden tree. Why did they ignore this seemingly obvious possibility? The tree of life would have protected them from death. Even in their fallen state, the tree of life would have given

8. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

them eternal life, which is why God drove them out of the garden (Gen. 3:22–23).

To have taken God's word so seriously as to foresee the likelihood of their destruction as a result of their rebellion, they would have had to recognize the extremely high stakes in their gamble. If man needed the protection of God's tree of life in order to protect him from God's wrath, then man was indeed dependent on God's grace. If man can trust God's word regarding the basis of eternal life, then man can trust God's word concerning the basis of eternal death. In order for Adam to have truly reduced the risk of rebellion, namely, by eating from the tree of life, he would have been forced to acknowledge the sovereignty of God over life, and the absolute reliability of God's word regarding life. Had he taken God's word that seriously, Adam would not have rebelled. It was only because he regarded himself as the arbitrator between God's word and Satan's, and therefore the true source of judgment, that Adam discounted God's word. Adam had to assume that God's word could not possibly (or very, very improbably) be true in order to make the risk of rebellion worthwhile. To have gone first to the tree of life would have meant that man *did* take God's threat seriously, and that man needed the promised protection of God's tree of life. To have relied on the tree of life for protection would have meant the end of man's pretended claims of autonomy.

Adam had a choice: to choose life or to choose death. By the very nature of man's rebellion, he could not have deliberately chosen life first, since he would have been acknowledging ritually what his rebellion implicitly was denying: that the source of life is man's conformity to God's promises. His calculation of costs and benefits had to be made as covenant-keeping man or covenantbreaking man. As a covenant-keeping man, he would have reasoned as follows: "God's word is reliable, so I had better eat from the tree of life first, in order to protect myself. Protect myself from what? From the reliability of God's word concerning eating from the forbidden tree. But if His word is reliable regarding life, then His word is reliable concerning death. I had better not consider eating from the forbidden tree." Covenant-keeping man protects himself by adhering to God's word and taking God's word seriously! He does not make calculations (in his state of innocence, anyway) concerning the odds for or against God's word. To choose God's way to eternal life necessarily involves the rejection of God's way to eternal death.

Covenant-breaking man in the garden would have reasoned as fol-

lows: "God's word is not reliable, so I need not protect myself from any hypothetical effects of eating from the forbidden tree. His word is not reliable concerning death, so His word is not reliable concerning life. The odds against His word coming true are astronomically high, so it would be a denial of my own sovereignty, my own assessment of the low reliability of God's word, for me to eat from the tree of life as a calculated way of reducing the risk of disobedience. I have already determined that there is virtually no risk in disobedience. I had better not consider eating from the tree of life." Covenant-breaking man builds up his own self-confidence by adhering to his self-proclaimed autonomous word. To choose God's way to eternal death necessarily involves the rejection of God's way to eternal life.

After the judgment, of course, man knew experimentally how wrong his assessment had been. Then he would have been willing to eat from the tree of life. But the tree was closed to him. To eat of it now would have been theft. As a proven covenant-breaker, Adam would not be permitted to gain access to eternal life on his own terms. He had made his choice. His choice was the way to death. The presence of two special trees in the garden, one leading to life and the other leading to death, offers us a solution to an interesting question: "How long was Adam's period of probation to be?" Adam could essentially do three things. First, he could go straight to the forbidden fruit, thereby ending the period of testing in the garden. Second, he could go straight to the tree of life, thereby removing the threat of eternal death, but only by affirming God's word and by subordinating himself to God as a covenant-keeper. Third, he could postpone a choice between the two trees, concentrating his attention on other trees or other tasks in the garden.

There is no revelation concerning a specified period of testing. The Bible does not tell us that Adam had a day, a week, or a millennium to make up his mind. This should tell us that the period of testing involved the tree of life. If the test had been simply "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" vs. "dressing the remainder of the garden," then the temptation would have been before him forever, or until God stepped in to tell him that it was over, that his refusal to eat the forbidden fruit for all this time proved that he was serious about obeying God. At that point, God would have granted him eternal life, and invited him to eat from the tree of life.

The Bible's words are more specific than this: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest

freely eat: But the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2:16–17a). The words are not only clear; they are inescapable: *Adam had legal access to the tree of life*. To conclude anything different is to deny the plain teaching of the text. To eat of the tree of life, however, required that Adam affirm God's word of promise concerning the way to eternal life. Indefinite temporal extension was what he had as a garden-dresser. Eternal life was more (and is more) than mere temporal extension, for it is definite, guaranteed eternal temporal extension, without the possibility of eternal death, without the presence of the forbidden tree before man. In other words, Adam's own assessment of the reliability of God's word determined the period of probation. When he had made up his mind to eat of one tree or the other in terms of how much he trusted God's word of promise, the period of probation would end. He would choose life or death, sacramentally, by eating from one of the two trees.

By viewing the test as a choice between eating or not eating from the forbidden tree, and nothing else, we implicitly deny man's ability in the garden to affirm ritually God's word of promise. Adam would then have had to say to himself, moment by moment, "I will not eat of that forbidden fruit because I believe in God's word. I will content myself to putter around in the garden doing other tasks. I shall wait on the Lord. Behold, today is not the day of the Lord. Behold, today apparently is not the day of salvation. But when that day comes, I will ritually affirm my commitment to Him. When God finally says to me that the period of probation is over, I will be found spotless. Then I will ritually affirm my commitment to His word by eating of the tree of life."

Yet throughout Scripture, the message is plain: ". . . behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2b). God awaits man's affirmation of His word of promise. He encourages it. He does not tell man to delay in making such an affirmation. He does not ask man to remain in a condition of suspended judgment. He also does not ask us to affirm our faith in Him, and then leave us without a communion feast.

By placing the tree of life in the midst of the garden, God made available to Adam *a sacrament of life*. The forbidden fruit was *Satan's sacrament of death*. Both God and Satan call us to communion feasts. Paul warns us: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (I Cor. 10:21). *Adam's period of probation would end in a communion feast: at the tree of life or at the tree of the knowledge of good*

and evil.

Adam was given time in the garden—all the time he chose to take—to make up his mind. The garden was a battlefield of faiths, a battlefield of ideas. Adam faced a decision, every moment of every day, the same decision that Elijah placed before the people of Israel on Mt. Carmel: “How long halt ye between two opinions: if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” (I Ki. 18:21). Every day that Adam spent in the garden torn between two views of God’s word, he would spend as the Israelites spent time: answering not a word.

The garden experience, of course, was to teach him. He was to learn about God’s reliable word, God’s eternal blessings, and God’s dominion covenant. But that learning experience was to bring him to the tree of life, to affirm his faith in God’s word sacramentally.

D. Revelation and Costs

The word of God is given to men for many reasons, but one of these is to enable them to reduce their costs of economic action. This enables them to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant with minimal expenditures of scarce economic resources. In other words, the word of God is given in order to *prevent waste*. Since God is the sovereign owner of the world (Ps. 50:10),⁹ it is understandable that He should expect us to work efficiently as honest, hard-working, and smart-working stewards of His property. *God’s revelation of Himself and His law-order is our primary cost-cutting device.* This revelation comes from a wholly omniscient God who controls all events, yet it is divinely designed to match the capacities of man, a creature. God’s revelation fits the mind of man, even as it fits the total creation. It offers us a tool of dominion. Men are offered a capital asset that reduces the cost of the most expensive and crucial of all scarce economic resources: *information*. Revelation reduces information costs, and in doing so, it thereby frees up other scarce capital assets—time, effort, money—that otherwise would have to be expended in testing. In fact, God’s revelation offers us a way of action without having to test certain aspects of reality that are, by design, beyond the ability of man to test accurately (Deut. 29:29). God’s revelation frees us from the demonic pursuit of exhaustive knowledge—a knowledge that must be totally

9. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

perfect if it is to be reliable, since any aspect of creation could conceivably influence the operation of any other aspect of creation. The self-proclaimed autonomous man must therefore master all of the universe in order to be confident concerning his mastery of any small fragment of it. The covenantally faithful man does not have this burden over him; his God is omnipotent, and his God has provided him with the revelation of Himself and the rules of order necessary for prosperity and success in man's enterprise of dominion.

Eve, however, rejected this marvelous gift of revelation. She rejected this revelational tool of dominion. She decided that the conflicting interpretations of the rules concerning the forbidden fruit, the serpent's vs. God's, might be testable propositions. She believed herself capable of designing and executing a neutral empirical test between the word of God and the word of the serpent. As the arbitrator of truth, she could determine who was correct. Of course, she preferred to have her husband share in the responsibility of executing this cosmic test. But the risks seemed minimal, statistically remote, even insignificant. The odds against God's word were assumed from the beginning to be astronomically high, given the magnitude of the promised costs. They played a kind of cosmic lottery. The prize: "to be as God." The cost of the "ticket": the risk of eternal punishment. By imputing so little value to God's word, they imputed little cost to their rebellion. They would become instant gods.

There are costs associated with our choices. There are "real" costs, meaning objective costs, meaning costs imputed by God to each acting individual (Luke 12:48).¹⁰ God's subjective (personal) imputation of cost is the equivalent of a truly objective cost. Every act of man therefore has eternal implications; every idle word must be accounted for on the day of judgment (Matt. 12:36–37). There is no escape from the objective costs of our actions.

Nevertheless, there are also subjective costs imputed by acting men to their own and others' actions. Men make choices in terms of imputations and estimations, both concerning the present and the future. They are constantly searching for better, less costly, more accurate ways of imputing costs and benefits to the choices that confront them. They act in order to benefit themselves as they interpret benefits. Sometimes they make accurate ones in the face of universal opposition, as Caleb and Joshua did when they voted to spy on the people

10. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

of Canaan (Num. 14). But they must make estimations and make decisions in terms of these estimations when confronted with choices over which they have the power of action.

There are many possible intellectual defenses of the free market economy, but none so strong, from a biblical point of view, as this one:

The free market economy provides men with an institutional and legal framework for making choices in terms of each man's expected benefits and each man's expected costs.

The free market economy closely links together choice, costs, and benefits. It makes each acting man responsible for his own actions in a direct fashion. It decentralizes the decision-making process, making possible the effective use of more and more specialized information—the division of intellectual labor. In other words, it allows each man to work out his own salvation (or damnation) with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12b).¹¹ It forces each man to bear the burdens of responsibility for his own actions. If he imputes accurately and plans successfully, then he reaps the rewards. If he fails in his task, then he bears the burden of failure. The “carrot and stick” both stand before him as motivation devices. The market provides a forum for testing the economic validity of his decisions, namely, price signals that can be used to estimate profit and loss. The *subjective economic imputations* of acting men, along with the registration of their actual decisions through a price system, combine to produce *objective results*. Men are taught to respect objective economic knowledge, even though that knowledge is the product of millions of subjective imputations. Their enterprises turn a profit or a loss. Their subjective imputations come face to face with hard, objective reality.

Another benefit of the free market is the *rapid transmission of economic data*. Men are taught to respond to the real world in an efficient manner, meaning rapidly. They are told whether or not they need to change their imputations and actions. They are told in a forceful manner: profits or losses. The faster they learn of their errors, the faster they are likely to alter their practices. The more forcefully the costs of their errors are registered, the faster they are likely to alter their practices.

Adam and Eve made the most expensive transaction in human history. We assess cost in terms of the most important or valuable use

11. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

which we have to *give up* when we choose another economic (scarce) good or service. *Cost* is best defined as *the most beneficial alternative which we must forego*. Adam and Eve did receive instant special knowledge, but they paid a heavy price. They learned about good and evil, but from the standpoint of evil. They gave up ethical perfection, eternal life, and the opportunity to extend dominion only after they had received training in the curse-less garden. So horrendous was the price they had to pay, that Christ alone was capable of paying it in full (Isa. 53:5; Rom. 5:8). Christ became a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). What Adam and Eve did was to make a decision that made them less than paupers, and Christ's actions restored wealth to the remnant: "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9).¹² The costs were so high that Adam and Eve could not have calculated them successfully. They were not supposed to calculate the costs of rebellion to the last coin. They had God's command to guide them. They overestimated their estimating abilities.

Conclusion

The Bible affirms the reality and validity of *God's Bible-revealed law*. It is our standard of action. Therefore, *it is our primary tool for cost-benefit analysis*. It is a cost-cutting device because it provides us with universal guidelines that can be relied upon whether or not we have designed empirical tests to verify the benefits associated with a particular law, or the costs associated with disobedience. Men who reject the law of God are acting as Adam and Eve did. They are discounting the omniscience of God, the omnipotence of God, and the reliability of His word. *The rejection of God's law is the first step of the would-be autonomous man in his quest to become as God, and ultimately to replace God*. The rejection of God's law is the most expensive rejection of a capital resource that any man or any society can make. It substitutes for reliable knowledge the unreliability and astronomical costs of constant, universal, and eternal empirical testing—the testing of every fact in the universe.

Autonomous man first tests God's word, and then must test all other words and all other facts, constantly and eternally. He departs from the paradise of reliable law and enters the barren land of universal testing. The more autonomous he becomes, the more fascinated

12. North, *Ethics and Dominion*, ch. 5.

with tests, and the more despondent that the tests can ever produce reliable results. In the words of one 1960s critic of IQ (intelligence quotient) tests: "IQ tests test what IQ tests test." In short, that favorite screening test of 1930s humanistic educators was falling into disfavor, especially after certain racial minorities failed to perform well when taking them. The test was no longer assumed to test anything relevant.¹³ Yet humanists need screening devices, and quantitative tests have for centuries been the primary humanistic substitute for earlier screening devices, such as family name, moral character, or profit-and-loss performance. Losing faith in tests, modern man has no universally agreed-upon substitute for tests. The proliferation of testing, statistical surveys, data-gathering, sampling techniques, mathematical economic models, and similar supposed shortcuts for human decision-making has been the direct result of the philosophy of human autonomy and the systematic rejection of biblical revelation. *Testing man has replaced covenantal man*, yet it is man, not God, who has systematically failed the tests, even those devised by the experts in the field. We have imputed great value to our ability to test, and the costs of this error have been astronomical.

13. Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York: Knopf, 1977), chaps. 10–13, 18–20.

12

SCARCITY: CURSE AND BLESSING

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:17–19).

The theocentric principle undergirding this passage is God's sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

The starting point of all modern economics is here: the question of scarcity. The reason for this is the universality of scarcity. It is easy to gain a wide hearing for a system dedicated to overcoming scarcity, a widely perceived curse.² *At zero price*, there is greater demand for most things than there is supply to fill the demand. For some goods, such as air to breathe, there is normally no price, so air is not an object of purposeful human action. Of course, air in a submarine, or on top of a high mountain, or in a space ship will command a price; so will heated, filtered, or cooled air. But most resources are scarce most of the time, meaning simply that *they command a price*. We have to give up something in order to get something else. Even in the case of a free gift, the person who gives us the item had to give up something.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Biblical economics begins with the creation. This immediately raises the issue of ownership.

A. Scarcity and Eden

Was scarcity the product of rebellion? The explicit evidence of the Bible seems to favor this interpretation. We must speculate about conditions in the garden. Prior to the rebellion, the residents of the garden did not think that time would be a problem, or so their actions indicated. They did not immediately eat of the tree of life, so God banished them from the garden to keep them from attaining cheap eternal life (Gen. 3:22).³ They acted as though they thought they had endless life. If they could do as they pleased, thinking God's thoughts after him, naturally choosing exactly the food that was necessary or pleasing to them and refusing to worry about time, it is possible that they had no concept of scarcity. If a person knows exactly what he wants, and he has all the resources he needs to achieve his goals, and he is under no time constraints, and all "second-best" choices can be dismissed as irrelevant, then the cost of achieving his goals is zero. After all, whatever he gives up is worth nothing to him in comparison to the value of attaining his present goal. He is following God's will for him, and he is in perfect ethical communion with God. It may be possible to imagine that Adam operated in a zero-cost world. The day he rebelled, however, he paid the total price for something that seemed to be an inconsequential decision. He went from zero cost—acting in conformity with God's will in a totally abundant environment—to total cost. He lost his life and his zero-cost environment.

On the other hand, it is also possible to imagine that Adam did bear costs. He had choices to make. Perhaps he was not absolutely certain in each case just what he should do. Ethical perfection may not have implied such comprehensive knowledge of God's will that his every step in applying God's mandate to dominion was instinctively known to be exactly what God hoped for him at that instant. If he did have to give up the benefits of one course of action in order to achieve the benefits of some other course of action, then he faced scarcity. He paid a price for his actions. This seems more likely than a zero-cost world.

We do not know what kind of mental or instinctual relationship joined God and Adam in the garden, so we cannot say for certain whether his was an environment marked by scarcity. If a person wants one thing, and only one, at a particular instant, and has all that he wants at that instant, he does not face a scarce environment at that in-

3. Chapter 13.

stant. It is a question of supply and human demand.

There is no question that God's curse of the ground created a new environment. From that point on, the earth has resisted man. Thistles that interfere with man's ability to extract what he wants from the ground have grown up to increase man's costs of attaining his goals. Man must sweat in order to eat. His labor is now unpleasant and burdened, or at the very least it is often frustrated and discouraging, unlike the labor in the garden. The labor in the garden was entirely pleasant. Man was simply fulfilling his purpose and exercising his God-given talents. "To labor is human," but in the garden, it was without a curse. God added vast new costs to labor, reducing its efficiency, while simultaneously reducing the psychological pleasure and incentive attached to labor. Man would now be compelled to labor by his environment; no longer would his mere humanity be relied on by God in order to encourage man to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant.

God had created an environment which allowed man the option of linear economic and personal development. Adam would receive basic training in the garden, and from there he was to have gone into the world with his heirs to subdue it, spreading paradise across the face of the earth. Adam's rebellion broke this linear development.

God's curse in response to Adam's rebellion brought death into the cycle: birth, growth, and death. Man was placed under the bondage of this cycle ("dust to dust"), as was the creation, which longs to find release (Rom. 8:19–22).⁴ In terms of the standards of the garden, this cycle was unnatural. There had not been death in the garden, at least not of animals; vegetarianism prevailed. Man and the animals ate the seeds of herbs and trees for meat (Gen. 1:29–30). Isaiah's language indicates that the blessings of restoration also involve an eventual return to vegetarianism, where the wolf and lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw (Isa. 65:25). This is not confined to the post-judgment world; it takes place in time and on earth, for the serpent is still cursed, still eating dust (Isa. 65:25).⁵ But the curse of the ground

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

5. It is possible that Isaiah's language is allegorical, and that he was referring to political tranquility rather than a world of vegetarianism. It is interesting, however, that so many religions of the East, and pseudo-religions of the West, have proclaimed the ethical requirement of vegetarianism. They want a return to vegetarianism prior to the total transformation of culture through regeneration and the extension of biblical law. Paul warned against these calls to a "premature" establishment of mandatory vegetarianism: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall de-

brought the animals under the rule of “tooth and claw.”

B. Linear History

The curse would of necessity slow down the fulfillment of the dominion covenant, simply because of the restraints placed on animal multiplication. The animals would now eat each other, and their numbers would be limited by the thorns and thistles that clogged up the formerly abundant productivity of the land. The fulfillment had to be linear, but the new law of nature was cyclical. To overcome this cyclical restraint, covenantally faithful men must apply the principles of biblical law. Linearity of economic growth, of the growth of both human and animal populations, is now a product of ethically faithful societies (Ex. 23:26).⁶ Linear development is not natural in the post-Fall world. *Linear development is the product of a philosophy of life—a religious outlook—and few cultures in history have maintained anything like it.* Paganism promotes a cyclical view of life, using the regularities of the cursed, post-Fall agricultural world as its standard of human development. Cursed cyclical nature has become normative for pagan social thought.⁷

part from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth” (I Tim. 4:1–3). The eating of flesh was basic to the ritual celebrations of Israel (Deut. 12:15, 20). Parts of certain offerings belonged to the priests, the right shoulder going to the priest as a heave offering, and the breast going to Aaron and his sons (Lev. 7:31–32). The idea that the Bible teaches vegetarianism as a mandatory way of life is unquestionably heretical. As an ideal for a period of external kingdom blessings, during a millennial reign, it appears to be valid, though voluntary.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

7. Stanley Jaki, the historian of science, contrasted the cyclical views held by the Chinese, Hindus, Greeks, Babylonians, Mayans, and Arabs with the linear view of orthodox Christianity. Why did science develop only within the intellectual framework of the Christian West? “Needless to say, many factors—geographical, social, economical, and political—played a part in the stillbirth of the scientific enterprise in the various ancient cultures. The only common factor in all cases seems, however, to be the commitment to the cyclic world view.” Jaki, “The History of Science and the Idea of an Oscillating Universe,” in Wolfgang Yourgrau and Allen D. Breck (eds.), *Cosmology, History, and Theology* (New York: Plenum Press, 1977), p. 140n. He developed this idea at considerable length in his book, *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, [1974] 1980).

C. Common Curse, Common Grace⁸

We generally focus our attention on Adam's plight and the ground's curse. We see mostly wrath in both. Nevertheless, there was also grace in both curses, since we define grace as an unearned gift of God to man or the creation. As in all manifestations of God's common wrath, there was also common grace. This grace-curse produced special curses for the rebellious and special benefits for God's elect. By rebelling, Adam deformed the nature of man. Men would no longer naturally cooperate with each other in the tasks of dominion. Because of the murder in their hearts, they would search for ways of stealing from their fellow men and killing them. Man had rebelled against God; man's descendants would normally seek to destroy all those made in God's image. Mankind therefore needed external and internal restraints in order to survive. Men were now alienated from each other because they were alienated from God. Something was needed to heal this alienation. God provided a new incentive for men to be civil, cooperative, and helpful: *self-interest*.

Originally, the earth brought forth abundantly. Now it brings forth thorns and thistles. From the curse onward, men would have to cooperate in order to dig wealth out of the cursed ground. *The division of labor is now imperative for successful, efficient, low-cost production.* There are no free lunches in a cursed, scarce world. There are also no free murders. Every man's labor can be useful to others in the marketplace. Murder a man, and you remove a source of productivity from the marketplace. You remove someone who might have made your work easier or your wealth greater. Battling an uncooperative nature, men need the division of labor more now than they did prior to the rebellion. They need each other to enjoy the full potential of each person's productive capacities. The curse of the ground is a sign of God's grace: given the perverse nature of man, a less productive world is necessary to save him from his own self-destructive ends.

Having to work is also a way of draining energy that might have been put to perverse ends. Men have less free time to scheme and pillage. They have less strength. Part of the energy of nature was rechanneled by God into avenues that would thwart men's evil plans. Time, capital, and energy spent towards increasing the productivity of the land could not be used simultaneously to commit murder and

8. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

mayhem. The curse of the ground helped to produce a zone of safety for men from their fellows. *Man was made to sweat in order that he might not have to bleed.*

Poverty for the ungodly is a special blessing for the godly, even when the godly share in the poverty. Why should this be? Precisely because hungry ungodly men are compelled to beat swords into ploughshares in order to survive. Wealth-provided leisure time will eventually be spent in perverse ways, most often in lust, warfare, arson, and rape. Rich rebellious nations can use a greater portion of their wealth to construct even more efficient weapons.

It must also be pointed out that the curse of the ground is also a blessing for the ground. Men in a scarce world must treat the creation with care if they wish to retain the productivity of the ground. This is one of the important reasons why private property has so often been a means of preserving the ground from pollution and soil erosion. Where private property is compromised or unenforceable—"free" air, "free" streams, "free" oceans, "free" land—we tend to find ecological disturbances.⁹ Men rush in to get "their" share of the "free" goods, with little thought of the future, simply because they have little or no control over the future use of public property. They can control the future use of private property, and the costs come out of their capital resources, which provides a great incentive to use the resources in a cost-effective manner—one which respects the future expected benefits of the resources.¹⁰ There is a strong tendency, though not an invariable law, for men to take better care of the creation when they are allowed to take possession of the fruits of their labor on their parcel of the creation.¹¹ Again, it is scarcity which pressures innately lawless men to observe God's laws concerning the creation.

The curse of the ground is a form of grace to the godly—an unearned gift—for it allows them to work out their faith with less fear and trembling concerning the actions of the ungodly. It is also a form

9. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* (13 Dec. 1968). (<http://bit.ly/HardCom>)

10. C. R. Batten, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *The Freeman* (Oct. 1970). (<http://bit.ly/BatCom>)

11. Edwin G. Dolan, *TANSTAAFL: The Economic Strategy for Environmental Crises* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); J. H. Dales, *Pollution, Property and Prices* (University of Toronto Press, 1970). T. D. Crocker and A. J. Rogers, *Environmental Economics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971). On the disastrous state-enforced, state-subsidized pollution in the Soviet Union, see Marshall Goldman, *The Spoils of Progress* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1972).

of grace—an unearned gift—to the ungodly, for it allows them to work out the implications of their anti-Christian faith in ways that are less harmful to other ungodly men, godly men, and the creation: grace leading to destruction (Luke 12:47–48).¹² The ungodly are given life. They are given power. They participate in history—a kind of stay of execution. Their labors increase the wealth of the believers, since all share in the blessings of greater productivity. Common curse (sweat, death, and thistles), common grace (time and incentives to cooperate), special curse (final judgment), and special grace (salvation): all are involved in God's retaliation against evil.

Conclusion

The goal of a godly man is to overcome the curse of the ground and the curse of his own flesh. He is to accomplish this through applied faith. Biblical law is to serve as the tool of overcoming the curses. The cycles of nature are to be overcome through godly agriculture (greenhouses and hydroponics are examples), life is to be greatly extended (Isa. 65:20), thistles are to be minimized, and full production is to be achieved (Deut. 8:7–9).¹³ Linear growth is to overcome long-term cyclical stagnation.¹⁴ But it takes the *covenantal faithfulness of entire cultures* to begin achieving such goals over the long run. Without special (saving) grace, success becomes arrogance, and arrogance is visited with destruction (Deut. 8:19–20;¹⁵ 28:15–68).

Scarcity is therefore to be regarded as a curse, but not an unmitigated curse. It has its blessings in a world of corrupt, lawless, ethically rebellious men. It must be overcome through biblical law, not through revolution, humanistic social planning, communal living, or the abolition of private property. It is to be overcome by a systematic, universal, long-term application of biblical law to every area of human life. It is only in cultures made up of predominantly (though not exclusively) godly men that this kind of long-term reduction of grinding poverty, meaning excessive scarcity, can be expected.

12. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

13. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 20.

14. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, ch. 5.

15. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

13

THE BURDEN OF TIME

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:22–24).

The theocentric foundation of this passage is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Life and Death

God threw Adam out of the garden paradise. The garden was to have served as his training ground, the base of operations for the conquest of the world. His rebellion made it necessary to remove him from the garden. He was not to achieve eternal life simply by eating the fruit of a tree, for this would provide him with mere temporal extension. He had already abandoned life as a God-fearing subordinate under God. Life is not simply conscious existence, for if it were, we would have to conclude that there is life in hell. But the Bible says that life is to be contrasted with death, and eternal existence without God is the second death (Rev. 2:11; 20:6). Paul wrote that “to be carnally minded is death” (Rom. 8:6). Adam surrendered to the principle of death on the day he rebelled; his body survived for centuries thereafter, since he died at age 930 (Gen. 5:5). Physical death is a curse imposed by God to remind men of their rebellion and the fact that they

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

are spiritually dead as a result of that rebellion. Therefore, paradise was closed to Adam. He could not escape the burden of physical death—the first death—by eating of the tree of life, since paradise was no longer accessible to him or his heirs. He had to look forward to the establishment of the New Jerusalem, beyond the grave and beyond the bondage of sin, where the tree of life once again is accessible (Rev. 22:2). Not by the works of man's hands, and not by swallowing a particular fruit, can man regain his ethical standing before God. *The essence of life is right standing ethically before God*, and Adam had forfeited life.

The burden of time was placed on his physical body. His years would now be limited. He would be given a fixed amount of time to work out either his salvation or damnation with fear and trembling. Infinite time, apart from regeneration, was forbidden to him.

Time is therefore central to any philosophy of life and death. Men desperately wish to escape the burdens of time, yet they fear death's cessation of temporal existence. The *meaning of time* is an inescapable concomitant to any consideration of the *meaning of life*.

The ancient world apart from the Hebrews believed in some version of historical cycles. Nature's seasonal changes were regarded as normative. The world continues through endless cycles. Hesiod's poem, *Works and Days*, which was written at about the same time that Isaiah's ministry began, was one Greek's speculation about the rise and fall of civilizations and even the creation itself. This cycle began with the age of gold, degenerated to the age of silver, and continued through the age of brass.² Ours is the dead age of iron, he said. His language was similar to the visionary dream of King Nebuchadnezzar: the great image which was made of gold, silver, brass, and iron mixed with clay. But the end of that image was total destruction by the stone cut without hands, which smashed the image before growing into a great mountain which filled the earth (Dan. 2:31–35). The kingdoms of man will be replaced by the eternal kingdom of God (Dan. 2:36–45). History in the biblical outline is linear, not circular.

The ultimate uniformity in all pagan systems of thought, whether it is cyclical nature, commitment to evolutionary development, or belief in the static and fundamentally unchanging structure of "pure being," cannot be challenged successfully by any pagan deity. The central uniformity is the sovereign; gods and men must conform themselves

2. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 109–201.

to this fundamental sovereign. Both the gods and mankind are in bondage to it. Man must submit to its power. *Time is the god of paganism, and chance is his enemy.*

The Genesis account is hostile to the concept of uniformitarian temporal processes. Rates of change are not constant over time. In the garden of Eden, Adam did not bear the burden of time, just as he did not bear the burden of alienated, cursed labor. He worked and passed through time, but time was no threat to him. Rather, *time meant opportunity*. The curse was still in the future. The constraints of time did not weigh him down as they do his heirs. He named (classified) the animals of the garden (and perhaps all animals) in a portion of one day. His mind must have worked with the speed of a modern computer, but analogically (thinking God's thoughts after Him) rather than digitally, for he was a full personality under the sovereignty of God. His handling of the facts of nature was completely in terms of the categories given to him by God as God's image-bearer. He worked rapidly, just as God had worked rapidly to create the universe in six days.

This indicates that the processes within time prior to the Fall were explicitly unlike those of today. God is not bound in the straitjacket of fixed rates of change which now seem to bind fallen mankind. His fiat word determined the speed of creation, not the needs of random evolutionary processes. God did not need huge quantities of time to accomplish the creation. Therefore, it should not be difficult to imagine that Adam, as made in God's image, exhibited the capacity to deal mentally with the universe which God had created. Adam's mind was analogous to God's; it was precise, comprehensive, and rapid in its operations.

B. Prodigies

Every generation has numerous individuals who can perform prodigious feats of mental computation. These gifted individuals can solve various kinds of problems, frequently mathematical, with seemingly impossible speed. Consider the Dutch mathematician Willem Klein. He performed the following calculation in front of audiences. He was assigned a number of 499 digits by a computer. This number was the product of another number multiplied by itself 73 times. His task was to calculate this 73rd root in his head. In two minutes and 43 seconds, he solved it. The number was 6,789,235.³ Shakuntala Devi, an

3. *People* (Sept. 27, 1976).

Indian prodigy, was not quite so impressive, but she could find cube roots of six-digit numbers faster than students could find the answer on hand-held calculators, or she could find the cube of 777. She could instantly tell you what factorial 13 is, which is 13 times 12 times 11, and so forth, down to one: 6227020800. “Never use commas,” she said. “They’ll only confuse you.” She could tell you what day of the week it was on (say) Nov. 3, 1949. But she could not describe how she accomplished these feats.⁴ Eric Jablow taught himself how to read by the age of 20 months, or possibly sooner, and he taught himself calculus at age 6. He graduated from Brooklyn College with highest honors at age 15. He had attended graduate school lectures in mathematics as early as age 7.⁵ These people were obviously abnormal, yet people like them are common enough in every generation to remind us of what we have lost since the Fall.

A question could legitimately be raised concerning the source of these abnormal powers of mind. Is it possible that demonic, occult forces are behind them? In some cases, it is not only possible but probable. But no universal generalization can be made with complete confidence. A case of one occultist who developed extraordinary mathematical powers as a result of his family’s trafficking with demonic forces was the great Indian mathematician Ramanujan, who died at the age of 32 in 1920.⁶ His biographer, S. R. Ranganathan, devoted several pages to a discussion of Ramanujan’s occult background. He reported having a dream as a young man. The family goddess, Namagiri,

... wrote on his tongue. Thereafter his precocity developed suddenly. It has been stated by his mother that he was born after her parents had prayed to the Goddess to bless her with a son. There is another piece of information current in Ramanujan’s family. His maternal grandmother was a great devotee of Goddess Namagiri. She would often go into a trance and speak as Goddess Namagiri. In one such trance, before the birth of Ramanujan, she is said to have uttered that, after her own death, the Goddess would speak through the son of her daughter.⁷

His mother was an astrologer, and she predicted her son’s death a

4. *Washington Post* (Oct. 4, 1976).

5. *Washington Star* (May 22, 1977).

6. In the popular movie, *Good Will Hunting*, the university mathematician refers to him briefly in a discussion with Robin Williams’ character.

7. S. R. Ranganathan, *Ramanujan: The Man and the Mathematician* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967), p. 13.

month before it happened. She consulted another professional astrologer about her son's horoscope without revealing whose it was, and he confirmed her fears.⁸ He would narrate occult experiences to his friends in India. He possessed (or was possessed by) powers of precognition; he could foresee future events.⁹

Ramanujan and his family were ardent devotees of God Narashimha (the lion-faced incarnation [*avasara*] of God), the sign of whose grace consisted in drops of blood seen during dreams. Ramanujan stated that after seeing such drops, scrolls containing the most complicated mathematics used to unfold before him and that after waking, he could set down on paper only a fraction of what was shown to him.¹⁰

It must not be supposed that Ramanujan was some obscure, though talented, Indian mystic. He was brought to Cambridge University by Prof. G. H. Hardy, who long after regarded the young man as one of the most talented mathematicians of his era. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, a major honor. Nor is his biographer an obscure mystic; he was the official biographer for Ramanujan's *Collected Papers*, and he included some of these details of Ramanujan's occult background in that biography.

Hardy himself provided an example of Ramanujan's remarkable abilities. He had visited the young man at a sanatorium.

- HARDY: I came in the taxi-cab 1729. It is rather a dull number. I hope it is not an unfavorable omen.
- RAMANUJAN: No, it is a very interesting number.
- HARDY: How?
- RAMANUJAN: It is the smallest number expressible as the sum of two cubes in two ways. ($1729 = 1^3 + 12^3 = 9^3 + 10^3$).¹¹

C. Time and Modern Science

The bondage of time came after the Fall. Like the curse of the ground, it was both a curse and a blessing. It set limits on men's ability to work out the implications of their rebellion from the beginning, and as men nevertheless tried to develop their capacities for further rebel-

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 113. This incident is cited in several thousand Web pages about him.

lion, God placed additional limits on them, such as shorter life spans, death through the Noahic Flood, and the division of their language and the scattering of their habitations at the tower of Babel (Gen. 8–11). The curses restrained their evil, and therefore served as blessings for the godly. The ethical benefits outweighed the loss of longevity and the scattering abroad.

Also, like the curse of the ground, the bondage of time is to be lifted progressively. As men increasingly conform themselves to the laws of God, human society is to be restored to something approaching the garden paradise, and even beyond. After all, that paradise was a training ground for dominion. The preliminary manifestations of the new heavens and new earth that are described in Isaiah 65 serve as down payments on the final restoration beyond the day of judgment. But these days of external blessing are to be worldwide in scope, not confined to a tiny strip of land a little east of Eden. This earthly triumph will not be perfect, for sinners will still do their work (Isa. 65:20). Nevertheless, it will be a world more like paradise than hell.

The passage describes the end of conflict between carnivorous animals and their prey (Isa. 65:25). It also describes the lengthening of mankind's days on earth. These words do not refer to the post-judgment New Heavens and New Earth, for in that period there will be no sinners mingling with saints, and no death whatsoever. Isaiah announced: "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20). God can permit longer lives, even of sinners, since their influence in this period will be minimal compared to the influence of the godly. This will be in time and on earth. The curses of time will be progressively diminished in response to the creation of godly institutions and the preaching of the gospel. Longevity, which is a gift of God for ethical obedience (Ex. 20:12), will be restored, indicating that time will have had its curse aspects minimized.

It might be possible to interpret Isaiah 65:20 in terms of modern rates of economic and cultural change. Rather than taking the words literally, we might argue that compound annual rates of economic growth of 2%, 4%, or even 6% have produced such extraordinary changes in the modern world in such a brief period of time—one average human lifetime—that the typical Western industrial nation's citizens live the equivalent of several lifetimes of those living in Isaiah's day. In effect, the modern West has developed an economy which per-

mits people to “pack” several lives into one. Therefore, we might conclude, Isaiah 65:20 has been fulfilled allegorically or symbolically in today’s growth-oriented economies.

There are several problems with such an interpretation. First, the words of the passage speak of “an hundred years old” as a child’s age. Second, today’s high rates of economic growth have not been the product of spiritual renewal. What we have seen is an inverse relationship between Christian orthodoxy and economic growth: the worse their spiritual condition, the more material possessions modern men receive. We are viewing conditions analogous to those described in Deuteronomy 8:12–17, where men attribute their wealth to their own autonomous efforts.¹² *Today’s wealth appears to be a prelude to God’s judgment.* Per capita wealth is rising in the West, but population growth is declining. A major blessing of God is being withheld: children.

Today’s rates of economic growth cannot be sustained for centuries. The compounding process at 2% per annum, let alone 6%, creates astronomically high per capita wealth in a few centuries. We will run into the limits of growth eventually. Humanism may be nearing the end of its rapid economic growth rates, at least in terms of industrial growth. Most of the twentieth century was a radical historical aberration: large-scale mass production financed by monetary inflation, compounding annually, decade after decade. This is not the culmination of Christian orthodoxy but of arrogant secular humanism which is steadily consuming its moral foundation, namely, the cultural veneer of Christian orthodoxy. If anything, modern industrialism is a demonic imitation of Isaiah 65:20, the substitution of historically unprecedented economic and cultural change for long-term social progress and increased life expectancy through the application of biblical law to society. It is “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” A biblical social order offers longer life spans and slower, less radical social change which can be sustained by the environment—social, ecological, and psychological—over centuries.

The emergence of modern science and technology came in response to the establishment of godly rule on a far wider basis than ever before. Lynn White, Jr., chronicled the important technological developments of the Middle Ages.¹³ Medieval Catholic culture was far more

12. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

13. Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (New York: Oxford

productive than the pagan cultures that it replaced. But it was the Protestant Reformation which unleashed the forces of modern science.¹⁴ Loren Eiseley, the anthropologist-historian who was successful as a popularizer of Darwinian evolution in the mid-twentieth century, understood this more clearly than most of his fellow scientists: “The experimental method succeeded beyond men’s wildest dreams but the faith that brought it into being owes something to the Christian conception of the nature of God. It is surely one of the curious paradoxes of history that science, which professionally has little to do with faith, owes its origins to an act of faith that the universe can be rationally interpreted, and that science today is sustained by that assumption.”¹⁵

Christianity was instrumental in producing the beginnings of applied science. Applied science and technology stemmed from the understanding of the world which affirmed its orderliness and man’s access to knowledge of its processes. The fact that the mind’s logic, especially mathematical logic, conforms to the operations of the external world is nothing short of a miracle—an unexplainable coincidence from the standpoint of post-Darwinian science.¹⁶ Yet Christian writers have always provided an explanation: man is made in the image of God, the Creator. Applied science has now produced tools of dominion that enable man to approximate the lost skills of Adam in the garden. Even Willem Klein was finally replaced by a computer at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN). When the Center hired him in 1958, he was more efficient than their computer in many areas. Simple men with inexpensive calculators can perform mathematical computations faster than the early computers of the late 1940s,

University Press, 1962).

14. For an introduction to this question, see the two articles that appeared in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer 1979): “Medieval Speculation, Puritanism, and Modern Science,” by Charles Dykes, and “The Role of Puritan Calvinism in the Rise of Modern Science,” by E. L. Hebden Taylor. See also Robert K. Merton, “Puritanism, Pietism, and Science,” in his book, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1967), ch. 17; R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972); and E. M. Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977).

15. Loren Eiseley, *Darwin’s Century* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1958] 1961), p. 62. See also Stanley Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

16. Eugene P. Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>) Cf. Vern S. Poythress, “A Biblical View of Mathematics,” in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), ch. 9.

and which no tools could perform rapidly prior to 1945. There is a problem with such devices, however: they have almost allowed rebellious man back into the “garden” without saving faith and biblical dominion. Men may wish to find an escape from the bondage of death, thereby allowing them access to infinite temporal extension for the purpose of indulging their lusts. Yet their tools of dominion now threaten all of civilization, for the tools of dominion can produce and have produced mighty weapons, allowing us to turn ploughshares into swords more efficiently.

D. Time and Economics

Unquestionably, technology has permitted us to make more efficient use of our time. Time is the resource, above all, which men seek to conserve, if only to waste it in unfulfilling leisure activities. *Time is mankind's only absolutely irreplaceable environmental resource.* It is the human resource which confounded the attempts of Solomon to deal with in terms of the logic of autonomous man (Eccl. 1–3). Time's limitations led the psalmist to declare: “My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass” (Ps. 102:11). Time is in short supply—only one earthly life per customer!

1. Time Orientation

Time is the fundamental component in all economic planning. It is the foundation of a proper explanation of the phenomenon of the rate of interest. The interest rate stems from the rational distinction in each person's mind between an economic good enjoyed in the present and the same good enjoyed in the future. Goods to be used in the future are less valuable than the same goods used in the present (other things being equal, as the economist always says). Some men value present consumption very highly. They will therefore sacrifice the use of a presently owned resource only for large quantities of scarce economic resources in the future. These people will loan their assets only at high rates of interest. The premium of present goods over future goods is very high; some economists call this “high time-preference.”¹⁷ This *present-orientedness* is a crucial factor in slum communities and in underdeveloped (backward, primitive) nations.¹⁸

17. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. XVIII, sec. 2, see also pp. 496–99. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

18. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), argued

In contrast are those who are distinctly *future-oriented*. They have low time-preference, and consequently, they are willing to forego the present use of a scarce economic resource for relatively small increases in the future. These people will loan resources at low rates of interest. Compared with backward cultures, future-oriented cultures place a high premium on future income. The low interest rates make it possible for entrepreneurs to borrow resources (money) in order to expand the supply of future goods and services. Their profit margins can be lower because the rate of interest they have to pay is low. More projects can therefore be undertaken than would have been possible had interest rates been higher. These people do not feel the burden of time so heavily as those who are present-oriented. They see the future as a world to be overcome. They see time as a tool of dominion, not a means of escape. *Time is seen as an opportunity for future dominion.* The Puritan work ethic went (and goes) together with future-orientation. Both serve to increase economic productivity. When this faith erodes, economic growth is bound to slow down.

People buy in the market what they desire and can afford. High time-preference people want instant gratification, and they pay high interest rates for loans that enable them to buy today's consumer goods. Compared to future-oriented people, they want present goods more than they want future goods. So, investment opportunities dry up, since entrepreneurs cannot generally afford to pay the high interest rates that present-oriented people demand on their loaned funds. Therefore, output stagnates or declines. The supply of future goods drops. *But this is exactly what the high time-preference people wanted.* They discounted the value of future goods so much that potential producers of future goods decided not to produce them. They placed a low value on future goods, and the market responded accordingly. On the other hand, low time-preference societies have high rates of savings and investment. They place a high value on future goods. They

that one's class position is a function of one's attitude toward the future, with lower-class people being present-oriented. In Mises' terminology, they have high time-preference. See pp. 47ff., 62, 72, 163ff. The American ghetto suffers from massive present-orientedness. Sociologist Helmut Schoeck has pointed out that envy in primitive cultures prevents people from sharing their views of the economic possibilities of the future with those outside the immediate family unit. "No one can even begin to have rational aspirations for the future unless he has a realistic view of what that future may be; but no such prognosis can be made so long as each member of the group carefully keeps hidden his view of the future." Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 46.

are not nearly so present-oriented. Consequently, they lend money at low rates of interest, which stimulates the output of those future goods that they value so highly. People get what they pay for, and future-oriented societies demand far more future goods than present-oriented societies do. They want economic growth in the future, and this is exactly what they buy by giving up present goods. This is a major factor in economic development.

It is a familiar aspect of the human condition to desire a return to paradise. After all, paradise is what God originally intended for us. But the flaming sword was to remind Adam and his heirs that the return to paradise must be in terms of God's saving grace and His law-order, not in terms of man's autonomous labors. Godly men are to strive, through faith and labor, to *conquer* the burdens (curses) of time and scarcity. It is when men try to *escape* these burdens altogether, or to conquer by means of statist tyranny (the Moloch state), that their quest for paradise is illegitimate. There are numerous ways that men have devised to escape from time and its burdens, but all are illegitimate: drunkenness, drugs, nudity, primitive chaos festivals (Carnival, Mardi Gras), mystical union with a monistic god through asceticism, Marxian revolution, and so forth. The numerous books written by Mircea Eliade are accounts of these various attempts to escape time's bondage.¹⁹ The Christian answer is hard work in terms of biblical law, and low interest rates that are the product of a religiously based future-orientation. These are the fruits of personal and cultural maturity.

2. *Low Interest Rates*

It is important to understand, however, that *low interest rates must be the products of voluntary exchange*. They are not to be legislated by a civil government which is seeking to play God by increasing productivity through legislative fiat. When men are honest, ready to repay loans at any cost, the risk premium in any interest rate will drop. When governments refuse to inflate the currency, the price inflation premium disappears, or even becomes negative, also keeping interest rates down. When men are future-oriented, interest rates will be low. But when the state attempts to legislate the benefits of godly social order apart from these three features—low risks, low or no price inflation premium, and low time-preference—then bureaucrats merely

19. On Eliade's works, see Guilford Dudley III, *Religion on Trial: Mircea Eliade and His Critics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), chaps. 2–4.

succeed in drying up the supply of loanable funds on the free market. They impose a price ceiling on loans, and as always, the result is a shortage of the price-controlled good, which in this case is loanable money. A black market for loans springs up, with high interest rates compensating the lenders for the risks of breaking the law. Interest rate ceilings (usury laws) succeed merely in misallocating scarce economic resources.²⁰

Economic growth is the product of covenant-conforming human action: thrift, honest dealing, hard work, future-orientation, care for one's calling (vocation), etc. The function of civil government is to enforce biblical law, including modern applications of Old Testament law (such as traffic laws). There are no long-term fruits apart from biblical roots. The cheap imitations of paradise that have been created by modern Marxism, socialism, and Keynesian interventionism-inflationism are leading not toward a New Heavens and New Earth, but toward a new hell on the old earth.

Modern man believes that time has been operating for at least 13 billion years. He sees *the processes of time as essentially unchanging, or uniformitarian*. For better or worse, what man is today has come as a result of slow, continual changes over time through the process of evolution through natural selection. Time is seen as a burden to be overcome through science, through economic manipulation, or through some sort of new evolutionary leap which will at last speed up the process of evolution.

The Bible tells us that the processes of time have changed radically in the past, as a result of man's Fall. Men in the post-Fall period lived long lives, but man's life span was steadily shortened after Noah. Yet as a result of ethical conformity to God, men's lifetimes will once again be lengthened. As far as we know, time is a constant, but the processes of time vary in terms of man's ethical relationship to God and His law-order.

Temporal extension is to man what eternity is to God. Temporal extension makes it possible for man to accumulate knowledge and power, for good or evil. Time also makes human freedom possible: as each man moves into the future, he makes choices among options, which is what freedom means. God's freedom, of course, is immediate,

20. Murray N. Rothbard, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy*, 4th ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute. [1970] 2006), pp. 38–39 (<http://bit.ly/mrpam>); Armen A. Alchian and William R. Allen, *University Economics*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1972), p. 471.

timeless, and eternal.

Time, therefore, is a true blessing and opportunity for regenerate men. It is not without burdens this side of the new creation, but it is not fundamentally a burden, as it is for the rebellious. Those who wish to escape time altogether are rebellious. They choose occult methods of achieving secret knowledge, mystical illumination, or some secret formula to give them perfect power or perfect protection. Work-in-time was an opportunity for Adam. Work-in-time-under-the-curse is a burden for sinful man. The unregenerate hope to escape work and time by becoming omniscient, omnipotent, and even eternal like God. The godly man hopes to escape the curse of time by overcoming sin and working in time, as directed by the guidelines provided in God's law.

Conclusion

Time, matter-energy, and space appear to be constants in the creation. Certainly, we do not delay the coming of God's day of judgment by manipulating the universe in some way. Time does not change, but the processes within time's fixed limits do change, and so do men's attitude toward those processes. Men may view time's processes as opportunities to be used to the glory of God, or as burdens to be overcome through autonomous scientific techniques, magic, or mystical illumination. But time remains man's theater of response to God.

It is therefore understandable that the modern state should attempt to seek control of the processes of time, as well as to seek to control those features of the economy that are the product of a particular religious perception of the meaning of time. The secular humanist state seeks to attain the benefits of low interest rates by imposing usury laws that force down the legal, visible rates of interest in the various loan markets. The bureaucrats try to promote economic growth by lowering short-term interest rates by increasing the money supply, in a vain attempt to increase long-term production. They attempt to stimulate economic growth in the ghetto, or in backward foreign nations through humanistic, tax-supported schools, or through tax-financed welfare programs of all kinds. They do not deal with *the central problem of the ghetto and the underdeveloped nation*, namely, the present-orientation of those who make up the bulk of the backward or poverty-stricken population. Indeed, "poverty-stricken" is a phrase indicating that poverty is an active force that suppresses the in-

nate creativity of man—a hypothetical universal creativity. But men's time perspective can overcome all the foreign aid funds that any government agency might send into a high time-preference culture. What men believe has more relevance than the goods that men receive from messianic, humanistic civil governments.²¹ If time is seen as a burden, welfare funds can do little to lower the pressure of this perceived burden. And where time is seen as an opportunity for conquest, the funds for expansion will be generously provided by private loans from people who want to invest in productive cultures marked by future-oriented entrepreneurs. *Capital flows toward those who believe in the future, who accept the burdens of time as an opportunity for personal growth and personal profit.* To gain access to the capital assets of unwilling investors, the messianic state confiscates the funds of the productive in order to divert the normal flow of capital toward time-conquerors and away from the time-conquered. The state shifts capital toward the time-conquered in the hope that the mere possession of capital, apart from a new vision of time, will be an effective substitute for a change of time perspective—a sort of mechanical alternative to regeneration. The bureaucrats speak of inducing a “take off into self-sustained economic growth.”²² The results are almost uniformly negative.²³ Manipulation through coercive wealth redistribution is not an effective alternative to a culture-wide shift in people's perceptions of time and its burdens.

21. P. T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development: Studies and Debates in Development Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 78ff., 87, 202ff. See also Bauer, *Equality, The Third World and Economic Illusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981).

22. Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge: At the University Press, [1960] 1971). For extended critiques of Rostow's “take off” hypothesis, see the published debates of the International Economic History Association, ed. Rostow: *The Economics of Take off into Sustained Growth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963). Rostow was still clinging to his take off thesis in his extraordinarily detailed book, *The World Economy: History and Prospect* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), where he still spoke of a “post-take-off stage, the drive to technological maturity,” p. 59. As a one-volume introduction to the known details of economic history in the West, and an introduction to the secondary sources of the discipline as of the mid-1970s, this book is very useful. It is marred, as are all of Rostow's books on economic history, by a lack of any integrating market theory, other than the “take off” hypothesis, which he tended to de-emphasize in his later years.

23. P. T. Bauer argued that Rostow's stages are simply another variation of the fallacy of historicism. See his critical essay reprinted as chapter 18 of his book, *Dissent on Development*. As Bauer wrote, “Growth can never be self-sustaining in the sense of continuing irrespective of the maintenance or evolution of appropriate attitudes and institutions and the pursuit of sensible policies,” p. 485.

PRIMITIVE NOMADS

And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground (Gen. 4:2).

This passage has to do with dominion: point three of the biblical covenant model.¹

There was no myth cherished more in twentieth-century anthropological scholarship than the mid-nineteenth-century hypothesis concerning primitive man, the nomad. Anthropologists believed that human social groups were relatively recent, dating back about 60,000 years. However long ago it may have been, men supposedly roamed alone or in packs, eating wild berries or other plants that grew wild, hunting animals, and drifting with the productivity of nature. Then, about 10,000 years ago, men in the fertile crescent region of the Near East discovered the skills of animal husbandry and agriculture. Shepard Clough's evaluation is representative: "Here was one of the major technological revolutions of all time, for only in settled societies is man able fully to meet Western culture's criteria of civilization. At least no nomadic society has ever done so."² This narrative account assumes the validity of evolutionism's presuppositions concerning society and its origins: from animal to human being to social being. Nomadism supposedly evolved into civilization by means of certain technological

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Shepard B. Clough, *The Economic Development of Western Civilization* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 22. It is interesting that this statement critical of nomadism was dropped from a later edition of this standard textbook: Clough and Richard T. Rapp, *European Economic History: The Economic Development of Western Civilization* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 18. The revised sentence ends where the clause critical of nomadism began: "Here was one of the major technological revolutions of all time."

discoveries.

A. No Agricultural Revolution

The Bible says that Adam knew about both agriculture (dressing the garden) and animal husbandry (naming or classifying the animals) from the very beginning. His two sons received sufficient training from their father to embark on their respective careers. One was a husbandman, and the other was a farmer. The division of labor had already manifested itself, with each man concentrating on his own specialty. Evolutionary anthropologists and social historians have assumed that the simpler tasks of hunting animals and picking wild berries necessarily preceded the more complex tasks of domestication, both of animals and plant life. Yet the dominion covenant explicitly states the reverse: covenantally obedient men are required to subdue the world—domesticate it—to the glory of God. It is only when men seek to abandon the requirements of this dominion covenant that nomadism becomes a factor in human history.

The division of labor that we see in the case of the two brothers had been an explicit part of human life from the beginning. Eve was given to Adam in order to assist him in his tasks (Gen. 2:18; I Cor. 11:8–9). The division of labor principle was acknowledged by their sons. Presumably, this specialization of their skills was mutually beneficial to each man, since each could concentrate his time, capital, and knowledge on one area of the economy while enjoying the fruits of the other man's calling through voluntary exchange. Each wound up with more agricultural produce and sheep products than would have been possible had each of them tried to produce both products. The costs of dominion were reduced.

The dominion covenant is also referred to as the cultural mandate. This phrase is appropriate, for apart from the combined efforts of individuals acting cooperatively through market competition, the subduing of the earth would become far more difficult to coordinate, and far more expensive to regulate. Culture, the product of cooperative human action, is vital to the tasks of domestication. Men are expected by God to set down roots, build for the future, establish permanent institutions, and increase in wisdom. From the beginning, men formed communities. Cain built a city (Gen. 4:17). Civilized men have always feared the life of nomadism. Cain pleaded with God that the life of a vagabond was more than he could bear as a punishment, and God gra-

ciously reversed this condemnation (Gen. 4:12–15). It was too great a curse.

The advent of nomadism, especially the individualistic form, is a sign of social devolution. Chronologically, nomadism came later than civilization in human history, contrary to the religion of evolutionism. Nomadic tribes are often fierce warriors, but they leave few records of their own and no culture. The Huns, for example, left almost no trace of their years of conquest. The major history of the Huns written in the twentieth century was a lifetime research project which was never fully completed by its author.³ He had to master many languages in order to reassemble the story of the Huns, since there were only fragments available, in many geographical regions, written by their victims and enemies across different geographical regions. Victorious on horseback, they were eventually swallowed up by the cultures they conquered, leaving no literature of their own to testify to their importance.

B. Rootless

A wandering tribe that operates in terms of the stripped earth policy or theft is clearly rebellious. Like the years of wandering in the wilderness by the Israelites, nomadism is a curse of God. Men who try to escape from the ethical burdens of laboring under the terms of the dominion covenant are often tempted to escape into this form of cultural rebellion. Hitchhiking in the United States has always been the practice of the poor, the hobos, the criminals, and the rootless young.⁴ Police departments and other crime-fighting organizations have long warned drivers not to pick up hitchhikers, since there are so many criminals or disturbed, dangerous people among their ranks. It was no coincidence that in the years of the counterculture, 1965–72, there were millions of teenaged youths on the roads of the Western nations, all looking for a free automobile ride to nowhere in particular. The nomad's life is a life of few responsibilities, which is why nomadism increased so rapidly when the counterculture appeared.

There is little question that the most universally recognized American figure is the cowboy. Celebrated in movies, books, and television shows, the romantic figure of the lone cowboy, the ultimate rugged in-

3. Otto Manchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, ed. Max Wright (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

4. See the "classic" document of the so-called "beat generation," Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (New York: Viking, [1957] 1974).

dividualist, has been a favorite since the actual era of the cowboy in the 1870s and 1880s. The bulk of the stories are fictional, as is the romantic framework within which the legend of the cowboy operates. They were men of little capital, no vision, and no future.⁵ Those who became successful generally ceased being cowboys and became entrepreneurs who hired cowboys at low wages. The American cowboy was a phenomenon of one generation of economic expansion. He survived mainly in legend and fantasy, but there he has survived tenaciously. It is revealing to consider the fact that the television show *Gunsmoke* was the longest running, primetime dramatic series on American television, surviving two decades from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. It is also revealing that the show lasted about as long as the actual era of the cowboy did, especially if we consider the extra years that the show ran on the radio, prior to the television series. If we consider reruns of the series, it has long outlasted the era of the cowboy.⁶

The popularity of the American television series of the early 1960s, *Route 66*, also testifies to the widespread acceptance of nomadism as a fantasy idea just prior to the advent of the counterculture. Two young men roamed the country in an expensive sports car, a Chevrolet Corvette, which was apparently traded in each year for the latest model (the show was sponsored by Chevrolet), despite the fact that neither man had any visible signs of employment. *Then Came Bronson*, a one-year series in the late 1960s, featured a nomad on a motorcycle. Each show was introduced by a scene where Bronson is stopped at a traffic light, and a man in a station wagon, the symbol of family responsibility in America, looks at him and says, "Where are you going?" "Nowhere special," Bronson answers. "Boy, I wish I were you," the man replies. "Well, hang in there," says Bronson, and zooms away as the light turns green. Here was the heart of the message of romantic nomadism: the lure of low-responsibility existence, the lure of the road. The cowboy no-mads of American fiction brought law and order with them, though they themselves may have been on the fringes of the Establishment's law. The modern fictional nomad lives on the fringes of culture

5. On the cowboy as nomad, see the autobiographical books by Will James: *Lone Cowboy* (Barrington, Illinois: Peter Wolfe, 1930), and *Smokey* (New York: Scribner, 1926). The title of a third James book is appropriate: *The Drifting Cowboy* (Barrington, Illinois: Peter Wolfe, 1925).

6. Sometime around 1983, I had an opportunity to tell this to the show's star, James Arness, at a conference where I spoke. I gave him a copy of the first edition of this book, where I referred to the series. Arness played Matt Dillon through five decades, 1950s–1990s (made-for-TV movies).

and brings existential alienation. The real nomads of the counterculture brought (and still bring) disease, such as venereal disease and lice. Shortly after its inception, the counterculture was literally all loused up.

There is no question that nomads are primitive. They are not future-oriented. They do not build for the future. Whether in the African veldt, the Australian outback, the pre-Columbus American plains, the post-Civil War American plains, the wastes of the Arabian desert, or on Route 66, the nomads cannot build a civilization. God paralyzed the people who attempted to build the tower of Babel by scattering them. The wanderer is culturally impotent. But what must be understood is that *primitivism is primarily a religious and ethical outlook*; it is not some hypothetical steppingstone in man's upward evolution. It is a religion opposed to civilization.

Rootless men are not long creative. It is not surprising that, by 1980, American corporations were finally questioning the practice of moving executives from city to city every few years. They encountered increasing opposition from their employees, who now better understood the strains that such nomadism creates for the family. In the long run, the large American corporations will find that stronger community and family ties will benefit the companies, since productivity will increase in higher management.

C. Autonomy vs. Community

The autonomy of modern urban life, with its atomized life styles, has built-in limits. Unstable neighborhoods in which few people know more than one or two families on the block are easier targets for burglars and other criminals. The requirements of self-defense have prompted some neighborhoods in large American cities to establish "neighborhood watches," where people will look out for the property and homes of others on the block, or even create "citizen's patrols," with a car full of residents who patrol the street nightly looking for suspicious signs and phoning the police on cell phones if they think the police should investigate. Invariably, crime drops in such neighborhoods; it is cheaper for the criminals to work in more atomized neighborhoods.

An advertisement appeared in the *TV Times* supplement to the *Los Angeles Times* on Sunday, July 22, 1971. Television guides were read primarily by women, as the advertising revealed. In this case,

however, the appeal was made to the needs of the whole family. It was an advertisement for a Karate school, where students could learn the martial arts of the East. The headline reads: "My Sons and I. . . ." In smaller type, we read: "Morris Stapler of Torrance says, through our training in Karate, my sons and I have drawn closer. The few hours a week we spend together training does more for our father-son relationship than camping once a year." Here is an ad that would warm a mother's heart. At last, a way to get the boys together with their father! And while they are communicating together, they will be learning how to punch out the backbones of muggers and potential rapists. The advertising agency had sensed the multiple needs of the families of the notoriously rootless region of southern California.

The quest for community can become pathological, of course. Twentieth-century totalitarian regimes used the language of community to gain the commitment of the urban rootless, as well as the rural peasantry who had their religions and institutions shattered by the intrusions of the West. The conservative American sociologist, Robert A. Nisbet, wrote in 1953:

The greatest appeal of the totalitarian party, Marxist or other, lies in its capacity to produce a sense of moral coherence and communal membership to those who have become, to one degree or another, victims of the sense of exclusion from the ordinary channels of belonging in society. To consider the facts of poverty and economic distress as the causes of the growth of communism is deceptive. To say that the well-fed worker will never succumb to the lure of communism is as absurd as to say that the well-fed intellectual will never succumb. The presence or absence of three meals a day, or even the simple possession of a job, is not the decisive factor. What is decisive is the frame of reference. If, for one reason or another, the individual's immediate society comes to seem remote, purposeless, and hostile, if a people come to sense that, together, they are victims of discrimination and exclusion, not all the food and jobs in the world will prevent them from looking for the kind of surcease that comes with membership in a social and moral order seemingly directed toward their very souls.⁷

It is significant that the book in which this statement appears, *The Quest for Community*, went almost unnoticed when it was first published in 1953. A few conservative scholars knew its theme, but other

7. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1953] 1965), p. 37.

intellectuals ignored it. Its tide was changed to *Community and Power* in the 1962 paperback version. But it was changed back after 1965; the counterculture explosion brought the theme of the quest for community before the eyes of the intellectuals. Nisbet's career made a quantum leap only after the counterculture's advent, when the book became very popular. Also, as he once admitted, it helped when *Commentary*, the Jewish intellectual monthly, began to shift rightward, using his articles to help buttress the case for less radical politics and more conservative traditions. Jews, he said, buy a lot of books and read them, especially serious books.⁸

Conclusion

Like Cain, who feared the vagabond's existence, men cannot long bear the burdens of total rootlessness. Nomads will always be in the minority. Still, modern culture, with its philosophical and moral rootlessness, can conceivably become a temporary blessing. It provides a zone of freedom for Christians to begin to rethink and rebuild the foundations of culture. But this reconstruction must always be in terms of an *ideal of permanence*. The intellectual and cultural nomadism of modern urban secularism is a temporary phenomenon. Christians have an obligation to gain skills now, in every field of life, so that they will be prepared to replace the world's leadership, at every level, when secularism's cultural nomads wander off into the wilderness of drugs, retreat, totalitarianism, or suicide. We must move forward culturally, not in a static, nomadic circle. The static cycles of nomadism are demonic.

8. Nisbet made this statement to me in the late 1960s, although I cannot remember exactly when. I studied social theory under his guidance during the late 1960s. He was on my Ph.D. dissertation committee.

15

THE SIN OF ENVY

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him (Gen. 4:3–8).

The theocentric focus of this passage is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

The passage begins with an account of two men's offerings to God. These offerings revealed both men's commitment to God's hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant model.² God accepted one and rejected the other. The text does not say why. From later revelation, we know: God required a blood sacrifice. He required a representative substitute (point two) for man's sin. Abel imposed the ultimate sanction of an animal: death. Cain offered an agricultural sacrifice. It was rejected because there was no negative sanction involved, and also no legal representative. There was only an economic loss. Man cannot buy his way into favor with God.

Cain was angry. Why? Because he had believed that the best of his labor could buy favor with God. Wasn't his sacrifice just as great as Abel's? Economically, perhaps. Judicially, no.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstypm>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Sutton, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

God condemned Cain. He told him that his anger was not justified. He warned him of sin lying at the door. Then, without warning, he added a benefit for righteousness: "And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." Why? Because Cain was the older brother. He was the firstborn son. This was a position of honor even before the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law mandated a double portion of an inheritance for the firstborn son (Deut. 21:15–17).³ As the older brother, Cain deserved deference from Abel, even in their adulthood.

A. Envy and Self-Destruction

Cain did not benefit directly from the murder of Abel. His sacrifice would be no more acceptable to God than it had been before. In fact, it would be less acceptable. He was now a murderer. He did not kill Abel as a way to gain acceptance with God. He killed him because he resented the fact that Abel had experienced a success, whereas Cain had experienced a failure. Cain was so upset by discrepancy between Abel's success in his own failure that he believed that he could escape this sense of inferiority only by killing Abel.

Abel had not harmed Cain. They both could have brought acceptable sacrifices. There was nothing about Abel's sacrifice that kept Cain's sacrifice from being accepted by God. Abel's success was completely independent of Cain's failure. Abel did not cause Cain's failure.

There was nothing that Abel could have done or could do in the future that would make Cain's sacrifice acceptable to God. Cain deeply resented the success of Abel. He resented it so much that he killed him.

There was nothing that Abel could have done to buy off his brother. The very fact that he would have been in a position to buy off his brother would have constituted another reason for hating him. Cain resented the success of Abel. Any form of payment from Abel would have reminded Cain that Abel was in a better position than Cain was. There was no way that Abel could have escaped his brother's resentment by any payment to his brother.

This is why envy is so difficult to deal with. It cannot be placated by the victim. The fact that the victim is in a position to placate the envious person only makes the envious person more envious. He resents the fact that the other person is in a position to grant him any benefit

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

whatsoever.

Cain did not kill Abel to gain anything that belonged to Abel. He did not kill Abel in order to gain favor with God. He killed Abel because he resented the fact that Abel had been successful, and he had failed.

B. Envy vs. Jealousy

Cain was not a herdsman, nor did he want to become one. Abel was going to be his subordinate. God had promised this. By killing Abel, Cain did not gain favor with God. He lost what little favor he possessed: the position of the first-born son. He did not gain acceptance with God for his agricultural offerings by destroying Abel's ability to make animal offerings. He lost his safety from negative sanctions. He was no richer. He was poorer. Yet none of this swayed him. He wanted his brother out of the way, no matter the consequences.

The sin of envy is different from the sin of jealousy. The jealous person sees that someone else possesses something that he wants. He seeks to gain ownership of it. If he cannot do so through voluntary action, he seeks to gain ownership through violence or the threat of violence. He may be willing to compromise. He may settle for less than owning all of whatever it is. He is open to negotiation. He is not offering an all-or-nothing deal. If he can gain partial ownership, he is satisfied. "You had all of it. Now I own some of it. I win."

Envy is different. The envious person resents the other person for whatever he possesses. The difference between them galls him. He is not content with being placated. The very fact that the other person is in a position to placate him galls him. He is motivated by the desire to destroy, not the desire to possess. "You own it. I cannot have it. I will destroy it."

The envious person does not seek to gain equality through redistribution. He seeks equality through wealth destruction. By bringing down the person to his level, he gains a sense of satisfaction. He sees a benefit from the destruction of the other person's advantage. It is not that the envious person achieves greater wealth through obtaining all or part of what the other person owns. He can be satisfied only when the other person has been pulled down from his pedestal. The victim cannot successfully negotiate.

Jealousy can be bought off. If somebody is jealous about another person's possessions, he wants the other person's possessions. If there

is some way that he can gain ownership of some or all of these possessions, the jealous person will be satisfied. He does not resent them richer person because of the person's riches. He just wants some of those riches. He wants the rich person to share with him.

The envious person does not want the rich person to share with him. He resents the fact that the rich person is in a position to share anything with him. He does not wish to settle the matter by gaining access to the other person's possessions. He wants to tear the other person down, irrespective of whether this will benefit him.

The sin of envy is far more destructive than the sin of jealousy. It is all-encompassing, highly focused, and relentless. Only by destroying the other person's perceived advantage can he gain relief from the internal drive that moves him toward destruction.⁴

Envy is a destructive sin. It is internal. So, common measures to deal with it fail. The envy-driven person cannot easily overcome this sin, for the aggravating difference between him and his victim cannot be overcome. They stand as a testimony against him. He is inferior. The fact that Abel would remain his institutional subordinate did not placate Cain. Nothing placated him.

C. The Second-Born Son

The narrative of the Old Testament reveals a pattern: inheritance by the second-born son. Adam was the firstborn son. He sinned. He was punished. Cain was the firstborn son. He sinned. He was punished. His younger brother Seth became heir of the covenant line (Gen. 5:6–9). Ishmael was Abraham's first-born son. Isaac inherited. Esau was Isaac's first-born son. Jacob inherited. Manasseh was the first-born son. Ephraim inherited (Gen. 48). The New Covenant rests heavily on this Old Covenant pattern. Paul wrote: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45). Death came through Adam. Life comes through Christ.

Cain, the first-born son, murdered the second-born son, Abel. This cost Cain dearly. First, he would not rule over Abel. Second, he would spend his life under God's negative sanction. He had been a skilled farmer. He would henceforth be forced to learn to live in a city. "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the

4. The best study of envy is Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, [1966] 1987).

land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch” (Gen. 4:16–17). Third, his son inherited a city, but not the covenant line. Seth inherited that. Cain did not rule over Seth.

Cain was a loser. He knew he was a loser. Yet he offered no sign of repentance for his sins: offering an agricultural sacrifice to God, being angry with his brother, rejecting God’s gift of authority over his brother, slaying his brother, and seeking to conceal this from God (Gen. 4:9). He cared only about the threat of sanctions from his brothers. “Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him” (Gen. 4:14–15).

Cain was an unrepentant sinner. His main sin was murder. But murder was the effect of a deeper sin: envy.

Conclusion

Cain was driven by envy against Abel. He killed Abel as a way to deal with his resentment of God’s favor toward Abel and His lack of favor toward Cain. He was willing to suffer the loss of his social position in order to remove Abel from his sight. He gained no wealth; on the contrary, he lost it. He had been a farmer. He lost his land. He had been an heir of God. He became a disinherited son. Only by understanding the nature of the sin of envy can we make sense out of Abel’s action.

16

TO KEEP A BROTHER

And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? (Gen. 4:9).

The theocentric issue in this passage is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

The reason for my decision to include a chapter on this passage in an economic commentary on the Bible has nothing to do with the meaning of the passage, its implications, or its economic content. The context of the passage has very little to do with economics as such, except possibly the lawlessness of using coercion and violence against one's fellow man.

Unfortunately, the passage has become a familiar one in liberal political and theological circles. "My brother's keeper" has become a catch phrase. More to the point, "your brother's keeper" has become the shibboleth of shibboleths of the so-called Social Gospel movement,² second only to "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."

The standard explanation of this passage—completely out of context—is that each man owes his neighbor a great deal. Specifically, we all collectively owe each other life, liberty, and property, especially property, and most importantly, *property confiscated from the rich through political action*. We are supposedly the legal guardians of the poor, the infirm, and the feeble-minded. We have this responsibility not as Christian individuals, members of churches, or contributors to voluntary charities, but as members of the body politic. We become

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976).

our brother's *legally responsible keeper* for these two reasons: first, he is poor and we are not; second, both the poor and the rich are under the sovereignty of civil governments. We are all brothers because of *our shared humanity under the universal Fatherhood of God*, but more importantly, because of *our shared humanity under the sovereignty of the state*. It matters less to advocates of the Social Gospel what kind of God men believe they are sons of, than what kind of state men believe they are subordinate under. Their frame of reference is far more political than theological.³

A. The Prosecutor's Question

What was the context of Cain's response to God? First, he was a rebel whose sacrifice God had rejected (Gen. 4:5). Second, Cain had murdered his brother (Gen. 4:8). At this point, God approached Cain with a question concerning his brother's location. Cain answered with a lie: he did not know. Then he justified this lie to an omniscient God by asking a rhetorical question: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

What did this phrase mean? It should be obvious, but it is not obvious to the defenders of the socialistic Social Gospel. Cain sought to justify his supposed lack of knowledge concerning his brother's whereabouts. How was he supposed to know where Abel was? After all, was he Abel's keeper? We have to ask ourselves, what is the meaning of "keeper"? The Hebrew word used in Cain's rhetorical question is transliterated *shawmar*, meaning "guard, guardian." It is used specifically in I Samuel 17:20 to refer to guarding sheep. Strictly speaking, *shawmar* is not normally translated as "shepherd," but the nature of Cain's response indicates that "shepherd" was one meaning Cain had in mind. Cain was being very clever. Was he the guardian (shepherd) and Abel an incompetent, like some sheep? Of course not. Abel was in fact the shepherd (*rawhaw*, "keeper" or "shepherd"), not Cain. Abel was an independent, responsible man, not some helpless, stupid beast. Why, then, should God imagine that Cain had any knowledge about Abel's whereabouts? Did Abel report to Cain concerning his daily schedule, as a prisoner might report to a guard? Was Cain his brother's keeper? Of course not. Abel was the shepherd, not Cain; sheep are kept, not humans.

Cain asked this rhetorical question in a vain attempt to justify his

3. Joel McDurmon, *God versus Socialism: A Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

supposed lack of knowledge concerning his brother's whereabouts. Yet it was precisely this knowledge that Cain possessed. He was unquestionably not his brother's keeper; he was his brother's *murderer*. He was not a protector of the helpless, but rather a murderer of the responsible. He was being interrogated by his own Creator. Somehow he deluded himself into believing that his questioner, God, would accept Cain's retort that there was no reason for Cain to have any knowledge concerning his brother's location. After all, both brothers were independent men and neither was his brother's keeper.

B. A Question of Control

The meaning of "keeper" here implies the relationship between a controlling shepherd and a flock of docile, stupid, incompetent, wandering, helpless, and very profitable sheep. The primary economic function of sheep is, after all, to be sheared. They are to serve the financial (and sometimes gastronomical) desires of their masters. Anyone who begins discussing the state's supposed function to serve as a "keeper," meaning either "shepherd" or "guard," had better understand that the word "shepherd" implies "sheep," and the word "guard" implies "inmates"—or at the very least—it implies "wards."

This fact was understood by Herbert Bird when he wrote: "For to be one's brother's keeper implies just what Cain insinuated that it does—to supervise, in greater or lesser measure, another's life; to take it upon oneself to determine what is good for someone else; to override his liberty, and even his personality, in the interests of a social theory. To be one's brother's keeper is to control him."⁴ Anyone who misinterprets Cain's words, using the phrase "my brother's keeper" or some similar phrase, is saying that others are not responsible for themselves and their own affairs, and that they have a moral and legal right to part of the property of their neighbors. Having a legal right to his property thereby brings the coercive state into the picture. "We," meaning the state, meaning those who control the state, meaning politicians and especially bureaucrats, are supposedly responsible for the welfare of others. The state therefore has the obligation to serve as the official keeper of the unfortunate, the ignorant, the infirm, the lazy, the rebellious, the intoxicated, the unemployed, the extravagant corporations inefficient

4. Herbert Bird, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" *The Freeman* (May 1966), p. 56. (<http://bit.ly/BirdBrother>). Rev. Bird was an Orthodox Presbyterian Church missionary to Eritrea for many years.

enough to go bankrupt and large enough to create worries about the economic and political effects of their impending bankruptcy, and the banks that have made too many noncollectable loans to too many insolvent debtors, and everyone else who gets into economic trouble from time to time and begins to clamor for tax-supported government aid. “We” become full-time keepers, except when we are already full-time sheep. The tax burden of being full-time keepers increasingly convinces people that they are not much better off than sheep, who at least do not have to do anything in order to be fed, clothed, housed, and entertained. *The state becomes the keeper*, and productive citizens are sheared of their wealth, while the welfare recipients are sheared of their self-respect, independence, and incentive to work.⁵

God’s answer to Cain’s lie and his rhetorical question: God knew where Abel was, Cain knew where Abel was, and judgment had now arrived. In short, He paid no attention at all to Cain’s rhetorical question. Cain was a murderer, not a keeper. Abel had not been a sheep. He had been a man. Judgment had arrived.

Some of those who parrot the “brother’s keeper” phrase may be nothing more than ignorant, misled, good-hearted people who know little about the Bible and less about responsible living apart from coercive wealth redistribution. But those who first made the phrase popular were not ignorant about the Bible. They knew very well what the Bible said, and they rejected its testimony. They were determined to rewrite the Bible, misinterpret the Bible, and create a new secular humanist religion in the name of the Bible.⁶ They knew the power of the pulpit in the United States, and they sought to capture the seminaries, religious publishing houses, and religious newspapers in every denomination.⁷ With few exceptions, they had achieved their goals by 1940 in the North, and by 1965 in the South. The seminaries had become liberal by the 1930s in most of the denominations, so it was just a matter of time. Commenting on the career of Walter Rauschenbusch, perhaps the most influential defender of the Social Gospel in his era (around 1910), historian C. Gregg Singer wrote:

Rauschenbusch was keenly aware of the necessity of a policy of deception in introducing his brand of Christian Socialism into the

5. Gary North, “The Hidden Costs of Free Lunches,” *ibid.* (April 1978).

6. Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressive Achievement in American Civilization, 1889–1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

7. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996). (<http://bit.ly/northcf>)

churches of this country. He thus gave it a name that was designed to make it seem evangelical in character and not revolutionary at the same time. Calling for the Christianization of the social order for the realization of the kingdom of God, Rauschenbusch avoided demanding the government ownership of the railroads and other public utilities. He simply called for governmental controls of various kinds, confident that such a program would eventually bring the kind of socialism he wanted. He was willing to uphold a policy of gradualism in his program of social and democratic revolution.⁸

The statist theology of “my brother’s keeper” is consistent, though its advocates are deeply involved in the deception of Christians and others who do not recognize it for what it is. *It is a theology of substitution*: the state for the God of the Bible. It was enormously successful in confusing twentieth-century American Christians. It helped to convince them to promote political actions that are diametrically opposed to those recommended in the Bible. At the minimum, Bible-believing Christians have been convinced that there is nothing in the Bible to counter the message of social improvement through state action. Some have even gone so far as to claim that there is no such thing as Christian economics, and therefore the dominant ideology of wealth redistribution through state coercion should not be challenged biblically. Yet the proponents of the Social Gospel have almost universally been advocates of a rival religion, the religion of secular humanism. Singer put it well when he concluded:

The development of liberalism in the twentieth century pushed the God of the Scriptures further into the background of human affairs and gave an increasingly important role to man himself so that God, to the extent to which he was considered at all, was benignly regarded as an ally of progress and democracy. He could cooperate with the human race should he desire to do so, but any refusal on his part would not be taken too seriously by those in control of the situation in this country. . . . For many leaders the very term “God” had ceased to symbolize much more than the vague yearning of humanity for a better life on earth and the realization of the “best that was in the human race.”⁹

8. C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975), p. 24. (<http://bit.ly/singerua>)

9. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), p. 287.

Conclusion

“I am not my brother’s keeper, nor am I a sheep to be kept by my brother, my neighbor, or the political representatives of either my brother or my neighbor. I am my brother’s *brother*.” This is the proper answer to the misused phrase, “Aren’t you your brother’s keeper?” Rhetorical questions, whether used by murderers like Cain or socialists in the pulpit, are nonetheless rhetorical. They are supposed to silence the opposition. God answered Cain’s deliberately misleading rhetorical question with the truth, calling him a murderer and, by implication, a liar. This is the proper response to destroyers who misuse the words of men, let alone misuse the word of God. A rhetorical question should call forth a straightforward response. When men misuse the word of God, their judgment is at hand. Let us be on the side of the Judge, not at the side of the collectivist keepers.

All of this is not to deny in any way our moral responsibilities toward brothers in need. However, we must not expect to find guidelines for brotherly charity in this passage of Scripture. All that we learn about brotherhood in this passage is that we are not to murder our brothers. It has nothing to do with the hypothetical charity of tax-funded professional “keepers.”

CALLING AND OCCUPATION

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch (Gen. 6:12–14).

The theocentric issue here is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

The story of Noah and the ark is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. It tells of the wrath of God against all humanity, with the exception of one family. It also tells the story of God's judgment on all the land-based animals of the earth, with the exception of those that were brought into the ark. We see here once again the biblical principle that creatures under the jurisdiction of people reaping God's negative sections suffer along with their guilty heads. There was no escape for the animals that did not make it into the ark.

This is the story of a man who had a crucial calling: to save the planet. He had to do this in his spare time. He also had to make a living. This task paid nothing up front. If "full-time Christian service" means "working for the church," Noah was not in full-time Christian service. We are not told what Noah and his sons did for a living. The usual assumption is that they were involved in agriculture. Whether or not Noah and his family were involved in agriculture, they did have to make a living, day by day, year by year, during the time of the construction of the ark. There was no market for the ark. Noah was not instructed by God to sell tickets.

Consider their occupations. Here was a family that was involved in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

the construction of a gigantic ship. They were building it on dry land. There was no way for them to transport this ship to a ocean. They must have been the laughing stock of the community. The ark was a laughing stock of the community for years and then decades. Here was a family that had clearly lost touch with reality. These people were building a boat the likes of which no one had ever seen. They were doing this on dry ground.

God did not tell Noah to warn the people that a great flood was coming. God did not say anything about a flood. Noah must have drawn conclusions about the nature of the negative sanctions to come, but he was not specifically informed about the details, as far as the biblical text indicates.

The family had no assignment regarding evangelism. God did not tell Noah and his family to hand out tracts telling people to repent. He told Noah to build an ark, and He gave Noah a set of plans for it. Other than that, God had no instructions for Noah at all.

Noah was the central figure of humanity between Adam and Jesus Christ. Other biblical figures were important in the lines of covenantally faithful people, but Noah and his sons were crucial. All humanity traces its genetic inheritance back to Noah, and the entire animal kingdom had its genetic origins in the animals inside the ark. With the exception of Noah and his family, the entire history of man up until that time led to death and destruction. Noah was the turning point in all of human history, and also in the history of the animals.

We are not told what Noah did for a living. We are told what Noah did to live. He is not important historically for what he did for a living. He is important historically for what he did to live. Noah's occupation was so unimportant that the Bible does not even mention it. The Bible does tell us what he did to save his family and the animal kingdom from destruction. Until the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, Noah did more than any other human history to save humanity. No other figure in history comes close to the importance of Noah, with the exception of Adam. Noah is the central character from Adam to Christ.

This being the case, it is clear that the most important thing that Noah did was to build the ark. *It was the most important thing that anyone did from Adam to Jesus Christ.* In contrast, we are told nothing about what he did for a living.

In discussing the work of Noah and his family, I distinguish between their jobs and their calling. Their jobs were whatever tasks

they did to support themselves while building the ark. In modern terminology, their jobs put food on the table. Their most important work appeared to be ludicrous for a long time. They must have suffered considerable ridicule. Yet this was the most important work that anyone had ever done, and it was the most important work that any family has ever done. Nothing that you do will ever match what Noah did. We can say this of everyone else in history, with the exception of Jesus Christ.

Noah's calling was to build the ark, and he was the only man who could do it. He was irreplaceable, because he was the only righteous patriarch in the world. God picked him especially for his righteousness. There was no one else on the face of the earth whom God could have picked. It was the most important task that anyone had on earth, and he was the only person who could fulfill it.

A. What Is a Calling?

The construction of the ark was Noah's calling. I define calling as follows: *the most important thing that you can do in which you would be most difficult to replace*. Noah's calling was not his occupation. We are told nothing of his occupation. Unless he was supported full-time by his sons, who in turn had occupations, Noah had a job, but we are told nothing about it. His job was irrelevant for the story of Noah. His job was relevant for putting food on the table, but it was not relevant for the salvation of the world.

In the story of Noah, we probably have the best example in history of the difference between an occupation and a calling. Whatever Noah did for a living, he was probably easily replaceable. He certainly was more easily replaceable in his job than he was in his calling. So replaceable was he in his job that the Bible does not bother to tell us what his job was. It was just a way to earn a living, which in turn enabled him to pursue his calling. Nobody paid him anything to pursue his calling. His calling was a negative as far as the general public was concerned: a joke. Yet it was the most important work that he could do for which he would have been most difficult to replace.

This distinction between occupation and calling is at the heart of civilization. Most people are forgotten within 50 or 60 years of their death. Their children remember them, and the older grandchildren remember them, but the great grandchildren do not. When two generations die off, the memory of their ancestors dies with them. What the

ancestor did for a living is forgotten. Men's occupations leave no trace in almost all cases. The men are easily replaceable, and therefore the work that they do is not memorable.

There are a few people who achieve something memorable through their callings. For most of these famous people, their callings are their occupations. We think of famous political leaders, generals, or inventors. All of these people were paid to perform their callings.

Even in the case of philosophers, they are usually paid. Socrates had a job, but almost no one remembers what that job was. He was a stonemason. He left that occupation to pursue his calling. His self-assigned calling was to challenge men in their fundamental beliefs. It was also to train a younger generation of men to do the same. It cost him his life.

Jesus had a calling. His calling was to redeem the world. The initial means of His calling was the discipling of a small handful of people. For three years, He trained these men. He had been a carpenter, but He abandoned that job for the sake of His calling. Peter and his brother abandoned their callings as fishermen to become disciples. All of the disciples abandoned their lifetime occupations. Jesus called them to serve Him in a special way, but they did not make their livings serving as disciples.

The best New Testament example of someone who supported his calling by means of his job was the apostle Paul. We are told that he made tents for a living (Acts 18:3).² We are told nothing about the size of the tents, the price of the tents, or whether he sold the tents to a wholesaler or to the general public. We are only told that he made tents for a living.

His calling was to serve as an apostle. He did the most important work he could do for which he would have been most difficult to replace. No one thinks of the apostle Paul as one of the world's great tentmakers. No one thinks of him as a businessman. He became a tentmaker because he could no longer get paid by the Jews as a persecutor. His calling before his conversion was to be a persecutor. His tentmaking was an afterthought.

B. Two Kinds of Work

A man who finds his calling is blessed of God. A man who has an

2. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

occupation that he enjoys is also blessed by God. But rare is the man who achieves his calling as an employee. Ministers of the gospel do this. Missionaries achieve this. Some teachers achieve this. But most men never achieve enough in their occupations that they could legitimately call their occupations their callings. They may do something important in their jobs, but in most cases they are easily replaceable. Even in those cases where they are not replaceable, such as professional athletes of the highest caliber, they know that their callings will soon be over, and they will have to find a job. They will no longer be able to compete successfully as professional athletes. Their callings are short-lived. They last for a few years, and then fade from almost everyone's memory.

For most men and women, no one will pay them a salary for their callings. They are paid for their occupations. One of the reasons why so few men have callings is because they are unwilling or unable to perform their callings in their spare time. They do not finance their callings by means of their occupations. They spend the bulk of their time on their occupations, and they allocate whatever remains among such activities as watching sports on television, drinking in taverns, and spending ten minutes a day with their children. Rare is the man who self-consciously accepts a lower paying job because this job provide sufficient free time that he can work on his calling. Very few men even understand what a calling is. They have not identified the most important thing they can do with their lives for which they would be most difficult to replace.

When a man devotes the bulk of his labor to an occupation that is not also his calling, he risks two things. First, he risks discovering late in life that he never had a calling. Second, he risks *not* discovering late in life that he never had a calling. Such men do not pay attention to the need for some service that they could provide. When that service is not paid for in a competitive market, those who possess the skills to perform that service tend to ignore it.

Consider a physician. He could be a low-paid physician on the foreign mission field. Some Christian physicians do this. They make very little money, and they have enormous impact in communities in which no other physician lives within a hundred miles. Most physicians practice their occupations throughout their whole lives, earning a decent living and knowing that they are essentially replaceable. The physician on the mission field knows that he is very close to being irreplaceable. He is irreplaceable because nobody in the community he serves has

the money to pay a Western-trained physician. They can barely afford to pay the local witch doctor.

One solution for physicians who want to become missionaries is to save a large percentage of their income in their occupations. They budget carefully; they restrict their spending; and they save up enough money so that they can afford to go on the mission field when they are 50 or 55 years old. They understand that their callings are not their occupations. They understand that the only way they can support their callings is to earn enough money, and learn how to invest that money successfully, so that the income from their investments will fund their years on the foreign mission field.

What is true of a physician who wants to become a foreign missionary is equally true of any man who sees that he could be of enormous service in an area of life in which the people he will serve cannot afford to pay him what he could earn by serving the highest bidders. His employer sells the man's services or output to the highest bidders. The highest bidders are not the same people the worker could best serve if he was willing to quit his job and devote full-time service to poverty-stricken beneficiaries.

With respect to filling the needs of people who have few alternatives, a man has a calling if he can budget his time and money in such a way that he can devote time to serving those who could not otherwise afford his services. Here is his calling. It is supported by his occupation. In budgeting your money, you had better first decide what your calling is. If you do not know what your calling is, you will not allocate your time and money in such a way that you will maximize your contribution to the kingdom of God.

Most Christian men never discover their callings. They are tempted to see their callings in terms of their jobs. They define themselves in terms of their jobs, not in terms of their callings. They confuse their callings with their jobs, and in doing so, most of them neglect the most important thing that they could do for which they would be most difficult to replace.

What if Noah had spent all of his time at the office? Imagine him on his deathbed, with the water up to the mattress, telling his family, "I should have spent less time at the office." The response would have been: "You certainly should have."

Until a man finds his calling, he will not budget his time and his money efficiently. If he does not set aside time and money to pursue his calling, he will miss out on his calling. Most men miss out on their

callings. They devote their lives to the most profitable thing they can do for which they would be fairly easy to replace.

Conclusion

Noah had a calling: to preserve life on earth. It was the most important thing he could do for which he was most difficult to replace. He also had an occupation. We do not know what that was. He earned his living through his occupation. He used this income to prepare the ark. His job was subordinate to his calling. Both were God-given tasks. They were not of equal importance.

Noah served God full-time: as the ark's builder and as a producer of goods or services to customers. Both tasks were religiously motivated. He had to give an account to God of his work. If he had had no job, he would not have been able to build the ark. No one was going to pay him to build the ark. To identify his day job as secular and the ark building job as religious would miss the point. Both tasks were religious. One task was non-profit in the short term and of ultimate profit in the long term: the ark. The other was profitable in the short term but doomed in the long term. All of his customers died.

18

THE ECOLOGICAL COVENANT

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered (Gen. 9:1–2).

The theocentric focus of this passage is hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Covenant Renewal

The dominion covenant given to Adam and Eve by God (Gen. 1:28)² was reaffirmed between mankind and God after the great Flood. God made it clear to them that the dominion covenant was not limited to the garden of man's pre-Fall condition, but that it applies wherever men work out the implications of their faiths. *There can be no lawful escape from the comprehensive responsibilities associated with the dominion covenant.* Any attempt to deny its binding nature, or to eliminate any of its features, must be regarded as antinomian—a denial of the law of God. Man is unquestionably the legitimate dominant creature on earth, under the jurisdiction of God. Man is responsible for the enforcement of his Lord's covenants, even as he himself is bound by them.

The whole earth was placed under a curse as a result of man's rebellion (Gen. 3:17–19).³ The animals of the dry land perished as a result of man's sin and God's response in sending the great Flood. As sub-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Chapter 4.

3. Chapter 12.

ordinate to man, the creation necessarily shares in some of the blessings and curses brought upon man. This is basic to covenantal life: *subordinates participate in the successes and defeats of their superiors*, in much the same way that low-level military troops end up as victors, prisoners, or corpses, depending upon the decisions made by their superiors in the chain of command. The fact that nature suffers because of man's rebellion is evidence of *nature's subordinate position under man*, and therefore evidence of *man's position of dominion over nature*.

God showed grace to Noah's family. Through Noah, God also demonstrated His grace to the animals that were carried into the ark. A remnant of mankind preserved a remnant of the animals. God's covenant structure obviously extends beyond the mere salvation of individual souls: "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth" (Gen. 9:9–10). The sign of this covenant of peace between God and man, and therefore between God and the animals under man's dominion, is the rainbow, which apparently was unknown prior to the great Flood. As long as the rainbow survives, God proclaimed, His covenant with the creation, both man and beast, will survive.

Noah's ark stands as the greatest single implement of ecology in the history of the creation. God had Noah select pairs of some animals, and seven pairs of the "clean" animals (Gen. 7:2). These would be preserved with food provided by Noah, and by the ark itself (Gen. 6). Man mediated God's common (preserving) grace to the animals. Christ also mediated between God and the animals, as well as between God and man, though not in the sense of mediating regeneration for the animals. His grace will eventually lead to the abolition of the curse on the animal world (Rom. 8:21).⁴ Man's role is therefore ministerial under Christ, who in turn mediates between God the Father and mankind.

Men have responsibilities beyond their own species. The covenant of Genesis 9:1–17 places man in covenantal authority over the animals. This is why God put the fear of man in them. Animals feared Noah and his family, making it easier for Noah and his heirs to subdue the earth, for the long life spans granted to earlier generations were about to be removed (Gen. 6:3b). The ability of men to master the laws of

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

creation in a single lifetime was also going to be steadily removed. The degeneration of culture prior to the Flood unquestionably resulted in reduced knowledge of the biblical principles of law, presumably including the laws of nature. Noah and his sons would not have the same ability to dominate nature that previous long-lived and covenantally faithful generations possessed, and God acknowledged man's weakened condition by placing the fear of man in the animals.

God holds back His final judgment in order to give men sufficient time to work out their salvation or damnation with fear and trembling (II Peter 3:9; Phil. 2:12). He will see all His plans fulfilled in time and on earth. He has guaranteed man that there will never again be a universal flood, and the rainbow is the token of His promise. But this sign also means that man is under the terms of the ecological covenant. The dread of man in the animals was put there in order to protect man, but also to provide him with additional authority over the animal kingdom. Authority is supposed to be used lawfully. *Our lawful authority is supposed to call forth our covenantal service.*

Men are supposed to serve the realm of nature analogously to the way that Noah served it. His own service in preserving the lives of the animals also benefited himself and his heirs. The clean animals that were preserved could then serve as a means of sacrifice before God (Gen. 8:20) and for food (Gen. 9:3). God's creation is therefore to be respected. Men have been given power over it; they therefore have a full responsibility to prune it and care for it. The earth is not supposed to run wild in terms of its own nature any more than mankind is supposed to run wild in terms of man's fallen nature. Nature, like man, is to be governed lawfully. Nature must not be allowed to remain autonomous and idle forever; neither is it to be destroyed by men in their pretended autonomy. *Responsible pruning must not become irresponsible destroying.* The rainbow reminds us: nature is under man, not over him, because God is over man, and His grace preserves both. We are to be husbandmen, loving and disciplining that which has been entrusted to us for our personal development and enjoyment, and also for the benefit of nature itself.

The ecological covenant of Genesis 9 is a recapitulation of the dominion covenant of Genesis 1:28. To fulfill the terms of the ecological covenant, men need all their intellectual and cultural skills, including the implements of science, just as Noah needed knowledge and his great implement of ecology, the ark. Subduing the Earth involves just that, the subduing of all the earth. It is not simply an agri-

cultural covenant, for man's life is intertwined in a total division of labor. We cannot artificially separate "agriculture" from "business," "science," and "technology." Each man's efforts are supposed to complement the efforts of his neighbor.

B. Narrow Evangelism

This fact of economic life was ignored by the Bible Presbyterian Church, a small American denomination which in 1970 rejected the concept of the cultural mandate. The delegates to the 34th Synod un-animously capitulated to their ecclesiastical director, Rev. Carl McIntire, concluding that God's requirement that we subdue the earth in no way refers to the broader aspects of culture. All God had in mind was maximum biological reproduction and agriculture. Commenting on Genesis 1:28, the Synod declared:

This same command was renewed to Noah (Genesis 9) after the flood without any reference to the word "and subdue it." Furthermore, the verse has nothing to do with culture, in the present sense of the word. The so-called "cultural mandate" is based entirely on one word of the verse, the word that is translated "and subdue it." Like all words of Scripture, this word should be interpreted in context. Here the context is that of filling the empty earth with people. It says that the earth should be brought under cultivation, to enable these people to survive and multiply. That, and that alone, is what it means.⁵

So cut and dried! "That, and that alone, is what it means." But what does "that, and that alone" actually involve? How can we separate modern agriculture from the whole fabric of modern science, modern economics, and modern culture? How can any developing society segregate agriculture into some immediately post-flood context, telling farmers that they, and they alone, are responsible for the fulfillment of this mandate, and that the dominion covenant refers to nothing outside the borders of the farm? One word suffices to categorize such biblical exegesis: ludicrous.

The Synod did not stop there. Having accepted one preposterous conclusion, it could not resist asserting another: "We oppose the 'cultural mandate' also because it gives a false idea of the place of the Christian in this age of sin, and cuts the nerve of true missionary work

5. Cited in R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 724.

and evangelism.” In the Synod’s framework, missionary work and evangelism are truncated operations. They would call men to repentance from their sins, but then leave them without concrete, specific guidelines for godly action in their day-to-day lives in the arts (why not pornography?), in business (why not false advertising?), in government (why not socialism?), in military affairs (why not a sneak attack?), and on and on. What are men to repent from? And once converted, what are they to do about the evils from which they have been converted? Should they go back “into the world” (as if conversion somehow removes us from this world) and practice the same things? Should newly converted pornographers continue reaping a fortune from selling pornography? Does a so-called conversion of the pornographer somehow baptize all future pornography published by “converted” publishers?

Why is the task of evangelism so narrowly defined? If the Synod had been consistent, at least the preaching of the dominion covenant would have been understood as valid for agricultural pursuits. But then the requirements for preaching the whole counsel of God would necessarily spread from agricultural pursuits to agricultural equipment manufacturing, and government land policy, and so forth, right back into the fearful world of reality, from which twentieth-century American fundamentalism fled for generations. Prior to the Presidential campaign of 1980, twentieth-century fundamentalists did not wish to be bothered with the hard discipline of providing guidelines—distinctly Christian guidelines—for every area of human life. So, they constructed a theology of zero or little social responsibility in order to justify their own laziness and lack of competence in the world outside the sanctuary.⁶

Conclusion

The ecological covenant of Genesis 9 cannot be separated theologically from the dominion covenant of Genesis 1. The ecological covenant is simply a corollary to the more comprehensive dominion covenant. Every man operates under the terms of this ecological covenant, whether he acknowledges the fact or not. No man can escape being

6. See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), especially chapter 10. See also Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986). On the legitimacy of Christian social action see *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer 1981): “Symposium on Social Action.”

judged in terms of his responsibilities before God to adhere to the terms of this covenant. A theology which in any way mitigates or denies the existence of this covenant is antinomian, meaning that it is in direct and flagrant opposition to the revealed will of God. Such a theology must be avoided.

THE WORLD TRADE INCENTIVE

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth; and they left off to build the city (Gen. 11:7–8).

The theocentric issue here is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

The builders of the tower of Babel were attempting to construct a symbol of their unity—religious—cultural, linguistic, and political. Their symbol was to be a great tower, probably a Babylonian ziggurat, which was a multi-tiered structure that resembled stepping stones to heaven from whichever direction a person approached it. Men sought to “make us a name,” that is, to define themselves and their existence autonomously. Like Adam, who named—defined, classified—the animals in the garden, these men also had the power of naming. They wanted to build a symbol of their unity in order not to be scattered (Gen. 11:4). They needed political and religious unity in order to enforce the unitary power to define mankind. They feared disunity, which would compromise the ability of a unitary name-giver to enforce its names and definitions. As Rushdoony commented: “In all religious faiths one of the inevitable requirements for logical thought asserts itself in a demand for *the unity of the godhead*. Hence, since humanity is god, there can be no division in this godhead, humanity. Mankind must therefore be forced to unite.”² Humanism demands a unified god, namely, humanity, either through politics or free trade.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1964] 2002), p. 142.

A. The Politics of Unity

What was the agency of this unitary aspect of mankind? It was the political order. Again, citing Rushdoony:

The Tower of Babel was an attempt to force this apostate thesis of ultimate oneness and equality onto all mankind. There was to be no division among men, and no separation or discrimination, only an absolute unity. The religion and virtue or ethics of Babylon was to be the fact of humanity, and community was simply in the common fact of humanity. In the City of God, community is through the Redeemer in God; in the City of man, the Society of Satan, the ground of communion is a common humanity irrespective of any religious or moral differences. All differences must be suppressed in favor of the anonymity of union. The good life and the full life are in and through the State. The theological requirements for the unity of the godhead require this faith in the unity of humanity, its one true god. Hence, "Let us build us a city," a one-world order, and usher in paradise apart from God. . . . In terms of all this the meaning of the proclamation "Let us make us a *name*," becomes clear: let us be our own blessing, our own Messiah, saviour and god. Let us be our own creator, our own ultimate source of meaning and definition. Let there be no value above and beyond us; let man be the source of the definition, not the subject of it. Let man be beyond good and evil, and beyond meaning, since he is himself the source of all definition.³

The seemingly innocuous words, "Let us make us a name," are crucially important.

They had hoped to build a tower in order that they might not be scattered. Yet in attempting this project, they guaranteed their future scattering. They stood against God, and those who do not gather with God are scattered abroad (Matt. 12:20). God scattered them in order to restrain the outworking of their evil imaginations (Gen. 11:6). The quest for total unity in terms of principles other than those laid down in the Bible is a perverse quest. *Unity is to be confessional and ethical, not egalitarian or humanistic.* There are always distinctions in any community—different functions, different responsibilities, different skills (I Cor. 12).⁴ The attempt therefore to construct a one-world order was doomed from the start, for the nations survive throughout Bible history and will persist into the very city of God (Rev. 21:24–26).

3. R. J. Rushdoony, "The Society of Satan," *Christian Economics* (Aug. 4, 1964); reprinted in *Biblical Economics Today*, II (Oct./Nov. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/rjrsos>)

4. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

Such a one-state order has to involve extensive political centralization and therefore the loss of personal freedom and personal responsibility. By confounding their language, God removed the threat of totalitarian rule over the whole face of the earth. Secular totalitarian regimes are necessarily limited in geographical scope. The larger the geography of tyranny, the more resources must be wasted to maintain control. Productivity drops.

B. The Grace of Decentralization

As always, there was an element of grace within God's external judgment. While He stymied the pagans' centralized religious-political order with its pretensions of autonomy and absolute sovereignty, He simultaneously gave men conditions that were more favorable to political freedom. *Localism*, the criterion of a decentralized free order, could then be infused with another requirement of a free society, biblical faith.

Second, God tied this decentralization to the existence of separate languages. Apart from religion and direct family ties, there are few bonds, if any, that are more culturally binding than a shared language. When a language ceases to be spoken, it is because the society in which the language once flourished has been destroyed or scattered, or died out. God provided men with a key factor in the creation of a sense of community, without which human society cannot survive.

Third, God scattered them geographically. Economically, this was a very important aspect of God's judgment. Prior to the great flood, there seems to have been a common climate. Mammoths found in the Arctic still have semi-tropical foliage in their stomachs, indicating a rapid cooling. Otherwise, the contents of the animals' stomachs would have rotted inside the stomachs before the frozen outer bodies had time to pass the cold to the inner parts. One estimate has placed the necessary external temperature at minus 150 Fahrenheit—in the middle of the "arctic" tropics!⁵ The change was widespread and rapid.

5. The most sophisticated estimates of the temperatures required to quick-freeze a Siberian mammoth are found in Joseph C. Dillow, *The Waters Above: Earth's Pre-Flood Vapor Canopy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), pp. 383–96. His book provides an extensive bibliography of the source material, including Henry H. Howorth's out-of-print classic, *The Mammoth and the Flood* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1887); Charles Hapgood, *The Path of the Pole* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1970); Bassett Digby, *The Mammoth: And Mammoth Hunting Grounds in Northeast Siberia* (New York: Appleton, 1926). Dillow's is the best book to date on the universal climate before Noah's Flood, and the catastrophic climatic changes that the Flood produced.

After this cataclysmic alteration of the earth's tropical or semitropical climate, the mammoths no longer munched foliage in Siberia; a jungle no longer bloomed beneath the new ice of Antarctica. Men would now live in differing climates and on land with varying agricultural resources. They needed to specialize their economic production in order to increase output per unit of resource input.

Men desire more wealth. To attain their goals, they are forced to cooperate economically through voluntary exchange. Self-interest restrains the lust for blood, destruction, and rebellion in the hearts of men. God added the diversity of climates to the curse of the ground as an additional means of restraint on men's lawless activities. It was probably in Noah's time that the climates diversified with the breakup of the watery firmament above the earth. The linguistic separation came at Babel, perhaps a century later. So did the races of man. God was dividing and scattering men, yet He also saw to it that men had incentives to trade, for the curse of the ground still restrained men's productivity. It is likely that climatic differences, then as now, forced some nations into trade before others, but most eventually traded. Men would pursue increasingly specialized, and therefore increasingly productive and efficient, callings before God.

The scattering at Babel was therefore part of a two-fold process. First, it restrained the creation of a rebellious one-world political tyranny. God's response pointed to the illegitimacy of any political order based exclusively on the idea of monism, the ultimate One. Second, by providing teachable languages to the scattered populations, He restrained the creation of total anarchy and total nomadism. Family heads were divided from other family heads, but it was not a question of one language per person. God established a balance between *individualistic anarchy* and *totalitarian monism* in the politics and cultures of rebellious men. Families persevered.

Given the curse of the ground and the post-Flood diversity of climate, the scattering provided two important factors in an economic framework. First, it restrained the creation of a centralized socialistic bureaucracy. Second, it gave men an incentive to trade and thus gain access to the fruits of other cultures and other climates at low costs. Again, the one and the many were simultaneously recognized, this time in the economic realm: *the unity of trade amid diversity: international, racial, and cultural*.⁶

6. On the philosophical problem of unity and diversity in Western thought, see R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ul-*

C. An Ancient New Idea

The relationship between Genesis 11 and world trade has been understood by scholars since at least the fourth century A.D. Libanius, the pagan instructor of Basil and John Chrysostom, held to the “scattering-trade” outline. Libanius was a defender of the legitimacy of international trade. In his *Orationes*, he wrote: “God did not bestow all products upon all parts of the earth, but distributed His gifts over different regions, to the end that men might cultivate a social relationship because one would have need of the help of the other. And so he called commerce into being, that all men might be able to have common enjoyment of the fruits of earth, no matter where produced.”⁷ Basil and Chrysostom picked up this idea and placed it within a Christian framework.⁸ Theodoret, the fifth-century Bishop of Cyrus, a town about a two days’ journey west of Antioch, held this view. We know he was influenced by the writings of Chrysostom.⁹ Finally, Ambrose took up the idea. His *Hexameron* was a Latin adaptation of Basil’s Greek title of the same name (“six days”).¹⁰ Not all the church fathers were equally favorable to trade, but at least a tradition was established, one which found adherents throughout the middle ages. As Jacob Viner stated in his 1966 lecture before the American Philosophical Society, which he did not live to put into final, fully documented form as a full-length book, as he had planned to do:

I have the impression that there are few ideas of comparable age, subtlety, and prevalence with the idea whose history I have been commenting on, which have so often been received by modern scholars who encounter them in a text as being both important and novel. The origin of the idea of the interest of providence in commerce has been attributed by scholars to Bodin, to Calvin, to an English scholastic of the fourteenth century, Richard of Middleton, to an Italian Renaissance writer, L. B. Alberti, to Grotius, and to any number of others.¹¹

timacy (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1971] 2007).

7. Cited by Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1972), pp. 36–37.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

9. “Theodoret,” in John McClintock and James Strong (eds.), *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), X, p. 320.

10 Viner, *Role of Providence*, p. 37.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

For all we know, it may be found in the writings of someone even earlier than Libanius, but Viner had not discovered it any earlier.

While it is not universally true that “where goods do not cross borders, armies will”—that old nineteenth-century slogan¹²—it is true that free trade will make more obvious the real economic costs of cutting off such exchange through military conquest, or attempts at conquest. It is built into post-Babel society that men, although scattered abroad, although divided by language and culture, although heirs of very different historic traditions, will always be faced with an economic lure to increase their productivity by trucking and bartering. Those who refuse to trade thereby reduce the size of their market, and as Adam Smith said so long ago, the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market.¹³ By reducing its own national division of labor, a society reduces its per capita income, for it has necessarily reduced its per capita output. No society can choose to trade less without bearing the costs of forfeited per capita income. Trade brings added wealth.

Conclusion

The dominion covenant impels men to extend their control over the earth. The curse of the ground limits the productivity of solitary, autonomous men. The scattering of Babel has reduced the ability of central planning bureaucracies to substitute socialist allocation for voluntary exchange. The unity of mankind can be expressed through trade, but the diversity of cultures and environments prevents this economic unity from becoming the foundation of a bureaucratic one-state world. Unity and diversity are held in balance, or at least not tipped so far as to allow either to become totally destructive of society. The subduing of the earth can continue, therefore, by the operation of all these factors: the dominion covenant, the curse of the ground, the scattering of mankind, and free trade. When Viner chose as the title for his lectures, “The Role of Providence in the Social Order,” he had the right idea.

12. “If men and commodities are prevented from crossing the borderlines, why should not armies try to pave the way for them?” Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 828. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

13. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), ch. 3.

INVESTMENT AND CHARACTER

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. . . (Gen. 12:1–2).

The theocentric focus of this passage is inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. The Growth of Capital

It was not to some poor man that God came with His command; it was to Abram, a wealthy man who was “very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (13:2). These three commodities were basic signs of wealth throughout Old Testament times, and all three served as money, especially the two precious metals. Abram’s wealth was mobile, which is understandable, given the fact that he had already been uprooted once before, when his father left Ur of the Chaldees, heading for the land of Canaan, stopping in Haran and settling there (11:31). Now he was being called upon to move again, to continue the journey begun by his father.

Abram’s nephew Lot, who was also wealthy, decided to accompany Abram. The two families held their wealth in the form of cattle, and so great were the herds that the land in any particular area of Canaan was not capable of sustaining all of them (13:6). The result was conflict between herdsmen of the two families (13:7). The original patriarchs—Abram of the Israelites and Lot of the Moabites and Ammonites (Gen.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

19:37)—were men possessing great capital resources. God in no way questioned the legitimacy of their wealth. He did not call them to redistribute it to the people of Ur of the Chaldees, or of Haran, or of Canaan.

Each man had a capital base to work with. The history of the two men illustrates a fundamental aspect of biblical economics, namely, the strong relationship in the long run between character and wealth (Prov. 13:22).² More precisely, there is a relationship between the preservation of capital (and even its great expansion) and investment decisions based on principle. Lot lost what he had, while Abram multiplied his capital.

By the standards of his day, the 75-year-old Abram was in the prime of his life. Sarah was ten years his junior (17:17), yet she was sufficiently attractive that Abram devised a scheme of deception and called himself her brother (he was, in fact, only her half brother [20:12]), implying that he was not her husband, on two different occasions (12:11–20; 20:1–18). In this later incident, Sarah must have been in her nineties, unless Genesis 20 is a recapitulation of a journey earlier than the period in which God established His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17). So, Sarah was able to maintain her good looks well into her later years. Abram himself lived until age 175 (25:7), which the Bible describes as “a good old age” (25:8). He had over half his lifetime before him when he was called by God to leave Haran and enter the land of Canaan. He wandered for many years.

At first, he dwelt in a mountain along with Lot (12:8). He waited 24 years for God to establish His covenant with him. He was circumcised at age 99 (17:24). Thirty-seven years after his circumcision, Abram purchased a final resting place for his wife and family, the burial field for Sarah. Even then, he proclaimed to the children of Heth, “I am a stranger and sojourner with you” (23:4). Though he was no primitive nomad, he nevertheless wandered through Canaan for many decades. It was not the sort of life that would commend itself to a patriarch, or a long-term investor, or a man who had been promised the whole territory (12:7). He was a pilgrim—a wanderer with a destination.

B. Lot's Choice

In stark contrast to Abram, Lot was a man who seemed to possess

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

solid, reliable economic instincts. He understood the value of land. When strife between his shepherds and Abram's convinced them both that a geographical parting of the ways had become a necessity, Abram gave Lot his choice of settlement. Lot chose the land in the plain of Jordan, for "it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest into Zoar" (13:10). He decided to dwell in the cities of the plain, pitching his tent toward Sodom. The Bible informs us that "the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly" (13:13). Lot chose good land and poor company. He assumed that the ultimate form of capital is productive land.

Abram gave Lot his choice. He therefore agreed to go into the land of Canaan, less desirable property in those days than the well-watered lands of the plains of Jordan. Lot found himself in economically desirable circumstances from the point of view of externally measurable capital resources. But the company he was to keep, however limited his contact with them, always constituted a threat to his integrity and even his safety. He surrounded himself with evil men, and in the final days of his residence among them, they surrounded him (19:4). When God's judgment finally came upon his former neighbors, Lot found that members of his own household had been polluted by the perverse environment. His sons, married daughters, and sons-in-law all refused to believe his dire warnings of imminent destruction, so they were left behind to perish. His wife defied God's command and looked back at the city, suffering a unique judgment herself, leaving him a widower (19:26).

Lot paid dearly for his decision to live among members of a rebellious, perverse pagan society just for the sake of some productive land, a place where not even ten righteous men could be found (18:13). He wound up dwelling in a mountain in his old age—exactly as he had when he had entered the land with Abram, but this time he had no cattle or other assets, and no future. All he had were his two unmarried daughters (19:8), who proved to be morally corrupt and totally pragmatic. They deceived him, causing him to commit incest in his drunkenness (19:32–35). His descendants from these two women became the Moabites and the Ammonites (19:37–38), and so vicious were those cultures that God stipulated that anyone from either tribe who chose to join the congregation of Israel would not see his descendants become full citizens until the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3–

4). They were an extension of the culture of Sodom, and in time, they partook of the same destruction as the cities of the plains (Zeph. 2:8–10). From great wealth to life in a cave: such was the fate of Lot’s “investment portfolio.”

Because of the ethical perversity of Sodom’s residents, the land itself was put under a curse. It was burned, covered with salt, and thereby destroyed for future agricultural use (Deut. 29:23). So great was the destruction that afterward, the surrounding land of Canaan, by comparison, became known as the land flowing with milk and honey.

Lot had ignored the lessons of Adam and Noah: prosperity, in the long run, is the blessing of God to those who are faithful to His laws. The investment of one’s capital should be made with this fact in mind. Lot invested in terms of visible wealth, the seeming permanence of the value of the land. At the end of his days, he saw his investment burned. What turned out to be a very impermanent store of value had lured Lot into a disastrous investment decision.

C. Freedom and Economic Growth

Character, human freedom, and long-term development of human capital are all more important than physical resources. Access to free markets is also very important. It has been a continuing error of modern scholars to focus on natural resources in their discussions of economic growth. Professor P. T. Bauer was one economist who did not make this mistake.

Physical natural resources, notably fertile soil or rich minerals, are not the only or even major determinants of material progress, though differences in the bounty of nature may well account for differences in levels and ease of living in different parts of the underdeveloped world. It has always been known that physical resources are useless without capital and skills to develop them, or without access to markets. And the diminishing importance of land and other natural resources in production are also familiar. But the recent rapid development of such underdeveloped countries poorly endowed with natural resources has come as a surprise, though perhaps it should not have done so, in view of the Japanese experience. A recent but already classic case is that of Hong Kong, which has practically no raw materials, very little fertile soil, no fuel, no hydroelectric power, and only a very restricted domestic market, but which in spite of these limitations has progressed phenomenally. . . .³

3. P. T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development: Studies and Debates in Development Eco-*

Throughout the western world severe barriers have had to be erected [Bauer was speaking of political necessity, not economic necessity, since he was an advocate of free trade—G.N.] to protect the domestic industries of the United States, Great Britain, Germany and France against imports from the unsubsidized competition of the industries of Hong Kong, an underdeveloped country, eight thousand or more miles away. This rapid progress has occurred in spite of the presence in Hong Kong of three features often said to reinforce the vicious circle of poverty, namely lack of natural resources, extremely severe population pressure, and a very restricted domestic market.⁴

Those accounts of economic growth which have focused so narrowly on natural resources have too frequently been undergirded by a philosophy bordering on environmental determinism, and in some cases this intellectual presupposition has been openly admitted.

On the other hand, Hong Kong is not an unquestioned case of superior morality. Its commitment to the free market and international free trade is too comprehensive. Since World War II, Hong Kong has become one of the major centers of the drug traffic. One of the reasons why Communist China allowed Hong Kong to exist was because Hong Kong served as a funnel for opium, heroin, and other illegal drugs that are produced in China and in Southeast Asia. This traffic served a dual purpose for Communist China: it provided much-needed foreign currency, and it was part of China's systematic war against the West in general and the United States in particular.

In 1965, at the beginning of the escalation of the war in Vietnam, China's prime minister and foreign affairs specialist Chou En-lai met with Egypt's leader, General Nasser. Speaking of the U. S. troops then stationed in Vietnam, Chou said: ". . . some of them are trying opium. And we are helping them. We are planting the best kinds of opium especially for the American soldiers in Vietnam. . . . Do you remember when the West imposed opium on us? They fought us with opium. And we are going to fight them with their own weapons. We are going to use their own methods against them. We want them to have a big army in Vietnam which will be hostage to us and we want to demoralize them. The effect this demoralization is going to have on the United States will be far greater than anyone realizes."⁵ Hong Kong was an important part of Communist China's war against the West.

nomics (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 297.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

5. Quoted by Mohammed Heikal, *The Cairo Documents* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 306–7. Heikal heard Chou say this.

Conclusion

Godly men are instructed not to put their faith in earthly treasures (capital), where thieves break in and rust corrupts (Matt. 6:19–21).⁶ Men are to build in terms of Christian character and biblical law. Their decisions are not to be guided primarily by the land in front of them but by the human capital at hand. An investment in terms of character may not reap immediate rewards. After all, Lot settled down in temporary comfort, while Abram wandered. But Abram became Abraham —“father of nations”—and his children and grandchildren were buried with him (Gen. 49:28–31; 50:13), while the burial location for Lot and his daughters is not mentioned. Abraham’s commitment to character and his reliance upon the covenantal promises brought him visible blessings and rest in his old age. Lot, though a just man (II Peter 2:7), dwelt where his spirit was endlessly tormented (II Peter 2:8). He had left Haran with great wealth; he would leave Sodom with only the items he could carry away in an emergency retreat. He had traded internal peace for the seeming promise of external blessings, and he ended his life with neither internal peace nor external blessings.

God may, for a time, preserve the wealth of a rebellious culture for His own purposes. He may preserve it for the sake of a few godly men who dwell within the culture (Gen. 18:23–33). Nevertheless, when He brings down His wrath upon a culture, the faithful may have to make a grim and hasty retreat.⁷

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

7. Forms of mobile capital, such as gold, silver, and precious stones, are sensible investments for Christians in times of social disintegration for this very reason. We should not look back, but it is wise to take something for the future along with us as we make our escape.

21

THE COVENANTAL TITHE

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all (Gen. 14:18–20).

The theocentric focus of this passage is a sacramental system: bread and wine. This has to do with covenantal oaths: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ This sacrament is administered by a hierarchy: the church. Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant model.²

This is the first reference to the tithe in the Bible. There is one other in Genesis: Jacob's promise to pay a tithe (Gen. 28:22).³

The story of this first tithe is peculiar. Abram was returning from a victory over an invading king, Chedorlaomer, who had kidnapped Abram's nephew Lot. The king had also defeated local kings and had taken spoils of war. Abram returned with these spoils. Then he came to meet with Melchizedek. Abram gave a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek.

The reason for this payment was Melchizedek's position as a priest of God. As a priest, he was entitled to a tithe of all increases. Abram had not been living under his jurisdiction previously. This time, however, he was returning into the region where Melchizedek had lawful jurisdiction. Abram gave him a tenth of the spoils, which Chedorlaomer had removed from the region. This was wealth that was

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Sutton, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

3. Chapter 28.

now under Abram's lawful control. Abram had added to his wealth by means of a military victory. He therefore paid a tithe on this increase.

A. A Priestly Payment

Paying a tithe is a mark of ecclesiastical subordination. Abram was directly under God. There was no intermediary structure of ecclesiastical authority. Abram was therefore a household priest. He was not under the authority of local priests in Canaan. He did not acknowledge the jurisdiction of these local priests. He had not paid tithes to them. He was a stranger in the land.

When Abram profited under the jurisdiction of a priest, he acknowledged his subordination by paying a tithe. This was his lawful obligation. The text says that Melchizedek was the priest of the most high God. There was therefore another priest in Canaan. This priest was superior to Abram, the household priest. Abram therefore owed him a tithe on whatever wealth he had gained while operating within the territory.

Melchizedek was a priest because he possessed the authority to announce blessings: positive sanctions. "Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand." He then served Abram what became New Testament sacraments: bread and wine. Up until this time, there had been no reference to a meal shared with a priest. This was clearly a sacramental meal. Therefore, Abram paid him a tenth of his spoils after Melchizedek announced these blessings. Melchizedek's authority to offer such blessings to Abram on God's behalf, and also offer a confession of subordination was a mark of his priestly office.

Melchizedek was also a king. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18). Did Abram pay this tithe because Melchizedek was a king or a priest? Both. According to the New Testament, Melchizedek was a priest who set the pattern for Jesus Christ (Heb. 7). Jesus is both King of kings (Rev. 19:16) and the high priest. We read:

For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother,

without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually (Heb. 7:1–3).

The central argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that Melchizedek's priesthood was the forerunner of Christ's priesthood. Christ possesses kingly authority just as Melchizedek did. Christ changed the priesthood from Levitical to Melchizedekal.

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 7:12–17).

Melchizedek was a high priest. He was both a king and a priest. This was unique. This was not true under the Mosaic covenant, where the offices were separate. The kingly tribe was Judah. The priestly tribe was Levi. This separation ended with Christ. His forerunner was Melchizedek.

Abram, a household priest, paid a tithe to the high priest. This was a token of his subordination. Abram's subordination covenantally represented Levi's subordination.

Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him (Heb. 7:4–10).

B. Surrendering the Leftovers

Abram paid the tithe to Melchizedek. That entitled him to the re-

maintaining 90%. He kept none of this booty.

And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion (Gen. 14:21–24).

Abram refused to take his legitimate share of the goods. Why? Because he wanted it clear to all concerned that *he was God's agent*, not the king of Sodom's agent. The victory had come because God had intervened. Why had God intervened? Because Abram was God's agent. He represented his nephew Lot. Lot was under his protection. Lot had been kidnapped by an invading king (Gen. 14:12).

Abram's success on the battlefield with a small military force testified to the sovereignty of God over history. Abram fully understood his situation. He was a stranger in Canaan. God would later remind him of this, as if he needed any reminding. "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:8). He was therefore under the authority of strangers. He was a pilgrim going from place to place, a man without a city of his own.

It was one thing to operate only with the consent of strangers. It was another to take anything of value from them, other than the right to wander with his flocks. He had demonstrated his power by defeating an invading enemy that had defeated local kings. He had shown that he, not local kings, was the regional force to be reckoned with. He had shown them all that his God, not theirs, was sovereign. In fact, they operated at the discretion of his God, as the king of Sodom discovered shortly thereafter (Gen. 19).

Abram was unwilling to give the king of Sodom any way to claim victory in this matter. So, he let the king of Sodom keep the remaining spoils. It was obvious to all who was in charge here: Abram. He granted wealth to the king of Sodom, not the other way around. By accepting this payment, the king of Sodom was symbolically acknowledging who was in charge here: Abram's God.

The king of Sodom did have an available alternative to this humili-

ating arrangement. He also could have walked away from the spoils. That would have been a costly act of public nonsubordination to Abram's God. He could have paid a tithe to Melchizedek. This would have been an admission that Abram's God was in charge: point one of the biblical covenant model.⁴ It would have merely changed the answer to point two: "To whom do I report?" That this king-priest represented Abram's God had already been affirmed by Abram, who tithed to him and accepted a sacramental meal from him. The king of Sodom could have given Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils left to him by Abram. By doing this, he would have publicly acknowledged his total subordination to Melchizedek. But he still would have had to acknowledge his military subordination to Abram. It was Abram who had walked away from the spoils. At best, the king of Sodom could have maintained autonomy only as a "me, too" ruler.

There is no indication in the text that he gave a tithe to Melchizedek. He was not given a communion meal either. He was outside the covenant. Melchizedek did not ask him for a tithe, nor did he offer to serve him a covenant meal. God is not dependent on covenant-breaking man for His support. He also does not give him access to a covenant meal.

Conclusion

By giving a tenth to Melchizedek, he was acknowledging two things. First, he was subordinate to Melchizedek. Second, he possessed lawful title to all of the spoils. He gave 10% of these spoils. *This act was a legal claim to the other 90%*. The king of Sodom did not offer a tithe, because he did not initially have control over this wealth. Abram was making it plain to all concerned: he was fully in control of the situation as God's steward, just so long as he acknowledged the superior authority of Melchizedek. By visibly subordinating himself to Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God, he visibly demonstrated his lawful authority over the spoils. Then, with a contemptuous dismissal of the king of Sodom, he walked away from the wealth. What was extra wealth to him, after all? It was a means of paying his tithe to Melchizedek—nothing more.

Abram tithed to Melchizedek because *Melchizedek was a superior priest*. The sign of his priestly office was his serving of bread and wine to Abram and his blessing of Abram. He delivered positive ecclesiastic-

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 1.

al sanctions: the sacraments and a blessing. In doing so, he brought the sons of Abraham under his ecclesiastical authority.⁵

5. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

THE GROWTH OF HUMAN CAPITAL

And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:5–6).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Sons of Abraham

The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying: “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). Abram’s response is illuminating. After learning of his covenantal protection (shield) by God and his reward from God, Abram immediately asked for more. What is significant is that he asked about his lack of children. “And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir” (15:2–3).

1. Biblical Covenants

Abram’s candid response reveals that he knew a great deal about biblical covenants. He knew that the protection and favor of God accompany a calling before God. This meant that Abram’s capital assets would now be administered within an explicit covenantal framework. Who, then, would be the heir of these assets? Who would carry on the faithful administration of Abram’s capital? Abram clearly understood

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

the long-term nature of property under a covenant. Capital is to be used faithfully, expanded, and directed into the hands of one who will continue the faithful administration of the assets. Prior to the nineteenth century and the development of the limited liability corporation, capital was primarily familistic capital. This transgenerational responsibility required that someone else in Abram's house would have to be trained for long-term capital management in terms of a theocratic covenant. Who should it be? Eliezer, the Damascan? Was this the person God had chosen to continue the faithful administration of Abram's capital? Abram was already a man of great wealth (Gen. 13:2) and leadership abilities (14:13–24). Nevertheless, he was not yet a patriarch in a culture that placed high esteem on family authority. For any future-oriented Old Testament saint, the office of father was a cherished one indeed. As far as Abram was concerned, his lack of an heir was cause for great concern. What was the meaning of God's covenant with his household if he had no son or daughter?

God answered his question with a promise: his seed would be as numerous as the stars visible in the heavens (15:5). Abram believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness (15:6). The promise also involved the future acquisition of land to serve as a home for his heirs (15:16). Both promises were fulfilled in Joshua's day. Seventy of his direct descendants, plus their servants, went into Egypt, and 600,000 men, plus their families, emerged at the exodus (Ex. 12:37). Moses was specifically told that this was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham concerning the expansion of his seed, for the Israelites were "this day as the stars of heaven for multitude" (Deut. 1:10; cf. 10:22).

The Promised Land was also significant in terms of the covenant. Abram's heirs would not always be strangers in another land as Abram was, nor would they forever live as pilgrims. Strangers seldom exercise long-term dominion over whole cultures, except in cases of military conquest, and empires inevitably fragment when the centralized political sovereignty can no longer enforce its decisions at the extremities of the empire, or even inside the capital city. Nomads do not build civilizations either, and God did not intend His people to remain pilgrims forever. They had a final destination, a land to subdue.

Children were important to Abram, not merely because of the cultural standards of the Canaanitic tribes that surrounded him, but because of several distinctly theological reasons. First, the gift of children was important for the preservation of the covenant line prophesied by

God to Eve (Gen. 3:15). It seems quite probable that Abram knew about this prophecy to Eve (John. 8:56). Second, the task of cultural dominion was—and is—intimately linked with the expansion of human numbers (Gen. 1:28;² 9:1³). Third, a man's heirs—intellectual, spiritual, and biological—were part of his concern for linear history. This is not to say that other cultures besides the Hebrews did not hold children in high esteem, but the concern of these pagan cultures was not with linear history. The Greeks and Romans held male children in high esteem for a distinctly religious reason: the sons were family priests who alone could administer the family's rites, century after century. Should these rites be abandoned by any son, and not renewed by his son, then the family's long line of ancestors would be left to roam the shadows of the nether world in darkness. The concern of classical religion was therefore limited to future family rites, not long-term covenantal dominion. There was an inherent past-orientation and other-worldliness in classical religion, for it was to bring peace to one's ancestors, and to guarantee one's own peace in the afterlife, that one needed male heirs. Future generations were therefore important for the sake of long-dead ancestors.⁴

2. Future Orientation

In stark contrast to classical religion, Hebrew faith looked to the future. The covenants of the past were important, but not for the sake of the past. They demonstrated God's personal concern with, and commitment to, a special people selected by Him to perform important tasks in history. *The covenants of the past were tokens of victory in the future.* The psychology was altogether different from the dominant themes of classical religion. Eve was to look to the future, for her seed would battle the serpent's seed. Noah was given hope: no future deluge would destroy his heirs. Abram was promised a nation out of his loins; God changed his name to Abraham, "father of nations," when He announced the nature of the covenant (17:4–5). This covenant included the promise of the land (17:8). All of these features of the covenant related to God's original dominion covenant. The sure nature of God's word secured the future to Abraham's descendants. The dominion

2. Chapter 4.

3. Chapter 18.

4. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864]), Books I and II.

covenant would be extended by a new nation, as yet unborn. The faith of the Old Testament saints was to be in linear, irreversible historical development controlled by God. Men and women were to play an important role, in time and on earth, as parents. This work had meaning because of God's covenants and requirements.

Part of Job's testing was the loss of all his children (Job 1:18–19), as well as the loss of his material wealth (1:14–17). His blessings consisted of the restoration of his wealth beyond what he had possessed before (42:12), as well as the birth of ten children (42:13). As a final gift, he was granted a long life (42:16–17). In short, he was given the capital he needed to begin once again to exercise dominion over the earth as a godly family man: tools, children, and time.⁵

Children are basic to the covenant and a sign of God's unmerited favor to man: "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Ps. 127:3). Children are blessings—not blessings in disguise, but blessings—within the framework of the covenant of grace. The broader dominion covenant also implies that children are a blessing in time and on earth, since men and women are told to reproduce, and obedience involves blessings. The all-inclusive nature of the dominion covenant does not mean that the element of cursing on the day of judgment has been overcome merely by the willingness of people to have large families. But in time and on earth, children are a blessing.

The growth of his family, resulting in millions of descendants, was unquestionably basic to the Abrahamic covenant. As far as Abraham was concerned, the modern ideal of zero population growth would have been an acceptable one . . . for the Canaanites. The promise of ultimate victory in Canaan necessitated the extermination and expulsion of the enemies of God from the land (Gen. 15:16, 18–20; Ex. 23:31; Josh. 21:44). When the Israelites left Egypt, they were given a promise by God: their covenantal faithfulness would result in a society without miscarriages, either of animals or humans. In the same breath, God promised them long life: ". . . the number of thy days I will fulfill" (Ex. 23:26b).⁶ The "old folks" would be allowed to get even older. The earth would therefore be filled and subdued by covenantally faithful people far sooner. When you lower the death rate of infants by eliminating

5. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012).

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 59.

miscarriages, and you simultaneously lower the death rate of adults, you create ideal conditions for an historically unprecedented “population explosion.” Yet this was the promise of God to a people who had just undergone the most rapid expansion of population in recorded human history.⁷

The fulfillment of the covenant was inescapably linked to the declining influence of the ungodly in Canaan. *As the numbers of the faithful increase, the ungodly decrease.* This was basic to the Abrahamic covenant, as well as to the revelation presented to Abraham’s descendants immediately prior to the military invasion of Canaan (Deut. 1:10). God preferred the expansion of man’s numbers and man’s dominion in comparison to the dominion over the land by the wild animals (Ex. 23:29–30), but He much preferred the expansion of His special people and their dominion over the land instead of continued dominion by the Canaanites.

B. The Demographics of Defeat

It was indicative of the widespread secularism and defeatism in late twentieth-century Western culture that population in the industrial states slowed down radically. French population growth has been slow ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, increasing by about 41% from 1861 to 1974 (37 million to 52 million).⁸ Ireland, after the devastating famines of the 1840s, became Europe’s only zero population growth state. In fact, Ireland’s population actually shrank from 8 million in 1841 to 6.5 million in 1851, and from there to about 4.5 million in the early 1970s (counting the population of Northern Ireland, which is part of Great Britain today).⁹ Ireland, however, remained an essentially agricultural nation, and France was far more agricultural after 1850 than the other Western European industrial nations, which did experience population growth in the same period. The Netherlands grew from 2 million in 1816 to 3 million by 1849, and by 1975 the population was well over 13 million.¹⁰ In 1871, Germany had some 41 million; by the mid-1960s, the combined populations of East and

7. *Ibid.*, Part 1, ch. 1.

8. B. R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics, 1750–1970* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 20; *The World Almanac & Book of Facts, 1976* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1976), p. 615.

9. Mitchell, p. 21; *World Almanac*, pp. 627 (Ireland), 663 (Northern Ireland).

10. Mitchell, p. 22; *World Almanac*, p. 640.

West Germany were in the range of 73 million.¹¹ Where European industrialization flourished between 1850–1950, there was considerable population growth.

This shift has begun to catch the attention of the demographers, the specialists in population changes. After 1957, the birth rate in the United States began to plunge. The fertility rate in 1957 was 3,767 births per 1,000 women, meaning that the average woman was bearing almost four children in her years of fertility.¹² By 1975, the fertility rate had fallen to about 1,800 per 1,000 women, or 1.8 children per woman. Since the replacement level of population in the United States is 2.1 children per woman (because some children do not bear children), the United States was no longer reproducing sufficient children to replace the parents when they die. This was the lowest birth rate in United States history.¹³ This was a prosperity-induced slowdown, in contrast to the 1930s slowdown, the years of international economic depression. The percentage of women in the United States labor force has risen continuously, so that 45% of American workers were women by the mid-1970s.¹⁴ By 2008, this was 60%.¹⁵

West Germany was facing the same problem. The fertility rate was believed to have fallen to about 1.65 children per woman in 1978. The German birth rate fell by a startling 50% from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. At 1.65 children per woman, the 60 million West Germans in 1978 will produce losses in total population until their extinction is reached around 2500 A.D.¹⁶ But the reported statistics were incorrect. The fertility rate had fallen to 1.4 in 1977, where it remained in 2007.¹⁷

The Eastern European nations have experienced similar declines in births. In mid-1970s Hungary there were 150 abortions for every 100 births. By 2007, Hungary's fertility rate was below Germany's: 1.35.¹⁸ With the exception of Romania, where abortions were outlawed

11. Mitchell, p. 20; *World Almanac*, p. 618.

12. *U. S. Department of Commerce, Social Indicators, 1976* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977), Table 1/6, p. 26.

13. *Final Report*, Select Committee on Population, U.S. House of Representatives, 95th Congress, Second Session, Serial F, House Report No. 95–1842 (Jan. 5, 1979), p. 5.

14. *Social Indicators, 1976*, Table 8/4, p. 371.

15. "Quick Stats on Women Workers, 2008," United States Department of Labor. (<http://dol.gov/wb/stats/main.htm>)

16. *New York Times* (April 28, 1978). See also "People Shortage: West European States See Economic Troubles As Birth Rates Decline," *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 23, 1979).

17. Chart, "Fertility rate," Google. (<http://bit.ly/a1FL6p>)

18. *Idem*.

in 1966, all Soviet bloc nations experienced falling birth rates. Aside from Romania, only East Germany experienced a temporary increase as a result of a major shift in government policy in 1976, and the beginning of a program offering substantial maternity benefits. Before the program was implemented, in 1976 East Germany had the lowest birth rate of all Soviet bloc nations, and it was by far the most industrialized.¹⁹ With the merging of East and West Germany in 1990, the rate was reduced to West Germany's 1.4.

A Library of Congress Congressional Research Service report, which is periodically updated for use by Washington legislators, announced in 1976: "Responsibility for world population control rests with the whole world community."²⁰ What did this mean? That a world government should control people's decisions to have children? That some international committee should establish guidelines? Is such a goal feasible in the real world? Should it even be considered? What are the implications for the growth of the messianic state?

What we find, then, is that the optimistic future-orientation of Western industrial populations between 1850 and 1960 had important effects on the growth of population. Now, however, that confidence has faded along with birth rates. The present-orientation of young couples who delay having children for the sake of a higher present income is creating a demographic disaster for the state-created retirement and medical care programs, since not enough young workers will be able to fund them by the year 2030, unless birth rates increase, or unless the older generation is systematically exterminated by the young in a program of euthanasia.²¹ The welfare state faces bankruptcy.

The American Social Security system was statistically doomed, from the very beginning. Those who entered the system at its inception in 1937 paid in \$30 per year (maximum bracket), and their employers paid in \$30. Using the inflation calculator of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, we learn that prices were 15 times higher in 2010 than in 1937. That would make the co-payments worth \$900 in 2010 dollars. By 2010, each worker paid 7.65% of his wages, and his employer matched this, up to \$106,800. Total payment: \$16,340. Then an addi-

19. Associated Press story, *Durham Morning Herald* (Sept. 1, 1978).

20. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, *World Population Control*, Issue Brief #IB74098 (June 25, 1976).

21. In 2010, taxes on wages generated less revenue than Social Security payments. The deficit was funded by general tax revenues and borrowing. The same was true of the Medicare system.

tional 1.45% from both is paid on wages above \$106,800. Of course, many families have two members in the work force, so the family tax payment may be more.

The very first lady to receive a Social Security check, Ida Fuller, retired in 1940, after having paid in \$24.75. She died in 1975 at age 100. Her total benefits were just under \$23,000.²² She was a winner. The taxpayers paid her winnings. Ironically, it was 1975 that marked the first year of a deficit in the Social Security program.²³

Government officials assure voters that all benefits will be paid. This is either a mistake or a lie, or else the economy will collapse under the tax burden. If the program is not officially abolished, it will mean the destruction of the American dollar. This was admitted by James Cardwell, then the director of Social Security, in response to a statement by Senator William Proxmire in 1976. This exchange took place:

PROXMIRE: . . . There are 37 million people, is that right, that get social security benefits.

CARDWELL: Today between 32 and 34 million.

PROXMIRE: I am a little high; 32 to 34 million people. Almost all of them, or many of them, are voters. In my State, I figure that there are 600,000 voters that receive social security. Can you imagine a Senator or Congressman under those circumstances saying, we are going to repudiate that high a proportion of the electorate? No.

Furthermore, we have the capacity under the Constitution, the Congress does, to coin money, as well as to regulate the value thereof. And therefore we have the power to provide that money. And we are going to do it. It may not be worth anything when the recipient gets it, but he is going to get his benefits paid.

CARDWELL: I tend to agree.²⁴

Underdeveloped nations have received Western medical aid, which has enabled far more infants to survive. They have pesticides. "But more important as causative factors in the sharp drop in infant mortality which set off the population explosion," wrote economist

22. Social Security Administration: <http://bit.ly/IdaFuller>

23. "Ida Mae Fuller," Wikipedia.

24. *The Social Security System*, Hearings Before the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, 94th Congress, Second Session (May 26–27, 1976), pp. 27–28. Printed by the Government Printing Office, 1977. The Social Security System's unfunded liabilities are dwarfed by the unfunded liabilities of Medicare.

Peter Drucker, “were two very old ‘technologies’ to which no one paid any attention. One was the elementary public-health measure of keeping latrine and well apart—known to the Macedonians before Alexander the Great. The other one was the wire-mesh screen for doors and windows invented by an unknown American around 1860. Both were suddenly adopted even by backward tropical villages after World War II. Together they were probably the main causes of the population explosion.”²⁵ Drucker had a tendency to focus on unique and previously ignored historical factors in offering explanations for historical change, but this argument is certainly plausible. The immediate benefits of not having flies and other bothersome insects buzzing around the house were deemed to be worth the financial sacrifice involved in buying screens. Tribesmen did it for themselves, but an immediate side effect was a reduction in infant mortality. A simple imported technology from the West reshaped the underdeveloped world, yet few of the consumers involved had any knowledge of the cause-and-effect relationships among certain insects, disease, death, and demographics.

The commitment to larger families has not been dislodged in these populations, yet far fewer children must be born in order to have several of them survive into adulthood. So, the underdeveloped societies have become the short-run beneficiaries of the West’s technology, yet without the attitudes that enabled the West to expand agricultural and industrial productivity to accommodate the increased number of surviving youths. The result is a large increase of population. The socialistic, envy-dominated, underdeveloped nations without Western freedom and without Western attitudes toward thrift and capital accumulation—the old Protestant ethic—now face a demographic crisis. Will famine eventually strike these societies?

C. The Demographics of Dominion

Biblical economics affirms that children are a blessing, since they are a form of personal capital. Men are to become effective stewards of God’s resources. They are to invest in their children by constantly training them in the precepts of biblical law (Deut. 6:7). They are to encourage them to take up a productive calling before God. But parents are entitled to a return on their investment. Children are supposed to provide for their parents in the latter’s old age. Parents are

25. Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 330.

therefore to be honored (Ex. 20:12).²⁶ Honoring God involves giving of one's financial substance (Prov. 3:9).²⁷ Parents are also deserving of just this kind of honor. Jesus strongly criticized the Pharisees of His day for their denial of this law, in the name of tradition. They refused to support their parents by claiming that they were themselves without assets, having "given to God" all that they had (Mark 7:6–13).²⁸ Christ repudiated this "higher spirituality" in defiance of God's law. Children must support aged parents. The parents get the financial security they deserve; their investment in their children is returned to them in a direct fashion. This increases the likelihood that parents will honor their obligations while their children are young. The family becomes a trans-generational economic unit—one worth investing in.

James A. Weber's book, *Grow or Die!* (1977), is a compelling, lucid antidote to the zero-growth advocates, such as E. J. Mishan and Garrett Hardin. It cited the remark of Alfred Sauvy, director of the Institut de Demographie at Paris University and the past president of the United Nations Commission on Population. Sauvy wrote that a "stationary or very slowly moving population does not benefit enough from the advantages of growth. There is no historical example of a stationary population having achieved appreciable economic progress. Theoretically, it is not impossible, but in practice, in our period especially, it does not happen."²⁹

Simon Kuznets, the distinguished economist and winner of the Nobel Prize in economics in 1971, devoted his career to a series of studies of national income: its formation, statistics, and consequences. In an important essay published in 1960, Kuznets made some pertinent observations. There is an important relationship between people's faith in the future and high birth rates. "Contrariwise, a constant or slowly growing population is implicit evidence of lack of faith in the future."³⁰ Kuznets warned against relying on what we can see—the limits of material resources—to the exclusion of those factors that we

26. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 24.

27. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 8.

28. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

29. James A. Weber, *Grow or Die!* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1977), p. 21.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 3. This quotation is taken from Simon Kuznets, "Population Change and Aggregate Output," in *Demographic and Economic Change in Developed Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press for the National Bureau of Economic Research, 1960).

cannot yet see, such as human creativity. As he wrote, “There is no excuse for the consistent bias in the literature in the field, in which the clearly observable limits of existing resources tend to overshadow completely the dimly discernable potentials of the new discoveries, inventions, and innovations that the future may bring. Perhaps only those who are alarmed rush into print whereas those who are less concerned with the would-be dangers are likely to be mute.”³¹ Thus, concluded Weber, we should not look at a zero population growth as beneficial.

This is not to say that there are not disadvantages to population growth. To increase population obviously requires that an “investment” be made in more children, more new people. And, as with any future-oriented investment, this means that a sacrifice involving more work or less consumption or both must be made today in the interests of achieving greater population growth tomorrow. Conversely, if all children below working age suddenly vanished today, we could all immediately enjoy the “advantage” of consuming more and working less tomorrow, although the achievement of such an “advantage” would obviously be short-sighted as well as short-lived.”³²

The modern Pied Pipers, our zero and negative population growth (i.e., contraction) advocates, seem to ignore the long-run implications of their policies. When they retire to live off their government subsidies (e.g., Social Security and Medicare payments), they will be grateful for all those younger workers and taxpayers who are still willing and able to support them. “Honor thy father and mother” is a meaningless phrase in a world without children. Why not produce more children to do the honoring?

There is a continuing relationship in the Bible between seed and subduing. Genesis 1:28 commanded mankind to be fruitful and multiply (seed) and to subdue the earth. After the Fall of man, God’s covenantal promise to Eve involved her seed: hers would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), and God’s curse on Adam involved the ground and his efforts to subdue it (Gen. 3:17–19).³³ The importance of genealogies in Hebrew culture was based on this promise to Eve: tracing the covenant line and the lines of those who had become the seed of Satan. The covenant with Noah repeated the command to be

31. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

33. Chapter 12.

fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth (Gen. 9:1),³⁴ and God told Noah that the animals would fear man from that time on: “into your hand they are delivered” (9:2b). Furthermore, “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all these things” (9:3). Again, the earth’s fruits belong to mankind. Abraham received two promises—the promise of a land (12:1) that would be given to his seed (12:7). Here would be a land for Abraham’s seed to subdue to the glory of God. God promised David both seed and a permanent throne, the symbol of dominion. Speaking of Solomon, God said: “He shall build an house for my name, and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (I Chron. 22:10). Psalm 89 is even more explicit: “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah” (3–4). Again, “His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven” (29). The ultimate fulfillment of this promise came with Jesus Christ.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:30–33).

It is Jesus Christ, the “seed born of a woman,” who is the recipient of, and fulfillment of, the promises. It is Jesus who finally announces, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).³⁵ Christ has total power today. He is steadily subduing His enemies. This is why Paul could write to the Roman church, “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (16:20a). We believers are now the seed of Christ: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). The church is the Israel of God: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

What does it mean to be heirs of the promise? Are we to receive everything apart from any conditions? In the area of justification, all is

34. Chapter 18.

35. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

by grace (Eph. 2:8–9), but sanctification is equally by grace: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Both sanctification and justification are unearned gifts of God, in the sense that both are freely bestowed by God. Nevertheless, the grace of God was operating in the Old Testament era; justification was by grace in that era, and so was sanctification. What, then, is the source of our external blessings? *Sanctification*: the progressive disciplining of ourselves and our institutions to conform to God’s criteria of righteousness. We are His seed; we are therefore to subdue the earth. The *seed-subduing relationship* still exists. As we exercise godly dominion in terms of the concrete standards of biblical law, we are given greater quantities of resources. We are to use these resources as a means of extending God’s visible kingdom even further. We are to subdue those institutions that are under our authority, even as we are to subdue the lusts of the flesh in our own personalities. *We are heirs of the promise, and we must be heirs of the inheritance.* We are the Israel of God, and we are under the same requirement to subdue the earth to the glory of God in terms of His revealed standards of righteousness. God’s work done in God’s way: here is our dominion covenant. Here are our marching orders. We are under a sovereign Commander in Chief. We have assignments, conditions to meet; as we meet those conditions as faithful subordinates, we will receive promotions individually, and the church will be victorious in time and on earth.

The external blessings of God are offered in response to society’s external, covenantal conformity to the standards of biblical law (Deut. 8; 28). These blessings include the expansion of inanimate capital goods (Deut. 8:7), wealth in livestock (Deut. 8:13), and food (Deut. 8:8–9a). The promised expansion also applies to human capital, namely, children. The clearest statement of this principle of growth is found in Deuteronomy 28: “Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep” (v. 4).³⁶ By calling into question the lawfulness and benefits of an expanding population within a godly culture, the advocates of zero population growth thereby challenge the whole concept of the dominion covenant. They simultaneously challenge the validity of the covenant of grace, which is the theological foundation of a society’s partial fulfillment of the dominion covenant.

36. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

It is not surprising that the intellectual leaders of the zero population growth movement in the late twentieth century inhabited the temples of secular humanism in all their tenured safety, namely, the universities. Ironically, zero population growth is the primary economic threat to those employed by the universities, because a reduced birth rate inevitably reduces the applications for admission to colleges two decades later. The only way to “stay even” is to lower the academic standards of the university and admit students who would never have qualified had there been an increasing number of available applicants. In other words, the success of the academic proponents of zero population growth in convincing educated members of the public to have fewer children leads to a deterioration of academic performance by future users of university services, not to mention the eventual dilution of quality in the faculties themselves. God will not be mocked at zero cost to the mockers.

Nothing can grow at a constant rate forever. The effect of “positive feedback,” meaning compound growth, is to push life against the incapable limits of the environment. If, for example, the population of the world in the 2010, some 6.8 billion people, were to increase at 1 per cent per annum for a thousand years, the world’s population in human beings alone—not to mention the supplies of beef or other animals to feed them—would be over 147 trillion. Either the rate of increase slows eventually to zero, or less, or else we run out of time. But this is precisely the point: *exponential growth, meaning compound growth, points to a final judgment, the end of time*. If the growth process is God-ordained in response to a society’s covenantal faithfulness, then the day of judgment should become the focus of men’s concern and hope. History is not unbounded. The zero-growth advocates assume that resources are finite, that history is indefinite, and therefore growth has to be called to a halt eventually. The Christian response is different: growth is legitimate and possible, resources are indeed limited, and therefore the end of history will arrive before the growth process is reversed, assuming society does not first return to its ethically rebellious ways, thereby bringing on temporal judgment (Deut. 8:19–20; 28:15–68).

Conclusion

Any attempt to challenge the ethical legitimacy and economic possibility of an epoch of long-term compound growth, which is the

product of God's external blessings for covenantal faithfulness, is nothing less than paganism. Such an attack is based on a philosophy of history that is unquestionably pagan, either cyclical time or unbounded temporal extension. The goal of both views of history is the same: *to deny the possibility of an impending final judgment*. Compound growth points to final judgment. So, humanists are faced with a major problem: either the growth must stop or history must end, and most Western humanists in positions of academic, economic, or political responsibility are afraid or unwilling to admit the existence of this dilemma. They want endless progress and growth, and the "numbers"—compound growth rates matched against finite resources—testify to the impossibility of achieving both goals. A few have become zero-growth advocates; most simply prefer to ignore the problem.

Christians who have not been strongly influenced by contemporary humanism should answer: let us have ethical conformity to God's law, let us have the external blessings (including larger families)³⁷ that are promised by God in response to ethical conformity, let us extend regenerate mankind's dominion across the face of the earth, and let us pray for final judgment and the end of the curse of time. To pray for any other scenario is to pray for the social goals of paganism.³⁸

37. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1: "Population Explosion."

38. *Ibid.*, Appendix B: "The Demographics of Decline."

23

A GUARANTEED INHERITANCE

But in the fourth generation, they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full (Gen. 15:16).

The theocentric focus here is inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

Abram was concerned about his lack of a biological heir (v. 2). Here, God assured him that there would be a sufficient number of heirs to conquer the land in which he was wandering. God promised Abram that his heirs would inherit the Promised Land. Abram could rest assured that he was a pilgrim, not a nomad. He had a destination: right where he was. The future belonged to those who would bear his name, because God's name was on Abram. Abram was the patriarchal founder of a family covenant. He was not yet Abraham, the father of nations.

The promise was fulfilled four generations after the heirs of Abraham went down into Egypt, the nation not named by God (v. 13). The first generation that was born in Egypt was Kohath's. The second was Amram's. The third was Moses'. The fourth was Joshua's.

Why was there a need for a delay? Because inheritance is by ethics as well as by promise. So is disinheritance. The people of the land of Canaan in Abram's day were wicked. God designated them all as Amorites. Their wickedness was not yet full. In the fullness of time, the heirs of Abram would claim their inheritance. God's word is sure. This prophecy would be fulfilled.

God offers common grace to evil people. It is common because it does not offer redemption from sin and eternal death. It is grace be-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

cause it is not merited or deserved by the recipients. The Amorites would continue to extend their dominion over the land. They would accumulate capital. This capital would become the inheritance of the sons of Abram. The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22).²

The idea of compounded sin is taught clearly in this passage. Sin compounds over time if it is left unchecked. It is not static. The Amorites would continue to become ever more ethically consistent with their covenant-breaking religion. They would become more evil. As their sin compounded, they would move closer to their corporate and individual day of reckoning in history. They were already disinherited sons of God. Their condition as judicially disinherited sons would be revealed in history at some point. That point would be in the fourth generation of the sons of Abram who would be born in Egypt.

Abram was a powerful man. He commanded troops. These troops had defeated the invading king, Chedorlaomer. The invader had defeated the troops of five cities, yet Abram's comparatively small handful of servants had defeated the invader (Gen. 14). The local Amorites had good reason to fear Abram and Abram's God.

God told Abram that the day of inheritance was at least four centuries in the future (v. 13). It was clear that Abram would not live to see that day. Yet the promise meant everything to him, for it secured the inheritance of a childless man. The promise was tied to ethics: the rebellion of the Amorites. This delay was basic to God's covenant. The disinheritance would not come until the Amorites had been given sufficient time to condemn themselves. In the American phrase, God would give them enough rope to hang themselves. God's covenantal structure would become visible to the recipients of his common grace when this produced common wrath. The connection among ethics, sanctions, and inheritance would be visible to winners and losers alike.

The message of this passage should be clear: *delayed gratification is basic to dominion*. It would take generations to produce the conditions to make possible the transfer of the inheritance. *Dominion is by covenant, not by power*. Abram would have to wait on God for a son. His son would have to wait on the Amorites to fill up their corporate cup of wrath. This would take time.

The process of compounding takes time. For a time—many centuries—the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of covenant-breaking

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41

men grow side by side. The Amorites would extend their dominion, God promised. The sons of Abram would multiply. The land of Egypt would prosper. There would be success on all sides. Yet the successes of the Amorites and the successes of the Egyptians would prove to be short-lived. The sons of Abram extracted the inheritances of the recently deceased sons of Egypt at their departure from Egypt (Ex. 12:36). A generation later, the sons of the exodus generation inherited the Promised Land.

God was telling Abram to be patient. The day of inheritance would surely come, but Abram would not see it. He would participate covenantally as the father. This should be sufficient. God's promise was sure. Abram did not need to consider war in his day as the way to inherit. War would be the means of the transfer centuries hence. God's promise was its judicial basis.

This promise should encourage covenant-keepers of every generation not to become discouraged at seeming defeats. God told Abram that his heirs would be under the domination of another nation (v. 13). But that nation would subsequently come under God's judgment (v. 14). The promised heirs had a promise to comfort them in times of affliction. This was the promise of a secure inheritance.

Conclusion

The promised inheritance required faith on Abram's part and on the part of his heirs. There would be a great victory. There would also be years of affliction. Both promises were basic to the family covenant God was about to renew with Abram. Genesis 15 is a chapter on covenant renewal. So is chapter 17. It reinforced the terms of the covenant. God would impose negative sanctions on the Amorites at the appropriate time. That event would constitute the fulfilling of the covenant's promise.

HOSPITALITY

And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat (Gen. 18:6–8).

The theocentric issue here is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Food in Reserve

This is the story of a debt-free man who had food in reserve. This is always a good idea. In Abraham's day, having meat in reserve was not common. To share it with guests was for a special occasion. The West is so rich today that it no longer is.

When unexpected visitors arrived at Abraham's tent, he immediately responded by offering them hospitality. Hospitality is basic to biblical religion. This is one of the two most famous examples of hospitality in the Old Testament. (The other is Jael's "hospitality" to Sisera [Judges 4:17–22].) His guests were in fact angels. Abraham did not know this. There is a New Testament phrase which says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). That was what Abraham did.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

B. The Cost of Hospitality Then

So important is hospitality in the New Testament that the apostle Paul designated hospitality as one of the requirements for holding church office. “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach” (I Tim. 3:2).²

The ideal of hospitality rests on the assumption that God has been hospitable to us. He has shown grace to us. We are like visitors who show up in front of God’s tent. We are traveling light. God rewards us with blessings that we do not deserve.

A person who shows up at your front door today is unlikely to expect hospitality. He certainly does not expect you to invite him in, so that he could spend the night and have several meals at your expense. We live in a different society from Abraham’s. In his day, there were no nearby motels. There were very few restaurants for travelers. Someone who shows up on your doorstep today is probably not in need of food and shelter.

Hospitality is a way of showing grace to others, a way of demonstrating care and concern for other people. It is also a way of demonstrating that you have economic reserves. You have food to share, and you are willing to share it. You are not in need of the basics of life. You have savings to draw on. You are not spending all of your reserves. You have a pantry full of food. You enjoy positive cash flow.

The assumption of traditional hospitality is that most people will not request it most of the time. There are limited resources at any family’s disposal. But someone who prepares to show hospitality recognizes that, under certain circumstances, frequently unpredictable, there will be somebody on your church’s doorstep who is in need of hospitality. So, he donates to the church’s hospitality fund.

In a society with limited wealth, showing hospitality is one of the ways that someone demonstrates his concern for people outside his own family. This is universally recognized as a mark of a good person. Word gets out. This softens resistance to the message of the gospel, which is surely a message of God’s hospitality to us. We act out in our lives what we say we believe about the relationship between God and His people. Hospitality is way to put faith in action.

2. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

C. The Cost of Hospitality Today

It takes resources to show hospitality. A family has to be willing and able to save a portion of its income for hospitality. While the obligation to demonstrate hospitality is not on the same level as the obligation to help someone in a life-threatening emergency, it has the characteristics of an emergency. First, it requires prior thrift. Second, it requires a willingness to share. Third, the person in need of hospitality shows up unexpectedly. Fourth, the person showing hospitality should make it clear that this is not a *quid pro quo*. It is not sharing something in order to get something. It is sharing on something other than a self-serving basis. Jesus taught and when we invite people into our homes, they should be people from whom we expect no reciprocal offer. This is why He said we should invite in the poor.

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:12–14).³

In the modern industrial world, most people own a refrigerator. They have food in reserve. This is much easier to do today, because refrigeration is inexpensive. It makes a form of saving possible: food in reserve. The modern freezer is a popular appliance, because people can purchase food when it is on sale at a bargain price. Smart shopping involves purchasing in bulk when prices are attractively low. Also, bulk purchases usually are less expensive per ounce than smaller purchases.

A refrigerator and a freezer make hospitality possible on a moment's notice. In agricultural societies before the advent of electricity, people had to have beef on the hoof in order to offer anyone a dinner that served beef. It was an important sacrifice on the part of the hospitable person to kill an animal in order to feed a stranger. This degree of sacrifice required capital. The average family did not have a spare animal to sacrifice for a meal.

One of the marks of the wealth of the West is the fact that most families have food in reserve. It is not a major sacrifice when we show hospitality to a stranger. God has shown great hospitality to us as res-

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 34.

idents in a modern industrial society. This hospitality is unprecedented in human history. Yet residents of modern societies become used to the enormous wealth at their disposal. They do not think anything about having meat in a freezer that they can share when a guest arrives unexpectedly. The cost of being hospitable in today's world is much less than it was in Abraham's day.

Nevertheless, it does cost money to buy a refrigerator and a freezer. These are capital investments. It also costs a lot of money to stock a freezer with meat. To do this effectively, a person should not use debt. He must be in a position of positive cash flow. He benefits because he can pay cash. He can take advantage of opportunities.

A credit card enables us to take advantage of opportunities, but it makes it much more expensive for us to pay for the opportunities we have already taken advantage of. Future payments reduce our ability to take advantage of new opportunities. Opportunities must be paid for. We can pay with money saved, or we can pay with borrowed money. The difference is profound. One of the means of payment is future-oriented. The other means of payment is present-oriented. The Bible recommends future-orientation. This is why the Bible, when believed, produces thrift. It produces people who accumulate capital. It produces people who can show hospitality without digging deeply into their savings.

There is less household hospitality in modern society than there was in Abraham's day. There is less need for household hospitality today. There are motels and restaurants, and transportation per mile is fast and cheap. People can journey to a destination without stopping off at a stranger's house. We do not expect strangers to expect hospitality. This is a mark of our wealth. It is a sign that we rely more on impersonal market forces to supply us with our needs. We are not dependent on hospitality. We do not want to become dependent.

There is a famous line in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where a poverty-stricken distant relative, who has arrived unexpectedly to move in with a comparatively poor family, announces: "I have always relied on the kindness of strangers." In modern society, this is perceived as a defect of character. This is because the wealth of modern society has reduced most people's dependence on hospitality. The thrift that was once required to show hospitality can be used to invest or to fund organizations that offer hospitality. The result of this investment has been enormous productivity and enormous output per capita. We invest more, so society requires less hospitality.

The opportunities to show family hospitality today are limited. Hospitality is shown by churches and rescue missions. We donate money to them to act on our behalf.

Conclusion

Abraham had animals in reserve. He was ready to show hospitality to strangers. He demonstrated his wealth and his generosity by sharing meat with his guests. These guests brought him important news regarding Sodom, where his nephew Lot lived. The strangers brought news from the outside world. This was a common payment for hospitality in the world before the telegraph. The difference was, they brought news regarding what would happen, not what had happened.

ESCAPE FROM THE WILDERNESS

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink (Gen. 21:14–19).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

Sarah had told Abraham to cast them out of the family. He had listened to his wife, as he usually did, but he was saddened by what he had done. He had thrown out his own son. Ishmael was about 14 years old at the time. What father wouldn't be depressed about having to send away his son, even though his son had not done anything terribly wrong? All he had done was laugh at Isaac, whose very name means laughter. But that was enough to enrage Sarah.

God told Abraham not to worry, that God would make of Ishmael a great nation. He told Abraham that Ishmael would not represent Abraham covenantally in history. That position of authority would be inherited by Isaac. But God was not going to destroy Ishmael or Hagar.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. ([http://bit.ly /rstymp](http://bit.ly/rstymp)); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

God did not bother to tell this to Hagar. So, as she and her son wandered in the wilderness, they found no water. They ran out of the water which Abraham had given to them. Eventually, Ishmael collapsed. The Bible says that Hagar put him under a bush. This was not an infant. He was about 14 years old, a year older than when he was circumcised at 13 (Gen. 17:25). It is obvious that they had been without food and water for a considerable period. God had stretched them to the limit.

Finally, Hagar cried out to God. She did not ask for deliverance. She simply told God she did not want to see her son die. She had given up all hope. She told God this as her final testimony. Only at this point did the angel of God reveal the truth to her. God had set apart Ishmael, meaning that He had sanctified him, so that he could be a founder of a nation.

At that point, Hagar saw that there was a well nearby. There was a source of water, which meant that there was a source of life.

The angel of God had told her that her son would grow to be a leader of men. Only then did God reveal the means by which Ishmael would be restored. Hagar took some water to him, and held him up with one hand (21:18). Presumably, she reached behind his back, lifted him up, and gave him something to drink. That restored him. He was then able to continue growing. He became a great archer (21:20).

We have a lesson here. Hagar did not have sufficient faith in God. She believed that her son would soon die, and she would die after him. She knew enough about the relationship between God and man to pray to God. She explained her situation. She did not ask for deliverance, but she did point out to God the serious situation in which she and her son found themselves. She had no confidence that God would deliver either of them. But, just to make certain that she departed from life in communication with God, she prayed to him, telling him of her concern.

It was not that Hagar had no confidence at all in God. She knew that God exists. She knew that God listens to the prayers of men and women. She wanted to explain herself before she died. She did not want to die while out of touch with God. So, she had some knowledge of the way God deals with mankind. But, in the final analysis, she did not have very much trust in God. She did not see God as a deliverer. She saw him as a judge. She wanted to explain herself to the judge, but she was not begging for mercy.

Only after she admitted that she could no longer handle her own

affairs did God reveal to her that her son had a great future. Only then did He reveal to her that she was within walking distance of a well. She had not seen that well. There was her physical deliverance, right in front of her, and she had not seen it.

God deals with people in distress in the same way that He dealt with Hagar. He lets them wander aimlessly in the wilderness. He waits for them to call upon Him. There is no evidence from the text that Hagar had prayed to God prior to this. Even in dire straits, she did not pray for deliverance. We are not told why.

Here was how Hagar was delivered. First, she laid her son under a bush. This might give him some shade, but it would only delay death for a little time. Second, she walked away from him. She did not want to see him die. Third, she explained her situation to God. She did not ask for deliverance. Fourth, God revealed to her the fact that he had not withdrawn his blessing for her son. Her son would not die. Fifth, she looked around and saw a well.

Conclusion

Hagar was driven into the wilderness. She did not have much sense. She waited until she had completely run out of alternatives, meaning opportunities, before she finally sat down and told God about her problem. She should not have waited so long.

Hagar wanted to get out of the wilderness, but she did not see the way out. Hagar's deliverance was right in front of her. She did not see this. There was a well in the wilderness. There was an oasis. It was not free. The price of obtaining this water was self-discipline, obedience, and faith. This has not changed.

COMPETITIVE BARGAINING

And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob (Gen. 25:31–33).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Economic Oppression

Throughout the Bible, there are warnings against economic oppression. Men are not supposed to take advantage of weaker neighbors, widows, strangers, or those temporarily in need. Regarding food supplies, men are warned not to hold supplies off the market in order to obtain a higher price. “He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it” (Prov. 11:26).² It should be understood that this prohibition on “forestalling” does not involve the civil government. The state is not to set arbitrary prices for the sale of food (or any other scarce economic resource). The sanctions are social (cursing by the public) and the loss of a blessing from God. Food may be sold legitimately at a profit, but it is supposed to be sold, not hoarded for the sake of obtaining a higher price. The passage in Proverbs refers to large-scale commercial agriculture, since the forestalling involves sufficient quantities of corn to enrage the general public. It is unlikely that such an outcry would be aimed at someone who was hoarding only enough corn to feed his

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 32.

family, since a man is responsible for the welfare of his family (I Tim. 5:8), and since the withholding of such small quantities could hardly impose a major burden on the whole community. The frame of reference is the withholding of so much grain that local prices are affected, such that the sale of this grain represents a substantial benefit to the community.

Given this perspective on food sales, must we categorize Jacob as an oppressor? Or is it legitimate to classify him simply as a successful bargainer?

Bargaining in this family was an accepted tradition, after all. Jacob's grandfather had tried to negotiate with God Himself, who appeared to Abraham in a pre-Incarnation form of a man in the plains of Mamre. Abraham had tried to lower the price of preserving Sodom. Would God preserve the city for the sake of 50 righteous people? Yes? How about 45? Fair enough? How about 40? But that is a fairly considerable sum. What about 20? All right, here is my last offer: Will you spare the city for the sake of ten righteous people? And God, knowing that only Lot was righteous in the city, graciously agreed to each reduction of price offered by faithful Abraham (Gen. 18:22–32). In the language of the modern marketplace, Abraham was asking God to spare the city for a “wholesale” price. God in no way rebuffed this continual bargaining process as somehow immoral or in poor taste. Yet he was asking God to preserve a perverse society for the sake of only a handful of righteous men—a declining handful. He bargained.

B. Esau's Character

The New Testament's assessment of Esau is clear enough: he was a profane person, “who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” (Heb. 12:16). He “despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34b). In his heart, the man was a murderer (Gen. 27:41). Though he was entitled to the double portion of the inheritance because he was the firstborn (Deut. 21:15–17),³ in terms of his personal character, he was to be regarded as the second son. God loved Jacob (an astonishing miracle of grace) and hated Esau even before they were born (Rom. 9:10–13). God's promise had been with Jacob from the beginning (Gen. 25:23). God hated Esau from the beginning, and He laid waste to his heritage (Mal. 1:3).

Nevertheless, had not Esau come to his brother in time of great

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

need? Didn't he deserve lawful consideration from Jacob? Didn't he announce that he was dying of starvation, making his birthright worthless in his own eyes (25:32)? Shouldn't Jacob have had compassion on his dying brother, comforting him in his hour of crisis? Didn't Jacob in fact owe food to Esau? Yet he actually bargained with him for the starving man's birthright. Can we regard Jacob's actions as ethical?

Before commenting on the biblical account of the relationship between Jacob and Esau, we must first understand something about hunger, food deprivation, and actual starvation, which are not the same things. We are told in verse 29 that Esau was "faint." Yet the obvious reaction of Esau after his meal indicates that this faintness was anything but a faintness unto death.

Herbert Shelton, an advocate of supervised fasting as a means of attaining good health, documented numerous cases of individuals who have fasted well over a month. He cited a statement by Dr. Ragnar Berg, a Swedish biochemist: "One can fast for a long time, we know of fasts over a hundred days duration, so we have no need of fearing that we will die of hunger."⁴ In March of 1963, a couple was rescued in northern British Columbia. Victims of a plane crash, the pair had gone without food for over a month and a half. They had survived in their lean-to by drinking water and sitting by the fire. The lady, who had been somewhat overweight before the crash, had lost 30 pounds. The man, who had been more active during the fast, had lost 40 pounds. Physicians who examined them announced that they were in "remarkably good" condition.⁵ Shelton gave an account of one 70-year-old victim of asthma. The man was placed on a complete fast for 42 days under a physician's care. He experienced a major asthma attack the first night of the fast; subsequently, all symptoms disappeared, never to return.⁶ Fasts of similar lengths have been supervised by two physicians who specialize in treating overweight patients, Dr. Lyon Bloom of the Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta and Dr. Garfield Duncan of the University of Pennsylvania.⁷

The feelings of hunger that bother fasting individuals generally disappear within 36 hours, Shelton reported.⁸ The fast should end, he

4. Herbert Shelton, *Fasting Can Save Your Life* (Chicago: Natural Hygiene Press, 1978), p. 28.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–19.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 23. I have personally fasted for six consecutive days without food or juices, and I experienced no problems. My hunger pains were minimal.

said, only when hunger returns, which can be a month later. This re-appearance of hunger is not accompanied with hunger pains. “The hungry person is conscious of a desire for food, not of pain or irritation. It is a false appetite that manifests itself by morbid irritation, gnawing in the stomach, pain, the feeling of weakness, and various emotionally rooted discomforts.”⁹ The fact, then, that Esau was “faint” does not prove that he was biologically desperate for food.

It is important to bear in mind the fact that God had promised Rebekah that two separate nations would arise from her sons (Gen. 25:23). This indicated that a separation based on ethical standing before God would eventually take place, since “two manner of people” would be born. The covenant line, the true heirs of God’s promises, would be extended through the younger son. God’s hostility to Esau and his descendants, the nation of Edom, was implacable (Mal. 1:2–3).

Therefore, when Esau came before Jacob to request a meal, Jacob was confronting an enemy of God. Moreover, this enemy possessed a very valuable capital asset, namely, legal title to the birthright that was due to the eldest son. If this birthright had remained with Esau, then an important transfer of capital would not have taken place. The Edomites would be the heirs of the blessing. Yet the Edomites were not to be the heirs of God’s promises, something God had revealed to Rebekah.

It is true that Esau was Jacob’s brother, biologically speaking. The question then arises: Did Jacob owe his biological brother a free meal? Was it immoral for Jacob to refuse to give his biological brother a free meal? If he did owe a free meal to Esau, morally though not legally, then he was clearly being selfish when he began to bargain for one.

C. Subsidizing Evil

Are we acting immorally and selfishly when we enter into a voluntary economic exchange with the enemies of God, instead of giving them everything they ask for, irrespective of who they are, what they plan to do with our assets, and what their present condition of strength happens to be? Is a voluntary exchange less preferable than an unconditional gift to an enemy of God? If the enemy of God is not actually destitute, and therefore not totally dependent upon our mercy, must we heed his every request for a free handout? If so, where does the Bible say so? Must we subsidize evil men?

9. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

“In the name of Christian charity,” wrote Rushdoony,

we are being asked nowadays to subsidize evil. Every time we give in charity to anyone, we are extending a private and personal subsidy to that person. If through our church we help an elderly and needy couple, or if we help a neighboring farmer with his tractor work while he is in the hospital, we are giving them a subsidy because we consider them to be deserving persons. We are helping righteous people to survive, and we are fulfilling our Christian duty of brotherly love and charity. On the other hand, if we help a burglar buy the tools of his trade, and give him a boost through a neighbor’s window, we are criminal accomplices and are guilty before the law. If we buy a murderer a gun, hand it to him and watch him kill, we are again accessories to the fact and are ourselves murderers also. Whenever as individuals in our charity, or as a nation in that false charity known as foreign aid and welfare, we give a subsidy to any kind of evil, we are guilty before God of that evil, unless we separate ourselves from the subsidy by our protest.¹⁰

His conclusion is straightforward: “We need therefore to call most of which passes for charity today exactly what it is. First, it is a subsidy for evil. Second, it involves a penalizing and taxing of the righteous in order to subsidize evil, and this penalizing of the godly is an important part of this false charity. Third, basic to this kind of action is a love of evil, a preference for it and a demand that a new world be created in which evil will triumph and prevail.”¹¹

D. The Birthright

If you had been given the responsibility of offering counsel to Jacob, what would have been the proper advice? Would you have told him that he owed a meal to his lawless brother? If so, then your counsel would have meant the loss of the value associated with the birthright. If Esau was willing to trade his birthright for a meal, which was the case, then he was asking Jacob not simply to give him a free meal, but rather *to give him permanent possession of the birthright*. If Jacob was in a position to ask for and receive the birthright he cherished, which Esau despised, as the Bible says, then to fail to make the transaction meant *giving up the birthright that was virtually in his hands*. It

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *Bread Upon the Waters* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1969), p. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rjrsb>). This book is a compilation of columns Rushdoony wrote for *The California Farmer*.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

was not simply the value of the food that Jacob would have had to forfeit, but the value of both the food and the birthright—the birthright that Esau valued less than food.

To understand the nature of this exchange, consider verse 34: “Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.” What an astounding recovery from the brink of death! A few moments before he had announced that he was facing a life-and-death crisis. Yet after one hearty meal, he sauntered out undaunted. The New Testament does not say that he traded his birthright away for his life; he traded it away for “one morsel of meat.” One morsel of meat is not the dividing line between life and death. He wanted a handout. He did not deserve mercy.

What are we to make of Esau’s words? Did he really believe that he was facing death from imminent starvation? If so, he was present-oriented to a fault. His stomach was growling, and he simply could not bear the discomfort. Another possible interpretation is that he was lying to Jacob about his condition. He wanted a meal and thought he could play upon Jacob’s sympathy. This indicates that the two did not get along well to begin with—a reasonable assumption, given Jacob’s plain ways and Esau’s skills as a hunter (25:27). But, in all likelihood, Esau was present-oriented. How else could he justify his willingness to give up his birthright for a mess of pottage? Would any future-oriented man have traded so much for the sake of so little? He justified his willingness to enter into such a woefully ridiculous exchange by feigning near starvation. Once the transaction was consummated, he did not even bother to keep up the pretense. He got up and went his way, leaving his birthright behind. Then he despised his birthright, a phenomenon known among children by way of Aesop’s fables as “sour grapes.” Anything worth less than a single meal, yet valued so much in the eyes of the culture of that era, had to be despised by anyone so short-sighted as to sell it so cheaply. He wanted a handout. He feigned helplessness in order to receive mercy. His trick failed.

Why would anyone have entered into such a transaction? Esau’s present-orientedness was his downfall. He wanted immediate gratification. The benefits of the birthright seemed so far in the future to Esau, and the food was so tempting. Why cling to something so valueless in the present (the value of the birthright, discounted by his very high rate of interest, or time-preference), when one might get something quite valuable right now (a mess of pottage)?

Jacob knew his brother's character quite well. On the surface, His offer of some stew for his brother's birthright was nothing short of preposterous. He knew his brother's price because he understood Esau's preposterously high present-orientedness. Esau possessed a very high time-preference; he wanted instant gratification. He therefore made economic decisions in terms of a high rate of interest, so that he discounted the present value of future goods quite steeply, almost forcing their value to zero on his personal preference scale. Jacob understood the economic implications of his brother's preference for instant gratification, and he made him the offer: birthright for food. The food was worth a lot to Esau; the future value of the birthright meant practically nothing to him. The result was this remarkable exchange. Jacob purchased legal title to his promised birthright.

The birthright had been promised to Jacob. Yet Jacob bargained in a free market to obtain it. By God's law, later put into written form by Moses, it was Esau's right as the firstborn, as long as Esau remained faithful to the covenant. God knew in advance that he would not (Rom. 9:10–13). Jacob used this incident in Esau's life to purchase the birthright at a remarkably low price. Esau's character flaw, plus the presence of his temporary hunger, combined to present a unique economic opportunity to Jacob. Jacob was not one to let an opportunity like this escape. By despising the covenant, his birthright, Esau forfeited his rights as the firstborn son.

Conclusion

There is not the faintest hint in the Bible that Jacob's transaction with Esau was in any way immoral. Any attempt on the part of commentators to draw conclusions from this incident concerning the immorality of sharp economic bargaining is wholly unwarranted exegetically. It is in no way immoral to bargain competitively with anyone whose lack of vision, lack of foresight, lack of self-discipline, and lack of a strong future-orientation have combined to place him in a weak bargaining position. Such men are entitled to purchase their heart's desire, namely, instant gratification, at whatever price they are willing to pay. We should ask them to pay a lot.

This conclusion is not sufficient to justify overly sharp bargaining with righteous men who have been forced by unpredictable circumstances into a position of competitive weakness. Mercy is to be shown to victims of external crises. The moral rule against the forestalling

(withholding) of grain is a case-law application of the biblical law against economic oppression. But this valid rule in no way inhibits men from getting the best return they can in exchanges with undisciplined, present-oriented men. There is no doubt that the present-oriented man is at a distinct competitive disadvantage when bargaining with a future-oriented person, and it is quite possible that he will forfeit something as valuable as his birthright for something as valueless as a single meal. The fact that assets tend to flow in the direction of future-oriented, thrifty, and self-disciplined economic actors is a testimony to the godly order of a free economy. To stand in judgment of Jacob's competitive bargaining with Esau is to stand in judgment of a moral and economic order which penalizes the present-oriented man, benefits the future-oriented man, and in no way imposes compulsion on either. Such a critical judgment certainly goes beyond the Bible's assessment of Jacob's actions.

ENVY AND DESTRUCTION

And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him (Gen. 26:18–20).

This encounter was based on a conflict over ownership. The herdsmen claimed that the water was theirs. Isaac removed his flocks from the region. This was not necessarily an acknowledgment of their claim of ownership. It was a way to avoid conflict.

What has escaped the observation of most commentators is the peculiar aspect of the herdsmen's claim. Isaac knew where to dig for water. He did it twice more (vv. 21–22). This indicates that Abraham had told him exactly where the wells had been located. When he arrived at the designated locations, he found that the wells had been filled in with dirt. But why?

Their water was a valuable resource. The herdsmen claimed that the water belonged to them. It was worth challenging Isaac. Yet they had not been using this water. Why not? Why allow a valuable resource be wasted for decades? Maybe they had forgotten. This seems unlikely. The wells had belonged to Abraham. He had departed. Why did their predecessors fill in the wells with dirt? What was the point? Here was a valuable asset. Abraham had discovered water. Now he had abandoned the wells. Why not take over the asset? Why fill in these wells?

The answer is envy. The Philistines knew that Abraham had dug the wells. He had a special relationship with the king of the Philistines (Gen. 21:23–24). Abraham had complained that some of the king's ser-

vants had forcibly taken possession of wells that Abraham had dug (v. 25). The king said that he knew nothing about this (v. 26). At that point, the two men made a covenant with each other. Abraham handed over seven ewe lambs as a testimony to the king that he had dug the well (v. 30). Then Abraham returned to that place and planted a grove (v. 33). Abraham had left the region after many years (22:1–2). So, these wells were clearly Abraham's. Even though he had departed, none of the locals decided to occupy Abraham's land.

They filled in the wells with dirt. This was a public testimony that the assets would not be used by anyone. Abraham might return. This guess was incorrect; he didn't. His heir might return. This happened. Isaac returned. There was always a possibility that the heir would not recall the location of the wells. Why would that be an advantage to the local economy? It wouldn't. If Isaac returned to the land and became productive, the local economy would benefit. There would be new sources of wealth. But the locals resented Isaac's presence.

The locals then claimed that the wells belonged to them. This was preposterous. Isaac knew where the wells had been, because his father had told him. His father had dug them. He had owned them. The locals knew this. This was the reason why their fathers had not taken possession of the wells as soon as Abraham departed. Instead of taking possession of the wells, they filled them in. They decided that, as long as they could not own the wells, no one would, especially Abraham's heir. They preferred nothing to something. They could have worked a leasing arrangement. They chose to destroy the wells instead.

This was envy in action. Envy is not the desire to take away part of another person's wealth. That sin is covetousness or jealousy.¹ Envy is the desire to see to it that no one has any advantage. If they could not own the wells, then no one would gain any benefit from them. It is better to waste an asset, they concluded, rather than see the owner benefit from it in any way from its use.

This is a destructive outlook. The envious person would rather see no one benefit, just because he cannot directly benefit. The locals could have leased rights from Abraham. They would have received the use of water. But to gain this benefit, they would have had to offer Abraham something in exchange. Abraham would have benefitted. Better that no one benefit, they concluded. Better that the dominion covenant not be extended than to let Abraham benefit.

1. Chapter 15:B.

Conclusion

The conflict over the newly dug wells took place because the heirs of the original thieves of Abraham's wells wanted to re-claim the stolen property which the king had taken away from the thieves. The thieves had accepted this decision, for they had no choice. They acknowledged Abraham's ownership of the wells by their act of destruction: filling in the wells. As soon as Isaac's men had dug the wells, the locals tested Isaac's willingness to defend his inheritance. He was not willing. He wanted to avoid trouble. The local Philistines became the heirs of Abraham. It was a stolen legacy.

THE USES OF DECEPTION

And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me (Gen. 27:19).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance, point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

Commentators who are prone to criticize Jacob's sharp bargaining with Esau are equally prone to argue that Jacob's character flaw is inescapably visible in this incident. Here, Jacob resorted to lying to receive the coveted blessing from his father. He used a flagrant deception on his aged father, taking advantage of the old man's failing eyesight to gain the blessing. Jacob, it seems, would stop at nothing in order to secure an economic advantage for himself.

The commentator who comes to the Bible with the assumption that it is immoral to tell a falsehood in every conceivable case, must naturally conclude that Jacob's actions here were unlawful. However, such an *a priori* assumption concerning deception overlooks, or in some instances deliberately suppresses, the testimony of the Bible that God may bless deception for a godly cause.

A. Lying for God's Sake

The obvious example is Rahab, who deliberately lied to the representatives of Jericho's government who were searching for the Hebrew spies. Even John Calvin attacked the propriety of Rahab's lie, although he exonerated her completely in her act of treason against Jericho. Calvin was followed in this judgment by the Puritan commentator

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

Matthew Poole and the twentieth-century theologian John Murray.² Yet it should be patently obvious that a spy is, by definition, a full-time deceiver, as is the treasonous individual who remains inside the commonwealth as an agent of the enemy. Analytically speaking, the fact that a verbal lie was spoken by Rahab is incidental in comparison to the far greater deception of her treason, yet the commentators are all too often unwilling to accept the incidental lie, although they are forced to follow the New Testament's judgment concerning the righteousness of Rahab's treason (Heb. 11:31).

The closed-mouth traitor of Judges 1:24–26 and the obvious use of deception by Ehud the regicide (Judg. 3:15–25) are other examples of the successful use of deception by men who were covenanted to God. When Ehud announced the intention of his secret visit in the king's chambers, to deliver a “present” to the king, he was no less a liar than Rahab or Jacob; no king expects to receive in private a man carrying a dagger rather than a present from his defeated subjects (Judg. 3:15). So basic was deception in Ehud's case that his own biology was involved. He was a left-handed man, so he strapped his 18-inch dagger onto his right thigh, so that the lazy guards would examine only his left thigh, where any normal right-handed man would strap a dagger for rapid use.³

Another remarkable instance of wartime deception is the story of Jael and Sisera, the captain of the army of Hazor, the Canaanitic captor of Israel. In a successful uprising against their captors, the Israelites, commanded by Deborah, defeated Sisera's forces. Fleeing on foot, Sisera came to the home of Heber the Kenite, who had a peace treaty with Sisera's commander, Jabin (Judg. 4:17). He was welcomed by Heber's wife, Jael, who said, “Turn, my lord, in to me; fear not” (4:18). He told her to tell any man inquiring about some male visitor that there was no man present (4:20). Then he went to sleep, confident in the bond between him and the family and secure in the knowledge that Jael would lie for his sake and deceive his pursuers. What did she do? She unilaterally broke her husband's treaty with the defeated nation. She crushed his head by pounding a nail through his temples and liter-

2. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 47–48; Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (London: Banner of Truth, [1685] 1962), I, p. 411; John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 138–39.

3. For an extended discussion of the treasonous nature of Rahab's lie, and a justification of her actions, see my essay, “In Defense of Biblical Bribery,” in R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 838–42.

ally nailed him to the ground (4:21). As a type of the Messiah who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), she effectively broke the word of her husband. What is the Bible's judgment concerning her disobedience to her husband, her active deception, her lies, and her murder? "Most blessed of women is Jael" (Judg. 5:24). Deborah's song of praise to Jael catalogues her deceptions and praises them (4:25–27). Jael's nail has provided exegetical headaches for legalistic commentators ever since.

But, exclaim the "no deceptions allowed" commentators, would God use deception to bring forth His will in history? The Bible's answer is categorically affirmative. Speaking of the false prophets of Israel, God instructed Ezekiel to announce:

Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD: Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are estranged from me through their idols. . . . And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh [unto him]; That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 14:4–5, 9–11).

The legalistic or humanistic commentator will have enormous problems with this passage of Scripture, and it can serve as a very useful "litmus test" of an implicit exegetical humanism on the part of a Bible expositor. Another passage in which deception is singled out as a valid part of God's plan for the ages is II Thessalonians 2:8–12:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: [Even him] whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders. And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth,

but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It is difficult to understand why commentators criticize the actions of Rahab in lying to the representatives of a doomed, degenerate culture, and why Rahab's verbal deception should be accounted to her as unrighteousness, despite the clear testimony of the Bible concerning her faithfulness. It is as if the clear testimony of Scripture is too bright in the eyes of the commentators. They are as confused by the revelation of God in this area of applied faith as the early disciples were by the parables of Jesus. They simply cannot grasp the nature of God's total hostility toward humanistic rebellion.

B. Jacob's Lie

The problem in understanding Jacob's lie to his father should not be that he lied as such, but only that he lied to a fellow believer. Colossians 3:9 declares: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." Was Jacob guilty of a violation of this commandment? There seems to be no escape: he disobeyed the law. The question is: Is this law absolutely universal, irrespective of historical circumstances? If it is, then Jacob sinned. If Jacob's action here was lawful, then the rule is not absolutely universal, but must be tempered by our knowledge of other biblical rules that modify or even suspend its binding nature in certain instances.

Several facts must be borne in mind when dealing with the context of Jacob's lie. *First*, God had spoken out in favor of Jacob as against Esau (Gen. 25:23). The elder son would serve the younger, God had declared. *Second*, God's reason for reversing the normal relationship between elder and younger brothers was His grace toward Jacob. He hated Esau and his heirs, while He loved Jacob and his heirs (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:10–13). Jacob was redeemed; Esau was not. *Third*, God had explicitly revealed His plans for the two nations prior to the birth of the twins. He had told Rebekah. *Fourth*, Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the venison Esau shot, but Rebekah loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). Isaac was not concerned about the moral standing of the two sons before God, nor did he care about God's explicit revelation concerning their respective futures. What he was concerned about was meat. In this respect, he was a lot like Esau, who was more concerned with meat than his birthright (Heb. 12:16). This present-orientation of Isaac, who refused to consider God's word concerning the future position of the two families, blinded him to the character flaws in Esau,

who was a murderer in his heart (Gen. 27:4). *Fifth*, Isaac was determined to use his power of giving the patriarchal blessing as a device to get one last round of venison out of Esau (Gen. 27:41). He was perfectly willing to challenge God's judgment concerning the respective merits of the two sons in order to get one final meat dinner. He ignored the fact that Esau had sold his birthright. He ignored the fact that God had promised Jacob the position of superiority. All that mattered was his own instant gratification. In other words, at this point Isaac went to war against God. He rebelled. *Sixth*, Rebekah instigated the deception, not Jacob. She was a lawful authority in the home, and she had been told directly by God about the future of the two sons and the future of their heirs. She sided with the son God favored. *She sided with the covenant line*. Thus, Jacob did not unilaterally decide to thwart the desires of his parents; he decided to follow the advice of one of them—the one who was conforming her actions to the prophecy of God. Rebekah was clearly more future-oriented than her husband, for she took seriously the promise of God concerning the future of Jacob's side of the family—the covenant line that would ultimately bring forth the Messiah. Though God normally rules through the husband rather than the wife, and though the elder son normally receives the double portion, in this instance the wife sided with God against her husband, and with the younger son against the elder.

Jacob was unquestionably following the orders of a lawful superior. At first, he worried about the deception involved; his father might discover his deception, "and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing" (27:12). But his mother assured him that he had no need to worry: "Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice. . ." (27:13). Jacob obeyed.

C. Isaac's Rebellion

Isaac had decided to give Esau the whole blessing. It was not simply that he intended to give Esau the double portion, as first-born sons are entitled to under normal conditions. He intended to give Esau such a great blessing that he would put Jacob permanently under the dominion of the evil elder brother. His blessing had announced: "Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee. . ." (Gen. 27:29a). He thought he was giving the blessing to Esau. Instead, Jacob received it. From the beginning, it was clear that Esau was hated by

God, and would not be part of the covenant line. God had told Rebekah: “Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). Two nations meant that one nation was part of the covenant line and was chosen of God, while the other would be cast aside. God intended that Jacob would receive the total blessing, not just a double portion. Isaac, in contrast, decided that he could thwart God’s declared will by autonomously giving the blessing to the son and nation that God had decided to hate (Rom. 9:11–14; Mal. 1:3–4). It was through Jacob’s deception that Jacob received the promised comprehensive blessing, which left nothing for Esau except the promise of a dwelling place in “the fatness of the earth” (27:39). Isaac had tried to save the very best for rebellious Esau. So, he had nothing remaining within the framework of the covenant line to give to his hoped-for beneficiary, once Jacob’s deception had brought to pass God’s original promise to Rebekah. *Isaac’s rebellious choice*, coupled with *Jacob’s effective deception*, brought *God’s promised conditions* into the stream of covenant history.

Rebekah understood the motivation and character weakness of her husband. She had seen him favor Esau from the beginning. Now he was about to defy God, cheat Jacob, and bless the eldest son. Like Esau, Isaac was guilty of the sin of honoring his belly more than God’s promises, almost like the belly-worshipping sinners criticized by Paul (Phil. 3:18–19). There was no time to lose. Rebekah made an assessment concerning the likelihood that she and Jacob could convince Isaac to reverse his lifetime judgment concerning the respective merits of the two sons, and she decided that deception, rather than an appeal to God’s word, was more likely to be successful. After all, the two sons were 77 years old.⁴ Isaac had not yet seen the light. So she cooked up some meat, thereby appealing to Isaac’s desires, and dressed her son in camouflage.

When Esau returned to receive his blessing and found that Jacob

4. Joseph was 30 when he gave his prophecy to Pharaoh (Gen. 42:46). Nine years later (Gen. 45:6), Jacob came down to Egypt. He was 130 years old (Gen. 47:9). Joseph was 39. Thus, Jacob was 91 when Joseph was born (130 – 39). According to Gen. 29:20, 30 and 30:25, Joseph was born at the end of Jacob’s first 14 years of service. Thus, Jacob entered Padan-Aram at age 77 (91 – 14), and married at 84 (77 + 7). According to Gen. 27:41 to 28:1, Jacob fled to Padan-Aram immediately after his deception of Isaac, so that Jacob was 77 when he received the blessing. Esau was also 77, being Jacob’s twin.

had received it, he asked for an additional blessing from his father. Isaac's answer is significant: "Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants. . . ." (Gen. 27:37a). He announced that it was his blessing that had elevated Jacob over his brother. Yet God had announced this from the beginning. It is obvious that Isaac understood his blessing as having the power to convey this position of historical superiority—covenantal superiority—apart from God's word. Furthermore, he had unquestionably intended to give this favored position to the rebellious son who would trade him meat for the blessing.

What had Jacob accomplished? He had executed the preposterous exchange. Like Esau, who had traded his birthright for a mess of pottage—one morsel of meat (Heb. 12:16)—Isaac traded the blessing that was lawfully Jacob's for one meal of savory meat. Jacob was only purchasing that which was covenantally and legally his. God had promised it, and he had purchased the birthright from his brother. Isaac had recognized Jacob's voice, but the camouflaged hands that appeared to be hairy, coupled with the promise of an immediate meal, were sufficient to allay Isaac's suspicions (Gen. 27:2–25). The idea of trading a meal of meat for a blessing owed to God's chosen recipient was preposterous. Jacob, however, had learned that it was sometimes necessary to enter into preposterous exchanges with present-oriented men in order to purchase what was covenantally his in the first place.

Isaac had persisted in his defiance of God's revelation concerning the boys throughout their lives. He had shown no willingness to reverse his assessment of their respective character for 40 years or longer. The twins were born when Isaac was 60 years old (25:26), and Esau had married the Hittite women against his parents' wishes when he was 40 years old (26:34–35); but the blessing was given 37 years after Esau's marriage. Every visible action on Isaac's part indicated that he would bless Esau, despite the pain Esau's wives had caused him. What could an appeal to the original promise of God have accomplished?

There are those who would say in the face of Isaac's whole history that both Rebekah and Jacob were in error, that they should have appealed to the old man's theological judgment by reminding him of God's assessment of the two sons. They should have denied the effect of a lifetime of active, conscious rebellion on Isaac's part, and told him, in defiance of his life-long preference for Esau and his venison, to bless Jacob instead. There are those who would say this, but none of the

New Testament writers ever did.

We are told in Hebrews 11:20 that “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning the things to come,” but this refers only to the confidence Isaac had that his blessing, as a patriarch in the covenant line, would have historical impact in time and on earth. He had confidence in his own word. There is no doubt that he did have confidence in his own word. It was an important word. It was so important that Jacob and Rebekah had to use deception in order to be assured that his word would be applied in the way that God had prophesied. His word was so important that he could tell Esau that he had transferred long-term authority to Jacob (Gen. 27:37). The power of his word was nevertheless dependent on his faith in God, and it took a conspiracy against him to make certain that his verbal blessing actually conformed to the announced intention of God to bless Jacob. It took deception, in other words, to bring Isaac’s words into line with the God to whom Isaac was officially committed, but whose own words Isaac defied in practice.

One conjecture made by critics of Jacob’s deception is that he was repaid, like for like, when his uncle Laban deceived him into a marriage with Leah, and then was able to compel Jacob to work an additional seven years to pay for Rachel (Gen. 29:23–28). He, too, used a disguise to trap the victim. The Bible says nothing about any “like for like” retribution being involved in this incident. We are told that Jacob faithfully served Laban six additional years. So faithfully did he serve, in fact, that Laban begged him to remain an administrator of his flocks after the seven years were over (30:27–28). Furthermore, despite Laban’s continued deceptions, it was Jacob who prospered (31:1–13). It is true that Jacob had been deceived, but he wound up so wealthy that his own wives, Laban’s daughters, were viewed by Laban’s household as strangers (31:5). Laban had used up the capital of the family, leaving the daughters with no inheritance (31:5). God had transferred Laban’s wealth to Jacob’s household (31:16).

It should be clear enough for anyone who examines the record of Jacob’s sojourn in the household of Laban that Laban’s deceptions resulted in the opposite outcome from what he had intended. He knew that God was with Jacob, which is why he hired him after the second seven years were up (30:27). Yet he persisted in numerous deceptions, trying to gain economic advantage over Jacob (31:7). He lost his daughters, his wealth, and even his household idols (31:19). Yet, when he confronted Jacob, he had the audacity to assert that everything Jac-

ob owned was his (31:43). (The idols were his, but he never found them [31:33–35].) Jacob told his uncle just how honestly and efficiently he had served him for two decades, sweltering during the day, freezing at night, and getting little sleep (31:38–42). Had God not been with him, Jacob charged Laban, surely Laban would have sent him away empty-handed (31:42). Yet it was Jacob who had the wealth, not Laban.

The results of Jacob's deception of Isaac were altogether beneficial to Jacob. The results of Laban's deceptions of Jacob were economically beneficial to Jacob. What are we to conclude? That deceptions as such always backfire? Obviously, Jacob's deception of his father did not backfire. It was Esau who wailed his despair, not Jacob. Are we to conclude that deception as such always wins? Hardly: Laban's losses testify to the opposite conclusion. What, then, are we to conclude?

D. The Holy Pretense

We are to conclude that it is better to conform ourselves to the explicit revelation of God, unlike Isaac and Esau, and to the visible signs of God's favor, unlike Laban and his sons, than to defy God. We have evidence that God blesses those who conform themselves to His covenantal law-order. We have evidence that a similar tactic to gain personal advantage, namely, the use of deception, can result in vastly different results, depending upon a person's place in the plan of God. God honored Isaac's blessing because He honored the deception by Rebekah and Jacob. The deception saved Isaac from a crucially important error of judgment. The deception enabled Jacob to gain that which was rightfully his, both by God's promise and Esau's voluntary sale. The deception in no way led to Jacob's impoverishment; indeed, the words of Isaac's blessing were fulfilled in Jacob's life over the next 20 years, as his heirs and capital grew rapidly.

If Jacob's action was categorically wrong, the Bible's testimony against him is inferential, not explicit. It would no doubt have been better if Isaac had never indulged his taste for meat at the expense of God's promises. It would no doubt have been better if Jacob had never had to use deception at Rebekah's insistence. But the deception was unquestionably preferable to Isaac's giving the blessing to Esau, and that was the situation Rebekah and Jacob faced. Jacob and Rebekah accepted their historical circumstances and acted in terms of them. Jacob prospered.

God deceives the unbelievers. Christ Himself spoke in parables deliberately, so that the people of His day would be confused, fail to repent, and perish in time and eternity. This was Christ's own response when the disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables: "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:15). How explicit must the Bible become to convince men of the valid role of deception and even verbal camouflage—Christ's chosen method of sending lawless men to eternal judgment—to convince His followers of the usefulness of deception? Are we to condemn the use of spies in cases when Christian nations confront their enemies? Was Moses wrong in sending the 12 spies into the land of Canaan? Puritans like William Perkins and William Ames had no doubt on this score; there are perfectly valid uses, they said, of the holy pretense.⁵

When we see a godly man headed for disaster, and we have proven on countless occasions in the past that directly confronting him with the truth of God has proven wholly incapable of turning him aside from a particular act of rebellion, and when we do not have any lawful authority over him in this particular instance, then the testimony of Rebekah and Jacob stands as a beacon to guide us: if he must be tricked to save him from a serious error, deception is valid. This rule of conduct is not to be used by men to exonerate the Labans of the world, but with His explicit praise and blessing of Jacob, God has implicitly acknowledged the validity of the occasional use of deception against brothers in the faith, or even fathers, at least in cases where other lawful authorities approve (in this case, Rebekah).

E. Confused Commentators

Unfortunately, conservative commentators have failed to deal adequately with the biblical doctrine of legitimate deception. They have tended to take a woefully unrealistic view of deception as such, irrespective of the context. All too typical of this approach is the analysis of Jacob's deception of his father that appeared in the standard late nineteenth-century work, the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Knowledge* (1894): "It cannot be denied that this is a

5. Cf. George L. Masse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

most reprehensible transaction, and presents a truly painful picture, in which a mother conspires with one son in order to cheat her aged husband, with a view to deprive another son of his rightful inheritance. Justification is here impossible. . . ." Such an analysis is almost completely devoid of historical understanding. The circumstances are generally ignored, including God's promise concerning the two sons, the lawful exchange between Jacob and Esau, the short-run perspective of Isaac, and the murderous nature of Esau. The time limitation under which Rebekah and Jacob were operating is also ignored. Is it any wonder that such a blind spot toward history, combined with an a priori approach to deception as such, has led to the social and practical irrelevance of the vast bulk of Christian ethical analysis over the past three centuries? Can you imagine a military commander burdened by the limitations of this variety of Christianity? He could not camouflage his artillery or missiles. He could not send out spies. He could not manufacture false reports in order to deceive the enemy. Is it any wonder that secular leaders throughout the West have come to regard Christians as socially irrelevant and utterly impotent to deal with the realities of life?

The commentators can always reply that since Jacob had been given the promise, he did not have to resort to deception. Somehow, God would have been able to bring His promise into history. Jacob never had to resort to competitive bargaining with his lawless brother, or to deception with his short-sighted (literally and figuratively) father. This same argument can be raised (and has been raised) with respect to Rahab,⁶ and it could be raised with Ehud and Jael. Somehow, God would have brought His will to pass without deception. How, we do not know. We cannot say. But God would have overcome the effects of truth-telling on the part of His servants. By implication, we tell the military commander he need not use camouflage.⁷

Rahab lied because she did not believe the rulers of Jericho had the

6. Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 138–39.

7. John Murray, a soldier who lost his eye in World War I, was aware of the military advantages of camouflage. When teaching a children's catechism class, Murray spoke critically of Rebekah's deception. But when he raised the question of camouflage to the class, he denied that camouflage is comparable to a verbal deception. Camouflage is concealment, not deception, and concealment is justified under certain conditions, namely, when we "conceal something from a person when that person has no right to know. . . ." In such a case, concealment "is not deception." This account is reprinted in John Murray, *A Memorial with Tributes*, ed. Iain Murray (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), p. 46. Sadly, Murray did not pursue this crucial line of reasoning. Isn't the question of "the right to know" central to the issue of lying?

right to know the whereabouts of God's servants, the spies. Rebekah decided that Isaac did not have the right to know about the costume—we might call it camouflage—Jacob wore. If we can dismiss the charge of immorality in the case of concealment by raising the question of “the right to know,” should we not dismiss the same accusation raised by critics, including Murray, against Rahab and Rebekah? He will win the war without it, without spies, and without any other sort of deception. How, we do not know. We cannot say. But we know. We know that the military commander, like Jacob and Rahab and Jael, is not truly under the constraints of historical circumstances. We assert that our commitment to unqualified truth-telling can overcome historical circumstances. But there is a problem with such logic: on occasion those praised by the Bible as great men and women have been exceedingly skillful liars, and the unquestioned success they have enjoyed as a direct and immediate result of their lies has been the very cause of the Bible's praise of them.

Jacob faced historical constraints. His father had made up his mind long ago, and he was trying to get one more plate of stew out of the deal—an unrighteous deal at that, one in defiance of God's promise, as well as the lawful exchange made by the two brothers. He was going to override that exchange, intervene in the market and thwart the economic implications of Esau's sale of his birthright. Isaac was about to become an interventionist, a redistributor of wealth, taking away the blessing owed to Jacob, who had paid for his birthright in a voluntary transaction, and transferring it back to the present-oriented, rebellious brother who had given him and Rebekah so much pain when he married the Canaanite wives (Gen. 26:34–35). Jacob had only a brief period of time to overcome Isaac, the rebellious interventionist and present-oriented statist, who, in that very moment, was willing to turn his back on the promise and law of God concerning the protection of private property in the sanctity of voluntary exchange. Jacob looked at the historical constraints that had been placed on him, and he lied. That lie worked!

Why do the commentators refuse to acknowledge that Jacob's deception was the immediate historical cause of his receiving what was lawfully his—lawfully because of God's promise and lawfully because of the voluntary exchange? Why do they look down on Jacob? It is difficult to say. What can be said is that it is time to stop criticizing Jacob and, by implication, Rebekah, and to start criticizing Esau and his short-sighted father, Isaac. In taking this approach to the Scrip-

tures, we may be able to restore a sense of reality and awareness of historical circumstances, to biblical exposition.

As I have already written, one of the arguments that commentators sometimes lodge against Jacob's deception of Isaac is this one: God repaid Jacob for his sin by having Laban deceive him in the same way when Laban put Leah under wraps and gave her to Jacob as if she had been Rachel. On the surface, this looks like an impressive argument, but, like Leah herself, it is disguised. Yes, Jacob was deceived. Jacob, however, was not acting sinfully against Laban, as Isaac had acted against Jacob with respect to the ownership of the birthright and the blessing that was attached to it. The sin was wholly on the part of Laban's family. At least three people were involved: Laban, Leah, and Rachel. Either of the daughters could have come to Jacob in advance and revealed what their father was planning. Leah had little incentive to reveal this secret, but Rachel did. The obvious threat Laban could have used against Rachel was this: without her cooperation in the deception, he would never permit her marriage to Jacob. Also, Rachel knew that she ordinarily owed her father obedience. But did she owe obedience to her father in the committing of sin? Could she not have eloped with Jacob? After all, she later deceived her father by stealing his household gods (Gen. 31:19). Her sorrow throughout her marriage came as a result of her unwillingness to disobey her father and reveal the planned deception in advance. Jacob loved her, and she betrayed him.

Rachel's sin was that she obeyed her father and went through with his evil plan. With this painful chain of events, God was not punishing of Jacob for his deception of, and disobedience to, his father Isaac; He was punishing Rachel for not having also disobeyed her father, just as Jacob disobeyed his. In short, the fundamental issue involved in Rachel's sinful deception of Jacob was not the deception as such. Instead, it was the issue of obedience to the ungodly command of her father. She obeyed her father, unlike Jacob, who refused to participate in his father's sin. She entered into a sinful deception of her future husband. But it was not her deception as such that constituted her sin, but rather her obedience to an unlawful command. Once again, we are faced with an important biblical truth: *it is not deception as such that is sinful*. We should not avoid asking the more important questions: Deception for what purpose? Deception under whose authority? Is the authority in question biblically valid? These questions must be answered before we take up the question of the lawfulness or unlaw-

fulness of a particular deception.

Conclusion

This is not “situation ethics.” Situation ethics denies the existence of any permanent moral standards. Situation ethics denies the existence of a standard of action for which each man will be responsible on the day of judgment. Situation ethics argues that the existential moment determines the ethics of an action, that *time is the god of man*.

What the Bible says, in this particular and limited case of deception, is that deception can be warranted. It provides us cases in which deception was warranted, primarily cases of war or, in the instance of Jacob and Esau, conflict between the representative heads of two separate nations. Just because deception is valid in cases of war, as the Bible affirms, we should not be led to the conclusion that there is nothing wrong with deception in general. We know that we are not supposed to bear false witness against our neighbor, for example. But the Bible also informs us that righteous saints have sometimes been forced to deceive in cases where others were acting unrighteously in direct defiance of God and God’s law. And far from being criticized by a single word in the Bible, they have been praised openly (in the case of Deborah’s praise of Jael), or grafted into the covenant line (Rahab), or blessed with enormous wealth (Jacob). Jacob tricked his father into bestowing the blessing on the one to whom it belonged by law and promise, and sure enough, the blessings were poured out on him. We should take this lesson seriously. If we fail to do so, the world will (and should) conclude that our religion is simply not serious and is therefore unworthy of serious consideration. If Jacob and Rahab and Jael were serious actors in history, we should do our very best to emulate their seriousness, their understanding of the meaning of the covenant, and their understanding of the historical circumstances in which they performed their covenantal role.

JACOB'S TITHE

And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee (Gen. 28:20–22).

The theocentric issue here is God's legal claim on 10% of the income of His priesthood. This is an aspect of the church's exclusive right to administer the sacraments, which is an aspect of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

This is the second reference to the tithe in Genesis. It is also the last. In the first case, Abram tithed to Melchizedek, the priest of Salem. In this latter case, no priest is named.

A. Household Priesthood

One reason for this silence is that, except for Melchizedek, who was still alive, “having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God” (Hebrews 7:3), there was no covenantal priesthood apart from the household priests of the family of Abraham.

The Scriptures do not indicate that Melchizedek tithed to anyone. He was the high priest. To whom would he have tithed? To what priest would he have publicly proclaimed His subordination? None.

A household priest prior to the Mosaic covenant had no one to tithe to, except on a special occasion, as when Abram came under

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion by Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 2.

Melchizedek's administration because of geography. Jacob had been under his father's authority as the household priest. He was part of this household. There was only one holy tribe in his day: the family of Isaac. There is no evidence that Isaac was still under Abraham's authority, for Abraham had moved away at the time of Isaac's marriage. He no longer played a role in the history of the covenant, except as the father of Midian (Gen. 25:2).² When Abraham left the region, the covenantal priesthood transferred to Isaac.

Jacob was no longer under the household authority of his father Isaac, who had been the household priest of the family. So, he had a problem. He had broken with his father through his deception. He had instead obeyed his mother, who had told him, "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee" (Gen. 27:8).³ He could not return home safely for a time because of Esau's wrath. He only had the clothes on his back. He had no known source of income. If he gained a source of income, there was no God-fearing priesthood to which he could pay his tithe as a subordinate.

If he paid a tithe to anyone except Melchizedek, who was not local, he would be visibly subordinating himself to the god whom the priest claimed to represent. This would not have been Jacob's God. It was covenantally better to pay no tithe at all while he was outside of the jurisdiction of his father's household. So, he made a confession before God. His refusal to pay a tithe while outside of his father's household should not be considered as an act of rebellion towards God. On the contrary, it was an act of obedience. He affirmed to God that as soon as he returned safely to his father's house, he would pay the tithe.

He did not say to whom he would pay this tithe. He did not have to. It was obvious to him and to God: to his father, if the old man was still alive at Jacob's return. His father was the household priest.

B. Jacob's Vow: Conditional or Covenantal?

Jacob's request for aid came in a form that we associate with conditionality: if . . . then. "If you will give me what I need to live—food and clothing—then I will pay a tithe." But such a request can also affirm a limitation: "If you do not give me what I need to live, then I cannot pay a tithe." It is a confession of impotence, of total depend-

2. An heir of Midian, Jethro, was Moses' father-in-law. He was a priest. He subordinated himself to Moses after the exodus, serving as an advisor (Ex. 18).

3. Chapter 27.

ence on the God who supplies all good things. As James wrote almost two millennia later, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).⁴

Was this vow a prayer of covenantal or conditional subordination? Conditional subordination says: “If you won’t, then I won’t,” while covenantal subordination says: “If you won’t, then I can’t.” Anyone who argues that this vow was conditional is necessarily arguing that Jacob had already broken covenant with God. He was threatening God with his withdrawal from the covenant. “Fork over the goods, God, or else I shall find another God to worship.” This would have been a preposterous confrontation. He would have been placing his inheritance at risk.

Jacob had inherited the birthright which God had told Rebekah he would inherit. God had told her that the older son would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). This was covenantal language: hierarchy, which is point two of the biblical covenant model.⁵ Jacob had recently deceived his father at his mother’s demand and with her cooperation in order to secure his father’s blessing. This blessing belonged to him by promise (to Rebekah) and by contract (with Esau). Esau had sold his birthright to him (Gen. 25:31–34).⁶ Isaac had planned to overturn this lawful transaction, but he had failed (Gen. 27:37). The covenantal blessing was now part of Jacob’s inheritance. This blessing had been based on his father’s office as a household priest.

His inheritance was already conditional: continuing subordination to God. If he broke covenant with the God of Abraham, he could not inherit any of the promises that God had made to Abraham. He was on the run because he was defending his inheritance from the rebellious decision of his father to give it to Esau. To put God to the test on one’s own authority is always an act of covenantal rebellion. “Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah” (Deut. 6:16). “And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Luke 4:12).

Any suggestion that Jacob’s request was conditional rather than covenantal raises some crucial theological problems. The main one is this: Jacob’s lack of trust in God. This was affirmed by David Croteau: “Rather than being an act of reverent worship, the context appears to

4. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 32.

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

6. Chapter 26.

show that Jacob's vow reveals his lack of trust in God's promise."⁷ He insisted that "it is a conditional vow."⁸ He went so far as to argue that Jacob was not yet a covenant-keeper. "In fact, he does not appear to be converted *yet* in the present passage. . . . Jacob's reaction is *not* one of awe, but rather of terror or fear."⁹ When did Jacob finally subordinate himself to God covenantally? After his all-night wrestling match with God when he was returning home two decades later (Gen. 32:24–30).¹⁰ He therefore came to saving faith in the total sovereignty of God only after he had defeated God in a wrestling match, forcing God to give him a blessing. Had I been on Mr. Croteau's dissertation committee, I would have asked him to explain this line of reasoning in greater detail before voting to make him Dr. Crouteau. It is not self-explanatory.

On the contrary, Jacob was coming before God at Bethel in the name of the biblical covenant: the sovereignty of God (point one: God's sovereignty),¹¹ his own sonship (point two: hierarchy),¹² the blessing from his father (point four: sanctions),¹³ and his inheritance (point five: inheritance).¹⁴ He was affirming point three: law.¹⁵ How? By affirming the law of the tithe.

He made this affirmation: "then shall the LORD be my God." This was not a threat to worship another god. This was a covenantal reminder to God that He had made promises to Abraham and Rebekah regarding the inheritance. His prayer was comparable to Moses' prayer to God when God offered to destroy all of the Israelites and raise up a new nation for Moses to lead. Moses reminded God of the dark implications of such an offer. Pagans would scoff at God's unreliable promises.

And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them

7. David Croteau, "A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Tithing: Toward a Theology of Giving in the New Covenant Era," a Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (2005), p. 78.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

11. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever (Ex. 32:11–13).

Moses appealed to God's reputation as a promise-keeper. The prayer worked. "And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Ex. 32:14).

Jacob's prayer was a covenantal prayer. "If I die in the wilderness, then your ability to fulfill your promise will be suspect." How could God prove for all to see that His promises are reliable? By proving that He was Jacob's God. How could He do this? By arranging events "so that I come again to my father's house in peace." This is exactly what God did. Jacob and Esau later buried their father (Gen. 35:29), just as Isaac and Ishmael had buried theirs (Gen. 25:9). Isaac had received the greater inheritance as the son of the promise. So did Jacob.

C. The Holy Tenth

Jacob promised God that he would pay the tithe if he lived and later returned to his father's house. Why a tithe? Because that was what Abram had paid Melchizedek.¹⁶ *This holy tenth is a token of subordination to the high priest.* The high priest is an ecclesiastical representative of God. He administers the sacraments to members of the ecclesiastical covenant.

Jacob's promise had a geographical limitation: his father's house. This meant that he would not pay the tithe until his return to his father's house. That he would not pay the tithe during his sojourn outside the promised land should not be seen as an act of defiance on his part. Ten percent of whatever he earned during this sojourn would be returned to God when the sojourn was over. Jacob would not forget who had supplied him with his wealth and under what conditions.

This was an affirmation of covenantal faithfulness. "I will not pay the tithe to covenant-breakers in this strange land. I will pay it instead when I return to my father's house. I will not visibly subordinate myself to the strange gods of this strange land. I will pay what I owe when I return to my father's house, which is my lawful inheritance." Jacob never forgot his inheritance. Neither did God.

16. Chapter 21.

Conclusion

Jacob's promise to tithe should not be understood as a one-time offer to provide something extra to God in exchange for benefits received. The tithe was mandatory on those who were not household priests of God. Jacob had not previously paid a tithe. Why not? Because he had been a son in a priestly household. But this would not be true for as long as he lived outside of that household's jurisdiction.

He affirmed to God that, upon his return to his father's house, he would pay a tithe on whatever he had earned while living outside his father's priestly jurisdiction. This was not a promise to do something extra. It was a promise to do something required. It was an affirmation of his faith in the covenant. It was an affirmation of his adherence to the law of the tithe (point three), which acknowledged his subordination to a priest (point two) by acknowledging God as the source of the blessings (point four). By this, he would maintain his inheritance (point five). God honored this request.

To whom did he owe this tithe? The text does not say, but the obvious answer is Isaac. Isaac was the head of his household. For a time Jacob was living outside this household. Upon his return, he would pay his tithe to the household priest.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape (Gen. 32:7–8).

The theocentric focus of this passage is inheritance, point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

Jacob had left his home at his mother's suggestion, in order to avoid the wrath of his brother (Gen. 27:42–45). He also wished to fulfill his parents' desire that he not marry a Canaanite (27:46; 28:1–5). He had left empty-handed; he returned with massive wealth. Now, as he travelled through the land inhabited by his brother, he feared for his life. He was afraid of Esau's vengeance. His messengers had informed him that Esau was coming, accompanied by 400 men (32:4). This did not appear to be a peaceful welcoming committee as far as Jacob was concerned. His mother had believed that Esau's fury would last only a few days (27:44), and Jacob had been absent for 20 years (31:38). Nevertheless, he was not so certain of his brother's present-orientedness. Perhaps Esau still bore a grudge against the brother who he believed had defrauded him of his blessing.

A. Capital Preservation

Jacob's immediate goal was to preserve at least a portion of his capital. He divided his flocks into two sections on the assumption that at least half of his goods would be saved from destruction or confisca-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

tion in case of a direct confrontation. This willingness to forfeit half his goods in order to save the other half, rather than risk everything in an “all or nothing” situation, testifies to Jacob’s economic realism. He intended to minimize his losses. There was too much at stake to invest all of his assets in terms of the present-orientedness of his unpredictable brother.

What is not generally understood is that Jacob was an old man by this time. Joseph is spoken of as “the son of his old age” (37:3), even though Benjamin was born after Joseph. No events are recorded between the death of Rachel at the birth of Benjamin (35:19), Jacob’s visit to his father (35:26), and his father’s death at age 180 (35:27). Jacob was then about 120 years old, since he was born 20 years after Isaac’s marriage when Isaac was 60 (25:26). Jacob was 97 when he met Esau’s forces.² Therefore, Jacob was taking great care to preserve half of his capital for the sake of his family, since there was no guarantee that at his advanced age he would be able to recoup his losses if Esau took everything Jacob owned. He was probably running short of economically productive years, so capital preservation was far more important than it would have been had he been younger. The economic strategy of an older man is understandably different from that which might appeal to a younger man who has time to recover from mistakes.

Only after he had taken what he regarded as an effective contingency plan did he go to God in forthright prayer (32:9–12). He then pleaded with God to uphold His promises to him, though freely admitting, “I am not worthy of the least of all these mercies, and of all the truth, which thou has shewed unto thy servant . . .” (32:10). He reminded God of God’s own covenant with him, to uphold and bless him, but he did not assume that God was in any way bound to honor Jacob’s temporary interpretation of the meaning of the terms of the covenant in that particular situation. He did not sit idly by, waiting for God’s automatic seal of approval on his own self-confident decisions. Jacob had already taken prudent steps to preserve a portion of his capital before coming to God. He acted sensibly, and he did so almost automatically, knowing from experience that God is in no way morally compelled to honor foolishness or lethargy.

Jacob did not leave off at this point. He adopted a further tactic to use against his brother. He decided to buy him off. In this case, how-

2. Jacob was 91 when Joseph was born: footnote #4 in chapter 27. He left Laban’s service six years later (Gen. 31:38).

ever, he did not assume that Esau could be pacified with a mess of pottage. It would be very expensive, but well worth it if he could stay the hand of Esau without conflict. He separated numerous animals from the main flock and divided them into smaller groups. He then commanded his servants to go in small droves, one at a time, delivering multiple peace offerings to Esau (32:13–21). Esau would then be like a modern child on Christmas morning, gleefully unwrapping a dozen small presents, one by one, instead of unwrapping one big box, and then becoming bored or even resentful at having received “only one” present. If Esau would not be placated with only one present, he might be placated with several smaller ones distributed tactically. The tactic worked (33:9–11).

B. Preparing for Confrontation

Jacob abandoned neither his common sense nor his total faith in God’s covenant promises. He knew that God had promised to bless him, but he could not be sure that in this instance God was automatically going to guarantee his safe passage through the land of Seir. Jacob knew God’s general promise was reliable; the *specific application* of that promise in this instance was unclear. Jacob did not presume that the long-run reliability of God’s promises necessarily applied to each historical situation in the way that he, Jacob, hoped the promises would apply. Thus, he took the most effective action that he could to preserve some of his assets, given his imperfect knowledge of the uncertain immediate future. Jacob knew that his blessings were unmerited by his own worthiness, for they were given through God’s grace, but he also understood that *the Lord helps those who help themselves*.³

First, Jacob divided his flocks into two camps. Second, he prayed to God for aid. Third, he selected animals from his flocks to serve as peace offerings to Esau. Finally, he was ready for the great confronta-

3. This phrase, so familiar to Americans as a result of Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, was part of the Puritan heritage. Franklin was nine years old when Samuel Moodey delivered his sermon, *The Debtors Monitor* (1715), in which he offered the following advice: “It is the diligent hand that gathers in, because its works are blessed. Nor has the blessing of God [though his common providence may] ever enriched, either the folded hand, or the hand stretched out in deceit or oppression. And now, not any further, and more particularly to add, how it is most for God’s glory, and man’s good, that we should help ourselves, that God may help us” (p. 51). “The Lord helps those who help themselves” is little more than a reworking of Moodey’s words, and like so many of “Poor Richard’s” slogans, the phrase was probably quite common in Franklin’s day.

tion—not with Esau, but with God in the flesh. Jacob wrestled with the unnamed man throughout the night and demanded a blessing from Him (32:26). This man was a theophany of God, a pre-Incarnation revelation of God in human form. We know that God walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). We know that Abraham was visited by God in human form, and that Abraham spoke to Him face to face (Gen. 18). We know that “the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Ex. 33:11a), yet Moses was told that he could not look on God’s face and live (Ex. 33:20). The face of God the Father must be mediated through a theophany, or through Jesus Christ (John 14:9). Jesus said: “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father” (John 6:46). Again, we read in John 1:18: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Thus, what Moses saw in the burning bush was not the very face of God the Father, but a theophany, in this case a dual theophany: the burning bush itself and the angel of the LORD in the midst of the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). When Joshua saw the man holding the sword and challenged Him, the man announced that he was in fact the captain of the Lord’s host. Joshua fell on his face, and the man said, “Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy” (Josh. 5:15). These were the same words God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). Thus, concluded the author of “Anger” in the conservative *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (1894): “These appearances are evidently ‘foreshadowings of the incarnation.’ By these God the Son manifested himself from time to time in that human nature which he united to the Godhead forever in the virgin’s womb.” He lists the man who wrestled with Jacob as one of these angelic theophanies.

In Hosea 12:4, we read of Jacob: “Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication to him. . . .” Hosea equated the angel with the Lord God of hosts, since it was He who spoke with Jacob (Hos. 12:5). The defeated wrestler gave Jacob his new name, Israel, which can be translated “he will rule as God” or “prince,” and one commentator thinks it is best translated “successful wrestler with God.”⁴ The ability to rename a patriarch is clearly a prerogative of God (Gen. 17:1–5). The man announced: “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and

4. “Israel,” *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), IV, p. 693.

with men, and thou hast prevailed” (32:28). These words were spoken to an elderly man who had the strength to wrestle all night with a theophany. He was determined to have a blessing, whether it took wrestling or, in the case of his father, deception. In both cases, he received his blessing.

C. The Face of God

Jacob called the place of conflict Peniel, or “the face of God,” for as he said, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (32:30). What is most significant with respect to economics is that *Jacob sought God’s face and blessing only after he had made all of his plans, but before he executed them*. He planned, prayed, planned some more, and then sought his blessing from God with such confidence that he wrestled God Himself to obtain it. He had done all that he believed possible to protect his assets and his life, and then he asked for his blessing. *Systematic planning and systematic prayer are complementary*.

Peniel was the capstone of a life of common sense, hard work, shrewd planning, and remarkable economic acumen. Jacob had bargained for the birthright that God had promised his mother he would receive; collected his blessing under adverse circumstances; departed in poverty; and returned back to the land with great wealth, which had been amassed in the face of treachery by Laban, an economic oppressor and liar (Gen. 31:41). He saw no contradiction between his careful planning to preserve a portion of his capital and his humble prayers before God. He saw no contradiction in his advanced age and a night-long struggle with God in the flesh (not in the sense of full Incarnation, of course). He saw no contradiction between God’s unmerited favor toward him and his own personal responsibility to do all that he could to preserve what God had given to him. He saw no reason to be soft-headed on the one hand, and blindly self-confident on the other. Jacob-Israel was an eminently practical man of great wealth and skill in managing capital resources, a man willing to act in terms of a life of education in capital accumulation, even before he approached God in prayer. He assumed, quite correctly, that God honors the sensible instincts of law-governed and experience-disciplined stewards—instincts gained through years of self-discipline. At Peniel, Jacob became Israel, a prince, a man of power with men and God, one who prevailed over his shortsighted brother, his nearsighted father, his sin-blinded

uncle, and God Himself.

He went from Peniel to his brother and the troops, and once again, he emerged with his life and capital intact. He was to walk with a limp (32:31), a sign of his non-autonomy before God, but he walked once again into victory. He played the servant's role in front of Esau his brother (33:14), and he did not tarry with him, probably because he was unwilling to risk another emotional shift by Esau, from friendship to rage. His wisdom and his knowledge of his opponent's psychological weaknesses allowed him to triumph one more time.

Conclusion

Jacob stands like a beacon of common sense and careful economic planning. His example is not one to be ashamed of; it is to be imitated. There is no shame in continual victory in the face of seemingly overwhelming opposition. The world needs more godly men who can successfully wrestle with God and circumstances, and still emerge victorious, although possibly limping.

It is Isaac, not Jacob, who tends to be favored by the modern pietistic commentators, the supposed victim of ungodly deception, rather than a shortsighted, nearsighted, present-oriented old man who refused to take seriously God's promise concerning the respective destinies of his two sons. Isaac was ready and willing to defy God and sell his blessing unlawfully for a plate of venison stew. The sympathy for Isaac and the criticism dumped on Jacob by modern commentators is indicative of the power of pietism—a systematic retreat from the hard decisions of daily life—to distort men's judgment of the Scriptures. Future-oriented Jacob, not present-oriented Isaac, should be our representative guide. When Isaac was old (though at least two decades away from death), he wanted a plate of stew as his final reward before joining his fathers in death (Gen. 27:4). When Jacob was old, he wrestled with God and asked for still another blessing, that he might pass through yet another danger to safety, and with at least half his family's capital intact. May godly old men live like Jacob rather than Isaac. May godly young men live like Jacob, too, in order to learn the successful way to grow old. Victory, as with any other skill, takes practice.

If we are to learn anything from the careers of Esau and Laban, it is this: *defeat takes practice, too*. Esau and Laban may have been successful men in their dealings with lesser men, but when they faced the likes of Jacob, they were conditioned to defeat. Jacob had courage, shrewd-

ness, and a commitment to the future. Esau and Laban were not prepared to deal successfully with a godly man like Jacob. Neither is the unregenerate world today. Time and God are on the side of the Jacobs of the world. They shall become Israels.

31

THE LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS

And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle (Gen. 36:6–7).

The theocentric principle here is sanctions: point four of the biblical model.¹ It refers back to the curse of the land.²

This is the second great division of families recorded in the Book of Genesis. The first one was the division between Lot and Abraham. The same reason was given in both instances: “And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together” (Gen. 13:6).

We are not told why the land would no longer support the families and flocks of the two sons of Isaac. It may have been that the Canaanites were numerous, and that the families were able to occupy only a tiny fraction of the land of Canaan. Obviously, when the exodus from Egypt brought 600,000 men and their families (Ex. 12:37) back into the land, it was sufficiently productive to support them. Nevertheless, the Bible is clear: neither Abraham and Lot nor Esau and Jacob could raise their cattle on whatever land was available to them. The curse of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19) made itself felt. The families had more living wealth than the land could support.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapter 12.

A. Factors of Production

These men faced the law of diminishing returns, an economic doctrine made famous by the English economist David Ricardo in his important book, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817). The basic idea had been discussed by economists of the late eighteenth century, when Sir James Steuart and the Baron de Turgot both published treatments of the topic in 1767. Steuart's formulation, later called the law of the "extensive margin," observed that as population increases, poorer and poorer lands are brought into cultivation in order to feed the newcomers, so that equal amounts of productive effort yield progressively smaller harvests. (Of course, this statement of the problem implicitly assumes that other factors remain equal, especially agricultural technology.) The second formulation, put forth by Turgot, is far more relevant, the so-called law of the "intensive margin." Schumpeter's summary of Turgot's position is a good one. As equal quantities of capital (or labor) are applied to a given piece of land, the quantities of the product that result from each application will at first increase, then decrease. If more applications of the same resource are added, given a fixed quantity of land and fixed technology, then output will eventually fall to zero. Schumpeter wrote: "This statement of what eventually came to be recognized as the genuine law of decreasing returns cannot be commended too highly."³ After 1900, American economists termed this observation by Turgot "the law of variable proportions." First there is an increase, then a decrease in output per unit of resource input.

It is easiest to understand in the case of agriculture. Assume that there is a single acre of land. One man works the land by himself. He has trouble lifting large rocks, and he cannot move boulders. Rolling logs is very difficult. Then he hires an assistant. Now certain jobs become manageable, and some, which were previously impossible, become possible. The total output produced by two men may be more than double the cost of each man's wages. So, the owner of the land hires another man, and another, and another. Eventually, the men begin to get in each other's way. Production sags. Costs increase. It no longer pays to hire more men. It may even pay to fire one or more of them. Marginal net returns—the profits from the addition of one resource factor to the "production mix"—eventually fall to zero, or even

3. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *A History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 260.

become negative. The costs of employing an additional laborer eventually exceed the benefits derived from that additional laborer.

This is precisely the problem that Jacob and Esau faced. Within the confines of the available land, the two families could no longer remain productive. The land had “filled up.” This did not mean that cattle were standing side by side, or that the tents of Esau’s servants were right next door to those owned by Jacob’s servants. But the productivity of the land was falling noticeably. The output of cattle, whether in numbers, or weight, or however the two family leaders measured output, was falling because there were too many of them for the relatively fixed supply of land. Esau reached a major decision. He left in order to find a more profitable “mix” of cattle and land. He went searching for the “wide open spaces.”

This demonstrates the importance of the curse of the ground for the goal of geographical dominion. Because every single acre of ground has been cursed by God, productivity per acre has been restrained. Those wishing to multiply their flocks or crops are eventually forced to subdue more ground. They cannot remain on that original plot of ground and progressively expand the physical output of goods. If they want more wealth, they must seek out available land to bring under cultivation. Their desire for greater wealth impels them to bring more land under cultivation.

What must be understood from the beginning, however, is that *the law of diminishing returns is not limited to agriculture*. It is basic to all economic production. The limits of scarcity are everywhere. Schumpeter’s discussion of this point is extremely illuminating.

Both Steuart and Turgot spoke of agriculture only. Fifty years ago [i.e., about 1900] this would not have astonished anybody, since it was then established practice to restrict decreasing returns to agriculture. But we who take it for granted that neither increasing nor decreasing returns are restricted to any particular branch of economic activity but may prevail in any branch, provided certain general conditions are fulfilled, are in a position to realize how surprising that actually was. Explanation seems to lie in the fact that, to the unsophisticated mind, there is something particularly compelling in the limitations imposed upon human activity by an inexorably “given” physical environment. It takes prolonged effort to reduce the analytic importance of these limitations to their proper dimensions and divorce them from the soil and the industry that works the soil. Yet it should not have taken so long to see that there is really no logical difference between trying to expand output on a given farm and try-

ing to expand output in a given factory, and that if farms cannot be indefinitely multiplied or enlarged, neither can factories. The additional explanation required is provided by the belief of practically all eighteenth-century authors—a belief that carries over to the “classics” of the nineteenth century—that while the factor land was given once for all, the other original factor, labor, would always increase to any amount required if allowed to do so. If we adopt this view, we shall at once sympathize with the reluctance of those authors to treat labor and land alike and to apply the laws of physical returns impartially to both.⁴

In other words, all resources are limited. Put another way, at zero price, there is greater demand for most goods than supply of those goods. This is what defines a scarce resource, meaning an economic good. No single good can provide us with all the output we could ever want. There is no magic formula, no genie in a bottle, that can provide us with an infinite supply of desirable goods and services. We cannot turn stones into bread—not at zero cost, anyway. The limited productivity of “land,” and the limited supply of land, force us to search out new supplies of land when our productivity presses against the limits of the land. But the same restraints apply to all resources. *No asset is infinitely productive*. If we want more steel, we must build more steel mills, unless we can develop a cost-effective technology that enables us to expand steel production in the same factory. The curse of the ground also implies a curse on man: technology is not infinitely expandable. Contrary to Schumpeter, there are decreasing returns to technology.⁵ Man is not originally creative, nor is he infinitely creative. He is a creature. In any case, even if we admit that men have enormous powers of technological creativity, there are still two further limits that can never be overcome: *time* and *capital*. It takes time to develop and install a new technology, and it takes capital resources. The *day of judgment* limits the first factor, and the *curse on the creation* limits the other. The rate of interest—a phenomenon of time-preference—also limits the application of technology. Men will not and cannot give up all present consumption.⁶ For this reason, there is an *inescapable dis-*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 263. Inventor and evolutionist Raymond Kurzweil believes that there is a law of accelerating returns. This has to do with the constant reduction of information costs, which has continued since at least 1890. Raymond Kurzweil, “The Law of Accelerating Returns” (2001). (<http://bit.ly/LawAccel>) This theory presumes that energy costs will continue to decline.

6. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University

count rate applied to future income as against present income. Economists call this discount rate the rate of interest, or “originary interest,” or simply time-preference. Even if there were no limits on man’s intellectual capacity to devise new technologies, an assumption which cannot be made given the Bible’s doctrine of man, technological innovations require both time and capital, and there are limits on both.

Whatever man turns his hand to will eventually produce negative returns (losses) if the producer insists on adding ever-greater quantities of complementary resources to a fixed supply of any particular resource. He will have to search out new ways of combining these resources, or find quantities of the overextended factor of production that can be purchased or rented at prices that enable him to increase the value of his production’s final output. His desire for increased wealth impels him to devote energy, capital, and time to subduing his portion of the earth.

In the case of land, the law of diminishing returns tells us that there are limits on the soil’s ability to sustain life. If a land user refuses to acknowledge the existence of such limits, then his attempts to expand output by adding more and more complementary factors of production—more seed, more laborers, more water, etc.—will eventually deplete the soil. This is one technological reason why Israel was required to rest the soil one year in seven (Lev. 25:2–7).⁷ The land is entitled to its rest. Before the soil is completely exhausted, however, the law of diminishing returns will make itself felt. Output per unit of resource input will decline. The farmer will have to add fertilizers, use new technological devices, implement a system of soil-replenishing crop rotation, or allow the land to lie fallow if he is to save the value of his land. The law of diminishing returns therefore provides men with *an economic incentive to care for the land and make it fruitful* by acknowledging and honoring its limits.

B. The Tragedy of the Commons

Land that is not privately owned by the person using it is far more

Press, 1949), ch. XVIII. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>). See also the essays by the American economist Frank A. Fetter: *Capital, Interest, and Rent: Essays in the Theory of Distribution*, ed. Murray N. Rothbard (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1977). (<http://bit.ly/fafcair>)

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

exposed to reckless soil depletion and ecological devastation. This is the so-called “tragedy of the commons,” in which the political authority owns the land and leases it out (or even temporarily gives it away free of charge) to private or public uses. The man who benefits immediately from its use—running animals on it, stripping it of its trees, camping on it, digging minerals out of it—has little direct incentive to conserve its productivity. If he had exclusive use of it for many years, he might, but that is almost the same as reintroducing private ownership. His personal benefits are directly and immediately realized; the costs associated with the depletion of the resource are borne by all tax-paying citizens—an infinitesimal additional cost to the actual user. Because it is not his land, he need not conserve its long-run productivity. A kind of “positive feedback” occurs. It generally pays to add one more cow or cut down one more tree, unless the variable costs—supervising the cow, sharpening the saw, spending the time—have risen so high that even the “free” land is not a sufficient subsidy to continue production. The “positive feedback” process can continue until the ecological crisis hits, and the productivity of the “free” resource plummets.⁸ The “negative feedback” of the law of diminishing returns is temporarily blunted, because the retarding factors—increased costs of maintaining the long-term productivity of the resource—are not forcefully registered in the mind of the user. Others also bear these costs, and his personal benefits far outweigh his share of them. Eventually, the law visibly reasserts itself, since it is simply a discovered regularity based on a real fact, namely, the curse of the ground. But the crisis may give few warnings, at least few that the user will recognize or respect. It comes all at once, not in smaller portions that an owner of private property would be more likely to recognize and take steps to alleviate or reverse. Without private ownership of the means of production, the law of diminishing returns does not produce those warnings concerning the impending advent of radically reduced output from an over-used resource.⁹ Or, more accurately, the warnings are not heeded so rapidly. (Economists call this the problem of “externalities.”)

It is extremely difficult and costly for bureaucracies to evaluate the full effects of the use of any publicly owned resource. The costs of upkeep in relation to the benefits of use are evaluated by different people.

8. Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* (Dec. 13, 1968). (<http://bit.ly/HardCom>)

9. C. R. Batten, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *The Freeman* (Oct. 1970). (<http://bit.ly/BatCom>)

The reality of the subjective theory of value asserts itself. The bureaucrats in charge of managing or leasing the public property must estimate the value produced by the users of the resource, and this is inevitably impossible to estimate without prices. But even prices do not tell the administrators everything they wish to know. Is the subsidy to the public of “free” land, for example, really the best way to benefit the public? How can any bureaucrat determine the answer? Are the costs too high? Again, how can he put a price tag on the costs if the asset is publicly owned and therefore not subject to the subjective evaluation of costs by its legal owners, the voters? Who is to say whether the bureaucrats’ assessment of the “true” costs and benefits to the “public” are the same as the “public” would assess them? And how is the “public”—a collection of individuals—to register its collective judgment? Who pays the piper, whose ox will be gored, and who eats the cake? So, the management of publicly owned resources tends to swing between policies of overuse and no use, between the profligate squandering of resources through “free” leases that lead to erosion, and the mandated inactivity that leads valuable assets to sit inactive. First the bureaucrats allow erosion, then they require total conservation, which means that productive assets are rendered unproductive, or productive only for those few people who enjoy using the resource in a legally acceptable way (such as hikers who enjoy the wilderness and who do not enjoy the sound of chain saws or other tools of production).

The Puritans of New England learned these lessons early. After 1675, with half a century of mismanaged common lands behind them, they steadily sold off the communally owned property to private owners. The bickering about who was to pay for the cattle herders, how many trees were to be cut down yearly, whose fences were in disrepair, and the costs of policing the whole unmanageable scheme, finally ended. So ended the “tragedy of the commons.”¹⁰

C. Dominion and Diminishing Returns

When structured through the private ownership of scarce resources, the law of diminishing returns becomes an incentive for the fulfillment of the dominion covenant. Men reach the limits of productivity of a particular production process. They are forced to find better methods of production, or to find additional quantities of some overextended

10. Gary North, “The Puritan Experiment in Common Ownership,” *The Freeman* (April 1974). (<http://bit.ly/gnpeico>)

factor of production. They must either intensify production through better technology and more capital, or search for more of the resource that has reached its limits of productivity under the prevailing production "formula" or "recipe." The overextended resource may be land, a building, the labor supply, managerial talent, forecasting skill, or any other scarce economic resource. When its limits are reached, men have an economic incentive to find new ways of accomplishing their goals. They may have to re-think their goals because the costs have risen, or else they must find ways to reduce the costs of achieving their goals. Or they may have to settle for a combination: modified goals and reduced costs of production. But they must change. Along with many other factors, the law of diminishing returns makes change inevitable. The kind of culture that change produces in a profit-seeking society in which the private property system prevails is dominion-oriented. The earth is subdued, if not because men aim at subduing it for God's glory, then at least for individual profits. The general dominion covenant is furthered.

By fostering conservation, the quest for long-term returns from the ownership of any productive resource also tends to preserve the productivity of the earth. The dominion covenant is not to serve man as an excuse to destroy the earth. Because men failed to give the land of Israel its rest, they went into captivity for 70 years (II Chron. 36:21). They were warned not to misuse the soil. Because the price we pay for a productive asset is the function of our expected future returns from that resource (a stream of income over time), discounted by the rate of interest, we have an incentive to maintain that resource's productivity. We are pressured to count the costs of ownership and use. The law of diminishing returns is inescapable. We must recognize the limits of scarcity. Having recognized these limits, we are to find ways to mitigate scarcity's burden in lawful ways by expanding output, improving our techniques of production, and buying more capital resources. We must count the costs and evaluate the benefits. We become winners or losers as individual decision-makers. If output falls when we add more inputs, we are pressured to discover why. We are told by the profit-and-loss accounting statements that we are now overusing a particular resource, and that we must stop doing so if we are to keep from wasting resources. The search begins for more of the overextended resource or for techniques of production that compensate for the falling productivity of the present production mix. The dominion covenant is extended.

Conclusion

In Esau's case, he decided to leave. His decision led to the establishment of Edom. It also allowed Jacob to increase his family's holdings, at least until the time of the great famine when they journeyed to Egypt. The Canaanites who dominated the land in the era of the famine were to enjoy their independence for only 255 years after that famine.¹¹ Both Jacob and Esau were to increase their dominion of the earth as a result of the law of diminishing returns. It forced them to seek new lands to conquer.

11. The Israelites were in Egypt for 215 years. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1. *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1. Then they were in the wilderness for 40 years.

THE BLESSING OF RESPONSIBILITY

And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand (Gen. 39:2–4).

The theocentric issue here is hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Selecting Subordinates

Like Jacob his father, who had served Laban for many years, Joseph was proving to be an efficient, highly profitable servant. Potiphar, like Laban, recognized that God had some special relationship with his servant, and he was determined to benefit from this fact. Both Laban and Potiphar sought to appropriate the fruits of their servants' productivity by delegating increased responsibility into their hands (Gen. 30:27–28). Furthermore, during the period when each master dealt justly with his servant, he saw his own economic affairs prosper.

We are not told what duties Potiphar had as captain of the guard. We are told that as far as his own household was concerned, he delegated all authority to Joseph, “and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat” (39:6). In one respect, Potiphar proved that he was a successful businessman, for one of the most important aspects of the entrepreneur's tasks is to locate and employ able subordinates. Frank H. Knight, whose pioneering work, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

(1921), presented the first systematic, accurate analysis of profit, put it even more emphatically:

... this capacity for forming correct judgments (in a more or less extended or restricted field) is the principal fact which makes a man serviceable in business; it is the characteristic human activity, the most important endowment for which wages are received. The stability and success of business enterprise in general is largely dependent upon the possibility of estimating the powers of men in this regard, both for assigning men to their positions and for fixing remunerations which they are to receive for filling positions.²

The essence of control over a business, he argued, is mainly the selection of the men who will do the controlling. “Business judgment is chiefly judgment of men.”³ Therefore, he concluded,

In the field of organization, the knowledge on which what we call responsible control depends is not knowledge of situations and problems and of means for effecting changes, but is knowledge of other men’s knowledge of these things. . . . so fundamental is it for understanding the control of organized activity, that the problem of judging men’s powers of judgment overshadows the problem of judging the facts of the situation to be dealt with.⁴

This analysis may be exaggerated, but it certainly holds true for very large-scale organizations. In the case of Potiphar and Laban, they initially exercised very good judgment concerning the judgment of their God-blessed subordinates.

Potiphar’s error was in relinquishing control of his family. In abdicating the management position in the family business, he went too far. He did not notice, or chose to ignore, his wife’s roving eye. In the time of crisis, when it was his wife’s word against Joseph’s, he chose to believe his wife rather than the man who had proven faithful and competent in the management of the family business. He thereby forfeited the benefits that Joseph’s abilities had brought him, just as Laban had forfeited the benefits of Jacob’s productivity.

2. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), p. 229. (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

4. *Idem.*

B. Demotion and Promotion

Joseph was cast into prison. Through no fault of his own, he had lost his position of authority. Potiphar's envy had brought him low, just as Joseph's brothers' envy had led to his exile in Egypt. But the keeper of the prison immediately recognized Joseph's unique talents, and like Potiphar, he was willing to entrust the administration of his organization to Joseph, and "whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper" (39:22b–23). Officially, he had been a slave; in reality, he had been master of Potiphar's household. Legally, he was now a prisoner; in reality, he was the director of the prison.

Slavery and prison: neither position is relished by any servant of God. But once forced into such a position, the godly man does his best with whatever resources are available to him. He accepts whatever lawful authority is offered to him, going about his daily affairs honestly and efficiently. He subdues that portion of the earth which God has allotted to him. If he can obtain his freedom lawfully, he does so, for freedom is a better condition in which to exercise one's calling before God (I Cor. 7:21–23).⁵ Nevertheless, a man is to be content with the status quo if that is where God has placed him (I Cor. 7:20; I Tim. 6:6–8).⁶

By serving well in the position that had been given to him, Joseph discovered that responsibility flowed his way. As with scarce economic resources that flow in the direction of those who serve the buying public most efficiently, so responsibility tends to flow in the direction of those willing and able to bear the burdens of responsible decision-making. In a present-oriented culture, this is doubly true, for men seek to escape the burdens of future-oriented decision-making. They want to be the recipients of the fruits of efficient labor, but they are not interested in personally bearing the direct costs of bearing risk (in the sense of a statistically calculable risk) or uncertainty (in the sense of an unknown future that cannot be dealt with by means of the laws of probability). The more present-oriented and risk-avoiding a culture is, the more responsibility and profit opportunities it will lose to those willing to risk failure.

5. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

6. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

Neither Joseph nor Jacob was favored because he shared the religious presuppositions of his employer. The opposite was true: they were selected to serve precisely because a very different God from those the employers worshipped was favoring the two servants. The servants were not beloved, but only respected. Later, they were resented. Initially, however, the masters were not overly concerned about the religious beliefs of their servants, but only with their productivity. A very similar feature of the free market is this lack of concern about the personal characteristics of producers. The buyer is normally unconcerned about the race or religion of the manufacturer of the product. On a personal basis, the buyer might be alienated by the producer. He might even despise him. Yet, as a customer, he is primarily concerned with the price and quality of the product. The more impersonal the market—the broader, more extensive, more mechanized the market—the more likely that productivity will count for more than the personal characteristics of the producer. The covenant of dominion is assigned to all people; hence, the person who comes closest to fulfilling the buyers' concept of efficient production under competitive market conditions (price competition, open entry, absence of state-imposed restrictions on selling), will receive the value of his output. He will have the greatest opportunity to demonstrate his talents for production.

The problem faced by Joseph and Jacob was the fact that their employers regarded them as magical talismans of some sort. They saw that God blessed the two men, but they themselves did not choose to humble themselves before God. They thought that they might manipulate God by hiring those favored by Him. In the case of both Potiphar and Laban, their own character defects destroyed their ability to appropriate the productivity of their servants. Laban was greedy (Gen. 31:7), and Potiphar was envious of Joseph, or at least embarrassed by his wife's actions, and too weak to take Joseph's side in the dispute. Because they were so close to their servants, they were in effect surrendering themselves to the authority of their subordinates, for their prosperity depended upon the continuing relationship between the God of their servants and their own households. Eventually, this became too great a price to pay. They drove out their honorable servants, even as generations of gentiles drove out productive Jews, or as French Roman Catholic kings drove out the Huguenots in the sixteenth century.

C. Pragmatism's Weakness

This is the weakness of pragmatic thought. Pragmatism is related to magic. Pragmatists and magicians share similar presuppositions. Both deny the sovereignty of God. Both elevate the desires of man to principles of social organization. Both say in effect, "If it works, I'll buy it; if it pays, I'll manipulate it." Is it surprising that the modern secular world, officially pragmatic and relativistic, should witness an outbreak of magic, witchcraft, and occultism?⁷ The same relationship was basic to the Renaissance and the Roman Empire. Is it surprising that the pragmatists, relativists, and occultists resent the religion of the Bible? The burdens associated with a godly calling are heavy for the pragmatist. Thrift, future-oriented investing, honest dealing, and risk-bearing are increasingly abandoned by hedonistic pragmatists. *Pragmatism requires moral constraints that are the product of a non-pragmatic culture.* Without these restraints, pragmatism degenerates into the lowest common denominator principle: theft, envy, and the abdication of personal responsibility—very often an abdication to the political authorities. Pragmatists like Potiphar will not pay the price. They will not humble themselves before the God they seek to manipulate. In the long run, they lose. They are not productive, and capital tends to flow in the direction of those who are. As the Proverbs say, "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (13:22b).⁸

Responsibility is therefore a potential blessing. In the short run, good servants may be able to appropriate more of it indirectly from those willing to abdicate a position of full leadership. In time, their "masters" grow weaker economically and politically, as they delegate too much authority to their subordinates and become too dependent upon their subordinates' continuing productivity. If the masters refuse to submit themselves to God's law-order, the godly servants will eventually triumph, even as Joseph triumphed. Responsibility, like capital, eventually winds up in the hands of those who exercise it well. *The burden of responsibility is ultimately a blessing, for it is the basis of external victory in time and on earth.*

7. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/northus>)

8. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 40.

D. Suffering Servant

Joseph and Jacob were suffering servants. They served their masters well, yet their masters failed to appreciate their moral character. The same role was played by Jesus Christ, who was also a suffering servant. Through His own perfection, He alienated the rulers of His day. He paid the highest price in order to serve His friends, for he laid down His life for them (John 15:13). Yet in doing so, He triumphed over all His enemies (Matt. 28:18). This relationship between service and victory is basic to biblical order. Christ said:

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25–28).

Nowhere can this principle be seen more clearly than in the free market. The producer who best meets the desires of customers will prosper. He must subject himself to the highest-bidding participants in the market. This need not mean the richest people in society. In fact, the highest bidders may be a mass market: millions of people bidding a few dollars each, rather than a handful bidding several thousands each. The producer seeks the highest rate of return on his capital and labor. He cannot compel buyers to pay his price, except in very rare instances. He has to clear his inventory of products at the price that the buyers are willing to pay. Of course, he seeks the highest available price where no additional bidders are willing to pay his price, and no products remain in stock to be sold. We can imagine the market's clearing process as a theater. When all the seats are filled, and no one is standing in line to get in, the seller of seats has forecasted his market perfectly. He has set his price in terms of market demand. He has served his customers well, as his filled seats demonstrate, but he has also served himself well. He has earned the highest return per seat. The richest, most successful, most famous entrepreneurs in the market are those who have consistently and accurately forecasted future market demand. The chief rulers of the free market are those who serve the buyers well.

The free market does not call us to be suffering servants. It calls us to meet the demands of the potential buyers better than our compet-

ing sellers. It calls us to be prospering servants. The better we serve, the higher our income. If we would be chief among businessmen, we must serve the buyers best. The entrepreneur who bears full responsibility for his forecasts, and who also forecasts accurately, will experience the financial blessings of responsibility.

Conclusion

The Bible repeats the theme of prison as a training ground for victory: Joseph in prison, Daniel in the lion's den, Paul in several prisons, and the archetypal image of Jesus in the prison of the grave. The "suffering servant" motif is similar: suffering brings victory. In the case of the church in history, suffering of earlier generations brings victory for later generations. Thus, the *means* to victory, suffering, is *not* our goal: victory is our goal. The emphasis on continued suffering is theologically invalid; sin is to be progressively conquered in history, and suffering thereby progressively reduced.

The free market reflects this overcoming of suffering, sin, and scarcity. Men are to be servants, but successful men are not to suffer throughout their lifetimes; they are instead to prosper. Customers are not to suffer either; they are to benefit from the productivity that freedom and personal responsibility produce.

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL FUNCTION

And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do. . . . This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh (Gen. 41: 25, 28).

Joseph had demonstrated his administrative competence to Potiphar, captain of the guard, and to the Egyptian jailer. He had also shown his ability to interpret prophetic dreams to the Pharaoh's butler. The butler recommended Joseph to Pharaoh when Pharaoh confronted a dream which he could not understand. They brought him from the dungeon, and Pharaoh described his visions of the seven fat animals being devoured by the seven lean ones, and the seven fat ears of corn being devoured by the seven lean ones. Joseph informed Pharaoh that the dream revealed the coming of seven years of agricultural prosperity to be followed by seven years of famine. As for the two separate visions, "The dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (41:32). Joseph entertained no doubts whatsoever. God had provided a *double witness*.

Pharaoh wisely listened to Joseph's interpretation. When Joseph then recommended that Pharaoh seek out a man "discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt" to direct the collection of one-fifth of the grain during the seven years of plenty, Pharaoh appointed Joseph (41:33–43). Not only did Joseph's prophecy come true, but he also once again proved himself to be a reliable and efficient administrator of men. Because of his unique combination of economic foresight (in this case, prophetic in nature) and efficient administration, Joseph stands out as the Bible's archetype of the entrepreneur.

A. The Future Is Uncertain

It is the task of the entrepreneur to *forecast* the future accurately, at least insofar as it affects his business, and then to *plan* effectively to meet the economic demands of customers in that expected future. *Of all the economic functions of the free market, this is the pivotal one.* The ability of men to estimate the demands of their fellow men in the future, and then to produce in terms of those demands without wasting scarce economic resources, makes it possible for society to advance beyond the most primitive methods of production.

The individual who does plan efficiently for the future, producing goods or services that satisfy the demand of customers at the prices he expected them to pay, reaps a reward: entrepreneurial profit or pure profit. It is an *economic residual*: funds remaining after payment has been made for raw materials, labor, capital equipment, interest, rent, and taxes.¹ The person who misforecasts the future, or who is unable to foresee the costs of delivering his goods and services to the waiting customers, eventually produces losses. He is forced to dip into his capital in order to stay in business. If the losses continue, he loses control of capital resources, and others who are able to meet future customer demand with less waste are able to buy these resources from him.

In the competitive auction market for scarce economic resources, profit-making individuals bid more effectively for resources, transferring them to their own companies in order to meet the demands of customers. The customer benefits, for he is able to purchase more resources at the end of the production process, precisely because there has been less waste of land, labor, and capital in delivering the goods to him. *The customers therefore determine the success or failure of entrepreneurs.* Those who waste resources by failing to meet customer demand at prices customers are willing to pay are penalized, while those who are successful are rewarded with entrepreneurial profit. A free market encourages *customer satisfaction* and *efficiency of production*.

Profit is therefore a residual accruing to those who deal on a day-to-day basis with the *inescapable uncertainties of the future*. Men are not omniscient. We cannot see the future perfectly. We are limited

1. On profit as an economic residual which results from accurate forecasting, see Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921) (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>); Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. XV, sec. 8. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>); Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy and State*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

creatures. Even Jesus in His Incarnation as a perfect man admitted that He did not know—in terms of His human nature—when God’s judgment would arrive (Matt. 24:36). Creatures should respect their own limitations.

By encouraging specialists in economic forecasting to administer scarce economic resources, customers seek to mitigate the uncertainties of life. By permitting entrepreneurs the right to keep the economic residual, or *profit*, of their activities in meeting customer demand, customers ensure that their desires will be met with greater efficiency. The burden of bearing uncertainty is picked up by those willing to do it, and their incentive is the lure of profit. If they make mistakes, they produce losses.

1. Customer Authority

The *customer* is the beneficiary of the entrepreneurial function, Frank H. Knight concluded. Because others are willing to become entrepreneurs, or as they are also called, speculators, the customer can shift much of the responsibility for predicting the future to these specialists. In fact, the entrepreneurs make it their business to know what the customers will want in the future even before the customers know. We know, for example, that the customer seldom contracts in advance for the delivery of goods or services. Why not? (Note: Knight wrote of the consumers, not the customer.)

A part of the reason might be the consumer’s uncertainty as to his ability to pay at the end of the period, but this does not seem to be important in fact. The main reason is that he does not know what he will want, and how much, and how badly; consequently he leaves it to producers to create goods and hold them ready for his decision when the time comes. The clue to this apparent paradox is, of course, in the “law of large numbers,” the consolidation of risks (or uncertainties). The consumer is, himself, only one; to the producer he is a mere multitude in which individuality is lost. It turns out that an outsider can foresee the wants of a multitude with more ease and accuracy than an individual can attain with respect to his own. This phenomenon gives us the most fundamental feature of the economic system, *production for a market*, and hence also the general character of the environment in relation to which the effects of uncertainty are to be further investigated.²

2. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, p. 421.

Does this mean that bureaucrats operating at the very top levels of government planning agencies are better able to foresee the needs of customers than the customers are? Not necessarily. What we are comparing is not “customers” vs. “government forecasters” in the realm of forecasting future customer demand, but rather “customers served by profit-seeking, competitive entrepreneurs” vs. “customers served by Civil Service-protected, guaranteed tenure, monopolistic government planners.” The fact that government planners have access to reams of data concerning past decisions of customers and producers means very little. *The crucial ability is to make correct assessments about the uncertainties of the future*, meaning those aspects of the economic future that are not subject to computerization or even statistical probabilities. It is the presence of incessant *change* in human affairs that calls forth the skilled and not-so-skilled entrepreneurs in the quest for profits. The market provides a system of economic competition that sorts out the successful from the unsuccessful entrepreneurs. There is no comparable system operating in government, for government has a monopoly of support (taxation) and very often a monopoly of supply operations, such as the delivery of first-class mail, which insulates it from the competitive framework of the open market.³ Knight’s warning is significant: “The real trouble with bureaucracies is not that they are rash, but the opposite. When not actually rotten with dishonesty and corruption they universally show a tendency to ‘play safe’ and become hopelessly conservative. The great danger to be feared from a political control of economic life under ordinary conditions is not a reckless dissipation of the social resources so much as the arrest of progress and the vegetation of life.”⁴ Bureaucracy favors present-oriented risk- (uncertainty-) averters.⁵

What service is it that the entrepreneur performs in order to receive his residual? *He perceives a special opportunity in the future.* He

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944) (<http://bit.ly/MisesBur>). On the inability of governments to make accurate economic assessments of costs and benefits, see Mises’ essay, “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth,” (1920), in F. A. Hayek, (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963), ch. III (<http://mises.org/pdf/econcalc.pdf>). He expanded his analysis of this topic in his book, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1922] 1962), Book II, chaps. 1, 2 (<http://bit.ly/MisesSoc>).

4. Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

5. Gary North, “Statist Bureaucracy in the Modern Economy,” *The Freeman* (January 1970), reprinted in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 20. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

believes that customers will be willing and able in the future to pay more for a particular good or service than today's entrepreneurs think they will be willing and able to pay. Because of this lack of perception on the part of his competitors, the entrepreneur finds that the scarce economic resources that are used in the production of the good or service are underpriced in relation to what they would be if all entrepreneurs recognized the true state of future customer demand. The entrepreneurs are *middlemen for customers*, actual surrogates for them. They enter the markets for production goods and compete among each other in order to buy them, but always because they intend to sell the results of production to customers. If an entrepreneur sees that certain factors of production are presently underpriced in relation to what customers in the future really will be willing and able to pay for them in the form of final goods, then he has a profit opportunity. (Of course, he has to pay a rate of interest, because future goods are always discounted in comparison to what people will pay for present goods, and he has to tie up the use of the scarce resources until the time he can get the finished products to market.) The entrepreneur enters the market and begins to buy up production goods—land, labor, capital—in order to manufacture the customers' goods. Or he may simply rent these factors of production. In any case, *he removes them from the marketplace for a specific period of time*. When he brings the final products to market as finished goods, he raises their price to the level determined by the competitive auction bids of customers. In short, he makes his profit by estimating in advance what future customers, in bidding against each other, will be willing to pay in a free market for the output of his production process.

2. Entrepreneur vs. Entrepreneur

The entrepreneur does not compete against customers, except in so far as there are zones of ignorance in the minds of both customers and other potential sellers, concerning the market price of the goods or services. In a highly competitive market, these zones of ignorance are drastically reduced. People know pretty well what items sell for in the marketplace. *The entrepreneur is always competing against other entrepreneurs*—the middlemen who act for the benefit of customers—who also produce in order to meet future customer demand. When the finished consumer goods or services are offered for sale, the “auctioneer”—the seller of goods—is guided by the competitive bids of

competing customers. He is unable to set any price he wants to set, though of course he prefers to receive a high price. He sets his price in response to customers bids, so as to "clear the market." He wants to sell every item scheduled for sale in the particular time period. He cannot squeeze any more money out of the customers than they are willing and able to pay. Other sellers can also enter the market and offer goods or services for a lower price, and he has to consider this possibility, too. In short, *sellers compete against sellers*, while *customers compete against customers*.

If the entrepreneur was correct in his original estimation of the extent of customer demand, and if no unforeseen contingencies have disrupted the expected cost of producing the final goods, and if no new sources of supply are brought to market that he had not been able to predict, then the entrepreneur gets his expected price per unit sold. He has "bought low" and has been able to "sell high." He sells to the highest bidders. He reaps his reward, entrepreneurial profit. It is the *residual* which remains *after* he has paid for all production inputs, including interest and his own management wage (the equivalent income that he had to forego because he could not sell his services to other entrepreneurs during the time he was working in his own company). If all has gone according to his original plan, then he has profited. But one fact must be understood: *he has not profited at the expense of customers*. Customers have not "lost" because of his presence in the market as a seller. He has profited at the expense of rival entrepreneurs who failed to see the opportunity for profit, and who failed to enter the resource markets for scarce factors of production. They stayed out, thereby allowing him to buy up those production factors less expensively. But the customers have unquestionably benefited. He has served the highest-bidding customers well. What if he had never bothered to buy up those producer goods, pay the interest, and bear the risks of production? What if he had never brought the goods or services to market? How would that have helped those customers who wanted the goods so much that they were willing to pay him top prices? He made more of these goods available to them than they would have otherwise been offered. He has been their benefactor—at a profit.

Professor Mises summarized the nature of profits in a straightforward manner:

If all entrepreneurs were to anticipate correctly the future state of the

market, there would be neither profits nor losses. The prices of all factors of production would already today be fully adjusted to tomorrow's prices of the products. In buying the factors of production the entrepreneur would have to expend (with due allowance for the difference between the prices of present goods and future goods) no less an amount than the buyers will pay him later for the product. An entrepreneur can make a profit only if he anticipates future conditions more correctly than other entrepreneurs.⁶

While there is always considerable intellectual risk in discussing what anything would be like if man were not man—specifically, what profits would be if men were omniscient—nevertheless, the reader should grasp what Mises is saying. Profits and losses *are* part of the human condition, precisely because man is not God. *The quest for a risk-free, uncertainty-free, profit-and-loss-free world is demonic. It is the demand that we remake man into God, that man become omniscient, that man transcend the limits of his creaturehood.*

B. The Middleman

Every so often, some local businessman buys advertising time on television, usually on a non-network station, and tries to unload his merchandise by using a variation of this time-tested sales pitch: “Friends, we can offer these incredibly low prices because we sell directly to you, the consumer. That’s right, you buy directly from our factory warehouses at wholesale prices. You buy at factory prices because *we’ve eliminated the middleman.*” Isn’t that terrific? No middleman. All these years, profit-seeking businessmen have been paying middlemen to stand around in the middle doing nothing. For centuries, it seems, profit-seeking businessmen have been willing to buy nothing—the non-services of useless middlemen—for something. But now some enterprising businessman has found a way to eliminate the middleman, and he is willing to pass the savings on to us. As the old saying goes, “What a deal!”

Think about the logic of the offer. Where are we told about this fabulous opportunity? On television. Who is buying the time slot? The businessman. Who is stocking all of the inventory? The businessman. Who is paying the interest rate, space rental, night watchman, and utilities expenses to warehouse the merchandise? The businessman. Who is bearing the uncertainty of getting stuck with a warehouse full

6. Mises, *Human Action*, p. 291.

of unsalable merchandise? The businessman. Who pays the fire and theft insurance premiums? The businessman. Who, then, is the middleman?

There will always be a middleman because there will always be uncertainty. *The middleman is the entrepreneur*. He exists because there is an entrepreneurial function. The producer may decide to become the middleman. The state, through some bureaucratic agency, may decide to become the middleman. Or an independent “jobber” may decide the payoff potential is worth the risk. But what is not conceivable in a world of uncertainty is a production system without a middleman, where buyers never have to pay for the services of economic forecasters. The producer may “sell direct to the consumer,” but as long as the consumer has the right to say no and shop elsewhere, the producer is not really selling direct to the consumer. He is a buyer of goods or services who *hopes* to become a seller. The only consumer he can really sell direct to is himself in his capacity as entrepreneurial middleman.

It is imperative that we understand the difference between *profit seeking* and *gambling*, though both aim at predicting the future. Murray Rothbard’s analysis is illuminating in this regard.

It is not accurate to apply terms like “gambling” or “betting” to situations either of risk or of uncertainty. These terms have unfavorable emotional implications, and for this reason: they refer to situations where *new* risks or uncertainties are *created* for the enjoyment of the uncertainties themselves. Gambling on the throw of the dice and betting on horse races are examples of the deliberate creation by the bettor or gambler of new uncertainties which otherwise would not have existed. The entrepreneur, on the other hand, is not creating uncertainties for the fun of it. On the contrary, he tries to reduce them as much as possible. The uncertainties he confronts are already inherent in the market situation, indeed in the nature of human action; someone must deal with them, and he is the most skilled or willing candidate.⁷

Market speculation may be indulged in by the very same men who, in their off hours, enjoy betting on horses or dice, but the economic effects are vastly different. The market speculator tries to reduce uncertainty for the sake of future customers (which, of course, may well include himself), while the gambler is a present consumer of the joy or masochism of a game. Assume, for the sake of illustration, that the

7. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy and State*, p. 555.

same individual is a part-time entrepreneur and a part-time gambler. He is a public benefactor if he guesses correctly in his capacity as a market forecaster. He is simply a winner at a game—matched by losers in the same game—when he forecasts correctly as a gambler. He has put his capital at risk to serve future customers as a market speculator. He has put his capital at risk to serve himself as a believer in a chance-dominated universe when he enters a game of chance. As a market forecaster, he acknowledges his limits as a creature, and deals with the world of the future in which men can see only darkly. He cannot escape living in such a world without actually dying. He serves others by entering into market-forecasting activities. But, as a gambler, a man risks losing his God-given capital assets in a game of chance, probably in a game in which the laws of probability for winning are against him (and if they are for him, they are against his opponents in the game). He affirms a universe of luck, of chance, of “fortunate” benefits for those who take needless risks with their capital. In short, the market speculator affirms the universe God has created, while the gambler affirms a very different world. The speculator tries to conserve capital for his own profit and for the benefit of future customers. The gambler wastes capital in terms of a philosophy of impersonal chance or personal luck, neither of which is a valid assumption concerning a created universe which is governed by an omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign, personal God.

It is no doubt true that it is impossible for anyone, including the entrepreneur, to sort out precisely what part of his income is a wage for management services, what part is an interest return for the money he puts into the business, and what part is pure profit. But what we must understand is that these are *theoretically* distinct aspects of the production process. If we try to pay an entrepreneur a fixed wage for managerial services, he will quit, or cease bearing the uncertainties of predicting the future, or cease making consistently accurate predictions. If we pay him a predictable interest return on his money, and no more, then we have made him an investor, not an entrepreneur. There is an entrepreneurial function which cannot be remunerated in advance, precisely because *entrepreneurial profit is a residual* which at best is estimated effectively only by futurepredicting entrepreneurs.

C. Joseph, the Forecaster

It might be argued that Joseph's experience in Egypt serves as a

biblical justification of central planning by the civil government. Such an argument, while no doubt tempting, overlooks the key fact in this incident: *Pharaoh had been given a direct revelation by God*, and Joseph came to him as God's prophet with the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream perfectly. Only on this assumption, namely, that we can expect truly prophetic *omniscience* from salaried or elected officials of the central government, can a biblical case be made for universal central economic planning. If this assumption is rejected, then central economic planning initially has no greater claim to biblical sanction than private economic forecasting does.

Is the assumption correct? Is there some feature about becoming a State official which in some way endows a person with a prophetic mantle? What biblical evidence do we have for such an assumption? Is any foreign prisoner who has served two years of an indeterminate jail sentence a predictably effective interpreter of visions given to national leaders? Would anyone wish to build a theory of political economy on such a premise? Could we create a governmental planning structure in terms of such an operating presupposition about the nature of civil government?

The consequence of Joseph's economic planning in Egypt must also be borne in mind. The entire nation, excluding only the priests, went into bondage to the Egyptian state (Gen. 47:13–22). All land, except that owned by the priests, became the possession of the Pharaoh. The people survived the famine, which they would not have been able to do had it not been for Joseph's entrepreneurship, but they and their heirs became servants of the Pharaoh and his heirs.

It was basic to the religions of antiquity that the state was in some fundamental way divine, or linked to the divine through the ruler. Egypt's theology was especially notable for its adherence to the theology of a divine ruler. The Pharaoh was supposedly the descendent of the sun god. Only the Hebrews, with their doctrine of the Creator-creature distinction, avoided the lure of a theology of immanent divinity. The outcome of such a theology, when coupled with a process of state economic planning, was enslavement. This was the curse of what Wittfogel called oriental despotism.⁸

The Hebrews, in stark contrast, were told to worship God, and only God, as divine. The state is clearly not divine, and any attempt to make it divine—the sole representative of God on earth—was under-

8. Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957).

stood to be demonic. Officials were constantly told to remain honest stewards of the great King. The office of prophet was decentralized, and prophets continually challenged kings, princes, priests, and average Hebrew citizens when they turned away from God and His law. God sent a shepherd like Amos to speak to the people; they were expected to heed this shepherd's word, not the king and his court priests. *The civil government is no more trustworthy than any other human institution.* All institutions are to be under the jurisdiction of God. There is no monopoly of sovereignty on earth, except God's written word, the Bible.

By decentralizing the office of prophet, God ensured that His people would not be compelled to listen exclusively to false prophets who would rather cater to the civil government than serve God. When the people were stiff-necked, refusing to heed His word, He punished them by allowing them to believe the false reports that were provided by the court's false prophets (Ezek. 14:1–5). The curse on their ethical rebellion was quite specific: the imposition of centralized decision-making by corrupt kings and their officially sanctioned prophets.

We never face a choice of "planning" vs. "no planning." The only question is: "Whose plan?" When economic planning is decentralized, and decisions are made by owners of private property, society is shielded from the risks of massive, centralized error. An erroneous decision made by a particular privately owned firm may cost its shareholders dearly, and customers who would have purchased the goods that would have been made, had the firm not embarked on its error-filled course, are no doubt harmed. There has been waste. Nevertheless, the majority of customers are protected because competing firms and suppliers can step in and satisfy customer demand. The rival suppliers help to smooth out the disruptions caused by either the unforeseen external circumstances or the operations of the misallocating firm.

When a monopolistic central planning agency makes an error in forecasting the economic future, large segments of the population suffer. There are few legal alternatives open to potential buyers. For a high price, black market operators may step in and smooth out the disruptions in supply, but buyers bear greater uncertainty in dealing with these suppliers, and they pay higher prices than would have been necessary if private firms had been allowed to compete with State planners. Bureaucrats, controlled as they are by tenure, trade union restrictions, or Civil Service regulations, do not have the same incentives as

private entrepreneurs to bear uncertainty successfully. Bureaucrats are not directly rewarded with profits, nor are they immediately fired for losses. The carrot and the stick are only indirectly related to any given decision made by a central planning agency. Blame for error is easily transferred in anything as complex as a national economy. The customers cannot weed out the inefficient planners in a direct, forceful manner when planners are paid functionaries of the political state. By monopolizing the entrepreneurial function, the state creates a planning structure that is far too rigid and far less sensitive to shifts in customer demand and resource supplies than the decentralized planning of profit-seeking entrepreneurs. This *inflexibility in the face of ceaseless change* drastically increases the risk of *devastating, centralized, universal failure*. And even when the state's bureaucrats turn out to be successful forecasters, as Joseph was in Egypt, the citizens who benefit from this accurate forecasting run the risk of becoming increasingly dependent on the state. As those in Egypt learned during the reign of the Pharaoh of Moses' day, successful state planning in one period in no way guarantees the continued success of central planners in subsequent periods. But successful state planning does increase the share of capital assets controlled by the state and its bureaucratic functionaries, thereby protecting their subsequent decisions from private competition in the total decision-making process. The Egyptians learned this lesson the hard way.

Conclusion

It must be recognized that Joseph was in Egypt. No system of centralized economic planning was created at Mt. Sinai. God did not tell His people to imitate the experience of Egypt. He told them to avoid all contact with the "leaven" of Egyptian culture. Joseph brought the theological slaves of Egypt under bondage to their false god, the Pharaoh. God does not want His people to turn to the legacy of Egypt's bureaucratic tyranny as a model for a godly social order.

This exegesis of Joseph in Egypt outrages the typical state-promoting evangelical, especially college professors. They have tied their classroom lecture notes to the state-worshipping worldview of the tax-supported, humanist-accredited universities that awarded them their Ph.D's. They are the Pharaoh-worshippers of this era. Had they been in Egypt in Moses' day, they would have been the Hebrew foremen working under the authority of Pharaoh's Egyptian taskmasters. They

are the people who would have come to Moses and Aaron and told them to go away, because they were making Pharaoh angry (Ex. 5:20–21). Their high position in the slave system was dependent on the continuing bondage of their people. So it is with humanism's chaplains in the Christian college classroom and the pulpit today. Freedom would require them to revise their notes and begin promoting economic freedom in the name of Christ rather than bondage to the would-be savior state.

THE MISAPPLICATION OF INTRINSIC VALUE

And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth. And Joseph said, Give your cattle, if money fail (Gen. 47:15–16).

As with all of God's relationships with men, famine can be simultaneously a curse and a blessing. The curse aspect is far easier to understand. The threefold curse promised by God to the Israelites involved the sword, pestilence, and famine (Deut. 28:21–22). The famine promised by Isaiah was a witness to the "fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God" (Isa. 51:20b). The people of Egypt were being placed under a long-term curse in the form of perpetual servitude to a bureaucratic state. The famine was the means of producing this servitude. Egyptians would henceforth live externally in terms of the religious faith which they held: the religion of a divine ruler.

The blessing accrued not to the Egyptians, but to the family of the house of Jacob. During his journey from Canaan, where he was still a stranger in the land (Gen. 36:7; 37:1), Israel (Jacob) was specifically told by God: "Fear not to go down into Egypt: for I will there make of thee a great nation" (36:3). In Egypt, they multiplied greatly (Ex. 1:7), even in the face of affliction (Ex. 1:12). A single family and its covenanted servants (Gen. 36:6–7) became a nation of 600,000 men, plus women and children (Ex. 12:37), in a little over two centuries if Courville's estimate is correct.¹

1. Donovan A. Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications* (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, p. 151. Cf. North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix A.

A. Famine and Money

Famine can also be a means of enforcing the cultural mandate. In forcing the Israelites down into Egypt, God was assuring the ultimate conquest of Canaan. In setting up Joseph as master of Egypt, God was enforcing the dominion covenant. Famines act in much the same way as the law of diminishing returns acts, only far more rapidly and discontinuously; the migration of populations results. Men are forced into new lands in search of agricultural productivity. They are forced to trade with those in other regions whose lands have not been hit by famine. Egypt had grain. This meant that the world would have to come to Egypt to trade on whatever terms the Egyptians thought were advantageous to them. Egypt could become a center of world trade, assuming the Egyptians thought it worth the risk of bargaining away food (41:57).

Famine is an incentive for rapid cultural change. The great European famines of 1315–17 disrupted late-medieval life, and the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1348–50, which reappeared intermittently for over three centuries, helped to destroy people's faith in medieval institutions. Religion, philosophy, labor practices, interest rates, and attitudes toward art all shifted radically in the fourteenth century.² The rise of the Lollard movement, the influence of Wycliffe, and the spread of proto-Protestant ideas were all part of the cultural turmoil of the late fourteenth century. The combination of plague, famine, and the printing press made the Reformation possible. The famines and plague had put whole populations on the move. One result was the imposition of wage controls and restraints on the movement of laborers, in country after country, in the middle of the fourteenth century. This was the first great European experiment with wage controls. Predictably, they intensified the labor shortage created by the loss of population from the plague.³

The Bible tells us that the money failed. What is money? It is *the most marketable commodity*. Usually, a commodity that can function as money must have five characteristics: durability, divisibility, transportability, recognizability, and scarcity. Gold and silver have been the traditional monetary metals of mankind, but salt, sugar, beads, shells,

2. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Mineola, New York: Dover, [1924] 1999); Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Knopf, 1978).

3. Herbert Heaton, *Economic History of Europe* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948), p. 208.

and numerous other scarce economic commodities have served men in exchange transactions. By the second year of the famine, neither gold nor silver functioned as a means of exchange any longer. "The money faileth," cried the hungry Egyptians, and so it had. The Pharaoh had in his possession both the metal and the grain by the second year of the famine. If anything functioned as money in Egypt, it was grain.

Gold and silver were no longer acceptable means of payment. The bulk of the population no longer had much desire to possess metals. This indicates a total breakdown of the economy. The reason why men accept gold and silver in voluntary exchange for other scarce resources is because they believe that other people will do the same later on. Because people expect others to give up scarce resources for the money metals sometime in the future, the metals have exchange value in the present. This is what is usually meant by the phrase "storehouse of value." Of course, value is not some physical aspect of the metal. Acting men impute value to the metals because of estimates they have made concerning the future willingness of men to continue imputing value to the metals. *Money metals, like all forms of money, are valued because of the future orientation of acting men.* They use money in exchange today because they expect to be in the market buying other goods and services with money tomorrow or next year. They expect the traditional estimations of others to prevail in the marketplace, and the familiar institutional arrangements to persist through time.

Yet we are told that the money failed. What also must have failed was men's commitment to long-term planning. They needed food. They could not expect to survive over the long run unless they had access to food in the present. The long run was discounted to practically zero. *The famine made Egyptians intensely present-oriented.* Thus, the value of traditional monetary units fell to zero—"failed." Men lost confidence in the marketplace to supply them with their needs. They looked to the state and its warehouses filled with grain for their salvation. This shift in faith, or rather in confidence, destroyed the monetary unit of account that had prevailed in the marketplace prior to the catastrophe. The state was able to collect the money metals until they no longer served as money (47:14–15).

What could then serve as a means of payment? Joseph set the terms of exchange because he controlled the one asset the whole world wanted (41:57). First he asked for their cattle, and they capitulated (47:16–17). At the end of the year, they were back empty-handed. All they had left were their bodies and their lands (47:18). *Land and labor:*

here are the two sources of production. (Capital is simply the combination of land and labor over time.) They believed that they faced death, so the discounted present market value of the expected future income from both their land and their labor—their freedom—had fallen to zero. Joseph bought their land in Pharaoh's name. He then removed all of them to the cities of Egypt, which he could do only because of the huge stores of food that the state had collected. He separated them from their ancestral lands, a graphic demonstration of the reality of the transaction he had just made with them. They were no longer independent peasants; they were now totally dependent urban dwellers who looked to the state for sustenance. Once Joseph had assembled the people in the cities, he gave them grain so that they could replant (47:23). He then announced the imposition of a permanent tax of 20% of their production. He exempted only the priests from this transaction (47:22). They alone maintained ownership of their lands. Pharaoh already assigned them a portion of what he collected in taxes, so they did not need to sell their lands to Pharaoh. They would remain close supporters of Pharaoh's kingdom, visibly exempt from the new political order in which the people of Egypt had become slaves to Pharaoh.

B. Change and Economic Value

The experience of the Egyptians should draw our attention to the reality of *change* in human affairs. The traditional monetary units failed. The confidence of the people in money and money's supporting institutions failed. What had been valuable before fell to zero value. *There is therefore no ultimate, infallible, all-purpose "store of value" in the economic affairs of men.* Money is simply a marketable good, and if faith in market institutions fails, and men give up hope in their earthly futures, then money is not immune to this transformation of men's outlook. Ours is a world of *uncertainty*. No single earthly commodity or institution can successfully deal with every conceivable possibility of the human condition. No commodity is equally useful or valuable in every possible human situation. This is what Christ pointed to when he cautioned men to lay up treasure in heaven, since there alone is a man's treasure safe from the flux of human events (Matt. 6:19–21).⁴

Money may function as a unit of account in exchanges, but it does not "measure" value, any more than the number of diamond carats in a

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

girl's engagement ring's "measures" the love of her fiancé. Human value, like human love, is subjective. It is imputed by acting men to objects of their desire or revulsion. Men are told to impute value in terms of God's objective standards for men—to think God's thoughts after Him—even as God imputes value to His creation (Gen. 1:31).⁵ In their activities as acting agents responsible before God for their thoughts and actions, men assign value to objects, including money. *Money does not measure value; on the contrary, acting men impute value to money.* As external conditions change, or men's evaluations of external conditions change, men may well shift their value preferences away from money to something else, or from one form of money to another. In Egypt, men learned that they could not eat gold. They could not induce other men to exchange food for gold. The fact that they could not eat gold does not, of course, mean that they could have eaten paper money, credit cards, or certified checks from prestigious banks.

What we must recognize is that *money does not have intrinsic value.* Only the word of God has intrinsic value—permanent, unchanging value imputed to those words by God Himself, who is the source of value. God is self-attesting, self-sustaining, and absolutely autonomous. No human device, including gold and silver, possesses intrinsic value. All human devices are transitory; all shall pass away except God's Word (Matt. 24:35). Gold and silver have demonstrated for millennia that men evaluate their value in relatively predictable, stable ways. This stability of purchasing power over time and geographical boundaries testifies to the historic value of these monetary metals, but historic value is not the same thing as the hypothetical intrinsic value ascribed to the metals. Some people may use the term "intrinsic" when they really have in mind only the concept of historic value, but other people are actually quite confused about the concept of intrinsic value. They assume, for example, that some sort of long-term relationship of "16 to one" exists between the exchange value of silver and gold; 16 units of silver being equal to one unit of gold. Except on a random basis, no such relationship exists in a free market. *No permanent exchange value can exist between two or more economic objects. Human action is subject to change, and exchange values are no exception to this law of human life.*

By "intrinsic value," we must limit our discussion to free market goods and services. We are speaking of market value. Of course, God

5. Chapter 5.

imputes intrinsic value to this or that aspect of the creation. He imputes intrinsic value to the souls of His people. He evaluates the intrinsic evil of His enemies. But when we come to *values imputed by acting men to market phenomena*, there is nothing that possesses intrinsic value—nothing, in short, which remains a *created constant* within the framework of historical change. We might argue that the value of the word of God is greater than the value of gold and silver, but this does not mean that the value of God’s word is always precisely *this much* greater than gold and silver, since the value of gold and silver are not constants in time or eternity. The very existence of changing market exchange ratios (prices) between commodities testifies to the myth of intrinsic *market* value.

Conclusion

The value of money is determined by acting men in the marketplace. The value of God’s word is determined by God. Any appeal to a hypothetical intrinsic value—some supposed fixed exchange relationship between market goods—is simply an attempt to deify some aspect of the creation, to find one of the attributes of God in the creation, namely His unchangeableness. It is God, and only God, who can say, “I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal. 3:6a). The Egyptians of Joseph’s day learned this lesson when the money failed.

Well-meaning defenders of the traditional gold standard have confused the issue by proclaiming the *intrinsic* value of gold. They should instead proclaim the *historic* value of gold. Those who at least understand the basics of value theory can dismiss as naive all defenses of the gold standard that appeal to gold’s intrinsic value, and then go on to proclaim a fiat money standard in defiance of the historic value of gold over long periods of time.

We should not become defenders of the traditional gold standard anyway. We should instead become defenders of freedom of entry, honest weights and measures, and no state-created money.⁶ We should also not become defenders of “intrinsic value” theory. We should become consistent in our economic recommendations and theoretical defenses of biblical freedom.

6. Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>)

CONCLUSION

(2012)

The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch. It is structured in terms of point one of the biblical covenant model: the transcendence of God, yet also the presence of God.¹ It is the book of origins.

The Book of Genesis establishes the fundamental principle of economics: *original ownership*. God created the universe. He therefore owns it. He delegates subordinate, temporary ownership to individuals and institutions. This delegation began with Adam. *The concepts of original and delegated ownership must be the starting point of all valid economic reasoning—not the concept of scarcity.* Yet humanist economists ever since Adam Smith have sought another starting point: scarcity. They want to begin where there is universal agreement. “We all agree that there is scarcity. We all believe we would like more at zero price. So, let us begin with this.” It is a false start. The war of economic ideas always gets back to ownership and its inescapably linked issues of legal sovereignty and moral legitimacy.

A. Fundamentals of Economics

The Book of Genesis provides the economist with the fundamentals of his academic discipline. Without the revelation of God to man concerning the origins of the world, man, and scarcity, there can be no systematic, accurate economic science. The fact that such a science exists, and that it has been developed predominately by men who reject the testimony of the Bible, testifies to the willingness of men to accept at least some of the Bible’s truths, without actually accepting the Bible itself. As I have argued in Chapter 5, Appendix B, and my essay on

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

economics in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* (1976), modern free market economists have used stolen intellectual capital in their attempt to build an autonomous science of economics. There is no science of economics that can logically stand the test of reason, except for Christian economics. The antinomies of value theory—objective vs. subjective—are obvious to the more inquisitive economists, but there is no way to reconcile these antinomies by means of autonomous human reason. The antinomies are therefore ignored or dismissed as irrelevant. The contradictions in both *a priori*, deductivist economics and *a posteriori*, inductivist economics—best represented by the epistemologies of Ludwig von Mises (an *a priorist*) and Milton Friedman (an *a posteriorist* or empiricist)—are also obvious. Both schools of thought wind up relying on *nonrational intuition* to explain the mind-matter relationship. A few economists, such as Frank H. Knight, openly admit that such contradictions exist, but most economists never even think about such matters.² In short, all humanistic economic systems rely on stolen goods, namely, God's revelation to man concerning Himself, man, and the world of scarcity.

Without an understanding of the economics of the Book of Genesis, it is not possible to understand economics. Secularists or other anti-God writers may think they understand economics. They may well discover truths about men's economic relationships, but they will misinterpret whatever correct information they discover if they use their anti-Genesis presuppositions to analyze their discoveries. Because God does not allow men to think completely consistently with their anti-God presuppositions, He restrains their errors. They make beneficial contributions to human thought and culture. The common grace of God, meaning His unmerited gifts to men in general, allows secular economists to make valid contributions. But it is the Christians who will be the ultimate beneficiaries of these contributions, for they alone have the key to understanding, namely, the Bible. The Christians will make the best use of the secularists' discoveries in all fields of thought. The Christians will steadily integrate the valid findings of secular science into a biblically sanctioned framework. This is why we need to take the Book of Genesis seriously as a source of information concerning the foundations of economic analysis.

Admittedly, Christians have failed to understand the crucial posi-

2. Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, Calif.: Ross House Books, 1976).

tion of Genesis as the foundation of economics, education, and social science in general. They have been paralyzed by the myth of neutrality, ever since the days of Justin Martyr (the second century, A.D.). They have tried to establish a common intellectual ground with Greeks of all nations. Greek philosophy and its spiritual legacies have misled Christians almost from the beginning. Only when Christians recognize Genesis for what it is—the foundation of all human thought—will they begin to make culture-reconstructing intellectual contributions. They must no longer be satisfied with the scraps of stolen wisdom that fall from the humanists' tables.

The irony is that, to the extent that humanistic economists have made any lasting, valid contributions, they have used biblical categories of thought. Most obviously, they have acknowledged the effects of scarcity. They have come to grips with the economic consequences of God's curse of the ground. To the extent that economists have departed from the reality of Genesis 3:17–19, as is the case with Marxism, socialism, and other forms of collectivism, they have become irrational. When they argue that institutional changes will produce a world of zero scarcity—a utopian world of universal abundance at zero price—they have adopted satanic principles of interpretation. They have ceased to be economists.

If you have struggled through hundreds of pages of exegesis and economic analysis in this book, you may be asking yourself:

Why hasn't anyone ever tried this sort of a commentary in the past?

Why haven't there been many such attempts, from the days of Constantine to the present?

Why aren't there hundreds of commentaries available that deal not only with economics, but also with politics, education, family relationships, psychology, sociology, and anthropology?

How can serious Christians take the position that there is no such thing as Christian economics? After all, if there is no such thing as Christian economics, then there is no such thing as economics, for to the extent that they are consistent with their own presuppositions, the secularists have to admit that their discipline faces unsolved and probably unsolvable intellectual contradictions.

Why have Christians deliberately ignored the economics of Genesis for so long?³

3. This commentary has been in print since 1982. No humanistic economist has

These are all good questions. It would take a scholar far more familiar with the history of Christian thought than I am to answer these questions. I can only speculate concerning the answers. I know this much, however: the acceptance by Christian thinkers of *the myth of intellectual neutrality* lies at the heart of the problem. The acceptance of this myth over generations has kept Christian scholars from making the systematic, thoroughly biblical contributions to social science and social philosophy that have been needed for so long. They have assumed for too long that the anti-God philosophers and social commentators have done the Christians' work for them.

B. The Christian College Curriculum

I remember an incident back in 1973. I went into the office of the president of tiny Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon, to discuss the possibility of getting a job teaching economics. I had not made a formal appointment, so I was happy to have gained the opportunity to speak with him.

He said that the college did not need any economics courses, because the campus was next door to the University of Oregon. "If a student thinks he needs a course in economics, we just send him over to the University to take it." He told me that this was the college's policy in most of the social sciences, except for anthropology. He confirmed Rushdoony's observation: the closer we get to the doctrine of God, the clearer becomes the visible difference between Christianity and anti-Christianity. He and his faculty could not perceive this difference until they got to man and his cultures. There, they drew a line in the methodological sand. The humanists' attempt to equate primitive religions and Christianity was just too much to swallow.

Given his acceptance of the myth of neutrality, that college president was a fiscally prudent man. Today, most of his empirebuilding peers who raise funds for their struggling little Christian colleges are almost bankrupting their schools—to hire Ph.D.-holding intellectual humanists (who may attend church)—to teach the very same courses that the University of Oregon offered. Unlike them, this president drew the obvious conclusion:

No need to spend money on warmed-over, baptized humanism: go straight to the source. Go next door and take your economics courses from the Keynesians at the state university. Let the university

paid any attention to it. No Christian economist has, either.

hire the faculty, buy the library books, and worry about budget deficits. Let the college concentrate on the courses that are exclusively Christian, such as missions, evangelism, and how to run a church. If our students think they need “secular” courses, let them get their secularism from the certified humanists at tax-subsidized tuition levels. Why drain the funds of God’s kingdom—the “Christian courses”—by importing third-rate humanists to teach our students?

He never said any of this, of course, but there is no doubt in my mind that he was operating in terms of a worldview similar to what I have described. So do Christian college presidents everywhere. The difference is only that he was geographically close enough to a state university, and smart enough financially, to make use of its humanistic opportunities.

The students who took the college’s advice and enrolled part-time at the University of Oregon probably did not corrupt themselves intellectually any more than the thousands of students in Christian colleges do five days a week when they take classes in baptized humanism. If anything, the Christian student at a state university may be more alert to humanist propaganda than the student in a “Christian’s” classroom. He knows he is getting his humanism straight. The student at the Christian college doesn’t.

Conclusion

Genesis gives us the foundations of Christian thought. It tells us of the Creator-creature distinction. It tells us of the dominion covenant. It tells us of the Fall of man and the curse of the ground. We learn that we are stewards of God’s property, fully responsible to Him for the proper administration of His goods. At the same time, we learn that we are also legitimate owners during the period of our stewardship. God entrusts His property to individuals and organizations, and they are called to increase the value of this property. Wealth is therefore not an innate evil, but a means of opportunity for godly service, as we learn in the case of Abraham. Wealth is preserved and expanded by means of character and lawful stewardship (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph), and it is lost by those with poor character and no respect for God’s law (Lot, Laban, Esau).

Genesis teaches us that there is a curse on the ground. This means that we must cooperate with other men to increase our per capita wealth. There is a division of labor principle, as well as the law of di-

minishing returns. The latter law pressures men to expand their area of responsibility, find new means of increasing production, and subdue new lands to the glory of God (or at least to the benefit of their own pocketbooks).

Perhaps more important than anything else for a proper understanding of science, *Genesis teaches us the concept of cosmic personalism*. There is purpose in the creation: God's purpose foundationally, but also men's purposes derivatively. Life has meaning in terms of God's plan for the ages. This means that our labor has meaning in time and on earth, and also in the post-judgment world to come (I Cor. 3). While some aspects of these truths are taught later in the Bible, *Genesis provides us with the basics. The theocentric nature of all existence is the message of Genesis*. This is assuredly not the operating presupposition of humanistic science, including economics.

The Bible lays the legal and social foundations for a society that extends human freedom. This legal and social order, when respected by the rulers and the subjects of a nation, produces the economic framework which is known today as the free enterprise system. *Biblical economics is free enterprise economics*. It is not anarchistic economics, but it is certainly not Keynesian economics or Marxist economics. When birthrights can be validly exchanged for a pot of stew, and God honors such an exchange, we are talking about free enterprise. When legal authorities try to intervene to reverse the consequences of such a voluntary exchange, as Isaac did, those about to lose what their exchange entitled them to can legitimately take steps, including the use of deception, to defend their lives, their property, and their sacred honor.

The example of Joseph in Egypt is just that: Joseph in Egypt. He brought all of Egypt into bondage to the state. This is not an example to be followed by Christian societies.

End of Volume 1

SOVEREIGNTY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

VOLUME 2

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SOVEREIGNTY AND DOMINION

An Economic Commentary on Genesis

Volume 2
Appendixes

Gary North

Sovereignty and Dominion

An Economic Commentary on Genesis

Formerly: *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*

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Appendix A

FROM COSMIC PURPOSELESSNESS TO HUMANISTIC SOVEREIGNTY

Through billions of years of blind mutation, pressing against the shifting walls of their environment, microbes finally emerged as man. We are no longer blind; at least we are beginning to be conscious of what has happened and of what may happen. From now on, evolution is what we make it.

So wrote Hermann J. Muller, the 1946 Nobel Prize winner in physiology.¹ Muller stated his position quite clearly. His statement of faith is almost universally believed within scientific and intellectual circles today. The idea is commonplace, part of the “conventional wisdom” of the age. Man will henceforth direct the evolutionary process. But who will represent man in this cosmic endeavor? Who will direct the process? Answer: Darwinian scientists.

A. The Legacy of Hermann Muller

Muller’s thesis regarding a new, man-directed evolution is worth considering in detail. It provides insight into the underlying vision and motivation of modern evolutionary science. The goal is the creation of a new humanity. Man, meaning scientific man, becomes the creator.

Muller was a disciple of Francis Galton, Darwin’s cousin. Like Galton, he believed in eugenics: the scientific manipulation of human ge-

1. Hermann J. Muller, “One Hundred Years Without Darwinism Are Enough,” *The Humanist*, XIX (1959); reprinted in Philip Appleman (ed.), *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 570. I first saw an incomplete version of this quotation in an article by Elisabeth Mann Borghese, “Human Nature Is Still Evolving,” in *The Center Magazine* (March/April 1973), a publication of the now defunct Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, a Santa Barbara humanist think-tank which was influential in the 1950s and 1960s. It was founded by Robert Maynard Hutchins. My point: this is a standard idea among liberals and humanists.

netic inheritance. For decades, he was America's leading scientific theorist of eugenics. He won his Nobel Prize for his research on how radiation affects genes.

Unlike his peers, he was consistent in his proclamation of scientific planning of the species. He was also a dedicated Marxist. He fled the United States in 1932 because of his sponsorship of a college student Marxist group at the University of Texas. He went to work at the Rockefeller-funded eugenical Institute for Brain Research in Germany even after Hitler came to power in March of 1933. Muller was technically a Jew; his mother was Jewish, which, by Rabbinical law, made him a Jew. Still, he remained in Germany through 1933. In June of 1933, he wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation, which funded the Institute's work, asking it to pressure the Nazi government to keep the Institute's work going under its director, who was being threatened with dismissal. The Nazi government did decide to allow him remain in charge.² Muller continued to do research in Germany that advanced the cause of eugenics.

The Nazis soon passed eugenic laws mandating sterilization. Muller decided that it was no longer safe for him in Germany. He did not leave out of opposition to Nazi eugenics policies. He moved to the Soviet Union from 1934 until 1937, when Stalin found out that he did not follow Lysenko's theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

1. *A Genetic New World Order*

His 1935 book, *Out of the Night*, detailed his vision of a new genetic world order.

The child on the average stands half-way, in its inherited constitution, between its father and the average of the general population, and so it would be theoretically possible even now—were it not for the shackles upon human wills in our society—so to order our reproduction that a considerable part of the very next generation might average, in its hereditary physical and mental constitution, half-way between the average of the present population and that of our greatest living men of mind, body, or “spirit” (as we choose). At the same time, it can be reckoned, the number of men and women of great though not supreme ability would thereby be increased several hundred fold. It is easy to show that in the course of a paltry century or two (paltry, considering the advance in question) it would be pos-

2. Edwin Black, *War on the Weak: Eugenics and the American Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), pp. 302–3.

sible for the majority of the population to become of the innate quality of such men as Lenin, Newton, Leonardo, Pasteur, Beethoven, Omar Khayyam, Pushkin, Sun Yat Sen, Marx.³

How can this be accomplished? By sperm banks. Through artificial insemination, "a vast number of children of the future generation should inherit the characteristics of some transcendently estimable man. . . ."⁴ Dare we say it? A superman will lead to the creation of a master race: the universal human race.

His view of eugenics was messianic. He announced that "we should be able to raise virtually all mankind to or beyond levels heretofore attained only by the most remarkably gifted."⁵ He assured his readers that this can be done voluntarily. This can be done, on the one hand, by furthering birth control, providing low-cost abortions on demand, and universal child care outside the home, "with more motherly mothers, and hence more brotherly brothers."⁶ This will require the end of capitalism: "the change from the profit system to socialization. . . ."⁷ There will be some, compulsion, of course. Science requires compulsion "in a negative role, as a potential force standing ready only to prevent exploitation of the enhanced possibilities of multiplication by unduly egoistic, aggressive, or paranoid individuals."⁸ He did not use the words "forced sterilization." In 1935, there was no need. Forced sterilization laws had been on the books ever since 1907, when Indiana passed the first one.

Muller believed in government planning of the economy and the scientific elite's planning of the races. He is the consummate model of the scientist who used Darwinism to promote the sovereignty of the state. He was among the most respected evolutionists of his generation.

It might be objected that he was a lone wolf who was not representative of Darwinian geneticists in his era. With respect to his overt Marxism, this is correct. It is not correct with respect to his view of both genetic planning and economic planning.

3. Hermann Muller, *Out of the Night* (New York: Vanguard, 1935), pp. 112–13.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

2. *The Geneticists' Manifesto*

In August 1939, in the week before World War II began, a meeting of geneticists was held in Edinburgh: the Seventh International Congress of Genetics. World-famous geneticists from around the world attended. In response to a question cabled by a non-attendee, "How can the world's population be improved most effectively genetically?" a group of the attendees produced a detailed report.⁹ It became known as the Geneticists' Manifesto. The paper announced six principles.

1. There is no valid way to assess the "intrinsic worth of different individuals without economic and social conditions which provide approximately equal opportunities for all members of society instead of stratifying them from birth into classes with widely different privileges."¹⁰ [This means: (1) there are valid, though unmentioned ways to do this; (2) civil governments must create the proper equal-opportunity society.—G.N.]

2. There must be no race prejudice. "This requires some effective sort of federation of the whole world, based on the common interests of all peoples."¹¹

3. Children must be raised by parents who have "a very considerable economic security," including education and medical funding. This means a world in which "dwellings, towns and communities are reshaped with the good of children as one of their main objectives."¹²

4. There must be birth control, which requires a society in which "the superstitious attitude toward sex and reproduction now prevalent has been replaced by a scientific and social attitude."¹³

5. People and the state must recognize biological principles. Heredity and environment are both major factors—factors that "are under the potential control of man and admit of unlimited but interdependent progress."¹⁴ This requires "some kind of conscious guidance of selec-

9. On this background, see *Eugenical News* (June 1946), pp. 33–34. The full document was republished. This was the post-War era. The pre-War eugenics movement was fading in popularity, due to Hitler's use of forced sterilization, which gave the practice a bad press. But the laws remained on the books for two more decades.

10. "The 'Geneticists' Manifesto,'" *Studies in Genetics: The Selected Papers of H. J. Muller* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 545. He died in 1967.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 545–46.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 546.

13. *Idem.*

14. *Idem.*

tion.”¹⁵

6. To guide selection, there must be “an agreed direction for selection to take. . . .” This cannot be accomplished “unless social motives predominate in society. This in turn implies its socialized organization.”¹⁶

This will produce a new world order and a new humanity. Within “a comparatively small number of generations,” we are assured, this new era could come into existence, a world in which “everyone might look upon ‘genius,’ combined of course with stability, as his birthright. And, as the course of evolution shows, this would represent no final stage at all, but only an earnest of still further progress in the future.”¹⁷

Who signed this manifesto? Muller, of course, and six others initially. More added their signatures later, for a total of 21, including Julian Huxley, J. B. S. Haldane, C. H. Waddington, and Theodosius Dobzhansky.¹⁸

B. Man Must Plan

Theodosius Dobzhansky’s influence matched Muller’s. He taught zoology at Columbia University and several other universities. He concluded his essay, “The Present Evolution of Man,” which appeared in the widely read *Scientific American* (September 1960), with these words:

Yet man is the only product of biological evolution who knows that he has evolved and is evolving farther. He should be able to replace the blind force of natural selection by conscious direction, based on his knowledge of his own nature and on his values. It is as certain that such direction will be needed as it is questionable whether man is ready to provide it. He is unready because his knowledge of his own nature and its evolution is insufficient; because a vast majority of people are unaware of the necessity of facing the problem; and because there is so wide a gap between the way people actually live and values and ideals to which they pay lip service.

Therefore, man must now direct the evolutionary process, but the majority of men will not face up to their responsibilities in this respect. He did not elaborate, but the implication is clear enough: *a minority of*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

16. *Idem.*

17. *Idem.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 548.

men, who will face up to their responsibilities for directing the evolutionary process, must step in and provide the scientifically required leadership.

In a 1967 book, Dobzhansky discussed the role of the masses. They exist only in order to provide the raw numbers of humans out of whom will arise the elite. "Are the multitudes supererogatory? They may seem so, in view of the fact that the intellectual and spiritual advances are chiefly the works of elites. To a large extent, they are due to an even smaller minority of individuals of genius. The destiny of a vast majority of humans is death and oblivion. Does this majority play any role in the evolutionary advancement of humanity?" He admitted that the elites need the majority if they themselves are to survive. And the masses provide more than mere "manure in the soil in which are to grow the gorgeous flowers of the elite culture. Only a small fraction of those who try to scale the heights of human achievement arrive anywhere close to the summit. It is imperative that there be a multitude of climbers. Otherwise the summit may not be reached by anybody. The individually lost and forgotten multitudes have not lived in vain, provided they, too, made the effort to climb."¹⁹ It is mankind, a collective whole, that was the focus of his concern, but it is obvious that the elite members are the directing geniuses of the progress of man, as mankind struggles to reach the summit, whatever that may be. "Man is able, or soon will be able, to control his environments successfully. Extinction of mankind could occur only through some suicidal madness, such as an atomic war, or through a cosmic catastrophe."²⁰ Man, the directing god of evolution, need fear only himself, the new cosmic sovereign, or else some totally impersonal event, such as a supernova. Insofar as personalism reigns, *man is sovereign*.

It should be clear by now that the evolutionist is not humble. He has never viewed man as a helpless, struggling product of chaos. *A cosmic leap of being has taken place*. Dobzhansky spoke of two events of transcendence in the history of natural processes: the origin of life and the origin of man. Man is the second great transcendence. "Only once before, when life originated out of inorganic matter, has there occurred a comparable event."²¹ As he wrote, "The origin of life and the origin of man are, understandably, among the most challenging and

19. Theodosius Dobzhansky, *The Biology of Ultimate Concern* (New York: New American Library, 1967), p. 132.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

21. Dobzhansky, *Scientific American* (Sept. 1960), p. 206.

also the most difficult problems in evolutionary history.”²² The continuity of slow evolutionary change is clearly not an applicable law when these tremendous “leaps in being” occur. In fact, these two remarkable discontinuities are notable only for their magnitude; there have been others, such as the appearance of terrestrial vertebrates from fish-like ancestors.²³

Nevertheless, the appearance of man was a true revolution: “The biological evolution had transcended itself in the human ‘revolution.’ A new level of dimension has been reached. The light of the human spirit has begun to shine. The *humanum* is born.”²⁴ His language is unmistakably religious, as well it should be, given his presentation of a distinctly religious cosmology. The post-Darwin evolutionist is no less religious than the Christian creationist. *Evolutionists reverse God’s order of creation*. The Christian affirms that a sovereign, autonomous, omnipotent personal God created the universe. The evolutionist insists that a sovereign, autonomous, omnipotent impersonal universe led to the creation (development) of a now-sovereign personal god, mankind.

C. Making the Universe Bigger

Central to the task of eliminating God from the universe and time were two important intellectual developments. The first was the extension of space. The second was the extension of time, forward and backward.

1. *The Copernican Revolution*

The late-medieval and early modern world saw the shattering of the pre-modern world’s conception of the size of the universe. One of the standard arguments found in textbook accounts of the history of science is that when Copernicus broke the spell of the older Ptolemaic universe, which had hypothesized the sun and heavenly bodies circling the earth, he somehow diminished the significance of man. Astronomer William Saslaw repeated this standard analysis in a 1972 essay. He wrote, “by diminishing the earth, Copernicus also diminished our own importance to the Universe.”²⁵

22. Dobzhansky, *Biology of Ultimate Concern*, p. 45.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

25. William C. Saslaw, “An Introduction to the Emerging Universe,” in Saslaw and

This kind of language goes back to the early years of the Darwinian controversy. Thomas H. Huxley, one of Darwin's earliest defenders, and the most influential promoter of Darwin's gospel in England in the nineteenth century, wrote these words:

For, as the astronomers discover in the earth no centre of the universe, but an eccentric speck, so the naturalists find man to be no centre of the living world, but one amidst endless modifications of life; and as the astronomer observes the mark of practically endless time set upon the arrangements of the solar system so the student of life finds the records of ancient forms of existence peopling the world for ages, which, in relation to human experience, are infinite. . . . Men have acquired the ideas of the practically infinite extent of the universe and of its practical eternity; they are familiar with the conception that our earth is but an infinitesimal fragment of that part of the universe which can be seen; and that, nevertheless, its duration is, as compared with our standards of time, infinite. . . . Whether these ideas are well or ill founded is not the question. No one can deny that they exist, and have been the inevitable outgrowth of the improvement of natural knowledge. And if so, it cannot be doubted that they are changing the form of men's most cherished and most important convictions.²⁶

This supposed diminishing of man was accompanied by the rise of humanism, and Copernicus' theory was in fact basic to humanism's growth. A diminished view of man has somehow led to an elevated view of man. How was this possible?

One lucid answer was provided by Arthur O. Lovejoy, the historian of ideas. He argued that the traditional account of the significance of Copernicus' theory has been erroneous. It has misunderstood the place of the earth in the medieval cosmology. For them, hell was the center of the universe.

It has often been said that the older picture of the world in space was peculiarly fitted to give man a high sense of his own importance and dignity; and some modern writers have made much of this supposed implication of pre-Copernican astronomy. Man occupied, we are told, the central place in the universe, and round the planet of his habitation all the vast, unpeopled spheres obsequiously revolved. But the actual tendency of the geocentric system was, for the medieval

Kenneth C. Jacobs, (eds.), *The Emerging Universe* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1972), no page number, but introductory paragraph.

26. Huxley, "On Improving Knowledge" (1886), in Frederick Barry (ed.), *Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 227-29.

mind, precisely the opposite. For the centre of the world was not a position of honor; it was rather the place farthest removed from the Empyrean, the bottom of the creation, to which its dregs and baser elements sank. The actual centre, indeed, was Hell; in the spatial sense the medieval world was literally diabolocentric. And the whole sublunary region was, of course, incomparably inferior to the resplendent and incorruptible heavens above the moon. . . . It is sufficiently evident from such passages that the geocentric cosmography served rather for man's humiliation than for his exaltation, and that Copernicanism was opposed partly on the ground that it assigned too dignified and lofty a position to his dwelling-place.²⁷

To break the intellectual hold of the older medieval conception of the universe as well as man's place on a cursed earth, the humanists found it convenient to promote Copernicus' cosmography. The basic step in creating a new, autonomous universe did not reduce the cosmological significance of man, for it was a key to establishing the centuries-long intellectual process of *shoving God out of the universe*. It was necessary to reduce God's significance in order to give to mankind the monopoly of cosmological significance. The infinite universe could be substituted for the once-central earth as the arena of man's drama. There is a problem, however. *An impersonal universe, however large, cannot provide meaning*. Man, therefore, can now become the source of meaning in (and for) the universe, by virtue of his exclusive claim to cosmic personalism²⁸—the only source of personal purpose in this infinite universe. Even better from autonomous man's perspective, this modern universe does not relegate man to the pit of sin and spiritual warfare, as the medieval view of the universe had done.

2. The Darwinian Revolution

What the Copernican revolution did for man's sense of autonomy and monopoly of power within the spatial dimension, Darwin's revolution did for man's sense of temporal autonomy. An analogous error in the textbook accounts of the history of science and the history of modern thought is that Darwin made man the descendant of apes (or pre-apes).²⁹ This supposedly debased man's view of himself and his import-

27. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1936] 1965), pp. 101–2.

28. Chapter 1.

29. Predictably, some overly sensitive evolutionist, upon reading this reference to man's ancestors, the apes, will be horrified. "Darwin never said that man descended from apes!" On this point, let me quote George Gaylord Simpson, Harvard's prestigi-

ance in history. The opposite is the case. What Darwin did was to rescue rebellious Western man from Christianity's theology of moral transgression and its doctrine of eternal doom.

A valuable analysis of the impact Darwinian thought had on late-nineteenth-century religious thought was presented by Rev. James Maurice Wilson, Canon of Worcester, in a 1925 essay, "The Religious Effect of the Idea of Evolution." Man became the focal point of religion, for "it is only in the study of man's nature that we can hope to find a clue to God's Purpose in Creation. Herein lies, as I think, the great service that the idea of evolution is rendering to theology."³⁰ Darwin freed man from the biblical God, concluded Rev. Wilson, and so did his contemporaries.

The evolution of man from lower forms of life was in itself a new and startling fact, and one that broke up the old theology. I and my contemporaries, however, accepted it as fact. The first and obvious result of this acceptance was that we were compelled to regard the Biblical story of the Fall as not historic, as it had long been believed to be. We were compelled to regard that story as a primitive attempt to account for the presence of sin and evil in the world. . . . But now, in the light of the fact of evolution, the Fall, as a historic event, already questioned on other grounds, was excluded and denied by science.³¹

Understandably, the rejection of the doctrine of the ethical rebellion of man against God, at a particular point in human history, necessarily transformed that generation's interpretation of Christianity.

The abandonment of the belief in a historic "Fall" of a primeval pair of human beings has removed one of the great obstacles to the

ous paleontologist: "No one doubts that man is a member of the order Primates along with lemurs, tarsiers, monkeys and apes. Few doubt that his closest living relatives are apes. On this subject, by the way, there has been too much pussyfooting. Apologists emphasize that man cannot be a descendant of any living ape—a statement that is obvious to the verge of imbecility—and go on to state or imply that man is not really descended from an ape or monkey at all, but from an earlier common ancestor. In fact, that common ancestor would certainly be called an ape or monkey in popular speech by anyone who saw it. Since the terms ape and monkey are defined by popular usage, man's ancestors were apes or monkeys (or successively both). It is pusillanimous if not dishonest for an informed investigator to say otherwise." Simpson, *This View of Life: The World of an Evolutionist* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 12.

30. James Maurice Wilson, "The Religious Effect of the Idea of Evolution," in *Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge: A Collective work* (London: Blackie & Son, 1925), p. 492.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 497–98.

acceptance by our generation of the Christian Faith which had required that belief. Yet taken by itself it certainly tends to create, as well as to remove, a difficulty. For if there was no historic Fall, what becomes of the Redemption, the Salvation through Christ, which the universal experience of Christendom proves incontestably to be fact? How does Jesus save His people from their sins? *He makes men better.*³²

Man now becomes a co-worker with a vague, undefinable God who does not judge. "It is the sins of the world and our sins that He who died on the Cross is taking away, by making us better. Salvation is not then thought of as an escape from hell; but as a lifting us all out from living lives unworthy of us. Religion so conceived is not the art of winning heaven, but the effort to become better and to work with God."³³

Man now becomes part of God, who in turn is part of the universe. There is *a continuity of life* through evolution. There is therefore *a continuity of being*. Wilson concluded:

The idea of evolution affects Christology because it assumes and implies continuity along with advance in creation. And it is this idea and fact of continuity, impressed on us from all quarters, that is now determining what men are able to believe concerning Divine action in every sphere. The evidence for continuity everywhere is overwhelming. The implicit or explicit recognition of it among educated people, and a general sense of it, are becoming universal and axiomatic. . . . What a chain it is! Begin anywhere: with your own intelligence as you read, or mine as I write. First go down the chain. Intelligence is not confined to those who can read and write. It is shared by every human being. It is shared by animals. It is not limited to animals. Plants cannot be denied a share of it. It is found in roots and leaves and flowers. Go down farther still; and farther. You cannot find the end of the chain. And then go up. . . . To us intelligence, mind, spirit, is now seen as one long continuous chain, of which we see neither beginning nor end. We are perhaps at least as far from the top of it as we are from the bottom.³⁴

This is a modern version of the ancient religion known as *pantheism*. It is certainly one reasonable extension of Darwinism. This is another reason why a generation of public school graduates in the late 1960s could turn to pantheism and then to forms of animism. The be-

32. *Ibid.* pp. 498–99.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 501.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 501–2.

st-selling book, *The Secret Life of Plants* (1974), was essentially a defense of the animist cosmology, where sprites and personal "forces" inhabit plants and special regions of the earth.

This doctrine of the continuity of being was basic to ancient paganism, most notably in Egypt's theology of the divine Pharaoh and his divine state. It is the oldest heresy of all, tempting man "to be as god" (Gen. 3:5). Rev. Wilson was being too modest. Man is not only closer to the top of the chain than to the bottom, he actually is the top. Dobzhansky made this point inescapably clear. He knew how erroneous the textbook account is; he knew that Darwin elevated mankind by making him the product of ape-like beings, which in turn were products of impersonal random forces governed only by the law of natural selection. He wrote:

It has become almost a commonplace that Darwin's discovery of biological evolution completed the downgrading and estrangement of man begun by Copernicus and Galileo. I can scarcely imagine a judgment more mistaken. Perhaps the central point to be argued in this book is that the opposite is true. Evolution is a source of hope for man. To be sure, modern evolution has not restored the earth to the position of the center of the universe. However, while the universe is surely not geocentric, it may conceivably be anthropocentric. Man, this mysterious product of the world's evolution, may also be its protagonist, and eventually its pilot. In any case, the world is not fixed, not finished, and not unchangeable. Everything in it is engaged in evolutionary flow and development.³⁵

A changing, evolving world is at last free from the providence of God.

Since the world is evolving it may in time become different from what it is. And if so, man may help to channel the changes in a direction which he deems desirable and good. . . . In particular, it is not true that human nature does not change; this "nature" is not a status but a process. The potentialities of man's development are far from exhausted, either biologically or culturally. Man must develop as the bearer of spirit and of ultimate concern. Together with Nietzsche we must say: "Man is something that must be overcome."³⁶

Man, in short, must transcend himself. He must evolve into the pilot of the universe. He can do this because he alone is fully self-conscious, fully self-aware. "Self-awareness is, then, one of the fundamen-

35. Dobzhansky, *Biology of Ultimate Concern*, p. 7.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

al, possibly the most fundamental, characteristic of the human species. This characteristic is an evolutionary novelty. . . . The evolutionary adaptive significance of self-awareness lies in that it serves to organize and to integrate man's physical and mental capacities by means of which man controls his environment."³⁷ Man must take control of man and the environment.

Understandably, Dobzhansky despised Protestant fundamentalism. Above all, he had to reject the idea of creationism. To accept such a creed would be to knock man from his pedestal, to drag him away from the pilot's wheel. In fact, scholarly fundamentalists enraged him.

There are still many people who are happy and comfortable adhering to fundamentalist creeds. This should cause no surprise, since a large majority of these believers are as unfamiliar with scientific findings as were people who lived centuries ago. The really extraordinary phenomenon is the continued existence of a small minority of scientifically educated fundamentalists who know that their beliefs are in utter, flagrant, glaring contradiction with firmly established scientific findings. . . . Discussions and debates with such persons is [sic] a waste of time; I suspect that they are unhappy people, envious of those who are helped to hold similar views by plain ignorance.³⁸

What is the heart of the evolutionist's religion? Dobzhansky made his humanism clear: "One can study facts without bothering to inquire about their meaning. But there is one stupendous fact with which people were confronted at all stages of their factual enlightenment, the meaning of which they have ceaselessly tried to discover. This fact is Man."³⁹ This is the link among all of man's religions, he said. Man with a capital "M" is the heart of man's religions; so, on these terms, evolutionism must certainly be the humanistic world's foremost religion. It is not surprising that Dobzhansky's book was published as one of a series, edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen: "Perspectives in Humanism."

You need to understand from the beginning that *evolutionism's cosmology involves an intellectual sleight-of-hand operation*. It appears initially to denigrate man's position in a universe of infinite (or almost infinite) space and time, only subsequently to place man on the pinnacle of this non-created realm. Man becomes content to be a child of the meaningless slime, in order that he might claim his rightful sover-

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.

39. *Ibid.* p. 96.

eignty in the place once occupied by God. By default—the disappearance of God the Creator—man achieves his evolving divinity.

D. Uniformitarianism

Uniformitarianism is the deeply religious and inherently unprovable assumption that rates of astrophysical and geological change observed today have been the same since the beginning of time. Differently put, uniformitarianism teaches that the processes that acted in the evolution of the universe and the earth were the same as those that operate today. (Some evolutionary scientists have finally abandoned this straightforward version of uniformitarianism,⁴⁰ but it is the one which has long been acceptable to most scientists, especially geologists, astronomers, and life scientists.)

Science needs a constant, even the science of Einstein's theory of relativity. That constant is the speed of light. By striking at the validity of such a constant, the Bible necessarily denies the doctrine of uniformitarianism in relation to origins of the universe. Either the transmission of light from the most distant stars began on the same day as the transmission of light from the moon, with the rays of light from all sources striking the earth on the day the heavenly bodies were created, or else the Genesis account of the creation is false. The Bible's account of the chronology of creation points to an illusion, one created by the modern doctrine of uniformitarianism. *The seeming age of the stars is an illusion.* The events that we seem to be observing, such as novas (exploding stars), did not take place billions of years ago. If they did

40. See, for example, Simpson, *This View of Life*, p. 132. Simpson denied that rates of geological change observable today have always prevailed. "Some processes (those of vulcanism or glaciation, for example) have evidently acted in the past with scales and rates that cannot by any stretch be called 'the same' or even 'approximately the same' as those of today." However, he still clung to uniformitarianism as a principle, though unprovable, because it is scientifically necessary to assume its existence: "Gravity would be immanent (an inherent characteristic of matter now) even if the law of gravity had changed, and it is impossible to prove that it has not changed. Uniformity, in this sense, is an unprovable postulate justified, or indeed required, on two grounds. First, nothing in our incomplete but extensive knowledge of history disagrees with it. Second, only on this postulate is a rational interpretation of history possible, and we are justified in seeking—as scientists we must seek—such a rational interpretation" (p. 133). Cf. Stephen Jay Gould, "Evolution: Explosion, Not Ascent," *New York Times* (Jan. 22, 1978); *Ever Since Darwin* (1977), and *The Panda's Thumb* (1980), both published by Norton, New York. Gould was a Harvard professor of paleontology, just as Simpson was. See also Steven N. Stanley, *The New Evolutionary Timetable* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

take place, they took place recently. If so, the speed of light is not a reliable constant. If the speed of light has been a constant since the creation of the earth, then the flashes of light which we explain as exploding stars are in no way related to actual historical events like explosions, unless the universe is relatively small. Either the constancy of the speed of light is an illusion, or the size of the universe is an illusion, or else the physical events that we hypothesize to explain the visible changes in light or radiation are false inferences. The speed of light should not be used to estimate the age and size of the universe.⁴¹

E. Cosmic Purpose

Genesis 1:14–16 has implications outside the discipline of astronomy. These verses are uniquely important for the biological and social sciences. First, they teach us that *the origin of life was outside the cause-and-effect sequence of today's environment*. Plant life appeared before the creation of the sun. If biological processes were the same then as now, then chlorophyll preceded the appearance of the sun. Light did not “call forth the plant”—not solar light, anyway. The biological processes of plant life were in operation before the existence of the star that today sustains all plant life. *The sun, in this sense, was created for the present benefit of the plants*. The Bible's account of creation reverses modern biological science's interpretation of cause and effect. Plants had capacities for reproduction and survival before the present basis of plant life was created. Nothing could be further removed from the hypothesis of modern biology. Such a creationist view of reality indicates the future-orientation of cause and effect, as if the

41. A story written by Walter Sullivan in the *New York Times* (Dec. 20, 1978) reported on four quasars that appeared to be moving through space at speeds far in excess of the speed of light. Scientists were frantically trying to find some sort of explanation for this phenomenon, since it challenged the modern world's only accepted constant, namely, the speed of light. Nevertheless, John Kolena, Assistant Professor of Astronomy at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, could write in total confidence in a letter to the Editor: “The earth's age is thus based neither on ‘assumptions’ nor on ‘faith’ but on a law of nature, experimentally verified literally millions of times without exception.” He was referring to the radioactive decay of uranium atoms. He ended his letter with an appeal to the Deist's God of the eighteenth century: “Those of us who still need to believe in God should in fact, be even more impressed by his or her decision to make just a few natural laws and yet keep the universe running so well for so many billions of years without any necessity for active intervention.” *Durham Morning Herald* (Nov. 1, 1979). It is inspiring to know that such a God (male or female) should be so smart as to create the world and then conveniently disappear for 13 billion years, in order to demonstrate His (or Her) majestic sovereignty. Meanwhile, the quasars went merrily along, at eight times the speed of light. Maybe.

plants called forth the sun. God, of course, called forth both plants and sun, but from the point of view of chronology, the biblical account denies the past-orientation of secular theories of cause and effect. Science declares that every event has some set of prior causes. At least with respect to the creation of the world, the Bible denies that such causes were in any way environmentally determined by existing matter-energy.

A second implication of Genesis 1:14–16, which is related to the first, is significant in the social sciences as well as in the biological sciences. *The stars, sun, and moon were created in order to serve the needs of plants, animals, and men.* Modern science does not permit the use of the words “in order to” except when a human being or thinking animal is seeking to achieve some goal. *The concept of cosmic purpose is not allowed to exist in modern science except in relationship to man.* The processes of hypothetically autonomous nature are explained by modern science strictly in terms of purposeless prior events. The universe’s origins were purely random and therefore completely without purpose. What all modern science denies absolutely is the old Christian doctrine of *teleology*.

“Teleology” is not a commonly used word any longer. It refers to *final causation*: ultimate ends. Modern science is concerned only with prior causation. Cosmic impersonalism necessarily has to exclude any concept of final causation, since there can be no personal, directing agent who has created our world in order to achieve certain ends. Without a directing agent—a conscious, powerful planner—the concept of purpose is meaningless. Modern science denies the doctrine of transcendent cosmic personalism, so it also has to deny teleology, except with reference to the goals of man or men. It is man, and only man, who has brought purpose into the rationalist’s universe. *Causation had to be purposeless causation prior to man.* Final causation implies a personal agent who is directing creation towards a goal which was chosen prior to the appearance of man. This is precisely what the Bible affirms (Eph. 1). This is precisely what modern, rationalist science denies.

Teleology, the doctrine of final causation, was used by Aquinas as one of the five proofs of God. It became a popular apologetic device used by Protestants to defend the faith “rationally,” especially after the appearance of William Paley’s books, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794) and *Natural Theology* (1802). The signs of design in creation point to God’s plan for the ages, Paley argued. He used the fam-

ous analogy of the clock and the universe: a designer must be postulated in both cases. (The radical Deist, whose universe is mechanistic, can use this analogy to prove God's neglect of man's affairs, thereby denying the doctrine of providence, which is why Paley also relied on the evidence of miracles—providential discontinuities—to state the case for Christianity.) Paley's *Evidences* was still assigned to Cambridge University students just prior to World War I, though it is doubtful that many of them took it seriously. Malcolm Muggeridge certainly was unimpressed.⁴² Is the universe orderly because God has specific ends for it, and has therefore directed its operations? If the universe is orderly, can some other explanation be given besides conscious design?

It has been the goal of the modern evolutionist, ever since the days of Darwin, to find a suitable alternate explanation. Darwin's answer was evolution through natural selection. George Bernard Shaw confidently stated that Darwin had thrown Paley's watch into the ocean. Marjorie Greene added:

It was not really, however, the watch he threw away, but the watchmaker. Darwinism is teleologically decapitated; everything in nature is explained in terms of its purpose, but an unplanned purpose in which the organism is tool, tool user, and beneficiary all in one. And the artifact analogy is as basic to Darwinism, both old and new, as it is to natural theology: not only is the concept of natural selection grounded on the analogy with the great livestock breeders, but the organisms themselves are conceived in Paleyan terms as contrivances, aggregates of characters and functions of good—for what? For survival, that is, for going on and being good for, going on and being good for—and so on ad infinitum.⁴³

Instead of eternity, the Darwinist substitutes infinite extension, at least until all energy is dissipated in the final cold of entropy. Instead of immortality, he substitutes the survival of the species. Anyway, the old-fashioned, less consistent Darwinist did these things. The new ones are growing less confident about man's survival as they grow more consistent concerning man's autonomous power, e.g., nuclear war or biological warfare that uses microbes that are genetically engineered to be racially specific.

42. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick* (New York: William Morrow, 1973), p. 75.

43. Marjorie Greene, "The Faith of Darwinism," *Encounter* (Nov. 1959), p. 53.

F. Whose Purposes?

The great enemy of modern science is purpose apart from man's purposes. As the Medawars stated so clearly, "It is upon the notion of *randomness* that geneticists have based their case against a benevolent or malevolent deity and against there being any overall purpose or design in nature."⁴⁴ The old-fashioned version of Darwinism did include an element of purposefulness, at least in its language. The so-called "survival of the fittest" indicated that there was upward progress inherent in the processes of evolution. This phrase was coined by Herbert Spencer, the nineteenth-century sociologist, in his 1852 essay, "A Theory of Population, deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility," and Darwin inserted the phrase into the fifth edition of *The Origin of Species*. Spencer's language was ethical and teleological: "From the beginning, pressure of population has been the proximate cause of progress." Again, "those left behind to continue the race, are those in whom the power of self-preservation is the greatest—are the select of their generation."⁴⁵ The words "progress" and "select" are giveaways. Mere biological change is equated with progress, with all the nuances associated with "progress," and the best are "selected" by nature, converting a random, impersonal process into something resembling purposeful action.

One reason why Darwinism swept nineteenth-century thought was because of the seemingly teleological implications of the language of Darwinism. The public was not yet ready to abandon teleology as rapidly as the more consistent scientists were. Even today, the language of evolutionists is still clouded by the language of final causation and purpose. A. R. Manser wrote:

Darwin's theory is generally claimed to be non-teleological. But the very criterion of success in the "struggle for existence," survival and/or expansion, seems to put a teleological notion back into the center of evolutionary thought. This explains why it is generally assumed that evolution is in an "upward" direction, that new species are an improvement of the old. . . . I am not claiming that this anthropomorphism is necessarily involved in Darwin's theory itself, or that Darwin must have thought in these terms; all I claim is that this was one of the elements that made the theory acceptable both to sci-

44. Peter and Jean Medawar, "Revising the Facts of Life," *Harper's* (Feb. 1977), p. 41.

45. Cited by William Irvine, *Apes, Angels, and Victorians: The Story of Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), p. 30.

entists and to laymen. . . . From a historical point of view, it seems likely that many of the nonscientific supporters of Darwin would have been less willing to accept the theory if this prop had not been available.⁴⁶

Furthermore, he pointed out, "even now it is clear that many biologists have to make a conscious effort to prevent themselves from lapsing into such a mode of thought or expression."

From the beginning, Darwin used the analogy of the professional breeder in defending the idea of natural selection, and this led to continuing confusion on the part of readers, both scientific and amateur, who had assimilated his explanation of the so-called mechanism of evolution. Again and again, popularizers (including Harvard's influential nineteenth-century biologist, Asa Gray) tried to combine some version of Paley's *Natural Theology* with an activist version of natural selection. Darwin over and over had to explain that his language was not to be taken literally, that Nature is not a planning, conscious entity that selects one or another species to survive. Yet, in the first edition of *Origin of Species*, he had written that "Natural Selection, as we shall hereafter see, is a power incessantly ready for action, and is as immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to Art."⁴⁷ No wonder he had to keep revising each edition to eliminate such language! The sixth edition was so far removed from the first that something like 75% of the first was rewritten by the final edition—rewritten as many as five times each, in the case of some sentences. The sixth edition was one-third longer than the first.⁴⁸

As a result of constant criticism, he steadily abandoned natural selection as the sole cause of evolution. He adopted elements of the idea of Lamarck: the "inheritance of acquired characteristics," an idea that has been repudiated by modern Darwinians. He referred back to an earlier statement in the first edition, in the conclusion of the sixth edition: "I am convinced that natural selection has been the main but not the exclusive means of modification."⁴⁹ Those who have seen the triumph of Darwinism forget that for half a century after the publication of *Origin of Species*, the ideas of evolution and uniformitarianism came

46. A. R. Manser, "The Concept of Evolution," *Philosophy*, XL (1965), p. 22.

47. Cited by Robert M. Young, "Darwin's Metaphor: Does Nature Select?" *Monist*, LV (1971), p. 462.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 496.

49. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 6th ed. (New York: Modern Library, [1871]), p. 367.

to be accepted universally, but the idea of natural selection as the mechanism (explanation) went into decline. As Robert M. Young commented:

As a result of successive theoretical and experimental developments in biology which seemed inconsistent with Darwin's mechanism of natural selection, this aspect of his theory went into increasing decline, so much so that Nordenskiöld's standard *History of Biology* (written between 1920–24 and still in print [as of 1970—G.N.]) included long chapters chronicling the decline of Darwinism, in the same period as evolution was being increasingly accepted. "To raise the theory of selection, as had often been done, to the rank of a 'natural law' comparable in value with the law of gravity established by Newton is, of course, quite irrational, as time has already shown; Darwin's theory of the origin of the species was long ago abandoned." Within ten years, however, biologists were generally convinced that Darwin had been right in the first place. . . .⁵⁰

The phrase, "in the first place," refers to the first edition of *Origin*, before he had begun to compromise the theory of natural selection so severely. What Darwin had accomplished in 1859 was impressive: the presentation of a seeming mechanism which could explain evolution. But his book was tinged with teleological elements in its language, thereby making far easier the spread of the idea of evolution among people who still wanted to believe in a semi-providence-governed universe. The public did not understand the importance of natural selection, despite the fact that this was Darwin's hypothesis justifying belief in biological evolution. Even Darwin steadily abandoned the hypothesis as an all-encompassing explanation. He seems to have abandoned confidence in chance as a meaningful explanation of origins in his last years. In the last letter that he wrote to Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-discoverer of "evolution through natural selection," Darwin commended a book by William Graham, *The Creed of Science*, which was straightforwardly teleological in approach. Graham had written: "We are compelled to interpret the course of evolution as being under guidance; to believe that the final results were aimed at; that Nature did not stumble on her best works by sheer accident, . . . Chance, as an explanation—and if design be denied, chance must be offered as the explanation—is a word expressing nothing, a word which, under pretence of explanation, affirms nothing whatever. It is this; but it is also much more serious; for it is the express denial of God and it is thus genuine

50. Young, *Monist* (1971), p. 497. Cf. Simpson, *This View of Life*, pp. 14ff.

atheism.”⁵¹ Darwin wrote to Graham that “you have expressed my inward conviction, though far more vividly and clearly than I could have done, that ‘the universe is not the result of chance.’”⁵²

But if not chance, then what? Modern science cannot accept explanations for events that are outside of nature itself. Modern science cannot accept final causation. Therefore, *modern science had to abandon Darwin in the name of Darwinian presuppositions*. Better the lawless laws of chance than God; better chaos than providence, says the secular scientist.

In biology, and especially genetics, the element of randomness enters at the very beginning of life. The scientist knows no way of predicting either chromosome combinations or genetic mutations. Furthermore, he does not know which environmental factors will prove conclusive in the development of the particular species in question. He may speak about the “survival of the fittest,” yet the only way to test the fittest is to see, in retrospect, which species actually do survive. The so-called survival of the fittest is a tautology; it means simply *the survival of the survivors*. There is no mechanism today that geneticists can use that enables them to predict, in advance, which species will survive or which species will not. Darwin’s theory is therefore a descriptive theory, not a theory useful in scientific prediction. The heart of the meaning of the “survival of the fittest,” therefore, is not scientific but rather historical.⁵³ More to the point, it is more *religious* than anything. It is a statement about God and His relationship with the creation. As one philosopher has written:

All that the statement “It is the fit that survive” can mean is that for any kind of organism in any circumstances there are some possible features whose possession is more conducive to survival than that of their alternatives. But the phrase “the survival of the fittest,” though it is something of a catchphrase, does indicate something of importance. It indicates that according to the theory there is nothing mysterious in the fact of the survival of some forms in preference to others; there is no need to postulate the unfathomable designs of a di-

51. Cited by Young, *ibid.*, pp. 486–87.

52. Cited by Young, *ibid.*, p. 486. One difficulty in attributing this passage as a late opinion of Darwin’s is that he had questioned the purely random universe in earlier correspondence, such as his Nov. 26, 1860, letter to Asa Gray: *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 2 vols., ed. Francis Darwin (New York: Appleton, 1887), II, p. 146. (<http://bit.ly/DarwinLife2>)

53. A. R. Manser, *Philosophy* (1965), pp. 24–25. Cf. Simpson, *This View of Life*, p. 96.

vine will.⁵⁴

God is eliminated from biological science. This is the very essence of all modern, anti-teleological science. This is why science must not be teleological, the secularist argues.

The secular scientist really does not want randomness all of the time. He wants *predictable randomness*. He wants the operation of the law of large numbers. He wants the laws of probability. He wants sufficient order to give him power, but he usually wants sufficient randomness to preserve him from the power of others, especially God. When the biologist speaks of randomness, he means man's limited ability to predict the future, yet no scientist clings to a theory of total randomness. As Barker wrote concerning randomness as it applies to Darwinism: "It is an essential presupposition of the theory that variation should occur at random with respect to any advantage or disadvantage it may confer on the organism, in its relations with factors in its internal or external environment."⁵⁵ As he emphatically stated, "any theory that did not postulate randomness of this kind, or at least which involved its denial, could not count as a scientific theory."⁵⁶ Here is the heart of the argument concerning teleology. Any trace of teleology must be scrapped by secular science. The secular scientists have *defined* science to exclude all forms of final, teleological causation. Darwin, however confused he may have been, or however attracted to the teleological arguments of William Graham he may have become at the end of his life, made it plain in the final edition of *Origin of Species* that he could not accept any trace of God-ordained benefits in the processes of nature. "The foregoing remarks lead me to say a few words on the protest lately made by some naturalists, against the utilitarian doctrine that every detail of structure has been produced for the good of its possessor. They believe that many structures have been created for the sake of beauty, to delight man or the Creator (but this latter point is beyond the scope of scientific discussion), or for the sake of mere variety, a view already discussed. Such doctrines, if true, would be absolutely fatal to my theory."⁵⁷ Indeed; they would be absolutely fatal for all forms of modern secular science. Or, should I say, would have been *up until now* fatal for modern secular science.

54. A. D. Barker, "An Approach to the Theory of Natural Selection," *Philosophy*, XLIV (Oct. 1969), p. 274.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

57. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p. 146.

G. Man: The New Predestinator

There is an exception to the *a priori* denial of teleological causation in the universe. Man is this exception. The secularist has denied that there could be even a trace of final causation, meaning ends-dominated causation, anywhere in the origin of nature or in nature's products. But when we come to a consideration of man, now freed from God or any other form of conscious causation external to man, the position of the secularists changes. *Man is the new sovereign over nature*. Nature's otherwise mindless processes have now produced a thinking, acting creature, man. Man can learn the laws of nature, and he can then subdue nature to his ends. He can plan and execute his plans. *Man proposes and man disposes*, to quote Karl Marx's partner, Frederick Engels.⁵⁸ Nature has therefore transcended its own laws. A series of uncreated random developments has resulted in the creation of a planning being. *Teleology has come into the world*. Man, the new predestinator, can take over the directing of evolution, even as the selective breeders who so fascinated Darwin took over the breeding of animals and plants. What modern science has denied to God and nature, it now permits to man.

The Bible affirms that the stars were created by God for the benefit of His creatures on earth. The Bible absolutely denies the first principle of all secular natural science, namely, that there can be no teleology in nature prior to man. But the Bible also subordinates man and the creation to God, the Creator. Modern secular science comes to a new conclusion: there is teleology, but man—generic, collective man—

58. Frederick Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (Anti-Dühring) (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1877] 1934), p. 348. Engels wrote: "We have already seen, more than once, that in existing bourgeois society men are dominated by the economic conditions created by themselves, by the means of production which they themselves have produced, as if by an extraneous force. The actual basis of religious reflex action therefore continues to exist, and with it the religious reflex itself. . . . It is still true that man proposes and God (that is, the extraneous force of the capitalist mode of production) disposes. Mere knowledge, even if it went much further and deeper than that of bourgeois economic science, is not enough to bring social forces under the control of society. What is above all necessary for this, is a social act. And when this act has been accomplished, when society, by taking possession of all means of production and using them on a planned basis, has freed itself and all its members from the bondage in which they are at present held by these means of production but which now confront them as an irresistible extraneous force; when therefore man no longer merely proposes, but also disposes—only then will the last extraneous force which is still reflected in religion vanish; and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect" (pp. 347–48).

kind—is the source of this final causation. The Bible denies this. The Bible affirms that God proposes and God disposes, and that man is responsible before God (Rom. 9). God's ends are sovereign over both man and nature.

The war between the first principles of the Bible's account of creation and secular science is absolute. No compromise is possible. Christians who happen to hold advanced degrees in biology and geology may think that some sort of working compromise is possible, but the humanists deny it. George Gaylord Simpson called teleology "the higher superstition." He wrote: "Another subtler and even more deeply warping concept of the higher superstition was that the world was created for man. Other organisms had no separate purpose in the scheme of creation. Whether noxious or useful, they were to be seriously considered only in their relationship to the supreme creation, the image of God."⁵⁹ Simpson was adamant: "There is no fact in the history of life that requires a postulate of purpose external to the organisms themselves."⁶⁰ *This is clearly a statement of religious faith.* Simpson then asked: "Does this mean that religion is simply invalid from a scientific point of view, that the conflict is insoluble and one must choose one side or the other? I do not think so. Science can and does invalidate some views held to be religious. Whatever else God may be held to be, He is surely consistent with the world of observed phenomena in which we live. A god whose means of creation is not evolution is a false god."⁶¹ He thought that the world of observed phenomena—observed by us, today—automatically teaches historical evolution. It does, if you assume, *a priori*, that evolution is always true, and that every fact of the universe is in conformity with this dogma.

1. A Sleight-of-Hand Operation

Secular science has attempted a sleight-of-hand operation. Denying the existence of any transcendent conscious purpose, and denying even the scientific consideration of such a transcendent conscious purpose, secular scientists conclude that there is no authority above man to deflect man's conscious purposes. You cannot be a respectable scientist and assume transcendent purpose, since "postulating the transcendental always stultifies inquiry."⁶² *Nature must first be depersonal-*

59. Simpson, *This View of Life*, p. 7.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

ized.

As astronomy made the universe immense, physics itself and related physical sciences made it lawful. Physical effects have physical causes, and the relationship is such that when causes are adequately known effects can be reliably predicted. We no longer live in a capricious world. We may expect the universe to deal consistently, even if not fairly, with us. If the unusual happens, we need no longer blame *kanaima* (or a whimsical god or devil) but may look confidently for an unusual or hitherto unknown physical cause. That is, perhaps, an act of faith, but it is not superstition. Unlike recourse to the supernatural, it is validated by thousands of successful searches for verifiable causes. This view depersonalizes the universe and makes it more austere, but it also makes it dependable.⁶³

The depersonalization of nature was originally asserted in terms of a philosophy that proclaimed nature's autonomy. This autonomy for nature no longer will be permitted. Once man achieves his *freedom from undesigned nature* by means of his knowledge of nature's laws, he can then assert his *autonomous sovereignty over nature* (including, of course, other men). There are no conscious ends in the universe that can overcome the conscious purpose of the planning elite. There is no court of higher appeal. R. J. Rushdoony summarized this new cosmology very well:

Humanistic law, moreover, is inescapably totalitarian law. Humanism, as a logical development of evolutionary theory, holds fundamentally to a concept of an evolving universe. This is held to be an "open universe," whereas Biblical Christianity, because of its faith in the triune God and His eternal decree, is said to be a faith in a "closed universe." This terminology not only intends to prejudice the case; it reverses reality. The universe of evolutionism and humanism is a closed universe. There is no law, no appeal, no higher order, beyond and above the universe. Instead of an open window upwards, there is a closed cosmos. There is thus no ultimate law and decree beyond man and the universe. Man's law is therefore beyond criticism except by man. In practice, this means that the positive law of the state is absolute law. The state is the most powerful and most highly organized expression of humanistic man, and the state is the form and expression of humanistic law. Because there is no higher law of God as judge over the universe, over every human order, the law of the state is a closed system of law. There is no appeal beyond it. Man has no "right," no realm of justice, no source of law beyond

63. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the state, to which man can appeal against the state. Humanism therefore imprisons man within the closed world of the state and the closed universe of the evolutionary scheme.⁶⁴

Simpson, one of the most prominent paleontologists of the mid-twentieth century, offered us this interpretation of man, the new sovereign: "Man is the highest animal. The fact that he alone is capable of making such a judgment is in itself part of the evidence that this decision is correct. . . . He is also a fundamentally new sort of animal and one in which, although organic evolution continues on its way, fundamentally a new sort of evolution has also appeared. The basis of this new sort of evolution is a new sort of heredity, the inheritance of learning."⁶⁵

2. *The New Evolution*

Simpson contrasted *organic evolution*, nature's non-teleological, random development of nonhuman species, with the new *social evolution* of mankind. "Organic evolution rejects acquired characters in inheritance and adaptively orients the essentially random, non-environmental interplay of genetical systems. The new evolution peculiar to man operates directly by the inheritance of acquired characters, of knowledge and learned activities which arise in and are continuously a part of an organismic-environmental system, that of social organization."⁶⁶ A new Lamarckianism, with its inheritance of acquired characteristics, has arisen; it has brought with it a *legitimate teleology*. Man, the product of nature, can at last provide what autonomous nature could not: *conscious control*. "Through this very basic distinction between the old evolution and the new, the new evolution becomes subject to conscious control. Man, alone among all organisms, knows that he evolves and he alone is capable of directing his own evolution. For him evolution is no longer something that happens to the organism regardless but something in which the organism may and must take an active hand."⁶⁷

64. Rushdoony, "Introduction" to E. L. Hebdon Taylor, *The New Legality* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1967), pp. vi–vii. The text of this citation was incorrectly printed in Taylor's book and was later corrected by Mr. Rushdoony.

65. Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution: A Study of the History of Life and of Its Significance for Man* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1949] 1969), p. 286.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

Man's control over future evolution is limited, of course. He cannot choose every direction of a new evolution, nor the rate of change. "In organic evolution he cannot decide what sort of mutation he would like to have,"⁶⁸ but he does have power, and therefore must make responsible decisions. "Conscious knowledge, purpose, choice, foresight, and values carry as an inevitable corollary responsibility."⁶⁹ Of course, we know that all ethics is relative, in fact, "highly relative."⁷⁰ "The search for an absolute ethic, either intuitive or naturalistic, has been a failure."⁷¹ There are no fixed ethical principles. "They become ethical principles only if man chooses to make them such."⁷² Man, the creative force behind today's evolution, becomes at the same time the creator and judge of his own ethics. "Man cannot evade the responsibility of choice."⁷³ Whatever the outcomes of our search for ethical principles, this much is certain: "The purposes and plans are ours, not those of the universe, which displays convincing evidence of their absence."⁷⁴ *We are the new predestinators, the source of the universe's new teleology.*

Man was certainly not the goal of evolution, which evidently had no goal. He was not planned, in an operation wholly planless. . . . His rise was neither insignificant nor inevitable. Man did originate after a tremendously long sequence of events in which chance and orientation played a part. Not all the chance favored his appearance, none might have, but enough did. Not all the orientation was in his direction, it did not lead unerringly human-ward, but some of it came this way. The result is the most highly endowed organization of matter that has yet appeared on the earth—and we certainly have no good reason to believe there is any higher in the universe.⁷⁵

Man proposes, and man, working with nature, also disposes.

H. Evolutionism's Sleight-of-Hand

The humanistic philosophy of Darwinism is an enormously successful sleight-of-hand operation. It has two primary steps. *First*, man

68. *Idem.*

69. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 297.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

72. *Idem.*

73. *Idem.*

74. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 293–94.

must be defined as no more than an animal, the product of the same meaningless, impersonal, unplanned forces that produced all the forms of life. This axiom is necessary in order to free man completely from the concept of final judgment. Man must not be understood as a created being, made in God's image, and therefore fully responsible before God. Man is no more unique, and therefore no more responsible, than an amoeba. *Second*, man, once freed from the idea of a Creator, is immediately redefined as the unique life form in the universe. In short, he is and is not special, depending on which stage of the argument you consider.

1. Simpson on Teleology

Simpson provided the argumentation for both steps. *First*, man is just another life form.

This world into which Darwin led us is certainly very different from the world of the higher superstition. In the world of Darwin man has no special status other than his definition as a distinct species of animal. He is in the fullest sense a part of nature and not apart from it. He is akin, not figuratively but literally, to every living thing, be it an amoeba, a tapeworm, a flea, a seaweed, an oak tree, or a monkey—even though the degrees of relationship are different and we may feel less empathy for forty-second cousins like the tapeworms than for, comparatively speaking, brothers like the monkeys. This is togetherness and brotherhood with a vengeance, beyond the wildest dreams of copy writers or of theologians.⁷⁶

Man has not been favored in any way by the impersonal and directionless process of evolution through natural selection. "Moreover, since man is one of many millions of species all produced by the same grand process, it is in the highest degree improbable that anything in the world exists specifically for his benefit or ill. . . . The rational world is not teleological in the old sense."⁷⁷

Second, man is unquestionably teleological in the new sense—the post-Darwin sense. Nothing was designed by God to meet the needs of man, but because man is now the directing agent of evolution, he can take control over everything. Furthermore, he does not need to humble himself as a steward before God. All of the fruits of the meaningless universe are now man's, for he is the pinnacle, not of creation,

⁷⁶ Simpson, *This View of Life*, pp. 12–13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

but of evolution. Simpson moved to the second step of the argument a dozen pages later.

Man is one of the millions of results of this material process. He is another species of animal but not just another animal. He is unique in peculiar and extraordinarily significant ways. He is probably the most self-conscious of organisms, and quite surely the only one that is aware of his own origins, of his own biological nature. He has developed symbolization to a unique degree and is the only organism with true language. This makes him also the only animal who can store knowledge beyond individual capacity and pass it on beyond individual memory. He is by far the most adaptable of all organisms because he has developed culture as a biological adaptation. Now his culture evolves not distinct from and not in replacement of but in addition to biological evolution, which also continues.⁷⁸

He elaborated: "The evolutionary process is not moral—the word is simply irrelevant in that connection—but it has finally produced a moral animal. Conspicuous among his moral attributes is a sense of responsibility. . . . In the post-Darwinian world another answer seems fairly clear: man is responsible to himself and for himself. 'Himself' here means the whole human species, not only the individual and certainly not just those of a certain color of hair or cast of features."⁷⁹ Man, meaning collective man or species man, is sovereign. Individuals are responsible to this collective entity. Simpson made his position crystal clear.

Man is a glorious and unique species of animal. The species originated by evolution, it is still actively evolving, and it will continue to evolve. Future evolution could raise man to superb heights as yet hardly glimpsed, but it will not automatically do so. As far as can now be foreseen, evolutionary degeneration is at least as likely in our future as is further progress. The only way to ensure a progressive evolutionary future for mankind is for man himself to take a hand in the process. Although much further knowledge is needed, it is unquestionably possible for man to guide his own evolution (within limits) along desirable lines. But the great weight of the most widespread current beliefs and institutions is against even attempting such guidance. If there is any hope, it is this: that there may be an increasing number of people who face this dilemma squarely and honestly seek a way out.⁸⁰

78. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

With these words, Simpson ended his book.

Are Simpson and Dobzhansky representative of post-Darwinian evolutionism? They are. It is difficult to find biologists who do not take this approach when they address themselves to these problems. Many, of course, remain silent, content to perform the most prosaic tasks of what Thomas Kuhn has called "normal science."⁸¹ When they speak out on the great questions of cosmology, however, their words are basically the same as Simpson's.

2. *Thomas Huxley on Teleology*

Thomas Huxley was one of those who began to make the case for step two. Darwin for the most part had been content to deal with step one, devoting himself to wrapping up the case for an anti-teleological universe, with its order-producing process of natural selection. Huxley, his contemporary and early defender, was ready to place man on the pinnacle of the evolutionary process. In his famous 1893 Romanes Lectures, "Evolution and Ethics," Huxley announced: "The history of civilization details the steps by which men have succeeded in building up an artificial world within the cosmos. Fragile reed as he may be, man, Pascal says, is a thinking reed: there lies within him a fund of energy, operating intelligently and so far akin to that which pervades the universe, that it is competent to influence and modify the cosmic process. In virtue of his intelligence, the dwarf bends the Titan to his will."⁸² Huxley was no optimist. He was convinced that eventually, the law of entropy would triumph.

If, for millions of years, our globe has taken the upward road, yet, some time, the summit will be reached and the downward route will be commenced. The most daring imagination will hardly venture upon the suggestion that the power and the intelligence of man can ever arrest the procession of the great year. . . . But, on the other hand, I see no limit to the extent to which intelligence and will, guided by sound principles of investigation and organized in common effort, may modify the conditions of existence, for a period longer than that now covered by history. And much may be done to

81. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1970), coined this phrase. For an extended discussion of Kuhn's important distinction between "normal science" and "revolutionary science," see Imre Lakatos [LakaTOSH] and A. E. Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

82. T. H. Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics," (1893), in *Collected Essays*, 9 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1893), IX, pp. 83–84.

change the nature of man himself.⁸³

When Huxley spoke of man, he meant collective man:

Further, the consummation is not reached in man, the mere animal; nor in man, the whole or half savage; but only in man, the member of an organized polity. And it is a necessary consequence of his attempt to live in this way; that is, under those conditions which are essential to the full development of his noblest powers. Man, the animal, in fact, has worked his way to the headship of the sentient world, and has become the superb animal which he is, in virtue of his success in the struggle for existence. The conditions having been of a certain order, man's organization has adjusted itself to them better than that of his competitors in the cosmic strife.⁸⁴

Huxley strongly opposed Social Darwinism, with its ethic of individualism and personal competition in a free market, which he referred to as "fanatical individualism."⁸⁵ He reminded his listeners of "the duties of the individual to the State. . . ."⁸⁶ We cannot look, he said, to the competitive processes of nature (meaning other species) as a guide for human social ethics and social organization, since "the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combatting it."⁸⁷

I. The Theology of Self-Transcendence

Huxley's grandson, the biologist Sir Julian Huxley, delivered the Romanes lectures a half century after his grandfather had, in 1943. He attempted to reconcile the seeming dichotomy that his grandfather had presented, namely, the conflict between cosmic evolution and human ethics. He did so by focusing on the leap of being which man represents, a new evolutionary power that can direct the cosmic processes by means of his own science and values. In other words, he argued for *continuity of evolutionary processes*—a denial of any conflict between ethics and evolution—by stressing the *radical discontinuity represented by man*. The first great discontinuity was the appearance of life, which was Dobzhansky's assertion, too.⁸⁸ As life developed, "there in-

83. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

86. *Idem.*

87. *Idem.*

88. Theodosius Dobzhansky, "The Present Evolution of Man," *Scientific American* (Sept. 1960), p. 206.

creased also the possibilities of control, of independence, of inner harmony and self-regulation, of experience.”⁸⁹ Animal brains made their advent. But then came nature’s crowning glory, man, meaning *collective man*. As he wrote, “during the last half-million years or so a new and more comprehensive type of order of organization has arisen; and on this new level, the world-stuff is once more introduced to altogether new possibilities, and has quite new methods of evolutionary operation at its disposal. Biological and organic evolution has at its upper end been merged into and largely succeeded by conscious social evolution.”⁹⁰ This, of course, is the second great discontinuity in the history of evolution.

1. *The Order of Creation*

Earlier, I argued that evolutionists have reversed the order of creation. Instead of affirming that a sovereign, autonomous, omnipotent *personal* God created the universe, they argue that a sovereign, autonomous, omnipotent, and *impersonal* universe has created a now-sovereign personal god, mankind. Julian Huxley took this argument one step further. He also abandoned uniformitarianism, the device by which God was supposedly shoved out of the universe. The slow time scale of cosmic evolution now speeds up, for it now has a planning agent directing it. The new god, mankind, has the power to speed up evolutionary processes, even as Christians have argued that God demonstrated His power over time in creating the world in six days.

With this, a new type of organization came into being—that of self-reproducing society. So long as man survives as a species (and there is no reason for thinking he will not) there seems to be no possibility for any other form of life to push up to this new organizational level. Indeed there are grounds for supposing that biological evolution has come to an end, so far as any sort of major advance is concerned. Thus further large-scale evolution has once again been immensely restricted in extent, being now it would seem confined to the single species man; but at the same time immensely accelerated in its speed, through the operation of the new mechanisms now available.⁹¹

89. Julian Huxley, “Evolutionary Ethics,” (1943), in T. H. Huxley and Julian Huxley, *Touchstone for Ethics, 1893–1943* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), p. 13. Reprinted by Arno Press.

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 133–34.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Why should this be true? Because man has replaced genetic mutation (ordered by natural selection) with language, symbols, and writing. "The slow methods of variation and heredity are outstripped by the speedier processes of acquiring and transmitting experience."⁹² Therefore, "in so far as the mechanism of evolution ceases to be blind and automatic and becomes conscious, ethics can be injected into the evolutionary process."⁹³

2. Relativism and Statism

Huxley, predictably, argued for ethical relativism. There can be no "Absolute" ethics.⁹⁴ "The theologian and the moralist will be doing wrong so long as they cling to any absolute or unyielding certitude."⁹⁵ (We might ask the obvious questions: Would the "absolutizing" theologian or moralist *always* be wrong? Was Huxley *absolutely certain* of this?) In a later essay, Huxley criticized his grandfather's view of ethics as being too static.

We can now say that T. H. Huxley's antithesis between ethics and evolution was false, because based on a limited definition of evolution and a static view of ethics. . . . More than that, we perceive that ethics itself is an organ of evolution, and itself evolves. And finally, by adopting this dynamic or evolutionary point of view of ethics as something with a time-dimension, a process rather than a system, we obtain light on one of the most difficult but also most central problems of ethics—the relation between individual and social ethics, and perceive that the antithesis between the individual and society can also be reconciled.⁹⁶

Evolution means, above all, *process*—the ethics of historical relativism.

How can these two forms of ethics be reconciled? In his 1943 lecture, Huxley argued for the supremacy of individualistic ethics, since "it is clear on evolutionary grounds that the individual is in a real sense higher than the State or the social organism. . . . All claims that the State has an intrinsically higher value than the individual are false. They turn out, on closer scrutiny, to be rationalizations or myths aimed at securing greater power or privilege for a limited group which

92. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

93. *Idem.*

94. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

controls the machinery of the State.”⁹⁷ He delivered this speech during World War II, and he made certain that his audience knew where he stood. “Nazi ethics put the State above the individual.”⁹⁸ The Nazi method is against evolutionism “on the grounds of efficiency alone.”⁹⁹ All of a sudden, evolutionism’s ethics of relativism grew rock-hard: “Furthermore, its principles run counter to those guaranteed by universalist evolutionary ethics.”¹⁰⁰ The Nazis were doomed to fail, he concluded.

Four years later, in 1947, Huxley was calling for a one-world state. The atomic bomb had appeared, and civilization now had the possibility of destroying itself. (While the evolutionists never call thermonuclear holocaust “theocide,” this is what they mean: god can now commit suicide.) In short, “the separate regions of the world have, for the first time in history, shrunk politically into a single unit, though so far not an orderly but a chaotic one: and now the atomic bomb hangs with equal grimness over all parts of this infant commonwealth of man. . . . The threat of the atomic bomb is simple—unite or perish.”¹⁰¹ He went on:

So long as the human species is organized in a number of competing and sovereign nation-states, not only is it easy for a group to pick another group to serve as enemy, but it is in the group’s narrow and short-term interest that it should do so. . . . The specific steps which will have to be taken before we can reach this next stage of ethical evolution are somewhat various. There is first the practical step of discovering how to transfer some of the sovereign power of several nation-states of the world to a central organization. This has its counterpart in the moral world: for one thing, any practical success in this task will make it easier for men to abandon the tribalist ethics (for tribalist they still are, however magnified in scale) associated with the co-existence of competing social groups.¹⁰²

Even more strongly: “This is the major ethical problem of our time—to achieve global unity for man. . . . Present-day men and nations will

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–39.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

100. *Idem.* Huxley could resist taking a swing at the Old Testament for its exaltation of the idea of a special chosen people. “In this the Nazis merely translate into modern terms the ethics of tribes or peoples in an early barbarous phase of the world’s history, such as the ancient Hebrews before the prophetic period” (p. 147).

101. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 247–49.

be judged by history as moral or immoral according as to whether they have helped or hindered unification.”¹⁰³

3. A Unified God

Huxley provided documentation for Rushdoony’s assessment that “humanity is the true god of the Enlightenment and of French Revolutionary thought. In all religious faiths one of the inevitable requirements of logical thought asserts itself in the demand for *the unity of the godhead*. Hence, since humanity is a god, there can be no division in this godhead, humanity. Mankind must therefore be forced to unite.”¹⁰⁴ This is another reason why Rushdoony called the United Nations a religious dream.¹⁰⁵ Huxley confirmed this suspicion. Unity will advance mankind to the next stage of evolution. “I would suggest that the secondary critical point in human evolution will be marked by the union of all separate traditions in a single common pool, the orchestration of human diversity from competitive discord to harmonious symphony. Of what future possibilities beyond the human this may be the first foundation, who can say? But at least it will for the first time give full scope to man’s distinctive method of evolution, and open the door to many human potentialities that are as yet scarcely dreamed of.”¹⁰⁶ But who will lead the orchestra? He did not ask or say.

Huxley ended this book on evolutionary ethics with a statement quite similar to the one introducing this appendix: “Man the conscious microcosm has been thrown up by the blind and automatic forces of the unconscious macrocosm. But now his consciousness can begin to play an active part, and to influence the process of the macrocosm by guiding and acting as the growing-point of its evolution. Man’s ethics and his moral aspirations have now become an integral part of any fu-

103. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

104. R. J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1964] 2001), p. 130.

105. Rushdoony, “The United Nations: A Religious Dream,” in *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), pp. 184–99. He wrote two other essays on the religious quest of the United Nations: “The United Nations,” in Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1965] 2001), ch. 7, and “Has the U.N. Replaced Christ as a World Religion?” in *Our Church: Their Target* (Arlington, Virginia: Better Books, 1966), ch. 10.

106. Huxley, “Conclusion,” *Touchstone for Ethics*, p. 255. This is a quotation from an earlier book by Huxley, published by the United Nations’ Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): *The Prerequisites of Progress* (Paris: Editions Fontaine, 1947).

ture evolutionary process.”¹⁰⁷

This theme became a familiar one in later books by Huxley. No statement is more forthright, however, than the opening chapter of his 1957 book, *Knowledge, Morality, and Destiny*, which he titled “Transhumanism.” “As a result of a thousand million years of evolution, the universe is becoming conscious of itself, able to understand something of its past history and possible future. This cosmic self-awareness is being realized in one tiny fragment of the universe—in a few of us human beings.”¹⁰⁸ Here is the combination of “Flyspeck Earth” and “man, the new predestinator.” There is nothing humble about residing on a tiny bit of dust in an immense universe, whether one is a Christian or an evolutionist. Huxley repeated the now-familiar theme: man as a leap of being. “For do not let us forget that the human species is as radically different from any of the microscopic single-celled animals that lived a thousand million years ago as they were from a fragment of stone or metal.”¹⁰⁹ He, too, affirmed that the two great discontinuities in the uniformitarian universe were the appearance of life and the appearance of man. Evolutionists use uniformitarianism to push God back to the pre-life past or into the post-life future, and to deny the six-day creation. They do not use uniformitarianism to refute these two great discontinuities.

4. *A New Evolution*

We are supposedly now at another great period of evolutionary discontinuity. A new era is about to dawn. “The new understanding of the universe has come about through the new knowledge amassed in the last hundred years—by psychologists, biologists, and other scientists, by archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians. It has defined man’s responsibility and destiny—to be an agent for the rest of the world in the job of realizing its inherent potentialities as fully as possible.”¹¹⁰ An amazing bit of luck for all of us, isn’t it? It took ten billion years to get from the “big bang” to the advent of life in the solar system. Then it took another 3.497 (or possibly 3.498) billion years to get from life’s origin (3.5 billion until about 300,000 years ago) to that second great cosmological discontinuity, man. And now, here we are,

107. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

108. Julian Huxley, *Knowledge, Morality, and Destiny* (New York: Mentor Book, [1957] 1960), p. 13.

109. *Idem.*

110. *Idem.*

ready for stage three, the ascension of man to his position of universal power. If you had been born a Neanderthal man (let alone a brontosaurus), or even an eighteenth-century *Philosophe*, you would have missed it. Missed what? This:

It is as if man had been suddenly appointed managing director of the biggest business of all, the business of evolution—appointed without being asked if he wanted it, and without proper warning or preparation. What is more, he can't refuse the job. Whether he wants to or not, whether he is conscious of what he is doing or not, he is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on this earth. That is his inescapable destiny, and the sooner he realizes it and starts believing in it, the better for all concerned.¹¹¹

A new humanity is coming: "The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, and an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature."¹¹²

In case readers fail to recognize this ancient heresy, it is called *gnosticism*. This, in turn, was simply a variation of the original sin, the desire of man to be as God, to transcend man's own creaturely limitations by seeking special knowledge. Adam sought the knowledge of good and evil. The gnostics, in the second and third centuries A.D. in Asia Minor and North Africa, sought mystical illumination. In the Middle Ages, alchemists sought self-transcendence through repetitive chemical rituals—the quest for the so-called "philosopher's stone," which was not simply a means of converting lead into gold, but a means of enabling the alchemist to transcend his own limits as a creature. It is not surprising, then, that with the rise of secular humanism—in the late-medieval and early modern periods, as well as today—has come occultism, sorcery, demonism, and the quest for mystical utopia, especially through the techniques of Eastern religion, which has always been evolutionary in philosophy.¹¹³ Humanism, whether Renaissance humanism or post-Darwinian humanism, is in league

111. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

113. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, [1947] 1967), pp. 87–89. Cf. Thomas Molnar, *God and the Knowledge of Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage, [1964] 1969).

with occultism.¹¹⁴

5. Genetic Engineering

It would be unproductive to multiply citations of the evolutionists' sleight-of-hand operation. The Darwinists have used the dogma of cosmic purposelessness to free man from the constraints of biblical law and the threat of eternal judgment. Once freed from God, man is said to become the new predestinator. Dobzhansky, the Huxleys, Simpson, and others holding similar views have presented secular man with the humanists' version of the dominion covenant. Man is to conquer. With the discovery by Watson and Crick of the make-up of the DNA molecule, scientists are now in the process of creating new forms of life. The General Electric Company filed patents on one new life form, and an appeals court in 1979 upheld the firm's property right to this new species. The "gene splicers" are in our midst. Warnings are unlikely to stop the experimental mania of modern biological scientists. The technological imperative is too strong: "If it can be done, it must be done."¹¹⁵ The hope of profits also lures research firms into the field. Financial success, which is likely over the short run at least, will bring in the competition. Recombinant DNA, the tool of the "gene splicers," discovered in 1973, has opened a true Pandora's box of moral, intellectual, medical, and legal problems.¹¹⁶ As one popular book on the subject warned: "'Man the engineer' may soon become 'man the engineered.'"¹¹⁷ The authors went on to cite recent statements by biological scientists that are in line with everything that has been said since the days of Thomas Huxley.

Over these past three billion years, one hundred million species have existed on this planet. Of those, ninety-eight million are now extinct. Among the two million that remain today, only one, *Homo sapiens* ("wise man"), has evolved to the point of being able to harness and control its own evolutionary future. Many biologists welcome this possibility, seeing it as a great challenge that will ennoble and preserve our species. "Modern progress in microbiology and genetics suggests that man can outwit extinction through genetic en-

114. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gnoccultism>)

115. The idea of the technological imperative is the foundation of the critical book by Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage [1964] 1967).

116. John Lear, *Recombinant DNA: The Untold Story* (New York: Crown, 1978).

117. Jeremy Rifkin and Ted Howard, *Who Should Play God?* (New York: Dell, 1977), p. 14.

gineering,” argues Cal Tech biologist James Bonner. “Genetic change is not basically immoral. It takes place all the time, naturally. What man can do, however, is to make sure that these changes are no longer random in the gigantic lottery in nature. . . . Instead, he can control the changes to produce better individuals.” Bonner’s viewpoint is seconded by Dr. Joseph Fletcher, professor of Medical Ethics at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, who sees in genetic engineering the fulfillment of our cosmic role on earth. “To be men,” he believes, “we must be in control. That is the first and last ethical word.” Promises a third scientist, our newly developed eugenic potential will lead humanity to “a growth of social wisdom and glorious survival-toward the evolution of a kind of superman.”¹¹⁸

The book is well titled: *Who Should Play God?*

J. Darwin’s Intellectual Revolution

What a magnificent sleight-of-hand operation the defenders of evolution and humanism have accomplished! *First*, the universe was depersonalized. Darwin put it very forcefully: “It has been said that I speak of natural selection as an active power or Deity; but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movement of the planets? Everyone knows what is meant and implied by such metaphorical expressions; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature; but I mean by Nature, only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws, and bylaws the sequence of events as ascertained by us.”¹¹⁹ God was shoved out of the universe, leaving only humble man, whose power seems to be limited to “ascertaining laws,” which are the sequence of events observed by us.

Second, man was reduced to being a mere cog in a mighty machine, not the representative of an infinite God, governing the earth as a subordinate in terms of the dominion covenant. A few paragraphs later, Darwin wrote: “How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! how short his time! and consequently how poor will be his results, compared with those accumulated by Nature during the whole geological periods! Can we wonder, then, that Nature’s productions should

118. *Ibid.*, p. 21. See also Michael Rogers, *Biohazard* (New York: Knopf, 1977); June Goodfield, *Playing God: Genetic Engineering and the Manipulation of Life* (New York: Random House, 1977); Nicholas Wade, *The Ultimate Experiment: Man-Made Evolution* (New York: Walker & Walker, 1977).

119. Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*, ch. 4; in *The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man* (New York: Modern Library edition), p. 64.

be far 'truer' in character than man's productions; that they should be infinitely better adapted to the most complex conditions of life, and should plainly bear the stamp of higher workmanship?"¹²⁰ Not the higher workmanship of the God of the Bible or even the deistic god of Paley's *Natural Theology*, man is the "higher workmanship" of plan-less, meaningless, "random, yet cause-and-effect-governed" geological and biological process.

Third, evolutionists added a purposeful, meaning-providing conscious agent to this "random, yet cause-and-effect-governed," *previously* impersonal process. Darwin gave the intellectual game away in the concluding paragraph of *The Descent of Man* (second edition, 1874): "Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future."¹²¹ But not so distant a future after all! In 1957, Sir Julian Huxley concluded: "Assuredly the concept of man as instrument and agent of the evolutionary process will become the dominant integrator of all ideas about human destiny, and will set the pattern of our general attitude to life. It will replace the idea of man as the Lord of Creation, as the puppet of blind fate, or as the willing or unwilling subject of a Divine Master."¹²²

Man had lowly origins, but man is now the source of direction and meaning for the evolutionary process. This is Darwin's intellectual legacy. As he concluded *The Descent of Man*, "We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system—with all these exalted powers—Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin."¹²³ Notice that Darwin chose to capitalize the word "man" in his final reference to this exalted being, as befits the name of one's deity. Man is no longer the image of God, but the image of apes, pre-apes, amoebae, and meaningless cosmic process. Still, he has this "god-like intellect," which shows sympathy and benevolence. He is

120. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 920.

122. Julian Huxley, *Knowledge, Morality, and Destiny*, p. 54.

123. Darwin, *op. cit.*, p. 920.

therefore “exalted.” But lowly, always the product of humble origins. In fact, *it is precisely man’s humble, impersonal origins that provide him with his credentials of being the sole source of cosmic meaning.*

There is no one higher than man, for there is no one—no self-aware Creator—who preceded man. Anyone who is not familiar with this monumental sleight-of-hand operation may fail to grasp this, *the single most important intellectual transformation in the heart and soul of the religion of humanism.* Marxism was an important subordinate stream in this intellectual transformation, but by the late twentieth century, few people outside of a handful of Western intellectuals really believed in the tenets of original Marxism. They may well have believed in exercising power in the name of the Marxist intellectual heritage, but the priests, no less than the laymen, had lost faith in the old dogma. They had not abandoned faith in Darwin’s dogma.

In 1959, Hermann J. Muller could write that *The Origin of Species* “was undoubtedly the greatest scientific book of all time . . . The result has been that this revolutionary view of life now stands as one of the most firmly established generalizations of science. . . .”¹²⁴ It is a religion, as Muller’s words indicate: “We dare not leave it to the Soviets alone to offer to their rising generation the inspiration that is to be gained from the wonderful world view opened up by Darwin and other Western biologists.”¹²⁵ On both sides of the Iron Curtain, the priest-hoods were enlisting the faithful, offering them salvation by means of evolution. This is a religion that supposedly will provide meaning, and the objections of anti-evolutionists must be stifled for the sake of the masses: “The history of living things, and its interpretation, can be made a fascinating story that will give our young people a strong sense of the meaning of life, not only for plants and animals in general, but for mankind in particular, and for them themselves. . . . We have no more right to starve the masses of our youth intellectually and emotionally because of the objections of the uninformed than we have a right to allow people to keep their children from being vaccinated and thus endanger the whole community physically.”¹²⁶ Statement after statement like this one can be found in the extraordinarily revealing book, *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition* (1970).

124. Hermann J. Muller, “One Hundred Years Without Darwinism Are Enough,” *The Humanist*, XIX (1959); reprinted in Philip Appleman (ed.), *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 545.

125. *Idem.*

126. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

The humility of post-Darwin humanists is a myth—a myth fostered by them, and one which has its roots in Darwin's own sleight-of-hand operation. Anyone who thinks that man was anything but elevated by Darwinism has deluded himself. He has swallowed only the first bit of bait tossed to him by the Darwinians. There was more to come.

Thomas Huxley, Darwin's first great promoter and Sir Julian's grandfather, could write about earth, "the speck," or the supposed fact that man is not the "centre of the living world, but one amidst endless modifications of life,"¹²⁷ but this was (and is) part of an enormous deception. Consider the words of Philip Handler, who was the president of the National Academy of Sciences in 1976. He delivered this speech to the General Assembly of the International Council of Scientific Unions, so it was not intended to be too off-beat, too radical, or too embarrassing to its author. You will not find his view of man's role particularly long on humility.

How very privileged we are—we who have lived through the last half-century of science, that historic few decades in which the mind of man first came really to understand the nature of the atomic nucleus; first learned the history of our planet and identified the forces that continue to refigure its surface, the habitat of our species; the time when man's mind first engaged the immense sweep and grandeur of the cosmos in what we believe to be its true dimensions; the time when our species commenced upon the physical exploration of the solar system. Ours is the fortunate generation that, for the first time, came to understand the essential aspects of the marvelous phenomenon which is life, a phenomenon describable only in the language of chemistry; came to understand the mechanisms that have operated over the eons of biological evolution. In short, ours may well be the first generation that knows what we are and where we are. That knowledge permitted the acquisition of new capabilities whereby we utilize an extraordinary assemblage of synthetic materials, each created for a specific purpose, whereby we manipulate our environment, communicate, move about, protect our health, avoid pain and even extend the power of our own intellects. . . . In a historic sense, the scientific endeavor began only yesterday, yet we have come a wondrous distance from our primeval ignorance in so short a time. . . .¹²⁸

127. Thomas H. Huxley, "On Improving Natural Knowledge" (1866), *Collected Works*, I, p. 39.

128. Philip Handler, "Science and Hope," *Science: A Resource for Mankind*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, Bicentennial Symposium (Oct. 10–14,

This remarkable testimony of a prominent biologist's faith was published in *The Washington Post* (Dec. 22, 1976), the most widely read newspaper in the political capital of the United States.

Evolution is the religion of modern humanism. It was also the religion of ancient humanism. The explanation is different evolution by natural selection—but the religion's really important dogma has not been changed significantly since the primary version was presented to mankind by Satan: We shall be as gods (Gen. 3:5).

K. Fictional Science, Science Fiction

One of occultism's universal themes is the appearance of a new creation, some sort of positive human mutation.¹²⁹ But do serious scientists take this vision very seriously? Some do, as indicated by their explicit statements concerning recombinant DNA and genetic engineering. Another bit of evidence appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* (Sept. 10, 1979), on the back page. An expensive advertisement was run by Pertec Computer Corporation, apparently some sort of "public service" advertisement. It featured a photograph of America's most prolific author, Dr. Isaac Asimov, who had written over 200 books at the time the ad appeared.¹³⁰ He held a Ph.D. in biochemistry, but he was more famous for his science fiction stories and his popularizations of modern natural science. During one period of 100 months, Asimov turned out 100 books. He did all his own typing (90 words a minute), almost every day, for most of the day. He has at least one book in nine of the ten Dewey decimal classification categories. He did not write a book on philosophy. In short, he was no raving lunatic. The advertisement read: "Will computers take over?"

Asimov addressed the question of computer intelligence. Could computers ever become more intelligent than men? Asimov's answer: the knowledge stored by a computer is not the same as man's knowledge. They are two separate developments. "The human brain evolved by hit-and-miss, by random mutations, making use of subtle chemical changes, and with a forward drive powered by natural selection and by the need to survive in a particular world of given qualities and dangers. The computer brain is evolving by deliberate design as the result of careful human thought, making use of subtle electrical charges, and

1976), pp. 12–13. (<http://bit.ly/HandlerHope>)

129. Cf. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits*, ch. 10.

130. *Time* (Feb. 26, 1979).

with a forward drive powered by technological advancement and the need to serve particular human requirements.” From the “hit-and-miss” random evolution of man’s brain, to man the battling and planning survivor, to the forward-driven computer (impersonal, purposeless mechanism, to purposeful organic agent, to personalized mechanism): here is the standard, post-Darwin account. But Asimov blazed new trails. The two forms of intelligence are too different to be compared on the same scale. We cannot make such comparisons. We must keep the systems distinct. Each should specialize. “This would be particularly true if genetic engineering was deliberately used to improve the human brain in precisely those directions in which the computer is weak.” We must avoid wasteful duplication he said.

Consequently the question of “taking over” need never arise. What we might see, instead, would be symbiosis or complementation, human brain and computer working together, each supplying what the other lacks, forming an intelligence pair that would be greater than either could be alone, an intelligence pair that would open new horizons, not now imaginable, and make it possible to achieve new heights, not now dreamed of. In fact, the union of brains, human and human-made, might serve as the doorway through which human beings could emerge from their isolated childhood into their combination adulthood.

The advertisement sold no product and did not instruct him to clip a coupon or take any sort of action. It simply offered a message—a message of a new evolution.

The same theme is found in the first *Star Trek* movie, released in December of 1979. The movie’s science advisor was Asimov. The movie is about a future space ship crew that confronts an unimaginably powerful intelligence. This intelligence turns out to be an enormous machine, one which had been built by a civilization run entirely by machines. It literally knows everything in the universe, yet it is traveling back to earth to seek the “Creator” and to join with the “Creator” in a metaphysical union (Eastern mysticism). The machine is perfectly rational, totally devoid of feeling, and is a “child” at the very beginning of its evolution. It turns out that the center of the machine’s guidance system is a centuries-old United States space probe, the Voyager, which had been sent into space to seek knowledge and send back that knowledge to earth. Hence, the “Creator” was man. The movie ends when an officer of the crew joins in metaphysical union with the machine, along with a mechanical robot built by the machine—a robot

that duplicated his ex-lover. The officer, the female robot, and the enormous machine then disappear. Science officer Spock, a human-Vulcan genius—a mutant product of two races—announces that a new being has just evolved from the fusion of man, man-made machinery, machinery-made machinery, and a machine-made robot that is “almost human” (actually, Deltan, whatever the planet Delta produces; the lady had a shaved head to match her vow of chastity). Spock, a cult figure from the mid-1960s through the next 45 years, who had been seeking total rationalism (his Vulcan side) to the exclusion of feeling (his human side), now is content to remain with the humans on board the Starship *Enterprise*, apparently satisfied with his somewhat schizophrenic mind-emotion dualism. And why not? He had seen the perfectly rational (the huge machine), and it had been lonely, seeking its “Creator.” To make the next evolutionary step, it required fusion with mankind. Spock, with his pointed ears and his computer-like brain, is as close to that next evolution as any Vulcan-human could ever hope for. The movie, based on a popular television series of the late 1960s, immediately attracted ticket buyers among the millions of “trekkies,” their cult-like fans.

If Asimov’s vision does not border on the occult, what does? If the message of that computer company’s advertisement and the *Star Trek* movie does not represent a religious position, what else should we call such a message? Science? Science fiction? “Mere” entertainment? Or a combination of all three, which in addition is also a religion?

L. Christian Orthodoxy vs. Process Philosophy

Readers may think that I am belaboring a point, but this point is crucial for understanding the confessional foundation of modern humanism. Charles Darwin created an intellectual revolution. That intellectual revolution still affects us. He did not simply provide interesting new evidence concerning historical geology or biological reproduction; he created a new world-and-life view. It was this new perspective on man’s origins, not the factual data, that made Darwin’s *Origin of Species* an instant best-seller. The clergy in Darwin’s day recognized the threat to the biblical world-and-life view which was posed by the *Origin*. As Philip Appleman observed:

Theologians worried because they saw, perhaps more clearly than others, the philosophical implications of post-Darwinian thought. It was not just that Darwin had complicated the reading of Genesis, or

even that he had furnished impressive scientific authority for the nineteenth-century habit of thinking in terms of wholes and continuities rather than in discrete parts and rigidities; or that the evolutionary orientation stressed context and complexity—though all of these influences could be bothersome when used by “materialists.” The worst threat of all was that Darwin’s universe operated not by Design but by natural selection, a self-regulating mechanism. . . . Natural selection pictured the world in a constant process of change, but without any prior intention of going anywhere in particular or of becoming anything in particular. This was a devastating proposition to the conventional theologian—more so, perhaps, than the Copernican theory had been, because it struck so close to home. Natural selection therefore seemed, to many, hopelessly negative, fraught with blasphemy and conducive of despair.¹³¹

This despair was initially covered over by optimism concerning the power of man to take over the direction of the evolutionary process, an optimism that still survives, though not without fear and foreboding on the part of some scientists and philosophers.

So it *made a difference* to philosophers and theologians that man not only evolved, but evolved by natural selection rather than by a vital force or cosmic urge of some sort. Darwinism seemed uncompromisingly non-teleological, non-vitalist, and non-finalist, and that basic fact could not help but affect the work of philosophers. “Once man was swept into the evolutionary orbit,” Bert James Lowenberg has written, “a revolution in Western thought was initiated. Man was seen to be a part of nature, and nature was seen to be a part of man. The Darwinian revolution was not a revolution in science alone; it was a revolution in man’s conception of himself and in man’s conception of all his works.”¹³²

Appleman chronicled the decline in the opposition to Darwinism on the part of Roman Catholics and other theologians. “The activities of science, relentlessly pushing back the margins of the unknown, have in effect been forcing the concept of ‘God’ into a perpetual retreat into the still-unknown, and it is in this condition that ‘God’ has frequently come to have meaning for modern man.”¹³³

The modern evolutionist is a defender of a concept of process that removes God and His control from the universe, so that man and

131. Philip Appleman, “Darwin: On Changing the Mind,” Epilogue in Appleman (ed.), *Darwin*, pp. 636–37.

132. *Ibid.*, p. 637.

133. *Ibid.*, pp. 638–39.

man's sovereignty can be substituted for the supposedly nonexistent God. Meaningless process is the evolutionist's god of origins. Only when a meaningful God who created the universe in terms of His *eternal, unchanging decree* is finally removed from our thought processes, can our thought processes take control of all other processes, the modern evolutionist argues. *Evolutionary process is the humanist's god of origins*, a god whose crucial purpose for man is to remove from the question of origins any concept of purpose. Man's monopoly of cosmic purpose is supposedly assured as a direct result of the non-purposeful origins of the universe. This is why Rushdoony took such pains to contrast process philosophy and creationism.¹³⁴

It is revealing to read the attempted refutation of Rushdoony written by a self-proclaimed orthodox Christian geologist (who argued for a 4.6 billion-year-old earth).¹³⁵ He had no understanding of what process philosophy is and how Darwinism promotes it. "Rushdoony's fears are unfounded. An affirmation of process in itself certainly does not constitute an attack on the sovereignty of God. Scripture reveals in [sic] the sovereignty of God in history, in day-to-day affairs, in the ordinary rising and setting of the sun. Process is going on all about us

134. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1967] 2001), pp. 53–54, 85. Process philosophy, which is basic to all evolutionary systems, leads inescapably into relativism. The implicit relativism of evolutionism cannot be reconciled with the implicit authoritarianism of the biblical doctrine of creation. Rushdoony's discussion of evolutionism is fundamental: "In this concept, being is evolving and is in process. Because being is in process, and being is seen as one and undivided, truth itself is tentative, evolving, and without finality. Since being has not yet assumed a final form, since the universe is in process and not yet a finished product, truth itself is in process and is continually changing. A new movement or 'leap of being' can give a man a new truth and render yesterday's truth a lie. But, in an order created by a perfect, omnipotent, and totally self-conscious Being, God, truth is both final, specific, and authoritative. God's word can then be, and is inevitably, infallible, because there is nothing tentative about God himself. Moreover, truth is ultimately personal, because the source, God, is personal, and truth becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ and is communicated to those who believe in Him. Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as the way, the truth, and the life, is also the Christian principle of continuity. The Christian doctrine, therefore, involved a radical break with the pagan doctrine of continuity of being and with the doctrine of chaos. It also involved a break with the other aspect of the dialectic, the pagan, rationalistic concept of order. Order is not the work of autonomous and developing gods and men but rather the sovereign decree of the omnipotent God. This faith freed man from the sterile autonomy which made him the helpless prisoner of Fate, or the relentless workings of a blind order." Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), pp. 151–52.

135. Davis A. Young, *Creation and the Flood: An Alternative to Flood Geology and Theistic Evolution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 87.

now, and God is every whit as sovereign as He was in the creation."¹³⁶

Exactly what kind of creation did Dr. Young have in mind? A creation in which the sun, moon, and stars were created after the earth? Not necessarily.¹³⁷ The six-day creation? No, because "*we have no human interpretation of Genesis 1 that is infallible.*"¹³⁸ A view of Genesis 1 which says that Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day? No, because the genealogies in the Bible do not tell us enough to say that man is only a few thousand years old.¹³⁹ "On the basis of these considerations it is probably virtually impossible for the Christian to identify, from the fossil record, the time when special creation occurred."¹⁴⁰ In short, he asserted, everything the Bible says is *indeterminate* with respect to chronological time. Therefore, he continued to use the 4.6 billion-year-old date as his operating presupposition, thereby providing himself with full acceptability within the state university faculty of secular humanists where he was employed. If he believed otherwise, he would have had to give up that work which he has chosen as his profession, namely, providing explanations for the hypothetically one-billion-year-old rocks. He said as much: "If Scripture really does teach unequivocally that the universe was miraculously created in 144 hours a few thousands of years ago, then I, as a Christian geologist, will be willing to stop scientific interpretation of the supposedly one-billion-year-old rocks of northern New Jersey which I have been studying for the past several years. Obviously my only task now is to describe those rocks and to find valuable resources in them. If the mature creationist interpretation of Genesis 1 is correct, I am wasting my time talking about magmas and metamorphism inasmuch as these rocks were created instantaneously in place."¹⁴¹

Those of us who, like myself, believe in the Bible's narrative of a six-day creation, must conclude that Dr. Young did indeed waste his time by studying those rocks in terms of a uniformitarian presupposition. He also used money confiscated from me by the state of North Carolina, where Dr. Young taught when I lived there. The state used my money to hire Dr. Young to indoctrinate students with uniformitarianism. Dr. Young then wrote an intellectual defense of his uniformitarian faith, so that other Christians might be convinced! Confiscated

136. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

137. *Ibid.*, pp. 128–29.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

139. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

140. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

tax dollars were promoting Dr. Young's professional religion, uniformitarianism. (His professed religion has been compromised by his professional, academic religion. He later taught at Calvin College.)

We must not be naive. *The uniformitarian interpretation of geological processes is a religion.* It has led to a more consistent religion, that of evolution through natural selection. The god of uniformitarian, meaningless, directionless process was created by nineteenth-century humanists and compromising Christian geologists—whose intellectual and spiritual heirs are still publishing books—in order to provide an explanation of this world which did not require full allegiance to the plain teaching of Genesis 1. The god of uniformitarian geology, whose high priest was Charles Lyell, metamorphosed (evolved?) into a far stronger deity, the god of evolution through natural selection. Charles Darwin became the founder and high priest of this new god, whose kingdom is the whole academic and scientific world. Finally, Darwin's god of meaningless process has developed into the modern god, mankind, who will take over the operations of evolutionary process.

Anyone who fails to recognize the satanic nature of uniformitarianism's process divinity is hopelessly naive, for it is this divinity who has torn the eternal decree of God from the presuppositions of modern man, leaving man with only random process, or man-directed tyrannical process, to comfort him. Christians cannot afford to be hopelessly naive, even if this self-imposed naiveté is their justification for remaining on the faculties of state university geology or biology departments. The price of such naiveté is still too high, for them and for their equally naive Christian readers, who do not recognize a theological battle when they see it.

M. Social Darwinism: Phase I

The social philosophers of the late nineteenth century grappled with the same fundamental intellectual problems that faced the biologists. What is the nature of evolution? Is the species *Homo sapiens* governed by the same laws as those governing other species? Is "survival of the fittest" a law applying to mankind? If so, in what ways? Is competition primarily individualistic—man vs. man, man vs. environment—or primarily collectivist, with mankind as a united species seeking to conquer all other opponents for the domination of the external world?

There is no question concerning the existence of purpose. The

economists and sociologists of the late nineteenth century, no less than those of the twenty-first, accepted the reality of human purpose. Like today's professional social thinkers, the leading defenders of the "new evolutionism" were often atheists and agnostics, in their methodology certainly, and usually also in their private beliefs. They did not rely on grandiose concepts of cosmic purpose. Man's purpose was sufficient to explain human cause and effect. But the word "man" posed a major problem: Was collective man, meaning mankind, the proper focus of concern, or was the individual man the source of purpose? Are we to speak of some sort of overarching purpose of man the species, or should we be content to explain the workings of political economy in terms of multiple individualistic purposes? Is our methodology to be holistic or individualistic? Are we to proclaim the sovereignty of "man, the purposeful, planning individual" or "man, the purposeful, planning species"? Are we talking about the survival of the fittest species, or about the survival of the fittest individuals *within* a particular species? Can we speak of the survival of the fittest species without stating the conditions for the survival of the most fit individuals within the species? What, in other words, is meant by "fit"?

1. Right-Wing Social Darwinism

The Social Darwinists of the late nineteenth century, led by the British sociologist-philosopher Herbert Spencer and Yale University's sociologist William Graham Sumner, focused on the individual. Individual action is primary, they said. Individuals have purposes; collective wholes do not. Sumner stated the case for individual rights in his book, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883):

The notion of civil liberty which we have inherited is that of *a status created for the individual by laws and institutions, the effect of which is that each man is guaranteed the use of all his own powers exclusively for his own welfare*. It is not at all a matter of elections, or universal suffrage, or democracy. All institutions are to be tested by the degree to which they guarantee liberty. It is not to be admitted for a moment that liberty is a means to social ends, and that it may be impaired for major considerations. Anyone who so argues has lost his bearing and relation of all the facts and factors in a free state. A human being has a life to live, a career to run. He is a centre of powers to work, and of capacities to suffer.¹⁴²

142. William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, [1883] 1952), p. 30. (<http://bit.ly/SumnerSC>)

His conclusion was straightforward: "It is not at all the function of the state to make men happy. They must make themselves happy in their own way, and at their own risk."¹⁴³

As a Darwinist, Sumner believed in the survival of the fittest. (Spencer had coined the phrase in 1852.) Sumner criticized social reformers who believed that the civil government should intervene to help the weak and defenseless members of society. "They do not perceive, furthermore, that if we do not like the survival of the fittest, we have only one possible alternative, and that is the survival of the unfittest. The former is the law of civilization; the latter is the law of anti-civilization. We have our choice between the two, or we can go on, as in the past, vacillating between the two, but a third plan—the socialist desideratum—a plan for nourishing the unfittest and yet advancing in civilization, no man will ever find."¹⁴⁴

Spencer was so worried about the survival of the least fit that he questioned even private charity, although he accepted the legitimacy of such charity, because its alternative—allowing the poor to reproduce their kind without guidance from those giving the charity—frightened him. As he said, "the problem seems insoluble."¹⁴⁵ There is only one possible answer: *suffering*. We cannot alleviate the misery of the poor in general. "Each new effort to mitigate the penalties on improvidence, has the inevitable effect of adding to the number of the improvident."¹⁴⁶ Charity leads to more mouths to feed.

Having, by unwise institutions, brought into existence large numbers who are unadapted to the requirements of social life, and are consequently sources of misery to themselves and others, we cannot repress and gradually diminish this body of relatively worthless people without inflicting much pain. Evil has been done and the penalty must be paid. Cure can come only through affliction. The artificial assuaging of distress by state appliances, is a kind of social opium eating, yielding temporary mitigation at the eventual cost of intenser misery.¹⁴⁷

Ultimately, it would be best even to eliminate private charity. "If

143. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

144. Sumner, cited by Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (New York: George Braziller, 1959), p. 57.

145. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Classics, [1897] 1978), II, p. 409.

146. *Ibid.*, II, p. 408.

147. *Ibid.*, II, p. 409.

left to operate in all its sternness, the principle of the survival of the fittest, which, as ethically considered, we have seen to imply that each individual shall be left to experience the effects of his own nature and consequent conduct, would quickly clear away the degraded."¹⁴⁸

Through the competition of individuals in a free market, the greatest possible output will be achieved, and this leads to greater wealth for those who survive, as well as greater strength for the species as a whole. Social Darwinism did not argue that there is not purpose in the universe, or that individuals do not belong to a species. Through voluntary cooperation in production, the division of labor increases each participant's wealth. Yet the higher a species, the more an individual member must live in terms of his own production and skills.¹⁴⁹ Man cannot escape this law of nature, Spencer wrote.

Of man, as of all inferior creatures, the law by conformity to which the species is preserved, is that among adults the individuals best adapted to the conditions of their existence shall prosper most, and that the individuals least adapted to the conditions of their existence shall prosper least—a law which, if uninterfered with, entails the survival of the fittest, and the spread of the most adapted varieties. And as before so here, we see that, ethically considered, this law implies that each individual ought to receive the benefits and the evils of his own nature and consequent conduct: neither being prevented from having whatever good his actions normally bring to him, nor allowed to shoulder off on to other persons whatever ill is brought to him by his actions.¹⁵⁰

This is the methodological individualism of right-wing Social Darwinism.

Right-wing Social Darwinists had to assume that there is a relationship between the prosperity of the productive individual and the prosperity of the species. In other words, the prosperity of the effective competitor leads to an increase of strength for the species. One obvious and troublesome exception seems to be success at offensive warfare, where the most courageous and dedicated men wind up killing each other, leaving the cowards and weaklings to return home to reproduce. Spencer realized this and specifically denied that offensive wars are a productive form of intra-species competition.¹⁵¹ On the

148. *Ibid.*, II, p. 408.

149. *Ibid.*, II, p. 278.

150. *Ibid.*, II, p. 33.

151. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 37–39.

whole, though, individuals who compete successfully will be able to take the society along with them. The human race therefore ensures its survival by permitting the full competition of all its members. The *one* (society) is strengthened by the continual competition of its *parts* (individuals). This is the message of Darwin, which the Social Darwinists asked late nineteenth-century readers to believe.

This faith involved confidence in the integrating capacity of the free market. The “cut-throat” competition of individuals leads to social progress. Men need capital to equip them for the battle against nature, Sumner said. Capital is man’s great tool of survival.

Undoubtedly the man who possesses capital has a great advantage over the man who has no capital, in the struggle for existence. . . . This does not mean that the one man has an advantage against the other, but that, when they are rivals in the effort to get the means of subsistence from Nature, the one who has capital has immeasurable advantages over the other. If it were not so, capital would not be formed. Capital is only formed by self-denial, and if the possession of it did not secure advantages and superiorities of a high order, men would never submit to what is necessary to get it.¹⁵²

This sounds plausible, until you realize that the disadvantaged man is, in fact, in direct competition for scarce resources, and if one man gets more of nature’s goods out of the earth, then in some circumstances, his neighbor may be harmed (e.g., in a drought, when only one man can buy water, or in a famine, when only one of them can buy food). Since the neighbor is also a part of impersonal nature, then one aspect of man’s struggle with nature is the defeat of his neighbor in the struggle for limited resources. Why, then, should we be so confident in the law of the survival of the fittest? Can we say for sure that the inheritors of the rich man’s capital will use it for the survival of the species, in the same way that evolutionists argue that the heirs of a successful mutant amoeba will have a better chance of surviving? Even here, is it really the original species that survives, or is the mutant a stepping stone in a new development which will not benefit the non-mutant original species? May not the mutant subspecies wipe out the original species in the competition for survival? Isn’t that precisely what the survival of the fittest is all about—not the survival of species, but survival of mutant or genetically better equipped members of a particular species?

152. Sumner, *Social Classes*, p. 66–67.

2. *Deceiving the Victims*

Let us consider an impossibility. What if the members of some lower species a billion years ago recognized the advent of a mutant member? The original members see that the newcomer possesses certain genetic advantages which will enable it to compete more successfully for the limited supply of food, shelter, and space. It will pick off the most desirable females (if it is male). Its progeny will survive, while the progeny of the original members of the older “about-to-be-superseded” population will be less likely to survive. The new tribe member, with its mutant genes, is the first representative of a somewhat different future species. After all, that is what evolution is all about.

The members of the older species recognize that whatever comes out of the “loins” of the mutant a million years or billion years down the evolutionary road, the heirs will not be the same species. In fact, if such an heir walked down the path right now, it would be regarded by everyone in the community as an enemy, dangerously different, and fit to be killed in the competition. In short, what would be the most rational response of the original members of the species? Wouldn’t the smart thing be the immediate execution of the mutant, that herald of a conquering alien race, that emissary of future foreign conquerors?

The modern evolutionist would say that such a hypothetical scenario is preposterous. Why? Because lower species are ignorant. They do not understand evolution. They do not recognize mutants. Quite true, but man does. Men do know these supposed laws of evolution. How, then, do we convince today’s species, *Homo sapiens*, not to kill off the mutants? If the primary form of evolution is now cultural and intellectual—a familiar theme among all evolutionists—then how does the average man protect himself against the “mutant” intellectual? How does the average man defend himself against the gene-splicing experts who proclaim themselves to be capable of altering the course of evolution, who say that some time in the future, they will be able to create a new race of supermen? How do the average members escape Aldous Huxley’s brave new world? And if the right-wing Social Darwinists are correct, how does the poor man without capital guarantee the survival of his progeny, if he sees that the success of his rich neighbor is a threat to his family’s success? *If we recognize the mutants, will we kill them?* If we do kill them, will the race survive without them? But if we don’t, will some mutant heirs win out?

The answer of modern social evolutionists and non-Social Darwin-

ists is not all that clear. Generally, they have countered the right-wing Social Darwinists in the name of a higher reason, a collective human reason. Man is the capstone of an unplanned evolutionary process. He has transcended this undirected process, or at least may be about to transcend it. Through conscious planning, elite members of the race will be able to integrate the plans of all the members into an overarching whole, and this overarching whole will guarantee the survival of all, including the "least fit," who might otherwise be prepared to kill off the "mutants."

What other approach would be better? If you believed that you are a "mutant"—an expert, a rich man, the member of the planning elite—wouldn't you come to the "about-to-be-superseded" masses and tell them that you are "just one of the boys," and "we're all in this together," and that we all need to buckle down "for the sake of humanity"? In other words, wouldn't you devise a social philosophy which would promise to the masses sufficient benefits to guarantee their survival in the competition? Or would you continue to shout them down as members of an about-to-be-superseded species, telling them that it is their responsibility to play the game by your ferocious rules or else get off the playing field, when getting off the field means death?

If you were really a mutant, then the one thing you would not have is numerical superiority. The one thing you could not risk would be a head-on collision with the massive numbers of "about-to-be-superseded" voters, troops, or whatever. You would make your sales pitch in terms of the greatest good for the greatest number. You would tell the masses that the greatest good for the greatest number involves playing the game by your rules, which on the surface seem to be democratic, but which in fact are radically elitist. You would deny that blood lines count, or that the feudal principle is valid. You would offer them democracy, bureaucracy, universal free education, welfare redistribution, and so forth. Then you would select only those members of the masses who showed themselves willing and able to compete in terms of the elitist system. You would give a few of them scholarships to the best universities, and you would recruit them into what they believe (and you may even believe) is "the inner circle." You would expand the power of the government, and then you would open high-level positions in that government only to those specially chosen by the ruling power.

What you would do, in short, is to construct precisely the statist system which exists today in every major industrial nation—a system

that in the 1930s was called fascism, but which can also be called socialism, communism, the corporate state, the business-industrial complex, the new federalism, the Programming, Planning and Budgeting System (PPBS), or just to make your real goals explicit, the New World Order. What you would construct, in the name of man-controlled evolution, is a new Tower of Babel.

3. *American Progressivism*

The logic of the right-wing Social Darwinists was bound to fail. The “robber barons” (an unfortunate term) of the late nineteenth century may have appreciated the ruthless logic of right-wing Social Darwinism during the period of their upward mobility, but once they were established as the dominant forces in the market, they abandoned the market’s competition in the name of “economic stability.” In short, they preferred monopoly to competition. By 1900, the large American conglomerates began to look to government intervention, all in the name of protecting the consumer, for protection against newer, innovative, “cut-throat” firms.¹⁵³

Almost at the same time, the Progressive movement in the United States began to make itself felt in politics. This political-intellectual movement was run by elitists for elitists, and it proclaimed a philosophy of economic interventionism. The state was now to replace the free market as the engine of evolution. The market was too free, too uncontrolled, too individualistic for the Progressives. They wanted to direct market forces for national, and later international, ends. They lost faith in the progress-producing automatic forces of market competition. The free market was too much like the hypothetical competition of evolutionary change. There was no way to guarantee the survival of humanity if humanity proved to be less fit. *The external environment had to be manipulated to conform to the needs of mankind, thereby reversing the purposeless, anti-teleological processes of natural selection.* Man, the new source of direction and meaning, must assert his dominance by means other than random competition. Random competition was fine for pre-human, pre-teleological evolution, but it will no longer suffice. The “survival of the fittest” henceforth would mean “the survival of the *fitters*.” Planning man (collective man) would

153. Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Frederic C. Howe, *Confessions of a Monopolist* (Dearborn, Michigan: Alpine, [1906] 1977).

fit the environment (including other men) to fit his needs, aspirations, and skills.

With the Progressive movement came a new version of social Darwinism: left-wing social Darwinism. Within two decades, 1885–1905, it replaced right-wing social Darwinism. One intellectual, perhaps more than any other, was responsible for shifting American evolutionists' outlook from right-wing social Darwinism's free market competition to modern statism's central planning and interference with market forces. It was not Karl Marx. It was a long-forgotten government bureaucrat, one of the founders of American sociology, Lester Frank Ward.

N. Social Darwinism: Phase II

Lester Frank Ward wrote *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), the first comprehensive sociological treatise written in the United States.¹⁵⁴ He has been described as the father of the American concept of the planned society.¹⁵⁵ He was born in Illinois in 1841. His father was an itinerant mechanic and his mother the daughter of a clergyman. He was poor as a youth, but he still found time to teach himself Latin, French, German, biology, and physiology. He was self-disciplined. He joined the U. S. Treasury Department in 1865. He continued his studies at night school, and within five years he had earned degrees in medicine, law, and the arts. In the mid-1870s he worked for the Bureau of Statistics, and it was at this time that he concluded that a study of statistics could lead to the formulation of laws of society, which in turn could be used in a program of social planning. He continued his self-education in the field of paleontology, and in 1883, the year *Dynamic Sociology* appeared, he was appointed chief paleontologist of the U.S. Geological Survey. Finally, after publishing five books in sociology, he was appointed to the chair of sociology in 1906 at Brown University, the same year that he was elected the first president of the newly formed American Sociological Association.¹⁵⁶

Ward's *Dynamic Sociology* was ignored for a decade after its publication, selling only 500 copies.¹⁵⁷ In 1897, a second edition was issued,

154. Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, p. 69.

155. Clarence J. Karier, *Shaping the American Educational State: 1900 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1975), p. 139. Cf. Sidney Fine, *Laissez-Faire and the General Welfare State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956), p. 253–64.

156. Ward's biography is supplied by Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, pp. 68–71.

157. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

and within three years he was considered one of the leaders in the field. After his death in 1913, his reputation faded rapidly. He had laid the groundwork for American collectivism in the name of progressive evolution, but he was forgotten by the next and subsequent generations.

Ward broke radically with Spencer and Sumner. He had two great enemies, intellectually speaking: the social Darwinist movement and all supernatural religion. It is difficult to say which he hated more, although religion received the more vitriolic attacks. *Dynamic Sociology* stands as the first and perhaps the most comprehensive defense of government planning in American intellectual history. It was published about 15 years too early, but when his ideas caught on, they spread like wildfire. In fact, they became the “coin of the realm” in planning circles so rapidly that the source of these ideas was forgotten. Because the book is almost unknown today, and because Ward’s concepts and language are so graphic, I am providing an extended summary and analysis of his thought.

In *Dynamic Sociology*, we have the heart and soul of modern, post-Darwin social evolutionist philosophy. Ward did not pull any punches. He did not try to evade the full implications of his position. Modern thinkers may not be so blatant and forthright, but if they hold to the modern version of evolution—man-directed evolution—then they are unlikely to reject the basic ideas that Ward set forth. If you want to follow through the logic of man-directed evolution, you must start with Ward’s *Dynamic Sociology*.

1. *Supernaturally Revealed Religion*

Ward was forthright. He made it clear that the enemy is revealed religion, which in the United States in the early 1880s, meant Christianity. In the 82-page introduction to the book, in which he outlined his thesis, Ward announced that those people claiming to have received divine inspiration, and those who have founded religious systems, have been found by modern medicine to be not only “pathological” but to be burdened by “an actually deranged condition of their minds.”¹⁵⁸ Because of the power these religious leaders have wielded historically, “we can only deplore the vast waste of energy which their

158. Lester Frank Ward, *Dynamic Sociology; or Applied Social Science, as Based Upon Statistical Sociology and the Less Complex Sciences*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1883), I, p. 12. (These volumes are posted by Google Books: http://bit.ly/Ward_DS1 and DS2.)

failure to accomplish their end shows them to have made."¹⁵⁹ (Waste, above all, was what Ward said his system of social planning would avoid.) There is no evidence, he wrote in volume II, that religion provides any moral sanctions whatever. As a matter of fact, we find in the advanced countries that individuals who avow no religion are the true moral leaders. "The greater part of them are found among the devotees of the exact sciences. Yet there is no more exemplary class of citizens in society than scientific men. . . ."¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the "criminals and the dangerous classes of society are generally believers in the prevailing faith of the country which they infest. . . ."¹⁶¹ In any case, morals precede religion. "It is morality which has saved religion, and not religion which has saved morality."¹⁶² Prayer is a social evil, because it is "inconsistent with that independence and originality of mind which accompany all progressive movements."¹⁶³ It deters effective action. He then devoted several pages to a demonstration of the anti-progressive influences of all religion, but he provided examples primarily from paganism and animism.¹⁶⁴ He said religion leads to a retreat from this world and a divorce between man and nature.¹⁶⁵ There are two methods for modifying the external world to make it conform to man's needs: science and religion. There is a perpetual conflict between these two methods, and religion will lose this war.¹⁶⁶

2. Right-Wing Social Darwinism

Ward's second intellectual enemy was right-wing Social Darwinism. They misunderstood evolution, he argued. Nature's ways are not man's way. The progress of nature is too slow, and it is so inefficient that earth's resources will not be able to support such slow progress forever. What is needed is "something swifter and more certain than natural selection," and this means man.¹⁶⁷ We need a new teleology, he argued—the crucial argument of all post-Darwin social and even biological evolutionists. The evolutionary process needs a sure hand to guide it. We must adopt, he said at the end of the second volume, "the

159. *Ibid.*, I, p. 17.

160. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 281–82.

161. *Ibid.*, II, p. 282.

162. *Ibid.*, II, p. 283.

163. *Ibid.*, II, p. 286.

164. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 287ff.

165. *Ibid.*, II, p. 298.

166. *Ibid.*, II, p. 305.

167. *Ibid.*, I, p. 16.

teleological method."¹⁶⁸ We must reject Social Darwinism (although he never used this phrase to designate his opponents). Here is the familiar and central argument of modern evolution, predictably formulated first by a social scientist rather than a natural scientist:

Again, it becomes necessary to combat the views of those scientists who, having probed deep enough to perceive how nature works, think they have found the key to the way man should work, thus ignoring the great distinguishing characteristic of intellectual labor. Having found the claims of those who believe that nature is a product of design and outside contrivance to be unsound, they conclude that there is no design or contrivance, and having seen that results in the organic world are produced through rhythmic differentiations, they infer that results in the superorganic world should be left to the same influences. Nothing could be more false or more pernicious. Scientists of this school, from the weight which their opinions must have, are really doing more to counteract the true tendencies of social progress than those who openly oppose them. All social progress is artificial. It is the consequence of teleological foresight, design, and intellectual labor, which are processes diametrically opposed in principle to the processes of nature. If in learning the law of evolution we must apply it to society, it would have been better to have remained ignorant of that law.¹⁶⁹

Because the chief opponents of Social Darwinism were orthodox Christians, this statement indicates that Ward hated the right-wing social Darwinists' ideas more than he hated Christian orthodoxy.

Who was he challenging? Spencer and Sumner. He was attacking Sumner's whole methodology of investigating the conflicts found in nature and then transferring this conflict principle to human society. After all, it was Sumner who wrote in *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* that "We cannot get a revision of the laws of human life. We are absolutely shut up to the need and duty, if we would learn how to live happily, of investigating the laws of Nature, and deducing the rules of right living in the world as it is."¹⁷⁰ Not so, announced Ward. "Civilization consists in the wholesale and ruthless trampling down of natural laws, the complete subordination of the cosmical point of view to the human point of view. Man revolutionizes the universe. . . . The essential function of Knowledge is to aid him in accomplishing this re-

168. *Ibid.*, II, p. 627.

169. *Ibid.*, II, p. 627-8.

170. Sumner, *Social Classes*, p. 14.

volution."¹⁷¹ *Man must exercise dominion.*

Ward set forth the basic conflict between the two forms of evolutionary thought. It is a question of properly interpreting the concept of *adaptation*, the central idea in Darwinian evolution. No one has made the issues any clearer.

All progress is brought about by adaptation. Whatever view we may take of the cause of progress, it must be the result of correspondence between the organism and the changed environment. This, in its widest sense, is adaptation. But adaptation is of two kinds: One form of adaptation is passive or consensual, the other form is active or provisional. The former represents natural progress, the latter artificial progress. The former results in a growth, the latter in a manufacture. The one is the genetic process, the other a teleological process.¹⁷²

Ward was clearly a proponent of activism.

3. Reducing Waste by Central Planning

How did Ward refute the "passive" evolutionists (Social Darwinists) in the name of Darwin? Ward came up with this fundamental idea: *Nature's processes are wasteful.*¹⁷³ This is completely in accord with Darwin and Wallace. It was their recognition of the enormous pressure of multiplying populations—a multiplication which pressed upon the limits of the environment—which leads to the survival of certain genetically advantaged members of any given species. The failure to survive caught their attention: the millions of extinct species that did not gain the advantage of random genetic changes that would have enabled them to compete successfully in the slowly changing environment, as well as the enormous number of non-survivors in each generation. The idea began with Malthus: the assertion that populations multiply far more rapidly than the food supply necessary to ensure the survival of all members of the multiplying species. Darwin cited Malthus' observation in the first paragraph of Darwin's 1858 essay, which appeared in the Linnean Society's *Journal*.¹⁷⁴

Waste is nature's way, and waste was Ward's sworn enemy. "The prodigality of nature is now a well-understood truth in biology, and

171. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, II, p. 473.

172. *Ibid.*, I, p. 72.

173. *Ibid.*, II, p. 494.

174. Charles Darwin, "The Linnean Society Papers," in Appleman (ed.), *Darwin*, p. 83.

one that every sociologist and every statesman should not only understand but be able to apply to society, which is still under the complete dominion of these same wasteful laws. No true economy is ever attained until intellectual foresight is brought to bear upon social phenomena. Teleological adaptation is the only economical adaptation."¹⁷⁵ Here was Ward's battle cry against right-wing social Darwinism: The civil government alone is capable of stamping out unplanned, natural, non-teleological waste.

Where do we find waste? In natural processes and in the free market. Free trade is enormously wasteful. "Free trade is the impersonation of the genetic or developmental process in nature."¹⁷⁶ He also understood that free trade is the archetype of all free market processes, and that defenders of the free market, from David Hume and Adam Smith to Spencer and Sumner, had used free trade to defend the idea of market freedom. Therefore, Ward concluded, market freedom is a great social evil. Do people establish private schools to educate children? Stop this waste of educational resources; the state alone should educate children, for the state alone is teleological, truly teleological. Better no education than private education, because "no system of education not exclusively intrusted to the highest social authority is worthy of the name."¹⁷⁷ Here is a key phrase: *the highest social authority*. If true foresight, true design, and true planning are to be brought into the wasteful world of nature and free markets, then the state, as the highest social authority, must bring them. Therefore, "education must be exclusively intrusted to the state. . . ."¹⁷⁸ The state is the highest social authority in Ward's system.

There are other forms of economic waste. Take the example of the railroads. "That unrestricted private enterprise can not be trusted to conduct the railroad system of a rapidly growing country, may now be safely said to be demonstrated."¹⁷⁹ The state should operate them, as is done in Europe. Ward was America's first sociologist—though hardly the last—who called for the total sovereignty of the state in economic affairs. Here is his reasoning. His reasoning is shared, to one extent or another, by modern evolutionists. "While the railroad problem is just now the most prominent before the world, and best exemplifies both

175. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, I, pp. 74–75.

176. *Ibid.*, I, p. 74; II, p. 398.

177. *Ibid.*, II, p. 572.

178. *Idem.*

179. *Ibid.*, II, p. 576.

the incapacity of private individuals to undertake vast enterprises like this, and the superior aggregate wisdom of the state in such matters, it is by no means the only one that could be held up in a similar manner and made to conform to the same truth."¹⁸⁰ Ward's next paragraph presents his basic conclusion: "Competition is to industry what 'free trade' is to commerce. They both represent the wasteful genetic method, destroying a large proportion of what is produced, and progressing only by rhythmic waves whose ebb is but just less extensive than their flow."¹⁸¹

The question arises: Is the state truly economical? Ward's answer: Unquestionably! "Now, of all the enterprises which the state has thus appropriated to itself, there is not one which it has not managed better and more wisely than it had been managed before by private parties."¹⁸² These include transportation, communications, and education. The greater the profitability of any private enterprise, the more need there is for state control, he concluded.¹⁸³ In fact, the legitimate purpose of state interference is to make business unprofitable! For instance, the state-operated railroads offer lower rates than private firms did, "which, from the standpoint of the public, is the kernel of the whole matter. The people should look with suspicion upon extremely lucrative industries, since their very sound financial condition proves that they are conducted too much in the interests of the directors and stockholders and too little in that of the public."¹⁸⁴ Ward then set forth the guiding principle of government bureaucrats and state-operated businesses, from his day to ours: *Losses testify to efficiency*. "The failure of the state to make them lucrative should also be construed as an evidence of the integrity and proper sense of duty of the officers of the state."¹⁸⁵ (Yes, he really wrote this. I am not quoting it out of context. It is the end of the paragraph, and he stated in the next paragraph that it is a fact "that whatever the state does is usually better, if not more economically, done than what is done by individuals." Then, to make sure his readers got the picture, he wrote on the same page: "It might similarly be shown that all the functions of government are usually performed with far greater thoroughness and fidelity than similar functions intrusted to private individuals.")

180. *Ibid.*, II, p. 578.

181. *Idem.*

182. *Ibid.*, II, p. 579.

183. *Ibid.*, II, p. 580.

184. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 581–82.

185. *Ibid.*, II, p. 582.

Despite his praise of the state, he admitted that, in his day, the state had not advanced sufficiently to become truly scientific. In the introduction to his book, he freely admitted that governments have always avowed that they were working for the benefit of mankind, but government "has almost without exception failed to realize the results claimed. . . ." ¹⁸⁶ In fact, Ward went so far as to write this amazing paragraph: "Let us admit, however, as candor dictates, that almost everything that has been said by the advocates of laissez faire about the evils of government is true, and there is much more that has not been said which should be said on the same subject. Let us only take care not to admit the principle in its abstract essence, which is the only hope there is for the ultimate establishment of a teleological progress in society." ¹⁸⁷

Why this failure in practice (in volume I, anyway)? Answer: the failure of legislators to understand the laws of society, which are "so deep and occult that the present political rulers have only the vaguest conception of them. . . ." ¹⁸⁸ The practical answer is to train legislators in the laws of sociological science. "Before progressive legislation can become a success, every legislature must become, as it were, a polytechnic school, ¹⁸⁹ a laboratory of philosophical research into the laws of society and of human nature. ¹⁹⁰ (vol. II, p. 249). No legislator is qualified to propose or vote on measures designed to affect the destinies of millions of social units until he masters all that is known of the science of society. Every true legislator must be a sociologist, and have his knowledge of that most intricate of all sciences founded upon organic and inorganic science." ¹⁹¹ Not the philosopher-king, as Plato had hoped for, but *the sociologist-legislator*, will bring true teleology into the affairs of man.

4. *The Elite vs. the Masses*

This brings us to the question of elites. Ward's conception of teleology requires scientific planning and scientific legislation. There must be experts who provide the necessary teleological leadership. We find in Ward's book a characteristic dualism between the capacities of the

186. *Ibid.*, I, p. 31.

187. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 54–55.

188. *Ibid.*, I, p. 55.

189. *Ibid.*, II, p. 252.

190. *Ibid.*, II, p. 249.

191. *Ibid.*, I, p. 37.

elite and the capacities of the masses. The elite are unquestionably superior. Ward did not say that they are genetically superior, but they are nevertheless superior. Yet the masses outnumber the elite. What the elite must do, then, to gain the confidence of the masses, whose lives will be directed by the elite, is to proclaim their devotion to the needs of the masses. What statist of all shades of opinion have proclaimed as their ultimate goal, Ward set forth in *Dynamic Sociology*. Ward's commitment to the elite as a class is also their commitment.

The first step is to assert *the beneficence of the elite*. They are working for us all. They are the true altruists. "It is only within a few centuries that such [altruistic] sentiments can be said to have had an existence in the world. They now exist in the breasts of a comparatively few, but it is remarkable how much power these few have been able to wield."¹⁹² You see, "The normal condition of the great mass of mankind, even in the most enlightened states, is one of complete indifference to the sufferings of all beyond the circle of their own immediate experience. In moral progress, almost as much as in material progress, it is a relatively insignificant number of minds that must be credited with the accomplishment of all the results attained."¹⁹³ This is the grim reality: "A very few minds have furnished the world with all its knowledge, the general mass contributing nothing at all."¹⁹⁴ However, we need not worry about this problem today. Public education is overcoming this uneven distribution of knowledge.¹⁹⁵ In fact, public education is making this distribution of knowledge far easier, since this process is "a comparatively simple and easy one."¹⁹⁶ In other words, *the elitist planners*, best represented by scientists and teachers, are raising the level of knowledge and consciousness possessed by the masses. The elite planners are really working to produce *a new evolution*, and the masses will be allowed to participate in this elevation of humanity. They will not perish in a non-teleological, natural evolutionary leap. There are two ways of elevating man: (1) scientific propagation of human beings (artificial selection) and (2) rational change of environment, which means an increase of human knowledge.¹⁹⁷ "The amount of useful knowledge possessed by the average mind is far below its in-

192. *Ibid.*, II, p. 448.

193. *Idem*.

194. *Ibid.*, II, p. 485.

195. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 597–98.

196. *Ibid.*, II, p. 486.

197. *Ibid.*, II, p. 487.

tellectual capacity. . . ."¹⁹⁸ This is a key to evolutionary advance: "That the actual amount of such knowledge originated by man, though doubtless still below his ability to utilize it, is sufficient, if equally distributed, to elevate him to a relatively high position, and to awaken society to complete consciousness."¹⁹⁹

5. *State-Run Education*

The public schools are therefore fundamental in the teleological evolutionary process. They are the change agents of the new evolution.

Competitive private schools are evil.²⁰⁰ The state must have an educational monopoly. "The system of private education, all things considered, is not only a very bad one, but, properly viewed, it is absolutely worse than none, since it tends still further to increase the inequality in the existing intelligence, which is a worse evil than a general state of intelligence would be."²⁰¹ Fortunately for society, he argued, private education has no academic standards, since parents control or at least heavily influence private education. Therefore, with respect to private education, "The less society has of it the better, and therefore its very inefficiency must be set down as a blessing."²⁰² The radical elitism here should be obvious, but Ward was kind enough to spell out the implications (something later elitist evolutionists have not always been willing to do).

Lastly, public education is immeasurably better for society. It is so because it accomplishes the object of education, which private education does not. What society most needs is the distribution of the knowledge in its possession. This is a work which can not be trusted to individuals. It can neither be left to the discretion of children, of parents, nor of teachers. It is not for any of these to say what knowledge is most useful to society. No tribunal short of that which society in its own sovereign capacity shall appoint is competent to decide this question.²⁰³

Are there to be teachers? Yes, but very special kinds of teachers, namely, teachers totally independent from "parents, guardians, and pupils. Of the latter he is happily independent. This independence

198. *Idem.*

199. *Idem.*

200. *Ibid.*, II, p. 584.

201. *Ibid.*, II, p. 588.

202. *Idem.*

203. *Ibid.*, II, p. 591.

renders him practically free. His own ideas of method naturally harmonize more or less completely with those of the state."²⁰⁴ True freedom, true independence, is defined as being in harmony with the state. This, of course, is the definition of freedom that Christianity uses with respect to a man's relation to God.

Was Ward a true egalitarian, a true democrat? Did he really believe that the masses would at long last reach the pinnacle of knowledge, to become equal with the scientific elite? Of course not. Here is the perennial ambivalence of the modern evolutionists' social theory. Society needs planning and direction, and "society" is mostly made up of individuals, or "the masses." So, they need direction. They need guidance. They cannot effectively make their own plans and execute them on a free market. *Teleology is too important to be left to the incompetent masses, acting as individuals on a free market.* The masses simply are not intelligent enough. "Mediocrity is the normal state of the human intellect; brilliancy of genius and weight of talent are exceptional. . . . This mass can not be expected to reach the excessive standards of excellence which society sets up. The real need is to devise the means necessary to render mediocrity, such as it is, more comfortable."²⁰⁵ (Aldous Huxley, brother of Sir Julian Huxley, and grandson of Thomas Huxley, saw this clearly. He wrote *Brave New World* to describe the techniques usable by some future state to "render mediocrity, such as it is, more comfortable": drugs, orgiastic religion, and total central control.)

The goal of total educational equality is really a myth. Then why such emphasis on public education? *Control!* Teachers are to serve as the new predestinators. "One of the most important objects of education, thus systematically conducted, should be to determine the natural characteristics of individual minds. The real work of human progress should be doubled with the same outlay of energy if every member of society could be assigned with certainty to the duty for whose performance he is best adapted. . . . Most men are out of place because there has been no systematic direction to the inherent intellectual energies, and the force of circumstances arid time-honored custom have arbitrarily chalked out the field of labor for each."²⁰⁶ Ward's next paragraph tells us how we can overcome this lack of external directions.

204. *Ibid.*, II, p. 590. Cf. Ward, "Education," (1871–73), in Karier (ed.), *Shaping the American Educational State*, pp. 145–59.

205. *Ibid.*, II, p. 600.

206. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 623–24.

"The system of education here described affords a means of regulating this important condition on strictly natural principles. . . . A school should be conducted on scientific principles." Teachers can discover "the true character of any particular mind," and then a safe conclusion can be drawn "as to what mode of life will be most successful, from the point of view of the interest both of the individual and of society."²⁰⁷

6. *Education as Censorship*

There is another important function of public education and all other tax-funded information services: *the total control over information and its distribution*. We cannot make progress compulsory, Ward said. "No law, no physical coercion, from whichever code or from whatever source, can compel the mind to discover principles or invent machines. . . . To influence such action, other means must be employed."²⁰⁸ Men act in terms of their opinions, "and without changing those opinions it is wholly impossible perceptibly to change such conduct."²⁰⁹ Here is the planner's task: "Instill progressive principles, no matter how, into the mind, and progressive actions will result."²¹⁰

There are political pitfalls to overcome. "The attempt to change opinions by direct efforts has frequently been made. No one will now deny that coercion applied to this end has been a signal failure."²¹¹ Is there some answer to this dilemma? Can the planner find a way to alter men's opinions without using coercion? Yes. *The planner must restrict access to competing ideas*—another form of evil competition. "There is one way, however, in which force may and does secure, not a change of existing opinion, but the acceptance of approved beliefs; but this, so far from weakening the position here taken, affords a capital defense of it. The forcible suppression of the utterance or publication in any form of unwelcome opinions is equivalent to withholding from all undetermined minds the evidence upon which such views rest; and, since opinions are rigidly the products of the data previously furnished the mind, such opinions cannot exist, because no data for them have ever been received."²¹² In short, *another crucial key to social progress is systematic censorship*. He called this the "method of exclusion." He

207. *Ibid.*, II, p. 624.

208. *Ibid.*, II, p. 547.

209. *Idem.*

210. *Idem.*

211. *Idem.*

212. *Idem.*

wrote:

It is simply that true views may as easily be created by this method of exclusion as false ones, which latter is the point of view from which the fact is usually regarded. The more or less arbitrary exclusion of error, i. e., of false data, is to a great degree justifiable, especially where the true data supplied consist of verified experiences, and all the means of reverifying them are left free. But the same end is practically attained by the intentional supply, on a large scale and systematically carried out, of true data without effort to exclude the false. This, however, is the essence of what is here meant by education, which may be regarded as a systematic process for the manufacture of correct opinions. As such, it is of course highly inventive in its character, and the same may be said of all modes of producing desired belief by the method of exclusion.²¹³

The government's schools guarantee that competing data are excluded. "Assume an adequate system of education to be in force, and the question of the quantity and quality of knowledge in society is no longer an open one."²¹⁴ What about the freedom of the teacher? Basically, there is none. "To the teacher duly trained for his work may be left certain questions of method, especially of detail; but even the method must be in its main features unified with a view to the greatest economy in its application. This must necessarily also be the duty of the supreme authority."²¹⁵ As Ward said, "The state education implied in the foregoing remarks is, of course, the ideal state education."²¹⁶ Of course it is, if you are a teleological evolutionist.

The elites who control the government's education system are the agents of social change and progress. "The knowledge which enables a very few to introduce all the progressive agencies into civilization tends not in the least to render the mass of mankind, though possessing equal average capacity for such service, capable of contributing anything to that result."²¹⁷ Then what are the masses, really?

In contrast to this small, earnest class, we behold the great swarming mass of thoughtless humanity, filled with highly derivative ideas vaguely and confusedly held together; eagerly devouring the light gossip, current rumor, and daily events of society which are in-

213. *Ibid.*, II, p. 548.

214. *Ibid.*, II, p. 549.

215. *Ibid.*, II, p. 591.

216. *Idem.*

217. *Ibid.*, II, p. 535.

tensely dwelt upon, each in itself, and wholly disconnected from all others; entertaining the most positive opinions on the most doubtful questions; never looking down upon a pebble, a flower, or a butterfly, or up at a star, a planet, or a cloud; wholly unacquainted with any of the direct manifestations of nature, . . . passing through a half-unconscious existence with which they keep no account, and leaving the world in all respects the same as they found it.²¹⁸

Ward understood quite well that the self-proclaimed scientist and change agent would anger the masses—at least the masses in 1883—and they would ridicule his pretensions. “The unscientific man looks upon the scientific man as a sort of anomaly or curiosity. . . . The man of science is deemed whimsical or eccentric. The advanced views which he always holds are apt to be imputed to internal depravity, though his conduct is generally confessed to be exemplary.”²¹⁹ How does the man of science, the elite determiner of the next evolutionary social advance, rid himself of guilt about his feelings? Perhaps even more important, *how should he deflect the suspicion concerning his intentions* among these masses of emotional incompetents? One very good way is to tell them that the elite is on their side! Ward did. “It will be a long time before the world will recognize the fundamental truth that it is not to apotheosize a few exceptional intellects, but to render the great proletariat comfortable, that true civilization should aim.”²²⁰ It was the self-imposed task of the believers in statist planning by elites to buy off the proletariat by making proletarians comfortable, or at least by promising to make them comfortable soon, just as soon as the evolutionary leap of social being takes place.

7. *Salvation by Knowledge*

Ward, as with all evolutionists, believed in the dominion covenant, or rather *a* dominion covenant. This covenant rests on elite knowledge. Man elevates himself through knowledge. Man is therefore saved by knowledge. This is Satan’s temptation: Ye shall be as gods, if ye eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Ward wrote: “We see in this brief sketch what a dominion man exercises over all departments of nature, and we may safely conclude that he has not yet reached the maximum limit of his power in this direction. But that power is wholly due to his intellectual faculty, which has guided his act

218. *Ibid.*, II, p. 505.

219. *Ibid.*, II, p. 503.

220. *Ibid.*, II, p. 368.

in devising indirect means of accomplishing ends otherwise unattainable.”²²¹ Men are not innately evil. “Mankind, as a whole, are honest.”²²² *Man’s problem is not sin; it is ignorance.* “If all the people knew what course of action was for their best interest, they would certainly pursue that course.”²²³ It would be possible, through education, to eliminate crime. “The inmates of our prisons are but the victims of untoward circumstances. The murderer has but acted out his education. Would you change his conduct, change his education.”²²⁴

What we must do, then, is *to raise society’s consciousness*. Consciousness, not conscience, is the problem.

After dynamic opinions of the universe, of life, and of man have been formed, it is easy to rise to the position from which society can be contemplated as progressive and subject to a central control. The duties of society toward itself are manifest enough so soon as its true character can be understood. . . . The great problem remains how to bring society to consciousness. Assuming it to have been brought to consciousness, the dynamic truths with which it must deal are comparatively plain. The mouthpiece of a conscious society is the legislature.²²⁵

In short, *the visible symbol of a fully conscious society is the self-conscious divinity of the state.* Society must agree about any particular course of action, but once unanimity of opinion is reached—and it is the function of public education to promote it—then debate ends. “Let there be no excuse for anyone to debate a question which has at any time or place, or in any manner, been once definitively answered.”²²⁶ Like the laws of the Medes and the Persians, once the divine ruler has made a law, it must not be broken (Dan. 6:8,12).

Does this mean that democracy will allow all men to have a veto power over the decisions of the rulers? Of course not. The elite must continue to rule.

Deliberative bodies rarely enact any measures which involve the indirect method. If individual members who have worked such schemes out by themselves propose them in such bodies, the confusion of discordant minds, coupled with the usual preponderance of

221. *Ibid.*, II, p. 385.

222. *Ibid.*, II, p. 508.

223. *Ibid.*, II, p. 238.

224. *Ibid.*, II, p. 241.

225. *Ibid.*, II, p. 467.

226. *Ibid.*, II, p. 407.

inferior ones, almost always defeats their adoption. Such bodies, mis-called deliberative, afford the most ineffective means possible of reaching the maximum wisdom of their individual members. A radical change should be inaugurated in the entire method of legislation. By the present system, not even an average expression of the intelligence of the body is obtainable. The uniform product of such deliberations falls far below this average. True deliberation can never be reached until all partisanship is laid aside, and each member is enabled to work out every problem on strictly scientific principles and by scientific methods, and until the sum total of truth actually obtained is embodied in the enactment. The real work can not be done in open session. The confusion of such assemblies is fatal to all mental application. There need be no open sessions. The labor and thought should be performed in private seclusion, the results reached by others should in this way be calmly compared by each with those reached by himself, and in a general and voluntary acquiescence by at least a majority in that which really conforms with the truth in each case should be deliberately embodied as law. The nature of political bodies should be made to conform as nearly as possible with that of scientific bodies. . . .²²⁷

What, then, becomes of unanimity, of open covenants openly arrived at (to cite President Woodrow Wilson's unheeded principle of diplomacy)? It should be obvious. When Ward said that he wanted unanimity, he really meant *scientific planning without opposition*. "The legislature must, therefore, as before maintained, be compared with the workshop of the inventor."²²⁸ There is no opposition to the inventor in his workshop, it should be pointed out.

Scientists must lead the legislators. Men of informed opinion must tell them what needs to be done. Then the legislators can pass laws that will compel the masses to follow the lead of the scientists into a new realm of "comfort." Ward was quite explicit about this.

The problem is a difficult and complicated one. While legislators as a class are far behind the few progressive individuals by whose dynamic actions social progress is secured, it is also true that, as a general rule, they are somewhat in advance of the average constituent, sometimes considerably so. This is seen in many quasi-scientific enterprises that they quietly continue, which their constituents, could they know of them, would promptly condemn. The question, therefore, arises whether the legislators may not find means, as a work of supererogation, to place their constituents upon the highway to a

227. *Ibid.*, II, p. 395.

228. *Ibid.*, II, p. 396.

condition of intelligence which, when attained, will in turn work out the problem of inaugurating a scientific legislature and a system of scientific legislation.²²⁹

With these words, he ended chapter XI, "Action." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "supererogation" as "The performance of good works beyond what God commands or requires, which are held to constitute a state of merit which the Church may dispense to others to make up for their deficiencies." Ward may have known what he was writing; the state, as the dispenser of salvation, needs saints to build up merit to pass along to the proletariat, who can do nothing by themselves. Scientists and legislators are the saints.

8. The State as Society

When Ward wrote "society," he meant the state. "When we speak of society, therefore, we must, for all practical purposes, confine the conception to some single automatic nation or state or, at the widest, to those few leading nations whose commercial relations have to a considerable extent cemented their material interests and unified their habits of thought and modes of life." Yet even this is too loose a definition, he wrote. "Only where actual legislation is conducted can there be said to exist a complete social organism. Wherever any such complete social organism exists, it is possible to conceive of true scientific legislation."²³⁰ *Where there is no scientific legislation, therefore, there is no true society.*

There was one, and only one, area of life where laissez faire was said to be legitimate. That was the area we call morality. Morality "is a code which enforces itself, and therefore requires no priesthood and no manual. And strangely enough, here, where alone laissez-faire is sound doctrine, we find the laissez faire school calling loudly for 'regulation.'"²³¹ For example (we could easily have predicted this example), "It is a remarkable fact that loose conduct between the sexes, which is commonly regarded as the worst form of immorality, seems to have no influence whatever upon the essential moral condition of those races among whom it prevails."²³² (When J. D. Unwin's studies showing the conflict between polygamy and cultural progress were published in the

229. *Ibid.*, II, p. 399.

230. *Ibid.*, II, p. 397.

231. *Ibid.*, II, p. 373.

232. *Ibid.*, II, p. 455.

1920s and 1930s, they were systematically ignored. The fornicators and adulterers who are the self-proclaimed scientific elite prefer not to have this dogma of the irrelevance of adultery shattered by historical research.²³³)

Ward rejected the non-teleological (personal and individual teleology) Darwinism of the right-wing Social Darwinists. He rejected entirely their thesis that social progress must involve personal misery and competition. That is the way of nature, not mankind, Ward argued. A proper society, meaning state, "aims to create conditions under which no suffering can exist." This may involve the coercive redistribution of wealth by the state, for a good social order "is ready even to sacrifice temporary enjoyment for greater future enjoyment—the pleasure of a few for that of the masses."²³⁴ Sumner was correct when he described this sort of social policy: "The agents who are to direct the State action are, of course, the reformers and philanthropists. Their schemes, therefore, may always be reduced to this type—that A and B decide what C shall do for D. . . . I call C the Forgotten Man, because I have never seen that any notice was taken of him in any of the discussions."²³⁵ Ward called citizen C "the rich," and let it go at that. His intellectual heirs have not improved much on this strategy, especially when they run for public office.

We must understand precisely what Ward was trying to create: a totalitarian state. As he wrote, "the present empirical, anti-progressive institution, miscalled the art of government, must be transformed into a central academy of social science, which shall stand in the same relation to the control of men in which a polytechnic institute stands to the control of nature."²³⁶ He was a defender of despotism.

9. Population Control

There is one final feature of his system which bears mentioning. The basis of Darwin's analysis of evolution through natural selection was Malthus' observation that species reproduce too fast for their environments. Then only a few will survive, concluded Darwin and Wallace. Ward accepted this as it pertained to nature. But man is a new

233. J. D. Unwin, "Monogamy as a Condition of Social Energy," *The Hibbert Journal*, XXV (Winter 1927); reprinted in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, IV (1977–78); Unwin, *Sex and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1934).

234. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, II, p. 468.

235. Sumner, *Social Classes*, p. 22.

236. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, II, pp. 251–52.

evolutionary life form, and man's ways are not nature's ways. Man's successful heirs are not supposed to be those individuals who by special genetic advantages or inherited wealth will be able to multiply their numbers. Man, unlike the animals, advances by means of state planning. If society is to prevent suffering, as Ward said is necessary, then the multiplication of those who receive charity must be prohibited. (This was the same problem that baffled Spencer.) "This fact points to the importance of all means which tend to prevent this result."²³⁷ Three children are probably the maximum allowable number. "In an ignorant community this could not be enforced, but in a sufficiently enlightened one it could and would be."²³⁸ In short, "What society needs is restriction of population, especially among the classes and at the points where it now increases most rapidly."²³⁹ But who are these classes? The masses, of course, since the present moral code (1883) of having large families "is tacitly violated by intelligent people, but enforced by the ignorant and the poor, a state of things which powerfully counteracts all efforts to enlighten the masses."²⁴⁰ The state needs to provide universal education to the masses to uplift them, but there are so many that the state's resources are strained to the limit. The answer: *population control*. In short, in Ward's version of the dominion covenant, "be fruitful and multiply" must be abolished, and the state, not individuals acting in voluntary cooperation, is to exercise dominion over nature. The rise of the family planning movement in Ward's era, and the appearance of zero population growth advocates in the mid-1960s, can be explained by means of the same arguments used in understanding Ward's humanistic version of the dominion covenant.

10. The Society of Satan

Ward proclaimed in the name of man-directed evolution that which Rushdoony described as the society of Satan. Rushdoony's four points apply quite well to the outline of the society sketched by Ward.

First, it is held that man is not guilty of his sin, not responsible for his lawlessness, for the sources of his guilt are not personal but social and natural. . . . Second, a society is demanded in which it is unneces-

237. *Ibid.*, II, p. 307.

238. *Ibid.*, II, p. 465.

239. *Ibid.*, II, p. 466.

240. *Ibid.*, II, p. 465.

sary for man to be good. Everything is to be provided so that man may attain true blessedness, a problem-free life. . . . Third, a society is demanded in which it is impossible for men to be bad. This is a logical concomitant of the second demand. It is a demand that there be no testing. . . . Fourth, a society is demanded in which it is impossible for men to fail. There must be no failure in heaven or on earth. All men must be saved, all students must pass, all men are employable, all men are entitled to rights. As Satan stated it baldly in the wilderness, giving in short form the program for the "good" State, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Make it unnecessary for man to work, unnecessary for man to be good, impossible for man to be bad. Provide man with such a cushion of social planning, the temptations asserted, that man might neither hunger nor thirst, work or suffer, believe or disbelieve, succeed or fail, be good or evil. Let his every need be met and his world ordered in terms of his wishes. Let it be a trouble-free world, cradle-to-grave security; let there be no failure. No failure is tolerable, and none recognized, save one, God's, for having dared to create a world in which we can suffer for our sins, in which we can be tried and tested, in which we can be good or evil, in which we can and must be men. Let us through communism, socialism or our welfare state construct a world better than God's, a world in which failure is impossible and man is beyond good and evil.²⁴¹

What are some of the basic themes of the society of Satan, the evolutionist's new paradise, as described by Ward? What are the principles—cosmological principles—by which such a society is deduced? Here is a brief summary:

No teleology (purpose) in the natural realm (I, 57; II, 32).

Human consciousness is teleological (II, 9).

Human teleology is opposed to laissez faire (I, 55).

Man now directs nature and evolution (I, 29; II, 89).

The state directs social evolution (I, 37).

The state is society (II, 397).

Science is the basis of progress (II, 497, 507).

A scientific elite directs progress (II, 504, 535).

The masses are thoughtless (II, 506, 600).

The masses can be taught (II, 598, 602).

241. R.J. Rushdoony, "The Society of Satan," *Christian Economics* (1964); reprinted in *Biblical Economics Today*, II (Oct./Nov. 1979), p. [2]. (<http://bit.ly/rjrsos>)

The state must monopolize education (II, 572, 589, 602).

Censorship is mandatory (II, 547).

Nature wastes; man should not (II, 494).

Competition is wasteful (I, 74; II, 576, 584).

Competition is laissez faire (I, 74).

Mankind is honest (II, 508).

Man's problem is lack of knowledge (II, 238).

Ignorance produces crime (II, 241).

Dominion is by means of the intellect (II, 385).

Government is to be founded on secrecy (II, 395).

Dissent can be illegitimate (II, 407).

Morality is strictly an individual matter (II, 373).

Scientists are selfless (II, 583).

Believers in God's teleology are immoral (II, 508).

State administration is almost always better (II, 579).

Profitless management is honest management (II, 582).

Population control is mandatory (II, 307, 465).

The masses must be made comfortable (II, 368).

The social goal is zero suffering (II, 468).

The society of Satan is the kingdom of autonomous man. This is the continuing theme of post-Darwin evolutionists. Again, let us see what Ward had to say.

In his pursuit of information with regard to the nature of the universe and his position in it, he must be deterred by no fears. If he can evade the action of natural laws, he has no other source of apprehension. Nature has neither feeling nor will, neither consciousness nor intelligence. He can lay open her bowels and study her most delicate tissues with entire impunity. Except as the great creative mother of all things, she is absolutely passive toward all sentient beings. Man's right to probe and penetrate the deepest secrets of the universe is absolute and unchallenged. It is only he himself who has ever ventured to question it. . . . He has been the servant of Nature too long. All true progress has been measured by his growing mastery over her, which has in turn been strictly proportional to his knowledge of her truths.²⁴²

242. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, II, pp. 12–13.

Man is autonomous, the rightful master over nature. Here is autonomous man's self-assigned dominion covenant: "This is why, in the second place, man should assume toward Nature the attitude of a master, or ruler."²⁴³ Man can seek *exhaustive knowledge* and therefore *total power*. He can claim the right to attain the attributes of God.

Here is evolutionist's creed. The universe was not created by God. It was not designed for man. Man must be thrown into the mud of insignificance only for a moment—to sever him from the idea of a personal God—and then he can become master of the earth. Satan also tempted Jesus along these same lines: Worship me, and all this world shall be yours (Luke 4:7).²⁴⁴ Ward allowed man only one brief paragraph to grovel in the mud of insignificance:

Anthropocentric ideas are essentially immoral. They puff their holders with conceit and arrogance, and lead to base, selfish abuses of power, warped by interest and passion. The old geocentric theory had the same tendency. All narrow views about nature not only contract in the mind, but dwarf and disfigure the moral nature of man. It is only when the eyes commence to open to the true vastness of the universe and the relative insignificance of human achievements, that it begins to be thought not worth while to boast, to oppress, or to persecute.²⁴⁵

Once freed of God and meaning—personal significance that is established in terms of the decree of God and man's status as God's image-bearer—then it is up, out of the mud, and on to the stars.²⁴⁶

O. Darwinian Economic Theory

Man cannot escape the dominion covenant. It is inherent to his being. He can only modify it. The evolutionists also operate in terms of Genesis 1:28.²⁴⁷ Let us reread the words: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,

243. *Ibid.*, II, p. 13.

244. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

245. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, II, p. 508.

246. It is a familiar theme in science fiction to speculate that man, through technology, will overcome the last remaining barrier of nature, the speed of light, to guarantee his dominion of the entire universe, and not just the solar system and those stars close enough to make sub-speed-of-light travel conceivable. Man will conquer the last remaining uniformitarian limit, since it has achieved its goal: shoving God out of the universe of time and space. Man will direct the processes of time.

247. Chapter 4.

and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." The entire scheme of modern post-Darwin evolution is built upon the premise that animals do, in fact, multiply to the limits of their environments.

Post-Darwin scientists also argue that by means of mastering the scientific laws of evolution, man can have dominion over the creation, including other men. When men start talking about "Man taking control of man," as the C. S. Lewis character warned in *That Hideous Strength*,²⁴⁸ watch out: some men are planning to take control of others. But now that man has achieved mastery, or is about to, he must stop reproducing so fast, stop multiplying, so that he can demonstrate to himself that he is no longer governed, as the animals are, by the Malthusian law of population growth. Man must not fulfill this part of the dominion covenant, for a process of compound population growth points inevitably to the limits of the environment, which is finite. It means that man will face either the limits to population growth—a sign of his own finitude—or else the limit of time, namely, the day of judgment. Both limits thwart autonomous, evolution-directing man. Man must thereby voluntarily limit his population, meaning that some men—the elite—will have to pass laws limiting the population growth of the stubborn, traditional, uneducated masses. Man must exercise dominion through genetic engineering, power politics, centralized economic planning, public education, and other techniques of control. He must act as God does, not multiplying but directing, not pressing against the limits of a finite environment, but mastering it for his own ends. And, to paraphrase Lewis, when you hear men speak about mastering the environment for the benefit of man, watch out: it will be the confiscation of the productivity of the environment for the uses of the elitist planners.

The overwhelming intellectual success of the philosophy of interventionism has been due, in large part, to the greater consistency the logic of interventionism has with post-Darwin evolutionism. Free market economists who cling to evolutionism have suffered an academic fate similar to that suffered by the right-wing Social Darwinists, namely, their case for the reliability of spontaneous market forces cannot compete with the case for man's directing hand through state power. Men want meaning, purpose, and confidence in their own sur-

248. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 42.

vival. While Mises and Hayek rejected the old “dog eat dog, man eat man” philosophy of right-wing Social Darwinism, they did not succeed in convincing the modern evolutionists of the validity of the competitive, unhampered market. That sort of institutional arrangement does not seem to be in synchronization with the modern evolutionists’ vision of man-directed, elite-directed, teleological evolution.

Israel Kirzner, Mises’ disciple, wrote his theory of capital in terms of teleology. He said that “The principal point to be emphasized is that capital goods, thus defined, are distinguished in that they fall neatly into place in a *teleological* framework.”²⁴⁹ He was speaking of individuals’ teleological frameworks, however, not Man’s teleological framework.

Modern economists want the luxury of using statistical aggregates in their work. Kirzner demonstrated that the methodological presupposition undergirding all economic aggregates is the premise, stated or unstated, that there exists a single planning agent, with a single integrated plan. The quest for that single planning agent, with his single integrated plan, is enhanced when we operate in terms of the assumption, stated or unstated, that this planning mind does, in fact, have to exist. Couple this quest, whether implicit or explicit, with modern evolutionism’s longing for a new evolution—the emergence of a new personal sovereign who can offer this impersonal, meaningless universe a comprehensive plan with comprehensive meaning—and you have created serious problems for the defenders of the free market.

The case for the free market as an impersonal, spontaneous, unplanned institution that can nevertheless successfully integrate the multitudinous plans of acting men is generally at odds with the intellectual spirit of the twenty-first century. Men are seeking cosmic purpose, having been told that collective mankind is capable of imposing such purpose by means of scientific planning and even genetic engineering. They are less likely to abandon this quest in exchange for the free market’s decentralized planning mechanism, its freely fluctuating price system, and its system of economic calculation for private individuals. The price that post-Darwin evolutionists are asked to pay, religiously speaking, is simply too high. In short, *the defenders of the free market have priced themselves out of secular humanism’s marketplace of ideas.*

This is not to say that every modern economist is self-consciously

249. Israel Kirzner, *An Essay on Capital* (New York: Augustus Kelley, 1966), p. 38.

a defender of the kind of planning outlined by Lester Frank Ward. Not very many economists are *that* confident about centralized economic planning. This is also not to say that the majority of men, or even a majority of trained social scientists, understand fully the sleight-of-hand operation of modern evolutionism, with its shift from purposeless origins to man-directed evolutionary process. Nevertheless, the climate of opinion in the twenty-first century is strongly influenced by this sleight-of-hand operation, and its conclusions regarding the sovereignty of planning over collective mankind have permeated the thinking of those who probably do not fully understand the epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions of these conclusions. The fact is, *autonomous men want their godhead unified*, and the hydra-headed, impersonal, spontaneous institution we call the free market is not sufficiently conscious and purposeful to satisfy the longings of modern men for cosmic personalism, meaning humanism's version of cosmic personalism, meaning deified Man.

Conclusion

We should not hope to succeed in making a successful case for the free market by using the logic of Kant, the logic of Darwin, or the logic of Mises, Hayek, Friedman, and other Kantian Darwinists. We should not hope to convert modern evolutionists to the free market ideology if we ground that defense in terms of a less consistent version of evolutionism. The older Darwinist heritage simply does not gain large numbers of adherents, precisely because *modern evolutionists are involved in a religious quest for man-directed cosmic evolution*, and this quest is at odds with the logic of decentralized markets.

If the case for the free market is to be successful in the long run, it must be made in terms of a fully consistent philosophy of creationism and theocentric cosmic personalism. The case for the free market must be made in terms of the doctrines of divine providence, biblical revelation, the image of God in man, and the dominion covenant. While this intellectual defense may not impress today's humanistic evolutionists, including Christian scholars whose methodology is still grounded in humanistic evolutionism, it will enable Christians to have a foundation that will survive the predictable disruptions of the economic, political, intellectual, and social universe of the modern evolutionists. We must not try to establish the intellectual foundations of the kingdom of God in terms of the presuppositions of a doomed evol-

utionist religion. We may be able to use the conclusions of selected secular economists, when these conclusions are in conformity with biblical premises, but it is we who must pick and choose in terms of the Bible, not they. We must abandon evolutionary presuppositions in every area of human thought, including economics.

Appendix B

THE EVOLUTIONISTS' DEFENSE OF THE MARKET

The Book of Genesis cannot be reconciled with the books of Darwin. This is the leading presupposition of this book. Those who prefer to compromise Christian orthodoxy for the sake of academic respectability, or for the sake of their own commitment to the claims of modern science, have made various attempts to mix the two systems. Without exception, Christian orthodoxy is sacrificed on the altar of Darwinism. The Darwinists will accept no compromises with the creationism of Genesis 1. Far too many Christians have been less adamant about the intellectual claims of their religion's premises.

Throughout this book, I have been arguing in terms of a framework that is radically opposed to modern economics' epistemology. Modern schools of economics rest on the presuppositions of Darwinism: Marxism, socialism, free enterprise, and the various mixtures. They begin with the mind of man. They assume that the laws of nature and the laws of thought have evolved over countless eons, with the mind of man being able where necessary to grasp and use the regularities of nature. Not that the human mind can grasp everything; but it can grasp enough to create a science of economics. All systems officially accept some version of *process philosophy*: as conditions change, and the process of evolution continues, the *laws of thought* could conceivably change. Ludwig von Mises put it quite well:

Human knowledge is conditioned by the power of the human mind and by the extent of the sphere in which objects evoke human sensations. Perhaps there are in the universe things that our senses cannot perceive and relations that our minds cannot comprehend. There may also exist outside of the orbit we call the universe other systems of things about which we cannot learn anything because, for the time being, no traces of their existence penetrate into our sphere

in a way that can modify our sensations. It may also be that the regularity in the conjunction of natural phenomena we are observing is not eternal but only passing, that it prevails only in the present stage (which may last millions of years) of the history of the universe and may one day be replaced by another arrangement.¹

At least as an official position, *the mind of man may become something different in the future*. Mises wrote: “Man—up to now, at least—has always gone lamentably amiss in his attempts to bridge the gulf that he sees yawning between mind and matter, between the rider and the horse, between the mason and the stone. It would be preposterous to view this failure as a sufficient demonstration of the soundness of a dualistic philosophy. All that we can infer from it is that science—at least for the time being—must adopt a dualistic approach, less as a philosophical explanation than as a methodological device.”² This logical dualism is *post-Kantian dualism*: the split between thought and matter, and between the phenomena of science (scientific regularity) and the noumena of ethics (beyond rational categories). Somehow the two realms are connected (if man is to retain *power*), yet unconnected (if man is to retain *freedom*). This *nature-freedom dualism* is basic to all modern philosophy.³ Secular economics cannot escape this dualism.⁴

As I have begun to demonstrate in this book, and as I demonstrate more thoroughly in the commentaries that follow, the Bible establishes as a social norm a system of civil government and personal responsibility that leads to the formation of a free market economy. I have drawn heavily from the writings of economists who favor the free market in order to explain certain relationships and consequences of such a market system. Predictably, those who argue that the Bible does not establish moral and judicial foundations that lead to capitalism tend also to reject the logic of free market economics. They wind up citing secular economists who favor Keynesian intervention by the civil gov-

1. Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution* (Auburn Alabama: Mises Institute, 2007), p. 8. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTAH>) This book was first published by Yale University Press in 1957.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

3. Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960), pp. 46–52.

4. Gary North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976).

ernment into economic affairs, or they cite even more radical secular economists. But both sides rely heavily on the conclusions of the warring camps of humanistic economists.

If I have rejected environmental determinism, evolutionism, and humanism in general, how can I legitimately use the arguments of environmental determinists, evolutionists, and humanists to support my case for a free market social order? Can I evade the accusation of the “Christian socialists” and “liberation theologians” that what I propose is simply a disguised version of secular capitalism, a baptized version of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*?

The best way that I can legitimately counter this criticism is to show that I do not accept Darwinian evolution as the scientific foundation of Christian economics, and then demonstrate that, to the extent that the defenders of the free market accept such a foundation, they wind up without a logical position to defend. I also have tried to show in Appendix A on Social Darwinism that the demise of nineteenth-century Classical liberal economics was assured from the start, precisely because Darwinism really does not believe in the “survival of the fittest” and “evolution through natural selection,” once *man, the rational planner* appears in history. In other words, to paraphrase Cornelius Van Til, the humanistic economists have borrowed their accurate conclusions from Christianity. They cannot tell us why human minds agree, or why such minds can interpret the universe, or why the universe is coherent (since it has its origins in randomness or chaos), or why there is human freedom in a deterministic universe, or why the noumenal realm of ethics (outside of the determined realm of scientific law) can determine affairs in the external, cause-determined world of matter. Yet they say they can make all kinds of statements about economic events. How can they do this? They do not say.

The Christian economist *can* say. He points to a sovereign God who is the Creator. He points to a record of the creation in Genesis, chapter 1. He points to man, who is made in the image of God. He points to God’s assignment to man in Genesis 1:28 to subdue the earth. He points to man’s ability to name the animals. All of these facts of the Genesis account provide the foundation of Christian thought in general and Christian economics in particular. *The orderly creation reflects an orderly, sovereign God.* Man is made in God’s image, so he can understand the external world, for which he is responsible before God as a steward. Nature and man are not chance-determined, for *how can anything be determined in a chance universe?* Nor are nature

and man determined by a law-chained system of impersonal, freedom-denying cause and effect. God is sovereign, man is responsible, and nature is orderly. The Christian announces this in confidence. The humanistic economists deny the first assertion, so they have found no logical, universally acceptable arguments to affirm the second and third. They are intellectually defenseless.

A. Hayek's Evolutionism

F. A. Hayek won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1974, sharing the award with the Swedish socialist, Gunnar Myrdal. (It was widely rumored that Hayek never expected to win it, and Myrdal never expected to share it.) Hayek's award was made specifically for his early work in economics, which lent a degree of irony to the award, since so much of Hayek's early writings on trade cycles and capital theory was dependent upon the pioneering work of Ludwig von Mises.⁵ Mises had died in relative obscurity in 1973, ignored by the economics profession, an outcast who had never been given a full professorship in the United States, even at New York University, which was not one of the more prestigious universities in America. He had remained a pariah in his own department, subsidized by outside funds, and officially a "visiting professor"—whose visit lasted from the mid-1940s until his retirement in the late 1960s.⁶ Yet by 1912, Mises had established himself as one of the world's most eloquent defenders of free market economics.⁷ He was a neo-Kantian rationalist who was unwilling to adopt the modern Darwinian view of Man, the sovereign central planner.

Hayek devoted a decade of his academic career to the construction of monetary and capital theory based on Mises' "Austrian" premises. The second phase of Hayek's career was more deeply social and philosophical, and it began in the 1940s. He is far more famous for the books and essays that he produced during this later period, especially *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). Hayek offered the finest statement of

5. F. A. Hayek, *Prices and Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1931] 1960); *Monetary Theory and the Trade Cycle* (New York: Augustus Kelley, [1933] 1966); *Profits, Interest, and Investment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937); *The Pure Theory of Capital* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1941] 1962). All are available as free downloads from the Mises Institute. (<http://bit.ly/miseslit>)

6. Margit von Mises, *My Years with Ludwig von Mises* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1976), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/mvmyears>)

7. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Press, [1912] 1981). The first American edition was published in 1953 by Yale University Press. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>)

late-nineteenth-century classical social theory in his later books. They are erudite, heavily footnoted, eloquent defenses of Darwinian, Kantian social philosophy. They all rest on an explicit foundation of evolutionism.

1. The Two Rationalisms

One of the recurring themes in Hayek's writings is this one: There have been *two forms of rationalism* in the West. The *first* form is best represented by the writings of the Scottish social theorists of the eighteenth century, most notably Adam Ferguson, who wrote: "Nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design."⁸ Hayek used this phrase repeatedly, most notably in an essay "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design" (1967). The *second* form of rationalism is the rationalism of the central planner. Human action is seen as being rational only when it is the result of human design, namely, the design of a sovereign, rational, scientific planning agency. The origin of this second position, as far as the history of the modern West is concerned, was the French Revolution. Hayek's book, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (1952), is an historical study of the origin and development of "designing rationalism" in social theory.⁹ He called this "constructivist rationalism." Men rationally construct social institutions.

If we use Darwinian categories, we can better understand the two rationalisms. The *first* form, which Hayek favored, is that propounded by Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and other eighteenth-century mainly Scottish social theorists. Their view was that human institutions are the product of long years of unregulated development. Legal, economic, and other institutional arrangements were not consciously designed by any human planning agency. Nevertheless, they are coherent, rational, and productive.

This argument impressed the early evolutionists, who took the paradigm and transferred it to geology and biology. A process of undesigned competition produced the biological world in which man

8. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1797), p. 187; cited by Hayek, "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design" (1967), in his book, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 96n.

9. F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Press, [1952] 1979).

finds himself, they argued. Eighteenth-century social theory influenced the development of nineteenth-century scientific evolutionary thought, not the other way around. Hayek made this explicit. The goal of the Scottish social theorists was to find the source of institutional regularity in man rather than God. The same motivation—*eliminating God from theory*—was basic to nineteenth-century scientific evolutionism. Hayek wrote:

From these conceptions gradually grew a body of social theory that showed how, in the relations among men complex and orderly and, in a very definite sense, purposive institutions might grow up which owed little to design, which were not invented but arose from the separate actions of many men who did not know what they were doing. This demonstration that something greater than man's individual mind may grow from men's fumbling efforts represented in some ways an even greater challenge to all design theories than even the later theory of biological evolution. For the first time it was shown that an evident order which was not the product of a designing human intelligence need not therefore be ascribed to the design of a higher, supernatural intelligence, but that there was a third possibility—the emergence of order as the result of adaptive evolution.

Since the emphasis we shall have to place on the role that selection plays in this process of social evolution today is likely to create the impression that we are borrowing the idea from biology, it is worth stressing that it was, in fact, the other way around: there can be little doubt that it was from the theories of social evolution that Darwin and his contemporaries derived the suggestion for their theories.¹⁰

Man becomes the sovereign acting and planning agent in such a framework, but not man, the central planner. The Scottish philosophers were seeking for the origins of purposeful institutions outside of purposeful and comprehensive designs, either by men or God. Few of them were willing to abandon the concept of God entirely, but they did want to eliminate a continuing series of miracles from the record of man's institutions. They did not want to eliminate the idea of providence, but they also did not want to base their historical accounts of man's progress on miracles or other kinds of divine intervention. They were headed in the direction of *cosmic impersonalism*, and the scientific evolutionists a century later finally arrived, briefly, at their destination, only to substitute man as the new source of cosmic per-

10. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 58–59.

sonalism.

The *second* form of rationalism also can be seen in the writings of the scientific evolutionists. Darwin was impressed with the skills of horticulturalists and animal breeders in breeding new variations of plants and animals.¹¹ He recognized that there is a role for conscious planning. Natural selection's co-discoverer, Alfred Russel Wallace, was aware of the anomaly in the theory of natural selection, namely, the power of man's mind, which did not come from a slow, steady, continuous interaction with his environment, but which must have been the result of *a discontinuous leap in being*—a violation of the very heart of the theory of evolution through natural selection.¹² Man, the thinker, can begin to replace the purposeless, impersonal processes of nature. This same sort of transformation of the theory—from purposelessness to man's sovereignty—took place in biological theory as well as social theory. *This is the heart of modern humanism.*¹³

Hayek recognized the error of the late-nineteenth-century right-wing Social Darwinists.

It is unfortunate that at a later date the social sciences, instead of building on their beginnings in their own field, reimported some of these ideas from biology and with them brought in such conceptions as "natural selection," "struggle for existence," and "survival of the fittest," which are not appropriate in their field; for in social evolution, the decisive factor is not the selection of the physical and inheritable properties of the individuals but the selection by imitation of successful institutions and habits. Though this operates also through the success of individuals and groups, what emerges is not an inheritable attribute of individuals, but ideas and skills—in short, the whole cultural inheritance which is passed on by learning and imitation.¹⁴

It should be obvious what Hayek was trying to do. He was trying to return social theory to the Scottish evolutionism of the eighteenth

11. "We cannot suppose that all the breeds were suddenly produced as perfect and as useful as we now see them; indeed, in many cases, we know that this has not been their history. The key is man's power of accumulative selection: nature gives successive variations; man adds them up in certain directions useful to him. In this sense he may be said to have made for himself useful species." Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: Modern Library edition), p. 29. This statement is taken from the first chapter of the book, "Variation Under Domestication."

12. Cf. Loren Eiseley, *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1958] 1961), ch. 11: "Wallace and the Brain."

13. Appendix A.

14. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 59.

century. He was trying to get the model of impersonal, physical competition in biology out of economic theory. He wanted to return to eighteenth-century social evolutionism. But he was unsuccessful in his attempt. The modern version of evolutionistic social theory moves forward, not backward; its promoters want to bring to the forefront Man, the purposeful central planner—a source of coherence and design in an otherwise impersonal universe. Man, the decentralized actor is not sufficiently powerful to assure the species of survival, let alone domination and Godless dominion. Modern socialists want the dominion covenant, but they do not want God, except insofar as man as a species is God. Men want design: they just refuse to believe in a sovereign, supernatural Designer.

2. *Decentralized Knowledge*

Hayek's defense of the free market social order rests on his concept of human knowledge. He argued for the division of labor in knowledge.¹⁵ Men are not omniscient. Each individual knows his own talents and weaknesses, challenges and successes, better than anyone else. What is needed is an *integrating system* to call forth the most accurate and relevant knowledge that each man possesses to deal with the economic problems of a universe of scarce resources. This system needs a *feedback process*, so that erroneous information and inapplicable approaches are not funded endlessly, thereby wasting resources. Men need to learn from their mistakes. They also need to imitate successful strategies. Only by *decentralizing the decision-making process*, Hayek argued, can mankind call forth its greatest reserves in order to achieve . . . what? Each individual's highest personal goals. Hayek was an individualist. He believed that we must begin our social analysis with the individual decision-maker. By allowing each person to achieve his goals by whatever voluntary and non-coercive approach he decides is best-fitted to his skills and capital, we allow the spontaneous development of a social order that allows each of us to prosper. Conclusion: *what is best for a majority of economic actors is best for the society as a whole*. Out of individual competition comes collective prosperity. This is the essence of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and it is still the essence of modern free market social theory. Hayek defended the whole

15. F. A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (1945); reprinted in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), ch. 4. This was a seminal essay in economic theory. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>)

idea.

This social philosophy requires great faith to sustain it. Its system of social causation is not self-evident. Men must believe that the voluntaristic exchange system is, in fact, a system. They must believe that beneficial social results stem from individual decisions to truck and barter. Out of the voluntary, self-centered decisions of the *many* will come a social order beneficial to the *one* of human society. This is the religion which Hayek offers to us. Very few post-Darwin intellectuals believe in this eighteenth-century religion.

"It is through the mutually adjusted efforts of many people that more knowledge is utilized than anyone individual possesses," Hayek wrote, "or than it is possible to synthesize intellectually; and it is through such utilization of dispersed knowledge that achievements are made possible greater than any single mind can foresee. It is because freedom means the renunciation of direct control of individual efforts that a free society can make use of so much more knowledge than the mind of the wisest ruler can comprehend."¹⁶ *This is the heart of Hayek's defense of human freedom: the better use of that most precious of scarce resources, knowledge.* "It is therefore no argument against individual freedom that it is frequently abused. Freedom necessarily means that many things will be done which we do not like. Our faith in freedom does not rest on the foreseeable results in particular circumstances but on the belief that it will, on balance, release more forces for the good than for the bad."¹⁷

Here is an undefendable faith indeed. "Our faith in freedom" rests on our "belief" that freedom will "on balance" produce more good than bad. Yet, as I have surveyed at some length in Chapter 5, the secular economist cannot possibly assess either good or bad in a social order, since it is not possible to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility—assuming that we are speaking about what rational, autonomous, scientific economics can. The same problem faces the ethicist. It is the old problem of aggregates: Is the total pleasure I get from sticking pins into you greater than the total pain you receive? How can we add and subtract good and bad? Modern subjectivist economics cannot possibly permit such aggregation, yet it must make such judgments in order to defend the validity of the free market's social order. "The benefits of this system, *on balance*, are greater than the costs." On what balance? Evaluated by whom? Hayek appealed to something

16. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, pp. 30–31.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

that he knew is irrational and inconsistent with the very foundations of modern subjectivist economics. *He appealed to an aggregate that by definition cannot possibly exist, if we accept the logic of subjectivism.* In short, he could not logically defend the free market's benefits.

3. *A Balanced Social Order*

Socialists and interventionists do not take Hayek's faith seriously. They see it as irrational. How can we possibly believe that an unplanned, undesigned, individualistic economic system is beneficial, when we know some participants get hurt, or lose money? Why not allow the greater vision of central planners to intervene and remove the evils, while leaving the benefits? Not possible, said Hayek: to call forth men's best knowledge and best efforts, they must know that the civil government will not intervene and redistribute the gains any man makes. Nonsense, say the interventionists. People want to live in a "fair" regime, in which nobody is faced with total disaster. We can "clean up" the market's failures. We can "balance" its inequities. If Hayek's unnamed and undefined balance undergirds his system, the concept of the equitable nature of the civil government undergirds the socialists' system. Each side appeals to logic in order to convince us that such a balance exists. Yet neither side can show how such a balance can be perceived and achieved in a world devoid of a method of adding and subtracting individual assessments of utility.

Hayek's system rests on the idea that undesigned human institutional arrangements are reliable. The socialist wants us to believe that man-designed, centrally administered human institutions are reliable. Hayek wanted *species man*, the purposeful planners. The socialists want *scientific elites* who plan for the benefit of species man. The implicit and even explicit humanism of both camps should be obvious. Neither side is willing to appeal to *fixed standards* of ethics, economics, or civil government in the Bible. Neither side wants to consider the balance as being in the hand of an omniscient God. Men or Man, individuals or planning elites, must be understood to possess the balance. Economists insist that they can see good or evil in the aggregate. God is an irrelevant hypothesis for both camps. They both agree: *man is the starting point for economic and political analysis.* But man is both individual and corporate. Which man is fundamental to economic analysis?

The socialist wants to pass laws against sticking pins into people,

so to speak—laws against “excessive” or “obscene” profits, laws against price competition, and so forth. The free market defender says that such “pins” are a lot better than the “pins” of unemployment (minimum wage laws), gluts (price floors), shortages (price ceilings), weak competition (restricted profits), and so forth. Which are the real “pins”? The two sides cannot agree. They cannot appeal to a reliable, eternal definition of pins, coercion, and immoral activity. They cannot define pin-sticking, let alone tally up pleasure and pain from pin-sticking.

4. Hayek's Historicism

In a perceptive essay by one of Hayek's former students, Eugene Miller, he pointed to an important contradiction in Hayek's thought. He did not point out that this same contradiction is basic to every humanist system, but the point is nonetheless well taken. Hayek rejected *historicism*: the theory that the mind of man changes with the stages of history. Yet he also rejected the idea of *fixed categories* of thought or sensory perception in the human mind. Hayek used the idea of fixed ideas in order to refute those who went too far for him in this area of historical change and its effects on human perception, thought, and action. Yet he was dependent on some variation of “mild” historicism in order to defend himself against the charge of static idealism. Miller summarized Hayek's dualism:

On the one hand, Hayek wants to retain the idea that science can give a reliable explanation of regularities in the objective physical world. Indeed, his account of human cognition presupposes the validity of his physiological explanation of the principles that underlie the cognitive processes. On the other hand, his general conclusions about the character of human cognition seem to undermine the very possibility of objective knowledge and to concede the basic premises of extreme historicism. He argues that all perception and reasoning are predetermined by a classificatory system or “map” that varies from one individual and group to another and changes over time.¹⁸

Hayek's epistemology is therefore dualistic.

Hayek argued explicitly that *all values are evolutionary*. They are determined by the interaction of the changing environment and our

18. Eugene F. Miller, “Hayek's Critique of Reason,” *Modern Age* (Fall 1976), p. 390. (<http://bit.ly/MillerHayek>)

civilization. He explicitly rejected radical historicism—the doctrine that each stage of history has its own values, laws, and perceptions—yet he implicitly adopted precisely this outlook. He wrote, “the basic conclusion that the whole of our civilization and all human values are the result of a long process of evolution in the course of which values, as the aims of human activity appeared, continue to change, seems inescapable in the light of our present knowledge. We are probably also entitled to conclude that our present values exist only as the elements of a particular cultural tradition and are significant only for some more or less long phase of evolution—whether this phase includes some of our pre-human ancestors or is confined to certain periods of human civilization. We have no more ground to ascribe to them eternal existence than to the human race itself.”¹⁹ Hayek believed in morals, since morality is the foundation of the free market order, but he wanted *morals derived from tradition*—the products of human action but not human design. In fact, he excoriated the “rationalism” of Descartes and the French Revolutionaries for having insisted that morality be subject to logical proof. He wrote:

This moral system on which the formation of a worldwide market rested increasingly lacked credence and was partly destroyed, with the assistance of a new philosophy. In the seventeenth century, Hobbes, and particularly Descartes, at first in the intellectual, and then in the moral, field stated that one must not believe anything which cannot be proved. This view gradually spread, especially in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century this philosophical doubt about traditional morals suddenly became practically effective. The loss of the moral beliefs which had been essential for the maintenance of the existing market system was suddenly given a sort of intellectual foundation. It came to be believed that the ruling moral beliefs were unfounded, were pretenses contrary to instinct and reason, and were invented for the protection of those who would profit by them. The young decided that since nobody could explain why they should obey these morals rather than others, they were going to make their own morals. Only morals which had been deliberately designed for a recognized common good purpose could really be accepted as worthy of a fully adult human race. And the purpose would have to be the satisfaction of the innate natural instincts of man.²⁰

19. F. A. Hayek, “The Theory of Complex Phenomena” (1964); reprinted in Hayek, *Studies*, p. 38.

20. *A Conversation with Friedrich A. von Hayek: Science and Socialism* (Feb. 9, 1978) (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1979), p. 11.

How could he defend himself against the accusation that his morality is irrational or relative? What if the socialist argues that we are entering into a new era? The old laws of capitalism, including bourgeois morality, are now being superseded by a new era of proletarian production, proletarian morality, and proletarian economics! This is precisely what Marx and his followers have been arguing since the 1840s. It is the argument of all historicist systems: eras change, and morals change with them. How could Hayek, as an evolutionist, deal with historicism? He stated his preference for the traditionalism of Ferguson and Burke, which “is based on an evolutionary interpretation of all phenomena of culture and mind and on an insight into the limits of the powers of the human reason.”²¹ Miller commented:

The fact is, however, that “tradition” is not a single, unified phenomenon. What we call “Western civilization” is but one of many traditions of mankind; and internal to it are many divergent and conflicting strands. Hayek himself acknowledges that the tradition of constructivist [designing] rationalism is as old and as strong within Western civilization as the tradition of critical [evolutionary] rationalism. What are we to do in the face of this conflict among and within traditions? Hayek leaves us only with the options of submitting humbly to the tradition which makes the most forceful claim upon us or else of choosing boldly but blindly among competing traditions. He eliminates the possibility that we can make a rational choice among traditions on the basis of what is true or good by nature. Reason cannot judge among traditions, because it can function only within such a matrix as tradition itself supplies; and this matrix is nonrational and devoid of meaning. Moreover, there are no permanent values by reference to which reason could make this judgment. All human values are the result of a long process of evolution, and they continue to change in the course of this process.²²

Hayek's system, like all other modern systems of economics, is epistemologically committed to *process philosophy*, better known as *historicism*. It leaves his defense of the market intellectually defenseless against those more self-consistent historicists who boldly proclaim a change in eras, the arrival of a new world order.

5. Moral Structure and Change

Hayek, for all his immense erudition, was caught in a familiar bind

21. Hayek, *Studies*, p. 161.

22. Miller, “Hayek's Critique,” *op. cit.*, pp. 392–93.

of all humanistic scholarship: *the problem of structure and change*.²³ He wanted a moral order, but he did not want it imposed by a sovereign God who is outside the processes of history. He wanted a moral order that provides stability, so that the free market possesses widely recognized “rules of the game.” His later career was marked by a series of studies relating to the way in which such rules are established, and how a society can enforce them without changing them unrealistically, or tampering with them too much, or converting them into arbitrary pieces of legislation. Without structure, there can be no orderly social and economic progress. Without a moral standard, it is not possible to determine whether any given social change is progressive. If everything is flux, then whirl is king, and Hayek never argued for whirl. But he did argue that all morality is, ultimately, the product of an interaction between decentralized acting men and a changing environment.²⁴

What kind of foundation is this? What kind of stable moral and legal order can result from such a concept of morality? How can any variety of process philosophy (evolutionism) produce a reliable, universally recognized, widely accepted moral framework? Hayek wound up calling for men to believe in the morality of selfishness, the benefits of which “we cannot see.”

There is, ultimately, a moral justification for selfishness, if you care to call it that, for just obeying the commands of the market system. If we can make people understand this, we may revive the kinds of general rules of behavior which, a hundred years ago, governed the Western world and which have become largely discredited, but without which our capacity to benefit others will decline. We can tell people that the rules which we are rapidly discarding do serve the benefit of mankind, although we cannot see it; we must not imagine that we can choose what to do in order to serve the benefit of mankind. All we can do is to obey the rules which have established themselves and produce the worldwide division of labor and perhaps gradually try to improve these rules.²⁵

Why did Hayek expect to win the battle for men’s minds with this

23. This dualism goes back to the pre-Socratics: Parmenides (logical structure) vs. Heraclitus (historical change).

24. “Every change in conditions will make necessary some change in the use of resources, in the direction and kind of human activities, in habits and practices. And each change in the actions of those affected in the first instance will require further adjustments that will gradually extend throughout the whole of society.” Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 28.

25. *Conversation*, pp. 14–15.

kind of a defense of the market? It is initially repulsive morally (selfishness), until we consider the sophisticated arguments that undergird it. Yet even these arguments ultimately fail, for he could not demonstrate the benefits scientifically (no interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility),²⁶ and he could not demonstrate that the moral and legal rules of the game should not be changed in some future social order—or even in today's social order, which is no longer the environment of the late nineteenth century, let alone Scotland in the mid-eighteenth century.

Evolutionism is another variety of historicism, and historicism offers man no fixed, reliable, universal, and perpetually binding principles of law, legislation, and liberty (to use the title of Hayek's trilogy). How can any decentralist version of evolution win men's minds in an era in which the second stage of evolutionism, the infamous "sleight of hand"—elitist planners as the source of future evolution for the benefit of species man—has become the reigning faith?

Men must believe in some authority. They must obey that authority if they are to survive. It may be the market economy, or the civil government, or the Bible, but men need a source of reliable authority to commit themselves to. There can be no division of labor without such subordination. *Men necessarily obey someone*. Hayek fully understood this principle of human action. He called on men to obey the laws and conventions of the undesigned free market order. Men are to exercise faith in the benefits and reliability of this order. They are to believe that it is, in fact, a true order, and not a capricious, random, and destructive anti-system. Hayek did not minimize the individual's obligation to obey: ". . . the individual, in participating in the social processes, must be ready and willing to adjust himself to changes and to submit to conventions which are not the result of intelligent design, whose justification in the particular instance may not be recognizable, and which to him will often appear unintelligible and irrational."²⁷ Men must, in short, exercise *blind faith*. They must subordinate themselves faithfully to social processes that they do not understand, processes that even appear irrational to them. They must do this if the free market order is to survive.

If survival is the criterion of success, then the free market order in the twentieth century began to resemble a social dodo bird, headed for

26. Chapter 5.

27. F. A. Hayek, "Individualism: True and False" (1945); reprinted in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order*, p. 22.

extinction. If success in the open marketplace of ideas is the proper criterion, then the free market's undesigned structure has not produced the intellectual defenses that might insure its survival. Perhaps someday people will believe in the market as fervently as Hayek wanted men to believe—a blind faith in an undesigned order—but throughout the twentieth century, such faith shrank. Men are far more ready to believe in a designed social order as a way to secure man's place in the cosmos as the provider of cosmic personalism. This is a social order that in conformity to the second stage of the *Darwinian sleight of hand*, with scientific planners taking control of the impersonal forces of evolution. Hayek's decentralized rationalism runs against the grain of the dominant schools of post-Darwin social philosophy. Hayek's arguments, one could say, are not rationally designed to be successful in an era that wants to believe in rational designs.

6. *Human Action*

The great intellectual contribution of the Austrian School of economics is the focus on *purposeful human action*. Austrian School economists have again and again called attention to the individual decision-making of acting men. They have argued that a system of voluntary exchange enables men to call forth the productivity of others, as well as to evaluate the economic value of their own contributions. The free market order has produced more wealth and more freedom, as well as more personal responsibility in economic affairs, than any other economic system in man's history. But the Austrians, being humanists, evolutionists, and radical subjectivists, cannot logically prove any of this.

The "designing rationalists," who want the power of the civil government to direct human actions, can point to the obvious coherence of the idea of national economic planning. They seldom find people who understand that the imposed rationalism of socialism creates what Mises has called "planned chaos," while the seemingly uncoordinated efforts of men voluntarily exchanging goods and services on a free market produce an integrated, growth-oriented production system. The "top-down" rationalism produces just the opposite of what the intellectual defenders of central planning have promised. It produces an uncoordinated, fragmented system of disrupted production. The "bottom-up" system of decentralized planning is alone capable of producing social order, for it places greater responsibility for decision-

making in the hands of the individual. But without a concept of *a fixed moral order with its source outside of man*, imposed as an ideal for man by a sovereign Creator, Hayek and the other humanist economists cannot prove that a decentralized economic order can produce a just, productive, and desirable social order. Without standards of performance, men cannot make wise decisions.

7. Shifting Standards

Mises argued eloquently that without a market economy, men cannot make accurate economic calculations.²⁸ A Christian social philosopher points out that, without a system of *permanent, universal morality*, there is also no way to make accurate economic calculations, for there is *no constant* that survives over time—from the beginning of acting man's plan to its conclusion—by which any man can evaluate the success of his efforts. As the Bible says, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul (Mark 8:36)?²⁹ Here is the most crucial of all economic decisions—the question of profitable stewardship before God—and secular man cannot make this decision accurately. He has no fixed moral or aesthetic standards by which to evaluate his success. *Process philosophy cannot provide permanent standards*, for no man can be sure that he has not entered into a new world order between the time when he began to plan and the time he believes he has brought his plan to completion. *Continuity over time*—moral, epistemological, social, economic—cannot be logically affirmed by means of any evolutionary philosophy.

How do we know that the market order still works? How do we avoid Marx's argument that capitalism was far more productive than feudal production methods, but its day has come at last, now that proletarians are about to bring in a new world order? Hayek could not tell us. How do we know that our capitalist tools still are performing better than socialist tools? Hayek wrote:

. . . we command many tools—in the widest sense of that word—which the human race has evolved and which enable us to deal with our environment. These are the results of the experience of successive generations which are handed down. And, once a more efficient tool is available, it will be used without our knowing why it is better,

28. Ludwig von Mises, *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth* (1920). (<http://mises.org/econcalc.asp>)

29. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

or even what the alternatives are.

These “tools” which man has evolved and which constitute such an important part of his adaptation to his environment include much more than material implements. They consist in a large measure of forms of conduct which he habitually follows without knowing why; they consist of what we call “traditions” and “institutions,” which he uses because they are available to him as a product of cumulative growth without ever having been designed by anyone mind. Man is generally ignorant not only of why he uses implements of one shape rather than of another but also of how much is dependent on his actions taking one form rather than another. . . . Every change in conditions will make necessary some change in the use of resources, in the direction and kind of human activities, in habits and practices. And each change in the actions of those affected in the first instance will require further adjustments that will gradually extend throughout the whole of society. Thus every change in a sense creates a “problem” for society, even though no single individual perceives it as such; and it is gradually “solved” by the establishment of a new overall adjustment. . . . Who will prove to possess the right combination of aptitudes and opportunities to find the better way is just as little predictable as by what manner or process different kinds of knowledge and skill will combine to bring about a solution of the problem.³⁰

To use the same kind of reasoning, what if we are today at one of those periods in which new intellectual tools are replacing the old ones? What if the Marxists are correct, that man is entering a new moral age? As Irving Kristol said in a speech in 1981, one of the important products in all capitalist systems is socialism. Joseph Schumpeter said the same thing in 1942.³¹ Why should we resist the obvious and universal transformation of capitalist social orders into socialist orders? We cannot, as methodological individualists, make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. People are adopting socialist ideas. Isn't that proof enough of the development of a “new tool,” the intellectual tool of socialism? Why fight it?

Darwin argued that species evolved into new species. Marx argued the same thing concerning societies, although he expected a discontinuous leap—revolution—to mark such transitions. Hayek argued

30. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, pp. 27–28.

31. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1942] 1965), especially chapters 12 and 13. See also Ben Rogge [ROWEguez], *Can Capitalism Survive?* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Press, 1979).

that tools are evolved through imitation and competition to deal with environmental changes, or men's new perceptions of environmental possibilities. How could he legitimately argue that socialism is an invalid "tool" in today's Darwinian society, if the planners can predict the future better, arouse moral indignation more efficiently, and erase the flaws of the older, pre-modern capitalist order?

If you cannot legitimately appeal to fixed human nature (evolutionism denies any such thing), and you cannot appeal to fixed moral standards (process philosophy denies any such standards), and you cannot appeal to the greater output of capitalism (no interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility are scientifically valid), then how are you able to defend the free market? Who is going to pay any attention? When mankind faces the possibility of extinction if we fail to compete successfully with other species, isn't it sensible to adopt social, economic, and genetic planning in order to guarantee man's triumph? Aren't we in a war against other species? Can any army be successful that has no chain of command, no centralized leadership? The social impulse of Darwinism is to establish man's position as the new sovereign over nature. *Man as central planner is a powerful image.* How can Hayek's version of evolutionism—analogue to the pre-human, purposeless, undesigned evolutionary process—compete with "the real thing," namely, elitist planning by scientific experts?

Hayek's reasoning has failed to convince men in the marketplace of ideas. What other standard can be used by Hayek or his followers to appeal to beyond the marketplace of ideas? Mises, Hayek's mentor, knew there was no such appeal for a true Austrian economist, which is why he was incapable of optimism regarding the future of man.

Whatever is to be said in favor of correct logical thinking does not prove that the coming generations of men will surpass their ancestors in intellectual effort and achievements. History shows that again and again periods of marvelous mental accomplishments were followed by periods of decay and retrogression. We do not know whether the next generation will beget people who are able to continue along the lines of the geniuses who made the last centuries so glorious. We do not know anything about the biological conditions that enable a man to take one step forward in the march of intellectual advancement. We cannot preclude the assumption that there may be limits to man's further intellectual ascent. And certainly we do not know whether in this ascent there is not a point beyond which the intellectual leaders can no longer succeed in convincing the

masses and making them follow their lead.³²

Or, as he wrote in a manuscript as he was about to flee Switzerland in 1940: "Occasionally I entertained the hope that my writings would bear practical fruit and show the way for policy. Constantly I have been looking for evidence of a change in ideology. But I have never allowed myself to be deceived. I have come to realize that my theories explain the degeneration of a great civilization; they do not prevent it. I set out to be a reformer, but only became the historian of decline."³³ The historian of decline: a sad task for an economist. His Darwinian evolutionism was too old-fashioned; it did not honor Man, the central planner, or Man, the new predestinator. Hayek and Mises won few followers among economists.

B. Purposeless Evolutionism

Hayek's most notable contribution to the epistemology of economics is his continuing development of the concept of purposeful action within the legal framework of a free market. It is the *market process* that provides acting men with a maximum of information, especially information necessary to the dovetailing of competing plans by individuals. The focus on purposeful action marks the Austrian School of economists more than any other academic group of economists.

The most influential group of free market economists, generally referred to as the Chicago School (since so many of the members attended, or have taught at, the University of Chicago), is more forthrightly empiricist in its epistemology. They want to discuss economic facts. They want economic theory to prove itself by its performance in making verifiable predictions. They regard themselves as defenders of positivist economics: empirical, inductivist economics, as contrasted to logical, deductivist economics (the Austrian School's approach). Because they cling to a scientific idea that is much closer to the logic of the natural sciences, they are less concerned about unmeasurable, unverifiable concepts such as "human purpose." The Kantian dualism between the phenomenal realm of science and the noumenal realm of human personality has led to the formation of rival schools of free market economists. The Chicago School economists are attempting to

32. Ludwig von Mises, *The Historical Setting of the Austrian School of Economics* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1969] 1984), pp. 17–18.

33. Mises, *Notes and Recollections* (South Holland, Illinois: Libertarian Press, 1978), p. 115.

be “hard” science advocates, so they are less concerned about the “noumenal.”

1. Armen Alchian

Chicago School economist Milton Friedman wrote *Free to Choose*, but Armen Alchian was more consistent with the methodology of natural science. He tried to avoid a word like “choice,” since it is supposedly irrelevant to a discussion based on science.³⁴ It implies too much independence from the law of cause and effect. Human choice as an independent factor cannot be tested; all we can do is speak about demonstrated preference or actual actions made by men.

Because of his devotion to empirical science, Alchian was committed to a concept of economics that is based on *results* of human actions. He was a committed evolutionist. Nevertheless, Hayek’s brand of decentralized but purposeful evolutionism does not appear in Alchian’s version of evolutionistic economics. Hayek’s system involves heavy reliance on the idea of human purposefulness. Alchian’s essay relies heavily on the idea that the results of human action are what matter, not purposeful behavior. Alchian returned economics to Stage One of the Darwinian paradigm: *the purposeless competitive process*. This stage, for Darwin and his scientific disciples, was exclusively confined to *pre-human evolution*, meaning a world of cosmic purposelessness. Once man appeared on the scene, Darwin and his disciples concluded, the rules of evolution changed. Human purposeful choice became the new source of evolutionary change. Man the planning being, man the communicator, man the maker of recorded information, became the source of evolutionary directionality. Alchian’s approach, therefore, is an anachronism: a throwback to the methodology of pre-human evolution.

The classic statement of this methodology is found in his 1950 article, “Uncertainty, Evolution, and Economic Theory.” It should be pointed out from the beginning that few significant new approaches have been achieved through the use of this methodology. One essay by Gary Becker, which I will discuss a bit later, is just about all we have to show for Alchian’s pioneering work. But the original article is import-

34. In a seminar held at Claremont Men’s College in June of 1969, sponsored by the Institute for Humane Studies, Alchian lectured graduate students. He explicitly refused to use the word “choice.” He said that choice is not economically distinguished from impulsive, instinctively motivated action. There is no choice. I attended the conference and kept my notes. That was my choice.

ant, for it points to the all-pervasive nature of the evolutionary paradigm in modern economic thought. No school of economics has escaped from this paradigm. Alchian's article simply presses one phase of the evolutionary model—the pre-human purposeless phase—to a uniquely depersonalized conclusion.³⁵

The criterion for success is *survival*, Alchian concluded. This is original Darwinism. *The economic system as a whole determines the survivors*. "It does not matter through what process of reasoning or motivation such success was achieved. The fact of its accomplishment is sufficient. This is the criterion by which the economic system selects survivors: those who realize positive profits are the survivors; those who suffer losses disappear."³⁶ We are back to right-wing Social Darwinism. Yet Alchian's version is even more radical, for he was not in the least concerned about the motivation of the survivors. "The preceding interpretation suggests two ideas. First, success (survival) accompanies relative superiority; and, second, it does not require proper motivation but may rather be the result of fortuitous circumstances. Among all competitors, those whose peculiar conditions happen to be the most appropriate of those offered to the economic system for testing and adoption will be 'selected' as survivors."³⁷

Alchian's language, like Darwin's before him, personalizes an impersonal process. The impersonal economic system, like the equally impersonal pre-human process of evolution through natural selection, is described as *adopting* or *selecting* survivors. Yet this process cannot be personal. It surely cannot be purposeful. The cold impersonalism of such a process alienated Darwin, as it alienates his disciples, once man appears on the scene. Alchian was more coldly, rigorously logical in his commitment to cosmic impersonalism. The Kantian ideal of personality must be sacrificed to the Kantian ideal of science. "All individual rationality, motivation, and foresight will be temporarily abandoned in order to concentrate upon the ability of the environment to *adopt* 'appropriate' survivors even in the absence of any adaptive behavior. This is an apparently unrealistic, but never the less very useful, expository

35. I have read other materials written by Alchian, and they show little or no sign of influence from this pioneer essay. It is possible—I think it is likely—that Alchian wrote the 1950 essay as a kind of intellectual exercise, just to make a scientific and radically theoretical point.

36. Armen Alchian, "Uncertainty, Evolution and Economic Theory" (1950); reprinted in *The Collected Works of Armen A. Alchian*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Press, 2006), I, p. 6.

37. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 6–7.

approach. . . ."³⁸

Survival may very well be chance-based. He spoke about

the richness which is really inherent in chance. First, even if each and every individual acted in a haphazard and nonmotivated manner, it is possible that the variety of actions would be so great that the resulting collective set would contain actions that are best, in the sense of perfect foresight. For example, at a horse race with enough bettors wagering strictly at random, someone will win on all eight races. Thus individual random behavior does not eliminate the likelihood of observing "appropriate" decisions. Second, and conversely, individual behavior according to some foresight and motivation does not necessarily imply a collective pattern of behavior that is different from the collective variety of actions associated with a random selection of actions.³⁹

Is the market process really comparable to a large horse race? Is entrepreneurship and the market process that rewards or penalizes various degrees of entrepreneurship really comparable to a game of chance? A zero-sum game has rules: winners win at the expense of losers. It is illogical to assume that a game is the same as the uncertainty-reducing process of the free market. Games of chance are based on probability distributions. They involve *risk*. They rely on the law of large numbers. There is a class probability associated with individual flips of a coin or roll of the dice. But *uncertainty* is different.⁴⁰ The class probability aspect of games of chance does not apply to future events that are truly uncertain. They cannot be known in advance through the application of statistics.⁴¹ How could Alchian be sure that the analogy of the horse race applies to the competitive struggle of the market—a struggle that is the product of human action? We know that people plan; they also act in terms of plans. They have motivations. Does the logic of impersonal chance apply to the processes of personal decision-making, simply because the market process rewards and punishes? Alchian wrote that "it is possible," but is it probable? Is there any way of testing the probability of his theory? Is there an empirical method that can tell us whether or not the market process is statistically identical to a large game of chance? No empiricist from the

38. *Ibid.*, I, p. 7.

39. *Ibid.*, I, p. 9.

40. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

41. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 6.

economics profession has offered such a test, although Alchian thought that such a test is possible.⁴²

The scientism of Alchian's position should be obvious. He was equating men with atoms, biological evolution with market selection. Alchian did not shrink back from his radical methodology.

It is not even necessary to suppose that each firm acts as if it possessed the conventional diagrams and knew the analytical principles employed by economists in deriving optimum and equilibrium conditions. The atoms and electrons do not know the laws of nature; the physicist does not impart to each atom a willful scheme of actions based on laws of conservation of energy, etc. The fact that an economist deals with human beings who have sense and ambitions does not automatically warrant imparting to these humans the great degree of foresight and motivations which the economist may require for his customary analysis as an outside observer or "oracle." The similarity between this argument and Gibbsian statistical mechanics, as well as biological evolution, is not mere coincidence.⁴³

The continuing reliance on the *language of personalism* to describe a *hypothetically impersonal process* is revealing. Alchian dismissed trial and error as a standard of economic success. This is too purposeful a process. It involves "conscious adaptive behavior."⁴⁴ This allows far too much importance for the decisions of acting men. Trial and error, he asserted, cannot serve as a success indicator in a changing environment. "As a consequence, the measure of goodness of actions in anything except a tolerable-intolerable sense is lost, and the possibility of an individual's converging to the optimum activity via a trial-and-error process disappears. Trial and error becomes survival or death. It cannot serve as a basis of the individual's method of convergence to a 'maximum' or optimum position. Success is discovered by the economic system through a blanketing shotgun process, not by the individual through a converging search."⁴⁵ Success is *discovered*—the language of personalism—by the economic system. Survival is the sole criterion. The aggregate process *screens* the survivors. *There is nothing rational or purposeful about this process.* It is altogether impersonal.

What is left as an explanation for economic causation? *Imitation.*⁴⁶

42. Alchian, *Collected Works*, I, p. 9.

43. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 10n–11n.

44. *Ibid.*, I, p. 14.

45. *Idem.*

46. *Ibid.*, I, p. 13.

Men seek profits. The economic system screens out the successful imitators and innovators from the unsuccessful. "The economic counterparts of genetic heredity, mutations, and natural selection are imitation, innovation, and positive profits."⁴⁷ Alchian did not deny purposeful actions on the part of individuals, but he asserted that "the precise role and nature of purposive behavior in the presence of uncertainty and incomplete information have not been clearly understood or analyzed. It is straightforward, if not heuristic, to start with complete uncertainty and nonmotivation and then to add elements of foresight and motivation in the process of building an analytical model."⁴⁸

This sounds scientific, but it is not. To add elements of personalism to an impersonal system undermines the impersonalism of that system. Personalism is like an acid that brings purpose into a purposeless system. This is what Darwinism did to the evolutionary process. Man brings purpose. This completely transformed cosmic impersonalism. It also led to statism: the planning elite.

2. Becker vs. Kirzner

Gary Becker, who later won the Nobel Prize, acknowledged his intellectual debt to Alchian's article. He attempted to do what Alchian had imagined possible: explain economic success apart from human purpose. In a path-breaking essay—although nobody else has followed him down this path—Becker argued that it is not necessary to assume that men act purposefully or rationally in order to conclude that aggregate market demand curves are negatively inclined (that is, that at lower prices, people in the aggregate will purchase more of the scarce resource in question). We do not need to assume that either individuals or households are economically rational—that they, too, have negatively inclined demand curves—in order to demonstrate that market demand curves are negatively sloping. "Hence the market would act as if 'it' were rational not only when households were rational, but also when they were inert, impulsive, or otherwise irrational."⁴⁹ He compared his model to the physicist's model, as Alchian did before him.

47. *Ibid.*, I, p. 15.

48. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 16–17.

49. Gary Becker, "Irrational Behavior and Economic Theory," *Journal of Political Economy*, LXX (Feb. 1962), p. 7. This was the lead article for this issue. The *JPE* is published by the University of Chicago.

We can have a rational market even when we have irrational individualistic decisions. "If we may join the trend toward borrowing analogies from the currently glamorous field of physics, the theory of molecular motion does not simply reproduce the motion of large bodies; the smooth, 'rational' motion of a macrobody is assumed to result from the erratic, 'irrational' motions of a very large number of microbodies."⁵⁰ The post-Kantian ideal of science is here triumphant. Men are treated as atoms.

Israel Kirzner, the most academically respected member of the Austrian School, subjected Becker's analysis to a withering critique. As an Austrian, Kirzner focused on individuals who must make decisions concerning an uncertain future. The Austrian School begins with *methodological individualism*. When people go to buy a good or service, they make bids. If a man bids too low, he cannot buy all of the scarce resource that he wants. He is outbid by other customers. So, he must revise his plans. "The *essence* of this market process, it will be observed, is *the systematic way in which plan revisions are made as a consequence of the disappointment of earlier plans*."⁵¹ More important for economic theory, "Such a pattern of plan revision can be conceived of only for rational buyers. If buyers were afflicted with chronic inertia, they would presumably come to market each day with the same low bids as yesterday, and return home with the same disappointments. If buyers made bids in a purely random manner, there is again no assurance that 'the' market price would rise at all. Only by assuming that buyers purposefully seek to achieve given goals can we predict that their thwarted plans of yesterday will lead to their systematically offering more attractive choices to sellers today."⁵² Acting men are rational. They learn.

Becker relied heavily on the logic of equilibrium. Equilibrium assumes that all men are omniscient about the future, and therefore they are *responders* to the supply and demand conditions of the market. They are all *price-takers*. As Kirzner stated, "The essence of the market process is precisely what happens before equilibrium has been reached."⁵³ Uncertainty prevails in real life. Men are not simply price-takers. They offer new bids, both as buyers and sellers (since every

50. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

51. Israel Kirzner, "Rational Action and Economic Theory," *ibid.*, LXX (Aug. 1962), p. 381.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

buyer is a seller of something else). "As soon, therefore, as one begins to analyze the consequences of the absence of the conditions for equilibrium, it becomes apparent that plan revisions must be the focus of attention. It is primarily upon the systematic revisions of disappointed plans that the market process depends."⁵⁴

If I understand what Becker was really saying (he never says this explicitly), he was arguing that the market process eliminates those economic decision-makers who waste resources, it rewards those who do not waste resources, and it does not matter why members of each group made their respective decisions. Maybe they were lucky. Maybe they were rational. It makes no difference, so we need not assume rationality. The market will produce the same results. In the *aggregate*, the market will buy more of a good if its price is lower; it makes no difference if individuals act rationally and seek out lower prices. They need not be assumed to be rational seekers of lower prices. The market process is conceivably totally impersonal, even including its randomly acting participants.

Kirzner, as an Austrian, wanted explanations for the rationality of the *market process*. He very carefully avoided speaking, as Becker did, of the rationality of the market itself, as if the market as a whole possessed a supply or demand curve. There were reasons for his unwillingness to speak of "the rationality of the market." He was a methodological individualist. This methodology categorically denies the validity of any aggregate constructs. There are only acting individuals; there are no "acting markets." But individual actions by acting men can be discussed, and Kirzner provides a clear description of the way in which market participants plan ahead, learn from market experiences, and reformulate their plans.

In one sense, the two men were talking at cross purposes. Becker wanted to discuss a hypothetical construct, the market as a whole. Kirzner did not explicitly say so here, but his methodology denies the existence of any such construct, let alone its rationality. Becker did not want to discuss the market process explicitly (how the hypothetically random actions of individuals are merged into an aggregate which is rational), and Kirzner wanted to discuss nothing else. Becker avoided discussing the market process, and Kirzner avoided discussing market (collective) rationality. Neither man really addressed the central feature of the other's position, namely, the implicit assumptions about the

54. *Idem*.

one (the aggregate market) and the *many* (acting men). What each scholar refused to come out and say explicitly is the heart of each man's analysis. Such is the fate of scholarly discussions in academic journals.

Why the failure of each man to "go for the throat"? I contend that it stems from a sort of unwritten agreement among humanistic scholars: they will not "expose the nakedness" of their opponents, if their opponents politely reciprocate. Humanism cannot solve the problem of the one and the many; so, when discussions involving this fundamental issue arise, neither participant is immune from a devastating attack from the other.

Becker never said in his rebuttal: "Prof. Kirzner, you cannot logically discuss the rationality of the market as an aggregate. There are no aggregates in Austrian School economic theory. All that you can discuss is the individual. All that you can discuss is a market process. You are unable to say anything about whether the market as a whole responds to high or low prices in predictable ways. You have no right even to use a model of 'the market,' since your presuppositions deny the possibility of such a model. In fact, you cannot claim to be an economist at all, since you are far too consistent with your own presupposition about the scientific illegitimacy of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Any model of the market as a system must abstract from reality, and human action in Austrian School economics is not conceivable in such abstract terms. Without a market model of human action, you ought to get out of the economics profession. Why not sell insurance for a living?"

If Becker had attacked him so forthrightly, Kirzner might have replied: "You cannot explain how a market works. Your system is totally static. You cannot integrate human actions by means of a theory of market process, because acting men are rational, they learn from the past, and they are low price-seekers. You draw a lot of charts that show indifference curves, but no such curves exist in reality; they are all mental constructs. All things never remain equal. Your static system is a sham. You must rely on some version of equilibrium, yet all equilibrium analysis necessarily involves timelessness, not to mention perfect human foresight—the elimination of all unforeseen uncertainty. So, you claim to be building a case for irrational individuals as the foundation for market rationality, but your graphs can only be constructed by means of a presupposition of total, perfect human foresight and rationality. You cannot explain how your inconceivable

aggregate market with its hypothetical demand curves ever comes into existence—which it does not do, since it is all a mental construct. So, you ought to get out of the economics profession. But stay out of the insurance business; insurance salesman must deal with acting men, and you refuse to acknowledge that men act rationally anyway. You ought to become a mystic.”

In such an exchange, both men would have to deny that the other is a true economist, and in doing so, both men would deny the existence of a science of economics. They would show that neither the a priorists nor the empiricists can deal with the problem of the one and the many. Both sides need to deny the validity of their own presuppositions in order to practice their profession. As Van Til once quipped, each side stays in business by taking in each other’s washing. So, to this extent, these men were not talking at cross purposes. They were united in their willingness to let each other stay in the profession; otherwise, both of them would have to get out. And, for that matter, so would the editors of all the scholarly economics journals. There would be no economics profession to write for.

3. Equilibrium

What about equilibrium? Is the concept of equilibrium really crucial to modern free market economics? It has been an implicit aspect of economic reasoning from the beginning, and an explicit aspect since the 1800s. Free market economic models all assume the “tendency toward equilibrium” in the market process. Was Kirzner correct in challenging Becker for having used the concept in an essay that denied the necessity of assuming rational (low price-seeking) individuals? And, if he was correct, does that very equilibrium come back to haunt him?

Equilibrium is an impossibility, since it involves perfect foreknowledge—a world with no surprises, no profits, and no losses.⁵⁵ Everyone is a price-taker; everyone responds predictably to market conditions; no one has any independence from all other participants’ predictions. In short, *human action is inconceivable in such a universe*. Yet it is this inconceivable standard that undergirds all non-socialist economic thought, including Kirzner’s. He wrote: “It is generally recognized that the market process (whether within a given industry or for an entire economy) is a means of communicating knowledge. The knowledge that a market communicates is made up of precisely those elements of

55. Mises called this the evenly rotating economy.

information necessary to bring about the systematic revisions of plans in the direction of equilibrium (whether partial or general). Each market decision is made in the light of market information. Where the decisions of all market participants dovetail completely, all of them can be implemented without disappointments and without subsequent alterations of plans; the market is in equilibrium."⁵⁶ So, Kirzner, as with all other market-oriented economists, judged the real world of human action in terms of a hypothetical, intellectually inconsistent world of equilibrium—a world in which forecasting is perfect, everyone's actions are fully known in advance, and men have no freedom of choice. In such a world, humans respond as automatons to stimuli. Cause and effect rule supreme: the triumph of Kant's phenomenal realm of science over Kant's noumenal realm of free human personality. In short, Kirzner had to rely on a limiting concept, equilibrium, in order to judge the success or failure of market institutions in dovetailing the varying plans of acting men. Yet this limiting concept is in total opposition to the methodological individualism (autonomous man) that Kirzner and the Austrian School economists constantly preach. *To explain human action, economists use a model which denies human action.*

Here is one of the important assumptions of Alchian: "Comparability of resulting situations is destroyed by the changing environment."⁵⁷ The changing environment in an evolving universe may have changed the rules of survival. This is also true for Hayek's evolving universe. This is the plight of all process philosophy. Hayek relied on the market to guide men in their quest to dovetail their plans, but how can he be sure that the laws of the market process are still supreme? After all, we live in a world of constant change. Where is his measuring rod that tells us whether or not we are progressing according to our individual plans? How could he or Kirzner use equilibrium as the standard, when equilibrium analysis is absolutely contrary to the concept of free, autonomous human action?

Alchian, as a consistent evolutionist, said that survival is the only criterion. This leads us back to the old debate: Who or what is to insure the survival of mankind? The intellectual appeal of Lester Frank Ward and all other advocates of central planning is that they argue that man is different from the animals around him or before him. Man has a mind. Scientific men, as an elite corps of specialists, can there-

56. Kirzner, "Rational Action and Economic Theory," *op. cit.*, p. 384.

57. Alchian, *Collected Works*, I, p. 14.

fore do what no other animal can: change the environment according to a plan that ensures the survival of their own species. Man the planner overcomes through central planning the limits that have constrained all other life forms. Man the planner is a new being, a being that can adapt evolutionary processes to his own advantage as a species. No longer is man nothing more than a product of evolutionary, purposeless competition among all the species. Now man can take control of the processes of evolutionary change. Science has made this possible. This perspective is widely held. The religion of humanism teaches it.

Hayek and Kirzner affirmed that man the planning individual can best achieve control over nature by decentralized planning within the framework of a market order. But to claim this, they had to rely on some sort of standard. They asked: How can men, as individuals, be sure that their plans' are working to their advantage? By appealing to the hypothetical standard of equilibrium? But Hayek's reliance on the institutions of the free market was founded on his *denial* of omniscience. Equilibrium analysis affirms universal human omniscience, and it simultaneously denies autonomous human action.⁵⁸ Progress toward equilibrium is the Austrian School's equivalent to progress toward absolute zero: when we achieve it, we have denied all progress.⁵⁹

58. Mises wrote: "Action is change, and change is in the temporal sequence. But in the evenly rotating economy change and succession of events are eliminated. Action is to make choices and to cope with an uncertain future. But in the evenly rotating economy there is no choosing and the future is not uncertain as it does not differ from the present known state. Such a rigid system is not peopled with living men making choices and liable to error; it is a world of soulless unthinking automatons; it is not a human society, it is an ant hill." *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 249. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA1949>) In the third edition published by Regnery in 1966, this appears on page 248.

59. Mises wrote: "The only method of dealing with the problem of action is to conceive that action ultimately aims at bringing about a state of affairs in which there is no longer any action, whether because all uneasiness had been removed or because any further removal of felt uneasiness is out of the question. Action thus tends toward a state of rest, absence of action." *Ibid.*, (1949), p. 245; (1966), p. 244. Mises, however, insists that the use of such imaginary and self-contradictory constructs is inescapable for the science of economics. He does not offer a theoretical defense of static theory; he uses pragmatism. "The method of imaginary constructions is justified by its success," (1949), p. 238; (1966), p. 236. Then how can we know whether an imaginary construct "works"? He has no answer: "The method of imaginary constructions is indispensable for praxeology [the science of human action-G.N.]; it is the only method of praxeological and economic inquiry. It is, to be sure, a method very difficult to handle because it can easily result in fallacious syllogisms. It leads along a sharp edge; on both sides yawns the chasm of absurdity and nonsense. Only merciless self-criticism can prevent a man from falling headlong into these abysmal depths," (1949), p. 238; (1966), p. 237.

It is progress toward man the omniscient being, meaning men as totally predictable, cause-and-effect dominated, price-taking non-actors. *The world of equilibrium is a world without autonomous men.* But autonomous man is the universally shared presupposition of all schools of humanistic economics.

Can the decentralized competition of the free market ensure the survival of man? There is no way that Hayek or Kirzner could affirm this scientifically. How can we even speak of species man, when we cannot legitimately make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility? How can “man, the collective” ever know anything? How can we even speak of such an intellectual abstraction, if we are methodological individualists and subjectivists? Only by denying our premises.

Chicago School rationalists want to avoid such questions, but they are also unable to escape the antinomies of Kantian thought. Their world of economic equilibrium analysis also assumes omniscience. Becker began with equilibrium analysis to prove that in the aggregate, the market is rational, even if individuals are not. Yet, as Kirzner asked, how could he assume the existence of equilibrium conditions? It is men as plan-makers and plan-revisers who create a tendency toward equilibrium. You cannot legitimately argue rationality in an equilibrium market and also deny that men are necessarily rational, since to achieve equilibrium, all men must be perfectly rational and totally omniscient.

Alchian began with the presumption of uncertainty: “The existence of uncertainty and incomplete information is the foundation of the suggested type of analysis; the importance of the concept of a class of ‘chance’ decisions rests upon it. . . .”⁶⁰ Yet Becker began with equilibrium charts to prove his case that a rational market can be the product of irrational decisions. There is something illogical here.

Conclusion

The dualisms of Kantian thought are inescapable. To evaluate change, you need a fixed standard. To evaluate the success of human action, you need a model that denies human action, whether you call it equilibrium or “the evenly rotating economy,” as Mises did. To meas-

But, we must ask, self-criticism according to what standards? How do we link our hypothetical and self-contradictory constructs (human action without human action) to the external realm of events? Mises does not say. No economist can say. The only way we can do this is through intuition, as Mises and Milton Friedman agree: North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, *op. cit.*

60. Alchian, *Collected Works*, I, p. 17.

ure the progress of mankind, you need a changeless standard which thwarts the progress of mankind. (How can we have progress in a static order?) To assert that personal irrationality is compatible with market rationality, you need an equilibrium model that rests on personal infallibility. By arguing that we need a decentralized market order to preserve and expand human knowledge, the evolutionist winds up affirming that no one can understand the market order. The laws of the market order are said to be the result of eons of development—the product of human action but not of human design—yet we are asked to believe that this order is as useful to mankind as a whole (when we can legitimately say nothing as methodological individualists about mankind as a whole) as if it had been designed specifically for mankind as a whole. We are asked to affirm cause and effect in a world that is the product of chance. We are asked to affirm that man the planning individual cannot effectively make decisions for other men, because no man has sufficient knowledge to integrate the knowledge of other acting men, yet we are also supposed to affirm that the market is a reliable institution for the progress of the species, when we do not know how the market ever developed, and we cannot speak of an aggregate like “man, the species.” We want the one (the market order) to conform to the needs of the many (acting individuals), yet we cannot, as methodological individualists, make any scientifically legitimate statements about the needs of the many. (One man “needs” to stick pins in others, while others insist that they “need” to avoid being stuck.) We make our case for the market in terms of imperfect knowledge (Alchian and Hayek), yet we are then forced to make judgments about evolution as a process, the best interests of mankind as a species, the reliability of the market in a world of evolutionary change, and so forth. From ignorance (we need the market to integrate and expand knowledge) to near-omniscience (we know that the market will provide us with this needed knowledge). From irrationality (Becker’s irrationality thesis) to rationality (Becker’s equilibrium analysis). The logic of humanistic economics is hopelessly self-contradictory.

Christian economics is the only answer. We have a source of rationality. We have a guarantee of economic laws. We have confidence that the market order is fully conformable to the needs of individuals, and also to the needs of mankind as a whole. We know that we do not need perfect knowledge (omniscience) in order to have reliable knowledge. We know that the logic of our minds, despite its limitations when pushed, is a reliable device for interpreting and moulding ex-

ternal reality. We know that the market is historically the product of human action, precisely because it is transcendently the product of God's design.

The dominion covenant offers us all these needed intellectual requirements. It makes economic thought possible. Without the presupposition of the dominion covenant, and the revelation of God's design for economic institutions and relationships, there can be no logical, consistent, reliable, self-attesting science of economics, whether deductivist (logical) or inductivist (empirical). Any economic theory based on evolutionism must fail; its own internal contradictions cannot support it. *Evolution is process philosophy, and process philosophy is relativism, lawlessness—the kingdom of whirl.* All humanistic systems of economics are evolutionistic: Marxism, Austrianism, Chicagoism, and Keynesianism. If we are to have a reliable concept of economics, we need reliable concepts of God, man, law, causation, and progress. Humanism provides us with unreliable concepts of God, man, law, causation, and progress. It is time to abandon humanism as the foundation of economic analysis.

I have argued that the humanists must borrow heavily from Christianity in order to build their economic systems. They deny omniscience, yet they must affirm it as an ideal in order to create an equilibrium model which serves as a standard toward which human action moves. They affirm structure in the midst of change. They affirm progress for the species as a whole, despite the fact that they cannot speak of progress for the species as a whole if they are faithful to the principle of methodological individualism.

The free market's advocates are united in their belief that there is an inherent rationality in the market order, yet neither Hayek nor Alchian could explain why such rationality can exist in a world of flux and irrationality. They denied the epistemological necessity of the doctrine of providence, yet they spoke of market processes as if these processes were providential in nature: *selecting* survivors, *adopting* species, *integrating* conflicting plans of individuals, and so forth. The very features of their individualistic systems that demand aggregate coherence cannot be affirmed without abandoning the logical requirements of methodological individualism. They did not wish to speak of methodological covenantalism, yet they were forced to adopt the conclusions of covenantalism in order to escape the clutches of methodological collectivism. They wrote as though they were living in a world of cosmic personalism, yet they explicitly denied the existence of any

such universe. They wanted the fruits of a Christian world-and-life view, but not the roots.

We cannot enjoy forever the fruits of Christian civilization, including the free market social order, without the roots: the biblical doctrines of God, creation, law, sanctions, inheritance. We must affirm the doctrine of man as the image of God. We must affirm the dominion covenant. We must abandon the evolutionists' various defenses of the free market if we are successfully to defend the market from the evolutionistic opponents of the free market.

Appendix C

COSMOLOGIES IN CONFLICT: CREATION VS. EVOLUTION

Gertrude Himmelfarb, in her superb study, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (1959), quoted an amusing and highly revealing section from Benjamin Disraeli's 1847 novel, *Tancred*. Disraeli, who later became England's Prime Minister, caught the new evolutionistic spirit of some of Britain's upper classes—pre-Darwinian evolution, and a perspective universally condemned by scientists everywhere prior to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). A fashionable lady urges Tancred, the hero, to read a new book, *Revelations of Chaos* (actually, Robert Chambers' anonymously printed and enormously popular *Vestiges of Creation*): "You know, all is development. The principle is perpetually going on. First, there was nothing, then there was something; then—I forget the next—I think there were shells, then fishes; then we came—let me see—did we come next? Never mind that; we came at last. And at the next change there will be something very superior to us—something with wings. Ah! that's it: we were fishes, and I believe we shall be crows. But you must read it. [Tancred protests, mentioning that he had never been a fish. She goes on:] Oh! but it is all proved. . . . You understand, it is all science. . . . Everything is proved—by geology, you know."

It was people like this lady who bought 24,000 copies of *Vestiges of Creation* from its publication in 1844 until 1860—not the scientists, but good, upstanding Anglican Church members. When Darwin's *Origin* was published, the entire edition of 1,250 copies was sold out to booksellers in one day. The doctrine of evolution, rejected by scientists in 1850, was the universal orthodoxy in 1875. The idea of natural selection over millions of years had become the catch-all of the sciences. The entire universe is a chance operation in this perspective. Chance brought all things into existence (if in fact all things were not always in existence), and chance presently sustains the system. The utterly im-

probable laws of probability provide creation with whatever piecemeal direction it possesses. This cosmology was a return to the cosmologies of ancient paganism, though of course it is all dressed up in its scientific smock and footnotes.

The reigning cosmologies of the non-Christian world have always had one feature in common: they do not distinguish between the being of God and the being of the universe. In all these cosmogonies—stories of the original creation—a finite god created the world out of a pre-existing “stuff,” either spiritual or material. This god, only comparatively powerful, faced the contingent (chance) elements of the ultimately mysterious “stuff” in a way analogous to the way we now face a basically mysterious creation. *Chance is therefore ultimate in most non-biblical systems.* Some “primitive” cosmogonies affirm creation from an original cosmic egg (Polynesian, eighth-century Japan).¹ A large number of the creation stories were creation out of water (Maori, certain California Indian tribes, the Central Bantu Tribe of the Lunda Cluster, Mayan Indians in Central America, Babylon).² The Egyptian text, “The Book of Overthrowing Apophis,” provides an excellent example of a water cosmogony: “The Lord of All, after having come into being, says: I am he who came into being as Khepri (i.e., the Becoming One). When I came into being, the beings came into being, all the beings came into being after I became. Numerous are those who became, who came out of my mouth, before heaven ever existed, nor earth came into being, nor the worms, nor snakes, were created in this place. I being in weariness, was bound to them in the Watery Abyss. I found no place to stand.”³ After planning in his heart the various beings, he spat them out of his mouth. “It was my father the Watery Abyss who brought them up and my eye followed them (?) while they became far from me.” This god is not the sovereign God of the biblical creation story. The Bible’s God did not spring from a watery abyss, nor did He create the world from His own substance. He created it out of nothing.

A. Greek Speculation

Hesiod, who probably wrote his classic poems in the eighth century B.C., sketched a cosmogony that sought the source of creation in the infinite void (chaos), in much the same way as modern science

1. Mircea Eliade (ed.), *From Primitives to Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 88, 94.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 88, 90, 91, 93, 98.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

searches for the origin of the universe. Chaos is the source of all that is.⁴ As was the case and is the case in most non-Christian cosmologies, he held to a theory of eternal cycles: the original Age of Gold is inevitably followed by a process of deterioration into new ages: Silver, Bronze, and finally Iron.⁵ (A similar outline is given by Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2; Daniel's exposition to the king's vision is not cyclical, however, for a fifth kingdom—God's eternal kingdom—finally replaces the fourth and final earthly kingdom.) Pagan cyclical theories held to a faith that the grim age of iron could be regenerated back into a new age of gold through the application of ritual acts of chaos. Our present age is characterized by law and order—the opposite of life—so that by violating established social and political laws, societies can be regenerated from below. Thus, the ancient pagan cultures had annual or seasonal chaos festivals. Metaphysical regeneration rather than ethical regeneration was basic to their cosmologies. Not a return to covenantal law, as in the Hebrew-Christian perspective, but an escape from law: here was the alternative to the biblical perspective.⁶ This dialectic between order and chaos was universal in the Near Eastern and classical civilizations. Ethics was therefore primarily political, for it was the state, as the supposed link between heaven and earth, that was the agency of social and personal salvation.⁷

In examining the history of the universe, Greek scientists were not noticeably superior to their predecessors, the poets, or the cosmologists of other ancient cultures. In an extremely important study, *The Discovery of Time* (1965), the authors concluded: "For all the rationality of their concepts, they never put down firm intellectual roots into the temporal development of Nature, nor could they grasp the timescale of Creation with any more certainty than men had done before. In the *History of Nature*, therefore, the continuity between the ideas of the Greek philosophers and those of the preceding era is particularly striking: here, even more than elsewhere, one may justly speak of their theories as 'radical myths.'"⁸

4. Hesiod, "Theogony," *ibid.*, p. 115.

5. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 109-201.

6. Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (1958); *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957). See also Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959).

7. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), chaps. 3, 4. Cf. Charles N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957), p. 323. This has been reprinted by Liberty Press, Indianapolis.

8. Stephen Toulmin and Jane Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York: Harper

Hecateus of Miletos, an historian of the mid-sixth century, B.C., attempted to link human history with natural history. His conclusions were still being quoted by Diodorus of Sicily five centuries later, in the latter's *Historical Library*. "When in the beginning, as their account runs, the universe was being formed, both heaven and earth were indistinguishable in appearance, since their elements were intermingled: then, when their bodies separated from one another, the universe took on in all its parts the ordered form in which it is now seen. . . ."⁹ Life sprang from "the wet" by reason of the warmth from the sun; all the various forms were created at once. The creation of the elements was therefore impersonal. The creation of life was spontaneous, instantaneous, and fixed for all time. It was a purely autonomous development.

Plato was caught in the tension between order and chaos. Two of the pre-Socratic philosophers, Heraclitus and Parmenides, had set forth the case for each. Heraclitus had argued that all is flux, change, and process; Parmenides had argued that all is rational, static, and universal. This so-called dialectic between structure and change, order and chaos, was expressed in terms of the Form (Idea)-Matter dualism.¹⁰ Plato, in the *Timaeus* dialogue, began with a contrast between exact, eternal mathematical concepts and the temporal flux of history. As Toulmin and Goodfield commented: "The Creation of the cosmos was the process by which the eternal mathematical principles were given material embodiment, imposing an order on the formless raw materials of the world, and setting them working according to ideal specifications."¹¹ It is the vision of a Divine Craftsman. Plato was non-committal about the timing of this creation or the order of the creation; it was, at the minimum, 9,000 years earlier. In response to Aristotle's attack on this theory, Plato's pupils argued that it was only an intellectual construct, not something to be taken literally.¹² They were correct. Plato's god, as his other dialogues indicate, was an impersonal Idea of the Good, itself a fragmented universal.¹³

Torchbook, 1965), p. 33; cf. p. 37.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

10. Rushdoony, *One and the Many*, ch. 4; Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), pp. 39–42; Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, Volume II of *In Defense of the Faith* (den Dulk Foundation, 1969), ch. 3.

11. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, p. 42.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

13. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1936] 1965), pp. 38, 48–53; Van Til, *Survey*, pp. 37–38.

Aristotle's cosmology was different. His god was a totally impersonal, totally aloof being—thought contemplating itself—and therefore indifferent to the world. The affairs of the world are determined by autonomous processes. Both god and the world are eternal (*Physics*, VIII). His god was therefore “Unmoved Perfection,” totally independent. The creation was equally independent.¹⁴ God's existence does not explain why other beings exist, or why they exist in a particular way.¹⁵ There had never been a temporal beginning; time is unbounded. History operates in terms of cycles.¹⁶ Aristotle was intensely skeptical concerning questions about some hypothetical and unknowable original creation.

The later Greek philosophical schools known as the Stoics (deterministic) and Epicureans (skeptical, atheistic) also held to a cyclical view of history. Their curiosity about the universe's origins went unsatisfied. When Paul confronted members of both schools of thought on Mars' Hill in Athens, he was unable to convince them to believe in the Bible's Creator God—the God in whom we live and have our being (Acts 17:24–28, 32). Paul's concept of God was utterly foreign to their belief in an independent, autonomous universe. They preferred to believe that an impersonal world of pure chance (luck) battles eternally for supremacy over pure determinism (fate), equally impersonal.¹⁷

Christianity offered a solution to this eternal tension. The Creator of heaven and earth is a God of three Persons: eternal, omnipotent, exhaustive in self-revelation. The revelation of the Bible, not the logic of the self-proclaimed autonomous human mind, serves as the foundation of this belief.¹⁸ This belief overcame the dualism of classical thought by denying the impersonalism of the cosmos. It provided an alternative to the collapsing classical civilization, for it offered a wholly new cosmology. As Cochrane says, “The fall of Rome was the fall of an idea, or rather of a system of life based upon a complex of ideas which may be described broadly as those of Classicism; and the deficiencies

14. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, pp. 44–45. For Aristotle's arguments against the Greek “creationists,” see *Meteorologica*, Bk. II, ch. I, par. 1.

15. Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being*, p. 55.

16. Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, II: XIV: 352a, 353a. Haber has concluded that Aristotle was essentially a uniformitarian: Francis C. Haber, “Fossils and Early Cosmology,” in Bentley Glass, et al. (eds.), *Forerunners of Darwin: 1745–1859* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), pp. 9–10. Cf. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, pp. 45–46.

17. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 159.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

of Classicism, already exposed in the third century, were destined sooner or later to involve the system in ruin."¹⁹

B. Eastern Monism

The major philosophical religions of China and India are Buddhism and Hinduism. Both are ultimately monistic faiths. They hypothesize an ultimate oneness of being underlying all reality. This total oneness became plural at some point in the past, thus producing the creation out of itself; at some later point in history, it will overcome this dualism to become unified again. The change and multiplicity of life are therefore maya—illusions. Only unity can be said truly to exist. Somehow, the ultimate reality of one has included in itself the illusion of plurality. Swami Nikhilananda, a respected Hindu scholar whose article appears in a symposium of Darwinian evolutionists, tried to explain his system's cosmology.

According to the Upanishads, which form the conclusion and the essence of the Vedas and are also the basis of the Vedanta philosophy, Atman, or the unchanging spirit in the individual, and Brahman, or the unchanging spirit in the universe, are identical. This spirit of consciousness—eternal, homogeneous, attributeless, and self-existent is the ultimate cause of all things. . . . Vedanta Philosophy speaks of attributeless reality as beyond time, space, and causality. It is not said to be the cause of the Saguna Brahman [first individual] in the same way as the potter is the cause of the pot (dualism), or milk of curds (pantheism). The creation of Saguna Brahman is explained as an illusory superimposition such as one notices when the desert appears as a mirage, or a rope in semi-darkness as a snake. This superimposition does not change the nature of reality, as the apparent water of the mirage does not soak a single grain of sand in the desert. A name and a form are thus superimposed upon Brahman by maya, a power inherent in Brahman and inseparable from it, as the power to burn is inseparable from fire. . . . According to Vedanta, maya is the material basis of creation; it is something positive. It is called positive because it is capable of evolving the tangible material universe.²⁰

The one of Atman-Brahman produces something different, maya, which really is not different in reality from the one, and maya in turn

19. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

20. Swami Nikhilananda, "Hinduism and the Idea of Evolution," in *A Book that Shook the World* (University of Pittsburgh, 1958), pp. 48–49. The position of philosophical Buddhism is similar: D. T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, [1907] 1963), pp. 46–47.

evolves the material universe, although it is not itself material. It is an illusion. The universe is therefore an illusion. The process is cyclical:

Evolution or manifestation is periodical or cyclic; manifestation and non-manifestation alternate; there is not continuous progress in one direction only. The universe oscillates in both directions like a pendulum of a clock. The evolution of the universe is called the beginning of a cycle, and the involution, the termination of the cycle. The whole process is spontaneous, like a person's breathing out and breathing in. At the end of a cycle all the physical bodies resolve into maya, which is the undifferentiated substratum of matter, and all individualized energy into prana, which is the cosmic energy; and both energy and matter remain in an indistinguishable form. At the beginning of the new cycle, the physical bodies separate out again, and the prana animates them. Evolution and involution are postulated on the basis of the indestructibility of matter and the conservation of energy. [The swami seems to be throwing a sop to the evolutionists here, since matter really cannot exist, for all is one—spirit.—G.N.] From the relative standpoint, the creation is without beginning or end. A cycle is initiated by the power or intelligence of God. According to Hindu thinkers, the present cycle commenced about three billion years ago. It appears from some of the Upanishads that all beings—superhuman, human, and subhuman—appear simultaneously at the beginning of a cycle.²¹

There can be no true separation or distinction between the Creator and the creation. All is ultimately one substance: spirit. If matter is eternal, this means that illusion is eternal. Yet the attainment of Nirvana implies an escape from the process of time and change, so it would appear that not everything is matter eternally, i.e., illusion. Something—one's sou—escapes from this eternal illusion to return to the oneness. Thus, both Hindus and Buddhists developed systems of ascetic practices by which the souls of men, or at least the surviving deeds of men (Buddhism), could escape from creation. In this sense, the asceticism of the East was similar to the monistic (not necessarily monastic) asceticism of the West's gnostic sects, desert mystics, or other neoplatonic groups.²²

21. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

22. R. J. Rushdoony, "Asceticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1964), 1, pp. 432–36; Rushdoony, *One and the Many*, pp. 164–70; Rushdoony, *The Flight from Humanity: A Study of the Effect of Neoplatonism on Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Vallecito, California: Chalcedon, [1973] 2008), chaps. 1–5. An example of heretical Christian monistic asceticism almost Eastern in its perspective was the medieval mystic, Meister Eckhart.

During the first half of the twentieth century, English language readers had to rely almost exclusively on the voluminous researches of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki for their knowledge of Zen Buddhism. His studies of the more orthodox and scholarly Mahayana Buddhism were also influential. Both systems are ultimately monistic, as is Hinduism, from which Buddhism developed. Paralleling the almost scholastic Mahayana form of Buddhism is Hinayana, or ascetic-magical Buddhism, but Western readers are far less concerned with this less speculative offshoot, however important it may have been in practice. As might be expected, Suzuki tried to come to grips with the ultimate oneness—Absolute Suchness—but his explanation was by definition hopeless. “Absolute Suchness from its very nature thus defies all definitions.”²³ The ground of all existence is therefore nonrational, incommunicative, mysterious. As with Hinduism, diversity is viewed as a result of finite consciousness.²⁴ There can be no answer of the eternal one-many distinction; we can never know how the one became many.²⁵

Certain conclusions utterly foreign to Western, Christian thought result from this monism. For example, *there can be no personal responsibility in such a system*. Suzuki explained that “Buddhism does not condemn this life and universe for their wickedness as was done by some religious teachers and philosophers. The so-called wickedness is not radical in nature and life. It is merely superficial.”²⁶ All things are at bottom one; thus, there can be no murder. “It is true that Mahayanism perfectly agrees with Vedantism when the latter declares: ‘If the killer thinks that he kills, if the killed thinks that he is killed, they do not understand; for this one does not kill, nor is that one killed.’ (*The Kato-panishad*, II, 19.)”²⁷ Furthermore, according to Suzuki, there is no personal immortal soul in Mahayana Buddhism.²⁸ There is no personal God.²⁹ There is no grace; all merit is earned.³⁰ One’s deeds—not the person—are carried into eternity through karma, or reincarnation, as-

See Raymond Bernard Blakney, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1941]).

23. D. T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, pp. 101–2.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 135n.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 184–85.

ending or descending along the scale of being.³¹ The deeds survive, not an individual soul.³² Yet somehow it is possible to distinguish good deeds from bad deeds, in spite of the fact that at bottom all things are one, and all distinctions are illusions.³³ There is no Creator, no Fall, and no hell.³⁴ In the final analysis, there is no knowledge:

Human consciousness is so made that at the beginning there was utter not knowing. Then there was the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge—the knowledge that consists in making the knower different from what he knows. That is the origin of this world. The fruit separated us from not-knowing in the sense of not knowing subject and object. This awakening of knowledge resulted in our ejection from the Garden of Eden. But we have a persistent desire to return to the state of innocence prior, epistemologically speaking, to creation, to the state where there is no division, no knowledge—prior to the subject-object division, to the time when there was only God as He was before He created the world. The separation of God from the world is the source of all our troubles. We have an innate desire to be united with God.³⁵

He deliberately uses Western and Christian terms to describe a completely non-Western concept of God—impersonal, without attributes. But the thrust of Buddhist monism should be clear: *the goal is universal, eternal unity*. The Creator must be unified with the creature. We are to unite with God metaphysically, as equals, not ethically, as subordinates. We are to share God's attribute of divinity and oneness, rather than be united ethically to Christ in His perfect humanity.

The idea of creation out of nothing, and hence the Creator-creature distinction, is repugnant to Eastern thought. While the following quotation from Suzuki is chaotic, it is no worse than an extract from Hegel, Tillich, or Bonhoeffer, whose book, *Creation and Fall*, must rank as one of the truly perverse, contorted efforts in modernist biblical exegesis.

When God created the world outside Himself, He made a great mistake. He could not solve the problem of the world as long as He kept it outside of Himself. In Christian theological terminology, God, to

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 187, 192.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 200. Capitalism, for example is evil: pp. 188–89.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

35. Suzuki, "The Buddha and Zen," (1953), in *The Field of Zen* (New York: Harper and Row Perennial Library, 1970), pp. 15–16.

say "I am," has to negate Himself. For God to know Himself He must negate Himself, and His negation comes in the form of the creation of the world of particulars. To be God is not to be God. We must negate ourselves to affirm ourselves. Our affirmation is negation, but as long as we remain in negation we shall have no rest; we must return to affirmation. We must go out into negation of ourselves and come back. We go out but that negation must come back into affirmation. Going out is coming back. But to realize that going out is coming back we have to go through all kinds of suffering and hardship, of trials and disciplines.³⁶

The use of intense mystical contemplation of total absurdities, sometimes followed by acts of asceticism, or physical beatings, is the Zen Buddhist means of achieving satori, the heart of Zen.³⁷ Nothing has meaning or purpose: this is the gateway to satori, or pure religious freedom. Total chaos rules supreme, and in chaos there is perfect peace.³⁸ All aspects of life must be accepted.³⁹ True existence is timeless.⁴⁰ By abandoning one's own individuality, man links himself to the infinite—infinite possibilities, infinite responsibilities, unlimited freedom.⁴¹ Total annihilation means total perfection.

Given such a philosophy, it is not surprising that the East should have produced a stagnant culture in which men seek escape in earthly routine and the timelessness of satori: "The only thing that makes Buddhists look rather idle or backward in so-called 'social service' work is the fact that Eastern people, among whom Buddhism flourished, are not very good at organization; they are just as charitably disposed as any religious people and ready to put their teachings into practice. But they are not accustomed to carry on their philanthropic undertakings in a systematic way. . . ."⁴² This stands in contrast to Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who built charitable institutions that still exist today, and which transformed the character of English life.⁴³ Eastern people can organize successfully, as the Com-

36. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

37. *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), chaps. 3, 4.

38. *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 256.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 250, 264.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 265–66.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 274. For a critique of Zen, see Lit-sen Chang, *Zen-Existentialism* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1967).

43. W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480–1660* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959; New York: Russell Sage Foundation).

munists have shown, but only under the influence of a Western philosophy of progress and triumph. Monism is a religion of stagnation and retreat.

C. Cosmological Evolution

God is not part of the creation, according to Christianity. He is the Creator. He existed before time began. The Bible offers a unique concept of time. There was a beginning; there is linear development; there will be a final judgment. The first philosopher to develop this concept of linear history was Augustine.

1. Augustine's Cosmology

The concluding chapter of Charles Norris Cochrane's superb study, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1944), deals with the philosophy of St. Augustine and his concept of history.⁴⁴ Augustine marks the transition between the shattered world of classical civilization and the new Christian society. Augustine reshaped the historical vision of Western Civilization, a monumental intellectual feat. Augustine's twin vision of predestination and linear line—both explicitly Pauline concepts—gave Western culture the idea of history. All human history is directional. It began with the creation, and it shall end with the final judgment. Earthly kingdoms rise and fall, but God's kingdom (which Augustine saw, unfortunately, as exclusively spiritual and ecclesiastical in impact) is permanent. The doctrine of historical cycles is therefore false.⁴⁵ Furthermore, creation was not a process extending back into the mists of time; it was a fiat creation within the time span of human records:

In vain, then do some babble with most empty presumption, saying that Egypt has understood the reckoning of the stars for more than a hundred thousand years. For in what books have they collected that number who learned letters from Isis their mistress, not much more than two thousand years ago? . . . For as it is not yet six thousand years since the first man, who is called Adam, are not those to be ri-

44. On the importance of his philosophy of history, see Lynn White, Jr., "Christian Myth and Christian History," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, III (1942), p. 147; Theodore Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," *ibid.*, XII (1951), pp. 346–74; Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), ch. 2; Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 71–73.

45. Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XII, chaps. 14–16.

diculed rather than refuted who try to persuade us of anything regarding a space of time so different from, and contrary to, the ascertained truth?⁴⁶

Sadly for the condition of the besieged Church in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Christian scholars must spend whole lifetimes in refuting that which is, in Augustine's term, ridiculous—worthy of ridicule rather than refutation.

Augustine's world was a universe of cosmic personalism. God's providence brings all things to pass. This was his answer to the cosmic impersonalism of the classical world. "By thus discarding characteristic prejudices of classical mentality, Augustine opens the way for a philosophy of history in terms of the *logos* of Christ; i.e. in terms of the Trinity, recognized as the creative and moving principle."⁴⁷ In short, wrote Cochrane, "For Augustine, therefore, the order of human life is not the order of 'matter,' blindly and aimlessly working out the 'logic' of its own process, nor yet is it any mere reproduction of a pattern or idea which may be apprehended *a priori* by the human mind."⁴⁸ Process is not the source of structure or meaning. "The *logos* of Christ thus serves to introduce a new principle of unity and division into human life and human history."⁴⁹

The world has a fixed order. The Greeks believed this with respect to the creation of the various species, as do the Hindus. They were not so rigorous in applying a theology of process to the world. They hesitated to follow the implications of their view of cycles. They refused to question fully the firmness of a fixed order of creation that is not the product of a sovereign Creator. But Christians do have a foundation for their trust in natural laws. From the time of Augustine in the early fifth century through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Christian West stood in confidence before a nature which is under the control of God.⁵⁰

2. Medieval Cosmology

The medieval view of the earth was still basic to Western men's understanding of the universe as late as 1600. Because of the centrality

46. *Ibid.*, XVIII: 40.

47. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 480; cf. p. 474.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 484.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 487.

50. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, p. 68. Cf. the works of the French historian, Pierre Duhem.

of the earth in the order of God's creation, and because of the drama of the Fall of man and the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ, their view of the universe was understandably geocentric. But they took the Ptolomaic construction of the universe as physically geocentric as a valid representation of the *covenantal* geocentricity of earth in the creation. The earth was understood as round. (The incredible portolano maps of the Middle Ages rival the accuracy of modern maps; they were probably pre-Phoenician in origin.)⁵¹ But it was supposedly placed at the center of a huge system of translucent spheres, to which the sun, planets, and stars were attached, all rotating in perfect spherical harmony around the earth. While the existence of comets should have warned them against the translucent spheres, it did not. Galileo's telescopes, not comets, smashed these spheres.

Some commentators, such as J. B. Bury, have argued that this geocentricity gave men a sense of importance and power in the universe. This was supposedly destroyed by the advent of modern astronomical theories.⁵² Others, such as Arthur O. Lovejoy, have argued just the opposite: the earth, was seen as the garbage dump of the universe, with hell at its center. "It is sufficiently evident from such passages that the geocentric cosmography served rather for man's humiliation than for his exaltation, and that Copernicanism was opposed partly on the ground that it assigned too dignified and lofty a position to his dwelling-place."⁵³ The fact seems to be that man's escape from the geocentric universe could be viewed either as a contraction of man's physical (and therefore historical) place in creation, or as an elevation, ethically, because of one's escape from the wrath of the God of the formerly confined creation. On the other hand, men might view the universe as majestically huge, and therefore the God who created it

51. Charles H. Hapgood, *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1966). This is one of the most startling books ever published. Ignored by professional historians and geographers, it produces evidence that accurate maps of the world, including Antarctica, were available to explorers in the sixteenth century, probably in the twelfth century, and very likely long before the Phoenicians. Antarctica was not re-discovered—discovered, given the standard textbook account—until the eighteenth century. The book is an eloquent rebuttal of cultural and historical evolutionists: if anything, it indicates cultural devolution. No wonder it is ignored by modern scholars!

52. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (New York: Dover, [1932] 1955), p. 115. The book first appeared in 1920.

53. Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 102; cf. Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, [1957] 1970), pp. 19, 43. This garbage-dump cosmology was an Aristotelian conception of the world: *Great Chain*, p. 104.

must be infinite. This is metaphysically humbling, but for the regenerate it can be the promise of triumph. The key is not the size or shape of the universe, but the reliability of the revelation of the God of creation. The problem is not size, but ethics, not geographical position, but ethical position. The great danger, soon witnessed, of the expanded size of God's universe was the next step, wholly illegitimate: *infinite time*.⁵⁴

3. Renaissance Cosmology

Modern historians have often been remiss, lazy, or deliberately misleading in their unwillingness to comment on another aspect of the conflict between medieval Roman Catholic orthodox science and the Renaissance discoveries. Renaissance speculation was not the product of a group of armchair college professors. It was deeply involved in magic, demonism, and the occult arts. C. S. Lewis was correct when he observed that it was not the Middle Ages that encouraged grotesque superstitions; it was the "rational" Renaissance. These men were searching for *power*, like Faustus, not truth for its own sake.⁵⁵ For example, it is generally today accepted that the first late-medieval or early modern figure to advance the old Greek concept of an infinite universe was Giordano Bruno.⁵⁶ Yet it was Bruno's reputation, well-deserved, as a magician, a Kabbalist, and an astrologer that brought him to his disastrous end.⁵⁷ It was not simply that Copernicus, in the name of mathematical precision, placed the sun at the center of the universe. Ptolemy's system was as accurate in its predictions as Copernicus' system (for Copernicus erroneously favored circular planet orbits instead of ellipses).⁵⁸ Copernicus was involved in a neoplatonic, Pythagorean revival against the Aristotelian universe of the late-medieval period. Mathematics governs everything, this tradition teaches, contrary to Aristotle's teachings.⁵⁹ It was also a deeply mystical and

54. The crucial aspect of time in cosmological speculation will be discussed more fully in the section dealing with geological evolution.

55. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, [1947] 1965), pp. 87–89. The attempt of modern science to fuse rational scientific technique and magical power is the theme of Lewis' magnificent novel, *That Hideous Strength* (1945).

56. Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, pp. 116–17; Koyré, *Closed World*, p. 39.

57. Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage, [1964] 1969). This is required reading for anyone who still believes the myth of the "rational" Renaissance.

58. E. A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor [1925] 1954), p. 36. This is a very fine study of the mind-matter dualism of modern scientific and philosophical thought.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 52–56.

magical tradition. Kepler, the mathematical genius who discovered that planetoid motion is elliptical, was a sun-worshipper and an astrologer.⁶⁰ The leaders of the institutional church understandably were disturbed by these theologically and cosmologically heretical individuals.

The debate over whether or not the universe is infinite is still with us today. Einstein's curved (in relation to what?) and finite universe is obviously not in harmony with the absolute space of Newton's cosmology. Prior to the sixteenth century, however, European scholars had not raised the question. Aristotle's rejection of the idea was considered final. The problem is exceedingly intricate, as anyone understands who has attempted to struggle through Alexander Koyré's book, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (1957). Copernicus and Kepler rejected the idea, although their speculations vastly expanded men's vision of the creation. Galileo, whose telescopes shattered the translucent spheres as comets never had, was content to affirm an indeterminate universe. Descartes, who above all other men of his era believed in a totally mathematical universe, and whose vision in this regard was crucial for the development of modern science, said that space is indefinite. He was always cautious on theological or semi-theological topics. The limit, he thought, may well be in our minds; we should therefore avoid such disputes. In fact, Descartes' refusal to postulate limits (due to men's inability to conceive such limits) really served as an assertion of an infinite space.⁶¹ Descartes' god was simply pure mind, having nothing in common with the material world.⁶²

Henry More (not Sir Thomas More), in the latter part of the seventeenth century, was converted to a belief in an infinite void space, identifying this with God's omnipresence. The limited material universe is therefore contained in this infinite void. Space is eternal, uncreated, and the necessary presupposition of our thinking. He identified the spatiality of God and the divinity of space.⁶³ Space is an attribute of God in this perspective—a dangerous linking of Creator and creature. (This position, by the way, was also held by Jonathan Edwards in his youth.⁶⁴) More is not that crucial a figure in the history of

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–58, 69. Kepler's Platonism was tempered by his Christian faith.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

62. Koyré, *Closed World*, p. 124.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–53.

64. R. J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1964] 2001), p. 6. Rushdoony cited Edwards' youthful notebooks: "Notes on Natural Science, Of Being."

Europe, but his opinion on the infinity of space was shared by Isaac Newton.⁶⁵ Newton's affirmation of Absolute Space and Absolute Time as postulates of all physics was to open the door to a conclusion which he personally opposed: an autonomous universe.

Leibniz identified Newton's Absolute Space with the material universe, a step Newton did not take, but one which few others seemed able to resist after 1700. It was the crucial step in severing God from His universe. Thus, concluded Koyré,

At the end of the [seventeenth] century Newton's victory was complete. The Newtonian God reigned supreme in the infinite void of absolute space in which the force of universal attraction linked together the atomically structured bodies of the immense universe and made them move around in accordance with strict mathematical laws. Yet it can be argued that this victory was a Pyrrhic one, and that the price paid for it was disastrously high. . . . Moreover, an infinite universe existing only for a limited duration seems illogical. Thus the created world became infinite both in Space and in Time. But an infinite and eternal world, as [Dr. Samuel] Clarke had so strongly objected to in Leibniz, can hardly admit creation. It does not need it; it exists by virtue of this very infinity.⁶⁶

From a closed world to an infinite universe means, therefore, *a universe closed to God*. There is nothing to which men can appeal beyond the creation itself. But without God there can be no meaning. Max Weber was correct: modern science removes meaning from the world.⁶⁷ Koyré ended his book with this statement: "The infinite Universe of the New Cosmology, infinite in Duration as well as Extension, in which eternal matter in accordance with eternal and necessary laws moves endlessly and aimlessly in eternal space, inherited all the ontological [being] attributes of Divinity. Yet only those—all the others the departed God took away with Him."⁶⁸ This is cosmic impersonalism. We are back to the ancient pagan cosmology, only now there is no doubt about the randomness of the universe; it is aimless.

This did not mean that those holding the new cosmology abandoned the idea of linear time. Now that God was officially removed, the linearity of time was secularized and thereby ostensibly human-

65. Koyré, p. 159; Burt, pp. 260–61.

66. Koyré, pp. 274–75.

67. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," (1919), in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 139–42. (<http://bit.ly/WeberScience>)

68. Koyré, p. 276.

ized. The universe would now be cosmically personal in terms of man. The secular idea of progress was born in the seventeenth century, paralleling the advent of a resurgence of orthodox Protestant (especially Calvinistic and Puritan) optimism. Nothing has characterized this secularization of Christian providence any better than Nisbet's comment: "By the late 17th century, Western philosophers, noting that the earth's frame had still not been consumed by Augustinian holocaust, took a kind of politician's courage in the fact, and declared bravely that the world was never going to end (Descartes, it seems, had proved this) and that mankind was going to become ever more knowledgeable and, who knows, progressively happy. Now, of a sudden, the year 2000 became the object of philosophical speculation."⁶⁹ They had not yet become fully consistent with their own philosophy of randomness.

Bernard de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686) became the great popular work announcing the new infinity of creation, as well as its new-found autonomy. In 1755, Immanuel Kant took these speculations and became the first systematic evolutionist. Process theology came into its own. Wrote Toulmin and Goodfield: "The fame of Immanuel Kant's three Critiques has obscured his striking contributions to cosmology. In fact, his earlier work on the *General History of Nature and Theory of the Heavens* (1755) was the first systematic attempt to give an evolutionary account of cosmic history. In it, he spoke of the whole Order of Nature, not as something completed at the time of the original Creation, but as something still coming into existence. The transition from Chaos to Order had not taken place all at once."⁷⁰ Creation, argued Kant, had taken millions of centuries. Time may somehow be linear and infinite, but the process of creation is cyclical. The world will run down, only to be reformed once again out of the climactic conflagration at the end. As he put it, "Worlds and systems perish and are swallowed up in the abyss of Eternity; but at the same time Creation is always busy constructing new formations in the Heavens, and advantageously making up for the loss." So, what we have here, in his words, is a "Phoenix of Nature, which burns itself only in order to revive again in restored youth from its ashes, through all infinity of times and spaces. . . ."⁷¹ Kant, on whose speculations modern philosophy is built, also set forth the presuppositions in terms

69. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 and All That," *Commentary* (June 1968), p. 61.

70. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, p. 130.

71. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 134.

of which supposedly neutral “eternal oscillation” astronomers have constructed their footnoted cosmologies. Religious presuppositions govern modern astronomical science and modern geological science.

Men have abandoned the revelation of God. In the name of science, they inform us that the belief in a creation by God a few thousand years ago is preposterous—reversing St. Augustine’s dictum. In place of this creation account, physicist George Gamow asked us to believe that the universe began its existence as a condensed droplet of matter at an extremely high density and temperature. This primordial egg—the “ylem”—generated fantastic internal pressures and exploded. As it expanded its temperature dropped. As Robert Jastrow summarized Gamow’s theory: “In the first few minutes of its existence the temperature was many millions of degrees, and all the matter within the droplet consisted of the basic particles—electrons, neutrons and protons. . . . According to the big-bang theory, all 92 elements were formed in this way in the first half-hour of the existence of the universe.”⁷² Jastrow offered this as a serious possibility. He was the Director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, and the lectures were originally viewed over CBS television in 1964 as a *Summer Semester*. The public is expected to believe this, but not expected to take seriously the biblical account of creation.

We are told that the laws of probability probably govern the universe. The universe evolved in terms of these laws. Prof. Charles-Eugene Guye once estimated the probability of evolving an imaginary (but given) random assortment of atoms into an equally imaginary protein molecule containing a minimum of four atoms: carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen. He did not assume the coming of all 92 elements or even life itself—just the components of a single protein molecule. The volume of original random atomic substance necessary to produce—randomly—the single protein molecule would be a sphere with a radius so large that light, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, would take 10^{82} years to cover the distance (10, followed by 81 zeros). The outermost limits of the known universe today, however, is about ten billion light-years, or 10^9 light-years. The probability that this imaginary molecule might be formed on a globe the size of the earth, assuming vibrations of the random electrons and protons on the mag-

72. Robert Jastrow, *Red Giants and White Dwarfs* (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 69. This happened 10 billion years ago, wrote Jastrow. This figure has been revised to 13 billion. This remains the commonly accepted date, give or take a few hundred million years.

nitude of light frequencies, is next to nil. It would take—get this!— 10^{243} years. The universe is supposedly a minimum of 10 billion years old, or 10^9 years.⁷³ Obviously, modern scientists dismiss Guye's estimates as impossible, but if he is even remotely correct (within 50 or 60 zeroes), the laws of probability simply do not account for the existence of the universe. Yet scientists regard the creation story of the Bible as utterly fantastic, the cultic tale of a primitive Semitic tribe. Of course, what they fail to point out is that the theory that the universe sprang from the random impact of atoms in motion was first developed by Epicurus and Democritus; the theoretical presuppositions of the "new cosmology" are very ancient indeed. In the area of speculation concerning ultimate origins, the scientists of today have contributed very little improvement over Greek speculation twenty-three centuries ago. The fact that Kant propounded it in 1755 does not make it automatically modern.⁷⁴

D. Geological Evolution

Renaissance science broadened the conception of the universe that had been inherited from Aristotelian science. The physical boundaries of the universe seemed immeasurably gigantic, inconceivably large, and finally infinite. Enlightenment thinkers, most notably Kant, then hypothesized the infinity of time to match the hypothetical infinity of the spatial universe. From the Christian point of view, this constituted the "evolutionary wedge" by which the creation account of the Bible was steadily shoved into the realm of myth and fable. Mechanical laws replaced personal providence, thus seemingly negating the necessity of believing in "creation as sustaining." Next, the expansion of men's temporal horizon seemingly negated the necessity of believing in "creation as origin." *Cosmological* evolution provided the hypothetical framework for *geological* evolution; geological evolution was to make possible the hypothesis of *biological* evolution. But all three required *vast quantities of time* to make them plausible. Loren Eiseley, perhaps

73. Guye's figure of probability is 2.02×10^{321} ; cited in Lecomte du Nouy, *Human Destiny* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1947), p. 34. A "far less" impossible figure has been computed by Prof. Edward Blick: 10^{67} to one. Henry M. Morris, et al. (eds.), *Creation: Acts, Facts, Impacts* (San Diego: Creation Life Publishers, 1974), p. 175. For a lighthearted discussion of the mathematics of the evolution of life, see Fred Reed, "Fredwin on Evolution" (March 7, 2005). (<http://bit.ly/Fredwin>)

74. John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1959), pp. 8, 28–30.

the most successful popularizer of biological evolutionary concepts within America's intellectual circles, made this point repeatedly: "No theory of evolution can exist without an allotment of time in generous quantities. Yet it is just this factor which was denied to the questioning scientist by the then current Christian cosmology. A change as vast as that existing between the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems of the heavens had to be effected in Western thinking upon the subject of time before one could even contemplate the possibility of extensive organic change; the one idea is an absolute prerequisite to the other."⁷⁵

In the year 1750, there were still very few scientists, let alone average citizens, who believed that the earth was much older than 6,000 years. By 1850, a majority of scientists were convinced that the earth was far older. *The Origin of Species*, which sold out in one day (1,250 copies) in 1859, would probably not have been published, and certainly would not have been popular, apart from a revolution in men's conception of the earth's chronology. How had this revolution come about?

1. Buffon's System

If any man deserves the distinction of having set forth the outlines of geological evolution in a scientific framework, it is probably the French scholar and literary figure, the Comte de Buffon. Named as a member of the Royal Academy at age 26 (1733), appointed keeper of the Royal Cabinet of Natural History in 1739, Buffon published the first volume of his *Natural History* in 1749. He published 35 more volumes before his death in 1788, one year before the outbreak of the French Revolution. His cosmological presupposition was straightforward: "Time is the great workman of Nature."⁷⁶ In the next sentences, he outlined the doctrine of uniformitarianism: "He [time] moves with regular and uniform steps. He performs no operation suddenly; but, by degrees, or successive impressions, nothing can resist his power. . . ." Buffon personalized the impersonal. His universe was the same as an American popular song's: "We run our race in an hourglass of space; but we're only the toys in time's great game: time gives and time takes away."⁷⁷ Only the French censors kept his language even remotely orthodox.

75. Loren Eiseley, *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1958] 1961), p. 58.

76. Buffon, cited by Greene, *Death of Adam*, p. 148.

77. "Toys in Time," by Bob Kimmel and Ken Edwards, BMI.

Buffon also abandoned one of the fundamental beliefs of orthodox Christianity and non-Christian Aristotelian speculation (fused temporarily in one of Thomas Aquinas' proofs of God): the doctrine of final causes. The universe, Buffon believed, is not headed anywhere in particular. This is one of the crucial tenets of all modern science: teleology cannot be assumed by or proved by modern science. In fact, it was only by Charles Darwin's rejection of teleology—final cause, ultimate direction, etc.—that modern biological evolutionism became possible. As we shall see, the earlier systems of biological evolutionism assumed to some degree a teleological framework. Buffon set the standard over a century before the publication of Darwin's *Origin*.⁷⁸

Furthermore, Buffon rejected the idea that the present order of existence was set immutably by God in the original creation. As John C. Greene summarized Buffon's position, "it tried to conceive organic phenomena as the outcome of temporal process rather than a static expression of a pattern of creation."⁷⁹ *Providence disappears*, and with it, the idea that each kind reproduces after its own kind indefinitely (Gen. 1:24). He did not take this next step, Greene said, but he could not dismiss the idea of the mutability of species from his mind.

Thus, by removing God from the realm of science, Buffon thought he had transferred sovereignty to man. "There is no boundary to the human intellect. It extends in proportion as the universe is displayed. Hence man can and ought to attempt everything: He wants nothing but time to enable him to obtain universal knowledge."⁸⁰ Greene's comments are significant: "Buffon had come a long way from the Christian concept of the earth as a stage for the drama of man's redemption by divine grace. Burning with the thirst for knowledge and intoxicated with the sense of man's potential control over nature, he proclaimed man's power to be master of his own fate. Hitherto, he declared, man had pursued evil more energetically than good, amusement more diligently than knowledge, but there was reason to hope that he would at last discover peace to be his true happiness and sci-

78. Buffon was not a biological evolutionist, however: Lovejoy, "Buffon and the Problem of Species," in Glass, (ed.), *Forerunners of Darwin*, ch. 4. He did not believe in the mutability of the species. Writing as he did before the development of stratigraphy—an early nineteenth century science—he did not feel compelled to deal with the problem of fossils in some temporal succession. The question had not yet arisen. He could have both time and stable species.

79. Greene, *Death of Adam*, p. 145.

80. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 154.

ence his true glory.”⁸¹

Buffon offered a “scientific” conclusion that it had taken about 72,000 years for the globe to cool enough to allow the appearance of life.⁸² We have about 70,000 years ahead of us before the planet chills to lifelessness. This is neither far enough back in time to please modern geologists nor far enough ahead to please evolutionary humanists, but the break between 6,000 years and 72,000 was all that was necessary; ten billion more years was easy enough, once the 6,000-year barrier was breached.

He did not believe in organic evolution; instead, he offered a theory of repeated spontaneous, though naturalistic, appearances of new life-forms. He allowed God to be present only at the very beginning, far back in the mists of time, and far ahead in the final, unspecified, end.⁸³ By his prestige, Buffon offered man the apostate gift of Godless time. Time was the needed dwelling place of uniformitarian change, and the zone of safety from a personal God. Providence was removed from space by autonomous laws of nature and pushed back into antiquity by the newly discovered time machine.

2. Hutton's Uniformitarianism

Geology, as a specialized profession, came into being with mining and metallurgy. As men burrowed into the earth, a few of them began to notice the fact that the earth's crust often appears to be layered, like a multi-tiered cake without frosting. Prior to the uniformitarian geology, the two generally accepted explanations were: (1) Neptunism, that is, deposition by water (either at the flood of Noah or in some great sea of creation); (2) Vulcanism, that is, the deposits of volcanic action. An influential pioneering work was Johann G. Lehmann's *In-*

81. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

82. Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, p. 42. Haber pointed out that in the unpublished manuscript copy of Buffon's *Epoques de la Nature*, he admitted that his estimate of 72,000 years to cool the molten earth was conservative; it may have taken as much as a million years, possibly more: Francis C. Haber, “Fossils and the Idea of a Process of Time in Natural History,” in Glass (ed.), *Forerunners of Darwin*, p. 256. Buffon saw that the Newtonian view of infinite space could serve as an intellectual wedge for his concept of extended time: “And why does the mind seem to get lost in the space of duration rather than in that of extension, or in the consideration of measures, weights and numbers? Why are 100,000 years more difficult to conceive and to count than 100,000 pounds of money?” *Ibid.*, p. 235. The obvious answer—obvious in the mid-eighteenth century—was that by no stretch of the language of Genesis 1 could a period of 100,000 years be obtained. In 1750, that was important. A century later it was not.

83. Greene, *Death of Adam*, p. 138.

vestigation into the History of Stratified Mountains (1756). The author believed that Noah's Deluge was the crucial event in the past that reshaped the earth's crust. Another German, Abraham Werner, was an influential teacher of stratigraphy. He was a Neptunist, but his focus was a great primeval sea, and he did not explicitly profess faith in a six-day creation. It was against Werner's theories that James Hutton reacted.⁸⁴

In all of these theories—Neptunism, Vulcanism, and even Buffon's—there were elements of catastrophism. James Hutton set out to refute this presupposition. He accepted the earth at face value; all changes on earth have always occurred at the leisurely pace observable today. He first offered the results of his investigations in 1785; his two-volume *Theory of the Earth* appeared in 1795. He held defiantly to a totally mechanistic view of geological processes; all forces and changes produce counter-forces and compensating changes. In his famous sentence, Hutton announced to the world: "The result, therefore, of this physical inquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning,—no prospect of an end."⁸⁵

Eiseley stated categorically: "He discovered, in other words, time—time boundless and without end, the time of the ancient Easterners. . . ."⁸⁶ Indeed he did; as Eiseley also had to admit, Hutton's time bears traces of cyclicalism. There is no linear development in Hutton's self-compensating world machine. "Hutton was thus a total uniformitarian."⁸⁷ There have never been any catastrophic changes, Hutton believed, because there have never been any significant change at all. But there has been time—countless eons of time; the checkbook might even be large enough for biological evolutionists to draw the needed time reserves for their cosmologies. The cosmic judgment of God was pushed forward into the endless recesses of time's comforting womb.

Toulmin and Goodfield, in an otherwise excellent study, could not seem to grasp the threat to Christianity which Hutton's system represented. They said that "his fundamental aims were conservative and devout." He was just an honest observer of facts, letting them carry him to some cosmically neutral conclusion. They asked: Why did his contemporaries attack him? For one thing, it was not simply theology that

84. On Werner and Lehmann, see *ibid.*, pp. 59–62, 70–72.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

86. Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, p. 65.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

motivated his opponents; his position was undermining Vulcanism's catastrophism, while simultaneously undermining Neptunism, since Hutton laid great emphasis on the power of slowly acting subterranean heat.⁸⁸ He was stepping on everyone's methodological toes. But some of the opposition was theological. Naively, Toulmin and Goodfield remarked: "Yet there was, in fact, nothing in Hutton's system—apart from the unbounded chronology—that could legitimately give offense."⁸⁹ That, however, was precisely the point, as Eiseley understood so well:

The uniformitarians were, on the whole, disinclined to countenance the intrusion of strange or unknown forces into the universe. They eschewed final causes and all aspects of world creation, feeling like their master Hutton that such problems were confusing and beyond human reach. The uniformitarian school, in other words, is essentially a revolt against the Christian conception of time as limited and containing historic direction, with supernatural intervention constantly immanent [immanent—"inherent, operating within"—not imminent—"about to happen"—G.N.]. Rather, this philosophy involves the idea of the Newtonian machine, self-sustaining and forever operating on the same principles."⁹⁰

There should be no confusion on this point: the great theological debate centered around the question of time. All good men—Frenchmen excepted, naturally—believed in a personal God in the period 1750–1850. This God was allowed to be a creator in some sense or other. But, by pushing the time or order of God's creative acts back into a misty past, men were relegating this God into a mere intellectual construction—a kind of useful myth, rather like Plato's creator god. *One's concept of time is fundamental in defining one's concept of God.*

Prior to Lyell's hesitating conversion to Darwinism, his view of time was almost static. Some geological forces tend to raise portions of the earth's crust; there are forces elsewhere which tend to allow land to sink. If elevation is happening in one region, leveling or erosion is taking place somewhere else. It has been this way indefinitely. The forces are evenly balanced. "If we ask what of significance has happened in this expanse of time, the answer is, 'Nothing.' There have been no unique events. There have been no stages of growth. We have a system of indifference, of more or less meaningless fluctuations

88. Greene, *Death of Adam*, p. 84.

89. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, p. 156.

90. Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, p. 114. Cf. Nisbet, *Social Change and History*, p. 184.

around an eternal mean.”⁹¹ As Walter Cannon pointed out, this is not developing time—the time of the modern historian. It is simply unlimited, meaningless time. We might say that his impersonal time is like an infinitely long geometrical line, composed of an indefinite number of identical points. Uniformitarian time does not, in or of itself, give us a theory of evolution, for evolution implies growth, and the eighteenth-century world machine could not grow. It was a gyroscope, not a seed. But it was an exceedingly old gyroscope, and that was to prove crucial.

There is a distinctly religious impulse undergirding uniformitarianism. Eiseley was correct when he said that Hutton was proposing an anti-Christian concept of time. Charles C. Gillispie concluded that “The essence of Huttonianism lay not in specific details of weathering, denudation, or uplift, but in its attitude towards natural history.”⁹² Consider what Hutton was saying. On the basis of his own limited wanderings and observations around Edinburgh, Hutton announced a new theory of change to the world. In doing so, modern commentators have concluded, he created the first truly historical natural science, geology. Hutton challenged the biblical account of Noah’s Flood, the researches and conclusions of the Neptunists and the more cataclysmic Vulcanists, and concluded that what he had seen—slow, even imperceptible geological change—is all men now know. Furthermore, we can assume that such imperceptible change is all any man can know—past, present, and future. Because he had never seen the universal Flood, obviously no one has ever seen one. His operational presupposition was about as sophisticated as the opinion of the Soviet Union’s cosmonaut who announced, after returning from a few revolutions above the earth’s atmosphere, that he had not seen God up there! What Hutton imposed, all in the name of rational historical insight, was the most arrogant and blatant form of what historians call “the tyranny of the present.” What was true in Edinburgh in 1780 was true for the whole world throughout endless eons of time. If any other historical data refute such a claim—the Bible, the almost universal pagan myths concerning a universal Flood, the astoundingly precise calendars of the Babylonians and other ancient cultures, the equally

91. Walter F. Cannon, “The Basis of Darwin’s Achievement: A Revaluation,” *Victorian Studies*, V (1961); reprinted in Philip Appleman (ed.), *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 42.

92. Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1951] 1959), p. 83.

astounding Babylonian astronomical records—then they must be disregarded as insufficiently historical. History is what we can observe here and now, not what primitive people used to think they were observing. Or, as Van Til summarized it, “what my net won’t catch aren’t fish.” Yet what Hutton and his endless troops of defenders have claimed is that he alone was truly empirical, truly concerned with the “facts.” But no fact is allowed which seems to come into direct conflict with Hutton’s deeply religious presupposition that rates of change today have always existed, or at the very least, that we have no evidence that indicates that the rates of change have ever been different.

The prolix, unreadable writing of James Hutton did not convince men to believe in the uniformitarian religion. It was not the testimony of the rocks near Edinburgh that converted the world to a theory of an ancient earth. It was rather the built-in desire of men to escape the revelation of a God who judges men and societies, in time and on earth, as well as on the final day of judgment. They prefer to believe in the tyranny of the present because the past indicates the existence of a God who brings immense, unstoppable judgments upon sinners. *Men prefer the tyranny of the present to the sovereignty of God.* Nothing less than a deeply religious impulse could lead men to accept a presupposition as narrow, parochial, and preposterous as the theory of uniformitarian change. Hutton announced, “today Edinburgh; tomorrow the world—past, present, and future,” and men rushed to join the new anti-millennial religion. Like the Soviet cosmonaut, Hutton just could not see any sign of God in the Edinburgh rocks, and those were the rocks men soon wanted.

3. Lyell’s Uniformitarianism

James Hutton is long forgotten, except by specialists in the history of geology. But his most famous follower, Sir Charles Lyell, cannot be ignored, for it is Lyell’s book, *Principles of Geology* (1830–33), which gave Charles Darwin his operating presuppositions. The son of a botanist, Lyell was by profession a lawyer. He studied geology on the weekends. He was in his early thirties when his multi-volume work was published, and it became an instant classic—indeed, the definitive book. He had been a catastrophist until 1827; three years later, he was the premier uniformitarian in the English-speaking world.

It is not easy to summarize Lyell’s work. He opposed the theory of biological evolution until the late 1860s, yet it was sometime around

1860 that the evangelical Christianity of his youth returned to him.⁹³ His commitment to uniformitarian principles of interpretation led him to view geological processes as if they were part of a huge mechanism. He was familiar with the young science of paleontology; he was aware of the fact that lower strata ("older") often contained species that did not appear in the higher ("younger") strata. This seemed to point to both extinct species and completely new ("recent") species, indicating biological development, given the "fact" of eons of time in between the geological strata. Yet Lyell resisted this conclusion until 1867—nine years after Darwin and Wallace had published their first essays on natural selection and biological evolution. Lyell's opposition to evolution had long vexed Darwin; he could not understand why Lyell resisted the obvious conclusion of the uniformitarian position. As recently as 1958, scholars were still as confused over this as Darwin had been. Lyell's correspondence indicates that he was committed to the idea of final causation—teleology—like most other scientists of his day. He spoke of a "*Presiding Mind*" in an 1836 letter to Sir John Herschel.⁹⁴ This divine intelligence directed any extinctions or new appearances of species that might have taken place in the past. He called these "intermediate causes," and let it go at that. But such interventions by God, direct or indirect, violated the principle of uniformitarian change, since no such intervention is visible today. Thus, concludes the meticulous scholar, A. O. Lovejoy, "once uniformitarianism was accepted, evolutionism became the most natural and most probable hypothesis concerning the origin of the species."⁹⁵ But Lyell insisted (in the 1830s through 1863) on the recent origin of man and the validity, respecting mankind, of the Mosaic record. "He simply did not see," wrote Lovejoy, "that a uniformitarian could not consistently accept special-creationism, and must therefore accept some form of evolutionism."⁹⁶ In the tenth edition of *Principles* (1867), Lyell finally capitulated, becoming a full Darwinian.

93. William Irvine, *Apes, Angels, and Victorians: The Story of Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), p. 139.

94. Quoted by Greene, *Death of Adam*, p. 373, note #6.

95. Lovejoy, "The Argument for Organic Evolution Before the Origin of the Species, 1830–1858," in Glass (ed.), *Forerunners of Darwin*, p. 367.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 373. Gertrude Himmelfarb believed that Lyell was an evolutionist in private. But his private letters also indicate his belief in a "Presiding Mind." He was certainly ambivalent—or epistemologically schizophrenic—but I do not think he was dishonest. See Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith [1959] 1967), pp. 189–93.

Lyell's ultimate faith was in uniformitarianism: unlimited geological time and slow, continuous geological change. This was to override his commitment to special creation (or some unnamed nonevolutionary natural process of species transformation). It was an inescapable either/or situation. Nineteenth-century geological and biological scientists could not forever cling to a God who intervened to rewrite the book on living species, eon after eon, letting the "geological clock" tick for ages in between interventions. *If creationism was not a one-time fiat act of God, it was ludicrous.* The ridiculousness of such a God could not forever be avoided. Here was a God who created creatures, then let them perish; intervening, He created new creatures, and some of them perished. In order to keep the balance of nature going, He intervened over and over through countless ages, adding ever more complex creatures to the earth. Some of these became extinct, but cockroaches and ants survived. He behaved, in Lovejoy's words, like a very lazy and befuddled architect, intervening with endless *ad hoc* plans to reconstruct the jerry-built structure. As Lovejoy wryly commented, "no man outside of a madhouse ever behaved in such a manner as that in which, by this hypothesis, the Creator of the universe was supposed to have behaved."⁹⁷ Yet such a view was orthodox, both theologically and geologically, from 1820–30. Enlightenment rationalism had eroded the Christian foundation of knowledge; Christians had built on a foundation of sand. Darwinism destroyed the structure, but only because the "creationists" had long before gone bankrupt, leasing the grounds temporarily to Lyell until Darwin foreclosed, bringing in the demolition equipment.

What is both baffling and appalling is that so many Christians still cling to Lyell's temporary and hopeless compromise—a compromise he had to abandon in 1867. Geologists who profess orthodoxy still argue that we must accept the results of uniformitarian geology, yet assure us that we do not have to accept organic evolution. In a scholarly journal of a modern Calvinistic seminary we read:

We believe that Scripture does not permit the interpretation of the theistic evolutionist. We do believe that the data of Scripture permit, although they do not require, the view that the days of Genesis one were periods of time of indefinite length. Hence we believe that the products of creation of the various days one through six were not necessarily instantaneously produced in a mature state but were formed over a long period of time. This view does have the advantage

97. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

of permitting the Christian geologist to interpret intelligibly the actual data of geology.⁹⁸

This has the advantage of allowing a geologist who is a Christian to interpret the Bible in terms of the geology and theology of 1840, when some men could still believe in numerous special creations. The geology of 1859 or later, devoid of final causes, purpose, interventions by God, or the need of reconciliation with the Bible, has no space for God's activity in between the autonomous strata of the earth.

Galileo had begun the steady removal by autonomous men of God from His universe. By the 1840s, God's last place of refuge among scientists was in the realm of biology. Uniformitarianism after 1830 had finally removed Him from the rocks. He was allowed His various "special creations" from time to time among living beings. Lovejoy commented: "And while all these miraculous interpositions were taking place in order to keep the organic kingdom in a going condition, the Creator was not for a moment allowed, by most of these geologists (including, as we shall see, Lyell and his followers) to interfere in a similar manner in their own particular province of the inorganic processes. . . . So, in the opinion of most naturalists the only officially licensed area in which miracles might be performed by the Creator was the domain of organic phenomena."⁹⁹ Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* repealed the license even here. Thus, it is a sign of the demoralization and naivete of modern uniformitarian geologists who claim to be Christian in their scholarship, that they expect the methodology of uniformitarianism to be easily restrained. It is supposedly fine for geologists to assume as valid this uniformitarian methodology (as it was in 1840), but biologists nevertheless have to be anti-evolutionists, denying therefore Darwin's overwhelmingly successful-pragmatically speaking-fusion of uniformitarianism and biology. But Darwinianism is not to be denied by compromising Christian biologists today, any more than he could be denied by uniformitarian scholarship in the

98. Davis A. Young, "Some Practical Geological Problems in the Application of the Mature Creation Doctrine," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXXV (Spring 1973), p. 269. He was the son of Edward J. Young, author of *Studies in Genesis One*. A reply to Young's article appeared in the subsequent issue: John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "The Science of Historical Geology in the Light of the Biblical Doctrine of a Mature Creation," *ibid.*, XXXVI (Fall 1973). Young's doctorate was in geology; Whitcomb's was in theology. Whitcomb was co-author of *The Genesis Flood* (1961), the most important book in the revival of the six-day creation view of Genesis, for it helped to develop the market for numerous additional studies along these lines in the 1960s.

99. Lovejoy, in *Forerunners of Darwin*, p. 365.

1870s. Uniformitarian concepts of time are far too potent for half-measures.

The important humanist study, *Forerunners of Darwin* (1959), published on the centenary of the publication of *Origin of Species*, opens with a crucial quotation from the uniformitarian geologist, George Scrope, who in 1858 wrote these memorable words: “The leading idea which is present in all our researches, and which accompanies every fresh observation, the sound which to the ear of the student of Nature seems continually echoed from every part of her works, is—Time! Time! Time!”¹⁰⁰

E. Biological Evolution: Pre-Darwin

The seventeenth century had seen the reappearance of postmillennial eschatology—out of favor ever since the fifth century—which offered Christians new hope. The preaching of the gospel and the establishment of Christian institutions would eventually transform the world ethically, and this ethical transformation would eventually be accompanied by external personal and cultural blessings. This had been the vision of many English Puritans and most of the American colonial Puritans until the pessimism of the 1660s, symbolized by the poetry of Michael Wigglesworth, set in. This vision was to have a revival, unfortunately in more antinomian, “spiritual” forms, through the influence of Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century.¹⁰¹

1. *The Idea of Progress*

Paralleling this biblical optimism was the secular idea of progress of Enlightenment thinkers, especially Frenchmen. By the 1750s, this perspective was becoming a part of the European climate of opinion.¹⁰²

100. Cited by Francis C. Haber, “Fossils and Early Cosmology,” *ibid.*, p. 3.

101. On the Puritans’ postmillennial impulse, see the articles by James Payton, Aletha Gilsdorf, and Gary North in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer 1979); Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966). One of the representative documents of the colonial American period is Edward Johnson’s *Wonder-Working Providence*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1952). Until quite recently, postmillennial thought was a neglected—indeed, completely misunderstood—factor in American history.

102. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (1920), is a standard account of secular optimism.

The idea of stages of historical development fascinated the writers of the day. The cosmological evolutionary schemes of Kant and Laplace were discussed as serious contributions, and Maupertuis and Diderot, the French secularists, offered theories of biological development—"transformism."¹⁰³ Three important features were present in these new theories; without these theoretical axioms, there would have been no reason to assume the evolutionary perspective. First, *change* (not stability) is "natural"—one of the key words of the Enlightenment.¹⁰⁴ Second, the natural order is regular; nature makes no leaps. This is the doctrine of *continuity* (uniformitarianism). Finally, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the method of investigation selected by the progressivists was the *comparative method*. Classification preceded the demonstration of evolutionary change.¹⁰⁵

Classification: this was all-important. Because of the influence of the Greek concept of the *chain of being*, men had long regarded all life as a harmonious interdependence of every species, from God at the top of the chain (or ladder) to the lowest creature. (This presented problems in theory: Are Satan and his angels therefore metaphysically necessary for the operation of the cosmos? Is Satan at the bottom of the scale because of his ethical depravity, or just under God Himself because of his metaphysical power? In fact, if he is totally evil, can he be said to have true existence at all? Questions like these destroyed the jerry-built "medieval synthesis" of Greek philosophy—itsself self-contradictory—and biblical revelation. Even in the eighteenth century, much of the original potency of the concept of the "great chain of being" remained.) But this chain of being was made up of fixed species. There was progress possible *within* one's species, but *not between* the fixed categories. Part of the magical impulse of alchemy was the desire to change lead into gold, not primarily for the sake of wealth, but for the power involved. The magical "philosopher's stone" would enable

103. Bentley Glass, "Maupertuis, Pioneer of Genetics and Evolution," and Lester G. Crocker, "Diderot and Eighteenth Century Transformism," in Glass (ed.), *Forerunners of Darwin*.

104. On the importance of the word "nature" to the eighteenth century, see Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1932). On the way in which "natural history" was used, see Nisbet, *Social Change and History*, ch. 4. It meant, essentially, *conjectural history*, that is, how events would automatically develop "naturally" if there were no "artificial" restraints on them. Developmentalism became biological evolutionism in the nineteenth century.

105. Frederick J. Teggart, *Theory of History* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1925), pp. 129–32.

the magician-scientist to transcend the limits of creation. Thus, the search for the magical talisman; thus, the quest for magical salvation: *metaphysical manipulation* rather than ethical repentance and regeneration was the magician's means of grace.¹⁰⁶ To break the limits of creaturehood!

Enlightenment progressivists now offered a new theory: there had been progress of species through time. There had been development, and to Enlightenment thinkers, it was easy to assume that biological modification implied ethical improvement. There had been progress! And there would continue to be progress, not just politically and economically, but in the very nature of mankind. The religious impulse was clear enough: *there are no longer any fixed barriers in the creation, given sufficient time to transcend them*. The great chain of being could now be temporalized. Heaven was no longer above men; it was in front of mankind chronologically. Genetics would serve as a substitute for the alchemical talisman.

Not many thinkers were convinced by the biological evidence in 1750, or even in 1850. But the *comparative method* which had always been implied in the concept of the great chain of being was now emphasized by a newly developed discipline, *natural history*. The crucial figure in this field in the eighteenth century was the Swedish naturalist, Linnaeus. He possessed an unparalleled reputation in 1750; indeed, after the publication of the first edition of his *Sustema Natura* in 1735, he became world-famous, "a phenomenon rather than a man," as Eiseley put it.¹⁰⁷ He had a mania for naming things, and he created the system of dual names which still exists today, generic and species (which H. L. Mencken used in classifying the *boobus Americanus*). He was not an evolutionist in any sense, but by popularizing comparative anatomy as the means of classification—a method to be applied to every living organism—he added the crucial third axiom of the developmental hypothesis.¹⁰⁸

Buffon's researches also added prestige to the taxonomic research of the mid-eighteenth-century naturalists. But the next major step was half a century away. An obscure mining engineer, William Smith, had created a system of classifying strata in terms of the placement of or-

106. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, chaps. 2, 3.

107. Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, p. 16.

108. Linnaeus did admit, in later years, that nature had a "sportiveness" about her, that is, surprising variations within species. But not even Eiseley or Greene concluded that he ever leaned toward biological developmentalism.

ganic fossils in each layer. “Strata” Smith’s system would be popularized by Rev. William Townsend after 1800. (Ministers would have an important role in natural science for well over a century. Rev. John Ray was the first popular classifier, four decades before Linneaus published. Rev. John Playfair would be the popularizer of James Hutton’s uniformitarianism after 1800. Even Charles Darwin himself had once studied to be a minister.) Smith avoided any theoretical explanation of his system. He hated both speculating and publication. He was a convinced catastrophist. Nevertheless, he had provided the uniformitarians with their necessary yardstick. By fusing Hutton’s time scale and Smith’s progressive fossil beds (“older” fossils in the lower layers), uniformitarians could now argue that they could measure the slow, steady history of the earth.

By 1820, there was hardly a single reputable scientist in the British Isles who was committed to a six-day creation. Both the Neptunists (flooders) and Vulcanists (heaters) believed in long ages preceding man’s appearance on the earth. The Hutton time scale was common property among all the groups. All geologists therefore faced a disturbing problem: the fossil record demonstrated clearly that animals and plants appearing in one layer of the earth often did not appear in lower or higher layers—dinosaurs, for example. This implied extinction. It also implied a series of special creations over eons of time. The “creationism” of the 1820s, by clinging to Hutton’s time scale, was involved in a whole series of difficult, self-imposed dilemmas. We have already discussed them in the previous section: God the lazy architect; uniformitarianism with too many supernatural interventions; catastrophism with too much time to explain and too little emphasis on the great Noahic Flood. (Not that it was ignored, but it was regarded as only one of many important crises; after 1830, the Flood had become a local disaster in Palestine, or the Near East, at most.)

2. *Organic Evolution*

The doctrine of organic evolution was advocated by two thinkers at the turn of the century, Jean Baptiste Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin. Their speculations never proved popular among scientists or laymen. Each came to the conclusion that members of the various species adapted themselves to changes in their environments. This process of adaptation was supposedly hereditary; thus, *the doctrine of acquired characteristics* was born. It was never to be taken seriously officially;

unofficially, it became an escape hatch in the later editions of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. But their major premise, namely, the *unlimited possibility of species variation*, did become the touchstone of Darwinian evolution. It was this premise that broke the spell of the great fixed chain of being.

One of the most important books of the early nineteenth century was Rev. William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802). Paley's work synthesized many of the then-prominent arguments for God's providence on earth. He argued that Newton's clock-like universe offers us testimony to God's sustaining providence. We can see it if only we look at nature's intricate design; the harmonious interdependence of the infinite number of parts assures us that only an omnipotent Creator could have designed, created, and sustained it for all these years. The language of design had become universal by Paley's day, and his book only reinforced an established dogma. Darwin himself had been greatly influenced by Paley's providentialism in his college days, as he admitted much later: "I do not think I hardly ever admired a book more than Paley's 'Natural Theology.' I could almost formerly have said it by heart."¹⁰⁹ At the heart of all these schemes of God's mechanistic providence was the doctrine of final causation: the whole universe was designed to serve the needs of man. All things were planned in advance to further man's affairs; in every being created in the mists of time there were the materials available to deal with the survival of the species. (This posed a serious theoretical problem: how to explain extinct fossils.) The evolutionary form of this doctrine is obviously Lamarckianism: species have the power of adaptation, individual by individual, organ by organ. *Unconscious adaptation* is the mechanism of organic evolution. When Darwin finally broke with Rev. Paley, he therefore also had to break with Lamarckianism, a position which he had never held anyway. Only later, under criticism, did he return to partial Lamarckianism.

3. The Concept of Purpose

Providence implies control by God; control implies purpose. The doctrine of final causation had provided Western man with philosophical purpose since the days of Aristotle.¹¹⁰ For as long as scientists were

109. Darwin to John Lubbock (Nov. 15, 1859); in Francis Darwin (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1887), II, p. 15. (<http://bit.ly/DarwinLife2>)

110. F. S. C. Northrop, "Evolution and Its Relation to the Philosophy of Nature," in

able to cling to the concept of purpose, science would never become fully autonomous. It is safe to say that *the struggle over Darwinian evolution was, above all, a struggle over the concept of purpose.*

Darwin is regarded as the Newton of biological science. Why? Most of his arguments and data had been offered by others much earlier; the crucial arguments had been provided in the much maligned *Vestiges of Creation* (1844).¹¹¹ The answer would appear to be in the purposeless quality of the doctrine of natural selection; it is based on the philosophy of random variations. Biological processes, in theory, can now be subjected to the rigors of mathematical logic, just as Newton subjected all astronomical changes to mathematical law—or thought he had. It was no longer necessary, Darwin and his followers believed, to hypothesize the existence of creation, providence, or final causes. *Therefore, God was seen as no longer a part of the operating hypothesis of biological science.* From the observation that final causes are not necessary for the operations of modern science, it was easy—almost automatic—to conclude that there can be no final causes. “Whatever my net doesn’t catch aren’t fish,” and the net of modern science excludes final causes, both impersonal and personal, but especially personal. Final causation points to God; so does design; hence, let us abolish final causation from the domain of logic and science. If God is to confront us, He must do so only through the non-logical communication of mysticism, ecstasy, encounter, the tongues movement, or some other way which does not confront us in our external, intellectual apostasy. God, being unnecessary to science, was shaved away by the logic of Occam’s razor: needless propositions in any logical statement may be safely ignored.

Lamarck was a representative of the French Enlightenment. In England, after 1789 had brought the French Revolution, it was not popular to be identified with French revolutionaries. After the advent of Napoleon in 1799, it was not popular to be identified with the French, unless it was the “orthodox” comparative anatomist, Cuvier. Lamarck’s arguments were not compelling to conservative Christians or even vague Anglican scholars. He had broken with theological and biological orthodoxy by offering the theory of organic evolution (as

Stow Persons (ed.), *Evolutionary Thought in America* (New York: George Braziller, 1956), pp. 48–54. This was first published in 1950 by Yale University Press. It is a compilation of lectures delivered to the American Civilization Program at Princeton University, 1945–46.

111. Lovejoy, “The Argument for Organic Evolution Before the Origin of Species, 1830–1858,” in Glass (ed.), *Forerunners of Darwin*, pp. 381–410.

had Erasmus Darwin), thus alienating conservatives. Yet he held to the idea of purpose, however remote, in arguing for the unconscious adaptation of species to the environment. He had not gone far enough to propose a true “scientific revolution.” Too heretical for the conservatives, too providential for any potential atheists and “total autonomy” investigators, the doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics died for want of takers. It survived after 1859 only because Charles Darwin’s mechanism of natural selection had washed all traces of purpose from its exterior, and after 1900, the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics finally buried it.

There were other possibilities for an earlier conversion to biological evolution, but none took hold. Hegel’s thought was one of these, but the discontinuous “leaps” of nature that he proposed alienated uniformitarians.¹¹² In Germany, the close association of romanticism and evolutionary thought alienated the professional biologists, most of whom were increasingly mechanistic in outlook.¹¹³ Darwin’s theory was truly a scientific revolution.

4. A “Higher” View of God

The defeat of orthodox creationism was not an overnight event. One of the most interesting features of this steady retreat between 1750 and 1859 was the rallying cry of each successive capitulation: the “higher” view of God involved, or the “deeper” understanding of His providence. Six days just did not do justice to God; He must have showered His providence on His creation for millions of extra years. If only we accept the action of God’s primeval sea, the Neptunists said, plus a less comprehensive impact of the flood. If only we accept God’s activity in unleashing volcanoes and internal heat, said the Vulcanists. If only we will admit the effects of the flood and earthquakes, said the catastrophists of the 1820s. If only we allow God the right to create new species from eon to eon, the uniformitarians said. If only we do these things, then the introduction of vast geologic time will not harm us. *At each step, the name of God was invoked.* Men were not to be limited by the confines of God’s six-day creation; God is unlimited.

The “unlimited” God of geologic time steadily retreated from the scene. The “unlimited” God was steadily replaced by unlimited time.

112. Northrop, *Evolutionary Thought*, pp. 61–68.

113. Owsei Temkin, “The Idea of Descent in Post-Romantic German Biology: 1848–1858,” *Forerunners of Darwin*, ch. 12.

Time was not seen as personal; time was not seen as calling men to repentance. Time seemed holy and magnifying, but most of all, it seemed *safe*. This centrality of time is understood by today's evolutionists; "respectable" Christian geologists—geologists who may be regenerate—have never grasped the fact. Wrote Gillispie:

From both the empirical and the interpretative points of view, the progress of geological science in the first half of the nineteenth century was an essential prelude to the formulation of a successful theory of biological evolution. There had, of course, been a number of more or less fanciful evolutionary schemes suggested ever since the middle of the eighteenth century. In [Thomas H.] Huxley's opinion, however, these speculative proposals had little influence on scientific thinking, and it was rather Lyell's work which was primarily responsible for smoothing the road for Darwin, so that from this standpoint it is James Hutton and not Lamarck who ought to be considered Darwin's intellectual ancestor. . . . But uniformitarianism as an attitude toward the course of nature could not be carried to its logical conclusion in a theory of organic evolution until a formulation sufficiently scientific to be compelling could attack the idea of a governing Providence in its last refuge, the creation of new species, and drive it right out of the whole field of natural history.¹¹⁴

Men abandoned creationism step by step, not overnight.

Gillispie went on to argue that it was the commitment to providentialism that kept the idea of immutable species in the canons of biological orthodoxy: design implied fixed species. *Step by step, uniformitarianism removed God from the earth's history*. "And after each successive retreat, providential empiricists took up positions on new ground, which their own researches were simultaneously cutting out from under them."¹¹⁵ Not starting with God as the presupposition of their empirical researches, not starting with God's self-justifying revelation in the Bible, the supposedly neutral scientists—operating as they were in terms of non-Christian methodologies—found that their own logic drove them into the waiting arms of infinite time and random change. Not starting with God, they could not logically wind up with God—not the God of the Bible, at least.

No document can be found that better demonstrates this "higher view of God" than Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation*. More than

114. Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology*, pp. 217–18. See also Francis C. Haber, *The Age of the World: Moses to Darwin* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959).

115. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

any other scientific work, though produced by an amateur scientist, this one prepared the public's mind for Darwin. Not even Herbert Spencer's evolutionism was more important. How did Chambers defend his researches? First, he defended the Mosaic record as being most in conformity with his views. Then he said that it was God's expressions of will, not His direct activities, that brought forth the creation. (He ignored, of course, the orthodox doctrine of the verbal creation, that is, the response out of nothing to the command of God.) God created all life; Chambers stated that he took this for granted. "In what way was the creation of animated beings effected? The ordinary notion [that is, the debased doctrine of successive creations over endless ages—G.N.] may, I think, be described as this,—that the Almighty Author produced the progenitors of all existing species by some sort of personal or immediate exertion." So, he allowed God to create life. But he then proceeded to ridicule the "orthodox" creationism of his day, that disastrous fusion of geologic time, uniformitarian change with successive creations:

How can we suppose an immediate exertion of this creative power at one time to produce zoophytes, another time to add a few marine mollusks, another to bring in one or two crustacea, again to produce crustaceous fishes, again perfect fishes, and so on to the end? This would surely be to take a very mean view of the Creative Power. . . . And yet this would be unavoidable; for that the organic creation was thus progressive through a long space of time, rests on evidence which nothing can overturn or gainsay. Some other idea must then be come to with regard to *the mode* in which the Divine Author proceeded in the organic creation.¹¹⁶

It should be obvious that the progression described by Chambers is correct: given the idea of vast geological time, fossils distributed in layers, and uniformitarian change—and it was, by 1840, a single idea—God's creative interventions do look foolish. So, he offered new mode of creation: *organic evolution*. In two sentences, Chambers took his readers from Newton's cosmic impersonalism for the heavens (not that Newton intended such a conclusion) into a hypothetically impersonal world of biological law: "We have seen powerful evidence, that the construction of this globe and its associates, and inferentially that of all the other globes of space, was the result, not of any immediate or

116.[Robert Chambers], *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, 4th ed. (Soho, London: John Churchill, 1845), pp. 157–58. It sold 24,000 copies, 1844–60: Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, p. 133.

personal exertion on the part of the Deity, but of natural laws which are expressions of his will. What is to hinder our supposing that the organic creation is also a result of natural laws, which are in like manner an expression of his will?¹¹⁷ Only one thing was to inhibit such a supposition: *there was too much of God's will in the picture*. When Darwin substituted natural selection through random variation, there would no longer be any hindrance to the supposition in the minds of "liberated" scientists—liberated from the doctrine of final causation or design. Chambers prepared the way for Darwin among the public even as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. And, like John the Baptist, he did it in the name of God, he thought.

To a reasonable mind the Divine attributes must appear, not diminished or reduced in any way, by supposing a creation by law, but infinitely exalted. It is the narrowest of all views of the Deity, and characteristic of a humble class of intellects, to suppose him constantly acting in particular ways for particular occasions. It, for one thing, greatly detracts from his foresight, the most undeniable of all the attributes of Omnipotence. It lowers him towards the level of our own humble intellects. . . . Those who would object to the hypothesis of a creation by the intervention of law, do not perhaps consider how powerful an argument in favour of the existence of God is lost by rejecting this doctrine.¹¹⁸

Men adopted heresy in the name of a "higher orthodoxy."

Odd, is it not? With every so-called strengthening of the idea of God, He became less and less important to the affairs of men. With each "elevated concept" of God's sovereign power, He became less and less relevant for the activities of empirical scientists. This "exalted" conception of God was to collapse into oblivion a decade and a half later, when Charles Darwin finally made biology autonomous.

F. Biological Evolution: Darwinism

Early in the year 1858, Alfred Russel Wallace lay on his bed on the island of Ternate in the Dutch East Indies, suffering from what he later described as "a sharp attack of intermittent fever." Because of hot and cold fits, he had to lie down, "during which time I had nothing to do but think over any subjects then particularly interesting to me." So, in the midst of some tropical fever, with nothing else to while away his

117. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

118. *Ibid.*, pp. 160–61.

time, Wallace discovered the principle of organic development through natural selection, the theory which shook the world. Somewhere in between 98.7 degrees Fahrenheit and delirium, modern secularism's most important theory of human autonomy was born. It was an auspicious beginning.¹¹⁹

Wallace had been thinking about the problem for almost a decade. He had wondered why some men live and some men die. "And the answer was clearly, that on the whole the best fitted live." He might have said simply, those who survive do, in fact, survive. But that would never have satisfied a scientist like Wallace. "From the effects of disease the most healthy escaped"—you can't fault his logic here, certainly—"from enemies, the strongest, the swiftest, or the most cunning; from famine, the best hunters or those with the best digestion; and so on." A skeptic might not be very impressed so far, but you have to remember that the man was suffering from a fever. "Then it suddenly flashed upon me that this self-acting process would necessarily *improve the race*, because in every generation the inferior would inevitably be killed and the superior would remain—that is, *the fittest would survive*."¹²⁰ This is the Darwinian theory of evolution, without its footnotes, intricate arguments, flank-covering, and graphs.

There are two answers to this perspective. *First*, the absolute sovereignty of God: "So then it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). The other is that of the *philosophy of pure contingency*, described so wonderfully in Ecclesiastes: "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" (Eccl. 9:11–12).¹²¹

Pure contingency or God's sovereignty: neither satisfied Alfred Russel Wallace, Charles Darwin, and the myriad of their monograph-writing followers. Somewhere in the randomness that overtakes the individual, the evolutionists believe, there has to be some stability: impersonal, laws-of-probability-obeying stability. Thomas Huxley, Dar-

119. Alfred Russel Wallace, *My Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905), I, p. 361.

120. *Ibid.*, I, p. 362.

121. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 35.

win's unofficial hatchet-man and progenitor of that remarkable family of professional skeptics—skeptics except where evolution was concerned—stated his faith quite eloquently: chance is really quite orderly, all things considered, and totally sovereign in any case. Here is the testament of modern evolutionary thought.

It is said that he [Darwin] supposes variation to come about “by chance,” and that the fittest survive the “chances” of the struggle for existence, and thus “chance” is substituted for providential design.

It is not a little wonderful that such an accusation as this should be brought against a writer who has, over and over again, warned his readers that when he uses the word “spontaneous,” he merely means that he is ignorant of the cause of that which is so termed; and whose whole theory crumbles to pieces if the uniformity and regularity of natural causation of illimitable past ages is denied. But probably the best answer to those who talk of Darwinism meaning the reign of “chance” is to ask them what they themselves understand by “chance”? Do they believe that anything in this universe happens without reason or without a cause? Do they really conceive that any event has no cause, and could not have been predicted by anyone who had a sufficient insight into the order of Nature? If they do, it is they who are the inheritors of antique superstition and ignorance, and whose minds have never been illuminated by a ray of scientific thought. The one act of faith in the convert to science, is the confession of the universality of order and of the absolute validity in all times and under all circumstances, of the law of causation. This confession is an act of faith, because, by the nature of the case, the truth of such propositions is not susceptible of proof. But such faith is not blind, but reasonable; because it is invariably confirmed by experience, and constitutes the sole trustworthy foundation for all action.¹²²

At least he called this view what it was: *faith*.

This is one of the endearing qualities about science, especially nineteenth-century, pre-Heisenberg science: its candid lack of modesty.¹²³ We know where Huxley stood—at the vanguard of irrefutable

122. T. H. Huxley, “On the Reception of ‘Origin of Species’” (1887), in Francis D. Darwin (ed.), *Life & Letters of Charles Darwin*, 2vols. (New York: Appleton, 1887), I, p. 553. (<http://bit.ly/DarwinLife1>).

123. Werner Heisenberg, an influential physicist of the early twentieth century, destroyed the Newtonian view of the universe. Instead of a mathematically regular, precise world, the modern conception is that of a world governed by the highly improbable laws of probability. Radical contingency was substituted for Newtonian order. Individual events are random; only aggregates can be dealt with statistically—order in the aggregate out of chaos in the individual. Huxley’s faith is, by twentieth-cen-

truth—because he told us so.

Wallace was so confident in the truth of what he had discovered that he could hardly contain himself. “I waited anxiously for the termination of my fit so that I might at once make notes for a paper on the subject.” His fit-induced paper was completed post-haste and sent to his acquaintance, Charles Darwin, who was working on the same problem that had occupied Wallace’s mind for so long.

1. Darwin’s Response: Despair

When Darwin read the paper, he was crestfallen. He wrote despondently to Charles Lyell:

Your words have come true with a vengeance—that I should be forestalled. You said this, when I explained to you here very briefly my views of “Natural Selection” depending on the struggle for existence. I never saw a more striking coincidence; if Wallace had my MS. [manuscript] sketch written out in 1842, he could not have made a better short abstract! Even his terms now stand as heads of my chapters. . . . So all my originality, whatever it may amount to, will be smashed. . . .¹²⁴

Actually, Darwin should not have worried about Wallace’s paper and its possible effects on Darwin’s claim of originality. The theory had already been offered back in 1813 by William Wells, in a paper delivered before the Royal Society of London, and it immediately sank into oblivion. Furthermore, another obscure writer, Patrick Matthew, had outlined a very similar theory in an appendix to an 1831 book on timber.¹²⁵ But in 1858, few scientists remembered these papers.

He offered to have Wallace’s paper added to a summary of his own—carefully selected from a pre-1858 pile of notes, just to make certain that nobody would forget who had the idea first—and they were published in the *Journal of the Linnean Society*, Zoology, Vol. III (1858).¹²⁶

tury standards, hopelessly naive. For a superb study of modern physics, see the article by the Nobel prize winner, Eugene Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>) Basically, the pessimism of Ecclesiastes 9:11–12 comes closer to modern temper than Huxley’s optimism.

124. Darwin to Lyell (June 18, 1858), *Life & Letters*, I, p. 473.

125. Darwin gave belated recognition to Wells and Matthew (among a long list of others, thereby downplaying their importance) in his “Historical Sketch,” added to the third (1861) edition of the *Origin*.

126. Reprinted in Appleman (ed.), *Darwin*, pp. 81–97. Arnold Brackman argued persuasively that Charles Lyell and Joseph Dalton Hooker, Darwin’s friends, set up the

The fate of these path-breaking, revolutionary papers was identical to those published by Wells and Matthew: they sank beneath the surface without a trace. No angry rebuttals, no outraged theologians, nothing. So much for the impact of scholarly journals on nineteenth-century society (and perhaps today).

The matter might have ended there, an obscure footnote in some obscure Ph.D. dissertation (which is the fate of most scholarly articles published in obscure academic journals), had it not been for Darwin's willingness to bring his *Origin of Species* to a conclusion. It was published on November 24, 1859, and it sold out the entire edition of 1,250 copies in one day.¹²⁷ This must have surprised the publisher, John Murray, who had begged Darwin to write a book on pigeons instead.¹²⁸ The reading public, which had purchased 24,000 copies of *Vestiges of Creation*, in marked contrast to the subscribers to the *Journal of the Linnean Society*, obviously was in tune to the times. (Or, in Darwinian terminology, was better adapted to the intellectual environment.)

2. *Why Such Success?*

There can be no question about the book's impact. It launched an intellectual revolution. Many historians and scientists have tried to grasp this instant success, and few can. It was an unpredictable fluke, by human standards. Thomas Huxley remarked years later that the principle of natural selection was so clear, so obvious, that he could not understand why he had not thought of it before. This was the reaction of most of the academic community. For about a year, the reviews in professional magazines were hostile. One exception—"by chance"—was the review in the *Times*, which had been assigned to a staff reviewer, and had in turn been referred to Huxley when he had decided that it was too technical for him to review. Thus, the December 26, 1859 review was very favorable.¹²⁹ Yet at first it had not appeared that Darwin's victory would prove so easy. Huxley wrote much later: "On the

"delicate arrangement" whereby Darwin got the credit for discovering the principle of evolution through natural selection. They had the extracts from Darwin's notes read at the Linnean Society meeting, along with Wallace's paper. Brackman, *A Delicate Arrangement: The Strange Case of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace* (New York: Times Books, 1980).

127. *Life & Letters*, II, p. 1. (<http://bit.ly/DarwinLife2>)

128. Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, p. 252.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

whole, then, the supporters of Mr. Darwin's views in 1860 were numerically extremely insignificant. There is not the slightest doubt that, if a general council of the Church scientific had been held at that time, we should have been condemned by an overwhelming majority."¹³⁰ By 1869, the Church scientific (except in France) was in Darwin's camp.¹³¹

Darwin knew in 1859 just what is needed to pull off an academic revolution: younger scientists and the support of laymen. He went after both, and he won. As he wrote to one correspondent within two weeks of the publication of the *Origin*, "we are now a good and compact body of really good men, and mostly not old men. In the long run we shall conquer."¹³² He was like a troop commander, sending copies with accompanying personal letters to most of the eminent scientific figures in Europe and America.¹³³ Laymen may not have converted the scientists, as Himmelfarb noted, but they helped to create the climate of opinion in which both laymen and professionals worked.¹³⁴

Good tactics will seldom win a world war. Why did Darwin and his book succeed so completely? *Because the various geological theories had already undermined the traditional faith of Christians in the historical accuracy of the Bible.* Huxley may have been correct in his complaint that nine-tenths of the civilized world was Christian in 1860; he was not correct when he also complained that the Bible was accepted "as the authoritative standard of fact and the criterion of the justice of scientific conclusions, in all that relates to the origin of things, and, among them, of species."¹³⁵ If it had been true, then Huxley's 1871 pronouncement would not have been very likely: ". . . this much is certain, that, in a dozen years, the 'Origin of Species' has worked as complete a revolution in biological science as the 'Principia' [of Isaac Newton] did in astronomy. . . ."¹³⁶ Himmelfarb's assessment is closer to the mark: "Thus the 1850s, which have been apotheosized as the most tranquil, prosperous, and assured of all decades in English history, were, in fact, a period of intense spiritual anxiety and intellectual restlessness."¹³⁷ The geology question had disturbed many thinking Christians. As a specialist in the history of Victorian England, her words have to be

130. *Life & Letters*, I, p. 540.

131. Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, pp. 304–9.

132. Darwin to Carpenter (Dec. 3, 1859), *Life & Letters*, II, p. 34.

133. Irvine, *Apes, Angels & Victorians*, p. 114.

134. Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, p. 296.

135. Huxley, *Westminster Review* (1860); in Appleman (ed.), *Darwin*, p. 435.

136. Huxley, *Quarterly Review* (1871); *ibid.*, p. 438.

137. Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, p. 239.

taken seriously: "What the Origin did was to focus and stimulate the religious and nihilist passions of men. Dramatically and urgently, it confronted them with a situation that could no longer be evaded, a situation brought about not by anyone scientific discovery, nor even by science as a whole, but by an antecedent condition of religious and philosophical turmoil. The Origin was not so much the cause as the occasion of the upsurge of these passions."¹³⁸ With this kind of religious and spiritual assessment of Darwin's impact, it is not surprising to find, as late as 1969, a deservedly obscure evolutionary scientist warning his readers to "beware" of books like Himmelfarb's.¹³⁹ She points to the religious roots of Darwin's success.

3. *A Slow Starter*

Charles Darwin had not been a bright child; he had not been ambitious, either. His father had despaired of him for years. He had studied to be a physician, like his father, but had given it up. He had studied to be a minister, but had given that up, too. At the end of his university career, he had developed a fondness for natural science under the direction of Prof. J. S. Henslow, the Cambridge botanist. Henslow secured for Darwin a position as naturalist for the voyage of the *H. M. S. Beagle*, a five-year cruise which changed Darwin's life, as he freely admitted. Henslow also recommended that Darwin read Lyell's newly published first volume of *Principles of Geology*, although Henslow warned against its uniformitarian thesis. The warning went unheeded. At the first port of call for the ship, in early 1832, Darwin's observation of the St. Jago volcanic mountains and boulders, coupled with the uniformitarian vision of Lyell, converted him.

The voyage lasted from late 1831 through the fall of 1836. During that time Darwin collected, classified, made many notes, read books, speculated endlessly, and vomited (he was seasick throughout the trip). He sent reports back to England about his findings, and the ready market made by the geologizing mania saw to it that these essays were published and read. He returned to England a mildly prominent fellow. And, like other slow-starting sons, he undoubtedly could face his father—who had opposed the trip in the first place—with a good deal more confidence.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 400.

139. Michael T. Ghiselin, *The Triumph of the Darwinian Method* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 8, and footnote #19, p. 251.

Darwin always regarded himself as a truly empirical investigator, a man in the tradition of Francis Bacon, the philosopher of scientific empiricism. He wanted to be known as a “fact man.” He freely admitted in his autobiography that he had difficulty in following long, abstract arguments.¹⁴⁰ Commenting many years later on his early researches, he proclaimed: “My first note-book was opened in July 1837. I worked on true Baconian principles, and without any theory collected facts on a wholesale scale. . . .”¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, he wrote to Wallace in 1857 that “I am a firm believer that without speculation there is no good and original observation.”¹⁴² In 1860, he wrote to Lyell that “without the making of theories I am convinced there would be no observation.”¹⁴³ Thus, we can side safely with Himmelfarb’s judgment: “As the notebooks amply demonstrate, he was speculating boldly from the very beginning of this period [1837], and his speculations were all directed to a particular theory -that of mutability. What is impressive about these early notebooks is not the patient marshaling of the evidence, which in fact was conspicuously absent, but rather the bold and spirited character of his thought. What clearly urged him on was theory capable of the widest extension and a mind willing to entertain any idea, however extravagant.”¹⁴⁴

In the fall of 1838, Darwin read Rev. Thomas Malthus’ classic study in political economy, *An Essay on the Principles of Population* (1798). This, he later said, transformed him. Malthus’ hypothesis of a geometrically expanding population pressing against an arithmetically expanding food supply convinced him that the key to the species question is the struggle for existence. It is doubly interesting that Wallace admitted that it was his recollection of Malthus’ theory, during his fever, that triggered his formulation of the theory of natural selection. Once again, a minister had been crucial—indirectly, this time—in the steady progress of the theory of evolution. Darwin’s theory was basically complete as early as 1838. Lest we forget the circumstances of this intellectual breakthrough:

Darwin was only twenty-nine and barely out of his apprenticeship, so to speak, when, by this second leap of imagination, his theory took full shape. If this chance reading—or misreading—of Malthus, like

140. *Life & Letters*, I, p. 82.

141. *Ibid.*, I, p. 68.

142. *Ibid.*, I, p. 465.

143. *Ibid.*, I, p. 108.

144. Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, p. 156.

his first general speculations about evolution, seems too fortuitous a mode of inspiration, the fault may lie not with Darwin but with the conventional notion of scientific discovery. The image of the passionless, painstaking scientist following his data blindly, and provoked to a new theory only when the facts can no longer accommodate the old, turns out to be, in the case of Darwin as of others, largely mythical.¹⁴⁵

There was another relevant coincidence during this period. Between 1836 and 1839, Darwin simultaneously lost his early faith in the accuracy of the Bible,¹⁴⁶ and he became afflicted with an unnamed physical sickness that remained with him for the remainder of his life, some 45 years. The sickness weakened him, so that he seldom left his home, could see few visitors, and could work only a few hours each day.¹⁴⁷ Thomas Huxley was also afflicted with a lifelong “internal pain” and “hypochondriacal dyspepsia,” and like Darwin’s burden, it had come upon him within a year or two after he had abandoned his faith (a loss which occurred when he was eleven or twelve years old).¹⁴⁸ Most of Darwin’s children suffered from this same affliction (one son, his namesake, was feeble-minded, and died very young—not a surprising event in the family life of a man who had married his first cousin). William, his eldest son, like his father, was never one to take needless chances with the weather. At his father’s funeral in Westminster Abbey, which was unfortunately conducted under cloudy skies, William sat with his gloves on top of his bald head, keeping out unnecessary drafts.¹⁴⁹

It took Darwin 20 years to piece together the evidence for the theory he had decided was true at age 29, including eight years in classifying barnacles. (Non-evolutionists may fault his biological theory, but one thing is certain: that man knew his barnacles!) He had published

145. *Ibid.*, p. 66. See also Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1970) and James D. Watson, *The Double Helix* (New York: New American Library, 1969). This last book is an autobiographical account of one of the co-discoverers of the DNA molecule, the second major breakthrough of modern genetics (Mendel’s was the first). Watson shows how many unscientific factors, including (humanly speaking) pure luck, go into a major intellectual discovery.

146. *Life & Letters*, I, p. 227.

147. Irvine, *Apes*, pp. 53, 124, 162, 200, 229.

148. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12. Irvine thought that it was Huxley’s witnessing of an autopsy at age 14 that triggered his life-long physical disturbances, an odd feature in the life of a self-proclaimed expert in biology. I think Irvine was incorrect.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 229; Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, p. 441.

an account of his voyage, plus numerous articles and monographs, but he told only close friends of his doubts concerning the fixity of the species. In the early stages of his labors, all he claimed to be asking was fair hearing for his theory as one among many.¹⁵⁰ He admitted the “many huge difficulties on this view” to Asa Grey, the noted American scientist.¹⁵¹ Cautious, patient, modest to a fault: this is the legend of Charles Darwin. And modesty was a wise tactic, given the paucity of his position. In 1863, four years after the publication of the *Origin*, he wrote to one correspondent: “When we descend to details, we can prove that no one species has changed [i.e. we cannot prove that a single species has changed]—[note: apparently added by Francis Darwin, the editor]; nor can we prove that the supposed changes are beneficial, which is the groundwork of the theory. Nor can we explain why some species have changed and others have not.”¹⁵² Therefore, he warned, we must “always remember our ignorance.” But in 1871, his *Descent of Man* carefully defined the “neutral” ground on which the discussion of species would henceforth be conducted: “But it is a hopeless endeavor to decide this point, until some definition of the term ‘species’ is generally accepted; and the definition must not include an indeterminate element such as an act of creation.”¹⁵³ His modesty had earlier overcome him in the *Origin*: “Thus, on the theory of descent with modification, the main facts with respect to the mutual affinities of the extinct forms of life to each other and to living forms, are explained in a satisfactory manner. And they are wholly inexplicable on any other view.”¹⁵⁴ However, he was quite willing to debate the details with all comers, so long as they were willing to be truly scientific. Therefore, let all good men join hands and march under the banner unfurled in 1969 by Michael Ghiselin, when he reminded us all that “Darwin was a master of scientific method.”¹⁵⁵ Let us all “beware” of Miss Himmelfarb’s book, taking care to read the one book Dr. Ghiselin thinks is an adequate biography of Darwin, in which we learn of the “extremes of hypocrisy and self-contradiction” of Darwin’s nineteenth-century critics, as well as the “venomous and confused counterattacks”

150. Darwin to Jenyns (1845?), *Life & Letters*, I, p. 394.

151. Darwin to Gray (July 20, 1856), *ibid.*, I, p. 437.

152. Darwin to G. Bentham (May 22, 1863), *ibid.*, II p. 210.

153. Darwin, *The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man* (Modern Library, 2 vols. in one): *Descent*, ch. 11, p. 268.

154. Darwin, *Origin*, ch. 11, p. 268.

155. Ghiselin, *Triumph*, p. 4.

these men used.¹⁵⁶ If we do all these things, we shall become truly adapted to our intellectual environment, and we shall prosper—for as long as that climate of opinion survives.

4. *Indeterminacy*

The technical details of Darwin's thought are best left to professional biologists. But we can consider the operating presuppositions and practical conclusions that Darwin set forth. Three of these are *indeterminacy*, *continuity*, and *cosmic impersonalism*.

The heart of the Darwinian system is *indeterminacy*. The universe is a chance event. Darwin was self-conscious in his commitment to randomness. Take, for example, his definition of species, the origin of which his book was intended to demonstrate. *There is no definition of species*.¹⁵⁷ This is Darwin's chief contribution to biological science. He denied that there are any limits on genetic variation within the arbitrarily defined group called species. "Slow though the process of selection may be, if feeble man can do much by artificial selection, I can see no limit to the amount of change. . . ."¹⁵⁸ The great chain of being, with its separate and permanent links, has become a multi-tiered escalator. The second chapter of the *Origin* reiterates this theme over and over: there are no reliable definitions (although, as we have already seen, there are unreliable definitions: creationists' definitions). "Nor shall I here discuss the various definitions which have been given of the term species. No one definition has satisfied all naturalists; yet every naturalist knows vaguely what he means when he speaks of a species." (This is vaguely reminiscent of the old line, "I can't define art, but I know what I like." Unfortunately, Darwin is regarded as the Newton of biology.)

We are no better off when we seek his definition of that other crucial term, "variety": "The term 'variety' is almost equally difficult to define. . . ."¹⁵⁹ In short, to clear things up once and for all: "From these remarks it will be seen that I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given, for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms. The term variety, again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is

156. Irvine, *Apes*, p. 88; Ghiselin's recommendation: p. 8.

157. This is comparable to Karl Marx's refusal ever to define "class."

158. Darwin, *Origin*, ch. 4, p. 82.

159. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 38.

also applied arbitrarily, for convenience' sake."¹⁶⁰ Got that? Excellent!

The biblical account of Genesis 1:24–25 indicates one very good definition: reproduction. Buffon's definition corresponded with this one fairly closely: no infertile progeny. A perfect definition may no longer be possible in a post-Fall age; the ground has been cursed, and "nature" is no longer normative, even as a fool-proof pointer to the truth. But Buffon's position is so vastly superior for operational purposes in day-to-day experiments that one can only conclude that the professional preference for Darwin's indeterminate definition rests on a deeply religious commitment: *evolutionary change in an indeterminate universe*. When a variety is simply an "incipient species,"¹⁶¹ and species is undefined, it is no feat of genius to conclude that it is possible for varieties to vary and species to change. Everything is in flux.

5. Continuity

Darwin was a theologian of the continuity of life. While he never faced the issue squarely, later evolutionists have concluded that organic life stemmed from inorganic matter. Thus, *Darwinism is the theology of the continuity of everything*. All "being" is basically one. Huxley was quite correct when he called Darwinian evolution "the revived thought of ancient Greece."¹⁶² This is the old Greek denial of a fundamental difference between God and the creation. *This doctrine of continuity destroyed the semi-creationism of the early nineteenth century*. There could be no special creations in the world's history. To argue that such events could have occurred was to argue against the logic of uniformitarian science. Modern "Theistic evolutionists" and "successive creationists" may not grasp this fact, but Darwin and his followers did. God's activities could no longer have any measurable effect in time. Eiseley made his point forcefully:

As one studies these remarks, and many like them, one can observe that the continuity in nature which had been maintained by Sir Charles Lyell against the catastrophists in geology has now been extended to the living world. The stability of natural law, first glimpsed in the heavens, had been by slow degrees extended to the work of waves and winds that shape the continents. Finally, through the long cycles of erosion and the uneasy stirring of the ocean beds, it was be-

160. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 46.

161. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 51.

162. Huxley, "On the Reception of the 'Origin of Species,'" *Life & Letters of Darwin* (ed.), I, p. 534.

ginning dimly to be seen that life itself had passed like a shifting and ephemeral apparition across the face of nature. Nor could that elusive phantom be divorced from man himself, the great subject, as even Darwin once remarked. If fin and wing and hoof led backward toward some ancient union in the vertebrate line, then the hand of man and ape could be scanned in the same light. Even had they wished, the scientists could not stop short at the human boundary. A world, a dream world which had sustained human hearts for many centuries, was about to pass away. It was a world of design.¹⁶³

The continuity of change was as dear to Darwin as the continuity of being. Uniformitarianism pervaded all of his writings. Nature, he asserted, "can never take a great and sudden leap, but must advance by short and sure, though slow steps."¹⁶⁴ Admittedly, "The mind cannot possibly grasp the full meaning of the term of even a million years; it cannot add up and perceive the full effects of many slight variations, accumulated during an almost infinite number of generations." But even though the mind cannot grasp this, we are expected to drop our unwarranted prejudices against what we cannot grasp, and accept it. "Whoever is led to believe that species are mutable will do good service by conscientiously expressing his conviction; for thus only can the load of prejudice by which this subject is overwhelmed be removed."¹⁶⁵ We should not "hide our ignorance" by using terms like "plan of creation" or "unity of design." Instead, we should stand firm alongside those "few naturalists, endowed with flexibility of mind, and who have already begun to doubt the immutability of species," and wrap our newly flexible minds around a concept of uniformitarian change which no mind can grasp.¹⁶⁶ This, you understand, is the scientific method.

6. Cosmic Impersonalism

The third feature of Darwin's thought is cosmic impersonalism. Obviously, this is the product of both his philosophy of indeterminacy and uniformitarianism. They are intertwined. There is no personal God in Darwin's system who can in any way affect the operations of random variation and statistical natural law. In general, this is regarded as the heart of the system. Biology, the last refuge of a personal God, was finally cleared of this embarrassing influence.

163. Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, p. 194.

164. Darwin, *Origin*, ch. 6, p. 144.

165. *Ibid.*, ch. 15, p. 368.

166. *Idem.*

While he regarded nature as wholly impersonal, Darwin was never able to escape the language of personification in describing natural processes. The very phrase “natural selection” implied an active power, as he admitted, but he reminded his readers that this was simply a metaphor. But metaphors are powerful devices, however candid Darwin’s admission may have been. It made the transition from cosmic personalism to cosmic impersonalism that much easier. “So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature; but I mean by Nature, only the aggregate action and project of many natural laws, and by laws the sequence of events as ascertained by US.”¹⁶⁷ The obvious conclusion is that his doctrine of natural law is completely nominalistic: we humans make the laws, since we observe and interpret the data of observation. We hope that the regularities “out there” conform to our vision of them, but how do we know? As he had written to his old teacher, Henslow, after five months at sea on the *Beagle*: “One great source of perplexity to me is an utter ignorance whether I note the right facts, and whether they are of sufficient importance to interest others.”¹⁶⁸ And how do we know our theories are correct, once we have selected the facts? Furthermore, “it is lamentable,” as he wrote to Wallace, “how each man draws his own different conclusions from the very same facts.”¹⁶⁹ Charles Darwin had a naive view of law, or else a grimly skeptical estimation of the public’s ability to bother about its intellectual nakedness, one way or the other.

To erase God from the universe of phenomena, he had to erase teleology, the doctrine of final causation. He went as far as the following admission to sweep away any trace of final cause: “There is no evidence, as was remarked in the last chapter, of the existence of any law of necessary development.”¹⁷⁰ No necessary law of development; no necessary anything: the whole universe is random. How long should a species survive? “No fixed law seems to determine the length of time during which any single species or any single genus endures.”¹⁷¹ We are quite ignorant concerning the laws of variation within species.¹⁷² (He need not have been so ignorant; Mendel’s famous paper on genetics was available in 1865, prior to the sixth edition of the *Origin*, but none of Darwin’s contemporaries ever saw the significance of it, al-

167. *Ibid.*, ch. 4, p. 64.

168. Darwin to Henslow (May 18, 1832), *Life & Letters*, I, p. 208.

169. Darwin to Wallace (May 1, 1857), *ibid.*, I, p. 453.

170. Darwin, *Origin*, ch. 12, p. 281.

171. *Ibid.*, ch. 11, p. 259.

172. *Ibid.*, ch. 6, p. 147.

though reprints were sent to many scientific men. This truly great advance in biological science was not spectacular enough to be visible amidst the evolution controversy.) Darwin's view of nature's laws was indeterminate, however much he disliked the implications. *He suffered with indeterminacy in order to maintain his cosmic impersonalism.*

He was convinced that chance governs the variability of any genetic (he did not use the term, of course) inheritance.¹⁷³ Time, he said, is important only to give scope to selection.¹⁷⁴ And, wonder of wonders, "We have almost unlimited time. . . ."¹⁷⁵ (He was forced to give up his open checkbook of time when Lord Kelvin, the physicist, offered his theory of heat loss for the earth, which Darwin thought he had to accept: 300,000,000 years of organic life in the first edition of the *Origin* disappeared in later editions. Instead, we read: "Unfortunately we have no means of determining, according to the standards of years, how long a period it takes to modify a species...."¹⁷⁶) Yet it appalled him to argue for an indeterminate universe, with or without unlimited quantities of time in which chance could operate. To Asa Gray, who never abandoned his faith in God's design in nature, he confessed: "I am conscious that I am in an utterly hopeless muddle. I cannot think that the world, as we see it, is the result of chance; and yet I cannot look at each separate thing as the result of Design. . . . Again, I say I am, and ever shall remain, in a hopeless muddle."¹⁷⁷ And so he remained. *To abandon a non-teleological universe would have meant abandoning his life's work.*

How did he view his labors? What did he think was the significance of those years in the laboratory and the study? In his autobiography, written in 1876, he was forced to reflect upon the meaning of his life. What impressed him was his victory over Rev. William Paley, whose *Natural Theology* had influenced him so greatly before his voyage on the Beagle. First, he took Paley's argument from the regularity of the universe and reversed it; for once, he returned to a vision of impersonal, totally sovereign natural law—in contrast to his former doubts, which favored the randomness of nature. He had long ago abandoned faith in the miracles of Christianity, for "the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become."

173. Darwin to Hooker (Nov. 23, 1856), *Life & Letters*, I, p. 445.

174. *Idem*.

175. Darwin to Gray (Sept. 5, 1857), *ibid.*, I, p. 479.

176. Darwin, *Origin*, ch. 11, p. 239. On Lord Kelvin's criticism, see Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, ch. 9.

177. Darwin to Gray (Nov. 26, 1860), *Life & Letters*, II, p. 146.

Nevertheless, he admits, "I was very unwilling to give up my belief. . . . Thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress." (Even his loss of faith was uniformitarian, in his recollections!) This was sent just one year after the publication of the *Origin*. At last he was free from Paley: "The old argument from design in Nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to be so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered."¹⁷⁸ What little cosmic personalism that still remained in Paley's rationalistic universe was now officially rejected.

When challenged by Asa Gray to defend his anti-teleological attitude, Darwin did not call forth his notes on barnacles or some new theory of coral reef formation. He replied from his heart, and his heart was exceedingly religious. *What he really hated was the Christian doctrine of a totally sovereign God*. He hated this God more than he feared a random universe.

With respect to the theological view of the question. This is always painful to me. I am bewildered. I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice. Not believing this, I see no necessity in the belief that the eye was expressly designed. On the other hand, I cannot anyhow be contented to view this wonderful universe, and especially the nature of man, and to conclude that everything is the result of brute force. I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance. Not that this notion at all satisfies me. I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect. A dog might as well speculate on the mind of Newton.¹⁷⁹

He could not believe that the eye was designed, despite the incapable difficulty that it is a totally complex element of the body that needs to be complete before it can function at all. How could this organ have evolved? What good was it during the countless millennia be-

178. *Ibid.*, I, p. 278.

179. Darwin to Gray (May 22, 1860), *ibid.*, II, p. 105.

fore it was an eye? Darwin was familiar with this objection, but he could not believe in specific design. However, in order to save his hypothetical universe from the burden of total randomness—from “brute force”—he was willing to admit that natural laws had been designed, a conclusion wholly at odds with his own theoretical methodology. But he was not satisfied with this conclusion, either.

So, he feigned modesty. These questions are beyond human intellect. Questions of biology, factual and theoretical, are answerable, but not questions that are raised as a direct product of the biological answers. This has been a tactic of “neutral” scientists for years: challenge the conclusions of a culture’s presuppositions by referring to neutral science, but claim honest ignorance when discussing the presuppositions of the methodology of neutral science. As he wrote to W. Graham, two decades later, contradicting his earlier defense of designed natural laws: “You would not probably expect anyone fully to agree with you on so many abstruse subjects; and there are some points in your book which I cannot digest. The chief one is that the existence of so-called natural laws implies purpose. I cannot see this.” Here is the dilemma of modern, Kantian philosophy: Law or no law? When defending the *total reliability and stability of “autonomous” natural science* against the claims of Christians in favor of God’s miraculous interventions, natural law is absolute. But when faced with *the totalitarian implications of absolute natural law*—a law so complete and systematic that it indicates design rather than randomness as its foundation—the “neutral” scientist throws out “so-called natural laws.” God may neither thwart absolute natural law, nor claim credit for the existence of such law, because it really is not absolute after all. Absolute randomness is therefore a philosophical corollary of absolute, impersonal law, and Darwin was uncomfortable with both horns of his dilemma. So, he appealed once again to ignorance, since he had to agree that chance is not sovereign:

But I have had no practice in abstract reasoning, and I may be all astray. Nevertheless you have expressed my inward conviction, though far more vividly and clearly than I could have done, that the Universe is not the result of chance. But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?¹⁸⁰

180. Darwin to W. Graham (July 3, 1881), *ibid.*, I, p. 285.

Notice Darwin's implicit faith. He has absolute confidence in his "monkey-descended" (or, for the purists, "ancestor-of-monkey-descended") mind when it concluded that his mind had, in fact, descended from some lower animal. But when the implications of this religiously held belief came into direct conflict with a belief that man's mind can be relied upon precisely because man is made in the image of God, then he doubted the capacity of his monkey-descended mind to grapple with such abstract questions. We are intelligent enough to know that we are not intelligent enough to know; we can have sufficient confidence in our minds to rest assured that we can have no confidence in our minds. God is locked out of His universe by man's simultaneous confidence and lack of confidence in his own logic. Neither doubt nor confidence is allowed to point to God. Cosmic impersonalism is thereby assured; autonomous man is defended by his supposedly autonomous science. Like the universe around man, his own thought processes are simultaneously absolute (man is descended from lower animals; no other theory is valid¹⁸¹) and contingent (man cannot trust his own speculations when they concern absolutes).

Anyone who imagines that the implications for philosophy of Darwinism are not both widespread and important in modern life is embarrassingly naive. It was not the details of the Darwinian system that captivated European thought—Darwin had to repudiate much of his system anyway. He once admitted to his earliest supporter, J. D. Hooker, that he was proficient "in the master art of wriggling."¹⁸² Few biologists could follow all of his arguments; if they had done so, they would have grasped the fact that his retreat into the categories of "use and disuse" represented a revival of Lamarckianism. But they did not read his works that closely. Liberated men scarcely question the logic or fine points of their liberator's scriptural canon. *What did capture the minds of intellectuals, and continues to captivate them, is Darwin's rejection of meaning or purpose; the Darwinian universe has no traces of final or ultimate causation.*

A marvelous statement of the Darwinian faith was presented in the *Britannica Roundtable* (Vol. I, #3, 1972), a slick magazine which was on the intellectual level of the Sunday newspaper's magazine insert, but which paraded under the banner of high culture. C. P. Snow, widely ballyhooed in the early 1960s because of his propaganda favoring the fusion of the "two cultures"—autonomous rational science and

181. Darwin, *Origin*, ch. 11, p. 268; quoted earlier.

182. Darwin to Hooker (Dec. to, 1866), *Life & Letters*, II, p. 239.

the equally autonomous humanities—offered us his personal credo in “What I Believe.”

I believe life, human life, all life, is a singular chance. A fluke, which depended on all manner of improbable conditionings happening at the same time, or in the same sequence of time. Between ten and twenty billion years ago there was a big bang, and the universe started. Before that, time did not exist: this is something our minds are not able to comprehend. . . . It has all been a very unlikely process, with many kinds of improbability along the way. . . . If any asked me on what basis I make these assumptions, I have no answer. Except to affirm that I do. Some will say I am making them because, under all the intellectual qualification, I am a residual legatee of the Judeo-Christian tradition. I doubt that. I have a nostalgic affection for the Anglican Church in which I was brought up, but for me its theological formulations have no meaning. Nor have any theological formulations of any kind.

“Nobody in here but us non-theologians,” Snow affirmed. His little credo went out to those who purchased their *Encyclopedia Britannicas* in the hope of upgrading their minds and their children’s social position. In fact, I would guess that it is likely that they read through this slick magazine more often than they looked up references in their dust-covered set of encyclopedias. Sooner or later, ideas have consequences.

Most modern commentators, both philosophers and professional scientists (Himmelfarb excepted), see Darwin’s denial of teleology as his most important intellectual contribution. It is not simply that science can *see* no traces of purpose or design in the universe; science now affirms that it has *shown* that there is no design or purpose in the universe. If there is, it is wholly internal to the non-rational recesses of the human personality, and the behaviorist psychologist B. F. Skinner did his best to reduce *that* noumenal realm of mystery. George Gaylord Simpson, the world-famous Darwinian paleontologist, stated quite forthrightly that “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned.”¹⁸³ You just cannot make it any plainer than that.

Darwin’s work, wrote Loren Eiseley, “had, in fact, left man only one of innumerable creatures evolving through the play of secondary forces and it had divested him of his mythological and supernatural

183. George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1949] 1967), p. 345.

trappings. The whole tradition of the parson-naturalists had been overthrown. Mechanical cause had replaced Paley's watch and watch maker."¹⁸⁴ Man has to view this mechanical cause as essentially random, however, since man's mind is finite. Nevertheless, in spite of this lack of omniscience, *man can see the random universe as sufficiently orderly and absolute to remove God from the premises*. So we are now at last set free from God: "The evolutionists discovered that nature 'makes things make themselves' and thus succeeded in apparently removing the need of a Master Craftsman."¹⁸⁵ Impersonal, random biological variation within the framework of an impersonal, random, passively pruning environment is the key to all purposeful, orderly life. But man now makes his own purpose; or, as C. S. Lewis warned, some elite men now seek to define and impose purpose and meaning for all the others.¹⁸⁶

7. Darwinian Man

The cosmic impersonalism, the indeterminacy, and the continuity of natural processes have all combined to produce a remarkably discontinuous leap: *Man*. Man now is to take over the direction of the processes of evolution. Man is now to make the cosmos personal; he shall determine it. As Simpson said, "Plan, purpose, goal, all absent in evolution to this point, enter with the coming of man and are inherent in the new evolution, which is confined to him."¹⁸⁷ Julian Huxley said the same thing.¹⁸⁸ Cosmic impersonalism is now transcended. Man, the product of nature (immanence), now takes control of nature (transcendence). Freed from God's sovereignty by nature's random, impersonal sovereignty, man now affirms his own sovereignty, to impart meaning and purpose to the formerly random forces of evolutionary process. Our first true god has come at last!

Darwinian man is simultaneously transcendent and immanent with respect to nature, just as orthodox Christian man has been. But there is this fundamental difference: Christian man gained his claim of transcendence over some of nature's physical processes only by maintaining his meekness under God and His laws. *He achieved limited*

184. Eiseley, *Darwin's Century*, pp. 195–96.

185. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

186. C. S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, ch. 3.

187. Simpson, *Meaning of Evolution*, pp. 345–46.

188. J. Huxley, "Evolutionary Ethics," (1943): in Appleman (ed.), *Darwin*, pp. 406–

sovereignty over nature by means of his complete dependence on God's total sovereignty. But Darwinian man has dispensed with God's sovereignty in order to grant such sovereignty (temporarily and as a theoretical limiting concept) to random, impersonal nature. Once this transfer of sovereignty has taken place, Darwinian man reclaims his sovereignty, as the legitimate heir of nature. Man then becomes the official king of nature, and like Napoleon Bonaparte, he has been careful to place the crown on his own head (not relying on the Pope or any other theological agent).

Eiseley was quite correct when he said that Darwin's work destroyed the labors of the parson-naturalists. This did not keep the parsons from flocking to him in droves, bearing symbolic frankincense and myrrh, in his later years. This typical yet pathetic development only served to intensify his hostility to religion. His cousin remarked that he was far more sympathetic to religious critics than the fawning ecclesiastics who lauded his work.¹⁸⁹ Preposterously,

The religious managed to find in Darwinism a variety of consolations and virtues not dreamed of even in natural theology. One distinguished botanist bewildered Darwin by declaring himself a convert on the grounds that the theory finally made intelligible the birth of Christ and redemption by grace. A clergyman was converted on the grounds that it opened up new and more glorious prospects for immortality. And theologians declared themselves ready to give up the old doctrine of "the fall" in favor of the happier idea of a gradual and unceasing progress to a higher physical and spiritual state.¹⁹⁰

Himmelfarb hit the nail on the head when she wrote that *the Darwinian controversy was not between theists and evolutionists, but between the reconcilers and irreconcilables on both sides of the controversy.*¹⁹¹ In our century, the irreconcilable Christians (and, I gather, Orthodox Jews) have diminished in number. The new evolutionists do not care enough one way or the other whether Christians do or do not rewrite their religion to conform to the Darwinian universe. The historian, John C. Greene, bent over backward to say nice things about the various theological compromises of men like Russell Mixter and James O. Buswell III, but he was only stating an inescapable fact (from the consistent Darwinian point of view) when he concluded:

189. Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, p. 386.

190. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

191. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

These theories may help to conserve belief in the inspiration of the Bible, but it is difficult to see how they can be of much scientific value. . . . [When Greene referred to the inspiration of the Bible, he had in mind the heretical Barthian variety, as he said two pages later.] As science advances, moreover, the maintenance of what these writers call "verbal inspiration" is likely to prove possible only by continual reinterpretation of the Bible. In the long run, perpetual reinterpretation may prove more subversive of the authority of Scripture than would a frank recognition of the limitations of traditional doctrines.¹⁹²

The compromisers are trapped.

The best summary was made by Richard Holt Hutton back in 1879, and the fact that hardly a pastor in the conservative churches today sees the truth of this statement constitutes one of the most chilling facts of contemporary religious life. "The people who believe today that God has made so fast the laws of His physical universe, that it is in many directions utterly impenetrable to moral and spiritual influences, will believe tomorrow that the physical universe subsists by its own inherent laws, and that God, even if He dwells within it, cannot do with it what He would, and will find out the next day, that God does not even dwell within it, but must, as Renan says, be 'organized' by man, if we are to have a God at all."¹⁹³ From the natural law of the parson-naturalists, to Robert Chambers' "Christian" evolution, to Charles Darwin's autonomous law, to Julian Huxley's evolving human master of the evolutionary process: the development has seemed almost irreversible. It has led us into three cultural quagmires: the modern chaotic world of impotent existentialism, the modern bureaucratic world of the planners, and the modern retreatist world of visionless, compromised religion.

G. Christianity and Evolutionism

There is only one accurate doctrine of creation: *creation out of nothing*. All other systems partake either of pantheism or deism, both implying a finite Creator. The Bible's account avoids both pitfalls. A totally sovereign God created the universe out of nothing in six days, according to His own trinitarian counsel. He then placed man, His subordinate representative, in authority over the creation. Man re-

192. John C. Greene, *Darwin and the Modern World View* (New York: Mentor, 1963), p. 34.

193. Cited in Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, pp. 398–99.

belled against the Creator, thereby bringing the wrath of God upon himself and, to some extent, on the creation itself. But, in His grace, God revealed Himself to men, both in the creation (the testimony of which is always rejected by rebellious men) and in His verbal, written word, the Bible. He has informed men of His creative acts in bringing all things into existence in six days—a period of time identical to the six days in which men are to labor at their vocations. Men are to subdue the earth to the glory of God and in terms of His natural laws, as interpreted by His written word. Man is subordinate to God, operating entirely in terms of His ethical laws, and he is both under and over laws of nature. Nature responds to mankind's authority in terms of mankind's ethical relationship to God, especially with respect to man's obedience to the external laws of God. God's law, both natural and revealed through the Bible, is man's tool of godly subduing.

All other systems place man in a position either of total impersonal autonomy (transcendence), or total impersonal passivity (immanence), or—as in the case of Darwinian thought—both simultaneously. The deist's god is on vacation, leaving man in full control of the semi-autonomous world machine. The pantheist's god is indistinguishable from the organic, living creation. *In either case, God is silent concerning ethics.* The deist's god ignores the world; the pantheist's god is impotent to speak in a voice separate from the world. Thus, man is seen as rationally autonomous from God (eighteenth-century Continental deism) or irrationally immersed in and part of God. In neither case is there a final ethical judgment by a self-contained, sovereign, personal God in whose image man is created. Man either rules over nature as a totalitarian despot, or else he is completely subservient to nature, like some oriental slave. The universe is closed to any judgment outside itself in both pantheism and deism; man has no higher court of appeal than nature itself. In both cases, *nature ignores ethics.* As Simpson put it: "Discovery that the universe apart from man or before his coming lacks and lacked any purpose or plan has the inevitable corollary that the workings of the universe cannot provide any automatic, universal, eternal, or absolute ethical criteria of right or wrong."¹⁹⁴

H. Rival Methodologies

What should be inescapably clear by now is this; *there is no doctrine of ultimate origins that is not intensely religious.* Similarly, there is

194. Simpson, *Meaning of Evolution*, p. 346.

no philosophical system that does not possess a doctrine of creation—the origin of all things and the constitution which presently sustains all things. For Christians to tamper with the plain meaning of the Bible in order to make it conform to the latest findings of this or that school of evolutionary thought is nothing short of disastrous. It means an amalgamation of rival and irreconcilable religious presuppositions. Neither Darwin nor the orthodox Christian can escape the philosophical and theological implications of methodology. Both Darwin and the compromising Christians tried to push questions of philosophy and epistemology (knowledge) into the background, as if there could be some universally shared scientific methodology that is independent of philosophical presuppositions. But when the chips were down, Darwin always sided with atheism; he refused to acknowledge that the God of the Bible could have created or influenced the world in the ways explicitly affirmed by the Bible. *Evolutionism is methodological atheism*, whether Hindu, or Buddhist, or Lamarckian, or Darwinian. It always was; it always will be.

Darwinian thought is fundamentally Greek paganism. This was recognized very early by Darwin's hatchet-man, Thomas Huxley. In Huxley's assessment of the impact of Darwin's thought, which Huxley wrote for the *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* in 1887, he expressed his opinion:

The oldest of all philosophies, that of Evolution, was bound hand and foot and cast into utter darkness during the millennium of theological scholasticism. [Actually, scholastic philosophy lasted only from the twelfth century through the fifteenth as a cultural force in Europe, but Huxley means simply medieval Christian thought in general—G.N.] But Darwin poured new lifeblood into the ancient frame; the bonds burst, and the revived thought of ancient Greece has proved itself to be a more adequate expression of the universal order of things than any of the schemes which have been accepted by the credulity and welcomed by the superstition of seventy later generations of men.

Indeed; all three of the accepted "scientific" evolutionary cosmologies today are simply footnoted revivals of Greek cosmological thought.

First, consider George Gamow's "primeval atom" or "big bang" theory—the exploding "ylem" of matter-energy that created all the elements of the universe in the first half-hour of its existence. Plato's theory of creation outlined in the *Timaeus* dialogue was its analogue in

Greek thought. *Second*, there is the so-called steady-state theory (Fred Hoyle, the famous British astronomer, used to believe in this one). Matter and energy are continuously being created out of nothing. Everything continues today as it always has. This is the Aristotelian outlook, and it undergirded the geology of Hutton and Lyell. It is the uniformitarian theory. *Finally*, there is the theory of the oscillating universe: big bang, explosion outward, slowing, imploding inward, crash, and new big bang. Marx's partner, Engels, held this faith. It is quite similar to the Stoic theory of a cyclical cosmos. As Toulmin and Goodfield noted: "The disagreement between supporters of these views today is just about complete. Nor does there seem to be any real hope of reaching an accommodation without abandoning elements which are regarded as indispensable to the theories."¹⁹⁵ In short, rival pagan faiths are no less in opposition to each other, despite their unity against cosmic personalism. It was true in the days of Greece; it is equally true today.

"Details apart," wrote Toulmin and Goodfield, "the *general* resemblances between twentieth-century cosmology and its ancestors are no mere coincidence. Rather, they prompt one to look for an equally general motive." There is not sufficient evidence today to prove any theory of the earth's history, so the same old a priori refrains are repeated, generation after generation. As the authors concluded, "cosmological theory is still basically philosophical," and certain "obstinate and insoluble" problems and objections "still face us which cannot be evaded by dressing them up in twentieth-century terminology."¹⁹⁶ Either time had an origin, thereby making discussion of what happened "before" impossible; or else time is infinite in both directions, thus forcing us to ask forever, "Before then, what?"

Secularists, who too often spend little or no time thinking about the internal contradictions of their own presuppositions, like to ridicule Christians with stupid questions like "Who created God?" or "Where did God get the 'stuff' to build the universe?" as if they had some non-theistic answer to these questions. They do not. They have a tendency to ignore their own rootless systems of philosophy, however, which gives them great confidence in challenging the revelation of the Scripture. They prefer to have faith in the impersonal "ylem" or impersonal, infinite, steady-state time or impersonal cosmic cycles; a personal Creator God is too preposterous for their sophisticated tastes.

195. Toulmin and Goodfield, *Discovery of Time*, p. 255.

196. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

Yet if we are compelled to regard secular opponents of the biblical doctrine of the six-day creation as naive, then those Christians who try to amalgamate Genesis 1 and one (or all) of the secular cosmologies are doubly naive. Philosophically, the concept of process undergirds the secular positions. Toulmin and Goodfield recognized this. R. J. Rushdoony, in his study, *The Mythology of Science*, recognized this. Instead of the fiat word of God—a discontinuous event which created time and the universe—we are expected to believe in the creativity of impersonal process. As Rushdoony argued, “the moment creativity is transferred or to any degree ascribed to the process of being, to the inner powers of nature, to that extent sovereignty and power are transferred from God to nature. Nature having developed as a result of its creative process has within itself inherently the laws of its being. God is an outsider to Nature, able to give inspiration to men within Nature but unable to govern them because He is not their Creator and hence not their source of law.”¹⁹⁷ Is it any wonder, then, that the first modern cosmological evolutionist, Immanuel Kant, was also the premier philosopher of the modern world? Is it any wonder that his theory of the two realms—autonomous external and random “noumena” vs. scientific, mathematically law-governed “phenomena”—is the foundation of modern neo-orthodox theology, which has eroded both Protestantism and Catholicism? Is it any wonder that Kant’s “god” is the lord of the noumenal realm, without power to influence the external realm of science, without even the power to speak to men directly, in terms of a verbal, cognitive, creedal revelation? This is the god of process theology, of evolution, of the modern world. It is the only god that humanists allow to exist. The God of Deuteronomy 8 and 28, who controls famines, plagues, and pestilences in terms of the ethical response of men to His law-word, is not the God of modern, apostate evolutionary science. He is not the god of process theology. The Christian with the Ph.D. in geology who says that he just cannot see what process has to do with the sovereignty of God is telling the truth: he cannot see. Had he been able to see, no “respectable” university would ever have granted him a Ph.D. in geology, at least not in historical geology.¹⁹⁸

The Bible does not teach the theology of process. It does not tell us that an original chaos evolved into today’s order, and will become even more orderly later. That is the theology of the Greeks, of the East, and

197. Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1967] 1995), p. 53.

198. Davis Young, *Westminster Theological Journal* (Spring 1973), p. 272.

the modern evolutionist. It is not a part of the biblical heritage. Even the so-called “chaos” of Genesis 1:2—“And the earth was without form and void”—does not teach a “chaos into order” scheme. Prof. Edward J. Young offered considerable proof of the fact that the Hebrew phrase translated “without form and void” should be rendered, “desolation and waste.” It signifies that “God did not create the earth for desolation, but rather to be inhabited. . . . Such an earth has not fulfilled the purpose for which it was created; it is an earth created in vain, a desolate earth.”¹⁹⁹ Young cited Isaiah 45:18, which contains the same Hebrew words: “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.” What is described in Gen. 1:2 is a great primeval sea, which was uninhabitable and therefore desolate. (See verse 9: “let the dry land appear.”) The “chaos” factor, so heavily relied upon by compromising biblical expositors, not only does not conform to Greek speculation, but is intensely anti-modern: the desolation implies purpose, that great bugaboo of modern science. Any attempt to view Gen. 1:2 in terms of some original chaos plays into the hands of the Darwinians, for it compromises the element of purpose in the creation.

One popular variation on this theme is the so-called “gap hypothesis,” which argues that in Gen. 1:1 God created the earth, only to shake up the elements in Genesis 1:2 as a result of Satan’s fall. He then created the new, six-day earth in Genesis 1:3–27. There are three things wrong with this view, at the very least. First, the Bible does not teach anything like this; it is obviously a jerry-built interpretation that has become popular in order to give an explanation for the apparent age of the uniformitarians’ earth. Second, the uniformitarians are entitled to dismiss it, since a true “chaos” would have been a complete erasure of the previously existing earth, thus removing the “precious” traces of age that the “gapologists” so desperately desire. *Third*, as already mentioned, it compromises the explicit traces of purpose in the creation’s original desolation. A *fourth* reason is at least possible: Satan fell on the seventh day, after God had pronounced the whole creation “good.”

The step-by-step retreat of Christian thinkers from the six-day creation—universally acknowledged in 1725, and generally believed

199. Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1964), p. 33. See also pp. 13, 16, 34.

until 1800—has been a disastrous, though temporary, setback for Christian orthodoxy. Sadly, Christians were not usually dragged, kicking and screaming, into Lyell's uniformitarian and Darwin's purposeless evolution. They accepted each new scientific "breakthrough" with glee. At best, each resistance attempt was a three-stepped process: (1) it is not true; (2) it is not relevant, anyway; (3) we always knew it was true, and Christianity teaches it, and teaches it better than any other system. No wonder Darwin was irritated; a good, purposeless universe could not be left in peace by these silly people!

The battle lines should be clear: Christianity or error, the six-day creation or chaos, purpose and meaning or cosmic impersonalism and randomness. It is not hard to understand why the religion of modernism clings to Darwinian thought. It is also not surprising why occultist Max Heindel could write *The Rosicrucian CosmoConception or Mystic Christianity: An Elementary Treatise upon Man's Past Evolution, Present Constitution and Future Development* (1909). But why Christians should give one second's consideration of the possibility of evolution—ancient or modern, occultist or scientific—is a mystery.

The compromise with uniformitarian principles has been a steady, almost uniformitarian process within Christian circles. Gillispie, describing the steady capitulation of early nineteenth-century Christian naturalists, shows how disastrous the retreat was for orthodoxy. At each stage, the Christians, copying the mythical act of King Canute, shouted "thus far and no farther" to uniformitarianism. "And at every stage except the last, progressives admitted that a further step, the possibility of which they disavowed while they unwittingly prepared it, would indeed have had serious implications for orthodox religious fidelity."²⁰⁰ But each new uniformitarian "discovery" was assimilated into the supposedly orthodox framework nonetheless, despite the fact that at every preceding capitulation, the proponents of that compromise admitted that the next step (now greeted passively or even enthusiastically) would be unnecessary, impossible, and utterly wrong. (Any similarity between nineteenth-century Christian progressives and today's Christian progressives is hardly coincidental.) The progressivists of the 1840s, like the compromisers of today, would not face up to reality. They could not admit to themselves or their few orthodox opponents the fact that Robert Nisbet has called to our attention: "It is hard today to realize the degree to which the attack on Christianity ob-

200. Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology*, p. 221.

sessed intellectuals of rationalist and utilitarian will. Christianity had much the same position that capitalism was to hold in the first half of the twentieth century. It was the enemy in the minds of most intellectuals. Uniformitarianism, above any other single element of the theory of evolution, was the perfect point of attack on a theory that made external manipulation its essence and a succession of 'catastrophes' its plot."²⁰¹

Conclusion

Thomas H. Huxley, the scientist who helped spread the gospel of Darwinism more than any other man in the second half of the nineteenth century, was vitriolic in his hostility to orthodox Christianity, with its insistence on the doctrine of creation. He knew there could never be any compromise between Darwinism and creationism. He announced in his important defense of Darwin in 1859:

In this nineteenth century, as at the dawn of modern physical science, the cosmogony of the semi-barbarous Hebrew is the incubus of the philosopher and the opprobrium of the orthodox. Who shall number the patient and earnest seekers after truth, from the days of Galileo until now, whose lives have been embittered and their good name blasted by the mistaken zeal of Bibliolators? Who shall count the host of weaker men whose sense of truth has been destroyed in the effort to harmonise impossibilities—whose life has been wasted in the attempt to force the generous new wine of Science into the old bottles of Judaism, compelled by the outcry of the same strong party?²⁰²

Huxley was totally confident in the long-term success of Darwinism. In fact, he believed that this victory of science (which he dutifully capitalized, as one should do when spelling out the name of any divinity one worships) had already been secured. He viewed this triumph as the result of an intellectual war.

It is true that if philosophers have suffered, their cause has been amply avenged. Extinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules; and history records that whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed if not annihilated; scotched, if not slain. But orthodoxy

201. Nisbet, *Social Change and History*, p. 184.

202. Thomas Huxley, "The Origin of Species," (1859), in Frederick Barry (ed.), *Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 105–6.

is the Bourbon [referring to the French monarchy, the House of Bourbon—G.N.] of the world of thought. It learns not, neither can it forget; and though, at present, bewildered and afraid to move, it is as willing as ever to insist that the first chapter of Genesis contains the beginning and the end of sound science; and to visit, with such petty thunderbolts as its half-paralyzed hands can hurl, those who refuse to degrade Nature to the levels of primitive Judaism.²⁰³

His next paragraph begins with this unforgettable sentence: "Philosophers, on the other hand, have no such aggressive tendencies." Why not?

The majesty of Fact is on their side, and the elemental forces of Nature are working for them. Not a star comes to the meridian of their methods: their beliefs are 'one with the falling rain and with the growing corn.' By doubt they are established, and open inquiry is their bosom friend. Such men have no fear of traditions however venerable, and no respect for them when they become mischievous and obstructive; . . .²⁰⁴

He knew his contemporary enemies well. He realized clearly, as they did not, that their hypothesis of continuing special creations "owes its existence very largely to the supposed necessity of making science accord with the Hebrew cosmogony; but it is curious to observe that, as the doctrine is at present maintained by men of science, it is as hopelessly inconsistent with the Hebrew view as any other hypothesis."²⁰⁵ Darwinian scientists from Huxley's day to the present have been able to make the same criticism of later attempts of Christian scholars to compromise the teachings of Genesis 1 and evolution. Sadly, Huxley's barb applies quite well to these professional academic compromisers: they are like the Bourbon kings. They never seem to learn that there can be no successful compromise between the rival cosmologies.

The six-day creation is not a narrow cosmology. It is as broad as the creation itself and the revelation of that creation given by its Creator. Evolution and uniformitarian geology (however modified the uniformitarianism may be) may appear very broad-minded, but only in the sense of Matthew 7:13: "Enter ye in at the strait [narrow, tight] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

203. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

204. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7.

205. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Appendix D

BASIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE SIX-DAY CREATION

Christian churches seldom lack an issue that can serve as a means of internal disruption and conflict: the mode of baptism, the age of one's first communion, the form of government, the role of the institutional church in non-church realms. The conflict between evolution and creation has not been one of these major and continuing sources of contention within the vast majority of Christian churches.

Prior to 1800, the concept of biological evolution had not been widely considered. A few secular philosophers—for example, Immanuel Kant—had argued for some form of cosmic evolution, but Christians were generally uninformed about, or unimpressed by, such speculation. Yet, after 1900, outside of a few so-called fundamentalist groups, the question of the time and mode of God's creation was no longer considered intellectually or ecclesiastically respectable as an important topic. People have been expected to “agree to disagree” as Christians; specifics concerning creation are officially relegated into the realm of *adiaphora*, that is, things indifferent to salvation or the life of the church. “Theistic evolution” or the “gap theory” or “progressive creation” or the “literary framework hypothesis” have served as alternatives to the six-day creation within those circles that still concern themselves with the question of biblical inerrancy.

Ever since 1900, we have witnessed a strange phenomenon inside the evangelical churches. Pastors have been dismissed by their congregations or their hierarchical superiors for mismanaging budgets, changing their minds about the mode of baptism, softening their views concerning the sabbath, or disrupting the autonomy of the choir director. But a heresy trial for a pastor who holds some variant of theistic evolution would be unthinkable in evangelical churches today. As a means of institutional confrontation, the choir is a far more potent issue than the doctrine of creation. So powerful have been the forces of

religious syncretism, philosophical pragmatism, and academic respectability inside the churches, that this crucial foundation of the faith has become operationally secondary—or less.

If pastors, clutching desperately at their advanced academic degrees from accredited colleges, have abandoned the defense of the faith, why should the layman think that he has any right to call the churches to repentance? How can a layman challenge the official expertise of certified scholarship and ordained respectability? This was Moses' question to God, basically, in Exodus 4:10. God's answer was straightforward: "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I, the LORD?" (Ex. 4:11). God is the source of all valid theories and all valid footnotes, not the geology department of Harvard University. His revelation of Himself in the Bible is the standard of accuracy, not the latest discovery (which will be refuted in five years by someone else) of hypothetically neutral science. If intelligent, devoted, and necessarily self-taught laymen do not make use of the services of the various creation research organizations in their efforts to call Christians back to the explicit revelation of the Bible and the historic faith of the orthodox churches, then a major battle will have been lost. The status quo in the churches today is our visible defeat; *orthodoxy demands reconstruction*. Assistance from the pastors in this struggle would be appreciated, but as it stands today, the laymen are necessarily the strategists and generals.

A. Here I Stand

Why take a stand here? Why should the doctrine of the six-day creation be a rallying issue? First, because it is the one issue that has established itself in the minds of many orthodox Christians as a necessary and legitimate area of confrontation between apostate science and Christianity. Men who would not be confident in challenging secular thought in the realms of psychology, politics, economics, or other academic disciplines, nevertheless do understand the false nature of the claim of scientific neutrality concerning evolution. As a result, the intellectual division of labor is greater in the areas of biology and geology than in any other Christian endeavor.

More people are already involved in the battle. Thus, it is tactically a solid place to take a stand. More important than tactics, however, is the centrality of the doctrine of creation to Christian faith. Langdon Gilkey, a neo-orthodox theologian who does not believe in the verbal,

plenary inspiration of the Bible, nonetheless saw the issue more clearly than most supposedly evangelical theologians. He announced forthrightly:

It is quite natural, of course, that Christian devotion and Christian thought should concern themselves most with God's redeeming activity in Jesus Christ, for upon this our knowledge of God as loving Father, and so of our hope for salvation, most directly depends. Nevertheless, the centrality of God's redeeming activity to our life and thought should not blind Christians to the divine work of creation, which, if not so close to our hearts, is just as significant for our existence and just as important if we are to think rightly about God. Through God's redeeming works we know that He is supremely righteous and supremely loving. But when we ask who is supremely righteous and loving, the answer comes in terms of God's original activity, creation: the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord, is He who judges and redeems us. The transcendent "Godness" of God, what gives Him deity and so ultimate significance to our lives, is most directly manifested to us through His creative activity as the transcendent source of all being and of all existence. Without this transcendent aspect of "deity," the judgment and love of God would be ultimately unimportant to us, and the redemption promised by them impossible for God. The idea of creation, therefore, provides the most fundamental, if not the most characteristic, definition of God in the Christian faith. Among all the activities of God, creation is that activity or attribute which sets him apart as "God."¹

The doctrine of the Trinity—the eternal, infinite, fully self-revealing and communing holy God who is three persons—has always been the starting point for Christian theology. But insofar as God has any relationship with men, the doctrine of creation is central. The fact that Gilkey, who is not orthodox, can see this, and evangelicals do not, testifies to the disastrous effects of syncretism. Christianity and antitheism cannot be successfully fused without destroying Christianity.

B. Creation Defined

The Bible testifies to the fact that a personal God created all things—matter and energy, structure and motion—out of nothing: *creatio ex nihilo*. The opening words of the Bible are concerned with the question of origins: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the

1. Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1959] 1965), pp. 83–84.

earth" (Gen. 1:1). God repeats this fact to us again and again: "Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" (Isa. 43:13). We read in the New Testament concerning God the Son: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:16–17). There is no more comprehensive statement in Scripture concerning the creation. Christ our savior is identified with God the Creator; were He not the Creator, He would not be the Savior. We would still be dead in our sins (Eph. 2:5). The Gospel of John, the most explicitly evangelistic of the gospels (John 20:30, 31), begins with the affirmation that Christ, the Word of God, is the Creator: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (1:3). God precedes all things: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2). He is therefore sovereign over all things: "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men" (Ps. 90:3).

No knowledge of God as Creator could penetrate the minds of rebellious men sufficiently to bring them to repentance were it not for God's gracious self-revelation in the Bible, by means of the Holy Spirit. Men willfully hold back the knowledge they have of God as Creator (Rom. 1:18–23).² The saving knowledge of God comes only by means of His special revelation and special grace to His people. Therefore, all men are required to believe that God is the Creator, and not the creator devised by the rebellious human imagination, but the Creator as revealed in the Bible. Any old kind of creation will not do; we are not to adopt a doctrine of creation in the same way as we select salads in a cafeteria. The words of Genesis 1 inform us of the fact that God created all things in six days. This is repeated in the Decalogue (Ten Commandments): ". . . in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. . ." (Ex. 20:11). The creation was out of nothing, in response to the sovereign word of God: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth . . . For he spake, and it

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2; Cf. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959), I, p. 37.

was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:6, 9). Therefore, the Apostle Paul wrote: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

Modern translators of the Bible have sometimes sought to revive the theology of the pagan ancient world, since a similar theology undergirds all modern apostate rationalism. They have translated Genesis 1:1–2 as follows: "When God began to create the heaven and the earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the earth. . . ."³ The language, while grammatically possible, is theologically perverse. The translation is governed by the premises of apostate man rather than by the explicit teaching of the Bible. It is the Bible, not the presuppositions of rebellious men, which is to interpret the verbal revelation of God (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:20). Modern translators believe, far too often, in the co-existence of the material (or energetic) universe with the being of God. This assumption of the ancient cosmologies, contemporary "primitive" cosmologies, ancient philosophy (Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII), and modern evolutionism, is erroneous. When this pagan god began to mold the eternally existing "stuff" of the universe, he found that he was not sovereign over it, because he had not created it. He, like the "stuff" in front of him, behind him, above him, and beneath him, was governed by the independent laws of probability and chance. "Lots of luck there, God! We're pulling for you!"

In contrast to this is the Creator of the Bible. At best, the pagan god is Dr. God, while we humans are only Mr. But the Epistle to Hebrews testifies of another God altogether: "And, thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And, as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail" (Heb. 1:10–12). God dwells in eternity (Isa. 57:15). He creates the new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:17–18; II Pet. 3:9–13; Rev. 21:1). The Creator is the Savior: "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they

3. *The Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962). For a scholarly refutation of this approach to Genesis 1:1, see Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), pp. 1–7. Young's study also offers refutations of the so-called "gap theory"—eons of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2—and the literary or framework hypothesis, which argues against the chronological succession of the six days of creation.

that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished" (Isa. 51:6). He who dares to tamper with the doctrine of creation compromises the revelation of the Creator concerning His own activity. If the latest finding of science—based, as it is, on the oldest antitheistic philosophy of creation—should be permitted to undermine the explicit revelation of God concerning one aspect of His relationship to His creation, there is no logical reason to draw back in horror when science also undermines the doctrine of salvation. Without the doctrine of creation there can be no doctrine of salvation—not, at least, an orthodox doctrine.

God is eternal and unchanging (Mal. 3:6). His words will not pass away (Matt. 24:35); His counsel is immutable (Heb. 6:17). "The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens" (Prov. 3:19). God's wisdom founded the world; the fallen world's wisdom cannot accept this. God's wisdom is foolishness to the world (I Cor. 1:20), and God warns His people not to be beguiled by the vanity of apostate philosophies (Col. 2:4–9). God is the standard of reference, the unchanging measure of all truth. Thus, the Bible rejects the pagan idea of creation through self-generated process, and it affirms the *fiat* creation by the word of God. Creation was a discontinuous event—the discontinuous event prior to Christ's incarnation. Process theology is the remnant of Adam's thought; by stressing the continuity between man's truth and God's truth, it relativizes God's truth. The shifting opinions of scientists replace the verbal revelation of God. Time, not God, becomes the framework of creation; chance, not God's eternal word, becomes the creative force in history. Evolution, the most consistent and most dangerous form of process theology, cannot be made to fit the categories of Christian faith.

C. Providence

The definition of creation goes beyond the concept of the original creation which ended on the sixth day. It simultaneously affirms the sustaining hand of God in time. It is Christ, "who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3), maintains the earth and the stars. "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of

the earth: he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures" (Jer. 51:15–16). Psalm 104 is a lengthy presentation of God's creative, sustaining providence in history. This applies equally to matters spiritual and physical: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10; cf. 42:5–6). The doctrine of providence reveals the total sovereignty of God.

D. Creator-Creature Distinction

Is God wholly removed from the world, as an eighteenth-century deist would have argued? Is God wholly identified with the world, as the pantheists have argued? As far back as we have written records, men have answered both ways. Sometimes, as in the case of the philosopher Plato and the neo-orthodox theologian Barth, secularists have held both positions simultaneously.⁴ Aristotle's "thought thinking itself," deism's watchmaker god, and Plato's For-ms or Ideas are all wholly transcendent, wholly aloof gods. Eastern religious monism and Western pantheism are examples of the god who reveals himself wholly in his creation. The first god has no point of contact with life and change; the second god cannot be distinguished from life and change. Neither is therefore truly personal.

The Bible affirms the existence of a *personal* Creator who is simultaneously transcendent and immanent. This is not held, as in the case of neo-orthodoxy, on the basis of modern philosophical dualism, but rather on the basis of a personal God's verbal and therefore understandable revelation of Himself to those creatures made in His image. God is not to be identified with His creation, yet the creation testifies to His existence. There is no uniform being that in some way links God and the creation—some ultra something that both God and creation participate in. There is no scale of being between the devil and God, with God as the possessor of more being than anyone else, and the devil drifting into non-being. The God of the Bible is personal and sovereign, unlike the secular transcendent God (who is too different or too removed to care about the world) or the secular immanent God

4. On Plato's position, see Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. II of *In Defense of the Faith* (den Dulk Foundation, 1969), ch. 3. (This was published originally in 1932 as *The Metaphysics of Apologetics*.) On Barth's dualism between God as wholly revealed, yet wholly hidden, see Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), ch. 6.

(who is too similar and too close to the world to influence it). We are informed by Psalm 90:1–2 that God is our dwelling place (immanence), yet He existed before the foundation of the world (transcendence). The universe is therefore personal; in contrast to all forms of paganism, at bottom a personal God controls all His creation. Christianity affirms cosmic personalism.

1. Transcendence.

“For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods” (Ps. 97:9; cf. 135:5; Isa. 46:9). The Psalms are filled with the language of transcendence. “The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people” (Ps. 99:2). “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth” (Ps. 108:5). While we do not need to accept the conclusions of the so-called higher criticism of the Bible, that is, the multiple authorship of many individual books of the Bible, there is no doubt that Isaiah 40–66 does stress the idea of the transcendence of God far more than Isaiah 1–39. Perhaps the crucial verses in the Bible dealing with God’s transcendence are Isaiah 55:8–9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Yet God’s transcendence is not impersonal; He is on high, but He cares for His people: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15). This same connection between God’s transcendence and mercy is found in Jeremiah 32:17–18. But the most comprehensive statement of God’s absolute transcendence is presented in Job, chapters 38–41.⁵ No created being can challenge the creative hand of God.

It is therefore insufficient to argue merely for the separation of God and the creation. As Cornelius Van Til wrote: “The transcendence concept of theism is not clearly stated, if it is merely said that God is independent of the world. According to the ordinary use of the word, that would not exclude the possibility that the world would also be independent of God. And it is this dependence of the world upon

5. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

God that a theist is interested in as much as the independence of God apart from the world. In fact God would not be truly independent of the world unless the world were dependent upon God. No one is absolutely independent unless he alone is independent.”⁶ The doctrine of creation prevents the appearance of a deistic view of transcendence, for the Bible’s account of creation also teaches the doctrine of providence. God sustains the world. It is only in terms of His eternal decree that the world has existence or meaning.

2. *Immanence.*

The transcendence of God the Creator implies His immanence. “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (I Kings 8:27). God is omnipresent; He cannot be contained in heaven alone. He dwells throughout His creation and far beyond infinity. Psalm 139:7–8 is the archetype passage: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” God asks Jeremiah: “Am I a God at hand . . . and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD” (Jer. 23:23–24). Near and far, God is present. “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?” (Deut. 4:7). God’s words are very clear in this regard. As Paul proclaimed before the pagans in Athens, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being. . . .” (Acts 17:28a). Our physical bodies serve as the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19; II Cor. 6:16).

Man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). Man’s inner being calls him to repentance and worship. Man’s environment also calls him to worship the Creator: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Ps. 19:1). Therefore, concluded Paul, every man is totally without excuse:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their fool-

6. Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p. 16.

ish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen (Rom. 1:20–25).

There is no escape from God's revelation of Himself; the whole creation proclaims His majesty. There is not sufficient natural revelation to save people from destruction, but there is natural revelation sufficient to condemn them for all eternity. The "work of the law" is written in every man's heart, "conscience also bearing witness" to his own evil nature (Rom. 2:15). Men seek desperately to escape this testimony. Again, quoting Van Til:

The main point is that if man could look anywhere and not be confronted with the revelation of God then he could not sin in the Biblical sense of the term. Sin is the breaking of the law of God. God confronts man everywhere. He cannot in the nature of the case confront man anywhere if he does not confront him everywhere. God is one; the law is one. If man could press one button on the radio of his experience and not hear the voice of God then he would always press that button and not the others. But man cannot even press the button of his own self-consciousness without hearing the requirement of God.⁷

In short, "Psychologically there are no atheistic men; epistemologically [knowledgeably] every sinner is atheistic."⁸ For this reason, the evil man in Jesus' parable of Lazarus asked to be allowed to return from hell to warn his lost brothers—not because he had a trace of goodness or compassion for the lost, but because if he could get God to admit that His revelation to the brothers was not sufficient to warn them, then God would have no cause to judge any man, including Dives. God, understandably, turned the request down flatly: though one rose from the dead (Jesus Christ), they would not be persuaded (Luke 16:27–31). Men's problem is not their lack of revelation; it is their willful rebellion against that revelation. God's creation reveals Him.

7. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), pp. 176–77.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

E. The Sovereignty of God

Job 38–41 is an important testimony to the sovereignty of God.⁹ God, who created all things and sustains all things, rules all things. Nothing happens outside the decrees of God; Satan had to ask permission in order to harass Job, and God set limits to everything he did (Job 1:12; 2:6). Everything is known to God beforehand, of course: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). In Isaiah 45 we learn of the extent of God’s total direction of all events:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? . . . I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded (Isa. 45:7–9, 12).

God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33), yet He controls and directs all things. There is no solution to this seeming intellectual dilemma in terms of the logic of autonomous man.

The image of the potter and his workmanship is a recurring one in the Bible. “But now, O LORD, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isa. 64:8). Jeremiah 18, God’s confrontation with Israel, is constructed upon this analogy: “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (Jer. 18:6). But in Romans 9, the great chapter in the New Testament dealing with the total predestination of the world by God, Paul used the potter analogy to stifle the apostate and illegitimate conclusion of those who would argue that God’s predestination is opposed to human responsibility. Paul’s use of the potter analogy had no meaning except in terms of such an illegitimate use of human logic; he answered that issue, and only that issue, in these words:

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find

9. North, *Predictability and Dominion*, ch. 6.

fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, a man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (vv. 18–21).

God therefore has set explicit limits on the exercise of human logic. God is good, and He created all things good in the beginning, yet He uses evil and rebellion to fulfill His plan of history. Man is totally predestined by the Creator (Rom. 8:28–30; Eph. 1), yet man is wholly responsible for his actions. We are required to affirm both points. We are the vessels; God, the Creator, is the potter. Men are reminded that “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). Creatures are not permitted knowledge as exhaustive as God’s is, whether of outward affairs or of the heart (I Sam. 16:7). *Godly humility requires every Christian to submit to the sovereignty of God, acknowledging His total predestination as well as man’s total responsibility.* Anything less than this affirmation—any quibbling concerning possible zones of human autonomy to make decisions respecting anything, including their salvation—involves men in outward rebellion. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Prov. 16:9).¹⁰

F. Meekness and Dominion

Because God is sovereign over the creation, which exists only because of God’s decree, and because man is made in the image of God, man therefore has a legitimate, though subordinate, *right of dominion* over the creation. This is man’s *cultural mandate*: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply,

10. For a more detailed introduction to these issues, see the chapter on God in my book, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010). This appendix is basically a summary of *Unconditional Surrender*.

and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26–28).¹¹ This cultural mandate was reaffirmed with Noah and his sons (Gen. 9:1).¹² Man’s meekness before a Creator God is the foundation of man’s inheritance of the earth, for the meek shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).¹³ Christ, who claimed to be meek (Matt. 11:29), was the one who drove the money-changers from the temple (Matt. 21:12)¹⁴ and called the Pharisees sons of the devil (John 8:44). *Meekness before God gives man dominion over nature.*

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our LORD, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! (Ps. 8:3–9).¹⁵

Now we are made a little lower than the angels, but not forever. “Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?” (I Cor. 6:3). Christians who retreat from the affairs of this world are, by their very actions, acknowledging the devil’s view of God’s sovereignty: Man does not have legitimate rule because God, in whose image man is made, does not have legitimate sovereignty. It should come as no surprise that as the doctrine of evolution has invaded the churches, the idea of meekness before God has departed. With it has departed the idea of man’s legitimate rule over earthly affairs. Christians today are in full retreat almost everywhere.

I have noted that God is transcendent to, yet immanent to, His creation. Man, created in God’s image, occupies an analogical position in the creation. He is under many of nature’s laws, yet he is simultaneously above nature as God’s subordinate sovereign. Gilkey, the neo-

11. Chaps. 3, 4.

12. Chapter 18.

13. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 42.

15. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

orthodox theologian, has called attention to this dual position of man.

History takes on meaning, then, when man not only sees himself as a creature in a “good” nature, but, more importantly, has distinguished himself from nature. He must realize that he alone among God’s creatures is not completely dominated by nature; he must become conscious of his own unique capacity for self-direction and meaning, and therefore of being in some sense transcendent to the repetitive natural order in which he participates. . . . If man is understood as totally out of relation to nature because he is regarded as purely soul or mind, or if man is understood as totally immersed in nature and so as purely creature, then no understanding of history arises. Greek idealism lost a sense of history because it could not understand the value of the natural world and of time [pure transcendence -G.N.]; Greek naturalism never achieved historical consciousness because it understood existence only in terms of the cycles of natural life [pure immanence—G.N.].¹⁶

Man’s tool of dominion over nature is law. God has established patterns of regularity in the mind of man (logic) and in the creation (natural law). He has also established ethical and social laws by His revealed word. Rebellious man cannot acknowledge the fact that God’s sovereign word undergirds natural law, human logic, and ethical (revealed) law. The self-proclaimed autonomous man cannot even explain the relationship between the logic of his own mind—especially mathematical logic—and the external universe he perceives, although his science demands that such a relationship exist.¹⁷ The work of the law is in men’s hearts (Rom. 2:15).¹⁸ God established His covenant with men, and His ordinances are continual (Jer. 33:25–26; Heb. 8:10–12; 10:15–17). Our universe is orderly (Prov. 30:24–28). It is orderly because God is its Creator (Ps. 136:6–9; Prov. 8:22–31). Therefore, He calls us to repentance: “Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways” (Prov. 8:32). “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13).

This is God’s universe; He does as He pleases with it. Here is the

16. Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, pp. 203–4. Cf. Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), ch. 1.

17. Cf. Eugene Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>) Cf. Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, Vol. VI of *In Defense of the Faith* (Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1975), chaps. 6, 7.

18. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 3.

primary lesson from the book of Job. Nevertheless, men are to gain power over earthly affairs through the godly exercise of biblical law (Deut. 8). God covenants with men in terms of His law; though men violate His statutes, yet He still shows mercy to many, as chapters 5–8 of the epistle to the Romans indicate. God’s covenant, through grace, is sure, for man can safely trust in God’s word. Because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, God’s wrath is placated (Rom. 5:8). Men can therefore subdue the earth in confidence through God’s law (Gen. 9:1–7), for “the earth hath he given to the children of men” (Ps. 115:16).

G. Fall and Restoration

By breaking the law of God, Adam brought destruction to humanity (Rom. 5:12–21). Deny this historic event, and you deny the doctrine of original sin. Deny the doctrine of original sin, and man is left without an understanding of his desperate plight. He will think that his own efforts can bring him eternal life. Without a comprehension of the effects, both in time and eternity, of the ethical rebellion of man, it becomes impossible to appreciate the extent of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. Theological modernism, so closely linked with an evolutionary cosmology, has produced precisely this state of disbelief.

Man’s ethical rebellion took place in time and on earth. The death and resurrection of Christ also took place in time and on earth. The firstfruits of the new heaven and new earth are now manifested and will continue to manifest themselves in time and on earth. As men subdue their own hearts in terms of God’s law, they work out their gift of salvation (Phil. 2:12).¹⁹ God’s gift of sanctification, personal and social, is added unto His great gift of personal justification. God gives the increase (I Cor. 3:7). Every good gift is from God (James 1:17).²⁰ The possibility of the restoration of the external world is set before God’s people (Deut. 8; 28; Isa. 2; 65; 66).

The Fall of man involved a false claim of divinity on the part of man. Man, following the devil’s lead, came to the conclusion that his own word, rather than God’s, is ultimately creative. He made himself the judge of the reality of God’s word. He would stand between God and the devil to test which one was telling the truth. He made his own hypothetical neutrality as the standard of judgment. He wanted to de-

19. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

20. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

termine good and evil (Gen. 3:5), for knowledge is always preliminary to the exercise of power. This was the sin of pride (Isa. 14:12–15). Such a path leads to destruction (Isa. 14:16–23). Man is supposed to think God's thoughts after Him, not attempt to be an autonomous creature. When man becomes humble in all his ways before God, victory is within his grasp, in time and on earth: "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God" (Deut. 28:1–2). Or, in other words, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).²¹ Christ is given all power (Matt. 28:18).²² He gives power to us.

H. Time and Development

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:27–28). History has meaning; it determines the place of each man in eternity. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:13–15).²³ History had a beginning (Gen. 1:1), and the fallen earth shall have an end (I Cor. 15).²⁴ Therefore, in absolute opposition to ancient pagan philosophies, the Bible teaches that time is linear. It is also limited. Only after the final judgment shall the burden of time be removed from this world (Rev. 10:6). God is the ruler of time.

Sanctification in a personal sense is a progressive process, after God has imparted the perfect sanctification of Christ to us at the moment of regeneration. Paul spoke of running the good race (I Cor. 9:24) and fighting the good fight (II Tim. 4:7). As with the individual

21. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 15.

22. *Ibid.*, ch. 48.

23. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

24. *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

who strives against sin in his own life (Eph. 6:10–18), so it is with Christian institutions and nations. The earth is to be subdued to the glory of God, not just in eternity, but in time—not just after the final judgment, but before it, when sinners are still alive on earth (Isa. 65:20).²⁵ History has purpose, direction, and meaning, precisely because God’s decree controls all events. Ours is a personal universe, not an impersonal, chance multiverse. Ours is a providential world. As Gilkey wrote: “Now in a world created by a transcendent and purposive God, such an ultimate coherence and significance is possible. . . . The belief that existence finds its ultimate origin in God sets each creaturely life in a context of coherence and significance impossible on any other terms. . . . And the sole basis for such a faith is the knowledge of the Creator. Without such knowledge, there is no basis for this context for coherence and significance, and without that context the meaning of life quickly evaporates.”²⁶ If a neo-orthodox theologian can see this so clearly, why is the doctrine of creation so neglected in the pulpits of the supposedly evangelical churches? This optimism concerning God’s decree in history made modern science possible.²⁷ Without faith in the possibility of progress, science loses meaning. By destroying the faith in creation, apostate science has almost entirely eroded the foundation of its own existence.²⁸

Because God’s eternal decree undergirds time, and because in His grace He assures His people that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28),²⁹ Christians need not fear time. Time brings with it the curses imposed by God as punishment for the rebellion of man, and not until death is finally subdued and the new heavens and new earth appear will time lose all of its characteristic burdens, but Christians are not time’s prisoners. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Unlike the pagans, whose chaos festivals like Mardi Gras and Carnival have symbolized a desperate attempt to escape time,³⁰ Christians are

25. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

26. Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, pp. 188–89.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66. See also Jaki, *Road of Science*, chaps. 1, 6, 19, 20.

28. Cf. Gunther Stent, *The Coming of the Golden Age: A View of the End of Progress* (Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, 1969).

29. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 6.

30. For various examples of this attempted “escape from time,” see the works of the comparative anthropologist, Mircea Eliade, such as *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), pp. 399–407; *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1963] 1968), chaps. 3, 5; *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the*

told to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time, that is, buying it back, prolonging it, conserving it, and using it diligently (Eph. 5:16). It is a tool for one's calling, a gift of God to His people. It is a resource to be used efficiently for the glory of God, and not a burden to be escaped by means of ritual debauchery or bloody revolution.³¹ Time is therefore a means of production, not the justification for destruction.

I. Knowledge and Interpretation

I have already noted the scriptural instruction concerning God's wisdom as the foundation of the creation (Prov. 3:19–20). The revelation of God to man is the source of all human wisdom. Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, stands as the great passage dealing with the close relationship between wisdom and God's holy law: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). "Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies" (Ps. 119:124–25). But it is in Job that we find most succinctly stated the basis of our knowledge: "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (32:8).

Elihu, the youthful fourth companion who came to visit Job, challenged Job and the other three "comforters" for their failure to consider the ways of a totally sovereign God.³² Apart from God the sovereign Creator, no knowledge is possible. He has made all things, directed all events, and He comprehends all facts. We, as God's images, are to think God's thoughts after Him: "Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay" (33:6). It is only by God's grace, Elihu announced, that we are given knowledge: "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters. For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, That he may withdraw man from his [man's] purpose, and hide pride from man" (33:13–17). God, through His gracious revelation, restrains the hands of evil men who are bent on destruction. He is not compelled to do so; His mercy is unearned by the recipients.

Eternal Return (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1954] 1959).

31. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnmrro>)

32. North, *Predictability and Dominion*, ch. 5.

God finally replied to Job as Elihu had, announcing that He alone possesses original knowledge. He drove this point home by referring back to the creation; He is God the Creator:³³

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the cornerstone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? . . . hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all. Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, That thou shouldst take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths of the house thereof? . . . Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are? Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart? (38:4–7, 18–20, 33–36).

The lessons of these latter passages in the book of Job were repeated by Paul: “For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:34–36). As the Creator, He *controls*; as the Redeemer, He *reveals*. All things are known to Him: A Psalmist wrote: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” (Ps. 139:14–16). God knows all things because He creates all things; His book sets forth what is or is not possible and actual. And in grace He redeems: “He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, o LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked” (Ps. 94:10–13). God has revealed Himself preeminently through His Son (John 1).

33. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

Men are not autonomous from God; they are *analogous* to God. Their knowledge should therefore be analogical to God’s knowledge, that is, in conformity to His revelation concerning Himself, man, and the creation. Men are told that they are not the source of knowledge, because they are not the source of the creation. They have knowledge only to the extent that they think God’s thoughts after Him. Even in their rebellious thought, sinners can be said to see the world only in terms of borrowed capital. To use Van Til’s analogy, the child must sit on his father’s lap in order to slap his face. He wrote, “Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as other positions, or a bit more reasonable than other positions; it alone is the natural and reasonable position for man to take.”³⁴ Apart from God’s revelation, all men are blind. God, in fact, deliberately blinds the minds of some men, so that they will not see the truth and be converted; Christ specifically said that this is why He spoke in parables (citing Isa. 6:9–10 in Matt. 13:10–15). Sinful men want to believe lies, so God sends them lies (Ezek. 14:9–11; II Thess. 2:11–12). “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16–17). In all true knowledge there is grace. God the Redeemer is God the Creator. What He reveals is true because He created and sustains all things. Were He not the Creator, He could not be the Redeemer; His revelation could always be suspect—another possible interpretation in a random multiverse. In fact, His revelation of what He is and does would have to be false, since it is not compatible with a random multiverse. A God who is not the Creator is not the God of the Bible.

J. Ownership and Stewardship

God, as Creator, is owner of the universe. This is stated throughout the Bible, but especially in the Psalms. “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy

34. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p. 62.

place?" (Ps. 24:1–3).³⁵ "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them" (Ps. 89:11). Perhaps most famously: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).³⁶ This being true, then man, as God's image-bearer, possesses subordinate ownership: "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men" (Ps. 115:16). The foundation of ownership on earth is God's creation of the earth.

1. *Limited Rights*

God places limitations on the exercise of the rights of property. Secularists, whether Marxists, Keynesians, or anarchists, do not acknowledge these restrictions. God requires a system of tithes, and the whole book of Malachi is devoted to an exposition of the ethical and social impact of tithe-rejection.³⁷ In the Old Testament economy, God placed restrictions on the practice of lending money, prohibiting the taking of interest from a poverty-stricken fellow believer (Ex. 22:25–27).³⁸ There is no indication that this restriction is no longer binding.³⁹ During the time that Israel served God as His throne, containing the tabernacle and the Holy of Holies, it was also illegal to sell the family's land for a period longer than 49 years; in the jubilee year, all land was to revert to the original owner or his family (Lev. 25:23–28).⁴⁰ "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). With the rending of the veil of the temple, which had separated the Holy of Holies, at the point of Christ's death (Matt. 27:50–51), this unique position of the land of Israel departed from God's economy, but the general ownership of the whole earth by God still holds true. *Ownership is never autonomous. It is always covenantal.*

35. North, *Confidence and Dominion*, ch. 6.

36. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

37. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

38. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1990] 2012), ch. 53.

39. Gary North, "Stewardship, Investment, and Usury: Financing the Kingdom of God," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), Appendix 3. This is also reprinted in my book, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 31.

40. For an analysis of the Hebrew restrictions on the sale of land, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28.

2. Personal Stewardship

Ownership thus involves personal stewardship. The use of property is bounded by the laws governing the various possessors: individuals, civil governments, private corporations, families, churches. Each has its own rules and regulations set by the Bible. None can ever be the exclusive owner, for no human or earthly sphere of life is exclusively divine. As Proverbs 20 through 29 indicates, men are to be charitable, industrious, honest, just; in short, they are to be faithful stewards of the goods that God loans or leases to them. Each institution or individual has some legitimate rights of ownership that may not be infringed upon by another human sovereignty. Ahab was not acting legally when he killed Naboth to steal his vineyard (I Kings 21:18–19),⁴¹ even though he was the king. God is the source of all wealth, not men, states, churches, or the devil (Deut. 8:18;⁴² James 1:17⁴³). Thus, when the devil offered Christ the world in return for Christ's worship of him, he was making an impossible offer (Matt. 4:9).⁴⁴ It was not his to give.

The cosmic personalism of the Bible's universe is obviously in total opposition to the autonomous multiverse of modern man. This is God's universe. He brings blessings and curses as He sees fit (Job 38–41),⁴⁵ but He has covenanted Himself to bring earthly blessings and troubles to communities (though not necessarily to individuals) in terms of their covenantal responses to Him. Deuteronomy 8 and 28 outline this relationship: blessings for obedience; curses for rebellion. All human sovereignties are derivative. All attempts to escape the limitations set by God on the exercise of property rights are therefore self-defeating.

K. The Good Creation

“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Gen. 1:31).⁴⁶ The creation was originally good. This included even Satan himself. At a point in time he rebelled. He then led Adam and Eve into

41. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

42. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

43. North, *Ethics and Dominion*, ch. 35.

44. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 3.

45. North, *Predictability and Dominion*, ch. 6.

46. Chapter 5.

this same path of destruction (Gen. 3). As Van Til pointed out so well, our parents in Eden were tempted to think of themselves as determiners of reality. They would test God's word to see if it would hold true. They placed their own logic and interpretation of the universe above God's interpretation. Thus, they viewed the universe as problematical and therefore God's word as problematical. They denied the absolute sovereignty of God's word over history and nature. It was this that constituted the Fall—knowing (determining) not only good and evil, but also knowing (determining) the possible and impossible.⁴⁷

1. *Adam's Sin*

Through Adam, sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12). Man's rebellion, like Satan's, was therefore ethical. It was not metaphysical, i.e., having to do with some abstract "being" or essential reality. It was not some flaw in man's being, but a willful rejection of God's sovereignty. It was an attempt to play God. It was a matter of purpose and will, not a defect in creation. Man did not slide into a lower realm of "Being in general"; he simply rebelled. Sin, therefore, is not a built-in eternal aspect of the creation. The fault was in the will of Satan and man: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13–15).

Man's ethical rebellion led God to curse the world (Gen. 3:17–18).⁴⁸ Men are now ethically blind and willfully rebellious (Rom. 1). But this evil is restrained, as in the case of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:6).⁴⁹ It must not be regarded as a permanent phenomenon. The final end of rebellion is the lake of fire, into which hell, death, Satan, and all his followers will be dumped on the day of judgment (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:13–14). It is a place of true existence—the eternal reminder of the results of ethical rebellion, eternally glorifying God and His justice—but a place of utter impotence. But even as hell is only a temporary dwelling place of disembodied rebellious souls, so is heaven an equally temporary dwelling place for disembodied regenerate souls. Heaven is not a place of total bliss and perfection, just as hell is not a place of

47. Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, pp. 19–20.

48. Chapter 12.

49. Chapter 19.

total desolation, for final bliss and final desolation come only after souls and bodies are reunited on the day of judgment (I Cor. 15:39–57). The souls of the slain saints of God are in heaven, John wrote, crying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10). Yet even this scene is temporary, for evil is limited in time, however strong it may appear prior to the final judgment.

2. Restoration in History

God has promised a final restoration of edenic bliss for His elect (Rev. 21; 22). Yet He graciously gives us a foretaste of this ultimate internal and external victory as an “earnest”—down payment—on our blessed hope. Isaiah 65 and 66 tell of a preliminary manifestation of the new heavens and new earth, prior to the day of judgment, for in these promised days of earthly peace, there shall be sinners still alive (Isa. 65:20).⁵⁰ Similarly, Ezekiel 37 presents us with the famous vision of the valley of dry bones. The dead shall be resurrected. But this passage can be interpreted in terms of spiritual death as well as physical death. In fact, it must be seen as applying to both forms of death and both forms of resurrection. Ezekiel was called to “Prophesy upon these bones”; it was a preaching ministry to the spiritually dead people of Israel. Men are spiritually dead (Luke 9:60); he who believes in Christ “is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). Ezekiel 37 therefore promises an age of spiritual rebirth as well as a day of judgment and resurrection. “For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (I Peter 4:6). Spiritual death is the foretaste of physical and eternal death; spiritual life is the foretaste of physical and eternal life. God promises to raise up the dead bones of the valley, spiritually and physically. The image loses its impact if either aspect is ignored.

Chapters 8–10⁵¹ and 12–14 of the book of Zechariah are deeply imbued with the spirit and language of external victory over evil. The restoration of godly rule is prophesied in all of its force and clarity. Restoration shall be in time and on earth; the rule of the saints on earth is a preliminary of the day on which men shall judge the angels (I Cor.

50. North, *Restoration and Dominion*, ch. 16.

51. *Ibid.*, ch. 33.

6:3).⁵² The nations and their false gods will be utterly defeated, wrote Jeremiah (Jer. 10:10–11). These false gods “shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens” (vs. 11). In Daniel’s explanation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, we learn of the great kingdom stone of God: “. . . the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35b). *Restoration is the promise of the prophetic vision.*

How does God intend to bring this about? Not by some discontinuous political event, or some miraculous intervention into the daily processes of the world, but by steady spiritual progress. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (I John 5:4–5). The day of judgment itself is not a discontinuous event in the midst of some steady, relentless spiritual decline, but rather a discontinuous event which will have been preceded by long ages of spiritual and social sanctification (I Cor. 15:25–28), and which will have been briefly interrupted at the end by a rebellion of a tiny minority (“remnant”) of Satan’s host (Rev. 19:19–21). Then the whole creation will be restored.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope: because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:18–23).⁵³

3. Blessings in History

Outward ethical conformity to God’s Bible-revealed law brings God’s covenantal blessings. The very blessings will tempt those who are only outwardly obedient to forget God and violate His statutes. But the regenerate community will use His blessings to further His glory and expand His kingdom into all areas of life. Thus, special grace is ne-

52. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 6.

53. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 5.

cessary to maintain common grace's blessings. (By common grace, theologians mean—or should mean—the unearned gifts of God to all men, including the unregenerate. All men deserve death as a result of Adam's sin [Rom. 5]; life itself is a sign of common grace, that is, an unearned gift.) We learn in Deuteronomy 8 and 28 that the external world of nature responds in terms of a community's outward conformity to or rejection of God's law. Thus, as always, ethical questions are primary, not metaphysical questions of being. The creation itself is closely linked to man's ethical response to God. It was cursed when man sinned, and it will be restored progressively as men are conformed once again to God's legal requirements.

God makes it plain that His requirements are ethical rather than metaphysical. Magic is therefore rejected as a means of pleasing God. Men do not manipulate God by manipulating some aspect of the creation. The magical formula, "as above, so below," which undergirds astrology, divination, and other forms of ritualistic manipulation, is a false formula. Man is only analogical to God, not a participant with God in some universal "being." God requires ritual, but not ritual devoid of spiritual content. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:7–8). This is why God can promise external restoration; it will have been preceded by personal regeneration in the elect, and by outward conformity to the law of God by both the regenerate and the unregenerate.

L. Fatherhood and Adoption

As far as man is concerned, no more crucial distinction in the Bible exists: *created sonship* and *adopted sonship*. Men's eternal destinies rest upon this distinction. God has created all men. Paul, preaching to the Athenians, announced that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26a), and therefore all men are brothers in the flesh. This constitutes the equality of all men in Adam—absolute total depravity, regardless of race or color—and it serves as *the sole point of contact* in all men for the message of the gospel, since all men are created in God's image. There can be no other point of contact, certainly not in hypothetically

“neutral” logical proofs of God.⁵⁴ Paul preached to the pagans of Athens, not using logical proofs of God, but using an appeal to their common, but sinful, humanity.

The Christian goal is not the universal brotherhood of man on earth and in time. We already have the brotherhood of man; we have had it since Cain and Abel walked on earth. What the Bible calls for is *the adoption of the elect into the family of God*. It is no accident that the Gospel of John begins with a call to adopted sonship: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11–13). The regenerate “have received the Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15). This is God’s greatest gift to individual men: ethical adoption by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness into God’s holy (set apart) family. “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world; But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:3–5).

Adoption is exclusively in terms of God’s total sovereignty and total predestination. “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:4–5). It could not be made any plainer than this. The children of God by adoption were chosen before the foundation of the world, even as God chose Jacob and hated Esau, before either was born or could do evil (Rom. 9:10–13). (The amazing fact, it should be noted, is that God loved Jacob, not that he hated the unregenerate, though unborn, Esau. Secularists and Arminians would paint the picture as a mirror image to the Bible’s: it seems astounding to them that God could hate Esau.) In short, wrote Paul, “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Rom 9:8).

54. For a Christian refutation of the so-called “proofs of God,” see Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R, [1955] 2008), pp. 332–44; cf. *Christian-Theistic Evidences*. Van Til asserted that the premise of all human thought must be the sovereign, trinitarian, Creator God of the Bible. Anything other than this as an operating presupposition is simply argumentation from a void to a void.

God imposes a basic division between men. There is no universal gift of peace on earth, good will toward men. Jesus' own account of His ministry could not be any plainer: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34–36).

There are therefore two distinct brotherhoods, for there are two fatherhoods: God the Father-Creator of all men and God the Father-Redeemer of some men. God disinherited the sons of the first Adam; He adopts sinners because of the work on the cross of His own Son, the second Adam (I Cor. 15:45). All men are *brothers metaphysically*, a fact which, were it not for God's saving grace (Eph. 2:8–9), would unite all men in destruction. Not all men are *brothers ethically*; the brotherhood of the promise of grace is limited to God's predestined elect.

M. Creation and Covenant

The Fall of man was ethical, not metaphysical. The creation therefore was originally good. The concern of the gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ is with adoption. This means that God's concern is exclusively covenantal. God covenants Himself with a chosen and exclusive people. He will be their God; they will be His people. He acts on their behalf as their sovereign monarch. He delivers them from evil. He intervenes in a special way in the history of His people. The so-called "two tables of the law" given by God to Moses were not separated in terms of *two sets of five commandments each* (with the second half—social laws—somehow less crucial than the first half, or spiritual commandments). The two tables were almost certainly two sets of the same ten laws, one serving as a copy for God the King, and the other serving as a copy for His covenanted people. This was the standard practice of kings in the second millennium, B.C.⁵⁵ God the sovereign monarch sets forth the terms of His treaty with His people; His people must respond in obedience, or else suffer the wrath of the monarch's hand upon them. (This is the meaning of both circumcision and baptism; an oath sign promising blessings to the faithful or wrath to the unfaithful.)⁵⁶

55. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), ch. 1.

56. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969). Kline is as superb in his studies of the meaning of covenant as he is appalling in his "frame-

The prophets, time and again, confronted the people of Israel with the claims of God. They recapitulated His dealings with them. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who delivered the captive people out of the bondage of Egypt, who led them into a promised land, now calls His people to repentance. The focus is on the history and provisions of the covenant. Stephen, in his testimony before his accusers, began with God's call to Abraham to leave pagan Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2). In terms of the rituals of the chosen people, God is primarily the God of the covenant. Ritually, He is only marginally the God of Creation. In only one biblical passage, Psalm 136, is the creation mentioned as part of the otherwise familiar recapitulation of God's covenant history.

This aspect of Bible history is in stark contrast to virtually all pagan and "primitive" (that is, degenerate) cultures. Pagans pay exclusive attention to the creation in their accounts of God's activities. The primary Christian and Hebrew festivals are associated with the Passover, that is, the exodus from Egypt. The first communion service held by the Christians was during the Passover (Matt. 26: 17–35). Paul wrote, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:7–8). *The Passover feast was covenantal and ethical. The pagan creation festivals are exclusively metaphysical.* They assume a common bond between God and man—a common bond of pure being. The Passover assumed a covenantal and ethical bond between God and His people; in the communion service, this is symbolized by the eating of bread and the drinking of wine. Christ's body and blood are symbolized, and men participate in His perfect humanity. They hope for the day when they shall be recreated and dressed in perfection like His body (Phil. 3:21). But we can never participate in Christ's divinity. God is fundamentally different from man.

The pagan festivals have basic similarities. They all are based on the idea that the world was created by God in a massive struggle with chaos. Creation was not out of nothing; it was the triumph of order over chaos. God therefore is said to confront chaos. The implication is that God, no less than men, faces zones of pure chance and unpredictability. He faces a world that is only partially known to Him. In other

work hypothesis" concerning the creation.

words, we are like God, only less powerful and less knowledgeable, relatively speaking. By reenacting the original creation, men believe that they can participate in the original pre-time event. Men can share the act of creation, thereby escaping ritually (and, some cultures believe, actually) the bondage of time. Saturnalia, Mardi Gras, and Carnival are all chaos festivals. Laws are broken, mores are violated, masks are worn, and men are revitalized from below. They become co-creators, co-participants with God in the act of original creation.⁵⁷ The creation, since it was not an absolute creation out of nothing by the fiat word of a sovereign God, can therefore be thought of as just one more finite event, however important. Paradise is to be reestablished through ritual chaos—total moral discontinuity—which brings back the age of gold.

The biblical promise of the new creation is based upon the grace of a totally sovereign Creator. He restores men ethically. He puts His law in their hearts. This was the promise in Jeremiah 31:31–34; it was fulfilled by Christ (Heb. 8:9–13; 10:16–17). God's promises and His prophecies are being fulfilled or have been fulfilled in this age, the age of the church, the body of Christ. We can thus celebrate the covenant of God with the people of Israel, for we are called "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).⁵⁸ Our celebrations are not disorderly, for they deny the existence of some metaphysical chaos confronting a limited God. Our rule is simple: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40).

The celebrations of the church call us to acknowledge our total dependence, metaphysically and ethically, on the Creator God. He has covenanted with us out of mercy. We therefore do not celebrate the creation, for that act was exclusively God's as sovereign Creator. We had no part in it, due to the fact that we are the work of His hands. We do not participate in the acts of divinity, for there is an unbridgeable gulf between our being and God's being. The Son of God, through the incarnation, once walked on earth, perfectly human and perfectly divine, two natures in union but without intermixture. This is the foundation of our faith. Only through the greatest discontinuous event of all history—the incarnation of the Son of God—is man restored to wholeness. Christians therefore neglect the celebration of the creation, not because our God is not the Creator, but because He, and He alone,

57. See the references to the works of Mircea Eliade, footnote #30.

58. Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1954] 1982).

is the Creator. We do not attempt through ritual to participate in His divine acts or His divine being. We acknowledge the greatest of all distinctions, the Creator-creature distinction. And we announce, in confidence: "My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:2).⁵⁹

Conclusion

The doctrine of the six-day creation lies at the heart of biblical wisdom. God initially revealed Himself as the Creator who created all things in six days. Christians can accept this or not, but if they do not accept it, they lose access to a worldview that is provided only by God in His Bible. This worldview offers them unique insights into the way the social and economic world works. Without this worldview, Christians wind up baptizing this or that humanist outlook. They find themselves ensnared in the contradictions of humanism.

59. This essay first appeared in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I (Summer 1974), published by Chalcedon, P. O. Box 158, Vallecito, California, 95251. At the time that I wrote the original version of this essay, the crucially important works of the Benedictine scholar, Stanley Jaki, were not yet in print: *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, [1974] 1980); *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and *Cosmos and Creator* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1980). Jaki argued that without a concept of God, the Creator, and without faith in man's mind as competent to study the externally existent, orderly universe—faith in man as the image of God, in other words—there can be no scientific progress. Without a concept of linear history, there can be no scientific progress. Jaki, as a Thomist, was a philosophical realist. He accepted as valid the proofs of God, something Van Til effectively refuted, at least insofar as such proofs begin with the assumption of the validity of neutral, autonomous reasoning. Nevertheless, Jaki's extraordinary scholarship makes plain one fact: that all modern science rests on presuppositions concerning nature's regularities and also on the interpretive ability of men's minds that are "borrowed premises." Only by assuming the validity of an essentially Christian view of man and the creation have Western scientists advanced their disciplines. And where these premises have not been accepted, there has been no scientific progress. Jaki's studies, along with those of the French scholar, Pierre Duhem, constitute some of the most remarkable works in historical revisionism that have ever been written. Anyone who is not thoroughly familiar with them cannot be taken seriously as an historian of science. This, it should be understood, in 2012 includes the vast majority of those who call themselves scientists. They are abysmally ignorant of the historical and philosophical roots of modern science.

Appendix E

WITNESSES AND JUDGES

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16–17).

Good judgment. The Bible calls it wisdom. What is it worth to a godly man? This is what Solomon asked for (I Kings 3:9), and what the Book of Proverbs says is the most valuable asset that a person can seek (Prov. 1).

Adam was called upon by God to render good judgment. He was to exercise good judgment in three senses. The first sense was *economic or dominical judgment*, in the sense of technical and leadership skills, as a dominion man. Second, he was to exercise *judicial judgment*: to declare God's word in condemnation of God's enemies. Third, he was to exercise *moral judgment*. Most commentaries dwell exclusively on the moral aspect of Adam's fall, but the dominical and judicial are equally important considerations.

The development of good *dominical judgment* as a godly subordinate was basic to Adam's calling before God. It is basic to humanity, for basic to humanity is the dominion assignment (Gen. 1:28).¹ Adam was placed in the garden temporarily in order to develop his dominion skills and judgment: managerial, agricultural, aesthetic, technological, etc. Later, he was to begin the conquest of the whole earth. *The garden of Eden was a training ground for him*. It was not to become a permanent residence. He could not stay there forever. He was to move out of the garden and into the world at large, bringing it under dominion. The garden was only a temporary residence.

The essence of good judgment in both the economic and judicial sense is the ability to "think God's thoughts after Him" as an ethically

1. Chapter 4.

dependent subordinate. *Men are to exercise dominion over nature by remaining ethically subordinate to God.* Men are creatures. They are not to strive to attain exhaustive knowledge, which is an incommunicable attribute of God. They are to strive to organize the knowledge they possess in terms of the presuppositions and explicit revelations that God has given to man concerning the creation. God holds men responsible for such intellectual and moral subordination. He rewards them for obedience. *Thus, the starting-point of good judgment is man's affirmation of the reliability and ethically binding nature of God's word.* When men do not start with this presupposition, they cannot hope to exercise good judgment for very long.

A. Bearing False Witness

The serpent tempted mankind in a very specific way. He first raised doubts in Eve's mind concerning the reliability of her husband's testimony to her concerning God's word. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" the serpent asked (Gen. 3:1). He quoted only part of God's word. Hadn't God opened up the entire garden to them?

Initially, she answered him properly. She told him of God's warning that they would die if they ate of one tree. So, the serpent escalated his attack: he denied that God's word is reliable. "Ye shall not surely die" (3:4). Then he made the accusation that God had a secret ulterior motive in establishing the prohibition: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (3:5). In other words, God is jealously monopolizing His position as the Lord of creation, a position that can and should be shared with others. Man, of course, should share in this lofty position, the serpent implied on behalf of Satan. He misled her, for Satan was the one with the ulterior motive: he believed that ultimately he should occupy God's position monopolistically.

Satan made a three-part claim: God's word is not what He says it is, God's position is not what He says it is, and the results of eating the forbidden fruit are not what God says they will be. In short, God is a liar. The heart of Satan's accusation against God was this: *God bears false witness concerning Himself and the creation.*

The phrase, "to know good and evil," implies power greater than mere intellectual comprehension. It implies the ability to *determine*

good and evil, as Rushdoony has pointed out.² This is a God-like ability, and Adam and Eve desired it. So did Satan. Man hoped to make his own law, carrying out his will without interference from God or other men, and certainly without resistance from the creation. So did Satan. Neither man nor Satan achieved this goal.

Eve saw that the tree was good for food, for aesthetic pleasure ("pleasant to the eyes"), and for wisdom. She did not seek to confirm her new understanding of God's word with her husband. She sought autonomy of interpretation. She would test God's word for herself. She ate, and she gave her husband fruit to eat. The subordinate in the family took control of the situation. The results were predictable for those governed by God's word. Adam and Eve did not predict them.

Why did Satan begin by calling God's word into question? Because this was the essence of the temptation. The fruit was only the symbol; the reliability of God's word, and His authority to bring that word to pass, were the ultimate issues. Satan was challenging both. He was calling God a liar. He also was saying that God is not omnipotent: He cannot bring His word to pass. In short, Satan was saying that he was telling the truth, and that God was a false witness. Man had to decide. He had to make a judgment: Who was the false witness?

B. Two Witnesses

What modern commentators fail to emphasize, or even to recognize, is this: *The temptation in the garden was fundamentally a judicial proceeding.* Satan's agent was bringing a formal charge against God. The charge was bearing false witness. Yet this was more than bearing false witness; it was the charge of bearing false witness concerning God almighty. The serpent charged that God was not telling the truth about the "real" God. God later revealed to Moses that it is a capital crime to teach a family member to worship a false god (Deut. 13:6–11). Adam and Eve were the children of God was therefore deserving of death. But who would listen? To bring a charge of this magnitude against anyone, the accuser needs two witnesses (Num. 35:30). To begin his rebellion, Satan needed two witnesses to testify against God.³

Furthermore, who had the right to execute the death sentence?

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *Genesis* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 2002), p. 35.

3. This is why Satan's rebellion probably began in the garden, not in heaven days before or even before time began.

Not the accuser. The witnesses have this responsibility: "The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put away evil from among you" (Deut. 17:7). Satan needed at least two witnesses who had knowledge of the actual words of God before he could see his goal achieved, namely, *the death of God*.

Adam had been given God's instructions concerning the forbidden tree. He was the witness whose word was fundamental to the trial. Eve knew of God's instructions, but only because Adam had told her. She had not been present when God had spoken these words to Adam. Her testimony would have been based on "hearsay evidence."

Judicially speaking, God's word could not be legally challenged in this court, for there were not two witnesses. But Satan proceeded as if he were in a position to bring charges. He appealed to Eve, who then acted autonomously, and who subsequently brought her husband into the court as an implicit witness against God, for she gave him fruit to eat, and he ate. Adam never verbally confirmed Satan's charge. He did not verbally lie. He simply acted out his rebellion. *But his act of rebellion constituted his testimony*, for implicit in his eating of the fruit was a denial of the binding authority of God's word.

The Christian view of God is Trinitarian. God is three Persons, yet also one Person. Each Person always has the corroborating testimony of the others. Therefore, God's word cannot be successfully challenged in a court. Two Witnesses testify eternally to the validity of what the other Person declares. Each has exhaustive knowledge of the others; each has exhaustive knowledge of the creation. The truth of God's word is established by Witnesses. As the supreme Witness, God casts the first stone on the day of final judgment, and then His people follow Him in executing judgment.

The doctrine of the two witnesses also throws light on the New Testament doctrine of the *rebellious third*. In Revelation 8, we are told that one-third of the trees are burned up (v. 7), one-third of the sea becomes blood (v. 8), and a third part of the creatures and ships in the sea are destroyed (v. 9). A third part of the rivers are hit by the star from heaven (v. 10), and a third part of the sun, moon, and stars are smitten (v. 12). In Revelation 9, we read that angels in judgment work for a time to slay a third part of rebellious mankind (v. 15), to testify to the other two-thirds of the coming judgment, yet they do not repent (v. 21). A third of the stars (angels) of heaven are pulled down by Satan's tail (Rev. 12:4).

Why these divisions into thirds? Because *for every transgressor, there are two righteous witnesses to condemn him*. God's final judgment is assured, for in God's court, there will always be a sufficient number of witnesses to condemn the ethical rebels.

C. Instant Judgment

What was the primary lure of this particular fruit? It would make men wise. But what kind of wisdom was this? It was the wisdom given to Solomon by God: *the ability to make wise judgments*. Satan's promise was that men would be able to determine good and evil and then act upon the information. On the other hand, God had told man that he was to avoid the tree, and by implication, to avoid the quest for instant illumination, meaning instant authority as a judge. But man did not obey. He did not want to wait.

How was man to achieve good judgment? By conforming himself to God's word. Man was and is required first and foremost *to obey God's word*. This requirement applied both to his role as a *judge*, declaring good and evil, and in his role as a *dominion man*, working out the implications of God's word, in time and on earth. In terms of his role as a subordinate sovereign over nature, he was to attain good judgment by bringing the whole world into subjection to God. When we are speaking of making economic judgments, we say that over time—possibly a lengthy period of time—man's skills in conforming his actions to God's standards would have progressively developed in him the judgment he needed.

In his role as a judge, on the other hand, man's field of testing was limited by God: to stay away from just one tree during a period of testing. Do this, the test implied, and you will eventually attain good judgment. Adam should have joined with Eve in trying and executing the serpent. That was his role as judge: to render judgment. Instead, they rendered judgment against God. They ate the forbidden fruit.

Adam could have achieved a position as a law-abiding, God-appointed judge by the end of the day, for he had another option: to eat of the tree of life. This would have served as a visible, public affirmation of man's belief in God's word. Eternal life is attainable only from that tree. *By eating of the tree of life, man would have declared ritually that he was subordinating himself wholly to God, relying wholly upon God's word concerning the true way of life*. Eating a meal from the tree of life would have meant communion with God—a ritual communion

meal, eaten in faith while God was physically absent.

The moment that Adam and Eve had eaten from that tree, the ethical test—the test of Adam as a judge—would have been over. The possibility of death would have been removed. On the day that they ate of the tree of life, they could not have died. The penalty of eating from the forbidden tree would have been removed. *Without a penalty, there is no law.*

In all likelihood, God would have returned to judge Satan at this point. Adam's test would have been over. God would have declared the forbidden tree "on limits." Satan's trial would have been held on this day of judgment. There would have been no need for God to have retained His prohibition after His return to the garden and after the trial, for their ethical temptation would have been over. But as the final Judge, He would have had to declare His acceptance of their provisional judgment against Satan and Satan's interpretation of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

By conforming themselves ritually to God's word concerning eternal life, they would have attained man's assigned goal of rendering judgment against the serpent. But then they could not have attained their preferred goal: *autonomous judgment*. The issues were autonomy, the question of the reliability of God's word, and the authority to render final judgment concerning that word.

D. Witness: An Inescapable Office

The drama in the garden was a courtroom drama. We commonly speak of the garden as a "trial" for Adam, in the sense of a test; it was also a trial in a judicial sense. There was an intruder in the garden. He was tempting them to commit a capital crime—in fact, a crime doubly capital in its offensiveness: eating the forbidden fruit and perjuring themselves in a court of law regarding another person's commission of a capital crime. The penalty for committing perjury is the punishment that would have been imposed on the innocent victim (Deut. 19:16–19).⁴

Satan's charge, had he been able to prove it, would have required the death of God. This would have left Satan as the most powerful being in the universe, the one who renders final judgment. It was their responsibility to avoid all further contact with this intruder until they

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

could bring formal charges against him when God returned. He had tempted them to deny the word of God and become false witnesses. He deserved death.

Inevitably, they would have to testify. They were witnesses. Adam had witnessed God's word, and Eve had witnessed the serpent's. Eve should have gone to her husband and openly asked him what God had said. If she still had doubts, she should have waited for God to return to repeat His law. Had Eve remained faithful to her husband's word, she would have joined with him to try, condemn, and execute the serpent.

Had Adam served as a righteous witness, he would have asked the serpent to repeat the interpretation of God's word, which it had given to Eve (unless Adam had been silently present with her during the temptation). Then Adam would have issued judgment against the serpent and crushed his head.

They could testify against God or against Satan, but they could not escape testifying. God subpoenas all witnesses. From the moment of temptation, man became a witness. *This is the heart of the experience in the garden: man had to serve as a witness against Satan before he could serve as a judge of the angels (I Cor. 6:3).* This is also the experience of mankind throughout history, with some men testifying for Satan and against God, hoping to become *autonomous judges*, and others testifying against Satan and for God, hoping to become *subordinate judges*. Before becoming judges, men must first exercise judgment concerning which kind of witness they will be. They must also decide whose court it is, and who the prosecutor is. Most important of all, who is the presiding judge: God, Satan, or man?

If they testified against the serpent, and he was convicted, they would also have to execute justice against him. They would crush his head. It is clear why God established stoning as the normal mode of execution in a covenantal commonwealth. *Stoning is the symbolic equivalent of head-crushing.* To crush the convicted person's head is to destroy him. Also, the witnesses for the prosecution must take full responsibility for their testimony. This is the requirement of God for human courts, and it was the requirement in Eden. Bringing charges against Satan, they would have to execute the Judge's judgment.

There was no escape from the ethical obligation to witness against Satan and for God. There still isn't. There is also no escape from the ethical duty of crushing the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). It is done progressively, through cultural dominion. Man will eventually judge

the angels.

Man is to crush the head of the serpent, and redeemed man does so as he witnesses against Satan, but now man is vulnerable to the bite of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). This would not have been true if Adam and Eve had executed the serpent. They should have then celebrated a communion meal at the tree of life. They should have awaited God's return, when they should have served as witnesses against Satan, telling God of the testimony of Satan's agent, the serpent.

Final judgment was delayed. They had to wait for God to return in order to obtain judgment. There had to be a trial. This delay was part of what repelled them. They wanted to declare instant judgment, and they believed that they could do this only by siding with Satan and eating from the forbidden tree immediately. They ate, thereby becoming *witnesses for Satan*. Their eyes were immediately opened, as promised by Satan—his partial word of truth—but they still had to wait on God. They wanted to become autonomous judges instantly, but they could not achieve their goal. They had to wait for God to return, for only God can declare final judgment.

E. Judicial Robes

Their immediate response to their new condition—at this point, an ethical condition, not yet a physical condition—was to sew fig leaves together to cover themselves. They needed a covering because of their shame. They could no longer work together without coverings. Their sin had interfered with the division of labor between them. I suspect that they worked separately, not as a team. This is an explanation which is most consistent with the nature of their rebellion: they hid from each other until their coverings were in place. Their sin alienated them ethically from God and from each other, as God's images. They sewed fig leaves together; they were probably not working together. Their ability to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant in the God-designed division of labor was compromised by their perception of their nakedness.

It took time to sew these fig leaves together. They worked, not to subdue the earth, but to cover their shame. Rather than working together in their first joint project on their first day of independent labor, in all likelihood, they worked separately. It was each for his own glory—or at least lack of shame—that they worked. Man's imitation glory is simply a make-shift covering, a hoped-for lack of shame.

Why did they think they needed clothing? Shame is specifically mentioned in the text. But shame over what? Vulnerability? What kind of vulnerability? Was it their fear of God? If they were afraid of God, they needed protection. They still had access to protection: *the tree of life*. What seems astounding in retrospect is that they did not make a mad dash for the tree of life. God later closed the garden to them, and set a flaming sword in front of it, specifically to keep them from eating from the tree of life and gaining immortality (Gen. 3:22). The tree of life still retained its life-giving power. Why did they refuse to eat during God's physical absence?

We come to the heart of man's sin when we answer this question. *Man would have had to subordinate himself to God's word in order to receive eternal life*. They saw that they were naked. Their eyes had been opened. The serpent's word was partially fulfilled. God had not told them about this aspect of the tree of knowledge, and now the serpent was apparently vindicated. However, the second half of the serpent's word had yet to be fulfilled, namely, that on the day that they ate, they would *not* surely die. But God had said that they would die. So, the partial fulfillment of Satan's word—having their eyes opened—was insufficient to prove the case. This was merely the serpent's additional information vs. the silence of God. The crucial test was still undecided. What would be the outcome of the two antithetical words? Would the rebels die before the day was over?

The serpent had said that they would not die. Why would they believe such a thing? Because God is immortal. By implication, becoming as God would mean that they, too, were immortal. Would they not participate in the very being of God? Would not His attributes become theirs, including immortality? This temptation, James Jordan said, is the origin of the *chain of being* philosophy.

They were still clinging to their false witness. They would not admit that the serpent was lying, that God's word was sure. They did not go directly to the tree of life while there was still time remaining prior to the judgment of God. They refused to admit ritually that the day was not yet over, that God would surely come in judgment and slay them as He had promised. Instead, they spent their time making coverings for themselves. It was a question of *saving their skins* or *covering their hides*. They chose to cover their hides. Their pride condemned them.

Jordan argued that they sensed their need for coverings because they understood a judge's need for a robe. The robe in the Bible is *a*

robe of judicial office. Joseph's long, sleeved robe (sometimes translated "coat of many colors") from Jacob was just this kind of robe (Gen. 37:3). It signified his authority over his brothers. When he told them of his dream that they would bow down to him (37:5–11), they stripped him of his robe (37:23) and tore it up (37:32). They refused to tolerate his authority over them. They cast him into a pit, and the pit was in the wilderness (37:22)—another familiar Bible theme.

Robes are given by God or those who are God's lawful subordinates. Adam and Eve wanted to manifest their self-appointed authority as judges, but without robes, they were visibly usurpers. They had judged God's word. By implication, they had to judge God and execute the sentence. Yet they were naked. A naked judge is not in a position to render judgment.

Adam and Eve were naked, not because they were sinless, but because they were children. As they matured, they would have been given clothing by God as a sign of their maturity, and as a sign of their authority as judges. Now that they had autonomously and *prematurely* grabbed judicial authority, they felt compelled to sew coverings for themselves. They were the image of God, and God wears clothing. He wears the glory cloud. In Daniel 8:9, the Ancient of Days is adorned in a white robe. In Revelation 1:13, the son of man has a robe that covers his feet. But God is not a sinner in need of covering. He is a judge who wears a robe. They, too, wanted to wear such robes.

It is significant that God in His mercy killed animals and made coverings for them. He simultaneously saved their skins (temporarily) and covered their hides, but only by sacrificing the life of an animal whose hide became man's covering. They were covered physically because of the shed blood of one or more animals. Their physical shame was temporarily removed from sight. (Ultimately, the shame of death can no longer be successfully hidden by clothing.) But this act of slaying the animal pointed to the necessity of the death of an innocent victim to cover man ethically.

Perhaps they were too ashamed to be seen running for the tree of life. They may have decided to clothe themselves before heading in the direction of the tree. They may have believed that, with their coverings, they would not be ashamed in front of each other or the serpent; they could eat of the tree of life after their coverings were in place. "First things first."

Prior to the judge's rendering of final judgment, witnesses can change their testimony. If they have perjured themselves, they must

admit their guilt, but they can avoid the penalty by throwing themselves before the mercy of the court. *They incur shame, but they avoid the penalty for perjury.* But Adam and Eve would not accept shame. Rebellious man never does. They preferred to risk the penalty. Rebellious man always does.

They could have gone to the tree of life. They could have had a ritual communion meal with God. They could have attained eternal life. They refused. It was more important to cover their shame.

They had another option. When they heard God walking in the cool of the day, they could still have run to him and admitted their guilt. Instead, they hid from him, thereby abandoning their last opportunity to escape the penalty.

F. The Judicial Process

Immediately upon His return, God began His investigation. He looked at the evidence. They were wearing fig leaves. He concluded that their eyes were open. This meant that they had eaten from the forbidden tree (3:11). Adam admitted that he had eaten, but first he blamed his wife. He refused to take the blame by himself. Misery loves company. He wanted the “bone of his bone” to suffer the penalty, too.

Then God asked Eve about what she had done. She blamed the serpent. In effect, both Adam and Eve blamed their environment, which God had made. They blamed God indirectly. But neither wanted to suffer the penalty alone.

This is the response of ethical rebels. It is not a godly response. What did Christ say? “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). He accepted the full punishment. This is what Isaiah said the messiah would do for Israel: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:4–5). What is rebellious men’s response? Isaiah points to *shame*: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (52:3). Men hide their faces in shame, just as our parents did in the garden.

God judged the serpent without asking him to testify. No cross examination was necessary. Adam had admitted guilt; Eve had blamed

the serpent. He had lured them into sin. The serpent had nothing to say in his defense. The serpent stood condemned. Soon he would crawl condemned. God had seen and heard. But God did not declare final judgment against the serpent. He declared *definitive judgment* and announced a *provisional penalty*: the serpent would crawl on its belly and eat the dust of the ground. Eventually, its head will be crushed by the promised man (Gen. 3:15). There will be a final judgment. But Satan now has no response to give in God's court. He has been definitively condemned along with his covenantal agent.

What we see in the story of the garden is that God gives men time to repent and become faithful witnesses to the validity of God's word. But, once the final verdict is rendered, there is no escape. Men are cast out of the garden and away from the tree of life. They cannot attain eternal life through a return to the physical garden and a physical tree. Once God pronounces judgment, man's destiny is sealed.

The day in the garden is symbolic of each man's life on earth, as well as mankind's stay on earth prior to the final judgment. There is still time to repent of the act of bearing false witness against God. There is time to eat the tree of life. This is what the communion meal means: a ritual meal eaten in the spiritual presence of God, before He returns physically to render final judgment. When He returns physically, it is the time of final judgment, just as when He draws near spiritually (for example, in the glory cloud in Old Testament times), it is a time of provisional judgment. Ungodly men hide; godly men rejoice. God delays rendering final judgment for mercy's sake. He did so in the garden, and He does so today. But He will eventually return. The time of mercy will end.

G. Rendering Provisional Judgment

Man wanted to render autonomous judgment. He also wanted to render instant judgment. Eve had the authority to kill the serpent, who was an invader. She could have gone to Adam to tell him to render judgment. They had the authority to crush its head. They were to defend the garden's boundaries.⁵ They chose not to do their duty as

5. In the 1987 edition of this book, I argued that they should have waited for God to return before rendering judgment against the serpent. But, as guardians of the garden, they had the authority to crush the serpent's head. They could lawfully render instant judgment against Satan's agent. They would have to wait until God's return in order to serve as witnesses against Satan by justifying their crushing of the serpent's head.

God's delegated agents. They refused to act as His agents. They instead chose to test His word.

Had they done their duty, God would have rendered judgment against Satan. They could have testified that the serpent told them to eat of the tree. They possessed lawful authority to crush its head. But they had neither the authority or the power to crush Satan's head. That was God's authority and power to execute. They were witnesses to what the serpent had said. They would have to wait on God to testify against Satan in God's court.

God spared the serpent's life. He spared Satan's life. He spared Adam's life and Eve's. The drama of the garden would be repeated again and again in history. More temptations would come. Men would serve as witnesses and judges, executing either God's judgment or their own.

The reason why man today can execute judgment provisionally is because he is made in God's image (Gen. 9:5–6). God has declared His judgment against sin in His word. This was a *definitive* declaration. He brings His judgment to pass in history. This is His *progressive* judgment. He will declare and execute judgment at the end of time. This is His *final* judgment. Men can therefore render provisional judgment because God has declared His judgment and His standards of enforcement in His law. He declared Himself definitively to Moses, as He had to Adam. Men are therefore called to render earthly, provisional judgment in God's name, as His lawful subordinates. But they must render honest judgment in terms of His law.

The temptation in the garden was in the form of a judicial proceeding. So is all of life. We are to render provisional, subordinate judgment in every area of life. We are to master God's Bible-revealed law so that we can render honest judgment, just as Adam and Eve should have rendered provisional judgment against the serpent in the garden by avoiding him and the forbidden tree before God returned physically to render final judgment.

Man wanted to be able to render autonomous, instant judgment. He ate of the forbidden tree. What he found was that final judgment is delayed. It is delayed against him, but it is also delayed against Satan. Satan remains man's enemy, bruising man's heel. God threw Adam and Eve out of the garden and banned their return to it physically, in time and on earth. But He offered them grace and a promise: Man will eventually crush the head of the serpent by steadily overcoming Satan's kingdom in time and on earth. Redeemed men will witness

against him formally, in the court of life, and then execute judgment against him. But now the delay in God's physical return is more than one afternoon. Rebellious man declared instant judgment against God and for Satan; redeemed man must now struggle against Satan and the works of Satan's people, developing his good judgment over time.

Man must serve as a judge in history. He must declare judgment *progressively* in terms of God's *definitive* judgment and the promised *final* judgment. Man is now outside the garden, which was to have served as his training ground before he entered the world at large. Now the garden is closed to him, and the earth is cursed. This cursing of the ground also delays man's judgment, under God. It takes longer to render judgment as he works under God to build up the kingdom of God, in time and on earth. He struggles ethically against Satan and physically against the thorns. Adam had hoped to be an instant judge, but only Satan was willing to promise him that option, and then only if he testified against God.

So, man's dream has been turned against him. Hoping to *render judgment autonomously and instantaneously*, he has had to *render judgment subordinately and progressively*. His dream of autonomy has also been thwarted. He can declare judgment against God under Satan, or he can declare against Satan under God. But he is a provisional judge, not a final judge. He is always under the overall sovereignty of God, but ethically he places himself under the judicial sovereignty of either God or Satan.

H. Standards of Judgment

What God has declared *definitively* must serve as man's standards *provisionally*, for man will be judged in terms of these standards *finally*. This points inescapably to the continuing validity of biblical law. Rebellious man will attempt to adhere to the dominion covenant by rendering judgment, but as he grows more consistent with his condition as a covenant-breaker, he will seek to declare his own standards, and to render final judgment.

There are two humanistic standards that covenant-breakers substitute in place of biblical law: *natural law* and *positive law*. Natural law theorists declare that man, as judge, has access to universal standards of righteousness that are binding on all men in all periods of time. These standards are therefore available to all men through the use of a universal faculty of judgment, either reason or intuition. In fact, to de-

clare judgment in terms of such a law-order, the judge must exercise both reason and intuition, in order to “fit” the morally binding universal standard to the particular circumstances of the case. What is therefore *logically binding* becomes *morally binding* in natural law theories. What is logical is therefore right.

Positive law does not appeal to universal standards of logic in order to discover righteousness. It appeals to the particular case. Circumstances determine what is correct. In the United States, the legislature (Congress) declares definitively what the law is, and this becomes the morally binding code of justice. But the legislature has a rival: the judiciary. The judge interprets the law in terms of a written Constitution and also previous judicial declarations. In other societies, there is no such authority of the courts. Judgment *finally* becomes the true law, if “the people” (or the executive) are willing and able to enforce what the judge declares. In short, *what the state can enforce is therefore right*.

Neither the legislature nor the courts can escape the need to declare some sort of coherent (logical) standard, and neither branch of civil government can avoid the use of some non-logical human facility (intuition) to apply the law to specific cases. “Circumstances” do not speak with a universally clear voice, nor does “reason.” Both must get an answer to this question: By what standard? Autonomous positive law and autonomous natural law rely on each other. As Cornelius Van Til has said, each side makes its living by taking in the other side’s laundry. Both natural law theory and positive law theory are apostate. Both cry out together against the universally binding nature of God’s Bible-revealed law. Both sides define justice in terms of what man can discover and enforce, not in terms of what God has declared, has enforced, and will bring to final judgment.

It is more common for self-styled Christian social, political, and legal theorists to declare the doctrines of natural law. Natural law seems at first glance to be closer to a concept of eternal law made by God. Natural law theorists can also appeal to the fatherhood of God (Acts 17:26) as the foundation of their universal valid categories of law. But the fatherhood of God is a doctrine that condemns man, for it points to fallen man’s position as *a disinherited covenant-breaker*, not an ethical son. How can a disinherited son agree with an adopted son about the nature of their mutual responsibilities to themselves and to the Father, let alone agree about the final distribution of the inheritance? Did Isaac and Ishmael agree? Did Jacob and Esau agree? Did

Cain and Abel?

What was the “natural law” aspect of God’s prohibition against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? The serpent at first tried to lure Eve into eating by an appeal to what appeared to be a universal law. Hadn’t God said that they could eat of every tree in the garden? In other words, why not eat of this one tree? Eve replied appropriately: God has forbidden us to eat of this particular tree. This was a specific revelation to her husband. If she had stuck with her initial resistance, Satan would have thwarted his plans. If man had relied on natural law theory to guide his actions, he would not have offered even this token resistance to the temptation. The general law—eat from every tree—would have prevailed. It took God’s verbal revelation to warn them about the prohibited tree.

It is not surprising to find that those Christian scholars who have been most open in their denial of the continuing applicability of revealed Old Testament law have also been vociferous promoters of some version of natural law theory. Natural law theory offers them a time-honored, man-made covering for their shame, for they fear being exposed as unfashionably dressed in the eyes of their humanist colleagues. *Natural law theory is the conservative antinomian Christian’s fashion preference in the world of fig leaf coverings.* The “bloody skins of God-slaughtered animals”—the forthrightly biblical morality of Bible-revealed law—are just not adequate for him.

There was also an element of positive law in the temptation. The serpent denied that God’s sanction would come true. So, he was asking them to test the reliability of God’s word with respect to the sanctions. “Go ahead and test this. You’re in charge. See if I’m correct about the outcome.” Adam and Eve attempted to establish an alternative legal order by eating. They sought to impose a different outcome in history from the one God had declared.

Conclusion

The development of a godly sense of judgment takes many years. The emphasis of the Bible on the importance of training in the law is central to the question of godly judgment. “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:6–7). *The mastery of God’s*

Bible-revealed law is fundamental for rendering righteous, provisional, subordinate judgment, just as it was on that first working day in Eden.

One of the main reasons why Christians are culturally impotent today is that, for well over two centuries, they have been taught alternative theories of law. They have been told that Christianity can survive under any system of law. The accent is on mere survival. There is supposedly no prospect of Christians' exercising godly rule in every area of life. Of course, we are told, Christianity cannot be expected to flourish under any system of law, not because of specific kinds of flaws in humanistic law systems, but because the church is supposedly impotent by nature in history. For many of those who believe that Christianity is doomed to historical impotence, there seems to be no reason to call forth ridicule, let alone persecution, on themselves by declaring that all humanists are wearing fig leaves, and that Bible-revealed law is the only way that God wants us to cover our nakedness, through grace. Meanwhile, they can buy an "off the rack" fig leaf wardrobe from the latest humanist collection—well, maybe not the latest, but a discount version that is only ten years out of date. "Better to be trendy ten years late than never to be trendy at all!"

Fig leaves do not stand up to the howling winters of a cursed world. When Christians finally learn this lesson, they will be ready to begin to exercise godly judgment.

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(1982)

Economics

It is difficult to recommend a list of books on Christian economics, since the thesis lying behind my writing of this book is that the Christian world has neglected the whole question for three centuries. There is nothing on a par with Adam Smith's *Wealth of the Nations* or Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action*. The best we have available are collections of essays, monographs on certain topics, and one very introductory textbook.

The textbook is Tom Rose's *Economics: Principles and Policy from a Christian Perspective* (Mott Media). He co-authored (with Robert Metcalf) *The Coming Victory* (Christian Studies Center, Memphis, TN 38111).

I compiled a collection of 31 essays, *An Introduction to Christian Economics*, published by Craig Press in 1973. It is presently out of print. It is scheduled to be reprinted by the Institute for Christian Economics. I wrote these essays for several magazines and newspapers from the late 1960s through the early 1970s.

For those interested in Marxism, my out-of-print book, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: The Doctrine of Creative Destruction* (1968) might be useful. No one who makes a detailed study of socialism can afford to miss Ludwig von Mises' classic refutation, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (1922), which is available from Liberty Classics (7440 N. Shadeland, Indianapolis, IN 46250). It was published in the United States by Yale University Press in 1951.

I offer a critique of the epistemology of modern schools of economic thought in my essay, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* (Ross House Books, P.O. Box 67, Vallecito, CA 95251). Two humanist books criticize the assumption of value-free economics: Walter E. Weisskopf, *Alienation*

and Economics (E. P. Dutton, 1971) and Mark A. Lutz and Kenneth Lux, *The Challenge of Humanistic Economics* (Benjamin/Cummings), published in 1979.

Two issues of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* are devoted to the topic: "Christian Economics" (Summer, 1975) and "Inflation" (Summer, 1980): P. O. Box 158, Vallecito, CA 95251.

Books on economic development by the British economist, P. T. Bauer, are important: *Dissent on Development* (1972) and *Equality, The Third World and Economic Delusion* (1981), *Reality and Rhetoric* (1984), all published by Harvard University Press. He is the co-author (with Basil Yamey) of *The Economics of Under-Developed Countries* (Cambridge University Press, 1957). Bauer stresses the importance of freedom, the attitudes of citizens, people's willingness to sacrifice for the long run, and similar issues. He says that without the proper attitudes toward economic success and the freedom to pursue personal goals, long-term economic growth is unlikely.

Complementary to Bauer's books are Helmut Schoeck's *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (Harcourt, Brace, 1970) and Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Little, Brown, 1974). Both books point to the importance of the future-orientation of economic actors for the success of the economy. Banfield argues that economic classes should be defined in terms of future-orientation, not income or capital. My book, *Successful Investing in an Age of Envy* (1981), applies the insights of Schoeck and Banfield to the economy and politics.

The works of Wilhelm Röpke are very important, not simply because he was a fine economist (greatly influenced as a young man by Mises), but because his perspective was far more broad than virtually all other free markets economists. He asked the tough questions about the effects of market freedom on social institutions. He was interested in the moral foundations of freedom, not just in questions of economic efficiency. Most important are his books, *A Humane Economy* (1957), distributed by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 14 S. Bryn Mawr, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010; *Economics of the Free Society* (1963), published originally by Henry Regnery Co., Chicago; *Against the Tide* (1969), a posthumously published collection of his essays, distributed by I.S.I.; *Civitas Humana* (1948); *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (1950); and *International Economic Disintegration* (1942); all published in London by William Hedge & Co. (British books are most easily ordered through Blackwell's, Broad Street, Oxford, England.)

The books written by Murray Rothbard, the anarcho-capitalist, are

all very clear, well documented, and powerfully argued. They include *Man, Economy and State* (1962), *America's Great Depression* (1963), and *What Has Government Done to Our Money?* (1964), available from the Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington, NY 10533. His book denying the legitimacy of all civil government is very good on the economic effects of various kinds of government regulation and taxation: *Power and Market: Government and the Economy* (1970).

F. A. Hayek's books are basic to any understanding of the free market. The most important are: *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960); *Individualism and Economic Order* (1948); *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (1967); and the trilogy, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1973–80), all published by the University of Chicago Press. Also important is his study of the rise of socialist thought, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (1952), which has been reprinted by Liberty Press.

By far the best book on the economics of information is ex-Marxist economist, Thomas Sowell: *Knowledge and Decisions* (Basic Books, 1980), which provides more unique insights, page for page, than any economics book I have ever read. His *Race and Economics* (David McKay Co., 1975) is also very good, as are *Markets and Minorities* (1981) and *Ethnic America* (1981), both published by Basic Books.

Two books by Bettina Greaves are suitable for an introduction to free market thought: *Free Market Economics: A Syllabus* and *Free Market Economics: A Basic Reader*, published by the Foundation for Economic Education. FEE also publishes the monthly magazine, *The Freeman* (subscription by request, free). Address: Irvington, NY 10533.

Very important are the works of R. J. Rushdoony, which are related to questions of economics: *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, Vol. I (Craig Press, 1973), and Vol. II (Ross House Books, P.O. Box 67, Vallecito, CA 95251); *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (1970) and *The One and the Many* (1971), both published by Thoburn Press, P.O. Box 6941, Tyler, TX 75711. Also important for political and social theory is *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (1969), also published by Thoburn Press.

The sociologist Robert Nisbet has written many books that are important for social theory, including *The Quest for Community* (Oxford University Press, 1952), *The Sociological Tradition* (Basic Books, 1966), *Tradition and Revolt* (Vintage, 1969), *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (Oxford University Press, 1969), *The Social Philosophers: Community and Conflict in Western*

Thought (Crowell, 1973), *Twilight of Authority* (Oxford University Press, 1975), and *History of the Idea of Progress* (Basic Books, 1980). Nisbet is a pluralist and decentralist, in marked contrast to so many sociologists. His essay, "The Year 2000 and All That," *Commentary* (June, 1968), is important for its investigation of the fascination of the coming of the third millennium, A.D., in Enlightenment thought.

Evolution

Gertrude Himmelfarb's book, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (1959) created a kind of revolution itself. It is very good on mid-nineteenth-century British thought, and why Darwin appealed to that culture. Reprinted by Peter Smith, Gloucester, MA 01930.

Philip Appleman's *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition* (Norton, 1970), is very important because of its extracts from Darwin's major works, as well as contemporary criticisms and evaluations of Darwin. It also includes modern evaluations. Conclusion: man must now take control over the evolutionary process.

Henry Morris' book, *The Troubled Waters of Evolution* (C. L. P. Publishers, P.O. Box 15666, San Diego, CA 92115), ch. 2, has many citations from modern evolutionists who have adopted the "man, the animal, becomes man, the predestinator" paradigm. It becomes obvious, after reading pages of these citations, that evolutionism is a religion.

On the coming of Darwinism, see the biography of William Irvine, *Apes, Angels, and Victorians* (McGraw-Hill, 1955); Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology: The Impact of Scientific Discoveries Upon Religious Beliefs in the Decades Before Darwin* (Harper Torchbook, [1951], 1959); Francis C. Haber, *The Age of the World: Moses to Darwin* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959); and Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Harper Torchbook, 1965). Also useful is Robert Nisbet's book, *Social Change and History* (Oxford University Press, 1969). He deals with "development" as an idea and an ideal in Western thought. Loren Eiseley's *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men who Discovered It* (Anchor, [1958] 1961) is important, especially for the chapter on Alfred R. Wallace, the co-discoverer of natural selection, who concluded that man's mind could not have evolved by slow, steady steps.

On the humanistic implications of evolution, see George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution* (Yale University Press, [1949]

1967) and *This View of Life* (Harcourt, Brace, 1964). Simpson gives us most of the clichés of modern humanism. Any he may have neglected are provided by Sir Julian Huxley, in *Knowledge, Morality, and Destiny* (Mentor, 1957), and his essay, "Evolutionary Ethics," in *Touchstone for Ethics, 1893–1943* (Harper & Bros., 1947). Theodosius Dobzhansky's *The Biology of Ultimate Concern* (New American Library, 1967) offers a clear introduction to man, the new divinity.

Indispensable, of course, is anything written by Lester Frank Ward, especially his 1883 classic, *Dynamic Sociology* (Greenwood Press). He used the idea that man has transcended animalistic evolution to promote the idea of a planned society. The new evolution will be a man-directed evolution.

On the importance of the doctrine of creation in the development of modern science, the works of Stanley Jaki are indispensable. Jaki argues that it was only in the Christian West, where men believe in linear time, that science ever developed. Cyclical time, which is the almost universally shared view in pagan societies, never has been conducive to scientific progress. Jaki's erudition and documentation are extraordinary. His works have been neglected by all but a handful of specialists in the historiography of science. His more easily available books include *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (University of Chicago Press, 1978), a book that is slow reading but overwhelming in its impact; *The Origin of Science and the Science of Origins* (Gateway Editions, 120 W. La Salle, Suite 600, South Bend, IN 46624); and *The Milky Way: An Elusive Road for Science* (New York: Natural History Press, 1975). Extremely important is *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Scottish Academic Press, 33 Montgomery St., Edinburgh, Scotland EH7 5JX) and the small book, *Cosmos and Creator* (Scottish Academic Press).

Also important are the works by the French scholar, Pierre Duhem. His 10-volume *Système du monde*, published from 1913 through the 1950s, presents a similar thesis to Jaki's books. English-language readers can read translations of two books by Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* (Atheneum, 1962) and *To Save The Phenomena: An Essay on the Idea of Physical Theory from Plato to Galileo* (University of Chicago Press, 1969).

End of Volume 2

AUTHORITY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON EXODUS

VOLUME 1

REPRESENTATION AND DOMINION

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AUTHORITY AND DOMINION

Gary North

PART 1: REPRESENTATION AND DOMINION

An Economic Commentary on Exodus 1-19

Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus

Part 1: Representation and Dominion

Formerly: *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion*

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This book is dedicated to
Julian Russell
the most rhetorically gifted pastor I ever had.

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PREFACE

This book was originally the first section of volume 2 of my series, *An Economic Commentary on the Bible*. The focus of this volume is on those aspects of Exodus 1–19 that relate to economics. Nevertheless, it is broader than a narrowly defined economic analysis, for biblical economics is broader than strictly economic analysis. The early nineteenth-century term, “political economy,” is closer to the biblical norm for economics; the late eighteenth-century term, “moral philosophy,” is closer yet.

It would be unwise for me to repeat the foundational material that I covered in *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis*. In that book, I made the strongest case that I could for the existence of a uniquely Christian economics, especially with respect to epistemology: “What can we know, and how can we know it?” This volume is based on the epistemological foundation laid down in *Sovereignty and Dominion*. For those who are uninterested in epistemology—and there are a lot of you in this category—I can only restate my original position: it is not that there is a meaningful Christian economics among all other economic schools of thought; it is that there is *only* Christian economics. There is no other sure foundation of true knowledge except the Bible. The only firmly grounded economics is Christian economics. All non-Christian approaches are simply crude imitations of the truth: imitations that cannot be logically supported, given their own first principles concerning God, man, law, and knowledge. Biblical economics is therefore at war epistemologically with all other economic systems.

We can see this in the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh. This conflict was a conflict which involved every aspect of life, including economics. We need to understand the theological issues that divided Egypt from Israel in order to understand similarly divisive approaches to economics and political theory today. Economic disagreements today are closely related to the same theological divisions that separated Moses from Pharaoh.

There is no doubt that Pharaoh knew some things about economics. If we do not assume this, we can make no sense of his actions. He also knew a great deal about biblical law. But this knowledge only led to his condemnation, just as it does in the case of all other forms of non-Christian knowledge. The anti-Christians have enough knowledge to condemn them eternally, but not enough to construct a progressive long-term civilization. They have occasionally constructed long-term static civilizations, most notably Egypt and China, but only through the imposition of tyranny.¹

A. Using Humanists to Defeat Humanism

Similarly, modern economists have considerable knowledge about the workings of the market and the failures associated with all forms of central economic planning. But again and again, the officially neutral, value-free economists appeal to biblical notions of peace and prosperity. The idea of value-free science is a myth. So, it is time to take up where Moses left off: with a challenge to humanistic economics.

Readers will find that I cite the writings of many economists and social thinkers. I use their insights—insights that are *stolen from the Bible* when they are correct. When men come to conclusions that are also the conclusions of the Bible, we should use their discoveries. These discoveries are our property, not theirs. God owns the world; the devil owns nothing. We are God's adopted children; they are God's disinherited children. Therefore, I am quite willing to cite secular scholars at length, since I know that most readers have neither the time nor access to the sources to follow up on every idea. I do not expect the majority of my readers to master the intricate details of every scholar's argument, nor master my refutations or applications of their insights.

When we read Christian refutations of this or that writer in books written a generation ago, let alone a century or a millennium ago, we find that the reading is slow going. "Why did the authors spend so much space dealing with such dead issues?" we ask ourselves. The answer is simple: because when the books were written, those issues were not dead. Similarly, a hundred years from now, any readers who may stumble across this book will skim over most of its extended quotations. Few works of scholarship in one generation survive into the

1. Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957).

next, and the writers I cite or refute will be long-forgotten for the most part. Indeed, many of them are not well-known today. I am not devoting time simply to refute every erroneous idea in sight; I am using these citations as examples, as springboards to introduce explicitly biblical interpretations. The scholars I cite are very often foils for me; I want readers to know that such ideas exist and need refuting or reinterpreting.

The most important thing is how well I integrate such humanistic insights into my biblical reconstruction of economics, without (1) losing the importance of these insights or (2) becoming a slave of the humanist presuppositions which officially undergird such insights. But this is the most important task in any field. Every Christian faces this problem. We buy and sell with pagans in many marketplaces, and one of these marketplaces is the marketplace for ideas. We must use their best ideas against them, and we must expose their worst ideas in order to undermine men's confidence in them. In short, in God's universe, it is a question of "heads, we win; tails, they lose."

B. The Outrage of the Christian Classroom Compromisers

It is important to understand from the beginning that the perspective expounded in this book is unpopular in academic Christian circles. Two economic ideas dominate the thinking of the modern world: the idea of central economic planning, and the idea of the "mixed economy," meaning interventionism by the civil government into the economy: Keynesianism, fascism, or the corporate state. Men have had great confidence in the economic wisdom of the state, at least until the 1970s. Most Christian academics in the social sciences still go along enthusiastically with some variant of this statist ideology. Thus, when they are confronted with what the Bible *really* teaches in the field of political economy, they react in horror.

Most amusingly, one of these interventionists has accused me of holding Enlightenment ideas,² not realizing that he and his associates are the true heirs of the dominant Enlightenment tradition, the tradition which exalts the state. When these "radical Christian" critics think "Enlightenment," they think "Adam Smith." They obviously do not understand the Enlightenment. When we look at the historical results of

2. Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, [1977] 1984), p. 102.

the Enlightenment, we should think “French Revolution, Russian Revolution, and President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.” We should think “the glorification of the state.”

The Enlightenment had its right wing, of course, and Adam Smith was in it, but he was heavily influenced by the moral ideals of Deism, which were in turn a pale reflection of Christian theism.³ But this individualistic tradition barely survived the revolutionary and statist Enlightenment heritage. What the successful bearers of the torch of the Enlightenment did was to set Europe on fire—in the name of liberty, fraternity, and equality. James Billington’s book has described it well: *Fire in the Minds of Men* (1980). It was the left wing of the Enlightenment which triumphed. When men deify mankind, they almost always wind up deifying the state, the highest collective of mankind, the apotheosis of man’s power. They become adherents of the power religion.

I reject all Enlightenment thought. This is why I reject most of what is taught in your typical Christian college. The baptized humanism of the modern Christian college classroom, especially in the social sciences and humanities, has led many people astray. This is one reason why I wrote my little book, *75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won’t Ask* (1984). It is subtitled, “How to Spot Humanism in the Classroom and the Pulpit.” There is a lot of it to spot. The book is an antidote to baptized humanism.

What the typical Christian college course in the social sciences teaches is left-wing Enlightenment thought: naïve Kantianism, warmed-over Darwinism, armchair Marxism (especially his theory of class consciousness and the innate disharmony of interests), and the discarded economic policies of some Presidential administration of a decade and a half earlier. It is all taught in the name of Jesus, in the interests of “Christian social concern” and “relevant Christianity.” They fight that great bugaboo of 1880–1900, Social Darwinism (which hardly anyone has ever believed in), in the name of Christianity, but they do so by means of the same arguments that the founders of the dominant intellectual stream, Darwinian central planning, used against the Social Darwinists.⁴ They peddle the conclusions of the really dangerous brand of Darwinism—the Darwinism of the planning

3. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), with a new introduction by E. G. West (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Classics, 1976).

4. The best introduction to the history of this subject is Sidney Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General-Welfare State: A Study of Conflict in American Thought, 1865–1901* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956).

elite⁵—in the name of Christianity.

The hue and cry against my explicitly revelational Christian economics has been raised in the unread little journals of the Christian academic community.⁶ What has offended them most is the heavy reliance I place on Old Testament law. On this point, they are in agreement with the antinomian pietists: all such laws are no longer binding.⁷

Why this hostility to Old Testament law, or even New Testament “instructions”? Because Old Testament law categorically rejects the use of taxes to promote statist social welfare programs. It categorically rejects the idea of state power in coercive wealth-redistribution programs. Samuel warned the people against raising up a king, for the king would take 10% of their income (I Sam. 8:15, 17). He promised that the state would, in short, extract the equivalent of God’s tithe from the hapless citizenry. Today, most modern industrial civil governments extract four to five times God’s tithe. The tax policies of the modern welfare state are therefore immoral. More than this: they are demonic.

“Proof texting, proof texting!” cry the church-attending Darwinists of the college classroom. (“Proof texting” apparently means citing a biblical passage which undercuts their position.) These men think that John Maynard Keynes’ *General Theory* (which, in fact, they have never read, since practically no one ever has, so convoluted are its language and arguments) is the essence of permanent truth, on a par with Newton’s *Principia* (which they also have never read). On the other hand, they regard the Old Testament as “the Word of God (emeritus).”

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

6. See, for example, the essay by Thomas E. Van Dahm, professor of economics at Carthage College (which I had never before heard of), “The Christian Far Right and the Economic Role of the State,” *Christian Scholars Review*, XII (1983), pp. 17–36. He peddled another diatribe, this time against the biblical case for the gold standard, to *The Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, XXXVII (March 1984): “The Christian Far Right and Economic Policy Issues.” This journal originally devoted its space to essays critical of the six-day creation position, but then it branched out, publishing articles that deny the legitimacy of applying Old Testament biblical standards in many other academic areas besides geology and biology.

7. Van Dahm wrote: “This article did not deal with the basic issue of whether Old Testament laws and even New Testament ‘instructions’ are binding on Christians—and others—in contemporary society. A recent treatment of this issue, offering a definite ‘no’ answer I found persuasive is Walter J. Chantry’s *God’s Righteous Kingdom . . .*” p. 35, footnote 44. Here we have it: the defenders of power religion (statist planning) join hands with the defenders of escapist religion (antinomian pietism) in their opposition to dominion religion (biblical law).

Perhaps the most notable example of this sort of thinking is the “Keynesian-Christian” economist, Professor (emeritus) Douglas Vickers. He adopted Keynes’ economic theories in the name of Jesus, but he did not adopt Keynes’ economy of language. He did his best to refute my approach to economics with arguments such as this one: “. . . it is the economist’s task so to understand the deeper determinants of economic conjectures and affairs that his policy prescriptions can be intelligently and properly shaped toward their proper ordering, or, where it is considered necessary, their correction and resolution. This should be done in such a way as to accord with the demands of both those deeper causal complexes now perceived in the light of God’s word and purpose, and the requirements and basic desiderata of economic thought and administration.”⁸ This is what he substituted for “Thus saith the Lord!” His book did not go into a second printing. I can understand why not.

These scholars regard the Old Testament as a kind of discarded first draft. Now that God has wisely seen fit to revise it (that is, now that He has completely replaced it), they argue, it is wrong to appeal to it as the basis for the construction of a Christian social order.⁹ But Christian Reconstructionists continue to appeal to all Old Testament laws that have not been explicitly revised by the New Testament. So, the classroom scholars are outraged; they are incensed; they threaten to hold their breath until they turn blue if Reconstructionists keep writing books like this one. They have sounded the alarm. But nobody pays much attention to them. This enrages them even more. Their temper tantrums probably will get even worse. It is best to ignore them. They have bet on the wrong horse—the welfare state—and they resent anyone who tries to embarrass, let alone shoot, this aging horse.

C. The End of an Era

The fires of the Enlightenment are beginning to burn low. The civilization of the Enlightenment is losing confidence in its own principles. Perhaps even more important, *it is beginning to lose faith in the future*. The American historian-sociologist Robert Nisbet put it well:

It was belief in the sacred and the mythological that in the beginning of Western history made possible belief in and assimilation of

8. Douglas Vickers, *Economics and Man: Prelude to a Christian Critique* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1976), p. 90.

9. See, for example, Vickers’ remarks to this effect: *ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

ideas of time, history, development, and either progress or regress. Only on the basis of confidence in the existence of divine power was confidence possible with respect to design or pattern in the world and in the history of the world. . . .

But it is absent now, whether ever to be recovered, we cannot know. And with the absence of the sense of sacredness of knowledge there is now to be seen in more and more areas absence of real respect for or confidence in knowledge—that is, the kind of knowledge that proceeds from reason and its intrinsic disciplines. From the Enlightenment on, an increasing number of people came to believe that reason and its works could maintain a momentum and could preserve their status in society with no influence save which they themselves generated. But the present age of the revolt against reason, of crusading irrationalism, of the almost exponential development and diffusion of the occult, and the constant spread of narcissism and solipsism make evident enough how fallible were and are the secular foundations of modern thought. It is inconceivable that faith in either progress as a historical reality or in progress as a possibility can exist for long, to the degree that either concept does exist at the present moment, amid such alien and hostile intellectual forces.¹⁰

The leaders of this staggering humanist civilization have now adopted the strategy of every dying civilization which has ever lost the confidence of its citizens: they resort to the exercise of raw power. This was the strategy of the Roman Empire, and it failed.¹¹ This *substitution of power for ethics* is the essence of the satanic delusion. It is the essence of the power religion. It also is the essence of failure.

What will replace this phase of humanist civilization? Some version of the society which Solzhenitsyn called the Gulag Archipelago? As a form of judgment, this is possible. God used Assyria and Babylon as rods of iron to bring Israel to repentance. Or will it be the steady grinding down of freedom by the West's massive bureaucracies? This was Max Weber's vision of the future of the West, and it is not a pretty picture.¹² It has also come progressively true ever since he wrote his warnings from 1905 to 1920. Or will it be a new society based on a reli-

10. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 355.

11. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957). (<http://bit.ly/cnccacc>). Reprinted by Liberty Fund.

12. Gary North, "Max Weber: Rationalism, Irrationalism, and the Bureaucratic Cage," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976).

gious revival? Nisbet saw this as a real possibility: "Much more probable, I believe, is the appearance of yet another full-blown 'awakening,' even a major religious reformation. For some time now we have been witnessing what might properly be called the beginnings of such a transformation, beginnings which range from popular to scholarly, from eruptions of fundamentalism, pentecostalism—and, even within the Jewish, Roman Catholic and Protestant establishments, millennialism—all the way to what has to be regarded as a true efflorescence of formal theology."¹³

The time has come for a program of Christian reconstruction. Something new must replace humanism, from the bottom up, in every sphere of human existence. The dominion religion must replace the power religion. Humanism's world is disintegrating, both intellectually and institutionally, and it will drag the compromised Christian academic world into the abyss with it. That is where they both belong. Weep not for their passing. And if you happen to spot some aspect of humanism which is beginning to wobble, take an appropriate action. Push it.

D. Liberation from the State

Liberation theologians in the 1970s and 1980s kept appealing to the Book of Exodus as their very special book. Michael Walzer's study of Exodus called this assertion into question. Walzer's earlier studies of the Puritan revolution established him as an authority in the field. His study of Exodus argues that this story has affected politics in the West, especially radical politics, for many centuries. But it is a story which does not fit the model used by liberation theologians, whose enemy is the free market social order. As he said, the Israelites "were not the victims of the market but of the state, the absolute monarchy of the pharaohs. Hence, Samuel's warning to the elders of Israel against choosing a king. . . . Egyptian bondage was the bondage of a people to the arbitrary power of the state."¹⁴

The misuse of the exodus story by liberation theologians is another example of the misuse of the Bible generally to promote anti-biblical social, political, and economic views. This is why practical commentaries dealing with specific disciplines are needed. The Bible still commands great authority, and this public perception of the Bible's au-

13. Nisbet, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

14. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 30.

thority is increasing, especially regarding social issues. This willingness on the part of social critics to appeal to the Bible is itself a major break with the recent past, yet a return to a more distant past.

Prior to 1660, it was common for conservatives and radicals to appeal to the Bible to defend their visions of a righteous social order. Almost overnight, in 1660, this appeal to the Bible ended. Defenders of the free market appealed to logic or experience rather than “debatable” religious or moral views.¹⁵ Socialists and reformers also dropped their appeal to the Bible after 1660, again, almost overnight. Shafarevich wrote: “The development of socialist ideas did not cease, of course. On the contrary, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, socialist writings literally flooded Europe. But these ideas were produced by different circumstances and by men of a different mentality. The preacher and the wandering Apostle gave way to a publicist and philosopher. Religious exaltation and references to revelation were replaced by appeals to reason. The literature of socialism acquired a purely secular and rationalistic character; new means of popularization were devised: works on this theme now frequently appear under the guise of voyages to unknown lands, interlarded with frivolous episodes.”¹⁶

The exodus was a time of liberation—liberation from the statist social order that had been created by adherents of the power religion. The spiritual heirs of those statist Egyptians are now coming before the spiritual heirs of the Israelites with a new claim: the need to be liberated from the institutions of the once-Christian West. They offer chains in the name of liberation, bureaucracy in the name of individual freedom, and central economic planning in the name of prosperity. They offer men a return to power religion in the name of the God of the Bible. What this commentary offers, in contrast, is a call for men to return to dominion religion—the religion of biblical orthodoxy.

E. How to Read this Book

There is an old line that asks: “How do you eat an elephant?” The answer: “One bite at a time.” That rule should be applied to this book.

This is a detailed book. Some of its chapters are lengthy, but they are broken down into convenient sections and subsections. The idea is not to memorize each chapter. The idea is to get a general sense of

15. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1963), ch. 6.

16. Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (New York: Harper & Row, [1975] 1980), pp. 80–81.

what happens in the field of economics when rival religions clash: *power religion* vs. *dominion religion*. If you want to follow up on any particular idea, footnotes are provided at no extra charge at the bottom of the page, so that you will not spend extra time flipping to the back of the book. Footnotes are there to help you, not to intimidate you.

Read the conclusions of each chapter before you read the chapter. Then skim over it rapidly. If it seems worth your time, reread it more carefully. You can read this book a chapter at a time, since it is a commentary. It deals with one or two verses at a time. The book develops its chain of arguments only insofar as the verses show a progression. I think they do reveal a progression, but not so rigorous a progression as you would find in a logic textbook, or even an economics textbook (Keynes' *General Theory* excluded, since it substitutes confusion for progression).¹⁷

Subsequent sections of this commentary on Exodus will cover the Ten Commandments and the biblical case laws that apply the principles of the Ten Commandments to society.¹⁸

17. One of the reasons why I am sure that his *General Theory* is a classic example of deliberate "disinformation" is that most of Keynes' other books are models of logic and clarity. But the *General Theory* is nearly unreadable. He was writing nonsense, and the book reflects it. For a good introduction to this classic example of jargon-filled nonsense, see Henry Hazlitt's book, *The Failure of the "New Economics"* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1959). (<http://bit.ly/HazlittKeynes>) Hazlitt never went to college, so he was not fooled by Keynes, something two generations of Ph.D.-holding power religionists cannot say for themselves. For more technical scholarly critiques, written quite early in response to Keynes by economists who were not power religionists, see Hazlitt (ed.), *The Critics of Keynesian Economics* (Van Nostrand, 1960). (<http://bit.ly/HazlittCKE>)

18. See also James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984). (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

INTRODUCTION

This book is about a clash between two religions, with believers in a third religion standing on the sidelines, waiting to see the outcome of the clash. The Bible presents the story of Moses and Pharaoh as the archetypal clash in history between these two religions: dominion religion vs. power religion. This confrontation has been going on ever since the garden of Eden.

The first of the conflicting religions was power religion, the religion of Pharaoh, who was Satan's representative in the battle. The second was dominion religion, the religion of Moses, God's representative in this mighty battle. The testimony of the Book of Exodus is clear: first, *those who seek power apart from God are doomed to comprehensive, total defeat*. Second, those who seek God are called to exercise dominion, and they shall be victorious over the enemies of God. But this victory takes time. It is not achieved instantaneously. It is the product of long years of *self-discipline under God's authority*. The power religionists do not want to wait. Like Adam in his rebellion, sinners choose to dress themselves in the robes of authority, so that they can render instant autonomous judgment.¹ They do not want to subordinate themselves to God.

The third form of religion is what I call escapist religion. This religion proclaims the inevitability of external defeat for the corporate people of God. The defenders of temporal corporate impotence for covenant-keepers thereby become the allies of temporal power-seekers. This religion was dominant in the lives of the Hebrew slaves. They became easy prey for the power religionists. But when the power manifested by dominion religion overcame the pagan power religion, they grudgingly followed the victors.

Before discussing the specifics of the clash between Moses and Pharaoh, it is necessary to survey briefly the first principles of these

1. Gary North, "Witnesses and Judges," *Biblical Economics Today*, VI (Aug./Sept. 1983), pp. 3–4. Reprinted in Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix E.

three religious outlooks.

A. Power Religion

This religious viewpoint affirms that the most important goal for a man, group, or species is the capture and maintenance of power. Power is seen as the chief attribute of God, or if the religion is officially atheistic, then the chief attribute of man. This perspective is a satanic perversion of God's command to man to exercise dominion over all the creation (Gen. 1:26–28).² *Power religion is the attempt to exercise dominion apart from covenantal subordination to the true Creator God.*

What distinguishes biblical dominion religion from satanic power religion is *ethics*. Is the person who seeks power doing so for the glory of God, and for himself secondarily, and only to the extent that he is God's lawful and covenantally faithful representative? If so, he will act in terms of God's ethical standards and in terms of a profession of faith in the God of the Bible. The church has recognized this two-fold requirement historically, and has established a dual requirement for membership: profession of faith and a godly life.

In contrast, power religion is a religion of autonomy. It affirms that "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).³ It seeks power or wealth in order to make credible this very claim.

Wealth and power are aspects of both religions. Wealth and power are covenantal manifestations of the success of rival religious views. This is why God warns His people not to believe that their autonomous actions gained them their blessings: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).⁴ God's opponents also want visible confirmation of the validity of their covenant with a rival god, but God warns them that "the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22b).⁵ The entry of the Hebrews into Canaan was supposed to remind them of this fact: the Canaanites had built homes and vineyards to no avail;

2. *Ibid.*, chaps. 3, 4.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012) ch. 21.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

their enemies, the Hebrews, inherited them (Josh. 24:13).

Those who believe in power religion have refused to see that long-term wealth in any society is the product of ethical conformity to biblical law. They have sought the blessings of God's covenant while denying the validity and eternally binding ethical standards of that covenant. In short, they have confused the fruits of Christianity with the roots. They have attempted to chop away the roots yet somehow preserve the fruits.

B. Escapist Religion

This is the second great tradition of anti-Christian religion. Seeing that the exercise of autonomous power is a snare and a delusion, the proponents of escapist religion have sought to insulate themselves from the general culture—a culture maintained by power. They have fled the responsibilities of worldwide dominion, or even regional dominion, in the vain hope that God will release them from the requirements of the general dominion covenant.

The Christian version of the escapist religion is sometimes called “pietism,” but its theological roots can be traced back to the ancient heresy of *mysticism*. Rather than proclaiming the requirement of *ethical union* with Jesus Christ, the perfect man, the mystic calls for *metaphysical union* with a monistic, unified god. In the early church, there were many types of mysticism, but the most feared rival religion which continually infiltrated the church was gnosticism. It proclaimed many doctrines, but the essence of gnostic faith was *radical personal individualism*—personal escape from matter—leading to *radical impersonal collectivism*: the abolition of human personality through absorption into the Godhead. It proclaimed retreat from the material realm and escape to a higher, purer, spiritual realm through various “Eastern” techniques of self-manipulation: asceticism, higher consciousness, and initiation into secret mysteries.

Gnosticism survives as a way of thinking and acting (or failing to act) even today, as Rushdoony pointed out. The essence of this faith is its antinomianism. Gnostics despise biblical law. But their hatred of the law of God leads them to accept the laws of the state. Rushdoony put it this way.

Gnosticism survives today in theosophy, Jewish Kabbalism, occultism, existentialism, masonry, and like faiths. Because Gnosticism made the individual, rather than a dualism of mind and matter, ulti-

mate, it was essentially hostile to morality and law, requiring often that believers live beyond good and evil by denying the validity of all moral law. Gnostic groups which did not openly avow such doctrines affirmed an ethic of love as against law, negating law and morality in terms of the 'higher' law and morality of love. Their contempt of law and time manifested itself also by a willingness to comply with the state. . . . The usual attitude was one of contempt for the material world, which included the state, and an outward compliance and indifference. A philosophy calling for an escape from time is not likely to involve itself in the battles of time.⁶

Their denial of the continuing validity of biblical law has led them to deny the relevance of earthly time. By denying biblical law, they thereby forsake the chief tool of dominion—our means of using time to subdue the earth to the glory of God. The basic idea that undergirds escapist religion is the *denial of the dominion covenant*. The escapist religionists believe that the techniques of self-discipline, whether under God or apart from God (e.g., Buddhism), offer power over only limited areas of life. They attempt to conserve their power by focusing their ethical concern on progressively (regressively) narrower areas of personal responsibility. The “true believer” thinks that he will gain more control over himself and his narrow environment by restricting his self-imposed zones of responsibility. His concern is *self*, from start to finish; his attempt to escape from responsibilities beyond the narrow confines of self is a program for gaining power over self. It is a religion of works, of *self-salvation*. A man first “humbles” himself by admitting that there are limits to his power. He then insists that there are major limits to the range of his responsibilities. He does this in order to elevate himself to a position of hypothetically God-like spirituality: a being unconcerned with dominion or power.

Escapist religion proclaims institutional peace—“peace at any price.” Ezekiel responded to such an assertion in the name of God: “. . . they have seduced my people, saying, “Peace; and there was no peace” (Ezek. 13:10a). Patrick Henry’s inflammatory words in March of 1775—“Peace, peace—but there is no peace”⁷—were taken from E-

6. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), pp. 136–37. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

7. Norine Dickson Campbell, *Patrick Henry: Patriot and Statesman* (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: Devin-Adair, 1969), p. 130. The substance of Henry’s famous St. John’s Church speech, which mobilized the Virginia Assembly, was reconstructed by a later historian, William Wirt, but is generally considered representative. This was

zekiel and also Jeremiah: “They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). This rival religion proclaims peace because it has little interest in the systematic efforts that are always required to purify institutions as a prelude to social reconstruction.

In short, escapist religion calls for flight from the world, and because man is in this world, it calls for a *flight from humanity*.⁸ Its advocates may hide their real concern: the systematic abandonment of a world supposedly so corrupt that nothing can be done to overcome widespread cultural evil. They invoke their moral responsibility of “sharing Christ to the world” or “building up the Church” rather than also rebuilding civilization. Their ultimate concern is *personal flight from responsibility*. This is a revolt against maturity.⁹

C. Dominion Religion

This is the orthodox faith. It proclaims the sovereignty of God, the reliability of the historic creeds, the necessity of standing up for principle, and the requirement that faithful men take risks for God’s sake. It proclaims this testimony: “Through the exercise of saving faith, and through ethical conformity to biblical law, regenerate men will increase the extent of their dominion over the earth.” It is a religion of conquest—*conquest by grace through ethical action*. The goal is ethical conformity to God, but the results of this conformity involve dominion—over lawful subordinates, over ethical rebels, and over nature. This is the message of Deuteronomy 28:1–14. It is also the message of Jesus Christ, who walked perfectly in God’s statutes and in God’s Spirit, and who then was granted total power over all creation by the Father (Matt. 28:18).¹⁰ I am not speaking here of Christ’s divine nature as the Second Person of the Trinity, who always had total power; I am speaking of His nature as perfect man, who earned total power through ethical conformity to God and through His death and resur-

Henry’s famous “Give me liberty or give me death” speech, one of the most famous speeches in United States history.

8. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Flight from Humanity: A Study of the Effect of Neoplatonism on Christianity* (Vallecito, California: Chalcedon, [1973] 2008). (<http://bit.ly/rjrffh>)

9. R. J. Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity: A Biblical Psychology of Man* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 1987). (<http://bit.ly/rjrram>)

10. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [2000] 2012), ch. 48; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

rection.

Dominion religion recognizes the relationship between *righteousness* and *authority*, between covenantal faithfulness and covenantal blessings. Those who are faithful in little things are given more. This is the meaning of Christ's parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30).¹¹ The process of dominion is a function of *progressive sanctification*, both personal-individual and also institutional (family, church, business, school, civil government, etc.: Deut. 28:1–14).

D. Moses vs. Pharaoh

Pick up any commentary on the Book of Exodus. Read its account of the first 15 chapters. You will find a lot of discussion of Hebrew vocabulary, Moses' theology, and the sovereignty of God's power. But you will not find a detailed discussion of Egypt. You will not find an analysis of the theology and culture of the society that placed the Hebrews under bondage. You will not find a discussion of the relationship between Egypt's theology and Egypt's economic and political institutions.

These are remarkable omissions. It is not that commentators have no knowledge about Egypt. Rather, it is that they have failed to understand the theological and political issues that were inherent in this confrontation. Sufficient information is available to construct at least an outline of Egyptian society. While Egyptology is a highly specialized and linguistically rigorous field of study, there are numerous scholarly summaries of the religion and social institutions of Egypt. I am no specialist in this field, and I have no immediate access to a large university library of books and manuscripts relating to Egypt, but the World Wide Web, interlibrary loans, and normal intelligence are sufficient to "open the closed book" of at least the bare essentials of Egyptian thought and culture. The bare essentials are sufficient to enable anyone to draw some simple conclusions concerning the differences between the gods of Egypt and the God of the Israelites. Furthermore, it is not that difficult to make other comparisons: socialism vs. market freedom, bureaucracy vs. decentralized decision-making, the omniscient state vs. limited civil government, static society vs. future-oriented society, stagnation vs. growth. Yet the commentators, as far as I have been able to determine, have systematically refused to discuss such issues. *They have been blind to the all-encompassing nature of the*

11. North, *ibid.*, ch. 47.

confrontation. To a great extent, this is because they have been blind to the implications of biblical religion for both social theory and institutions.

E. Chronology

There are other topics that need to be discussed. One of the most important is the problem of chronology. You can find Bible commentaries that attempt to deal with this issue, but I have yet to find one which openly faces the overwhelming difficulties posed by the almost universal acceptance of the conventional chronology of Egypt.

What these commentaries never admit is that Egyptians did not believe in chronology. The historical records that modern (and even classical Greek) historians have used to reconstruct Egypt's chronology are woefully deficient. The Egyptians simply did not take seriously their own history. *They did not believe in the importance of linear time*. The records they left behind reflect this lack of concern. A century ago, historian George Rawlinson began his chapter on Egyptian chronology with this statement: "It is a patent fact, and one that is beginning to obtain general recognition, that the chronological element in early Egyptian history is in a state of almost hopeless obscurity."¹² He was incorrect, however, concerning the coming "general recognition" of the problem. Only the most scholarly and detailed monographs on Egypt bother to warn readers about the problem.

There are several kinds of chronological documents, including the actual monuments. "The chronological value of these various sources of information is, however, in every case slight. The great defect of these monuments is their incompleteness. The Egyptians had no era. They drew out no chronological schemes. They cared for nothing but to know how long each incarnate god, human or bovine, had condescended to tarry on the earth. They recorded carefully the length of the life of each Apis bull, and the length of the reign of each king; but they neglected to take note of the intervals between one Apis bull and another, and omitted to distinguish the sole reign of a monarch from his joint reign with others."¹³

Commentary readers are also not informed of this crucial fact: virtually all chronologies of the ancient Near East and pre-classical Greece are constructed on the assumption that the conventional chro-

12. George Rawlinson, *A History of Egypt*, 2 vols. (New York: Alden, 1886), II, p. 1.

13. *Ibid.*, II, p. 2.

nology of Egypt is the legitimate standard. modern scholars believe that *the chronology of Egypt should be imposed on the chronologies of all other civilizations of the ancient Near East*, including the biblical chronology of the Hebrews. Thus, when the Bible says explicitly that the exodus took place 480 years before Solomon began to construct the temple (I Kings 6:1),¹⁴ historians interpret this information within the framework of the hypothetical Egyptian chronological scheme. When they even admit that the pharaohs of the *supposed* dynastic era of the fifteenth century before Christ were extremely powerful kings—men like Thutmose III—whose mummies still exist,¹⁵ they are tempted to ignore these difficulties, or even to ignore the clear teaching of the Bible. Many of them date the exodus centuries later. They allow a hypothetical chronology of Egypt to dictate their interpretation of Scripture. This is not the way that Christian scholarship is supposed to be conducted.

In the early 1950s, Immanuel Velikovsky, a genius (or fraud, his critics say) began to publish a series of studies that reconstructed (among other things) the chronologies of the ancient world. Velikovsky began his reconstruction with a discussion of an ancient Egyptian document, long overlooked by historians, which contains references to a series of catastrophes that look remarkably similar to those described in early chapters of the Book of Exodus.

Then, in 1971, an amateur historian named Donovan Courville published a book that was based in part on Velikovsky's work, but which went far beyond it. Courville's book has been systematically ignored by Egyptologists and Christian scholars alike. I know of one case where a seminary professor absolutely refused to discuss the book with his students, either publicly or privately, when asked about it. Why the hostility? Because Courville's book, like Velikovsky's books, offers a frontal assault on the reigning presuppositions of historians regarding the reliability of Egyptian records and the reliability of the conclusions based on them. In Courville's case, the affront is worse: he was saying that Christian specialists in the field of ancient history have accepted the testimony of humanist (Darwinian) scholars and humanist (Egyptian) records in preference to the clear testimony of the Bible. Conser-

14. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

15. Photographs of the mummies of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II appear in Donovan Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, p. 37.

vative scholars resent the implication that they have compromised their scholarship in order to seek recognition from (or avoid confrontation with) the conventional, dominant humanist academic community. Thus, I have seen no commentary on the Book of Exodus which refers to (let alone promotes) either Velikovsky or Courville, nor do the standard Christian encyclopedias.

This commentary is the exception. For this reason, it represents a break with prevailing scholarship concerning the circumstances of the exodus. It may be incorrect, but it is incorrect in new ways—ways that do not begin with the presupposition that conventional humanist historical scholarship is binding, or the presupposition that the biblical account of history is inferior to the Egyptian record. My position is clear: it is better to make mistakes within an intellectual framework that is governed by the presupposition of the Bible's infallibility than it is to make mistakes that are governed by the presupposition that Darwinian scholarship is the eternal standard of truth.

F. Confrontation

The first 15 chapters of the Book of Exodus deal with the confrontation between God and Egypt. This confrontation was comprehensive. It involved a dispute between two radically different worldviews. It involved a war between the God of the Hebrews and a false god called Pharaoh. Every aspect of civilization was at stake. It was not “merely” a war over theology as such. It was a war over *theology as life*. This commentary brings into the open several areas of confrontation that previously have not been discussed. These subordinate areas of confrontation were inescapably linked to the main confrontation between God and Pharaoh. Amazingly, the terms of even this primary confrontation are seldom discussed.

Essentially the same confrontation has continued from the beginning, meaning from the garden of Eden. It has manifested itself in many ways, but the essential question never changes: *Who is God?* Secondly, *what is the relationship between God and His creation?* The answers given by the rulers of Egypt were essentially the same answer proposed to man by Satan by way of the serpent: “ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:5). Because the modern world has come to a similar theological conclusion—that, in the absence of any other god, man must be the only reliable candidate—the modern world has come to similar social and economic conclusions.

The rise of totalitarian bureaucracies in the twentieth century can and should be discussed in relation to the rise of a humanistic variation of Egyptian theology. It is not that humanists have adopted Egypt's polytheism (though modern relativism sounds suspiciously like polytheism), but rather that they have, as Darwinians (or worse), adopted *Egypt's theology of the continuity of being*, with the state, as the most powerful representative of "collective mankind," serving as the primary agency of social organization. The remaining chapters in the Book of Exodus describe the continuation of this same confrontation with Egypt. In this case, however, the departing slaves of the now-smashed Egyptian civilization replaced their former rulers as the defenders of the old order. God dealt with them in very similar ways, though with greater mercy, as a result of Moses' prayer on behalf of the integrity of God's name and God's promises (Ex. 32:9–14; Num. 14:13–16).

Therefore, it should not surprise us that there are still many Christian defenders of that same old statist order in our current wilderness wanderings, especially in the barren wastes of the college and seminary classroom. These people are slaves who have not yet recognized the freedom that God has offered to His people through His Bible-revealed law-order. When covenant-keeping people sit too long as household slaves beneath the table of the Satanists, hoping for a few crumbs (or academic degrees) to fall from their table, they find it difficult to imagine that *it is the enemies of God who are supposed to sit beneath the table of the righteous*, begging for scraps until the day of judgment provides them with no further opportunities for repentance. Let us not forget that it was a Canaanite woman, not a ruler of Israel, who first articulated this principle of biblical government.

And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her

daughter was made whole from that very hour (Matt. 15:22–28).¹⁶

Israel's leaders were sitting at the table of the Romans, begging. Some things have not changed. Christian leaders sit at the table of the humanists, begging.¹⁷ Some things have not changed.

Conclusion

Three and a half millennia ago, Moses was commanded by God to confront the Pharaoh. The result was the exodus, the archetype historical event in the life of Israel, the event to which the prophets appealed again and again in their confrontations with the rebellious Hebrews of their day. This same confrontation goes on in every era, and the contemporary Christian critic must be equally willing to confront the pharaohs of his day with the same theological distinctions: sovereign God or sovereign man, God's revelation or man's revelation, biblical society or the bureaucratic State, God's law or chaos. "Choose this day whom ye will serve." Serve God or perish.

16. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 34.

17. The most egregious form of this institutional begging in my day is the request by Christian seminaries to be accredited by the God-hating humanist liberal theologians who control the seminary accreditation system.

1

POPULATION GROWTH: TOOL OF DOMINION

And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them (Ex. 1:5–7).

The theocentric principle here is *dominion through biological multiplication*. This passage is an extension of the dominion covenant. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28).¹

The words relating to growth are repeated in verse 7: fruitful, increased (teemed), multiplied, waxed (numerous), with exceeding strength, strongly, and filled—a seven-fold representation.² Bible-believing commentators have seldom focused much attention on these verses, possibly because they are so difficult to explain by means of their usual assumption, namely, that only 70 people originally descended into Egypt. How could it be that 70 people and their spouses multiplied to 600,000 men, plus women and children, by the time of the exodus (Ex. 12:37)? A probable explanation is this one: the 70 were not the only source of the original population base. Presumably, they brought with them many household servants who had been circumcised and who were therefore counted as part of the covenant popula-

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

2. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), p. 9. He said that the “seven expressions for increase are used in this verse, a number indicative of perfection. . . .”

tion. We do not know for certain how many of these circumcised household servants came, but it may have been in the thousands.

We should also bear in mind that “70” is a significant number in Scripture, in terms of age, chronology, and also in terms of numbering people. In Genesis 10, 70 peoples of mankind are listed, 14 from Japheth, 30 from Ham, and 26 from Shem.³ At the feast of tabernacles in the seventh month, beginning on the fifteenth day, the priests were to begin a week of sacrifices. For seven days, a descending number of bullocks were to be sacrificed: 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, and 7, for a total of 70 bullocks. Then, on the eighth day (the beginning of the next week), one final bullock was to be sacrificed (Num. 29:12–36). Presumably, these were sacrifices for all the nations of the world, plus Israel. There were 70 elders in Israel at the time of God’s confirmation of the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 24:1). God at one point took His Spirit from Moses and gave it to the 70 elders (Num. 11:16). Also, when the Israelites defeated Adoni-Bezek after the death of Joshua, he confessed that he had slain 70 kings (Judges 1:7), presumably a number referring symbolically to the whole world. Seventy men were sent out by Jesus to evangelize southern Israel (Luke 10:1, 17).⁴ In Christ’s day, there were 70 members of the Sanhedrin, plus the President.⁵ So the number “70” meant for the Hebrews something like “a whole population,” although this does not deny the validity of 70 as the number of lineal heirs who came down into Egypt.

The growth of the Hebrew population has to be considered a remarkable expansion. How long did it take? This question has also baffled Bible-believing commentators. When did the exodus occur? When did Jacob’s family enter Egypt? Were the Israelites in Egypt a full 430 years? Donovan Courville, the Seventh Day Adventist scholar, called this chronology question “the exodus problem.”⁶

3. Frederick Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, [1887]), II, p. 17. Godet discussed the problem of 70 vs. 72, which occurs in this estimation, and also in the differing New Testament references to the 70 or 72 sent out by Jesus (Luke 10:1).

4. Some manuscripts read 72. Godet argued that 70 is the correct reading: *idem*.

5. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1886]), II, p. 554. Cf. “Sanhedrim,” in McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), IX, p. 342.

6. Donovan A. Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971). Courville’s original insight concerning the need for a reconstruction of Egypt’s chronology came from Immanuel Velikovsky’s study, *Ages in Chaos* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952), which presents the

A. The Problem of Chronology

Exodus 12:40 reads as follows in the King James Version: "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." *Fact number one*: a sojourn of 430 years. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from the second century B.C.) both say "Egypt and Canaan,"⁷ rather than just "Egypt," which indicates the likely solution to the exodus problem.

We can see the nature of the problem in Stephen's testimony, just prior to his martyrdom. It includes this statement: "And God spoke on this wise [in this way], That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years" (Acts 7:6). *Fact number two*: bondage of 400 years. This was also the period promised by God to Abraham: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Gen. 15:13–14). *Fact number three*: deliverance in the fourth generation. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16).⁸ Did God mean the fourth generation of captives? If the period of bondage was 430 years, how could only four generations have filled up the entire period assigned to them?

Paul provided additional crucial information: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. . . . And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (Gal. 3:16a, 17). *Fact number four*: it was 430 years from the covenant to the exodus. This further complic-

case against the traditional chronologies of the ancient world. Velikovsky identified the Hyksos rulers ("shepherd kings") of Egypt as the invading Amelekites. He argued that modern scholars have inserted a 500–700 year period into all the histories of the ancient world (since all are based on Egypt's supposed chronology), a period which must be eliminated. Velikovsky wrote that "we still do not know which of the two histories, Egyptian or Israelite, must be readjusted" (p. 338). Courville's book shows that it is modern scholarship's version of Egypt's chronology which is defective, not the chronology of the Old Testament. See Appendix A: "The Reconstruction of Egypt's Chronology."

7. Note in the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), p. 83.

8. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 23.

ates the problem: *the entire period, from Abraham to the exodus, was 430 years*—a period which encompassed Isaac’s life, Jacob’s, Joseph in Egypt, the arrival of the brothers and their families, the years of prosperity and population growth in the land of Goshen in Egypt, Moses’ birth, his departure at age 40, his 40 years in the wilderness, and the exodus itself. Paul’s language is unambiguous. What, then, are we to make of the other three accounts?

1. The Patriarchal Era: 215 Years

The best place to begin to unravel this problem is with the chronology of Abraham’s family. We are told that he was called out of Haran when he was 75 years old (Gen. 12:4). Isaac was born 25 years later, when Abraham was a hundred (Gen. 21:5). Jacob and Esau were born 60 years later, when Isaac was 60 years old (Gen. 25:26). Finally, Jacob died at age 130 in Egypt (Gen. 47:9). Therefore, from Abraham’s entrance into a foreign land until the Israelites’ descent into Egypt, about 215 years elapsed (25 + 60 + 130). If we assume that the establishment of the covenant took place in the first year or so of Abraham’s sojourn in Canaan, with 25 years in between the covenant (Gen. 15) and the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21), then we can begin to make sense of the data. God said that Abraham’s heirs would be *in bondage for 400 years*, while Paul said it was *430 years from the Abrahamic covenant to the giving of the law*. If we subtract 25 from 430—from the covenant to the birth of Isaac, the promised son of the covenant line—we get 405 years. This is very close to the 400 years of the “affliction” promised in Genesis 15:13–14 and mentioned by Stephen in Acts 7:6. We are now arguing about only five years, from the birth of Isaac to the period in which the captivity “in” Egypt—*under Egypt’s domination*—began. Genesis 21 says that it was only after Isaac was weaned that Ishmael mocked him—“laughing” in the Hebrew (vv. 8–9). This can be understood as the beginning of the period of Egyptian persecution, for Ishmael was half Egyptian.⁹ It was the time of Isaac’s youth, perhaps about age five. Abraham then expelled the Egyptian woman and her son, who travelled into the wilderness (21:14). Thus, it was not the bondage period in geographical Egypt that God had in mind, but the *entire period of pilgrimage*, during which they were afflicted by strangers.

9. I am indebted to James Jordan for this insight. If it is incorrect, then we would have to adopt Courville’s approach, namely, to argue that it seems legitimate to understand the 400 years of Genesis 15:13 as a rounding off of 405.

2. *Residence in Egypt: 215 Years*

The culmination of this period of rootlessness, or life in foreign lands, was the final era of outright bondage in Egypt (Gen. 15:14). Courville's comments are appropriate, that

the period of affliction began back in the time of Abraham and not with the descent. Actually, the affliction in Egypt did not begin with the descent but only with the rise of the king "who knew not Joseph." That the "sojourn" also began back in the time of Abraham is clear from the statement in Hebrews 11:9, which reads:

By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.

Others of the ancients than Paul thus understood the 430-year sojourn. The translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek have added a phrase to make clear the meaning of Exodus 12:40 as they understood it. The Septuagint reading of the verse is:

The sojourning of the children and of their fathers, which they so journeyed in the land of Canaan and in the land of Egypt. . . .

Josephus, as a Hebrew scholar of antiquity, thus understood the verse:

They left Egypt in the month Xanthicus, on the fifteenth day of the lunar month; four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into Canaan, but two hundred and fifteen years only after Jacob removed into Egypt.¹⁰

This citation from Courville's book indicates that it was long ago understood that the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 must be interpreted in terms of *the entire pilgrimage experience, Abraham to Moses*. The reference to "the children of Israel" must be understood as *Hebrews in general*, not simply to those born of Jacob. It includes Abraham and Isaac. This means that Palestine was an Egyptian vassal region throughout the Patriarchal era of Exodus 12:40. It also helps to explain

10. *Ibid.*, I, p. 140. For Josephus' statement, see *Antiquities of the Jews*, II:XV:2, in *Josephus: Complete Works*, William Whiston, translator (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1960), p. 62.

why Abraham journeyed to Egypt during the famine (Gen. 12:10). Egypt was the capital.

Consider Courville's chart of his proposed reconstructed chronology of Egypt and Israel.¹¹ Understand that Courville's book remains almost unknown in Christian circles, and even less known in academic circles. His reconstructed chronology is not taken seriously by archaeologists and historians, any more than Velikovsky's chronology in *Ages in Chaos* was (or is) taken seriously.

Correlation of Scriptural Incidents with Egyptian History by the Traditional and Reconstructed Chronologies

| Incident or Era | Traditional Background or Date | Reconstruction Background or Date |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Noachian Flood | Not recognized as factual. The proper background for the immediate post-diluvian period is the Mesolithic period, dated c. 10,000 B.C. or earlier. | The Mesolithic background for the immediate post-diluvian period is accepted, Date c. 2300 B.C. |
| Dispersion from Babel | If recognized at all, the incident is set far back in the pre-dynastic. | Dated 27 years before the unification of Egypt under Mena. Date, c. 2125 B.C. |
| Abraham enters Canaan | Commonly set in early Dynasty XII dated c. 1900 B.C. Earlier dates are entertained. | Dated very soon after the beginning of Dynasty IV; 1875 B.C. |
| Famine of Joseph | No famine inscription datable to the era of Joseph as placed in the Hyksos period. | Equated with the famine inscription in the reign of Sesotris I of twelfth dynasty. Dated 1662 B.C. |
| Enslavement of Israel | Eighteenth dynasty theory of Exodus must recognize an early king of this dynasty as the pharaoh initiating the enslavement. This would be Amenhotep I or Thutmose I. | Enslavement initiated by Sesotris III of Dynasty XII. Date, c. 1560 B.C. |
| The Exodus | Eighteenth dynasty theory must recognize the position either at the end of the reign | The reconstruction places the Exodus at the end of the five year reign of Koneharis, second |

11. Taken from *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975), p. 145.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| | of Thutmose III or early in the reign of Amenhotep II. Date c. 1445 B.C. | primary ruler of Dynasty XIII, but 26th in the Turin list. Date is 1446–1445 B.C. |
| Period of the Judges | Encompasses the period of Dynasty XVIII from Amenhotep III, all of XIX as currently composed, and the first half of XX. Dates: 1375–1050 B.C. | Falls in the Hyksos period, c. 1375–1050 B.C. |
| United Monarchy of Israel | Background is in Dynasties XX and XXI. Dates, 1050–930 B.C. | Background is in early Dynasty XVIII ending near the beginning of the sole reign of Thutmose III. Dates, 1050–930 B.C. |
| Sacking of Solomon's Temple | Shishak identified as Sheshonk I of Dynasty XXII. Date is 926 B.C. in fifth year of Rehoboam. | Shishak identified as Thutmose III of Dynasty XVIII. Date 926 B.C. |
| Fall of Israel to Assyria | Must be placed in the background of Dynasty XXIII to retain the established date 722–721 B.C. | Falls in the fifth year of Merneptah dated 721 B.C. Synchronism indicated by inscription of this year telling of catastrophe to Israel. |
| Fall of Judah to Babylon | In Dynasty XXVI. Date c. 606 B.C. | In Dynasty XXV, Date c. 606 B.C. |

Courville produced a creative reconstruction of Egypt's chronology in terms of the 215–215 division. He pinpointed the famine as having begun 217 years before the exodus.¹² Using this estimate in conjunction with my dating calculations, with I Kings 6:1 as a date marker,¹³ this was 1710 B.C. He provided evidence from Egyptian inscriptions of a famine in this era, and he even identified the Pharaoh of this era, Sesostri I. He thought that references to a vizier of Sesostri I, Mentuhotep, refer to Joseph.¹⁴ The fact that a tombstone exists does

12. Courville, *Exodus Problem*, I, p. 151.

13. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

14. *Ibid.*, I, p. 141. George Rawlinson wrote of Mentuhotep: "This official, whose tombstone is among the treasures of the museum of Boulaq, appears to have held a rank in the kingdom second only to that of the king. He filled at one and the same time

not necessarily mean that the bones of “Mentuhotep” were still under it when it was discovered. Joseph’s bones were removed from Egypt and taken to Israel (Ex. 13:19). It is possible that the Hebrews decided to leave the tombstone behind as a reminder to their former taskmasters, and that the Egyptians, in the confusion of the Amalekite invasion, subsequently neglected to dispose of it. Later Egyptians may not have remembered who this official really was. The possibility exists, of course, that Courville was incorrect concerning the Joseph-Mentuhotep identity.

His thesis is simple, though complex in its demonstration: the three conventional lists of kings—Manetho’s list, the Turin list, and the Sothis list—are in error when they assume that each king’s reign followed another. Courville demonstrated that many of these “kings” were not kings at all, but lower officials whose rule overlapped the reign of the true pharaohs. In short, the conventional histories of Egypt have overestimated the age of Egypt’s kingdoms because they have relied on a false assumption, namely, that the kings on the various lists did not frequently have overlapping reigns. Thus, among other problems, Courville’s reconstructed chronology solves the problem of the conventional dating of the origins of Egypt thousands of years prior to a Bible-based estimate of the date of the Noachian flood. In short, Courville’s book indicates that Christian scholars are still in bondage to Egypt. He offered them a methodological exodus. But, like the slaves of Moses’ day, they cry out against the proposed deliverance. They prefer to remain in bondage. The leeks and onions of Egypt—Ph.D. degrees, tenured teaching positions, and intellectual respectability among their heathen masters—still entice them.

B. Jacob’s Heirs

Unquestionably, the growth of the Hebrew population was rapid. If the sons of Jacob, which included each family’s circumcised bondservants, came down to Egypt 215 years before Moses led their heirs out of Egypt, then the Hebrews experienced long-term population growth unequalled in the records of man. Remember, however, that

the offices of minister of justice, home secretary, chief commissioner of public works, director of public worship, and perhaps of foreign secretary and minister of war. [He cites Brugsch’s *History of Egypt*.] ‘When he arrived at the gate of the royal residence, all the other great personages who might be present bowed down before him, and did obeisance.’ He was judge, financier, general, administrator, artist.” George Rawlinson, *History of Ancient Egypt* (New York: John B. Alden, 1886), II, p. 83.

people lived longer in Joseph's era. Kohath, Moses' grandfather, lived for 133 years (Ex. 6:18). Levi, Kohath's father, died at age 137 (Ex. 6:16). Moses' brother Aaron died at age 123 (Num. 33:39). Moses died at age 120 (Deut. 34:7). Nevertheless, Moses acknowledged that in his day, normal life spans were down to about 70 years: "The days of our years are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Ps. 90:10). (Again, the number "70" appears, in this case to describe a whole lifetime, rather than a whole population.) Caleb boasted about his strength for a man of 85 (Josh. 14:10–11), indicating that in his generation life spans had shrunk.

These years of long life were reduced after the exodus. Men seldom survived beyond 120. One exception was Jehoiada, the high priest, who lived to 130 (II Chron. 24:15). The supreme exception was Job, who lived 140 years after his confrontation with God (Job 42:16), making him the oldest man after Abraham. If, during the years in Egypt, they begat children from an early age and continued to bear them until well into their eighties and nineties, as Jacob had done before them, then we can understand how such a tremendous expansion of numbers was possible. As I explain below, foreigners in large numbers covenanted themselves to Hebrew families. It is also possible that Hebrew men married Egyptian wives in the first century of prosperity, as Joseph had done (Gen. 41:45). This would have greatly expanded the number of children born into Hebrew families, since the Hebrew husbands would not have been limited exclusively to Hebrew women. A family of five boys and five girls could have become a family of 100 Hebrew grandchildren within the grandparents' lifetimes. Of course, not every family could have seen this happen, since some Hebrew men would have had to marry Hebrew wives (along with Egyptian wives) in order for the daughters of all the families to have remained inside the covenant lines. On the other hand, Egyptian men may have converted to the faith, especially during the period of Israel's preeminence in Egypt (e.g., Lev. 24:10). Even apart from the assumption of multiple wives (some Egyptian), it is obvious that long lives, high birth rates, and low death rates could have produced a huge population within two centuries.

1. Household Servants

We should also understand that the 70 direct heirs of Jacob described in Exodus 1:5 were lineal heirs, “out of the loins of Jacob.” But the total number of households under each lineal heir would have been far larger. Servants who were circumcised were part of the families, and they would have come down into Egypt with the direct lineal heirs. These servants would have participated in the blessings of Goshen, which was the best land in Egypt (Gen. 47:6). The Pharaoh of the famine gave his best land to Joseph’s relatives, but this included their entire households. The size of the land indicates this: the land needed administration. Pharaoh even wanted to place his own cattle under the administration of “men of activity” among the households (Gen. 47:6b). He expected them to care for the best land of Egypt (Goshen), but this would have required more than 70 men and their immediate families.

Therefore, when the households of Israel went into bondage under a later Pharaoh, the descendants of the servants were counted as the covenantal heirs of Jacob.¹⁵ They also went into bondage. When the exodus from Egypt freed the Israelites, all those who had been part of the families of Jacob went free. The multitude that swarmed out of Egypt included the heirs of the circumcised servants of the 70 lineal heirs of Jacob.

How many people actually came down into Egypt during the famine? It could have been as many as 10,000. One estimate of Abraham’s household is 3,000, given his 318 fighting men (Gen. 14:14).¹⁶ We are not told how many servants were still under the administration of Jacob. It is likely that most of Isaac’s servant families went with Esau rather than Jacob. But Jacob had recruited servants during his stay with Laban (Gen. 32:16), although we do not know how many. We do know that Pharaoh wanted his best land to be taken care of by Jacob’s family, and he would have recognized the covenantal relationship between the lineal heirs and their servants. The servants would have been responsible administrators because they were under the authority of Jacob’s heirs. Any relationship between the God of Jacob and his lineal heirs would have included the household servants. Pharaoh, as a king, would have understood this covenantal principle, especially since

15. See Numbers 1:4–18 and 7:2–11 for an indication that the princes of each tribe were the physical descendants of the twelve patriarchs.

16. Folker Willeson, “The Yalid in Hebrew Society,” *Studia Theologica*, XII (1958), p. 198.

the theology of Egypt asserted the divinity of the Pharaoh. All Egyptians were his servants; any relationship between him and the gods of Egypt was therefore also a relationship between the gods and the Egyptian people.¹⁷ It seems safe to conclude that the 70 households included non-lineal heirs.

C. Exponential Growth

We need to understand the remarkable aspects of compound growth. If as few as 3,000 came into Egypt in Joseph's day, then the rate of population growth over the next 215 years was 3.18% per annum in order to reach 2.5 million by the time of the exodus. Had this rate of increase been maintained after their settlement of Canaan, there would have been over two billion of them 215 years later, not counting the "mixed multitude" (Ex. 12:38) that went with them out of Egypt. Two hundred and seventy five years after the settlement of Canaan, there would have been 13.8 billion, roughly equivalent to three times the world's population in 1980. In short, they would have spread across the face of the earth.

If there were more than 3,000 people in the families of the Israelites who came down to Egypt in Joseph's day, then the rate of growth was under 3% per annum over the 215-year period in Egypt. A lower rate of growth would have lengthened the time necessary to reach 13.8 billion people, but the speed of increase would still have been startling. If there were 10,000 who entered Egypt in Joseph's day, then to reach 2.5 million people 215 years later, the annual rate of increase would have been 2.6%. Had this "low" rate been maintained after their entry into Canaan (assuming no population growth during the 40 years in the wilderness and in five years of fighting to conquer Canaan), the Hebrews would have multiplied to 620 million people 215 years after settling the land, 2.9 billion in 275 years, 5.5 billion in 300 years, 10 billion in 325 years, and 13.8 billion in 335 years. But God told them that there would be no miscarriages or diseases if they obeyed His law (Ex. 20:10; 25:25–26), implying a more rapid rate of population growth than they had experienced in Egypt.

We get some idea of just what kind of growth was implied by a 2.6% annual increase when we consider that Solomon began building

17. This covenantal relationship proved to be the undoing of the Egyptian people at the time of the exodus. Their Pharaoh's rebellion against God brought them low, just as the obedience to God by the Pharaoh of Joseph's day brought them the external blessing of survival.

the temple 480 years after the exodus (I Kings 6:1). Subtracting the 40 years in the wilderness and five years spent in conquering that part of Canaan which was on the far side of the Jordan River (Josh. 14:10),¹⁸ we get 435 years after the settlement of Canaan. If 2.5 million Hebrews began to reproduce when the land was settled, and the rate of increase was 2.6% per annum, 435 years later there would have been 176 billion Hebrews. The land of Israel was about 7 million acres. The population density by Solomon's time would have been 15,143 Hebrews per acre. An acre is a square about 210 feet per side, or 44,000 square feet. Obviously, either the rate of population increase would have fallen well before Solomon's day, or else they would have spread across the face of the earth. Even with a nation of high-rise apartment houses, 176 billion Hebrews would not have squeezed into the land of Israel. More than this: a population of 176 billion Hebrews implies that the earth would have been filled well before Solomon's day. It therefore implies that the requirement of the dominion covenant relating to multiplying and filling the earth would long since have been fulfilled.

These numbers should lead us to question the whole scenario of compound growth of over 2.5% per annum for many centuries on end. Nothing like this has ever taken place in man's history. Only since the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century has anything like it taken place in recorded history. We need to examine some of the statistical relationships before we can make valid conclusions concerning what happened in this 215-year period.

D. The 2.5 Million Hebrews

The standard estimation of how many people left Egypt at the exodus is 2–2.5 million Hebrews, not counting the “mixed multitudes.” Why is this figure reasonable? The best answer relates to the number of Hebrews a generation later, after the deaths of all of the members of the adult Hebrews who fled, with only two exceptions: Joshua and Caleb.

The generation in the wilderness entered Canaan with approximately the same number of men who had left Egypt 40 years earlier. There were 600,000 men who left Egypt (Ex. 12:37), and one year later (Num. 1:1), there were 603,550 fighting men (Num. 1:46), plus 22,273

18. Actually, part of Canaan began to be conquered 38 years after the exodus (Deut. 2:14). The first generation of Hebrews had all died by this time (Deut. 2:15–16). Seven years later, all of Canaan was under Israel's control, except for those pockets of resistance that never were conquered (Jud. 1:27–2:4).

Levites (Num. 3:43). The number of adult males was only slowly increasing. When the second census was taken before they entered the land, 40 years later, the population of the tribes had decreased slightly, to 601,730 (Num 26:51), plus 23,000 Levites (Num. 26:62).

This points to population stagnation. More important, it points to at least two generations of stable reproduction: one male child and one female child per family. Why do I say this? Because populations that are growing experience the after-effects of prior high birth rates, even in later periods when the birth rate in the society falls below the bare minimum reproduction rate of 2.1 children per woman. This is what most Western industrial nations are facing today: birth rates below the reproduction rate. Nevertheless, the populations are still growing. The reason is that in previous periods, there were higher birth rates, and women who were born up to 45 years earlier are still in the child-bearing ages. As these women marry and begin to have children, the upward curve of population continues to rise, although it is slowing down. Women may be having fewer children than their mothers did, but there are lots of women still within or entering the child-bearing ages. It takes decades of below reproduction-rate births to begin to bring down the aggregate number of people in a society, as middle-aged women cease having children, and the very old members of society continue to die off.

What is abnormal at any time in history is for a population to remain stable for a full generation. A steady-state population is far more common on islands or in very small nations, where emigration is possible or where abortion or even infanticide is practiced as a means of population control. In the ancient world, steady-state populations were common because of high death rates for children, but this had not been the experience of the Hebrews during the years of rapid growth. Their population growth rate had been sufficiently high so that the Pharaoh of the oppression issued his edict concerning infanticide.

Sometime in between this edict and the exodus, the Hebrew population became a steady-state population. Thus, the fathers of the exodus generation were succeeded by almost exactly the same number of sons. This points to the fact that their fathers had also reproduced at close to a steady-state level, since there was no "bulge" of women entering the child-bearing years—women who had been produced 20 years earlier by a higher fertility culture. Just about the same number of males arrived in the wilderness years, just barely replacing their dy-

ing fathers. This points to a figure of 2.5 million at the exodus: 600,000 men, about 600,000 women, and 1.3 million children. The average Hebrew family was therefore the replacement rate family of about 2.1 children per family. (It is assumed that about 5% of the children—one in 21—will not marry or at least will not bear children: ill health, mental or physical defects, infertility, or just an unwillingness or inability to marry.)

The stable population of the wilderness experience points to a total population of 2.5 million at the time of the exodus. Only with high death rates in the wilderness could we imagine that significantly more than 2.5 million Hebrews departed. With the exception of the judgments against adult rebels, totalling about 40,000 (Num. 16:35, 49; 25:9), there are no records of high death rates for Israel during the wilderness years. We can safely conclude that the steady-state reproduction rate of the wilderness generation points back to approximately 2.5 million Hebrews involved in the exodus.

If the exodus generation averaged two children per family, this reveals a “mature” or zero-growth population in the generation prior to the exodus. But since there were only four generations from the descent into Egypt and the conquest of Canaan (Gen. 15:16), and the generation of the exodus was already into the steady-state growth phase, the growth to 2.5 million had to take place in the first two generations. There is simply no way that this could have been accomplished by biological reproduction alone.

If we examine the age distribution of a growing population, age group by age group, we find that the numbers get larger as the age group gets lower. Those under age 15 constitute the largest single segment of the population. While it was biologically possible for 3,000 Hebrews and their circumcised servants to have reached 2.5 million in 215 years (3.18% increase per annum), the departing Hebrews would have had very large families. There could not have been 600,000 adult males. There would have been fewer men and far more children in the total population of 2.5 million.

We now must make sense of the data. It is not conceivable, biologically or mentally, that the 3,000 or 10,000 people who came at the descent had multiplied to 600,000 adult males at the exodus. Then where did the 2.5 million Hebrews come from? There is only one possible explanation: from conversions. The number of circumcised servants must have grown rapidly until the era of the oppression, at least 80 years before the exodus. Thus, for about 135 years (215–80), the

Hebrews and their circumcised servants experienced high birth and survival rates. The Pharaoh feared their fertility. But their fertility was not sufficient to explain the 600,000 males who departed at the exodus. There must also have been foreigners who covenanted with the favored Hebrews who lived in the choice land of Goshen. They became Hebrews by circumcision.

We can now better understand Moses' words to the Hebrews: "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of people" (Deut. 7:7). Their growth was due primarily to conversions to the faith. The external blessings of God enabled them to multiply, but especially to multiply by conversion. The majority of those who conquered Canaan were not the biological descendants of Abraham, but they were the covenantal descendants.

This has enormous implications for Judaism. The religious issue of "who is a Jew?" is not primarily the question of physical birth; the issue is the covenant. When Jesus warned the Pharisees that God could raise up descendants of Abraham from the stones (Matt. 3:9), He was speaking of vast conversions of gentiles. This was about to happen through the ministry of the church. The true heirs of Israel, Paul wrote, are the spiritual heirs of Abraham, the heirs of the promise of Abraham (Rom. 9:7–8). But what must be recognized is that this had been true in the sojourn in Egypt. It was the promise, as transferred through the covenant, which was the essential mark of the Hebrew. The mark in the flesh only testified to this more important mark, which was spiritual and covenantal. Their numbers had not come from biological generation alone, but from the dominion process of conversion and circumcision. It was not biology which was fundamental, but faith.

E. The Uniqueness of Hebrew Fertility

We can begin to perceive the magnitude of the judgment against Egypt, which was probably also a steady-state population. Zero population growth was an aspect of their static religion and static social theory. In the ancient world, populations did not grow rapidly as they do in the modern world. Thus, the deaths of all the firstborn males in a steady-state population was tantamount to the destruction of that population. Children normally died in their youth. It might take the birth of ten or more children to maintain a two-child legacy. Adam Smith, as late as 1776, remarked that it was common knowledge that

poverty-stricken Highland Scot women would bear 20 children in their lifetimes, yet only two or fewer would actually grow to adulthood.¹⁹ After the death of the firstborn Egyptian males, there was no assurance that there would be replacement male children who would reach adulthood and marry.

We know that the Egyptians were facing something uniquely threatening in the population growth of the Hebrews. It is understandable why the Egyptians had been terrified of the Hebrews. With such a growing population in servitude, it would not be long before their sheer numbers would have overpowered the Egyptian guards. Furthermore, chattel slaves are notoriously unproductive, and the Egyptians had to feed them. The vast bureaucratic projects that the pharaohs were building by means of chattel slave labor were by nature unproductive and resource-absorbing. How much longer beyond Moses' era would they have been able to feed and control the Hebrews? The Pharaoh's policy decision was the oppression.

The oppression shocked the Hebrews. The drowning of the male infants must have had cataclysmic psychological effects on all the Hebrews, and we can easily understand why few if any converts subsequently presented themselves for circumcision. This explains why, in their final 80 years in Egypt, the Hebrews (which meant all circumcised males and their families) experienced a steady-state population rate, that is, zero population growth. The dead males, coupled with the oppression's negative psychological effects, brought population stagnation overnight to the Hebrews.

F. Limits to Growth

A growing population is a tool of dominion, as are all the blessings of God. The humanists' hostility to population growth, beginning in the final third of the twentieth century, was part of a growing suspicion of all forms of economic growth. Growth points to an eventual using up of finite resources, including living space. This, in turn, points either to the end of growth or the end of time. The thought of an end of time within a few centuries is not acceptable to humanists. Therefore, they have instead attacked the concept of linear growth, since growth—especially population growth—cannot be linear indefinitely in a finite universe.²⁰ (See Appendix B: "The Demographics of De-

19. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Ch. VIII, p. 79 (Modern Library).

20. This hostility to population growth compromised even Wilhelm Röpke's eco-

cline.”)

Until these attitudes are seen by large numbers of Christians for what they are—*aspects of paganism*—Christians will continue to labor under a modern version of Egyptian slavery. This slavery is both religious and intellectual. It cannot be limited to the spirit and the intellect, however; ideas do have social consequences. *Christians cannot legitimately expect to conquer the world for Jesus Christ in terms of the ideology of zero-growth humanism.* Such a philosophy should be handed over to the humanists as their very own “tool of subservience,” the opposite of dominion. Even better would be population decline for the God-haters. They would simply fade away as an influence on earth. This is the long-term implication of a birth rate below 2.1 children per woman. It is a birth rate below 2.1 children per woman which alone is fully consistent with the Bible’s description of the God-hating ethical rebels: “all they that hate me love death” (Prov. 8:36b). It is this suicidal birth rate which presently prevails in all Western industrial nations. This is the population program which Pharaoh hoped to impose on his enemies, the Hebrews. He was not sufficiently stupid, or so utterly perverse, to have sought to impose it on his own people.

Pharaoh saw the necessity of protecting his nation’s resources from the prolific Israelites. Three and a half millennia later, fearful and defensive socialists have similar concerns. Bertrand Russell, the British socialist philosopher and mathematician, saw clearly the dilemma of socialism: to produce rising per capita wealth, low-productivity socialism requires zero population growth. Socialism also still requires the imposition of harsh penalties against rival populations that continue to grow, just as it did in ancient Egypt. He wrote:

Socialism, especially international socialism, is only possible as a stable system if the population is stationary or nearly so. A slow increase might be coped with by improvements in agricultural methods, but a rapid increase must in the end reduce the whole population to penury, and would be almost certain to cause wars. In view of the fact that the population of France has become stationary, and the birth rate has declined enormously among other white nations, it may be hoped that the white population of the world will soon cease

nomic analysis. His fear of “mass society” overwhelmed his otherwise good sense. He never understood that it is not sheer numbers of people that create “mass society,” but rather the rebellious ethical and religious assumptions of the population that create “mass society.” Röpke’s anti-population growth theme appears in several of his books, but especially in *International Order and Economic Integration* (Dortrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1959), Pt. II, ch. IV. (<http://bit.ly/RopkeIOEI>)

to increase. The Asiatic races will be longer, and the negroes still longer, before their birth-rate falls sufficiently to make their numbers stable without the help of war and pestilence. But it is to be hoped that the religious prejudices which have hitherto hampered the spread of birth control will die out, and that within (say) two hundred years the whole world will learn not to be unduly prolific. Until that happens, the benefits aimed at by socialism can only be partially realized, and the less prolific races will have to defend themselves against the more prolific by methods which are disgusting even if they are necessary. In the meantime, therefore, our socialistic aspirations have to be confined to the white races, perhaps with the inclusion of the Japanese and Chinese at no distant date.²¹

The more progressive modern socialist ideology appears, the more satanically backward it becomes. The spirit of Pharaoh still lives. The anti-dominion defensive spirit of modern socialism has its roots deep in the past, as well as deep in hell.

Conclusion

The historically unprecedented growth of the Hebrew population in Egypt startled the Egyptians. It took 215 years for the 70 lineal heirs of Jacob and their circumcised servants, plus circumcised converts who were adopted into Jacob's family line during the first 135 years in Egypt, to grow to 600,000 men, plus women and children.

Rapid, long-term population growth in response to covenantal faithfulness is one of the promised blessings of biblical law. A potentially greater blessing waited for them in the land of Canaan: no miscarriages, long lives, reduced sickness (Ex. 20:12; 23:25–26). These blessings did not occur; the continuing ethical rebellion of the Hebrews led instead to population stagnation, a curse.

A growing population is a tool of dominion. The humanists' hostility to population growth in the final decades of the twentieth century is part of a growing suspicion of all forms of economic growth. Growth points to an eventual using up of finite resources, including living space. This, in turn, points either to the end of growth or the end of time. The thought of an end of time within a few centuries is not acceptable to humanists. Therefore, they have instead attacked the concept of linear growth.

21. Bertrand Russell, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 273. First edition: 1923. He did not change his views enough to warrant a revision of this passage.

2

IMPERIAL BUREAUCRACY

Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely [shrewdly] with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel (Ex. 1:8–12).

Who was this new Pharaoh? Old Testament scholars are divided, but Donovan Courville's reconstruction of Egyptian chronology points to Sesostris III.¹ A major transformation of the Egyptian system of rule was imposed by this Twelfth Dynasty Pharaoh. The political centralization of the pharaohs of the Pyramid Age had disintegrated. Egypt had become a feudal state. Courville wrote:

During the period preceding Sesostris III, Egypt had existed as a feudal system, and historians speak of this period as the "feudal age." Under this arrangement, the territory of Egypt was divided into numerous local areas called nomes, over each of which was a prince or governor. He was not a servant of the Pharaoh and was permitted to rule undisturbed so long as he contributed his allotted quota to the king's treasury and perhaps to the army in case of need. . . . Under the reign of Sesostris III, this situation was changed. For the most part, these local princes were stripped of their power and stripped of their excessive possessions. For the first time in a hundred years or more, Egypt was now under the immediate and direct dictatorship of the pharaoh. . . . From this time on, we find no more of the tombs of these princes nor of the prolific inscriptions which they had previ-

1. Conventional historians date him as 1878–1843 B.C. (<http://bit.ly/SesotrisIII>)

ously left.”²

His centralization of political power was accompanied by an extensive building program. Courville argued that this program had to have been accomplished by means of slave labor. Furthermore, “Unlike the structures of the huge building program in the Pyramid Age, and again unlike that which occurred later in the XVIIIth Dynasty, this building was of brick and not of stone.”³ This corresponds with the account in the Book of Exodus: the Hebrews used bricks to fulfill their assignments (Ex. 1:14). Another important historical correlation is this: the building programs of Sesostri III and his successor, Amenemhet III, were in the eastern Delta region, which included the land of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived. The cities of Pi-Raamses and Pi-Thorn have been discovered in this region, but modern scholars have attributed the bulk of these ruins to Rameses II, a king of a much later date.⁴ Courville argued also that the list of the Ramessides kings in the Sothis list correlates to the earlier line of kings,⁵ which would explain why the land of Goshen was described as “the best in the land, in the land of Rameses” (Gen. 47:11).⁶

If Courville’s identification of the Pharaoh of the oppression is incorrect, then what can we say with confidence? First, he did have an extensive military force at his disposal. He put into slavery a nation of formerly independent people. Second, he was financially capable of building treasure cities. This would have required an extensive and

2. Donovan A. Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, pp. 146–47. Rawlinson commented on the career of Sesostri III (Usurtasen III): “At the head of disciplined troops he gained repeated victories over the half-armed and untrained races, in part negro, in part Ethiopic, of the south. By a continued merciless persecution, he so far intimidated them, that they were induced to submit to Egyptian supremacy, and to endure the loss of freedom and independence. As he understood the value of fortresses as a means of establishing a dominion, of riveting a detested yoke on a proud nation’s neck, and of making revolt hopeless, if not impossible. He was also so far ambitious, so far desirous of posthumous fame, that he took care to have his deeds declared in words, and graven with an iron pen in the rock forever. But in this respect he merely followed the previous traditional practice of the Egyptian kings, while in his conquests he only a little exceeded the limits reached by more than one of his predecessors.” George Rawlinson, *History of Ancient Egypt* (New York: John B. Alden, 1886), II, p. 86. This description certainly seems to fit the personality of the man who enslaved the Hebrews, though of course Rawlinson did not believe that Sesostri III was the Pharaoh of the oppression.

3. *Ibid.*, I, p. 147.

4. *Ibid.*, I, p. 148.

5. *Ibid.*, I, p. 149; cf. p. 120.

6. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 24, 33, 45.

well-developed taxation system. Third, he was ruthless, as his attempt to execute the Hebrew male infants indicates.

A. Egypt's Theology: The Continuity of Being

The religion of ancient Egypt, like all religious systems of the ancient Near East,⁷ viewed history as a struggle between chaos and order. Our world had its origin in the primordial waters of the underworld, the Egyptians believed.⁸ Atum, the original god, created two other gods (male and female), which in turn created two more, and these two created Osiris (male sun god) and Isis, who gave birth to Horus, the falcon god of the sky.⁹ John A. Wilson concludes that chaos was not overcome by Re-Atum, the creator god, since the god of the underworld and the god of darkness continued to live, "but they continued in their proper places and not in universal and formless disorder."¹⁰

The Egyptians lacked a specific mythological account of the creation of man.¹¹ However, as Wilson made clear, basic to Egyptian mythology was the concept of *continuity*. "To be sure," wrote Wilson, "a man seems to be one thing, and the sky or a tree seems to be another. But to the ancient Egyptian such concepts had a protean and complementary nature. The sky might be thought of as a material vault above earth, or as a cow, or as a female. A tree might be a tree or the female who was the tree-goddess. Truth might be treated as an abstract concept, or as a goddess, or as a divine hero who once lived on earth. A god might be depicted as a man, or as a falcon, or as a falcon-headed man. . . . There was thus a continuing substance across the phenomena of the universe, whether organic, inorganic, or abstract."¹² There was no absolute distinction between creator and creature; in-

7. Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 218–19, 473.

8. John A. Wilson, "Egypt," in Henri Frankfort, *et al.*, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1946] 1977), p. 45. Penguin Books published a version of this book called *Before Philosophy*.

9. Rudolph Anthes, "Mythology of Ancient Egypt," in Samuel Noah Kramer (ed.), *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1961), pp. 36–39. Anthes thought that the cosmology of Heliopolis, which was only one of the religious centers of Egypt, and only one of the Egyptian cosmologies, was more concerned with establishing the divinity of the king than with the actual details of creation: p. 40.

10. Wilson, "Egypt," *op. cit.*, p. 53.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

stead, there was a continuity of being.

The doctrine of the continuity of being has a tendency to become the doctrine of the divinization of man. Furthermore, the divinization of man has an equally distinct tendency to become a doctrine of the divine State, or the divine Church, or the divine Church-State. The state, as the most concentrated power in human affairs, becomes the mediating institution between the gods and evolving mankind. We can see this in the history of Egyptian kingship. Wilson's summary is to the point: "The king of Egypt was himself one of the gods and was the land's representative among the gods. Furthermore, he was the one official intermediary between the people and the gods, the one recognized priest of all the gods. Endowed with divinity, the pharaoh had the protean character of divinity; he could merge with his fellow-gods and could become anyone of them. In part this was symbolic, the acting of a part in religious drama or the simile of praise. But the Egyptian did not distinguish between symbolism and participation; if he said that the king was Horus, he did not mean that the king was playing the part of Horus, he meant that the king was Horus, that the god was effectively present in the king's body during the particular activity in question."¹³ The Pharaoh deputized priests to perform religious duties, just as he deputized bureaucratic functionaries to perform administrative duties, but state theory maintained that these deputies acted for him as the supreme incarnation of the gods. Egyptian theology was polytheistic, but it was also *monophysite*: ". . . many men and many gods, but all ultimately of one nature."¹⁴

To understand the enormous significance of the Hebrews' stay in Egypt, we have to understand the central position of the Pharaoh. Joseph's ability to interpret the king's dream and then to administer the collection and distribution of grain elevated the Pharaoh's position, reinforcing the traditional Egyptian state theology. Then, two centuries later, Moses smashed the very foundations of Egypt by smashing men's faith in their king's position as a divine figure. Again, citing Wilson: "The gods had sent him forth to tend mankind, but he was not of mankind. This is perhaps the most fitting picture of the good Egyptian ruler, that he was the herdsman for his people. . . . The herdsman is primarily the pastor, the 'feeder,' and a first responsibility of the state was to see that the people were fed. Thus the king of Egypt was the god who brought fertility to Egypt, produced the life-giving waters,

13. *Ibid.*, p. 64–65.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 66.

and presented the gods with the sheaf of grain which symbolized abundant food. Indeed, an essential function of his kingship was that of a medicine man, whose magic insured good crops. In one of the ceremonies of kingship, the pharaoh encircled a field four times as a rite of conferring fertility upon the land."¹⁵

God blessed Sesostri I through Joseph. The arrogance of power led Sesostri III, his great-grandson, to enslave the heirs of Joseph.¹⁶ Within a century, Egypt was in ruins, under the domination of foreign invaders, the Hyksos (Amalekites). In the light of all this, we can better appreciate God's words to the (probable) Pharaoh of the exodus, Koncharis: "For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:15–6).

B. Slavery

The Pharaoh of the enslavement followed a pattern which had become familiar in the lives of the Hebrews. Like Laban in his dealings with Jacob, and Potiphar in his dealings with Joseph, the Pharaoh recognized the economic value of the Hebrews. At the same time, he resented certain concomitant aspects of Hebrew productivity, in this case, their fertility.¹⁷ Yet he was unwilling to take the obvious defensive step, namely, to remove them from the land. He wanted to expropriate their productivity, to compel their service. It was not enough that they were in Egypt, bringing the land under dominion, filling the nation with productive workers. Their productivity was a threat to the Egyptian theocratic state. These foreigners did not serve Egyptian gods, nor did they acknowledge the divinity of the Pharaoh, the link between the gods and mankind. They were foreigners in Egypt, and they threatened to fill up the land, making the Egyptians a minority population in their own nation. How, then, could the Egyptian state appropriate their obvious productivity without surrendering sovereignty to a foreign

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 79–80.

16. Courville, *Exodus Problem*, I, p. 218.

17. Demographer William Peterson wrote: "The terms fecundity and fertility, originally used synonymously, were differentiated from one another only gradually. In 1934 the Population Association of America officially endorsed the distinction between fecundity, the physiological ability to reproduce, and fertility, the realization of this potential, the actual birth performance as measured by the number of offspring." William Peterson, *Population*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 173.

people and a foreign God? The answer, so familiar in the history of the ancient world, was slavery.

It is a fact of economic life that people always want to buy goods and services on more favorable terms than are presently available. They want “more for less,” in other words. The Egyptians wanted a better deal. They hoped to gain the economic benefits of a godly people’s productivity by offering (commanding) terms of employment that were hostile to long-term productivity. They hoped to enslave the Hebrews, making it impossible for them to revolt, or to replace Egyptian sovereignty, or to flee. Yet they also expected these slaves to remain as productive as before. The Pharaoh of the exodus even accused them of being lazy, and he burdened them with the task of gathering their own straw to manufacture bricks (Ex. 5:6–19). He wanted “more for less,” or better stated, *he wanted the same output for reduced expenditures*. He hoped to pay less for his non-labor inputs and no more for labor inputs.

The Egyptians wanted the fruits of godly behavior and God’s visible blessings without having to humble themselves before that God and His laws. *They believed that, by capturing God’s people, they could enslave God Himself*. By enslaving the Israelites, they believed that it was possible to bring the God of the Israelites under subjection. This was a common belief of the ancient world: when a nation defeated another nation in battle, or otherwise subdued it, the gods of the defeated nation were themselves defeated.¹⁸ The Egyptians thought that they could trap the God of the Hebrews, as someone might ensnare a wild stallion, by capturing its “harem.” They would use the Hebrews as living amulets or talismans—magical devices that could be manipulated in order to call forth powers of the gods. They understood that the Hebrews had a special relationship with a God who provided them with wealth and knowledge. They knew that it was better to enslave such a people (and such a God) than to destroy them.

The Pharaoh of Joseph’s day acknowledged Joseph’s access to accurate secret knowledge, and he honored him and his family, transferring the sovereignty of the state to Joseph. He placed his own ring on Joseph’s hand, arrayed him in fine linen and gold, and placed him in the second chariot after his own (Gen. 41:42–43). That Pharaoh bowed to God’s sovereignty and to God’s dream-mediated word, and his king-

18. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Bk. III, ch. 15.

dom was blessed by God.

In contrast, the Pharaoh of the oppression wanted Jacob's heirs to produce on Egypt's terms, without the transfer of any of the king's sovereignty. He expected to be able to control and even reduce that fertility, while appropriating the fruits of their labor. He was wrong; their fertility continued, and he was forced to attempt the murder of all the male infants in order to stop this Hebrew population explosion (Ex. 1:15–19). He, like the Pharaoh of the exodus, found that he could not control God through His people. Laban had discovered the same thing in his dealings with Jacob.¹⁹

God's plan, not the plans of the pharaohs, was sovereign over Egyptian history. The Pharaoh of Joseph's day had recognized this, and Egypt had prospered because he was wise enough to transfer the symbols and prerogatives of state sovereignty to Joseph. His successors sought to reassert their self-proclaimed divine sovereignty over the Hebrews, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus saw Egypt's wealth and military power swallowed up.

C. The Bureaucratic Megamachine

It was not only the Hebrews who were enslaved. Sesostri III re-centralized the Egyptian social and political order. He began to construct treasure cities, indicating that he had begun to use tax revenues in order to strengthen the visible sovereignty of the central government. Centuries earlier, pharaohs had used state revenues to construct the giant pyramids, which were monuments to a theology of death and resurrection for the Pharaoh (and later, of the nobility). The Pharaoh of the oppression settled for less grandiose displays of his immediate sovereignty. By Joseph's day, the pharaohs no longer built pyramids. The total centralization of the Pyramid Age had disintegrated. Nevertheless, the theology of the continuity of being was still basic to Egyptian theology, and the lure of centralized power in the person of the Pharaoh was still ready to find its political expression. Although it is true that Joseph had bought all the land of Egypt, excepting only the land belonging to the priests (Gen. 47:20–22), in the name of the Pharaoh (Sesostri I), the visible and institutional manifestation of that

19. "Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (Gen. 31:41–42).

implicit centralization (public works pyramids) did not take place until a century later. When Sesostrius III abolished the prerogatives of the regional princes, simultaneously placing the Hebrews in bondage, he thereby asserted the sovereignty of *theocratic monophysitism*, with the Pharaoh as the link between heaven and earth. He formally reversed the special position of the Hebrews, which Sesostrius I had acknowledged in return for special knowledge of the future—a special revelation that Joseph had stated came from God (Gen. 41:16), thereby placing the Pharaoh under God's control. Joseph had announced, "What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:28), making plain the true source of history and agricultural productivity. Sesostrius III attempted to deny any sovereignty other than his own, and in a massive centralization of political power, he cancelled the special position of both the Hebrews and the regional princes.²⁰

1. Pyramids and Power

The Pyramid Age had demonstrated the degree to which a political order could be bureaucratized. Max Weber, the influential German historian-sociologist, devoted the last 15 years of his life to a series of studies on the West's tendency to rationalize and bureaucratize itself. In 1909, he wrote: "To this day there has never existed a bureaucracy which could compare with that of Egypt."²¹ Lewis Mumford, who specialized in the history of architecture, concluded that nothing short of total bureaucratization would have enabled Egypt to construct its pyramids. More than this: it required the creation of a social machine. Egypt became the first megamachine, to use Mumford's terminology.²² Egyptian society had to be molded along the lines of a pyramid—a hierarchy, with the divine Pharaoh as the capstone.

The divinity of the king had to serve as the universal faith, given the magnitude of the undertaking.

20. Courville, *Exodus Problem*, I, p. 146.

21. "Max Weber on Bureaucratization" (1909); in J. P. Mayer, *Max Weber and German Politics: A Study in Political Sociology* (London: Faber and Faber, [1943] 1956), p. 127.

22. Lewis Mumford, "The First Megamachine," *Daedalus* (1966); reprinted in Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922–1972* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), ch. 24. It is an oddity of history that an essay on the Egyptian pyramid society should appear in a journal named after Daedalus, the legendary figure of Greek mythology who built King Minos' famous labyrinth on Crete. He supposedly learned the secret of the labyrinth from the Egyptians. See Appendix C: "The Garden and the Labyrinth."

This extension of magnitude in every direction, this raising of the ceiling of human effort, this subordination of individual aptitudes and interests to the mechanical job in hand, and this unification of a multitude of subordinates to a single end that derived from the divine power exercised by the king, in turn, by the success of the result, confirmed that power.

For note: it was the king who uttered the original commands: it was the king who demanded absolute obedience and punished disobedience with torture, mutilation, or death: it was the king who alone had the godlike power of turning live men into dead mechanical objects: and finally it was the king who assembled the parts to form the machine and imposed a new discipline of mechanical organization, with the same regularity that moved the heavenly bodies on their undeviating course.

No vegetation god, no fertility myth, could produce this kind of cold abstract order, this detachment of power from life. Only one empowered by the Sun God could remove all the hitherto respected norms or limits of human endeavor.²³

The construction of the pyramids required a reliable organization of knowledge, both supernatural (priesthood) and technological (bureaucracy). The great Cheops (Khufu) pyramid contains at least 2,300,000 stone blocks, each weighing two and a half tons, on average.²⁴ These stone blocks, if cut into cubes one foot on each side, would circle two-thirds of the earth's surface at the equator. Such a construction task could not have been carried out without a bureaucratic transmission belt. It would not have been possible to build the pyramids apart from a significant *depersonalization* of the people who made up this massive human machine. Mumford summarized the nature of this bureaucratic machine:

The removal of human dimensions and organic limits is indeed the chief boast of the authoritarian machine. Part of its productivity is due to the use of unstinted physical coercion to overcome human laziness or bodily fatigue. Occupational specialization was a necessary step in the assemblage of the human machine: only by intense specialization at every part of the process could the superhuman accuracy and perfection of the product have been achieved. . . . These human machines were by nature impersonal, if not deliberately de-

23. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

24. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Howard F. Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 69.

humanized; they had to operate on a big scale or they could not work at all; for no bureaucracy, however well organized, could govern a thousand little workshops, each with its own traditions, its own craft skills, its own willful personal pride and sense of responsibility. So the form of control imposed by kingship was confined to great collective enterprises."²⁵

2. *The Bureaucratization of Life*

What kind of society emerges from an economic and political system that is determined to construct pyramids to glorify the eldest sons of a kingly line, and to glorify each one's transition from the god Horus to the god Osiris (at death)?²⁶ Such a bureaucratic society infringes upon the ability and responsibility of individuals to extend dominion across the earth. Such a *concentration of capital* in a single bureaucratic enterprise absorbs the resources that could otherwise be used to finance smaller, decentralized businesses. It also concentrates so much responsibility into the hands of a single monarch or bureaucratic regime that *an error on the part of the hierarchy can threaten the survival of the entire social order*. This is the kind of centralization, though on a less intense level, which brought down Egypt at the time of the exodus. *Egypt lived or died in terms of one man's decisions*: Joseph's Pharaoh (life) vs. Moses' Pharaoh (death).

Another important danger of bureaucracy is its lack of creativity. "Now the important part about the functioning of a classic bureaucracy," Mumford wrote, "is that it originates nothing: its function is to transmit, without alteration or deviation, the orders that come from above. No merely local information or human considerations may alter this inflexible transmission process—except by corruption. This administrative method ideally requires a studious repression of all the autonomous functions of the personality, and a readiness to perform the daily task with ritual exactitude. Not for the first time does such ritual exactitude enter into the process of work: indeed, it is highly unlikely that submission to colorless repetition would have been possible without the millennial discipline of religious ritual."²⁷ From top to bottom, in the massive Church-State of Egypt, ritual was dominant over ethics. *This kind of bureaucracy produces a static social order which*

25. Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts*, p. 265.

26. Wilson, "Egypt," p. 74; E. O. James, *The Ancient Gods* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1960), p. 117.

27. Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts*, p. 266.

eventually disintegrates from external pressures, or disintegrates from its own costs and its inability to generate productive resources. Both events took place in Egypt: an early disintegration into feudalism, and then a revival of centralization during what conventional historians call the Twelfth Dynasty (from Joseph to the fleeing of Moses), which was followed by national defeat immediately after the exodus. Then, after a century or more under the Hyksos (Amalekites), Egypt experienced a brief rise of power under the Eighteenth Dynasty,²⁸ and then further decline.

Egypt could not throw off the static rule of the pharaohs, for the Egyptians remained faithful to their monophysite theology, the continuity of being. The only major change, late in Egyptian history, long after the Exodus, was an extension of the process of divinization to the common man, so that he, too, might become Osiris after his death, as the pharaohs had before him.²⁹ Egyptian culture was remarkably stable; it was the longest-lived of all the ancient kingdoms, but it was "life through institutional death." E. O. James was correct when he referred to Egypt's characteristic feature as the *cult of the dead*, one which assumed "gigantic proportions."³⁰ The pyramids are the most visible, most impressive, and most representative monuments to Egyptian religion and society.³¹

D. The Cult of the Dead

The Egyptian cult of the dead was, in fact, a religion of death and rebirth. It was also a fertility cult. The voluminous and painstaking researches of E. A. Wallis Budge in the early years of the twentieth century made this clear. "The central figure of the ancient Egyptian religion was Osiris, and the chief fundamentals of his cult were the belief in his divinity, death, resurrection, and absolute control of the destinies of the bodies and souls of men. The central point of each Osirian's religion was his hope of resurrection in a transformed body and

28. Velikovsky argued cogently that the Egyptian king Shishak, mentioned in II Chronicles 12:2–4, was Thutmose III of the Eighteenth Dynasty: Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952), pp. 152–55. The invasion of Israel by Shishak was in the fifth year of King Rehoboam: sometime around 969 B.C. This dating is over 500 years after the conventional dating of Thutmose III's dynasty, which is commonly placed in the early or mid-fifteenth century, B.C.

29. James, *Ancient Gods*, p. 61.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

31. The other major Egyptian design was the labyrinth, discussed in greater detail in Appendix C: "The Labyrinth and the Garden."

of immortality, which could only be realized by him through the death and resurrection of Osiris.”³²

Budge tried to reconstruct the basics of Egyptian religion without too extensive a reliance on the native Egyptian literature, since “we find that in no portion of it does there exist a text which is not associated with magic, that no text contains a connected statement of the purely religious beliefs which we know the Egyptians certainly possessed. . . .”³³ But magic was basic to Egyptian religion, as Moses’ confrontation with the court magicians indicates. It will not do to attribute such “base characteristics” of Egyptian religion to later developments, as Budge did, and to link them with foreign gods.³⁴ The Egyptians believed in a *power religion*, in contrast to the ethics religion of the Hebrews.

The gods of the Egyptians remind us of the nature gods of the American Indians. Like the Amerindians, the Egyptians were polytheistic. Budge said in 1911 that Egyptologists knew then of at least three thousand different names of their gods. But he could not resist adding, as so many anthropologists add to their accounts of pagan polytheism, “the Egyptians believed in the existence of One Great God, self-produced, self-existent, almighty and eternal, Who created the ‘gods,’ the heavens and the sun, moon and stars in them, and the earth and everything on it, including man and beast, bird, fish, and reptile. They believed that he maintained in being everything which He had created, and that He was the support of the universe and the Lord of it all.”³⁵ In short, the Egyptians supposedly believed in the same sort of distant, impotent god that late-nineteenth-century nominal Anglicans believed in, and this god was just about as important to the Egyptians in their daily lives as the Anglicans’ god was to the English in 1900.

According to Budge, the Egyptians seldom even mentioned this god’s name, “Neter.” “No proof of any kind is forthcoming which shows that the Egyptians ever entirely forgot the existence of God, but they certainly seem to have believed that he had altogether ceased to interfere in human affairs, and was content to leave the destinies of men to the care of the gods and spirits.”³⁶ In short, Budge implied, they were all basically Deists when it came to formal theism, and polytheists

32. E. A. Wallis Budge, “Preface,” *Osiris: The Egyptian Religion of Resurrection* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1911] 1961), p. xi.

33. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

34. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. xxvii–xxviii.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. xxviii–xxix.

when it came to ritual. But ritual was the heart and soul of Egyptian religion.

Ethics vs. ritual: here is the heart of the difference between the Egyptians' religion of death and resurrection and the Hebrews' religion of death and resurrection. Biblical religion places ethics above ritual. In the Book of Micah, we read: "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:6–8). In contrast, consider Budge's summary of the Egyptians' concern over resurrection, and their attempt to achieve this exalted state through the manipulation of physical means.

Theirs was a world filled with demons that could be controlled only by magic, especially word magic. They were obsessed with the physical signs of death. He writes of the dynastic-era Egyptians that they attached supreme importance to the preservation and integrity of the dead body, and they adopted every means known to them to prevent its dismemberment and decay. They cleansed it and embalmed it with drugs, spices and balsams; they annointed it with aromatic oils and preservative fluids; they swathed it in hundreds of yards of linen bandages; and then they sealed it up in a coffin or sarcophagus, which they laid in a chamber hewn in the bowels of the mountain. All these things were done to protect the physical body against damp, dry rot and decay, and against the attacks of moth, beetles, worms and wild animals. But these were not the only enemies of the dead against which precautions had to be taken, for both the mummified body and the spiritual elements which had inhabited it upon earth had to be protected from a multitude of devils and fiends, and from the powers of darkness generally. These powers of evil had hideous and terrifying shapes and forms, and their haunts were well known, for they infested the region through which the road of the dead lay when passing from this world to the Kingdom of Osiris. The "great gods" were afraid of them, and were obliged to protect themselves by the use of spells and magical names, and words of power, which were composed and written down by Thoth. In fact it was believed in very early times in Egypt that Ra, the Sun god, owed his continued existence to the possession of a secret name with which Thoth provided him. And each morning the rising sun was menaced

by a fearful monster called Aapep which lay hidden under the place of sunrise waiting to swallow up the solar disc. It was impossible, even for the Sun-god, to destroy this “Great Devil,” but by reciting each morning the powerful spell with which Thoth had provided him he was able to paralyze all Aapep’s limbs and rise upon this world.³⁷

Theologically, it was the Egyptians who were in bondage. It was they who needed deliverance: ethical, political, and social. Instead, they enslaved those people whose God could alone grant Egypt the deliverance which all men need, the God who had granted them preliminary manifestations of His power and mercy under Joseph.

1. *Death and Resurrection: The Contrast*

The significant point here is the difference between the biblical and pagan views of death and resurrection. The places of the dead did not become centers of religion or culture for the Hebrews, nor were these locations considered the dwelling places of spirits, human or otherwise. They were just the caves or burial places of those who would one day be resurrected, either to life or death (Dan. 12:1–3). Death and resurrection were central concerns of both pagan and biblical religion, but the heart of biblical religion is ethics, not ritual. The center of the tabernacle and the temple was the Ark of the Covenant, and inside this Ark were the two copies of God’s covenant with Israel, a covenant of ten “words” or commandments. It is this summary of God’s laws of life, not the physical remains of death, which is primary in biblical religion.

The periodic celebrations of social renewal by the ancients—the chaos festivals—were their attempt to achieve *metaphysical renewal*. The very cosmos itself was to be reborn periodically through men’s acts of ritual chaos. They believed in a *religion of revolution*. By ritually recreating the “time before time”—the time of the creation, meaning the advent of order out of disorder—pagans celebrated their concept of death and resurrection. In these festivals, of which the Caribbean’s carnival and New Orleans’ Mardi Gras are pale imitations, regeneration comes from below during a temporary cultural and ritual overthrow of all normal ethical and social standards.³⁸ They wanted *power*

37. E. A. Wallis Budge, “Preface,” *The Book of the Dead* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1920] 1960), pp. xi–xii.

38. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1959), surveys many aspects of this theology, the religion of revolution. Eliade was correct in linking Marxism and chaos festivals: p. 149. Cf. Gary

from below.³⁹ (A similar theology undergirded nineteenth-century and twentieth-century revolutionary movements of both the “right” and the “left.”⁴⁰

These chaos festivals find no parallel in Israel. Instead, *Israel's social renewal was covenantal*, when the people gathered annually for the Passover and other festivals, and *judicial*, when they gathered every seventh year for a national abolition of debt (Deut. 15:1–4),⁴¹ the release of bondservants (Deut. 15:7–1), and the reading of the whole law to all people, including strangers (Deut. 31:10–3).⁴² It was *covenantal renewal*, not a ritual renewal of the cosmos, which was paramount. They did not celebrate the creation, which was solely the work of God; instead, they celebrated their deliverance from Egypt by the power of God, in which they had participated historically. They were to *look backward* toward a real historical event of ethical and national deliverance, so that they could *look forward* in confidence to the coming of the Messiah-deliverer, who in turn would make possible the ultimate deliverance, their resurrection from the dead, so graphically revealed to Ezekiel in the vision of the resurrection of the dry bones of Israel (Ezek. 37).⁴³

The theme of life after death is basic to most religions, and certainly to Egyptian religion. But there was a radical distinction between the Egyptian view and the Bible's. Life after death—the resurrection—for the Egyptians, as for those ancient pagan societies that imitated the Egyptian cult of the dead, was seen as a metaphysical extension of this life. The doctrine of the *continuity of being from man to God* on this side of the grave implies that there will be a *continuity of existence between man's life now and man's life in the resurrection*.

Therefore, ethical regeneration was not seen as being necessary

North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), ch. 4: “The Cosmology of Chaos.” (<http://bit.ly/gnmror>)

39. R. J. Rushdoony, “Power from Below,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I (Winter 1974).

40. James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

41. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

42. *Ibid.*, ch. 76.

43. Partial fulfillment of this vision took place immediately after Christ's resurrection from the dead: “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matt. 27:52–53).

now in order to make possible participation in the life of the renewed world beyond the grave. In such religions, there is only one kind of final resurrection: resurrection unto life. If a man can evolve into God, either on this side of the grave, or in the shadows of death, or through successive reincarnations, then God cannot require man before death to meet ethical standards that are appropriate to man as the image of God—an image that never can become God because of the absolute Creator-creature distinction.

In other words, the cult of the dead rested on the assumption that the kind of existence which men now enjoy is the same sort of life that they will enjoy beyond the grave. This is why pagan tombs have their walls covered with paintings of hunters, or dancers, or people involved in sexual debauchery.⁴⁴ This is why Egyptian kings were buried with their gold and other valuables, including (sometimes) the bodies of their ritually executed wives.

The essence of such a religion is *metaphysics*, not a final judgment based on God's specially revealed ethics. There is no ethical transformation required of man, no regeneration of man by God's grace, this side of the grave. Ritual and magic—man's manipulation of the cosmos, man's manipulation of God—are substituted for ethics as the basis of the man's transition from this life through death to resurrection. Man's departed spirit must draw the labyrinth pattern to perfection, or utter the proper words to the guardian of the gate, or greet the guardian with the proper handshake. Man needs to be wearing the proper clothing or amulet at the time of death, or be buried according to tradition, or have the proper prayer prayed over him by the priest (just before death or soon thereafter), or have the ancient rites performed on schedule by the family's future priest-patriarchs down through the generations. Such practices testify to a religion's adherence to aspects of the satanic delusion.

The conflict between Moses and Pharaoh involved the clash between two radically different concepts of death and resurrection, of salvation and final judgment. One was overwhelmingly ritualistic and metaphysical; the other was distinctly ethical and judicial. One was linked to salvation through ritual chaos; the other was linked to regeneration through faith and adherence to revealed, fixed, ethical law. One deified man; the other did not. One venerated the dead; the other

44. The paintings on the walls of the so-called "Palace of Minos" on Crete probably are tomb paintings. It was not a palace. It was an elaborate grave. See Hans George Wunderlich, *The Secret of Crete* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).

did not. One was a fertility cult; the other was not. As Wunderlich remarked: "The idea of a link between veneration of the dead and a fertility cult runs counter to our modern ways of thinking. But there is a close connection, so close that we might almost speak of the cult of the dead as a form of fertility magic. . . . It is based on an ancient belief that the dead know the future. Ancestors are also responsible for providing for the continuation of the race."⁴⁵

Such a view of the legitimacy of consulting the dead is utterly foreign to biblical religion. The one example in the Bible of a Hebrew leader consulting the dead was Saul's use of the witch of Endor—a "medium" with a familiar spirit (I Sam. 28:7)—who called up Samuel from the dead. This was in direct violation of Leviticus 19:31. God cut Saul off the very next day, as Samuel told him (I Sam. 28:19), thereby fulfilling the law's warning: "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people" (Lev. 20:6). The use of the word "whoring" points to the fertility cult aspects of the cult of the dead.

Neither system could be reconciled with the other. There could be a temporary truce between them, but ultimately one or the other had to triumph. The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh was to determine which system would surrender to, or be defeated by the other. God made it clear in advance to Pharaoh just which system would lose: "For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:15–16).

2. A Digression on Greece

It is revealing that Wunderlich, whose intellectual reconstruction of the Egypt-influenced supposed palace of Knossos—the Bronze Age, labyrinth-based mausoleum venerating the cult of the dead on the island of Crete—recognized that *only sterility and stagnation could result from the cult of the dead*. But instead of looking to Christianity for an answer as to how the ancient world eventually escaped from this cult, he looked to the classical Greeks. He saw the classical Greeks as the inheritors of Knossos. It was they, he argued, who converted the

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 294–95, 295–96.

rituals of death, including funeral plays, into a celebration of life. He asserted that this transformation was the origin of Western civilization.⁴⁶

He failed to acknowledge just how oppressed Greek culture was by the fear of spirits, departed souls, and demons. He looked to Olympus for his explanation of the Greeks, rather than to the underground gods that dominated their lives.⁴⁷ He looked to a political religion, the Olympian gods and Olympian myths, rather than to demonology, which was the real religion of Greece.

Olympic mythology temporarily unified some of the city-states of Greece, and it bonded local families to particular city-states. Today it still unifies humanist historians and anthropologists. That fleeting century of Athenian democracy in the fifth century, B.C. continues to hypnotize Western scholars. It was a century of war and the reckless expansion of Athenian political power, which ultimately led to the downfall of Athens (when their gold ran out) to Sparta, and later to the fall of Greece to the Macedonians. *Periclean Athens was a massive welfare state* in which the state built huge public works projects, organized public assistance, offered pensions to the disabled, subsidized bread purchases, established price controls on bread, imposed export controls, established free theater programs for the poor, and regulated corn merchants.⁴⁸ The “bread and circuses” political religion of Athens ended in an enforced inter-city alliance, war with Sparta, defeat, tyranny, and finally the loss to Macedon. That is the fate of all bread and circus religions.

Athens worshiped politics with all its being, on a scale barely understood by most historians. It was understood by Glotz.

Five hundred citizens were to sit in the Boule for a whole year. The heliasts, whose functions were originally confined to hearing appeals against awards made by the magistrates, were now to judge in first instance and without appeal the increasingly numerous cases in

46. Wunderlich, ch. 25: “The Origin of Western Civilization.”

47. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1922] 1991); *Epilogomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1921) (<http://bit.ly/jehetsgr>), and *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, [1912] 1927). See also John Cuthbert Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1910). (<http://bit.ly/jclmgfaagr>)

48. G. Glotz, *The Greek City and Its Institutions* (New York: Barnes and Noble, [1929] 1969), pp. 131–32.

which citizens of Athens and the confederate towns were involved: they formed a body of six thousand members of which half on an average were in session every working day. There were ten thousand officials within the country or outside, five hundred wardens of arsenals, etc. Thus public affairs did not merely demand the intermittent presence of all the citizens of the Assembly; they required besides the constant exertions of more than a third of them.⁴⁹

Consider this: one-third of all the estimated 35,000 to 44,000 resident male citizens of Athens in the year 431 B.C. were in state service.⁵⁰ At least 20,000 were “eating public bread,” meaning that they were either on the payroll or on the dole.⁵¹ The legend of Pericles, the legend of Athenian democracy, and the legend of Olympus constitute the basis of the legend—a Renaissance legend—of the glory that was Athens and the greatness that was Greece. It is the most enduring of all Greek myths.⁵²

E. The Denial of Time

What kind of society was early dynastic Egypt, the Egypt of the Pyramid Age? Mumford’s words ring true.

Bureaucratic regimentation was in fact part of the larger regimentation of life, introduced by this power-centered culture. Nothing emerges more clearly from the Pyramid texts themselves, with their wearisome repetitions of formulae, than a colossal capacity for enduring monotony: a capacity that anticipates the universal boredom achieved in our own day. Even the poetry of both early Egypt and Babylonia reveal this iterative hypnosis: the same words, in the same order, with no gain in meaning, repeated a dozen times—or a hundred times. This verbal compulsiveness is the psychical side of the systematic compulsion that brought the labor machine into existence. Only those who were sufficiently docile to endure this regimen at every stage from command to execution could become an effective unit in the human machine.⁵³

The culture denied linear time. It substituted endless repetition for

49. *Ibid.* p. 126.

50. Alfred E. Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1915), p. 172. (<http://bit.ly/ZimmernGC>)

51. *Ibid.* pp. 172–73.

52. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix D.

53. Mumford, “First Megamachine,” *Interpretations and Forecasts*, p. 266.

progress, monotony for hope.

While the re-centralization of power by the Pharaoh of the oppression did not revive the enormous capital outlays of the Pyramid Age, it did reflect more accurately than feudalism Egypt's theology of the continuity of being. It did establish slavery, and it did involve the construction of state-worshipping public works projects. In the era of the oppression and the exodus, Egypt's presuppositions concerning the true nature of God, man, and law were manifested in the new bureaucratization.

Here was a culture devoid of any concept of progress, a culture which ignored its own history, except insofar as it built monuments to the dead. It did not even have an accurate chronology of its own kings, as Courville's study demonstrates. The Greeks paid more attention to Egypt's dynastic chronology than the later Egyptians did. Egypt was a society without a future, so it was not particularly concerned about its past. As Wilson wrote, "For the Jews the future is normative. For the Egyptians, on the other hand, the past was normative; and no pharaoh could hope to achieve more than the establishment of the conditions as they were in the time of Re, in the beginning."⁵⁴ The state would, at best, be able to preserve the status quo. Static peace, not any fundamental alteration, was the ideal, despite the fact that certain kings—Sesostris III, Thutmose III—were able to expand the dynasty's limits at least as far as Asia Minor.

The Egyptians believed that the creation originated in chaos. Here is the reigning cosmological vision of all pagan thought, from Egypt to Darwin, from Babel to Marx: *order developed from chaos and is in perpetual tension with chaos*. Mircea Eliade's voluminous studies surveyed this theme in dozens of pagan cosmologies, and Egypt was no exception. Rushdoony summarized this theme in ancient religion: "True social order requires peace and communication with both chaos and deity, and society either moves downward into chaos or forward into deification. The significance of the Tower of Babel is thus apparent: it denied the discontinuity of God's being and asserted man's claim to a continuity of being with God and heaven. The Tower was the *gate* to God and *gate* of God, signifying that man's social order made possible an ascent of being into the divine order. The Egyptian pyramid set forth the same faith."⁵⁵ Egyptian culture was inescapably statist. "The

54. Wilson, "Egypt," *Intellectual Adventure*, p. 26.

55. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2008), p. 43. (<http://bit.ly/>

one and the many were brought together in the person of the king. The Egyptian language had no word for 'state.' For them, the state was not one institution among many but rather the essence of the divine order for life and the means of communication between heaven, earth, and hell. Life therefore was totally and inescapably statist. In this perspective, anything resembling liberty and individuality in the contemporary sense was alien and impossible. . . . Deification was entry into the oneness of the divine order, and membership in the state in this life was similarly participation in the divine oneness manifested in the pharaoh and protection against the horror of chaos and meaningless particularity."⁵⁶ The product of such a theology was imperial bureaucracy.

The Pharaoh of Moses' day looked at the remarkable growth of the Hebrew population, even in the face of affliction, and he grew fearful. What if these people allied themselves to an invading army? How was it that they could multiply like this? What would stop their growth? This population growth, promised to Abraham four centuries before (Gen. 17:2), was a threat to all the plans of the Pharaoh—an uncontrolled factor in a human megamachine. Growth, in a static culture represents a frightening challenge, something beyond the calculations of the planning agencies. Uncontrolled growth—growth outside the bureaucratic plan—is a destabilizing factor for planned economies. Pharaoh knew that it had to be thwarted. Yet he was powerless to call it to a halt.

Conclusion

Imperial bureaucracy is one of the two major political manifestations of the society of Satan.⁵⁷ The other is anarchism. *Imperial bureaucracy is a top-down system of central planning.* It inescapably rests on the presupposition (stated or implied) that the planners are near-gods, that they have sufficient imagination and a God-like comprehensive knowledge to set forth their decrees, and that their words shall come to pass. Imperial bureaucracy is produced whenever men believe that at least some men—the central planning elite—are essentially divine, or what is the same thing, that they have no god above them to

rjroam)

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

57. The best account I have ever read on this subject is R. J. Rushdoony's 1964 essay, "The Society of Satan," reprinted in *Biblical Economics Today*, II (Oct./Nov. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/rjrsos>)

whom their subjects (slaves) can successfully appeal.

The idea of imperial bureaucracy therefore rests on the idea of the continuity of being: *from God to the planning elite*, who are the representatives of the people (who may or may not be considered part of this continuity of being).

The Egyptian state created a bureaucracy so vast, so all-encompassing, that nothing in man's history rivaled it until the rise of the modern industrialized socialist commonwealths. The state enshrined the cult of the dead in a desperate attempt to achieve life beyond the grave.⁵⁸ Life was seen as static, something that possesses unchanging continuity with life after death, at least for the Pharaoh. This static culture was statist to the core.

When the exodus came, it did not simply free an enslaved population from physical bondage. It freed them from a static, hopeless society that was doomed, even if economically successful for the kings and nobles, to endless boredom—a kind of living death. *The “living” death of a Pharaoh’s mummy was mirrored in the living death of the society.* God delivered Israel from a society that was based on the theology of the divine State. No king in Israel ever claimed to be divine, for only God has that right of absolute sovereignty. The people of Israel, even under the worst of Israel's kings, were never again to live within the imperial bureaucracy of a centralized divine order, except when they were again in bondage to foreign rulers.

The freedom that God provided for them was comprehensive, and the heart of this freedom was religious: the denial of absolute sovereignty any place on earth except in God's “holy of holies” in His temple, the center of which was the ark which contained the summary of His law. There is sovereignty only in God's word, not in the secret labyrinth recesses of some dead man's pyramid.

58. In the Soviet Union, Lenin's tomb became the national shrine. They kept his embalmed body in a glass case for the masses to visit. The body remains on display in 2012.

3

RIGOROUS WASTE AND RIGOROUS SOCIALISM

The Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them to serve, was with rigour (Ex. 1:13–14).

A. Slavery and Waste

The Egyptians subjugated the Israelites. The language of this passage indicates a grinding servitude, for it lists a seven-fold subjection: serve, rigor, bondage, slavery, service, serve, and rigor.¹ Unquestionably, the Egyptians were able to extract extensive labor services out of these captives. This period of servitude may have lasted over a century; certainly, it lasted from Moses' birth until the exodus, 80 years later. Given the Old Testament's familiar 40-year period of servitude and "wilderness wandering," I believe that 80 years is more likely. Therefore, we might be tempted to conclude that the Egyptians were the beneficiaries of the Hebrews' labor services. Nevertheless, in retrospect, the Egyptians (through the decisions of their sovereigns, the pharaohs) made a disastrous error in their estimate of costs and benefits. They overestimated the benefits of the Hebrews' productivity, and they underestimated the costs of enslaving them. As they learned after the exodus, if Courville's reconstructed chronology is correct, a nation is defenseless without its army. The invading Amalekites, meaning the

1. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), p. 12. The word for "slave labor" occurs five times, and the word "rigor" appears twice. A seven-fold emphasis appears also in verse 7, which lists seven aspects of Israel's population growth. If Cassuto is correct in his assertion that the number 7 is "indicative of perfection" (p. 9), then Egypt's oppression was perfectly horrible.

Hyksos, who are identified by conventional historians as the shepherd kings, were able to conquer them. They lost their Hebrew labor force, and they became the servants (slaves).²

It is hard to understand how so valuable an economic resource as human labor might be wasted in a slave system, yet economics informs us that *excessive waste is characteristic of any slave economy which is not closely linked to a free market*. It is the institution of a competitive market which enables slave owners to assess the productivity of the slaves. The South's slave system of the United States prior to the Civil War (1861–65) appears to have been a profitable institutional arrangement for the slave-owning planters,³ but they operated within a free market, and they produced cash crops, especially cotton, which were sold in worldwide markets. Slaves were sold at price-competitive auctions, and a re-sale market existed. The output of the slaves could be calculated rationally. Owners and renters (slaves were sometimes rented out) could make estimates of costs and benefits within the framework of a money economy that possessed a high degree of economic specialization.

The Egyptians used the Hebrews to construct treasure cities, or storehouse cities, made of brick. They also used them in the fields. However, we must recognize that treasure cities were huge public works projects built for the Pharaoh. They were statist enterprises, not market enterprises. Furthermore, there was almost certainly no open market for the bulk of these Hebrew slaves, as if all branches of the Egyptian government were competitively pitted against each other in an open auction for slaves' services. This is not to say that all the slaves were held by the state, but it is likely that the majority of them were. When the Pharaoh imposed the punishment that they gather their own straw for brick-making, he was acting as a political sovereign. The

2. . Immanuel Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952), ch. 2.

3. Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, "The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South," *The Journal of Political Economy*, LXVI (April 1966); reprinted in Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *The Reinterpretation of American Economic History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Cf. Fogel and Engerman, "The Economics of Slavery," *ibid.*, and Yasukichi Yasuba, "The Profitability and Viability of Plantation Slavery in the United States," *The Economic Studies Quarterly*, XII (Sept. 1961), in *ibid.* For a general introduction to the question of the profitability of slavery in the American South, see Harold D. Woodman (ed.), *Slavery and the Southern Economy: Sources and Readings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966). The essays in this collection are older, written before the advent of the "new economic history," with its statistical techniques and econometric market models.

punishment made sense only as a political-theological-military decision, not as a profit-seeking economic measure (Ex. 5:5–7). Such a restraint on productivity made sense only within the framework of a state-operated construction program in which the slaves were an instrument of state power.

The Pharaoh, in any case, was the owner of all Egypt (Gen. 47:20). He was the official source of meaning in the cosmos. He was responsible for allocating scarce economic resources for the benefit of the state. The economic estimations of the Pharaoh, not the estimations of acting buyers and sellers in free markets, were the standards of economic value. It was incumbent on the Pharaoh to make accurate cost-benefit estimates if the nation was to prosper. “The king,” wrote Frankfort, “is not only instrumental in producing the ‘fat of the land’; he must also dispense it. Only then is there evidence that he functions effectively. If his bounty proves that he disposes, as a king should dispose, of the earth and its produce. . . . But the king also keeps alive the hearts of all those subjects who do not directly partake of his bounty. For he exercises a never ending mysterious activity on the strength of which daily, hourly, nature and society are integrated.”⁴ The king was understood to direct the very forces of nature. It was the king, and only the king, whose judgments concerning economic production were sovereign.

B. Economic Calculation

When the Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews, he made a cost-benefit analysis. He concluded that the risks in allowing them to remain free were too high (Ex. 1:10). He concluded that the risks of breaking Egypt’s covenant with the Hebrews—and, by implication, with their God—were minimal. He decided that any loss of productivity on their part could be compensated for, assuming his taskmasters used whips and other coercive measures to compel their hard labor. In other words, he concluded that sheer force, and not the profit opportunities of a free market, was the best means of extracting valuable labor services from them. He forfeited the productivity of a profit-seeking people who willingly bore the costs of their own actions. He concluded that coercion was more efficient in extracting their services, despite

4. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1948] 1962), pp. 59–60.

the necessity of having to feed them, supervise them constantly, and continually pressure them to greater output. In short, he underestimated the productivity-engendering features of a free market, and he overestimated the benefits of coercion. When they left Egypt triumphantly, after God had reduced Egypt's economy by means of plagues and spoils, *the Egyptians learned just what kind of economic losses a nation can sustain as a result of kings' errors in cost-benefit analysis.*

The Hebrews worked very hard. Did this ensure their productivity? Can we conclude that hard work is efficient work? How do we measure or calculate efficient labor? How could the Egyptians have made such estimations? How did they know when they were getting "their money's worth" out of these slaves?

If we accepted the labor theory of value, we would have to conclude that no matter what they were assigned to achieve, their rigorous efforts must have produced profitable results. This is a good argument against the labor theory of value. But how can anyone measure efficiency if there are no profits? A socialist economy has no profits and losses to compare. A divine monarch does not permit a free market in labor services, once he enslaves a people.

Slavery in Egypt in Moses' day meant hard labor in constructing treasure cities. Hard work led to waste on a massive scale. The slaves' efforts benefited the king, and *the Egyptians paid for their king's public works projects in many ways*: lost labor that the Hebrews might have provided the general population, lost raw materials that went into the projects, and the greatest cost of all, the growing wrath of God, which would culminate in the destruction of the economy, the Pharaoh, and the army. The enslaving kings no doubt were satisfied with the transaction; the people, governed by a false theology, temporarily may have approved; but the end result was unmitigated destruction.

The mere expenditure of human effort on state public works projects does not guarantee a return on the investment that is positive. Without a free market, in which the competing bids of buyers and sellers of resources determine the allocation of scarce resources, there is no way for the state's officials to calculate economic value accurately. They can only make estimates, but *there is no self-correcting information system* available to inform them of the accuracy or inaccuracy of their judgments.

Egypt had a theology that asserted the ability of the Pharaoh to make such judgments, which is precisely the theology a consistent so-

cialist commonwealth must have if it is to be a valid substitute for a market economy. The integration of all economic plans can be furthered by the market, or it can theoretically be accomplished by an omniscient agency; in Egypt's case, this agency was supposedly the Pharaoh. "He was a lonely being, this god-king of Egypt," wrote Wilson. "All by himself he stood between humans and gods. Texts and scenes emphasize his solitary responsibility. The temple scenes show him as the only priest in ceremonies with the gods. A hymn to a god states: 'There is no one else that knows thee except thy son, (the king), whom thou causest to understand thy plans and power.' It was the king who built temples and cities, who won battles, who made laws, who collected taxes, or who provided the bounty for the tombs of his nobles."⁵ Egypt possessed the necessary theology for a consistent socialist commonwealth, but this theology was wrong, as the Egyptians learned in the year of the exodus. The king did not possess omniscience; he did not know what the true costs of enslaving the Hebrews really were.

The pharaohs who constructed the mighty pyramids of the Old Kingdom had weakened the Egyptian economy drastically. Wilson described these structures quite accurately: huge, non-economic construction projects that were supposed to last for eternity, but which had to be followed by more of them in each generation.⁶ The brick pyramids of the later pharaohs were not equally majestic, but their construction involved comparable problems. Were they cost-effective? Only the Pharaoh could decide, since there was no free market available for men to use as a means of evaluating the true costs involved. The Hebrews were forced to work *rigorously*, but this could not guarantee that they were working *efficiently*. The wit's definition of modern commercialism applies to the Pharaoh's pyramids and cities: something done magnificently which should not have been done at all. The Pharaoh, as a divinity, was supposed to know what ultimate value really is, but he was not divine, so he faced the inescapable economic problem that has baffled all central planners, namely, *the impossibility of making rational economic calculations in an economy without competitive free markets*. This is the problem described by Ludwig von

5. John A. Wilson, "Egypt," in Henri Frankfort, *et al.*, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1946] 1977), p. 77.

6. John A. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt: An Interpretation of Ancient Egyptian Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1951] 1967), p. 98.

Mises as the problem of economic calculation in a socialist commonwealth.⁷ *An economy with-out competitive markets is an economy without rational economic guidelines.* It is an economy which is “flying blind.”

The central planner does not know what slave labor is really worth, for such labor commands no free market price. He does not know what the true cost of his capital equipment is, since there is no competitive market for capital goods. The Pharaoh, like any other socialist planner, could only guess. All he could do was to make intuitive judgments about what his cities were worth to him and what the actual costs of production really were. The larger the scope of the projects, and the larger the slave labor supply, the more difficult it was to make such intuitive estimates apart from fully competitive prices. But competitive pricing is precisely what socialist economic planning denies.

C. Socialism’s Economic Miscalculation

Mises commented at some length on this problem of economic calculation in his book, *Socialism* (1922).

Let us try to imagine the position of a socialist community. There will be hundreds and thousands of establishments in which work is going on. A minority of these will produce goods ready for use. The majority will produce capital goods and semi-manufactures. All these establishments will be closely connected. Each commodity produced will pass through a whole series of such establishments before it is ready for consumption. Yet in the incessant press of all these processes the economic administration will have no real sense of direction. It will have no means of ascertaining whether a given piece of work is really necessary, whether labour and material are not being wasted in completing it. How would it discover which of two processes was the most satisfactory? At best, it could compare the quantity of ultimate products. But only rarely could it compare the expenditure incurred in their production. It would know exactly—or

7. Ludwig von Mises, “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth,” (1920), in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963), ch. 3. (<http://mises.org/econcalc.asp>) Cf. Mises, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1922] 1951), Pt. II. (<http://mises.org/socialism.pdf>) This has been reprinted in both hardback and paperback editions in 1981 by Liberty Classics, Indianapolis, Indiana. See also Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), chaps. 7–9. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIEO>); T. J. B. Hoff, *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Society* (London: Hodge & Co. 1948). (<http://bit.ly/HoffCalc>)

it would imagine it knew—what it wanted to produce. It ought therefore to set about obtaining the desired results with the smallest possible expenditure. But to do this it would have to be able to make calculations. And such calculations must be calculations of value. They could not be merely ‘technical,’ they could not be calculations of the objective use-value of goods and services. . . . The economic administration may indeed know exactly what commodities are needed most urgently. But this is only half the problem. The other half, the valuation of the means of production, it cannot solve. It can ascertain the value of the totality of such instruments. That is obviously equal to the satisfactions they afford. If it calculates the loss that would be incurred by withdrawing them, it can also ascertain the value of single instruments of production. But it cannot assimilate them to a common price denominator, as can be done under a system of economic freedom and money prices.⁸

Mises was too generous here to his ideological opponents, the socialists. Unless the state is defined as the desires of one man, which is what the Pharaoh could claim, it is not possible for socialist planners to “know exactly what commodities are needed most urgently.” They cannot possibly ascertain “the value of the totality of such instruments,” precisely because no planning agency can ever estimate “the satisfactions they afford.” The satisfactions afforded to a multitude of citizens by any single mix of consumer goods cannot possibly be known; they can only be guessed at. Furthermore, *there is no way for the socialist planners to judge the failure of their estimations outside of massive revolution by the victimized consumers*—a contingency made less likely by the systematic repression by the police and military leaders of most socialist commonwealths. They know that they cannot possibly make such calculations accurately, and so they spend great quantities of sorely needed capital on the suppression of potentially violent consumer dissatisfaction.

Rothbard’s summary of Mises’ argument is illuminating: “In short, if there were no market for a product, and all of its exchanges were internal, there would be no way for a firm or for anyone else to determine a price for the good. A firm can estimate an implicit price when an external market exists; but when a market is absent, the good can have no price, whether implicit or explicit. Any figure could then be only an arbitrary symbol. Not being able to calculate a price, the firm could not rationally allocate factors and resources from one stage to another.”⁹ In

8. Mises, *Socialism*, pp. 120–21.

9. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama:

fact, Rothbard concluded, *a universal monopoly by one great corporation is theoretically impossible*, because a universal monopoly would have no market-determined array of prices to guide its production decisions. “As the area of incalculability increases, the degrees of irrationality, misallocation, loss, impoverishment, etc., become greater. Under *one* owner or *one* cartel for the whole productive system, there would be no possible areas of calculation at all, and therefore complete economic chaos would prevail.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, this kind of universal ownership was precisely what the pharaohs had attempted to create ever since Joseph’s day. Only to the extent that a particular pharaoh would turn his back on his theoretical ownership of Egypt, and would allow independent buyers and sellers to produce for a free market in goods and services, could the Egyptian economy reverse its drift into economic chaos.

1. Lange’s “Refutation” of Mises

There was an attempt by a Polish Communist economist of the 1930s, Oskar Lange, to refute Mises by arguing that socialist economies can use prices to allocate production rationally.¹¹ These would be hypothetical prices, established initially on a purely arbitrary basis by the central planners. If supplies cleared the markets, the price structure would be left unchanged. If not, prices would be changed until production did clear all markets.¹²

This argument ignores many things, such as the possibility of any central planning agency’s establishing an initial array of prices for mil-

Ludwig von Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), p. 613. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

10. *Ibid.*, p. 614.

11. Lange wrote: “Socialists have certainly good reason to be grateful to Professor Mises, the great advocatus diaboli of their cause. For it was his powerful challenge that forced the socialists to recognize the importance of an adequate system of economic accounting to guide the allocation of resources in a socialist economy. Even more, it was chiefly due to Professor Mises’ challenge that many socialists became aware of the very existence of such a problem. And although Professor Mises was not the first to raise it, and although not all socialists were as completely unaware of the problem as is frequently held, nevertheless, that, particularly on the European Continent (outside of Italy), the merit of having caused the socialists to approach this problem systematically belongs entirely to Professor Mises. Both as an expression of recognition for the great service rendered by him and as a memento of the prime importance of sound economic reasoning, a statue of Professor Mises ought to occupy an honorable place in the great hall of the Ministry of Socialization or of the Central Planning Board of the socialist state.” Lange, in Oskar Lange and Fred M. Taylor, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, [1938] 1956), pp. 57–58.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–98. For a refutation of Lange, see Hoff, *Economic Calculation*.

lions of consumer goods and services, or even the basic raw materials and capital, both human and physical, that would be needed to produce these goods. Second, if there is no private ownership, especially of capital goods, how can customers enforce their preferences on the planners? So what if markets do not clear? So what if some firms do poorly? Since no one owns them, how can the central planners act as surrogates for customers and persuade all managers to produce the proper number and quality of goods? Third, why would central planners want to enforce the preferences of customers on managers? After all, we are speaking of self-conscious slave-holding societies. What was the Soviet Union's Gulag Archipelago of labor camps, with its millions of inmates, if not a system of slavery?

It is revealing that no socialist economic commonwealth has ever adopted Lange's hypothetical "solution" to the objections raised by Mises. Lange returned to his native Poland after the Communists took over the country in 1945. He became Poland's minister of economics. He never attempted to implement his theory. What is even more revealing is that the myth of Lange's supposed "refutation" was still found in textbooks on comparative economic systems in 1985, when this book first appeared. Mises' 1920 essay and his book, *Socialism*, were never cited; only brief references are made to Lange's supposed answer. Only in 1990, as the Soviet Union was collapsing economically, did one prominent socialist economist admit in public that Mises had been right. He admitted that socialism is not as efficient as the free market is. He admitted that the economics profession had ignored Mises and praised Lange for over half a century. He did so, not in a scholarly economics journal, but in a literary magazine, *The New Yorker*.¹³

2. *Flying Blind*

The socialists may believe that the systematic planning of specialized agencies will lead to a huge increase in productivity. They may believe that the co-ordination of all segments of a nation's economy can be achieved only by central planning. They may believe that people will work rigorously and therefore effectively only when compelled to do so in the name of the sovereign political order. What we learn from

13. Robert Heilbroner, "After Communism," *The New Yorker* (Sept. 10, 1990). Heilbroner, who became a multimillionaire from royalties on his book, *The Worldly Philosophers*, a study of the major economists, did not even mention Mises in his book.

Israel's experience in bondage is the opposite. Men can serve the state rigorously, but *the centrally planned state is economically blind*. The state may indeed overcome the so-called "anarchy" of an unregulated free market, but this in no way assures the triumph of economic rationality. As Mises wrote in 1922: "Instead of the economy of 'anarchical' production, the senseless order of an irrational machine would be supreme. The wheels would go round, but to no effect."¹⁴ Without the ability to calculate the value of any resource's contribution to the economy, and its economic burden on the economy as it is used up, the socialist central planning agency is "flying blind." Without a free market, especially a free market in capital goods, it is impossible for central planners to make any more than woefully uneducated guesses concerning economic costs and benefits. No economically rational prices exist to guide them in their task. The longer they do without a market economy, the less educated are their guesses.

A fine summary of the problem of economic calculation in a socialist commonwealth was provided by I. Borovitski, a disgruntled enterprise manager in the Soviet Union, in 1962. He complained in the newspaper, *Pravda* (Oct. 5, 1962):

The department of Gosplan [the Soviet central planning agency—G.N.] which drafts the production program for Sovnarkhozy [regional economic councils—G.N.] and enterprises is totally uninterested in costs and profits. Ask the senior official in the production program department in what factor it is cheaper to produce this or that commodity? He has no idea, and never even puts the question to himself. He is responsible only for the distribution of production tasks. Another department, not really concerned with the costs of production, decides on the plan for gross output. A third department or sub-department, proceeding from the principle that costs must always decline and labor productivity increase, plans costs, wages fund and labor on the basis of past performance. Material allocations and components are planned by numerous other departments. Not a single department of Gosplan is responsible for the consistency of these plans.¹⁵

14. Mises, *Socialism*, p. 120.

15. Cited by Alec Nove, *The Soviet Economy: An Introduction*, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 207. Cf. Gary North, "The Crisis in Soviet Economic Planning," *Modern Age*, XIV (1969–70); reprinted in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 22. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>). See also Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), Appendix B: "Soviet Economic Planning." (<http://bit.ly/gnmror>)

Furthermore, if such a department existed, it would still be helpless. It would possess no reliable information concerning competitive prices by which to estimate economic costs.

D. Oppression and Misallocated Resources

When the Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews, he reduced the economic rationality of the Egyptian nation. When he and his successors began to use the labor of the Hebrews to construct treasure cities, they took another step in the direction of economic irrationality and tyranny, for they were extracting these labor services from the customer-oriented markets and redirecting them into statist projects. These projects were state monopolies; there was no way to calculate the benefits they conveyed to Egypt, except insofar as Egypt was defined as the state, and the state was equated with the Pharaoh. This enormous transfer of productive wealth—human capital—from the market to the bureaucratic state benefited the pharaohs in the short run, but it made the Egyptian economy less productive and less rational economically. The value of the labor services of an individual Hebrew could easily be calculated on a free market. The value of the labor services of all Hebrews could not be calculated in the state's public works programs.

The Hebrews were forced to work rigorously. This was significant as *a means of oppression*; it was not necessarily significant as a testimony to the rationality of the Egyptian economy. By transferring their labor services to statist building projects, the Egyptian taskmasters reaffirmed the commitment of the state to its own deification at the expense of national per capita wealth. The state would collect its huge "tithe" on a permanent basis. Yet it could not guarantee that this "tithe" would be used efficiently. As the Egyptians learned in the year of the exodus, there had been far better uses for Israel's labor than the construction of treasure cities and coerced work in the fields. The state could, for a time, extract labor from the Hebrews; it was unable to escape the inevitable costs. It was also unable to escape the necessity of making accurate cost-benefit analyses, despite the fact that the pharaohs believed that they had done so. The Hebrews worked rigorously, but at the time of the exodus, Egyptians learned how expensive this labor had been, and how wasteful the expenditure had been. The Pharaoh of the exodus was no longer able to enjoy his treasure cities; he was at the bottom of the Red Sea, and the treasures were gone.

A drowned Pharaoh, it should be noted, renders questionable the simultaneous belief in two possibilities: (1) the conventional dating of the powerful Eighteenth Dynasty in the fifteenth century (whose pharaohs' mummies still exist); and (2) the dating of the exodus in the fifteenth century. If you assume the former, you cannot easily hold to the latter. Yet virtually all Christian historians accept the fifteenth-century dating of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Thus, with the exception of amateur historian Courville, they have wound up arguing for both positions simultaneously, or worse, arguing for a later date for the exodus. Such is the power of humanist scholarship in our day that well-meaning Christian scholars have surrendered themselves to the humanists.

Anyone who argues for a thirteenth-century date of the exodus has sold out the case for biblical inerrancy by denying the truth of I Kings 6:1.¹⁶ This is far more serious than making yourself look ridiculous by arguing for the doubtful proposition that the exodus really did take place in the fifteenth century, but somehow it left no trace—not even a hint of a minor regional dislocation—in the records of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and furthermore, that the Pharaoh's body was somehow retrieved from the sea, mummified, and buried honorably.

It is the initial assumption which must be rejected—the fifteenth-century dating of the early Eighteenth Dynasty—because I Kings 6:1 makes it impossible to date the exodus in any other century except the fifteenth. It was not some powerful early Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaoh, whose mummies have all survived, who died in the Red Sea. Some other Pharaoh, whose mummy did not survive, and who was a member of some other dynasty, was the Pharaoh of the exodus. The Eighteenth Dynasty is therefore improperly dated by conventional historians, Christian and non-Christian. This is why we should take seriously Courville's reconstructed chronology, at least as a preliminary step for a thorough reconsideration of the chronology of the ancient Near East.

Conclusion

The pharaohs, claiming omniscience, abandoned the free market for labor—a market that offers men at least some means of evaluating economic value. They claimed omnipotence, yet the Pharaoh of the

16. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

exodus was totally vanquished. They extracted rigorous service from the Israelites, yet they had no way of knowing whether or not such service from the Israelites was a national benefit. They believed that slavery was a national benefit, yet one of them finally learned that it was a national disaster. *The arrogance of a sovereign central planning system was shattered in the year of the exodus.* What several pharaohs had believed was rigorous service to the Egyptian State turned out to be rigorous waste on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaoh who first enslaved Israel. It was Egypt, finally, which paid the price for this waste.

The modern version of the pharaohs' economy, socialist economic planning, also rests on an implicit assumption of near-omniscience of the central planning agencies. Like the pharaohs, socialist planners are "flying blind." They cannot accurately calculate true costs and benefits because they do not have access to the information which is produced on a competitive free market. Centrally planned economies are wasteful, tyrannical, and ultimately self-destructive, just as the pharaohs' economy was. Socialist economic planning is an updated application of the religion of ancient Egypt.

4

ILLEGITIMATE STATE POWER

The king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools [birthstools]; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive (Ex. 1:15–16).

The theocentric principle here is the legitimacy of deceiving covenant-breaking tyrants when their actions threaten God's covenant people. Covenant-keepers are to use deception in the same way that God did. God later told Ezekiel:

For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him (Ezek. 14:7–10).

A. Population Control

The goal of every imperial bureaucracy is control. No factor in the economy is supposed to be left to chance. This includes the population factor. Because human labor is one of the most basic of all economic

inputs, a central planning agency which would leave population growth to “chance”—the natural fertility rate of the population’s sexual partners—would be abdicating its responsibilities. The Hebrews were therefore an “unknown quantity” economically. *The very presence of their growing numbers in the face of deliberate oppression was a denial of the sovereignty of the Egyptian bureaucracy.*

There was also a religious issue at stake. Here was a significant portion of the total population of Egypt that was clearly out of favor with the ruler. The Pharaoh was in theory a divine figure; his protection was given to his subjects in the name of the gods. Egypt was extremely polytheistic. Yet one of the primary symbols of blessing, population growth, was present to a startling extent among this foreign, enslaved people. The literal fulfillment of God’s covenantal promise to Abraham (Gen. 17:2–6) before the eyes of the Egyptians was a standing testimony to the sovereignty of a God other than the gods of Egypt, a universal God whose power and authority were not limited to the original homeland of these displaced people. Here was a God who showed His presence among a defeated people, in stark contrast to the theory of pagan antiquity that gods are local in their sovereignty and are themselves defeated when their people are defeated by troops of another state. (See the disastrously erroneous but typical arguments of the king of Syria in this regard: I Kings 20:23–25.) *The fertility of the Hebrew slaves was a visible contradiction of the theology of the imperial bureaucracy.* The Egyptians were determined to call a halt to the extraordinary population growth of their newly enslaved Hebrew servants, and they were willing to resort to infanticide to achieve their ends.

The unprecedented population growth of the Hebrews served as a major threat to the sovereignty of the Pharaoh, who was the embodiment of the Egyptian state. They posed a potential military threat, since they might ally themselves to an invading foreign army (Ex. 1:9–10). They might succeed in displacing the Egyptians, since such population growth, if continued over several centuries, would fill up the land. Furthermore, the very presence of a growing population constituted an economic factor of great magnitude. How was such a factor to be incorporated into the state economic plan? How could they be controlled? How could the state supply them with basic necessities? How could the state be certain that their labor was being used in an efficient, productive fashion? How many imperial cities could the Pharaoh afford to build? How long would the resources of Egypt be absorbed by

the Hebrews in their status as public works employees? The Egyptians made them work rigorously (Ex. 1:14), but this could not guarantee that their efforts would be productive.

B. The Lying Midwives

In response to the Hebrews' multiplication, Pharaoh called in two Hebrew midwives. He ordered them to kill all male infants born to the slave women. Two women acting alone would not have been able to kill more than a fraction of the male children born on any day; therefore, many commentators have concluded that these two midwives were the leaders of a midwives' guild. As representatives of the guild, they would have been required by Pharaoh to pass along the order to the other midwives. The midwives refused to participate in these evil plans. They made a moral decision. They refused to obey the king. Then they lied to him about the reason for their supposed inability to obey: "And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere [before] the midwives come into them" (Ex. 1:19).

This passage has bothered far too many orthodox commentators. One person who could not accept the obvious—that God was pleased with their successful lie—was John Murray. His chapter on "The Sanctity of Truth" challenges their actions, just as it challenges Rahab's famous lie to the authorities of Jericho concerning the whereabouts of the Hebrew spies. "Let us grant, however, that the midwives did speak an untruth and that their reply was really false. There is still no warrant to conclude that the untruth is endorsed, far less that it is the untruth that is—in view when we read, 'And God dealt well with the midwives' (Exodus I: 20). The midwives feared God in disobeying the king and it is because they feared God that the Lord blessed them (cf. verses 17, 21). It is not at all strange that their fear of God should have coexisted with moral infirmity. The case is simply that no warrant for untruth can be elicited from this instance any more than in the cases of Jacob and Rahab."¹

I have commented elsewhere at some length on the legitimacy of Jacob's lie to Isaac.² I have also commented on the legitimacy of Ra-

1. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 141–42.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 27: "The Uses of Deception."

hab's lie to the Jericho authorities.³ Many of the same arguments apply here. First, what else could the Hebrew midwives have done to save the lives of the children, except lie? Second, did Pharaoh deserve to be told the truth? Did the Nazis in World War II deserve to be told where Jews were being hidden? If those Dutchmen or Germans who hid Jews in their homes to protect them in World War II had been approached by the Nazis and asked if they had Jews hidden in their homes, knowing that all Christians are somehow morally bound to tell the truth at all times, no matter what, there would have been a lot of condemned Christians and captured Jews. Silence under such circumstances would have been regarded as an admission of guilt, and searches would have been conducted. Third, what is spying, other than a lie? (This is why the rules of Western warfare sanction the execution of spies during wartime, but men who are captured in foreign territory wearing their nation's uniform are supposed to be treated as prisoners of war.) Fourth, what is wartime camouflage, other than a lie?

This last question bothered Murray, a veteran of the First World War. When teaching a children's catechism class, he criticized the lie of Rebekah and Jacob to Isaac. Then he asked the class about camouflage. He denied that camouflage is a form of lying. It is only concealment, not deception, and concealment is legitimate under certain conditions. We are allowed to conceal something from so-meone "when that person has no right to know. . . ."⁴ But that, of course, is the whole point. Did the authorities at Jericho have a "right to know," since they had been marked out by God for total destruction? Did Pharaoh have a "right to know," when he was seeking the destruction of God's people? So desperate was Murray to maintain his position of the universal immorality of lying that he speculated about the possibility that the midwives' tale really might have been the partial truth. "We need not suppose that the midwives' reply to Pharaoh was altogether void of truth. There is good reason to believe that the Hebrew women often bore their children without aid of the midwives. We may therefore have an instance of partial truth and not total untruth, and partial truth relevant to the circumstances."⁵ But he did not tell us why "there is good reason to believe that the Hebrew women often bore their children

3. Gary North, "Appendix 5," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 838–42. Cf. Jim West, "Rahab's Justifiable Lie," *Christianity and Civilization*, 2 (1982–83). (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>)

4. John Murray: *A Memorial with Tributes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), p. 46.

5. Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 141.

without the aid of midwives.” If this was the case “often,” then how did the midwives survive as a guild? This, in fact, is precisely the question Pharaoh should have asked them. He did not think to ask: “What have you midwives been doing all these years? Why is it that the Hebrew wives have only recently begun to deliver their babies so rapidly?” That he failed to ask them this question indicates that God had blinded him. That Prof. Murray also failed to ask this question indicates that his false presupposition blinded him.

The Pharaoh’s decision was clearly *ad hoc* in nature. He immediately imposed a new policy of extermination: drowning, or at least abandonment (1:22). This new policy also obviously failed, since younger men participated in the exodus—Joshua and his generation—and someone in Moses’ generation must have fathered them. The extermination policy was clearly an interim measure, and it was unsuccessful. Whether the original Pharaoh’s intent was the ultimate extermination of the Hebrew slave population, or merely a short-run population control device, it failed.

Conclusion

The midwives lied directly to the Pharaoh. Given the preposterous nature of the tale, they lied baldly and shamelessly to him. The Bible is very clear concerning God’s opinion of such outright lying: “Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses” (1:20–21).

By no bending of the Scriptures can legalistic commentators find the slightest trace of condemnation by God in the midwives’ act of defiance against the constituted authority of Egypt. The state had spoken, and the midwives dealt with it in devious defiance. A biblical principle is hereby demonstrated. *The illegitimate laws of a civil government may be legitimately skirted when they come into direct conflict with a fundamental biblical principle.* This principle was announced clearly by Peter in Acts 5:29: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”⁶ In this case, the principle being upheld by the midwives was the morality of resisting the genocide of God’s covenant people. Godly men must obey God, not the illegitimate demands of an apostate bureaucratic state.

6. For a symposium on the question of the right of Christian resistance against tyranny, see *Christianity and Civilization*, 2 (Winter 1982–83). *op. cit.*

Had the midwives been contemporary legalists, the infants would either have been slaughtered, or else the lying, “compromising” legalists would have had guilty consciences and no new houses. But the midwives were neither legalists nor moralists. They honored God’s law in preference to the state’s law. In doing so, they acknowledged the *absolute sovereignty of God*, as well as *the limits that God places on the authority of the state*.

Addendum

A neglected document relating to the historicity of Shiprah, or at least someone bearing this name, is provided by a papyrus that is held by the Brooklyn Museum. It is a document from the Thirteenth Dynasty. It lists 90 slaves, 30 of whom had Northwest Semitic names. Shiprah was one of these names. The conventional dating of this document is about the eighteenth century B.C. However, according to Courville’s reconstructed chronology, the Thirteenth Dynasty was the dynasty of the exodus. Though the attempted execution of the Hebrew males took place at least 80 years before the exodus, in the Twelfth Dynasty, Shiprah could still have been alive in the new Pharaoh’s household. At least, Shiprah was a name that could have been used both in the era of the oppression and the exodus. This lends further support to Courville’s chronological reconstruction.⁷

7. Donovan A. Courville, “A Biblical Reconstruction of Egypt’s Early Chronology,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975), p. 152. On the papyrus, see Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 93–94; John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 49–50.

5

ENVY, RUMOR, AND BONDAGE

And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known (Ex. 2:11–14).

The theocentric principle here is the authority of God's agent of protection to intervene in order to protect the defenseless. Moses was God's agent of protection four decades before he returned from the wilderness to lead the Israelites out of bondage.

This passage raises several difficult points of interpretation. First, was Moses a murderer? Second, why was he resented by the Hebrew who had initiated the wrong? Third, what was the motivating force behind the rumor? Fourth, what were the results when this rumor became widespread?

A. Was Moses a Murderer?

Was Moses a murderer? Biblically, a murderer is a person who fatally wounds another individual, but who has not received the sanction of legitimate civil or divine law for carrying out the violent act. "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13)¹ refers to the autonomous act of one individual against another. It does not refer to capital punishment by the civil government, since the law of God singles out crimes that must

1. Chapter 26.

be punished by execution (cf. Ex. 22:18–20).² Also, self-defense is a legitimate excuse; a biblical case law authorizes the slaying of a thief if he breaks in at night, when his intentions—thief, violence, or murder—cannot be readily known (Ex. 22:2–3). By implication, we can legitimately slay a life-threatening (or potentially life-threatening) attacker in defense of an innocent third party, just as Moses did. An unsanctioned slaying constitutes murder. A man takes the law into his own hands; it has not been placed there by God or society. Murder is an act of self-proclaimed autonomous man against another man, created in God's image, who is entitled to protection by the law of God.

Moses was not sanctioned by Egyptian law to execute the Egyptian taskmaster. But this man had no biblically legitimate authority over the defenseless Hebrews. Their land had been stolen, and they had all been kidnapped—a capital offense (Ex. 21:16).³ He deserved death, as did all the taskmasters in Egypt. The New Testament affirms that Moses was a faithful man in the decision to stand with his fellow Hebrews and then in his flight from Egypt (Heb. 11:24–27).

Why did he do it? In part, because he made a miscalculation concerning the hearts of his brethren. Stephen testified to his executioners: “And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian. For he supposed his brethren would have understood now that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not” (Acts 7:24–25). The Pharaoh sought to kill Moses, despite Moses' position in the Pharaoh's family, when he learned of Moses' act (Ex. 2:15).⁴

Moses was clearly the most highly placed Hebrew of his day. No other Hebrew resided in the king's household. No other Hebrew had access to the highest authorities in the land. No other Hebrew had grown up under the instruction of Egyptian tutors, possibly even to serve as a ruler in the state. If Moses' act was not murder, then we have to view him as a judge of Israel comparable to Samson, Deborah, Ehud,

2. Chapters 35, 36.

3. Chapter 34.

4. Donovan Courville speculated that the daughter of Pharaoh was Sebek-nefrure, the daughter of Amenemhet III, and the last of the kings of Dynasty XII. He also speculated that she married Kha-nefer-re, the twenty-fourth king on the Turin papyrus. There is a legend that Chenephres (Greek transliteration) was the foster father of Moses, but prior to Courville's chronological reconstruction, it was not believed possible, given this king's placement on the Turin papyrus. Courville, *The Exodus Problem and its Ramifications*, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, pp. 155–57.

and other judges who defended Israel from conquering enemies.

Israel was a captive people. The Hebrews had been unlawfully thrown into slavery. The covenant between the Egyptian state of Joseph's day and the Hebrews had been broken by Egypt. They had become captives in a foreign land. Moses, who was used to the trappings of authority, witnessed a criminal act by an Egyptian against a Hebrew brother. Moses took action, thinking there were no witnesses. He brought judgment against a representative of the Pharaoh, who had enslaved the Hebrews illegitimately. He acted as a judge of Israel.

Immediately, the rumor spread. The man who had been defended by Moses must have spread the word. When Moses confronted two striving Hebrews, the guilty initiator of violence resisted Moses' intervention into the case. He challenged Moses' right to rule by threatening him. He reminded Moses of his own act, and by implication he threatened Moses with death, since the Egyptian authorities were ready to execute any slave who killed an Egyptian. Moses instantly recognized the threat, and he fled Egypt.

The guilty man who had been challenged by Moses did not want judgment by another Hebrew. He preferred to act immorally against a Hebrew brother, striking him, if necessary, while remaining in bondage to the Egyptian state. He was ready to call the wrath of the Egyptians down upon Moses, who represented Israel's best hope and highest placed representative. He wanted to remain free to commit violence against another Hebrew, even if this freedom to act immorally would continue to cost him his opportunity to live as a free man. He preferred bondage under Egypt rather than the rule of biblical law. *He preferred slavery under pagan law to freedom under biblical law.* This was to be the continuing theme for many years: biblical law vs. slavish Israelites.

The speed with which the rumor spread astonished Moses, and he knew that it would be hopeless to call its further transmission to a halt. In only one day, the story had spread to one of the combatants, and possibly to both of them. Moses recognized his vulnerability. He was highly placed. He was not a slave. He was a Hebrew, yet he did not share the trials and tribulations of the Hebrews. If he could remain in his station as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, he could escape the rigorous service that was the expected fate of the other Israelites. But he had already decided to cast his lot with the Israelites (Heb. 11:24), and so, as the rumor spread, he knew that he would be brought down, possibly even executed. The rumor spread, which is to say that

people actively spread the rumor.

B. The Envy Factor

What could have been their motivation? If Moses was brought low, what possible benefit could this have brought the Israelites? Was it not a benefit to have a Hebrew in the house of the Pharaoh? It certainly was beneficial centuries later, when Esther was the wife of the Persian king. In fact, her high position saved the lives of her fellow Hebrews. Would it not have been a wise policy for every hearer of the rumor to caution the tale-bearer against spreading it further? Wouldn't such gossip threaten the one person in high places who might mitigate the burdens of their slavery? And if Moses tumbled from power, what Hebrew had anything to gain from his loss of influence and wealth?

The answer should be obvious: *no Hebrew would have been helped by Moses' fall*. Yet the rumor spread like wildfire, forcing him to flee. Someone must have told an Egyptian, who carried the story to Pharaoh. The joy of acting as a tale-bearer was too intense.⁵ It was not covetousness that motivated them; it was envy. It was not the expectation of increased personal wealth as a result of Moses' fall, but rather an intense excitement from contemplating Moses' loss as such. It was Moses' very position that grated on the Israelites. It was his ability to escape their daily lifestyle that angered them. *It was the sheer joy of seeing Moses brought low that helped to fan the flames of resentment and spread the rumor*.

Helmut Schoeck's study of envy brings out the tremendous social consequences of this universal sin. It is the root of socialism, he argued. We cannot understand socialism as strictly the product of covetousness (which Schoeck called 'jealousy'), that is, the desire of one group of voters to legislate for themselves a portion of another group's assets. These voting patterns are also maintained by envy: the desire to destroy those who are perceived to be better off, better looking, more privileged, or whatever. Wrote Schoeck:

It is anguish to perceive the prosperity and advantages of others. Envy is emphatically an act of perception. As we shall see, there are no objective criteria for what it is that stimulates envy. And herein

5. On the sociology of secrecy, see *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), Pt. 4: "The Secret and the Secret Society." Simmel was an early twentieth-century sociologist.

lies the error of political egalitarians who believe that it is only necessary to eliminate once and for all certain inequalities from this world to produce a harmonious society of equals devoid of envy. Anyone who has a propensity for envy, who is driven by that emotion, will always manage to find enviable qualities or possessions in others to arouse envy. . . . One begrudges others their personal or material assets, being as a rule almost more intent on their destruction than on their acquisition. The professional thief is less tormented, less motivated by envy, than is the arsonist. Beneath the envious man's primarily destructive desire is the realization that in the long run it would be a very demanding responsibility were he to have the envied man's qualities or possessions, and that the best kind of world would be one in which neither he, the subject, nor the object of his envy would have them. For instance, an envy-oriented politician regards a lower national income *per capita* as more tolerable than one that is higher for all and includes a number of wealthy men.⁶

The Hebrews of Moses' day were envious, more arsonists than thieves, more hostile to his outward success than desirous of personally replacing him in his position of authority. *They were fleeing responsibility*, and they did not want to be judged by a man who would force them to adhere to God's specially revealed law, to stand up against their unlawful captors, and to take risks associated with full personal responsibility. They preferred to remain slaves and to delight in gossip against their perceived superiors.

Another point stressed by Schoeck is that envy is primarily a product of *social proximity*. The closer someone is to the successful person—not geographically, but socially—the more likely it is that envy will spring up. "Envy plays a negligible part where it is a question of restraining a prince, a head of state or a tycoon from absurd expenditure, but it plays an important part when one among almost equals has got out of step."⁷ This was Moses' problem. He was socially and racially a Hebrew, but he had escaped the burdens of his people. The envy of the Hebrews was not directed against the Pharaoh or his vizier; it was directed against a Hebrew who was enjoying the external comforts of Pharaoh's household. The Pharaoh was seemingly beyond a downfall; he was the incarnate god, the state walking on earth. Moses, on the other hand, was uniquely vulnerable: a Hebrew in an Egyptian court, a judge who had executed an Egyptian, and a member

6. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1966] 1970), p. 19. This has been reprinted by Liberty Press, Indianapolis.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 349.

of an enslaved race.

The slaves viewed Pharaoh as a legitimate monarch, although by God's standards, he had broken a covenant between Egypt and Israel. Moses was not seen as being a legitimate judge. "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" taunted the Hebrew offender.

Wasn't Moses trying to elevate himself over his own people? How dare he? He could be cut down to size! The Pharaoh had unassailable power; Moses had completely assailable power. Moses was envied; the Pharaoh was not. Social proximity was a threat to Moses. As a rich man among envious people, he was too close for comfort. He fled.

Modern democratic societies are especially threatened by envy, just as slaves within a slave society are. The similarity is this: men are officially alike within a democratic social order; so are slaves in a slave society. The official social proximity of the members of a democratic society makes envy far more likely than in a caste society or traditional or feudal society, with their supposedly innate class or status hierarchies. What is resented is not luxury as such, but relative luxury on the part of people who are regarded by the envious as being essentially on a par with them.⁸ This is why it is futile and even dangerous to pursue political programs of coercive wealth redistribution in an age of envy. The closer society comes to the egalitarian goal, the more envious that men will become.

Moses seemed to be "lording it over" the Hebrews. He was a lord, as the adopted son of the daughter of Pharaoh, but socially (racially) he was a Hebrew. He was close to them racially, and therefore he was vulnerable. He could be brought low—back down to the level of his fellow Hebrews—by the information they possessed. Even if it might mean his life, they were willing to spread the tale.

Moses was not a murderer; he was a judge. Yet he was forced by the murderous envy of the Hebrews to seek safety in a strange land, where he married (Ex. 2:21). He was not accepted as a judge by the Hebrews of his generation. He was like Joseph, whose envious brothers sold him into slavery. He, too, went to a strange land, and he also married the daughter of a foreign priest (Gen. 41:45). In both instances, the key role God gave to each—the delivery of his kinsman from a crisis—could be achieved only by *geographical separation and social separation*. Moses would return from Midian as an 80-year-old man whose old enemy, the Pharaoh, had died (Ex. 2:23). He had been for-

8. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

gotten by his brethren, who still groaned for deliverance. For a full generation, the Hebrews remained in bondage, while the one who might have delivered them, had it not been for their intense envy, lived in the wilderness. They paid dearly for their envy. And later, when they refused to forsake envy after the exodus, they paid with another 40 years of sufferings.⁹

C. Envy vs. Economic Growth

Another aspect of envy is its inhibiting effect on social and economic advance. The successful man who struggles to raise himself above the common denominator faces envy because of his success. Because those around him are socially close to him, every sign of success raises the threat of envy. It then becomes imperative to conceal the extent of one's success, to keep others from discovering one's plans for the future.¹⁰ Those who would advance themselves will resort to deception. (The other alternative: moving away. This removes success symbols and successful role models and skills from the community.) Shared social goals in such circumstances must be of a sort that do not involve the kind of economic or social change that might elevate one man or a few families above the average. But elites induce economic change by testing new processes and new products. Only later, when the success of the venture has been proven, will capital be made available widely to finance an extension of its benefits to the masses. *Inequality is basic to human progress*. Elites always are important in the development of new ideas, new products, and new technologies. The question is this: On what basis will the elites gain access to capital? By political power? By an ecclesiastical monopoly? Or by productivity that is valued by customers, as demonstrated on the free market? We cannot escape the process of innovation by elites. *The key area of innovation is knowledge*. Hayek commented:

The growth of knowledge is of such special importance because, while the material resources will always remain scarce and will have to be reserved for limited purposes, the uses of new knowledge (where we do not make them artificially scarce by patents of monopoly) are unrestricted. Knowledge, once achieved, becomes gratuitously available for the benefit of all. It is through this free gift of the knowledge acquired by the experiments of some members of society

9. On envy in the wilderness, see Numbers 12 and 16.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

that general progress is made possible, that the achievements of those who have gone before facilitate the advance of those who follow. At any stage of this process there will always be many things we already know how to produce but which are still too expensive to provide for more than a few. . . . If we, in the wealthier countries, today can provide facilities and conveniences for most which not long ago would have been physically impossible to produce in such quantities, this is in large measure the direct consequence of the fact that they were first made for a few. A large part of the expenditure of the rich, though not intended for that end, thus serves to defray the cost of the experimentation with the new things that, as a result, can later be available for the poor. . . . The path of advance is greatly eased by the fact that it has been trodden before. It is because scouts have found the goal that the road can be built for the less lucky or less energetic. What today may seem extravagance or even waste, because it is enjoyed by the few and even undreamed of by the masses, is payment for the experimentation with a style of living that will eventually be made available to the many. The range of what will be tried and later developed, the fund of experience that will become available to all, is greatly extended by the unequal distribution of present benefits; and the rate of advance will be greatly increased if the first steps are taken long before the majority can profit from them. Many of the improvements would indeed never become a possibility for all if they had not long before been available to some. If all had to wait for better things until they could be provided for all, that day would in many instances never come. Even the poorest today owe their relative material well-being to the results of past inequality.¹¹

Compulsory, state-enforced programs of wealth redistribution are inimical to the social and economic progress of civilization. So is envy. *Envy leads to a present-oriented society*. This is a lower-class society, in Edward Banfield's definition.¹² Why should this present-orientation be

11. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 43–44. Chapter 6 of Hayek's book, "The Common Sense of Progress," is invaluable.

12. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), pp. 53–54, 61–62. In the original book, *The Unheavenly City* (Little Brown, 1970), he included a more hard-hitting analysis of the lower-class, present-oriented individual: pp. 217–23. Wrote Banfield in *Revisited*: "The implication that lower-class culture is pathological seems fully warranted both because of the relatively high incidence of mental illness in the lower class and also because human nature seems loathe to accept a style of life that is so radically present-oriented" (p. 63). He was incorrect on one point: it is not "human nature" as such which is loathe to accept present-oriented, lower-class culture. It is Christianity which finds it loathsome.

the product of envy? Schoeck elaborated:

The future, the only field where the fruits of any development are to be reaped, lends itself to a co-operative approach, to exploitation by men able to exchange and co-ordinate their ideas, knowledge and desires. But this is conceivable only when fear of the other's envy, of his possible sabotage or malicious sorcery, has to some extent been overcome. No one can even begin to have rational aspirations for the future unless he has a realistic view of what the future may be; but no such prognosis can be made so long as each member of the group carefully keeps hidden his view of the future. Nor can a view that is conducive to social and economic development be formed within a group until its individual members are able, in frank discussion, to compare, weigh and synchronize all their different pictures of the future. It is precisely this, however, which more than anything else is impeded by the ever-present fear that basically everyone, more especially our near neighbour, is potentially envious and that the best defence against him is to pretend complete indifference about the future.¹³

D. Envy vs. Deliverance

This analysis throws light on Moses' experience. How could he serve as a leader of his people, given their entrenched envy? How could he conspire with them to co-ordinate their efforts? He knew within 24 hours of his execution of the Egyptian that his position as a judge of Israel had been rejected by the Israelites. The best approach was immediate flight. He would wash his hands of them. God refused to allow him to wash his hands of them. For decades, he was able to concentrate on his own affairs, independent of his brethren, developing his talents as a shepherd—skills that he would subsequently put to use during the final 40 years of his lifetime—but at last God called to him out of the burning bush. Moses resisted, but eventually he went back to Egypt. This time, he came as a stranger. This time, he came as an independent outsider from another land. This time, he was not easily envied, since few Hebrews could look upon him as a social equal who had somehow been elevated to a position of vulnerable authority. This time, he came with signs and wonders to demonstrate his position as a judge, one who came in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This time, he would confront the Pharaoh directly, not intervene secretly to eliminate one Egyptian persecutor. This time, he

13. Schoeck, *Envy*, p. 46.

would not be in a position to be ruined by the envy-motivated gossip of a slave population. This time, a God-inspired future-orientation would motivate him, and the Hebrew slaves followed out of awe, fear, and hope. This time, he came as God's acknowledged agent, not as a social equal. This time, his continual victories over Pharaoh would demonstrate just who it was who had raised him up. This time, it was Pharaoh, not a Hebrew slave, who would ask him who he thought he was. No Hebrew in Egypt would again taunt him with the words, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" This time, they knew. This time, most important of all, they went free.

Conclusion

Moses was the victim of envy when the Hebrews of his youth refused to subordinate themselves to his rule. They spread the rumor of his execution of the Egyptian. He fled into the wilderness for 40 years, leaving his brethren in slavery for an additional 40 years. Gossip placed a whole generation in needless bondage. Bondage was God's judgment on them.

The sin of envy strikes the sinner. It restricts his ability to cooperate with his fellow man. It rankles in his heart and can lead to slower or even zero economic growth. In the case of the Israelites, it led to an additional 40 years of bondage. The Hebrews preferred to live in bondage to a socially distant, cruel, self-proclaimed divine monarch rather than subordinate themselves under a man of their own covenant. They preferred to be slaves than to be under God's representative, Moses. They preferred the delights of rumor-spreading to the delights and responsibilities of freedom. They preferred to tear down Moses from his pedestal rather than elevate themselves, under Moses' leadership, to freedom. They received what they wanted: another generation of servitude.

6

CUMULATIVE TRANSGRESSION AND RESTITUTION

And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians (Ex. 3:21–22).

The theocentric principle here is restitution, which God requires of all transgressors against Him and His people

God's promise to Moses was explicitly and completely fulfilled at the time of the exodus. Plague after plague had come upon the Egyptians. They could stand no more after the final plague, the death of the firstborn child of every house. "And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men" (Ex. 12:33).

In order to speed the Hebrews along their way out of the land, the Egyptians gave them what they requested: spoils. God's promise to Moses had not been a mere prophecy; it had been a command. "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment" (Ex. 12:35). The Hebrew verb translated as "borrow" is the normal, everyday Hebrew word for "ask."¹ This was a form of tribute, like military spoils. The Israelites incurred no debt to repay. Both the Egyptians and the Israelites understood this.

The language of the Bible is peculiar here. First, the Israelites were told that they would find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. This is an odd use of the word "favor." It did not signify love on the part of the

1. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), p. 44.

Egyptians. Their favor was the product of extreme fear. They feared the Israelites, for the God of these slaves was too powerful and dangerous. The Egyptians were not converted to this God; they did not choose to worship Him. They chose instead to remove His people from their midst, to put the fearful arm of God into a different nation. They hoped to escape the earthly wrath of God by encouraging the Israelites to leave as rapidly as possible, even though the Israelites possessed the “borrowed” wealth. Pharaoh did not even wait until morning to call Moses and Aaron before him (Ex. 12:31). The favor of the Egyptians was a fear-induced favor.

The second peculiarity of language is the use of the word translated by the King James translators as “borrow.” It clearly means “ask,” but here it implies “to extract under threat of violence.” It meant *tribute*—in this case, tribute to a departing army rather than to an invading one. The Israelites had not tried to invade Egypt militarily, but the Egyptians had created a hostile nation within the boundaries of Egypt by having placed the Israelites in bondage.

A. Slavery

It is not clear just how long the Israelites had been in bondage. By the year of the exodus, they had been slaves for at least 80 years, since Moses was born during the reign of the Pharaoh of the infanticide edict, and he led the nation out of Egypt when he was 80 (Ex. 7:7; he died at age 120 [Deut. 34:7], and Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness [Num. 14:33–34]). Courville’s reconstruction indicates that the daughter of Pharaoh who brought up Moses was the daughter of Amenemhet III, who succeeded Sesostri III.² Sesostri III, concludes Courville, was the Pharaoh who first enslaved the Israelites.³ Therefore, the Israelites were in actual bondage for perhaps a century, possibly one or two decades longer. I believe they were in bondage for 80 years: two 40-year periods. It would depend on the point of time in the reign of Sesostri III that he placed the Israelites in bondage. If Courville’s reconstruction is incorrect, or if he has not accurately identified the proper kings of Egypt, then all we can say in confidence is that the enslavement was at least 80 years. This conclusion rests on the additional assumption that the Pharaoh of the enslavement was the same as the

2. Donovan Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, p. 157.

3. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 147–48.

Pharaoh of the infanticide edict, and that the edict was made at the same time as the enslavement, and that Moses was born in that year. Because none of these correlations is mandatory, it is possible that the enslavement was longer than 80 years.

Slavery is a valid form of economic activity, according to the Bible, but only under very specific limitations. The maximum term of a brother's service for defaulting on a zero-interest charitable loan is six years (Deut. 15:12). Even if a Hebrew were to sell himself to a foreigner, he retained the right of redemption, as did his relatives (Lev. 25:47–55).⁴ No Hebrew could be enslaved under any circumstances for more than 49 years, for all of them belonged to God (Lev. 25:54–55). *The only perpetual slaves were those of the conquered local tribes of Canaan*, and only after Israel had taken possession of her land, and also slaves purchased from caravaners (Lev. 25:44–46).⁵ The Hebrews had been given the land of Goshen, for Joseph had saved the lives of all Egyptians (Gen. 47:11). The Egyptians had stolen Israel's freedom. They had executed Hebrew children (Ex. 1). They had stolen generations of Hebrew labor. They had asserted illegitimate sovereignty over God's people. They had not set them free in the seventh year. In 1491 B.C., the bills came due.

B. Restitution

If Israel could be punished by God for ignoring His laws regulating slavery, it is not surprising that Egypt should be forced to offer restitution. The years in Egypt were to serve as a reminder to Israel of the horrors and injustice of unregulated slavery: the terrors of being a stranger. The experience was supposed to move them to justice (Ex. 22:21;⁶ 23:9;⁷ Deut. 10:17–19; 15:15). Jeremiah spared no words when Israel violated the laws regulating slavery. He promised them the sword, the pestilence, and the famine; he promised them captivity (Jer. 34:8–17).⁸ His words were fulfilled. The Israelites did not take the preferred form of escape.

Neither did the Egyptians. The Egyptians had sinned for several

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [1994] 2012), ch. 32.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

6. Chapter 36.

7. Chapter 54.

8. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 18.

generations. God had spared their fathers, but in Moses' day, God extracted restitution from the sons. He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon later generations of those who hate Him (Ex. 20:5).⁹ Not that the sons are punished for their fathers' sins (Deut. 24:16); every man is to be put to death for his own sin. But the iniquities of fathers in a society tend to be the iniquities of the sons. There is historical continuity in life. Some of the fathers and grandfathers had escaped external, cultural judgment, and their sons continued in the same sin. But there came a time when the restitution came due. All the sabbatical years of release that had been ignored, and all the capital goods that had been required for them to give to the released slaves (Deut. 15:14),¹⁰ had to be paid, plus a penalty for theft (Lev. 6:5), by that final generation. They themselves went into bondage to the invading Amalekites (Hyksos, called the shepherd kings by conventional historians) for at least a century.¹¹ The glory of Egypt was removed.

If the sons are not to be punished for the sins of their fathers, why should the Egyptian generation in the year of the exodus have been required to bear such a heavy economic burden? The explanation that is most consistent with biblical law is the argument from the concept of familistic capital. The heirs of earlier generations of enslaving Egyptians had become the beneficiaries of the labor of earlier generations of Hebrews. The fathers and grandfathers had extracted labor from the Hebrews at below-market prices. Had below-market pricing not been in effect, they could have hired the Hebrews to construct the cities. However, *they wanted something for nothing*: rigorous labor without competitive wage rates. They had sunk their capital into monuments for the Egyptian state. They had escaped the taxation levels that would have been necessary to hire the services of the Hebrews, had there been a free market for labor services. Their heirs had become the beneficiaries of all the capital that had been retained within the families—capital that would have gone to the Pharaoh in the form of additional taxes to finance his self-glorifying public works projects.

Furthermore, we can conclude that such capital could have been

9. Chapter 22.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [1999] 2012), ch. 37.

11. Siegfried Schwantes, *A Short History of the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 76. Other historians believe that the period of the Hyksos may have been two centuries. Courville believed that the Hyksos period was over four centuries: from the exodus to Solomon. Courville, *Exodus Problem*, I, pp. 124–25.

invested in growth-producing activities. We have no idea what the compound rate of economic growth was in that era, but some growth in capital was possible. Therefore, the sons who saw their riches “borrowed” by the Hebrews were simply *returning the compounded capital that they and their ancestors had coercively extracted from the Hebrews*. The Hebrews had been forced to pay homage, in the form of taxes in kind (labor services, forfeited freedom), to the Egyptian state. Now the heirs of Joseph were collecting on past accounts that had finally come due. They were collecting capital that lawfully belonged to them. *The Egyptians were simply paying restitution*. God had prospered the pharaohs by giving one of them a monopoly over the grain supplies in an era of famine. God’s representative, Joseph, had provided the necessary agricultural forecast and the efficient administration of the program.¹² Then the heirs of the Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews, who had been promised the land of Goshen as a permanent reward (Gen. 45:8–10; 47:6). *The state, in the person of Pharaoh, had broken its covenant with Israel*. That covenant was a civil covenant with God, since it had been established with His people. God, in the day of the exodus, collected His lawful tribute. They had broken their treaty with His people, and as the Hebrews’ lawful sovereign, He intervened to bring judgment upon the Egyptians.

There is no escape from the laws of God, either individually or socially. God held the Egyptians fully responsible for upholding their covenant with the Hebrews. The Egyptians had profited from Joseph’s warning. They had also profited from the labor provided by generations of Hebrews. They were held fully responsible for decisions made by the pharaohs. They paid for their sins, and because of the additional capital possessed by the Egyptians of the exodus period—as a direct result of the reduced taxes paid by their ancestors—they also paid for the sins of their fathers. After all, the Egyptians of the exodus period were the beneficiaries of the sins of their fathers. They had been bound by the terms of their fathers’ promise to Israel that the land of Goshen would belong to Israel, and they had broken this covenant.

The Egyptians paid more than jewels to the Hebrews. They paid their firstborn. God had told Moses that this would be the price extracted from them if they did not repent through their representative, the Pharaoh: “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn. And I say unto thee, Let my son go,

12. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 33.

that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Ex. 4:22–23). The Egyptians had enslaved God's firstborn. They had, in effect, *kidnapped* them. The penalty for kidnapping is death (Ex. 21:16).¹³ By refusing to allow the Israelites to go and sacrifice to their God, the Pharaoh was admitting that he was guilty of kidnapping, for he was stating clearly that the people of Israel were his, when in fact they belonged to God. When the Egyptians made restitution, it was expensive beyond their wildest imaginations. The heirs (firstborn) of the slave-owners were slain.

C. Tribute

The Pharaoh, as a self-proclaimed divinity, was viewed as the only incarnate representative on earth of the Egyptian gods. It was the king who brought the crucially important annual flood of the Nile. Frankfort commented on this: "Even as late an author as Ammianus Marcellus [late 4th century, A.D.—G.N.] knew that the Egyptians ascribed plenty or famine to the quality of their king—not, in a modern sense, to his quality as an administrator, but to his effectiveness as an organ of integration, partaking of the divine and of the human and entrusted with making the mutual dependence of the two a source of 'laughter and wonder.'"¹⁴ It was the king who, as a divine being, brought *moral order* to the whole world. Thus, when the Pharaoh of the famine established policies that assured Egypt's survival during seven years of famine, thereby reestablishing his ownership of all Egypt, his followers could interpret his acts as inspired. The Pharaoh could be understood as having reemphasized his own divinity, and the power of the Egyptian gods, before his people.

By enslaving the Hebrews, the later Pharaoh was elevating the gods of Egypt above the God of Joseph. The ancient world interpreted a military victory by one nation or city-state as the victory of its gods over the gods of the defeated people. Thus, by enslaving the Hebrews, the Pharaoh was announcing the sovereignty of Egypt's gods over Joseph's God. By bringing Egypt to its knees at the time of the exodus, God was ritually announcing His sovereignty in the most graphic way possible. The Egyptians had lost their prosperity, their children, and now their jewelry. The gods of Egypt had been brought low. Only the

13. Chapter 34.

14. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near East Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1948] 1962), p. 58.

outright destruction of Egypt's army, followed by an invasion and conquest by foreigners, could have made the picture any more graphic, and these events were shortly to follow. The Pharaoh-god would perish with his army.

The gods of Egypt paid tribute to the God of Israel. This tribute was paid by the representative of Egypt's gods, Pharaoh, as well as his subordinates, the nobles and wealthy people who had amassed great capital. It was paid to servants who represented the God of Israel. The humiliation in such a transaction is easily understood.

D. The Slave Wife

The exodus can be seen from another perspective, that of a man who rejects his slave-wife. Exodus 11:1 has been translated in the King James Version as follows: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether." An alternative reading throws more light on the concluding clause: ". . . after that he will let you go hence; as one letteth go a slave-wife shall he surely expel you hence."¹⁵ Exodus 21 begins the detailed presentation of the laws of God, immediately after the presentation of the ten commandments, or general principles of God's law. What is significant about Exodus 21 is that *it begins with the laws applying to slavery, the social and economic condition from which God has just freed His people.* It was a topic which was eminently familiar to them.

Exodus 21:7–11 provides the laws dealing with the slave wife.¹⁶ If a man sold his daughter to be the wife of a master, with the purchase price going to the father rather than to the wife as her dowry, then she needed protection. The dowry was permanently forfeited by the husband if he unlawfully divorced her, or did not deal with her as a lawful wife. Rushdoony has commented on the function of the dowry: "The dowry was an important part of marriage. We meet it first in Jacob, who worked seven years for Laban to earn a dowry for Rachel (Gen. 29:18). The pay for this service belonged to the bride as her dowry, and Rachel and Leah could indignantly speak of themselves as having been 'sold' by their father, because he had withheld from them their dowry

15. David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 56. He relied heavily on the work of Reuven Yaron's article in the *Revue Internationale des Droits de l'Antiquité*, 3rd Series, Vol. IV (1957), pp. 122ff.

16. Chapter 32.

(Gen. 31:14, 15). It was the family capital; it represented the wife's security, in case of divorce where the husband was at fault."¹⁷

The girl who was sold to a master did not personally possess a dowry; it belonged to her father. She had the legal status of a concubine: a wife without a dowry. Biblical law nevertheless protected her. If the master decided not to marry her after all, he was required to allow her to be redeemed (bought back); he could not sell her into a foreign nation, "seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her" (Ex. 21:8).¹⁸ "And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he do not these three things unto her, then she shall go out free without money" (Ex. 21:9–11). In other words, her family, which had received payment for her, owed the master nothing under such circumstances. She did not have to be bought back.

Israel had not been treated justly in Egypt. Her Egyptian "husband" had not dealt with her as a lawful wife. She deserved her freedom, but the Egyptians had refused to let her go. Furthermore, Israel had never been a slave-wife. Joseph had increased Egypt's wealth, and *Pharaoh had granted Israel the land of Goshen*. The value of that good land, the best in Egypt (Gen. 47:11), had been transferred to Israel. *This was Israel's dowry*. Now Israel was being cast out, as if she were a slave-wife. A real wife is entitled to her dowry. Instead of a mortgage on the land of Goshen, which the Egyptians should have paid to Israel, the Israelites took the jewels (female adornment) of the Egyptians. *Egypt could not legitimately treat Israel as a slave wife, sending her out without her lawful dowry*. The verse following God's revelation that Pharaoh would expel Israel as a slave-wife reads: "Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold" (Ex. 11:2).

Conclusion

Egypt could not escape the principle of restitution. Restitution extends to the cross. God required payment by His Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for the sins of mankind, both collectively (common grace) and individually.¹⁹ This transaction should also be understood as the pay-

17. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 176–77.

18. Chapter 32.

19. Gary North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," *The Journal of*

ment of a dowry, thereby making the church, Christ's bride, a lawful wife, not just a concubine. Egypt made restitution. Egypt offered her sacrifice, the firstborn, to God, since no Egyptian was willing to make restitution by the shedding of a lamb's blood, "for there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Ex. 12:30b). God required restitution for the years of servitude beyond the maximum permitted, six. In fact, Egypt even owed Israel for the first six years, since the six-year slave contract was a debt-slavery contract, and Israel had not been in debt to Egypt. Egypt had acted as though Israel had been a lawful captive in wartime, or a debtor to Egypt. Israel was neither. Furthermore, Egypt owed restitution for having kidnapped Israel. Egypt owed Israel for having treated Israel as less than a full wife, trying to expel her without returning her dowry, as though she had been a slave-wife. Egypt paid dearly for these acts of long-term lawlessness.

The cost of the pharaohs' brick pyramids and brick treasure cities turned out to be far higher than any Egyptian, especially the various pharaohs, had dared to calculate. Any intuitive cost-benefit analysis in the mind of a pharaoh—so many benefits, in time and eternity, from a new pyramid or city versus so many expenditures in feeding and controlling the Hebrew slaves—turned out to be catastrophically erroneous. The pharaohs drastically overestimated the benefits of their construction projects, and they underestimated the real costs of enslaving the Hebrews.²⁰ The pharaohs had abandoned their most important pair of guidelines for making accurate cost-benefit analyses, namely, the *free market*, which establishes prices through competitive bidding, and the *law of God*, which establishes God's justice. All the pharaohs, from the enslaving Pharaoh to the Pharaoh of the exodus, ignored the principle of restitution in their dealings with the Israelites. When the final bills came due, ancient Egypt collapsed.

Christian Reconstruction, III (Winter 1976–77). Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

20. Chapter 3.

THE OPTIMUM PRODUCTION MIX

And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens. And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves (Ex. 5:5–7).

The theocentric issue here is God's three omnis: omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. He is not affected by scarcity. The creation is limited. God is not. To maximize output, men need a plan to coordinate the factors of production, including other men. God has a plan: subjective and objective. His plan is the basis of all human plans. He imputes meaning and order to the creation.

A. The Confrontation Begins

God witnessed the oppression of His people by the Egyptians for at least 80 years (Ex. 3:9). He sent Moses and Aaron before the Pharaoh. God did not instruct Moses to ask for an immediate and permanent release of His people from bondage; Moses was only to request a time of religious sacrifice for them (Ex. 3:18; 5:1). However, given the theology of Egypt, this would have to be regarded by the Pharaoh as blasphemy.

The Pharaoh was believed to be the sole divine-human link, the god Horus walking on earth, who would become Osiris at his death, and who was also the descendant of Re, the sun god. Frankfort has summarized this doctrine of divine kingship: "Egyptian kingship emerged at the end of the predynastic period. Of this the Egyptians were well aware; they recognized a first king of the first dynasty, Menes. Tradition named as his predecessors the 'semi-divine spirits' who had succeeded rule by the gods. These in their turn had been preceded by the Creator, Re. Monarchical rule, then, was coeval with the

universe; the Creator had assumed kingship over his creation from the first.”¹

Moses’ request to allow the Israelites to sacrifice to a foreign God was an affront to this Pharaoh. This Thirteenth Dynasty king²—weak dynasty—was not ready to admit the existence of any rival to his self-professed divine status. His answer was the answer of a supposed cosmological sovereign: “And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” (Ex. 5:2). Like Nebuchadnezzar after him (Dan. 3:15), Pharaoh saw himself as the divine-human link, the capstone of a bureaucratic pyramid in a divine state, beyond which there could be no appeal. Also like Nebuchadnezzar, he was cut down in the midst of his kingdom.

Pharaoh was so enraged at the request of Moses, that he decided to impose a punishment on the Israelites. He forbade the taskmasters to deliver straw to the Hebrews for the construction of bricks. Their work load would therefore increase, since the size of the bricks would remain the same, and presumably also the numerical quotas. “And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God” (Ex. 5:8).³

This punishment was calculated to accomplish several ends. *First* and perhaps most important, it was to discourage Moses and Aaron from challenging his authority as a divine master. If they did it again, their people would be injured even more. *Second*, it was an effective means of alienating the people from these two leaders. If, every time they came before Pharaoh in the name of their God, the two leaders would draw the wrath of Pharaoh upon the Israelites, the Israelites would presumably seek to disassociate themselves from the pair. They would bring pressure on them to cease and desist. This would tend to discourage all future leaders from rising up in the name of the slaves,

1. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1948] 1962), p. 15.

2. I am assuming the correctness of Donovan Courville’s reconstructed chronology of Egypt.

3. Prof. A. S. Yahuda argued that the use of the Hebrew word for “tale” is so specific that it demonstrates that Exodus was not written by some post-exilic priest. The “tale” was a specific measurement, not a numerical quantity. He pointed to the discovery of a tomb picture which shows a man measuring the bricks. The writer of Exodus was therefore familiar with this specific usage. Yahuda, *The Accuracy of the Bible* (New York: Dutton, 1935), pp. 76–77.

or in the name of their God. The slaves, without leadership, would remain slaves. *Third*, the Pharaoh would be able to reduce the costs of construction of his cities. The output of the slaves would remain constant, but the state's input costs would be reduced. No longer would Egyptians be expected to supply the Israelites with straw. This labor service would henceforth come from the slaves. *Fourth*, the slave population would be scattered (Ex. 5:12), thereby reducing the potential military threat to Egypt.

Pharaoh removed one of the crucial factors of production from the brick-making process, yet he required that the daily output of bricks be maintained. His edict reduced the division of labor, since it forced the Hebrews to search out and collect straw, in addition to producing the bricks. *Specialization was reduced*. The edict required the same output despite a reduction in raw material costs. Given the inescapable reality of scarcity, the edict therefore required a compensating increase in labor inputs from the slaves. These would be unpaid labor inputs. Previously, the slaves had been allowed to concentrate on the task of producing bricks from the raw materials supplied by the Egyptian state. Now their time would also be expended in achieving an additional step in the production process. They would have to work longer hours, or work more intensively, or both, in order to produce the same quantity and size of bricks. Specialists in straw-gathering may have been recruited from within the Hebrew community and trained. They would have been removed from the normal work force, thereby increasing the labor burden on those who remained in close proximity to the construction projects. The edict by Pharaoh placed a great burden on the backs of an already heavily burdened slave population.

B. Reduced Efficiency

The punishment was fully consistent with the nature of the sin of the slaves, as perceived by Pharaoh. He said that they were idle, since they wanted time off to sacrifice to their God. Such a waste of time could not be tolerated. It was idleness to substitute the worship of God for brick production. "Let more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words" (Ex. 5:9).

Obviously, there was no day of rest for these slaves. It was a life of almost unending drudgery, one which provided little hope. The Hebrews were destined to spend their lives working on public works

projects that honored a false god, the Egyptian Pharaoh, and by implication, the Egyptian state. Only the god of the state might be legitimately honored, and its service was a heavy yoke, one devoid of hope. The static empire of Egypt would, if the Pharaoh had his way, require the compulsory service of the Hebrews until the end of the world. For them, life would be a hell on earth. There would be no rest, no progress, and no escape.

The scattering of the slaves was also important to Pharaoh. Like Christ, who told his enemies that anyone who does not gather with Him scatters abroad (Matt. 12:30), the Pharaoh wanted his enemies scattered. He no doubt recognized, as had the Pharaoh of the enslavement, that the concentrated population of Hebrews in the land of Goshen constituted a potential military threat to Egypt (Ex. 1:10). The Hebrews were scattered by the king's edict (Ex. 5:12), for they were no longer the recipients of straw imported from outside Goshen. Obviously, in these massive building projects, the supplies of straw in the immediate vicinity would have been depleted rapidly. In all likelihood, the supplies had been depleted long before the edict of Pharaoh, since it would have been less expensive for the Egyptian suppliers to have collected the straw close to the construction sites, which were in the region around Goshen. The cost of transporting straw to the construction sites would continually rise, and the Pharaoh transferred this economic burden to the Hebrews. They would have to send more and more of their straw-gatherers out across the Nile valley in order to find this necessary factor of production.

Predictably, the better quality resource, straw, was depleted, and the Hebrews found it economically advantageous to substitute a less efficient—*technically* less efficient—resource: stubble (Ex. 5:12). The cost of locating and transporting straw grew too great; they had to use stubble, working harder to produce as high a quality of bricks as before. This was *economically* more efficient, given the “rising cost of using straw, even though the straw was more efficient technically. The Hebrews were forced to “cut corners” with stubble.

Pharaoh used the innate restraints of the land's productivity as a means of disciplining the Hebrews. This decision to misuse a fundamental law of economics—the God-imposed scarcity of nature—turned out to be a disastrous one for Egypt. This was a deliberate misuse of the phenomenon of scarcity. Instead of encouraging trade and economic specialization, which scarcity is intended to encour-

age—a curse which can become a blessing⁴—Pharaoh’s edict reduced both trade and specialization. Instead of reducing the costs of production, Pharaoh’s edict deliberately increased the costs of production, simply as a punishment. He was misusing God’s laws of economics in order to humiliate His people and to keep them from worshiping the true God. For this, Pharaoh subsequently paid dearly, as did his people.

The nature of the punishment testifies to Pharaoh’s understanding of the issues involved: theological, political, and economic. He also grasped at least some of the implications of *the law of the optimum mix of production factors*. This law of the optimum production mix is a corollary to *the law of diminishing returns*. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the law of the optimum production mix is really another way of stating the law of diminishing returns.⁵ The existence of the optimum factor mix is the conclusion we reach when we acknowledge the existence of the law of diminishing returns. What do economists mean when they speak of the law of diminishing returns?

C. Complementary Factors of Production

We note that when two or more complementary factors of production are combined in the production process, output per unit of resource input rises initially as we add the “sub-optimum” factor of production, and then output begins to fall after the formerly “sub-optimum” resource passes the point of optimality. This economic law might better be described as *the law of variable proportions*.⁶ One person, for example, cannot efficiently farm 800 acres, unless he has specialized equipment. Facing the task of farming 800 acres, he adds additional labor. He hires another man to help him work the land. By combining the labor of two workers, the worker-owner sees the value of his farm’s total agricultural output increase by more than the cost of hiring the extra laborer. So, he adds more laborers and/or equipment. Output value increases even faster than input costs increase, *initially*. But at some point, the law of diminishing returns (variable proportions) tells us, the increases in output value will begin to lag behind the increases

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

5. Wrote Murray Rothbard: “The law of returns states that with the quantity of complementary factors held constant, there always exists some optimum amount of the varying factor.” Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), p. 35–36.

6. Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 260.

in factor input costs. There will be too many workers on the fixed supply of 800 acres. They will get in each other's way, or spend too much time loafing, or fighting, or whatever. Output will actually decline if the owner adds still more laborers without buying or leasing more land. In other words, it will pay him to dismiss some workers. He will either have to *dismiss workers* (the now excessive complementary production factor) or *add more land* (the now "sub-optimum" production factor) to the existing number of workers.

There is, in this agricultural example, *an optimum mix* (optimum proportions) of the complementary factors of production: more land or fewer workers. To produce a product at this optimum point minimizes waste and maximizes income. The existence of such an optimum point therefore pressures the resource owner to release one factor of production—in this case, labor—so that this scarce factor can be used in some other industry or on some other farm, thereby increasing total output and maximizing consumer satisfaction with a given quantity of resource inputs. The former resource renter is a beneficiary of this decision: he no longer needs to pay for the freed-up resource input. Other resource users also become beneficiaries, for a new source of the scarce resource has now been made available. The consumer is also a beneficiary: competition among producers will tend to reduce the cost of final output and will also eventually reduce the consumer price of the product.

We can examine this topic from another angle. If the law of diminishing returns were not true, then by taking a fixed supply of one factor of production and adding to it a complementary factor, eventually the proportion of the first (fixed) factor in the production mix would approach (though never quite reach) zero percent. After you reach the point of diminishing returns, the original (fixed) factor of production is increasingly "swamped" by the second (variable) factor. (Both factors are actually variable in practice; this is only an illustration.) To use an analogy from mathematics, the "swamped" factor of production is like a fraction with an increasingly large denominator, and therefore a decreasing value. One-to-two becomes one-to-three, and then downward to, say, one-to-five billion. One five billionth is obviously a lot smaller than one half. The value of the fraction approaches zero as a limit. By fixing the numerator and increasing the denominator, the "percentage contribution" of the numerator to the "value" of the frac-

tional number is reduced.⁷

To return to the example of the 800-acre farm, as we add more and more men, we will eventually overwhelm the productivity of the resource factor which is in fixed supply, namely, land. *If*, by adding men continually, but without adding more land (the “swamped” fixed production factor), we could increase output forever, then land and labor in this example are not really complementary factors of production. They do not really “work together” in the production process, since we can endlessly increase the value of output by adding units of only a single factor. This is the same as saying that *the production factor* that we keep adding is, in fact, *the consumer product* we are producing. There really is no production process in this example; *our variable resource input is, in fact, the final output*.

Let us consider this argument from another angle: *subtracting resources*. If we could get an increase in the value of output by continually adding a variable resource, then we could also get a decrease in the cost of inputs without lowering the value of output simply by subtracting the previously “fixed” resource input. After all, why pay for a resource that really is not contributing anything of value to the production process? To use the subtraction example, assume that land is now the variable resource and labor is the fixed resource. (Maybe a labor union contract has made labor the fixed resource.) The value of output will not decline as we steadily reduce the land component of the production mix. But in such a situation, we really never had a production mix; the factors of production were not really complementary.

To summarize: if we can forever continue to increase the value of output by adding one factor of production, or (alternatively) if we can maintain the value of output by continually removing the other “complementary” factor, then there is no production process. There is no true combination of production factors. The factors are not really complementary.

We need not limit our discussion to land and labor. Land and water are equally good examples. If you take away all the water in agricultural production, you produce a fruitless desert. If you add water continually, you produce a lake. Neither is a farm. *There is, in theory, an economically optimum production mix*, in which the value of the water (cost of providing it) and the value of the land (cost of leasing or buy-

7. The analogy is imperfect because there are no “optimal” fractions. You never get increasing returns by adding to the denominator. The analogy applies only to the case where the optimum production mix has been passed.

ing it) are combined to *maximize net income*, where one additional drop of water or one additional grain of dirt would reduce total net income if either were added (paid for) in the production process. Remember, we are talking about *income*, not technology as such. We are not talking about maximum numbers of goods, but about net income (revenues minus costs). We are, in short, discussing economics, not plant biology or engineering.

The law of diminishing returns (variable proportions) applies to every area of production, not just agriculture.⁸ It is an aspect of the creation. It existed even before the Fall of man and God's curse of the ground.

D. Scarcity Before the Fall

Even in the garden, there were diminishing returns—if nothing else, in the fields of genetics, aesthetics, and technology. Adam had to work in the garden. He had to make it more productive. He had to combine factors of production in order to produce anything new. Perhaps he had to plant one species in one spot rather than another, for aesthetic effects. More likely, he would have begun to cross-breed within certain species to produce flowers or edible fruits that did not occur “naturally.” We are not told. What we are told is that he had a responsibility to make the garden bloom. He needed to understand technology and aesthetics in order to produce a fruitful environment.

What about economics? Did Adam face *an economic law* (constraint) of variable proportions, rather than just technological and aesthetic constraints? I believe that he did. If we define scarcity as “greater demand than supply at zero price,” then Adam seems to have faced a world of scarcity. If nothing else, his time had to be allocated. If he had worked on one job, he could not simultaneously have worked on another. He would have faced the decision to invest time and natural resources in producing one capital good (tool of production). This would have been a true decision; he could not simultaneously have used these resources to produce a different sort of capital good. The very concept of an *economic production decision* implies an *optimum production mix*. Only if there was no scarcity (including a scarcity of time) before the Fall could Adam have escaped the constraints of an economically optimum production mix. Then the production constraint would have

8. Schumpeter, *History*, p. 261. See also Gary North, *Sovereignty And Dominion*, ch. 31: “The Law of Diminishing Returns.”

been exclusively technological, genetic, or aesthetic.

1. Knowledge

We need to focus on that most scarce of all resources, knowledge. Was Adam omniscient? The Bible teaches that God alone is omniscient. *Omniscience is an incommunicable attribute of God.* There is a special knowledge which belongs only to God: "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). *Adam therefore faced limits on his knowledge.* He had to learn. He faced a world which required *an educational process based on trial and error.* Eventually, there would have been children and descendants. He could not perfectly have known the mind of any other human being. Thus, he could not perfectly have known other people's wants, needs, and ability to pay in order to attain their goals. He would have needed a source of publicly available information (a price system) in order to learn about the kinds of economic demand that other people placed on the available resources, including the demand for knowledge in its broadest sense, and also the demand for time. *He would have needed knowledge concerning just exactly what resources were available.* His incentive to discover this would have been dependent on the economic demand for resources in the marketplace. Thus, *the very concept of the incommunicable attribute of God's omniscience points to the inescapable concept of scarcity.* Man has to give up something in order to gain certain kinds of knowledge.

The Fall of man came, in part, because man was unwilling to pay for a specific resource: righteous judgment. He refused to render righteous judgment on the serpent when he heard the tempter's offer. Adam did not immediately judge the serpent provisionally and then wait for God to return to render final judgment on the serpent and Satan. Adam did not wait for God to render this final judgment and then invest him and his wife with *the judge's robes of authority* before he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Adam therefore faced a universe governed by scarcity, even in the garden. He faced scarcity of good judgment and scarcity of time. He was unwilling to "pay the price," meaning the *judgment price* and the *time price*. He wanted instant gratification.⁹ But he could not escape

9. Gary North, "Witnesses and Judges," *Biblical Economics Today*, VI (Aug./Sept.

paying a price. The price he actually paid was a lot higher than he had estimated.¹⁰ He therefore faced the restraint of scarcity.

2. Management and Specialization

The creation has built into it incentives for management. The very genetic structure of plants and animals makes management by man technologically productive. Men can master the art of breeding animals and plants, a subordinately creative skill which is analogous to God's original creative act. The genetic structure of man also makes management by man more productive, but not the kind of management possessed by the breeder. Man is not given that kind of authority over God's image. The genetic reality of mankind is that people are different in terms of their inborn capacities, despite being members of a single species. In this respect, mankind reflects the Trinity, for God's three Persons have varying functions in relationship to the creation, despite being equal in essence and glory. Men become more productive individually by co-operating with each other. The most important aspect of this social co-operation is ethical.

The curse of the ground has made co-operation even more imperative, for the creation's original scarcity is accentuated by increasing costs as a result of the curse on both man and the ground.

The fact that in God's creation there are complementary factors of production implies that for any given output, there is *a structure of production*. The planner must actively *combine* factors of production. Complementary factors of production must be combined in terms of *a plan*. One plan meets the requirements of the planner better than all other possible plans. *This plan is both personal and objective*, because God's personal and objective plan undergirds all human planning, and gives meaning to all human planning. *The existence of an omniscient God with a perfect plan is what makes possible human planning.*¹¹ Thus, we must conclude that there is a law of diminishing economic returns, even without the curse; the curse has only increased the need to plan production carefully because of the effects of entropy. The importance of allocating resources is magnified in a cursed world, but there was still an allocation problem in the garden.

1983), pp. 2–3. Reprinted as Appendix E in North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 5: "Economic Value: Objective and Subjective."

E. Epistemology and Optimum Production

We must recognize the reality of the economic implications of the fact of scarcity. *If there were no optimum production mix, then Pharaoh's punishment would make no sense. It would have been no punishment at all.* The Hebrews would have been able to manufacture just as many bricks as before with no additional inputs, including labor. But the punishment really was a punishment, as the Hebrews complained to Moses. The Bible therefore draws our attention to economic theory at this point. There is an optimum production mix. There is a law of diminishing returns. We achieve greater output per unit of resource input by means of the division of labor and the consequent specialization of production. For any given process of production, *at any point in time*, the economist tells us that there is some *theoretically optimum mix of production factors*.

There is a major epistemological problem here: a "point in time" is a theoretically discrete unit of time that is in fact immeasurable and is therefore *outside of time*. A point in time is therefore timeless. It is analogous to a theoretically discrete point in a line which is also autonomous and immeasurable. A point in time is a theoretical (and indescribable) period in which human action is not possible—"no time for action"—and if human action is not possible, it becomes problematic (self-contradictory) to speak of such phenomena as market-clearing prices, knowledge, and responsibility. We are dealing here with innate contradictions or antinomies in all human thought, so at best we can only *approach* the idea of the optimum production mix, just as we can only approach the idea of economic equilibrium. If we lean too heavily on the weak reed of autonomous human logic, the reed collapses.

While men can never have perfect knowledge of this economically optimum production mix, either in theory or in practice, especially in a world of constant change (including technological change), they still must try to approach this optimum mix if they wish to minimize waste and maximize income. Biblical economics informs us that *there is an objective plan in the mind of God*. "This objective plan serves as a theoretical foundation for the assertion of the existence of this *economically optimum mix*. Maximum economic output (and therefore maximum income) requires specific co-operation in terms of a plan.

Understand, however, that approaching this optimum is not easy, even as a theoretical matter. What are the success indicators that en-

able planning agents to determine whether or not they are approaching the optimum production mix? The existence of profit and loss indicators in a competitive free market is the preliminary answer. Nevertheless, these indicators have built-in limits, both in practice and in theory. Modern economic theory is officially individualistic. But methodological individualism, if pursued to its logical conclusion, does not allow us to conclude anything about optimum aggregates. Once again, the problem of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility reappears to haunt the humanistic economist.

We cannot legitimately, as “neutral” humanistic economists, make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. This means that civil government cannot make such comparisons scientifically. “Since all costs and benefits are subjective, no government can accurately identify, much less establish, the optimum quantity of anything.”¹² But neither can any other organization. According to the principles of methodological subjectivism, individuals can only make comparisons of the *subjectively interpreted results* of their own *subjectively constructed plans*, and even here, there is the epistemological problem of making *intertemporal* comparisons.¹³ After all, I may have forgotten today what I really intended to achieve yesterday. Or my tastes may have changed in the meantime. Furthermore, the purchasing power of the monetary unit may have changed, yet I cannot measure the extent of this change without constructing an aggregate index number of prices, including the subjective importance or “weighted average” *for me* of each price change. I need *permanent standards*—ethical standards above all, but also aesthetic and economic standards—to make such *comparisons over time*. I need an *objective personal “index number”* by which to measure economic change. But by the logic of methodological individualism, there are no such fixed reference points, no unchanging standards. There are no objective standards by which I can formulate my subjective standards, nor can I measure economic changes over time. There are no such scientific measures.

In short, modern economic theory is incapable of discovering what this optimum production mix is, either in the case of a private firm or

12. Charles W. Baird, “The Philosophy and Ideology of Pollution Regulation,” *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), p. 303.

13. Ludwig Lachmann, *Capital, Expectations, and the Market Process: Essays on the Theory of the Market Economy* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed, Andrews & McMeel, 1977), pp. 83–85. Lachmann appealed to the epistemologically suspect “common experience” in a desperate and ill-fated attempt to refute Prof. G. L. S. Shackle’s assertion that an individual cannot make intertemporal comparisons.

in the case of a society. The concept of *optimum* necessarily involves the use of *aggregate value*, including value aggregates that must be compared over time. But pure subjective value theory, if pressed to its logical conclusions, cannot deal with interpersonal value aggregates, nor is it possible for “scientific” economics to compare intrapersonal subjective utility over time. Thus, the more consistent economists have admitted that no one can scientifically determine the optimum quantity of anything.

This is why God’s revelation of His *permanent law structure* is an imperative concept for the very existence of truly logical economics. Without such a permanent standard, simultaneously personal and objective, economics is logically impossible. In a subjective universe without an authoritative God who reveals Himself to man, who in turn is made in God’s image and can therefore understand God’s revelation to man, there can be no permanent objective standards that are relevant or meaningful for human action, including economics.

F. Other Things Never Remain Equal

One critic of the concept of the law of diminishing returns was Julian Simon. He argued that economists have erred in attempting to apply the concept in the case of mineral extraction.

The concept of diminishing returns applies to situations where one element is fixed in quantity—say, a given copper mine—and where the type of technology is also fixed. But neither of these factors apply to mineral extraction in the long run. New lodes are found, and new cost-cutting extraction technologies are developed. Therefore, whether the cost rises or falls in the long run depends on the extent to which advances in technology and new lode discoveries counteract the tendency toward increasing cost in the absence of the new developments. Historically, as we have seen, costs have consistently fallen rather than risen, and there is no empirical warrant for believing that this historical trend will reverse itself in the foreseeable future. Hence there is no “law” of diminishing returns appropriate here.¹⁴

Simon also applied this interpretation of the law of diminishing returns to the field of population theory. He argued that classical economic theory followed Malthus and held that additional people would

14. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 53.

reduce the per capita share of fixed economic resources. “The more people using a stock of resources, the lower the income per person, if all else remains equal.”¹⁵ But new people coming into the community have the effect of changing the responses of other people, especially their parents. Fathers start working harder, or longer hours, or both.¹⁶ Parents become more future-oriented in many instances. They begin saving a larger proportion of their income. In short, the honeymoon is over when Junior arrives. “more mouths to feed” means more food to feed them in nations that are future-oriented and whose people possess what is known as the Protestant (or Puritan) work ethic.

These observations, however, must not be taken as refutations of the existence of the law of diminishing returns. On the contrary, such evidence points directly to the existence of such a law. If it is true, as it so often appears to be, that “necessity is the mother of invention,” then from whence comes the perceived necessity? If additional mouths to feed call forth ever-greater exertion and creativity to feed them, how is it that these mouths produce the desirable stimulus? Isn’t it because there was an optimum production mix under the old conditions that was disturbed by the new mouths? Isn’t it because the new conditions changed the thinking of the former honeymooners, giving them new incentives to mature and become more responsible? Isn’t it the very pressure of the optimum production mix that calls forth better efforts to find *new combinations of resources* (new plans) in response to *new economic conditions*?

The law of diminishing returns (optimum production mix) is an aspect of the creation which can, given the proper ethical and institutional circumstances, lead to human progress. Sinful men need to be pressured into greater self-discipline, more effective thinking, and better strategies of innovation. One of the means of calling forth these better efforts is scarcity. While the law of diminishing returns would have prevailed in the garden, the direct economic incentives to overcome scarcity in a cursed world augment this original aspect of the creation. Thus, it is unwise to de-emphasize the importance of this law of human action, as Simon appeared to do. But the concept should not be misused, either. It should not lead men to conclude that the price of raw materials will necessarily rise if population grows. The concept should not be used to justify a zero population growth ideology.

What we should understand is that the existence of an optimum

15. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

production mix is what lures entrepreneurs, inventors, and economists to seek out better (less wasteful) ways to accomplish their goals in the midst of endless change. Discover this better way, and then *persuade the customer to spend his money on your service or product* because you have, in fact, discovered this better way, and you, the producer, will prosper. So will the customers. Profit in a free market is the success indicator that reveals the better way, meaning a more optimal mix of scarce economic resources.

G. Success Indicators and Relevant Information

Men are supposed to co-operate. This is an ethical requirement, but it is also an economic imperative, if men wish to increase their per capita output. In almost all cases, the intervention of the state into the market reduces this co-operation, since such intervention thwarts the voluntary transfer of accurate, self-correcting economic information. State interference reduces the division of labor in most cases, although it can also lead to overspecialization when it encourages technical developments that are, from the point of view of the market, uneconomical.¹⁷ It is significant that Israel had no laws that discriminated against “strangers in the land.” No laws against immigration or emigration exist in the Bible. A free market in labor services is established by biblical law. The “city on a hill” in the Bible has no barbed wire around it, to keep foreigners out or citizens in. It is the modern humanist societies that erect barbed wire barriers: the West to keep out “undesirables,” and the East to keep in “desirables.” To prevent both overspecialization and underspecialization, producers need the continual feedback of economic information provided by the market’s pricing system. This means that they need private ownership, for without this, there can be no rational assessment of profit and loss, meaning no economic calculation. Without private ownership, it becomes difficult or im-

17. An example of such “forced” technological innovation is the development of capital-intensive, labor-saving equipment that has been adopted by producers because of the artificially high cost of hiring trade union laborers. The producers substitute expensive labor-saving equipment when the cost of labor gets too high. If the government had not granted to the trade union the right to keep employers from firing strikers and hiring replacements (“scabs”) during a strike, the employers would have been able to hire laborers at a market price. The above-market price of unionized labor encourages employers to search for labor substitutes. Laws against “illegal aliens” push up labor costs by restricting the supply of legal laborers; this encourages over-investment in labor—substituting equipment—meaning over-investment compared to what economic freedom would have produced.

possible for future-predicting entrepreneurs to collect profits that are the residual of accurate forecasting.¹⁸

An enslaved population is unable to make full use of the information which is available to producers, for the source of the continual correcting of this information must come from a bureaucratic agency—an agency that does not offer employee incentives comparable to employee incentives in a free market for the collection of *accurate and economically relevant information*, or incentives for affected institutions to respond appropriately to new information. If a society relies heavily on the output of an enslaved population, then its non-slave members are also unable to make the most efficient use of the available resources, for *the society's information-delivery system is made increasingly unreliable*. Neither the slaves nor the taskmasters know what scarce economic resources really should cost. Without a competitive market, the planners are flying blind. *Those who fly blind eventually crash.*

Conclusion

Pharaoh decided to tighten the screws on the Israelites. In doing so, he reduced the freedom of a productive people to increase the per capita wealth of the Egyptian nation. He imposed new costs on them that could only reduce their productivity, either by reducing the division of labor or by grinding them into despair, both of which would ultimately waste Egyptian resources. He abandoned a free market in goods and services. He increased the authority of his bureaucratic state. He brought his judgment on the people of God, merely because their representatives asked for time off to worship God. Because of Egypt's heavy reliance on the slave system, neither Pharaoh nor the nobles knew what the cost of any resource really was. The more rigorously he enslaved them, the less reliable was the economic knowledge available to the planners. Pharaoh thereby proclaimed his faith in Egypt's theology: the sovereignty of Pharaoh and the bureaucratic state that was incarnate in his own person. The result was the destruction of both the Egyptian state and his person.

18. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 32: "The Entrepreneurial Function."

8

COVENANTAL JUDGMENT

Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said (Ex. 8:19).

The theocentric issue here is God as the cosmic Judge.

The supernatural contest between the representatives of God and the magicians of Egypt escalated from the beginning. In the first confrontation, Aaron cast down the rod that God had presented to Moses. It became a serpent. The magicians matched this display of supernatural transformation, but then Aaron's serpent swallowed the serpents of the Egyptians. This presumably did not help the magicians to persuade Pharaoh that their magic was stronger than the supernatural power available to these two Hebrews (Ex. 7:10–12).

A. Access to Power: Plagues

The second display of power involved the Nile's water: plague number one. Aaron stretched out the rod, and the waters of Egypt turned to blood. The magicians matched this supernatural act (Ex. 7:19–22). In this instance, their magic seemed comparable to Aaron's. However, this was no consolation to Pharaoh; now he had even more bloody water than he had before the contest.

Third, this same "victory" of Egyptian magic was repeated in the coming of the frogs (Ex. 8:5–7). This was the second plague. We can almost imagine Pharaoh's consternation, how he must have said to himself, "No, you idiots, not more frogs; fewer frogs! Show me how powerful you are by removing these frogs."

Fourth were the lice: the third plague. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote

the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast" (Ex. 8:16–18). At this point, they made their confession: "This is the finger of God."

His magicians were determined to prove their mastery of the black arts by matching Aaron, plague for plague, thereby *reinforcing God's judgment on Egypt*. But there is no indication that they brought additional blood, frogs, and lice to the land of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived. They simply multiplied the burdens of Egypt. The Egyptians were worse off as a result of the nation's magicians. The arrogance of the magicians had made things even less bearable.

The first three plagues afflicted Goshen: blood, frogs, and lice. Only with the fourth plague, flies (or insects), did God declare that Goshen would be spared (Ex. 8:22). As slaves, the Israelites were under the covenantal rule of the Egyptians, both for good (the economic benefits of living in an extensive empire) and evil. Like the animals who were cursed because of man's sin in the garden, or draftees in an army ruled by an incompetent Commander-in-Chief, so are the slaves of a rebellious culture. In the case of the ethical condition of the Israelite slaves, their subsequent behavior indicated that they were not wholly innocent victims of a society whose first principles they should have utterly rejected. The leeks and onions of Egypt had their appeal in Goshen, too.

That God should bring frogs to curse Egypt as the second plague was fitting. The frog was an important fertility deity in Egypt. The frog-goddess Heqet at Abydos was pictured as sitting at the bier of Osiris, a god of death and rebirth. Frog amulets were popular as symbols of new life and new birth. "The 'matlametlo,' a great frog over five inches long, hides in the root of a bush as long as there is a drought, and when rain falls, it rushes out. It comes with the rain as the beetle with the rising of the Nile; both are symbolic of new life and growth."¹ Just as the Nile, Egypt's life-bringer, became the death-bringer, so did the frogs become a plague.

After the frogs came the third plague, when the dust of the ground became lice. Again, we can almost imagine Pharaoh's thoughts, as he

1. Jane E. Harrison, "Introduction" to E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1911] 1961), p. vii. The introduction actually first appeared as an essay in *The Spectator* (April 13, 1912), and was included in the 1961 edition.

stood scratching himself: “Look, I don’t need any more proof of your mastery of magic. If you can’t get rid of the lice, then just sit quietly. Who needs magical powers like yours at a time like this?” The magicians tried to match this event and failed (Ex. 8:18). At this point, they capitulated. If they could not make the nation even more miserable than it already was, if they were unable to louse up Egypt even more, then their opponent must be God. “This is the finger of God,” they said, using the same term which Jesus used to describe the Spirit of God in tasting out demons (Luke 11:20: “finger of God”; Matt. 12:28: “Spirit of God”). They recognized that they were dealing with supernatural power that was greater than their own, meaning a God who was more powerful than the gods of Egypt. By telling Pharaoh that the finger of God was the source of the power facing him, they were advising him to capitulate. We are told that he hearkened not unto them, and that his heart was hardened. He understood what they meant, and he refused to listen.

B. Comparative Wealth

Then came seven other plagues: swarms of insects (the King James Version inserts the words “of flies” after swarms, but the Hebrew is not specific), the death of all the cattle of Egypt, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. In the final seven plagues, the Egyptians were afflicted, while the Israelites were not. Because of this protection, the Israelites were increasing their per capita wealth in comparison to the Egyptians. They were growing steadily richer—not just comparatively, but absolutely. How could this be? If the Israelites were not actually increasing the size of their herds, how could the plagues have increased their per capita wealth? Because demand for cattle in the marketplace was now focused on the only available local supply, and the Israelites possessed this local monopoly. The market value of their cattle rose, meaning that the exchange value of their cattle rose. Furthermore, their fields had not been struck by the hail, so their crops had survived. The kinds of wealth held by the Egyptians after the plagues—gold, jewels, etc.—always drop in value relative to survival goods during a major catastrophe. The “coin of the realm” during a famine is food, not pieces of metal or shining stones (Gen. 47:15–16).² The Hebrews pos-

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 35: “The Misapplication of Intrinsic Value.”

sessed food, and all the demand for food would have been concentrated on their possessions. They had what the Egyptians needed in order to survive. The market value of their assets increased.

C. The Problem of the Cattle

We face a difficult problem in explaining this economic event. The plague on the cattle of Egypt destroyed them all (Ex. 9:6). Then came the pestilence of the boils, which struck Egyptians, their other animals, and even the priests (Ex. 9:11). (Fortunately for the Egyptians, the magicians had by this time given up any attempts to match God's plagues, boil for boil.) Finally, Egypt was struck with a mighty hail. Some of the Egyptians believed Moses this time: "He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: And he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field" (Ex. 9:20–21). The problem: Where had they purchased these new herds of cattle?

They could either have bought or confiscated cattle from the Hebrews, since the Hebrews had not lost their cattle in the plague (Ex. 3:6). The Hebrews had cattle after the hail, since the hail did not strike Goshen (Ex. 9:26). It is also possible that cattle were imported from Canaan. We are not told. If the Egyptians bought cattle from the Hebrews, it meant that they were unwilling to confiscate the Hebrews' cattle. It would have been possible for them to have marched in and taken cattle out of Goshen. They did not confiscate all the cattle, nor did they buy all the cattle, since the Hebrews still had cattle when the hail began. Perhaps they never sought the Hebrews' cattle. We know that the Hebrews took large herds of cattle with them when they left Egypt (Ex. 12:38). This indicates that the Egyptians did not confiscate their cattle after the plague, and probably not after the hail. Conceivably, they did confiscate the cattle after the hail, and gave back the cattle at the time of the exodus, but the text does not say that this happened.

When the hail stopped, the Israelites had all the cattle still alive in Egypt. Did the Egyptians buy from them? It is not easy to say. The Hebrews requested precious metals and jewels from the Egyptians at the time of the exodus, which might be interpreted as a unique event, indicating that they had not owned any jewels before. Did the Egyptians buy their cattle from the Hebrews without paying in jewelry? We do not know. What we do know is that the Israelites had crops and

cattle, the key resources, immediately following the hail. *The slaves were now rich.*

Of course, if the Israelites had been facing starvation, then their position would not have risen absolutely. They would have been better off than the Egyptians, but they would have had to consume their resources, making it impossible for them to have profited from their position of relatively greater wealth. But they were being protected by God; they were not going to starve. They might have traded their cattle and crops for the surplus gold and jewels of the Egyptians, had God decided to let them remain in Egypt. They would have collected the valuables of the Egyptians in exchange for their surplus food. However, God had even better plans; they would keep the food and also collect the jewels of the Egyptians. God's protection had already made them the beneficiaries of rising per capita wealth, even before they "borrowed" from their former masters. They had monopoly ownership of the crucial survival resources in a time of great shortages. They had what the Egyptians needed. Not only had their masters lost the necessities, they would shortly have to forfeit their luxuries, either in exchange for the Israelites' food or in restitution for the generations of bondage.

D. The Sovereign Who Failed

The Egyptians had been wiped out economically by the plagues. They had been ruined. Their ruler, who was theoretically divine, was stubborn and arrogant. He was the protector of Egypt, yet he had led Egypt into an economic disaster. He was the ruler of the Nile, and it had been turned to blood, killing the fish. Walter Brueggemann's comments on the significance of this judgment against the Nile are to the point: "We cannot grasp the trouble fully until we recall that the Nile River is not only a geographical referent. It is also an expression of the imperial power of fertility. It is administration of the Nile which permits the king to generate and guarantee life. The failure of the Nile and its life system means that the empire does not have in itself the power of life (cf. Ezek. 29:3). It is for this reason that the plague of the Nile is so crucial (Ex. 7:7–22). An assault on the Nile strikes at the heart of Pharaoh's claim to authority."³

Pharaoh was also the controller of the seasons, yet the nation's agricultural system had been disrupted by hail—hail in a land where it

3. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 327.

seldom rained! He was the shepherd of the nation's flocks, and the cattle had been struck with sickness and then with hail. Wilson wrote, concerning the social function of the Pharaoh: "The herdsman is primarily the pastor, the 'feeder,' and a first responsibility of the state was to see that the people were fed. Thus the king of Egypt was the god who had brought fertility to Egypt, produced the life-giving waters, and presented the gods with the sheaf of grain which symbolized abundant food. Indeed, an essential function of his kingship was that of a medicine man, whose magic ensured good crops."⁴ This Pharaoh had failed in every respect to measure up to the theological system of Egypt. God had hardened his heart, thereby increasing his innate stubbornness, in order to display the power of a true God. Speaking of the Pharaoh, God said: "And in very deed for this cause I raise thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:16). God would continue to demonstrate before other kings just how sovereign the Pharaoh really was.

Except possibly for a brief period under Joseph, the Egyptians had clung to their *theology of the continuity of being* for centuries. They had placed themselves under the sovereign power of a god, they believed. Their prosperity was guaranteed by a divine man, and their future life beyond the grave would be analogous to their life on earth: under the jurisdiction of the Pharaoh. Again, citing Wilson: "Since the central factor in this world was the divine nature of the king, who owned and controlled everything within Egypt, the next world would be based on the same absolute authority. Life after death, independent of the Pharaoh, would thus be out of the question for this early period."⁵ Everything in Egypt took place under the supposed sovereignty of a king-god. What the Egyptians assented to when the pharaohs put the Israelites in bondage was this: a king-god on earth had lawful, sovereign power over the representatives of the God of the Bible. No king reigns apart from a concept of legitimate rule, and the assent of the Egyptians to the decisions of their ruler brought them into conflict with the God of the Bible.

E. Covenants and Representative Government

There are covenants on earth. The Egyptians were under a coven-

4. John A. Wilson, "Egypt," in Henri Frankfort, *et al.*, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1946] 1977), pp. 79–80.

5. John A. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt: An Interpretation of Ancient Egyptian Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1951] 1967), p. 65.

ant with their king. This covenant had been reaffirmed when they sold their lands to the Pharaoh of the famine (Gen. 47:20–26). They had entered into another covenant when that Pharaoh gave the land of Goshen to the family of Joseph (Gen. 47:1–6). This covenant was broken by a later Pharaoh, and the Egyptians were under his rule by choice, by the prior sale of their lands, and by the theology of Egypt. His covenant was their covenant; the breaking of his covenant with the family of Joseph was also the breaking of their covenant with the family of Joseph. *Men are judged in social orders in terms of the decisions made by their legitimate covenantal rulers.*

This is an important concept. The Bible teaches the doctrine of representative government. This refers to all government, not just civil government. Representative government applies to churches, corporations, trusts, and families. Adam, our representative before God, sinned, and we are under a curse. This “federal headship” of Adam was based on a concept of representative government under a covenant. So was the “federal headship” of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh was the federal head of Egypt. Egypt’s theology recognized this; he was seen as the divine-human link, the representative of the Egyptian gods. When the judgment of God began, it struck the Pharaoh’s house first. His magicians’ serpents were consumed by Aaron’s. Then the escalation carried the conflict into the rivers and fields and homes of the whole land. Goshen was protected after the initial three plagues because God’s people resided there, and because they were captives, not fully assenting citizens, of Egypt. Egyptians far removed from the seat of power were afflicted with the insects, pestilence, boils, and hail. They knew nothing of the conflict between Moses and the Pharaoh. They had never heard of Moses or Aaron. Yet their crops were destroyed, their waters turned to blood, their land filled with the stench of death. When they reclined on their beds or walked through their homes, the squishing of frogs was continual. Egyptians who had never personally owned, controlled, or punished a Hebrew slave were scratching lice day and night. Poor farmers, who lived on the edge of starvation, saw their milk cows die. What had they done to deserve this? *They had believed in a false god.* Now that this god was at last being brought under judgment by the true God, they became recipients of that judgment. Their self-proclaimed god had stood in terms of his sovereign kingdom and its prosperity to challenge God’s own representatives. To demonstrate the true source of sovereignty, God smashed Pharaoh and his kingdom, including his people.

F. Methodologies

To imagine that the judgments of God, in time and on earth, are limited to personal, individualistic penalties, is to misread the Bible. If anything, the reverse is true, in time and on earth. *God's collective curses, like His collective blessings, are proclaimed in the Bible.* God does not promise that every good man will prosper economically, or that every evil man will be brought low. What the Bible promises is that covenantally faithful societies will prosper in the long run, and that covenantally rebellious ones will be crushed eventually.

This brings up the question of *methodological individualism*. The Bible teaches *methodological covenantalism*, not methodological individualism. When we speak of "society," we have in mind an association of men which is under the law of God, and through which men and institutions are blessed or judged by God. A social covenant *does* exist, whether explicit or implicit in human documents or institutions. Thus, methodological covenantalism conflicts with the anarchism of the methodological individualist. Rothbard's libertarian view of society is not conformable to the story of God's judgment of the Egyptian masses. "We have talked at length of individual rights; but what, it may be asked, of the 'rights of society'? Don't they supersede the rights of the mere individual? The libertarian, however, is an individualist; he believes that one of the prime errors in social theory is to treat 'society' as if it were an actually existing entity. 'Society' is sometimes treated as a superior or quasi-divine figure with overriding 'rights' of its own; at other times as an existing evil which can be blamed for all the ills of the world. The individualist holds that only individuals exist, think, feel, choose, and act; and that 'society' is not a living entity but simply a label for a set of interacting individuals. Treating society as a thing that chooses and acts, then, serves to obscure the real forces at work."⁶

In terms of the history of Western philosophy, Rothbard was a nominalist. He did not believe in the independent reality of collectives. He argued that collectives are merely names that people apply to relationships among individuals. Individuals are sovereign; collectives are not. Most free market economists are nominalists. As an anarchist, Rothbard was more self-conscious about this than his limited-government peers. In contrast, those social theorists who declare their commitment to the independent existence of collectives are part of the

6. Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1973] 2006), p. 45. (<http://bit.ly/mrfanl>)

realist tradition. Nominalists and realists had done battle from the beginning. Both groups—whether real or merely named—are opposed to biblical covenantalism.

Rothbard rejected methodological holism (collectivism), which sees the evolution of society as a force independent of human will and human action. But methodological covenantalism is not methodological holism; it does not view society as a personal entity separate from men. It sees men as being *represented by others before God* in various institutional relationships. Men suffer and prosper, not only by what they do as individuals, but also by the decisions of those in authority over them. Methodological covenantalism teaches that there are law-governed arrangements by which God deals with people—not impersonal natural law, or the law of karma (reincarnation), or evolutionary law, but God-ordained law. The biblical view categorically rejects the utilitarian view of law presented by classical liberals, e.g., Mises and Hayek.⁷

G. Mises vs. the Covenant

Mises' rejection of this covenantal outlook, which he equated with holism, was characteristically uncompromising.

According to the doctrines of universalism, conceptual realism, holism, collectivism, and some representatives of Gestaltpsychologie, society is an entity living its own life, independent of and separate from the lives of the various individuals, acting on its own behalf and aiming at its own ends which are different from the ends sought by the individuals. Then, of course, an antagonism between the aims of society and those of its members can emerge. In order to safeguard the flowering and further development of society it becomes necessary to master the selfishness of the individuals and to compel them to sacrifice their egoistic designs to the benefit of society. At this point all these holistic doctrines are bound to abandon the secular methods of human science and logical reasoning and to shift to theological or metaphysical professions of faith. They must assume that Providence, through its prophets, apostles, and charismatic leaders, forces men who are constitutionally wicked, i.e., prone to pursue their own ends, to walk in the ways of righteousness which the Lord or Weltgeist or history wants them to walk.⁸

7. For a critique of Hayek, see Appendix B, "The Evolutionists' Defense of the Market," in North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*.

8. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 145. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

In other words, Mises rejected the epistemological significance of the fact that *God converts men*. Sometimes, these men become representative agents before God for other men whom God places under their jurisdiction, whether those represented approve of it or not (as in the case of the Israelites who wanted Moses and Aaron to go away and leave them alone). Mises rejected this explanation of human affairs.

This is the philosophy which has characterized from time immemorial the creeds of primitive tribes. It has been an element in all religious teachings. Man is bound to comply with the law issued by a superhuman power and to obey the authorities which this power has entrusted with the enforcement of the law. The order created by this law, human society, is consequently the work of the Deity and not of man. If the Lord had not interfered and had not given enlightenment to erring mankind, society would not have come into existence. . . . The scientific theory as developed by the social philosophy of eighteenth-century rationalism and liberalism and by modern economics does not resort to any miraculous interference of superhuman powers. . . . Society is a product of human action, i.e., the human urge to remove uneasiness as far as possible. In order to explain its becoming and its evolution it is not necessary to have recourse to a doctrine, certainly offensive to a truly religious mind, according to which the original creation was so defective that reiterated superhuman intervention is needed to prevent its failure.⁹

In other words, “a truly religious mind” is the mind of an eighteenth-century Continental European deist, whose silent, distant God is sufficiently irrelevant to human affairs to satisfy a generous and broad-minded humanistic economist (assuming he is not a follower of Ayn Rand’s atheistic “objectivism”—and few economists are).¹⁰

For Mises, a confirmed utilitarian, “Law and legality, the moral code and social institutions are no longer revered as unfathomable decrees of Heaven. They are of human origin, and the only yardstick that must be applied to them is that of expediency with regard to human welfare.”¹¹ His methodological individualism was grounded in *human expediency*, which somehow (he could not say how) is understood by all men, or at least all *reasonable* men who recognize the value of free

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 145–46.

10. Rothbard once remarked concerning the Randians: “They hate God more than they hate the state.” For a comprehensive critique of Rand’s thought, see John Robbins, *Without a Prayer: Ayn Rand and the Close of Her System* (Unicoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation, [1974] 1997).

11. Mises, *Human Action*, p. 147.

market economics and economic growth. In short, economists—*true* economists, meaning defenders of the free market—“have repeatedly emphasized that they deal with socialism and interventionism from the point of view of the generally accepted values of Western civilization.”¹² Even a methodological individualist sometimes finds collectives—“the values of Western civilization”—epistemologically indispensable. Sadly, Mises never admitted what should have been obvious, specifically, that he was partially dependent on the epistemological holism that he vociferously rejected.¹³

The idea of representative civil government was basic to nineteenth-century liberalism. Defenders of classical liberalism wanted limited civil government and a free market economy. But there are few strict defenders of the old faith today. Mises and Hayek have few followers in the academic world. Their intellectual heirs are either Christians or outright anarchists. Neither group (a holistic noun) accepts the viewpoint of nineteenth-century classical liberalism.¹⁴ Christians base their views on the Bible, and the anarchists want no civil government—certainly not one which is supported by compulsory taxation.

The empirical or “positive economics” of the Chicago School defends the limited-government viewpoint. These scholars do not appeal to hypothetically universal rights of man that are based on natural law. They explain economics strictly in terms of economic self-interest, and they use scientific tools of “empirical,” value-free economic analysis,

12. Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1969), p. 33. Published originally by Yale University Press in 1957. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTAH>)

13. Gary North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976), pp. 87–96.

14. It is one of the ironies of recent history that the two main groups that continue to read and quote Mises both reject his utilitarianism. The anarcho-capitalists, led by Rothbard, are defenders of natural law theory, and they explicitly reject utilitarianism as a legitimate foundation of social and economic theory: Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, p. 19. They are anarchists, and Mises explicitly rejected anarchism. He even said that a military draft is sometimes legitimate. In the 1966 Regnery edition of *Human Action*, he wrote: “He who in our age opposes armaments and conscription is, perhaps unbeknown to himself, an abettor of those aiming at the enslavement of all.” Mises, *Human Action*, p. 282. The anarcho-capitalists seldom go into print against Mises by name, since they are self-professed followers of Mises and Austrian economic theory, but they have abandoned much of his epistemology (he was a self-conscious Kantian dualist, as well as a utilitarian) and his philosophy of limited (rather than zero) civil government. The other group that uses Mises’ economic arguments is the Christian Reconstruction movement, whose members reject his humanism-agnosticism and his methodological individualism.

especially mathematics, which implies some sort of holism (economic aggregates). Mises categorically rejected such holism as an invalid tool for understanding human action. Therefore, the old classical liberalism, with its strict commitment to methodological individualism, is today a shadow of its former moral self.

Conclusion

The Pharaoh's court magicians warned him. They told him that he was facing God almighty. He did not accept their evaluation, or at least he chose to challenge the God of Moses anyway. Did this protect the families of the magicians? Did they avoid the plagues? Did they escape the death of their firstborn? Not without the blood on the doorposts. Not without an outward covenantal sign indicating that they had placed themselves under the sovereignty of God. They gave the king good advice, but he did not take it, and they did not escape.

When God brought judgment on Egypt, the seemingly innocent Egyptians were not spared. This was because there were no innocent Egyptians. They were all under the Pharaoh's covenant, they all operated in terms of his divinity, and they all felt the wrath of God, in time and on earth. They were doomed because he was doomed. He was their representative in a great confrontation with God, almost as the Philistines were represented by Goliath. The result was the same in each instance: death for the representative, and scattering and defeat for the represented.

Covenants cannot be avoided. Man cannot serve two masters; he serves only one (Matt. 6:24).¹⁵ The system of representative government has been with mankind since the beginning. Adam's heirs cannot escape the results of Adam's choice in the garden. He served as our representative head; his loss was our loss. The Pharaoh's loss was the Egyptian peasant's loss. Men do not stand alone, as independent, totally autonomous entities, facing a cosmos which is impersonal. Though covenant-breaking man would like to believe its conclusion, William Ernest Henley's late-nineteenth-century poem, *Invictus*, proclaimed a false doctrine of man's autonomy. Its concluding lines: "It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."

Henley is forgotten today, as is his poem, but the last two lines of

15. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

this stanza are part of the English language, familiar to millions who have never heard of him. Its sentiments were basic to the twentieth century, in which more people died as a result of disastrous decisions by national leaders than in any previous century, with the possible exception of Noah's generation, depending upon the size of that population.

9

ORIGINAL OWNERSHIP

And Moses said unto him [Pharaoh], As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD'S. But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God (Ex. 9:29–30).

The theocentric principle here is the absolute sovereignty of God, from which is derived absolute ownership by God.

This is not the first statement in Scripture concerning the ownership of the earth. Melchizedek blessed Abram, who was “of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19b), and Abram used the same phrase, “possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:22b). In that instance, Abram refused to accept any gifts from the king of Sodom, lest the king should say, “I have made Abram rich” (Gen. 14:23b). God’s total sovereignty over the earth required Abram to tithe, in this case to the priest Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20).¹ Abram understood that God could legitimately extract His portion from Abram, the steward, even though Abram believed it would be wise to forego the gifts from the king of Sodom. God was to be honored, not Abram. God was to receive the tithe, not Abram. Yet Abram was rich, and he took care to keep the king of Sodom from receiving the credit. God was the source of Abram’s wealth, not a pagan earthly king.

A. A Defiant Pharaoh

It was different in the case of Pharaoh. He *did* owe a payment to the Israelites. He had challenged Moses and Moses’ God. He came before God under a curse. He and his people had enslaved God’s people, had broken their covenant with the Israelites, and had burdened them

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 21.

with the requirement to make bricks without straw. Pharaoh had changed his mind repeatedly, breaking each successive promise to Moses concerning the Israelites. Egypt would pay restitution to the Israelites before the exodus. It was not a question of making the Israelites rich. Pharaoh would receive no credit in this regard. The restitution payment was being extracted from the Egyptians by a series of external judgments. Abram refused Sodom's payment, while God demanded Egypt's. Egypt's payment was no gift.

Moses' message to Pharaoh was clear: *God owns the world*. He also controls its operations. Moses reminded Pharaoh of the source of his miseries. The land was in ruins. Egypt had been overtaken by a series of disasters. But Moses' point was that these had not been "natural" disasters. They had been supernatural disasters. To prove his point, he promised to pray to God, and God would then halt the hail and thunderstorms. The *proof* of God's ownership is God's word. He made the world, He made man, and He is sovereign over both man and the world. But to demonstrate His ownership before Pharaoh, God stopped the hail.

His word was sufficient proof. He did not need to verify His word before Pharaoh. Nevertheless, God provided the additional evidence. Yet Moses told Pharaoh that he would not fear God, despite the evidence. Pharaoh's heart was hardened. The evidence did not matter. If he would not listen to God's prophet, he would not assent to the evidence of his eyes. If God's word was insufficient, then the absence of hail would not be sufficient. He would still not fear God. In this sense, he resembled Satan, whom he represented.

Pharaoh never did believe the testimony of his eyes. Right up until the moment when the waters of the Red Sea closed over him, he refused to assent to the obvious. He raced into the arms of death, shouting his defiance against God, breaking his word, and taking the Egyptian state with him. *He refused to believe God's word, so the testimony of his eyes meant nothing*. His operating presupposition was that he, the Pharaoh, was god. God is not the being He claims to be, nor could such a being exist, Pharaoh presupposed. No sovereign, absolute being can lay claim to total control, and therefore original ownership of everything, he believed. He died for his beliefs. He did not die alone.

God's claim is comprehensive. He possesses absolute property rights to every atom of the universe. He created it, and He owns it. He, unlike man, does not operate in terms of a definition of ownership that requires the right and ability of an owner to disown the property at his

discretion.² His ownership is original. No other being is absolutely sovereign, so therefore no other being can claim original, uncontested rights to any aspect of the creation. *No other being owns any economic asset that he did not receive from God.* Therefore, no other being can bargain with God to buy any part of the creation. All property is held by means of a transfer of rights from God to the new owner. It is held in terms of a covenant. Men or demons can break their covenant with God, denying the terms of subordinate ownership, but they cannot thereby achieve their goal of final sovereignty. Whatever rights (legal immunities and protections) they possess to buy or sell property, or even to confiscate property, are derivative rights. *Absolute ownership is an incommunicable attribute of God.*

B. Ownership and Sovereignty

God's statement that He owns the earth is an announcement of His total sovereignty. It is therefore a denial of all of the claims of rebellious man against the plan of God. Jesus' parable of the vineyard owner who hired the laborers throughout the day elaborates on the implications of God's ownership. The land owner hires men all day long, at an identical agreed-upon wage, and at the end of the day, each man receives his wage, one penny. The ones who had labored all day complained: those who came late to work received the same wage for a shorter day's work. They ignored the fact that they had no guarantee when they signed on in the morning that the owner would offer anyone employment later in the day. Neither did those who could not find employment that morning. The complainers were ignoring the effects of *uncertainty* on contractual obligations. The owner answers them with questions. First, hadn't they agreed to work for this wage (Matt. 20:13)? Second, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (20:15).³ Here is the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, but conveyed by Jesus in an economic parable that could be understood by His listeners. God has the right to do what He wants with the whole creation. He owns the earth, just as the owner of a field owns that field. He is sovereign over it. *This*

2. F. A. Harper wrote: "The corollary of the right of ownership is the right of dis-ownership. So if I cannot sell a thing, it is evident that I do not really own it." *Liberty: A Path to Its Recovery* (Irvington, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1949), p. 106. (<http://bit.ly/HarperLiberty>)

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

is one of the key passages in the New Testament which defends the ethical and legal legitimacy of private property. If the owner in the parable did not have the right to do what he wanted with his own property, then the meaning of the parable is lost. An individual's personal, private ownership is analogous to God's personal, private ownership of the earth, in eluding the souls of men. Private ownership, not state ownership, is the foundation of the parable. *To challenge the legitimacy of God's delegated sovereignty of private ownership of the means of production is to challenge the doctrine of the original sovereignty of God. Socialism is therefore an innately demonic and evil doctrine.* It is not surprising that the rise of socialism and statism in the West was also accompanied by the rise of philosophies hostile to the sovereignty of God.⁴

C. Pharaoh's Assertion

Pharaoh recognized the implications of this doctrine of God's absolute ownership, and he rejected it. He refused to humble himself before the God of the Israelites. He had no fear of this God, despite God's control over the forces of nature. He rejected the doctrine of God's sovereignty over the affairs of Egypt. He, as a legitimate god, according to Egyptian theology, possessed at least some degree of autonomous sovereignty. He was entitled to the lives and labors of these Hebrews. Any attempt by their God to impose non-negotiable demands on Egypt had to be resisted. To capitulate on this issue would have implied a moral obligation on Pharaoh's part to conform his economic decisions to the law of God. If God owns the whole earth, then each man is merely a steward of God's property, and is therefore morally obligated to administer the original owner's property according to His instructions. Pharaoh would have had to acknowledge his position as a subordinate ruler under God, a prince rather than a king. He would

4. On the rise of revolutionary socialism and equally revolutionary nationalism—both philosophies of State sovereignty—as religious and extensively occult phenomena, see James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). I regard this as the single most significant work of historical scholarship to be published in the United States in the post-World War II era. Volume 1 of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was the most important work overall, in terms of its impact on the thinking of Western intellectuals, forcing them to confront the reality of Soviet civilization. It is not, strictly speaking, a work of historical scholarship, since it forgoes the historian's paraphernalia of footnotes and extensive documentation, although I regard the work as accurate historically. The author has subtitled this work, "An Experiment in Literary Investigation."

not do it.

As Moses had predicted, as soon as the hail and thunder ceased, Pharaoh and his servants resumed their resistance (Ex. 9:34). Their theology acknowledged the possibility of the appearance of a powerful god to challenge Egypt. Any war between states in the ancient world was believed to involve the gods of both nations. The idea that God might own part of the world, or might legitimately have some claim on the Hebrews as a form of His personal property, could be accepted in theory by the Egyptians. What was repugnant to them was the idea that He owned everything, “lock, stock, and barrel,” in the traditional English terminology. That left them no bargaining room.

The Hebrews belonged to God, the Egyptians belonged to God, and Egypt belonged to God. God’s assault against Egypt was not a form of competition for temporary advantage, God against Pharaoh. His victory was not an instance of a temporarily sovereign invader who might be overcome later, when conditions changed. The same event—the withdrawal of visible judgment—was *interpreted differently* by Moses and Pharaoh. Pharaoh acted as though he believed that God’s withdrawal of the plagues was a sign of His weakening, as if cosmic forces or the gods of Egypt had finally begun to repel this invader. He grew arrogant each time a plague ended. Moses had told him that the removal of the hail and thunder was proof of God’s continuing sovereignty, proof that the forces of nature are not autonomous, but under the direct administration of God.

D. The Marxists’ Dilemma

This incident points to a fundamental problem for all secular economic theory, namely, *the establishment of a point of originating (and therefore final) ownership*. The modern socialist movement, especially Marxism, asserts that all ownership should be collective, and the tools of production should be lodged in the state. Marx’s words in Part II of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) do not explicitly establish state ownership, but they deny the rights of private ownership: “In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.”⁵ Again, “Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the

5. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1969] 1977), I, p. 120.

last resort, only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion. Capital is, therefore, not a personal, it is a social power.”⁶ At the end of Part II, he argued that under pure communism, class antagonisms will disappear, and therefore the state, as an organ of repression used by the ruling class to suppress the lower classes, will finally disappear. “When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. . . . In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”⁷ The “vast association” replaces the state.

This may sound as though Marx was not really in favor of the state as the owner of the tools of production. But how will the “vast association of the whole nation” allocate scarce economic resources, unless either the state or free markets order the decisions of producers? Marx’s comment in *The German Ideology* (1845) is of little use: “Modern universal intercourse can be controlled by individuals, therefore, only when controlled by all.”⁸ Murray Rothbard, an advocate of the zero-state economy, called attention to this confusion in Marx’s thinking: “Rejecting private property, especially capital, the Left Socialists were then trapped in an inner contradiction: if the State is to disappear after the Revolution (immediately for Bakunin, gradually ‘withering’ for Marx), then how is the ‘collective’ to run its property without becoming an enormous State itself in fact even if not in name? This was the contradiction which neither the Marxists nor the Bakuninists were ever able to resolve.”⁹

E. The Anarchists’ Dilemma

On the other hand, the libertarians, or anarcho-capitalists, argue

6. *Ibid.*, I, p. 121.

7. *Ibid.*, I, p. 127.

8. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1845] 1965), p. 84.

9. Murray N. Rothbard, “Left and Right: The Prospects for Liberty,” *Left and Right*, 1 (1965). (<http://mises.org/daily/910>) For a discussion of this problem in Marxism and socialism, see my book, Gary North, *Marx’s Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), pp. 155–59. (<http://bit.ly/gnmrro>)

that the *individual* is absolutely sovereign over property. Even the settlement of disputes over property rights is to be solved by private organizations. There must be no political authority—no agency possessing a legal monopoly of violence—to suppress private violence. There must be only profit-seeking law courts, meaning courts without the legal authority to issue a subpoena to compel anyone to testify,¹⁰ plus voluntary arbitration organizations and insurance companies.¹¹

This raises an important question: How would this mythical libertarian society be different from Marx's mythical association? Neither one is supposed to be a political body, yet both seem to have important attributes of lawful authority. Why wouldn't *For a New Liberty* become Volume I of *For a New Tyranny*, should a warlord society ever be constructed on the original legal foundation of the privatization of violence? How would "purely defensive, profit-seeking" armies be restrained from tearing a libertarian society apart in their quest for even greater short-run profits than peaceful competition can provide? These questions have proven to be equally as unsolvable, even in theory, as the socialists' problem of allocating scarce economic resources apart from either the state or the free market.

Conclusion

Ultimate sovereignty over economic resources is possessed by God, who delegates to men certain responsibilities over property. Some of these rights are delegated to individuals, who co-operate voluntarily in exchange. Other rights are delegated to the civil govern-

10. Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1973] 2006), p. 107. (<http://bit.ly/mrfanl>)

11. Bruno Leoni, *Freedom and the Law* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1961). (<http://bit.ly/LeoniLaw>). Rothbard's review of the book criticizes it for not going far enough: "While Leoni is vague and wavering on the structure that his courts would take, he at least indicates the possibility of privately competing judges and courts. . . . Similarly, while in some passages Leoni accepts the idea of a governmental supreme court which he admits becomes itself a quasi-legislature, he does call for the restoration of the ancient practice of separation of government from the judicial function. If for no other reason, Professor Leoni's work is extremely valuable for raising, in our State-bemused age, the possibility of a workable separation of the judicial function from the State apparatus." Rothbard, "On Freedom and the Law," *New Individualist Review*, I (Winter 1962), p. 38. (<http://bit.ly/NewIndRev>). This short-lived journal of the 1960s has also been reprinted in one volume by Liberty Classics. Rothbard went into greater detail concerning his theory of a judicial system in a society without a civil government with the power to impose sanctions, in his book, *For a New Liberty*, pp. 275–90.

ment. Associations also possess limited sovereignty: churches, corporations, clubs, charitable associations, educational institutions, and so forth. The law of God recognizes the legitimacy of limited sovereignty in many forms of organization, but none of them is regarded as absolutely sovereign overall spheres of life, or even in any given sphere. Fathers may not legally murder infants; churches may not embezzle funds; civil governments may not confiscate private property without due process of law. God, however, can do anything He wants, as the experiences of both Pharaoh and Job indicate. *God's total control is correlative to God's absolute ownership.*

To unravel the complex intertwining of the various spheres, in order to obtain the proper idea of the limits on the sovereignty of any or all of them, we need to search out the terms and implications of biblical law. Without the concrete examples of Old Testament law, which are seen as morally binding throughout history, men are left without any reliable guide to balance competing claims of all the self-proclaimed sovereign owners, or even admittedly derivative owners, assuming no one knows which group is sovereign in any given instance.

Those who reject the idea that biblical law governs property rights, and who also recognize the evil of attributing absolute sovereignty either to the civil government or the autonomous individual, have a distressing tendency to substitute platitudes for analysis. We hear phrases like, "We're neither socialists nor free market capitalists." Fine; then what are they? Medieval guild socialists? Keynesian interventionists? Social credit advocates? Henry Georgists? "Ordo" liberals (followers of Wilhelm Röpke)? What analytical tool kit do they use to interpret the economy? What are their first principles and logical developments?

It is the task of Christian economists to discover basic biblical principles and case-law applications that offer a framework of responsible, subordinate ownership. They must discover biblical laws of stewardship. They must discover a means of analysis that enables people to understand economic causation.

Pharaoh could not, or at least he did not, and the Egypt of his day perished.

10

TOTAL SACRIFICE, TOTAL SOVEREIGNTY

And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you (Ex. 10:24).

The theocentric principle here is God as totally separate from His creation: *transcendence*, point one of the biblical covenant model.¹ He establishes a series of separating covenants with those whom He chooses to become His representatives: point two of the biblical covenant model. This system of judicial representation is hierarchical.²

A. Negotiations

Pharaoh at this point was a battered despot. His original inflexibility was becoming more pliant, at least on the surface. When Moses first came before Pharaoh to request a time for sacrifice to God, Pharaoh absolutely rejected his request (Ex. 5:2). He denied knowing the God whom Moses spoke about. He punished the Hebrews by withdrawing the state-supplied straw for their brick-making. He retained his self-confident prohibition through four plagues: the Nile's transformation into blood, the frogs (after which he temporarily capitulated), the lice, and the swarms of insects.

Pharaoh then called Moses and informed him that it would be all right if the Israelites sacrificed in the land of Egypt (Ex. 8:25). Moses rejected the offer with the argument that lawful sacrifice involved the sacrifice of an animal that was an abomination in the sight of the Egy-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch.1.

2. Sutton, ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

tians (Ex. 8:26). This probably meant sheep, since the profession of shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians (Gen. 46:34). So, Pharaoh backed down some more: they could go into the wilderness, but not too far away (Ex. 8:28). He would not permit them to travel a full three days' journey, as Moses requested (Ex. 8:27). Pharaoh again reversed himself and refused to allow them to go (Ex. 8:32). Then came three more plagues: dying cattle, boils, and hail (Ex. 9).

At this point, Moses came and announced the imminence of another plague: locusts. Pharaoh's response to Moses and also to his own advisors was a compromise that was, in reality, the same old stubbornness. The New American Standard Bible's translation is far more clear than the King James: "And Pharaoh's servants said to him, 'How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?'" So, Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones who are going?" And Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." Then he said unto them, "Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind" (Ex. 10:7–10).

God then brought the plague of locusts upon Egypt. Pharaoh repented, asked Moses to remove them, and then once again forbade them to depart. Next, God brought thick darkness upon Egypt. "And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you" (Ex. 10:24). Moses again rejected this compromise: "Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God, until we come thither" (Ex. 10:26). The next verse repeats the familiar theme: "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go." Pharaoh then sent Moses and Aaron away permanently (Ex. 10:28).

What was in Pharaoh's mind? A probable explanation is this: *Pharaoh wanted to tie the Hebrews to an anchor.* At first, he did not want them to travel anywhere or sacrifice to any other God. Then he was willing to have them travel a little distance, just out of sight of the Egyptian people (Ex. 8:28). This way, Egypt's army could put them under surveillance, and if they tried to escape, the army could easily get to them in time to pull them back. A three days' journey would have given them too great a head start. Moses was unwilling to capitulate.

So, Pharaoh and his counselors came up with the idea of letting only the males go to sacrifice. Again, Moses was uncooperative. So, Pharaoh counter-offered: "All right, how about this? All the people go, but not the animals. Leave your capital here." Unacceptable, said Moses.

B. Non-Negotiable Demands

What we see is a conflict between two very stubborn men. Pharaoh appeared to be the more "reasonable." After all, hadn't he retreated from his original prohibition? Hadn't he tried his best to work out a solution? True, it took two or three plagues each time to convince him to make a counter-offer to Moses, but he always seemed to repent. But Moses—what an ideologue! He refused to budge. He had to have it all. He kept making non-negotiable demands. All the people had to go. All the animals had to go. They had to go three days' journey away from Goshen. They had to be out of sight of the Egyptians. Moses, as God's representative, did not choose to work out a compromise. It was "all or nothing" with Moses: *all for the Israelites and, if Pharaoh remained obstinate, nothing for the Egyptians*. Pharaoh's advisors saw this clearly: "Egypt is destroyed," they reminded Pharaoh. Little did they suspect just how destroyed Egypt would shortly become.

The Bible's account is equally uncompromising: it was Pharaoh, not Moses, who had his heart actively hardened by God. Yet Moses appears to be the uncompromising representative in this battle of the wills. Why should Moses seem so rigid to modern readers? The modern world, with its presupposition of relativism, has a tendency to regard compromise as an almost universal benefit. "You go along to get along," is an old saying in the United States Senate.³ Speaker of the House of Representatives Sam Rayburn made it famous.⁴ You compromise. You rise above your principles. You make a deal.

Moses stood with God. He asked for a few days to sacrifice to God—a *comprehensive sacrifice* that would have involved the whole of Israel: men, women, children, and animals. All of them would be separated from their earthly captors. All of them would be outside the direct sovereign control of the Egyptian state. In short, they would be utterly under the dominion of God, and visibly so.

They did not propose to escape. When Moses asked Pharaoh to

3. William Safire, *Safire's Political Dictionary* (New York: Ballentine, 1978), p. 303.

4. Anthony Champagne, *Congressman Sam Rayburn* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 161.

“let my people go,” he was not asking him to give up control of God’s people. At least, Moses did not ask this directly. But when he came to a self-proclaimed god, the ruler of a supposedly divine state, there could be no question about what was implied by his request. He was asking Pharaoh to revoke an area of his self-proclaimed total sovereignty in Egypt. He was asking Pharaoh to announce that the continuity of being between him and the gods of Egypt was in fact not a divine continuity at all, that there is a God who is higher, and who commands the sacrifices of a slave population. *Moses was asking Pharaoh to make a symbolic commitment to God.* Pharaoh was to admit to everyone that he held power over the Israelites by permission from the God of Israel, and that this foreign God had the authority to compel Egypt to suspend all signs of its sovereignty over Israel for several days, perhaps a week. (The phrase, “three days’ journey,” may have meant a round-trip of three days, or three days out and three days back, although the latter seems more plausible: Ex. 5:3.) Pharaoh had to put the Israelites on their “good behavior,” relying on their sense of justice to return to bondage. To have done so would have meant abandoning his role as absolute sovereign.

What if he had agreed to Moses’ request? The Israelites had not requested freedom. God had not instructed Moses to call for a permanent release from Egypt. God had told Moses that He intended to lead them out of Egypt on a permanent basis (Ex. 3:8), but He did not instruct Moses to demand their release. Moses was only to request a week or less of freedom. God promised: “And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand” (Ex. 3:19), or as the New English Bible puts it, “unless he is compelled.” Why was God so certain? Because He intended to control Pharaoh’s decisions: “. . . and the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of the land” (Ex. 11:10). God’s active hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was basic to His promise to deliver Israel permanently: “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments” (Ex. 7:3–4).

C. The Question of Sovereignty

God demands absolute commitment from all creatures. Pharaoh,

who was believed by the Egyptians to be an absolute sovereign, only needed to proclaim his partial sovereignty in order to challenge God's claim of total sovereignty. All he needed to do was to retain a token sovereignty over Israel to make his claim valid. If the children stayed, or the wives stayed, or the animals stayed, then the Israelites were symbolically acknowledging the legitimate divine sovereignty of the Egyptian state. If they would sacrifice inside Egypt's borders, or at least not too far into the wilderness, then God's claim of total sovereignty would be successfully challenged. If Pharaoh could extract even the tiniest token of symbolic sovereignty, then God's claim to the whole of the lives of all the Israelites would be invalidated. In other words, if Pharaoh, as a self-proclaimed divinity, could extract a sign of his sovereignty from another self-proclaimed divinity, *then neither of them could claim full sovereignty.*

Pharaoh's strategy implicitly admitted that he was not fully sovereign. Full sovereignty had been his initial claim, but the plagues had beaten him down. By now, he was willing to accept partial sovereignty, for that would pull the God of the Israelites down to his level, or at least low enough to re-establish the theology of the continuity of being. He could acknowledge that the God of the Israelites was a powerful God, even more powerful than Pharaoh, *at that point in time*. Both of them would then be gods, both striving to overcome the external world, both with limitations, both willing to deal with each other as sovereign beings possessing the same fundamental being. *This would preserve Egypt's theology of the continuity of being.* This would sanction Pharaoh's position as the highest representative in Egypt of the gods. If Moses would compromise, as the authorized representative of his God, then Pharaoh could achieve a theological victory in principle: the God of the Israelites would thereby cede him lawful authority, in time and on earth, as a full-fledged god, who possessed the right to demand and receive concessions from Israel's God. Had Moses capitulated, with God's acquiescence, Pharaoh would have successfully challenged God's claim of total sovereignty, His claim that He was the only God to whom Israel owed total obedience, and who therefore had the right to demand total sacrifice from His people, leaving no outward symbol of original, primary sovereignty over them for Pharaoh to display.

D. Implicit Statism

Pharaoh, at the end of his attempts to bargain with Moses and

Moses' God, was hoping to extract at least token control over the terms of Israel's sacrifice. He wanted to retain at least one sign of his sovereignty over their worship. If God had capitulated to Pharaoh on this point, He would thereby have acknowledged Pharaoh's lawful authority to grant to the Israelites their right to worship. *The Egyptian state would then have become the earthly, institutional source of religious rights*, because God Himself had been compelled to accede to at least one of the terms Pharaoh had laid down. This would have made the state the final institutional authority on the question of the nature of legitimate worship. *The needs of the state would have become the criteria for external worship*. By extracting from God even the tiniest compromise, this self-proclaimed god of a divine state would have been sanctioned as the *final earthly authority concerning religion*, and also the source of the rights of religion. God would thereby have acknowledged the legitimacy of Egypt's prior claim of lawful authority over the religious affairs of the Israelites. God would thereby have acknowledged the right of Pharaoh to retain at least token authority, which meant the right of Pharaoh and his heirs to compete with God at any time in the future for total authority. The God of the Hebrews might eventually be compelled to give back to the state what the state had originally claimed.

Pharaoh had rejected Moses' initial request because he had believed that he possessed total authority. At each stage, he gave up something, but he never was willing to give up everything. He was willing to relinquish some of his authority temporarily, for as long as God brought the plagues. However, should God change His mind, or lose power, or forget the Israelites, then Pharaoh might be able to re-establish his claim of total sovereignty. Pharaoh viewed this contest as a sort of cosmological "tug of war," in which he retained lawful authority of at least one end of the rope. God might pull him close to the line temporarily, but one end was rightfully his. If God would simply acknowledge Pharaoh's right to his end by allowing him the right to set any of the terms of Hebrew sacrifice, then Pharaoh's case would not be completely destroyed. If he bided his time, the God of the Hebrews might go away, leaving Pharaoh with the whole rope.

If the state can establish a foothold—even a temporary toehold—of autonomous sovereignty, then it has established a lawful claim to as much sovereignty as it can gain through the imposition of raw power. God's claim to absolute, uncompromised sovereignty is successfully challenged by man whenever God is forced to surrender even

token autonomous sovereignty to man. Only if God's sovereignty is absolute can God claim to be the sole source of meaning and power in the universe. It is fallen man's goal to share some of that sovereignty. It is also Satan's goal, even if man becomes, temporarily, the holder of any fraction of this original, autonomous sovereignty, for if Satan can demonstrate that man has any final (or original) sovereignty whatsoever, then God's claim of total sovereignty collapses, which is the very essence of Satan's challenge to God. Satan can collect from man whatever sovereignty man might snatch from God, given the fact of Satan's greater power; but he must first place man in the same continuity of being with God. This attempt is always futile, from Genesis to Revelation.

E. No Compromise

God refused to grant Pharaoh anything. He rejected the seemingly reasonable compromises offered to Him by this self-proclaimed god, this ruler of a supposedly divine state. God hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he might not capitulate and let the Israelites journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to God. Pharaoh is the great historical example in Scripture of Proverbs 21:1: "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Yet Pharaoh was totally responsible for his acts. In great wrath, he challenged God, and God killed the firstborn of Egypt. Then the Egyptians expelled the Israelites in great fear, allowing them not merely a week of freedom to sacrifice to God, but permanent freedom to sacrifice to God. The Egyptians fulfilled God's promise to Moses, that the whole nation of Israel would go free and claim the land of Canaan (Ex. 3:8). God gave them total victory, yet Moses had officially requested only, at most, a week's freedom to sacrifice. However, *this sacrifice was comprehensive*: every man, woman, child, and beast had to go three days' journey into the wilderness.

Pharaoh, unwilling to acknowledge the validity of this claim upon the whole of Israel, because it would have denied absolute sovereignty on his part and on the part of the Egyptian state, resisted unto death. He could not allow Israel a week of freedom, a week of rest, a week in which no tokens of subservience to Egypt's gods would be adhered to by the Israelites. He realized that all the claims of absolute authority on the part of Egypt would be refuted by such a capitulation on his part. Therefore, he hardened his heart, hoping to preserve the theology

of Egypt and the autonomous sovereignty of man. When the Israelites left triumphantly, he lashed out against them, in a suicidal attempt to destroy them or drag them back. God had not compromised with him; the all-or-nothing claim of God could not be sacrificed by some token acknowledgment of lawful Egyptian sovereignty.

Pharaoh recognized the nature of God's total rejection of his claims to divinity, the absolute denial of the continuity of being. God had cut away his claim to divinity in front of his people and the kings of the earth, just as He had promised (Ex. 9:16). Pharaoh preferred to risk his own death, the destruction of his army, and the captivity of Egypt, rather than submit meekly to the triumph of the Israelites. He bet and lost. As such, Pharaoh's experience is archetypal for all the societies of Satan. They all make the same bet; they all lose. The only exception in the Bible was the case of the Gibeonites. They tricked the Israelites into making a covenant with them. By becoming permanent slaves to the Hebrews, they thereby acknowledged the sovereignty of God (Josh. 9).

Conclusion

The state is not absolutely sovereign. There is no divine right of kings, irrespective of what they say or do. There was no way for Moses to deal with Pharaoh on Egypt's terms without compromising the sovereignty of God. Moses refused to compromise. The state is not the source of the right (duty) of religious worship; God is. The state may *acknowledge* the right (duty) of men to worship God by providing a legal code or bill of rights, but the state is not the source of this right. This right cannot be revoked unilaterally by state officials without bringing into play the vengeance of God. To acknowledge the permanent right (duty) of men to sacrifice to God is to acknowledge the comprehensive and absolute sovereignty of God—an original sovereignty, a final sovereignty, and a primary sovereignty, which is all one fundamental sovereignty. *All human sovereignty is secondary; it is a derivative sovereignty.* It is, above all, a completely accountable sovereignty, in terms of which every individual will be judged, and in terms of which every institution is also judged, in time and on earth (Deut. 8; 28).

11

SEPARATION AND DOMINION

But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel (Ex. 11:7).

God announced that there was a radical covenantal difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians. This difference was about to be manifested in a sharp break historically: the exodus. So great was this difference, that no dog would lick its lips (literal translation: sharpen its tongue) at the Hebrews upon their departure from Egypt. No dog would eat any Hebrew, as dogs later ate Jezebel, the result of God's special curse (II Kings 9:36). The Egyptians now respected them and their leader, Moses. "And the LORD gave the people favour in the land of Egypt, in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people" (Ex. 11:3). The meaning was clear: the Hebrews would leave victorious, having seen their enemies so thoroughly defeated, that not one of them would raise a cry against them. No jeering crowds would force them to "run the gauntlet," throwing rocks or garbage at them as they departed. The Egyptians believed in the continuity of being, and Moses had vanquished the representative of Egypt's gods, who himself was believed to be divine. Were not the Hebrews linked to that victorious God, through Moses?

A. Egypt vs. Israel

Consider the exodus from the point of view of a citizen of Egypt or one of the Canaanitic nations. A slave population had successfully challenged the dominant political order of its day. Egypt's wealth and power, even in decline (if Courville's chronology of the dynasties is correct), were recognized throughout the ancient world. Yet Egypt could not bring these Hebrews into submission. The ancient world

viewed a military defeat as a defeat for the gods of the vanquished city-state. What a defeat for the gods of Egypt! A slave population had risen up, under the very noses of the Egyptians, and had smashed the political order. So complete was this victory, that the invading Hyksos (Amalekites) swept over Egypt without encountering military resistance. God had been so victorious over Egypt that His people did not even bother to remain in the land as conquerors. So contemptuous of Egypt were the Hebrews that they marched out, leaving the spoils of war to the Amalekites, who were being replaced in Canaan by the Hebrews.¹ Here was a God so great, that He did not even bother to subdue the land of Egypt. And now, the Canaanites knew, these people were coming for them. Is it any wonder that they trembled for a generation (Josh. 2:9–11)?

The division between Egypt and Israel was assured. The Hebrews could not be tricked back into submission. Egyptians would not be able to subdue them, as vanquished populations sometimes do, by intermarrying, nor would the Hebrews absorb Egyptian religion and culture by intermarrying. The religious and linguistic separation would be maintained permanently, since God was taking them out of Egypt and was preparing to displace the Canaanites. The Canaanites knew what was in store for them (Josh. 2:9–11). Israel took no prisoners (Josh. 6:21). Israel, if the people remained faithful to their God, would annihilate the Canaanites.

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people

1. Immanuel Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952), ch. 2.

that are upon the face of the earth (Deut. 7:1–6).²

There was a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. That difference was God. He had made a covenant with them. They had been a tiny nation; now they would be victorious. They had already been so victorious over Egypt that Egypt's dogs recognized it; they would not lick their chops at Israelites. Yet it had not been their strength which had led them to freedom. "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:7–8). It was God's choice, not theirs, to redeem them—to buy them back by destroying their enemies. It was God's choice when He had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham for his seed. It was God's choice when He had selected Moses as their leader. It was God's choice to harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not compromise and permit the Hebrews to go and sacrifice to their God. God had done it all, and God would continue to do it all, if they remained faithful to His covenant.

God's covenant with Israel was the great dividing sword. It was the dividing line between Israel and Egypt. Israel received its blessings; Egypt received its curse. It was also the dividing line between Israel and the nations of Canaan. It separated Egypt from Israel, and it was to serve as a means of destruction in Canaan. God had separated Israel from Egypt geographically; He planned to separate Israel and the tribes of Canaan biologically: the Canaanites would all die. The Canaanites recognized this, according to Rahab (Josh. 2:9–11).

Among the Hebrews of Moses' day, only Joshua and Caleb recognized the commitment of God to give His people total victory, in time and in Canaan (Num. 14).³ The Hebrews of Moses' era did not recog-

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 17. It should be obvious that pacifism as a moral philosophy has no support in the Bible. The same God who was incarnate in Jesus Christ ordered the Hebrews to annihilate the Canaanites. Any discussion by God-fearing people of the legitimacy of warfare from a biblical standpoint must begin with a consideration and moral acceptance of these verses.

3. A similar incident took place a millennium and a half later, when the Jews and Romans had a stone rolled across Jesus' tomb, in order to keep His disciples from taking His body and claiming that His prophecy concerning His resurrection had been fulfilled; meanwhile, the disciples scattered to the winds in self-imposed defeat.

nize the inevitability of their impending victory. They had not recognized the nature of their victory over the Egyptians. They did not understand the nature of the God who had given them freedom, nor did they understand the nature of the ethical covenant which He had set before them. They had to serve Him continuously. They chose to serve other gods intermittently. They were supposed to exercise dominion continuously. They chose to exercise dominion intermittently. They were supposed to be victorious continuously. They were defeated intermittently.

B. The Covenant and Separation

The covenant is the means by which God separates His people from the world. It is supposed to be the means by which his people bring the world into conformity with biblical law. He shows grace to His people and gives them the tool of dominion, His law-order. This separation finally results in the *permanent separation* between God and His enemies, on the day of judgment. *Eternity is marked by this covenantal separation.*

God separated His people from the surrounding cultures in the Old Testament era. He separated Noah from the pre-flood world. He separated Abram from both Ur of the Chaldees and Haran. He separated Israel from Canaan during Israel's sojourn in Egypt. He separated Israel from Egypt's masses by putting them in Goshen. He separated Israel from Egypt completely at the time of the exodus. All of these separations were essentially separations from pagan gods and pagan cultures. But these separations did not imply retreat and impotence. These separations were established by God in *Israel's history* in order to give God's people confidence concerning Israel's future. The *covenantal separation from other nations* established the possibility and the requirement of *Israel's dominion* over those nations. Israel wiped out most of the Canaanites, and Israel was supposed to wipe out, or drive out, all of them. *God had prepared for His people a new training ground, a type of paradise, a land flowing with milk and honey (covenant feast), which pointed back to the garden of Eden and forward to the new heavens and new earth.* This land had been cleared of wild beasts, except for relatively few of them (Ex. 23:28–29), and Israel's victory cleared the land of most of the wild cultures.⁴ It was to have been a

4. Joshua 10:21 reads: "And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Mekkedah in peace: none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel." Lit-

theological, cultural, and political *clean sweep*. Israel was to take the land by force, and this land was to become the base of operations in a mighty conquest, fueled by a population explosion and compound economic growth, which was to have carried God's dominion across the face of the earth. To fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant, God's redeemed people must separate themselves ethically from Satan's unredeemed people.

The separation of God's people from ethical rebels is a permanent separation. Heaven does not eventually fuse with hell. The new heavens and the new earth do not eventually merge into the lake of fire. The residents of the new heavens and new earth rule eternally (Rev. 21; 22); the residents of the lake of fire are subjected to endless defeat (Rev. 20:14–15). The people of God are separated from the ethical rebels on a permanent basis after the final judgment, and this final separation brings with it *absolute dominion*. It is the final victory of God over Satan, and it involves the permanent dominion of man over the creation. The rebels are killed, for they suffer the second, permanent death (Rev. 20:14). *Covenantal separation therefore implies covenantal dominion*.

This necessary relationship was never meant to be postponed until the day of judgment. It is supposed to be progressively worked out, in time and on earth.⁵ *God's separation* of Abram from his people, of Abraham's seed from the other nations, of Israel from Egypt, and of Israel from all the religious traditions of Canaan, all required *action by His covenanted people, in time and on earth*. Abram left Ur and Haran, and he circumcised Isaac. Similarly, Moses challenged Pharaoh. Israel did not stay in Egypt. Israel did not wander in the wilderness forever. *Israel fought and won, in history, in terms of God's separating covenant, which is a dominion covenant*. These mighty acts of God were designed to convince Israel of the necessity of remaining true to the covenant. The prophets kept returning to these historical acts of God in the life of Israel, especially the delivery from Egypt (I Sam. 8:8; Isa. 11:16; Jer. 2:6; Hos. 13:4). So did Stephen in his sermon (Acts 7). *Men's separation from Satan and his works is to bring them dominion over Satan and his works*: in politics, economics, military affairs, art, medi-

erally, this can be translated: "Not (he) sharpened (his) tongue against a man." It seems to refer back to Exodus 11:7, meaning that no Israelites died in battle.

5. I use this phrase repeatedly in my writings. It refers to human history prior to the second coming of Christ at the final judgment) and therefore prior to the establishment of a sin-free world after the resurrection. It is easier to use the phrase than continually search for substitute phrases.

cine, science, and every other area of human action.

C. Ancient Humanism's Separation

Basic to many of the ancient cultures was the distinction between "the people," the group to which a citizen belonged, and "the others," or "barbarians," who were outside the covenantal membership. Egypt was no exception. Wilson commented: "In their feeling of special election and special providence, the Egyptians called themselves 'the people' in contrast to foreigners."⁶ So deeply embedded in Greek and Roman thought was the division between peoples, that classical legal theory recognized no common law within the city.⁷ Fustel wrote:

No one could become a citizen at Athens, if he was a citizen in another city; for it was a religious impossibility to be at the same time a member of two cities, as it also was to be a member of two families. One could not have two religions at the same time. . . . Neither at Rome nor at Athens could a foreigner be a proprietor. He could not marry; or, if he married, his marriage was not recognized, and his children were reputed illegitimate. He could not make a contract with a citizen; at any rate, the law did not recognize such a contract as valid. . . . The Roman law forbade him to inherit from a citizen, and even forbade a citizen to inherit from him. They pushed this principle so far, that if a foreigner obtained the rights of a citizen without his son, born before this event, obtaining the same favor, the son became a foreigner in regard to his father, and could not inherit from him. The distinction between citizen and foreigner was stronger than the natural tie between father and son.⁸

There was also the linguistic difference. The very term "barbarian" has its origins in Greek grammar. The Greeks spoke Greek, of course, while foreigners' languages all sounded like "bar bar"—incoherent, in other words. This, at least, is the standard explanation of the term, and it is repeated by the influential British historian of classical culture, H. D. F. Kitto, in the introduction to his book, *The Greeks* (1951). Both Kitto and C. M. Bowra argued that "barbarian" did not have a pejorative sense in Homer, but later the term came to mean inferior status.⁹

6. John A. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt: An Interpretation of Ancient Egyptian Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1951] 1967), p. 112.

7. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Bk. III, ch. XI, pp. 192–93.

8. *Ibid.*, III:xii, pp. 196–97.

9. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, [1951] 1962), pp. 8–

Gilbert Murray, whose *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (1925) is regarded as a classic, said that we can mark the origin of classical Greece with the advent of the cultural distinction between the Greek and the barbarian, when the Greek historian Herodotus could write that “the Hellenic race was marked off from the barbarian, as more intelligent and more emancipated from silly nonsense.”¹⁰ By the middle of the fifth century, B.C., the difference between Greek and barbarian, in the minds of the Greeks, was enormous.

We see the linguistic origin of the word “barbarian” in Paul’s comments on tongues in the church. “Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me” (I Cor. 14:11). Again, in Romans 1:14: “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians. . . .” Paul, however, did not distinguish between Greeks and barbarians in terms of their innate differences, but only in terms of linguistic differences.

D. The Ethical Disunity of Man

The unity of man, which was assumed and announced architecturally at the tower of Babel, had been shattered by God when He confounded their language and scattered them. God’s restraint on the creation of a one-state world brought freedom to men—freedom to develop personally and culturally. Yet it also brought audible distinctions between men. Linguistic distinctions, at least in literate cultures, resist alterations, and even when linguistic changes occur, the written records of the past draw men’s thoughts and commitment back to a once-distinct past. It was no accident that the perceived international unity of the Roman Catholic Church was maintained for centuries by the Latin Mass, and it was also not accidental that the historically unprecedented disruptions within that church, which took place from the mid-1960s onward, were intimately related to the successful efforts of the church’s religious liberals in abolishing the use of the Latin Mass.

Religious humanists sometimes have attacked this kind of division between men. Ludwig Feuerbach was one example. His book, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), created a sensation, and converted a

10; C. M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (New York: Mentor, [1957] 1964), p. 26.

10. Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1925] 1955), p. 38.

whole generation of European intellectuals to atheism. Frederick Engels, Marxism's co-founder, remarked once that "One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians."¹¹ In this book, Feuerbach attacked Christianity's concept of saved and lost. Such a view of man separates men from other men. Yet man is a unified whole, a species being. In fact, Feuerbach said, God is really nothing more than man's own thoughts, projected into the religious consciousness of men. "God is the human being; but he presents himself to the religious consciousness as a distinct being."¹² The Christian denies that man is God, and this is unforgivable. Even worse, Christians say that some men will be saved by God, and others will not be saved. "To believe, is synonymous with goodness; not to believe, with wickedness. Faith, narrow and prejudiced, refers all unbelief to the moral disposition. In its view the unbeliever is an enemy to Christ out of obduracy, out of wickedness. Hence faith has fellowship with believers only; unbelievers it rejects. It is well-disposed towards believers, but ill-disposed towards unbelievers. *In faith there lies a malignant principle.*"¹³

Marx and Engels, his most famous converts, rejected Feuerbach's brand of non-divisive humanism. They saw the "illusion" of God as a product of a deliberate lie: a weapon used by capitalists to suppress the proletariat. The problem is class divisions; the solution is class warfare, with the proletariat finally emerging victorious over the bourgeoisie.¹⁴ They called for unconditional surrender by the bourgeoisie; they called for all-out warfare. They predicted absolute victory. They saw that true victory over evil involves triumph, in time and on earth.¹⁵ They saw that there must be a self-awareness on the part of the "vanguard" of history, the proletariat, concerning the irreconcilable differences between them and their class enemies, the bourgeoisie.¹⁶ They substi-

11. Frederick Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy" (1888), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1969] 1977), III, p. 344.

12. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1841] 1957), p. 247.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 252. Emphasis in original.

14. Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (1848), in *Selected Works*, I, pp. 125–26.

15. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010).

16. "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent

tuted the forces of dialectical, materialistic history for the providence of God, thereby preserving *an eschatology of victory*.¹⁷ They saw that there must be separation in order to achieve victory. To that extent, Marxism adheres to a humanistic variant of a fundamental doctrine of the Bible. It is one reason why the Marxists have been so successful in promoting their imitation gospel in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

It was Israel's continuing refusal to break with the theology and culture of Egypt as such which condemned that first generation to a life of wandering in the wilderness. It was not the covenantal separation from Egypt which resulted in Israel's wilderness journey. God did not bring Israel into the wilderness to die. This was the accusation of the rebels against Moses, time after time (Ex. 14:11–12; 16:3), so they all died in the wilderness. Their children, led by Joshua and Caleb—two men who had understood the nature of God and His covenant—took possession of the land. It was Satan's lie that covenantal separation from "establishment civilization"—first from Egypt, and later from the remains of the Canaanitic cultures meant historical defeat and impotence for Israel. This same lie was one of the most important factors in Satan's success against the church in the twentieth century. Whenever this lie becomes the dominant opinion among God's covenanted people, they can expect to die in the wilderness, just as the complainers and defeatists of Moses' day also died in the wilderness.

Christians must also recognize that *the defeat of complainers and defeatists in one generation does not necessarily condemn the next generation to a similar defeat*. When men recognize the optimistic nature of God's separating covenant, and when they seek to work out the terms of God's law-order in their various spheres of influence and responsibility, they will discover the impotence of God's enemies, even as Joshua and 85-year-old Caleb discovered it. Their *separation by God* implies their *victory with God*, in eternity but also in history. Fur-

movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air." *Communist Manifesto*, in *ibid.*, I, p. 118.

17. F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology: A Christian Philosophical Analysis of the Post-Capitalistic Views of Marx, Engels, and Lenin* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1974).

thermore, with respect to the enemies of God, their *separation from God* leads directly to their *defeat by God*, not only throughout eternity, but in time and on earth. Their eventual defeat by the people of God—those who honor the terms of God’s separating covenant—in time and on earth is an earnest (down payment) of their coming eternal defeat. *Without biblical law, men become progressively impotent culturally.*¹⁸

When God separates His people from the world by means of His separating covenant, He provides them with the means of external victory, not simply their individualistic internal victory over personal sin. As God progressively separates His people in terms of their conformity to His law, He thereby gives them their tool of dominion.

The dogs of Egypt had more understanding of this fact than did the fleeing slaves of Moses’ day. The dogs of Egypt had a better understanding of the implications of God’s covenantal partition than fundamentalism’s hordes of self-proclaimed experts in biblical prophecy. The dogs of Egypt may have whetted their tongues, but if they ate anyone, it was dead Egyptians, not dead Hebrews.

18. Gary North, “Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Winter 1976–77). Cf. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

12

DISCONTINUITY AND CONTINUITY IN SOCIAL CHANGE

And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover (Ex. 12:10–11).

The theocentric principle here is the centrality of God's deliverance of His people in history. Deliverance is always hierarchical: God delivers His people. This is point two of the biblical covenant model: *hierarchy*.¹ The deliverance of the exodus was a manifestation of the principle of discontinuity, which is an application of the biblical doctrine of *sanctions*: point four of the biblical covenant model.²

A. Social Progress

Any social philosophy that does not contain an explicit concept of social progress is incapable of producing the kinds of cultural transformations that are required by the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).³ Without faith in the possibility of escape from an individual's familiar failures in the present, a person has no legitimate hope in the future. Extending this principle of faith from the individual to the social order, without a belief in the possibility of social progress, people are left without one of the fundamental motivating factors necessary for

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Sutton, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

building and maintaining a civilization.⁴ Faith in the possibility of both personal and social deliverance *in* history, as well as final deliverance *out of* history, must be widespread if history is ever to be re-shaped by the gospel, as required by the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).⁵ *There is no neutral safety zone for sin or sinners anywhere in time and on earth. Redemption is comprehensive.*⁶

Is social progress possible? If so, is it attained through a series of revolutions, or is it marked by slow, organic change? In short, is progress discontinuous or continuous? Or is it some mixture of the two? This fundamental question has divided social philosophers in Western history.⁷ This question was the crucial philosophical dividing line between the revolutionaries of France in 1789–94 and the conservative doctrines of Edmund Burke.⁸ Modern conservatism can be dated from the publication of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The question of continuity vs. revolution was also the heart of the 150-year dispute between Marxism and all non-revolutionary social philosophies.⁹

The Bible provides the basis of the correct answer to this fundamental social question. The key factor is *ethics*: point three of the biblical covenant model.¹⁰ But ethics in biblical theology is always linked to God's *sanctions*, both in history (Deut. 28)¹¹ and eternity (Rev. 20). Whether a society experiences long-term progress or catastrophic external judgments that produce discontinuous social change depends on the ethical condition of those who compose the society, especially

4. See Robert A. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), especially the Epilogue.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

6. Gary North, "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology of Social Action," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer 1981). Reprinted in Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

7. It was not a topic of discussion in classical philosophy, for neither the Greeks nor the Romans believed in long-term progress. They debated the nature of social change, but not social progress.

8. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: from Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), ch. 2; Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers: Community and Conflict in Western Thought* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973), pp. 265–80.

9. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnmror>)

10 Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3.

11. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

the religious and political leaders.

The Book of Exodus provides the archetype of all discontinuous social events, which is why the story of the exodus initially appeals to revolutionaries, “liberation theologians,” and other proponents of humanistic confrontations between “the exploited poor” and the “exploiting rich.”¹² But the revelational ethical framework that the Bible presents gives no support for the dreams and schemes of social revolutionaries.

B. Promise and Deliverance

To understand the biblical concept of social change, we must understand the theology of Passover.

God promised to pass over all the households in Egypt that had blood sprinkled on the doorposts (Ex. 12:13). He would allow the destroyer (Ex. 12:23) to enter all other homes, bringing death to the first-born male of both man and beast.¹³ This was the *avenger of blood*, who was about to avenge the land of Egypt for the pollution caused by the murder of the Hebrew males at least 80 years before.¹⁴ Any family that did not acknowledge its need for a sacrificial substitute would make its sacrifice with its firstborn son. There was no escape from this sacrifice; it was only a question of *which kind of firstborn sacrifice* a family would choose to offer to God: human or animal.

The Egyptians chose to cling to their faith in Pharaoh’s divinity, in the hope that this final plague would not come upon them. Not one Egyptian family took its stand with the God of the Hebrews, “for there

12. The anti-capitalist Christian social critic Ronald Sider wrote this: “The God of the Bible cares when people enslave and oppress others. At the Exodus he acted to end economic oppression and bring freedom to slaves. . . . The Exodus was certainly the decisive event in the creation of the chosen people. We distort the biblical interpretation of this momentous occasion. unless we see that at this pivotal point, the Lord of the universe was at work correcting oppression and liberating the poor.” Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), pp. 60–61. The book was a best-seller.

13. This destroyer may have been an angel, possibly the angel of the Lord. Hebrews 11:28 personifies the destroying agent: “he that destroyed,” in the King James Version; “the destroying/one” in the Greek. James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: James Publications, [1868] 1976), p. 128.

14. The avenger of blood was the judge of all the inhabitants of Egypt, including the Hebrews and the mixed multitude. He was avenging the land at last for the murder of the Hebrew infant males, who had been drowned in the Nile (Ex. 1:22). The first judgment had been against the Nile, turning it into blood (Ex. 7:17–21). Now the death of the firstborn male children would cleanse the land of its pollution.

was not a house where there was not one dead" (Ex. 12:30b). Once again, the gods of Egypt failed them. God had executed judgment upon all the gods of Egypt, including the Pharaoh, the self-proclaimed divine-human link on earth.

The Egyptians had seen Pharaoh fail to protect the nation; plague after plague came upon them, yet they did not recognize the imminence and inescapability of this final judgment. Egypt had long seemed immune to foreign invasion and foreign domination; now the slaves of Egypt would alone be protected from judgment. Goshen, the home of God's people, would alone receive protection, but only because of the willingness of these people to recognize judgment and take steps to avoid it.¹⁵

The Hebrews had been in Egypt for at least two centuries. They had worked on Egypt's monuments and cities for at least two generations. The Egyptians expected this slave population to remain subservient on a permanent basis. So did most of the members of that population. God's promise to Abraham had been forgotten. Even with Moses' words before them, and the Passover meal required of them, they did not really expect deliverance. "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual" (Ex. 12:39). They had prepared no food for the journey. Why had they made no preparations for their imminent journey? The answer seems obvious: *they really did not expect God's overnight deliverance*. The Passover ceremony pointed to just such a deliverance, but they did not really believe it. They did what they were instructed by Moses and Aaron (Ex. 12:50), but no more. *Their religion was a minimal religion*, as their actions demonstrated repeatedly for the next 40 years.

After at least two centuries in Egypt, the Hebrews had grown accustomed to their environment. The envy of the Hebrews against

15. It could be objected that God never did offer a way of escape to the Egyptians. There is no explicit evidence that God did tell them of the blood on the doorposts, but there is little doubt that Egypt's representatives by this time were monitoring everything the Hebrews did or said. They must have known. These people were not ignorant of God's law; they had been placed under the administration of Joseph two centuries before. Also, the confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh indicate that Pharaoh knew exactly the crimes Egypt had committed against the Hebrews. Finally, I argue that the free offer of the gospel must not be denied: John Murray, "The Free Offer of the Gospel," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), IV, pp. 113–32.

Moses 40 years earlier had kept them in bondage, for they had not been content to be judged by Moses. They had preferred to bring Moses low, even though this meant that their Egyptian rulers would remain dominant over them. They had been willing to remain slaves rather than risk standing up with the young Moses. When Moses returned to challenge Pharaoh, their sons complained bitterly to Moses that his troublemaking had brought new burdens upon them (Ex. 5:21). They preferred to trust the continuing tyranny of Egypt rather than trust the promise of God or His servants, Moses and Aaron. *They put their faith in the Egyptian state rather than God.* To that extent, they agreed with the religion of their captors. As Joshua warned their children, “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD” (Josh. 24:14). Notice the words, “in sincerity and in truth”; they are important for understanding the apostle Paul’s references to unleavened bread, discussed below.

The familiarity of present troubles makes men hesitate to seek risky improvements in their condition. The risks of change seem too high, and the benefits seem too few or too far removed. Men choose today’s horrors in preference to tomorrow’s unfamiliar problems, even if those problems will be accompanied with the personal freedom to deal with them. *Personal responsibility is too great a burden for slaves.* The slave becomes passive toward his environment, content to accept what the world brings, so long as he can avoid life’s hard decisions. What keeps slaves in bondage, even when freedom is possible? *Their willingness to put up with a harsh environment, just so long as it is a familiar one that brings few opportunities for personal initiative and therefore personal responsibility.* Joseph was in bondage, but he did not evade responsibility. Such a slave usually does not remain in bondage permanently, for he is not mentally a slave. The willingness of some men to bear the burdens of responsible choice eventually makes them too valuable, or too powerful, for their masters to keep in servitude. *Fully responsible men are difficult to enslave.*

The Hebrews preferred low-risk institutional continuity. They preferred a life of little or no personal responsibility. This was a great asset for their masters, who could then devote more of their resources to things other than the suppression of rebellion. Fewer taskmasters and guards were needed, for the prisoners were docile. Even after their deliverance, that generation continued to complain to Moses about the

rigors and dangers of the wilderness, despite the fact that God provided them with manna, clothing that never wore out, and feet that did not swell or blister (Deut. 8:3–4;¹⁶ Neh. 9:21).

Unquestionably, institutional continuity under most conditions is a valid goal in life. We want marital continuity when we exchange vows with our mates. We want continuity in our legal system, so that when we drive at the posted speed limit, for example, we are not issued a traffic citation by a police officer who has autonomously and arbitrarily made up new rules. At the same time, most of us want our marriages to develop, since maturity is basic to a successful life. And if we find that the existing speed limit is no longer adequate to protect life and limb, then we want legal procedures for having the speed limit changed. Therefore, *institutional continuity should be understood in terms of a framework of potential change*, except for changes in certain areas that are governed by God's Bible-revealed law. Even here, God reserves the right to make changes in His laws, or suspend external judgment for a time. A good example is God's retroactive suspension of a law that prohibited Passover to ritually unsanctified Hebrews. Because some members of the nation under Hezekiah had not been ritually purified when they ate the Passover,¹⁷ Hezekiah prayed that they be forgiven. God healed them retroactively, thereby overlooking the written requirements of the Mosaic law (II Chr. 30:17–20).¹⁸ If we seek the continuity of the Medes and the Persians, where the king's word was absolutely inviolable, then we may face potential disasters, as Darius did when he was forced to sentence Daniel to the lions' den (Dan. 6:14). Life's conditions change, and men's survival and prosperity depend on quick and competent reactions to changed conditions. Static continuity—the complete predictability of a familiar and dependable future—is an illegitimate goal. It is the world of the grave.

C. Structure and Change

We are here dealing with the inescapable problem of structure and

16. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 18.

17. The nature of this lack of purification is not stated.

18. The priests had begun to cleanse the temple in the first month of the first year of his reign, which was also Passover month. Passover had to be celebrated by the fourteenth day, but they did not complete the cleansing of the temple until the sixteenth (II Chr. 29:17). It was too late to celebrate Passover normally. But the second month was legitimate for travellers or people defiled by a dead body on the normal day of Passover (Num. 9:9–11). Hezekiah called for the Passover to be celebrated the next month, but all of the people were still not purified.

change, which is a variation of the traditional philosophical problem, the one (structure, unity) and the many (change, diverse conditions). Men want predictable law and predictable environments, yet they do not want to be strangled by our laws or our environment. In every science, in every field of human thought, we face the problem of structure and change, of law and flux.¹⁹

In the field of modern historiography, scholars tend to be divided into two camps: the revolutionists and the consensus historians.²⁰ One group sees man's history as a series of revolutions, or at least major conflicts. Karl Marx is perhaps the most prominent of the revolutionists; he was a proponent of violent revolution. "Revolutions are the locomotives of history," he wrote.²¹ Yet revolutions take place within *a framework of continuity*. They do not totally destroy the past. In contrast to the revolutionists are the consensus historians, who see history in terms of progress by means of agreement and compromise: social evolution.

The conservative American sociologist Robert Nisbet articulated a theory of social change that opposes both social revolutionism and social evolutionism as valid explanations of "inevitable" historical development. "That things should continue in time, persist, hold stable, is not to be doubted. Given such persistence, changes, however far apart, however random, discrete, and disconnected they may be in themselves, are nonetheless given the semblance of a continuity by the persisting identity itself—by the persisting kinship system, social class, religion, or whatever it may be. But, as a moment's reflection tells us, there is no continuity of change here; only continuity in the sense of persistence, punctuated, however, by the changes which occur from time to time."²² Without a consensus against which revolutionaries can

19. I used a chemistry textbook in college called *Structure and Change*, by Gordon S. Christiansen and Paul Garrett (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1960). The problem is basic to every academic discipline.

20. See, for example, *Conflict or Consensus in American History*, ed. Allen F. Davis and Harold D. Woodman (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1966). They wrote in the introduction: "Has there been real conflict in American history between classes, sections, and interest groups, or has the story of the American past been primarily one of general agreement or consensus? This theme, expressed either explicitly or implicitly, may be found in virtually all major interpretations of our country's past" (p. vii). Cf. James P. Young (ed.), *Consensus and Conflict: Readings in American Politics* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972).

21. Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850" (1850); in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1969] 1977), I, p. 277.

22. Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of*

rebel, all revolutions would become mere chaos, without meaning or direction.²³

In contrast to the revolutionists, consensus historians are defenders of the idea of continuity. Wherever they look, they cannot find "true" revolutions: the industrial revolution really was too slow to be called a revolution, as was the agricultural revolution, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and possibly even the Russian Revolution. Because every revolution retains elements from the past, it is possible to focus on the elements that have remained stable, and then conclude that the supposed revolutions, in and of themselves, really do not change societies very much in the long run. "The more things change, the more things stay the same," says a French proverb.

Then when is a revolution *really* a revolution?

D. Ethical Continuity

Pharaoh did not really grasp the revolutionary nature of the crisis he was facing. He believed in the continuity of being between his own nature and the power gods of Egypt. He therefore believed in the eternality of Egyptian power. These upstart Hebrews, he knew, could be brought to heel. Their God was not really a totally sovereign being. Their God was not really able to deliver them out of his hand.

To a great extent, the Hebrew slaves shared his view. They also did not believe that Moses was representing a sovereign God who would deliver them from bondage. Not even after the plagues on Egypt had brought their Egyptian masters low did they believe that their external conditions would change. *Institutional continuity* was still dominant in their thinking, for *ontological continuity between God and man* was

Development (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 288–89.

23. Gunther Stent, a molecular biologist, commented on this problem with respect to artistic revolutions. They are eventually self-defeating, he argued. "As artistic evolution unfolds, the artist is being freed more and more from strict canons governing the method of working his medium of creative expression. The end result of this evolution has been that, finally, in our time, the artist's liberation has been almost total. However, the artist's accession to near-total freedom of expression now presents very great cognitive difficulties for the appreciation of his work: The absence of recognizable canons reduces his act of creation to near-randomness for the perceiver. In other words, artistic evolution along the one-way street to freedom embodies an element of self-limitation. The greater the freedom already attained and hence the closer the approach to the random of any artistic style for the percipient, the less possible for any successor style to seem significantly different from its predecessor." Stent, *The Coming of the Golden Age: A View of the End of Progress* (Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, published for the American Museum of Natural History, 1969), p. 98.

still dominant in their thinking. They trusted more in the theocratic power of Egypt's gods than they did in the God of Moses. They believed that they would still remain slaves in Egypt, as their fathers had been. And if the gods of Egypt were what Pharaoh claimed, then there could never be a radical break with the past.

The history of the patriarchs should have warned them against such a view of history. The creation was itself an incomparably radical break—a break into history, or better stated, the advent of history out of nothing. The creation of the species, the creation of Adam, and the creation of Eve were all radical breaks. Adam's rebellion was a break, and the signs of that break are with men still, since the creation labors under a curse (Gen. 3:17–18;²⁴ Rom. 8:19–22²⁵). The flood in Noah's day was a startling break with the past—a clean sweep of unimaginable proportions. The scattering at Babel, the calling of Abraham, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the famine of Joseph's day were all discontinuities in history.

On the one hand, *historical continuity is guaranteed by the transcendent plan (decree) of God over history*, which is unshakable in its permanence. Because of the centrality of biblical law and its sanctions, *historical continuity rests on ethical continuity*. Men and societies are totally responsible before God, who sustains the entire creation and whose decree is inescapable. On the other hand, actual historical events are sometimes sharp breaks from the historical continuities that preceded the breaks.

Passover was meant to teach the Israelites three things: (1) God judges kings and commoners in terms of His law and its historical sanctions; (2) the foundation of human freedom and human progress is ethical; (3) God's grace delivers His people. This raises two fundamental questions. First, which divinity will men worship, God or some idolatrous representation of another god, either natural or supernatural? Second, which law-order will men attempt to conform to, God's or some idol's?²⁶ The continuity that relates covenantal faithfulness to institutional blessings (Deut. 8:18;²⁷ 28:1–14²⁸) is contrasted with the institutional discontinuities produced by God's judgment against ethical

24. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 12.

25. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

26. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American History* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993).

27. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

28. *Ibid.*, ch. 71.

rebellion (Deut. 8:19–20;²⁹ 28:15–68). The exodus was the archetypal event in Israel's history that revealed the relationship between faithfulness and institutional continuity, and also the relationship between ethical rebellion and institutional discontinuity.

E. Passover: Deliverance and Conquest

When Moses announced to his people that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was about to lead them out of bondage, they did not believe it. They had lost their faith in God's providence, which necessarily involves a concept of cosmic personalism.³⁰ God had given a promise to Abraham, their patriarch. That promise involved the unfolding of history. But the promised unfolding was not a garment without wrinkles. It was inevitable, but it involved visible alterations of historical patterns. The years spent in captivity were not normative. The years spent under the gods of Egypt were not to become static standards for future events. God told them that He was about to shake the very foundations of Egypt. Just as He had promised, they were about to be led into the land of Canaan. The famine had driven the Hebrews into Egypt in Joseph's day; now God would lead them out.

1. *Discontinuity and Redemption*

They had to be *driven* out. The Egyptians implored them to leave on the night of the death of the firstborn. "And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men" (Ex. 12:33). These slaves might otherwise have remained in Egypt; indeed, they later begged Moses to allow them to return to Egypt (Num. 14:3). The plagues were brought to Egypt not merely to convince the Egyptian Pharaoh to allow the Hebrews to go and sacrifice for a week. They were not imposed merely to convince the Egyptians to let the Hebrews leave permanently. They were imposed as a means of *making it impossible for the Hebrews to stay right where they were, in a position of irresponsible subservience to foreign gods*. The plagues forced the Hebrews out of Egypt and into the wilderness.

Passover was designed to impress the Hebrews of Moses' day, as well as all succeeding generations of Hebrews, with the stark reality of *rapid historical change in a culture that comes under the visible judg-*

29. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

30. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 1.

ment of God. They were to eat unleavened bread. There was no time for the yeast to do its work: unleavened bread was the only kind allowed. Unleavened bread is quicker to bake. Everything about Passover pointed to *haste*: the unleavened bread, the roasted lamb that was to be completely consumed by morning, and even the eating: “And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’s passover” (Ex. 12:11). Everything in Passover pointed to God’s deliverance of His people from bondage—literally, an *overnight deliverance*. The lamb was consumed in one night. The people were to stand, staffs in their hand, shoes on their feet, ready to march. *Ready to march*: out of Ur, out of Haran, out of Sodom, out of Egypt, and into the Promised Land. God’s people were to celebrate a feast as an army celebrates a victory, for their feast pointed to the coming victory—over Egypt, over Canaan, and especially over sin (Eph. 6:10–18). It was a pre-victory feast, celebrated before marching orders were officially given.

Passover reminds all future generations of God’s people of *the miraculous discontinuity of God’s redemption in history*. God passed over the houses of the Hebrews, and the destroyer passed through the houses of His enemies, taking as a lawful sacrifice the firstborn. Then Israel passed through the Red Sea and finally through the Jordan River. Had they remained faithful to God, they would have passed through the wilderness in much less than 40 years. *When God “passes through” a rebellious culture, judgment is at hand.* The Hebrews became instruments of His judgment in Canaan.

2. Marching Orders

The Passover feast was to remind them of both life and death. It was to remind them of *the need for immediate marching at the command of God*. There was no time to waste. A shattering of Egypt’s foundations was about to begin. The Israelites were being called out of Egypt. Yet this also meant one of two things: being *called into the wilderness* for the remainder of their lives, or being *called into Canaan*. Leaving meant going. Going where? The wilderness or the Promised Land? *We can never leave without going*. Even our departure from the world demands that we travel to a final destination: the new heavens and new earth, or the lake of fire. (Heaven and hell are “holding areas” or “embarkation points,” not permanent resting places: Rev. 20:12–14.) The Hebrews knew what leaving Egypt meant: *a radical break with*

their immediate past and all of its familiar aspects—a break that would inaugurate a new era of personal responsibility. Their complaints in the wilderness demonstrated that they preferred not to remain there, and their refusal to enter the land of Canaan immediately indicated that they chose not to go there, either.³¹ They preferred “Canaan at zero price.” They could not get God to agree on the price they were willing to pay. Yet God would not permit them to return to Egypt. It was Moses’ pleading on their behalf that kept them from departing from this world immediately—the obvious alternative for this complaining nation (Ex. 32:9–14).

Passover necessarily pointed to *conquest*. They could not leave Egypt without marching to war. Passover pointed to a new life) and this new life requires *full personal responsibility before God*. It pointed to *dominion*. The land of Canaan had to be subdued by military force if God’s promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled. The Passover feast was to be eaten in haste, for God was about to mobilize an army, where only 70 lineal heirs and their households had come down into Egypt two centuries before. Egypt had served as a recruiting depot; the wilderness came to serve as boot camp; and the army, under Joshua, won the battle.

The Hebrews believed Moses enough to sprinkle the blood and eat the Passover feast. That is all God required of them in order for them to avoid making the costly sacrifice that the Egyptians paid. Yet the Hebrew slaves did not believe Moses beyond that minimal commitment. They did not believe they could escape through the Red Sea. They did not believe they would find food and water in the wilderness. They did not believe they could defeat the cities of Canaan. They did not truly believe that Egypt, with all its tyranny, was really that terrible. They believed only that God would take their firstborn if they refused to participate, and that was sufficient. Their children, whom they did not sacrifice to God’s wrath, became the firstfruits in the wilderness; it was they who conquered Canaan. The firstborn sons were preserved by the ritual conformity of their parents’ minimal covenantal faithfulness. The parents did not save anything else. Their faith extended this far, and no farther; that was also the limit of their blessing. *God kept*

31. It could be argued that the Israelites simply feared to enter Canaan, but they did not specifically choose not to go in. This argument is misleading. The concept of choice necessarily involves selection among alternatives. It involves giving up one set of conditions in exchange for another set. The Israelites chose not to exchange the perceived safety of wandering in the wilderness for the perceived danger of confronting the people of Canaan in battle. In short, they chose not to enter Canaan.

them alive in the wilderness for the sake of their children. The covenant blood line was preserved (Gen. 49:10), and the tribes were preserved. Their own skins were preserved, but only to rot after death in the wilderness they dreaded.

God had called an army into battle that was not ready to fight. All it was ready to do was to save its firstborn and then leave, under the intense pressure of their former captors.

F. The Peace Treaty

The New Testament Passover is Christ (I Cor. 5:7). When Christ celebrated Passover, He sat down with the disciples (Luke 22:14). They did not stand with staffs in their hands, ready to march out of Egypt and into Canaan. They had at last arrived; they could rest in confidence.³² Christ's sacrifice transferred all power to Himself (Matt. 28:18).³³ Those who drink His cup and eat His bread are *judges and ambassadors* (Eph. 6:20). "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29–30). *The world has been conquered in principle*: "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b).

God's judges carry His law to the defeated kingdoms of Satan, just as they carried His law to Israel in the years before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.³⁴ The new Israel, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), is to be

32. Alfred Edersheim, the late-nineteenth-century historian, reported that even before Christ's celebration of the Last Supper, the Hebrews had abandoned the original Passover requirement that they remain standing. "As the guests gathered around the Paschal table, they came no longer, as at the first celebration, with their 'loins girded,' with shoes on their feet, and a staff in their hand—that is, as travellers waiting to take their departure. On the contrary, they were arrayed in their best festive garments, joyous and at rest, as became children of a king. To express this idea the Rabbis also insisted that the Paschal Supper—or at least part of it—must be eaten in that recumbent position with which we are familiar from the New Testament. 'For,' say they, 'they use this leaning posture, as free men do, in memorial of their freedom.' And, again, 'Because it is the manner of slaves to eat standing, therefore now they eat sitting and leaning, in order to show that they have been delivered from bondage into freedom.'" Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministries and Services* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1874] 1975), p. 234.

33. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

34. For a grim account of the fall of Jerusalem, see the primary source document written by Josephus, a Hebrew zealot who defected to the invading Roman army before defection became impossible. *Wars of the Jews*, Books V and VI, in Josephus, *Collected Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, [1960] 1977).

judged by the law (Rom. 2:12). But, as an army that in principle has already conquered, this new Israel must sit in judgment of the world. *The whole world is Canaan now, and Christ announced His victory over it.* As judges, in time and on earth, Christians are to make manifest that victory by imposing the terms of the treaty of the great King.³⁵ *Armies stand*, for they must be ready to march. *Judges sit*, ready to dispense judgment. Christians are not warriors whose primary assignment is to physically destroy nations that are not yet ethically subdued; they are instead *ambassadors*—an army of ambassadors who come before a defeated population to announce the terms of peace. But this peace treaty involves *surrender*; it is imposed by a *victor*. The enemy's commander was defeated at Calvary; it is our task to convince his subordinates to lay down their weapons and sign the peace treaty.³⁶ The decisive battle was won at Calvary; the mopping-up operation is still going on (Rom. 16:20; I John 3:8).

There has been a shift in assignments ever since the days of Passover. The Hebrews were commanded to annihilate their Canaanitic enemies. God planned to make a clean sweep of the land of Canaan. He intended the total devastation of those nations. The Hebrews were to spare no one (Deut. 7:16–24). Dominion was to be by means of military might initially, and later by settling the land. While there was eventually to be evangelism, as the Book of Jonah indicates, the Hebrews were first to establish the kingdom in Israel on a firm basis, and then God's promised blessings were to bring a particular response on the part of Israel: expansion.

Ever since the resurrection, Christ has been planting His kingdom by means of *the sword of the gospel*. The word of God, we are told, is sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). We possess “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). The prophecy of Isaiah is progressively coming true: “He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” (Isa. 11:4). *Those who bring the message of Christ are ethical soldiers.* Their main task is to judge the world, subduing it by means of the Holy Spirit, but in terms of His Bible-revealed law. God's kingdom has been removed from genetic Israel and given to those who bring forth its fruits (Matt. 21:43). The fruits produced by righteous living mani-

35. The phrase is Meredith Kline's: *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963).

36. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010).

fest the kingdom. Lawful living, in time and on earth, verifies a man's claim to the kingdom (Matt. 7:15–20).³⁷

The entry into Canaan was a preliminary battle. God's title to the land was made manifest by the success of His people on the battlefield. In Egypt and in Canaan, He demonstrated His sovereignty for all to see. The victory over Satan at Calvary has released *an army of judges* who spread the message of salvation throughout the world. These ambassadors rest in Christ's victory. They know the mortal blow has been delivered by Christ; Satan roars like a dying wild beast—dangerous to those in his path, but nonetheless vanquished.

Christians no longer celebrate Passover standing up, as if we were a literal army about to receive marching orders. We have *already* received our marching orders. They are in fact on the march, as agents of a victorious commander, calling out the terms of surrender as judges. Men must sign the peace treaty now, *before* they meet the church's commander. Christians are the emissaries of a mighty commanding officer, who sends them to the enemy with an offer of peace, as required by biblical law (Deut. 20:10). To refuse to surrender means total defeat, eternal defeat.

The New Testament soldier is a judge. We are to establish a new civilization based on God's law. Rushdoony wrote:

In brief, every law-order is a state of war against the enemies of that order, *and all law is a form of warfare*. Every law declares that certain offenders are enemies of the law-order and must be arrested. For limited offenses, there are limited penalties; for capital offenses, capital punishment. *Law is a state of war*; it is the organization of the powers of civil government to bring the enemies of the law-order to justice. The officers of the law are properly armed; in a godly state, they should be armed by the justice of the law as well as weapons of warfare, in order to defend society against its enemies. Friends of the law will therefore seek at all times to improve, strengthen, and confirm a godly law-order. Enemies of the law will accordingly be in continuing warfare against the law. . . . Men cannot seek co-existence with evil without thereby declaring war against God.³⁸

Christ's peace treaty involves surrender to Him, but the promise of victory, in this world, as well as in eternity. His law will triumph, for

37. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 18.

38. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 93–94.

His kingdom has been established on the battlefield at Calvary.³⁹

G. Continual Warfare

Paul wrote, concerning the internal warfare of regenerate men, “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:23). He also wrote: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). Yet we also know that Christ, having spoiled principalities and powers, “made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15b). So, the chief battle is behind us. The mopping-up operation in our own hearts continues. Our weapon of personal self-dominion is the law of God. It is a lifetime battle against sin and its effects.

1. *Judicial Continuity*

There is continuity in Christians’ warfare today—a step-by-step process of conquest. First of all, it is *internal ethical warfare*: “Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isa. 28:9–10). Second, it is *external cultural warfare*: “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (Isa. 28:13). Line upon line, law upon law, institution by institution, nation by nation: the whole earth is subdued to the glory of God.

The Hebrews marched out of Egypt victorious. That victory had been won by a series of *10 radically discontinuous events*: blood, frogs, lice, swarms, cattle plague, boils, locusts, hail, darkness, and the death of Egypt’s firstborn. Then they marched across the dry path cleared through the Red Sea. A generation later, their children, under Joshua, marched through a path in the Jordan River, and one by one, the cities of Canaan fell. Like the walls of Jericho, they all (or almost all) came

39. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/dcpardise>); Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1954] 1982).

tumbling down. God's miraculous delivery of Israel demonstrated His control over the realm of human history. The prophets reminded their listeners of this radically discontinuous history—a history marked by the miracles of God—when they came before them to call the people to repentance.

At the same time, *the Israelites were to rely increasingly on the regularities of biblical law*. The manna ceased when they crossed into Canaan (Josh. 5:12).⁴⁰ In Hebrews 9:4 we are told that the Ark of the Covenant contained the tables of the covenant, a pot containing manna, and Aaron's rod. These were manifestations of God's dealings with them, and they involved discontinuous events in Israel's history. But Aaron's rod no longer has power, and the manna has ceased. It is God's law-order, proclaimed on the tablets of stone, and empowered by the Spirit, which remains powerful.⁴¹ It is *the continuity of God's law*, not the implements of God's previous miraculous discontinuities in history, that is *the tool of dominion in New Testament times*. It was the primary tool even in Old Testament times.

2. New Testament Revisions

Christians do not celebrate Passover in the way prescribed by Moses in Exodus 12. We are not to wait for the earthly appearance of the Messiah. He has already appeared. He has won His victory. The chief battle is long over.

We are in the land of Canaan. We have crossed over the Jordan River. There are still cities to conquer, but the sharp discontinuities of the past are not to become our standards of conquest for today. It is the steady preaching of the gospel, the subduing of sin in each man, and the continuous extension of God's law over human culture, that constitutes the New Testament's program of conquest. That is why we can sit with Christ at His communion table, knowing that we will sit with him on thrones. *We are presently symbolically seated with Him on thrones of authority, even as the Hebrews were symbolically standing with, Him, ready to march*. The difference is based on the historical position of the chief military victory, the cross. That victory is behind us, so we can take it for granted. *The battle is now spiritual and cul-*

40. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 2.

41. Obviously, it is not the tablets of stone which are powerful, but the laws proclaimed on them. It is God's law, written in the hearts of His people (II Cor. 3:3; Heb. 8:10), which is the proper tool of dominion, both internal and external.

tural: subduing our spirits and our environment to the Lord, by means of His law.

The revolution *was*.⁴² We no longer look for a future radical discontinuity that will establish our earthly dominion. The next major discontinuity is the coming of Christ in final judgment.⁴³ This takes place after God's rule has been manifested, but prior to the final judgment. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:24–26). Yet Christ's victory is in principle behind us: "For he hath put all things under his feet" (I Cor. 15:27a). Christ has all power right now (Matt. 28:18). *The four great discontinuities of God's New Covenant history are past: Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.* The arrival of His Spirit at Pentecost gave us our official papers as His ambassadors, our commissions as His judges. There are only two great discontinuities remaining: Satan's final rebellion (Rev. 20:7–8) and defeat (Rev. 20:9–10), and the final judgment (Rev. 20:12–15). (Some commentators might call these two discontinuities the last continuity, since they take place close together.) In between, there are the daily struggles between the two armies, the ebb and flow of the mopping-up operations, and the progressive extension of God's kingdom, in time and on earth.

It is a mistake, then, to expect what Israel was told to expect. It is a mistake to expect the delivery of our marching orders. It is a mistake to expect visible, direct, cataclysmic interventions of God on earth. Miracles still occur, but not the pillar of the cloud and the pillar of fire. God's law is still in force, but we no longer need to have its terms delivered to us on tablets of stone actually written by God. There are still spiritually Canaanitic cities to be conquered, but not by the blast of trumpets on our seventh day of marching around them. We sit at the Lord's victorious table. We no longer stand, staffs in hand. The lamb has been consumed already. We need not offer it again. The blood is on our doorposts. We need not sprinkle it on them again (Heb. 9). *The continuity of God's law, not the discontinuities of God's military vic-*

42. The phrase comes from a 1938 essay by Garet Garrett, who wrote of the economic and political revolution of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal (1933–54). (<http://bit.ly/RevWas>)

43. The conversion of the Jews, forecast in Romans 11, lies ahead. This will lead to the expansion of Christianity as never before. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 7.

tories or miracles, is *our standard*.⁴⁴

H. Unleavened and Leavened Bread

The unleavened bread that the Hebrews were commanded to use during the Passover feast (Ex. 12:15) was a symbol of the impending discontinuity, their deliverance from Egypt. They had to cook and eat in haste. It was not to symbolize affliction as such, for as Edersheim wrote in the late nineteenth century, “the bread of the Paschal night was not that of affliction because it was unleavened; it was unleavened because it had been that of affliction. For it had been Israel’s ‘affliction,’ and a mark of their bondage and subjection to the Egyptians, to be driven forth in such ‘haste’ as not even to have time for leavening their bread. . . . The Passover, therefore, was not so much the remembrance of Israel’s bondage as of Israel’s deliverance from that bondage, and the bread which had originally been that of affliction, because that of haste, now became, as it were, the bread of a new state of existence. None of Egypt’s leaven was to pervade it; nay, all the old leaven, which served as the symbol of corruption and of death, was to be wholly banished from their homes. They were to be ‘a new lump,’ as they were ‘unleavened.’”⁴⁵

They did not have time to allow the yeast of Egypt to leaven their bread. This symbolized *God’s overnight deliverance of His people from Egypt*, another reason why the lamb was to be eaten in one night, with nothing left over (Ex. 12:10). *Here was the greatest discontinuity in Israel’s history*. Here was the discontinuity that they were to teach to their children (Ex. 12:26–27).

Paul, as a Pharisee, was thoroughly familiar with the meaning of Passover. He did not require us to eat unleavened bread, nor are the bitter herbs required. His own teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), taught the meaning of the lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread, and his words have become authoritative in Jewish law: “Whoever does not explain three things in the Passover has not fulfilled the duty incumbent on him. These three things are: the Passover lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs. The *Passover lamb* means that God passed over the blood-sprinkled place on the houses of our fathers in Egypt;

44. It is one of the major weaknesses of revivalism in general, and the Pentecostal movement in particular, that Christians have relied so heavily on miraculous manifestations of the power of God, rather than relying on the continuous power of the law of God as a tool of dominion.

45. Edersheim, *Temple*, pp. 249–50.

the *unleavened bread* means that our fathers were delivered out of Egypt (in haste); and the *bitter herbs* mean that the Egyptians made bitter the lives of our fathers in Egypt."⁴⁶ Christians no longer eat bitter herbs, because Christ has delivered us from sin; the bitterness of Egypt is no longer to be part of our worship. It is the Lamb that was slain, not the deliverance from Egypt, which is our central celebration as Christians. *Christians are on the offensive now, carrying redeemed Canaan's leaven back into Egypt* (Isa. 19).

1. Leaven

The progress of Christ's kingdom is to be like the leavening of bread. "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13:33).⁴⁷ *Leaven is not a symbol of sin.* Yes, the leaven of Egypt was evil. The corrupting effects of Egyptian culture and Egyptian religion no doubt burdened the Israelites. They were to purge away all their leaven in the week before the exodus (Ex. 12:15). This meant that none of Egypt's leaven was to be carried into Canaan with them, to serve as the source of corruption in the promised land. *Egypt's leaven was perverse, but not leaven as such.* The Hebrew term for leaven in Exodus 12:15, "put away leaven out of your houses," and in Exodus 12:19a, "Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses," is transliterated *se'or*. It was leavened dough, and a bit of it was retained in an unbaked form, so that it could be used to "start" the next batch of dough. Leavened bread, the finished product, was also forbidden: none of the actual products of Egypt's leaven would go into Canaan. Neither the "starter" nor the finished product would leave Egypt with the Hebrews. *Egypt's leaven stood for sin, but there can also be holy leaven. In fact, there must be holy leaven.* Modern expositors who follow a dispensational-premillennial outline fail to recognize this distinction,⁴⁸ but the ancient Hebrews understood it quite well.

How do we know this? Because leavened bread was offered as the firstfruits of the Lord, meaning that leavened bread was the best of a family's productivity: "Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave

46. Gamaliel, cited by Edersheim, *ibid.*, p. 237.

47. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 30.

48. The standard view is that of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909): "Leaven, as a symbolic or typical substance, is always mentioned in the O.T. in an evil sense. . . ." Note 4, p. 1016: Matthew 13:33.

loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD" (Lev. 23:17). *Leaven is the best bread man has to offer, the bread he eats with pleasure.* It is man's best grain offering to God. *Leaven, in short, is a symbol of growth, maturation, continuity, and prosperity.* But such leaven must be the leaven of the promised land, the leaven of redeemed Canaan. It must not be the leaven of Egypt.

It is important to understand the general peace offerings made by individual Israelites, as well as the nationally observed ritual of the firstfruits. The peace offerings of unleavened bread were also accompanied with unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil (Lev. 7:12). The priests and offerer ate the peace-offering, which was a unique feature of the peace-offering. In this sense, concluded Andrew Jukes, this offering shows communion: God, priest, and offerer.⁴⁹ Christ was our offering, yet He was the offerer; He was also the High Priest and God.⁵⁰ He was the firstfruits (I Cor. 15:23), from which the peace-offering had to be made.

Leavened dough could not be burned lawfully on the altar (Lev. 2:11). It had to be brought already baked, ready for eating. Leavened bread was offered as a *finished work*, the fully-risen product of the "starter." It was not to be burned on God's altar, not because it was "corrupted" or "sin-laden," but because it was a *finished loaf*.⁵¹ Burning it would have ruined it. It was not the "corrupted" nature of leaven that kept it off God's fiery altar, for honey was also prohibited (Lev. 2:11). There was nothing corrupt about honey. Honey, like leavened bread, is a finished product, the product of labor, capital, and time.

49. Andrew Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1968), pp. 115–21. The book was first published in the late nineteenth century.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 118–19.

51. Rushdoony's assessment of the meaning of leaven is incorrect. He wrote: "Leaven is taken by some as a symbol or type of sin; it is rather a symbol of corruptibility. . . . Man's obedience to the law is a leavened offering, clearly corruptible, yet when faithful and obedient to God's authority and order, a 'sacrifice' well-pleasing in His sight and assured of His reward." *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 83. I am arguing that leaven symbolizes neither sin nor corruptibility; leaven is a symbol of the continuity of development, meaning maturation over time. All of men's offerings are corruptible; focusing on leaven as a uniquely corruptible offering misses the point. Leaven as a symbol of continuity fits Rushdoony's postmillennial eschatology far better than leaven as a symbol of corruptibility.

2. Pentecost

It is extremely important to note that this compulsory offering of the firstfruits, which included the leavened bread offering, came on the day of Pentecost. The Greek word, “pentekostos,” means fifty. The firstfruits offering was made on the fiftieth day after the sabbath day of the Passover week, the feast of unleavened bread (Lev. 23:15–16), meaning 49 days after the wave offering. On the day after the sabbath of Passover week, the priests brought a sheaf of grain offering and waved it before God. Then, 49 days of maturation later, came the baked bread of the day of Pentecost. At *Passover*, the people were required to use *unleavened* bread, the symbol of religious, cultural, and historical *discontinuity*. At *Pentecost*, they were required to offer *leavened* bread, the symbol of *continuity and completion*. At Passover, Israel found its release from bondage. At Pentecost, they experienced full blessings.

Cassuto believed that the law was given to the Israelites seven weeks after the exodus. Exodus 19:1 reads: “In the third month [new moon], when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.” Cassuto commented.

The mention of the third new moon is not unintentional. Since the exodus from Egypt, the last two weeks of Nissan and four weeks of Iyyar had passed, and we are now in the seventh week. Since seven was considered the number of perfection, seven days constituted, according to the customary conception of the ancient East, a given unit of time, while seven weeks formed a still higher unit; and just as after six days of labour the seventh day brought rest and the enjoyment of the results of that labour, so after six weeks of the travails of journeying, the seventh week brought a sense of exaltation and of drawing nearer to the word Divine. Although the Torah does not state the exact day on which the Revelation on Mount Sinai occurred, and only the later tradition connects the Festival of Weeks with the commemorative of the giving of the Torah, yet it is obvious that this tradition corresponds to what, if not expressly stated in Scripture, is at least alluded to therein by inference.⁵²

The firstfruits offering on the day following the sabbath of Passover week was marked by the wave offering of the sheaf of grain—the

52. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), p. 224.

unbaked offering (Lev. 23:10–11). At Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, 49 days later, the wave offering was a pair of leavened loaves (Lev. 23:17). In the interim, the grain had been harvested, ground into flour, allowed to rise by means of yeast, and baked as a completed offering to God. This symbolism of discontinuity, followed by continuity, should be clear enough.

3. New Testament Symbolism

The same parallelism is present in the New Testament events: the Passover meal of Christ and the disciples, followed by His death and resurrection.⁵³ Then, 49 days after Christ's resurrection, came the day of Pentecost. The break with the old covenant was established by Christ's death and resurrection, when He inaugurated a new era. He gave the Holy Spirit to His disciples on the day of resurrection (John 20:22). The manifestations of power of the Holy Spirit came seven weeks later, at Pentecost (Acts 2). The church, Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:12–27),⁵⁴ was established as a visible unity at Pentecost. "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). Yet Christ equated His own body with bread (1 Cor. 11:24). The New Testament parallels with Passover and Pentecost in the Old Testament should be obvious. *The coming of God's Spirit at Pentecost was God's presentation of the newly leavened loaf of the church*—a presentation to the Son (Dan. 7:13–14). The day of Pentecost in the New Testament was God's presentation of the risen bread of the church, which paralleled the risen Lord Jesus (an event

53. There are some difficult problems associated with the dating of Christ's Passover meal with the disciples. The most convincing presentation is Hoehner's: they met on Thursday night, Nisan 14, which was the Pharisees' practice. The Passover lamb was slain between 3–5 P.M. that afternoon by the Pharisees and Galileans. The Judean dating, used by the Sadducees, was different. They slew the lamb that year on Friday afternoon, since they dated Nisan 14 from Thursday evening. This explains why Jesus and the disciples ate their Passover meal the night before Jesus was crucified, and why the Jews did not enter the Praetorium when they took Jesus to Pilate, "lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover" (John 18:28b). This confrontation between Jesus and His accusers took place on Nisan 15, as reckoned by the Pharisees, and on Nisan 14, as reckoned by the Sadducees. Jesus died at about 3 in the afternoon, at precisely the time that the Judeans were slaying their Passover lamb, 24 hours after the Pharisees and Galileans had slain theirs. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1977), ch. 4, especially the chart on p. 89. Jesus died on Friday (sixth day) and arose on Sunday (first day) morning.

54. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

that took place 49 days earlier), who is called "Christ the firstfruits" by Paul (I Cor. 15:23). Leaven is a product of resurrection: Christ's, the church's, and the day of judgment's. *The great discontinuity at Calvary has produced a new continuity: the civilization of the kingdom of God.*

Paul speaks of the leavened and unleavened bread. "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened [bread] of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:6–8). Paul was contrasting the old leaven (evil) with unleavened (a new ethical beginning). (The King James translators added the word "bread.") He was speaking of Christ our Passover. In the Passover feast, unleavened bread was eaten in order to purge away the leaven of Egypt, the leaven of sin. Christ, like the unleavened bread of Passover, represented a discontinuous break with normal historical development, a break with the maturation of the principle of evil. This is what unleavened bread always symbolized: *a new beginning, a break with the evil maturation principle (leaven) of the past.* This is what Joshua meant when he told the Israelites to serve God in sincerity and truth (Josh. 24:14). *Evil leaven does not mature into a holy loaf; it must be purged out. It must be replaced.* Replaced with what? A new, holy leaven.

Christ was quite specific about this. "How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:11–12). *The leavening process of unsound doctrine leads to evil acts; it is the maturation process of evil yeast. It must be purged out from the beginning. Purge out the old leaven. This purging is ethical, intellectual, and theological.* It means becoming a new creation (II Cor. 5:17). It means being born again, or born from above (John 3:3–8). *God replaces the old unethical leaven with a new, holy leaven.*

John Calvin recognized the ethical focus of Paul's words regarding leaven and unleavened. "Now, in the solemnity of this sacred feast we must abstain from *leaven*, as God commanded the fathers to abstain. But from what leaven? As the outward passover was to them a figure of the true *passover*, so its appendages were figures of the reality which we at this day possess. If, therefore, we would wish to feed on Christ's

flesh and blood, let us bring to this feast *sincerity and truth*. Let these be our loaves of *unleavened bread*. Away with all *malice and wickedness*, for it is unlawful to mix up *leaven* with the *passover*. In fine, he declares that we shall be members of Christ only when we shall have renounced malice and deceit.”⁵⁵ Calvin did not say that we must eat unleavened bread at the communion table. He said only that we must not bring malice and deceit in our hearts when we come to the Lord’s Supper. *God’s people must be set apart as unleavened*—free from the religious leaven of rebellion against God and His law. This is the symbolism of discontinuity. It is the symbolism of Christ the Passover. But Christ is also the firstfruits, both unleavened (waving the sheaf) and leavened (waving the loaves). *The discontinuity from sin is supposed to lead to the continuity of dominion*—ethical, ecclesiastical, social, political, and cultural.

4. The Process of Maturation

Leaven is not a symbol of sin. Leaven is a symbol of rising up, the process of maturation. But there must first be a discontinuous act of implanting the original leaven. Adam, yielding to Satan’s temptation, brought forth the leaven of evil, and implanted it into man’s history. Christ, the second Adam, removes the old Adamic leaven, implants His new leaven, and creates *a maturing Christian kingdom that steadily replaces Satan’s older leaven*. Immediately following the unleavened bread is the beginning of the new leavening process, the *rising up*. Israel was brought *up* out of Egypt (Ex. 17:3). On the third day, Christ *rose* from the dead. On the day of Christ’s resurrection, many saints *rose* from the dead (Matt. 27:52–53). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit presented the risen (leavened) bread offering, the church. *The discontinuous event of redemption is supposed to be followed by the ethical leavening process, a rising up in victory, in time and on earth*. Christ does not simply remove the old leaven. He is not content with unleavened bread, the symbol of deliverance. *Christ produces the new leavened bread, the leavening process of victory*. It is not enough to escape from Egypt; Canaan must be conquered. It is not enough to remain in a spiritually unleavened condition, the condition of “not being leavened with evil.” We must become fully leavened as God’s individu-

55. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, Vol. I, which appears as Vol. XX of Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 189.

al saints and also as His gathered church. *Where this leaven is absent, there is no life, no growth, and no dominion.*

I. No Leaven on the Old Testament Altar

Neither leaven (yeast) nor the products of leaven' (leavened loaves) could be placed on God's fiery altar during the Old Testament era (Lev. 2:11). We are not told specifically why not. We also are not told why honey was also prohibited. There are two possible explanations that seem to make sense of the prohibition.

1. Full Development

Leavened loaves and honey are finished, *fully developed products*. They are fully matured. No further development is possible. They are both the products of *time*. Neither is hastily produced. They symbolize the end of the maturation process, the fruits of thorough labor. What was offered on God's altar in the Old Testament economy was that which had not had time to mature fully. The animals were yearling lambs (Num. 28:3, 9), young bulls (Num. 28:11), a young goat, or kid (Num. 28:15), and young pigeons (Lev. 1:14; 5:7). The day of atonement required young animals (Num. 29:1–5). These animals had not yet begun their work. The red heifer, which was used to make the ashes for the water of purification, had to be unblemished, three years old, and never yoked (Num. 19:2). *The sacrifices required an animal cut down in its prime, with its productive life ahead of it.* This animal forfeited both the joys and labors of the bulk of its adult life. *Unquestionably, this symbolism pointed to Jesus Christ, the lamb of God slain in the midst of His prime.* In time and on earth, He forfeited a life of dominion. He forfeited the joy of eating the fruits of His labor. He forfeited the leavened loaves and the honey. He forfeited the blessings of long life, despite His perfect keeping of the law of God. He forfeited all this, so that His people might receive these blessings. Christians are to exercise dominion, in time and on earth. They are to labor. They are to eat the firstfruits, symbolized by Pentecost. They are also to eat the honey and the baked leaven loaves.⁵⁶ They are to serve, in short, as

56. Churches do not celebrate the communion meal with honey, yet many of them use leavened bread. This is inconsistent. *The use of leaven points to the use of honey.* The completed work of Christ's sacrifice is behind us historically. The completed offering of Christ at Calvary points both to the use of leaven (the formerly prohibited completed baked bread) and honey (the formerly prohibited completed sweetener). Honey ought to be substituted for the bitter herbs. The church has not been consist-

God's leaven, "incorrupting" Satan's former kingdoms, causing the kingdom of God to rise up. They are given what Christ forfeited: *visible dominion*, in time and on earth. God does not burn up the leaven before its time, before it has matured, before it is fit for communion's joyful eating. A leavened offering, like honey, is not burned on God's altar.

But what about Satan? Isn't Satan eventually burned? Aren't Satan's followers burned, as salted offerings? Haven't they been given time? This points to the removal of the devil's ability to continue to develop. He will be cut down in the midst of his rebellion against God's church (Rev. 20:9). *The very essence of leaven—its ability to spread through the dough—will be removed from Satan.* He will be like unleavened dough, fit only for burning, cut down in God's final discontinuous event, just as Pharaoh was cut down. The "leaven of Egypt" will be purged out, finally, at the end of time. It will be leaven that can no longer do its work. It is finally made useless, like savorless salt, fit only for being ground underfoot (Matt. 5:13).⁵⁷ *Satan's leaven is purged at the end of time when the leaven of God's finished loaf has fully matured. Christ's leaven will have done its work.* The fire of the last day bakes this bread, for it is ready for the oven, but Satan's partial leaven is left on the altar forever, never fit for consumption, never fit for God's blessed communion feast. Satan's cultural leaven never fully rises, in time and on earth, since his leaven eventually is replaced by God's leaven.

2. Living Sacrifices

There may have been an additional reason for prohibiting leaven from God's altar. The leaven, until baked, was a living thing. *No living thing was ever lawfully sacrificed on the altar.* Animals were killed at the door of the tabernacle (Lev. 1:3). Then they were brought to the altar for burning. In the case of Satan and his followers, they will be placed in the lake of fire only after they have been slain (Rev. 20:14).

ent with its symbolism; bitter herbs were never incorporated into the Christian Passover, yet honey has not replaced the Mosaic law's required herbs—an obvious lack of consistency. Passover was to be tasted. What was bitter is now sweet. The contrast has not been made visible symbolically. Deliverance has not been consistently symbolized. The taste of victory implied in honey's sweetness has not been a feature of the church's sacraments. When the church's eschatology changes to a more optimistic view of the role of the church in history, and its victory over creation is made progressively clearer, churches will then adopt the use of honey in the communion service.

57. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

This burning is referred to as the second death. No living being was to be burned on the altar, according to Old Testament law.

The one legitimate exception in history was Jesus Christ. As a perfect creation, a perfect human who had fulfilled the terms of the law, Christ was allowed to become a living sacrifice. God accepted this living sacrifice as a substitute. *No other living being was suitable*. All other beings are subject to death. Christ was not, yet He gave up His life for His friends (John 15:13). The sacrificial animals were cut down in the prime of life, but they all faced death eventually. Jesus Christ was cut down in the prime of life when, in terms of His perfect fulfilling of the law, He had not been faced with death.

Christ was a *leavened offering*—an *ethically* fully developed offering—on the symbolic altar, the cross. Christ was a *living sacrifice*, too. In neither case was He violating the laws of the offering. He was instead fulfilling them. The leaven offering (unbaked leavened loaves) and the final baked leavened loaves were not to be burned, but Christ, as *a living man*, and as *a fully developed perfect humanity*, did die on God's altar. Christ, being perfect, was God's own *leavened, living sacrifice* to God's own holiness.

Christ was also a *honey offering*, thereby completing the symbolism. He is said to be the word of God (John 1:1), and the word of God is equated with honey (Ezek. 3:1–3; Rev. 10:9–10). “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Ps. 119:103). The completeness of God's word, the completeness of Christ's work, and the completeness of honey as a sweetener come together in Christ's complete sacrifice on Calvary. His perfect honey was acceptable to God as a legitimate offering in this one instance in man's history. These three offerings, which had previously not been allowed on God's altar—leaven, living animals, and honey—completed and ended the Old Testament sacrifices. Only Christ, and not man's leavened imitations, or nature's (honey), was ethically fit for God's altar. His perfect offering was the culmination of the sacrificial system, as the Book of Hebrews teaches. His *ethical perfection* was always the goal of the sacrificial system. The law's prohibition against the use of leaven and honey was there to keep imperfection from claiming the perfection that only Christ legitimately could claim and did claim.

Christians are told to offer themselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1).⁵⁸ *The sacrificial system is now straightforwardly ethical*. The old

58. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 8.

sacrifices of rams and goats are over; Christ has replaced them, once and for all, as the true living sacrifice, the only living sacrifice suitable for God's altar. His last words were, "It is finished" (John 19:30). This marked the end of the Old Covenant, the end of the sacrificial system, and the end of Christ's work, in time and on earth, in fulfilling the terms of the Mosaic law. He would no longer appear before men, angels, or God as a man under the curse; the final discontinuity had come to Him as a suffering servant. *There could be no remaining potential ethical development for mankind, as a creature. Christ had fulfilled all of mankind's ethical potential, in time and on earth.* Ethically perfect humanity had been fully realized, in time and on earth. Christ was, in this sense, a *leavened offering*, for He was fully matured, ready for eating, the ultimate development of humanity. Christ, and Christ alone, could become a suitable *living sacrifice*, a living blood offering, as well as a legitimate leavened offering. None of Egypt's leaven was in Him.

What Christ is, man is told to become: not a member of the Trinity, but a perfect man. This is why the church is called His body (I Cor. 12:12–27).⁵⁹ This is why it is called bread: "For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (I Cor. 10:17). *The principle of maturation has a goal: full development.* Christ, the head of the church, has already attained this goal. The discontinuity is behind us. The lamb has been sacrificed. The fully developed, fully leavened bread, without a trace of Satan's leaven, has conquered our satanic foe, and has served as redeemed mankind's peace offering, and also as our thank offering. Christ was both *unleavened* (free from Satan's leaven) and *leavened* (fully developed perfect humanity). He was both our discontinuity (the definitive break from the sin principle) and our continuity (the full development of human perfection).

J. The Kingdom as Leaven

The kingdom of God is like leaven. Christianity is the yeast, and it has a leavening effect on pagan, satanic cultures around it. It permeates the whole of culture, causing it to rise. *The bread produced by this leaven is the preferred bread.* In ancient times—indeed, right up until the advent of late-nineteenth-century industrialism and modern agricultural methods—leavened bread was considered the staff of life,

59. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 15.

the symbol of God's sustaining hand. "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11)⁶⁰ Christians have prayed for centuries, and they have eaten leavened bread at their tables. So did the ancient Hebrews. The kingdom of God is the force that produces the fine quality bread that all men seek. The symbolism should be obvious: *Christianity makes life a joy for godly men. It provides men with the very best.*

Leaven takes time to produce its product. It takes time for the leaven-laden dough to rise. *Leaven is a symbol of historical continuity, just as unleavened bread was Israel's symbol of historical discontinuity.* Men can wait for the yeast to do its work. God gives man time for the working of His spiritual leaven. Men may not understand exactly how the leaven works—how the spiritual power of God's kingdom spreads throughout their culture and makes it rise—but they can see and taste its effects. If we really push the analogy (pound it, even), we can point to the fact that dough is pounded down several times by the baker before the final baking, almost as God, through the agents of Satan in the world, pounds His kingdom in history. Nevertheless, the yeast does its marvelous work, *just so long as the fires of the oven are not lit prematurely.* If the full heat of the oven is applied to the dough before the yeast has done its work, both the yeast and the dough perish in the flames. God waits to apply the final heat (II Peter 3:9–10). First, His yeast—His church—must do its work, in time and on earth. The kingdom of God (which includes the institutional church, but is broader than the institutional church) must rise, having "incorrupted" the satanic dough of the kingdom of Satan with the gospel of life, including the life-giving reconstruction of all the institutions of culture.

What a marvelous description of God's kingdom! Christians work inside the cultural material available in any given culture, seeking to refine it, permeate it, and make it into something fine. They know they will be successful, just as yeast is eventually successful in the dough, if it is given sufficient time to do its work. This is what God implicitly promises us in the analogy of the leaven: *enough time to accomplish our individual and collective assignments.* He tells us that His kingdom will produce the desirable bread of life. It will take time. It may take several poundings, as God, through the hostility of the world, kneads the yeast-filled dough of men's cultures.⁶¹ But the end result is guaran-

60. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 12.

61. I am using the analogy of pounding the dough to apply to historical circumstances. It is a suggestive analogy, not necessarily an inescapable implication of the biblical text.

teed. God does not intend to burn His bread to a useless crisp by prematurely placing it in the oven. He is a better baker than that.

1. *The Symbolism of Communion*

Christians should not eat unleavened bread exclusively at their celebrations of the Lord's Supper. They should eat large chunks of leavened bread, delighting in the flavor and its ability to fill them. This is what God says His kingdom is like. *The leavened bread is a symbol of God's patience with us, a symbol of His restraint.* As Peter wrote, concerning the fiery judgment to come at the last judgment, God is not slack concerning his promise, "but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9b). He delays the application of fire to the earth (II Peter 3:10). As Christians celebrating the Lord's Supper, we look toward the future, toward the effects of our labors, in time and on earth. We are God's yeast, inevitably permeating the whole loaf, until the risen dough is ready for the final fire. *God does not intend to throw the dough into the fire prematurely.* He does not intend to burn up the work of His hands. He allows us to make our peace offering. Christ was the firstfruits offering (I Cor. 15:20), yet so are we, every man in his own order (I Cor. 15:23).⁶²

It could be argued that we should eat both unleavened and leavened bread at the communion table. The symbol of discontinuity may still be ritually legitimate: the decisive break with sin at the cross, when the lamb was slain. But a communion table with only unleavened bread conflicts with the symbolism of Christ's church (His body), which has the task of building His kingdom. "This is my body," He said (Matt. 26:26). But if the church is His body (I Cor. 12:12–14),⁶³ then how can this body remain flat (unleavened) in history, if it is to replace Satan's evil leaven? Churches must strive to make the symbolism of the Lord's Supper clear to Christ's people, and unleavened flat bread, if eaten without leavened bread, conveys the symbolism of historical and cultural impotence.⁶⁴ To use both unleavened and leavened bread, un-

62. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 16.

63. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

64. It is true that Jesus ate unleavened bread at the Last Supper. It is also true that He had not yet suffered and died, thereby fulfilling the ethical demands of the Old Testament's sacrificial system, and thereby also abolishing it for all time. He had also not yet risen from the dead. The day He rose from the dead, the historical and cultural impotence of ancient Israel was at last definitively broken, even as new wine breaks old

less the congregation has sophisticated instructors and members with a taste for biblical theology and biblical symbolism, is to risk confusion. If we eat one type of bread only, let it be leavened bread.

“Unleavened wine,” meaning grape juice, never had a place in the symbolism of the Old Testament offerings. Contrary to the opinion of some commentators, *wine is fermented*. Jesus’ metaphor of the wine and wineskins makes this clear: new wine breaks old wineskins (Matt. 9:17). To break wineskins, it has to be fermenting. There is no ritual significance for grape juice in the New Testament. It is not a symbol of discontinuity, as unleavened bread is. It is not a biblical symbol at all. *Grape juice* may, however, be the symbol for the church that is most preferred by Satan, symbolizing *the historical impotence of the church*—a new wine that breaks nothing because it is not wine at all.

Let us eat sitting down. Let us eat no bitter herbs. Instead, *let us spread our leavened bread with honey*. The basis of our victory is past; let us look forward with confidence. *Victory is sweet*. Let Satan’s troops eat bitter herbs, not Christ’s troops. The church has never eaten bitter herbs at the Lord’s Supper.⁶⁵

Some churches still insist on unleavened bread exclusively. Those who argue that the communion feast should be celebrated with unleavened bread point to I Corinthians 5, which I cited earlier, where Paul writes:

Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (I Cor. 5:6–8).

Several comments are in order. First, Paul was dealing with sin in the Corinthian church. When he speaks of purging out the old leaven, he is referring to a specific individual, a man who was practicing incest (I Cor. 5:1–5). Second, the word “bread” was added by the translators

wineskins. Pentecost pointed to this definitive break with the old covenant’s defensive mentality and rituals.

65. Why were the Israelites required to eat bitter herbs? To remind them of the horrors of cultural bondage to a foreign, anti-God power. The threat of another period of bondage was always before them. But from the day of Christ’s resurrection, the old geographical and cultural wineskins were broken. The church is on the offensive internationally, for the ethical requirements of God have been met, in time and on earth. Definitive ethical victory is behind us, once and for all.

of the King James Version. It is not in Paul's text. Third, he tells us to celebrate the Lord's Table with the unleaven of sincerity and truth—a definitive, discontinuous break from Satan's insincerity and lies. This "unleaven" is the starting point of ethical and cultural maturation. *It is the "old leaven" that is forbidden.* This is the same imagery that was basic to Passover. It was the old leaven of Egypt that was forbidden. Israel had to make a symbolic break with the religion and culture of Egypt before leaving Egypt for the land of Canaan. *Unleavened bread in this instance symbolized the discontinuity with sin that God's deliverance represents.* (I have already referred Calvin's comments on this passage. He did not use the passage to advocate the use of unleavened bread during communion. He used it to drive home the ethical implications of the communion feast.) The fourth comment is simply that Paul also refers to Christ as the *firstfruits*, and this involved a *leavened offering*. Paul held to both images. Thus, to insist on unleavened bread as alone symbolically valid for the communion table is to claim too much. To the extent that churches want the communion celebration to point forward to victory, leavened bread is far more preferable.

K. The Final Revolution

There will be another great discontinuity, in time and on earth. It will come on the heels of long years of continuity. This next revolution of prophetic significance is Satan's final attempt to throw off godly rule (Rev. 20:3). It will be grounded in *a continuity of despair*. Satan's despairing forces will vainly attempt to throw off the continuity of godly rule. It will be a perverse image of the exodus. The Hebrews had experienced generations of ungodly servitude to the gods of Egypt, through the representatives of the gods, the pharaohs. They were pushed into rebellion after generations of despair. Neither they nor their Egyptian masters had expected this revolt to be successful. Satan's rebellion will come in much the same way, except that it will be *an active rebellion perversely directed against the visible manifestations of the benefits of godly rule*. Unlike the Hebrew rebellion, it will be cut short in rapid order (Rev. 20:9).

The forces of Satan will acknowledge as binding the terms of the peace treaty, but they will secretly resist them. They will organize their forces for the final rebellion. Their sins will be that much greater, for they will heap coals upon their heads by rebelling in the face of the vis-

ible blessings of God (Pr. 25:21–22;⁶⁶ Rom. 12:20⁶⁷). It is our responsibility, as agents of the victorious commander, to dispense justice, thereby calling forth the external blessings that will condemn the rebels to their well-deserved punishment. The steady extension of godly rule will have its long-term effects, in time and on earth. These effects will have implications throughout eternity: *training for dominion* by the saints, and *training for defeat* by the rebels.

We should not expect a great discontinuity in training for either camp. We should not expect endless external defeat for the spiritual army of a victorious commander, Jesus Christ, only to have victory handed over on a silver platter to troops that have proven themselves totally incompetent for thousands of years. We should also not expect to see endless victories for Satan, only to have victory snatched away from his troops in the final moments of the ancient contest. Our victory is past: Calvary. Their defeat is past: Calvary. *History is a progressive working out of the implications of Calvary's crucial discontinuity.* We should not expect to see the progressive historical defeat of the implicit victors, members of Christ's church, nor should we expect to see the progressive historical victory of the implicit losers.⁶⁸ What we should expect to see is the Satanists' equivalent of the exodus: a desperate rebellion by a people who had experienced generations of rule by their enemies.⁶⁹

Let the Satanists celebrate their communion standing up, staffs in hand. Those staffs were broken at Calvary. We are seated on the thrones of judgment in history, and we shall dispense continual justice, making their final revolt all the less justified, all the more culpable, and all the more unsuccessful. *The continuity of the word of God will bring external cultural victory, step by step.* "But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (Isa. 28:13). The enemies of God cannot survive the steady onslaught of God's people,

66. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 75.

67. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

68. Gary North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Winter 1976–77). Cf. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

69. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 300–2

as the latter progressively fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Passover points to a radical break with evil. The leaven of the world—sin, death, and corruption—is not to be the ethical foundation of God's kingdom. Unleavened bread symbolized this radical ethical discontinuity with Egypt and Egypt's gods and culture. Bitter herbs symbolized the grim reality of life under the dominion of Satan and his representatives. God called the Israelites to obey His law. Obedience to God's law was to become the foundation of a new civilization. At the feast of Pentecost, they were to celebrate the founding of this new civilization, and they were to use leavened bread in this ritual.

To accomplish the liberation of Israel from the bondage of sin, represented by Egyptian civilization, God destroyed Egypt. The avenger of blood gained vengeance for the blood-stained land on Passover night. *A radical historical discontinuity* was the event that drove the Israelites out of bondage and toward the land of Canaan. This, in turn, was designed to bring the *continuity of the maturation process*. Ethical conformity to God over time produces this continuity of growth, both personally and culturally.

The ethical discontinuity of sin brings the historical discontinuity of God's judgment. Adam learned this lesson when God expelled him from the garden; the people of Noah's day learned it; and so did Pharaoh, though only in his last minutes in a watery grave. *God cuts off the leaven of sin in history*, so that the leaven of righteousness can develop and become the dominant cultural force.

The biblical concept of social change is therefore grounded in the doctrines of creation, ethical rebellion, redemption, dominion, and final judgment. In short, *the Bible teaches a doctrine of linear time*. We are both pushed and pulled through time, and not by impersonal forces, but by a personal God. God's declared and inescapable future draws us through present history, but always by way of the past. What has gone before has its influence over us, but so also does all that is yet to come. *The link between past and future is responsible decision-making, primarily by God and secondarily by men.*

The exodus was a discontinuous event, yet the covenantal life of Israel was to be renewed annually by a continuing series of Passover meals down through the ages. The great discontinuous event (for it is

70. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

essentially one event) of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ took place once and only once, yet the Communion meals that announce His definitive triumph over death and evil are to be continually celebrated by His people through the ages. In short, *a definitive and completed past event*—a discontinuity—is to be celebrated continuously through history, for *it points to a definitive final event in the future: the final judgment*. This next great discontinuity becomes the foundation of the great future continuity: the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21, 22).

History is therefore equally influenced both by discontinuities and continuities, the “one great event” and the “many little events.” *History is simultaneously one and many*. In this sense, history reflects the being of God, which is simultaneously one and many. But above all, *historical change is personal*: God proposes, God disposes, and men are fully responsible (Rom. 9:10–24).

In a world of cosmic personalism, the “great men” theory of history is valid. Great men do produce historical discontinuities that are crucial. But they make these changes within a framework of historical continuity. They become crucial as pivotal characters precisely because there is a broad historical milieu that is ready to be pivoted. The “great man” is nothing without the “little men,” past and present, who have participated in the development of the historical setting that at last makes a radical break with the past.

The *continuity of biblical law* is an important aspect of historical continuity. It is man’s tool of dominion, and the measure by which man is either blessed or judged. It speaks to men in all eras because man is still made in God’s image in all eras. Thus, it true, as the French proverb says, that “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” It is also true that as things stay the same—man’s creaturehood, God’s law—the more things are able to change.

The radical discontinuity in a person’s individual life is ethical: from death unto life, from the old creature to the new creature, from condemnation to blessing, from rebellion to obedience, from covenant-breaking to covenant-keeping. Without this discontinuity, every man stands condemned by the original discontinuity of Adam’s ethical rebellion. Adam inaugurated a continuity of death by his act of rebellion. The continuity of spiritual death will otherwise prevail in each person’s life apart from the discontinuity of regeneration.

The *discontinuity of regeneration* has been the same discontinuity that has prevailed from the day of Adam’s sin. It has created a rival

continuity: the *continuity of life*. This continuity has many institutional forms, but the chief one is the church. The basis of this regenerative discontinuity has always been the grace of God, which in turn is made possible by the greatest of all discontinuities: the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

As this regenerative discontinuity takes place in more and more lives, the continuity of growth in the kingdom of God is revealed. In short, *a series of radical ethical discontinuities in individual lives produces Christian cultural and civilizational continuity*. Biblical revival is therefore radically different from revivalism. Revivalism promotes an emotional personal break from an existing social order, but not the transformation of that order. Biblical revival is a comprehensive, all-encompassing, civilization-transforming revival.⁷¹ It comes by means of a series of rapid multiple ethical discontinuities—personal ethical discontinuities—that combine to create a historic civilizational discontinuity. Biblical revival lays the foundation of *Christian civilization's continuity*. It lays the foundation, in short, of the visible manifestation of the dominion covenant.

71. Gary North, "The Pressing Need for Revival," *Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Nov./Dec. 1984). (<http://bit.ly/gnpnfr>)

13

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also (Ex. 12:30–32).

The theocentric principle here is the absolute sovereignty of God in the affairs of men.

A. The Final Confrontation

The Pharaoh and his people had been subjected to the final humiliation, they believed. They had suffered plague after plague, and their priests had been impotent to combat them. The Pharaoh himself, the great god of Egypt, had now lost his son, heir to divinity. The gods of Egypt had been decisively defeated by the God of Moses and Aaron. Surely their defeat was total. The Israelites had won.

The Israelites then took their belongings, packed them up, and made ready to depart. They collected the tribute of the Egyptians, who pressed them to leave. The tribute money was paid; restitution was made. The slaves were now officially free men. They had been visibly returned to bondage under God, which is the sole the basis of human freedom.

This capitulation on the part of Pharaoh was not to last long. His defeat was not yet total. He still had his life, his army, his chariots, and his authority. Egypt still had sovereignty over the land; possibly Egypt still maintained considerable sovereignty in Canaan, although Courville's dating of the exodus, coupled with his reconstruction of the dynasties, indicates that the Pharaoh of the exodus was much weaker

than the Pharaoh of the late Twelfth Dynasty who had first enslaved the Hebrews. Pharaoh was once again about to reverse himself and seek a victory over the departing slaves, and this proved to be the final humiliation for him, and also for Egypt, which was defeated by the invading Hyksos (Amalekites) and subjugated for at least a century, and possibly four—about twice the duration of Israel's stay in Egypt.

Pharaoh knew precisely what his surrender implied. The gods of Egypt had been decisively defeated. Pharaoh had been driven to capitulate completely to the demands of Moses and Moses' God. This God had demanded that Pharaoh allow the whole nation of Israel to journey three days in order to sacrifice to Him. Now God had been able to extract His demands from Pharaoh. Pharaoh was implicitly admitting that the Egyptian theology was a myth, that there is no continuity of being between man and God, that there is a God so great and so powerful that He can extract His every demand from mighty Egypt, the center of the earth. Here was a God unlike any ever encountered by Pharaoh or.

Pharaoh also understood what Egypt's sin against the Hebrews had been. They had enslaved Israel, breaking their treaty with Israel and Israel's God. They had treated Israel as a concubine, a slave wife. They had stolen Israel's dowry, the land of Goshen. There was restitution to pay. Pharaoh, however, did not want to pay all that he owed. He wanted one last admission on the part of the Hebrews that he was not really guilty. He wanted Moses to bless him.

How could this man have hoped for one moment that the God of Israel might bless him? How could he have imagined that God would regard him as anything but a lawless rebel? Was Pharaoh at last asking for mercy? Was he at last humbling himself before the God of the Israelites? Was his request for a blessing a sign of his repentance? The answer is unconditionally no to all these questions. What was Pharaoh really asking for? He was asking for *God's seal of approval* on his actions as a monarch, the master of Egypt. He was asking for God's sanction as a *lawful former master* over Israel. He was trying to justify his tyranny and his continual lying. He was trying to cover himself with the protecting law of God, but without humbling himself before that law. He was trying to get God to acknowledge publicly that Pharaoh's acts of charity—which were in fact tribute payments extracted by God's awesome power—entitled him to God's protection.

B. The Year of Release

The law of God respecting Hebrew slaves placed specific requirements on the Hebrew masters. Pharaoh must have understood the basic principle of lawful slave ownership. "And if thy brother, an Hebrew man or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty. Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him" (Deut. 15:12–14). It is revealing that the justification of this law was the bondage they had experienced in Egypt: "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing today" (Deut. 15:15).

1. Blessing for Evil

Pharaoh wanted to be recognized as a lawful master, for he was giving liberally of Egypt's wealth. Was he not treating the Hebrews honestly, as a brother might treat them? In fact, it was God's responsibility to bless him, for he was adhering to the law: "It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee: for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest" (Deut. 15:18). The blessing, Pharaoh insisted. Where is the blessing?

Pharaoh the slavemaster, Pharaoh the kidnapper, Pharaoh the treaty-breaker, Pharaoh the slave-wife-divorcer, and Pharaoh the divine ruler was once again demanding to be recognized as a sovereign. He was arguing that he and his predecessors had possessed the right to violate all of the laws concerning lawful servitude, enslaving the Israelites unlawfully, just as surely as Potiphar threw Joseph into prison unlawfully. He had conducted himself lawfully, he implied, and now his payment to the Israelites testified, he wanted God to admit, to his position as a covenant-keeper. Facing a victorious slave population and their victorious God, Pharaoh wanted to be justified by works: his liberality in giving the Hebrews their seventh-year payment. This was not tribute. This was not restitution. This was not the restoration of the stolen dowry. This was simply lawful payment for lawful slaveowning, which had been conducted by a well-meaning brother in the faith. He wanted all the promised benefits of the law, the blessing in "all that

thou doest,” in return for this final payment to Israel. If he could get God’s blessing, his payment would wipe the slate clean. God would be testifying to the legitimacy of Egypt’s past rule over His people.

Pharaoh was not offering unconditional surrender to God. Once again, he was bargaining with God. This time, he used the law of God to try to justify his actions. Instead of flatly denying the right of Israel to sacrifice to God, or denying Israel the right to take along wives, or children, or cattle, he was now denying the legitimacy of any judicial case that God might bring against him as a rebellious, law-denying sovereign. He was asking God to sanction all of his past transgressions, including his unwillingness to grant the Hebrews the right to worship their God. But if these earlier transgressions were not really illegitimate, then God would have to sanction Pharaoh’s original argument, namely, that he had been a lawful sovereign during the period of the subjugation. In fact, he was asking for God’s sanction on the whole era of enslavement. He wanted his blessing; he was paying for it “fair and square.” God owed him this blessing.

2. Restitution

God did not grant him a blessing. Pharaoh was paying restitution, and he was paying it under extreme duress. He would gain no blessing from God; he would have no stamp of approval on his actions as a self-proclaimed divine monarch. He was not going to be able to buy his way out of judgment. He still had not recognized the nature of the God he was dealing with.

God warned Moses as they were leaving Egypt: “For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so. And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” (Ex. 14:3–5).¹

Pharaoh covenantally represented his subordinates well. The Egyptians were not innocent victims of a misguided leader who did not

1. The phrase, “entangled in the land,” is expressive of the labyrinth concept which dominated Egyptian and ancient pagan thought. The Hebrews’ wandering in the wilderness did become an entanglement—an ethical entanglement, rather than a physical entanglement. On the labyrinth, see Appendix C: “The Labyrinth and the Garden.”

represent them ethically and spiritually. They advised him to pursue the fleeing Hebrews. They had not learned, and they had not humbled themselves before God for their generations of sinful dealing with the Israelites. They had not yet received God's final verdict on the assertion of Egypt's continuity-of-being theology. They had not yet surrendered unconditionally.

C. Dominion and Surrender: Unconditional but Progressive

God requires unconditional surrender from mankind. He does not offer terms of permanent peace on anything other than full, unconditional surrender.²

1. Terms of Surrender

God's dealings with the Egyptians and the Canaanites were about to demonstrate, for all the world to see, just how unconditional His terms of surrender are. Egypt faced at least a century of submission to foreign rulers, and most of the cities of Canaan faced absolute annihilation. The Canaanites understood this when Israel crossed the Red Sea, as Rahab told the spies (Josh. 2:9–11). *Men must submit themselves to God as their lawful, absolute master, or else they perish.* The terms of surrender are stated in His covenant of law: ethical perfection.³ However, because no one except Jesus Christ is perfect before God, a sacrifice has been prepared, so that those relying on it might be

2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010).

3. It is misleading to redefine the Bible's definition of ethical perfection to mean simply spiritual maturity. Maturity implies ethical progress through time, and progress implies movement toward a fixed ethical standard. This standard is perfection. The perfection of the Bible is definitive as well as progressive. It is important to consider usage when we read that Noah was perfect (Gen. 6:9), or most notably of all, that Job was perfect and upright (Job. 1:1). The Bible does not teach perfectionism that men can attain ethical perfection in time and on earth. But it does teach that Jesus Christ did attain ethical perfection in time and on earth. Christ's perfect conformity to the law of God, in time and on earth, is the foundation of the regenerate person's definitive sanctification, as well as his progressive sanctification. On this point, see North, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 51–52. Any discussion of perfection as either exclusively definitive or exclusively progressive is incomplete. On the heresy of perfectionism, see B. B. Warfield, *Perfectionism*, either the abridged one-volume version published by Presbyterian and Reformed (1954) or the two-volume set published originally by Oxford University Press in 1931, and reprinted in 1981 by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

justified by God and adopted back into God's family (Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:4–5). The passage of His people out of bondage and through the Red Sea was symbolic of the salvation offered by God to His people. The failure of the Egyptians to prevent their escape testified to Canaan and to all the nations of the futility of challenging God by challenging God's people.

Dominion comes through adherence to the terms of God's covenant of peace. Pharaoh attempted to achieve dominion over Israel by defying God and denying the terms of unconditional surrender. He tried to buy God's acceptance by offering tribute money to the Hebrews, but also by implying that this was nothing more than a lawful payment, voluntarily given to lawfully enslaved brothers. Pharaoh wanted God's blessing on Egypt's statist order, for he still believed that He was the divine-human link. Not so, God declared. There would be no blessing on the terms laid down by Pharaoh. Pharaoh once again failed to gain any sort of compromise from God. The God of Israel was implacable except to those who acknowledged His lawful authority as a true slave-master. When Israel later refused to acknowledge this from time to time, God gave them into the hands of other slave-masters, like the archetypal slave-masters of Egypt. Pharaoh could not obtain what Israel, God's own people, could never obtain: an admission from God of the legitimacy of partial surrender to His authority.

God's requirement of unconditional surrender is ethical. "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). "Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God" (Deut. 18:13). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The standard of perfection is the standard met by Jesus Christ and imputed to His people by grace (Rom. 5:13–19). There can be no compromise here: perfection means *definitive perfection*.⁴

What about *progressive perfection*, or the process of spiritual maturation? God, by His grace, honors this process. The terms of the covenant are unquestionably conditional: if men do this, then God will give that. He honors the terms of His covenant, not because men have performed innately righteous acts perfectly, but because Jesus Christ did, and by seeking to imitate Christ and Christ's perfect humanity (but not His divinity), men become the recipients of God's blessings, in

4. See footnote #3.

time and on earth.

Covenant-keeping men cannot command God's blessings in the way that a magician thinks he can command blessings from occult forces, namely, on the basis of some precisely performed ritual. God is not bound by some autonomous cosmic order to respond automatically to the requests of men, including covenant-keeping men. Whatever men receive from God is by God's grace, since fallen men cannot claim to be in absolute and unconditional subordination to God, that is, totally righteous. But God's moral universe is orderly (common grace), so there are cause-and-effect relationships between righteousness (covenant-keeping) and prosperity. This orderliness is no less a matter of grace than God's imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness to His people. It is a world-ordering grace.

God instructed Israel to destroy utterly the Canaanites (Deut. 7:16–24). It was failure on Israel's part that resulted in the failure of their mission (Jud. 1:21–36). They did not utterly destroy the cities of Canaan. Why was this total destruction required by God? Because God was establishing a new base of operations for Israel, one which was to have been unpolluted by foreign gods. Once established in the land, however, the Israelites were not to demand the unconditional and immediate surrender of every pagan nation. They were to offer *terms of peace*, which might involve perpetual servitude, to nations far away from Canaan (Deut. 20:10–15).⁵ Furthermore, Israel was not supposed to have a standing army, meaning a king who multiplies horses, which are too easily used in offensive military operations (Deut. 17:16).⁶ Conquest was by means of God's word, as Jonah the prophet was instructed to deliver to Nineveh. The "clean sweep" in Canaan was unique in Israel's history, and even here, the terms of God's unconditional surrender were not successfully imposed, for these terms required totally faithful servants. The imposition of the terms of unconditional surrender by God's people demanded *unconditional faithfulness* on their part. They failed.

Christ, however, was unconditionally faithful to God, and therefore He was able to impose these terms on Satan at the cross. *The extension of His terms of surrender is what the New Testament era is all about.* The steady encroaching on Satan's fallen kingdom is what *the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of Christian institutions,*

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 42.

governed by God's law, are intended to accomplish. God's terms are still unconditional; men must surrender totally to God, either before they die (or, in the case of the final generation, before Christ comes in judgment), or else after they die (or after Christ comes in judgment). Eventually, all mankind will surrender unconditionally. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9–11). In time and on earth, however, not every knee will bow, and among those who formally bow themselves before Christ, not every heart will bow. The principle of unconditional surrender is nonetheless valid even before the final judgment. It will not be *consummately* extended in history by fallen men, but as the followers of Christ progressively conform themselves to Christ's image, to a greater and greater extent, the preaching of the gospel and the construction of institutions based on the full application of biblical law will extend Christ's kingdom: *progressive* unconditional surrender, the working out in history of the *definitive* unconditional surrender of Jesus Christ to God the Father.

2. Pharaoh's Negotiations

It is part of Satan's imitation kingdom that he, too, requires unconditional surrender. He wants men to bow to him and worship him, which is what he demanded of Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:9).⁷ Pharaoh seemed to compromise with Moses, but at no stage was he asking for anything less than unconditional surrender from God, for Pharaoh asked God to sanction the idea that Pharaoh had some trace of divinity in him, that he represented true divinity in the continuity of being between God and man. God refused to compromise, for anything less than total sovereignty on His part is a denial of who He is and what He is. Satan wants "just a speck" of sovereignty, so that he can successfully deny that God is who God says that He is. This is not unconditional surrender to God, for it requires that God deny Himself. In effect, it would be the unconditional surrender of God to Satan, for by having testified falsely concerning both Satan and Himself, God would thereby have sinned against Satan. He would have borne false

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

witness concerning the nature of divinity and false witness against His maligned (not malignant) neighbor. False testimony concerning the nature of God is a capital offense. This challenge to the validity of God's self-testimony was the very heart of Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve: an assertion that God had testified falsely concerning God, man, and reality.⁸

After Pharaoh finally allowed the Hebrews to depart in total triumph, without maintaining a shred of original sovereignty for himself or the Egyptian state, he raced after the Hebrews in a rage. Why had he let them go? Didn't they know who he was? Didn't they know what Egypt was? Didn't they know that he represented man's divinity in this world? He would show them. He would bring them low. Every Hebrew knee would bow to him, for they had not allowed him even a trace of sovereignty. They had wanted him to surrender unconditionally to their God and therefore to them, given the Egyptian theology of the continuity of being, although God allowed him to keep his kingdom. But it was the principle of the thing that concerned him. If they were going to demand unconditional surrender by him to their God in principle, then he was going to demand visible unconditional surrender from them once again. He was going to drag them back. They would not go free. They would not sacrifice to any God who would not acknowledge at least a degree of independent sovereignty to Pharaoh and his state. It would be a fight to the finish. It turned out to be just exactly that.

Pagan kingdoms implicitly want unconditional surrender from their enemies. Lawless men want the same. As men grow more arrogant, as they attempt to divorce themselves from the concept of lawful dominion under the restraints of God's law, they adopt policies of unconditional surrender, in time and on earth. They launch sneak attacks, in violation of Deuteronomy 20:10–15, as the Japanese did against the Russians in 1904 and as they did against the United States in December of 1941. Pagan governments demand unconditional surrender, as the Allies demanded from Germany, Italy, and Japan in the Second World War.⁹ In short, they want "a fight to the finish," just as Pharaoh wanted when he pursued the Israelites into the Red Sea. They

8. Gary North, "Witnesses and Judges," *Biblical Economics Today*, VI (Aug./Sept. 1983). Reprinted in Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix E.

9. Ann Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender* (Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961).

seek to be free of the restraints of God's law in order to impose a law-order which violates God's law.

Conclusion

Unconditional surrender is an inescapable concept: the question is, "Surrender to whom?" Will it be surrender to God, progressively through time, until the final day of judgment, when surrender will be absolute and unconditional? Or will it be surrender to Satan's kingdom, in time and on earth, through Satan's radical breaks in the continuities of history, the wars and conquests of his earthly kingdoms, all of which are at war with God's kingdom and His law? Satan wants a final break with history in history, a radical break with the sovereignty of God. He wants the abolition of history, for history testifies to his failure, in time, at the cross. He wants the unconditional surrender of time to revolutionary chaos or static timelessness, where the progressive, linear extension of God's kingdom will be overcome. Satan imitates God by demanding total, immediate, temporal surrender.

The argument favoring discontinuous breaks in history was valid when the static kingdoms of the ancient world faced the discontinuity represented by Israel. But now the church is bringing God's peace treaty to the nations. There are minor discontinuities, as nations rise and fall, but the next biblically significant discontinuity is Satan's final rebellion and Christ's return in judgment. At that point, unconditional surrender will be required. The kingdom will be delivered, in completed form, to the Father (I Cor. 15:24). The history of fallen, rebellious man will end. Until that time, it is the *continuity of God's progressive dominion*, through the preaching of the gospel and the construction of institutions imposing God's law, that is the criterion of historical change. It is the *steady extension of Christ's kingdom*, not the desperate discontinuities of Satan's kingdoms, with their treaties of *immediate unconditional surrender*, that is the basis of historical change.

There will be one final, all-out attempt by Satan to avoid total surrender. Then will come the return of Christ in full power and judgment. It will be the death knell of Satan's kingdom, in time, on earth, and in eternity (Rev. 20). All satanic imitations of this great discontinuity of God's final judgment will wind up as Pharaoh's attempted discontinuity in covenantal history wound up: buried in the depths of the sea.

Satan's theology is the religion of revolution, and it cannot survive

the steady, implacable onslaught of God's theology of progressive dominion. It is not the minor discontinuities of history that serve as our criteria of victory, but the steadiness of the word of God: "But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (Isa. 28:13). God used discontinuities in history to smash the kingdoms of the ancient world: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it to him" (Ezek. 21:27). Give what? The diadem of power (Ezek. 21:26). God still overturns Satan's kingdoms, but by the steady expansion of the gospel age, the progressive dominion of God's law and God's people, in time and on earth. Christians' task is to lay the groundwork for a new kingdom, built on the foundation of God's law—which is to govern every human institution—by God's grace, which is applied to the heart of every Christian (Heb. 8:7–13). *The New Testament does not teach a religion of social revolution, but a religion of ethical regeneration, restitution, and repentance.*

While Christianity preaches the tactics of social continuity during its "minority religion" phase—go the extra mile with your enemy, turn the other cheek—it nevertheless is a religion of social transformation. The Christian revolution takes place in the hearts and minds of men—the place where all revolutions begin. The opponents of Christianity recognize that Christianity is indeed a religion of total transformation. To them, the ethical discontinuity between the Old Adam and the New Adam represents a revolutionary doctrine. It threatens them with the destruction of their anti-Christian civilization.

The Roman emperors launched a series of bloody, though intermittent, persecutions against the early church because they recognized the all-or-nothing nature of the confrontation. It was either Christ or Caesar. The Roman state was quite willing to tolerate any religion which acknowledged the divinity (or genius) of the emperor. Christians refused. They paid a heavy price. But Rome paid a heavier price in the long run. So did Egypt.

14

THE RULE OF LAW

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you (Ex. 12:48–49).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the authority of biblical law: the third point of the biblical covenant model.¹ Access to Passover was by confession of faith and circumcision. The circumcised stranger and his household had access to Passover.

A. Subordination to Biblical Law

The Passover was closed to outsiders who had not been circumcised. A man's slave, if he had been purchased with money and subsequently circumcised, had the obligation of participating in the Passover rites (Ex. 12:44). He had a place in the family and was under the sovereignty of God, through his master. The mark of subordination was in his flesh. In contrast, the foreigner and hired servant were excluded from Passover, since they had not visibly (physiologically) humbled themselves before God, and were therefore not part of the covenant: "There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof" (12:43b–45). No foreigner could eat leavened bread anywhere in Israel during Passover week (12:19). Any stranger who wished to participate

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

in Passover could do so, if he and all the males of his household were circumcised (12:48). This indicated his *subordination to God* and His *dominion in the name of God* over his own household. A circumcised stranger was to be treated as one born in the land, although it is unclear how he could ever have lawfully owned rural land permanently, because of the redistribution back to the original family owners, which was required at the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:10).²

The rites of circumcision and Passover were simple enough. Biblical law in Israel was public. In fact, it had to be read in its entirety every seventh year in front of the assembled nation:

And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (Deut. 31:9–13).³

The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. He is the Creator. As such, He owns the whole world. He commands respect from all men, and the terms of His law are binding on all men. *The stranger within Israel's gates, no less than the priests, had to honor the law.* There was no mystery about the law. While some things are known only to God (Deut. 29:29), these secret matters are as closed to the priests as to the stranger. Public law was in principle open to every resident in the land of Israel. The law had to be an open book for everyone to understand and observe, including the children of strangers (Deut. 31:13). The Hebrews were not to make a mistake concerning the universality of God's rule. He is not confined to one city, one nation, or one people. His rule is universal. So is biblical law, which is the judicial manifestation of His sovereign rule.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 25.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch 75.

B. Access to Citizenship

God's law for Israel did not permit every circumcised stranger to become a full citizen immediately upon being circumcised. There were exceptions. Certain nations had been especially evil in their treatment of Israel, indicating a cultural perverseness that might take several generations to overcome in the lives of family members. The strong bond of the family covenant was acknowledged. It had taken the death of Israel's exodus generation to cleanse their families of the cultural legacy of Egypt; such a legacy remained a potential threat to Israel from newly circumcised pagans. Thus, it took three generations for circumcised Egyptians and Edomites (the heirs of Esau) to become full citizens (Deut. 23:7–8). Second, it took ten generations for Ammonites and Moabites:

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever. Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee (Deut. 23:3–4).

The language here is incomplete. We need other passages to help us understand. Does it say that they could become citizens in the tenth generation or does it say that they are banned forever? Was “forever” understood to mean a nearly permanent ban against them—to the tenth generation—or was it in fact permanent?

We read in Nehemiah 13: “On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing” (vv. 1–2). I believe that this use of “forever” was figurative; it meant ten generations. We are given an analogous prohibition in the case of bastardy. Bastards were also prevented from entering the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation (Deut. 23:2). The most conspicuous example of the enforcement of this restriction is seen in the adultery of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38), which produced Pharez and Zarah. They were bastards in terms of God's law. David was the tenth in the line of

those born of Pharez.⁴ He became king.

Despite this prohibition against Moabites, Ruth became a respected member of the covenant, though not a full citizen; she was a woman of humility and faithfulness. She even became the great grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). The grace of God is our standard; full ethical conformity to God's covenant, through faith in God's grace (Hab. 2:4), overcomes the general restrictions against the greatest sinners. Ruth's covenant was secured in a three-fold manner: through her marriage to her first husband, a Hebrew; through her faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi; and through her marriage to her second husband, Boaz. She was in subjection to him, as she had been in subjection to the other two. Her children were counted as Israelites, although not as members of the congregation, because of Boaz's position as an heir of Pharez.⁵ But her great grandson—the third generation—became the king; therefore, any general prohibition on her heirs from serving as judges to the tenth generation was overcome by her marriage to Boaz.

It might be argued that Ruth is not an adequate example, since as a woman, she could never have exercised political or judicial office. Possibly; but the ban would have applied to her male heirs. Furthermore, it is instructive that this was a marriage between a politically restricted Moabite and an equally restricted heir of a bastard. It was part of the most important covenantal line in Israel—indeed, the most important in all history. It produced David, and it eventually produced Jesus (Matt. 1; Luke 3). *Therefore, the crucial issue is ethics, not genetics. The covenant is fundamentally ethical.* Those who were under the ban were under it because of the transgressions of their forebears. But this ban could be overcome through righteousness over time. *Time is a means of testing covenantal faithfulness and external performance*

4. The named generations were: Pharez, Hezron, Ram, Amminidab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David (Ruth 4:18–22). The listed line of Judah was Pharez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, and Nahshon. Nahshon was a contemporary of Moses (Num. 1:7). Thus, only four generations are listed in between Nahshon and David: Salmon, who married Rahab (Matt. 1:5), Boaz (who married Ruth), Obed, Jesse, and then David. This list is clearly incomplete. It is symbolic. The time between Pharez and David was over six centuries.

5. A member of the congregation could serve as a judge or elder. It is fitting that the restoration of this family, through God's grace, came with David, the most powerful ruler in Israel's history. This tends to support the idea that being cut off from the congregation did not mean religious excommunication—prohibiting participation in the rituals of Israel—but rather separation from rulership, meaning separation from dominion through service in the civil government.

across generations.

Neither genetics nor time was ever determinative in the covenant structure. The covenantal grafting in of the gentiles through faith in Christ alienated the Pharisees who failed to understand this fundamental principle of the covenant (Rom. 11).⁶ The administrative period of ethical testing—even ten generations—had its limits. “Forever” thus was figurative in the case⁷ of citizenship for Moabites and Ammonites.

C. Covenantal Citizenship

The concept of citizenship in the Old Testament was unquestionably covenantal. This is because God had established the nation by His sovereign act of grace, and had placed all the Israelites under the rule of His covenantal law-order.

1. Restrictive Covenants

Covenants are always restrictive; they exclude even as they include. The civil covenant is also restrictive. Rushdoony commented on Israel’s civil covenant.

In Biblical law, neither equalitarianism nor an oligarchy have [sic] any standing. God as the source of law established the covenant as the principle of citizenship. Only those within the covenant are citizens. The covenant is restrictive in terms of God’s law; it is also restrictive in terms of a bar against membership, which appears specifically, naming certain kinds of groups of persons. This aspect of the law is usually overlooked, because it is embarrassing to modern man. It needs therefore especial attention. In Deuteronomy 23:1–2, eunuchs are barred from citizenship; bastards are banned through the tenth generation. Ammonites and Moabites were banned through the tenth generation, or they are totally excluded, depending on the reading of the text. Edomites and Egyptians were eligible for citizenship “in their third generation”; the implication is that they are eligible after three generations of faith, after demonstrating for three generations that they believed in the covenant God and abided by His law. The throne being the ark in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle being also the central place of atonement, membership in the nation-civil and in the nation-ecclesiastical were one and the same.⁷

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

7. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press,

There is therefore a covenantal relationship between the kind of god a society believes in and the kind of citizenship that the society creates. The foundation of both the theological covenant and citizenship is *faith*.

Citizenship rested on faith. Apostasy was treason. The believing alien had some kind of access to the sanctuary (II Chron. 6:32–33), at least for prayer, but this act did not give him citizenship. The alien[s]—Egyptian, Babylonian, Ethiopian, Philistine, Phoenician, and any others—could be citizens of the true or heavenly Zion, the city of God (Ps. 87), but the local Zion, Israel, was not to admit the banned groups except on God's terms. . . . Thus, it would appear from the evidence of the law that, *first*, a restrictive membership or citizenship was a part of the practice of Israel by law. . . . *Second*, the predominant fact in Israel was one law for all, irrespective of faith or national origin, that is, the absolute requirement of justice for all without respect of persons.⁸

Non-citizens were protected by God's law. This meant *protection from citizens* who might use their possession of citizenship as a means of exploiting strangers. It therefore meant *protection from oppression by the civil government*.

The legal protections ("rights") granted by biblical law to non-citizens were so comprehensive that it is difficult in retrospect to specify exactly what privileges citizens enjoyed that non-citizens did not. One possibility: not being members of any tribe, the non-citizens could not have served as judges. Foreigners were not automatically prohibited from serving in Israel's army, for David's officer, Uriah, was a Hittite, or at least his family background was Hittite (II Sam. 11:6). No privileges of citizenship are spelled out in the Old Testament that are explicitly restricted to Israelites, although there must have been such privileges, since Deuteronomy 23:3–8 provides a list of those nations whose members are prohibited from joining the "assembly" (civil, not ecclesiastical). A circumcised stranger could, however, participate in Passover (Ex. 12:48). So, it is not a simple matter to determine just what protections were not available to strangers.

2. Differing Applications

There were a few cases where the law was *applied differently* be-

1973), p. 99.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

tween strangers and Israelites. Two of these dealt with slavery. *First*, a stranger could become a *debt slave* as a result of some economic crisis. It was not legal for a Hebrew to make interest-bearing loans to a fellow Hebrew who was in need of a charitable loan. “Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury” (Deut. 23:19–20a).⁹ This prohibition was against interest-bearing loans to the needy poor, not against loans for business endeavors in which the lender shared some of the risk. The defining factor for usury was poverty. “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury” (Ex. 22:25).¹⁰ Strangers, however, were regarded as *slaves to foreign gods*, and therefore as *slaves to sin*. The Hebrew was allowed to charge them interest. The Hebrew also owed his tithes and offerings to God, including God’s portion of any interest payments received, so the stranger in this way paid at least a portion of what he owed to God. *Second*, heathens could be purchased as permanent slaves (Lev. 25:44–46),¹¹ or taken as captives in war (Num. 31:9; Deut. 20:10–14).¹² The Gibeonites, by tricking the Israelites, became permanent servants to Israel (Josh. 9). A Hebrew bondservant went free in the jubilee year (Lev. 25:39–41).¹³ The stranger did not go free; he and his children remained in the Hebrew family as permanent capital assets (Lev. 25:45–46).

Third, strangers could worship foreign gods in the privacy of their households (though not publicly), but it was a capital offense for a Hebrew to do so (Deut. 13; 17:2–7). Apostasy—breaking the theological covenant—was a capital offense, but being unconverted wasn’t.

Fourth, strangers could legally eat the meat of beasts that died naturally; Hebrews couldn’t (Deut. 14:21).¹⁴

What could the purposes of the exceptions have been in the case of slavery? James Jordan’s analysis is illuminating.

Why does the law differ in regard to the unbelievers? Is this merely to symbolize the difference between a covenant people and

9. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 57.

10. Chapter 49.

11. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31.

12. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 48.

13. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 30.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 34.

those outside it? Not so. As the earlier chapters of this monograph demonstrated, the psychology of the unregenerate man is radically different from that of the regenerate man at the most basic level. The unbeliever is by nature an anti-dominion man, and thus lazy and unproductive. He is suicidal as well, and a rebel against all authority. He is a murderer. The Bible is realistic about this, and makes slavery a provision for the unbeliever, both for his own protection and well-being, and for the protection of society. Additionally, the enslavement of the heathen is, as has been noted before, an excellent means of evangelization and acculturation. There is to be one law and one standard for the believer and unbeliever (Lev. 24:22); the differences in application of this one law are due to the differing psychological situations of the believer and the unbeliever.¹⁵

God requires one legal standard, for all men are held accountable to Him. His law specifies *differences in application*, and these differences must be respected. Nevertheless, the law did not give the Hebrew rulers the right to multiply exceptions to a straightforward application of the law. Debt and slavery were the main exceptions with respect to strangers in the land, plus the privileges and duties of citizenship, most notably (and possibly only) serving as a judge.

3. No Respect for Persons

Again and again in the books of the law, the warning and reminder is given by God concerning the rule of law for strangers: "I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God" (Lev. 25:38). He redeemed (bought back) Israel from oppression; therefore, Israel is not to become an oppressor. "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:21; cf. 23:9; Lev. 19:33; and Deut. 10:19). The prophets also repeated this warning against oppressing strangers (Jer. 7:6–7; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5).¹⁶

15. James Jordan, *Slavery in Biblical Perspective* (Master's Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 95–96.

16. One of the continuing themes in the writings of "liberation theologians" is the evil of oppression. They always equate oppression with economic oppression, and economic oppression with free market capitalism. What is important to consider here is the implicitly statist nature of oppression: Israel was oppressed in Egypt precisely because the Egyptians did not honor God's law. Hebrews are to honor God's law and enforce it throughout the land. The state is to be restrained by biblical law. This makes it very difficult for anyone to gain oppressive powers over others. Potential oppressors cannot gain the co-operation of public officials in applying the state's monopoly of vi-

The rule of law is established unmistakably: “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it” (Deut. 1:17). This was Moses’ recapitulation of his decision to create a hierarchy of judges over Israel (Ex. 18).¹⁷ The judges must not respect persons, for they act as God’s agents. God does not respect persons: “For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible [God] which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward. He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:17–19). *This is the biblical doctrine of judicial love: we are required to render honest judgment and to bring the rule of law over all men, including the stranger.* The very next verse tells us why we must love all men in this way: “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name” (Deut. 10:20).¹⁸ Those who love God, who cleave to His name,¹⁹ and who swear (give a binding oath) by His name, are to love His law and apply it without prejudice of persons.

The universality of God’s law implies the universal responsibility of all men to obey His law. Both principles are based on the idea of *the total sovereignty of God*. By establishing a unified law code for all residents of Israel, God thereby announced His kingdom. No one was exempt. It was not a person’s participation in family rites, as in Greece and Rome, which opened the courts of law to him—courts to which strangers could therefore not appeal with hope of receiving justice. The principle of justice for all is based on the principle of *God’s final judgment on all*. This was seen first within the geographical confines of Israel, and all nations were to stand in awe of the legal system built on the principle of justice for all (Deut. 4:5–8).²⁰ The biblical principle is

olence against certain economic groups or organizations. When the civil government refuses to enforce God’s law on all people, the result is oppression. The whole of the law must be enforced in order to avoid oppression. The liberation theologians are universally unwilling to recommend that the civil government enforce the whole of Old Testament law. Thus, they are advocates of oppressing institutions.

17. Chapter 19.

18. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 27.

19. The Hebrew word translated here as “cleave”—*dawbak*—means “to join to” or “cling to,” the same word used in Genesis 2:24: “cleave unto his wife.” It refers to a covenant.

20. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

clear: *one God, one law-order*. Deny the universality of a single law-order, and you thereby deny a universal God. This is precisely what ancient paganism denied.

D. Pagan Citizenship

One God, one law-order: here is a principle that stood in stark contrast to the law structures of the ancient world. The pagan kingdoms of the ancient world made it exceedingly difficult for foreigners to gain citizenship, for this meant the right to participate in the religious rites of the city. *Religious exclusion meant political exclusion*. It also meant exclusion from courts of law. It meant, ultimately, *exclusion from justice*. Polytheistic societies recognized the biblical principle in its reverse form: *many gods, many law-orders*. They understood that they could have no legal standing in another city's courts, for the same reason that foreigners could possess no legal standing in theirs: they worshipped different gods.

Let us consider the "democratic" city-states of the classical world, since they represent the "best case" of ancient pagan politics. Fustel de Coulanges' book, *The Ancient City* (1864), remains the classic in the field. He wrote about the link between classical (Greek and Roman) religion and politics. Religion and politics were inseparably linked. Because classical religion was essentially initiatory and mystery oriented, politics was equally based on secrecy and participation in closed rites. Unlike the closed rite of Passover, classical religion and politics were closed rites based on blood lines, meaning family lines. "As law was a part of religion, it participated in the mysterious character of all this religion of the cities. The legal formulas, like those of religion, were kept secret. They were concealed from the stranger, and even from the plebeian. This was not because the patricians had calculated that they should possess a great power in the exclusive knowledge of the law, but because the law, by its origin and nature, long appeared to be a mystery, to which one could be initiated only after having first been initiated into the national worship and the domestic worship."²¹

This meant that residence in a city was not the same as citizenship. This is a universal distinction: residency vs. citizenship. But it is possible for residents to receive the protection of civil law. This was the

21. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), III:XI, p. 192.

case in Israel, the only example in the ancient world of a political order that granted comprehensive legal protection for religious aliens. Not so in classical civilization, where there were many gods and many law-orders.

To live in a city did not make one subject to its laws and place him under their protection; one had to be a citizen. The law did not exist for the slave; no more did it exist for the stranger. . . . These provisions of ancient law were perfectly logical. Law was not born of the idea of justice, but of religion, and was not conceived as going beyond it. In order that there should be a legal relation between two men, it was necessary that there should already exist a religious relation; that is to say, that they should worship at the same hearth and have the same sacrifices. When this religious community did not exist, it did not seem that there could be any legal relation. Now, neither the stranger nor the slave had any part in the religion of the city. A foreigner and a citizen might live side by side during long years, without one's thinking of the possibility of a legal relation being established between them. Law was nothing more than one phase of religion. Where there was no common religion, there was no common law.²²

Fustel had a tendency to exaggerate the impact of family religion in later Greek culture, although its influence never died out. There were important modifications in Greek political religion, especially in Athens, from the sixth century before Christ until the conquest of Greece by Macedonia, late in the fourth century, B.C. Early in the sixth century, Solon revised the laws of Athens and began to encourage immigration.²³ Foreign craftsmen were promised citizenship if they came to dwell permanently in Athens. Alfred Zimmern saw this as an important innovation in ancient Greece, for "the states of the Greek world had not been trained by generations of competition to regard the foreigner as a unit of labour. They were in their nature select and exclusive corporations, rigidly subdivided into lesser and still selecter circles; and there was no place in them for outsiders. Solon's policy, therefore, marks the beginning of a far-reaching change of attitude. Henceforward newcomers are no longer to be despised, as in the old days, as 'cityless vagrants without hearth-fire or lands,' but welcomed as useful comrades and helpers in the work of the community. In other words, Athens was now willing to accept new blood on its merits,

22. *Ibid.*, III:XI, pp. 192–93.

23. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, [1951] 1962), p. 100.

quite apart from questions of religion and nationality.”²⁴ Better put, Athens found ways to enroll skilled foreign craftsmen onto the lists of the civic religion.

Nevertheless, Athens was unique, and even this uniqueness had limits. In the law of 451–450 B.C., Pericles, who is regarded as the consummate Athenian democrat by modern scholars, had a law passed that limited citizenship for outsiders to those whose parents were both Athenians, thereby closing citizenship to outsiders, including the sons of Athenian men with foreign-born mothers.²⁵ Glotz’s statement is representative of the Greek city-states: “Within each city aliens had only very limited rights, even if their position were established not only by law but also by a treaty, and even if they were permanently domiciled in it as metics. These principles persisted to the end; but their severity was tempered, in international and public law alike, without, however, infringing on the sovereignty of the State.”²⁶ Foreigners could become citizens, but the practice was always rare. Women, slaves, freedmen, and foreigners were not given the rights of citizenship. Greek political religion excluded them.

E. Dominion, Law, and Citizenship

Why the difference in access to citizenship between Israel and classical civilization? It was the difference between metaphysical and ethical religion, between ritual religion and judicial religion, between power religion and dominion religion. The difference is found in the differing conceptions of man that were proclaimed by the two religions.

The biblical view of mankind is simultaneously universal and particular (both one and many). There is unity: all men are made in God’s image, and all men (apart from grace) are ethical rebels, disinherited by their Father in heaven. There is also *disunity*: some men have been regenerated and put under *a new household covenant*, which is the household of faith, meaning God’s household. In contrast to pagan religion, the meaningful differentiation is not between those born in one geographical area versus those born in another. The differentiation is between *birth in Adam’s flesh versus moral rebirth by God’s spirit*. It is

24. Alfred E. Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1915), p. 136.

25. G. Glotz, *The Greek City and its Institutions* (New York: Barnes & Noble, [1929] 1969), p. 270.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

the “old birth” versus the “new birth” that ultimately divides men.

There is, on the one hand, a *divisive aspect* in biblical religion, as in every religion. It is the division between saved and lost, between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. In short, this division is ethical, not geographical. The new creation is equally ethical, not the product of civic rituals of chaos, or the family religion of placating dead ancestors. On the other hand, there is also a universal aspect of biblical religion, which in turn creates a universality of biblical civic order. The link between all men, saved and lost, is the fact that all men are made in God’s image, and all men have been assigned the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).²⁷ This, in turn, implies *the universality of God’s law*, for God’s law is the primary tool of dominion. Since all men are in rebellion against God, all men need the restraint that biblical law offers. Biblical law provides social and political order. Thus, the covenantal law structure of Israel is morally binding on all men. This law-order is essentially *ethical*. All men are to live righteously and exercise dominion; therefore, all men deserve the protection of biblical civil law.

Aliens in Israel were to see the beneficial effects of the law and report back to their own nations concerning the rule of righteousness in Israel—a righteousness that was not confined to citizens only. Therefore, *biblical civil law was and still is a means of evangelism*.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).²⁸

1. The Medieval City: Covenantal

Max Weber, the German historian-sociologist, devoted considerable space to a study of the differences between the oriental city and the medieval city, especially the city in Northern Europe. He accepted

27. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

28. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

Fustel's analysis of the clan-based ancient city. The primary difference between the two cities was the basis of citizenship: clan vs. oath. The personal covenantal oath of the individual was the basis of access to citizenship in the medieval city. Jews were excluded from citizenship, not because they were members of an outside clan, but because they could not swear allegiance to Christianity's God. "The medieval city, after all, was still a cultic association. The city church, the city saint, participation of the burgher in the Lord's Supper, the official celebrations of the church holy days—all these are obvious features of the medieval city. But the sib [brotherhood—G.N.] had been deprived of all ritual significance by Christianity, for by its very nature the Christian congregation was a religious association of individual believers, not a ritual association of clans."²⁹

The city became the focal point of the advent of industrialism, free trade, and the accumulation of financial resources. The Western city was instrumental in the coming of capitalism, meaning rational production and distribution that is monitored by means of rational (monetary) calculation methods. The medieval city was originally a Christian institution, a corporation based on a common oath and common law-order. It was, in short, *a covenantal association based on a shared confession of faith*. This corporate faith Was not clan-based but oath-based.

F. The Foundation of Social Order

The foundation of all social order is God. It is not the state. It is not the will of the majority. It is not the king. It is not any human institution. Biblical law provides us with the only reliable long-term program for the establishment of sustainable social order.

God created the universe, created man, and made man in His image. He assigned to man the tasks of dominion. Man therefore was endowed by God with the ability to interpret and classify the creation. Adam named the animals of the garden (Gen. 2:20). After man's rebellion, God gave men verbal instructions, and in our day, we possess written instructions in His word. Man, in short, has access to an *integ-*

29. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 1247. This is the English-language version of Weber's never completed and posthumously published *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 4th edition (1956). He died in 1920. This section on the city also appears in Weber, *The City*, translated and edited by Don Martindale and Gertrude Neuwirth (New York: Free Press, 1958), pp. 102–3.

rating principle that links God, man, human institutions, and the creation within one ethical order. Understand: this order is *ethical*; it is *not ontological*. We are not unified with God's being, nor is God an aspect of the creation. But we can achieve *ethical union with God through Jesus Christ*, who is both God and a perfect man, two natures in union but without mixture in one Person. The link between God and man, between time and eternity, is Jesus Christ, and only Jesus Christ.

1. Biblical Law, Biblical Order

We can say with confidence that *the enforcement of biblical law provides man with the social order he requires for efficient dominion*. This efficiency is present precisely because it is in harmony with the moral law. In other words, formal rationalism and substantive rationalism are in harmony under the terms of biblical law. We can attain *economic efficiency* at the same time that we attain *valid ethical ends*. We find in God's law the link between *the letter of the law* (formal rationalism) and *the spirit of the law* (substantive rationalism). We know that the common good of mankind is promoted by biblical law, not because we claim the ability to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility,³⁰ and not because we believe that the "general will" of man is expressed by majority vote,³¹ but because we have faith in the reliability of God's law to integrate each man with other men and with man's environment. The law is *designed* to fit the creation, including man's institutions. The law did not evolve, nor did man evolve. We can have confidence in biblical law, not because it has been useful *up until now* in promoting the dominion of evolving man, but because it is established by God as the tool of dominion and the foundation of social peace.

This perspective relieves us of the philosophical contradictions of the humanistic concept of natural rights or human rights. *It shifts sovereignty back to God and away from man, whether individual man or collective mankind*. Natural rights theory, like its philosophical corollary, natural law theory, cannot give us specifics that are supposedly agreed upon by all rational investigators.³²

30. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

31. Robert A. Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1968), ch. 1: "Rousseau and the Political Community."

32. Section J, below.

2. *God's Judgment of Collectives*

What the humanist always neglects to consider is the response of God to continuing public moral evil that is not suppressed by governments, including the civil government. God brings visible judgment on evil societies (Deut. 28:15–68). The refusal to recognize this fact was (and is) a major weakness in all versions of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century classical liberalism. The liberals look only at what men do *to* other men, ignoring what evil men do *in association with* other evil men. F. A. Hayek wrote concerning “victimless crimes”: “Since for a case to come before a judge a dispute must have arisen, and since judges are not normally concerned with relations of command and obedience, only such actions of individuals as affect other persons, or, as they are traditionally described, actions towards other persons . . . will give rise to the formulation of legal rules. . . . At the moment we want merely to point out that actions which are clearly not of this kind, such as what a person does alone within his four walls, or even the voluntary collaboration of several persons, in a manner which clearly cannot affect or harm others, can never become the subject of rules of conduct that will concern a judge.”³³ Examples of “victimless crimes” are such “capitalist acts between consenting adults” as the sale and use of hard drugs, prostitution, homosexuality, and so forth.

Such acts are assumed by classical liberals and modern libertarians to be harmless to other people; they are matters “which clearly cannot affect or harm others.” Hayek was honest enough to put in this qualifying sentence: “At least where it is not believed that the whole group may be punished by a supernatural power for the sins of individuals, there can arise no such rules from the limitation of conduct towards others, and therefore from the settlement of disputes.”³⁴ The heart of the matter is here: there is a supernatural God who promises the destruction of societies that permit immoral, though voluntary, acts between consenting adults. If these acts are public, or if they are contracted in a public manner (soliciting, in other words), then they should be punishable by civil law.

The Bible says that strangers are under the law in a biblical commonwealth. The fact that they are strangers in no way exempts them

33. F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 3 vols., *Rules and Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), vol. 1, p. 101.

34. *Idem*.

from the requirements of the law. They are a part of the social order, so they must abide by the legal foundation of that order, biblical law. Christians have unfortunately adopted variations of Greek and Roman concepts of natural law and natural rights in order to convince the humanists, pagans, and other “strangers within the gates” of the advantages and moral necessity of accepting biblical laws.³⁵ They long ago adopted the language of “right reason” and “human rights” to defend the common law, that was heavily influenced by biblical law. In adopting incompatible judicial doctrines, Christians relinquished their claim to the only law-order that is universally valid and universally binding: biblical law.

God’s law-order cannot be successfully defended intellectually in terms of natural law, because no system can be defended successfully in terms of natural law. The strangers within the gates have the *work of the law* written on their hearts, but they actively and willfully suppress this testimony.³⁶ They need the protection of biblical law, which has been revealed to us in God’s word. God’s people also need the protection of biblical law to protect them from the evil deeds of others. Every man needs biblical law; and every man had better acknowledge his need for a substitutionary sacrifice because of his own transgression of at least some of the requirements of biblical law.

G. Self-Government Under Biblical Law

When biblical law is enforced without respect to persons, society is given the legal structure that favors economic development and external blessings. Men are told of their moral and legal responsibilities before God. *Self-government under God’s law is the primary form of government in every sphere of life*: civil government, family government, church government, economic government. There is to be a means of settling disputes: an appeals court that enforces biblical law without respect of persons. There is an *appeals court* in the church (Matt. 18:15–20; I Cor. 6:1–10³⁷) and the civil government (Ex. 18:13–26). *No earthly government can possibly afford to police every aspect of human action*. No human court possesses sufficient economic resources to do so. Any court that would attempt this seeks to impose a

35. Gary North, “The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right,” *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 1 (1982). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1982>)

36. Section J, below.

37. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

top-down bureaucracy that is antithetical to personal initiative, personal responsibility, and economic development. Such a concept of government is the pyramid view, where the state is god, an omniscient directing agent staffed by automatons who simply carry out orders to the letter. The *pyramid society* is self-defeating; it is parasitic, uncreative, and stifling. It destroys self-government.

The biblical form of government is *a system of multiple sovereignties* (“authorities” we read in Romans 13:1), with *multiple hierarchies* (the appeals court structures), and with none universally sovereign over all other human institutions. This is a system of decentralized government, competing institutional sovereignties, and limited civil government. It is a system of government that rejects absolute human sovereignty. It recognizes the implicit total depravity of man—the definitive depravity of man—apart from God’s common or special grace—and therefore the explicit total depravity of any absolutely sovereign human institution, assuming that any institution could ever be free of God’s restraints, which is not possible.

The basic and indispensable form of social discipline is the preaching of the whole counsel of God. The church must do this, the civil government must proclaim biblical civil law, and the fathers in all the families should proclaim it. *Self-government under biblical law is the indispensable means of attaining a sustainable social order.* This does not deny the need for appeals courts, but it places such courts in their proper perspective. The individual has the greatest responsibility for conforming to God’s law, since the individual must give an account of his actions, thoughts, and words on the day of judgment (Matt. 12:36; Rom. 14:12). God polices everything and judges everything. He provides perfect justice and perfect punishment. There is no escape. Since the punishment is individual (Luke 12:47–48),³⁸ and the rewards are individual (I Cor. 3:11–15),³⁹ *the primary agent of earthly law enforcement is the individual.* No one else has comparable knowledge of his own actions. No other earthly authority has comparable incentives to conform a man’s actions to the standards presented in God’s law. The *incentive system* described by God in His word makes it plain that *the most important agency of government is the individual.*

For the individual to exercise self-government, as required by biblical law, he must be aware of the terms of the law. He must under-

38. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

39. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 3.

stand what his responsibilities are before God. This is why every institution ought to proclaim biblical law as it applies to that particular institution. Men should be openly confronted with biblical law, from morning to night to morning, in every sphere of life, for each man is responsible to God, and in some cases to his fellow men, from morning to night to morning, in every sphere of life. *There is no neutral zone that is free from the requirements of God's law, no area of lawlessness.* There can be conformity to the law of God or rebellion against it, but there can never be sheer lawlessness. The Bible speaks of “lawless” men, but it really means rebels against biblical law.

H. Multiple Hierarchies

The Protestants' most important contribution to the social theory of the West was their refinement of the Christian and medieval view of multiple sovereignties and therefore multiple hierarchies.⁴⁰ No man is an island. No man is solely responsible to any single institution, either. *There is no divine right of kings, who owe allegiance only to God. There is no divine right of citizens, who owe allegiance only to God.* There is no divine right of the free market. There is no divine right of any earthly institution. Each is under God; none is completely independent of all the others. This legal pluralism is one of the sources of Western liberty. But note: Western legal pluralism was not a self-conscious pluralism of law-orders (“polylegalism,” which is implicitly polytheistic), but *a pluralism of human institutional sovereignties under a single law-order, God's law.* The absolute sovereignty of any human institution is denied by such a doctrine. Church canon law broke decisively with any doctrine of the unitary state. As Rushdoony noted:

To understand the implications of canon law, it is necessary to realize that ancient society was unitary, and it had a single, visible, human sovereignty. It was totalitarian in practice and in faith. A visible “divine” authority governed the whole of life and admitted the

40. On the multiplicity of legal jurisdictions in medieval legal theory after 1150, see Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), Pt. II. Berman wrote: “Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the Western legal tradition is the coexistence and competition within the same community of diverse jurisdictions and diverse legal systems. It is this plurality of jurisdictions and legal systems that makes the supremacy of law both necessary and possible. Legal pluralism originated in the differentiation of the ecclesiastical polity from secular polities. The church declared its freedom from secular control, its exclusive jurisdiction in some matters, and its concurrent jurisdiction in other matters” (p. 10).

existence of no independent order. For the ancient state, the uncontrolled was the enemy, and the controlled was the subject. Neither man nor any of his activities and institutions possessed any free, uncontrolled, or independent domain wherein the state had no jurisdiction. The sovereignty of the state meant that man was the creature of the state and entirely its subject.

But Biblical faith asserted instead the sovereignty of God and the ultimacy of His decree and law, so that man, the state, and every institution were under God and His law. Instead of the sovereign state providing the overall shelter for all things, the sovereign God is that over-lord, and all of man's institutions are directly under God and His word. Instead of a mediatorial state, Christ is man's mediator. The Bible provides a legal mandate for the institutions, and the state is made the ministry of justice, and the church the ministry of the word and the sacraments. The family is under God's law, as is agriculture, commerce, science, education, and all things else. Neither the church, nor the state, nor any other institution has a legitimate overall power of control. But the state in antiquity, and again today, has played the overall role of God, the sovereign over every realm and with basic and ultimate power over every realm. The state can permit or grant to its children or creatures certain privileges, but it cannot tolerate their denial of its sovereign authority. For the church therefore to issue canons placing Christians under the canons of Christ, under the laws of God, was a denial of the sovereignty of the state and of its canons. It was a shattering of the concept of the totalitarian unitary state.⁴¹

Harold Berman's brilliant and comprehensive history of medieval law concluded much the same concerning the role of canon law, although he did not discuss the theological foundations and implications in the same detail as Rushdoony did. He saw clearly the importance of legal pluralism in the development of Western liberty. "The pluralism of Western law, which has both reflected and reinforced the pluralism of Western political and economic life, has been, or once was, a source of development, or growth—legal growth as well as political and economic growth. It also has been, or once was, a source of freedom. A serf might run to the town court for protection against his master. A vassal might run to the king's court for protection against his lord. A cleric might run to the ecclesiastical court for protection against the

41. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House [1969] 1998), p. 110. (<http://bit.ly/rjrfs0>)

king.”⁴²

Let us consider an example of the legal operation of the principle of multiple sovereignties. A person is found to be an adulterer. This obviously has implications for *family government*. The authority structure of the family has been broken by the guilty individual. There are lawful ways of handling this problem, at the discretion of the injured party (Matt. 1:19). At the same time, adultery is a matter of *church government*. The church can bring discipline to the guilty party, by excommunication if necessary. The *civil government* is also involved. A civil covenant has been broken. The civil government, upon complaint of the injured partner, or on the complaint of citizens who discovered the crime, must step in and bring justice (Lev. 20:10). The penalty for adultery is death. There are legal questions that must be dealt with, questions of evidence. Any decision by any of the governmental units will also have economic implications: the dowry, the custody of the children (if the state fails to execute the guilty party), and so forth. Each of these sovereign agencies has limited but legitimate sovereignty. None is absolutely sovereign.

I. Moral Norms and Market Order

What I am describing is a *decentralized social order*. Even in the largest city, each man is to be under the rule of some local agencies of governments (plural). This brings to the forefront each man's personal responsibility before God. The law of God is able to provide the norms of righteousness in every sphere of life, since it provides the proper view of man, the responsible creature. We are not describing an autonomous social order, one in which there are no norms other than personal self-interest. Even the free market, which does function well in terms of personal self-interest among market participants, requires a moral foundation. Hayek admitted this, but no economist has defended more eloquently the *necessity of moral norms*—norms beyond mere market profitability—than Wilhelm Röpke. This is why he is such an important economist. The market system is based neither on violence nor on charity, Röpke argued, but it is never morally neutral. Without the bedrock of morality—essentially Christian morality—the free market cannot be sustained. Most remarkably, this economist even understood that the market is based on a *creed*.

42. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, p. 10.

It is certainly true that the competitive market system—the “business economy”—keeps itself at an equal distance from both the ethically negative system of violence or ruse and the ethically positive one of altruism and charity. It reduces both to the common level of a mild standard of commercial good behaviour, but it would be a great mistake to think that that would make the market system an ethically neutral sphere. On the contrary, it is a highly sensitive artefact of occidental civilization, with all the latter’s ingredients of Christian and pre-Christian morality and its secularized forms; and it should not be forgotten that the “economic man” of the classics was really an English gentleman of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, whose normal code was fixed by the church and by tradition. In fact, the market economy is an economic system which cannot exist without a minimum of mutual trust, confidence in the stability of the legal-institutional framework of the economic process (including money), contractual loyalty, honesty, fair play, professional honour, and that pride which considers it beneath one to cheat, bribe, or misuse the authority of the state for one’s own egoistic purposes. Above all, there must be a “creed” in the most general sense of the term, a belief in a definite scale of ultimate values giving sense and purpose to the ordinary doings of all participating in the economic process, and, finally, at least a provisional understanding of the meaning and working of this economic process.⁴³

The free market economy needs a creed—what Rushdoony called a foundation of social order—in order to be maintained by any society. If this creed is not based on an ethical code that is in conformity to the one presented by the Bible, the free market social order cannot survive. God removes the prosperity of that culture by removing *the moral foundation of the market*, namely, men’s faith in the legitimacy of the market process—a process that is sanctioned by orthodox Christian doctrine. Röpke warned: “Thus the market economy is living on certain psycho-moral reserves, which are taken for granted when everything is going well, and only reveal their supreme importance when they are giving out.”⁴⁴ That these “capital reserves” of morality are running out and not being replenished is increasingly obvious, and it was obvious to Röpke when he wrote this book in the early 1940s.

Röpke made another important point concerning the moral order undergirding the market. There is no doubt that the division of labor is basic to the market order, a point driven home graphically by Adam

43. Wilhelm Röpke, *International Economic Disintegration* (London: Hodge, [1942] 1950), pp. 68–69. (<http://bit.ly/wried>)

44. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Smith in his deservedly famous story of the pin-makers with which he begins *Wealth of Nations* (1776). But the division of labor is a fragile and therefore potentially dangerous feature of modern society. Each of us is dependent on one another's productivity.

We saw that an intensive economic intercourse, which involves a wide scale of division of labour and a high degree of mutual dependence of individuals, is possible only under a number of conditions, which all fall under the head of "socio-political" integration. It is this latter which, in the last resort, sets the limits to the extent and degree of economic integration. There must be a framework of institutions and of a strong legal order, and behind them, there must be a generally observed and undisputed code of moral norms and principles of behaviour. In this way, it is possible to have a society in which all its members may feel sheltered in an atmosphere of mutual confidence, security, and continuity. Only in this way is it possible to reduce and make bearable the enormous risks involved in a high degree of dependence, which is inevitably connected with the division of labour. Every page of economic history proclaims the truth of this statement, which is, indeed, the ultimate principle explaining the rise and decay, the expansion and contraction of economic organization.⁴⁵

If this economic division of labor collapses, which is possible in a program of price and wage controls—which Röpke called repressed inflation⁴⁶—the very survival of modern, industrialized populations is threatened.

Röpke saw what was coming: *statism*. Political centralization destroys the market. It destroys the whole concept of responsible personal self-government.

The wider the span of proletarianisation, the wilder become the cravings of the uprooted to be guaranteed social services and economic security by the state, the more do the few remaining in possession of a sense of responsibility despair, all the more stringently is the greater part of the national income claimed for and directed by the state; the more oppressive becomes the burden of taxation, a burden heavy enough already and one made all the worse through war, revolution, and public spending, and which will of course have to be extracted predominantly from the pockets of the middle classes. . . . There is no reason to foresee that this process is likely to stop, since this apparatus of insurance and social services is nothing other than a thirst-creating substitute for the anchor of property and can never

45. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

46. Röpke, *Economics of the Free Society* (Chicago: Regnery, 1963), p. 104.

lead to the real satisfaction of the needs of the unhappy victims of proletarianisation. The total burden will become ever more oppressive, the burden of taxation ever harder and more embittering, the apparatus ever more unwieldy, and the social bureaucracy ever more numerous. Any bits coming to the individual out of the national hotch-pot will become ever more subject to formulae, tickets, reportings on and off, income-tax forms, etc.; the hair-spring of a sense of responsibility cum self-respect which keeps the whole thing going will become ever weaker, the whole economic process will function more and more clumsily, its defects will increase and become ever more tiresome; all in all enough to increase the individual's sense of insecurity and also to put up his demands. The only possible end to all this would seem to be complete catastrophe for nation and society, nor need we go back for examples to the latter period of the Roman Empire.⁴⁷

He wrote this in the late 1940s, before the process of bureaucratization had fully accelerated. It was the same process that Max Weber had seen at the beginning of the twentieth century, except that Weber did not even have the hope of economic collapse as a possible way to escape what he called the bureaucratic cage.⁴⁸

J. Natural Law Theory vs. Biblical Law

In the history of Christian social theory, there has been continuing confusion concerning the relationship between biblical law and Greek and Roman natural law theory. Before drawing this chapter to a close, we need to review what the Bible says about law. Christian social theory has been compromised again and again in the past because of errors in thinking about Bible-revealed law and the various aspects of this revelation.

The biblical doctrine of the universality of God's law is not the same as the concept of natural law, a theory developed especially by Greek and Roman philosophers, which passed into Western history through the writings of medieval church scholars.⁴⁹ Natural law is based on the idea of man's universal reason. The minds of men sup-

47. Röpke, *Civitas Humana: A Humane Order of Society* (London: Hodge, 1948), pp. 141–42.

48. Gary North, "Max Weber: Rationalism, Irrationalism, and the Bureaucratic Cage," in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976).

49. Archie P. Jones, "Natural Law and Christian Resistance to Tyranny," *Christianity and Civilization*, 2 (1983). (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>)

posedly have in common the powers of reasoning, thereby implying the existence of a universal human mind, and the logic of this universal mind could, if respected, bring all men everywhere to acknowledge identical fundamental principles of law.

Aristotle's analytic distinction between particular laws and general laws is an excellent example of natural law philosophy. It rests on a concept of *human unity*, implying shared viewpoints. "Now there are two kinds of laws, particular and general. By particular laws I mean those established by each people in reference to themselves, which again are divided into written and unwritten; by general laws I mean those based upon nature. In fact, there is a general idea of just and unjust in accordance with nature, as all men in manner divine, even if there is neither communication nor agreement between them."⁵⁰ Such a conception of natural law rests on the assumption of a universal human logic, the universal applicability in history of that logic, and the universal recognition of this logic and its universal applicability by all reasonable men. It assumes, in short, the neutrality of human thought.

1. The Myth of Neutrality

The Bible explicitly denies any such neutrality. Men are divided into saved and lost, keepers of God's covenant and breakers of God's covenant. There is no agreement between the two positions. There is such a thing as the *work* of the law of God which is written in every human heart—not the law itself, which is a special gift of God to His people (Heb. 8:8–11), but the work of the law (Rom. 2:14–15).⁵¹ Nevertheless, this law serves only to condemn men, for they will not abide by its provisions: "For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:11–12). Human reason, unaided by God's revelation—untwisted by God's grace—cannot devise a universal law code based on any presumed universal human logic. What mankind's universal reason can do is to rebel against God and His law. Ethical rebels are not logically faithful to God.

Biblical law had to be read to everyone in Israel at least once every seven years (Deut. 31:10–13).⁵² God presumed that men would not un-

50. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 1373b; from *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1926).

51. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 2.

52. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuter-*

derstand His law unless they heard it (Deut. 31:13). Every resident of the land had to listen to this law. If the whole of biblical law had been ingrained into the consciences of all men from the beginning of time, or if the terms of the law, including the law's explicit penalties, were always available to all men through the exercise of man's universal reason, then the law would not have required the priests to read the Mosaic law before the congregation of Israel every seventh year.

In our day, why should Christians who have biblical law written in their heart (Heb. 8:9–11) still have to listen to the public teaching of this law? Because the implantation of biblical law at the time of a person's regeneration is *definitive, not progressive*, and certainly *not final*. Biblical law is implanted in the believer, but the old sin nature still wars against the law (Rom. 7). Thus, Christians also as sinners tend to hold back the truths of the law in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).⁵³ Nevertheless, the definitive implanting of biblical law in the hearts of the regenerate—a definitive event leading progressively through study and application to our final understanding of the law—is different from the work of the law which is in the heart of the unbeliever. What the unbeliever has in his heart is *definitive rebellion*, in Adam. As he progressively works out the implications of his faith, he loses sight of the work of the law. *He works out progressively what is definitively inherited by him, namely, ethical rebellion.*

The popularity of natural law concepts has been very great throughout the history of the church. By importing Greek and Roman concepts of natural law into church law, medieval theologians unknowingly mixed together two rival systems of thought. *The Greek and Roman concept of natural law rested on the presupposition of man's autonomy. It rested on the presupposition of neutrality in human thought.* The Bible recognizes the common heritage of the image of God in man, but it sees this image as twisted and perverse in rebellious man. Thus, the universality of men's perception of certain aspects of biblical law is a *universality of condemnation*. The Bible requires that we build the kingdom of God in terms of a different universality, the *universality of the binding nature of biblical law*. The whole of God's law is binding on individual men and corporate associations, not simply this or that dimly perceived, and improperly interpreted, aspect of God's law.

onomy, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

53. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 1.

2. *The Work of the Law*

Romans 2:14–15 reads: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law of God, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.” John Murray’s extensive commentary on these verses is important in understanding what they do not mean, as well as what they do mean. Murray wrote:

“By nature” is contrasted with what is derived from external sources and refers to that which is engraven on our natural constitution. What is done “by nature” is done by native instinct or propensity, by spontaneous impulse as distinguished from what is induced by forces extraneous to ourselves. The things done by nature are said to be “the things of the law.” It is to be observed that the apostle does not say that they do or fulfil the law and he must have intentionally refrained from such an expression. “The things of the law” must mean certain things which the law prescribes and refer to those things practiced by pagans which are stipulated in the law, such as the pursuit of lawful vocations, the procreation of offspring, filial and natural affection, the care of the poor and sick, and numerous other natural virtues which are required by the law. In doing these things “by nature” they “are the law unto themselves.” This expression should not be understood in the sense of popular current use when we say that a man is a law to himself. It means almost the opposite, that they themselves, by reason of what is implanted in their nature, confront themselves with the law of God. They themselves reveal the law of God to themselves—their persons is the medium of revelation. . . . Hence with respect to those without specifically revealed law three things are true: (1) the law of God confronts them and registers itself in their consciousness by reason of what they natively and constitutionally are; (2) they do things which this law prescribes; (3) this doing is not by extraneous constraint but by natural impulse.⁵⁴

It is not a different law that confronts them in their heart, Murray says; it is not a rival law to the law delivered to God’s people through Moses. At the same time, “Paul does not say that the law is written upon their hearts. He refrains from this form of statement apparently for the same reason as in verse 14 he had said that the Gentiles ‘do the

54. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), I, pp. 73–74. A later edition in one volume replaced the two-volume edition.

things of the law' and not that they did or fulfilled the law. Such expressions as 'fulfilling the law' and 'the law written upon the heart' are reserved for a state of heart and mind and will far beyond that predicated of unbelieving Gentiles."⁵⁵ So, the *work* of the law, or the *things* of the law, written in their hearts, is comprehensive enough to *condemn* them, but it is not the transforming reworking of the heart that the Bible refers to as regeneration.

There is no dominion apart from the categories of biblical law. All men are called to subdue the earth, and even rebellious men are sufficiently restrained by their own nature, in time and on earth, so that they might exercise dominion. God promised to drive the Canaanites out of the land slowly, so that the land might not revert to wilderness (Ex. 23:28–29). Better unregenerate man in control of Canaan than the wild beasts, God said. The unregenerate are given a restraining knowledge of the law, so that they might exercise dominion. When we find a culture that is in almost total rebellion against the work of the law, we find almost total impotence. Men cannot build societies by means of "natural" law.

Perhaps the clearest statement of the progressive separation of the righteous from the unrighteous over time was made by a character in C. S. Lewis' magnificent novel, *That Hideous Strength*. The character, Prof. Dimble, describes the effects of the development over time of both the Christian and non-Christian views. As time goes on, they become more and more self-consistent, and therefore less and less compatible. "If you dip into any college, or school, or parish, or family—anything you like—at a given point in its history, you always find that there was a time before that point when there was more elbow room, and contrasts weren't quite as sharp; and that there's going to be a time after that point when there is even less room for indecision, and choices are even more momentous. Good is always getting better, and bad is always getting worse: the possibilities of even apparent neutrality are always diminishing. The whole thing is sorting itself out all the time, coming to a point, getting sharper and harder."⁵⁶ The further in time we get from the garden of Eden, or from Noah's flood, or from the crucifixion, the less that rebellious men will acknowledge or adhere to the testimony of the work of the law written on their hearts. To appeal to natural law is to lean on a weak reed.

55. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 74–75.

56. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (New York: Macmillan, [1946] 1965), p. 283.

3. The Collapse of Natural Law Theory

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, the West experienced the long-term effects of a revolution that began in the Enlightenment and became institutionally inescapable with the outbreak of World War I. A crisis of confidence has appeared in the West that has undermined the West's confidence in its own legal institutions. Harold Berman's account of this erosion is masterful.

That the Western legal tradition, like Western civilization as a whole, is undergoing in the twentieth century a crisis greater than it has ever known before is not something that can be proved scientifically. It is something that is known, ultimately, by intuition. I can only testify, so to speak, that I sense that we are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis of legal values and of legal thought, in which our entire legal tradition is being challenged—not only the so-called liberal concepts of the past few hundred years, but the very structure of Western legality, which dates from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The crisis is being generated both from within Western experience and from without. From within, social and economic and political transformations of unprecedented magnitude have put a tremendous strain upon traditional legal institutions, legal values, and legal concepts in virtually all countries of the West. Yet in the past there have been periods of revolutionary upheaval which have also threatened to destroy basic elements of the Western legal tradition, and that tradition has nevertheless survived. What is new today is the challenge to the legal tradition as a whole, and not merely to particular elements or aspects of it; and this is manifested above all in the confrontation with non-Western civilizations and non-Western philosophies. In the past, Western man has confidently carried his law with him throughout the world. The world today, however, is suspicious—more, suspicious than ever before—of Western “legalism.” Eastern and Southern Man offer other alternatives. The West itself has come to doubt the universal validity of its traditional vision of law, especially its validity for non-Western cultures. Law that used to seem “natural” seems only “Western.” And many are saying that it is obsolete even for the West.⁵⁷

The acids of the West's own humanism and relativism have eroded the foundations of Western legality, which has been one of the chief pillars of Western civilization. If all cultures are equally valid, then

57. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, pp. 33–34.

their legal traditions are also equally valid as aspects of these competing cultures. Therefore, Hayek recommended that it would be morally wrong to revive a dying elderly Eskimo who has been left to perish in the snow by his peers, unless you are willing to put him in a new society. Otherwise, the Eskimos' legal order should be left alone.⁵⁸ Is it any wonder, then, that Hayek's eloquent plea for a nineteenth-century humanist version of the rule of law has failed to gain the commitment of scholars and social philosophers in the twentieth? His own twentieth-century relativism (implicit in nineteenth-century relativism) eroded his economic and legal prescriptions. Is it any wonder that his logical defense of the free market economy, which rests on the legal foundation of plural legal sovereignties, limited civil government, and equality before the law, has lost its appeal in this age of democratic centralism?

Men seek a sovereignty greater than themselves, a sovereignty that can guarantee meaning to their lives and success in their many ventures. If God is not the source of law, and law is not universally valid because it is revealed, biblical law, then only a hypothetical universal power state remains to give man the sovereignty he seeks. If this also fails, then nothing remains to assure mankind that his works have meaning in time and on earth. Then the escapist religion leaves mankind with its only hope: mystical self-transcendence and flight from mundane reality.⁵⁹

The failure of the natural law doctrine was assured when men at last ceased to equate natural law with biblical law. When natural law was at last recognized as "natural" rather than revealed, autonomous rather than created, then it gained its universality only to the extent that mankind is seen as a true universal. But with the rise of relativism as an epistemological principle, the hoped-for unity of man collapsed. Now only power remains, not natural law. Now only the rise of a new source of unity, the world state, can guarantee man's legal order the unity it requires to maintain its claim to "naturalness." Natural law thereby ceases being natural. A universal law can only be *imposed* by the power state. To summarize: natural law theory abandoned reliance on the revealed law of the God of the Bible in order to assert its autonomy and universality, only to lose both its autonomy and natur-

58. F. A Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), II, *The Mirage of Social Justice*, p. 27.

59. This was Max Weber's recommendation in his 1919 lecture, "Politics as a Vocation." (<http://bit.ly/mwpaav>)

alness (self-attesting universal validity) to the new sovereignty of the power state.

4. The Primacy of Faith

Because different men and different nations are always in various stages of active rebellion against God—the *active restraining* of the truth of God that testifies to them in their own natures—we cannot hope to gain agreement about universal principles of law. It is not reason that opens the precepts of the law to rebellious men. They already have such precepts. Their consciences testify to them of the truth, but they restrain the truth, holding it back in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).⁶⁰ To believe that *reason* will reveal to men the universal principles of God's dominion covenant, which is also His treaty of unconditional surrender, is to believe that *reason is untainted by the Fall of man*. But reason has been as twisted by that ethical rebellion as surely as any other aspect of man's personality. To believe in natural law is to believe in natural reason; to believe in natural reason, or "reason rightly understood," is to believe in *the primacy of the intellect*.⁶¹ The Bible does not teach the primacy of the intellect; it teaches *the primacy of faith*.

When men say that "the Bible is not in contradiction to scientific truth," they generally mean that the Bible is not in opposition to the discoveries of the autonomous human intellect. This statement is absolutely false, if such a conclusion is intended. The Bible is *opposed* to such universally proclaimed "scientific truths" as evolution of one species into another through natural selection, or the eternity of matter-energy, or the doctrine of uniformitarian change. What a consistent Christian must maintain is this: "The Bible is the foundation for human reason, and no conclusion of the human mind which is in opposition to revealed truth in the Bible is scientifically valid." *The truths of science, if they are to be accepted, must be in conformity to biblical revelation*. There are not two truths—"natural science" and biblical revel-

60. On this active suppression of the truth, see Murray, *Romans*, pp. 36–37.

61. The rationalist apologetic methodology of "old Princeton" Seminary is representative of this error. Benjamin B. Warfield wrote of "irrational faith, that is, a faith without grounds in right reason." Warfield, "Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's Apologetics" (1903); reprinted in John E. Meeter (ed.), *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*—II (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973), p. 98. He implicitly contrasted such a faith with Christianity, which apparently is a faith which is grounded in "right reason." The problem, of course, is that nobody agrees about the content or standards of "right reason."

ation—but rather one truth: *science in conformity to biblical revelation*. What is true of natural science—the man-interpreted regularities of the observed universe—must also be true of man’s speculation in other areas of life.

Christians should not say that “natural law” and biblical revelation are the same because the truths of human jurisprudence are “naturally” in conformity to biblical revelation. They should say, on the contrary, that the truths of human jurisprudence, insofar as they are true, are true in spite of man’s twisted, rebellious, “natural” reason. This is why the Bible required that Israel assemble once every seven years to listen to the reading of the law of God.

Conclusion

The doctrine of the rule of law is distinctly biblical in origin. A law-order that is universally binding on all men is an idea that had its origins in biblical religion. The same God who judges all men also puts all men under the terms of biblical law. The God who made Adam also made all men responsible to Him through Adam. Thus, when the Hebrews placed foreign residents under both the restraints of biblical law and the benefits of biblical law, they made a fundamental break with paganism. Natural law theory, which was later paganism’s attempt to appropriate the universalism of biblical law, was adopted by the West through the influence of church canon law and other remnants of Hebrew law.

Some fundamental aspects of the rule of law are these:

1. A common set of moral requirements
2. Public proclamation of the law
3. Universal application of these standards
4. Equality before the law (no respecting of persons)

In short, *the law is to be predictable and universal*. Civil law as it applies to citizens in their daily activities is to be sufficiently simple so that the vast majority of men can understand its general principles and its specific applications (case laws). This is not to deny that specialized applications of biblical law principles are never going to be complex. But those who work in specialized areas of society are to be aware of these specialized applications. It may be that a “jury of one’s peers,” or at least a portion of the jury’s membership, should be composed of people selected randomly from a group of specialists in the particular

sphere or calling of the litigants. *The crucial issue is legal predictability, not the technicalities of the law.* In short, men are to have reasonable expectations concerning the decisions of judges and juries in specific legal conflicts. Most important, *men must have confidence in the integrity of the law itself*, and not just the institutional agencies of law enforcement, for without confidence in the law itself, men will not believe that their day-by-day adherence to the law is related directly to external benefits, both individual and social. They will lose the major incentive of *self-government under law*.

Without the rule of law, capitalism could never have developed. It developed in the West precisely because Christianity was the religion of the West. As Christianity's influence has waned, especially in the last hundred years, capitalism has been challenged by increasingly hostile socialist critics. *Formal legal predictability*, the bedrock of a free market social order, has been abandoned by the intellectuals and the voters. The predictable "rules of the game" that govern capitalism are no longer respected by expansionist civil governments that are propelled by the politics of envy.

J. R. Lucas commented on the relationship between atheism and state-worship: "In an age in which many people find it hard to believe in God, there is a strong tendency to worship the state—or society—as a God-substitute and to refer all our demands and duties to it alone, and then the demand for distributive justice will manifest totalitarian tendencies. The mistake lies in thinking too much of the state, not in seeking justice in our dealings with our fellow man."⁶² As faith in God's law has declined along the greased skids of human autonomy—from Roman law to canon law, to scholastic natural law, to Deism's natural law, and then to the positive law of the state—the state has become increasingly dominant.

Pluralism of the law is the great threat to Western society. What was plural in the Western legal tradition was not the law-order itself, but rather the *legal order*—the institutions and spheres of application of a universal law-order. It was not the law-order that was plural, but the enforcement mechanisms in the various social and institutional spheres. What is today destroying the Western legal tradition is the pluralism of religious humanism—a *pluralism of law-orders*. This points to a pluralism of gods, or rather the absence of anyone God as

62. J. R. Lucas, "Liberty, Morality, and Justice," in Robert L. Cunningham (ed.), *Liberty and the Rule on Law* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1979), p. 148.

Creator and Guarantor of a single law-order. *Men now seek to create a new unified law-order that will testify to a new god.* This new god is the same old god of the satanic temptation: the *power state*, the highest and most powerful representative of the sovereign god of humanism, collective mankind.

The rise of arbitrary government, with its punitive legislation against profits, now threatens the West with a return to pagan barbarism. This was the lesson of the Hebrews in Egypt. It also became the lesson of twentieth-century administrative law, administered by bureaucracies. We must take seriously Berman's warning.

The crisis of the Western legal tradition is not merely a crisis in legal philosophy but also a crisis in law itself. Legal philosophers have always debated, and presumably always will debate, whether law is founded in reason and morality or whether it is only the will of the political ruler. It is not necessary to resolve that debate in order to conclude that as a matter of historical fact the legal systems of all the nations that are heirs to the Western legal tradition have been rooted in certain beliefs or postulates: that is, the legal systems themselves have presupposed the validity of those beliefs. Today those beliefs or postulates—such as the structural integrity of the law, its ongoingness, its religious roots, its transcendent qualities—are rapidly disappearing, not only from the minds of philosophers, not only from the minds of lawmakers, judges, lawyers, law teachers, and other members of the legal profession, but from the consciousness of the vast majority of citizens, the people as a whole; and more than that, they are disappearing from the law itself. The law is becoming more fragmented, more subjective, geared more to expediency and less to morality, concerned more with immediate consequences and less with consistency and continuity. Thus the historical soil of the Western legal tradition is being washed away in the twentieth century, and the tradition itself is threatened with collapse.

The breakdown of the Western legal tradition springs only in part from the socialist revolutions that were inaugurated in Russia in October 1917 and that have gradually spread throughout the West (and throughout other parts of the world as well), albeit often in relatively mild forms. It springs only in part from massive state intervention in the economy of the nation (the welfare state), and only in part from the massive bureaucratization of social and economic life through huge centralized corporate entities (the corporate state). It springs much more from the crisis of Western civilization itself, commencing in 1914 with the outbreak of World War 1. This was more than an economic and technological revolution, more even

than a political revolution. If it had not been, Western society would be able to adapt its legal institutions to meet the new demands placed upon them, as it has done in revolutionary situations in the past. Western society would be able to accommodate socialism—of whatever variety—within its legal tradition. But the disintegration of the very foundations of that tradition cannot be accommodated; and the greatest challenge to those foundations is the massive loss of confidence in the West itself, as a civilization, a community, and in the legal tradition which for nine centuries has helped to sustain it.⁶³

The age-old debate among legal scholars that he mentions—whether reason and morality are the source of law, or the ruler—is answered by the Bible. God is the Ruler and therefore the source of both reason and morality. Both morality and the law-order are harmonious and self-reinforcing, because they are both created by God and under God. Because men as philosophers, moralists, and political rulers are in the image of God, their thoughts and acts reflect the God who made them. They may deviate from His thoughts and laws, for they are in various degrees ethical rebels, but man's law-order can never wholly escape God's ultimate standards. God is absolutely sovereign; reason, morality, and kings are only derivatively sovereign.

Christians should also respond to the crisis of Western law with the answers that Berman is unwilling to call for: the restoration of Christianity as the foundation of Western religion, the restoration of this religion as the foundation of morality and reason, and the establishment of biblical law rather than the restoration of natural law theory as the foundation of social order. Nothing else will revive the West. A true religious revival—a *comprehensive revival* that restructures every human institution in terms of biblical law—alone can establish the West's foundations of long-term social and legal order. A true revival alone can re-establish the long-term institutional foundations of the free market economy.

63. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, pp. 39–40.

15

THE FIRSTBORN OFFERING

The LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the first-born, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine (Ex. 13:1–2).

The theocentric principle here is God's absolute ownership of all things (Ps. 24:1).¹

A. The Symbolism

God set apart ritually the firstborn males of Israel. It was a symbol to the people of Israel of the sovereignty of God. Each family had to regard the precious firstborn son as God's property. "For all of the first-born of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself" (Num. 8:17). God set them apart—sanctified them—as His special possession.

The symbolism of the firstborn is important in the Bible. Adam was God's created firstborn son (Luke 3:38), and Adam was created to serve God as God's assistant in charge of the earth. Adam's rebellion called forth God's grace in sending Jesus Christ, the *second Adam* (I Cor. 15:45). Jesus Christ was more than a created firstborn Son; He was the only begotten Son of God, the *second Person* of the Trinity (John 1:14, 18; Acts 13:33). This only begotten Son was set aside by God as a living, literal sacrifice to God—the *second sacrifice* that forever removed the first sacrifices (Heb. 10:9)—so that God's people might not taste the *second death* (Rev. 20:14–15).

The sacrifices of the Old Testament looked forward to Christ's final sacrifice. The owner of the pregnant beast could not profit from the potential productivity of the first male offspring. "All the firstling

1. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 5.

males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the firstling of thy sheep” (Deut. 15:19).² The animal belonged to God. To use a modern phrase, “God took His cut (percentage) off the top.” He received an immediate payment; the owner had to wait until the birth of the second male to reap his profit.

“The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me” (Ex. 22:29b–30). The firstborn male animal was separated from its mother and was eventually sacrificed in Jerusalem; the newborn son was circumcised (Lev. 12:3). In the case of all sons, circumcision was required, but the eighth day was significant. It marked the sign of God’s wrath on all male flesh, the result of Adam’s rebellion. It pointed to man’s rebellion against God on the seventh day, God’s day of rest, and testified to the need of restoration—a new week in which man might reconstruct a fallen order, under God. When man struck out on his own, as a self-professed autonomous being, inaugurating “man’s week,” God cut him off from the garden and from the tree of life. We are not specifically told in the Bible that Adam rebelled on the seventh day of creation, but it seems likely. That day was to have been a day of communion with God, a day that established Adam’s covenantal commitment and religious perspective.³

There is an apparent problem with the thesis of a seventh-day rebellion. Israel’s bloody sacrifice of circumcision was performed on the eighth day. Also, the separation of firstborn male animals from their mothers in preparation for their slaughter (or their redemption) took place on the eighth day. The sorrow of the mothers on the eighth day seems to parallel the sorrow of women in childbirth (Gen. 3:16). (Female mammals suffer similar travails when giving birth, though the Bible does not record a specific curse on them by God.) Problem: If the judgment on Eve came on the seventh day because of her sin on that day, why was the eighth day the day of sorrow for mothers in Israel? Don’t the eighth-day sacrifices point to an eighth-day rebellion—the day after the first sabbath? I deal with this problem below (“Christ, the Firstfruits”).

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 38.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 6.

B. The Economic Cost of Sacrifice

In the case of sacrificial animals (ox, sheep, goat), redemption was forbidden (Num. 18:17), so the loss of the firstborn male animal was irrevocable. It was a total loss for both its mother and the human owner. It symbolized the total extent of God's wrath against sin. The animal was forever lost; so was the time it had taken to breed the mother and care for her during her pregnancy. By sacrificing the firstborn male animals, the Israelites were admitting that they and all that they possessed were under the threat of judgment, and that only by conforming to the terms of God's covenant could they escape God's total cutting off of man and his works. Apart from God's grace, man's covenantal rebellion brings permanent destruction. Egypt learned this on the night of the Passover meal.

Even an animal that was not allowed on God's altar had to die or obtain a substitute. "And every firstling, of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem" (Ex. 13:13; cf. Num. 18:15–17). Just because a profitable donkey could not be sacrificed on the altar, the Israelites were not entitled to make use of it free of charge, as if it were not the Lord's. Either it died away from the altar or a lamb died before the altar. If the lamb was perceived by its owner to be of greater value, then he was allowed to execute the donkey. He could not reap the income available from a firstborn male without sacrificing something of comparable value. He did have some discretion, however. If donkeys were in high demand, and sheep were in relatively low demand, or vice versa, he had his choice. *The Bible does not teach a doctrine of fixed or intrinsic market value.* It does not teach that a donkey's market price is always equal to a lamb's during the first week of its life. The possibility of wide variations in market prices between the two firstborn animals was always present. The owner made his choice. The animals were symbolically equivalent, but not equal in market value.

It should be obvious, however, that *permanent large price discrepancies would have been unlikely.* If one or the other firstborn animal was highly valued, men would have begun to slay the other, which would have reduced the supply of the less valuable species. An increased supply of lambs in relation to donkeys, because men were choosing to break the necks of donkeys, would have tended to increase the price of donkeys relative to lambs. Owners would then have had an

economic incentive to spare some donkeys and slay more lambs. *Each species had a built-in economic protection from excessive losses.*

The priests received the burnt offerings. Since they lived in Jerusalem, the animals set aside (removed from their dams) had to be brought to Jerusalem (Deut. 12:6). This indicates that on the eighth day the sacrificial animal was not immediately sacrificed by the father in the household, but set apart—*sanctified*, in other words—for God. When the family journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover or other visits, it carried the animal, or its substitute, or its money payment. In the meantime, the beast could not be used for profit (Deut. 15:19). The formal or symbolic separation from the mother took place on the eighth day; to keep it alive, it would have been necessary to let it continue to nurse. This was the case in the dedication of Samuel by Hannah (I Sam. 1:11, 22–23). Perhaps the family devised some mechanical means to feed the newborn animals during the waiting period between the separation and the sacrifice or the redemption.

The firstborn male in each family had to be redeemed by means of a payment to the priests. The family had to pay five shekels (Num. 18:16). This was done one month after the birth of the child. The same payment could be made to save the life of an unclean beast (Num. 18:15). Possibly only the donkey had to be redeemed by means of a lamb; other unclean animals were purchased with money from death, although it may have been that all animals were redeemed with lambs.⁴ The firstborn of cows, sheep, and goats had to die (Num. 18:17).

The language of the firstborn indicates that the firstborn son of every Hebrew family had to be dedicated to God for service. God made the following arrangement: “Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD” (Num. 3:45). Families then made payment to the Aaronical priesthood instead of dedicating their own firstborn sons (Num. 3:48, 51). At the time of the segregation of the Levitical priesthood, each family with a firstborn son made this initial payment (Num. 3:46–47). From that time on, the payment for firstborn sons went to Aaron’s house.

Egypt had chosen not to substitute the blood offering required by

4. James Jordan suggested that all unclean beasts were “redeemed” by lambs, while humans were redeemed with silver. He cites I Peter 1:18–19: “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

God to serve as a substitute payment. The firstborn sons of Egypt died. There is no escape from this required sacrifice. God shows mercy to the sons of Adam for the sake of Christ's sacrifice as God's firstborn, the high priest, the one set apart by God to become the firstborn offering.

C. Christ, the Firstfruits

Jesus rose from the dead on the day after the Passover sabbath. It was the first day of the week (Luke 24:1). This day was also the day of the firstfruits offering, the day the lamb of the firstfruits was to be sacrificed (Lev. 23:12). Paul refers to "Christ the firstfruits" (I Cor. 15:23). I argued in the first edition of *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* that this firstfruits offering was made on the eighth day (the day after the seventh day), and it covered the sin of Adam, who probably rebelled on the eighth day after God began His work of creation, meaning the day after the sabbath.⁵ I have been persuaded by James Jordan that this explanation needs modification. Adam probably rebelled on the first full day of life, the sabbath. God covered him with the skins of animals on that day, which meant that blood was shed. What about the shedding of blood of the Hebrew male in circumcision on the eighth day (Lev. 12:3), and the separation of the firstborn male from its mother on the eighth day (Ex. 22:30)? Why was this required on the eighth day, if the symbolic ethical covering (animal skins) had been provided by God in the garden on the seventh day, assuming that Jordan is correct concerning Adam's seventh-day rebellion? Jordan argued that the eighth-day rites pointed to *the need for a new creation*, a coming *ethical transformation* that would inaugurate a new kingdom and a new dominion. Adam's sin had polluted the sabbath. It had polluted the first day of man's week, a day that is supposed to prepare us for six days of service in the kingdom. This was the day on which he was to have received his marching orders in preparation for his work week. *What mankind needed after Adam's rebellion was a new day, a cleansed day, for a new beginning.*

"Christ the firstfruits" was resurrected on the eighth day (the day following the sabbath) *to inaugurate the new week of redeemed humanity*, beginning with *a new day of rest*. This was the long-expected culmination of the rites of circumcision and firstborn sacrifice, the necessary substitute payment for the sin of Adam, but timed so as to

5. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 6:D.

point to a new creation. Christ's resurrection proved that His sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to atone for men's sins, so the Old Testament's annual sacrifices, the circumcisions, and the firstborn sacrifices are no longer necessary (Heb. 7:26–28).

The Book of Nehemiah explicitly links together the firstfruits of the ground, the trees, the dough, the wine, and the firstborn of sons and animals (Neh. 10:35–37). *Christ can be seen as both the firstfruits and firstborn offerings.* He is the firstborn and only begotten Son of God. His resurrection proves that firstborn sons no longer need to die, that firstborn animals no longer need to be sacrificed, and that firstborn sons no longer need to be circumcised the eighth day. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). Christ's victory on the eighth day has overcome the need for sacrifices on the eighth day.

Christ's sacrifice transfers capital back to man. No longer are men required to sacrifice the firstborn animals of their flocks. No longer must they journey to Jerusalem to present their sacrificial animals. No longer are the "mothers in Israel" saddened on the eighth day by the loss of their firstborn males (animals) or the marring of their sons' flesh. No longer are fathers required to pay five shekels upon the birth of the first son. *Family capital is thereby increased by Christ's sacrifice.* Men paid token prices to a holy God in Old Testament times, only because God honored the incomparably costly future sacrifice of His Son. Now, even those token payments have been abrogated. Redeemed men keep their lives and their capital, for God's Son lost both His life and His capital at the cross. Not even a cloak to cover His nakedness was held back by Christ (Matt. 27:35). It cost Christ every earthly possession, including His modesty. His people are the immediate beneficiaries, for they retain a greater portion of their capital than they did before the cross. Our dominion tasks are made less onerous, and our celebrations become that much more splendid, as a result of this New Testament transfer of capital back to His people. *The resurrection lightened the financial burdens of His people, forever.* The restraints imposed on the outworking of the dominion covenant in the Old Testament have been removed with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of a new covenant. A righteous culture is now possible. Like the child/slave who matures into an adult (Gal. 4), we no longer suffer the dominical restraints of the ceremonial aspects of the law.

Conclusion

Christ's death and resurrection in principle erased our guilt and our obligation to offer blood sacrifices. It healed the rebellious hearts of God's adopted sons, allowing them to participate in redeemed man's week, which *begins with man's rest*, because Christ's sacrifice is now behind us chronologically. Thus the Lord's day has been moved to the eighth day, so that the first day of man's week is, *as it was in the garden*, a day of rest. Redeemed men announce their dependence on God by beginning their work week with rest, a statement of their complete dependence on God's grace and blessings—a ritual declaration of their having abandoned autonomous man's week, which allows no cost-free rest for man. Christians announce their reliance on the work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, thereby renouncing their reliance on their own efforts, as sons of the first Adam. God restores their capital to them by reducing their former obligation to pay in blood on the eighth day. We rest now, and we have increased wealth to show for it. Let the fathers rejoice, and let all mothers rejoice, too. The blood no longer flows in the new covenant Israel.

16

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SLAVERY

Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Ex. 14:12).

The theocentric principle here is God's patience with repeated rebellion and loss of faith on the part of covenant-keepers.

A. The Day of Release

The day of the Lord had come to Israel, the long-awaited day of release from bondage. God had manifested His power in a series of mighty acts, culminating in the death of the firstborn of Egypt. If ever there was going to be a day of release, this was it. Remaining in bondage for "a better day to flee, a more opportune moment to escape" would have been preposterous. Pharaoh's will to resist their departure had been temporarily overcome. The Egyptians had encouraged their rapid departure. God had opened the way of escape to them, and the Egyptians had literally pushed them out of the land, paying them to depart.

All the same, neither Pharaoh nor the Israelites had escaped from their basic outlooks. Pharaoh had temporarily capitulated to the demands of Moses. The Israelites had temporarily taken heart at God's mighty acts, and they had even dared to demand restitution (spoils) from their Egyptian captors. But Pharaoh was a self-proclaimed divine monarch, theoretically sovereign over all Egypt, and the Hebrews had been his slaves. The Hebrews were convinced that their position as servants in the land was permanent. They had been slaves in body, and their responses to Moses, time after time, were the responses of people who were also slaves in their souls.

Pharaoh soon became convinced that he had made a mistake in allowing them to leave (Ex. 14:5), and the Hebrews soon became con-

vinced that they had made a mistake in listening to Moses and leaving. The Hebrews could not forget the earthly power of their former master; they seemed unable to acknowledge the awesome power of their new master, Jehovah. Their cry went up to Moses: better to have served as earthly slaves in Egypt than to bear the visible risks and burdens of freedom under God. Neither the Hebrews nor Pharaoh wanted to admit that God does not call His people to be perpetual slaves in body, and that they are never to become slaves of men in spirit. Neither Pharaoh nor the Hebrews could admit that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Cor. 3:17b).

The Bible contrasts two sorts of servitude: slavery to the earthly life and its sinful perspectives, on the one hand, and slavery to God, whose “yoke is easy” and whose “burden is light” (Matt. 11:30), on the other. *Slaves unto life or slaves unto death: men cannot escape from subordination.* Hierarchy is built into the dominion covenant that defines mankind. Satan lures people to believe that they can achieve freedom from all subordination by asserting their own autonomy and sovereignty—in short, to be as God. The result is temporal ethical subordination to Satan, and eternal judgmental subordination to God. When God’s hand is lowered in judgment on a civilization, ethical subordination to Satan also means destruction, in time and on earth.

God recognized the weakness of these newly freed slaves. When it came time for them to depart from Egypt, He led them east to the Red Sea. Had they gone in a northeast direction, they would have had to pass through the land of the Philistines, although geographically speaking, it would have been a shorter route into Canaan. But God recognized their weakness; they were not ready for a direct military confrontation (Ex. 13:17–18). They might have returned to Egypt had they been challenged from the front. They were being driven from the rear, at first by the Egyptians who implored them to depart, and then by the attacking army of Pharaoh.

This pressure from the rear was accompanied by God’s pillar of fire and cloud in front of them (Ex. 13:21–22). They looked forward toward the manifestation of God which preceded them, despite the fact that their major motivation was rearward. If they were to *flee*, they had to *march forward*. They became used to following God’s theophany, the fire and the cloud.

Psychologically, they were still slaves of Egypt, always tempted to look backward at their former home and former masters, but because they had been ejected, they were forced to pay attention to the leader-

ship of God. Psychologically speaking, they were marching *out of* Egypt more than they were *marching toward* Canaan. *But the discipline of marching was basic to their training*: a means of transforming their vision and motivation. (Marching is a universally recognized means of training military recruits.) The King James Version says that they went up “harnessed” out of the land of Egypt, but a better translation is provided by the Berkeley Version: “In martial order the Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 13:18b). Cassuto translated it: “in orderly array.”¹ James Jordan comments: “When Israel marched out of Egypt, she marched five in a rank. The term translated ‘battle array’ in Exodus 13:18 actually means ‘five in a rank’ (cf. also Josh. 1:14; 4:12; Jud. 7:11; Num. 32:17).”² God was treating them as recruits are treated in basic training: marching them in an orderly fashion, under the leadership of a drill instructor. They were to learn the art of war through the discipline of enforced marching, visible leadership, and a carefully staged “obstacle course.” That obstacle course was the Red Sea. Later, their obstacle course was the wilderness.

B. Three Types of Slavery

Earthly slavery, as manifested clearly in the history of the exodus, involves at least three factors: slavery to food, slavery to the past, and slavery to the present. The Hebrews cursed Moses, for he had served them as a deliverer. He had enabled them to cast off the chains of bondage. They looked to the uncertainty that lay before them (the Red Sea) and the chariots behind them, and they wailed. They had lost what they regarded as external security in Egypt, a welfare state existence, and they resented Moses’ leadership. They had no confidence in God and God’s promised future. Looking resolutely over their shoulders, they stumbled at the very border of freedom, the Red Sea. Fearing death in freedom, this generation died in the wilderness. Better to serve in Egypt than die in the desert, they proclaimed. God then proved to all but Caleb and Joshua, who never believed in this slave slogan, that it was much better to die in the wilderness than to serve in Egypt. Best of all, God showed the next generation, was the conquest of Canaan. But the Israelites of Moses’ day could not see that far into the future; they saw only the past and the present—a present bounded,

1. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), pp. 156–57.

2. James Jordan, *The Geneva Papers*, No. 25 (Feb. 1984), [p. 3].

they believed, by Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. What they saw as the end of their lives was in fact only an obstacle course.

1. *Slaves to Food*

Once they had been delivered from their Egyptian enemies, they were determined to keep their heads riveted to the rear anyway. They were stiffnecked indeed. No longer able to hear the rumble of Egyptian chariots, they were deafened by the rumbling of their stomachs. Better to have died in Egypt, they complained, "when we did eat bread to the full," than to die in the wilderness (Ex. 16:3). They had short memories about their former condition. So, the Lord gave them manna. "Not good enough," came the cries. "We need meat. In Egypt, we had garlic and onions and leeks and melons. Mere manna, even if accompanied by liberty, can hardly compare." So, God gave them meat for a month—so much, He promised them, that it would come out of their nostrils, and they would loathe it (Num. 11:4–6, 18–21).

Their problem was not a protein deficiency. Their problem was a theological deficiency. Their god was their belly (Phil. 3:19). Their stiff necks did not permit them to look up to the heavens and rejoice in the source of their manna.

The fact that man needs food in order to live indicates that he is a creature. Ascetic fasting, designed to free the individual from his dependence on food, is simply one more example of man's blasphemous move to transcend his creaturehood.³ Food and drink in Scripture, from Eden to the New Jerusalem, signify man's dependence on God, the Source of all life. Thus, the mere fact that Israel needed food, and that they asked Moses and God for it, was not sinful in itself, and might otherwise have been an act of faith. What is clear, however, is that they did not see food as a gift of God, and its lack as a token of God's displeasure; rather, they saw food as a thing in itself. Their affections were placed preeminently on the creature, not the Creator. Satisfaction of physical hunger was more important to them than the ob-

3. Several examples of mystics who live virtually without food are offered in Paramhansa Yogananda's popular book, *The Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, [1946] 1971). The most impressive is the case of Roman Catholic mystic and stigmatic Therese Neumann of Konnersreuth: pp. 367–75. Yogananda cited other books about her: *Therese Neumann: A Stigmatist of Our Day and Further Chronicles of Therese Neumann*, by Friederich Ritter von Lama, and A. P. Schimberg's *The Story of Therese Neumann*, all published by the Bruce Publishing Co. of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; cf. Johannes Steiner, *Therese Neumann* (Staten Island, New York: Alba House).

taining of spiritual and eternal life from the life-giver. Repeatedly God withheld food from them. Repeatedly they did not ask for food in faith. Repeatedly they complained against God and Moses, and expressed a preference for Egypt. They never got the message.

Manna was a special kind of food. It was provided for them supernaturally. It was scheduled to appear predictably. It was also exceedingly plain—the kind of food that is provided to an army in the field. In World War II, the United States Army's all-to-familiar canned C-rations became the objects of scorn and jokes, just so long as they were delivered on time. The U.S. Army was the best-fed army in history up to that time, but the boring food, especially the canned food that was the common fare when men were in the battlefield, was resented by the troops, unless a crisis occurred which cut them off from new supplies.⁴ Israel resented manna, for the Israelites did not see themselves as an army on a battlefield. Their memories of special occasional meals in Egypt chased away their memories of bondage. They had developed a taste for slavery, literally.

2. Slaves to the Past

How could they have forgotten the grinding bondage of their former state? Could they learn nothing from history? In a word, no. Historiography is an intellectual reconstruction that man attempts, and he hopes that his reconstruction resembles the actual events of the past. But, being an intellectual reconstruction, it is dependent upon a philosophical foundation for accurate interpretation. The events of history teach nothing to those who are blind to God's sovereignty over these events. Or more accurately, their interpretation teaches something that is inaccurate.⁵

The Israelites told Moses that death in Egypt would have been preferable to the responsibilities of godly liberty. The pain of dying would have been over by now, they complained. Wouldn't the graves of Egypt have been preferable (Ex. 14:11)? They faced the responsibilities of life, and they grumbled. They were blinded by a false vision of the past. They preferred to live in terms of historical fantasy rather

4. The United States soldier was also the most heavily laden foot soldier in history: 84 pounds of equipment. William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 281.

5. C. Gregg Singer, "The Problem of Historical Interpretation," in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), ch. 4.

than face the realities of life. They preferred to remember their bondage in Egypt as a golden age by comparison, thereby trading the opportunities of the present for the imaginary comforts of the past. Is it any wonder that God imposed upon them the ritual observance of the Passover? Mouthing words that they did not really understand, the fathers of that generation transmitted a true vision of the past to their children. The mandatory bitter herbs were educational.

3. *Slaves to the Present*

The laws of the Old Testament recognized the existence of psychological slavery. Restrictions were placed on the administration of that institution. The case laws of the Old Testament begin with the laws of slavery (Ex. 21). Slavery was never intended to be normative for the people of God. Debtors who sold themselves into slavery went free in the seventh (sabbatical) year (Deut. 15:2).⁶ Criminals who went into slavery to payoff the restitution payment owed to the victim could be kept in slavery until the debt was finally paid,⁷ but criminal acts were not considered normative for Israel. It took a special vow, marked by a hole punched in the slave's ear, to place a man in voluntary lifetime slavery (Ex. 21:5–6). The biblical injunction regarding slavery is seen in Paul's assertion that a godly man should accept an offer of freedom from his master (I Cor. 7:21–22).⁸ The exercise of *godly dominion under God* is made more effective by *widespread personal freedom*.

There is little doubt that the affairs of this life are burdensome. If getting out of life's burdens were the essence of human life, then death would be preferable to life. Paul recognized this fact even more clearly than the murmuring Hebrews did. Yet he made it clear that the present responsibilities of godly service were more important than his desire to depart from the body to be with Christ (Phil. 1:22–26). As a free man, Paul saw the burdens of the present as an opportunity. He was to serve God as an instrument for the extension of God's kingdom. He did not think it proper to escape prematurely from this earthly service in order to enjoy heaven's rest.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

7. James Jordan, *Slavery in Biblical Perspective* (Master's Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980), p. 80.

8 Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

C. Slaves to the Future

The Bible tells us that we are to be slaves to the future. *Life, despite its petty burdens, is a resource.* Free men are not chained to life; they are users of it. Servants of a sovereign God are to be free men, and free men use life as a means of attaining *long-run victory*, both personally and covenantally, in the final day, and also in time and on earth. Life is like a high-powered rifle that is painful to fire because of the recoil. In the hands of God's servant, life has a specific purpose. It is an instrument of victory. However painful it may be to fire, the godly man knows that it is much more painful for those on the "receiving end." Better to suffer the pain of a recoiling rifle than its projectile. Our task is to aim the weapon and pull the trigger. God will heal our bruised shoulders just as surely as he will guide the bullets to their predestined targets.

To the victors go the spoils. The Hebrews of Moses' day should have learned this on the night of the exodus. Joshua and Caleb learned this lesson well. Their contemporaries were overtaken in the wilderness by death, the event they had feared most, for their fear of the present had blinded their vision of the spoils of Canaan which lay ahead.

Future-orientation marks the free man's perspective. He makes decisions in terms of the future, has confidence in the future, and can happily sacrifice present income for increased income in the future. As a responsible agent in God's kingdom, *the redeemed man is motivated more by future successes than by present enjoyments.* The uncertainties of life are less of a threat to him than the certainties of the welfare state and slavery. To remain in bondage to Satan, whose destruction in the future is sure, is to remain earth-bound, and ultimately present-bound psychologically. A future-oriented man or culture is operating in terms of a perspective which is innately biblical, for it is Satan's goal to squander his assets in the present, given his inevitable defeat in the future. It is Satan who revels in the present, dreaming of his triumphs in the past. He shudders at his prospects for the future.

Joseph's bondage was external, not mental. The same was true of the three young Hebrews in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was a captive, but he continued to wind up in positions of authority. Again and again, *external bondage became a training ground for external victory*, precisely because the bondage was merely external rather than psychological. Psychological bondage, a reflection of spiritual bondage

to sin, is a more powerful form of bondage than physical bondage.

Conclusion

The Hebrews of Moses' day had become slaves psychologically because they had become slaves to sin and slaves to a false religion, the escapist religion. Having abandoned hope in the future, they clung mentally to the past. They hoped continually to return to the bondage of the past in order to escape the burdens of the present.

Joshua and Caleb also resented the burdens of the present, but their focus was the promised victory in Canaan. Their chief burden in the present was the past-orientation of their fellow Hebrews. They had to wait for God to leave that generation in the dust of the wilderness before they could begin to organize the victory of the future. They had learned the lesson of the Red Sea. They had no desire to hear God's words again, the words He had spoken to Moses: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Ex. 14:15). But their contemporaries never learned that lesson, even after the army of their former masters had perished in the waters. As psychological slaves, they resisted unto the end God's call for them to go forward. The best they could manage was wandering around in a 40-year circle.

We need to recognize the extraordinary power of the psychology of slavery. For at least 80 years, the Hebrews in Egypt had been in physical bondage. When Moses returned from the wilderness, they did not want his deliverance. They did not want God's deliverance. They much preferred life in Egyptian slavery, despite its hardships. Their commitment to sin and slavery was to last an additional 40 years after the exodus. So powerful is the psychology of slavery, which is a manifestation of the escapist religion, that it took at least 120 years to stamp it out in Israel. They were bondservants to a false religion—escapist religion—and also bondservants to sin, bondservants to the Egyptians, and bondservants to fear. They had adopted certain aspects of Egyptian religion and culture—the longing for leeks and onions and golden calves⁹—and their separation from these false gods was not purged out by the first Passover or the 39 that followed. The leaven of Egypt was still with them until the day that all but two of them died in the wilderness.

9. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 56–57.

There is an alliance between power religion and escapist religion. The *psychology of tyranny* is the other side of the ethically rebellious coin of the *psychology of slavery*, just as sadism is the other side of masochism. Bullies need victims. The power religionists and the escapist religionists need each other.

THE METAPHOR OF GROWTH: ETHICS

Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established (Ex. 15:17).

The theocentric foundation of the imagery of agricultural planting is God as the supreme planter of the field. The land serves as God's set-apart sanctuary for His set-apart sanctified people.

A. Nature Reflects Man

The sociologist-historian Robert Nisbet wrote: "There has never been a time in Western thought when the image of social change has not been predominantly biological in nature."¹ Even his use of the English-language phrase, "in nature," is revealing of the influence of the metaphor; he means, as we all do, "in form" or "in essence," or "fundamentally," but we all frequently substitute the phrase "in nature." The power of the metaphor of nature is very great, intellectually and linguistically.

The Bible uses the language of biological processes in order to communicate certain truths concerning the affairs of mankind. Such terms as "planting," "grass," and "seed" are fairly common. The Bible unquestionably describes the processes of social change in the language of biological growth and decay. It does not use the imagery of the machine, which has been the primary alternative metaphor to organic change that has been used by Western humanists ever since the Newtonian revolution. Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that mankind is a reflection of nature, or that the affairs of man are reflections of nature's processes. The reverse is the case. *Man is the arche-*

1. Robert A. Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 274.

type of nature, not the other way around. Nature's processes are analogous to man's.

Man's mortality does appear to be analogous to the processes of a cursed earth, of growth and decay, and his certain aspects of man's institutions also resemble living and dying biological organisms. *But the essence of man is not his mortality.* The essence of man is his position as God's agent of dominion over creation. Man is a creature made in God's image. Man's rebellion led to the curse of nature, for nature is covenantally subordinate to man. Nature is afflicted with the process of growth and decay as a result of man's ethical rebellion. Both man and nature were cursed by God in response to this ethical rebellion (Gen. 3:17–19).² Therefore, we ought to conclude that *man's mortality is analogous to the processes of nature, not because nature is normative, but because man is.*

B. Social Sanctification

The Bible affirms the existence of *social change that advances ideally from spiritual immaturity to spiritual maturity.* This process is inescapably *ethical.* The Bible sets forth ethical standards in the law of God, and the extent to which people approach these standards in their daily activities determines their moral progress. Spiritual maturity is imputed to man at the time of regeneration,³ but working out one's salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12b), in time and on earth, is the basis of a man's progressive sanctification.⁴ Progressive sanctification cannot lead to perfection on this side of the grave.

What is true for the individual is also true for a society. Adherence to biblical law brings beneficial developments throughout the society's institutions. Conversely, widespread departure from adherence to bib-

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

3. *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), II, ch. 21: "Definitive Sanctification." Speaking of the antithesis between moral regeneration and moral bondage, Murray wrote: "There is no possibility of toning down the antithesis; it appears all along the line of the varying aspects from which life and action are to be viewed. In respect of every criterion by which moral and spiritual life is to be assessed, there is absolute differentiation. This means that there is a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of every one who has come under the control of the provisions of grace" (p. 208). In short, progressive sanctification in the life of an individual begins with definitive sanctification.

4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), pp. 48–52 See also John Murray, *Collected Writings*, II, ch. 23: "Progressive Sanctification."

lical law brings God's historic judgment and social contraction. The external blessings are removed by God. Thus, it is not a case of social "birth, growth, senility, death, and decay," but rather grace (external blessings), covenantal faithfulness, added blessings in response to faithfulness, temptation, and then, if Satan's temptation is successful, covenantal rebellion, followed by God's judgment (Deut. 8⁵ and 28⁶).

Thus, there can be no greater contrast between true religion and false religion as it applies to social theory than the distinction between the *metaphor of biological growth* and the *metaphor of spiritual growth* from immaturity to maturity. What takes place in man's social institutions is a reflection of the society's adherence or rejection of the terms of the covenant—a covenant that is expressly *ethical and judicial*. This is one of the most important underlying themes in my entire commentary.

Nevertheless, we do find that the language of agriculture is used by the biblical writers to describe spiritual and institutional development. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "I have planted, and Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (I Cor. 3:6). We need to understand the differences between the Bible's use of such biological language and the seemingly similar use of such terms by pagan social theorists.

C. Planting

"Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O LORD, which thy hands have established" (Ex. 15:17). The translators of the King James Version capitalized "Sanctuary," which seems to imply that Moses was speaking of the temple. Psalm 78:53–54 provides evidence that "sanctuary" should not be capitalized, because it refers in this case to *the land of Israel itself*: "And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased." The Berkeley version translates verse 54: "He brought them to His holy domain, to the mountain which His right hand had gained." The passage refers, then, to a *special land* in which God's people

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

would dwell with Him. God intended to plant His people in this land. The metaphor of planting is a familiar one in the Bible. It is related to the metaphor of growth, which was understood by ancient pagan cultures. While the He-brew metaphor was similar in language to those pagan metaphors of agricultural prosperity, there were important differences in usage. These differences stemmed from the differing conceptions of the creation.

The Hebrews believed that God created the universe out of nothing. God's sovereignty in the fiat act of creation therefore guarantees His total sovereignty over the affairs of history. The doctrine of creation out of nothing implies the doctrine of God's providence. History is *linear*—creation, Fall, redemption (incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension), partial restoration, final judgment, total restoration—and it is totally *personal*. The Fall of man was seen as being ethical, an act of man's will in defiance of God. This Fall was not understood as a product of some flaw in nature, for nature had been created good. The Fall of man resulted in the judgment by God of both man and his environment, but the cause was man's ethical rebellion. Ethical restoration, which involves personal repentance and adherence to God's covenant, was promised by God. The original peace of nature will return (Isa. 11:6–9).

Restoration therefore meant to the Hebrews the eventual victory of God in time and on earth. The New Testament's vision is the same (Rom. 8:18–23).⁷

Pagan cosmologies did not share this view of creation. God was not seen as the Creator who brought the creation out of nothing. Matter, whether in the form of raw chaos, or water, or a cosmic egg, was seen as co-eternal with "god." This god's victory over chaos at the time of "creation" (the emergence of "ordered being")—the "original time"⁸—was viewed as a continuous process. God cannot guarantee the outcome of the struggle between order and chaos. He cannot guarantee

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

8. The subject of pagan man's concept of "original time," the time of the creation, is treated in most of the books by Mircea Eliade, but especially in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), and in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1957] 1961), ch. 2: "Sacred Time and Myths." Pagan men in primitive cultures have long believed that they can participate in this original time through special rituals, especially chaos festivals. It is significant that neither Judaism nor Christianity celebrates the creation ritually, nor does it appear in their religious calendars. The creation is understood as exclusively the work of God.

the outcome, because he himself is finite. Historical change is neither linear nor absolutely personal; it is inherently cyclical. The Fall of man was not primarily ethical, but metaphysical. A flaw in nature was involved. Man is now imprisoned in the bondage of time. Covenant-breaking man's goal is therefore *self-transcendence through overcoming time*—its abolition, generally through ritual chaos. Out of chaos came time, structure, and order; out of the progressive bondage of order will come a new chaos, which will then renew law-burdened order.⁹ The two are eternal equals in many pagan cosmologies.

This dialectical tension between chaos and order is reflected in the natural processes of growth and decay. Eternal repetition swallows up historical development and historical meaning. The seasons of nature therefore become normative, both culturally and religiously. The importance of fertility rituals to ancient paganism was based on a particular view of the origin of being. It was a view not shared by the Hebrews.

D. Grass and Seed

In contrast to the normative processes of nature, which pagan cosmologies proclaimed, stood the Hebrew metaphor *grass*. David used grass to illustrate the universal extension of God's kingdom: ". . . they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth" (Ps. 72:16b). Yet, in other passages, the wicked are compared to another aspect of grass, something to be cut down (Ps. 37:2, 28). Man's transitoriness, in contrast to God's eternal word, is compared to withering grass (Isa. 40:6–8; cf. I Peter 1:24–25). The uses of the metaphor of grass are *ethical* in intent.

Another metaphor of growth can be found in the Hebrews' metaphor of the *seed*. The generations of man are described as seed (Gen. 9:9; 13:16, etc.). Both cultural progress and cultural decline, being functions of man's ethical response to God's law rather than the products of forces in nature, are also characterized by the metaphor of growth and decay. The language of agriculture is used to describe both cultural destruction (Jer. 7:20; 8:13; Ezek. 17:1–10) and cultural restoration (Ezek. 17:23–24; Jer. 17:7–8). Cultural destruction and cultural restoration are God's responses to the ethical decisions of whole na-

9. In addition to Eliade's books that deal with this theme, see Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* (New York: Free Press, 1959). On man's attempt to achieve self-transcendence through the abolition of "normal" or "profane" time, see Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gnoccultism>)

tions or populations.

The New Testament uses the metaphor of the seed in several passages. The parable of the sower focuses on the effects of the various environments on four seeds that are scattered (Matt. 13:3–8).

Another parable using the sower focuses on two different kinds of seeds that are planted by two rival sowers in the same field, the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24–30).¹⁰ Obviously, these agricultural metaphors are only metaphors. They are used in varying ways to drive home spiritual points. They point to time's role in the process of maturation.

Paul used the metaphor of domestic agriculture to make his case for the restoration and victory of the kingdom of God. He used the metaphor of the wild olive branch, which is grafted into the root. His goal was to describe the relationship historically between the Jews and the gentiles. The regrafting in of the elect Jews at the end of the era of the gentiles is seen by Paul as the foundation of external reconstruction and victory—the basis of Paul's eschatological optimism (Rom. 11:17–27).¹¹ His usage of the metaphor makes it plain that *the whole process is unnatural*. God, as the plant domesticator, does not graft the domesticated branch into the wild root, which is the traditional agricultural practice. He grafts the wild olive branch (gentiles) into the original root (covenant Israel).¹² Not the process of growth and decay, but the *calculated, purposeful intervention* of the active tree-grafter, is Paul's point. Natural or even traditional practices are not normative. *God's sovereignty is normative*.

E. Classical Culture and Cycles

The possibility of external progress was set before the Hebrew nation very early. This promise involved the possibility of *long-term economic development as the product of long-term covenantal faithfulness to God's laws*. Pagan cultures, including the Greeks and the Romans, took the cyclical processes of nature as normative, and never were able to develop a progressive philosophy of time.¹³ They were unable to be-

10. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

11. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 7.

12. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), II, pp. 84–90.

13. Ludwig Edelstein argued in his posthumously published book, *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins Press, 1967), that the

lieve in the possibility of long-term, cumulative social and economic progress.¹⁴ To believe in such a possibility, they would have had to abandon their commitment to the twin doctrines of cycles and impersonal fate.¹⁵

In the debate over whether classical civilization was or was not committed to the ultimate pessimism of cycles, this much is clear: the historians of classical Greece have not been able to produce evidence of a confident commitment to *the idea of inescapable progress*, or a doctrine of ultimate victory by man over nature. Nisbet's book, *History of the Idea of Progress*, presents worthy examples of fragments from classical authors that proclaimed some progress by man over the ages, and the possibility of continuing progress—if not for mankind in general, then at least for the beneficiaries of classical culture.¹⁶ But to maintain that the classical world did not adopt almost completely the idea of historical cycles makes it very difficult to explain the Renaissance's rejection of linear history. Nisbet himself wrote: "From Au-

Greeks and Romans did not all believe in cyclical time, and that some of the prominent philosophers did believe that some linear progress is possible indefinitely. His evidence is weak, however. He had to admit that Plato and Aristotle held to a cyclical view of time, and that rampant skepticism throughout later Greek culture militated against a widespread belief in progress. There is no question that neither the Greeks nor the Romans had any concept of time that is exclusively linear—beginning, meaningful time, and final judgment—or that is necessarily progressive, meaning beneficial to mankind, in the long run. Greek and Roman society maintained the annual chaos festivals until the very end, which Edelstein fails to mention. This points to the cultural and religious commitment of classical civilization to a cyclical view of time. On the cyclical views of Greek science, see Stanley Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), ch. 2.

14. I am here taking exception with Robert Nisbet's excellent book, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), ch. 1. He followed Edelstein, W. K. C. Guthrie, M. I. Finley, and his own teacher, Frederick Teggart, in arguing that there were philosophers in Greece and Rome who held out the possibility of cumulative increases in men's knowledge, technological improvements, and even moral improvement over time. He rejected the thesis that classical thought was dominated by a notion of cyclical time, as argued by John Baillie, F. M. Cornford, W. R. Inge, R. G. Collingwood, and J. B. Bury, Nisbet's intellectual enemy in this debate. He saw the myth of Prometheus, the god who gave mankind fire, as the archetypal example of human advancement: pp. 17–18.

15. On the collapse of the ancient world's philosophical base, which led to the collapse of classical civilization, see Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study in Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957). Reprinted by Liberty Press, Indianapolis.

16. Cochrane pointed to the Roman poet Vergil as one who believed Rome might break out of the familiar cycle of growth and decay, to become eternal Rome. The Empire's universality might lead to a permanence that other empires had failed to achieve. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–73.

gustine down to the modern world, with the exception of the Renaissance, when cyclical conceptions of history crowded out the linear scheme inherent in the idea of progress, these ideas have been powerful in impact, adhered to by some of the greatest minds in Western history."¹⁷ But the Renaissance was a self-conscious revival of pagan antiquity. How was it, then, that Renaissance scholars so completely misinterpreted the conception of non-cyclical history that Nisbet thought was held by Greek and Roman thinkers? It is easier to believe—and much easier to demonstrate through the primary source documents of classical culture—that Renaissance scholars knew their religious forefathers well.

What no one has yet produced is any evidence that classical culture possessed any concept of *dominion*, in time and on earth, comparable to that held by the Old Testament authors and New Testament writers. The idea that an exclusive group of people is under the special care of an omnipotent God, and that this God has covenanted with them, guaranteeing comprehensive victory, on earth and in heaven, to His people, simply was absent in classical authors. They had no such view of God's sovereignty. Furthermore, according to Cochrane, "for classical idealism, the very possibility of growth is restricted to individuals; communal or social development in the sense envisaged by modern liberalism is completely beyond its horizon."¹⁸ The end was faith in the superman, the divine Caesar, an idea with its roots in Greek thought,¹⁹ as the figure who could bring permanence to Rome, the long-sought Pax Romana. At best, Rome might not capitulate "to the Great God *Whirl*, the terror of the 'political' mind."²⁰ Only *luck*, in its war with inexorable fate and inevitable chance, had made possible the advent of Caesar Augustus.²¹

Thus, the Hebrews and Christians held to a concept of development which was unique in the ancient world. They believed that pro-

17. Nisbet, *Prejudices*, pp. 239–40.

18. Cochrane, *Christianity*, p. 103. Cochrane wrote of Livy: "It is hardly necessary to comment upon the intense conservatism implied in such a view of human life. It betrays an utter lack of faith in the goodness of any possible 'world to come' and invites men to conform to established models. . . . One result of this is to engender a fear and hatred of social change, regardless of its character and potentiality; and, with Livy, this manifests itself in a disposition to condemn as pernicious every tendency to innovation." *Ibid.*, p. 104.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 103. See especially Cochrane's analysis of the crisis of the third century, A.D.: ch. 4.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

gress is inevitable if and when men conform themselves covenantally to the God of the Bible.

F. The Concept of Economic Growth

Redeemed man's hope is in continual internal and external progress, including economic growth (Deut. 8:6–9).²² The promise is ultimate external victory (Isa. 66:22). Even the normal processes of nature will be overcome by the healing power of God's grace, as hostile animals will find peace with each other (Isa. 65:25).²³ The kind of progress which the Bible denies is the progress hoped for by the drunkard, a concept of progress which is autonomous: "Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant" (Isa. 56:12).²⁴ This kind of progress cannot be sustained. God judges it.

Economic growth is always under severe restraints. Compound growth rates of 5% per annum cannot continue for centuries.²⁵ But it is valid to expect continual blessings in response to continued faithfulness to God's laws. Economic growth is not an autonomous process that can be engineered into a society. It is the product of a world-and-life view that can be adopted by a society.

There is an additional problem for humanist economics. The Christian economist believes that the mind of God is comprehensive and normative. God can make plans and evaluate economic growth, and man, who is made in God's image, can also make plans and evaluate aggregate growth, though not perfectly.²⁶ The blessings of God that appear in the form of increased numbers of cattle or other assets are meaningful because of the plan of God. He imputes value to certain material objects, and therefore when individuals increase their holdings of them, they are indeed better off than before.

The subjectivist economist has no consistent way to be sure that economic growth is a blessing. Some economists, such as E. J. Mishan, reject the idea that economic growth is beneficial. But the problem is deeper than simply evaluating the costs and benefits of growth. Is the

22. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 19, 20.

23. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 16.

24. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

25. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970); reprinted in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

26. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5:E.

metaphor of growth even applicable to the economy, given the presuppositions of subjectivism?

The extreme subjectivist, Ludwig Lachmann, recommended that economists abandon the whole concept. He did speak of “economic progress,” which he defined as “an increase in real income per head.”²⁷ Yet even this is illegitimate. How can we divide “heads” into “real income,” since we cannot even define “real income” without resorting to aggregates, index numbers, and similar anti-subjectivist concepts. But even if subjectivist economists could define such concepts, Lachmann’s warning should make them hesitate. No model of a uniformly expanding or growing economy is valid. “This model embodies the notion of ‘growth,’ of progress at a known and *expected* rate. Its significance for the real world, however, is doubtful. Already the metaphor ‘growth’ is singularly inappropriate to the real world, as it suggests a process during which the harmony of proportions remains undisturbed.”²⁸ He asked: How can we be sure that there is harmony? Sometimes capital is malinvested—just before a depression, for example. Some capital is reduced in value by economic change; other capital assets appreciate. How can we “tally up” these changes in the value of capital? Only if there is harmony—a fitting together of personal plans into a coherent whole—can we use the metaphor of growth. But the radical subjectivist does not believe in any such harmonious aggregate. Economic aggregates are mythical in a world of consistent subjectivism. We cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, or interpersonal comparisons of subjective plans, given the tenets of subjective economics. There is no plan of God in their system to provide the necessary unity and coherence. Thus, the metaphor of growth is misleading, Lachmann says. Growth or a tree or plant is orderly. It is governed by a genetic code. An economy has no similar regulative principle, the subjectivist has to say, if he is consistent. Few are.

The Christian can legitimately use the metaphor of growth, precisely because he believes in the sovereignty of God. While his explanation of the origins of growth should be based on ethics rather than the mind of man or some other creaturely source, he can use this universal metaphor to make sense of the world. “More is better,” *if* it is the product of righteousness, and *if* it does not become a snare and a delusion.

27. Ludwig Lachmann, *Capital and Its Structure* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, [1956] 1977), p. 17. (<http://bit.ly/LLcapital>)

28. *Idem*.

Long-term economic growth is normative. The cyclical pattern of growth and decay, progress and regress, being hostile to the idea of the ethical covenant between God and man, is not the standard for a godly culture. The possibility of economic, social, military, and agricultural collapse always faces a covenantally faithful people—a warning of what will inevitably happen should they rebel against the terms of God's covenant (Deut. 28:15–68). Nevertheless, the cyclical pattern of prosperity and depression, which denies the possibility of perpetual expansion, is normative only for covenantally rebellious cultures. God nowhere says that all societies will conform historically to the cyclical pattern. *Covenantal dominion is expansionist.*

Economic growth is the inescapable product of the extension of God's kingdom. That the Protestant Reformation, and especially Puritan Calvinism, produced historically unprecedented economic growth, was not a random correlation.²⁹ Because nature is under the curse, and therefore limited, such compound growth cannot be an eternal process. Such expansion therefore points to an end of time, the end of the limits of our curse-induced scarcity. *Such growth therefore points to a coming judgment, a cessation of the processes of the cursed earth.* Paganism's attempt to substitute endless cycles of growth and decay is an ancient ploy to blind men to the reality of final judgment. The modern version of this ancient philosophy is the "zero growth" philosophy.³⁰ By abandoning the pagan use of the metaphor of growth—a metaphor which of necessity includes decay—and replacing it with a biblical version, which relates ethical conformity to God's law with external dominion and expansion, godly men remind ungodly men of the coming judgment. Growth will end when time does; growth clearly cannot go on for-ever.

29. On this point, see Max Weber's classic study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner's, [1904–05] 1958). For a defense of Weber against those who have criticized his thesis, see Gary North, "The 'Protestant Ethic' Hypothesis," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976). For documentation concerning the applicability of Weber's hypothesis in American colonial Puritanism, see my three essays on Puritan economic thought and practice in New England, 1630–1720, in *ibid.*, vol. V, no. 2; vol. VI, nos. 1, 2.

30. The most widely read example of this zero-growth philosophy is Dennis Meadows, *et al.*, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972). The book is subtitled: *A Report for the Club of Rome on the Predicament of Mankind*. It was a kind of "media event" in the early 1970s. Another example of this sort of analysis is *Entropy: A New World View*, by Jeremy Rifkin and Ted Howard (New York: Bantam New Age Book, 1980). The most forceful defense of zero economic growth is E. J. Mishan's book, *The Economic Growth Debate: An Assessment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977).

Conclusion

God will plant His people in the mountain of His inheritance, which will be the whole earth. This is the ultimate use of the metaphor of growth in the Bible. The individual blades of grass will wither and die, but the grass itself—the fields of grass—will spread. The earth will become the promised garden. “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1). “For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the LORD God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations” (Isa. 61:11).

18

MANNA, PREDICTABILITY, AND DOMINION

Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily (Ex. 16:4–5).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the supplier of food. God is the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. The Slave's Life

As former slaves in Egypt, the Hebrews had become accustomed to certain features of slave life. *First*, they had been assigned *regular tasks* by their masters. For the most part, these tasks had involved minimal creativity. The imperial bureaucracy had not been geared to local autonomy and individual responsibility of its slaves. The bureaucratic structure had to be predictable, from top to bottom. Deviations from the central plan had to be minimized.

Second, they had been supplied with *tools and raw materials*. This had increased their productivity, since it had increased the division of labor. Capital investments had come from the state. Only as a form of punishment did the Pharaoh of Moses' day impose the requirement that they produce bricks without straw (Ex. 5:18). This reduced the division of labor within the slave community, which thereby increased

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

the efforts of the slave population to produce the same quantity of bricks.² Their productivity was therefore dependent on the continuing support of a bureaucratic state.

Third, they had been supplied with *food*. This food had been supplied to them on a regular, predictable basis. Some of this food they produced on their own. They owned cattle (Ex. 9:4), sheep (Ex. 12:3), and crops. We presume that they grew crops, since the hail and fire consumed crops in Egypt, but not in Goshen, where the Hebrews resided (Ex. 9:25–26). Despite their own food supplies, they were nonetheless dependent, as all Egyptians were, on the state, for the state owned all the land, except that owned by the priests (Gen. 47:20–22). Furthermore, the predictable waters of the Nile, which were controlled by the state through irrigation projects and canals, made possible agricultural production in Egypt.³ We can surmise that whenever the slaves were engaged on building projects located away from Goshen, the taskmasters must have maintained discipline by controlling access to food supplies. Controlling men's access to food is a traditional means of control in slave societies.

The Hebrews experienced *the static world of slavery*. It was a society that did not systematically reward individual initiative and creativity. It was a society dominated by the decisions of senior officials. The Hebrew slave society was dependent on the representatives of foreign gods. A man's calling was established by the state. Egypt was governed by the annual cycle of the Nile, which in turn was understood to be under the control of a divine monarch, whose daily ritual observances determined even the rising of the sun. It was a culture that had no doctrine of progress, which built huge public works projects, and which concentrated its attention on death.

B. Deliverance from Slavery and into Freedom

God had called them out of this static world. Their response was predictable for slaves: *longing for the past*. They lodged their bitter complaints against God, although indirectly (Ex. 16:8). Moses took the brunt of the criticism. They resented the inhospitable world of the wilderness. Their familiar surroundings were gone. The wilderness was a sparse land. No taskmasters supplied them with instructions, tools,

2. Chapter 7.

3. Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study on Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), discusses several ancient civilizations that were tyrannies based on the centralized control of water by the state.

raw materials, and food. Constant wandering denied them access to a fixed piece of land. Their new environment was filled with risks. New skills were needed to survive; self-reliance and self-confidence had to be built up over time. Again and again, the Hebrews complained that God had brought them out of slavery in order to kill them (Ex. 14:11; 16:3; 17:3). *They had no self-confidence because they had no confidence in the God who had delivered them.*

This slave population was not equipped psychologically to assume the heavy responsibilities of godly reconstruction. They lacked two primary requirements of successful reconstruction: (1) *optimism* concerning the future; and (2) a concept of God-revealed, reliable *law*. To subdue the earth, they needed a doctrine of law under God's sovereign authority, and the world under God's law. Law is a tool of social reconstruction that involves a progressive reduction in society's reliance upon miracles. Simultaneously, the more predictable fruits of adherence to biblical law elevates to normality the benefits of the miraculous, such as abundance, health, long life, and the absence of disasters. Adherence to the law requires an increase of maturity on the part of those laboring to rebuild, yet it is itself the source of this spiritual maturity. Since the existence of a revealed law-order and the visible external results of the imposition of this law-order have to be understood as a sign of God's presence and ultimate sovereignty, man's need for miraculous intervention—"signs"—is reduced. As slaves, the Hebrews clung to the signs of God's presence, requiring endless miracles by God to protect them. Even with the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day, they were not satisfied. They kept crying, in effect, "What has God done for us lately?"

C. Manna vs. the Slave Psychology

Manna was necessary to break this psychology of slavery. Manna filled the bellies of the exodus generation, but for the younger generation, the manna served as a means of transforming their minds.

1. Regular Miracles

First, they received their *daily bread*. It was simple, tasty, and predictable to the point of monotony. Second, its appearance in the midst of a wilderness involved a *daily miracle*—a phenomenon not normally available to nomads. Their new taskmaster, God, supplied their needs as a display of His sovereignty over them. Furthermore, a weekly mir-

acle was added: a double portion on the sixth day, and nothing on the seventh. The manna, which would rot if kept overnight on the other five days, was preserved for the sabbath meal (Ex. 16:17–26).

The Hebrews could not store up large portions of manna, since it would rot within 24 hours. They had to rely totally on God, even as they had been forced to rely on Egypt's bureaucracy, Egypt's irrigation, and Egypt's gods. Modern "critical" biblical scholarship is intensely hostile to such a view of manna. The element of the miraculous appalls modern scholars. They want the regularities of biblical law, but without God, and certainly without God's alteration of the familiar regularities of nature. A typical statement from the world of secular scholarship is found in F. S. Bodenheimer's 1947 article on manna: "In Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 we find reports of manna in the desert. Some believe that this manna was similar to bread and that it was furnished in quantities large enough to feed a whole people. Others regard it as a natural phenomenon which contributed to the diet of the Israelites in the desert. Only the latter view permits analysis and discussion. Since biblical history often is confirmed by archeology, why not confirm the reports of manna by existing natural phenomena?"⁴ He concluded that the manna was really excretions of two species of insects, one found in the mountains and the other in the lowlands. Predictably, when the biblical account provides information that conflicts with his naturalistic explanation, he concluded that the biblical account is "a late and mistaken interpolation."⁵ He preferred to "prove" modern naturalism by rewriting the Bible. He apparently wanted us to believe that these insects were instinctive sabbatarians: excreting double portions on the day before the sabbath, and refraining from eating or excreting on the sabbath.

2. Predictable God

For 40 years the manna came, and the younger generation could not have failed to appreciate its implications. They began to become confident in the *lawful administration* of Israel's sovereign monarch. The covenantal relationship between them and their new king—psychologically a new king in their experience—was reaffirmed each morning. *A totally supernatural, yet totally regular event reconfirmed the*

4. F. S. Bodenheimer, "The Manna of Sinai," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, X (Feb. 1947); reprinted in G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman (eds.), *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1961), p. 76.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

covenant daily. The daily provision of the manna taught the younger generation that God is *faithful*. At the same time, the prohibition against gathering it on the seventh day, and the double portion on the sixth, taught them that God is holy. A special day of rest was set apart for the people of Israel, even as God had set them apart from Egypt in a display of His sovereign grace. Violations of the prohibition against gathering food on the sabbath were viewed by God as symbolic violations of His law in general: “And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?” (Ex. 16:28).

The confidence of the younger generation in the whole of the law was built upon the observed regularities of the provision and administration of this seemingly innocuous substance. These were supernatural regularities that were not available to other wanderers in the wilderness. The Hebrews needed faith in God’s ability to overcome the normal regularities of wilderness ecology—an ecology which could not sustain two to three million wanderers—as well as faith in the predictability of His providence. Manna provided a daily and weekly testimony to God’s sovereign power: *providential regularity within a framework of ecological abnormality*. The curse of the ground was overcome daily, which pointed to the Author of that curse, and the power He possesses to deliver His people ethically and economically from the effects of that curse. A God who can be relied upon to overcome the laws of biology and ecology on a daily basis can also be relied upon to honor His covenantal promises to provide external blessings for those who honor His law-order.

A remnant of the wilderness experience of manna was provided by God in the land of Israel by guaranteeing a triple harvest in the year preceding that sabbatical year which preceded the jubilee year (Lev. 25:21).⁶ There is no subsequent reference to the occurrence of this miraculous triple crop, probably because the Hebrews in the pre-exilic period did not honor the sabbath year principle, which is why God sent them into exile (II Chron. 36:20–21). After their return to Israel they did honor the sabbatical year, according to a non-canonical source (I Maccabees 6:49), but there is no mention of the jubilee year or to its triple harvest. It seems likely that the manna experience was the background for Christ’s multiplying of the loaves in “a desert place” (Matt. 14:15–20), which was part of a ministry that He an-

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 27.

nounced in terms of the jubilee year (Luke 4:18–19).⁷

D. Biblical Law and Conquest

This younger generation was being prepared to conquer Canaan. They had to learn two things about biblical law. First, biblical law is *personal*. Second, it is regular enough to be *predictable*. They also learned that self-discipline and faithfulness are necessary for survival, because violations of the sabbath requirements had brought criticism from God (Ex. 16:28). They learned of the *continuity of biblical law over time* (four decades) and over *geography* (wandering). God's provision of the manna created *a psychology of godly dominion*. Humble before God, and totally dependent upon His care, they could become totally confident in the face of human enemies. They expected to find a tight relationship between God's commands and God's blessings. *They learned humility before God and confidence before the creation*. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3).⁸

1. Covenantal Symbol

The manna became a symbol of God's covenant with Israel. "And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations. As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept" (Ex. 16:33–34). The New Testament informs us that the Ark of the Covenant contained the two tables of the law, Aaron's rod, and the golden pot that held the manna (Heb. 9:4). The manna came for forty years, until the people crossed over the Jordan into Canaan. They kept the Passover on that day, and they ate of the old corn of the land. "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year" (Josh. 5:12). A new generation crossed over Jordan. On the

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

8. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

day they crossed over, God “rolled away the reproach of Egypt” from the nation (Josh. 5:9). They began the process of taking possession of their heritage. They no longer needed the daily bread of manna. Hard fighting, hard work, and hard-headed commitment to biblical law were to replace the manna. *Their faith in the welfare state regularity of static Egypt had at last been abolished; the true welfare civilization of advancing dominion could now begin.* The regularity of law replaced the regularity of daily miracles. Responsibility under God’s predictable law replaced the predictability of manna, just as predictable manna had replaced the predictability of Egyptian slavery.

Slavery is a reproach to God’s people. They are to exercise dominion under God, not be dominated by servants of foreign gods. *But to escape slavery, men must switch allegiances. They must make a covenant with the God of freedom.* The exodus generation made their covenant, but they barely believed in its God or its terms. They were still mental slaves. They still clung to the supposed benefits of the bureaucratic welfare state. They still hesitated to exercise dominion. God pulled them out of Egypt’s welfare state, but He did not pull the welfare state mentality out of them. The 40 years of wandering slowly pulled the next generation away from the mental chains that bound their fathers.

2. Welfare Through Miracles

There was welfare in the wilderness, but no welfare state. No bureaucracy supplied their daily bread. God was visibly the source of their welfare. This welfare, they learned, was predictable. They could rely on it, which meant that they could rely on Him. They did not need to trust in some bureaucracy for their existence. They could rest in God. And because they could rest in God, visibly, one day each week, they learned that they could rest in God on the battlefield and in the work place. Each family gathered its own manna daily (Ex. 16:16). There was precisely enough for every individual, since God, not man, was the central planner (Ex. 16:18). Once they began to rely on *God’s mercy* as the source of their prosperity, and on *biblical law*, which was their tool of dominion, they could abandon the religion of their fathers, *the religion of bureaucratic welfarism*. Each man could then attend to his own affairs in confidence, even as each man had gathered up his own manna. Each man knew that he was under the direct sovereignty of God, and that his own economic prosperity was not metaphysically de-

pendent on the state and the state's bureaucratic planning. Their fathers had never fully grasped this principle, and their fathers had perished in the wilderness.

They would no longer long for Egypt. The sons would not be burdened by memories of a welfare state existence—unreliable memories—where they supposedly had eaten “bread to the full” (Ex. 16:3). The children would no longer pine away for the food of bondage, “the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick” (Num. 11:5). Instead, they chose the bread of diligence, the fruits of victory.

Conclusion

If there was any universal religion in the second half of the twentieth century, it was the religion of the bureaucratic welfare state. Not since the days of Egypt, said Max Weber in the first decade of the twentieth century, have we seen a bureaucracy like the ones we are constructing, nation by nation.⁹ And, he might have pointed out a century later, not since the days of Egypt have we seen tax burdens like those which are universal today. In fact, neither the system of universal bureaucracy nor the system of confiscatory taxation in Egypt came anywhere near the systems the modern statist priests have imposed on their populations—populations that groan under the burdens, but who cry for more benefits, higher tax burdens on the rich, more coercive wealth redistribution, and more government programs to protect them.

If God should manifest His grace, and deliver us from bondage, we can expect the older generation to murmur against God, and tell their children about the safety in bondage and the onions of Egypt. After all, we even have Christian apologists for the present welfare state who cry out for more state programs, more redistribution, and the universalization of the welfare state system, all in the name of Jesus.¹⁰ When the

9. “Max Weber on Bureaucratization in 1909,” Appendix I in J. P. Meyer, *Max Weber and German Politics: A Study in Political Sociology* (London: Faber & Faber, [1943] 1956).

10. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977). This book had gone into its sixth printing by 1979, after only two years on the market. For a few years, its influence was very great in educated American evangelical circles. Sider wrote for the neo-evangelical community, but he was widely accepted in conservative Presbyterian circles, especially on seminary campuses. For a critique of Sider's thesis, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in An Age of Guilt-Manipulators*, 4th ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christi-

state-educated slaves come before their people to extol the benefits of the bureaucratic slave system, we can expect the slaves and their state-promoting “trusties”—the modern Christian version of the black overseers of nineteenth-century American Negro slavery—to complain against any Moses who calls them out of bondage and into responsible freedom.

an Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>). By the time Chilton’s third edition appeared, the Sider phenomenon had faded. Elected to a second four-year term, President Ronald Reagan spoke for evangelicals in 1985. Sider did not. Sider was a phenomenon of the short-lived leftist neoevangelical fad that faded rapidly after Reagan defeated liberal Baptist Jimmy Carter for President in 1980.

19

IMPERFECT JUSTICE

Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee (Ex. 18:21–22).

The Bible is not a perfectionist document. While it lays down a standard of human perfection (Gen. 17:1; I Kings 8:61; Matt. 5:48)—a standard met only by Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:17; Rom. 3:23; II Cor. 5:21)—it nonetheless acknowledges in its very law code that the administration of even a perfect law system designed by God must be understood as fallible, limited, and tainted with sin. As this passage amply demonstrates, the Bible is hostile to the humanists' quest for perfect justice on earth.

A. The Division of Labor

Under Moses' direct rule, God's revelation was instantly available in any given case. Yet there was insufficient time available for Moses to hear every case of legal dispute in the land. Perfect justice was limited by time and space. Men had to come to Moses' tent and stand in (presumably) long lines (Ex. 18:14). The quest for perfect earthly justice from God through His servant Moses was eating up countless man-hours. Not only was Moses' time limited, but so was the time of those who stood in lines.

Jethro warned Moses that the people, as well as Moses himself, were wearing away (v. 18). He recommended the creation of a *judicial hierarchy*, thereby taking advantage of the principle of the *division of labor*. Moses could reserve time to hear the cases that were too diffi-

cult for his subordinates—"every great matter" (v. 22)—and in doing so, would redeem his allotted time more wisely by exercising leadership in areas of Hebrew life other than the court-room. Furthermore, this system would permit more rapid resolutions of disputes. Justice was to be dispensed continually—"at all seasons"—and speedily.

God gave no explicit revelation to Moses concerning the establishment of a court of appeals. It was an *ad hoc* decision based on informed common sense. Jethro, who was a priest of Midian (v. 1), must have been familiar with the problems of dispensing divine justice. He could see how large the nation of Israel was. Acknowledging the validity of the principle of scarcity—in this case, the *scarcity of time*—Jethro came to an obvious conclusion. This conclusion involved the acceptance of man's limitations. Even in this historically unique circumstance of men's access to perfect justice, it was preferable in the vast majority of cases to obtain speedy human justice rather than delayed divine justice. Human justice was at least available to everyone, while Moses' judgments were allocated by means of lining up. No one could be sure that his case would even be considered.

The scarcity of time demands a judicial division of labor. The division of labor allows men to overcome many of the restrictions imposed by scarcity in every area of life. In this case, the judge's office was broken down into many offices, with specialists at each level (one in every ten judges) who could take appeals.

The criteria for admission into the position of judge were moral rather than technical or educational. Uncovetous men (bribe-resistant), fearful of God, with reputations of truthfulness, were the preferred judges (v. 21). Ability was also important, but moral qualities were emphasized.

Consider the available judges. They had grown up as slaves. The whole generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, possessed slave mentalities. Nevertheless, their rule was preferable in most cases to a system which offered perfect justice in individual cases, but which had to ration the number of cases. Conclusion: *regular and predictable justice provided by responsible amateurs is better than perfect justice provided on a sporadic or "first in line" basis.* The burden of dispensing justice had to be shared (v. 22). This was required in order to permit the people to endure, going their way in peace (v. 23).

B. The Right of Appeal

The right of appeal was limited to “great matters.” Cases involving fundamental principle, and those that would be likely to have important repercussions throughout the society, were the ones that were to be sent up the judicial chain of appeals. In order to limit the number of cases being sent to Moses for a final decision, the judges at each level must have had the right to refuse to reconsider the verdict of a lower court. If the judge did not believe that the decision of the lower court was in error, and if the higher court decided that the case was of relatively little importance as a precedent for society at large, the case was settled. Access to Moses’ supreme court was restricted to great cases, and this required screening by the lower courts. Jethro understood that the limitations on Moses’ time were paralyzing the justice system. Obviously, if every case considered by the lower courts eventually wound up in front of Moses, the hierarchy of courts would have provided no respite for Moses. *The screening feature of the court system was fundamental to its success.* This meant that the majority of litigants had to content themselves with something less than perfect justice.

Jethro also understood that *endless litigation threatens the survival of the system of justice.* Losers in a case clearly have an incentive to appeal, if the possibility of overturning the decision of the lower court judge offers hope. So there has to be restraint on the part of higher court judges to refrain from constant overturning of lower court decisions. Furthermore, a society composed of people who always are going to court against each other will suffer from clogged courts and delayed justice. A society, in short, that is not governed by self-restrained people, and which does not provide other means of settling disputes besides the civil government—church courts, arbitration panels, mediation boards, industry-wide courts, and so forth—will find itself paralyzed.

Macklin Fleming was a justice of the California Court of Appeal. His book, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (1974), documented the increasing paralysis of the legal system in the United States. It is this quest for earthly perfection that has been the legal system’s undoing.

The fuel that powers the modern legal engine is the ideal of perfectibility the concept that with the expenditure of sufficient time, patience, energy, and money it is possible eventually to achieve perfect justice in all legal process. For the past twenty years this ideal has

dominated legal thought, and the ideal has been widely translated into legal action. Yet a look at almost any specific area of the judicial process will disclose that the noble ideal has consistently spawned results that can only be described as pandemoniac. For example, in criminal prosecutions we find as long as five months spent in the selection of a jury; the same murder charge tried five different times; the same issues of search and seizure reviewed over and over again, conceivably as many as twenty-six different times; prosecutions pending a decade or more; accusations routinely sidestepped by an accused who makes the legal machinery the target instead of his own conduct.¹

Where have modern secular humanistic courts failed? Fleming cited Lord Macaulay's rule: *the government that attempts more than it ought ends up doing less than it should*. Human law has its limits. Human courts have their limits. "The law cannot be both infinitely just and infinitely merciful; nor can it achieve both perfect form and perfect substance. These limitations were well understood in the past. But today's dominant legal theorists, impatient with selective goals, with limited objectives, and with human fallibility, have embarked on a quest for perfection in all aspects of the social order, and, in particular, perfection in legal procedure."²

The requirements of legal perfection, Fleming said, involve the following hypothetical conditions: totally impartial and competent tribunals, unlimited time for the defense, total factuality, total familiarity with the law, the abolition of procedural error, and the denial of the use of disreputable informants, despite the fact, as he noted, that "the strongest protection against organized thievery lies in the fact that thieves sell each other out."³ *Costless justice theory* has adopted the slogan, "Better to free a hundred guilty men than to convict a single innocent man." But what about the costs to future victims of the hundred guilty men? The legal perfectionists refuse to count the costs of their hypothetical universe.⁴

The goal of *correct procedure* as the *only* goal worth attaining is steadily eroding both the concept of moral justice and the crucially important deterrent, a speedy punishment. Everything is to be sacrificed on the altar of technical precision. "In this way the ideal of justice is

1. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 3.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

transformed into an ideal of correct procedure.”⁵ But the ideal is impossible to achieve perfectly, and by sacrificing all other goals, the cost has become astronomical. The incredible complexity of perfect procedures has led to a revival of judge-made law—judicial arbitrariness—since judges have been able to pick and choose from the morass of conflicting decisions. *Almost total legislative power has therefore been transferred to the courts.* And, as Fleming argued, the courts are not efficient in creating law. They have no staffs, little time, too many cases, and too theoretical a knowledge of the law. “Partisans are quick to furnish whatever literature will promote their cause, and a cottage industry has grown up in the preparation of the sociological brief. . . .”⁶

The whole system procrastinates: judges, defense lawyers, prosecutors, appeals courts, even the stenographic corps.⁷ Speedy justice is no longer a reality. Prisoners appeal constantly to federal courts on the basis of *habeas corpus*: illegal detention because of an unconstitutional act on the part of someone, anyone. In 1940, 89 prisoners convicted in state courts made such an appeal. In 1970, the figure was 12,000.⁸ Thus, concluded Fleming: “The consequence of this expansion of federal power over state criminal procedure through the creation of fiat prohibitions and rigidly ritualistic rules has been to elevate formalism to constitutional right, to complicate every significant phase of criminal procedure to the point where in some instances the system of criminal law has difficulty functioning and in others it turns loose persons who are patently guilty.”⁹

C. Salvation by Law

The quest for perfect justice leads inevitably to *arbitrary jurisprudence and public lawlessness*. Joseph in Pharaoh’s jail, Daniel in the lions’ den, and Jesus on the cross all testify to the imperfections in human courts of law. Nevertheless, godly men can live with imperfect justice, just as they live with imperfections in all other spheres of human life, because they know that perfect justice does exist and will be made manifest on the day of judgment. Life is too short to demand perfect justice on earth; better by far to have speedy justice handed

5. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 97. Cf. Richard A. Posner, *The Federal Courts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985).

down by godly amateurs than the clogged courts of messianic humanism. We need not wring our hands in despair because men's courts, in time and on earth, fail to meet the standards of perfection which will reign supreme in God's court. *We are not saved either by the perfect spirit of the law or the perfect letter of the law.* We are surely not saved by imperfect imitations of the spirit and letter of the law. We are not saved by law.

Salvation by law is an ancient heresy, and it leads to the triumph of statist theology. Christianity is in total opposition to this doctrine. As Rushdoony wrote: "The reality of man apart from Christ is guilt and masochism. And guilt and masochism involve an unshakable inner slavery which governs the total life of the non-Christian. The politics of the anti-Christian will thus inescapably be *the politics of guilt*. In the politics of guilt, man is perpetually drained in his social energy and cultural activity by his over-riding sense of guilt and his masochistic activity. He will progressively demand of the state a redemptive role. What he cannot do personally, i.e., to save himself, he demands that the state do for him, so that the state, as man enlarged, becomes the human savior of man. The politics of guilt, therefore, is not directed, as the Christian politics of liberty, to the creation of godly justice and order, but to the creation of a redeeming order, a saving state."¹⁰ Christian jurisprudence cannot adopt a doctrine of the saving state and remain orthodox. The adoption of just such a concept of the state in the twentieth century testifies to the extent to which the modern world has abandoned Christian orthodoxy.

D. Jamming the System

One of the most important aspects of any legal order is the willingness of the citizens of a society to exercise self-restraint. This means that men must emphasize self-government, as well as gain access to court systems that serve as alternatives to civil government. This was a basic feature of the Western legal tradition after the mid-twelfth century, although since World War I, the rise of socialistic administrative states has begun to undermine this tradition.¹¹

Self-government is not a zero-price resource. The emphasis in the Bible on training up children in the details of biblical law must be un-

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), p. 9. (<http://bit.ly/rjrpgap>)

11. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), Pt. II.

derstood as a requirement of citizens to provide “social overhead capital”—respect for law and therefore self-restraint—for civilization. Another aspect of the public’s respect for civil law is the *self-restraint of government officials* in not burdening the society with a massive, incomprehensible structure of administrative law. When civil law reaches into every aspect of the daily lives of men, the state loses a very important *subsidy from the public*, namely, men’s willingness to submit voluntarily to the civil law. Any legal structure is vulnerable to the foot-dragging of the public. If men refuse to submit to regulations that cannot be enforced, one by one, by the legal system, then that system will be destroyed. Court-jamming will paralyze it. This was a familiar phenomenon in the United States in the final decades of the twentieth century.

It is possible to bring down any legal system simply by taking advantage of every legal avenue of delay. Any administrative system has procedural rules; by following these rules so closely that action on the part of the authorities becomes hopelessly bogged down in red tape (procedural details), the protestors can paralyze the system. Too many laws can produce lawlessness. The courts can no longer enforce their will on the citizens. At the same time, administrative agencies can destroy individual citizens, knowing that citizens must wait too long to receive justice in the courts. The result is a combination of anarchy and tyranny—the antinomian legacy.

This possibility of bureaucratic paralysis is characteristic of all administrative systems, even a centralized tyranny such as the Soviet Union. A classic example is the case of the Soviet dissident of the 1960s and early 1970s, Vladimir Bukovsky. Bukovsky spent well over a decade in the Soviet gulag concentration camp system. He was arrested and sentenced in spite of specific civil rights protections provided by the Soviet Constitution—a document that has never been respected by the Soviet bureaucracy. But, once in prison, he learned to make life miserable for the director of his camp. He learned that written complaints had to be responded to officially within a month. This administrative rule governing the camps was for “Western consumption,” but it was nevertheless a rule. Any camp administrator who failed to honor it risked the possibility of punishment, should a superior or an ambitious subordinate decide to pressure him for any reason. In short, any failure to “do it by the book” could be used against him later on.

Bukovsky became an assembly-line producer of official protests. By the end of his career as a “zek,” he had taught hundreds of other in-

mates to follow his lead. By following certain procedures that were specified by the complaint system, Bukovsky's protesting army began to disrupt the whole Soviet bureaucracy. His camp clogged the entire system with protests—hundreds of them per day. He estimates that eventually the number of formal complaints exceeded 75,000. To achieve such a phenomenal output, the protestors had to adopt the division of labor. Bukovsky described the process: "At the height of our war, each of us wrote from ten to thirty complaints a day. Composing thirty complaints in one day is not easy, so we usually divided up the subjects among ourselves and each man wrote on his own subject before handing it around for copying by all the others. If there are five men in a cell and each man takes six subjects, each of them has the chance to write thirty complaints while composing only six himself."¹² The complaints were addressed to prominent individuals and organizations: the deputies of the Supreme Soviet, the regional directors, astronauts, actors, generals, admirals, the secretaries of the Central Committee, shepherds, sportsmen, and so forth. "In the Soviet Union, all well-known individuals are state functionaries."¹³ Each complaint had to be responded to. The camp administrators grew frantic. They threatened punishments, and often imposed them, but it did no good; the ocean of protests grew. Bukovsky's description is incomparable:

The next thing that happens is that the prison office, inundated with complaints, is unable to dispatch them within the three-day deadline. For overrunning the deadline they are bound to be reprimanded and to lose any bonuses they might have won. When our war was at its hottest the prison governor summoned every last employee to help out at the office with this work—librarians, bookkeepers, censors, political instructors, security officers. And it went even further. All the students at the next-door Ministry of the Interior training college were pressed into helping out as well.

All answers to and dispatches of complaints have to be registered in a special book, and strict attention has to be paid to observing the correct deadlines. Since complaints follow a complex route and have to be registered every step of the way, they spawn dossiers and records of their own. In the end they all land in one of two places: the local prosecutor's office or the local department of the Interior Ministry. These offices can't keep up with the flood

12. Vladimir Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life As a Dissident* (New York: Viking, 1979), p. 37.

13. *Idem*.

either and also break their deadlines, for which they too are reprimanded and lose their bonuses. The bureaucratic machine is thus obliged to work at full stretch, and you transfer the paper avalanche from one office to another, sowing panic in the ranks of the enemy. Bureaucrats are bureaucrats, always at loggerheads with one another, and often enough your complaints become weapons in internecine wars between bureaucrat and bureaucrat, department and department. This goes on for months and months, until, at last, the most powerful factor of all in Soviet life enters the fray—statistics.¹⁴

As the 75,000 complaints became part of the statistical record, the statistical record of the prison camp and the regional camps was spoiled. All bureaucrats suffered. There went the prizes, pennants, and other benefits. “The workers start seething with discontent, there is panic in the regional Party headquarters, and a senior commission of inquiry is dispatched to the prison.”¹⁵ The commission then discovered a mass of shortcomings with the work of the prison’s administration, although the commission would seldom aid specific prisoners. The prisoners knew this in advance. But the flood of protests continued for two years. “The entire bureaucratic system of the Soviet Union found itself drawn into this war. There was virtually no government department or institution, no region or republic, from which we weren’t getting answers. Eventually we had even drawn the criminal cons into our game, and the complaints disease began to spread throughout the prison—in which there were twelve hundred men altogether. I think that if the business had continued a little longer and involved everyone in the prison, the Soviet bureaucratic machine would have simply ground to a halt: all Soviet institutions would have had to stop work and busy themselves with writing replies to US.”¹⁶

Finally, in 1977, they capitulated to several specific demands of the prisoners to improve the conditions of the camps. The governor of the prison was removed and pensioned off.¹⁷ Their ability to inflict death-producing punishments did them little good, once the prisoners learned of the Achilles’ heel of the bureaucracy: paperwork. The leaders of the Soviet Union could bear it no longer: they deported Bukovsky. Subsequently, according to one Soviet defector, the Soviets had to scrap the Constitution once again (unofficially, of course) in the

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

17. *Idem.*

area of protection of free speech.¹⁸ Dissidents were again subjected to long-term incarceration in psychiatric hospitals, just as they were before Bukovsky and other dissidents organized their protesting techniques, both inside and outside the Gulag.¹⁹ As Bukovsky noted, "they wrote a Constitution with a plethora of rights and freedoms that they simply couldn't afford to grant, rightly supposing that nobody would be reckless enough to insist on them being observed."²⁰ Nevertheless, when internal dissidents and external observers put the pressure of formal paperwork on the ruling elite, they sometimes capitulated.

E. Centralization and the Declining Respect for Law

Economist Milton Friedman suggested that the respect for law that prevails in capitalist societies is closely related to the absence of comprehensive, detailed administrative regulations. The British experience of the nineteenth century provides Friedman with a case study of the public's response to civil law.

In the early nineteenth century, British citizens were notorious law-breakers. They were a nation of smugglers, ready to offer bribes, ready to take advantage of every inefficiency in the law-enforcement system. Very little could be accomplished through legal channels. Friedman says that one of the reasons why Jeremy Bentham and the Utilitarians were hostile to civil government and adopted *laissez-faire* doctrines in the early nineteenth century was because they recognized that civil government was completely inefficient. "The government was corrupt and inefficient. It was clearly oppressive. It was something that had to be gotten out of the way as a first step to reform. The fundamental philosophy of the Utilitarians, or any philosophy that puts its emphasis on some kind of a sum of utilities, however loose may be the expression, does not lead to *laissez-faire* in principle. It leads to whatever kind of organization of economic activity is thought to produce results which are regarded as good in the sense of adding to the sum total of utilities. I think the major reason why the Utilitarians tended to be in favor of *laissez-faire* was the obvious fact that government

18. He appeared on the Cable News Network in February, 1984.

19. On the use of mental hospitals as substitute prisons, see Zhores Medvedev and Roy Medvedev, *A Question of Madness: Repression by Psychiatry in the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1971); Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway, *Psychiatric Terror: How Soviet Psychiatry Is Used to Suppress Dissent* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

20. Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle*, p. 239.

was incompetent to perform any of the tasks they wanted to see performed.”²¹ (Friedman’s assertion that Utilitarianism was not philosophically attached to the free market social order is borne out by the fact that many British Utilitarians in the late nineteenth century were ready to advocate government regulation in order to produce “the greatest good for the greatest number”—a reversal of the conclusions of the early Utilitarians, but not a reversal of their pragmatic philosophy.)²²

Friedman went on to make some extremely important observations concerning what he calls *the capital stock of people’s willingness to obey the law*. First, there must be an increase in people’s respect for civil law through a reduction of the number of burdensome regulations. Second, there is an increase in the number of such laws, since politicians and bureaucrats begin to take advantage of the citizens’ willingness to co-operate with the state. This, in turn, reduces the ability of the state planners to achieve their publicly announced goals. There are therefore *limits to centralization*.

Whatever the reason for its appeal, the adoption of *laissez-faire* had some important consequences. Once *laissez-faire* was adopted, the economic incentive for corruption was largely removed. After all, if governmental officials had no favors to grant, there was no need to bribe them. And if there was nothing to be gained from government, it could hardly be a source of corruption. Moreover, the laws that were left were for the most part—and again, I am oversimplifying and exaggerating—laws that were widely accepted, as proper and desirable; laws against theft, robbery, murder, etc. This is in sharp contrast to a situation in which the legislative structure designates as crimes what people individually do not regard as crimes or makes it illegal for people to do what seems to them the sensible thing. The latter situation tends to reduce respect for the law. One of the unintended and indirect effects of *laissez-faire* was thus to establish a climate in Britain of a much greater degree of obedience and respect for the law than had existed earlier. Probably there were other forces at work in this development, but I believe that the establishment of *laissez-faire* laid the groundwork for a reform in the civil service in the latter part of the century—the establishment of a civil service

21. Milton Friedman, “Is a Free Society Stable?” *New Individualist Review*, II (Summer 1962); reprinted in one volume by the Liberty Press, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1981, p. 245. (<http://bit.ly/FriedmanStable>)

22. Ellen Frankel Paul, *Moral Revolution and Economic Science: The Demise of Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth-Century British Political Philosophy* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979).

chosen on the basis of examinations and merit of professional competence. You could get that kind of development because the incentives to seek such places for purposes of exerting "improper" influence were greatly reduced when government had few favors to confer.

In these ways, the development of *laissez-faire* laid the groundwork for a widespread respect for the law, on the one hand, and a relatively incorrupt, honest, and efficient civil service on the other, both of which are essential preconditions for the operation of a collectivist society. In order for a collectivist society to operate, the people must obey the laws and there must be a civil service that can and will carry out the laws. The success of capitalism established these preconditions for a movement in the direction of much greater state intervention.

The process I have described obviously runs both ways. A movement in the direction of a collectivist society involves increased governmental intervention into the daily lives of people and the conversion into crimes of actions that are regarded by the ordinary person as entirely proper. These tend in turn to undermine respect for the law and to give incentives to corrupt state officials. There can, I think, be little doubt that this process has begun in Britain and has gone a substantial distance. Although respect for the law may still be greater than it is here [the United States], most observers would agree that respect for the law in Britain has gone down decidedly in the course of the last twenty or thirty years, certainly since the war [World War II], as a result of the kind of laws people have been asked to obey. . . . The erosion of the capital stock of willingness to obey the law reduces the capacity of a society to run a centralized state, to move away from freedom. This effect on law obedience is, thus one that is reversible and runs in both directions. . . .

This seems to me an important point. Once the government embarks on intervention into and regulation of private activities, this establishes an incentive for large numbers of individuals to use their ingenuity to find ways to get around the government regulations. One result is that there appears to be a lot more regulation than there really is. Another is that the time and energy of government officials is increasingly taken up with the need to plug the holes in the regulations that the citizens are finding, creating, and exploiting. From this point of view, Parkinson's law about the growth of bureaucracy without a corresponding growth of output may be a favorable feature for the maintenance of a free society. An efficient governmental organization and not an inefficient one is almost surely the greater threat to a free society. One of the virtues of a free society is precisely that the market tends to be a more efficient organizing principle than

centralized direction. Centralized direction in this way is always having to fight something of a losing battle.²³

Conclusion

What we can and should strive for is to conform our human law codes to the explicit requirements of the Ten Commandments and the case-law applications of biblical law. The answer to our legal crisis is not to be found in the hypothetical perfection of formal law, nor can it be found in the hypothetical perfection of substantive (ethical) justice. Judges will make errors, but these errors can be minimized by placing them within the framework of biblical law. Before God gave the nation of Israel a comprehensive system of law, Jethro gave Israel a comprehensive system of decentralized courts. By admitting the impossibility of the goal for earthly perfect justice, Moses made possible the reign of imperfectly applied revealed law—perfect in principle, but inevitably flawed in application. The messianic goal of a perfect law-order, in time and on earth, was denied to Moses and his successors.

One of the most obvious failures of the modern administrative civil government system is its quest for perfect justice and perfect control over the details of economic life. The implicit assertion of omniscience on the part of the central planners is economically fatal. The result of such an assertion is an increase of regulations, increased confusion among both rulers and ruled, and a growing disrespect for civil law. The productivity of the West cannot be maintained in the face of such an exponential build-up of central power. It is only because the laws are not consistent, nor universally enforced or obeyed, that the modern messianic state has survived. The price of perfect human justice is too high to be achieved by the efforts of men.

23. Friedman, pp. 245–47. I read it as an undergraduate. I never forgot it.

THE OATH-BOUND KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Ex. 19:3–6).

The theocentric principle here is the oath: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

God told Moses to tell the people of Israel that they must covenant with Him. He had delivered them out of the house of bondage. Meredith G. Kline identified this as point two of the Near Eastern treaty model: the sovereign's announcement of his mighty works in history. He called this "historical prologue."² I associate point two mainly with the covenant itself. The Book of Exodus is the book of the covenant. "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). It is the second book of the Pentateuch, which in turn is structured in terms of the five points.

Who was this God who had delivered them? The owner of all the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Cf. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963). The is reprinted in Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972).

earth: “for all the earth is mine.” Here, God identifies His sovereignty with His comprehensive ownership. Ownership is associated with boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant model. The sanctity of God’s name (third commandment)³ is associated with the commandment against theft (eighth commandment).⁴

Priests are mediators between God and man. They are representatives. It is appropriate that the identification of the Israelites as a kingdom of priests should complete Part 1 of this commentary on Exodus, which is the story of rival claims of representation: God vs. Pharaoh.⁵

Israel would henceforth serve as a representative priesthood for the whole world. This was an aspect of God’s common grace.⁶ God preserved the world for the sake of His people: the division of labor. God’s people are given greater productivity and therefore greater income because of the specialized efforts of people who are outside the covenant of redemption. The general dominion covenant still binds all mankind. At the same time, He preserved his people for the sake of the world: the priestly function. Representation is always hierarchical: upward and downward.

The tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe for the priestly nation. The family of Aaron served as the high priests. They officiated at the sanctuary, i.e., the judicially set-apart place where the sacrifices to God were made.

And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father’s house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die. And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you (Num. 18:1–4).

An important aspect of this office of priest was the tithe.⁷ The tithe

3. Chapter 23.

4. Chapter 28.

5. I did not see this when I wrote *Moses and Pharaoh* (1985).

6. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

7. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*,

is paid by lower priests to higher priests. At the time of Israel's oath, there was not yet a higher priesthood to receive the tithes of the kingdom of priests. God designated this priesthood only after the golden calf incident: the tribe of Levi. After Israel inherited the land of Canaan, members of the other tribes paid ten percent of their agricultural produce to the Levites, who in turn paid ten percent to the priests who officiated at the temple.

And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation (Num. 18:20–21).

Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe. And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress. Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the LORD of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the LORD'S heave offering to Aaron the priest (Num. 18:26–28).

The tithe system applied only to the priests. The world outside the land of Israel did not tithe to Israel. Why not? Because covenant-breakers outside the Promised Land were not priests.

The reason why the requirement to tithe applies to Christians is because God has designated them as priests.

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9). As priests, they are required to pay a tenth to the local church, which represents them before God. The judicial marks of this representation are the sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Conclusion

God established a kingdom of priests at Mt. Sinai. The people voluntarily covenanted themselves to God by a formal act of ratification. “And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD

hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD” (Ex. 19:8).

This formal act of covenantal ratification to the God who owns the earth, who was the God who had delivered them, established the national covenant. It also made mandatory a system of tithes.

CONCLUSION

And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horse-men, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses (Ex. 14:27–31).

When Moses and the Israelites looked behind them from the eastern shore of the Red Sea and saw the army of Egypt overwhelmed by the water, they saw the judgment of God on the power religion and its institutional manifestation, the power state. They had been involved in an historic confrontation analogous to the original confrontation between Satan and God. They had been given visible evidence of the inescapable outcome of this confrontation between these two rival religions: in heaven, in the garden, at the cross, and at the final judgment. The power religion does not have the power to defeat a holy God and His holy people, whenever they conform themselves to the terms of His covenant. Seeking power, the power religionists lose it—in time, on earth, and in eternity.

Nevertheless, the victory of God's people, while assured, is not visibly manifested in every confrontation. Herbert Schlossberg was correct: "The Bible can be interpreted as a string of God's triumphs disguised as disasters."¹ As he said, "We need a theological interpretation of disaster, one that recognizes that God acts in such events as captiv-

1. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 304.

ities, defeats, and crucifixions.”² It often seems as though the power religionists—the seekers of gnostic salvation, the elite central planners—have all power. They don’t. “Never ask the enlightened ones about their track record, which is a series of disguised disasters. . . .”³ Most of Christianity’s victories have been disguised in the past, and so have most of Satan’s disasters.

The Hebrews’ experience in Egypt testified to a truth summarized by Schlossberg: “When loyalty to God disappears, there is no longer a barrier to an omniscient state.”⁴ But the self-professed omniscient state isn’t omniscient; it is progressively incompetent, as Egypt’s experience reveals. Such a state is simply the chief institutional manifestation of covenant-breaking man’s attempt to imitate, and then usurp, the omnipotence of God. But omnipotence is an incommunicable attribute of God. Therefore, the only possible source of man’s long-term but limited power is biblical ethics. Adherence to biblical law, by grace through faith, is the only means of fulfilling the terms of the dominion covenant.

Thus, there is no need for Christians to become adherents of the escapist religion in order to avoid becoming adherents of the power religion. *The dominion religion is God’s authorized alternative.* “We do not pretend that the fate of the world is in our hands. That way lies madness, being a burden that no human being can bear. Yet, we are not condemned to resignation and quietism, still less to despair. We are not the lords of history and do not control its outcome, but we have assurance that there is a lord of history and he controls its outcome.”⁵

I cite Schlossberg repeatedly because his book, more than any other in my lifetime, has best stated the theological case against the power religion.⁶ (Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* has best stated the historical case.) The idols of covenant-breaking man—history, humanity, mammon, nature, power, and religion—again and again reappear in the civilizations built by self-professed autonomous man. All idols, he asserts, are either idols of history or idols of nature.⁷ Covenant-breaking man asserts his authority over both nature and history, but because

2. *Idem.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 304.

6. I wrote this in 1985, two years after his book was published. I have not changed my opinion.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

man is a creature, mankind is thereby captured, for mankind is, in the humanist view, both a product of history and a product of nature. By seeking power over both, covenant-breaking people place themselves in bondage to the self-professed masters of the mysteries. By asserting that "man must take control of man," the humanist thereby implicitly asserts that "some men should take control over all the others." By seeking to exercise dominion apart from God, ethical rebels thereby deny their own creaturehood and therefore their status as humans.⁸

Egypt is the archetype of covenant-breaking society. It proclaimed divinity for its leader, the sole link between the gods and mankind. It sought escape from the rigors of nature (drought and famine) and the rigors of history (change). The goal was static power—power over nature, over the netherworld, and over scarcity. But such a static state of existence can be achieved only in death. Thus, *the monuments of Egypt were monuments of death*: the pyramids, the tombs, and the labyrinths. Their *quest for power*, meaning freedom from the God-cursed changes in life, led to their *cult of the dead*. The Egyptians hoped for resurrection, but theirs was a resurrection based on magical manipulation, not a resurrection based on biblical ethics.

Pharaoh manifested this cult of the dead in his attempt to murder the Hebrew males. He could not stand the pressures of social change, particularly the social changes forced upon Egypt by the high birth rates of the Hebrews. He launched a program of genocide. In this respect, he was only marginally different from the humanitarians of the twentieth century. As Schlossberg said:

It is no coincidence that humanitarian policy has reached the zenith of its influence at a time when death propaganda is so much in evidence. The arguments in favor of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia reveal that the humanitarian ethic wishes to restrict the right to live and expand the right to die—and to kill. Humanism is a philosophy of death. It embraces death, wishes a good death, speaks of the horrible burdens of living for the baby who is less than perfect, for the sick person in pain. It is intolerable to live, cruel to be forced to live, but blessed to die. It is unfair to have to care for the helpless, and therefore merciful to kill. Those who wish to go on living, it seems, are guilty and ungrateful wretches dissipating the energies of 'loved ones' who have better uses for the estate than paying medical bills.⁹

8. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

9. Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*, p. 82.

God confronted the Egyptian religion of death by calling into question its assertion of power. He dealt with Pharaoh, his priests, and his people in terms of their religious presuppositions. He demonstrated publicly for all the world to see that the power religion of Egypt was a fraud. Pharaoh had no choice in the matter. God decided to make a spectacle out of him and out of Egypt. "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:16).

The Hebrews had this example behind them. They were to remind themselves and their children of the implications of the power religion. This was the educational function of Passover. It was an institutional testimony to the futility of seeking power apart from biblical law. It is therefore futile to seek to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant apart from God. It is equally futile to attempt to escape from the burdens of this covenant. Such an escape leads directly to historical impotence and slavery under some temporarily successful group of power religionists. Better to be Moses herding sheep in Midian than anywhere in Egypt, either as a Hebrew or as a Pharaoh. Better yet to be Moses confronting Pharaoh. Even better, to be Moses on the far side of the Red Sea watching Pharaoh drown. Better yet, to be in the Promised Land, with a copy of God's law in your possession. But, best of all, to be at work in the wilderness, progressively converting it into a garden by means of hard work, in terms of the biblical law which is in your heart, and also in the hearts of all your neighbors (Ezek. 36:26–29; Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 8:10–11).

End of Volume 1

Volume 2: *Decalogue and Dominion*

AUTHORITY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON EXODUS

VOLUME 2

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AUTHORITY AND DOMINION

Gary North

PART 2: DECALOGUE AND DOMINION

*An Economic Commentary on The Ten
Commandments*

Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus

Part 2: Decalogue and Dominion

Formerly: *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments*

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PREFACE

Why should you devote the many hours that it will take to read this book, which is over 450 pages long (including the original appendixes)? Here are a dozen possible reasons.

You want to understand the Ten Commandments better.

You want to understand economics better.

You want to know more about the importance of the Ten Commandments in history.

You want to answer theological liberals who attack the Ten Commandments as valid only in an ancient agricultural world.

You want to answer political liberals who insist that Jesus was a socialist revolutionary, or close to it.

You want to see if the Bible sets forth moral and judicial principles that inevitably produce a free market economy if widely obeyed.

You want to answer skeptics (humanists and pietists) who insist that "There is no such thing as Christian economics."

You want to know if the Ten Commandments are an unbreakable unity.

You want to know why Christians take a day off on Sunday rather than Saturday.

You want to know if the civil government should prohibit people from working on Sunday.

You want to know how the Ten Commandments should be applied in the modern world.

You want to know how the Ten Commandments ought to be numbered and why.

This book is part of a project: an economic commentary on the Bible. I wrote the first edition of this volume in 1985, which was titled *The Sinai Strategy*. The Institute for Christian Economics published it in 1986, I did not have anything like the volume of verse-by-verse exegesis behind me that I have today.

This book had an odd history. In my 1986 Preface, I recorded the following series of events.

The day I finished the final reading (ha!) of the page proofs of *The Sinai Strategy*, I sat down and began editing a manuscript on the covenant by Ray Sutton. It is an insightful book, one which I suspect may provide Bible students with the fundamental framework for understanding the biblical concept of the covenant, which is the Bible's most important doctrine relating to the relationship between God and man.

As I was reading his chapter on the Ten Commandments, I was stunned. He had entirely missed the most important single piece of evidence for his thesis. So had I. So has every commentator I have ever read. What he had failed to see was that his five-point outline of the covenant, which he had developed independently of the Ten Commandments, fits them like a glove. More than this: It opens up the whole structure of the Ten Commandments.

My immediate thought was: "Here comes a major revision of *The Sinai Strategy*, and there goes \$4000¹ in typesetting charges, plus two week's work on the index I just completed." The indexing upset me most. Above everything else associated with writing a book, I hate to index. Yet if I were to attempt to incorporate my discovery into the text, I would have to rewrite everything.

Or else I could change the Preface by adding a summary of Sutton's outline. So I went back to the page proofs to see how lengthy the Preface was. Guess what? No Preface. Nothing. It was listed right there in the Table of Contents, but there was nothing in the page proofs, nothing in my original manuscript, and nothing in my computer. I had forgotten to write a Preface. It would have been listed in the Table of Contents, but there would have been nothing in the book

So, what I have decided to do is to take the easy way out. I am not going to rewrite this book. I am going to tell you here what the outline should have been, and you can insert it into the chapters mentally as you read. None of my conclusions should need revising, I hope. There is some space left at the end of most of the chapters, so I will add a few comments if necessary. The content of the book should not be affected, but the ability of the reader to "fit the pieces together" might have been easier if I had seen Sutton's manuscript earlier, assuming I would have spotted its applicability to the Ten

1. That would be \$8,000 in 2012.

Commandments.

In retrospect, I see that I made the correct decision. I did not know enough to revise the book to the extent that I have revised it in 2006 and again in 2011. In 1985, I was not in a position to re-write this book. I did not grasp the fact that the Pentateuch itself is structured in terms of the five-point biblical covenant model.² I did not recognize that the Book of Exodus is structured in terms of this model.³ I did not recognize that the Book of Leviticus is structured in terms of this model,⁴ or that the five sacrifices in Leviticus are structured in terms of it.⁵ I did not recognize that the Book of Revelation is structured in terms of it, and neither did David Chilton.⁶ I did recognize that Deuteronomy is. Sutton had reminded me of Meredith G. Kline's discussion of this fact in *The Treaty of the Great King* (1963), following George Mendenhall's discovery in the 1950s.⁷

A. The Covenant's Outline

What Sutton argues is that there is a five-part structure to both the Old Testament and New Testament covenants. This points to the fact that there is continuity between these two covenants. He modified the structure suggested by Kline for the Book of Deuteronomy, substituting "hierarchy" for "kingdom prologue" (point two). I had never carefully considered this structure before, and surely not as a guide to the structure of the Bible. Neither had Sutton. But I recognized instantly the enormous importance of this discovery for a correct understanding of the Biblical covenant and covenants generally. His book, *That You May Prosper*, was published in 1987. The model:

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), pp. xxx–xxxiii; North, *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), pp. xlii–xlix. (<http://bit.ly/gnleviticus>); North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Introduction to Part 1, Section B.

3. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), p. 93. (<http://bit.ly/gntools>)

4. North, *Leviticus*, pp. 44–45. Cf. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

5. *Ibid.*, pp. xlix–liv, 45–47.

6. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

7. George Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *Biblical Archeologist*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1954), pp. 50–76.

1. Transcendence/immanence (redemption)
2. Hierarchy/authority (submission)
3. Ethics/dominion (stipulations)
4. Judicial/evaluational (sanctions)
5. Legitimacy/inheritance (continuity)

This may not seem to be a revolutionary insight, but it is. It is not possible for me to reproduce all of his arguments that support this interpretation, nor discuss all of its applications. Sutton's book is the bare-bones minimum. He had to cut down the manuscript in order to keep the book to 318 pages.

Following Kline, he argued that this same structure is found in the suzerainty treaties of the ancient world. The king (suzerain) would initially announce his sovereignty over a nation, demand loyalty, impose sanctions for disobedience, offer protection for obedience, publish a law code, and establish the rules of succession. Sutton believes that these treaties were simply imitations of a fundamental structure of human government which is inherent in man's relationship with God.

Two decades later, in 2006, I felt compelled to revise this book. Chapter 3 required a complete revision: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain." In 1986, I followed Rushdoony's exposition in *Institutes of Biblical Law*, which stresses the oath aspect of the third commandment. The hermeneutical problem for my thesis was not clear to me then, namely, that the oath is closely associated with the fourth point of the biblical covenant model. Law is associated with point three. Law and oath are covenantally linked, of course, but the third commandment has to do more with God's title or possession of His name, and therefore His authority over the uses to which His name can be put.

What brought this discrepancy to my attention was a suggested revision that a reader sent to Sutton after the Institute for Christian Economics published his book in 1987. He had more accurately seen the nature of the five points. He suggested this revision:

1. Transcendence/immanence
2. Hierarchy/authority
3. Ethics/dominion
4. Oath/sanctions
5. Succession/inheritance

This creative individual had created an acronym: THEOS, the an-

cient Greek word for God. But he had done far more than this. He had recognized the importance of the covenantal oath in the fourth point, namely, the self-maledictory oath of every biblical covenant. The oath involves sanctions. This, I did not see clearly in 1986.

With this in mind, I now return to the Preface of 1986, but with the revised scheme for points 4 and 5.

1. *Transcendence/immanence (sovereignty)*

Some of the highlights include the following. In Genesis 1:1 we read, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." He is the Creator God. He is not part of the creation. Thus, the Bible announces the *Creator/creature distinction*. This distinction is fundamental to every aspect of life. God is not to be in any way confused with His creation. He is not part of a hypothetical "chain of being" with His creation. As the Psalmist put it: "For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods" (Ps. 97:9). "The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people" (Ps. 99:2). Perhaps the crucial verses in the Bible that deal with God's transcendence are Isaiah 55:8–9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."⁸

God is transcendent, but He is also immanent. He is not so far removed from His creation that He has no contact with it. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God hovered (moved) upon the face of the waters. This imagery of God as a bird hovering over its brood is found throughout the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 32:11 compares God's deliverance of Israel out of the wilderness to an eagle fluttering over

8. Those who are familiar with the writings of Christian philosopher Cornelius Van Til will recognize that the Creator/creature distinction is Van Til's starting point: the *sovereignty of God* and therefore the *non-autonomy of man*. John Frame wrote: "Van Til's apologetics is essentially simple, however complicated its elaborations. It makes two basic assertions: (1) that human beings are obligated to presuppose God in all of their thinking, and (2) that unbelievers resist this obligation in every aspect of thought and life. The first assumption leads Van Til to criticize the notion of intellectual autonomy; the second leads him to discuss the noetic [knowledge] effects of sin. . . . The initial description of presuppositionalism shows insight in the prominent place given to Van Til's critique of autonomy: that is, I think, the foundation of Van Til's system and its most persuasive principle. We must not do apologetics as if we were a law unto ourselves, as if we were the measure of all things. Christian thinking, like all of Christian life, is subject to God's lordship." John Frame, "Van Til and the Ligonier Apologetic," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLVII (1985), p. 282.

her young. Psalm 91:4 reads: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." Thus, the Bible denies both deism and pantheism. God is not like the god of deism who "winds up the universe" as a man winds up a clock, and then goes away, leaving it to its own preordained, impersonal devices. We do not live in a world of cosmic impersonalism. God is also not to be identified with His creation, as pantheism's god is. The creation *reflects* His glory; it does not participate in God. God is present with His creation; He is not part of it.

2. *Hierarchy/authority (representation)*

The second principle of the covenant is that of hierarchy/authority. The King of creation comes before men and demands that they submit to Him. God required Adam to obey Him. The relationship between God and man is therefore one of *command and obedience*. The covenant is therefore a *bond*. It is a personal relationship between responsible individuals. It is to be a *union*. But this union is not ontological. It is not a union of common "being." God is not some pantheistic being. Men are not evolving into God (Eastern religion). It is a personal relationship based on *authority and submission*.

3. *Ethics/law (standards)*

The third aspect of the covenant is its ethical quality. The terms of submission are ethical. The union between covenant-keepers and their God is an ethical union. The disunion between covenant-breakers and God is equally ethical: They are rebels against His law. Adam's fall into sin did not take place because he lacked some essence, some aspect of "being." He was created perfect. He fell willfully. He knew exactly what he was doing. "Adam was not deceived," Paul writes (I Tim. 2:14a).

This emphasis on ethics separates biblical religion from pagan religion. Man is supposed to exercise dominion, but not autonomous power. He is also not to seek power through ritual, or through any attempted manipulation of God or the universe. Dominion is based on adherence to the law of God—by Christ, perfectly and definitively, and by men, subordinately and progressively. Thus, ethics is set in opposition to magic (what Van Til calls metaphysics).

We are not to misuse God's name in a quest for power over creation. God spoke the creation into existence by the power of His word.

4. Oath/sanctions (evaluation/imputation)

The fourth aspect of the covenant is its judicial character. The essence of maturity is man's ability to render God-honoring judgment. God renders definitive judgment in His word, the Bible, and renders final judgment at the end of time. Man is to render analogous judgment progressively through time. During the creation week, God said "It is good" after each day. He *evaluated* His own work, and He *rendered judgment verbally*. God is the supreme King, but also the supreme Judge. When He declares a man *innocent*, because of His grace to the person through the gift of saving faith, God thereby imputes Christ's righteousness to him.⁹ Without God's declaration of salvation, meaning without the imputation of Christ's righteousness to overcome the imputation of Adam's sin, there is no salvation.

When a covenant is "cut," men are reminded of both the blessings and the cursings attached to the covenant. There are oaths and vows. There are covenant rituals. There are visible signs and seals. We see this in the church (baptism, Lord's Supper), the family (marriage ceremony), and in civil government (pledge of allegiance, oath-taking of officers).

5. Succession/inheritance (continuity)

Finally, there is the succession/inheritance aspect of the covenant. There are covenantally specified standards of transferring the blessings of God to the next generation. In other words, the covenant extends over time and across generations. It is a bond that links past, present, and future. It has implications for men's time perspective. It makes covenantally faithful people mindful of the earthly future after they die. It also makes them respectful of the past. For example, they assume that the terms of the covenant do not change in principle. At the same time, they also know that they must be diligent in seeking to apply the fixed ethical terms of the covenant to new historical situations. They are respectful of great historic creeds, and they are also advocates of progress, creedal and otherwise. They believe in change *within the fixed ethical terms of the covenant*.

The following material appeared in the 1986 Preface.

9. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (London: Banner of Truth Trust; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1961).

B. The Structure of the Ten Commandments

What Sutton had not seen when he wrote his first draft was that the Ten Commandments adhere to this same structure, even its very numbering. Once we recognize that this structure undergirds the Ten Commandments, we come to a remarkable insight: There really are two “tables” of the law. No, there was not a pair of stones, with five laws written on each. There were two tablets with all ten written on each. They served as copies, one for God and one for Israel, in much the same way as a modern sales receipt, which is implicitly modeled after God’s covenant. But there were two separate sections of the Ten Commandments (literally: ten “words” [Deut. 4:13]). They were arranged along this same covenantal pattern in two separate sections, 1–5 and 6–10.

In the Bible, there is to be a *two-fold witness* to the truth. Conviction for a capital crime requires two witnesses (Deut. 17:7; Num. 35:30). Satan in the garden sought two human witnesses against God, to test God’s word and therefore challenge it. There are two angelic witnesses for every demon, for Satan only took a third of the angelic host with him (Rev. 12:4). Revelation 8 provides a deeply symbolic description of God’s earthly judgment. He sends angels to judge one-third of trees, sea, creatures, ships, rivers, waters, sun, moon, and stars. In short, *two-thirds are spared*. This is the testimony to God’s victory, in time and on earth. The double-witness pattern is basic to covenantal law and historic judgment.¹⁰

What we find is that the very structure of the Ten Commandments serves as a two-fold witness to the structure of the covenant. Sutton subsequently concluded that the first five-part pattern deals with the priestly functions, while the second five-part pattern deals with the kingly.

I. First Table (priestly)

The traditional distinction between the “two tables of the law”¹¹ is based on (1) what man owes to God, namely, proper worship (first table) and (2) what man owes to his fellow man (second table).

10. Gary North, “Witnesses and Judges,” *Biblical Economics Today* (Aug./Sept. 1983). I added this essay as Appendix E of the 1987 edition of *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*. It remains in *Sovereignty and Dominion*.

11. The traditional language of two tables, with five laws on each, is incorrect. The physical tables were not divided this way. But there is a five-five division conceptually.

The problem has always come with the fifth commandment, which requires children to honor parents. This one seems to violate any five-fold division between the God-oriented “first table” and the man-oriented or society-oriented pattern of the “second table.” In fact, as we shall see, the fifth commandment is right where it belongs, on the “priestly side of the table.” Martin Luther’s concept of the priesthood of all believers is applicable here.

This arrangement has implications for the kingly category. It deals with coveting as a comprehensive sin. Coveting in general is prohibited.

1. Transcendence/immanence (sovereignty)

The first commandment begins with a description of who God is. He is the God who delivered Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Therefore, we must have no other gods before Him.

This God is the God of liberation—liberation in history. He is transcendent because he is the God of gods, the one true God who exercises absolute sovereignty. How do we know this? First, He says so in Genesis 1. Second, He offers evidence: His defeat of the gods of Egypt. In fact, because He is transcendent, He must be immanent. He is omnipresent. The Psalmist says: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Ps. 139:7–8). Jeremiah writes: “Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD” (Jer. 23:23–24). Not only is He *generally present* throughout creation, He is *especially present* with His people. “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? (Deut. 4:7). He is a universal God, the God of creation, yet He is also the God of history. In short, this most high God is the God of *deliverance*. Therefore, men are to have no other gods before Him, meaning above Him.

2. Hierarchy/authority (representation)

He then forbids the use of graven images. Men bow down to their gods. This shows their subordination to them. God said that men are not to make graven images for themselves, nor are they to serve them. This would be an act of rebellion: removing themselves from the sub-

ordination to God, and substituting a rival god of their choice—their autonomous choice—to worship. There is a warning attached: God is a jealous God who visits (sees) the iniquity of men. There is also a promise: God also shows mercy to thousands (of generations) of those who love him and keep His commandments. Keep His commandments, therefore, and gain His mercy. He is in power over men, and He is in a position as a judge to dispense punishments and mercy. In short, obey.

3. *Ethics/law (standards)*

Do not take the name of God in vain. In 1986, I made an error of analysis. I wrote:

As I argue in the third chapter, by using the name of a society's god, rebellious men seek to *invoke power*. It is an attempt to manipulate that god in order to get him to do the will of man. God warns us against using His name in this way. To do so is to use His name in vain.

This does not mean that there is no power associated with God's name. On the contrary, there is immense power. This is why men are not to invoke this power autonomously. God promises to honor His name when it is used lawfully by church authorities, which is his ordained monopoly. The church alone can legitimately declare excommunication in the name of God. Thus, what we call "swearing" (profanity) is an unlawful attempt to manipulate God by rebellious men who assume the position of His ordained monopoly, the church.

This analysis confused point four—sanctions—with point three: ethics. The declaration of sanctions is not what the third commandment is about. The third commandment is about extending God's name in history by extending His kingdom in history. His kingdom bears His name. His name is not to be associated with words or deeds that are not in conformity to His revelation of Himself in His law.

I then went on to apply what I had written about the oath.

The magician believes that "words of power" can be used to manipulate external events. Man seeks power by manipulating his environment. He attempts to become master of the creation by the use of secret phrases or techniques known only to initiates, whether witch doctors or scientists. Men seek *power through manipulation* rather than by ethics, obedience, and service to others.

The prohibition on the misuse of God's name cuts off magic at the roots. The commandment, being negative, is nonetheless positive: ethical. We are considering the priestly function here, however; the ethical and dominical aspects are more clearly seen in the eighth commandment, which parallels the third.

This is accurate, but it is incomplete. The magician and the power religionist mistake invocation for dominion. This is a fundamental distinction between dominion religion and power religion. *Biblical religion establishes dominion by covenant*, as Sutton's subtitle affirmed. God's Bible-revealed law is His mandated tool of dominion. Thus, *ethics rather than power is the heart of biblical religion*. Obedience is central, not the use of God's name as a means to power. Power religion uses magical words in the broadest sense—"word magic"—to extend the power of the manipulating person or group. *Power religion substitutes words for ethics*. It seeks to imitate God, who spoke the universe into existence. Man does not have creative power, only re-creative power. Obedience to God's law is man's lawful way to extend the kingdom of God outward: subordination.

4. Oath/sanctions (evaluation/imputation)

Sutton argues that the sabbath was the day of evaluation in the Old Testament. As I argue in chapter four, following James Jordan's exegesis, the sabbath was also the day of judgment by God. On that day, Satan tempted man. Thus, there had to be judgment. There was supposed to be judgment of Satan by Adam provisionally, and then by God upon His return that afternoon. Instead, Adam sided with Satan against God's Word, and God returned to judge both man and Satan. But it was indeed judgment day. The sabbath was therefore a day of rendering judgment on the efforts of the previous six days. Men halted their normal labors and rested, as God had rested after His six-day efforts. In the New Testament, the church celebrates the Lord's Supper on the Lord's day, which is analogous to (but not the same as) the Old Testament sabbath. Each church member is to examine himself for the previous week's transgressions, making confession before God before taking communion (I Cor.11:28–32). Paul's words are forthright: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (vv. 31–32). Those who judge themselves falsely can thereby come under God's earthly judgment, which is why

Paul points to sickness and even death within the Corinthian church (v. 30). In short, the fourth commandment is judicial.

I also argue that the sabbath millennium is coming, and that this will be an era of rest and judgment, when God's people will take dominion by exercising godly judgment, thereby bringing Satan and his host under preliminary condemnation, in preparation for God's return at the end of the millennium to render final judgment.

5. *Succession/inheritance (continuity)*

Honoring father and mother is required because of the testamental nature of the covenant. Men grow old and need care; they also transfer wealth and authority to successors. To this fifth commandment a promise is attached: long life in the land which God gives to us. This commandment seems to be man-oriented, and also a uniquely *positive* law, in contrast to the priestly negatives of the first four.¹² Nevertheless, if we see this law as essentially priestly in scope, then it places the family under the overall protection of the church, or in Old Testament times, under the protection of the priests. The priesthood, not the civil government, is the protector of the primary agency of welfare, the family, and therefore the church is the secondary agency of welfare, should the family prove incapable of providing for its own.

This is why Jesus cited the fifth commandment when He criticized the Pharisees for giving alms in public but not taking care of their parents (Mark 7:10–13).¹³ They were being unfaithful to their calling as sons. They were therefore illegitimate sons. Jesus was calling them *bastards*. He also told them that they were the sons of their father, the devil (John 8:44). Again, He was calling them illegitimate spiritual sons rather than sons of Abraham, which they proclaimed of themselves.

It should not be surprising that the church is required to care for “widows indeed,” meaning 60-year-old women who have not remarried and whose younger relatives refused to support them (I Tim. 5:2–5).¹⁴ This is because the protection of the family is a priestly function. It should also not be surprising that the same passage says that the man who refuses to take care of his family is worse than an infidel (I Tim. 5:8). This is why the church can and should excommunicate such

12. The sabbath law was essentially negative: no work.

13. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

14. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

people. They come under the priestly ban.

It is clear that the civil government is not the economic protector of the family when it breaks down. The church is. The unwarranted growth of the welfare state in the twentieth century was therefore a manifestation of a satanic pseudo-family and a pseudo-priesthood of the modern messianic state. This development paralleled the breakdown of the family, a breakdown which the state in fact subsidizes through tax-financed welfare programs; it has also paralleled the default of the church as the secondary agency of welfare.

II. Second Table (kingly)

There is no question that this second table of the ten is not ecclesiastical and priestly in focus but rather social (familial) and political. On the other hand, the second table is no less religious than the first table of the law. Both tables are inescapably religious. But the two are separated in terms of the *primary* locus of sovereignty: family and civil government, not church.

6. *Transcendence/immanence (sovereignty)*

It is illegal to kill men. Why? Because men are made in the image of God (Gen. 9:5–6). They reflect His transcendence in a way that animals and other aspects of the creation do not. *Man is uniquely symbolic of God.*

God is transcendent. He is untouchable, absolutely sovereign, and beyond challenge. Man, His image, is not equally sovereign or equally protected. To a limited extent, he is protected. Animals, for instance, are afraid of him (Gen. 9:2). Still, he has been vulnerable to attack since Adam's Fall. Thus, to attack man seems to be an indirect way to attack God. This is one reason why Satan tempted man in the first place. To a kill man unlawfully is an affront against the image of God.

I discuss "God's monopoly of execution," the civil government, in chapter six, but I failed to link this commandment with the first commandment. The transcendence of God is the basis of this commandment: The transcendent God must be worshipped, and His image must not be slain.

7. *Hierarchy/authority (representation)*

Adultery is prohibited. Adultery in the Bible is linked theologically

to idolatry. Ancient pagan societies adopted ritual prostitution, sometimes in the temple or at the entrance to the temple.¹⁵ To break the marital covenant is the earthly equivalent of breaking the covenant with God. This was the message of the prophet Hosea. Adultery is the equivalent of worshiping a false god, an idol. This is why it is punished by execution (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Like the sixth commandment, which is *analogous to* and *reflective of* the first commandment, so is the seventh analogous to and reflective of the second commandment: the worship of graven images. Ultimately, both violations are the worship of autonomous man, the worship of the products of man's rebellion.

The man is head of the household. He represents God before his wife and children. They are to obey him. His authority is analogous to and reflective of God's authority. The wife is functionally subordinate to the husband, just as the Son of God is functionally subordinate to the Father. The wife is not ethically inferior to the husband, just as the Son of God is not ethically inferior to the Father. There is hierarchy in the family, just as there is hierarchy in the Godhead itself. (This is what theologians call the "economical Trinity," to distinguish it from the "ontological Trinity," meaning the co-equal nature of the three Persons. Both doctrines are true, depending on what aspect of the Trinity you are discussing.)

Adultery is a ritual denial of the faithfulness of Christ to His church, which Paul compares to a marriage (Eph. 5:22–33). It is a denial of the permanence of the hierarchical bond between Christ and the church.

Adultery is also a ritual denial of the Trinity. It says that the covenantal bond between marriage partners is breakable. But this bond is analogous to the bond among the members of the Trinity. Thus, it is a denial of the Trinity, for if men can lawfully break the marriage covenant at will, then analogously, so can God break the covenant that binds the Persons of the godhead. This leads to polytheism, which is why polytheistic cultures of the ancient world so often had ritual prostitution. This ritual reflected the theological foundation of these cultures. Adultery is therefore a form of idolatry, and analogous to the idolatry which is prohibited by the second commandment. It is a denial of man's subordination to God.

15. This is still practiced in India.

8. *Ethics/law (sanctions)*

The eighth commandment protects private property. This is a fundamental aspect of dominion. The third commandment prohibits using the Lord's name in vain. This commandment prohibits any interference with another man's tools of dominion (his capital goods), and it also protects the fruits of his labor, consumer goods. Just as a deceiver deliberately misuses God's name in order to gain people's trust, so does a thief appropriate wealth that was produced by the owner, or bought by the owner, or lawfully inherited by the owner. The deceiver wants to manipulate those around him in order to gain his ends apart from lawful service. The thief has a similar view of life: to enrich himself at the expense of others without voluntary exchange and service to the victim. Both the deceiver and the thief seek to escape the limits God has placed on them. Both seek power without covenantal faithfulness to the laws of God.

9. *Oath/sanctions (evaluation/imputation)*

The ninth commandment prohibits false witness. This commandment implicitly refers to a law court. It is illegal to harm another person by testifying falsely to his character or his actions. Satan asked Adam and Eve to act against God's law—in short, to deny the integrity of God and the reliability of His Word. God's judgment is imposed in terms of an accurate assessment of all the facts, and then these acts are evaluated by Him in terms of His law. He bears true witness to Himself and to the acts, thoughts, and motives of all men. God does not bear false witness against others. In other words, He evaluates reliably. On the day of judgment, His judgment will be perfect. Meanwhile, in time and on earth, men are to "think God's thoughts after Him." They are to evaluate everything in terms of God's standards, and in terms of an accurate perception of external events. They are to regard history as God's product. To testify falsely against a truthful historical record is to violate the ninth commandment.

The link between the sabbath law and the false witness law is the day of judgment. Just as each person at the end of the week in Israel was supposed to evaluate his work, and whose rest was an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty over all of history, so is the commandment against false witness designed to force men to acknowledge God's sovereignty over history. Man does not create a new story by distorting the past. Man does not create a new future by distorting the

past. Man only brings himself under condemnation by attempting such a crime against man and God.

10. Succession/inheritance (continuity)

Coveting another person's goods is to covet the inheritance he will leave to his children. This also prohibits a premature coveting of parents' wealth by the children. Coveting is the first step to theft (eighth commandment). It is also a first step before adultery (seventh commandment, "thy neighbor's wife") and sometimes before murder (sixth commandment, e.g., David's murder of Uriah). Coveting is a denial of the ninth commandment, too: an implicit assertion of the illegitimacy of the present legal order which establishes the owner's rights to his property and his children's legal rights of inheritance. Evil men are tempted to misuse the courts to achieve their goals. Ahab's theft of Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21) is representative: Coveting led to the corrupting of justice through the hiring of false witnesses and then the murder of a righteous man.¹⁶

The jubilee law in Old Testament Israel was designed to reduce such coveting with respect to land. Land had to be returned to the lawful, legitimate heirs every 50 years (Lev. 25:8–13).¹⁷

In effect, the covetous person regards himself as the true heir to his neighbor's patrimony. He wishes to dispossess the lawful heirs. He plots against history—the history which led to his neighbor's position and goods—in the name of his own autonomy.

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections of five commandments each. The first section is priestly, while the second is kingly or dominical. Both sections reflect the same five-part aspect of the Deuteronomic covenant structure.

Is this structure permanent? Sutton traces it back to Adam, Noah, and Abraham. He traces it forward to David, Malachi, and Jesus' Great Commission. I find it also in the temptation of Christ by Satan, and in the trial of Jesus by the Jewish leaders.

16. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

17. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 22.

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments are the archetypal summary of the two covenants of God, Old and New. They manifest the five component parts of the Deuteronomic covenant, and they manifest them twice: commandments 1–5 and 6–10. They provide a dual witness to the truth. By identifying all five elements of the covenant, we can better understand God’s legal claims on all men in general and redeemed men in particular. These claims involve *economic* claims and requirements, as we shall see.

In this revised edition, I have added footnotes that refer the reader to materials that I wrote after 1986, especially my other commentaries. I have also removed two sections from this Preface: “Satan’s Temptation of Jesus” and “The Pharisees’ False Covenant Lawsuit Against Jesus.” Readers who want to read the original version of this book can download a free copy here:

<http://bit.ly/gnsinai>

INTRODUCTION

A standard remark that we hear in Christian circles is this: "The Bible has answers for all of man's problems." This sounds impressive. Problems arise, however, when we begin to ask specific questions about the Bible's answers for specific problems in any one area of cultural or civic life. All of a sudden, people who only moments before had assured us that the Bible has the answers now begin to backtrack. "Well," they say, "the Bible has all the answers for man's *spiritual* problems."

This is a significant qualification. *It is an admission of failure.* If the Bible has answers for only narrowly defined spiritual problems, and not for the concrete, day-to-day problems of economics, family relationships, politics, law, medicine, and all other areas of life, then Christians are faced with a terrible dilemma. Either these areas of life are not areas affected by the "spirit"—the so-called "spiritual" concerns—or else the Bible *doesn't* really have the specific answers that men desperately need in their daily decision-making. Either we live in a dualistic world—a world of totally separated parts: "spirit" and "matter"—or else we have been mistaken about the ability of the Bible to answer man's questions.

But what if we refuse to accept either of these explanations? What if we still want to insist that the Bible *does* have answers for men's problems? There is a third explanation, namely, that the original statement is correct after all: the Bible really does have answers to all of men's problems. These answers are in the form of *first principles*. These biblical first principles apply to every area of life. Sometimes they apply specifically, such as this law: "Thou shalt not kill." In other situations, they apply in principle, such as the scientific principle that the universe is orderly. But why is it orderly? Because it is sustained providentially by the absolutely sovereign God who created it out of nothing. Biblical principles do apply, and without them, there can be no accurate explanation for "the way the world works."

There is a fourth possibility. Sometimes the Bible presents very

specific laws that modern men mistakenly believe no longer apply to our era. People misinterpret these Old Testament laws as temporary instructions given by God in ancient times—laws that no longer apply to the modern world. But what if God still intends for His people to honor these laws? What if these laws really *are* valid in modern times? What if the presumed dualism between spirit and matter is false in the case of specific biblical laws, as well as false in theory?

A. Spiritual Problems and Biblical Law

The original statement is true. The Bible does provide the answer for every problem, not just narrowly defined “spiritual” problems. What we need to understand is that *all of man’s problems are spiritual problems*.

The dualism of spirit and matter is an ancient heresy. It was called gnosticism in the ancient world, and it was a major rival philosophy to Christianity. Forms of it have revived throughout history. We must reject it entirely. We must recognize that man’s so-called “earthly” problems are in reality spiritual problems, because when Adam rebelled, he *really* rebelled. It wasn’t some Sunday morning rebellion; it was an “all week long” kind of rebellion. He rebelled in spirit, but this rebellion had an outward manifestation: eating the forbidden fruit. Was that forbidden fruit an earthly problem? Of course; Adam was an earthly creature. Was that forbidden fruit a spiritual problem? Of course; Adam was a spiritual creature. Did God’s judgment on Adam involve his flesh, not to mention his environment? Yes. Did God’s judgment involve Adam’s spirit? Yes. And what we say of Adam we also must say of ourselves, and of mankind in general. *Every problem is a spiritual problem, for man’s spirit is in ethical rebellion against God’s Spirit*.

Modern Christians have had a false view of spirituality because they have had *an incomplete view of sin*. They have failed to understand how comprehensive the effects of sin really are, and because of this, *they have not understood how comprehensive the redemption of Jesus Christ really is*.¹ They have failed to understand that the redemption of Jesus Christ involves both the spirit of man and the body of man. It also involves the redemption of the environment of man. In short, Jesus Christ *definitively* (once and for all) removed the curse of

1. Gary North, “Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer 1981). Reprinted in Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

God from redeemed men. Because that curse was comprehensive, so is the removal of that curse. *Progressively* redeemed men are told to work out their salvations with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). *Finally*, God will declare them righteous before all men and angels at the day of judgment, when the removal of the curse will be complete. In short, what was definitive at Calvary—Satan’s defeat—is being progressively revealed in history, and will be finally revealed at the day of judgment and in eternity.

Because Christians in our day have failed to understand these fundamental biblical principles, they have misunderstood the meaning of “spiritual.” David Chilton’s comments are to the point: “When the Bible uses the term *Spiritual*, it is generally speaking of *the Holy Spirit*. . . . To be Spiritual is to be guided and motivated by the Holy Spirit. It means obeying His commands as recorded in the Scriptures. The Spiritual man is not someone who floats in midair and hears eerie voices. The Spiritual man is the man who does what the Bible says (Rom. 8:4–8). This means, therefore, that we are supposed to get involved in life. God wants us to apply Christian standards everywhere, in every area. Spirituality does not mean retreat and withdrawal from life; it means *dominion*. The basic Christian confession of faith is that *Jesus is Lord* (Rom. 10:9–10)—Lord of all things, in heaven and on earth. As Lord, He is to be glorified in every area (Rom. 11:36). In terms of Christian Spirituality, in terms of God’s requirements for Christian action in every area of life, there is no reason to retreat.”²

But how do we know when we are being Spiritual? By looking to the Bible in order to discover the principles of Spiritual living. What is this system of *permanent* principles called in the Bible? *The law*. Modern Christians may prefer to use some other word to describe these fixed, permanent principles—rules, guidelines, blueprints for living—but the Bible calls these principles *the law of God*. This is why faith in, respect for, and obedience to the law always accompany true Spirituality.

Let us return to the question at hand: Does the Bible speak to every kind of problem that man has? It does. I believe in the third explanation: The Bible provides the only source of true principles of knowledge, with God the Creator as the only source of order. I also believe in the fourth explanation: the continuing validity of many Mosaic laws. We have ignored these laws in modern times, and we have paid a

2. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985), p. 4. (<http://bit.ly/dcpardise>)

heavy price. We will pay an even heavier price if we continue to discount the laws of God.

How do we know that a particular Old Testament law is no longer legally binding, let alone no longer morally binding, in New Testament times? There can be only one legitimate answer: *because the New Testament says so*. There should be a specific injunction that a particular Mosaic law, or a particular class of Mosaic laws, is no longer binding in New Testament times because Jesus' work of redemption has fulfilled it *and also annulled it*. If the New Testament does not reveal this, then the law still must be in force.³

If a New Testament principle implicitly annuls a category of the Mosaic law, then that law no longer is in force. But this must be proven through exegesis and theology, not merely assumed. For example, if a Mosaic law was tied explicitly or implicitly to the priesthood, the land of Israel, or the tribes of Jacob, it is no longer in force, because the priesthood, the holy status of the land of Israel, and the tribes of Jacob no longer exist in the New Covenant era.⁴ But a Bible scholar must show that a case law was uniquely tied to one of these three Mosaic Covenant factors in order to make his case that a particular case law was annulled.

Most Christians say that they believe in the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue). A few say that these laws no longer apply in New Testament times, but most Christians refuse to go this far. If we turn to the Ten Commandments, we should expect to find principles, as well as specifics, that give us guidance for evaluating the successes or failures of our own era and civilization. If God threatens a rebellious civilization with temporal judgment, just as He threatens individual sinners with final judgment, then we ought to be able to discover laws that God expects us not to violate. If we turn to the Ten Commandments, we should be able to discover the foundational standards of biblical social order.⁵

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacodoches, Texas: Covenant Media Foundation, [1977] 2002). For a shorter introduction, see Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

4. Gary North, *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), pp. 637–45. (<http://bit.ly/gnleviticus>); North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion, Section C.

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998). (<http://bit.ly/rjrfs0>)

At the very least, we should find in the Ten Commandments laws that apply to civil government and economics. After all, God delivered these laws to a nation that had experienced many decades of tyrannical slavery. God announced Himself as their deliverer in the very first commandment. Wouldn't we expect to find rules that govern economics and politics in these laws? The answer should be an unequivocal "yes."

Why is it, then, that so few commentators have ever addressed this problem? What are the political and economic laws of the Ten Commandments? Why don't commentators ask the two crucial questions:

1. How did these commandments apply in Old Testament times?
2. How should they apply today?

The reason is fairly simple: They do not believe in the God of the Bible or God's revealed will for mankind, His law. This is especially true of seminary professors.

B. Useful Idiots

A good example of the professional drivel of modern antinomian "scholarship so-called" is a book by Walter Harrelson, *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights*. This book is as forthright and honest a defense of the Ten Commandments as the late Premier Konstantin Chernenko's book on human rights in the Soviet Union was for human rights in the Soviet Union.⁶ What Harrelson and other academic "experts" on the Ten Commandments really want is to *escape* from the Ten Commandments. Their faith is clear: better situation ethics than the restraining effects of God's law. As he wrote,

In contemporary, secularized Western society there is a wistful longing for such norms, upon which individual and family could depend in all circumstances. One reason for the rapid growth today of evangelical religion of a fundamentalist nature, or for the growth of charismatic religion, with its rigid personal and communal norms, is that such communities are thought to supply just norms. . . . We should know, however, that if we are to find a way to supply nourishment to meet this hunger, we have to do so with the utmost care. The gains of a contextualist and existentialist ethic are too numerous and too solid to be endangered by facile returns to absolutist norms.

6. Konstantin U. Chernenko, *Human Rights in Soviet Society* (New York: International Publishers, 1981). This was published just before he became Soviet Premier.

The enslavement of the human spirit in the name of religion is too well known in history. We dare not risk a recurrence of such enslavement out of fear that our society is about to collapse into normlessness. And the misuse of norms for the protection of the privileged is a perennial danger.⁷

Or, as another concerned student of biblical law and authoritarian regimes once asked: "Hath God said?"

But God *hath* said! God said that Egypt was the tyranny, not Israel. God showed the Israelites that Assyria and Babylon, not His law, were the true threats to human rights. But in the name of Jesus, and in the name of human rights, today's academic specialists in the law of God come before us and warn us of the supposedly frightful risks of asserting the eternal validity of an eternal law-order of an eternal God. They worry about offending the defenders of "a contextualist and existential ethic," meaning their old professors at Yale Divinity School (or wherever). They survey the strongholds of these situation ethicists, and rather than seeing the ongoing crises of humanist civilization as the greatest opportunity in man's history for the triumph of God's law as the *only* possible substitute for this collapsing moral order, they urge faithful Christians to restrain themselves. Why, such efforts might embarrass these waffling theologians among their peers, and their peers are not the tithing people in the pews who pay their salaries, but the tenured atheists in the prestige divinity schools that awarded them their coveted (and low market value) doctorates. (I've got a Ph.D. myself; I know how little it is worth these days.)⁸

In short, these fearful, obscure, and academically irrelevant drones, with their Ph.D.'s, their tenured seminary positions, and their minimal prospects for future employment if righteous Christian people ever purge the seminaries of heretics, now see what is coming: a revival of interest in God's law, and the rapid development of political skills on the part of those who take God's law seriously. They see their liberal, pleasant, tenured little world on the verge of disaster, for those naive people who have funded their rebellion—the little people in the pews—may soon catch on to their game. The court prophets are once again in trouble on Mt. Carmel. They saw what happened last time, and they

7. Walter Harrelson, *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 9.

8. Gary North, "The Ph.D. Glut Revisited," <http://lewrockwell.com> (Jan. 24, 2006). An extract appeared in the *New York Times* (Feb. 5, 2006): "In Academia, Big Brains, Empty Pockets." (<http://bit.ly/Glut>)

are not happy about it.

Sadly, they have allies in the conservative camp: those who preach the irrelevance of the Ten Commandments in New Testament times. But pietism's influence is also waning. The ecclesiastical irrelevance of the older pietistic fundamentalism is becoming pronounced. What has taken place in the United States since 1980⁹—really, since 1965¹⁰—has exposed the nakedness of the fundamentalist antinomians. They had no concrete, specifically biblical social answers for the radicals of the late 1960s, and they knew it. They went into retreat in the 1970s, and they are now being ignored into oblivion.

At last, conservative Christian laymen, and even a growing number of pastors, are beginning to see the light. They are beginning to understand the choices laid before them:

God's law or chaos
God's law or tyranny
God's law or God's wrath

C. Proof Texts, Blueprints, and Economic Antinomianism

The Ten Commandments set forth a strategy. This strategy is *a strategy for dominion*. The general principles of the Ten Commandments summarize the whole of biblical law. The case-law applications of Exodus 21–23 illustrate ways in which the Ten Commandments are to be applied.¹¹ The Decalogue itself is the master plan, the *blueprint* for biblical social order. These laws have very definite economic implications. This sort of thinking is foreign to virtually all modern Christian social and economic thinkers, whether conservative or liberal, Protestant or Catholic.

If I were to offer a single sentence of warning with respect to the misuse of the Bible by modern scholars, it would be this: *Beware of doubletalk and outright gibberish*. I will put it even more bluntly: If you cannot understand what a theologian has written concerning a per-

9. The election of Ronald Reagan.

10. When the counter-culture became visible publicly, and fundamentalists had nothing biblical to offer in place of the establishment's humanist culture, yet also offered nothing explicitly biblical to challenge the counter-culture.

11. Part 3, *Tools of Dominion*; James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984). (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

fectly plain passage in the Bible, trust your instincts; you are probably being conned by a professional. These hypocrites for over three hundred years¹² have made a lifetime occupation out of hiding their radical ideas behind a mask of orthodox language. They want to be low-risk revolutionaries, fully tenured, with their salaries provided by unsuspecting Christian sheep. Furthermore, they are, almost to a man (person?), desperate for public acceptance by secular scholars. They are humanists by conviction, even though they operate inside the churches. If they forthrightly proclaimed the doctrines of the historic Christian faith without compromise, they would be ridiculed by humanist scholars. They fear this above all. So, they write endless reams of convoluted language in order to hide the academic irrelevance of their concepts. (German theology is especially afflicted by this verbal constipation.) Their concepts are dangerous to orthodoxy and irrelevant to humanism, except as a tool of confusing the faithful. Liberal theologians are simply examples of what Lenin called "useful idiots." They are middlemen for the humanists in a great deception of the faithful. They have been described best by David Chilton: "Modern theologians are like a pack of dogs who spend most of their time sniffing each other's behinds."

1. Roman Catholic Economic Antinomianism

The Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy was a conservative group whose members were some of the most famous American Catholic conservative social thinkers and political figures. It was formed in 1984 by William Simon, who had served as Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Nixon and Ford, and Michael Novak, its main theoretician.¹³ The organization's study of Catholic economic thought announced on the opening page: "... Christian Scripture does not offer programmatic guidance for the concrete institutions of political economy."¹⁴ It then cited someone it referred to as "the great Catholic economist Heinrich Pesch, S.J." who proclaimed that morally advanced societies will be better prepared to endure hard times, but "this does not mean that the economist should

12. Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM Press., [1980] 1984).

13. John J. Miller, "When the Flock Takes the Lead," *Opinion Journal* (Nov. 26, 2004). This is an on-line publication of the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page.

14. *Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the U. S. Economy* (North Tarrytown, New York: Lay Commission, 1984), p. ix.

theologize or moralize in the treatment of his subject matter or, what is worse, try to derive an economic system from Holy Scripture.”¹⁵ This document was written specifically to counter the ultra-liberal proposed first draft of Catholic bishops regarding the United States economy. And what first principle regarding biblical authority governed the liberal bishops? The same as the one adopted by the Catholic lay conservatives: “Although the Bible does not and cannot give us simple and direct answers to today’s complex economic questions, it can and must shape our vision of the meaning of economic life.”¹⁶ The conservatives cited the free market economists they liked, while the liberals cited the anti-free market non-economists they liked. No one invoked biblical law.

2. Conservative Protestant Economic Antinomianism

Conservative Protestant philosopher Ronald Nash is opposed to liberation theology and Christian socialism. His book, *Social Justice and The Christian Church* (1983), is a ringing defense of capitalism. But not biblical capitalism. It appeals, not to the Bible, but to universal standards of logic, i.e., universal truths that can be recognized by all right-thinking people. He began with the implicit but unstated presupposition that the Bible is not sufficiently self-attesting and clear to provide generally agreed-upon conclusions; an appeal to universal logic is therefore necessary. He wrote:

Chapter 6 considers what the Bible teaches about justice. This book intentionally rejects any proof-text approach to its subject. [But why should we expect to find autonomous proof in opposition to a biblical text?—G.N.] Many other treatments [but not all!—G.N.] of the topic purport to “discover” revealed truth about economic and social theory in the Bible and then deduce the appropriate applications of that truth to the contemporary scene. The great problem with the proof-text method is the extent to which the participants beg the question. [Beg what question?—G.N.] In most cases [but not all!—G.N.], what happens is that the writer finds some passage in the Old Testament that relates to an extinct cultural situation. [Is human reason eternally applicable, and biblical principles that undergirded the “extinct cultural situation” merely temporary?—G.N.] It is often the case [but not always!—G.N.] that such passages are ambiguous enough to give

15. *Ibid.*, pp. ix–x.

16. “First Draft—Bishop’s Pastoral: Catholic Social Teaching and the U. S. Economy,” *Origins*, Vol. 14 (Nov. 15, 1984), p. 343. Published by the National Catholic News Service, Washington, D.C.

any interpreter problems. [Is human reason never ambiguous, and therefore more reliable than the “ambiguous” Bible?—G.N.] But before the reader knows it, the passage is used to prove the truth of socialism or capitalism. [Are serious Christians unable to determine good from bad exegesis in the case of biblical economic policy, so must we therefore appeal to “unambiguous” logic? And is the Bible equally ambiguous, and readers equally defenseless, with regard to everything else it speaks about? Must autonomous logic also be used to establish theological truths?—G.N.] This book takes a totally different approach. It assumes the unity of all truth. Truth in any area of human knowledge will be consistent with truth in every other area. [So, why not begin, and end, with biblical revelation, since it is unquestionably true, while the speculations of men are unquestionably fallible in part?—G.N.]¹⁷

Notice the qualifying phrases: “many other treatments,” “in most cases,” “it often is the case.” Fine and dandy; then why not search for the *exceptions* to these generalities, and then adopt them when we find them? Why not search out those unique cases in which biblical texts are used properly by expositors, and then follow their lead? The answer is fairly simple: Nash does not believe that any Christian ever has successfully used the Bible to create a coherent, accurate, God-given and man-interpreted biblical economic framework. Furthermore, he obviously did not believe that such an effort *should* be attempted. *He* avoids the temptation, certainly. After all, why should we appeal to the Bible instead of appealing to universal human reason, which unlocks “the unity of all truth”? Implicitly, he is arguing that the Bible is not the bedrock universal; human reason is. Some people do not accept the Bible; presumably, all *rational* people will accept the findings of human reason.

As a devoted follower of the Calvinist philosopher Gordon Clark, Nash rejected the idea of Van Til’s presuppositional, Bible-based (i. e., “proof-text”) approach to the intellectual defense of Christianity. He relied instead on the hypothetical natural, unbiased, and reliable reasoning abilities of natural (unregenerate) man. In short, he appealed to biblically unaided (autonomous) reason because of his personal preference and philosophical commitment. He found what he regarded as inescapably clear free market principles in the conclusions of autonomous human reason. Unfortunately, “radical Christians” somehow have escaped from this inescapably clear set of economic conclusions.

17. Ronald Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Milford, Michigan: Mott Media, 1983), pp. 7–8.

3. *Liberal Evangelical Economic Antinomianism*

We find the same sort of “anti-proof text” reasoning in the camp of the “radical Christian Protestants,” the left-wing targets of Nash’s book. In a symposium on Christian economics published by the neo-evangelical Protestant InterVarsity Press in 1984, three of the four contributors were defenders of more state planning and authority over the economy. I was the lone critic of the state.¹⁸ All three of the anti-market essayists explicitly denied that the Bible gives us any specifics concerning economics.

The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it another way.¹⁹

The Old Testament gives detailed laws regulating economic relationships. Although we need not feel bound by these laws, the general concern of justice and shalom found there is repeated in the New Testament and is meant for us.²⁰

There is no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy.²¹

If this is true—if there are no biblical blueprints—then how can we, as Christians, come before a fallen, rebellious society that is threatened by the judgment of God, and announce confidently, “Thus saith the Lord”? How can we criticize specific economic sins with the confidence of Old Testament prophets? How can we call men to repent, if we cannot say for certain what specific biblical laws they are violating? And more to the point, *how can we offer biblical alternatives?* How can we confidently affirm with Paul: “. . . God is faithful, who will

18. The book was taken off the market in 1985 by IVP, which sold me thousands of copies at 25 cents each. I like to think that it was my uncompromising defense of the free market and my rhetorically robust challenges to the three other authors that led to IVP’s decision. My original article appears as Appendix E in Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

19. William Diehl, “The Guided-Market System,” in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 87. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

20. Art Gish, “Decentralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 133–34.

21. John Gladwin, “Centralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 183.

not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able [to bear]; but will, with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13b)? Are we saying that God offers *no specific way* to escape? Are we saying that any old way will do, just so long as it feels right, just so long as it conforms to the recommended political and economic outlook of political liberals fifteen years ago (which they discarded five years later)?

David Chilton has called this attitude toward the Bible on the part of economic radicals, "The Case of the Missing Blueprints."²² These "concerned Christians" reject modern free market capitalism in the name of "biblical justice," just as the so-called Social Gospel's promoters did in the first half of the twentieth century.²³ Unlike Social Gospel theologians, who really did believe that the Bible teaches some form of socialism, the more recent evangelical statist tell us that the Bible does not provide a specific blueprint or outline of the godly economic system. The reason for their rejection of the Bible as a guide for economics is clear. They understood what the Social Gospel theologians should have understood but did not, namely, that the Bible categorically *affirms legal, moral, and economic principles that lay the foundations of a free market economic system*. They stand firm with John Gladwin, who affirmed: "Scripture offers no blueprint for the form of modern government. This means that I will resist any idea that decentralized or privatized versions of management of the economy and the provision of services are necessarily more Christian than the centralized solution."²⁴ He saw that the Bible does teach such a decentralized and privatized view of society, so he rejected from the start any suggestion that this blueprint is still morally or legally binding on Christian societies. (Gladwin later became a bishop in the Church of England.)

InterVarsity Press in 1983 published one of its typically statist tracts in the name of Jesus. The author, a British Ph.D. from Cambridge, who was teaching theology in India, rejected the idea that Old Testament law is still literally binding in New Testament times. "In the economic sphere, the Old Testament paradigms provide us with objectives without requiring a *literal* transposition of ancient Israelite

22. David Chilton, "The Case of the Missing Blueprints," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer 1981).

23. C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975). (<http://bit.ly/singerua>)

24. Gladwin, in Clouse, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

practice into twentieth-century society.”²⁵ In other words, Old Testament law, which drastically limited the centralization of power by the civil government, is no longer supposed to bind the state.

Here is the two-part argument which virtually all of these clever fellows have adopted. First, they say they believe that the Mosaic law’s *objectives* are still binding today, and the state must see to it that its objectives are achieved. Second, the *means* established by the Mosaic law to achieve these objectives are rejected as being old fashioned or inappropriate for today’s complex society, namely, men acting as individuals or as agents of the church, voluntary charitable societies, or families. In short, Wright proposed what virtually all academic Christian social commentators proposed in the twentieth century: *the substitution of the state for society*. This has been a common error in the modern world, and an exceedingly pernicious one.²⁶

Wright stated that “there are societies where the conditions of allegedly ‘free’ employees are pitifully more harsh and oppressive than those of slaves in Israel.”²⁷ (He did not mention the giant slave societies created by the Communists.) “In such situations, the paradigmatic relevance of the Old Testament economic laws concerning work and employment can be taken almost as they stand. To introduce statutory rest days and holidays, statutory terms and conditions of employment, statutory protection from infringement of personal rights and physical dignity, statutory provision for fair wages promptly paid, would revolutionize the face of economic life for multitudes of workers in some parts of the world. And all of these are drawn from the economic legislation of God’s redeemed people, Israel.”²⁸

Such statutory actions would indeed revolutionize the face of economic life for multitudes of workers. Such actions would guarantee continuing unemployment in all legal markets. They would, if enforced universally, transfer a monopoly grant of power to industrial economies, and specifically to the state-licensed and protected monopolistic trade unions, whose members cannot stand the wage competition that is offered by Third World employees.

“Statutory” was Dr. Wright’s key word, and it is this word that was *not* used in the Old Testament. God, not the state, is sovereign. God is-

25. Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p. 89.

26. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 99.

27. Wright, *Eye for an Eye*, 79–80.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

sued His economic laws, and it is market competition and self-government under God's law, not statutes, that are supposed to govern men's economic actions in the vast majority of cases, as my commentaries on the Pentateuch and the New Testament demonstrate. Those scholars who deny my assessment of the texts have an obligation to show how and where I misinterpreted the texts. They have a great many texts to consider. As of 2011, I have written over 650 chapters of exegesis, plus appendixes and four support books.

What is noticeable is Wright's hostility to the binding character of Old Testament law *literally* transferred to today's political institutions, for what that law would bind is the messianic state. Predictably, we find *antinomianism*—hostility to the continuing validity of God's Bible-revealed law—in close association with statism and a mania for legislation. What the Bible warns against—*the divinization of man*—and what the Bible's law-order undermines whenever it is taken seriously, modern academic antinomians have implicitly accepted. The divinized state that the Bible's law-order militates against is the sacred cow of the intellectuals today. In short, there is a relationship between *false gods* and *high taxes*. These armchair socialists proclaim their allegiance to the “paradigmatic principles” of Old Testament law, but not its state-restricting specifics. They proclaim the “principle of the tithe,” and then go on to promote massive compulsory taxation by the state. In short, they are devoted to Old Testament laws only on an ad hoc basis: whenever such verbal allegiance can be misdirected to glorify the authority of the state.

4. *Whose Word Is Sovereign?*

We discover that contemporary Christian social commentators are agreed: the revealed law of God is not applicable in New Testament times. God's Bible-revealed law-order is somehow out of date. It deals with “an extinct cultural situation.” Antinomians view the Old Testament as some sort of discarded first draft, “the Word of God (emeritus).” These commentators want to avoid the restrictions that God has said must be placed on men, institutions, and governments, if freedom and justice are to prevail. How, then, will freedom and justice be maintained? How will “the word of man (tenured)” establish and defend freedom and justice?

The biblical program is clear: self-government under revealed biblical law, with various aspects of this law enforced by a biblically re-

vealed system of decentralized courts. There is no other valid program for the establishment and maintenance of biblically sanctioned government. All other programs are aspects of false religions. Christians have adopted aspects of false religions for two millennia. Christian social thought has been syncretistic from the beginning. Christians have failed in their attempt to establish freedom and justice for this very reason.

With the publication of Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, this syncretism was at long last systematically challenged. Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetic method, when coupled with a renewed interest in (and exposition of) biblical law, has opened the possibility of the establishment of a self-conscious Christian civilization. To accomplish this, Christians must go forward in terms of the law delivered to man at Sinai.

Conclusion

We see the "privatized" nature of the biblical social order in the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal." But we also find the foundational principles of a free market economy in all the other nine commandments. The Ten Commandments are as fine a statement of the principles of liberty, including liberty of voluntary exchange, as we can find anywhere in the history of man. *The Old Testament is an anti-statist document*. It limits the civil government in the interests of *personal self-government*. Limited civil government is one of the two political preconditions of a free market economy. The other political precondition is *predictable law*, which places limits on civil government. This, the Ten Commandments and the Old Covenant's case laws also provide.

The Bible does not teach a doctrine of salvation by law. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the doctrine is clear: "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4). The Bible teaches *dominion under God*, but it does not teach salvation by law. In contrast, all other religions teach either salvation by law or salvation by mystical escape, with the techniques of asceticism and mysticism serving as the "laws" that save man.²⁹ Humanism teaches salvation by law, and most forms of humanism in the twentieth century were statist, for the state is clearly the highest and most concentrated form of power. Salvation by

29. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, Introduction.

the state, or by an agency of the state,³⁰ was the common faith of twentieth-century humanists. This is why the Bible was repugnant to twentieth-century humanists. This is not going to change.

In the ten chapters that follow, you will learn more about the relationship between the Ten Commandments and economics. You will also learn more concerning the relation between the Ten Commandments and the dominion covenant.³¹ The Ten Commandments certainly have implications outside of the realm of economics, but they surely have implications at least for economics. When men see how relevant the Ten Commandments are for economics, they should gain new respect for the importance of the laws of God for all of life, but especially for the life of dominion man, the man redeemed by grace through faith in the one true Dominion Man, Jesus Christ.

This book can serve as a model. We need more studies: in politics, education, and social structures.

30. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963).

31. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

THE GOD OF LIBERATION

God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me (Ex. 20:1–3).

The theocentric issue here is obvious: *the sovereignty of God*. God mandates absolute devotion. He is number-one. All biblical laws are extensions of this law. All of them rest on this law.

But who is this God? In this passage, God identifies Himself as the God of liberation. He also reveals Himself as the God of the covenant. His self-revelation here invokes four of the five points of the biblical covenant model: sovereignty, hierarchy, law, and sanctions.

A. The Biblical Covenant Model

Sovereignty. God here announces that He has intervened decisively and miraculously in the lives of the Hebrews. This intervention was radically personal. The events of the exodus cannot be cogently explained as a series of impersonal natural events. There could be no doubt in the minds of the Hebrews of Moses' day that God had been the source of their liberation from Egypt. There was certainly no doubt in the minds of the people of the Canaanitic city of Jericho, as Rahab informed the spies a generation later (Josh. 2:10–11).

By identifying Himself as the source of their liberation, God announced his total sovereignty over Israel. A God who intervenes in history is not some distant God. He is a God of power. He had already revealed to them by His deeds that He possesses the power to reshape nations, seas, and history. No other God possesses such power; therefore, the Israelites are required to worship only Him. Sovereignty is point one of the biblical covenant model.¹ Events are controlled by a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>).

God who can bring His words to pass: cosmic personalism.²

Hierarchy. He was also their king. Eastern kings of the second millennium B.C. used a formula for announcing their sovereignty similar to this and to God's announcement to Moses of His name (Ex. 6:2). Even when their names were well known, they announced them in the introduction to their proclamation.³

Second, it was customary for him to record his mighty deeds. Cassuto summarizes God's announcement: "I, the Speaker, am called YHWH, and I am your God specifically. Although I am the God of the whole earth (xix 5), yet I am also your God in the sense that, in consideration of this sanctification, I have chosen you to be the people of My special possession from among all the peoples of the earth (xix 6); and it is I who brought you out of the land of Egypt, not just bringing you forth from one place to another, but liberating you from the house of bondage. Hence it behooves you to serve Me not out of fear and dread, in the way that the other peoples are used to worship their gods, but from a sense of love and gratitude."⁴ Meredith G. Kline identified this as the second part of the suzerainty treaty.⁵ Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant model.⁶

God contrasts life in Egypt with life outside of Egypt. Egypt had been the house of bondage for Israel. Israel's deliverance was a liberating act on God's part. The contrast is between *bondage in Egypt* and *liberty under God*. The Israelites were in the wilderness when God revealed this law to them. The wilderness was a place of liberation by comparison with Egypt. The issue is *hierarchy*—which God will men serve?—not geography. Men are always under authority: point two of the biblical covenant model. The question is: Under whose authority?

Ethics. This God of *power* is a God of *ethics*. Ethics is point three of the biblical covenant model.⁷ His power was revealed by His act of

Cf. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1: "Cosmic Personalism."

3. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, [1951] 1967), pp. 76–77.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

5. Meredith G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 52–61; cf. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 53–57.

6. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2; North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 3; North, *ibid.*, ch. 3.

freeing the Hebrews from their Egyptian masters. He therefore has the authority to lay down the law, beginning with the first commandment.

The Hebrews had deliverance as the historical foundation of their faith in God and His law-order. This law-order is summarized in the Ten Commandments. The commandments are the foundation of righteous living. The whole of Old Testament law serves as a series of case-law applications of the ten.⁸ Therefore, the case laws must be regarded as the basis of all social institutions and all interpersonal relationships. Whatever the area of life under discussion—family, business, charitable association, military command, medicine, etc.—biblical law provides the standards that should govern our actions.

Men can choose to ignore the requirements of biblical law. God dealt harshly in Egypt and in the Red Sea with those who flagrantly and defiantly rejected the rule of His law. The Israelites had experienced firsthand the institutional effects of a social order governed by a law-order different from the Bible's. They had been enslaved. The God who had delivered them from bondage here announces His standards of righteousness—not just private righteousness but social and institutional righteousness. Thus, the *God of liberation* is simultaneously the *law-giver*. The close association of biblical law and human freedom is grounded in the very character of God.

Sanctions. God had delivered them in history. This involved imposing negative sanctions on Egypt. The positive sanction of God's deliverance of covenant-keepers was inextricably associated with negative sanctions against covenant-breakers. Sanctions are point four of the biblical covenant model.⁹

The only covenantal point not found in this verse is point five: succession.

How does all of this relate to economics? By means of the biblical covenant model. There are numerous systems of economic theory and organizations. Their defenders all come in the name of the liberation of individuals and the society. We must test these claims. But how? By means of the biblical covenant model.

Because God identifies Himself in this commandment as the God of liberation, we should begin our study of economic theory with a detailed study of His comprehensive law-order. The summary of His law-order is found in the Ten Commandments.

8. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973).

9. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4; North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 4.

B. Causation and Providence

Causation is never impersonal. This is the ultimate message of the first commandment. The Israelites were not in the wilderness because of the impersonal forces of history, or the impersonal mode of production, or the impersonal rise of the middle class. They were in the wilderness awaiting the next move of God in history. He had raised up Moses and Aaron to lead them out of Egypt. This was behind them. Now their task was to conquer Canaan. This was the promised inheritance that had been given by God to Abraham. The fourth generation after the Israelites' descent into Egypt would conquer Canaan, God had prophesied. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16).¹⁰

The basis of cause and effect is the providence of God. This includes economic causation. The laws of economics are not impersonal. They are not random. They do have purpose. They are reliable as a way to predict the outcome of policies. Economics is covenantal. It involves a sovereign God, man made in His image, economic law, causation, and economic growth. This is taught by the Decalogue as a whole. But it begins here, with the doctrine of the sovereignty of the God of liberation.

The God of liberation does not set forth laws of bondage. The Israelites could safely trust the laws of God because He had delivered them from bondage. The proof of His goodness and also His reliability was His deliverance of Israel out of Egypt.

This means that they could trust His economic commandments. His verbal commandments are consistent with His acts of deliverance in history. He possesses the power to produce the results that He promises in His law. This description encompasses His economic commandments. The structure of the universe and the universal rule of providential cause and effect are not impersonal. They are also not random.

If men are to obey God over the long run, they must have faith that they are placing their trust in a reliable law-order that is backed up by a reliable, predictable God. He must be the God of the biblical covenant model. If God is not reliable, then His law is not reliable. If He is weak or forgetful or inconsistent, then his sanctions are unpredictable. If His sanctions—positive and negative—are unpredictable, then the inheritance of His people is problematical.

10. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 23.

This verse announces that the God of liberation has proven in history that He is sovereign over history. He brought negative sanctions against Egypt and positive sanctions for Israel. He therefore commands His people to worship Him and no other.

What is worship? It is subordination to a sovereign God and obedience to His law.

Can men legitimately have confidence in the law of God in the area of economic affairs? Yes. Why is this confidence justified? Because the same God who delivered Israel from the Egyptians also established the laws of economics. This means that the basis of these economic laws is not man, or random chance, or historical cycles, or the impersonal forces of history, but instead is the *sustaining providence of God*. The guarantor of the reliability of economic law is a personal Being who delivers His people from those who defy His law.

C. Liberation Economics: True and False

The Bible sets forth the only valid liberation theology, which undergirds the only valid liberation economics. The moral, institutional, and legal foundations of this economic system are found in biblical law.

What was commonly called liberation theology in the latter decades of the twentieth century was very often warmed-over Marxism or some other type of socialistic economics.¹¹ Appeals to the example of exodus were made by self-professed liberation theologians, but few if any references were made to the many Old Testament case-law applications of the Ten Commandments. In fact, the continuing validity of Old Testament laws that deal with economic relationships was denied by liberation theologians; only those laws that *seem* to expand the economic power of the state—and there are very few of these in the Bible—were cited by them. This “pick and choose” aspect of modern liberation theology—a choice governed by the standards of socialism and revolution rather than by the standards of orthodox theology—undermines the church’s ability to reconstruct social institutions in terms of God’s revealed word.¹²

11. See David Chilton’s review of Jose Miguez Bonino’s book, *The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976), in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Summer 1978).

12. See Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977); Stephen Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). For a critique of Sider’s book, see David

Biblical economics is liberation economics. Anti-biblical economics is therefore bondage economics. Those who proclaim liberation economics, but who refuse to be guided by the concrete, explicit revelation of God in the Bible concerning economic law, are wolves in sheep's clothing. They were dominant in academia until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. That historic event made it embarrassing for anyone to admit that he was a socialist, or ever had been.

If theologians proclaim some variant of Marxism, socialism, interventionism, or some other form of state-deifying economics, they are the equivalent of the Egyptians. They are laying the foundations of what Hayek called the road to serfdom.¹³ On the other hand, if they proclaim radical libertarianism—a world devoid of all civil government—they are laying the foundations for an ethical and political backlash, which will aid those who are seeking to expand the powers of the state. Men will not live under anarchy. Civil government is an aspect of the post-Fall world. Hierarchy is mandated by men's quest for power. The world of the victorious warlord becomes the state. There is no escape from this system of hierarchical physical coercion. The question is: Who controls it? Whose law prevails?

Historically, anarchists have allied themselves with statist revolutionaries at the beginning of a revolution, but they have invariably been destroyed after their former allies capture control of the coercive apparatus of the state. Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin initially cooperated in the founding of the First International (International Workingmen's Association), but the two men later split, and Marx and Engels destroyed the organization in the late 1870s—by transferring its headquarters to New York City—rather than allow it to fall into the hands of Bakunin's followers.¹⁴ In the case of the Russian Revolution, the anarchists were among the first dissidents to be arrested by the

Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1983). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>); Ronald H. Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Milford, Michigan: Mott Media, 1983).

13. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

14. Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1918] 1962), pp. 484ff. Bakunin hated communism because of its innate statism: "I am not a communist, because communism concentrates and swallows up in itself for the benefit of the State all the forces of society, because it inevitably leads to the concentration of property in the hands of the State, whereas I want the abolition of the State. . . ." Cited by E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York: Vintage, [1937] 1961), p. 356.

Cheka, Lenin's secret police.¹⁵

D. Darwinism vs. Economic Law

Modern economic theory is grounded on the assumption that mankind is autonomous, that there is no need to invoke the concept of God, that all cosmic law is impersonal, that all social laws are either derived from the state or from the voluntary association of individuals, and that laws evolve over time. All modern economic theory is Darwinian, either statist Darwinian or free market Darwinian.¹⁶

The secular economist must find a way to adjust his theories of causation to an evolving society. If economic law is separate from social conventions, then the economist must find a way to relate conceptually the independent laws of economics to the beliefs and practices of each individual and each society. How can this be done? This is the age-old question of epistemology: "What can a man know for certain, and how can he know it?" In a changing social world (Heraclitus), how can a man's mind find permanent principles of economics (Parmenides)? How can one man communicate his discovery to others?

Darwinism undermines all concepts of permanent law, whether biological or social. It undermines economic theory. If the laws of economics are unchanging, then how can they be relevant for a changing world? If economic laws change, then how does an economist know for sure whether the laws that he thinks are internally consistent really do connect with the evolving world around him? In short, *what is the Darwinian economist's principle of final sovereignty?* In an evolving world, where everything is moving toward the heat death of the universe, what is sovereign other than the frozen tomb of absolute zero?¹⁷

Exodus 20:1–3 provides the intellectual foundation of epistemology. A sovereign God controls history. He must be worshipped, and He alone. Those who have been delivered from bondage possess legitimate hope that their worship will not result in bondage. They will se-

15. George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian, 1962), p. 219. See Part 8, "Anarchists in Prison," *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Paul Avrich (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1973). For an account of the anarchists in the Russian Revolution, see "Voline" (Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eichenbaum), *The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921* (New York: Free Life Editions, [1947] 1975). Voline was an anarchist who participated in the revolution.

16. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix B.

17. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

cure their liberation by worshipping this God.

There is nothing remotely Darwinian about this worldview. It is expressly anti-Darwinian. There is nothing remotely humanistic about it. It begins, not with man, but with the God of the Bible, who is sovereign over history and who controls history for the benefit of those who worship Him and Him alone.

E. Law and Liberation

The Hebrews could not have misunderstood this relationship between God's law and liberation. God identified Himself as the deliverer of Israel, and then He set forth the summary of the law structure which He requires as a standard of human action. *The God of history is the God of ethics*. There can be no biblical ethics apart from an ultimate standard, yet this standard is fully applicable to history, for the God of history has announced the standard. Ethics must be simultaneously permanent and historically applicable. Permanence must not compromise the applicability of the law in history, and historical circumstances must not relativize the universal standard. The *dialectical tension between law and history*, which undermines every non-biblical social philosophy, is overcome by God, who is the guarantor of His law and the social order that is governed by this law.¹⁸ He is the *guarantor* of the law's permanent applicability because his is the *deliverer*, in time and on earth.

The prophets of Israel repeatedly announced their detailed critiques of Israel and Judah by first recalling that the God in whose name they were coming before the nation was the same God who had delivered them from Egypt.¹⁹ Having made this identification, they would go on to catalogue the sins of the nation—sins that were prohibited by biblical law. Ezekiel wrote: "Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them" (20:10–11). The New American Standard Version translates this final clause, "if a man observes them, he will live." In other words, the very foundation of life is the law of God, *if* a man lives in terms of this law. The prophets then listed the sins of the

18. Cornelius Van Til offered the two pre-Socratic philosophers, Parmenides and Heraclitus, as the supreme examples of this dialectic. Parmenides was the philosopher of static law and logic. Parmenides was the philosopher of historical change. He wrote, "everything flows"—*panta rei*. He was the original philosopher of "go with the flow."

19. Isaiah 43:3; Jeremiah 2:6; Hosea 13:4.

nation which were inevitably bringing death and destruction—the external judgment of God.

F. Biblical Law: God's Prescription for Healing

Daniel Fuller provided a helpful analogy of the relationship between biblical law and salvation by grace through faith. He described God as a physician who prescribes a particular health regimen to patients. Jesus likened Himself to a physician with the task of healing mankind's sins (Matt. 1:21). "We avoid legalism to the extent that we acknowledge how truly sick we are and look away from ourselves and, with complete confidence in the Doctor's expertise and desire to heal us, follow his instructions (the obedience of faith!) *in order to* get well. We should understand that the entire business of our lives is the convalescence involved in becoming like Christ."²⁰ While a physician expects patients to deviate occasionally from his prescribed program, he understands that a patient who consistently rejects his advice has lost faith in the physician and his program. "That is why the Bible emphasizes persevering faith."²¹ This biblical faith looks toward the future, for saving faith is essentially "a confidence directed toward a future in which God will do and be all he has promised in the Bible."²²

It should now be clear why the necessity for obedience in no way clashes with *sola gratia* ('by grace alone'), for the Doctor is administering his cure just from the sheer joy he has in extending a blessing to others and in being appreciated for what he does. The Doctor does not bless people because they are the workmen who have rendered some necessary service to him which obligates him to reimburse them with medical care. It should also be clear why the obedience of faith is *sola fide* ("by faith alone"), for obedience is impelled wholly by faith and is not something added on to faith as though it were co-ordinate with it. . . . Finally, there should be no difficulty in understanding how the Doctor receives all the glory (*sola gloria*), the credit for the cures that are performed, and for the additional patients that flock to his clinic because of the glowing testimonies of those who have already experienced partial healing.²³

Those who worship any god other than the God who reveals His

20. Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 118.

21. *Idem*.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 119f.

standards in the Bible are worshippers of a false god. No other god, no other goal, no other standard is to replace men's faith in the living God who delivered Israel. God is primary; there is no secondary God. From this it follows that *those who proclaim a law-order alien to the one set forth in the Bible are thereby proclaiming the validity of the word of some other god*. They have become idolators—perhaps not conscious idolators, but idolators nonetheless. They are aiding and abetting the plans of men who worship another god. A god's personal (or impersonal) attributes are revealed by its law-order. *To proclaim a rival law-order is to proclaim a rival god*. Religious pluralism is political polytheism.²⁴

Conclusion

God's announcement to His people that He is the God who delivered them from Egypt laid the basis for the next nine commandments. This verse makes the connection between freedom and worship, which in turn requires obedience to God's law, beginning with this law governing worship.

To abandon faith in the sovereignty of the God who delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage is to abandon any reliable foundation for discovering cause and effect in the world, including the world of economics. This confessional-epistemological principle lays the foundation for the next nine. To abandon faith in God's Bible-revealed law-order is to undermine men's faith in the reliability of God's laws of economics. This is to abandon faith in the what the Bible proclaims as the only basis of liberation, namely, liberation under the sovereign power of God, who sustains the universe and calls all men to conform themselves to His ethical standards in every area of life, in time and on earth.

24. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

GRAVEN IMAGES AND RIVAL CIVILIZATIONS

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Ex. 20: 4–6).

The theocentric principle here is stated plainly: *the jealousy of God*. This law is an extension of the first commandment. The first commandment establishes the principle of God's exclusive sovereignty over history. The second commandment establishes the principle of legitimate authority: no bowing down—physical subordination—to rival gods. It also deals with representation.

A. The Structure of This Commandment

The second commandment is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the prohibition against graven images. The second section deals with the punishment and mercy of God.

It is not initially clear just how these two sections are linked together. Possibly because of this confusion, the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches combine this commandment with the first commandment, so that the prohibition against worshipping other gods, the prohibition against graven images, and the promise of judgment and mercy are all considered as a single commandment. To get ten commandments, they divide the tenth, the prohibition against covetousness, into two: coveting the neighbor's house, and coveting the

neighbor's wife, servants, and work animals.¹ This handling of the tenth looks strained, but the handling of the first two by other Protestant groups also initially looks strained. They do seem to be one unit, rather than a one-part commandment followed by a two-part commandment.

The theological solution to this ancient debate is the five-point biblical covenant model. As I have argued in the Preface and will demonstrate in this book, the biblical covenant model structures the Ten Commandments into a pair of five-five sections, priestly and kingly. This conforms to the traditional Reformed and Anglican division. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran arrangement does not.

The first commandment is clear: People are not to worship any other god. The first part of the second commandment is also clear: Make no graven images. This is an application of the principle governing the first commandment, namely, that no rival gods are allowed. In other words, first there is faith in God and no other god; then there is an application of this faith in action (or better, inaction): no graven images. *The second commandment is an application of the principle governing the first commandment.* Men must not bow down to the hand-crafted images of rival gods.

One reason why we can legitimately conclude that these are two separate commandments is that both share a common feature: a *prohibition* and a *reason* for the prohibition. The first commandment gives a reason for obedience: God delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt. This was both a positive sanction and a negative sanction. The second commandment also gives a reason for obedience: God is the One who brings judgment against those who hate Him, and who also brings mercy and love to those who love Him.

The third, fourth, and fifth commandments also follow this pattern: *command and explanation*. The third says not to take the name of the Lord in vain, "for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain," (20:7b). The fourth prohibits work on the sabbath. In the Exodus version, the reason offered is that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. In the Deuteronomy version, the reason offered is that they had been bondservants in Egypt, and God had delivered them (Deut. 5:15).² The fifth command-

1. "The Ten Commandments," under "Lutheran Creeds," in John H. Leith (ed.), *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine* (Chicago: Aldine, 1963), pp. 113–14.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deutero-*

ment, honoring parents, also has a reason for obedience: a promise of long life.

So, the first five commandments reveal a common pattern: commandment and explanation (or motivation). The second five do not. Because of this, it is reasonable to consider the prohibition against graven images as a separate commandment: one of five.

There is a far stronger reason to divide the first two commandments in this way. The first commandment parallels the first point of the biblical covenant model: sovereignty.³ The second commandment parallels the second point of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy/representation.⁴

The issues here are *hierarchy* and *representation*. The economic issue dividing biblical religion and pagan religion is the issue of dominion vs. power. Dominion is based on a hierarchy: God>man> nature (resources). It involves the extension of God's kingdom on earth and in history. Power is based on one of three rival theories of hierarchy: (1) Satan>man>nature; (2) Man>nature; (3) Nature> man. Power involves the extension of the kingdom of whichever sovereign is at the top of the hierarchy. In terms of the language of political philosophy, dominion is based on authority because authority is legitimate, while power is illegitimate because it represents a revolt against lawfully constituted authority.

In economics, the dividing issue is *ownership vs. theft*. To determine the lawful owner of any asset, the court must have a theory of hierarchy, meaning a concept of delegated authority, or as Christianity has used the term, of *stewardship*.⁵

Thus, every social order requires a theory of authority. To sort out this crucial issue, we must first understand the second commandment. To do this, I offer an analysis of the second commandment as it applies to social theory and then economic theory. Section I applies to social theory and civil government. Section II applies more specifically to economics.

nomy, 2nd ed (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 12.

3. Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

4. Sutton, *ibid.*, ch. 2; North, *ibid.*, ch. 2.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 30.

- I. No Graven Images
 - A. The Theology of Images
 - B. Rival World Orders
- II. The Compounding Process
 - A. The Iniquity of the Children
 - B. Mercy Unto Thousands

B. No Graven Images

The reason offered for this law was God's jealousy. God had delivered Israel; the nation therefore owed Him exclusive loyalty. God had brought negative sanctions against Egypt; the Israelites should therefore fear Him. This was the dual testimony of the first commandment. Loyalty was to be based on gratitude and fear, which were in turn based on historical experience. These were underlying implications of the first commandment. The second commandment made explicit what the first commandment implied. Not only were the Israelites not to honor any god before the true God, they were not to bow down to images that *represented* rival gods.

1. *The Theology of Images*

Man is made in God's image. He has authority over the creation as a lawful subordinate to God. But rebellious man is not content to remain a steward to God, i.e., a subordinate creature. He wants autonomy. At least, he wants to operate under some creature rather than God. So, man makes an image, thereby imitating God, who made man, His image. This image is a *point of contact* between man and the supernatural being associated with the image. The image *represents* the supernatural being. Man has an integral part in the formation of this being's point of contact. Man believes that he participates in the work of the divinity by giving shape to its image.

Ironically, man worships something less than man when he worships an idol. He worships power—power that is limited to the period of history prior to Christ's final judgment. But man himself is God's image. Redeemed men (the church) will eventually judge the angels (I Cor. 6:3).⁶ Therefore, in an attempt to imitate God's original creativity by making an image—just as God made man in His image—men identify themselves with the eschatological fate of some fallen angel,

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

for the graven image serves as a point of contact with some fallen angel. *Men thereby identify themselves with ultimate impotence and death.* “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but speak not. Eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not. Noses have they, but they smell not. They have hands, but they handle not. Feet have they, but they walk not. Neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Ps. 115:4–8; cf. 135:15–18).

Fallen man wants a mediator between himself and God. He wants that mediator to be the work of his own hands. This is an attempt to make himself a co-equal with God, or at least a co-participant with God in their “mutual struggle” against the unpredictable forces of nature and history. The idea that there is a God-ordained mediator who was not the product of men’s hands—a “stone cut out without hands” (Dan. 2:34)—is repulsive to fallen man. Such a concept of God denies man’s own sovereignty and places him at the mercy of God exclusively. He would rather worship some other kind of god. As Rushdoony wrote, “the only God they can tolerate is on[e] who is immersed in history, one who is Himself a product of natural process and is working together with man to conquer time and history. God and man are thus partners and co-workers in the war against brute factuality.”⁷

(a) Representing God

God was not to be represented visually by the people of the Old Testament, because He had not yet appeared as the Incarnation, the perfectly human mediator between God and men who perfectly represented God (John 14:9).⁸

7. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1969] 2000), pp. 3–4. (<http://bit.ly/rjrbph>)

8. Can we legitimately represent Jesus in art? Men did see Him. If a camera had been available to one of His followers, He could have been photographed. He was not an apparition. Someone could have made a sculpture of him, or a painting. But no one did. Should we guess concerning His appearance? We make guesses at what other biblical figures looked like. Moses, since the days of Michelangelo, has come to be thought of in a particular way. But Moses was a man, not divine. So, we face a dilemma: Jesus Christ was both human and divine. We can legitimately represent Him in His work on earth. He was an historical figure. On the other hand, representations of Christ with a pagan halo around His head are not historical representations of His humanity, and are therefore illegitimate. On the pagan origins of halos in medieval art, and their relationship to the occult phenomenon of the “human aura,” see “aura,” in Nandor Fodor, *Encyclopedia of Psychic Sciences* (New Hyde Park, New York: Univer-

Any pre-Christian attempt on the part of man to picture God would have been an assertion of divinity on the part of man, for only Jesus Christ has seen God, because He is of God (John 6:46). It would have meant that fallen man had seen the face of God. But to view God meant death, as the Hebrews had been told (Ex. 19:21). Not even Moses was allowed to see God's face (Ex. 33:23). Men could have painted a burning bush, which was a manifestation of God, or produced a sculpture of Jacob wrestling with the theophany (Gen. 32:24–32), but there was no way they would have been able to represent God in His Person as a divine being. Men violated this prohibition by representing God in the form of animals, worshipping creatures as if they were the Creator (Rom. 1:23).

An idol is a means of negating the Creator-creature distinction. Men believe that they can approach God, placate God, and even control God through bowing to an idol. Yet idols are radically distinct from God, as this passage tells us: men are not to worship any aspect of the creation, whether in heaven, on earth, or under the earth.⁹

Idols are weak. The Hebrews had seen that idols had not protected the Egyptians, and their children would see that the idols of the Canaanites would be equally impotent. At best, idols put men in contact with demonic beings that can manifest power, but nothing comparable to the awesome power of God. Forbidden rites place men in bondage to underworld spirits that can control them, even as men hope to control the spirits and the external environment by means of idol worship.

God forbade the use of tools in the construction of His altar. "Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon" (Ex. 20:23–26).¹⁰

sity Books, [1934] 1966), pp. 17–18; Lewis Spence, *Encyclopaedia of Occultism* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1920] 1960), pp. 50–51. Also, any use of icons or paintings that "aid" us in the worship of God—aids that supposedly provide a point of contact between the worshipper and God—are illegitimate.

9. I am indebted to Prof. John Frame's class syllabus, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, for these insights.

10. Deuteronomy 27:5; Joshua 8:30–31.

The Hebrews were not allowed to design and build at their own discretion the shape of the place of atonement before God. God provided the raw materials, and they were not to reshape them.

When the early church spread the gospel, the image-makers suffered financial losses. Acts 19 records the confrontation between the evangelists and the silversmiths who made the images of the temple of Diana. The leader of the craft guild, Demetrius, warned his colleagues: “Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands” (v. 26). The gospel had negative economic consequences for the pagan craftsmen of idols.

The prohibition of graven images was not a universal condemnation of all religious images. The tabernacle had images of the cherubim (Ex. 25:18–22) and bowls shaped like almonds (Ex. 25:33–34). The cherubim were not “cherubs” in the modern sense—not ruddy-faced children. They had four faces: a man’s, an ox’s, an eagle’s, and a lion’s (Ezk. 1:10). The temple actually had a large basin supported by 12 oxen (I Ki. 7:25), yet bulls were a familiar part of pagan worship. But the permitted likenesses were spelled out by God and limited to the Old Testament house of God. Men were not acting autonomously when they put these likenesses in the tabernacle. In short, these specified likenesses were symbols, not icons. As symbolic of God and His relationship with man, they rested on the doctrine of creation, the absolute distinction between Creator and creation. The icon, in contrast, points to a supposed *scale of being*, an ontological link between God and the image. This is the theology of magic.

(b) Icons and Magic

Let us consider an Old Testament example of a legitimate use of an image for religious purposes. It is one of the strangest events in the Bible. The setting, however, was only too typical an event in the life of that first generation in the wilderness. God had made a vow with them to deliver a Canaanitic nation into their hands, if they in turn utterly destroyed the city. He did, and they did. The victory was complete (Num. 21:1–4). Then they journeyed around Edom, and once again they grew discouraged. They made their standard complaint: “And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no

bread, neither is there any water: and our soul loatheth this light bread" (Num. 21:5).

This time, God responded in anger. He sent fiery serpents among them to bite them. Many of them died (21:6). They repented. Moses then prayed for them (v. 7). God instructed him to make an image of a fiery serpent and place it on a pole. Everyone who looks at it after he is bitten will live, God told Moses (v. 8). Moses made the image, and God's word came true: Merely looking at it saved their lives (v. 9).

Was this magic? No, for God had instructed them on *a one-time basis* to follow this *one-time ritual*. The use of the serpent on a pole was not to become part of Israel's worship. Moses had been instructed by God to make such an image. Yet, of all images, this one is the one that we would assume could never be made legitimately. The serpent became a universal symbol in pagan civilizations. The Sumerian god Ningishzida was the son of the healing god Ninazu, and he was represented by a pair of snakes entwined around a rod. This god was worshipped in Babylon in the late Bronze Age era in which the exodus took place.¹¹ In Greece, the symbol of a snake was also associated with divine healing: Asklepios, a snake-god, was their god of healing. He was symbolized as a snake wrapped around a staff.¹² We still see the Sumerian snakes' use as a symbol of healing: the medical profession's symbol is a pair of intertwined snakes on a pole. Yet God instructed Moses to construct a snake image.

Why was this image not an icon? Because it was used in an actual historical event. This is the key that unlocks the New Testament era's standard for the proper use of images. Now that God has come in the flesh and has manifested Himself among men, it is legitimate to represent God by making representations of Jesus Christ. How can such statues or paintings be kept from becoming magical talismans, amulets, or icons? *By placing the representations in a Bible-revealed historical setting.*

We do not know what Jesus looked like. We know that He was sufficiently nondescript that the Jews paid Judas to identify Him. So, we cannot legitimately represent Jesus apart from recognizable historical settings from the Bible. The historical setting is the identifying

11. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New Hyde Park: New York: University Books, [1930?] 1961), pp. 488–89. "The snake sloughs its skin annually, and so suggested the ideas of renewed life and immortality to the ancients" (p. 489).

12. Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1903] 1991), p. 341. (<http://bit.ly/jehprol>)

mark of who the image represents. It points also to a one-time only event in man's history. In this way, the image does not readily become a continuing incarnation. It does not readily become a link in the present between the worshipper and the object of his worship. Thus, the presence of statues or paintings or stained glass windows in a church need not be violations of the second commandment. But when these images are used as links between the present worship of God in prayer, except as a way to recall the memory of some mighty act of God, they become idols.

The use of icons as *mediating instruments* between worshippers and God does involve elements of the forbidden practice, but this is not always a *self-conscious* defiance of the second commandment.¹³ Eastern orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are marked by practices that are rebellious in this regard, but this may not always be self-conscious rebellion. The leadership of both churches has unquestionably failed in the past to limit the use of images within the worship ceremonies to strictly historical settings. By failing to limit the use of visual representations of Jesus or the "saints"—historical figures from the Bible—to their historical settings, churches have there by implicitly or explicitly encouraged the misuse of images. They have not warned the worshippers that the use of images is to be historical, not ontological. Images are to remind men of the deliverances in history by God of His people. They may be used to remind men of the power of God in history, and therefore to reinforce their faith in God's power in the affairs of this world. They may not be used to link a specific worshipper with a specific mediator who is represented by the image so closely that the very presence of the image is the source of the mediation. In other words, worshippers can easily be lured into substituting magic for Christian faith.

We can understand how easy it is for a believer to make this illegitimate substitution when we examine the case of Moses' tapping of the

13. The iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium in the eighth century A.D. was a war by the emperors against the use of icons in the church. As Ladner noted in 1940, this was a political struggle. The emperors wanted a monopoly over the use of icons. The icons of the emperors in public places were to be the manifestation on earth of material aspects of God's kingdom. In short, "they did not wish to permit on this the imagery of their own imperial natural world." Gerhard B. Ladner, "Origin and Significance of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Medieval Studies*, II (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940), p. 135. Cited in R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), p. 188. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

rock in order to bring forth water for the Israelites. Moses tapped the rock in order to get water out of it. Why? He had once been told by God to smite a rock in order to bring water out of it (Ex. 17:6), and he made a false conclusion: God rewards the man who properly manipulates the talismans or implements of ritualistic power. He concluded that a one-time historical link between tapping a rock and getting water out of it was in fact an *ontological* link between ritual precision and desired effect. He was lured into heresy. The influence of the power religion of Egypt was still strong in his thinking. He began to think in terms of ritual rather than ethics, of the precise repetition of a familiar formula rather than obedience to God's revealed word. In short, Moses adopted magic in place of biblical religion.¹⁴

God knew that this shift in Moses' thinking had taken place. This is why He tested Moses. He told Moses in the desert of Zin to take the rod and gather the assembly, and then speak to the rock before earth any other but their own image or more exactly their eyes, "and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock" (Num. 20:8). Moses did not believe God. He relied instead on ritual. He concluded that adherence to a form (formula) that had produced results in the past is the key to tapping God's power. So he tapped the rock in order to "tap" God's power. He even added a touch of his own—literally: a second tap of the rod. "And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them" (vv. 11–12). This was a high price to pay.

A legitimate symbol reminds us of what God is like by revealing what kinds of physical blessings God has given to His people. Its prohibited pagan equivalent is the amulet or talisman, which commands a god's obedience because of the presence of the object, or because of ritual precisely performed by man. It assumes that both the god and man are under the bondage of ritual, but that man can impose his will on the god through manipulating a talisman or other implement of power. Budge wrote:

The use of amulets dates from the time when animism or magic sat-

14. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 11.

isfied the spiritual needs of man. Primitive man seems to have adopted them as a result of an internal urge or the natural instinct which made him protect himself and to try to divine the future. He required amulets to enable him to beget children, to give him strength to overcome enemies, visible and invisible, and above all the EVIL EYE, and to protect his women and children, and house and cattle; and his descendants throughout the world have always done the same. When the notion of a god developed in his mind, he ascribed to that god the authorship of the magical powers which he believed to be inherent in the amulets, and he believed that his god needed them as much as he himself did. He did not think it possible for his god to exist without the help of magical powers. . . . The gods became magicians, and employed magic when necessary, and dispensed it through their priests to man kind.¹⁵

A legitimate image of a Bible event reminds men of what God has done. An icon is the hypothetical representation of a person out of the Bible—a representation that offers the worshipper power over today's events because it manifests the displayed power that the person represented by the image once possessed. It is an illegitimate device, because the worshipper seeks to appropriate the power that was *once revealed historically* in the life of the person represented by the image. It is not biblically significant that the person represented by the image once possessed such power. What is significant is that he was *placed under grace* and received power sufficient to perform his God-assigned task or sufficient to demonstrate God's power in history. The basis of this gift of power was not the precision of his ritual performance, or his special place on the hypothetical (and nonexistent) chain of being between God and man, but rather *his position in history*, meaning his place in the providentially controlled history of God's people. Worshipers should never forget that *the biblical personality represented by the image never used an image to appropriate the power he received*. There are no indications that worshipers in the Old Testament or New Testament church used images of historic persons to aid them in their prayers and devotions.

Similarly, our possession of power is not based on our ability to repeat precise rituals, or on our position in some chain of being. Our power is dependent on the providence of God. Thus, it is *obedience*, not ritual, that is essential. It is *ethics*, not power, that is our lawful goal. Extending the kingdom of God, not extending the kingdom of

15. Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, pp. xv, xvi.

man, Satan, or autonomous nature, is our primary goal (Matt. 6:33).¹⁶ Thus, the use of images to enhance our power by bringing us closer to God *metaphysically or ontologically* is illegitimate. Images are to bring us closer to Jesus Christ *ethically*. To reduce the likelihood of our misusing images, they must be kept *historical* in their frame of reference. They must remind us of what God once did for people who verbally and ethically proclaimed biblical religion, not what He did for people who ritually proclaimed the power religion. What God did *to* the latter is what faithful worshippers wish to avoid.

As I have said, the improper use of icons, candles, or other objects used in worship is not always self-consciously magical. In the world of occultism, on the other hand, we still find a self-conscious acceptance of the old religion of images. The revival of an occultist political order under Nazism in the 1930s indicates that the lingering traces of occultism can be revived at any time. If occultism continues to expand its influence, we can expect to see more examples of the ancient practice of image-worship.

2. Rival World Orders

The image, the god represented by the image, and the social order are always closely linked. Bowing down to an idol means the acceptance of that god's law-order. "Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works; but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images" (Ex. 23:24). To *bow down* to any deity means to *walk in his ordinances*. "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances" (Lev. 18:3). The history of Israel testifies to the inescapable link between gods and their social orders: "They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them, but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and daughters unto devils" (Ps. 106:34–37).

Making a graven image means to participate in the creation of a new world order. This new world order is in opposition to God's world order. A different god is elevated to a position of sovereignty. In the Old Testament era, this meant that some demonic being became the

16. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

source of health and prosperity. In modern civilization, which is the historical product of Christianity, most men no longer worship demons explicitly. They attribute sovereignty to impersonal forces of history (Marxism), or forces of the unconscious mind (Freudianism), or the spirit of the Volk (Nazism), or the impersonal forces of nature (Darwinism's explanation of pre-human evolution). Modern man has attempted to become what C. S. Lewis prophesied: the materialist magician.¹⁷ Ultimately, man is the sovereign agent, by means of the proletarian Party (Marxism), economic planning (Fabianism), genetic manipulation (eugenics), conditioned response training (behaviorism), psychoanalysis (Freudianism), the führer (Nazism), higher consciousness techniques (New Age transcendentalism), compulsory public education (progressive education), scientific planning (Darwinism), or scientific management (Taylorism).¹⁸

Satan did not tempt Adam and Eve to worship him openly; he only asked them to violate the law of God. The violation of God's law was the equivalent of worshipping Satan. Only when he approached Christ did he ask to be worshipped (Luke 4:7).¹⁹ *The worship of man and his works is essentially the worship of Satan.* In short, man the idol-maker and idol-worshipper is man the Satan-worshipper. Humanism is inescapably satanism, which is why satanism revives during periods of humanistic dominance.²⁰

The construction of a world order that is opposed to the new world order set forth by God is therefore theologically comparable to constructing a graven image. There may be no official graven image at first. Men may not be asked to bow down to it at first. But the substitution of the ordinances of man for the ordinances of God is the heart of idol-worship. It is an assertion of *man's autonomy*, which ultimately

17. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, [1961] 1969), p. 33. These "letters from a senior devil" were published first during World War II.

18. Gary North, "From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty," Appendix A in *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012).

19. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

20. On the occultism of the Renaissance, see Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage, 1964). On the occult background of nineteenth-century revolutionism, see James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). On the link between humanism and occultism in the United States, especially after 1964, see Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/gnoccultism>)

results in *the subordination of man to the ordinances of Satan*. The society of Satan does not need graven images to make it operational.²¹

It is a testimony to the impact of Christianity on Western culture that graven images have all but disappeared. Humanists have adopted faith in the original promise of Satan to Eve, namely, the impossible offer of autonomy to man, but they do not bow down to graven images. To make a profession of faith in man's autonomy is to become ethically subordinate to Satan (under the overall sovereignty of God).²² Men who believe that they worship no god have nevertheless conformed themselves sufficiently to Satan's standards to warrant eternal punishment, and to that extent, Satan is pleased. In worshipping the works of their own hands, they refuse to worship God. Their idols are not explicitly religious or explicitly rebellious ritually. They do not celebrate their faith by adopting the ancient rituals of satanism, namely, by making graven images.²³ Worshipping graven images would make manifest their ultimate theology, so in this respect Christianity has influenced humanism and has also restrained it.

(a) *Images and Political Covenants*

The prohibition against worshipping graven images was unique in the ancient world. Whenever archaeologists dig up the remains of some ancient city, they find images of all kinds—in temples, in the palace of the king, in graves, and in the homes of the people. Ancient cultures were polytheistic. The proliferation of civic and household images was a universal phenomenon. By prohibiting the use of graven images, God was separating the Israelites from the surrounding cultures. It was always the mark of rebellion when the Israelites began to worship graven images.

Because images were prohibited in Israel, this made political covenants with surrounding nations impossible during the periods in which Israel remained faithful and avoided images. Temporary alli-

21. R. J. Rushdoony, "The Society of Satan" (1964); reprinted in *Biblical Economics Today*, II (Oct./Nov. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/rjrsos>)

22. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, p. 132.

23. C. S. Lewis' insightful novel, *That Hideous Strength* (1946), presents a literary prophecy of a coming fusion of power-seeking modern science and power-seeking ancient demonism. This experiment ends in the novel with the destruction of the scientists: one by a suicidal but consistent application of modern dualistic psychology (Frost), another as a blood sacrifice to a demonic god-head whose scientific "creator" never suspected (until the moment of his death) that it was anything but a strictly scientific phenomenon (Filostrata).

ances were allowed (Gen. 14), but not oath-bound covenants. In the ancient world, including the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome, political alliances involved a peace treaty between the gods of the city-states. Politics was fundamentally religious. Citizenship was based on a free man's right by birth to participate in the religious rites of a particular city. He could participate only in the rites of his own city. Dual citizenship was therefore impossible. The gods of the ancient city were jealous gods. Their worshippers were not allowed to participate in the religious rites of other cities.

Where did the local gods come from? A Greek city-state could adopt local gods that were identified with certain families within the city. When a family consented to allow its deity to become the god of a city, it generally retained the hereditary right of priesthood for that deity.²⁴ Different cities would have local deities named Zeus or Athena, but these were not the same gods.²⁵

Warfare between cities was simultaneously warfare between the gods of each city. A conquered city had to be allowed to remain independent, or else it had to be destroyed. "There was no middle course," Fustel de Coulanges wrote. "Either the city ceased to exist, or it was a sovereign state. So long as it retained its worship, it retained its government; it lost the one only by losing the other; and then it existed no longer."²⁶ Understandably, this made warfare total. Soldiers burned crops because the crops were dedicated to other gods. Cattle were slaughtered. The sacred fires of the defeated city and its households were extinguished. There was no sense of duty towards the enemy.²⁷

What about peace treaties between cities? They were established by religious acts. The ceremony of the treaty was conducted by the priests of each city.

These religious ceremonies alone gave a sacred and inviolable character to international conventions. . . . With such ideas it was important, in a treaty of peace, that each city called its own gods to bear witness to its oaths. . . . Both parties tried, indeed, if it was possible, to invoke divinities that were common to both cities. They swore by those gods that were visible everywhere—the sun, which

24. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] n.d.), III:II:2, pp. 124–25. Reprinted by Peter Smith, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1979.

25. *Ibid.*, III:VI, p. 150. Cf. Harrison, *Prolegomena*, ch. 1.

26. *Ibid.*, III:XIV, p. 205.

27. *Ibid.*, III:XV, pp. 205–6.

shines upon all, and the nourishing earth. But the gods of each city, and its protecting heroes, touched men much more, and it was necessary to call them to witness, if men wished to have oaths really confirmed by religion. As the gods mingled in the battles during the war, they had to be included in the treaty. It was stipulated, therefore, that there should be an alliance between the gods as between the two cities. To indicate this alliance of the gods, it sometimes happened that the two peoples agreed mutually to take part in each other's sacred festivals. Sometimes they opened their temples to each other, and made an exchange of religious rites.²⁸

Fustel wrote about Greece and Rome, but similar theologies reigned in the Near East. Thus, it was impossible for Israel to make covenants of peace with the foreign nations and still remain faithful to God. "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods" (Ex. 23:32). The nations of Canaan had to be utterly destroyed (Ex. 23:27), for their altars had to be destroyed (Ex. 34:13). "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down their high places; and ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein; for I have given you the land to possess it" (Num. 33:51–53). It was also forbidden for the Israelites to intermarry with foreigners who were not under the covenantal authority of God (Deut. 7:3–4).

How could God deny His own sovereignty? He was the God who had delivered His people from Egypt, demonstrating that He was no local god, but a God over all kingdoms. Pharaoh had not conquered God by subjugating His people. Pharaoh had wanted to negotiate with God through Moses, but God had issued a non-negotiable demand to let His people go for one week to worship Him.²⁹ When Pharaoh refused to capitulate, God destroyed him. No self-proclaimed human divinity could come before God as an equal. No common rites were possible between God's people and the foreign gods of pagan cities.

It was this issue that got the early church into a life-and-death confrontation with Rome. Members were willing to be honest citizens, but they could not be citizens in Rome's view. They refused to participate in the rites of the Empire. The Roman pantheon was filled with the gods of the various conquered nations, which was the basis of the

28. *Ibid.*, III:XV, pp. 208–9.

29. Chapter 10.

peace treaty between Rome and each of its subject peoples, but neither Israel nor the church could conform to the ritual terms of this treaty. Israel was scattered in the diaspora in the second century A.D., and the church was intermittently persecuted until Constantine's era. This is why Fustel could write, "The victory of Christianity marks the end of ancient society."³⁰

When God told the Israelites they could not make graven images or worship them, He was announcing the terms of the dominion covenant. There had to be religious separation in Israel. They were to be isolated culturally from pagan nations. But this prohibition was more than a means to separate the Israelites culturally from their neighbors. It was a call to conquest. There could be no peace treaties with the people dwelling in the land which God had given to them; God imposes unconditional surrender or ultimate extinction.³¹

C. The Compounding Process

We come now to the reason given for the prohibition against constructing graven images. The reason is that God is a jealous God. What kind of God is that? It is a God who visits the iniquity of the fathers on subsequent generations of ethical rebels. It is also a God who shows mercy to generations of covenantally faithful people. The presence or absence of graven images testifies to the spiritual condition of the two ethically distinct and ritually distinct types of people.

The heart of the description of the jealous God is the *covenantal process of compound growth*: either growth unto destruction or growth unto dominion. History is linear. It develops over time. What goes before affects what comes after. Nevertheless, it does not *determine* what comes after. God determines both the "before" and the "after." God is sovereign, not the forces of history. But the criteria of performance are ethical. We know which covenant we are in by evaluating the external events of our lives in terms of God's list of blessings and curses (Deut. 28).³²

1. The Iniquity of the Children

We read: "[F]or I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth gen-

30. Fustel, *Ancient City*, V:III, p. 389.

31. North, *Unconditional Surrender*.

32. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 69, 70.

erations. . . ” (Ex. 20:5b). This verse is frequently misunderstood. It does not say that God punishes sons for the sins of their fathers. The Bible’s testimony concerning the responsibilities of children for the sins of their fathers is clear: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16). This principle was reaffirmed by Ezekiel: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezk. 18:20). We therefore must interpret the unique phrase, “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children,” in terms of this clearly stated principle of judgment.

What we have in view here is *a covenantal framework of reference*. The Hebrews had just come out of Egypt. They and their ancestors had labored under slavery. The year of release had not been honored by their captors. Year after year, the Egyptians had built up their cities by the use of Hebrew labor. This capital base kept expanding. The wages that would have been paid to free laborers, as well as the capital that was to be given to slaves in the year of release (Deut. 15:13–14), was retained by succeeding generations of Egyptians. Thus, the later generations became the beneficiaries of the compounding process.³³ They were richer, they supposed, than their ancestors because they possessed the visible manifestations of labor extracted illegally over decades.

Then came God’s judgment. With the compound growth of the visible benefits came the compound judgment of God. Both had built up over time. The final generation suffered incomparable judgment because they had not repented, made restitution voluntarily, and freed the Hebrews. For God not to have judged that final generation in terms of the benefits they had received illegally—benefits conveyed to them as a continuing legacy from their ancestors—would have been an act of extreme mercy on the part of God.

2. Repeated Iniquities

The iniquities of the fathers were repeated by the sons. The fathers escaped the full temporal retribution of God. In this sense, God showed them mercy, in time and on earth. But the sons also did not

33. Chapter 6.

repent. They continued in the sins of their fathers. If anything, they enjoyed the luxury of sinning even more flagrantly, because they were the beneficiaries of a larger capital base—a capital base of evil.

How long will God allow the sins of the heirs to go on? Unto the third and fourth generation. How long had the Hebrews been under the dominance of Egypt? Three generations.³⁴ The historical precedent should have been obvious to any Hebrew in Moses' day. God *visits the iniquity* for several generations. He *punishes* iniquity, according to one possible translation. He *numbers* iniquities, according to another.³⁵ It can also mean *remember* (I Sam. 15:2).

The sons of the final generation in Egypt indulged in the sins of their fathers. The same sins were popular. God numbered or remembered these sins. This is the meaning of "visiting the iniquity." He visits and sees the sins, generation after generation. A satanically covenantal society becomes skilled in certain sins. There is a systematic specialization in particular evils. Men are creatures. They are limited. *Men have to specialize in order to achieve their goals.* This is as true of sinfulness (and righteousness) as it is of economic production. As time goes on, the sinners get very good at what they are doing. Their unique cultural sins compound over time. As God put it with reference to the iniquity of the Amorites, their cup had to be filled up before the heirs of Abraham could inherit the promised land (Gen. 15:16b). The cup of iniquity of the Egyptians filled up one generation (40 years) before the cup of the Amorites filled up. Thus, in the fourth generation (Kohath's generation to Joshua's), Israel returned to Canaan, just as God had promised (Gen. 15:16a).

The compounding process that builds up *the capital base of iniquity* explains Isaiah 65:7: "I will repay your iniquities, yours and your fathers, all at once, says the LORD, because they burnt incense on the mountains and defied me on the hills; I will first measure out their reward and then pay them in full" (NEB). It is not that the sons have broken with the sins of the fathers, but nonetheless are going to be judged in terms of their fathers' rebellion. On the contrary, it is that the sons have become *even more efficient* in sinning. Mercy had been shown to the fathers in not destroying them. The fathers had been able

34. Kohath, Moses' grandfather, was alive before the descent into Egypt (Gen. 46:11). His son was Amram (Ex. 6:18), Moses' father (Num. 26:59). For a discussion of the problem of the period of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, see Donovan Courville, *The Exodus Problem and its Ramifications*, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, pp. 137–41.

35. Numbers 1:44; 4:37, 41, 45, 46, 49.

to pass down a *legacy of evil* to the sons. Thus, the sons suffer for their own sins, but their sins are more deserving of judgment, for this final generation has not repented in thankfulness for the mercy shown to their fathers by God. The final generation exists only because God had not destroyed their fathers, yet they refuse to repent. God's massive judgment is just, for their sin is greater. Why? Because, first, they did not repent in the face of God's mercy to their fathers, and second, because they have inherited a legacy of evil that has built up over time—a covenantal inheritance of death.

3. *Mercy Unto Thousands*

In contrast to the compounding process of evil, which is cut short after a few generations, stands God's promise to show mercy to thousands of those who keep His commandments. Cassuto interpreted this to mean *thousands of generations*. Nachmanides translated it: "He showeth mercy unto the thousandth generation."³⁶ The contrast is between a few generations and many—so many that it really means eternity. Cassuto cites Deuteronomy 7:9: "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."³⁷ The next verse is also significant, although Cassuto neglects it: "And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face" (Deut. 7:10).

This is one of the most optimistic concepts in the Bible. What God is saying is that *the works of evil will be cut short*, sometimes after three or four generations, and sometimes immediately. The process of compound growth for the sinners will not go on forever, in contrast to the compounding process for the righteous. The evils of the sinners overtake them; their cup becomes full and they are destroyed. But for the righteous man and the righteous society, the cup runneth over (Ps. 23:5b). Even the now-empty cup of the vanquished wicked—the economic base in which sin was finally filled to the brim—is inherited by the righteous. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov.

36. Ramban, *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shilo Publishing House, [1267?] 1973), p. 300.

37. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), p. 243.

13:22b).³⁸

Could the Hebrews really have understood all this? In general, yes. Abraham had been told that the fourth generation would inherit the land of Canaan. This was the generation that succeeded Moses' generation. The children of the exodus were told this explicitly by God, with respect to the external blessings that He was about to give them, and were reminded of their covenantal responsibility to obey His law and teach it to their children (Deut. 6:5–9).³⁹

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 6: 10–12).

The compound growth rate of evil is temporary. Such growth is always brought into judgment by God. The “positive feedback” of growth is always overturned by the “negative feedback” of judgment — sometimes overnight, as in the case of Babylon when it fell to the Medo-Persian Empire (Dan. 5). *The compound growth rate of righteousness is long term.* More than this: it is perpetual. God shows mercy to thousands of generations, meaning throughout history and (symbolically) beyond history. But this growth process does include history; generations are historical phenomena. There can be intermittent departures from faith by God's covenant people. This interrupts the growth process. But the contrast is between a *brief period* of three or four unrighteous generations and a *stupendously long period* of mercy to those who love God and keep His commandments. The magnitude of the growth period of mercy and mercy's works is enormous, compared with the growth period of evil. This fact points to comprehensive dominion by God's people in history. It points to the fulfilment of the dominion covenant in history.

(a) Exponential Righteousness

The implication should be obvious: *the capital base of righteous-*

38. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 40

39. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 15.

ness will grow to fill the earth over time. Even a little growth, if compounded over a long enough period of time, produces astronomically large results—so large, in fact, that exponential growth points to an eventual final judgment and an end to time, with its cursed, scarce creation.⁴⁰ The righteous widow's two mites (Luke 21:2–4), if invested at 1% per annum over a thousand generations, would be worth more than all the wealth on earth. In other words, the concept of “a thousand generations” is symbolic; it means everything there is, a total victory for righteousness. Furthermore, this victory is no overnight affair; it comes as all growth processes come for a society: step by step, line upon line, here a little, there a little.

The sheer magnitude of righteousness' compounding capital base will inescapably overcome the feeble capital structure of iniquity, as surely as God's army will overcome Satan's. Men who work diligently and faithfully in terms of God's law can legitimately have confidence in the snowball effect of their efforts. There can be a comparable snowball effect for rebellious societies, but rebellion's snowball eventually is melted by the heat of God's fury. Four generations of compounding—even “leveraged” compounding—cannot match a thousand generations of compounding.

(b) Kingdoms: Simultaneously Internal and External

It is difficult to interpret Exodus 20:4–6 in terms of the idea that Satan's kingdom grows externally, but God's kingdom grows only internally. If Satan's kingdom is essentially external and cultural, rather than both internal (“spiritual”) and external, then why did Satan demand that Jesus worship him? On the other hand, if God's kingdom is essentially internal (“spiritual”) and not also external and cultural, then why does He demand visible conformity to His commandments? Even more important, why does God promise external blessings to those who conform themselves to his law (Deut. 8:1–13),⁴¹ and warn against the lure of the religion of autonomous man when those blessings tempt men to forget God (Deut. 8:14–17)?⁴² Why should God tell His people not to worship graven images, and then immediately thereafter list all the external blessings—agricultural and military blessings, plus peace—that they can confidently expect if they obey this command-

40. Chapter 17; cf. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, p. 237.

41. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 14.

42. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

ment (Lev. 26:1–12)? The answer should be obvious. *Both kingdoms are simultaneously internal (“spiritual”) and external*; the spirit and the flesh are interconnected. Both kingdoms operate in the supernatural realm and in the temporal realm. Both seek dominion over the creation. Both have periods of growth, internally and externally. But Satan’s kingdom is cut down early, “in the midst of its prime,” so to speak, just as Jesus was cut off in the midst of His prime, and the animals sacrificed in the Old Testament were cut off in the midst of their prime,⁴³ so that God’s kingdom might have long life and not suffer the judgment of Satan’s kingdom.

The comparative growth rates are, of course, symbolic. Egypt’s case was literal, and the Hebrews should have recognized the power of God to bring His word to pass. Nevertheless, some pagan societies have gone on in their rebellion far longer than four generations. The Roman Empire is one historical example, although the Pax Romana lasted less than two centuries before the Empire began to be subjected to major crises. The point is, *compared to the long-term growth of God’s kingdom, in time and on earth as well as beyond the grave, Satan’s earthly kingdoms are short-lived*. The mercy that God shows to pagan kingdoms by not bringing judgment on them the moment they transgress His law is ultimately a form of judgment. They receive common grace, meaning an unmerited and temporary gift of an extension of time without judgment, but this only increases the magnitude of the eventual wrath of God.

We should not expect to see Satan’s kingdom cut down overnight in the future, after having attained a position of universal dominion. The process of growth for Satan’s kingdom is not continuous. The “negative feedback” phenomenon of external judgment repeatedly cuts back the growth of Satan’s external dominion long before it can achieve worldwide dominion. These verses point to a far different future: the steady growth of Christ’s kingdom as the *leaven of righteousness* overwhelms and replaces the God-hindered leaven of Satan’s kingdom.⁴⁴

43. Young turtledoves or young pigeons (Lev. 5:7), young bullocks (Ex. 29:1; Num. 28:11, 19), a three-year-old heifer, goat, and ram (Gen. 15:9), a virgin heifer which has never been yoked (Deut. 21:3), and the archetype of all sacrifices, the lamb (Gen. 22:7; Ex. 12:3–5; etc.).

44. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 283–92.

(c) The Gambler

Satan's kingdom manifests itself intermittently during temporary periods of exceedingly rapid growth, but this growth cannot be sustained for "a thousand generations." The growth rate of Satan's kingdom is the growth rate of the gambler who has a string of successful bets, or the highly leveraged (indebted) investor who predicts the market accurately for a time and multiplies his wealth with borrowed money. Such growth is rapid, but it cannot be sustained. It is the growth rate of a person who has *limited time*, and who must make his fortune in one lifetime. He requires rapid growth, for he has no faith in long-term growth over many generations. The compound growth rate must be high, and it must be rapid, for it will not last for long.

Paganism and gambling are closely linked, especially in periods of declining social order. Rushdoony writes: "Gambling comes to have a religious prominence and passion in the minds of men, so that it is more than a mere pastime: it is a hope for life. . . . The gambler denies implicitly that the universe is under law; he insists that 'all life is a gamble' and a falling brick can kill you, and totally meaningless events always surround you, because chance, not God, is ultimate. Since chance, not God, rules the universe, causality does not prevail. It is therefore possible to get something for nothing, and the gambler, knowing what the odds are, nevertheless expects chance to overrule law and enrich him."⁴⁵ The gambler believes in law-overcoming chance, or luck. Such an outlook was dominant during the Roman Empire, and it destroyed the foundations of classical civilization.⁴⁶

Such an outlook is also the ideology of the revolutionary. Faith in the great revolutionary discontinuous event, the run of successful bets, or the overnight "killing" in the market marks *the short-run view of fallen man*.⁴⁷ Continuity holds no promise of victory for him, for he

45. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), p. 217. (<http://bit.ly/rjrpgap>)

46. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957), p. 159. (<http://bit.ly/cnccacc>). Reprinted by Liberty Fund.

47. Karl Marx, who spent most of his life in self-imposed poverty, inherited a fortune in 1864. As the money was being sent in chunks, Marx invested in the stock market. He wrote to Engels on July 15: "If I had the money during the last ten days, I would have been able to make a good deal on the stock exchange. The time has come now when with wit and very little money one can make a killing in London." As his biographer reports, a year later he was again begging for money from Engels. Robert Payne, *Marx* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), p. 353. Marx was supported entirely by Engels, a successful businessman, from the early 1870s until his death in 1883.

knows that *time and continuity are his great enemies*. The run of luck for a gambler cannot hold; the law of averages (statistical continuity) eventually reasserts itself. Similarly, the traditions and habits of men (social and ethical continuity) thwart the revolutionary; if the revolutionaries cannot capture the seats of central power overnight, in a top-down transfer of power to the newly captured central government, they fear that all will be lost.⁴⁸

Even a successful revolution is threatened by institutional continuity: lethargy, corruption, bureaucracy. This was the fate of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ To overcome these results, Communists argued for the necessity of continual revolutions. Trotsky⁵⁰ and Mao⁵¹ both called for a continuing series of revolutions, echoing the instruction given to Communist proletarians by Karl Marx in 1850: “Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence.”⁵² Billington traced the idea back to the Bavarian Illuminati.⁵³ Thomas Jefferson used similar language: “What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants. It is its natural manure.”⁵⁴ He was writing of Daniel Shays’ rebel-

Engels, had sent him money for decades. In contrast to Marx’s profligate, gambling ways was his uncle, Lion Philips, who despised his nephew. Philips’ grandsons founded the Philips Company, which is still one of the largest manufacturing companies in Europe. In the United States, it is known as the North American Philips Company, or Norelco.

48. Lenin wrote a secret message from his hiding place to the Bolshevik Central Committee on Oct. 8, 1917, a few days before the Communists captured Russia. It outlined the tactics for the capture of power. He ended his letter with these words: “The success of both the Russian and the world revolution depends on two or three days’ fighting.” “Advice of an Onlooker,” in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Lenin Anthology* (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 414.

49. Konstantin Simis, USSR: *The Corrupt Society: The Secret World of Soviet Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982); Michael Voslensky, *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984).

50. *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*, ed. Isaac Deutscher (New York: Dell, 1964).

51. “Revolution was the proper occupation of the masses, Mao believed, for only through perpetual revolution could he realize his vision of an egalitarian collective society.” Dennis Bloodworth, *The Messiah and the Mandarins: Mao Tse-tung and the Ironies of Power* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), p. 187.

52. Marx, “Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League” (1850), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1969] 1977), I, p. 185. A similar call was made by Tolstoy: “. . . the only revolution is the one that never stops.” Cited by Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, p. 417.

53. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, p. 597, note 309.

54. Jefferson to William S. Smith, Nov. 13, 1787, from Paris; in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Library Classics of America, 1984), p. 911.

lion (1786–87), the reaction against which became one of the main motivations of the Constitutional convention in 1787.⁵⁵ Yet here was Jefferson, writing: “God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion.”

God’s people, on the contrary, should have faith in both time and continuity.⁵⁶ God governs both. The steady efforts of the godly man accomplish much. God’s Word does not return to Him void (Isa. 55: 11). Through the covenantal community, over time, each man’s efforts are multiplied for “thousands of generations.” The regenerate person should expect a long-term return from his efforts: the establishment and steady expansion of the kingdom of God, in time and on earth, and then beyond the grave.

Conclusion

The prohibition against graven images is fundamentally a prohibition against man’s worshipping the works of man. When man worships an image created by man, he does not worship the Creator, whose image man is. He is worshipping something less than man. All men should see this, but only regenerate men do. The *prohibition of graven images* should therefore be understood as the *repudiation of humanism* (Ex. 20:4). All forms of *idolatry* are ultimately variations of *self-worship*, for it is man, as a self-proclaimed sovereign being, who asserts the right to choose whom he will worship in place of God. Man, the sovereign, decides.

Men are called to exercise dominion over all creatures, but ethically rebellious men worship images of creatures (Rom. 1:22).⁵⁷ Sometimes these images are graven images; sometimes they are mirror images. In either case, men bow down to the creation. What appears to be *an act of human autonomy*—worshipping the creation of one’s own hands—is ultimately *an act of subordination to the dark one* who is supposed to be judged by men, not worshipped by men, and who will be judged by God’s people (I Cor. 6:3).

The fulfillment of the dominion covenant is based on simultan-

55. Gary North, *Conspiracy in Philadelphia: Origins of the United States Constitution* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Dominion Educational Ministries, Inc., 2004), Appendix B. (<http://GaryNorth.com/philadelphia.pdf>)

56. Chapter 12.

57. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

eous *subordination and rulership*.⁵⁸ Men are under God and over the creation. There is no escape from the governing principle of subordination and fulfillment. It is an inescapable concept. The questions are: To whom will men be ethically subordinate, and over what will they exercise dominion? Whose ethical yoke will men wear: Christ's or Satan's? *Men cannot operate without an ethical yoke*. Whose law-order will they uphold and conform themselves to?

When men worship the creature, including man, they are worshipping Satan, who is temporally and temporarily the most powerful of creatures. *They have adopted a religion of exclusively temporal power*. Supernatural forces may or may not be invoked, but the goal is the same: the acquisition of temporal power. Anton Szandor LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan in the mid-1960s, put it well: "Anyone who pretends to be interested in magic or the occult for reasons other than gaining personal power is the worst kind of hypocrite."⁵⁹ This is the heart and soul of all Baal worship. But Satan's rule is doomed. It can grow in influence culturally for short periods, but ultimately temporal judgment comes, as it came to the Egyptians. The capital investment of the idol-worshippers is eventually squandered, destroyed, or inherited by the faithful.

On the other hand, when men worship God, they place themselves within a covenantal framework that is guaranteed for "thousands of generations." They can take dominion over the external realm because they operate in terms of God's tool of dominion, His law. Time and continuity are not the enemies of God's people, for long-term growth eventually brings prosperity to the spiritual, covenantal heirs of the faithful. The *continuity of faith* over time brings the *continuity of expansion* over time, spiritually and culturally.

Men are to seek covenantal dominion, not autonomous power. Dominion comes through obedience to God. God possesses ultimate authority. Man cannot escape being subordinate to something ultimate, and this ultimate something is God. By refusing to make graven images, the ancient Hebrews ritually affirmed that their covenantal yoke was imposed by God, not by themselves.

To whom will a man or society be subordinate: God or Satan? Will a man become part of God's hierarchy or, as C. S. Lewis puts it in his *Screwtape Letters*, part of Satan's "lowerarchy"? Whose covenantal yoke will men wear, Christ's or Satan's? There is no escape from yokes;

58. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 8.

59. Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon, 1972), p. 51.

the question is: Whose? The issue of hierarchy and obedience is crucial in this commandment. God commands men to worship Him, and not to attempt to escape subordination to Him by seeking autonomy. Worshipping anything other than God is an affirmation of autonomy, for man autonomously determines for himself that he will worship something other than God. The second commandment prohibits man from setting up any visible manifestations of a representative of any supernatural authority other than God.

23

LAWFUL TITLE

Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain (Ex. 20:7).

The theocentric principle here is God's control over the use of His name. This commandment asserts a property right. This commandment parallels the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." Both are aspects of point three of the biblical covenant model: boundaries.¹

A. God's Name and God's Covenant

The covenant is a systematic judicial arrangement. The name of God is at the center of the covenant. To deny that God is the God of the patriarchs, Moses, and the conquest of Canaan is to deny His name. When studying the name of God, it is safest to begin where God begins: with what God says about who He is.

1. Sovereignty

God has a name. He is the source of His name. Covenantally speaking, He is the owner of His name because He is absolutely sovereign. Theologians speak of the *aseity* of God. This means that God is *self-existent*. So rare is this concept today that standard dictionaries sometimes do not include the word.

When Moses asked God who he should say had sent him to the Israelites, God replied, "I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Ex. 3:14–15). (The Hebrew can also be translated, "I will be who I will be.") We learn, first, that He is the self-defining God: "I am." Second, we learn that He is the God of Israel's history. So, He is eternal, yet He enters into history. That is, He is both transcendent and immanent. This is point one of the biblical covenant model.²

Any creature who claims to be the Creator has violated the third commandment. Any agent of such a usurper has identified himself as an interloper. He has profaned God's name. The original name violation was the serpent's.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (Gen. 3:1).

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4–5).

He implied that God's Word is unreliable. He implied that God was envious of Adam and Eve, withholding what was legitimately theirs. The serpent asserted God's ulterior motive: to deny to Adam and Eve their ability right to become gods, knowing good and evil. In other words, the serpent insisted that God is not who He said He is, and what He said would happen to them for violating His command would not happen. This was false testimony about the Creator God who defines Himself and defines reality, rendering judgment on it, both in history and at the final day. "Hath God said?" is the age-old false rhetorical question of covenantal rebels.

Another example of name violation is Ben-hadad's, the Syrian king, whose forces had been defeated by the Northern Kingdom, whose king was the monstrous Ahab. Ben-hadad had even worse counsellors than Ahab had.

And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his

2. Sutton, ch. 1; North, ch. 1.

place, and put captains in their rooms: And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so (I Kings 20:23–25).

Ben-hadad invaded again, and again he was defeated. God defended His name and His authority as the universal God, not a god of the local hills. He was willing to let a low-life scoundrel like Ahab have the military victory in preference to Ben-hadad's having the victory in the name of another god. The infraction of the Syrian counsellors was profanity: false testimony about the nature and character of God. Their profanity was not a verbal curse. It had to do with a theological infraction: claiming that God is not who He said He is.

2. Hierarchy

Title sometimes conveys the sense of *office*. We identify a high official by the title he possesses in the organization. It is a means of *ranking*. "Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven" (Ps. 148:13). Christians affirm: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. 2:10). Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant model.

Possessing lawful title His own name, God identified Himself with the Israelites. God told Moses, "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Ex. 4:22–23). The Israelites owed God worship. This is what Pharaoh denied.

Another aspect of point two is *representation*. The Israelites would represent God to the nations. The Israelites had the right—in fact, the covenantal obligation—to identify their names with His. By the time God gave the Israelites His law, the Canaanites knew the connection between the Israelites and God (Josh. 2:9–11).

3. Boundaries

Point three involves boundaries or limits on what man can lawfully do. There is a sacred boundary around God and His name. When Moses came before the burning bush, God said: "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest

is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Ex. 3:5–6). The ground itself was sacred because of its proximity to a theophany of God. God therefore told Moses to remove his shoes. Next, God explicitly identified Himself with the patriarchs. Then He identified Himself with the Israelites. “And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows” (v. 7).

God was about to take back His people from Pharaoh, who had stolen them and placed them in bondage. “And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Ex. 6:7).

Pharaoh had claimed to be the owner of Israel-Jacob. In doing so, he violated God’s property. He also violated God’s title as the sovereign Lord over Israel. It was an assertion of sovereignty. This was the dividing issue of the exodus.³

God’s revealed law is an aspect of dominion. God’s revealed laws are to serve as a way to evangelize covenant-breakers. Keeping the law is an aspect of honoring the name of God among the nations.

But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:4–8).⁴

Moses gave the law to Israel in preparation for the invasion and conquest of Canaan. When the third generation refused to invade (Num. 14), God’s curse on them was four decades of their wandering in the wilderness. When it was time for the fourth generation to invade, Moses recapitulated the law: Deuteronomy. Biblical law is an as-

3. Part 1.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

pect of dominion.

The third commandment establishes that God possesses title to His name. Title here refers to property. We say that the owner of property possesses *lawful title* to the property. His name is on the certificate of ownership. This ownership is limited to whatever is described in the title. The property has *boundaries*. We also speak of *entitlement*. A person is owed something because he has a legal right to it. Such a person is *entitled* to something. For example, God is entitled to praise, based on His name. "Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven" (Ps. 148:13).

4. Oath

The males of Israel were marked by circumcision: point four, the oath sign.⁵ This was a form of branding. God's mark was on them. Their flesh testified to the nation they belonged to. This branding was crucial for the Abrahamic Covenant. It was a sign of God's ownership of them. Yet this was specifically a covenant mark: a negative sanction brought against the flesh.

When ownership is legally established, there must be witnesses to confirm possession of title. Strict monotheism has no doctrine of original witnesses. Christianity does. There are two witnesses to testify to the ownership rights of each individual owner. "And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances" (Jer. 32:10).

Usually, the commentators focus on prohibited oaths as the central issue in this commandment. This would place it under point four. But it appears under point three. This has greatly influenced my exposition of the commandment.

5. Continuity

We say that title can be passed to a new owner. That is, the property described in the certificate of ownership continues to exist. Its boundaries do not change because of the change of ownership. The title changes. In the case of God's name, there is no change of title. In this case, the title is the property. Both the title and the property are

5. On circumcision as an oath sign, see Meredith G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963).

continuous. "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

God owned the land of Canaan. He had passed title in Abraham's day to the fourth generation. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full (Gen. 15:16). Yet this extension of God's kingdom could be maintained only by Israel's obedience to God's revealed law: ethics, point three. "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:19–20).⁶ This is the covenantal basis of the command not to take God's name in vain.

B. To Take or Misuse

The key verb in the passage is the Hebrew word for "take." Unfortunately for expositors, it is one of the most frequently used words in the Old Testament, and it is used in about 45 different ways. This has led to considerable confusion on the part of commentators.

I believe that the King James Version's translators were correct in selecting "take" to translate the word. To take something is to remove it from its owner's immediate control. This transfer can be according to the terms of a contract between two individuals, one of whom is the owner, or it can be a violation of the owner's property right.

The second commandment is about hierarchy. Man is not to bow down to any god other than the God who delivered the Israelites out of bondage. In this sense, the second commandment re-affirms the principle of stewardship. God is over man. Man is accountable to God.

The third commandment extends the second commandment's principle of delegation. Because this commandment is presented as a prohibition, it implicitly affirms an authorization. The illegitimate use of God's name by man implies a legitimate use of God's name by man. Man is a steward and a priest. God delegates the use of His name to men. But, as with all other aspects of this delegated sovereignty, there are stipulations, meaning terms of use. The third commandment lays down the law of the covenant regarding God's name. It must not be misused. The translators selected "vain" as the modifier.

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

What does the Hebrew word that is translated as “vain” really mean? Generally, it refers to something that is false. Later, in the section in Exodus on the case laws, we read: “Thou shalt not raise a **false** report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness” (Ex. 23:1). Even more to the point, in the section of Deuteronomy that re-states the Ten Commandments, the ninth commandment uses the Hebrew word for “vain”: “Neither shalt thou bear **false** witness against thy neighbour” (Deut. 5:20). Isaiah warned the people regarding the nation: “None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak **lies**; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity” (Isa. 59:4). Hosea said, “They have spoken words, swearing **falsely** in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field” (Hosea 10:4).

This commandment prohibits the deliberate misuse of God’s name in any formal declaration. The transgression seems to contain an element of deception, something that pays the violator to promote falsehood by using God’s name. The commentators have not agreed on the nature of this declaration. In fact, most of them have not even mentioned it. Another issue fascinates them: profanity.

C. Profanity

Because of a tradition of biblical exposition going back for many centuries, this law is usually interpreted as the misuse of God’s name in a verbal oath. It is usually equated with obscenity: a verbal violation of social standards. But profanity is different from obscenity. It has to do with an oath. It is an oath in a formal sense: a self-maledictory oath.

Most commentators say little about this law, and when they do, they focus on swearing, not in the sense of a false oath in a court, but in the sense of profanity. There is a sense in which profanity does apply to such language, but the commentators rarely explain the underlying meaning of profanity. As I discuss at length in the full version of my commentary on Leviticus, *profanity is a boundary violation of a sacred object or sacred space*. It is the misuse of something holy in the sense of holiness as something sacred.⁷ God’s name is surely sacred. So, the misuse of God’s name in cursing is a form of profanity. But it is not the only one. Theologically, it is not the main one.

A verbal curse is an aspect of the oath: point four of the biblical

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: The Economics of Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

covenant model. The oath is associated with sanctions: specifically, the *self-maledictory oath* of a covenant. An ordained covenantal agent of a local church in an excommunication lawfully curses another person. He calls down God's negative sanctions on the excommunicant. This is the meaning of a covenantal curse. This is not profanity.

Profanity's words may parallel a legitimate verbal oath, but it is performed unlawfully, outside of formal excommunication. The problem with this definition of profanity is that it, too, is associated with point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions. The commentators usually focus on this narrowly circumscribed aspect of profanity. The common verbal habit of using God's name to emphasize a point is a misuse of God's name. The question here is this: Why is the third commandment, which has to do with boundaries, almost universally associated by the commentators with the judicial issue that point four of the biblical covenant model is concerned with, *oath*?

Profanity in the context of the third commandment explicitly has to do with *false testimony*. The text does not mention a curse as an aspect of profanity, nor does it mention loose language. The commentators have ignored this for centuries. They write as if this commandment has as its focus intemperate language rather than false language.

Profaning the name of God has to do far more with disobedience in general than with verbal oaths. "Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and do them: I am the LORD. Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD which hallow you, That brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD" (Lev. 22:31–33). Under the Mosaic Covenant, profanity also had to do with offering false sacrifices.

And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD (Lev. 18:21).

They [priests] shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy (Lev. 21:6).

In the first edition of this book, I followed Rushdoony's exposition in developing my points regarding contracts. He, too, focuses on the oath. Unlike most commentators, he focuses mainly on the oath in its

covenantal sense, not its profanity sense.⁸ He devotes only a few pages to profanity⁹ and blasphemy.¹⁰ What I did not see in 1985, when I wrote this book, was that point three of the five-point covenant model is concerned with *God's name as a boundary* rather than as an oath confirmation or violation. I made the connection between oath-bound covenants and promise-bound contracts. A covenant is not a contract, I argued, because of the self-maledictory aspect of the covenant. This is true enough, but it is not the focus of this commandment. It is an implication of the fourth point of the biblical covenant model, not the third.

I also went into detail about profanity. Because I had not yet written my exposition of Leviticus 5:14–19, which deals with the sacred, the profane, and the common, I did not recognize in 1985 the extent to which the third commandment refers to a boundary violation, i.e., the profaning of God's name. But this is profanity in the sense of a falsehood rather than in the sense of an invocation of God's name as a means of harnessing power, either directly from God directly or through an illegitimate empowering of daily language.

D. Covenants and Contracts

How does the third commandment relate to economics? By way of the covenant. The covenant is a judicial relationship between God and men, which is based on a self-maledictory oath before God. Men promise to obey God's stipulations as the sign of their covenantal faithfulness.

1. Higher Sovereignty

A covenant testifies to the existence of a higher sovereignty. Biblically sanctioned self-maledictory oaths are formally administered by a God-ordained subordinate sovereignty, which possesses more than a contractual sovereignty: church, state, or family. It possesses covenantal sovereignty. This is why the eighteenth-century Enlightenment's explanations of the origins of civil government by the so-called social contract theorists are categorically incorrect. The three governments ordained by God—ecclesiastical, civil, and family—were not the

8. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 111–224.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–11.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 124–27.

product of a hypothetical historical social contract among sovereign individuals. They were the covenantal creations of the Creator God. They are not organizations that were created by the equivalent of business contracts.

There is always a tendency for Satan to imitate God. Satan establishes pseudo-covenants, just as he establishes pseudo-churches. Pseudo-covenants include such pagan associations as crime syndicates and secret societies. These are seen by their members as brotherhoods. They are oath-bound associations, with negative physical sanctions for oath-breakers.

A contract is analogous to a covenant, but without a self-maledictory oath before God. *This is a fundamental distinction between contracts and covenants.* A contract is made between individuals or organizations on the basis of mutual self-interest. So is a covenant. The terms of a contract are governed by the written and customary laws of the civil government. So is a covenant. A contract may or may not be enforceable in civil courts. So is a covenant. But a private contract does not legitimately involve the use of a self-maledictory oath, implicitly or explicitly, since no God-ordained sovereign institution has initially bound the parties by means of such an oath. Oaths may be required in the future by a sovereign government if a dispute concerning the terms of the covenant or the performance of the contracting parties drives the antagonists into civil court. Originally, however, the two contracting parties are not in possession of God's grant of monopoly authority. A business is not institutionally sovereign in the way that the church or civil government is.

This absence of an oath keeps the contract out of the jurisdiction of point four. A contract is more a matter of name than oath. It is a matter of stipulations more than sanctions. This is what I failed to recognize in the first edition of this book.¹¹

2. *The Business Contract*

Men can make better use of their scarce economic resources by co-operating in the activities of production. The idea behind a business contract is that such co-operation involves costs, especially unknown future costs. A contract reduces uncertainty by formalizing

11. Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), ch. 3: "Oaths, Covenants, and Contracts." (<http://bit.ly/gnsinai>)

various responsibilities of the co-operating entrepreneurs. *A contract therefore is a cost-reduction device.* Men learn to trust one another to fulfill the terms of the contract. Self-government becomes easier, since everyone has a clearer idea of what is expected from him and from others who are parties to the contract. This greater certainty of performance frees up resources that would otherwise have to be expended in policing the venture.

The contract is signed. Two or more people put their names on the contract. This identifies them as people who have made promises. A signer is responsible for the performance of his word. To enter into a contract with a plan to perform otherwise than stipulated in the contract is a form of fraud.

When God's name is on an individual because of his confession and the mark of the covenant, God's reputation is at stake. This is why people who acknowledge their position as covenant-keepers have an obligation not to misuse God's name. It is not merely that they avoid profane language. It is that they do not do in the name of God what will bring a bad reputation on God.

In the Old Testament, no case stands out more clearly of the misuse of God's name than David's adultery and his murder of the man who could have brought charges against him, Uriah the Hittite. Nathan the prophet told David this: "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (II Sam. 12:14). The enemies did not blaspheme by calling David an evil man. Blasphemy is a violation of God's name. In this case, it meant attributing to God the evil behavior of the king who represented Him.

David did this, not as a businessman, but as a king. This was the misuse of the covenantal office of king. His penalty was very great. But, analogously, a corrupt businessman who openly places himself under the authority of a church, and then commits deliberate fraud by means of the trust people have in him as a man of God, has taken the name of the Lord in vain.

A contract may have penalties for non-performance written into it. These are analogous to, but not identical to, the self-maledictory aspect of a covenant. The contract cannot legitimately call upon God to uphold directly the terms of the contract. Depending on circumstances, the ultimate earthly enforcing agency may be the civil government, or an agreed-upon arbitration organization, or even the church

(I Cor. 6:4),¹² but a truly sovereign agency cannot delegate its sovereignty in advance without thereby transferring its character as a sovereign agency to the recipient. For example, the transfer of the seal of government involves also the transfer of governmental sovereignty to the recipient. But this transforms the contract-making ability of the recipient organization into a covenant-making ability.

3. From "Brotherhood" to "Otherhood"

This is a phrase adopted by the sociologist-historian Benjamin Nelson.¹³ He used the so-called "Weber thesis"¹⁴ to provide an interpretation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The historical documentation and debates surrounding this thesis are not the main issue at this point.¹⁵ What is important is the concept of the non-covenantal voluntary association. The brotherhood is pseudo-covenantal, but in primitive societies, it sometimes function as a civil government. The otherhood is contractual.

As the West became increasingly Christian during the Middle Ages, men could deal with each other because they belonged to a universal church. Christian associations steadily replaced pagan brotherhoods and tribes. The medieval world was a world of mutualloyalties, often written down. Feudal contracts were military and civil covenants, however. What steadily replaced these covenants was the contract, especially the business contract.

The Protestant Reformation destroyed the ecclesiastical unity of the medieval world, but it did not destroy trade. On the contrary, trade increased.¹⁶ Men who did not share membership in a common church or a common city could still truck and barter with each other, even in the absence of a universal currency, although gold coins minted by the Italian city-states circulated increasingly, especially after 1500. Trade

12. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

13. Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

14. The Protestant ethic theses of Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic of the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905–6).

15. Gary North, "The 'Protestant Ethic' Hypothesis," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976).

16. On the growth of commerce in this period, see the multi-volume study by the French historian, Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), and his earlier work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, [1966] 1973).

was fostered by men's adoption of contracts which partially substituted society for the destruction of a common church covenant.

Consider the benefits provided by the contract. Men whose ends are radically different, or even opposed, can trade in the market place in order to capture the benefits of the division of labor. Because the contract spells out mutual obligations, men can make better plans concerning the future. A contract, because it is not a covenantal document, can bring together people of varying religious beliefs and practices. The division of labor expands, and so does specialization. Per capita output increases. Had men been limited to exchanges within the covenanted "brotherhood," their markets would have remained small. The division of labor is limited by the extent of the market.¹⁷ Therefore, their per capita wealth would have remained small. Contracts allow men to exchange with members of an "otherhood."

E. Deceptive Promises

Consider a person who agrees to perform a specified service for a specified price. "You can count on me. My word is my bond. I agree to perform the service." But what if he escalates his rhetoric? What if he says this? "I am absolutely trustworthy. I swear on the Bible that I will fulfill the terms of our agreement. But I want payment in advance."

He has sworn on the Bible. So what? If he is a God-fearing man, he will avoid such covenant-related rituals as a misuse of God's name. It violates God's property right in His own name in the interest of invoking God's authority. But if the person is a deceiver, he may very well use such a phrase. The Bible becomes just another a tool in his tool kit of deceptive techniques. He enlists God's name, by implication, in this deception. He is able to extract money in advance because the buyer believes that the seller will be too afraid not to perform the promised service. Or perhaps the use of religious-sounding language calmed the buyer into believing that this is a man familiar with God's blessings. In any case, vaguely religious and ignorant people can become victims of those who take the name of God in vain.

Such language involves *fraud*. A person poses as God-fearing, yet his very language belies his claim. But a theologically ignorant person is deceived. This is a recapitulation of Satan's temptation of Eve in the garden. He used God's name and religious-sounding language in order to calm Eve's sense of insecurity. Because of the misleading use of lan-

17. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), ch. 3.

guage, Eve believed that her risks were lower than they really were. In business contracts, the misuse of religious language accomplishes the same thing: a reduction in the buyer's perceived risk. The deal seems less risky than it really is because of the seller's use of religious language, at least less risky in the mind of the superstitious or ignorant person who is unfamiliar with the third commandment.

A covenant-keeper should be a lower-risk employee than a covenant-breaker. He believes in God. He believes that God's Word is reliable and sure. He performs his agreed-upon tasks on time and at the level of quality as is customary in his profession, and perhaps above that level. He is not supposed to be an inefficient or unreliable employee. He is supposed to be doing all things for the glory of God, performing his tasks of the dominion covenant.

A Christian's word should be worth more in the marketplace than other men's words. If this is not a characteristic feature of Christian service, then there is a glaring deficiency in the church's level of instruction and discipline. When a Christian says "yea," then the other person can rely on that "yea." The other person can make a budget for the future that includes predictable performance on the part of his Christian suppliers of goods and services. He can more accurately plan for the future. This makes his plans less expensive. There is therefore less waste in the economy. God's resources are allocated more efficiently. In short, there should be less risk when we rely upon the promises of Christians.

Christians since New Testament times have borne the name of Christ (Acts 11:26). They say, "I am of Christ." This is not a violation of the third commandment. But if they attempt to create a market in terms of the name of Christ, they must be ready to sacrifice wealth in order to honor that name. To use God's name explicitly in commercial ventures requires above-average performance, what some have called "going the extra mile." To swear to a contract, verbal or written, explicitly by God's name, is a violation of the third commandment.

Conclusion

The prohibition against taking the name of God in vain has implications for several areas: civil, familial, and ecclesiastical covenants; private contracts, both business and associational (voluntary societies); public language and therefore public law; and literature. The essence of the prohibition is the question of ultimate sovereignty. Who is sov-

ereign: God, man, or rival gods?

A covenant is not a contract. It rests on higher authority, and it invokes a greater penalty for non-fulfillment of terms. Therefore, to swear by God or any aspect of the creation in a contractual situation is to use God's name in vain. To do this is to create the illusion of more reliable performance because of the presence, implicit or explicit, of a pseudo-self-maledictory oath. This involves deception, and should be penalized by civil statutes governing fraud.

These biblical distinctions between covenants and contracts necessarily involve a rejection of any social contract theory of civil (or any other) government. Government is of God, not of men. Only God, as Creator, has absolutely sovereign authority and power. Authority, as distinguished from power, is lawfully delegated sovereignty. Its model is what theologians refer to as the *economical Trinity*: the hierarchy of authority and responsibility of the Son to the Father and of the Holy Spirit to both the Father and the Son—the Filioque clause¹⁸—in their relationships to men. By upholding the sanctity of God's name, all governments thereby testify to this subordination. One aspect of this upholding is the enforcement of the civil law against the misuse of God's name. The practical problem is to identify those infractions that are a matter of civil law, such as blasphemy and some forms of cursing.

With respect to covenants, the violation of God's name in open verbal profanity is a matter of civil law, according to the Bible. The blasphemer in Leviticus had to be executed. "And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death" (Lev. 24:16). But with respect to economic crimes in which the reputation of God is at stake, civil laws governing fraud are sufficient.

This is additional evidence for the jusicial and conceptual distinction between covenants and contracts. A covenant is established through a self-maledictory oath before God, with God as the sanctioning agent. A contract is not judicially established by a covenantal oath. It is based on mutual promises that are sealed by the names of the parties to the agreement. A violation of a contract does not bring into

18. The Filioque clause identifies the Holy Spirit, "who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." It was included in the Council of Toledo (589). R. J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998), pp. 99–100. (<http://bit.ly/rjrfs0>)

play a self-maledictory oath before God. A contractual violation can be settled through a lawsuit initiated by the injured party or parties. It is not a capital crime.

A detailed study of the third commandment would break down the commandment into five parts, corresponding to the biblical covenant model. The most detailed section would be point four: oath and sanctions, i.e., curses in a covenantal sense primarily—the invocation of supernatural power—and secondarily as verbal profanity. Verbal profanity is the traditional focus of the commentators on the third commandment. But in the context of the Ten Commandments, the third commandment's primary implication has to do with the misuse of God's name in the sense of His name as a boundary. It is an illicit attempt to use God's name as a kind of brand, in order to further one's goals at the expense of others who are part of a non-covenantal agreement. This is a prohibited appropriation of a property right: God's reputation.

24

REST AND DOMINION

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8–11).

The theocentric meaning of this law is the positive sanction of rest in God. It is grounded in the original six-one pattern of God's creation of the universe. Here, the basis of the sabbath is said to be God's week of creation. In Deuteronomy, the reason given is Israel's liberation from the tyranny of Egypt, where the Israelites were worked unmercifully (Deut. 5:15).

A. A Major Problem for Bible Commentators

We come now to one of the most difficult of all exegetical and application problems in the Bible: the question of the meaning and enforcement of the sabbath. In economic affairs, only the proper interpretation and application of the tithe principle are equally as difficult and controversial.¹ These economic issues involve the question of what man is required to forfeit in order to honor God: time and money.

Several questions must be considered. First, what is the meaning of "rest"? Second, what is the meaning of "sabbath"? Third, is the Lord's day (Firstday) the same as the sabbath (Seventhday)? Fourth, what was the focus of the sabbath in Old Testament times: rest or worship or

1. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

both? Fifth, how extensive were the restrictions against working in Old Testament times? Sixth, are these same restrictions still required by God in New Testament times? Seventh, who or what agency is to enforce sabbath requirements in New Testament times? In short, where is the *locus of sovereignty* for sabbath enforcement? Eighth, if the Old Testament's prohibitions had been enforced throughout the history of the West, could the modern, industrialized West ever have come into existence?

In order to keep this introductory chapter sufficiently short and uncluttered with technical problems, I have decided to add an appendix on the economics of sabbath-keeping. I cover questions four through eight in Appendix D. In this chapter, I devote more space to the meaning of rest and its relationship with dominion, and secondarily, the problem of the sabbath in New Testament times. I argue here that the *sabbath principle* is related closely to *communion with God*, and that both are closely related to *dominion*.

B. Autonomy and Creation

God alone is absolutely sovereign. He is also the Creator. This link between absolute sovereignty and original creation is reflected in man's nature as the image of God. Man is subordinately sovereign and subordinately creative, or we might say, re-creative. He exercises dominion over the creation because he is subordinate to God. He can never be at the top of the pyramid of power. Only God can occupy that position. To attempt to occupy is an attempt to become divine.

When Adam rebelled, he believed that he had the opportunity of becoming as God, knowing (determining) good and evil (Gen. 3:5). His ethical rebellion was an assertion of human autonomy, a conscious decision to substitute his own authority and judgment for God's. Was Adam's word sovereign, or was God's?

That single forbidden tree, with its forbidden fruit, was a symbol of Adam's subordination, meaning his lack of original sovereignty. He did not have authority over that one sphere of the creation. Only God possessed absolute authority over everything, including authority over both Adam and that tree. By asserting his right to eat from that tree, Adam was announcing unilaterally the legitimacy of his quest for total power—the power to control anything and possibly even everything, as if he were God. If he could achieve such control, through autonomous knowledge and autonomous power, then God could not fully con-

trol man. Man is therefore truly autonomous and potentially divine, Adam declared by his act of defiance. The sign of his autonomy was his power: the power to eat rebelliously without suffering the predicted consequences. Adam adopted *power religion* in place of God's required *dominion religion*—a dominion process based on ethics.

Adam probably ate of the forbidden tree on that first sabbath. The serpent beguiled Eve (II Cor. 11:3), and Adam listened to his beguiled wife. She was deceived; he was not (I Tim. 2:14). Rather than trying and executing the serpent, thereby passing preliminary judgment against Satan, Adam attempted to render autonomous judgment. By asserting such autonomy, he thereby rendered judgment against God's Word and in favor of the serpent's announced estimation of the low or zero likelihood of God's punishment for Adam's disobedience.

Adam and Eve could have refused to accept Satan's evaluation of the effects of eating from the tree. They could have tried and executed the serpent, and then sat down to eat of the tree of life. This communion meal was postponed by their rebellion and their subsequent ejection from the garden. The celebration of Passover and later the Lord's Supper points to a future meal with God after He pronounces final judgment against sin and Satan's forces, but it also points back to the "meal that might have been."

1. Rest: God's and Man's

Adam's rebellion was linked to the question of the sabbath. God had created the world, including Adam, in six days, and He rested the seventh day. The sabbath day was man's first full day of life. This day began with rest, since God's original creation activity had ended the day before. Man was the capstone of God's creation, the final species to be created, but he was nevertheless under God's sovereignty as a creature. The whole creation, except for one tree, had been delivered into Adam's hand. The day after the sabbath, the "eighth day," meaning the eighth day after God first announced, "Let there be light," Adam was to have gone forth to subdue the earth as God's subordinate.

Rest means something different for God than it means for man. God rested on the seventh day, after His work was over, and after He had pronounced judgment on it, announcing its inherent goodness. For God, rest is a testimony of His absolute independence. He created the world out of nothing. It is dependent on Him; He is in no way de-

pendent on it. For creatures, on the other hand, *rest means subordination*. Rest means that God is absolutely sovereign, and that man is absolutely dependent on God. Man begins with rest, for he is subordinate. God ended with rest, for He is absolutely sovereign.

Adam did not rest in his position of dependence under God. To have accepted the first day of the week as God's gift of rest, to have admitted that the creation was finished, would have meant the acceptance of man's perpetual position as a *re-creative* sovereign, not an originally creative sovereign. It would have meant that Adam had accepted his position as a creature. The restriction placed upon Adam by God meant that divinity is forever closed to man. Adam refused to accept this. *He could not abide in his God-given rest, precisely because it was God-given*. He wanted rest on his own terms. *He wanted rest as an originally creative sovereign*. He wanted his rest at the end of man's week, for God had inaugurated a day of rest at the end of His week.²

2. Resting the Land

On the seventh day, God rested. Adam should also have rested (his first full day). Thus, for one day in seven, the land is to rest. There was to have been no direct personal attention of man or God to the care of the land. The general personal sovereignty of God undergirds all reality, but there was to have been no visible management of the land on that day. It, too, was to have rested. It, too, was to have been free to develop apart from constant direct attention by another. In this sense, nature was analogous to Adam, for God had departed and left him physically alone.

This should have pointed to man that he is not ultimately sovereign over nature. The land continued to operate without man's active supervision. If man rebelled against God, the land would come under a

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6. I have come to the conclusion that Adam sinned on the sabbath, rather than on the day following the sabbath, in contrast to the arguments I presented in the first edition of *Genesis* (1982). I revised this in the second edition of *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (1987). The "eighth-day covering"—the eighth-day circumcision of all Hebrew males (Lev. 12:3) and the eighth-day separation from the animal mother of the firstborn male (Ex. 22:30)—makes sense if we regard the evening of the day as the beginning of the next day. "And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:5b). When God came at the end of the seventh day, He judged them and then covered them, in preparation for their departure from the garden. They would spend the evening and night of the eighth day outside the protection of the garden. Thus, their second full day (God's eighth day) was their first day of labor outside the garden, the curse placed on their assertion of autonomy.

curse, but if Adam remained ethically faithful and enjoyed his rest, the land would suffer no damage from its day of solitude. The forces of nature were never intended to be autonomous from man, but they were nevertheless not entirely dependent on man. This pointed to another source of nature's daily operations: a law-order created by God, which did not require man or God to be physically present for its continued operation.

After the Fall of man, nature was cursed (Gen. 3:17–18).³ The Mosaic law imposed an additional form of sabbath on Israel: Every seventh year, the land was not to be worked, for man was not to do agricultural work (Lev. 25:2–7).⁴ It was called a sabbath of the land. Just as in the case of that first day in the garden, the land was to be free from man's care. This pointed to the sovereignty of God over creation.

In that same year, the law was to be read to the assembled nation (Deut. 31:10–13).⁵ All debts of Hebrews were canceled (Deut. 15: 1–10).⁶ All Hebrew slaves (except criminal slaves who were repaying debts, and permanent slaves who had voluntarily covenanted with a family) were to be released (Deut. 15:12–18). Biblical law and freedom go together. They are tied ritually to a sabbath.

C. Defining “Sabbath”

What is the meaning of “sabbath”? Scholars debate this point. The Hebrew term means, at the very least, a cessation from activity. It is an *intermission*. God ceased from the activity of creation on the seventh day, a sign to man that the environment had been delivered to man in a completed form, though not historically developed. Man would henceforth work with this environment to subdue it, but this environment is a gift of God. The first week's seven-day pattern is to be an eternal pattern—a covenantal symbol of man's subordination to God. Man is to labor six days and rest one day. Man's week began with rest. Adam, however, was not content with this pattern, since it began with God's rest from His labors, which implied that man's labors must begin with an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. He wanted to become as God, which meant that he chose to imitate God's week: six

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

6. *Ibid.*, chaps. 36, 37.

days of labor followed by a day of rest. Man would be a creator for six days, and then he would enjoy his rest at the end of the week, after his efforts had been brought to completion by his own hand.⁷ The seventh day of rest would be a man-made sabbath. Man would rest from his autonomous labors.

Adam did not count on God's response to this rebellion: the curse of the ground. He also did not count on the advent of his own mortality, even though God had warned him that he would surely die if he disobeyed. His time on earth was shortened, while his work load was increased. His work was made burdensome, mixed with his own sweat. The ground would supply him with life, but at the same time, his life would be, in effect, poured into the ground. To dust man now returns. Man's rest was taken away; his labor is now cursed. By this curse of the ground and this shortening of man's days, man is made to see that he will never be able to complete his work by himself; *completion requires God's grace*. Without a God-imposed day of rest—without God's re-creating grace, in other words—dominion-driven man would work himself to death: spiritually, culturally, and historically. Without God's grace, Adam was a dead man. He would never achieve rest, not even in the grave, for there is no spiritual rest for the wicked beyond the grave. There is only impotence and incomparable excruciating pain. *The sign of God's grace is the sabbath day*, a promise both of re-creation and the eternal rest to come.

7. Meredith Kline wrote: "For on the seventh day God rested from his work of creation, and this Sabbath of God is a royal resting and enthronement on the judgment seat. One indication that God's Sabbath-rest consequent to the finishing of his cosmic house was an enthronement is that the Scriptures present the converse of this idea; they portray God's enthronement in his micro-cosmic (temple-) house as a Sabbath-rest. Thus, when Isaiah makes his challenging comparison between the earthly temple built by Israel and the creation temple of heaven and earth built by God at the beginning, he introduces the Sabbath-rest imagery of the creation history as a parallel to God's throne house: 'The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: Where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest (menuhafi)?' (Isa. 66:1; cf. II Chron. 6:18; Acts 7:49)." Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 111. Man, in his assertion of divine sovereignty, acted as though he himself had created the universe, using it as a throne of his own. He would bring judgment, deciding between God's Word and Satan's word. He, like God, would rest at the end of his creative week. But while man was created to enjoy a seventh-day royal resting—God's seventh day—and to sit at God's table for a royal meal, man was not to do so apart from beginning with the enjoyment of a first-day, creature's, vice-gerent resting. He is to begin his week with rest.

D. Costs and Choice

What are some of the economic implications of a day of rest? Man's world is a world of costs and benefits, of choices made in terms of these costs and benefits. It costs men the forfeited income that a day of rest involves, but it also brings them benefits. Leisure is a consumer good, and it has a market value, namely, forfeited income. A day of rest may increase human efficiency, which then results in increased total weekly production (and therefore increased income). Furthermore, God's covenantal promises are available to those who are faithful to the terms of the covenant, so these promised blessings for obedience must also be added to the visible, immediate blessings of man's external rest. These promised blessings are not always acknowledged by those who are not aware of, or not confident concerning, God's covenant with His people. They tend to underestimate the benefits of honoring one day of rest in seven. In the Old Testament economy under the Mosaic law, the people of Israel were placed under severe restrictions against sabbath violations. The benefits of rest were in force, but God saw fit to raise the costs of disobedience, thereby encouraging men to remain faithful to the sabbath principle. All those who lived under the civic administration of God's covenant had to obey. The penalty was stiff: "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD; whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day" (Ex. 35:2–3).⁸ This same penalty was later reinforced during the wilderness period, when a man who was caught gathering sticks on the sabbath was executed by stoning at the express command of God (Num. 15:32–41). No one could miss the message: God wants men to honor the sabbath principle.

The death penalty, when enforced, imposed a tremendous cost on sabbath violators. While all men in Israel were expected to understand the nature of the covenant, with external blessings assured for external conformity to the terms of the covenant, nevertheless, God relied on the "stick" as well as the "carrot." The promised benefits were less visible, and therefore more to be taken on faith, than the promised punishment. The punishment was visible and the sanctions were permanent. A man with weak faith still had an incentive to obey.

8. Chapter 63.

E. New Testament Alterations

What about New Testament times? Is the Old Testament sabbath still in force? The church has never given a straightforward answer to this question. The church has generally celebrated the first day of the week as the Lord's day (the Day of the Lord), and Christians have often linked certain Old Testament provisions concerning the sabbath with the New Testament's day of rest. From the church's beginning, God's "eighth day" (Adam's first working day of the week) was honored as the day of worship⁹ (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2a), although it took perhaps a century for the first day of the week to be regarded by most Christians as the sole and exclusive day of worship.¹⁰ This day has also been honored as a day of rest. The church has generally timed the Lord's day from sunrise to sunrise, in contrast to the Old Testament's requirement of sunset to sunset.¹¹ This represents a break from the sabbath. There is another break, far more important judicially.

What about the penalty? Has the church maintained that the death

9. Wilfrid Stott, in Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday: A Biblical and Historical Study* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1978] 1980), ch. 12: "The Theology of the Christian Sunday: The Eighth Day"; cf. pp. 64–69.

10. Seventh Day Adventist scholar Samuele Bacchiocchi argued that it was only in the late second century that the Christians, especially in Rome, began to celebrate the first day of the week (Lord's day) exclusively as the day of rest, in order to distinguish themselves from the Jews: *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), p. 2. This study is an impressive work of historical scholarship, though far less distinguished as a work of reliable biblical exposition. I would guess that the reason why the Pontifical Gregorian University awarded Dr. Bacchiocchi his doctorate and published his dissertation is that he presented the Roman Church as the source of the change "from sabbath to Sunday," thereby attesting to the historical authority of the Roman Church. Church officials were understandably unconcerned about his arguments against all interpretations of New Testament passages that attest to the first day of the week ("Sunday") as the day of rest and worship. The authority of the Roman Church, rather than the evidence of Scripture, was the crucial criterion in the minds of the churchmen. This, in fact, had been the familiar argument used by Rome against the Reformers: If sola scriptura really is your guide, they asked, why don't you keep the Saturday sabbath? Luther's opponent, John Eck, used this argument with great skill. It was repeated in the Zurich Disputation, the Baden Disputation, and at both the pre-Reformation debates in Geneva in 1534 and 1535: Daniel A. Augsbürger, "Pierre Viret on the Sabbath Commandment," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 20 (Summer 1982), p. 92. Andrews University is a Seventh Day Adventist school. For a brief but penetrating critique of Bacchiocchi's thesis, see R. J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," in D. A. Carson (ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan-Acadamie, 1982), pp. 270–73.

11. Appendix F: "Timing the Lord's Day."

penalty should still be enforced on all members of society? The answer is unquestionably *no*. The church has never required the civil government to execute sabbath violators, although occasionally some commentator does. Examples include the continental Protestant Reformer Heinrich Bullinger in the late sixteenth century and the American Puritan Thomas Shepherd in the mid-seventeenth.¹² The church has enforced its own laws, even excommunication, on sabbath violators. It has also recommended that the civil government fine violators, or punish them in other ways. But throughout the history of the church, the vast majority of expositors and church officials have hesitated to call for the death penalty. They have, by word and deed, admitted that *there has been a fundamental transformation of the civil aspects of sabbath law*.

Typical of this approach to sabbath law in the New Testament era is John Murray's statement. Mr. Murray was a leading twentieth-century Calvinist scholar and a Scot. He acknowledged the "element of truth" in the statement "by good men, that we do not now under this economy observe the Sabbath as strictly as was required of the people of Israel under the Old Testament." For one thing, they were not allowed to kindle a fire. For another, the death penalty was imposed. "Now there is no warrant for supposing that such regulatory provisions both prohibitive and punitive bind us under the New Testament. This is particularly apparent in the case of the capital punishment executed for Sabbath desecration in the matter of labour. If this is what is meant when it is said that observance is not as strict in its application to us as it was under the Mosaic law, then the contention should have to be granted."¹³ Murray offered no exegesis to explain how the requirement of sabbath observance has survived, but without the civil sanctions attached to Mosaic sabbath law.

F. N. Lee, a South African Calvinist Sabbatarian who, like Mr. Murray, left his country to teach in other English-speaking nations, wrote in his 1966 doctoral dissertation on the sabbath that the capital punishment provisions of the sabbath law have been abrogated. "It is important to realize that these aspects of the weekly sabbath, even though they were ordained by God, were only of temporary ceremonial and/or political significance, and were not intrinsically normative

12. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," in Carson (ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, pp. 319, 326 (note 98).

13. John Murray, "The Sabbath Institution" (1953), in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1976), I, p. 211.

for the permanent weekly sabbath as such, although they were certainly temporarily normative for the Sinaitic weekly sabbath of Israel from Sinai up to the death and resurrection of Christ in which events all these aspects were fulfilled.”¹⁴ (Lee altered his position since the time of publication of his dissertation in the early 1970s. He told me that he believed that Old Testament law is still in force in this age, but he was not yet ready to recommend, categorically, that the death penalty should be imposed in all cases of sabbath violations, although continued willful desecration might be sufficient reason to execute the rebel, he said.)¹⁵

F. The Sabbatical Year

The church has never honored a sabbatical year, nor has any civil government. The land is not rested, debts are not canceled, and the whole law is not read publicly before the gathered nation. Why not?

The New Testament has internalized the locus of sovereignty for the enforcement of the sabbath. Men are to rest the land, but not as a nation, and not simultaneously. The civil government honors Paul’s dictum that some regard one day (or year) as equal to any other, and some regard one as special, to be set apart for rest. A farmer might decide to rest his entire farm for one year in seven. An alternative arrangement would be to rest one-seventh of his land each year. A Dutch-American immigrant informed me that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was common in Holland for land owners to lease their agricultural land with a provision that each year, one-seventh of the land would not be planted.

As for debt, the Mosaic laws of debt cancellation applied to two forms of debt: (1) morally obligatory charitable loans in the sabbatical (seventh) year (Deut. 15:1–6)¹⁶ and (2) commercial loans in the jubilee (49th) year (Lev. 25:47–55).¹⁷ The latter law was part of the jubilee laws. These laws were annulled by Christ (Luke 4:16–18).¹⁸ With respect to charitable loans, the state has no authority in the matter.

14. F. N. Lee, *The Covenantal Sabbath* (London: Lord’s Day Observance Society, 1972), p. 30.

15. Cf. F. N. Lee, *Christocracy and the Divine Savior’s Law for All Mankind* (Tallahassee, Florida: Jesus Lives Society, [1979]), p. 7.

16. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 36

17. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 32.

18. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

Conclusion

There is a connection between sabbath rest and dominion. *Sabbath rest is a **tool of and culmination of dominion.***

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest (Heb. 4:1–5).

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:9–11).

The sabbath points to the fulfillment of the dominion covenant. The eschatological rest that was long ago promised by God is symbolized in the sabbath. A weekly sabbath is God's "earnest"—His down payment—on the cosmic sabbath to come.

Ours is a Firstday sabbath, or Sunday sabbath, in New Testament times. We begin the week with rest, as Adam was supposed to but did not. Adam wanted to create by his own efforts the conditions of man's rest, and he never rested again.

The economic implications of the sabbath are extensive. This is why of necessity I have added an appendix on the topic. The key question, however, is this: *In New Testament times, where is the locus of authority for the enforcement of sabbath law?* If I am correct in my conclusion that Paul has lodged this sovereignty with the *individual conscience* rather than with church government or civil government, then there is no legitimate role in New Testament times for "blue laws," or other Sabbatarian legislation. This conclusion represents a major break with historic Protestantism and should be understood as such. It is a major theological step that needs to be discussed in detail by Christian commentators.

If commentators decide that mine is not a legitimate conclusion from Paul's writings, then the locus of authority issue must be dealt with in detail. Who is to impose sanctions? What sanctions? Under

what conditions? How will those who must impose sanctions deal with the multiple economic problems raised by compulsory legislation? These problems are discussed in greater detail in Appendix G. This issue has been skirted for centuries. There has been no consistent answer—Sabbatarian, “continental sabbath” or otherwise—concerning the final locus of sovereignty for sabbath enforcement. Until it is faced and dealt with in a manner sufficiently clear for the writing and enforcement of Sabbatarian statutes, in church or state, the issue will remain muddled and an exegetical embarrassment for Christians. It will not be resolved successfully by the election of Christian politicians. They need guidelines for sabbath legislation, and these guidelines have yet to come forth from the 2,000-year-old church.

25

FAMILY CAPITAL

Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Ex. 20:12).

The theocentric basis of this law is God as Father. Parents' represent God in a unique way. They are due special consideration from their children.

A. Population Growth

Paul wrote that this is the first commandment to which a promise is attached (Eph. 6:3). What does it mean, "that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee"? It is a promise given to the nation. It is a collective promise, not an individual promise as such. God does not promise that every single child who shows honor for his parents will enjoy long life, nor does He assure us that every single dishonoring child will die young. Esau went against his parents' wishes when he married Canaanite women (Gen. 26:34–35), yet he lived to be at least 120, for he and Jacob buried Isaac, who had died at age 180 (Gen. 35:29), and they had been born when Isaac was 60 years old (Gen. 25:26). Joseph was alive at this time, and the Bible speaks of Joseph as the son of Jacob's old age (Gen. 37:3). In the case of Esau, a dishonoring child lived into old age. Abel, who honored God, and who presumably honored his parents as God's representatives, was slain by his violent brother, who in turn survived to establish a pagan civilization (Gen. 4).

What God does promise is that a society in which the majority of men do honor their parents will be marked by the long life expectancy of its members. This longer life span will be statistically significant. The society will enjoy, for example, lower life insurance premiums in every age bracket compared with the premiums in cultures that are

marked by rebellion against parents. In other words, the risk of death in any given year will be lower, statistically, for the average member of that age bracket. Some will die, of course, but not so many as those who die at the same age in a parent-dishonoring culture.

The promise is significant. It offers long life. The very first promise that is connected to a commandment is long life. This is indicative of men's desire to survive into old age. Men want to live. It is a universal desire, though it is marred or distorted by the effects of sin. All those who hate God love death (Prov. 8:36). Nevertheless, a standard expression of honor in the ancient Near East, especially in pagan civilizations, was reserved for the king: "O king, live forever" (Dan. 2:4; 5:10; 6:21). When God attached this particular blessing to this commandment, He could be assured of its initial attractiveness in the eyes of men. Life is a blessing for the faithful, and it is desired even by the unfaithful. It is not a burden to be borne patiently by steadfast "pilgrims" who are stoically "passing through life." Life is not just something to pass the time away. It is a *positive blessing*.

We know that the promise to Abraham was that he would have many children, meaning heirs throughout time (Gen. 17:4–6). We know that a large family is a blessing (Ps. 127:3–5). We know that one of the promised blessings for the godly is that miscarriages will be reduced in a nation which is seeking to conform itself to God's law (Ex. 23:26).¹ The demographic implication of the biblical perspective should be obvious: *a large and growing population*. When godliness simultaneously increases both the birth rate and the survival rate, the godly society will experience a population explosion. What God sets forth in His word is simple enough, although Christians and pagans in my era have refused to believe this: one sign of His pleasure with His people is a population explosion.² It is not a guarantee of His pleasure. Ungodly societies can temporarily sustain a population explosion, especially when they have become the recipients of the blessings of God's law (for example, Western medical technology or the availability of inexpensive wire mesh window screens)³ apart from the ethical foundations that sustain these blessings. Nevertheless, sustained population growth over many generations is one of God's external blessings, and these blessings cannot be sustained long term apart from

1. Chapter 59.

2. Chapter 1.

3. Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 330.

conformity to at least the external, civil, and institutional requirements of God's law.

Long life is a biological foretaste of eternal life. It is an earthly down payment by God. It points to eternal life. It is also a capital asset that enables men to labor longer in their assigned task of subduing their portion of the earth to God's glory. *Long life is an integral part of the dominion covenant.*

Because the fulfillment of the dominion covenant involves filling the earth, it is understandable why long life should be so important. It is one critical factor in the population expansion that is necessary to fulfill the terms of that covenant, the other being high birth rates. God has pointed clearly to the importance of the family—indeed, *the central importance of the family*—fulfilling the terms of the dominion covenant. The parents receive the blessing of children (high birth rate), and the children secure long life by honoring their parents. Or, to put it even more plainly, a man gains the blessing of long life, including the ability to produce a large family, by honoring his parents. The way in which the people of a civilization define and practice their family obligations will determine their ability to approach the earthly fulfillment of the dominion covenant. Without a close adherence to this, the fifth commandment, no society can hope to receive and keep the capital necessary to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant, especially the human capital involved in a population explosion.

B. Parental Authority

Parents possess limited, derivative, but completely legitimate sovereignty over their children during the formative years of the children's lives. When children reach the age of civil responsibility, one sign of their maturity is their willingness to establish families of their own (Gen. 2:24). Responsibility therefore steadily shifts as time passes. Eventually, aged parents transfer economic and other responsibilities to their children, who care for them when they are no longer able to care for themselves. The man in his peak production years may have two-way financial responsibilities: to his parents and to his children. Maximum responsibility hits at an age when, because of economic and biological patterns, a man attains his maximum productive capacity. This shift of responsibility is mandatory, given the mortality of mankind. The Bible provides guidelines for the proper transfer of family responsibility over time. These guidelines are necessarily economic.

The requirement that men honor their parents preserves the continuity of the covenantal family, and therefore it preserves the *continuity of responsibility*. The totally atomistic family unit is probably impossible; where it exists, the culture which has created it will collapse. Mutual obligations bind the family units together. Parents have an obligation to lay up wealth for their children: “. . . for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (II Cor. 12: 14b). Parents are not to squander their children’s inheritance. It should also be recognized that *each of the children has a legitimate claim to part of the patrimony*, unless disinherited because of his rebellion against parents or his personal immorality. The eldest son is entitled to a double portion of the estate (Deut. 21:15–17).⁴ Why does the eldest son inherit this double portion? A reasonable explanation is that he is the person with the primary responsibility for the care of his parents.⁵ The English system of primogeniture, in which the eldest son inherited all of the landed estate, was clearly unbiblical, and the breakdown of that system in the nineteenth century was a step forward for England. Such a system places too much responsibility on the eldest son, leaving the other children bereft of capital, but also psychologically free of economic obligations toward the parents. It cuts off most of the children from the mutual obligations of the covenantal family.

Economic obligations should flow in both directions: toward the children in their early years, toward the parents in their later years, and back toward the children at the death of the parents, when the family’s capital is inherited by the survivors. In short, children inherit, but parents must first be provided for.

C. The Continuity of Capital

The biblical law-order is a unity. Blessings and responsibilities are linked. Without the coherence of comprehensive biblical law, blessings can become curses. We can apply this insight to the fifth commandment. Assume that a son honors his parents during their lifetime. He receives the blessing of long life. Nevertheless, he neglects to teach his own children the requirements of this commandment. He also wastes his own estate in a present-oriented orgy of consumption. He miscalculates his own life expectancy. He runs out of money before he runs

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 60.

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 180.

out of time. He has nothing to live on in his old age. His fortune is gone, and his own children know it. The break in the family between generations is now a serious threat to him. His children know that he has abandoned them by squandering the family estate, so they in turn abandon him to poverty in his old age, when he most needs assistance. The blessing of long life then becomes a curse to him. He slowly rots away in abject poverty.

Capital, if familistic in nature, is less likely to be squandered. In a truly godly social order, the familiar rags-to-riches-to-rags progression of three generations, from grandfather to grandchildren, is not supposed to become typical, despite the fact that the legal possibility of “rags-to-riches-to-rags” is basic to the preservation of a free society. The example of a man who pulls himself up out of poverty, only to see his children squander his fortune, leaving his grandchildren destitute, is neither normative nor normal in a Christian social order. The godly do not lay up treasure for the ungodly; the reverse is true (Prov. 13:22).⁶ *Wealth in the long run flows toward provident and productive citizens who exercise dominion in terms of biblical law.* Therefore, these dual obligations, from fathers to sons and from sons to fathers, are an important aspect of the biblical tendency toward economic growth over many generations.

Fathers have economic incentives to expand the family’s capital base, and they also have an incentive to train up children who will not dissipate the family’s capital. The *continuity of capital*, under God’s law, is promoted by the laws of inheritance-honor. This preservation of capital is crucial for long-term economic development.

In order to preserve family capital over time, godly parents must train their children to follow the ethical standards of the Bible. The biblical basis for long-term expansion of family capital is ethical: *character* and *competence*. But this ethical foundation for long-term family capital growth is not acceptable to anti-biblical cultures. They want the fruits of Christian culture without the roots. Thus, we find that civil governments often take steps to preserve *already existing* family fortunes at the expense of those productive families that are ready and willing to make their economic contribution to the production process. A phenomenon that is supposed to be the product of ethics and education—the expansion of family capital over many generations—is temporarily produced by the use of state power. This substitution of

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

power for ethics is characteristic of Satan's religions—not power as the product of biblical ethics (“right eventually produces might”), but power as a substitute for biblical ethics (“might makes right”).

The pagan imitation of a godly social order frequently involves the use of *legislated barriers to entry*. Those who have achieved economic success seek political power in order to restrict their competitors from displacing them.⁷ This phenomenon has been described as “pulling up the ladder after you’ve reached the top.” This discriminates against poor people, who are unable to organize politically and who lack capital, especially formal education. Primogeniture was one such restriction, which held together the great landed estates of England for many centuries. So was entail: the legal prohibition against selling a landed family estate.⁸ Other sorts of restrictions prevail in the modern “mixed” economy, all of them hostile to the great engine of progress under capitalism, price competition.⁹ These restrictions include: tariffs or import quotas,¹⁰ prohibitions against price competition (price floors) in the name of protecting market stability,¹¹ protecting the consumer from trusts,¹² minimum wage laws (another price floor),¹³ restrictions against advertising (still another kind of price floor),¹⁴ com-

7. Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963). Kolko is a “New Left” historian. He argued that the American Progressive movement, which promoted government regulation of the trusts in the name of protecting the consumers, was supported by large businesses that were seeking legislated protection from new competitors. For further evidence on this point, see James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900–1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Clarence Cramer, *American Enterprise: Free and Not So Free* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), chaps. 10–14.

8. This restriction could be overcome through debt. An heir would indebted the estate, with the land as collateral. When he defaulted on the debt, the creditor took possession of the land.

9. Gary North, “Price Competition and Expanding Alternatives,” *The Freeman* (August 1974). (<http://bit.ly/PriceCompetition>)

10. Gary North, “Buy American!” *Ibid.* (January 1981). (<http://bit.ly/BuyAmer>) The relationship between monopolies and tariffs was explained as long ago as 1907: Franklin Pierce, *The Tariff and the Trusts* (New York: Macmillan, 1907).

11. Mary Peterson, *The Regulated Consumer* (Ottawa, Illinois: Green Hill, 1971); Dan Smoot, *The Business End of Government* (Boston: Western Islands, 1973).

12. D. T. Armentano, *Antitrust and Monopoly: Anatomy of a Policy Failure* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982); Harold Fleming, *Ten Thousand Commandments: A Story of the Antitrust Laws* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951). See also Pierce, *Tariffs and the Trusts*, op. cit.

13. Walter Williams, *The State Against Blacks* (New York: McGraw-Hill New Press, 1982), ch. 3. This book also covers occupational licensing, regulation by the states, taxicab licensing, and trucking regulation.

14. Yale Brozen, *Advertising and Society* (New York: New York University Press,

pulsory trade unionism,¹⁵ restrictions on agricultural production,¹⁶ state licensing of the professions,¹⁷ zoning laws,¹⁸ and the most blatant and universally accepted restriction, immigration quotas.¹⁹ All of these statist economic restrictions reduce people's freedom of movement—geographically, economically, and socially. They all involve the misuse of the otherwise legitimate monopoly of state power in order to restrict individual and social progress and personal responsibility.²⁰ The result of such legislation, if continued and enforced, is the universal

1974); George Stigler, "The Economics of Information," *Journal of Political Economy*, LXIX (June 1961); Yale Brozen, "Entry Barriers: Advertising and Product Differentiation," in Harvey J. Goldschmidt, et al. (eds.), *Industrial Concentration: The New Learning* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); David G. Tuerck (ed.), *The Political Economy of Advertising* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978); Tuerck (ed.), *Issues in Advertising: The Economics of Persuasion* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978).

15. Gary North, "A Christian View of Labor Unions," *Biblical Economics Today*, I (April/May 1978). (<http://bit.ly/gncvolu>); Philip D. Bradley (ed.), *The Public Stake in Union Power* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959); Sylvester Petro, *Power Unlimited: The Corruption of Union Leadership* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959).

16. William Peterson, *The Great Farm Problem* (Chicago: Regnery, 1959); Clarence B. Carson, *The War on the Poor* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1969), ch. 4: "Farmers at Bay."

17. Reuben A. Kessel, "Price Discrimination in Medicine," *Journal of Law and Economics*, I (October 1958). (<http://bit.ly/KesselMed>); Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), ch. 9: "Occupational Licensure."

18. Bernard H. Siegan, *Land Use Without Zoning* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington, 1972).

19. Gary North, "The Sanctuary Society," *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, XIII (Summer 1998), pp. 205–19. (<http://bit.ly/SanctSoc>); Gary North, "Public Goods and Fear of Foreigners," *The Freeman* (March 1974). (<http://bit.ly/PublicGoods>). An example of special pleading favoring immigration restrictions is Roy L. Garis, *Immigration Restriction: A Study of the Opposition to and Regulation of Immigration Into the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1928). Such restrictions, had they been passed into law and enforced prior to 1924, would have greatly reduced American economic growth. On the multiple cultural and economic contributions of several immigrant groups—Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and orientals—see Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). He covered similar material in a condensed way in *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1983), but added new material on the performance of immigrant groups in other societies. On the spectacular economic miracle of the city of Miami, Florida, as a result of heavy immigration from Cuba after 1960, see George Gilder, *The Spirit of Enterprise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), ch. 5. The political-economic problem today is twofold: (1) new immigrants in a democracy are soon allowed to vote, and (2) they become eligible for tax-financed "welfare" programs. In the Old Testament, it took several generations for members of pagan cultures to achieve citizenship (Deut. 23:3–8), and there were very

destruction of freedom, as the state regulators steadily squeeze away the monopoly profits received by the early members of the protected group. This is especially true of state-licensed professionals, such as physicians.²¹ Another result is the reduction of per capita productivity, and therefore per capita wealth.

D. Compound Growth

The importance of the continuity of capital can be seen in any example involving compound interest. Let me say from the beginning that we cannot expect to see this compound interest phenomenon continue uninterrupted in any family forever. We also cannot expect to see annual rates of growth over 1% for centuries at a time. As I pointed out in 1986, the four billion people on earth in 1980 would multiply to over 83 trillion in a thousand years, if the rate of population growth were 1% per annum. But, the fact remains, the longer that the compound growth phenomenon continues, the smaller the annual percentage increase needs to be in order to produce spectacular results.

Let us assume that we are dealing with a given monetary unit. We can call it a talent. A young married man begins with 100 talents. Say that he multiplies this capital base by 2% per annum. At the end of 50 years, the couple has 269 talents. Let us assume that the heirs of the family multiply at 1% per annum, on the average, throughout each subsequent family's lifetime. After 250 years, if the growth rates both of people and capital persist, the total family capital base is up to 14,126 talents. Divided by 24 family units, each family now has 589 talents. This is almost a six-fold increase per family unit, which is considerable. We now have 24 family units, with each family possessing almost six times the wealth that the original family started out with, even assuming that each heir has married someone who has brought

few publicly financed charities, the most notable being the third-year tithe (Deut. 14:28–29). Thus, mass democracy has violated a fundamental biblical principle—that time is needed for ethical acculturation of pagan immigrants—and the result of this transgression has been xenophobia: the fear of foreigners, especially immigrant newcomers. Cf. Gary North, “Two-Tier Church Membership,” *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

20. Walter Adams and Horace M. Gray, *Monopoly in America: The Government as Promoter* (New York: Macmillan, 1955); George Reisman, *The Government Against the Economy* (Ottawa, Illinois: Caroline House, 1979).

21. Gary North, “Walking Into a Trap,” *The Freeman* (May 1978). (<http://bit.ly/WalkTrap>)

no capital into the marriage.

What if the capital base should increase by 3%? At the end of 50 years, the original couple would have 438 talents—over a four-fold increase. This is quite impressive. But at the end of 250 years, the family would possess 161,922 talents, over 1,600 times as large. Even divided by 24 family units, the per family capital base would be 6,747 talents, or over 67 times larger than the original capital base of 100 talents.

Consider the implications of these figures. A future-oriented man—a man like Abraham—could look forward to his heirs' possessing vastly greater wealth than he ever could hope to attain personally. This is the kind of vision God offers His people, just as he offered to Abraham: heirs two or three generations later who will be numerous and rich. God offers a man the hope of substantially increased wealth during his own lifetime, in response to his covenantal faithfulness, hard work, and thrift. But God also offers the covenantal family truly vast increases in per family wealth, if the disciplined economic growth per family is maintained. The covenant community increases its control of capital, generation by generation, piling up ever-greater quantities of capital, until the growth becomes exponential, meaning astronomical, meaning impossible. Compound growth therefore points to the fulfillment of the dominion covenant, the subduing of the earth. It points to the end of cursed time.

It might be appropriate at this point to clarify what I mean when I speak about a covenant society amassing huge numbers of monetary units called talents. If we are speaking of a whole society, and not just a single family, then for all of them to amass 6,747 talents per family in 250 years, there would have to be mass inflation—the printing of billions of “talent notes.” I am speaking not of physical slips of paper called talents; I am speaking of goods and services of value. One hundred talents per family, multiplied by all the families in the society, would not be able to increase in an economy based on a precious metal standard; instead, prices would fall in response to increased production of 3% per annum. Eventually, if the whole society experiences 3% per annum economic growth, given a fixed money supply, prices would begin to approach zero.

But prices in a cursed world will never reach zero; there will always be economic scarcity (Gen. 3:17–19).²² In fact, scarcity is defined as a universe in which total demand is greater than supply at zero price. So,

22. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 12.

the assumption of permanent compound economic growth is incorrect. Either the growth process stops in the aggregate, or else time ends. That, of course, is precisely the point. Time *will* end.

A man whose vision is geared to dominion, in time and on earth, has to look to the years beyond his lifetime. He cannot hope to build up his family's capital base in his own lifetime sufficient to achieve conquest. If he looks two or more centuries into the future, it becomes a conceivable task. Only a handful of men can expect to amass a fortune in a single lifetime. If a man's time perspective is limited to his own lifetime, then he must either give up the idea of family dominion, or else he must adopt the mentality of the gambler. He has to "go for the big pay-off." He must sacrifice everything for capital expansion, risking everything he has, plus vast quantities of borrowed money, on untried, high-risk, high-return ventures. He must abandon everything conventional, for an investor earns only conventional returns (prevailing interest rate) from conventional ventures. The man's world becomes an endless series of all-or-nothing decisions.²³ He "puts it all on the line" time after time.

E. Trusteeship: Which Family?

The continuity of capital is obviously threatened by the rise of the familistic state. It establishes itself as the trustee for all men, from womb to tomb. It therefore demands support from those who receive its protection. Like a father, or better yet, like a distant uncle who guides the fortunes of an orphaned nephew, the state must administer the funds, always taking a large portion of those funds as a necessary fee for services performed.

As men steadily begin to perceive the implications of the familistic state, they seek to hide their assets from its tax collectors. Men try to find ways to pass along wealth to their legitimate heirs, and the state, as the enraged illegitimate heir, relentlessly searches for ways of closing off escape hatches. The new "parent" must not be deprived of its support from every member of the family. And once the capital is collected, it is dissipated in a wave of corruption, mismanagement, bureaucratic salaries, and politically motivated compulsory charity programs. Men see the erosion of their capital, and they seek to hide it

23. This is the world of modern entrepreneurship. Only a few people can make huge fortunes. Still, the rest of us benefit from their initiative and uncertainty-bearing: Gilder, *Spirit of Enterprise*.

away. They recognize what the pseudo-family of the state will do to the inheritance of their children. Still, because of their own entrenched envy, they are unwilling to turn back. They and their parents and grandparents accepted the philosophical justifications of “soaking the rich” by means of the ballot box, but now that price inflation has pushed everyone into higher tax brackets, they are horrified by what they find. They have now been snared themselves, but they seem unable to turn back, for to turn back would involve an admission of the immorality and inefficiency of the “soak the rich” programs of modern democratic politics.

1. *Permanent Children*

The modern messianic state would like to make permanent wards of its citizens. This is a primary justification for the state's existence today. It must administer the inheritance for the benefit of children. But the children are *perpetual servants* and a growing army, increasingly dependent upon the coercive wealth redistribution of politics. What we have here is a reversal of the New Testament teaching concerning sons and servants. “Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all. But is under tutors and governors until the time pointed of the father” (Gal. 4:1–2). The state's bureaucrats do not recognize what every human parent must eventually recognize, namely, that he is going to become weak, and that he must encourage *independence on the part of his heirs* if he is to secure safety for himself in his old age. The state, by making men permanent children, guarantees its own demise, for the children cannot forever support the “trustee state,” if the state has, in effect, institutionalized the voters.

The family is a trustee. By acknowledging the legitimacy of the laws of the family, men honor God, although the unregenerate do so unwittingly and in spite of their professed theology of autonomy before God. *External blessings flow to those who honor God's laws.* By establishing a tradition of honoring parents, sons increase the likelihood that in their old age their own children will protect them from the burdens of old age. The risks that life poses to the old are therefore minimized. The familistic welfare structure is reciprocal and personal. It is undergirded by revealed law and by family tradition. It need not rely heavily on the far weaker support of sentiment—an important aspect

of the religion of humanism.²⁴ The growth of capital within the family increases each succeeding generation's ability to conquer nature to the glory of God, including the infirmities and vulnerabilities of old age.

The statist pseudo-family cannot permit this sort of challenge to its self-proclaimed sovereignty. The modern state has therefore laid claim to ownership of the children through the tax-supported public school system. Children are obviously a form of family capital. They are to be trained, which involves costs to the parents. But the parents have a legitimate claim on a portion of the future assets of the children. The relationship involves costs and benefits for both generations. Neither side needs to buy the love of the other, any more than men need to buy the love of God. Each generation gives; each receives. The relationship is both personal and economic. But the modern state intervenes. It provides the children's education. It lays claim to future payments (taxes) by the children when they have reached maturity. Of necessity, it must try to buy the love (votes) of those children when they reach maturity. The children often remain subservient to the state-parent, unwilling to launch independent lives of their own, given the costs of breaking the financial and emotional tie with the welfare office. *Children, the covenant family's primary resource, are stolen by the modern state.* The state promises old age support. The state promises health care for the aged. The state provides state-financed and state-licensed education for the young. The modern state attempts to replace the benefits of the family, and simultaneously must require the same sort of financial support from the adults during their productive years. The relationship is impersonal and economic. The relationship is, by law, coercive and bureaucratic.

2. Impersonalism and Capital Consumption

This disastrous attempt of the state to replace the functions of the family eventually destroys the productive mutual relationships between generations. It destroys the personal bond, making the *young in general* legally responsible for the *old in general*. The family name—so central to the life of a godly social order—is erased, and computerized numbers are substituted. The incentives for families to preserve their capital, whether for old age or for generations into the future, are reduced, for each generation's economic future is no longer legally

24. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation With American Society* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), pp. 43–47.

bound to the success and prosperity of the children. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow there will be government money." But the dissipation of family capital, when it becomes a culture-wide phenomenon, destroys economic productivity, which in turn destroys the tax base of the state. The state cannot write the promised checks, or if it does, the monetary unit steadily grows less valuable, as fiat money inflates the price level.

By abandoning the principle of family responsibility, the modern messianic state wastes a culture's capital, destroys inheritance, and makes more acceptable both euthanasia (which reduces the expense of caring for the unproductive elderly) and abortion (which reduces the expense of training and caring for the unproductive young). Lawless men, in their productive years, increasingly refuse to share their wealth with dying parents and squabbling children. They look only at present costs, neglecting future benefits, such as the care that the unborn might provide them in their old age. They have faith in *the compassionate and productive state*—the great social myth of the modern world. They want its benefits, but they never ask themselves the key question: Who will pay for their retirement years? Not the shrinking number of children, who are even more present-oriented, even more conditioned by the statist educational system, even more unwilling to share their wealth with the now-unproductive aged of the land. With the dissipation of capital, the productive voters will resist the demands of the elderly. *The generations go to war against one another—the war of politics.*

The pseudo-family state is an agent of social, political, and economic bankruptcy. It still has its intellectual defenders, even within the Christian community, although its defenders tend to be products of the state-supported, state-certified, and state-aggrandizing universities. *This pseudo-family is suicidal.* It destroys the foundations of productivity, and productivity is the source of all voluntary charity. It is a suicidal family which will pay off its debts with inflated fiat currency. Its compassion will be limited to paper and ink.

The impersonalism of the modern pseudo-family, along with its present-orientation—a vision no longer than the next election—will produce massive, universal failure of the welfare system. It has already done so. The rapid escalation of government-funded anti-poverty programs has created more poverty, except for the middle-class bureau-

crats who operate the programs.²⁵ The great economic experiment that was launched in the twentieth century is failing in a wave of government deficits. All the college-level textbooks in economics, political science, and sociology will not be able to justify the system, once it erodes the productivity which every parasitic structure requires for its own survival. Like the Canaanitic cultures of Joshua's day, the end is in sight for the modern, messianic, welfare state economies. They have decapitalized their envy-driven, guilt-ridden citizens. Only to the extent that citizens hide their economic assets or vote to reverse the politics of envy will they escape the clutching hand of today's spend-thrift, senile pseudo-parent.

Conclusion

It is imperative for Christians to abandon the religion of humanism. It is imperative that they fulfill their responsibilities as members covenantal community. It is imperative that they see to it that their old people, as well as their young people, must not become in any way dependent upon the services of a declining welfare state. To become dependent on such an institution is to become a slave. Worse than this: it is to become dependent on a master whose economic resources are almost spent.²⁶ When men and women honor their fathers and mothers—financially, spiritually, and institutionally—they will have begun the painful but mandatory journey out of slavery. They will have begun to amass family capital for yet unborn generations.

The question is inescapable in any society: *Who will inherit?* The key issue in the fifth commandment is therefore the question of *legitimacy*. Every institution faces the question of continuity over time. The biblical pattern for the family is to become representative for all other institutions: the legitimate heir is the one who does the explicit will of the righteous parent. God the Father establishes these eternal standards of performance, including the laws of inheritance. We must begin by honoring the laws of family inheritance.²⁷

We must de-capitalize the state. This is a moral imperative. The al-

25. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

26. Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Cultural Life, 1500 to the Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), Epilog; Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Conclusion.

27. For an example of a man who misunderstood inheritance, see Appendix H: "Andrew Carnegie: Social Darwinist."

ternative is for the state to de-capitalize us. If we are dependent on the state for its support, we are necessarily fostering the decapitalization of the family. *The first and crucial step in decapitalizing the state is to cease calling for favors from the state.* It is to create alternative, voluntary, biblical institutions that will replace the pseudo-compassion of the messianic state. If the covenant communities refuse to accept this challenge, then they will see their capital dissipated by the spendthrift managers of the humanistic state. The archetypal bastard will then inherit the inheritance of the righteous.

This will not come to pass. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). God has made it clear: the bastard should not and will not inherit.

The issue is family capital. The reason why this commandment is found in the first five, which relates to the priesthood, is two-fold. First, the head of the family is a household priest. He was the one who circumcised the newborn males of the household. Second, the church, not the civil government, is the back-up agency of welfare, after the family has either failed to act or has exhausted its resources. To protect the integrity of the Mosaic priesthood, this law made it clear that the family, not civil government, is the primary agency of welfare. Any attempt by the civil government to replace the welfare function of the family is an indirect attack on the authority of ecclesiastical government. It is an attempt to call into question the welfare function of both the family and the church.

Power flows to the agency that takes responsibility for providing aid in a crisis. By placing the family in the front line of welfare, this commandment builds a wall of protection around the church. The civil government cannot lawfully undermine the church by arrogating to itself the welfare function of society. The messianic state seeks both power and legitimacy as the true heir. Thus, it must become a welfare state. This commandment, when obeyed, undermines the legitimacy of the welfare state.

GOD'S MONOPOLY OF EXECUTION

Thou shall not kill (Ex. 20:13).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's protection of His own image, man. God is sacred. This clearly is an aspect of point one of the biblical covenant model: God's sovereignty.¹ Thus, His image is sacred in the sense of being holy. As the Creator, God delegates to civil government the authority to execute murderers.

A. The Image of God

Man's life is protected because he is made in the image of God. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6). The explanatory clause—"for in the image of God made he man"—can be understood in two different ways. *First*, it explains the nature of the violation: man's life is uniquely important to God, since man is made in God's image. An assault on man is an assault on the image of God. *Second*, the clause explains why men, by means of the civil government, are required to execute bloody judgment on murderers. Man is made in the image of God; therefore, as God's image, mankind can bring judgment in the name of God, the supreme Judge who executes final judgment. Man is God's agent who exercises God's delegated authority. He is an agent of the King. He is to exercise dominion over the earth.² Man is a royal agent, and as such, he deserves protection. Christ's parable of the rebellious husbandmen who slew the owner's emissaries, including his

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1977] 1984), p. 444.

son, rests on the principle of God's ultimate sovereignty and the authority which He delegates to all men (Matt. 21:33–40).³ Murder is rebellion, but a special kind of rebellion: lashing out at God's very image, the capstone of His creation. This is the most probable interpretation of the clause in terms of why murder is a capital crime. This explains why man-killing animals are to be executed (Gen. 9:5).⁴

Vengeance belongs to God (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19;⁵ Heb. 10:30). It is His monopoly. He avenges the blood of his servants (Deut. 32:35–43). Individual men do not have the right to act as executioners except by law: "Thou shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Lev. 19:18). The context of this oft-quoted final clause is clearly the administration of judgment. Because God established His monopoly, transgression brings judgment. This boundary must be respected. We see an example of this—indeed, *the* example—in the garden of Eden. By challenging God's single, exclusive, and temporary monopoly in the garden, namely, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve rebelled, for they were attempting to play God, to usurp His position over creation. It was an attempt to worship an image: the image of God in man.

The *prohibition of graven images* in the second commandment should therefore be understood as the *repudiation of humanism* (Ex. 20:4).⁶ All forms of idolatry are ultimately variations of *self-worship*, for it is man, as a self-proclaimed sovereign being, who asserts the right to choose whom he will worship in place of God. Man, the sovereign, decides.

Critics of capital punishment could argue that men are not to avenge, and that we must view capital punishment itself as a transgres-

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

4. Because of the unnecessary exclusiveness of Bahnsen's interpretation of Genesis 9:6, which I discuss below, I need to stress the point that the right of the civil government to execute an animal should not be surprising, and the biblical defense of this right does not require any detailed exegesis, given the dominion covenant. It is not that the image of God in man uniquely empowers the civil government to execute animals; it is simply that the image of God in man is the reason why it is so heinous an act to kill a human being—so heinous that not even a "morally neutral" animal can escape the penalty. What the passage stresses is the responsibility of the civil government to execute an offending beast, not its authority to do so.

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

6. Chapter 22.

sion of God's sole and exclusive monopoly of execution. This argument is dead wrong. The institution of civil government is entrusted with this responsibility. The individual may not execute another man, as if he were an autonomous agent of judgment, but the covenanted political community may do so. In fact, this power reduces the likelihood of blood vengeance by close relatives of the slain: blood feuds.

Why does the state have the right to slay transgressors? Because man is made in the image of God. God executes; so may covenant man. Bahnsen explained:

The reason offered is that man is the *image of God*: man can accordingly carry out God's judgments on a creaturely level. Thinking God's thoughts after Him, man judges and penalizes after the commandment of God; man is properly *like God* his Father and Judge when he too judges crimes as God does. . . . Man should do this as well on his level as a creature, not in personal vindictiveness (i.e., such judgment does not apply to interpersonal affairs: 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17ff.), but as a matter of *social justice* (i.e., it is the *magistrate's* duty to punish criminals for the good of society: Rom. 13:1–4). The man created in God's image who has the responsibility of rule in human government (not citizens, not the church) is required to punish violators of God's law for the welfare of his country; he has the right to do this because he is the image of God and has God's law to direct him.⁷

Bahnsen then argued that it is not the death penalty as such that is the focus of Genesis 9:6, but rather the right of the civil government to *inflict* this penalty. "Instead of smoothly saying 'his blood is to be shed by man' the verse reads 'by man his blood is to be shed.' We stumble over the 'by man' due to its obtrusion and conspicuousness. Man's being made as God's image explains the infliction of the death penalty *by man*? In other words, "the proper question at Genesis 9:5f. is: what *right* has *man* to retaliate against the murderer? Genesis 9:6 gives the rationale: man is God's image."⁸ Bahnsen's interpretation is an attempt to force us to choose between two views: (1) the image of God in man as the *cause* of the death penalty—the reason why such a harsh penalty must be imposed—and (2) the image as the *justification* of the civil government's God-given authority to inflict the penalty.

I do not choose between the two interpretations; I choose them both. The image of God in man makes sacred the life of man, assuming

7. Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, p. 443.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

that he has not transgressed the law by committing a capital crime, but this image also legitimizes the execution of the transgressor in the case of murder. Both the *reason for* the death penalty against murderers and the *requirement of* capital punishment by the civil government are explained by the presence of the image of God. Nevertheless, there is a stronger emphasis on the image of God in man as the reason why murder must be punished by the death penalty, as I have already argued. The execution of man-killing animals required by Genesis 9:5 points more clearly to the magnitude of the crime than it points to the right of the civil government to inflict the supreme earthly penalty. But ultimately it points to both.

B. Murder and Execution

The usage, though not the grammar, of the Hebrew translated here as “kill” (*ratsach*) indicates murder or manslaughter. It means “to dash to pieces,” but it is used in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 4:42 to indicate accidental manslaughter. The biblical definition of murder is the willful execution of one man by another, unless the execution is sanctioned by the civil government; it is referred to as the shedding of man’s blood (Gen. 4:10). It is an act of man in rebellion against God.

The prohibition against the shedding of man’s blood applies even to murderous animals (Gen. 9:5). Guilty animals are to be stoned to death, the Mosaic law’s most common means of public execution (Ex. 21:28). Because owners are covenantally responsible for the administration of their property, if the owner of the beast had been warned beforehand that the animal was dangerous, he also must be executed. He is permitted to buy his life by the payment of restitution, however (Ex. 21:29–30).⁹ Because all ownership is delegated, economic responsibility is necessarily personal.

There are no exceptions based on idiocy, temporary insanity, temporary anger, or anything else. Unless it can be proved that the death came as a result of an accident—no premeditation—the criminal is to be executed. The willful shedding of man’s blood must be punished by the civil government by execution.

C. Protecting the Division of Labor

Each person in history has been assigned a role by God for extend-

9. Chapter 34.

ing His kingdom in history. There is no escape from the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).¹⁰ Man's existence as a creature is defined by this covenant. Therefore, in God's assignment to mankind as a species, each person contributes something to this process of dominion.

When anyone dies, his or her contribution to this process of dominion ceases. Within the overall providence of God, death plays a role in the process of dominion. Evil is cut short (Ex. 20:6). Its compounding process ceases.¹¹ But it is for God to determine when each person's contribution to the process should cease. No other individual is to intervene to speed up this removal on his time schedule. This includes suicide.

The division of labor is a crucial concept in the history of economic thought. Adam Smith placed it at the heart of his *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith's description of the pin-makers is probably the most famous passage in the history of economic thought. The pin-makers who possessed specialized machinery could produce far more than a comparable number of individual pin-makers, each acting alone.

In modern times, Leonard E. Read's metaphor of the pencil rivals Smith's for its power of communication. In "I, Pencil," Read had a pencil narrate the story of its origin. No one knows how to make a pencil, the pencil says. No one knows all that goes into wood, paint, lacquer, graphite, rubber, and metal, yet all are necessary for the production of a single inexpensive pencil. Without the complex division of labor, a pencil would be impossible to produce. Read wrote:

Does anyone wish to challenge my earlier assertion that no single person on the face of this earth knows how to make me?

Actually, millions of human beings have had a hand in my creation, no one of whom even knows more than a very few of the others. Now, you may say that I go too far in relating the picker of a coffee berry in far off Brazil and food growers elsewhere to my creation; that this is an extreme position. I shall stand by my claim. There isn't a single person in all these millions, including the president of the pencil company, who contributes more than a tiny, infinitesimal bit of know-how. From the standpoint of know-how the only difference between the miner of graphite in Ceylon and the logger in Oregon is in the type of know-how. Neither the miner nor the logger can be dispensed with, any more than can the chemist at the factory

10. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3–4.

11. Chapter 23.

or the worker in the oil field—paraffin being a by-product of petroleum.

Here is an astounding fact: Neither the worker in the oil field nor the chemist nor the digger of graphite or clay nor any who mans or makes the ships or trains or trucks nor the one who runs the machine that does the knurling on my bit of metal nor the president of the company performs his singular task because he wants me. Each one wants me less, perhaps, than does a child in the first grade. Indeed, there are some among this vast multitude who never saw a pencil nor would they know how to use one. Their motivation is other than me. Perhaps it is something like this: Each of these millions sees that he can thus exchange his tiny know-how for the goods and services he needs or wants. I may or may not be among these items.

Then Read came to his main point. The point is incorrect, but it lies at the heart of all modern economic theory: the absence of an economic central planner.

There is a fact still more astounding: the absence of a master mind, of anyone dictating or forcibly directing these countless actions which bring me into being. No trace of such a person can be found. Instead, we find the Invisible Hand at work. This is the mystery to which I earlier referred.¹²

But there *is* a Planner: a sovereign God who oversees all things and events. His is the “invisible hand”—Adam Smith’s famous phrase. But this hand operates through a system of secondary, subordinate causation, which includes responsible acting individuals. The free market, through its pricing system and its system of sanctions—profit and loss—allows the creation of pencils and far more amazing products than pencils.

“No man is an island,” the poet John Donne wrote in 1624. In his famous Meditation 17, he set forth the heart of the matter.

No man is an island, entire of itself.
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were,
as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were.
Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in man kind,
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls.

12. “I Pencil: My Family Tree as Told to Leonard E. Read,” *The Freeman* (Dec. 1958). (<http://bit.ly/ReadPencil>)

It tolls for thee.

In the grand division of labor, each person's productive contribution benefits the entire society to some degree, although usually unmeasurable and unperceived. Even though no one knows how to make a pencil, and no one knows the value of a clod of earth, each plays its part. When anyone dies, the wealth of society is reduced. Murder is therefore an assault on the wealth of nations and individuals. It is one man's attempt to play God, an attempt to gain an immediate personal benefit—the elimination of an enemy—at the cost of reduced productivity for society. The murderer treats another person as if the victim were a zero-price resource whose negative impact can be inexpensively removed. Yet no man knows what might have been, what contribution the deceased victim might have made. No man is omniscient. No man can calculate the cost that his victim's death will impose on others.

God protects His image from murderers. He can count the cost of murder. He assesses this cost as being far too high for anyone to be allowed to impose on his own authority. So, He authorizes the civil government to impose a final sanction on murderers.

D. Delegated Monopoly

God has shared His monopoly of execution with men. The final power of death is held by Jesus Christ. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18). It is He who triumphed over death (I Cor. 15). Christ is the *go'el*, the *kinsman-redeemer* who is also the family avenger of blood (Num. 35:19). Satan himself could not take Job's life without God's permission (Job 3:6). Only the original Creator of life has the original right to destroy life; only He can establish the standards by which man's life may be legitimately removed, including the standards of execution by the civil government.

The biblical view of the state unquestionably and irrefutably affirms the right and obligation of the state to execute men, for the Bible sets forth God's law. God has delegated this authority to the state. This assignment cannot lawfully be neglected—certainly not in the name of a "higher, more compassionate" interpretation of God's holy law. *To deny the legitimate, derived, and ministerial authority of the state in this regard is to deny the original sovereignty of God.* It is to

call into question (1) God's Bible-revealed law, (2) man as the image of God, (3) the protection this image is entitled to, and (4) the responsibility of state officials under God. The denial of capital punishment is, in a very real sense, an attempt to deny God's right of final execution, i.e., the imposition of the penalty of the second death, eternal punishment in fire (Rev. 20:14). Such a position denies the right of God to offer murderers an earthly, institutional "down payment" or "earnest" that points to and affirms the reality of their future eternal punishment to come. It also denies God's requirement that the convicted murderer be transferred to His supreme court immediately. Furthermore, by denying this right of execution to the state, the opponents of capital punishment are implicitly turning over the power of execution (as distinguished from the right of execution) to murderers and rebels. It reduces their risk of permanent bodily judgment.

Anarchists, rebels, warlords, and criminals all resent the legitimate authority of civil government. Such a authority points to an even higher authority and the final judgment. Man's very image is repulsive to murderers, for it also points to the subordination of mankind's being to a sovereign God. Man's image points to *man's subordinate responsibility*, but also possessing lawful authority as a ruler over creation. It points to *dominion*. Satan and his followers loathe this image. They loathe it and love death (Prov. 8:36). But the image of God in man, when regenerate, is a death-defying image.

When the state executes a murderer, it delivers the criminal to God's court. Whenever God establishes execution as the appropriate civil sanction, He declares what legal theorists call a *change of venue*. The accused is delivered to a court with a more comprehensive jurisdiction.

E. The Question of Deterrence

Do the opponents of capital punishment really play into the hands of the criminal classes? Does a society without capital punishment really transfer power into the hands of the lawless? Consider these historical facts. A murderer in the state of California in 1975 was eligible for parole in seven years.¹³ In Massachusetts in the early 1970s, where no one had been executed since 1947,¹⁴ the median time served in pris-

13. Frank G. Carrington, *The Victims* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975), p. 6.

14. James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 192.

on for homicide was under 30 months.¹⁵ As Prof. James Q. Wilson noted: "And even in states that practice the death penalty, the chances of a murderer's being executed have been so small that a rational murderer might well decide to take the risk. There were eight thousand murders in 1960, but only fifty-six executions; thus, a murderer's chances of being executed were only about one in one hundred forty. After 1960 the number of executions dropped sharply, thus improving his chances."¹⁶

1. *Deterring Crime*

Scholars debate endlessly about whether or not the death penalty deters crime. Mafia members apparently have weighed the evidence and have discovered that *swift, predictable execution* does indeed influence people's behavior. Those who act as informers to the civil authorities wind up dead. This has made it difficult for civil authorities to find witnesses who will testify in court against criminal syndicates. The use of the threat of execution by secret societies of many varieties indicates just how effective the death penalty is in modifying people's behavior. Criminal societies, unlike modern scholars, may not have access to statistical data and complex explanations, but their members think they have adopted an effective approach to the "deviant behavior" problem. They may not have many footnotes, but they are still nearly immune to successful prosecution by the civil government. Capital punishment works well for them.

One of the important factors in designing punishments to fit the crime is the fact that most criminals are lower class. The best definition of class position was provided by Prof. Edward Banfield, in his book, *The Unheavenly City* (1970). He defined class in terms of future-orientation. An upper-class person is future-oriented. A lower-class person is present-oriented. This is another way of saying that a present-oriented person discounts the future more than a future-oriented person does. Banfield writes: "At the present-oriented end of the scale, the lower-class individual lives from moment to moment. If he has any awareness of a future, it is of something fixed, fated, beyond his control: things happen *to* him, he does not *make* them happen. Impulse governs his behavior, either because he cannot discipline himself to sacrifice a present for a future satisfaction or because he has no

15. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

sense of the future. He is therefore radically improvident: whatever he cannot use immediately he considers valueless.”¹⁷ Future costs and future benefits register less forcefully on a lower-class person. This applies to punishment. He is not deterred by distant punishments when facing near-term benefits from committing a crime.

With the death penalty, the future cost is both radical and permanent. While the criminal discounts the future, the magnitude of this sanction is so great that he finds it difficult to discount it to zero, as he does with other forms of negative civil sanctions. This makes the death penalty the most important sanction. Once imposed, there is no escape.

At the same time, the death penalty must not be imposed on criminals who commit crimes of lesser threats to social order. If this sanction is used indiscriminately to fight crime in general, the policy will backfire. One goal of civil law is to reduce the number of serious crimes. If the death penalty were imposed for stealing a bicycle, then bicycle thieves would become extremely dangerous. They would be ready to kill anyone who threatened to expose their crime or take action against it. If the maximum penalty for stealing a bicycle were the same as for murder, the imposition of capital punishment for stealing a bicycle would increase the number of murders. But the goal of the civil law is to reduce the number of murders.

If a sanction is considered by a jury as excessive, the jury will vote not to convict. The criminals will understand that, if captured, they will not be convicted. This subsidizes criminal behavior. This is another reason why the punishment must fit the crime. This is why the Bible requires restitution for crimes against property. Juries will more often convict.

The fundamental principle of biblical civil justice is victim's rights.¹⁸ The victim has the right to prosecute. He also has the right to show mercy. But, in the case of murder, the victim did not survive. The civil government must therefore act on behalf of the deceased victim. It must assume that the victim would have prosecuted.

2. Humanism vs. God's Law

Humanism has steadily eroded the rule of God's law. The human-

17. Edward Banfield, *The Heavenly City Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), p. 61.

18. Chapter 37. Cf. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

ists have, again and again, substituted alternative punishments for those specifically required by the Bible. They have substituted long-term imprisonment for economic restitution to the victim by the criminal. They have substituted life imprisonment for the death penalty. They have substituted parole in three years for life imprisonment. The results have been disastrous.¹⁹ From 1963 to 1992, crime rates in the United States soared. They also soared in Europe, due to similar causes. They did not soar in Asia.²⁰ There, theories of humanistic criminologists did not influence the civil courts.

People want social order. Without this order, too many scarce economic resources must be assigned to crime prevention and safety programs. Voters want a system of prevention that maintains personal freedom for the innocent, but does not bankrupt the enforcing civil government.

There is little doubt that the vast majority of crimes go unpunished. Very few criminals are apprehended; few of these are brought to trial; few of these are convicted; few of these serve complete sentences. But, eventually, most criminals are caught. When they are "off the market," they are not victimizing the innocent. How can society reduce the number of serious crimes, given the reality of penalty?

Murder is a major crime. Victims are permanently disenfranchised. Thus, societies throughout history have imposed the death penalty. Even when a criminal knows that he may not be caught and convicted, the presence of the death penalty serves as a deterrent. If he is caught—if "his number comes up"—then the punishment is permanent. Those who believe in a chance universe are willing to take chances. All criminals take chances if they believe that the odds are in their favor. But losing a bet against capital punishment is something else. Losers don't get to "play the game" again.

When societies raise the stakes to criminals by imposing capital punishment for capital crimes, they thereby reduce the likelihood of criminals' committing these crimes. Furthermore, those who do murder and who are convicted are not set free to kill again. While any single instance of criminal behavior may not be punished, eventually the professional criminal gets caught and convicted. If he is executed, all future crimes by this specialist in brutality are eliminated.

19. Jessica Mitford, *Kind and Unusual Punishment: The Prison Business* (New York: Knopf, 1973).

20. Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of the Social Order* (New York: Free Press, 1999), pp. 31–36.

Society itself must not become brutal. By adhering to biblical law, a society can specify which crimes are capital and which involve paying restitution. But for those crimes that are specified as capital, the biblical commonwealth can reduce their likelihood even in an imperfect penal system which does not operate in terms of perfect knowledge. It raises the stakes so high that risk-taking criminals prefer to commit other sorts of crimes. The imperfection of the legal system is offset by the risk of permanent loss to the murderer.

Conclusion

Man, as the designated agent of the King of kings, possesses lawful authority. He is made in the image of the King, so he is to be protected by civil government. One aspect of this protection is the death penalty. God has delegated the right to execute to the civil government. The civil government can also protect men from kidnapping, a capital crime (Ex. 21:16).²¹ The police power of the state is to serve as one of the foundations of social stability.

The state thereby permits men to apply time and capital to their callings. It offers them legal predictability, which is vital to the flourishing of personal freedom and economic development. Most important, the right of the civil government to take a man's life under specified conditions is apt to remind men of the ultimate Judge who gives the gift of life, but who also retains the right to remove life from those who rebel against Him. The civil government's monopoly of execution testifies to God's absolute hostility against sin, especially the sin of striking out against God's own image.

This is an extremely important point. Man's life is to be protected, not because each man possesses a hypothetical absolute and original right of ownership over his own person (the fundamental assertion of most libertarian and anarcho-capitalist theoreticians), but because God is absolutely sovereign and the absolute owner of all things, including men. He will not permit His image, man, to be mortally wounded without imposing a form of judgment which, in time and on earth, is analogous to that final judgment beyond the grave. Peter speaks of "the grace of life" (I Pet. 3:7); to destroy human life is to reject grace. Murderers have no place in God's inheritance (Gal. 5:21; Rev. 21:8).

21. Chapter 38.

THE YOKE OF CO-OPERATIVE SERVICE

Thou shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14).

The theocentric basis of this law is God as the faithful husband of His chosen people, which Israel was in the Old Testament. This clearly is an aspect of point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy.¹ The subordinate wife is not to commit adultery against her husband. The hierarchy of marriage must be maintained by both parties.

A. Bondage: An Inescapable Concept

As in all covenantal institutions, marriage necessarily involves the restraining factor of *discipline*. It is therefore a form of bondage. The Bible teaches that all creatures are bound by God through intermediaries established under His authority. *All life is bondage*. In Egypt, the people of God were in bondage. God delivered them: “I have broken the bands of your yoke” (Lev. 26:13b). Rebellion against God leads to the reimposition of earthly bondage under God’s enemies—an external manifestation of a spiritual condition (Deut. 28:48). The book of Judges is an account of this process.

When the Israelites fell away from God and began to worship the deities of the surrounding Canaanite nations, they were brought under the domination of these foreign nations. They “had their noses rubbed” in the cultures of God’s enemies, until they cried out for deliverance.² Therefore, men must bear a yoke of some kind: God’s or Satan’s. They are commanded to take up Christ’s yoke, for it is a light

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/jjjjudges>)

and easy one (Matt. 11:29–30).³ Men are always in *ethical bondage*, for they always serve either God or Mammon, the god of this world (Matt. 6:24).⁴ Men must do the work of some master. There is no such thing as a free (autonomous) man. Man is always *subordinate*.

The yoke of marriage, as with all yokes, is a *yoke of labor*. This is one reason why Christians are cautioned to shun marriages with someone of another religious faith: labor performed by the partners will ultimately be at cross purposes (II Cor. 6:14).⁵ There is a *fundamental ethical separation* between believers and unbelievers, so the work of the believing partner is necessarily compromised. The Old Testament prohibition against ethical dualism within covenantal institutions can be seen in the case-law application regarding oxen (clean beasts) and donkeys (unclean): they were not to be yoked together (Deut. 22:10).⁶ If this rule is binding with respect to plowing, how much more binding in marriage!

A yoke provides *balance and direction* for both laborers. In the case of beasts of burden, the yoke multiplies the output of the two animals, and it also provides the master with a means of guiding their efforts. Neither animal can stray from its master or its partner. Each beast's labor should therefore complement the productivity of the other. The analogy of the yoke holds true for marriage. The seeds of the kingdom are sown in an orderly, productive, efficient manner. Marriage is a yoke of service.

The establishment of the marriage bond is an affirmation of interpersonal *communion*. Genesis 2:24 presents the concept of two persons' becoming one flesh, which is a distinctly theological description of the marriage bond. The act of physical union is a symbolic affirmation of this personal communion. Fornication (premarital sexual union) and adultery (post-betrothal sexual union with a partner other than one's mate) are both prohibited by God's law. The Bible sets forth explicit theological reasons for this prohibition, namely, God's ownership of mankind, and His specific design of the body for morality rather than immorality (I Cor. 6:13–20). Other implications are easy to discern. Fornication and adultery are symbolic affirmations of the le-

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

5. A slogan might be: "Marriage should be for the purposes of the cross, not at cross purposes."

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 55.

gitimacy of communion outside of the marital covenant. Paul cites Genesis 2:24 in his presentation of the analogy between marriage and salvation: Christ's love for His church is like a man's love for his wife (Eph. 5:22–31).

B. Adultery

Adultery is the symbolic rejection of Christ's covenant with His church, an assertion of the impermanence of Christ's love and His commitment to His people. But even more fundamental is the foundation of all interpersonal relationships, the Trinity. The very Godhead is personal: total personalism in mutually self-exhaustive communion. The bond among the Persons of the Trinity is eternal. Adultery is therefore a symbolic denial of the permanence of the Trinity, as well as being a symbolic denial of the permanence of Christ's love for His church. Thus, when Adam and Eve sinned against God, they felt shame with particular intensity regarding their private parts, and they immediately hid them from each other, thereby introducing a symbolic barrier between themselves which reflected the new *ethical barrier* between themselves and God. It is not surprising that the Bible specifies the death penalty for adultery (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22: 22).⁷ It is also not surprising that pagan nations in antiquity, being *polytheistic*, were marked by ritual prostitution near or inside the temples: many gods, many covenants, many communions.

Marriage is a *covenantal* institution. It is established by the exchange of vows, both implicit and explicit. These vows are three-way vows initially: man and wife under God. Relationships with children and parents are also involved. Because of the covenantal nature of these vows, their terms are subject to enforcement by external human institutions: family, church, and civil government. No one who violates these vows can legitimately escape the judgment of these earthly institutions, nor can he escape ultimate retribution (Gal. 5:19–21).

Adultery is a straightforward denial of the legitimacy of God's covenantal yoke. It is a denial of permanent communion, a denial of binding contracts, and a denial of the permanence of God's grace in election. It is ultimately a *denial of the Trinity*—an assertion of the interpersonal unfaithfulness of the Persons of the Godhead. Adultery

7. This was the maximum penalty authorized, imposed by the civil government at the discretion of the victimized spouse. Chapter, ch. 37, section on "Dying, He Must Die."

affirms the autonomy of man and the impermanence of man's institutions. It affirms that God's special love for His redeemed people is at bottom unpredictable and impermanent. In short, adultery affirms that Christ's love for His church is grounded in chance and lawlessness. *Adultery is a symbolic assertion of a radically false theology.* The ministry of the prophet Hosea was God's explicit and symbolic refutation of the theology of adultery.

Adultery disrupts the covenantal bonds of the family unit. It thwarts the proper administration of God's system of familistic capital. Based on mistrust, unfaithfulness, and a rejection of the restraints of verbal promises, adultery shatters the yoke of service. The result is predictable: the dissipation of familistic capital.

Vows are permanent. They cannot be revoked if they are made to God. "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth" (Num. 30:2).⁸ A woman's vow is binding 24 hours after her father (if she is single) or her husband has heard of it and has not revoked it (Num. 30:3–8). The vow of a widow or a divorced woman stands (Num. 30:9). Because of the covenantal nature of the vow to God, God holds the vow-taker responsible for the fulfillment of the vow. God is sovereign, and He holds men responsible.

Permanent or household slavery in the Old Testament was a vow taken voluntarily. The slave who wished to remain in his master's house beyond the sixth year, or beyond the jubilee year, could do so. The master drove an awl through the slave's ear and into the door (Deut. 15:17). It was a bloody symbol of a permanent relationship, even as the blood on the doorpost at the Passover was a sign of a family's permanent relationship with God (Ex. 12:7). The slave was no longer a chattel slave but rather an adopted son of the house.

Marriage involves the same bloody sign. The "tokens of virginity" of the Old Testament were almost certainly the bloody cloth of the wedding night, which was presented to the wife's father in order to protect her from the charge of premarital sexual activity made by a lying husband (Deut. 22:13–17). The cloth of verse 17 bore the mark of her virginity; it must have been blood. The blood of the circumcised male was also a covenantal sign of permanence.⁹

8. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

9. Gary North, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Christianity and Civilization*,

C. Time and Commitment

Yoked beasts clearly *belong* to someone. The same is true of yoked marriage partners. They serve some master. The marriage is a covenant bond, metaphysically always under God, but *ethically* under either Satan or God. The partners build for the future: a future under God or a future dominated by Satan. The yokeless beast is a wild beast; the family yoke domesticates each partner, rather like the yoke on beasts of burden.

The efforts of the marriage partners can be directed toward the *future*, for the family extends into the future through the children and the expansion of family capital. This future-oriented nature of the family adds incentives for thrift, careful planning, hard work, and economic growth. Each partner can rely on the assistance of the other, as well as the compassion of the other in times of crisis. This frees up the minds of both partners, for each knows that the other is there to help. What would otherwise be “uneven plowing” by one is smoothed out by the effect of the “yoke”: the family goes forward, day by day, despite the occasional failings of either of the partners.

While yoked together, neither partner can stray far without the other; neither can go his or her own way without regard for the other. One of the most eloquent affirmations of the social value of marriage comes from George Gilder.

The short-sighted outlook of poverty stems largely from the breakdown of family responsibilities among fathers. The lives of the poor, all too often, are governed by the rhythms of tension and release that characterize the sexual experience of young single men. . . . Civilized society is dependent upon the submission of the short-term sexuality of young men to the extended maternal horizons of women. This is what happens in monogamous marriage; the man disciplines his sexuality and extends it into the future through a woman's womb. The woman gives him access to his children, otherwise forever denied to him; and he gives her the product of his labor, otherwise dissipated on temporary pleasures. The woman gives him a unique link to the future and a vision of it; he gives her faithfulness and a commitment to a lifetime of hard work. If work effort is the first principle of overcoming poverty, marriage is the prime source of upwardly mobile work.¹⁰

Gilder also reported that, when marriages fail, the now-unen-

4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

10. George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 70.

cumbered husband may revert to the lifestyle of singleness. "On the average, his income drops by one-third and he shows a far higher propensity for drink, drugs, and crime." Thus, he concludes, "The key to the intractable poverty of the hardcore American poor is the dominance of single and separated men in poor communities."¹¹ Crime and social pathology in general increase when family cohesion decreases. This has been documented in literally thousands of sociological studies.¹² The problem for the conventional social scientist is that there are no generally acceptable measures that the civil government can take that will increase the stability of the family. As political scientist James Wilson says, "I cannot imagine any collective action we could take consistent with our civil liberties that would restore a moral consensus. . . ."¹³

There is one step, however, that could be taken without violating civil liberties. In fact, it would increase civil liberties by reducing the size of the state. It is the step that the politicians believe that they dare not consider, yet which must eventually be considered: the abolition of all forms of state welfare payments, especially aid to dependent children. This is the recommendation of Charles Murray, whose 1984 book, *Losing Ground*, revealed the extent of the moral and social bankruptcy of the Federal welfare programs. Murray made clear what is taking place. The state is subsidizing immorality, and immorality is disrupting the society. In 1960, approximately 224,000 children in the United States were born to single mothers; in 1980, over 665,000 of these children were born.¹⁴ This increase was especially marked within the black community. From 1950 through 1963, just before President Johnson's heralded "War on Poverty" began, black illegitimate births rose slowly from 17% of all black births to 23%. In 1980, 48% of all live births among blacks were to single women.¹⁵ Furthermore, a growing proportion of all illegitimate children are being born to teenagers.¹⁶ This, it should be pointed out, took place during the period in which compulsory "sex education" courses were being established in the government school systems.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

12. Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Origins of Alienation," *Scientific American*, Vol. 231 (Aug. 1974).

13. James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 206.

14. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 125-26.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

In 1950, about 88% of white families consisted of husband-wife households, and about 78% of black families did. In a single year, 1968, the percentage for black families slipped from 72% to 69%, and in the next five years, it dropped another six percentage points. By the end of 1980, the proportion was down to 59%.¹⁷ As Murray says, “a change of this magnitude is a demographic wonder, without precedent in the American experience.”¹⁸ “As of 1980, 65 percent of all poor blacks who were living in families were living in families headed by a single female. The parallel statistic for whites was 34 percent.”¹⁹

What about low-income blacks—not just the hard-core poor? These are people with incomes equal to or up to 25% above the defined poverty level. “In 1959, low-income blacks lived in families very much like those of low-income whites and, for that matter, like those of middle- and upper-income persons of all races. Barely one in ten of the low-income blacks in families was living in a single-female family. By 1980, the 10 percent figure had become 44 percent.” This was higher than the percentage common among poor whites.²⁰

Murray’s conclusion is eloquent, and it gets right to the point: The presence of long-term poverty is not primarily a function of family income. It is a function of morality, time perspective, and faith regarding economic causes and effects.

Let us suppose that you, a parent, could know that tomorrow your own child would be made an orphan. You have a choice. You may put your child with an extremely poor family, so poor that your child will be badly clothed and will indeed sometimes be hungry. But you also know that the parents have worked hard all their lives, will make sure your child goes to school and studies, and will teach your child that independence is a primary value. Or you may put your child with a family with parents who have never worked, will be incapable of overseeing your child’s education—but who have plenty of food and good clothes, provided by others. If the choice about where one would put one’s own child is as clear to you as it is to me, on what grounds does one justify support of a system that, indirectly but without doubt, makes the other choice for other children? The answer that ‘What we really want is a world where that choice is not forced upon us’ is no answer. We have tried to have it that way. We failed. Everything we know about why we failed tells us that more of

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

20. *Idem.*

the same will not make the dilemma go away.²¹

The dilemma did not go away. In 2006, the rates of illegitimate births in the United States were as follows: whites (non-Hispanics), 26.6%; African-Americans, 70.2%; American Indians, 64.7%; Hispanics, 50%.²² The poverty rate among racial groups and the illegitimacy rate among these groups remained closely correlated.

The defenders of modern socialism—who are far fewer in 2011 than in 1986—and defenders of the welfare state have closed their eyes for three generations or more to the testimony of the Bible, and also to the testimony of the statisticians. They cling to a demonic view of stewardship, with the pseudo-family of the state at the head of the financial household. The result has been the destruction of families and also the productivity and social peace produced by the family.

D. Binding Contracts and Economic Growth

Covenants are binding. If men refuse to accept this truth, the possibilities for economic development in a society are thereby reduced. The historic link between the biblical idea of binding covenants and the West's idea of binding contracts is obvious enough. The covenant of marriage supports the institution that was the first to implement the division of labor. Without the predictability associated with contracts, the division of labor is hampered. Contracts involve the sharing of the fruits of combined labor.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the family unit. The basis of the idea of a contract, like the idea of a covenant, is *personal faithfulness*. It begins with the Trinity, extends to the relationship between Christ and His church, undergirds the family, and makes long-term economic co-operation possible. A covenant is binding in the same way that an individualistic vow to God is binding. God is the sanctioning agent. A contract, which does not have the same degree of authority as a covenant or a vow to God, nevertheless is analogous. If the model of permanence for contracts, namely, the vow or the covenant, is denied true permanence, then how much less permanent are contracts!

When J. D. Unwin examined the relationship between monogamy and cultural development, he found that in every society that he stud-

21. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

22. Centers for Disease Control, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 57, No. 7 (Jan. 2009), Table 18, p. 54.

ied, the absence of monogamy guaranteed the eventual stagnation or retrogression of that society.²³ The Bible provides us with the information concerning man that allows us to understand why such a relationship between monogamy and culture should exist. The promise of external blessings is held out to those societies that covenant themselves with God, and which enforce the terms of that covenant, biblical law. The archetypal symbol of the rejection of God's covenant is adultery. The old business rule is close to the truth: "A man who cheats on his wife will probably cheat on anybody." It may not hold true in every single instance of adultery by a businessman, but when a society accepts adultery as "business as usual," business will not long retain its character as an enterprise marked by binding contracts. Honest business will become increasingly unusual, and litigation costs will rise, as men seek to enforce contracts. This represents needless waste—needless from the point of view of the dominion covenant. Lawyers prosper and multiply—a sign of a collapsing culture.

Thomas Sowell pointed out the importance of rigid, formal, and enforceable rules regarding marriage. His insights are to the point.

Society itself may need to guarantee that certain relationships will remain rigid and inviolate in all but the most extraordinary circumstances. Much socially beneficial prospective action will not take place, or will not take place to the same extent, without rigid guarantees. The heavy investment of emotion, time, and resources necessary to raise a child would be less likely in a society where the child might at any moment, for any capricious reason, be taken away and never seen again. Such behavior is rejected not only for its retrospective injustice but also for its *prospective* effect on parental behavior. Not only will the state forbear from such behavior; it will use severe sanctions against private individuals who do such things (kidnappers). This rigid legal framework of parent-child relationships provides the protective setting within which the most flexible kinds of parent-child social relationships may develop.²⁴

Sowell immediately proceeds to the questions of property and ownership, "Similar considerations apply across a spectrum of other social arrangements, particularly those involving long and large individual investments of efforts for prospective personal and social bene-

23. J. D. Unwin, *Sex and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934). Cf. Unwin, "Monogamy as a Condition of Social Energy," *The Hibbert Journal*, XXV (July 1927); reprinted in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, IV (Winter 1977–78).

24. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 31.

fits. Property rights introduce rigidities into the use of vast amounts of many resources—by excluding all but the legal owner(s) from a serious voice in most of the decisions made about the disposition of the resources—on the assumption that such losses as are occasioned by this rigidity are more than offset by the gains in prospective behavior by people acting under these guarantees.”²⁵ There is a socially indivisible link between rules protecting the integrity of the family and rules protecting private property. The civil government must enforce these rules.

Christians who are familiar with the commandment against coveting should understand this important link between family and property. “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Ex. 20:17).²⁶ Socialism is the legislated economics of covetousness. It is as much a threat against the family’s integrity as adultery is a threat to the integrity of the free market’s contractual order.

Sowell’s analysis is accurate. If the following paragraph were understood and implemented by societies that regard themselves as Christian—and even by societies that do not regard themselves as Christian—the world would prosper economically.

Someone who is going to work for many years to have his own home wants some fairly rigid assurance that the house will in fact belong to him—that he cannot be dispossessed by someone who is physically stronger, better armed, or more ruthless, or who is deemed more “worthy” by political authorities. Rigid assurances are needed that changing fashions, mores, and power relationships will not suddenly deprive him of his property, his children, or his life. Informal relationships which flourish in a society do so within the protection of formal laws on property, ownership, kidnapping, murder, and other basic matters on which people want rigidity rather than continuously negotiable or modifiable relationships.²⁷

E. Libertarian Contracts

A major theoretical dilemma for the modern libertarian or anarcho-capitalist is the problem of the lifetime contract. Each man is seen as the absolute owner of his own body. He therefore can legitim-

25. *Idem.*

26. Chapter 30.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

ately make contracts with other men that involve his own labor services. *He is absolutely sovereign over his own person.* This is the theoretical foundation of almost all libertarian thought. Murray Rothbard wrote: "The central core of the libertarian creed, then, is to establish the absolute right to private property of every man: first, in his own body, and second, in the previous unused natural resources which he first transforms by his labor. These two axioms, the right of self-ownership and the right to 'homestead,' establish the complete set of principles of the libertarian system."²⁸

But then there arises the problem of slavery: *the lifetime contract.* Man, the absolute sovereign agent, seems to be able to *sign away his autonomy* in such a contract. To say that man cannot legitimately sign such a contract—that such a contract is not morally or legally binding—is to say that there are limits placed on this autonomous sovereignty of man. This is the libertarian's version of the old question: "Is God powerful enough to make a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it?" The libertarians ask: "Is man sovereign enough to make a contract so binding that he cannot break it?" The theist is not particularly bothered by the real-life applications of the God-rock paradox, but the libertarian faces several paradoxical problems that are only too real. First, how long is a contract really binding, if lifetime contracts are illegitimate? Forty years? Four years? Four weeks? When does the absolute sovereignty of a man to make a binding contract come into conflict with the absolute sovereignty of a man not to be bound by any permanent transfer of his own will? Lifetime slavery is immoral and illegal in a libertarian framework. A libertarian must argue that such a contract should always be legally unenforceable. But what about a ten-year baseball contract? Second, and more to the point, what about marriage?

Rothbard was the most consistent and innovative of the libertarian economists. He stated his position with his usual clarity: "... a man cannot permanently transfer his will, even though he may transfer much of his services and his property. As mentioned above, a man may not agree to permanent bondage by contracting to work for another man for the rest of his life. He might change his mind at a later date, and then he cannot, in a free market, be compelled to continue working thereafter. Because a man's self-ownership over his will is inalienable, he cannot, on the unhampered market, be compelled to continue

28. Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1978), p. 39. (<http://bit.ly/RothLib>)

an arrangement whereby he submits his will to the orders of another, even though he might have agreed to this arrangement previously.”²⁹ In the footnote to this final sentence, he adds: “In other words, he cannot make enforceable contracts binding his future personal actions. . . . This applies also to *marriage contracts*. Since human self-ownership cannot be alienated, a man or a woman, on a free market, could not be compelled to continue in marriage if he or she no longer desired to do so. This is regardless of any previous agreement. Thus, a marriage contract, like an individual labor contract, is, on an unhampered market, terminable at the will of *either one* of the parties.”³⁰

The libertarian concept of absolute self-ownership as the foundation of all economic exchanges sinks into oblivion when it hits the libertarian concept of the illegitimacy of lifetime contracts. The libertarian’s universe could not bind a man to perform any sort of future labor service. It certainly could not require him to love, cherish, and support a recently abandoned wife. She may have given him her youth in the days of her beauty—her “high-yield capital” stage, or her “high exchange value capital” stage—but once this capital is gone, she is without legal protection. Thus, *the radical impermanence of libertarian contracts* would threaten the social fabric of any society so short-sighted as to adopt this social philosophy as its foundation. The *future-orientation* provided by the safety of permanent vows in a godly society could not exist in a consistently libertarian society. There would be no institutional means of enforcing the terms of covenants, and this would eventually reduce men’s confidence in the enforceability of shorter-run contracts. A society that rejects the binding nature of covenants will not long retain the economic blessings of binding contracts.

Conclusion

A biblical social order protects a man’s life, wife, and property. The woman is protected, too. The time perspective of such a society will be longer term than a social order (disorder) characterized by adultery, divorce, illegitimate births, and single-parent households. Whenever a social order is marked by successful attacks against private property and also by the removal of stringent sanctions against adultery, the so-

29. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), p. 164.

30. *Idem.*, footnote 35. Emphasis in original.

cial order in question has departed from the standards set forth in the Bible. It has adopted an anti-biblical religion, whatever the official pronouncements of its leaders, including its church leaders. A survey of 950 religious teachers and counsellors, which was conducted by the University of Houston in 1984, revealed that of the 500 who responded to the questionnaire, 40% did not believe that premarital heterosexual sex is immoral, and that 87% believed that adultery should not be a crime. Sixteen per cent said that adultery is not morally wrong, 9% were uncertain, and 75% said it is morally wrong. But almost none of them thought the civil government has any role in punishing adulterers. Only 53% said that the legal system ought to limit marriage to people of opposite sexes.³¹ When the religious and political leaders of a society begin to wink at adultery, they will soon enough wink at coercive wealth redistribution, confiscatory taxation, and the compulsory retraining of children by statist planners. In fact, we can expect to see these leaders not only wink at such invasions of both the family and property, but also actively pursue these policies. There are too many adulterers in the highest seats of civil government and in the pulpit.

In the sixth commandment, we are told that man's life is sacrosanct, for man is made in God's image. In the seventh, we are told that the marriage covenant is also sacrosanct, for it reflects the covenantal bond of Christ with His church, and even the covenantal bond within the Trinity.

The yoke of co-operative service necessarily involves a hierarchy: husbands possess lawful (though biblically specified) authority over their wives. But this possession is mutual, Paul tells us: the man's body belongs to the wife, and her body belongs to him (I Cor. 7:4). The husband's authority is therefore limited. Each of the partners belongs to God, whose ownership is absolute. But God's ultimate authority is reflected in the husband's authority. This hierarchy reflects the hierarchy of God the Father over God the Son. Thus, the seventh commandment parallels the second: there must be authority, hierarchy, and obedience.

31. Associated Press story, *Tyler Morning Telegraph* (Dec. 28, 1984).

THE RIGHTS OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

Thou shalt not steal (Ex. 20:15).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the original owner of the creation. Its judicial precedent was God's command to Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which belonged exclusively to God. That tree was a symbol of all five points of the covenant: the sovereignty of God, the hierarchical structure of creation, the ownership boundary around property, sanctions—positive (knowledge) and negative (death)—and man's inheritance in history. But the primary judicial issue was boundaries. Boundaries are an aspect of point three of the biblical covenant model.¹ Those people and institutions to whom God delegates temporary ownership of property are to be protected from theft. This law is a requirement of effective kingdom-building.

A. The Number-One Passage

It has long been recognized by Christian commentators that the biblical case for private property rests more heavily on this passage than on any other passage in the Bible. Individuals are prohibited by biblical law from forcibly appropriating the fruits of another man's labor or his inheritance. The civil government is required by the Bible to defend a social order based on the rights of private ownership. The various laws requiring restitution that are found in Exodus 22 explicitly limit the state in its imposition of sanctions against thieves, but there can be no doubt that the civil government is required to impose them.

Rights of ownership mean that God transfers to specific men and

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

organizations the unique authority to use specific property for certain kinds of ends. The state is required to *exclude* others from the unauthorized use of such property. Property *rights* therefore refer to *legal immunities* from interference by others in the administration of property. The duties associated with dominion are more readily and effectively achieved by individuals and societies through adherence to the private property system, which is one reason why the Bible protects private ownership. *Private property is basic to effective dominion.*

The only conceivable biblical argument against this interpretation of the commandment against theft would be an assertion that the only valid form of ownership is ownership by the state, meaning control by bureaucracies established by civil law. But to argue along these lines demands evidence that the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, authorized the public (state) ownership of all goods. There is not a shred of evidence for such a view, and massive evidence against it. The tenth commandment prohibits coveting the property of a *neighbor*. The state is no one's neighbor. The state has no wife to covet. The social order that is presented as binding in the Mosaic law is a social order that acknowledges and defends the rights—the *legal immunities*—of private property. This prohibition against theft binds individuals and institutions, including the state. This commandment does not say, "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

B. God's Ownership, Man's Stewardship

The foundation of property rights is the ultimate ownership of all things by God, the Creator. God owns the whole world. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 50:10–12).² God's sovereignty is absolute. The biblical concept of property rests on this definition of God's authority over the creation. The Bible provides us with data concerning God's delegation of responsibility to men—as individuals and as members of collective associations—but all human sovereignty, including property rights, must be understood as *limited, delegated, and covenantal*.

Christ's parable of the talents presents the sovereignty of God in terms of the analogy of a loan from a lord to his servants. The servants

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

have an obligation to increase the value of the capital entrusted to them. They are directly responsible to their lord, who is the real owner of the capital. *Ownership is therefore stewardship*. Men's rights of ownership are delegated, legally enforceable rights. God's "loan" must be repaid with capital gains, or at the very least, with interest (Matt. 25:27).³ This is one of Christ's "pocketbook parables," and while it was designed to illustrate God's absolute sovereignty over the affairs of men, it nevertheless conveys a secondary meaning, namely, the legitimate rights of private ownership. Each man is fully responsible before God for the lawful and profitable administration of God's capital, which includes both spiritual capital and economic capital (Luke 12:48).⁴

God distributed to Adam and Eve the resources of the world. They were made covenantally responsible for the care and expansion of this capital base when God established His dominion covenant with them. This same covenant was reestablished with Noah and his family (Gen. 9:1–7).⁵ In the originally sinless condition of Adam and Eve, this initial distribution of the earth's resources could be made by God in terms of an original harmony of anyone's interests.⁶ This harmony included *hierarchy*, for Eve was functionally subordinate to Adam (though not ethically inferior).⁷ The God-designed harmony of interests was never an egalitarian relationship. It is surely not egalitarian in the post-Fall world. The church, as the body of Christ, is similarly described in terms of an organic unity which is supposed to be harmonious, with each "organ" essential to the proper functioning of the whole, yet with each performing separate tasks (I Cor. 12).⁸ All are under Christ, the head of the church (Eph. 5:23).

God's universe is orderly. *There is a God-ordained regularity in economic affairs*. There is a predictable, lawful relationship between personal industriousness and wealth, between laziness and poverty. "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 18.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

8. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man" (Prov. 6:9–11). "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase" (Prov. 13:11). This applies to individuals, families, corporations, and nations. Not every godly man or organization will inevitably prosper economically, in time and on earth, and not every evil man will lose his wealth during his lifetime (Luke 16:19–31),⁹ but in the aggregate, there will be a significant correlation between *covenantal faithfulness* and *external prosperity*. In the long run, the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22).¹⁰ This same principle applies to national, cultural, and racial groups (Deut. 8).¹¹ Covenantal law governs the sphere of economics. Wealth flows to those who work hard, deal honestly with their customers, and who honor God. To argue, as the Marxists and socialists do, that wealth flows in a free market social order towards those who are ruthless, dishonest, and blinded by greed, is to deny the Bible's explicit teachings concerning the nature of economic life. It is a denial of the covenantal lawfulness of the creation.

C. The Theology of the Welfare State

Critics of the capitalist system have inflicted great damage on those societies that have accepted such criticisms as valid. Men have concluded that the private property system is rigged against the poor and weak, forcing them into positions of permanent servitude. Historically, on the contrary, *no social order has provided more opportunities for upward social mobility than capitalism*. The remarkable advance of numerous immigrant groups, but especially of Eastern European Jews, in the United States from 1880 to 1950, is historically unprecedented.¹² Today, the policies of the welfare state are making lifetime dependents out of a substantial minority of citizens.¹³ The modern welfare system is deeply flawed, not simply because it uses coercion to take income from the employed, but because it destroys the will of the recipients to

9. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 40.

10. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

11. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 21, 22.

12. Cf. Thomas Sowell, *Race and Economics* (New York: David McKay Co., 1975), Part II.

13. George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), chaps. 6–13.

escape from the welfare system.¹⁴ The politics of welfare is also leading to class conflict. George Gilder's words are eloquent in this regard: "A program to lift by transfers and preferences the incomes of less diligent groups is politically divisive—and very unlikely—because it incurs the bitter resistance of the real working class. In addition, such an effort breaks the psychological link between effort and reward, which is crucial to long-run upward mobility. Because effective work consists not in merely fulfilling the requirements of labor contracts, but in 'putting out' with alertness and emotional commitment, workers have to understand and feel deeply that what they are given depends on what they give—that they must supply work in order to demand goods. Parents and schools must inculcate this idea in their children both by instruction and example. Nothing is more deadly to achievement than the belief that effort will not be rewarded, that the world is a bleak and discriminatory place in which only the predatory and the specially preferred can get ahead. Such a view in the home discourages the work effort in school that shapes earnings capacity afterward. As with so many aspects of human performance, work effort begins in family experiences, and its sources can be best explored through an examination of family structure. Indeed, after work the second principle of upward mobility is the maintenance of monogamous marriage and family."¹⁵

The biblical perspective on marriage, like the biblical perspective on the foundations of economic growth, points to both ideas: the relationship between work and reward, and the central importance of the family bond. Men are told to have faith in the work-reward relationship, which encourages them to take risks and invest time and effort to improve their own personal work habits. The Bible tells us that such efforts will not go unrewarded, whether on earth or in heaven (I Cor. 3:10–15).¹⁶ The habits of discipline, thrift, long hours of effort, investment in work skills, and the instruction of children in this philosophy of life will not be wasted, will not be "capital down the drain." On the

14. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984).

15. Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty*, pp. 68–69. Gilder's book is second only to Murray's *Losing Ground* as a study of the welfare state and its destruction of the avenues of private economic advancement. It is not equally good on questions of fiscal and monetary policy. For a critique of Gilder's recommended monetary policies, see Gary North, *The Last Train Out* (Ft. Worth, Texas: American Bureau of Economic Research, 1983), pp. 9–13.

16. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 3.

contrary, the Bible teaches that *such an approach to life is the very essence of the dominion covenant*.

When philosophies contrary to the philosophy of capital accumulation and private economic dominion are encountered, Christians should recognize them for what they are. When men are taught that the capitalist system is rigged against them, that they have a legal and moral right to welfare payments, and that those who live well as a result of their own labor, effort, and forecasting skills are immoral and owe the bulk of their wealth to the poor, we must recognize the source of these teachings: the pits of hell. This is Satan's counter-philosophy, which is expressly intended to thwart godly men in their efforts to subdue the earth to the glory of God. This radically anti-biblical philosophy is not simply a matter of intellectual error; it is a *conscious philosophy of destruction*, a systematically anti-biblical framework that is calculated to undercut successful Christians by means of false guilt and paralysis. That such teachings were popular among Christian intellectuals in the latter years of the twentieth century testifies to their abysmal ignorance—indeed, their judicial blindness (Matt. 13:14-15)—concerning both biblical ethics and economic theory. Christian intellectuals by the mid-twentieth century had adopted the politics of envy from the secular humanists, especially in college and seminary classrooms. We live in an age of guilt-manipulators, and some of them use Scripture to persuade unsuspecting Christians of the truth of their anti-biblical worldview.¹⁷ They are either wolves in sheep's clothing or else they are ill-informed to the point that they are dangerous to church and society.

D. Theft and Market Value

Christian commentators have, from earliest times, understood that the prohibition of theft, like the prohibition against covetousness, serves as a defense of private property. Theft is an autonomous, willful

17. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1996). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>). Sider finally abandoned much of his state-expanding economics in the twentieth anniversary edition of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1997). See North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F. Sider's successor is Jim Wallis, whose book, *God's Politics* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), extends much of Sider's original analysis. I maintain a continuing refutation of Wallis on my Website, www.garynorth.com: Questions for Jim Wallis. See also Joel McDurmon, *God versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009), ch. 10.

act of economic redistribution, and therefore it is a denial of the legitimacy and reliability of God's moral and economic law-order.

The immediate economic effect of widespread theft in society is the creation of insecurity. This lowers the market value of goods, since people are less willing to bid high prices for items that are likely to be stolen. Uncertainty is increased, which requires that people invest a greater proportion of their assets in buying protection services or devices. Scarce economic resources are shifted from production and consumption to crime fighting. This clearly lowers per capita productivity and therefore per capita wealth, at least among law-abiding people.

The internal restraints on theft that are provided by godly preaching and upbringing help to reduce crime, thereby increasing per capita wealth within the society. *Godly preaching and active church courts* are therefore forms of *capital investment* for the society as a whole (what the economists call "social overhead capital"), for they release scarce economic resources that would otherwise have been spent on the protection of private and public property. Such preaching and church court actions also reduce the necessary size of the civil government, which is important in reducing the growth of unwarranted state power.

What is true about the reduction of theft is equally true concerning the strengthening of men's commitment to private property in general. When property rights are carefully defined and enforced, the value of property increases. Allen and Alchian, in their college-level economics textbook, comment on this aspect of property rights. "For market prices to guide allocation of goods, there must be an incentive for people to express and to respond to offers. If it is costly to reveal bids and offers and to negotiate and make exchanges, the gains from exchange might be offset. If each person speaks a different language [as at the tower of Babel—G.N.], if thievery is rampant, or if contracts are likely to be dishonored, then negotiation, transaction, and policing costs will be so high that fewer market exchanges will occur. If *property rights* in goods are weaker, ill defined, or vague, their reallocation is likely to be guided by lower offers and bids. Who would offer as much for a coat likely to be stolen?"¹⁸ The authors believe that the higher market value of goods that are protected by strong ownership rights spurs individuals to seek laws that will strengthen private-prop-

18. Armen A. Alchian and William R. Allen, *University Economics: Elements of Inquiry*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1972), p. 141.

erty rights. Furthermore, to the extent that private-property rights exist, the *power of the civil government* to control the uses of goods is thereby *decreased*. This, unfortunately, has led politicians and jurists to resist the spread of secured private-property rights.¹⁹

There is no question that a society that honors the terms of the commandment against theft will eventually enjoy greater per capita wealth. Such a society rewards honest people with greater possessions. This is as it should be. A widespread hostility to theft, especially from the point of view of self-government (self-restraint), allows men to make more accurate decisions concerning what they want to buy, and therefore what they ought to produce in order to offer something in exchange for the items they want. Again, quoting Allen and Alchian: "The more expensive is protection against theft, the more common is thievery. Suppose that thievery of coats were relatively easy. People would be willing to pay only a lower price for coats. The lower market price of coats will understate the value of coats, for it will not include the value to the thief. If the thief were induced to rent or purchase a used coat, the price of coats would more correctly represent their value to society. It follows that the cheaper the policing costs, the greater the efficiency with which values of various uses or resources are revealed. The more likely something is to be stolen, the less of it that will be produced."²⁰ When communities set up "neighborhood watches" to keep an eye on each other's homes, and to call the police when something suspicious is going on, the value of property in the community is increased, or at least the value of the property on the streets where the neighbors are helping each other. By lowering the benefits to criminals, property owners increase the value of their goods.

1. A Critic Responds

When I referred to the passage by Allen and Alchian in my essay in *Wealth and Poverty* (1984), a collection of four Christian views (the book's cover says)²¹ on economics, one of the three anti-market respondents was horrified. In the name of Jesus, he attacked the idea of the biblical sanction for privately owned property, as well as my defense of the economics of crime prevention, with the following line of

19. *Idem*.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

21. There were four views expressed by Christians.

argumentation: "The less thievery there is, the more the value of private property increases and the less able the poor are to buy it. In capitalism, the more 'moral' a people are, the more the poor are oppressed."²² He was not joking. He expected readers to take him seriously.

The culprit is capitalism, in Mr. Gish's view. Capitalism hurts the poor, he insisted, even when the crime rate goes down. Less thievery means that the poor are exploited under capitalism. First, they are exploited by thieves under capitalism; then they are exploited by capitalists when the thieves go away. Heads, the poor lose; tails, they also lose. If there are any benefits accrued as a result of any reduction in theft, they accrue for the capitalist rich. If this argument is the best that Christian communalists and egalitarians can come up with in their ideological struggle against private ownership, then the intellectual battle is just about over.²³ I cannot resist citing Oscar Wilde's definition of a cynic: "a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." This is Mr. Gish's problem.²⁴

What Mr. Gish did not understand is that thieves reduce the value of everyone's property, both rich and poor, but especially those poor people who live in neighborhoods where crime is rampant. Mr. Gish's comment revealed that he failed to understand the economic reasoning behind Allen and Alchian's conclusion. It is not that prices neces-

22. Art Gish, "A Decentralist Response," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views on Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1984), p. 75. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

23. This turned out to be the case within five years of the publication of this book in 1986. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and socialism fell into disrepute overnight among Western intellectuals. Socialism became passé.

24. I single out Mr. Gish, not because he was a serious economist or a serious social philosopher, but because his article and his criticisms of my position were printed in a book published by a company whose targeted market has always been college-educated American Protestant Christians. Within a year of its publication, senior officials with the company decided to suppress the book. The company pulled it off the market, despite good sales, and sold every copy to me for 25 cents each. I like to think that it was my theoretically uncompromising and rhetorically challenging remarks on the anti-market positions of the other three authors that were the cause of this suppression. In the mid-1980s, in Ronald Reagan's second term, when Protestant evangelicals had voted overwhelmingly for Reagan and against the idea of socialism and high marginal tax rates, anti-market opinions were still *de rigueur* in Protestant evangelical intellectual circles. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the climate of opinion grudgingly turned around among secular humanists. Therefore, by 1995, it began to turn around in Protestant evangelical intellectual circles. There is an echo effect in Protestant evangelical intellectual circles, who take their cues from humanist intellectual circles.

sarily go up when crime is reduced (although they may), thereby excluding the poor; it is that the *value* of goods goes up, including the value of property owned by the poor. The poor get richer, not poorer. Mr. Gish confused increases in the value of property with increases in the cost of living. He was so consumed by his hatred of capitalism that he could not understand a simple economic argument. If the poor now enjoy property that is worth more, why are they oppressed under capitalism? They aren't, unless they are eaten up by envy, and hate to see the rich also get richer—hate it with such intensity that they would give up their own increases in order to tear down the rich. Envy is one of the primary motivations of socialists, as sociologist Helmut Schoeck argued in the mid-1960s.²⁵

The decrease in the value of property as a result of theft would also occur in a socialist economy. Official prices might not change—who knows what a socialist planning board might do to prices in response to crime?—but the value of goods would drop. This has nothing to do with the structure of a particular economy; it has everything to do with the effects of crime on people's assessment of the costs of holding goods. If criminals are raising the costs of holding goods, then the value of the goods falls. In other words, *costs of ownership rise*, so the *value of the items owned drops*. If I own an item that was worth five ounces of gold before the crime wave hit, but it now costs me three ounces of gold a year to store it or otherwise protect it, the net value of that item to me will drop in my calculations. I may be willing to sell it today for two ounces of gold, or even less. Its *price* has dropped only because its *value* to me and to potential buyers *dropped first*. This is so incredibly simple that only a professional capitalism-hater could miss it. Mr. Gish missed it.

If the crime wave stops, and it costs me only an ounce of silver to store it or otherwise defend it—the same storage fee that I paid before the crime wave hit—its value to me will rise. Now I may not be willing to sell it for under five ounces of gold. Others may offer me five ounces because they, too, see its increased net value to them. The crime wave is over. The price rises because the costs of ownership have fallen. Prices “return to normal,” meaning closer to those that prevailed before the crime wave, because value has “returned to normal.”

The wealth of the poor increases when crimes against property are reduced. The market value of the items poor people own also goes up.

25. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*, trans. Michael Glenny and Betty Ross (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1966] 1970), pp. 149ff, 197, 373.

It may even go up more, since the poor may have been the targets of the criminals even more than the rich were. Burglars tend to live and work in neighborhoods where poor people live, not where rich people live. In any case, the cost of defending their goods, proportional to the market value of those goods, was probably far higher for the poor during the crime wave than the protection costs for the rich were, proportional to the value of their goods. The poor probably will experience a more rapid percentage increase in net worth when theft goes down. The poor suffered more when the crime wave hit, so they gain more when it is reduced. This is so incredibly simple that only a professional capitalism-hater could miss it. Mr. Gish missed it.

The increased value of private property in a society that prosecutes theft would also take place in response to preaching against theft, if hearers take seriously the sermons. Mr. Gish continually moralized against theft (theft by ruling elites) in the passage immediately preceding his outraged protest against capitalism. He blamed capitalism for raising the cost of living to poor people whenever theft is reduced. Implicitly, he was arguing that under socialism (or local communal ownership) reducing theft will not lead to higher prices.

2. Value and Price

Let us consider the effects of a wave of theft on market prices. If we understand what is going on in this scenario, we probably have a firm grasp of economic theory. It can serve as a good example. Under capitalism, any *additional* self-government and self-restraint against theft will tend *initially* to raise the market price of goods above that which prevailed prior to the wave of thefts. So will any cost-effective increases in the civil government's war against thieves. Let us look at the sequence of events.

First, the wave of thefts begins. Assume that it is national in scope and horrendous. People are afraid to leave their homes. They reduce the number of shopping trips. They put more money in the bank, since banks are perceived to be safer against bank robbers than homes are against burglars. In other words, they decide to buy fewer stealable goods. Demand for consumer goods therefore drops.

On the other hand, the supply of available goods *initially* rises. Stolen goods that would not have been offered for sale by their owners at the older, higher prices, begin to enter the resale markets. These goods carry price discounts. Honest producers of goods must compete

by lowering their prices. Production of new goods drops. New goods producers begin to go into bankruptcy and start selling goods at huge discounts. Then, after they sell off inventories, some of them stop producing.

In short, prices drop because the value of goods has dropped. Why has the value of goods dropped? Because the *costs of ownership have risen*. If you raise costs, you should expect reduced demand. This is what we do see. The demand for consumer goods drops. This is especially true for poor people, who are more vulnerable to theft and violence in their communities. The value of their presently owned goods is drastically reduced because the costs of ownership for them have been drastically increased.

As I have already pointed out, Mr. Gish was not used to this sort of economic reasoning, so he resorted to his knee-jerk policy of criticizing capitalism for the evils of both increased crime and decreased crime. In good times and bad times, capitalism is evil. He was not alone in his hostility to capitalism in 1984. It was the characteristic feature of literati everywhere until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.²⁶

Second, falling prices are not the end of the story. Prices subsequently start to rise, because buyers can no longer locate sellers of new goods. Too many sellers have gone out of business. The burglars hit them, too. The costs of production rose for them, since producers are owners, too. Furthermore, thieves find that owners have bought burglar alarms, locks, and guard dogs. The costs of being a burglar also rise, so there is less burglary. The availability of stolen goods drops. The initial discounts disappear. Stolen goods start to command higher prices. Fewer goods are bought and sold, but for those necessities that do remain on the shelves, their prices will be higher. *Buyers' money* will be chasing a smaller number of goods, so prices of these goods tend to rise. If the crime wave persists, prices of goods actually brought to market rise higher than they had been before, since fewer goods are available. Most people continue to be worse off as a result of the crime wave.

We need to ask ourselves: How are poor people benefited if prices are pushed *initially* lower by criminal behavior (reduced demand coupled with lower prices for stolen goods)? How are they benefited when the uncertainties associated with theft must be dealt with? What benefit is the high rate of theft in, say, New York City's black ghetto,

26. Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956). (<http://bit.ly/MisesAnti>)

Harlem? I have visited apartments in Harlem, with their expensive doors and intricate locks. Burglary is profitable for sellers of anti-burglary devices, but not for any other law-abiding citizen.

Prices of other consumer goods are initially lowered because of money that must be spent on locks, burglar alarms, and insurance. But they do not remain low. Buyers need to lure sellers into high-risk markets where theft is common. People in Harlem wind up having to pay far higher prices than in other areas of New York City because costs of doing business are high (you might get killed), and it is expensive to lure sellers into the area. Customer choices are drastically limited; there are no supermarkets in Harlem; only small “mom and pop” stores that issue credit and know their customers. Harlem’s problem is not capitalism; its problem is that too many criminals and people with short-run perspectives live (and prey) there.²⁷

What if the crime wave ends? We now come to *phase three*. There will still be an increase in prices, as buyers seek to lure back potential sellers. *Initially*, prices will rise, but they will not rise as high as they would have risen had the crime wave not come to an end. It is this phase of the economic process that Mr. Gish singled out and criticized: the recovery phase. He blamed capitalism for high prices. But he ignored phase four.

Fourth, if the criminals are kept out of the crime business, the high prices being offered by buyers will lure manufacturers back into the markets. Manufacturers are given accurate signals about true customer demand. As they target specific markets and their output increases, prices will again fall back closer to where they had been prior to the crime wave. Never forget: *Producers need accurate signals concerning true customer demand*. This is what the free market gives them. Prices enable producers to assess more accurately the value in the marketplace of all scarce resources. They can then make better decisions about production.

This is what the critics of capitalism simply will not admit, namely, that producers respond to higher consumer prices by producing more goods and services to meet the new demand, unless the costs of production rise as fast or faster. If it becomes safer to own goods, and people want to buy additional goods, then prices may rise initially. But this is not the end of the story, except in books written by socialists

27. On short-run perspectives in black ghettos and the grim effects, see Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 53–54, 124–28.

and free market critics. The question is: What happens next? What happens next in a free market society is greater output of the newly demanded goods. This new production tends to lower consumer prices.

3. Socialism's War Against Price Signals

We might ask Mr. Gish: What would be the result of similar self-restraint or civil government restraint against theft in a socialist society that had previously been hit with a crime wave? If government bureaucrats set most prices, and they keep prices fixed during both the crime wave and the recovery phase, which is likely, then the ethics-induced *increased value* of consumer goods will not send a *price signal* to producers to produce more goods. Producers will therefore not respond rapidly to the new conditions of higher value for goods, because the bureaucrats hold down official (legal) prices.

True, citizens who no longer are victimized by thieves are benefited. Thus, there is a net social benefit in socialist societies, as in all societies, from a reduction in theft. But far from this crime reduction's leading to an indirect benefit for the poor, it leads nowhere in particular in the official, state-controlled markets. The market value of goods rises in the black market, where prices more closely match true value to buyers and sellers, but not in the state-controlled markets. Only to the extent that poor people have greater skills in entering the black market will poor people be favored by the indirect economic effects of a reduction in theft.

In all likelihood, the poorest members of society will not be well-informed black marketeers. Thus, the reduction of theft by private individuals in a socialist economy tends to augment the flow of consumer goods flowing into an illegal market that is dominated by people with specialized skills in illegal bargaining. The primary beneficiaries are those people who trade in the illegal markets. This is the curse of all socialist economies. Those people who become dependent on the state to deliver the goods become the victims of bureaucratic incompetence, and those who ignore the official markets and who enter black markets become the winners. It is a good lesson in economics. (I am sure my critic's answer would be that socialist governments ought to pass more laws against black markets.)²⁸

28. The economic ignorance that underlies the arguments of my critic is monumental. Yet such ignorance was representative of the published books and essays of "socially concerned," Christian college-educated, seminary-trained social thinkers in the American and British evangelical community in the 1980s.

4. Conclusion

As buyers, we want sellers to respond to our offers to buy goods and services. Yet as producers, we want to know what buyers are willing and able to pay for our goods and services. The better everyone's knowledge of the markets he deals in, the fewer the resources necessary for advertising, negotiating, and guessing about the future. These "released" resources can then be devoted to producing goods and services to satisfy wants that would otherwise have gone unsatisfied. The lower our transaction costs, the more wealth we can devote to the purchase and sale of the items involved in the transactions.

One transaction cost is the defense of property against theft or fraud. God therefore steps in and offers us a "free good": an inescapable system of punishment. To the extent that criminals and potential criminals believe that God really does punish criminal behavior, both on earth and in heaven, their costs of operation go up. When the price of any scarce item rises, other things being equal, less of it will be demanded. What if we can raise the "price" of crime? Less criminal behavior will be the result of a widespread belief in God's judgments, both temporal and final. *God raises the risks to thieves.* When the commandment against theft is preached, and when both the preachers and the hearers believe in the God who has announced His warning against theft, then we can expect less crime and greater per capita wealth in that society. God's criminal justice system is coherent, and it is also inescapable, so it truly is a free good—a gift from God that is a sign of His grace. *This is one aspect of the grace of law.*²⁹ It leads to increased wealth for those who respect His laws.

E. Theft at the Ballot Box

We have dealt so far primarily with the question of criminal behavior by private individuals or organized criminal societies. But the economic analysis that applies to theft by private individuals also applies to theft by the civil government. The commandment against theft does not read: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote." We need to have private property rights respected, not just by criminals, but also by individual citizens who find that they can extract wealth from others by means of state power. Furthermore, private property rights must be respected by profit-seeking businesses that would otherwise

29. Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1976] 1983).

petition the state for economic assistance: tariffs, import quotas, below-market interest rate government loans, and so forth. To violate this principle is to call for the so-called “corporate state,” another form of the welfare state—fascism, monopoly capitalism, or whatever.³⁰ Whenever such a system has been constructed, it has led to reduced productivity and an increase in bureaucracy. The politicians are simply not competent enough to plan for an entire economy.³¹ To promote such a system of state planning and protection of industry is an illegitimate use of the ballot box, meaning democratic pressure politics.

1. *Property and Voting*

Let us consider an example that has been debated from the Puritan revolution of the 1640s until today: the property qualification for voting. At the Putney Debates of Cromwell’s New Model Army in 1647, Ireton, Cromwell’s son-in-law, debated Rainsborough, the representative of the democratic faction, the Levellers. The Levellers were not communists, but they were committed to a far wider franchise. (The communists in the English Revolution were the Diggers, who called themselves the “True Levellers.”)³²

Rainsborough argued that because all men are under the laws of a nation, they deserve a voice in the affairs of civil government. Ireton

30. An example of just such a proposal for the corporate state was a favorably reviewed book by Robert B. Reich, *The Next American Frontier* (New York: Times Books, 1983). The author recognizes the evils of the hidden subsidies (Chapter 9), but his solution is for more direct collusion between industry and state. Reich became President Clinton’s Secretary of Labor during his first term, 1993–97. A similar book was Felix G. Rohatyn, *The Twenty-Year Century: Essays on Economics and Public Finance* (New York: Random House, 1983). For examples of the close alliance between monopoly capitalists and the Communists, see Antony Sutton, *Wall Street and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1974); Joseph Finder, *Red Carpet* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1983); Charles Levinson, *Vodka Cola* (London: Gordon & Cremenosi, 1978). On the relationship between monopoly capitalists and the Nazi movement, see Antony Sutton, *Wall Street and the Rise of Hitler* (Seal Beach, California: 76 Press, 1976); Charles Higham, *Trading With the Enemy: An Exposé of the Nazi-American Money Plot, 1933–1949* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1983). There is little evidence that German big business financed Hitler: Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

31. *The Politics of Planning: A Review and Critique of Centralized Planning* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1976). See also Don Lavoie, *National Economic Planning: What Is Left?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1985), a detailed criticism of the idea of central planning.

32. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1972), ch. 7.

countered with a ringing defense of property rights. A man must have some stake in society, he said, meaning property to defend, if he is to be entrusted with the right to vote. Men without permanent interests in the society—property, in other words—are too dangerous when handed the power of civil government. The property qualification is crucial to preserve society in a democratic order. “And if we shall go to take away this, we shall plainly go to take away all property and interest that any man hath either in land by inheritance, or in estate by possession, or in anything else. . . .”³³

Two centuries later, Karl Marx concluded much the same, except that he favored the abolition of the property qualification for voting, precisely *because* it would destroy private property: “. . . the state as a state abolishes *private property* (i.e., man decrees by *political* means the *abolition* of private property) when it abolishes the property qualification for electors and representatives. . . . Is not private property ideally abolished when the non-owner comes to legislate for the owner of property? The *property qualification* is the last political form in which property is recognized.”³⁴ His contemporary, the Whig historian and politician Lord Macaulay, offered a similar assessment.³⁵

Yet there is a major theoretical problem that Christian defenders of the property qualification for voting have chosen to overlook or downplay: defining citizenship apart from a Trinitarian confession of faith. Instead, they have generally defined citizenship in terms of a stake in society, and then have defined this stake as possessing some minimal value of property. In opposition to this argument, Rainsborough in 1647 argued that residence in a nation should establish a right of citizenship. The laws apply to all residents. Why should they not be able to have a say in who writes the laws and enforces them? More than a century later, a slogan of America’s revolutionaries was “No taxation without representation.” Sales taxes were extracted from every resident, yet the colonists had no votes in Parliament. This argument left confession of faith out of the debate. It made citizenship a function of economics. Yet the Bible places covenants above economics, for covenants are oath-bound under God.

Protestant churches have adopted Rainsborough’s definition of

33. A. S. P. Woodhouse (ed.), *Puritanism and Liberty, Being the Army Debates* (1647–9) (London: Dent, 1938), p. 53.

34. Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (1843), in T. B. Bottomore (ed.), *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 11–12.

35. G. Otto Trevelyan (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), II, pp. 408–10. See Appendix G: “Macaulay on Democracy.”

voting membership. He argued that the ownership of property should not be made a criterion for exercising the vote. Protestant churches argue that every confessing adult member should have the right to vote for church officers in the local congregation. Some churches even allow children to vote, because children are communicant members. This policy transfers judicial authority to those church members who do not tithe to the local congregation. Most church members do not tithe. But Hebrews 7 teaches that tithing to a local congregation is a judicial obligation, for the church collects the obligatory tithe in the name of the high priest, Jesus Christ.³⁶ Those church members who fail to meet the requirement to tithe possess the votes to determine what is done with the money that those who did meet their obligations pay for. The churches do not distinguish between communicant members and voting members. This was Rainsborough's theory of the civil franchise.

The biblical solution ecclesiastically is to limit voting membership to adult members of families that tithe. No church does this. No democratic civil government does, either. The church has become the model for the state's franchise system. The result is churches that build large buildings enjoyed by members who do not pay their share of the costs, rather than churches that help poor non-members. Church members are then content to see the civil government assume the task of helping the poor, thereby passing this ancient church obligation onto non-church members. So, the welfare state has replaced the welfare church in Christian and formerly Christian societies.

No respectable political philosopher in the Protestant West today raises this issue: theological confession as the basis of citizenship. If civil government is a covenant established under God, then why should Christians ignore baptism and confession of faith as the dual foundation of citizenship? Modern theories of democracy and political pluralism deny the legitimacy of such a judicial foundation of citizenship, substituting other civil oaths and confessions for theological confession. But there is nothing in the Bible to support political pluralism and much that denies it.³⁷

By insisting on the possession of property as a defining characteristic of citizenship, the Cromwellians undermined the holy common-

36. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011), ch. 10.

37. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

wealth ideal, which they had fought a revolution to establish. In 1660, Charles II ascended to the throne and relegated the Puritans to second-class citizenship because of their failure to affirm allegiance to the Church of England, over which the king formally ruled. By 1700, theological unitarians and even pantheists—religious dissenters—who traced their political roots back to the Puritan revolution against Charles I, helped to establish Whig political theory, which became Anglo-American Enlightenment political humanism.³⁸ By 1750, the contractualism of Hobbes (1651) and Locke (1690) had replaced the older covenantalism in debates over political theory. The ideal of Christendom no longer commanded respect by the West's intellectuals and opinion-shapers. Then came Rousseau's version of the social contract in 1762: a theory of the sovereign General Will, represented solely by the nation-state, in which the intermediary institutions of Christendom lost all political legitimacy.³⁹ The right wing of the Enlightenment (Scottish) and the left wing (French) were united in their opposition to the ideal of Christendom.

Today, there is no well-developed political theory from an explicitly Trinitarian and self-consciously biblical point of view that deals with citizenship in terms of these categories: theological confession, church membership, taxation, and oaths of allegiance. Yet it has been two millennia since Jesus was born. Much work remains to be done.

F. Protection

All property is God's. He has established rules for the exchange, transmission, and development of this property. Theft is explicitly prohibited. God's law provides us with the case laws that enable us to define theft biblically. For example, it is *not* theft if a neighbor picks an apple from someone else's tree and eats it (Deut. 23:24–25).⁴⁰ Furthermore, it *is* theft if the owner of an agricultural property does not leave fallen fruit on the ground for gleaners (Deut. 24:19).⁴¹ The Bible is our standard of what constitutes theft, not Adam Smith or Karl Marx.

The civil government is required by God to serve as the protector

38. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959). This has been reprinted by Liberty Press, Indianapolis.

39. Robert A. Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1968), ch. 1.

40. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 59.

41. *Ibid.*, ch. 62.

of property. It must honor the laws of ownership that are set forth in the Bible. It should not prosecute a man who takes grain from his neighbor's field. Christ and the disciples were not guilty of theft when they did so (Matt. 12:1).⁴² The civil government can legitimately compel a farm owner to respect the gleaning laws. In a biblical society, the threatened negative civil sanction would be the revocation of citizenship, based on a prior revocation of church membership for his defying the gleaning law. But the civil government cannot legitimately say which persons have to be allowed into the field to glean. The owner of the property has that responsibility, just as Boaz did (Ruth 2:3–12).

This view of theft and protection is not in conformity to either modern socialism or modern libertarianism. In the first system (socialism), the state collects the tithe for itself, and many times God's tithe, to be used for purposes specified by bureaucratic and political bodies. In the second system (libertarianism), all coercion against private property is defined as theft, including taxation itself (in some libertarian systems).⁴³ Nevertheless, the Bible's standards are the valid ones, and the Bible is clear: *there is no absolute sovereignty in any person or institution*. Unquestionably, there are limits on the use of private property. But these limits are minimal. Given the biblical standards of theft, the civil government becomes a legitimate sovereign in the area of theft prevention and punishment—not the only institution, but one of them, and the one that has the lawful authority to impose economic sanctions against thieves.

Nobel-Prize winning economist R. H. Coase stated emphatically: "A private-enterprise system cannot function properly unless property rights are created in resources, and, when this is done, someone wishing to use a resource has to pay the owner to obtain it."⁴⁴ The defense of private ownership by the civil government against theft is, in and of itself, a foundation of capitalism. By *defining* the limits of ownership, and by *defending* property from coercive attack from violent men and

42. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 26.

43. Perhaps the most systematic of the libertarian criticisms of all forms of taxation is Murray N. Rothbard's book, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy* (Menlo Park, California: Institute for Humane Studies, 1970). It was reprinted as the final section of *Man, Economy, and State* (1962) by the Ludwig von Mises Institute, Auburn, Alabama, in 2004. This section of the book was originally intended by Rothbard to be in *Man, Economy, and State*. The Volker Fund, which had funded the book, decided to drop that anti-state section.

44. R. H. Coase, "The Federal Communications Commission," *Journal of Law and Economics* (1959); reprinted in Eirik G. Furubotn and Svetozar Pejovich (eds.), *The Economics of Property Rights* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1974), p. 82.

fraudulent practices, a godly civil government establishes the basis of economic growth and prosperity.

One of the most important features of a private property social order is *the reduction of uncertainty*. The market rewards forecasters (entrepreneurs) for their successful attempts to meet future customer demand at competitive prices. Here is the basis of the power of the customers over the suppliers: the lure of profit. The profit-and-loss system is also the process through which less efficient (more wasteful) forecasters are steadily eliminated from the market, thereby increasing the stability of the market. Customers can rely more readily on the free market for the future delivery of goods and services than they could dare to rely on a bureaucratic delivery system, with its guaranteed jobs for suppliers, its past-oriented rules, and its lack of risk-bearing. Uncertainty is reduced in society by the free, competitive market precisely because the market places such high rewards for *overcoming uncertainty*, namely, profits. The market's *flexibility* provides customers with future *stability*, since the mistakes of producers tend to cancel out, and the more successful producers strengthen their position in the market.

G. Defining Property Rights

If the free market order rests on property rights, then what exactly are they? As with all definitions, the human mind, not to mention language, is imperfect. An absolutely rigorous definition is probably impossible. Harold Demsetz made an attempt.

Crucially involved is the notion that individuals have control over the use to which scarce resources (including ideas) can be put, and that this right of control is saleable or transferable. A private property right system requires the prior consent of 'owners' before their property can be affected by others. The role of the body politic in this system is twofold. Firstly, the government or courts must help decide which individuals possess what property rights and, therefore, who has the power to claim that his rights are affected by others. Secondly, property rights so assigned must be protected by the police power of the state or the owners must be allowed to protect property rights themselves. Presumably the best mix of public and private protection will depend on ethical and other considerations."⁴⁵

45. Harold Demsetz, "Some Aspects of Property Rights," *Journal of Law and Economics*, IX (1966), p. 62.

Unfortunately, the economics profession, in its self-professed moral neutrality, has not been able to come up with these ethical and other criteria, nor have economists shown exactly how economics would relate to such criteria.

Property, from this perspective, is basically a “bundle of rights.” Again, citing Demsetz: “When a transaction is concluded in the marketplace, two bundles of property rights are exchanged. A bundle of rights often attaches to a physical commodity or service, but it is the value of the rights that determines the value of what is exchanged.”⁴⁶ The control over such rights necessarily involves *the right to exclude others* from the value of the rights over time. It is here that the civil government must take special care. Rights are not absolute, but they should be *sufficiently familiar* to acting men that these men can make *valid predictions* concerning the future—the future actions of competitors, as well as of the civil government. *The reduction of uncertainty is of paramount importance.* As Cheung wrote: “The transfer of property rights among individual owners through contracting in the marketplace requires that the rights be exclusive. An exclusive property right grants its owner a limited authority to make a decision on resource use so as to derive income therefrom. To define this limit requires measurement and enforcement. Any property is multidimensional and exclusivity is frequently a matter of degree. But without some enforced or policed exclusivity to a right of action, the right to contract so as to exchange is absent.”⁴⁷ The civil government must protect property because it must protect property owners.

H. The Market for Knowledge and Uncertainty

The establishment of property rights is therefore fundamental in any system of voluntary exchange. Men rely on the division of labor to increase their economic output and therefore their income. Of critical importance is *the exchange of information*, including *the voluntary exchange of uncertainty*. Those who want to buy more uncertainty, and therefore open up to themselves the opportunity for greater profit, are enabled to do so by purchasing higher-risk property from those who are willing to settle for a more guaranteed return.⁴⁸ Some people want

46. Demsetz, “Toward a Theory of Property Rights,” *American Economic Review* (1967); reprinted in *Economics of Property Rights*, p. 31.

47. S. Cheung, “The Structure of a Contract and the Theory of a Non-Exclusive Resource,” *Journal of Law and Economics* (1970); reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 27.

48. I employ Frank Knight’s distinction between risk and uncertainty. Risk is a

bonds, others want stocks, while still others want to speculate in commodities. Farmers may prefer to lock in a price for their future crops, so as to concentrate their knowledge on raising more crops. Speculators who think they understand agricultural markets, even if they know very little about the actual mechanics (or organics) of farming, can contract with uncertainty-avoiding farmers to guarantee them a specified future price for their crop. Those who want uncertainty can buy it; those who want to avoid it can sell it. This helps *reduce the mistakes*—forecasting mistakes—in those societies that allow voluntary transactions in the marketplace. But a society that does not take care to *specify and enforce property rights* cannot derive the full benefits of the market in *reducing uncertainty*. Costs of ownership remain needlessly high. Co-operation is reduced.

Man is not God. Man's knowledge is not God's exhaustive knowledge. Man must seek wisdom and knowledge as one of his tasks on earth (Prov. 1:1–7). He needs *the division of labor in knowledge* more than he needs the division of labor in any other field, since wisdom is the thing above all which we are told to pursue. *The free market, more than any institutional arrangement in the history of man, facilitates the division of labor in knowledge.*⁴⁹ Men are forced to recognize that knowledge is never free of charge, and that other men put a high price on certain kinds of knowledge. This, predictably, tends to encourage increased production of the high-valued knowledge.

The free market increases men's knowledge, but there must be *open competition for knowledge*, and there must be *legal transferability* of that knowledge. Competition assembles knowledge from many potential suppliers. The knowledge here is men's knowledge of all the *potential uses* for a scarce resource, and all the *contractual arrangements* possible for implementing this knowledge. Cheung writes that the "transferability of property rights ensures that the most valuable knowledge will be utilized."⁵⁰ When a society allows buyers of know-

statistically calculable class of future events, such as the deaths within a particular age group. Mortality tables used by life insurance firms are examples of statistical calculations of risk. In contrast, uncertainty is not subject to mathematical analysis in advance. Correctly forecasting uncertain future events—or at least events not deemed as uncertain by one's competitors—is the source of all profits, Knight cogently argued. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

49. F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>)

50. Cheung, in *Economics of Property Rights*, p. 29.

ledge to bid against each other, and it also facilitates the sellers' ability to transfer their resources, it thereby reduces the cost of enforcing the stipulated terms of contracts. How? Because competing parties stand by to offer or accept similar terms of exchange. If one participant tries to cheat, others will step in and make legitimate offers. Thus, concluded Cheung, "competition *in the marketplace* reduces the costs of finding and pursuing the most valuable option in which a resource may be contacted for production."⁵¹ This, of course, reduces waste. People can buy what they want with fewer resources, since all resources tend to be allocated to those uses most highly demanded by customers or their economic agents: entrepreneurs. Producers think they know what lots of people will want to buy, and those customers who want to buy finished products gain their influence over suppliers because the transactions are voluntary, and suppliers are seeking to make a profit. To the extent that the state restricts the profitability of voluntary exchange, buyers lose influence over suppliers, for the whole incentive structure is compromised. The state restricts the buyers' use of "economic carrots."

The words "mine" and "yours" are two of the most important words in any society. Biblical preaching has, over centuries, enabled men to appreciate the importance of these two words. When the differences between the two are honored in law, word, and deed, society benefits. Men can better co-operate with each other in peaceful transactions precisely because of the *predictability* provided by a social order which recognizes "mine" and "yours." This facilitates the division of labor.

Demsetz saw the importance of property rights from the perspective of *social co-operation*. "In the world of Robinson Crusoe property rights play no role. Property rights are an instrument of society and derive their significance from the fact that they help a man form those expectations which he can reasonably hold in his dealings with others. These expectations find expression in the laws, customs, and mores of a society. An owner of property rights possesses the consent of fellow men to allow him to act in particular ways."⁵² Men can make contracts with each other, and enjoy the fruits of their decisions concerning the stewardship of God's resources. To return to a now-familiar theme, *property rights reduce the zones of uncertainty in life*. Men see through a glass darkly. Anything that throws light on the subject is a benefit.

51. *Idem*.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

I. Ownership as a Social Function

What is not understood by many is that private ownership necessarily involves social responsibilities. There can be no escape from the responsibilities of ownership. God always links power and responsibility.

Consider a scarce resource. Being scarce, it commands a price. (A non-scarce resource is any resource for which demand does not exceed supply at zero price.) Therefore, the person who owns it possesses wealth. What will he do with this wealth? Will he use the asset (money, for example) to invest? This makes the wealth available for a period of time to someone else. Will he spend the money on a consumer good? Then he pays for it and thereby forfeits the income that he might have received had he invested the money. Will he give it away? Then he forfeits the use of the investment income or the psychic income that the consumer good would have produced.

Who establishes the price of the asset? Consumers do. A consumer is here defined as the *final buyer*. He does not purchase the good in order to make a profit by selling it to someone else. Consumers make *subjective evaluations* of what any asset is worth, and their competitive bids in the marketplace establish the *objective price* of a particular asset.

Producers compete against producers to sell to customers, who in turn compete against each other. Producers cannot sell assets at prices higher than customers are willing and able to pay. Thus, customers determine what is going to be produced. Entrepreneurs act as their middlemen, buying up producer goods, raw materials, labor, and other forms of capital, and using them over time to meet expected customer demand. If they are successful in their guesses, they will reap profits. If they are incorrect, they will reap losses. But there is no escape from what free market economists call *consumers' sovereignty*,⁵³ at least not apart from the intervention of the civil government with some sort of coercive protection scheme. This sovereignty is delegated by God to property owners. Delegated sovereignty is the same as authority. It is the legitimate authority to make use of some asset.

This means that every person who owns an asset that commands a price must act as the agent of customers (including himself), or pay the

53. The phrase "consumers' sovereignty" was coined by William H. Hutt as early as 1934: *Individual Freedom: Selected Works of William H. Hutt*, Svetozar Pejovich and David Klingaman, eds. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 185, and footnote 1 on p. 203.

price of failing to serve their needs. If customers want to see assets used in a particular way, and an asset owner refuses to sell, then he pays a price. He cannot ignore customer demand at zero price to himself. Customers or their economic agents (entrepreneurial middlemen) make bids for ownership, as revealed by a market price for the asset. Those owners who refuse to take the offered price thereby forfeit all the uses to which they might otherwise have put the money. There is no escape from this required payment. The owner who says, "I'll use it my way," is saying, "I'll pay for my decision." He turns his back on the money or goods offered by customers for his property.

Thus, ownership is a social function. Owners inescapably act as *stewards on behalf of the consuming public*, or else pay the price. There is no such thing as a free (gratuitous) lunch. There is also no such thing as cost-free ownership of scarce economic resources. The existence of free markets—institutional arrangements for *open, competitive bidding*—enables customers to price all economic assets according to their subjective evaluations. Free markets produce objective bids (prices). These bids produce either profits or losses for entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs are not in charge of the bidding process. Customers are, for they possess money: the most marketable asset. They own what specialized producers desire: money. Producers worry about having large inventories. Few customers worry about possessing too large an inventory of money. Free markets aid customers in establishing their will over producers. Producers are legally free agents, but they are not cost-free agents.

There are two ways to impose your will on another person: reward and penalty, the carrot and the stick. The stick relies on coercion. The coercion of legal adults is a covenantal monopoly of the civil government. Thus, customers must rely on the carrot approach. "Do it my way," they assert, "or suffer the consequences." What are the consequences? Forfeited income.

The market is not some autonomous institution that thwarts the "little guy." It is an institution that promotes the interests of every asset-owning participant. It provides customers with the ultimate institutional carrot: a legal order that allows them to make competitive bids to the owners of the resources they want to buy. The market is a *social institution* that places daily inescapable burdens of ownership on every resource owner.⁵⁴ As Mises wrote: "Ownership of the means

54. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 28: "Ownership: Free But Not Cheap." (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

of production is not a privilege, but a social liability. Capitalists and landowners are compelled to employ their property for the best possible satisfaction of the customers. If they are slow and inept in the performance of their duties, they are penalized by losses. If they do not learn their lesson and do not reform their conduct of affairs, they lose their wealth. No investment is safe forever. He who does not use his property in serving the customers in the most efficient way is doomed to failure. There is no room left for people who would like to enjoy their fortunes in idleness and thoughtlessness.”⁵⁵ In a society in which the rights of private property are honored, men can make self-conscious, calculating decisions concerning their assets, which will influence future generations. Family capital is protected by the prohibition against theft. Men’s consideration of time perspective can then focus on the long-term prospects for their capital, just as Abraham’s vision did.

Which system of property management tends to be more concerned with the future, private ownership or communal ownership? Demsetz addressed this issue, and he concluded that private ownership tends to be far more future-oriented. By communal ownership, he meant “a right which can be exercised by all members of the community,”⁵⁶ He pointed to a phenomenon made famous by biologist Garrett Hardin, the “tragedy of the commons,”⁵⁷ although he did not use this terminology. “Suppose that land is communally owned. Every person has the right to hunt, till, or mine the land. This form of ownership fails to concentrate the cost associated with any person’s exercise of his communal right on that person. If a person seeks to maximize the value of his communal rights, he will tend to overhunt and overwork the land because some of the costs of his doing so are borne by others. The stock of game and the richness of the soil will be diminished too quickly.”⁵⁸ People may agree to reduce the demands they are

This was published by *The Freeman* (July 1972). (<http://bit.ly/NorthOwn>)

55. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 308. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

56. Demsetz, “Toward a Theory of Property Rights,” in *Economics of Property Rights*, op. cit., p. 37.

57. Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* (13 Dec. 1968); reprinted in Garrett de Bell (ed.), *The Environmental Handbook* (New York: Ballentine, 1970). Hardin called for more government control over pollution and resource depletion. In contrast, C. R. Batten called for less government control and greater attention to defining private property rights: Batten, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *The Freeman* (Oct. 1970). (<http://bit.ly/BatCom>)

58. Demsetz, in *Economics of Property Rights*, p. 38.

making, as individuals, on the land, but the *costs of negotiating* are high, and so are the *costs of policing* the agreement.

"If a single person owns the land," said Demsetz, "he will attempt to maximize its present value by taking into account alternative future time streams of benefits and costs and selecting that one which he believes will maximize the present value of his privately owned rights. We all know that this means that he will attempt to take into account the supply-and-demand conditions that he thinks will exist after his death. It is very difficult to see how the existing communal owners can reach an agreement that takes account of these costs."⁵⁹ Then Demsetz offered a stunning insight into the social function of an owner of a private property right: *the owner as a broker between generations*. "In effect, an owner of a private right to use land acts as a broker whose wealth depends on how well he takes into account the competing claims of the present and future. But with communal rights there is no broker, and the claims of the present generation will be given an uneconomically large weight in determining the intensity with which the land is worked. Future generations might desire to pay present generations enough to change the present intensity of land usage. But they have no living agent to place their claims on the market."⁶⁰

By its very nature and time perspective, *family capital is privately owned capital*. Privately owned capital necessarily involves the defense of private property. *The stewardship of resources should be supervised by the most intensely committed social unit, the family*. It is not the only legitimate institution of ownership,⁶¹ but it is unquestionably the most universally recognized ownership institution historically, and it is the social unit to which God originally announced the dominion covenant. By establishing a tight (though imperfect) relationship between *costs* and *benefits*, private property rights encourage men to count the costs of their actions. The counting of costs is a biblical requirement (Luke 14:28–30).⁶² If a man overworks his soil, he or his heirs will pay the price. If his animals overgraze the land, he or his heirs will suffer reduced income later. He cannot pass on his costs so easily to those outside his family, which therefore encourages him to examine the

59. *Idem*.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

61. The corporation is another important institution for holding property, but corporate shares of ownership are held by heads of households primarily, or by agents of heads of households: banks, retirement funds, mutual funds, etc. Thus, these are delegated sovereignties.

62. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 35.

effects, including long-run effects, of his present decisions. He seeks a profit—an excess of income over outgo—so he cannot safely ignore costs. He will waste fewer of God’s resources because of the profit incentive, compared to the waste involved in communal ownership or state ownership systems, where each man is offered direct incentives to waste the common asset while profiting personally from the immediate use of the asset. To avoid the tragedy of the commons, society must actively reinforce the laws and institutions of private property.

There can be commitment to the goals of other social units besides the family, but no institution commands the degree of loyalty that the family has commanded historically. When devising a system of incentives, we should stick with the Bible and “go with the winner,” which is the family. Family capital is *private* capital.

J. Communal Property and Nomads

Those within the Christian tradition who have been committed to socialism have pointed to the communal property of the Jerusalem church as an example to be followed by all Christians. Several comments are in order. First, communal property in the Jerusalem church was strictly voluntary (Acts 5:4).⁶³ Second, property was shared in common (Acts 4:32), but for a reason: Christ’s prediction of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20–24). By selling fixed property, such as homes, Jerusalem’s church members made it easier to heed Christ’s warning and flee the city during the crisis. They could convert their fixed capital assets into mobile capital, thereby helping to preserve the value of their capital.⁶⁴ This prophecy concerning Jerusalem was fulfilled in 69 and 70 A.D., when the Romans surrounded the city and starved out the inhabitants.⁶⁵ The Christians fled to Pella, church legend has it, before the final siege of Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church abandoned private property temporarily, but there is no indication that communal property was regarded as morally binding. It was a temporary response to a particular set of circumstances: Christ’s

63. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

64. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

65. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985), ch. 10: “The Great Tribulation,” and Appendix B of Chilton’s book, which reprints sections from Josephus’ *The Wars of the Jews*. (<http://bit.ly/dcpardise>). Cf. Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/ChilTrib>)

prophecy and Rome's tyranny. The early church in Jerusalem (and only in Jerusalem) prepared to flee by selling fixed property and pooling the funds. Members became, in effect, *temporary nomads*, for they intended to flee when the time came. As nomads, they adopted transportable property and more communal property ownership. There is no indication that this nomadic system of ownership was ever regarded as a policy for gentile congregations.

The nomad is not a builder of civilization. His geographical perspective is too short run. He comes and goes, never staying to establish roots, whether personal or agricultural. The nomadic family concerns itself primarily with *transportable assets*. Weapons and household utensils are prized, and nomadic law protects them. Both kinds of articles require raw materials, human ingenuity, and time to produce. But far less concern is placed on defining and policing property rights in land. Demsetz wrote: "Property rights in land among such people would require costs for several years during which no sizable output is obtained. Since to provide for sustenance these people must move to a new land, a property right to be of value to them must be associated with a portable object. Among these people it is common to find property rights to the crops, which, after harvest, are portable, but not to the land. The more advanced agriculturally based primitive societies are able to remain with particular land for longer periods, and here we generally observe property rights to the land as well as to the crops."⁶⁶

A godly society seeks to defend the property rights of ever-multiplying kinds of goods and services. An increasing market value of more and more formerly ignored goods is made possible by rising productivity. *Civilization can be measured by an increase in the kinds of private property recognized and developed by members of a particular society.* As societies advance, they are marked by this extension of protection to new products, new technologies, and new transactions. The division of labor increases.

K. Human Rights and Property Rights

One of the most successful political slogans of economic interventionists in the twentieth century was this one: "We're in favor of human rights over property rights." One of America's most beloved Presidents, the feisty and extremely well-read Teddy Roosevelt, used a variation of this slogan in the early years of the twentieth century: "In

66. Demsetz, in *Economics of Property Rights*, p. 37n.

every civilized society, property rights must be carefully safeguarded. Ordinarily and in the great majority of cases, human rights and property rights are fundamentally and in the long run, identical; but when it clearly appears that there is a real conflict between them, human rights must have the upper hand; for property belongs to man and not man to property.”⁶⁷ Allen and Alchian’s analysis strikes at the heart of such a contrast: “Exclusivity of control constitutes a basic component of the private-property economic system. We emphasize that property rights are *not* rights of property, they are rights *of people* to [the] use of goods. In sum, two basic elements of private property are *exclusivity* of rights and *voluntary transferability* or exchangeability of rights. It is silly to speak of a contrast or conflict between human rights and property rights. Property rights *are* human rights to the use of economic goods.”⁶⁸

We can legitimately speak of a misuse of property by an individual. If my factory blows smoke on your house and wears off the paint, I have invaded your sphere of responsibility. I have attacked your property. I have assaulted your sense of justice. When men come to agree, through custom or formal law, that a specific space is to be protected and honored, another man cannot legitimately invade that space for his own personal profit, except with the consent of the owner. But this is not a case of “property rights vs. human rights”; it is a case of a conflict between human rights—a dispute between people concerning the lawful use of privately owned property.

1. Pollution and Economic Competition

There are inevitably problems to be settled in human society, areas that need more research, more understanding. Even theoretically, the defender of the free market has difficulties in defining property rights or an invasion of property rights. For example, free market defenders argue that when the state taxes one quarter of the income of a particular piece of property, it has in effect confiscated one quarter of that property.⁶⁹ Consider, then, this problem (raised by Demsetz).⁷⁰ If my

67. Theodore Roosevelt, “The Man in the Arena,” Speech at the Sorbonne (April 23, 1910). (<http://bit.ly/TRarena>), cited in R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), p. 179. (<http://bit.ly/rjrrogap>)

68. Alchian and Allen, *University Economics*, p. 142.

69. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 39.

70. Harold Demsetz, “The Exchange and Enforcement of Property Rights,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, VII (1964), pp. 25–26.

factory blows smoke on your property, you expect restitution, or a cessation of smoke production, since it lowers the value of your property. Pollution-control equipment can be defended in terms of this view of property rights. However, if my factory is located a thousand miles away, or across the ocean, and my improvements in methods of production drive out of business a factory in your area, which happens to employ half the town, the market value of your home may drop even more than if my factory were spewing smoke into your neighborhood. Few defenders of the free market would insist that I owe restitution to anyone who has the value of his house wiped out in this manner. Yet the value of your house may be down 25%. Have I really confiscated 25% of your house? Is the argument which is levelled at the tax collector equally applicable to my distant factory? Competition, confiscation, and cooperation are sometimes very difficult concepts to distinguish—not always, or even usually, but sometimes.

The Bible provides us with an example of “spillover effects” and what to do about them. If a man starts a fire on his property, and the fire spreads to his neighbor’s property, the man who started the fire is responsible for compensating his neighbor for the latter’s losses (Ex. 22:6).⁷¹ Obviously, this invasion of property is *physical*, rather than merely competitive and economic in nature, and therefore the firestarter is liable. The destruction of property in this instance is physical and immediate; the victim actually loses part of his crop. But what about noise pollution, where the man’s house is not burned, but its market value drops as a result of his neighbor’s noisy factory? This would seem to be covered by the case law on fire, since sound waves are physical phenomena, just as sparks are. But when the loss is exclusively economic, *without physical invasion*, the Bible is silent. There is no biblical law that would require the successful innovator to compensate those who lost money because of the introduction of new production techniques or new products. Alchian’s analysis would seem to apply: “Although private property rights protect private property from physical changes chosen by other people, no immunity is implied for the exchange value of one’s property.”⁷²

71. Chapter 48.

72. Armen Alchian, “Some Economics of Property Rights,” *Il Politico* (1965); reprinted in *The Collected Works of Armen Alchian*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 2006), II, p. 55. His conclusion, however, that making pornographic pictures and selling them must be free from legal restraint (p. 55) follows only if we assume that there are (1) no absolute standards of morality, (2) no God, and (3) no social consequences for immoral behavior—in short, no consequences imposed on many

Is it fair, then, to equate the economic effects of the state's collection of taxes and the industrialist's pollution? The answer depends on the level of taxation. If the state attempts to extract taxes greater than 10% of income, thereby equating its sovereignty with God's sovereignty (the tithe), then the answer is yes, the two should be equated. Both forms of economic redistribution rest on *illegitimate violence*. The tax collector extracts money or goods from the citizen upon threat of imprisonment or outright confiscation of capital assets. Thus, when the state taxes, say, 50% of a present and future stream of income, the present capital value of the asset producing the stream of income is reduced by nearly 50%.⁷³ Because some benefits may flow from the state's laws, such as protection from violence or fraud, the economic loss is not necessarily 100% of the tax. The economic effect is almost the same as if the state had taken almost half the lands or almost half the shares of stock or bonds.⁷⁴ This is destructive.

2. Taxation: Investment vs. Consumption

By confiscating up to 100% of a person's income (in late twentieth-century England and Sweden, for example),⁷⁵ the tax collectors have

members of society by God's judgment. Most economists erroneously make all three assumptions. When we speak of the legitimacy of innovation, we must always have in mind this qualification: "... assuming the innovation or transaction is not singled out by the Bible as being defined by God as perverse, and also illegal."

73. Meaning, "reduced from what it would otherwise have been."

74. The economic effect is not precisely the same. It is generally easier for a special-interest group to get tax policies changed than it is for members of the group to get the state to return all the property that had been confiscated from each of them, especially if the confiscated property has been sold in the meantime to other private buyers, who will fight any such legislation. The longer the period after the confiscation, the more difficult it is to get the law changed. Thus, when the state confiscates 50% of the property's income in the form of taxes, this probably does not produce a full 50% drop in the market value of the property, whereas a confiscation of 50% of the property does involve a loss of 50%, unless the new owner does something with the property that enhances the value of the contiguous property that the original owner still owns.

75. In 1975, British citizens in the highest tax brackets paid up to 83% of all "earned" income, and 98% of "unearned" (investment) income. The tax authorities actually assessed Mick Jagger, the leader of the Rolling Stones rock band, 101% of his income (since they have property taxes and capital taxes in addition to income taxes), but settled for 94%. He fled the country to become a resident of France, which had established far lower negotiable tax rates for rich immigrants from high-tax countries. "Taxing the Talent Out of England," *U.S. News and World Report* (Sept. 8, 1975). It was estimated in 1977 that as many as 100,000 British executives, middle managers, and entrepreneurs had left England to escape confiscatory taxation during the previ-

wiped out billions of dollars worth of capital assets, and lowered the public's willingness to invest more in productive capital. Money flows into other kinds of investments in a welfare state: goods that can be used without paying taxes on the psychic income received. These goods include expensive automobiles, beach homes, gold, jewelry, art objects, mistresses, and other forms of user-tax-free, user-satisfying capital.

The *Wall Street Journal* has provided a classic example of how the state's existing tax policies discourage investment. Say that a very rich man wants to invest a million dollars. He takes the money and invests in a new business—80% of which fail within the first five years. Let us say that he thinks the business will make him 10% on his money in the second year of operation, but nothing in the first year (a reasonable presumption). Let us also say that his estimations were rewarded. At the end of the second year, he had back \$100,000 profit for his small corporation. Here is what happened to his corporation in New York City.

Of the hundred thousand dollars in profit, the city clears away roughly \$5,700, leaving \$94,300. The state clears away about 10 percent of that, leaving \$84,870. The IRS, levying at progressive rates, snatches \$38,000, leaving \$46,870. Our good rich person then pays himself a dividend.

Being rich, our man is of course in the highest personal income-tax brackets, and after paying 4.3 percent to the city (\$2,015) has \$44,855 left. The state clips him for 15 percent of that (\$6,728) and leaves him \$38,127. Uncle Sam 'nicks' him for 70 percent of that, which is \$26,689, leaving him with \$11,438.

Thus, on the investment of 1 million dollars in capital and two years of hard work in assembling the enterprise that is risky to begin with, this lucky fellow who turned a profit of \$100,000 has \$11,438 to spend. He has given up two years on his yacht to gain \$5,719 in annual income.⁷⁶

It may not have been quite this bad.⁷⁷ But the point is clear, despite

ous three years. Britain's "revenue loss" was estimated to be a billion pounds in 1976 alone. Bruce Bartlett, "Taxes in Great Britain," *Libertarian Review* (June 1981), p. 26. In the 1970s, Sweden's world-famous film director, Ingmar Bergman, emigrated when the tax authorities taxed him over 100% of his previous year's income.

76. *Wall Street Journal* editorial, cited in George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 174.

77. Federal tax laws in the United States during that period allowed deductions

the slight exaggeration of the *Wall Street Journal* essay: The higher the tax level, the less that people are going to invest in risky, future-oriented, employment-producing capital assets.

Paul Craig Roberts has described a realistic decision facing a rich man in the late 1970s: "Take the case of a person facing the 70 percent tax rate on investment income. He can choose to invest \$50,000 at a 10 percent rate of return, which would bring him \$5,000 per year of additional income before taxes. Or he can choose to spend \$50,000 on a Rolls Royce. Since the after-tax value of \$5,000 is only \$1,500, he can enjoy a fine motor car by giving up only that amount. Britain's 98% tax rate on 'unearned' (investment) income has reduced the cost of the Rolls in terms of foregone income to only \$100 a year. The profusion of Roll Royces seen in England today is mistaken as a sign of prosperity."⁷⁸ The pre-1980 tax policies of England steadily wiped out the capital base of the nation—sacrificing future productivity for present luxury. Given the fact that a Rolls Royce generally appreciates with inflation, and also because the newly rich are always coming into the market, and given the income tax-deductibility of interest payments in the United States in 1985, the rich man could make more after-tax money by buying a Rolls on credit, driving it several years, and paying off the debt in depreciated money—and meanwhile enjoying a tax break on the interest payments to the bank that loaned him the money to buy the Rolls. The price of a Rolls appreciated from 1977, when Roberts wrote his essay, until the recession of 1981, four years later. This is *present-oriented investing* with a vengeance, and it is a direct, predictable result of envy-inspired confiscatory taxation rates. With tax rates at modern levels, and with theological rebellion loose in the land, we actually find that the *systematic decadence of the rich*—cocaine parties, sexual deviation, perverse art forms—can in fact be interpreted as a form of tax-free income.⁷⁹ After all, pleasure as a result of spending is taxed only mildly (sales taxes), if at all. Better to spend now, says the

from taxable income for taxes paid at the state and local level. Donald Regan, the Secretary of the Treasury under President Reagan, announced immediately after Reagan's successful bid for a second term of office (November 1984) that the Treasury was proposing a new Federal tax rule which would deny the deductibility of local taxes from Federally taxable income.

78. Roberts, "The Economic Case for Kemp-Roth," *Wall Street Journal* (August 1, 1978); cited in *ibid.*, p. 173. Because of reductions in tax rates in the highest tax brackets in both nations since 1978, the example is somewhat exaggerated.

79. One of the most comprehensive reports on decadence in the United States appeared in the final issue of the now-defunct magazine, *New Times* (Jan. 8, 1979). The entire issue was devoted to the topic.

present-oriented man, than to invest for the future. *Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we go broke, and can then apply for unemployment benefits and food stamps.*

The modern welfare state has imposed tax burdens on the wage-earning, middle-class citizenry that are systematically decapitalizing the modern world. The envy-dominated legislatures and government-financed economic research centers are destroying the capital base of future generations. Economic growth throughout the West began to slow down, 1970–80, as a result of these tax policies. Capital was not being replaced. Investors all over the world were involved in housing speculation during the 1970s, where there were direct benefits (living in a nicer home), and in the United States, at least, there were also major tax benefits (interest-payment deductions from taxable income, as well as depreciation benefits for investment homes, despite the appreciation in value of these investment homes).

This began to change in a remarkable three-year period: 1978–81. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping reversed the communist economic policies in Mainland China, allowing farmers to own their own land. Agricultural output immediately soared. This policy was then transferred to the general economy, which launched the most rapid and comprehensive economic boom in human history, a boom matched only by India's in the 1990s, as a result of similar policy changes. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in Great Britain, and in 1981, Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as President of the United States. Thatcher and Reagan succeeded in getting tax reductions legislated, which led to economic booms in both nations.

3. *The State vs. Human Rights*

So, the answer to the original question—"Are taxes the equivalent of capital confiscation?"—is yes, they are. Taxes are no longer simply the means of supporting the civil government's protection of private property, which enhances the value of capital by protecting it. Graduated taxation is envy-dominated, based on a theology of salvation by statist law. *The state is a messianic institution in the modern world, and it is a destroyer of capital.* The Moloch state consumes the economic future of its worshippers, and the economic future of its worshippers' heirs. The state, like the polluting factory, is a coercive, capital-destroying agent in the economy. But the polluting factory may provide productive employment for local residents, and it provides the

customers with lower-priced goods (lower priced than if the factory had to pay for pollution-control equipment). The state, in contrast, employs only bureaucrats, and uses its funds generally to subsidize the improvident members of society (some of whom may be quite rich),⁸⁰ ensnaring them in a web of promised benefits, and destroying their incentive to work for the benefit of customers. The very poor also suffer a reduction of their opportunities to obtain the work skills they need to advance themselves in modern economic society.⁸¹ The confiscatory state is a far greater threat to property and freedom than some local factory which pollutes the air or water.

The modern state is a threat to human rights, for it is a threat to property rights. The modern state is a destroyer of human rights, for it is a destroyer of property rights. Guilt-ridden intellectuals, politicians, and sons of the rich have promoted an ideology of wealth redistribution that destroys capital and therefore destroys human aspirations. They have used the misleading slogan, "human rights above property rights," to destroy both human rights and property rights.

Conclusion

The eighth commandment parallels the third commandment, which establishes a property right to God's name, a boundary that must be respected by men.

The biblical doctrine of ownership is a doctrine of stewardship. God's property is to be carefully developed and improved by His stewards.⁸² The servants have chosen to ignore God, and they have also chosen to ignore His commandment against theft. Modern man has adopted a new theology, the ownership of property by the state. The state, as the sovereign owner, delegates to its servants the right to ad-

80. By "improvident," I mean "one who wastes his capital, or the capital entrusted to him by others." This certainly applies to senior executives of major industrial companies that apply to the Federal government for financial aid, tariffs, and other stolen economic goods.

81. George Gilder's book shows how this system works to enslave people in the United States. The work of P. T. Bauer has contributed to our understanding of similar disincentives in underdeveloped nations. See especially his book, *Dissent on Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972).

82. Though the idea will horrify socialists and egalitarians, the best way to assess the value of an improvement of any property is to compare its price today with its price before the improvement was made. If someone spent a great deal of money to improve a property, but these improvements did not produce a market price greater than the money invested, then that invested wealth was probably misallocated. It might have been better spent elsewhere.

minister the property, but the state gets its cut, its tithe. The tithe principle is built into the creation; the only question is this: *Who gets the tithe?* The state is collecting its tithe. As Thomas Sowell has summarized it: "Win, and the state wins with you; lose, and you lose alone." This is the rule for the rich and the middle class, in any case. *The modern state is a thief.* When Samuel warned the nation of Israel against selecting a king to rule over them, he tried to scare them by telling them that the king would extract a tithe of 10% (I Sam. 8:15–17). The greatest bureaucratic dynasty of the ancient world, Egypt, took 20% as its tithe (Gen. 47:26). There is no Western industrial state that extracts as little as Egypt took. In fact, in most instances, substituting a tax rate of one-fifth of a nation's productivity would constitute a tax *reduction* of at least 50%.

Private property reduces uncertainty. It gives men an incentive to produce. It expands men's time horizons to unborn generations. It encourages economic growth by enabling innovators and workers to capture the value of their increased productivity. It encourages thrift. Being familistic in nature, it promotes the central institution of economic dominion. It allows the transfer of information, the transfer of uncertainty, and the transfer of capital to those who are willing and able to bear the economic responsibilities of ownership. *The protection of private property is one of the cornerstones of civilization.* The civil government is to protect private property, not steal it.

Private property is basic to God's program of dominion. It is crucial to the success of the Sinai strategy. The dominion covenant requires it. Thieves are not to be allowed to gain access to other men's lawful tools of dominion. They are not to appropriate other men's property except by voluntary contract. This includes thieves who use the ballot box as their weapon.

The rise of the messianic nation-state in the twentieth century threatened Western civilization. It remains the greatest single danger today to the preservation and expansion of familistic capital. The ideologies of wealth distribution through political coercion—Marxism, socialism, Keynesianism, and the "Social Gospel"—captured the minds of the intellectuals and political leaders of the twentieth century. While this outlook began to be reversed after 1980 and accelerated after 1991, the institutional legacy of the state interventionism rests on well-developed political constituencies, especially the elderly, who grew up in the era of the welfare state and came to rely on it for their retirement years.

The intellectual defenders of the ideal of the welfare state today are less confident than they and their predecessors were before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But faith in its replacement by the free market and voluntary charities is not yet widespread. Most voters remain convinced that the civil government can and therefore must protect them from major adversity. Until they change their minds regarding the competence of the state to guarantee a society-wide safety net for personal incompetence or improvidence, the masses will continue to defend the legitimacy of the politics of plunder. They will continue to affirm the modification of this commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

THE VALUE OF A NAME

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor (Ex. 20:16).

The theocentric principle governing this commandment is God's testimony, meaning His *imputation* of meaning, relevance, coherence, and purpose to His creation. He assessed each day's work of creation, day by day, in the first week (Gen. 1). He will judge all men at the final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46). God has rendered judgment, currently renders judgment, and will render final judgment.

The context of this commandment is a courtroom, where witnesses swear an oath. The covenant oath is point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ Men are not to become false witnesses. Men, who are made in God's image, are required to tell the truth in a court of law, just as God will tell the truth on judgment day. This principle governs men's public judgments in every area of life, including economic life. Men are to make evaluations, moment by moment. Rendering judgment is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model. This means *imputation*: assessing the fit or coherence between God's law and men's actions, beginning with themselves (Rom. 7).

A. The Importance of a Name

The importance of the biblical concept of "name" can be seen in God's response to the builders of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11), when they sought to "make a name" for themselves, i.e., to define themselves and their place in the universe apart from God's revelation concerning (1) Himself, (2) the creation, and (3) His sustaining providence. God

¹ Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

scattered them for their arrogance.²

1. Family Name

Because the family's name is so important in a godly commonwealth, the Bible provides laws regulating the *family's name and reputation*. The preservation of a man's name through children born to his widow and his brother was the basis of the Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–6).³ There was a law in the Hebrew commonwealth that penalized bastardy (Deut. 23:2). This law reinforced the general prohibition against sexual activity outside of marriage (Deut. 22:21). It was unlawful for a newly married man to bring an unsubstantiated charge of non-virginity against a daughter of Israel (Deut. 22:19).

A name in Old Testament times represented power—either magical power or ethics-based dominion power. Very early in the Genesis account, men of God began to call upon His name (Gen. 4:26). Abram, upon entering the land of Canaan, built an altar to God. He moved again, building a second altar unto God, “and called upon the name of the LORD” (Gen. 12:8b). This was in response to God's original command to Abram to leave his country: “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2).⁴ God changed Abram's name to Abraham —“father of nations” (Gen. 17:5)—and He changed Jacob's name to Israel (Gen. 32:27–29): the major transition point in each of their lives. A new name emphasized the magnitude of each of these turning points.

In the New Testament, the name of Jesus Christ must be invoked to enter into salvation. Peter's speech at Pentecost makes this clear. Citing Joel 2:32, Peter proclaimed: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Baptism is performed in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). Peter healed the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6). He attributed the man's healing to his faith in Christ's name (Acts 3:16). In a ringing affirmation of the centrality of Christ's name, Peter announced: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). *To invoke the name of one's god is to invoke the*

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 19.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

4. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 20.

power of that god. This is equally true concerning the God of the Bible.

When we are adopted into the family of God (John 1:12), we take on God's family name, just as Israel was referred to by God as His son (Ex. 4:22). We are called by His name, even by the world. It was at Antioch, a pagan city, that the word "Christians" was first applied to the disciples of Christ (Acts 11:26). *God honors His own name.* The adoption by God of the sinner, who bears the name of Satan before his adoption, transfers to him a new family name. The confrontation between Christ and the Pharisees in John 8 focused on the claim of the Pharisees to be the sons of Abraham. Christ challenged them defiantly: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). We should not mistake the nature of Jesus' accusation: He was calling them spiritual bastards, and bastards had no place in the congregational worship of Israel (Deut. 23:2). *Like father, like son:* Here was Jesus' challenge to His enemies. The Pharisees, Christ affirmed, were claiming the name of Abraham illegitimately, for they themselves were illegitimate sons.

2. Character and Reputation

It should not be difficult for a Christian to understand the reason for the inclusion of the prohibition against false witness in the summary of God's law that is provided by the Ten Commandments. *Bearing false witness against an individual is the same as bearing false witness against his family name.* It is bearing false witness against the man's historical position in the plan of God. *It misrepresents God's plan for the ages.* It strikes at the key institution, the family, for it misrepresents the individual's family name. For example, when a new husband brought the accusation of non-virginity against his bride, he had to prove it in court. If he could not prove it, he had to pay a fine of one hundred shekels of silver—an immense sum—to her father, "because he hath brought up an evil name upon a daughter of Israel" (Deut. 22:19). The father's reputation could be harmed by the bad reputation of his daughter, and so could the reputation of the covenanted nation of Israel. This reputation was protected by law from false accusations.

In a godly social order, a man's name is one of his most valuable assets. When we speak of "a man's name," we really mean his reputation. His reputation as an honest person, or as a competent workman,

or whatever his calling may be, must be protected by law. *To impugn his name is to impugn his character.* A man's character, for good or evil, must be respected. This was recognized by Shakespeare.

Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash;
'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.⁵

The preservation of a man's reputation is not a matter of being polite. Christ was hardly being polite to the Pharisees when he called them sons of someone other than Abraham, namely, the bastard sons of Satan. In fact, it is one sign of a godly social order that men recognize churls for what they are, and the sign of an unjust social order when they are not called what they are. Thus, Isaiah pointed to this aspect of a future reign of justice: "The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail" (Isa. 32: 5–6). The American slang expression, "calling a spade a spade," reflects this concern for honest witness. It includes calling the churl a churl. A man's reputation is to be protected, including his reputation for evil, if he is still evil. Anything else lends itself to "confidence games" by "con men." We are asked to have confidence in someone who does not deserve it. The con man steals from the unwary by means of a false reputation. He cultivates this false reputation, even as the Pharisees of Christ's day cultivated a false reputation. The so-called "polite culture" is a culture that is not guided by the law regarding false witness.

We forget that names were descriptive in Bible times. "Abram," for instance, means "exalted father." "Abraham" means "father of nations" or "father of a multitude." This naming process worked negatively as well. The evil man in Judges 9:26 is named Gaal ("Loathsome") the son of Ebed ("the slave"). It is unlikely that his parents gave him this name at his birth. Perhaps Samuel (or whoever wrote Judges) gave him that

5. *Othello*, III:3.

name for theological reasons.⁶ A similar social phenomenon was found in twentieth-century China. Steven Mosher's fine book on the rural Chinese points this out.

Another result of life-long encounters on village paths is an effortlessly acquired and altogether exhaustive fund of knowledge of each fellow denizen's finances and possessions, history and hopes, strengths and weaknesses, allies and enemies. One sign of this intimate communal familiarity lies in the revealing nicknames which Chinese everywhere assign to one another, and which I found to be uncannily accurate appraisals of a person's appearance and character. The best are truly inspired sobriquets. One brigade [Communist] Party secretary surnamed Wang is known to everyone in his village as Toad Wang, which is precisely the image evoked by his squat body and flat, powerful head, as well as by a distasteful deviousness he is known for. Then there is Cherrystone Shen, a tightfisted peddler whom, as many of his neighbors have discovered, it is next to impossible to get the best of in a deal. Some handles are obvious choices, like Big Head Yan for a man whose head is unusually large and dome-like, or Wine Rice Su for a villager who is well known for his habit of scooping only a finger of steamed rice into his bowl and then filling it up to the brim with rice liquor. Others ring unpleasantly, even cruelly, to Western ears, for instance the nickname of one Sandhead brigade official who has a severe speech impediment. He is called Cripple Mouth Lin. But when I asked Comrade Lin, as I carefully addressed him, if his seemingly disparaging appellation had ever made him angry or uncomfortable, he was perplexed. "Why should it have?" he answered mildly. "After all, my mouth is crippled." As he well knew, his nickname carried no hint of taunt or blame, but was simply the public recognition of the obvious fact of an infirmity. More generally, these names stem from the down-to-earth unpretentiousness of Chinese life, where people are seen—and identified—as what they are.⁷

B. Name-Brand Identification

When we recognize the link between *reputation* and *performance*, and where the civil magistrate enforces this link by penalizing the false witness, we can understand the economic importance of brand names. Very early in man's history, this link between name and workmanship was established. For example, the two craftsmen who helped supervise

6. I am indebted to James Jordan for these examples.

7. Steven W. Mosher, *Broken Earth: The Rural Chinese* (New York: Free Press, 1983), p. 33.

the construction of God's tent, the Tabernacle, Aholiab ("a father's tent") and Bezaleel ("the shadow of God"), are mentioned repeatedly in Exodus 31–38 as master craftsmen. They had reputations for competence. God specially called Bezaleel, filling him with His own spirit—in wisdom, understanding, knowledge, "and in all manner of workmanship"—that he might perform this important task in Israel's history (Ex. 31:1–5). Throughout the history of Israel, their names were associated with fine craftsmanship.

1. Maintaining a Reputation

When a craftsman knows that people recognize his work, or at least his name, he has a direct economic incentive to maintain this tradition. It takes great skill and possibly many years of struggle in the competitive marketplace for a craftsman or a producer to develop positive name-identification among his potential clientele. People learn, over many years in some instances, that a particular individual produces quality products that can be relied upon to deliver long-term service. It may take years for buyers to discover this about a man's products, since it takes time to test them in actual use. Buyers invest time and effort and money in their search for bargains. Gathering and evaluating this information is expensive. Mistakes are easy to make. The "school of hard knocks" can be a high-tuition institution for slow learners. Thus, when a product line becomes recognized as a reliable, valuable one, the producer has an incentive not to tamper with quality, since he is now the recipient of *customer loyalty* for his products. The recognition and acceptance given to his products by the buying public is an important *capital asset*. Like any capital asset, its value can plummet if the buyers begin to change their assessments. He has an incentive to keep them from changing their buying habits.

This is not to say that name-brand identification cannot be used for short-term gains at the expense of long-term gains. We are all familiar with this scenario: a firm that has developed a reputation for producing high quality goods is taken over by an outside company. The new managers decide to reduce costs by cutting the quality of inputs. The public may not initially recognize that quality debasement is going on. It takes time and experience to convince buyers that such a change in policy has been made by top management. They may conclude that their recent bad experience with a particular product is not representative of the product line in general, since the firm has such a

respected name. They may not trust their own judgment. But eventually, buyers learn that the old reliability is no longer available. At that point, they may choose to switch loyalties, or remain buyers only by inducements such as price reductions by the seller. The firm can obtain short-term profits—an excess of revenues over costs—by reducing quality, but only by risking the loss of the positive name identification that the firm previously enjoyed. In other words, this sort of short-run profit comes through a form of *capital depletion*.

2. *Specialization and Marketing*

In ancient history, a family that enjoyed economic surpluses (meaning an excess of production over actual expenditures or consumption) was in a position to seek buyers for its products or services. The family could begin to increase its output by specializing. Specialization increases the division of labor, and hence it increases output per unit of resource input. As the buying public began to differentiate one product or service from competing products or services, specialized sellers could begin to invest greater quantities of capital in the enterprise. These family businesses could be more confident of selling into a stable market, since product or service loyalty among buyers was beginning to develop. The *high costs* to customers of shopping around, of searching for alternative product or service substitutes, make name-brand identification a convenient *economic shorthand*. This is as true today as it was in the ancient world.

As certain families, especially those engaged in craft production, found ways of differentiating their products from those of their competitors, they could convert this recognition in the marketplace into money or bartered goods. Perhaps a family head possessed a unique skill or special knowledge of marketing. Others may have become known for their sense of honor. These family traditions became capital assets. The *family name* became an early form of *family capital*. This was especially true among artists. With greater name identification, customers found it less expensive to identify desirable products. This helped to extend market transactions, for customers could make more purchases because of the savings that resulted from the better information to customers as a result of name-brand identification.

This analysis is a form of “hypothetical history.” We cannot find ancient family budget records that say, “Today, we saved 10% of our monthly budget because we reduced our search costs.” We know that

certain craftsmen gained reputations for excellence. We then analyze this fact from the point of view of economics. We know that people want to reduce their costs of searching for bargains. We know that in the Hebrew commonwealth, the preservation of the family name was of paramount importance. Such a concern always has economic implications. We can conclude that buyers understood that producers would want to maintain their names' good reputations. Thus, buyers could adopt the "short cut" of substituting the producer's name for an involved testing of the product or an expensive search for information.

The wider the positive reputation of a seller, the wider is his market. When a product's reputation is high, additional marketing expenditures may be reduced without reducing sales. This makes international trade less expensive, just as it makes domestic trade less expensive. In foreign trade, a reputation for quality counts for even more than it does in local trade, since foreigners may have great difficulty in returning a defective product to the producer for repair or a refund. The local buyer may find it relatively inexpensive to confront the seller directly, since his transportation costs are low. Foreigners, especially in the ancient world, were not the beneficiaries of many of the advantages that domestic buyers possess. They were not citizens of the country where the producer lived. In the ancient world, this made it almost impossible for foreign buyers to gain justice in another nation's legal system, since foreigners had no legal rights, not being part of the civic religion. Thus, the reputation of the producer, or the importer-trader, was important in establishing foreign markets for the products of a nation's citizens.

We can readily understand that a close relationship between morality and the family name, between a sense of craftsmanship and the family name, or between both morality and craftsmanship and an identifying mark on the product, must have made it easier for a nation to gain an international reputation. Foreigners would learn of the high quality products produced by the citizens of some foreign culture. The reputation of that nation would be enhanced. This was true of Israel's laws:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and un-

derstanding people (Deut. 4:5–6).⁸

What is true of a law-order is also true for products. When customers can more readily identify products that satisfy them, the efficiency of the market is greatly enhanced. *The division of labor is limited by the extent of the market*, Adam Smith wrote in Chapter 3 of *Wealth of Nations* (1776), and by increasing name-brand identification, producers thereby contribute to extending the market. Men become familiar with buying in the marketplace, which is important in the transition between a primitive society, with its low division of labor, to a modern society. *Brand names transmit knowledge* in an effective, rapid, and summary fashion, and knowledge is what the Bible commends again and again. Brands help customers to *economize on knowledge*, which is the most important and valuable of all commodities (Prov. 3:13–20).⁹

Another neglected aspect of brand names is that a brand name makes possible scientific testing by independent research organizations. Brands establish an identifiable subclass of goods (a particular product line), which can then be compared scientifically by means of random selection from this and other competing products in that same class. The performance of a randomly selected product from an identifiable company can be compared with the performance of other randomly selected products that are produced by competitors. The results of these tests may be purchased by customers. This helps customers to make cost-effective decisions about which products to purchase.

If potential competitors were allowed to adopt identical identifying marks of successful products, including even the name of the competitor's firm, the customer would find his ability to make cost-effective choices dramatically reduced, and the successful producer would be robbed of a capital asset, namely, his position in the market as a recognizable seller of desirable, familiar products. The costs of knowledge

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

9. By far the finest book on the economics of knowledge is Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). Also useful is the specialized study by the legal theorist, Henry Manne [MANee], *Insider Trading and the Stock Market* (New York: Free Press, 1966). A bit narrow in focus, but important in dealing with the question of knowledge and the stock market, is the symposium edited by Manne, *Economic Policy and the Regulation of Corporate Securities* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1969), especially the essay by Harold Demsetz, "Perfect Competition, Regulation, and the Stock Market." Cf. Frederick G. Klein and John A. Prestbo, *News and the Market* (Chicago: Regnery, 1974).

would rise. The customer would be poorer, because his knowledge of name-brand product lines, gathered over months or years of reading or comparing brands, would be wiped out. The protection of a name by the civil government is basic to the efficient functioning of a free market society.

The fusion of *identifiable product lines* with *free pricing* (open competition) made possible modern economic life. By speeding up customers' decision-making—by lowering the costs of making decisions, in other words—name-brand identification has increased per capita wealth. Customers not only can make more rapid decisions about buying, as a result of their past experience, but advertising also reduces the time and trouble associated with bargaining. *The wider the market for information, the narrower the zones of ignorance on the part of buyers and sellers.* The buyer knows more concerning the comparative offers of other sellers, while the seller knows more about the offers of competing buyers. Well-publicized prices for specific brands therefore reduce the need for “hard bargaining” between the buyer and seller—bargaining that all too often involves lying, cheating, misrepresentation, and special advantages to one party in the transaction over the other (an advantage based on better knowledge concerning market alternatives).¹⁰

C. Slander and Theft

The prohibition against bearing false witness is theocentric. Men are to give an honest account of God, God's work, and God's plan for history. The commandment requires men to adhere to the God-interpreted facts of history. The existence of this theocentric commandment against distorting the truth concerning God has created a unique property right: *the right to a name*. A man is entitled to his good name. *Slander is therefore a form of theft.* The civil government has an obligation to defend the right of an individual to use a particular name, both personal and corporate, both familial and institutional. The civil government must also defend that name against false witnesses. In doing so, the civil authorities thereby reduce customers' search costs, for the

10. Hard bargaining is not innately evil, but it is fraught with ethical dangers. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 26. By reducing the need for hard bargaining—itself essentially an exercise in competitive knowledge, buyer vs. seller (although force of will is also important)—the wide knowledge of economic alternatives conveyed by a free market pricing system helps reduce men's temptations in economic affairs. Reducing the cost of knowledge reduces conflicts.

property right to a name, trademark, or other identifying mark encourages men to build up their capital by establishing good reputations for themselves. This helps to increase the sale of quality products, or price-competitive products, and it also reduces search costs for the customers. Buyers can make decisions more effectively (less wastefully) because of the availability of brand names.

The prohibition against an evil report should remind us of the proclivity of rebellious men to listen to evil, false reports, and then to spread such reports to others. The spread of lies within a rebellious, envious culture is far easier (less costly) than the spread of the truth. Men who are in rebellion against God have a vested interest in falsehood about God (Rom. 1:18–22)¹¹ and therefore also about their fellow man. *There is greater demand for false rumors than there is for the truth.* Men delight in twisting the revelation of God concerning Himself and His creation. There are too many volunteer agents (gossips), and the market for false rumors is wider and more easily accessible than the market for truth, with its greater precision and its comparative lack of rebellion-filled excitement. False rumors are like mistresses: more exciting initially than wives, but more deadly. This is why Proverbs compares false knowledge with harlotry (Prov. 7:6–23), and compares wisdom with the honest woman crying in the streets, ignored by the inhabitants of the city (Prov. 1:20–33).

Because men are evil, the transmission of false reports against morally upright citizens is subsidized. This subsidy by the ungodly—their preference for falsehood—reduces the per capita wealth of a society, for decisions made in terms of false information are far less likely to produce beneficial results at the lowest possible costs.

D. Advertising

Advertising is not well understood by social commentators. There has been a great deal of criticism aimed at advertising in general and the advertising industry in particular.¹² Many sorts of economic evils

11. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

12. Criticism of advertising has been a constant theme in the writings of John Kenneth Galbraith. Cf. *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), pp. 155–58; *The New Industrial State*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), pp. 203–9, 273–74. He comments: “The educational and scientific estate and the larger intellectual community tend to view this effort [modern advertising] with disdain” (p. 293). For a self-professed Christian’s similar disdain, see Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 46–50. I cite it, not

are laid at the door of advertising, especially the creation of new wants—wants that become “needs” in the minds of the masses. This is an odd criticism, coming as it does from educated people. What was the university, or the inventor’s laboratory, other than a means of creating hitherto unappreciated opportunities (“wants”) for those who had not previously considered them? How can we imagine the operation of the famed institution, “the marketplace of ideas,” apart from men’s quest for better arguments, more effective presentations, and improved communications? Advertising is grounded in the right of free speech. It is also grounded in the right to one’s name, which is a capital asset whose market value is enhanced by advertising.

1. Property Rights in a Name

Christian commentators have failed to recognize the biblical foundation of advertising. *All advertising rests on the commandment that prohibits false witness.* This commandment, as we have seen, establishes a situation analogous to *a property right in a person’s name.* This name can become a means of transmitting information to customers. The name “Rembrandt” on a painting conveys certain information concerning the quality of the painting. The name “Coca-Cola” conveys information concerning the taste of a soft drink. When the company changed the drink’s formula and name to “New Coke” in 1985, it suffered immediate losses. It was pressured by customers to reintroduce the discontinued drink within three months: “Classic Coke.”

Advertising’s critics object to any misuse of this property right. There are many failings of the advertising industry that are singled out. But are they really significant? Here are some of the typical complaints. “The industry creates unnecessary desires for consumer goods in the minds of the public.” (In other words, advertising does convey knowledge of opportunities or benefits that potential purchasers might otherwise have overlooked.) “The industry manipulates the buyers.” (The same way that these same advertising firms manipulate voters who elect politicians who will establish national policies, not just sell car wax. Should we therefore abolish free speech?) “Buyers are helpless to resist these manipulations.” (Just as the buyers must be helpless to decide for themselves the better political candidate. Should we there-

because it is the only neo-evangelical book to take such a position, but because it is the representative book.

fore abolish free speech?) “The industry sells dreams, not reality, sizzle rather than steak.” (What else do national political party platforms sell except dreams, and how close to subsequent reality are the pre-election promises of politicians? Should we therefore abolish free speech?) “Advertising misleads buyers continually.” (Apparently, the competition of rival advertising presentations cannot offset such misleading information.) “Advertising reduces human freedom to act rationally.” (Multiple opportunities apparently are bad for human freedom.)

The reality of advertising is simple enough. As with any tool of motivation and communication, it can be misused, fraudulently used, tastelessly used, and illegally used. When a company promises something tangible (as distinguished from dreams and fantasies that no one believes logically), and then fails to deliver, the advertiser has violated the prohibition against false witness. He has promised that which cannot be delivered as promised. He has said that a particular brand offers a certain set of benefits, and it offers no such benefits. That is fraud, and it is illegal. Victims can sue in court. Prosecuting attorneys can bring charges in the name of the victims.

The point should be clear: Any property right, or human skill, or tool can be misused. What is more important is *to decide who will have the right to use the tool or technique*, under what circumstances, under what penalties, and most important of all, *who will decide what is legitimate?* No one has stated the problems more intelligently than Thomas Sowell: “The broad sweep of knowledge needed for decision making is brought to bear through various systems of coordination of the scattered fragmentary information possessed by individuals in organizations. . . . The most basic decision is who makes the decision, under what constraints, and subject to what feedback mechanisms. This is fundamentally different from the approach which seeks better decisions by replacing ‘the bad guys’ with ‘the good guys’—that is, by relying on differential rectitude and differential ingenuity rather than on a structure of incentives geared to the normal range of human propensities.”¹³ In other words, two issues—(1) *the carrot and the stick*, and (2) who has the *authority* to establish when to use the carrot or the stick—are far more important issues than the appointment of hoped-for moral giants to positions of high authority. How to coordinate knowledge? How to determine which facts are the economically relevant facts? How to devise an incentive system to encourage people

13. Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions*, p. 17.

to seek the proper facts and use this knowledge efficiently in order to satisfy consumer demand? These are the relevant questions.

2. Motivation

Advertising provides a means of communicating information in an effective, motivating way. Let me offer an example from my own business. When I began publishing my bi-weekly economic newsletter, *Remnant Review* in 1974, I wrote a promotion letter that was mailed to a specially targeted audience that was familiar with my name and my previous economic work. I received sufficient subscription income to pay for the mailing, and even show a profit. This same letter was reprinted (at zero cost to me) in a local newspaper with a circulation of over 100,000—50 times larger than the select group I mailed to originally. Total response: zero. Name-identification made much of the difference.¹⁴ Because some people knew who I was, they were willing to risk their money and subscribe. I communicated in an effective way to one group, but not to the other. *Motivation and name-identification are closely linked.*

What about pictures of rugged cowboys (one might say “worn-out cowboys”) that sell cigarettes? Marlboro used “Marlboro Man” (1955–62) and then “Marlboro Country” (western theme: 1963–) ads for five decades to gain and retain a large share of the world’s cigarette market. Consider what went before. From the late nineteenth century until 1954, Marlboro catered to women. In 1954, the cigarette featured a red filter tip. The company dropped this marketing strategy in 1954. The second approach, begun in 1955, was a resounding success. By 1971, the Marlboro brand was number-one in the world, up from 1% in the United States in 1954. Was either advertising approach innately immoral (setting aside the question of whether cigarettes as such are somehow immoral)?¹⁵ Has the public been misled in the latter case, but not in the former? Or are buyers somehow pleased to smoke “he-man” cigarettes rather than “she-woman” cigarettes? They were unwilling to buy red filter tipped cigarettes that attempted to sell to wo-

14. Another difference: People do not expect to be asked to buy something when they read what appears to be an information article. They read ads in order to be sold. Thus, the mental switch from “information mode” to “buying mode” is not automatic. It is an expensive switch to make, unless the ad has been specifically designed to activate this switching process.

15. Two of the Marlboro Country models, who really were cowboys, died of lung cancer in the early 1990s. (<http://bit.ly/MarlboroMen>)

men. But did red filter tips convey “true” information about femininity? Was the early Marlboro cigarette more a women’s cigarette than a man’s? Or were the advertisers simply trying to position the cigarette in the market by a subtle (or not too subtle) appeal to the buyers’ imaginations?

Is it wrong to give a customer a sense of belonging to a “special breed” of men, even when nobody believes it? Why do buyers return, year after year, to the companies that offer them illusions—harmless illusions in themselves—that buyers respond to? What possible benefit would the customer or the seller derive from an endless series of ads that announce: “This product is basically the same as all the others, but we want you to buy ours, since we like our present employment opportunities”? How exciting would that be, even though most of us know that such a disclaimer is essentially true, and that free market competition keeps most of the products within any given price range basically comparable (though not identical)?

This point cannot be avoided in marketing: the competitive structure that provides incentives for one company to improve a product, and for others to follow this lead, is heavily dependent on advertising to create the *desire to buy* in the minds of the readers or viewers. The advertising system, so widely criticized, is itself one foundation of the competitive system that makes “miracles” available to the public at competitive prices. The “evils of advertising,” meaning effective, motivating advertising, are absolutely fundamental to free market sales. The *voluntarism* that lies at the heart of the market makes necessary the conveying of information concerning new opportunities in *effective packaging*. Sellers cannot force buyers to buy.¹⁶

Write a newspaper column about a new book, unless it is a book review in a major publication that caters to the book-buying public, and few sales will result. Design an ad written around an extract from this review, and run the ad in the same newspaper or magazine in which the review originally ran, and sales could be considerable. Why the difference? Critics of advertising ignore the obvious: *people read ads with minds open to motivation*. They seldom read newspaper columns in such a way.

16. The ability of customers to resist the persuasion of advertisers is admired by Galbraith; “The power to influence the individual consumer is not, of course, plenary. It operates within limits of cost. . . . That the power to manage the individual consumer is imperfect must be emphasized.” John Kenneth Galbraith, *Economics and the Public Purpose* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 138. The title of the chapter, however, tells the story: “Persuasion and Power.”

Then there is the filtering process of the mind. People unconsciously screen out vastly more data than they notice, let alone absorb, or even less often, act upon. *Habit screens out new opportunities*. So do many other mental processes that we do not understand yet. Some way to “punch through” the mental veil of indifference must be found. This is what advertising is all about. It is not economically sufficient merely to inform people concerning opportunities; *advertising must motivate them to act*. We are not hypothetical Greek rationalists, who always do the right thing whenever we have sufficient knowledge. We are not saved by knowledge, nor are we exclusively (or even mainly) motivated by sheer intellectual awareness. We are motivated by other aspects of human personality: fear, greed, joy, hope, love, humor, imagination, respect, and the desire to be the first person on the block to own one. We are motivated by altruism, too, but you will receive far more donations to “save the children” if you include a picture of a waif and include a brief description of the waif’s plight. People respond to real-life situations or perceived real-life situations. They respond to emotions, to empathy, to the concrete—not to the abstract. They are not so ready to respond to statistical summaries of disaster-laden foreign nations. They want stories and photographs.

The Bible is the model of effective persuasion. It is not a book of systematic theology. It is a book of stories and practical letters. We read Bible stories to our children. Catechisms are extensions of these stories. The stories of Cain and Abel, Moses and Pharaoh, David and Goliath: these are God’s tools of persuasion.

3. The Non-Primacy of the Intellect

A favorite myth of intellectuals, the primacy of the intellect, is seldom taken seriously by advertisers, because advertisers know that human beings are multifaceted creatures, not just austere, pristine intellects. If you want to help the real-life victims of disasters, and you need money to do this, then you had better be prepared to abandon the doctrine of the primacy of the intellect. You must use advertising techniques that have been successful in selling soap, as well as selling political candidates, if you want to communicate your program to the oversaturated, numbed potential donor. Jerry Huntsinger, one of the most successful direct-mail fund-raisers in the world, says that once the recipient opens the envelope (and it is not easy to get him to open it), he will put it down or throw it away if you have not caught his interest

within five seconds. This brief attention span is the statistical reality of direct-mail fund-raising appeals, and no repetitive chanting of the primacy of the intellect can overcome this discovery of the intellect, namely, the statistical results of direct-mail appeals for funds.

Thus, to judge the legitimacy of advertising strictly in terms of the myth of the primacy of the intellect, is to misjudge the validity of advertising. If some statistically significant (meaning revenue-generating) portion of the buying public is responding to a “manipulative” advertising campaign, the proper response is not to call the state in to ban the campaign, but rather to allow the predictable free-market response, namely, for other sellers to enter the market with a similar “manipulative” campaign. Just as the answer to a “manipulative” prosecuting attorney’s presentation is an equally “manipulative” defense attorney’s presentation, so the answer for “manipulative” advertising is open entry to a competing advertising campaign. The important issue is not the presence of supposedly manipulative elements in advertising, but rather the *open entry of competitors into the marketplace*. The only known alternative is a statist nightmare of regulatory activities by entrenched, monopolistic bureaucrats. This price is too high.

4. *Behavioral Economics*

Economists are great believers in the final authority of the intellect. The economist’s conception of the model known as economic man, the rational calculator, is at the heart of modern economics. Yet that model is beginning to unravel. When the first edition of this book appeared, that was not true, but in the 1990s, the model began to be challenged by a new school of thought within the profession, called behavioral economics.

Psychologists at long last began to penetrate the thinking of a handful of economists. They began to conduct experiments that undermined a few economists’ confidence in men’s commitment to their own rational self-interest. Here, I must invoke the only known law of sociology: “Some do. Some don’t.” Economists disagree with psychologists, who reciprocate. Also, members of each group do not agree with members of their group. But, as of 2011, some psychologists argue that the brain is divided into the limbic and paralimbic systems, which deal with emotions, and the analytic system, which is centered in the frontal and parietal cortices. The analytic system handles the rules of whatever environment a person finds himself in. It is future-oriented

and rules-oriented. The limbic system is present-oriented. In other words, here is scientific physiological evidence of the ancient rational-irrational dualism.

There are experiments by psychologists that do point to physiological causes of this dualism. Certain decisions are accompanied by brain activity that can be monitored through brain scanning techniques, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Research subjects are offered a choice: \$20 now or \$23 in a month. Some will take \$20 now. Limbic system activity is visible on-screen. But if the choice is between \$20 in two weeks and \$23 in a month, hardly anyone chooses \$20. The limbic system ceases to influence the decision, since both choices are in the future. Those experiments that are economics-oriented have led to a branch of economics called neuroeconomics.¹⁷

Economists are now discovering that such emotions as vengeance, envy, and the fear of betrayal influence decision-making. In repeated experiments, one of two players is given money to divide between both players. Player A makes an offer to divide the money. If player B accepts the offer, each player gets what he has agreed to. If player B rejects the offer, neither player gets any money. In thousands of trials, with different stakes, the results are predictable: player B will reject any offer lower than 30%. The A players sense this, and so they usually offer 40% to 50%. Here is the kicker. If player B believes that a computer has made the offer, he is likely to accept less than 30%.¹⁸ Yet traditional economic theory says that a rational person will accept anything rather than receive nothing. "You can't beat something with nothing." Yet, where envy or resentment at being offered an "unfair" offer is concerned, people *do* prefer nothing to something. This is real-world economics. This is acting man, not economic man.

Behavioral economists have discovered that the ways in which offers are presented, not simply the net economic return, influence people's choices. They are just beginning to accept the reality that advertisers have known for a century: *people respond to emotion*. A South African bank ran tests of a series of offers to previous borrowers. The bank offered lower-interest loans. But the bank tested to see what motivated borrowers. It found that by including a photo of a bank employee in the offer, more people took out a loan, even at a rate of interest higher than that offered to people whose offer did not include a photo. If the photo was of a woman, men were willing to borrow at five

17. "Neuroeconomics," *Harvard Magazine* (March–April 2006), p. 54.

18. Craig Lambert, "The Marketplace of Perceptions," *ibid.*, p. 93.

percentage points higher. This information has stunned economists.¹⁹ It did not stun me. I have written too many direct-response ads.

One of the major economists in the field of behavioral economics is Harvard University's Sendhil Mullainathan. He commented on what advertisers and Austrian School economists have always known.

We tend to think people are driven by purposeful choices. We think big things drive big behaviors: if people don't go to school, we think they don't like school. Instead, most behaviors are driven by the moment. They aren't purposeful, thought-out choices. That's an illusion we have about others. Policymakers think that if they get the abstractions right, that will drive behavior in the desired direction. But the world happens in real time. We can talk abstractions of risk and return, but when the person is physically checking off the box on that investment form, all the things going on at that moment will disproportionately influence the decision they make. That's the temptation element—in real time, the moment can be very tempting. The main thing is to define what is in your mind at the moment of choice.²⁰

He defined "purposeful" as "thought-out choices." He still did not escape from the mythology of the primacy of the intellect. His economic analysis did not incorporate *purpose* as *non-financial*. His economic theory is only beginning to comprehend man as a decision-maker who is not an analytical calculator devoid of emotion and sin.

He and his colleague Andrei Shleifer wrote a detailed study of financial advertising. They discovered that the ads paralleled the state of the stock market. The advertisers did not try to educate investors; they designed their ads to match the present opinions of the targeted audience. Any advertiser could have told the professors that no one can afford to finance an ad campaign that runs counter to the targeted audience's beliefs.

The two economists recognized that persuasion and rhetoric are linked. They admit in the abstract of their article: "Persuasion is a fundamental part of social activity, yet it is rarely studied by economists." The traditional theoretical model discusses advertising as the presentation of objectively verifiable information. The behavioral model sees persuasion as matching the audience's existing beliefs.²¹ *Rhetoric is*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

20. *Idem.*

21. Sendhil Mullainathan and Andrei Shleifer, "Persuasion in Finance," *Third Draft* (Oct. 2005).

central, meaning symbolism and emotion. Economists generally have not grasped what I recognized in 1992: The tripartite biblical hermeneutic of *grammatical-historical, theological, and symbolical* corresponds to the medieval trivium: *grammar, logic, and rhetoric*. These three factors are at the heart of the direct-response advertising industry. An ad must have a powerful offer that appeals to the buyer's self-interest: grammar. It must offer proof: logic. It must appeal to the emotions: rhetoric.²² To understand mankind, we must move beyond the myth of the primacy of the intellect.

E. Imputation and Value

To name something is to define it. To define it is to impute meaning to it, to assess its relevance and role in a larger scheme of things. To impute meaning is to evaluate something *objectively external* in terms of coherent, internally self-consistent *objective standards*. There must be an objective relationship between historical events and fixed ethical or value-based standards. There must also be a way to discover and then assess this relationship. This is the meaning of imputation. The entire process of imputation is inherently *subjective*. A person does the naming-assessing-imputing.

1. Realism and Nominalism in Economic Theory

Modern economic theory rests self-consciously on the concept of imputed value. This was not always the case. Following Adam Smith, classical economists explained the relationship between value and price in terms of objective value, either a labor theory of value or a cost-of-production theory of value. Adam Smith taught both, although both cannot be true. We can call this the *realist* concept of value. Value is explained in terms of something real that goes into a product. The theory could not explain the value of a waterfall. The theory left out all of nature, which is God's creation. Has nature no value? The Physiocrats, contemporaries of Smith, explained value in terms of land. Then what of man's labor? Is it worth nothing?

In contrast to the realists were the *nominalists*—as always in human philosophy. Three men offered a subjective theory of value, inde-

22. Dorothy Sayers' article, "The Lost Tools of Learning" (1947), called for a restoration of the trivium, which she argued corresponds to a child's mental development: childhood, puberty, and early adulthood. Few people know that she was a professional advertiser, not just a writer of mystery novels.

pendently and at the same time (1871–73): William Stanley Jevons of England, Carl Menger of Austria, and Léon Walras of Switzerland. They argued that men subjectively impute value to consumer goods. Men's competitive bidding against one another establishes objective prices. Thus, the basis of economic value is subjective. The basis of price is supply and demand. Value and price are related by the process of imputation.

The practical problem for subjective value theory was not recognized until the 1930s. If value is completely subjective, then there is no objective standard—no measure—that applies to all mankind. There is no scientific way to compare one person's value scale with another person's. There is no way for economists, as scientists, to make *inter-personal comparisons of subjective utility*. This implication of subjective value theory was first developed by Lionel Robbins, who had been greatly influenced by Ludwig von Mises, who in turn was an Austrian economist in the tradition of Menger. Robbins came up with this argument in response to the argument by A. C. Pigou that a case can be made for the graduated income tax on this basis. The value of an extra unit of income is less for a millionaire than for a poor person. There is a gain in total social utility when the state takes away a large portion of rich man's money and gives it to poor people. This concept is the foundation of welfare economics, which Pigou had pioneered. Robbins argued in 1932 that this argument has no epistemological validity. There is no way to measure objectively the value of a unit of income for anyone, let alone cross comparisons among people.²³ Had Robbins chosen to extend this idea, he could have challenged the very concept of an objective unit of income. If a dollar is the unit of income, its subjective value to an individual is not objectively measurable, because each penny's worth of value is subjective, and it is slightly though immeasurably less valuable than the previous penny's worth. And so on, *ad infinitum*.

To counter Robbins, Roy Harrod, editor of *The Economic Journal*, argued that if Robbins' theory were true, then it would be scientifically impossible for economists to defend or criticize any economic policy in terms of its expected or retrospective social benefits and costs. *It would impossible to make scientifically valid cost-benefit analyses*. This would destroy the entire field of applied economics, Harrod said. Robbins admitted in 1938 that Harrod was correct, yet he also affirmed his

23. Lionel Robbins, *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, [1932] 1935), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

own faith in the possibility of rendering sound advice to the government. This was a complete retreat from his original opinion. Although he lived for over four decades after this exchange, he never explained why this retreat is epistemologically valid in terms of subjective value theory. He also did not explain why Pigou's argument is incorrect, given his retreat. On the other hand, Harrod did not explain how his view of the "economist as advisor" can be defended scientifically if subjective value theory is true, which all schools of economic theory except for Marxism affirm is true. Most economists remain unaware of this problem. They do not propose a resolution.²⁴

This debate within the guild of the economists is merely the application of the *realist-nominalist antinomy* in all human thought, a radical and (so far) unreconciled contradiction. Reason, which is said by philosophers to be common to mankind, has not yet led philosophers to discover some universal and logically undeniable *common epistemological ground* between the sadist and his victim. There is no way to measure—to evaluate scientifically—the quantity of pleasure. So, there is no way to ascertain the quantity of pleasure received by a person who gets pleasure by inflicting pain on someone else, compared to the quantity of displeasure of the victim who has this pain inflicted on him. This being the case, is the civil government therefore logically incapable of defending laws against sadism and violence? Scientifically, the answer is *yes*, if we define science in terms of nominalism, i.e., autonomous men's individual understanding of the truth. There is no way to explain how autonomous individuals who disagree over these elusive first principles can draw accurate conclusions about the wisdom or illegitimacy of any social policy.

On the other hand, if we turn to realism as the basis of a solution to the philosophical problem of *corporate incoherence because of individual autonomy*, we find that there is no rational way to explain how individuals can discover the objective ethical or utilitarian principles by which the measurement or evaluation of any corporate policy can be made. These objective principles are said to exist, but what is missing is the metaphysical connection between them and the world of flux. What is also missing is a universal methodology for ascertaining these fixed principles.

This is why philosophers, social philosophers, and political philosophers have debated endlessly over the problem of the one and the

24. I have covered this debate in North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5, and North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

many.²⁵ So far, neither the ontological nor the epistemological existence of the *corporate one* has been reconciled with either the ontological or epistemological existence of the *autonomous many*. Cornelius Van Til spent his career arguing that no reconciliation is possible, given the assumption of each person's autonomy from God.

2. *Covenantalism: The Biblical Solution*

The biblical solution to this continuing epistemological impasse is theocentric: the ability of a Trinitarian God to impute value to His creation subjectively, an imputation based on His objective handiwork as the Creator and providential Sustainer of the creation. There is no confusion for God. There are no gaps in His understanding. His evaluation is both authoritative and comprehensive.

Christian economic theory solves the antinomy of objective value (realism) and subjective value (nominalism) by affirming covenantalism. A totally sovereign God (point one) created the world out of nothing (point two) and then placed it under law (point three). He then assessed the value of His work (point four). He has sustained the universe providentially (point five).

Man is made in the image of God. God delegates (point two) limited sovereignty to man as a steward over the creation. The individual therefore can make judgments by subjectively applying (point four) God's objective value scale (point three) to the objective affairs of men, including economics. Because the work of the law is written on all men's hearts (Rom. 2:14–15), men can make accurate preliminary evaluations of social utility.²⁶

Value is both individualistic and subjective. Men act in terms of their own value scales and preferences. Their actions are objective. God can and will evaluate these actions in terms of His own standards. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:35–37).

Ethical decision-making necessarily begins within a framework of

25. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007). (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

26. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 3.

individual responsibility before God. Jesus said that which is defiling in life is that which is subjective and internal, not that which is objective and external. "And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matt. 15:16–20).

God knows the relationship between what is inside a person ethically and what the person does externally in terms of his ethical first principles. "For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:44–45).²⁷ Nothing is hidden to God. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27–28).

God makes interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. For example, He accurately compares the subjective value of a coin to a poor woman with the subjective value of great wealth to a rich man or group of men. "And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:1–4).²⁸

What God can do originally, men who are made in His image can do subordinately. God holds each person responsible for evaluating the world in terms of what He has revealed to men objectively in His word, the Bible, and also what He has revealed to them subjectively in their hearts. God also holds entire societies responsible. There is corporate responsibility as well as individual responsibility, which was the

27. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

28. *Ibid.*, ch. 50.

message of the prophets and Jesus. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34).

Apart from the doctrines of the Trinity (one/many) and the doctrine of man as the image of God, the antinomy between the one and the many will persist. The imputation of value is based on objective standards of evaluation: the law of God, which is both objective (*spoken by God*) and subjective (*spoken by God*). God's law can and does correspond to objective reality, yet it is perceived subjectively. There is objective value, yet it is perceived subjectively. This applies to social theory in general and economic theory in particular. The Bible teaches *methodological covenantalism*, not methodological individualism (the many) or methodological holism (the one). *Covenantalism is the Bible's alternative to both realism and nominalism.*

For post-1870 humanistic economic theory, the doctrine of individual subjective imputation is epistemologically central. Christian economics moves the epistemological center to creation. The Creator imputes value subjectively according to His objective law and His objective handiwork. He created the universe day by day, and then imputed value to what He had accomplished at the end of each day. Then He evaluated all that He had done at the end of the sixth day. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Gen. 1:31). Men must do the same in their covenantal-judicial capacity as responsible agents of God. Men impute value because God imputes value. Men impute subjectively because God imputes subjectively. Men also impute objectively because God's handiwork is objective. This is the reconciliation of objective and subjective value theory. It is grounded in the activities of God.

Conclusion

The free market social order is the product historically of Christian preaching and Christian institutions. By fostering respect for the family name, Christianity reaffirmed the Hebrew tradition of respect for truth. This created an atmosphere highly favorable to advertising, because *producers are permitted to capture the capital value of a good reputation*. Advertising in turn extended information to a much wider market. The costs of decision-making dropped, the market expanded,

and the division of labor increased, thereby lowering the costs of production.

Information costs are inescapable. Men are not omniscient. The Bible warns men against the sin of presumption, the sin of seeking to be God. A godly society recognizes that information is not a free (gratuitous) good. It recognizes the need for establishing institutions that enhance the spread of *accurate, motivating, and self-correcting knowledge*. The West overcame this cost barrier more effectively than any society in history, because the West honored the laws protecting property, including the property right in one's name or company mark. The transmission of more accurate information through advertising, independent testing, and brand-name recognition has created the modern marketplace, with its relative lack of "hard bargaining" between buyers and sellers.

The free market transfers the competitive bargaining process to a far more fair and beneficial system: buyers vs. buyers, and sellers vs. sellers. The better the participants' knowledge of market alternatives, the less benefit one bargainer (buyer or seller) has over the other (seller or buyer). *Better information protects the weaker party in any economic exchange.* The face-to-face hard bargaining that characterizes the Middle Eastern bazaar or other trading areas takes *too much time* to conduct transactions, and it puts too great a premium on *monopolistic psychological manipulation*. The average buyer or seller is protected by a broadly based ("impersonal")²⁹ free market, with its highly developed systems for transmitting accurate knowledge concerning available economic alternatives.

A man's reputation must be protected, for good or evil, whether in a court of law or in the court of public opinion. Whether he is righteous or evil, efficient or incompetent, his reputation should reflect his true condition.

The jury, the church, and the free market are all institutions that *render judgment*. They are required by God to render righteous, accurate judgment. Rendering judgment is basic to the ninth commandment, and parallels the fourth commandment's sabbatical day of judgment by God. Evil men seek continuity not by establishing a righteous family name but instead by means of crime and false testimony. The result is a lack of rest for any society which refuses to judge men by God's standard. Where there is *no true judgment*, there can be *no rest*

29. On the proper and improper use of the word "impersonal" as it relates to the operations of the free market, see North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Ch. 1:D.

—none for the wicked, but more to the point, none for the societies that refuse to punish the wicked.

30

COVETOUSNESS AND CONFLICT

Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's (Ex. 20:17).

The theocentric issue of this law is God's ownership of the creation and His lawful delegation of ownership to individuals and organizations. As the cosmic Owner, He establishes the terms governing ownership. This is one of them.

As the tenth commandment, it is the fifth in the second pair of classifications of the Ten Commandments: kingly mode. It therefore has to do with inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹ Any undermining of a man's capital base threatens the inheritance of his heirs. A successful theft of any part of this inheritance reduces the effect of compounding over time. Theft is a way for covenant-breakers to thwart the effect of the inter-generational expansion of capital under the authority of covenant-keepers. It is an attack on this principle: "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13: 22).

The sanctions of point four of the biblical covenant model are translated into kingdom results through inheritance. So, in the battle in history between the two kingdoms, the compounding of a covenant-keeper's capital base is a means of dominion for God's kingdom. Any attempt to thwart this expansion should be regarded as hindering God's kingdom for the sake of Satan's kingdom.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1988] 2012) ch. 5.

A. Covetousness as Uncontrolled Lusting

Covetousness, biblically speaking, refers to an illicit craving of another person's possession, including his station in life. It can also involve the actual theft of someone else's property, either by force or by fraud. Achen, a thief who stole what belonged to God's temple, explained his actions.

When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it (Joshua 7:21).

The prophet Micah explained why God was angry at Israel.

And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage (Micah 2:2).

There is a problem in dealing with the biblical concept of covetousness. The tenth commandment groups together several forms of coveted property: a neighbor's wife, manservant, maidservant, and work animals. The problem here is trade. Why would men come together and trade if they were not desirous of purchasing each other's goods? Not every exchange is preceded by an announcement, "goods for sale." Sometimes men see an item that belongs to another, and they approach the potential seller to offer an exchange. Obviously, when men accept someone's offer to buy, they are acknowledging that they prefer to own the goods being offered by someone else. They were not committed to permanent ownership of their goods.

The sale of a wife is obviously illegal.² A man is not permitted by God to lust after another man's wife. No exchange here is legitimate. But why should the same prohibition restrict the exchange of, say, gold for work animals? Why should it be immoral to offer to buy the services of work animals on a permanent basis? True, the manservant or maidservant may be permanently associated with a particular family. The permanent slave in the Old Testament voluntarily decided to undergo the pierced ear ritual (the shedding of blood) in order to become part of a family (Deut. 15:16–17). He was unsalable. But other servants

2. The practice of selling wives at auction went on in Great Britain until the late nineteenth century. The practice was not sanctioned by the authorities, but it persisted in rural areas. Samuel P. Menefee, *Wives for Sale: An Ethnographic Study of British Popular Divorce* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981).

could be sold. Why, then, the prohibition against coveting these others? Bargains are made constantly, including the sale of Esau's birth-right, which Jacob unquestionably desired.³

So, what sense can we make of the commandment? A passage in Micah throws light on the usage of the Hebrew word for coveting. Covetousness involves *uncontrolled lusting*, a desire that can be satisfied only by possessing the other man's property. It is the kind of lusting that is involved in adultery, where the desire cannot legitimately be fulfilled, yet it persists. It is a desire that results in lawlessness when it is not thwarted, a desire that will not take "no" for an answer. "Woe unto them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage" (Mic. 2:1–2).⁴ It is the kind of desire that resulted in Ahab's unlawful confiscation of Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21).⁵ The man with power uses that power, despite the protection given to the original owner by the biblical laws regarding property.

The prohibition against covetousness therefore does not deal primarily with envy, meaning envy in the sense of resentment against the success of others. The covetous person really is intent upon obtaining the other man's property. Covetousness, in the biblical view, is an illicit form of jealousy. The attack against the other man's property is not motivated by a desire only to tear down his property, but to confiscate it.

The covetous person resents his own station in life. Someone else possesses what he wants. He is dissatisfied with the role he is playing in God's plan. Paul condemns this resentment against one's station in life (I Cor. 7:21–22).⁶ One person desires another's good looks, prestige, or worldly possessions. He feels thwarted by his own limitations, and therefore thwarted by his environment. God has thwarted his personal development, the covetous man is asserting. The Bible teaches that the other person is working out his salvation (Phil. 2:2) or

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 26.

4. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 25.

5. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

damnation before God. His property must be respected. Nevertheless, the covetous man thinks that he can appropriate for himself the fruits of the other man's labor, as if those fruits were unrelated to that man's personal responsibility before God as a steward.

B. Downward Social Mobility

Another aspect of this jealousy is overlooked by most commentators. Covetousness can also be directed downward, toward those who have fewer goods and therefore fewer responsibilities. This can be seen in the social phenomenon known as the drop-out mentality. In the late 1960's, for example, the sons and daughters of the middle classes and the wealthy were on the road, all over the Western world. They hitch-hiked, as if they were poor. They adopted the dress codes of poor people, wearing the faded blue denim jeans of field hands.⁷ They would even bleach their new, dark blue jeans, to give them an instant fade.⁸ Blue jeans became so associated with Western culture that they commanded a high price—a black market price—in Iron Curtain nations, especially the Soviet Union. Young people adopted the life style of nomads—unwashed drifters who refuse to face the responsibilities of dominion. Those with wealth and responsible callings became “primitive,” in an attempt to escape the burdens associated with economic stewardship. They wanted others to take the risks and bear the responsibilities.

The Bible prohibits men from escaping lawful callings, unless they are upgrading their responsibilities. A slave is authorized to take his freedom, if and when it is voluntarily offered by his master, either free of charge or by sale (I Cor. 7:21). The idea is to extend God's rule into every area of life, and men are not to turn their backs on this task simply because a particular calling looks as though it would involve too much responsibility. *It is important for each person to evaluate his own capabilities accurately, and then to match these capabilities with his calling before God—his highest, most productive calling.* God calls men to be imitators of His son, Jesus Christ, to conform themselves to

7. The original blue jeans were sold by the Levi Strauss Company during the gold rush days in California in the 1850s. Hence the almost generic name, “Levis.” The pants were marketed as being especially durable, a desirable feature in the opinion of gold miners.

8. The 1970s brought a fusion of symbols: “designer” jeans. These were blue denim jeans that bore the name of famous rich people or famous designers, and brought three or four times the price of a pair of normal blue jeans.

Christ's image (I Cor. 15:49). They are to work out the salvation that God gives them, and they are to do this with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).⁹ This kind of steady improvement involves *upward mobility*: spiritual improvement above all, but also economic and social mobility. The individual may not see himself advancing economically, but over generations, the spiritual heirs of a man will advance economically. The wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22).¹⁰ Upward mobility must be in terms of God's calling—service to God—and not simply in terms of amassing wealth (I Tim. 6:6–10).¹¹ We are to imitate godly examples (I Cor. 11:1),¹² but we are not to worry about “keeping up with the Joneses” in a purely material sense.

C. Political Covetousness

The commandment against covetousness refers to an individual who looks longingly at his neighbor's property. *The beginning of covetousness is clearly the human heart* (James 3:14–16). Men want goods that they have neither earned nor inherited. Their relationships with their neighbors cannot possibly be in conformity to God's law when such feelings are present in their hearts. The fact that one man possesses goods that are confiscatable in the eyes of his neighbor will disrupt their relationship. The possessor will be seen by the covetous man as an illegitimate owner, someone who has no right, under God, to maintain control over his possessions.

The commandment has implications beyond the local neighborhood. *When covetousness becomes widespread, the next step is political coercion.* The very usage of the words, “to covet,” implies violence. The covetous man will not limit his attempt to gain control of another man's property to an offer to purchase. Like Ahab, who was determined to gain control of Naboth's vineyard when Naboth refused to sell, the covetous man seeks to coerce his neighbor. When this cannot be done with the connivance of the police—outright oppression or theft—then he seeks to gain control of the civil government. Covetous men can join forces and encourage the civil government to adopt policies of

9. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

10. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

11. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

12. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 14.

wealth redistribution.

The *monopoly of legal violence* that is possessed by the civil government can then be turned against property owners. Those within the civil government can gain control over people's assets. They can then use them personally, or inside a government bureau, or distribute them to political special-interest groups. Political covetousness is a manifestation of *unrestrained desire* and the *threat of violence*. When the civil government becomes an instrument of covetousness, its monopoly of violence increases the danger of theft. A new commandment is adopted: "Thou shalt not covet, except by majority vote." What private citizen can effectively defend his property against unjust magistrates? Naboth died in his attempt to keep that which was his by law—God's law.

The misuse of the civil government in this way is doubly evil. First, it violates the principle of responsible stewardship. Second, it misuses the office of magistrate. *The spread of covetousness cannot be restrained by the magistrate when the structure of civil government is deeply influenced by political covetousness.* The old warning against putting the foxes in charge of the chicken coop is accurate. When the state becomes the agent of widespread covetousness, the whole society is threatened. *Waves of power struggles ensue, for each special-interest group recognizes that it must gain control of the primary agency of wealth redistribution.* The more power that is offered to the controllers by means of statist coercive mechanisms, the more ferocious is the struggle to gain access to the seats of power. Central planning rewards ruthlessness. F. A. Hayek spoke plainly concerning the awful implications of unlimited state power: *the worst get on top.* These two paragraphs are among the most important in the history of political theory. He describes the motivation of those who implement socialist central economic planning.

But while for the mass of the citizens of the totalitarian state it is often unselfish devotion to an ideal, although one that is repellent to us, which makes them approve and even perform such deeds, this cannot be pleaded for those who guide its policy. To be a useful assistant in the running of a totalitarian state, it is not enough that a man should be prepared to accept specious justification of vile deeds; he must himself be prepared actively to break every moral rule he has ever known if this seems necessary to achieve the end set for him. Since it is the supreme leader who alone determines the ends, his instruments must have no moral convictions of their own. They must,

above all, be unreservedly committed to the person of the leader; but next to this the most important thing is that they should be completely unprincipled and literally capable of everything. They must have no ideals of their own which they want to realize; no ideas about right or wrong which might interfere with the intentions of the leader. There is thus in the positions of power little to attract those who hold moral beliefs of the kind which in the past have guided the European peoples, little which could compensate for the distastefulness of many of the particular tasks, and little opportunity to gratify any more idealistic desires, to recompense for the undeniable risk, the sacrifice of most of the pleasures of private life and of personal independence which the posts of great responsibility involve. The only tastes which are satisfied are the taste for power as such and the pleasure of being obeyed and of being part of a well-functioning and immensely powerful machine to which everything else must give way.

Yet while there is little that is likely to induce men who are good by our standards to aspire to leading positions in the totalitarian machine, and much to deter them, there will be special opportunities for the ruthless and unscrupulous. There will be jobs to be done about the badness of which taken by themselves nobody has any doubt, but which have to be executed with the same expertness and efficiency as any others. And as there will be need for actions which are bad in themselves, and which all those still influenced by traditional morals will be reluctant to perform, the readiness to do bad things becomes a part to promotion and power. The positions in a totalitarian society in which it is necessary to practice cruelty and intimidation, deliberate deception and spying, are numerous. Neither the Gestapo nor the administration of a concentration camp, neither the Ministry of Propaganda nor the S.A. or S.S. (or their Italian or Russian counterparts), are suitable places for the exercise of humanitarian feelings. Yet it is through positions like these that the road to the highest positions in the totalitarian state leads.¹³

Hayek's book was intended to demonstrate how totalitarian societies develop out of the attempt by socialist planners to mold the economy into a centrally directed framework. He argued that, in socialist theory, nothing must deviate from the central economic plan, since human freedom will thwart any such plan. Thus, the power to redistribute wealth in accordance to some preconceived central plan eventually destroys human freedom and therefore thwarts personal re-

13. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), pp. 150–51.

sponsibility to act as a steward under God. *Covetousness, when legislated, becomes a major foundation of totalitarianism.*

Hayek's little book evoked outraged cries of "foul!" from statist intellectuals when it first appeared in 1944. Herbert Finer's *Road to Reaction* (1948) is perhaps the best example.¹⁴ But, year by year, decade by decade, *The Road to Serfdom* has grown in stature, until it is now considered a classic. It stays in print. From the beginning, it served as the financial backbone of the University of Chicago Press' paperback division. In contrast, almost no one remembers Herbert Finer.¹⁵ In the mid-1980s, four decades after the *Road to Serfdom* appeared, and a decade after Hayek won the Nobel Prize in economics, academic opinion leaders began to catch up with the wisdom of the average book buyer, who made *Road to Serfdom* a best-seller in 1944. (It even appeared in the *Reader's Digest* in 1945 as a condensed book.)¹⁶ After the fall of the Soviet Union (1991), Hayek's position became part of the conventional wisdom. He died in 1992.

D. Beyond the Tithe

The civil government is to be restrained by biblical law. The warning of Samuel against the establishment of a human kingship stands as a classic statement of what earthly kingdoms involve. The king will draft sons to serve in his armed forces. He will conscript daughters to serve as cooks and confectioners. He will confiscate the best agricultural land. He will impose a tithe on the flocks. In short, the king will collect a tithe for himself (I Sam. 8:11–19).¹⁷ The Hebrew state, Samuel promised, will be such a burden on them that they will cry out to God to deliver them, but He will not do it (v. 18). By denying God and His law-order, the Hebrews placed themselves under the sovereignty of man, and this sovereignty was centralized in the civil government. It is an ungodly state that demands tax payments as large as ten percent, God's tithe, let alone a state that requires more than God's tithe. Such a state has elevated itself to the position of a god. It is a false god. It is demonic.

Civil governments ever since World War I have found that a "mere ten percent" is not sufficient to finance massive programs of domestic and international wealth redistribution. Virtually all modern Western

14. By then, they both taught at the University of Chicago.

15. His Wikipedia entry is a stub (2012).

16. <http://bit.ly/HayekRoadRD>

17. North, *Disobedience and Defeat*, ch. 14.

civil governments impose taxes of over 40%—national, regional, and local—which is twice that imposed by the tyrannical bureaucracy of Egypt (Gen. 47:23–24). The allocations for welfare programs—wealth redistribution—are at least double the combined allocations for national defense and the law enforcement system. What we saw in the twentieth century was the creation of a universal system of *legislated covetousness*. Biblical law was ignored, even as Christians have ignored the principle of the tithe.¹⁸ Steadily, political freedoms were removed. The after-tax income of the citizenry has been reduced systematically, leaving men with fewer resources to use in stewardship programs of voluntary charity. The civil government has steadily supplanted churches and voluntary associations as the primary agent of charity—a compulsory charity which is in fact a form of state-operated serfdom. The difference is this: The non-working servants (welfare recipients) are controlled by the state,¹⁹ and the working servants who support them are also controlled by the state. *Massive, unrelenting political covetousness has led to universal enslavement.*

E. Social Co-operation

When men do not trust their neighbors, it becomes expensive for them to co-operate in projects that would otherwise be mutually beneficial to them. They hesitate to share their goals, feelings, and economic expectations with each other. After all, if a man is known to be economically successful in a covetous society, he faces the threat of theft, either by individuals or bureaucrats. He faces the hostility of his associates. He faces others on a regular basis who are determined to confiscate what he has. The obvious response is to conceal one's success from others. But this also means concealing one's economic expectations. *Planning becomes clothed in secrecy.* The planning agency of the family limits its goals. Disputes between families increase, since families cannot easily co-operate under such circumstances. The future is a topic of discussion only in vague terms, except in the privacy of family economic planning councils. The social division of labor is thwarted, and the future-orientation of communities is drastically reduced, since men refuse to discuss plans openly.²⁰

18. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>). Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011)

19. Star Parker, *Uncle Sam's Plantation* (Nashville, Tennessee: WND Books, 2003).

20. What Schoeck wrote concerning envy applies equally well to legislated covet-

Bible commentators are conspicuously vague about the precise meaning of covetousness. They link it with theft, especially Ahab's theft of Naboth's vineyard. They link it with envy in the sense of resentment. But one insight that Charles Hodge offered, which was followed by Herman Hoeksema, is this: above all, covetousness is *discontent with one's position in life*. Hodge wrote: "Thou shalt not inordinately desire what thou hast not; and especially what belongs to thy neighbor. It includes the positive command to be contented with the allotments of Providence; and the negative injunction not to repine, or complain on account of the dealings of God with us, or to envy the lot or possessions of others." Hodge did not have in mind any other-worldly or mystical rejection of property. As he said in the next section: "The command to be contented does not imply indifference, and it does not enjoin slothfulness. A cheerful and contented disposition is perfectly compatible with a due appreciation of the good things of this world, and diligence in the use of all proper means to improve our condition in life."²¹ He cited Philippians 4:11: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." He could have continued quoting Paul's words: "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:12–13).²² *Any external condition is acceptable to the man who is content with his present role in God's plan for the ages*. But owning little is usually the condition against which men rebel. Paul is clear on this point: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:6–8). The rich have many temptations (I Tim. 6:9–10).²³

Hodge saw the other aspect of covetousness: *envy*. Again, I think this aspect is overemphasized in explaining this verse, although the

ousness: "Ubiquitous envy, fear of it and those who harbour it, cuts off such people from any kind of communal action directed towards the future. Every man is for himself, every man is thrown back upon his own resources. All striving, all preparation and planning for the future can be undertaken only by socially fragmented, secretive beings." Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*, trans. Glenny and Betty Ross (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1966] 1970), p. 50.

21. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1872] 1960), III, p. 468.

22. North, *Ethics and Dominion*, ch. 23.

23. North, *Hierarchy and Dominion*, ch. 11.

fact that commentators have focused on it in the past testifies to the historical importance of Christian preaching against envy, even though in the context of the tenth commandment it is not completely appropriate. Hodge's words show that he fully understood the meaning of envy as *resentment*, and that he distinguished this aspect of envy from covetousness as the desire to confiscate another man's property for one's own use. "The second form of evil condemned by this commandment is envy. This is something more than an inordinate desire of unpossessed good. It includes regret that others should have what we do not enjoy; a feeling of hatred and malignity towards those more favoured than ourselves; and a desire to deprive them of their advantages. This is a real cancer of the soul; producing torture and eating out all right feelings. There are, of course, all degrees of this sin, from the secret satisfaction experienced at the misfortunes of others, or the unexpressed desire that evil may assail them or that they may be reduced to the same level with ourselves, to the Satanic hatred of the happy because of their happiness, and the determination, if possible, to render them miserable. There is more of this dreadful spirit in the human heart than we are willing to acknowledge. Montesquieu says that every man has a secret satisfaction in the misfortunes even of his dearest friends. As envy is the antithesis of love, it is of all sins that most opposed to the nature of God, and more effectually than any other excludes us from his fellowship."²⁴ It is clear that Hodge regarded envy as the most dangerous of all the sins. *It was this kind of preaching, generation after generation, that made possible the economic development of the Protestant West.* It was the absence of such preaching in the twentieth century that damaged the economic institutions of Western capitalism—the source of the West's productivity.

Hoeksema also identified covetousness as *discontent*.

The sin of covetousness is the desire to possess anything apart from God, against His will; anything that he does not give me and that evidently He does not want me to have. . . . If the sin of covetousness could be rooted out of society, most of our economic problems would be solved. Covetousness is the root of all the sinful unrest in society. The same is true of international life and relationships; if the sin of covetousness were not so deeply rooted in the heart of the depraved man, most wars, if not all, would be eliminated. Take covetousness away, and there would be no reason for men to fly at one another's throats, and you could hardly conceive of the possibility of

24. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III, pp. 464–65.

war. . . . Positively, this means, of course, that the tenth commandment enjoins us to be content with what we have. Christian contentment is perfect satisfaction with what one has, for the sake of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and that, too, in the midst of a corrupt and covetous world.²⁵

Hoeksema was correct: *Discontent is the heart of sin's problem, beginning with Satan's discontent with God's sovereignty*. Discontent is an aspect of all sin, for if men were contented with righteousness and the fruits of righteousness, they would not rebel against God. *Covetousness is a specific form of discontent*: the desire to possess another's goods at all cost, including the other man's loss. As Matthew Poole, the Puritan commentator, wrote in the seventeenth century, covetousness is the "inward and deliberate purpose and desire of a deceitful or violent taking away of another man's goods; but this is forbidden in the eighth commandment."²⁶ Theft is forbidden; covetousness is the *inward desire* that leads to theft or fraud. It is the evil desire that overwhelms the law's restraint on the sinner, the desire to have another man's property, whether or not the other man benefits from the transaction. Voluntary exchange offers the other man an opportunity. He may not have known of the opportunity. He may not have known of a person's willingness to part with some resource in order to obtain what he, the owner, possesses. It is not immoral to offer another person an opportunity, unless the opportunity is innately immoral (such as offering to buy his wife's favors). *Covetousness is the lawless desire to take the other man's property, whether or not he finds the transaction beneficial*. When covetousness is common, men lose faith in their neighbors, in the social and political structure that protects private property, and in the benefits offered by the division of labor. Covetousness threatens the very fabric of society.

The tenth commandment was given to us so that we might enjoy the fruits of *social peace and social co-operation*. This is equally true of the earlier commandments. The law-order of the Bible is a means of *reducing conflict and extending the division of labor*. Greater efficiency becomes possible through the division of labor. Whatever contributes to social peace thereby tends to increase per capita productivity, and

25. Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), III, pp. 427–28.

26. Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1683] 1968), I, p. 160.

therefore per capita income. People have an economic incentive to co-operate. The Bible's prohibition against covetousness increases social co-operation by reducing its costs. In other words, more co-operation is demanded because its price drops. One of the social institutions that results from such a prohibition is the free market. It, too, is an institution that furthers social co-operation.

It is significant that the prohibition against covetousness begins with the mind of man. There is no means of enforcing any civil law against thoughts, but God's law applies to men's thoughts. Because the very concept of covetousness involves the threat of violence and oppression, the *outworkings of covetousness* can be controlled by civil law, assuming the civil government has not been corrupted by a philosophy of universal legislated covetousness. The costs of policing the visible manifestations of covetousness are high. By focusing on the hearts of men, the Bible reduces the costs of law enforcement.

Men are to be taught from an early age that covetousness is a sin against God. These instruction costs are to be borne initially by the family (Deut. 6:7). By making men aware of God's hostility to covetousness, teachers of biblical law reduce the need for heavy taxation, either for law enforcement against visible, coercive oppressors, or for programs of legislated covetousness, i.e., "social welfare" programs. By helping to increase the social division of labor, the *internalization of the law against covetousness* helps to increase per capita output, also reducing thereby the proportion of income going to support law enforcement. The society is blessed in two ways: reduced crime, including the crime of statist wealth redistribution programs, and increased output per capita. *Men wind up with more wealth after taxes. They increase their opportunities for responsible action before God and men.*

F. The Modern Welfare State²⁷

The twentieth century, after the outbreak of World War I in 1914, abandoned the tenth commandment. Divorce and remarriage of the sinful partner became common events. Men today covet their neighbors' wives. They covet their neighbors' goods. (Coveting a man's goods is certainly less of a threat to the integrity of his family unit than

27. The phrase "welfare state" first attained prominence in 1949, wrote historian Sidney Fine, and has come to be associated in the United States with the administration of President Harry Truman, 1945–53: Sidney Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General Welfare State: A Study of Conflict in American Thought, 1865–1901* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Ann Arbor Paperback, [1956] 1964), Preface.

the coveting of his wife.) The rise of massive taxation, including the inflation tax, has led to the spread of covetous political programs. The graduated income tax, with its increasingly burdensome rates of taxation for those with higher income, has been proclaimed in the name of social justice, even Christian social justice.²⁸ Nevertheless, the combination of graduated income taxation, the psychology of debt, and the control of money by the state and its licensed agents, the banks, led to relentless taxation of the middle classes.²⁹ Men are tempted to vote for more wealth redistribution programs, and then they are tempted to pay for them by means of monetary inflation. This enables both individuals and the state to repay loans with depreciated money. "A little inflation" seems to be beneficial in the early years, since it fosters an economic boom.³⁰ It involves the destruction of the creditors' interests, but who cares about creditors?

Yet most middle-class citizens are creditors. When they vote, they may not fully understand this, failing to grasp its implications for their economic futures, but they are creditors nonetheless. They hold *paper certificates of ownership for future payments of paper money*. They extend mortgages to home buyers, they invest in pension programs, they buy cash-value life insurance, and they buy annuities. Worst of all, at least before the public catches on, they own long-term bonds, especially government bonds. The economist, Franz Pick, called government bonds "certificates of guaranteed confiscation." The result is the *universal expropriation* of these classes of investors when mass inflation strikes. Everyone is pushed into higher income levels, which means that people are forced to pay a higher percentage of their nominal (meaning their paper money-denominated) incomes to the state. The result of these three features of economic life—graduated income taxes, universal debt, and fiat money—is the eventual de-capitalization of the middle class. Yet it was the middle class in the twentieth century that voted for these programs of legislated covetousness. They set a

28. John C. Bennett, who taught ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and who served as president of that institution, wrote concerning needed social reforms: "The third reform is changes in the tax system that would close loopholes for the rich and in many ways bring about a more equal distribution of wealth. The adoption of the idea of a progressive income tax was in itself an early breakthrough of great importance." Bennett, *The Radical Imperative: From Theology to Social Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 153.

29. James Dale Davidson, *The Squeeze* (New York: Summit Books, 1980).

30. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. XX. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

trap for the rich, but inflation subsequently made *them* nominally rich. God will not be mocked.

Christians will someday read about the twentieth century and will marvel at the unwillingness of Christian intellectuals to challenge the economic policies of the welfare state. Worse: Christian intellectuals all too often defended such policies, or even called for an expansion of them.³¹ Future generations will not understand why programs of legislated covetousness were not decried as violations of the tenth commandment. They will be astounded to learn that spiritual leaders in every nation not only approved of such policies, but actively sought to have them enacted into law. The ethics of anti-biblical humanism permeated the thinking of twentieth-century Christians, so that the opposition to compulsory wealth redistribution programs generally did not come from Christian leaders, but has come from humanists who were defenders of nineteenth-century economic liberalism—a perspective that itself was a secularized and Darwinian version of biblical social ethics.³²

What has been called “the climate of opinion” in any given era is a powerful social force. This is why it is imperative that Christians develop and implement a systematically biblical social philosophy. Because Christians have neglected this critically important task, the secularists have taken the lead in setting the climate of social opinion. This climate of opinion has subsequently influenced the thinking of Christian intellectual leaders. The dominant conclusions of the god of humanism, autonomous mankind, have become the standards for Christian thinkers and policy-makers.

Not all Christian scholars are socialists, of course, but a favorable attitude toward the welfare state is a widely held opinion in Christian circles. Most Christians insist that any economic framework is acceptable to God (other than one based explicitly on biblical law), just so long as Christians have the right to preach the gospel of personal salvation. But they are faced with a theoretical question: By what stand-

31. See, for example, Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1981). For a refutation, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 4th ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>). See also the essay by John Gladwin, in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1984), and my response to his essay. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

32. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix B: “The Evolutionists’ Defense of the Market.”

ard can a Christian legitimately conclude that all economic frameworks are acceptable to Christ? Furthermore, *if any and all social and economic frameworks are legitimate before God, then in what way can the preaching of the gospel influence the social institutions of the day?* How can these institutions be reformed? And if they do not need reform, how is it that rebellious, sinful men have succeeded in creating social institutions that are not in need of reconstruction? How, in short, can Christians avoid constructing a social order on the shifting sands of warring humanist philosophies, special-interest groups, power-seekers, and contradictory social and political programs? Is the Bible irrelevant to social institutions?

Conclusion

Social peace is a major goal of biblical law—the social peace demanded by the prophet Isaiah: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). *The juridical foundation of such peace is biblical law.* The Ten Commandments serve as the basis of long-term, God-blessed social peace.

One important aspect of biblical social peace is the absence of covetousness—in the hearts of men, in the relationships between neighbors, and in the legislation of civil governments. A covetous person’s discontent with his station in life makes it impossible for him to have personal peace. This lack of personal peace spreads to society as a whole when covetousness becomes universalized through the political process. Where political covetousness reigns, there can be no social peace. There also cannot be personal freedom.

The covetous person disrupts social peace, just as the satanic magician and thief do. The sinner covets that which he has not lawfully earned or lawfully inherited. Nevertheless, he wants the other man’s patrimony or inheritance. He may not steal it outright, but he lusts after it.

The tenth commandment is framed in terms of neighboring families. It implies that peace must begin at home. The peace-breaker begins locally. The covetous man wants the other person’s house, wife, and goods. He cannot lawfully have all of these, and even the goods must be bargained for. The jubilee year in Israel guaranteed that the house would eventually return to the lawful family heirs (Lev. 25), and the law against adultery protected every wife. The eighth command-

ment protected men's goods, although goods could be exchanged. The lawful heirs inherited. The tenth commandment therefore parallels the fifth, which is also concerned with the question of legitimacy and inheritance, although the seventh and eighth commandments also add their force to the tenth.

The dominion covenant requires men to obey God's laws of inheritance. To gain social peace, these laws must be honored. The lack of social peace in the modern world testifies to the unwillingness of men, as mandated through covenantal institutions, to respect God's laws of inheritance. The modern world has institutionalized covetousness politically.

CONCLUSION

Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 18: 5).

The Ten Commandments set forth *God's laws of life*. They do not provide life, but they set forth the standards of life. This is why Jesus Christ came to earth to fulfill the terms of the law (Matt. 5:17–19).¹ Without His willingness and ability to obey these laws, in time and on earth, God would not have granted eternal life, or even temporary earthly life, to any law-breaker. Jesus Christ's perfect obedience in history is the foundation of God's common grace to the world.²

These ten laws were presented to the Israelites by God in the form of a covenant treaty.³ Men inescapably live in terms of covenants: either before God or before Satan, and always with each other. Thus, these laws of life are necessarily covenantal laws, both social and personal, both general and particular.⁴ What are the *covenantal goals* of God's laws of life in society? *Social peace and economic blessings*: "peace and prosperity." There is no other way to interpret Deuteronomy 28:1–14: The list of external and internal blessings is comprehensive. Furthermore, the list of cursings is long and threatening: Deuteronomy 28:15–68. What we need to understand is that *God's Bible-revealed law-order is intended to create conditions leading to peace, harmony, and wealth*.

The Ten Commandments also lay down the religious, legal, and economic foundations that are necessary for the creation and long-term maintenance of a free market economy. In other words, obeying

1. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), pp. 358–70.

2. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

3. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 113–71.

4. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

the basic principles of the Ten Commandments is both necessary and sufficient for the creation of a capitalist economy. Humanistic free market economists reject the first assertion—“necessary”—since they want a free market without God, while “Christian” socialist theologians reject the second—sufficient—since they want God without a free market.

Whenever the Ten Commandments are enforced by all agencies of human government, men will gain freedom. Economic freedom of contract and freedom from excessive taxation and bureaucratic interference produce that social order that we call the market society. This is why the Christian West was the first society to create national and regional economies called capitalistic. This is why long-term economic growth came originally only in the West, and then in those nations that have traded with the West and have imitated some of its institutional and legal arrangements. But if the goal of the Bible is social peace under God’s covenants, and if the free market economy has been not only the logical result of the Ten Commandments but also the historic product of Christianity, then a controversial conclusion follows: *Biblical social order and free market capitalism are a “package deal.”* Societies cannot attain the kind of long-term, compounding expansion that is required by the dominion covenant without the social, moral, and legal foundations that are established by law in the Ten Commandments. Humanistic free market economists refuse to believe this, and so do “Christian” socialists.

A. The Ten Commandments and Capitalism

The Ten Commandments as *a unified whole* offer mankind the moral basis of a progressive society. I am not arguing that it is only the eighth commandment, with its prohibition against theft, that sets forth such a view of private ownership. The Ten Commandments have provided mankind with the deeply theological faith that has produced Western prosperity.

God as sovereign over the creation⁵

Faith in the healing power of God’s law⁶

Personal stewardship before God and other men⁷

5. Chapter 21; Chapter 23:A:1,3.

6. Chapter 21:D–F.

7. Pages 317, 350, 424, 198–203, Chapter 28:I.

Legal responsibility for one's actions⁸
 Faith in permanent laws⁹
 Faith in economic cause and effect¹⁰
 Faith in ethical power over magical power¹¹
 Faith in work rather than luck¹²
 Faith in the productiveness of rest¹³
 Faith in the covenantal family (family name)¹⁴
 Optimism concerning the future (linear history)¹⁵
 The possibility of compound economic growth¹⁶
 Defense of the private ownership of both the means of production
 and the fruits of production¹⁷
 Future-orientation¹⁸
 The sanctity of covenants and the analogous and derivative legitimacy of contracts¹⁹
 Social co-operation through private contracts²⁰
 The illegitimacy of covetousness and envy²¹
 The legitimacy of civil government as a monopolistic agent of law
 enforcement, but not wealth redistribution²²
 Penalties against slander as theft²³
 Salvation by grace, not law (or legislation)²⁴

When we compare these premises with the underlying premises of backward societies, we find almost a perfect reverse image. *The society of Satan also has first principles*. A list of the major "tenets of backwardness" was provided by P. T. Bauer, a specialist in developmental economics, and a devout Roman Catholic. He did so in one sentence.

8. Chapter 22:C:1–2.

9. Pages 306, 210–11.

10. Pages 306–8.

11. Pages 322, 324–26, 328–29.

12. Pages 339–40, 421.

13. Pages 363–64.

14. Pages 375–76, 403–6, 444–45, 458–59, 463.

15. Pages 332, Chapter 25.

16. Chapter 22:C, 342–44, 380–85.

17. Chapters 7, 8.

18. Pages 341–43, 397–98.

19. Chapter 23:D–E.

20. Pages 409–12, 439–41.

21. Chapter 20.

22. Pages 383–86, 431–35, 450–54, 488–92, 498–501.

23. Pages 458–59, 467–68.

24. Pages 312, 454.

Examples of significant attitudes, beliefs and modes of conduct unfavourable to material progress include lack of interest in material advance, combined with resignation in the face of poverty; lack of initiative, self-reliance and a sense of personal responsibility for the economic future of oneself and one's family; high leisure preference, together with a lassitude often found in tropical climates; relatively high prestige of passive or contemplative life compared to active life; the prestige of mysticism and of renunciation of the world compared to acquisition and achievement; acceptance of a preordained, unchanging and unchangeable universe; emphasis on performance of duties and acceptance of obligations, rather than on achievement of results, or assertion or even a recognition of personal rights; lack of sustained curiosity, experimentation and interest in change; belief in the efficacy of supernatural and occult forces and of their influence over one's destiny; insistence on the unity of the organic universe, and on the need to live with nature rather than conquer it or harness it to man's needs, an attitude of which reluctance to take animal life is a corollary; belief in personal reincarnation, which reduces the significance of effort in the course of the present life; recognized status of beggary, together with a lack of stigma in the acceptance of charity; opposition to women's work outside the household.²⁵

I have not seen a single sentence that more comprehensively describes the mental outlook of primitivism, whether in Africa or the sociology department of an American university.

1. *Haters of the West*

When I cited this passage in an essay defending free market capitalism,²⁶ "radical Christian" Art Gish was outraged: "It troubles me then that North expresses an elitist, if not racist, view that Western values are superior to Third World values, that the Third World is poor because of its ignorance. This is not only arrogant; it is also un-biblical."²⁷

25. P. T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development: Studies and debates in development economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 78–79.

26. Gary North, "Free Market Capitalism," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views on Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1984). (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>) This essay is reprinted in Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Appendix E.

27. Art Gish, "A Decentralist Response," *ibid.*, p. 78. I ask: Was Moses arrogant and unbiblical when he instructed the Israelites to kill every Canaanite in the land (Deut. 7:2; 20:16–17)? Was he an "elitist" or (horror of horrors) a racist? No; he was a God-fearing man who sought to obey God, who commanded the Israelites to kill them all. This sounds like a "superior attitude" to me. Of course, Christians have been given

This, of course, is a total misrepresentation of my views. I do not believe that ignorance is the Third World's problem. The Third World's problems are religious: *moral perversity*, a long history of *demonism*, and outright *paganism*—including especially *socialistic paganism* (post-1960). But I can well understand why Mr. Gish was troubled by my analysis; he himself had adopted the “more-poverty-per-capita program” of the Third World and zero-growth pagans. When he was confronted with the economic curses that God has poured out on such pagans, he was troubled. (He should have been be terrified.)

He correctly criticized my arrogance. When it comes to pagan societies and pagan world views, there is no question about it: I am arrogant about the superiority of Christianity. Mr. Gish then got to the point: “I wonder why North quotes Bauer’s long list of attitudes which are opposed to capitalistic development. He seems unaware of the extent to which Jesus and the biblical prophets stand condemned by that list. I wish North could see the demonic and destructive nature of Western values. . . . I am shocked that North would suggest that we go to the Third World and preach ‘the culture of the West.’ I thought we were to preach Jesus and him crucified. Or is capitalistic affluence the same as the way of the cross? Apparently, North believes thrift, education, development and responsibility will save. I don’t. I believe the biblical vision stands in fundamental opposition to ‘the culture of the West.’”²⁸

Mr. Gish was certainly forthright. He was unafraid of aligning himself with the culture of the Third World. He was not neutral in the slightest. *He hated Western civilization*. He recognized that the West was originally the civilization of capitalism, and that large sections of it are still capitalistic, *and therefore he hated it*. He refused to admit that the culture of the West, prior to its secularization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was the product of Christianity. He also refused to admit that the poverty of the Third World is the product of its anti-Christian background. In an orgy of guilt, he called us to adopt the poverty-stricken life style of Third World paganism in the name of Jesus.

It is remarkable that self-styled “radical Christians” are surprised

no comparable military commandment in New Testament times, but I am trying to deal with the attitude of superiority—a superiority based on our possession of the law of God. This attitude is something Christians must have when dealing with all pagans. God has given us the tools of dominion.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

to learn that God hates ethical rebellion, and that He brings earthly judgments against pagan societies. The God of the Bible sends ethical rebels to the eternal miseries of the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). What is earthly poverty, sickness, and political oppression compared to eternal damnation? It makes me wonder if these “radical Christian” critics of capitalism and the West believe in a God who sends people to eternal fire. Of what concern is poverty for a few decades compared with perpetual fiery torment? The God of the Bible is the God of incomparable negative sanctions. Why should any Christian imagine that God owes covenant-breaking mankind wealth rather than poverty?

2. *Embittered by Guilt*

Mr. Gish’s problem was the problem that he shared with a whole generation of Western intellectuals: too much reliance on endless criticism and too much guilt. This attitude is beginning to paralyze the West. Revel’s comments are on target: “Not only do democracies today blame themselves for sins they have not committed, but they have formed a habit of judging themselves by ideals so inaccessible that the defendants are automatically guilty. It follows that a civilization that feels guilty for everything it is and does and thinks will lack the energy and conviction to defend itself when its existence is threatened. Drilling into a civilization that it deserves defending only if it can incarnate absolute justice is tantamount to urging that it let itself die or be enslaved.”²⁹ This guilt-induced self-flagellation is made even easier for humanism-influenced “radical Christians.” By failing to understand and rest upon the doctrines of definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification, they have become guilt-ridden and impotent. Definitive sanctification teaches that Jesus’ perfect moral life is imputed to His followers at the point of their conversion. Progressive sanctification teaches that regenerate people are required by God to work out their salvation with *fear and trembling in terms of biblical law*, even though they are imperfect in and of themselves. Their imperfect work is accounted righteous because of their definitive sanctification. It builds up over time, until the day of final judgment and final sanctification.³⁰

But “radical Christians” do not understand these doctrines. They are visibly overwhelmed with guilt concerning their own ineffective-

29. Jean-François Revel, *How Democracies Perish* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), p. 10.

30. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), pp. 48–52.

ness and the supposed ineffectiveness of “Christianity” in not putting a stop to the “moral evil” of capitalism. They have also been overwhelmed by the seeming impossibility of godly dominion. After all, we live in a sinful world. *We* are sinful. So how can we—pitiful, guilt-ridden worms that we are—take dominion? Aren’t we sinful perpetrators of injustice? Aren’t we the sinful religious accomplices of the evil elite which rules (and profits from) the greedy and corrupt capitalist system? Oh, let us escape to the communal farm, where the morally polluted efficiency of mass-producing, price-competitive industrialism is kept out of our sight (even though we benefit from it 24 hours a day)! Oh, let us refuse to fight in wars to defend our miserable freedoms, even if a foreign nation should invade.³¹ Oh, let us be delivered from this corrupt and capitalist world! Oh, oh, oh!

Above all, *they crave escape*. This is why they are progressively impotent. This is why their movement is doomed intellectually and doomed historically. These people will be bypassed, either by dominion-oriented Christians or power-oriented humanists, but they will be by-passed. They will not determine any civil government’s policy. They will be able only to wring their hands on the sidelines of life, telling everyone how guilty they feel and how guilty we ought to feel for not joining them on the sidelines. At most, they will cheer on the statist politicians every time the latter try to pass a tax increase for the higher income brackets. This is the politics aptly described by Rushdoony as the politics of guilt and pity.³²

B. Capitalism’s Critics Within the Church

There were two major intellectual movements within twentieth-century Christianity that were utterly hostile to capitalism: the Social Gospel movement and the “radical Christianity” or “liberation theology” movement. The first was prominent from the late nineteenth century through the 1950s. The second group came into prominence in the late 1960s and especially in the 1970s. (Art Gish was a representative of the second group.) Both groups hate capitalism with all

31. This was the pacifist recommendation of Ron Sider and Richard Taylor with respect to Russian Communism, even though, as they admitted, “hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions might die” as a result of nonviolent resistance. Ronald J. Sider and Richard K. Taylor, *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 281.

32. Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995). (<http://bit.ly/rjrpogap>)

their hearts—not just the secular version of nineteenth- and twentieth-century capitalism, but every manifestation of capitalism in history. They hate the premises of capitalism. Yet these premises are essentially biblical, derived from the Ten Commandments. Thus, *the critics of “capitalism in general are inescapably also haters of the law of God.* This is my conclusion, based on long years of study, both of the economics of the Bible and the published manifestos of the Christian socialists.

1. Socialism's Pessimism

With the visible failure of socialist economies to “deliver the goods,” the *underlying religious presuppositions* of capitalism's critics—including the “secular” critics—have become clearer. In the nineteenth century, capitalism's critics heralded socialism as the next stage in the economic progress of mankind. Capitalism was more efficient and productive than ancient slavery or medieval feudalism, Marx and others readily admitted,³³ but they believed that socialism would escalate the rate of progress and per capita wealth. That vision is now dead, outside of Western universities; it lies buried in the ashes of the socialist experiments of the twentieth century.

The promoters of secular evolutionary socialism were confident people. They believed that they would eventually be victorious. The Social Gospel movement picked up this humanistic optimism. It was therefore future-oriented and optimistic. Its members confronted capitalism as if they were in the vanguard of the next stage of human history. They believed in the state, and they sought to transfer power to the state, especially national government. They saw themselves as social revolutionaries—nice, well-meaning, well-fed, humanitarian, and above all *risk-free* revolutionaries of the sanctuary. The sanctuary was just that for them: a place of refuge. But it was to serve as headquarters for a co-ordinated program (they hoped) of coercive social transformation.

A good example of this satanic misuse of the sanctuary is provided by Nathaniel Weyl, in a footnote in his book on Karl Marx. In the 1940s, he reported, “when I was the leader of the radical movement on the Columbia University campus, I was invited to become an honorary

33. See especially the summary of the economic revolution of modern capitalism in Part I of the Communist Manifesto. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1969] 1977), I, pp. 109–10.

member of the Atheists' Club at adjacent Union Theological Seminary. I asked rather naively how an honorable man could accept an appointment to the ministry if he didn't believe in God. The reply was that the pulpit provided a captive audience, a position of authority and a regular salary—all most useful to socialist and Communist propagandists. I declined the invitation."³⁴ This is the humanists' strategy that I have called "capturing the robes."³⁵

I wrote the following in the 1986 first edition of this book:

That older optimistic socialism, both secular and "Christian," is pretty well gone today. Its optimism was drained by the experiences of power. The European socialist economies are becoming basket cases.

In 1988, Soviet Premier Gorbachev admitted publicly that the Soviet Union was economically bankrupt. He went begging in foreign banking and government circles for more aid. In 1989, the Berlin Wall went down. The Soviet Union's Eastern European satellites broke free and publicly abandoned Marxism. In 1991, the Soviet Union committed suicide and ceased to exist.

In the United States, the hard realities of the Presidency of Lyndon Johnson—he was crass, calculating, coercive, and above all, unstylish—removed much of the political liberals' hope in the older faith. Furthermore, the rise of alternative theologies undermined the older theological liberalism: politically pessimistic (Reinhold) Niebuhrism, non-rational Barthianism, and New Age transcendentalism. The spiritual odyssey of Harvard theology professor Harvey Cox is representative, though somewhat flamboyant: from outright secular humanism (old liberal-style rationalism) to irrationalism to liberation theology.³⁶ Cox was the leading theological weather vane of the decade, 1965–75, and every four years, he switched positions.

In place of the old secular socialism has arisen a new critique of capitalism. Capitalism is evil, we are now informed by the critics, be-

34. Nathaniel Weyl, *Karl Marx: Racist* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1979), p. 67.

35. Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/gnback>)

36. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969); *The Seduction of the Spirit: The Use and Misuse of People's Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973).

cause it is too growth-oriented. Economic growth is a liability.³⁷ More than this: Economic growth is a sin. We find the “simple life style” people advocating on principle a reduced division of labor and lower per capita income, especially for rich nations—that is, the nations in which guilty readers can afford to buy mass-produced, low-cost paperback diatribes and monthly magazines.

Paralleling the transformation of the secular socialists, the church has produced “radical Christianity,” sometimes known as “liberation theology.” In some senses, these are two different movements. The latter movement tends to be more Marxist; the former is more likely to be made up of Anabaptist pacifists. Sometimes their memberships overlap. The more hard-core liberation theologians tend to be Roman Catholic. The radical Christians are usually Protestants: neo-evangelicals, sometimes Reformed (seminary professors and younger seminary graduates), and especially Anabaptists.

We find so-called radical Christians (who are openly the spiritual heirs of the radical Anabaptist sects of the sixteenth century) espousing the “small is beautiful” philosophy of “neo-Gandhian” E. F. Schumacher, author of *Buddhist Economics*, as well as *Small Is Beautiful*. Schumacher’s recommended economic system is consistent with his religious presuppositions. The “radical Christians” are either inconsistent with theirs (Christianity), or else they are consistent with their true presuppositions (anti-Christianity), but dishonest in revealing publicly their true commitment. In any case, what the critics of capitalism—all the critics of capitalism—hate is the thought of a literal, comprehensive application of the Ten Commandments in society.

2. A Two-Gods Theology

These “radical Christians” are invariably implicit defenders of some version of the “two-gods” theory that Marcion and other early church heretics promoted. They contrast the views of Jesus with the views of Moses. *They hate Old Testament law with a passion*. They argue that there is some fundamental dualism between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They reject the Old Testament and proclaim the New Testament—a New Testament that is now conveniently stripped of its Old Testament foundations. (In this sense, they

37. E. J. Mishan, *The Costs of Economic Growth* (New York: Praeger, 1967); Mishan, *The Economic Growth Debate: An Assessment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977).

are not significantly different from modern pietists, dispensationalists, and conservative antinomians, who also assume a radical dualism between the Old and New Testaments.) Then, in the name of this “pure and undefiled” New Testament, they attack anyone who dares to appeal to passages in the Old Testament that sanction private ownership and individual responsibility. The Old Testament, it seems, is only to be used when you are looking for passages that support modern socialist revolutionism or modern pacifism. In credibly, some “radical Christians” support both. “Why is it that conservative Christians have such difficulty with the New Testament?” asked Mr. Gish. “They either ignore it, as North does, or try to explain it away.”³⁸ My relevant but incomplete response would be to throw back this contrast: Why do “radical Christians” have such difficulty with the Old Testament? Why do they ignore it, as Mr. Gish did, or try to explain it away?

But the significant answer to Mr. Gish’s rhetorical questions is to point out that the difference between Jesus and Moses was a *difference in historical circumstances*: Moses was waiting for the younger generation of Israelites to become a military force (so hated by the “radical Christians”). He was waiting to invade Canaan militarily. God had instructed Moses to exterminate the Canaanites and establish Israel’s kingdom in the long-promised territory. In contrast, Jesus established a new set of tactics, because the Holy Spirit would come at last and lead God’s people out of the narrow geographical confines of Palestine and into confrontation—religious confrontation, not military confrontation—with the world.

Jesus, like Moses, was preparing His people for a fight. It is a fight that involves self-discipline. As was true in Moses’ day, it involves multiple covenantal organizations: church, state, and family. Initially, Jesus called on poor men to begin the fight. But Jesus has always called His followers, whether rich or poor, to victory. He has called them *to exercise dominion in terms of His Father’s law*. This long-term strategy of dominion has never changed. Redeemed mankind’s fulfillment of the dominion covenant is supposed to produce a unique society, simultaneously a garden and a city. This new civilization will operate in terms of God’s law, by means of God’s grace.

The possibility of such a society is rejected by “radical Christians.” The hatred of God’s law by “radical Christians”—from the late medieval peasant and artisan rebellions³⁹ to the Evangelicals for Social Ac-

38. *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 77.

39. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary messianism in*

tion—is so total that they assert as forever binding the low-output Christian lifestyle of rural Israel in A.D. 30. But this has never been the Bible's perpetually normative social order. What Jesus was talking about was precisely what Moses was also talking about: a strategy of long-term dominion—in economics, in politics, in law, in public health, and everything else. This strategy remains the same throughout history. There was a shift in both tactics and geography with the coming of the church, but not a change in strategy. What Jesus was offering was *comprehensive redemption*.⁴⁰

The Social Gospel's advocates saw correctly that Jesus was a revolutionary, in the sense that He offered a program for comprehensive social change. He did exactly that. But they incorrectly modeled His revolution along the lines of the Fabian socialist movement in Britain.⁴¹ They argued that Jesus was an advocate of economic growth and development, as well as an advocate of external progress. Yet when we read the words of Jesus, we find that He did not discuss such issues.⁴² *It was Moses, not Jesus, who proclaimed economic growth as an ideal for society.* Only to the extent that Jesus implicitly retained the worldview of the Mosaic law that such a program of economic development can be associated with His ministry. The Social Gospel theologians wanted nothing to do with the Mosaic law. So, they interpreted Jesus' ministry to fit their model of evolutionary socialism.

The failure of socialist policies to produce economic progress has necessitated a change in strategy for the advocates of statist social change. Today, the spiritual heirs of the Social Gospel movement—radical Christians—are calling for the same old sectarian Anabaptist

medieval and Reformation Europe and its bearing on modern totalitarian movements (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961); Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (New York: Harper & Row, [1975] 1980), ch. 2.

40. Gary North, "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer 1981). Reprinted in Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

41. On Fabianism, see Margaret Patricia McCarren, *Fabianism in the Political Life of Britain, 1919–1931* (Chicago: Heritage Foundation, 1954) (<http://bit.ly/McCarren-Fab>); Rose L. Martin, *Fabian Freeway: High Road to Socialism in the U.S.A., 1884–1966* (Boston: Western Islands, 1966), which was based on the voluminous research in McCarran's unpublished manuscript, *The Fabian Transmission Belt*. (<http://bit.ly/MartinFab>)

42. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012); Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

revolutions: either some version of common-ownership communalism down on the farm, or else the expansion of power of the state to redistribute wealth by compulsion. What makes their present appeal unique in our day is that both scenarios are defended by a call for this revolution in the name of a vision of poverty, which is the one thing that socialism always produces in abundance. They defend their vision in the name of the simple life style—a life style without a high division of labor, mass production, price competition, computers, automobiles, jet planes, and similar high-technology tools of dominion.

Richard K. Taylor, who co-authored the InterVarsity Press book with Ronald Sider on why we should disarm the United States of all weapons, unilaterally if necessary, wrote an article in *the other side* (July-Aug. 1974), a journal of radical Christianity, entitled, the imperative of economic de-development. (The editors at *the other side* did not use capital letters in the old days.) Taylor concluded: "It is imperative that we de-develop the American economy, while encouraging the growth of the poorer nations economies to a level of ecologically sound adequacy, in which basic needs for food, clothing, housing, and medical care are met." Question: Who will decide for Third World national leaders precisely what ecologically sound adequacy is? Who will tell them, "Stop, you've had enough!" when they reach these predetermined levels? Who will determine just how much state-enforced de-development America needs? Over whose dead body? Here is a proposal guaranteed to produce social war, endless envy and resentment, and perpetual confrontations. In short, here is a proposal that will make Satan proud of his success in turning men's eyes away from the Ten Commandments.

"When I get to dreaming about this," Taylor said, "I see Christians leading a movement of tremendous significance. I see Billy Graham walking from one crusade to another rather than flying in a jet. I see him cutting his wardrobe to one suit, and hear him preaching on Mark 10:23 and I Timothy 6:7–10. I see the church going back to the Gospel ideal of humble poverty." What I see is a bunch of well-fed, pampered, and tenured social utopians out in a field during the day, trying to feed themselves without tools, and spending the evening writing their economic manifesto on papyrus with their goose quills and ink. Radical Christianity is anything but a movement of tremendous significance. It is a temporary phenomenon of guilt-ridden, public school-educated,

socialism-peddling, suicidal, retreatist *poverts*.⁴³ They are self-consciously advocates of zero-growth impotence. As a movement, they will undoubtedly achieve their goal. They are going nowhere, for they are low-capital nomads without a known destination. The radical Christianity of the neo-Anabaptists is a classic contemporary manifestation of escapist religion.⁴⁴ They propose programs that inescapably produce social conflict, but always in the name of social peace and social justice. They propose programs that lead inescapably to cultural impotence, but always in the name of relevance and importance. If they had any serious economic ideas or any likelihood of becoming influential leaders politically or even intellectually, we would call them wolves in sheep's clothing. They are goats in sheep's clothing.

These radical Christians serve the political left in the same capacity that the old fundamentalists⁴⁵ and pietists long served the humanist establishment: as *dogmatists of social impotence*. They are as hostile to the theonomic vision of capitalist Christianity as the old fundamentalists were hostile to the Social Gospel's vision of socialist Christianity. Both groups come up with the same answer: *The Bible offers no economic blueprints*. They are equally incorrect.

C. The Ten Commandments and Western Development

The Ten Commandments provide a strategy. I call it the Sinai strategy. It is neither a power strategy nor an escape strategy. It is a dominion strategy. It is a strategy for *not staying poor*, either individually or socially. It is a strategy that was first delivered by God to a rabble of ex-slaves who were about to begin a 40-year wandering in a wilderness, precisely because they rejected God's strategy of worldwide dominion. It is a strategy based on *covenantal subordination under God*, both personally and corporately, and calls for *dominion over creation*, both personally and corporately. A radical theologian of the "old liberalism," John C. Raines, recognized this impulse in John Calvin: "Calvin understood the Christian life not as 'a vessel filled with God' but as an active 'tool and instrument' of the Divine initiative. But this is precisely our point. Active toward the world, the Christian knows

43. Povert ("PAHvurt), noun: "A person who promotes poverty as a way of life for everyone, but with everyone else starting first." The term was coined by Louis Bulkeley.

44. See Part 1, Introduction.

45. North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers?*, ch. 4: "Fundamentalism: Old and New."

himself as utterly passive and obedient toward God, whose Will it is his sole task to discover and obey."⁴⁶ Unlike Raines, Christians find God's will in the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments, wherever respected, have produced remarkable economic growth and social progress. This includes the much-maligned Middle Ages. The medieval era was a period of remarkable technological change and economic growth.⁴⁷ The earlier transitional period (400 A.D. to 1100 A.D.) to the late medieval era (1100 A.D. to 1500 A.D.) has been labeled the "Dark Ages" ever since humanist Renaissance ("rebirth") scholars invented the phrase. The period came as a result of the collapse of Roman civilization. It was a period of economic growth, though irregular. Economic historian Robert Latouche said that it is incorrect to assume that the Christian world had contracted by comparison to the ancient world, because we always look at the Mediterranean world of Augustus and compare it to northern Europe eight hundred years later. The point is, northern Europe improved its economic position under Christianity compared with what it had been in classical times.⁴⁸ He also noted that one of the elements fostering stagnation was pessimistic millennialism: "By continuing to prophesy that the end of the world was approaching, it created an atmosphere of indifference to the natural and physical sciences which promoted worldly well-being and happiness, and which in the tenth century were still suspected of being inspired by the devil."⁴⁹ He might have added the negative effects of this shortened time perspective on capital accumulation. Such a time perspective raises interest rates by heavily discounting the future.

Furthermore, the progress of medieval civilization was not limited to economics and technology. The Papal Revolution of 1076–1150 created the legal foundations of Western civilization.⁵⁰ In that same period, Christians invented the university.⁵¹ A great revival of learning

46. John C. Raines, "From Passive to Active Man: Reflections on the Revolution in Consciousness in Modern Man," in John C. Raines and Thomas Dean (eds.), *Marxism and Radical Religion: Essays Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 114.

47. Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, [1962] 1966).

48. Robert Latouche, *The Birth of the Western Economy: Economic Aspects of the Dark Ages* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1956] 1966), p. 306.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 304.

50. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

51. Charles Homer Haskins, *The Rise of the Universities* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell

took place after the year 1100.⁵² The triumphs in architecture, most notably the great cathedrals but also the castle fortresses, are not denied by anyone.

The coming of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century transformed European thought and culture, politics and economics. Max Weber's thesis, that the Protestant ethic led to the civilization-wide extension of a spirit of capitalism and entrepreneurship, was correct.⁵³ Critics note that there was a spirit of capitalism in late medieval Italian trade cities. There was, indeed, but the attitude that characterizes capitalism did not spread to Europe as a whole. It did under Protestantism. One reason was Protestantism's opposition to holidays. There were about 150 holy days under Mediterranean Catholicism. There were only Sundays and a few prayer days under Calvinism. This made a huge difference in comparative rates of economic growth over the centuries.

Without Christianity, there would never have been modern science, as the voluminous (and generally ignored) researches of French historian Pierre Duhem and American scholar Stanley Jaki have demonstrated.⁵⁴ An large body of scholarly literature has built up that indicates the close relationship between the rise of Calvinism-Puritanism and the rise of modern science.⁵⁵

The Christian worldview created the foundations of Western civilization—foundations that are now being eroded by humanism. The antinomian (anti-biblical law) pietist tradition of withdrawal, non-involvement, and internal "spirituality" cannot withstand this erosion process.⁵⁶ When Christians lose faith in five essential biblical doctrines

University Press, [1923] 1965).

52. Christopher Brooke, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970).

53. Attempts to refute Weber have been numerous, but even after a century, the bulk of his thesis holds up well to specific criticisms. See Gary North, "Weber's 'Protestant Ethic' Hypothesis," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976). A good general introduction to the question is collection by S. N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

54. Stanley Jaki, *The Road to Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *Science and Creation: From eternal cycles to an oscillating universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, [1974] 1980).

55. For a survey and analysis of a portion of this literature, see E. L. Hebden Taylor, "The Role of Puritan-Calvinism in the Rise of Modern Science," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer 1979); Charles Dykes, "Medieval Speculation, Puritanism, and Modern Science," *ibid.*

56. *Christianity and Civilization*, 1 (1982): "The Failure of the American Baptist Culture." (<http://bit.ly/CAC1982>)

—the sovereignty of God, the self-sufficiency of the infallible Bible, the Bible-revealed law of God, the predictable corporate sanctions of God in history, and the victory of God’s people in time and on earth—they find themselves nearly defenseless (intellectually, institutionally, and culturally) against their rivals in every area of life.⁵⁷ When Christians refuse to take the offensive, they become like the Israelites of Moses’ generation: nomads without an earthly future.

Conclusion

How should Christians begin to take the offensive? By means of biblical law. In other words, we must put to good use the grace of God, which has been shown to us in Christ. *We are to live by grace in terms of biblical law.* We judge ourselves by our fruits, and we judge our fruits in terms of their conformity to God’s law. The Ten Commandments are the starting point today, just as they were in 1493 B.C., and just as they have been at all points in between. What I have tried to demonstrate in this book is that in the field of economics, there is no doubt: The Ten Commandments still apply. More than this: Without the principles laid down by the Ten Commandments, there is no hope for the economic future of man.

A God-blessed economic future is a future based on personal self-government under God, as evaluated by each individual (self-evaluation) and others (market evaluation) in terms of God’s revealed law. Economic justice, like economic progress, is not based on the reign of the king, the politician, or the bureaucrat. Above all, it is *familistic responsibility* which is the dominant force in economic life. Economic progress ultimately requires future-orientation and faith in a providential world of cosmic personalism—faith in the existence of economic order, faith in economic cause and effect. It was this confidence which created the Western economy, and only this faith can sustain it.

Humanism is losing its self-confidence, and is doomed. The question is this: *Is humanism doomed historically?* The Bible teaches that it is doomed historically, for Satan is doomed historically, despite the familiar eschatological teachings of the “pessimillennialists.” His defeat at Calvary *definitively* established his defeat in history. Nevertheless, history requires action. To establish the visible cultural manifestation of Christ’s historic triumph, Christians must first learn the truth of an old political slogan: “You can’t beat something with nothing.” Human-

57. Gary North and David Chilton, “Apologetics and Strategy,” *ibid.*, 3 (1983).

ism's visible failures today will not automatically lead to some sort of Christian "victory by default." There is no Christian "kingdom by default." Christians cannot win by default, because men are born into Satan's kingdom (original sin). Sinners must be actively pursued—by God's Holy Spirit and by those who bring the gospel message. If Christians were passive in terms of personal evangelism, Satan's kingdom would remain unchecked and unchallenged. The same is true of *cultural evangelism* by Christians: *no activism—no victory*. Once Adam sinned, had Christ's death not atoned for man's sin, Satan could have remained passive and have been historically victorious. Satan would have won by default, had it not been for Calvary. Christ's activism conquered Satan; analogously, Christians' activism will in history conquer Satan's troops, both human and angelic. Ethics, not power, is the critical factor. Biblical law, not state power or magical power, is decisive.

What I am arguing is simple: *There are no civilizational vacuums*. There are no tie scores in the competition to build an external kingdom, whether Satan's or God's. Unless Christianity positively wins, Satan positively wins. Christianity, if it is not accompanied by a program of comprehensive Christian reconstruction, cannot triumph historically. "You can't build something with nothing." There should be no doubt in any *orthodox* Christian's mind that in the field of economics, the basis of such reconstruction is faith in, and obedience to, the Ten Commandments.

End of Volume 2

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AUTHORITY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON EXODUS

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Gary North

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PREFACE

I write this Preface out of a sense of obligation. In the Table of Contents for *Tools of Dominion* (1990), there is this entry: Preface. In mid-2011, as I was proofreading the newly typeset Point Five Press edition, I noticed that there was no Preface in that book. The book went through its initial printing of either 3,000 or 5,000 copies. The Institute for Christian Economics published a second edition. I do not recall how many copies: at least 3,000. That was the only book in this commentary series, other than Genesis, that went into a second printing. In 21 years, no one mentioned that it was missing a Preface. This raises a question: How many people who bought it actually read it? Second, if the author did not notice, who should have noticed?

Tools of Dominion is the most intense of all of my commentaries. It covers mainly three chapters: Exodus: 21–23. The original edition filled 1,216 pages of text. The index was 70 pages long. It took me something in the range of 150 hours to compile it. I have never liked to index. That was the most burdensome index in my career. To say that there is a great deal of economic information in these three chapters is not an exaggeration.

A. The Main Issue

The main issue facing the Israelites at the time of the exodus was the conquest of Canaan. Would they or wouldn't they begin the conquest? They decided that they would not. This was the supreme issue of the Book of Numbers. Would they impose negative sanctions on the Canaanites? If not, God would impose negative sanctions on them: wandering. In Numbers 14, when the 12 spies returned, the nation decided that the 10 fearful spies were correct. The land was filled with giants. They tried to stone Joshua and Caleb, who recommended an immediate attack. God then brought a plague on the nation. They also would wander for another 38 years.

This had not taken place when God laid down the law: the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20) and the case laws that threw additional light

on how these laws should be enforced (Ex. 21–23). The case laws would govern the nation when they took possession of the Promised Land.

The case laws are short and to the point. My exposition of them indicates how comprehensive they were. They condensed a great deal of economic information into a short text. They did not explain these economic principles. They covered slavery, judicial liability, judicial procedure, penalties on violence, penalties on sabbath violations, and penalties on theft.

There was no law that mandated tax-funded charity. There was no law that mandated wealth redistribution by civil law. There was nothing that could legitimately be used to justify the modern welfare state.

B. A Counterfeit Gospel

What was true of the case laws of Exodus was equally true of the laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. If the defenders of the so-called Social Gospel cared about the judicial texts of the Bible, they would either abandon the Social Gospel or else re-position the Social Gospel as having nothing to do with biblical law and biblical ethics. But they want to claim the prestige associated with the Old Testament in Bible-believing churches—where the money is—so they self-consciously argue two mutually exclusive positions: (1) the Mosaic economic laws do not carry over literally into the New Testament; (2) the ethical passion of the prophets is still binding in the New Testament, even though the specific Mosaic economic laws that the prophets called the nation to enforce are no longer binding. Then they present socialism, or the welfare state, or even Marxism (liberation theology) as the “true Christianity” that New Testament prophetic passion demands that Christians strive to implement. They baptize socialism in the name of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus.

This deception has gone on for over a century. It is morally corrupt. The Social Gospel is morally corrupt. There is nothing remotely biblical about the Social Gospel, whether we are discussing the early twentieth-century version¹ or the early twenty-first-century version.² Those who promote such views are wolves in sheep’s clothing.

1. C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance: The Definitive History of the National Council of Churches and Its Leftist Policies—From 1908 to the Present* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975). (<http://bit.ly/SingerUA>).

2. Joel McDurmon, *God Versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

They have not gained a wide hearing inside American fundamentalist churches. They have gained only marginally more support in evangelical Protestant churches. They have drawn support from a much higher percentage of Christian college professors in the humanities and social sciences than from laymen in the pews. This has been true for over a century. This is because Social Gospel economics is essentially left-wing Progressivism (1885–1920) or far-left Keynesianism (post-1960), which is what most Christian college professors were taught in their years of higher education. Laymen can spot a spiritual counterfeit far more readily than a college professor can. Laymen have not spent their adult years submitting to state-funded and state-accredited universities in order to earn their salaries.

With respect to the Social Gospel, I remind my readers: this, too, shall pass. Liberation theology did. It sank on board the rudderless ship *Karl Marx* in 1991. When the modern welfare states of the West finally go bankrupt or else default on their promises to elderly voters, there will be a great moral revulsion against the welfare state and its defenders. This will include the antinomian prophets of the Social Gospel movement. I would like to think that my efforts over the last 45 years, and perhaps for another decade, will have something to do with that revulsion when it at last engulfs the promoters of the messianic welfare state.

INTRODUCTION

This is he [Moses] that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt (Acts 7:38–39).

We are witnessing today a recapitulation of Moses' experience with the Jews of his day. Protestant fundamentalist Christians have their eyes on the sky, their heads in the clouds, their hearts in Egypt, and their children in the government's schools. So, for that matter, do most of the other Christian groups. The handful of Christian Reconstructionist authors who are serving as modern-day Stephens with respect to defending the continuing validity of biblical law experienced a response from the various ecclesiastical Sanhedrins of our day somewhat analogous to the response that Stephen's testimony produced: verbal stones. (Prior to 1986, we received mostly stony silence.)

If the modern church were honest, it would rewrite one of the popular hymns of our day: "O, how hate I thy law, O, how hate I thy law. It is my consternation all the day." But the modern church, hating God's revealed law with all its Egyptian heart, is inherently dishonest. It is self-deceived, having no permanent ethical standards to use as an honest mirror. The hearer of the word who refuses to obey, James says, is like a man who beholds his face in a looking glass, walks away, "and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (James 1:24b). The modern Christian refuses even to pick up the mirror of God's law and look.

A. Why an Economic Commentary?

I have explained in the Introduction to my economic commentary on Genesis why I began this project in 1973.¹ I presented there my case

1. Initial presentations of my economic commentary on the Pentateuch appeared monthly in the *Chalcedon Report*, from 1973 until 1981.

for the whole idea of a specifically economic commentary. Basically, my reason is this: the Bible presents mankind with a God-mandated set of social, economic, educational, political, and legal principles that God expects His people to use as permanent blueprints for the total reconstruction of every society on earth. *Sovereignty and Dominion* provides a model of what kind of exegetical materials can and must be produced in every academic field if Christians are successfully to press the claims of Christ on the world. After the publication of the first two commentaries on Exodus, I also edited and published a ten-volume set of books that I call the Biblical Blueprints Series, four of which I wrote.²

What I want to stress from the outset is that writing this economic commentary has been very nearly a bootstrap operation. For almost two thousand years, Bible commentators—Jews and gentiles—have simply not taken seriously the specific details of Old Testament law. Despite the fact that John Calvin did preach about two hundred sermons on the Book of Deuteronomy, including its case laws,³ and that the Puritans, especially the New England Puritans, did take biblical law seriously,⁴ they did not write detailed expositions showing how these laws can be applied institutionally in New Testament times.

I found only two exegetical books repeatedly useful in writing this volume: R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973) and James Jordan's *Law of the Covenant* (1984). Both are recent studies, and both were written by people who shared my view of how the Old Testament case laws should be read, interpreted, and applied in New Testament times. This exegetical approach is unquestionably new, especially when coupled with Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics. This is why the Christian Reconstruction movement does represent a major break with recent church history. On this point—and just about only on this one—Reconstructionism's critics are correct. We represent a discontinuity in church history.⁵ Christian Reconstructionists

2. Published by Dominion Press, Ft. Worth, Texas, 1986–87. I wrote the books on monetary theory, economic theory, foreign policy, and the introductory volume on biblical liberation.

3. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1683, 1685] 1987).

4. Symposium on Puritanism and Law, *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Winter 1978–79).

5. I hope that it will be regarded by future church historians as a discontinuity analogous to the appearance of the Wycliffe movement or the advent of the Reformation rather than that other bold discontinuity, the introduction around the year 1000 of the doctrine of transubstantiation.

alone have gone to the Bible's legal passages in search of permanent authoritative guidelines ("blueprints") for what society ought to do and be. In this sense, we Reconstructionists are theological revolutionaries. If our view of biblical law continues to spread to the Christian community at large, as we expect it to do, there will eventually be a social revolution—hopefully nonviolent change, but unquestionably revolutionary. Why revolutionary? Because one of the primary manifestations of the revolutionary character of this change will be a radical and comprehensive alteration of the West's legal order.

This commentary is the foundation of my attempt to reconstruct the entire field of economics in terms of the Bible. If I did not have total confidence in the Bible, I would not even attempt such an outlandish task. It involves too great a break with the past, as well as a break with the fundamental presuppositions of the most methodologically rigorous of all the social sciences, economics. To attempt such a project, a man has to be confident. To do so as part of a movement which seeks to reconstruct every other field also requires confidence.

B. The Question of Confidence

This "Reconstructionist confidence" is frequently misunderstood. Our numerous critics view it as arrogance. Those who accuse theologians of arrogance miss the point: *we are totally confident in biblical law*. We are also totally confident that without biblical law, there is no way to create a self-consistent intellectual system or academic discipline. On the other hand, we are not totally confident in our specific applications of the law to real-world problems. Thus, while we acknowledge that we may be wrong in our particular interpretations, there is no possibility that we are wrong in our general intellectual strategy. King David said it well: he was wiser than his enemies, his teachers, and the ancients because of his commitment to, and continual study of, the law of God (Ps. 119:98–100). So am I, for the same reason. David had many enemies because of this confidence; so do I. So do Reconstructionists in general. But understand: *ours is not self-confidence; ours is confidence in the law*. However inferior our minds or intellectual skills may be in comparison to the pagan giants of the age, or even of the past, Christians have the one thing that none of them possessed: covenant theology. The more we understand God's revealed law, the greater our advantage over those who do not understand it. It is not primarily a matter of intellect; it is primarily a matter of ethics.

The task we Christian Reconstructionists have set for ourselves—the reconstruction of every intellectual discipline and social institution in terms of the Bible—has always been the task of the church as *ekklesia*. The more that Christians have deferred to the humanists in intellectual affairs, the more pressing this task of reconstruction has become. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga was correct: our enemies have established the operating presuppositions in every academic field. “In each of these areas the fundamental and often unexpressed presuppositions that govern and direct the discipline are not religiously neutral; they are often antithetic to a Christian perspective. In these areas, then, as in philosophy, it is up to Christians who practice the relevant discipline to develop the right alternatives.”⁶ What he neglected to mention is that when Christians within the discipline fail to develop the right alternatives—or, in the case of economics, any alternatives—then someone outside the field has to attempt it.⁷

C. Conflicting Hermeneutics

Because of our commitment to the Old Testament case laws, Christian Reconstructionists’ intentions are frequently misinterpreted. For example, Robert M. Bowman, Jr. complained: “One distressing application of theonomy by the Reconstructionists is their charge that all who reject any aspect of theonomy are ‘antinomian’ (against the law) and are pursuing ‘autonomy’ (self-law). According to Reconstructionists, it is either autonomy or theonomy; there apparently is no middle ground.”⁸

6. Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers (With a special preface for Christian thinkers from different disciplines),” *Truth*, I (1985), p. 11.

7. Thomas Kuhn, in his influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1970), argued that the major paradigm shifts in any discipline are inaugurated by younger researchers who are either very young or very new to the field (pp. 89–90). These breakthroughs are often made by two types of researchers: skilled amateurs operating outside the guild’s disciplinary system and obscure professionals laboring on the fringes of the academic discipline. For example, Darwin was an unknown amateur naturalist who had been laboring for almost three decades outside any academic setting when *Origin of Species* appeared. He had come to his insights as a young man, but had not had the courage or incentive to publish his thesis until much later. Einstein was an obscure clerk in the Swiss patent office when he made his major breakthroughs in physics.

8. Robert M. Bowman, Jr., “The New Puritanism: A Preliminary Assessment of Reconstructionism,” *Christian Research Journal*, X (Winter/Spring 1988), p. 26.

1. *Autonomy or Theonomy*

He was correct with respect to the “either/or” assertion by theonomists, but incorrect regarding our concern over the acceptance of specific laws. Those who have written the major Reconstructionists books have not argued that “all who reject any aspect of theonomy are ‘antinomian’ (against the law) and are pursuing ‘autonomy’ (self-law).” Serious Bible students can, do, and will continue to disagree regarding the proper application of specific Old Testament laws, both in ancient Israel and in the present New Covenant era. Our definition of antinomianism is the principle of biblical interpretation (hermeneutic) which says, in Bowman’s correct description of dispensationalism, that “the commands of the Law are presumed to be no longer binding except where the New Testament repeats or ratifies them.”⁹ We would agree with Bowman when he concluded that “dispensationalism, technically speaking, is antinomian, though more in theory than practice; . . .”¹⁰

This is precisely the Reconstructionists’ point: most of our opponents are antinomian in theory, though not necessarily in practice (i.e., in the specific details of personal ethics).¹¹ It is not the details of the personal ethics of our critics that concern Reconstructionists theologically; rather, it is our opponents’ governing principle of interpretation regarding Old Testament law in New Testament times. Our primary theological distinctives as a movement are judicial and cultural. We do not ignore the question of personal ethics, but *personal ethical issues must inevitably be dealt with intellectually on the basis of some general principle of biblical interpretation*. Our principle of biblical interpretation is explicit (theonomy); that of our opponents is generally implicit (antinomianism). Our hermeneutical explicitness is now forcing our critics to respond explicitly, and this pressure bothers them. They resent it. They must give up either their antinomianism or their claims to cultural relevance as Christians. They do not want to give up either position, but they no longer have any intellectual choice. They do not like to admit this, however. It disturbs them. But if they had an answer, someone in the evangelical world would provide at least an outline of a comprehensive Christian social theory based neither on biblical case laws nor natural law theory. We are still wait-

9. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

11. Given the sexual scandals of television evangelists Jim Bakker in 1987 and Jimmy Swaggart in 1988, Christian Reconstructionists are sorely tempted to conclude that dispensationalism tends toward antinomianism in practice, too.

ing. It has been 1,900 years.

Their silence in this time of escalating international crises, in every area of life, in the decades immediately preceding the third millennium after Christ, is an important reason for the growing influence of Christian Reconstructionism. Their silence is costing them heavily, but so will any attempt to respond to us without offering a biblically plausible alternative worldview. You cannot beat something with nothing.

2. Dispensationalism by Any Other Name

Dispensationalists have in the past been ethically explicit, denying God's Bible-revealed law in the New Covenant era. They have been self-conscious theological antinomians. They have argued for decades that a person can be saved eternally by accepting Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, a radically antinomian and widely accepted opinion which one of their number recently criticized quite eloquently.¹² Nevertheless, most of the leading intellectual targets of our theological criticisms have publicly disassociated themselves from dispensationalism. They deeply resent being tarred and feathered by us with dispensationalism's antinomian brush, yet when they reply to our accusations, they adopt the hermeneutic of dispensationalism regarding the Old Testament case laws. This poses continuing intellectual problems for them.¹³

Their original reaction was stony silence. It took two decades for Christian Reconstructionists to gain even a hostile public reception; until the mid-1980s, our theological opponents usually played the children's game of "let's pretend": "Let's pretend that the Reconstructionists are not here, and maybe they will go away soon!" Finally, when they correctly concluded that we were not going away, some of them started their public attacks.¹⁴ Prior to this, most of them had been content with murmuring, plus spreading an occasional nasty rumor.

They adopted the second strategy: publishing hostile but brief reviews. It was too late; by 1985 we had too many books in print and too many names on our computerized mailing lists. The theological

12. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1988).

13. Cf. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

14. I include the various academic Sanhedrins in this observation. Try to find as many as five book reviews of Christian Reconstructionist books in either *Bibliotheca Sacra* or the *Westminster Theological Journal*, 1963–88.

paradigm shift was too far advanced, not to mention the paradigm itself. To call attention to us publicly has become increasingly risky, given the voluminous quantity of our books. Too many bright young Christian scholars and activists were already being alerted to our existence, and we are enlisting many of them. Yet not calling attention to us publicly made it appear as though the critics had no coherent answers.

There has been a third strategy: attacking a brief outline or caricature of a few of the ideas of the Reconstruction movement, but without naming its leaders or any of our books. This will not work either, although it does delay the day of ideological reckoning. I call this strategy “hide and don’t seek.” The critic hides all specific references to our books, and hopes that his followers will not locate the unmentioned original sources.¹⁵

Our critics would much prefer to live in a world where they are not forced to deal with public issues in terms of a specific definition of Christian ethics, meaning *specific Old Testament civil laws with their accompanying public sanctions*. They wish that theonomists would go away and leave them in their ethical slumber. We won’t. That is what the 1980s demonstrated: theonomists will not go away. We will not shut up. Our critics can ignore us no longer and still remain intellectually respectable. We have written too much, and we continue to write. Fifteen years after the publication of R. J. Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973), over a decade after the publication of Greg L. Bahnsen’s *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977), there was still only one brief book-length academic reply from any critic in any theological camp: Walter Chantry’s.¹⁶ It was apparent that the professional theolo-

15. An example of this tactic is found in Charles Colson’s defense of pluralism and ethical dualism, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, co-published by William Morrow (secular humanist) and Zondervan (fundamentalist) in 1987. He mentioned the theonomist movement, but never named any of these “utopians,” as he called us (pp. 117–18). Why not name us? If the targets of your attack are “doomed to failure” (p. 117), why not at least identify us? If we are dead, then give us a decent Christian burial!

16. In late 1988, two critical books appeared: Dave Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House), and H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press), to which Greg Bahnsen and Kenneth Gentry wrote a reply: *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), (<http://bit.ly/gbkgd>). A third critique appeared in 1989: Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam), refuted by Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Legacy of Hatred Continues* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), (<http://bit.ly/gdplhatred>). Gary DeMar already has co-authored one book replying to earlier criticisms by Hunt: *The Reduction of Christianity* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion

gians had been playing a game of “hide and go sleep.” This tactic was adopted for a decade and a half, from 1973 to mid-1988. It did not work. I find it amusing that the humanist media paid more attention to Christian Reconstruction in 2011 than the theologians have. The media ran articles on the alleged influence of dominionists, meaning Christian Reconstructionists, on three of the candidates running for the Republican nomination for President. In the case of Ron Paul, this was true, but only in the area of economic policy. I was his staff economist in 1976. Very few of the media’s reporters knew this. The media focused on Michelle Bachmann and Rick Perry. The influence was indirect if it existed at all. A Google search in September 2011 for “dominionists” and “Tea Party” produced 550,000 hits. (<http://bit.ly/DominionTea>.)

3. *The Silence Is Deafening*

Those few theological critics who have gone into print against us have generally been amateur theologians and imitation scholars.¹⁷ They have read a few of our newsletters and a couple of our books (if that), and then have invented the rest. They have refuted stick men of their own creation. They forget that stick men burn easily, setting aflame those who rely heavily on them. This makes it easy for us to refute them. We cite them word for word, we show that they are either deliberately lying or have failed to read more than a tiny fraction of what we have written, and then we wait for the next willing victim.¹⁸ If a critic cannot accurately summarize what his opponents have said, with direct citations from original sources to prove his point, and then refute what his opponents have said by showing that they are incon-

Press, 1988), (<http://bit.ly/gdplreduction>). A second book replies to issues raised in the April, 1988, debate: Hunt and Ice vs. DeMar and North: Gary DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), (<http://bit.ly/CRdebate>).

17. The exception was Westminster Seminary’s Meredith G. Kline, who made the intellectually fatal mistake of attacking in print Greg Bahnsen’s *Theonomy* in the Fall 1978 issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal*. Bahnsen’s reply silenced Kline. Kline got his academic head handed to him on a platter. See Greg L. Bahnsen, “M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics: An Evaluation of His Reply,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Winter 1979–80), pp. 195–221. (<http://bit.ly/BahnsenKlineJCR>)

18. See, for example, my reply to Rodney Clapp’s article, “Democracy as Heresy,” *Christianity Today* (Feb. 20, 1987): “Honest Reporting as Heresy: My Response to Christianity Today” (1987), reprinted in Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), Appendix B. (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>)

sistent, ignorant, or intellectually dishonest, the critic is in no position to go into print. Yet this is what our critics have done. It has been amateur night at the critics' typewriters for the last ten years. (They resent it when I say so in print repeatedly.)

Meanwhile, we keep publishing. The longer a competent critic waits to produce a comprehensive, detailed attack on us, the more difficult his job becomes. No intelligent critic wants to become a sacrificial lamb who is subsequently exposed publicly as someone who failed to do his homework. This is why time is on our side. This is also why we are so confident in our theological paradigm. After four decades of either silence or intellectually third-rate published criticisms of our work, we are increasingly persuaded that we have the theological goods, while our critics are holding empty theological bags. This confidence on our part is occasionally visible, and it makes our critics hopping mad, so they rush into print with yet another third-rate, easily answered criticism. The prudent ones still keep their mouths shut and wait for us to go away.

Do not misunderstand me. Far be it from me to say that our critics should remain silent. I have waited for a long time to see a well-thought-out, detailed critical analysis from someone, an analysis that does not rely on lists of ideas that we do not believe and sometimes have specifically attacked (e.g., "Reconstructionists believe that the world will be transformed through political action"). A wise innovator knows the weak points in his own system. There is no man-made system without weak points. If a critic ever appears who can zero in on the weak points of Christian Reconstructionism, he will receive my respect. Better to sharpen one's skills by arguing the basic points with a competent critic than bludgeoning a long series of amateurs. What I am saying, however, is that we have yet to see even one critic who understands our system well enough to go for the theological jugular. In short, we have done our homework; our published critics have not. ("If that be arrogance, make the best of it!")

What Christian Reconstructionists argue is that virtually all schools of biblical interpretation today, and too often in the past (excepting only the Puritans), have been far closer to dispensationalism's hermeneutic principle—"the commands of the Law are presumed to be no longer binding except where the New Testament repeats or ratifies them"—than to the theonomists' hermeneutical principle, also correctly summarized by Bowman: "[T]he commands of the Law are presumed to be binding today except where the New Testament modi-

fies them or sets them aside in some manner. “¹⁹ This is why Christian Reconstructionism does represent a break with traditional Protestant theology, not in the details of theology—our distinguishing theological beliefs have all been preached before within orthodox circles—but in *our packaging of a unique, comprehensive system*: predestination, covenant theology, biblical law, Cornelius Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics,²⁰ and postmillennialism.

D. Beating Something With Something Better

It is my opinion, stated repeatedly, that you cannot beat something with nothing. This is the strategic and tactical problem facing Christians today whenever they seek to challenge apostate humanism in any sphere of life. This inescapable fact of political life is the major stumbling stone for non-theonomic Christian activists. Christian pietists who self-consciously, religiously, and confidently deny that Christians should ever get involved in any form of public confrontation with humanism, for any reason, have recognized this weakness on the part of antinomian Christian activists. They never tire of telling the activists that they are wasting their time in some “eschatologically futile reform program.” Such activism is a moral affront to the pietists. Those of us who have repeatedly marched in picket lines in front of an abortionist’s office have from time to time been confronted by some outraged Christian pietist who is clearly far more incensed by the sight of Christians in a picket line than the thought of infanticide in the nearby office. “Who do you think you are?” we are asked. “Why are you out here making a scene when you could be working in an adoption center or unwed mothers’ home?” (These same two questions seem equally appropriate for the pietist critic. Who does he think *he* is, and why isn’t *he* spending his time working in an adoption center or an unwed mothers’ home?)

Pietists implicitly and occasionally explicitly recognize that *the vast majority of today’s implicitly antinomian Christian activists possess no biblical blueprint for building a comprehensive alternative to the kingdom of humanism*. The pietistic critics of activism also understand that in any direct confrontation, Christians risk getting the stuffings—or their tax exemptions—knocked out of them. They impli-

19. Bowman, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

20. If there is one major break with traditional Christianity, it is here—apologetics—which is a philosophical break, not a discontinuity in theology proper. Van Til’s apologetic method is unquestionably radical, for it refutes natural law theory.

citly recognize that a frontal assault on entrenched humanism is futile and dangerous if you have nothing better to offer, since you cannot legitimately expect to beat something with nothing. They implicitly recognize that neither modern fundamentalism nor modern antinomian evangelicalism has any such blueprint, and therefore neither movement has anything better to offer, i.e., nothing biblically sanctioned by God for use in New Testament times (the so-called Church Age). Fundamentalism and evangelicalism deny the legitimacy of any such blueprint, for *blueprints inescapably require civil law and civil sanctions*. Fundamentalists have for a century chanted, “We’re under grace, not law!” They have forgotten (or never understood) that this statement inescapably means: “We’re therefore under humanist culture, not Christianity.” When reminded of this, they take one of three approaches: (1) abandon their fundamentalism in favor of Christian Reconstructionism, (2) abandon their activism, or (3) refuse to answer.²¹

Worse, those scholars who have accepted the intellectual burden of defending the Christian faith have generally had an abiding hatred for God’s Bible-revealed law. “Hatred” is the proper word. “Indifference” misses the point. “Ignorance” would be misleadingly gentle. *There can be no neutrality regarding God’s revealed law, any more than there can be neutrality regarding God’s revelation of Himself*. You either accept His authority over you or you reject it. You either accept His law’s authority over you or you reject it. Pietists reject it.

God’s authority over mankind is manifested ethically by His law, and it is manifested judicially by His law’s sanctions. You either affirm God’s law in its specifics, especially its sanctions, or you deny it, especially its sanctions. You either accept the 119th psalm or you reject it. “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word” (Ps. 119:16). There is no middle ground. Middle ground with respect to anything in the Bible is always deception: either self-deception or self-conscious deception of others.

The general attitude of the modern fundamentalist world—and really, of the whole evangelical world—regarding the authority of God’s law today was stated plainly in 1963 by then-Professor S. Lewis Johnson of Dallas Theological Seminary, in the seminary’s scholarly journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*: “At the heart of the problem of legalism is pride, a pride that refuses to admit spiritual bankruptcy. That is why the doctrines of grace stir up so much animosity. Donald Grey Barn-

21. Gary North, “The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right,” *Christianity and Civilization*, No.1 (1982), pp. 1-40. (<http://bit.ly/CAC1982>)

house, a giant of a man in free grace, wrote: 'It was a tragic hour when the Reformation churches wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds and catechisms and sought to bring Gentile believers into bondage to Jewish law, which was never intended either for the Gentile nations or for the church.'²² He was right, too."²³ Operationally, all denominations believe this today, but it took Presbyterian Barnhouse and independent fundamentalist Johnson to state the position plainly.

Dispensationalist Roy L. Aldrich also did not flinch from the same conclusion: ". . . the entire Mosaic system—including the Ten Commandments—is done away."²⁴ Again, "the Mosaic ten laws cannot apply to the Christian," although he hastened to affirm that "the New Testament believer is not without the highest moral obligations."²⁵ Problem: these supposedly high moral obligations are unaccompanied by specific biblical content or specific biblical sanctions. That is to say, the Christian is on his own, making up his own rules as he goes along, at best illuminated by the mystical whisperings of the Holy Spirit. (If anyone wonders why Dallas Seminary has experienced student outbreaks of antinomian versions of Pentecostalism, which Dallas' dispensational "no signs in the Church Age" theology explicitly rejects, and even outbreaks within its own faculty,²⁶ he need search no further than Dallas Seminary's antinomian theology. If God does not direct Christians through His law, then only mysticism, antinomian intuition, and inner voices remain to provide uniquely "Christian" guidance.)

This hostility to Old Testament law is also why dispensationalism has always had an unstated working alliance with modern humanism: they both share an antinomian theology that seeks to "liberate" man and the state from the restraints of God's revealed law and its sanctions. Their agreement has been simple: Christians should stay out of politics as Christians. This explicit antinomianism is also why dispensationalism has never developed an explicitly Christian social theory. If it could have, it would have, especially in the crucial years of protest,

22. He cited Barnhouse, *God's Freedom*, p. 134.

23. S. Lewis Johnson, "The Paralysis of Legalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120 (April/June 1963), p. 109.

24. Roy L. Aldrich, "Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?" *ibid.*, Vol. 116 (Oct. 1959), p. 326.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 331.

26. Two Dallas Seminary professors resigned and one was fired in 1987 because of their commitment to the legitimacy of the gifts of physical healing in the "Church Age." See *Christianity Today* (Feb. 5, 1988), p. 52; Jack Deere (one of the dismissed professors), "Being Right Isn't Enough," in Kevin Springer (ed.), *Power Encounters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), ch. 8.

1965–71. The silence of dispensational leaders and scholars in those years indicated that the movement was incapable of responding to real-world problems. In that era, dispensationalism committed intellectual suicide. By 1990, intellectual rigor mortis had visibly set in.²⁷

E. Natural Law Philosophy and Antinomianism

Some variation of the dispensational hermeneutic has long been adopted by theologians who officially claim they reject the idea of an ultimate ethical dualism between the Old Testament and New Testament. A good example is the statement by Robert Dabney, the Calvinist Presbyterian of the late-nineteenth-century American South. He assured us that the Ten Commandments provide universal ethical standards. “Although the Ten Commandments were given along with the civil and ceremonial laws of the Hebrews, we do not include them along with the latter, because the Decalogue was, unlike them, given for all men and all dispensations.”²⁸ The Ten Commandments were basically the Hebrews’ version of natural law. “It is a solemn repetition of the sum of those duties founded in the natures of man and of God, and on their relations, enjoined on all ages alike.”²⁹

Dabney’s primary presumption is obvious: the whole of the Old Testament civil legal order is a dead letter, because the case laws are no longer judicially binding. His secondary presumption is also obvious: the case laws were not covenantally connected to the Decalogue. They were merely temporary injunctions. Not so the Ten Commandments. “Hence, all the principles of right stated or implied in this Decalogue, are valid, not for Hebrews only, but for all men and ages. They rise wholly above the temporary and positive precepts, which

27. By 1990, Talbot Seminary in California had quietly departed from original dispensationalism. Its 2011 statement of faith does not mention the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, or the restoration of temple sacrifices. (<http://bit.ly/TalbotRapture>). Dallas Seminary was staffed by a faculty that paid little or no attention to the theological system of C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, and Charles Ryrie (who had long since departed). The “new, revisionist dispensationalism” taught by Prof. Wayne House and others was in fact the repudiation of key dispensational tenets, though not the pre-tribulational Rapture doctrine. Only the faithful donors who no longer read *Bibliotheca Sacra* remained unaware of what had happened. House’s *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* was as far from Scofield as John MacArthur’s *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

28. Robert L. Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia [And Through Her, of the South]* (New York: Hale & Son, 1867), p. 122. (<http://bit.ly/DabneyVirginia>)

29. *Idem*.

were only binding while they were expressly enjoined.”³⁰ He even argued that Christ’s words in Matthew 5:18 applied only to the Ten Commandments: “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle of this law shall not pass away.”³¹

This has been the ethical argument of Christian commentators almost from the beginning. Without exception, such a dispensationalist ethical argument rests either implicitly or explicitly on some version of *natural law philosophy*. If you abandon the continuing judicial authority of the Mosaic case laws *and their sanctions*, you must actively adopt or at least passively accept some other civil law structure to serve as the judicial basis of society. There are no judicial vacuums. *Either God’s revealed law is sovereign in society or else autonomous man’s declared law is sovereign*. There is no third choice. When a Christian denies the unbreakable connection between the case laws and the Ten Commandments, he must then seek to apply the “general moral principles” of the Decalogue to his own society in order to provide legitimacy to the “common legal order.” Yet he is then forced by his theory of natural law to defend the Decalogue’s highly general principles in terms of their common status among all “right thinking” people.

There is a major problem here: *there have been so many wrong-thinking tyrants and societies in history*. Christians have suffered under many of them, usually in silence, for they have been taught that there are no specific legal standards of righteousness on which to base a legitimate appeal to God (for example, by corporately praying the imprecatory psalms, such as Psalm 83). Nevertheless, Christians again and again have proclaimed their nearly unqualified allegiance to this or that humanist alternative to biblical social order. They base their allegiance on the supposed “natural conformity” to the Decalogue of their societies’ legal order. Natural law theory then becomes an all-purpose smoke screen for the Christians’ passive (or even active) acceptance of specific social evils.

F. The Problem of Social Reform

The acceptance of natural law philosophy inevitably leads to two possible and recurring evils. First, it paralyzes the Christians’ legitimate efforts to reform society, for it denies that there are specific biblical blueprints for social reform. This is the curse of the pietistic *escape re-*

30. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

31. *Idem.*

ligion on Christianity. Second, it enables humanist reformers to enlist Christians in this or that reform effort that is wrapped in the language of the Ten Commandments but which is in fact inspired by covenant-breakers and designed to further their aims. This is the curse of the *power religion* on Christianity.

In American history, no better example exists of both of these processes than the Unitarians' successful enlisting of evangelical Christians in the state-centralizing abolitionist movement.³² The fact is, the Quakers had pioneered the theory of abolitionism in the 1755–75 period, decades before the Unitarian Church even existed. The unwillingness of Trinitarian American Christians to obey the New Testament teachings with regard to the illegitimacy of lifetime chattel slavery allowed the Unitarians to capture the Quakers' issue and fan the evangelicals' moral fervor, 1820–65, which in turn allowed them to capture the whole country for the Unitarian worldview from the 1860s onward.³³ In short, American Christians ignored their social responsibilities by ignoring the Quakers' moral challenge regarding chattel slavery (1760–1820), for they did not recognize or acknowledge the judicial authority of the New Testament on this question.³⁴ As a result, they became institutionally and intellectually subordinate to those who hated Christianity (1820–1865).

Simultaneously, a parallel phenomenon took place with the rise of the state school systems, another Unitarian reform in the United States. Funded by Christian taxpayers, the schools have been operated in terms of an alien worldview.³⁵ *The escape religion led to the triumph of the power religion.* It always does. Dominion religion invariably suffers. This defeat of dominion religion is the temporal goal of the power religionists and the escape religionists, of Pharaoh and the enslaved Israelites. They always want Moses to go away and take his laws with him.

These two evil consequences of natural law theory—retreat from social concerns and the co-opting of Christians by non-Christian so-

32. Otto Scott, *The Secret Six: John Brown and the Abolitionist Movement* (New York: Times Books, 1979), reprinted by the Foundation for American Education; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969).

33. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (1965), ch. 6: "The Religion of Humanity." (<http://bit.ly/rjrns>)

34. See Chapter 4: "A Biblical Theology of Slavery."

35. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963).

cial reformers—have been the curse of natural law theory for almost two millennia. Dabney could have protested until kingdom come—or until Sherman’s army came—against the anti-Constitution agenda of the northern Abolitionists,³⁶ but his own commitment to natural law philosophy undercut his theological defense. He did not understand that when a law-abiding Christian adopts a hostile attitude toward the case laws of the Old Testament, he necessarily also adopts an attitude favorable to natural law theory, which is inescapably philosophical humanism: common-ground philosophy, common-ground ethics, and the autonomy of man.³⁷ Dispensationalist theologian and natural law philosopher Norman Geisler was simply more forthright regarding this necessary two-fold commitment: anti-Old Testament law and pro-natural law philosophy.³⁸ (It is unfortunate that both Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer were inconsistent in this regard: they ignored or denied the New Testament authority of biblical law, yet also officially denied natural law philosophy. This has produced great confusion among their respective followers.)³⁹

For two centuries, humanists in the United States have been enlisting Christian evangelicals into a seemingly endless stream of “save the world” programs. The humanists cry out, “Baptize us! Baptize us! . . .

36. *Defense of Virginia*, Conclusion.

37. Archie P. Jones, “Natural Law and Christian Resistance to Tyranny,” *Christianity and Civilization*, No.2 (1983), pp. 94–132. (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>)

38. Norman Geisler, “A Premillennial View of Law and Government,” in J. I. Packer (ed.), *The Best in Theology* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Christianity Today/Word, 1986). Wrote the *Fundamentalist Journal* (Sept. 1988): “Geisler credits [Thomas] Aquinas with ‘having the most influence on my life,’ and says that if his house were burning he would grab his wife, his Bible, and the *Summa Theologiae* by Aquinas” (p. 20). It is hardly surprising that he was a professor of philosophy at Baptist fundamentalist Liberty University. The anabaptists, who possess no separate philosophical tradition of their own, have always relied on the philosophy of medieval Roman Catholic scholasticism to defend their cause.

39. See North, *Political Polytheism*, chapter 2: “Halfway Covenant Ethics,” and chapter 3: “Halfway Covenant Social Criticism.” Van Til’s self-conscious rejection of both dispensationalism and natural law theory left him without any concept of social law or social justice, for he also rejected the continuing authority of the Old Testament case laws by silence in his published writings and explicitly in private communications. Thus, his system was always incomplete, hanging timelessly in the air like a ripe fruit that has just begun its fall to the ground. That the fruit was grabbed by R. J. Rushdoony in the early 1960s did not please Van Til, but there was not much that he could politely do about it. He had to remain silent, for his system is inherently ethically silent: it rejects both forms of law, natural and biblical, which is why he explicitly denied ethical cause and effect in history, and why he implicitly adopted the humanists’ version of ethical cause and effect: the good guys lose in history, and the bad guys win.

and please take up a compulsory collection for us.” For two centuries, well-meaning Christians have been digging deep into their wallets in order to supply the tax collectors with funds to finance a series of supposedly religiously neutral social reform programs that have been created by the messianic state and staffed by humanist bureaucrats. Taxpayer-funded, evolution-teaching government schools have been the most persistent, effective, and representative example of this continuing delusion. Without the spurious supporting doctrine of morally and intellectually neutral natural law, it would not be possible for the humanists to wrap these antiChristian programs in the ragged swaddling clothes of common morality.

G. “Normal Science”

Our critics in 1985 legitimately replied, “All right, let’s see if you can make sense of the case laws. Let’s see how you would apply them to today’s problems. Put up or shut up.” Since I did not intend to shut up, I “put up.” This book is a detailed study of the economic applications of the case laws of Exodus. It offers no grand hypothesis, no major breakthrough in biblical hermeneutics. It is an example of what someone can accomplish if he is willing to spend a lot of time thinking about the specifics of biblical law, comparing his conclusions with contemporary scholarship in several areas. To write this book, I have made a detailed study of modern economics, plus at least a cursory examination of the relatively new academic discipline of law and economics, plus studies of Jewish jurisprudence (Mishnah and Talmud), modern criminology, the history of slavery, and ecology. This effort I regard as basic intellectual trench work, or what Thomas Kuhn called “normal science.”⁴⁰ It is not in the same league with a breakthrough book like Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law*,⁴¹ with its innovative insight that each of the case laws of the Bible can be subsumed under one of the Ten Commandments (even if the thesis is overstated),⁴² and which surveys a wide array of topics—academic, cultural, historical, and contemporary. *Tools of Dominion* has neither the precision nor

40. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, *op. cit.* Kuhn distinguished normal science from a scientific revolution that produces a major paradigm shift.

41. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973).

42. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 22–23. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

the relentlessness of Greg Bahnsen's apologetic defense of biblical law in *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. It does not have the organizational power of Ray Sutton's five-point covenant model.⁴³ It does not have the innovative insights into biblical meaning that James Jordan's "maximal" hermeneutic offers.⁴⁴ It just plugs along, trying to make economic sense out of the details of the case laws.

Despite these limitations, this book still is part of my overall publishing strategy. If a reader is impressed with my conclusions regarding both the wisdom and the benefits that the case laws of Exodus offer, he will be pulled in the direction of the Christian Reconstructionists' paradigm. If he rejects the paradigm, he will then find himself asking: "Why do the case laws seem to be workable? Why have previous Christian theologians ignored the case laws? What was it in their theological paradigms that kept them from seeing how relevant the case laws are?" When a person starts asking himself such questions, he is approaching a personal paradigm shift.

Unless a whole series of studies like this one come into print, the brilliance of the previously mentioned paradigm-shifting theonomic books will fail to capture the minds of future generations of Christians. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, says an old slogan; similarly, the proof of theonomy is in its judicial applications. If what this book insists regarding the case laws of Exodus is not true—if they cannot in fact be applied productively in New Testament societies—then the brilliance of the theonomic paradigm is like the brilliance of a burning bush that is soon consumed by the fire. The paradigm is wood, hay, and stubble. So, while this book is not intended to be paradigm-shifting, it is unquestionably designed to be paradigm-confirming and paradigm-luring. In 1990, I wrote: "If the reviewers do anything except pan this book, they will have aided the theonomists' cause, but if they pan it without having effectively discredited the case laws themselves, they will have identified themselves to their more perceptive readers as intellectual lightweights." There were few reviewers, 1990–2011.

This is why I did not expect the book to be widely reviewed in 1990. This, plus its size. A reviewer cannot fake a review of a book on the case laws. The subject matter is just too complex. Reviewers will actually have to read the book before reviewing it negatively, some-

43. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

44. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/jjjjudges>)

thing our critics so far have been unwilling to do with our previous books. I expect the silence to continue. This, too, is now in our favor. The word is spreading: our critics have no answers to our paradigm.

Yes, this is a fat book. But, like Volume I of Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*, this book is divided into bite-sized portions: compact chapter sections and subsections. To make things as easy as possible for the reader, I have structured it for easy preliminary scanning and easy review. You deal with it as you would eat an elephant: one bite at a time. Chew well; it is occasionally tough.

H. A Final Note to Readers and Critics

Richard Baxter, in 1673, listed seven highly predictable objections to his *Christian Directory*. I feel compelled to list the first three again, though not his specific answers. (I have also dropped his italics.) I too have heard variations of these objections repeatedly.

Objection I: "You have written too many Books already: Who do you think hath so little to do as to read them all?"

Objection II: "Your Writings differing from the common judgment have already caused offence to the godly."

Objection III: "You should take more leisure, and take other mens judgement of your Writings before you thrust them out so hastily."⁴⁵

In response, I can do no better than to close with Baxter's summary comments. Indeed, if I were to issue a challenge to the critics of me in particular and Christian Reconstruction in general, this would be it:

In summ, to my quarrelsome Brethren I have two requests, 1. That instead of their unconscionable, and yet unreformed custome of backbiting, they would tell me to my face of my offences by convincing evidence, and not tempt the hearers to think them envious: and 2. That what I do amiss, they would do better: and not be such as will neither laboriously serve the Church themselves, nor suffer others: and that they will not be guilty of Idleness themselves, nor tempt me to be a slothful servant, who have so little time to spend: For I dare not stand before God under that guilt: And that they will not joyn with the enemies and resisters of the publication of the Word of

45. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory: Or, A Summ of Practical Theologie, and Cases of Conscience* (London: Robert White for Nevil Simmons, [1673] 1678), unnumbered pages, in Advertisements.

God.

And to the Readers my request is, 1. That whatever for Quantity or Quality in this Book is an impediment to their regular universal obedience, and to a truly holy life, they would neglect and cast away: 2. But that which is truly Instructing and Helpful, they would diligently Digest and Practice; And I encourage them by my testimony, that by long experience I am assured, that this PRACTICAL RELIGION will afford both to Church, State and Conscience, more certain and more solid Peace, than contending Disputers, with all their pretences of Orthodoxness and Zeal against Errors for the Truth, will ever bring, or did ever attain to.

I crave your pardon for this long Apology: It is an Age where the Objections are not feigned, and where our greatest and most costly services of God, are charged on us as our greatest sins; and where at once I am accused of Conscience for doing no more, and of men for doing so much: Being really

A most unworthy Servant of so good a Master.

SERVITUDE, PROTECTION, AND MARRIAGE

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have [has] given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself (Ex. 21:2–4).

It is a wise course to begin any discussion of the case laws of Exodus by pointing out that these laws are best understood theocentrically. God's relationship to man is the focus of many of these case laws, especially those involving slavery and marriage. The basic theme of this passage in Exodus is *protection through covenantal subordination*.¹ A secondary theme, closely related to the first, is the *right of redemption* (buying back). These are fundamental themes in the Book of Exodus specifically and in the Bible generally. God delivers His bride from bondage in the household of a foreign master who has kept her in illegal slavery—slavery without the right of redemption. The pharaohs of the Mosaic period had attempted to do what the Pharaoh of Abram's day had attempted. Like Jacob, Abram had journeyed to Egypt in the midst of a famine (Gen. 12:10). As Abram had expected, Pharaoh captured Abram's bride, Sarai, and brought her to his house (v. 15). God then sent plagues against Pharaoh's household (v. 17). The Pharaoh of Moses's infancy instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male infants but allow the females to live (Ex. 1:16). It is obvious what he intended: the capture of God's bride.

1. On the hierarchical nature of God's covenant, see Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Cf. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

A. Indentured Servitude

Exodus 21:2–4 presents the case law governing indentured servant marriages. God had just delivered a slave people out of bondage. He had removed them from the visible tyranny of Egypt, and He was preparing them for long-term service to Him in the Promised Land. It was not that servitude was being abolished; it was rather that a new Master had appeared on the historical scene. God had delivered them out of Pharaoh's household as intact families. He was now bringing them into His household as His servants. He was making Israel His bride.

The maximum legal period of the most rigorous form of non-criminal indentured servitude in Israel was a little over six years. This was the form of servitude in which the master had the right of corporal punishment, and the form in which the servant had to be provided with capital upon his release. At the beginning of the seventh year, sometimes called the *sabbatical year* by Bible commentators, these servants went free in Israel, and simultaneously all zero-interest charitable debts were cancelled (Deut. 15:1–6²). Not all debts were cancelled; just the charitable loans which were morally required by God (Deut. 15:9–10). It is noteworthy that the year of release was also the year when the law was read to the assembled nation at the feast of tabernacles (Deut. 31:10–13)³. God's law is to be understood as the means to freedom for those who obey it.⁴

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 75.

4. I should mention here that the Jewish scholar Maimonides asserted in 1180 A.D. that a Hebrew can legitimately sell himself to another Hebrew for more than six years, but not beyond the jubilee year. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Acquisition*, vol. 12 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1951), "Treatise V, Laws Concerning Slaves," V:II:3, p. 250. On the other hand, if the court sells him into servitude, which Maimonides said can only take place because the man is a thief who cannot afford to make restitution (V:I:1, p. 246), he can be required to work only six years (V:II:2, p. 249). I argue that a criminal who is sold to repay his victims can be enslaved permanently if that period is that is what it takes to raise enough money to repay his victims. A major problem with the *Code* is its sparse or absent arguments and explanations for controversial assertions. In reading the *Code*, we must remember that Maimonides distinguished between a code and a commentary: "In a monolithic code, only the correct subject matter is recorded, without any questions, without answers, and without any proofs, in the way which Rabbi Judah adopted when he composed the Mishnah." A commentary records opinions, debates, and identifies sources and persons, he said: letter to Rabbi Phinehas ben Meshullam, judge in Alexandria: reproduced in Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 33. The Code was basic to Maimonides' thinking. Twersky wrote: "The *Mishneh Torah* also

In the national seventh year, these full-scale bondservants went free.⁵ Why the statutory limitation? Probably because this sabbatical week of years pointed back to the symbolic work week that God imposed on man because of his sin. Adam had originally been given a one-six work week, with the first day as his day of rest. He sinned, seeking autonomy, and was then cursed by God with a six-one work week: six days of labor, with the promise of release and rest only at the end.⁶ This new weekly structure was a curse on man, although a curse with the grace of sabbatical liberation promised at the end of the week's period of servitude. Thus, man's position as a *debtor to God* is manifested in the sabbatical-year system of debt and slavery. God offers covenant-breaking man a means of escaping his debt: faithful labor as a bondservant for a specified period.

B. Marriage and Servitude

Verse three is clear: a married man who goes into indentured servitude, probably because of debt,⁷ takes his wife with him. She therefore departs with him when he goes out. Verse four is the difficult section for moralists. If he had been given a wife during his period of servitude, she and their children must remain behind with the master when the husband leaves.

The key question we need to ask ourselves is this: Where had the

becomes an Archimedean fulcrum in the sense that he regularly mentions it and refers correspondents and inquirers to it. The repeated references convey the impression that he wanted to establish it as a standard manual, a ready, steady, and uniform reference book for practically all issues" (p. 18).

5. This was not true of those who had indentured themselves to other Hebrews as permanent hired hands (Lev. 25:25–28), or those who had indentured themselves to resident aliens (Lev. 25:47–54).

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 6.

7. Maimonides declared without argument or biblical citation that "One is not permitted to sell himself into servitude and lay the money away or buy merchandise or vessels with it or give it to a creditor. He can sell himself only if he needs the money for food and only after he has nothing left in the house, not even a garment." *Acquisition*, V:I:1, p. 246. The problem here is that it seems inconceivable that a man could be placed in servitude for over six years in order to raise enough money for his family's food. It seems far more plausible to believe that he was forced into servitude because of debts amassed over a lengthy period. Maimonides did say that the state may legitimately sell a man into bondage to someone who pays the man's unpaid taxes for him: *ibid.*, V:I:8, p. 248. Since he had already argued that the state can sell someone into slavery only for theft, he must have believed that the failure to pay a tax must be a form of theft.

indentured servant received his wife if he originally brought her into the master's household? The answer is crucial to understanding this passage: *from her father*. He would have had to pay a *bride price* to her father, thereby indicating his economic productivity, or at least his position as a man possessing inherited capital.⁸ The bridegroom's payment of a required bride price is the key to understanding this case law.⁹

1. To Give a Wife

Jacob wanted to marry Rachel. He had no visible, transferable capital, for he was a fugitive, even though he had received Isaac's blessing. Without an assured inheritance, he had to pay Laban a bride price. That bride price was seven years of labor: "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel" (Gen. 29:20a). His words are significant: "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled" (Gen. 29:21a). *Give me my wife*, he insisted. The father had to *give* his daughter to the bridegroom, once he had met the terms of the bride price. Rachel now *belonged* to Jacob. He had paid the price.¹⁰

Exodus 21:4 reads: "If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself." The language is the same as Jacob's to Laban: He has given her to him. This raises a second crucial question: Where did the master get a woman for his servant in order to be able to give her to him in marriage? Either she was a servant already owned by the master, or else she had been purchased by the

8. The bride price would normally have been less than 50 shekels of silver. A man who seduced an unbetrothed virgin was required by law to pay 50 shekels to her father and then marry her, with no future right of divorce (Deut. 22:28–29). Additional evidence of this 50-shekel maximum: the bridegroom who falsely accused a new bride of not being a virgin at the time of their marriage, and who could not prove his accusation, had to pay a hundred shekels of silver to her father (Deut. 22:19). This was double restitution: two times 50. On these points, see chapter 47, "Seduction and Servitude."

9. Chapter 32.

10. This is the covenantal basis of Jesus Christ's exclusive lifetime (eternal) ownership of His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22–24). The church is a true bride, not a concubine. A concubine in Israel was a wife who possessed no dowry. No bride price was paid for her, and no dowry was brought into the marriage by her. Legally, had Christ not died for the church, the church would be a concubine—a second-rate wife. This is why the church knows that she will never be divorced. This is why Paul could ask rhetorically: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35a). Christ paid the required bride price to the Father. The church is not a concubine, even though she brings neither virginity nor dowry into the marriage. The bride price was paid by Christ at Calvary.

master for the servant. Perhaps she had been some other family's servant. Perhaps she had been the daughter of a free man. The point is, the master now lawfully controls her as a lawful father. He can therefore give her to his servant.

If she had been the daughter of a free man, then the master would have had to pay a bride price to her father. This assured the father that the man who was taking *legal authority over his daughter* was competent financially. The father had been given economic evidence that the requested transfer of authority over his daughter to another man posed no threat to her economic future. The bride price served as evidence of her future husband's ability to support her; as a weaker vessel, she was legally entitled to such support.

If the master paid the bride price, and her father transferred to him the right to give her in marriage, then the master became her new father, *covenantally* speaking. He would remain legally responsible for her until she married a legally independent man. The master had the legal right to give her as a wife to a servant in his household, but only because she would remain in his household. He could not legally transfer to a servant the economic obligation to support her, for *the servant was not a covenantally free agent*, either economically or legally. Because the servant possessed no capital, the master remained her father covenantally until such time as the servant purchased her from him, that is, *until he paid the master the bride price owed to a father*.

This law provided additional assurance to the woman's natural father of the lifetime economic protection owed to his daughter. The master did not have the legal authority to transfer this economic responsibility to a former indentured servant until the latter had proven that he was able to pay the same bride price originally owed to the father. If this law had not been in existence, or if it was unenforced by civil law, then there would be no guarantee to the woman's natural father that the master would not later decide to escape his economic liabilities to the woman by transferring such responsibility to a former indentured servant who had not yet demonstrated his economic competence. The legal requirement that the released servant pay the master the bride price before his wife could leave the household of the master was the natural father's assurance of her continuing protection.

The modern world has pretended that it can somehow ignore the economic aspects of marriage. People assume that the ancient world

was primitive,¹¹ and therefore the attention given by ancient law codes to such matters as dowries and bride price payments is evidence of this primitivism.¹² But it is the modern world that is primitive, for it has abandoned a covenantal view of marriage, and has substituted easily broken mutual contracts, where fathers have no responsibilities to investigate the economic competence of prospective sons-in-law, and wives have little legal protection from the courts if husbands decide to break their marriage contracts.¹³ Women have become the economic victims of divorce.

2. *The Family as the Primary Protection Agency*

Marriage is not lawless. It is a covenantal institution.¹⁴ It is the primary training ground for the next generation. It is the primary institution for welfare: care of the young, care of the aged, and education. It is the primary agency of economic inheritance. *The family is therefore the primary institutional arrangement for fulfilling the terms of the dominion covenant* (Gen. 1:27–28). God honored this crucial

11. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a liberal theologian and an immensely popular preacher for several decades, wrote: "We know now that every idea in the Bible started from primitive and childlike origins. . . ." *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 11. See also Henry Schaeffer, *The Social Legislation of the Primitive Semites* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1915). He began with a consideration of Hebrew marriage. He argued that "the matriarchal clan was the dominant form of social organization prior to the settlement in Canaan" (p. 7). It is astounding the lengths to which people will go to escape the Bible's testimony concerning God and man.

12. The Hammurabi Code devotes considerable space to these matters, paragraphs 128–84. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 171–74. Not equally detailed are the laws of Eshnunna, paragraphs 17–28: *ibid.*, p. 162; the Middle Assyrian laws, paragraphs 25–48: *ibid.*, pp. 182–84; and the Hittite laws, paragraphs 26–36: *ibid.*, p. 190.

13. In Victorian England, custody of the children automatically went to the divorced husband. This reduced the incentive for divorce on both sides. The husband feared the responsibility of taking care of the children, and the wife did not want to abandon them. As William Tucker commented: "The Victorian system favored neither men nor women: It favored families. . . . They loaded the system against the individual interests of men and women to keep both committed to the family." Only after 1910 did social workers and the courts shift the balance and begin to grant mothers automatic custody of the children. William Tucker, "Victorian Savvy," *New York Times* (June 26, 1983). The biblical approach is different: children go to the innocent victim of the sinning marriage partner.

14. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 8. The code of Hammurabi specified that an aristocrat who acquired a wife without contracts for her did not have a wife: paragraph 128. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 171.

dominion function of the family by placing restrictions on it. A servant is expected to defer marriage until he is an independent man. Later, as a husband in a position of authority, he can exercise dominion under God as the head of his family. The model here is Jacob (Gen. 29:20).

Both marriage and labor are normally to be part of the dominion covenant between man and God. Because the servant's dominion over his assigned portion of the earth is not independent of his master's authority, his authority over a wife taken during his term of service is also under his master's authority. There is a *human mediator* between God and the servant: *the master*. Therefore, it is the master, not the servant, who is directly responsible to God for the general care of the servant's wife. The servant takes orders from the master.¹⁵

The servant's protection comes from the master. The capital at his disposal comes from his master. He takes orders directly from his master or a representative of the master. If he is a foreman himself, he issues orders only as a representative of his master, because he is acting as an official under the master's general authority. The master is responsible before God for any delegation of authority to a servant, so the mediatorial position of the master is not abrogated simply because he turns limited authority over to the servant.

This law made it clear to any woman who married a Hebrew indentured servant that *the ultimate human authority over her*, and therefore her legal protector, was not her husband but rather *her husband's master*. She was fulfilling the terms of the dominion covenant as a wife within a family unit, but the head of her family was her husband's master. Her husband was therefore only a *representative* of the head of her family. The covenant of marriage was in this instance four-way: (1) God, (2) the master of the house, (3) the indentured servant, and (4) the servant's wife. Because the protection of the wife and children was ultimately the legal responsibility of the master, the servant's wife and the children remained with the master when the husband, now released, departed.

The existence of such a law regarding servant families testifies to the importance of protection for a wife. Economic protection is one of the reasons why a woman marries. If the source of her financial pro-

15. A modern application of this biblical principle would be that a wife should remain a member of the Bible-believing church she is covenanted to even if her husband leaves the church and joins a more liberal church, let alone an apostate church. Her spiritual covering is provided by the church, mediated through her husband. Even though he has removed himself from the church's covering for the family, she is still entitled to it.

tection is divided, then she faces dual loyalties. The problem of serving two masters arises. Which man possesses authority over her? If the master commands her husband, then her covenantal obligations to both men are unclear. This law forces the couple to recognize her ambiguous position as someone who owes loyalty to two men in the same household. This is a very difficult kind of in-law problem. The covenantal father-in-law actually owns the services of his covenantal son-in-law for a number of years, and literally owns his covenantal daughter until the servant becomes a free man and subsequently presents him with the bride price.

3. *Counting the Costs*

This law also forces both the servant and his prospective wife to consider carefully the costs, risks, and responsibilities of marriage. The husband's need for money to pay her bride price will remain a problem for them long after he regains his freedom. She may wind up with a part-time husband, should he decide to accept his independence and leave her behind. In this case, her master will become her day-to-day lord, unless her husband returns, either to buy her freedom or to become a permanent servant. Marriage to a man in bondage should not be entered into lightly. By asking her to marry him, the servant is asking her to subject herself to the covenantal authority of his master. A servant who married a woman was, in effect, acting as an agent of his master. The law testifies to her position of servitude as the wife of a servant. She might never be able escape this bondage. We can assume that the only woman ready to accept such bondage would be a household servant or the daughter of a poverty-stricken family (cf. Ex. 21:9).

Similarly, the servant has to consider the potential costs of marriage during his period of bondage. He may not be able to afford to redeem her and the children. In this case, he will face either a life of servitude or a life without his family. A future-oriented man probably would prefer to wait a few years, working out his term of service before bringing a woman into covenantal servitude under his master. By delaying marriage, he can then insure freedom for his future family. *Is freedom worth the delay?* This is the question facing a servant who is considering marriage. It is also the question facing his prospective bride.

Jacob's seven years of service for a wife had to be completed prior to his marriage. Similarly, a Hebrew bondservant, if he came into

bondage as a single man, was expected to remain single throughout his term of service. He was under another man's administration, and he was therefore less able to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant on his own initiative.

What about an indentured servant's children? The law did not permit law-abiding Hebrews to become involuntary lifetime servants to other Hebrews. A Hebrew could serve another Hebrew or a resident alien for up to 49 years, and he could become a member of the household through the pierced ear ritual, but nothing is said about the bondservant's children. Nothing needed to be said; the decision to become a servant, or even enforced servitude to repay a debt or make restitution, did not bind a man's children beyond the age of their maturity, for they were not permitted to be enslaved without their consent. Thus, it should be clear that the children of the released manservant, upon marriage for daughters or upon reaching the age of 20 for sons (Ex. 30:14), would have gone free. Presumably, an unmarried daughter who reached age 20 would have returned to her father's house or to her oldest brother's house, unless she, too, chose to become a lifetime servant in the master's house. Adult children no longer would have been in need of the legal protection of the master.

The wife, having married in terms of the servant status of her husband, in effect had already become *a voluntary lifetime servant to the master*, unless her husband came and redeemed her. Either she served her husband or her husband's former master, who remained her covenantal father until the bride price was paid.

The question arises, did the master own her future productivity, or did it belong to her husband? Maimonides wrote: "Though the master must support the wife and the children of his slave he is not entitled to the proceeds of their work. Rather do the proceeds of the wife's work and the things she finds belong to her husband."¹⁶ Then what would be the economic incentive for a master to give the wife to the bondservant? He does not escape the legal and economic responsibilities of supporting her, yet he loses her productivity, which is transferred to the bondservant. Only if the master could escape the costs of supporting her would such a transaction have made sense. But the whole justification of this law regarding wives of bondservants is that *it was the master's status as the provider of her protection* that made it mandatory that she and the children remain with him upon her husband's depar-

16. Maimonides, *Acquisition*, "Slave Laws," V:III:2, p. 254.

ture. Because the responsibilities associated with marriage would be a spur to the bondservant's productivity, marriage was also an incentive to liberty. Thus, contrary to Maimonides, it is difficult to imagine that the Bible would have created an economic disincentive for the master to provide his bondservant with a wife. He retained a portion of her productivity, and the productivity of any children born of the union, until the bondservant could afford to redeem her.

C. The Release Price

There were two ways of reuniting a broken Hebrew servant family. First, the servant could voluntarily become a lifetime servant. The sign of his bondage as an *adopted* household servant was a pierced ear (Ex. 21:6). This legal position as an adopted son would have been in effect until the jubilee year, when he would have returned as a free man to take possession of his family's inheritance in the land (unless he inherited land in his adoptive father's legacy¹⁷). Second, he could go out as a free man, returning intermittently for visitation rights with his wife, until such time as he earned funds to purchase his wife and children.

1. *The Right of Redemption*

Understand, however, that no biblical text explicitly specifies this right of redemption by the husband if the wife was owned by a Hebrew master. Nevertheless, such a legal right is an inescapable conclusion of Exodus 21:7–8: "And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her." The Hebrew daughter could be bought and sold as the Hebrew manservant could be. She could become a maidservant (Deut. 15:12). She could also be purchased by means of a *bride price*, that is, to become a wife. Her father could not

17. Hebrew rabbis agreed that the word "forever" in Exodus 21:6 referred to the period remaining until the jubilee, said the medieval Jewish commentator, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban), *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), pp. 348–49: Ex. 21:6. We do not know exactly when Nachmanides wrote this section; he did not complete his commentary on the Pentateuch until his arrival in Jerusalem in 1267. Charles B. Chavel, *RAMBAN: His Life and Teachings* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1960), p. 44. He died sometime around 1270, although the date of his death is not known: *ibid.*, p. 66. On "forever," see also Maimonides, *Acquisition*, "Slave Laws," V:III:7, p. 255.

legally abolish the God-given judicial, covenantal office of father; he could only transfer this office to another man who was promising to become her future husband or her future father-in-law. This transfer of office was legally possible only because *marriage is judicially a form of adoption*.¹⁸

We know this must have been the case, because of the laws governing vows. A woman could take a vow, but the male head of household, father or husband, had to affirm it within 24 hours in order for it to be judicially binding before God (Num. 30:3–14¹⁹). This law appears, appropriately, in the Book of Numbers, the book corresponding to point four of the covenant: oath. Only a widow could make a judicially binding oath on her own (Num. 30:9). This indicates that a woman, unless a widow, was always legally under the hierarchical rule of a man. She was under a man's judicial authority: the office of household head. This office could not be transferred except through adoption or temporary maidservice. (A daughter could be used as collateral for a charity loan. A minor son could be, too, which is why the widow approached Elisha when the creditor threatened to make her sons into bondservants [II Kings 4]. Elisha did not say that the creditor had broken the law. Instead, as her mediatory kinsman-redeemer [her pastor], he provided a miracle for this widow: oil that could be sold in order to redeem the debt.)

2. Daube's Hermeneutics: From Law to Theology

The prominent Old Testament scholar David Daube went so far as to argue that the original right of self-redemption by the Hebrew bondservant was strictly limited to cases of ownership of Hebrews by resident aliens.²⁰ Daube self-consciously preferred to argue from the legal to the theological,²¹ but he then failed to deal with the actual judicial standards regarding redemption. This is why we need to argue theologically as well as judicially; otherwise, we will miss important aspects of both the theological and judicial character of God's revelation. Daube's hostility to theology was so great that he argued that the priests and prophets who supposedly wrote the Pentateuch in the

18. Chapter 32:B.

19. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

20. David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1947), p. 43.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3, 43.

eightth century B.C. (or later) actually invented the idea of God's liberating His people from guilt²². Again, he was arguing from the judicial to the theological: a view based on the prior exclusively judicial concept of God as the liberator from physical bondage (the exodus), which in turn was based on the idea of His liberating His people from debt servitude and economic oppression.²³ He refused to acknowledge that liberation from debt, economic oppression, and slavery was first and foremost God's liberation of His people from sin and idolatry. Again, we see a refusal to accept the existence of the Bible-revealed relationship between covenant-breaking and God's negative sanctions in history.

In contrast to Daube, I am arguing from the theological to the legal. *We need to explain the Bible's legal texts by analyzing them in terms of the covenant. Covenant theology always governs biblical laws.* The legal right of redemption from bondservitude through offering a purchase price is implied throughout the Bible because of biblical religion's equating of personal freedom, economic success, and ethical obedience to God. The biblical theme of national and personal liberation is always grounded in the general commandment of liberation from the bondage of sin. The focus of biblical law is primarily *ethical* rather than primarily legal, primarily economic, or primarily political.

3. *Covenant-Keeping and Prosperity*

If a man is economically unskilled, his incompetence is expected to lead him into poverty. This, in turn, tends to lead him into bondservitude, where he can learn the biblical law of liberty—obedience to God—through obedience to a covenantally self-disciplined person. Why is it assumed in the Mosaic law that the owner of a bondservant is covenantally faithful? Obviously, because he had sufficient wealth to purchase the bondservant. Immoral and incompetent men do not gain *and maintain* control over riches in a commonwealth governed by biblical law (Deut. 28:15–68). This case law rests on the presupposition of a statistically relevant link between covenant-keeping and long-term personal prosperity.

Because ethical behavior is best learned under a covenant-keeping

22. Appendix P, "The Hoax of Higher Criticism."

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56. He wrote: "The result that I wish to stress is that the idea of God or Jesus redeeming mankind from sin and damnation, apparently a purely religious idea, derives from those ancient rules of insolvent debtors and victims of murder, on the preservation of existing clans and the patrimony of clans." *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Hebrew master rather than under a covenant-breaking resident alien, the preferred form of servitude is Hebrew over Hebrew. Thus, contrary to Daube, the law regarding the redemption price would have been applied in cases of Hebrew household bondservice, and not just in cases of ownership by resident aliens. When the bondservant's incompetence is overcome, first by the master and then by himself, he is to be freed upon payment of the redemption price. He is expected to be able to earn the purchase price through faithful service. Here is the ethics-capital link in operation once again. The Bible recommends faithfulness, prosperity, and legal freedom. The Bible teaches that personal responsibility before God is enhanced by a person's legal status as a free man. This is why Paul wrote that Christian slaves should accept freedom if it is made available to them (I Cor. 7:21²⁴).

D. Will Taxpayers Be Enslaved?

There are cases where righteous people fall into poverty or trials through no fault of their own. In order to give them a way back into profitable service as debt-free producers, God makes indentured servitude available to them. It is God's means of grace to them, a means of release from debt bondage. It is clear that the society at large is not supposed to become burdened with extra taxes in order to care for such people. Despite the fact that they may have come into hard times through no fault of their own, *bondservice is still a Bible-sanctioned remedy for poverty*. The society at large is presumed to be unable to sort out judicially on a case-by-case basis the righteous poor from the unrighteous poor. Thus, the same remedy for both is established by biblical law: indentured servitude. The poor man is expected to bear the unpleasant burden of becoming a bondservant as the means of his restoration economically. The taxpayers are not to become his servants. *A welfare state cannot develop when the biblical laws of servitude are honored*.

In modern societies where these laws are not honored, *the enslavement of taxpayers to the economically incompetent* has become the political norm. Debt is seen as a blessing, bondservitude as a cursing, and theft by the ballot box as liberation. The welfare state does put legally innocent, economically competent people into servitude to the economically incompetent. Nevertheless, Christian voters volun-

24. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

tarily resort to ballot-box coercion to care for their own parents (compulsory old age support programs), as well as the distant poor. This testifies to the almost universal spread of antinomianism in our day. When a welfare state goes bankrupt, there are not enough rich to pay the enormous debts. Its unproductive and economically dependent creditors find themselves facing disaster. Bankruptcy cannot be avoided; it can only be deferred by transferring it to others. The bills eventually come due.

E. Prosperity Is Both the Standard and Goal

The biblical economic standard for a righteous person, as with a nation or other covenantally bound groups, is prosperity.²⁵ Thus, the man who has fallen into poverty needs guidance from someone who is more skilled economically. There is presumably some flaw in the poor man's character or abilities that needs correction.

A physical or other catastrophe may also be the cause of the man's poverty, but the case law's provisions do not differentiate among the causes. The concern of biblical law is moral rehabilitation, which is then to lead to economic rehabilitation, or perhaps vice versa. The two forms of rehabilitation are assumed by the Bible to be connected.

Household servitude is a means of deliverance from bad habits based on personal character flaws. It is the bankrupt person's first step to personal economic liberation. The case of a convicted thief who is sold into slavery to raise the funds to make restitution to his victims is an even more obvious example of being a slave to sin. Servitude is a means of progressive release for him. He is already in bondage to sin; *bondservice in a righteous household is the first step in his redemption out of slavery.*

1. Hostility to Covenantal Sanctions

The suggestion of any links in history between covenantal faithfulness under God and personal liberty, personal responsibility, and personal economic success is unacceptable to modern political liberals, including the vast majority of today's secular university-trained Christian social theorists. They implicitly understand that if such a covenantal relationship really exists, then biblical religion promotes the idea

25. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 4th ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1996). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>)

of the free market society, where individuals are to be held legally and economically responsible for their own mistakes. If the biblical covenant really does establish this connection, then any society that is faithful to the terms of God's covenant, meaning biblical law, will eventually become capitalist. There are few ideas more repugnant to the modern, liberal-minded, humanist-educated Christian social thinker. The Book of Deuteronomy, especially chapter 28, is the great offense, the great stumbling stone, for Christian political liberals.²⁶ On the other hand, dispensational fundamentalists' hostility to the idea of the continuing authority of Old Testament law makes it virtually impossible for them to present a specifically biblical-exegetical case for the free market economy, despite the fact that their instincts are generally conservative politically.

If this relationship between covenant-keeping and visible prosperity is denied, and poverty is not seen as statistically and covenantally correlated to ethical disobedience and a lack of self-discipline, then Old Testament servitude makes no ethical sense. Why should a man be put into legal bondage just because "random" events made him poor? If people's condition of poverty is in no statistically relevant way connected to their ethical condition, and if other people's condition of prosperity is in no statistically relevant way connected to their ethical condition, then indentured servitude, let alone intergenerational slavery, is ethically monstrous. This is exactly what modern liberal commentators say, *because above all they hate the idea of God's covenant sanctions in history*.

It is not random that the rise of Unitarianism (which tended to be deistic) and then Transcendentalism (which tended to be pantheistic) in New England were closely connected with the rise of abolitionism, 1820–1860.²⁷ What was common to both theological movements was a

26. It was not an accident that William E. Diehl, a self-professed Keynesian, was so offended by my presentation of the biblical case for the free market economy. What really offended him was the Old Testament. He wrote: "That the author is strong on 'biblical law' is apparent. [What is also apparent is Diehl's hostility to biblical law: he placed the phrase in quotation marks, as if Old Testament law were not really biblical law—G.N.] The essay provides us with thirty-nine Old Testament citations, of which thirty-three are from the book of Deuteronomy. . . . [T]his essay might more properly be entitled, 'Poverty and Wealth according to Deuteronomy.'" Diehl, "A Guided-Market Response," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 66. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

27. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), ch. 2; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1965] 2002), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/rjrnas>)

philosophy of *cosmic impersonalism*. Both theological systems were inherently anti-Christian and anti-covenantal. A representative statement of this anti-covenantal theology is provided by Unitarian Octavius Brooks Frothingham in his aptly titled book, *The Religion of Humanity* (1875): "The first sin was the first triumph of virtue. The fall was the first step forward. The advent of evil was the dawn of intelligence, discernment, enterprise, aspiration. Eden was the scene of humanity's birth. The tempter was Lucifer—the bringer of light. Thus even in him is something prophetic of salvation. The fault of Adam was disobedience to spoken law; but disobedience to arbitrary spoken decree, to unreasoning command, what is that but in essence obedience to the unspoken command of intelligence, and what is that but the soul of goodness?"²⁸ That which God is not allowed to do in history in His name—impose covenantal sanctions—the state was expected to do in the name of universal humanity.²⁹

The black slave became a tool in the statist plans of the North's Republican politicians. Congressman William D. ("Pig Iron") Kelley of Pennsylvania announced this messianic humanist vision: "Yes, sneer at or doubt it as you may, the negro is the 'coming man' for whom we have waited."³⁰ Frothingham recalled in 1875 the messianic viewpoint of his theological peers during the Civil War (1861–65): "The army of the North was to them the church militant; the leader of the army was the avenging Lord; and the reconstruction of a new order, on the basis of freedom for mankind, was the first installment of the Messianic Kingdom."³¹ What should have been a biblical moral crusade against illegitimate lifetime chattel slavery became a humanist moral crusade against all forms of private, profit-seeking servitude. The result in the twentieth century was the advancement of universal servitude to the state.

2. *Protecting the Weak*

The wife and children needed lawful protection. They retained their lawful protection, either from the master or from an industrious,

28. Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *The Religion of Humanity* (New York: Putnam's, 1875), pp. 299–300; cited in Rushdoony, *Nature of the American System*, p. 89.

29. See especially the book by Unitarian Moncure D. Conway, *The Rejected Stone; or, Insurrection vs. Resurrection in America* (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1862).

30. *The Old Guard*, vol. I, no. IX (Sept. 1863), p. 240; cited in Rushdoony, *Nature of the American System*, p. 83.

31. Frothingham, *Religion of Humanity*, p. 20; cited in Rushdoony, *idem*.

now future-oriented former bondservant, whether we are speaking of voluntary permanent servitude of the ex-bondservant husband or their purchase by him through the payment of a redemption price. But the husband would probably have retained little capital after having paid to buy freedom for his family. Nevertheless, his *time orientation and demonstrated industriousness* were paramount for the subsequent protection of his family, not his remaining accumulated savings. This was also true, of course, with the bride price. A young man would probably have to give most of his capital to his father-in-law at the time of the marriage, although the father-in-law probably would have passed these assets to his daughter as her permanent dowry, in lieu of her inheritance of a portion of her family's land.³²

Economically speaking, a master who wanted the lifetime services of a man had an incentive to find a man with a short-run time perspective to serve him. He might be able to persuade him to get married during his period of service. That way, the master would have gained the woman as a lifetime servant, or both of them as lifetime servants, or the bride price. But, in doing this, he risked having to take responsibility for servants with short-run outlooks, both husband and wife. He had no choice about accepting the servant as a lifetime servant; that decision was exclusively the servant's. As Mendelsohn pointed out, it was probably less expensive to hire workers part-time as needed than to buy someone's lifetime services.³³

This law does not provide specific details about the redemption of a servant wife and children from a master. What would he have had to pay to free them? We might look at the entry prices governing adoption into the Mosaic priesthood. The woman's price was 30 shekels of silver (Lev. 27:4). The restitution payment for a male or female servant killed by a goading ox was also 30 shekels (Ex. 21:32).³⁴ On the other

32. Chapter 32:B.

33. Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery In the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 119.

34. Children adopted into a priestly family, from five years old to age 20, required an entry price of 20 shekels for boys and 10 for girls. For young children, a month to five years old, it was five shekels and three shekels (Lev. 27:5–6). Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 36. I presume, however, that no payment would have been required to redeem children, since the master controlled them only as a covenantal grandfather, not as an owner. With the restoration of the covenantally independent family unit, the children would have gone out with their parents. If this was not the rule, and he had to buy his children, then with the birth of every child, the former servant would have been penalized. It is not likely that such a penalty would

hand, the compulsory bride price owed to the father of a seduced virgin was 50 shekels of silver (Deut. 22:29). It seems more likely that the price would be the bride price paid by the master to the woman's father.

If the bride price was normally 50 shekels of silver, and the market price of a female servant fluctuated, the servant-master would have been careful not to overpay. He would have preferred to buy a woman in the open market for less than 50 shekels. The servant might also have asked for a wife from the master's household servants, although the number of these servants was probably small in any household, as Mendelsohn's study indicates.³⁵ The servant probably would not have had many opportunities to meet girls outside this narrow household circle. He would have been dependent to a great extent on the servant-master's ability and willingness to locate a bride for him, unless he knew the prospective bride before he became a servant.

Why was the master entitled to payment from the former servant? *Because he was still covenantally the wife's father.* The man who gives a woman to another man to become his wife is covenantally her father. He was therefore entitled to a bride price—evidence that she will be protected in the new household.³⁶ The servant had taken the wife in advance, just as Jacob took Rachel after the switch had been made, and he owed the servant-master the required payment. In Jacob's case, the agreed-upon price was another seven years of service (Gen. 29:27–30).

How do we know that the husband would have been permitted to buy his family out of servitude? Because of the office of kinsman-redeemer. We know that the kinsman-redeemer was assigned the re-

have been in force in a society designed by a God who favors population growth.

35. Mendelsohn, *Slavery In the Ancient Near East*, p. 121.

36. In the United States, fathers have historically paid for their daughters' weddings and post-wedding receptions. This is biblically foolish in a society in which the sons-in-law pay no bride price to the father. The prospective son-in-law should pay for everything. This is the father's evidence that the young man is thrifty, or at least a person who possesses inherited capital. Like the dowry that once came from the father as a gift, but which was based on the size of the bride price, so today are the presents that come from the wedding guests. The larger the wedding expenditure, the more guests who will attend; the more guests, the larger the number of presents. But the size of the wedding, and therefore the size of the gifts (her dowry) should be determined by the husband's ability to pay for the wedding, not her father's ability. The gifts to the couple are really the bride's, for they constitute her dowry, her economic protection in case she is unlawfully divorced. Should the daughter bring assets of her own to the marriage, they should remain her property in case of a divorce. They are not "community property"; they are her protection. At her death, these assets would normally go to her children.

sponsibility of buying his near-kinsman out of servitude to a stranger (Lev. 25:47–50). We know that the freed husband would have been his wife's kinsman-redeemer, as nearest of kin.

Normally, buying a wife out of servitude would have meant that the ex-servant had to earn these assets personally, unless his own kinsman-redeemer (or perhaps his wife's brother) voluntarily provided him with the funds. His ability to earn the redemption money testified to his capacity as an independent man under God. *Capital was the sign of independence and maturity* and therefore the means of securing his family's freedom.

F. Jesus Christ as Kinsman-Redeemer

God always allowed His people in bondage to be redeemed. This, of course, testified to the coming redemption of the nation of Israel by Jesus Christ. One way for a man to be reunited with his servant wife was for him to become adopted as a household servant, with the "circumcision of the ear" as the covenantal sign of household adoption. Only by adoption into God's family as a permanent bondservant can any person gain salvation (John 1:12). We become household servants in the family of faith.

Another important aspect of Christ's ministry is highlighted by the second avenue of escape from bondage, the bride-redemption system. Adam placed himself, his wife, and his heirs in spiritual bondage to sin. Eve suffered as a slave because of her husband's rebellious action. Ethically rebellious man still serves as a permanent slave to sin because he cannot pay the release price. But the *people of God* are referred to repeatedly in both testaments as being *God's bride*. "For thy Maker is thine husband" (Isa. 54:5a). Ezekiel 16 is built upon this analogy, as is Hosea 1–2. Christ referred to Himself as the Bridegroom (Matt. 9:15). Paul wrote: "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Cor. 11:2b). Ephesians 5, which describes Christ's relationship to His church, is built on the analogy of marriage. The final consummation of this marriage comes with the resurrection and final judgment, when Christians shall indeed be spotless.³⁷ But in principle, *we are betrothed now*.

37. On the symbolic connections of circumcision to baptism, and the Passover to communion, and all four sacraments to the marriage supper, see my essay, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

The Bridegroom, as kinsman-redeemer, has paid our release price.³⁸ He progressively delivers the betrothed bride ethically, though at a distance, helping her to mature in the spiritual independence from sin that He has purchased. The church experiences *progressive liberation from sin and bondage* in history—a progressive liberation based on the Bridegroom’s definitive redemption payment at Calvary. The Lord’s Supper covenantally represents this communion with the Bridegroom. The church now awaits His return at the final consummation.

We know that we are in principle set free from sin, but in history, our sanctification is not yet complete. Christ has betrothed the church, thereby delivering us *legally* out of bondage to sin, but the consummation has not yet taken place. We wait for the return of our Bridegroom, who has redeemed us from the household of servitude. He did not betroth the church as a servant betroths. We will not remain in ethical bondage. He completed His work on Calvary. The resurrection testifies to His condition as a free man. We are resurrected in Him in principle—definitively set free *judicially and ethically* from sin as His lawful bride (Gal. 4:7).³⁹ But in history, we still labor under the bondage of sin (Heb. 2:8–18). Our sanctification in history is not yet complete. We have not yet been presented as a chaste virgin before Christ (II Cor. 11:2). One reason why there is no marriage after the resurrection (Matt. 22:30) is that the church has but one husband, Christ. There will be no divided family loyalties.

The marriage covenant between Christ and His church did not take place before Calvary. He was still laboring to complete His term of service. He would not marry prematurely. It was the error of the Jewish multitudes that they expected liberation—both marriage and the consummation—in history, when they hailed Him as their earthly king and placed palm branches before Him as He entered Jerusalem in the final week of His pre-resurrection ministry (John 12:12–15).

G. The Fulfillment of the Jubilee Year

God’s laws regarding Israel’s land tenure system required that every fiftieth year, each plot of ground in Israel be returned to the heirs

38. The Bridegroom is Jesus Christ. He also holds the office of kinsman-redeemer, the one who has the legal responsibility of buying his nearest of kin out of slavery, if the slave is in bondage to a foreigner (Lev. 25:47–49). North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 32.

39. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2:D:1.

of the original family member who had it allocated to him after the conquest of Canaan (Lev. 25:8–34). This land tenure system was to keep those outside a particular tribe from becoming permanent owners of rural land throughout Israel. This restricted the intermarriage of the tribes (Num. 36),⁴⁰ and it also prohibited the consolidation of rural land by the Levites or the king. It was to keep the nation politically and economically decentralized. This system was also to keep strangers in the land—gentile alien residents—from ever becoming landowners rather than leaseholders, except through adoption into a Hebrew family.

1. Annulment

We know that this land tenure system was both judicially fulfilled and historically annulled by Jesus, for He explicitly transferred the kingdom of God to the gentiles (Matt. 21:43). The “strangers to the land” inherited God’s kingdom. This judicial transfer of ownership of the kingdom to the gentiles is the legal foundation of the inheritance of the earth by Christians.⁴¹ The kingdom of God no longer is uniquely connected to the land of Palestine. The conquest of Canaan by Joshua is no longer judicially relevant to members of the kingdom. The jubilee’s land-release system is therefore no longer judicially relevant in history, except as a type of Christ’s redemptive work in history.

The historical transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, which was completed with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.,⁴² also abolished another law that governed the period of servitude for heathen slaves: the residency requirements for full citizenship in God’s kingdom commonwealth. The law that delayed citizenship for the heirs of bastards for ten generations (Deut. 23:2–3) was annulled with the historic destruction of Moab and Ammon, and also with the inauguration of a New Testament definition of lawful citizenship in God’s kingdom: faith in Christ and covenant membership in the church.⁴³ As the kingdom of God in history becomes progressively manifested in the affairs of men, mankind’s legal institutions are supposed to reflect

40. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 22.

41. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

42. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

43. This, of course, raises a whole host of problems for any theory of universal citizenship and therefore universal suffrage.

God's kingdom. Men's institutions are supposed to be conformed to the principles of biblical law, just as men are supposed to be conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). To argue otherwise is to deny progressive sanctification in history, both for individuals and institutions.⁴⁴

In New Testament times, any slave must be regarded legally as an indentured servant. Involuntary lifetime servitude was abolished when Jesus fulfilled the jubilee year; the only other form of servitude authorized by the Bible is indentured servitude. A slave in New Testament times is therefore entitled to be treated as a Hebrew servant was to have been treated in the Old Testament commonwealth, with his release delayed by no more than six years, except in cases of criminal sanctions. His children must be freed upon reaching their maturity at age 20.

2. *A Long History of Self-Serving Bible Interpretation*

Purchasing lifetime slaves from pagan nations or resident aliens was biblically legitimate prior to Christ's fulfillment of the jubilee year, meaning prior to the abolition of its land tenure provisions. After Christ's death and resurrection, the Christian is to understand that slave-owning is for the purpose of liberating people from bondage, buying them out of demonic covenants. It is illegal to compel any male to remain in bondage beyond six years, except in the case of criminals paying off debts to victims.

This abolition of permanent slavery was long ignored or unrecognized by Bible commentators. It took Christians and Jews over 1,800 years to come to the conclusion that lifetime slavery is illegitimate. The myth that the "curse of the children of Ham" refers exclusively to blacks was adopted by Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Middle Ages.⁴⁵ There had been a curse: Noah cursed Canaan, the son of Ham,

44. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

45. David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 87. As late as 1867, Robert L. Dabney, the American South's greatest Calvinist theologian in the late nineteenth century, appealed to Genesis 9 and the curse of Canaan to justify the legitimacy of the idea of slavery in general: "... it gives us the origin of domestic slavery. And we find that it was appointed by God as the punishment of, and remedy for (nearly all God's providential chastisements are also remedial) the peculiar moral degradation of a part of the race." He did not argue that blacks are necessarily under this same curse, although he hardly denied it: "It may be that we should find little difficulty in tracing the lineage of the present Africans to

but this curse was covenantal, not racial, and it was generally fulfilled by the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, and the subjection of the remnant as slaves.⁴⁶ Winthrop Jordan identified the source of the idea of Ham's curse as black skin: it first appeared in the Jewish Talmud and the Midrash.⁴⁷ Maimonides ("Rambam")⁴⁸ insisted that slaves should not be taught the Bible.⁴⁹

The medieval church recognized that Christians were not to be enslaved by infidels (Jews, Muslims), although Christians could legally own Christian slaves and non-Christian slaves.⁵⁰ The seventeenth-century Puritans, as dedicated to Old Testament law as any Christian group in history, did not believe that the sabbatical year of release, or any other law of mandatory release, applied to Negro slavery, whether the slaves were Christians or not.⁵¹ The price of slaves was kept high because slave-owners could capitalize the income stream of a lifetime of service, plus the lifetimes of the heirs of the slaves.

The classic example of "Christian" slavery is probably the case of the bequest by Christopher Codrington to London's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in 1710 of a plantation on Barbados with over 300 slaves. Did the SPG release them? Hardly. In 1732, a Codrington attorney suggested that the SPG cease branding the chests of newly purchased slaves with "SOCIETY." On the subject of slave marriage, the SPG was silent. The Society did not even enforce a sab-

Ham. But this inquiry is not essential to our argument." Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia [And Through Her, of the South]* (New York: Negro University Press, [1867] 1969), pp. 103, 104.

46. Davis appealed to the liberal higher critic Von Rad to argue that "the original Yahwistic narrative had nothing to do with Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and the ecumenical scheme of nations which follows. It was rather an older story, limited to the Palestinian Shem, Japheth, and Canaan. . . ." Davis, "Slavery and Sin: The Cultural Background," in Martin Duberman (ed.), *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 5n.

47. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 18. He cited the Babylonian Talmud (Soncino Press edition), tractate *Sanhedrin*, vol. II, p. 745; *Midrash Rabbah* (Soncino Press edition), vol. I, p. 293. Reprinted by Bloch Pub. Co., New York.

48. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon.

49. Maimonides wrote: "It is forbidden for a man to teach his slave the Scriptures. If he does teach him, however, the slave does not become free thereby." Maimonides, *Acquisition*, "Laws Concerning Slaves," V:VIII:18, p. 278.

50. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 98–103.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 203–7. Cf. Marcus W. Jernegan, "Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies," *American Historical Review* (April 1916).

bath day of rest; the slaves were worked for six days, and allowed to tend to their own plots and work on Sundays.⁵²

Nevertheless, we must recognize that *these slaves had been rescued from the culture of demonism*. Those who were converted to Christ are unquestionably better off today than they would be if they had remained slaves elsewhere, or even “free men,” worshipping Satan under the fear of the local shaman. They did learn something of the Western, Protestant work ethic.

H. Lifetime Servitude

The only form of non-criminal lifetime servitude authorized today by the Bible is for men who voluntarily become permanent household servants and for women who voluntarily marry these lifetime servants. A servant wife must go free upon her husband’s payment of her bride price, but she is not automatically set free with her husband.

Her potential lifetime of institutional servitude to her husband’s former master is an institutional manifestation of a married woman’s lifetime of covenantal subordination—a subordination that is necessarily involved judicially in every marriage covenant. This idea appalls most modern Christian commentators. They simply refuse to take this law seriously. They have also begun to refuse to take biblical marriage seriously. (When was the last time you heard any Christian scholar call for the imposition by civil government of the death penalty for adultery, as specified by Leviticus 20:10?)⁵³ Christians have begun to think as humanists do. Humanism’s view of Exodus 21:2–4 is matched by twenty-first-century humanism’s view of marriage.

God has imposed laws governing marriage, and therefore He has also imposed laws governing women who marry indentured servants. Humanists reject these laws. This is the reason why wives are regarded today as not being legally entitled to the economic protection that biblical law mandates for wives. Husbands are allowed to break their marriage vows almost at will. They are increasingly permitted by church courts and civil courts to abandon most of their economic obligations to their former wives. Modern humanism’s hostility to the God-imposed legal requirements of Exodus 21:2–4 is generally accompanied by an equal hostility to the idea of marriage as a God-required legal

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 219–20.

53. As to the question of whether the death penalty was automatic, as distinguished from the maximum penalty that the victim (the woman’s husband) could demand, see Chapter 34: “Kidnapping.”

subordination of wives to husbands: the biblical idea of marriage. Humanists take pride in defying God's law regarding servant wives, and then they take pride in ignoring God's laws regarding adultery. Innocent, non-adulterous wives are inevitably the victims.

Israel also defied God's laws regarding servitude. Prior to their captivity, Israel and Judah did not honor the terms of the sabbatical year, at least with respect to the resting of the land. Jeremiah says specifically that their removal from the land was required by God in order to give the land its accumulated sabbaths (Jer. 50:34; cf. II Chron. 36:21). Jeremiah's account also indicates that slaves had not been released, at least in his day (Jer. 34).

The institution of servitude is founded on the existing condition of all mankind as slaves to sin. Because of differences in ethical and moral capacities among men, some men find themselves unable to cope with their environment. Lacking an adequate degree of personal self-government, they need guidance in a disciplined but protected environment. The indentured servant system allows men to overcome their lack of self-discipline and lack of specialized knowledge of the requirements of dominion. For up to six years, a regenerate person can be kept in servitude in order to pay off his debts. A criminal, however, can be kept beyond the sixth year in order to make restitution. Indentured servitude protects the victims, either creditors or victims of crime.

Wives of servants under the Mosaic Covenant were entitled to protection. The husband of a wife married in servitude had not exercised personal self-discipline (or was overcome by his environment) prior to his marriage, and had been forced to become a bondservant. Subsequently, he did not exercise long-term deferred gratification in order to wait for his release before marrying. Thus, his lack of self-discipline and lack of future-orientation was institutionalized by the marriage. His wife was the property of her master until the day that her husband could buy her freedom as her closest relative, meaning her kinsman-redeemer. A relative could always redeem a servant, even one owned by a foreigner (Lev. 25:48–49). She received the protection of one man or another who was capable of dealing successfully with his environment, either her liberated husband or her original master.

The man who paid the bride price to a girl's father in order to provide a concubine⁵⁴ for his son or his servant thereby became her covenantal father. In this sense, the office of father was legally transfer-

54. A wife whose father had not provided her with a dowry.

able. *This transfer was based on a legal adoption.* Adoption is also the legal basis of marriage; the bride is adopted into the family of her husband.⁵⁵ Thus, the released male bondservant owed the slave-owner a bride price for the wife he had already been given, for the slave-owner had taken the office of covenantal father from her biological father. This is the reason why Jacob owed Laban seven additional years of service for Rachel: she had come to him in advance of any such payment. Until the bride price was paid to her owner, the servant wife would remain the master's *legally adopted daughter*. She would have to remain in his household. The payment of the bride price to her biological father by her master was the legal basis of her continuing position as bondservant in her master's house, but the payment of the release price by her released husband to her legal owner would be the legal basis of her emancipation. There was always the legal possibility of release from female indentured servitude by means of a payment of a release price or a bride price.

Conclusion

The goal of indentured servitude is to impart the economic and self-motivational skills of dominion to people who have in the past not demonstrated their ability to cope with a cursed, resistant environment. The goal is *ethical* self-government, but the starting point is *economic* self-government, which is the responsibility of all free men under God. A person who has been broken by some aspect of the external environment is given the tools of dominion—ethical, educational, motivational, and, after at most six years of service, technological—by his close contact with, and subordination to, a competent master.

There was one major danger in this system. The master might decide to gain a lifetime pair of bondservants for himself by taking advantage of the present-orientation of the male bondservant. If he could persuade the man to accept a servant girl as his wife, he might be able to persuade the man later on to become a lifetime bondservant by submitting to the ritual of the drilled ear (Ex. 21:5–6). There are always pitfalls for present-oriented men. But in ancient Israel, a man who wanted a wife or a concubine would have had to pay a bride price anyway. The difference was, a released man might be able to earn this by

55. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), Part 2. (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

saving his money for several years after his release. By taking a bride before his release, he might find this too difficult, and so he might have been tempted to sell himself into lifetime servitude. But this was the outgrowth of the moral flaw of the bondservant: his present-orientation.

WIVES AND CONCUBINES

And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her. And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money (Ex. 21:7–11).

The theocentric issue here is God as the bridegroom of Israel. God first adopted Israel, then married her (Ezek. 16:1–14). He showed grace to an abandoned daughter of Canaan (vv. 3–4). This symbolism was not to serve as a license for incest, which was (and still is) explicitly prohibited by biblical law (Lev. 18:6–7).¹ This symbolism was a defense of the biblical office of husband: he adopts a bride.

The Mosaic servitude laws that governed female bondservants were tied directly to the laws governing marriage. The reason was simple, though not inherently obvious: *a Hebrew woman could not be permanently purchased, although she could become a maidservant; she could only be adopted.* She could not go out of her father's household "as the menservants do." The theocentric principle illustrated by this law is this: *adoption by God is the sole basis of man's deliverance.*

These laws governed female bondservants, and they also governed marriage. The marriage of a female bondservant was governed by laws different from those governing the marriage of a free woman. Why should this have been the case? How was marriage to a bondwoman different from marriage to a free woman? Why would God have estab-

1. This poses a difficult exegetical problem for those who deny the continuing authority of Old Testament law in the New Testament era: On what basis can one biblically and authoritatively deny the legality of incest?

lished two different forms of marriage? Does such a distinction still apply to marriages in New Testament times?

We must begin our analysis with the biblical doctrine of the bride of God, a theme that appears throughout both Testaments. We must begin with the covenantal marriage between God and Israel, for we recognize the theocentric nature of the Bible. God's covenantal relations with men should always be our starting point for any discussion of men's relationships with each other and with the environment. Therefore, before we examine the economics of this slave wife transaction, we must first understand the distinction between a wife and a concubine. *A wife came into an Old Covenant marriage with a dowry; the concubine did not.*

A. God Married Israel

God speaks of Israel as His bride in Ezekiel 16. The chapter begins with a description of Israel's illegitimacy. God told Ezekiel, "And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite" (Ezek. 16:3). The parents had ignored the child, not even cutting its navel or washing it (v. 4). The infant had been cast off by its parents, even as a bastard child is cast off, "to the loathing of thy person" (v. 5). Israel was therefore an orphan as well as a bastard.

God "passed by" Israel, and "saw thee polluted in thine own blood" (v. 6). He caused Israel to multiply, to come to maturity. God again "passed by" Israel, and looked with mercy on the nation. Then God married Israel: "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine" (v. 8). The imagery is very similar to the imagery in Ruth 3, where rich Boaz spread his own cloak over poverty-stricken Moabitess Ruth (v. 10), as a testimony of his covenantal promise to marry her (v. 13).

1. Concubine or Bride?

The question is: Was Israel a concubine or a true bride? Ezekiel 16 assures us that Israel was a true bride. Ezekiel describes God's provision for His bride:

Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy

blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck (vv. 9–11).

The description continues: God gave Israel a jewel for her forehead, earrings, a crown, fine linen, and the best food (vv. 11–13). "And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD" (v. 14). But then Israel played the whore, trusting in her own beauty (vv. 15–31). "But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! They give gifts to all whores: but thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers, and hirest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom" (vv. 32–33).

Israel was God's bride, not His concubine. What was the difference between a bride and a concubine? It was the presence of a dowry in the original marriage covenant. The concubine possessed no dowry. Israel had possessed nothing of her own to bring into the marriage. God had discovered Israel as a man discovers a cast-off infant at the side of the road. Upon her maturity, God graciously washed her and "covered her nakedness" with his own garment (v. 8a), a symbolic reference to marriage: "yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee" (v. 8b). There is no question: Israel was God's bride. Her adultery was therefore much worse than if she had been a mere concubine. She had been decked in ornaments, the proof of her status as a wife, yet she had traded them for the pleasures provided by male whores, meaning the gods and rituals of the surrounding nations. Worse than a whore who was in it for the money, Israel was a wife who was in it for the sheer pleasure of covenant-breaking. It was the difference between the low-passion, income-seeking sin of the professional prostitute and the high-passion, self-conscious rebellion of the adulterer. Prostitution was not a capital crime in Israel; had it been a capital crime, there would have been no need for a law prohibiting the high priest from marrying a prostitute (Lev. 21:14). Adultery was a capital crime (Lev. 20:10). This was the heart of Israel's self-conscious perversion: "And the contrary is in thee from other women in thy whoredoms, whereas none followeth thee to commit whoredoms: and in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary" (v. 34). It was Israel's position as a bride with her own assets, enabling her to pay for her consorts, that marked her as uniquely evil.

2. *Grace and Marriage*

God's marriage to Israel was an act of grace. God recognized that Israel was a bastard nation, an orphan. Ultimately, this is the spiritual and legal condition of all humanity, for humanity is fallen, disinherited by God because of Adam's rebellion. Nevertheless, God singled out Israel as uniquely fallen, uniquely in need of God's grace. Without God's grace, there could be no life, marriage, or future.² Thus, God displays His common grace to all people by giving them life, marriage, and a future. But He displays His special grace to His people by entering into a covenant with them, one so intimate that only the marriage analogy suffices to explain it (Eph. 5:22–23).

If God had not stopped to give life to Israel, the people would have perished. Moses' generation was to learn this lesson again and again in four decades of wandering. If God had not married Israel, the Hebrews would have had neither protection nor hope for the future. God granted them both life and protection. He granted them legitimate hope.

For Israel to become a fully protected bride, she had to receive a dowry. The dowry served the bride as her token of security in case her husband divorced her or in other ways abused her. The dowry was her token of independence. A free woman was a wife who could survive economically even if her husband broke his covenant with her. God provided a huge dowry to Israel in Ezekiel 16 as a visible manifestation of His grace and protection. What husband would endow a wife with such wealth if He intended to divorce her? Thus, the very magnitude of His visible grace testified to her permanently protected legal status under God.

Israel then squandered her dowry in repeated acts of covenantal rebellion. She impoverished herself through idolatry and whoredom. Step by step, she placed herself in the economic position of a concubine: an unendowed wife. But she was far worse than a concubine, who would have possessed no dowry of her own to squander; she was an adulteress who had squandered God's marriage gifts. She was clearly deserving of death (Lev. 20:10). It was only God's grace to Israel in not bringing her before the bar of justice that enabled her to maintain her status as even God's concubine.³

2. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

3. At the end, national Israel pronounced judgment against Jesus Christ and joined with her false lover, Rome, in a fatal affair. Both perished, but national Israel perished first, when she twice proved false to Rome in rebellion, in A.D. 69–70, and in A.D.

What this testifies to is that *even the concubine's status is a position that depends on grace*. God recognizes that societies and individuals fall into sin, and from sin into poverty (Deut. 28:18). Thus, His law made it possible for a daughter of a poor Israelite to marry into a family that could afford to pay a bride price. In effect, *this option of concubinage was a poor girl's way out of poverty*. Her father had no way to protect her economically. If every marriage had required a dowry, she might never have been able to marry. Her future as a mother would have been cut off. So, God graciously established a way out: concubinage. This pointed to something that the Bible never says explicitly, but which Ezekiel 16 points to: the biblical requirement of the bride price for a free woman.

B. Bride Price and Dowry

God gave Israel jewels and bracelets. This is reminiscent of the gifts to Rebekah from Abraham's servant: "And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things" (Gen. 24:53). Abraham, as Isaac's father, used his capital to pay the girl and her relatives. The property would ultimately have become Isaac's, however, for it was part of his inheritance. Abraham acted as a *representative* of his son. He supplied the bride price, and his own agent acted in Isaac's best interests. The gifts from Abraham served as her dowry, and the gifts to the relatives served as a bride price. This indicates that the bride price could be separated from the dowry, meaning that *the family could keep part of the total payment without passing the total bride price to the daughter as her dowry*. This could become a means of increasing the capital base of the family of the bride. This would clearly have made the daughter an economic asset for her family.

There was a covenantal reason for this economic obligation on the part of a bridegroom. The father of the prospective bride represented God to his daughter. This covenantal authority before God—this position as *God's representative* to his daughter—had to be lawfully transferred from the father to the bridegroom. By paying the bride price to her father, *the bridegroom ritually swore to a lifetime of faithfulness to*

132–34 under Bar Kochba. The Jews were scattered throughout the empire by the Romans in 135. See Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, [1893] 1945), II, chaps. 15, 16.

his wife as God's representative over her, faithfulness comparable to what her father's faithfulness to her had been. This is precisely what Jesus swore to God the Father in His role as the cosmic Bridegroom. He paid the price at Calvary. God then transferred all authority over heaven and earth to Christ as His lawful representative (Matt. 28:18–20).⁴

1. Cancelling the Daughter's Obligation

The dowry functioned in Israel as an alternative to inheritance by daughters. Sons inherited the family land in the Old Testament, not daughters. Sons had the responsibility of caring for aged parents, not daughters and sons-in-law.⁵ To whom much is given, much is expected (Luke 12:47–48). Because the daughter could not inherit, she was not obligated to share in her parents' support. But because she would not share in her parents' support, she was not supposed to receive her dowry from her father's capital, for this would deplete the portion remaining to her brothers. The system was consistent.

Normally, the bride price was used to repay the family for the expense of the dowry. Such a system guaranteed that being a daughter would not be regarded by her family as being an economic liability. The bride price kept daughters from draining the inheritance that normally went to sons. A daughter did not normally remain economically responsible for her parents; she became responsible for her husband's parents. Why? Because legally she was *adopted* into the family of her husband. Thus, inheritances in Israel went to sons, who later cared for aged parents, and dowries went to daughters, who extended their original family's ethical standards over time, though not the family's name.

To enable a girl to leave her father's household as a free woman—a wife with a dowry—the bridegroom paid the bride price. Most of the bride price or perhaps all of it would have passed to his wife as her dowry. By paying her father the equivalent of the girl's dowry, *he was relieving both her and himself from the legal obligation to support her parents in their old age*. The girl's father would officially provide the dowry. The daughter would therefore be in a position to take a portion of the family's inheritance now, indicating her future obligation. Then

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 180.

the bridegroom would replace the dowry with the payment of the bride price, thereby relieving her and himself of the future responsibilities associated with supporting her parents. Her brothers lost nothing, she gained a dowry, and he escaped the future obligation of supporting her parents.

Whether she brought a dowry into the marriage or not, the bridegroom had to pay the bride price to her father or to her brothers. This indicated that, *in principle*, he owed the family of the bride some form of service if he was going to be permitted to marry the daughter. He was allowed to substitute a bride price for actual service. In Jacob's case, for example, he actually had to serve Laban for 14 years in payment for Rachel and Leah, for he had no capital to pay the bride price, because he had fled from his father's house without bringing his inheritance (Gen. 29). Why did Jacob owe such service? Because in each marriage, he wanted a wife with a dowry, but if their father had unilaterally paid the dowry each time as their brothers' representative, then in effect the brothers were paying the sisters to leave the family and join themselves to another family. This would have been the economic equivalent of the daughters' taking present family assets, yet also avoiding future family responsibilities.

Without the existence of the bride price requirement, a girl's brothers would have been tempted to regard her as a liability, a potential drain on the family's capital, meaning their own inheritance.⁶ They would have had an incentive to refuse to allow any man to marry her, for her services in the existing household would have been valuable. Why give her up to serve another, and also allow her to take with her present family capital? Who could be sure that she and her husband would support the aged parents in the future? How could her brothers enforce such a requirement? In contrast, with a bride price system operating, there was even a possibility for family gain as well as loss, as the case of Rebekah's family indicates. Old Testament law nowhere specified that all of the bride price would become the girl's dowry. The bride price might sometimes actually exceed the dowry.

6. In India, a Hindu with many daughters is ruined. If he also has sons, they will inherit little. The cost of the dowries will wipe out his capital. This makes daughters a liability. A similar rule prevailed in early modern Europe, where fathers had to supply the dowry to the grooms. "Girls became, in such a system, a liability." Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 177. He cited Iris Origo, *The World of San Bernardino* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), pp. 52–53.

2. *Competitive Bargaining*

The final allocation of the bride price would have been established by competitive bargaining of her father and the potential bridegroom or by their representatives.⁷ Shechem's father Hamor dealt with Jacob and Dinah's brothers in the matter of his son's seduction of Dinah, although the text indicates that Shechem was also present (Gen. 34:6–11). In general, bargaining being what it is, the two payments would have been similar in magnitude, except in the case of a seduction. In this unique case, the bride price was far more likely to exceed the normal dowry. Because Shechem was a seducer, he was in no position to bargain: "Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife" (Gen. 34:12).

Why couldn't the father have agreed with the bridegroom on allowing a marriage with neither dowry nor bride price? The girl would not deplete her brothers' inheritance by taking a dowry with her, and the bridegroom would not be required to come up with the bride price. After all, if the size of the bride price was even close to the dowry, the marriage could presumably take place without either of the ritual asset transfers: bridegroom to father, father to daughter. What would have been wrong with this? There are three reasons: (1) the bride price served as a screening device; (2) it served as a ritual sign of subordination; and (3) the dowry served as the woman's protection against the short-sightedness of her husband and perhaps also her father and brothers.

3. *Screening Device*

By the payment of the bride price, the groom was also acknowledging that he was capable of being as good a supporter of the girl as her father had been. He needed to assure her family of her future eco-

7. This same competitive outlook regarding arranged marriages prevailed in seventeenth-century New England; so did the system of family representation. Edmund Morgan described the process of marriage bargaining: ". . . in many cases the wooing of a lady consisted largely in financial bargaining. In the case of widows and widowers the haggling took place directly between the parties concerned, but in most first marriages the parents fought out the sordid pecuniary details while the children were left to the business of knitting their affections to each other. The latter process, however, was usually supposed to follow rather than precede the financial agreement." Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1944] 1966), pp. 56–57.

conomic protection, thereby releasing her father and brothers from this legal responsibility. His ability to follow through on this covenantal guarantee was revealed by his ability to pay the bride price. The bride price was therefore an economic screening device for the family of the girl. The bridegroom's ability to pay a bride price was evidence of his outward faithfulness to the terms of God's covenant.⁸ The parents were transferring legal responsibility to a new covenantal head. They were participating in the establishment of a new family. Thus, the in-laws had to serve as God's agents. Rushdoony wrote that "the Hebrew word for bridegroom means 'the circumcised,' the Hebrew word for father-in-law means *he who performed the operation of circumcision*, and the Hebrew word for mother-in-law is similar. This obviously had no reference to the actual physical rite, because Hebrew males were circumcised on the eighth day. What it meant was that the father-in-law ensured the fact of *spiritual circumcision*, as did the mother-in-law, by making sure of the covenantal status of the groom. It was their duty to prevent a mixed marriage. A man could marry their daughter, and become a bridegroom, only when clearly a man under God."⁹

The bride price was also a sign of the bridegroom's future-orientation and self-discipline. Because Jacob came without capital into Laban's household, he first had to work for Laban as a servant for seven years in order to prove his capacity to lead his own household. To lead covenantally, you must first follow. To rule, you must also have served. Dominion is by covenant, and covenants are always hierarchical.¹⁰ This hierarchical structure of the biblical covenant is, above all, the message of the Book of Exodus. Israel was to be visibly under God's administration, not Pharaoh's.

Finally, the bride price was proof of the bridegroom's lawful subordination to his own father, under whom he had probably worked in an agricultural society, or from whom he had received the bride price as part of his inheritance.¹¹

8. Those who deny that there has ever been any relationship between individual productivity and personal faithfulness to the external requirements of the covenant (Deut. 28:1–14) will reject this explanation of the usefulness of the bride price. Those who think it makes sense as a screening device will be led to conclude that there must have been a predictable relationship between economic performance and faithfulness to the covenant's external requirements.

9. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 344.

10. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

11. Christ's faithful service to His Father during His earthly ministry was the basis of His ability to provide a bride price for the church.

4. Symbol of Subordination

The bride price was an extension of the bridegroom's productivity to the girl's household. The bride price was therefore symbolic of the son-in-law's devotion and subordination to her father, *as if he were a family member*, although this was not an actual contract to become a son who would inherit. The bride price testified to the covenantal requirements that sons-in-law owe to fathers-in-law. It testified that the bridegroom had previously served someone else (probably his father) productively, and he had amassed capital equivalent to what could be accumulated during a period of subordination to the father-in-law. He then transferred this capital to his father-in-law as a *ritual sign of his subordination*.

The bride price compensated the father for the expense of the daughter's dowry. From a purely economic standpoint, the dowry could have been delivered directly from the bridegroom to the daughter. Why did God require this seemingly unnecessary intermediate step, the payment of the bride price to the father? *Because the formal transfer of the bride price to her father pointed to the bridegroom's requirement of covenantal subordination to her father*. We see this clearly in the case of Saul's insistence on payment from David, despite the fact that Saul did not ask David to supply Michal's dowry. Saul could require the payment of a bride price. In fact, the killing of Goliath was in effect the bride price. He promised his daughter to the one who defeated Goliath (I Sam. 17:25b). Saul was demanding the payment of an additional bride price, the hundred foreskins of Philistines. Neither the death of Goliath nor the foreskins of the Philistines would have served as an economic dowry for his daughter.

David knew that he could not afford the bride price appropriate to a king's daughter, for he was a poor man (I Sam. 18:23b). Only if Saul fulfilled his promise and supplied David with great riches (I Sam. 17:25b) could David afford the bride price. The king, by implicitly agreeing to supply her with her dowry, was in effect backing away from his original promise to give Goliath's victor great riches. What he insisted on instead was the payment of a second bride price that he believed was in his own interest, though not his economic interest. "Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines" (I Sam. 18:25a). He hoped to see David killed in an attempt to pay it (I Sam. 18:25b). David delivered the hundred foreskins to Saul in place of the normal bride price, much to

Saul's surprise and consternation (I Sam. 18:29). *The issue was not economics; it was covenantal subordination.* David was obedient to Saul continually.

The passage in Ezekiel 16 does not mention the payment of a bride price by God to Israel's parents. This is because Israel was a bastard. The parents—Amorites and Hittites—had cast out the nation of Israel. Israel was covenantally not only a bastard but also an orphan. So, God intervened and paid Israel's dowry directly to the bride by dressing her. He owed nothing to the Amorites or Hittites. He was in no way obligated to any pagan culture.

5. Protection for the Wife

The dowry was an extension of the father's reputation and his family's reputation to his daughter and her children. It was a sign of future-orientation on his part. The dowry testified to the father's covenantal obligation to future generations born through his daughters, even though they would not inherit his name or his land. It also acknowledged that daughters were not covenantally inferior to sons.

The dowry assured the daughter a degree of economic independence if her future husband proved incompetent or died without leaving her much immediately useful capital, or if he divorced her.

The dowry served as a kind of "incompetence insurance." What if her husband divorced her, and her father and brothers should lose their wealth at the same time? The wife could not easily return empty-handed to her father's household under such conditions. With a dowry she would be protected from this sort of dual calamity.

6. The Concubine

God in his grace protects women. Brides need protection. The Old Testament required payment to the bride's family. This insured at least some degree of competence on the part of bridegrooms or their families. But God also acknowledges the legitimacy of marriage despite a girl's poverty. She was not absolutely required to bring a dowry into the marriage, the way the bridegroom was required to bring a bride price. Her father's improvidence was not to make her marriage impossible; his improvidence was not supposed to trap her in his household if there was a way for her to improve her economic position.

The evidence of a slave marriage's forced status was the fact that her father kept the bride price. By keeping it, he was acknowledging

that he had been improvident, and that he either cared little for his daughter's future protection against an unjust husband, or that he simply could not afford to give her the dowry she needed. In either case, his failure to provide her a dowry lowered her future legal status to that of concubine (slave wife). On the other hand, there were economic benefits to compensate her for her lowered legal status.

If a girl's father was so defenseless economically that he decided to sell her, she obviously had very little, if any, choice in the matter. Nevertheless, it was better for her to be provided for in a new household than to live hand to mouth in her father's household. But to improve her economic position by moving out of her impoverished family's household, she had to sacrifice her legal status as a free woman. This would be a marriage of necessity, a slave marriage. This was the legal meaning of concubinage. She was going to be put into the position of a slave. She could not veto this slave marriage (concubinage), any more than a male Hebrew slave could veto a decision by his master to sell him to a new master.¹²

This is indirect evidence that daughters in Israel did have the right to veto *conventional* arranged marriages. That was part of what it meant to be a free woman: neither completely dependent on an improvident father nor on an improvident or unjust future bridegroom. The dowry system provided this protection, thereby making her a free woman. *Wealth revealed her legal status.*

C. Marriage and Adoption

The text reads: "And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her" (Ex. 21:7–8). What does it mean, "she shall not go out as the menservants do"? This refers to the girl's special position of covenantal subordination. She could not be bought and sold by resident aliens in the same way that sons could be.¹³

12. Maimonides supported half of my contention. On the one hand, he denied that a Hebrew male servant could be sold to any other family. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Acquisition*, vol. 12 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1951), "Treatise V: Laws Concerning Slaves," IV:10, p. 262. On the other hand, he did affirm that the young bondwoman could reject the proposed marriage: *ibid.*, V:IV:8, 8, p. 262.

13. Maimonides concluded that the phrase, "she shall not go out as the menses-

1. *Protection for Daughters*

The text says that “to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her.” Does this mean that female servants who had not been deceived could be sold into a foreign nation, meaning outside the land? It could not possibly mean this, because no Hebrew could be sold lawfully to anyone outside the land. The Hebrews were sojourners with God *in the land* (Lev. 25:23). The term “strange nation” must be interpreted here as “strange people.” These were resident aliens in Israel. A Hebrew male servant could be sold to any Hebrew inside the land.¹⁴ Normally, the resident alien was not under the limitations of the sabbatical year; he was only under the terms of the jubilee year. Because the resident alien could capitalize up to 49 years of service from a Hebrew male bondservant (Lev. 25:47–52), he was in a position to offer a higher purchase price. This would have created a major source of profit: buying sabbatical-year-release Hebrews bondservants and selling them to pagans. Therefore, we have to conclude that if a Hebrew sabbatical-year bondservant was sold to a resident alien, the stranger would have had to abide in this unique instance by the terms of the sabbatical year. *It is illegal to sell what you do not own*; a Hebrew who purchased a sabbatical-year Hebrew servant did not own any claim on his services beyond the sabbatical year.¹⁵

What this passage establishes, at the very least, is that a Hebrew girl could not be sold to a stranger.¹⁶ There was a covenantal reason for this restriction: *hierarchy*. A woman was always covenantally subordinate to a man, except for a widow (Num. 30:9). She was inherently in a position of covenantal subordination. It was therefore illegal to sell her into a pagan household ruled under pagan household deities. This cultural influence was too dangerous for her, compared to the risks for

vants do,” meant that if her master knocked out her tooth or blinded her in one eye, she would not become a free woman, although a male bondservant injured this way did go out free. This, in spite of the plain reading of the text: “And if a man smite the eye of his servant, *or the eye of his maid*, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye’s sake” (Ex. 21:26). *Ibid.*, V:IV:6, p. 261.

14. Maimonides denied this: “The Hebrew slave may neither be sold by her master or given away to another man, regardless of whether he is a stranger or a kinsman.” Maimonides, *Acquisition*, V:IV:10, p. 262. He went so far as to say, “Neither may one sell or give away to another a Hebrew male slave.” *Idem*.

15. A Hebrew convicted of a crime and sold into bondservice was therefore legal to sell again to a resident alien on the same terms: service for full restitution.

16. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman [Ramban], *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), pp. 352–53.

a man. A father could not sell a daughter into a foreign household, for he was her lawful representative before God. His son could lawfully be sold into servitude to a resident alien.¹⁷

2. Adoption

The daughter referred to in the text was someone who had been bought from her father to become a wife, either for the master or for his son. Thus, she was bought by means of *a permanent transfer of authority*. The master, as either a future husband or future father-in-law, was making a permanent purchase. If he bought her to give to his son, then *he was covenantally becoming her father*. He would thereby take full responsibility *as her covenant father* for giving her to his own son, who would guarantee her a lifetime of support. He was in effect *adopting* her into his household. It was not a six-year or less guarantee, but rather a lifetime guarantee.¹⁸

Consider Ezekiel 16. At first, Israel is described as a discarded infant. God “passes by” her, picks her up, and raises her until she becomes an adult (vv. 6–7). This was clearly an act of adoption. Then the same phrase occurs again, God “passes by” her (v. 8). This time, however, God married her. Thus, with respect to God’s salvation of Israel, *covenantal adoption took place before covenantal marriage*. This is why Exodus 21:8 says, “If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed.” The master was not allowed to keep her if he did not marry her, assuming some relative would buy her. He was able to buy her only as a bridegroom purchases a wife for himself, or as a father purchases a wife for his son.

The text says, “And if he hath betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters” (v. 9). He was required to treat her as if he were her father, for covenantally speaking, *he had in*

17. The relevant case law in this regard is Exodus 21:7: “And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do.” This implies that sons could be sold.

18. Maimonides viewed her tenure as an espoused bride as ending when she reached puberty, after age 12. Fathers could not sell daughters, he argued, once they reached puberty: *Acquisition*, “Slave Laws,” IV:1, p. 259. She had to consent to the marriage, IV:8, p. 262. If the master refuses to marry her, either to himself or his son, “she shall go out free for nothing” at puberty: IV:9, p. 262. He was silent about the explicit biblical text, “let her be redeemed” (v. 8). If the master fails to marry her, her father or kinsman-redeemer can redeem her. The text says nothing about going out for free, or her puberty, or any restriction against the sale of daughters beyond puberty.

fact become her father. When Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, he was in effect adopting Rebekah into his household. He was taking parental responsibility for her. He was promising to watch over her as conscientiously as her own father or brothers would.

Similarly, when a bridegroom took a wife, he was becoming her covenantal brother.¹⁹ This is why Abraham was not lying to Abimelech when he called Sarah his sister (Gen. 26:7). This is why the betrothed man in the Song of Solomon exclaimed, “Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse. . . . How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse!” (Song 4:9a, 10a). The bridegroom promised to care for the woman as if he were her brother. Covenantally, she was adopted into the family of her husband. The Western practice of giving the bride the last name of her husband indicates her adoption into the bridegroom’s family. This is also why both sets of parental in-laws are usually referred to as Mom or Dad by the children. It is a verbal acknowledgment of the covenantal relationship of adoption.

D. The Concubine

Rachel and Leah complained that their father Laban had squandered the inheritance that they and their children were entitled to (Gen. 31:14–16), treating them as if they had been sold into slavery. They had in mind the accumulated earnings of fourteen years of Jacob’s labors to pay their bride prices. Jacob had earned this wealth back from Laban, as they recognized (v. 16), but this meant that it once again belonged to Jacob; they still had no dowries. They were being re-legated by their father to the status of concubines, not wives.

1. *Endowing a Daughter*

In ancient Israel, keeping the bride price was the economic equivalent of selling a daughter into slavery. When a father in this way sold his daughter to a husband, he was legally making her a concubine. He did not pass on to her any portion of the money he had received from the bridegroom or her future father-in-law. He kept it all. This is why the transaction was a purchase. His daughter was becoming a bondservant inside another man’s household. This bondservice would not be governed by the sabbatical principle of the year of release. Also, her father did not retain the right of redeeming her as her kinsman-re-

19. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, pp. 149–51.

deemer, unless the man who bought her decided before the marriage to return her, and her father could and would repay him his bride price. Thus, a concubine was a permanent bondservant who worked at the discretion of her husband.

Does this mean that her betrothed husband could have sold her to another Hebrew at will? To answer this question, we must first look at the covenantal nature of her position. The text speaks of “her master, who hath betrothed her.” The betrothal constituted a marriage promise, but because she was not a free woman, meaning a woman with a dowry, this was not a totally binding vow on his part. It was not the same legally as a promise to marry a free woman for whom a bride price had been paid, and who brought a dowry into the marriage. We know that it was not the same, because it was not considered adultery for another man to have sexual relations with her. The two would be scourged but not executed, “because she was not free” (Lev. 19:20). If a woman possessed a dowry, then a betrothal was the same covenantally as a marriage vow. Sexual relations with such a woman was a capital crime (Deut. 22:23–24). Thus, there were two kinds of betrothals; they were covenantally and legally different. The covenantal sign that distinguished between them was the dowry. The difference was covenantal—free vs. unfree—but the visible manifestation of this difference was economic.

The question then arises: Which was the determining factor in determining her status, the legal or the economic? *The Bible always places the foundational status of all human relationships in the legal sphere, not the physical, intellectual, emotional, or economic sphere.* It is this legal relationship that governs all of God’s relationships with mankind, either saved or lost. What was the covenantal basis of her legal status as a wife? Her position as an *adopted daughter*. Her father allowed her to be adopted by another family. He relinquished his position as her covenantal representative before God.

What about her status as a concubine? Her father determined the economic terms of her adoption. He chose to keep the bride price for himself. In so doing, he placed her in a second-best legal status. His motivation was no doubt deeply tied to his personal or familistic economic goals, but the basis of her status as a concubine was the result of a *legal transfer of covenantal authority over her*, not economics as such. Her primary status was that of wife, meaning an adopted sister (Song 4:9–10). Her secondary legal status as a concubine stemmed from the nature of the one-step transfer of wealth from the bride-

groom to her father. Biblical law recognized her vulnerability and took steps to protect her. Her father determined her legal status; economics was his motivating factor in making this legal determination.

2. *Consummation and Legal Protection*

Once their sexual union had taken place, the marriage was covenantally complete. It then became a capital crime for another man to take her sexually. Thus, she became a true wife. We now return to the original question: Could her husband then sell her to anyone who would pay him what he had paid to her father? The text does not indicate any such right on his part. He could sell her to another Hebrew during the betrothal period with her family's consent. He could thereby transfer her covenantal position as an *adopted woman*, though not to a resident alien, who did not have the legal right of adopting Hebrews into his household. But once covenantally bonded sexually before God, she became his wife. He could not divorce her, except insofar as any wife could be divorced. The Bible is silent about any special divorce proceedings available to him under concubinage.

On the other hand, the concubine could divorce him under certain specified circumstances. She had the three rights of any wife: food, clothing, and sexual relations. This meant that she had the right to be given an opportunity to bear children. The text says, "If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money" (vv. 10–11). Why list food and clothing here? Any bondservant had the right to food and clothing. Masters could not legally starve their servants, nor force them to go naked. Thus, what the right to food and clothing must have meant in this case was food and clothing *comparable to that received by the new wife*.

If her husband did not treat the concubine equally, then she could leave his household free of charge. She could not be legally compelled to remain in her husband's household if she could prove to the authorities that she was being treated as a second-class wife. In other words, her legal status as a free woman had been lost when her father sold her, but, once married, she became a wife who could not be overtly discriminated against. Her second-class legal status disappeared upon sexual consummation; only her second-class economic status remained. She could take no economic assets out of the marriage, other than her children, but other than this, she possessed equal status with

her husband's other wives. Of course, she was tied to him economically to the extent that her lifestyle outside her husband's care might have looked even worse to her, and she possessed no dowry. Nevertheless, she retained the formal legal right to leave his household. Her father kept the original purchase price, and she went free.

3. *Keeping the Children*

Would she have been able to bring her children with her? It could be argued that the concubine would have had to leave her children behind, for children of a bondservant wife stayed with the master when the servant left (Ex. 21:4), and the master in this case was her husband. But this would miss the point. The children did go with the concubine when her former slave husband redeemed her. The ex-slave husband's payment of the redemption price (bride price) to his former master made her his wife rather than a concubine, for her children served as her dowry. Hagar took Ishmael when she was forced out of Abraham's household (Gen. 21:9–14). She was not divorcing Abraham because he had refused her anything; rather, he was divorcing her. Sarah's decision to remove Ishmael from Abraham's household and from any inheritance necessarily involved Abraham's divorce of Hagar; otherwise, Abraham possessed no legal authority to send Ishmael out of his household. Abraham disinherited Ishmael. How? *By revoking the adopted status of Ishmael's mother.* Ishmael then became a member of his mother's household, not Abraham's.

Does this mean that children should today go with their lawfully divorced mother? No. The Old Testament allowed husbands to divorce wives for reasons other than the wives' commission of capital crimes (Deut. 24:1). Jesus said that such a law had been given by Moses because of the hardness of their hearts (Matt. 19:8).²⁰ The new Testament requirement is far more rigorous: only the capital crimes of the Old Testament serve as lawful grounds of divorce—in effect, divorce by *covenantal death*.²¹ Covenantally dead people should not be allowed to take their children with them. The children should remain with the innocent injured party.

20. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix A, section on "Jesus vs. the Mosaic Law of Remarriage," subsection on "Matthew 19:3–9."

21. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, pp. 401–15; Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

Upon what legal principle could the mistreated concubine have taken her children with her? By an appeal to her own legal status. The legal basis of the marriage had been her adoption into the master's family. By the husband's treating her in such a way that she had legally regained her freedom, she was no longer an adopted member of his family. As the innocent victim, she had reclaimed her former legal status. *Biblical law always defends the innocent party.* She would therefore keep the children when she left her husband's household. She would then be in the position of a widow who was the head of her own household (Num. 30:9). *The legal issues in biblical covenant arrangements are based on ethics, not blood or biology.* Her husband had not treated her righteously. If she remained single and outside any man's household authority, she became both father and mother to her children, just as a widow became.²² If she remarried, the new husband adopted her and her children into his family. If she returned to her father's house, he became the true father of her children. *Fatherhood in all cases was by adoption, not biology.* This legal principle reflects our own covenantal status before God: we are either disinherited children because of Adam's sin, or else we are adopted children in God's household because of Christ's death and resurrection (John 1:12).

22. If the Numbers 30:9 principle governed her, meaning that she refused to return to her father's house, she became both father and mother. She became a daughter of God, which is why a widow was allowed to take a vow before God without getting approval from anyone. Her legal subordination to God no longer required a visible male head of household as her representative. Biblically, Jesus Christ became her intermediary.

4. A Woman Without Capital

Then in what visible way was a former concubine different from a former wife? Only in terms of her capital. She took no dowry with her when she left, for she had brought no dowry to the marriage when she came. A bride price transaction without a dowry for the daughter in fact was *a servant purchase price*. A concubine had no personally held economic protection. If treated unequally compared to another wife, she could return to her father's household, and she could marry again. She could also remain single and alone, although that was rare in any agricultural society, except for a few urban occupations such as tavern-keeping and prostitution, and the court would probably remove her children from her if she became a prostitute. Nevertheless, an honest, moral woman was legally able to leave her husband's house with her children: her new dowry.

She could return to her father's household without a sense of becoming a needless burden, because her father had been paid. He had kept all of the bride price, which made it more strictly an economic transaction. She had borne the risk of winding up with a husband who mistreated her, so her father could have no legitimate complaints about her returning home.

E. New Testament Applications

Jesus Christ paid the bride price to God through His death at Calvary. This is the basis of His marriage to the bride, the church. It is also the basis of all marriages through God's common grace.²³ Christ paid the bride price for all of humanity, for each individual, for Old Covenant Israel, and for New Covenant Israel. It was the highest price that has ever been paid. Old Covenant Israel looked forward to this payment, while New Covenant Israel now looks backward.²⁴ This is the proper New Testament starting point for any discussion of the bride

23. If we do not maintain that Christ's payment of the bride price is the foundation of all marriages through common grace, then we must conclude that there is still a valid form of concubinage among non-Christians. We would have to argue that only Christian brides are exempt from the requirements of the bride price/dowry system.

24. Self-professed Old Covenant Israelites (the Jews of today), described in Romans 11 as the branches that were cut off (v. 17–19), still look forward to this payment, but God requires them to join themselves to the church and begin to look backward. There is only one bride, the church of Jesus Christ. God is not a polygamist. The old bride, national Israel, was executed for her whoredoms in A.D. 70. See David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

price.

One conclusion is inescapable: *there are no more concubines in the New Testament economy*. That institution was done away with by Calvary. If concubinage were still lawfully in force, it would point away from Christ's definitive overcoming of mankind's slavery to sin, the ultimate form of bondage. Permanent servitude, except as a criminal penalty (restitution), is no longer biblically sanctioned as a valid institutional arrangement.

1. Adoption and Legal Status

The concubine's second-class legal status always ended with the consummation of the marriage. It applied only to the betrothal period. The whole imagery of the marriage supper of the lamb²⁵ points to the status of the church as a free woman, a full bride in legal possession of a vast dowry, the whole earth.²⁶ There are no slave wives any more; all lawfully married women are regarded by God as having entered marriage as free women. They gained their status as free women by means of Christ's payment of the bride price at Calvary. This payment serves as the legal basis of *God's adoption of His people into His eternal family*. The covenantal distinctions between the betrothed slave wife and the betrothed free wife have disappeared. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27–28). Galatians 4 is the chapter above all others in the Bible that deals with spiritual adoption—"the adoption of sons" (v. 5)—and our deliverance out of the family of the bondwoman into the family of the free woman, the "Jerusalem which is above" which is free, "the mother of us all" (v. 26). The church rather than the family is the agency of covenantal adoption in New Testament times. It is the agency that publicly represents the new birth.²⁷

25. Gary North, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

26. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

27. In churches that fully honor this principle, infants are baptized. Parents hand over the infant to the pastor, who then baptizes it, and hands it back. This is the public symbol of the inability of parents in their own strength to give eternal life to their children. The church adopts children publicly, and then hands them back to parents as the designated agents of the church—the covenanted, international, trans-historical institution known as the bride of Christ. This does not guarantee the continuing cov-

The justification of divorce for the concubine was that her husband treated another wife with greater favor. The New Testament's standard is monogamy, for only through membership in Christ's bride, the church, can people find salvation. God is not a bigamist; Israel as a bride has been lawfully divorced because of her rebellion. He has not taken an additional new wife; the church is the replacement for the lawfully divorced wife. Israel must become part of the church if she is ever to regain her status as bride (Rom. 11). Therefore, men are not supposed to be bigamists. Monogamy was the legal standard for Hebrew kings (Deut. 17:17), and this "one wife" standard is explicitly stated as a requirement for church elders (I Tim. 3:2).

Brides can no longer legally be offered for sale by fathers. Fathers are no longer allowed to demand a bride price as a condition of a daughter's marriage. Institutionally, there is no longer any necessity for the bride price, except in cases of criminal penalties imposed by the church or state on offending males in cases of the seduction of a virgin.²⁸ Church symbols and church discipline have replaced the original functions of the bride price/dowry system. First, baptism and church membership have become the screening devices. Second, baptism and church membership also have become the evidence of covenantal subordination to the family of God. Third, various economic contracts and legal provisions for the protection of the innocent victim of a divorce become the proper protective devices. Finally, husbands are not allowed to take extra wives, so there is clearly no purpose in establishing special divorce laws to protect a concubine who is not being treated equally to the new wife.²⁹

2. From Circumcision to Baptism

Because daughters receive the covenantal sign of baptism, the New Testament's position is that in all but biological respects, *adult women*

enantal faithfulness of the children, but it does honor the legal principle that without adoption into the family of God, each person stands condemned before God.

28. See Chapter 47: "Seduction and Servitude."

29. There is this exception to the rule against divorce laws for concubines. If a polygamous culture converts to Christ, the missionaries would be foolish to impose monogamy retroactively on existing polygamous households. The husbands would then throw wives out of their homes, whether they wanted to stay or not. Who would protect or remarry these divorced wives? They would be tempted to become prostitutes. In such mission situations, biblical law would protect concubines who were subsequently treated as second-class wives. They could lawfully leave their husbands if they chose to.

are now covenantally equal with adult men. The only exception is that women are not allowed to speak in church worship services (I Cor. 14:34). Circumcision as a required rite is no longer binding in the New Testament era. It is significant that Paul inserted his famous statement on the irrelevance of circumcision in the middle of his chapter on marriage: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing" (I Cor. 7:19a).

The locus of final earthly authority for approving a marriage has shifted from the family to the church. This is manifested symbolically by the fact that baptism has replaced circumcision as the covenantal sign of family membership. The bride's father therefore no longer serves as the "circumciser" of the bridegroom, for the rite of circumcision no longer has any role to play covenantally. The church is the ultimate marital screening agent today for covenant-keepers.

A father who prohibits his daughter from marrying can be overruled by the church or churches to which the communicant prospective partners belong. The idea that a non-Christian father can lawfully and legitimately prohibit his Christian daughter from marrying a Christian man is outrageous theologically. The assertion that the couple is legally defenseless, and that they must confine their efforts to praying that her father will change his mind, is an indirect attack on the legitimate authority of the church.³⁰ Similarly, a father may authorize the marriage of his Christian daughter to a pagan young man, but the church can lawfully before God veto the proposed marriage and place the daughter under discipline if she follows her father's advice. She cannot biblically claim her father's authorization of the marriage as somehow validating it.

The abolition of concubinage did not abolish the covenantal principle of hierarchy. *Someone must represent the bride.* Who represents the girl in the name of Jesus Christ in today's marriage arrangements? Obviously, the girl's father does, unless the church has intervened to sanction the marriage if her father has immorally denied permission. *But the father represents his daughter as the agent of the church rather than as the agent of the bloodline family.* The church, as the true covenantal family of the God-adopted believer, retains its sanctioning authority. It is this *fundamental transfer of authority from the family to*

30. In effect, such an argument makes a father the equivalent of the Pope. It is odd that Protestants sometimes use such arguments, for such a view of paternal authority transforms the New Testament family into a pagan, patriarchal, humanistic institution, one whose standards are autonomous, governed by neither church nor state.

the church, as symbolized ritually by the abolition of circumcision and the substitution of baptism, that has made the bride price and dowry legally optional. Christ has paid the bride price for His church, and His church now has become the locus of primary covenantal authority for conducting marriages, enforcing the terms of the marriage covenant, and screening the prospective partners. The bridegroom submits himself to the jurisdiction of the church.

We have seen that the bride price-dowry system was part of a program of inheritance. The daughter received a dowry in lieu of receiving her share of her father's inheritance. Her marriage relieved her of the requirement to support her aged parents. I am arguing that Christ's establishment of His church has made optional this transfer of funds. The church has become the new screening agent. This raises fundamental questions concerning family inheritance. Does this mean that the church becomes the primary agent for the care of older people, replacing the children? No. The church does become the agent of last resort if families fail in their responsibilities. Older widows (age 60 and older) whose families fail to support them are to be supported by the church (I Tim. 5:9–10). Family members of such widows thereby identify themselves covenantally as infidels (v. 8), and would be excommunicated. The church then becomes the covenantal kinsman-redeemer of the widows.

Today, sons and daughters inherit. They both receive expensive educations. Daughters also share in the various responsibilities of caring for aged parents, to the extent that daughters possess independent capital. Their husbands know that they may be called upon to assist aged in-laws. There is no clear line of authority for establishing institutional responsibility for aged parents, nor is there a clear structure of inheritance. It was far easier to establish such responsibility when blood lines and gender determined inheritance. Inheritance in the New Testament is expressly covenantal rather than familistic. This blurs the formal, legal lines of economic responsibility.

Membership in the church is of far greater consequence than membership in the family. Jesus was at war with any view of the human family that elevated it to equality with the church. "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:35–36). The biblical economic goal is to increase the dominion of Christians, not families as such; the institutional focus is on the kingdom rather than

the family. Thus, parents should not leave great wealth to apostate children. Parents should normally leave their wealth to believing children, *assuming* that the children are economically competent and faithful to the external requirements of the covenant. If they are not, then parents should consider setting up trusts governed by competent church members. The only exception to these guidelines is where the apostate children give evidence that they are lawful, parent-honoring, responsibility-affirming people who are far more competent economically than the family's creed-affirming children, and who appear to be willing and able to support the aged parents. As a matter of self-defense, parents would transfer sufficient wealth to these children to compensate them for the expected future burden of caring for them in old age. Unbelieving children who abide by the external terms of the covenant are to this extent sanctified—set apart—by believing parents.

Parents must use their wealth to endow those who will carry their religious vision into the future, though not necessarily their names. Covenantally faithful daughters should inherit. Christian charities should also inherit. The Christian vision is far broader than family or tribe. The transfer of the kingdom to the "nation" of the church (Matt. 21:43)³¹ testified to this shift in sovereignty away from tribal, regional, and even familial groups.

3. *Inheritance or Dowry?*

Because of their change in covenantal status in the New Testament, there is no reason to believe that daughters should not inherit, even if they have brothers. Sisters without brothers were allowed to inherit in the Old Testament: the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. Because of the operation of the jubilee land tenure law, daughters who inherited were required to marry only inside the tribe of their fathers (Num. 36:8).³² With Jesus' fulfillment of the jubilee law (Luke 4),³³ and with the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70, these restrictions on inheritance disappeared. Nevertheless, family responsibilities did not disappear just because tribal responsibility did. If daughters can lawfully inherit, then *daughters who inherit and their husbands necessarily be-*

31. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), Introduction. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

32. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

33. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

come legally responsible for the care of her aged parents. Thus, the husband of a daughter who prefers to inherit rather than accept a dowry should legally agree in advance to become equally liable for the care of her parents as any of her brothers. Because the West ignores such responsibilities, it has ignored these sorts of legitimate family legal contracts. As a result, families have not been careful to take care of aged parents. This furthered the expansion of the welfare state, for its proponents have successfully appealed to guilt-ridden voters in the name of indigent aged parents. The welfare state has steadily made itself the primary heir.³⁴

The dowry is legitimate, though not required, as an alternative to inheritance. If a father decides to pay for the education of his daughter, he should tell her in advance the terms of the arrangement. If this is not her dowry, but is instead an advance payment of her lawful inheritance, then he need not seek to collect a bride price from her future husband, but she and her husband will be expected to bear their share of the costs of supporting the parents in their old age. If her education or a very expensive wedding is her dowry, this constitutes a formal admission on her part and on the part of her husband of their obligation to repay him in the form of a bride price—highly unlikely in our day—either before the marriage or in the years following the marriage.

Because the bride price is seldom paid today, daughters and bridegrooms implicitly do become responsible for the support of her parents. Such implicit support is no longer regarded as enforceable by civil law, however. Thus, the state has steadily encroached on the family as the primary agency for the support of aged parents. Taxes have replaced both the bride price and financial support by children. There has been no escape from these biblical economic and legal responsibilities; there is only a shift in institutional authority for collecting and distributing the funds.

4. Alternatives to the Dowry

The economic consequences of divorce are the big economic problem that has arisen from the disappearance of the bride price and/or dowry system. When the husband walks out of the marriage, all he generally is required by law to pay is child support. Alimony payments to wives have become far less common in the United States since the mid-1970s. Divorced wives receive very little, except in cases

34. Chapter 25.

where there is a major distribution of property. Few families possess that much debt-free property to divide. There is a slogan that says that “the husband gets the mortgage, and the wife gets the house.” Then the husband stops paying on the mortgage, and the lending institution gets the house. At the youngest child’s eighteenth birthday, the father’s responsibility ends. The wife and her parents are cut off.

If there were not so much debt in society, then community property laws would protect wives far better. By requiring the husband to forfeit half of their property to the divorced wife, the state does act as an intermediary. What should be required, however, is the honoring of the biblical principle of *covenantal death*. The offending party should take nothing; the injured party should keep everything, including all the children. The offending party should not even be given visitation rights. If biblical law were enforced, the offending party would often be publicly executed. Only because the state has been negligent in its duty to enforce the biblically required standards and sanctions have divorce settlements become a problem. Community property laws—the automatic division of family assets—were the precursor of no-fault divorce, which in a debt-ridden society is another way of guaranteeing the impoverishment of divorced wives.

One way to protect the daughter and her parents would be for the church (which becomes ultimately liable economically for indigent members) to require the prospective bridegroom to agree in writing to give his wife sufficient funds for her to take out a term life insurance policy on his life. The policy would be owned by his wife or owned by a diaconate-managed trust in the name of the wife. He would do the same for her parents, with the premium money being given by the bridegroom to both wife and parents in advance of the wedding. He would sign the policy immediately after the wedding ceremony: no signature, no consummation. A refusal to sign would annul the marriage. He would not own the policy; therefore, he could not name new beneficiaries, or cancel the policies, should he walk out of the marriage. He would subsequently pay additional annual premiums each year, so that the paid-up policies would be extended over time, or new policies be purchased.

Another way to reduce the likelihood of his walking out is to require him to agree in advance to create irrevocable trusts for his wife each time the couple buys any major investment, with her father or the diaconate as the trustee. Everything they buy that costs over, say, five ounces of gold during the first decade of their marriage is placed into

this trust. The father-in-law should require the son-in-law to agree in writing to put at least ten percent of his salary into an automatic savings account inside the wife's trust. The husband would be legally allowed only to suggest where this money should be invested. Her brother (or someone covenantally responsible) would be named in the trust as the successor trustee, in case of the father-in-law's death.

All of this today would be regarded as "crass" and "mercenary." So was the bride price and dowry system of the Old Testament. The system offered economic protection to the economically vulnerable.

5. Freedom and Risks

All women in New Testament times have been freed from the Old Testament's requirement of bringing dowries into their marriages in order to avoid the second-class status of concubinage. This testifies to their status as wives whose bride price has been paid. The economic reality of this transformation was not visible in history for many centuries, but only because Western capitalism had not made it economically feasible for most young women and young men to leave home and marry, with or without parental financial support. The growth of highly urbanized capitalism changed this picture in the twentieth century. This development has placed heavy new economic and moral responsibilities on the shoulders of single adult women. With greater authority inevitably comes greater responsibility. They can set the terms of their own marriages. What we have seen is that they have proven to be tragically incompetent bargainers. No one represents them any more. With the rise of no-fault divorce, not even the civil government protects their interests any longer. In the United States in the mid-1990s, one year after a divorce, the woman's standard of living has fallen by about 30%, while her former husband's living standard may have risen by 10%.³⁵

To ignore these economic realities in the name of formal biblical law would be foolish. The dowry is not legally required in order to avoid concubinage, because concubinage is no longer a biblical office, but this does not solve the economic problem of the economic vulnerability of wives, especially in an increasingly humanistic civilization in which divorce is regarded as some sort of opportunity to escape responsibility—an economic subsidy to lawless, irresponsible males if

35. Associated Press story, *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (May 18, 1996); reproduced in *Christian News* (May 27, 1996), p. 3.

there ever was one. When husbands walk out of a marriage, leaving the care of children to the wives, as well as the wives' support of themselves, the division of labor is restricted. Wives must become self-supporting, even when husbands pay child support, and in millions of cases, they refuse. With this contraction of the division of labor, wives' personal productivity necessarily falls, and therefore their net income falls. The husbands find younger wives to marry, but divorced wives over age 35 with children seldom find husbands. The majority of divorced husbands win; the majority of divorced wives lose. Thus, wives without dowries are still unprotected economically, just as they were in the Old Testament. The difference is, concubines had biblical laws to protect them in the Old Testament. So did their aged parents. Today, these economic problems must be dealt with early by voluntary contract rather than by civil law. They seldom are, except in second marriages³⁶ or in cohabitation.³⁷ In the latter cases, women recognize more clearly how vulnerable they are legally and economically.

Conclusion

The Old Testament authorized two forms of marriage contracts: free marriage and concubinage. The free wife brought a dowry into the marriage; the concubine did not. Both forms of marriage were lawful, but concubinage was less desirable. It left wives far more vulnerable to divorce or neglect by husbands.

The bride price was a requirement for marriage. If the father used the money to endow his daughter, she entered the marriage as a free woman. If he kept the bride price for himself, she entered as a concubine. The system allowed poor girls to escape from a life of poverty in their fathers' households.

The basis of Old Testament marriage was adoption. In effect, it was a symbol of the new birth, which is also a covenantal adoption (John 1:12). The bridegroom adopted the girl into his family. He had to gain the cooperation of her father in this transfer of family membership from her family to his. Fathers used the bride price system to screen out bridegrooms who were more likely to be economically irresponsible. When fathers transferred to bridegrooms their covenantal office as God's representative for their daughters, they wanted some

36. Georgia Dullea, "Prenuptial Agreements the 2nd Time Around," *New York Times* (June 7, 1982).

37. <http://bit.ly/prenup-cohab>.

visible sign that the recipient would be responsible. The payment of the bride price was a manifestation of the bridegroom's competence and also a symbol of his subordination to the girl's family.

The New Testament annulled the bride price system by transferring the marital adoption process to the church. There are no lawful concubines today. Christ's payment of the bride price to God the Father at Calvary marked Him as the Bridegroom to the true bride, the church. The church is today the appropriate agency of the covenantal adoption process of marriage. Like God, who found abandoned Israel as an infant and raised her, and later married her (Ezek. 16), so the church baptizes children and then later sanctions the human marriage bond that reflects Christ's love of His church (Eph. 5:22–33). Christian fathers still screen prospective bridegrooms, but as delegated agents of the church rather than as agents of the extended bloodline family.

The church is the ultimate protector of unlawfully divorced wives. The preaching of the gospel is to lead to the rewriting of the divorce laws. The legal structure should protect the innocent partner and impose heavy sanctions on the offending partner, up to and including the death penalty for capital crimes identified by the Bible. The state should recognize in its statutes that biblical divorce is always and only by death, and this includes covenantal death.

When marriage partners are not Christians, the state should become the judicial sanctioning agency, for its laws also govern marriage and divorce. It becomes the primary agency by default. The state alone possesses the lawful monopoly of violence. It can punish those who disobey certain of God's standards, including certain aspects of marriage. The family no longer possesses any legal authority to marry or divorce couples. Fathers can lawfully prevent marriages under some circumstances, but they cannot perform lawful marriages simply and solely because they hold the office of father.

EXECUTING A REBELLIOUS SON

And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death (Ex. 21:15).

And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death (Ex. 21:17).

The theocentric principle here is obvious: God the Father must not be attacked by His children. Parents are God's covenantal agents in the family, which is a hierarchical, oath-bound covenantal institution. They are God's covenantal *representatives* in the family. To strike an earthly parent is the covenantal equivalent of striking at God. It is an act of moral rebellion so great that the death penalty is mandated by biblical law.

In a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 21, Moses laid down the following law. If a son is morally rebellious, and he refuses to obey his father or mother, the parents jointly are required to bring him into civil court. The parents must testify against their son. The son is a glutton and a drunkard. That is, *he is a fully responsible adult*. The citizens are required to stone him to death (Deut. 21:18–21).

This law had nothing to do with tribal separatism (seed laws) or the inheritance of tribal land (land laws). It was not a priestly law. So, it was a cross-boundary law. Therefore, it is still in force.

It did have impact on inheritance. The biblical principle of inheritance is this: the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22).¹ A rebellious son should not inherit. This would reverse the biblical order. The wealth of the just is not to be laid up for the wicked.

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

A. Agents of Society

Both parents are required by biblical law to bring a covenant lawsuit against their rebellious son.² This double witness is sufficient to convict. As I explain in my comments on this passage, the parents act as agents of God, but also as agents of the holy commonwealth. Their son is a criminal, as defined by biblical law. He is a rebel. The family is not authorized to execute him. This authority belongs to the civil court. So, the parents are required to bring formal charges against him. Not to do this is to transfer onto society the risk of becoming the son's victim. They possess intimate knowledge of his moral character. They are to act as defenders of the community by charging him with a crime. They have a moral and legal obligation to act as covenant lawsuit initiators.³

Because they possess detailed knowledge of his character and behavior, they are the first line of defense against the spread of rebelliousness. They must defend their own authority inside their household, but their responsibility goes beyond the household. They are agents of the court. The court cannot know as much as they do about their son. A court that attempted to gather this degree of knowledge would exercise tyrannical power. So, God has mandated parents to act on His behalf in protecting the society against rebellion. God does not authorize parents to impose capital punishment. Instead, He has announced the parents' responsibility to bring their son before the court.

In other laws to which execution is mandated, the victim decides, if he is an adult and if he is still alive, i.e., not the victim of murder. Yet in this case, the state must execute. Few parents would cooperate on their own authority, meaning on behalf solely of themselves. The existence of capital punishment is evidence that the parents are acting as agents of the court. What the son has done to them is evidence of what he will do to others outside his family. The parents are therefore required to bring him to trial.

What if they refuse to bring a formal charge against their rebellious son? Then they have implicitly subsidized evil behavior. They have implicitly *sanctioned* it. They know that they are risking the possibility that he will become an incorrigible adult. If he does, they will lose him anyway. Better to bring him before the civil court early. Better to obey

2. On the covenant lawsuit, see Appendix M, Section J.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 51.

God. Better to avoid God's sanctions against the family for the parents' refusal to obey. The son may learn fear of the civil court even though he has no fear of the family court.

If they bring him several times, the court will undoubtedly recommend increased sanctions. He has been identified as an incorrigible youth. The day that he commits a crime against someone outside his family, the court will be able to demonstrate to the victim that leniency is no solution, that this man is a habitual criminal. Thus, by allowing parents to insist on the death penalty, but by also allowing them to be lenient, God encourages parents to identify rebellious sons before the latter become incorrigible criminals. The court can take steps to enforce parentally recommended sanctions before it is too late.

B. Restricting a Criminal Class

The law in Deuteronomy, Rushdoony argued, is a law against the development of a professional criminal class. "But the godly exercise of capital punishment cleanses the land of evil and protects the righteous. In calling for the death of incorrigible juvenile delinquents, which means, therefore, in terms of case law, the death of incorrigible adult delinquents; the law declares, 'so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear' (Deut. 21:21)."⁴ His mistake was to see this as specifying juvenile delinquents. It was a law against adult sons: drunkards and gluttons.

Such a son was a physical threat to his parents. The law in Exodus 21 refers to violence. This is not a law against a young child who hits a parent. The parent can hit back, and should. The child must learn early that striking a parent is a serious crime. The should point to this case law as evidence. If the civil government has executed a few sons for this crime, the parents can point to this as a warning. The threat of execution is a powerful warning.

The Mosaic case laws were all warnings. This warning was directed against physical rebellion. The son who is willing to injure a parent is a threat to the social order. Biblical society has a moral obligation and the legal authority to remove such citizens from history. The state must execute.

4. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 77-78; cf. p. 188.

Conclusion

A mark of rebellion is this crime: physically striking a parent. This indicates the presence of a hardened criminal. These two case laws provide society with a tool to remove such rebels from their midst. Once rebellion has gone so far that a son strikes or curses a parent, it must be removed. This removal is attained on a permanent basis through public execution.

KIDNAPPING

And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death (Ex. 21:16).

In Appendix M, I present my thesis that the pleonasm, “he shall surely be put to death,” is binding on the civil authorities whenever the state initiates the prosecution of the covenant lawsuit, but it does not bind the victim when he initiates the prosecution solely on his own behalf. We must examine the implications of this principle in the case of kidnapping, a crime that is bound by the terms of the pleonasm.

A. The Nature of the Crime

Before getting to this problem, however, we must search for the theocentric principle that governs the crime of kidnapping. James Jordan quite properly listed kidnapping under the general heading of *violence*. The nature of violence biblically is that it represents an attempted assault on God, an attempt to murder God by murdering His image.¹ He listed other aspects of violence: the desire of sinful men to play god, the desire to achieve autonomous vengeance, and sado-masochism.² Violence should be understood as a sinner’s rebellious attempt to achieve dominion by power.³ It is a form of *revolution*. The preaching of the gospel is intended to reduce violence.

Ultimately, this crime and its civil penalty should be understood in terms of the assumption of a *theocentric* universe. Jordan’s assessment is valid: “The death penalty is appropriate because kidnapping is an assault on the very person of the image of God, and as such is a radical manifestation of man’s desire to murder God. Like rape, it is a deep vi-

1. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 93. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–96.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

olation of personhood and manifests a deep-rooted contempt for God and his image.”⁴

Nevertheless, the crime of kidnapping goes beyond the question of the image of God in man. Kidnapping is more than an assault against God’s image in man. It is not simply man’s blood that is inviolate (Gen. 9:6); it is also his life’s *calling*. It is not simply his image that commands respect from other men; it is also his *God-ordained assignment in life*. Perhaps it would be better to argue that man’s *imaging* also includes the *calling*. God is revealed in Genesis 1 as a God who works and who judges. Man images this God. Kidnapping is therefore an assault on both of these aspects of man’s imaging.

Who is the true owner of the kidnapper’s victim? God is. God owns the whole world (Ps. 50:10).⁵ Nevertheless, stealing a privately owned animal is not a capital crime (Ex. 22:1).⁶ Why the special case of a man? The answer is found in man’s special position: subordinate under God and possessing authority over the creation. Man is made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26;⁷ 9:6). By interfering with a man’s God-given calling before God, the kidnapper disrupts God’s revealed administrative structure for subduing the earth. Each man must work out his salvation—or, presumably, work out his damnation—with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).⁸ The kidnapper asserts his presumed autonomy and authority over the victim, as if he were God, as if he possessed a lawful right to determine what another man’s responsibilities on earth ought to be.

B. The Death Penalty

The Bible recognizes that there are two potential criminals involved in kidnapping: the actual kidnapper and the person to whom he sells the victim. The international slave trade did exist. The passage deals with both types of criminal: “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.” Both the kidnapper and the recipient of the stolen victim are subject to

4. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

5. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

6. Chapter 43.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

8. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

the death penalty.⁹ Slave traders were at risk.

The obvious problem with a universally mandatory death penalty is that a crime whose effects are less permanent than murder bears the same permanent penalty that murder does. Consider the case of kidnapping. The kidnapper has a strong incentive to kill the victim if he thinks that the authorities are closing in on him. The victim may later identify him as the kidnapper; better to kill the source of the incriminating evidence. After all, the penalty for murder is the same as the penalty for kidnapping. A person can only be killed once by the civil government. Jordan recognized this problem.¹⁰ So do humanist legal theorists.

Then why does the Bible specify the death penalty for kidnapping? Isn't this dangerous for the victim? Other ancient Near Eastern law codes—if we can accurately call them codes¹¹—did not impose such a harsh penalty. The code of Hammurabi specified the death penalty for kidnapping only when an aristocrat kidnapped the young son of another aristocrat.¹² What lies behind the rigorous biblical penalty?

The Bible does not limit the death penalty to cases involving physical harm to the victim. The person who is kidnapped in order to be sold as a slave is not said to have been harmed. If anything, the kidnapper who intends to sell the victim into servitude has an economic incentive not to harm the victim, because an injury would presumably reduce the market value of “the property.” Yet the kidnapper potentially faces the most fearful penalty that society can inflict. Why such a concern for this crime?

9. Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 74.

10 James B. Jordan, *The Death Penalty in the Mosaic Law* (Tyler, Texas: Biblical Horizons, 1988), p. 17.

11. Shalom Paul cited the 1963 warning of his teacher, E. A. Speiser, regarding the famous Code of Hammurabi: “The handful of jurists . . . seem agreed that what we have before us is not properly a code or a digest but ‘a series of amendments to the common law of Babylon’ (Driver and Miles, *Babylonian Laws I*, p. 41).” Shalom Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 3n. But Yehezkel Kaufman insisted that Deuteronomy “is unquestionably intended to be a law code in the ancient Near Eastern sense.” *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 46.

12. Hammurabi Code, paragraph 14: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 166.

C. Sacrilege

To steal from God is a sacrilege. Rushdoony made an interesting study of the meaning and implications of sacrilege, and his general comments apply in the case of kidnapping. “*Theft* is basic to the word, and sacrilege is theft directed against God. It is apparent from this that the idea of sacrilege is present throughout Scripture. . . . The concept of sacrilege rests on God’s sovereignty and the fact that He has an absolute ownership over all things: men and the universe are God’s property. The covenant people are *doubly* God’s property: *first*, by virtue of His creation, and, *second*, by virtue of His redemption. For this reason, sin is more than personal and more than man-centered. It is a theological offense.”¹³ So serious is the crime of sacrilege that it is compared by Paul to adultery and idolatry (Rom. 2:22), both of which were capital crimes in the Old Testament.¹⁴ (The code of Hammurabi specified the death penalty for those who stole the property of either church or state, and also for those who received the stolen goods.)¹⁵

Because sacrilege is theft, it requires restitution.¹⁶ Because sacrilege is theft against God, it requires restitution to God. In this case, the crime is so great that the maximum restitution is the death of the criminal. No lower payment can suffice if the state prosecutes and convicts in God’s name. The implied assertion of autonomy by the criminal, who seeks to play God, represents a form of idolatry, worshipping another God. The kidnapper steals God’s property—a person made in His image—and seeks to profit from the asset. This is the essence of the crime of Adam, to be as God (Gen. 3:5).

D. Future Deterrence

The death penalty is final. Its beneficial effects for society are twofold: it restrains the judgment of God on society, and it provides a deterrence effect—detering the criminal from future crime (he dies), deterring other criminals from committing similar crimes (fear of death), and deterring God from bringing His covenant judgments on the com-

13. R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, vol. II of *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1982), p. 28.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

15. CH, paragraph 6; *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 166. There was an exception: if the person stole an ox or a sheep from church or state, he paid 30-fold restitution; it was ten-fold restitution if the animal had belonged to a private citizen: CH, paragraph 8, *idem*.

16. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, p. 33.

munity for its failure to uphold covenant law (fear of God's wrath). Capital punishment is God's way of telling criminals, whether convicted criminals or potential criminals, that they have gone too far by committing certain crimes. It also warns the community that biblical law is to be respected.

Obviously, there is no element of rehabilitation for the convicted criminal in the imposition of the death penalty. The state speeds the convicted criminal's march toward final judgment. The state delivers the sinner into the presence of the final and perfect Judge.¹⁷

If we interpret the presence of the pleonasm as making the death penalty mandatory, irrespective of the wishes of the victim, then we create a problem for the victim. *A mandatory death penalty may actually increase the risk to the victim, once the criminal act has taken place.* First, the victim may have seen the criminal. His positive identification of the kidnapper and his testimony against him can convict him. Second, should the criminal begin to suspect that he is about to be caught by the authorities, he may choose to kill the victim and dispose of the body. By disposing of the evidence of the crime, the victim loses his life, while the criminal reduces his risk of being detected. This is a good reason to suppose that the death penalty for kidnapping is a maximum allowable penalty, one which a victim can impose but need not impose on a convicted kidnapper.

What if the kidnapper has stolen more than one adult person? What if one adult victim asks the court to impose the death penalty, but the other victim asks for leniency? Or, if the kidnapper has stolen more than one minor, what if the parent or legal guardian of one asks for the death penalty, but the parent or legal guardian of the other recommends leniency? The victim who demands execution is sovereign. The extension of mercy is not mandatory. The pleonasm of execution is attached to this law. The presence of the pleonasm indicates that capital punishment is the normal sanction. Anything less than execution is abnormal: a unique sign of leniency by the victim. The victim who specifies execution is adhering to God's written law. He is upholding the sanctity of the sanction against sacrilege. His decision is final.

17. One reason why the torture of a convicted criminal prior to his execution is immoral is that it symbolically arrogates to the state what God reserves exclusively for Himself: the legal authority to torture people for eternity. It is a right that God exercises exclusively. By torturing a person prior to his execution, the state asserts that its punishments are on a par with God's, that the state's penalties are to be feared as much or more than God's. On the state as torturer, see Edward Peters, *Torture* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1985), ch. 5.

Can the state prosecute if the victim declines? Only if the state is itself a victim. It seems reasonable to allow the state to recover the costs of searching for the victim. The kidnapper has stolen from the state by his criminal act. If the state successfully prosecutes a kidnapper, judges can impose a double restitution penalty payment for the costs incurred. But the judges cannot lawfully impose the capital sanction. They must uphold the principle of victim's rights.

There is the possibility that in other circumstances, the threat of the death penalty may reduce the risk to the victim. A criminal in the Bible is allowed to go to the authorities before he has been caught and make a 20% restitution payment, plus the capital value of the stolen property or unpaid vow (Lev. 6:1–7). The kidnap victim in the Old Testament presumably would have been sold as a servant. The market price of this sort of servant could have been calculated in the Old Testament.¹⁸ The judges could also have used the Bible's fixed price system for a servant killed by a goring ox: 30 shekels of silver (Ex. 21:32). Or perhaps the prices listed for human vows to the temple could have been used by the judges (Lev. 27:3–7). The Bible always offers opportunities for repentance. By allowing the kidnapper to escape the threat of the death penalty by surrendering to the authorities, biblical law reduces the threat to the kidnap victims in those cases where a kidnapper repents before he is arrested.

E. Ransom

But what about the modern form of kidnapping, where the kidnapper demands a ransom? The same principle operates: the repenting but as yet unarrested kidnapper offers to the victim the value of the ransom demanded, plus one-fifth. In most cases, this would mean a lifetime of servitude to repay the debt. Servitude for the kidnapper is

18. Wrote the mid-nineteenth-century Jewish commentator S. R. Hirsch: "The value of any human life can not be expressed in pounds, shillings and pence. But atonement-money has to be paid in certain cases. This 'atonement-money' the token value of his own life, in the case of a free man, is estimated at the amount he would fetch if sold in the market as a slave. There is no other way of fixing the amount of human life in terms of hard cash." Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained*, translated by Isaac Levy, 5 vols., *Exodus*, 3rd ed. (London: Honig & Sons, 1967), p. 323; at Exodus 21:32. This ignores another valid means of estimating a kidnapped man's hard-cash value: the ransom payment demanded by the kidnapper (what economists call "reservation value"). Another problem with Hirsch's restricted means of estimating a person's value is that today there is no lawful slave market operating. He must have known that this would complicate things for the judges.

better for the victim and society than what the modern criminal justice system imposes. The modern criminal justice system would probably impose a life sentence in jail for the criminal, at the expense of taxpayers, with parole possible (likely) in a few years. The kidnap victim gets nothing.

There was a motion picture in 1956 called *Ransom*. The hero of the film is a rich businessman. His son is kidnapped, and the kidnappers demand a huge ransom. The police tell him that kidnap victims wind up dead about half the time, whether a ransom is paid or not. The father decides not to pay. He goes to his bank and gets the money demanded by the kidnappers. He then calls in the local television station, which broadcasts his announcement. In front of him on a desk is the money, in cash. He says to all those listening that if his son is murdered, he intends to pay every cent of the money to anyone who will tell him the name of the person who kidnapped his son. He offers to pay the accomplices to the crime. He reminds the kidnapper of the risk of relying on the reliability of his accomplices. He then points to the money and declares to the kidnapper, "This is as close to this money as you'll ever get." When he returns home, his neighbors are outraged. They throw rocks through his window. He had not shown filial piety. He deserves to be an outcast. But, at the end of the movie, his son is returned to him. The kidnapper was fearful of being turned in for the reward.¹⁹

What the movie's hero did was to place a greater priority on *bringing the criminal to justice* than he placed on public acceptance of his act. (The statistical risk to his son, he had been told, was the same, whether he paid the ransom or not.) By using the ransom money in a unique way—as a reward that would increase the likelihood of someone's becoming an informant—the father increased the odds in favor of his son's survival. (The majority of crimes are probably solved as a result of informants.)²⁰ He relied on the threat of punishment more than he did on the good will of the criminal in honoring the terms of the transaction, his son's life for a cash payment. He turned to the law for protection, not to the criminal's sense of honor.

In 1973, the grandson of J. Paul Getty, one of the world's richest men, was kidnapped in Italy. The kidnapping received worldwide at-

19. The re-make of the movie in 1996 had a different ending. Only the scene with the money and the television was retained.

20. Edward Powell, "The Coming Crisis in Criminal Investigation," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter 1975–76), pp. 81–83.

tention. The kidnappers demanded over a million dollars as the ransom.²¹ Getty publicly refused to pay. He said that if he did, this would place his 14 other grandchildren in jeopardy. By not paying, he said, he was telling all other potential kidnappers that it was useless to kidnap any of his relatives. The kidnappers cut off the youth's ear and sent it to his mother. Still the grandfather refused. Privately, he lent \$850,000 to the boy's father to pay the ransom—at 4% per annum. Getty never missed an opportunity for profit.²² The gamble paid off: the kidnappers released him.²³ No other Getty relatives became victims.²⁴

F. Equal Penalties or Equal Results?

The Bible does not forbid the victim's family to pay a ransom, but the threat of the death penalty makes the risk of conviction so great that few potential kidnappers would take the risk, except for a very high return. The average citizen therefore receives additional but indirect protection because of this biblical law. The penalty to the convicted kidnapper is so high that the money which the middle-class victim's relatives could raise to pay the ransom probably would not compensate most potential kidnappers for the tremendous risk involved. Presumably, kidnappers will avoid kidnapping poorer people.

In effect, *the threat of the death penalty increases the likelihood that members of very rich families or senior employees of very rich corporations will be the primary victims of kidnappers.* Also, in cases of politically motivated kidnappings, the famous or politically powerful could become the victims. They seem to be discriminated against economically by biblical law: high penalties make it more profitable for kidnappers to target their families. On the other hand, these people

21. The price of gold was then about \$100 an ounce.

22. Fellow billionaire industrialist Armand Hammer referred to him as "that tight old weasel." Armand Hammer (with Neil Lyndon), *Hammer* (New York: Putnam's, 1987), p. 386. Hammer did respect him as an entrepreneur, however.

23 The grandson later suffered a stroke as a result of alcohol and drug abuse, and became paralyzed and blind. *Time* (March 17, 1986), p. 80.

24. I have instructed my wife never to pay a ransom for me under any conditions. I have also told her that I will not pay a ransom for her or any of our children. The goal is to reduce the risk of kidnapping before it takes place, not to increase the likelihood of the victim's survival. The evil of kidnapping should not be rewarded. It should be made devastatingly unprofitable. The same should be true for terrorist kidnappings. The original policy of the modern State of Israel regarding terrorist kidnappings was correct: a kidnapper-for-victims exchange before any victim is harmed, but no compromise thereafter.

possess greater economic resources, making it more likely that they can more easily afford to protect themselves and their relatives.

From the point of view of economic analysis, the stiff penalty for kidnapping protects society at large, though not always the actual victim of the crime, and it protects the average citizen more than it protects the rich. The law applies to all kidnappers equally; it has varying effects on different people and groups within the society. Because the Bible requires *equality before the law*, it produces *different results*. To equalize the results—equal risk for rich families and poor families—the Bible would have to impose the death penalty only for kidnappers of rich people. This, as we have seen, is what Hammurabi's Code did: it imposed the death penalty only on those who kidnapped the sons of aristocrats. The economic payoff would have to be made lower in the case of a kidnapper who steals a poor person. Therefore, in order to put poor families at risk as high as that borne by rich families, the law would have to discriminate between kidnappers of the poor and kidnappers of the rich. But *the kidnapper sins primarily against God*, so the death penalty can be specified by the victim in both cases. God is not a respecter of persons, meaning those convicted of a capital crime. The question is not the economic status of the victims, but the nature of the crime (sacrilege) and the sanctions specified by the victims (victim's rights). Thus, a consistent application of this law in every case of kidnapping increases the risk of being kidnapped for the rich.

This brings up a very important question relating to the word "equality." When men demand equality, what do they really want? If they demand *equality before the law*—"Equal penalties for identical crimes, irrespective of persons!"—then they are simultaneously demanding *unequal economic results*. This is not true only in the case of the variation of risk for different economic groups when a society demands the death penalty for all kidnappers. This is true of the economy in general. When men demand *equal economic results*, they are simultaneously demanding *inequality before the law*. Hayek's analysis is correct.

From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either the one or the other, but not both at the same time. The equality before the law which freedom requires

leads to material inequality. Our argument will be that, though where the state must use coercion for other reasons, it should treat all people alike, the desire of making people more alike in their condition cannot be accepted in a free society as a justification for further and discriminatory coercion.²⁵

Biblical law is clear: *equality before the civil law is the God-sanctioned concept of equality*. Equality of results does not apply to the sanctions that God imposes after a person dies, either positive sanctions or negative sanctions. The principle of *positive sanctions* is specified in I Corinthians 3:11–15: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” The principle of *negative sanctions* is specified in Luke 12:47–48: “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”²⁶

G. Time Perspective

The establishment of the death penalty is necessary to increase risk to the potential kidnapper—risk that is proportional to the magnitude of his proposed crime. By calculating in advance the permanent nature of the penalty (death), the criminal is forced to come to grips with the future. The criminal presumably is present-oriented.²⁷ Certainly, he ignores the eternal consequences of his acts. He generally

25. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 87.

26. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

27. Edward C. Banfield, “Present-Orientedness and Crime”; Gerald P. O’Driscoll, “Professor Banfield on Time Horizon: What Has He Taught Us About Crime?” in Randy E. Barnett and John Hegel III (eds.), *Assessing the Criminal: Restitution, Retribution, and the Legal Process* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1977).

lives for the moment. His long-term fate is total destruction on the day of judgment. He discounts this, refusing to act in terms of this knowledge. That day seems too far away chronologically, and God is not visible. "Perhaps God is not going to enforce the promised penalty. Maybe God doesn't even exist," the criminal thinks to himself. Therefore, God sets the civil government's penalty so high that even a present-oriented criminal will feel the restraining pressure of extreme risk, even if his psychological rate of discount is very high. The severity of the earthly punishment testifies to the severity of the eternal punishment. It serves as an "earnest" or down payment on eternity.

The Bible teaches us that history is linear. History has a beginning and an end. The Bible also teaches us that our thoughts, as well as our deeds, have consequences in history and also in eternity beyond the grave (Matt. 5:28). It tells men to redeem (buy back) their time (Eph. 5:16), to work while there is still light (John 9:4). If God-fearing people must be educated and motivated for them to believe such doctrines, then we have to come to grips with the reality of a world in which members of a criminal class reject all these doctrines. More than this: members of a professional criminal class self-consciously live in terms of *a rival set of attitudes* toward time, personal responsibility, and the consequences of human action.

The possibility of the death penalty for kidnapping forces the potential kidnapper to count the cost of his transgression. Remember, *a person's perception of total cost (including risk) is affected directly by his perception of time*. If men discount the future greatly, as Esau did with respect to his birthright, then they will accept low cash bids for future income.²⁸ Present-oriented men discount future benefits and future curses alike; the distant future is of very little concern to them. As Harvard political scientist Edward Banfield commented:

At the present-oriented end of the scale, the lower-class individual lives from moment to moment. If he has any awareness of a future, it is of something fixed, fated, beyond his control: things happen to him, he does not make them happen. Impulse governs his behavior, either because he cannot discipline himself to sacrifice a present for a future satisfaction or because he has no sense of the future. He is therefore radically improvident: whatever he cannot use immediately he considers valueless. His bodily needs (especially for sex) and his taste for "action" take precedence over everything else—and cer-

28. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 13:C, cf. ch. 26.

tainly over any work routine.²⁹

A law-order must recognize present-oriented people for what they are. The kidnapper may be somewhat more future-oriented than the lower-class man. He makes plans, counts costs, and takes risks. But he discounts the long-term consequences of his acts. He does not care about the effects on the victim, his family, or the community. It is this *radical lack of concern for the lives and callings of other men* that makes him a menace to society. To catch his attention, to convince him of the seriousness of his crime, the Bible stipulates the death penalty. Richard Posner, an economist and also a judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals, acknowledged the validity of relationship between a criminal's time perspective and the need for capital punishment, but only in a footnote: "Notice that if criminals' discount rates are very high, capital punishment may be an inescapable method of punishing very serious crimes."³⁰

The total discontinuity involved in the execution of the kidnapper favors *continuity in the lives of the innocent*. It is the innocent people of society who deserve continuity, not the kidnappers. The decision to prosecute, or to specify a penalty other than death, is in the hands of the victim or his survivors. The victim is allowed by biblical law to bargain with the kidnapper in order to obtain his freedom. (The kidnapper would have no way to get even with a victim who subsequently changed his mind and called for the death penalty.)

H. Kidnapping and the Slave Trade

The abolition of slavery has made kidnapping less profitable financially. Before slavery was abolished by law, the slave market offered a profit to kidnappers because *they could capitalize the entire working lifetime of the victim*. There were numerous buyers who were willing to bid against each other for the lifetime output of kidnap victims. Today, only families, major corporations, and civil governments are willing and able to buy back a victim, and very often not primarily because of the victim's earning power.

29. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), p. 61.

30. Richard Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), p. 212n.

1. *Free Market Demand*

The slave trade existed for many centuries because of the ready market for its victims. The purchase of slaves by slave-buyers created the market price of the slaves, from ancient Greece until the not-so-ancient 1960s. As recently as 1960, in the words of Britain's Lord Shackleton, African Muslims on pilgrimages sold slaves on arrival, "using them as living traveller's cheques."³¹ Slavery was officially outlawed in Saudi Arabia in 1962 and by Oman in 1970.³² Nevertheless, though African slavery declined sharply in the 1960s, "slave-trading continued to flourish in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad, along the drought-stricken southern fringe of the Sahara."³³ As recently as 1981, the United Nations Human Rights Commission reported that there were 100,000 slaves in Mauritania. Other estimates place the total number of slaves at 250,000 among the nomadic tribes of the drought-ridden Sahel in North Africa.³⁴ The slave-owners are Moors (Islamic), while the slaves are blacks from Senegal. There are no open slave markets because the trade is officially illegal. The biggest part of the trade is in children. They belong to the owners of the mothers.³⁵

A steady economic demand for slaves created the demand for new victims. The *slave traders*, so hated and despised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by "respectable" English-speaking society, including most slave owners, and equally despised by slave-owning writers in the ancient world,³⁶ were, from a strictly economic point of view, nothing less than *the paid agents of the buyers*. They were performing specialized work as purchasing agents for slave-buyers. The Arab and native African kidnappers were, to that extent, merely the specialized collection agents of the slave-buyers. They were economic middlemen, entrepreneurs. The entrepreneur necessarily serves the wants of customers.

In every free market transaction, the potential customers for any economic good or service are competing with other customers for

31. Cited by David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 317.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

33. *Idem.*

34. Roger Sawyer, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 14.

35. Bernard D. Nossiter, "U.N. Group Gets Report on Slaves in Mauritania," *New York Times* (Aug. 21, 1981).

36. Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 6, 106–7.

control over all scarce economic resources. They compete directly and indirectly for the final output of the economy. The outcome of this competition establishes prices, quality standards, and costs related directly to the production of all economic goods. The middlemen (entrepreneurs) simply serve those customers whose competing bids are expected to produce the highest profits. *Customers ultimately determine prices and therefore also costs.*³⁷ This economic process was no less true of the slave trade. It is one of the peculiar aspects of “the peculiar institution” of American Negro slavery that the “final consumers” refused to recognize their own personal responsibility, as economic actors and political voters, for the operations of the entire slave-delivery system.

What we should recognize here is the relationship between the abolition of compulsory slavery and the reduction of involuntary servitude for citizens in general. By making illegal the *market* for imported slaves, Western nations reduced the demand for imported slaves in the early 1800s. This in turn reduced the risk of being kidnapped for the average African.³⁸ A policy of state-enforced coercion against slave-buying reduced the profit-seeking private coercive activity of kidnapping Africans thousands of miles away.

This policy worked only because (1) the British navy enforced its regulations against the slave traders after 1807, (2) a majority of citizens in the recipient nations were steadily educated to reject the idea of the legitimacy of involuntary servitude, and (3) slavery’s defenders were defeated on the battlefield, in the case of the American South in the 1860s. The economic lesson: disregarding the needs and preferences of slave-holders (the final users) by outlawing slavery led to the reduction of the entire slave trade. The profitability of the international slave trade was reduced. We learn that there are cases where state coercion is valid, when that coercion is directed against private coer-

37. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 5:8. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

38. This falling demand for imported slaves was offset by an increase in demand for legal, domestically produced slaves. This transformed some plantations into slave-breeding centers, especially in the Virginia tidewater region, where soil-eroding agricultural techniques had reduced the land’s output, and therefore had reduced the regional market value of the human tools who produced the output. This region began to export slaves to buyers who cultivated the fresher soils of Louisiana and Mississippi. See Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, “The Economics of Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South,” *Journal of Political Economy*, LXVI (April 1958); reprinted in Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *The Reinterpretation of American Economic History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), ch. 25.

cers. The anti-slave trade legislation recognized the complicity of slave-owners (final users) in the coercive international slave trade. The market for slaves was not a free market, for the supply side of the transaction was based on coercion.

2. *Monopoly Returns and Reduced Sales*

There is a curious myth that laws against evil acts do not reduce the total number of these acts that criminals commit. Some critics even go so far as to argue that the very presence of the law subsidizes evil, in the case of laws against the sale of illegal drugs or laws against prostitution. Somehow, passing a law makes the prohibited market more profitable, and therefore the law leads to greater output of the prohibited substances or services. This is a very odd argument when it comes from people who defend the efficiency and productivity of *laissez-faire* economics.

A fundamental principle of economics is this: the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market. This was articulated by Adam Smith in Chapter 3 of *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Another basic principle is this one: the greater the division of labor, the greater the output per unit of resource input—in short, the greater the efficiency of the market. When the market increases in size, it makes possible an increase in cost-effective production. Advertising and mass-production techniques lower the cost of production and therefore increase the total quantity of goods and services demanded. This is well understood by economists.

Nevertheless, there are some people who still believe that laws against so-called “victimless crimes”—sins that they do not regard as major transgressions, I suspect—actually increase the profitability of crime. On the contrary, such laws increase the risk of the prohibited activities, both to sellers and consumers. Prices rise; the market shrinks; per unit costs rise; efficiency drops. Such laws create monopoly returns for a few criminals. But the critics of such laws conveniently forget that *monopoly returns are always the product of reduced output*. This, in fact, is the conventional definition of a monopoly. Thus, civil laws do reduce the extent of the specified criminal behavior.³⁹ They confine such behavior to certain criminal subclasses within

39. Cf. James M. Buchanan, “A Defense of Organized Crime?” in Ralph Andreano and John J. Siegfried (eds.), *The Economics of Crime* (New York: Wiley, 1980), pp. 395–409.

the society. Biblically speaking, such laws place *boundaries* around such behavior.

There is no doubt that nineteenth-century laws against the slave trade drastically reduced the profitability of the international slave trade. These laws increased the risks for slavers, reduced their profits, and narrowed their markets. The result was a drop in output (slavery) per unit of resource input.

3. Household Evangelism

Apart from the one exception provided by the jubilee law, the Old Testament recognized the legitimacy of involuntary slavery of foreigners only when the slaves were female captives taken after a battle (Deut. 20:10–11, 14).⁴⁰ To fight a war for the *purpose* of taking slaves would have been illegitimate, for this was (and is) the foreign policy of empires. It is true that the jubilee law did allow both the importation of pagan slaves and the purchase of children from resident aliens (Lev. 25:44–46),⁴¹ but the purpose of this practice was primarily covenantal: bringing slaves of demon-possessed cultures into servitude under Hebrew families that were in turn under God.

Once the New Testament gospel became an international phenomenon that spread outward from local churches rather than from a central sanctuary in Jerusalem, there was no longer any need to bring potential converts into the land through purchase. Jesus completely fulfilled the terms of the jubilee law, including the kingdom-oriented goals of the imported slave law (Luke 4:16–18).⁴² He transferred the kingdom from the land of Israel to the church international: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43).⁴³ He abolished the jubilee’s land tenure laws, as well as the slave-holding laws associated with the land of Israel as the exclusive place of temple sacrifice and worship.

40. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48.

41. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

42. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 4.

43. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), Introduction. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

4. Adoption

Nevertheless, in principle there remains a modern Christian practice that resembles the Old Testament jubilee slave law. This is the practice of adoption. Christians pay lawyers to arrange for the adoption of infants whose pagan parents do not want them. This is true household adoption rather than permanent slavery, but biblical law requires children to support parents in their old age, so the arrangement is not purely altruistic. The practice of adoption is governed by civil law in order to reduce the creation of a market for profit,⁴⁴ therefore discouraging the kidnapping of infants, but the economics of modern adoption are similar to the Old Testament practice of buying children from resident aliens. Adoption is a very good practice. Children are bought out of slavery inside covenant-breaking households.

Rushdoony referred to kidnapping as “stealing freedom.”⁴⁵ He commented:

The purpose of man's existence is that man should exercise dominion over the earth in terms of God's calling. This duty involves the restoration of a broken order by means of restitution. To kidnap a man and enslave him is to rob him of his freedom. A believer is not to be a slave (I Cor. 7:23; Gal. 5:1). Some men are slaves by nature; slavery was voluntary, and a dissatisfied slave could leave, and he could not be compelled to return, and other men were forbidden to deliver him to his master (Deut. 23:15, 16). . . . The purpose of freedom is that man exercise dominion and subdue the earth under God. A man who abuses this freedom to steal⁴⁶ can be sold into slavery in order to work out his restitution (Ex. 22:3); if he cannot use his freedom for its true purpose, godly dominion, reconstruction, and restitution, he must then work towards restitution in his bondage.⁴⁷

44. Actually, the adoption laws have created a profitable market for babies, but only state-licensed lawyers and adoption agencies are legally allowed to reap these profits. This is a legitimate licensing arrangement, similar in intent and economic effect as the licensing of physicians: to control a potentially coercive market phenomenon. Physicians control access to addictive drugs, and lawyers and adoption agencies control access to babies offered for adoption. This reduces the threat of kidnapped babies. By centralizing access to the flow of babies offered for adoption, the civil government can more successfully impose restrictions on the market for babies by guaranteeing that parents make the decision to supply this market, not kidnappers.

45. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 484.

46. Rushdoony obviously did not mean “freedom to steal”; he means a person who “abuses his freedom by stealing,” or “in order to steal.” The use of the infinitive, “to steal,” could lead to confusion.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 485.

Conclusion

Kidnapping is a crime against God, man, and the social order. It steals men's freedom. It asserts the autonomy of the kidnapper over the victim. It substitutes the kidnapper's profit for the calling God gives to each man. It attacks God through His image, man. The kidnapper is therefore subject to the death penalty, at the discretion of his victim.

The potential imposition of the death penalty produces unequal risks for different economic classes. The rich are more likely to be victims in a non-slave society, where the quest for a ransom payment is the primary motivation for the kidnapper. *Equality before the law* is the fundamental principle of biblical law enforcement; *inequality of economic results* is therefore inescapable. By imposing a single penalty, death, the law increases the percentage of rich kidnap victims.

The legislated abolition of slavery reduces the market demand for stolen men, thereby reducing the profit accruing to kidnappers, and increasing the safety from kidnapping for the average citizen. To be effective, however, the majority of potential slave-owners must agree with the abolition, or else be fearful of violating the law. A profit-seeking black market in slaves would partially offset the economic effects of this law, namely, reduced demand for slaves. The high penalty imposed on both kidnapper and buyer, if coupled with the moral education of potential buyers of slaves (the final users), reduces the size and therefore the efficiency of the slave market. (Remember Adam Smith's observation: the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market.)⁴⁸

Finally, the death penalty overcomes the short-run, present-oriented time perspective of the potential kidnappers. The magnitude of the punishment calls attention to the magnitude of the crime. A death penalty forces the criminal to contemplate the possible results of his actions.

Rushdoony did not consider the concept of victim's rights in his *Institutes of Biblical Law*. He wrote that "the death penalty is mandatory for kidnapping. No discretion is allowed the court. To rob a man of his freedom requires death."⁴⁹ I would agree with this statement if it were qualified as follows: "The death penalty is mandatory for kidnapping. No discretion is allowed the court, once the victim has specified

48. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), ch. 3.

49. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 486.

the death of the kidnapper as his preferred penalty." To deny the victim the legal right to specify the appropriate sanction is to deny the concept of victim's rights.

THE COSTS OF PRIVATE CONFLICT

And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed: If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed (Ex. 21:18–19).

The theocentric principle here is that man is God's image, and that for anyone to strike another person unlawfully or autonomously is an attempt to commit violence against God. It is man as God's representative that places him under the covenantal protection of civil government. The state is required by God to protect men from the physical violence of other men.

A. Reducing Conflict

One of the primary earthly goals of any godly society is the elimination of conflict among its citizens. The establishment of a reign of peace is one of the most prominent promises in the Old Testament's prophetic messages. Peace is therefore a sign of God's blessing and also a means of attaining other blessings, such as economic growth. Men who strive together in private battle testify to their own lack of self-discipline, and a godly legal order must provide sanctions against such disturbances of public order.

The Bible reminds men that they are responsible before God and society for their private actions. Specific costs are imposed by biblical law on the victor in any physical conflict. The eventual loser is to be protected and so is his family, whose rights he cannot waive simply by stepping into the arena. The loser is to be compensated for his loss of time while in bed and also for his medical expenses. In short, the victor must make *restitution* to the loser. The mere possession of superior strength or combat skills is not to be an advantage in the resolution of

personal disputes.

We see a similar perspective in the Hittite laws: "If anyone batters a man so that he falls ill, he shall take care of him. He shall give a man in his stead who can look after his house until he recovers. When he recovers, he shall give him 6 shekels of silver, and he shall also pay the physician's fee. If anyone breaks a free man's hand or foot, he shall give him 20 shekels of silver and pledge his estate as security. If anyone breaks the hand or foot of a male or a female slave, he shall give 10 shekels of silver and pledge his estate as security."¹ Men must pay the costs of restoring the injured party to physical wholeness.

B. Winners and Losers

These economic restraints on victors remind men of the costs of injuring others. There are economic costs borne by the physical confrontation's loser. There are also costs borne by society at large. A man in a sickbed can no longer exercise either his calling or his job. He cannot labor efficiently, and the products of his labor are not brought to the marketplace. If he is employed by another person, the employer's operation is disrupted. By forcing the physical victor to pay for both the medical costs and the alternative costs (forfeited productivity on the part of the loser), biblical law helps to reduce conflict. The physical victor becomes an economic loser. The law also insures society against having to bear the medical costs involved. The immediate family, charitable institutions, or publicly financed medical facilities do not bear the costs.

The Mishnah, which was the legal code for Judaism until the late nineteenth century, establishes five different types of compensation. First, compensation for the injury itself, meaning damages for a permanent injury that results from the occurrence. Second, compensation for the injured person's pain and suffering. Third, compensation for the injured person's medical expenses. Fourth, compensation for the injured person's loss of earnings (time). Fifth, compensation for the embarrassment or indignity suffered by the victim.² Not all five will be

1. "The Hittite Laws," paragraphs 10–12, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 189. Paragraphs 13–16 continue the restitution theme: monetary penalties for biting off noses and ears of free men or slaves.

2. *Baba Kamma* 8:1, *The Mishnah*, ed. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. 342.

found in each case, of course.³

The judicially significant point is that *the person who wins the conflict physically becomes the loser economically*. The one who is still walking around after the fight must finance the physical recovery of the one who is in bed. The focus of judicial concern is on the victim who suffers the greatest physical injury. Biblical law and Jewish law impose economic penalties on the injury-inflicting victors of such private conflicts. As Maimonides put it, “The Sages have penalized strong-armed fools by ruling that the injured person should be held trustworthy. . . .”⁴

C. Games of Bloodshed

The murderous “games” of ancient Rome, where gladiators slew each other in front of cheering crowds, violated biblical law. The same is true of “sports” such as boxing, where inflicting injury is basic to victory. The lure of bloody games is decidedly pagan. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, spoke of a former student of his, Alypius. The young man had been deeply fond of the Circensian games of Carthage. Augustine had persuaded him of their evil, and the young man stopped attending. Later on, however, in Rome, Alypius met some fellow students who dragged him in a friendly way to the Roman amphitheater on the day of the bloody games. He swore to himself that he would not even look, but he did, briefly, and was trapped. “As he saw that blood, he drank in savageness at the same time. He did not turn away, but fixed his sight on it, and drank in madness without knowing it. He took delight in that evil struggle, and he became drunk on blood and pleasure. He was no longer the man who entered there, but only one of the crowd that he had joined, and a true comrade of those who brought him there. What more shall I say? He looked, he shouted, he took fire, he bore

3. Emanuel B. Quint, *Jewish Jurisprudence: Its Sources and Modern Applications*, 2 vols. (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1980), I, p. 126. Maimonides wrote: “If one wounds another, he must pay compensation to him for five effects of the injury, namely, damages, pain, medical treatment, enforced idleness, and humiliation. These five effects are all payable from the injurer’s best property, as is the law for all who do wrongful damage.” Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1954), “Laws Concerning Wounding and Damaging,” IV:I:1, p. 160. Maimonides made one strange exception: if a person deliberately frightens someone, but does not touch him, he bears no legal liability, only moral liability. Even if he shouts in a person’s ear and deafens him, there is no legal liability. Only if he touches the person is there legal liability: *ibid.*, IV:II:7, pp. 165–66.

4. Maimonides, *Torts*, IV:V:4, p. 177.

away with himself a madness that should arouse him to return, not only with those who had drawn him there, but even before them, and dragging others along as well."⁵ Only later was his faith in Christ able to break his addiction to the games.

In the city of Trier (Treves) in what is today Germany, alien hordes burned the town in the early fifth century, murdering people and leaving their bodies in piles. Salvian (the Presbyter) recorded what took place immediately thereafter: "A few nobles who survived destruction demanded circuses from the emperors as the greatest relief for the destroyed city."⁶ They wanted the immediate reconstruction of the arena, not the town's walls, so powerful was the hold of the bloody games on the minds of Roman citizens.

D. Chaos Festivals

Roger Caillois, in his book, *Man and the Sacred* (1959), argued that the chaos festivals of the ancient and primitive worlds served as outlets for hostilities. These festivals are unfamiliar to most modern citizens, or in the case of the familiar ones, such as Mardi Gras in New Orleans, carnival in the Caribbean, or New Year's Eve parties in many nations, they are not recognized for what they are. He wrote:

It is a time of excess. Reserves accumulated over the course of several years are squandered. The holiest laws are violated, those that seem at the very basis of social life. Yesterday's crime is now prescribed, and in place of customary rules, new taboos and disciplines are established, the purpose of which is not to avoid or soothe intense emotions, but rather to excite and bring them to climax. Movement increases, and the participants become intoxicated. Civil or administrative authorities see their powers temporarily diminish or disappear. This is not so much to the advantage of the regular sacerdotal caste as to the gain of secret confraternities or representatives of the other world, masked actors personifying the Gods or the dead. This fervor is also the time for sacrifices, even the time for the sacred, a time outside of time that recreates, purifies, and rejuvenates society. . . All excesses are permitted, for society expects to be regenerated as

5. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. by John K. Ryan (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1960), Book 6, ch. 8.

6. Salvian, *The Governance of God*, in *The Writings of Salvian, the Presbyter*, Jeremiah F. O'sullivan, trans. (New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947), Bk. VI, Sect. 15, p. 178. Salvian was a contemporary of St. Augustine, in the fifth century. This was probably written around A.D. 440.

a result of excesses, waste, orgies, and violence.⁷

It was these festivals, he argued, that in some way drained off the violent emotions inherent in men. (On the contrary, such festivals stimulated violent emotions.)⁸ The festivals, he argues, were therefore basic to the preservation of social peace. Without these ritual celebrations of lawlessness, he argues, there will be an increase of actual wars. In other words, men innately require the tension and release of violence. Prohibit the socially circumscribed ritual chaos of Mardi Gras, carnival, and New Year, and we therefore supposedly risk the outbreak of war. Because modern man has suppressed such ritual chaos, he concludes, we have seen the increase of wars and their intensity and devastation.⁹

In contrast to Caillois's analysis stands the Bible. Leaders in a godly social order should strive to eliminate such chaos festivals and "circumscribed violence." The laws requiring restitution for anyone injured in a brawl are related to the general prohibition against individual violence. Lawlessness is to be suppressed. Man is not told to give vent to his feelings of violence; he is told to overcome them through self-discipline under God. Wars and violence come from the lusts of men (James 4:1). These bloody lusts are to be overcome, not ritually sanctioned. The celebration of communion is God's sanctioned bloody ritual which gives men symbolic blood, but the Bible forbids the drinking of actual blood (Lev. 3:17; Deut. 12:16, 23; Acts 15:20).

E. Biblical Law Confronts the "Honorable Duel"

The Bible informs us that the civil government is to protect human life. Each man is made in God's image, and men, acting as private citizens, do not have the right to attempt to attack God indirectly by attacking His image in other men. Men are not sovereign over their own lives or over the lives of others; God is (Rev. 1:18). God delegates the right of execution to the civil government, not to individual men act-

7. Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), p. 164.

8. It is interesting to note that modern political liberals criticize graphic violence on television because it may produce violent behavior, especially in children. In contrast, they argue that graphic sex in magazines, books, and moving pictures is harmless, and in no way can be shown to produce deviant sexual behavior. In other words, liberals are opposed to violence and favor open sex. Conservatives have a tendency to reverse these two preferences and argue the opposite positions.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

ing outside a lawful institution in the pursuit of lawful objectives.

1. *The Duel*

The private duel is just such a threat to human life and safety. Fighting is a threat to social peace. It is disorderly, willful, vengeful, and hypothetically autonomous. It poses a threat to innocent bystanders (Ex. 21:22–25).¹⁰ It can destroy property. When a death or serious injury is involved, a duel can lead in some societies—especially those that place family status above civil law—to an escalation of inter-family feuding and blood vengeance.

The premise of the duel or the brawl is the assertion of the existence of *zones of judicial irresponsibility*. Men set aside for themselves a kind of arena in which the laws of civil society should not prevail. There may or may not be rules governing the private battlefield, but these rules are supposedly special, removing men from the jurisdiction of civil law. The protection of life and limb, which is basic to the civil law, is supposedly suspended by mutual consent. “Common” laws supposedly have no force over “uncommon” men during the period of the duel. Somehow, the law of God does not apply to private warriors who defend their own honor and seek to impose a mutually agreed-upon form of punishment on their rivals.

But the laws of God *do* apply. James Jordan wrote: “The Bible does not permit the use of force to resolve disputes, except where force is lawfully exercised by God’s ordained officer, the civil magistrate. To put it another way, the Bible requires men to submit to arbitration, and categorically prohibits them from taking their own personal vengeance (Rom. 12:17–13:7).”¹¹

An obvious implication of the biblical law against dueling is the prohibition of gladiatorial contests, which would include boxing. A boxer who kills another man in the ring should be executed. Another implication is the necessity of rejecting the notion of a “fair fight.” There is no such thing as a fair fight. Flight is almost always preferable to private fighting, but where fighting is unavoidable, it should be an all-out confrontation. Should a person “fight fair” when his wife is attacked? Should women under attack from a man “fight fairly”? The answer ought to be clear.¹² Thus, the code of the duel is doubly perverse:

10. Chapter 36.

11. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 110. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

12. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

first, it imputes cowardice to a man who would seek to keep the peace by walking away from a challenge to his honor; second, it restricts a man's lawful self-defense to a set of agreed-upon "rules of the game." Fighting is not a game; it is either an evil assertion of personal autonomy or else a necessary defense of life, limb, and perhaps property.

2. Duel to the Death: Murder

One implication of Exodus 21:18–19 is that a death resulting from a duel or a brawl is to be regarded as murder.¹³ This is a concept of personal responsibility that is foreign to societies that allow private violence. In such societies, the quest for personal power and prestige overrides the quest for public peace. *The autonomy of man is affirmed by the ritual practices of the duel and brawl.* Wyatt-Brown wrote of the antebellum (pre-1861) American South: "Ordinarily, honor under the dueling test called for public recognition of a man's claim to power, whatever social level he or his immediate circle of friends might belong to. A street fight could and often did accomplish the same thing for the victor. Murder, or at least manslaughter, inspired the same public approval in some instances. Just as lesser folk spoke ungrammatically, so too they fought ungrammatically, but their actions were expressions of the same desire for prestige."¹⁴

Under biblical law, injured bystanders are protected from deliberate violence on the part of other people on an "eye for eye" basis.¹⁵ An

13. Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, [1878] 1972), pp. 404–6. Dabney was by far the most insightful Presbyterian theologian in the nineteenth-century South. He had served for several months, before becoming too ill to continue, as Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's chaplain, as well as his Chief of Staff. He later wrote a biography of Jackson, so he cannot be considered a man hostile to military virtues. Cf. Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1903), ch. 13.

14. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 353.

15. A somewhat different problem is raised if a person defends himself from another person who has initiated violence. What if, in defending himself, a person injures a bystander? Clearly, it was not the bystander's fault. The person responsible for inflicting the injury should pay damages. Should it be the person who initiated the violence or the defender who inadvertently harmed the bystander? For example, what if a man attacks another man, and the second person pulls out a gun and fires at the attacker, hitting a bystander by mistake? A humanistic theory of strict liability would produce a judgment against the defender, for his defense was misguided, or excessive, or ineffective. But what if the attacker had grabbed the defender's "shooting hand,"

injured loser who walks again is entitled to full compensation. But in the case where the loser dies, the judges are required to impose a capital sentence on a surviving fighter. When the loser cannot “walk abroad,” the victor must not be “quit.” At best, he would have to pay an enormous fine to the family of the dead man, but even this would seem to be too lenient, because the only instance of a substitution of payment for the death sentence involves criminal negligence, but not willful violence: the owner’s failure to contain a dangerous beast that subsequently kills a man (Ex. 21:29–30). The autonomous shedding of man’s blood, even to “defend one’s good name,” is still murder.

It is clear that if a biblically honorable man refuses to fight because the civil law supports his position by threatening him with death should he successfully kill his opponent, he can avoid the fight in the name of personal self-confidence. He says, in effect, “I know I can probably kill you; therefore, I choose not to enter this fight because I will surely be executed after I kill you.” Thus, he can avoid being regarded as a coward. This breaks the central social hold that the *code duello* has always possessed: the honorable man’s fear of being labeled a coward. But in order to deflect this powerful hold, the state must be willing to enforce the death penalty on victors.

F. Courts and Vigilantes

Legal predictability is crucial to the preservation of an orderly society. The breakdown of predictable justice in any era can lead to a revival of blood vengeance. Those who are convinced that the court system is unable to dispense justice and defend the innocent are tempted to “take the law into their own hands.” The rise of vigilante groups that take over the administration of physical sanctions always comes at the expense of legal predictability. This is a sign of the breakdown in the legal order, and it is accompanied by a loss of legitimacy by “establish-

causing him to fire wildly? The injury to the bystander would seem to be the fault of the attacker. However, if the original attacker was using only his fists, and the defender had pulled out a gun and started shooting—a seemingly excessive response—would this make the original attacker a defender when he attempted to grab the weapon? Judgment is complicated, for life is complicated. The Bible places restraints on violence. The goal of the God-fearing man should be to reduce private physical violence. Thus, if the attacker uses fists, and the defender has a weapon, the attacker should be warned to stop. The victim does have the right to identify the attacker and press charges. The civil government should inflict the penalty. But if the attacker still challenges the person with the weapon, then the person has the right to stop the attacker from inflicting violence on him.

ment” institutions.¹⁶ Eventually, vigilante movements are either stamped out by the existing social order or else they become the foundation of a new social order: the warlord society.

The various vigilante movements of the United States in the nineteenth century arose when the civil authorities would not or could not enforce the law.¹⁷ Vigilantes were common in the American West after the Civil War prior to the establishment of local and regional judicial order. The most famous vigilante group in United States history is the Ku Klux Klan. The original Ku Klux Klan of the American South, 1865–71, was a defensive movement.¹⁸ The organization was self-consciously occult in its regalia. Members wore white sheets with holes cut out for eyes, so that they would resemble the folklore version of ghosts, thereby adding to the terror of superstitious former slaves. The Klan was highly liturgical, its rituals filled with diabolic symbols, hidden signs, and other elements of secret societies, and it predictably degenerated into violence and lawlessness within a few years. It was officially disbanded in 1869, and when local “dens” persisted, it was stamped out by the U.S. military. An imitation of the old Klan rose again to national political prominence in the 1920s,¹⁹ only to fade na-

16. This appears to be beginning in large cities in the United States. Citizen's patrols became common in certain Jewish districts in the New York City area in the late 1960s. A parallel group of inner-city youths sprang up in the late 1970s, the Guardian Angels, initially composed mostly of Puerto Ricans. This group has spread across the United States. By 1988, its leaders claimed 60 chapters and 6,000 members. Citizen's patrols have now spread to black neighborhoods and middle class neighborhoods, especially in response to the advent of “crack” houses: the modern equivalent of the opium dens of the nineteenth century. In some cases, local police departments do cooperate with these citizen's patrols, and to this extent they are not pure vigilante organizations. See “Neighbors Join to Rout the Criminals in the Streets,” *Insight* (Nov. 28, 1988), pp. 8–21.

17. Richard Maxwell Brown, “The History of Vigilantism in America,” in H. Jon Rosenbaum and Peter C. Sederberg (eds.), *Vigilante Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976); see also Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

18. The early twentieth-century trilogy of novels by Thomas Dixon eulogized this early Klan. *Birth of a Nation*, the epic D. W. Griffith silent film of 1915, was based on Dixon's second novel in this trilogy, *The Clansman* (1905). This moving picture was the first modern “spectacular,” and was shown to large audiences across the United States. It had the support of President Woodrow Wilson (a college classmate of Dixon's) and the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, a former Klansman. See David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865–1965* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 26–27. The film, unfortunately, led to a revival of the Klan: *ibid.*, ch. 4. (The 17-year-old star of Griffith's movie, Lillian Gish, also starred in *The Whales of August* in 1987—a long career.)

19. It was the victory of an anti-Klan candidate for governor in the Republican

tionally in the 1930s and in the South in the 1940s. Today, numerous local Klan-type groups exist, but they have little influence.²⁰ But the Klan's former power testifies to the fact that when civil courts fail to dispense justice and therefore lose their legitimacy in the eyes of large numbers of citizens, societies will eventually see the rise of private dispensers of "people's justice."

Without a sense of legitimacy, the authority of public courts is threatened. The courts need legitimacy in order to gain the long-term voluntary cooperation of the public, meaning self-government under law, without which law enforcement becomes both sporadic and tyrannical. No legal system can afford the economic resources that would be necessary to gain full compliance to an alien law-order in a society whose members are unwilling to govern themselves voluntarily in terms of that law-order.²¹ If the courts do not receive assent from the public as legitimate institutions, they can maintain the peace only by imposing sentences whose severity goes beyond people's sense of justice, which again calls into doubt both legitimacy and legal predictability.

G. Judicial Pluralism and Social Disintegration

A civil government that refuses to defend a law-order that is seen as legitimate by the public is inviting the revival of the duel, the feud, and blood vengeance. If the public cannot agree on standards of decency, then the courts will be tempted to become autonomous. Widespread and deep differences concerning religion lead to equally strong disagreements over morality and law. Religious pluralism leads to moral and judicial pluralism, meaning unpredictable courts. Religious pluralism is an outgrowth of polytheism. Polytheism inescapably leads to what we might call "polylegalism." Too many law courts decide in terms of conflicting moralities. Only the strong hand of centralized and bureaucratic civil government can enforce a single standard of law

Party's primary in the state of Oregon which led the Klan to jump to the Democratic Party. They elected the Democratic candidate, plus enough members of the legislature to pass a law mandating that all children between the ages of eight and sixteen attend a government-operated school. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, p. 3. This law was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1925 in a landmark case, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, which has remained the key Court decision in the fight for Christian schools.

20. As one southerner described the Klan: "It is made up mainly of gasoline station attendants and FBI informers. The members can easily spot the informers: they are the only ones who pay their monthly dues."

21. Chapter 19:D.

on a religiously divided public, which is why religious and judicial pluralism ultimately leads to tyranny: the grab for power. Long-term judicial pluralism is a myth: one group or another ultimately must decide what is right and what is wrong, what should be prohibited by civil law and what shouldn't.²²

The myth of judicial pluralism has hidden from the people (including Christians) the reality of the inescapable *intolerance* of all civil government. There can no more be permanent religious neutrality on earth than in heaven, and as time moves toward that final court decision, the impossibility of pluralism is becoming more obvious. Either God or Satan will execute final judgment; either God's law or man's law will be imposed on eternity. The covenantal representatives of each kingdom will, on earth and in history, progressively present their respective supernatural sovereign's case to the world. There is no way to reconcile these competing claims. Marxism cannot be reconciled with Christianity, and neither system can be reconciled with Islam. The liberal humanist's hope in treaties, arms control, and endless tax-supported economic deals with Communist nations, 1917–1991, was as doomed to failure as the conservative humanist's faith in the peace-promoting reign of neutral natural law.²³ Elijah's challenge is inescapable: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." Then as now, the people delay making a decision: "And the people answered him not a word" (I Kings 18:21).

They did not remain silent forever. The fire came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice on God's altar. The people saw, understood, and acted: they brought the 850 priests of Baal to Elijah, who killed them (I Kings 18:40). The nation for the moment sided with God's prophet. The "priests of Baal" of any era can delay judgment for a while, but eventually *judgment comes in history*. Nevertheless, without a change in heart, the people eventually return to their old ways. The Revolution consumes its own children. The prophet is again put on the run (I Kings 19).

The humanist courts of our day appeal to religious pluralism, yet they are creating judicial tyranny.²⁴ The anti-feud, anti-clan,²⁵ anti-duel

22. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

23. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

24. Carrol D. Kilgore, *Judicial Tyranny* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1977).

25. Weber wrote: "When Christianity became the religion of these peoples who

ethic of once-Christian Western bourgeois cultures—societies in which social peace has fostered economic growth—is being undermined by judges who are creating lawlessness in the name of a purified humanist legal system. Judicial pluralism must be replaced, but not from the top down, and not from the vigilante's noose outward. The satanic myth of legal pluralism must be replaced by the power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. The Holy Spirit is the enforcer in New Testament times.

Conclusion

Social order requires a degree of social peace. When biblical law began to influence the civil governments of the West, an increase of social peace and social order took place. This, in turn, led to greater economic growth and technological development.²⁶

Christian culture is orderly. The Christian West steadily abolished or redirected the chaos festivals of the pagan world, until the growth of humanism-paganism began to reverse this process.²⁷ Legal systems became predictable, as the “eye for eye” principle spread alongside the gospel of salvation. The unpredictable violence of state power was thereby reduced. In private relationships, men were not allowed to vent their wrath on each other in acts of violence. Those who violated this law became economically liable for their actions.

The duel or brawl is by nature a direct challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the civil government. It transfers to individuals operating outside the state—the God-ordained monopoly of violence—a degree of legal immunity from civil judgment. It transfers sovereignty in the administration of violence from the state to the individual. It is not surprising, therefore, that one program of legal reform recommended by some contemporary libertarian anarchists is the legalization of

had been so profoundly shaken in all their traditions, it finally destroyed whatever religious significance these clan ties retained; perhaps, indeed, it was precisely the weakness or absence of such magical and taboo barriers which made the conversion possible. The often very significant role played by the parish community in the administrative organization of medieval cities is only one of the many symptoms pointing to this quality of the Christian religion which, in dissolving clan ties, importantly shaped the medieval city.” He contrasted this anti-clan perspective with that of Islam. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, [1924] 1968), p. 1244.

26. Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion*, Conclusion, D.

27. Peter Gay aptly titled the first volume of his study of the Enlightenment, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Knopf, 1966). The two-volume study is titled, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1966, 1969).

dueling. The duel is seen as a private act between consenting adults and therefore sacrosanct. (Sacrosanct: from *sacro* = sacred rite, and *sanctum* = holy and inviolable. Also related to *sanction* = legal and sovereign authority, or a judgment by a legal and sovereign authority.)

The abolition of the private duel in the late nineteenth century was a case in point. While this development came during an era of increasing secularism, it was consistent with a Christian view of civil law. Personal self-control within a social framework of predictable biblical law is to replace physical violence. The failure of Christian culture in the antebellum South to eliminate the imported feudal tradition of duelling in the name of gentlemanly honor eventually was rectified. The Southern duel disappeared with Gen. Lee's surrender to Gen. Grant at the Appomattox Court House in 1865.

Yet even in the South, there were strict limits placed on this code duello. It had been a highly ritualized procedure, as the duelling handbook of the era indicated, a book written by a Governor of South Carolina, John Lyde Wilson's Code of Honor (1838). It is significant that custom recognized the immunity of serious Christians to the formal ritual of the honorable duel. Wyatt-Brown comments: "Of course, among Christians and older men who were not expected to show youthful passions excessive violence was considered inappropriate. As Henry Foote noted, devout churchmen could forgo duels or, in fact, any other form of physical redress without incurring public censure. For other men a different standard prevailed."²⁸ Bruce, also citing Foote's statement, concurred: "Only a known Christian, appealing to religious scruples, could refuse to challenge another gentlemen with public approval. . . ."²⁹ It was only the defeat of the South on the battlefield that finally transformed the model of a Southern gentlemen from a man ready to defend his honor with personal violence into a self-disciplined, soft-spoken person who gains his revenge for an insult to his honor in non-violent ways. A similar transformation of Japanese aristocratic ideals, also closely tied to feudal and military concepts of honor, took place after Japan's defeat in World War II. A military defeat is an expensive way for a society to learn to conform its social standards to the requirements of biblical law.

28. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, p. 354.

29. Bruce, *Violence and Culture*, p. 28.

36

THE HUMAN COMMODITY

And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money (Ex.21:20–21).

Exodus 21:20–21 clearly teaches that an owner could legitimately beat his permanent heathen slaves (Lev. 25:44–46) and indentured Hebrew bondservants (Deut. 15:12). The theocentric principle here is that *the slave-owner is God's representative agent to the slave*. God deals with all men hierarchically. This is very clear in the case of master and slave. The slave is in an inferior position institutionally, though not necessarily morally. His servitude may be the result of some flaw in his character or his skills, or it may be because of uncontrollable external circumstances. The case laws do not distinguish between the servant who is a moral failure and the servant who has suffered a temporary but uncontrollable setback. The bondservice laws apply to all bondservants and all masters equally. The bondservant's legal status is judicially binding on the civil magistrates; they are not to make arbitrary exceptions to God's authorized sanctions in terms of their evaluation of the servant's moral condition. In this way, *the state is placed under limits*, which is even more important than placing masters and slaves under limits.¹ Jesus fulfilled the jubilee laws and thereby abol-

1. Critics of competitive free market capitalism sometimes argue that personal wealth can result from "luck" as well as from hard work, from the "accident of birth" as well as from successful entrepreneurship. They want the civil government's bureaucrats to determine whether other men's wealth is morally deserved, and then redistribute wealth by compulsion in terms of the "deserving character" of the recipients. But because civil law must be general in scope, the proponents of compulsory wealth redistribution must then generalize their criticisms of the more economically successful. One legislative result is the graduated ("progressive") income tax, which assumes that all high-income earners have been rewarded disproportionately to their productivity, and all low-income people therefore deserve a share in the high-income people's gains.

ished the legal foundation of permanent chattel slavery (Luke 4:16–18);² He did not abolish the state. The state is a far more important institution historically and judicially than private chattel slavery ever has been.

A. “He Is His Money”

What did this phrase mean? How was a bondservant the owner’s money? The answer should be obvious: he could trade the servant for assets, just as he could trade money for assets. The bondservant was a commodity, just as money in the ancient world was a commodity. He could sell a bondservant for money. There was a market for these slaves.

This equivalency is basic to understanding labor services as commodities. They possess value. They can be sold for services, commodities, or money that can buy services and commodities. Human labor services have characteristic features of services supplied by commodities. In a slave system, the services of a slave can be capitalized. The slave is a capital good, just as a tool is a capital good. A slave can perform services; so can a tool. There are markets for both forms of capitalized services. The same rules of asset evaluation and pricing apply to both forms of capital. It is only because slave markets are illegal and underground today that we are not more familiar with the pricing of slaves.

Does this mean that a human being is a commodity? Is he a capital good? He is, but he is more than this. He is the image of God. But what of human labor services? Are they commodities? Are they priced in the same way that commodities are priced? Yes. In one of the last remaining forms of labor capitalization, professional athletics, buyers and

The economically successful must subsidize the unsuccessful. Thus, there can be no neutrality with respect to the Bible in tax policy. We should affirm the biblical standard, namely, that civil law must not distinguish between the morally deserving or undeserving nature of income recipients, so long as they did not use force or fraud in gaining their wealth. The alternative is to conclude that civil law must assume that either the successful deserve special treatment at the expense of the less successful, or vice versa. The law must “take sides.” It must discriminate. This makes the state arbitrary and dangerous. If the case laws of Exodus do not distinguish between slaves and masters in terms of their comparative moral stature or their prior outward circumstances, then there is no way biblically to justify the creation of welfare state wealth-redistribution schemes based on people’s comparative moral stature or their prior outward circumstances.

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4

sellers of labor services establish prices for long-term packages of these highly specialized labor services. In this case, the seller benefits from this capitalized value. Under the slave systems in history, he did not. But the principles of asset pricing are the same.

Then in what ways were Hebrew owners of slaves to act differently in dealing with them than they did as owners of beasts of burden? More important, what was the judicial basis of these distinctions? When we understand these principles, we can better understand what modern labor relations should be.

There is another consideration. There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that indentured servitude is no longer legitimate. The buyer of labor services still has the legal right to offer laborers long-term contracts that cannot legally be broken by either party. If this were not true, then Paul's epistle to Philemon is incomprehensible. Paul sent Onesimus back into slavery to Philemon.

B. Sanctions and Moral Reform

The master is supposed to be an agent of moral reform; his training, support, and example are supposed to serve as the bondservant's pathway back to self-government and productivity. The master therefore exercises lawful discipline in God's name, including physical discipline. He brings *covenantal sanctions*. Because the servant is made in God's image, there are limits placed on the master's authority. This authority to impose sanctions is not unlimited; it is restrained by civil law and, as we shall see, by economic self-interest.

So severe is a Bible-sanctioned beating that a servant may even die a few days later. This is regarded as a case of *accidental death*, and the owner is not to be held responsible. It is acknowledged by God that servants can be rebellious to the point that they may be severely beaten. This is the passage that so disturbed Christian family counselor James Dobson: "Do you agree that if a man beats his slave to death, he is to be considered guilty only if the individual dies instantly? If the slave lives a few days, the owner is considered not guilty (Exodus 21:20–21)[?] Do you believe that we should stone to death rebellious children (Deuteronomy 21:18–21)? Do you really believe we can draw subtle meaning about complex issues from Mosaic law, when even the obvious interpretation makes no sense to us today? We can hardly select what we will and will not apply now. If we accept the verses you

cited, we are obligated to deal with every last jot and tittle.”³ He is correct; we are required to take seriously every last jot and tittle.

All human authority is limited by God’s law. Man is not autonomous (*autos* = self; *nomos* = law). There are therefore God-imposed judicial limits on the master’s lawful authority to impose physical sanctions. What are these limits? The first limit is mechanical. The bond-servant must be punished with a rod, not with a lethal weapon. If the master used a lethal weapon to administer the punishment, such as a rock, and the slave died a few days later, the protection normally afforded to him by this law would become the basis of his conviction for murder.⁴

The second limit is the threat of the execution of the master if a servant dies on the day of the beating. “And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death” (Lev.24:17). The owner is not exempted from this law. He is in a position of authority, and he must not abuse this position of authority. *He who exercises dominion is always under lawful authority.* Men are not autonomous. It should be noted at this point that this law was unique in the legal collections of the ancient Near East. No other collection even deals with a master who kills a slave.⁵

Obviously, it would be difficult to prove that a master deliberately killed his servant if the servant survived the beating for several days.⁶ Biblical civil justice is concerned with criminal intent, but only to the extent that such intent can be deduced from the external events. The state is not allowed to seek to get inside a person’s mind. This is why lie detector exams must never be made mandatory, nor regarded as anything more than circumstantial evidence.

The third limit is the loss suffered by the servant. If the owner breaks a servant’s tooth or puts out an eye—representative injuries indicating any major permanent disfigurement—the servant goes free (Ex.21:26–27).⁷ Also, if the servant dies a few days later, the owner has just lost a major capital investment. His self-interest instructs him to

3. James Dobson, “Dialogue on Abortion,” in Dobson and Gary Bergel, *The Decision of Life* (Arcadia, California: Focus on the Family, 1986), p. 14.

4. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1983), p. 102.

5. Shalom Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 69.

6. *Idem.*

7. Chapter 39.

restrain his wrath.⁸ The Bible recognizes this economic self-interest on the part of the owner, when it refers to the servant as “his money” (Ex.21:21). A rational, calculating owner is not going to destroy his own asset needlessly. *It is the very fact of the “servant as commodity” that protects him from excessive abuse.* It is his commodity status that enables the civil government to leave him in the hands of his owner. Self-government by the owner is encouraged by economic self-interest.⁹

If the economic self-interest of bondservant-owners is biblically legitimate, and even a factor in the self-restraint of owners, as the Bible says is the case, then this implies that *men can legitimately be regarded by others in terms of the economic value that their services offer those other people.* Bondservants command a price in a market. Thus, they are regarded by purchasers as economic commodities. Workers also command a contract price. Thus, they too are regarded by purchasers as economic commodities. The question then is: To what extent?

C. Marx on Workers as Commodities: A Myth

A familiar criticism of capitalism is that it treats people as if they were commodities rather than human beings. The capitalist order supposedly dehumanizes man by defining him as a thing, a part of the production process, a cog in a great machine. The solution, we are told, is to permit men to organize collectively in labor unions (even Christian labor unions),¹⁰ or to overturn the capitalist order, or to get Christians in labor and management to have prayer meetings together.

You might imagine that such a moralistic argument against capit-

8. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 102.

9. None of this provides any insight into the rule of Maimonides regarding the deliberate injuring of other men's slaves: “One's slave is regarded as his own person, but his animal is regarded as his inanimate property. Thus, if one places a burning coal on the breast of another's slave so that he dies, or if one pushes a slave into the sea or into a fire from which he can escape but he does not escape and dies, the injurer is exempt from paying compensation. If, however, one does the same to another's animal, it is regarded as if he had placed a burning coal on another's clothing and burned it, in which case he is liable for payment. The same rule applies in all similar cases.” Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), “Laws Concerning Wounding and Damaging,” IV:IV:22, p. 176. The reader is left on his own here; the logic of this analysis is beyond me. I cannot fathom what general principle of jurisprudence Maimonides' case law represents.

10. See the essay by Gerald Vandezande, “On Strikes and Strife: A Critique of the Status Quo,” in John H. Redekop (ed.), *Labor Problems in a Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972).

alism is a variation of Marxism. Such is not the case. Marx's few references to workers as commodities appear only in his youthful and unpublished *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which were not translated into English until the mid-1960s, and which had zero influence on traditional Marxist thought.¹¹ Marx was quite matter-of-fact in his published writings concerning human labor as a commodity. In his major theoretical work, *Capital* (1867), Marx argued that the "free laborer," meaning the wage-earner in a capitalist economy, sells his own commodity, labor power, to the capitalist. He "must constantly look upon his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and this he can only do by placing it at the disposal of the buyer temporarily, for a definite period of time."¹² Original Marxist theory presumed that if the legally free laborer can legitimately look at his own labor power as a commodity, then so can the capitalist buyer. Marx argued that the terms of sale involve exploitation by the capitalist, but he did not argue that the item sold, human labor, is somehow not a commodity.

Years earlier, Marx had distinguished between slave labor, in which the worker is a commodity, and free labor under capitalism, in which he isn't. He discussed labor power, not the worker as a commodity. "Labour power was not always a *commodity*. Labour was not always wage labour, that is, *free labour*. The *slave* did not sell his labour power to the slave-owner, any more than the ox sells its services to the peasant. The slave, together with his labour power, is sold once and for all to his owner. He is a commodity which can pass from the hand of one owner to that of another. He is *himself* a commodity, but the labour power is not *his* commodity."¹³ Popular Marxism may occasionally have used the idea of "proletarian man, the commodity" to gain converts, but traditional Marxism always focused on Marx's exploitation theory, his surplus value theory, and other more arcane topics. Thus, to criticize capitalism because of its alleged result—workers as commodities—is a most un-Marxist line of reasoning. Marx believed that it was feudalism and especially capitalism that destroyed

11. These statements appear in the essay, "Antithesis of Capital and Labor. Landed Property and Capital." Two brief references to workers as commodities from this essay are the only ones listed in *Karl Marx Dictionary*, ed. Morris Stockhammer (New York: Philosophical Library, 1965), p. 268.

12. Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: Modern Library, [1867] 1906), ch.6, pp.186–87. The Modern Library version is a reprint of the Charles H. Kerr edition.

13. Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital* (1849), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), I, p. 153.

slavery, the system in which workers supposedly did become commodities.

D. Reductionism and Impersonalism: Costly Errors

We need to ask ourselves this question: *Is everything that commands a price nothing more than a commodity?* The phrase “nothing more than” is crucial. Whenever we encounter it, either explicitly or implicitly, we are encountering a form of *economic reductionism*.

1. Reductionism

In any sort of scientific analysis, there lurks the threat of reductionism. This is especially true in the case of social science. Man and man’s personal relationships can be reduced to “merely” economics, or “merely” induced responses to stimuli, or “merely” chemical responses, or even nothing more than a figment of his imagination (solipsism). By reducing our explanation of man and his actions to one seemingly all-encompassing model, we become “monocausal” (single cause) thinkers. Monocausal theories invariably become tautological—a repetition of the same concept using different words—and wind up explaining little, throwing little light on most of man’s actions. An otherwise useful explanation of some *aspect* of man or society becomes a misleading concept when we attempt to explain *everything* in terms of it.

Economic analysis can easily be misused. Man’s labor is sometimes discussed as *nothing more than* an impersonal commodity on an impersonal market. The producers of human labor then are formally reduced to *nothing more than* suppliers of a useful commodity. Man is treated as if he were *nothing more than* a commodity. But what we find in free market societies is that such attitudes on the part of employers (renters of human labor services) lead to reduced profits. Workers resent being treated as machines or as beasts of burden. They respond to such treatment by reducing their output, sometimes in subtle ways that cannot be easily monitored by their supervisors. Thus, on a free market, economic reductionism is self-penalizing for employers. Those who treat workers better, acknowledging the cosmic personalism of all existence, are more likely to bring forth positive, productive efforts from those who are employed by them. The false assumption of impersonalism therefore pays a price. Those who indulge themselves

in the fantasy of economic reductionism and impersonalism pay for the privilege.¹⁴ Reductionism is not a zero-price intellectual resource.

2. The Commodity Factor

At the same time, those who categorically assail the idea that the laborer is *in part* a commodity, or that man's labor power is *in part* a commodity, have abandoned both the Bible and economic analysis. Obviously, if a man can exchange his labor services for scarce economic resources, then the person who purchases his labor services must regard these labor services as scarce economic resources. In short, *the buyer regards labor services as commodities*. Why else would the buyer (employer) give up scarce economic resources (wages) in order to obtain labor services?

Let us take the next step. Why would someone purchase an indentured servant? Why would he forfeit the ownership of present scarce economic resources in order to buy the future services of a person? The answer is obvious: he expects to gain from the transaction. Buyer and seller agree on a present price that they both believe is approximately equal to the *discounted* (by the relevant interest rate) value of that expected future stream of income, in the form of labor services.¹⁵ The buyer buys the future services of the man by using the same process of economic estimation that he uses when buying the services of any tool of production. To get those future economic services from a machine, he must take delivery of the machine that supplies him with the services. Because indentured servitude is rare today, buyers normally rent the services of laborers for a day, a week, or a month at a time.¹⁶ But under a system of indentured servitude, these *labor services*

14. A good book on the positive effects of managers treating workers as human beings is R. C. Sproul's *Stronger than Steel: The Wayne Alderson Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). Alderson took a faltering steel fabrication company that was 24 hours away from bankruptcy and made it one of the top ten in terms of efficiency, in less than two years, and without an infusion of new financial capital, simply by setting up daily prayer meetings open to all employees, and by requiring managers and foremen to show at least some minimal concern about the lives of the workers. He called forth the latent reserves of productivity from previously disgruntled, resentful workers.

15. Technically speaking, the exchange takes place because the *present value of the expected future stream of labor services* from the servant (minus the costs of maintaining the servant) is more valuable, in the eyes of the purchaser, than the expected future income stream of the asset he gives up in the exchange. The buyer and the seller *capitalize the expected future value of the servant*.

16. One of the few exceptions to this rule in the United States is the purchase of a

are legally capitalized at the time of purchase, and the buyer takes delivery of the *person* who is to supply them.

Slaves and indentured servants command a sale price. Why? Because their expected labor services are valuable. These services can be capitalized. The purchaser calculates the present market value of this expected stream of income in *exactly the same way* that he capitalizes the expected future income stream of any commodity. The same rate of interest establishes the discount of the future services of man, land, and machine, and to the same degree. The buyer estimates the proper purchase price of all forms of capital by means of the same statistical techniques.¹⁷ To this extent, the transaction appears to be impersonal, “treating men like machines.” But if we look closer, we find that all such transactions are ultimately personal. The wise (profit-seeking) slave-buyer calculates the expected future services of the slave in terms of how well he will treat the slave. He does the same when he estimates the value of a piece of farmland. He even makes such calculations regarding machinery. We speak of “babying” a tool when we really mean treating it with care by lubricating it, servicing it, and recognizing its limits in service. The rate of interest is itself an impersonal number that is the product of all the highly personal time-preferences (discounts for future goods and services) of the many economic decision-makers in the society. Ultimately, there can be no impersonalism in a universe created and providentially sustained by God.¹⁸

The very fact that bondservants command a price, and owners make rational economic decisions about how much to pay for bondservants, testifies to the reality of the commodity aspect of human labor. The existence of a market for bondservants indicates that men’s labor services can be treated as commodities. In short, expected future labor services can be *capitalized*—converted into capital goods that can be bought and sold in the present. This is the definition of every

professional athlete’s future services. The best amateur athletes usually receive large bonuses in advance when they sign their professional contracts, as well as receiving a guaranteed wage for a specified period of time. They can legally quit the team and forfeit the agreed-upon wage income, but they are legally prohibited from offering their services to a rival team within the same sports league. The bonus capitalizes a portion of their future productivity.

17. If the tax laws recognized indentured servitude, bondservants would probably be depreciated the way a machine or any other depreciating asset would be. The United States tax code allows animals and fruit-bearing trees to be depreciated in this fashion.

18. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

economic commodity: a producer of expected future income that can be priced—bought and sold—today. Present goods (the price) are exchanged for expected future services (income).

If a buyer expects a plot of land to produce a net income of one ounce of gold per year indefinitely, and he also expects a married pair of slaves to produce a net income of one ounce of gold per year, including the value of their children over an indefinite period, then he will pay the same price for the plot of land that he will pay for the slaves, other things being equal. The same estimating process governs both transactions, as does the same rate of interest. Both the land and the slaves are capitalized. Their expected future net incomes, when discounted by the prevailing rate of interest, produce the same sales price.

3. The Image of God

The Bible sets forth laws that regulate indentured servitude. This is another example of God's recognition of the image of God in man. It is immoral to treat men as if they were *nothing more than* beasts or burden. He allowed the Israelites to suffer under the crushing burden of slavery in Egypt in order to demonstrate to them the way in which rebellious men who worship other gods—demonic spirits—view their servants: as beasts to be sacrificed, as *nothing more than* commodities. The Egyptian Pharaohs who enslaved them were *reductionists*. They viewed the Israelite males only as beasts of burden or as potential future military enemies (Ex. 1:10). The Pharaoh was willing to kill all of Israel's male infants (Ex. 1:16), just as he might have slaughtered animals. He refused to acknowledge that there are God-ordained limits placed on bondservant-owners. God warns men not to make such an assumption. Men are more than beasts or machines. The commodity factor in human labor is only one aspect of man. A slave is more than the commodity that Aristotle described as "property with a soul."¹⁹

Nevertheless, the commodity factor is unquestionably one factor. Because the expected income stream produced by human labor can be capitalized according to the rules governing all other expected income streams, there is a potential market for permanent slaves and indentured servants. The Old Testament legitimized a system of private

19. I am using M. I. Finley's translation of *Politics* 1253b: Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking, 1980), p. 73. Sir Ernest Barker's translation is less graphic: "an animate article of property." *The Politics of Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1946] 1960), pp. 9–10.

ownership of the *human* means of production. It has been only during the last two centuries that this outlook has become unacceptable.

E. The Command to Labor

The second principle of the biblical covenant is "hierarchy."²⁰ The dominion covenant reflects this general covenantal principle: (1) God is over man, (2) man is over his wife, (3) parents are over children, and (4) mankind is over nature. To exercise effective, long-term *dominion over nature*, men must become *subordinate under God*.²¹

Modern democratic theory has steadily begun to reject all four points of this hierarchical worldview. First, God is seen as mythical, or at best a distant, powerless uncle. He does not intervene in human history. He does not "take sides" in mankind's disputes (at least not since World War II). Second, marriage is not seen as hierarchical; divorce has been legitimized legislatively for "unreconcilable differences," and the women's liberation movement has asserted equality between the marriage partners. Third, parents are understood as unreliable supervisors generally; a state-operated school system is to be substituted for parental authority. There is also a growing "children's rights" movement, which promotes a program that includes such provisions as self-determination for children, the right to leave home, the right to all information available to adults, the right of self-education, the right of freedom from physical punishment, the right to sexual freedom, and the right to vote and hold political office.²² We should recall Isaiah's words: "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them" (Isa. 3:4). Finally, the more radical of the ecology

20. Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstypm>)

21. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, chaps. 8, 9. Humanist theologian John C. Raines wrote of Calvin: "Calvin understood the Christian life not as 'a vessel filled with God' but as an active 'tool and instrument' of the Divine initiative. But this is precisely our point. Active toward the world, the Christian knows himself as utterly passive and obedient toward God, whose Will it is his sole task to discover and obey." Raines, "From Passive to Active Man: Reflections on the Revolution in Consciousness in Modern Man," in Raines and Thomas Dean (eds.), *Marxism and Radical Religion: Essays Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 114.

22. Richard Farson, *Birthrights* (New York: Macmillan, 1974); cited by John Whitehead, *Parents' Rights* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1985), pp. 24–25. This movement began to be noticed in the mid-1970s: "Drive for Rights of Children," *U.S. News and World Report* (Aug. 15, 1974).

movement's advocates have denied that men are over nature.²³ They have even argued that the idea of man over nature is a terrible legacy of Christianity, and that it has led to mass pollution.²⁴

1. Unfaithful Servants and Indentured Servitude

Some people are unfaithful servants. They seek to escape the moral and institutional obligations of God's dominion covenant. One of the ways historically that God has put men visibly under the terms of His dominion covenant is through indentured servitude. Some ethical rebels can be made more effective laborers in God's kingdom through indentured servitude. Indentured servitude is an earthly manifestation of the authority-hierarchy relationship. The New Testament reconfirms the Old Testament view of marriage as a covenantal yoke,²⁵ and it reminds men that this yoke is analogous to the relationship of Christ to His church (Eph. 5:21–28). We must become servants of God in order to avoid remaining slaves to Satan.

Human slavery in history testifies to the reality of sin, as well as to the need of some rebels and some weak people for institutional subordination. Private property in slaves therefore testifies to the need for men to learn submission to God, who is the personal Sovereign who owns the universe.²⁶ This thought is repulsive to the modern democratic faith. Modern democratic theory rejects the idea that private property in the form of indentured servants can deal effectively with such issues as depravity, rebellion, laziness, and crime. Democratic theorists refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of indentured servitude

23. This view of the "autonomous" environment became part of the U.S. Park Service's policies regarding forest fires. Unless a fire was started by a camper or an arsonist, it was left alone to burn itself out "naturally." In the drought-ridden summer of 1988, a series of lightning-induced fires began in Yellowstone National Park. They spread, as the saying goes, like wildfire. By the time winter snows began to fall, these fires had burned about 800,000 acres of land in three states. The President of the United States later admitted that he had not known about this "let it burn" policy. Public outrage forced the government officially to reverse this policy on forest fires. For a highly critical analysis of the National Park Service in general, written before this fire, see Alston Chase, *Playing God in Yellowstone: The Destruction of America's First National Park* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986).

24. The key document is Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* (10 March 1967). (<http://bit.ly/WhiteRoots>) For a critique of White's thesis, see R. V. Young, Jr., "Christianity and Ecology," *National Review* (Dec. 20, 1974). For my analysis, see *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 4:A.

25. Chapter 27.

26. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gdmruler>)

as a God-ordained private hierarchy that promotes the fulfillment of the dominion covenant. They attack private slavery as the greatest of all evils in history. Then they pass laws that make people slaves to the state. They do not reject the hierarchical structure of slavery; they merely substitute the state for the private slave-owner, and then they rename this relationship with a term more acceptable politically, such as “public welfare” which is to be paid for by “progressive taxation.” They raise taxes above 40% of a family’s income, and they call this “paying your fair share.” Ancient Egypt, which under Joseph suffered from a 20% income tax rate, is called “oriental despotism.”²⁷ Contemporary taxation at twice or three times this level is called progressive democratic fiscal policy.

2. *Two Kinds of Ancient Slavery*

Democratic theorists make no ethical distinction between the Hebrews’ slave status in ancient Egypt and the enslavement of heathens in ancient Israel. All private chattel slavery is dismissed as evil. “Slavery is an example of an institutionalized evil,” wrote liberation theologian Ronald Sider.²⁸ The Bible, however, does distinguish sharply between permanent slavery that was regulated by God’s law and slavery that was antinomian—unregulated by God’s law. This is why Paul was quite ready to have the escaped slave Onesimus return to the Christian household of Philemon (Phm. 10–12).

Men must serve one of two masters (Matt. 6:24).²⁹ Each supernatural master has used slavery as part of his particular program of kingdom development. We are either under God’s yoke or Satan’s (Matt. 11:29–30). Christ’s yoke is freedom; Satan’s is bondage (Gal. 5:1). The ethical question of slavery—which form is righteous and which form is evil—must be answered by an appeal to biblical law. *A retroactive condemnation of all ancient slavery is biblically illegitimate; it reflects the critics’ ethical submission to Satan.* When the Bible affirms the legitimacy of any institution, even if only for a millennium or two, then it is sin to call that institution universally evil, without qualification or respect to time. Such an accusation is analogous to calling God

27. Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957).

28. Ronald J. Sider, “Words and Deeds,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (Dec. 1979), p.38.

29. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

evil. Theologians and social philosophers who call God evil are dancing at the edge of permanent slavery in the lake of fire.

Why would God authorize indentured servitude? Because rebels sometimes seek to escape the requirements of the dominion covenant. They may work in ways prohibited by God. God therefore has placed some men under indentured servitude as a *means of evangelism*, and also as a means of extracting from them the *service due to Him*. Men who would otherwise perish are also placed under the care of a godly household. The most famous example in the Bible of this is the case of the Gibeonites, who tricked Joshua into taking them as permanent slaves—hewers of wood and drawers of water (Josh.9:27)—rather than perish at his hand or be forced out of the land of Canaan. Their servitude was voluntary. This was not true of the kidnapped Africans who were brought to North America.³⁰

Conclusion

Men can legitimately be evaluated as commodities, meaning as scarce economic resources that are still in demand at a price above zero. A man whose services are not in demand at zero price—a man who is not a producer of the commodity of labor—is in sorry shape unless he has a great deal of income-producing capital.

The Bible's slave laws confirm this obvious economic truth. So valuable is "man, the commodity," that specific rules that limit the exploitation of this commodity by other men have been established by God. The key limitation is the six-year maximum period of indentured servitude (Deut. 15:12). This limitation keeps down the price of the human commodity by *restricting the period of time in which his services can be lawfully capitalized by an owner*. Even in the case of lifetime slavery, Old Testament law restricted slave-owners in their dealings with slaves. It is not true, as M. I. Finley asserted, that "The failure of any individual slaveowner to exercise all his rights over his slave-property was always a unilateral act on his part, never binding, always revocable."³¹ In Greece and Rome, perhaps; not in ancient Israel. God, then as now, always warned those under the terms of His covenant that those in authority over men are also under the authority of other men, and that all men are under God and His law.

The Bible uses the economic self-interest of the owner to supple-

30. Appendix K.

31. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, p. 74.

ment the self-government and therefore the self-restraint that owners are expected to demonstrate to those under their authority. The bond-servant is a valuable commodity. God tells bondservant-owners, "Handle with care, for these people are made in My image!" If they refuse to listen to God, then perhaps they will listen to the market. If they refuse to listen either to God or to the market, then the civil government must step in and enforce the law of God regarding indentured servitude. If the civil government refuses to obey God in this way, then God imposes other forms of negative sanctions: war, pestilence, or famine. There is no better example of this inescapable covenantal process in New Covenant history than the history of slavery in the American South.

Modern democratic theory has denied the legitimacy of biblical indentured servitude, but it has substituted a new form of slavery, which is in fact a very ancient form of slavery: *slavery to the state*. The state is a slave-owner that wants no private competition. It wants people placed in permanent bondage to the state. It establishes what sociologist Max Weber described as the bureaucratic cage.³² It calls this system democratic freedom.

32. Gary North, "Max Weber: Rationalism, Irrationalism, and the Bureaucratic Cage," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976).

CRIMINAL LAW AND RESTORATION

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex.21:22–25).

The theocentric principle here is that man is made in God's image and therefore must be protected by civil law. The husband of the victimized woman represents God the Judge to the convicted criminal. The state is required to impose sanctions specified by the husband. The violent person who has imposed on the woman and the child the risk of injury or death must compensate the family. The judges do retain some degree of authority in specifying the appropriate sanction. The criminal must pay "as the judges determine." In the absence of actual physical harm, there is no rigorous or direct way to assess the value of this risk of injury or death, so the state does not allow the husband to be unreasonable in imposing sanctions.

Where physical damage can be determined objectively, the criminal must pay on an "eye for eye" basis. This is the judicial principle known as the *lex talionis*. The punishment must fit the magnitude of the violation; the violation is assessed in terms of the damages inflicted.

A. Controversy Over Abortion

Exodus 21:22–25 has recently become one of the most controversial passages in the Old Testament. Prior to the 1960's, when the abortion issue again began to be debated publicly in the United States after half a century of relative silence,¹ only the second half of this passage

1. Marvin Olasky, *The Press and Abortion, 1838–1988* (Hillsdale, New Jersey:

was controversial in Christian circles: the judicial requirement of “an eye for an eye.” The abortion aspect of the argument was not controversial, for the practice of abortion was illegal and publicly invisible. A physician who performed an abortion could be sent to jail, though not for murder, which abortion is. It was clearly understood by Christians that anyone who caused a premature birth in which the baby died or was injured had committed a criminal act, despite the fact that the person did not plan to cause the infant’s injury or death. The abortion described in the text is the result of a man’s battle with another man, an illegitimate form of private vengeance for which each man is made fully responsible should injury ensue, either to each other (Ex.21:18–19)² or to innocent bystanders. If this sort of “accidental” abortion is treated as a criminal act, how much more a deliberate abortion by a physician or other murderer! Only when pagan intellectuals in the general culture came out in favor of abortion on demand did pro-abortionists within the church begin to deny the relevancy of the introductory section of the passage.

This anti-abortion attitude among Christians began to change with the escalation of the humanists’ pro-abortion rhetoric in the early 1960s. Christian intellectuals have always taken their ideological cues from the humanist intellectuals who have established the prevailing “climate of opinion,” from the early church’s acceptance of the categories of pagan Greek philosophy to the modern church’s acceptance of tax-funded, “religiously neutral” education. As the humanists’ opinions regarding the legitimacy of abortion began to change in the early 1960s,³ so did the opinions of the Christian intellectual community. Speaking for the dispensationalist world of social thought, dispensationalist author Tommy Ice forthrightly admitted in a 1988 debate: “Premillennialists have always been involved in the present world. And basically, they have picked up on the ethical positions of their contemporaries.”⁴ (He defended this practice, it should be noted.) The shift in Christian opinion regarding the illegitimacy of abortion took place

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988), ch. 6. This book shows that in the late nineteenth century, the battle over abortion, as revealed in the press, was widespread.

2. Chapter 35.

3. *Ibid.*, chaps. 10, 11.

4. Cited in Gary DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), p. 185. (<http://bit.ly/DebateCR>). The debate was Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice vs. Gary North and Gary DeMar. A pair of audio cassette tapes or a videotape of this April 14, 1988 debate are available from American Vision, Powder Springs, Georgia.

throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.

The moral schizophrenia of contemporary pietism can be seen when anti-abortion picketers confront killer physicians at their offices with some variation of “Smile! God loves you” or “God hates abortion but loves abortionists.” On the contrary, God hates abortionists, and He demands that the civil government execute them. Where are Christian protesters who pray the imprecatory psalms, such as Psalm 83? Where are they calling publicly on God to bring judgment against abortionists and their political allies?⁵ Only when Christian anti-abortionists at last openly and enthusiastically admit that the Bible demands public execution for all convicted abortionists, and also for the women who pay for them, will they at last be proclaiming the Bible’s judicial requirements.

The fact that they draw back from proclaiming this testifies to the appalling lack of biblical thinking that prevails in contemporary Christianity. *The vast majority of Christians hate God’s Bible-revealed law far more than they hate either abortion or abortionists.* They would far rather live in a political world that is controlled by humanists who have legalized abortion than in a society governed by Christians in terms of biblical law. So, God has answered the desire of their hearts. He has done to modern Christians what He did to the Israelites in the wilderness: “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Ps. 106:15).

B. The Legalized Slaughter of the Innocents

I do not intend to deal in detail with the question of abortion in this context.⁶ There is no doubt that Exodus 21:22–25 does apply to abortion.⁷ The legal issue is clear: *victim’s rights*. In all cases of public

5. Gary North, *When Justice Is Aborted: Biblical Standards for Non-Violent Resistance* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1989), pp. 88–94. (<http://bit.ly/gnjustice>)

6. J. J. Finkelstein pointed out that some variation of this law—the jostled woman who aborts her infant—is found in many of the ancient law sources. Finkelstein, *The Ox That Gored* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), p. 19n. It is treated at length in Hammurabi’s laws (209–14), Hittite laws (17–18), and Middle Assyrian laws (21): *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), Part II, Legal Texts. Finkelstein argued that the text is probably a literary device rather than legal, since the likelihood of an abortion occurring in this way is minimal. What he did not consider is that as a case law, it was intended to be a minimal application example: if, in this biologically unlikely situation, the one causing harm is fully liable, how much more the liability of an actual abortionist.

7. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Myth of Over-Population* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press,

evil that the Bible prohibits, there must be judicial representatives of God: the victims are the primary representatives, and the various covenant officials are secondary representatives. When the victims cannot defend their interests, then the covenantal officers become the legal representatives of the victims.⁸ The potential victims in this case are the unborn infants whose lives are sacrificed on the altar of convenience. Because they are incapable of speaking on their own behalf, God empowers their fathers to speak for them, or in cases where a father remains silent, God empowers the civil government to speak for them: first to prohibit abortion, and second to impose the death penalty on all those who are involved with abortion, either as murderers (mothers) or as their paid accomplices (physicians, nurses, office receptionists, and so forth).

Exonerating mothers who pay to have abortions is the same as retroactively exonerating slave buyers who bought recently kidnapped Africans from slave traders. The buyers liked to think of the slave traders as beneath them both morally and socially. In fact, the slave buyers were far more morally corrupt. They made the slave trade profitable. The traders were merely hired servants of the buyers. Bringing it closer to home, it would be comparable to arresting pimps and prostitutes, but letting the Johns off the hook. If the police put the buyers in jail alongside the pimps and hookers, there would be howls of protest, but the demand for prostitutes would decline.⁹

1. Christian Academic Spokesmen for Legalized Abortion

All this is conveniently ignored by Christian abortionists and their academically respectable spokesmen.¹⁰ Examples of pro-abortionists, especially physicians, in evangelical churches can be found in a book put out in 1969 by the Christian Medical Society, *Birth Control and the Christian: A Protestant Symposium on the Control of Human Reproduction*, edited by Walter O. S. Pitzer and Carlyle L. Saylor.¹¹ Bruce K. Waltke, then a Dallas Theological Seminary professor, and briefly a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, explicitly stated in that book that Exodus 21:22 teaches that “the fetus is not

1969), Appendix 3.

8. North, *When Justice Is Aborted*, ch. 2.

9. Legislators will resist this suggestion, who as customers, do not want to risk having pimps and prostitutes testify against them in order to get reduced sentences.

10. *Ibid.*, Appendix A.

11. Wheaton, Illinois:Tyndale House, 1969.

reckoned as a soul.”¹² (He subsequently reversed his pro-abortion stance.) Dr. M. O. Vincent, psychiatrist, reported that the symposium moved him to conclude that “the foetus has great and developing value, but is less than a human being. It will be sacrificed only for weighty reasons.”¹³ Predictably, he refused to spell out in detail what these weighty reasons are. Dr. William B. Kiesewetter, before leading the reader to his conclusion that a Christian physician friend was doing the right thing when he “terminated the pregnancy” (never seen as terminating the baby) of a missionary’s wife, warned against “Rigid, authoritarian evangelicals [who] so often extract from the Word of God precepts which they then congeal into a legalism by which everyone is admonished to live.”¹⁴ (His main problem is not with rigid, authoritarian evangelicals. His main problem is with the rigid, authoritarian God who commanded Moses to write Exodus 21:22–25. This is the main problem faced by all spokesmen who blithely deny the continuing judicial authority of God’s Bible-revealed law, and who then proceed to recommend the violation of God’s law whenever convenient.)

In short, it is supposedly not necessarily immoral to take money for performing an abortion, provided that you are licensed by the medical profession to do so. These self-deluded physicians would bring a non-physician to court for practicing an abortion—an infringement on their state-licensed monopoly—but not a licensed colleague. Such was the state of late twentieth-century medical ethics, including the ethics of self-professed Christians.

A book by D. Gareth Jones, Professor of Anatomy at the University of New Zealand, *Brave New People: Ethical Issues at the Commencement of Life* (1984), created a national Christian protest in the United States against its neo-evangelical publisher, Inter-Varsity Press. The book promoted a view of the “foetus” that would allow abortion in uncertain, undefined cases. Franky Schaeffer, the son of Francis Schaeffer (*Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*), mounted a protest in 1984 which led to the resignation of the editor of IVP and the scrapping of the book. Eerdmans republished it the next year. It is still published by IVP in Britain.¹⁵

12. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

15. For a critique of this book, see Appendix B:E.

2. A Question of “Barbaric” Sanctions

Christian scholars generally choose to ignore Exodus 21:22–25, and then they spend their time defending mass murder in the name of biblical ethics and “compassion”—compassion for murderous women and their well-paid, state-licensed accomplices. Meanwhile, these critics of biblical law are busy challenging any defenders of the law with criticisms along these lines: “You would reimpose the barbaric principle of poking out a man’s eye or cutting off his hand. This is nothing but vengeance, a return to savagery. What possible good would it do the victim to see the assailant suffer physical damage identical to his own? Why not impose some sort of economic restitution to the victim? To inflict permanent injury on the assailant is to reduce his productivity and therefore the wealth of the community. By returning to Old Testament law, you are returning to the tribal laws of a primitive people.”¹⁶ This line of criticism incorrectly assumes that the *lex talionis* principle was not in fact designed by God to encourage economic restitution to the victim from the criminal. Chapter 38 demonstrates that *lex talionis* promotes economic restitution.

Nevertheless, the question remains: *Which is truly “barbaric,” mass murder through legalized abortion or the required judicial sanctions revealed in biblical law?* The Christian antinomians of our day—that is to say, virtually all Christians—have voted for the barbaric character of biblical law. They are faced with a choice: Minimal sanctions against abortion or the civil enforcement of biblical law? Their answer is automatic. They shout to their elected civil magistrates, “Give us Barabbas!” Better to suffer politically the silent screams of murdered babies, they conclude, than to suffer the theocratic embarrassment of calling for the public execution of convicted abortionists.¹⁷

16. Henry Schaeffer wrote a book called *The Social Legislation of the Primitive Semites* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1915). The title is revealing. He did not comment on the “eye for eye” passages.

17. We must not miss the point: the inevitable issue here is *theocracy*. When a Christian calls for the execution of the convicted abortionist, he is necessarily calling for the enforcement of God’s revealed law by the civil magistrate. This fear of being labeled a theocrat is why James Dobson chose to weaken his response to a pro-abortion physician by not dealing forthrightly with Exodus 21:22–25: “Do you agree that if a man beats his slave to death, he is to be considered guilty only if the individual dies instantly? If the slave lives a few days, the owner is considered not guilty (Exodus 21:20–21)[?] Do you believe that we should stone to death rebellious children (Deuteronomy 21:18–21)? Do you really believe we can draw subtle meaning about complex issues from Mosaic law, when even the obvious interpretation makes no sense to us today? We can hardly select what we will and will not apply now. If we accept the

The babies who are targeted for destruction have only a confused, inconsistent, waffling, squabbling, rag-tag army of Christians to speak for them authoritatively in God's name inside the corridors of political and judicial power. Their defenders are agreed: "Abortion is the lesser of two evils, if the alternative is theocracy."¹⁸

In stark contrast is the tiny handful of Christians¹⁹ who confidently believe in the whole Bible, including Exodus 21:22–25, and who have therefore confidently voted against abortion as the true barbarism and for biblical law as the sole long-term foundation of Christian civilization. But most Christians have self-consciously suppressed any temptation to think about this dilemma, one way or the other. The thin picket lines in front of abortion clinics testify to the thoughtlessness of Christians in our day. (So do the thin shelves of the Christian bookstores.)²⁰

C. Restitution and Vengeance

The "eye for an eye" principle is known by the Latin phrase, *lex talionis*, or "law of retaliation." The English word, "retaliate," is derived from the same Roman root as "talionis." Today, "retaliate" means to inflict injury, but earlier English usage conveyed a broader meaning: *to pay back or return in kind*, including good will.²¹ According to one source, the *lex talionis* was a Roman law that specified that anyone

verses you cited, we are obligated to deal with every last jot and tittle." Dobson, "Dialogue on Abortion," in James Dobson and Gary Bergel, *The Decision of Life* (Arcadia, California: Focus on the Family, 1986), p. 14. I handed him a copy of *Tools of Dominion* in 1990, and said the book provided the answer to his question. He has yet to respond after 20 years. He knows where I am and who I am. I once raised \$50,000 for his ministry in two minutes at a meeting. He remains the single most influential Protestant fundamentalist social commentator in the United States. For him to remain silent for two decades is revealing.

18. Christian anti-abortionists will attempt to find a third choice. It may be natural law. It may be emotion. It may be the will of the people. It may be to some less familiar version of common-ground philosophy, meaning baptized humanism. What it will not be is an appeal to the whole Bible as the sole authoritative will of God.

19. Christian Reconstructionists or theonomists.

20. James Jordan's book, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), was removed from the shelves of a local Christian bookstore in Tyler when the store's owner discovered that Jordan had called for the execution of the aborting physician and the mother. The owner dared not take the heat for selling a book which announced: "Until the anti-abortion movement in America is willing to return to God's law and advocate the death penalty for abortion, God will not bless the movement. God does not bless those who despise His law, just because pictures of salted infants make them sick" (p. 115).

21. See the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "retaliate."

who brought an accusation against another citizen but could not prove his case in the courts would suffer the same penalty that he had sought to inflict on the defendant.²² (This was a perverted version of the biblical principle of the law governing deliberate perjury, found in Deuteronomy 19:16–21, which concludes with a restatement of the “eye for eye” requirement in verse 21.²³ The law reads: “Then shall ye do unto him [the false witness], as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you” [v.19].²⁴ Only if the innocent person could prove perjury on the part of his accuser could he demand that the civil government impose on the latter the penalty that would have been imposed on him.²⁵)

Not every Bible commentator has seen the “eye for eye” sanction as primitive. Shalom Paul wrote: “Rather than being a primitive residuum, it restricts retaliation to the person of the offender, while at the same time limiting it to the exact measure of the injury—thereby according equal justice to all.”²⁶ W.F. Albright, the archeologist who specialized in Hebrew and Palestinian studies, wrote: “This principle may seem and is often said to be extraordinarily primitive. But it is actually not in the least primitive. Whereas the beginnings of *lex talionis* are found before Israel, the principle was now extended by analogy until it dominated all punishment of injuries or homicides. In ordinary Ancient Oriental jurisprudence, men who belonged to the higher social categories or who were wealthy simply paid fines, otherwise escaping punishment. . . So the *lex talionis* (is). . . the principle of equal justice for all!”²⁷ Albright understood some of the implications of the passage for the principle of equal justice for all, meaning *equality before the law*. Nevertheless, the myth of “primitive” legislation still clings in people’s

22. *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, ed. John McClintock and James Strong (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), vol. X, p. 165: “Talionis, Lex.”

23. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

24. The same rule applied in Hammurabi’s Code: “If a seignior came forward with false testimony in a case, and has not proved the word which he spoke, if that case was a case involving life, that seignior shall be put to death. If he came forward with (false) testimony concerning grain or money, he shall bear the penalty of that case.” CH, paragraphs 3–4: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 166.

25. A moral judicial system would impose on the accuser or his insurance company all court costs, plus the costs incurred by the defendant in defending himself.

26. Shalom Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 40.

27. W. F. Albright, *History, Archeology, and Christian Humanism* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 74; cited in *ibid.*, p. 77.

minds.²⁸ It seems to some Christians to be a needlessly bloody law. In a reaction against the rigor of this judicial principle, liberal scholar Hans Jochen Boecker went so far as to argue that Old Testament law was not actually governed by *lex talionis*,²⁹ that it only appears in three instances, and that it is a holdover of early nomadic law.³⁰

1. “Vengeance Is Mine”

Vengeance in the Bible is God’s original responsibility. “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste” (Deut.32:35). “If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh. . .” (Deut. 32:41–42a). All nations are required to rejoice because of God’s willingness and ability to avenge His people: “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people” (Deut.32:43). These passages, and many others in the Old Testament, are the foundation of Paul’s summary statement: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom.12:19b). “For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people” (Heb. 10:30).

God makes it clear that He sometimes intervenes personally in history and brings bloody vengeance on His enemies. The state, under limited and Bible-defined circumstances, possesses an analogous authority. It is therefore highly inaccurate to say that the authority to impose vengeance in history is exclusively God’s prerogative. God has delegated to the civil government its limited and derived sovereignty to impose physical vengeance. The state is allowed, by the testimony of witnesses, to impose the death penalty and other physical punish-

28. Hammurabi’s “code” had similar rules: “If a seignior has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they shall destroy his eye. If he has broken another seignior’s bone, they shall break his bone.” CH, paragraphs 196–97. If an aristocrat destroyed the eye of a commoner, however, the *lex talionis* did not apply: he paid one mina of silver (CH 198). *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 175.

29. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, [1976] 1980), pp. 171–72.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 174–75.

ments. *Perfect justice must wait until the day of judgment; so must perfect vengeance.*³¹ But men do not have to wait until the end of time in order to see preliminary justice done, and therefore preliminary vengeance imposed.

Vengeance is a form of *restitution*. "Vengeance is mine; I will *re-pay*." This repayment is in the form of punishment and even permanent judgment. God *pays back* what is owed to the sinner. It is *repayment in kind*, an original meaning of "retaliate." Capital crimes require the public execution of the guilty person. In the case of crimes less repugnant to God than capital crimes, economic restitution is often paid by the criminal to the victim. But restitution is ultimately owed to God.³² The victim, as God's image bearer, deserves his restitution, just as God deserves His. When repayment in kind is not made, a sense of injustice prevails. The victim, or the family members who survive the victim, understand that a convicted criminal who is not forced to make restitution has evaded justice. Such an escape is seen as being unfair.

2. Fair Warning

God reminds His people that His ultimate justice cannot be evaded. This testimony of a final judgment is provided by the sanctions imposed by the authorities. Historical sanctions are designed by God to fit the crime in order to persuade men that *the universe is ultimately fair, for both time and eternity are governed by the decree of God*. God's people should not despair because some men escape the earnest (down payment) of the final justice that is coming. Psalm 73 is a reminder of the seeming injustice of life, and how the wicked are finally rewarded according to their deeds. "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps.73:3). David was beaten down by events (v.2), yet he saw all the good things that come to the wicked in life (vv.4–5, 12). He flayed himself with such thoughts, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors" (vv.17–19). David finally admits: "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before

31. Chapter 19.

32. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 525–30.

thee" (v.22).³³

The relationship between covenantal faithfulness and external prosperity is clearly taught in the Bible (Deut. 28:1–14). So is the relationship between covenant-breaking and calamity (Deut. 28:15–68). This system of sanctions applies to the whole world, not just in Old Testament Israel. Deny this, and you have also denied the possibility of an explicitly and exclusively Christian social theory. Christians who deny the continuing relevance of Deuteronomy 28's sanctions in post-Calvary, pre-Second Coming history should be warned by David's admission that he had been foolish to doubt these relationships. The concept of *slippery places* is not often discussed, but it is very important. God sets people high *in order to make them slide*, visibly, before the world. God said to Pharaoh: "For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex.9:15–16). The temporary prosperity of the wicked must not be viewed as evidence that would call into question the long-term relationship between covenant-breaking and destruction.

Vengeance is legitimate, but not as a private act. It is always to be covenantal, governed by God's institutional monopoly, civil government. James Fitzjames Stephen said it best: "The criminal law stands to the passion of revenge in much the same relation as marriage to the sexual appetite."³⁴ The private vendetta is always illegitimate; public vengeance is sometimes legitimate. There are many examples of private vengeance not sanctioned by God: gangster wars, clan feuds, the murder of those who testify against a criminal or syndicate, and murders for breaking the code of silence of a secret society. It is a crime against God Himself to take any oath that testifies to the right of any private organization or voluntary society to inflict physical violence, especially death, for breaking the oath or any other violation of the "code," even if this oath's invoked penalties are supposedly only "symbolic" rather than literal. I refer here to Masonic oaths,³⁵ but also

33. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

34. James Fitzjames Stephen, *A History of the Criminal Law in England* (London: Macmillan, 1863), II, p. 80. Cited by Ernest van den Haag, *Punishing Criminals: Concerning a Very Old and Painful Question* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 12.

35. That the Freemasons adopt a covenantal view of the self-maledictory oath is admitted in *The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, a standard Masonic publication. The

to any other similar oath. For example, the oath of an Entered Apprentice of the Masonic order ends with these words: “. . . binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my throat cut from ear to ear, my tongue torn out by its roots and buried in the rough sands of the sea at low-water mark where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours, should I ever knowingly or willingly violate this my solemn oath and obligation as an Entered Apprentice Mason.”³⁶ Such an oath affirms the legitimacy of private institutional vengeance—vengeance applied by institutions that have not been assigned the state’s limited sovereignty to serve as God’s agency of vengeance. This sort of physical vengeance is prohibited by biblical law, but the Bible does not condemn all earthly vengeance. The state is an agency of God’s vengeance. So is the church, but the church may not lawfully impose physical vengeance, while the state can. Therefore, no church can legitimately invoke oaths or oath signs similar in form to secret society blood oaths. A church that does this has marked itself as a cult.

D. Limiting the State

The authority to impose vengeance is limited. This authority is too easily abused for God not to place Bible-revealed restraints on it. The officers of the civil government readily overstep their authority. The state has often been seen as divine because it possesses the ability to impose the death penalty and other punishments. What the Bible

author of the section on “Oath” discussed the objections raised in the nineteenth century by the Roman Catholic Church and the Scottish seceders to Masonic oaths. He referred to the “sacred sanction” of an oath, and insists on the legitimacy of “the invocation of the Deity to witness” the oath. He cited Dr. Harris’ *Masonic Discourses*: “What the ignorant call ‘the oath,’ is simply an obligation, covenant, and promise, exacted previously to the divulging of the specialties of the Order, and our means of recognizing each other; . . .” Explaining away the accusation that these secret oaths are taken in religious ceremonies, the author says: “Oaths, in all countries and at all times, have been accompanied by peculiar rites, intended to increase the solemnity and reverence of the act. . . . In all solemn covenants the oath was accompanied by a sacrifice; . . .” He admitted that a Masonic oath may have sanctions attached, even a capital penalty. All oaths do, he insists. This is “an attestation of God to the truth of a declaration, as a witness and avenger; and hence every oath includes in itself, and as its very essence, the covenant of God’s wrath, the heaviest of all penalties, as the necessary consequence of its violation.” Albert G. Mackey, *The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences*, 2 vols., rev. ed. (New York: Masonic History Co., 1925), II, pp. 522–23.

36. *King Solomon and His Followers* (New York: Allen Pub. Co., 1943); cited in E. M. Storms, *Should a Christian Be a Mason?* (Fletcher, North Carolina: New Puritan Library, 1980), p. 63.

presents as a limited, derived sovereignty, men have defined as an ultimate, original sovereignty. To combat this false interpretation, biblical law restrains the officers of the state by imposing strict limitations on their enforcement of law. God's law must be enforced, and this law establishes criteria of evidence and a standard of justice. This standard is "an eye for an eye." A popular slogan in the modern world promotes a parallel juridical principle: "The punishment should fit the crime."

1. *The Punishment Should Fit the Crime*

Why should the punishment fit the crime? What ethical principle leads Western people to believe that the Islamic judicial practice of cutting off a pickpocket's hand is too severe a punishment? After all, this will make future pickpocketing by the man far less likely. Why not cut off his other hand if he is caught and convicted again? People who have grown up in the West are repelled by the realization that such punishments have been imposed in the past, and are still imposed in Muslim societies.³⁷ Why this repulsion? Because they are convinced that the punishment exceeds the severity of the loss imposed on the victim by the thief.

The Bible teaches that the victim must have his goods restored two-fold (Ex.22:4, 7), four-fold (for stealing a sheep), or five-fold (for stealing an ox) (Ex.22:1).³⁸ The passage on restitution in Leviticus 6 in-

37. This is Islam's *Shari'a* law. It is officially the civil law in Mauritania, where such amputations are still imposed: Roger Sawyer, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 15. *Shari'a* was reimposed in Sudan in 1988. Complained M. Ismail of Arlington, Virginia in a letter to the editor: "As a Sudanese, I feel that the previous legal code, which was an adoption of the British secular code, was a colonial yoke that disfigured our national independence." *Washington Times* (Oct. 3, 1988). Better to disfigure pickpockets than Sudan's national independence, Mr. Ismail was saying.

38. The seven-fold restitution of Proverbs 6:31 appears to be a *symbolic statement* regarding the comprehensive nature of restitution. The hungry thief who is destitute and who steals food must repay "all the substance of his house," meaning that what little he owns is forfeited when the normal two-fold restitution payment is imposed. A rich man who steals bread would not be made destitute by a two-fold payment. The poor thief has to pay to the limits of his wealth, despite his "extenuating circumstances," while the rich thief who steals for the love of evil-doing is barely touched financially. In short, the law plays no favorites. It does not respect persons. The perverse rich thief is not required to pay any greater percentage than the impoverished thief. The seven-fold vengeance of God against anyone who might persecute Cain is another example of the language of fullness (Gen. 4:15). It means full judgment. Christ's words in Matthew 18 also indicate fullness: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (vv. 21–22).

dicates that if the thief turns himself in before the authorities identify him as the thief, he must restore the principal (6:4), and must also add a 20% payment—a double tithe—presumably because of the false oath (6:5). The restitution is equal to the value of the item stolen, and the penalty is one-fifth of this.³⁹

The Bible does not teach that a convicted man's future productivity should be utterly destroyed by the judges, except in the case of capital crimes. The dominion covenant imposes a moral obligation on all men to labor to subdue the earth to the glory of God. A man whose body has been deliberately mutilated probably will become a less productive worker. He may find it difficult to earn enough wealth to repay his debt to the victim. By cutting off the pickpocket's hand, the state is saying that there is no effective regeneration in life, that God cannot restore to wholeness a sinner's soul and his calling. Because he is a convicted pickpocket, he must be assumed to be a perpetual thief by nature; therefore, the state must make his future labor in his illegal calling less efficient. His hand is not being cut off because his victim lost a hand; it is being cut off simply as *an assertion of state power*, and as a deterrent against crime.

Boecker correctly observed that "The intention of the talion was not, therefore, to *inflict* injury—as it might sound to us today—but to *limit* injury."⁴⁰ But then he got everything confused once again. He said that this law restrained the institution of blood revenge.⁴¹ He never bothered to apply this principle of restraint to the modern state. The Bible teaches that excessive penalties imposed by the state violate a fundamental principle of biblical obedience, both personal and civil: "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32). Conclusion: neither is the state to *cut off* the pickpocket's right hand or his left.⁴²

"Seventy times seven" is hyperbolic language; seventy times "fullness" means totality. Such forgiveness is not to be forgiveness apart from biblical restitution, however; the principle of forgiveness is not to be used to subsidize evil: Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 463.

39. The King James translation reads: "he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto" (6:5). The New English Bible is clearer: "He shall make full restitution, adding one fifth to it." The New American Standard reads: "[H]e shall make restitution for it in full, and add to it one-fifth more." The restitution payment would appear to be the penalty payment equal to the item stolen.

40. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice*, p. 174.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 174–75.

42. The Hammurabi Code specified death for any thief who had taken an oath that

2. *The Punishment Should Benefit the Victim*

Societies that are not governed by biblical law do not place the proper emphasis on the principle of economic restitution. The concern of the judicial system becomes *punishment of the criminal* rather than *restitution to the victim*. W. Cleon Skousen, a lawyer and former law enforcement official, described the prevailing situation: “Under modern law, fines are almost invariably paid to the city, county or federal government. If the victim wants any remedy he must sue for damages in a civil court. However, as everyone knows, by the time a criminal has paid his fines to the court, he is usually depleted of funds or consigned to prison where he is earning nothing and therefore could not pay damages even if his victim went to the expense of filing a suit and getting a judgment. As a result, modern justice penalizes the offender, but does virtually nothing for the victim.”⁴³ In later stages of the development of humanism, state officials begin to substitute the shibboleth of “rehabilitation” for punishment, although the form this “rehabilitation” takes makes the state’s officers even more arbitrary than before.

Biblical law restrains the arbitrariness of the state’s officers. If the punishment must fit the crime, then the judges do not have the authority to impose lighter judgments or heavier judgments on the criminal. The victim decides the penalty, not the judges.⁴⁴ The criminal is to be given sufficient freedom to repay the victim, even if he must be sold into indentured servitude for a specific period of time in order to raise sufficient funds to pay off the victim. As a servant, he learns the discipline of work, and perhaps sufficient skills to give him a new calling and a new life when his debt is paid. But the debt is always to a private party: to the victim originally, and the slave-owner secondarily. Where a specific victim is involved and can be identified, the debt is not owed as a fine to the state. It is owed to the victim. The man who causes a premature birth in which the baby is not harmed nevertheless pays a fine to the family because of the risk to which he subjected the pregnant woman and her child.

he had not stolen: CH, paragraphs 9–10. There was a 30-fold restitution for stealing animals belonging to the state: paragraph 8. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 166.

43. W. Cleon Skousen, *The Third Thousand Years* (Salt Lake City, Utah:Bookcraft, 1964), p. 354. Skousen served in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for 16 years and also served as Chief of Police in Salt Lake City in 1956. He became Editorial Director of *Law and Order* in 1960, the leading professional law enforcement journal in the United States.

44. Chapter 33.

3. *Fines Should Compensate Victims*

This should not be understood as an argument against fines to the civil government for so-called “victimless crimes.” For example, a person is prohibited from driving a car at 70 miles an hour through a residential district or school zone. There are potential victims who deserve legal protection. The speeding driver is subjecting them to added risk of injury or death. Clearly, it is more dangerous statistically for children to attend a school located near an unfenced street on which drivers are travelling at 70 miles an hour rather than 25. The imposition of a fine helps to reduce the number of speeding drivers. Because they increase risks to families, drivers who exceed the speed limit can legitimately be fined, because the victims of this increased statistical risk cannot be specified. These fines should be imposed locally: to be used to indemnify future local victims of crimes that go unpunished.

The state is not to use fines to increase its operating budget or increase its control over the lives of innocent citizens. The state is to be supported by tax levies, so that no conflict of interest should occur between honest judgment and the desire to increase the state’s budget. The proper use of fines is the establishment of a *restitution fund for victims of crimes whose perpetrators cannot be located or convicted*, analogous to the Old Testament sacrifice of the heifer when a murderer could not be found (Deut.21:1–9). Such a fund is a valid use of the civil law. Even if law enforcement authorities are unable to locate and convict a criminal, the victim still deserves restitution, just as God deserved restitution for an unsolved murder in Israel in the form of a sacrificed heifer. A reasonable way of funding such a restitution program is to collect money from those who have been successfully convicted by law enforcement authorities.

E. Hayek’s Three Principles

Lex talionis binds the state. This so-called “primitive” principle keeps the state from becoming arbitrary in its imposition of penalties. *Citizens can better predict in advance what the penalty will be for a specific crime.* This is extremely important for maintaining a free society. The three legal foundations for a free society, Hayek argued, are known general rules, certainty of enforcement, and equality before the law. I argue that the principle of “eye for eye” preserves all three.

1. General Rules

First, with respect to general rules, Hayek wrote that these rules must distinguish private spheres of action from public spheres, which is crucial in maintaining freedom: “What distinguishes a free from an unfree society is that in the former each individual has a recognized private sphere clearly distinct from the public sphere, and the private individual cannot be ordered about but is expected to obey only the rules which are equally applicable to all. It used to be the boast of free men that, so long as they kept within the bounds of the known law, there was no need to ask anybody’s permission or to obey anybody’s orders. It is doubtful whether any of us can make this claim today.”⁴⁵ If men must ask permission before they act, society then becomes a *top-down bureaucratic order*, which is an appropriate structure only for the military and the police force (the “sword”).⁴⁶ The Bible specifies that the proper hierarchical structure in a biblical covenant is a bottom-up appeals court structure (Ex. 18).⁴⁷

Adam was allowed to do anything he wanted to do in the garden, with only one exception. He had to avoid touching or eating the forbidden fruit. He did not have to ask permission to do anything else. He was free to choose.⁴⁸ This biblical principle of legal freedom is to govern all our decisions.⁴⁹ This is stated clearly in Jesus’s parable of the laborers who all received the same wage. Those who had worked all day complained to the owner of the field. The owner responded: “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (Matt. 20:13–15).⁵⁰ Neither the owner nor the workers had to get permission in advance from some government agency. God leaves both sides free to choose the terms of

45. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 207–8.

46. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/MisesBur>)

47. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

48. Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).

49. Grace Hopper, who developed the computer language Cobol, and who served as an officer in the U.S. Navy until she was well into her seventies, offered this theory of leadership: “It’s easier to say you’re sorry than it is to ask permission.”

50. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

labor and payment.

Because God alone is omniscient, He controls the world perfectly. Men, not being omniscient, must accept judicial restrictions on their own legitimate spheres of action. In doing so, they acknowledge their position as creatures under God. They must face the reality of their own limitations as creatures. They must not pretend that they can foresee the complex outcome of every activity of every person in society. The complexity of life is too great. Men can only make guesses about the consequences of human action. *To bring the greatest quantity of accurate knowledge to bear on society at any point in time, men must be allowed great latitude in their personal decision-making.* This division of intellectual labor is what provides society with the best available knowledge at a price people are willing to pay.⁵¹ If men pretend that a committee of experts can plan for an entire economy, they have denied God's exclusive omnipotence and omniscience. Hayek was correct: ". . . the demand for conscious control is therefore equivalent to the demand for control by a single mind."⁵² He went on to argue: "Indeed, any social processes which deserve to be called 'social' in distinction from the action of individuals are almost *ex definitione* not conscious. Insofar as such processes are capable of producing a useful order which could not have been produced by conscious direction, any attempt to make them subject to such direction would necessarily mean that we restrict what social activity can achieve to the inferior capacity of the individual mind."⁵³ Worse; in a socialist society, we restrict what social activity can achieve to what a responsibility-avoiding, government-protected committee can achieve.

By decentralizing decision-making within a system of known rules, and by allowing a competitive system of market-imposed rewards and punishments, society preserves individual freedom, individual and corporate productivity, and personal responsibility. This decentralized decision-making process is what is established by the profit management system.⁵⁴

The principle of "eye for eye" is easily understood. It allows people to evaluate in advance their potential liabilities for actions that inflict physical harm on others. This encourages personal responsibility. It

51. F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>)

52. F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution in Science: Studies of the Abuse of Reason* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Press, [1952] 1979), p. 153.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 154

54. Mises, *Bureaucracy*, ch. 1.

also encourages people to make accurate assessments of potential costs and benefits of their actions. This is the biblical principle of *counting the cost* (Luke 14:28–30).⁵⁵ It is basic to biblical liberty that individuals count the costs of their behavior.

2. Legal Predictability

Second, there is the crucial issue of legal predictability. “There is probably no single factor which has contributed more to the prosperity of the West than the relative certainty of the law which has prevailed here.”⁵⁶ He made a very important point in this regard. The certainty of law is important, not just in cases that come before the courts, but also in those cases that do not lead to formal litigation because the outcome is so certain. “It is the cases that never come before the courts, not those that do, that are the measure of the certainty of the law.”⁵⁷ In the United States, there is seemingly endless litigation, precisely because of the unpredictability of the courts.⁵⁸ Men go into the courts seeking justice because they do not know what to expect from the courts. If they knew what to expect, fewer people would bother to litigate. They would settle out of court or perhaps even avoid the original infraction.

The law of God establishes the “eye for eye” principle. Men can assess, in advance, what their punishment is likely to be if they transgress the law. They can count the potential cost of violence. This is a restraining factor on all sin. A person can imagine the costs to his potential victim of losing an eye or a tooth. If convicted, the criminal will bear a comparable cost.

Rulers ought to be aware that the *lex talionis* principle is not simply limited to crimes by private citizens. Judgments fall on nations, both blessings and cursings (Judges, Jonah, Lamentations). The list of promised *national* cursings in Deuteronomy 28:15–68 is a detailed extension of the list of promised blessings in verses 1–14. When nations defy God in specific ways, they will be judged in specific ways—mirror images of the promised blessings to covenantally faithful nations. Instead of going out in war (a national endeavor, not private) and scattering their enemies, they will go out to war and be scattered by their

55. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

56. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 208.

57. *Idem.*

58. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

enemies. Instead of lending to their enemies, they will become debtors to their enemies. The principle of “eye for eye” is essential to all of life. From him to whom much has been given, much is expected (Luke 12:47–48).⁵⁹

3. *Equality Before the Law*

“The third requirement of true law is equality.”⁶⁰ Equality before the law, as W. F. Albright wrote, is reinforced by the “eye for eye” principle.⁶¹ The rich man, as well as the poor man, wants to avoid the loss of an eye or a tooth. Therefore, the rich man, like the poor man, must avoid inflicting such injuries on other people. There must be equality before the law (Lev. 19:15).⁶² The judges must not impose a tooth’s worth of punishment for an eye’s worth of damage just because the convicted person is rich or famous. People can then trust the law and the courts, for they know that the law is being enforced because God is sovereign over the affairs of men. The law does not become a weapon of oppression to be used by one class over another. The law, to use Marx’s terminology, is not to become a superstructure which is built on the foundation of an economic substructure. The law of God is the substructure in terms of which the economy, the political order, and the pattern of society develop.

Thus, the general legal principle of “eye for eye” in the imposition of civil punishments is a crucial foundation of human freedom, for it binds the civil government in advance. Hayek’s discussion is very useful for understanding the state-binding purposes of the *lex talionis*. There are three legal principles that undergird a free society, he argues: general legal rules that (1) distinguish private from public spheres of action; (2) provide legal predictability; and (3) provide equality before the law. The judicial principle of *lex talionis* supports all three.

F. Restoration, Repentance, and Restitution

Men have failed to understand the fundamental goal of biblical

59. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

60. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 209.

61. “So the *lex talionis* (is). . . the principle of equal justice for all!” W. F. Albright, *History, Archeology, and Christian Humanism*, p. 74, as cited in Shalom Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant*, op. cit., p.77.

62. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

law: *restoration*—restoration of the covenantal relation between God and a formerly rebellious man, and restitution between the criminal and his victim. Rushdoony wrote: “Emphatically, in Biblical law the goal is *not punishment but restoration*, not the infliction of certain penalties on criminals but the restoration of godly order.”⁶³ The criminal is to make restitution to the victim. This restores the victim’s position prior to the crime, plus it increases his holdings to compensate him for the trouble the crime caused him. He is as fully repaid as the court system can lawfully determine. The innocent members of society can feel more confident about their lives and property because the state is obeying God and punishing criminals in a way that preserves the dominion covenant. They can work hard, knowing that the state is working to reduce crime and help them keep the fruits of their labor. At the same time, the criminal now knows that his debt is paid, and that *the burden of guilt is removed*. He can then return to a lawful calling and begin to exercise dominion as a free man. This is what Rushdoony meant when he spoke of restoration, of maintaining godly order.

The Bible teaches restitution, repentance, and restoration. The criminal must make outward restitution to the victim, no matter what his feelings are. The state lawfully enforces this. Second, he is morally required by God to repent, and to declare himself at the mercy of God. No human government can lawfully enforce this. Finally, in response to both external restitution and internal repentance, God restores the sinner to wholeness.

The state cannot legitimately require the internal act of repentance; officers cannot know the criminal’s heart. The state cannot legitimately require a public statement of theological faith from all residents in a society. The “stranger within the gates” may believe what he wants about God, man, and law.⁶⁴ The state can legitimately claim only the right to compel outward conformity to the law, including the law

63. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p.515.

64. This does not mean that the state cannot legitimately require a statement of faith from those who seek citizenship, and therefore the right potentially to serve as judges “within the gates.” In the United States, citizens are required to uphold and defend the Constitution; resident aliens make no such profession of faith. They are required to obey the terms of laws that are based on the Constitution, but they are not required by law to swear that they will uphold and defend it. This is one reason why foreign citizens should be exempt from military conscription: soldiers, as covenanted officials of the national government, are required to uphold and defend the Constitution. They wear the marks of their civil office (uniforms) and carry “swords”: weapons.

of economic restitution. *Outward conformity to the law* is sufficient to create the conditions of *external social order*. This is the function of civil government: *the preservation of external social order through the administration of justice*. At the same time, we must recognize that apart from widespread inward repentance, no social order can be preserved in the long run, for men will chafe at the requirements of God's law, including the law of restitution. Men will not honor God's law indefinitely, apart from widespread conversions. *Regeneration ultimately undergirds long-term social order*.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it is not the state's function to seek to enforce inward regeneration. The state is not the Holy Spirit.

1. Concern for the Victim

Concern for the victim rather than with rehabilitation of the criminal often marked so-called "primitive" societies. English common law has also tended to focus on retribution, not the rehabilitation of the criminal. It seeks to punish men in specific ways for specific evil acts. In contrast, modern humanistic theories of jurisprudence, in the name of humanitarianism, to a great extent have promoted a messianic view of the state. Lon Fuller summarized the contrasting views, and the heart of the controversy is the assertion of the ability of the state to *re-create* man: "The familiar penal or retributive theory looks to the act and seeks to make the miscreant pay for his misdeed; the rehabilitative theory on the other hand, sees the purpose of the law as recreating the person, or improving the criminal himself so that any impulses toward misconduct will be eliminated or brought under internal control. Despite the humane appeal of the rehabilitative theory, the actual processes of criminal trials remain under the domination of the view that we must try the act, not the man; any departure from this conception, it is feared, would sacrifice justice to a policy of paternalistic intervention in the life of the individual."⁶⁶ This fear is well-deserved: continual interventions into the lives of men by a self-professed omniscient paternalistic state is exactly where a legal theory of "trying the man rather than his acts" does lead. A jury can make the criminal "pay for

65. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

66. Lon Fuller (1969), cited by Richard E. Laster, "Criminal Restitution: A Survey of Its Past History and an Analysis of Its Present Usefulness," *University of Richmond Law Review*, V (1970), p. 97. Laster's study concluded that the role of the victim in criminal law has steadily diminished (p.97).

his crime” by paying the victim because members of the jury can make reasonable estimates of the economic effects of the convicted criminal’s acts. On the other hand, jurors cannot read the convicted criminal’s mind. When judges try to read other men’s minds, the result is tyranny.

Restitution by the criminal to the victim is one way of restoring wholeness to the victim. It also reduces the likelihood of private attempts at vengeance.⁶⁷ It is a way of dealing with guilt. In this sense, it is a means of restoring wholeness to the criminal, too.

Israel’s history can legitimately be classified in terms of a series of incidents by which this three-fold relationship—repentance, restitution, and restoration—was illustrated in a covenantal, communal, and national way. Israel’s deliverance from Babylon is a good example of this restorative process. It is also illustrated in the instance of David’s adultery and his murder of Uriah the Hittite. David repented (II Sam. 12:13); the child died (12:18), and so did three of his adult sons—Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah—thereby making four-fold restitution on a “four lives for one” basis.⁶⁸ Four-fold restitution was the required payment for the slaughter of a lamb (Ex. 22:1). Nathan the prophet had used the analogy of the slaughtered ewe lamb in his confrontation with David (II Sam. 12:4). David recognized that the culprit was worthy of death (v. 5). David therefore could not escape making the four-fold restitution payment to God’s sense of justice (adultery and murder are both capital crimes in the Bible). Subsequently, David and Bathsheba were covenantally restored in their marriage, which God testified to publicly by the birth of Solomon (12:24), who became the lawful heir of David’s throne.

We must understand capital punishment as God’s required restitution payment. The death penalty is not a means of revenge alone or deterrence alone. It was imposed on Adam and his heirs, and also on the second Adam, Jesus Christ. For any civil crime too great to be compensated for by a monetary restitution payment to the victim, God requires the civil magistrate to impose the death penalty, God’s restitution payment. Homicide, for example, could not be paid for in Israel by anything less rigorous than life for life (Num. 35:31), a law which is without parallel in the laws of the ancient Near East.⁶⁹ Later rabbinic

67. Laster, *ibid.*, p. 75.

68. Herbert Chanan Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XLIV (1973), p. 42.

69. Paul, *Book of the Covenant*, p. 61.

Judaism abandoned the principle that all murderers are subject to the death penalty, in order to reduce the penalty for Jews who kill resident aliens or gentiles. Maimonides was quite open about this: "If an Israelite kills a resident alien, he does not suffer capital punishment at the hands of the court, because Scripture says, *And if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor* (Exod. 21:12). Needless to say, one is not put to death if he kills a heathen."⁷⁰

Restitution, repentance, and restoration are equally fundamental concepts in Christian theology. Without Christ's restitution payment to God for the sins of mankind, there could have been no history from the day Adam fell. Without repentance, the individual cannot claim to be free from the requirement to make the restitution payment to God. Eternal judgment is God's lawful vengeance on all those who have not made restitution, meaning all those who have not placed themselves at the mercy of God by claiming to be under Christ's general repayment. The absolute righteousness of God is demonstrated by His eternal punishment of those who have not made full restitution to Him. The punishment fits the crime of ethical rebellion against a sovereign, holy God.

2. *Restitution in Practice*

Various forms of restitution have been adopted by civil governments for centuries.⁷¹ Experiments by state and local governments in the United States since the mid-1970s also indicated that such a system can provide significant benefits to victims. The state of Minnesota began its experiment in October of 1973. Based on one year's data, researchers made a study of opinions and results. Restitution was a condition of probation of the criminals in one-fourth of all probation cases. "Restitution was used in a straightforward manner by most courts. Full cash restitution was ordered to be paid by the offender to the victim in more than nine out of ten cases. Adjustments in the amount of restitution because of limited ability of the offender were rare. In-kind, or service, restitution to the victim or community was ordered in only a few cases. . . ."⁷²

70. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11, *The Code of Mainonides*, 14 vols (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), V:II:11, p. 201.

71. J. A. Gyls and F. Reidy, "The Case for Compensating Victims of Crime," *Atlanta Economic Review*, XXV (May/June 1975).

72. *Summary Report: The Assessment of Restitution in the Minnesota Probation Services*, prepared for the Governor's Commission on Crime Prevention and Control

The program was limited primarily to non-violent criminal offenders who were considered able to pay, which generally meant white middle-class criminal offenders.⁷³ This limits the empirical reliability of the conclusions concerning the overall effectiveness of the program. Also, the amount of restitution was limited to the amount of the economic loss by the victims, not two-fold restitution, as required by the Bible. The original state-level trial program was dropped in 1976, but the principle has been instituted at the local level. Judges in every jurisdiction now impose restitution as a penal sanction.

The *Summary Report* stated that “Most judges and probation officers favored the use of restitution. Similarly most judges and probation officers expressed the belief that restitution had a rehabilitative effect.” Furthermore, “most victims believed that restitution by the offender to the victim is the proper method of victim compensation. Victims who were dissatisfied tended to be those who felt that they had not been involved in the process of ordering or aiding in the completion of restitution.” And perhaps most revealing of all, “Most offenders thought that restitution as ordered was fair.”⁷⁴ Only ten of the offenders (14.4%) would have preferred a fine or a jail sentence.⁷⁵ It is understandable why we have seen a renewed interest in restitution as a form of punishment.⁷⁶

G. Prisons

The prison as a correctional and rehabilitative institution was the invention of the early nineteenth-century reform movement in the United States. Visitors from all over Europe came to see these correctional “wonders.” The most famous of these visitors was Alexis de Tocqueville, who came from France in 1831 to see our prisons, and who then wrote the most insightful study of American institutions in the nineteenth century, which also became the earliest major work in

(Jan.31, 1976), p.1.

73. *Idem.*

74. *Idem.*

75. *Ibid.*, p.26.

76. Joe Hudson and Burt Galloway (eds.), *Considering the Victim: Readings in Restitution and Victim Compensation* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1975); O. Hobart Mowrer, “Loss and Recovery of Community,” in George M. Gazda (ed.), *Innovations to Group Psychotherapy* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1975). Such interest has never been entirely absent: see Irving E. Cohen, “The Integration of Restitution in the Probation Services,” *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, XXXIV (1944), pp.315–26.

the discipline of sociology, *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840). He and his colleague Gustave de Beaumont produced a report on their observations, *On the Penitentiary System in the United States* (1833).⁷⁷ Parallel tax-supported institutions were developed during this same era: the insane asylum, the orphanage, the reformatory for youthful delinquents, and the large-scale public almshouse.⁷⁸ It was also the era of the first “religiously neutral” (humanistic) tax-supported day schools in the United States.⁷⁹

1. No Prisons

In Israel, there was no prison system. Egypt had prisons; Israel did not.⁸⁰ Why not? Because prisons do not offer adequate opportunities for criminals to repay their victims. *A prison restricts the criminal's ability to make restitution, and restitution is the very essence of biblical punishment.* Prisons restrict men's ability to repay; they also make it difficult for men to exercise dominion over nature.

In a sense, the prison is analogous to the final judgment. There is no restitution to victims by those in hell or in the lake of fire. There is permanent restitution to God, but not to man. In this sense, hell is outside history and the process of restitution and restoration. Hell is described as a debtors prison in Jesus' parable of the unjust debtor. The debtor is cast into prison until every last payment is made (Matt.

77. Tocqueville and Beaumont on *Social Reform*, ed. Seymour Drescher (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Gannon, 1968).

78. David Rothman wrote: “Americans in the colonial period had followed very different procedures. They relieved the poor at home or with relatives or neighbors; they did not remove them to almshouses. They fined or whipped criminals or put them in stocks or, if the crime was serious enough, hung them; they did not conceive of imprisoning them for specific periods of time. The colonists left the insane in the care of their families, supporting them, in case of need, as one of the poor. They did not erect special buildings for incarcerating the mentally ill. Similarly, homeless children lived with neighbors, not in orphan asylums. . . . The few institutions that existed in the eighteenth century were clearly places of last resort. Americans in the Jacksonian period reversed these practices. Institutions became places of first resort, the preferred solution to the problems of poverty, crime, delinquency, and insanity.” David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), p. xiii.

79. The two leaders in this self-consciously anti-Christian public school movement were Horace Mann and James G. Carter: R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963), chaps. 3, 4.

80. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, pp. 514–16.

18:23–35).⁸¹ The debtor could get out only if someone else paid his obligations. Clearly, this is a picture of Christ's payment of His people's ethical debts to God, as their kinsman-redeemer. This substitute payment is available to mankind only in history. Thus, the prison is illegitimate because it represents a denial of history and its opportunities. That Egypt had prisons is understandable; Egyptians had a static view of time. Israel did not. Old Testament law did not allow imprisonment.⁸²

Western Europe abandoned debtors prison during the decade 1867–77.⁸³ Legislators at last recognized that it did victims no good to see a debtor cast into prison until he paid, because he could not earn his way out. It is not coincidental that Europe passed such legislation in the same era that the United States and Russia abolished slavery, another system that also did not provide a way for people to buy their way out.

The ultimate earthly prison is the concentration camp. While the Soviet camp system had economic functions, the cruelty of long sentences was obvious. Under Stalin, these sentences were incredibly grotesque. As many as 30 million people were sent into the camps, never to return.⁸⁴ The magnitude of the crime against humanity seems irrationally cruel.⁸⁵ They were irrational, according to Solzhenitsyn. The first thought of the arrested person was always, "Me? What for?"⁸⁶ From 1934 on, a soldier captured in wartime was automatically given a 10-year sentence upon being freed from the enemy.⁸⁷ Encircled military units got 10-year sentences after 1941.⁸⁸ Failure to denounce specified evil acts carried an indeterminate sentence.⁸⁹ Quotas for arrests made the diversity of the camps fantastic, he said; there was no logic to

81. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch.37.

82. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained*, translated by Isaac Levy, 5 vols., *Exodus*, 3rd ed. (London: Honig & Sons, 1967), p. 294: at Exodus 21:6.

83. France abolished debtors prison in 1867; England abolished it by the Debtors Act of 1869. Ireland followed in 1872, Scotland in 1880. Switzerland and Norway abolished it in 1874, Italy in 1877. "Debt," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1910), VII, p. 906.

84. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purges of the Thirties*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1973), p. 710.

85. Van den Haag, *Punishing Criminals*, p. 43.

86. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, I–II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 4.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 363.

them.⁹⁰ A chance meeting with a condemned man could get you 10 years.⁹¹ Owning a radio tube was worth ten years.⁹² In 1948, the average sentence increased to 25 years; juveniles received 10.⁹³

The classic story he told was of a district Party conference in Moscow Province. At the end of the conference, someone called for a tribute to Stalin. A wave of applause began, and continued. Everyone was afraid to be the first person to stop clapping, for fear of being arrested. It went on for eleven minutes. Finally, one man, a factory director, stopped clapping and sat down, then the whole group immediately stopped and sat down. That night the man was arrested, and he then received a 10-year sentence.⁹⁴

There is only one way to explain this: *the desire of the state to become God and to impose hell on earth*. It became a goal of state policy to destroy men's lives, to leave them without earthly hope in the future. It was easy to go to jail without a trial. The Special Boards attached to the secret police, the OSO's,⁹⁵ handed down "administrative penalties," not sentences. "The OSO enjoyed another important advantage in that its penalty could not be appealed. There was nowhere to appeal to. There was no appeals jurisdiction above it, and no jurisdiction beneath it. It was subordinate only to the Minister of Internal Affairs, to Stalin, and to Satan."⁹⁶ It is not surprising that the camps became the closest thing in recorded history to hell on earth.

2. Bureaucracy

The prison is a bureaucracy, not a market-oriented institution. It is run by the state through taxes. It is a bureaucratic management system, not a profit management system.⁹⁷ Men are trained to follow orders, not to innovate, take risks, and meet market demand. There are many arguments against prisons, as revealed by an enormous bibliography on alternatives to prisons,⁹⁸ but the most important one is that

90. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

97. See Gary North, "Statist Bureaucracy in the Modern Economy," in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 20. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>) See also Mises, *Bureaucracy*.

98. James R. Brantley and Marjorie Kravitz (eds.), *Alternatives to Institutionaliza-*

they thwart the biblical principle of restitution.

The prison also creates other horrors, such as homosexuality and training in criminal behavior for the younger inmates by the “skilled” older inmates. It puts too much power in the hands of prisoners, who can commit rape and even murder with their AIDS infections.⁹⁹ It puts too much power in the hands of guards, who can then indulge their tastes in brutality. It puts too much power in the hands of parole boards, who can shorten a man’s sentence irrespective of the crime, thereby making the punishment fit the board’s assessment of the criminal, not the judge’s assessment of the effects of the crime—or more to the point, making the punishment fit the latest humanistic theory of criminal behavior and social responsibility, not the crime.¹⁰⁰

Left-wing humanists have begun to see the threat to justice posed by the indeterminate sentence.¹⁰¹ Mitford described the indeterminate sentence as “a potent psychological instrument for inmate manipulation and control, the ‘uncertainty’ ever nagging at the prisoner’s mind a far more effective weapon than the cruder ones then [in the 1870s] in vogue: the club, the starvation regime, the iron shackle.”¹⁰² Because of doubts regarding the prison as a means of correcting evil behavior, we have seen an increasing resistance by juries and judges to send first offenders or minor offenders to prison. But because restitution has not yet become a common means of punishing criminals, these “minor” criminals receive no punishment, other than having to report occasionally to an overburdened probation or parole officer.¹⁰³

tion: A Definitive Bibliography, published by the National Criminal Justice Reference Service of the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, a division of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Justice (May 1979), 240 pages.

99. National columnist Mike Royko recommended prison sentences rather than fines for computer hackers, because intelligent middle-class prisoners will be raped in jail. “If the computer vandals are as bright as they think they are, they’ll decide that they don’t want to be forcibly betrothed to some hulk of a cellmate with a shaved head and 10 tattoos.” Mike Royko, “No software in his heart for hackers,” *Washington Times* (Nov. 11, 1988). This is a politically conservative newspaper.

100. C. S. Lewis, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment,” in Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 287–300.

101. Jessica Mitford, *Kind and Usual Punishment: The Prison Business* (New York: Knopf, 1973), ch.6. Those who have opposed capital punishment have denounced it as cruel and unusual. Mitford’s attack implies that imprisonment is, too. What, then, is legitimate punishment? The Bible gives us guidelines; few humanists do.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

103. Charles Manson, who led the “family” (cult) of murderers who killed actress Sharon Tate and several others in 1969, was on parole from prison at the time. Others

These same humanists look at the “eye for eye” principle, and react in horror. They did not react with equal consternation when they confronted the problem of the late twentieth century’s increase in violent crime. At the end of an age, we expect to see an increase in criminal behavior, as lawlessness becomes a way of life for a dedicated, pathological minority, while religious and cultural relativism and self-doubt render citizens and their elected authorities helpless to stem this tide of consistent lawlessness. Gilbert Murray, the great student of Greek civilization, characterized the last days of Greek religion as “the failure of nerve.”¹⁰⁴ This seems to fit contemporary Western humanism quite well.

3. *Emptying Prisons and Stoning Sons*

Prisons need to be emptied. The biblical way to accomplish this is to revive the biblical practices of execution for habitual criminals (Deut. 21:18–21), corporal punishment (Deut. 25:1–3), and restitution. It is interesting that the justification for executing habitual criminals rests on that bugaboo of all pietism, the execution of the rebellious son. It is a case of “if *this*, then how much more *that*.” If it is mandatory that a man bring his incorrigible adult son before the elders for gluttony, drunkenness,¹⁰⁵ and verbal rebellion, how much more ready will a society be to execute repeatedly violent individuals or members of a professional criminal class! Remove from the law books the law regarding the civic execution of the rebellious son, and you thereby remove the one *and only* biblical sanction for executing professional criminals. The “three-time loser” penalty of American jurisprudence¹⁰⁶

in his “family” were also on probation. As the prosecuting attorney later wrote: “Manson associated with ex-cons, known narcotics users, and minor girls. He failed to report his whereabouts, made few attempts to obtain employment, repeatedly lied regarding his activities. During the first six months of 1969 alone, he had been charged, among other things, with grand theft auto, narcotics possession, rape, contributing to the delinquency of a minor. There was more than ample reason for parole revocation.” Vincent Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 420. Manson’s parole officer stated in court that he could not remember whether Manson had been on probation or parole; the man was responsible for overseeing 150 persons (p. 419). Manson had actually begged to be allowed to remain in jail when they released him in 1967; at that time, he was 32 years old, and had spent 17 years in penal and reform institutions (p. 146).

104. Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (1925 edition), reprinted by AMS Press and Greenwood Press.

105. Seven-year-olds are not drunkards; this verse deals with adult rebels.

106. A man convicted of a felony for the third time used to receive life imprisonment without possibility of parole.

has disappeared; in its place has come a criminal class of far more than three felony convictions—and most of these professionals are paroled early.

Incorrigible sons and incorrigible criminals are to be removed from society: “. . . so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear” (Deut. 21:21b). Rushdoony identified the importance of this law for society: “Such persons were thus blotted out of the commonwealth. When and if this law is observed, ungodly families who are given to lawlessness are denied a place in the nation. The law thus clearly works to eliminate all but the godly families.”¹⁰⁷ The point here is that if incorrigible sons are to be executed, how much more the members of the professional criminal class. The case law is based on the idea that this maximum sanction, if applied to a seemingly minimal infraction, is surely to be applied in an analogous major infraction. The infraction is repeated lawlessness as a lifestyle: *incorrigibility*.

The prison is a second-best device. It does keep some habitual criminals locked up for part of their lives. It is sometimes argued that by keeping them out of circulation, the overall crime rate drops. There is only spotty evidence to prove this. The problem is, when one criminal is locked up, others move into the “vacuum” of crime.¹⁰⁸ It may take time for the new entrants to become equally skilled, however.

Still, prison is a threat. If a society refuses to execute professional criminals, then it must impose some kind of sanctions if evil is not to be indirectly subsidized. Biblical law is a package deal. It will not suffice to empty the prisons until the whole of biblical criminal law is on the law books and enforced, especially the death penalty against rebellious sons. Those who are appalled by this law are not sufficiently appalled by professional criminal behavior.

Conclusion

The biblical principle of an eye for an eye protects society from a lawless state that recognizes no limitations on its power. This law establishes the fundamental judicial principle that the punishment should fit the crime. This principle, sometimes called *lex talionis*, requires that the criminal *pay back* to the victim whatever was stolen, and in some cases an additional penalty payment is required.

107. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 380.

108. Van den Haag, *Punishing Criminals*, pp. 53–60.

There is no doubt that this law is based on vengeance, but vengeance is a basic principle of biblical law. God extracts a vengeance payment from evil-doers: perfect vengeance at the day of judgment, and imperfect vengeance through the civil government. Vengeance is a form of restitution to God.

The fundamental goal of biblical law is *restoration*. Evil people are to be restored by God to righteousness. The state cannot save mankind, except in the sense of healing through enforcing justice, but it can impose external punishments that make social and economic restoration possible. Restitution by the criminal to the victim is an effective way of restoring wholeness to both parties. It upholds a basic principle of civil law: punishment should benefit the victim.

Prisons are a second-best system of punishment. They keep hardened criminals off the street, but they do very little for the past victims. While they should eventually be emptied, except for holding suspects for trial at the local level, this would be too risky before all three biblical sanctions are restored to civil law: the death penalty, corporal punishment, and economic restitution.

THE AUCTION FOR SUBSTITUTE SANCTIONS

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:22–25).

As I stated in the previous chapter, the theocentric issue here is man as God's image. The victim represents God. God requires the civil government to impose a negative sanction on the convicted criminal because of his violation of the victim's rights. The judicial principle governing the sanction is "eye for eye."

Politically left-wing humanists have long ridiculed the legitimacy of this principle of governance. Is their concern about the supposed brutality shown by the Bible's "eye for eye" principle misguided? Shouldn't their concern be focused on the brutality of the criminal against the innocent victim? Is the *lex talionis* principle not a deterrent to crime, especially repeated crimes by a criminal class? Shouldn't our concern be with the victims of violent crime rather than with the criminals who commit them?

A. Thumb for Thumb, Eye for Eye

We read of Adoni-bezek in the first chapter of Judges. Adoni-bezek (Lord of Bezek) was a Canaanitic king. The Israelites fought him and defeated him. "But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem,

and there he died" (Jud.1:6–7). This Canaanitic king's confession reveals that he recognized the justice of the punishment imposed on him by his conquerors.¹ He had cut off the toes and thumbs of kings; now he had suffered the same punishment. He had removed their anatomical "tools of dominion"; now he had his removed.²

This incident raises some difficult exegetical questions. Was the "eye for eye" principle literally applied in ancient Israel after the defeat of Canaan? Did Israel's courts really poke out people's teeth and eyes? If not, why not? Or is it merely that there are no clear-cut biblical records of such physical penalties being imposed by Israelite judges on Israelite citizens?

The incident also raises some difficult historical questions. In the Christian West, judges have consistently refused to impose "eye for eye" physical penalties. In non-Christian societies, permanent physical vengeance is quite common, e.g., Islam's *Shari'a* law. Why not in the West? What is it about inflicting permanent physical mutilation—in contrast to whippings or other relatively impermanent forms of physical violence—that so repels Westerners?

1. *The West's Future-Orientation*

The West's impulse toward dominion in history is one possible answer. The West has been future-oriented, as a direct result of its Christian eschatological heritage: *a faith in linear history*, with a God-created beginning, a God-sustaining providence, and a God-governed final judgment.³ This vision of linear time made possible the development of modern science.⁴ The future-orientation of the West, especially from the seventeenth century onward, and especially in Protestant societies, led to faith in long-term progress, including long-term eco-

1. The Hammurabi Code specified mutilations on an "eye for eye" basis, paragraphs 196–201. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 175.

2. Without a thumb, a person cannot grasp a tool or weapon. Without a big toe, he cannot balance himself easily. See James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), pp. 4–5. (<http://bit.ly/jjjudges>)

3. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), ch. 11: "The Biblical View of History."

4. Stanley Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), chaps. 1, 2; *Science and Creation: From eternal cycles to an oscillating universe* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, [1974] 1980); "The History of Science and the Idea of an Oscillating Universe," in Wolfgang Yourgrau and Allen D. Beck (eds.), *Cosmology, History, and Theology* (New York: Plenum Press, 1977).

conomic growth.⁵ Western people have understood the importance to the community of full production from all members. There is (or was) the psychological and social phenomenon called “the Protestant Ethic.”⁶ Begging, for example, has not been favored in Protestant nations. Idleness has been frowned upon. Therefore, the realization that physical punishment can permanently reduce the productivity of any citizen repels the Westerner. The Western judge asks: What happens to the criminal after he has “paid his debt”? Why should the criminal, his family, his future employers, and consumers be deprived of his full future productivity? Why should any man be hampered in working out his own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12)?⁷ Wouldn’t permanent physical mutilation tend to impair his future employment, thereby luring him back into a life of crime? What if he should experience a moral transformation in the future? Western justice seems to recognize such problems, and so it has rejected physical mutilation as a legal sanction.

2. Figuratively Speaking?

Are we to interpret the “eye for eye” passage figuratively? Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. . . . And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee” (Matt. 5:29a, 30a). We recognize that He spoke figuratively. He meant that the lusts of the flesh are so dangerous spiritually that even the loss of eye or hand is to be preferred. Therefore, avoid moral contamination; avoid lust (5:28). But the issue in Exodus 21:24–25 is that there has been physical injury inflicted on another person. The eye which the victim has lost is a literal eye. To interpret the “eye for eye” passage figuratively because Jesus interpreted “eye” figuratively in a very different context is not legitimate.

There is no doubt that the “thumb for thumb” penalty was literally applied to Adoni-bezek. He recognized the justice of the penalty. Permanent physical mutilation is legitimate when applied to one who has

5. Gary North, “Medieval Economics in Puritan New England, 1630–1660,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Winter 1978–79), pp. 157–60.

6. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner’s, [1904–5] 1958). See also Gary North, “The ‘Protestant Ethic’ Hypothesis,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976); Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

7. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

committed a crime that has produced the same mutilation in another person. Yet the resistance of Western judges against imposing this physical penalty on their own nation's citizens indicates that they have sought other ways to deal with criminals and victims in crimes involving permanent physical mutilation. Question: In cases other than manslaughter—the death of an innocent third party as a result of unwarranted violence—as in the abortion of Exodus 21:22–23, *may some other penalty legitimately be imposed*, one which meets God's standards of justice, as well as men's sense of justice?

B. Option: Economic Restitution

Say that an ox has been known to gore people in the past. It gets loose again and kills someone. The owner in this instance is held legally liable; in fact, he is to be put to death (Ex. 21:29). However, Exodus 21:30 provides an exception to the requirement that a crime that results in a person's death be punished by the execution of the person responsible. "If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him." The death penalty is set aside at the discretion of the judges and the victim's heirs. *The man pays a ransom for his life*. The text does not specifically say that the ransom is paid to the victim's next of kin, but this was the familiar pattern in the Old Testament. The payment would become part of the dead person's estate, as if he were still alive and had been merely injured by the beast. The ransom is a restitution payment. There is no evidence that the ransom would go anywhere else except to the victim's heirs.

The question can be raised: If the death of the owner of the ox does not benefit the victim's heirs, while the ransom does benefit them, does the *lex talionis* allow a comparable solution to the problem of the physically mutilated person? Instead of physically mutilating the criminal, may the judges legitimately impose a restitution payment?

1. Jewish Commentaries

Traditional Jewish explanations of the *lex talionis* principle point to a payment in lieu of physical mutilation. Nachmanides wrote in the thirteenth century concerning "eye 'tachath' (for) eye":

It is known in the tradition of our rabbis that this means monetary compensation. Such a usage [of the term *tachath* to indicate] monet-

any compensation is found in the verse: *And he that smiteth a beast mortally shall pay for it; life "tacheth" life* [Lev. 24:18], [in which case *tacheth* surely indicates monetary compensation]. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra commented that Scripture uses such a term to indicate that he really is deserving of such a punishment, [that his eye be taken from him], if he does not give his ransom. For Scripture has forbidden us to take *ransom for the life of a murderer, that is guilty of death* [Num. 35:31], but we may take ransom from a wicked person who cut off any of the limbs of another person. Therefore we are never to cut off that limb from him, but rather he is to pay monetary compensation, and if he has no money to pay, it lies as a debt on him until he acquires the means to pay, and then he is redeemed.⁸

Nachmanides's citation of Abraham ibn Ezra indicates that he was disturbed by the literal wording of the "eye for eye" stipulation. By refusing to call for a literal application of the verse in the case of a poor criminal, and also by their refusal to call for indentured servitude as a way to repay the debt, these two Jewish medieval commentators softened the threat of the punishment.

There are difficulties with this interpretation. It is ingenious, but it has no explicit biblical precedent, and it may therefore be incorrect, even though it appears to conform to the implicit meaning of "eye for eye." It involves speculation that relies heavily on the precedent of economic restitution in the case of the ox that gores someone to death (Ex. 21:30)—a separate case law that may not apply to the *lex talionis* law of Exodus 21:24–25. This view became common in the interpretation of Jewish law. Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch commented on Exodus 21:25 in the mid-nineteenth century: ". . . the taking of this legal canon literally, in the sense of an eye for an eye, would be morally impossible for any idea of equity; . . ." Further, "the whole spirit of the text is what the traditional Halacha [Jewish law] teaches, viz., that here it is only speaking of monetary compensation for the injury inflicted. . . ."⁹

2. Restitution and Equity

In principle, the interpretation of the *lex talionis* as allowing economic restitution in place of physical mutilation raises some fundamental questions. First, is the requirement of vengeance compromised

8. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman [Ramban], *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shiloh, [1267?] 1973), p. 368.

9. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained*, trans. Isaac Levy, 5 vols., *Exodus*, 3rd ed. (London: Honig & Sons, 1967), p. 315.

by the imposition of a restitution payment? Is there some fundamental aspect of justice, or men's sense of justice, that should allow a man to "buy his way out" of an injury that he has inflicted on another person? If so, what is this long-neglected aspect of justice?¹⁰

Second, does this law, so interpreted, lead to class antagonism? What if the criminal is poor? He cannot pay what a rich man can afford to pay. Is it fair to allow a rich man to forfeit only money, when the poor man must forfeit his eye or tooth or else become an indentured servant to pay off the debt? Will violent rich people become more careless than violent poor people with regard to injuring others? Are the rich being taught to care less for the law of God than the poor do? If the rich can buy their way out, is society thereby allowing the development of resentment among the poor, who feel that the law is working against them? Is society implicitly subsidizing rich criminals?

The most important questions are these: Has the "eye for eye" principle been abandoned when economic restitution is substituted for physical punishment? Will God honor a society that abandons this literal principle?

But what if the economic interpretation of *lex talionis* is denied? Would the requirement that all criminals pay the full physical price rather than economic restitution really be beneficial to their victims? The victim may need additional capital to compensate for his loss of productivity as a result of the injury. What benefit is it to him that the criminal becomes equally hampered physically?

Furthermore, there are important social consequences of denying the economic interpretation. What benefit is it to society that two people now will suffer from some physical impairment rather than only one? Is the dominion covenant better fulfilled when two men lose an eye or an arm rather than only one man? After he makes economic restitution to the victim, the criminal can work hard and perhaps regain his lost wealth, but he can never regain a lost eye. Society may benefit more in the long run because of the productivity that the convicted man retains. If he repents and becomes a law-abiding member of the community, his greater productivity increases the wealth of all those consumers whom he will serve as a producer.

These questions deserve biblical answers. We can begin to discover answers by examining in detail how the substitution of economic

10. I argue that three principles of justice lead us to such a view of *lex talionis*: victim's rights, the criminal's right to seek mercy through making a substitute payment, and the limitation of the judges' authority.

restitution for physical mutilation might work.

C. Establishing a Fair Payment

Let us begin with the case of a victim who has lost his eye. A partially blinded person could insist on a particular restitution payment from the convicted criminal. He could say to the judges, “Tell that man that he can keep his eye, but only if he pays me 100 ounces of gold.” The judges would then present this option to the criminal: *your gold or your eye*.

If the criminal values his body more highly than he values the economic restitution demanded by the victim, he pays the money. This is the principle of *victim's rights* in action. On the other hand, if he values the payment higher, or if he simply cannot afford to pay, then he can forfeit his eye. This is the principle of *maximum specified sanctions* in action. The criminal could also make payment by selling himself into indentured servitude, with the buyer paying the victim. But perhaps the convicted man would prefer to lose the use of part of his body rather than becoming a bondservant. He could reject the demand of the victim for economic restitution and insist instead on his legal right under biblical law: to suffer the same physical mutilation that he had imposed on the victim.

1. The Right to Punishment

Each of the parties in this judicial dispute has biblically specified legal rights. The victim has the right to insist on the biblically specified maximum physical sanction: eye for eye. He also has the right to offer the criminal an alternative, one that appears to be less severe than the biblically specified physical sanction. If the alternative offered to the criminal is not regarded by him as less severe, then he has the legal right to insist on the imposition of the biblically specified maximum sanction. He therefore possesses the *right to be punished by the specified biblical sanction*. His punishment is limited by the extent of the injury which he imposed on his victim. The punishment fits the crime.

It is basic to the preservation of liberty that the state not be allowed to deny to either the victim or the criminal his right of punishment. While this principle of the right to punishment is at least vaguely understood by most people with respect to the victim, it is not well understood with respect to the criminal. The right to be punished is a crucial legal right, one which Paul insisted on at his trial: “For if I

be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar" (Acts 25:11).

If the state can autonomously substitute other criteria for deserved punishment, such as personal or social rehabilitation, then society loses its right to be governed by predictable laws with predictable judicial sanctions. The messianic state then replaces the judicially limited state. Neither the victim nor the criminal can be assured of receiving justice, for justice is defined by the state rather than by God in the Bible. If punishment is not seen as *deserved* by the criminal, and therefore his *fundamental right*, then he is delivered into the "merciful" hands of elitist captors who are not bound by written law or social custom. No one has described this threat more eloquently than C. S. Lewis:

To be taken without consent from my home and friends; to lose my liberty; to undergo all those assaults on my personality which modern psychotherapy knows how to deliver; to be re-made after some pattern of 'normality' hatched in a Viennese laboratory to which I never professed allegiance; to know that this process will never end until either my captors have succeeded or I grown wise enough to cheat them with apparent success—who cares whether this is called Punishment or not? That it includes most of the elements for which any punishment is feared—shame, exile, bondage, and years eaten by the locust—is obvious. Only enormous ill-desert could justify it; but ill-desert is the very conception which the Humanitarian theory has thrown overboard.¹¹

The state represents God in history in His capacity as cosmic Judge (Rom. 13:1–7).¹² When a civil government's leaders say that the state represents any other agent or principle, the state has begun its march toward either tyranny or impotence. Either it will bring judgment on men and other states in the name of its deity, its official source of law,¹³ or else some other state will bring judgment on it and those governed by it in the name of a foreign deity. Only a rare nation

11. C. S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," in Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 290–91.

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

13. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 4.

like Switzerland can defend its borders for centuries, and then only by renouncing all thought of conquest in the name of defense and international neutrality.¹⁴

The mark of this transformation of the state is when the state insists on imposing the punishment in terms of the supposed “needs of society,” meaning ultimately the needs of the state’s officers. When the state collects fines for use by the state rather than to pay victims, when it imposes prison sentences paid for by the taxes of law-abiding citizens, and when it insists that every convicted criminal “pay his debt to society,” then the messianic state has arrived. God has specified that the victim is His representative in criminal cases, not the state, unless the victim is legally unable to represent himself, in which case the state acts as his trustee. Only if the state is the victim can it lawfully demand restitution. When the state presents itself as the universal victim of all crime to which is owed universal restitution by criminals and taxpayers alike, it has asserted its own divinity.

2. Benefits of Alternative Sanctions

The proposed economic solution to the dilemma of the *lex talionis* offers at least three very real benefits. The first benefit is judicial: *the victim has the right to specify the appropriate punishment*. This punishment is limited only by the maximum penalty specified by biblical law, *eye for eye*. The biblical principle of victim’s rights is upheld by the judges. If the victim believes that the criminal’s act was malicious, and if he wishes to inflict the same damage on the criminal which he himself suffered, this is his legal option.

To take this retributive approach, however, he necessarily forfeits all the economic advantages that he might have received from a restitution payment from the criminal. He can exercise his legitimate desire for vengeance—his desire to reduce the criminal to a physical condition comparable to his own—but this desire for vengeance has a price attached to it. He is made no better off financially because of his enemy’s suffering. In fact, he could be made slightly worse off: he, as a member of the economic community, loses his portion of the other man’s lost future productivity, assuming the man cannot overcome the effects of his lost eye or limb. *Vengeance in the Bible’s judicial system*

14. It had better have high mountains, civil defense, an armed population, and services such as private banking and a geographical “King’s X” facilities for overthrown rulers. See John McPhee, *La Place de la Concorde Suisse* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1984).

has a price tag attached to it. This inevitably reduces the quantity of physical vengeance insisted on by victims, for biblical civil justice recognizes the judicial legitimacy of a fundamental economic law: "The higher the price of any economic good, the less the quantity demanded."

The second benefit of this interpretation of *lex talionis* is also judicial: *the criminal who is about to lose his eye or tooth is permitted to make a counter-offer.* He has the right to be punished to the limit of the written law, but he also can suggest a less onerous punishment—less onerous for him, but possibly more beneficial to his victim. He can legally offer money or services in exchange for the continued preservation of his unmutilated body. The system puts him in the position of being able to pay in order to retain his limbs. *He places a price tag on his body.*

This price tag makes it costly for the victim to pursue an emotion that, had there been no crime, would be called envious: the desire to tear another person down, irrespective of the direct benefits to the person who is envious.¹⁵ But because there has been a crime, envy is legitimate in this case. It must be understood that "getting even" with a convicted criminal is a legitimate goal for the victim of a crime. God eventually "gets even" with Satan and his followers who have sinned against Him; He pulls them down from their positions of power and influence. This process of pulling Satan down began with Jesus's ministry, an event which was manifested by the power of His disciples. "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:17–19). The victims of violent crime are in an analogous position with God: innocent people who deserve to be avenged. But grace still abounds in history, so the criminal is allowed to make a counter-offer to his victim, just as the sinner can make a counter-offer to God.¹⁶

15. Of course, the desire to gain compensation would be regarded as jealousy, in the absence of a crime: the desire to gain at another person's expense. The crime, naturally, does make a difference: the right of the state to avenge the victim is crucial; pseudo-envy or pseudo-jealousy are just that: pseudo. These are legitimate emotions when a crime has been committed that has cost the victim the use of part of his body.

16. When sick or injured people learn that they are about to die, one common reaction is to make a deal with God: specific service for an extension of the gift of life. Contrary to secular humanists and theological liberals, this makes good sense. The dy-

The third benefit of this interpretation is social: *the integrity of the legal system is upheld in the eyes of all the nation*. Members of society at large cannot complain that the judges are playing favorites. The judges are not “respecting persons.” If a rich man loses money, while the victim has lost the use of his body, this result has been the decision of the victim, not the judges. What is essentially a private dispute, victim vs. criminal, rather than a conflict between classes, has been settled by the disputants. The victim has made his choice. Outsiders therefore have no valid moral complaint against the judicial system. This keeps the ideology of class conflict from spreading to the general population. This is a very important feature of the justice system in an era of class conflict, meaning an era of rhetoric by competing elites in the name of various classes.

3. Insurance for Criminals?

Should the victim be denied the option of specifying the form of vengeance? Does it thwart justice to set up a judicial system where a rich criminal can offer to “buy his way out”?¹⁷ Worse, what if his rich insurance company can offer to buy his way out?

If criminals could escape the likelihood of physical violence by means of monetary restitution, they might start buying insurance contracts that would enable them to escape the economic penalty of inflicting physical violence. This could be regarded as licensing criminal behavior. No one is going to co-insure another man’s eye with his own eye, but the public has already set up co-insurance for monetary claims. Thus, by allowing economic restitution for crimes of violence, criminal behavior might be made less costly to the criminals.

One answer to this objection is that insurance companies are unlikely to insure a person from claims made by victims if the man is a repeat violator. The risk of writing such contracts is too high. Private insurance contracts are designed to be sold to the general public, and to keep premiums sufficiently price competitive, sellers exclude people known to be high risks. Low-risk buyers do not want to pay for high-risk buyers. Furthermore, insurance policies often specify that the coverage is for civil damages rather than criminal acts. This is true of most

ing individual is thereby admitting that God is in control of life and death. This is another reason why dying people deserve to be told that they are dying.

17. If the criminal could “buy his way out” by bribing the judges, then justice would be thwarted. But judges in a biblical system represent the victims, not the state. If they represent a victim who wishes to be “bought off,” where is the injustice?

automobile insurance policies. Policies specify exactly what is to be covered—the famous insurance industry principle of “the large print giveth, but the fine print taketh away.”

Policies actually designed by criminals to co-insure would be extremely unlikely. Violent criminals seldom think ahead. They do not work well with others. They are essentially anti-social people. A system of insurance company-subsidized crime could not last very long without government financial aid.

D. The Auction for Human Flesh

By allowing the substitution of an economic payment for actual physical disfigurement, the judges unquestionably do authorize an auction for human flesh. If a convicted criminal is allowed to pay the victim in order to avoid physical mutilation, he is participating in an auction. Such an implicit auction may sound crass, but so does poking out an innocent person's eye. So does all criminal behavior. Covenant-breaking men may not like to think of criminal behavior in such terms, but this is what the Bible teaches. Sin is the evil, not economic restitution.

1. The Auction Process

We begin our economic analysis of this auction process with a consideration of the victim. Let us assume that he has lost his eye. He tells the judges that he wants to see the other man's eye poked out, just as his was. He offers the criminal no choice between mutilation and restitution. Because the victim initially offers no alternative sanction, the criminal is then allowed to make a single counter-offer, if he wants to. Assume that he makes this counter-offer: 10 ounces of gold instead of losing his eye.¹⁸ Perhaps he is a skilled craftsman who needs both eyes. Perhaps he fears disfigurement. In any case, he places a high premium on his eye. He bids 10 ounces of gold to retain it.

Once the victim receives an offer from the criminal, he may

18. As we shall see, this counter-offer is allowed because the victim did not offer the criminal a choice between mutilation and economic restitution. If the victim specifies a choice between mutilation and a money payment, he is not entitled to accept less money, since this would indicate that he had not been honest when he specified the initial conditions. On the other hand, if the criminal should propose a non-monetary payment, the victim would be entitled to consider it, since this would constitute a different kind of offer from that specified by the victim. See subsection below, “Limiting One's Original Demands.”

change his mind about his commitment to seeing the criminal disfigured. Perhaps he did not suspect that he could get this much money from the criminal. Perhaps his wife has seen the wisdom of taking the money. He may conclude that he would much prefer 100 ounces of gold to the joy he would receive in seeing (with his remaining eye) his enemy brought low. After all, seeing his enemy part with 10 ounces of gold is also seeing him brought low, and the event brings other benefits, such as all the pleasures or security the 10 ounces of gold can buy. So he accepts the counter-offer. The criminal keeps his eye.

In this case, the criminal is the high-money bidder. The victim values the gold more than he values the criminal's eye. The criminal places more value on his eye than the gold. Each man gets what he most prefers. The criminal has bought the right to determine what happens to his own body. He has bought the right to avoid mutilation.

Consider the victim's other possible choice. He is still outraged at what has befallen him. He wants the criminal to share the same physical limitation. He is unwilling to accept the financial counter-offer. Now, economically speaking, the criminal had just placed 10 ounces of gold into the victim's lap. He had been willing to pay. The victim is not impressed, or not sufficiently impressed. He figuratively hands the 100 ounces of gold back to the criminal. "Keep your filthy money, you butcher! Keep your only remaining eye on your money." The victim has now matched the money bid of the criminal. He has forfeited the 10 ounces of gold that he might have received. He places a higher value on his legal ability to blind the other man's eye than he does on 10 ounces of gold. So, the victim gets what he values most, the joy of seeing the other man lose his eye. But he pays 10 ounces of gold for this pleasure. The pleasure is biblically legitimate, but it is expensive.

The criminal's 10 ounces of gold did not constitute a high enough bid. The victim might have agreed for more than the 10 ounces, but the criminal had not been willing to pay this much. The criminal keeps what he wants: the 10+ ounces of gold that the victim might have accepted in payment, but which the criminal refused to offer. The criminal would rather have this larger quantity of gold than keep his eye. There is what the economists call "reservation demand" for this money; the criminal pays with his eye for his continued possession of the money.

None of this suggests that the criminal can buy justice. Justice is what the court provides when it tries the case and imposes the victim's preferred sanction, up to the limit of the law. The criminal is buying a

specific sanction that he prefers by offering the victim an alternative which the criminal hopes the victim will prefer. It is an auction for flesh, not an auction for justice.

2. *The Private Slave Market*

To give the criminal access to capital sufficient to make the offer, the state must allow another auction for flesh: a slave market. Deny this, and the criminal is thwarted in gaining what he wants, and so is his victim. The most valuable asset a criminal may possess is his own ability to work. If he is denied the legal right to capitalize this asset, he may not be able to offer a sufficiently high bid to the victim to avoid mutilation.

The modern democratic theorist professes horror at such a thought. Why? *Because the modern state's disciples want the state to have a monopoly on the slave market.* The state imposes prison as the alternative to both restitution and slavery—an alternative which benefits neither the victim nor the potentially productive criminal.

At this point, we return once again to the basic theme of the Book of Exodus: *the choice between slavery to man and service to God.* It is therefore the question of *representation*: Who is represented by the state, God or autonomous man? When autonomous man is represented by the state, then tyranny or impotence is the result. Autonomous man seeks to enslave others, for he seeks to imitate God, just as Satan imitates God. The state becomes the primary agency of this enslavement process. It should not be surprising to learn that the call for the abolition of chattel slavery in the United States began in the 1820s in the Northeast, where the new state prison systems were also being implemented.¹⁹

Slavery may seem brutal. The *lex talionis* also may seem brutal. Judicially unregulated violence is more brutal. Injustice in the face of crime is more brutal yet. The high penalty imposed on the convicted criminal is intended to impress the criminal, potential criminals, and all ethical rebels of *the majesty of God's law*, and the high price God will impose eternally on those who break it. This no doubt repels the

19. David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). This same era saw Horace Mann's call for the establishment of a "theologically neutral" tax-financed day school movement, meaning a call for social morality without Christian supernaturalism. When American society began to abandon the God of the Bible, it also began to abandon the institutional foundations of freedom.

sense of justice of covenant-breakers, but God is not concerned about the ethical sensibilities of covenant-breakers. He is concerned primarily about His own majesty, which is reflected in His law, including the penalties imposed on those who transgress its provisions.

3. Technological Progress and Restitution

With the advent of modern technology, it might be possible for the victim to secure a replacement eye. He might demand an operation, with the criminal's eye being transplanted as a replacement. Or an exchange might be set up: the criminal's eye goes to an eye bank in exchange for an eye that might be more compatible biologically with the victim's system. Alternatively, the judges could allow the criminal to pay for an operation for the victim, and give the victim an additional payment equal to the value of the operation. The criminal would lose the money, but the victim would see again.

This sort of economic resolution to the problem of "eye for eye" standard is ideal: the victim gains what he had lost, and the criminal pays for it, plus restitution for the victim's pain, fear, and trouble. The technological advances brought by Western—and initially Christian—civilization make possible the best solution for both parties, namely, the restoration of the injured man's sight, but at the expense of the criminal. The technological progress that would be brought by a thoroughly Christian civilization would make possible a better set of options for both victim and criminal. The more faithful a society's commitment to enforcing God's law, the more rapid its technological progress is going to be.

E. Limiting One's Original Demands

The threat of actual physical mutilation for the convicted violent criminal will always be present in a biblical legal order. The victim has lost his eye or tooth; the criminal deserves to lose his. But few criminals would sacrifice an eye if they could make restitution in some other way. They might sacrifice a tooth, but not an eye. The victim can legitimately demand the removal of the other man's eye, but there is not much doubt that he would prefer a large cash settlement to help him recover his lost productivity and forfeited economic opportunities. He might even be able to get a new eye through surgery. The rich man is allowed to "buy his way out," but only at the discretion (and direct economic benefit) of the victim. On the other hand, the victim can de-

mand his "pound of flesh," but only by forfeiting the money that he might have been paid.

What if the victim is really vindictive? What if he demands 1,000 ounces of gold for the other person's tooth? In all likelihood, the criminal would prefer to forfeit the tooth. *Under this kind of judicial system, the victim must estimate carefully in advance just what the convicted person might be willing and able to pay.* There must be no "fall-back position" after the victim submits his pair of demands to the judges: physical mutilation or a specified financial restitution payment.

Under a biblical system of economic substitution, the victim would be required by the court to specify the minimum amount of money he would be willing to accept in exchange for not having mutilation imposed on the criminal. The victim would not be allowed to present a false estimate about how much of restitution he would be willing to accept. This would be false witness, or perjury. He could not come back a second time, after the criminal has refused to pay the 10 ounces of gold, and say, "All right, I'll accept 5 ounces of gold instead of his tooth." By lowering his new demand, he would be admitting that his initial offer had been higher than his minimal demand. In short, the injured victim must know in advance that by making an excessive initial financial demand, he might "price himself out of the market"; he therefore has to be reasonable if he is really after money. He might wind up with nothing except the pain and disfigurement of the criminal as his reward. He must ask for less money in order to increase his likelihood of collecting anything.

The judges would present the victim's specified choices to the criminal, and the criminal would have the option of refusing to pay the 1,000 ounces. The judges would then have the physical penalty imposed.

The man condemned by the victim to permanent physical mutilation would have the option of making a counter-proposal if the victim had offered no option to mutilation. The victim could then consider it. Again, the criminal would be allowed only one offer; if the victim still says no, and the criminal then makes a higher offer, he can be presumed to have given false witness when he made the first offer. By limiting the victim to presenting the criminal with only one set of options, and by giving the criminal the opportunity to make a single counter-offer only when no alternative option has been offered by the victim, the judges can obtain honest offers from the beginning.

The court would allow only one form of second-chance bids. If the

criminal is unwilling to pay the victim the money payment demanded, but he is willing to pay in some other way than money, he would have the opportunity to present the alternative or group of alternatives for the victim to choose from. But if the victim turns this counter-offer down, the criminal will then have to undergo mutilation. He is governed by the equivalent rule that governs the victim: honest bidding. He offers his highest price or best bid. If it is rejected, he must suffer the physical consequences.

F. The Authority of the Judges

The integrity of society's covenantal civil judges is fundamental to the preservation of social order. The Bible warns rulers and judges to render honest judgment. They are forbidden to take bribes (although it is *not* forbidden for righteous people to offer bribes to corrupt judges).²⁰ Judges are to render honest judgment because the Bible requires it and because God requires it, not because it is made personally profitable for them to do so. When citizens distrust the judicial system, a fundamental weakness exists in the society. Bribes are a sign of such weakness and distrust.

1. Initial Penalty

The judges establish the initial penalty payment in the case of a notorious ox that has killed a person (Ex. 21:30). What about in the case of the crime of mutilation? Shouldn't the judges set the penalty? In the case of a non-injurious, accidental, premature birth caused by another man's violent behavior, the husband establishes the penalty, and the judges then impose it. "If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine" (Ex. 21:22). This implies that the judges can overrule the husband if the penalty is thought by them to be excessive. The authority of the judges is supreme in this case.

If it is true that the Bible requires that in the case of bodily mutilation, the judges must assess the penalty, as they do in the case of criminal manslaughter (the owner of the notorious ox), then they must make the decision: economic restitution or physical restitution. Both

20. Proverbs 17:8; 21:14. Cf. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, Appendix 5; see also Chapter 52:D, below.

are legitimate forms of vengeance; both are true forms of restitution. If the judges are solely responsible for making this determination, then sovereignty is transferred to them and away from the victim and the criminal, who might prefer to come to a different, more mutually beneficial transaction. This raises the question of righteous judgment. Why should the victim and the criminal be excluded from the process of the setting of the penalty? After all, in the case of the non-injurious premature birth, the husband has the opportunity of setting a preliminary penalty. Why not in the case of mutilation?

One solution to this dilemma would be to allow the judges to assess the original penalty, estimating what the defense of an eye is worth in the open market, and then make a preliminary announcement of the size of the payment. Then either of the two contending parties could make a counter-offer, which the judges would accept if both parties agree. In this way, the authority of the law would have a visible manifestation—rule by the judges—but the type of restitution could be modified at the discretion of the affected parties. It would be analogous to parents making an arranged marriage: either of the two children can legitimately protest and refuse the other, but initiating the marriage would be the right of the parents.

It is important that collusion between the judges and either the victim or the convicted criminal be prevented. To help prevent such collusion, dual rights are established: the right of the victim to demand different restitution from that set by the judges, and the right of the criminal to make a counter-offer to the victim when he receives notice of the judges' initial proposal.

There is another factor to consider. Economic value is both objective and subjective.²¹ The judges are required by God to attempt to assess the cost to the victim, as well as the cost to the criminal, but they may make a mistake. There is no scientifically or theoretically valid way for judges to assess the comparative costs of injuries, because these costs are based on other people's subjective utilities. For example, if either the victim or the criminal is a right-handed skilled craftsman whose hand is his calling, and he has lost (or is faced with the threat of loss of) his right hand, the penalty is not easily fitted to the crime. Say that the victim has lost his right hand, and he is the craftsman. The criminal is a left-handed lawyer whose right hand is seemingly less crucial to him than the right hand of the victim. Is the

21. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

loss of the criminal's right hand really a case of "hand for hand"? How can the judges determine what is a really comparable penalty? Hasn't the victim suffered far greater loss? Of course, the reverse could be true: a left-handed lawyer loses his right hand, and the criminal is a right-handed craftsman. Is the *physically* identical penalty really comparable in terms of the costs to each person?

2. The System in Operation

Consider a hypothetical case. A criminal is convicted for having mutilated another man's hand. Let us consider three possible outcomes. *First*, the judges determine that the criminal should lose his hand. Why would they impose this penalty? Perhaps the criminal is a known brawler. He used a weapon to bash a victim's hand, making it permanently useless. The judges decide that the best thing for society would be for the criminal to have his hand bashed into uselessness or amputated, so that he could not easily repeat the offense.

The victim at this point might prefer economic restitution. The brawler also might be willing to pay to keep his hand. In such a case, the judges would be placing their perception of the public's need for future social peace above the economic needs of the victim.

The victim would have the option of asking for a different kind of punishment. The victim may want money, so he appeals the decision, and demands monetary compensation. The judges then go to the criminal. Is he willing to pay the victim the proposed monetary restitution? The criminal has three choices: pay the money, accept the judges' original penalty, or offer a third proposal to the victim. If the criminal turns down the request of the victim to be paid, and if the victim rejects the criminal's counter-offer, then the judges' original sentence would be carried out. He would lose the use of his hand.

Second, the judges impose a monetary penalty that is too low in the opinion of the victim. He demands more money. The criminal has a new set of choices: pay the higher penalty, make a counter-offer of something other than money, or lose his hand. He no longer has the option of paying the original penalty established by the judges. The victim has overruled the judges on the question of the appropriate monetary penalty.

Third, the judges impose a monetary penalty. The victim is outraged. He believes that the criminal should lose his hand, just as he lost his. The judges then go to the criminal. You must lose your hand, the

victim says. Do you wish to offer the victim more money than we determined originally, or offer something other than money? The criminal makes his decision. If he decides to offer more money or another non-monetary option, he has only one opportunity to persuade the victim. If the victim refuses to accept the counter-offer, the criminal loses his hand.

By allowing the victim to demand different compensation—money or service rather than physical mutilation, or more money than the judges have imposed, or physical mutilation rather than money—the proposed restitution process allows subjective value to assert itself. The *victim* determines whether or not the judges have really offered him what his loss is worth to him personally. If he thinks he is being cheated, he can demand that his enemy pay more or suffer the same physical loss. The *criminal* also has the right to substitute the loss of an appendage, if the judges determine that he should lose the appendage, rather than pay what he believes is an excessive economic demand by the victim, if the demand is higher than the judges originally set.

The Bible does not anywhere indicate that the criminal has any legal, formal ability to overturn the final decision of the highest civil court of appeal. If the judges impose a particular penalty—mutilation, for example—and the victim is satisfied, then the criminal has no formal right of appeal. He cannot override the decision of the judges. But in fact he really does have the indirect ability to appeal—an appeal through the victim. He or his representatives can approach the victim with a counter-proposal. “Look, I would be willing to pay 10 ounces of gold if you would appeal the decision of the judges to have me mutilated.” If this is satisfactory to the victim, he then appeals the decision, and the criminal agrees to the new terms of restitution. The judges are not allowed to overturn this mutually agreed-upon form of restitution.

If the court sets an economic penalty, and the victim agrees, the criminal still has a legal, formal ability to substitute his own mutilation for the economic restitution. He can demand the explicit physical sanction of the law: *lex talionis*. This means that the law upholds his right to demand the punishment specified by God. Bargaining is legitimate, but both the victim and the criminal can insist on the specified penalty. If the victim insists on physical mutilation, the criminal has no choice. If the criminal insists on physical mutilation, the victim has no choice. Bargaining, however, is likely.

By establishing the three-way system of establishing penalties—judges, victim, and convicted criminal—the judicial system receives a

means of making *objective* approximations of the inescapably *subjective* “eye for eye” standard—subjective to both victim and criminal. By permitting subjective estimations of loss by both the victim and the criminal, the judges find a way to offer compensation to the victim that he believes is comparable to the crime. The criminal, however, is allowed to counter-offer a different, economic form of restitution penalty if he believes that the cost of a physical penalty is too high.

Conclusion

My discussion of the possible outworkings of the “eye for eye” passage should not be understood as the last word on the subject. It is, however, a “first word.” I want readers to understand that the biblical justice system is just, workable, and effective. The *lex talionis* should not be dismissed as some sort of peculiar juridical testament of a long-defunct primitive agricultural society. What the Bible spells out as judicially binding is vastly superior to anything offered by modern humanism in the name of civic justice.

The problems in dealing with the actual imposition of the *lex talionis* principle are great. The history of the people of God testifies to these difficulties. We have few if any examples of Christian societies that have attempted to impose the “eye for eye” principle literally. The basic principle is clear: *the punishment should fit the crime*. By allowing the victim to demand restitution in the form pleasing to him, and by allowing the criminal to counter-offer something more pleasing to him, the penalty comes close to matching the effects of the crime, as assessed by the victim.

Each party gets to make one offer. If the victim offers a choice between penalties, the criminal chooses which one he prefers, or can offer something completely different. If the victim specifies one and only one penalty, mutilation, the criminal is entitled to counter-offer. If the victim specifies only a money payment, but the criminal prefers mutilation on an “eye for eye” basis, then he has the right to choose mutilation.

The judges can establish the original restitution payment, whether physical or economic, but the two affected parties should have the final determination. This places limits on the state. The economic assets involved in this auction process are transferred (or retained) by the person who is more concerned with economic capital than with physical mutilation. In this way, biblical justice is furthered.

The modern Western world has not imposed deliberate, permanent physical mutilation on violent criminals. These criminals, when convicted, have been imprisoned. They have been compelled to pay fines to the state. In very few cases have they been compelled to make monetary restitution to the victims. The result has been escalating violence against private citizens, as well as the escalating power of the state.

Biblical law imposes penalties on violent criminals that tend to reduce the amount of violent crime. Biblical penalties encourage criminals to count the cost in advance. In the case of "crimes of passion," the convicted passionate criminals would be reminded of the benefits of self-lex talionis principle, provides criminals with a glimpse of (or preliminary down payment to) this cosmic principle of justice.

FREEDOM FOR AN EYE

And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake. And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake (Ex. 21:26–27).

The theocentric issue here is ownership. God created the world. He owns it. He upholds it by His grace and in terms of His law. He has established laws governing men's ownership of other men.

The law concerning the striking of a bondservant¹ seems to be in conflict with the immediately preceding verses. The “eye for eye” principle of verse 24 does not seem to be upheld in this passage. The master who has blinded his slave is not to be blinded by the judges. This in turn seems to be a violation of the principle of equality before the law: “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49). If the master may strike a Hebrew bondservant, putting out his eye, why shouldn't he suffer the same physical consequences? Why is he allowed to retain his sight? Is the law unfair?

Whenever we find a variation in the application of some general biblical law, we should search the context to discover which special circumstances of the case have made mandatory the variation. We must bear in mind that *in principle*, the general law is still in force. God does not change His mind concerning ethics. The ethical terms of His covenant do not change. Nevertheless, in order for the law to apply fairly to those under the terms of the covenant, *differences in circumstances must be respected*. Some people deserve more protection than others because of their place in society. Young children are one example. Widows and orphans are another. So is the bondservant.

1. Reminder: I use the word “bondservant” rather than slave, except when referring to permanent ownership of non-Hebrew slaves.

A. The Bondservant's Special Position

The Bible recognizes the legitimacy of the institution of indentured servitude. It places this institution under specific laws, and the law governing the injuring of a bondservant is one such law. On the one hand, as we shall see, the master needs special legal protection from the false claims of a disobedient bondservant. On the other hand, the dependent bondservant needs special legal protection against excessive discipline by the master. This law governing physical punishment protects both master and bondservant.

We need to examine the biblical principles that undergird this law. First, the master has legitimate authority over the bondservant. The bondservant is a form of property. The master is allowed to assign tasks to the bondservant that produce profit for the master. In this sense, the bondservant is his property, for the fruits of the bondservant's productivity belong to the master, as if he were a beast or a tool. The master may not mistreat the bondservant, however, as this law indicates. The bondservant is not without legal protection, but he is not a free man. The "eye for eye" principle is applied differently in the case of a bondservant because the legal relationships are different from those governing free men.

Second, ownership is an inescapable social function. We say that ownership necessarily involves *stewardship*. The ownership of an asset imposes certain inescapable costs on the owner. He must make decisions about how to use an asset, or whether or not to divest himself of ownership. If he uses the asset in one way, he cannot use it in another. By earning income (or attempting to) by using an asset in one productive process, he necessarily forfeits whatever income he might otherwise have produced with the asset.² He must choose what to do with whatever assets he legally controls. This is called *allocation*.

The bondservant's owner has a capital asset at his disposal. The bondservant can produce income for him. An economically rational purchaser of a bondservant looks at the expected future stream of income—net income, after caring for the bondservant's physical needs—and he then discounts this by the prevailing rate of interest. He will pay no more for a bondservant than he will pay for any other capital asset that is expected to produce the same net output, nor will the

2. Gary North, "Ownership: Free but Not Cheap," *The Freeman* (July 1972). (<http://bit.ly/OwnFree>) Reprinted in *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 28. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

seller sell the bondservant for less.³ If he pays more, he will lose money on the investment. On the other hand, he cannot buy the bondservant for less, because the competitive bids of other potential buyers keep the bondservant's price high. The bondservant's market price will be the same as the market price of a piece of land that is leased for the period of his bondage, or a bond, mortgage, or any other productive asset that produces the same net economic return over the same period of time.

It may bother some people to learn that the market price of the human bondservant is governed by the same economic forces that govern all other economic assets that are expected to produce the same rate of return. This seems to equate people with things. But we also know that buyers and sellers make their economic decisions in terms of economic costs and benefits. Unless the buyers are sadists who love to mistreat people (and who are therefore willing to pay more than the market price of leased land or a bond in order to assure their ownership of a bondservant),⁴ the market price of the bondservant will equal the market price of any economic asset that is expected to produce the same rate of return. As we shall see, this equation of market prices for all equally productive assets is one of the aspects of a market economy that protects the bondservant from abuse.

So, from the point of view of economic return on the investment, the bondservant is not in a special position. But the Bible teaches that he is a human being, not a beast of burden or a machine. He is therefore singled out for special protection by civil law.

B. Self-Interest and Self-Restraint

The bondservant-owner's quest for profit places limits on his relationship with his bondservant. The bondservant is expected to be a producer of net income. The owner risks losing this income, or part of the income, if he permanently mutilates the bondservant. First, there will be the loss in productivity associated directly with the bondservant's physical loss. Second, there could also be loss as a result of the mistreated bondservant's resentment. He will not perform as expected.

3. There is this exception: to the degree that owning a slave is a prestige factor, the buyer will pay more, and the seller will demand more. The value of the slave in this case reflects his position as both a capital good and a consumer good.

4. This really does not invalidate the general rule. The sadist is receiving non-monetary returns psychologically through the suffering he imposes on the slave. Thus, he will pay more to buy the human asset.

The market's forces of profit and loss restrain the bondservant's owner. The civil authorities can presume that the bondservant's owner is not going to mistreat his bondservant physically to the extent that the bondservant's performance will be seriously impaired. *Because of the competitive market for the bondservant's economic output, civil authorities can more safely delegate authority to the bondservant's owner.* This decentralizes power in the society. The competitive market, through the self-interest of the bondservant's owner, serves as an institution that restrains the illegitimate use of power. The economic costs of lawless behavior are borne by the bondservant's owner. This is true of all capital resource ownership. This is why the bondservant's economic position as a capital asset protects him.

Bondservants are understood to be potentially rebellious. This is clearly true in the case of criminals who are sold to masters in order to raise money for the restitution payment to the victims. But rebellion is not limited to criminals. Men are by nature rebellious. They resist authority, both lawful and unlawful. Adam rebelled against God; bondservants rebel against masters. Without a means of enforcing lawful authority, no form of external government could exist. The bondservant system is an aspect of biblical family government in the Bible. Thus, the bondservant's owner possesses the legitimate authority to inflict limited physical punishment. What the Bible restrains is punishment that inflicts *permanent physical damage*.

There are five reasons why we can presume for this prohibition. *First*, men are made in God's image, and therefore they deserve protection. *Second*, interpersonal relationships between people are threatened when one person has seemingly unlimited power to impose his will on another. Punishment is supposed to increase respect for the law, the master, and God on the part of the bondservant, not foster an urge to revenge because of the outrageous nature of some type of punishment. Evil calls forth evil. *Third*, permanent injuries generally restrict people's ability to exercise dominion. Punishment is not to thwart the dominion covenant. *Fourth*, a man's spirit can be broken by continual, ruthless beatings. Without the protection of law, the victim may see himself as exploited and without hope. This also conflicts with the psychology of dominion. The law provides him with an area of safety. He is to increase his dominion by his subservience to God's law. This, in fact, is one of the functions of indentured servitude: to bring men under God's law. *If there is no protection, then there is no law. Without law, there can be no dominion.* Indentured servitude is sup-

posed to teach this biblical principle of life.

C. Judicially Unrestrained Violence: The Lure of Autonomy

There is a fifth reason why it was illegal for the bondservants' owners to inflict permanent physical damage on their slaves. This reason is more narrowly theological in nature. It is one which contemporary Christians do not want to think about: *eternal punishment*.

Slavery and bondservice point to man's subordinate relationship to God. This relationship, being covenantal, is governed by the inescapable aspect of all covenants, judgment. There are two forms of covenantal judgment: blessing and cursing.⁵ The blessing side of slavery is the *judicially guaranteed prospect of release*. A slave who matures and learns to be self-disciplined and productive is to be released, and civil law is to enforce his right to freedom by establishing specific performance standards for slaves. This hope of eventual release must not be destroyed. Thus, slavery points to covenantal blessing. It points to God's final release of covenant-keepers from bondage to sin and death.

On the other hand, slavery also points to the other side of God's final judgment, the eternal curse: the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). It points to God's position as cosmic Slavemaster. In the lake of fire, the "whipping" never ceases. The physical sanctions are eternal. These physical sanctions have no redeeming value, meaning no redemptive purpose. God whips rebels forever in order to satisfy His own sense of justice. But the inflicting of permanent cursing is exclusively God's decision and activity. Men are never to imitate God in this respect. *Men in history are never to be given the power to impose non-redemptive sanctions, either physical or spiritual*. Even capital punishment is legally only a change in venue: convicted criminals are transferred to God's court for final trial and sentencing. This is why the Bible provides no authorization for torturing those who have been legally condemned to execution.

D. Freedom: The Best Compensation

Biblical law makes the presumption that *a master who is not self-restrained is incapable of exercising responsible dominion over the bondservant*. Dominion is always to be in terms of God's law. The

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

master is in a weak position to teach the bondservant the basics of the dominion covenant if he is himself not self-restrained. Self-government is the fundamental level of government in human affairs. God's law promotes self-government.

The bondservant's owner may misuse his authority by inflicting excessive punishment. The bondservant loses the use of his eye or tooth. How is he to be compensated? By a *non-literal* application of the "eye for eye" principle. The Bible recognizes the ultimate earthly desire of a God-fearing bondservant who is in bondage to a master who does not exercise self-restraint: *freedom*. The civil authorities do not put out the master's eye or knock out a tooth. If his master were to lose an eye to match his eye, then the bondservant would be no better off, and the brooding master might attempt to murder the bondservant in order to gain revenge.

The injured bondservant is rewarded with his freedom. This reminds the bondservant of the essential righteousness of God's law. It also reminds the undisciplined former owner of the same thing, as well as the necessity of his exercising self-restraint in the future. *The bondservant is taken out of the jurisdiction of a lawless man.*

The victim receives compensation for the loss he has sustained. While his physical ability to exercise dominion may be permanently impaired by a physical injury, the increase of the scope of his authority compensates him. The former bondservant's freedom also benefits society, if the bondservant becomes successful in some free market activity. The lure of self-interest which the market provides may offset the loss of productivity which results from the physical injury. Thus, the terms of the dominion covenant are more closely fulfilled. Output increases because of the incentives provided through freedom. The bondservant will now receive the fruits of his labor, not the former master. This increased productivity benefits both the bondservant and consumers.

The bondservant is not compensated in any other way. The law does not require the master to provide him with tools or other capital assets. This indicates that the value of personal freedom is very high—so high, in fact, that the loss of a tooth barely compares with it. Freedom is such an advantage that it can barely be compared with the losses associated with physical impairment. Freedom is the reward for both the loss of a tooth or an eye. It is so valuable in comparison with physical impairment that no additional compensation is granted to the bondservant who has lost an eye, even though an eye is more valuable

than a tooth. So precious is freedom that the eye-less bondservant cannot legitimately protest to God or the authorities that he has received the compensation “only” of the tooth-less man.⁶ He does not receive “freedom plus.” Freedom is sufficient.

Biblical law substitutes the bondservant’s freedom for a retaliatory loss of the master’s tooth or eye. This substitution may or may not be to the liking of the master. The economic loss of the bondservant may be greater in the opinion of the master than the loss of his own tooth, but he has no choice in the matter. He must allow the bondservant to go free.

This substitution is evidence of the legitimacy of substitution in other non-capital “eye for eye” crimes. In cases involving free men, the victims can demand compensation other than the literal inflicting of physical mutilation of the criminals. *The goal is dominion*. Free men are allowed to “get even” with those who have mistreated them, not necessarily by pulling their enemies down to their physically damaged level (although this is the victim’s option), but rather by increasing their own wealth and productivity. This is also how the mistreated bondservant is supposed to “get even.” The guilty party does lose, just as the victim has lost, but *the loss is a form of economic compensation to the victim*—a grant of capital (freedom) to the victim that may enable him to perform the tasks of dominion more effectively. The criminal is “pulled down,” but the victim is also “raised up.”⁷ The motivation of the bondservant is not to be envy—pulling down the master without any compensating move upward on the part of the bondservant.⁸

6. I had never noticed a curiosity of the English language before I wrote this sentence. “Eyeless” is a term for a totally blind man, not “eyesless.” The same is true of “toothless” rather than “teethless.” We have no convenient terms for “one eye less” and “one tooth less.”

7. We have seen in chapter 37 that “pulling down” the criminal is lawful in the case of the “eye for eye” law between free men (Ex. 21:22–25). The victim can demand physical punishment of the criminal. This prerogative is unlikely to be exercised often. Men generally want capital more than physical revenge. The option of demanding physical vengeance is more important as a device for pressuring the criminal to pay what he really regards as a fair price to the victim—a payment to avoid the same injury. It creates incentive for the criminal to pay the appropriate economic compensation to the victim.

8. On the distinction between envy and jealousy (meaning covetousness), see the classic book by sociologist Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1966] 1970).

E. Protecting the Bondservant-Owners

The “freedom for an eye” law also protects the bondservant-owning class. This may not be immediately apparent. Consider an alternative rule: strict eye-for-eye vengeance. Let us say that a bondservant’s owner faces an unruly bondservant. He knows that he must maintain order in his household—defined in the broadest sense—and without his ability to inflict physical punishment, this particular bondservant is unlikely to respond to his commands. Inflicting physical damage on him is always risky. The bondservant might be permanently damaged. The owner might lose the production that the bondservant would otherwise have provided. Additionally, the owner might be convicted by a court of exercising illegitimate brutality, and have his own body mutilated. Nevertheless, the bondservant would not go free.

What if the bondservant finds the owner alone in a field and attacks him? How is the owner to defend himself? If he puts out the eye of his attacker, but *there are no witnesses* who can testify that his action was in self-defense, the bondservant has him at a disadvantage. The bondservant can claim in a court that he had been thoughtlessly or maliciously mutilated by the owner. This will not gain him his freedom, but the master will lose his eye if the bondservant loses his.

An envious bondservant might accept this loss, to “bring down” a person who possesses authority over him. After all, if the bondservant cannot gain his freedom as a result of his loss, and the master will be punished physically, then an envious bondservant might think to himself: “If I attack this man, I get even. If he defends himself and really hurts me, I can still get even. The power to inflict pain at will is transferred to me, if I’m willing to accept the risk of physical loss. The master may even be afraid to fight back, for fear of injuring himself by injuring me. I have him at a disadvantage. All I need to do is to be willing to risk the loss of my tooth or eye. I will be worse off, but so will he. He has more to lose than I do. I’m only a bondservant. I’m used to hardship. He isn’t. He will be more afraid of me than I am of him. I have the upper hand, for I have the willingness to suffer more physical damage than he does.”

The bondservants’ owners need to maintain their authority. The way that we exercise dominion is to submit ourselves to God’s law. *Self-restraint leads to dominion*. It is no different for bondservants’ owners. The master must be able to impose his will on the bondservant in external ways. To make more certain that the bondservant is

restrained, there must be incentives for the bondservant to comply. *The bondservant, no less than the master, needs self-government.* The bondservant, no less than the master, needs to count the costs of rebellion. A bondservant who is granted the ability by law to inflict permanent damage on his master merely for the price of suffering the same injury, is a dangerous bondservant. If he is willing to accept the pain, and the master isn't, then the bondservant is given the upper hand. The social order of society is threatened. Power is transferred from those who will not accept pain to those who will. But power in a godly society should be based on *moral authority*, not the comparative ability to withstand pain. Power should be based on *ethical standing before God*, not tolerance for pain.

A bondservant-owner in a society whose civil law recognizes the principle of “freedom for an eye” who is attacked without witnesses present knows that he can defend himself to the utmost. If he cannot prove self-defense in the court, then the worst he will suffer is the loss of the bondservant. But at the moment a man is attacked, the thought of the removal of the bondservant from his presence is not really that repugnant to him. The bondservant-owner will not hesitate to defend himself under such circumstances. The bondservant knows this.

The freedom-seeking bondservant might think to himself: “If I attack the man in private, and he mutilates me, I can go free. I will do it. I want my freedom more than I want my tooth. On the other hand, he might punch out my eye. There are risks here. I can go free in a few years anyway. This is not a permanent position of servitude. Is it worth the possible loss of my eye to gain my freedom a few years early? I may not be able to hurt him very much, and he will not hesitate to beat me to a pulp. Is an attack worth the risk?” The bondservant counts the cost. In a Christian society governed by biblical civil law, in which servitude is not permanent, but can extend at most for seven years, will he risk forfeiting his eye for the rest of his life? He must pay a high price for rebellion-based freedom. The court may decide against him anyway and convict him of assault on the owner. Attacking the bondservant-owner in secret is a very risky act. The bondservant is restrained by the threat of physical punishment by the owner, and the court may not impose any penalty on the owner. The master is restrained, at most, by the threat of losing the bondservant. The master has the edge in this case.

F. The Foreign Slave

The foreign slave, like the committed criminal sold into permanent bondage, was in a different situation. He was not guaranteed release after a fixed period of time (Lev. 25:44–46).⁹ He therefore might have been willing to attack the slave-owner in secret, not fearing physical retribution, for the reward would be freedom. Provoking a Hebrew master to excessive punishment might have been to the advantage of a foreign slave. The price of freedom was mutilation—a price that some slaves might have been willing to pay.

1. Separation

This would have been an incentive for masters to avoid being alone with foreign slaves. In the absence of witnesses, the slave could do two evil things. First, he might attack the owner in order to cause the owner to mutilate him in self-defense. Then he could claim to be the victim. Second, he might self-mutilate himself and then claim that the owner had struck him. In the absence of witnesses, the court might decide in his favor, especially if the slave-owner had a reputation for violence. These possibilities increase the risks to an owner of being alone with a foreign slave.

By separating foreign slaves from Hebrew masters, the law also tended to separate the religious rites of foreign slaves from their masters. In the Old Testament commonwealth, there would have been fewer opportunities for Hebrew masters to learn the secret rites of demon-worshipping foreign slaves. An owner would have been more likely to have witnesses present in his dealings with foreign slaves, and therefore capital punishment for his worship of false gods would always have been far more likely. Intimate contacts between foreign slaves and Hebrew masters would have been less likely. In private, the master would have been at a disadvantage to the slave, compared to the advantage he possessed in public. The slave would have had more to gain from such contacts than the master: (1) an opportunity to attack him and provoke a freedom-producing response; (2) an opportunity to fake an attack through self-mutilation; and (3) an opportunity to convert him to the worship of the slave's hidden gods of darkness.

There are other intimacies between master and slave that would have borne great risks to the Hebrew master. Secret encounters with

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

foreign slaves for sexual contact would have been made less likely because of the law that offered freedom to mutilated slaves. The slave might argue in court that the master had attempted to violate her (or him, in the case of sexual deviation), and when she resisted, he attacked her physically. This might actually be true; resistance by the slave might provoke a lawless master to violence. Or it could be a lie—perhaps the lie most easily believed by a court. In either case, secret associations with a foreign slave would be reduced if the “freedom for an eye” law was enforced. Only the most trustworthy foreign slave would have had access to a master in total privacy.

2. The Jubilee Year

With respect to the jubilee law, which alone authorized Israelites to own permanent foreign slaves, this “freedom for an eye” law served to separate Hebrew masters from their foreign slaves. This was probably more of a protection for Hebrew masters than foreign slaves. Hebrews under the Old Covenant were highly vulnerable to the lure of foreign gods. The Old Testament laws concerning ritual pollution, which included the dietary laws, pointed to the defensive position of the Hebrews spiritually: death contaminated them ritually because theologies of death lured them repeatedly. It was only after Christ’s ministry cleansed the ground, making possible the annulment of the laws concerning ritual pollution,¹⁰ that God’s people could at last be self-confident in their offensive campaign against evil. It was only then that the conquest of the nations became ritually easy.

At that point in covenantal history, however, the jubilee laws were abolished. All of Leviticus 25 became a dead letter. This included the

10. James Jordan wrote: “In the Old Covenant, the land was perpetually defiled, and only provisionally cleansed by a variety of cleansing actions, the most prominent being the annual cleansing on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Apart from this, the holy land of Canaan would revert to a defiled status. Within this annual provisional cleansing, there was the possibility of local, occasional defilements. . . . In the New Covenant, the land is perpetually cleansed. It is only the occasional defilement which must be dealt with. The ceremony of dealing with it is not the sacrifice of slaying an animal, or the death of a Church leader, but the ceremony of the Church’s declaring a man forgiven and permitting him to partake of the Holy Eucharist, which applies the finished sacrifice to him. Such a ceremony would be an important part of a Christian society.” James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 101–2. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>). This is why any attempt to revive the ritual slaying of animals, even as a “memorial,” is a return to the heresy of the Judaizers. Baptism and Holy Communion, not the slaying of animals, are the only memorial of rituals of cleansing that remain.

law allowing permanent household slavery. No longer were slaves allowed to be imported from the lands around God's people, for God's people were now enabled to extend the kingdom of God far more easily than before Christ's death and resurrection cleansed the earth ritually. There were to be no more "heathen that are round about you" nationally (Lev. 25:44); heathen would henceforth be immediately round about God's people, because God's people were to enter heathen lands, bringing the gospel and discipling the nations (Matt. 28:19).¹¹ God's people were to be in close contact with racially and culturally foreign household slaves, even in private, sometimes as brothers in the faith. At that point, the law of permanent household slavery had to go, to protect the slave-owner as much or more than to protect the slave.

Conclusion

The goal of servitude in the Bible is liberation through self-discipline, dominion through service. This is true for both the master and the bondservant. Each must show self-restraint or else suffer penalties. A lawless, undisciplined, violent master therefore loses legal control over his bondservant. This law reminds us that the exercise of power must be governed by law; he who holds power is supposed to hold it by means of his moral authority as well as by the sword. To the extent that the master is handed the sword by the civil government, as an agent of the civil government, he is under restrictions imposed by God's law through the civil government.

This law protects slaves from lawless tyrants. It also protects masters from cost-calculating, envious, violent slaves. The penalty of losing the slave raises the price of lawlessness to the master. Simultaneously, the inability of the court to impose physical retribution on the owner restrains the envious bondservant in any attempt to "get even" with the master by provoking a physical attack on himself. By limiting the duration of debt servitude to seven years, the incentive to revolt is minimized among bondservants. An act of physical rebellion against a master which might cost the bondservant an eye is less advantageous in a society with a time limit on slavery. If bondservants wait a few years, they will keep their eyes and also gain freedom. Better to bear the rule of the master patiently.

God defines deviant behavior in His law. Individuals and societies

11. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

that transgress these standards of deviance are eventually placed under God's formal judicial sanctions, in history (Deut. 8:19–20)¹² and beyond history (Matt. 25:31–46). The South was not deviant in terms of ancient historical precedent regarding permanent slavery; the North was. The fact is, the South was deviant in terms of God's written standards, for its legislators and judges honored neither Old Testament laws governing servitude nor Jesus's abolition of permanent slavery in His abolition of Israel's jubilee land tenure laws. It took a long time, but God eventually imposed His sanctions by means of Northern aggression, for the North had more closely approached the biblical norms regarding permanent slavery.

12. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

THE RANSOM FOR A LIFE

If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. But if the ox were wont to push [gore] with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death. If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him. Whether he have gored a son, or have gored a daughter, according to this judgment shall it be done unto him (Ex. 21:28–31).

The Bible tells us that we live in a universe that was created by God at the beginning of time and history, and that this world is sustained by Him, moment by moment. The doctrines of creation and providence are therefore linked. The universe which God created, He presently sustains. We live in a world of cosmic personalism.¹ God's answer to Job, beginning in chapter 38 and continuing through chapter 40, presents a summary of the total control of all events by God.²

In such a world, men cannot escape full responsibility for their actions. God holds them responsible for everything they think, say, and do. "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). Everything people do is done within a personally sustained, God-ordained universe (Rom. 9). They succeed or fail in terms of

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

2. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

God's decree. They run to God ethically, or they run away from God unethically; they cannot run away from Him metaphysically. God is everywhere; there is no escape: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Ps. 139:7–8). "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD" (Jer. 23:23–24).

Human action is always personal, never impersonal. First, it is personal primarily with respect to God. God is the ultimate, inescapable fact of man's environment, not sticks and stones. Second, human action is secondarily personal with respect to oneself: one's goals, choices, and assets. Third, human action is personal with respect to other human actors, both as individuals and as covenantal groups. Fourth, human action is personal with respect to the environment, which God has created and presently sustains, and over which He has placed mankind. Man's responsibility extends *upward* to God, *inward* to himself, *outward* toward other men, and *downward* toward the environment. It is comprehensive responsibility. When we speak of "responsible men," we should have this four-part, comprehensive responsibility in mind, not just one or two aspects. A person may appear to be responsible in one or two areas of his life, but whether he likes it or not, or whether he is adequately instructed or not, he is covenantally responsible before God in all four ways, and he will be held totally accountable for his thoughts and actions on the day of judgment.

A. Liability for Damages

Although God holds each person fully responsible, no agency of human government has the power to do so. This is why we must affirm as Christians that with respect to the decisions of human governments regarding men's personal responsibility, there must always be *limited liability*. No agency of human government is omniscient; none possesses the ability of God to read the human heart or to assess damages perfectly. We must wait for perfect justice until the day of final judgment. To insist on perfect justice from human government is to divinize that agency. It will also lead to its bankruptcy and the destruction of justice.³

3. Chapter 19.

The case laws of Exodus function as the groupings under which many different kinds of disputes over liability for damages can be classified. This has been recognized by Jewish scholars for at least two millennia. Later Jewish law created various categories of offenses subject to private lawsuits (“torts”) that were based on the case laws of Exodus. Jewish legal scholar Shalom Albeck wrote:

Four principal cases are considered: (1) where someone opens a pit into which an animal falls and dies (Ex. 21:33–4); (2) where cattle trespass into the fields of others and do damage (Ex. 22:4 [English version, 22:5]); (3) where someone lights a fire which spreads to neighboring fields (Ex. 22:5 [Eng. 22:6]); (4) where an ox gores man or beast (Ex. 21:28–32, 35–6). To those has to be added the case where a man injures his fellow or damages his property (Ex. 21:18–19, 22–5; Lev. 24:18–20). The Talmud calls the cases contained in the Torah primary categories of damage (*Avot Nezikin*) and these serve as archetypes for similar groups of torts. The principal categories of animal torts are: *shen* (tooth)—where the animal causes damage by consuming; *regel* (foot)—where the animal causes damage by walking in its normal manner; and *keren* (horn)—where the animal causes damage by goring with the intention of doing harm or does any other kind of unusual damage. The other principal categories of damage are: *bor* (pit)—any nuisance which ipso facto causes damage; *esh* (fire)—anything which causes damage when spread by the wind; and direct damage by man to another’s person or property. These principal categories and their derivative rules were expanded to form a complete and homogeneous legal system embracing many other factual situations. As a result they were capable of dealing with any case of tortious liability which might arise.⁴

The key issue is personal responsibility. Who is responsible for damages sustained, and what are the appropriate penalties? The case laws provide us with the governing standards for assigning legal responsibility for damages and the appropriate penalties.

B. Responsibility: Upward and Downward

Man’s responsibility outward and downward is seen in this section of Exodus. A man owes protection to his fellow man, which includes women, as the passage at the beginning of the chapter clearly points

4. “TORTS. The Principal Categories of Torts,” in *The Principles of Jewish Law*, edited by Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975?), col. 319. This compilation of articles taken from the *Encyclopedia Judaica* was published as Publication No. 6 of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

out. This passage also teaches that “dumb animals” under a man’s personal administration are responsible, through him, for their actions. They are responsible upward to mankind through their master, as well as outward to other beasts through their master (v. 35). Human society enforces sanctions against lawless behavior, whether in the animals or their owners. Domesticated animals are responsible to mankind through their owners, and therefore society holds the owners responsible for those animals under their control. Animals that are not domesticated—neither trained nor tamed—are to be under physical restraint, at the owner’s expense.

1. Domesticated Beasts

The shedding of man’s blood is illegal, either by man or beast. “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:4–6). The ox that gores a man to death cannot escape the sanctions of biblical law. Neither can other man-killing animals.

In the case of the ox, the animal is presumed to be domesticated, for if it were dangerous, the owner would be required to restrain it. The owner becomes legally liable because what was, in fact, a dangerous animal had been publicly treated by him as if it had been safe. *The owner deliberately or inadvertently misinformed the public about the risks.* He did not place restraints on it. The victim died because of the owner’s neglect. The owner should have placed restraints on the beast, or else he should have placed warnings for bystanders.

Why shouldn’t bystanders recognize that the animal is dangerous? Why are they considered judicially innocent? Don’t people know that bulls charge people and gore them? They do know, which is why the Hebrew usage, as in English, indicates that “ox” in this case must refer to a castrated male bovine. The castrated beast is not normally aggressive. It is easier to bring under dominion through training. In this sense, a castrated male bovine is unnaturally subordinate.

As an aside, the question of unnatural subordination (lack of male dominion) can also be raised with respect to the prohibition against immigrant eunuchs’ becoming citizens (Deut. 23:1). Presumably, this was because eunuchs could not produce a family, and to that extent

they were cut off from the future. Rushdoony wrote (unfortunately using the present tense): "Because eunuchs are without posterity, they have no interest in the future, and hence no citizenship."⁵ This was true enough in ancient Israel, where land tenure, bloodlines, political participation (elders in the gates), and the national covenant were intermixed. The New Testament forever abolished this biological-geographical intermixture. Spiritual adoption⁶ became forthrightly the foundation of heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20), and therefore the only basis of church membership. The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip the deacon (Acts 8)⁷ indicates that the Old Testament rule lost all meaning, once Jesus, the promised seed, had come and completed His work.

The goring ox is also judicially guilty. It is therefore treated as a responsible moral agent—not to the extent that a man is, of course, but responsible nonetheless. We train our domestic animals. We beat them and reward them. Modern scientists call this training "behavior modification." In other words, we deal with them on the assumption that they can learn, remember, and discipline themselves. Anyone who has ever seen a dog that looks guilty, which slinks around as if it has done something it knows is wrong, can safely guess that the dog *has* done something wrong. It may take time to find out what, but the search must begin. The dog *knows*.

2. An Ethically Unclean Beast

The goring ox is to be treated as if it were an unclean beast. It has become an ethically unclean beast. Because of its ethical uncleanness, it is still subject to this punishment in New Testament times, despite the New Testament's abandonment of the category of physical and ritual uncleanness. James Jordan commented on the biblical meaning of unclean animals.

All unclean animals *resemble the serpent* in three ways. They eat "dirt" (rotting carrion, manure, garbage). They move in contact with "dirt" (crawling on their bellies, fleshy pads of their feet in touch with the ground, no scales to keep their skin from contact with their wa-

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 100.

6. John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5.

7. That a deacon performed this baptism, as well as many others in Samaria, creates a presently unsolved theological problem for all denominations that specify elders as the only ordained church officers with a lawful call to baptize.

tery environment). They revolt against human dominion, killing men or other beasts. Under the symbolism of the Old Covenant, such Satanic beasts represent the Satanic nations (Lev. 20:22–26), for animals are “images” of men. To eat Satanic animals, under the Old Covenant, was to “eat” the Satanic lifestyle, to “eat” death and rebellion.

The ox is a clean animal. The heifer and the pre-pubescent bullock have sweet temperaments, and can be sacrificed for human sin, for their gentle, non-violent dispositions reflect the character of Jesus Christ. When the bullock enters puberty, however, his temperament changes for the worse. He becomes ornery, testy, and sometimes downright vicious. Many a man has lost his life to a goring bull. *The change from bullock to bull can be seen as analogous to the fall of man*, at least potentially. If the ox rises up and gores a man, he becomes unclean, fallen. . . .

The *unnaturalness* of an animal’s killing a man is only highlighted in the case of a clean, domesticated beast like the ox. Such an ox, by its actions, becomes unclean, so that its flesh may not be eaten. . . .

The fact that the animal is stoned indicates that the purpose of the law is not simply to rid the earth of a dangerous beast. Stoning in the Bible is the normal means of capital punishment for men. Its application to the animal here shows that animals are to be held accountable to some degree for their actions. It is also a visual sign of what happens when a clean covenant man rebels against authority and kills men. Stoning is usually understood to represent the judgment of God, since the Christ is “the rock” and the “stone” which threatens to fall upon men and destroy them (Matt. 21:44). In line with this, the community of believers is often likened to stones, used for building God’s Spiritual Temple, and so forth. In stoning, each member of the community hurls a rock representing himself and his affirmation of God’s judgment. The principle of stoning, then, affirms that the judgment is God’s; the application of stoning affirms the community’s assent and participation in that judgment.⁸

C. Covenantal Hierarchy and Guilty Animals

“But if the ox were wont to push [gore] with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in,

8. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 122–24. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death." The owner had been warned that the beast was dangerous. (We shall consider in the next section what constitutes valid evidence of habitual goring.) He had withheld this information from the victim. How? By refusing to place adequate restraints on the beast. The victim had every reason to believe that the ox was fully domesticated, meaning that it was *self-disciplined* under the general authority of its owner. Again, it is *self-government under God's law* which is the crucial form of government.

The Bible is unique in establishing the judicial requirement of self-government to beasts in general. Any beast is to be held accountable if it kills a human being. (Maimonides made one exception regarding a domesticated beast: it is not responsible if it kills a heathen, meaning a gentile.)⁹ Since the days of Noah, they have had the fear of man placed in them by God (Gen. 9:2). A beast must somehow suppress this fear—an internal warning from God—in order to kill a man. Beasts are responsible creatures; they are to be hunted down and killed for this form of rebellion. Some domesticated beasts are responsible outward to other beasts, upward to man, and, through their masters, upward to God.¹⁰

The Bible deals with the liability problem by making owners personally responsible for the actions of their animals. If their animals cause no problems, there will be no penalties. The more dangerous the animals, the more risky the ownership. Clearly, Exodus 21:30 is a case-law application of a general principle regarding the responsibilities of ownership. The principle can be extended to ownership of other animals besides oxen, and also to related instances of personal financial liability for damages in cases not involving animals.

The law makes it clear that the owner may not profit in any way from the evil act of the beast. He is not permitted to salvage anything of value. The beast is stoned—the same death penalty that a guilty hu-

9. "If an ox kills a person anywhere, whether an adult or a minor, a slave or a free-man, it incurs death by stoning whether it is innocuous or forewarned. However, if it kills a heathen, it is exempt in accordance with heathen law." Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), "Laws Concerning Damage by Chattels," I:X:1, p. 36.

10. The incomparable biblical example of upward responsibility of an animal toward man is Balaam's ass. "And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay" (Num. 22:30).

man would receive—and the owner does not receive the carcass. Its flesh may not be eaten (v. 28). The beast is treated as if it were a human being. Its evil act brings death—not the normal killing of oxen, which allows owners to eat the flesh or sell it to those who will, but the death of the guilty. The guilty beast is no longer part of the dominion covenant. It can no longer serve the economic purposes of men, except as an example. It has to be cut off in the midst of time, just as a murderer is to be cut off in the midst of time.

1. Why Stoning?

J. J. Finkelstein discussed at considerable length the question of the stoning of the ox. While similar laws regarding the goring ox are found in many ancient Near Eastern law codes, the Hebrew law was unique: it specifically required stoning of the ox that kills any human being, even a slave. Finkelstein concluded that this requirement testified to the ox's crime as being of a different order than the crime of its negligent owner. It pointed to *treason*, a rebellion against the cosmic order, a crime comparable to a Hebrew's enticing of a family member to worship foreign gods, which was also to be punished by stoning (Deut. 13:6–11). It was an offense against the whole community, and the whole community is therefore involved in the execution.

The real crime of the ox is that by killing a human being—whether out of viciousness or by an involuntary motion—it has objectively committed a *de facto* insurrection against the hierarchic order established by Creation: Man was designated by God 'to rule over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the skies, the cattle, the earth, and all creatures that roam over the earth' (Gen. 1:26, 28). Simply by its behavior—and it is vital here to stress that intention is immaterial; the guilt is objective—the ox has, albeit involuntarily, performed an act whose effect amounts to "treason." It has acted against man, its superior in the hierarchy of Creation, as man acts against God when violating the Sabbath or when practicing idolatry. It is precisely for this reason that the flesh of the ox may not be consumed.¹¹

Finkelstein traced this biblical law forward into the Middle Ages. In medieval Europe, trials for animals were actually held by the civil government. Defense lawyers in secular courts were hired at public expense to defend accused beasts. Witnesses were called. Guilty animals

11. J. J. Finkelstein, *The Ox That Gored* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), p. 28.

were destroyed as a civic act. In some cases, they were publicly hanged.¹² Few people know about this side of European history, although specialized historians have known all along. Some of the great minds of Western philosophy, including Aquinas and Leibniz, attempted to explain this practice rationally.¹³ Yet the specialized historians have generally remained silent, and few professional historians have ever heard of such goings-on, nor are they aware that in ancient Athens, the courts tried inanimate objects, such as statues that had fallen and killed someone. If convicted, the object was banished from the city.¹⁴ Why the silence? Why don't these stories get into the textbooks? As Humphrey asked: "Why were we never told? Why were we taught so many dreary facts of history at school, *and not taught these?*"¹⁵

He answered his own question: modern historians can make little sense out of these facts. There seems to be no logical explanation for the way our ancestors treated guilty animals. What is a guilty animal, anyway—a legally convicted guilty animal? How can such events be explained? Finkelstein cited the theory of legal scholar Hans Kelsen that such a practice points to the "animism" of early medieval Europe, because to try an animal in court obviously points to a theory of the animal's possession of a soul.¹⁶ Kelsen said that this reflects early Europe's older primitivism. Finkelstein then attacked Kelsen's naive approach to an understanding of this practice. In contrast to primitive societies, it is only in the West that such legal sanctions against offending animals have been enforced. "Only in Western society, or in societies based on the hierarchic classification of the phenomena of the universe that is biblical in its origins, do we see the curious practice of trying and executing animals as if they were human criminals."¹⁷ Then he made a profound observation: "What Kelsen has misunderstood here—and in this he is typical of most Western commentators—is the

12. A painting of the hanging of a pig in Normandy in 1386 appears on the cover of the 1987 reprint of E. P. Evans's 1906 book, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (London: Faber & Faber). The painting shows the pig dressed in a jacket. The original edition is here: <http://bit.ly/CrimPros>.

13. Nicholas Humphrey, Foreword, *ibid.*, p. xviii.

14. W. W. Hyde, "The prosecution of animals and lifeless things in the middle ages and modern times," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* (1916). Finkelstein was somewhat suspicious of these accounts.

15. Humphrey, "Foreword," p. xv.

16. Finkelstein, *Ox That Gored*, p. 48. He cited Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State* (1961), pp. 3–4.

17. Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

sense, widespread in primitive societies (as, indeed in civilized societies of non-Western derivation), that the extra-human universe is *autonomous* and that this autonomy or integrity is a quality inherent in every species of thing.”¹⁸ Because Western society long denied such autonomy to the creation, it has in the past adhered to the biblical requirement of destroying killer animals; in Europe, they were even given a formal trial.

2. Expiation

What none of the scholars discusses is the need for expiation, a need which is both psychological and covenantal. The animal's owner and the community at large, through its representatives, must publicly disassociate themselves from the killer beast. They must demonstrate publicly that they in no way sanction the beast's murderous act. There is an Old Testament precedent for the need for this sort of formal expiation: the requirement in ancient Israel that civic officials sacrifice a heifer when they could not solve a murder that had taken place in a nearby field (Deut. 21:1–9). “So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD” (v. 9). In New Testament times, we no longer need to sacrifice animals (Heb. 9, 10), but the need for formal procedures for the expiation of the crime of man-killing is still basic. To ignore this need is to unleash the furies of the human heart.

The medieval world understood this to some degree, however imperfectly; the modern humanistic West does not understand it at all, and seeks to deny it by abolishing any trace of such ritual practices. We cannot make sense of the so-called “primitive folk practices” of medieval and early modern Western history that dealt with this fundamental civic and personal need, and so we refuse even to discuss them in our history books. We execute murderers in private when we execute them at all. (In the state of Massachusetts in the early 1970s, the median jail term served by a murderer was under two and a half years.)¹⁹ Humanist intellectuals seek to persuade the public that society is itself ritually guilty for maintaining the “barbarous” practice of capital punishment.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

19. James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 186.

D. Personal Liability and Self-Discipline

The convicted owner of the habitually goring ox in Exodus 21:28 implicitly misinformed the ox's victim. He had known that the ox had been violent in the past, yet he did not take steps to restrain it. The beast was roaming around as if it had no prior record of violence. The victim did not recognize the danger involved in being near the beast.

The Bible does not reveal in these passages regarding goring oxen the evidence that constituted judicially binding prior knowledge. What kind of information did the owner have to possess in order for the court to declare him guilty? The rabbinical specialists in Jewish law said that the animal had to have gored someone or other animals on three occasions before the owner became personally liable.²⁰

1. *Maimonides' Exposition*

Maimonides spelled it out in even greater detail: any domesticated animal must first kill three heathen (gentiles), plus one Israelite; or kill three fatally ill Israelites, plus one in good health; or kill three people at one time, or kill three animals at one time.²¹

This is an excessive number of prior infractions in order to activate capital sanctions. Subsequent victims need more protection than these Talmudic rules would provide. It is far more reasonable to conclude that a single prior conviction should suffice to identify the beast as dangerous. What should be obvious in any study of traditional Rabbinic laws regarding killer oxen is the extent to which the rabbis would go in order to exempt the owners. Maimonides's example is remarkable, found in Chapter 10 of the first treatise on torts, "Laws Concerning Damage by Chattels."

11. No owner need pay ransom unless his animal kills outside his premises. But if it kills on his premises, then although it is liable for stoning, the owner is exempt from paying ransom. Thus if one enters a privately owned courtyard without the owner's permission—even if he enters to collect wages or a debt from the owner—and the householder's ox gores him and he dies, the ox must be stoned, but the owner is exempt from paying ransom since the victim had no right to enter another's premises without the owner's consent.

12. If one stands at the entrance and calls to the householder, and the

20. Albeck, *Jewish Law*, col. 322.

21. Maimonides, *Torts*, "Laws Concerning Damage by Chattels," I:X:3, p. 36.

householder answers, “Yes,” and he then enters and is gored by the householder’s ox and dies, the owner is exempt, for “Yes” means no more than “Stay where you are until I speak to you.”²²

He even exempted the owner of a notorious ox that has gored a pregnant woman whose child is born prematurely. “For Scripture imposes liability to pay the value of such infants on humans only.”²³ Because the ox did it, and is not a human, its owner is exempt; the transfer of liability upward to the owner is cut short, because the ox cannot be held responsible. He did admit that if the ox gores a pregnant bond-woman, and the same thing happens, the owner is financially liable in this case, “for this is as if the ox gored a she-ass about to foal.”²⁴ Oxen are responsible for damaging other animals, so this responsibility is transferred upward to owners, unlike the previous case.

On the other hand, Maimonides was very hard on the animal associates of a condemned criminal ox. “If its trial has been concluded and it then becomes mixed with other oxen—even with a thousand others—all must be stoned and buried and are forbidden for use, as is the rule concerning any animal condemned to be stoned.”²⁵ Owners of friendly oxen were forewarned by Maimonides: don’t let your law-abiding beasts fall in with bad company!²⁶ (After reading Maimonides’s *Code* in detail, this gentile begins to suspect that pre-modern Rabbinic reasoning regarding the case laws is very different from his own.)

2. Re-Sold Ox

We know that an ox that had gored another ox had to be sold by its owner to a third party (Ex. 21:35). Thus, to be the owner of an ox that had been convicted of goring, he would have had to go out and repurchase the offending ox, or else he is the person who bought the

22. *Ibid.*, I:X:12, pp. 38–39.

23. *Ibid.*, I:XI:3, p. 40.

24. *Ibid.*, I:XI:4.

25. *Ibid.*, XI:10, p. 41.

26. What Maimonides and the rabbis failed to understand is this: the guilt of a murderous animal is covenantal, not metaphysical. The evil that the animal has committed is not passed to other animals by mere physical contact or proximity. The evil act of the animal was rebellion against the fear of man that God places in every animal’s heart (Gen. 9:2). It had trespassed the moral boundaries that God placed in its heart. Maimonides was more concerned about the boundary between the convicted animal and other animals than with the boundary inside the animal between it and mankind, and the physical boundary between the animal and his last three human victims.

offending ox. In either case, he had taken active steps to buy a known offender. To have done this, and then to have refused to take active measures to restrain it, should make him legally vulnerable to the charge of negligence.

Would other evidence rather than a prior conviction be a sufficient warning? What if neighbors had reported the beast to the authorities? If the authorities had issued a formal warning to the owner, would this serve as evidence of its status as a habitual offender? If we answer yes, then this raises the issue of “innocent until proven guilty.” There had been no proven evidence against the beast. Perhaps neighbors were hostile to the ox’s owner, and reported false information. On the other hand, perhaps they were telling the truth, and the owner was negligent in not taking steps to restrain the ox.

The easiest way to resolve the issue is to rely on the biblical principle of the double witness (Deut. 17:6). If two different witnesses each reports a different infraction—neither of the infractions had a double witness—then the authorities must issue a warning to the owner. This formal warning can then serve as evidence in a future trial.

3. *David Daube’s Judicial Subjectivism*

David Daube, dazzled by the legerdemain of biblical higher criticism, argued that this law was written much earlier than the law in Exodus 21:35–36. He argued that there was a strict rule of evidence in this instance: a formal warning given to the owner of the ox. “This means that the judge need not examine whether or not you were really clear on the point—which might be difficult for him to discover. He need only examine whether or not the necessary announcement was made to you—a very easy thing to find out. If the announcement was made, you are responsible for everything that has happened since; and it would be no excuse to say that you personally had not believed that the ox was so savage. If no announcement was made, you are not responsible even if you yourself had seen all the time how dangerous the ox was.”²⁷ The decision of the judge is to be made “on a strict, archaic, ‘objective’ kind of proof,” Daube said. Notice his characterization of objective proof as archaic. He contrasted this supposedly archaic legal rule with a supposedly more advanced rule of law that governed the supposedly later law of Exodus 21:35–36.

27. David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1947), p. 87.

The judge does not raise the freer, more advanced, “subjective” question: Did you or did you not know about the nature of the ox? Now in the other, later paragraph, on the case where your ox kills an ox, we do get this “subjective” element. No mention is here made of the necessity of a formal announcement: the responsibility is yours from the moment you are aware, or should be aware, that your ox is not to be trusted. At this more advanced stage of the law, the judge must investigate the affair much more closely; he must, above all, search men’s hearts. If he reaches the conclusion that you knew the beast was dangerous, he will find you guilty even though no announcement was ever made to you in the matter.²⁸

Daube did not discuss the differing criteria of evidence in terms of the differing impact of the crime and differences in the resulting liability: the death of a human being vs. the death of someone else’s ox. He failed to recognize that the formal criteria that govern evidence of liability in the case of an ox that kills another ox are less rigorous, because the crime is less damaging. In a case of an ox that slays another ox, biblical law does not require that a formal warning be given by the authorities to the owner; prior general knowledge is sufficient to convict: “Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push [gore] in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own” (Ex. 21:36). *Public knowledge rather than a formal complaint to the civil authorities is sufficient to convict the owner in this instance.* It can be safely assumed by the judge that if the public knew about the beast’s habits, then the owner must have known. In contrast, the potential liability of the owner is far greater when an ox kills a human being. It is too dangerous to allow the judge to make his ruling in terms of the assumption of general knowledge. By requiring more rigorous standards of evidence, biblical law restrains the discretionary authority of the state’s representative in the more serious cases of negligence. This restrains the state.

Daube ignored this explanation in order to argue that the later rule was chronologically later in Israel rather than merely later in the biblical text. He also argued that the later rule was governed by a more mature concept of legality, a legal development that allows the judge to search the hearts of the disputants. He is a faithful representative of contemporary humanism: a man who weakens men’s confidence in the integrity of God’s revealed word and the reliability of His law, and thereby strengthens the arbitrary power of the state.

28. *Ibid.*

Daube's view of the state is the modern humanist's view: the state as an agency that possesses the judicial authority and obligation to search men's hearts, and to render formal judgment in terms of its findings. This view of state power asserts that the state possesses an ability that only God possesses: the ability to know man's heart. The prophet Jeremiah asked rhetorically: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). His answer was clear: "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:10). The human judge can make causal connections based on public evidence, but he cannot search the defendant's heart. Any assertion to the contrary necessarily involves an attempt to divinize man, and in all likelihood, divinize man's major judicial representative, the state.

4. The Economics of Negligence

We know from the text that the ox's owner had been warned about the dangerous ox, yet he did nothing visibly to restrain it. Why would an owner neglect a warning from someone else regarding the threat of his ox to others? There are several possible reasons. First, he may not trust the judgment of the person bringing the warning. The beast may behave quite well in the owner's presence. Is he to trust the judgment of a stranger, and not trust his own personal experience? But once the warning is delivered, he is in jeopardy. If the beast injures someone, and the informant announces publicly that he had warned the owner, the owner becomes legally liable for the victim's suffering.²⁹

Second, the owner may be a procrastinator. He fully intended to place restraints on the ox, but he just never got around to it. This does not absolve him from full personal liability, but it does explain why he failed to take effective action.

Another reason for not restraining the ox is economics. It takes extra care and cost to keep an unruly beast under control. For example, over and over in colonial America, town records reveal that owners of pigs, sheep, and cattle had disobeyed previous legislation requiring them to pen the beasts in or put rings in their noses. Apparently, the authorities were unable to gain compliance, for this complaint was

29. Because a serious penalty could be imposed on the liable owner, the informant would have to have proof that he had, in fact, actually warned the owner of the beast's prior misconduct. Otherwise, the perjured testimony of one man could ruin the owner of a previously safe beast which then injured someone.

continual and widespread throughout the seventeenth century.³⁰ The costs of supervising the animals or maintaining fences in good repair were just too high in the opinion of countless owners. Even putting a ring in the beasts' noses, making it easier for others to put a rope through the ring and pull a beast home or to some other location, was simply too much trouble.³¹ Boston imposed stiff fines on the owners of wandering animals, which helped to reduce the problem.³²

In one case, the unwillingness or inability of a woman to control her wandering pig literally changed the political history of the United States. Litigation over the ownership of a wandering pig between Goodwoman ("Goodie") Sherman and the well-to-do Boston merchant, Robert Keayne, led in 1644 to a deadlock in the General Court (legislature) of Massachusetts between the deputies, who were direct representatives of the people (who favored Sherman, and the magistrates (who favored Keayne). The result was the division of the two groups into separate legislative houses—the origin of bicameralism in America.³³ As Bridenbaugh noted, "The frequency with which the hog appears in town records is mute proof that despite many 'good and sufficient' measures the problem was never solved, and the bicameral legislature of Massachusetts remains a monument to its persistence."³⁴ Passing laws is not sufficient. Sanctions must be imposed that alter human behavior.

E. Limited Liability

The Bible imposes liability on owners of animals known to be dangerous. Penalties are imposed that vary according to the nature of the infraction and the degree of prior knowledge by the owner. These pen-

30. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625–1742* (New York: Capricorn, [1938] 1964), pp. 19, 167, 323.

31. In my research on my doctoral dissertation on colonial American Puritanism, I came across no case where an owner was executed for the act of his beast, nor do I recall locating an example where heavy restitution was paid to a victim.

32. Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness*, p. 168.

33. On the "sow" incident, see Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, 4 vols., *The Settlements* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1934] 1964), I, pp. 450–51. Cf. Gov. John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal: "History of New England," 1630–1649*, ed. James Kendall Hosmer, 2 vols. (New York: Barnes & Noble, [1908] 1966), II, pp. 64–66, 120–21.

34. Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness*, p. 19. I put a question mark in the margin of my book upon first reading it. I had not yet heard of the Keayne-Sherman conflict, and Bridenbaugh never explained what he meant. Scholars can sometimes be too cryptic.

alties are intended to reduce uncertainty about potentially violent beasts. By extending the principle of legal liability, we can derive principles of liability for owners of inanimate objects.

Man is a limited creature. His knowledge is therefore limited. Because his knowledge is limited, God limits man's legal liability. Man is not to be judged by standards that could apply justly only to an omniscient being. If a state seeks to impose perfectionist standards of liability, the legal system will cease to function. It will begin to produce unjust decisions, and there will be an increase of uncertainty and also an increase of arbitrary decisions—precisely what biblical law is designed to prevent. Such judicial uncertainty would make economic decision-making prohibitively expensive. The economy would be threatened.

Consider the case of a potentially dangerous beast that broke its rope or knocked down a restraining fence in Old Testament Israel. The owner would be in the same position as a man who was using an axe which he thought was safe. The axe head flew off and killed someone. This was a case of accidental manslaughter. Immediately, the man would have fled to a city of refuge, in order to escape the dead man's avenger of blood. At that point, the avenger of blood would have demanded a trial, and the elders of the city would have held it. If judged guilty of premeditated murder, the guilty man would have been delivered up to the avenger. If judged innocent, he would have had to remain in the city until the death of the high priest (Num. 35:22–28).

1. A Broken Rope

Consider the dangerous beast in our day. It breaks its restraining rope and kills someone. The victim's heirs sue the owner. They argue that the owner should have used a more sturdy rope. If convicted, the owner then has to prove that the rope's manufacturer was the true culprit. The court then investigates the rope manufacturer. Should he be held liable? To defend himself, he charges the hemp growers with selling a substandard product. Each stage in the case gets more technical and more expensive. The quest for perfect justice is suicidal. It increases the costs of litigation to such an extent that real victims cannot ever afford to attain restitution, for the case never ends. The courts become clogged with expensive cases that can never be resolved by anyone other than God. Only the lawyers profit. God's law does not exist in order to create employment for lawyers.

A state that attempts to impose standards of personal responsibil-

ity that imply omniscience and omnipotence will eventually make life impossible. Sometime before civilization grinds to a strangled halt, however, the bureaucrats will back down or else there will be a revolution which removes these messianic standards of personal and corporate responsibility from the law books. The price of perfect liability laws, like the price of perfect justice, or the price of a risk-free society, is death.³⁵ Such justice will be available only at the end of history. At that point, it will not only be available, it will be inescapable.

This passage therefore has implications for the concept so popular in modern economies, that of *limited liability*. The modern corporation is protected by limited liability laws. In case of its bankruptcy, creditors cannot collect anything from the owners of the corporation's shares of ownership. The corporation is liable only to the extent of its separate, corporate assets.

2. Legitimate Limitations

Certain kinds of economic transactions that limit the liability of either party, should one of them go bankrupt, are valid. For example, a bank that makes a loan to a church to construct a building cannot collect payment from individual members, should the church be unable to meet its financial obligations. It can repossess the building, of course, something that few banks relish doing. It is bad publicity, and a church building is a kind of white elephant in the real estate world: only churches buy them, and almost all of them are short of funds. This is why bankers prefer to avoid making loans to churches, other things being even remotely equal.³⁶

The same sorts of limited liability arrangements ought to be legally

35. It should be understood that the selection of "socially appropriate risk" is like any other selection process: it involves subjective valuation and "aggregation" through politics and market forces of the "socially appropriate" mixture of risk and productivity. See Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

36. A wise banker would recommend to the church's officers that church members refinance their homes or assume debt using other forms of collateral, and then donate the borrowed money to the church. This ties the loans to personal collateral that a banker can repossess without appearing to be heartless. It makes church members personally responsible for repayment. (Co-signed notes are also acceptable from the banker's point of view, but questionable biblically: e.g., prohibitions against "surety.") Members cannot escape their former financial promises by walking away from the church. It also keeps the church out of debt as an institution, which is godly testimony concerning the evil of debt (Rom. 13:8a).

valid for other kinds of associations, including profit-seeking corporations,³⁷ limited partnerships, or other private citizens who can get other economic actors to agree voluntarily to some sort of limited liability arrangement. For example, a “daredevil” who accepts a very dangerous job, such as putting out an oil well fire, is probably willing to release his employer from all legal damages in case he gets killed. He is paid more than a normal wage for his services in order to compensate him for the risk. A normally dangerous job, such as uranium mining or handling radioactive substances, may carry with it an economic obligation to release the employer from any responsibility for injury or death. The very existence of the danger keeps other workers from applying, thereby lowering the competition and keeping economic wages higher than would have been the case, had the job been safe. The laborer is compensated fairly. He gets more money for being willing to bear greater risk. Without the limited liability provision, the employer might not be willing to employ anyone. The dominion assignment might not be completed in this field until some new technological development reduces risk. Some tasks in life cannot be actuarially insured at a profit, but this does not mean that they should not be performed by people who are aware of the risks and who agree to “self-insure” themselves.³⁸

3. Other Cases

On the other hand, consider the case of citizens who once lived

37. Robert Hessen, *In Defense of the Corporation* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1979). I disagree with R. J. Rushdoony's condemnation of limited liability. See Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), Part III, ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/rjrpogap>). What persuaded me that he was incorrect here was a careful consideration of the legal implications of the imposition of unlimited personal liability of church members for the decisions of pastors and church officers. Could the church function if every member were made potentially liable to the limits of his capital for the illegal activity of the church's officers?

38. After the fatal explosion of the launch vehicle of the Challenger space shuttle in January of 1986, it was revealed that the seven military-employed “astronauts” had been required by the government to forego all but minimal life insurance benefits as a condition of participating in the launch. The one civilian, a school teacher, had been given anonymously a one-trip life insurance policy for a million dollars, insured by Lloyd's of London. Months later, the heirs of four of the astronauts received payments totaling \$7.7 million, or about \$1.9 million per family. (Gold: \$350/oz.) The federal government paid 40% of this, and the firm that constructed the rocket paid 60%. This was a political decision; the actual figures paid were kept secret by the government, and only became public 15 months later when legal action was taken by seven news organizations. *New York Times* (March 8, 1988).

near an atomic bomb test site. They were assured by government officials (who were presumed to be knowledgeable and therefore were legally responsible) that there were no excessive risks involved in remaining where they were, when there is evidence that these officials knew or should have known about the risks. The citizens who sustain long-term radiation-related injuries as a result of the explosion have every reason to sue and collect from the federal government, even if those officials cannot be located today, or are dead. It is the policy of deliberate misinformation (“disinformation”) concerning risks which is the issue. The civil government cannot escape these responsibilities. “I was just following orders,” is no excuse for some bureaucrat’s deliberately misinforming the civilian victims.

There are other cases that are more difficult to assess. A chemical firm buries toxic wastes. It uses means that are at the time of burial believed to be safe by private health experts or government health officials—people whose tasks are part of the quarantine function of the civil government (cf. Lev. 13, 14).³⁹ The firm’s managers have not deliberately misinformed anyone. Neither have public health officials. They acted with good intentions to the best of their ability, according to the best technical knowledge generally available at the time of the decision. They are like a man who ties up a dangerous beast with a rope generally believed to meet standards of strength, but which snaps unexpectedly, allowing the beast to escape and injure or kill someone.⁴⁰ Men are limited creatures; they cannot be held to be liable for every unforeseen act. This was also the conclusion of the rabbinical experts of Jewish law.⁴¹

F. “Ransom” Insurance

The Bible provides only one explicit example of a capital crime that can be punished either by execution or a fine: this one. Murder has to be punished by the death penalty (Num. 35:31). In this case, the ox is executed, so the general principle of “life for life” is maintained. Genesis 9:4–6 is not violated by Exodus 21:28–30. The owner, because he is not directly guilty of committing a capital crime, although fully

39. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

40. Chapter 52.

41. Wrote Shalom Albeck: “The foreseeability test as the basis of liability for damage led the rabbis to conclude that even where negligent the tortfeasor would only be liable for damage that he could foresee.” *Principles of Jewish Law*, col. 322.

responsible before the law for the actions of his beast, can escape execution. It is not stated that the judges make this decision: death or restitution. The victim's family probably makes this decision. Perhaps both judges and family do.⁴² Restitution is owed to the relatives, as heirs of his estate; legally, the payment is made to the dead victim. The economic incentive of the family is clear: money is more useful than the death of the ox's owner.

The restitution payment normally would be high. A man has to pay. There is no escape. If he cannot pay what is demanded, either through liability insurance, personal capital, or selling himself into slavery, then he dies. Restitution is mandatory.

1. Liability Insurance

The development of personal liability insurance is one way that Western society has dealt with the problem of the catastrophic judgment. The question then arises: Should *criminal negligence* be covered? The civil government must face the questions raised by economic analysis. If the criminal is criminally negligent, yet covered by liability insurance, can the insurance firm be forced by law to pay, even if its contract with the convicted person says that it must? Is a third-party payment to the victim in the name of the criminal an immoral contract and therefore illegal? Does it reduce the economic threat of personal bankruptcy to such an extent that criminal negligence is thereby subsidized? Is criminal negligence a legitimate event to insure against? Should such contracts be made illegal—not just unenforceable in a court of law, but illegal?

There is another problem. If the “deeper pocket” of the insurance company is available for the victim's family to reach into, will they demand “all the traffic will bear,” irrespective of justice? If the owner were not insured, would the victim's family ever demand such a high restitution payment? In the absence of insurance, the victim's heirs would probably have to limit their demands. Question: Should judgments be based on the merits of the case or the “depth of the pocket” of the insurance company?

2. Limiting the Insurer's Liability

To sell personal liability policies, insurance companies have to lim-

42. Finkelstein, *Ox That Gored*, p. 29.

it their liability. They do so by placing maximum monetary limits on all pay-outs. They also limit their liability by insuring people who have reputations for being reliable. High-risk buyers raise the premiums that low-risk buyers are forced to pay. There is an economic incentive for companies to seek out lower-risk buyers for any given type of policy. They can insure a special class of higher-risk people, but only by charging all members high premiums. Eventually, they run out of volume sales when they seek out more and more high-risk buyers. They eventually stop selling policies to the highest-risk people.

Personal liability insurance, to be profitable, must be sold to a *particular class* of insurable people. The very concept of “insurable class” refers to a group of people to whom the actuarial laws of probability apply. Groups to which these laws do not apply cannot be safely and profitably insured by private firms selling voluntary policies. Thus, insurance companies attempt to sell to people who are members of a large, insurable class.⁴³ Insurance firms limit their risk by enlarging the number of policy buyers within a particular large class. They do not want to be bankrupted by one or two large settlements; to avoid bankruptcy, they must sell large numbers of policies. The larger the number of policy holders, the closer the “fit” between the actuarial laws—“laws of large numbers”—and the actual number of cases in which the company must pay victims of negligence.

Liability insurance therefore will cover occasional cases of criminal negligence, for any given policy holder may occasionally be criminally negligent. For example, personal liability coverage on automobile drivers covers those rare cases in which a driver may be criminally negligent.⁴⁴ But the firms will not insure people who have received numerous traffic tickets for speeding, and especially for drunk driving. It is true that high-risk drivers can purchase automobile and liability insurance, but only because state governments require the auto insurance industry to set up high-risk pools for otherwise uninsurable drivers do the companies sell policies to these people. *Today’s civil governments are requiring private firms to insure people who are more likely to be regarded by the courts as criminally negligent.* These laws reduce political pressures from those classified as criminally negligent; they continue to be allowed to drive. The states also avoid having to

43. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 107–9. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

44. Some policies may exclude such coverage. It is in the self-interest of policy-buyers to read the fine print of their insurance contracts before they buy.

set up taxpayer-financed insurance programs for the high-risk drivers—programs that might bring complaints from low-risk drivers who also vote. The legislators require all drivers to carry personal liability policies—“ransoms for lives”—but they also require insurance companies to sell high-risk drivers this coverage.

If the legal system did not compel the purchase of auto insurance, or strongly encourage it by requiring visible evidence of a driver's ability to self-insure himself, the insurance firms would be trapped. They could not easily pass on to low-risk drivers the added costs of insuring high-risk people. Low-risk drivers are forced by the state to pay higher premiums for their policies than would have been the case had the high-risk drivers been refused coverage and thereby forced off the roads. Without this compulsion, they would not purchase the policies. The companies would then suffer losses because of the reduced sales. In fact, they do suffer some losses; some buyers drop coverage and drive illegally. The sellers cannot pass on all the additional costs to buyers.⁴⁵

Thus, the concern about criminals' being able to escape justice because of private insurance contracts is misplaced. The greater problem is the civil government's demand that people who are more likely to be convicted of negligence be covered by insurance, whether or not they are insurable by private firms on a voluntary basis. It is not that the state *allows* insurance companies to pay “ransoms for the lives” of negligent people; it is rather that the state *compels* private firms to sell such coverage to people or firms that are more likely to be convicted of negligence.

G. The State as Insurer

The state even enters as the “insurer of last resort” when no private firms will insure extremely high-risk people or industries. One example in the United States—which is common in Western industrial nations, though not in Japan⁴⁶—is the government-guaranteed cov-

45. Part of these costs are passed on to uninsured or under-insured drivers who would have liked the coverage but who cannot afford the higher premiums. Also, the company's shareholders bear some of these costs. They suffer capital losses because the companies cannot sell policies to all those who would be willing to buy policies if the costs were lower. It is erroneous to argue that higher costs can be passed on to customers indiscriminately or at zero cost to companies. See Murray N. Rothbard, *Power and Market: Government and the Market Economy*, 4th ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1970] 2006), pp. 110–16. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardPaM>)

46. H. Peter Metzger, *The Atomic Power Establishment* (New York: Simon &

erage for accidents connected with the generation of electricity through nuclear power. Power companies are government-licensed public utilities that possess regional monopolies. The “Price-Anderson” legislation of the 1957 set relatively low ceilings for financial liability by such firms—\$560 million per accident.⁴⁷ The federal government collects the premium money. In 2010, this limit was \$375 million to be covered by the plant’s insurance. The company has to insure the next \$112 million. The purchasing power of the dollar in 2010 was approximately eight times less than in 1957. Above this payout, the industry must insure \$10 billion. Anything above this will be covered by the Federal government. Because of this federal legislation, public utilities were able to expand the use of nuclear power generation. In this sense, today’s nuclear power industry has not been the product of a free market economy; it has been the product of special-interest legislation in the form of liability maximums and compulsory state insurance coverage.⁴⁸

Liability insurance is another example of a free market, scientific development that protects the victims without bankrupting those who are personally responsible. The victims receive more money than the private, uninsured citizen or firm would otherwise have been able to pay. The lifetime income loss suffered by the family of the victim is compensated by the insurance company. The negligent person still could be executed, should the plaintiffs desire it, but it is far more likely that they would prefer to accept money from the insurance firm.

Schuster, 1972), p. 218.

47. *Idem.*

48. Anti-nuclear power advocates tend to be anti-free market, and usually blame the free market for the nuclear power industry. Nuclear power proponents usually are pro-free market, so they seldom talk about the statist nature of the subsidy. But when the chips are down, the pro-nuclear power people accept federal subsidies to their program as being economically and ideologically valid. Wrote nuclear power advocate Petr Beckman: “Yes, the American taxpayer has paid \$1 billion to research nuclear safety, and I consider that a good investment. . . .” Beckman, *The Health Hazards of NOT Going Nuclear* (Boulder, Colorado: Golem Press, 1976), p. 154. He also argued that the Price-Anderson insurance program makes money for the federal government because power companies pay premiums to Washington, along with money sent to private insurance pools. “You call that a subsidy?” he asks rhetorically (p. 156). Of course it is a subsidy. The premium rates are far below market rates, even assuming private firms would insure against a nuclear power plant disaster, which is doubtful. The maximum liability is fixed by law far below what would be demanded in a court if some major nuclear accident took place in a populated area. This is why the Price-Anderson legislation was enacted in the first place: to subsidize the power industry by reducing its legal liability and its insurance rates.

The “ransom for a life” is higher; thus, the guilty person is more likely to survive. This extends the dominion covenant; the victim’s family carries on, but the guilty man suffers no loss of capital, except possibly his ability to buy insurance subsequently.

Does the state have a biblically sanctioned right to compel people to buy liability insurance or else proof of sufficient capital to make restitution? In the case of drivers’ liability insurance, where death and serious injury to innocent parties are common, and the drivers are using the state’s highway system, the answer is yes. The state can establish rules and regulations for drivers who wish to qualify to use its highways. One of these regulations is liability insurance. Another requirement might be an annual auto safety inspection.⁴⁹ The automobile is like a large beast; if it becomes dangerous through neglect by its owner, innocent people can be killed. Insurance companies can be used as screening agents. They may be able write cheaper policies for those who drive inspected automobiles.

Other forms of liability insurance should not be mandatory, unless the situation is comparable to the “dangerous beast in a state-owned place” analogy, but civil government should recognize the legitimacy of the victim’s heirs to call for the execution of the criminally negligent party. This would encourage people to buy sufficiently large personal liability insurance policies so that the victim’s heirs would have a strong financial incentive to allow the guilty man to live.

H. The Goring of a Slave or a Child

“If the ox shall push [gore] a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned” (Ex. 21:32). Normally, the death penalty could be imposed on the owner of the ox. In this case, however, the penalty was fixed by law: 30 shekels of silver.

The wording here is peculiar. To “push” means, in this instance, to kill. In verse 29, “push” did not mean to kill. “But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in. . . .” Had “to push” meant “to kill,” the ox would have been executed upon conviction. An ox that killed

49. This assumes that there is statistically valid evidence that state-mandated auto inspections do in fact reduce accidents and injuries. This evidence is frequently unclear. What *is* clear is that such legislation provides an initial increase in the net worth of those who are granted the licenses to perform these inspections, and that a continuation of such laws brings a stream of rents to those who possess these licenses.

someone was stoned to death (v. 28). Thus, “push” in verse 29 had to mean something other than killing. But with respect to servants, the word “push” or “gore” is used in the sense of “gore to death.” This is why the ox is executed: a human being has died.

Why the comparatively small penalty?⁵⁰ Why is the death of a servant dealt with less severely? Because the servant’s owner has not suffered a loss comparable to the loss suffered by the heirs of a free man or woman. He has lost part of an investment in human capital—one which he would have had to part with after a set term of years. He has not suffered the loss of a relative. The primary issue is covenantal. The owner has not suffered a covenantal loss; he has suffered only an economic loss. He is not entitled to place penalties on the owner of the goring ox larger than the economic penalty specified by law.

1. Slave

If a male bondservant had brought a wife and children into the household of the owner, they would now go free, which serves them as a form of compensation. The master would have recouped his investment from the owner of the ox, thereby freeing the slave’s heirs from further service.

What if the deceased bondservant had married after becoming a bondservant? In this instance, the heirs probably would have had the option of either remaining as servants in the owner’s household or going free. Whether they would go free or not would depend on the size of the penalty payment to the bondservant’s owner, compared to what he had paid for the bondservant. If the death occurred shortly before the bondservant was to have gone free, then the penalty payment would have constituted an overpayment, and the extra money probably would have functioned as a release price for the wife and children of the bondservant. But if the penalty payment was approximately what the owner had spent to pay off the bondservant’s debt—the original cause of his going into slavery—then the bondservant’s family would have remained with the owner, as specified in Exodus 21:4.

An interesting connection can be seen between the death of Christ on the cross and the death of the gored servant. Jordan commented on this connection:

As we have seen, our Lord Jesus Christ was born into the world

50. Thirty pieces of silver were a lot of money in terms of what they could buy, but not compared to what the victim’s heirs could normally impose.

as a homeborn slave-son, for His incarnation was His ear's circumcision. On the cross, he was made sin for us, and thus came under condemnation of death. He became an abject slave, that we might be elevated into the status of adopted slave-sons. He was killed by the wild beasts, the lions of paganism, and the apostate unclean goring bulls of Israel: "Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong ones from Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion. . . . Save Me from the lion's mouth; and from the horns of the wild oxen Thou dost answer Me" (Ps. 22:12, 13, 21). Thus, the price given for Christ's death was the price of the gored slave, thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15). At His resurrection, however, our Lord overcame the bulls and trampled on the silver for which He was sold: "Rebuke the beasts of the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples, trampling under foot the pieces of silver; He has scattered the people who delight in war" (Ps. 68:30). Thus, Judas found no joy in his silver, and it was used to buy a burying field for dead strangers, pagans destroyed by the wrath of God (Matt. 27:2-10).⁵¹

2. *The Goring of a Child*

"Whether he have gored a son, or have gored a daughter, according to this judgment shall it be done unto him" (Ex. 21:31). This is an important biblical principle: the imposition of a fine rather than the execution of the ox's owner or his child (a pagan practice of the ancient Near East). The Bible places this example under the general rule that allows the substitution of a fine for the death of the owner. This means that the evil practice of the ancient Near East, killing a man's child if he kills another man's child, is prohibited.⁵² The Hammurabi Code specified: "If a builder constructed a house for a seignior, but did not make his work strong, with the result that the house which he built collapsed and so has caused the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death. If it has caused the death of a son of the owner of the house, they shall put the son of that builder to death."⁵³ This sharp difference from Babylonian law would appear to be an application of the principle of Deuteronomy 24:16: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to

51. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, pp. 127-28.

52. Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 78.

53. Code Hammurabi, paragraphs 229-30. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 176.

death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.”

Conclusion

The Bible establishes the principle of cosmic personalism as the foundation of the universe.⁵⁴ There is no way that men can escape their responsibilities before God. Because biblical law recognizes this principle, it establishes the judicial principle of restitution to victims by the negligent. The general rule is: an eye for an eye, a life for a life.

The Bible affirms the principle of limited liability before men. The state is not God. It cannot know every aspect of historical causation. Neither can men. The state therefore cannot lawfully impose unlimited liability on those convicted of negligence, irrespective of their knowledge, decisions, and contractual arrangements.

In this unique instance, the case of a dangerous ox that kills a person, the guilty owner can legitimately escape death, though his beast cannot, because the victim’s heirs are allowed to impose an economic restitution payment on the negligent individual. This law of criminal negligence is much broader than simply oxen and owners; it applies to all cases of death to innocent parties that are the result of negligence on the part of owners of notorious beasts or notorious machinery—capital that is known to be risky to innocent bystanders. Automobiles, trucks, certain kinds of occupations, nuclear power plants, coal mines, and similar examples of dangerous tools are covered by this general principle of personal liability.

This law should not be understood as applying to workers who voluntarily work in dangerous callings and who have been warned in advance of the risks by their employers, nor should it be used as a justification for the creation of a messianic state that attempts to discover criminal negligence in every case of third-party injury, despite the lack of knowledge of risks by the owners or experts in the field.

Personal liability insurance is a development of the West that allows criminally negligent people a greater opportunity to escape the death penalty by means of high payments to the heirs of their victims. Purchasing such insurance is not to become mandatory, except in cases related to the use of state-financed capital (e.g., highways). Nevertheless, the risk is so high—execution—and the cost of premiums so low in comparison to the risk, that personal liability coverage is available to most people. Only the very poor, who would not normally own

54. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 1.

“oxen” (expensive capital equipment), or people convicted repeatedly of criminal negligence or actions that would lead to convictions for criminal negligence (e.g., drunk driving), or people who manage or own businesses that create high risks for innocent bystanders, would normally be excluded from the purchase of such insurance coverage. They would have to learn to handle their “oxen” with care.

41

THE UNCOVERED PIT

And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein; the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his (Ex. 21:33–34).

The theocentric principle here is God's ownership of the world. He has delegated temporary ownership of the portions of world to individuals, families, and institutions. An owner of one piece of land is not to extend his dominion over his portion of the allocated capital at the expense of another person's property. To do so is an attempt to profit at someone else's expense.

Here is another variation of the restitution principle. A man digs a pit for some reason, and fails to cover it. This is negligent behavior. He knows that unsuspecting people or animals could fall into the pit and be harmed. His failure to go to the expense of covering the pit is an example of what economists call "externalities." He imposes the risk of an injured beast on the owner of the beast. *By saving time and money in not covering the pit, he thereby transfers the economic burden of risk to someone else.* This is a form of theft. Someone who cannot benefit from the use of the pit is expected to pay a portion of its costs of operation, namely, the risk of injury to any animal that might fall into it. This is the meaning of economic "externalities": those who cannot benefit from an economic decision are forced to pay for part of the costs of operation.

Biblical civil law settles the question of property rights and the responsibilities of ownership. Because the Bible affirms the rights of private ownership—meaning *legal immunities* from interference by either the state or other agencies in the use of one's property—it therefore imposes *responsibilities* on owners. The law regulating uncovered pits is not an infringement on private property rights. On the

contrary, it is an *affirmation* of such rights. By linking personal economic responsibility to personal, private ownership, biblical civil law identifies the legal owner of the pit, namely, the person who is required to pay damages should another person's animal be killed by a fall into the unsafe pit. He receives some sort of advantage from the pit, and therefore he must bear the expense of making it safe for other people's animals.

A. "Pit" in Rabbinical Literature

"Pit" is a classification used for centuries by the rabbis to assess responsibility and damages. The Mishnah specified that any pit ten handbreadths deep qualifies as deep enough to cause death, and therefore is actionable in cases of death. If less than this depth, the pit is actionable in case of injury to a beast, but not if the beast died.¹ Wrote Jewish legal scholar Shalom Albeck:

This is the name given to another leading category of tort and covers cases where an obstacle is created by a person's negligence and left as a hazard by means of which another is injured. The prime example is that of a person who digs a pit, leaves it uncovered, and another person or an animal falls into it. Other major examples would be leaving stones or water unfenced and thus potentially hazardous. The common factor is the commission or omission of something which brings about a dangerous situation and the foreseeability of damage resulting. A person who fails to take adequate precautions to render harmless a hazard under his control is considered negligent, because he is presumed able to foresee that damage may result, and he is therefore liable for any such subsequent damage.²

Samson Raphael Hirsch, the brilliant mid-nineteenth-century Jewish Torah commentator, analyzed the economics of negligence under the general heading of property, and property under the more general classification of guardianship. "Man, in taking possession of the unreasoning world, becomes guardian of unreasoning property and is responsible for the forces inherent in it, just as he is responsible for the forces of his own body; for property is nothing but the artificially ex-

1. *Baba Kamma* 5:5, *The Mishnah*, ed. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. 338.

2. "Avot Nezikin: (2) Pit," *The Principles of Jewish Law*, edited by Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975?), col. 326. This compilation of articles taken from the *Encyclopedia Judaica* was published as Publication No. 6 of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

tended body, and body and property together are the realm and sphere of action of the soul—*i.e.*, of the human personality, which rules them and becomes effective through them and in them. Thus is the person responsible for all the material things under his dominion and in his use; and even without the verdict of a court of law, even if no claim is put forward by another person, he must pay compensation for any harm done to another's property or body for which he is responsible."³ The guardian is always responsible before God for the administration of everything under his legal authority.

Hirsch went so far as to say that our willingness to indemnify a victim is not enough, morally speaking; we must take care not to allow damage in the first place. "Once you have done harm the only thing you are able to do is to pay compensation; you can never undo the harm and wipe out all its consequences."⁴ A righteous person should become a blessing for those around him. "You, with all your belongings, should become a blessing; be on your guard that you and your belongings do not become a curse! Watch over all your belongings so that they do no harm to your neighbour!" And also what you throw away or pour away—see to it that it do no harm; you ought to bring good, so do not bring evil!"⁵ Thus, our economic responsibility is an *active* responsibility. We must actively seek to avoid harming others. It is within this moral framework that the Bible discusses the uncovered pit.

B. Animals and Children

This case law deals specifically with animals. It does not mention people. Why not? Because the pit is almost certainly located on the land of the person who digs it. An animal that wanders onto the man's property has no understanding of private property rights. Presumably, no fence has restrained it from coming onto the property. If a fence is present, then the animal would have to knock it down to get onto the property. The damage to the fencing would then be the responsibility of the owner of the animal. He should have restrained his animal. *The fence in such an instance serves as the legal equivalent of a cover.* But unrestrained access to the area of the uncovered pit places the responsibility on the land-owner. An animal is not expected to honor the

3. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb: A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observances*, trans. I. Grunfeld (New York: Soncino, [1837] 1962), pp. 243–44, paragraph 360.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 247, paragraph 367.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 248, paragraph 367.

law against trespassing.

What holds true for an animal is also true for a young child. If the child is not restrained by a fence or a cover over the pit, then the owner is liable. Like an ox with a reputation for violence, so is the uncovered pit. The owner is responsible. The parents of a child who is killed by a fall into an uncovered pit are entitled to the same restitution as the heirs of a victim of an ox that was known to be dangerous.

A responsible adult who comes onto another person's property and falls into a pit has to have a legitimate reason for being there. If the uncovered pit is located on a path over which a visitor might normally pass, and the pit is not easily visible, then the owner becomes legally responsible. The visitor, in this instance, is like a dumb animal: he is not aware of special prohibitions against walking in the vicinity of the uncovered pit. But if the visitor has climbed over a fence and is wandering over the property in the dead of night, where he has no reason to be, then the owner is innocent. If the intruder ignores "No Trespassing" signs, he is also unprotected by the "covered pit" law. He is not to be treated in a literate culture as if he were a dumb animal. Albeck commented: "If the *bor* [pit] (i.e., the hazard) is adequately guarded or left in a place where persons or animals do not normally pass, such as one's private property, no negligence or presumed foreseeability can be ascribed and no liability would arise."⁶

The pit-digger is required to reimburse the owner of the dead beast. The latter can then buy a replacement for the dead animal. The pit-digger becomes the owner of the dead animal. In Israel, he could have sold it or eaten it, because it died of a known cause; it did not die "of itself," which would have made it forbidden meat for Israelites (Deut. 14:21). The pit-digger does not suffer a total loss.

In modern times, people build swimming pools on their property. These are certainly uncovered most of the swimming season. They are holes in the ground. Are these the modern equivalent of a pit? No. A pit is a hole in the ground that is not expected. It is not readily visible. A swimming pool has a cement deck around it. It may have a diving board. It is plainly visible in the back yard. It is anything but inconspicuous. Besides, if an animal falls into it, it will swim out. If a small child falls into it, liability could be imposed on the owner only under the "railed roof" statute (Deut. 22:8),⁷ not under the "uncovered pit"

6. Albeck, "Pit," *Principles of Jewish Law*, col. 326.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 54.

statute. The pool is a place of entertainment and recreation, just as flat-roof housetops were in the ancient world. It is not a pit which men stumble into unexpectedly. The so-called “attractive nuisance” problem—a dangerous object to which small children are attracted—falls under the railing statute.

C. Public “Pits”

There are areas of life that are almost always the responsibility of the civil government. Highways are one example. If people are to use the highways, they need protection, both as drivers and pedestrians. The civil government erects stop signs and stop lights; it places other road signs along the highways, so that drivers can drive more safely and make better high-speed decisions. Similarly, residential areas and school zones are restricted to slower traffic. This protects pedestrians and home owners who would otherwise face the continual threat of high-speed vehicles that are difficult to control in tight quarters.

1. *Speed Laws*

The posting of a speed limit is essentially the same as a private citizen who posts a “no trespassing” sign, or a “beware of dog” sign on his property. The sign serves as a substitute for the “cover for the pit”; the sign, like the cover, is a device for *protecting the innocent*. Where children in cities are forced to cross busy streets, local governments hire crossing guards to control traffic and help younger children across the street. Sometimes, older students in a grammar school serve as unpaid crossing guards in a safety patrol. In some communities, fenced, overhead ramps are built across busy highways. The fence serves as a means of protection for (1) pedestrians who might fall off the overpass and (2) motorists who face risks from vandals who would drop heavy rocks onto the passing cars beneath. But fences are expensive, and they cannot be built in every residential area. Thus, the civil government establishes speed limits, and it posts signs that warn drivers of these limits.

A philosophy of nearly risk-free existence would impose speed limits of no more than a few miles per hour on all drivers, except perhaps on specially designed highways. But voters, who are both pedestrians and drivers, would not long tolerate such utopian restrictions. In most places in the United States, voters drive far more hours during the day than they walk. So, they will not allow defenders of the rhetoric

of risk-free living to have their way. They make judgments as individuals that legislators must respect in the aggregate: *speed limits that meet the needs of voters*, both as drivers and pedestrians, or the parents of pedestrians. Once the speed limit is posted, people make personal adjustments, both as drivers (by slowing down to approach the legal limit, but letting pedestrians look out more for themselves) and as pedestrians (by reducing their watchfulness about cars, so long as cars are moving at or near the posted limit). Voters compromise: slower speeds close to schools, but faster speeds on highways.

Drivers who violate these limits are increasing the statistical risks of walking in a neighborhood. Residents believe that they have been granted a degree of safety by the authorities—not perfect safety, because automobiles are still permitted in the area, but *calculable safety*. They use the streets and sidewalks in terms of this greater degree of safety. But pedestrians and other (slower) drivers are threatened by those who refuse to honor the posted speed limit. They have made decisions in terms of a given environment (“25 m.p.h.”), and a law-breaker unilaterally alters this environment. He has, in effect, torn down the protective fencing. He has “uncovered the pit.”

2. *Fines and Restitution*

What is the proper remedy? Most communities impose fines for excessive speeding, with the fines proportional to the violations: a higher fine for a higher speed. Can a fine be justified biblically? Yes. *The fine is imposed because a specific victim cannot be identified*. No one was injured by the speeding vehicle. Therefore, the civil government collects a *restitution payment* in the name of all the victims who had their lives and property *threatened* by the speeder’s act.

A statistically measurable risk of injury was transferred by the speeder to those in the area of his speeding vehicle. This is another case of “externalities”: people are being forced by the speeder to bear risks involuntarily. The fines should be used to establish *a trust fund for future victims of “hit and run” auto accidents*, where the guilty party cannot be located and/or convicted. The perpetrator of this “victimless crime” becomes a source of restitution payments for the subsequent victims of this same criminal act by an unconvicted agent. *Fines are therefore an acknowledgement by the authorities of the limits placed on their knowledge*. If law enforcement authorities were omniscient, all restitution payments in a biblical society would go from the

known criminal to the known victim.

Fines should be imposed by local authorities for a specific purpose: to make restitution payments to victims who reside in the same general neighborhood. The civil government acts as a *trustee* for future victims in cases where the authorities cannot locate or convict the violator. *Fines are not to be regarded as a normal source of revenue for the civil government.* The civil government must enforce biblical law without prejudice. The bureaucrats' fond hope of collecting municipal operating revenues from fines creates prejudice. In a biblical commonwealth, taxes are supposed to finance civil government—*predictable* taxes that are collected from every responsible adult in a community. Citizens must know what law enforcement is really costing them. Setting up "speed traps" along the highway so that non-residents can be forced to finance the local government is a gross perversion of the function of the fine. This subsidizes local bureaucrats rather than assisting future victims.

3. Drunk Drivers

An individual who deliberately distorts his own perceptions is implicitly attacking God and his God-created environment.⁸ He is saying by his actions that God has not been fair to him in placing him in such an environment. He then makes decisions under the influence of alcohol or drugs. These decisions can physically damage others because of his self-induced distorted perceptions. Drunk drivers are therefore to be prosecuted as criminally negligent, should their acts cause damage. They have "torn off the pit cover" with impunity. Their injury-inflicting acts are not to be considered as accidents, meaning low-probability events that cannot reasonably be predicted in advance in the life of any specific individual. Their injury-inflicting actions are rather the product of an act of moral rebellion: the implicit denial of their own personal responsibility for their actions.

Drunk drivers impose increased statistical risks on their potential victims. The victim or the heirs must be given the legal option of imposing a heavy restitution payment, under the guidance of the judges. Where there is no victim, the drunk driver must pay the fine.

8. Obviously an exception is the person who has accepted an anesthetic in order to reduce his pain. Thrashing around in agony during a medical operation clearly reduces the likelihood of a successful operation. But such people are always placed under medical observation and supervision. They are not legally responsible agents during their period of distorted perceptions.

Repeated convictions for drunk driving indicate moral rebellion. Here is a person who has the equivalent of a notorious ox: the lawless “beast” is inside him. Worse: he is responsible in a way that a beast is not. He has moral insights concerning the consequences of his acts that a beast does not possess. The authorities can legitimately “tie him up” by revoking his right to operate a vehicle until he has demonstrated his continued sobriety for a fixed period of time. Like a notorious ox that must be fenced until it becomes self-disciplined, so is the drunk driver, or the repeat speeder, or the driver who drives under the influence of drugs. There may not be identifiable victims, but there are certainly *statistical victims* whose interests need protection.

The same principles of economic analysis that apply to speeding and drunk driving can be applied to other areas of life in which the state is the primary protector of life and limb. Fines to the civil government should be imposed on convicted violators only in cases where the civil government is acting as a trustee for future unknown victims.

D. Political Hypocrisy

The problem today is that society refuses to accept the morally and legally binding nature of Old Testament legal principles of criminal negligence. First, legislators do not consistently make “pit owners” legally liable for damages, as the Bible requires. The most flagrant example is the failure of state and local governments to impose stiff fines on all drunk drivers, and capital punishment on drunk drivers whose unsafe driving leads to someone else’s death. Furthermore, politicians do not impose fines on themselves or city employees for failing to repair public streets with potholes which cause damages to people’s cars or which cause accidents.

Second, politicians pass safety laws (or allow the bureaucracy to define and then enforce earlier laws) whose costs to the general public are not immediately perceptible. Politicians may require automobile companies to install seat belts that buyers do not want to pay for, and which occupants subsequently refuse to use, but politicians are not about to pass a law that would impose fines on families for refusing to install smoke detectors in their own homes. The first piece of legislation would not gain the reprisal of voters; the second probably would. In short, they pass pieces of legislation with minimal political and statistical impact (for good or evil) in terms of the utopian principle of “better to spend millions of dollars than to suffer one dead victim,” but

fail to honor it in statistically relevant cases because of the equally relevant (to them) political backlash they would receive from voters. The proclamation of the “better millions of dollars than. . .” principle has been, is, and will continue to be the product of economic ignorance and political hypocrisy.

This is not to say that it is always wrong to require owners to pay more in order to save lives, but the Bible provides us with the proper guidelines, not some hypothetically universal utopian principle that would necessitate the creation of a messianic state. The general principle is simple: *those who own a known dangerous object are legally responsible for making it safer for those who are either immature or otherwise unwarned about the very real danger.*

Conclusion

Ownership is a social function.⁹ There is a link between the costs and benefits of lawful ownership. He who *benefits* from the use of private property must also bear the *costs* of ownership. He cannot legitimately pass on the costs to other people who have not voluntarily agreed to accept these costs. He is also responsible for the risks of physical damage that he imposes on them without their prior knowledge and consent.

The pit-digger must cover the pit or be responsible for the consequences. The owner of an unpenned notorious ox is equally responsible. Beasts are not expected to understand property rights; the owner must fence his property, or cover his pit, or pay restitution to the dead beast’s owner. He cannot legitimately pass on the risks associated with uncovered pits to his neighbors.

The civil government has an analogous responsibility to protect those who use the property which belongs to, or is administered by, the state. Thus, speed limits, crossing guards, and school safety patrols are created. Patrol cars monitor traffic in neighborhoods. Fines are collected from speeders and other traffic violators. Why fines? Because there are limits on the knowledge of law enforcement authorities; thus, fines are used as a way to collect restitution payments from known violators, and to make payments to victims of unknown violators.

Responsibility is personal, and it involves every area of authority

9. Gary North, “Ownership: Free but Not Cheap,” *The Freeman* (July 1972). (<http://bit.ly/OwnFree>) Reprinted in Gary North, *Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 28. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

exercised by any individual. The civil government has the obligation of setting forth principles of judicial interpretation that will prevail in any civil court. The court will look at the circumstances surrounding the injured party, and determine who was responsible. If the property owner was attempting to pass on involuntarily to innocent third parties the risks of ownership, the court will find the owner guilty. All property owners know this in advance, and they can take steps to reduce their legal risks by reducing involuntary risks borne by innocent third parties.

The Bible does not warrant the establishment of a huge bureaucracy to define every area of possible risk, promulgate minute definitions of what constitutes unlawful uses of property, and describe in detail every penalty associated with a violation. The Bible certainly does not indicate that the civil government is warranted to step in and proclaim a potentially injurious action illegal, except in cases where the violator could not conceivably make restitution to all the potential victims (e.g., fire codes) or in cases of repeated violations (the “notorious ox” principle). The Bible simply reminds property owners of the consequences of creating hazards to life and limb for third parties who are not consulted in advance concerning their willingness to bear the risks. The property owner is assumed to be competent to make judgments for himself concerning the consequences of his actions, and then take the steps necessary to reduce these risks.

KNOWLEDGE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE PRESUMPTION OF GUILT

And if one man's ox hurt another's, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the money of it; and the dead ox also they shall divide. Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push [gore] in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own (Ex. 21:35–36).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's omniscience. Man does not possess this attribute. Omniscience is a noncommunicable attribute of God. Delegated ownership imposes responsibility in terms of knowledge. The greater is a person's knowledge, the greater is his responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).¹

The crucial fact in these verses is that two different sorts of offending oxen are dealt with: a previously peaceful ox and a notorious ox. Because of these differences, the penalties differ. The question is: Why?

A. A Domesticated Beast

An ox is a domesticated work animal. It is under the dominion of its owner. The owner therefore incurs certain responsibilities for the behavior of his animal. The animal is to refrain from attacking man or other animals of its own species. The owner must take steps to train the animal to respect the life and limbs of others, or else he is to restrain its ability to inflict such injuries.

The concept of a domesticated animal points to the ability of men to train and discipline lower species. Animals are responsible to man, and by implication, to God. The owner of a dangerous beast must see

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

to it that others in the vicinity do not become involuntary risk-bearers as a result of the animal's lack of self-discipline. To create judicial incentives for owners of oxen to train or restrain their beasts, the Bible sets forth principles of economic responsibility.

Say that a man's previously passive ox gores another ox to death. Because the ox has gored another animal, but not a human, it is not to be killed by the original owner. It is to be sold to a third party. The third party who subsequently buys it may kill it if he wishes; if he does, he reduces his risks of ownership. The ox has become a notorious ox. There are risks associated with the ownership of such a beast. There are costs of fencing it or restraining it in some fashion. The new owner may decide not to keep it alive.

There is also no biblical law that restricts the original owner from making an offer to buy back (redeem) the ox from the third party, but the law requires that the beast be sold initially.

The case of the notorious ox is different. The owner is fully responsible, exactly as the owner of the uncovered pit is responsible. This case law presumes that for the owner to be liable, the notorious beast not be penned in or otherwise restrained, just as in the case of the notorious ox that gores a human (Ex. 21:29). The owner has to pay the full value of the dead beast to the beast's owner. Again, he is allowed to keep the dead animal. He is also allowed to keep the offending animal.

Why isn't the offending animal stoned to death for killing another beast, as would be required in the case of an unpenned notorious ox that gores a man or woman to death? The reason should be clear to anyone who understands the implications of the dominion covenant. An ox is *responsible upward*, toward man. It suffers the death penalty for killing a man. The *innate fear of man*, which is in all animals (Gen. 9:2), serves as a *restraining factor*, a kind of "fence" that the animal knows it must not break through. By killing a man, the ox has demonstrated that it actively transgressed this God-imposed restraint. It is therefore rebellious and deserving of death. It is acting like the serpent of Genesis 3, and therefore it suffers a judicial penalty. But it is not held responsible "to the death" for killing another animal. It is not "responsible outward," toward other beasts. Its owner is responsible for its behavior "outward," not the ox.

B. Who Pays?

Who pays for damages? The owner of the surviving ox pays. Under normal circumstances, the individual who is legally and financially responsible is the owner of the offending ox that initiated the attack. But there is a problem here. Whose beast took the initiative? Can this be determined in a court of law? Were there witnesses? Can we understand the motivation of oxen? These questions are almost self-explanatory. The assessment of which animal “started it” is most problematic. The ox cannot be placed under oath and cross-examined.

The Bible’s solution is to divide the proceeds from the sale of the surviving animal, and to divide the carcass of the dead one. Each owner has an incentive to maximize the proceeds from the sale of the survivor, because both of them gain an equal share of the sale price. The owner of the dead beast cannot come before the judges and claim that his beast was worth ten times as much as it really was worth. The judges do not have to call in specialists in assessing retroactively the value of dead cattle. They can leave it to both owners to settle their differences. Each man has an incentive to get the transaction over with. Neither can trick the other (or the judges) as to the former value of the dead beast. The market then reveals the live beast’s value.

The dead beast is also worth something. The Old Testament rules prohibiting the sale of unclean dead beasts (Deut. 14:21; Lev. 17:15) do not apply in the New Covenant era. Even under the Old Covenant, the beast could be sold to a resident alien gentile (Deut. 14:21b). Today, the beast can lawfully be sold to Jew or gentile if the carcass meets public health standards. Each owner receives an equal share of the returns.

What if a run-of-the-mill bull kills a champion? The owner of the champion suffers the greater loss. But because it cannot easily be determined which bull initiated the violence, the court is not required by God to examine the detailed question of what is owed to the owner of the dead beast. This law implicitly recognizes the limitations on courts in assessing responsibility in the case of the behavior of animals. Owners of prize animals are forewarned to take care of their property.

C. Jewish Law: Whose Ox Is Gored?

The Mishnah makes some exemptions to this law. “If an ox of an Israelite gored an ox that belonged to the Temple, or an ox that belonged to the Temple gored the ox of an Israelite, the owner is not

culpable, for it is written, *The ox of his neighbour* [Ex. 21:35]—not an ox that belongs to the Temple.”² This is most peculiar. One would think that if any ox was to be protected by the threat of damages imposed on the owner of the killer ox, it would be an ox belonging to the temple. Why the word “neighbor” excluded the temple is not explained.

The Mishnah continued: “If an ox of an Israelite gored the ox of a gentile, the owner is not culpable. But if the ox of a gentile gored the ox of an Israelite, whether it was accounted harmless or an attested danger, the owner must pay full damages.”³ Almost a millennium later, Maimonides agreed: he exempted the Israelite owner from being required to pay damages, whether or not he was forewarned about his beast, if his ox gores an ox belonging to a heathen. He added reasons for the Mishnah’s discriminatory law. The “heathen do not hold one responsible for damage caused by one’s animals, and their own law is applied to them.” (This is truly preposterous, and he offers no evidence.) On the other hand, the heathen is fully liable, whether or not he was forewarned, if his ox gores the ox of an Israelite. Why? Because “should they not be held liable for damage caused by their animals, they would not take care of them and thus would inflict loss on other people’s property.”⁴ This is a classic example of different laws for different residents, in open violation of Exodus 12:49.⁵

Maimonides argued that if the ox was unowned at the time of the goring, and is subsequently appropriated by someone else, before the plaintiff can seize it, the new owner is not liable for previous damages.⁶ This would leave the victim without recourse, and it would leave the animal immune from judgment, for it would not serve as payment—ox for ox—for the damages it caused. (Rabbi Judah had early argued that “A wild ox, or an ox belonging to the temple, or an ox belonging to a proselyte who died are exempt from death, since they have no owner.”)⁷

2. *Baba Kamma* 4:3, *The Mishnah*, ed. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. 337.

3. *Idem*.

4. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), “Laws Concerning Damage by Chattels,” I:VIII:5, p. 29.

5. Chapter 14.

6. Maimonides, *Torts*, I:VIII:4, p. 29.

7. *Baba Kamma* 4:7, *Mishnah*, p. 337. The Talmud also specifies that the ox had to have gored on three previous occasions for the owner to become personally liable: Shalom Albeck, “TORTS. The Principal Categories of Torts,” in *The Principles of Jew-*

Even more incredibly, Maimonides argued that if the existing owner renounces ownership after the goring takes place, but before the trial, “he is exempt, for there is no liability unless the ox has an owner both at the time it causes the damage and at the time the case is tried in court.”⁸ This would destroy personal legal liability in the most serious cases. The owner would be allowed to separate himself retroactively from the social responsibilities of ownership, as if ownership of a physical object were all that is involved in ownership, and not also the legal immunities and legal responsibilities that are inescapably bound up with possession of the object. Maimonides did not say that the victim may not demand that the beast be destroyed or sold in order to compensate him. He did say that if the owner sells the animal, the victim can collect compensation from the animal, and the buyer must reclaim damages from the defendant.⁹

Maimonides also added that the testimony of certain witnesses is invalid: slaves, shepherds, children, and women. “One must not think that because only slaves, shepherds, or similar persons are generally found in horse stables, cattle stalls, or sheep pens, these should be heard if they testify that one animal has caused damage to another, or that children or women should be relied on if they testify that one person has wounded another or if they testify about other types of damage.”¹⁰

The Christian commentator finds little that he can appeal to in confidence in Jewish laws regarding the goring ox. It is no better in the case of the notorious ox. How many occurrences establish a pattern of habitual action? How many gorings need to take place before the beast is identified as a notorious beast? It was the opinion of Rabbi Meir that the court should identify as an “attested danger” any ox against which three separate proven accusations of damage have been brought in the past.¹¹ Maimonides did not indicate how many accusations were required, unlike the Mishnah and Talmud, but he indicated that it must be more than one. “An animal is called *mu'ad*, ‘forewarned,’ with respect to actions which it does normally and habitually, and *tam*, ‘innocuous,’ with respect to actions which it does only exceptionally and which are not normally done by members of its species—as, for ex-

ish Law, edited by Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975?), col. 322.

8. Maimonides, *Torts*, I:VIII:4, p. 29.

9. *Ibid.*, I:VIII:6, p. 29.

10. *Ibid.*, I:VIII:13, p. 31.

11. *Baba Kamma* 1:4, *Mishnah*, p. 333.

ample, if an ox gores or bites. If an animal, having acted abnormally once, makes it a habit to repeat the abnormal action on numerous occasions, it becomes 'forewarned' with respect to the particular action which it has made a habit. For Scripture says, *Or if it be known that the ox was wont to gore* (Exod. 21:36).¹²

We need better guidelines than this.

D. The Notorious Ox

Responsibility is more easily assessed by a court in the case of an ox that was known in the past to be a violent animal. The owner had been given a previous warning concerning the behavior of the beast under his jurisdiction. Perhaps the court had convicted this beast of a prior violation; perhaps witnesses had independently complained to the civil authorities, who then had issued the owner a formal warning. There is no indication in the text that three warnings are required; one warning should be sufficient to persuade the owner to take additional steps to restrain his beast. From the time of the warning, it becomes the owner's responsibility to keep the beast penned in or in some way restrained from inflicting damage on others.

This case law applied to an owner who chose to keep possession of the beast. Thus, he simultaneously chose to bear the additional risks associated with the behavior of that particular beast. The owner also chose not to take the time and trouble necessary to restrain the beast. This is his lawful decision. No one is sent by the civil government to inspect the quality of the fence or the strength of the rope around its neck. But its owner is prohibited by biblical law from passing on these now-known risks of ownership to innocent third parties. *Self-government under law*—written laws with specified, predictable sanctions—is the biblical standard, not a legal order based on a top-down bureaucratic enforcement system.

The judicial problem with this rule regarding the notorious ox is its vagueness: How much information is enough? The Bible says that if the ox was known to gore in the past, it becomes for legal purposes a notorious beast. Known by whom? By the owner, certainly. But how can this knowledge be proven in court to have been in the possession of the owner? Only through previous publicly provable complaints registered by neighbors, either to the owner or the public authorities, or by a single prior conviction of the beast. If the owner has publicly

12. Maimonides, *Torts*, I:I:4, pp. 4–5.

provable evidence that the ox gored someone in the past, he becomes legally liable.

Obviously, if the beast has gored on several occasions, it is a known offender. But society needs to defend the property of those victims of the beast in the meantime. This passage of Scripture establishes that the issue of legal liability in the case of the damage-producing actions of a dangerous domestic animal is to be established in terms of *the judges' ability to assess comparative knowledge between the plaintiff and the defendant*. The owner is presumed to have better information concerning his beast's behavior than an outsider possesses. Thus, a single proven case of previous bad behavior on the part of an ox places its owner at risk judicially.

"Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push [gore] in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox" (Ex. 21:36). What is the meaning of "ox for ox"? In the previous case of a beast whose dangerous behavior had not been a matter of public knowledge, the owner of the dead beast does not receive a replacement ox. He only receives half of the proceeds of the sale of the live ox and the dead ox's carcass. But this case is different. The goring beast is known to have gored in the past. The owner of the dead ox is to be fully reimbursed, "ox for ox."

Does this mean that the owner of the dead beast is simply to be given the surviving ox? This would be a very unlikely interpretation. First, the surviving ox is now a known renegade. It is a menace, as the owner of the dead ox knows only too well. The owner of the survivor therefore would be transferring ownership of a high-risk beast to the owner of the victim. But a high-risk property always commands a lower sale price than a low-risk property, for obvious reasons. The buyer has to be compensated for the added liability he is accepting by purchasing the high-risk property.

Second, the market value of the dead beast may be far higher than the transgressing survivor, irrespective of the risk factor. Perhaps the dead beast was a prize-winning beast. The victim now can sue for damages. He is to be reimbursed, "ox for ox." In other words, he is to be reimbursed like for like, value for value. On the one hand, as the owner of a champion bull, he has a financial incentive to keep his high-value beast away from any potentially dangerous beast that has not been identified as dangerous. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the owner of a known renegade beast to keep it away from other bulls, especially champion bulls. The economic burden now shifts to

the owner of the killer beast.

What is the difference between the two cases? In both cases, one man loses his beast, and another man's beast survives. The difference has to do with differences in *knowledge*; by the court, by the dead beast's owner, and by the surviving beast's owner. Greater knowledge establishes greater responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).

This principle of comparative knowledge leads to the conclusion that specific animals are by nature dangerous, and only marginally and sporadically responsive to human training, are automatically considered notorious. Maimonides defined such animals as those that kill by goring, biting, clawing, or similar action. Following the Mishnah,¹³ he listed the wolf, lion, bear, panther, and leopard. He also added snakes, but strangely enough, only those that have bitten in the past.¹⁴ These species would today be classified as "exotic animals." Most communities in the United States place legal restrictions on the private, non-institutional ownership of such animals, and in many cases such ownership is banned by law. To these species should probably be added species of dogs that have been bred to be fighters. The very possession of such breeds places the owners at risk. The individual animal may not be known to be dangerous, but it can be presumed in advance by the owner to be dangerous, and therefore also by the court retroactively.

E. Limited Knowledge

The court's knowledge is limited, yet it has to have evidence to make a judgment. The only evidence sufficiently reliable to allow the court to presume guilt on the part of a beast is the beast's previous public record. Why must the court presume guilt? Because there is no way for the court to determine guilt with the same degree of accuracy that must prevail in deciding human transgressions of the law, where the innocence of the accused is presumed.¹⁵

1. Establishing Value

First, let us consider the case of the goring of a prize-winning beast by a previously peaceful ox. The prize-winning beast's owner has to

13. *Baba Kamma* 1:4, *Mishnah*, p. 332.

14. *Torts*, I:I:6, p. 5.

15. I am speaking here of common law societies. Napoleonic Code societies do presume that the accused is guilty unless proven innocent.

bear the increased risks associated with ownership of a champion beast. He has to assess the risks of putting it in close contact with other beasts. Neither he nor the owner of the previously tame beast had special knowledge of the future behavior of either beast. Neither owner possessed a uniquely inexpensive way to gain such knowledge. Therefore, neither owner is to be assessed by the court with special burdens of responsibility, because the knowledge of each is presumed to be the same. It might have been the champion beast that was the potential killer.

Second, in the case of the owner of a known renegade beast, the court can presume that he had access to better knowledge concerning the behavior of his beast than the dead beast's owner had with respect to either beast. Because the owner of the renegade had greater knowledge concerning his beast's behavior—knowledge that was *less expensive* for him to obtain than for the owner of the dead beast to have obtained—the law finds him guilty of negligence. He had the responsibility to keep his beast away from other beasts, especially championship beasts. The *burden of economic responsibility* is different because the *costs of obtaining better knowledge* are different.

This is why “ox for ox” refers to a *replacement of equal value*. The owner of the dead beast is entitled to full-value compensation. Nevertheless, championship beasts can become renegades, too. It would not be fair for the owner of a newly vicious beast that is worth, say, 100 ounces of gold, to be forced to sell his beast and split the proceeds with the victim's owner, just because his beast killed a beast worth, say, one ounce of gold. He is required to pay the owner what it will cost him to buy a replacement beast, but no more. Were it otherwise, it would pay owners of average beasts to place their beasts in close proximity to the champion but possibly violent beast, in the hope that a fight would take place in which the less valuable beast is killed. The Bible does not recommend laws that promote profit-seeking violence.

The owner of the survivor gets to keep the carcass of the dead beast. “If the ox hath used to push [gore] in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own.” He has paid the owner of the dead beast, ox for ox. But the owner of the dead beast is not entitled to everything. The man who is required to pay at least gets something.

2. *Guilt Is Presumed*

Again, this recognizes the limitations of judges to make perfect assessments concerning which beast was responsible. The victim does not lose anything, economically speaking, but he is not given a bonus payment, either. Why doesn't the owner of the survivor owe a penalty payment to the victim? Because the courts cannot ascertain that the renegade was completely responsible. Guilt is *presumed* by the court; it need not be established beyond reasonable doubt, unlike a case involving human behavior. In a legal dispute involving human beings, the present guilt of a previously convicted criminal is not to be presumed by the court; it must be proven. But a decision must be rendered by the court in order to honor God's law and to preserve the juridical foundation of social peace. So the court is required to presume one beast's guilt, and therefore its owner's responsibility.

The Bible is silent with respect to fights between two known renegade beasts, but by an extension of this argument, it can safely be concluded that the first example becomes the standard. The surviving beast is sold and the proceeds are divided. The court cannot presume to know which beast started the fight.

Conclusion

Biblical law favors neither the rich nor the poor. It places a greater burden of responsibility on the owner who has access to better or cheaper information concerning the probable behavior of a domesticated beast under his command. Biblical law implicitly recognizes that *knowledge is not a zero-cost resource*, and therefore neither courts nor owners should be treated as if they were omniscient.

Where two beasts with clean records fight, and one is killed, the owners split the proceeds. Where the surviving beast was known to be a greater risk, its owner must fully compensate the victim for his economic loss, on the basis of equal value restored. The court is not required to presume which beast was responsible in the first example, but it is required by God's law to make this presumption automatically in cases involving a known renegade. The important thing, however, is that judgment be rendered by the court. Without judgment, social peace cannot long be maintained.

PROPORTIONAL RESTITUTION

If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. . . . If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double (Ex. 22:1, 4).

In any attempted explanation of a Bible passage, we must have as our principle of interpretation the Bible's revelation of the theocentric nature of all existence. God created and now sustains all life. Thus, a sin against a person is first and foremost a sin against God. Restitution must always be made to God. God demands the death of the sinner as the only sufficient lawful restitution payment. But God allows a substitute payment, symbolized in the Old Testament economy by the sacrifice of animals. These symbols pointed forward in time to the death of Jesus Christ, which alone serves as the foundation of all of life (Heb. 8). Jesus Christ made a temporary restitution payment to God in the name of mankind in general (temporal life goes on) and a permanent one for His people (eternal life will come).¹ Adam deserved death on the day he rebelled; God gave him extended life on earth because of the atonement of Christ. The same is true for Adam's biological heirs. We live because of Christ's atonement, and only because of it.

Crimes can also be against men. This means that restitution must be made to the victim, not just to God. There is no forgiveness apart from restitution: Christ's primarily, and the criminal's secondarily. As images of God, victims are entitled to restitution payments from crim-

1. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), chaps. 3, 6. (<http://bit.ly/gnd-cg>) The Bible passage that indicates these two aspects of salvation is I Timothy 4:10: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

inals. Because crimes differ in terms of their impact on victims, penalties also vary. The biblical principle is a familiar one in Western jurisprudence: *the punishment must fit the crime*. Because economic restitution is the form that punishment must take in the case of theft, *economic restitution must therefore "fit the crime."* It must fit the crime in at least three ways: first, by restoring to the victim as closely as possible the value of what had been stolen; second, by compensating the victim for his suffering in losing the item or items; third, by compensating the victim for the costs of detecting the thief.

A. Costs of Retraining: The Traditional Explanation

R. J. Rushdoony's discussion of multiple penalties, which he called multiple restitution, is important for the light it sheds on the first aspect of restitution, the payment necessary to compensate the victim for the loss he suffered as a result of the theft. Unfortunately, Rushdoony followed rabbinical tradition and introduced an extraneous issue which confuses the discussion, namely, the *use-value of the animals*. He wrote:

Multiple restitution rests on the principle of justice. Sheep are capable of a high rate of reproduction and have use, not only as meat, but also by means of their wool, for clothing, as well as other uses. To steal a sheep is to steal the present and future value of a man's property. The ox requires a higher rate of restitution, five-fold, because the ox was trained to pull carts, and to plow, and was used for a variety of farm tasks. The ox therefore had not only the value of its meat and its usefulness, but also the value of its training, in that training an ox for work was a task requiring time and skill. It thus commanded a higher rate of restitution. Clearly, a principle of restitution is in evidence here. Restitution must calculate not only the present and future value of a thing stolen, but also the specialized skills involved in its replacement.²

Walter Kaiser agreed.³ The Jewish scholar, Cassuto, argued along similar lines: "*He shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep*—less for a sheep than for an ox, possibly because the rearing of a sheep does not require so much, or so prolonged, effort as the rearing

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 459–60.

3. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1983), p. 105.

of herds."⁴ This interpretation is quite traditional among Jewish scholars.⁵

This interpretation seems to get support from the laws of at least one nation contemporary with ancient Israel. The Hittites also imposed varying penalties according to which animal had been stolen. Anyone who stole a bull and changed its brand, if discovered, had to repay the owner with seven head of cattle: two three-year-olds, three yearlings, and two weanlings.⁶ A cow received a five-fold restitution payment.⁷ The same penalty was imposed on thieves of stallions and rams.⁸ A plow-ox required a ten-fold restitution (previously 15).⁹ The same was true of a draft horse.¹⁰ Thus, it appears that trained work animals were evaluated as being worth more to replace than the others. Anyone who recovered a stolen horse, mule, or donkey was to receive an additional animal: double restitution.¹¹ The original animal that had received training was returned; thus, the thief did not have to pay multiple restitution.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the Bible's higher payment for a sheep or ox is based on the costs of retraining an equivalent animal. But what seems reasonable at first glance turns out to be mistaken.

B. Discounted Future Value and Capitalization

Consider the argument that the higher restitution penalty is related to the increased difficulty of training domestic animals. No doubt it is true that the owner must go to considerable effort to re-train a work animal. But is a sheep a work animal? Does it need training? Obviously not. This should warn us against adopting such an argument regarding any restitution payment that is greater than two-fold.

It is quite true that the future value of any stolen asset must be paid to the victim by the thief. What is not generally understood by

4. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), p. 282.

5. See the citations by Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, Part 2 (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976), p. 364.

6. "Hittite Laws," paragraph 60. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 192.

7. *Ibid.*, paragraph 67.

8. *Ibid.*, paragraphs 61, 62.

9. *Ibid.*, paragraph 63.

10. *Ibid.*, paragraph 64.

11. *Ibid.*, paragraph 70.

non-economists is that *the present market price of an asset already includes its expected future value*. Modern price theory teaches that the present price of any scarce economic resource reflects the estimated future value of the asset's net output (net stream of income, or net rents), discounted by the market rate of interest for the time period that corresponds to the expected productive life of the asset.¹² For example, if I expect a piece of land to produce a net economic return (rent) equivalent to one ounce of gold per year for 1,000 years, I would be foolish to pay 1,000 ounces of gold for it today. The present value to me of my thousandth ounce of gold is vastly higher than the present value to me of that thousandth ounce of gold a thousand and one years in the future. When offering to buy the land, I therefore discount that expected income stream of gold by the longest-term interest rate on the market. So do all my potential competitors (other buyers). The cash payment for the land will therefore be substantially less than the expected rental payments of 1,000 ounces of gold.

This discounting process is called *capitalization*. When we capitalize something, we pay a cash price—an actual transaction or an imputed estimation—for a future stream of income. Capitalization stems from the fact, as Rothbard argued, that “Rents from any durable good accrue at different points in time, at different dates in the future. The capital value of any good then becomes the sum of its expected future rents, discounted by the rate of time preference for present over future goods, which is the rate of interest. In short, the capital value of a good is the ‘capitalization’ of its future rents in accordance with the rate of time preference or interest.”¹³ This is not a difficult concept to grasp; unfortunately for human freedom and productivity, very few people have ever heard about it.

What is most important to understand is that this discounting process applies to *all* capital goods (including durable consumer goods) in the market; it is not simply the product of a money economy. Monetary exchanges are as bound by the process of discounting expected future income (rents) as are all other transactions. Put a different way, *the phenomenon of interest is basic to human action; it is not the product of a money economy*.

12. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State* 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

13. Murray N. Rothbard, Introduction; Frank A. Fetter, *Capital, Interest, and Rent: Essays in the Theory of Distribution* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977), p. 13. (<http://bit.ly/FetterCIR>)

If economists could persuade people of this fact, there would be less freedom-restricting legislation such as usury laws. Governments sometimes pass usury laws that establish a price ceiling on legal interest rates. These laws are almost always applied only on monetary transactions. As with any price control, a usury law will reduce the number of transactions at the coercively fixed price. It will reduce the supply of loanable funds, because lenders do not wish to loan money at an artificially undervalued rate of return.¹⁴ Usury laws are the destroyers of civilization, for they impede the free flow of capital. Indeed, if they could be fully enforced, usury laws that prohibit all interest payments would make impossible the creation of capital goods, for capital goods are nothing more than human labor (including intellectual insight) combined with raw materials over time.¹⁵ All three must be paid for: labor (wages), raw materials (rent), and time (interest). Usury laws deny the legitimate return of the third component of a capital good.¹⁶

This process of capitalization means that the higher the prevailing interest rate, the smaller the cash payment that a buyer will offer for a piece of land today: the buyer applies a *higher discount* to its expected stream of income.¹⁷ Always bear in mind, however, that no one knows

14. A low official rate of interest makes it appear as though people are discounting future income at a lower rate than is actually the case. Thus, a legislated (or fiat-money-induced) lower rate of interest will make it appear as though buyers are willing offer higher prices for land bought by means of long-term debt contracts (mortgages). But this is an illusion created by the government's usury law. In the case of property sold by a seller who is willing to finance the sale by accepting a long-term debt contract from the buyer, he will have to accept a lower price if the market's true rate of interest exceeds the official interest rate ceiling; otherwise the buyer will not buy. A usury law, like any price control, is analogous to placing a limit on a thermometer's scale. A cap on a thermometer does not reduce the fever of the sick person; it simply keeps people from assessing the true conditions. A usury law creates an illusion of a lower rate of discount than market transactors voluntarily agree upon.

15. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 6.

16. There is no surer way to identify a crackpot theory of economics than to examine the economist's theory of interest is. If he denies the legitimacy of interest in morally legitimate profit-seeking transactions, he is not an economist; he is a monetary crank. If he denies interest as a theoretically inescapable tool of economic analysis, he is a true crackpot, as nutty as a man who promotes the idea of the possibility of a perpetual motion machine. But he is far more dangerous: legislators do not listen to "scientists" who would propose making illegal all machines except perpetual motion machines. Legislators have on occasion passed usury laws that are based on the idea that interest is illegitimate. The most precise discussion of interest remains Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk's classic study, *History and Critique of Interest Theories* (1884), which is volume 1 of *Capital and Interest*, 3 vols. (South Holland, Illinois: Libertarian Press, 1959).

17. If we expect a lower rate of interest in the future than presently prevails, we

for certain what the future value of an asset's output will be, nor does anyone know precisely how much the interest rate will fluctuate over the expected productive life of the asset. Obviously, no one is sure just what the productive life of any asset will be. Market forecasting involves a great deal of uncertainty.

Uncertainty is the origin of what some economists call entrepreneurial or "pure" profit.¹⁸ When the estimates of the various competing entrepreneurs—market forecasters-investors¹⁹—are brought to bear in the capital goods markets, the outcome is a price for any capital asset.²⁰ Today's demand is a composite of demand for present use (shear, kill, and eat a sheep today) and future use (shear a sheep repeatedly over several years and then kill and eat it). Today's price is the product of the competitive interaction between *today's demand*—which includes an estimation of future demand and an estimation of future supply—and *today's supply*.

The present price of any scarce economic resource already in-

will be willing to pay the prevailing cash price, since the annual rate of return will be discounted subsequently by a smaller number. Thus, we buy today at a nice, fat "discount for cash," and we will be able to sell the property later on for a smaller discount for cash when the rate of discount (interest) drops. If we expect rates to rise, we will only buy at less than the prevailing cash market price, which means, of course, that we will not be able to buy it, since the owner can sell it for more to someone else. The new buyer will then suffer economic losses, if our expectation is correct. He will get a smaller "discount for cash" when he buys today, and if he wants to sell later on, he will have to accept a larger discount, since the rate of interest will have risen. The market value of his land will drop.

18. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>) See also Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 32.

19. Some economists distinguish between the capitalist owner-investor and the future-predicting entrepreneur. I have not found this distinction particularly helpful. A forecaster who does not invest capital is not a participant in the market. If someone invests in terms of what the capital-deficient forecaster has said, then the investor becomes the significant participant. Like the race track tout who refuses to invest his own money, and who therefore has no effect on the odds at the ticket window unless he gets someone to bet in terms of his forecasts, so is the entrepreneur who is not a capitalist. Both are economically irrelevant in practice. I prefer to avoid distinctions that are irrelevant in practice. For examples of this distinction, see Israel Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 47–52; Henry Manne, *Insider Trading and the Stock Market* (New York: Free Press, 1966), pp. 117–19.

20. There can be various prices, depending on market information concerning other buyers and sellers, including substitute producer goods, as well as transportation costs, insurance rates, and so forth. But the tendency of competition is to produce a single market price for a given piece of equipment in a particular geographical region.

cludes its expected future price, discounted by the applicable period's market rate of interest.²¹

C. The Economics of Restitution

Having said this, I now consider the economics of restitution. The task of the judges in estimating a morally legitimate restitution payment is easier than it seems. Judges can safely ignore the question of just how much the future value of a stolen asset might be. The best experts in forecasting economic value—entrepreneurs—have already provided this information to the judges, all nicely discounted by the market rate of interest. The judges need only use *existing market prices* in order to compute restitution payments.

A restitution payment is normally twice the prevailing market price of the asset. When the stolen ox is returned by the authorities to the owner (the thief neither slaughtered it nor sold it), the thief pays double restitution. "If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double" (Ex. 22:4). Rushdoony followed the traditional rabbinical interpretation when he argued that this 100% penalty above the market price is the minimum amount by which the thief expected to profit from his action.²² The thief must return the original beast, plus his expected minimum "profit" from the transaction, namely, the market value of the stolen beast. He forfeits that which he had expected to gain. Maimonides wrote of the requirement that the thief pay double: "He thus loses an amount equal to that of which he wished to deprive another."²³ Akedat Yizhak concurred: "The thief is treated differently from the one who causes damage. The latter who caused damage through his ox or pit did not intend to deprive his fellow of anything. He is therefore only required to make half or total restitution. The thief who deliberately sets out to inflict loss on his fellow deserves to have a taste of his own medicine—to lose the same amount that he deprived his fellow of. This can only be achieved through double restitution."²⁴ This is ana-

21. The prevailing rate of interest for loans of any given duration, like the prevailing price of any asset, is the product of the best guesses of entrepreneurs (speculators) concerning the future of interest rates of that duration.

22. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 460.

23. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), "Laws Concerning Theft," II:1:4, p. 60.

24. Cited by Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, p. 362.

logous to the perjurer who is subject to the judicial penalty which his lie, had it been believed by the judges, would have imposed on the innocent person (Deut. 19:16–21).²⁵

1. *Victim's Rights*

“If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep” (Ex. 22:1). What if a stolen sheep or ox had been sold by the thief? The thief may know where the animal is. If the authorities convict him of the crime, would he be given an opportunity to buy back the stolen animal and return it to the owner, plus the 100% penalty, and thereby avoid the four-fold or five-fold restitution penalty? This would seem to violate the third goal of proportional restitution (see below): increasing the risk for thieves who steal sheep or oxen, and who then dispose of the evidence by destroying them or selling them, thereby making it more difficult to convict them in court. The thief would still have to pay the four-fold or five-fold penalty, *unless the victim decides otherwise*. The fundamental judicial principle here is *victim's rights*. The victim decides the penalty, up to the limits of the law.

The victimized original owner should always have the authority to offer the convicted criminal an alternative that is more to the victim's liking. Perhaps he is emotionally attached to the missing ox, especially if he personally trained it. He may even be attached emotionally to the stolen sheep—less likely, I suspect, than attachment to an ox that he had personally trained. What if he offers to accept double restitution if (1) the criminal will tell him where the sold beast is, and (2) the beast is returned to him alive? What if the thief then tells the victim and the civil authorities where the missing beast is? The authorities would then compel the new owner—who, legally speaking, is not truly an owner, as we shall see—to return the animal to the original owner.

The buyer of the stolen beast now has neither beast nor the forfeited purchase price. He has become the thief's victim. The thief therefore owes him some sort of restitution payment. The question is: How much? This is a difficult question to answer. It would be either a 20% penalty or a 100% penalty. I believe that it is a 20% penalty.

25. This section of Deuteronomy is explicitly a case-law application of the “eye for eye” principle.

2. Timely Confession Receives Its Appropriate Reward

Here is my reasoning. Say that the convicted thief confesses his crime of having either sold or slaughtered the stolen beast. The court is not sure which he did, but the penalty is the same in either case: four-fold (sheep) or five-fold (ox) restitution. In an attempt to persuade the original owner to accept the return of his animal plus a 100% penalty, he now confesses that he sold it. Say that the owner agrees to accept two-fold restitution if the thief can get the animal back (the victim need not consent to this). The thief must now return the stolen beast. He goes to the buyer and tells him that the animal was stolen and must be returned to the original owner. He now also owes the victimized buyer the purchase price of the beast, plus a penalty payment of 20% (Lev. 6:2–5).²⁶

If the initial buyer has already sold the beast, then it is the responsibility of the thief, not the buyer, to trace down its present location. The person who has final possession when the state intervenes and requires him to return it to its original owner is the defrauded buyer to whom the thief owes the restitution payment. Because the “bundle of rights” associated with legal ownership could not be transferred by the thief to the various buyers, the final buyer has no legal claim on the animal. He is in receipt of stolen goods.

By cooperating with the original victim, the thief may be able to reduce his overall liability. Instead of paying the original owner five-fold restitution for an ox, he now pays less. First, the stolen beast is returned to the true owner: basic restitution. Second, the thief then must pay that person the equivalent value of the beast. Third, he also owes the defrauded purchaser the return of his purchase price plus a penalty of 20%. Thus, he pays 3.2-fold restitution, plus the cost of locating and transporting the beast, rather than five-fold or four-fold restitution. Obviously, the thief is better off if he cooperates with the true owner, and tells him who bought the stolen ox or sheep from him.

Why assume that the thief only owes the victimized buyer 20%? Because biblical law recognizes that thieves have *better information* about what they did than other people do. It is best for the law to offer thieves a reduced penalty for confession in order to elicit better information from them before the costs of the trial must be borne. To encourage the criminal to tell the truth, there has to be a threat

26. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 7.

hanging over him: the possibility that someone with the missing information will come to the judges and present it. Thus, if the thief remains silent about the person who bought the sheep or ox, he bears greater risk.

3. *The Silent Thief*

A silent thief faces an additional threat. Assume that the original owner demands four-fold (sheep) or five-fold (ox) restitution. Still, the thief says nothing because he knows that if he admits that he sold the beast, he will also have to pay the victimized buyer 120%, yet the original owner may nevertheless refuse to deal with him, and may demand (as is his legal right) either four-fold or five-fold restitution. Once the thief has sold a stolen a sheep or ox, the victim can legally demand the higher penalty payment. The victim is owed the four-fold or five-fold restitution whether or not the thief locates the stolen beast, buys it back, and returns it to its original owner. *The very act of selling a stolen ox or sheep invokes the law's full penalty.* It is very much like the crime of kidnapping. The family of the kidnapped victim, or the judge, or the jury can legally insist on the death penalty even if the kidnapper offers to identify the person to whom the victim had been sold into bondage.

Why would the thief remain silent about the whereabouts of the stolen animal? One reason might be his fear of revenge from an accomplice in the crime. Laying this motivation aside, let us consider other possible motivations for the thief's remaining silent. First and foremost, the thief may believe that he will not be convicted of the crime. After all, the beast is missing. It is not in the thief's possession. Second, he may believe that the victim is hard-hearted and will insist on the maximum restitution payment even if the thief can get the beast back by identifying the defrauded buyer and paying him the purchase price plus a penalty payment of 20%.

He remains silent. He may be convicted anyway. If so, he now faces a new problem: he not only owes four-fold or five-fold restitution to the victim, he could also wind up owing the victimized buyer whatever the buyer paid him for the stolen animal. Why? Because the victimized buyer may later discover that he has purchased a stolen beast. If he then remains silent, he breaks the law. He is a recipient of stolen goods. He has become an accomplice of the thief. His silence condemns him. Additionally, he may feel guilty because he is not its

legal owner.

How can the defrauded buyer escape these burdens? He can go to the original owner, who has already received full restitution from the thief (or from the person who has purchased the thief as a slave), and offer to sell the animal back to him. Once the victimized buyer identifies himself, the thief now owes restitution to the defrauded buyer: double restitution, minus the purchase price that the defrauded buyer receives from the original owner. The thief has stolen from the buyer through fraud. As is the case with any other victim of unconfessed theft, the defrauded buyer is entitled to double restitution from the thief. Therefore, as soon as the thief gets through paying his debt to the original owner, he then must pay the victimized buyer the penalty payment.

If the original owner declines to buy the beast, the buyer becomes its legal owner. The original owner does not want it back. He has also been paid: restitution from the thief. But the defrauded buyer remains a victim. He keeps the beast, but he is also entitled to restitution from the thief equal to the original purchase price charged by the thief.

If the thief confesses before the trial begins, he can avoid the risk of the extra payment to the defrauded buyer. Even if the victim demands four-fold or five-fold restitution, by paying it, the thief thereby becomes the owner of the beast. *The criminal's act of timely confession, plus his agreement to pay full restitution to the victim, atones judicially for the theft.*²⁶

But what about the defrauding of the buyer? The confessed thief would owe the buyer a restitution payment of 20% of the purchase price, because he had involved the buyer in an illegal transaction. Having repaid both owner and buyer, he has legitimized the new ownership arrangement. The buyer has gained full legal title to the animal plus restitution, so he is no longer a defrauded buyer. He now has no additional complaint against the thief. He may not demand any additional restitution payments.

Without confession and restitution, the thief would owe the buyer at least 100% restitution if discovered, which is an important economic incentive in getting the buyer to identify himself. Thus, the thief's silence at the trial regarding the existence of a defrauded buyer hangs over him continually.²⁷

26. Obviously, I am speaking here only of the earthly court. Atonement means "covering."

27. If the victimized buyer waits for several years before identifying the stolen

Let us assume that he is convicted. He pays his maximum restitution to the victim. He still has an economic incentive to confess. He tells the judges that he had sold the animal. He tells them who the defrauded buyer is. He now owes the defrauded buyer the 20% restitution payment. This is better than paying the defrauded buyer 100% (or two-fold restitution minus any re-purchase price from the original owner), should the buyer learn that the beast was stolen property and decide to confess to the original owner or the judges.

Biblical law puts a premium on timely confession. The criminal who confesses receives a lighter penalty than the criminal who refuses to confess, and who is then subsequently convicted.²⁸ There is an economic incentive for him to confess. There is also an economic threat if he refuses to confess. The possibility of two-fold restitution provides an incentive for a defrauded buyer to reveal the existence of the stolen animal to the original owner. The Bible's penalty structure for theft provides economic incentives for all parties to present accurate information to the civil authorities. The Bible recognizes that accurate information is not a zero-price resource.

4. Considering an Alternative Arrangement

If there were no risk to the thief attached to remaining silent, what would be the thief's incentive to tell the owner that he knows where the stolen beast is? Assume that the thief owes no mandatory penalty payment to the defrauded buyer once he has paid restitution to the victim. He pays full restitution to the owner, and the defrauded buyer then hears about this, realizes that he has purchased stolen property, and comes to the owner. He offers to sell back the missing beast to the owner at the market price the beast was worth to the owner when the beast was stolen (presumably, the price he paid to the thief). If the thief owes nothing to the defrauded buyer, he is still out only five-fold restitution by having concealed evidence.

What is wrong with this interpretation of the restitution statutes?
Answer: the thief has entangled the buyer in an illegal transaction that

beast, the court might decide that the stolen beast has aged too much, and that it constitutes half of the payment owed. Still, the thief would have to make the 100% penalty payment to him.

28. In modern American jurisprudence, plea bargaining is used by defense attorneys to reduce their clients' sentences by persuading criminals to confess to milder crimes than they actually committed. In biblical law, the criminal also is given an opportunity to escape a heavier sentence by confessing before the trial; the confessed crime, however, remains the same.

was inherently filled with uncertainty for the buyer. The latter might have been convicted of being a “fence”—a professional receiver of stolen goods. He has therefore been defrauded by the thief. He deserves restitution.

What if the original owner says that he does not want to buy the beast from the defrauded buyer? The buyer has now in effect purchased the beast from its rightful owner. He now owns the “bundle of rights” associated with true ownership. But the thief has nevertheless exposed him to the discomfort of being involved in an illegal transaction. Shouldn’t the thief still owe the seller a 100% restitution payment? My assessment of the principle of victim’s rights leads me to conclude that biblical law does in principle allow the defrauded buyer to come to the judges and have them compel the thief to pay him 100% of the price he had paid the thief. This has nothing to do with whether he has sold the beast to the original owner or whether the owner has allowed him to retain legal possession of it.

5. Transferring Lawful Title

Why must we regard the sale of the animal as fraudulent? Why can the authorities legitimately demand that the purchaser return the animal to the original owner? Because the thief implicitly and possibly explicitly pretended to be transferring an asset that he did not possess: *lawful title*. The thief did not possess lawful title to the property. This illuminates a fundamental principle of biblical ownership: *whatever someone does not legally own, he cannot legally sell*. Ownership is not simply possession of a thing; it is possession of certain *legal immunities* associated with the thing. It involves above all the *right to exclude*. According economist-legal theorist-judge Richard Posner: “A property right, in both law and economics, is a right to exclude everyone else from the use of some scarce resource.”²⁹ This right to exclude was never owned by the thief; therefore, he cannot transfer this bundle of legal immunities to the purchaser. The purchaser can legally demand compensation from the thief, but he does not lawfully own the stolen item. The civil authorities can legitimately compel the buyer to transfer the property back to the thief, who then returns it to the original owner, or else compel him to return it directly to the original owner.

The explicit language of the kidnapping statute provides us with

29. Richard A. Posner, *The Economics of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 70.

the legal foundation of this conclusion regarding the transfer of ownership. "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:16). Even to have a stolen man in your possession was a capital crime, unless you could prove that you did not know that he was stolen. Just because a kidnapper sold you a stolen person as a slave did not mean that this person would remain in your possession as a slave. The same is true of other property.

English common law does not recognize this biblical standard. Receiving stolen goods was not made a crime by statute until the nineteenth century. Common law had recognized no such crime; it took statute law to make it a crime.³⁰ While it is no doubt true that it is expensive to research every title before making a purchase, especially in a pre-modern society, the responsibility to do so is biblically inescapable if the buyer wishes to reduce his risk of purchasing stolen goods—goods that must be returned to the original owner. Not only is the childhood chant of "finders, keepers; losers, weepers" not biblical, neither is common law's "buyers, keepers; victims, weepers." A far better rule is the traditional *caveat emptor*: let the buyer beware.

What if the thief has already spent the purchase money, and is unable to repay the buyer? The victim agrees to accept two-fold restitution if the original beast is returned to him unharmed. He owes the restitution payment (the animal) to the original owner, plus the penalty; he also owes double restitution to the defrauded buyer. It will take him years to repay. Who has first claim on the thief's money? The original owner does. He made the offer to accept a reduced payment from the thief. Without this offer, he would have been entitled to four-fold (sheep) or five-fold (ox) restitution. For him to grant legal relief to the thief in exchange for information from the thief, he will presumably want at least double restitution.

The defrauded buyer has had to forfeit both the purchase price and the stolen animal, which must be returned to the true owner. The initial claim to restitution belongs to the owner of the beast, which has now been returned to him, leaving the purchaser with neither money nor beast. The defrauded buyer has now become the primary economic victim of the thief. This position as *secondary legal victim* but primary economic victim imposes added risks on buyers: they must

30. Wayne LaFave and Austin Scott, Jr., *Handbook on Criminal Law* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: West, 1972), pp. 681–91: "Receiving Stolen Property." My thanks to Prof. Gary Amos for this reference.

take special care to see to it that the goods they purchase are accompanied by valid titles. If the original owner is willing to bargain with the convicted thief, the purchaser then becomes the major loser. Legal initiative lies with the initial victim of the theft.

D. Protecting the Victims

We think of the criminal's victims as being people who have lost their animals or money. But there are other victims: the animals themselves. This is analogous to the crime of kidnapping. The restitution system that the Bible establishes for oxen and sheep reflects this special concern by God for helpless animals. What makes sheep and oxen special is their status in the Old Testament as symbolically helpless animals. So, biblical law protects both the animals and their owners. Let us consider each in turn.

Why the requirement of five-fold restitution for a slaughtered or sold ox? Oxen require training, meaning a capital investment by the owner, in order to make them effective servants of man in the tasks of dominion, but so do other animals, such as horses and donkeys, yet only two-fold restitution is required for them. Also, a thief who is found with a living ox in his possession pays only double restitution. What makes a slaughtered or sold ox different? Answer: *the ox is symbolic of the employed servant*. This symbolism has more to do with its five-fold restitution penalty than the value of its training does.

The law forbids the muzzling of oxen when they are working in the field (Deut. 25:4).³¹ Paul cited this verse on two occasions: first, to make the point that God cares for His people, and that our spiritual labors will not be in vain (I Cor. 9:9);³² second, to point out that the laborer is worthy of his reward, and that elders in the church are worthy of double honor (I Tim. 5:17–18).³³ It pays to train an ox, just as it pays to train human workers in their jobs. Unquestionably, a trained ox is worth more to the owner than an untrained steer, just as a trained worker is worth more than an unskilled worker, and just as an elder is deserving of double honor (payment). Furthermore, the ox is a dominion beast, but the steer is only a source of food and leather. The ox is productive until the day it is killed by man or beast; the steer

31. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 63.

32. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

33. North, *Hierarchy and Dominion*, ch. 8.

is simply fattened for the slaughter.

Sheep are very different from oxen. They are stupid animals. Shepherds care for them, sheep dogs monitor their movements, but wise men do not invest a lot of time and energy in trying to train them for service. They are not active work animals like oxen, which pull plows; they are far more passive. A sheep is in fact the *classic passive animal*—an animal whose main purpose in life is to get *sheared*. They are helpless. For this reason, they are symbolic in the Bible of the poor.³⁴

How do we make sense of the four-fold restitution payment for a stolen sheep that is subsequently killed or sold by the thief? Why is this loss (as indicated by the size of the restitution payment) so great to the owner, compared to the double restitution payment he receives if the stolen sheep is restored to him by the thief? Economic analysis of a sheep's output does not throw much light on this problem, except in a negative sense: there is no strictly economic reason. A beast of burden such as a donkey has to be trained, and was unquestionably a valuable asset in the Old Testament economy. So was a horse. Yet neither slaughtered horses nor slaughtered donkeys are singled out in the law as entitling their owners to four-fold or five-fold restitution. What is so special about a sheep? Is its wool production that much more valuable than the economic output of a horse or donkey? Clearly, the answer is in the negative. We are forced to conclude that the distinguishing characteristic between a slaughtered stolen donkey and a slaughtered stolen sheep has nothing to do with the comparative economic value of each beast's output. Instead, it has a great deal to do with the sheep's *symbolic subordinate relationship to the owner*.

E. Of Sheep and Men

In the Bible, animals *image* man.³⁵ Sheep are specifically compared to men throughout the Bible, with God as the Shepherd and men as helpless dependents. The twenty-third psalm makes use of the imagery of the shepherd and sheep. David, a shepherd, compared himself to a sheep, for he described God as his shepherd (Ps. 23:1). Christ called Himself the "good shepherd" who gives His life for His sheep (John 10:11). He said to His disciples on the night of His capture by the au-

34. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 267–69. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

35. Animals in men's image: *ibid.*, p. 122. He cited Prov. 6:6; 26:11; 30:15, 19, 24–31; Dan. 5:21; Ex. 13:2, 13. When I use the noun "image" as a verb, I am reminded of one cynic's remark: "There is no noun in the English language that cannot be verbed."

thorities, citing Zechariah 13:7, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (Matt. 26:31). He referred to the Jews as "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6), echoing Jeremiah, "Israel is a scattered sheep" (Jer. 50:17a) and Ezekiel, "And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered" (Ezek. 34:5). Christ spoke of children as sheep, and offered the analogy of the man who loses one sheep out of a hundred. The man searches diligently to locate that one lost sheep and rejoices if he finds it. "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14).

1. *Helpless Sheep*

It is thus the *helplessness* of sheep rather than their value as beasts of burden or dominion that makes four-fold restitution mandatory.³⁶ Shepherds regard sheep as their special responsibility. The position of sheep is therefore unique. *Sheep are representative of the utter helplessness of men.* An attack on the sheep under a man's control strikes at his position as a covenantally responsible steward. David risked his life to save a lamb (or perhaps lambs) captured by a bear and a lion, and he slew them both (I Sam. 17:34–36), taking the lamb, apparently unharmed, out of the mouth of the lion: "I caught him by his beard" (v. 35). Just as God had delivered him out of the paw of both lion and bear, David told Saul, so would He deliver him out of the hand of Goliath (v. 37). Again, David was comparing himself (and Israel) with the lamb, and comparing God with the shepherd. Thus, the recovery of a specific lost or stolen sheep is important to a faithful shepherd or owner, not just a replacement animal.

Perhaps the best example of sheep as a symbol for defenseless humans is found in Nathan's confrontation with King David concerning his adultery with Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. Nathan proposed a legal case for David to judge. A rich man steals a female lamb

36. Maimonides ignored all this when he insisted that if a thief "butchers or sells on the owner's premises (an animal stolen there), he need not pay fourfold or fivefold. But if he lifts the object up, he is liable for theft even before he removes it from the owner's premises. Thus, if one steals a lamb from a fold and it dies on the owner's premises while he is pulling it away, he is exempt. But if he picks it up, or takes it off the owner's premises and it then dies, he is liable." Maimonides, *Torts*, "Laws Concerning Theft," II:II:16, p. 67.

from a poor neighbor, and then kills it. "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (II Sam. 12:5–6). Then Nathan replied to him, "Thou art the man." Uriah had been the neighbor; Bathsheba is the ewe lamb who, biblically speaking, has been killed, the death penalty being applicable in cases of adultery (Lev. 20:10).

David recognized that the four-fold restitution was applicable in the case of stolen and slaughtered sheep. But in fact, Nathan was not talking about a lamb; he was talking about a human being. He used the symbol of the slaughtered sheep for the foolish woman who consented to the capital crime of adultery. The woman had been entitled to protection, especially by the king. Instead, she had been placed in jeopardy of her life by the king. The king had proven himself to be an evil shepherd.

What was the penalty extracted by God? First, the infant born of the illicit union would die, Nathan promised (II Sam. 12:14). On the seventh day, the day before its circumcision, the child died (v. 18). The next section of Second Samuel records the rape of Tamar by David's son Amnon. Absalom, her brother, commanded his servants to kill Amnon, which they did (II Sam. 13:29). Absalom revolted against David and was later slain by Joab (II Sam. 18:14). Finally, Adonijah attempted to steal the throne, but Solomon was anointed (I Kings 1), and Adonijah tried again to secure the throne by asking Solomon to allow him to marry David's bed-warmer. Solomon recognized this attempt to gain the throne through marriage, and had him executed (I Kings 2:24–25). Thus, four of David's sons died, fulfilling the required four-for-one punishment for his adultery and his murder of Uriah.³⁷

2. *Shepherds and Sheep*

By striking at a man's lawful position of personal stewardship, the sheep-stealer takes an extra risk. It is far less risky to steal gold or silver

37. The Jewish scholar Brichto recognized the connection between Exodus 22:1 and the death of four of David's sons. His comment on the fourth of the four-fold penalty that God imposed on David is pertinent: "The execution of Adonijah, occurring after David's death has, in this context, escaped general notice: even of scholars, who have been conditioned not to count as significant (for biblical man) what happens to a man's son(s) after his demise." Herbert Chanan Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and After-life—A Biblical Complex," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XLIV (1973), p. 42.

and then sell it than to steal and sell a sheep; he will pay only two-fold restitution if he is captured for stealing and then selling gold. The sheep-stealer strikes at the very heart of a man's dominion assignment, in which a man has invested love and care on helpless, dependent beasts. *The shepherd's calling (vocation) is the archetypal calling: it points analogically to the cosmic personalism and providential goodness of God.* It is therefore specially defended by biblical law.

We see the archetypal nature of the shepherd's calling in the office of church elder. We call ministers of the gospel "pastors," a word derived from the same root as "pastoral." They are shepherds. Christ three times told Peter that his task would be to feed Christ's sheep (John 21:15–17). Peter later instructed elders of the church to "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" (I Peter 5:2a). The shepherd's role as caretaker and protector is analogous to God's care and protection of the world and Christ's care and protection of His church (John 10).

It is significant that the Israelites had been shepherds of cattle and sheep when they came into Egypt. The Egyptians despised shepherds. Because of this, Joseph instructed his brothers to ask Pharaoh for a separate land, Goshen, where the Hebrews would not come into contact with the Egyptians (Gen. 46:33–34). God's law, delivered so soon after their escape from a land in which their calling was despised, dealt with that occupation and its risks and responsibilities.

The Egyptians had despised shepherds, whose task is to care for flocks. These same Egyptians had placed the Israelites in bondage. The Egyptians were repulsed by an occupation that is based on a covenantal model of God's responsibility for the care and protection of His people. They were also repulsed by the concept of a society based on the idea of a ruler's covenantal responsibility for the care and protection of men. This hostility is understandable: Egypt was a bureaucratic, tyrannical state.³⁸ The Hebrews' experience in Egypt was designed by God to teach them that men are not allowed to do to cattle and sheep something that they are unquestionably not to do to other men: treat them unmercifully and carelessly or steal them and illegally slaughter them. Thus, God imposed His four-fold restitution on the Egyptians: He destroyed them.

Sheep, being stupid, are inescapably dependent. They have to trust their master if they are to survive. The shepherd is not to betray this

38. Chapter 2.

personal trust until it is time to kill the sheep for food or, in Old Testament times, for sacrifice. Christ pointed to the intimate relationship between the shepherd and his sheep: "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:4-5). When removed from the care of their shepherd, forcibly or otherwise, the sheep become lost.

F. Symbolism or Training?

At this point, I must resort to a somewhat speculative hypothesis in order to make sense out of the four-fold restitution payment for a missing or dead sheep and the five-fold restitution payment for a missing or dead ox. I am arguing that the high penalties are imposed because of the symbolic nature of sheep and oxen, although I cannot prove it textually.³⁹

To make sense of Exodus 22:1, we have to go beyond considerations of strictly financial profit and loss. Economics as such does not provide a clear-cut answer to a fundamental question: *Why doesn't God's law impose five-fold or four-fold restitution payments for the slaughter or sale of stolen horses or donkeys or other beasts of burden (dominion)?* They require the capital investment of training, just as an ox does. The value of this training is forfeited when the thief cannot return the actual stolen beast to the owner. We might presume that the principle of the four-fold and five-fold restitution payment does, by implication, apply to these other beasts, if they have received training or other capital investments that set them apart from untrained beasts of the same species. Nevertheless, the Bible never says this explicitly. It specifically singles out sheep and oxen. Why?

I see two possible reasons. First, unlike horses, donkeys, and other domesticated animals that might be trainable, sheep and oxen were commonly *slaughtered and eaten*, as they are today. Thus, they need special protection from thieves. A thief who slaughters an ox or sheep is subject to more stringent penalties. The higher penalty tends to restrain him in his blood-letting. This is a more strictly economic argument, one based on the economic effects of the law. Second, both sheep and oxen are *symbolic in the Bible of mankind*: oxen for men of

39. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, Appendix G. I discussed my thesis in the present chapter with Jordan prior to the publication of his book, and he expanded on the idea.

power or office, and sheep for dependent, spiritually helpless people. Oxen are normally peaceful, dominion beasts that are used for plowing the fields, never for war. Sheep are passive creatures that require special care on the part of shepherds. Thus, as archetypes of man in his relationship to God—*creatures in need of care*—oxen and sheep receive special consideration by the law.

Why a five-fold restitution payment for oxen? Why not four-fold? Probably because oxen are beasts of burden and therefore living tools of dominion. They are dependent,⁴⁰ though not so dependent as sheep, but they are also symbolic of God's dominion covenant. The number five is associated with the covenant in the Bible. Also, Israel marched in military formations based on the number five.⁴¹ The number five is associated with dominion. By killing a stolen ox, the thief is symbolically sacrificing another person's economic future for the sake of his own present enjoyment. This is what Satan attempted to do to Adam, and only the grace of God in Christ prevented Satan's successful slaughtering of humanity.

This law of restitution singles out oxen and sheep as being special creatures. Other passages in the Bible do the same. What the stringent restitution penalties of Exodus 22:1 point to is a general principle: *how you treat oxen and sheep is indicative of how you treat other men*. The ox is worthy of his hire; how much more a man! The sheep is helpless, and is deserving of protection; how much more a man! A society whose legal order protects oxen and sheep from thieves who would slaughter them is a society whose legal order is likely also to protect men from oppression, kidnapping, and murder. A biblical social order offers special protection to oxen, sheep, and men.⁴²

40. I believe that the male ox in this case law is castrated and not a bull. Castration reduces its threat to men, yet the animal's strength can still be harnessed for man's purposes. It is more dependent on man than a bull would be.

41. James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), pp. 215–16. (<http://bit.ly/jjchurch>)

42. David Daube's comments on the four-fold and five-fold restitution requirements acknowledge none of this. Instead, he returned to his favorite theme, like a dog returns to its vomit: the "later addition" thesis. He contrasted the two-fold restitution requirement with the four-fold and five-fold requirements. The higher penalties are evidence of an earlier law. ". . . the older rule makes a rather primitive distinction between theft of an ox and theft of a sheep: for one ox you have to give five, but for one sheep only four. No such distinction occurs in the later rule. Whatever kind of animal you steal, you have to restore two for one." Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1947), pp. 94–95. He used a similar line of argumentation to distinguish Exodus 21:28–31 from 21:35–36: *ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

G. Restitution and Deterrence

We are required by God always to begin our analysis of any problem with the operating presupposition of *the theocentric nature of all existence*. Modern jurisprudence refuses to begin with God. It begins with man and man's needs, and generally progresses to the state and the state's needs. This is why modern jurisprudence is in near-chaos. It is also why the court system is in near-chaos.⁴³

1. Deterring God's Wrath in History

Whenever we speak of deterring crime, we must speak first of the deterrence of God's wrath against the community because of the courts' unwillingness to impose God's justice within the community. The civil government is required by God to seek to deter crimes because all crimes are above all *crimes against God*. An unwillingness on the part of civil magistrates to enforce God's specified sanctions against certain specified public acts calls forth God's specified covenantal cursings against the community. This threat of God's sanctions is the fourth section of God's covenant; without this covenant, either explicit or implicit, no community can exist.⁴⁴ Only when we clearly recognize the *theocentric nature of deterrence*—and when we are ready to seek to have it *recognized publicly in our civil and ecclesiastical statute books*—can we legitimately begin to speak about deterring criminal behavior for the protection of the community.

The Bible does not distinguish between civil law and criminal law. All sins are crimes against God, for they break His law. All public sins must be restrained by one or more of God's covenantal agencies of government: family, church, and state. Certain public transgressions of God's law are specified as acts to be punished by the civil magistrate. In the modern world, we call these acts crimes. (The King James Version uses the word "crime" only twice, and "crimes" only twice.) The civil government enforces biblical laws against such acts. The general guideline for designating a particular public act as a crime is this: if by failing to impose sanctions against certain specified public acts, the whole community could be subsequently threatened by God's non-civil sanctions—war, plague, and famine—then the civil government becomes God's designated agency of enforcement. *The civil govern-*

43. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

44. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

ment's primary function is to protect the community against the wrath of God by enforcing His laws against public acts that threaten the survival of the community.

The perverse practice of modern jurisprudence of allowing a person who has been declared legally innocent of a crime to be subsequently sued for damages in civil court by alleged victims cannot be found in the Bible. There is no distinction in the Bible between criminal law and civil law. If the *civil* magistrates are entitled to enforce a rule or a law, then this rule or law should be classified in the modern world under a *criminal* statute. Because the state is not omniscient, God allows self-proclaimed victims of lawless behavior to sue other individuals in the presence of a civil magistrate, which we call civil procedure or torts, but if the state is the lawful agency of enforcement, then we are always talking about criminal acts. Continued injustice, *if* it can be biblically defined and publicly identified in advance through statute or judicial precedent, because it goes unpunished by the civil government, calls forth the wrath of God on the community.

The Bible encourages the *legitimate division of labor* in identifying all types of criminal behavior, including such acts of injustice as breaking contracts or polluting the environment. The Bible recognizes that the state is not God. It is not omniscient. The initiation of public sanctions against all criminal acts therefore must not become a monopoly of civil officers. Citizen's arrest and torts—where one person sues another in order to collect damages—are modern examples of the outworking of this biblical principle of the decentralization of law enforcement. All government begins with self-government. The bottom-up, appeals court structure of covenant society (Ex. 18)⁴⁵ is protected by not requiring that agents of the civil government initiate all of the civil government's sanctions against criminal behavior. Nevertheless, all disputes into which the state can legitimately intervene and settle by judicial decision must be regarded in a biblical commonwealth as criminal behavior. *There is no biblical distinction between criminal law and civil law.*

It is therefore preposterous to argue, as liberal scholar Anthony Phillips argued concerning the Mosaic law, that "A crime is a breach of an obligation imposed by the law which is felt to endanger the community, and which results in the punishment of the offender in the name of the community, but which is not the personal concern of the

45. Chapter 19.

individual who may have suffered injury, and who has no power to stop the prosecution, nor derives any gain from it.”⁴⁶ The argument is preposterous because every transgression of the civil law that goes unpunished by the authorities raises the threat of God’s judgment on the community, which is why unsolved murders required expiation in the Old Testament: (1) the sacrifice of a heifer (Deut. 21:1–7); and (2) the elders were required to pray, “Be merciful, O LORD, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel’s charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them” (Deut. 21:8). The state must regard as crimes against God all public transgressions for which the Bible specifies restitution payments to victims. Such acts are criminal acts against the community. Why? Because if they go unpunished, God threatens to curse the community. Thus, criminal law in the Bible was not enforced “in the name of the community,” but *in the name of God*, so as to protect the community from God’s wrath.

2. Restitution to God

Phillips was consistent in his errors, at least; he also argued that Hebrew covenant law was *exclusively* criminal law, meaning that its goal was solely the enforcement of public morals, rather than civil law (torts), in which restitution to the victim was primary.⁴⁷ This definition, if correct, would remove from covenant law all biblical statutes that require restitution to victims. He was trying to separate the case laws of Exodus from the Ten Commandments. If believed, this argument would make it far easier for antinomians to reject the continuing validity of the case laws in New Testament times, for the case laws of Exodus and other books rest heavily on the imposition of restitution payments to victims. The antinomians could publicly claim allegiance to the Ten Commandments, but then they could distance themselves from the specific applications of these commandments through the case laws, for they have concluded that the case laws are unconnected to the Decalogue because these are “civil” laws rather than “criminal” laws.⁴⁸ Phillips wrote: “But it is the contention of this study that Israel

46. Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel’s Criminal Law: A New Approach to the Decalogue* (New York: Schocken, 1970), p. 10.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

48. Phillips says that the “Book of the Covenant,” meaning Exodus 21–23, was a product of David’s reign, with some of it quite possibly written by David himself. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

herself understood the Decalogue as her criminal law code, and that the law contained in it, and developed from it, was sharply distinguished from her civil law.”⁴⁹

If true, then all you need to do to escape from the covenantal, state-enforced requirements of the Decalogue is to make the Ten Commandments appear ridiculous. This he attempted in Chapter Two. “Initially only free adult males were subject to Israel’s criminal law, for only they could have entered into the covenant relationship with Yahweh. . . . But women did not enter into the covenant relationship, and were therefore outside the scope of the criminal law. They had no legal status, being the personal property first of their fathers and then of their husbands.”⁵⁰ The Decalogue is clearly preposterous, he implied. Presto: modern man is freed from *any* covenantal relationship to God. Man is on his own in the cosmos. He is autonomous. He shall be as God.

His case rests, first and foremost, on his distinguishing of criminal law from civil law in terms of the presence of restitution requirements in civil law. Next, he excluded women from the covenant. Then he turned them into chattel slaves. His tactic is obvious: to make God’s law appear ridiculous. But it is Phillips who is ridiculous, not the Bible. Like all humanists, he did not begin with the presupposition of a theocentric universe. He therefore did not begin his discussion of crimes and restitution with the understanding that all crimes are ultimately crimes against God, and all restitution payments belong ultimately to God as the ultimate injured party. It did not occur to him that *all of God’s curses are His imposition of restitution payments to Himself as the ultimate Victim*. Because covenant-breakers do not voluntarily repay to God what they owe Him as the innocent victim—the ultimate object of their moral rebellion—He therefore repays them with inescapable final judgment. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19b).

All sins are crimes against God. All sins are therefore judged by God: “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a). Each person is a sinner in God’s eyes, and therefore a criminal. The key question that must be answered during each person’s life on earth—acknowledged by him

49. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15. He did say that Deuteronomy later made women full members of the covenant. *Ibid.*, p. 25. This is the standard liberal dismemberment of the Pentateuch into the hypothetical documents of the play-pretend scribes, J, E, D, P, and their as-yet unidentified accomplices.

or not—is this one: Will I allow Jesus Christ’s payment of the God-imposed eternal penalty to serve as my substitutionary restitution payment to God, or will I instead choose to ignore the magnitude of this looming restitution payment and cross death’s threshold autonomously? Anyone who makes the second choice will spend eternity in God’s non-rehabilitative torture chamber.

3. “Victimless Crimes” and Civil Judgment

In the ultimate covenantal sense, it is improper to speak of victimless crimes. Every person who entices another to sin is bringing that person under the threat of God’s negative sanctions, in time and in eternity. God therefore threatens the whole community for its failure to impose civil sanctions against such crimes. If there were no threat of God’s sanctions against the community for the failure of the magistrates to enforce all statutes assigned by the Bible to the civil magistrates for enforcement, then there would be no biblical justification for sanctions against such “victimless crimes” as prostitution, pornography, and homosexuality. Because he rejected the idea of such a covenant, classical liberal economist and legal theorist F. A. Hayek rejected laws against “victimless crimes,” saying that they are illegitimate interventions of the civil government, “At least where it is not believed that the whole group may be punished by a supernatural power for the sins of individuals. . . .”⁵¹ But that is the whole point: such a community-threatening God *does* exist.

Many actions that are specified in the Bible as sins are not to be tried and judged by the civil magistrate, but this is not evidence of neglect by God; it is instead *a restraint on the growth of messianic civil government*. The absence of civil penalties against such designated sinful behavior indicates only a postponement of judgment until the sinner’s final and eternal restitution payment to God. Through their public enforcement of God’s law, civil magistrates warn people of the necessity of obeying God, the cosmic Enforcer: “By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Prov. 16:6b). This legitimate fear is to be both personal and national, for God’s punishments in history are imposed on individuals and nations: “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the

51. F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), I, p. 101.

LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance” (Deut. 28:58–59).

The necessity of making restitution reminds the covenanted nation to fear the God who exacts a perfect restitution payment to Himself on judgment day, and who brings His wrath in history as a warning of the final judgment to come. He brings His wrath either through lawfully constituted civil government or, if civil government refuses to honor the terms of His covenant, through such visible judgments as wars, plagues, and famines. This is why the nation was warned to fear God, immediately after the presentation of the Ten Commandments: “. . . God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not” (Ex. 20:20b).

Jesus was not departing from the biblical view of judicial sanctions when He warned: “Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28b). Eternal punishment is to serve as the covenantal foundation of all judicial sanctions. Civil government is supposed to reflect God’s government. Public punishments deter evil. They remind men: better temporal punishment that leads to repentance (personal and national) than eternal punishment that does not lead to repentance (personal). Repentance is possible only in history.

4. Capital Punishment

Phillips was consistently incorrect when he wrote: “Modern theories of punishment are therefore totally inapplicable when considering reasons why ancient Israel executed her criminals, for the punishment was not looked at from the criminal’s point of view. This extreme penalty was not designed to deter potential criminals, nor as an act of retribution, but as a means of preventing divine action by appeasing Yahweh’s wrath.”⁵² If criminal law was “not looked at from the criminal’s point of view,” then why does the Bible repeatedly refer to the fear of external punishment by the civil authorities as a means of leading men to fear God and to obey His law? “And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you” (Deut. 13:11).

Deterring future crimes is certainly one of the functions of capital punishment in a biblical law-order. Capital punishment is also an act of retribution and restitution. And, yes, it is also “a means of prevent-

52. Phillips, *Ancient Israel’s Criminal Law*, p. 12.

ing divine action by appeasing Yahweh's wrath." It is erroneous to argue exclusively in terms of "either-or" when considering the potential social motivations for capital punishment or any other required civil sanction in the Bible.⁵³

Capital punishment points to the final judgment as no other civil penalty does. It reminds sinners of the ultimate restitution penalty that God will impose on all those who refuse to accept His Son's payment on their behalf. The civil government acknowledges that its most fearful form of punishment is to speed convicted criminals along into the courtroom of the cosmic Judge. The magistrate announces that there is no way to restore the convicted criminal to fellowship in earthly society. He visibly becomes what he already is in principle: a sinner in the hands of an angry God.

H. Final Judgment

We see the ultimate example of this two-fold aspect of restitution in the final judgment. Satan and his host, both human and angelic, pay for their rebellion with their lives. Their leavening power of corruption in history is reduced to zero. Their assets are transferred to God's people, who inherit the earth. From a biblical standpoint, this transfer of legal title to the world was accomplished by Christ at Calvary.⁵⁴ Then the rebels are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15).

This eternal, continual restitution payment honors God, while it simultaneously acts as the perfect deterrent to crime—a covenantal warning that remains before God's servants, both human and angelic, throughout eternity. Resurrected people will never sin again, whether

53. I do not want to give the reader an inflated opinion of Phillips' importance. He was just another obscure liberal theologian toiling fruitlessly in the barren wilderness of higher criticism. I have included this brief survey of some of his ideas as an example of just how intellectually sloppy liberal theology can be, not because he is an important thinker. He is simply a convenient foil. He is all too typical of a small army of liberal theologians whose works would be immediately forgotten if they had ever been read in the first place. These scholars will eventually make full restitution to God for their efforts to deceive their readers concerning the Bible. Liberal scholars are always looking for a new angle to justify the publication of yet another heavily footnoted, utterly boring, totally useless book, especially books like Phillips', which is a rewritten doctoral dissertation—the most footnoted, boring, and useless academic exercise of all. Doctoral dissertations should be interred quietly, preferably in private, with only the author and close family in attendance. If such interment must be public, then it should be as a summary published in a scholarly journal, where the remains' entombment will seldom be disturbed again. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

54. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gnininherit>)

they are covenant-breakers or covenant-keepers. Righteous people will not choose to sin, and resurrected sinners will not be able to. In the lake of fire there is only impotence. The ability to adhere to any of the terms of the dominion covenant cease when grace ceases, and there is no grace in the lake of fire.

Then why speak of the deterrence effect of eternal damnation? Because God's judgment is covenantal: blessings and cursings (point four of the Biblical covenant).⁵⁵ There are always conditional aspects to God's covenant promises, as well as unconditional aspects. The promises of God are part of the structure of the covenant. There will be promises and blessings in the post-resurrection new heaven and new earth. Cursing and blessing are eternal, which reminds everyone of the covenant's conditions. Thus, the lake of fire can be spoken of covenantally as a perfect deterrent, for it deters all God-defying behavior forever. It also complements and reinforces the perfect obedience of covenant-keepers who know perfectly well about the perfect torment of covenant-breakers, with their perfect bodies that possess the terrifying ability, like the burning bush that Moses saw, of not being destroyed by a perfect fire. God's perfection is manifested in His perfect wrath.

It is not God's grace that keeps alive covenant-breakers, with their perfect bodies that are so sensitive to every subtle aspect of their endless torment; it is instead His uncompromising *wrath* that keeps them alive.⁵⁶ Covenant promises, conditions, and sanctions are eternally perfect.⁵⁷ The soul and body of every covenant-breaker are reunited per-

55. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

56. On this point, I disagree with John Calvin's reference to God's grace in keeping souls alive: "And although the soul, after it has departed from the prison of the body, remains alive, yet its doing so does not arise from any inherent power of its own. Were God to withdraw his grace, the soul would be nothing more than a puff or blast, even as the body is dust; and thus there would doubtless be found in the whole man nothing but mere vanity." Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Barker Book House, 1979), Baker's volume VI, p. 138: Ps. 103:15. There is no grace shown by God to the souls of covenant-breakers in hell or the lake of fire. Grace is shown only to the souls of covenant-keepers. Calvin's loose language here was misused by Edward William Fudge in his book-long attempt to deny the biblical doctrine of eternal torment: *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston, Texas: Providential Press, 1982), p. 74.

57. Fudge attempted to trace Protestantism's doctrine of the immortality of the soul to Calvin, and Calvin's doctrine of the immortality of the soul to Plato. This argument is nonsense, though representative of similar arguments used by heretical theologians to reject Bible doctrines in the name of rejecting Greek speculation, when in fact they have adopted some variation of humanist speculation. The Bible's doctrine of

fectly at the resurrection, so that each can experience the eternal torments of covenant judgment as unified and fully human. There is no dualism of body and soul in the lake of fire.⁵⁸

Perfect justice brings with it a resurrection life permanently devoid of sin. Furthermore, the punishment perfectly fits the ethical crime of rebellion against God. It is a punishment whose magnitude God made quite plain from the beginning: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Absolutely proportional restitution at the final judgment creates the conditions necessary to establish a perfect society beyond the final resurrection.

I. *Lex Talionis*

Throughout the section of Exodus that immediately follows the Ten Commandments, we are given case-law applications of these commandments. In these case laws, we discover an operating principle: "an eye for an eye," the *lex talionis*. This principle is the theological foundation of all punishment, and therefore serves as the basis of restitution. This is why God required a living sacrifice, life for life, to atone for mankind's sin. A perfect man had to die in order to atone for the sin of another formerly perfect man, Adam. This is why the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews could write concerning the life and work of Jesus Christ: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou

the immortality of the soul and also its doctrine of eternal torment of the wicked are both grounded in the doctrine of the covenant. It is not surprising that Fudge finds in the Calvinist tradition the most tenacious die-hard defense of the doctrine of eternal punishment. Fudge, *ibid.*, pp. 26n, 466. There is a reason for this tenacity. Calvinism, more than any other Christian tradition, is grounded in the doctrine of the covenant.

58. Fudge and several of the drifting theologians whom he cited continually referred to the orthodox doctrine of souls in hell as implicitly dualistic. The doctrine of hell is no more dualistic than the traditional doctrine of heaven. The issue is not heaven or hell, for both are temporary way stations for souls until God's final judgment; the issue is the post-resurrection world, where souls and bodies are reunited. Fudge fudged this issue, as he did so many others. He covered his flanks with a whole series of peripheral issues—theological and historical rabbit trails for non-covenant theologians to pursue until exhaustion. The fundamental issue is the covenant: God's eternal dead-end judgment for covenant-breakers. This is the issue Fudge never discussed in chapter 20, "Focusing on the Issue," with its subsection, "Traditional Arguments Summarized." It is not man who is central to discussions of final judgment, but rather God and His eternal covenant.

hast had no pleasure” (Heb. 10:4–6). Again, “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12). This should have come as no surprise to anyone who had read and believed Exodus 21–22. Atonement for sins against God requires more than the slaughter of animals. Slaughtering an animal does not compensate God for man’s sin. *The principle of proportional restitution testified from the beginning against the autonomous adequacy of the Mosaic sacrificial system. It pointed to a greater sacrifice to come.* A perfect man would have to die, and more than a perfect man: God’s Son.

As history’s pre-resurrection society begins to approach, though never attain, the perfect justice of proportional restitution, it will thereby approach, though never attain, institutional perfection.⁵⁹ In God’s pre-resurrection cultural “earnest” to His people—His down payment or pledge (Rom. 8:19; Eph. 1:14)—which is the earthly beginning of the new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17), people will still die, proving that it will be an era prior to the final judgment, but they will normally live extraordinarily long lives (Isa. 65:20). It will be a period of reduced immorality (Isa. 1:25; 4:2–4), more equitable judgment (Isa. 1:26–27), and greater productivity as a result of universal peace (Isa. 65:22–23). There is an earthly relationship between righteous living (progressive sanctification), godly civil justice, and economic growth.⁶⁰

J. Offsetting Reduced Risks of Detection

The thief who steals a specially protected beast must suffer greater risks for stealing it when compared to any other kind of property. The sheep or ox can easily be slaughtered and eaten. This makes it far more difficult for the civil authorities to discover who the thief is and then prove it in court. Thus, the thief who steals an ox or sheep seems to have a greater likelihood of getting away with the crime. The law therefore imposes far higher penalties in cases of ox-stealing or sheep-

59. Perfection is an ethical requirement, for each individual and for all covenant institutions. It is a mandatory goal: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Christ was simply citing an Old Testament principle regarding sanctification, or holiness (Lev. 11:44). Perfection cannot be attained prior to the day of resurrection, however: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (I John 1:8–10).

60. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3: C–D.

stealing. This offsets part of the self-subsidy—the reduction of the risk of detection—that the thief receives when he slaughters the animal, thereby destroying the evidence.

But what about selling the animals? This is the equivalent of kidnapping, for these particular animals represent man. Thus, there is a higher penalty attached to their theft. This higher penalty relates to the *symbolic aspect* of the forbidden act of man-stealing. Selling a useful beast that can be taken into a different part of the country makes it easier for the thief to escape detection. The thief does not wear a stolen jewel or use a stolen tool, which would make it easier to detect his crime locally. The animal, which was under the personal protection of its owner, is separated from the owner permanently. Biblical law therefore stipulates that the thief who does sell the beast is placed under greater risk. Should he be proven to be the thief, he will be required to pay four-fold or five-fold restitution to the victim.

This explanation may seem strained, but it is necessary if we are to make sense of Exodus 22:9, which regulates property placed in trust with a neighbor. If the neighbor loses the goods, they both must go before the civil magistrates. If the neighbor is found guilty, he pays double restitution. “For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour.”

Why should the neighbor be required to pay only double restitution for a sheep or ox in this case? What about five-fold and four-fold restitution? My answer: because the neighbor cannot conceal the crime in the way that the outsider can when he slaughters or sells the animal. In short, *it is easier for the victimized owner to prove his legal case against a neighbor than it is for him to prove his case against an unknown thief who disposes of the evidence*. Thus, the penalty imposed on the neighbor is double restitution, which is the standard requirement for the theft of all other goods except slaughtered or sold oxen and sheep. Because the owner faces reduced difficulties in recovering his property, and the thief therefore faces increased risk, the penalty payment is reduced.

Conclusion

What will be the marks of civil justice during an era of biblical

justice? Victims will see the restoration of their stolen assets, while criminals will see their ill-gotten capital melt away because of the financial burden of making restitution payments. The dual sanctions of *curse and blessing*—part four of the biblical covenant model⁶¹—are invoked and imposed wherever the principle of restitution is honored in the courts, both civil and ecclesiastical. Restitution brings both *judgment and restoration*, which affect individual lives and social institutions.

There are limits to biblical restitution. First, the full value of whatever was stolen is returned by the thief to the original owner. Second, the thief makes an additional penalty payment equal to the value of the item stolen. To encourage criminals to admit their guilt and seek restoration before their crimes are discovered, the Bible imposes a reduced penalty of 20% on those who admit their guilt voluntarily (Lev. 6:2–5).

There are two exceptions to double restitution. The law singles out oxen and sheep as deserving special protection in the form of five-fold and four-fold restitution in cases where the stolen animals are killed or sold. Because oxen and sheep are symbolic of mankind, the law thereby points to the need of protecting men from oppression and slavery. He is given responsibility over oxen and sheep, implying that he is also given responsibility over other men in various circumstances. To thwart a man in the exercise of his lawful occupation is a crime against dominion man, and is punishable by God.

Proportional restitution is imposed by the civil government as God's lawful representative on earth. The three economic goals of proportional restitution are these: (1) restoring full value to the victim; (2) protecting future potential victims by means of the deterrence effect of the penalty payment (Deut. 13:11): (a) animals, especially those symbolic of man's helplessness (sheep and oxen), and (b) property owners; and (3) offsetting the lower economic risks of detection associated with certain kinds of theft—the slaughter or sale of specially protected edible animals.

Biblical restitution also has at least three civil goals in addition to the three economic goals. The first civil goal of restitution is to make life easier for the law-abiding citizen by fostering external social conditions in which he can live in peace and safety. Peace and safety are the fully legitimate goals of all biblical justice, which God has promised to

61. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

bring to pass in world history through His church during a future period of earthly millennial peace. The nations will come to God's church ("the mountain of the house of the LORD") in search of true justice (Mic. 4:1–5).

A second civil goal of biblical restitution is to make possible the full *judicial* restoration of the criminal to society after he has paid the victim what he owes him.⁶² The state is not to concern itself with the psychological restoration of the criminal, the victim, or society in general. The state's jurisdiction is strictly limited to the realm of the judicial: *restitution*. The psychological state of the criminal is between himself and God, as is the psychological state of the victim. Nevertheless, as in the case of the salvation of any individual by God's grace, judicial restoration is the first step toward psychological restoration.

The third civil goal of biblical restitution is not intuitively obvious, but it may be the most important goal for the modern world. A system of biblical restitution is required in order to reduce the likelihood that citizens will come to view the civil government as an agency that lawfully initiates programs leading to personal or social transformation. The state's task is to assess the economic damage that was inflicted on the victim and then impose judgment on the convicted criminal that will reimburse the victim for his loss, plus a penalty payment. Normally, this means double restitution. The state is not an agency of creative transformation. It is not a savior state. Men should not seek to make the state an agency of social salvation. It is supposed to enforce biblical civil law—no more, no less. The state is not supposed to seek to make men righteous; its God-assigned task is to restrain certain specified acts of public evil. Theft is one of these acts.

Civil government is an agency of visible judgment in history. Justice demands judgment. The judgments handed down by civil government acknowledge the historic judgments of God, as well as point to the final judgment of God. The goal of civil justice is always restoration; restoration through restitution or restoration through execution. This two-fold system of civil judgment also characterizes God's judgments, which are equally judicial.

62. The modern American practice of never again allowing convicted felons to vote is clearly immoral. Under biblical law, a convicted criminal becomes a *former* convicted criminal when he has made full restitution to his victims. In this sense, he is "resurrected" judicially. After he has paid his debt to his victims, he must be restored to full political participation. To segregate the former convicted criminal from any area of civic authority or participation is to deny judicially that full civil restoration is made possible by means of God's civil law.

When God deals with His people in a harsh way in history, it is a means of restoration: *judgment unto restoration*, not judgment unto destruction. The atoning work of Jesus Christ at Calvary points the way to a better world in history; restitution has been made to God by the only possible ethically acceptable representative of man, the Son of God. The Christian's expectation of better earthly times is therefore valid. Christ's restitution payment has been made, on earth and in history.

One thing is needed to translate His atonement into social reality: the progressive transformation of the criminal justice system in terms of biblical law, something that cannot take place until the humanistic theology which undergirds the existing system of justice is replaced by biblical orthodoxy. Anyone who denies that such a progressive transformation of the criminal justice system is possible in history is thereby also denying that the atoning work of Christ can be manifested progressively in history. Anyone who denies that such a progressive transformation of the criminal justice system will actually take place in history is thereby also denying that the atoning work of Christ can be manifested progressively in history. People should therefore consider carefully the economic, social, political, and ethical implications of their eschatological views. When they make eschatological pronouncements, they are inescapably also making economic, social, political and ethical pronouncements. Eschatology and ethics cannot be successfully separated.

POLLUTION, OWNERSHIP, AND RESPONSIBILITY

If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution. If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution (Ex. 22:5–6).

The theocentric issue raised by this passage rests on the recognition of each person's legal obligations as a responsible steward over private property (hierarchy: point 2) in a world in which God is the absolute owner of the world (sovereignty: point 1). As part of His providential administration over the world, God establishes boundaries in life (boundaries: point 3). These boundaries are ultimately ethical: the boundaries between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. The existence of these ethical boundaries is reflected in every area of life. Man cannot think or act apart from boundaries of various kinds. These ethical boundaries are reinforced by legal boundaries that separate the use of property. Boundaries are therefore inescapably tied to the legal issue of personal responsibility before God and man. To enforce these boundaries, God imposes penalties for their violation: (point 4: sanctions). This structure of biblical authority is basic to the extension of the kingdom of God in history (point 5: inheritance).

This passage deals with fire. Fire is a form of pollution. In this case, it has a source. It has a victim. It spreads across legal boundaries. This boundary violation calls forth sanctions: restitution. This simple legal relationship is the biblical starting point for a discussion of pollution in general. This legal relationship has economic effects. It provides the proper conceptual framework for an analysis of the economics of pollution.

A. God Allocates Property and Responsibility

God parcels out property to his subordinates. The very phrase, *parcels out*, reflects the noun, a parcel. God places specified units of land under the administration of specific individuals, families, and institutions. This *division of authority is an aspect of God's overall system of the division of labor*. Responsibility for the administration of specific property units can therefore be specified by law. *The allocation of legal responsibility matches the allocation of property*. God holds specific people responsible for their stewardship over specific pieces of property. This enables owners to evaluate their own performance as stewards, and it also allows the free market and God-ordained governmental authorities to evaluate owners' specific performance. The ultimate economic issues are these: (1) each person's stewardship over property in history and (2) God's judicial response in history and at the final judgment to their administration of His property (Matt. 25). The temporal institutional issues of ownership-stewardship are covenantally related to these ultimate issues.

1. Property Rights

These verses make plain at least three facts. First, the Bible affirms the moral and legal legitimacy of the private ownership of the means of production. Fields and cattle and crops are owned by private individuals. Second, private property rights (legal immunities from action by others) are to be defended by the civil government. The state can and must require those people whose activities injure their neighbor or their neighbor's property to make restitution payments to those injured. Third, owners are therefore responsible for their own actions and for the actions of their subordinates, including wandering beasts.¹

This combination of (1) privately owned property, (2) personal liability, and (3) predictable court enforcement of private property rights is the foundation of capitalism. It surely was a major aspect of the West's long-term economic growth.² But, as I argue in this chapter,

1. Hammurabi's Code penalized a man who neglected to repair a dike on his property, which in turn broke and allowed his neighbor's property to be flooded: CH, paragraph 53. If he allowed water to flow through his canal and onto his neighbor's property, he was liable: CH, paragraph 55. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 168.

2. Nathan Rosenberg and L. E. Birdsell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), ch. 4.

this property ownership arrangement is also important for both the reduction and the allocation of pollution.

2. *The Wandering Domestic Animal*

We begin with the case of the wandering animal. It wanders from its property and invades another man's corn field. It eats some of this corn. The owner of the beast owes the victimized neighbor the equivalent of whatever has been destroyed.³ The owner of the beast must not short-change the victim; he pays from the best of his field. The legal principle is that the injured party is entitled to the replacement of his damaged goods by the best of the responsible party's possessions. What is the theocentric principle that this legal principle reflects? It is this: *God, in imposing an appropriate restitution payment from rebellious mankind, is entitled to the best that man has to offer*. This is why man was not allowed under the Old Covenant to bring to God's sacrificial altar any injured or blemished animal (Lev. 1:10). "But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing" (Mal. 1:14a). When Ananias and Sapphira brought only part of their pledged money to the church, but claimed that they were bringing in all of it, God killed them (Acts 5:1–10).⁴ They had violated a fundamental biblical principle. They became publicly cursed deceivers. "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

3. *Restitution to God*

This theocentric principle governing restitution to God points to the ultimate principle governing the atonement: *only a perfect offering for sin can placate the God of perfect wrath*. Anyone who attempts to bring a blemished sacrifice to the altar of God will be destroyed. This, of course, is the underlying soteriological requirement that made ne-

3. Maimonides made this peculiar exception: "If an animal eats foodstuffs harmful to it, such as wheat, the owner is exempt because it has not benefited." Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), I:III:3, p. 12. That the victim must suffer an economic loss just because his neighbor's animal did not profit biologically from its invasion of the former's property is a principle of justice that needs a great deal of explaining. Maimonides provided no further discussion; he just laid down this principle of Jewish law, and went on.

4. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

cessary the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Only a perfect man, God's own Son, can serve as an acceptable sacrifice for sinful mankind (Heb. 2:14–18; 9:12–14). A sinful man will perish eternally if he attempts to short-change God by offering anything on judgment day in place of exclusive faith in the true mediator and high priest, Jesus Christ.

Initially, Exodus 22:5–6 may seem self-explanatory. Nevertheless, when we consider the passage in the light of the many intellectual and institutional problems related to the whole question of pollution and ecology, its application in society becomes an enormously complex judicial task. Without the legal guidelines established by the passage, we could not deal effectively with the pollution problem.

B. Pollution: Socialistic and Free Market

Contrary to many of the twentieth-century critiques of both capitalism and pollution, socialist commonwealths did not produce reasonable, cost-effective, workable solutions to the pollution problem.⁵ Think of Poland's Katowice region, in which the sulphuric and nitric acids released into the atmosphere by coal and steel plants so corroded the railway tracks that the trains were not allowed to go over 25 miles per hour.⁶ Think of the workers in Cracow's steel plant, where in 1980, 80% of those leaving the plant received disability payments, and 7.5% died while still employed.⁷ The problem is inherent in the state's ownership of the means of production; the means of production necessarily must include the workers. The state owns their labor. Ultimately, the radical socialist and Communist states assert actual ownership of the workers, disposing of them however the bureaucrats see fit. It is "common ownership"—bureaucratic ownership—which creates most of the economic incentives to pollute and exploit the environment, because leaders within the civil government's hierarchy become the unnoticed beneficiaries of the increased output of lower-cost industrial processes that produce the pollution. The plant managers meet their state-assigned output quotas less expensively (for their local plants) by transferring some of the costs of production to the public: smoke, noise, chemical wastes, etc. Politically acceptable solutions to wide-

5. Fred Singleton (ed.), *Environmental Misuse in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1976).

6. Lloyd Timberlake, "Poland—the most polluted country in the world?" *New Statesman* (22 October 1981), p. 248.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

spread pollution have never been successfully implemented in socialist societies because it is the private ownership of the means of production that serves as a key element in any successful program of pollution control.⁸

At the same time, free market economists have not been able to produce theoretically acceptable solutions to the problem of pollution that do not rest heavily on the idea of the necessity of government intervention into market operations. The problem then becomes: *How much intervention is appropriate in any given case?* There is no theoretically acceptable answer to this problem. In fact, because of the very nature of modern economic theory, there never will be a theoretically acceptable solution that is consistent with contemporary economics. I have added Appendix H to prove this assertion. It deals with the crucial, neglected, and somewhat technical problem: *determining social cost*. I have added it in order to demonstrate that conventional humanist economic theory is epistemologically incapable of dealing with the problem of pollution—or any problem of applied economics, for that matter—because there is no self-consistent way for the economist to go from modern economics’ methodological individualism to collective decision-making in terms of the presuppositions of modern economic theory. The economists almost never discuss this embarrassing fact, although the more sophisticated members of the economics profession have been aware of it since at least 1938,⁹ but it is nonetheless a fact.

Thus, both collectivism and free enterprise face a growing problem, the problem of minimizing the negative effects of pollution without simultaneously destroying the benefits of economic growth. Neither variety of secular economic theory has a scientific answer to this problem. This is why Christian economics is needed. This is why we must begin our economic analysis with Exodus 22:5–6.

C. Capturing Economics for Christ

The theoretical and practical problems associated with the pollution question are numerous. The problems are ethical, technical, theoretical, and ultimately philosophical. Economists do not like to admit that all problems in applied economic theory have inherent and ines-

8. See Appendix I: “Pollution in the Soviet Union.”

9. The debate in *The Economic Journal* between Lionel Robbins and Roy Harrod. I discuss this in *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

capable ethical and philosophical aspects, so they tend to ignore or even suppress these aspects of applied economics when discussing them in their scholarly journals. This is why modern economics to a great extent is fraudulent—a mental contrivance to conceal fundamental ethical issues, a series of rarified mental exercises devised for agnostics by agnostics. But the agnostics maintain monopoly control over the professional journals because they control the funds, the academic institutions, and the certification of younger scholars. This epistemological agnosticism must change if economics as a discipline is to be saved, but only self-consciously Christian scholars can redeem it.

How should Christians go about redeeming any academic discipline? By beginning with the whole Bible as academically and professionally authoritative. Christians must begin to tackle those intellectual problems for which the humanists have no consistent answers. In the case of economics, Christians must follow the lead set by Cornelius Van Til in philosophy. Van Til did not ask: “Is Christian philosophy valid?” He started with the premise that there is no valid philosophy except Christian philosophy. That is what I have asserted with regard to Christian economics. The humanists have run out of internally consistent answers. In fact, they never had accurate answers that were not implicitly based on biblical presuppositions, and the further away the economists get from the Bible, the fewer accurate answers they provided.

We can see this drift away from theoretically consistent answers by a study of a specific problem of applied economics, pollution. This chapter can serve as an introduction to the kinds of theoretical and practical problems that face professional economists, and that also face Christians who are intent upon redeeming economics for Christ. It is a scaled-down study, not overly technical (except for Appendix H, on social costs). It is only an introduction. Nevertheless, the topic’s complexity may scare off Christian laymen. Because of this complexity, I need to list in advance some of the basic themes in this lengthy chapter. The reader should be prepared to think through some fundamental ethical issues. This is the price of the first phase of Christian reconstruction.

- How to assess true costs and benefits
- Overusing “free” resources
- Private property vs. disputes
- Fire as pollution
- Damage and restitution

Restitution in advance (discounts)
 Allowing prior pollution to continue
 Voluntary contracts that allow pollution
 Pollution and the varying costs of knowledge
 Risks that can be insured against
 Undiscovered risk and legal liability
 Retroactive penalties vs. innovation
 Externalities: forcing you to pay me
 How to allocate pollution regionally
 A pollution auction
 Wastes and stewardship: Who pays?
 Pollution as trespassing
 The problem of moving fluids: liability
 Automobile emissions: noise and exhaust
 Fire codes: Are they biblical?
 Organizing injured victims
 Exchanging risks voluntarily
 Increased wealth and pollution complaints
 Localism and pollution control
 Subsidizing the politically skilled
 The anti-dominion impulse
 Claims of future generations
 Incentives and sanctions
 Pollution and responsibility
 State officers as surrogates
 Information and pollution: Who knew?
 Incentives and sanctions to stop
 Zero pollution: a messianic quest

D. The “Tragedy of the Commons”

A fundamental economic problem in any system of common ownership is the problem of assessing true costs and benefits.

1. *Common Land*

Historically, one of the most familiar of these systems of common ownership has been commonly held land. From the Middle Ages through at least the late seventeenth century, these property units were known as “the commons,” and the term still persists in some regions of the United States, referring usually to city parks.

Where the community allows citizens to place their grazing animals on the commons, a whole series of difficulties emerges. The economic benefits accrue directly to the man who places his animal on the

“free” land, but the costs are borne by everyone in the community who would like to use the property for any other purpose. In Puritan New England in the seventeenth century, roaming animals uprooted plants and overgrazed pastures. Townspeople cut down trees in the night for firewood or fencing.¹⁰ Similar problems have plagued the commons in every culture. This is the direct result of a system of ownership in which economic gains go to individual users and costs are borne by non-users.

Such a system inevitably produces economic waste and personal disputes over the proper use of the common property. Those who benefit directly from their personal use of the commons have few direct economic incentives to conserve the commons’ scarce economic resources, for these resources are obtained at nearly zero cost to the private users. The cost of running one additional animal on the commons is minutely felt by any single taxpayer-owner, but he receives the full benefits immediately. Individual benefits are high; per capita costs are low. There is an economic incentive to overgraze the commons, for economic restraints are minimal (e.g., taking your animals to the pasture), while the benefits are direct. This creates a system of “positive economic feedback” rather than “negative feedback.” It leads to a situation described by some scholars as “the tragedy of the commons.”¹¹ It involves such phenomena as overgrazing, soil exhaustion, and pollution. J. H. Dales correctly observed: “The economic effect of making common property available for use on a no-rule basis, so that it may be freely used by anyone for any purpose at any time, is crystal clear. Common property will be over-used relative to both private property and to public property that is subject to charges for its use or to rules about its use; and if the unrestricted common property resource is depletable, over-use will in time lead to its depletion and therefore to the destruction of the property.”¹²

10. Gary North, “The Puritan Experiment in Common Ownership,” *The Freeman* (April 1974); reprinted in *Puritan Economic Experiments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gnpuritanecon>)

11. Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* (13 Dec. 1968). (<http://bit.ly/HardinCom>) Hardin called for greater government intervention rather than an expansion of private property rights. A refutation is C. R. Batten’s “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *The Freeman* (Oct. 1970). (<http://bit.ly/BatCom>). See also Robert J. Smith, “Resolving the Tragedy of the Commons by Creating Private Property Rights in Wildlife,” *Cato Journal*, I (Fall 1981), pp. 439–68, and “Comment” by Walter N. Thurman, pp. 469–71.

12. J. H. Dales, *Pollution, Property, and Prices: An Essay in Policy-Making and Economics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 63.

2. *Private Ownership*

The private ownership of property drastically reduces these problems. Private costs are more readily, accurately, and inexpensively assessed than public or social costs, precisely because private owners directly face the effects of their own economic decisions. The cost of adding another animal to the land is borne directly by the man who expects to profit from the decision, if the owner of the animal is also the owner of the land.¹³ When the expected private costs of adding one more animal to the land exceed expected future benefits, owners will stop adding new animals. Private costs and private benefits tend to balance over the long run. The better the knowledge that owners have about costs and benefits, the more rapidly these costs and benefits will be balanced. Scarce economic resources are thereby better conserved in a legal system that affirms and enforces private ownership of the means of production, i.e., the free market system.

Nevertheless, men are continually tempted to pass on their costs of operation to their neighbors, while retaining personally all the benefits of production. In private affairs, this quite properly is called theft. One man may sneak his animals into another man's field. The other man is harmed economically—robbed of a portion of his land's productivity. The injured party has an immediate economic incentive to put a stop to his neighbor's practice of transferring production costs to him. His incentive as an injured private owner to stop the practice is far greater than it would be in a system of common ownership, where the injury is spread over the entire population of so-called owners. (Do we really own common property? If a man cannot disown a piece of property, it is difficult to see how he can be said to own it.¹⁴ At best, the costs of "disownership" are high; they involve political mobilization, not simply a private offer to sell.)

13. In the case of land which is rented or leased, the renter may attempt to pass some of these costs to the owner. He may allow his animals to overgraze, or he may allow the soil to be depleted or damaged in other ways. Profit-seeking owners need to consider these costs when they draw up the terms of the lease. The original lease contract may impose penalties on renters who damage the property, or it may include incentives so that he will care for it. These economic-legal problems plagued Irish tenant farming during the centuries of absentee English ownership: Richard A. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), pp. 63–65.

14. "The corollary of the right of ownership is the right of disownership. So if I cannot sell a thing, it is evident that I do not really own it." F. A. Harper, *Liberty: A Path to Its Recovery* (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1949), p. 106. (<http://bit.ly/HarperLiberty>)

The desire to reduce costs is strongly felt on both sides of the fence that separates privately owned properties. In fact, the very existence of the fence testifies to a man's desire to keep outsiders from transferring their costs to him. Of course, a fence also testifies to people's desire to avoid having their "benefits" wander off, especially if they might cause damage to another person's property, assuming restitution is the law of the land. As the American poet Robert Frost put it in his poem *Mending Wall*, good fences make good neighbors. What we need is a system of law that encourages people to mend their own fences. We need to do better than Talmudic Judaism, which simply forbade Jews to breed cattle, sheep, and goats anywhere near towns or settlements. These animals could be legally bred only in desert areas.¹⁵

3. Fences Reduce Conflicts

The Bible affirms that those who violate fences or property lines must make full restitution to the economically injured neighbor. The assessment of harm is easier to make than under common ownership. "His cows ate this row of corn in my cornfield." The owner of the damage-producing animals is responsible. Responsibility and ownership are directly linked under a system of private property rights. Under a system of private ownership, property lines are in effect cost-cutting devices, for they serve as cost-assessing devices. Without clearly defined property rights, and therefore without clearly defined responsibilities, the rights of "property"—God's living creatures and a created environment under man's dominion (Gen. 9:1–17)¹⁶—will be sacrificed.

Carefully defined property rights also help to reduce social conflicts. Dales wrote:

Unrestricted common property rights are bound to lead to all sorts of social, political, and economic friction, especially as population pressure increases, because, in the nature of the case, individuals have no legal rights with respect to the property when its government owner follows a policy of "anything goes." Notice, too, that such a policy, though apparently neutral as between conflicting interests, in fact always favours one party against the other. Technolo-

15. Aaron Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law: Aspects of Jewish Business Ethics* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Yeshiva University, 1980), p. 68. He cited the Talmudic book, *Baba Kamma*, 79b, 80a. He also cited numerous rabbinic sources: Maimonides, Karo, etc. (p. 194, note 42).

16. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 17.

gically, swimmers cannot harm the polluters, but the polluters can harm the swimmers; when property rights are undefined those who wish to use the property in ways that deteriorate it will inevitably triumph every time over those who wish to use it in ways that do not deteriorate it.¹⁷

Common ownership of large bodies of water, when coupled with an opportunity to pass on private costs of polluted production, increases the extent of water pollution. This is a bad system for the swimmers of this world.

In questions of pollution and environmental quality, there can be no neutrality. There are always winners and losers, although net winners may suffer some losses (air polluters breathe, too), and net losers may gain some benefits (asthmatics may earn high incomes by working for firms that sell raw materials to local polluting factories). It is the task of biblical exegesis to establish the ethical and legal foundations that enable civil judges to do the following: (1) identify the winners and the losers; (2) adjudicate cases properly in the sight of God; and (3) determine what is fair compensation to the losers from any unauthorized winners. One thing is certain: we cannot hope to attain a zero-pollution environment. All life is a form of pollution.

E. Fire and Pollution

Each owner is also responsible for whatever actions that his animate or inanimate objects do that injure others. A fire that a man kindles on his land must be kept restrained to his property. If the fire spreads to his neighbor's field, he is fully accountable for all the damages. Men therefore have an incentive to take greater care when using potentially dangerous tools or techniques.

The problem of pollution should be subsumed under the general principle of responsibility for fire. A fire is a physical cause of physical damage. From the case-law example in Exodus 22:5, it is clear that a fire that a man starts is his responsibility. He cannot legally transfer risks to his neighbor without his neighbor's consent.

The Bible is not talking here about some shared project in which both men expect to profit, such as burning fields to get rid of weeds or unwanted grass. In such a mutually shared project, the case-law example of the man who rents his work animal to a neighbor, but who stays with the animal the whole time, is applicable. The neighbor is not

17. Dales, *Pollution*, p. 67.

required to pay anything beyond the hiring fee to the owner (Ex. 22:14–15).¹⁸ If the animal is hurt or killed, the neighbor owes nothing. (If the two men start a fire that spreads to a third party's property and damages it, English common law holds both of them responsible, though not necessarily in equal economic portions, because the victim can collect more money from one than another¹⁹—what we might call “deeper pockets jurisprudence.” Such a legal tradition makes joint activities between rich men and poor men less likely; the rich person, if he is aware of the law, knows that he will be required by the court to pay the lion's share of any joint restitution, simply because he can pay it more easily.)

There is no doubt that the fire-starter is responsible for all subsequent fires that his original fire starts. Sparks from a fire can spread anywhere. A fire beginning on one man's farm can spread to thousands of acres. Fire is therefore essentially unpredictable. Its effects on specific people living nearby cannot be known with precision. I adopt the principle of uncertainty, meaning the unpredictability of the specific, individual consequences of any fire, as the governing principle of my discussion of restitution for damage-producing fires, as well as laws relating to the regulation of fire hazards.

What about pollution? Specifically, what about the uncertainty aspect of pollution? A Christian economist should argue that a man must not pollute his neighbor's property without making restitution to him for any new damaging effects. If existing pollution is discovered to be more harmful medically or ecologically than had been understood before, the polluter should be required to reimburse those who are subsequently affected adversely by the pollutant after the information concerning the danger is made public by the state or becomes known within the polluting industry. (I will consider the legal and economic problems associated with retroactive responsibility in a subsection of this chapter, F:3: “Undiscovered Risk.”)

1. Land Discounts: Restitution in Advance

But what if the complaining neighbor had purchased his land knowing all about present nuisance effects (as distinguished from subsequently discovered nuisance effects) of the pollution process that was going on next door to his property? Does he now have the legal

18. Chapter 47.

19. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, pp. 171–73.

right to sue his neighbor, who is doing exactly what he was doing before the contiguous property was sold? After all, the buyer bought the property at a discount as a result of the depressing effect on local land prices produced by the pollution. There is no doubt that there is an inverse relationship between the damage caused by pollution and land rents (and therefore the market price of land): the greater the pollution, the lower the rents.²⁰ The purchase price of land—the capitalization of expected net returns over time—reveals this inverse relationship.

Economic analysis informs us about the costs and benefits of biblical morality, and biblical law tells us who should bear these costs and receive these benefits. As potential buyers, we look at the discount in the purchase price of the land next door to a polluting production process, and we can conclude that this discount serves as an advance payment of restitution to the buyer. It is an advance payment for specified, known kinds of expected future “spillovers.” The nuisance effects of these spillovers from the property next door are implicitly agreed to by the buyer when he receives his discount from the seller. Any subsequent attempt by the buyer to demand financial compensation from the polluter under such circumstances is simply a demand for a statist, compulsory redistribution of private property. So is any legislation that would force the polluter to reduce pollution, unless new information regarding the dangers of the pollution is discovered. It would be a demand for restitution in addition to the discount already received by the buyer when he bought the property.

Murray Rothbard used the concept of the “homesteading principle” to defend the legal right of a polluter to continue to pollute. By developing a previously unused piece of land, the polluter has created an easement right to whatever polluting processes he adopts, just so long as these processes do no physical harm to those people who owned nearby property when he bought or discovered his land. He “owns the right” to emit noise or other forms of pollution, assuming his original neighbors were unaffected. In the case of pollution, he called this a pollution easement.²¹ This is comparable to the right to start a fire on property you own.

20. T. D. Crocker, “Externalities, Property Rights, and Transaction Costs: An Empirical Study,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, XIV (Oct. 1971), p. 452.

21. Murray N. Rothbard, “Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution,” *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), p. 77; reprinted in Rothbard, *The Logic of Action: Two* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. (1997), pp. 146–47. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardLPRAP>)

The Christian economist could also argue that a protesting “pro-environmentalist” who demands that the civil government put a stop to his neighbor’s pollution is seeking to achieve a less polluted lifestyle at his neighbor’s expense, despite the fact that he bought the property at a discount because of the pollution. Would the protester be willing to pass on to the polluter any increase in the value of his property that results from the reduction of pollution, to help defray the costs of reducing the pollution? Or would he be willing to return an amount of money equal to the increased property value to the original seller, who had to take a discount in order to sell the property? If not, why not? Economically speaking, he is demanding double compensation: initially from the seller, who took a discount, and then from the polluter. Is this fair, even in the name of ecology?

2. Sewers and Property Value

Perhaps we can better understand the economic issues that are involved here by examining the economics involved in the installation of water or sewer lines in a region of town that had previously been dependent on wells and septic tanks. The municipal government could make an offer to local residents who are about to see their property values rise as a result of the new municipal service. The city says: “If you want to hook up to the new lines, you must pay a high hook-up fee to the municipal water company—a fee closer to the full value of the resulting increase in your property’s value.” In short, the resident who receives the increase in the value of his land must pay for this appreciated value. This is the way that new sewer projects should be financed, not by assessing all taxpayers in the community. Those who benefit directly and immediately should bear the full costs of the project, or at the minimum, should be required to pay the equivalent of the immediate increase in the value of the property, perhaps in the form of higher assessments per month for a fixed period of time. If sewers were financed this way, there would probably be less political resistance from local taxpayers to local growth.²²

What is the economic principle involved? Simple: one person should not be compelled by the state to finance the exclusive increase in value of another person’s property. The taxpayer whose property is unaffected by the increased benefits associated with a new water or

22. Gary North, “Public Goods and Fear of Foreigners,” *The Freeman* (March 1974). (<http://bit.ly/PublicGoods>)

sewer line should not suffer economic losses (higher property taxes or water bills) because he has to pay for another resident's economic windfall (waterfall?). The beneficiary should pay for the benefit.

So it is with pollution. The beneficiary of the improved environment—a benefit extracted through compulsion by the civil government—should pay for this improvement. He should compensate the neighbor for the costs borne by the neighbor in reducing the existing level of pollution.

3. Private Contracts

Why should the civil government get involved in the dispute at all? Why shouldn't the benefit-seeker approach the polluter directly and offer him direct compensation? The beneficiary knows approximately what it would be worth to him to escape from the pollutant. The polluter knows approximately what the value of being able to pollute means to him. If the benefit-seeker's price is high enough, he can persuade the polluter to sign a contract guaranteeing to reduce or eliminate the polluting activity. In effect, the benefit-seeker pays to the polluter part or all of the discount he initially received from the seller.

The polluter may reject the offer. Under the assumptions of this hypothetical example, this is his legal privilege. But it costs him to reject the offer. He forfeits the economic benefit offered by the pollution-avoider. His cost of continuing to pollute has just risen appreciably. He can no longer pollute at zero cost. He has an economic incentive to stop polluting the environment.

I am speaking here of pollution that was known in advance, and for which the buyer of the adjacent property received a discount. I am not speaking of new pollution or an older pollution process which, through improved scientific knowledge, is now understood to be more of a physical hazard than had been understood before.

Summary

By assigning to individuals the economic and legal responsibilities of ownership, God imposes on individuals the burden of assessing the costs and benefits of their actions. There is no escape from this economic responsibility. "No decision" is still a decision. If an asset is squandered, the owner loses.

The chief failure of what is commonly referred to as collective ownership is that no individual can be sure that his assessment of the

costs and benefits of a particular use of any asset is the same assessment that those whom he represents economically would make. The tendency is for individuals who are legally empowered to make these representative decisions to decide in terms of what is best for them as individuals. There is also a tendency for the decision-maker to make mistakes, because he cannot know the minds and desires of the community as a whole.

The common property tends to be wasted unless restraints on its use are imposed by the civil government. The “positive feedback” signals of high profits for the users are not offset by equally constraining “negative feedback” signals. Users of a scarce economic resource benefit highly as immediate users, yet they bear few costs as diluted-responsibility collective owners. Thus, in order to “save the property from exploitation,” the civil government steps in and regulates users. This leads to political conflicts.

The biblical solution to this problem is to establish clear ownership rights (legal immunities) for property. The individual assesses costs and benefits in terms of his scale of values. He represents the consumer as an economic agent only because he has exclusive use of the property as legal agent. He produces profits or losses with these assets in terms of his abilities as an economic steward. The market tells him whether he is an effective agent of the competing consumers.

The legal system simultaneously assigns responsibility for the administration of these privately owned assets to the legal owners. It becomes the owners’ legal responsibility to avoid physically damaging their neighbors through the use of their privately held property. The specific biblical classification of fire damage governs pollution in general.

There is no doubt that living close to a source of pollution increases the risk of suffering economic losses. The market reveals this by forcing sellers of polluted or nearly polluted land to offer discounts to buyers. This leads us to conclude that if a person has bought a piece of property at a discount because of its proximity to a known source of pollution, the buyer has no legal claim against the polluter unless the latter adds to the level of pollution or else new dangers regarding the pollution itself are subsequently discovered.

The civil government should not tax one group in order to reward exclusively some other group. Thus, individuals should pay to gain access to a cleaner environment if they are the only (or primary) beneficiaries of the cleaner environment. Each person should assess the costs

and benefits of living in a cleaner environment. Nevertheless, when someone begins to damage his neighbor's physical environment, the victim should be able by law to put a stop to the polluter's activity or else be compensated by the polluter.

F. Pollution and the Costs of Knowledge

If pollution is really equivalent to fire's damaging effects, and because we see that the Bible makes all fire-starters legally liable for damages, then is this economic analysis of pollution and damages—the concept of the purchase price discount as a form of restitution payment—ethically biblical? Shouldn't all damage-inflicting pollution be banned, whether or not the buyer next door knew in advance about it? After all, he may also have known that the man next door started fires regularly, but he would also know in a biblical commonwealth that the fire-starter is personally liable for all future damages that his fire might cause. Why should the polluter be allowed to go on with his polluting without paying damages, yet the fire-starter be required to pay for all damages, irrespective of the neighbor's discount? Are the two cases ethically the same or different?

1. *The Economics of Uncertainty*

They are the same cases in principle, but they are different in application. To explain the differences in application, I must return to the issue of uncertainty. Specific effects of noise and smoke are known by the general public. They are nuisance effects. They are effects that buyers can estimate, at least to the extent that discounts are offered by sellers to buyers for agreeing to live next door to smoke and noise pollution. In contrast to the known effects of a familiar form of pollution, the specific effects of any given fire are uncertain. They can be negligible or catastrophic. A fire may affect people distant from the point of origin. Thus, the fire-starter is warned: be extremely careful. Biblical law warns all fire-starters: "You are legally responsible for all damages caused by your actions. We all know how dangerous fires are; do not attempt to transfer the side-effects to a neighbor." Under biblical law, society is partially protected from essentially unpredictable catastrophes, because those who light the fires are restrained by the threat of full financial responsibility for damages that the fires inflict.

The difference between "traditional" polluters—smoke, noise, smells—and fire-starters is primarily a difference in men's knowledge

of each action's future effects. The specific local effects of a familiar form of pollution are approximately known in advance to those who choose to live near pollution. The specific effects of specific fires caused by local fire-starters are not well known to nearby residents. Whether specific sparks from a specific fire will be harmless or will ignite this or that field, or this or that neighborhood, cannot be known in advance. I must focus my exegetical attention on these specific effects.

2. Insurable Risk

The existence of fire insurance does not invalidate this analysis of "the economics of specific effects." While it is often possible for a person to buy fire insurance, the reason why fire insurance is available at all is because companies insure many different regions, thereby taking advantage of "the law of large numbers." They can insure specific properties economically only because fires have known effects in the aggregate. If there were no known statistical pattern to fires in general, insurers would not insure specific properties against fire damage.

This is not to say that the following arrangement should be prohibited by law. A person who wishes to begin a business that is known to be dangerous approaches others who could be affected. "I'll make you a deal," he says. "I will pay for all increases in your insurance coverage if you let me begin this business in the neighborhood." If they agree, and if the insurance companies agree to write the policies, then he has met his obligations. He has made himself economically responsible for subsequent damages. Instead of paying for damages after the fact, he has paid in advance by providing the added insurance premiums necessary to buy the insurance.

What if some resident says "no"? The prospective producer of danger can then offer to buy him out by buying his property. If the offer is accepted, the prospective danger-producer can then either keep the property or sell it to someone who is willing to live with the risk, if the discount on the land's selling price is sufficiently large. But if the original owner refuses to sell, and if he also refuses to accept the offer regarding insurance premiums, then the first man should not be allowed to force out the original owner. If he begins the dangerous production process, the existing property owner can legitimately sue for damages. The court may require a money payment from the danger-producer to the potential victim. If it does, then many other

people may sue for damages. This threat will inhibit the dangerous production. The court need not necessarily prohibit the activity altogether.

Judges must do the best they can in estimating the costs and benefits to the community, including the perceived value to citizens everywhere of the preservation of private property rights by the state. They cannot estimate perfectly, for they cannot know the psychic costs and benefits involved in the minds of the conflicting parties. But they can make general, “unscientific” estimations, given the image of God in all men, and given the created environment in which all men live. This is an important application of biblical revelation to economics: if there is no universal humanity (no universal human nature) and no Creator who serves as the basis for man’s image, and no creation governed by the Creator in terms of His value and His laws, then it is impossible for the judges legitimately to have confidence in their estimation of social costs, social benefits, private costs, and private benefits. Without our knowledge of objective economic value provided by God’s plan and His image in man, objective economic value becomes epistemologically impossible.²³ Judges would then be blind in a sea of exclusively subjective economic values in which it is philosophically impossible for men to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.²⁴

3. *Undiscovered Risk*

If the case of the polluter and the fire-starter is essentially the same case ethically, then we have another legitimate question to deal with. Should the polluter be held fully responsible for any yet-to-be-discovered effects of his pollution? Should judges require polluters to make retroactive penalty payments to victims if dangerous effects of the pollution are discovered? After all, a man who starts a fire cannot escape responsibility for the damage his fire inflicts on others. Why should the polluter escape? Again, the ethical principle is the same, but the application is different. Again, the difference in application relates to the question of knowledge.

Men know about fire’s general potential for creating damage. It is a dangerous tool. In contrast, a particular form of pollution may not be known to be dangerous generally, although it is known to be a nuisance specifically. The nuisance factor is what provides the victim with

23. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

24. See Appendix H: “The Epistemological Problem of Social Cost.”

his discount when he buys the neighboring property—a discount appropriate to the known side-effects of the polluting process. The limited but known effects of the polluting activity can be dealt with by the victims. They receive compensation in advance in the form of discounted land purchase prices for relatively predictable damages.

The problem of uncertainty concerning pollution has increased since the end of World War II. The development of the petrochemical industry has created new problems associated with toxic wastes. The physiological effects of today's forms of pollution may not be well known. Uncertainty increases, making some forms of pollution more like the example of uncontrolled sparks than like smoke, whose effects are not lethal. The modern legal system has struggled with the implications of the new technology:

However, modern chemicals are suspected of causing physical injuries, such as cancer, and certain emotional dysfunctions having etiologies that are little understood by science or medicine. One of the most significant characteristics of the development of these types of diseases is their latency, the time between exposure and expression of the disease. For example, a few types of cancer have a latency period of 20 to 30 years while some mutagenic diseases may take a generation or more to become evident. Moreover, chemicals suspected of causing such diseases often function at low concentrations, e.g., parts per billion, or perhaps a single molecule. In addition, pollution injuries, unlike common traumatic injuries, may be inflicted on many persons located far from the pollution source.

Particularly baffling is their unpredictability. If a heavy beam falls upon a worker, the injury will be much the same regardless of who is struck. Exposure to identical concentrations of a given pollutant, however, may produce reactions varying from no observable ailment to a life-threatening emergency.

These characteristics create unprecedented uncertainty, thereby challenging the ability of the judicial system to perform its traditional role of balancing the availability of compensation for individual injury against the social benefits of the injury-causing agent.²⁵

25. Robert K. Best and James I. Collins, "Legal Issues in Pollution-Engendered Torts," *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), pp. 104–5. (<http://bit.ly/PollutionTorts>) See also Peter Huber, *Liability: The Legal Revolution and Its Consequences* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 67–70, 112–14.

4. *Retroactive Payments vs. Innovation*

The question of a retroactive payment in the future for late-appearing medical or ecological harm that was produced by the pollutant before the pollutant was regarded as dangerous is a controversial topic. Polluting when the specific effects are not presently regarded as dangerous seems to be a case of accidental harm without personal liability. Men are not omniscient. They should not be held personally liable for harm that results from seemingly harmless activities or activities that were known to be nuisance-producing, but for which the victims had received compensation, either directly (e.g., restitution) or indirectly (e.g., a discount on land purchase price).

This is an aspect of the judicial problem of negligence. Traditional Jewish law recognized that where no foreseeability was possible, individuals should not be held legally liable for damages that result from their actions. "Cases where the defendant is entirely exempt from liability because he was in no way negligent are of two kinds: (1) the plaintiff himself was negligent because he should have foreseen the possibility of damage, i.e., where the defendant acted in the usual way and the plaintiff acted in an unusual way and the damage was therefore unforeseeable; (2) neither party could have foreseen the possibility of damage and therefore neither was negligent."²⁶ These conditions are theoretical; seldom are real-life situations able to be defined this clearly. In the older common law tradition, if the courts determine that both parties are negligent, the victim must pay for his own losses—the doctrine of contributory negligence.²⁷ The point is clear, however: a legal system must not be constructed that rests on the operating presupposition that people can be expected to possess perfect foreknowledge.

If civil law does hold innovators financially responsible for possessing knowledge before even specialists have it, then innovation will be inhibited. Developers of potentially dangerous production methods will be afraid to produce anything new. The more rigorously the law links long-run damage to a particular new technology, the more that any given innovation will be regarded by producers as potentially dan-

26. Shalom Albeck, "TORTS. The Principle Categories of Torts," *The Principles of Jewish Law*, edited by Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975?), col. 321.

27. In recent years, a new doctrine has emerged: comparative negligence. It examines "relative fault" in accidents. It is a means of forcing some people or businesses to provide insurance for negligent accident victims. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, pp. 156–57. See also Huber, *Liability*, pp. 78–79.

gerous. The costs of testing all possible effects could conceivably wipe out most innovation. (By requiring perfect testing, and by enforcing this requirement perfectly, the civil government could wipe out all innovation perfectly.) At the very least, newer, more innovative but undercapitalized firms would be forced out of the market, which is one reason why large, bureaucratic, lawyer-filled, conventional, and heavily capitalized firms tend to favor government rules and regulations that make the introduction of a new technology expensive. If such legislation is passed, existing firms can then buy up innovative processes at prices lower than those that would otherwise have prevailed.

The costs (forfeited opportunities) borne by many members of society as a result of the innovation that is not introduced could easily be far greater than the damage inflicted by a mistake in the early stages of a production process. A classic example of just this sort of retarded technology is the American pharmaceutical industry, which is hemmed in by extremely expensive testing requirements—requirements that are designed more to protect the careers of the federal bureaucrats who are empowered by law to regulate the industry than designed to protect the public.²⁸

Common law recognizes a category of activities called ultrahazardous. The legal principle of strict liability applies to them. Those who are involved with them are held fully responsible, no matter what. Such things as blasting with explosives are included, as well as the ownership of wild animals. But “ultrahazardous activity” is a vague concept. There is a tendency to affix the label to new activities. Posner argued that because we do not know much about their effects, the best way to prevent damage may be to take greater care. This means imposing the law of strict liability until society gains more knowledge about them. This is a means of accident control.²⁹ The proper biblical response to this state-enforced limitation of innovation is to allow contracting parties to waive their right to sue in case damage results. The case of a terminally ill patient who is willing to try an experimental drug is an obvious example. Needless to say, this is rarely allowed by the bureaucrats.

I began with the premise that men are not omniscient; therefore,

28. Sam Peltzman, *Regulation of Pharmaceutical Innovation* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1974); Peltzman, “The Benefits and Costs of New Drug Regulation,” in R. Landau (ed.), *Regulating New Drugs* (University of Chicago Center for Public Policy Study, 1973); Robert B. Helms (ed.), *Drug Development and Marketing* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1975).

29. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, pp. 163–64.

knowledge is not a free good. A society generally should not make an increase of knowledge a retroactive liability on those who make a discovery and implement it. Retroactive compensation statutes would put too great a liability on polluters who discover a dangerous effect from the effluent that their company produces. The firm's officers would have too great an incentive to hide the results of their findings. It is better to encourage them to admit the existence of the problem and then remove the offending product or manufacturing process, or remove it geographically, in order to avoid any future judgments against them. Penalties could legitimately be imposed in cases where prudent research—"prudent" ultimately being defined retroactively by a jury—into the dangerous effects of a production process or a product was deliberately avoided by the producer. But from the standpoint of passing legislation in the United States, Article I, Section 9 of the United States Constitution prohibits *ex post facto* laws that declare some action illegal, and then retroactively impose damages on those who broke the law before it became a law—a wise, state-restraining provision of the Constitution.

Summary

Men are not omniscient; therefore, information must be paid for. Accurate information is even more expensive. Any approach to economics that does not honor this principle from start to finish will be filled with errors.³⁰

Individual sparks from a fire are unpredictable in their effects. We can make guesses about the overall effects of a fire, but an area of uncertainty is inescapable. Thus, when we analyze pollution damage in terms of the damage produced by a fire, we must be careful analytically. There are differences of available knowledge in the two types of cases, and therefore different solutions to the respective threats.

Living next door to a fire-starter may be tolerable. Farmers start fires to burn grasses or timber, for example. We do not call for a complete banning of all open fires. We do make people responsible for damage produced by fires that they start. The greater the danger of fire, the more concerned nearby residents must be. Sometimes, the public bans fires altogether.

The same is true of pollution. Sometimes polluters are allowed to continue to pollute the environment, especially if they have been pol-

30. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

luting it for a long time, and those nearby have purchased land at a discount. But with respect to newly discovered dangers, the polluter is warned: continue polluting, and you will be required to make restitution to victims. This is analogous to the warning to fire-starters if the wind shifts or increases. What was acceptable before may be unacceptable now.

Because no one can know everything, it is impossible to preserve life by eliminating every possible danger before taking any action. It would make human action impossible. We are not God; society must not expect people to perform as if they were God. Thus, there must always be limited legal liability in life. Nevertheless, for those actions that are known to be dangerous, people must be made legally responsible for their actions. This does not justify holding people fully responsible for actions made in terms of earlier knowledge. With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).³¹ If society tries to impose damages retroactively on actions that were taken yesterday based on yesterday's information, it would destroy the legal foundation of progress.

There can be no life without pollution. There can be no life without risk and uncertainty. We must not strive to build a zero-pollution, zero-risk world. What we must do is to restrain those who would impose added known risks in the lives of neighbors without the latter's permission. We find the legal rule that provides this restraint in Exodus 22:5–6.

G. Externalities

A man should not be prosecuted for polluting his own land, so long as the form of pollution does not have measurable, physical, and undesired effects on anyone else's life, health, or property. Because it is his own land, he has internalized the costs of pollution. (By "internalize," I do not mean simply a mental calculation; I mean that his property alone suffers from his actions.) He risks starting a fire on his own property, or he runs a herd of cattle on his own property. The man making the estimate of benefits is the same person who makes the estimate of costs; it is the same man who will reap what he sows.

Once he sells a section of his land, he no longer internalizes costs and benefits on the section that was sold. Another person is now in-

31. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

volved: his neighbor. The first man must not be allowed to pass on to his neighbor the risks of living next door to a person who sets fire on his property. The fire-starter cannot legally transfer to his neighbor the generally known but highly unpredictable specific, individual production costs of fire. Economic analysis must begin with the Bible's assessment of personal responsibility for a man's actions. It must begin with the presupposition of the rights (legal immunities) of private property. These rights must be protected by civil law and custom.

The act of polluting someone else's environment is a crime in cases where either production costs or consumption costs³² (including risks) that are known to a polluter but unknown to the victim are deliberately imposed on the victim. It is also a crime when someone begins a new and previously unpredicted polluting process without getting permission from future victims. In both cases, it is an attempt on the part of a beneficiary to "externalize" his costs of production or consumption by passing them along to others who do not profit directly from the production process or consumption activity. He lowers his costs by transferring a portion of these costs to innocent victims.

We can grasp the economics of pollution quite easily in the case of a manufacturer. Polluting allows him to retain a greater net income when he sells the goods, and it eventually allows him to increase output until his personally borne marginal costs equal his personally received marginal revenues, i.e., until he arrives at that level of output at which he loses money by producing one more item. But the total costs of production are higher than his personally borne marginal costs. These additional costs—costs above his personally borne costs—are involuntarily borne by the victims of his pollution. So, he continues to expand production above the level of output that he would have produced had he borne the full costs of his production process. If he is not required by law to share these marginal benefits with victims (restitution), and if he is also allowed to continue to pass on some of his production costs to them, then the law has created an incentive to over-produce this particular product.

There are many beneficiaries of this overproduction—overproduction that is subsidized by the victims of the pollution. Obviously, the owner of the firm benefits. Another group of beneficiaries is his customers, who can buy more goods at the same price, or the same number of goods at a lower price, than before the pollution process began.

32. An example of a consumption cost that produces net losses for a neighbor would be the keeping of pets that bark or bite or otherwise disturb the neighbor.

Third, there are employees of his company.

These groups of beneficiaries can become allies of the polluter in any political dispute concerning the continuation of the polluting practices. Edwin Dolan's comment is applicable.

If he has to clean up he may pass part of the cost along to his customers in the form of a price increase, so his customers may testify on his behalf before the city council. If less of the product can be sold at the higher price, he may have to lay off some of his workers, and thus his employees may join the propollution faction. The addition of these allies does not alter the normative analysis of the situation, for if the act of pollution itself is a crime then these allies are nothing but partners in crime. The customers of the firm are in a position analytically identical to the recipient of stolen goods. The producer kept his price low only by forcing the residents adjacent to his establishment involuntarily to subsidize the cost of production, by permitting their lungs and noses to be used as industrial waste disposal units, substituting for the mechanical units which should have been installed at the plant. The customers no more deserve to benefit from this tactic than the owner himself.³³

Dolan explicitly used normative economic analysis. He did not ignore ethics. To ignore ethics as a matter of methodological objectivity, as most humanistic free market economists claim that they must,³⁴ is to subsidize immorality. They are importing immorality into their "neutral" economic analysis, all in the name of scientific objectivity. There are always unrecognized and uncompensated victims of "neutral" economic analysis, at least in those cases when policy-makers take seriously an economist's suggestion (sometimes called "a conclusion of scientific economics").

H. Allocating Pollution

Dolan's analogies are both clever and graphic: consumers as "recipients of stolen goods," and nearby residents as "unpaid organic pollution-absorption devices." We need to pursue the analogy of the consumer as a receiver of stolen goods.

33. Edwin G. Dolan, *TANSTAAFL: The Economic Strategy for Environmental Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), pp. 42–43. TANSTAAFL, the book's cover tells us, stands for: "there ain't no such thing as a free lunch."

34. In fact, they sneak in their ethical views through the back door of applied economics—evaluating economic policies—and also through aggregation. See Appendix H: "The Epistemological Problem of Social Cost."

1. *Shifting Costs*

If a buyer of a domestically produced consumer good is enabled to make the purchase at a lower price than would have been possible, had the producer not been a polluter, then he has benefitted at the expense of the residents who have “absorbed” the pollution. The customer is a participant in the pollution process, even if he is unaware of the reason why he has been offered an opportunity to buy a product at a low price. The customer has transformed his private costs into social costs, for he in effect “hires” the polluter as his production agent when he makes the purchase. He provides the seller with money, which in turn encourages the producer to continue producing the product.

Should the customer be held legally responsible and economically responsible? No. He must assume that the producer is violating no laws in anyone’s community. He cannot investigate every instance of lower-than-normal prices. He must act in terms of what is presented before him—product and price—and not become a full-time, one-man investigative agency. He assumes that the local civil government in the producer’s region is serving as the agent of any injured local victims of pollution. The state should not attempt to impose on consumers all the producers’ costs of knowledge in every economic transaction.

If the civil government in the producer’s community steps in and requires the producer to install pollution-control equipment, and if the producer then discovers that he is in a position to pass these costs along to the buyer, at least temporarily, the buyer may begin to shop for a cheaper substitute. In this sense, the pollution-control equipment is essentially a tax. Contrary to popular opinion, taxes cannot be shifted forward to customers, at least not without uncertainty, precisely because customers may begin shopping around for cheaper, untaxed goods.³¹ What if some “foreign” producer—in a foreign nation, or a

31. Rothbard stressed this. “It is generally considered that any tax on production or sales increases the cost of production and therefore is passed on as an increase in price to the consumer. Prices, however, are never determined by costs of production, but rather the reverse is true. The price of a good is determined by its total stock in existence and the demand schedule for it on the market. But the demand schedule is not affected at all by the tax. The selling price is set by any firm at the maximum net revenue point, and any higher price, given the demand schedule, will simply decrease net revenue. A tax, therefore, *cannot* be passed on to the consumer. It is true that a tax *can* be shifted forward, in a sense, if the tax causes the supply of the good to decrease, and therefore the price to rise on the market. This can hardly be called shifting *per se*, however, for shifting implies that the tax is passed on with little or no trouble to the producer.” Rothbard, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy*, 4th ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1970] 2006), pp. 110–11. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardPM>)

“foreign” state or province across the nation, or in a “foreign” city across the state—is in a position to get the authorities in his region to allow the production of a comparable product at a more competitive price, by using the same polluting methods that the authorities in the first community banned? The foreign producer is allowed to pollute—to externalize production costs without getting permission from the victims.

2. Voting for Pollution

What if a majority of the “victims”—local townspeople—want jobs more than they want clean air or water? What if they agree, implicitly, with the decision of their civil authorities to allow the pollution? In other words, what if most residents in a different community are willing to receive income in the form of wages rather than in the form of a clean environment? The polluting process will then be transferred to the new region where this form of pollution is not so great a concern. The free market allocates pollution through competition.³² The manufacturer in the first region, where voters prefer a cleaner environment to higher monetary income for local firms and higher income for those servicing those firms, will lose his share of the market to the producer in the second region.

Is the buyer of legalized higher pollution goods still “a receiver of stolen goods,” economically speaking? (At no time is the consumer morally or legally guilty of receiving “stolen” goods. It is only a ques-

32. There is a problem here with majority rule. What if one person in the community objects to the polluting factory? If social policy by civil governments always had to attain unanimous consent in order to be implemented, there could be no civil government. The economic goals of a few people sometimes must be sacrificed for the sake of the majority. There are obligations and benefits for both the “one” (the society) and the “many” (individuals). The problem for humanistic economists is that if unanimous consent is not achieved within the electorate, then there is no way for economists to know whether a particular intervention by the state has maximized social welfare: John Burton, Epilogue, in Steven N. S. Cheung, *The Myth of Social Cost* (San Francisco: Cato Institute, [1978] 1980), pp. 62–63. The Bible gives us guidelines for establishing the necessary balance between the two. In the case of the anti-pollutionists in a community, they can sell their property to others who want to take advantage of a better “environment for jobs.” Higher pay scales will tend to offset declines in property values that result from pollution. If a property owner believes that his losses are too great, he can sue the polluting company. Local legislation should not make such law suits impossible; it should only reflect a community’s consent concerning the *approximate* level of pollution which a particular facility is permitted to emit. If one man’s property is damaged excessively (wind patterns, etc.), then he should be allowed by law to take his claim before a jury of his peers.

tion of formal economic analysis—the economist’s attempt to show who wins, who loses, and why, in terms of economic theory.) No, he is not guilty. Why not? Because a majority of voters in the manufacturer’s community really are not deeply worried about the particular form of pollution involved in the specific manufacturing process, possibly because local air currents or water flows disperse the pollution effectively. The voters have announced, in principle: “Go ahead and buy our local manufacturer’s lower-priced goods, for we are willing to accept the costs that his manufacturing process imposes on us as ‘pollution absorbers.’”

The consumer cannot be held accountable, economically speaking, because he cannot know the local opinions of the townspeople. He has to assume that the goods are being produced lawfully. If residents are willing to put up with the pollution for the sake of the local economy, then in effect they are being compensated by the polluter. The higher wages or other economic benefits accruing to local residents as a result of the employment opportunities offered by the polluting company are, economically speaking, the equivalent of restitution. Victims are being compensated for their suffering. Therefore, the goods are no longer “stolen.”

3. The Pollution Auction

Most people in the economically developed nations live in urban areas. These urban centers are noted for their smog-filled air, the noise of trucks rumbling down highways, traffic jams, noisy power lawn mowers, and other “spillover” effects. Yet people in the United States refused to move back to small towns until the 1970s, and even then, the move out of the major cities amounted to little more than a trickle. Few people in Western nations are moving to the small town or farming community. For that matter, few people in any nation are moving to small towns; the phenomenon of urbanization is international. A nation’s major economic opportunities are generally concentrated in cities. Yet there is little doubt that industrial pollution is nonexistent in most of these rural areas.

What is a legitimate conclusion regarding this fact of urbanized life? Simple: most people do prefer clean air and quiet streets, but they want them at very low prices. The demonstrated preference of the vast majority of Western citizens is for the city, with all its pollution. The polluted environment of the city is preferable to the differently pol-

luted environment of the rural countryside. It may have something to do with rural insects, dust, or pollen; it may have more to do with loneliness or the hard work of subduing a rural environment. It almost certainly has a lot to do with comparative opportunities for monetary income. But it is a fact that most people have chosen to live in the industrially or mechanically polluted environments that a vocal minority decries publicly. Most people prefer an urban type of pollution to a rural type, given today's array of prices. Change the array of prices, and people may well move out of the city.³³

In effect, people in various regions are involved in a giant auction—a pollution auction. Some people bid high. They announce, in effect, “We’ll put up with a lot of smog for the sake of high incomes to match our sunny climate” (Southern California). Or they say, “We’ll put up with noxious fumes from wood pulp mills in order to live in the green outdoors” (western Oregon). People in particular regions are more concerned about one form of pollution than another. This preference may be strictly aesthetic, or it may be due to special problems posed by the fluid in question. For example, a region’s stagnant air but free-flowing, aerated streams may make liquid effluents more acceptable than smoke effluents. In another region, the reverse may be the case. What we find, then, is that voters in regions “buy” the quantity and kind of pollution they most prefer.

There will always be some pollution where there is life. Francis Schaeffer wrote a book called *Pollution and the Death of Man*. I much prefer the title, *Pollution and the Life of Man*. Pollution is inescapable. We are all polluters. We are all exhalers and excreters. What we need are legal and institutional arrangements that allow us as individuals to make our own decisions concerning what kind of pollution we are willing to put up with, and at what price.

This is the legal and institutional framework that is produced by biblical law and free market economics. Each region selects a particular form of pollution in the quantity it can tolerate at prices it is willing to pay. Each community is forced to give up particular forms of a clean environment in exchange for other benefits. There are no free lunches in life; there are also no pollution-free environments. Scarcity is ines-

33. If people presently dwelling in American cities should become convinced that a terrorist group plans to attack cities with biological weapons next year, the array of prices would shift. The same would also be true if people became convinced that some deadly plague is specifically urban and expected to become an epidemic.

capable (Gen. 3:17–19).³⁴ At zero price, there is always more demand for clean air and pure water than there is available supply.

4. The Mobility of Capital

The free market's mobility of capital allows communities to make the choice among various mixtures of pollution and economic benefits, but local regulations also force polluters to participate in this choice. Production can shift, industry by industry, to those regions of the globe where the particular form of pollution involved is most acceptable. The free movement of capital combines with competitive markets for consumer goods to make it possible for regions to make effective "bids" for the "pollution-income package" they prefer. At the same time, local legislation that restricts certain kinds of locally less desirable pollutants forces plant managers to come to grips with the true costs of production in that region. They can then decide if it would pay to shut down the factory and relocate elsewhere. And even if they simply shut down the factory and go out of business, another firm using the same production methods can always go to a community where the firm's polluting is acceptable at some price. So, customers, by responding or failing to respond to offers by sellers, force a redistribution of pollution from one region to another. But to do this, consumers in effect work with local civil governments.

Anthony Koo remarked that two countries with identical economic resources and technologies could engage profitably in trade if the two populations had different environmental preferences. He also warned against the danger of globally enforced, uniform environmental standards. People in underdeveloped nations will be suspicious about the imposition of Western standards. "The movement could be construed as an attempt to impose pollution controls that will prevent them from taking full advantage of comparative cost. . . ." ³⁵

Summary

Pollution is a side effect of production (including life). What is a side effect? It is an effect that the affected people do not like. Effects are effects; the "side" aspect of an effect is an assessment made by observers.

34. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 11.

35. Cited in James C. Hite, *et al.*, *The Economics of Environmental Quality* (Washington, D. C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972), p. 35.

In any production process, there are costs to be borne and benefits to be reaped. The economic goal of a biblical legal order is to create an institutional order that will allocate costs and benefits fairly. What is fair? The Bible is clear: a man reaps what he sows. Those who seek the benefits must bear the costs. But men are advantage-seekers. If they can pass on costs of operations to others, their net return on their property increases. Thus, the legal order must see to it that costs are paid by those who can legally claim the benefits of any action. In short, costs (“side effects”) must be allocated, just as benefits (“effects”) must be.

There are inescapable costs involved in achieving the benefits of reduced pollution. Production involves costs; therefore, the production of a cleaner environment produces costs. We speak of externalities, but there are two kinds of externalities in any production process: cursings (costs) and blessings (benefits). A person who is not an owner of a firm may suffer from its pollution, but he may also make a living by selling goods or services to people employed by the polluting firm. Thus, for him to see the reduction of the costs (pollution), he may also find the reduction of the benefits (income). Non-owners who are affected will differ in their personal cost-benefit analysis regarding the effects of the local production process. Some of them will seek economic restitution or political allies in stopping the pollution; others will bear the costs and even organize politically to defeat those who have organized a zero economic growth—clean air lobbying group.

The allocation of pollution is in part political and in part economic. The free market requires a legal order to protect it (benefit). One of the costs of obtaining this legal order is the risk that the owners of a particular production process will lose wealth when the production process is either hampered by regulations or else is legally shut down by those who have become “pollution absorbers” in the community.

The civil government is one institutional means through which the competing individual assessments of costs (“side effects”) and benefits (“effects”) are weighed and acted upon. The decision may be made in terms of “one man—one vote,” or it may be made representatively by a council or a judge; it may be made representatively by a jury. Civil governments also compete against each other, bidding for or against polluting industries.

The other institutional means of assessing costs and benefits is the free market itself: “high bid wins.” Customers vote with their money (productivity). The interaction of these competing assessments results

allocates pollution. The owner of the production facility then responds to the highest bid: market plus civil government. He may close the factory, or install pollution-control devices, or pay the fines, but it is the owner who is ultimately responsible. This is why ownership is ultimately a social function, an aspect of representative government. The owner is inescapably a steward.

I. Identifying the Polluter

We cannot live in a pollution-free world. We pollute the environment simply by being alive. Even when we die, we “pollute” as we rot; but one species’ pollution is another species’ life-support system. The question is: How can we see to it that pollution is distributed according to the needs of individuals, social units, and the non-human environment? How can we best adhere to our responsibilities under the ecological covenant?³⁶

Some forms of industrial pollution may be illegitimate. Permanent or near-permanent toxic wastes, including radioactive waste and waste from burning coal, may place such a burden on future generations and future environments that toxic waste-producing processes should be abandoned until cost-effective disposal methods are developed. The problem is, the public has been misled about the risks. Waste from radioactive materials is a legitimate problem. The major creator of radioactive wastes in the United States has been the United States government, which was involved in the production of nuclear weaponry. Both the production and (of course) the ultimate use of these weapons are sources of such waste. Second, the risks of peacetime radiation are not overwhelmingly great, compared to coal wastes. The waste-disposal problem is a real one; there are real economic costs involved in solving this problem. Nevertheless, scientific evidence points to the ability of radioactive waste-producers to reduce risks to a minimum, especially cancer risks. Even in the much-feared and highly improbable case of a core meltdown of a nuclear reactor, the risks are not that great, especially compared to the very real risks of dying from pollution from coal-fired plants.³⁷

The public is not aware of the huge waste-storage problems associated with coal-fired electricity. Coal ash is being disposed of in land-

36. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 17.

37. For a carefully argued presentation of the evidence in this regard, see Bernard L. Cohen, “Radiation Pollution and Cancer: Comparative Risks and Proof,” *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982). (<http://bit.ly/RisksProof>)

fills. A 1,000 megawatt plant must dispose of 36,500 truckloads a year. A professor of electrical engineering offered this assessment:

The tens of millions of tons of ash generated by U.S. coal-fired plants every year are dumped in landfills. . . . There are no provisions to prevent the poisons in coal ash being leached out by rainwater (they are dumped close to the surface) and creeping into aquifers. . . . The radioactivity of the radium and thorium isotopes in coal ash exposes the public to [up to 50] times³⁸ the dose received from nuclear plants of equal capacity and would violate NRC [Nuclear Regulatory Commission] standards if the NRC were responsible for coal-fired plants, but it isn't. The radionuclides contained in coal ash are chemically active and soluble in water; yet the stuff is dumped close to the surface without strict control and without even any monitoring.³⁹

The best way to achieve increased safety from toxic waste is for the state to establish safety criteria for dumping sites and then to require producers to bear the full costs of waste disposal.⁴⁰ This includes the cost of dismantling nuclear power plants after their economic life is over.⁴¹ The state has increasingly begun to require this, but two problems have appeared. First, organized crime has moved into the "midnight waste disposal business." Highly toxic wastes are being dumped at below-market prices by criminals who pick up the liquid wastes in

38. In the 1976 book, the author used the figure "at least 180 times," but has revised this downward as of 1988: letter to me.

39. Petr Beckmann, *The Health Hazards of NOT Going Nuclear* (Boulder, Colorado: The Golem Press, 1976), p. 107. Beckman was a professor of electrical engineering at the University of Colorado.

40. Cohen wrote: "One important aspect of the high-level waste disposal question is the quantities involved: The waste generated by one large nuclear power plant in one year is about six cubic yards. This waste is 2 million times smaller by weight and billions of times smaller by volume than wastes from a coal-burning plant. The electricity generated by a nuclear plant in a year sells for more than \$200 million, so if only one percent of the sales price were diverted to waste disposal, \$2 million might be spent to bury this waste. Obviously, some very elaborate protective measures can be afforded." Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

41. The important economic and political argument against the commercial use of nuclear power is that the state, because of the military applications of nuclear power, and because of its declared monopoly over the supply of nuclear materials, has an implicit monopoly over electricity generated by nuclear power. This centralizes the production of electricity. The free market solution should be a *decentralized* distribution system. Free market power generation should be as localized and independent of the state as economically feasible, such as power produced by cost-effective solar energy, with rooftop solar panels. The sooner consumers can "unplug" from municipal power companies—or at least can sell back excess power their panels produce during the day—the better it will be for the cause of freedom.

tank trucks and deposit these effluents in public sewers or on private property.⁴² The civil government is almost helpless in the face of this activity. It is an evasion of the problem to blame the government for imposing compulsory waste-disposal costs on private firms, as one libertarian economist does.⁴³ If the government has imposed too many regulations, then economists need to show what an appropriate program would be. But anarchist economists reject this responsibility. They simply announce: "There is no government solution to pollution or to the common-pool problem because government is the problem."⁴⁴

The second problem arises when the state and its licensed agencies are the prime polluters. This is especially true in the case of water pollution. Municipalities have saved money by reducing expenditures on sewage treatment facilities. How can the state compel itself to be responsible to God, men, and the non-human environment? Jerome Milliman, a specialist in the field of the economics of water distribution and environmentalism, commented on this problem.

In 1972 Congress established the Federal Water Pollution Control Act in which the Environmental Protection Agency was given responsibility to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters." Two national goals of "swimmable and fishable" in 1983 and "zero-discharge" in 1985 were set forth. . . .

As of 1980, EPA reported that the industrial dischargers had a compliance rate of 80 percent. By contrast, municipal dischargers have been slow to comply despite being eligible for construction grants, with a compliance rate of 40 percent with the 1977 requirements. In February 1980, EPA estimated that 63 percent of major municipal treatment facilities were not yet in compliance with the original July 1977 deadline. By the end of 1979, EPA had obligated \$24.4 billion in construction grant appropriations (75 percent of construction costs) to municipalities for sewage treatment plants. Construction had begun on 6,623 projects but only 1,552 were in operation. EPA inspections of operating municipal sewage plants reveal

42. Michael Brown, "Toxic Waste: Organized Crime Moves In," *Reader's Digest* (July 1984). The problem of toxic wastes from commercial manufacturing processes appeared only after the Second World War, with the development of the petrochemical industry.

43. "Already existing regulations and laws make it too costly for honest firms to dispose legally of these wastes." Gerald P. O'Driscoll, Jr., "Pollution, Libertarianism, and the Law," *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), p. 51.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

that less than one half perform satisfactorily because of operation and maintenance problems. Apparently, EPA is in a poor bargaining position with reluctant municipalities to require compliance because of lack of effective sanctions.⁴⁵

Milliman also pointed to another problem—a problem that no one so far has been able to deal with successfully, either theoretically or institutionally: non-point sources of water pollution. All our energy and effort has been lavished on the question of how to reduce point sources, such as manufacturing plants, municipal sewage treatment centers, and other “piped” effluents. But what about agriculture? What about topsoil runoff and livestock urea runoff? In the cities, what about storm water runoff? Over half of all pollutants coming from non-point sources were uncontrolled, as of the early 1980s, and over half of all pollutants entering surface waters came from non-point sources.⁴⁶ As he said, “In contrast to the limited progress that has been made in cleaning up point discharges, progress with nonpoint sources is almost negligible.”⁴⁷

Christians must insist that this world is God’s, and men are His stewards. When certain forms of pollution are beyond our ability as creatures to deal with effectively, we should abandon the production processes that leave the uncontrollable wastes. But this also means that we have a responsibility to develop economically and institutionally workable allocation systems to dispose of the wastes that we can control. A combination of private ownership, private responsibility, public sanctions, and the free flow of capital makes possible an efficient spreading of pollution into those communities that can deal with them most effectively. There is a division of labor in the world. There are different environments in different regions of the earth. We need a cost-effective allocation of pollutants in order to protect the earth’s entire environment. More specifically, we need a program of market incentives and state sanctions to distribute pollution in such a manner that concentrated and dangerous pollutants are rendered harmless, either by safety packaging or by dilution through geographical dispersion. Without the free market, it is unlikely that the earth’s total pollution will be allocated efficiently. Civil government alone cannot do it.

45. Jerome W. Milliman, “Can Water Pollution Policy Be Efficient?” *ibid.*, pp. 165–66.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 190.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

J. Moving Fluids

Dolan linked the crime of pollution with the crime of trespassing.⁴⁸ Pollution is therefore an invasion of the rights of private ownership. This explains why it is legitimate to bring in the civil government to reduce "pollution invasions" in a neighborhood. By placing pollution within a moral framework, his study avoids a sense of unreality, something that too many other economists have not avoided.

1. Private Property

What do we mean by "private property"? Wrote legal theorist, economist, and later Federal judge Richard Posner: "A property right, in both law and economics, is a right to exclude everyone else from the use of some scarce resource."⁴⁹ Professor Steven Cheung agreed, but added two important qualifying aspects of this legal right to exclude: a property right is the right to exclude others from using an asset, the right to benefit from an asset's productivity, and the right to transfer either or both of these two rights to others.⁵⁰ This is an ideal definition, as he admitted. In practice, exclusivity and transferability are matters of degree.

It should be clear why questions of pollution arise more readily in cases where private property rights have not been (or cannot be) established. The great area of pollution is the area of moving fluids, namely, air and water. Who owns the air? Who owns the oceans? Who owns the river? Everyone? No one? Economically, it makes little difference which we conclude, everyone or no one. There is a tendency for men to waste resources under either assumption. As Dales said, "There is an old saying that 'everyone's property is no one's property,' the inference being that no one looks after it, that everyone over-uses it, and that the property therefore deteriorates. History bears out the truth of this saying in many sad ways. Property that is freely available to all is

48. Dolan, *TANSTAAFL*, p. 69.

49. Richard A. Posner, *The Economics of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 70.

50. "A good or an asset is defined to be private property if, and only if, three distinct sets of rights are associated with its ownership. First, the exclusive right to *use* (or to decide how to use) the good may be viewed as the right to exclude other individuals from its use. Second is the exclusive right to receive *income* generated by the use of the good. Third, the full right to *transfer*, or freely 'alienate,' its ownership includes the right to enter into contracts and to choose their form." Steven N. S. Cheung, *The Myth of Social Cost*, p. 34.

unowned except in a purely formal, constitutional sense, and lack of effective ownership is almost always the source of much mischief.”⁵¹ There is an economic incentive to convert private costs (smoke, heat, effluents, noise) into social costs—costs borne by others in society.

2. Automobile Emissions

The problem is especially acute when there are multiple and basically unidentifiable polluters. Very often those who pollute the environment also suffer from the pollution. For example, a man starts an automobile engine. He becomes a polluter of the air (exhaust emissions, noise). His car’s contribution to the overall level of exhaust emissions pollution is infinitesimal—probably unmeasurable from five feet away, unless the car is old and smoking. Yet 13 million internal combustion-engine registered vehicles in a trapped-air basin like California’s Los Angeles county region create pollution that is all too measurable: smog. If total air pollution in a particular region is to be reduced, then all the permanent polluters in that region—e.g., people whose automobiles are licensed locally, but not visitors from outside the region—must be restrained by civil law.

Economically speaking, the emissions-control device on a car is no different from the exhaust muffler, although the latter is more readily understood. Both devices raise the price of the car, reduce its engine’s efficiency, and increase gasoline consumption. Both protect innocent bystanders: less noise, less bad air. Both protect the owner of the car: less noise, less bad air. The protection of the innocent bystander is the focus of biblical law, however. If the owner were the only person affected, the law would not be legitimate. He should be allowed to do what he wants with his own eardrums and lungs.

Neither of these emissions-control devices will be paid for entirely by the automobile manufacturers, for manufacturers are not the only ones involved in the pollution process. Pollution-control or noise-control devices are, economically speaking, a kind of sales tax that is paid by consumers, despite the fact that the “collection” of the sales tax is made by the auto companies when they sell the cars. Drivers are the local polluters; auto manufacturers are their accomplices. Drivers usually prefer to convert private costs (lower performance, the cost of the device) into social costs (noise and air pollution), especially if they believe that other drivers are allowed to do the same thing. Car buyers

51. Dales, *Pollution*, pp. 63–64.

are therefore required by law to pay for pollution-control devices when they purchase the cars. But, in most cases, pollution-control devices are not required for older model cars; the laws only apply to current production models and future models.

The automobile companies also lose, as the new car drivers' "accomplices," for they cannot automatically "pass along" the added costs of production to buyers. Some buyers may decide to keep driving older, "hotter" performance cars, especially if new car prices rise. This raises the question of who pays. If the public insists on buying new cars, and if all new cars must be fitted with the equipment, then the companies will more readily attempt to "pass on" the extra costs to the buyers. But this is always risky. If buyers have acceptable substitutes—mass transit, for example, or keeping older model cars—then the car manufacturers may not be able to pass on costs without losing buyers. Substitutes or not, total sales of cars could drop as a result of higher prices, and total revenues might fall. The auto manufacturers cannot be certain in advance. So, they tend to resist any new legislation that would raise their costs of production because of this uncertainty.

Managers do not want to risk the threat of the wrath of the legal owners of the automobile companies. Who are the legal owners of these firms? Those people who own shares of ownership. How can they retaliate against the senior managers? By selling their shares, thereby depressing the price of the shares and reducing the value of the capital owned by the senior managers. We know that a very important form of compensation to the senior managers of a firm is the appreciation of their shares of stock in the firm.⁵² They do not want to risk seeing the price of the shares drop. Why would the share owners start selling? Because of the very real possibility that the company's total net revenues will drop in response to reduced sales of the now higher priced cars. Therefore, the costs of pollution-control devices cannot be passed on by the company to the customers at zero price (zero risk) to the company—its managers, workers, and share owners.

Mandatory pollution-control devices, biblically, are like spark-retarding devices: they protect other people's property. Where there are multiple polluters, only the civil government can effectively restrain a significant number of polluters, for all are bound under civil law. The civil government protects property owners

52. Henry Manne [MANee], *Insider Trading and the Stock Market* (New York: Free Press, 1966), ch. 8.

Summary

There are always problems in identifying polluters, because all of life is a pollution process. The media have focused on nuclear power plants, but they have generally ignored waste materials produced by coal-fired plants. The politicians studiously ignore the pollution produced by the state's own production facilities. Also, there are non-point sources of pollution that cannot be regulated effectively by law. There are limits to bureaucratic regulation, in other words. If self-government fails, then civil government will fail, too.

The world is under a curse. This curse cannot be escaped, only modified. The land brings forth thorns (Gen. 3:18)—“side effects,” in other words, meaning unwanted effects. Pollution can be reduced through self-discipline, better scientific knowledge, market incentives, and the threat of punishment. It cannot be eliminated, however, because man's knowledge is limited, and so is his power over the many known effects of human action. The best that we can hope to accomplish is to identify major sources of known dangerous pollution, to study the effects of legislation in reducing the production of such pollution, and then persuade voters to impose workable sanctions against polluters. When criminals are convicted for illegally dumping known toxic wastes into public sewers, and then sold into lifetime servitude to pay the fines, we will see less toxic waste dumped into sewers. There will always be some, however.

All government begins with self-government. Self-government must become more important in regulating pollution, for it is not possible to identify all polluters, and it is also not possible to eliminate every known form of pollution. When polluters know that they will suffer economic sanctions and public ostracism when convicted, they will modify their behavior. They will not modify economically profitable behavior until the public is willing to impose civil sanctions, however. We can see this in the case of abortion. If physicians are willing to get rich by aborting babies, we should not be surprised to find that ordinary businessmen are willing to dump effluents into rivers, even dangerous effluents. If the voting public and its judges cannot distinguish between the effects of abortion (legal) and the effects of the agricultural use of DDT (illegal), then we should not expect to see the spread of self-restraint by industrial polluters.

K. Legitimate State Coercion

In the case of a single violator or a few potential violators, there are two reasons justifying the coercive intervention of the civil government.

1. Fire

To use the biblical example of fire, a man who permits a fire to get out of control may see an entire town burned to the ground. There is no way, economically, that he can make full restitution. In fact, it would be almost impossibly expensive to estimate the value of the destroyed physical property, let alone the loss of life, or the psychological anguish of the victims. Therefore, in high-risk situations, the civil government can legitimately establish minimum fire prevention standards. (Analogously, the civil government can also legitimately establish medical quarantines to protect public health: Lev. 13, 14.)⁵³

Carl Bridenbaugh, in his study of urban life in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century colonial America, discussed this problem in detail. "The specter of fire has ever haunted the town-dweller. This necessary servant may, amidst crowded town conditions, buildings of inflammable construction and the combustible materials of daily housekeeping and commerce, become his deadly enemy. Even in Europe the means of fighting fire were very crude in the seventeenth century, and only towards its close did the great cities, driven by a series of disasters, begin to evolve a system for combatting it."⁵⁴ Such measures infringed on personal freedom, and they increased costs on citizens, but they were necessary to help protect people from each other's mistakes—mistakes that the person responsible could not have paid for. In fact, it could easily be argued that the very inability of anyone to pay for them is in itself an incentive for people to take such risks. As Posner wrote, "An injurer may not have the resources to pay a very large damages judgment; and if not, his incentive to comply with the law will be reduced. . . ."⁵⁵

53. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012) ch. 9.

54. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625–1742* (New York: Capricorn, [1938] 1964), p. 55.

55. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, p. 344.

2. Marginal Damages and Profit Centers

A second reason for allowing state coercion, though far less relevant, is that there may be cases of identifiable polluters who injure many neighbors in a minor, though measurable, way. The costs of assembling all the injured parties—search costs, lawyer fees, delays in court hearings, injury assessments—into one or more legitimate complaining units may be too high for each member of the group to bear. Another way to gain restitution is the establishment of fines for polluters, including graduated fines as the levels of pollution increase. Least desirable, probably, is the outright abolition of the pollution-producing activity, although the costs of pollution abatement may in effect serve as outright prohibitions for marginally profitable firms.

The buyers of a particular product may save a few cents or many dollars because the costs of producing it are passed along, involuntarily, to residents living close to the plant, but this does not justify polluting, nor do considerations of the comparative wealth of buyers and injured parties. Coercion in the form of unforeseen and injurious pollution can legitimately be met by coercion from the civil government.

On the other hand, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, such pollution is not necessarily evil, if those who are injured have voluntarily assented to the injury. For example, consider the “company town,” a town whose houses and public facilities have been built by a profit-seeking company that employs most of the town’s residents. The firm’s employees are given access to low-cost housing as part of their pay. They breathe the fumes of the factory, but they also gain the benefits of employment. A required anti-pollution program might make production costs skyrocket and force the closing of the factory. The benefits of employment at that location would then disappear. Workers may very well prefer noxious fumes to unemployment. Even in a normal community, where employees and non-employees live side by side and breathe the same foul air, a majority of voters may prefer the fumes to the economic effects of unemployment. This is especially true if the factory, or industry in general, is a primary employer in a particular region. Bad air may be preferable to most local residents, compared to the firm’s bankruptcy. The poorer a community—the fewer economic and employment alternatives available to people—the more likely it is that people will choose bad air to unemployment.

If specific physiological dangers exist because of the fumes that are dumped into the atmosphere, or some water-carried effluent that is

dumped into the public water supply system, then those affected must be warned. The problem of toxic wastes is a real one. When the victims do not have the technical expertise to discern a measurable, statistically relevant danger to people's health, the civil government can legitimately require the polluter to warn them. But smoke is a familiar fact of life. So is smog. So is noise. If people choose to put up with these nuisances for the sake of employment or for a stronger local economy, then they should be allowed to do so.

3. Permitting Voluntary Exchange

Suppose, for example, that there is a very desirable piece of land overlooking a lake that is in the path of a proposed runway for jet planes. The land sells at a discount because of the expected noise. Potential buyers are warned in writing of the proposed airport. The buyer takes a risk. He buys his land less expensively, assuming that he will get used to the noise (which most people do). Perhaps the runway will never be built. Then he may find himself the owner of a far more valuable piece of property. Or perhaps the airport will be built, and the land appreciates anyway. (Empirical research indicates that almost without exception, land adjacent to proposed airports rises in value after the construction of the airport.)⁵⁶

Question: Should the civil government forbid such a transaction if the seller has warned the buyer in writing concerning the risk? Why should the civil government be given such power? Perhaps a potential buyer cannot afford to buy a piece of land near a lake in any area not subject to a negative factor like noise. Wouldn't an outright prohibition on land sales be harmful to potential buyers and potential sellers? Wouldn't such legislation be discriminatory against poorer members of the community? Why should men be forbidden to trade off money against noise? On the other hand, should the airport be shut down by law because people who bought the land at a discount later decide that they want a noise-free environment, and then decide that a lawsuit is the way to get it? Is this not another case of theft, a coercive redistribution of wealth from the airport and airlines to the buyers of discounted land?

This example should not be construed to validate the case of a person who buys land at a high price and then is informed that the city council has voted to build the runway. Here is a case of a violation of

56. Cheung, *Myth of Social Cost*, p. 20.

his property rights. The Bible says that he must be compensated for any resulting loss. The beneficiaries of the council's action, i.e., the airlines that use the airport facility, should pay the victims either directly or indirectly, through taxes collected by the city and passed on to the victims. What should the compensation be? A payment equivalent to any drop in the market value of the property caused by the airport, plus moving costs, if owners decide to leave.

Something else should be considered. One reason why Western industrial nations have become so concerned with pollution is that they are wealthy.⁵⁷ As people's per capita income rises, they tend to worry less about where the next meal is coming from and more about their "quality of life," meaning their physical environment. The West does pollute the environment, but as people get richer, they tend to buy more services than goods. As national wealth increases, capital shifts to the service sector, and to high-technology, low-pollution production. Yet as the level of pollution may be dropping—or shifting from, say, horses to autos, from manure-filled streets and flies to smog and stinging eyes⁵⁸—people's concern about pollution may be rising. As they become financially capable of reducing pollution levels, they demand action, even in the face of less dangerous forms of pollution than before. The smoke-filled skies of the great steel towns of the late-nineteenth century are sometimes smog-filled today. Are we so confident that we suffer from more pollution today? Women can safely hang clothes out to dry on a clothes line in Pittsburgh today; in the 1930s, the clothes—and even curtains in their homes—would be covered with soot in a few hours.⁵⁹ (Of course, most women use clothes driers today, which were not available to consumers in the 1930s.) The main reason why Pittsburgh's air is cleaner today is that so many steel mills have shut down due to foreign competition.

57. Lester Lave, "Health, Safety, and Environmental Regulations," in Joseph A. Peckman (ed.), *Setting National Priorities: Agenda for the 1980s* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1980), pp. 134–35.

58. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1907 had a population of 350,000 people and a horse population of 12,500. The city had to dispose of 133 tons of horse manure daily. In 1908, when New York City's population was 4,777,000, it had 120,000 horses. Chicago in 1900 had 83,300 horses. This was in the early era of the streetcar and automobile. There were still 3.5 million horses in American cities and 17 million in the countryside. Joel A. Tarr, "Urban Pollution—Many Long Years Ago," *American Heritage*, XXII (October 1971). (<http://bit.ly/TarrPollution>)

59. Ted O. Thackery, "Pittsburgh: How One City Did It," in Marshall I. Goldman (ed.), *Ecology and Economics: Controlling Pollution in the 70s* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 199–202.

L. Regional Standards

When it comes to the problem of reducing the costs (increasing the efficiency) of assessing the effect of injuries, local civil governments are best equipped to enforce pollution (cleanliness) standards. The larger the administrative or geographical unit, the more difficult it is to assess costs and benefits. Only when conflicts across political or jurisdictional boundaries are involved—county vs. county, state vs. state—should higher levels of civil government be called in to redress grievances. Local conditions, local standards of cleanliness, silence, or whatever, involve local conflicts. These are best settled by local governmental units.

If a national civil government imposes general pollution-control standards for clean air, local communities could be damaged economically. A community may have a polluting factory as its primary employment base. The factory is bankrupted by the newly applied national standards. Its owners, or rival producers of similar goods, may choose to move capital into a foreign nation whose political leaders are more anxious to create jobs than to avoid pollution. The pollution is simply shifted “off shore.” This may be a good thing, overall; perhaps this particular sort of pollution will be less of a problem in some other geographical environment that is blessed with pollution-reducing wind patterns. Or a foreign nation may have a less dense population. The first question is: Who knows best? Is some political body or bureaucratic agency thousands of miles away from the affected areas sufficiently informed about local effects of such decisions?

A second relevant question is: Who pays? Rich voters in some regions of a country may be making political decisions that adversely affect poorer voters in different regions whenever national environmental standards are imposed. Are such national standards really that crucial to the survival of the environment? Can local geographical regions really destroy the ecology of the entire nation? What kind of proof can the defenders of national pollution-control standards present to defend their conclusion that such standards are exclusively a matter of national self-interest?

1. Subsidies to the Politically Skilled

One reason why we get national ecology or pollution-control standards is because of the costs of political mobilization. It is less expensive for special-interest groups to lobby a few hundred politicians in the

nation's capital or to gain control over a Washington bureaucracy than it is to conduct a lobbying campaign in every regional legislature and local town council. The national civil government then preempts the regional units of civil government. This centralizes political power, which leads increasingly to a reduction of everyone's political freedom.

Why should residents of Los Angeles, California, or Denver, Colorado, who live in peculiar geographical environments (stagnant air currents, breeze-reducing surrounding mountains) impose their environmental standards on drivers in wide-open Texas or Wyoming? Why should they lobby for national auto pollution emission standards that will necessarily reduce the performance and increase the purchase price of all cars produced in the United States? They are demanding a subsidy: lower costs per unit for required pollution-control equipment (as a result of higher production of regulated cars), but increased costs for most other drivers whose communities are not in need of such devices. In this case, national pollution-control legislation is a politically acceptable wealth-redistribution scheme. If people in southern California want mandatory pollution-control devices for cars registered in their region, they can vote accordingly. Indeed, given the vast number of cars in this region, they must vote for emission standards if they are to improve the quality of the air they breathe. But they should not insist on a subsidy from car buyers and operators in other regions of the country.⁶⁰

Why should those who worry about pollution be allowed to extract a subsidy from those who do not worry so much? Those who hate pollution are allowed to move to a less polluted region of the country. But they prefer to achieve their goal of living in a cleaner environment at the expense of local factory workers, whose jobs are "up in the air." How many factory workers are enthusiastic and dedicated supporters of the ecology movement, or were in its early days in the late 1960s? Aren't the movement's white-collar supporters better paid, more highly educated (at taxpayers' expense), and more mobile than the blue-collar working people whose jobs are at stake? The leather goods-selling "street people" with university degrees in sociology were more likely to be at the forefront of the ecology movement in 1968 than the average employee with General Motors. As one book pointed out, "Preliminary studies indicate in fact the opposite result from that expected by critics; that is, wealthy people tend to be lovers of [ecologic-

60. To some extent, this principle is honored. Emissions-control standards have in the past been far more stringent for California than for other states in the U.S.

al] purity while the very poor are more interested in other problems.”⁶¹

Some readers may think I am exaggerating. Not so. The Sierra Club is perhaps the most active lobbying organization for ecology in the world, along with Friends of the Earth. The group took out an advertisement in Advertising Age magazine, to attract advertisers for their magazine, Sierra. Why advertise in Sierra? Money! “Sierra readers have very good taste. Each month 81 percent serve domestic or imported wines, 27 percent serve bottled mineral water and 42 percent offer their guests imported beer.”⁶² In other words, they say of their readers, here are the educational and financial elite. Kevin Phillips, the political commentator, referred to environmentalists as “the wine and cheese belt.”⁶³ The same theme was pursued brilliantly by William Tucker, in his 1982 book, *Progress and Privilege: America in the Age of Environmentalism*.⁶⁴ We should ask ourselves: To what extent is the concern about pollution a concern of the highly educated, higher-income intellectuals who have more skills in media manipulation and political manipulation than those who are not equally skilled, or who do not trust in salvation by political action?

Economist Thomas Sowell, who grew up in rural North Carolina and the Harlem “ghetto” of New York City in the depression and war years,⁶⁵ has identified the problem: the majority poor have too much money in the aggregate for the minority rich to compete against them successfully in a confined geographical region. The poor have more money. “There are infinitely more of them, and real estate dealers and developers would rather get \$10 million from 10,000 people than get \$1 million from one millionaire.”⁶⁶ You will not see economic analysis like this in Sierra magazine:

In the natural course of economic events, the non-rich would end up taking more and more land and shore away from the rich. Spectacular homes with spectacular views would be replaced by mundane apartment buildings with only moderately pleasant vistas.

61. James C. Hite, *et al.*, *Economics of Environmental Quality*, p. 34.

62. “Briefing,” I (Nov. 8, 1982).

63. *Idem.*

64. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1982.

65. Thomas Sowell, *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies* (New York: David McKay, 1972).

66. Thomas Sowell, *Pink and Brown People and Other Controversial Essays* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), p. 104. This essay appeared originally in the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* (March 23, 1979): “Those Phony Environmentalists.”

A doctor or movie mogul who can now walk the beach in front of his house in splendid isolation would be replaced by whole families of ordinary grubby mortals seeking a respite from the asphalt and an occasional view of the sunset.

The climax of the story is when the affluent heroes are rescued by the government. In the old days, this used to be the cavalry, but nowadays it is more likely to be the zoning board or the coastal commission. They decree that the land cannot be used in ways that would make it accessible to the many, but only in ways accessible to the few. Legal phrasing is of course more elaborate and indirect than this, but that is what it all boils down to. This is called “preserving the environment” (applause) from those who would “misuse” it (boos).⁶⁷

2. The Anti-Dominion Impulse

James Jordan was correct: biblical law is essentially antiaristocratic in the field of economics. An aristocracy of birth finds it difficult to retain its position at the top of the economic hierarchy in a free market society, which biblical law produces when it is enforced. The main antiaristocratic feature of biblical economics is the familistic aspect of capital. The reason for the anti-aristocratic provisions is dominion.

If language is the first stage and prerequisite of dominion, property is the second. Adam was given the garden to beautify and protect (Gen. 2:15). He was to name it, get power over it, and creatively remold it. The eighth commandment protects private property, as do other provisions in the law of God (cf. esp. Lev. 25:13; and see I Ki. 21). Every man is to have his own garden. His marriage and his garden (work) are the major axes around which the ellipse of the temporal life is drawn. In pagan aristocratic societies, few men have gardens, and many men are slaves. Moreover, such aristocrats often exercise only minimal dominion, preferring to war or entertain themselves.

Under the influence of Christian concepts of familistic property, the free market has acted to break up such large aristocratic holdings. The industrious poor eventually buy out the lazy rich, and anyone with thrift can eventually obtain his own garden. Dominion is multiplied.⁶⁸

67. *Idem.*

68. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 133. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

Public concern, meaning media headlines, for both the “population explosion” and the “ecology crisis” hit overnight, around 1967. As Marshall Goldman commented in 1967, “Today’s news media devote almost as much attention to air and water pollution as to the problems of poverty. Virtually overnight pollution seems to have become one of America’s major issues.”⁶⁹ The rapid rise and fall of both issues as “media events” indicate that a deeply felt concern over these issues in the minds of large numbers of voters was never present. Can we be sure that much of the motivation behind the once loudly proclaimed “concern for the environment” was not really a hatred of free enterprise, a hatred of economic growth as such?⁷⁰ Is a major underlying (and unstated) intellectual impulse behind the ecology movement an anti-dominion, anti-progress, anti-Christian Eastern mysticism, or a “back to nature” ideology that hates modern industrialism?⁷¹

It is difficult to take seriously anyone who writes, as the leading anti-growth economist, E. J. Mishan, wrote in a purportedly scholarly work: “The private automobile is, surely, one of the greatest, if not the greatest, disasters that ever befell the human race. For sheer irresistible destructive power, no other creation of man—save, perhaps the airliner—can compete with it. . . . One could go on, for the extent of its destructive powers is awesome to contemplate. Criminal success, especially of robbery and violence, has come to depend heavily on the fast get-away car.”⁷² (The get-away car? He must have been watching too many late-night gangster movies on television. Besides, the police have cars, too.) He should write a book called *The Sinister Ambulance*.

Mishan’s radical elitism is clear enough in his discussion of the terrible effects of jet planes. They have allowed hordes of middle-class people to travel to the former pleasure spots of the rich: “. . . the airliner has conspired with the automobile to create a tourist explosion that, within a few years, has irrevocably destroyed the once-famed

69. Marshall I. Goldman, “Pollution: The Mess Around Us,” in Goldman (ed.), *Ecology and Economics*, *op. cit.*, p. 3. This book was first published in 1967 under the title, *Controlling Pollution: The Economics of a Cleaner America*.

70. See, for example, two books by Prof. Ezra J. Mishan, *The Costs of Economic Growth* (New York: Praeger, 1967) and *The Economic Growth Debate: An Assessment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977).

71. Ayn Rand argued that the ecology movement is intensely anti-progress: “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in her book, *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* (New York: Signet, 1971), ch. 8. A similar thesis is presented by John Maddox, the editor of the British scientific journal, *Nature*, in his book, *The Doomsday Syndrome* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

72. Mishan, *Economic Growth Debate*, pp. 122–23.

beauty spots of the Mediterranean coastline.”⁷³ In the name of “the good life” and “the quality of life,” the supposedly democratic and equalitarian academic scribblers are proclaiming the wonders of a world in which the middle class and the poor will not have the economic opportunity to “dirty up the environments” of the rich. “No growth” means less competition from the “unwashed masses” for those who have already arrived at the top.

Are there objective scientific standards of pollution? Yes. Are the physiological, ecological and economic effects of these pollutants universally agreed upon by scientists and other professionals? Seldom. Can economists assess the costs and benefits of pollution or anything else scientifically? No. As Dales wrote,

The important question is how much “better quality environment” we would be willing to buy at different “prices” in terms of higher taxes and higher costs of goods, and most of us are not sure about this. As was suggested in the last chapter, the only way to answer the question may be to have the politicians start charging us for better quality air and water and then keep “upping the ante” until we say “Enough! No more!” The trouble is that when we call a halt about half of us will think that we are already spending too much to improve the environment, and about half of us will want to spend more; therefore very few of us will be very happy with the outcome.⁷⁴

A perfect environment will not come from political pressure.

Few people are aware that the whole debate over carcinogens (cancer-producing substances) in the environment has been conducted with virtually no evidence. In her 1984 study of 15,000 scientific papers and books, Edith Efron reported that the scientific community has identified very few clear threats to human health in the modern environment. The public discussions of carcinogens in the environment had been conducted primarily by special-interest groups, political propagandists, social scientists, and a handful of scientists, often those employed by government regulatory agencies whose survival is dependent on continuing public funding. As she said, “the government has systematically fed the public the views of one faction in the academic world while the views of others have been largely withheld.”⁷⁵ She correctly pinpointed the underlying problem: a commitment to a

73. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

74. Dales, *Pollution*, pp. 71–72.

75. Edith Efron, *The Apocalypstics: Cancer and the Big Lie* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), p. 12.

particular view of man and nature by modern scientists. Rachel Carson, whose apocalyptic book on the environment, *Silent Spring* (1962), launched the modern political ecology movement, operated in terms of a view that man is an invader in nature. Efron was correct: "... the apocalyptic approach to cancer rests, fundamentally, on the 'axiom' of a largely benevolent nature—on a vision of a largely noncarcinogenic Garden of Eden now defiled by the sins of pride and greed."⁷⁶ This deeply religious perspective has produced faith in a political solution: "... the 'axiom' of nature's minimal role in cancer causation led to a political conception of the disease of cancer and to a political solution. . . . The underlying 'axiom' of nature's virtual noncarcinogenicity was tacitly accepted, and the little packet of ideas that followed from that 'axiom' soon became the conventional wisdom: 'Man,' not nature, was responsible for the evil. . . . 'man' meant the men who made and used chemicals. . . . 'man' meant industry. . . . cancer was fundamentally a political disease."⁷⁷ The scientific facts prove otherwise: man's natural environment is itself carcinogenic.⁷⁸

What is the biblical perspective? The Bible teaches that man is cursed, and so is nature. Neither man nor nature is normative, ethically or biologically. Man sickens and dies because he is under a curse, but no one environmental source is the primary cause of man's condition. To assume that nature is not carcinogenic is an exercise in fantasy.

Summary

There are certain kinds of damage that can become so widespread that those who produce them endanger too many people. In the case of some form of pollution that is known to be so damaging that the producer could not possibly make restitution to those injured, the state possesses the lawful authority to prohibit or isolate the activity. The example of fire codes is representative. Similar codes for polluting processes can and should be worked out by experts who are hired by the government, with the politicians invoking the required regulations. The legal justification for outright prohibition must be the known inability of damage-producers to pay their victims, should a crisis take place. The more widespread the production process is, and the more

76. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 125–75.

widespread its spillover effects, the less likely that a single producer could afford to make restitution. Thus, the civil government restricts the process.

The civil government is the necessary agent for settling disputes that cannot be worked out voluntarily and peaceably. It is an agent of last resort, for it uses coercion, a very dangerous monopoly to be invoked by anyone. The public should be willing to permit people to settle disputes over pollution on a mutually profit-seeking basis. The most obvious example is to allow people to accept known environmental defects in order to gain discounts on land purchases.

The assessment of risks (costs) and rewards is a cultural phenomenon.⁷⁹ Cultural preferences are expressed locally. They are more identifiable and distinct. Thus, the regulation of pollution should be limited judicially. The judicial authority to which voters assign the tasks of regulation should be closely restricted to the geographical region in which that type of pollution is being produced. There will therefore be less distorting of the pollution allocation preferences of the people who are involuntarily affected by the particular pollutants.

A major reason why regional pollution preferences are ignored is that those who are politically skilled in imposing their views on politicians prefer to concentrate their efforts and resources at the national level. A region-by-region political fight is expensive and essentially open-ended; the results will not be clear cut, for many regional politicians will resist the arguments of the anti-pollution forces. It is cheaper for the anti-pollution lobby to risk losing nationally on any particular vote and then try again than it is to try to win each region separately.

Dominion involves costs and risks. Those who want anything like a perfectly safe environment are calling for the extinction of the human species—a very high-risk program. It is ultimately a religious program. This anti-dominion religion is not Christianity. The biblical goal is the progressive sanctification of the environment as an effect of the progressive sanctification of a growing number of individuals through God's grace. The environment must be progressively healed as a result of God's judgment of blessing on covenant-keeping men, for it was first polluted as a result of God's judgment against covenant-breaking

79. Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

mankind (Gen. 3:18).⁸⁰

M. Brokers Between Generations

All government is representative. Each individual represents God, for better or worse. Each person is responsible before God. We are all stewards. There is no escape. The final judgment is sure. The question then arises: Why should the civil government be a better long-run steward of resources than individual or corporate owners? The fact is, if ownership becomes political, then the only true ownership is the ability of the politician to maintain himself in political office. If ownership is bureaucratic, then it is based on considerations of tenure and bureaucratic advancement. If it is private, familial, or corporate, then ownership is governed by competitive market considerations. The public is always represented by owners, just as God is; the question is: Which form of representation is appropriate? Which form is most responsive to God and to the public in any given instance?

R. H. Coase quite properly called attention to the problem of state enterprise and responsibility for damages. He remarked that "it is likely that an extension of Government economic activity will often lead to this protection against action for nuisance being pushed further than is desirable. For one thing, the Government is likely to look with a benevolent eye on enterprises which it is itself promoting. For another, it is possible to describe the committing of a nuisance by public enterprise in a much more pleasant way than when the same thing is done by private enterprise. . . . There can be little doubt that the Welfare State is likely to bring an extension of that immunity from liability for damage, which economists have been in the habit of condemning. . . ." ⁸¹

A proper analysis of ownership, pollution, and responsibility quite properly begins with libertarian economist F. A. Harper's observation that if I do not have the right to disown an asset, I do not really own it.

80. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 11.

81. R. H. Coase, "The Problem of Social Cost," *The Journal of Law and Economics*, III (Oct. 1960), pp. 26–27. A classic example of this unwillingness of the federal government to police its own agencies is the case of the radioactive waste disposal sites that are believed to be leaking wastes into local environments. Seventeen of these nuclear weapon production facilities in 12 states are owned by the U. S. Department of Energy. Congressman Albert Bustamante of Texas admitted: "Anytime we get into a problem like now, nobody on the committee knows what is what. We just delegate things to the Department of Energy." Fox Butterworth, "Trouble at Atomic Bomb Plants: How Lawmakers Missed the Signs," *New York Times* (Nov. 28, 1988).

Murray Rothbard extended Harper's comment and applied it to the question of who really owns "public" property. Very important, Rothbard concluded, is the short-run perspective of politicians, who face re-election battles every few years.

While rulers of government own "public" property, their ownership is not secure in the long run, since they may always be defeated in an election or deposed. Hence government officials will tend to regard themselves as only transitory owners of "public" resources. While a private owner, secure in his property and its capital value, may plan the use of his resource over a long period of time in the future, the government official must exploit "his" property as quickly as he can, since he has no security of tenure. And even the most securely entrenched civil servant must concentrate on present use, because government officials cannot usually sell the capitalized value of their property, as private owners can. In short, except in the case of the "private property" of a hereditary monarch, government officials own the current use of resources, but not their capital value. But if a resource itself cannot be owned, but only its current use, there will rapidly ensue an uneconomic exhaustion of the resource, since it will be to no one's benefit to conserve it over a period of time, and yet to each owner's advantage to use it up quickly. It is particularly curious, then, that almost all writers parrot the notion that private owners, possessing time preference, must take the "short view" in using their resources, while only government officials are properly equipped to exercise the "long view." The truth is precisely the reverse. The private individual, secure in his capital ownership, can afford to take the long view because of his interest in maintaining the capital value of his resource. It is the government official who must take and run, who must exploit the property quickly while he is still in command.⁸²

Harold Demsetz argued that the private owner serves as a broker between generations. "In effect, an owner of a private right to use land acts as a broker whose wealth depends on how well he takes into account the competing claims of the present and the future. But with communal rights there is no broker, and the claims of the present generation will be given an uneconomically large weight in determining the intensity with which the land is worked. Future generations might desire to pay present generations enough to change the present intensity of land usage. But they have no living agent to place their claims on the market. Under a communal property system, should a living, per-

82. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), pp. 956–57.

son pay others to reduce the rate at which they work the land, he would not gain anything of value for his efforts. Communal property means that future generations must speak for themselves.”⁸³

Because private owners can personally capitalize their efforts to conserve resources (“land”), and pass this asset on to children, or sell it to other private parties who will want to pass the capitalized assets on to future generations, the property’s future value can be estimated by a private owner—the demand by future consumers for the output of the resource in question, discounted by the prevailing rate of interest. The lower the rate of interest,⁸⁴ of course, the higher the present value of the capitalized asset. Why? Because the rate of interest discounts the present market value of the expected future stream of income (including personal use value) of a capital asset. The higher the discount, the less the asset is worth in the present. A future-oriented society has a lower rate of interest than a present-oriented society. A lower rate of interest therefore allows future generations to “shout their bids” more effectively to this generation’s “brokers” or “auctioneers.” It generally takes private, profit-seeking “auctioneers” to hear those bids clearly and act in terms of them. In short, the more that a society conforms itself to the biblical concept of private ownership and a biblical concept of time, the higher the capitalized value of privately owned assets, as a result of the greater attention that profit-seeking owners will pay to the perceived demand of future owners and users.

Summary

The question of resource conservation is intimately tied to the question of time perspective. When we ask ourselves questions concerning resource conservation, we are asking questions regarding conservation for future consumption.

The debate over ecology has been dominated by people who believe (or say they believe) that the civil government has the most responsible view of the future. They do not raise the obvious question: What motivates the individuals who control the various agencies of

83. Harold Demsetz, “Toward a Theory of Property Rights,” *American Economic Review*, LVII (May 1967); reprinted in Furubotn and Pejovich (eds.), *Economics of Property Rights*, pp. 38–39.

84. Lower interest stems from: (1) a lower risk premium (to compensate for debtors’ defaulting), (2) a lower price inflation premium (to compensate lenders for the loss of purchasing power of the monetary unit), and (3) a lower social rate of time preference (the more citizens are future-oriented).

civil government? What is their motivation regarding pollution and resource conservation compared to the motivation of private owners?

Free market economists stress the long-range motivations of those who own property. When a person sells an asset, he is capitalizing in the present the expected future net productivity of that asset. The individual who can sell an asset owns it. The government bureaucrat cannot legally sell it and pocket the money, so he does not own it. Thus, his motivation is to use the asset in such a way that his income or prestige is increased. He is not paid to represent future generations of users; the private owner is paid to represent those living in the future, for an asset's present price depends heavily on the expected stream of net income it will generate over time.⁸⁵

What we find is what economics predicts concerning the motivation of managers under socialist ownership of the means of production. Managers in socialist nations tend to pollute the environment, use state-owned resources, and ignore the complaints of the politically impotent public. This was especially true of the Soviet Union.⁸⁶ Managers used the state's resources to benefit their own careers, which meant meeting state-assigned production quotas. The subtle pressures and rewards of private ownership were missing; socialist plans are crude and focus on aggregate output. Little else matters to the manager, except possibly laying up hidden reserves to barter with or steal and then sell into the black market. He must make his factory's quota (plus a few percentage points more, to earn his bonus). The environment suffers as a direct result.

Pollution is controlled by a combination of widespread private ownership, and local and regional civil government enforcement of Exodus 22:5–6. Socialist ownership is guaranteed to produce pollution because it places at the top of the list the goals of non-owning factory managers.

N. Solutions to Pollution

The first step is to recognize that men are responsible for their actions. The man who pollutes the environment in such a way that it infringes on the way of life of his neighbors must be made to pay restitution. He is responsible; he must pay.

85. The other major considerations are selling costs and the prevailing rate of interest.

86. See Appendix I: "Pollution in the Soviet Union."

There are always problems in applying this rule. Here are some basic ones. First, it may be impossible to identify a single polluter as the major source of pollution. An entire region may be filled with polluting industries. In this case, the local civil government or governments will have to begin to formulate general policies that encourage all polluters to reduce their polluting activities, even though each polluter cannot be matched precisely with all those who are harmed by the pollution.

This raises some very hard legal questions. The main one is that of strict liability.⁸⁷ If a plaintiff cannot prove that a specific polluter hurt his property in a specific physical way, and that he thereby suffered a specific economic loss, then how can he legitimately receive restitution from a supposed polluter? Is a defendant presumed innocent until proven guilty or not? Paul Downing wrote: "Currently, a party who has been damaged by air pollution must prove in court that emitter A damaged him. He must establish that he was damaged and emitter A did it, and not emitter B. This is almost always an impossible task."⁸⁸ Murray Rothbard, a proponent of a zero-civil government society, responded: "If true, then we must assent uncomplainingly. . . . Are defendants now to be guilty until they can prove themselves innocent?"⁸⁹ Rothbard preferred to live with pollution rather than live with a civil

87. Richard Epstein, an articulate defender of strict liability, contrasted his position with what he called a negligence theory of law. "The development of the common law of tort has been marked by the opposition between two major theories. The first holds that a plaintiff should be entitled, *prima facie*, to recover from a defendant who has caused him harm only if the defendant intended to harm the plaintiff or failed to take reasonable steps to avoid inflicting the harm. The alternative theory, that of strict liability, holds the defendant *prima facie* liable for the harm caused whether or not either of the two further conditions relating to negligence and intent is satisfied." Epstein, *A Theory of Strict Liability: Toward a Reformulation of Tort Law* (San Francisco: Cato Institute, 1980), p. 5. He distinguished four cases governing private tort (law suit) action: A hits B; A frightens B; A coerces B to hit G; and A creates dangerous conditions. He advocated the adoption of a rigorous concept of causation. Because he relied so heavily on the nearly absolute nature of private property rights, Epstein's position has become the foundation of the legal theory most popular with anarcho-capitalists of the Austrian School of economics. It should be noted that he admitted that in actual cases, the same outcome is reached by judges who adopt either of the two approaches. "Hence the choice between these two systems comes down to the few, but still important, cases where the outcome will rest upon choice of theory." *Ibid.*, p. 135.

88. Paul B. Downing, "An Introduction to the Problem of Air Quality," in Downing (ed.), *Air Pollution and the Social Sciences* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 13; cited by Murray N. Rothbard, "Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution," *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), p. 88. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardAir>)

89. *Idem.*

government that does not honor the principle of strict liability in courts of law.

The proper biblical response is that the officers of the state must act as surrogates for injured citizens in this instance. The state must of course prove its case, namely, that the physical effects of the polluting substances are harming specific people in a specific region, or, in the case of noisy automobiles, that the pollutant—“noise”—in almost all known cases involves an infringement on the property rights of citizens who will never be able to locate and prosecute all violators of their rights (legal immunities). Civil law should not ignore the effects on existing property rights that are produced by such social changes as new technology, the crowding of residential areas, the high costs of proving specific damages in a multipolluter environment, and the desire of people to reduce the assault on their bodies and their property.

No perfect system of pollution control (or allocation) can be devised, either by the free market or the state. But to leave the polluters free to pollute just because there are a lot of them to prosecute will only lead to a growth in their numbers and the amount of pollution. Civil law should not subsidize pollution's involuntary transfers of wealth by adhering to man-made legal principles that were not designed to deal with every conceivable technological problem—legal rules that have never been applied perfectly anyway.

Nevertheless, there is a definite legal problem here, and Christians should not ignore it. The state can become over-zealous in its prosecution of every known form of pollution. The messianic state is a greater menace to civilization than pollution has ever proven to be. People can at least move away from polluters. Also, the polluters generally live in the local environment, so they have an incentive to restrict the polluting processes. The messianic state is not equally self-limiting or limited by the direct response of the public, especially a public that has lost faith in the God of the Bible and His law.

The main restraint on the advent of a messianic state in a Christian commonwealth will be the inability of the state financially to expand its influence, since the taxing powers of the combined levels of civil government, local to federal, will be limited to less than 10% of national income (1 Sam. 8),⁹⁰ and it will not have the legal ability to debase the currency, either through debasing precious metals (Isa. 1:22)⁹¹

90. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

91. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the*

or by fractional reserve banking (Ex. 22:26).⁹² This general restraint on the growth of state power limits the state specifically in the area of pollution control (and in all other areas).

A second problem of enforcing responsibility for pollution is that there may be no way for victims to organize on a costeffective basis in order to gain restitution. The costs of organizing and proving damages in a court of law may exceed the actual, or at least demonstrable, injuries from the pollution.⁹³ Crocker called these “informational, contractual, and policing costs.”

Third, the complexity of the situation may make it difficult for a court to determine just what is fair with respect to compensation. Which firm’s smoke hurt what home owner in exactly what proportion of the total pollutants in a valley? And how much was he hurt? Contrary to the rarified discussions found in professional economics journals, there is no known scientific way to come up with an answer to the question of damages.⁹⁴ There is a lot of guesswork or intuition involved. (Economists should not object too strenuously, since intuition is the bedrock foundation of all humanistic economics anyway.)⁹⁵

Nobody can use the complex mathematical and logical formulas found in the scholarly journals to solve the “externalities” problem.⁹⁶ There are other issues to consider. First, did the property owner know in advance about the pollution, and did he buy the property at a discount? In short, has he already been compensated economically for his suffering? Second, has new information on the danger of a particular

Prophets (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

92. Chapter 49:J. See also Gary North, *Honest Money* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>). Cf. North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 1: “The Biblical Critique of Inflation.” (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>). For an even more detailed analysis, see North, “Isaiah’s Critique of Inflation,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VII (Summer 1980).

93. For an instance of just such a situation, see T. D. Crocker, “Externalities, Property Rights, and Transaction Costs: An Empirical Study,” *The Journal of Law and Economics*, XIV (Oct. 1971), pp. 461–62.

94. See Appendix H: “The Epistemological Problem of Social Cost.”

95. Gary North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976).

96. For an example of such unrealistic and utterly useless mathematical models, see S. A. Y. Lin and D. K. Whitcomb, “Externality Taxes and Subsidies,” in Lin (ed.), *Theory and Measurement of Externalities* (New York: Academic Press, 1976). The authors’ model assumes that: (1) private firms and the civil government have perfect and costless information; and (2) the costs of policing are zero. See John Burton’s comments, Epilogue, in Cheung, *Myth of Social Cost*, p. 60.

form of pollution recently become available? If so, did the victim pay too much for the property, even with the discount, and is he entitled to more compensation? Third, is the danger so great to the whole community that the pollution should be stopped entirely? Fourth, if regulations need to be passed to control regional pollution, will the enforcement mechanism be too powerful and arbitrary to preserve freedom, or will it be too weak to achieve its goals? Who decides? What kinds of self-compliance incentives can be built into the law to encourage the polluters to discipline themselves?

1. Incentives and Sanctions

The economists debate about incentives and sanctions. There are several recommended approaches. First, an outright ban on polluting. This is seldom wise. The costs are too high: costs of lost freedom and capital to producers, costs of lost jobs for employees, costs of forfeited tax revenues to the civil government, and lost economic growth when new factories fail to move in for fear of arbitrary, retroactive decisions by regional authorities. Also, it transfers too much power to enforcing agencies.

Second, tax credits (deductible against taxes owed to the community or civil government agency that is imposing the law) for installing pollution-control equipment. This gives the polluters an incentive to install the pollution-control devices. It also puts pressure on civil governments to reduce their expenditures to compensate for falling revenues—almost always a desirable political effect. If the civil government raises taxes from other sources, it risks a tax revolt. If it succeeds, however, taxpayers are then forced to pay for cleaner air or water. But if they had bought land under the older conditions—at a discount because of the pollution—they are going to be compensated by rising property values and a more pleasant way of life. This makes higher taxes more bearable.

The problem with the tax credit approach, on the face of it, is that polluters are not penalized. The Bible's rule that the victims should be compensated by the trespassers is seemingly not being honored. The best answer is that the rising concern for ecological purity is placing new environmental standards on producers—standards that did not prevail when they moved into the region to start business. The local residents got the benefits—more jobs, lower-priced land, perhaps a lower property tax rate—and are not entitled to direct restitution, ex-

cept by the better environment they will receive. Thus, if residents want less pollution, they have to pay for it. One way to pay for this is to allow profitable manufacturers the right to pay fewer taxes.

Third, progressive fines for polluters: the more pollution, the higher the fines. In effect, this allows polluters to “buy” the right of polluting. They must assess the value to them of continuing to pollute. They get no more “free lunches” in the form of an open sky or stream. The fines can be experimented with by the local civil government to reduce the worst kinds of pollution without bankrupting local businesses. If the money is used to reimburse victims directly or indirectly by lowering tax rates, this follows the biblical injunction.

If the fines are used by the bureaucrats and politicians to expand the civil government, then this is not what the Bible requires. There is always a great temptation by the civil government to use the fines to expand their power. The tax credit approach seems to be a better way to restrict the expansion of civil government. Higher taxes unquestionably act as an incentive to make changes as the output of pollutants increases. If the goal is to “put a lid on pollution, a graduated fine system is effective. But there are problems with defining legitimate fines or charges for any given level of pollution. There is no science of appropriate fines.⁹⁷

Fourth, in the case of a localized polluter that is affecting only land close by, the civil government can establish specific pollution standards, such as parts per million. The company can then be given a choice: meet the standards, or buy the lands that are being affected. This was done in Polk County, Florida, in the late 1950s when phosphate producing plants were reducing the value of adjacent cattle land and citrus properties. The companies could then decide which to do: pay for more pollution-control equipment or pay for the land. Increasingly, they bought the land, as the marginal cost of each additional increase in pollution control climbed much higher. In the mid-1950s, the companies had owned 50% of the affected land; by 1964, they owned 80%.⁹⁸

There are other possible solutions, but any workable long-term solution will have to be at bottom voluntaristic. We need greater decentralization of our population. It is the concentrated population of

97. Peter Lewin, “Pollution Externalities: Social Cost and Strict Liability,” *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), pp. 214–15; Jerome Millimen, “Can Water Pollution Policy be Efficient?” *ibid.* (<http://bit.ly/CatoPollution>)

98. Crocker, “Externalities,” pp. 456–59.

the modern city that is the great burden to the environment. The advent of decentralized power-generation systems would enable people to move to less expensive land in presently less populated regions. The strain on the environment will be reduced. With the advent of a low-cost system of international telecommunications through the Internet, another barrier to small town and rural living is gone. Because we can now educate and entertain ourselves without hooking up to wires, “wireless” living is capable of making possible lower-pollution living. If technologically advanced societies continue to sell information rather than manufactured goods, substituting high-technology, low-pollution manufacturing for older steel mills and automobile plants, then we can escape both big government and pollution. Something approaching the kind of decentralized utopia outlined by Tofler may not be that far away, technologically speaking.⁹⁹

All talk in scholarly economic journals about the ability of science to discover socially “optimal” levels of pollution is as far-fetched as science’s ability to come up with socially optimal anything (especially an optimal investment of scarce economic resources in scientific reports). Because humanistic economists cannot scientifically make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, it is illegitimate to assert the ability of any economist or other scientist to offer advice or data on how to achieve socially optimal anything. All the equations in the world will not add one iota of knowledge that will prove useful to any economist who relies exclusively on subjective economic theory in his search for socially optimal levels of pollution. (If the equations are sufficiently elegant to be utterly irrelevant, they could, on the other hand, win the developer a Nobel Prize in economics.)

The modern state is becoming messianic. Its supporters believe that salvation is essentially political. Thus, they promote state action in their efforts to heal the environment. Instead, we should begin with the issue of legal responsibility. Individuals are to be held accountable for their actions—by God, by the civil government, and by the free market.

When many polluters are harming many people, the state must intervene and impose sanctions against all producers of the particular type of generally unwanted pollution. But in doing so, the officials must count the costs to society of the intervention’s effects of people’s faith in private ownership. The intervention must be made in terms of

99. Alvin Tofler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Random House, 1980).

a defense of private property rights, not its abolition. The rise of the messianic state is a greater threat to liberty than pollution is. Pollution is a recognized evil; the messianic state is the agent of a rival religion.

A whole system of incentives and sanctions is available: fines, tax credits, pollution control standards, and even outright prohibition. What must be recognized is that the quest for zero pollution is messianic. It is a program that covers the real intent of its promoters: salvation by legislation. If men do not restrain themselves voluntarily as both polluters and pollution-fighters, the social order will be torn apart by the messianic quest for the perfect environment. Such an environment is available only after the final judgment, when the curse is removed (Rom. 8:19–22).

O. The Messianic Quest for Zero Pollution

The question of pollution, ultimately, is a question of stewardship, meaning personal responsibility. The Bible affirms that each man is responsible for his actions. No man is to pass along the costs of his activities to his neighbor, apart from the latter's consent. Where there is ownership (legitimate sovereignty), there must also be responsibility.

Perfect justice in this regard is impossible, and any attempt to create a completely pollution-free environment is doomed to failure. After all, men exhale—a form of pollution that unquestionably has some environmental consequences. Furthermore, it is not possible to assess the full costs of pollution, since estimating costs necessarily requires men to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, and such comparisons can be made only imperfectly.¹⁰⁰ Arbitrary estimates must be made by judges, arbitration committees, or administrative bureaucracies in charge of pollution-control programs. These will not be “scientific” estimates, for such measurable estimates cannot be made in economics. As Dales admitted, “the economist is quite unable to draw up a neat table showing all benefits and all costs of all anti-pollution policies that are proposed (or that might be proposed); he is therefore quite unable to say that one policy is demonstrably superior to all others. . . . At the moment, the subject is humility.”¹⁰¹ Perfection here cannot be achieved at any cost.

The example of the phosphate companies of Polk County, Florida, is representative. Achieving 95% efficiency in controlling emissions

100. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

101. Dales, *Pollution*, pp. 39, 40.

was economically possible. The last 5 percent would have bankrupted the companies. "Once an efficiency level of 95 per cent has been attained, it is clear that further increases in efficiency become relatively unresponsive to additional capital outlays. For plants at least ten years old in 1965, it is unlikely that the 97 per cent efficiency level can even be reached. The plant less than ten years old required an outlay of almost one-half million dollars to move from a 98 to a 99 per cent level of efficiency. Two two-year old plants needed a quarter million dollars to increase their control efficiency from 99.1 to 99.2 per cent."¹⁰² In 1968, the Pennsylvania Power Company of Newcastle, Pennsylvania spent \$2 million on a facility to reduce fly ash and suspended particulates discharged by the plant. To attain 99% removal, the firm had to spend an additional \$4 million.¹⁰³

Citizens must use self-discipline in their quest for a better world. If every citizen is forever suing his neighbor for each perceived infringement on his environmental lifestyle, society will perish. This is the great danger of class-action suits by one person in the name of an unspecified number of others in a supposed "class" of victims. Each person can sue a company, which may be operating within the law, thereby imposing endless legal fees on the firm. This could tie up a firm's legitimate operations. Such suits could be brought by anyone for almost any perceived infraction: automobile safety, national defense, and on and on.¹⁰⁴ Those who bring class-action suits that are determined by a jury to constitute unwarranted harassment of a business must be put "at risk" for their actions. Everyone must become responsible for his actions, not just producers.¹⁰⁵

Ours is not a perfect world, and any attempt to impose perfect standards on it, without acknowledging the limits imposed by scarcity, and therefore the costs involved, is demonic. The whole community will be harmed. "As costs rise for persons who must treat more and more of their wastes so that other persons can enjoy more and more purity, it will become apparent that the party who wants pure water is hurting the environment for the party who wants food, clothing, and shelter."¹⁰⁶

102. Crocker, "Externalities," p. 458.

103. Hite, *Economics of Environmental Quality*, p. 25.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

105. On the legal problems associated with class-action suits, see the critical comments by Murray N. Rothbard, "Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution," *op. cit.*, pp. 93–97. See also Huber, *Liability*, ch. 5.

106. Hite, *Economics of Environmental Quality*, p. 91.

Any civil government that attempts to reduce pollution to anywhere near zero is messianic. The results of a quest for zero pollution will be similar to the results of a quest for perfect justice: bankruptcy of the treasury, bankruptcy of producers, judicial arbitrariness, and an increasing number of economic disruptions.¹⁰⁷

The following piece of legislation, Senate Bill 2770, passed by the United States Senate by a vote of 86 to 0 in 1971, is indicative of this sort of messianic role for the state: "This section establishes a policy that the discharge of pollutants should be eliminated by 1985, that the natural chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters be restored, and that an interim goal of a water quality allowing fish propagation and suitable for swimming should be reached by 1981. The states are declared to have the primary responsibility and right to implement such a goal.¹⁰⁸ At least the Senate was wise enough to pass along "primary responsibility" to achieve these unattainable goals to the state governments. Since these goals were not attained, should someone ever remind the politicians about this bill, the Senate can blame someone else for its failure. Should the national government decide to impose sanctions in a futile attempt to achieve zero water pollution, it will mean the end of personal freedom for United States' citizens.

Summary

The Bible tells us to count the costs of our actions (Luke 14:28–30).¹⁰⁹ We cannot avoid the inescapable reality of scarcity in our cursed world. We are creatures who labor under a curse, and our environment is also under a curse. It is therefore as messianic to expect to be able to achieve a zero-pollution world in history as it is to expect to be able to achieve a sinfree world in history.

The pollution that we experience is simply a "side effect" of man's sin—the thorns and weeds with which God has cursed us (Gen. 3:18). We are told to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Perfection is the standard by which we are judged by God in both time and eternity. We are to strive toward this goal, but never in the hope of being able to achieve it in history, and never by means of political power alone. The same standard of perfection exists for our

107. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

108. Cited in Hite, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

109. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 35.

environment. Mankind is supposed to dwell in a pollution-free environment that matches his sin-free environment. When God's curse is removed from the creation after the final judgment, sin will no longer be a problem for mankind. Neither will pollution. But that perfect environment will be trans-historical.

To devote scarce resources to reduce sin is legitimate judicially and morally mandatory. To devote resources to reduce pollution is equally legitimate judicially and morally mandatory. Nevertheless, the task of reducing sin is not God's monopoly assignment to the state; neither is the reduction of pollution. We must avoid perfectionism and its institutional concomitant, the messianic state.

Conclusion

The Bible provides us with moral and legal guidelines that will permit those who abide by biblical law to serve as stewards of God's resources. As in any stewardship activity, sin reduces our ability to achieve perfection. The earth is cursed. We cannot legitimately expect to achieve perfect results. Nevertheless, we can expect God's blessings on our activities if we faithfully apply ourselves to the terms of the dominion covenant.

The free market allows us to estimate individual costs and benefits. A combination of political authority and free market allocation is needed to allocate the disposal of waste products. It is sometimes impossible to allocate private property rights, including waste disposal responsibilities, and the civil government has a role to play in this allocation process. The local civil government, governed by the value preferences of local residents, should have the primary responsibility in this regard. Larger units of civil government are to enter into the allocation process only because there are disputes between local units of government. The goal is to assign responsibility for cleaning up waste products to private beneficiaries of waste production (lower-cost producers and their clients), or when this proves too costly for them to remain in business, then to allow community standards of the majority to allocate the production and distribution of pollution in order to retain the local economic benefits that these polluters also produce.

Without market pricing of resources, underpriced resources tend to be overused by profit-seeking (cost-reducing) users. This has led to the so-called tragedy of the commons. Commonly owned property is treated as a cost-free resource. The individual users overgraze, over-

pollute, or generally abuse it because they receive the immediate benefits (lower costs of production) and share in the liabilities only as members of a large, diffused group—the “owners.”

1. Spillover Effects

We must treat the pollution issue as a “spillover” effect. The Bible’s case law regarding fire is applicable to pollution in general. One man’s actions impose costs on other people, and this should not be allowed without their express or implicit permission. He who imposes damage must make restitution to the victims. But we must recognize that buying property at a discount because of existing pollution constitutes “restitution in advance.” It is often legitimate under such circumstances to allow polluters to continue polluting.

Pollution is not always harmful (e.g., a bakery’s scent). Sometimes some form of pollution is harmful, but people may not recognize this. To hold men accountable retroactively for the recently recognized harmful effects of prior pollution is to treat people as if they were omniscient. If such penalties were automatically imposed as a matter of law, innovation would be stifled.

The civil government enters as an indirect allocator of pollution when markets fail to allocate pollution efficiently. This is necessary in most instances because property rights cannot be assigned to moving fluids. The state protects victims of unauthorized pollution. But this task is generally a local responsibility, for people in different communities may be willing to tolerate more pollution than others, if the economic payoff is high enough. The market then allocates pollution, given the state-enforced liability system. The state creates a kind of auction for pollution where the “high bid” (high tolerance) wins.

Pollution should be seen as a form of trespassing. It is an invasion of private property. The state has a responsibility to enforce property rights against trespassers; similarly, it has a responsibility of enforcing laws against polluters. This would include legislating fire codes (pre-pollution restrictions) and automobile emissions and noise-reduction devices.

We must recognize, however, that many of the most vocal opponents of pollution are in fact wealthy people who are attempting to keep less wealthy people from invading “their” common property. The ecology movement is dominated by upper-middle class people and the rich. They are articulate. They are threatened by the combined eco-

conomic bidding of poorer people. They have mobilized people to pressure the politicians to pass laws that favor a narrow special-interest group. By passing such all-encompassing legislation, especially at the national level, politicians are subsidizing the politically skilled minority whose interests frequently are at odds with the less skilled majority. The language of environmental ethics can be easily misused. In our day, the ecology movement has reflected a general attitude that is hostile to dominion. It has proclaimed the sovereignty of nature over covenant man.

2. Biblical Intuition vs. Humanist Science

Nevertheless, it is not possible to make a valid biblical case against all pollution legislation. Some defenders of the autonomous free market deny that the civil government has any responsibility in the area of pollution control. This clearly is a policy recommendation. When these intellectual defenders of the free market are challenged to answer one crucial question—the question of how economists can scientifically formulate social policy if they cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility—they are forced by the logic of their position to affirm a sort of intellectual agnosticism. As scientists, they must remain silent about social policy. They cannot possibly tell us as citizens or tell society's judges just how much pollution is "socially optimal," or how much restitution is "efficient" in the reduction of pollution. They do not accept the idea that God-directed and biblical law-affirming civil judges have the ability to make these intuitive judgments, but if economists are intellectually honest, they must also admit that all such judgments are necessarily intuitive, not "scientific."¹¹⁰ There can be no "scientific" economic judgments regarding social policy in a world in which it is impossible to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. I keep stressing this point throughout this commentary series because it is the Achilles heel of modern subjectivist economics. Nowhere is this epistemological problem more crucial or less solvable than in the field of pollution control.

The Christian knows that God can and does make such interpersonal comparisons. God knows how much pollution is optimal in any society at any point in time. His law-order is designed to enable God-fearing and biblical law-honoring societies to approach this optimum

110. Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*.

level of pollution, though not attain it perfectly. Christians who understand and believe Deuteronomy 28:1–14 also know that God has promised great blessings to those who seek to conform themselves to His law. These blessings presumably include reduced pollution, both as a benefit to man and the environment, but also because man is responsible for this environment. Such blessings are the product of a property rights system that honors the Bible's guidelines. The Bible gives us moral and legal guidelines, and biblical economics alerts us to the costs and benefits involved in the resolution of disputes concerning the proper level of pollution.

Our long-run goal is perfection, of course: ethical perfection. But we know that we are cursed sinners living in a cursed world. We aim at perfection as an ethical ideal, but we do not wring our hands in despair because we cannot attain perfection, in time and on earth. We know the costs associated with state-enforced programs that promise perfection and establish sanctions against those who do not achieve it. Those costs are too high.

SAFEKEEPING, LIABILITY, AND CRIME PREVENTION

If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double. If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges, to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour (Ex. 22:7–9).

The theocentric issue here is man's stewardship to God, point two of the biblical covenant model.¹ God delegates control over His property to men for safekeeping. Men are to do the same. *Delegation is basic to dominion.*

Part of ancient Israel's concept of neighborly hospitality² involved taking care of the neighbor's property from time to time. Exodus 22:7–9 deals with inanimate property as well as animals. Exodus 22:10–13 deals exclusively with animals entrusted to another's care.³ The existence of case laws governing safekeeping testifies to the fact that it was considered socially acceptable for an Israelite to ask his neighbor to safeguard his goods temporarily. This should also be true for modern Christians. Neighborly safekeeping is clearly a benefit to a man who is taking his family on a journey. He needs someone to watch over his possessions.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

2. James B. Jordan, "God's Hospitality and Holistic Evangelism" (1981), in Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), pp. 207–20. (<http://bit.ly/jjchurch>)

3. Chapter 50.

The neighbor is expected by both God and man voluntarily to accept this caretaking responsibility. Why? Because God accepted this same responsibility in ancient Israel. God promised to serve the Israelites as the safekeeper of their goods when they journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts. "For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year" (Ex. 34:24). Men are therefore to imitate God by guarding their neighbors' property when the latter go on journeys. God the cosmic Safekeeper and Caretaker is the theocentric frame of reference for these verses. Covenant-keeping man must be like God.

Adam was entrusted with the task of guarding God's property in the garden. God told Adam that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was off-limits to him. Then God departed from Adam's presence, as if He was going on a journey—the theme of the New Testament's parable of the talents (Matt. 25:15).⁴ God tested Adam's faithfulness in a particular way: to see if Adam would protect God's property from an invader during His absence. Instead of defending God's property from this invader, the serpent, Adam and Eve listened to the invader and did what he suggested: join in a covenantal alliance with him by sharing a covenant meal in his presence at the forbidden tree. God also tested Adam to see whether he would "put his hand unto his neighbour's goods." God was Adam's neighbor, which was a special privilege for Adam. But to maintain good relations with this cosmic Neighbor, Adam and Eve had to pass the test of hospitality. They failed the test. Thus, they owed God double restitution: death in history and death in eternity.

A. Representative Laws

Because God tested Adam's covenantal faithfulness by testing Adam's commitment to be an honest safekeeper, we should conclude that the Exodus case laws governing safekeeping have broad implications for the life of man. The caretaking laws are therefore representative laws. Samson Raphael Hirsch, the nineteenth-century Jewish commentator, wrote that verses 7–15 (6–14 in the Hebrew Torah) deal with "responsibilities which are incurred in the case of duties which are voluntarily undertaken." He divided the cases in terms of four par-

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

ticipants: the unpaid custodian, the paid custodian, the borrower, and the hirer. “In working out the different responsibilities incurred, and in the laws laid down regarding them, many general basic laws of civil law and justice are incidentally laid down, laws which have far-reaching application.”⁵

This passage covers criminal behavior: *theft*. It specifically refers to a *trespass*. In contrast, Exodus 22:10–13 deals with the caretaker’s *negligence*. The requirement here that double restitution be imposed by the judges indicates that this law deals with a criminal trespass. Not so in the case of Exodus 22:12: “And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof.” Double restitution is the penalty for criminal theft; value-for-value restitution is the penalty for negligence.

This passage does not indicate that the neighbor who receives the goods is given any kind of payment for his trouble. The rabbis so interpreted it.⁶ Hirsch said that this passage deals with “a custodian who is not responsible if the object left in his charge is stolen from him,” whereas the custodian in verses 10–13 is “one who has to pay compensation in such a case . . . and who is only free from responsibility if the property is lost in a manner which could not possibly have been prevented.” Citing the Talmud,⁷ he added: “A non-paid custodian in accepting custody, implicitly undertakes to give the entrusted goods the same care that he normally gives to his own property e.g., that at night time he places them in a securely closed place. But a paid custodian (unless of course, special conditions are agreed) implicitly accepts the duties of a watchman, so that even if he leaves it out of his personal surveillance he would be responsible even if it were stolen by thieves breaking in to properly closed premises.”⁸ I am not persuaded that Hirsch was correct about the legal distinction here being based on paid vs. unpaid custodianship, because I believe that the dividing issue is theft vs. negligence, but his comments indicate that he and the rabbis had given considerable thought to the meaning and application of these verses. He devoted ten pages to expositing just Exodus 22:7–9, more than he devoted to almost any other passage in the case law section of Exodus.

5. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained*, trans. Isaac Levy, 5 vols., *Exodus*, 3rd ed. (London: Honig & Sons, [1870?] 1967), p. 348.

6. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman [Ramban], *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), pp. 378–79.

7. *Baba Kamma* 57a; *Baba Metzia* 93b.

8. Hirsch, *Exodus*, p. 348.

B. Preserving Godly Social Order

It is not specified in the text just why the owner would transfer his assets to a neighbor, although an obvious reason would have been an upcoming journey. The fear of thieves would have motivated a man to entrust his capital to a neighbor.

1. Reducing Crime

The nature of the liabilities imposed by this and the related safekeeping passage (Ex. 22:10–13) indicates that the primary intent of the laws governing safekeeping was to reduce crime. Members of the covenant community are expected voluntarily to take on certain limited responsibilities in order to place the criminal at a disadvantage. The maintenance of godly social order is the goal of these laws.

A thief, then as now, would have looked for telltale signs of an abandoned house. When houses are empty, they are vulnerable to invasion: a boundary violation. The motif of the “empty house” is found throughout Scripture, most notably in the threat of God to abandon the House of Israel, symbolized by His departure from the temple, should Israel rebel against Him (Ezek. 8–11). Covenantal emptiness is a spiritual condition to be avoided. It cannot be maintained; something will always fill a covenantally empty place, whether an individual soul or a social order. In Jesus’s parable of the swept house, He compared a house to man’s heart, and then to the spiritual condition of the Jewish culture of His day. When a man “sweeps” out an evil spirit, but then leaves his “house” empty, the spirit returns with seven other spirits, all worse than the first, and reoccupies the house (Matt. 12:43–45). In short, from a spiritual standpoint, “you can’t beat something with nothing.” The covenantal “house” is not to be left empty. There can be no ethical or spiritual vacuums in life.

2. Stewardship and Dominion

The case laws governing safekeeping point to this important covenantal truth. Valuable property must be under someone’s administration if it is to be protected. It must be cared for. The thief who finds an empty house is more likely to be able to commit his crime undetected. *Guarding private property is therefore an important aspect of the dominion covenant.* Because all property belongs to God, the steward is required to be faithful in caring for whatever property has been as-

signed to him by God to guard, just as Adam was to care for God's garden. The steward must seek to preserve it intact. In cases when a person needs to go on a journey, and cannot carry all of his property with him, or fears to carry it because of highway robbers, he must locate a local guardian. Keeping thieves from breaking in and taking property is very important.

Because ownership is inescapably covenantal, and because neighbors are involved in a civil covenant with each other, the owner transfers limited and temporary control over his property to his neighbor. Neighbors have an incentive to reduce crime in the neighborhood. This was especially true in agricultural ancient Israel. Rural neighbors are more dependent on each other than urban neighbors are. There is less commerce with those outside the local community than there is in a city, which is a trade center. In other words, there is a reduced division of labor in a rural area. Rural residents are therefore more dependent on each other's productivity than residents of a city are. This was especially true before the revolutionary development of mail-order catalogue marketing.⁹ Rural residents have a unique economic incentive to preserve the wealth of their neighbors, for it is always better to have a prosperous neighbor nearby, because a wealthy neighbor has more goods to exchange with his neighbors, and more assets to help them in a crisis.

Additionally, wealthier neighbors are a social asset. This is why the influx of richer neighbors into the neighborhood has a tendency to increase the market value of local real estate.¹⁰ Envy and jealousy against those with greater wealth are evil impulses that threaten the covenantal integrity of a neighborhood, for they make the wealthier residents secretive and distrustful of their neighbors.¹¹ These twin evils

9. Peter Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), ch. 5: "Managing a Business: The Sears Story."

10. The best example of such a process in the United States in recent years is the movement of upper-middle-class whites into crime-ridden urban ghetto areas, especially in Washington, D.C. Crime decreases, housing is improved by the new owners, and then unimproved local property values rise. This does lead to the displacement of former residents, however. But "movement in" usually involves "movement out" in real estate transactions.

11. The sociologist Helmut Schoeck argued that envy—the desire to tear down someone simply because he is better off—is always a phenomenon of social proximity. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behaviour* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1966] 1970), pp. 20, 40, 62, 121, 189, 220, 237, 273, 349, 355. Social proximity is commonly very closely related to geographical proximity, at least in modern urban societies.

therefore reduce voluntary local cooperation and planning.

When neighbors can be trusted to care for each other's goods, a society probably has a strong covenantal bond. Residents see the thief's threat to the neighborhood, and they cooperate in order to make the thief's task more difficult. A similar bond is seen in the urban "neighborhood watch" societies, in which residents of a neighborhood join together in a voluntary agreement to keep an eye on each other's homes, and to report anything suspicious to the police. The social atomization of the typical modern urban neighborhood, in which people do not know the names of their next-door neighbors, or the neighbors two houses down the street, favors the thieves.¹²

C. Accepting Responsibility

So common was the entrusting of goods to neighbors in Israel that the case laws established rules governing the practice. The case laws' provisions still govern similar relationships today. When a man accepts the task of guarding his neighbor's property, he thereby accepts a considerable degree of personal liability. Control is inescapably tied to ownership.¹³ Yet, in this case, the controller is not the legal owner. This places certain disadvantages on him.

1. *Legal Responsibility and Economic Responsibility*

We must distinguish here between legal responsibility and economic responsibility, lest there be any confusion about the nature of the responsibility of the safekeeper. Ownership is inescapably connected to economic responsibility. Ownership is a social function; it is a

12. A profitable tactic for thieves in urban America is to buy, hire, or steal a large moving van, paint counterfeit company symbols on its sides, drive up to a house while the family is away, load the van with the family's household goods, and drive away. So impersonal are most American neighborhoods that the neighbors seldom report this activity to the police as it is taking place. They simply assume that the family is moving away. They do not regard it as remarkable that the departing family never said good-bye to anyone. American families seldom say hello to anyone living next door or across the street, year after year.

13. This is why the fascist states of the 1930s were really socialist economies. Ownership of industry was officially retained by private individuals, but control over industrial assets was placed in the hands of state bureaucrats. Cf. Guenter Reimann, *The Vampire Economy: Doing Business Under Fascism* (New York: Vanguard, 1939). This has been reprinted by the Mises Institute. (<http://bit.ly/VampEcon>) This was the only detailed English-language book on the German economy under the Nazis until Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction* (New York: Viking, 2006). That is over 65 years—an astounding academic oversight.

stewardship function.¹⁴ Owners must decide, moment by moment, what to do with the assets they own. Moment by moment, others are bidding in the market for the services, animate and inanimate, that each person owns. The moment this bidding process ceases, the price of the asset in question falls to zero, and therefore it ceases to be a scarce economic resource. The existence of a price testifies to the existence of the competing bids for ownership. There is no escape for a property owner from these God-imposed economic functions and responsibilities. Arrangements can be made to distribute these ownership functions among those who are willing to bear certain kinds of risk, such as through insurance contracts, but with the ownership of legal titles to property inevitably comes a “bundle of rights” (legal immunities from specified kinds of physical interference) and therefore a “bundle of responsibilities” (economic obligations to the market).¹⁵

Exodus 22:7–15 is not speaking about inescapable, God-imposed economic responsibilities of ownership. It speaks instead about certain *legal* responsibilities that pass to the safekeeper even though he is not the owner of the property. Biblical law spells out these legal responsibilities. A neighbor can be held accountable in a court of law for his actions. In the case of missing goods, the man to whom the property has been entrusted must give an account for the missing property. “For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour” (Ex. 22:9). This is the case of suspected *trespass*. It involves a suspicion of criminal behavior. Double restitution is therefore the penalty upon

14. Gary North, “Ownership: Free but Not Cheap,” *The Freeman* (July 1972). (<http://bit.ly/OwnFree>) Reprinted in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 28. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

15. These economic responsibilities stem directly from the legal immunities of others in the marketplace. Owners of assets in a free society possess a legal right to bid for ownership of other people’s property. This is sometimes called *consumers’ sovereignty*. An early use of this term is found in W. H. Hutt, “The Nature of Aggressive Selling,” *Economica*, 12 (1935); reprinted in *Individual Freedom: Selected Works of William H. Hutt*, eds. Svetozar Pejovich and David Klingaman (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1975), p. 185. The concept of consumer’s sovereignty is incorrect. Sovereignty is an aspect of civil law: legal title. Authority is an aspect of economics: economic stewardship. The phrase should be “customer’s authority.” In this case, the present owner is also a consumer: he holds the property for himself. The interaction of the bidders determines the price of the good. Responding to these offers is the inescapable economic responsibility of the present legal owner: no response is in fact a response of “no.”

conviction (Ex. 22:4).

2. *Why Only Double Restitution?*

Notice that the passage specifies double restitution for a stolen sheep. Clearly, the convicted caretaker has either eaten the sheep or has sold it; otherwise, there would be no court case: the animal would be in the caretaker's herd. The suspected neighbor would simply return the animal to its owner. Then why only double restitution in this instance? Four-fold restitution is imposed on the thief who kills or sells a sheep (Ex. 22:1). The answer is that one of the reasons why there is a higher penalty imposed for stealing and destroying a sheep or ox (specially protected because of their symbolizing mankind) is that it is difficult to locate and convict the unknown thief.¹⁶ In the case of a neighbor, there is greater ease (i.e., less expense) of conviction; the owner knows who had possession of it last. Because there is lower risk of detection for a stranger who commits the theft, there are increased criminal penalties to offset this lower risk.

There are risks for both of the disputants when they go to court to settle the conflict. The neighbor who brings a false accusation, as distinguished from a mistaken accusation, risks being condemned by the judges. He would then be required to pay double restitution to the falsely accused victim, the same penalty that the latter would have suffered (Deut. 19:18–19).¹⁷ Bringing a false accusation is a form of perjury, and the law of perjury applies: forfeiting to the victim what the victim would have been required to forfeit as a result of the false testimony (Deut. 19:19). Understand, however, that the victim would have to prove that the accuser had knowingly accused him falsely.

3. *Implied Trust and Presumed Innocence*

Because of the implied trust that the first man had in the character of the second person, it becomes difficult for the judges to convict the second man for theft, a criminal act. The owner's original decision to trust the neighbor indicates that he believed the person to be honest. The judges must therefore operate with the presumption of the innocence of the accused, just as the owner had originally operated. This difficulty of gaining a conviction adds to the risk borne by the accuser

16. Chapter 17.

17. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

if he decides to charge his neighbor with criminal trespass (Ex. 22:7–9) rather than mere negligence (Ex. 22:10–13).¹⁸

The property owner is unwilling to bear the full legal responsibilities and costs of ownership by paying someone to perform this service. He therefore decides to transfer some of this legal responsibility to a neighbor. By leaving, the owner must bear an added degree of risk. His neighbor may turn out to be a criminal negligent. If his neighbor is willing to lie to the judges, it will be very difficult to prove criminal action. “If a man deliver unto his neighbor an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it: Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour’s goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good” (Ex. 22:10–11). Thus, there is *shared risk*: the owner imputes trustworthiness to the neighbor, and the neighbor takes on added legal responsibility. The requirement of the oath reduces risk to the property owner, however, if the safekeeper believes in God. (The modern loss of faith in God has unquestionably increased the level of risk in society, as well as having increased the difficulty of gaining judicial convictions.) The compulsory oath is an important biblical device for promoting civil justice.¹⁹ The accused may remain silent, but if he speaks, he is required to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He is not to place his accusers under the risk of loss through his false testimony.

D. Compulsory Judicial Oaths

1. Reducing State Power

Why should the Bible authorize the civil government to require covenant oaths from all witnesses? Why should the accused be required to testify under oath, and therefore be under the threat of both civil and ecclesiastical sanctions? *Because the state is not allowed by God to attempt to read the mind of any witness.* Far from being a means of enhancing state power, the compulsory oath is a device that is intended to restrain state power. By making it possible for the state

18. Chapter 51.

19. Is the state authorized by God to compel testimony from the oath-taker if he is the accused? Yes, except in cases when the accused is being charged with the sin of blasphemy against God or treason against the state, as Jesus was. He refused to answer Herod (Luke 23:9) and Pilate (Matt. 27:14). His silence was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s messianic prophecy (Isa. 53:7). This was not a case involving alleged damages suffered by another oath-taking individual, as in Exodus 22:1.

to impose sanctions against convicted perjurers, biblical law removes from the judges any presumed authority to read the mind of a witness. The witness' false public testimony against the accused can later be used against him (perjury).

To render justice, the court needs accurate information. The court is legally *entitled* to accurate information from all third-party witnesses who are called by law to testify. The compulsory oath is God's authorized means of lowering the court's cost of attaining such knowledge. The accusing witness is not allowed to hide his thoughts because *the state is not allowed to imitate God by claiming to be able to search the hearts of men*. For instance, testimony based on "lie detector" tests or on such occult arts as mind-reading, hypnotism, and information revealed in dreams or trances is biblically invalid.

The court is God's agency of justice and temporal judgment. Civil judges represent God in history. A witness is no more allowed to testify falsely to a lawful civil court than he is allowed to testify falsely to God.²⁰ A third-party witness is required to reveal every-thing he knows about the facts of the case when asked specific questions under legitimate cross-examination.

The witness is required to swear an oath before God, and not just before the earthly judges. He invokes God's name and therefore invokes God's sanctions. The civil court-imposed oath is therefore a true covenantal oath, for all covenantal oaths are self-maledictory under God.²¹ By invoking God's sanctions by taking a judicially valid oath, the witness faces negative sanctions, not just from the court in case his perjury is detected, but from God who knows all hearts. The witness is reminded by the oath that *God will condemn him if he gives false testimony, for God knows the thoughts of men*. This is why offering false testimony under oath places a man under God's sanctions, and why the sinner owes a trespass offering to the church, God's agency of excommunication, rather than to the state, God's agency of the sword: "And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offer-

20. False testimony is legitimate when the court is illegal, or is demanding information that it is not entitled to. For example, Pharaoh's "court" was not entitled to accurate information from the midwives regarding the birth of male Hebrew children. They could legitimately lie to Pharaoh because they were under covenant to a different God who was in the process of bringing Pharaoh and his society under judgment. See chapter 4.

21. Chapter 23.

ing, unto the priest” (Lev. 6:6).²²

2. *Hammurabi’s Code*

The oath was also used in Hammurabi’s Babylon. Speaking of the seignior, or aristocrat, the law states: “If a seignior deposited grain in a(nother) seignior’s house for storage and a loss has then occurred at the granary or the owner of the house opened the storage-room and took grain or he has denied completely (the receipt of) the grain which was stored in his house, the owner of the grain shall set forth the particulars regarding his grain in the presence of god and the owner of the house shall give to the owner of the grain double the grain that he took.”²³ The one who was said to have stored the grain was assumed to be guilty, once the accuser had made an oath in the presence of a god. Whether theft was involved or simply negligence, the granary owner paid double. But this was not a case of voluntary safekeeping. This was a commercial transaction. The law imposed a fixed price for storing grain.²⁴

The Code of Hammurabi did not rely exclusively on an oath before a god in every case. It also relied on written contracts and witnesses. There is no reason to believe that this was not also true in ancient Israel. But in an illiterate culture, not everyone can afford such written documents. The Code of Hammurabi was almost entirely concerned with laws governing the oligarchy. This was not the case with biblical law. Thus, Old Testament rules of evidence were based on verbal promises and oaths, because it set down general laws that governed all people in Israel. Anyone who wished to have someone else store silver, gold, or anything else for safekeeping had to show witnesses what was being entrusted to another. Contracts were drawn up.²⁵ “If he gave (it) for safekeeping without witnesses and contracts and they have denied (its receipt) to him at the place where he made the deposit, that case is not subject to claim.”²⁶ On the other hand, if there were witnesses, the person who accepted the property for safekeeping paid the depositor

22. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 7.

23. Hammurabi Code, paragraph 120. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 171.

24. *Ibid.*, paragraph 121.

25. *Ibid.*, paragraph 122.

26. *Ibid.*, paragraph 123.

double.²⁷ There is no reason to doubt that the same sorts of evidence could be used in a Hebrew law court, but the case law does not mention types of formal evidence.

If the safekeeper's house was broken into, and both his property and the depositor's stored property were missing, he was presumed by law to be careless. The law declares: he "shall make (it) good and make restitution to the owner of the goods, while the owner of the house shall make a thorough search for his lost property and take (it) from its thief."²⁸ First, the language indicates that the safekeeper did not pay double, but only restored what was lost, making good the loss. This corresponds to the provision of Exodus 22:12: "And if it be surely stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof." Second, this law indicates that any property subsequently returned by the thief to the safekeeper who had paid restitution to his neighbor would be kept by him as compensation for his loss.

The most interesting section of the Code refers to a man who claimed that his property was lost, when it was not lost. The law says that he has deceived the city council. The council set forth the facts of the case "in the presence of god," and he then paid double restitution to the city council, not to the person who was falsely accused.²⁹ This is in stark contrast to biblical law, which makes the false accuser liable for damages he sought to impose on a private party. It is much closer to modern concepts of jurisprudence, where fines are paid to the state.

The other major difference between Hammurabi's Code and the Bible is that these laws applied only to aristocrats. Nothing is said about the legal relations between aristocrats and commoners. The law protected aristocrats in their relations with each other, but no legal protection was guaranteed for other classes.

3. Escaping an Erroneous Accusation

Once the accuser has made his accusation, the accused has a lawful way of escape: the oath.³⁰ "Then shall an oath of the LORD be

27. *Ibid.*, paragraph 124.

28. *Ibid.*, paragraph 125.

29. *Ibid.*, paragraph 126.

30. Boecker made the observation that oaths were taken only by the accused in Israel's courts. There is no case in the Bible that an oath was taken by a witness, he says. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, [1976] 1980), p. 35. This seems to be true with respect to formal oath-taking, but Boecker's observation is also irrelevant. The witness who gave his testimony in a Hebrew court was im-

between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good" (Ex. 22:11). If the accused takes this oath, the court must declare him innocent. But if he refuses, the court can lawfully declare him guilty. The accused is legally obligated to take the oath.³¹ As we shall see, added economic penalties were imposed by the civil magistrates and also by ecclesiastical officers on a man who offered false testimony under oath.

Hirsch argued that the double restitution penalty is to be imposed only after the thief has sworn falsely.³² I disagree. Once the trial has begun, the convicted thief owes double restitution, with or without the oath. Only if he confesses before the trial can he escape double restitution, in which case he pays to the victim full value restitution plus 20%.³³ It is not simply that theft is to be penalized; false oaths must also be penalized. The Book of Leviticus specifies that a trespass offering to God must be made by anyone who makes a false oath. The Old Testament trespass offerings for swearing falsely (Lev. 5:4) involved ritual animals: lambs, turtledoves, or pigeons (Lev. 5:6–7). The priest made atonement for the guilty person (Lev. 5:6).

In New Testament times, such ritual atonement offerings have not been applicable (Heb. 9). This does not mean that there are no valid penalties against false oaths. A payment must go to the church as a means of restitution to God (Lev. 6:6). This also reminds the civil court

licitly under an oath, for he was under the threat of civil covenant sanctions. Perjury on the part of the witness, when discovered and proven, subjected the lying witness to the punishment that would have been imposed on the victim (Deut. 19:15–21). Where there are covenant sanctions, there is inevitably a covenant oath, either implicit or explicit.

31. The Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution prohibits the federal government from forcing an individual to testify in court against himself in a criminal case. This provision is clearly opposed to the requirement of biblical law that a person swear before God that he is innocent: he may not remain silent. Until the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, the first eight amendments did not apply to the states. Chief Justice John Marshall articulated this position in his famous decision, *Barron v. Baltimore* (1833). See *The Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation*, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 889–90. The Committee of Eleven, to whom the Bill of Rights (first ten amendments) had been referred by Congress in 1789, rejected any suggestion that these amendments be applied to state governments as well as to the federal government: Raoul Berger, *Government by Judiciary: The Transformation of the Fourteenth Amendment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 134n.

32. Hirsch, *Exodus*, p. 349.

33. Chapter 47.

that it is not the only valid court in society. The church, as God's representative court over the individual's moral conscience, is entitled to a payment, although the civil judges are to specify the size of this payment. "And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD, a ram without blemish out of the flock, *with thy estimation*, for a trespass offering, unto the priest" (Lev. 6:6).

E. Confession and Restitution

I argue in this commentary that once a person commits a theft, he automatically owes the victim at least a 20% payment in addition to the return of his principal. The case does not have to come to trial for this penalty payment to be owed by the thief. I derive this conclusion from the case law's texts regarding theft, but also from the example of the archetypal theft: Adam and Eve's stealing of God's forbidden fruit.

1. *Adam's Trial*

The moment they touched it, they were guilty. They owed God at least a ritual apology. In the Old Testament, anyone who touched a forbidden (unclean) thing was himself unclean until evening (Lev. 11:24–25). I think this was because God had originally returned in judgment to the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8), meaning at evening. It may not have hurt God's net asset value for them to have merely touched the fruit, but it was a violation of His law, His ethical boundary.

They went beyond mere touching; they stole the fruit and ate it. This was theft. It was corrupt caretaking. It was also the equivalent of eating a forbidden sacrifice, for it was a ritual meal eaten in the presence of the serpent. The penalty for this in ancient Israel was separation from God's people: "But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people. Moreover the soul that shall touch any unclean thing, as the uncleanness of man, or any unclean beast, or any abominable unclean thing, and eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which pertain unto the LORD, even that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Lev. 7:20–21). This penalty pointed back to the garden, where God separated Adam and Eve from Himself by casting them out of the garden.

God, however, is merciful to sinners. Why else would He have created the sacrificial system? Thus, had Adam and Eve come to God as

He entered the garden, admitting their sin and pleading for mercy, He would have spared mankind the ultimate penalty of eternal separation from Him. In fact, had they prayed a prayer of confession rather than spending their time sewing fig leaves for themselves, they would have escaped the death penalty—full restitution payment to God. This very act would have constituted a pre-trial confession of guilt. It would have been an act of symbolic communion with God—a judicial, sanctions-governed act of repentance. But instead they tried to cover their own guilt through their own efforts: sewing fig leaves. God therefore announced His sentence of death against them: dust to dust. Those who wait until the end of the trial must make full (multiple) restitution.

My conclusion is that a pre-trial confession of guilt by the criminal is punished less rigorously than a crime in which the criminal is convicted on the basis of the judges' inquiry. A person is always encouraged by God to confess his sins. If these sins are public sins, then his confession must also be public, if not to a court, then at least to the victim. For example, if a worker steals cash from his employer, but later replaces it before the theft is discovered, he still must confess his crime to the owner. The fact that no human being detected the crime does not affect the question of guilt and sanctions in God's eyes. The thief did impose the *risk* of permanent loss on the victim, even though the victim suffered no known loss; the victim therefore deserves compensation. This upholds the biblical principle of victim's rights. The victim, like God, should strive to be merciful, but biblical law teaches that he is entitled to be informed that mercy is now in order.

2. Leviticus 6

Biblical law subsidizes public confession. If a man confesses, he can escape the multiple restitution requirement: he is required only to repay the stolen principal, plus 20%.

If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour; or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he hath sworn

falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering (Lev. 6:2–5).³⁴

There appears to be an inconsistency here. The penalty for theft is here stated to be 20%, yet in other verses, restitution for theft in general is two-fold, and sometimes four-fold or five-fold. Why the apparent discrepancy? We know that Leviticus 6 is dealing with cases in which the guilty person has sworn falsely to the authorities. Later, however, he voluntarily confesses the crime and his false oath. I conclude that the double restitution penalty is imposed only in cases where a formal trial has begun. The provision in Leviticus 6 of a reduced penalty is an economic incentive for a guilty person to confess his crime before the trial has begun, or at least before the court hands down its decision.

The thief has testified falsely to the authorities, either before the trial or during it. This is why he owes a trespass offering to the priest (Lev. 5:1–13; 6:6). I argue here that he can lawfully escape the obligation to pay double restitution if he confesses after his initial denial, but before the trial begins. He cannot lawfully escape paying double restitution and making the trespass offering if he swears falsely during the trial. He has to confess before the oath is imposed and the trial begins.

As always, we should search for a theocentric principle lying behind the law. There is one in this case: the correlation between this *reduced criminal penalty* for voluntary, public confession of sin, when accompanied by economic restitution, and God's offer of a *reduced (eliminated) eternal penalty* for people who make public Christian confession of sin prior to their physical death, if this confession is also accompanied by economic or other kinds of restitution.³⁵ If we wait for God's formal trial at the throne of judgment, we are assured of being forced to pay a far higher restitution penalty.

Why do I believe that Leviticus 6 refers to a pre-trial voluntary confession? Because of the context of Leviticus 6. Leviticus 5 deals with sins against God that must be voluntarily confessed: "And it shall

34. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 7.

35. I am not arguing that salvation is by works. It is by grace (Eph. 2:8–9). But let us not forget Ephesians 2:10: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." I am arguing that without obedience, our faith is dead. James 2:18 says: "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." And in James 2:20, we read: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" The outward obedience of the criminal is supposed to be demonstrated by his willingness to make restitution to his victim.

be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing” (Lev. 5:5). The sinner in Israel then brought a trespass offering to the priest (Lev. 5:8). This made atonement for the trespass: “And he shall offer the second for a burnt offering, according to the manner: and the priest shall make an atonement for him for his sin which he hath sinned, and it shall be forgiven him” (Lev. 5:10). Why would he make such a public confession? Because of his fear of the ultimate penalty that God will impose on those who offer false testimony in His courts.

We then note that Leviticus 6 also deals with trespasses against God. It is specifically stated in Leviticus 6:2 that the 20% penalty payment applies to “a trespass against the LORD” in which the sinning individual has lied to his neighbor about anything that was delivered to him by the neighbor for safekeeping. The context indicates that the sinner has voluntarily confessed his crime against God and his neighbor, just as he voluntarily confessed his trespass against God in Leviticus 5.

The question is inevitable: Are there two penalties of 20% implied in Leviticus 6, or only one? In other words, is there a 20% penalty only for making a false oath, with the payment going to the victim, and with a trespass offering also going to the church court, or is there also a 20% penalty to the victim in cases of pre-trial confession?

3. Restitution Plus a Trespass Offering

Here is the problem the commentator faces. The text in Exodus 22 states that the court is to require double restitution from the neighbor who has “put his hands to” his neighbor’s goods. He is therefore to be treated as a common thief. But if double restitution is the required penalty, then what is the 20% penalty of Leviticus 6:5 all about?

It has been argued by some Jewish commentators that the 20% penalty in Leviticus 6:5 is to be imposed only in cases where there has been a public oath before a rabbinical court. They argue that the penalty payment does not apply to cases of voluntarily confessed theft as such, meaning secret or even undetected thefts, but only to cases of forcible robbery in which the thief is identified, arrested, and brought before an *ecclesiastical* (i.e. synagogue) court, where he gives a false oath of denial, and later admits this lie. Wrote Jacob Milgrom: “Since the point of this law is to list only those cases that culminate in the possessor’s false oath, it would therefore be pointless to include the

term 'theft' which assumes that the possessor-thief is unknown."³⁶ He went so far as to argue that the Leviticus passage deals only with religious law, not civil law. "All that matters to the priestly legislator is to enumerate those situations whereby the defrauding of man leads, by a false oath, to the 'defrauding' of God. The general category of theft in which the thief remains unidentifiable is therefore irrelevant to his purpose."³⁷ Eight centuries earlier, Maimonides wrote that the thief who confesses of his own accord owes only the value of the asset he stole, not double restitution. He did not mention the 20% penalty.³⁸

If Milgrom's view were correct, this would mean that there would be no court-imposed restitution penalty payment from criminals to victims in (oathless) cases of pre-trial, self-confessed theft. Why wouldn't there be such compensation? Because the one-fifth penalty was assumed by Milgrom to be applicable only in cases where there has been a false oath. This interpretation therefore eliminates the 20% penalty payment for pre-trial, self-confessed crimes.

While this judicial implication follows the premise, it is not in accord with the biblical principle of victim's rights. The victim has been deprived of his property, and he has suffered a sense of loss, assuming that he had actually discovered that the stolen item was missing, yet the Bible supposedly makes no provision to compensate him for these obvious burdens. On the face of it, this conclusion seems highly unlikely, yet it follows inevitably from the initial claim that the 20% penalty only applies to cases where there has been a false oath to a court.

Why do I believe that this interpretation is unlikely? Because the Bible is emphatic that *victims are to be protected*, and that *criminals are to suffer losses in proportion to their crimes*. The thief who confesses before a trial is not on a par judicially with a neighbor who has, through negligence, lost or inadvertently ruined an item placed in his safekeeping. The negligent neighbor pays only for what he lost; the self-confessed thief has to pay more. The principle of *lex talionis* applies here as elsewhere: the penalty must fit the crime.³⁹ To argue that the penalty is the same for theft and negligence—merely the return of the stolen item or its equivalent value—is to deny *lex talionis*.

36. Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The "Asham" and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), p. 100.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–1.

38. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), "Laws Concerning Theft," II:1:5, pp. 60–61.

39. Chapter 41.

If thieves were granted the legal option of returning stolen goods whenever it appeared to them that they might be discovered, but before they are put under oath, then it would be far less risky to steal. If there is a 20% penalty only after a false oath is given, but before a trial, then a theft that is confessed before the oath is administered would become virtually risk-free for the thief. He could escape any penalty simply by confessing his crime and by returning the stolen property. The option of self-confession would remain as an escape device whenever the authorities began to close in. If God's law did not impose penalties on theft, it would implicitly be subsidizing criminal behavior. God does not subsidize rebellion.

The express language of the passage militates against Milgrom's interpretation of Leviticus 6. After listing all sorts of theft and deception, the text says, "he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto" (v. 5). To whom must this penalty payment be paid? To the victim: "Or all that about which he hath *sworn falsely*; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and *give it unto him to whom it appertaineth*, in the day of his trespass offering" (Lev. 6:5b). While the passage does mention a false oath, this does not render null and void a penalty for each of the crimes that preceded verse 5.

The sense of the passage is not that a false oath must accompany each of the list of transgressions in order for the penalty to be invoked. On the contrary, *each of the victims of these crimes is to be compensated by a 20% penalty payment*. The crimes are separate acts; thus, translators used the English word "or" in listing them, indicating that any one of these criminal infractions automatically invokes the 20% penalty, not merely the taking of a false oath. The false oath invokes its own independent penalty payment: the trespass offering, a ram without blemish (Lev. 6:6). So, the criminal must pay the victim 20%, with or without a false oath. The false oath makes the trespass offering to the priest an additional requirement.

Leviticus 6 is not in opposition to Exodus 22:9. Exodus 22:9 requires double restitution either from the false accuser who perjured himself (Deut. 19:16–19) or from the criminal neighbor (thief). Assume that the criminal neighbor swears falsely before the judges in order to avoid having to pay double restitution to his victim. If successful in his deception, he escapes the penalty. But what if the accuser is convicted of making a false accusation? The lying neighbor collects double restitution from the victim. He now owes him four-fold restitution.

What if he then repents of his false oath before it is discovered? He still owes the original double restitution, plus the return of the falsely collected double penalty, plus a 20% penalty payment on everything (Lev. 6:1–6). Thus, if the stolen object was worth one ounce of gold, the restitution payment owed to the victim by a now-confessed perjured thief would be 4.8 ounces of gold: 2 ounces (the original double restitution payment), plus 2 ounces (the falsely extracted penalty) plus .2 times 4 ounces, meaning .8 ounces = 4.8 ounces.

What about the perjured thief who refuses to admit his guilt and who is later convicted of this perjury? Because he had been paid double restitution by his victim (Ex. 22:9), he now owes him *six-fold restitution*: double whatever he had stolen (2 X 1) plus double whatever he had unlawfully collected (2 X 2). This threat of six-fold restitution serves as an economic incentive for the perjured thief to confess to the court that he had offered false testimony earlier. We see once again that *biblical law rewards timely confession*.

Exodus 22:9 establishes double restitution for stolen sheep and oxen, not four-fold or five-fold. This is because neighbors are involved. What if the court does not have proof that the accuser testified falsely against his neighbor, yet also does not have sufficient proof to convict the neighbor? The thieving neighbor escapes paying two-fold restitution. What if he then repents and confesses? He owes his neighbor a 2.4 restitution penalty (2 X 1, plus 2 X .2). What if his crime is discovered later? He owes four-fold restitution for perjury: double what he would have owed if he had been convicted originally.

What would he have owed to the temple in the case of unconfessed perjury? If the trespass offering was one animal if he had confessed after having made a false oath or oaths, presumably the penalty was double this.⁴⁰ This follows from my thesis that *there is an escalation of penalties*. At each step of the legal proceedings, he can confess and bear a reduced penalty. For each level of deception, there are increased sanctions.

God is honored by the very act of self-confession, when such confession has a penalty attached to it. Oath or no oath, the two primary goals of laws governing theft are the *protection of property* and the *compensation of the victim*. Earthly civil courts are therefore to safeguard the property rights of the victims, making sure that the appropriate penalty is extracted from the criminal and transferred to the vic-

40. It could be argued that the penalty was death: a high-handed false oath that was not confessed.

tim. There is no requirement of an additional money penalty payment to the civil court because of a false oath regarding theft. A trespass or guilt offering must be paid to the church.⁴¹

The false oath before God invokes the threat of the ultimate penalty: the eternal wrath of God, preceded by the physical death of the criminal. Unless a person confesses his false oath in this life, makes appropriate restitution to his victim and brings a transgression offering, God will collect His own restitution payment, and it is far greater than 20%. Ananias and Sapphira lied to church authorities concerning the %age of their economic gains that they had voluntarily donated to the church. When asked individually by Peter if what they had told the authorities was true, they lied, and God struck each of them dead on the spot, one by one (Acts 5:1–10). This served as a very effective warning to the church in general (v. 11). Presumably, they could have confessed their crime at that point, paying all the money from the sale into the church's treasury, because God was the intended victim of their lies (Acts 5:4). They chose instead to lie. So, God imposed His more rigorous penalty.⁴²

4. After the Accusation, but Before the Trial

What if the thief stole an animal, especially a sheep or an ox, and then sold it? If the civil authorities have brought the thief to trial, but the trial has not been held, would he be given the opportunity to confess to the victim, and then go to the buyer, confess his crime, buy it back at the purchase price plus 20%, and return it to the true owner, plus 20%? This would seem to be a reasonable conclusion. His confession would reduce the cost of prosecuting him and convicting him. Understand, however, that the thief has committed two crimes: the original theft and the defrauding of the buyer. The buyer was led to believe that the thief possessed the legal right of ownership, which was being passed to the new buyer.⁴³ Thus, the defrauded buyer is also entitled to a 20% penalty payment, as well as the return of his purchase price. This would make the total penalty 40%, because he had de-

41. The question arises: Which church? To the church that the convicted thief belongs to, since it suffers the public humiliation. If he belongs to no church, then it should probably go to the victim's church, or if he also does not belong to a church, to a local church selected randomly or in predictable sequence by the civil judges.

42. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

43. Chapter 43:C.

frauded two people: the first by means of the theft and the second by means of his lie.

The thief's confession reduces the possibility that a guilty man will go free and an innocent victim will be defrauded. Apart from this admission, the judges might make a mistake, especially if the thief commits perjury during the trial. His confession eliminates this judicial problem.

The modern judicial system has adopted an analogous solution: plea bargaining. A criminal confesses falsely to having committed a lesser crime, and the judge accepts this admission and hands down a reduced penalty. This is the way that prosecuting attorneys unclog the court system. The Bible rejects this approach. Plea bargaining leaves the main crime officially unsolved, and it allows the guilty person to appear less of a threat to society than his behavior indicates that he is. The Bible does recognize the institutional problem, however: the risks and costs of gaining a conviction. Instead of having the criminal plead guilty to a lesser crime, it encourages him to plead guilty to the actual crime before the trial, and thereby receive a reduced penalty.

F. Who Pays What?

The judges must determine the nature of the negligence, and therefore the size of the restitution payment. A thief pays double (v. 7). If the neighbor is the thief, he pays double (v. 9). But verse 12 speaks of "restitution," not a double payment: "And if it shall be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof." In this case, "restitution" means "making good the loss." We can see this in verse 13, where it says that when he can produce the torn remains of the animal, "he shall not make it good." "Making it good" and "restitution" are identical words in Hebrew, and should be regarded as equivalents here.

Restitution in the context of the obligation of the negligent safekeeper is *a payment equal to the value of what had been lost*. The responsible neighbor did not intend to profit from the theft. Indeed, he voluntarily took on added responsibilities by agreeing to serve as a protector. Negligence on the part of the safekeeper is not the same as criminal intent on the part of the thief; therefore, the penalties are different. The thief pays the victim an extra penalty equal to his hoped-for profit: double restitution. There is no additional penalty payment imposed on the safekeeper, for he had not hoped to profit by

the transaction. To make safekeepers responsible for large restitution payments associated with criminal action would be to break down the covenantal bonds of the community, because too high a risk factor would be transferred to safekeepers. Men would no longer be so willing voluntarily to accept the liabilities of safekeeping. This reduction in voluntary safekeeping activities would tend to subsidize the criminal class, which is certainly not the intent of biblical law.

The “hospitality of safekeeping” is designed to make theft more difficult for professional thieves. Clearly, it makes theft easier for previously honest neighbors. Nevertheless, the law has been given by God. So, the focus of judicial concern has to be on the professional thief. A man delivers his inanimate goods to a neighbor, above all, to keep them from being stolen. The recipient therefore must take care to see to it that the property is not stolen. He cannot guard against every conceivable loss, but he is required to make life more difficult for thieves. The law makes this responsibility inescapably clear: “And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof” (v. 12). The safekeeper has to repay the depositor. This motivates the safekeeper to seek to capture the thief.

If subsequently apprehended and convicted, the thief must pay the victimized safekeeper double. The safekeeper has already had to repay the depositor. It should be obvious that if the safekeeping neighbor has been assessed a compensating restitution payment, he has “bought” the missing beast from the original owner. Therefore, half of what the thief has returned to him serves as compensation for the loss he incurred by repaying the depositor. The other half of the double restitution payment is his compensation for having been put into a bind by the thief’s actions.

The principle of ownership does not change in the case of the stolen ox or sheep. If the thief had stolen and killed or sold a sheep or an ox, and therefore must make a five-fold or four-fold restitution payment, the safekeeper receives the total restitution payment. He has become the victim, not the original owner, who has been compensated by the safekeeper; therefore, the safekeeper should receive the four-fold or five-fold restitution payment.

Conclusion

Accepting the responsibilities associated with safekeeping is a voluntary act that affirms the existence of covenantal bonds. There are ju-

dicial bonds with the neighbor, with the community, and with God. By acting as a steward of another man's property, the safekeeper becomes an agent of the neighbor, the community, and God. He must do his best to keep thieves at bay. He is not responsible for every possible loss that might befall these entrusted goods, but he is responsible to see that thieves do not break in and take them. He is responsible up to the value of the stolen goods, beast for beast, good for good.

The neighbor who is a thief jeopardizes covenantal social order. He is to be brought before the judges by the victim. This passage refers exclusively to criminal behavior. This is why double restitution is imposed in each case. Double restitution is biblical law's sanction against criminal intent: an additional restitution payment is imposed that is equal to the gross return that the thief hoped to gain from the transgression. If the case comes to trial, the accused must take an oath before God and the court that he is innocent. The thief takes great risks in giving a false oath. A false oath involves him in a second theft: the attempt to avoid paying the victim his lawful restitution. If he later admits his false oath, he will have to make an additional payment of 20% of the required double restitution to the victim, plus a trespass offering to the church. If he never admits it, and his false oath is subsequently proven in court, he will have to make quadruple restitution to the victim, or six-fold restitution, plus at least a double trespass offering to the church.

End of Volume 3

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CARETAKING AND NEGLIGENCE

If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it: Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good. And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof. If it be torn in pieces, then let him bring it for witness, and he shall not make good that which was torn (Ex. 22:10–13).

The theocentric issue here is stewardship to God, point two of the biblical covenant model.¹ God entrusts property to men, who serve as His agents. This law is an extension of the issue raised in the previous case law, Exodus 22:7–9, which dealt with property that has been put in safekeeping with a neighbor. The property is then stolen from the neighbor, or is said by the neighbor to have been stolen.

The present passage begins with the same phrase as verse 8 does: “If a man deliver unto his neighbour. . . .” If verse 8 refers to a non-commercial transaction, as it seems to,² then so does this passage.³ There is no indication that the neighbor is a professional who is hired for a fee. The relationship is neighborly, not commercial. If this were a commercial transaction, it would necessarily involve the transfer of much greater responsibility for taking care of the animals. The owner

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman [Ramban], *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), pp. 378–79; Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained*, translated by Isaac Levy, 5 vols., *Exodus*, 3rd ed. (London: Honig & Sons, [1870?] 1967), p. 348.

3. Hirsch said that this section does involve a commercial transaction, but he offered no evidence from the biblical text: *Exodus*, p. 348.

is paying the professional to become his *delegated surrogate*, someone who is therefore to protect the animals from danger.⁴ The person renting the skills of a shepherd or a cattle drover expects this hired professional to do his job responsibly.

If the thief cannot be located, the neighbor immediately may fall under suspicion and can be brought before the judges (Ex. 22:9). The Hebrew word here translated as “judges” is transliterated as *elohim*, one of the names of God (Gen. 1:1). Some commentators translate the word in Exodus 22:9 as “God,” arguing that suspects were actually brought before God in expectation of a divine judgment. But the verb used here with *elohim* is plural, indicating men who serve as God’s authorized judicial representatives rather than God Himself as the immediate Judge. The meaning is comparable to the meaning of *elohim* in Psalm 82:6: “I have said, Ye are gods. . . .”⁵ The judges must determine which of the contending parties is lying and therefore who owes restitution to whom. The principle of “eye for eye” also applies to cases of false witness (Deut. 19:17–21).⁶

A. Animals

This case law focuses exclusively on animals. An inanimate object remains where it was placed until someone or something moves it. An animal is mobile. The problems of taking care of an animal are greater, generally, than the problems of guarding inanimate objects. The animal has to be cared for as well as protected from thieves and wild animals. There is greater expense involved in taking care of an animal, and greater risk of its getting in trouble.

The punishments vary for the deliberate theft of an animal. Two-fold restitution is required in the case of most stolen animals and all

4. The Hammurabi Code specified that if a hired shepherd lost a sheep or ox, he had to restore the equivalent animal to the owner: CH, paragraphs 263–64. If he sold an animal or switched its brand, and the owner proved it, he had to restore ten-fold: 265. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 177.

5. DeMar and Leithart pointed out that virtually all Protestant commentators interpret “gods” of Psalm 82:6 as “judges.” They cited Charles H. Spurgeon, H. C. Leupold, Thomas Scott, F. S. Delitzsch, J. J. Stewart Perone, David Dickson, Joseph Addison Alexander, William S. Plummer, John Calvin, Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, and Woodrow Michael Kroll. Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), pp. 78–81. (<http://bit.ly/gdplreduction>)

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012) ch. 45.

stolen inanimate property. Five-fold restitution is required for a stolen ox, while four-fold restitution is sufficient in the case of a stolen sheep. These high penalties were imposed only when the animal had already been killed or sold by the time of the thief's capture (Ex. 22:1). Double payment was required from the man who still had the living animal in his possession when caught by the authorities (Ex. 22:4). Contrary to commentators who argue that the differences in the size of the fines were based on the difference in cost of training certain animals, the differing penalties were probably imposed because of the *special symbolism of sheep and oxen*—symbols that represent mankind—and also because of differing levels of difficulty in apprehending and convicting the thief.⁷

Cases of known theft (Ex. 22:1–4), as well as cases of carelessness concerning fire or pollution (Ex. 22:5–6)—the coercive transfer of operating costs to one's neighbor—are easier for the authorities to adjudicate than those cases in which the responsibility for someone's loss is hidden. Verses 7–15 deal with several of these more difficult cases involving loss: (1) the safekeeping or storage of inanimate objects; (2) caretaking of animals; (3) borrowing goods; and (4) renting goods.

These passages indicate that it was a common practice among the Hebrews to ask their neighbors to act as temporary guardians for their property, thereby transferring to their neighbors the risks of supervision. This was one of the costs of "neighborliness," and the law established legal limits of responsibility, risk, and restitution. One of the advantages of this safekeeping system was the *greater physical mobility* it permitted to Hebrew families.

B. Passover

When would such mobility have been most important? At Passover and at the other celebrations in Jerusalem. There is no way that families could have left their flocks and herds at home without supervision. At the same time, it is inconceivable that they could have brought the animals with them to Jerusalem. Thus, neighbors would have taken turns in caring for the animals of their neighbors.

Wasn't Passover absolutely required for all Hebrews every year? Not necessarily. It was required for all adult males who were numbered (Num. 1:1–4). It was not required of all women. For instance, Jesus and His disciples met together for Passover; there is no indication

7. Chapter 47.

that women or children were present (John 13–17). Furthermore, men on very distant journeys probably were not required to attend. A second Passover celebration was established a month after the first one for those who legitimately missed the first one, either for having been in contact with a dead body or for having been on a journey (Num. 9:10–11). While caretaking for a neighbor's animals was not listed as one of the reasons for missing the Passover legitimately, it must have been one of them.

If we argue that Passover was required for every Hebrew at one time, then the only explanation of who kept the animals would seem to be permanent foreign slaves, meaning that Passover was a major economic incentive for every Hebrew family to become owners of permanent foreign slaves, and to place all the mobile property of the land into their hands at least once a year. This seems to be an unlikely ritual incentive in biblical law.

C. Restitution, Risk, and Knowledge

The case of a dead or lost animal is different from the case of a stolen animal. The caretaker has to swear before God that he did not steal it, destroy it for his own use, or sell it. If he is willing to swear this, he is not required to restore the missing animal. The owner has to accept this oath as binding (Ex. 22:10–11). The sacred nature of the oath has to be recognized; the original owner thereby acknowledges his faith in God's final judgment and His perfect restitution. Vengeance belongs to God, and He will impose judgment (Rom. 12:19). Social peace is therefore far easier (cheaper) to attain in a community of men who believe in a living God who serves as perfect Judge. The judges will have fewer cases to adjudicate, for self-discipline increases in such a society. The likelihood of blood vengeance and clan feuds is also reduced. Socially disrupting suspicions and accusations can be put to rest.

The caretaker cannot escape his responsibility for the stolen animal. He only escapes the additional penalty for criminal activity (Ex. 22:11b). If the animal has been stolen from him, he has to make a restitution payment to the original owner (Ex. 22:12). This payment is equal to the value of the goods stolen or lost.⁸ Exodus 22:12 indicates that if the thief is found, he must make proportional restitution to the caretaker, who is now the economic victim, because the caretaker had

8. Chapter 49.

made the restitution payment to the owner.

1. The Wild Beast

One kind of negligence is not penalized: a loss imposed by a wild beast. Verse 13 provides the details: “If it be torn to pieces, then let him bring it for witness, and he shall not make good that which was torn.” If a bear, wolf, lion, or a pack of dangerous animals rips apart a beast that has been entrusted to a neighbor, he is not liable. He is not required to risk his life trying to save the animal from wild beasts.

Why should he escape his obligation in the case of an animal carried away by a beast? Why should he be less liable? After all, the animal is gone. The loss to the owner is just as great as it would be if the animal had been stolen. If the loss is as great, why shouldn’t the restitution be equal? One answer relates to comparative risks to the life of the caretaker. He is under no pressure judicially to challenge a bear or other dangerous beast in order to protect his neighbor’s property, any more than he has a legal obligation to challenge a dangerous beast in order to defend his own property.⁹ There are limits on his responsibilities as a neighbor. Second, men in general cannot be expected to know the habits of another man’s animal. Perhaps it can lift a latch with its nose, or maybe it runs away as soon as it gets outside its pen. If it exposes itself to danger in this way, it has to bear responsibility for its actions. If it removes itself from the protection of the caretaker, it is not the caretaker’s fault.

An animal can kill itself or injure itself in many ways. A man cannot be expected to provide free caretaking services for every contingency. He is dealing with an unfamiliar animal, and the animal is in unfamiliar surroundings. The predictability of its behavior is reduced, compared to its predictability under the dominion of its owner. The owner may recognize certain patterns of behavior that point to injury or sickness that a neighbor would probably ignore. The neighbor does not have equally accurate background information on the animal.

2. The Witness

Why is the safekeeper responsible when something inanimate is stolen, but not in the case of animals that are torn apart? Verses 10 and

9. Challenging a criminal, or at least doing what is necessary to bring him to justice, is a different situation. The law-abiding citizen is to take risks to restrict evil people. They are a greater threat to social order than wild beasts are.

11 provide the solution: "If a man deliver unto his neighbor an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, *no man seeing it*, then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good."¹⁰ Verse 10 deals with the death, injury, or driving away of an animal. If no one has seen what happened to the missing animal, then there is no way to prove that some wild animal did not do it, or that the protected beast did not hurt itself. Wild animals might drive away or carry away a sheep; they might drive away an ox or donkey. The presumption is that a wild animal dragged away the animal that was being guarded.

The dead carcass of the animal serves as a witness to the honesty of the safekeeper, so in this case there is no need to go before the judges and swear an oath. There is a *witness* in this case: the carcass itself. The carcass is evidence that a wild beast destroyed it. The safekeeper did not profit from its death, nor did any thief. There is no human being to be held accountable for the loss. This allows the safekeeper to escape legal liability for the return of the animal or its equivalent value.

When it comes to defending against thieves, however, men are expected to possess approximately the same information. Men understand the ways of other men. Locking or blocking a door at night to restrict access to the home is a universal practice. So is listening to animals, because they tend to cry out, bark, or stamp around when strangers approach. The absent neighbor wants to reduce the likelihood of theft by placing his animal under someone else's protection, so as to avoid the "empty house" problem. The neighbor's house is a safer place for his animals. He expects his neighbor to provide him with safety from thieves.

How could the complaining neighbor prove that the other man should be held economically responsible? He would have to prove that the safekeeper sought to profit from the loss of the animal, or failed to do his duty in stopping a thief. To prove the latter case, he would have

10. Maimonides argued that in cases where there are witnesses, the oath is not to be imposed. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Civil Laws*, vol. 13 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1949), "Hiring," I:III:1, p. 12. This would seem to eliminate the use of the oath between the disputing parties in any courtroom where there are witnesses available to testify. God is called upon through the oath only when there are no "normal" sources of resolving the dispute.

to have a witness. The key phrase is, “no man seeing it” (v. 10). Some witness would have to come forward and testify that he saw someone snooping around the home of the safekeeper during the night of the theft, and that he had warned the safekeeper (indicating that he, the witness, was not an accomplice or a guilty, silent onlooker), or that he saw the beast penned in the night before it disappeared (indicating that a thief had released it).

The safekeeping neighbor has to spend time and capital in making sure that his neighbor’s property is protected. This is his voluntary contribution to his neighbor, the neighborhood, and God. He acts as a steward to keep the property protected from the criminal class.

3. *Inanimate Goods*

Inanimate goods are a less difficult case. They are not “driven off.” They are stolen by a criminal or lost by the safekeeper. The man who accepts his neighbor’s goods in trust must be willing to take precautions to protect these goods from theft. If he cannot honestly swear that the goods had been lost, or if a witness can point to signs that the man was negligent—negligent in failing to protect the property against criminal action—then he has to pay. This gives him added incentive to take some risks in stopping a thief who breaks into his home. He will bear the penalty if the thief gets away with the crime. Thus, in the case of a thief who breaks in, he has both the legal right and the economic incentive to stop the thief, even to the point (at night) of killing him (Ex. 22:2). Again, the focus of concern of these case laws is the *reduction of criminal activity in the local community*, namely, the prevention of theft. A thief must be specially guarded against.

D. Borrowed Property

In the case of borrowed property, any loss or damage is not the responsibility of the borrower if the owner accompanies his property when it is being used. “And if a man borrow ought of his neighbour, and it be hurt, or die, the owner thereof being not with it, he shall surely make it good. But if the owner thereof be with it, he shall not make it good: if it be an hired thing, it came for his hire” (Ex. 22:14–15).¹¹ The owner retains his oversight over it, and therefore bears the full responsibility for its proper use. He can see how the borrower is

11. Chapter 47.

using the property when the accident occurred.¹²

On the other hand, if he does not accompany his property, then the borrower has to pay simple “like for like” compensation, not double or quadruple restitution, for criminal activity is not involved in the loss, only carelessness. James Jordan wrote:

Since this is the kind of thing that happens every day, a few comments are in order. Let us assume that you borrowed your neighbor’s punchbowl and broke it. How should you make compensation? First, don’t tell her in advance that you broke the punchbowl, unless you have to. That only gives her an opportunity to say she doesn’t need a replacement. People say things like, “Oh, well, forget it. It’s not important,” but in fact they don’t forget. Second, don’t just give her the money. She is likely to refuse to take it. Also, why should she have to go to the trouble of purchasing a new bowl, when you are the one who broke it? Third, don’t buy a more expensive punchbowl. It may not match her set. Let her use the receipt and exchange it if she wants to. Fourth, don’t neglect the opportunity to witness for Christ. You are not doing this because it seems nice and neighborly. You are doing it because Christ your Lord tells you to. Let her know that.

If someone wants to make compensation to you, don’t despise him by refusing to accept it. Accept it graciously as from the Lord.¹³

Finally, in the case of rented property, the borrower is not legally responsible for loss, for the property “came for his hire.” The risk premium or insurance premium is included in the rental fee.¹⁴ *The owner-renter is self-insuring his own property.* (The translation of the Hebrew in the second half of Exodus 22:15 is disputed, however; it may refer to a hired servant who accompanies his master’s property as the owner’s representative, in which case, no restitution is owed.)

What is in focus in these laws is the particular “bundle of rights” that is transferred along with the physical property. With rights of

12. Maimonides cited the Jewish oral tradition as saying that the lender needed to be present with the borrower only when the property was transferred, but not afterwards, in order for the lender to escape liability. Even more peculiar, “if the lender was not with him at the time of the borrowing, though he was present at the time of the death or capture, the borrower is liable.” Maimonides, *Civil Laws*, “Treatise I, Laws Concerning Hiring,” I:I:3, p. 5. This makes the law difficult to interpret from an economic standpoint. The focus of the passage is on the risk borne by the owner-lender because, being present with his property, he has the legal authority to call a halt to some high-risk use of it.

13. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 143. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

14. Chapter 47.

ownership come certain responsibilities for preserving the quality of the goods loaned out. All property is God's; He delegates certain rights and responsibilities to specific people. The goal of this delegation of this stewardship system is to extend God's dominion on earth. Thus, ownership has inescapable legal implications, that is, *covenantal* implications. There cannot be ownership without legal responsibility. These laws set forth the limits of the "bundle of rights" in three types of lending transactions: (1) when the owner or his agent accompanies his property, (2) when he does not accompany his property, and (3) when he rents his property for a fee. In the first case, the rights and therefore responsibilities of ownership remain with the owner. In the second, they shift to the borrower. In the third, they remain with the owner.

There is a system of *strict liability* operating here. The borrower assumes risks when he borrows a work animal. He is asking another person to give him something free of charge. He is asking for *grace*. The borrower becomes responsible for the proper administration of the other person's property. If the animal dies of natural causes, the borrower has to repay the owner. Who can be sure what killed it? Was it overworked or not? When the borrower asks for grace from his neighbor, he must not expect unlimited grace. Biblical law establishes the limits of his responsibility.¹⁵

Conclusion

This section of the case laws refers to the voluntary, charitable care of a neighbor's animals. Rules are established regarding the extent of personal responsibility for the caretaking of animals. There is no penalty imposed on the caretaker if an animal is carried off when no one sees it, if he swears before the judges that he has not stolen the animal.

15. Maimonides argued that if the animal died of natural causes during normal work activities, the borrower is exempt: *Civil Laws*, II:I:1, p. 52. Incredibly, he argued that if a man asks another man for a drink of water and also to borrow his work animal, no matter what happens to the animal, he owes the lender nothing. Why? Because this is a case of "the owner thereof be with it" (Ex. 22:13). "Whether the commodatary borrowed the services of the owner or hired them, whether he borrowed the services for the same work, or for other work, or for anything in the world . . . it is a case of borrowing with the owner and the commodatary is quit. If, however, he borrowed the animal first, and then the owner gave him water to drink, it is not a case of borrowing with the owner. And so it is in all similar cases." *Ibid.*, II:II:1, p. 55. This sort of reasoning places barriers of extreme legalism in between neighbors. Legal technicalities can overwhelm personal relationships.

He is responsible for restoring, like for like, any animal that is stolen from him. If the beast's torn carcass is located, the caretaker is not held responsible.

Charity is basic to social order. Property needs protection when owners are away from their homes. Men's geographical mobility would be heavily restricted if they could not occasionally trust their neighbors to look after their property. But there are legitimate limits to people's willingness to bear risks. By establishing rules in advance that govern the judges' assessment of responsibility in the case of theft or loss, the Bible allows neighbors to estimate more precisely the extent of the risk they are being asked to bear in these instances. This assists them in making an estimate concerning the amount of charity they are willing to extend, for that is what caretaking involves: extra work and extra responsibility.

The costs of litigation are lowered by the fear of God and the fear of the restitution payment owed to God because of false oaths. The fear of having to make equal restitution increases the costs of carelessness. As I pointed out in Chapter 47, the fear of double restitution increases the costs of theft when the animals are not immediately sold or killed, or when the stolen property is inanimate. *Restitution and the fear of God are basic to social order.*

SEDUCTION AND SERVITUDE

And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins (Ex. 22:16–17).

The theocentric principle that governs this case law is the defense of God the Father's covenantal authority over the family of man. This case law governs a man's seduction of an unmarried and unbetrothed (unengaged) virgin. This is not a capital crime. Adultery, in contrast, is a capital crime (Deut. 22:22). Why is there a difference in the punishments? Because the seduction of a virgin does not break a covenant vow. In fact, it involves *taking* a covenant vow: the physical bonding associated with the consummation of a binding marriage vow. In biblical law, physical consummation is itself the mutual vow of betrothal.

Adultery was involved in the sins in the garden of Eden. Eve's spiritual seduction by Satan was an adulterous attack on her existing covenantal bond with her husband Adam. She had been given by God to Adam. It had been an arranged marriage, one to which both partners had freely consented. She was therefore "spoken for" covenantally at the time of her temptation, either as a betrothed woman or as a consummated bride. She was Adam's wife. Satan intervened and lured her into disobeying God, her husband's master. This was a capital crime, even though she, unlike Adam, was deceived into sinning (1 Tim. 2:14). She could not claim ignorance of God's law as justification of her crime. Because Adam consented to this act of adultery, and participated in it, he also came under God's condemnation of death. He became, in effect, a covenantal pimp for his own wife.

A. The Age of Lawful Independence

Fornication by unmarried and unbetrothed partners was a crime

in the Old Testament if the daughter was still living in the household of her father. The question arises: At what age did the father's authority legally cease or become drastically reduced? The Bible is silent on this point. Sons in the Old Testament became subject to a military draft at age 20 (Ex. 30:14). This "age of independence" may also have applied to a daughter who lived outside her father's home, although the Bible does not say so explicitly. The dividing line of authority seems to have been her presence in her father's house: "These are the statutes, which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, between the father and his daughter, being yet in her youth in her father's house" (Num. 30:16). If she was outside his house, unmarried, yet economically self-sufficient—highly unlikely, given the ancient world's agricultural economy and Israel's jubilee land tenure system (Lev. 25)—she would have been beyond his legal responsibility over her. She would have been free to conduct her life as she saw fit, for good or evil, without calling his judgment into question, although he could have disinherited her by refusing to provide any dowry for her.¹

In the New Covenant era, seduction remains an attack on the covenantal authority of the girl's family. There is no indication that the legal terms have changed. Fornication is behavior that covenantally faithful families should seek to impair, and the civil government is required to back up the family with the threat of sanctions against the seducer. The father becomes the lawful prosecutor of the seducer, and the state supports him in his decision. In this sense, the father becomes a lawful agent of the state, the state's representative. This is why the seduction is a crime.

The state enforces all sorts of contracts, but this case is different. The magnitude of the potential penalty is so great, as we shall see, that in order to impose it, the state must number the transgressor among felony criminals, such as major thieves. In the case of a seduction, biblical law transfers to the girl's father a monopoly position in setting the terms of the bride price.² The magnitude of the sanctions against seduction is such that only the state could enforce them without risking

1. I do not take seriously the comment by Nachmanides, who said that the father's authority over her decision to marry lasts only from age twelve and one day to twelve and a half, and that after this, she is lawfully able to decide for herself to accept a marriage proposal, with or without fornication's having preceded the marriage. Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), p. 388.

2. As we shall see, there is a judicial distinction between the bride price, which is paid by the bridegroom to the girl's family, and the dowry, which is paid to the girl by her family.

a clan war or other violence. The act of seduction therefore came under the jurisdiction of Israel's criminal statutes.

Consenting to a girl's marriage is normally a family responsibility, not primarily a civil government or church responsibility, except in those rare cases when the couple appeals the negative decision of the father to the church or churches to which they belong.³ The father does not have a final say, for no single human agent ever possesses an absolutely final say in any legal decision, including the state,⁴ but he has the primary responsibility to sanction the marriage of his daughter. His decision can lawfully be appealed to the church, but in general his decision stands. In the case of dealing with the seduction of a virgin, however, the father's authority is supplemented by civil authority, according to biblical law.

B. Consummating the Vow

A lawful marriage normally requires three things in the following order: a mutual vow of the proposed marriage partners, a public transfer of covenantal authority from the girl's father to the bridegroom, and sexual consummation. A verbal vow (betrothal) is to precede the formal ritual of public, covenantal marriage; physical consummation follows. But when private physical consummation itself becomes the form that the vow takes, then a public act must follow: either the seducer's payment to her father (or brother)⁵ of an unspecified bride price plus a marriage ceremony, or his payment of "the dowry of virgins" without a marriage ceremony. *The physical consummation constitutes covenantal betrothal.* It is a binding oath. It is a *bond*. Her father then determines whether a marriage will consummate the vow, or whether

3. The case of a pagan father who refuses to sanction the marriage of his Christian daughter to a Christian man would be a case that the couple could lawfully appeal to the church or churches that possess covenantal sovereignty over them. To deny this right of appeal would be to absolutize the father's word, and to designate him as the sole authorized agent under God over the daughter. This would elevate the father's word to a sovereign position comparable to the Roman Church's view of the Pope.

4. The father can appeal this decision to the civil magistrate. The decision of the civil magistrate would then confirm either the father's decision or the church's. The state serves only as a settler of disputes between lawful authorities, not as the initiator of laws regarding marriage, except when public health considerations are involved, e.g., compulsory testing of both parties for disease. The state's word is not autonomously final; it simply confirms the decision of one of the disputants in the case.

5. Abraham's servant dealt with Rebekah's brother Laban and her mother (Gen. 24:29, 53, 55) even though her father Bethuel was alive (v. 50). The sons of Jacob set the terms of Shechem's dowry, even though Jacob was present with them (Gen. 34:13).

the payment of the formal bride price, the “dowry of virgins,” will alone consummate it.⁶ But payment of some sort is necessary to consummate the vow.

1. Seduction and Betrothal

The consent of the girl to her seduction is the equivalent of her private betrothal. She takes a binding covenant vow with the seducer by means of her body. The seducer does the same with his body. She implicitly agrees to marry the seducer, and he implicitly agrees to marry her. Neither of them has the option of breaking the vow. Only her father does. An unmarried girl has no independent authority to take a vow if her father refuses to accept it (Num. 30:3–5). Numbers 30:3 refers to a binding vow as “a vow unto the LORD.” Thus, this passage in Exodus informs us that her father, as God’s covenantal agent over her until her marriage, has the authority to deny the consummation of his daughter’s vow through marriage.

The girl must immediately inform her father of the act-vow. If she refuses, she has identified herself before God as a promiscuous woman, a prostitute. She has accepted the legitimacy of sexual union outside of marriage, the essence of prostitution. She has thereby become an idolater. If she marries later on, and neither she nor her father formally informs her suitor prior to the betrothal, her discovered lack of virginity could lead to her public execution (Deut. 22:20–21). Also, should she become pregnant, she would soon be publicly identified as a prostitute. If she was the daughter of a priest in Israel, she would be stoned to death, with her body burned after (Lev. 21:9; see Josh. 7:25), but only after the birth of her child. This, of course, drastically increased the risks of fornicating with the promiscuous daughter of a priest. If she knew she was pregnant from an earlier act, she might immediately seduce some other young man—as Eve seduced Adam by means of the forbidden fruit—and then announce the act to her father, as if the night before had been her first time, in order to get herself a husband or a bride price, and thereby avoid the death penalty.

2. The Father’s Status

Why does the seducer owe money to the father, rather than to the

6. In the United States, it has long been a crime to seduce a woman by promising to marry her later, and then refusing to marry her. The crime is called “breach of promise.” It clearly parallels this biblical case law. It is seldom enforced today.

girl? Because the father is legally liable for the girl and for his family's reputation. But this liability is limited by the extent of his knowledge. He cannot know everything she does. He always needs better information. Biblical law creates incentives for the transfer of appropriate knowledge to those who are God's legally responsible representatives.

The daughter's original consent to the act of seduction does not itself constitute whoredom. Her failure to tell her father immediately of the seduction is what constitutes her whoredom, for whoredom (as distinguished from adultery) is defined biblically as sexual bonding apart from a marriage vow.⁷ If she accepts the legitimacy of her sexual union apart from a marriage vow, then she has become a whore. She had taken the vow implicitly by her consent to the act, but her unwillingness to tell her father of the act that constituted her vow thereby establishes her covenantally as a whore.

She remains "in her father's house" (Num. 30:16), and under his covenantal jurisdiction, yet she is no longer a virgin. The presence of this unannounced non-virgin daughter brings disgrace on her house and on Israel when she is discovered. Because she has willfully broken her covenantal bond with her father, but has refused to acknowledge her implicit vow with her seducer, biblical law considers her a whore. The capital penalty can subsequently be imposed if she marries another man who has been asked to pay a bride price to her father, if the new husband immediately prosecutes her (Deut. 22:13–19).

If the father had known of her act, yet took no steps to receive payment from the seducer, he thereby consented to the theology of legitimate sexual bonding without covenantal bonding. He has also become an implicit idolater. He has no legal excuse. He has identified himself as a pimp for his own daughter. To avoid this humiliation, there must be a consummation of the marriage vow by the seducer, either through marriage plus payment of the bride price or payment without marriage. Thus, the father's insistence on receiving the bride

7. This indicates that Jesus' announcement that divorce is legitimate only because of fornication (*porneia*) must have been based on a far broader definition of *porneia* than mere sexual bonding. The King James translators too narrowly defined the word as fornication. Under Old Testament law, once a marriage had taken place, fornication was always defined as adultery, a capital offense. Obviously, divorce through execution was possible, and Jesus would not have had to raise the issue. He would have used the term for adultery rather than fornication. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 406–14; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984), pp. 105–9.

price is a legal announcement of his rejection of whoredom in his household and in Israel. His daughter is declared not to be a whore, for he has received the bride price. *Without payment of the bride price by the seducer, the father's house and his family's name are polluted.*

Once the bride price has been paid, the father cannot legitimately collect it from another man. Thus, if someone else lies with the woman, he is protected from a forced marriage. He has identified himself as a whoremonger, but not as a compulsory bridegroom. She identifies herself as a prostitute as soon as she identifies the second seducer. She has no legal claim on any man who does not voluntarily agree to marry a non-virgin, nor does her father have any economic claim on him, even if the seducer decides to marry her. A daughter is entitled only to one dowry per marriage, and her father is entitled to one bride price per marriage. (Negotiations between a father and a prospective bridegroom are legitimate, though not mandatory, for a widow who wishes to remarry, for she is taking on another set of responsibilities, and is in need of economic protection from potentially bad decisions of the next husband. The reason why negotiations are not mandatory is that she no longer is required to have her vows authorized by her father [Num. 30:9].)

C. The Formal Bride Price

The payment of a bride price by the bridegroom is a sign of his subordination and obligation to the bride's family.⁸ This text discusses "the dowry of virgins." The text does not specify how much this was. The reason for this omission is that *this payment was negotiable between families* within each economic class. The Bible could not specify a particular price without either placing it out of reach for most Israelites or else trivializing it for the rich. The price was not set so high that the poor would be forced to adopt concubinage—marriage without a dowry—or so low that the rich could dismiss it as nothing more than a mere ritual. Also, if a poor man wanted to marry a rich girl, her father could set a bride price lower than his intended dowry for her. Why? In order to test the willingness of the prospective bridegroom to work hard to earn what for him would be a large sum, but which would nevertheless be a pittance for the father. This was the problem David faced (I Sam. 18:23). The bride price was, first, a ritual sign of subordination; second, it was a screening device for the girl's

8. Chapter 36.

parents; and third, it was a means of compensating the girl's family for the expense of the dowry. The first two aspects were more important than the third. Thus, a fixed bride price was not set by biblical law. The existence of its requirement was far more important than the actual money involved, with only two judicial exceptions: the case of seduction (Ex. 22:16–17) and the case of accused harlotry (Deut. 22:13–19).

1. Seduction

Let us consider the case of seduction. There is no doubt that the father, under the jurisdiction of the judges, was allowed to establish a bride price requirement for the seducer, and even prohibit the marriage after having collected it. Obviously, only the state could have lawfully enforced such a penalty.

When the state enters the picture to enforce a private decision, there must be upper limits on the punishment if liberty under predictable law is to be preserved. At the same time, the penalty must be high enough to deter the immoral behavior. Thus, the maximum bride price that could be imposed by the father with the consent of the judges could and would be different from normally negotiated bride prices. We know what that upper limit was: 50 shekels of silver. I call this compulsory maximum the *formal* bride price, in contrast to the normal or negotiated bride price, in which the state was not involved. It is specified in Deuteronomy 22:28–29:

If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.

The formal bride price of 50 shekels of silver specified here was far higher than the common dowry in Israel. This was a great deal of money. It was not required of every suitor. The Old Testament did not establish a fixed price so high that only a few women could have become wives, with most of them being forced by a government-imposed price floor to settle for status as concubines (wives without dowries) instead. What the Mosaic law did was to establish *a penalty price so high that it discouraged seduction*. It also discouraged false accusations of whoredom.

The threat of the imposition of the formal bride price was de-

signed to restrain the present-orientation of the couple – in this case, the lure of instant sexual gratification. The bride price jumped automatically to 50 shekels of silver in such instances. This economic threat forced marriage arrangements into specific patterns as *family-authorized covenants*, with the parents and older brothers of the girl as the agents with primary authority to inaugurate or veto her decision. This threat also forced irresponsible, short-sighted young men to save for the future, to develop good character traits. The normal bride price was a covenantal screening instrument; the formal bride price was a covenantal disciplining instrument.

The seducer placed himself outside the normal competitive position of a suitor. He was in no legal position to bargain effectively with the girl's father. Shechem pleaded: "Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife" (Gen 34:12). The father of a seduced girl was in a position to demand up to 50 shekels of silver from the young man, which probably would have involved many years of servitude on his part, unless his family was rich. The seducer could even be required to pay her father the 50 shekels of silver, and then not be allowed to marry the girl.

D. Establishing the Formal Bride Price

Rabbinical commentators agree that it was 50 shekels of silver, although they do not always precisely explain their line of reasoning. They connect this passage to Deuteronomy 22:19.⁹ This passage provides rules for penalizing a bridegroom who falsely accuses his new bride of not being a virgin. A new husband in Mosaic Israel who falsely accused his new wife of not being a virgin at the time of marriage was obviously after two things: (1) permanent separation from the girl; and (2) the return of his bride price. He may also have been after an additional penalty payment of 50 shekels from her father. I am assuming here that a bride price had been paid before the marriage; if not, then by his accusation, he was trying to avoid paying it. I believe, however, the bride price was normally paid before the marriage, which is why Jacob worked seven years for Laban before Laban was required to give him Rachel (Gen. 29:18–20).

9. Nachmanides, *Exodus*, p. 256; Haim H. Cohn, "Sexual Offenses," *The Principles of Jewish Law*, ed. Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter, [1975?]), col. 485.

1. *Why 100 Shekels?*

The required penalty owed to the father of a falsely accused girl was 100 shekels of silver (Deut. 22:19). The question then is: Does this provide evidence that confirms my suggestion concerning the size of the original bride price? We know that the Old Testament's authorized penalty payments were double damages, quadruple damages (a slaughtered sheep),¹⁰ and quintuple damages (a slaughtered ox). In this case, double damages were required. Half of a hundred is 50. Why 50 shekels? Because this was the maximum bride price that could be imposed by law. We must think through the issue with 50 shekels as the starting point.

Notice that the girl was executed if she was convicted, but her bridegroom was not executed if she was exonerated. This seems to be opposed to the principle of Deuteronomy 19:15–21, which states that the false witness must suffer the penalty that the falsely accused person would have suffered if convicted.¹¹ Instead, the seducer paid a heavy penalty to her father. All he owed his bride was a lifetime guarantee of no divorce. What he owed her father, however, was a lifetime of servitude, unless he was very rich. He became a slave to her father twice over, for the formal price of the lifetime slave for purposes of making a sanctuary vow was 50 shekels of silver (Lev. 27:3).

This is the only instance in the Bible of a false witness who is not subject to an equal penalty, as required by Deuteronomy 19:16. The falsely accused bride was to receive lifetime economic support from him rather than making her a divorcé by means of his execution. This exception to Deuteronomy 19:16 may be because of the difficulty in proving for certain either that she had or had not lost her physical evidence of virginity by some means other than copulation. The circumstantial nature of the required evidence—"tokens of virginity"—reduced the penalty for the false accuser, but it also made it possible for the wife to escape the death penalty if she had not broken her hymen during a previous sexual liaison. The threat of the death penalty was great; a bride who suspected that the "tokens" would not appear would have warned the bridegroom in advance, and this could have

10. David insisted on the four-fold restitution payment when he heard Nathan's story, but in this case, the "ewe" was another man's wife (II Sam. 12:6). His "slaughter" of Bathsheba was the result of their adultery, not his seduction of a virgin as an unmarried man.

11. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

led to his offering her father a reduced bride price, because he could not be sure of her explanation affirming her virginity. This reduced bride price would then have served as a substitute for her lack of the "tokens."

But if he owed his father-in-law 100 shekels, then in some way the father-in-law would have owed him 50 shekels if the accusation had been confirmed by the court. The text does not say this, but it is implied by the double restitution provisions of the case laws. We need to search for an implied theft of 50 shekels from the bridegroom on the part of the father-in-law, had the girl been guilty as charged.

2. Defrauding the Bridegroom

Let us assume that the bridegroom's accusation was accurate: she had not been a virgin at the time of marriage. The father-in-law was entitled only to one bride price per vow and marriage; whether collected by him or voluntarily forfeited, it could not be collected a second time, unless the girl was a widow, and the bridegroom agreed to pay it. (Because a widow would bring her original dowry into the subsequent marriage, she was not legally a concubine.) This payment was the formal bride price. The second man had owed her father nothing. By collecting a normal bride price from him, her father had cheated him.

Her father could have collected up to 50 shekels from the original seducer, but he failed to do so, either through ignorance of her condition, or through misplaced pity for the seducer, or through fear of the seducer's family, or because he knew that his daughter was promiscuous and not truly entitled to the first *discovered* seducer's bride price. In the last case, he had willfully allowed whoredom in his house, or, if he really had not known about it, then the daughter had to pay the maximum penalty for her deliberate concealment: execution. In any case, the bridegroom would have been entitled to the return of his bride price. The text is silent about this, but it is implied; if this were not the case, then the father-in-law would have profited from his daughter's whoredom at the expense of the injured party, the bridegroom. Biblical law does not subsidize evil. It protects the innocent.

If the bridegroom had been informed of the girl's loss of virginity, then he would not have paid her father a bride price. The bride price would have already been paid by the seducer, even though her father had not consented to their marriage. I am arguing that *the bride price owed to the father by the seducer was 50 shekels, the settlement price of*

a lifetime male slave in formal judicial disputes (Lev. 27:3).¹² This compulsory bride price should have been passed on to the daughter as her dowry, but passed on in a specific formal way, as I discuss below: first to the bridegroom, then back to her father, and then to the girl. If her father had not collected the money from the seducer, assuming that he knew of the seduction, he nevertheless owed a dowry to the daughter; otherwise, she would become a concubine. Without a dowry from her father, she was a concubine, yet only her father could pay for it this time; no subsequent bridegroom could be asked to pay a second bride price for a non-virgin non-widow.

The bridegroom had been forced to pay a bride price to the girl's father. Her father had either kept the 50 shekels that had been paid to him by the seducer, thereby making his daughter a concubine, or, if he had not collected the 50 shekels, he then owed the 50-shekel dowry out of his own assets. Again, the bridegroom had believed he was marrying a free woman who was bringing a dowry to the marriage, not a concubine. He was not legally required to pay the bride price because of her status as a non-virgin, so the father must have been required to pay it. Her father had not paid it. The bridegroom paid a bride price. This constituted fraud. Although the actual fraud involved whatever his negotiated bride price payment had been, for judicial settlement purposes, the fraud was assumed to be the maximum required formal bride price, and therefore the required dowry, of 50 shekels.

3. How Much Had He Actually Paid?

I am assuming for the sake of argument that the bridegroom was in fact the victim of a conspiracy between the girl and her family, or else at least the victim of the girl, who had kept her status a secret from her father. After the marriage, the bridegroom then decided to get rid of the wife on the official grounds that she was not a virgin. He had not been informed of her status. How could he prove this? Because he had paid the bride price, which would not have been required of him in the case of a non-virgin; her seducer should have provided the bride price. Her father had not delivered the required 50 shekels to her as her dowry; he had delivered only the bride price unjustly collected from the bridegroom. If the bridegroom could prove that he had been defrauded by the girl, or by her and her father, he could get back his

12. An exception: the owner of a slave killed by a goring ox always was reimbursed by payment of 30 shekels of silver (Ex. 21:32).

bride price that had been unjustly extracted from him.

He had paid something for the girl, but probably not 50 shekels of silver. Why would the court not have returned whatever bride price he had paid? What has precisely 50 shekels got to do with it? The bridegroom was saying in effect that 50 shekels should have been given to him by her father as a ritual sign of her family's dependence on his merciful willingness to marry a non-virgin. There was *mutual subordination* involved, so her father should have provided this bride price to the bridegroom, and then the bridegroom would have ritually returned it to her father. Just as the bride price was a ritual sign of his subordination to the father-in-law, so was the father-in-law's provision of a bride price to the bridegroom a ritual sign of his dependence on the bridegroom. It was a sign that her father was in no position to bargain under such circumstances, because of his daughter's defiled status. But her father had been unwilling to pay him the 50 shekels that would have served as his bride price payment, so that the bridegroom could in turn pay the 50 to the father, who would then endow the daughter. *The symbolism of the bridegroom's dependence was basic to the bride price-dowry transaction.* Even without the formal double transaction, the father's payment of the daughter's dowry was implicitly a form of his dependence on the bridegroom. I believe that the double formal transaction would have been carried out, as a public manifestation of the daughter's lack of virginity. Such a formal public transaction would have secured her from future prosecution by her husband.

The bridegroom was saying that he had never been informed of the girl's covenantal status. Her father had treated him unjustly, defrauding him of whatever bride price he had been asked to pay. Thus, from a strictly economic standpoint, her father owed him at least the return of the original bride price that he had paid. Her father may also have owed the 50 shekels that should have been given to him by the seducer. The text does not say this, and I may be reading too much into it. It may be that the death of the daughter was regarded by the court as a sufficient penalty on her family. The death of the daughter may have replaced the implicit 50-shekel payment owed by the father. The father lost his daughter forever, and the bridegroom regained his original bride price payment.

What is clear is that in these formal judicial proceedings, the court was implicitly using 50 shekels as the formal penalty that would have been implicitly or actually owed to the bridegroom if the wife had been

convicted. Why? Because the payment owed to the father by the original seducer was 50 shekels, the judicial price of an adult male slave.

4. Restitution: Double or Triple?

If the bridegroom lost the case, he was required to pay to the father-in-law the formal restitution penalty of the 50 shekels he had sought to collect through divorce by execution, plus another 50 shekels as a penalty. The court recognized the bridegroom as someone involved in intent to defraud the girl's father, whose reputation (and possibly 50 shekels) was at stake.

Thus, I conclude that *the penalty payment from the false accuser was directly related to the compulsory formal bride price of the seducer*. The new husband had accused his father-in-law of having cheated him out of the bride price. He never legally owed it, he insisted, yet his father-in-law had taken it. The court denied his accusation, so he was then forced to pay 100 shekels to his father-in-law.

The bridegroom had paid a negotiated bride price to the girl's father. Her father had transferred all or a part of this to her as her dowry. She was now formally accused by her husband of being a whore. If she was convicted, her father would probably have been forced to pay the bridegroom the formal (50-shekel) bride price; the bridegroom would also have kept her dowry, as her lawful heir after her execution. If she was declared innocent, the bridegroom owed double restitution to the father-in-law: twice the amount of the formal bride price that the father-in-law would have owed to him upon her conviction. The wife of course kept her dowry.

To repeat: because the court's decision in this example went against the bridegroom, he had to pay the father 100 shekels of silver, meaning that he returned the maximum bride price of 50 shekels, plus an additional 50—double restitution. Furthermore, he could never divorce her in the future (Deut. 22:19), except by her public execution for a capital crime. This indicates that the maximum formal bride price was 50 shekels of silver. It also indicates that any husband bringing such an accusation against his bride believed that he had a good case. His wife and father-in-law did not possess the required tokens of virginity, and he imagined that the court would uphold him.¹³

13. If corrupt, the father-in-law might have faked the blood stains on the cloth. To prevent this, the bridegroom would normally have insisted on a formal presentation in the presence of some authority. In case of his suspicion regarding his new wife, the young man would have had to complain immediately to the authorities. He would

This indicates that for purposes of establishing *public restitution payments*, a very high initial bride price would have been established by law. Once the dispute became a matter of public decision by the court, the formal penalties became very high. In this case, a price of 50 shekels was assumed as binding.

5. A Very Costly Penalty

We know that the price for an adult woman to be brought into a priestly family through adoption was 30 shekels (Lev. 27:4). What does 50 shekels have to do with 30? Nothing. If, as I argue, the 100 shekels constituted double restitution, then restitution must have been 50 shekels: the judicial bride price. It was the adult male who paid the entry price of 50 shekels (Lev. 27:3). This was the entry price for a man's lifetime of service to God and tithe income from the Levites as a priest. It was set this high in order to serve as a major barrier to entry, thereby keeping men with a welfare mentality out of the priesthood.

We begin to understand the magnitude of the penalty for seduction. The seducer could be required to pay the girl's father 50 shekels of silver. This would have constituted a judicial sentence of potentially lifetime bondservice against him. It was the sort of sentence handed down to major thieves with a lifetime of restitution payments to make to victims.

It was very risky for a bridegroom to accuse his new bride of non-virginity. His false accusation was a crime. The magnitude of the penalty payment was enormous: double what it cost to be adopted into the priesthood.¹⁴ He had to pay 100 shekels of silver as double restitution to his father-in-law, the equivalent of two lifetimes of priestly service. Few young men could have afforded this. To come up with that kind of money, he would have had to sell himself into servitude as a criminal—presumably lifetime servitude. Out of mercy, his father-in-law might have accepted a lifetime of service from him as payment of the 100 shekels. The young man would have lost his position as an independent head of household. His wife would have gone with him into servitude. She had subordinated herself covenantally to a man who had

have had to keep his wife under close surveillance, to keep her from faking the tokens and presenting them to the authorities. On the other hand, a corrupt husband might have tried to destroy the evidence that defended her. Thus, it would have become a formal public matter the day after the wedding, under public supervision.

14. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 36:D.

poor judgment, and she could not escape the consequences of her decision. She had subordinated herself covenantally to a man who had poor judgment, and she could not escape the consequences of her decision. It paid girls to judge accurately the character of prospective husbands before the marriage took place.

6. *Purchasing Power*

What was the value of 50 shekels of silver? We cannot know for sure, because at different times in the ancient world, silver's value would have fluctuated, just as it fluctuates today. We know that the atonement money paid by Israelite adult males when they were numbered for military service was half a shekel (Ex. 30:16).¹⁵ If this was half a shekel of silver, then the judicial bride payment was a hundred times this large. An ox that killed another person's bondservant brought a payment of 30 shekels of silver to the owner of the servant (Ex. 21:32). As I have already mentioned, an adult male's entry price into the priesthood was 50 shekels (Lev. 27:3). This was the price of priestly servitude to God.¹⁶ We know that the ownership of slaves was sufficiently expensive so that very few families could afford them in the ancient world.¹⁷

The price of 20 shekels of silver for a male adoptee under age 20 (Lev. 27:5) corresponds with the 20 shekels paid to Joseph's brothers by the caravan that bought Joseph (Gen. 37:28). This indicates a remarkably stable monetary system throughout the Middle East, from Joseph's day at least until the giving of the Mosaic law over two centuries later.¹⁸ Mendelsohn provided slave prices in the surrounding cultures, and these are reasonably commensurate with the prices listed in Leviticus 27.¹⁹ The purchase of a slave gained the buyer the net return from a lifetime of service from a slave. We are not talking about merely a Hebrew's seven-year term of service, for the caravan bought

15. Chapter 62. Cf. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), Appendix D. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

16. When I wrote the first edition of *Tools of Dominion*, I did not understand that Leviticus 27:1–5 was a system of priestly adoption entry prices. I came to this conclusion as a result of my work on Leviticus. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36. These prices constituted priestly servitude, not servitude as such.

17. Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery In the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 119–21.

18. Appendix A: "The Reconstruction of Egypt's Chronology."

19. Mendelsohn, *Slavery In the Ancient Near East*, pp. 117–18.

Joseph for resale into permanent servitude. Thirty shekels of silver must have been a lot of money; 50 shekels was that much more.²⁰

E. Lifetime Servitude

Would the seducer have come under the provisions of the debt-release provisions of the sabbatical year (Deut. 15)? Probably not. If these sabbatical year provisions had applied to this crime, they would have subsidized seductions in the years immediately preceding a year of release by lowering their financial risk. To avoid this implicit subsidy of sin, the young man would probably have been regarded by the court as the equivalent of a thief who had to make full restitution to his victims, even if it meant lifetime servitude. He could not escape the payment of the bride price.

In effect, the young man would have come under his father-in-law's jurisdiction for many years. This would have been an appropriate form of judgment for his having lured the girl into making a covenant vow autonomously. They would both be brought under the jurisdiction of the girl's father as a punishment, but also as a way to bring them greater respect for his authority in the future.²¹

All or most of the bride price eventually came to the daughter, and from her to her children. It was her protection against an incompetent husband. It was administered on her behalf by her father. It was held in trust by him in her name, unless he delivered it to her at the time of her marriage as her dowry. In this case, her father would have collected the bride price, year by year, in the form of wages from the son-in-law, unless the son-in-law sold himself into bondage to another buyer, with the money going to his father-in-law. If he sold himself to his father-in-law, this would have built up his heirs' capital indirectly. He

20. There is a hidden danger in one account of a purchase in the Old Testament, David's apparent purchase, for 50 shekels of silver, of the threshing floor that later became the site of the temple (II Sam. 24:24). This was a very desirable location on a mountain top in the midst of the capital city of the nation. How could he have purchased this for the price of a slave? The answer is that he actually paid 600 shekels of gold (I Chron. 21:25). The 50 shekels probably bought only the oxen used in the sacrifice.

21. United States Senator Daniel Moynihan (New York) proposed a sweeping reform of the national welfare system. One of these reforms would make mandatory that unmarried parents under the age of 18 years old be required to live with their own parents, or in a foster home or a maternity home, if they receive welfare payments. The system presently encourages a teenage mother to move away from her home by paying her more money if she moves out. Suzanne Fields, "Welfare Reincarnate: Seeking new life for a gasping system," *Washington Times* (July 28, 1987), Sect. D, p. 1.

would learn future-orientation (deferred gratification) the hard way.

Thus, the risk of seducing a virgin was very great, even if the father accepted the seducer as a son-in-law. Seduction had tremendously negative consequences. There were heavy economic sanctions against seduction. The worst sanction, however, was a father's refusal to allow her to marry him. He would still have to pay the bride price. The girl's father could extract the full penalty, up to 50 shekels of silver. If the father was vindictive, or if he believed that the young man was morally corrupt or an economic incompetent, he could choose to get him away from his daughter by selling him into lifetime slavery. Then the young man could marry only at the discretion of his new master. If kept by the girl's father, he faced the prospect of a life without a wife, if the man was vindictive and refused to provide a wife for him.

All this risk for a few moments of unauthorized ecstasy. Unauthorized ecstasy carried a high price under the Old Covenant.

1. The Seducer's Legal Right to Pay

The fundamental legal principles of this case law are still in force. Consider this law's implications. The seducer was not entitled to the girl, but he was entitled (and required) to pay her father. Being "entitled to pay" the equivalent of a large fine may seem a peculiar way to describe his legal position, but the right of payment was important to the judicial standing of the seducer. If he was to be regarded by God and the community as one who stands behind his vows, he had to be allowed to pay the formal bride price. Otherwise, it would seem to the community that he was a man who willingly visited prostitutes (promiscuous women). Such evil men prefer paying token fees for sexual favors rather than paying a large bride price once.

The implicit vow of the seducer was not rendered null and void just because the girl's father denied her permission to marry him. He was required by God to consummate his vow, not in marriage, but through the payment of the formal bride price to the father. The adult male, as the initiator of the vow, had to fulfill its terms. In this case, any male old enough to seduce a woman was considered an adult whose vow was binding.

If he had not been required to pay her father, it would then have appeared as though her father had no legal ground to collect the formal bride price, meaning that he recognized that his daughter was a whore, and also that he had been implicitly or explicitly consenting to

the fact. A whore is not simply a woman who charges money for sexual favors. A whore is anyone who experiences sex outside of marriage, except the first time through an implicit vow, which is then consummated either in marriage or the payment of the formal bride price. If her father knew that she was no longer a virgin, and still consented to her repeated contacts, he was thereby identifying his own household as a house of prostitution.

How would a young man who fornicates with a non-virgin, believing her to be a virgin, subsequently defend himself against compulsory marriage to a promiscuous woman if she then goes to her father and claims that this young man is her first seducer? He is very nearly defenseless judicially. To escape marrying her, he must either prove in court that she is promiscuous or else pay the 50 shekels to her father and hope that he refuses to allow the marriage. How can he prove that she is a promiscuous woman? Only by identifying a previous seducer. This would probably be very difficult without the earlier consort's willingness to identify himself voluntarily. What would be another man's incentive to admit this? Only to satisfy his sense of righteousness—a moral sense that previous fornicators might not possess in abundance. While her father could no longer compel any man to marry her, because she would be publicly identified as promiscuous, the confessed seducer would lose his reputation. Furthermore, had he been a married man at the time of the seduction, his wife could legally insist on his execution. Thus, seducing a presumed virgin was a highly risky activity in Old Covenant Israel: a man could wind up in debt servitude, married to a retired whore.

Could the average young man have afforded a bride price of 50 shekels of silver? Only by selling himself into lifetime service to someone. This is the amount of money appropriate to the purchase of a criminal who was being sold into lifetime servitude in order to raise enough money to repay his victims. Obviously, it was not the intention of God to force each bridegroom into slavery in order to marry. Thus, the 50-shekel payment indicates an extreme.

Why would this penalty be imposed? Because the young man unilaterally arrogated to himself the right to lure her into making a vow that only her father could rightfully sanction. He acted as her advisor, as if he possessed the authority of her father. Thus, he becomes responsible for paying the bride price that may serve as her future dowry for marriage to another man. He acted in place of her father; he now pays her dowry in place of her father.

F. The Bridegroom's Covenant Lawsuit

The girl now is no longer a virgin. In a God-honoring society, any future suitor would have to be informed of this fact before a betrothal. If the marriage takes place, she will be discovered by the bridegroom not to be a virgin. If he has not been informed of her status, he can break the marriage through divorce, including *divorce by execution*, “because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father’s house” (Deut. 22:21). He does not have to have her executed, for Joseph decided to put Mary away quietly for her perceived unfaithfulness (Matt. 1:19), but in a biblical commonwealth, the bridegroom would have the legal option of requiring her death. He would not know if the violation had taken place after the betrothal unless he had been informed of her condition before the betrothal.

1. The Two Victims

Notice that the law in Deuteronomy does not say that she has sinned against the bridegroom, although he surely had been deceived. He had paid the bride price to her father, yet she had implicitly taken a vow to another. The Bible says that she has sinned against her *father* and against *Israel*, the priestly nation. Then why does the bridegroom bring formal charges against her? Because the bridegroom has become *the lawful covenantal agent of Israel and her father*.

The bridegroom is the only one who can legally discover her lack of biological evidence attesting to her own virginity.²² If he does not present the biological tokens of her virginity to her father or an agent of civil or church government, then her father cannot subsequently prove that his daughter had not played the whore under his household administration.²³ Her father is therefore legally powerless to defend

22. Today, a gynecologist could also legally discover this. This raises the legal question of the authority of the physician to remain silent. Biblically, the daughter who is still living at home is not an independent legal agent. An unmarried daughter living at home is under her father's covenantal administration. The physician's contractual obligation to provide information is with her father, not with her. Thus, biblically speaking, the physician has an obligation to inform her father of the lack of evidence of her virginity, including her pregnancy. This principle also governs the covenantal obligation of anyone dispensing contraceptives to an unmarried male or female minor to receive written permission from the head of household first.

23. If her lack of physical evidence for her virginity was the result of something other than previous sexual intercourse, then she would have to inform her father, who would in turn warn the prospective bridegroom before the betrothal, and get from him a signed statement or other suitable courtroom evidence of his acceptance of this ex-

her life. In fact, only by remaining silent can he demonstrate publicly that his household is free from the bridegroom's accusation of whoredom, and that he is not a pimp. The bridegroom is the covenantal agent of the holy community and also the covenantal agent of a righteous father's household. His public accusation allows her father to preserve his family's good name by implicitly supporting his charge by not coming to her defense. He has replaced her father as the covenantal head over her. He brings a covenant lawsuit against her as a whore in the name of her father and the priestly nation.

2. Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom

Biblically speaking, Jesus Christ brought a covenantal lawsuit when He charged Israel with spiritual whoredom. He was Israel's divine Bridegroom, sanctioned by Israel's Father, yet He caught Israel worshipping false gods. He publicly called the rulers of Israel "sons of your father, the devil" (John 8:44).

Whoredom had been Israel's problem from the beginning, which the entire Book of Hosea was written to illustrate, and which Ezekiel 16 was devoted to explaining. In God's eyes, as Israel's Father, His daughter was deserving of death as a whore. But Jesus Christ came to pay the bride price for all mankind, including Israel. He paid it to God the Father, as required. This restored God's reputation among His enemies as the cosmic Judge.²⁴ Without this payment, God's authority as cosmic Judge would have been compromised, for He would be viewed as a God who cannot bring His word to pass in history. He would be viewed as a Father who cannot control the actions of his promiscuous or adulterous daughter. His only other option would have been to bring His daughter to the authorities for burning, as the fornicating daughter of a priest (Lev. 21:9). This is what God did with national Israel in 70 A.D.

Israel needed the payment of this bride price by the Bridegroom in order to be married. Without His acceptance of her, He could have had her executed. The period from Christ's resurrection to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was the period in which Israel could accept this bride price, and covenant with Jesus. But to do this, Israel had to align

planation in lieu of the physical tokens.

24. The family name of God is always *the* key motivation in God's decision to bring judgment. Moses appealed to God to spare the Hebrews by appealing to God's reputation among His enemies (Ex. 32:11–14). Nathan reminded David that his adultery and murder had given the enemies of God a cause to blaspheme (II Sam. 12:14).

herself with the gentile church, the new bride of Christ. This implication is what the Jews and the Judaizers in the church resisted.

It was clear what it meant if the church really is God's new bride. If Jesus was the true Bridegroom, and if Israel was truly promiscuous and in need of acceptance by the Bridegroom, then Old Covenant Israel was about to be publicly burned by God. Jesus had identified Israel as a whore, a spiritual adulteress. Israel was doomed to certain death. The daughter of a priest was under special restraints.

It is quite likely that the Judaizers who kept infiltrating the early church understood what was coming. If Israel was truly required to covenant with Christ, becoming His bride through church membership, then it meant that the old bride, Old Covenant Israel, would be cut off by divorce, making the consummation of Christ with His new bride legitimate. God would consummate His marriage with the church, the new wife, through *divorce by execution*. Thus, the Judaizers worked hard to bring the gentiles under the covenantal signs of the older covenant. The gentiles had to be made members of the Jewish bride. Not to do so would have been to admit that covenantal judgment was coming to the nation of Israel.

Israel's destruction can be viewed symbolically in several ways: first, as God the Father's burning of her as the promiscuous daughter of a priest; second, as Jesus Christ's successful prosecution of her as the Bridegroom of a non-virgin bride; third, as God's adulterous bride (Hosea). The Father would have burned her, but He offered her one last possibility: marriage to the Bridegroom who knew of her fornication, but who was willing to pay the bride price, as if she were righteous. When Israel rejected this offer of marriage, God the Father had His Son serve as the instrument of His wrath. Israel was publicly burned. Fire from heaven is what was poured forth symbolically on Israel in 70 A.D., the comprehensive judgment of God.²⁵

The Bridegroom, in His mercy, still has left alive a remnant of the old bride: genetic Israel. He offers full covenantal restoration to fallen Israel, and He promises to bring her into union with Him when the fullness of the gentiles has come (Rom. 11).²⁶ But Israel will come in only as part of the church, not as a separate body. *God publicly divorced Israel by execution in 70 A.D.* Once a covenantally valid divorce

25. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

26. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

has taken place, and one partner has remarried, there can never be a remarriage between the lawfully divorced partners (Deut. 24:4). Genetic-covenantal Israel as genetic-covenantal Israel can never again become God's bride. Only by joining new covenant Israel can genetic-covenantal Israel be reunited in marriage to God.²⁷

G. New Testament Applications

I already explained how the principle of the bride price and dowry could apply in New Testament times.²⁸ What about the possible applications of the laws regarding seduction? Are they still mandatory in New Testament times? If so, have they been modified in any way?

1. Dowries

What would be the equivalent of the mandatory bride price for seducers? It would be at least the economic equivalent of a girl's dowry from her father. Most Western nations have abandoned formal dowries, but the principle of endowing a daughter is still recognized. Instead of jewelry or land, a daughter receives an expensive formal education and a wedding paid for by her parents. Friends bring presents to the wedding, but parents pay for it.

The Old Testament principle was far better: the bridegroom paid the father, who then either paid the daughter in capital goods (not presents), or else he held the assets for her and the grandchildren.

The collections of laws from the ancient Near East devoted considerable space to discussing dowries and obligations. Hammurabi's Code from paragraph 128 through 184 deals with dowries, the longest section in the Code.²⁹ These rules were generally well thought-out and sensible. Examples: "If, when a seignior acquired a wife, she bore him children and that woman has then gone to (her) fate, her father may not lay claim to her dowry, since her dowry belongs to her children" (paragraph 162). All right, what if she died, leaving no children? Should the son-in-law inherit the dowry? That depends on who keeps

27. This line of argumentation based on Deuteronomy 24:4 rejects the teaching of dispensationalism that the ritual signs and symbols of the Old Covenant will be the basis of membership in the New Covenant during a future millennium. This is the underlying theology of the Judaizers.

28. Chapter 3.

29. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the New Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 171–74.

the bride price. “If a seignior acquired a wife and that woman has gone to (her) fate without providing him with children, if his father-in-law has then returned to him the marriage-price which that seignior brought to the house of his father-in-law, her husband may not lay claim to the dowry of that woman, because her dowry belongs to her father’s house. If his father-in-law has not returned the marriage-price to him, he shall deduct the full amount of her marriage-price from her dowry and return (the rest of) her dowry to her father’s house” (paragraphs 163–64). It was all spelled out in advance. Each party knew where he stood.

2. The Absence of Monetary Specifics

In the Old Testament era, 50 shekels of silver was a great deal of money, the vow price of an adult male slave (Lev. 27:3). Today, because of the vast increase in mining, 50 one-ounce silver coins are not worth much: the equivalent of two months’ wages in a low-age job in the United States. Thus, the imposition of a 50-shekel bride payment would not be meaningful in an advanced society.

What is the basis for arguing that in principle, the obligation of the bride price is still in force, yet the specific penalty is no longer in force? Can the spirit of the law be maintained while violating the Old Testament letter of the law? If so, on what basis?

With the death in 70 A.D. of national Israel, the harlot daughter and harlot wife, God removed the specific monetary penalties attached to the land. Christ’s payment fulfilled the specific terms of the law, as did the death of the law-breaker, national Israel. Penalties that involve physical pain (whipping, for example), or the loss of life (capital punishment), or percentages forfeited (proportional restitution) retain their permanent character as punishments to be avoided irrespective of time or place. This is comparable to the principle of the tithe: the required percentage remains constant, but the currency unit is not specified by biblical law.

On the other hand, punishments that were tied to Israel’s land and the nation’s historical role are no longer binding, such as specific money prices for a slave gored by an ox, or the bride price, or the military atonement price (the erroneously named “head tax”),³⁰ or the sacrifices of specific animals for specific transgressions, or specific ritual washings. The common latrine in a military camp is now the technical

30. Chapter 62.

substitute for going outside the camp and using a personal spade to dig an individual hole (Deut. 23:13).

The Old Testament, unlike the law collections of contemporary nations, did not impose many specific monetary fines. There were also no price controls in Israel, unlike the laws of Eshnunna, which is basically a listing of fixed prices for goods, services, and fines,³¹ or Hammurabi's Babylon,³² or the Hittites.³³ Thus, with very few exceptions, the Mosaic law avoided detailed monetary penalties. It did not presume to interfere with competitive bargaining. Only in a handful of instances were specific prices mentioned, and these were in the context of ritual payments to the temple and restitution payments to victims. Percentages, not specific amounts of metal, were the rule for imposing punishments. This makes it more difficult to understand in retrospect the magnitude of a handful of specified monetary penalties, but it also made it possible for biblical law to stand without revision until 70 A.D.

3. *Modern Equivalents*

Let us consider what the ideal situation would be, when enforced by family, church, and civil authorities. A man seduces an unmarried woman. They immediately go to her father and admit their physical bond. He then decides whether to allow the marriage. If he is willing to listen to the man, he demands a bride price, probably high. The man has no choice in the matter. He may have to sell everything he has, or even accept bondservice to the father for a period of time. The civil government would enforce the father's decision. The father retains the option of denying them the right to marry. If he is supported in this decision by church and state—which would be normal—he can impose on the man the equivalent of her dowry.

What is the modern dowry? A monetary payment equivalent of a college education or other formal training, plus the cost of a wedding. This would probably involve the equivalent of many years of net income, after minimal support for himself. If the girl had received no advanced education, he would pay for it. If she had been sent to private

31. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 161–63.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 167–77: paragraphs 17, 24, 51, 88, 90, 111, 114, 116, 121, 156, 203–4, 207–9, 211–17, 220–24, 228, 234, 239, 241–43, 251–52, 257–61, 268–77. End of text: 282.

33. *Ibid.*, 189–97: paragraphs 4–18, 20, 22–25, 26(B), 42, 77–78, 81–89, 91–97, 101–5, 107–9, 119–48, 150–62, 164–65, 167–68, 170, 172, 177–86 (extremely detailed price controls), 200. End of text: 200.

high school and college by her father, the father would be reimbursed for the expenses, plus interest from the time of the seduction until final payment. The seducer would pay for her dowry.

The next potential bridegroom could not be asked to pay something. She has become a liability. In a God-honoring society, her lack of virginity would be an initial liability, depending on the circumstances of her rebellion. A righteous young man would fear a flaw in her moral character. But if she brings skills and money into the marriage, plus several years of righteous behavior, he may be willing to consider her.

In our day, all this sounds very old fashioned, even archaic. These days, so does chastity. This marks the moral decline of the West, not its moral maturity. With Christ's payment behind us, all sins can be covered in each person's experience, but this does not obliterate the need for visible evidence of progressive sanctification. The words of moral warning of the father to his son in the first nine chapters of Proverbs are still valid.

Conclusion

This case law indirectly brings up the threat of slavery. This is the integrating theme of the case laws of Exodus 21–23. The penalties of public sinning are always of such magnitude that flagrant public sinning could and probably would involve a return to slavery for most publicly condemned sinners. This, of course, is the central message of the Book of Exodus: God delivers His covenant people from slavery, but He threatens them with a return to slavery if they should continue to break His covenant. Ultimately, He threatens them with public execution.

The bride price paid to the father by the seducer is a classic example of this return to slavery. The short-run perspective of the seducer is essentially the time perspective of Satan and his followers: a few moments of ecstasy in defying God, and eternity in bondage to repay Him. These forbidden moments of ecstasy began in the garden and will end at the final judgment.

In the Old Covenant era, the seducer might be allowed to become a righteous husband, but only at the discretion of the seduced girl's father. He became a righteous husband—with or without a bride—through the public payment of a very high bride price. The maximum of 50 shekels of silver points to a lifetime of bondservice to repay. If the

father allowed the marriage, the heirs of the sinner would inherit, but he himself paid the price. Wealth was transferred from the older generation to the younger.

This was Israel's lesson in the wilderness. The fathers were still mental and moral slaves. They rejected God when they tried to stone Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:10). They were forced to wander in the wilderness until their children could inherit the land. Even Joshua and Caleb suffered, just as Jacob had suffered at the hand of Laban, for the unrighteousness and cowardice of their covenantal peers. They had to wait for an extra generation before they could enter the land. God extracted the bride price from that seducing and adulterous generation, so that their heirs might inherit it. God gave them sufficient capital to raise the next generation, and then they died in the wilderness. Delivered by God's grace from Egyptian slavery, they nevertheless remained in lifetime bondservice to God in the wilderness.

The New Testament standard is analogous, not identical. The land of Israel has lost its covenantal relevance. The price of silver has changed. But the judicial principle has remained the same: the seducer must pay for the bride's dowry, whether her father allows the couple to marry or not. The civil government is supposed to enforce this penalty. Seduction is not to be indirectly subsidized by the removal of negative economic sanctions.

OPPRESSION, OMNISCIENCE, AND JUDGMENT

Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in anywise [any way], and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless (Ex. 22:21–24).

The theocentric principle here is the office of God as the kinsman-redeemer, and therefore the blood avenger (the same office): the *ga'al*. “Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed. But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him” (Num. 5:6–8). In lieu of a family kinsman-redeemer, God serves in this office.

A. Protecting the Vulnerable Members of Society

God protects the vulnerable members of His covenant family when they have no one to act in their behalf. So should we. Men’s treatment of the helpless reflects their willingness or unwillingness to serve as representatives of God in His capacity as the defender of the oppressed. How men treat other people indicates their attitude toward God, for man is made in God’s image. How they treat others tells God how He would be treated by them if they got the opportunity. Speaking of the final day of Judgment, Jesus said:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:34–40).

If one's protection of the weak testifies to one's willingness to honor God, then God in turn will protect those who offer protection. Men are weak in the sight of God. They need His protection. How they treat the weak in history will determine how God treats them in history. "And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given" (Mark 4:24).

B. Restraint and Protection

Strangers, widows, and orphans: these three representative examples, along with the poor, are seen in the Bible as being especially vulnerable to oppression.¹ "Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). They deserve protection.

1. *Faithfulness and Liberty*

If the Hebrews remained faithful to God in this matter of dealing with strangers, God promised, they would retain their own civil liberties. If the judges of the land remained so committed to the ethical terms of God's covenant that they would restrain the oppression of strangers, widows, and orphans by fellow Hebrews, then all righteous Hebrews could safely retain confidence in their judges. On the other hand, if a system of bribes or special favors corrupted the judges, and they began to show favor to the interests of Hebrews in their legal disputes with resident aliens, widows, and orphans, then this would be a

1. Charles F. Fensham, "Widow, Orphan and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XXI (1962), pp. 129–39.

preliminary manifestation of looming tyranny, domestic and then foreign. “Your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless” (v. 24).

Why does God single out the widow, the orphan, and the resident alien? Because they are representative of a general class of people. If we search for the distinguishing characteristic of all three—their representative feature—we find that there is only one: *their lack of covenantal representation*. It is appropriate that this should be the focus of the law in the Book of Exodus, the premier book in the Bible and in the Pentateuch on hierarchical representation. The widow has no husband; the orphan has no parents; the resident alien has no tribe and no legal status in the assembly. The first two have no family head above them; the third has no ecclesiastical or judicial place in the hierarchy. No earthly agent *speaks* for the resident alien in the assembly. No one *listens* to the widow and orphan. No one has a major cultural incentive to protect them.

Nevertheless, they are not covenantally defenseless. Their lack of a covenantal intermediary between them and God does not leave them without judicial recourse. Prayer can bring them before the judgment seat of the King. Their prayers indicate that they honor God in their hearts by subordinating themselves to Him. Prayer testifies to a person’s faith in the hierarchical nature of the universe. God will therefore listen to them. “If thou afflict them in anywise [any way], and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry.” God will protect them. They have honored His sovereignty and His hierarchy through their prayers. In contrast, their oppressors have ignored His revealed law. He will therefore uphold His law. He will intervene, acting on their behalf: “And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.” He will bring judgment in history, on the basis of *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye, a dead husband for the victim’s dead husband, dead parents for the victim’s dead parents. The invisible God of the Bible will intervene in history as their representative agent. He becomes their kinsman-redeemer, and in doing so, He becomes the wicked oppressor’s blood avenger. He cuts off the oppressor’s inheritance. In short, God defends all five points of His covenant.

2. God’s Negative Sanctions in History

God says that Biblical law is to be honored by individuals and their courts above all considerations of race, family, or other personal rela-

tionships. Judges are required to uphold its terms without respect to persons. "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it" (Deut. 1:17).² If for any reason the civil courts should fail to uphold the law, God warned the Israelites, then the nation as a whole would be held responsible for having broken the terms of His covenant. God would bring His negative sanctions against the whole nation.

But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy (Lev. 26:14–25).³

The decision to ignore God's law by the civil and priestly representatives of a nation is inescapably a covenantal decision, God has always insisted. Citizens under the judges' authority in ancient Israel were held responsible by God for the injustice of the judges, for they

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 35.

possessed the power to replace the judges for unrighteousness (Ex. 18:21). Furthermore, their long-term public consent to the faithless decisions of Israel's civil magistrates meant that God would hold them responsible as a nation. There could be no lawful appeal to God by any private citizen that "I was only following orders." There could be no successful appeal by the citizens as a covenantal unit that "our leaders did these things against our will." The existence of a covenantal cause-and-effect relationship between the moral character of a nation's rulers and the moral character of a majority of its citizens is why we know that evil, incompetent, and cowardly leaders are a curse brought by God on self-consciously evil citizens. Those who prefer to be ruled by the laws of men rather than the laws of God shall be given their heart's desire: tyranny and high taxes (I Sam. 8).⁴

3. *Protection*

If the people of Israel oppressed strangers, they could do this only by ignoring God's law. God's Bible-revealed law was designed by God to be the judicial means of civic righteousness throughout history. It was designed to *protect* men. But in ancient Israel, men soon learned that if they were compelled by the civil government to obey God's law, they could not effectively oppress the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. Yet exploiting these victims proved so profitable in the short run that short-run thinkers decided to abandon God's law. Short-run thinkers always do.⁵ They think that God will not see what they do.

They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.
They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet
they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.
Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise?
He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?
He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?
(Ps. 94:5–10).

4. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

5. Today, however, a strange transformation has taken place. Humanists and pietists agree: God's revealed law is tyrannical, inherently a source of oppression. They have abandoned God's revealed law in the name of universal principles of "right reason" and "religiously neutral civil justice." Because they view God's revealed law as the source of oppression rather than its cure, they call for the extension of humanist civil law. They cannot seem to understand why oppression multiplied in the twentieth century, but they know what is needed to cure it: more of the same.

The spiritual advisors of every era who come before God's people and tell them not to pay any attention to the specifics of God's revealed law are sure that God will not impose His negative sanctions in history. "Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place" (Jer. 14:13). They lie. They are the apologists for oppression, the watchmen who are asleep.

C. Evangelism Through Law

The treatment that Hebrew judges displayed officially to the resident alien was the primary civil symbol of the nation's honoring of the terms of God's covenant. The uncircumcised stranger was outside the ecclesiastical covenant, but he was not outside both the restraint and the protection of the civil law. Everyone inside the geographical boundaries of the nation of Israel was bound to the judicial terms of the civil covenant. Each resident was therefore compelled to affirm his subordination to God, not necessarily as a member of God's ritual household, but as one who was nevertheless under God's visible authority.

1. Aliens and the National Covenant

To achieve the comprehensive external blessings of the covenant, aliens were required by God to place themselves inside Israel's geographical and covenantal boundaries. Isaiah predicted that one sign of Israel's covenantal faithfulness would be that the nations would pour into the land to worship at Mt. Zion (Isa. 2:2–3). When this happens, Isaiah said, the Lord will judge the nations and turn swords into ploughshares (Isa. 2:4). This did not mean that every person on earth was to take up permanent residence in tiny Israel. It meant that the borders of Israel were to be extended *covenantally* to cover the whole earth. The sign of this geographical expansion would be the willingness of the nations to covenant with the God of Israel. They would accept His law and His sacrifices as their own. They would replace their false gods with the God of the Bible. To say that they were not to do this is to say that God's salvation was in principle offered only to the Israelites. It would mean that there was supposed to be no evangelism prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ, no preaching of God's word and the need for repentance outside the geographical boundaries of Palestinian Israel. Does any Christian want to maintain such a view of

1,400 years of biblical religion in Old Testament Israel? (Officially, no; practically, yes.)

How could the gentile nations learn of the wonders of God's judgment and His blessings (Deut. 4:6–8)?⁶ One way would be through the information sent back from fellow countrymen living in Israel. Placing resident aliens under the protection of God's civil law was therefore to be a preliminary stage of international evangelism.

2. Greek Mythology: Justice for All

This was an evangelism program unique to ancient Israel. It was common in the ancient world to regard resident aliens as outside the protection of civil law. This was true even of "enlightened" Greece and Rome.⁷ To be a citizen meant that you had to participate in the religious rites of the city. Only those born into or adopted by families that had been "present at the creation" of the city-state had lawful access to these civil sacrifices; only they were citizens.⁸ This is why exile was so devastating to an ancient citizen; he was permanently cut off from his family's religious rites as well as his city's rites, yet he could not participate in the rites of his new residence. Fustel wrote:

We can easily understand that, for the ancients, God was not everywhere. If they had some vague idea of a God of the universe, this was not the one whom they considered as their providence, and whom they invoked. Every man's gods were those who inhabited his house, his canton, his city. The exile, on leaving his country behind him, also left his gods. He no longer found a religion that could console and protect him; he no longer felt that providence was watching over him; the happiness of praying was taken away. All that could satisfy the needs of his soul was far away.

Now, religion was the source whence flowed civil and political rights. The exile, therefore, lost all this in losing his religion and country. Excluded from the city worship, he saw at the same time his domestic worship taken from him, and was forced to extinguish his hearth-fire. He could no longer hold property; his goods, as if he was dead, passed to his children, unless they were confiscated to the

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

7. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Bk. III, ch. XI, pp. 192–93.

8. *Ibid.*, III:III. Occasionally, citizenship was granted to an individual who had served a city faithfully or to skilled immigrants in times of acute labor shortages, but this was rare.

profit of the gods or of the state. Having no longer a worship, he had no longer a family; he ceased to be a husband and a father. His sons were no longer in his power; his wife was no longer his wife, and might immediately take another husband. . . . It is not surprising that the ancient republics almost all permitted a convict to escape death by flight. Exile did not seem to be a milder punishment than death. The Roman jurists called it capital punishment.⁹

3. *Israel Was Different*

The unbreakable link between the family's religious rites and the possession of civil rights did not prevail in Israel's holy commonwealth. Adoption was required for access to the nation's religious rites, but *this adoption was open to all people*, irrespective of the decision of a particular Hebrew family to adopt an alien son or daughter. God adopted individuals into His family, just as He had adopted Israel as a nation. The sign of God's adoption was circumcision. First, a person could gain access to civil and ecclesiastical rites through circumcision (Ex. 12:48). Access to membership in the biblical covenant in Old Testament Israel was not achieved through incorporation into one of the nation's founding families. Circumcised foreigners and their families were outside the jubilee land redistribution law (Lev. 25), but they or their heirs could nevertheless become full citizens (Deut. 23:3–8), although they would have had to live in the cities, where this law did not apply, or else live as renters or long-term leaseholders in rural areas. Second, resident aliens who chose not to be circumcised were under the civil law of Israel (Ex. 12:49), for the God of Israel is a universal God.

It was His assertion of universality that made the claims of the God of the Hebrews unique in the ancient world. For example, the theology of ancient Israel taught, in contrast to the theologies of rival pagan civilizations, that the defeat of His people militarily did not mean that the gods of Israel's military conquerors had triumphed over the God of Israel (Isa. 9–11). The Israelites could be scattered geographically, yet still remain under the terms of God's covenant law (Deut. 28:64–68). Why? Because God is a universal God who judges all men wherever they are in terms of His law or the work of the law written in their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15).¹⁰ All of the ancient world was therefore under

9. *Ibid.*, III:XIII, pp. 200–1.

10. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

the ethical requirements of God's revealed law. The ancients were supposed to conform themselves to the Ten Commandments and the case laws that applied these commandments in daily living. Foreign nations were supposed to see the application of the legal principles outlined in the Ten Commandments in the actual daily operations of Israelite society, and they were supposed to imitate Israel. The resident alien was able to acknowledge this fact in a more visible way than those living outside the land of Israel.

4. Resident Aliens Deserve Legal Protection

Any attempt on the part of the judges of Israel to place the resident alien outside the protection of God's law would have represented an attempt to pervert God's universal standards of justice. By not honoring God's law in every dispute between a Hebrew and a resident alien, the judge was in effect announcing: "God's law is binding only in terms of circumcision. Those outside this blood covenant are therefore not under the law's protection. This means that they are outside any general covenant that God has established with mankind. This in turn means that mankind is not required by God to honor the judicial terms of His covenant. God imposes no final claims on those outside the covenant, which is marked exclusively by physical circumcision of male heads of households. He is, therefore, a God of Palestine rather than the cosmic Creator. There is no universal covenant."

Obviously, such a view of God is foreign to everything God teaches regarding His absolute sovereignty as the Creator. To respect persons in rendering judgment, the judges would be denying God's holiness, His general covenant with mankind, the universality of His civil laws, and the absolute claims He places on all mankind. Thus, the uncircumcised stranger was entitled to full protection under the law, even though he could not become a citizen, meaning that he could not become a judge or own land permanently inside the nation (Lev. 25:11–17).¹¹

Furthermore, if the judges refused to succumb to pressures by Hebrews to favor their cause just because of their racial characteristics, as marked by their circumcised flesh and their families' permanent ownership of land inside Israel, then they would probably not succumb to other pressures to withhold justice. The law of God made it clear that a Hebrew's treatment of bondservants, strangers, widows, orph-

11. Chapter 14. Cf. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 25.

ans, the poor, and animals represented his treatment of all mankind. These weaker people and creatures were frequently under his authority, just as he was always under God's authority. As he treated those under him, so would God treat him. This is a very common theme in both Testaments, but especially in the case laws of Exodus, which is why so much space is devoted to setting forth the legal principles governing bondservants, maidservants, widows, the poor, and animals. God reminds them again and again that they had been strangers in Egypt. They needed the protection provided by righteous judgment, and so did the strangers in the land.

This is why their years as slaves in Egypt were so important covenantally. They had suffered at the hands of lawless judges who refused to honor God's law. Such is tyranny throughout history: civil courts that deny the specific terms of God's revealed covenantal law. To avoid tyranny, God told them, render righteous judgment regardless of race, color, or creed. Place all people dwelling inside the *geographical boundaries* of Israel under the *ethical boundaries* of God's civil covenant. This was to remind residents of Israel that all men are born under the ethical terms of God's covenant, and they will all be held accountable in time and eternity for their disobedience. Thus, any refusal by the judges of Israel to honor God's law would inescapably damage God's testimony to the *sanctity* of His law, which necessarily meant His *sanctions*: blessing and cursing.¹²

If a Hebrew judge cursed a publicly righteous stranger in order to bless a publicly law-breaking Hebrew, then that judge was implicitly testifying to the partiality of God regarding the enforcement of His law, a false god who respects persons more than he respects the integrity of his law. This is false testimony to a false and unjust god who had been invented by the corrupt judge, and Jehovah God promises to bring judgment against any nation that continues to promote such false testimony through civil injustice.

5. *Christian Antinomians Deny This*

Those today who deny that the Old Testament case laws also applied judicially to the ancient world as far as God was concerned must therefore take the position that: (1) the Ten Commandments were never intended by God to be more than a local, temporary, tribal legal

12. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

code; or (2) the Old Testament's case laws were not connected judicially to the Ten Commandments; or (3) both of the above. I have several questions for those who maintain such a position. Didn't God want pagans to worship Him? Didn't He want them to avoid worshipping idols, avoid using His name in vain, and avoid breaking the sabbath? Didn't He want them to honor father and mother, avoid murder, avoid adultery, avoid stealing, avoid bearing false witness, and avoid covetousness? Which of the Ten Commandments didn't apply to the ancient pagan world? And I would also ask this: Which of the case laws has nothing to do judicially with one or more of the Ten Commandments?

Christians really do not want to maintain such a position publicly, yet their endlessly repeated statements against the legitimacy of biblical law forces them to take this position. "Should the Nations Be Under the Mosaic Law?" ask two dispensationalists, theologian H. Wayne House and pastor Thomas D. Ice.¹³ They answer their question clearly: *no*. "The nations surrounding Israel were never called to adopt the law of Moses; rather Israel's obedience to the law would attract nations. Deuteronomy 4:6–8 says that the surrounding nations would be attracted to Israel and consider it wise."¹⁴ This is the theological equivalent of saying: "The people surrounding the church are never called to adopt the religion of Christianity; rather Christians' obedience to the Christ should attract people. Matthew 28:18–20 says that the surrounding nations will be attracted to the church and consider it wise." That the authors' logic is internally schizophrenic should be clear to anyone who can follow an argument. To put it bluntly, this line of reasoning is utter nonsense. It is the argument that the specifics of God's revealed law are wise but they are not now nor were they ever in any way judicially binding on those outside of tiny Israel.

What can it possibly mean to argue that the law of God is wise but not morally or judicially binding? It means only this: those who argue this way prefer not to obey God's revealed law, except when they can prove to themselves and others that any particular biblical law is "wise." Their implicit (but always undefined) universal standard for wisdom is therefore something other than God's revelation of Himself in His law. But then the nagging question arises: *On what other basis than God's revealed law are men and nations condemned by God, in*

13. H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), ch. 7.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

history and at the final judgment? By what other standard will the sheep be separated from the goats? “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left” (Matt. 25:32-33). To put it in terms that even a dispensationalist can understand: *Is it wise to want to avoid eternal damnation?* If so, then isn’t it also wise to have faith in Jesus Christ? Isn’t it wise to obey Jesus? “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4). Faith requires obedience to validate its reality. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:17-20).

One of these faithful works is to avoid oppressing the weak.

D. Economic Oppression

The question then arises: Is economic oppression a matter of civil action? Is it a criminal offense to oppress a stranger, widow, or orphan? In my comments on Exodus 22:1, 4, I wrote, “The general guideline for designating a particular public act as a crime is this: if by failing to impose sanctions against certain specified public acts, the whole community could be subsequently threatened by God’s non-civil sanctions—war, plague, and famine—then the civil government becomes God’s designated agency of enforcement. *The civil government’s primary function is to protect the community against the wrath of God* by enforcing His laws against public acts that threaten the survival of the community.”¹⁵ The language of Exodus 22:24 surely indicates that God will avenge the oppressed by bringing curses on the community. “My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword.”

Should the state pass specific legislation against economic oppression? Should the courts enforce legal precedents against economic oppression? The answers depend on whether the laws and penalties can

15. Chapter 17.

be formulated clearly and interpreted predictably on the basis of biblical revelation. I also wrote this regarding the legitimate jurisdiction of civil government: “Continued injustice, if it can be biblically defined and publicly identified in advance through statute or judicial precedent, because it goes unpunished by the civil government, calls forth the wrath of God on the community, so there is ultimately no Bible-based distinction between civil law and criminal law.”¹⁶ Can a specific law against oppression be “biblically defined and publicly identified in advance through statute or judicial precedent”? This is the key judicial problem facing the civil magistrate. It is also the key judicial problem facing a free society: the problem of the *messianic state*, whose mark of oppression is its *judicial arbitrariness*.¹⁷

Economic theory provides no definition of the concept of “economic oppression” in the case of voluntary transactions. Only where coercion is involved—the threat of physical violence—can the economist be confident that oppression is involved. This does not mean that a definition of oppression is impossible, but it does mean that no appeal to modern humanistic economic theory can provide a clear-cut definition. The use of the coercive power of the civil government to extract resources from other people can be regarded as oppression in most instances, but there are no clearly defined criteria of oppressive voluntary transactions made in a free market. The mere presence of competitive bargaining between unequally rich or unequally skillful bargainers does not constitute economic oppression, as the bargain between Jacob and Esau indicates (Gen. 25:29–34).¹⁸ Nevertheless, there *are* acts of economic oppression, even if conventional economic theory cannot state the criteria scientifically (neutrally).¹⁹

Oppression and affliction are related concepts. The translators of the King James Version translated the Hebrew word for “oppression” (*lah-gahtz*) as “affliction” in I Kings 22:27: “bread of affliction” and “water of affliction.” The word is translated as “crush” in Numbers 22:25: “and crushed Balaam’s foot.” The Hebrew word for “affliction” (*guh-nah*) is also translated as “humble” in several instances.²⁰ Oppres-

16. Chapter 17.

17. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

18. See Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 26: “Competitive Bargaining.”

19. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 26.

20. Ex. 10:3; Jud. 19:24, Ps. 35:13, etc.

sion can be judicial oppression (Ex. 23:7–9). Examples of this would be rendering false judgment or testifying falsely. It sometimes carries the meaning of sexual abuse of a defenseless woman.²¹

E. Protecting Women

One of the complaints of the American “women’s liberation movement” of the 1970s and 1980s has been that women in the work force are frequently told by their supervisors or employers that they must compromise themselves sexually in order to retain their jobs or to advance their careers. This practice of “sexual harassment” is unquestionably an instance of affliction, as defined by the Bible. Women have called for legal penalties on men who resort to such tactics.²²

It might be argued by defenders of pure laissez-faire capitalism that such a request by an employer may (or may not) be immoral, but that there should be no law against it. “After all, the woman does not have to submit. If she chooses not to prostitute herself, it could cost her dearly in terms of her career, but this is the free market’s way: if you are not willing to pay the price demanded by the seller—in this case, the seller of the job—you have no valid complaint. After all, any attractive woman who decides not to become a prostitute thereby gives up the economic income that she might have earned. The only strictly economic difference between this woman and the woman who has been solicited by her employer is that she may not have been asked to become a prostitute by some man. But the economics of the two examples are the same: forfeited income for lack of consent. Each woman pays to retain her moral integrity. But the civil government should have nothing to say in either case.”

The Bible prohibits prostitution. “Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness” (Lev. 19:29). To profane or pollute the land morally was a sin in the Old Testament. Today, it is a direct sin against Christ, who now spews out evil (Rev. 3:16), as the land was said to do in the Old Testament (Lev. 18:25). To pressure a woman to become a prostitute is itself an act of defilement. If either the woman or the employer is married, then the demand that she submit is also a call to commit the capital crime of adultery, for which both parties could be

21. Deut. 21:14, 22:24, 29; II Sam. 13:22; Lam. 5:11; Ezk. 22:10–11.

22. Men who find themselves employed by women who make the same demand would be equally entitled to protection by civil law.

executed if discovered and convicted in a civil court, if the woman's husband so insists (Lev. 20:10). While there is no civil penalty attached to the command not to afflict the weak, it is clear that the judges have the authority in this instance—sexual harassment—to penalize the offender. Oppression as such is not penalized, but this specific form of oppression is, because biblical civil law deals with it.

Without the civil government's authority to inflict a penalty, this crime of demanding the performance of a capital crime could not easily be exposed to the civil authorities by the victim. The employer would suffer no civil penalty, and the woman would probably lose her job for having complained publicly. Thus, the enforceability of the law of God would be compromised. Sin would encounter less restraint. The *enticement* to commit a sin to which a civil penalty is attached is therefore itself a civil crime, punishable by civil law, analogous to the case of someone who secretly enticed a family member to worship a god other than the God of the Bible, a crime punished by the authorities (Deut. 13:6–11). The judges might use public flogging as a first-time penalty, and execution for the second infraction.

The question at hand, therefore, is this: To what extent is the practice of oppression or affliction a matter of civil jurisdiction? What is the responsibility of the civil government in suppressing economic oppression by means of its legal monopoly of violence? Furthermore, is an ecclesiastical court responsible in some way to step in and call a halt to economic oppression? Will the criteria used by ecclesiastical courts be different from those used by civil courts? Such questions have baffled Christian commentators for centuries.

F. Criteria of Oppression

What, precisely, are the criteria of economic oppression? The medieval scholastic theologians struggled long and hard with questions relating to the “just price,” and “usurious loans.” What is a “fair profit”? Without exception, the analytical attempts of the scholars failed to survive the test of applying the criteria. The late-medieval scholastic theologians actually defined the “just price” as the *competitive market price*, as long as the market price was not the result of price fixing by public or monopolistic concerns.”²³

23. Marjorie Grice-Hutchinson, *The School of Salamanca: Readings in Spanish Monetary Theory, 1544–1605* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952) (<http://bit.ly/MG-H>); Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 98–99; Raymond de Roover, “The Concept of the Just Price: Theory

The same problem disrupted the attempts of the early New England Puritans to establish formal standards of economic justice. A famous instance was the trial of Capt. Robert Keayne, a Boston merchant, who was convicted in 1639 of having taken unjust profits on the sale of foreign commodities (specifically, above 50% in some instances, and above 100% in others).²⁴ The fine was set by the deputies (the "lower" court, or lower chamber of the legislature-court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony) at 200 pounds; the magistrates ("upper" court) reduced it to 100 pounds.

He was punished, Gov. Winthrop argued, because the colony's leaders were determined to take action. "For the cry of the country was so great against oppression, and some of the elders and magistrates had declared such detestation of the corrupt practice of this man (which was the more observable, because he was wealthy and sold dearer than most other tradesmen, and for that he was of ill report for the like covetous practice in England, that incensed the deputies very much against him)." The politics of envy seems to have been in full force against Capt. Keayne. Gov. Winthrop's five-point explanation of why the magistrates showed leniency to him is revealing, especially the fifth: (1) because there was no law on the statute books prohibiting his rate of profit; (2) because merchants all over the world raised prices when market conditions allowed them to do so; (3) because he was not alone in this fault; (4) because all men throughout the colony were guilty of "like excess in prices" in the sale of cattle, corn, and labor; and (5) "Because a certain rule could not be found out for an equal rate between buyer and seller, though much labor had been bestowed in it, and divers laws had been made, which, upon experience, were repealed, as being neither safe nor equal."²⁵

The Colony had passed and repealed just price and maximum wage laws on numerous occasions during its first decade (1630-39), without being able to solve the theological and economic problem of

and Economic Policy," *Journal of Economic History*, XVIII (1958), pp. 418-34; Murray N. Rothbard, "Late Medieval Origins of Free Market Economic Thought," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975); Alejandro A. Chafuen, *Christians for Freedom: Late-Scholastic Economics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), ch. 7.

24. The account of his conviction is found in the diary of Gov. John Winthrop: *Winthrop's Journal: "History of New England," 1630-1649*, ed. J. Franklin Jamison, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [1908] 1966), I, pp. 315-16. (<http://bit.ly/Winthrop1>)

25. *Ibid.*, I, p. 316.

defining economic injustice.²⁶ After 1676, the legislators capitulated: there was virtually no “just price” legislation in Massachusetts for a century, until the American Revolution’s wartime controls.²⁷

The decision to specify a maximum price or rate of profit as universally evil is clearly arbitrary. Legislators, judges, and defendants all can point to “special circumstances” that supposedly justify or invalidate the charge of economic oppression in any specific instance. By what specific, authoritative, predictable, and generally agreed-upon standard can the civil or ecclesiastical authorities render judgment? This is the problem of *formal law*: the establishment of a written standard relating to ethics which does not rest on some appeal to external circumstances (as interpreted by the judges) or human conscience.

In the case of voluntary economic transactions, the Bible gives no specific guidelines as to what constitutes economic oppression, apart from oppression in the form of commands to perform a civil crime (e.g., adultery). There are laws that prohibit false weights and measures or other crimes involving fraud, but these are general rules for the whole population. They are not laws designed specifically to protect widows, the fatherless, and strangers. Apart from the law regarding weights and measures, *the Bible does not authorize legislation or court decisions against perceived cases of economic oppression*.²⁸ There are no biblical (or economic) guidelines that define “price gouging” or “rent-racking,” or similar unpopular practices. The attempt of governors and judges, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to go beyond the enforcement of specific laws against fraud is necessarily an expansion of arbitrary rule. Legal predictability suffers, and therefore human freedom also suffers. The power-seeking state expands at the expense of individual freedom.

This is not to argue that such evil economic practices do not exist. No doubt they do exist. The question is: What, if anything, is the civil government or a church court supposed to do in any formal case of alleged oppression? The problem that freedom-seeking Christian societies must deal with is the preservation of the judicial conditions neces-

26. See Gary North, “Medieval Economics in Puritan New England, 1630–1660,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Winter 1978–79), pp. 171–77.

27. Gary North, “From Medieval Economics to Indecisive Pietism: Second-Generation Preaching in New England, 1661–1690,” *ibid.*, VI (Summer 1979), pp. 165–70. See also North, *Puritan Economic Experiments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), pp. 35–39. (<http://bit.ly/gnpuritanecon>)

28. The laws requiring gleaning and prohibiting interest-bearing charitable loans to fellow Hebrews had no civil penalty attached to them.

sary for maintaining personal liberty. How can a society avoid oppression by unjust civil magistrates if the legal system offers great latitude for civil judges to define arbitrarily and retroactively what constitutes an economic crime? Civil government is a God-ordained monopoly of violence. Allow arbitrary and unpredictable power here, and the entire society can be placed under the bondage of oppressors—oppressors who legally wield instruments of physical punishment. In contrast, economic oppression is an individual act by a specific person against a handful of people locally. It is a temporary phenomenon, limited at the very least by the continuing wealth of the oppressor, the continuing poverty of the victims, and the lifespans of both the oppressor and the oppressed. There are no comparably effective restraints on oppression by those who control the administration of civil justice. Society-wide, monopolistic, state-enforced sin is generally a far greater threat to potential victims of oppression than localized, privately financed sin.

Despite this limitation on the sanctions that can be legitimately imposed by the civil government, individuals are warned against oppressing the weak. Men are told in this passage that God will make widows of their wives if they are themselves oppressors. The *lex talionis* principle of “eye for eye” undergirds the principle of doing unto others what you would have others do unto you and your family. God, not the civil government, knows men’s hearts. God is the Enforcer.

Judges possess lawful authority to impose sanctions against law-breakers. Civil magistrates possess a legal monopoly of violence. Ecclesiastical authorities possess the lawful authority to keep covenant-breaking people from lawfully partaking of the sacraments. Because they possess these monopoly grants of power—monopolies granted by God (Rom. 13:1–7)—judges must be restrained by law from acting arbitrarily, in order to avoid widespread, monopolistic oppression (Isa. 1). In short, “oppression” is not a monopoly of private individuals; it is also a temptation open to men who hold the office of judge. Indeed, the ability to oppress the defenseless is far easier for a judge, for he possesses a God-ordained monopoly of power, or at least an “oligopoly” of power (because men can usually appeal to other judges). Nevertheless, each participant in a voluntary transaction must take care not to exercise his civil or institutional freedom to the detriment of the defenseless, and ultimately to the detriment of himself and his own family.

G. Defending the Institutionally Defenseless

The Bible singles out three representative groups as being uniquely defenseless: widows, the fatherless, and strangers. Strangers in the Hebrew commonwealth were politically at the mercy of the rulers and those citizens who were upheld judicially by the rulers. Widows and the fatherless were economically disadvantaged, having lost a reliable source of family income. The division of labor which prevails in a covenantal family unit had been broken by the death of the husband. The per capita productivity of the other members of the family normally drops under such circumstances because of a reduction in the family's division of labor. Thus, the biblical concept of oppression encompasses both forms of weakness, political and economic. The weak are not to be afflicted. They are not like Esau, who was in a position of presumed defenselessness only because of a flaw in his character.²⁹

All three disadvantaged groups were entitled in Old Testament times to their portion of the feast of weeks and the feast of tabernacles (so were the landless Levites: Deut. 16:11, 14), as well as to the third-year tithe (Deut. 14:28–29).³⁰ These injunctions would have been enforced by the priests.

1. Positive Injunctions

To protect these groups, biblical law imposes morally mandatory forms of charitable giving on the part of neighbors. But there is no civil sanction attached to this moral obligation. Biblical civil law does not compel people to do good things for others; it imposes sanctions on those who do evil things to others. Biblical civil law is therefore a barrier to the creation of a state-funded, state-mandated welfare system.

Interest payments (usury) are prohibited in the case of a morally obligatory loan to a poor brother in the faith.³¹ Thus, because usury—defined very strictly in the Bible as a *charitable* loan with an interest payment attached—is prohibited, the oppressed victim can sue a lender in a civil court and recover double damages upon the lender's conviction, meaning twice the judicially prohibited interest payment. Such a lawsuit is legitimate because there are civil sanctions against specified activities. What the state cannot lawfully do is compel

29. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 26.

30. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 35.

31. On the other hand, usury is permitted in loans to religious strangers (Deut. 23:20). *Ibid.*, ch. 57.

lenders to make charitable loans. God is the enforcer in this instance. He brings *positive sanctions* to those who obey His *positive injunction*. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteth thine hand unto" (Deut. 15:9–10). The state is not authorized by God to bring positive sanctions.

It is not lawful to ask for the cloak of a widow as collateral (Deut. 24:17), but it is legal to ask for a cloak as collateral from a poverty-stricken Hebrew man (Ex. 22:26).³² The Bible recognizes degrees of vulnerability and degrees of responsibility. Farmers are told to permit strangers, widows, and the fatherless to glean the fallen fruit and unharvested corners of their fields (Lev. 19:9–10;³³ Deut. 24:19–21³⁴), but being a positive injunction, it is not a judicially enforceable law in civil court. Because this is a moral injunction, religious leaders can advise people to obey God. A church court cannot lawfully impose physical sanctions, but it can teach people to obey God's positive injunctions. Can it also legitimately impose the sanction of excommunication against those who are morally stiffnecked? Biblical law places great restrictions on those who bear the sword, but what about church discipline? The same rule seems to bind an ecclesiastical court: no arbitrary law enforcement. There have to be written rules, or at least known rules that are predictable. Men need to govern their actions in terms of their expectations regarding the decisions of courts, including church courts.

If the mark of the messianic state is arbitrary law, what of the church? The threat is far less. First, the state controls everyone within a geographical territory. The church does not. Second, there are competing churches locally; there are not competing civil governments, at least not in the same sense. Third, the state taxes people by force; the church does not. Fourth, the state inflicts physical punishment; the church does not. Thus, moral persuasion is far safer in the hands of a church court than a civil court. But the problem still remains: What is to restrain the judges in a church court? What is to make their de-

32. Chapter 49:C

33. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11.

34. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62.

cisions predictable? I can see only one answer: predictable written law, including case law precedents, announced in advance. Without this, the rule of moral persuasion must serve as the church's tool of discipline. The church is not to enforce God's positive injunctions apart from the specifics of Bible-revealed law.

The reason given to the Israelites for these morally (but not judicially) *mandatory* forms of *individual* charity—the state, it must be stressed, is not God's authorized agency of charitable wealth redistribution—was straightforward: God had delivered the Hebrews from bondage and oppression, and their acts of charity were to serve as reminders and symbols of their *total dependence on God* for their wealth and freedom (Deut. 16:11–12; 24:22). To oppress the weak, therefore, is equivalent to throwing off the covenant, reproaching God, and returning to the bondage of sin: "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoreth him hath mercy on the poor" (Prov. 14:31). Isaiah charged the rulers of the land with just this crime: refusing to render lawful judgment to the widows and the fatherless (Isa. 1:23). Judah's rulers had become oppressors.

The decline of charitable giving is one sign of an increase in economic oppression within a society. The law of gleaning and the law of the tithe are to be upheld by ecclesiastical law. There is no New Testament evidence that either tithing or gleaning has been abolished as a moral and ecclesiastical requirement. Gifts to the poor, we are told, are made to God, and He promises to repay them (Prov. 19:17). He brings positive sanctions to those who obey His positive injunctions. He leaves to the priests the task of imposing moral sanctions for His positive injunctions. For example, the church enforces the tithe, and it grants a positive sanction to those who pay: the right of voting membership. The church also supports poor widows when relatives cannot or refuse to do so (I Tim. 5:3–10). It excommunicates relatives who can support widows but refuse, for they are worse than infidels (I Tim. 5:8).

2. Limited Knowledge

A voluntary exchange can be oppressive to a weaker party, biblically speaking, even though economic analysis does not provide the civil or ecclesiastical authorities the guideline, and therefore the ability, to render lawful judgment in specific cases. Why is the institutional government limited? Because there are *limits on the knowledge available*

to observers of any economic transaction. Each party entered the transaction hoping to benefit. Sometimes men may cry “oppression” when they are secretly pleased with the bargain: “It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth” (Prov. 20:14). No man can measure another man’s subjective benefits; no man or committee of men can compare the gains of each party in a voluntary exchange.³⁵ But God can make such estimations, as Jesus demonstrated when He assessed the extent of the economic sacrifice of the widow who gave away her two “mites,” or small coins (Luke 21:1–4).³⁶ The fact that the authorities are not omniscient does not relieve sharp bargainers from their obligation of being alert to the weak position of the defenseless, and to make adjustments in favor of the weak in their exchanges with them.

By not seeking maximum profits in such transactions, strong bargainers thereby grant a *non-humiliating form of charity*. A good bargainer always seeks to guess what the other man is willing and able to *pay*. If he is confident in his ability to make this exceedingly difficult estimation, then he should have comparable confidence in his ability to make an estimation of how much the other, weaker bargainer may *need*.

H. Biblical Law or Revolution

The quest for a zero-oppression society in history is demonic. It implicitly denies that mankind is burdened by sin and the effects of sin throughout history.

1. *The Question of Sovereignty*

When we ask questions regarding the proper means of bringing healing to social relations and institutions, we need to be clear about the fundamental question of sovereignty. Who is to heal man in history, God or the state? This raises the question of the Messiah. Who is this Messiah, Jesus Christ or the state? Who are the Messiah’s chosen representatives? What are the Messiah’s designated means of achieving this reduction of oppression: biblical law or violent revolution? What is the goal of this social quest: the kingdom of God or the kingdom of man? Is this goal of perfection to be approached as a limit in a

35. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

36. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 50.

historically sin-filled world, or to be achieved in history by a scientific program of remaking man? As Rushdoony warned: “There is thus a dimension of victory in history, Jesus Christ. The alternative plan of victory is social science, and history as a social science. This means the totalitarian socialist state, the world of 1984. For the Christian this is rather the dimension of hell, not of victory; . . .”³⁷

Those who proclaim the legitimacy of such a quest apart from the preaching of the gospel and the extension of biblical law into every area of life want to lodge absolute sovereignty in the centralized “scientific” state. They begin their quest with the presupposition that there is no God who applies visible sanctions in history, either blessings or cursings. If there is a God, they assume, He reveals Himself only at the final judgment, and few of them assume that there will be even a final judgment. He is a God outside of history, they believe. This was exactly what the Pharaoh of the oppression assumed, as did the Pharaoh of the exodus. “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” he asked rhetorically (Ex. 5:2). Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar rhetorically asked the three Hebrew youths: “Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (Dan. 3:15b). Pride goeth before destruction (Prov. 16:18), and pride before God is the ultimate form of pride. These kings in their rebellion had become opponents of covenant theology, which teaches that God imposes visible sanctions in history.³⁸

2. Christians vs. the Covenant

One reason for the growth of (1) private oppression, (2) messianic movements against private oppression, and (3) statist tyranny in the name of relieving oppression is that Christians in the twentieth century for the most part accepted implicitly the anti-covenantal view of God that is proclaimed by the humanistic defenders of the messianic state. Most Christians believe that historical affairs will get progressively worse and worse for righteous people until Jesus comes again, either to establish a bureaucratically enforced millennium in which He will rule from the top in person (premillennialism), or to impose the final judgment (amillennialism). Such a view of God in pre-Second Coming history agrees with the pessimistic conclusions of humanists

37. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1969] 2000), p. 21. (<http://bit.ly/rjrbph>)

38. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

and liberation theologians who say that God does not reveal Himself in history.³⁹

Christian eschatological pessimists do admit one minor exception to the absence of God's covenant sanctions in history: representative acts of voluntary private charity by Christians that do assist a handful of people to survive a little longer or in a little more comfort. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, liberation theologians also admitted an exception: representative acts of revolutionary violence against the innately oppressive social institutions of capitalist society. Nevertheless, both groups are agreed: God will not redeem society through His church's preaching of the gospel and the extension of Bible-revealed law enforcement across the face of the earth. They are agreed that God will not impose in history His dual sanctions of external blessings for covenant-keepers and external cursings for covenant-breakers. They are agreed that the Old Testament civil covenant of God is irrelevant in New Testament times, and therefore God's sanctions in history are today either nonexistent or confined exclusively to the hearts and minds of men. They insist that the visible authority of God's law and His church is steadily removed from history, and His kingdom is steadily shoved into the historically impotent realm of undefinable spirit.⁴⁰

Such a view of God is implicitly or explicitly a denial of both the creation and the resurrection. This view leads to a world-denying pietism. Rushdoony pointed to the anti-pietistic implications of covenant theology.

The purpose of Biblical history is to trace the victory of Jesus

39. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

40. God will be victorious in history, premillennialists claim, only when He returns physically in awesome power to judge the nations in history for a thousand years. But this is the direct imposition of judgment; it is not based on representative judgment in history by God's elect people in His name, while He is in heaven and His people are on earth. This rulership only takes place after the church—meaning you and I—are physically dead and gone. Premillennialists and amillennialists are agreed: the church is impotent in history to change history through the preaching of the gospel and through covenantal faithfulness to God's law. As dispensationalists House and Ice insist: "Because the Bible speaks of things progressing from 'bad to worse,' of men 'deceiving and being deceived' (2 Timothy 3:13), we look out at our world and see how bad things really are. . . . Common grace is on the decline, especially God's restraint of evil. This accounts for the rising apostasy and the decline of Christianity. North is wrong and Van Til [an amillennialist] is right on this issue." House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 183.

Christ. That victory is not merely spiritual; it is also historical. Creation, man, and man's body, all move in terms of a glorious destiny for which the whole creation groans and travails as it awaits the fullness of that glorious liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18-23). The victory is historical and eschatological, and it is not the rejection of creation but its fulfillment.

This victory was set forth in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who destroyed the power of sin and death and emerged victorious from the grave. As St. Paul emphasized in I Corinthians 15, this victory is the victory of all believers. Christ is the firstfruit, the beginning, the alpha and omega of the life of the saints. Had Christ merely arisen as a spirit from the grave, it would have signified His lordship over the world of spirit but His surrender of matter and history. But by His physical resurrection, by His rising again in the same body with which He was crucified, He set forth His lordship over creation and over history. The world of history will see Christ's triumph and the triumph of His saints, His church, and His kingdom. History will not end in tribulation and disaster: it will see the triumph of the people of God and the manifestation of Christian order from pole to pole before Christ comes again. The doctrine of the resurrection is thus a cornerstone of the Biblical dimension of victory.

The doctrine of the resurrection, however, does not last long in any church or philosophy which surrenders or compromises the doctrine of creation. Creationism asserts that the world is the creative act of the triune God, Who made it wholly good. Sin is a perversion of man and a deformation of creation. The goal of the Messianic purpose of history is the "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21), their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, first in time and then in eternity.⁴¹

Because modern Christians have abandoned the biblical doctrine of the six-day creation, they have failed to understand the biblical doctrine of God's providential control over history in terms of His covenant. Because the vast majority of the handful of scientists who teach the six-day creation have been either premillennialists or amillennialists, their defense of creationism has been based on humanistic science's theory of entropy (the second law of thermodynamics), which rests on the inescapability of God's curse of the cosmos in Genesis 3:17–19, rather than the doctrine of Christ's definitive restoration of all things by His resurrection, and the progressive (though imperfect) restoration of the pre-Fall world through the power of the Holy Spirit and the extension of biblical law. Thus, modern Bible-affirming Christians

41. Rushdoony, *Biblical Philosophy of History*, pp. 19–20.

have found it difficult to refute by an appeal to the Bible the modern messianic quest for socialistic perfection⁴². They cannot successfully defend the idea of the free market economy as an institutional manifestation of the fourth point of the biblical covenant, the principle of judgment-sanctions: blessing and cursing, profit and loss.⁴³

I. The Free Market's Auction Process

The pricing principle enunciated by the villain in Frank Norris' early twentieth-century, anti-capitalist novel, *The Octopus*, is a morally valid principle for commercial transactions: "All the traffic will bear." At an auction, the highest-bidding buyer gets the sought-for asset. This principle reigns at every auction: *the high bid wins*. Yet, there is hardly any principle of capitalism that is more hated and more criticized than this one. The only one that receives greater criticism is the free market principle of the legitimacy of economic inequality, especially inequality of inheritance at birth. But the right (legal immunity) of unequal inheritance is the legal manifestation of point five of the biblical covenant, inheritance-disinheritance.⁴⁴ In short, capitalism is hated because visible institutional manifestations of God's covenant are hated.

The free market economic system is essentially a giant auction. If potential buyers at an auction were repeatedly frustrated when low-bidding competitors were favored by the auctioneer, it would eventually destroy the auction. Similarly, if sellers of goods and services in a free market economy were unwilling to honor this principle of "high bid wins" *most of the time* (though not necessarily in every case), they would destroy the market as an institution for producing and allocating scarce economic resources. By refusing to honor the "high bid wins" principle, *sellers of goods* ("auctioneers") would thereby force potential *sellers of money* (buyers or "bidders") to search out another, less preferable system of allocating scarce economic resources. Alternatively, new sellers of goods and services would appear who would honor the auction principle of "high bid wins," and thereby recapture the buyers. In coercive societies, such alternatives are called black markets.

"All the traffic will bear" is simply another way of saying "the high

42. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

43. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

44. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 5.

bid wins.” This arrangement benefits those customers who at any point in time are willing and able to pay the highest price offered by all known buyers. It also benefits all other customers—the “excluded buyers”—who learn the rules of the free market, and who can plan their own economic futures accordingly. They can enter other markets next time where they will be the highest bidders. The fact that some customers are excluded from ownership on any given day is the fact of scarcity: at zero price, there is greater demand for scarce economic resources than there is supply of those resources. Every economic system must face the fact of scarcity, not just capitalism.

“All the traffic will bear” is a rational response of sellers to competitive bids by all known buyers. It honors the principle of *customer authority*. When we affirm that sellers of goods and services have the right (legal immunity) to request “all the traffic will bear” from competing buyers (sellers of money), we are simultaneously saying that buyers have the right to make “the lowest bid possible.”⁴⁵ If the final bid for an item is one ounce of gold, the state should not insist that the buyer pay the seller two ounces of gold “because the seller deserves it,” or because “stable markets for sellers is a benefit to the economy,” which is precisely what civil governments do when they legislate tariffs, import quotas, and other monopoly-producing restraints on voluntary trade. “All the traffic will bear,” “high bid wins,” and “final bid wins” are three ways of expressing a single principle of market competition: the right (legal immunity) of free people to agree upon a familiar standard for conducting voluntary exchange.

Civil and ecclesiastical governments should respect the lawful authority of men to operate in terms of this auction principle when making their voluntary exchanges. There is no way for judges to distinguish “oppressive” transactions from “just barely oppressive” transactions and “not quite oppressive” transactions by means of an appeal to percentages, such as 8% profit per sale or 15% profit on invested capital (both of which are at least 50% above the normal rate of before-tax profits in the United States).⁴⁶ To make lawful judicial decisions,

45. It must also be understood that “sellers” are also buyers in every transaction. Each party gives up something in order to get something. But we normally do not speak of “sellers of goods and services” as “buyers of money.” As “buyers of money,” we all try to offer the lowest price (in goods and services) that we can get away with. Thus, we all make the lowest bid possible, and still get what we want: sometimes we make the lowest bid possible in money (when we are “buyers”), and sometimes we make the lowest bid possible in goods and services (when we are “sellers”).

46. What is not understood by most Americans, as a poll taken annually by the

judges need *moral constants*; but economic percentages change over time. Consider the question: "How much of anything should be universally illegal?" This question has baffled moral philosophers for millennia. Only in rare instances, such as the tithe of 10%, does the Bible give a specific answer to a question regarding a legal minimum percentage⁴⁷.

J. The Lawful Domain of Conscience

Conscience is a valid, though not exclusive, guide to individual action. It is *self-government* which regulates the overwhelming majority of all human actions. Men must not be burdened with unnecessary guilt, nor should they become libertines, sinning against themselves because some other agency of government is not authorized by God to step in and call a halt to their activities. The question is: What are the proper standards for men to use in determining whether or not a specific transaction is oppressive, biblically speaking?

The Bible mentions strangers, widows, the poor, and the fatherless as the representative examples of people who are easily exploited. In dealing with these people, what questions should the sharp bargainer ask himself? What kinds of offers would be innately immoral?

1. An Immoral or Illegal Act

The request that the economically weaker party perform an immoral or illegal act is a form of oppression. The civil government can enforce sanctions against anyone who entices another person into illegal acts, but enticement is both difficult and expensive to prove in a court of law. Nevertheless, no such enticement is legitimate, for the charge will be easy to prove in God's court of law on judgment day.

Opinion Research Corporation reveals year after year, is that the average rate of net after-tax profit on sales in the United States is about 5% or less. See, for example, "Public Attitudes Toward Corporate Profits," *ORC Report to Management* (Aug. 1981). The average rate of before-tax profits on invested capital (excluding banks and savings & loan associations) is around 10%. In 1964, the profit rate was about 16%. This figure declined steadily in the United States, 1964–80, corresponding to the coming of inflation and the vast expansion of the welfare state. After taxes, of course, it is substantially less. See Dale N. Allman, "The Decline in Business Profitability: A Disaggregated Analysis," *Economic Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City (Jan. 1983). Employee compensation varies between 85% and 90% of after-tax business income, year after year.

47. Then the experts debate over the question, "10% of what?" They also debate: "Does the Bible require a third-year additional tithe?"

2. Forestalling

Forestalling is the act of holding goods off the market in order to drive up the price. “He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it” (Prov. 11:26).⁴⁸ It should be noted that the people will curse the forestaller, but the state is not authorized in the Bible to be a price-setting agency or a confiscating agent “in the name of the people.” Also, it is God, not the state, who is the rewarder of those who sell.

The man who is criticized here for holding the corn off the market in expectation of a higher price is obviously holding back *sufficient quantities of food to make a difference in price in the market*. There is no implication in this passage that someone who buys food for his own use, who has a refrigerator full of food or a freezer full of beef, is in some way an exploiter. (This is not a hypothetical argument on my part. Ronald J. Sider has criticized Christians who eat beef because it takes twice as much grain to produce the same quantity of protein in a steer as in a chicken. Christians should eat more chicken, he says. This is a moral imperative, he says.⁴⁹ His vegetarian socialist peers no doubt would regard this as a woefully weak argument, smacking—perhaps even lip-smacking—of capitalist exploitation.) The exploiter is a person who is holding back the sale of a great deal of food—so much, in fact, that the market price would be affected if he brought it to market. Not many farmers or sellers have this much food at their disposal, given the huge size of the international grain markets. This is one of the strongest arguments in favor of free markets and against tariffs and import quotas of any kind: *economic freedom reduces the possibility of successful local or regional forestalling*.

In a godly society, no honest man curses the entrepreneur (risk-taking forecaster) who “buys low” during the bounty of the harvest and plans to “sell high” in the winter. Rational people understand, for example, that fruits and vegetables in the off-season are more expensive: supplies are limited, and they must be imported. Distant sellers must be lured into the local market through the hope of receiving higher prices for their produce than they can receive locally. In short, *someone* has to store the food, harvest season through off-season; few users have the storage facilities. The economic function of allocating

48. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 32.

49. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 43.

food across the seasons and across regions has to be performed by someone.

Profit-seeking (uncertainty-bearing) entrepreneurs are the most responsible, least bureaucratic people for this task.⁵⁰ Why? Because if they guess wrong, they lose. If they charge too little, they run out of food before they run out of buyers. They lose sales that they could have made, and therefore they lose money. On the other hand, if they charge too much, they lure in competitors who take away potential buyers and leave them sitting on a lot of unsold food. They lose sales that they could have made, and therefore they lose money. Conclusion: they have an economic incentive not to overcharge or undercharge the customers.

3. *A Government-Enforced Monopoly*

Any offer that lacks a competitive alternative offer because of *interference by the civil government in the market* is potentially immoral, unless the civil authorities are regulating the market as a “public utility.” Even if they are regulating the market in the name of the customer, such a monopoly may still be exploitative, for collusion between the regulators and the regulated is not only possible, it is predictable.⁵¹ If the seller of a good or service is protected by the judges from other competitors who might otherwise enter the market and make the buyer a better (lower price) offer, then the seller is oppressing the buyer. He may not have approved of this legislation or judicial interpretation, but he is now the beneficiary. If such restrictive legislation is in force, then the seller must do his best to sell his product or service to the buyer at a price that would prevail if there were open competition.

50. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 32: “The Entrepreneurial Function.”

51. This is understood by representatives of the far left wing of American politics: e.g., Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); Robert C. Fellmeth, *The Interstate Commerce Commission: The Public Interest and the ICC*, The Ralph Nader Study Group Report on the ICC (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1970). It is also recognized by free market economists: e.g., Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), ch. 9: “Occupational Licensure”; Friedman, *Free to Choose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), ch. 7: “Who Protects the Consumer?”; Mary Bennett Peterson, *The Regulated Consumer* (Ottawa, Illinois: Green Hill Publishers, 1971); Thomas Gale Moore, *Trucking Regulation: Lessons from Europe* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute-Hoover Institution, 1976); Yale Brozen, *Is Government the Source of Monopoly? and Other Essays* (San Francisco: Cato Institute, 1980); Harold Flemming, *Ten Thousand Commandments: A Story of the Antitrust Laws* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951).

The problem, of course, is that *in the absence of a free market, no one can really be sure just what such a free market price might be.*⁵² Without the information made available through market competition, buyers and sellers are left without reliable indicators of the true conditions of supply and demand.⁵³ Moral decisions concerning “fair” pricing are therefore made more difficult—more expensive to solve—by the state’s interference with the flow of economic information. The prevailing price in a government-regulated market raises moral questions concerning fairness precisely because it is not a competitive market price. Moral dilemmas for honest sellers are created by the state’s interference because this interference creates opportunities for sellers to extract monopoly profits from buyers. The “non-monopoly” price can only be guessed at by judges, buyers, and sellers.

4. Better Information

The economically stronger party in a transaction may have better information at his disposal. How much of this is he morally required to give to the economically weaker seller? If he asks a lower price, then he is, economically speaking, transferring the value of his information to the other party in the exchange.

The civil government should not compel the transfer of such information. If such a law were passed, it would inhibit the quest for better information on the part of all participants, which would eventually harm all people in the society.⁵⁴ Besides, judges would face that age-old problem, defining exactly *how much* of his information the economically stronger seller (or buyer) is required to give up to the other person before a voluntary exchange is legal. For that matter, how can the economically stronger party be precisely determined? The question, “How much stronger?” is closely related to the other question, “How much information?”⁵⁵

52. Ludwig von Mises, “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth” (1920), in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963). (<http://bit.ly/MisesCalc>). Cf. T. J. B. Hoff, *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Society* (London: Hodge, 1949). (<http://bit.ly/HoffCalc>); Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), chaps. 7–9. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>)

53. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), ch. 8.

54. Gary North, “Exploitation and Knowledge,” *The Freeman* (Jan. 1982). (<http://bit.ly/Exploit>)

55. There are other questions, of course: “How much capital does each participant have in reserve?” “What are the living expenses that each participant incurs while he is

What governing principle does the Bible offer to the individual conscience? If the economically weaker party would be able to locate someone who would make a better offer if it were not for the particular circumstance—pressures on a widow or orphan, legal discrimination against a stranger, etc.—then the economically stronger party should offer a price comparable to what the person might reasonably expect to receive. A person who finds “a pearl of great price” on another person’s property has a moral right to sell what he has and offer to buy that property in order to get ownership of the pearl (Matt. 13:44).

But what if the seller is blind, and would never have had an opportunity to find that pearl? There is no explicit biblical law here, but the discoverer should remember that God is not blind. The buyer of the field might choose to give, say, half of the net profits in the transaction to the economically weaker party, in order to avoid inflicting economic oppression. (Again, there are no fixed rules available to us, but a 50-50 split is a good operating principle.) Nevertheless, the Bible is silent with respect to any state prohibition against such a transaction, either retroactively or in advance. To write a legal code that would attempt to cover every similar transaction would become a nightmare of confusion and uncontrolled state power in a short period of time. The behavior of monopolistic bureaucrats is not noticeably superior to profit-seeking buyers of hidden pearls. At least such oppression by private entrepreneurs is not subsidized by the taxpayers.

There are those who deny the legitimacy of a “pearl of great price” type of transaction under any circumstances. They do not understand (or choose to deny) the inescapable fact of *man’s lack of omniscience*. They assume, consciously or unconsciously, that accurate knowledge is (or ought to be) a zero-price resource—a resource that really ought to be available free of charge to all, either naturally or through the intervention of the state.

K. The Pearl of Great Price

This kingdom parable is important for a proper understanding of entrepreneurship—*forecasting* the economic future and *efficient (low waste) planning* in terms of the forecast. Jesus said: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a

waiting to complete the transaction?” “How much time does each participant have to complete the transaction?” “What are the transaction (exchange) costs incurred by each participant?”

man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Matt. 13:44).⁵⁶

1. The Shopper’s Discovery

Consider what the buyer in this parable is doing. He stumbles across an important piece of information: there is a valuable treasure hidden in a field. He is not sure just who it was who hid it there, but now he knows where it is. He presumes that the person who hid it was not the present owner of the field.⁵⁷ He hides the treasure, and then goes out and sells everything he owns in order to buy the field. Notice that he does not steal the treasure. He is not a thief. He is simply the possessor of information.

He may have done some preliminary investigating, just to see if the present owner of the field is willing to sell it. Still, the present owner may change his mind before the sale is completed. Perhaps the owner may sell it at what he knows is a higher-than-normal market price, because he knows that the treasure has been left there by a vicious criminal who stole it. Perhaps the stolen treasure will be confiscated by the police and turned over to the victim, or the victim’s insurance company, as soon as it appears on the market. It is even possible that the treasure is a fake: the owner may have placed a phony treasure on his land just to lure in some ecstatic discoverer.⁵⁸ The discoverer cannot be sure. But he takes a chance, meaning that he decides to bear some uncertainty in hope of economic profit. He sells what he owns and buys the field.

Now he owns the treasure. Assume that the police do not confiscate it, and some criminal does not return to collect it. The new owner did take advantage of a special situation: his knowledge of this treasure in his newly purchased field. He took a risk and sold everything. Now he has his reward. He has benefitted himself, and he has given the original owner of the field all that he asked for. If the treasure is worth

56. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 31.

57. If the owner of the field hid the treasure, then before he sells it, he will go and search for it. When he does not find it, he can report it lost to the authorities. At that point, the discoverer is required by biblical law to return it to the owner (Ex. 23:4). The Bible does not teach “finders-keepers, losers-weepers.”

58. In the gold rush days of the American West, mine owners would sometimes place grains of gold in a shotgun and fire at one of the mine’s walls. This was called “salting a mine,” and buyers could be lured into paying a high price for the mine, in order to profit from the perceived ignorance of the seller.

selling, then someone who buys it will gain access to his heart's desire. Who loses?

Clearly, the original owner might have stumbled across that treasure. On the other hand, he might never have found it. Is it a moral obligation on the discoverer to run to the owner of the field and tell him? Jesus did not indicate that it was. The discoverer has a potentially valuable asset: information. He lacks ownership of the field. The owner of the field also has a potentially valuable asset: title to the treasure. But he lacks knowledge of its presence on his property. Each man possesses something of potential value, but neither man can make personal use of his potential asset: the owner of the field has no knowledge of the pearl, and the man who knows where the pearl is has no economic incentive to make this knowledge public unless he owns the field. Society gets no use of it until the potential asset is translated through market exchange into a known asset. The *opportunity for profit* is what translates that potential asset into a marketable asset. The discoverer buys the field. In this way, potential assets become market assets.

The modern socialist is outraged at this parable. The entrepreneur (uncertainty-bearing forecaster) who discovered the treasure is seen by the socialist as immoral. First, the land he was on should have been owned by "the people" through the state. Second, he had no business being on the land, because he had no official papers entitling him to be on the state's property. Third, he should never have hidden the treasure again. It belonged to the state. Fourth, if the land was not yet the property of the state, then he should have notified the present owner of the field about the existence of this newly discovered treasure. Fifth, failing to do this much, he was immoral in making an offer to buy the field. He was really stealing from the owner of the field. Sixth, should he attempt to sell the treasure, the state ought to tax his profits at a minimum rate of 50%, and probably more. Seventh, if he refuses to sell, the state should impose a capital tax or property tax in order to force him to sell.

2. Socialists Resent Limitations

What the socialist-redistributionist objects to, in the final analysis, is *mankind's lack of omniscience*. The socialist believes, implicitly or explicitly, that the economy should operate as smoothly, as efficiently, and as profit-free as a hypothetical economy in which each participant has equally good knowledge—perfect knowledge—as all other parti-

cipants. Knowledge, in a “decent” social order, should be a zero-price resource, equally available to all, and equally acted upon by all. Socialist arguments implicitly assume that it is only the *temporary* existence of such factors as private property, personal greed, and people’s willingness to exploit the poor, that has created a world of scarcity, profits, and losses. Knowledge concerning the future should be regarded as a free good, they implicitly assume. Profits are therefore evil, not to mention unnecessary, in a sound economy. This has been the underlying line of reasoning for centuries of all those who equate economic profits with exploitation.

Men are not omniscient. This angers the socialists. They strike out in wrath against the free market institutional order that encourages men to seek out better information, day by day, so that they might profit individually from its application in economic affairs. The socialists prefer to create legislative barriers that interfere with the operation of the market’s “auction for information.”

It should be clear why so little innovation takes place in socialist economies. The development—or rather, the lack of development—of commercial technology in the Soviet Union is a representative historical example.⁵⁹ Innovation is not a service that people normally offer free of charge to others. It involves creativity, capital, and the willingness to take risks. In a socialist commonwealth, the entrepreneur who is willing to bear uncertainty cannot legally receive payment for the full economic value to society—as determined by market forces—of his innovation. For entrepreneurs to receive full value for services rendered, the socialist commonwealth would have to abandon the collective ownership of the means of production-distribution.⁶⁰

Those who discover treasures in “collectively owned” fields, meaning state-controlled and bureaucracy-administered fields, have these choices: (1) provide information, free of charge, of the treasure’s whereabouts to bureaucratic officials of the state; (2) say nothing and

59. Antony Sutton’s three-volume study of Soviet technology, 1917–1965, indicates that almost none of the Soviet Union’s industrial technology (as distinguished from its military technology) originated in the U.S.S.R. Out of 75 different major technologies surveyed, the percentage of Soviet technology was zero, 1917–30, 10%, 1930–45, and 11%, 1945–65. “It should be emphasized that this is the most favorable interpretation possible of the empirical findings.” Sutton, *Western Technology and Soviet Economic Development, 1945 to 1965* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p. 370.

60. Svetozar Pejovich, “Liberman’s Reforms and Property Rights in The Soviet Union,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, XII (April 1969).

save themselves a lot of trouble; (3) work out an illegal deal with some official; or (4) steal the treasure. In the Soviet Union, predictably, the final three possibilities were the ones people choose; the first choice was simply not taken seriously as a sensible alternative.⁶¹

Conclusion

The Bible forbids economic oppression, but only vaguely defines it. Economic theory provides even fewer guidelines than the Bible. About all that economic theory can say is that when the threat of violence is imposed on someone, there is oppression. But violence must not be defined as a market participant's threat of refusing to trade with someone else, unless the violation of an existing contract is involved, or unless someone is being asked to commit a crime or immoral act. Sharp bargaining is not automatically considered oppressive, either in the Bible or economic theory.

Without specified infractions, it is very difficult to develop a system of civil law. The law must specify the action that is being prohibited. It must be sufficiently clear that juries can make judgments, and that their judgments can be predicted with better than 50-50 accuracy by most people, especially potential criminals. If the decisions of juries are random, then the law will not protect innocent people on a predictable basis. This means that civil law no longer serves its God-given purpose of providing social order.

Defining oppression clearly is very difficult. Oppression must be defined in such a way that the courts do not easily become tyrannical or arbitrary in their decisions. But, as I have said, a definition of economic oppression that is both equitable and tyranny-resistant when it is applied to a large number of cases over time has not yet been discovered. This is why economic oppression rarely can be legislated against without creating more harm than benefits for the potential victims of oppression. The legislation itself becomes a major source of oppression.⁶² The medieval notion of the "just price" is one of the best examples of this problem in history, especially when interpreted centuries later by civil magistrates who were not familiar with the late-medieval Scholastic theologians' distrust of government price-fixing.

This points to the fact that human conscience must rule over all

61. Konstantin Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

62. Chapter 50.

pricing decisions in voluntary exchanges, not because the individual conscience is in any way autonomous, but because *only God is legitimately sovereign over the minds of men*. He alone, not human authorities, can make accurate comparisons of interpersonal subjective utility. He alone knows precisely how much one person has benefitted from a transaction, and to what extent the magnitude of his gain was based on the defenselessness of the other participant in the exchange. Therefore, penalties against those who are suspected of acting oppressively in economic transactions—apart from those cases specified in Scripture—are not to be imposed by human institutional governments, precisely because omniscience is God's monopoly. This is why men can rest assured that God's penalties against cases of economic oppression are utterly certain and will be applied precisely by God, according to the magnitude of each oppressive act. *The self-governed individual under God*, not institutional governments, is the proper agent of earthly enforcement. If this human agent fails to render God-honoring judgment, then God will bring him under judgment.

The Bible does mandate certain forms of charity to relieve oppression, including morally mandatory interest-free loans to the deserving, covenanted poor, gleaning, and the prohibition against asking a widow for her cloak as collateral. But there are no specified penalties for violating these laws, and the civil government is not specified as the enforcing institution. In the case of hoarding goods in order to increase the market price of the particular good, the Bible says that the penalty is public censure: "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it" (Prov. 11:26).⁶³ The people can lawfully curse him, but no physical violence or fines are to be imposed on the culprit.

God is the Enforcer. He brings *judgment in history*. Because modern man refuses to acknowledge this, he seeks to become his own God by making the state an enforcer. He does not believe that God enters into the historical affairs of men to bring judgment. Because many Christians today have adopted this same "God is beyond history" theology—God as Judge only on the day of final judgment, or only during a future millennial reign of Christ in person—they have fallen into the same state-expanding worldview. They want an enforcer. More than this: they want a *near-omniscient* enforcer. But, in calling for such an enforcer, they are denying the very basis of civil freedom: civil law that

63. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 32.

is biblically specific as to what constitutes illegal behavior, and biblically specific as to what constitutes appropriate punishment.

When such an enforcer is constructed by antinomian man, economic oppression will become universal.

Those who argue today that God's law does not and should not apply to all men have in mind the restraining aspects of civil law. Christians today insist, alongside the humanists, that God has not entrusted Christians with the responsibility of "telling other people how to live." Christians do not understand that biblical civil law never was intended to tell men how to live; it tells them how *not* to act in public. What modern antinomian Christians systematically ignore is this: if God's law does not restrain the stranger as well as the believer, it therefore does not protect either the stranger or the believer. Christians forget all about the protective benefits of God's civil law. They have implicitly accepted humanism's lie: that biblical law is inherently tyrannical, and that "true" humanist law is beneficent. (Problem: no one ever seems to be able to discover what this beneficent "true" humanist law is.)

Christians today hate the law of God as surely as the humanists do. They hate the idea of God's judgments in history. But God's judgments are always both positive and negative, blessings and cursings. Christians today much prefer to live under the negative civil sanctions of humanism and thereby forfeit the positive sanctions of God's law rather than suffer the embarrassment and personal responsibility of enforcing biblical law. The result is that Christians have become strangers in their own land.⁶⁴ And the astounding fact is this: they prefer it this way. It provides them with the psychologically necessary self-justification for their own cultural impotence.

64. Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

THE PROHIBITION AGAINST USURY

If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious (Ex. 22:25–27).

The context of these verses indicates that they are an extension of the immediately preceding verses: “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless” (Ex. 22:21–24).¹ The general category of all these verses is affliction or oppression. In the first case, the law singles out a particular judicial category of victims: people without covenantal representation. In this case, the law singles out another class of potential victims: poor people. They, too, are vulnerable. They, too, deserve sympathy and protection—in this case, economic protection.

What is the category that links all of these people? Not their legal status, for the poor brother in Israel had full legal status, unlike the stranger in Exodus 22:21. There must be some other link. There is: their status as economically vulnerable. The presumption is that they share one thing in common with the previous three: *they are economically vulnerable through no fault of their own*. They are the “victims of circumstances” rather than the victims of their own evil behavior. The poor man here is presumed by God to be a sober, righteous person,

1. Chapter 48.

not a drunk who drinks up his family's substance, and not a previous oppressor of the vulnerable who has now come under God's promised sanctions. The Bible is clear: *we are not to subsidize evil*. Charity that deliberately subsidizes visible moral evil or failure that is the product of moral failure is itself morally corrupt.

In Exodus 22:21–24, the theocentric principle is that God is the kinsman-redeemer. How we treat the judicially most vulnerable people in the commonwealth reflects our covenantal response to God. This identifies those who will and who will not act voluntarily as kinsmen-redeemers for the helpless. The issue in Exodus 22:21–24 is the legal status of the oppressed as covenantally unrepresented. Because the legal status of the poor Hebrew in Exodus 22:25–27 is different from the legal status of the widow, orphan, or resident alien, we need to search for some theocentric principle other than God as protector and judge, kinsman-redeemer and blood avenger.

A. God Is the Owner

Because this case law is tied directly to economics, the theocentric category must also be economic. The foundational biblical economic principle is always this one: *God is the owner of all the earth*. “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1).² “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10).³

God delegates ownership to mankind in terms of a *leasehold contract*. Men deeply resent their position as subordinate stewards. They would rather become murderers than remain rent-payers. Because they cannot kill the true Owner, they seek to kill His lawful representative. Instead of collecting their rent in the Owner’s name, his highest representative will collect their vengeance. This is the message of Jesus’ parable of the vineyard.

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 5.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

more than the first; and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance (Matt. 21:33–38).⁴

God judges a person's attitude toward Him by judging his attitude toward His servants. Sometimes these servants are in positions of authority, as in the parable of the vineyard. Sometimes they are in positions of weakness (Matt. 25:34–40). A good steward must be obedient to those over him and merciful to those under him. God judges our performance as stewards in terms of this upward and downward covenantal responsibility.

This brings us to the topic at hand: the prohibition of interest payments from a poor fellow believer. God establishes a rule with respect to loans to poor fellow believers: *no interest payment may be imposed on charity loans*. The lender who violates this law is violating the terms of God's leasehold arrangement.

B. God-Mandated Charity

By prohibiting an interest return on charitable loans, the Bible requires a form of charitable giving on the part of lenders, namely, the *forfeited use* of their present goods over the life of the loan. It is one of the very few examples in the Bible of God-required wealth redistribution.

What are the predictable results of such a moral (though not civil) law? When it is obeyed, there will be fewer loans available for other kinds of investments, *other things remaining equal*. But God promises that things will not remain equal in such a society; things will get better. "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6).⁵ So, there will be more wealth, and faithful commonwealths will have money to lend to foreigners—and at a profit. This distinguishes the biblical view of progressive history from the cyclical classical Greek view. There is a covenantal relationship between obedience to God's revealed law and economic growth, something that the

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

Greeks ignored or even denied.⁶

1. Disobeying This Law

People may choose not to obey God's directive, of course. Potential lenders can simply refuse to make loans to brothers in distress, and there is nothing in biblical law that allows the authorities to take any kind of legal action against them. Poor people can only appeal to a lender's conscience. Lenders can get around the prohibition in many ways, such as by unofficially requiring the borrower to perform some sort of service, or requiring the borrower to buy goods or services that the lender sells. Nevertheless, God's law is clear: all such subterfuges are immoral, and the victims will cry out to God, who will hear their complaints (Ex. 22:27).

Another product of this prohibition against usury would be political pressures from lenders in a money economy to reduce prices by reducing the money supply. If the money supply is stabilized, or even lowered, this will tend to reduce prices. Thus, a return of the same amount of gold, silver, or paper money will in effect grant lenders increased wealth. They can buy a greater quantity of goods and services when the loan is repaid. Should this political pressure fail to achieve its goal, and should monetary inflation continue, then lenders will prefer to loan goods rather than money, with repayment denominated in goods of equal quality. They will at least regain an equal quantity of goods that have appreciated in value (as denominated in the depreciating monetary units).

2. Loans to Christians

The prohibition on usury clearly and absolutely prohibits interest payments on all charitable loans to other Christians. This includes loans to churches and other non-profit institutions that come to Christians in the name of Christ. The church is not a business. The Christian who loans the church anything, at any time, for which he requires an extra amount in repayment, is violating the law against usury. Any leader in a church or charitable Christian organization who encourages Christians to make interest-bearing loans to it is involving its supporters in the sin of usury. This restriction on "church bonds" is almost universally ignored by denominational leaders today. They ig-

6. As do premillennialists H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice: *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), ch. 8; cf. p. 183.

nore the prohibition against usury. The Bible is clear on this point: usury is a terrible crime (Jer. 15:10). The prophet Ezekiel announced that it is actually a capital crime in the eyes of God, and will not go unpunished (Ezek. 18:8–9,⁷ 13). Yet church and Christian school leaders in almost every denomination can be found offering “Christian stewardship” (usury) contracts to their people. They come in the name of charitable, kingdom-building projects and promise to pay interest.⁸

A church may lawfully request a loan from a bank or other thrift institution. This is unwise, given the fact that the borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7).⁹ Nevertheless, the bank is not wrong in taking an interest return from a church. The bank is not a Christian. It is not a member of a church. It does not face damnation or salvation. The church does not approach it in the name of Jesus, or with the promise of future rewards in heaven. The bank is strictly a commercial lending institution. The bank is the agent of depositors of all religious faiths.

But is the zero-interest loan exclusively a charitable loan? Some expositors deny this.¹⁰ We need to examine the biblical texts to learn the truth.

C. Charitable Loans

The text is clear: “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury” (v. 25). This verse does not compel a person to make a loan to the poor person, but if the lender decides to make such a loan, he may not ask the recipient to pay interest. The text in Leviticus 25, the chapter on the jubilee year, is equally clear: “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger [*geyr*], or a sojourner [*to-shawb*]; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou

7. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 19.

8. Gary North, “Stewardship, Investment, and Usury: Financing the Kingdom of God,” in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), Appendix 3; reprinted also in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 31. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

9. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 66.

10. For example, S. C. Mooney, *Usury: Destroyer of Nations* (Warsaw, Ohio: Theopolis, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/MooneyUsury>)

shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase" (Lev. 25:35–37).¹¹ It begins with the determining clause: "If thy brother be waxen poor."

1. Two Kinds of Strangers

The interpretation of the Leviticus 25 passage initially seems difficult because of the King James translation of Deuteronomy 23:20: "Unto a stranger [*nok-ree*] thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it." We must begin with the presupposition that God's revealed law is not inconsistent. But here we have what appear to be two rules regarding the stranger: you may not lawfully charge the stranger interest, yet you may lawfully charge him interest. How can we reconcile these two statements?

The answer is that the Hebrew word used in Leviticus 25:35, transliterated *geyr* [*gare*], is not the same as the Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 23:20. Similarly, "sojourner" [*to-shawb*] is related to *yaw-shab*,¹² meaning "sit," and implying "remain," "settle," "dwell," or even "marry."¹³ *To-shawb* therefore means *resident alien*. The stranger [*nok-ree*] referred to in Deuteronomy 23:20 was simply a foreigner.¹⁴ Two different kinds of "stranger" are referred to in the two verses. Thus, if the resident alien was poor, and if he was willing to live in Israel under the terms of the civil covenant, then he was entitled to a special degree of civil legal protection. What was this legal protection? If he fell into poverty, he was not to be asked to pay interest on any loan that a richer man extended to him. With respect to usury, he was to be treated as a poverty-stricken Hebrew. Not so the foreigner.

The economic setting is clearly *the relief of the poor*. The recipient was any poor person who had fallen into poverty through no ethical fault of his own, and who was willing to remain under God's civil hierarchy.

There is a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 15. Deuteronomy 15

11. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 29.

12. Strong's *Concordance*, Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary, p. 123.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

14. This is the translation given in the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version. The alien and the sojourner were equivalents judicially in Old Covenant law. The NIV translates Leviticus 25:35 as "an alien or a temporary resident."

lists the economic laws governing Israel's national sabbatical year. In this national year of release, the text literally says, all debts *to neighbors* are to be forgiven: "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release" (Deut. 15:1–2).¹⁵ The text is clear: the neighborly loan is the focus of the law.

At least one kind of loan was explicitly exempted by the text: loans to non-resident foreigners: "Of a foreigner [*nok-ree*] thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release" (Deut. 15:3). This could have been a traveller or foreigner who owned a business locally. It could have been a business contact in another country. It was not a poverty-stricken resident alien, who was treated by biblical civil law as a neighbor.

2. *Who Is My Neighbor?*

Because all debts to a neighbor are to be forgiven, the legal question legitimately arises: "Who is my neighbor?" This was the question that the lawyer asked Jesus (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered this question with His parable of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan finds a beaten man on the highway. The man had been robbed. He looked as though he was dead. He was in deep trouble *through no fault of his own*. He was on the same road that the Samaritan was traveling. The Samaritan takes him to an inn, pays to have him helped, and goes on his journey. He agrees to cover expenses. He is the neighbor. He showed mercy to the man. The lawyer admitted this (Luke 10:37).¹⁶

So, the context of the parable is not simply geographical proximity in a neighborhood. It is *proximity of life*. Samaritans did not live in Israel. They had very little to do with the Israelites. But this Samaritan was walking along the same road as the beaten man, and he was in a position to help. He saw that the man was a true victim. The latter was in trouble through no visible fault of his own. He therefore deserved help —morally, though not by statute law—but the priest and the Levite had refused to offer him any help. The Samaritan was being faithful to the law.

15. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 36.

16. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

This parable was a reproach to the Jews. They knew what Jesus was saying, namely, that they were too concerned with the details of the ceremonial law to honor the most important law of all, which the lawyer had cited: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). What they also fully understood was that Jesus was predicting that the gentiles (Samaritans) who did obey this law of the neighbor would eventually rule over the Jews, for this is what Deuteronomy 15 explicitly says. *He who shows mercy to his neighbor will participate in his nation's rule over other nations.* "Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:5–6).¹⁷ Notice also that the means of exercising this rule is through extending them credit.

This is a very significant covenantal cause-and-effect relationship. If a nation is characterized by the willingness of its citizens to loan money, interest-free, to their poverty-stricken neighbors, including resident aliens, the nation will eventually extend its control over others by placing them under the obligation of debt. "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7).¹⁸ This is why it was legal to take interest from the foreigner who was living outside the land. It was a means of subduing him, his family, and his God-defying civilization. It was (and is) a means of dominion.

3. Moral Compulsion

Because these charitable loans were supposed to be cancelled in the seventh year, the national sabbatical year, there was an obvious temptation to refuse to make such loans as the sabbatical year approached. God recognized this temptation, and He warned against it.

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Be-

17. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 37.

18. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 66.

ware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto (Deut. 15:7–10).

This indicates that God placed a moral obligation on the heart of the more successful man. He was supposed to lend to his neighbor. But this was not statute law enforceable in a civil court. God would be the avenger, not the state.

The context of the obligatory loan of Deuteronomy 15, like the zero-interest loan of Exodus 22:25–27, is poverty. There will be poor people in the promised land, Moses warned. Because of this, these special loans are morally mandatory. There must be a year or release, “Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it” (Deut. 15:4). Does this mean that these loan provisions would eventually be annulled? No. “For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deut. 15:11). Everything in Deuteronomy 15 speaks of poverty and biblical law’s means of overcoming it. *Deuteronomy 15 is not dealing with business loans; it is dealing with charity loans.*

But let the reader be forewarned: biblical law is a broader category than biblical civil law. There was no statute law that imposed sanctions on anyone who refused to make an interest-free loan.

4. Defining Poverty by Statute

Why was this not a statute law? Because biblical civil law presents only negative injunctions. It prohibits publicly evil acts. Biblical civil law does not authorize the Dallas to make men good. It does not authorize the state to force men to do good things. It does not authorize the creation of a messianic, salvationist state. The state cannot search the hearts of men. God does this, as the Creator and Judge, so the state must not claim such an ability. The state is only authorized by God to impose negative sanctions against publicly evil acts. It is not author-

ized to seek to force men to do good acts. In short, the Bible is opposed to the modern welfare state.

There is no way for biblical statute law to define what poverty is apart from the opinions of those affected by the law, either as taxpayers, charitable lenders, or recipients of public welfare or private charity. "Poverty" is too subjective a category to be defined by statute law. The state needs to be able to assign legal definitions to crimes, in order that its arbitrary power not be expanded. Yet economic definitions of wealth and poverty that are not arbitrary are not available to the civil magistrates for the creation of positive legal injunctions. Thus, God's civil law does not compel a man to make a loan to a poor person.

Nevertheless, the civil law does prohibit taking interest from poor people. How can it do this without creating the conditions of judicial tyranny through arbitrariness? If the magistrates cannot define exactly what poverty is for the purpose of writing positive civil injunctions, how can they define what a charitable loan is? How can the state legitimately prohibit interest from a charity loan if the legislators and judges cannot define poverty with a sufficient degree of accuracy to identify cases where a charity loan is legally obligatory for the potential lender?¹⁹

The lender decides who is deserving of his loan and who is not. This is his moral choice. God, not the state, will judge him. However, once the lender grants this *unique, morally enjoined charity loan*, he may not extract an interest payment. This is a negative injunction—not doing something which is forbidden by law—and therefore it is legitimately enforceable by civil law, as surely as the civil magistrates in ancient Israel were supposed to enforce the release of debt slaves²⁰ in the seventh (sabbatical) year (Deut. 15:12–15). The requirement to lend to the brother in need under the terms specified in biblical law, being a positive injunction, therefore comes under the self-government provisions of the conscience and the negative sanctions of God. This positive injunction is not under the jurisdiction of the civil courts. On the other hand, the prohibition against interest on these unique loans, being a negative injunction, does come under the enforcement of both civil courts and church courts.

19. This is the question that S. C. Mooney raised in his attempt to remove any distinction between charity loans and business loans. Mooney, *Usury*, pp. 123–27.

20. A debt slave was a person who had asked his neighbor for a morally mandatory, zero-interest charity loan, and who had then defaulted. He was then placed in bondage until the sabbatical year, or until his debt was paid.

The key to understanding the Bible's civil definition of poverty is the loan's contract. There must be a mutually agreed-upon contract, explicit or implicit, in order to establish a legally enforceable loan. If the borrower comes to the lender and calls upon him to honor Deuteronomy 15:7–8, then the borrower admits that his is a special case, a charity loan, and it is governed by the civil law's terms of the sabbatical year and the prohibition against interest. The borrower makes his request a matter of conscience.

In so doing, he necessarily and inescapably places himself under the terms of biblical civil law. *If he cannot repay his debt on time, he can be legally sold into bondservice.* This is not a collateralized commercial loan. The borrower is so poor that he has no collateral except his land. He chooses not to use his land as collateral. He therefore chooses not to become a landless man, meaning landless until the next jubilee year. Yet he is still in dire need. All he can offer as collateral is his promise, his cloak, and his bodily service until the next sabbatical year should he default. Thus, the borrower admits that he in principle has already become a bondservant. He admits through the loan's contractual arrangement that the borrower is servant to the lender. If he cannot repay, he will go into bondservice until the next sabbatical year, or until his debt is repaid, whichever comes first.

How would the civil magistrate in Israel know which kind of loan was in force, commercial or charitable, and therefore whether interest was valid or illegal? By examining the nature of the loan's collateral. If a loan went to an individual who, if he should default on the loan, would be placed in debt slavery, then this was a charitable loan governed by the provisions of Deuteronomy 15. This is why the year of release applied to both kinds of servitude: debt servitude and bodily servitude that arose because of a man's default on a charity loan.

Furthermore, if it was a loan with the individual's cloak as security, then it was also a zero-interest loan. The collateral described in Exodus 22:25–27 insured little more than that the individual was a local resident—he had to come to the lender to get it back each evening—and that the loan was temporary. (It also made multiple indebtedness more difficult.)²¹ It would have been a very small loan. This is clearly not a business loan. A business loan would have a different kind of collateral: property that was not crucial to personal survival on a cold night. If the borrower defaulted on a commercial loan, he would forfeit

21. See below: "Multiple Indebtedness."

the property specified in the loan contract. He would not forfeit his freedom or his children's freedom. In short, the Old Testament biblical texts governing lending specify that certain kinds of loans would have certain kinds of collateral, and wherever specific forms of collateral appeared, the lender could not legally demand an interest payment.

Biblical civil law is exclusively negative law—prohibiting evil public deeds—not positive law, which enjoins the performance of righteous public deeds. An example of this distinction is the enforcement of the tithe: church courts can legitimately require voting members to tithe as a condition of maintaining their voting church membership. In contrast, the state cannot legitimately require residents to tithe to a church or other organization on threat of civil punishment.²²

Once the contract is agreed to, the lender is placed under the limits of the civil law. He could not extract interest from the borrower, even a resident alien. But the borrower also was placed under limits: if he defaults, he could be sold into bondservice. Each party was under limits. Each had decided that this is a true poor loan situation. Each agreed to a unique set of contractual obligations by entering into this arrangement.

Thus, once the contract was made, either implicitly or explicitly, the state had a legal definition of poverty. If the borrower was legally subject to the possibility of being sold into bondservice for defaulting on the loan, then the lender could not lawfully extract interest from him. On the other hand, if the borrower was unwilling to place his own freedom in jeopardy, then he was unwilling to define himself as a poor man for the sake of the civil law's definition. Thus, he has to pay interest on the loan, *and his obligation to repay the loan extended beyond the sabbatical year*. If he was not under the threat of bondservice, he was not under the protection of the sabbatical year or the zero-interest provisions against usury.

D. Revising Past Mistakes

No one likes to admit publicly that he was wrong in the past, but honesty requires it. For two decades, I followed R. J. Rushdoony's lead on the question of the sabbatical year of debt release. I taught that no debt should be contracted by the debtor that is longer than seven years

22. North, *Covenantal Tithe*.

(Rushdoony said six years).²³ I adhered to this in my own finances. It cost me a great deal of money. I sold a rapidly appreciating investment property I wanted to keep because my seven years had run out, and I did not want to pay \$45,000 cash to pay off the loan. I paid off other real estate investment loans in the seventh year. I stayed out of other real estate investments I really should have made. I did my best to honor in practice what I had taught in theory. God holds us responsible for obeying our own interpretations of His law, even when we have misinterpreted the law. This is how we learn to obey. This is also how we show Him that we are serious about being covenantally faithful. But now I realize that I was wrong in my interpretation. I no longer wish to mislead people.

1. Mooney's Challenge

I was forced to rethink my position by S. C. Mooney. Mr. Mooney wrote a truly misguided book on usury. He said that interest on all loans is immoral and should be illegal in a Christian society. He also correctly concluded that this law against all forms of interest would have to apply to all rents, something that previous critics of interest had been unwilling to say in print. Thus, he concluded, no Christian can lawfully collect either interest or rent on his investment capital. This is economically preposterous, as well as biblically unwarranted. This was also the official position of the Roman Catholic Church until the sixteenth century, and it collapsed of its own weight.²⁴ It collapsed because it was not biblical.

Mr. Mooney's book offered a challenge to me. He observed, correctly, that I had previously argued that the interest-free loans of the Bible were (and are) charitable loans. I have always argued that business loans were (and are) loans of a completely different ethical and judicial character, and therefore lenders can legitimately ask for an interest payment. But I had also said that no loan beyond seven years is valid. He quite properly called me to account. If Rushdoony and I appealed to Deuteronomy 15 in order to defend the seven-year (or six-year) maximum on *all* loans, yet Deuteronomy 15 is also the basis of

23. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 510.

24. For a very clear summary of the transition in the Church away from the medieval position, see John T. Noonan, "The Amendment of Papal Teaching by Theologians," in Charles E. Curran (ed.), *Contraception: Authority and Dissent* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), pp. 41–75.

our arguing that morally compulsory *charity* loans—zero-interest loans—are unique, then we were mixing our judicial categories. He asked: “Why do they not hold that only the debts of ‘poor’ brethren are to be cancelled, and [thus] infer from this that it is lawful for one to continue to exact the debts of the ‘rich’? The present writer agrees with their views concerning the remission of debts, particularly as cited above.”²⁵

When I read that, I instantly changed my views. In the twinkling of an eye, I abandoned my old argument that there must be a seventh-year debt cancellation by civil law.²⁶ Mooney was correct: either Christians must accept the fact that there is no biblically valid judicial distinction between charity loans and profit-seeking loans, and therefore no biblically legitimate economic distinction, or else we must interpret Deuteronomy 15 exclusively in terms of charity loans. Either all loans are to be zero-interest loans, or else charity loans alone are under the temporal restrictions of the sabbatical year principle. Thus, from this point on, I will argue, to cite Mr. Mooney, that “it is lawful for one to continue to exact the debts of the rich.”

2. *Who Are the Rich?*

Who are the “rich,” judicially speaking? Those who are not judicially poor. We have seen what constitutes poverty judicially: those who go to the potential lender and (1) remind him of his moral obligation to lend to the deserving poor (2) at zero interest, and (3) offer to go into bondage for as much as seven years to pay off the note if they should default on the loan.

This formula therefore tells us who the rich are, judicially speaking: all those people who are willing to sign a strictly voluntary, interest-bearing debt contract that is collateralized by something other than the threat of placing them in bondservice if they should default on their obligation. If the lender extends them credit on the basis of their signatures, or because they have offered him other collateral, including their real estate, then they are not considered poor people judicially. They come to him on the basis of a business opportunity, not on the basis of his moral obligation to lend them an interest-free loan.

What about the jubilee year? The jubilee law has been completely

25. Mooney, *Usury*, p. 131.

26. This was not a paradigm shift, but it surely was a sub-paradigm shift. They can take place very rapidly.

fulfilled in history by Jesus (Luke 4:16–21).²⁷ This that the Old Testament's ten-generation slave system for foreigners has been legally abolished. It also means that the land tenure laws of ancient Israel are legally abolished. There is no longer any legal obligation to return a piece of rural property to the original owner or his heirs. *Thus, a debtor can legitimately collateralize a loan with his property.* If he defaults on the loan, he loses his property unless he buys it back later on. (While this revision of my views did not please Mr. Mooney, it satisfied Greg Bahnsen, who once wrote that he did not agree with "Gary North's view of home mortgages."²⁸)

This is not to say that the debtor should do this. It is a great embarrassment to a man if he loses ownership of his family's property—his home—even in an urban society. If he is evicted from his home, he loses face. It is best if a man can own his home debt-free. He then does not face the threat of eviction and the embarrassment associated with eviction. But it is his legal right biblically to sign a debt contract to buy or refinance a home.²⁹

E. A Millennium of Misinterpretation

Medieval Roman Catholics and early modern Protestants misinterpreted these verses. They interpreted them as if they were prohibitions against all forms of interest, rather than prohibitions against interest earned from charitable loans to fellow believers, as the Exodus 22 text explicitly says: "If thou lend money to any of *my people that is [are] poor*. . . ." The church's hostile view of interest had its origin in the teaching of Aristotle. Aristotle's economic analysis, rather than the explicit teaching of the biblical texts, always was the unstated intellectual foundation of the church's prohibition on interest-bearing business loans.

27. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

28. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984), p. xix.

29. This does not mean that the state should subsidize this practice, as the U.S. government does, by offering deductions from total income, for income tax reporting purposes, for interest paid on mortgages. It also does not mean that the government should create (or promise) deposit insurance for those who put their money in savings institutions, with the legal right of immediate withdrawal, when the institutions then use this money to lend on 30-year mortgages. The length of the loan must be the same for both lender and debtor. Otherwise, the demand for immediate repayment by lenders threatens the solvency of the lending institution, which cannot demand repayment by the debtors.

1. Aristotle on Interest

Aristotle taught that money is sterile—that it cannot increase by moving from person to person over time—and therefore undeserving of any return beyond the principal. Economist Joseph Schumpeter wrote this of Aristotle: “He condemned interest—which he equated to ‘usury’ in all cases—on the ground that there was no justification for money, a mere medium of exchange, to increase in going from hand to hand (which of course it does not do). But he never asked the question why interest was being paid all the same. This question was first asked by the scholastic doctors. It is to them that the credit belongs of having been the first both to collect facts about interest and to develop the outlines of a theory of it. Aristotle himself had no theory of interest.”³⁰ Neither did the early church.

From the beginning, the West’s view of interest was clouded by the association of interest rates and physical production. They are not linked in economic theory. It was also clouded by the association of interest with money. Furthermore, the Greeks were hostile to the idea of long-term progress.³¹ They believed that time does not bring economic growth to society as a whole. This view was basic to all Greek thought. This pessimism about the economy dominated Western social thought until the Protestant Reformation. In this sense, the Greeks were not future-oriented, and Aristotle’s analysis of money was clouded by this view of time. Only with the Reformation, and especially the Calvinist branches, did men begin to abandon this pessimistic view of the earthly future, and also begin to abandon medieval interest theory.

Early medieval theologians were unaware of Aristotle’s specific arguments; copies of his manuscripts were not available until the eleventh century.³² Later, Aquinas did follow Aristotle in condemning interest.³³ On the other hand, some of the late-medieval scholastic theo-

30. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 65.

31. On this point, I have always been in opposition to the opinion to the contrary of my teacher Robert Nisbet. See Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), ch. 1; *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), ch. 1. I wrote “The Metaphor of Growth” for him personally (not a class) in 1967 or thereabouts as a rebuttal to his position. See Chapter 17.

32. John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 12.

33. Mooney recommended both Aristotle and Aquinas in this regard: Mooney, *Usury*, pp. 43–45.

logians broke with Aristotle on this point.³⁴ With or without Aristotle, however, the Roman Church remained officially hostile to usury throughout the medieval period. We still find a few isolated Roman Catholic theologians who try to defend the view of those medieval Scholastic theologians who opposed all interest as usury.³⁵ Sadly, we occasionally find Protestant non-theologians and non-economists who say the same thing.³⁶

2. Not Interest as Such

There has been a great deal of confusion over the years regarding the “true meaning” of the English word *usury*, and how usury relates to *interest*, and how both words relate to the Bible. It is common for those without training in either economic theory or biblical studies to go rummaging around in 200-year-old English dictionaries in search of the “true meaning” of usury and interest. They have the illusion that what “Webster says”—any Webster—is somehow authoritative in economics or biblical studies. They may even pick up a Bible dictionary or two. Anyone who has looked up a word in the *Oxford English Dictionary* knows that there may be dozens of uses of the word. For example, look up “fix” or “set.” The same is true of any other dictionary, including a Hebrew or Greek dictionary. Usage varies.

The Bible expositor must look at the uses of words in the actual texts, sorting out how the words and the meanings they convey can be conformed to each other. It is long, hard work. This commentary is a good example of what the expositor must do. It is surely not accomplished in a short paragraph in a Bible dictionary. Why, then, do otherwise literate people think that a Bible dictionary—perhaps one written a century ago—is the last word on the meaning of a hotly disputed word? I think it is because they never took a graduate school course in anything. When the college student gets beyond the textbook level of

34. Alejandro A. Chafuen, *Christians for Freedom: Late-Scholastic Economics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), ch. 7.

35. Patrick Cleary, *The Church and Usury: An Essay on Some Historical and Theological Aspects of Money Lending* (Hawthorne, California: Christian Book Club of America, [1914] 1972). This publishing house was closely related to Omni Books. They were the primary publishers in the United States of “greenback” or “populist” tracts: defenses of fiat money controlled by the Federal government. For my critique of this movement, see Gary North, *Gertrude Coogan’s Bluff: Greenback Populism as Conservative Economics* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 2010). (<http://bit.ly/CoogBluff>)

36. Mooney is a good example. See Appendix J: “Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney.”

learning, he finds out how difficult words and meanings are in texts as recent as half a century ago—or in specialized disciplines with extensive jargons, the day before yesterday.

Where do the writers of textbooks and dictionaries go in search of meanings? They go to fat academic studies, such as this one. They have no time to research the meaning of every word. They rely on specialists. It is strange, then, to find that critics of a book like this will offer as supposedly serious evidence against it the fact that several dictionaries do not agree with the specialist's findings.

A common error historically has been the idea that usury in the Bible means high (undefined) interest, but not interest as such. Such an interpretation first appeared in the Christian era, and is not supported by any Hebrew text.³⁷ This definition of biblical usury obviously cannot be reconciled with Deuteronomy 23:19, which prohibits any interest return whatsoever: "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals [food, or "vittles"], usury of any thing that is lent upon usury." The question of the rate of interest is irrelevant; any charge above zero is prohibited.

The question then must be raised: Does this prohibition apply to every type of loan? The biblical answer is no. The Bible does indeed prohibit any increase from *charitable* loans to the *impoverished* neighbor or brother, if he is willing to live in terms of the *biblical civil covenant*, and if he is not in poverty because of laziness or rebellion. It is not the moral obligation of the Christian to subsidize laziness or evil. The impoverished person must be part of the *deserving poor*. All four of these qualifications must be present in order to qualify someone as a candidate for a morally mandatory, interest-free loan. Deuteronomy 23:19–20 does not mention poverty. The other texts do, including Ezekiel 18, which warns against a son who "Hath oppressed the poor and needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him" (Ezek. 18:12–13). The specific texts that detail the limiting conditions should be used to interpret Deuteronomy 23:19–20.³⁸

37. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academie, 1983), p. 215.

38. Those who would place a universal ban on all interest-bearing loans interpret all Old Testament verses regarding usury in terms of the general, unqualified prohibi-

The Bible allows other types of interest payments. First, it does not prohibit interest payments on business loans, as Jesus' parable of the talents indicates (Matt. 25:27).³⁹ Second, the Old Testament specifically exempted the foreigner from the protection of the prohibition against interest. It was legal to charge him interest (Deut. 23:20). Thus, any attempt to argue that the Bible always prohibits interest payments is untenable.

3. Positive Injunctions

Any attempt to argue that interest payments are inherently illegitimate because they involve demanding "something for nothing," and therefore necessarily involve cheating, is inescapably an attempt to deny the universalism of the ethics of the Bible. The Bible specifies that certain kinds of *positive charity* are appropriate for believers to provide in certain circumstances, but are not required to provide in their dealings with unbelievers in the same circumstances. On the other hand, the Bible never allows the *judicial oppression* of anyone; all people under the jurisdiction of a God-covenanted civil society are entitled to equal protection of the law. "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (Ex. 12:49).⁴⁰

Thus, if interest payments truly involved collecting something for no service received in return, then interest payments for every kind of loan would fall under the general biblical prohibitions against fraud and theft. Why would interest be allowed from loans to foreigners if interest involves taking something for nothing? Why would people be so foolish as to pay something for nothing, millennium after millennium? Interest does not involve collecting something for nothing, as I shall explain.

F. Interest: Time, Risk, and Price Inflation

The prohibition against interest payments for charitable loans was not limited to money loans; "usury of anything that was lent" was pro-

tion of Deuteronomy 23:19–20. They also are forced to deny the plain teaching of Jesus' parable of the talents in Luke 19:23: "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" See below: "Interest-Seeking Loans."

39. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Books, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

40. Chapter 14.

hibited (Deut. 23:19b). By refusing to make any distinction between money loans and loans “in kind” (goods or services), the Bible avoids a very serious analytical error. The Bible announces clearly that *the phenomenon of interest is not confined to money loans*. Had the church fathers understood the implications of this from the beginning, perhaps the church would have avoided over a millennium of error, 300 to 1550.

Confusion over the two forms of loans—money loans and loans in kind—for centuries kept incipient economists and other intelligent observers from coming to grips with the phenomenon of *interest as a universal aspect of human action*. Only with the writings of Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk in the late nineteenth century, and the writings of Ludwig von Mises and Frank Fetter in the early twentieth century, did modern economists at last unravel this aspect of interest. These economists classified interest payments under the general economic phenomenon of *time-preference*.⁴¹ Time-preference is an inherent aspect of human action; it is therefore inescapable. This explanation denies the Aristotelian idea that the phenomenon of interest is solely a function of money.

The prevailing market rate of interest is a component of three factors, modern economics informs us: (1) time-preference, or the originary rate of interest (as Mises calls it); (2) a risk premium; and (3) the inflation (or deflation) premium. Few economic textbooks ever explain this, and no proponents of zero-interest free market loans ever discuss it.

1. Time-Preference

The originary interest rate, or time-preference factor, is the least understood and yet the most fundamental aspect of the phenomenon of the market rate of interest.⁴² Other things remaining equal, a given

41. Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, *History and Critique of Interest Theories*, vol. 1 of *Capital and Interest*, 3 vols. (South Holland, Illinois: Libertarian Press, [1921 ed.] 1959), (<http://bit.ly/B-Binterest>); Frank A. Fetter, *Capital, Interest, and Rent: Essays in the Theory of Distribution*, ed. Murray N. Rothbard (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977) (<http://bit.ly/FetterCap>); Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1912] 1953) (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>); Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>); Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), chaps. 5–7 (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>).

42. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

quantity and quality of *future* goods is worth less in the free market (and in people's minds) than the same basket of goods today. This is not because, in the words of an old proverb, "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush." I am *not* speaking here about *comparative risks* of obtaining ownership, "in hand" vs. "in the bush," meaning present vs. future. I will discuss the risk factor later on. I am speaking here about interest as *a fundamental category of human action*.

We live in a universe that is structured by the category of *time*. We necessarily live and act in the present. We cannot escape the constraints of time. We prefer satisfaction now. A brand-new automobile (or anything else) is more valuable to me right now than the delivery of an identical car a year from now (other things—public tastes, market value, gasoline prices, etc.—being equal). I act in the present. I choose to do in a *sequence of events* those things that I am capable of doing with whatever assets I possess. I plan for the future, but I am not immediately responsible for the future, for I have no control over it. I am responsible only in the present. Thus, what happens in the present is more relevant for me than what I expect in the earthly future, because I must live in the present in order to get to the future. I am responsible in the here and now, not in the there and then.

Let us consider all this in more general terms. Biblically speaking, an individual is responsible to God in the present. He cannot escape this covenantal responsibility. As a person created in God's image, he must place higher value on action in the present than action in the future. He is not yet responsible for what he will do in the future. Thus, an individual does those things first that he rates as most important in a calculated sequence of events. He places higher value on present goods and services than on future goods and services, because he has a proposed plan of action: first, second, third, etc. in a plan of sequential events. He does not control future goods; he controls only present goods. He must act in the present. Thus, *the goods that he owns in the present are worth more to him than those same physical goods in the expected future*. There is a premium for present goods over identical future goods in the world of human action because of the time-constrained nature of covenantal responsibility before God. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34).⁴³ Also sufficient unto the day are the pleasures thereof.

43. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 15.

A lender will always require an interest return on a loan in order to compensate him for the loss of his use of his present goods. The borrower should not expect to get something for nothing. Critics of interest claim that the lender gets something for nothing. On the contrary, if there is no interest return on the loan, *the borrower gets something for nothing*.⁴⁴ The borrower is offering the lender nothing for something when he asks the lender to transfer to him something worth more (a presently owned good, e.g., money) in exchange for something worth less (that same or a comparable good in the future). The rate of interest expresses the difference in present market value between *present goods* and physically identical *future goods*. It does not matter whether a loan is made in the form of money or any other commodity; the same discount on the market price of future goods exists for all commodities.

The more *future-oriented* the lender is—the more he values the future in relation to the present—the lower the rate of interest he will require in order to persuade him to make the loan. This is why future-oriented cultures experience greater economic growth per capita than present-oriented cultures. It is easier to obtain capital loans in such societies, meaning that at any given rate of interest, more loans are available. This is another aspect of consumer sovereignty. If consumers in one society value future wealth more highly than consumers in another society do, both groups “buy” the future they prefer. How? The former save more (defer consumption) at any given rate of interest than the latter do.

Consider the case of two societies, each possessing capital equipment and land of equal value. If consumers in Civilization A place higher value on future goods (low time-preference) than the people of Civilization B place on future goods (high time-preference), it therefore means that Civilization A places lower value on present goods than Civilization B does. If people in both societies plan production equally accurately—if their respective entrepreneurs and laborers are equally skilled—then the consumers in Civilization A who prefer future goods will get what they want if they plan accurately: higher future income. They must pay for that higher future income by forego-

44. Obviously, I am assuming here that market competition has eliminated differences in the retail price of the goods. Some sellers will offer goods or services on the basis that the buyer does not have to pay any interest on the loan for a month, three months, or whatever. The economically literate buyer knows better. There is a concealed interest rate in the selling price.

ing present income. They save more. They allocate more present goods for increased future consumption than citizens of Civilization B do. Citizens of Civilization B also get what they want: higher present income than the future-oriented citizens Civilization A enjoy, but lower future income. They save less. The free market interest rate is the economic indicator that both reflects and guides the respective concerns of consumers, present goods vs. future goods.

If there were no market rate of interest, it would be impossible for anyone to make rational economic plans. It would be irrational to expect anyone to be able to plan rationally if all prices were compelled by law to be the same. It would be equally irrational to expect anyone to be able to plan rationally if the price of future goods were compelled by law to be the same as the price of present goods. Future goods are less valuable than present goods. Passing a law does not make them of equal value.⁴⁵

What is really being said by those who pass “usury laws” is that capital is free of charge. (“Capital” = land + labor over time.)⁴⁶ Thus, when capital’s rental price is lowered by law below the market rate—or worse, to zero—the supply of this supposedly free good dries up.

Interest is not the “product” of capital. Interest does not originate with the productivity of capital. Economic *rent* is the stream of income which is produced by a capital asset. The interest rate (people’s time-preference) is applied to the future value of this expected stream of income. A better way to put this is to say that the prevailing rate of interest *discounts* the future expected value of this expected stream of income.⁴⁷

Similarly, *interest is not the “product” of a loan.* It is simply the discount applied to the future stream of income called repayment. Interest arises from the present-orientation of human beings as creatures of the present; it is applied to the future as a discount. Murray Rothbard writes: “*The time market is therefore not restricted to the loan market. It permeates the entire production structure of the complex economy.*”⁴⁸ This is such a simple concept, yet it took over two millennia for anyone to figure it out. Not many people understand it even

45. The only reason the Bible’s law against interest can be expected to function is to admit that such loans are charitable loans. Such a moral (though not civil) law requires the lender to give the borrower something for nothing.

46. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 6:5.

47. Fetter, *Capital, Interest, and Rent*, pp. 192–221: “The Relations between Rent and Interest.”

48. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, p. 378.

today.

2. Risk Premium

The market rate of interest also contains a risk premium. The risk that a particular borrower will not repay his loan must be shared among all borrowers within any particular class of borrowers—class in this case referring to a statistical grouping of borrowers according to lending risks. Toyota will pay a lower rate of interest to borrow money than a buyer of a used Toyota car will have to pay. A nation of people who believe that the wicked borrow and do not repay (Ps. 37:21),⁴⁹ and who believe that God judges the wicked, will experience lower rates of interest than a nation of “devil-may-care, but God doesn’t” borrowers.

If the national government is trusted by the public, then its debt will be able to be sold at the lowest rate of interest. Major corporations will enjoy the privilege of paying rates slightly higher than the national government. At the bottom of the pile are those who are least credit-worthy. They will be able to get only small loans from pawn shops that demand collateral (highly discounted, in case the lender defaults), or, worst of all, from “loan sharks” who charge very high rates, and who are willing to accept this risk of default only because they are also willing to impose physical violence on those who refuse to pay on time. They do not “re-schedule” loans without rearranging faces.

3. Price Inflation Premium

The inflation premium becomes an increasingly important factor in the market rate of interest in a society which permits or encourages monetary debasement, including fractional reserve banking. Loans will contain an inflation premium component—interest rates higher than the mere ordinary rate, or “present goods vs. future goods” component. The lender of money will lose if money of less purchasing power is returned to him. Inflation raises long-term interest rates.⁵⁰

One way around price inflation is to make loans in kind. The lender loans gold coins, for example, and demands repayment of both principal and interest in gold coins. Or perhaps the loan is made in a comparatively stable foreign currency. The loan’s price inflation premium then disappears.

49. North, *Confidence and Dominion*, ch. 6.

50. Monetary inflation can temporarily lower short-term interest rates: Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 20.

Summary

The reason why interest rates never fall to zero is that a lender does not need to transfer an asset to anyone else merely to have that same asset returned to him in the future. He can hold onto the asset and achieve the same economic return in the future. Meanwhile, he has the asset ready for immediate use, should a profitable opportunity arise. Therefore, should someone voluntarily lend any asset at a zero rate of interest, it is because the person is making a *charitable loan*, or else he is buying safer storage for the asset. In the latter case, he is then paying an *implicit fee for storage*; the interest that he is forfeiting that the borrower will receive by re-lending the asset, or the immediate access to the asset that he is forfeiting. A *negative interest rate*, should it ever appear on a voluntary market, is clearly evidence of a *storage fee*.

People do not voluntarily give up something for nothing unless they are confused about the details of the transaction.⁵¹ Thus, all talk about a zero rate of interest in a time-bound, risk-bound, free market world is nonsense.⁵² In an attempt to achieve such a world, the civil government would have to prohibit all profit-seeking lending and borrowing, including mortgages; but that would not be a world of voluntary exchange. It would also be a world of barbarism: the destruction of all capital by consumption.⁵³

G. Inescapable Interest

The phenomenon of interest is inescapable in any economy. It is not something “extracted” from borrowers by lenders. It is inherent in the very way we all think about the future, whether as borrowers or lenders. We are creatures. We are always *time-constrained*. We live in the present. Those items which we presently possess are of greater use to us—and therefore of greater economic value to us—right now than the prospect of using those same physical items in the future. We are covenantally responsible *now* for the use of whatever we presently own or control. We therefore *discount future value* as against present value. It is this present market discount of future value, above all, which is the reason why there is an interest phenomenon in economics.

51. In the case of making a zero-interest charitable loan, the lender is honoring God. He is thereby building up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20), to be received in the future (I Cor. 3:12–14).

52. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, p. 382.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 399–400, 450–51.

1. *Perpetual Motion Machine*

Any attempt to legislate away the inescapable effects of the rate of interest (discount for time-preference) should be seen as a doomed attempt to escape both time and creaturehood. To put it as bluntly as possible, anyone who argues that an economy can operate apart from the effects of the time-preference factor has adopted the *economic equivalent of the perpetual motion machine*. Both arguments—perpetual motion physics and zero interest economics—rely on men's obtaining "something for nothing."

In fact, anyone who would recommend civil legislation against all interest payments is far more dangerous than a person who would argue for legislation prohibiting all machines except perpetual motion machines. The second person is instantly recognized as a crackpot whose proposed legislation would destroy civilization, assuming that the civil government would seriously attempt to enforce it. The anti-usurer isn't as readily recognized as a dangerous crackpot, even though his recommendation, if seriously enforced by civil law, would be equally a threat to the survival of civilization. Both forms of legislation, if enforced, would decapitalize society. The crackpot amateur physicist, however, cannot do what the crackpot amateur economist can do and has done in the past: present himself as a defender of "love" in social theory, a protector of society's "bank-oppressed" little people, and a person who has found a long-neglected way to eliminate from this world a group of corrupt money middlemen and their extortionate ways, thereby making everyone else a little bit richer. Even worse, the anti-interest destroyer of nations who would ruin society by making illegal all interest payments can easily present his case in the name of the Bible. The nut (or outright occultist) who would prohibit by civil law all non-perpetual motion machines cannot easily appeal to any body of literature in the history of moral thought. Nevertheless, both types of self-professed reformers—the perpetual motion "physicist" and the zero-interest "economist"—are ultimately appealing to the occult or to magic, but the anti-usurer's appeal is not recognized as such, even by Christians. Usury laws are the destroyer of nations.

2. *Let's Make a Deal*

To make my point clear—that interest is inescapable—let us assume that you are a potential buyer of my piece of property, a gold mine. I persuade you that you can earn one ounce of gold per year *net*

profit from this land, after all expenses are paid, simply by paying someone to dig the gold ore and selling it to a refiner. Furthermore, we both agree (and all other potential buyers agree) that the mine will probably be able to produce this profit for a thousand years, with the first ounce coming in one year. Then I ask you to pay me one thousand ounces of gold, cash, for the mine.

You, of course, protest. It is not worth a thousand ounces, cash. I counter by showing you that you have already agreed that the land will produce a thousand ounces of gold, so why shouldn't I be entitled to a thousand ounces? We all agree: equal for equal, right? Where is my argument incorrect?

The error has to do with the value to you *today* of those *future* ounces of gold. I am asking you to give me gold, ounce for ounce, in advance. But what is the gold mine's thousandth ounce, delivered a thousand and one years from now, really worth to you? Will you give up your thousandth ounce of gold today (and all that it will buy) for that thousandth ounce in the distant future for some unnamed heir of yours? I doubt it. Why won't you? *Because you apply a cash discount to that future stream of income.* An ounce of gold a thousand and one years down the road isn't worth as much to you today as your thousandth ounce is worth to you today. You will not be here to enjoy that future thousandth ounce; you can enjoy whatever your presently owned thousandth ounce will buy today.

Now, think about this process of discounting for cash. We call this process *capitalization*. Let us assume that you own an ounce of gold today. An ounce of gold fifty years from now, or twenty years from now, is not worth your ounce of gold today. A future ounce of gold, whether scheduled to be received a year from now or a thousand and one years from now, is discounted in your mind. We have therefore discovered a law of human action (which applies in economics): *the present cash market value of expected future goods is always discounted compared with the present cash market value of the identical physical goods.*

What is this discount called? It is called the *rate of interest*. You discount the future value to you of any good compared to what that same good is worth to you immediately, whether it is that automobile or an ounce of gold from that piece of property. For me to get you to hand over the present good today (money), I have to promise to return it to you in the future, plus extra money or other benefit. In other words, I have to pay you *interest*.

Let us consider another example. You win a brand new Rolls Royce automobile. These cars do not change in styling very often. They actually look more like a 1953 Packard than like a new car. But they are a status symbol. Assume that all taxes are paid by the prize-granter. You are now offered a choice: delivery of the car today or in a year. The style probably will not change (low risk factor). Tastes of the very rich public for Rolls Royces probably will not change. The car will be taken care of, you are assured. Make your choice: the car now or the car in a year. The choice is obvious. Why is it obvious? Because of interest, meaning time-preference. "Better now than later!"

Why do some people believe that your preference is pathological, the product of your morally diseased mind? Because they are utopians.

H. Utopianism: A World Without Scarcity

It would be nice if I did not have to mention any of the following crackpot theories of economics. The reason why this task is unavoidable is that these ideas have spread far and wide in Christian circles. Christian economics has been an ignored topic for centuries. What has passed for Christian economics in the past has either been baptized moralism or baptized humanism. Numerous crackpot schemes have been promoted in the name of Christian economics, and still are being promoted. The closer we get to the question of monetary policy and interest, the more likely we are to discover pamphlets claiming to be Christian.⁵⁴

Anyone who seriously discusses the possibility of judicially compulsory zero-interest loans in a "free" or "wise" economy is a monetary crank, a person with no formal training in economics or social theory, and a person dangerously devoid of understanding regarding the human condition. You know for sure that you are listening to an economic amateur when you hear someone seriously propose the possibility of an economy without any legal debt, meaning an economy without legally enforceable contracts to deliver goods or services in the present in exchange for a greater quantity of goods or services in the future. This would be an economy run exclusively in terms of zero-interest business loans.

There has never been such a phenomenon as a zero-interest business loan. There never will be. Why not? Because *time is not a zero-price resource*.

54. See Appendix J: "Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney."

1. Crackpot Non-Economists

There have been a lot of these “anti-usury” amateur economists on the fringes of the American conservative movement ever since the days of the “greenback” movement and the politically radical Populist movement of the late nineteenth century. These views on debt were associated with calls for inflation and the free coinage of silver.⁵⁵ Radical conservatives and radical leftists have cooperated for over a century in these Populist-type movements.⁵⁶ The Technocracy movement and the Social Credit movement are contemporary examples.⁵⁷ Both groups gained their prominence during the economic confusion of the 1930s.⁵⁸ Defenders of such views on interest-free debt are also to be found in certain Christian circles.⁵⁹ Very traditional Roman Catholics have promoted such ideas, most notably the notorious anti-Semitic radio priest of the 1930s, Rev. Charles Coughlin.⁶⁰ Today, the “British Israel” or “Identity” movement is filled with tract-writers who offer such

55. Allen Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism: Origins of the Silver Issue, 1867–1878* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1970); Willis A. Carto (ed.), *Profiles in Populism* (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: Flag Press, 1982). See the three-volume reprint of “Money”: *A Monthly Magazine* (New York: Money Pub. Co., 1897–1900).

56. The most obvious example of a liberal promoter of such views is Jerry Voorhis, the California Democrat who lost his seat in Congress in 1946 to a young Richard Nixon. He later became associated with the co-operative movement. See his books, *Out of Debt—Out of Danger* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1943), published by a conservative publisher, and *Beyond Victory* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944).

57. The Social Credit movement of Canada (especially in the province of British Columbia) no longer takes seriously the monetary theories of the founder of Social Credit, Major Douglas. The Party may sell Major Douglas’ books or pamphlets based on them, such as Maurice Colbourne’s *The Meaning of Social Credit* (Edmonton, Alberta: Social Credit Board, 1933). But once in office, Social Credit politicians never mention Social Credit monetary theory.

58. Frank Arkright, *The ABC of Technocracy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1933); E. S. Holter, *The ABC of Social Credit* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1934).

59. Cf. George F. MacLeod, *Money: A Christian View* (Glasgow: William Maclellan, 1963). In Australia, the Social Credit movement is heavily dependent on support by Christians. Cf. Eric D. Butler, *Social Credit and Christian Philosophy* (Melbourne: New Times Limited, 1956). The Australian movement, never having achieved any political influence, still takes Major Douglas seriously.

60. Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, *The New Deal in Money* (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1933); *Money! Questions and Answers* (Royal Oak, Michigan: National Union for Social Justice, 1936). On his national influence, see Sheldon Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973). Another Catholic priest whose books have promoted these monetary theories is Rev. Denis Fahey. Cf. Fahey, *Money Manipulation and Social Order* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1944).

monetary theories, all claiming that their views are Bible-based.⁶¹ Two of the monetary crank paperback books in my library are written by dentists and physicians.⁶² Another was written by a Nobel Prize-winning chemist, Frederick Soddy.⁶³ Few, if any, of these books have been written by a trained economist.⁶⁴ All of them display bad typography, and many of them reprint 1930s-style (or earlier) political cartoons. (Occasionally, they are printed from computer print-outs.)⁶⁵ There is a peculiar combined scent of forgotten used books and fresh mimeograph ink that emanates from the American and Australian Social Credit movement.⁶⁶

2. *The Crackpot Economics of J. M. Keynes*

I have said that no trained economist has taught such doctrines. There is one glaring exception, which may not be an exception after all: John Maynard Keynes. Mr. Keynes actually earned only a bachelor's degree in mathematics. He never took a graduate degree in economics or any other subject. His father, Cambridge University economist John Neville Keynes, got him a job teaching economics at Cambridge by putting up the money to pay his salary. From that privileged pulpit, he began to make his international reputation.

Mr. Keynes taught that "Interest to-day rewards no genuine sacrifice, any more than does the rent of land. The owner of capital can obtain interest because capital is scarce, just as the owner of land can obtain rent because land is scarce. But whilst there may be intrinsic reas-

61. J. Taylor Peddie, *The Economic Mechanism of Scripture: The Cure for the World Crises* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1934); C. F. Parker, *Moses the Economist* (London: Covenant Pub. Co., 1947); C. O. Stadskev, *New Money for the New Age* (Hopkins, Minnesota: Gospel Temple, 1968).

62. Cf. Edward Popp, D.D.S., *Money—Bona Fide or Non-Bona Fide* (Port Washington, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Educational Fund, 1970); Charles Norburn, M.D., *Honest Money* (Asheville, North Carolina: New Puritan Library, 1983).

63. Frederick Soddy, *Wealth, Virtual Wealth and Debt: The Solution of the Economic Paradox*, 3rd ed. (Hawthorne, California: Omni, 1961).

64. A pamphlet by Georges-Henri Levesque, O.P., *Social Credit and Catholicism* (Hawthorne, California: Omni, [1936]), seems to be an exception. He taught economics at Laval and Montreal Universities, the pamphlet says. He was a graduate of the School of Social and Political Sciences, Lille, France. To say that he was not a well-known figure is putting it mildly.

65. Richard Kelly Hoskins, *War Cycles—Peace Cycles* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Virginia Group, 1985).

66. For a critique of these doctrines, see Gary North, *Salvation Through Inflation: The Economics of Social Credit* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993). (<http://bit.ly/gnsti>)

ons for the scarcity of land, there are no intrinsic reasons for the scarcity of capital.”⁶⁷ His liberal followers do not want to admit that he believed such nonsense, and the right-wing monetary cranks who do believe it do not want to be associated with him or his ideas. Nevertheless, he is one of theirs, meaning both ideological groups.

Keynes promoted the theories of Major Douglas, who founded Social Credit.⁶⁸ Keynes also recommended Silvio Gesell, a true monetary crank and socialist, whom he referred to as “the strange, unduly neglected prophet.”⁶⁹ He spent several pages of the *General Theory* praising Gesell. Referring to the preface of Gesell’s *Natural Economic Order* (1916), Keynes said that “The answer to Marxism is, I think, to be found along the lines of this preface.”⁷⁰ He went on: “He argues that the growth of real capital is held back by the money-rate of interest, and that if this brake were removed the growth of real capital would be, in the modern world, so rapid that a zero money-rate of interest would probably be justified, not indeed forthwith, but within a comparatively short period of time.”⁷¹ But can the money rate of interest be reduced to zero? Of course, Keynes said.

Keynes praised Gesell’s plan⁷² for the government to issue paper money with a date stamped on it; to keep the money legal, the users would have to get their money re-stamped each month. There would be a stamping tax on the money. Keynes highly recommended this scheme. “According to my theory it [the stamping tax] should be roughly equal to the excess of the money-rate of interest (apart from the stamps) over the marginal efficiency of capital corresponding to a rate of new investment compatible with full employment.”⁷³ But Keynes also taught that the marginal efficiency of capital could fall to zero “within a single generation. . . .”⁷⁴ In fact, he said that it would be “comparatively easy to make capital-goods so abundant that the marginal efficiency of capital is zero. . . .”⁷⁵ Thus, when the marginal efficiency of capital falls to zero, then there will be no economic reason

67. John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 376.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 370–71.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 353.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

72. And also Irving Fisher’s, another prominent academic proponent of government-produced fiat money.

73. *Idem.*

74. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

for the rate of interest not to do the same. Just tax interest and rents out of existence! In short, under his system of economics, "the rentier would disappear. . . ." ⁷⁶

This is so clearly an example of crackpot economic utopianism that his respectable academic disciples have spent two generations either ignoring this or explaining it away as really meaning something else. But he meant what he said. One reason why the *General Theory* is so incoherent, in sharp contrast to his earlier economic writings, is that it is an attempted defense of a program to produce the impossible: a world without scarcity, a world where capital is free for the asking, a world without interest.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Keynes was also a promoter of the basic monetary theory and policy of Social Credit. Social Credit economics teaches that the government should create fiat money to match the aggregate economic growth of the nation. This, we are told, will keep effective demand high enough to promote full employment. This is what Keynes taught, too: "There will be a determinate amount of increase in the quantity of effective demand which, after taking everything into account, will correspond to, and be in equilibrium with, the increase in the quantity of money." ⁷⁷ Keynes was unquestionably a monetary crank.

I agree with Sir Eric Roll, at least on this one point: the growth of such utopian ideas represented a reaction to the Great Depression of the 1930s, and it also represented a decline in the influence of rational economic reasoning. "In particular, the social and political roots of the monetary doctrines of Major Douglas, of the mystical views on wealth and debt of Professor Soddy, of the 'free land' and 'free money' agitation of Silvio Gesell, would form an interesting subject of analysis. What needs, however, to be pointed out is that the keen discussion which those views evoked and the many adherents which they could claim, particularly in the years immediately after the Great Depression, were both a symptom and an aggravating cause of the decline of relevance and of authority of economic theory." ⁷⁸ I regret only that Professor Roll did not have the academic courage to list Keynes in this menagerie of cranks.

76. *Idem.*

77. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

78. Eric Roll, *A History of Economic Thought*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1956), p. 457.

I. Capitalization: Human vs. Non-Human

I fully acknowledge that men, in their quest for autonomy from God, are willing to become slaves of sin, and therefore in principle to become slaves of other men. I recognize the accuracy of the New Testament principle that it is best to owe no man anything (Rom. 13:8a).⁷⁹ I also recognize that modern economics has promoted the ideal of perpetual debt for perpetual prosperity, and that a world so constructed will eventually collapse if, as happens when governments control the issue of money, political pressures from debtors create steady monetary inflation. Long-term debt tends to lure debtors into the illusion that monetary inflation benefits them more than it harms society. In the short run, they may be correct; not in the long run.

Nevertheless, the long-term capitalization of inanimate equipment, agricultural land, and work animals is biblically legitimate. So, in the Old Testament economy, was the capitalization of foreign heathen slaves, although not for resale to foreign nations (Lev. 25:44–46).⁸⁰ The borrower owns an economically valuable asset. The lender may be willing to lend money if this asset serves as collateral for the loan. The borrower owes the lender something, but it is something that he already owns. He can “buy his way out” of the loan contract by turning over to the lender the agreed-upon collateral. He does not place himself in bondage with this type of loan. He can pay off the loan at any time, either by turning over cash or the collateral to the lender.

Thus, the capitalization of long-term rents is legitimate today. In a biblical society, governments would not be allowed to issue money.⁸¹ Neither would fractional reserve banks.⁸² This would eliminate the primary biblical objection against collateralized debt: the subsidy that monetary inflation offers to debtors. They could not pay off their debts with depreciated money.

1. Unsecured Debt

What about unsecured debt? That has to be the decision of the lender. Are the risks worth it? He decides. He should have the legal right to extend credit. The creditor believes that debt is to his advant-

79. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

80. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 30.

81. Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>)

82. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

age. The Bible says that such personal debt is best avoided (Rom. 13:8), but it does not forbid debt. In some cases, debt may actually be to the benefit of the debtor. Debt to finance a higher education is one example. But the debtor must always understand that by taking an unsecured debt, he is risking disgrace. He has in principle become a bond-servant (Prov. 22:7).

In a biblical social order, a defaulting debtor would be required to sell everything he owns to pay his creditors. “The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth” (Ps. 37:21).⁸³ There must be sanctions against such public wickedness as defaulting on a loan. When a person declares bankruptcy, he is publicly announcing that the total value of his possessions is insufficient to repay his creditor or creditors. He violates the terms of the loan’s contract if he retains any personal assets after declaring bankruptcy. He must turn over everything he owes to his creditor up to the amount specified in the contract. (Some societies may allow him to retain some of his possessions, but this exception was known to lenders beforehand, and the added risk to the creditor was already built into the loan’s risk premium.) He cannot legitimately be sold into indentured servitude unless this was specified in the loan contract, and if it was, then the loan had to be a zero-interest charity loan, as I have argued above (“Defining Poverty by Statute”). There should be little doubt that the abolition of debtors prison in the West during the late-nineteenth century was an act in conformity with biblical law’s standards of debt and repayment.

If such laws were on the statute books, there would be a lot less consumer debt.

2. Collateralized Debt

The lender is permitted to take a poor man’s cloak as collateral, but the cloak must be returned at night. This is a strange form of collateral, because the lender cannot use it when it is most needed. Its purpose is two-fold. *First*, to restrict loans of charity to *local regions* whenever possible. Lenders are supposed to be in close contact with borrowers. They should know their character. Lenders are very likely employers. They can distinguish a true emergency from a disguised consumer loan. *Second*, to reduce *multiple indebtedness*. While the

83. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6

lender cannot use the cloak during the night, the debtor cannot use it during the day. He cannot use the same cloak as collateral for several loans at the same time.⁸⁴ He is limited in his ability to indebt himself and his future.

A lender is not required to take any form of collateral. This indicates that a major form of collateral for a loan is the lender's perception of the borrower's character and his ability to repay the loan. Character, in fact, is a better form of collateral, because the lender does not have to go to the trouble of returning the cloak each evening. This reduces transaction costs. The less trustworthy the borrower's character, the more likely that a lender would require the cloak, fearing multiple indebtedness.

J. Multiple Indebtedness

There is a very important application of the law of collateral, one that is seldom discussed.

1. The Cloak

Consider the case of a poor man who comes in search of an emergency loan from his neighbor. The neighbor assesses the man's character, and concludes that the man is likely to repay the loan. The lender has made a mistake. The man may visit several people to ask for an emergency loan. If he collects from all of them, he may waste the money. Even if he repays these loans, he has dealt fraudulently with lenders by accepting numerous interest-bearing loans. They have unknowingly borne added risk.

But what if the lender suspects that the borrower is somewhat unreliable? The lender wants to honor God, so he intends to make the loan. But he wants collateral. He wants to give the borrower an economic incentive to repay the loan as soon as possible. The man is poor. He has no collateral of value. But the lender can still demand the man's cloak. He is not allowed to take the widow's cloak (Deut. 24:17).

What good is this cloak to the lender? He must return it in the evening, when the man needs it. It cannot be sold. It cannot be used by anyone in the lender's household. It is a nuisance, for it must be returned each evening. But it has two important economic functions.

84. This was the opinion of the twelfth-century Jewish scholar, Ibn Ezra, citing Saadia Gaon. Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, Part 2 (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976), p. 418.

First, the borrower has to come back every evening to get it back. This is an inconvenience. He will have an added incentive to repay the loan early. Second, because the garment is in the possession of the lender during the day, it cannot be used as collateral with another lender. One piece of collateral can be used for only one loan at a time, if the lender demands collateral. If the borrower kept it, and simply signed a note saying that it stands as collateral for the loan, he may sign several such notes for several lenders. If he defaults, they cannot all collect their collateral. Therefore, by permitting the lender to demand half a day's collateral, biblical law reduces the temptation on the part of borrowers to commit fraud.

2. *Fractional Reserve Banking*

Modern banking is based on the flagrant flouting of the prohibition against multiple indebtedness. For every asset a bank owns, there are many legal claims against that asset at any point in time. The bank keeps fewer reserves on hand to meet demands of lenders to the bank—depositors—than the bank has promised to deliver on demand. This is called *fractional reserve banking*. It is the universal form of banking and has been since the early modern period. It was an invention of the Renaissance.

Depositors believe that their money is available on demand. The banks have promised them that it is available on demand. But it isn't. If every depositor came to the bank one day and began to withdraw his money, the bank would go bankrupt. The bank loaned out the depositors' money in order to earn interest on the loans. Part of this return is paid to depositors as interest on their accounts. The depositors know this, but they all assume (as do the bank's managers) that not all depositors will try to get their money out on the same day. They assume that withdrawals will tend to equal deposits on any given day. Usually, this assumption is correct. On the day when men lose faith in the solvency of the bank—the bank's ability to repay those few depositors who demand their money—a bank run ensues. Everyone wants his money at once. The bank defaults. It has run out of "raiment."

Without the protection of state and federal government agencies, fractional reserve banking would face the prospect of bank runs, as lenders (depositors) would lose faith in overextended (multipally indebted) banks. The most important form of collateral a bank should have is its reputation for honesty and conservative (minimal fractional

reserves) investing policies. In a truly biblical society, banks would be required to have 100% reserves.⁸⁵ In the early twenty-first century, however, a commercial bank's most important form of collateral in the United States is the legal backing of the federal government, which stands ready to repay depositors in bankrupt banks—a guarantee that is ultimately backed up by the fiat money of the Federal Reserve System, the nation's central bank.⁸⁶ We have guaranteed inflation by ignoring the warning against multiple indebtedness.

Fractional reserve banking is inflationary, for it creates credit money—money that is backed only by faith. When a person deposits his money on the condition that he can write a check and spend it, the inflation is about to begin. The banker loans, say, 90% of this money to a borrower. The borrower then spends the money. Whoever gets the borrower's money then either spends it or deposits it in *his* bank, and the process continues. As a theoretical limit (though not always in practice), for every dollar deposited in a banking system with 10% reserves, nine additional dollars will eventually come into circulation.⁸⁷ Thus, fractional reserve banking is inherently inflationary.⁸⁸ It also creates inflationary booms and their inevitable consequences, depressions.⁸⁹

K. Warehouse Receipts

Say that a person brings in ten ounces of gold to a warehouse for safekeeping, and the warehouse issues a receipt for ten ounces of gold. The owner pays a fee for storing the money, but he presumably increases the safety of his holdings. The warehouse specializes in protecting money metals from burglars. The depositor pays for this specialized service. It is somewhat like a safety deposit box in a bank, except that the warehouse issues a receipt.

The receipt may begin to function as money. If people trust the warehouse, they will accept a receipt for all or part of this gold in payment for goods and services. A piece of paper authorizing the bearer to collect a specified amount of gold is just about the same as the actual ounce of gold. Besides, the gold is safer in storage, and paper is a lot

85. North, *Honest Money*, ch. 7.

86. On the operations of the Federal Reserve System, see North, *ibid.*, ch. 9.

87. The process is described, step by step, in a free book which was published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, *Modern Money Mechanics*.

88. North, *Honest Money*, ch. 8.

89. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 20.

more convenient than pieces of metal.

1. The Great Temptation

But a problem threatens the system. What if the warehouse owner recognizes that people in the community trust him? They know that he has a lot of guards watching everything, and that he has always been scrupulously honest. He then betrays this trust. He issues warehouse receipts for gold for which there is no gold in reserve. He then loans these receipts to borrowers. The receipts serve as money. People accept them in exchange for goods and services. These warehouse receipts are considered “as good as gold.” Why? Because they are always exchangeable for gold upon demand. Just take the piece of paper to the warehouse, and get your gold. No problem!

But now there *is* a problem. There are more receipts for gold than there is gold in reserve to pay all the potential bearers on demand. These “demand deposits” are now vulnerable to that most feared of financial events, a *bank run*. Depositors who have receipts come down and demand repayment. There is not enough gold in reserve to meet the total demand.

The warehouse has placed itself in a position similar to that of the poor man who immorally secures loans from a dozen lenders on the basis of one piece of collateral. The warehouse owner has become a banker. He makes loans, for which borrowers agree to pay him interest in the future, along with a return of the principal. But the money, once loaned out, is gone until the day that repayment comes. The warehouse is vulnerable to a run on the deposits. The warehouse owes gold to the depositors. It is indebted to them. The deposits are legal liabilities to the bank. The bank has become multiply indebted.

2. The Creation of Money

The warehouse receipt circulates as if it were gold. Now, if gold serves as money in that society, the pieces of paper will also serve as money.

When these pieces of paper are pure money-metal substitutes, nothing changes. Physical gold is taken out of circulation and put into a warehouse. A piece of paper (a warehouse receipt) substitutes for the physical gold. No new money has come into circulation. No money has been taken out of circulation. Nothing fundamental changes, except for convenience. But if the warehouse owner writes up a warehouse re-

ceipt for gold when there is no new gold on deposit, he has thereby increased the money supply in the community. No one has come to the warehouse and deposited gold (taken it out of the day-to-day economy). So, the warehouse receipt is inescapably *inflationary*. It is an addition of money into the economy. I am defining “inflation” as “an increase in the money supply,” the way dictionaries and economists defined it before 1940. The result is either: (1) rising prices, or (2) prices will not fall as far as they would otherwise have fallen.

Here is what normally would happen. The warehouse receipt circulates as if it were gold. If the warehouse owner is very cautious, and issues only a few extra receipts, probably nobody will find out. He will collect a little interest from borrowers, and everyone will be happy. Prices of goods (as denominated in gold) may rise only a little, or perhaps not at all. But other warehouse owners hear about their competitor. So, he is lending out money, is he? Well, two can play at that game. So can five or six. They all begin to issue their warehouse receipts to borrowers. They get in on the banking game. The money supply now starts to increase.

Prices start to rise, as denominated in paper money. But gold bullion's currency-denominated price does not rise, for all the unbacked receipts to gold are “as good as gold,” and therefore supposedly identical to gold. The increase in circulation of these receipts does not initially push up gold's paper money-denominated price. So, those who hold gold get hurt initially. They see the paper money-denominated prices of other goods rising, but the market price of stodgy old gold is unchanged. It looks as though lots of newly mined gold is coming onto the market. But statistics are available to show that this is not true. So, the increase must be coming from the issuers of warehouse receipts. So, receipt-holders do the rational thing: they start buying goods and services before the price of these goods gets any higher. This puts upward pressure on prices, *as denominated in gold receipts*. That is to say, the market value of these receipts falls. Holders of these warehouse receipts try to pass them to other people. The decline in their market value continues.

Then what happens? Store owners continue to take a lot of paper receipts. They steadily deposit them with their local banks. Unlike the general public, bankers understand how the fractional reserve system works; at least, they understand the risks associated with issuing more receipts for gold than there is gold to redeem the receipts. *Bankers become increasingly suspicious of each other's gold receipts*. Too many re-

ceipts are being deposited by their customers. Many of the bankers know that there is not this much new gold coming into circulation. What if the public figures this out, too? They think to themselves, "Maybe it would be smart to cash in these receipts and demand delivery of gold, just in case some receipt-issuing competitor is hit with a bank run." They start demanding gold for the receipts issued by suspected banks. This places added downward pressure on the gold-related price of some banks' receipts, and possibly on many banks' receipts. Thus, the bankers have an incentive individually to pull the plug on their own fractional reserve scheme. So do market speculators. Specialist traders suspect that the price of gold will zoom when the deception is discovered, once the general public starts cashing in their warehouse receipts for their hoped-for gold. Thus, bankers and speculators begin the run on the banks' gold hoards—a run that the bankers fear the public will initiate if the bankers do not get in line first. They dearly want to get in line first. They want their gold before their fractionally reserved competitors run out.

This is why bankers and other sophisticated holders of gold receipts eventually go to the warehouses and start demanding their gold. They understand that at least some of the banks are technically insolvent. They are not sure which ones are weakest, so all the banks risk getting hit. Receipt-holders want their gold now, while they can still get it on demand. The run on the warehouses begins. Warehouse receipts for gold continue to fall in value compared to gold. Other people then rush down to get their gold (which is now rising in value compared to the warehouse receipts people are holding). The insolvent banks collapse, or else they are forced to delay repayment to receipt-owners.

This declaration of insolvency (insufficient reserves) is similar to the action of the wicked cloak-owner who has multipally indebted himself, and then leaves his creditors standing out in the cold. Thus, fractional reserve banking violates two biblical principles: (1) honest weights and measures, and (2) no multiple indebtedness. Fractional reserve banking is inflationary while people accept the checks, and deflationary when confidence in the banks finally collapses.

Understand, however, that the evil of fractional reserve banking is not created by the phenomenon of interest (time preference) as such. It is not money-lending as such that is condemned by the Bible; rather, it is *borrowing with collateral that you do not have* and lending what you do not have (i.e., issuing receipts for commodities not held in re-

serve).

L. Interest-Seeking Loans

The prohibition against usury only appears in the context of charitable loans. The Bible does not prohibit loans that draw interest in business dealings, as Jesus' parable of the talents indicates (Matt. 25:27).⁹⁰

Consider the problem faced by the person who argues, as medieval theologians argued, that all interest is immoral. What if the banker comes to the potential depositor and makes this offer? "Sir, you have money that you do not need for immediate consumption. I have several prospects for earning money on invested capital. Let us make a bargain. You loan me the money for a year. I, in turn, will see to it that your money gets into the hands of low-risk borrowers who have some excellent business opportunities, if they can only locate some capital at reasonable rates of interest. I will retain a percentage of the money they pay me for having located your money. This is my service fee. But you will do much better on this loan than you could if you loaned the money to people you know. I will save you the time, expense, and trouble of seeking out reputable borrowers. They come to me. That is my job." This sounds good.

"I must make this stipulation, however. For the agreed-upon period of the loan, you won't be able to get your money. The money will be used by the borrowers in their business operations. After all, we can't spend the same money at the same time! So, you forfeit the use of your money for a year; the borrower gets the use of your money for a year; he pays you for the privilege of using your money, and I will take a small percentage for my services. Everyone wins, including consumers who will benefit from the increased production."

This still sounds good. But the lender wants security. "Mr. Banker, I will agree to this on the following condition. I want security for my investment. I will buy an insurance policy from you. If the businessman you loan the money to should go bankrupt and be unable to repay me, then you will pay me the agreed-upon rate of interest anyway. I have to pay for this protection, of course, but you know so many businessmen, and can spread the investments of all depositors over so many different investments, that we all can gain greater security if you act as an insurance agent for our loans."

90. North, *Honest Money*, ch. 7.

Reasonable? Certainly. It is so reasonable that the medieval prohibition against all interest payments, including business loans, was destroyed by just this kind of insurance contract. Medieval businessmen agreed to finance various maritime enterprises, but only if the shipper guaranteed repayment. Instead of taking a percentage of the profits from a particular ship's voyage, the less risk-oriented investors agreed to a fixed percentage (interest rate), leaving more profits (or more losses) to the adventurer.

Then third parties entered into the transaction, probably beginning in the fourteenth century. They agreed to act as insurers for ship owners who did not want to offer such a guarantee to investors, or who could not because they owned only one ship, and if its voyage failed, there was no way to repay the loans. This third-party loan was called the *contractus trinus*, and it eventually sank the usury prohibition to the bottom of the historical sea.⁹¹ For what was the "insurer" offering, if not a guaranteed, fixed-interest return on loans? It may have been called shipping insurance, but it was identical to the medieval definition of usury. Yet it took over a century for even one scholastic commentator to spot the problem, and no one paid any attention to him.⁹²

When the insurance feature of non-shipping business contracts was first introduced, it was initially rejected by the theologians. In partnerships, where there was shared risk of failure, interest payments had always been acceptable, but not in contracts where there was a guaranteed rate of return, irrespective of the outcome of the particular business or business venture. But, step by step, the resistance of the church to interest payments in business loans was weakened. By Luther's day, the old prohibitions were almost gone. Incredibly, by the late fifteenth century, the Roman Church had actually approved charitable loans (called "contracts") that paid 5 percent to 6 percent per annum, the *montes pietatis*.⁹³ The church by the late medieval period had reversed the original meaning of the biblical prohibition, which forbids interest from charitable loans, but which places no restraints on interest from business loans. The church prohibited interest from business loans and itself collected interest from charitable loans.

The prohibition against interest could not be sustained. The future is always discounted. So, when we read in the Bible about loans

91. Noonan, *Scholastic Analysis of Usury*, pp. 202–3.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 203. His name was John Consobrinus.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

without interest, we are talking about charitable loans, not business or consumer loans. We are talking about destitute borrowers, not high-flying upwardly mobile lawyers, accountants, professionals, and entrepreneurs.

M. The Moral Legitimacy of 100% Reserve Banking

While I normally do not insert lengthy expositions of the New Testament in my Old Testament commentaries, it is necessary that I devote considerable space to Jesus' parable of the talents. Christians who have been influenced by the "economists of love" and their zero-interest fantasies need to know that the New Testament teaches clearly that what I have said regarding interest is valid, that there is no biblical rule against interest-bearing loans. The following passage verifies this point:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two (Matt. 25:14–17).

This parable is a kingdom parable. It follows the five-point covenant model.⁹⁴ First, the master calls his servants before him (sovereignty). Second, he delegates authority to them as his economic representatives by transferring money to them (hierarchy/representation). Third, while it is not stated explicitly, he commands them to make a profit (law/dominion). We know this because two of the three immediately take steps to obey his implicit economic command. Fourth, he returns and imposes positive sanctions: blessings to the profitable servants. Fifth, the blessings that he gives them involve rulership (inheritance). He then imposes negative sanctions against the unprofitable servant, casting him into outer darkness (disinheritance).

This parable contains several theological messages, but the three main ones are these: first, God owns all things; second, He delegates

94. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Cf. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010).

temporary control over these things to men; third, men are required to increase the value of whatever God has entrusted to them.

There are also secondary implications. First, the servants were required to act on their own initiative for a long period. The master was not present to tell them precisely what to do. He imposed *a profit management system of control, a bottom-up hierarchy*. It was not the management alternative, a non-market, top-down bureaucracy.⁹⁵ He wisely decentralized his investment portfolio before he departed. He allowed his subordinates to make their own decisions regarding the proper use of his capital. He subsequently held them legally responsible for the results.

1. Marxism as Covenant-Breaking

What about the person who takes no risks, buries his talent, and returns to the master only what he had been given initially? This man has produced losses. He is an evil, unprofitable servant. He has not performed according to minimum standards.

Like so many other incompetent, slothful people in history, the servant of the parable tries to justify his poor performance by blaming the master. He accuses the master of being a thief, or at least an unscrupulous exploiter. "Then he which had received one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine" (vv. 24–25).

What was the slothful servant's accusation of the master? Clearly, he was accusing him of being a *capitalist*. The master is rich, yet he does not go into the fields to labor. He expects a positive return on his money, even though he goes away on a journey. In short, *the servant is an incipient Marxist*. He believes, as Marx did, in the labor theory of value. He also believes in Marx's exploitation theory of profits. Anyone who gets money without working for a living is nothing but an exploiter, living on the labor of the poor. The servant calls him "a hard man." (Theologically speaking, this is the covenant-breaker's accusation against God: God is an unfair exploiter.)

The master accepts the ideological challenge. He reminds the servant that he is indeed a hard man, meaning someone who has the law-

95. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944). (<http://bit.ly/MisesBur>)

ful authority to establish standards of profitable performance, as well as the authority to hand out rewards and punishments. He admits freely to the servant that as a successful capitalist, he does not personally go into the fields to plant and reap, yet he reaps a profit. “His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed” (v. 26). Then he tells the servant the minimum that he is entitled to, an interest return: “Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury” (v. 27). Luke 19:23 reads: “Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?”

2. The Legitimacy of Interest

The King James translators used the English word *usury* to translate a Greek word that is more accurately translated as *interest*. This discussion of interest here is very revealing, for two reasons. First, this parable of God’s kingdom acknowledges that *interest-taking is legitimate*. God eventually comes to every person and demands a positive return on whatever had been entrusted to him by God. The master had done without the use of his funds during his absence. He is therefore entitled to a minimum return: interest.

Second, *the parable clearly distinguishes between profits and interest*. The other two stewards each produced a profit of 100% on invested capital. They received the greater praise and greater visible rewards. The minimum required performance was an interest payment. The slothful servant had been unwilling to take even the minimal risk of handing the money over to specialists in money-lending, who would seek out entrepreneurs to lend the money to, entrepreneurs who would then pay a competitive return to the money-lenders on this passively managed investment.

In other words, the master’s capital was supposed to become productive. Each steward had to become an entrepreneur, or else had to seek out an entrepreneur who would put the money to economically productive uses. The talent was not to sit in the earth; it was to perform a socially useful function.

3. The Entrepreneur and the Banker

The economic agent who is on the cutting edge of both prediction

and production is the entrepreneur. The first two men in the parable were entrepreneurs. They went out and found ways of investing the master's money that produced a positive rate of return. As the parable presents it, this rate of return was higher than what could have been earned by depositing the money with money-lenders. Thus, the entrepreneur is understood to be someone who bears much greater risk than someone who deposits money in a bank. The economist calls this form of risk *uncertainty*. It cannot be estimated in advance.⁹⁶ It involves guesswork, unlike the depositor who is promised a specific rate of interest when he deposits his money.

The only way that the banker can afford to pay out a promised return is because he successfully seeks out final borrowers (entrepreneurs) who produce an even higher rate of return. The banker makes his living on the difference between the interest payment that the final borrower pays to him and whatever he in turn pays to the depositors. He makes it "on the spread."

The future is uncertain to men. We do not know it perfectly. We barely know it at all. We see the future as though we were peering through a darkened glass. Nevertheless, all of life involves forecasting. There is no escape. We must all bear some degree of uncertainty. But some people are willing to bear more of it than others, and of these, some are more successful in dealing with it. In economic terminology, some produce greater profits than others. Profit is a *residual* that remains, if at all, only after all costs of the business have been paid, including interest.

4. *Banking: Reducing Uncertainty*

The banker is able to offer a special service to investors. He can diversify depositors' uncertainty by lending to many people—people who, like the servants in the parable, have performed successfully in the past. They have "a track record," to use the language of horse racing. By lending out money to many borrowers, the banker thereby converts a portion of the depositors' uncertainty into risk, meaning from the statistically incalculable to the statistically calculable. The banker is like an insurer. In fact, in the Middle Ages, the bank was an insurance company, because both church and state had made it illegal

96. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>).

for Christians to ask or pay interest.⁹⁷ The modern profession of banking grew out of the marine insurance guild, which was legal in the Middle Ages.⁹⁸

What does an insurance company do? Its statisticians (actuaries) calculate the likelihood of certain kinds of undesirable events in large populations. These unpleasant events cannot be statistically calculated individually, but they can be calculated collectively if the population involved is large enough. The seller of insurance then persuades members of these large populations to pay periodic premiums so as to “pool” their risks. When one member of the pool suffers the event that has been insured against, he is reimbursed from the pool of assets. Hence, some of life’s inescapable and individually incalculable uncertainties are converted to calculable risk by means of diversification: “the law of large numbers.”

The same is true of banking. Borrowers will seldom all go bankrupt at once. Most borrowers will repay their debts as specified in their loan agreements. Bad loans are more than offset by the good ones. Thus, the banker can offer a fixed rate of return to depositors. In almost all cases, depositors will be repaid as promised because most of the borrowers repay their loans as promised. The exception is in a depression, when banks fail. Depressions are the result of prior monetary inflation, which in our day means fractional reserve banking.⁹⁹

The master in this parable protects his funds in much the same way. He seeks out a group of potential entrepreneurs. He gives each of them an amount of money to invest. He makes predictions regarding their future performance based on their past performance, and then he allocates the distribution of his assets in terms of this estimation. He protects his portfolio by diversification.

He is not an interest-seeking banker, however. The money he invests is his own. He is not acting as the legal agent of other depositors. He legally claims all of the profits. He does not contract with borrowers who agree in advance to pay him a fixed rate of interest. The entrepreneurs are strictly his legal subordinates, unlike the relationship between banker and borrower.

Yet in the Old Testament era, there was a relationship of economic

97. Jews could legally lend to Christians, which is why Jews from the middle ages onward have been found in banking. It was a near-monopoly granted to them by Christian legislators.

98. Noonan, *Scholastic Analysis of Usury*, ch. 10.

99. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 20.

subordination between lender and borrower: the borrower was servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7). This economic subordination was based on the legal authority of the lender to place the borrower in indentured servitude for up to six years (Deut. 15). Because the borrower today can lose his collateral or his reputation, there is still a mild form of economic subordination in every debt contract. Debt is still a threat, even though it can also be very productive. It is like fire: a useful tool, but a danger if it gets out of control.

5. The Forfeited Productivity of Inaction

The master in the parable is outraged by the coin-burying servant. The parable is intended to show the subordinate (indebted) position of all men before God. The servant was cast into outer darkness because he was an unprofitable servant (v. 30). The parable stands as a warning to all men because the Bible teaches that all people are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).¹⁰⁰ Gary North, "Unprofitable Servants," *Biblical Economics Today* (Feb./March 1983). This is why we need a profitable servant as our intermediary before God, our perfect sin-bearer. But to understand our relationship of indebtedness to God, the parable's language must be taken seriously. We cannot make accurate theological conclusions about the broader meaning of the parable if the symbolic reference points of the parable are themselves inaccurate.

There is no question that the master not only approves of taking interest, he sends the servant to the nether regions for not taking it. This is strong imagery! The interest payment belongs to the master. By having refused to deposit the master's money with the moneylenders, the servant has in effect stolen the master's rightful increase. The servant was legally obligated to protect the master's interests, and interest on his money was the minimum requirement. He failed. The master's judgment of the servant's past performance had been accurate; he was entitled to only one talent initially, for he had not demonstrated competence previously. Had he been given more, he would have wasted more. The idea that the interest return was the master's minimum expectation leads us to the question of the origin of interest. Why did the master deserve an interest return? Because he had possession of an asset that could have been put to productive use, but was not. He had forfeited an economic return that could have been his. This concept of the forfeited return appeared in medieval economic literature as the doctrine of *lucrum cessans*. The owner of money who could have

made a profit by investing it elsewhere, but who loaned the money to someone, was said by some theologians to be entitled to an interest payment from the borrower because of the income he had forfeited. Interest compensated the lender for the opportunity he had missed.

This raises the whole question of cost. What is the cost of any action or any purchase? It is the value of whatever has to be forfeited, i.e., the value of the most valuable foregone use. If I do one thing with my money, I cannot do something else with it. The value of whatever I would actually have done but did not do is what it costs me to do whatever I do.

The lender who transfers to another person the use of an asset, monetary or nonmonetary, has given up whatever other opportunities might have been available to him. There are always other opportunities available. There is therefore always a cost to the lender of lending money.

The master in the parable was being gracious to the servant. He recognized from the beginning that the man was not very competent. The master did not tell the servant that he had failed because he had not made 100% on the money entrusted to him. He told him only that he had failed because he had not earned an interest payment. This is the least that the master could have expected.

The master probably could have doubled his money by entrusting it to either of the first two servants. But he had sought greater economic safety instead. He had adopted the principle of risk reduction through portfolio diversification. You get a lower rate of return but a more sure return. But the master had been cheated. He could have deposited his money directly with the money-lenders instead of giving it to the servant. That would have been safer—greater diversification through the bank—and it almost certainly would have produced a positive rate of return, however low. Instead, he received only his original capital in return.

He had forfeited his legitimate interest payment because he had transferred the asset to the slothful, risk-averse servant. This servant is a model of wickedness, not because he was actively evil, but that he was passively unproductive. He did nothing with that which had been entrusted to him. Doing nothing is sufficient to get you cast into hell, when doing the minimum would at least quench the master's wrath. (Warning: only one man in history has ever performed this minimum: Jesus Christ.)

6. *Interest and Capitalization*

Is interest-taking morally legitimate? This debate has been going on since at least the days of Aristotle, who called money sterile and interest illegitimate. But if money is sterile, why have men throughout history paid to gain access to its use for a period? How are so many people fooled into paying for the use of a sterile asset? Besides, interest is a phenomenon of every loan, not just loans of money. Modern economics teaches this; so does the Bible.

It is obvious that the phenomenon of interest is not confined to money. Aristotle was incorrect. The phenomenon of interest applies to every scarce economic resource. We always discount future value. Whatever we own in the present is worth more to us than the promise of owning that same item in the future. Promises to repay can be broken (the risk factor), but more to the point, the present commands a price premium over the future.¹⁰⁰

We live in the present. We make all of our decisions in the present. We enjoy the use of our assets in the present. While wise people plan for the future by purchasing streams of future income by buying assets that they expect to produce net income over time, they purchase these hoped-for streams of income at a discount. The rate of discount that we apply to any stream of expected future income is called the rate of interest. Mises called it time-preference.

Thus, the rate of interest is not exclusively a monetary phenomenon. Interest is a universal discount that we apply to every economic service that we expect to receive in the future. We buy a hoped-for stream of rents; we can buy them for cash; but we expect a discount for cash. This purchase at a discount for cash is called capitalization. It is the heart of capitalism. It is the heart of every society more advanced than the utterly primitive.

The person who lends money at zero interest is clearly forfeiting a potential stream of income. He will seldom do this voluntarily, except for charitable reasons. The ownership of the asset offers him an expected stream of income: psychological, physical, or monetary. If it did not offer such a stream of income, it would be a free good. It would not be demanded. It would therefore not command a price. The owner expects to receive a stream of income. He chooses the degree of risk that he is willing to accept, and he then refuses to lend the asset for less than the interest rate appropriate to this degree of risk.

100. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

The borrower compensates the owner for the use of the asset, or its exchange value, for a specified period of time. He borrows it only because he values its stream of services more highly than he values its rental fee (interest). He expects to make a profit of some kind on the temporary exchange of control over it.

Summary

Non-fractional reserve banking and the taking of interest are both biblically legitimate. The parable of the talents should be sufficient proof for anyone who is not trying to make an overnight theological reputation for himself based on the promotion of the utterly fantastic. We should take the Bible seriously in preference to Aristotle, and also in preference to the economics of love.¹⁰¹ The capitalization of long-term assets, including human services is biblically legitimate.

Again, I acknowledge that men, in their quest for autonomy from God, are willing to become slaves of sin, and therefore in principle slaves of other men. I recognize the New Testament principle that it is best to owe no man anything (Rom. 13:8a). I also recognize that modern economics has promoted the ideal of perpetual debt for perpetual prosperity, and that a world so constructed will eventually collapse. But to place temporal limits on the judicial enforceability of the discounting of future long-term human services, because the Bible requires that we restrain man's overconfidence about his long-term future, is not the same as denying that there is an inescapable discounting (capitalization) process between the present value of present goods and the present value of expected future goods.

With respect to capitalized debt, if both the lender and the borrower agree that a piece of collateral is acceptable in exchange for the defaulted loan, then the debtor is not in debt, net. He has an offsetting asset. He wants the money in cash; the lender would rather have the money over time. The existence of the collateral reduces the likelihood that the debtor will default. The debtor is therefore not a servant of the lender in this case. Nevertheless, if the loan involves the potential loss of a man's home, meaning his status and his own self-evaluation, then he is in a form of bondage. But if he owns investment assets (a house, for example) with a mortgage on it, and he risks losing the house if he defaults, then this voluntary transaction is merely a shifting of risk to

101. See Appendix J: "Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney."

the liking of both transactors. The lender feels better about the future with a stream of income guaranteed by the value of the collateral. The borrower feels better about owning the collateral and paying the money. Neither is a servant; neither is a master.¹⁰²

Conclusion

The confusion throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period concerning the evil or illegitimacy of interest came as a result of not paying attention to the biblical texts, and then mixing in the fallacious economic opinions of Aristotle. The Bible is clear: there is to be no interest return from money loaned to the poverty-stricken neighbor. This applies to money loans or loans of goods. But the definition of poverty must be the willingness of the borrower to serve as a bond-servant of the lender should he be unable to repay the loan. The larger the loan, the longer the term of service that will be required to repay it. Ordinarily, though, charity loans would be small, and the time to repay would probably not be seven years, unless it was for something like the payment of physicians' bills or lawyers' fees. There is no prohibition on interest returns from loans to distant pagans or from business loans. The term translated as "usury" in the King James Bible is narrow and precise in its application: interest derived from morally mandatory charity loans, either from poverty-stricken righteous brothers in the faith or from resident aliens who live alongside believers in nations that are formally covenanted under the God of the Bible. The word does not mean "exorbitant" interest. That usage was the product of the early modern period, and is not the product of biblical analysis. Any interest taken from a loan to the poor brother in the faith is usurious; no maximum rate of interest from other loans is ever mentioned in the Bible. Interest is inescapable. It is not a uniquely monetary phenomenon. It is the discount we apply to future goods as against present goods. This process goes on continually, whether or not there is a money market, whether or not published loan rates are available. We are mortal. We die. We live in an uncertain world. We cannot know the future. Thus, we discount the value of future goods, and we also confront the phenomenon of risk whenever we defer present consumption. If nothing else, we may not live long enough to enjoy the future. Fractional reserve banking is prohibited in the Bible, for two reasons.

¹⁰² Warning: do not take a loan if it is not 100% collateralized by an asset you are willing to lose.

ons: (1) it violates the prohibition against false weights and measures because it creates money, and (2) it violates the principle against multiple indebtedness. But interest-producing loans on a truly deferred basis—no check-writing on money already loaned out are biblically valid.

IMPARTIAL JUSTICE AND LEGAL PREDICTABILITY

Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline [bend] after many to wrest judgment: Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause (Ex. 23:1–3).

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked (Ex. 23:6–7).

God is the cosmic Judge. “And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah” (Ps. 50:6). “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation” (Ps. 68:5). “But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Ps. 75:7). “Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations” (Ps. 82:8).

Few doctrines alienate modern man as much as this one does. I believe that the doctrine of final judgment, above all others, is the biblical doctrine that most repels the unbeliever. The rise of modern evolutionary science can be traced back to the idea that infinite space and nearly infinite time have shoved God out of the universe.¹ Man wants some other judge besides God: either the heat death of the universe or cosmic crushing, in eternal cycles of creation and contraction.² By default, the modern state becomes the judge for man, substituting its temporal judgments for God’s.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), pp. 359, 381, 391.

2. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

A. No Respect for Persons

When He judges men, God does not respect persons. He respects His covenant law, not the social or economic position of the person being judged, whether rich or poor. This concept of highly personal but even-handed justice is basic New Testament doctrine. “For there is no respect of persons with God” (Rom. 2:11). “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (I Peter 1:17). It is also Old Testament doctrine, reflected in the requirement that human judges are to honor God by imitating Him in His capacity as Judge. “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it” (Deut. 1:17). “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deut. 16:19). “These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment” (Prov. 24:23).

There was a time when this doctrine of even-handed justice in terms of biblical law alienated the rulers of the world because they served as agents of the rich, who would not countenance the thought of honest judgment for the poor. James warned against this very temptation within the church:

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (James 2:1–9).³

3. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of the Epistles*

Today, on the other hand, there are many rulers and would-be rulers who refuse to tolerate this biblical doctrine, because it sounds as though God is on the side of the rich simply because He will not bend judgment in the name of the poor. Their court theologians and would-be court theologians dutifully reinterpret the biblical texts to fit the rulers' socialist goals: "The God of the Bible is on the side of the poor just because he is *not* biased, for he is a God of impartial justice."⁴ The fact is, however, it is the idea that *rulers are under God and under the obligation to enforce God's revealed law* that most antagonizes rulers, not to mention their court theologians. Whether they represent the poor, the rich, or the "middling sort," rulers refuse to represent God's court of justice. To do so would point to God as final Judge, and this doctrine is too repulsive for autonomous man.

B. Judicial Stability

God's justice is the goal for the entire commonwealth, and all members of society are personally responsible before God to meet all of the demands of His law. Exodus 23 provides us with some specific details of what constitutes biblical justice. False reports are prohibited (23:1, 7). Evil acts by men in crowds are banned (23:2). Favoritism of the rich or poor is banned (23:3, 6). Animals that belong to a hated neighbor must be assisted and returned to him (23:4–5). The acceptance of bribes by leaders is banned (23:8). Oppression of strangers is prohibited (23:9). God's law is to rule over the affairs of men, irrespective of anyone's personal emotions concerning the "worthiness" of a man or his cause. All men are worthy to receive God's justice, just as all men are worthy of the wrath to come.

God's justice is *constant*.⁵ It is constant because it is *theocentric*.⁶ It reflects the unchanging character of God. God's justice on judgment day will be reliable. Therefore, human judges are required by God to strive to become analogously reliable. They are to render decisions in terms of the fixed principles of biblical law.

This does not mean that the application of the law's principles is essentially a near-mechanical operation. While the principles of biblic-

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 34.

4. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 84.

5. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 11–17. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3.

al justice do not change, the *applications* of God's general principles in specific instances can change over time, for history has meaning.⁷ Christ's replacement of the Mosaic ritual ordinances with new ones, baptism and communion, is indicative of the nature of the relationship between God's law and history.⁸ With the coming of Christ, the last and greatest high priest—a member of the tribe of Judah (Matt. 1:2), not Levi—God changed some of the specifics of outward and inward obedience to the permanent principles He set forth.⁹ He annulled through perfect fulfillment the jubilee laws governing land and slaves in Israel (Lev. 25:44–46;¹⁰ Luke 4:18–21¹¹). He transferred His kingdom to a new nation (Matt. 21:43). History is not static. Neither Jews nor Christians worry today about eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; that transgression is behind us. Jews and Christians do not worry about the absence of animal sacrifices in the temple. The principle of obedience nevertheless is with us still, and will be throughout eternity, in heaven and hell, in the resurrected new heavens and new earth, and also in the lake of fire.

Men discover new areas of dominion, for good and evil, that were not previously covered by judicial interpretations in courts of law. But this does not invalidate the unchanging judicial principles of biblical law. Men are responsible for the correct matching of the Bible's case laws to specific circumstances, either before they take action as individuals (self-government), or as judges who hear cases after others have taken action and are in court because of it.

C. Personalism and Intuition

The dispensing of justice is not an impersonal activity, meaning a computerized, mathematical operation, because men serve as both judges and judged, and men are not machines. The affairs of men are not purely mechanical or numerical; neither are their formal legal conflicts.¹² fitting case laws to circumstances necessarily involves reason-

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–17.

8. Cf. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1977] 1984), ch. 9.

9. Jews no longer sacrifice bulls and lambs to God, indicating that they, too, recognize this relationship between unchanging law and changing history.

10. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

11. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

12. One naive attempt to find an impersonal program for dispensing justice by

ing by analogy, frequently an intuitive process—a process beyond the scope of mathematics.¹³ Hayek wrote: “That the judge can, or ought to, arrive at his decisions exclusively by a process of logical inference from explicit premises always has been and must be a fiction. For in fact the judge never proceeds in this way. As has been truly said [by Harvard’s Dean Roscoe Pound], ‘the trained intuition of the judge continuously leads him to right results for which he is puzzled to give unimpeachable legal reasons.’”¹⁴ Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, perhaps the most brilliant epistemologist that the economics profession has ever seen, described the problem: “And it is because society and its organization are in constant flux that genuine justice cannot mean rigid interpretation of the words in the written laws.”¹⁵

1. *Inescapable Intuition*

Human reasoning cannot function without intuition. Reason can be *progressively disciplined* by either covenant-keeping intuition or covenant-breaking intuition, but in either case, reasoning is not a mechanical-numerical process. “Between the plasticity of the brain

computer was announced in 1983. General Robotics Corp., a private firm, set up an experiment in 1983 to offer people an “electronic jury.” People send in information concerning pending cases (federal criminal law) and have a computer analyze these cases. The president of the company, an engineer, stated that federal cases are the easiest to quantify. A spokesman for the firm announced: “We are attempting to replace the warm, living, human juries with a cold, dead, robot jury so that citizens may have a plain and speedy adjudication or arbitration of their disputes. Our slogan is ‘Equal Justice Under the Law,’ which will be a welcome relief to anyone who has ever had a trial by jury.” *Infoworld* (Feb. 28, 1983), p. 1. The experiment failed the test of the marketplace: profit and loss. It had to. Men think analogically; electronic computers do not think at all; computer programs are structured numerically (digitally). As computer programmer A. L. Samuel said so well, computers “are giant morons, not giant brains.” Samuel, “Artificial Intelligence: A Frontier of Automation,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCCXL (March 1962), p. 13.

13. Higher mathematics, as with all human speculation, also involves the use of intuition. The popular understanding of mathematics ignores this. fitting the aesthetic purity of mathematics to the external world also involves such things as faith, genius, and insight. It is not a predictable, automatic process, and therefore not “mathematical.”

14. F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. I of *Rules and Order*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 116–17. Hayek went on to say that “The other view is a characteristic product of the constructivist [top-down planning] rationalism which regards all rules as deliberately made and therefore capable of exhaustive statement” (p. 117).

15. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1971] 1981), p. 82.

and the mechanistic structure of a computer there is an unbridgeable gap. . . .”¹⁶ Intuition is the inescapable element of the incalculable in all human thought and decision-making. Intuition connects the “steps” in the human reasoning process, a process which in fact cannot be shown to consist of a series of discrete, identifiable steps. The process of reasoning is a continuum, and it is applied to change over time, which is also a continuum.¹⁷ Georgescu-Roegen wrote, “The intuitive continuum belongs to that special category of concepts about which we can discourse with each other without being able to define them.”¹⁸ This statement does not go far enough: *all* logical concepts possess this same quality of not being able to be defined precisely. The human mind is not omniscient; absolutely precise definitions are always elusive to man’s mind. The mathematician-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said, “As soon as you leave the beaten track of vague clarity, and trust to exactness, you will meet difficulties.”¹⁹ You will meet more than difficulties: you will meet failure. As Georgescu-Roegen noted, “any vocabulary is a finite set of symbols.”²⁰ The structure of vocabulary “does not have the power of the continuum.”²¹ In short, there is an inescapable element of *uncertainty* in exercising judgment. “A measure for all uncertainty situations, even though a number, has absolutely no scientific value, for it can be obtained only by an intentionally mutilated representation of reality. We hear people almost every day speaking of ‘calculated risk,’ but no one yet can tell us how he calculated it so that we could check his calculations.”²²

Men are not omniscient. They cannot know another man’s heart (Jer. 17:9). Only God knows men’s hearts (Jer. 17:10). “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (I Sam. 16:7). But we do not need to render perfect justice in order to render adequate justice. We render preliminary justice, and leave the rest to God. This is why capital punishment is required by God: it turns over the person immediately to the highest

16. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–72.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

19. Whitehead, *Science and Philosophy* (New York: Littlefield, 1948), p. 136; cited in *ibid.*, p. 90.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

21. *Idem.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

court of all, the throne of God. God does not wait for a judicially convicted person's "biological time clock" to deliver him into His presence for God's preliminary judgment.²³

2. *Inescapable Casuistry*

Despite the impossibility of man's ability to declare and impose perfect, comprehensive judgment, judges must not be consciously partial in the inescapable process of fitting biblical law to public facts regarding historical circumstances. Judges must not give men legitimate reasons to complain that biblical law is not a trustworthy guide for rendering judgments in history. God's law *alone* is trustworthy for rendering judgments in history, for at least three reasons. first, it reflects certain aspects of God's nature, both ethical and ontological (being). His law is permanent. Second, it is constructed to meet the needs of men, who in turn are made in the image of God. God designed the law for men and their circumstances. Third, biblical law fits the creation and therefore serves as man's tool of dominion. *Biblical law links God, man, and the creation in a hierarchical chain of command.*²⁴

The doctrine of creation provides us with a concept of *transcendent law*. The source of all law is external to the universe. It can therefore be permanent in the face of changes within the universe. This view of law stands in radical contrast to the Darwinian view of law as totally immanent to—immersed in—the creation. Darwin and his intellectual heirs have explained all life in terms of random changes: random mutations and adaptations within a framework of random, or nearly random, impersonal environmental change.²⁵ (Post-Heisenberg science has increasingly abandoned the Newtonian view of a deterministic, predictable environment.)²⁶ All human laws in a Darwinian world

23. This judgment by God is preliminary because God confines a soul either to heaven or hell, both of which are temporary places of residence. final judgment comes at the resurrection, when body and soul are reunited perfectly, and people are sent either into the eternal lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15) or into the final manifestation of the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21).

24. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3:B. See also Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

25. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion* Appendix A:F, Appendix C:F.

26. German physicist Werner Heisenberg in 1927 announced an important finding of modern physics, the *uncertainty principle*. An undergraduate college textbook in 1960 described it in language reasonably close to English: "This principle, which is derivable from wave mechanics, says that, irrespective of technical errors of measure-

must be relative. Law is part of the overall evolutionary process. Any correspondence between the *one* (general law) and the *many* (specific circumstances) may last for no longer than an instant. Darwinism produces *process philosophy*: the assertion of a world devoid of permanent standards.²⁷ A sea of randomness engulfs Darwin's universe, threatening to overcome islands of permanence. Randomness also engulfs the mind of self-professed autonomous man.²⁸

D. Legal Predictability

Justice is simultaneously personal and impartial. God does not respect persons, a doctrine that is repeated again and again in Scripture, as we have seen.²⁹ *Cosmic personalism*, meaning God's comprehensive judgment of every fact in the universe, requires *judicial impartiality* for human law courts. Men are to think God's thoughts after Him, within the limits of their creaturehood. Truth is placed before friend-

ment, it is *fundamentally impossible* to describe the motion of a particle with unlimited precision. We may specify the position of a particle with increasing precision, but in so doing we introduce uncertainty into its motion, in particular into its momentum. Conversely, we may observe the momentum with increasing precision, but then we introduce uncertainties into its position." G. S. Christiansen and Paul H. Garrett, *Structure and Change: An Introduction to the Science of Matter* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1960), p. 558. This observation about the limits of observation in the world of subatomic physics led to another disconcerting discovery: the light wave that enables the scientist to observe phenomena itself upsets the observation (or makes observation impossible) at the level of subatomic physics. The positions between electrons are far smaller than the smallest light wave, so the light serves as a kind of blanket that covers up what is going on. If smaller gamma rays could ever be employed in a "microscope," these would strike the electrons and "kick" them, thereby changing their momentum. In short, *the observer interferes with the observed*. "A quantitative analysis of this argument shows that beyond any instrumental errors there is, as stated by the uncertainty principle, a residual uncertainty in these observations." *Ibid.*, p. 559. As a result, the optimism of scientists regarding Newtonian mechanics as a perfect description of the physical universe has disappeared. But this textbook summary for undergraduates avoided the real problem of modern quantum mechanics. The uncertainty of the universe is now said to be fundamental, and not just our uncertainty of measurement. The unobserved "real world" is said to be statistical rather than physical at the subatomic level. See North, *Is the World Running Down?*, ch. 2.

27. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, pp. 385, 399, 437–38, 448, 50, 451, 451–55, 458–60, 472, 540–41.

28. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1955] 1967), ch. VII:I. For a detailed defense of this thesis from a humanistic viewpoint, see William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1958] 1962).

29. Deut. 10:17; II Chr. 19:7; Job 34:19; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; I Peter 1:17.

ship or hatred, class or status. Biblical law is not class law, contrary to Marxists. It is not the product of class conflict. It is accurate to say that the *arena* of biblical law's application is the historical product of ethical conflict between man and God. Conflicts between men are a result of this ethical conflict between man and God (James 4:1), but these conflicts are not the origin of biblical law. Biblical law, to use Marx's terminology, is not the "superstructure" that has been produced by the "substructure" of class conflict. The legitimacy and eternally binding character of God's law have nothing to do with the success or failure of an economic class. Neither rich nor poor can legitimately claim special privileges under biblical law. Therefore, neither rich nor poor can legitimately claim the right to favorable arbitrary treatment by the judges. Judicial arbitrariness is to be reduced to a minimum.

The characteristic feature of biblical justice is therefore its *predictability*. Residents in a biblical commonwealth have access to the law. They can understand it. They can exercise self-government in their relationships, for they know what it means to transgress the law. They know what God expects from them positively, and they know the sanctions He will bring against them negatively. This same confidence in, and understanding of, biblical law can be transferred to society's law-enforcement system. Men know that the judges are restrained by the same law that restrains them. They know what to expect from their earthly judges because they know what to expect from their heavenly Judge. He has revealed Himself to them in His law.

1. *The Jury System*

To insure that the decisions of the courts do not become dependent on professional lawyers and judges, a free society establishes juries. The priesthood of all believers is the theological foundation of juries: every redeemed person is a Levite. The Levites studied the law and gave advice to the courts. In biblical civil society, every citizen is a judge. Citizens can make arrests, and citizens sit on juries, declaring other people's guilt or innocence. In order to insure that common people retain in their possession the authority to interpret and apply civil law (including criminal law), the doctrine of double jeopardy comes into play. Once a person has been declared innocent, he may not be retried. The historic roots of this judicial procedural principle can be found in the Bible.³⁰ The modern practice in American courts

30. Greg L. Bahnsen, "Double Jeopardy: A Case Study in the Influence of Christian

of allowing civil suits against people declared innocent of criminal charges is perverse.

Any weakening of the right of trial by a jury of one's peers—including "scientific screening" of jurors by attorneys—is an assault on the integrity of the predictability of the law. It is an attempt to make law the plaything of full-time legal technicians rather than the jury's application to trial court evidence of general laws that can be understood by the vast majority of those who are covenantally under its provisions. This is why judges are to be selected in terms of their reputation for honesty (Ex. 18:21). Ethics, not mental gymnastics by highly trained legal specialists, is God's screening system for judges. This is also why God required that His law be read publicly to all residents of Israel during the year of release, once every seven years (Deut. 31:9–13).³¹ He wants people to know in advance what He requires of them ethically.

2. Judges and Justice

Law enforcement is ideally to be immune to a judge's personal connections to the accused, whether pro or con. Enemies deserve justice. So do close relatives. All men deserve justice, meaning the impartial (but never impersonal) application of biblical law to every aspect of their lives—judgments imposed not just by the state, or even primarily by the state, but by all forms of government, including self-government. The emotions of the judge are not the issue; *external justice* is the issue. An emotion-filled judge is commanded by God to provide the same impartial judgment which would be rendered by a disinterested judge. The issue is not emotion; the issue is self-government under biblical law. God is emotional. He *hates* covenant-breakers as passionately as He loves covenant-keepers. How else could He create the eternal lake of fire for His enemies? Out of His love for them? Hardly. Why else would He recommend that we do good deeds to our enemies, so that we might heap coals of fire on their heads (Rom. 12:20)? David could say, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? And am I not grieved with those who rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Ps. 139:21–22). Nevertheless, to render anything less than impartial justice is to impugn

Legislation," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter, 1975), pp. 40–54.

31. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

the character of both the law and the Law-giver.

The doctrine of the atonement affirms this principle of impartiality despite emotion. The demands of the law must be met. God the Father spared not His own Son, despite His emotional involvement with His Son. Emotions may be present in certain judicial cases, but they are not to influence the application of God's standards to these cases.

We must distinguish *feeling* in judicial administration—feeling in the sense of intuition—from *emotions* regarding the people who are being judged. Feeling is inescapable in the judicial process, meaning the informed yet intuitive “feel” for the connections between permanent law and specific cases which a judge develops after years of studying and hearing cases. This sort of feeling is inherent in the judicial process. Emotion may or may not be present in the mind of a judge during a particular trial, but its influence is to be suppressed by the individual judge. Should his emotions deflect the imposition of the law's requirements, and therefore affect the outcome of the case, the appeals court can overrule him.

E. Oppression and Envy

The law of God protects private property. An enemy's lost animals must be returned by the finder, and the animals must be aided by the one who finds them in trouble (Ex. 23:4–5). Animals are not to run wild, for they are under the dominion of man. Domesticated animals are tools used by man in his dominion assignment. In other words, both man and beast are under law. Neighbors are required by God to forfeit time and effort, suppressing any emotions of vengeance, in order to see to it that the tools of dominion are returned to the lawful owner. finders are not to become keepers unless they become buyers. In one sense this is a requirement of charity; in another sense it is simply respect for the order of creation and its law-based hierarchy of command and responsibility.

No group within the commonwealth may legitimately be singled out for oppression. The context here places “oppression” within the category of legal judgment, not private economic oppression. There must not be false or partial justice. (By “partial,” I mean both “deliberately incomplete” and “not impartial.”) The productivity of those who would otherwise be likely victims of judicial discrimination can flourish when they know that they will be permitted to keep the fruits of their labor. The division of labor increases as a direct result, because

men are more willing to cooperate with each other in production. Output per capita increases, and therefore so does wealth per capita. Legal predictability, the product of impartial justice and permanent legal standards, produces greater wealth than any other system of justice.

1. With Justice for All

The court is to be a place of justice for all men, without respect to their economic position. Bearing false witness is described in Exodus 23 as being an aspect of oppression. The innocent are to be protected (v. 7), bribes are to be rejected by judges (v. 8), and the stranger is not to be oppressed (v. 9). When men can have reasonable faith in the content of the law and the reliability of the judges, they can cooperate with each other less expensively. The division of labor increases, along with voluntary exchange. Productivity increases throughout the society. The “miracle of the market,” with its benefits to all individuals who serve their neighbors by responding efficiently to consumer demand, becomes so familiar to the beneficiaries that they may forget the source of their blessings: God and His law-order.

A society that is filled with envy-driven false witnesses who “uphold the cause of the poor” by means of courtroom lies, university indoctrination, guilt-manipulation from the pulpit, and orchestration of the public by the mass media, is a doomed society if it continues in its rebellion. The self-righteousness of the envious will not alter the reality of the economic effects of envy. All the rhetoric about “healing unjust social structures” and “providing justice for the oppressed” will not delay the judgment of God if the content of the promised utopian reformation is founded on the politics of envy.³²

By perverting judgment, men tear down the foundation of their liberties and the foundation of their wealth, especially their freedom to profit from their own ingenuity, labor, and thrift. They find that others are increasingly hesitant to display visible signs of their prosperity. Economic prosperity cannot survive when productive members of a society withdraw from entrepreneurial activities—the uncertainty-bearing, future-oriented, consumer-satisfying quest for profit—and instead become content to consume their wealth (and hide it) rather than face the slander of false witnesses who rise up against them in the

32. Gonzalo Fernandez de la Mora, *Egalitarian Envy: The Political Foundations of Justice* (New York: Paragon House, [1984] 1987).

name of the poor.³³

2. *Justice and Productivity*

As capital, including human capital, is steadily withdrawn from the marketplace and consumed, almost everyone loses.³⁴ Like the kulaks (successful independent small farmers) of the Soviet Union in the early months of 1930, who killed their livestock and ate them rather than put them into the newly collectivized farms,³⁵ so envy-besieged entrepreneurs are buying Rolls-Royce automobiles and “state of the art” stereo systems. At least they are able to enjoy their depreciating capital base while it lasts. This form of capital consumption is taking place all over the democratic and socialist West,³⁶ although not in the capitalist Far East. The cost to society? All the forfeited opportunities—employment, innovation, and general productivity—that this capital base, if invested wisely, would have produced.

Through their continual false witness against biblically legitimate forms of wealth, the envious promote the destruction of society’s capital base. So do all those who tolerate envy and do not fight it, or who fail to recognize it for what it is. And most incongruous of all are the wealthy victims of envy who indulge their masochism (or their desperate quest for acceptance) by continuing to attend and support envy-preaching churches, and who send money to envy-promoting evangelical associations, colleges, and politicians—all in the name of Jesus!³⁷

Without legal predictability, capitalism as a social system cannot flourish. Max Weber listed calculable law as one of the five major fea-

33. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, [1966] 1970), pp. 46–47, 88, 290–91.

34. Short-run winners: competitors who no longer feel the heat of competition from the oppressed, productive capitalists who withdraw; government bureaucrats and corrupt judges, who gain access to bribes; and those who are better able to prosper in the black market, which is where the hidden transactions will take place as the civil government becomes debauched.

35. On the forced collectivization of Soviet agriculture, see Lazar Volin, *A Century of Russian Agriculture: From Alexander II to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 224–34.

36. George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), ch. 15.

37. See my discussion of this suicidal phenomenon in Appendix 4 in David Chilton’s book, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 4th ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1986). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>). For evidence of the theological drift toward liberalism of the major evangelical colleges, see James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 165–80.

tures of the capitalist economic system.³⁸ The bulk of Hayek's legal and economic studies, from *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) to the trilogy, *Rules and Order* (1973–80), was devoted to a demonstration of the links between formal, general, predictable law on the one hand, and economic freedom and the market economy on the other. Too many economic resources are wasted under social systems characterized by judicial arbitrariness—scarce resources that might otherwise be used to reduce uncertainty in forecasting uncertain future consumer demand rather than uncertain future judicial decisions. By reducing judicial uncertainty, biblical justice frees up resources that can then be used to increase output per unit of resource input. Nevertheless, biblical law should not be interpreted as the product of capitalistic institutions; on the contrary, capitalism is the historic product of a world-and-life view favorable to the kind of legal predictability which is produced by respect for biblical law.³⁹

F. False Witness and Organized Envy

Individuals are commanded not to raise a false report. This is a specific application of the law against bearing false witness (Ex. 20:16). Raising a false report is the equivalent of slander; God cuts off the slanderer (Ps. 101:5). By raising a false report, men endanger their victimized neighbor, as well as the peace of the community. By misleading the judges, and by luring them into making improper decisions, the man who bears false witness endangers the trust which other men place in the judges and the biblical system of justice. This is why a stiff penalty is imposed on perjurers: the penalty that would have been imposed on the victim of the falsehood (Deut. 19:16–19).⁴⁰

1. Oppressing the Rich

The focus of concern in this passage is with false witnesses, corrupt judges, and the oppressed rich. The “oppressed rich”? Yes. The law warns against upholding the poor man in his cause or lawsuit. But if we are not to uphold the poor as such, then the poor man or men must be bringing a case against someone or some group that is not equally poor. This classification of “non-poor” included successful

38. Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. Frank H. Knight (New York: Collier, [1920] 1961), p. 208.

39. Part 1, *Representation and Dominion*, especially the Conclusion.

40. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 45.

strangers (v. 9), who were willing to remain as resident aliens in urban areas. Economic success, or the hope of success, motivated the stranger to remain. Once successful, he would be less likely to return to his people and the society governed by the religion of his people.⁴¹ The phenomenon of the successful outsider is a familiar one: Chinese in Southeast Asia and the United States, Indians in Africa, West Indies blacks in New York, and Jews everywhere.⁴²

This raises an interesting question. What if the false witnesses accuse successful people *in general* of wrongdoing? What if they argue that the rich are inescapably economic oppressors unless they give their wealth, or a major portion of their wealth, to the poor? False witness need not be directed against an individual in order to have evil consequences. It can be directed against any group: religious, racial, national, or class. In this case, false witness against "rich men in general" falls under God's condemnation.

A philosophy or ideology that condemns the rich in general is equally as perverse as a philosophy that condemns the poor in general. If men are rich because they or their entire society have conformed themselves to biblical law (Deut. 28:1-14), they are not to be condemned. *To condemn them is to condemn God and His law-order.* Conversely, if men are poor because they or their entire society are in rebellion against God and God's law (Deut. 28:15-68), they are not to be upheld. *To uphold them is to uphold Satan and his law-order.*⁴³

41. It is worth considering the possibility that one reason for the economic and academic success of Jews in the twentieth century was the combination of modern secularism and remnants of historic discrimination. Secularism assumes that religious differences that are based on dogma or theology are irrelevant, or should be. This has opened up universities, businesses, professions, and most other institutions to hard-working Jews. At the same time, the lingering sense of being set apart from the society at large has given Jews a sense of covenantal mission: to outperform the gentile majority. If the acids of modernism do their predictable work, economic and social success will tend to produce Jews who no longer have the "outsider's" mentality, and the humanistic quest for unity will undermine the sense of covenantal or family mission. We are seeing this in the United States today, where Jews commonly marry non-Jews, since they come into social contact with each other in the secular universities. As Joseph Schumpeter warned of capitalism, so is Jewish performance likely to fail in the long run because of its success. The very secular institutions that allow Jews to compete without religious, social, or racial restrictions will undermine their sense of "Jewishness."

42. Thomas Sowell, *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1983), Pt. I.

43. R. J. Rushdoony, "The Society of Satan," *Christian Economics* (July 7 and Aug. 4, 1964); reprinted in *Biblical Economics Today*, II (Oct./Nov. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/rjr-sos>)

The twentieth century suffered the temporary triumph of many philosophies that advocated state-enforced policies of compulsory wealth redistribution. Generally, these philosophies were promoted in the name of democracy. In effect, advocates of these philosophies propose a revision of the eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote.” Other versions of collectivism are promoted as elitist programs that need to be imposed on the “rich” in the name of the poor, even when a majority of voters are opposed to the programs. These philosophies universally bear false witness against the rich in general, charging that the rich have exploited the poor throughout history. Marxism is only the most successful and most consistent of these philosophies of organized envy. There are many others: Fabian socialism, national socialism (Nazism), the corporate state (fascism), social democracy, populism, liberation theology, Christian socialism, the New World Order, the New International World Order, New Age communalism, and hundreds of variants. These philosophies have produced political movements that have pressured politicians to pass legislation that oppresses the productive: the present rich (though seldom the “super rich”)⁴⁴ and the future rich, meaning all those who would like the opportunity to become rich, i.e., the middle class entrepreneur, the independent businessman, and the potentially productive but presently poor person, whose avenues for advancement are cut off.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Because all men are under God and responsible to God, justice is to be impartial and predictable. It is not to be arbitrary, for God is not arbitrary. Law is both constant and theocentric, although applications of God’s fixed laws can and have changed, as a result of new historical circumstances. The Bible gives us our standards of application, just as it gives us God’s law.

Men are to judge in terms of God’s law. This process of rendering judgment is not mechanical. It is personal and covenantal. It involves the use of intuition, either Bible-based or humanistic. There is no escape from the “humanness” of human judgment. What is needed to restrain men from arbitrariness in rendering judgment is a system of

44. Ferdinand Lundberg, *The Rich and the Super Rich* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Lyle Stuart, 1968).

45. See, for example, Walter Williams, *The State Against Blacks* (New York: New Press, McGraw-Hill, 1982).

biblical law which restrains the flights of judicial fancy of intuition-guided judges. But we can never totally eliminate uncertainty from the judicial process. The price of perfectly certain justice is astronomical; it would destroy justice.

Legal predictability is one of the fundamental historical foundations for the development of capitalism in the West. The rise of envy-based political and economic systems is now threatening the productivity and very survival of them. Reason can be *progressively disciplined* by either covenant-keeping intuition or covenant-breaking intuition, but in either case, reasoning is not a mechanical-numerical process. "Between the plasticity of the brain and the mechanistic structure of a computer there is an unbridgeable gap. . . ." ⁴⁶

46. Georgescu-Roegan, *Entropy Law*, p. 90.

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FINDERS SHOULD NOT BE KEEPERS

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him (Ex. 23:4–5).

This case law, because it deals with property, is governed by the theocentric principle of God as the cosmic Owner. He has delegated temporary ownership of selected portions of His property to individuals and organizations, so that they might work out their salvation or damnation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).¹ Because God has delegated responsibility for the care and use of His property to specific individuals or organizations, who are held responsible for its management, others are required to honor this distribution of ownership and its associated responsibilities.

Exodus 23:4–5 requires the person who finds a stray domesticated beast to return it to its owner, an enemy. Why specify an enemy? Because, if a person is obedient to this narrowly defined law, he will also be obedient to the wider implications of the law. It is not that one may lawfully ignore a friend's lost animal, but return an enemy's. The Law-giver assumes that anyone who will do a favor for an enemy will also do a favor for a friend.

There are several beneficial results of such a moral injunction whenever it is widely obeyed. First, it upholds the sanctity of the legal rights of property owners. Second, it reasserts man's legitimate control over the animal creation. Third, it reduces hostilities between enemies. Fourth, the passage of time makes it easier to identify thieves. Fifth, it provides an incentive to develop marks of private ownership. It must be stressed from the beginning, however, that this law is not a civil law,

1. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, 2012), ch. 20.

for there is no way biblically to develop a system of compulsory charity or compulsory righteousness through the civil government. Exodus 23:4–5 is rather a moral law to be enforced through self-government.

A. Owner's Rights

There is a rhyme that English-speaking children chant, "Finders, keepers; losers, weepers." When one child finds a toy or possession of another, he torments the owner with this chant. Yet his very chanting testifies to the fact that the tormenter really does not believe in his ethical position. If he really wanted to keep the object, he would not admit to the victim that he had found it. He would forego the joys of tormenting the victim for the pleasure of keeping the object. The tormenter can always appeal to his own parents, who will then go to the parents of the tormenter. In Western society, most parents know that the discovered object is owned by the loser.

From time to time, someone discovers a very valuable lost object, such as a sack of money that had dropped out of an armored car. When he returns it to the owner, the newspapers record the story. Invariably, the doer of the good deed receives a series of telephone calls and letters from anonymous people who inform him that he was a fool, that he should have kept the money. Again, this is evidence of the West's dominant ethical position: the critics prefer to remain anonymous.

1. *Rights of Disposal*

From a legal standpoint, the reason why the law requires the finder to return the lost item to the owner is that the owner owns the rights of use and disposal of the property. What is owned is the *right to exclude* other people from using the property. This "bundle of rights" is the essence of ownership. The capitalist system is not based on "property rights"; it is based on the legal rights to control the use and disposal of property. Nothing inheres in the property that gives these rights.

There is another familiar phrase, "possession is nine-tenths of the law." This is incorrectly stated, if by "possession" we mean physical control over some object. The possession which is nine-tenths of the law is the possession of the *legal right to exclude*, not possession of the physical object itself. The object does not carry this legal right with it when it wanders off or is lost by the owner.

We can see this easily when we consider the case of a lost child.

The fact that someone discovers a lost child obviously transfers no legal right to keep the child. The child is to be returned to the parents or to the civil authorities who act as legal agents of the parents. Possession is clearly not nine-tenths of the law. If anything, possession of a long-lost child subjects a person to the threat of being charged with kidnapping. Because God is the ultimate owner of mankind, He has delegated the legal right to control children to parents, except in cases of physical abuse by parents that threatens the life of the child. In short, parental authority is nine-tenths of the law, not merely possession of physical control over a particular child.

When someone who discovers another person's property is required by God to return it to its owner, there can be no doubt concerning the Bible's commitment to the private ownership of the means of production. *Biblical moral law undergirds a capitalist economic order. Socialism is anti-biblical.* Where biblical moral law is self-enforced, and biblical civil law is publicly enforced, capitalism *must* develop. The reason why most modern Christian academics in the social sciences are so vocal in their opposition to biblical law is that they are deeply influenced by socialist economic thought. They recognize clearly that their socialist conclusions are incompatible with biblical law, so they have abandoned biblical law.²

B. Dominion Through Judgment

This case law extends man's dominion over nature: domesticated animals are not to "run wild." They are under man's care and protection. This reasserts man's place under God but above the animals: point two of the biblical covenant model, hierarchy³—appropriate for the Book of Exodus, as the second book of the Pentateuch.

1. Animals Are Subordinate

A law requiring a man to help an animal that has fallen because of too heavy a burden is similar in intent to the law regarding wandering animals. The owner is present with the animal, however: "thou shalt surely help with him." He has overburdened his animal, and it has

2. A good example of such antinomian socialist reasoning is John Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), ch. 4. See also my response, *ibid.*, pp. 198–203. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

fallen. The typical response of an enemy would be, "Well, that good-for-nothing has now gone too far. He has broken the back of his own animal. Let him find out just how much trouble it is to set things straight. Let him untie all the packages, lift up the beast, and repack." The problem with this approach is that the beast is suffering for the errors of its owner. The owner is having trouble, but so is the innocent beast. Should the beast suffer needlessly? The law directs a passerby to go over and help lift the beast back to its feet. This is a two-person job: one to help up the beast, and the other to help lift its burden. Man is to be a protector of those under his authority, including animals.

A lost animal can damage other people's property (Ex. 22:5). It can wander into a pit and get hurt or killed (Ex. 21:33–34).⁴ It can injure men or other animals (Ex. 21:35–36).⁵ To have a domesticated lost animal wandering without any form of supervision testifies against the dominion covenant. It is a sign that God's required moral and hierarchical order has broken down. It is an aspect of God's curse when beasts inherit the land (Ex. 23:29). In short, domesticated animals require supervision by man.

No man's knowledge is perfect. Men can lose control over their domestic work animals. When they do, it becomes a moral responsibility for other men to intervene and restore order. This is done for the sake of biblical social order: (1) for the individual who has lost control over his animal and who is legally responsible for any damage that it might perform, and (2) for the sake of the animal itself.

A domesticated animal is a capital asset, a tool of production. Mankind's development of tools of production is the basis of economic growth. The loss of a trained work animal reduces its owner's ability to subdue his portion of the earth. This sets back the fulfillment of God's dominion covenant with mankind. This loss of production reduces the per capita economic growth of the whole community, even though the loss may not be large enough to be perceived. The person who finds a lost animal is required to restore it to the owner, even though this involves economic sacrifice on his part. In the long run, this implicit sanctioning of privately owned capital will produce increased wealth for all.

The biblical imagery of the lost sheep of Israel is indicative of the central concern of the Bible: *the restoration of moral and legal order, the overcoming of sin and its effects*. The lost sheep in history need a

4. Chapter 41:B.

5. Chapter 42.

shepherd. They are wandering toward destruction. God intervenes and brings them home. The New Testament imagery of Jesus as the great shepherd points to the theme of restoration.

2. Righteous Judgment

A principle of justice visible is here. These verses appear in between verses dealing with civil justice. The first three verses of Exodus 23 deal with impartial justice. Verses four and five deal with the lost or fallen animal. Then verses six and seven return to the original theme of justice: “Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and the righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.” The idea that links these verses is this: *if you treat an animal well, you will probably treat other people well*. If you will care for your enemy’s helpless beast, you will probably not pervert justice when dealing with a helpless person.

This law is also a way of bringing God’s eternal judgment on one’s enemy. “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee” (Prov. 25:21–22).⁶ One destroys a covenant-breaking enemy forever by treating him lawfully. Every good deed done to a covenant-breaking enemy, if he remains a covenant-breaker, adds to his eternal agony. This is a basic New Testament doctrine: “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:20–21).

C. The Reduction of Personal Hostilities

When your enemy goes out of his way to restore a lost asset to you, it becomes more difficult to hate him. He has demonstrated his commitment to God’s law. This identifies him as someone who respects the terms of God’s covenant. This covenant is personal, not impersonal. All those who affirm this covenant are personally bonded to God and therefore to each other. Thus, whatever the dispute may be between them, it becomes more difficult to ascribe comprehensive evil motives to anyone who honors this moral injunction. He has gone to

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 76.

some expense to restore a lost animal to its owner. This is a visible affirmation that the law of God is more important than the personal disputes of life.

Obviously, it would be close to impossible to gain a court's conviction against anyone who breaks this law. There would have to be witnesses. The accused person could claim that he had never seen the animal or other lost object. It is also difficult to imagine what civil penalties might be attached to this law. We therefore should conclude that the enforcement of this law is based on *self-government under God's law*. The person who returns a lost object to its owner is demonstrating that he acted out of concern for the law, not out of concern for the civil magistrate. He is a person who exercises self-government under law. Again, it becomes more difficult to entertain suspicions about his overall ulterior motives.

1. Maimonides' Rule and Social Conflict

Moses Maimonides' rule would drastically increase hostilities between Jews and gentiles: "The lost property of a heathen may be kept, for Scripture says, *Lost thing of thy brother's* (Deut. 22:3). Furthermore, if one returns it, he commits a transgression, for he is supporting the wicked of the world."⁷ In other words, returning lost property to a gentile is primarily a form of economic subsidy, not primarily an honoring of the principle of owner's rights. It is revealing that he cited Deuteronomy 22:3, which refers to the lost property of one's brother, and made no mention of Exodus 23:4-5, which explicitly deals with the lost property of enemies.

He did add this qualification: "But if one returns it in order to sanctify God's name, thereby causing persons to praise the Israelites and realize that they are honest, he is deemed praiseworthy. In cases involving a profanation of God's name, it is forbidden to keep a heathen's lost property, and it must be returned."⁸ In other words, in order to maintain the appearance of honesty, the property should be returned. The problem was, of course, that eventually these rules might become known to the gentile community, and they would learn the truth about those Jews who follow Maimonides' precepts: they are governed by a very different concept of honesty from what the Bible it-

7. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), III:XI:3, p. 128.

8. *Idem*.

self establishes. At that point, the rule of expediency would be recognized for what it is, and would therefore backfire, bringing reproach on the Jewish community. This is not the way to increase social peace between hostile religious groups in a community.

If the town is inhabited equally by Jews and gentiles, he said, the Jew must advertise that he has found lost property.⁹ But if the town is less than half populated by Jews, and the lost property is found where heathen generally congregate, or in a highway, the Jew is blameless in keeping it, because “whatever he finds belongs to him, even if an Israelite comes along and identifies it.”¹⁰ Maimonides warned his fellow Jews that if the owner is a Jew, and he claims the property, the Jew who wishes to follow “the good and upright path and do more than the strict letter of the law requires” should return it to him.¹¹ Nevertheless, he is not required by law to do this.

The following rule is literally a corker. “If one finds a cask of wine in a town containing a majority of heathen, any benefit from the wine is forbidden, but the cask may be retained as lost property.” Leave the cork in the cask. Presumably, Maimonides was worried about some sort of ritual pollution problem associated with gentile food. That fear is solved as soon as a Jew asserts ownership of the lost cask: “. . . if an Israelite comes and identifies it, the finder may drink the wine.”¹² What a system! As soon as a Jew identifies himself as the legal owner, he loses ownership. The other Jew gains ownership. This is not the best way to reduce personal hostilities within the Jewish community.

Maimonides provided one rule that makes sense, toward the end of Chapter 11: “If one follows the good and upright path and does more than the strict letter of the law requires, he will return lost property in all cases, even if it is not in keeping with his dignity.”¹³ But this *is* the strict letter of the law: Exodus 23:4–5. Any form of dignity that is not in keeping with it is a form of pride, and should be eliminated, or at least suppressed through self-discipline. Obeying the law regarding lost property is a good place to begin the process.

D. Identifying Thieves

The person who steals an animal and is immediately arrested

9. *Ibid.*, III:XI:6.

10. *Ibid.*, III:XI:7.

11. *Idem.*

12. *Ibid.*, III:XI:8.

13. *Ibid.*, III:XI:17, p. 131.

could offer this excuse: “I found this animal wandering in the area, and I was simply returning it to its owner. I did not know who owned it, so I was taking it home until I could make further inquiries.” This might work once or twice. The man could appeal to the case law in Deuteronomy:

Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost thing of thy brother’s, which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself (Deut. 22:1–3).¹⁴

This would not be a suitable excuse three or four times. If a person lives in a society that has developed an information reporting system, he has a legal requirement to report the whereabouts of lost articles to the civil authorities if he does not know who the owner is. Thus, as time passes, the “excuse of the wandering animal” fades. The owner who discovers his animal in another’s possession has a far stronger legal case than if this case law were not in God’s law-order. A lost animal is not supposed to remain indefinitely in another person’s possession, especially after the person who lost it broadcasts its loss publicly. “Thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it.”

E. Marks of Ownership and Reduced Search Costs

This case law makes it far more likely that a lost animal will be immediately returned to the owner. Thus, the law increases the economic return from marking property. This is an incentive to promote the spread of owner’s rights that can be legally protected. A person’s property is brought under his own administration through a mark of ownership.

By marking property, the owner reduces future search costs: his search for the animal, as well as the finder’s search for the owner. It reduces search costs for a neighbor whose crops have been eaten or ruined by a wandering beast. He can then gain restitution from the

14. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 52.

owner (Ex. 22:5). This is an incentive for someone who wants to protect his property (the beast) from thieves or to protect his neighbor's property (crops) from loss by building a fence or by restraining the animal in some way.

Branding also reduces search costs for the civil authorities if the animal should be stolen. By burning an identifying mark into an animal's flesh, or by attaching a tag to its ear or other flesh, the owner increases risks to the thief. It also increases risks to those who would buy from the thief. The identifying mark makes it possible for buyers to avoid the possibility that they will be charged with having received stolen property. As I mentioned in Chapter 17, English common law recognizes no such crime; it took statute law in the nineteenth century to make it a crime.¹⁵ Biblical law does make it a crime to receive stolen property knowingly, and even when the buyer does not know that the property is stolen, the owner has the right to have it returned to him. The thief never possessed the "bundle of rights" necessary for biblical ownership. God delegates ownership; He does not delegate it to thieves.

God's use of circumcision in the Old Testament era is an obvious parallel to the brand. So was the hole punched in the ear of a slave (Ex. 21:6). These were both marks of ownership. The New Testament practice of baptism leaves no visible mark, but it leaves a legal description in the records of a continuing third party institution, the church. It is also a mark of God's primary ownership. The same is true of property registration generally. Titles, deeds, and other marks of legal ownership have developed over the centuries, thereby extending the dominion of mankind through the development of the institution of private property. By identifying legal owners, society increases the level of personal responsibility. This, too, is a basic biblical goal.

F. Not a Case of State-Enforced Charity

The discoverer must sacrifice time and effort to see to it that the beast is returned to its owner. This might be seen as a form of judicially mandated charity, one of the few examples of compulsory charity in the Bible. Compulsory charity, however, is a contradiction. Charity must always be voluntary. It is governed by the legal principle that the recipient has no judicially enforceable entitlement to the gift. This

15. Wayne LaFave and Austin Scott, Jr., *Handbook on Criminal Law* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: West, 1972), pp. 681–91: "Receiving Stolen Property."

is why the modern welfare state is careful to label its compulsory wealth-redistribution programs as *entitlements*. The creators of these programs want to get away from any suggestion of voluntarism, which implies that the donor has the right to refuse to make the gift. Thus, this case law is not related to charity. The owner has a legal claim on the property. He has an entitlement. The person who finds the lost animal is expected to honor this legal claim, even though it costs him money or time to do so.

This law requires a form of wealth-redistribution. The one who discovers the lost animal owes it to the owner to return it. This is a positive injunction. So is the law to assist an enemy whose animal has fallen down. Yet biblical civil law, I have argued, does not issue positive injunctions. It does not compel anyone to do good; it merely prohibits people from doing public evil. Thus, I conclude that this law is not a civil law, but is rather a moral injunction. There is no civil sanction attached to it, nor is there any general judicial principle of restitution that would enable the judges to determine a proper sanction. The civil government therefore has no role to play in the enforcement of this law.

The civil government can legitimately become involved if the person who owns the beast discovers it in someone else's possession. The suspicion of theft immediately arises. This threat is an incentive for the discoverer to return it to its owner, in order to avoid future criminal prosecution for theft. But this is a separate issue. The case law in question should be seen as a moral responsibility placed on the individual directly by God, and not as a civil statute.

Conclusion

The righteous person is not to use circumstances to gain revenge on his enemy at the expense of the innocent and helpless. He must do what he can to restore order—economic and moral—in his dealings with his enemies. This means that God's purposes for society are more important than men's short-term personal feuds. This is not to say that society is always more important than the individual is; it is to say that *God's purposes* are more important than man's purposes, either for society or for individuals.

God's requirement of returning a lost animal or lifting up a fallen domestic animal is imposed in order to restore harmonious relations among enemies, and to help fulfill the dominion covenant. While a

short-run burden is placed on the man who comes across a lost or fallen animal, he knows that in the long run his own interests as a property owner are improved when people honor this law. If he refuses to honor it, then others may also refuse. Thus, honoring the terms of the law improves the safety and security of all members of society.

This case law is an example of a biblical injunction that is narrowly circumscribed, but which in fact has wide application. The finder is to return the lost animal to the owner, an enemy. Does this mean that he need not return a lost animal to his friend? No; the focus of the law is on the case where the temptation is greater to keep the animal: the enemy's beast. The law assumes that if you are required to obey it in the difficult case, you surely are required to obey it in the easier case.

BRIBERY AND OPPRESSION

And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous (Ex. 23:8).

The theocentric issue here is God as a righteous Judge. His judgment cannot be purchased by anyone. He honors His law, not gifts from men. “Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (II Chron. 19:7). He sets the standard for rendering judgment; human judges are to follow it. “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deut. 16:19).¹

The context of this law is official judgment rendered by a court. Judges are not to render false judgment in favor of a poor man (Ex. 23:3) or against him (Ex. 23:6). People are not to offer false witness in a court against a righteous person (Ex. 23:7). They are not to oppress a stranger (Ex. 23:9). Such corrupt judicial acts constitute oppression, which points to the most common source of oppression in society: a misuse of God’s authorized monopoly of justice, the courts.² *Oppression is therefore primarily judicial*: either the court renders false judgment or else it refuses to prosecute a righteous person’s cause. “They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate” (Amos 5:12). The court indulges in official sins of commission or omission. It is supposed to uphold God’s *mission* by rendering righteous judgment as a means of national and international evangelism.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 40.

2. See Chapter 48.

my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).³

A. Blaming Capitalism

In the analysis of oppression that is offered by modern socialists, the free market is the source. Competition is seen as ruthless, immoral, and man-destroying. Capitalism in this view is not a system governed by the principle of customer's authority,⁴ but rather a system of consumer exploitation by unscrupulous businessmen whose goal is to hold down wages and raise prices. (In fact, free market firms raise wages through their mutual competition for scarce labor services,⁵ and also by investing in capital that increases the productivity of the workers.⁶ They reduce prices in their endless quest for new consumers.⁷ They are forced to do this through the competitive market process, because they are economic agents of the consumers.⁸) Karl Marx concluded volume 1 of *Das Kapital* (the only volume published in his lifetime) with these words: ". . . the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of self-earned private property; in other words, the expropriation of the labourer."⁹ A few pages earlier, he had prophesied the inevitable communist revolution in these envious and apocalyptic terms: "The knell of capitalist private

3. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

4. In earlier editions, I followed W. H. Hutt's usage: "consumer's sovereignty." But this is a legal category. Here, I emphasize economic authority, not legal sovereignty. See W. H. Hutt, "The Nature of Aggressive Selling," *Economica*, 12 (1935); reprinted in *Individual Freedom: Selected Works of William H. Hutt*, eds. Svetozar Pejovich and David Klingaman (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1975).

5. Gary North, "Exploitation and Knowledge," *The Freeman* (Jan. 1982).

6. Percy L. Greaves, Jr., "How Wages Are Determined," *The Freeman* (July 1970). (<http://bit.ly/GreavesWages>)

7. Gary North, "Price Competition and Expanding Alternatives," *The Freeman* (Aug. 1974). (<http://bit.ly/gnprice>); Cf. North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

8. Gary North, "Who's the Boss?" *The Freeman* (Feb. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/gnwho>)

9. Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: Modern Library, [1867] 1906 ed.), p. 848.

property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.”¹⁰

1. *Capitalism's Critics*

Such rhetoric has been highly influential in academic circles, including Christian academic circles. Before its embarrassed exit from the public arena after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, liberation theology was the most consistent and most visible theological by-product of such a view of the free market. The movement was dominated by extreme leftists, whose ideas were imported from Marxism. The movement collapsed when its social and economic model was abandoned by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was disbanded by its leaders. When the USSR lost power, this undermined the legitimacy of liberation theology, which had always been committed to political power as the proper way to manage the economy.

Liberation theology's intellectual legacy of the rejection of capitalism remains quite common in neo-evangelical colleges and seminaries—schools that do not openly adopt liberation theology, for fear of the wrath of the donors and the parents of prospective students. This outlook was dominant prior to 1991. Evidence of this bias was provided by George Grant, who in 1987 and 1988 visited 116 evangelical Protestant colleges, relief and development agencies, missionary groups, and charities in the United States. He asked for copies of their recommended reading lists; at the colleges, he got the required reading texts. After many months of this, he compiled a list of over three dozen of the most common titles. Without exception, they all shared an essentially anti-capitalist outlook. There was not a single openly pro-free market book on the list. Five of these titles were published by Orbis Books, the publishing outlet of the Roman Catholic Maryknoll Order, and the primary liberation theology publishing house in the United States.¹¹

By focusing on what is no more than a secondary source of economic oppression in society, the free market's system of private property, critics of capitalism have misled millions of people. The free market is not a major source of oppression, although the visible manifestations of oppression frequently are found in economic transactions. The source of oppression is the misuse of a biblically legitimate mono-

10. *Ibid.*, p. 837.

11. *Good News to the Poor* by Julio de Santa Ana, *God So Loved the Third World* by Tom Hanks, *Christ Outside the Gates* by Orlando Costas, *The Bible of the Oppressed* by Elsa Tamez, *The Militant Gospel* by Alfredo Fierro.

poly: the civil court system. Political oppressors in the West from the medieval period until the late seventeenth century were generally the allies of unscrupulous, power-seeking and rent-seeking¹² agricultural aristocrats, and from the eighteenth century until the Great Depression of the 1930s were allies of unscrupulous, power-seeking and rent-seeking businessmen. Ever since the early 1930s, they have more likely also been the allies of unscrupulous, power-seeking and rent-seeking socialists, Communists, fascists, Keynesian interventionists, and lifetime bureaucrats whose main goal in life is to expand their ability to tell other people what to do.¹³ Long-term economic monopolies, ancient and modern, have almost always been the creation of civil governments.¹⁴

2. Bribes

Why do judges become allies of economic oppressors, thereby making possible continuing oppression? This verse tells us why. Citizens take a portion of their capital and “invest” it. They bribe a court officer to render unrighteous judgment or to look the other way and refuse to prosecute unrighteous public behavior. This verse focuses on direct bribes, but the principle of bribery goes beyond a direct payoff to a personally corrupt official.

Bribes can come in many forms, including promises for financial

12. I use the term “rent” as the so-called “public choice” school of economics does: *a stream of income*. These streams of income are not limited to real estate investments. Income from government-created economic monopolies is surely a form of rent. The most prominent figure of the public choice school is Nobel laureate James Buchanan. Gordon Tullock, a law professor-turned-economist, was for many years Buchanan’s intellectual partner, and should have been awarded the Nobel Prize in economics with Buchanan in 1986. He told me in 1988 that he had received two votes in the committee. I suspect the fact that he had never taken an economics course proved too embarrassing to the committee. A good introduction to public-choice economics is the textbook by James D. Gwartney and Richard Stroup, *Economics: Private and Public Choice* (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

13. This is not to say that big business has not also remained the beneficiary of the politicians. Big business has itself become the subsidized ally of socialists, Communists, fascists, and Keynesians. On this point, see Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); Carroll Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), especially Chapter 17.

14. D. T. Armentano, *Antitrust and Monopoly: Anatomy of a Policy Failure* (New York: Wiley, 1982); Walter Adams and Horace M. Gray, *Monopoly in America: The Government as Promoter* (New York: Macmillan, 1955); Mary Bennet Peterson, *The Regulated Consumer* (Ottawa, Illinois: Green Hill, 1971).

or other support during the next election.¹⁵ Roman Catholic moralist and legal scholar John Noonan's massive and brilliant book, *Bribes*, lists two pages of bribe prices in history: gold, cash, percentages, etc.¹⁶ Even the definitions of what constitutes a bribe vary widely. Noonan listed four sources of the possible definitions of bribery, "that of the more advanced moralists; that of the law as written; that of the law as in any degree enforced; that of common practice. If one is to say that an act of bribery has been committed, one should know which standard one is using."¹⁷ But whatever the definition, in whatever society, bribes are officially disapproved.¹⁸

This disapproval causes problems for explaining a nation's history. We forget or ignore the fact that some of our greatest heroes have been bribees or bribers. Societies prefer to avoid accusing some great national historical figure with the valid accusation of having been involved in this kind of scandal. Noonan commented: "Francis Bacon, Samuel Pepys, Warren Hastings are not merely respectable; they are heroes—respectively the founders, in the view of their admirers, of British science, the British navy, and British India. Bacon was a bribee by the law as actually enforced; Pepys a bribee by his own measure; Hastings a bribee by the law that was being made. Apologists by the score have hesitated to give their bribetaking its proper name. As for bribers, judgment has always been even more charitable, the underlying assumption being that they are the victims of extortion. When the persons involved have been preeminently just, judgment has often been entirely suspended. Who thinks of Thomas Becket or John Quincy Adams as giving bribes?"¹⁹

B. The Power of the Bribe

The power of the bribe is very great. This passage tells us that wise men are blinded, and righteous men become perverse through bribes. The Bible repeats its warning against bribe-taking judges in Deuteronomy 16:19, Isaiah 1:23, Amos 5:12, Psalms 26:10, and I Samuel 12:3. It was this sin that Samuel's two evil sons practiced (I Sam. 8:3), and it led to the people of Israel calling for a king (I Sam. 8:5), which Samuel warned against (I Sam. 8:11–18). The judges' sin of bribery led step by

15. John T. Noonan, *Bribes* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), pp. xxi–xii.

16. *Ibid.*, Appendix.

17. *Ibid.*, p. xii.

18. *Ibid.*, p. xx.

19. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

step to the call for a stronger, more centralized civil government. It was difficult for Samuel to take a stand against the inauguration of the kingship when the judicial failure of his sons was the occasion of the people's demand.

1. Enforcement

Records from the ancient Near East do not indicate any actual prosecutions for bribe-taking. There are no Mesopotamian examples yet translated of any official's being punished for this crime—this, out of a total 100,000 cuneiform tablets in museums.²⁰ Nothing in the records of Egypt indicates that any official was prosecuted for this crime.²¹ Nowhere in the ancient Near East was there a specific civil law against bribery, with punishment specified. This was even true of the ancient Israel. "Reliance is not on human enforcement but on divine assistance."²² But Noonan understood that this is true of biblical history generally: "The enforcement of any law by actually applied human sanctions is not a prominent feature of biblical history. Vengeance is normally divine."²³ Noonan overstated his case with respect to biblical law, however. Deuteronomy 19 specifies that a false witness must suffer the same punishment that he had sought to inflict on his victim (Deut. 19:19).²⁴ There is no reason to believe that a judge and the one who bribed him would be any less subject to this penalty.²⁵ Case laws frequently specify the less obvious infraction in order to affirm the more obvious, e.g., requiring a person to return his enemy's stray animal to him (Ex. 23:4),²⁶ therefore indicating that this should surely be done with a friend's stray animal. If a false witness is to receive punishment on the *lex talionis* basis, surely a corrupt judge should suffer like-for-like retribution!

The combination of civil monopolistic power and the wealth transmitted by a bribe is too great for even good men to handle, so God prohibits bribe-taking. We never receive something for nothing,

20. *Ibid.*, p. 11. It should be recognized that only a small proportion of these tablets has been translated. Translators seldom translate as much as 15% of existing Near Eastern tablets.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

22. *Idem.*

23. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

24. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 45.

25. Why Noonan contrasted the Deuteronomic law regarding false witness with the absence of a law regarding bribe-taking is a mystery to me. Noonan, *Bribes*, p. 24.

26. Chapter 51.

except by God's grace. When a bribe is offered, it is not offered free of charge. *A bribe is not a friendly gift; it is payment for services received or hoped for.* But these services are usually corrupt.²⁷ When bribery becomes extensive, it is either because the rulers are corrupt already or because the bribers intend to corrupt them. Bribes are therefore a sign of widespread corruption.

This widespread acceptance of bribery as a way of life threatens the social order. When men believe that they can buy the civil judgment they prefer, they lose sight of the true character of God and the looming threat of His judgments, both temporal and eternal. People will eventually lose faith in a bribe-ridden social order, for a social order is sustained by men's faith in the character of God (real or imagined) and the trustworthiness of His sanctions. In a society marked by bribery, the guardians of social order no longer guard in the name of God and by means of His law. They make it appear as though they can sell God's judgment to the highest bidder. In response, God visits His judgment on them and their society. The *lex talionis* of the civil covenant cannot be annulled by civil legislation. It is basic to God's creation order. Societies will reap what they sow.

2. *Beyond Civil Corruption*

The corruption of the bribe goes beyond the civil order. It will affect family government, too. Noonan's insight is perceptive: *bribery is linked culturally and theologically to adultery.*

Metaphors drawn from the vocabulary of sexual sin are used to describe the bribetaker. Since the time of the Roman Republic, "to corrupt" has meant both to seduce a woman and to pay off an officeholder. One "betrays" a lover or an office. One is "faithless" to a spouse or a public trust. The same religions, the same kind of commandments and examples, the same kind of sanctions have addressed acts of bribery and acts of unlawful intercourse. Taken at a certain level of generality, the same substantive goods are protected and promoted by both ethics. Each sets enormous store by fidelity. Each lays down the lines that separate a gift, understood as an identification of one person with another person, from the manipulative or exploitative use of one person by another person. As the sexual ethic disintegrates, or appears to disintegrate, before our eyes, we can ask whether the ethic governing bribes will follow suit.²⁸

27. Not in every case, however; see section D: "The Righteous Bribe."

28. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

Bribery is also similar to witchcraft, he argued. Both bribery and sorcery are ways of influencing the outcome of an event by illegal means. Both are believed to be widely practiced, though no one admits being involved personally. The formal accusations of both offenses increase during times of moral ambiguity and institutional disruption.²⁹ That adultery in the Bible is also connected to witchcraft and idolatry should come as no surprise. However, the fact that bribery, witchcraft, and adultery are linked in terms of ethics, language, and social function in the history of the West is not intuitively obvious.

C. Bribes and Higher Courts

It should be obvious that local church courts are uniquely vulnerable to being swayed by considerations of money. The local church, unlike the civil government, faces the problem of its dependence on essentially voluntary contributions. Civil courts do not face this problem of voluntarism. Civil governments can compel the payment of taxes by threat of violence, such as confiscation of property. Few people ever voluntarily offer lots of extra money to the tax collector, just to be nice. But people who consistently bring tithes and offerings to the local church, and especially rich people who bring extensive additional offerings on a regular basis, automatically become important figures in that congregation. The more debt that a church carries, the more influential such people become.

In a dispute between a tithing rich person and a tithing poor person, or especially a non-tithing poor person, a local church court may be tempted not to render an adverse verdict against a demonstrably guilty but very rich man. *This is one reason why higher church courts are so necessary: to allow a poor man to appeal to a more distant court that is less dependent financially on one rich man's contributions.* While a bribe may not have been offered to the church's highest officer, the pastor, the economic equivalent of a bribe may have been offered to him: continued local employment. If the rich man in his dispute in any way threatens to cease giving his tithe, or threatens to stop giving the extra offerings, or threatens to leave the church altogether, then his previous offerings have in fact become *retroactive bribes*. This is a practical reason why it is imperative for all voting members³⁰ of a

29. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

30. I am not saying that all communicant members should be forced to tithe as a condition of membership; only the voting members should be. Those members who refuse to pay their God-required share of the ministry should not be given judicial

congregation to be required by church law to tithe to the local church. The church's source of income must be wide and deep, in order to reduce the influence of any particular member.

The direct bribe is more likely to be offered to a civil magistrate than to a church officer. Why? First, because it is illegal to offer a bribe to a civil servant. Second, because the civil magistrate receives a guaranteed salary that is relatively independent of competitive pressures. Unlike a pastor whose church could be thrown into a crisis if a disgruntled rich person leaves, the civil judge has considerable coercive power over those who are tried by his court. Those standing before him cannot autonomously walk out and transfer membership to another jurisdiction before the trial begins.³¹ The people in his court are paying their taxes to a third party, the tax collecting agency. The judge will probably not lose his job if he renders an adverse judgment against one of them, unless one of them is a political power broker or a celebrity who is popular with the public. If he is a lifetime judge, nothing but threats of coercion or promises of secret rewards may sway him. Thus, if he is to be influenced by a bribe, it is because he is *personally* after the money or other economic asset, such as inside information of economic value.³² In short, the bribe to a specific civil officer is far more likely to be obvious to the recipient; the bribe to the church court is more likely to be indirect.

Again, one of the reasons why a civil court of appeal is necessary is to insure honest judgment for those without money or local influence. A more distant higher court is less likely to be swayed by questions of a person's local influence. Also, the person who offers a bribe locally will find it more expensive and more risky to continue to offer bribes to higher courts' officers. Thus, the potential payoff of bribing a local judge is also reduced; on appeal, the favorable local decision may be overturned. The more visibly corrupt the paid-for local verdict is, the more likely it will be overturned on the basis of law.

status in the government of the church. If they refuse to place themselves under the ecclesiastical requirements of God's law, then they should not exercise authority over others in terms of the God's law. They should not hold any ecclesiastical office. Voting is an aspect of exercising citizenship, an office of judge. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision Press, 2011), ch. 9.

31. A "change of venue" plea can be offered, of course. The accused can request a trial in a different court. But such pleas can be turned down by the local court.

32. Henry Manne [MANee], *Insider Trading and the Stock Market* (New York: Free Press, 1966).

D. The Righteous Bribe³³

Exodus 23:8 forbids the judge's acceptance of a bribe. A bribe perverts the wise and righteous person. Thus, the judge who is righteous is characterized in part by his refusal to accept a bribe. The law of God is to be applied to each case before the court, irrespective of the personal advantage of a judge. The court has been granted a monopoly by God. It represents God in a covenantal hierarchy.³⁴ A judge is not to seek personal gain through altering justice, either to render a corrupt judgment or a righteous one.

But what of the unrighteous judge who rules in a corrupt society? What can righteous people do about him? If a righteous person is brought before an unrighteous judge or an unrighteous court, how does he gain righteous judgment? What if he is a stranger in some society that expects bribes from those seeking justice? An analogous example is the salesman who seeks to sell military equipment or other goods to nations governed by corrupt state officials. What if that nation's customs regarding state purchases recognize the legitimacy, or at least the necessity, of kickbacks and payoffs to public officials? In other words, what if some nation's traditions would rather have foreign capitalists pay part of the salaries of public officials, even though this means using tax money to buy possibly substandard foreign products? Obviously, to make such payments is to subsidize evil—corrupt officials—to some degree. On the other hand, to allow corrupt officials to continue to make personally profitable but socially bad decisions is also to subsidize evil to some degree. Wouldn't it be better to have a bribe-seeking public official profit from a good decision rather than from a bad decision? The question then arises: Are righteous people allowed to pay bribes, even though officials are forbidden by the Bible to receive them?

Contrary to most people's expectations, the Bible says yes. The Bible recognizes that in order to gain legitimate goals in life, righteous people are allowed to pay bribes to corrupt officials. In the same way that a bribe to a righteous judge is designed to twist righteous justice, a

33. The original version of this section appeared as Appendix 5 in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973). I have yet to receive a single criticism of the thesis. [Note in 2011: I have still received no criticism of the thesis.]

34. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 2, 12. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

bribe to an unrighteous judge is designed to straighten out unrighteous judgments.

1. Solomon's Recommended Strategy

Solomon the wise understood this biblical principle of productive bribery:

A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth (Prov. 17:8).

A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath (Prov. 21:14).³⁵

Notice the phrase, “a reward in the bosom.” It produces a mental image of a secret gift, one tucked away in one’s cloak. Nevertheless, someone might argue that Solomon did not have civil government in mind when he wrote these two proverbs. Perhaps Solomon had in mind only personal friendship rather than civil justice. But to argue in this fashion makes it very difficult to interpret Solomon’s use of the parallel phrase “a gift out of the bosom” in reference to paying bribes to civil magistrates:

A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom [under his cloak—G.N.] to pervert the ways of judgment (Prov. 17:23).

He had in mind a judge, someone who has the power “to pervert the ways of judgment.” Solomon was not talking about gifts of friendship; he was talking about gifts to produce favorable judgments.

It might also be argued that Solomon was simply commenting on the reality of the success of bribery, but not promoting the offering of bribes. If so, then why would he say of a bribe that “whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth”? Does evil always prosper? Not in the long run, certainly. So, he seems to have had in mind the *righteous bribe*—a gift to an unrighteous judge from a righteous person in order to gain righteous judgment.

2. Other Biblical Examples

When Jacob passed through the land controlled by his brother Esau, he had his servants present Esau with a series of presents, each

35. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 65.

nicer than the previous gift. He self-consciously decided to buy off his brother's wrath by a systematic program of bribery (Gen. 32:13–21).³⁶ Why was this necessary? Because his brother was a corrupt and present-oriented person. It was better, Jacob decided, to pay bribes to Esau in advance than to risk a military confrontation with him. The bribe, unlike tribute, was offered voluntarily in advance of Esau's rendering of judgment against Jacob. Esau did not impose a military defeat on Jacob and then ask for tribute from him. Instead, Jacob acted in advance of what he wisely expected to be a losing military effort when he passed through his brother's jurisdiction.

We also have examples of *negative bribes*: the imposition of unpleasantness on judges, with an implicit offer to stop, once judgment is rendered. Jesus told a parable of an unjust judge and a righteous widow. The judge, first of all, "feared not God, neither regarded man" (Luke 18:2). The widow comes to him to be avenged of her adversary. He refuses to render a decision. So she comes again. And again. She refuses to let him alone. Finally, he can stand it no longer. He announces, in desperation: "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" (vv. 4b–5). Let us not miss the economics of all this: the widow had offered the judge a bribe. "Render judgment," she was saying, "and I will give you peace. I will stop demanding judgment. I will *pay* you by going away and leaving you in peace." She was entitled to judgment, and she insisted on getting it. It was a reverse bribe: "I will pay you after the judgment is rendered." She did not ask for unrighteous judgment; she merely asked for prompt judgment. She asked for what God says that she was entitled to.³⁷

I realize that Bible commentators are not used to thinking in terms of subtle economic concepts such as reverse bribery. Yet we use a similar approach all the time when dealing with our children. We offer "carrots" for good behavior, and we offer "sticks" for bad behavior. We keep telling them to obey, with the harshest, most fearsome tone of voice we can muster; we make them feel uncomfortable. We implicitly promise to leave them alone if they obey. They dearly want to be left alone. When they do what we tell them, we once again speak pleasantly to them. They want to avoid our harsh words, so we devise a sys-

36. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 29 "Contingency Planning."

37. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

tem of negative rewards that uses this desire to our advantage. We also use positive rewards. We offer them payment if they obey. The goal of each kind of reward is the same: *gaining their cooperation*. The same is true of negative bribes and positive bribes: we seek to gain corrupt officials' cooperation.

3. *The Sermon on the Mount*

Consider also Jesus' recommendations in His famous Sermon on the Mount. He set forth suggestions for daily conduct in a world controlled by unrighteous people.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison (Matt. 5:25).³⁸

And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain (Matt. 5:40–41).³⁹

Jesus informed His followers that they should give to those in power over them, i.e., if anyone can *compel* our cooperation, an extra measure of cooperation. Give him your cloak also, He said. If such a gift were truly voluntary, we would call the extra gift a tip for good service or charity to the needy. What, then, should we call such cooperation under conditions involving the threat of external compulsion? *Obviously, this is bribery*. A bribe is a gift to a public official over and above what is legally required or officially asked for. Such a bribe enables a Christian to escape the full force of the wrath that, in principle, a consistent pagan ruler would impose on Christians if he realized how utterly at war Christ and His kingdom are against Satan and his kingdom. In other words, a bribe pacifies the receiver, just as Solomon said.

The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount is grounded on the principle that a godly bribe (of goods or services, cloak or walk) is sometimes the best way for Christians to buy temporary peace and freedom for themselves and the church, assuming that the enemies of God have overwhelming temporal power. Jesus was giving suggestions for a captive people who labored under the domination of the Roman Empire.

38. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

39. *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

This is also the context of His famous recommendation to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39). His advice should not lead us to believe that the proper Christian attitude under all circumstances should be to agree with our enemies. Perpetual forgiveness and endless toleration of evil should not be our attitude when we are given lawful authority over evil-doers. When we are given the lawful authority to prosecute, convict, and punish evil people in the civil courts, we should do so.

Jesus warned His listeners to “resist not evil” (Matt. 5:39). Is this a universal rule applicable in all circumstances? Not at all. James tells us, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Why the difference in the recommended strategies? Because Jesus’ words were directed toward a captive people who were under the heel of frequently evil local rulers who were the agents of Rome. He had in mind civil conduct by a captive nation. His advice? “Do not become violent revolutionaries. Don’t provoke a head-on armed conflict with military power that exceeds yours.” In contrast, James set forth a principle of moral conduct: resist the devil. Sometimes the best way to resist the devil is to cooperate temporarily with his subordinates, the way that Obadiah cooperated with King Ahab in order to save the lives of a hundred prophets (I Kings 18:13). We cooperate with evil-doers for the purposes of subversion. In effect, we become spies for God’s kingdom in a strategy of conquest. We do what Moses did as a young man in Pharaoh’s court, Rahab did in Jericho, Ehud did with Eglon when he brought the king a “present,” and Jael did with Sisera before he slept. We “play ball” long enough to get an opportunity to crush their skulls with the bat.

Does an evil civil ruler deserve obedience? No; he deserves eternal punishment. Is it wise for Christians to render an evil civil ruler obedience? Yes, but only if his judgments cannot be successfully overturned in court by superior magistrates or if he cannot be successfully overthrown by lower magistrates.⁴⁰

To the extent that a Christian’s position in some period of history resembles the plight of the Christians under Roman rule, he should take heed of the Sermon on the Mount. He should remain outwardly cooperative with civil magistrates. Under the rule of a Hitler or a Stalin, the Christian’s proper response is outward subservience. He should bribe the dictator’s lieutenants, join a Christian underground, and con-

40. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), Book 4, Chapter 20. See also Michael Gilstrap, “John Calvin’s Theology of Resistance,” *Christianity and Civilization*, 3 (1983), pp. 180–217. (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>)

tinue preaching the gospel, both openly (where legal) and clandestinely (where illegal). Bribes and outward cooperation gain people time and influence. The Christian can then continue his work of reshaping people's religious views, thereby undermining the power base of the tyrant. He should be as wise (and deadly) as a serpent by appearing as harmless as a dove.

This raises the practical question of how to deal with the Christian who insists in advance that he will inform on other Christians who break any civil law, or at the very least will tell the truth to any civil magistrate who asks him a question about someone else's law-breaking. First and foremost, such a compulsive truth-teller has not understood the Bible, especially the case of Rahab the God-honoring liar.⁴¹ Second, in a major crisis where the state threatens the church or obedience to biblical principles, it then becomes the moral responsibility of other Christians to lie to, confuse, and generally misinform any "blabbermouth for Jesus" in their midst. A real-world example of the threat of this sort of self-righteousness would be the case of Christians in Europe who hid Jews in their homes. Immediately after a successful invasion of a country, the Nazis insisted that all Jews report to local police headquarters. It was clear that the Jews were being shipped to concentration camps. Many Christians in the Netherlands, for example, hid Jews on their farms or in other hiding places. It was imperative that informers, Christian and non-Christian alike, not be given evidence of such activities. Lying to Christian informants was as ethical as lying to the state officials who were being served by collaborating Christians as their agents.

4. *The Failure of Neutrality*

If a bribe offered by a righteous man to an unrighteous court is legitimate in God's eyes, yet an offer of a bribe to a righteous judge is illegitimate, then a problem arises: how to discover a common definition of criminal behavior that encompasses the visible, prosecutable activity of paying off a judge. Can a proper definition be found that allows prosecution without relying on an investigation into the question of demonstrable intent of the briber? Can a biblically sanctioned legal definition of criminal action be imposed that does not raise the ques-

41. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 838–42. Jim West, "Rahab's Justifiable Lie," *Christianity and Civilization*, 2 (1983). (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>)

tion of the legitimacy of the judgment sought by the briber? Can both the briber and the bribee be legitimately convicted, irrespective of the intent of the briber?

The Bible's answer is clearly no. No common-ground definition of bribery is possible. There are biblically legitimate bribes as well as biblically condemned bribes. Judges must never accept bribes, the Bible teaches, but bribers are sometimes acting legitimately. Thus, *no common-ground, natural-law principle can be invoked to define specific visible acts that invariably constitute criminal bribery*. Noonan, as a Roman Catholic defender of natural law principles, searched in vain to provide a single definition of bribery that can be imposed on any society, irrespective of that society's theological roots. It is interesting that Thomas Aquinas did not invoke natural law theory in his discussion of bribery, and in this, Noonan said, "Thomas is representative of the medieval theologians working in the natural law tradition."⁴²

Here is what I wrote in the early 1970s. I have not changed my opinion:

There can be no neutral, universal application of a word like "bribery," for, to make such a universal definition, we would have to assume the existence of some universal, neutral, and completely accepted legal code. That is the basic presupposition of humanism, but Christianity denies such neutrality. Neutrality does not exist. Everything must be interpreted in terms of what God has revealed. The humanistic goal of neutral language (and therefore neutral law) was overturned at the Tower of Babel. Our *definitions* must be in terms of *biblical revelation*. Resistance to unjust laws is not anarchy; resistance to just laws is anarchy. Rahab was right, though her apostate state would have regarded her as treasonous; Judas Iscariot was wrong, though an apostate state regarded his actions as exemplary, and rewarded him handsomely. There is no universal definition of a concept like treason. God's law and His specific guidance determine what is or is not treasonous or anarchistic. Rahab was the saint and Judas was the traitor.⁴³

I linked treason and bribery together because they are obvious examples, biblically, of the impossibility of finding a universal definition of crime without any appeal to biblical ethics. What I did not recognize until I read Noonan's book is that treason and bribery are the two

42. Noonan, *Bribes*, p. 212.

43. North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 843.

crimes mentioned by name in the United States Constitution.⁴⁴

The legitimacy of certain forms of bribery points directly to the moral necessity of theocracy: the rule (*kratos*) of God (*theos*). If God's revealed law in the Bible is not acknowledged by the civil courts as the ultimate standard of civil law, then the state will of necessity convict people who are biblically innocent of any crime, or else fail to convict others who are guilty as charged. Once we recognize this fact with respect to crimes as important as treason and bribery, we also ought to recognize it with respect to the whole of civil law. To fail to recognize this is to continue to deny the moral and civil legitimacy of biblical law itself. Natural law theory is a myth. It is time for Christians to abandon it.

E. Highest Bid Wins: Illegitimate for Governments

We hear of bribes offered to public officials. We seldom hear of bribes offered to businessmen. We expect to hear of businessmen offering bribes, but we do not expect to hear of businessmen being offered bribes. Why not? Because the concept of bribery is linked almost exclusively to the misuse of a God-sanctioned monopoly, a judicial office. A bribe is a payment to an official. When one capitalist makes a cash payment to another in order to gain his cooperation, this is called market competition, not bribery.⁴⁵

1. Free Market Pricing

This illustrates a very important economic principle: *different systems of financing govern different sovereign spheres of society*. The principle of "highest bid wins" governs the competitive free market. If this principle were not honored, then the auctions (competitive open markets) of the world could not function, as we shall examine in detail below. Men always have expectations of how resources are to be distributed in any social order. If the principle of private ownership is maintained by the civil authorities, then people know that they have the *right to exclude others* from access to their property. The civil govern-

44. Noonan, *Bribes*, p. xvi.

45. An exception: a salesman who pays a bribe to a purchasing agent who is in a position to place a large order using his firm's money. They in effect "split the commission." This is a violation of company policy on the part of the purchasing agent, who is misusing company funds in order to get a personal reward. It is a criminal offense: theft. This must be recognized for what it is: a violation of company policy. It is not inherently a "capitalist act." It is a thief's act.

ment is expected to uphold ownership *boundaries*.⁴⁶ Only by offering higher and higher bids can other people hope to gain access to my assets and the key legal right (immunity) associated with ownership, namely, the right to exclude. The principle of *highest bid wins* is inherent in any society that upholds the private property system. The rules of economic order are known in advance, and people can make economic plans for the future in terms of these judicial assumptions.

The difference between the operation of the free market and the operation of the court system is that God has granted a legal monopoly of enforcement to church government and civil government. Courts must serve as the final voice of civil authority.⁴⁷ They are to be neither open nor competitive.⁴⁸ This means that they are not to be governed by the capitalist principle of “highest bid wins.” No man is supposed to be able to pay a court to gain his preferred decision, nor should people be able to “shop around” in search of a court more likely to be favorable to them.

A church government has been granted a unique monopolistic authority over those who have voluntarily covenanted with it (or whose parents have). A civil government has been granted a unique geographical monopoly over those who have covenanted with it (or whose parents have). The state represents God to those within its geographical boundaries, and it possesses an authority defined by constitutional law or custom. Thus, a court is not governed by the principle of “highest bid wins.” To imagine that such a principle governs the courts

46. This is point three of the biblical covenant model: Chapter 28.

47. If a national (or international) supreme court possesses, as a side-effect of rendering judgments in court cases, the constitutional authority to declare an act of the legislature illegal or unconstitutional—a power possessed by the U.S. Supreme Court (though not by many other nations’ courts)—this power should be tempered by the right of the legislature and the executive to combine (if they are divided) in a decision to overturn the supreme court’s decision, if the vote of the legislature is large enough (say, three-quarters of both houses of the legislature). Without this right of appeal beyond the supreme judicial court, a single agency of civil government gains the exclusive voice of authority, a power trustworthy only in the hands of God. On the accelerating power of the U.S. judiciary, see Carrol D. Kilgore, *Judicial Tyranny* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1977).

48. The legitimacy of a system of exclusively private, competitive, profit-seeking, free market civil courts is promoted by Bruno Leoni, *Freedom and the Law* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1961); cf. Murray N. Rothbard, “On Freedom and the Law,” *New Individualist Review*, I (Winter 1962), pp. 37–40; reprinted in one volume by Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1981, pp. 163–66; Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1973] 2006), pp. 282–90. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardFANL>)

is to imagine that God honors the same principle in His rendering of judgment. It would mean that rich people could buy a decision from God. But they cannot do this, even if they owned the whole world. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). God honors Himself alone by honoring His law. All men are judged by His law. He does not respect persons, including those who could offer him a higher bid. The basis of rewards in eternity is righteousness.

2. *Highest Ethical Bid?*

Someone could argue that the principle of "highest bid wins" still operates in God's courtroom of final judgment, in the sense that righteousness should be the true "coin of the realm," and therefore those who pay the most, ethically speaking, will receive the highest rewards (I Cor. 3:13–15). But there is a fundamental difference in the operating principles of the competitive market for goods and the closed monopoly of God's final judgment. The free market for goods operates in terms of *objective prices*, irrespective of one's relative capacity to pay. In contrast, God's monopoly of final judgment operates in terms of one's objective performance *relative to one's gifts*. The story of the widow's two mites informs us of this latter principle. Those rich people who gave much into the treasury did not give nearly so much as the poor widow who cast in two small coins, for this was all she possessed. Jesus said, "For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Mark 12:44).⁴⁹ God, unlike man, can search each heart. He knows what we possess and what it has cost us to give up something.

The principles that govern God's final judgment are predictable. They are revealed to everyone in the Bible. The principle of "highest ethical bid wins" *does* govern God's court: the perfect life of Jesus Christ, and His full payment on the cross. God's wrath is placated alone by this voluntary act of covenantal mercy on the part of Jesus Christ. Those who place themselves under Christ's jurisdiction thereby escape the perfect wrath of God. They then receive rewards in terms of their ethical performance, but only because they have first built on the foundation that Jesus Christ laid at Calvary (I Cor. 3:9–11).⁵⁰ These re-

49. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 19.

50. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

wards are granted on the basis of (1) gifts originally given to him by God and (2) the individual's lifetime ethical performance in terms of these gifts. The high bids are relative, not absolute. They are bids in terms of ethical performance, not financial performance.

A human court cannot search the heart in this way. The judges do not know what is in people's hearts; at best they can estimate. Human courts must render judgment in terms of public evidence regarding people's *objective external acts*; judges and juries can only indirectly search for a person's motives, for they must rely on objective, corroborated public testimony in the collection of facts. They cannot know what "ethical assets" any person possesses. Thus, a human court must judge human guilt or innocence in terms of people's objective conformity to God's revealed law. Whatever subjective motivations may have existed in the mind of someone who has committed a trespass, these motivations must be ascertainable through public evidence.

3. Financing Human Courts

This leads to definite conclusions concerning the financing of human courts. The principle of the "widow's mite" cannot be invoked to justify any particular financing system for a court. The "widow's mite" principle of sacrificial giving can be legitimately invoked only by God in rendering His judgments, in time and eternity, for He alone can search men's hearts. The Bible informs us of the principle of financing for the local church: the tithe. Samuel informed the Hebrews that the future king would also invoke the requirement of the tithe (I Sam. 8:15, 17). It was the level of civil taxation that Samuel warned against—a level equal to God's tithe—rather than the principle of equal proportional taxation.⁵¹

Human courts should not be financed by requiring all people to pay the same fixed money price, for this would allow rich people to escape their obligations too lightly.⁵² It would also either destroy the finances of the poor or strangle the courts. *The principle of the tithe must*

51. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

52. The so-called "head tax" of Exodus 30:11–16 was not a civil tax at all, contrary to Rushdoony. It was an atonement payment that was required before the Hebrews marched to war. See Chapter 58. See also James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), Appendix D. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>). Rushdoony's comments are found in *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 281–82, 492, 510, 719.

govern the two monopolistic human courts, church and state; each person under the jurisdiction of the monopolistic government pays the same percentage of the net increase of his income. This way, the poor person knows that the system is fair. He will receive justice because he has paid as much—a known percentage of his net income—as the rich man. He is therefore entitled to the same impartial justice.

On the other hand, the graduated income tax—making rich people pay a larger percentage of their income than other pay—is as corrupt as the so-called “head tax” system. Coupled with democratic voting privileges, the graduated income tax transfers legal control over one group’s wealth into the hands of another. Karl Marx believed that when a graduated income tax is imposed on a nation, in principle it has taken one of the ten steps toward communism.⁵³ The almost universal acceptance in the twentieth century of the legitimacy of the “progressive” income tax was indicative of just how far the modern world had drifted (or run) from the Bible. Even economists who defend the free market have frequently accepted its legitimacy.⁵⁴ That Christian social thinkers should promote the graduated income tax in the name of Jesus is almost beyond belief; that one of them should call for a “graduated tithe”—a graduated ten percent?—indicates the extent of the moral and intellectual confusion of our day.⁵⁵

Civil courts should be financed through tax revenues raised by equal proportional giving by the rich, the middle class, and the poor, either by a sales tax or an income tax.⁵⁶ The *principle of proportionality* must govern civil governments, for they are closed monopolies, not open competitive markets. The predictability of the courts’ enforcement of God’s law is the foundation of justice, both civil and ecclesiastical. It is also the foundation of social peace. Taking a bribe corrupts a Bible-based judicial system, for it introduces uncertainty and judicial self-interest into the court. The poor person never knows if he can trust the court, because a rich man may pay a small percentage of his

53. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1969] 1977), III, p. 126.

54. Walter J. Blum and Harry Kalven, Jr., *The Uneasy Case for Progressive Taxation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

55. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), pp. 175–78.

56. The sales tax is far more resistant to a call for graduated taxation, so I favor it. An example of a sensible tax is the tax on gasoline, assuming that all of the revenues generated by it go toward highway maintenance and safety.

assets to a judge—an absolute amount that is far beyond the capability of the poor person to match. A judge should no more take a bribe to pervert biblical justice than God would.

F. Highest Bid Wins: Mandatory for Markets

What I am arguing should be clear to everyone: *different forms of sovereignty require different forms of financing*. For example, to propose a financing system that is appropriate for the church or state as the proper way to run a competitive market system is to propose the destruction of the free market, as surely as the free market's financing principle would destroy the integrity of the church or state.

To examine how an institution can be destroyed by an inappropriate principle of financing, let us examine the operations of a competitive free market. Those potential buyers who bid the highest amount of money are thereby able to gain, through *voluntary transfer*, legal access to the sought-after goods, unless a seller for some reason prefers to forfeit money that is available to him in order to deliver the goods to someone making a lower bid. Such a below-market wealth transfer is a form of charity, not a profit-seeking business. While such decisions on the part of sellers are legal, they are not common. The highest bid usually wins. In any case, the highest bid inescapably forces the seller to consider the personal cost of not honoring the highest bid, i.e., forfeited income.

In a free market, auctions (the market process) are conducted in terms of public bids that are legally unconnected to considerations of the size of the bids in relation to the potential buyers' income level (the tithe principle) or net worth (the "widow's mite" principle). They must be separated, if increasing economic output and the competitive performance of producers are to be furthered.

1. Net-Worth Bidding

Consider the alternative. What if a society by civil law required all economic transactions to be conducted in terms of this principle: "the highest percentage of one's net worth offered in exchange will win the auction"—an economy based on the "widow's mite" principle? Bidders would not know who won the auction until a detailed study of each bidder's present net worth was conducted. Producers would be forced by law to sell expensive items and services to people who own almost nothing but who are willing to pay a very high percentage of their as-

sets in order to buy something. Obviously, production would grind to a halt. People would begin to produce only for their own personal use—outside of the open market. They would be afraid to bring their goods and services to sell to “highest percentage” bidders. The division of labor would collapse. So would per capita productivity and income.

An example may help to illustrate this. An automobile salesman would be required by law to sell a car to the person who offered the highest percentage of his present assets. Instead of a price sticker on the car’s window that says so much money, it would list a percentage number. “This week only: 35% of your net worth!” What would be the quickest way to buy the car? *Lower your net worth*. Instead of competition in terms of the production of assets, we would see competition in terms of destruction of assets. *The spendthrifts would inherit the earth*.

A poor man who really wanted a car to drive (or park it with an empty gasoline tank in front of his home) might be willing to give up almost everything he owns to buy it. He would therefore willingly come close to making the automobile into an idol. But he would not be pressured by the market to increase his personal productivity in order to buy it. In such a social order, no strictly objective performance is required: exactly so much money in exchange for the car. Instead, the test would be the percentage of his bid in relation to his present assets. This would virtually destroy the predictability of market pricing. A person with greater net worth who wanted to buy the car, either for personal use or business use, would be outbid by the person willing to make the car into a near-idol. Unless the second man was also willing to make the car into his own near-idol, sacrificing nearly everything he owns to buy it, he would not be able to buy the car.

2. Future-Orientation

The competitive free market encourages people to plan for the future, to become productive. It pressures them to use their skills and capital to create value—value registered in terms of competitive bids by potential consumers. To become a consumer, you must first become a producer, unless you are being supported by your inheritance, or by charity, or by the privately wielded sword (criminals), or by the civil government’s sword (welfare recipients). The market steadily pressures participants to become productive because it is governed by the principle of “highest bid wins”—bids usually registered by money, but at least in goods or services (barter). The market also pressures

people to become future-oriented. They have to earn money through personal productivity in order to make future purchases.

If the principle of “highest money bid wins” is abandoned, then the economic system becomes intensely present-oriented. People would look only to their present assets as the basis of their ability to buy what they want. They would be able to buy things by becoming poorer. If they can reduce their net worth sufficiently, and can squeeze their living standards down to the near-starvation level, they can buy their one dream item for practically no money, just as long as the purchase price absorbs a very high percentage of their assets. They sacrifice nearly everything they own, once, in order to make that one dream purchase. Attaining their dream impoverishes them. If this is not a form of implicit idol-worship, what is? The principle of the “widow’s mite,” which is appropriate for sacrificial *giving*, becomes a means of personal and cultural idolatry when it becomes sacrificial *buying*.

Another very efficient and pleasant way to reduce your net worth is to go deeply into debt for consumer goods and services that depreciate faster than the obligation is reduced. This, too, is counter-productive. It is a decision based on a deeply entrenched present-orientation.

3. *The Sellers’ Dilemma*

We have been speaking of buyers (sellers of money). What about sellers (sellers of goods)? Consider the car salesman. He sells cars, but he also buys cars. How would he be able to order a replacement car for every car sold? Only by offering the highest percentage of his dealership’s assets. Small, struggling, very high-risk dealerships that order a very small number of cars could get delivery precisely because they have so *few* cars in inventory, i.e., so little net worth. Obviously, the number of automobile orders would drop as small, struggling dealers became the legally competitive bidders. Fewer orders would lower the factories’ efficiency by increasing the cost-per-unit-produced, thereby reducing output. Reducing output is not the way to national prosperity.

Meanwhile, in the international competition for scarce resources, everyone outside the nation would be operating in terms of highest money bid wins. If you were a resource owner in another nation, to whom would you sell your assets? To residents of a nation governed by highest *money* bid wins or residents of a nation governed by highest *percentage of assets* bid wins? Probably you would sell it to whichever

bidder brought in the highest price. So, any nation operating in terms of “highest percentage of assets presently owned” would remove itself from the world’s market. Thus cut off, it would grow steadily poorer. It would be a nation characterized by falling production and the consumption of present assets. It would be a capital-consuming society.

4. *Privacy*

There is another factor to consider. Every transaction would require the seller to examine the assets of every potential buyer. The buyer (seller of money) would have to bring with him a government-authorized statement of exactly what he owned at that moment. It would be like paying your income tax every time you went to the market. It would be worse; it would be like going through an audit by the civil tax collector or ecclesiastical tithe collector every time you went to the market. No shred of financial privacy would remain in the society. It would also lead to the creation of counterfeit asset evaluations, for these would serve as the new currency of the realm. You can see where the principle of “highest percentage of owned assets offered in exchange” would lead to: reduced national competitiveness, reduced savings, falling income, petty tyranny, and massive cheating. In short, it would lead to bankruptcy and national extinction.

What I have described is a topsy-turvy economic world. It makes no sense. It sounds like a scene out of *Alice in Wonderland*. So, why dwell on the obvious? Because not all people acknowledge the obvious. They seek to operate one sphere of human existence in terms of financing principles appropriate for another sphere. Today we have far too many self-professed Christian social theorists who recommend taxing and financing policies that would drastically hamper or even destroy the free market. It is necessary to demonstrate clearly that the free market operates under a different set of financing principles from those governing a God-ordained monopoly government. The *voluntarily accepted* principle of “highest money bid wins” governs the free market. The principle of the *God-required* tithe governs the church. The principle of the *coercive* fixed percentage of net income (income tax) should govern the civil government, or else a fixed percentage of market purchase price (sales tax or use tax). In short, a monopolistic court is not an open competitive market. Both church and state are monopolistic courts.

Conclusion

Noonan's book on bribery is built around a single theme: that a bribe is a form of *reciprocity*. Why is it, his book asks, that reciprocity is basic to human life, yet in the case of bribery, it is condemned? His book provides no real answer. The biblical answer is primarily theocentric: *God's dual character as Judge and also as Creator-Redeemer*. Secondly, it rests on the difference between a monopolistic court and an open market. The court does not operate in terms of economic reciprocity; the market does. The court enforces the law of the God who declares that which is criminal and who specifies appropriate penalties. The reciprocity associated with a court is found in its imposition of a restitution program. The criminal repays his victim. The principle of reciprocity is enforced by the court on those who stand before it, righting wrongs and restoring order. There is no reciprocal economic relationship between the court and those being judged.

Men are wicked if they take bribes to pervert righteous judgment. God's laws are supposed to be every judge's standard. He is not to respect persons. He is not to favor one or the other. The court is to imitate God as the cosmic Judge: "Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts" (II Chron. 19:7). Yet we are told that God *does* take gifts: "And many brought gifts unto the LORD to Jerusalem" (II Chron. 32:23a). God never takes a gift or bribe in His capacity as Judge: "For the LORD your God is God of gods, and LORD of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward" (Deut. 10:17).

Noonan wrote, "As a believer in religion, I have asked how prayer and sacrifice to God are different from bribes."⁵⁷ What is the difference? It is the difference between worship and judgment. We do not lawfully ask God to pervert judgment when we pray or bring sacrifices to him. We honor Him as Creator and Redeemer, not as Judge. Civil judges are not to receive gifts because they are neither to be worshipped nor asked to pervert judgment; they serve as representatives of God's justice, not God's character as Creator and Redeemer.

The evil of taking gifts is the evil of threatening unrighteous judgment through respect of persons. Taking a bribe is synonymous with perverting judgment; it is prohibited in the affairs of civil or ecclesiastical judgment. It is not wrong for pastors to receive gifts to the church

57. Noonan, *Bribes*, p. xvi.

in the name of God, but to the extent that these gifts are received in order to pervert justice, they are regarded by God as bribes. Thus, church rulers have a more difficult task in identifying bribery than civil judges do. The civil magistrate does not represent God in His capacity as Creator and Redeemer, but only in His capacity as Judge. He is unlikely ever to be given a gift, except in his capacity as judge. This is not true of the church officer, who receives gifts in the name of the church.

The Bible does not teach that bribe-offering is always wrong. If given by a righteous person who seeks righteous judgment from an unrighteous judge, it is valid. If given by someone to pervert God's law, it is evil. The quest for a neutral definition of bribery which equates both practices is a biblically illegitimate quest.

SABBATICAL LIBERTY

Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed (Ex. 23:9–12).

The theocentric framework of this passage is the prohibition of oppression of the people or the land itself. Like the people, the land deserved its rest. So did the animals. This has to do with sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model. *God is Deliverer or Liberator*. James Jordan has argued that the theme of the Book of Exodus is God's deliverance of His people from bondage to sabbath rest. "The instructions for the design of the Tabernacle culminate in sabbath rules (31:12–17), and the procedure for building the Tabernacle commences with sabbath rules (35:1–3). The book closes with the definitive establishment of Old Covenant worship on the very first day of the new year. Thus, the book moves from the rigors of bondage to the sinful world order, to the glorious privilege of rest in the very throne room of God."¹ I argue that the placement of the Book of Exodus as the second book of the Pentateuch indicates that its central theme is that of the second point of the biblical covenant, hierarchy.

A. Sabbath Rest

The theme of sabbath rest is one that should have been easily un-

1. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 75. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

derstood by the Hebrews. The rigors of endless toil under Pharaoh's taskmasters had caused them to cry out to God, the true Monarch, and He heard their cries (Ex. 3:7–9). He responded by sending Moses and Aaron with a request to Pharaoh: to allow His people to go three days' journey, to sacrifice to God, and then return—a seven-day round trip, a sabbath week of service to God rather than to Pharaoh (Ex. 5:3), although a week with the day of sacrifice taking place midweek. This was unacceptable to Pharaoh, who piled extra work on them as a punishment by forcing them to produce bricks without straw (Ex. 5:6–19). Thus, they saw the contrast: labor with sabbath rest periods under God versus endless toil under Pharaoh. They could have a feast with God on a day of rest (Ex. 5:1), or else they could remain in a strange land as slaves.

Initially, they chose slavery in a strange land, for their hierarchical representatives, the officers of Israel, complained against Moses and Aaron for having stirred up trouble (Ex. 5:19–21). They did not want to bear the responsibility of challenging a state that had attempted to slay their children and that had brought them into slavery to a self-proclaimed divine monarch. They preferred the familiar trials of slavery to what seemed to them to be a high-risk encounter with Pharaoh, not to mention the Red Sea, the wilderness, and the Canaanites.

Nevertheless, the prospect of rest from their labors had to be a tempting one. God offered them a sabbatical week of respite from their lives of unrelieved toil. *This sabbatical week was in fact symbolic of their deliverance.* Pharaoh fully understood this, which is why he refused to permit it. To grant them a week outside of his jurisdiction meant that in principle he would be acknowledging the sovereignty over him of the God of the Hebrews. This is what he dared not allow, given the theology of theocratic Egypt.² Granting sabbath rest for the Hebrews would have involved acknowledging symbolically his own covenantal subordination to God. The issue of sabbath rest is in fact an issue regarding God's sovereignty, meaning covenantal subordination.³

2. Chapter 10.

3. I have elsewhere argued that the New Testament places the locus of enforcement regarding the sabbath with the individual conscience (Rom. 14:5–6; Col. 2:16). See Chapter 24. To head off arguments that I am now denying my former arguments by making sabbath observance an issue of covenantal subordination, I need to point out that there are five biblical covenants: dominion, personal, familial, civil, and ecclesiastical. The New Testament's covenantal subordination is directly personal under God, meaning that sabbath enforcement is no longer a judicial responsibility of family

B. The Heart of a Stranger

The Hebrews are told not to oppress a stranger because they “know the heart of a stranger.” How can they know this? Because they, too, had been strangers in the land of Egypt. This raises a crucially important issue in philosophy, the issue of epistemology: “What can men know, and how can they know it?”

The question here is the question of empathy. It tells us that because we can look within ourselves, we can make judgments regarding the feelings of others. What they feel is sufficiently close to what we feel to enable us to make ethical judgments. This ability undergirds the so-called golden rule: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” This phrase is one of those famous phrases attributed to Jesus that He never quite said. What He said was this: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).⁴ It is closely related to Paul’s words: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Gal. 5:14). This is the requirement of Leviticus 19:18, which Jesus cited in Matthew 22:39–40: love your neighbor as yourself.

The humanist has a problem with this moral injunction. The problem was best stated in George Bernard Shaw’s play, *Man and Superman* (1903): “Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same.” There is an implicit lawlessness in this, as he says forthrightly in the same play: “The golden rule is that there are no golden rules.” If each man is autonomous, and therefore utterly unconnected with other men by feelings and interpretations, then life is anarchy. But on the basis of the logic of autonomous man, there is no sure reason to believe that there are such connections. It may be convenient to believe that there are, if only to make sense of reality, but there is no way to prove that empathy serves as a means of unifying mankind.

But there *is* a link, the Bible tells us: the image of God in man. Man is made in God’s image, and he is therefore responsible to God covenantally (Gen. 1:26–27). There are common emotional and ethical bonds in all men. These bonds can be actively suppressed, in the same way that the knowledge of God is actively suppressed by sinful men

(when dealing with legal adults), church, or state. A person should not be disinherited, excommunicated, or executed because of his or her failure to observe the sabbath.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

(Rom. 1:18–22).⁵ Nevertheless, these bonds serve as the basis of social cooperation, which in turn requires people to make ethical judgments.

The Israelites were reminded that they had been strangers in Egypt. They should therefore not imitate their tyrannical captors by imposing unrighteous judgments on those who are under their God-given authority. If they should do so, then God will remove this authority from them and punish them in the same way. To escape God's temporal covenantal judgments, men must obey God's law. *They must subordinate themselves to this law in order lawfully to execute righteous judgment on those beneath them.* As they do unto others, so will God do to them.

Then what about differing tastes? What about using our feelings as guides for dealing with others? If tastes are ethically random, or even ethically neutral, how can we rely on introspection as a guide to external behavior? The biblical response is clear: *tastes are neither random nor ethically neutral.* Tastes are inherent in men as God's creatures, although this testimony can be suppressed and twisted to covenant-breaking purposes. Because of sin, tastes must be governed by the standards of God's law. The Hebrews were supposed to remind themselves of what it meant to be an oppressed slave in a foreign land. They were required to eat bitter herbs each year at Passover (Ex. 12:8). Tastes are not random; bitter herbs for one person will taste bitter for others. The memory of the bitterness of slavery would be preserved by the bitter taste in people's mouths each year at the Passover feast.

The memory of their ancestors' years in Egypt was important for the life of the nation. This memory was to stay with them through the history taught to them as children at the Passover feast (Ex. 12:26–27), in the readings from the Torah, and from their instruction in the law. *Covenant ethics and covenant history could not lawfully be separated in Israel.* Because they shared a common covenant history, they were under covenant law. God had told them centuries before when *they* were slaves in Egypt not to forget to remind their heirs of this experience.

How could later generations remember? In what way had they been slaves in Egypt? How could God expect later generations to remember what had never in history happened to them personally? Because *life is covenantal.* In the same sense that all men have rebelled in Eden's garden, so were the Hebrews to regard themselves as having

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

served a term as slaves. That sense is covenantal—personal, hierarchical, ethical, judgmental, and historical. God reminded the generation of the exodus that they had been slaves, and that they, meaning their heirs, would return to slavery in a foreign land again if they disobeyed Him (Deut. 28:64–65). Their heirs were required to remember this, too, long after that first generation had died in the wilderness.

The stranger in the land wants rest from his labors. He needs hope that at the end of his work, there will be rest. This is the equivalent of saying that at the end of his period of bondage, there will be liberty. This is the message of the Book of Exodus: *liberty comes through God's covenant blessings to those who serve God and other men faithfully through dedicated labor*. It was the denial of hope in future rest or future liberty that marked Pharaoh's Egypt. It marks every bureaucratic civilization.

C. Sabbath and Providence

The sabbath is an aspect of God's grace to man and the creation. It is the promise of rest and eventual liberty from bondage, primarily the bondage of sin. The Bible is clear: what man hopes to be his external reward from God he must therefore offer to all those under his authority. This includes not just people, but also animals and the land itself. The principle of interpretation goes from the least likely to the more likely. If man is to give even the land rest, then he is surely to give rest to the animals of the land. If he is to give animals rest, then he must surely be required to give strangers rest. If he is to give strangers rest, then surely he must give his servants rest. And if he is to give his servants rest, then he must surely give himself rest.

But how can he afford to give himself rest? Who is to guard the garden while he is resting? Who is to care for the needs of his family, his servants, strangers in the land, animals, and the land itself? Without man as the guardian and administrator, how will civilized life go on? The answer, of course, is theocentric: the sovereignty of God. *It is God who gives man rest, for it is God who providentially sustains man's environment and man himself*. If God refuses to give man rest, then rest becomes too expensive for man, too dangerous. Accepting rest from God requires a visible commitment to the covenant, faith that things will work out for the best for those who are obedient to God (Rom. 8:28).⁶ Only this faith in God and His covenant blessings

6. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 6.

can relieve man of the worry that without his own efforts, all will be lost.

The sabbatical week is designed to persuade covenant man that he can trust God for one day per week. It breaks man of his spirit of self-centeredness. By resting from his labors on the sabbath, man learns to rest his mind and soul as well. He sees, week by week, that life goes on, that the system holds, even though he has not worked for one day in seven. This self-discipline is designed to increase his faith in the sustaining providence of God.

1. From Miracles to Weekly Thrift

For that first generation, the miracle of the daily manna was supposed to persuade them of God's providence. So was the fact that any manna collected beyond a day's use would rot (Ex. 16:20). They were taught to rely on God before they were taught to save for the future. The suspension of the law of rotting manna for the double portion they collected on the morning before the sabbath served as a double witness to God's providence: they had to gather a double portion to sustain them on the sabbath, when the manna would cease (Ex. 16:5). This taught them short-term thrift. But it was thrift within the context of daily miracles. On the day that the miracle of new manna ceased, the miracle of non-rotting manna replaced it.

Once they crossed over the Jordan River, the miracle of the daily manna ceased (Josh. 5:12). They had to transfer their faith in the miracle of the manna to the less visibly miraculous six-one weekly pattern. They would have to get their work done in six days, just as they had been required to collect a double portion of manna on the sixth day. Now, however, they could structure their workweek more rationally. There would be no equivalent of the rotting second portion of manna. They could accumulate the excess production of each day in order to survive the seventh day of rest without a crisis. They learned the principle of thrift by accumulating goods for the future through abstaining from maximum present consumption. They worked a little harder in the present in order to enjoy a period of rest in the future. This future-orientation would have been limited to six days at a time, had it not been for the law of the sabbatical year.

Long-term thrift was forced on them whenever they obeyed this law governing agriculture (Ex. 23:9–12). What they had learned in the wilderness through the miracle of the manna, they were to apply to

their daily labors in the land. What they learned in their weekly efforts to save for the future, they were to apply to the God-imposed sabbatical year cycle. One year in seven they were to allow the land to rest.

If the land was entitled to rest, then how much more the animals. If the animals were entitled to rest, how much more strangers within the land, and so on, right up the hierarchical chain of command to the master of the household himself. Everyone could look forward to rest, if each did his labor diligently, and if each saved a portion of his output for that future day.

2. The Psychology of Growth

Each person is supposed to be self-disciplined. As he matures in his Christian faith, he is supposed to operate faithfully under God without prodding from a superior. The sluggard is supposed to abandon his slothful ways.

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an armed man (Prov. 6:6–11).⁷

The Hebrews were warned a generation before they entered the land what would be required of them. They would have to rest one day in seven, and rest the land one year in seven. They would have to save enough goods daily to get them through the day of rest, and they would have to save enough goods yearly to get them through the year of rest. The required self-discipline of future-orientation and thrift, coupled with the legal requirement to honor the sabbath, helped to create a particular attitude that leads to increased per capita output and lower interest rates.⁸

Reduced interest rates lead to greater output, for people are more willing to forego present consumption in favor of increased future consumption. This greater output could then be used to lend money

7. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 12.

8. Because the rate of interest is a reflection, in part, of individuals' time-preference or future-orientation, with high interest rates stemming from intense present-orientation, the requirement of the sabbatical year fostered greater future-orientation and therefore lower rates of interest.

or goods to non-Israelites, thereby gaining authority over them. This ability to lend is a sign of God's blessings:

The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).

If a nation filled with future-oriented people who are willing to lend money at 5% per annum encounters a more present-oriented society filled with people who are willing to pay 10% to finance their consumption or production, the people living in the first society can easily become the lenders to people living in the second. It is necessary for the lenders to monitor the ability and willingness of the borrowers to pay back the loans, of course. For a safe commercial transaction to take place, the differential between the respective interest rates must not be the product of a high *risk premium*—fear of outright default—or the product of a *price inflation premium*: fear of disguised default through loss of purchasing power.

The extension of dominion by lending at interest is legitimate for both lender and borrower. There are always risks associated with dominion, however. Lending to present-oriented consumers may later become a curse for the lender: he trusts in his riches but forgets that he is becoming dependent on present-oriented debtors. But it may also be that the foreign debtors are not consumers, but merely intelligent producers in the other country. In this case, the lender helps future-oriented foreign producers to become more productive by supplying them with capital more cheaply than they can borrow it at home. Dominion is by covenant. Lending to the foreigner at interest brings him indirectly under the sanctions of God, but these sanctions can be either blessing or cursing.⁹ So, it is always a question of intent

9. The possibility of blessing eludes utopian author S. C. Mooney, who refused to comment on Deuteronomy 28:12–13, since it clearly says that it is legitimate to make loans at interest. He insisted that “Usury enslaves. The brethren are not to be enslaved.” S. C. Mooney, *Usury: Destroyer of Nations* (Warsaw, Ohio: Theopolis, 1988), p. 98. (<http://bit.ly/MooneyUsury>). On the contrary, usury does not always enslave. Becoming a debtor for productive reasons—to go to college, for example, which Mr. Mooney never did—or to start a business, can be liberating. It depends on what the borrower intends to do with the money. Like fire, debt is risky. The older you get, the less you should rely on it. But young men and citizens in pagan nations that are trying

on the part of both lender and borrower. What is the goal of the lender, passive escapism or active expansion of his capital? To what purposes will the borrowed money be put, productive or unproductive? The raw numbers do not tell us these things.

D. Gleaning and Liberation

1. Morally Obligatory Charity

“But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat.” This verse makes it clear that the poor were allowed to enter the field and glean whatever grain has come up of its own accord. The same rule applied to the vineyards. This was an extension of the rule prohibiting the owner of the land to reap every nook and cranny of his fields. He had to allow poor people to enter his fields and glean the corners – the areas more difficult to harvest (Lev. 19:9–10). The Bible specifically identifies the poor who were to be invited in: the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (Deut. 24:21). Why was the landowner told to do this? Predictably, it was because of Israel’s years in Egypt: “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing” (Deut. 24:22).¹⁰

Was this a form of government-required public welfare? No. There are no negative sanctions mentioned, and it is difficult to imagine how anyone who felt abused could have sued for damages. Where there are no civil sanctions, there can be no crime. None is listed, and it is difficult to imagine the basis by which appropriate sanctions could be devised by the civil judges. *Lex talionis*? Would he be kept from gleaning for a year? By double restitution? Double what? How much could the potential gleaner have gleaned from the field? How many local potential gleaners could sue? All of them? Does each of them have a lawful claim against the landowner, no matter how small his fields?

God instructed farm owners to allow poor people to glean. The land was His (Lev. 25:23); the whole earth is His (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 24:1¹¹).

to advance themselves economically can legitimately go into debt for productive purposes. Debt is no more of a curse than personal apprenticeship with a master is—a form of personal and professional discipline that Mr. Mooney would have been wise to consider before he wrote his book.

10. The gleaning law was annulled by Jesus’ fulfillment of the Jubilee land laws.

11. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms*

As the permanent owner, God could tell his stewards how to administer His property. But God was the disciplining agent. He acted as Kinsman-Redeemer or as Blood Avenger, depending on the obedience or disobedience of the landowner. This law is in the form of a positive injunction, and biblical civil law is negative in scope: forbidding public evil.

This form of morally compulsory charity on the owner's part involved hard work on the part of the recipients. They were be allowed to glean the corners and difficult places only after the "easy pickings" have been gleaned by the hired harvesters. They were invited into the open fields only in the sabbatical year in which there had been no previous season's planting. They had to earn every bit of the produce they collected. This was not a chosen profession for sluggards. But for those who were willing to work, they would not perish at the hands of men who systematically used their competitive advantage to create a permanent class of the poor.

There was another great advantage to this form of morally enforced charity: it brought hard-working, efficient poor people to the attention of potential employers. There is always a market for hard-working, efficient, diligent workers. Such abilities are the product of a righteous worldview and a healthy body, both of which are gifts of God. It always pays employers to locate such people and hire them. In effect, the employers can "glean" future workers. Gleaning appears initially to have been a high-risk system of recruiting, for it required landowners to forfeit the corners of their fields and one year's productivity in seven. Nevertheless, God promised to bless those who obeyed Him. It really was not a high-risk system. Israel's gleaning system made the charity local, work-oriented, and a source of profitable information regarding potential employees. Thus, the system offered hope to those trapped in poverty. They could escape this burden through demonstrated productivity. This was how Ruth, a stranger in the land, began her escape: she caught the attention of Boaz (Ruth 2:5).

2. We Are All Gleaners

Because each person is in bondage to sin, God has made gleaners of everyone. He cursed the ground, making it bring forth thorns and thistles. This in effect has placed us all in the position of people who are not entitled to the best of the field. God removed the "easy pick-

ings” from mankind as a result of mankind’s rebellion. But at least he did not destroy the field (the world). He promises not to interfere directly with it until the final judgment (Matt. 13:29–30, 49).¹² We must work harder than before the curse, but God graciously grants us access to the field. Those who are content with second-best are given an opportunity to escape their economic bondage through faith in the great Gleaner, Jesus Christ, who served God faithfully unto death, buying our way out of spiritual bondage. God observes us, to see who is efficient and who is a sluggard. He uses history as a giant gleaning operation for recruiting servants for eternity. Those who do not demonstrate faithfulness under adversity are not given access to the fields of the post-judgment world, but instead are cast out into the fire.

In a very real sense, biblical evangelism prior to the great millennial outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a form of gleaning. We seem to reap small harvests. We get the spiritual leftovers, after the local tyrants, the humanist school system, the cults, and the drug dealers have passed through the field and have picked off “the best and the brightest.” Successes on the missions field are minor. The biological reproduction of God’s enemies is now becoming exponential. We have few reliable models to imitate. Evangelism seems futile. But to be a gleaner always tempts us to accept second-best as a way of life. The gleaner may not recognize or appreciate his God-given opportunity. He may not see that he is being called into the Master’s field in order to demonstrate his competence in the face of adversity. He may view his plight as something undeserved, not recognizing that after Adam, all that any man deserves is death and eternal wrath. He does not recognize the *stripped field* as a *garden of opportunity*. He imagines that all he can hope for is a sack of leftover grain. His time horizon is too short. His future-orientation suffers from a lack of vision, and also a lack of faith in God’s grace. He forgets how few and far between faithful workers are, and how the opportunity to glean the leftover harvest is a God-given way to demonstrate his character as a man with a future precisely because he has confidence in the future.

3. *Eschatologies of the Stripped Field*

Because the church has seen so few examples of successful evangelism, and because even the successful examples seem to fall back into paganism within a few centuries, Christians have come to adopt

12. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 29.

eschatologies that deny liberation for gleaners. They see themselves and their spiritual colleagues as people who are locked in a vicious “cycle of poverty,” to borrow the language of paganism’s modern welfare economics. They see no hope beyond the stripped field. Life only offers minimal opportunities for harvesting souls, they believe. “What we have today as gleaners is all that we or our heirs can expect in history.” They lose faith in the ability of the heavenly Observer to identify and hire good workers and to place them in new positions of responsibility. So, Christians have invented eschatologies that conform to their rejection of any vision of temporal liberation—*eschatologies of the stripped field*. Men with battered spirits preach that nothing Christians can do as spiritual gleaners will ever fill the sacks to overflowing. They see no covenantal cause-and-effect relationship between gleaning and liberation. They preach a new gospel of the kingdom—*the kingdom of perpetual leftovers*. They do not recognize that there is a valid historical function of gleaning: the public identification of those bondservants who actively seek liberation and who pursue every legitimate avenue of escape.

E. New Testament Applications

In Israel, the sabbatical year of release was national and simultaneous. It was a negative injunction, and therefore a civil law, for it forbade something that was a positive evil: working the land without a break. We know what an appropriate penalty might have been: double restitution of that year’s harvest, with the produce going to the priests as a payment to God. To pay that, the owner would probably have had to sell himself into slavery: a symbol of the transition from grace to wrath, a symbolic return to Egypt.

Today, there is no common year of release, nationally or internationally. The reason for this lack of a common year of release is because the enforcement of the New Testament sabbath has been decentralized. God now assigns to individuals the responsibility of deciding how to observe the sabbath. This decentralization of the locus of enforcement has led to the abolition of a common sabbatical year in which all fields are required to lie fallow in the same year, and charitable debts are cancelled in that same year (Deut. 15:1–6).¹³

If this land-protecting aspect of the law was enforced by the state,

13. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

as I believe it was, it rested on the legal status of the land as God's judicial agent, not on the state as an agency of wealth redistribution to the gleaners. This law is no longer in force in the New Testament era because the land ceased to be a covenantal agent after A.D. 70 (Lev. 18:24–29).¹⁴ This law was good for the land and all the creatures great and small that inhabited it. Owners were restrained in their use of God's land. The land, as God's judicial agent, deserved its rest. This law man

This is not to become a matter of civil law. It is no longer the state's responsibility to enforce sabbath requirements. Owners can do what they please, but God watches closely. Those who own land that is leased to others can certainly require the lease-holders to abide by a fallow-rotation system, so that the land's productivity can be preserved.

This is similar to the injunction that all zero-interest charitable debts be cancelled every seventh year. The state is not to enforce such a requirement. Instead, the state should simply refuse to enforce any charitable debt contract beyond the seventh year. If creditors can collect what is owed to them by poor debtors without resorting to violence, that is their business, but the coercive authority of the state will not be used to enforce a contract that clearly violates the terms of the covenant. The state should no more enforce a morally mandatory charitable debt obligation beyond the seventh year than it should enforce any other kind of inherently immoral contract. There are limits to the legitimacy of voluntary contracts.

We should understand that the gleaning requirement from the beginning applied only to agricultural operations. It was not extended to the cities in the Old Testament, and it should not be extended beyond agriculture today. To the extent that the modern world has become urban, the year of release applies far more to society's debt structure than to its agriculture. Debt slavery is far more common today than agricultural slavery. Today, it is the farmer who has sold himself into bondage in his lust for more land and more comfortable tractors. He has collateralized the present value of his land, and he has prayed for the future value of his land's produce. The process of urbanization continues.

14. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 10.

Conclusion

The stranger in the land was to be the beneficiary of the civil laws of Israel. This was to serve as a testimony to the nations. It was not only those who were born in the land who could experience the external blessings of God.

The land was to be given its rest every seventh year. The gleaners and the animals were not restricted from the unsown fields. Whatever output of value that the land produced in these years became the lawful possession of the propertyless poor who worked to claim it. Landowners rested, while the poor labored.

The sabbath was instituted in order to teach men about the necessity of relying on God to sustain them. Honoring the sabbath revealed to men that God sustains those who obey Him, no matter how improbable that might seem. It also taught people habits of thrift, future-orientation, and diligence. People had to get their work done in six days, not seven; they had to store up necessities out of the excess output of the days of lawful labor. This enforced system of sabbath discipline was intended to reshape the slave mentality of covenant-breakers.

What God taught them first with the miracle of the manna, He later taught their heirs with the weekly sabbath, then the sabbatical year, and finally with the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25). Because the people of Judah did not honor the law of the sabbatical year, God threatened to drive them into captivity for seventy years, that the land might obtain its lawful rest (Jer. 50:34). They did not repent; Judah then fell to Babylon. "To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (II Chron. 36:21).

God enforced His law when men refused to.

FEASTS AND CITIZENSHIP

Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD. Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning. The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk (Ex. 23:14–19).

God was the King who owned the Promised Land and who invited His people to join in corporate celebrations with Him. Those who harvested His crops were His judicial subordinates, and they publicly testified to this by their participation in His required feasts. They were to provide God with the firstfruits of the land. Those who refused to attend the required feasts of God are in open rebellion against Him, for they were declaring publicly that they are not under His jurisdiction and that they owed him no firstfruits.

A. God's Sharecroppers

A sharecropping farmer does not own his own land. He may not even own his own tools. The owner provides these capital assets to the worker, who then agrees to share a fixed percentage of the crop with the owner.

The owner gains several advantages through this legal arrange-

ment. He does not have to supervise the workers on a day-to-day basis.¹ The owner can therefore concentrate his attention on more economically profitable tasks, such as marketing the crop. Second, the owner teaches his subordinate independence, which should increase the latter's total productivity. Third, the owner provides incentives for the worker to maximize his output. The lower the percentage demanded by the owner, the greater the economic incentive of the worker to maximize his output, since the latter keeps the lion's share of the product.

God requires a tithe. He also required the feasts of the Old Covenant era. This brought His workers before him on a regular basis. They had to sacrifice time, energy, and money to journey to Jerusalem and eat the required feasts. They had to bring the token firstfruits as a ritual testimony to their faith in God as the true owner of their land: "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God" (Ex. 23:19a).

B. The Festivals and Civic Judgment

The feasts reminded them three times a year that the King of heaven requested their presence before Him. It reminded them who owned the land. Yet it was also an honor to attend. It also reminded them that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe protected them. He promised to protect the wives, children, and land during their absence. "Thrice in the year shall all your menchildren appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year" (Ex. 34:23–24).

This passage appears at the end of a longer passage dealing with oppression. Men are warned not to raise a false report or render false judgment (Ex. 23:1–3).² They are warned to return a lost animal to its owner, as well as help an enemy's fallen beast of burden (Ex. 23:4–5).³ Men are again reminded not to render false judgment or testify falsely

1. This was the problem with the American South's slave system prior to its abolition in 1865 after the defeat of the South in the Civil War. On the economic rationality of sharecropping in the post-Civil War American South, see Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The economic consequences of emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

2. Chapter 50.

3. Chapter 51.

(Ex. 23:6–7). They must not take bribes (Ex. 23:8).⁴ They must not oppress a stranger (Ex. 23:9).⁵ They must honor the sabbatical year and rest the land: no harvesting in the seventh year (Ex. 23:10–11).⁶ They must honor the weekly sabbath: no working (Ex. 23:12).⁷ They must not mention any other God (Ex. 23:13). Then they are given the requirement of attending the three annual feasts.

Why bring up the requirements associated with the feasts in a section of the law that deals with civil judgment and economic oppression? Does participation in the feasts have some connection to the rendering of civil judgment? It does. *A circumcised male in Israel who failed to attend the required sacramental feasts lost his inheritance in the land and therefore also lost his citizenship.* He lost his eligibility to become a civil magistrate in Israel. This chain of judicial events is not immediately apparent from the text in Exodus 23, which is why this chapter is a detailed exposition of implications based on other texts, especially New Testament texts regarding Israel's loss of the kingdom through covenantal rebellion.

C. An Open Invitation to Israel's Closed Feasts

There were three required annual feasts in ancient Israel. This law applied to the circumcised members of the congregation, i.e., the civil nation.⁸ The feasts were open to all those in Israel who were circumcised, including converts from foreign nations and household slaves. The model feast was the Passover:

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a

4. Chapter 52.

5. Chapter 53:B.

6. Chapter 53:C.

7. Chapter 53:C.

8. Rushdoony wrote: "*Congregation* has reference to the whole nation in its governmental function as God's covenant people. G. Ernest Wright defined it as 'the whole organized commonwealth as it assembled officially for various purposes, particularly worship.'" R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 85. Wright's statement appears in *The Interpreter's Bible*, II, p. 468.

stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you (Ex. 12:43–49).

The Passover was originally a household feast that was actually celebrated in the home. This is why hired servants were not allowed to participate. They would have to return to their own households in order to celebrate the feast. They were hired by money, and therefore not under the protection of the hiring family's covenant. The covenant was established by physical birth and circumcision, not by an economic contract. A stranger who was circumcised could participate in Passover, but only if all those under his household jurisdiction were also circumcised. The *mark of covenantal subordination* had to be on the flesh of every male participant, and it had to be on all those males under his family jurisdiction. (Moses' failure to circumcise his son was what brought God against Moses just before he re-entered Egypt [Ex. 4:24–26].)⁹

1. *Sacrificial Offerings*

After the Israelites arrived in the promised land, God made certain changes in the Passover ritual. Families were henceforth required to journey to a central location to celebrate the Passover: "Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there" (Deut. 16:2). The text makes it plain that the celebration was corporate, and it was not to be in a man's home town: "Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt" (Deut. 16:5–6). While the passage in Exodus 23 indicates that only the circumcised males were required to come to the various feasts, in fact the whole family was required to come to the place where the tabernacle was, and later on, where the temple was. The Exodus passage speaks representatively, but the parallel passage in

9. Gary North, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1985), pp. 209–26. (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

Deuteronomy 16 is more specific:

Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice. Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee (Deut. 16:13–17).

The men were to appear together at a corporate ritual at some point during each of these three feasts. They were to appear in their official covenantal capacity as judges of their households. Wives and children came to the city, but there must have been a separate ritual “before the Lord” at which only men were in attendance. It was there that the priests or Levites offered the families’ sacrifices, which were required offerings: “they shall not appear before the LORD empty.” In their capacity as *household priests*, the men were required to bring a sacrificial offering before God. Fathers no longer killed the sacrificial animals and ate them with their families in their own homes, as they had at the first Passover. The priests or priestly aides killed the animals for them representatively. Presumably each father took his portion of the sacrifice and returned to his family to eat it before the night was over: “neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning.”

It was during the feast of tabernacles that a week-long total of 70 bulls was sacrificed for the 70 nations, plus one for Israel: $13 + 12 + 11 + 10 + 9 + 8 + 7 + 1 = 71$ (Num. 29:13–36). Israel sacrificed bulls representatively for the nations.¹⁰ Because these sacrifices were priestly and therefore mediatorial, only circumcised males could lawfully participate in the actual ritual. God is only represented by males in the sacrifices, which is the reason why women cannot lawfully be ordained to

10. James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), pp. 101–2. (<http://bit.ly/jjchurch>). This was what I would call a “common grace” sacrifice. It accomplished ritually what Jesus’s death on the cross fulfilled: a covering for the nations of the earth that allowed them to survive temporally.

church offices (I Cor. 14:34–35).

2. *Every Man a Priest*

The Protestant doctrine of “every man a priest” was equally in force in Old Covenant Israel: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Ex. 19:5–6). *God’s covenant, ownership, kingdom, and priesthood*: all are linked together here. The hierarchical subordination of each man under God—a subordination marked physically by circumcision—entitled any man to serve as the priest of his own household. This was why the stranger who wanted to participate in Passover had to have all the males in his household circumcised. “And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof” (Ex. 12:48). He had to be marked as a priestly representative of God within his own home. He had to be a member of a judicially marked covenantal hierarchy.

D. Israel as a Sanctuary

This *family priestly office*, hierarchical in structure, opened the door to another office, that of *civil magistrate*. To be a citizen in Israel, a man first had to be under the jurisdiction of a family covenant,¹¹ either by physical birth into his own family or by adoption (including a woman’s marriage)¹² into a Hebrew family.¹³ This family-based order of governmental authority and office helps to explain an otherwise difficult exegetical problem. Immediately following the passage in Deuteronomy that deals with the feast of the tabernacles we read: “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou

11. Just as a church officer must first serve as the head of his household (I Tim. 3:2, 4).

12. For example, Rahab and Ruth.

13. Adoptions into Hebrew households took place on a widespread basis during the first century of Israel’s stay in Egypt, which is why their population was growing so rapidly by Moses’s day. See Chapter 1.

shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 16:18-20).

Here we find once again that *the laws of the festivals are closely associated with the laws of civil justice*. The civil judge is warned not to accept a bribe. He shall not render false or perverted judgments. The context is a court of law. The promise is that those who render righteous judgments will live and inherit the land. All three are tied together: required attendance at the festivals, rendering honest civic judgment, and inheriting family-owned land.

1. Sanctuary: Equality Before the Law

Any man who was willing to subordinate himself to God by living in the land of Israel as a stranger was entitled to the benefits of the God's Bible-revealed civil law, including its protection. He had access to civil justice by his very presence in God's geographical sanctuary, the land of Israel.

This sanctuary was man's sanctuary. *The land of Israel was every resident's boundary of judicial protection from the civil laws of false gods*. The promise of equality before the civil law was the judicial sanctuary offered by God to all those who would voluntarily remain within the geographical boundaries of those nations that formally covenanted with Him. This sanctuary status of a biblically covenanted nation was therefore geographical rather than ritualistic.

Biblical law is quite clear: there is to be one civil law-order governing all people, because everyone is under the jurisdiction of God, who rules by covenant. God holds men and nations accountable for their obedience to His laws. Even though not all men are willing ritually to admit their subordination to God as creatures, all are to be governed by the requirements of the same civil law-order that God established as His representative model in Israel (Deut. 4:4–5).¹⁴ This is God's wis-

14. Some may deny that this was true in the era of the Old Covenant, although they must contend with Greg L. Bahnsen in this regard: Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), ch. 24. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>). But Christians cannot escape the judicial and civil implications of Matthew 21:43: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." When God transferred His kingdom to the church, an international covenantal institution, he brought all nations under the covenantal obligations of his law, including civil law. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Rela-*

dom for all mankind. Wisdom cannot legitimately be observed by autonomous man on a “take it or leave it basis”; covenantal religion is not smorgasbord religion, picking and choosing in terms of what sounds good to unregenerate minds. Wisdom must be *obeyed*. Wisdom is part of God’s national covenant: “Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deut. 4:6).¹⁵ Because pagan nations in the Old Covenant era did not acknowledge their judicial obligations in this regard, God created a geographical sanctuary in Israel for men to flee to when they decided to place themselves under the civil covenant of God.

tions (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

15. In their critique of theonomic postmillennialism, dispensationalists H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice argued that the Mosaic Law is not binding today and was never binding on the ancient pagan world, yet the Mosaic Law offers wisdom. “Wisdom differs from law in that law provides the legal stipulations which regulate the covenantal agreement and can be enforced by civil penalties. . . . On the other hand, wisdom is advice with no legal penalties.” House and Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1988), p. 186. They argued for wisdom apart from any covenant law or covenant sanctions. Therefore, one has to conclude, outside the narrow geographical confines of ancient Israel, God’s Ten Commandments become the Ten Suggestions. The wisdom of Proverbs becomes a lot of wise sayings. But Solomon was a king whose fame spread because of his ability to impose *wise sanctions*. After the incident of the two prostitutes and the baby, we read: “And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment” (1 Kings 3:28). They were saying that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who suffered the ultimate sanctions, there are no further biblically required covenant sanctions in history (except execution for murder, a Noahic covenant sanction: p. 130) until His second coming. Autonomous man therefore gets to make up his own civil laws as he goes along. If you suspect that this view of civil law without specific biblical sanctions can easily become a license to sin, personally and nationally, and also a license to commit statist tyranny, you have correctly grasped their argument: *no biblical sanctions—no biblical crimes*. They wrote: “There is a big difference between law and wisdom, though often the net effect will be the same since the regenerate believer will want to apply the wisdom of God’s law” (p. 187). Why should the net effects ever be the same? There are no civil sanctions attached to their view of wisdom. When incentives are different, people’s responses will be different. By invoking an undefined wisdom devoid of civil sanctions, they are trying to avoid the appearance of social antinomianism. This is one last attempt to save dispensational ethics from the acids of antinomianism and ethical dualism—an attempt that clearly comes a century too late. On the morally and theologically devastating antinomianism of modern dispensationalism, see the book by dispensationalist theologian and pastor John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1988).

2. Judicial Distinctions

The question then arises: What was the judicial distinction between an uncircumcised resident and a circumcised resident? One distinction was inheritance: rural land reverted back to the original owner's family in the 50th year (Lev. 25:13). But this law did not govern property within walled cities or towns (Lev. 25:31). Does this mean that in walled cities, there was no judicial distinction between Jew and gentile? There must have been some sort of distinction, or else the gentiles could have captured the cities of Israel, *including Jerusalem*, simply by moving into them, buying up the property, and taking over each city's civil government. The strangers within the gates could thereby have inherited the land.

It was in fact legally possible for strangers in the gates to buy up houses and buildings inside the gates, but this did not make them citizens. Nor would the post-exilic revised terms of land ownership that God instructed Ezekiel to announce to Israel make citizens of strangers in the land: "And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 47:22–23).¹⁶ Citizenship in the biblical commonwealth of Israel was not by property ownership as such. Citizenship was by covenant. Citizenship was by *circumcision and feast*, by covenant mark and covenant renewal.

There was a judicial distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised residents. This distinction was explicitly not a difference in the God-required application of the civil law to different people (Ex. 12:49). This distinction must therefore be found elsewhere than in some supposed inequality before the law. There is to be no inequality before God's civil law.¹⁷ Thus, the difference had to have been in the very definition of citizenship, meaning *the exercise of civil rulership*. Citizenship was closely tied to one's participation in the three required annual feasts in Jerusalem. As was the case in the ancient world generally, *if a man could not legally participate in the religious rites of the*

16. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, 2012), ch. 22.

17. Chapter 14.

city, he could not become a citizen.¹⁸ What made Israel different was the widespread use of adoption, which mirrored God's gracious adoption of Israel (Ezek. 16:3-7). Paul connected God's adoption and God's covenant with Israel when he spoke of his kinsmen according to the flesh, "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). Thus, unless a resident was a bastard, Moabite, an Ammonite, an Edomite, or an Egyptian (Deut. 23:2-8), he had to be granted immediate access to the feasts: "And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land" (Num. 9:14).

E. Feasts and Sanctions

The uncircumcised resident male and his household did not gain access to God's sanctuary, the temple. To gain this priestly access, he was required first to accept a visible mark in his flesh, as were all the males under his family jurisdiction. He had to accept God's "brand" on him, God's sign of adoption. *God owns all men, and circumcision was a man's acknowledgment of God's lawful claim on him.* A man carried this servile mark in his flesh, and he was reminded daily of his judicial condition as a servant to God. For as long as he lived, he bore this mark of judicial subordination.

1. Subordination and Festivals

A circumcised man declared ritually and physically that he was under God's judicial authority; only then was he given access to the three annual feasts. These feasts were held in a central location. Attendance was mandatory for all circumcised men who were residents of the land.¹⁹ A resident male who refused to attend the feasts of the King of heaven came under the king's condemnation. One did not lawfully turn down the King's invitation. This was the message of Jesus' parable of the king's feast.

18. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Bk. III.

19. Men could go on journeys and escape this obligation. Passover could be celebrated late by those who had been on long journeys (Num. 9:10-11).

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen (Matt 22:2–14).

There is no doubt that Jesus was referring here to Israel. The Pharisees understood His accusation. “Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk” (Matt. 22:15).

There were two crimes associated with the festivals of the kingdom: (1) refusing to come when invited and (2) refusing to bear the appropriate mark of subordination: in Israel, circumcision; in the parable, a wedding garment.²⁰ It is an honor to be invited and a curse to refuse to come. It is an honor to attend, but only those who have subordinated themselves publicly to the heavenly King should dare to enter His presence.

The annual festivals of Israel were mandatory for those males who were under God’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction. These were members of the congregation. The question then arises: If it was required that every circumcised male attend the feasts, what were the sanctions for non-attendance? Who imposed them?

2. What Kind of Negative Sanctions?

I have argued throughout this book that biblical civil law does not

20. This is clearly symbolic of baptism.

set forth positive injunctions to do good. It only enforces laws against publicly evil acts, as defined by God's Bible-revealed law. This law of the compulsory feasts initially appears to be an exception to this rule. It is not an exception. Because no negative sanction is mentioned in the various texts dealing with the required festivals, we should initially conclude that this was not a civil law. Only if we can derive appropriate civil sanctions by examining the nature of the crime should we conclude that this was a civil law. I can see no appropriate sanctions. There was no earthly victim of a crime who could bring charges. There seems to be no appropriate fine to be distributed to some future victim of an unknown criminal. Whipping seems inappropriate, since the crime is not a positive assault on public morality.

It seems a likely inference that the appropriate negative sanction was *excommunication from the priestly congregation*. By failing to attend the required feasts, the man had placed himself in the camp of the uncircumcised strangers. He would have been kept from attending future ritual feasts. He would have been barred from attendance at local worship conducted by the priests. If he was an Israelite with an inheritance in the land, he would also have forfeited this inheritance, for he had renounced his family's ownership rights in Israel when he renounced God's ownership rights over Him and His family. Only if his sons or distant heirs later denied their father's rebellion and affirmed the family covenant under God when they became adults could they reclaim the forfeited inheritance. However, this re-covenanting procedure did give them the ability to reclaim what had been legally removed. This was God's promise to the future dispossessed sons of Israel whenever they were removed from the land:

And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them. If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land (Lev. 26:38–42).

A man who was outside God's holy army had no legal access to ju-

dicial office. This was another aspect of God's threat of imposing the physical sanction of removing them from their geographical sanctuary in the land. They would become slaves and strangers in a foreign land. Only through extraordinary faithfulness did certain Israelites become leaders in foreign lands, as Joseph had become in Egypt, as Daniel later became in Babylon and Medo-Persia, and as Esther became in Medo-Persia. Israelites would suffer by becoming subordinates to foreign gods whose spokesmen did not respect the principle of equality before the law. They would not again serve as judges in the land, declaring God's civil law, unless they repented.

To be an uncircumcised stranger in Israel was to be someone outside the congregation. Circumcision was a judicial act. It was a physical mark of covenantal subordination, not a magical mark of initiation. A man could make his circumcision null and void by rejecting the terms of the covenant. Refusing to attend the feasts was such a rejection.

3. Family Sanctions

Inheritance was familistic in Old Covenant Israel.²¹ The civil government was supposed to enforce the laws of inheritance, but the seat of family covenantal authority was in the father as the family priest. When a man died, his sons inherited. If he had no sons, his daughters inherited. If he had no daughters, his brothers inherited (Num. 27:8–10). "And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses" (Num. 27:11). The kinsman redeemer (*ga'al*), meaning the blood avenger (Deut. 19:6), inherited the property as his closest next of kin.

What about a man who had voluntarily abandoned the feasts? He had thereby publicly abandoned the covenant. This was a form of *covenantal death*.²² Covenantally, it was as if the original owner had died. His heirs inherited. But because he had cut off all those who were under his immediate covenantal authority in his family, his brothers immediately inherited, unless his sons broke covenant with him. If he had no brothers, then his next of kin inherited. His brothers or his closest

21. Chapter 25.

22. On covenantal death, see Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Marriage and Divorce* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), chaps 2, 4. (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

relatives could then go to the civil magistrate and compel the transfer of title to the land, which would presumably go into effect at the time of his physical death or the jubilee year, whichever came first.²³ This confiscation of the man's property was not the sovereign act of the civil government. It was not a negative civil sanction. It was a *family sanction* that was lawfully enforced by the civil government. The terms of land ownership had been set by God before they conquered Canaan. As the ultimate Owner, God had the legal right to specify in advance the judicial terms of the leaseholds.

Similarly, the removal of the man's status as someone eligible to serve as a civil magistrate was not a negative civil sanction. It was simply a *public acknowledgment* by the civil government of the individual's change in legal status when he withdrew from the congregation by ceasing to attend the feasts. It was the removal of a covenantal privilege open only to members of the congregation. The state merely confirmed what the former congregation member had publicly announced: he was no longer a citizen or judge in Israel.

4. Jesus and the Disinheritance of Israel

The kinsman-redeemer inherited because of the covenantal death of the covenant-breaker. This was the legal basis for Jesus Christ, the kinsman-redeemer and also the blood avenger of Israel, to inherit the kingdom and to pass this inheritance to those under His covenantal administration. Thus, Jesus prophesied to the Jews of His day: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

Israel had renounced the ethical terms of God's covenant, despite the fact that all the men bore the mark of covenantal subordination in their flesh. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23-24). The Jews crucified their kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ, who exercised the office of blood avenger after His resurrection. Jesus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D., so that never again could they honor

23. He would have been given time to repent. Also, while civil law in Israel had to abide by the terms of ownership, the original terms did not specify that immediately upon the covenantal death of a man he would be eligible to be thrown off his land. The sanction had to do with lawful inheritance. Inheritance was governed by the inheritance laws of Numbers 27 and the jubilee laws of Leviticus 25.

the feasts. The great tribulation came in 70 A.D.²⁴ The days of vengeance came in 70 A.D.²⁵

Never again would the temple sacrifices in Jerusalem serve as a legal covering for the nations. This meant that the Hebrews would never again serve as judges in God's Holy Commonwealth. Once they had lost title to the land, they could be expelled. Once removed from the land of promise, they no longer lawfully imposed biblical law's civil sanctions, either on themselves or on the gentiles.

Talmudic law recognized their new legal status. When the Romans captured Jerusalem and burned the temple, the ancient official Sanhedrin court came to an end. The rabbis, under the leadership of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, then took over many of the judicial functions of the Sanhedrin.²⁶ They established as a principle that every Jewish court must have at least one judge who had been ordained by the laying on of hands (*semikah*), and who could in principle trace his ordination back to Moses. This laying on of hands could take place only in the Holy Land. Legal scholar George Horowitz commented: "A court not thus qualified had no jurisdiction to impose the punishments prescribed in the Torah."²⁷ After the Bar Kokhba revolt was defeated in 135, the Jews were scattered across the Roman Empire in the diaspora. "The Rabbis were compelled, therefore, in order to preserve the Torah and to maintain law and order, to enlarge the authority of Rabbinical tribunals. This they accomplished by emphasizing the distinction between Biblical penalties and Rabbinical penalties. Rabbinical courts after the second century had no authority to impose Biblical punishments since they lacked *semikah*-; but as regards penalties created by Rabbinical legislation, the Rabbis had of necessity, accordingly, a whole series of sanctions and penalties: excommunications, fines, physical punishment, use of the 'secular arm' in imitation of the Church, etc."²⁸ Thus, by the time of the writing of the Mishnah, which was Rabbi Judah the Prince's authoritative late-second-century compilation of rabbinical laws, Jewish courts had already abandoned any attempt to enforce the Old Testament sanctions.

24. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

25. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

26. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co., [1953] 1963), pp. 92–93.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

28. *Idem.*

5. *Covenantal Restoration*

But there is always a qualification to God's historical judgments, the same one open to the Hebrews who had been scattered before in Babylon (Lev. 26:38–42): the Jews can repent, affirm the terms of the covenant, be adopted by God into His church, and serve as judges again. In fact, they will surely repent, Paul promised in Romans 11. They will be restored to faith.

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins (Rom. 11:11–27).

Next time, however, they will not have to settle for restoration of their ownership of tiny Israel. As members of the church, they will in-

herit the earth. “His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 25:13).

F. Citizenship by Birth Within the Covenant

On the eighth day, the Hebrew male child was to be circumcised (Lev. 12:3). This gave him the mark of citizenship. Birth gave him access to circumcision, and circumcision gave him citizen’s rights. He could lose his citizenship by violating the terms of the covenant in specific ways, most notably by refusing to attend the required festivals. The feasts were ritual acts of covenant renewal,²⁹ and these acts of covenant renewal had definite political consequences.

In the New Testament, the mark of the covenant is also by birth, but only through personal profession of faith (self-acknowledged *new birth*) or by parental representation.³⁰ In both cases, the person so marked can lose his citizenship, and in the same way as in the Old Covenant: by breaking God’s laws, by failing to repent and make restitution, and by failing to attend the required feast of covenant renewal, the Lord’s Supper.

1. The Office of Civil Magistrate

The law of the mandatory feasts did not impose negative *civil* sanctions against those who refused to attend the required feasts, but it did remove a civil privilege: the right to serve as a civil officer. Every civil government in New Testament times is supposed to respect the Bible’s definition of what constitutes a true citizen in the eyes of God: *a person under the covenantal discipline of a Trinitarian church*. A citizen in a formally covenanted Christian political order, as in ancient Israel, should be a person who lawfully eats God’s communion feast. If he refuses, he thereby removes himself from the jurisdiction of the church’s court, either through resigning church membership or through excommunication. He thereby redefines himself as no longer being a citizen, but rather a stranger in the land. The state acknowledges his renouncing of his citizenship. This is not a negative sanction; it is a judicial response to the former citizen’s voluntarily chosen new covenantal status, namely, that of public covenant-breaker.

Covenant-keepers were the only ones who were entitled to exer-

29. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), Appendix 8. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

30. *Ibid.*, Appendix 9.

cise judicial authority in the land of Israel. They could legally serve as judges or as electors of judges (Deut. 1:13; 16:18). How do we know this? Because all men were under the protection of biblical civil law. There was no distinguishing mark based on differing degrees of protection from the civil law; one's presence in the land was a sufficient mark entitling one to full legal protection (Ex. 12:49). Thus, *circumcision had to be a mark of judicial authority as well as a mark of judicial subordination*. It was a mark of covenantal subordination under God, and therefore a mark of one's authority to be eligible to serve as a judge. This is why Paul could write to the Corinthians: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church" (1 Cor. 6:2-4).

2. Baptism and Civil Authority

Women were not required to go to all these three feasts each year. They also did not normally serve as judges, although Deborah did (Jud. 4). Women were not to be kept away from these feasts, but they were not under judicial compulsion to attend. This is why the New Testament represents a major break with the Old Testament. *Females are baptized in the church; therefore, they are required to take communion*. Females (except infants) are not represented by a man—father or husband—in the required ritual feast.

As was the case in the Old Covenant, they are not allowed to become priests, for they cannot lawfully speak judicially in church. God presents Himself to humanity as a Husband, and thus He cannot be lawfully represented in His role as the priestly Lawgiver and sacrificial lamb by women. Women cannot lawfully declare God's law in formal church worship ceremonies (1 Cor. 14:34-35). In this sense, women are analogous to all those attendees at the required feasts of Israel who were also not authorized to become priests.³¹

Covenanted women were and still are eligible to become civil judges in the holy commonwealth. They did and still can lawfully represent God in declaring His judgments in civil courts. In ancient Israel,

31. Women, male children under age 20 (Ex. 30:14), castrated males (Deut. 23:1), plus: circumcised Moabites, Ammonites, and heirs of bastards to the tenth generation (Deut. 23:2-3), and circumcised Edomites and Egyptians to the third generation (Deut. 23:7-8).

women did not bear the mark of circumcision, but their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons did. Women were circumcised representatively. Thus, they had lawful access to the feasts, though not as actual household priests.³² They could lawfully serve as civil judges, although this was not common practice.³³ Deborah was breaking no civil law when she served as a prophetess and judge. “And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time” (Jud. 4:4). She could not serve as a sacrifice-offering priest in her household, but she could serve as a public prophetess³⁴ and judge. She could declare God’s law outside the sanctuary of the temple.

There is no representation with respect to the woman’s covenantal mark in the New Testament. There surely should be no question of the right of women to vote in elections, to serve on juries, and to be elected to political and judicial office in a Christian social order. *Baptism is the mark of this judicial civil authority*. Baptized women possess the covenantal proof of judicial subordination to God that is also a mark of civil authority in a Christian civil commonwealth.

This doctrine does not authorize universal women’s suffrage, however. Baptism as the basis of rulership is the mark of God’s theocratic order. Nevertheless, there can be no lawful discrimination by the state on the basis of differences in race, color, or sex. Why not? Because of Exodus 12:49: “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.” *But there must always be civil discrimination with respect to creed*, not in the sense of the application of biblical civil law, but with respect to those who have lawful access to the civil offices that apply it.

With respect to the right of baptized women to vote, to hold political office, and to sit on juries, it is clear that such rights were ignored by Christian men from the days that Christians first gained access to

32. It might be argued that a widow with no brothers and no adult son would have been allowed to participate in the required feasts as a recipient of the family’s burned sacrifice. She was clearly the head of her household, and the priestly office was a household office. She could take a vow that was binding before God without having to wait a day for her husband or father to confirm it (Num. 30:9). This points to her position as a household priest. The response to this argument is that the importance of God’s masculinity outweighs even the importance of the office as the head of the household. A Levite could have represented the widow at the actual ritual sacrifice.

33. Those who argue that the Israelite women never ate the Passover must find some way to explain the legitimacy of Deborah’s office as civil judge. He will have to separate citizenship from participation at the feasts. This will make citizenship in Israel very difficult to explain.

34. Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8–9).

political power in Rome. This judicial blindness is analogous to the refusal of Christians to liberate their permanent lifetime slaves, and to refuse to pass civil laws liberating them. It took until the mid-nineteenth century to persuade civil governments of the moral evil of refusing to abolish slavery. It took another three-quarters of a century to persuade national governments that all women should have the right to vote. In both cases, Christian scholars and leaders did not take the lead. They followed the lead of the humanists.³⁵

Does this mean that the institutional church learns only slowly how to apply fundamental biblical principles as time goes on? Yes. Does this mean that basic biblical principles of justice have been ignored by the church for many centuries? Yes. Does this mean that if the church refuses to acknowledge the Bible's authority for law, politics, economics, education, and similar supposedly non-ecclesiastical topics that the enemies of God will take the lead in promoting such ideas, but only by universalizing these judicial principles and removing their biblical covenantal content? The historical testimony of the last two centuries certainly indicates that such is the case. For example, Christians in the era of the early American republic sold their birth-right for a mess of judicial pottage in 1788—an historical and judicial fact still vehemently denied by today's disinherited American Christians—and the Unitarian humanists immediately began to collect their newly purchased inheritance. They were able to do this initially by deception: stealing the language of biblical civic and judicial righteousness by substituting the doctrine of Newtonian natural law.³⁶ They continued the transfer after 1788 by capturing Christianity's rhetoric of mission and its vision of victory.³⁷ The final transfer was made by

35. The first women's rights meeting was held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. In 1861, the state of Kansas authorized women to vote in school board elections. In 1890, the state of Wyoming authorized general women's suffrage, the first general civil government to do so. In 1893, New Zealand granted the right to vote to women; in 1902, Australia followed New Zealand's lead. Norway was the first nation in Europe to do so, in 1907 on a limited basis, and full suffrage in 1913. The Nineteenth Amendment (1920) modified the U.S. Constitution to allow women full voting rights: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." Not until 1928 did English women gain full suffrage.

36. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

37. If one event best captures the nature of the transfer it was the capture of Harvard College by the Unitarians in 1805, symbolized by Henry Ware's election to the chair of theology. On the transformation, see C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpret-*

Darwin: the destruction of natural law and the coming of the scientific planning elite.³⁸

G. Humanist Citizenship

The modern humanist wants the political fruits of ritual subordination to God, namely, the right to exercise civil judgment in society, but without the roots: actual ritual subordination to God. He wants the judicial fruits of lawful access to God's required feasts without actually having to attend them. He wants universal suffrage: a guarantee of his continuing access to the office of judge, despite his public denial of God's authority over him. He insists on being allowed to serve as a civil judge despite the fact that he is not under ecclesiastical discipline. If this demand is biblically legitimate, it means one of two things: (1) that he can interpret and apply God's revealed civil law as well as a Christian can, despite the fact that he refuses to honor the counsel of church officers by affirming the church covenant and submitting to church discipline; or (2) that God's revealed civil law—if such even exists—is irrelevant to civil affairs.

We need to understand what this means judicially and politically. *The humanists want a different covenant*, with a different set of five points: sovereignty (the General Will, the People, The *Volk*, the proletariat, etc.), hierarchy-representation (the Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, the *Führer*, the Supreme Court, national plebiscites, etc.), law (majority rule, evolutionary forces, Marxism-Leninism, etc.), judgment (oaths to different sovereignties in order to gain citizenship, welfare rights and entitlements, etc.), and inheritance (political citizenship). They have been successful in persuading voters, including Christian voters, of the supposed judicial necessity of abandoning the biblical covenant model that long undergirded Europe's civil commonwealths.

Humanists have written civil covenants (constitutions) that make citizenship the product of physical birth or of state adoption ("natural-

ation of American History (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), ch. 3; Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1944] 1965); Edward McNall Burns, *The American Ideal of Mission: Concepts of National Purpose and Destiny* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957); Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study in Nationalist Expansion in American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle, [1935] 1963).

38. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A: "From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty."

ized citizenship”) rather than citizenship by ritual subordination to the God of the Bible. In the twentieth century, for example, the suffragettes got their wish: the right to vote. But the suffragettes were radicals and humanists, not Christians. They wanted the right of all women to vote because of their supposed birthright as human beings. They saw political citizenship as a product of physical birth in a modern secular democracy. But the Bible does not teach that men and women have any birthrights, save one. They are born in sin and corruption, and what they are entitled to, apart from God’s special grace, is *a legal right to eternal death*.

So, universal suffrage is the political demand of those who bear no marks of ritual subordination to God. Biblically, the right of all Christian women to vote is clear from the meaning of circumcision and baptism. The right of all women to vote is denied by the same law that denies the right of all men to vote: the law that authorized circumcised men to attend Passover. “A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof” (Ex. 12:45).

Conclusion

The Old Testament laws of the feasts specified that the judges of Israel in the broadest sense had to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem three times a year. This reminded them of the magnitude of their blessings: a court appearance in the presence of the King of heaven. It also reminded them that they were under this King’s authority judicially. If they disobeyed this law, they were brought under condemnation: expulsion from the congregation of the Lord. This meant the removal of the condemned man’s office of judge.

Regular rituals of covenant renewal in the house of God were basic to the exercise of citizenship in the Old Testament. This is equally binding biblically in the New Testament. The New Testament covenant mark of baptism and the New Testament feast of the Lord’s Supper have replaced the Old Covenant’s mark of circumcision and Passover.

Women now have the mark of the covenant placed directly on them. Because women receive the mark of the covenant in baptism, they are required to participate in the ritual meal of covenant renewal: the Lord’s Supper. This becomes their legal title to access to the civil office of judge.³⁹ With respect to civil office, “There is neither Jew nor

39. Again, I am not arguing that women were not permitted to exercise judicial au-

Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). But this cannot mean that today there is no civil covenant. The civil covenant is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of "civil covenant vs. no civil covenant." It is always this question: "*Which* civil covenant, under *which* God?"

The Hebrews were required to give the firstfruits to God. He was the owner of the land. He was entitled to his percentage of the land's output. The Hebrews were required to declare ritually and collectively that they were sharecroppers on God's property. Only those who acknowledged their position as economic sharecroppers were allowed to serve as judges. Without both ritual subordination and economic subordination to God, they were not allowed by God to exercise justice as officials in the civil commonwealth. *Those who are not formally under the ecclesiastical covenant may not bear the sword of judgment as officers of God's civil court.* Those who are not under the terms of God's "sharecropping" agreement are to be removed from the congregation, meaning from the list of those entitled by law to become candidates for civil office.

This indicates that those in a church who do not tithe should not be allowed to become voting members. They may be communicant members, but not voting members. In a fully Christian social order, all churches would require tithing for voting membership. Only voting church members would be allowed to become voting members of civil government. The tithe is basic to both social order and political order. But Christians do not believe this today, and we suffer great disorder.

thority in Old Covenant Israel. I am making it clear, however, that there is still a covenant mark of judicial subordination, and this mark must be received by anyone who claims citizenship, meaning rulership, in a biblical commonwealth. It was received *representatively* by women in the Old Testament through their male relatives.

THE CURSE OF ZERO GROWTH

And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil (Ex. 23:25–26).

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. It is related to point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ Given the nature of the announced blessings, there is only one possible source: God. The state is incapable of applying these positive biological sanctions in history.

God is the Judge, both in history and eternity. When God renders judgment, He does at least three things: (1) He evaluates a person's thoughts and actions in terms of the requirements of His law; (2) He pronounces judgment, either "guilty" or "not guilty"; and (3) He imposes the appropriate sanctions, either cursings or blessings.

What is not generally recognized or sufficiently emphasized is that *God does this in His capacity as Father*. He created man in His own image. The image of God in man brings man under God's sanctions. This is what makes him judicially responsible before God. God puts the work of the law in each person's heart; each person is capable of understanding the ethical standards God lays down. Each person knows enough to condemn him on judgment day. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excus-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

ing one another” (Rom. 2:14–15).²

God the Father disinherited Adam, but He adopts those who have been elect by Him in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:3–5). The two most fundamental sanctions in time and eternity—inheritance and disinheritance—are imposed by God in His office as the Head of the family. This is why it is the head of the earthly family who is most analogous judicially to God’s role as Judge, not the civil magistrate or church officer.

A. Inheritance and Disinheritance

The exodus was based judicially on Israel’s office as God’s son. God had told Moses: “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (Ex. 4:22–23). His ability to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt was the sign of His office as Father, and the sign of Israel’s subordination to Him as a son. From that point on, the primary question for national Israel would be: “Am I the son who will inherit?” And the evidence, generation after generation, pointed to the answer: *no*. Israel was disinherited finally when the true Son, Jesus Christ, came to collect His inheritance, and the Jews refused to honor His claim.

They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:33–44).

Jesus called the Jews bastards. Bastards were to be cut off from judicial office (“the congregation”) in Israel for at least ten generations (Deut. 23:2).³ This is why Jesus also announced: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). The Father was about to cut off His son Israel for what Israel had done to His true Son, Jesus Christ.⁴

It is God in His office as heavenly Father who serves as the archetype of the earthly judge. It is the father as head of his household, rather than the church officer or the civil magistrate, who reveals God as Judge most accurately in history.

3. This means that genetic-covenant Israel can be adopted back into God’s family. This is what Paul said will happen in the future: “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Rom. 11:11–17). That genetic-covenantal Israel will be brought back into the church is the position of such Presbyterian and Reformed commentators on Romans 11 as Charles Hodge, Robert Haldane, and John Murray. It is also the position of the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith: Question 191. See Ray R. Sutton, “Does Israel Have a Future?” *Covenant Renewal* (Dec. 1988). (<http://bit.ly/SuttonIsrael>)

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

B. The Father as Rewarder

The human father hands out punishments and rewards to his children. He treats them as children during their period of dependency and hierarchical training. Jesus announced: “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:11–13).⁵ The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). The judicial authority of the earthly father to issue rewards to those who diligently serve him is the primary mark of his unique covenantal authority.

1. Positive Sanctions

God hands out rewards in history. So do earthly fathers. Neither the church nor the state is supposed to hand out rewards when it hands down formal judgments. The judges of these two God-ordained (but God-limited) covenant institutions are supposed to deal with people as adults. They are to settle disputes that arise between legal adults. They are to prepare people to serve as heads of their own households, not treat them as children. For this reason, neither church nor state is supposed to hand out earthly rewards at the end of a trial. They are to declare the legal status of the parties of the dispute—guilty or not guilty—impose negative sanctions on the guilty party, and release the innocent party from further obligations.

What this means is that *judges are not to offer positive sanctions from the government to those declared “not guilty.”*⁶ Why not? Because this would make the judges into tyrants and/or servants of sycophants. Judges would thereby become bribe-seekers: not necessarily seekers of monetary gifts, but seekers of toadies to make them feel important.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 22.

6. This is not to say that judges are not to force the guilty parties to make restitution. Also, victims of unsolved crimes such as hit-and-run driving may be legitimately rewarded out of special trust funds administered by the civil government and financed by fines collected from those who commit “victimless crimes,” such as speeding. But these rewards are not from the government; they are from convicted criminals.

They would move steadily from the dominion religion to the power religion. Judges are not supposed to issue orders and gain loyal followers; they are instead authorized to settle disputes. *The biblical commonwealth is not a top-down bureaucracy; it is a bottom-up appeals court.*

Judges are placed in the midst of a hierarchy. They are the legal servants of God, and they are also the servants of those who are under their judicial authority. They are servants upward to God and downward to men. In a biblical civil order, those who are under the judges are in fact the sovereign agents in the delegation of covenant authority. "Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you" (Deut. 1:13). "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment" (Deut. 16:18). Thus, there is never to be a final single voice of human authority until Jesus Christ speaks His words of judgment at the final judgment. The Bible divides authority in a series of hierarchies that remove final authority from any single individual or group.

It is the dream of the covenant-breaker either to annul this system of divided authority, and replace it with a top-down centralized order (statism), or else annul all hierarchical order and gain autonomy for himself (anarchism).

2. *Contrasting Supernatural Systems of Authority*

The visible sign of God's authority is His ability to bring judgments in history: blessing and cursing. He is invisible; His blessings and cursings are visible. Israel was warned: "And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee" (Deut. 28:37). God can deliver His people; He can also lead them back into bondage to a foreign nation.

Satan imitates God when he promises his followers blessings and cursings. But he owns nothing of his own. He is a thief⁷ and a squatter in history.⁸ Neither his threats nor his gifts are to be taken very seri-

7. Judas was representative of his covenantal master, Satan: "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:3-6).

8. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth,

ously. His promises and threats are all deceptions that are designed to deflect men's vision of God's true promises and the true threats. Jesus warned people to fear God, not Satan: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

God owns the world; thus, He has the power to distribute blessings out of His own capital. Satan can offer no blessings that he has not previously stolen. The mark of Satan's imitation sovereignty is his ability to deceive people into believing in *something for nothing* on any terms except God's grace. (And even God's free gift of grace to man was paid for by Jesus Christ.) God distributes true gifts; Satan creates the illusion of distributing rewards, net, but in fact he has to collect more than he gives. There is waste, confusion, and deception in his world. *Satan always runs a deficit.*

God is independent of His creation; Satan is dependent on God's creation and God's unmerited gift of time, knowledge, and power to Satan.⁹ Satan can do only what God permits him to do (Job 1). God therefore tells His servants to serve others because He has the power to renew their strength and their economic resources. Satan tells his followers to compel service from others because he does not have the power to renew their strength and their economic resources. God gives; Satan steals. God's service moves from multiple centers (productivity) to the periphery (the needy). Satan's service moves from the periphery (tax collections) to the center (centralized political power). God's blessings reflect the procession of the Holy Spirit. Satan's blessings reflect the contraction of his kingdom in history. God brings economic growth; Satan brings economic contraction. God expands society's capital; Satan consumes society's capital. These competing systems of *supernatural covenantal sanctions* are reflected in the rival economic systems that objectify their rival ethical and legal principles: free market capitalism vs. the welfare state, whether Keynesian, socialist, or Marxist.

3. Dominion Through Service

The biblical principle of authority in every area of life is this: the greater the *service to others*, the greater the *authority over others*. "And

Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 61. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), pp. 21, 35, 39-44. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:27). "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). The servant does not take; the servant gives. This is why Jesus Christ is the greatest servant with the greatest authority: He laid down His life for mankind in general and for His followers in particular (I Tim. 4:10).¹⁰ The satanic version of dominion is the reverse of this biblical principle. Satan teaches that the greater one's *authority over others*, the greater the *services extracted from others*.

The biblical principle of service is not manifested in the same way in every institution. What is appropriate service for a father is not always appropriate for a civil magistrate, and vice versa. Both are different from a church officer. Men are to serve and give; but the particular office determines what exactly is to be given and under what conditions.

It is the mark of authority of the messianic State that it hands out rewards to those who diligently serve it. It extracts capital from all groups, but returns the booty (minus at least 50 percent "for handling") to its supporters and clients. The state steadily converts its citizens into lifetime servants (who pay, and may or may not receive anything back) and children (who obey, but also receive something). The bureaucrats, as so-called "public servants," become the actual masters. (Tell the person who stands before the tax collector that the tax collector is a public servant, and that the U.S. Internal Revenue Service is in fact a service.) The messianic state converts its citizens into permanent servants and children, and then this pseudo-parent collects the inheritance for itself from society's true families.¹¹

Because both church and state are agencies that are dependent on those under their jurisdiction for financial support, neither is supposed to hand out rewards to those declared judicially innocent in a trial. Guilty parties are supposed to pay their victims. The court restores the *status quo ante* as much as possible; this includes restitution. Courts are to administer justice, not administer rewards.

4. Productivity and Judicial Authority

The family, in contrast to both church and State, is an independently productive unit. It is not simply a necessary protective agency

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

11. Chapter 25:E.

whose services make possible economic creativity and economic growth, as is the case with the State. It creates net wealth through the skills and talents of its members. The family's primary productivity stems generally from the father. The senior judge is usually also the primary breadwinner.¹² Fathers therefore can lawfully hand down rewards to those they declare "not guilty," as well as impose sanctions on those they declare "guilty." They can use both the "carrot" and the "stick." Unlike the judges of both church and state, fathers earn wealth through their own labors; they do not rely on either tithe or taxes to fill the family's treasury. Thus, fathers are entitled to distribute rewards in their judicial capacity as judges. They are judges who in this sense are *uniquely analogous to God*, who also is not dependent on the productivity of those under His jurisdiction. "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 50:12).

When the biblical civil government pronounces judgment through its authorized representatives, it can lawfully impose only negative sanctions. It does not reward those who are declared "not guilty." It simply releases them from bondage or the threat of bondage. It is prohibited from issuing positive injunctions, nor may it lawfully hand out positive rewards to those declared innocent. Why is the biblically mandated state to be a negative sanctioning agency only? Because the state's purpose is not to imitate God as a rewarder of those who diligently search Him and obey Him. It is also not supposed to make people righteous. Its purpose is to protect those under its lawful jurisdiction from the evil acts of others who are also under its jurisdiction. The civil government's functions are exclusively negative—prohibiting specified publicly evil acts—and therefore its sanctions are exclusively negative.

C. History: Cyclical or Linear?

We return now to the sanctions of Exodus 23:25–26: "I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil."

12. The confusion of office in the modern world is the result of a change in religion, but also a change in income sources. When mothers become secondary breadwinners, it is difficult for fathers to maintain the same degree of authority as before. Nevertheless, the judicial status of the office is primary, not the economic foundation of the office. The father still declares final judgment. But the more economically dependent the family is on the wife, the more he will have to listen to her counsel. She possesses a negative sanction: the authority to quit working.

These are positive sanctions in nature.

These sanctions presuppose that nature is not normative; rather, nature is under a curse as a result of man's ethical rebellion (Gen. 3:17–19).¹³ The so-called “balance of nature” hypothesis assumes either an autonomous process of temporary linear developments locally within an overall framework of decay (Darwinism and cosmic entropy), or else an eternal alternating process of development and cosmic decay (cosmic cycles). Both perspectives regarding nature are completely antithetical to the biblical viewpoint. The biblical scientific worldview is based on the theme of death and resurrection.¹⁴

The growth of human population, if directed by God in response to the widespread honoring of God's law, is normative. So is economic growth (Deut. 8). Not cycles of nature or culture, but rather *linear development* is God's response in history to men's ethical conformity to His law-order. God's law-order is designed to promote the *rapid* fulfilling of the terms of the dominion covenant. God does not desire nature to remain governed by the law of the jungle, the desert, or the frozen wastes. He wants the *ethical obedience of mankind*. When they give Him obedience by the means of grace, He promises to extend their rule over nature in history.¹⁵ The extension of man's rule over nature is delayed primarily by the ethics of rebellion, not by innate “limits to growth” in nature. Individual limits can be overcome in a few generations, though not at zero cost.

It was sin and rebellion that thwarted the Hebrews in the attainment of their assigned tasks. They turned to the gods of Canaan—gods of the chaos festivals, the eternal cycles, and the abolition of time.¹⁶ It was not the hypothetical autonomous restraint of biological “negative feedback,” which kept the Hebrews from multiplying and filling the earth; it was instead their adoption of Canaanitic religions of cyclical growth and decay. They began to work out the implications of these rival religions, and God permitted them to sink their culture into the paralyzing pessimism of pagan faiths. He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls (Ps. 106:15). Then He scattered them: by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and finally the Romans. This was the fulfillment of the prophecy of God's negative covenantal

13. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

14. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

16. Chapter 17.

sanctions on the nation in history: “And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind” (Deut. 28:64–65).

D. Obedience and Biology

Is dominion essentially biological? Could the Israelites’ growth of population have been even more rapid than it had been in Egypt? In Egypt there had been no guarantee against miscarriages. In short, that which is *biologically abnormal*—no miscarriages—is declared by God to be *culturally and historically normative* for His redeemed people. Did God expect them to fill the earth in only a few centuries?

The rate of conception could have been reduced by God, either directly or, as in the modern world, through the development of the technology of contraception. Thus, the birth rate might have dropped in response to the increasing pressures of population growth. It is possible that God would have delayed the external fulfillment of the population aspect of the dominion covenant. We are not told, however, that any such delay was normative. There is no indication in the revelation of God to His Old Covenant people that they would experience anything except large families, zero miscarriages, and high rates of population growth, *if* they would conform themselves to His law. Certainly, the *biological option* of rapid population growth was offered to them by God.

1. Biological Blessings

Exodus 23:25–26 speaks of God’s positive sanctions in history. These sanctions are biological. “And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil.” There is no question what the source of such positive sanctions must be: *God the Father*. The state is not capable of granting this kind of reward. Thus, by promising biological rewards, God announced His covenantal office of Father.

As slaves in Egypt, the Hebrews had already experienced what has

to be the most rapid population growth on record. Using Donovan Courville's estimate of 215 years from Joseph to the exodus, a single family, plus bondservants, had grown in two centuries to as many as two million people (Ex. 12:37). Mathematically speaking, such an increase can be explained only by assuming that during the first century of Israel's residence in Egypt, other tribes and even Egyptians had voluntarily joined themselves with the Hebrews through conversion and circumcision during the era of prosperity in the land of Goshen.¹⁷

Even after the exodus, God told them that their numbers were insufficient to enable them to subdue the land of Canaan all at once. Speaking of the pagan cultures still in the land, God said: "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Ex. 23:29–30).

This is an extremely important passage. *First*, it affirms man's authority over land and animals. Even the morally perverse Canaanite tribes possessed God-given authority over the works of nature. Men, not the beasts, are supposed to subdue the earth.¹⁸ *Second*, this passage warns God's covenant-keeping people against attempting to achieve instant dominion. They must first build up their numbers, their skills, and their capital before they can expect to reign over the creation. Covenant-breakers possess skills and capital that are important to the continuity of human dominion. They can be competent administrators. Their labor can be used by God and society until an era comes when God's people are ready to exercise primary leadership in terms of God's law. At that point, ethical rebels will either be regenerated through God's grace, or else steadily replaced by the new rulers of the land.¹⁹ Until then, God's people must be content to wait patiently, improving their own administrative abilities and increasing their numbers. *Dominion is an ethical process, a process of self-government under God's law.*²⁰

God promised His people a specific reward for covenantal faithful-

17. Chapter 1.

18. The all-too-familiar statement of evolutionists that insects, especially cockroaches, are the true inheritors of the earth, the longest-lived of animals, the creatures that endure throughout history, is fully consistent with Darwinian history. It is also theologically perverse. I call it "cockroach eschatology": the bugs shall inherit the earth.

19. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*.

20. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*.

ness (23:25): *health*, including an absence of miscarriages among both humans and domesticated animals. This *conditional promise* would have enabled the Hebrews, had they remained faithful as a nation, to have achieved cultural dominion more rapidly. Ultimately, it would have led to the subduing of the whole earth, had the same rate of population growth which they had experienced in Egypt been sustained for a few more centuries.

2. Biological Cursings

God promised to heal them if they remained faithful to Him. But if they refused to obey Him, He promised to bring them under the negative biological sanctions that had plagued them in Egypt:

If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed. And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God (Deut. 28:58–62).

These negative national sanctions would be visible symbols of a return to Egypt, a reversal of the exodus, the transition from grace to wrath. *The God who brings health as a corporate covenantal blessing is also the God who brings sickness as a corporate covenantal cursing.* The text says specifically that plague is a negative sanction used by God to call His people back to Him as a covenant unit. This is why God judged Israel with a plague that killed 70,000 people when He punished David for illegally numbering the people. “So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men” (II Sam. 24:15). Sickness in general is also a negative covenant sanction. (That some Christians affirm the positive sanction of health as being from God but simultaneously deny the negative sanction of sickness testifies to their hostility to the biblical doctrine of covenantal judgment. We must positively confess Christ as Healer and

negatively confess Christ as Plague-master. To refuse to do the latter is the equivalent of preaching heaven but denying hell.)²¹

What God did not promise was covenantal neutrality. He did not promise mere stagnation. These promised biological sanctions *take from*; they do not simply “fail to add to.”

E. Covenantal Cause and Effect: Life Expectancy

A nation that is characterized by increasing longevity is clearly under the common-grace blessing of God. “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Ex. 20:12). As Paul reminded his readers: “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise” (Eph. 6:2). Ultimately, as nations conform themselves to God covenantally, God promises to restore something analogous to people’s pre-Flood longevity—a covenantal promise that is the greatest single stumbling stone in the Bible for amillennial eschatology: “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed” (Isa. 65:20). This promise is found in the midst of a group of promises, mostly economic in scope.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them (Isa. 65:17–23).²²

21. I have in mind here the so-called “positive confession” charismatics who refuse to admit that God brings sickness and plagues as covenantal judgments.

22. Archibald Hughes, an amillennialist, wrote a book called *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958). He refused to comment on the meaning of this passage, one of only two in the Old Testament that refers to the

1. A Map of Life Expectancy

As recently as 1985, three dozen nations had average life expectancy above age 70. This matched the maximum average life expectancy of Moses' day (Ps. 90:10). These nations included the North American nations of the United States and Canada, Japan, Taiwan, New Zealand and Australia, the United Kingdom and Ireland, Norway and Sweden, Iceland, all continental European nations except Turkey (most of which is in Asia), Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and the tiny oil kingdoms of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.²³ By 2010, 115 nations had average life expectancy of 70 or above, according to the United Nations and reported by Wikipedia. These high rates of life extending breakthroughs have come since the late nineteenth century. No major life extension breakthroughs have been introduced by the medical profession since the mid-1940s, with the development of antibiotics and modern insecticides.²⁴

The improvement in life expectancy has been the result of many factors, most notably rising per capita wealth, better personal hygiene, inoculation against smallpox, vaccines, better sanitation, improved public water treatment, and the development and marketing of the "super drugs" from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, including sulpha drugs and penicillin. Without modern technology and modern capital markets, none of these developments would have been likely.

The major extension of human life expectancy has come as a result of falling rates of infant mortality. One estimate calculates that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, infant mortality among Europe's ruling families was over 200 per 1,000 live births.²⁵ This fell to 70 per 1,000 in the nineteenth century.²⁶ In the United States after 1900, the rate fell by 2.5 percent per annum to 65 in 1930, and similar declines

New Heaven and New Earth, and one of only four in the Bible. The others are Isaiah 66:22, II Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21:1. I can understand his reluctance to do so; the passage has to be denied by an amillennialist. There is a sinner mentioned in verse 20. This means that the verse cannot possibly refer to the post-final judgment world of the resurrection. Thus, the "new heaven and new earth" cannot possibly be relegated exclusively to the post-historical world.

23. *Atlas of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. 119; data based on the *World Bank Atlas*, 1985.

24. William Peterson, *Population*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 576.

25. Sigismund Teller, "Birth and Death among Europe's Ruling Families since 1500," in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965); cited by Victor Fuchs, *Who Shall Live? Health, Economics, and Social Choice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 32.

26. Fuchs, *idem*.

were experienced by all nations undergoing rapid economic development.²⁷ By 1961, the rate was down to about 26 deaths per 1,000 in the first five years of life, and by 1980, to about 12.²⁸ Reduced infant mortality is why the statistics show that we live longer in this century. "Comparison of life tables from various countries at various times suggests that as life expectancy rises from 35 to 70, about four-fifths of the increase is contributed by reductions in death rates under 70. . . ."²⁹

What took place in the industrializing nations during the nineteenth century was simply unprecedented since the era of Moses: babies who are allowed by their mothers to survive do survive. (Meanwhile, there are between 35 million and 55 million abortions performed worldwide each year.)³⁰ As population scholar George Stolnitz concluded in 1955, the rise in Western life expectancy during the past century has probably been more far-reaching than the gains of the previous two millennia.³¹ In fact, it is even more remarkable than this: most of the improvement in Western Europe and English-speaking North America came between 1850 and 1900.³² This is additional evidence that the bulk of the West's gain in life expectancy since 1900 has come through the reduction of infant mortality, since this period was marked by rapidly falling rates of infant mortality. There has been a sharp average rise in life expectancy within the West, meaning a remarkable decline of differences within the region.³³ Today, "West" primarily means high technology and low mortality rates, not geography, race, or religion.

Doesn't this deny the premise of Exodus 23:25–26, namely, that God rewards His covenant people with long life? No; it means that He rewards those *societies that obey His covenant's external ethical requirements*, even if they do not adhere to the formal theological affirmation of Trinitarian faith. Like Nineveh, which avoided God's wrath by repenting of its external sins, despite the fact that it did not affirm the

27. *Idem.*

28. William A. Knaus, *Inside Russian Medicine* (New York: Everest House, 1981), chart, p. 375.

29. Fuchs, *Who Shall Live?*, p. 40.

30. *World Population and Fertility Planning Techniques: The Next 20 Years* (Washington, D.C. Office of Technology and Assessment, 1982), p. 63.

31. George J. Stolnitz, "A Century of International Mortality Trends," *Population Studies* (July 1955); reprinted in Charles B. Nam (ed.), *Population and Society* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 127.

32. Peterson, *Population*, p. 547.

33. Stolnitz, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

covenant,³⁴ the modern world has adopted the Protestant work ethic and the Puritan concept of time and thrift with-out accepting Protestantism.

What about the third world? The introduction of DDT and antibiotics into third world nations has received considerable attention from those who try to explain the post-World War II population explosion in these areas. Another reason is the increasing urbanization of many areas and the introduction of modern agricultural techniques. The two most ignored major technological innovations that have extended life expectancy in backward countries, according to economist Peter Drucker, were the invention by an unknown American in the 1860s of wire mesh screens for doors and windows, which poor families adopted to escape flying insects, and the separation of drinking water supplies from latrine areas, a technique known before Alexander of Macedon. These two ignored developments are the primary health care component of the third world's population explosion, he argues.³⁵

2. The USSR: A Third-World Nation Medically

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, that nation was the great actuarial exception among major industrial nations. Its reported life expectancy was no higher than Communist China's, which was a vastly underdeveloped nation.³⁶ In recent years, life expectancy has declined in the USSR. Reported infant mortality rose from 22 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1971 to over 31 in 1977. The reported data have declined to about 29 in 1980.³⁷ The age-adjusted death rates of the USSR and the United States intersected in 1966 at about 7.5 per 1,000. After 1966, the Soviet death rate climbed to over 9 per 1,000, while the death rate in the United States fell to about 6 per 1,000.³⁸

But the reported data probably understate the reality. On December 7, 1988, a massive earthquake struck the Armenian region of the USSR. In less than one minute, 400,000 people were left homeless in the middle of winter. The death toll was initially estimated to be as

34. If it had been converted, there would have been signs of covenantal continuity: point five of the covenant. On the contrary, the Assyrian empire conquered Israel and carried the nation into captivity.

35. Peter Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 330.

36. *Atlas of the United States*, p. 118.

37. Knaus, *Inside Russian Medicine*, chart, p. 375.

38. *Ibid.*, chart, p. 376.

high as 100,000 (later revised downward by the Soviet government to 25,000). The Soviets then called for international aid to the victims, a sign of its third-world status economically.

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, a *Los Angeles Times* wire story revealed the fact that during the previous two years, as a result of Premier Gorbachev's loosening of controls on the Soviet press, the Soviets had admitted that their health care system was in shambles. Soviet medical authorities acknowledged that the quality of medical care had deteriorated since the 1960s, with male life expectancy dropping. The Soviet Union was 51st in male life expectancy in the world, behind the Caribbean island of Barbados. Medical equipment was 1940s and 1950s vintage. "Soviet newspapers now write critically of dilapidated hospitals, corrupt and underpaid doctors who earn less than the average blue-collar worker, and nationwide shortages of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals. . . ." ³⁹ Yet the USSR had over twice the number of physicians as the United States for a population only slightly larger. ⁴⁰

William Knaus served as a Foreign Service Medical Officer for the United States Information Agency in 1973–74. In his book, *Inside Russian Medicine*, he offers an appendix: "Taking Care of Yourself in the USSR—An Informal Guide for Tourists." He warns tourists to take two sets of prescription drugs in two separate suitcases. "There is no way for you to have a prescription filled in the USSR." ⁴¹ If you get a toothache, learn to live with it. "Most Soviet dental care is crude and done without anesthetics." If there is a problem with a loose filling, the Soviet dentist will probably just extract the tooth. ⁴²

What was the secret of Soviet medicine? It was free of charge—*besplatno*—to all citizens. You get what you pay for unless the State pays for it, and the Soviet State since 1917 was far more concerned about military expenditures than public health expenditures.

3. *A Tale of Two States*

Economist Victor Fuchs included a fascinating section in his book, *Who Shall Live?* He compares two United States western states that border each other, Utah and Nevada. Utah is the state where the Mormons live. Nevada is the state where everyone comes to gamble and

39. "Soviet health system deteriorating," *Dallas Times Herald* (Dec. 10, 1988).

40. Knaus, *Inside Russian Medicine*, p. 378.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 362.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

see the floorshows with the famous entertainers and the infamous semi-nude showgirls. Infant mortality is about 40% higher in Nevada than in Utah.⁴³ It is the same throughout Nevada, and not just in the large cities. Statistically, infant mortality or survival is heavily dependent on the physical and emotional condition of the mother.

The death rates for children ages 1–19 is 16% higher for males in Nevada; it is 26% higher for females. Then the disparity increases: 44% (males) and 42% (females), ages 20–39. It climbs to an astounding discrepancy of 54% (males) and 69% (females), ages 40–49. Then it drops to 20% (males) and 6% (females), ages 70–79.⁴⁴ Fuchs analyzed the differences.

The two states are very much alike with respect to income, schooling, degree of urbanization, climate, and many other variables that are frequently thought to be the cause of variations in mortality. (In fact, average family income is actually higher in Nevada than in Utah.) The numbers of physicians and of hospital beds per capita are also similar in the two states.

What, then, explains these huge differences in death rates? The answer almost surely lies in the different life-styles of the residents of the two states. Utah is inhabited primarily by Mormons, whose influence is strong throughout the state. Devout Mormons do not use tobacco or alcohol and in general lead stable, quiet lives. Nevada, on the other hand, is a state with high rates of cigarette and alcohol consumption and very high rates of marital and geographical instability. The contrast with Utah in these respects is extraordinary.

In 1970, 63 percent of Utah's residents 20 years of age and over had been born in the state; in Nevada the comparable figure was only 10 percent; for persons 35–64 the figures were 64 percent in Utah and 8 percent in Nevada. Not only were there more than nine of ten Nevadans of middle age born elsewhere, but more than 60 percent were not even born in the west. . . .

The differences in marital status between the two states are also significant in view of the association between marital status and mortality. . . . More than 20 percent of Nevada's males ages 35–64 are single, widowed, divorced, or not living with their spouses. Of those who are married with spouse present, more than one-third had been previously widowed or divorced. In Utah the comparable figures are

43. Fuchs, *Who Shall Live?*, p. 52.

44. *Idem*.

only half as large.⁴⁵

After studying the data, Fuchs concluded that rising income in the United States will make only marginal improvements in life expectancy. The great strides in life expectancy had little to do with improved medical care until the 1930s, and then only for one decade. Today, it is heart disease, cancer, and other degenerative diseases that kill us. He saw no major gains in life expectancy ahead based on improvements in public health or medical technology. Effective medicine is widely distributed and widely available. Thus, he concluded, the greatest potential for improving the health of Americans is a change in their life-style: diet, smoking, drinking, marriage, and so forth. In short, the fundamental health issues are now ethical.

If he had defined ethics as covenantal, and if he had linked ethics to such matters as invention, capitalization, and the diffusion of technology to the masses, I would agree with him. Ethics has effects far beyond personal life-style. Covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking affect everything, including personal health.

F. Stagnation as Judgment

God's covenants are frequently familistic. So are His blessings: long life for honoring parents (Ex. 20:12), health for general obedience (Ex. 23:25), and large families (Ps. 127:5). Long-term stagnation—economically, demographically, intellectually—is a sign of God's displeasure. Growth must not be seen as inherently destructive. More than this: *a static culture cannot survive*. It has to change in order to survive. Population growth, like any kind of social growth, can be either a blessing or a curse (a prelude to disaster), depending on the character of the people who are experiencing the expansion. It is *ethics*, not growth as such, which determines the legitimacy or illegitimacy of any given social growth process in a particular period of history.

Greater numbers of people can and often do result in more efficient ways to fulfill the cultural mandate. The increasing division of labor permits greater specialization and greater output per unit of resource input.⁴⁶ Population growth is specifically stated to be a response of God to covenantal faithfulness, but it is also a tool of dominion.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

46. This does not mean that a growing population is always an economic blessing. Again, it is the ethical character of the people, not rates of biological reproduction, which determines the character of the growth process, either curse or blessing.

God's ethical universe is one of *positive feedback*: from victory unto victory. This ethical standard has visible effects in history. Ethical development, meaning progressive sanctification ("set-apartness") in terms of God's law, is eventually accompanied by the compound growth process, i.e., positive feedback, in human affairs.⁴⁷

1. Entropy and Its Effects

Negative feedback is a limiting factor in a cursed world. The animals are not allowed to multiply and overcome the land. They are restrained by man or by "the forces of nature," meaning the environment's built-in limitations on the compound growth process. Negative feedback is *in part* the product of God's curse. There are indeed limits to growth. Growth is not automatic. Growth is not a zero-price process. But negative feedback—sometimes characterized as the so-called "law of entropy"—is not the characteristic feature of the universe. The grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ is the characteristic feature of the universe: *redemption, resurrection, and restoration*.

Entropy is a fundamental principle of physical science that states that the movement of molecules tends to become increasingly random over time. Less and less usable energy is available to perform work as time goes on. When the idea of entropy—a scientific phenomenon of hypothetically autonomous physical nature—begins to turn the faith of a particular civilization toward pessimism about mankind's long-term future, then that civilization has come under the judgment of God.⁴⁸ It was lack of faith in the future which brought down the ancient city-states, including Rome. When classical civilization finally capitulated to the inherent pessimism of all cyclical history, nothing could save it.⁴⁹ Rome fell: to Christianity in the East (Byzantium), and to the barbarians in the West.

Negative feedback in one's personal life is not necessarily a sign of God's curse. Positive feedback in life is not necessarily a sign of God's grace. There are cases where righteous individuals are judged (Job, for instance). It all depends on one's ethical standing before God. God

47. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, chaps. 7, 8.

48. See, for example, the book by Marxist critic and New Age commentator Jeremy Rifkin, *Entropy: A New World View* (New York: Bantam, [1980] 1981). For a detailed refutation, see my book, *Is the World Running Down?*

49. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957). (<http://bit.ly/cnccacc>). This was reprinted by the Liberty Fund.

sometimes “sets up” sinners for destruction—a kind of entrapment (the Pharaoh of the exodus, for instance). But generally, growth is a blessing, and contraction is a curse: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that [which] he hath” (Matt. 13:12). The general rule is growth for the godly and contraction for the ungodly. In neither case can people preserve the status quo.

2. *Humanism, Paganism, and the Status Quo*

A zero-growth philosophy is the product of humanism, both secular and occult. It is a philosophy of the status quo—the preservation of the society of Satan, as if he had not been dealt a mortal wound at Calvary, as if he were not on the defensive internationally against the leaven of Christ’s kingdom (Matt. 13:33). The universe is cursed; its resources are limited; but this reality is not evidence that favors a no-growth philosophy. The biblical doctrine of fallen man does not teach men to believe in a world that is cursed forever. Judgment and final restoration are coming. Time is bounded. Redeemed mankind must fulfill God’s dominion assignment, in time and on earth, before Jesus returns in final judgment.⁵⁰

Humanists and satanists wish to deny the sovereignty of God, and therefore virtually all of them affirm the sovereignty of the entropy process. They wish to escape the eternal judgment of God, so they affirm an impersonal finality for all biological life. Men have sometimes turned to a philosophy of historical cycles to help them avoid the testimony of God concerning linear history. Others have turned to the entropy process when they have adopted a Western version of linear history. They settle for slow decay rather than cycles. The goal is to escape the judgment of God. All of them prefer to avoid the truth: for covenant-breakers, the growth process will be cut short. A new downward cycle will triumph, they argue. Entropy will triumph. Anyway, *something* will triumph, but not the God of the Bible.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new phenomenon hit the academic and intellectual world: defenders of no-growth economics.⁵¹ Prior to this, virtually all professional economists had been concerned with foster-

50. Perfect fulfillment is impossible because of sin, but it can be approached as an ethical limit.

51. The most prominent academic economist in the no-growth camp is E. J. Mishan: *The Costs of Economic Growth* (New York: Praeger, 1967); *The Economic Growth Debate: An Assessment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977).

ing economic growth.⁵² This was part of an overall attack on growth in general.⁵³ Population growth was the primary target of these attacks.⁵⁴ From 1965 through 1976, governments had poured over a billion and a quarter dollars into programs promoting worldwide population control, and the Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation added another \$250 million.⁵⁵ All of this public concern over the population explosion was virtually an overnight phenomenon, beginning around 1965. All of it sprang from anti-Christian roots.⁵⁶

Rushdoony's comments on pagan antiquity's hostility to change is applicable to the zero-growth movement of the modern humanist world:

The pagan hatred of *change* was also a form of asceticism, and it is present in virtually all anti-Christianity. The hatred of change leads to attempts to stop change, to stop history, and to create an end-of-history civilization, a final order which will end mutability and give man an unchanging world. Part of this order involves also the scientific efforts to abolish death. This hatred of change is a hatred of creation, and of its movement in terms of God's purpose. Unlike the pagan and the humanist, the orthodox Christian is committed to a respect for creation.

This respect for creation gave roots to science in the Christian west. It is not an accident of history that science in other cultures has had a limited growth and a quick withering. . . . The pagan perspective is one of a fundamental disrespect for creation, for the universe. The central problems for the Hellenic mind were *change* and *decay*. . . .⁵⁷

52. Bert F. Hoselitz (ed.), *Theories of Economic Growth* (New York: Free Press, 1960). This book traces economic theories on growth back to the seventeenth century.

53. Dennis Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972). See also Mancur Olson and Hans H. Landsberg (eds.), *The No-Growth Society* (New York: Norton, 1973).

54. Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballentine, 1968). This became a runaway best-seller. See also Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Biological Time Bomb* (New York: World, 1968). These books are in contrast to an earlier, more restrained discussion of population issues: Philip M. Hauser, *The Population Dilemma* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963). Then came a Presidential commission report, *Population and the American Future* (New York: Signet, 1972), a popular paperback version of a government report. The story was the same: the danger of population growth.

55. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 293.

56. See my critique in Appendix B: "The Demographics of Decline." See also James A. Weber, *Grow or Die!* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1977).

57. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Coun-*

The religion of zero growth is a religion of *decay* and *delay*. It proclaims inescapable decay, and offers a short-term social program of delaying the effects on society of this supposedly inescapable decay. The proper response to this religion is to point to God, whose law-order, through grace, offers redeemed man an escape hatch from entropy. The godly response is to promote long-term growth by means of a proclamation and enforcement of biblical law. We must proclaim *dominion through long-term growth*—a growth process that is the product of *progressive ethical sanctification*.

Christianity is not a religion of decay, but of life and progress. It is not a religion of delay, but of the return of Christ in judgment, after He has delivered up a developed earthly kingdom to God the Father (I Cor. 15:24), and has put all His enemies under His feet (I Cor. 15:25). Christianity is not a religion of entropy, either cosmic or social; it is a religion of progress, both cosmic and social.

We must not promote growth for its own sake. "Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell," Edward Abbey once remarked. We are not to pursue the fruits of Christian faith; we are to pursue the roots. Through grace, we are to conform ourselves and our institutions to the requirements of biblical law. The result will be long-term growth. Growth is a reward for righteous living, not a goal to pursue at the expense of righteous living. But we must not be deluded into believing that the fruit of righteousness is zero growth. Far less are we to pursue zero growth as a way of life. Our obligation is to seek first the kingdom of God; all these other things will be added unto us (Matt. 6:33). *Added*—not subtracted, and not kept the same.

Conclusion

God brings His sanctions in history: cursings and blessings. He delegates to heads of families the authority to dispense positive sanctions to covenant-keeping children. The family unit is the heart of all economic growth, and therefore the head of the family, as the one who lawfully allocates the family's assets, is entitled to grant positive sanctions to those under his authority.

Church and state are not originally creative economically, but only corrective and protective ethically. The state provides the institutional framework of property ownership, which in turn affects economic pro-

ductivity. The church declares God's ethical standards, and it provides access to the sacraments which alone make possible God's common grace in history. Without common grace, there could be no economic growth for pagans, and there would be a drastically reduced division of labor, which would also reduce the wealth of Christians.⁵⁸ Both church and State are dependent economically on the blessings of God and the productivity of private citizens because these covenant institutions serve both God and private citizens. They possess lawful authority as derived sovereignties—derived from God and man—which means that they must derive their direct economic support from those over whom they rule and therefore also serve. Their authority cannot be separated from their economic dependence on those over whom they exercise authority.

This is one reason why both the tithe and civil taxes are supposed to be proportional to the net output and therefore the net income of those under their jurisdiction. Civil and ecclesiastical judges are supposed to declare and enforce God's law, so that the whole society can prosper. They should be able to expand their income and influence only to the extent that they serve God and man in a covenantally faithful way. The visible manifestation of their success or failure in this task is the performance of the economy, including the ability of the economy to deliver effective medical services.

Dominion requires the mastery of every area of life in terms of God's revealed laws. This in turn requires faithful preaching of the comprehensive effects of God's redemption. Christ bought back everything when He sacrificed Himself. What dominion produces is order and growth, as well as orderly growth.

When God brings judgment on rebellious societies, He brings sickness, disorder, and economic stagnation. The modern no-growth humanists, including baptized humanists who call themselves Christians, are proclaiming a gospel of stagnation. They want order—a top-down, centrally planned order—but they do not want growth. The very complexity of a modern growing economy threatens their ability to promote a growing state-directed order.⁵⁹ Other critics of capitalism want decentralization, a “down on the farm” world of a minimal division of

58. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, pp. 53, 58, 76, 245.

59. See the anti-population growth arguments of socialist Bertrand Russell, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 273. I have reproduced his arguments in the Conclusion to Chapter 1.

labor and zero growth.⁶⁰ Thus, their ideology is hostile to growth of most kinds.

God says that such a view of His kingdom is evil, although it is an accurate view of Satan's kingdom. To promote a zero-growth philosophy is to promote historical stalemate—a stalemate between God's kingdom and Satan's, between growth and decay, between good and evil. Satan wants a stalemate if he cannot get a victory. Long-term economic growth is a product of God's grace in response to covenantal faithfulness, itself a gift from God. Long-term economic growth is therefore a denial of stalemated kingdoms. It is a demonstration of God's victory over Satan, creativity over destruction, ethics over power.

60. Art Gish, "Decentralist Economics," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), Pt. III. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

GOD’S LIMITS ON SACRIFICE

And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats’ hair, And rams’ skins dyed red, and badgers’ skins, and shittim wood, Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them (Ex. 25:3–8).

And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much (Ex. 36:5–7).

God is the Creator of the world. He therefore owns it: “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1).¹ As the cosmic Owner, God demands a percentage of the profits from His subordinates. We are all sharecroppers in God’s world.

A. An Offering for the King

God is also the King of creation. Thus, as a reigning monarch, God is entitled to occasional public manifestations of loyalty from His people. At times of formal covenant renewal, His people are asked by God to bring offerings to Him. This is a continuing theme in the Bible. The word “offerings” appears 265 times in the King James Version.

1. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, 2012), ch. 5.

The word “offering” appears 724 times. “Sacrifice” appears 218 times.² When a man comes formally into the presence of God, he is expected to bring an offering.

God is present with His people at all times, but there are times of special covenantal presence with His people. There are also special times of God’s covenantal departure from His people. Both instances are times of judgment. This is why God’s presence is associated with peace offerings of various kinds. Man is not to come empty-handed into the presence of the King. A man who brings no offering or a cheap offering does not really expect judgment, either positive or negative. This was God’s warning to Israel through Malachi.

Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there

2. I am using the handy tallies provided by the Godspeed electronic Bible search program.

shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts (Mal. 2:17–3:12).³

B. A Question of Subordination

God's intention is to gain loyalty from His subordinates. The visible sign of their continued subordination is their willingness to bring Him their tithes and offerings. But the ultimate offering is always ethical. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:7–8). The ultimate offering is man's own life: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).⁴

In one sense, the sacrifices that men are required to bring are limited: the regular, disciplined tithe on all net increases. In another sense, the sacrifice is unlimited: a lifetime of perfect obedience. This points to the necessity of a substitute payment. Fallen man's gifts are insufficient to meet God's demands, and a man will destroy himself if he attempts to satisfy the perfect demands of God. No matter how hard he works, it is pointless. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6). Yet at the same time, God does demand this total sacrifice. There seems to be a contradiction here, but it is resolved in history by Jesus Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, the only offering that pleases God perfectly, once and for all.

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having ob-

3. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, 2012), ch. 33.

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

tained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:11–15).

The underlying ethical reason why God does not demand total sacrifice from men is that they do not have the means of placating His wrath or meeting His demands. So, He is gracious to man. *He limits His demands on them as a testimony to His grace to them.* He calls them to slow, steady, faithful, lifetime service, and He restrains their orgies of self-justifying sacrifice that cannot be sustained emotionally or economically over a lifetime. He announced this to Israel at the beginning of their journey in the wilderness.

C. Covenant Law, Covenant Presence

God brought Moses to Mt. Sinai in the third month after He had brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt (Ex. 19:1). He first instructed Moses to deliver His commandments and the case-law applications of these Ten Commandments to the people, and these laws fill chapters 20–23 of the Book of Exodus. The Israelites affirmed their allegiance to these laws, promising their obedience (Ex. 24:3). To seal this covenantal promise, Moses then subjected them to a rite of covenant affirmation.

And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words (Ex. 24:4–9).

1. *Covenantal Stipulations*

The ethical terms of this covenant are eternal and therefore still binding on all who desire to participate in God's covenant.⁵ Half the blood he sprinkled on the altar, and half on the people (Ex. 24:6–8). This bloody sacrifice made by Moses pointed to *the necessity of the shedding of blood as the means of gaining God's protection*, the same message that had been proclaimed ritually to the Hebrews by the blood on the doorposts on the night of the death of Egypt's firstborn.⁶

Again, God called Moses to return to the mountain. He told Moses that, once again, the people would be given His laws on tables of stone (Ex. 24:12). For six days, the glory of God shone on Mt. Sinai, and the cloud covered it. On the seventh day, God called out of the midst of the cloud to Moses, and Moses went into the cloud (Ex. 24:16–18). The symbolism should be obvious: God is transcendentally distant from man for six days, imaging the original week of creation; then He calls man into His glorious presence on the seventh day, the day of the Lord. The transcendent God brings man into His presence. The day of the Lord is the archetypal day of judgment.⁷

2. *Recapitulating the Creation*

Meredith Kline wrote that the history of the exodus, which culminates in the building of the tabernacle, is presented to us in such a way that it brings out its character as a redemptive re-enactment of creation.⁸ The building of the tabernacle was a microcosmic imitation of God's original creation week. Both were covenantal events, he said. There is a historical-literary parallelism between the original creation and the exodus re-creation.⁹ In this re-creation event, the tabernacle is important as a visible manifestation of God's transcendence and also His presence in His glory-cloud. The cloud hovers over Mt. Sinai and

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1977] 1984).

6. Gary North, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

7. Christians bring sacrifices to God each Sunday on the Lord's Day: tithes and offerings. This is fitting and proper. It is a day of judgment because it is a day of the Lord's presence. But rarely do churches celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. Why not? The presence of the Lord was manifested at his regular required feasts in Israel. Why is this not also the case in New Testament times?

8. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 37.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

reproduces its likeness below. "At the foot of Sinai the tabernacle appears, made according to the archetypal pattern seen on the mount, designed to be a replica of the Glory-Spirit-temple."¹⁰

The earth-cosmos was made after the archetypal pattern of the Glory-Spirit referred to in Genesis 1:2 and accordingly is viewed in Scripture as a cosmic royal residence or temple.¹¹ Heaven and earth were established as a holy palace of the Creator-King, with the heaven of heavens in particular corresponding to the Glory-cloud as the seat of his sovereignty.

Then, preparing a place for the man-priest who was to be created, the Lord God produced in Eden a microcosmic version of his cosmic sanctuary. The garden planted there was holy ground with guardianship of its sanctity committed in turn to men and to cherubim.¹² It was the temple-garden of God,¹³ the place chosen by the Glory-Spirit who hovered over creation from the beginning to be the focal site of his throne-presence among men.¹⁴

The tabernacle would be God's place of residence within the nation of Israel. His transcendent glory, manifested in the glory-cloud, would reside in the tabernacle. Kline continued: "Thus, in producing the tabernacle as a symbolic image of his Glory-Spirit, the Creator Lord so designed it that it also recapitulated the macrocosmic and microcosmic versions of the Glory-temple which he fashioned in the original creation. And as God crowned the finished Genesis creation with his majestic Glory over Eden, so, when the tabernacle stood complete at Sinai, the Glory-cloud covered and filled it, sealing it as an authentic likeness of the Spirit-temple (Exod. 40:34ff.), the Alpha and Omega of all creation."¹⁵

The first instructions that God gave to Moses after his entrance into God's glory-cloud involved the plans of the proposed tabernacle. The plans for this structure were so detailed that the written account takes up more space in Exodus (chapters 25–28) than the laws that had just been delivered to the people. Then came the detailed instructions concerning the ceremonies to be conducted in the tabernacle (chapters 29–31). Nothing else is recorded about God's instructions to

10. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

11. Rom. 13:14; I Cor. 15:53–54; II Cor. 5:2ff.; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10.

12. Gen. 2:15; 3:24.

13. Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13, 16, 31:9.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Moses during the 40 days and nights that Moses spent with God on Mt. Sinai, except for God's warning to the Israelites to keep the sabbath (31:12–17).

D. Covenants and Sacrifice

The importance of sacrifice in all religion cannot be overemphasized. The sacrifices inaugurated by God in these chapters are contrasted with the sacrifice demanded by the Israelites during Moses' absence. *Both paganism and orthodoxy require sacrifices from the faithful.* Abel brought his sacrifice before God, and Cain brought his. God gave specific instructions to Moses concerning the kinds of sacrifices that He required, just as the people of Israel had instructed Aaron about the kind that their god required.

1. Recapitulating the Fall

The Israelites had "spoiled" the Egyptians before they left, taking with them gold and jewels that had belonged to their former masters. This had been God's gracious restoration to them of the lost capital that the Egyptians had extracted from them and their forefathers.¹⁶ These goods offered them a new beginning economically. To this extent, the exodus was a restoration of Eden.

In Eden, God had departed from Adam and Eve for a while. During his absence, they sinned. Moses also departed, climbing the mountain of God. During Moses' initial absence, the Israelites had insisted to Aaron that they be allowed to sacrifice a portion of this wealth in order to construct gods to go before them (Ex. 32:1). Aaron used their gold to construct a calf, and the people then attributed their victory over the Egyptians to these new gods that were represented by the calf (Ex. 32:8). They re-enacted the fall of man.

It is not surprising that the Hebrews turned to the sculpture of a bull when they sought to represent polytheistic power. The Apis bull was the single most important religious animal in Egypt. The birth and death of each Apis bull were recorded in Egyptian records as faithfully as the ritual ordination and death of each Pharaoh. In fact, *only* these events were important enough in the eyes of the Egyptians to maintain in official records, dynasty after dynasty.¹⁷ The Hebrews demonstrated

16. Chapter 6.

17. George Rawlinson, *History of Ancient Egypt*, 2 vols. (New York: John B. Alden, 1886), II, p. 2.

by the construction of the calf that their world-and-life view was still dominated by the theology of Egypt. Though they had been delivered physically and geographically from Egypt, they had not yet been delivered spiritually. They still were under the influence of the religion of their former captors. They were still in spiritual bondage. For this reason, that first generation of the exodus did not enter the land of Canaan. They went out of Egypt, but they did not come into the promised land. They could not return to the sin-filled pseudo-garden of Egypt, just as Adam and Eve could not return to the garden. Yet they refused to go forward on God's terms, so they wandered until they died.

2. *The Works of Man's Hand*

They had cried out to Aaron, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us" (Ex. 32:1b). Why did they choose to worship *gods*? The calf represented the polytheistic gods of Egypt. They preferred to worship the defeated gods of their captors rather than worship the victorious God of the exodus. Had they been disciples of power as such, they would have worshipped God, but *the power religion necessarily is humanistic*: it worships only those gods that manifest themselves through man and the works of man's hand. This kind of hand-crafted god, they recognized clearly, was not the God of the Bible, who had brought judgment on Egypt despite their continual complaints and fears. He was a God who did not need their assistance or their sacrifices in order to manifest His consummate power in history. This God was not yet visibly manifested in their midst, and they were unwilling to wait for His presence—a familiar biblical theme (I Sam. 13:8–14). They had Aaron build a calf as their representative before the gods.

The Hebrews were not naive. They did not believe that the calf had delivered them. They wanted to worship an object that was symbolic of the supernatural powers that they now claimed had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, and which supposedly communicated with men through the medium of man-created idols. Pagan religion is not the worship of sticks and stones. It is the worship of powerful occult forces that do the bidding of men, if men worship them in a rigorously prescribed manner. Man manipulates his world by manipulating these occult forces. Even the English word *manipulates* testifies to the theology of idol worship: control is achieved manually, "by hand." This is the theology of magic: "As above, so below." Man believes that he can

manipulate the creation in certain ways that force the gods of power to conform to his will. What he does on earth calls forth the man-directed power of the gods. The popular description of the occult voodoo religion is accurate: the person sticking pins into a doll. Sticking pins into a doll is a form of what is called sympathetic magic. What man does to the doll will then be reflected in what happens to the person who is represented by the doll. As below (pins in the doll), so above (power of the gods). As above (power of the gods), so below (the human victim suffers). Man calls down (or calls up) the gods to serve his purposes. He chooses ritual manipulation rather than covenantal faithfulness as his tool of dominion. This is also the theology of modern autonomous science.¹⁸

E. The Creator-Creature Distinction

“As above, so below” is not simply the basis of the power religion, both magic and science; it is also the basis of cause and effect in biblical religion. The error of power religion is to assume that the link is metaphysical rather than covenantal, that the link is based on a chain of being among the gods, man, and the creation.

18. Prior to the 1920s, Western scientists believed that the forces put into the service of man were strictly impersonal. A specially trained priesthood—pure scientists and technologists—was seen as the source of access to these generally unknown powers. The priesthood has not changed, but the theology has shifted. Something far closer to ancient magic now dominates modern thought. The sharp distinction between subject and object, between man and his environment, has become blurred. Simultaneously, man has become more impersonal, while the external world around us has become far more personal, a reflection of man, and even the creation of man. Does this mean that modern humanist thought teaches that it is actually man who creates the orderliness of nature? Increasingly, this is exactly what is being said. Timothy Ferris wrote of Sir Arthur Eddington, the brilliant British astronomer of the early twentieth century: “Eddington believed the laws of nature reside within our minds, are created not by the cosmos but by our perceptions of it, so that a visitor from another planet could deduce all our science simply by analyzing how our brains are wired. In Eddington’s view, we know physical laws *a priori*, as [Immanuel] Kant maintained, although where Kant conceived part of our *a priori* knowledge as inborn, Eddington felt it was derived from experience in observation and reasoning.” Ferris, *The Red Limit: The Search for the Edge of the Universe* (New York: William Morrow, 1977), p. 116. This is radical subjectivism, an obvious development of consistent humanism. See Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

1. *A Legal Hierarchy*

The Bible rejects all versions of the religion of the chain of being.¹⁹ The Creator-creature distinction is absolute. As Van Til says, "The entire Christian theistic position stands or falls with the concept of the nature of the relation of God to man."²⁰ "The idea of creation makes a distinction of being between God and man. Anyone holding to the idea of creation (we speak of temporal and not of logical creation) must also hold to the idea of a God who existed apart from the world and had meaning for himself apart from the world. . . . If theism is right, all things are at bottom two, and not one."²¹ God is not man, nor is God part of the creation.

The link between the two realms, natural and supernatural, is the covenant. Christ told the disciples to pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The will of God, as revealed in His covenant law, is the standard of what should take place both above and below. Christ also told Peter, after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). It is the law of God which binds and looses; the keys of the kingdom are biblical law.²² Men in their capacity as ordained officers, as God's representative covenantal agents, declare His law and enforce it. The will of God, not the will of man, is absolute. This is why the Creator-creature distinction must be at the foundation of all Christian philosophy, for without it, the chain-of-being theology of autonomous man undermines the revelation of God to man and the law of God for man. As Van Til wrote:

The Christian position maintains that man, as a creature of God, naturally would have to inquire of God what is right and wrong. Originally God spoke to man directly and man could speak to God directly. Since the entrance of sin man has to speak to God mediately. He has now to learn from Scriptures what is the acceptable will of God for him. In opposition to this the non-Christian position holds that man

19. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), pp. 33–39. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

20. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. II of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (den Dulk Foundation, 1969), p. 16.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.

22. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 619.

does not need Scripture as a final authority. And this is maintained because the non-Christian does not believe that man ever needed to be absolutely obedient to God. Non-Christian ethics maintains that it is of the nature of the ethical life that man must, in the last analysis, decide for himself what is right and what is wrong.²³

2. Broken Tablets, Broken Covenant

Moses' dramatic response to the Hebrews' public demonstration of magical power religion—his response of symbolic ritual—was to break the stone tablets that had been delivered to him by God. These inscribed tablets were not the product of man's hand. God, not Moses, had written His ten laws on the tablets (Ex. 31:18). These laws set forth the basis of God's cooperation with man, a set of *ethical principles rather than prescribed rituals*. The ethical bond was based on a personal covenant between God and His people, a *law-covenant*. Moses destroyed the tablets as a ritual response to the people because they had broken the ethical covenant (Ex. 19) by their rebellious ritual response to God. They had chosen to worship a god of their own hands. Moses demonstrated ritually what this really meant: their breaking of the covenant of God the Cosmic Potter, who makes man as a potter forms the clay. They were not willing to acknowledge, as Isaiah later acknowledged: "But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Isa. 64:8). God then smashes the rebellious clay in judgment: "Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you. I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth the clay" (Isa. 41:24–5).

To dramatize the inevitable judgment of God, Moses then conducted another ritual—from a strictly economic standpoint, probably the most graphic ritual ever recorded in the Bible. He burned the calf in the fire, smashed its remains to powder, put the powder in water, and then commanded the people to drink the water (32:20).²⁴ Biological processes then took over to produce the final, graphic, and memorable

23. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), p. 33.

24. This was equivalent to the ordeal of jealousy which was required in the Old Testament when a husband brought a charge of adultery against his wife (Num. 5:11–31).

ritual disposal of the religious symbol that had consumed so much of their capital. They saw their capital go down the proverbial drain.

The people had demanded the right to sacrifice part of their wealth to the god of their own hands. The calf had been made quickly by amateur craftsmen working under Aaron, and had been put into immediate service. They sacrificed joyfully, participating in sexual debauchery (Ex. 32:25) as a religious affirmation of their faithfulness to the gods of the chaos festival, the gods of cosmic renewal through ritual lawlessness.²⁵ These were the gods that were familiar to them, polytheistic gods like those of Egypt, from which they had been delivered, and also like those of Canaan, which they believed was about to be delivered into their hands. *Here were gods that demanded sacrifice and ritual, but not ethical regeneration.* Here were gods of their hearts and hands.

3. Pyramid and Tabernacle

In contrast to the calf that had been crafted by amateurs, with its religion of professional debauchery, God's tabernacle was detailed and magnificent, yet portable. It moved with the people because God moved before the people, guiding them. To build it, the people had to dig deeply once again into what remained of their treasure. It was to be a voluntary sacrifice. They responded enthusiastically (Ex. 35:21–22, 29). The craftswomen contributed the best that they had (35:25–26). Bezaleel, a craftsman, was given special knowledge from God to master the arts (35:31), as well as a special gift of teaching (35:34). He and Aholiab, who also had been given the gift of teaching, became the contractors who directed the building of the tabernacle (35:30–34). God imparted special skills to those who assisted them (35:35). The people brought in their offerings daily (36:3). In fact, they continued to bring in so much that there was an overflow of materials (36:5). Moses had to tell them to cease their labors and to stop bringing in their handicrafts (36:6–7).

A very different structure is the Cheops pyramid of Giza in Egypt. It remains an architectural and technological wonder. It is the last surviving edifice of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Scholars have

25. Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), p. 164. Cf. Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia: The Function of the State," in H. and H. A. Frankfort, et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1946] 1977), pp. 198–201.

studied it in great detail. There is even a school of arcane knowledge called “pyramidology,” which attempts to find in its dimensions prophetic truths.²⁶

No one knows how it was built, but the usual estimate is that 100,000 slaves and 40,000 skilled craftsmen had to work on it for 20 years.²⁷ Not only is the pyramid a technological wonder—we still have no clear idea of how it was built—it is a mathematical wonder. This has been recognized by Western scholars for over a century. John Taylor, editor of the *London Observer*, and a gifted mathematician, began playing with the measurements of the Great pyramid reported by Col. Richard Howard-Vyse. This was in the 1850s. Taylor asked why only this pyramid had the angle of 51 degrees and 51 minutes. He found that each of the Pyramid's four faces had the area of the square of its height.²⁸ No other pyramid was so constructed. Then he discovered that if he divided the perimeter of the Pyramid by twice its height, it gave him a quotient of 3.144, which is very close to π : 3.14159+. Peter Tomkins remarked in a footnote that not until the sixth century A.D. was π correctly worked out to the fourth decimal point by a Hindu scholar, Arya-Bhata.²⁹

This was only the beginning. He concluded that the pyramid was a representation of the earth, with the perimeter as the circumference at the equator and the height as the distance from the earth's center to the pole. But what unit of measurement could they have used? He looked for a unit that would retain the π proportion and fit the pyramid in whole numbers.

When he came to 366.1165 he was struck by the similarity of 366 to the number of days in the year and wondered if the Egyptians might have intentionally divided the perimeter of the Pyramid into units of the solar year.

He then noticed that if he converted the perimeter into inches, it came very nearly to 100 times 366. Also he was surprised to see that

26. How it supposedly can do this by means of different measuring systems is indeed a wonder.

27. Peter Tomkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* (New York: Harper Colophon, [1971] 1978), pp. 227–28. The figure of 20 years comes from Herodotus.

28. This fact later led to the discovery that the Pyramid was designed to incorporate not only π but also the so-called Golden Section, or ϕ , or 1.618. $\phi + 1 = \phi^2$ square. Also, $1 + 1/\phi$ leads to the additive series known as the Fibonacci series. *Ibid.*, pp. 190, 192. They had also figured out the relation between π and ϕ : $\pi = \phi \times 6/5$. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 71n.

if he divided the base by 25 inches, he obtained the same 366 result. Could the ancient Egyptians have used a unit so close to the British inch? And a cubit of 25 such inches?³⁰

At the same time, the famed astronomer Sir John Herschel had postulated a unit of measurement half a hair's breadth longer than a British inch as the only sensible earth-commensurable unit based on the actual size of the earth. He was critical of the French meter derived from a curved meridian of the earth because of its erratic and variable nature from country to country because the earth is not a true sphere. Each meridian of longitude would be different. (One wonders if this may have been a bit of intellectual British imperialism, a reaction against the revolutionary French with their far more easily computed units of tenths, hundredths, and thousandths.) Herschel argued that the only reliable basis of a standard of measure is the polar axis of the earth—a straight line from pole to pole—which a recent British ordinance survey had set at 7898.78 miles, or 500,500,000 British inches, or an even 500 million inches if the unit was half a hair's breadth longer.³¹ (Do we all have equally wide hairs?)

So what? Fifty of such modified inches would make a yard exactly one ten-millionth of the polar axis, and half that measure would make a useful cubit. This was the unit that Taylor had found to fit the Pyramid in multiples of 366. "To Taylor the inference was clear: the ancient Egyptians must have had a system of measurements based on the true spherical dimensions of the planet, which used a unit which was within a thousandth part of being equal to a British inch."³²

These studies were followed by Charles Piazzzi Smyth, the Astronomer Royal of Scotland, who went to Egypt, made many detailed measurements, and concluded that the Egyptians had computed *pi* down to 3.14159.³³

Studies by British engineer David Davidson in the 1920s and 1930s revealed that the Pyramid measures all three types of the calendar year: solar, sidereal (star), and anomalistic (orbital-perihelion).³⁴

The base of the Pyramid corresponds to the distance the earth rotates in half a second at the equator.³⁵

30. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

The priests could have measured the length of the solar year within a minute, or four points of a decimal.³⁶

I could go on, but it is not necessary. The Egyptian priests and architects were masters of mathematics and geography to a degree unknown in the textbooks. Why did they go to such an effort in building the Cheops pyramid? Because the Cheops pyramid served them well. It was a measuring device as well as a symbol of their mastery of science. But it no doubt also served them as a giant talisman. It was a microcosm of the earth. Magic proclaims: "As above, so below." Here was a device for initiations, for manipulating the world.

In contrast to the pyramid stands—although it no longer stands—the tabernacle, and later the temple. The tabernacle did not rely on sophisticated measurements to put man in contact with cosmic forces. God's law did that, written on tablets at the center of the tabernacle and therefore at the center of society. God's presence with men was not based on their ability to reproduce His world in a model. His presence or absence was established by their covenantal faithfulness. It was the law that was crucial, not measurements in stone. It was man's heart of stone that was his problem, not the design of the tabernacle. The temple no longer stands because God destroyed it when it no longer served His covenantal purposes. He would not tolerate those who treated His temple as a talisman.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever (Jer. 7:3–7).

The Renaissance, with its fatal attraction to magic, misunderstood this. Frances Yates, who more than anyone else has opened this academically closed door of the Renaissance,³⁷ noted that Isaac Newton, a dedicated alchemist, was fascinated with Solomon's temple. She said that he was "determined to unravel the exact plan and proportions of

36. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

37. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage, [1964] 1969).

the Temple of Solomon. This was another Renaissance interest; the plan of the temple, laid down by God himself, was believed to reflect the divine plan of the universe. For Renaissance scholars, the theory of classical architecture was believed to derive from the Temple and, like it, to reflect the world in human proportions."³⁸ Newton even sketched the temple's dimensions.³⁹

The Renaissance was treating the temple as if it were the Great Pyramid. It was not. The religion of the Bible is covenantal and ethical, not metaphysical and magical. God is not to be manipulated; He is to be obeyed.

F. Man's Need of Limits

Limits were placed by God on their sacrifices. Moses did not ask them to bring in all of their capital in a wave of sacrificial giving, despite their sin in building the calf. Their giving was voluntary, meaning *beyond the mandatory tithe*. These were what Protestants call "gifts and offerings." So powerful was the motivation for sacrificial giving that the people had to be restrained. They were not to make the same mistake again: believing that the work of their hands could save them from the wrath of God, believing that the greater their giving, the less the wrath. Furthermore, they were to preserve capital for future productive uses.

1. *Sacrificing to Gods*

Men need to sacrifice to their gods. They insist on it. Their sacrifice links them to a source of power. But God warns men that He is not so concerned about men's material sacrifices; instead, He is concerned about justice, humility, and mercy (Deut. 10:12; I Sam. 15:22; Micah 6:8). He desires the sacrifice of a contrite heart: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:16–17). Only on these terms are burnt offerings acceptable to God. God grants wealth and power, not in terms of ritualistic precision, but in terms of conformity to an ethical law-order (Deut. 8). Righteousness is more important than ritual (II

38. Frances A. Yates, *Ideas and Ideals in the North European Renaissance*, vol. III of *Collected Essays*, 3 vols. (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 270.

39. Frank E. Manuel, *Isaac Newton, Historian* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), plate facing p. 148.

Chron. 30:13–20).

Early Protestantism, especially Puritan and Anabaptist Protestantism, criticized the cathedral builders. They argued that the money spent on cathedrals should have been given to the poor, or used for other purposes. As it has turned out historically, the great cathedrals have become tourist attractions, as the Christian faith of the public has waned. But these magnificent structures still stand as testimonies to the dedication, skill, and sacrifices of men for their God. The cathedrals reflect the builders' and worshippers' conception of the authority and majesty of God. The long-run perspective of the builders is still evident: they expected their work to survive. They expected it to glorify God for centuries. This long-run perspective is an important aspect of serious Christian faith. Men's time perspective is reflected in their architecture.⁴⁰ So is their view of God.⁴¹

2. *Sacrificing to the State*

Modern man worships the political order as the source of power and meaning. He shares this perspective with ancient man, both classical and Near Eastern.⁴² Throughout the West, since the days of World War I, men have willingly sacrificed their capital, their lives, and their futures to the messianic state, whether democratic, fascist, or Communist. Like God, the State loves a cheerful giver. Unlike God, the statist managers do not tell the people to cease sacrificing when they have given too much. *God limits the sacrifices that men are required to offer to any human, earthly institution.* God, not institutions, is wholly sovereign. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the only sacrifice sufficient to meet God's ethical requirements. Man and his institutions are limited. But the modern salvationist political order places no limits on

40. The cathedral becomes a pyramid rather than a home for God if the faith of the builders has been transferred to another god. The cathedrals of Europe have become tourist attractions. The enormous, unfinished Episcopalian pyramid, the Church of St. John the Divine, is still being built in New York City after a century of labor and fundraising. Meanwhile, the Harlem ghetto has moved almost to its borders, and it is unsafe to visit it at night.

41. Little that is orthodox remains in today's mainline Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, even in their liturgies, although there are pockets of orthodoxy. Nevertheless, their cathedrals have survived. What visible token remains of Cromwell's reign? A creed: the Westminster Confession of Faith. Almost nothing visible remains of Puritanism; its legacy was almost entirely ideological and theological.

42. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), chaps. 3–5. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

men's sacrifices, for it places no limits on its own sovereignty.

The universal grumbling about taxes that has shaken the revenue structures of every Western, industrial nation since 1970 (or earlier, in the case of European nations) indicates that men are increasingly distrustful about their god, the modern state. *A growing tax revolt indicates that a shift in faith is in progress.* Socialist humanism is cracking under the strain of increased spending on poverty programs and military hardware, as well as high unemployment and slower economic growth. The old statist faith is dying. Middle-class voters are at long last becoming aware that they have become the sacrificial lambs, not the elusive rich they sought for three or four generations to sacrifice on the altar of envy. They are still humanists, and their faith in individualism is inconsistent, but the ideological pendulum has unquestionably shifted away from the almost unquestioned monotheism of the State toward the mixed polytheism of hedonistic individualism and compulsory retirement subsidies.

Conclusion

Men want to sacrifice to something or some power higher than themselves. This act of sacrifice re-establishes their faith in some sort of cosmic order. The modern world has generally abandoned faith in a cosmic order, but it has affirmed faith in a man-directed earthly order. Thus, the most powerful agency of man, the state, has become the focus of modern man's sacrifice.

Man worships the creation of his own hands, just as Israel did in the wilderness rebellion. Men believe that they must sacrifice to mankind. Some men do this for profit by serving consumers on a free market. Others serve the state. Others serve some other human institution. But the point is, they attempt to offer themselves as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) to the gods of their choice.

God limits such sacrifice. A person is supposed to present himself as a living sacrifice to God, for God owns him and everything else (Ps. 50:10).⁴³ He owes God everything. In baptism, man places himself and everything he owns at God's disposal. But then God returns 90% of whatever is offered. He keeps the tithe as a symbolic token of man's subordination. This is offered to Him through His monopolistic covenantal institution, the church. God limits men's required sacrifices. Men in general cannot be trusted to make such sacrifices, for they

43. North, *Confidence and Dominion*, ch. 10.

make them only to gods of their own hands and imaginations. Thus, God's Old Testament law of sacrifice required only the tithe and three feasts. Today, God requires only the tithe.

Those who deny this formal limit have two motives: (1) to place man under unbearable guilt for not having given enough—"the better to control you with, my dear"—and (2) to escape the sense of personal guilt when they fail to pay what they owe. *By refusing to honor the tithe as a minimum required sacrifice, antinomians place man under an open-ended maximum.* This is a denial of man's fallen condition. It is also a denial of man's creaturehood. It is a re-enactment of the golden calf incident.

Men are growing weary of the economics of perpetual sacrifice to the State at payment levels far above anything God has required. Today, all men pay at least 40% of their income to various branches of civil government—double the extraction imposed by ancient Egypt (Gen. 47:24–26), the most bureaucratic tyranny of the ancient world. But men must believe in a god, a source of power and meaning. They need to sacrifice to a god. What will they sacrifice next? And to which god? The answers to these two questions will determine the next phase of the history of Western civilization.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE TABERNACLE

And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. Accordingly to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it (Ex. 25:8–9).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God, the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

God had promised to provide Israel with a sanctuary, the land of Canaan. This sanctuary would be both geographical and covenantal, an identifiable location where His covenant would be the law of the land. God first required them to build Him a place to serve as His personal sanctuary, which would be physical, transportable, and covenantal. In this tabernacle, God would meet with them in judgment. He would reward or curse them. Without covenant renewal, they could not expect to gain His blessing, yet with covenant renewal, they risked His wrath.

The tabernacle has been a familiar sermon topic for over a century in American fundamentalist circles. This theme allows a preacher to fulfill his annual quota of Old Testament messages without ever coming to grips with the comprehensive ethical and social requirements of Old Testament law. The tabernacle offers seemingly endless opportunities for allegorizing, spiritualizing, internalizing, and discovering secret meanings—all pointing to “great prophetic truths.” The tabernacle is a popular sermon topic, but only to the extent that the specific applications of the sermon’s message can be reduced to cultural irrelevance in New Testament times.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. The Tabernacle as the Place of Judgment

What preachers seldom mention is that the tabernacle was a place where the people came to God to receive judgment: blessing or cursing. God's judgment was handed down in terms of the people's covenantal faithfulness to the revealed Bible-laws of God. Three times a year the citizens of Israel were required to come before God and offer sacrifices (Ex. 23:14–19). This meant that they had to face God in judgment, as individuals and as a nation. *The tabernacle was God's place of judgment and sanctions in history.* To preach on the tabernacle is therefore risky business, for it leads straight to the doctrine of the covenant, with its five doctrines that so alienate modern evangelicalism: the absolute sovereignty of a predestinating God; the three hierarchical appeals courts: church, state, and family; the Bible-revealed law of God that is supposed to govern the decisions of the judges of all three courts; God's sanctions in history; and the disinheritation of covenant-breakers and the inheritance of covenant-keepers in history. This also raises the question of the Lord's Supper as the church's covenant-renewing event that brings people into the presence of God to receive His judgments in history.²

1. Tabernacle Sermons

The goal of modern sermons on the tabernacle is to make judicially irrelevant everything associated with the tabernacle in New Testament times. The discontinuity of the cross has supposedly made the tabernacle irrelevant today. As a building, this is unquestionably true, but this was true in Moses' day, too. The building was symbolic; what it symbolized was crucial. What it symbolized was Jesus Christ as the coming Judge in history. "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:11–12). Thus, every sermon on the tabernacle is supposed to point to the relevance of *Christ as Judge today*.

Judgments in New Testament history? Ethical cause and effect in New Testament history? Covenantal sanctions in New Testament history? The authority of biblical law in New Testament history? Such

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 304–13.

thoughts are not pleasant to shepherds who have denied all of this throughout their careers. They have dedicated their lives to the principle that Old Covenant history, with all its visible judgments, no longer operates today. The tabernacle is supposed to become a principle of the church's cultural irrelevance today, for ours is a world supposedly devoid of visible judgments based on covenantal cause and effect.

2. *Kline as the Archetype*

Professor Meredith Kline was representative of this ethereal approach to the tabernacle. Unlike the average pastor, he had the footnotes to prove that he had studied the tabernacle in depth, which he displayed in his book *Images of the Spirit* (1980). Even earlier, in his *Structure of Biblical Authority* (1975), he argued that there is an architectural aspect of the Bible. The building of God's house, he said, "comes to the fore in the Book of Exodus." House-building is also a familiar theme in the Canaanitic epic poem, *Enuna Elish*, he added.³ First, God structured the people of Israel into His house by means of His covenant words spoken at Mt. Sinai. Then God told them to build Him a house. "Though a more literal house than the living house of Israel, the tabernacle-house was designed to function as symbolical of the other; the kingdom-people house was the true residence of God (a concept more fully explored and spiritualized in the New Testament)."⁴ Spiritualized indeed!

Kline devoted his academic career to two primary tasks: (1) exploring in great detail the covenantal evidence and implications in the Old Testament; and (2) doing whatever possible to persuade his readers that God has abandoned these implications in the New Testament.⁵ He insisted that any New Testament connection between visible blessings and covenant-keeping is, humanly speaking, random. "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."⁶ Largely un-

3. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 79.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, Appendix 7: "Meredith G. Kline: Yes and No."

6. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological*

predictable? Dr. Kline obviously never considered just why it is that life insurance premiums and health insurance premiums are cheaper in Christianity-influenced societies than in pagan societies. Apparently, the blessings of long life that are promised in the Bible are sufficiently non-random and predictable that statisticians who advise insurance companies can detect statistically relevant differences between societies.

Kline was arguing that the testimony of God's covenant law and covenant sanctions in history was scrapped by God after Christ's resurrection from the dead. The visible sanctions of God do not operate in New Testament times. Ethical cause and effect in today's culture is random. *Christianity is therefore culturally irrelevant and progressively impotent.* The fact is, Kline's assertion that visible events are covenantally random is a smokescreen that covers up his pessimistic eschatological views. What he really believed was that things will get worse for the church as time goes on. Ethical cause and effect in New Testament history is not merely random; it is positively perverse. This conclusion is basic to Kline's amillennial eschatology.⁷ Once again, we see that eschatological neutrality is impossible.

It should be clear that the tabernacle was not culturally irrelevant or impotent in its day. It was basic to the religious life of Israel for almost half a millennium, until Solomon built the temple, 480 years after the Hebrews came out of Egypt (I Kings 6:1). The tabernacle was the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of the law (Ex. 25:10–22). God appeared at the tabernacle in the form of a cloud-pillar (Ex. 33:9–10; Num. 12:5; Deut. 31:15). The tabernacle was filled with gold, silver, jewels, and the finest artistic accomplishments of the people. It symbolized the majesty of the supernatural King who was in their midst.⁸

B. A Symbol of Covenantal Continuity

These pilgrims in the wilderness were given a symbol of the presence of God—a fundamental aspect of the biblical covenant.⁹ They had a stake in a covenantal society. The tabernacle gave them *a place of*

Journal, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

7. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

8. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 35–42.

9. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1.

sacrifice. God is master of the universe, and men must acknowledge their subordination to Him through sacrifice.¹⁰ The animal sacrifices would take place at a particular place. The tabernacle could therefore serve as a focus for the community's *sense of order and permanence*. The tribes would be drawn together, overcoming the potential fragmentation of tribal society.

1. *Symbol of Permanence*

The tabernacle was also a symbol of permanence, but only for as long as they honored the ethical terms of the covenant. While the building itself was portable, the ornaments were permanent and could be used by future generations in the promised land. The very portability of the tabernacle testified against the quest for man-made permanence—the kind of hoped-for stability that was reflected in Egypt's pyramids. *Permanence is ultimately covenantal, and therefore is governed by the ethical terms of the covenant.*¹¹ Permanence is mythical unless it is God-centered.

The tabernacle was evidence that they were pilgrims—people journeying toward a final destination—rather than nomads wandering in a circle. The Israelites never were nomads. Liberal theologians often refuse to accept this. The oft-repeated claim by liberal theologians that the Israelites were nomads is basic to most liberal studies of ancient Israel. Typical is Hans Jochen Boecker's statement: "The Israelites came basically from the eastern or southeastern and southern steppe countries and penetrated the cultivated areas of Palestine. They were not originally inhabitants of cultivated land; they were nomads, and their legal arrangements were typical of nomads."¹² He offered no evidence of these nomadic legal arrangements, for no such evidence exists. He went on to say that "Unlike the CH [Code Hammurabi], for example, the OT laws are still strongly marked by the nomadic view of property, which is characterised by being centered on the group rather than on the individual and so pays less attention to the property of the individual."¹³ The less intelligent liberal can then defend his antinomian rejection of Old Testament law by saying that Israel's law was nomad-

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

12. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, [1976] 1980), p. 28.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

ic, having nothing to do with the modern world. The more clever liberal is less direct in his defense of antinomianism. He can argue that the non-nomadic character of biblical law testifies to a much later date of the authorship of the Pentateuch, thereby denying the Mosaic authorship and calling into question the continuing authority of everything in it, including the law.¹⁴

2. An Eschatology of Victory

The people's economic contributions in constructing the tabernacle served as a ritual means for them to testify to an eschatology of victory. First, their craftsmanship was an affirmation of permanence. Second, their labor on the tabernacle was an affirmation of history. Each man's contribution would be seen by later generations and be appreciated, so long as the community retained its covenantal faithfulness to God. Those who would come later would look back and be thankful to those who had gone before. Finally, the tabernacle would replace the places of worship in the various cities of Canaan. The Canaanites would surely be defeated—an affirmation of the coming military conquest of Canaan. God would bring judgment against their enemies. This pointed to God as cosmic Judge, the fourth aspect of the biblical covenant.¹⁵

The tabernacle was important in reinforcing the doctrine of the covenant. This covenant joined the tribes together into one people. The covenant also extended through time, linking the fathers in the wilderness with the sons who would occupy the promised land. The covenant meant *continuity over time*, point five of the biblical covenant,¹⁶ and the tabernacle symbolized this future-orientation.

The importance of symbols for society should not be disregarded. Symbols will always exist; the issue is not "symbols vs. no symbols"; rather it is a question of *which* symbols and *whose* symbols. Symbols are an inescapable concept, whether linguistic, musical, architectural,

14. Boecker cited Max Weber and a 1927 book by A. Jepsen, both of whom denied any significant nomadic influence in Old Testament law. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–43. Boecker never clearly stated which view of "Israelite nomadism" he held, pro or con, which is typical of someone who has read far more than he can digest intellectually—to the extent that liberal Old Testament studies can be digested intellectually at all. Generally, they are fit only for ingestion and rapid regurgitation in doctoral dissertations and journal articles. It never ceases to amaze me how readily liberal theologians return to their regurgitations.

15. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

16. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

or whatever. Men need to sacrifice something of value in order to affirm their deeply felt commitments. Men do not choose wedding rings made of iron or brass to give to their wives. If they are committed to orthodox worship, they should prefer beautiful buildings to churches that resemble large shoe boxes.

C. Architecture and Culture

Architecture is closely linked to culture. The tabernacle revealed the centrality of the covenant in Hebrew culture. It was in terms of their confidence in this covenant that they subsequently constructed the other institutions of godly culture. The Israelites began with the tabernacle, for it was the place of God's special judicial presence.

In New Testament times, there is no need to build just one majestic structure as a central point of cultural focus. Ever since the time of Christ's resurrection, the law has been written on the hearts of the faithful (Heb. 8:10; 10:16–18). People no longer need to journey to Jerusalem in order to worship; they worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). The law is not written on stone tablets, nor do copies rest in the Ark of the Covenant. There has been a permanent *decentralization of authority, worship, and culture* in New Testament times.

1. Protestant Decentralization

This requirement of ecclesiastical decentralization in the New Testament era was recognized by Protestants of the sixteenth century, but they did not fully comprehend the importance of the tabernacle principle for the emotional and spiritual life of the families that built churches in local communities. They did not understand how fundamental to every culture is an economics of sacrifice. Men need to affirm and symbolize the permanence of their religious vision of the present and its links to the future.

One of the problems with Protestant architecture during the Reformation was the denial by Protestant leaders of the legitimacy of the cathedrals of Europe. The reformers often displayed a self-conscious rejection of the legitimacy of architectural beauty and community economic sacrifice. The drab surroundings of the Protestant churches, especially in the seventeenth century, denied the eschatology of victory held by many of them. The need for sacrifice was sublimated and transferred to business concerns, charity, and affairs external to the affairs of the institutional churches. This led to historically unpreced-

ented economic growth, but also to social and political instability. The brief reign of Oliver Cromwell, after all, was followed by the restoration to the English throne of Charles II, not by some Puritan republic. Economic growth continued to disrupt traditional social class relationships in Puritan New England.¹⁷

The economic and geographical mobility of modern capitalist society has also worked against the classical ideal of aesthetic permanence. A cathedral is very expensive. If it is constructed in a central city, it will soon find itself surrounded by very a different economic and social environment. A cathedral could be constructed in some distant rural region, but that would not serve the needs of worshippers. Any site within a two-hours' drive or train ride from a central city could become surrounded by urban decay within two generations.¹⁸ In this sense, the modern world has become a tabernacle society rather than a temple society. Cathedrals are not designed, as the tabernacle was, as a prefabricated mobile construction project.

2. Regional Splendor

The church is both local and international. It is tied to local historical circumstances at any stage in history, yet it is always international because it is linked to eternity. There is a tendency within Protestantism to ignore the international and eternal aspects of the church. Protestant pastors often enjoy building large, fancy places of worship, for these testify to the influence of the pastor as a builder. Seldom do these churches reflect long-lasting architectural standards. Architects display little concern with architectural manifestations of the church as a force to be reckoned with over long periods of time at every level of society. Too often the architects selected by churches are deeply humanistic and governed by aesthetic standards that are openly rebellious against beauty. They are committed to an architecture of self-conscious ugliness.¹⁹ Beauty is far more objective than something in the

17. Gary North, "From Medieval Economics to Indecisive Pietism: Second-Generation Preaching in New England, 1661–1690," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer 1979), pp. 144–50: "Status and Social Mobility." North, "From Covenant to Contract: Pietism and Secularism in Puritan New England, 1691–1720," *ibid.*, VI (Winter 1979–80), pp. 175–77. For a summary, see Gary North, *Puritan Economic Experiments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), pp. 50–54. (<http://bit.ly/gnpuritan>)

18. This is exactly what happened to the most grandiose of all American cathedral projects, the Episcopalians' Church of St. John the Divine in New York City.

19. Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux,

eye of the human beholder; beauty is in the eye of the Cosmic Beholder. Architects symbolically deny the Cosmic Beholder by rebelling against all permanent standards of beauty.

Because of the fragmenting of religious denominations, the economic resources necessary for constructing great cathedral and not appear in the twentieth century. The large mainline denominations that might have been able to afford to build them no longer bothered. Central denominational bureaucracies are far more likely to give money to revolutionary causes or bureaucracy-expanding causes. Meanwhile, the smaller denominations concentrate on missions or other spiritual ventures.

There is no architectural representation of the majesty of God that competes today with the majesty of the state. This statist majesty is anything but beautiful. There is a grim, ugly architectural style that is common to government buildings throughout the West: huge stones, few windows, marble or imitation marble. These make men feel insignificant. The buildings dwarf people. This style was pioneered in ancient imperial Rome. A similar theology of empire undergirds today's structures.

The Soviet Union was the most self-conscious empire we have seen in modern times. In the decades following the Revolution, the Soviets produced grand monuments to poor taste. Malcolm Muggeridge's autobiography recalls his stay in Moscow's National Hotel during the 1930s as a reporter for Britain's *Manchester Guardian*.

The decor was in heavy marble and gilt, rather like the stations in the Moscow underground [subway—G.N.], then under construction, and to become a tourist show-place. Once, sitting with Mirsky in the hotel lounge, I remarked upon its excruciating taste. Yes, he agreed, it was pretty ghastly, but it expressed the sense of what a luxury hotel should be like in the mind of someone who had only stared in at one through plate-glass windows from the cold, inhospitable street outside. This, he said, was the key to all the régime's artistic products—the long turgid novels, the lifeless portraits and landscapes in oils, the gruesome People's neo-Gothic architecture, the leaden conservatory concerts and creaking ballet. Culturally, it was all of a piece. There is no surer way of preserving the worst aspects of bourgeois style than liquidating the bourgeoisie. . . .²⁰

1981).

20. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick* (New York: Morrow, 1973), p. 245.

3. Restoring Cooperation

The theological and institutional fragmentation of the West's churches is visible today. The original ecumenical impulse of Christianity has dimmed. We should expect a future revival to bring new unity, for the church is now visibly at war with humanist empires, as it was from Christ's day to Constantine's. A revival is more likely to unify Christians than split them, for there is a visible, threatening common enemy. Thus, we should expect to see a new ecumenism of Bible-believing people to rival and offset the collectivist ecumenism of modernism. It will be a bottom-up ecumenism, not a top-down bureaucratic ecumenism.²¹

Thus, rather than expecting huge national cathedrals (a symbol of nationalism) or international cathedrals (a symbol of ecclesiastical empire), we should expect to see new buildings that coordinate the activities of various regional Christian groups. They will have to be functional yet magisterial. Instead of the sports arenas—modern man's urban equivalent of the Roman arenas—we will see artistic, educational, and meeting centers. They will not be primarily denominational, but oriented toward dominion activities. They will represent the activism of Christian civilization, not of the church narrowly defined.

Churches may also build common structures in various regions, comparable in sacrifice to the Mormon temples we find in many cities throughout the world. They will reflect the "best" that a denomination's regional efforts can produce. We will also see national and international architectural efforts, both secular and ecclesiastical. There will be regional, national, and international architectural manifestations of the majesty of God on earth. But there will not be a single center, as there was in Israel, for God has decentralized sacrifice and therefore His kingdom.

Such is my prediction. Yet the very decentralization of Christian culture is a would-be prophet's stumbling-stone. The freedom that Christianity provides invariably unleashes human creativity that defies categorization in advance. What is most significant architecturally is the stylistic freedom that Christian civilization offers within the overall constraints of finances and the restored image of God in redeemed man. What is far less important is the accuracy of the prediction.

21. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for Foreign Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 11. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

Conclusion

Local churches should embody visible elements of personal sacrifice. Modern concepts of long-term debt have reduced the psychological burden of present sacrifice, but long-term uncertainty and the threat of debt servitude have accompanied the increase in church indebtedness. The medieval churches sometimes took centuries to construct, calling forth the sacrifices and talents of many generations. Modern congregations build smaller, less beautiful, more efficient structures, borrow heavily from fractional reserve banks to do so, or sell usurious long-term bonds to church members,²² and then take a generation to pay off the debt. The medieval Christians were closer to the truth in this area of worship. They understood what the Old Testament Hebrews had been told by God: that *holy wastefulness* has its place in godly worship, as the tithe of celebration indicates (Deut. 14:23–29). Construction costs per square foot should not be the primary consideration in constructing every place of worship. An eschatology of victory should be reflected in an architecture of majesty and permanence somewhere in the Christian community.

22. Gary North, "Stewardship, Investment, and Usury: Financing the Kingdom of God," Appendix 3 in R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973).

BLOOD MONEY, NOT HEAD TAX

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs;) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls (Ex. 30:11–16).

The theocentric focus of the passage is God's holy army as an agency of negative sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ The members of this army needed a covering, an atonement before God. Why? The text does not say, but other texts tell us.

This was a mustering of the fighting men of Israel. Moses counted them as they left Egypt, on the assumption that they would soon enter into a war against Canaan. Israel had left Egypt as an army: "And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies" (Ex. 12:51). So God told Moses to number this assembly of tribal armies: "Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies" (Num. 1:2–3). After the plague that God brought on Israel for their fornication with the Midianite women, God ordered another census. "And it came to pass after the plague, that the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers' house, all that are able to go to war in Israel" (Num. 26:1–2). Joshua numbered them again for the same reason (Josh. 8:10).

A nation has a legitimate need for statistics on its military capability. It must count the costs of war. "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace" (Luke 14:31–32).² This is why the military commander of Israel numbered the people before he took them into battle.

A. Bloodshed and Blood Covering

The people needed an atonement before they marched into battle. The shedding of man's blood must be placed under tight covenantal limits. This is why the numbering of the circumcised males of Israel required their payment of atonement money. This numbering was only to be done in preparation for a war.

One thing is certain about this passage: *it does not have anything to do with a civil tax*. The State is in no way responsible for taking money from anyone for the purpose of making an atonement for his soul. Making atonement as God's representative is a priestly function, not a kingly function. The recipient of the funds was to be the tabernacle, not the civil government.

The atonement or covering was required by God whenever the adult males were numbered prior to military conflict. If they refused to pay, God threatened them with a plague. When David decided to number the people of Israel despite the fact that no war was imminent, his advisor Joab warned him not to do it (II Sam. 24:3). David refused to listen, and insisted that the census be taken. When he realized that

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

this assertion of his sovereignty was wrong, he admitted his sin to God. The seer Gad was told by God to inform David that he would be given three options: seven years of famine for the nation, three months of fleeing before his enemies, or a plague. David asked God to make the decision, and God sent the plague in which 70,000 people died (II Sam. 24:15).³

If the census had been a normal source of revenue for the civil government, it would have been an annual event. It was not an annual event; taking the national census was strictly limited to wartime, and required an atonement payment to the tabernacle. By acting as though the state had the authority to take a census at any time, David sinned against God. To “number” (*paqad*) the army meant to muster the troops for battle. James Jordan commented: “The word is also used throughout the prophets to mean ‘visit’ or ‘punish.’ There are other words in Hebrew which refer to numbering in the sense of counting up or adding up, as Exodus 30:12 aptly illustrates (“When you take a *sum* . . . to *muster* them”). Thus, the numbering spoken of here in Exodus 30 is not a mere counting census, but *a visitation or judgment designed to see who is on the LORD’s side*. Those who pass over into the camp of the mustered men are thereby declaring themselves to be in the army of God, as opposed to the army of Satan. When the LORD comes, he comes to visit and punish, to muster all men and see who has and who has not passed over into his army.”⁴ Jordan therefore concluded that this was not an annual census.

Jordan argued that it was *the presence of God in their midst* that threatened those who had not been covered by the payment of the atonement money. God walks in the midst of the army (Deut. 23:14), so the camp must be holy. “The fact that the money is used for the upkeep of the Tabernacle/Temple indicates a connection between the environment of the Temple (God’s House) and that of the army camp (God’s War Camp). Both are especially holy, and thus especially threatening to sinful man. Under the Old Covenant, each had to be especially sanctified, and the men who entered each had to be especially sanctified. . . .”⁵

3. The passage says that God was angry with Israel, so He “moved David against them” by numbering them (II Sam. 24:1). David could have brought the judgment of God on himself had he been willing to accept the curse of fleeing three months from his enemies, but he left the judgment up to God.

4. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 227. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Jordan also pointed out that in the Old Testament, *holy war was a priestly function*. Torched cities were called “whole burnt sacrifices” (Deut. 13:16; Jud. 1:17, in Hebrew). During a holy war, the soldiers became temporary priests by taking a Nazarite vow.⁶ “This is all to say that the rendering of specific judgments is a sabbatical and priestly function, not a kingly one. The kingly function in the Bible is in the area of leading, cultivating, and shepherding, especially through the skillful serving of one’s subordinates (Mark 10:42–45). *The sword of the state executes according to the judgments rendered by the priests*. (In the New Covenant age, every believer is a priest, just as the Old Covenant believers became priests by taking the Nazarite vow. In our system, the priests render judgment by sitting on a *jury*, and then the state executes the judgment.)”⁷

The point should be clear: the covering or atonement payment of Exodus 30 has nothing to do with the civil government. It is not a tax at all. “Thus, the military duty is priestly, and a duty of every believer-priest. Both Church and state are involved in it, since the Church must say whether the war is just and holy, and the state must organize the believer-priests for battle. The mustering of the host for a census is, then, not a ‘civil’ function as opposed to an ecclesiastical one, and the atonement money of Exodus 30 is not a poll tax, as some have alleged.”⁸

Jordan was being polite (or cautious) by refraining from mentioning the target of his exposition, but readers may not fully understand the nature of the theological problem unless they know the specifics of the debate. Jordan’s target was R. J. Rushdoony.

B. Rushdoony’s Theory of the Civil Head Tax

There has been considerable confusion about this in recent years because of Rushdoony’s insistence that this atonement payment became a civil head tax after the construction of the tabernacle. “It was used to maintain the civil order after the tabernacle (the throne room and palace of God’s government) was built.”⁹ He offered no evidence for this assertion. On the face of it, it seems utterly implausible. How did such a shift in the locus of taxing sovereignty take place? How did

6. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 231–32.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

9. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 50.

the state become the recipient of an atonement payment, thereby converting a ransom paid to God through the priesthood into a head tax collected by the state? *This would implicitly transfer sovereignty from the church to the state*, a procedure totally at odds with everything else Rushdoony had written about illegitimate state power.

1. Atonement by the State

He correctly observed that this payment was an atonement payment to the tabernacle which was paid by those going into battle, and he cites other commentators to support his point—a relatively non-controversial point.¹⁰ Problem number one: *On what basis did the state become the recipient of this atonement payment?* He tried to solve this problem by arguing that the tabernacle was as much a civil center as an ecclesiastical center. Civil taxes, he insisted, were brought to God at His throne room, the tabernacle. “The sanctuary was thus the civil center of Israel and no less religious for that fact.”¹¹ Thus, a “poll tax,” as he calls it, was always brought to the tabernacle.¹² He then stretches the argument to conclude that in Israel, “The basic tax was the poll or head tax (Ex. 30:11–16), which had to be the same for all men.”¹³

Thus, what is explicitly stated in the Bible to be *an atonement payment made to the tabernacle*, one which most commentators (including Rushdoony) believe was a payment associated with a military census taken immediately prior to a war, later became, in Rushdoony’s interpretation, a normal revenue collection device for the state—indeed, the *only* source of legitimate revenue for the state. “*First*, the basic civil tax in Scripture, the only tax, is the poll or head tax, paid by every man twenty years of age and older (Ex. 30:11–16).”¹⁴ “Its purpose was to provide for civil atonement, i.e., the covering or protection of civil government. Every male twenty years old or older was required to pay this tax to be protected by God the King in His theocratic government of Israel. This tax was thus a civil and religious duty (but not an ecclesiastical one).”¹⁵

Problem number two: *When did the state become the recipient of these atonement payments?* He argued that the head tax “was used ori-

10. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

12. *Idem.*

13. *Ibid.*, p. 492.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 510.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 719.

ginally for the construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 38:25–28).¹⁶ The key word here is *originally*. He implied that after the construction of the tabernacle, the money went to the state to finance its day-to-day operations. He did not explain anywhere in his writings just exactly how the day-to-day expenses of the entire civil government—local, tribal, and national—could have been financed by this one tax payment, one which could be legitimately collected only prior to a war. He did not explain this obvious difficulty because it obviously cannot be explained—not without concluding that Israel was a permanent warfare State. He did not want to make such a conclusion, so he simply ignores the problem.

Why did Rushdoony make this unwarranted leap from an atoning tabernacle payment during wartime to a permanent payment to the tabernacle as a civil tax? Why didn't he see the enormous threat to liberty involved in making the state a tax-collector in the name of atonement? Why did he fail to recognize that if this was the only legitimate tax in Old Testament Israel, that it would have created either an ecclesiocracy or a political tyranny? If the atonement payment was in fact a tax, one collected by the tabernacle's agents, meaning Aaronic priests, to be doled out as they saw fit to the civil authorities, then the church would inevitably be at the top of a single civil pyramid. On the other hand, if the civil magistrates possessed the authority to enter the tabernacle and collect the atonement payment, then the state would be at the top. Yet Rushdoony always argued that there is no single church-state pyramid of power in a biblical commonwealth; church and State are separate sovereign authorities under God and God's law.

2. Rushdoony's Unstated Problem

His unstated problem was that he did not want to face an unpleasant reality: the Old Testament never specifically says anything about what is proper for civil taxation, except in Samuel's warning against the king's collection of as great a percentage of a person's income as 10% (I Sam. 8).¹⁷ This was James Jordan's conclusion.¹⁸ It is also mine. If defenders of biblical law cannot point to any specific biblical laws that govern civil taxation, an apparent gap in their whole hermeneutics is exposed for all to see.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

17. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

18. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, p. 239.

Rushdoony preferred not to face this problem directly, although he clearly recognized that it exists. “Commentaries and Bible dictionaries on the whole cite no law governing taxation. One would assume, from reading them, that no system of taxation existed in ancient Israel, and that the Mosaic law did not speak on the subject.”¹⁹ If the Bible is truly silent here, then the theonomist is placed in the seemingly embarrassing position of claiming that the Old Testament’s law-order has specific guidelines and answers for all social and civil policy, yet he is unable to find explicit rules governing what became the central issue of civil sovereignty in the twentieth century, namely, the legal sanction of tax collection. Yet, apart from Samuel’s critique of the king’s collecting a tithe, the only references to compulsory payments in ancient Israel are the various tithes and sacrifices—clearly ecclesiastical—and the census atonement money of Exodus 30.

To overcome this embarrassment, Rushdoony offered a unique theory of Old Testament civil order and its relation to the taxing authority. “This failure to discern any tax law is due to the failure to recognize the nature of Israel’s civil order. God as King of Israel ruled from His throne room in the tabernacle, and to Him the taxes were brought. Because of the common error of viewing the tabernacle as an exclusively or essentially ‘religious,’ i.e., *ecclesiastical* center, there is a failure to recognize that it was indeed a *religious, civil* center. In terms of Biblical law, the state, home, school, and every other agency must be no less religious than the church. The sanctuary was thus the civil center of Israel and no less religious for that fact.”²⁰

3. A Question of Sovereignty

He systematically refused to explore the startling implications of this theory of the tabernacle as the only place where the Israelites paid their taxes to God as King of Israel. The issue is clearly not the “religiousness” of the civil order, for as he correctly said, all of society’s institutions are equally religious—state, home, school business, etc. But this is not to say that all institutions are equally covenantal, for only three institutions—family, church, and state—bear the marks of the covenant, namely, the legitimate imposition of a self-maledictory oath.²¹

19. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 281.

20. *Idem*.

21. Chapter 23.

Church and state collect their lawful payments from those who are covenanted to each institution, though not necessarily to both institutions: churches collect tithes from church members, and civil governments collect taxes from those under their jurisdiction. This has nothing to do with the question of the “religiousness” of either or both of these God-ordained covenant institutions. For example, private businesses are not entitled to collect taxes from anyone, except as agents of the civil government. Yet according to Rushdoony, businesses are inescapably religious institutions.

Rushdoony’s argument throughout his career was that all of life is inescapably religious. Following Van Til, he argued that all men are either covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. “Neutral man does not exist. Man is either a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker, either obeying God in faith, or in revolt against God as a would-be god.”²² Everything man does is therefore religious. This being the case, an appeal to religiousness as such cannot solve the crucial question he is dealing with: *To which institution or institutions has God delegated the lawful sovereignty to collect His taxes and His tithes?* God was surely both King and Priest in Israel, but that is not the issue here. The issue is: Did He delegate to a single institution the lawful sovereignty to collect payments owed to Him in His capacity as both King and Priest?

It is obvious that King Uzziah violated the temple by going into it to burn incense. God struck him down with Old Testament leprosy as a punishment (II Chron. 26:16–23). Rushdoony used this example to defend the institutional separation of church and state.²³ Speaking of priest and king, he wrote, “The two offices were not to have an immanent union but only a transcendental one.”²⁴ But to allow one of these offices to collect payments owed by people to the other is unquestionably declaring an immanent (earthly) union of the two offices, as surely as Uzziah’s attempt to offer incense in the temple was such a declaration.

The state was not to collect payments owed to the tabernacle for atonement purposes. Similarly, the priesthood was not to collect taxes owed to the civil government. The fact that the tabernacle, and later

22. Rushdoony, “Implications for Psychology,” in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976), p. 43.

23. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998), p. 58. (<http://bit.ly/rjrfso>)

24. *Idem.*

the temple, was the civil center of Israel was manifested symbolically by the fact that the Ark of the Covenant inside the holy of holies was the center of all Israel, and that inside the Ark were the two tablets (tables or copies)²⁵ of God's law. God's law was the center of life in Israel, and God was present with His law in the holy of holies. This has nothing to do with the institutional details of tax collecting or tithe collecting; it has everything to do with the inescapable religiousness of all life.

4. Ed Powell's Modification

Ed Powell's essay, "God's Plan of Taxation," is an extension of Rushdoony's position, which is why Rushdoony allowed it to appear in his only co-authored book. There is one interesting addition that Powell made, however. He quite correctly pointed out that the Levites were not subject to military conscription (Num. 1:47–49), and therefore they were not required to pay the so-called poll tax. Rushdoony had insisted in the *Institutes*: "It was paid by Levites and all others."²⁶ Powell argued that the Levites were not part of the civil order, and so were not required to pay any tax to the state, and this was the only tax the state could lawfully collect, according to both Rushdoony and Powell. "This tax went solely for the purpose of supporting the state, and only those who were members of the civil order because of their military service paid it."²⁷ Thus, in Powell's version of political theory, civil citizenship is based on two things, the payment of taxes and participation in the military. He clearly recognized the connection between the "tax" of Exodus 30:11–16 and military service. Would he conclude that in New Testament times, ordained ministers of the gospel should not be allowed to vote or be required to pay taxes? If he denied this, then would he then conclude that they should be subject to military conscription?

What Powell did not recognize is central to Jordan's argument and mine: *by becoming a Nazarite during a holy war, the soldier in Old Covenant Israel became a temporary priest*. It was the army's very position as a temporary priesthood that made the payment of blood

25. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 123–24.

26. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 50.

27. Rushdoony and Powell, *Tithing and Dominion* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1979), p. 64. The irony here is that it was my "freewill" offering to Pastor Robert Thoburn's church in Fairfax, Virginia, that financed the publication of this book.

money mandatory if the soldiers were to avoid the plague when God came into the camp. Thus, the requirement to pay blood money to the tabernacle had nothing to do with the supposed status of the Levites as being outside the civil order. It had everything to do with the *need for atonement* by those who were temporarily set aside (made holy) for God's special purposes during a war.

The Rushdoony-Powell position leads to innumerable problems, especially in extending into New Testament times the erroneous principle of the head tax as the sole means of state financing. I have dwelt at some length on this explanation of Exodus 30:11–16 only because Rushdoony's *Institutes* presented the preliminary model of the Christian Reconstruction position. His few remarks on taxation are found in the sections of the *Institutes* that attempt to explain this passage. Thus, by systematically restricting any discussion of biblical taxation to the supposed civil head tax of the Old Testament, Rushdoony eliminated the possibility of discussing such alternative tax policies as the gasoline tax used exclusively for local roadways, or income taxes lower than 10%, or sales taxes lower than 10%. He has made the head tax as the sole source of civic revenue, a conclusion unwarranted by the text.

Conclusion

The atonement money required from each adult male in Israel prior to a holy war had nothing to do with civil taxation. It was a unique assessment that took place only during the military census, and the taking of such a census was authorized by God only when war threatened the commonwealth. The state was not allowed to conduct such a census under any other circumstances (II Sam. 24). For the civil magistrate to have collected such a blood covering payment as a civil tax would have been an abomination. To have made it the only civil tax in Israel, to be collected on an annual or other regular basis, would have brought the wrath of God on the state. The collection of this mandatory payment was exclusively a priestly function. Thus, any discussion of the methods and limits of lawful civil taxation in Old Testament Israel must be based on passages other than Exodus 30:11–16. This required payment was not a head tax or any other kind of tax; it was a blood covering for warriors-become-Nazarite priests who were about to go into battle.

SABBATH REST VS. AUTONOMY

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death (Ex. 35:2).

God's work of creation is the archetype for man: six days of labor and a day of rest, or ceasing from our normal labors. If God rested the seventh day, then we must rest one day in seven. Originally, Adam's day of rest was his first full day of life. His firstday was God's seventhday. He was to have honored his position as a creature by resting the first day of the week, thereby acknowledging God's prior work as the foundation of his life and rest.

Adam pretended that his autonomous labor would bring forth fruits. He pretended that he had not received everything as a gift from God. He therefore imitated God's week, beginning his rebellion on the first day of his week. Because of Adam's sin of autonomy—playing God—God imposed a temporary six-and-one pattern for man's week until the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We now are required as individuals to structure our work weeks in terms of a one-and-six resurrection pattern. God has restored to His church the original pattern.¹

A. Sabbath and Sanctions

This chapter is really more of a summary of the material that I presented in Chapter 24 and Appendix E. This passage is an extension of Exodus 20:8–11, the law of the sabbath. It specifies the sanction: capital punishment.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 6.

1. *The Death Penalty*

God's designation of a specific sanction is crucial. Dispensationalist Roy Aldrich reminded us: "If the Ten Commandments of the law are still binding then all of the penalties must remain the same. The death penalties should be imposed for Sabbath-breaking, idolatry, adultery, rebellion against parents, etc. To change the penalty of a law means to abolish that law. A law without a penalty is an anomaly. A law with its penalty abolished becomes only good advice."² The fourth commandment was basic to the Decalogue. Thus, this case law specified the appropriate sanction: *execution*. This was reaffirmed by God in His specially revealed requirement that the stick-gatherer be stoned to death (Num. 15).

I have argued previously that this capital sanction was removed from God's law when the locus of *this particular law's* enforcement shifted from the civil government to the individual conscience. This is not to say that sabbath rest was abolished by God. It was transformed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is why Christians honor the principle by resting on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. The *individual Christian* who operates as a covenantal agent *directly under God* becomes the sole earthly agent for enforcing the law of the sabbath. There is no longer any civil sanction attached to it. (There was never any ecclesiastical sanction mentioned in the Old Testament.) Paul wrote that some men regard all days the same; other men regard one day as special; each individual is to obey his conscience in this matter (Rom. 14:5). Thus, the transfer of earthly sovereignty in enforcing the sabbath rest principle necessarily removed the capital sanction—the only sanction specified in the Old Testament. This is not to say that this law no longer holds. God will enforce whatever sanctions He believes are appropriate in history and on judgment day. But for all practical *judicial* purposes, the fourth commandment has been transformed from a civil law into good personal advice.

To argue otherwise is necessarily to call for the re-establishment of the death penalty for sabbath violators. To appeal to the Old Testament—meaning the fourth commandment—necessarily also involves an appeal to this passage, for it specifies the appropriate sanction. Again, let me repeat the theme of this entire book:

No sanctions, no laws; no laws, no social order; no social order,

2. Roy L. Aldrich, "Causes for Confusion of Law and Grace," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 116 (July 1959), p. 226.

no civilization; no civilization, no kingdom of God in church history.

2. Sanctions and Sanctification

Let me repeat what I said in the Introduction to Part 3: “What I argue throughout this book is really quite simple: *we can legitimately assess the importance of any biblical law by examining its case-law sanction.* This simple and seemingly obvious principle of jurisprudence has been implicitly denied for almost two millennia by the church. There has been an ancient tradition on the part of Christian commentators of appealing selectively to Old Testament laws whenever convenient in moral arguments, but almost never to the God-specified sanctions.” Exodus 35:2 seldom appears in any sabbatarian’s discussion of how important the sabbath remains, and what we must do in order to honor it. This is wholly illegitimate exegetically, and it has led to the accusation by consistent critics that Christians who uphold “the moral law of God” apart from God’s specified civil sanctions are hypocritical, that they want all the moral benefits of theocracy without any of the embarrassing theocratic sanctions.

The defenders of the “moral law only” approach inescapably have to agree in principle with dispensationalist Aldrich: “It should be remembered that the Ten Commandments were part of the legal system of Israel as a theocracy. In this Mosaic economy ‘every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward’ (Heb. 2:2b). A law without a penalty is only good advice. The Mosaic penalty for violation of each of the first four commandments was death. For certain overt violations of all the other commandments the penalty was death. Only a theocracy could enforce such laws. No government, or denomination, or society even pretends to enforce them today. This is as it should be for they were given only to Israel and have long been abolished.”³ Defenders of “the moral law only” favor the general law of God but not the specific sanctions. They argue for a *general theocracy*—a world controlled by God, who judges it continually and finally—yet they deny *specific theocracy*, meaning civil governments that are legitimately governed in terms of Old Testament laws and their God-revealed sanctions.

What I have argued for many years is this: *the covenantal stand-*

3. Aldrich, “Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?” *ibid.*, vol. 116 (Oct. 1959), p. 332.

ard of progressive sanctification applies to all human institutions, not just to the hearts, minds, and actions of regenerate believers. The Bible unquestionably teaches the concept of progressive sanctification which operates in the lives of redeemed individuals. This doctrine informs us that as redeemed people self-consciously conform themselves progressively to the requirement of God's law as they mature in the faith, they progressively approach (but never achieve in history) the perfect humanity (but never the divinity) of the incarnate Jesus Christ.⁴ Because God brings historical judgment on collectives, meaning human institutions (Deut. 28), especially the three covenant institutions—church, State, and family—progressive sanctification also applies to groups. It is the basis of worldwide dominion.⁵

B. No Salvation by Works

God's grace is the only basis of man's salvation, in the sense of healing (salve) as well as personal regeneration. Men cannot legitimately expect to work their way back into favor with God. Eternal life is by God's sovereign act of adoption (John 1:12). We are made true sons of God by means of adoption. Apart from this act of adoption, we remain *disinherited sons* through our covenantal (representative) father, Adam.

The sabbath law was designed to remind man that he cannot work his way into a position of authority. To think that the works of man's hand are the basis of success, power, and prosperity is to adopt the religion of humanism, the forbidden religion in the Bible. God warned the people of Israel through Moses against vain imaginations regarding the basis of their wealth: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17). God then warned them about the sanctions He would bring against them in history if they forgot this warning against the concept of man's autonomy.

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye

4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), pp. 50–54.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–84. Cf. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).⁶

Man is told that he owes his success to God. God gives him the original capital base that man possesses. Then, in response to man's grace-empowered covenantal faithfulness—outward conformity to God's revealed law—God showers man with external, visible blessings. These blessings are designed to become a means of evangelism, both to individuals within the commonwealth and foreigners abroad.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).⁷

God gave them the law of the sabbath in order to spare them. It was to remind them that they had been hard-pressed servants in Egypt. In the recapitulation of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, this is the reason given for the sabbath: "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15). They had to give their human and animal servants a day off each week (v. 14). God was gracious in delivering them from bondage; they must also be gracious to those under their authority. This is the *hierarchical principle of God's grace*. It is appropriate that we find this principle clearly displayed in the second book of the Pentateuch, Exodus, the book that deals with hierarchy, authority, and deliverance.

The man who honors the sabbath by refusing to work at his occupation publicly admits to himself and to those around him that he cannot work his way into prosperity, that is, into the favor of God. God requires him to rest one day in seven if he expects to receive long-term

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

external blessings from God. But Old Testament law went beyond the mere promise of external blessings; it required the state to impose the ultimate civil sanction: execution. Execution is what will happen to the whole society if it disobeys God (Deut. 8:19–20); this is what also happens to individuals now if they disobey Him (Ex. 35:2). The covenantal sanction that was attached to the microcosm (the individual) reflected the covenantal sanction that was attached to the macrocosm (society). Men are not to imagine that they owe their wealth to the work of their own hands. They are to understand that their wealth has come through God's covenant of grace, one which has both types of sanction: blessing and cursing.

Conclusion

The sanction attached to this law was a civil sanction, and it was the ultimate civil sanction. All discussions regarding the continuing legitimacy of the Old Testament sabbath must henceforth begin with a full discussion of Exodus 35:2, and how it applies in the New Testament era. The capital sanction was fundamental to the law as originally given. No appeal to the various Old Testament passages relating to the sabbath can be taken literally if this one is conveniently ignored. The discussion must begin with Exodus 35:2.

The meaning of the sabbath law is clear: man must rest one day in seven. In the Old Testament, it was the last day of the work week, for the day of rest was a national testimony to the sabbath rest to come, the fulfillment of God's covenant promise of salvation and deliverance. This deliverance is wholly the gift of God. Man cannot save himself. Thus, the sabbath law was a testimony to a theological truth: salvation by grace and not by works of the law. The work of autonomous man's hands brings only death, this law affirms. The same is equally true for societies.

THE ABILITY TO TEACH

And he hath filled him [Bezaleel] with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; . . . And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab. . . (Ex. 35:31, 34a).

God is the source of all wisdom and all technical skills. Human civilization is the result of the procession of God's Holy Spirit in history. There is continuity in human culture, generation to generation, only because there is continuity of the work of God's Spirit in history. God uses human instruments in order to achieve the progressive establishment of His kingdom in history. The *kingdom of God* is best described as the *civilization of God*. It is both heavenly and earthly.

Architecture is certainly a visible aspect of God's earthly kingdom, and it points to the architecture of heaven. This was understood far better by medieval Christians than it is today. They also understood the need of personal apprenticeship as the best means of training men in building skills. As Christians' time perspective has shortened, so has their sense of architectural aesthetics. The aesthetic link between earth and heaven is not taken seriously by most evangelical Christians, as their church buildings reveal.¹

It is significant that almost nothing remains of Israelite architecture. Neither the first nor second temple survived the invasions of Israel's enemies, nor did the king's palace. God destroyed all traces of Israelite monumental architecture because of their repeated rebellion. The Israelites lost continuity architecturally because they did not maintain continuity ethically.

1. The aesthetic link between earth and hell has been taken very seriously by satanists, as their record album and audio disk covers and posters reveal so blatantly.

A. From Discontinuity to Continuity

This public announcement by Moses regarding the Spirit's connection to the two young architects is a repetition of the assignment given to the young men by God (Ex. 31:1–6). In this case, however, it is specifically stated that God gave Bezaleel and Aholiab the desire and capacity to teach. They became God's temporal intermediaries, as surely as Noah had been. In both instances, someone had to serve as God's aesthetic vessel after the ordeal of water passage—the flood and the Red Sea—from wrath to grace. The leaven of Egypt was not to be brought into the land.

The fact that God specifically intervened in history to give these two young men the ability to design and execute plans for the tabernacle points to the *non-evolutionary* nature of the Hebrew experience in the wilderness. The Israelites were former slaves. They had all been assigned construction tasks in Egypt that were far less skilled than the requirements of careful craftsmanship necessary to construct an intricate, aesthetically awesome place of religious worship. They were brick-makers, not skilled artisans. But God did not wait for several generations to see His tabernacle built. His people did not rely on the borrowed technologies of Egypt or the surrounding cultures of Canaan in order to design and construct God's tabernacle. It was not to be constructed by means of a slave people's skills and in terms of a slave culture's liturgical preferences. God performed yet another miracle by granting these young men His spirit of competence.

A radical error of all humanistic outlines of human history is their dependence on a view of man which presupposes man's autonomy from God. They also presuppose an evolutionary history. Because the evolutionist erroneously assumes that man was not created "overnight," he also assumes that man's culture must have developed over long periods of time. Mankind as a collective whole supposedly creates culture over great periods of time. That which is *undeveloped culturally*—by the standards of a later, presumably higher culture—is seen as being *chronologically prior*. Step by step, the theory goes, mankind learned the arts of civilization. Long eons of time were required for this slow process of cultural development, and humanistic scholars grant to primitive men all the time thought to be necessary for cultural and technological development. Such is the myth of cultural Darwinism.

The Bible teaches another view of human progress. Civilization

develops in terms of *ethics*, not in terms of the advent of private property and alienation (Rousseau and Marx), or sexual sublimation (Freud), or “challenge and response” (Toynbee), or voluntary contracts (Maine), or the “cunning of history” (Hegel), or the survival of the fittest (Spencer), or planning by a scientific elite (Lester Frank Ward), or the development of the *volk* (Nazism), or the construction of democratic institutions (the “new” American historians), or psychological self-realization (just about everyone else). The story of the Tower of Babel and the continuing testimony of the Cheops pyramid indicate that the early history of man was marked by cultural and technological *devolution*. Mankind began with remarkable mathematical² and technological skills that were subsequently lost.

B. Educational Capital

Adam and Eve lost the bulk of their computational abilities after the Fall. Adam had named the animals in the garden in less than one day; only after this task was completed did God give Eve to him (Gen. 2:19–23).³ The life of man was shortened, forcing more frequent gaps in human knowledge, as each generation died off. To extend knowledge, over time, each generation must devote considerable quantities of scarce economic resources to the training of the next generation. There is an economic incentive in this, of course: the provisioning of one’s heirs with income-producing skills so that one might be provided for in old age.

The education of one’s heirs is required for the expansion of family capital over time. The familistic focus of the Bible inescapably calls men to educate their children (Deut. 6:6–7).⁴ The passing down of precepts and skills takes time and effort. This is an investment in the future that pays returns not only in one’s own lifetime, but also down through history. But, as with any investment, it requires that we forfeit present consumption and alternative investment possibilities in order to educate our children.

2. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet’s Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time* (New York: Gambit, 1969); Peter Tomkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* (New York: Harper Colophon, [1971] 1978).

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 7.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012) ch. 8; cf. Robert L. Thoburn, *The Children Trap: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/ThoburnCT>)

God openly intervened in history to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. But leading them out of Egypt was only the first phase of God's program of dominion. He also intended that they learn the skills of building a civilization. The radical discontinuity of the exodus from Egypt was to be followed by a radical discontinuity of conquest. Then *a long-term continuity of dominion* was to begin.

The Hebrews possessed a minimal educational inheritance. They had learned some construction skills in Egypt. But this inheritance could easily become a snare to them. They needed an *infusion of educational capital* before they could hope to extend the dominion covenant. Like a parent who educates his children in order to extend his own name in history—the family name, the family vision, and the family power—so God had to educate His people in every area of life. This included architecture and aesthetics.

C. The Need for Aesthetic Discontinuity

The Hebrews had been in bondage in Egypt. They had served as construction workers for at least a generation. To the extent that they knew anything about architecture, they understood the architecture of the Egyptian state. The pyramids and the treasure cities were monuments to empire.

Egypt was a top-down civilization. The pyramids were the architectural representation of this society. The Pharaoh was the divine-human link who mediated between man and the gods. He was the high priest of the society.⁵ The priests possessed specialized knowledge which gave them life-and-death power over the lives of the Egyptians: knowledge of the cycles of the flooding of the Nile. Egypt was the archetype of what Wittfogel has called the "hydraulic society"—a civilization built in terms of a water monopoly by the state or priesthood. Their knowledge of astronomy, the calendar, and the flooding of the Nile gave the priests an unchallenged authority. Without them, the nation starved. They did not rule Egypt, but they were powerful.⁶ The architecture of hydraulic societies is monumental.

This style is apparent in the fortress-like settlements of the Pueblo Indians. It is conspicuous in the palaces, temple cities, and fortresses of ancient Middle and South America. It characterizes the

5. Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1957] 1964), p. 93.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

tombs, palace-cities, temples, and royal monuments of Pharaonic Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia. No one who has ever observed the city gates and walls of a Chinese capital, such as Peking, or who has walked through the immense palace gates and squares of the Forbidden City to enter the equally immense court buildings, ancestral temples, and private residences can fail to be awed by their monumental design.

Pyramids and dome-shaped tombs manifest most consistently the monumental style of hydraulic building. They achieve their aesthetic effect with a minimum of ideas and a maximum of material. The pyramid is little more than a huge pile of symmetrically arranged stones.⁷

In contrast to the pyramid was the tabernacle. It was ornate and magnificent inside (for the priests to view), but it was not monumental. It was transportable. Its builders were wilderness wanderers. There was no possibility of pyramid-building for the Hebrews in the wilderness. The tabernacle's grandeur was visual, but this grandeur was based upon the creation of a sense of subordination in those few who entered it. God taught the Hebrews a sense of awe, but this sense of awe was based on *God's actual presence in the tabernacle, not on its shape*. The closer they came to the center, the more awesome it became, and only priests were able to get close to the holy of holies, and only the high priest could enter it. Take away God's presence, and the tabernacle became a large, ornament-filled tent; it lost its awesome quality.

The great Cheops pyramid of Egypt is empty and awesome. With the original white limestone exterior, it must have been beautiful.⁸ Its awesomeness is based on its height and immensity, not its communicated sense of God's presence. The tabernacle required constant care, meaning constant devotion; the pyramids stand unattended, monuments to the static civilization that they represented.⁹ They have always served as giant graveyard monuments.

The massive, monumental architecture of Egypt had glorified the State and the static social pyramid. It had inspired the wrong kind of awe. It had been designed by tyrants and built by slaves. The rulers of Egypt paid for such architecture but had not participated in its con-

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

8. An earthquake around 1300 broke this exterior. The limestone remnants were removed in 1356 to make mosques and fortresses.

9. Chapter 2.

struction.

The “empire” architecture of almost every national capital—Washington, D. C., the Kremlin, Nazi Berlin—is easily recognizable. Government buildings look alike: huge stones piled straight up to impress anyone who walks by or walks in. They are designed to dwarf men in the presence of the power state. They are also designed to produce massive cost overruns and therefore immense profits for the construction firms that build them. The State requires appropriate sacrifices.

The tabernacle was uniquely suited to the wilderness experience. It was also uniquely suited to the spiritual needs of the Hebrews. They had to develop a wholly new sense of aesthetics. The tabernacle was portable, not a huge imitation of timeless eternity. God’s presence was made visible when Israel moved, in the pillar of fire and the cloud. God is a God of history, they learned.

The Hebrews could participate in the building of the tabernacle, if they were provided with teachers. This is precisely what God gave them. *The tabernacle was neither designed by tyrants nor built by slaves.* It inspired a sense of God’s presence, not a sense of man’s presence. It did not elevate an elite by humiliating the common man.

The construction of the tabernacle represented a definitive break with the architecture of empire. *The psychological and aesthetic discontinuity with Egypt reinforced the covenantal discontinuity with Egypt that God required of them.* They were not to bring the architectural leaven of Egypt into the promised land.

D. The Need for Aesthetic Continuity

The two senior craftsmen needed assistants. God gave them the ability to raise up apprentices who could multiply the skills of the masters. Instruction by masters led to an increase of productivity. The skills could be imparted, freeing up the time of the masters. Without this multiplication effect, it would have taken far longer to construct the tabernacle. The people would have been left in the wilderness for many years with memories of Egypt’s awesomeness and confronted by the sight of the architectural greatness of their enemies across the Jordan River. Without a magnificent alternative which testified to God’s ability as a designer, and which also testified to God’s ability to endow His people with the skills to construct such a symbol of God’s presence, the Hebrews would have suffered from an inferiority com-

plex. The *splendor of the tabernacle* was clearly a *psychological implementation of dominion*.

Who got inside to see it? The priests. They served as representatives of the people. They shared with God the splendor of the interior. They experienced this splendor as *representative agents* of the nation. Nevertheless, everyone who read the account in Exodus knew what was inside. The people were called upon to visualize this splendor whenever they heard this section of the Word of God. They learned of a God who enjoys splendor for His own sake.

Man is made in God's image. Why, then, shouldn't a person enjoy the beauties of art for his own sake? Christian art and architecture do not have to serve the needs of State in order to be legitimate. Art must please God, but in a free society, God's delegated aesthetic agents are the patron and the artist, not anyone else. The very fact that the interior of the tabernacle had to be visualized by most Hebrews must have called forth the creative imaging process in the minds of artists.

They needed teachers. The students gained confidence in their ability to build. This gave them confidence concerning the future. They would not be dependent on the architectural capital of the Canaanites after the conquest. They would not be forced to live in the shadow of a rebellious culture's greatness. Apprentices now were present in the Hebrew commonwealth who had been given direction by master teachers who had been filled by God with the spirit of competence. *The nation would not be forever dependent on the continuing miracles of architectural revelation and Spirit-filled craftsmen.*

Men need self-confidence if they are to perform difficult tasks. If the two master craftsmen had been unable to impart their skills to others, then the society would have been aesthetically dependent on the one-time creation of two God-endowed men whose skills might not appear again. The Hebrews would then have lived in the fear of becoming aesthetic slaves to their experience in the wilderness, unable to take a progressive culture across the face of the globe in confidence.

Once the tabernacle was built, men who were recently trained in creative architecture could pass these skills down to their successors. This would not be easy in a wilderness. The locus of artistic creativity would have to be personal and local. Essentially, the source of demand must have been familial or tribal. The small scale of artistic creativity must have decentralized craftsmanship. This is one reason why we find no examples of magisterial artistry in the archeological digs of Israel.

Another reason was covenantal: they kept rebelling against God, and God kept delivering them into the hands of their enemies. There was a constant dispersion of Hebrew wealth out of the land. *The discontinuities of Hebrew ethical life led to discontinuities in Hebrew artistic life.* The disastrous cultural effects of these discontinuities are what Alfred Edersheim ignored when he wrote in the late-nineteenth century that "Israel, as a nation, was not intended to attain pre-eminence either in art or science. If we may venture to pronounce on such a matter, this was the part assigned, in the Providence of God, to the Gentile world. To Israel was specially entrusted the guardianship of that spiritual truth, which in the course of ages would develop in all its proportions, till finally it became the common property of the whole world. On the other hand, it was the task assigned to that world, to develop knowledge and thought so as to prepare a fitting reception for the truth. . . ." ¹⁰ This dualism between Israel's spirit and culture was never intended by God, nor did it ever exist. There was a unity between Israel's spirit of rebellion and the continual uprootings that God imposed as His covenantal judgment. There was a unity between these uprootings and the inability of the Israelites to produce anything artistic that survived.

Finally, wood was used extensively both for the temple and Solomon's house. Wood does not survive for eons. Common people in the ancient world used mud-based materials for their homes, or else used animal skins or wood. Only the State could afford to use stone extensively. The self-professed divine State had an incentive to build stone monuments, then as now, as testimonies to their hypothetical eternity. A handful of these monuments survived to become tombstones to dead civilizations.

Conclusion

The teachers provided both *discontinuity and continuity*. They provided discontinuity with the pagan past by enabling the Hebrews to break with Egypt and the surrounding Canaanite cultures. At the same time, their ability to instruct others provided continuity into a covenantal future, for the nation of Israel would not become stagnant architecturally. They could build a temple which would utilize some of the implements of the tabernacle. They could take the land of Canaan in

10. Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament*, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1890] 1972), V, pp. 70–71.

the knowledge that what they might destroy in battle could be rebuilt, and not through imitation. Architecturally speaking, they had abandoned the monumental leaven of Egypt and had been given a new leaven which would enable the cultural loaf to rise in the promised land. They had abandoned the pyramids.

The presence of teachers enabled the Israelites to make use of the division of labor principle, both in time and across time. Much of the artistry of the tabernacle was eventually transferred to the temple. Later generations continued the work in this way. The teachers brought God's presence to the people, not ritually but instead artistically. The artists were not God, but their skills manifested the instructions of God. There is a reason why artists have been regarded throughout history as special people, even mediatorial between man and God.

CONCLUSION

Tools of Dominion

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts (Psalm 119:99–100).

Christians should take David's words seriously. He defined personal progress in history in terms of a better understanding of God's revealed laws. He could measure his progress beyond anything achieved by those who had preceded him, not in terms of better study techniques, or improved means of communication, or greater per capita wealth, but in terms of his mastery of God's precepts.

Modern man regards such an idea of historical progress as preposterous. Sad to say, so does the modern Christian. This is why modern society is headed either for an enormous series of disasters or an enormous and culturally comprehensive revival. God will not be mocked. His covenantal sanctions—blessings and cursings—still operate in history.

Part 3 is an exposition of God's covenantal case laws from an economic point of view. This strategy is theologically appropriate in the early twenty-first century, for modern man worships at his own shrine in the hope of achieving unbroken compound economic growth per capita. It was originally published as *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (1990). It is a work of casuistry: the application of conscience to moral decisions. Conscience needs a reliable guide: biblical law.

Casuistry has not been a popular academic endeavor within Bible-believing Protestantism since the late seventeenth century. The only works I can think of that are anything like this volume in scope are Richard Baxter's enormous study, *A Christian Directory*,

written in 1664–65 and first published in 1673, and Samuel Willard's equally massive commentary on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726). Baxter's goal was basically the same as mine: "I do especially desire you to observe, that the resolving of *practical Cases of Conscience*, and the reducing of Theological knowledge into *serious Christian Practice*, and promoting a *skilful facility* in the faithful exercise of universal obedience and Holiness of heart and life, is the great work of this Treatise; . . ."¹ Unlike Baxter, I had access to my library when I wrote my book; he did not, having been barred from his pulpit by the state (after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660), and having to write most of it from memory, only subsequently checking the original sources.

A. Ignoring the Case Laws

The major problem I had in writing this book is that there are very few books that even explain the case laws, let alone take them seriously. There are at least three approaches to (or, more accurately, justifications for the rejection of) the case laws.

1. *The Case Laws as Annulled*

This is the standard Christian view. It has been the common viewpoint almost from the beginning of the church. Basically, it boils down to this: a compromise with late classical philosophy's natural law theory began in the early centuries of the church. Christian scholars appealed to universal human reason as the source of rational man's universal knowledge of civil law. This law was seen as natural, meaning that it is implicitly in the common possession of all rational men.

There was an early recognition on the part of church scholars and leaders that an appeal to Old Testament case laws could not be conformed intellectually to natural law theory. They understood the obvious question: "If these laws were universally binding on all men, then why did God have to reveal the specifics of His law to the Israelites, and only to them?" This, in fact, is a very good Christian rhetorical answer to those who declare the universality of natural law. The answer is simple: *there is no such thing as a universal system of rational natural law that is accessible to fallen human reason*. But this answer was

1. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory: Or, A Summ of Practical Theologie, and Cases of Conscience* (London: Robert White for Nevil Simmons, [1673] 1678), unnumbered page: the second page of "Advertisements."

too radical to suit scholars and apologists in the early church, just as it has been too radical for Christians ever since. It involves a sharp break with the doctrine of natural law.

The early commentators were sorely tempted to seek a way out of their common-ground apologetic difficulty by interpreting Paul's language regarding the annulment of the law's eternal death sentence against redeemed mankind to mean that the Mosaic Covenant's legal order is in no way judicially binding on New Testament society. They abandoned the concept of God's historical sanctions as applicable in New Testament history. They lumped together Mosaic civil case laws with the Mosaic Covenant's laws of ritual cleanliness, and then they dismissed both standards of law. This tradition lives on in modern conservative Christian theology.

2. The Case Laws as Antiquarian

Christian Bible commentators pass over these laws on the assumption that they are only of antiquarian interest. Commentators almost never attempt to explain how these laws might have worked in ancient Israel. They never discuss how they might be applied in the New Testament era. Also, the commentators are unfamiliar with even the rudiments of economic theory, so their comments on the economic implications of these verses are almost nonexistent. Their few brief observations are what the reader could readily have figured out for himself.

Another major problem is this: far too often, the commentators compare the biblical text with fragments of the legal texts of the surrounding Near Eastern cultures. This is not an evil practice in itself, but it is when they make the unproven assumption that Israel must have borrowed its legal code from these pagan cultures. They never discuss the possibility that Israel's law code preceded these pagan extracts, which once again raises the question of the need for the reconstruction of biblical and Near Eastern chronologies.²

3. The Case Laws as Mythical

Theologically liberal Bible scholars are so enamored with biblical "higher criticism" that they pay little attention to the meaning of the biblical texts. They prefer instead to spend their lives inventing mul-

2. Appendix A: "The Reconstruction of Egypt's Chronology."

multiple authors for each text, re-dating subsections in order to make the Book of Exodus appear to be a composite document written centuries after the exodus event (which many of them downplay anyway).³ When commentators believe that the oldest laws are remnants of some “primitive nomadism” or else imports from pagan law codes, they have no incentive to think through how these laws should be applied today. When they view most of the case laws as late developments that were inserted retroactively into older biblical texts for political reasons, they have little incentive to understand them as specific historical applications of permanent general principles. Jews and gentiles alike are afflicted with Bible scholarship that relies on the principles of higher criticism.

B. Useless Commentaries

An Economic Commentary on the Bible is not a typical Bible commentary. The typical Bible commentary judiciously avoids the really difficult questions, especially in the area of ethics. It also neglects all but the most obvious of the economic principles involved. It is painful to discover how little practical information is provided by the typical modern Bible commentary. It is understandable why people seldom use them after having bought them. Reality does not meet expectations when it comes to Bible commentaries. Yet people continue to buy them. Most commentaries sit unused on most pastors’ bookshelves. Maybe their primary use is decorative. I gave up on most Bible commentaries early in this project. I use them mainly to keep myself from making major linguistic or textual errors. This is why you will find very few references to Bible commentaries in my footnotes. I long ago stopped wasting my time trying to find economic and judicial information in them. Or, as the economist would say, “the marginal return on each additional invested unit of my time spent in reading them was consistently below the marginal cost.” In short, the information costs were too high per unit of relevant data.

3. In recent years, this has been changing to some degree. The arcane intricacies of the many rival textual reconstructions have led to such a cobweb of complexity that scholars prefer to avoid trying to untangle it. Thus, scholars are sorely tempted to do what was once considered a breach of faith: Treat the text as a unit when searching for its meaning.

1. *Jewish Commentaries*

If Christian commentaries are unhelpful, what about commentaries written by Jews? They are not much better. I did not find the commentaries written by medieval Jews more than occasionally useful in writing this commentary, including the Talmud. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish scholarship focused almost exclusively on the Talmud, which was completed around A.D. 500, parts of which extended back to several centuries before Christ in the form of oral tradition.⁴ The Talmud was the huge compilation of Rabbinical comments on the Mishnah, the Pharisees' oral tradition of comments on the laws of Moses.

Traditional Jewish commentaries on ethics often deal with highly specific legal cases involving economic disputes between men in a rabbinical court, or academic disputes among the rabbis, but there is seldom an attempt to spell out the general economic principles guiding any decision of a Jewish court. At best, the rabbis may try to explain why certain forms of restitution are imposed in certain cases, but nothing beyond a kind of common-sense view of economic justice. Thus, Jewish religious scholars until very recently did not bring their great skills of erudition and detailed scholarship to bear on the modern world. "Secular" topics did not interest them, and even today, most Jews who have become illustrious academically in so many fields display little or no interest in the Talmud.

There is a very important reason why the writings of Jewish legal scholars and judges prove to be of little assistance: Jewish courts after Bar Kokhba's revolt failed in 135 A.D. were not allowed to impose specifically biblical sanctions. Very few gentiles are aware of this, and I suspect that few Jews are, either. When the Romans captured Jerusalem and burned the Temple in A.D. 70, the ancient official Sanhedrin court came to an end. The rabbis, under the leadership of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, then took over many of the judicial functions of the Sanhedrin.⁵ They established as a principle that every Jewish court must have at least one judge who had been ordained by the laying on of hands (*semikah*), and who could in principle trace his ordination back to Moses. This laying on of hands could take place only in the Holy Land. Legal scholar George Horowitz explained: "A court not

4. See Appendix L: "Maimonides's *Code*: Is It Biblical?"

5. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co., [1953] 1963), pp. 92–93.

thus qualified had no jurisdiction to impose the punishments prescribed in the Torah.”⁶ After Bar Kokhba’s revolt, the Jews were scattered across the Roman Empire in the diaspora. “The Rabbis were compelled, therefore, in order to preserve the Torah and to maintain law and order, to enlarge the authority of Rabbinical tribunals. This they accomplished by emphasizing the distinction between Biblical penalties and Rabbinical penalties. Rabbinical courts after the second century had no authority to impose Biblical punishments because they lacked *semikah*: but as regards penalties created by Rabbinical legislation, the Rabbis had of necessity, accordingly, a whole series of sanctions and penalties: excommunications, fines, physical punishment, use of the ‘secular arm’ in imitation of the Church, etc.”⁷ Thus, by the time of the Mishnah, which was Rabbi Judah the Prince’s authoritative late-second-century compilation of rabbinical laws, Jewish courts had already abandoned the Mosaic law’s sanctions.

Because they were tied intellectually and ethically to the Mishnah, to the Talmud, and to the judicial literature produced in terms of this ancient tradition, Jewish commentators have never attempted to produce anything like the kind of Bible commentary that mine represents. I am aware of no Jewish compilation of Old Testament case laws that is organized in terms of the Ten Commandments or any other biblical organizational principle (e.g., the covenant model) that is comparable to R. J. Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law*. Furthermore, despite the intellectual dominance of economists who are Jews,⁸ there is as yet no body of scholarship known as Jewish economics.⁹ This is in sharp contrast to the Islamic academic community, which has produced a growing body of self-consciously Islamic economic literature, especially since 1975.¹⁰ With the exception only of Professor Israel Kirzner,

6. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

7. *Idem.*

8. Murray Rothbard, an agnostic Jew and a defender of free market economics, once made the observation that “The fate of Western Civilization will be determined by whether our Jews beat their Jews.” He presumably had in mind Ludwig von Mises, Israel Kirzner, and Milton Friedman (in his anti-regulatory writings) vs. Karl Marx, Paul Samuelson, Lawrence Klein, etc.

9. The two titles that might be offered as examples of such scholarship are quite recent: Aaron Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Yeshiva University Press, 1980); Meir Tamari, “*With All Your Possessions*”: *Jewish Ethics and Economic Life* (New York: Free Press, 1987). Neither study is particularly theoretical or detailed in its practical applications. They are more like introductory surveys of a handful of themes in the Talmud that are related to economics.

10. See Muhammed Nejatullah Siddiqi, *Muslim Economic Thinking: A Survey of Contemporary Literature* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1981); Muhammed

I can think of no contemporary academically recognized Jewish economist¹¹ who might agree with Rabbi Chajes' mid-nineteenth-century pronouncement: "Allegiance to the authority of the said [oral] rabbinic tradition is binding upon all sons of Israel, because these explanations and interpretations have come down to us by word of mouth from generation to generation, right from the time of Moses. They have been transmitted to us precise, correct, and unadulterated, and he who does not give his adherence to the unwritten law and the rabbinic tradition has no right to share the heritage of Israel; he belongs to the Sadducees or the Karaites who severed connection to us long ago."¹²

2. Orthodox Judaism

During the twentieth century in the West, Orthodox Judaism almost disappeared from sight in the United States, so widespread was the defection of millions of Jews who were assimilated into modern America. By Chajes' definition, there are today few Jews remaining in the world, except in the State of Israel. Even the term "Orthodox Judaism" indicates the nature of the problem; it was originally a term of de-

Akram Khan, *Islamic Economics: Annotated Sources in English and Urdu* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1983). A cursory list of English-language examples of this literature includes the following: Ibnul Hasan (ed.), *In Search of an Islamic Economic Model* (London: New Century Publishers, 1983); Afzal-Ur-Rahman, *Economic Doctrines of Islam*, 4 vols. (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications Limited, 1974-82); Muazzam Ali (ed.), *Islamic Banks and Strategies of Economic Cooperation* (London: New Century Publications, 1982); Mohammed Muslehuddin, *Insurance and Islamic Law* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1969); Muslehuddin, *Economics and Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1974); Alhaj A. D. Ajijola, *The Islamic Concept of Social Justice* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1977); Muhammed Nejatullah Siddiqi, *Banking Without Interest* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1983); Siddiqi, *Issues in Islamic Banking: Selected Papers* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1983); Siddiqi, *Partnership and Profit-Sharing in Islamic Law* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1985); M. Umer Chapra, *Towards a Just Monetary System* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1985); Waqar Masood Khan, *Towards an Interest-Free Islamic Economic System* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1985); Raquibuz M. Zaman, *Elimination of Interest from the Banking System in Pakistan* (Karachi: State Bank of Pakistan, 1985). I do not believe that Shaikh Mahmud Ahmad's book, *Economics of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ashraf Press, 1947), is representative of recent Islamic economic thought in general; the book is a socialist polemic in the name of Islam.

11. Kirzner was not a prominent academic figure, but he was the only Austrian School economist who has a solid reputation among academic economists. Kirzner's dual mastery of the Talmud and the works of Ludwig von Mises is not visible in his writings; the two fields were kept by Kirzner in hermetically sealed separate academic compartments. Few professional economists are aware that he was known as a rabbi in Orthodox Jewish circles. See Aaron Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law*, p. xi.

riasion used by liberal Jews in the nineteenth century against their traditionalist opponents. Grunfeld wrote: "The word 'Orthodoxy', on the other hand, which was applied by the Reformers to what they called 'Old-Timers' or 'Old-Believers' (Altgläubige), was taken from the sphere of Christian theology and does not fit Judaism at all, in which the main stress is laid on action or law and not on 'faith', as the Greek term orthodox would express. Nevertheless, once the word 'Orthodoxy' had been thrown at Hirsch and his followers in a derogatory sense, he accepted the challenge with the intention of turning that word into a name of honour."¹³ Notice his assertion regarding Judaism that "the main stress is laid on action or law and not on 'faith.'" This is indeed the main stress of orthodox Judaism, which nevertheless has an underlying theology: *salvation by law*. Robert Goldenberg observed: "Classical Judaism, drawing indirectly on its biblical antecedents, tends to emphasize act over intention, behavior over thought. Righteousness is chiefly a matter of proper behavior, not correct belief or appropriate intention."¹⁴ In contrast, Christianity stresses salvation by faith in Christ. But this faith means faith in Christ's *representative perfect obedience to God's perfect law*. Christian orthodoxy should never lead to a denial of the validity and moral authority of the perfect law that Christ obeyed perfectly.

C. Revolution and Law

I am convinced that both the West and the Far East are about to experience a major transformation. The pace of social change is already rapid and will get faster. The possibility grows daily of a terrorist attack with a mini-neutron bomb against a government;¹⁵ so does

12. Z. H. Chajes, *The Student's Guide Through the Talmud* (London: East and West Library, 1952), p. 4. The Karaites were a sect of Judaism established in 767 A.D. by Jews in Babylon. They did not accept the Talmud or the idea of an oral tradition stretching back to Moses.

13. I. Grunfeld, "Samson Raphael Hirsch—The Man and His Mission," in *Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays from the Writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (London: Soncino Press, 1956), p. xlvii.

14. Robert Goldenberg, "Law and Spirit in Talmudic Religion," in Arthur Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 232.

15. Sam Cohen, "The Coming Neutron Bomb Threat," *Wall Street Journal* (May 15, 1996). Cohen invented the neutron bomb in the late 1950s. He told me that the government's denial of this new technology matches its dismissal of his technology a generation ago. Telephone discussion with Cohen, Sept. 14, 1996.

the possibility of chemical and biological warfare;¹⁶ so does the threat of a pandemic. None of these threats to civilization may prove in retrospect to be devastating, but they are certainly perceived today as threats. Added to these grim possibilities is the much more predictable threat of an international economic collapse as a result of the vast build-up of international debt; this in turn could produce domestic political transformations. Drug addiction is spreading like a plague. Agricultural output may be endangered, long term, by weather changes¹⁷ and also by soil erosion. We are not sure. What Christians should be certain of is this: *God has been plowing up the ethically erosion-prone world since World War I, and this process is accelerating.*

This has created a unique opportunity for Christian revival, but this time revival could lead to a broad-based cultural transformation. Revival could produce an international revolution: family by family, church by church, nation by nation. For a true social revolution to take place, there must be a transformation of the legal order. This sort of transformation takes several generations, but without it, there has been no revolution, only a *coup d'état*.¹⁸ There is today an international crisis in the Western legal tradition.¹⁹ This fact testifies to the likelihood of a comprehensive, international revolution—not necessarily violent, but a revolution nonetheless. The Holy Spirit could produce such a revolution without firing a shot or releasing a virus into the atmosphere. This is my prayer. It should be every Christian's prayer.

Harold Berman's point is correct. *Without a transformation of the legal system, there is no revolution.* This is why I am devoting so much space to explaining the case laws of Exodus. It is these laws, and their amplification in the Book of Deuteronomy, that must serve as the foundation of any systematically, self-consciously Christian revolution. Natural law is a dead mule; it was always a sterile hybrid, and Darwinism has long-since killed the last known living specimens.²⁰ Anti-the-

16. Joseph D. Douglas and Neil C. Livingstone, *America the Vulnerable: The Threat of Chemical and Biological Warfare* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1987).

17. More likely cooling than warming.

18. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 20.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–41.

20. R. J. Rushdoony wrote: "Darwinism destroyed this faith in nature. The process of nature was now portrayed, not as a perfect working of law, but as a blind, unconscious energy working profligately to express itself. In the struggle for survival, the fittest survive by virtue of their own adaptations, not because of natural law. Nature produces many 'mistakes' which fail to survive and become extinct species and fossils.

istic conservative philosophers and a handful of traditional Roman Catholic and Protestant college instructors and magazine columnists still visibly cling to one or another of these taxidermic specimens, each proclaiming that his specimen is still alive. Thus, there is nowhere for Christians to turn for guidance in developing a believable social theory and workable social programs except to the case laws of the Old Testament. Once the myth of neutrality is abandoned—really abandoned, not just verbally admitted to be a myth—then the inevitable question arises: By what standard? Christians who have abandoned faith in the myth of neutrality have only one possible answer: “By *this* standard: biblical law.”²¹

D. The Conflict Between Two Kingdoms

What I am attempting to do with my life is to publish Christian worldview materials that will lead to the steady replacement of the humanist intellectual foundations of modern civilization. *The arena of conflict is nothing less than world civilization.* The issue is the kingdom of God, both in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18).²²

1. Kingdom as Civilization

There are many books that deal with the kingdom of God, but my view of the kingdom of God as it is visibly manifested in history is simple: it is God’s authorized and morally required *civilization*. It is simultaneously internal (world-and-life view), ethical (a moral law-order), and institutional (covenantal judicial relationships). Raymond Zorn began his book on the Kingdom of God with these words: “In the broadest sense God’s Kingdom refers to the most extended reaches of His sovereignty. As Psalm 103:19 puts it, ‘The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.’”²³ The king-

The destiny of the universe is extinction as its energy runs down.” Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1963] 2000), p. 7. (<http://bit.ly/rjrbph>)

21. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

22. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

23. Raymond O. Zorn, *Church and Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), p. 1. Zorn, an amillennialist, stressed the kingdom as the reign of God rather than the sphere or domain of His rule (p. 1). Greg Bahnsen’s response to this sort of argument is correct: it is ridiculous to speak of the reign of a king whose kingdom has few if any historical manifestations that are as comprehensive in scope as his

dom of God is all-encompassing, in the same sense that a civilization is all-encompassing.²⁴ I agree in principle with the Jewish scholar, I. Grunfeld, who wrote that “true religion and true civilisation are identical. It is the view of the Torah as the civilisation of the state of God—where Torah is coextensive with life in all its manifestations, personal, economic, political, national.”²⁵

Nothing less than this *comprehensive replacement* of humanism, Islam, and occultism with Christianity will suffice to please God. We are called to work for the progressive replacement of humanist civilization by Christian civilization, a replacement that was definitively achieved with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and manifested by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We are to *replace* Satan’s humanistic kingdoms. “Kingdom” is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of kingdom vs. no kingdom; it is always a question of *whose* kingdom. Rushdoony was correct in his evaluation of mankind’s inevitable quest for utopia, the final order, which only God can inaugurate and bring to pass. Rushdoony wrote: “The church accordingly has never been alone in history but has rather faced a multiplicity of either anti-Christian or pseudo-Christian churches fiercely resentful of any challenge to their claim to represent the way, truth

self-proclaimed sovereignty. Such a limited definition of God’s kingdom and kingship is in fact a denial of God’s kingdom. Bahnsen, “The World and the Kingdom of God” (1981), reprinted as Appendix D in Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gdplreduction>)

24. I agree with Geerhardus Vos’ statement: “While thus recognizing that the kingdom of God has an importance in our Lord’s teaching second to that of no other subject, we should not go to the extreme into which some writers have fallen, of finding in it the only theme on which Jesus actually taught, which would imply that all other topics dealt with in his discourses were to his mind but so many corollaries or subdivisions of this one great truth. . . . Salvation with all it contains flows from the nature and subserves the glory of God. . . .” Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 11. I am saying that the kingdom of God is inherently all-encompassing culturally. In fact, I am convinced that the best biblical definition of “kingdom” is *civilization*. The kingdom of God is the civilization of God—internal, external, heavenly, earthly, historical, and eternal.

25. Grunfeld, “Samson Raphael Hirsch—The Man and His Mission,” *Judaism Eternal*, I, p. xiv. Obviously, I do not agree with Grunfeld’s next sentence: “This concept is applicable, of course, only when there is a Jewish State, or at least an autonomous Jewish Society, which can be entirely ruled by the Torah.” This statement provides evidence of the accuracy of Vos’ analysis of Jewish teaching concerning the Kingdom of heaven: “The emphasis was placed largely on what the expected state would bring for Israel in a national and temporal sense. Hence it was preferably thought of as the kingdom of Israel over the other nations.” Vos, *Kingdom and the Church*, p. 19.

and life of that final order. The modern state, no less than the ancient empire, claims to be the vehicle and corporate body of that true estate of man. As the incarnation of that final order, it views family, church, school and every aspect of society as members and phases of its corporate life and subject to its general government. It is in terms of this faith, therefore, that the state claims prior or ultimate jurisdiction over every sphere, and steadily encroaches on their activity.”²⁶

2. *Comprehensive Revival*

Christian Reconstructionists are self-consciously attempting to lay new intellectual foundations for a comprehensive moral and therefore intellectual, social, political, and economic transformation of the world. Not until at least the preliminary steps in this theological and intellectual transformation are accomplished should we expect God to send worldwide revival. If the coming revival is not comprehensive in its effects, it will no more change the world permanently than earlier revivals have changed it permanently. The regeneration of people’s souls is only the first step on the road to comprehensive redemption. Christian philosopher Cornelius Van Til, who died in 1987, issued a warning: “The temptation is very great for the believers in these times when the Church is in apostasy, and its conquest of the world for Christ seems to be losing out, that they shall spend a great deal of their time in passive waiting instead of in active service. Another danger that lurks at a time of apostasy is that the few faithful ones give up the comprehensive ideal of the kingdom and limit themselves to the saving of individual souls.”²⁷ We need a comprehensive revival that will produce comprehensive redemption.²⁸

The message of the kingdom of God rests on a concept of *salvation that is supernaturally imparted*, not politically imparted. The kingdom of God is categorically not a narrow political program of social transformation. It is rather a supernaturally imposed salvational program that inevitably produces world-changing political, social, legal, and economic effects. Geerhardus Vos taught at Princeton Theolo-

26. R. J. Rushdoony, Foreword, in Zorn, *Church and Kingdom*, pp. xix–xx.

27. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), p. 122.

28. Gary North, “Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action” (1976), in North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

gical Seminary from 1893 until 1932. His book on the kingdom was published in 1958. I agree with his assessment regarding the ethical character of Christ's kingdom. "The kingdom represents the specifically *evangelical* element in our Lord's teaching. . . . Jesus' doctrine of the kingdom as both inward and outward, coming first in the heart of man and afterwards in the external world, upholds *the primacy of the spiritual and ethical* over the physical. The invisible world of the inner religious life, the righteousness of the disposition, the sonship of God are in it made supreme, the essence of the kingdom, the ultimate realities to which everything else is subordinate. The inherently ethical character of the kingdom finds subjective expression in the demand for repentance."²⁹ But ethics does not begin and end with personal behavior. It extends into every nook and cranny of life—wherever sin exercises influence. The kingdom of God competes with the kingdom of Satan—disguised as the kingdom of man—for control over history. To limit the kingdom of God to the human heart, the Christian family, and the Christian church is to surrender the rest of the world to Satan. *This is pre-emptive surrender.* Jesus Christ will have none of it. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). God did not give Christ all power on earth in order for Christians to hand it back to Satan.

The primary need today, as always, is the need for widespread personal repentance before God. We therefore need a Holy Spirit-initiated Christian revival to extend the kingdom of God across the face of the earth. If we do not get this revival soon, my work and the work of those who were involved in the Biblical Blueprints project (1986–87) will remain curiosities, and then become antiquarian curiosities, until the revival comes.

3. *Blueprints and Responsibility*

Without a bottom-up religious transformation of civilization, the policies that we Christian Reconstructionists recommend will at best have only a peripheral influence on society. We expect the revival and this bottom-up transformation, if not in our own lifetimes, then eventually. The Bible's blueprints for society will eventually be universally adopted across the face of the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9).³⁰ Christian Reconstructionists regard this as historically inevit-

29. Vos, *Kingdom and the Church*, pp. 102–3.

30. J. A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise*

able. This confidence is what makes the theonomic postmillennial worldview so hard-nosed and uncompromising. We annoy almost every Christian who has doubts about the earthly triumph of God's kingdom, which means that we initially alienate just about everyone who reads our materials. Our antinomian Christian critics call us arrogant. Bear in mind that the word "arrogant" usually means "a confident assertion of something I don't approve of."

Christians who doubt the future earthly triumph of God's kingdom tend to be less confident and less sure about the practical reliability of the Bible's blueprints. Sometimes they even deny that the Bible offers such blueprints. If it does offer such blueprints, then evangelical Christians have major responsibilities outside the sanctuary and the family. This prospect of worldwide, culture-wide responsibility frightens millions of Christians. They have even adopted eschatologies that assure them that God does not hold them responsible for anything so comprehensive as the transformation of today's sin-filled world. They do not believe that God offers to His church the tools, skills, and time necessary for such a generations-long project of social transformation. Therefore, they adopt the philosophy that says that Christians should not even try to reform society, for such efforts are futile, wasteful, and shift precious resources from the only legitimate tasks of the church: preaching individual salvation to the lost, and sustaining the converted spiritually in a time of inevitable cultural decline. They equate social reform programs with polishing brass on a sinking ship. As dispensationalist newsletter writer Peter Lalonde remarked concerning Christians who possess such a vision of God's world-transforming kingdom in history, "It's a question, 'Do you polish brass on a sinking ship?' And if they're working on setting up new institutions, instead of going out and winning the lost for Christ, then they're wasting the most valuable time on the planet earth right now, and that is the serious problem. . . ." ³¹ He devoted his career to promoting popular dispensationalism, focussing on prophecies that are supposedly being fulfilled in our day, despite the fact that academic dispensationalism has always taught that the clock of prophecy stopped in A.D. 70 and will not start again until the Rapture. His ministry was overwhelmingly devoted to prophecy, not evangelism or foreign missions. His audience was fun-

of Anglo-American Missions, 1640–1810 (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1970).

31. Tape One, *Dominion: A Dangerous New Theology*, in *Dominion: The Word and the New World Order*, a 3-tape set distributed by the Omega-Latter, Ontario, Canada, 1987.

damentalist Protestants who were looking for an escape from this world without having to die.

E. Doubt vs. Dominion

Christians, paralyzed by their own versions of eschatological pessimism, have not taken advantage of the growing self-doubt that is progressively paralyzing their humanistic opponents.

1. The Paralysis of Despair

Christians should recognize the extent of the despair that has engulfed those who have rejected the idea that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. An example of such despair is the following:

We live in a time in which old perspectives informing our understanding of the world have been seriously shaken by events of modern times. In many cases these old perspectives have collapsed; they no longer hold as our centers. . . . Against the backdrop of such events, an erosion of traditional values has taken place—an erosion which has left us feeling that we [are] adrift in a sea of relativity in which anything, including such evils as the holocaust or nuclear war might be rationalized as “necessary.” It is with this experience that we know that the cultural foundations have been shaken. We know that we are no longer guided by a vision of coherence and relatedness concerning our individual existence. We know that we are no longer bound together by a set of values infused with a common sense of destiny. Our sense of destiny, if any, is dominated by an uneasiness and sense of foreboding about the future. The future itself is now feared by many as the ultimate danger to the fragile hold we have on whatever security we have achieved in the present. All of this has left some to question the meaning of their endeavors, while it has left many with a sense of isolation and loneliness. The irony is that this new sense of insecurity has come at a time when the material well-being of those in the advanced industrial nations has reached a height hitherto undreamed of.³²

This is precisely what the Book of Deuteronomy predicts for a society that has covenanted with God, has been blessed with external wealth, and then has forgotten God in its humanistic confidence (Deut. 8:17): “. . . the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt be-

32. Howard J. Vogel, “A Survey and Commentary on the New Literature in Law and Religion,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, I (1983), p. 151.

fore thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life" (Deut. 28:65b–66). This sort of widespread pessimism leads either to cultural collapse or revival. The first is taking place visibly, yet revival is also becoming more likely. My mentor, sociologist Robert Nisbet asked this question: "[W]hat is the future of the idea of progress? Any logical answer must be that the idea has no future whatever if we assume the indefinite, prolonged continuation of the kind of culture that has become almost universal in the West in the late twentieth century. If the roots are dying, as they would appear to be at the present time, how can there be shrub and foliage?"³³ But, he then asked, "is this contemporary Western culture likely to continue for long? The answer, it seems to me, must be in the negative—if we take any stock in the lessons of the human past." He made no prophecies—much of his academic career has been devoted to reminding us that such comprehensive cultural prophecies are always overturned by the facts of the future³⁴—but he was correct when he wrote that "never in history have periods of culture such as our own lasted for very long." He saw "signs of the beginning of a religious renewal in Western civilization, notably in America."³⁵

2. *The Paralysis of Guilt*

This should not be a time for pessimism among Christians. Yet it is. They are missing an opportunity that has not been seen since the late eighteenth century, and possibly since the resurrection of Christ. A universal world civilization now exists for the first time since the Tower of Babel. It is disintegrating morally as it grows wealthy. It is ripe for the harvest.

A successful harvesting operation requires tools. To take advantage of this unique historical opportunity, Christians need tools of dominion—blueprints for the reconstruction of the world. But Christians today do not see that God has given them the tools of dominion, His revealed law. They agree with the humanists who in turn agree among themselves, above all, that the Bible offers society no specific legal standards for comprehensive reform and reconstruction. They agree with such statements as the one made by the editor of *The Journal of Law and Religion*, who was also a professor of Constitution-

33. Robert A. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 355–56.

34. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 And All That," *Commentary* (June 1968).

35. Nisbet, *History*, p. 356.

al law at a Catholic law school.

First, I assume that the Bible is not a detailed historical blueprint for American society, and that it does not contain much concrete guidance for the resolution of specific political conflicts or constitutional difficulties such as slavery and racism, sexism and equal opportunity to participate in society. The biblical traditions are not to be viewed as an arsenal of prooftexts for contemporary disputes. Contextual leaps from the situations in which the biblical authors wrote to the situations with which we find ourselves faced are likewise to be avoided.³⁶

Notice that he raised the controversial issue of slavery. So did a professor of Hebrew scriptures at Notre Dame University in Indiana: "Then there is the larger hermeneutical issue of the Christian appropriation of Old Testament law and the binding nature of biblical norms and stipulations in general. Who today, for example, would be prepared to argue that laws concerning the conduct of war or slavery retain their binding authority for the Christian or for anyone else?"³⁷ Who would? I would, and so would those who call themselves Christian Reconstructionists. This is why Christian Reconstruction represents a radical challenge to modern antinomian Christianity and modern humanism.

The enemies of God continue to bring up the issue of slavery in their war against Christianity. They seek to make Christians feel guilty regarding Christianity's theological and historical legacy. Christianity unquestionably condoned and even sanctioned chattel slavery until the nineteenth century. The enemies of Christianity then trace this judicial sanctioning of chattel slavery back to the Old Testament. In this way, they seek to create a sense of guilt and doubt in their targeted victims. They understand that guilt-ridden people are not effective opponents of the prevailing messianic social order. Rushdoony was correct when he said that "The reality of man apart from Christ is guilt and masochism. And guilt and masochism involve an unbreakable inner slavery which governs the total life of the non-Christian. The politics of the anti-Christian will thus inescapably be *the politics of guilt*. In the politics of guilt, man is perpetually drained in his social energy and cultural activity by his over-riding sense of guilt and his masochistic

36. Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr., "Of Covenants Ancient and New: The Influence of Secular Law on Biblical Religion," *Journal of Law and Religion*, II (1984), pp. 117-18.

37. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Biblical Law and Hermeneutics: A Reply to Professor Gaffney," *ibid.*, IV (1986), p. 98.

activity. He will progressively demand of the state a redemptive role. What he cannot do personally, i.e., to save himself, he demands that the state do for him, so that the state, as man enlarged, becomes the human savior of man.”³⁸

That Christians failed for many centuries to challenge chattel slavery is a black mark in the history of the church. But to lay the blame at the doorstep of the Bible is either a mistake or an ideological strategy. If this book persuades Christians that this doubt-inducing accusation against the Bible regarding its supposed support of chattel slavery is false, then it will have achieved a major success.

F. Embarrassed by God's Laws

What we find in our day is that Christians despise biblical law almost as much as secular humanists do. Christians have begun to adopt arguments similar to those used by the English Deists. For example, they attack the very thought of stoning drunken, gluttonous sons—not young children, but adult sons who are living at home with their parents, debauching themselves—as some sort of “crime against humanity,” when stoning them is specifically a civil sanction authorized by God (Deut. 21:18).³⁹ The very idea of execution by public stoning embarrasses Christians, despite the fact that public stoning is by far the most covenantally valid form of execution, for God's law requires the witnesses to cast the first stones, and it also requires representatives of the entire covenantal community to participate directly, rather than hiding the act in a sanitary room in some distant prison. The Bible is clear: “The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you” (Deut. 17:7).

1. Stoning and Personal Responsibility

Stoning was a communal activity, an aspect of the civil covenant: sanctions. It took place outside the town (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35–36; I Kings 21:13). “If sentence was passed with the help of eye-witnesses, the witnesses had to begin the execution (Deut. 17:7). This was to dis-

38. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), p. 9. (<http://bit.ly/rjrpgap>)

39. Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, “Apocalypse Now?,” *Policy Review* (Fall 1986), p. 20.

courage frivolous testimony in court."⁴⁰ Boecker argued that it was a form of excommunication, and that those stoned were not entitled to burial in the family plot, but he cited no Scriptural evidence. "For the ancients, the criminal was possessed of a real guilt which jeopardised the community. By covering the evil-doer with stones outside the town, the evil that he could spread was banished."⁴¹ This argument is ridiculous. It is a theological liberal's self-conscious attempt to reinterpret the Bible's covenantal concepts as magical. The execution of the evil-doer was sufficient to stop the spread of his evil. The pile of stones was intended rather to serve as a covenantal reminder. Each pile of stones testified to the reality of covenant sanctions, a monument to God's judgment of cursing in history, just as the stones from the River Jordan were made into a memorial of God's judgment of the deliverance of Israel (Josh. 4:7–8).

Public stoning forces citizens to face the reality of the ultimate civil sanction, execution, which in turn points to God's ultimate sanction at judgment day. Stoning also faithfully images the promised judgment against Satan: the crushing of his head by the promised Seed (Gen. 3:15). Because most people, including Christians, do not want to think about God's final judgment, they prefer to assign to distant unknown executioners the grim task of carrying out God's judgment in private. This privatization of execution is immoral; it is itself criminal. It is unjust to the convicted criminal,⁴² and it is unjust to the surviving victims, who do not see God's justice done in public. The *systematic impersonalism of capital punishment* is the problem, not capital punishment as such. This deliberate impersonalism has corrupted the entire penal system today.⁴³

40. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, translated by Jeremy Moiser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, [1976] 1980), p. 40.

41. *Idem*.

42. Public stoning would allow a condemned man to confront the witnesses and his executioners. The idea of a private execution where the condemned person cannot have a final word to those who have condemned him is anything but liberal-minded. It was long considered a basic legal privilege in the West for a condemned person to have this final opportunity to speak his mind. The sign of the intolerance of the "liberal" French Revolutionaries was their unwillingness to allow King Louis XVI to speak to the crowd at his execution. The judges had ordered drummers to begin drumming the moment he began to speak, which they did. Leo Gershoy, *The French Revolution and Napoleon* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1933), p. 238.

43. Whereas men used to be flogged in public or put in the stocks for a few days, we now put them in hidden jails that are filled with a professional criminal class (as well as with AIDS-carrying homosexual rapists). This impersonalism of punishment

The growth of impersonalism has been a problem for the West from the beginning. Even in the days of public executions, several centuries ago, the axeman wore a face mask. The Bible does not allow the establishment of a professional, taxpayer-financed guild of faceless executioners who, over time, inevitably either grow callous and impersonal toward their awful (full of awe) task, or else grow sadistic. Instead, the Bible imposes personal responsibility on members of society at large for enforcing this ultimate sanction. But people in the Christian West have always refused to accept this God-imposed personal responsibility. They prefer to make a lone executioner psychologically responsible for carrying out the sentence rather than participate in this covenantal responsibility, as God requires. This refusal to accept personal responsibility by citizens led to a crisis in Western jurisprudence in the twentieth century. Decade by decade, the more consistent haters of God's law have become politically dominant. They have used the same kinds of arguments against capital punishment in general that embarrassed Christians had accepted in their rejection of public stoning. Step by step, society eliminates capital punishment. Men's hatred of God's law is steadily manifested covenantally in modern civil law.

It is painfully clear that most Christians today are embarrassed by God. He set forth laws that seem barbaric to modern Christians. The question is: Whose law is barbaric? Also, whose society honors the principles of civil righteousness? Finally, how can Christians answer this accurately if they reject God's revealed law as morally repulsive?

2. *Economic Restitution*

A considerable percentage of this book is devoted to a defense of the biblical concept of penal restitution. *Convicted criminals are supposed to make restitution payments to their victims.* This "revolutionary" idea is at last being taken seriously by a few judges in the United States.⁴⁴ But behind the ability of today's civil courts to impose the

has been paralleled by a steady bureaucratization and institutionalization of the penal system. The guards in prisons tend to become as impersonal and callous as their prisoners. Bukovsky wrote of Soviet prisons: "There's no real difference between the criminals and their guards. Except for the uniforms. The slang is the same, the manners, concepts, psychology. It's all the same criminal world, all joined by an unbreakable chain." Vladimir Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle—My Life as a Dissenter* (New York: Viking, 1978), p. 334.

44. For example, Lois G. Forer, *Criminals and Victims: A Trial Judge Reflects on Crime and Punishment* (New York: Norton, 1980).

sanction of restitution lies a greater threat to the criminal: *imprisonment*. This is the “dirty little secret” of those atheists, pietists, and antinomians who ridicule the biblical system of slavery. They have accepted the horror of unproductive imprisonment in place of the biblical institution of penal labor servitude, out of which an industrious slave could purchase his freedom. If the criminal in ancient Israel was financially unable to pay his victim, his sale to a slave-buyer was what provided the victim with his lawful restitution payment. The prison system has always been the Bible-hater’s preferred substitute for the Old Testament’s system of law-restricted labor servitude. In short, in order to enforce the Bible’s principle of economic restitution to victims by criminals, there always has to be a more fearful support sanction in reserve: death, imprisonment, whipping, banishment, or indentured servitude. But only one of these reserve sanctions raises money for the victims: indentured servitude. The critics of biblical law never remember to mention this fact.

G. The Fear of God’s Law

This hatred of God’s law has affected millions of Christians who sing the old hymn, “O How Love I Thy Law.” Even when they do not actively hate it (and most do), they are afraid of it. They have not studied it, and they have been beaten into intellectual submission by humanists, Christian antinomians, and those who fear personal and cultural responsibility.

A discouraging example of this is Dr. James Dobson, whose books, films, and daily radio broadcasts on Christian family issues inspired millions of Americans, and who by 1988 had become the Protestant evangelical leader in the United States with the largest and most dedicated following.⁴⁵ He led the fight against abortion and pornography, and the fight for home schooling and the re-establishment of godly disciplining of children in the home. Nevertheless, in a pamphlet against abortion, he rejected as inapplicable the single most important passage in the Bible that deals with abortion, one which makes abor-

45. Pat Robertson, by resigning from the ministry and also from his *700 Club* television show in his quest for the Presidency in early 1988, inescapably exchanged his office of religious commentator for that of political activist. After his defeat in the Republican Party primaries, he returned to television, and he retained a large following, though smaller than when he left. His leadership role was probably perceived even by his most admiring followers as being different from what it had been before he entered politics.

tion a capital crime, Exodus 21:22–25. In response to a preposterous misinterpretation of this passage by a state-licensed, profit-seeking “Christian” murderer (a pro-abortion gynecologist), Dr. Dobson did not refute the misinterpretation, but instead dismissed the Old Testament case laws as inappropriate guides for contemporary Christian righteousness. He asked his critic rhetorically:

Do you agree that if a man beats his slave to death, he is to be considered guilty only if the individual dies instantly? If the slave lives a few days, the owner is considered not guilty (Exodus 21:20–21)[?] Do you believe that we should stone to death rebellious children (Deuteronomy 21:18–21)? Do you really believe we can draw subtle meaning about complex issues from Mosaic law, when even the obvious interpretation makes no sense to us today? We can hardly select what we will and will not apply now. If we accept the verses you cited, we are obligated to deal with every last jot and tittle.⁴⁶

What we see here is an attempt to avoid dealing with “every last jot and tittle” of God’s inspired word. Yet it was Jesus who warned His people: “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise [way] pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18). Are we to ignore this? Dr. Dobson did. Admittedly, it is possible to argue that “heaven and earth” here mean the Old Covenant order, and that the fall of Jerusalem did fulfil the law. It is also possible to argue, as James Jordan has argued, that the death of Christ buried the law, and that His resurrection restored it in a new form, with the various dietary and ritual cleansing laws fulfilled (and therefore annulled in history) by the resurrection (Acts 10; I Cor. 8). But this does not absolve us from the difficult task that so disturbed Dr. Dobson, namely, selecting “what we will and will not apply now.” To retreat from this task of applied Christianity is to turn over the running of the world to pagan humanists and their theological allies, Christian antinomians. *It is to turn the medical world over to the God-hating abortionists who are opposed so vigorously by Dr. Dobson.* Yet this is precisely what every publicly visible Christian leader did throughout the twentieth century, and what almost all of them did after the late seventeenth century. It is universally assumed by Christians that the case laws of Exodus are null and void, and *should* be. It is this assumption that this book is designed to challenge.

46. James Dobson, “Dialogue on Abortion,” in Dobson and Gary Bergel, *The Decision of Life* (Arcadia, California: Focus on the Family, 1986), p. 14.

The tools of dominion, God's law, sit unused and generally unread by those who call themselves Christians. They are the best weapons that Christians possess for moral self-defense, because the best defense is a good offense, yet they steadfastly refuse to use them. To use God's Bible-revealed law effectively would require them to become intimately familiar with its many subtleties and complex applications, and even less appealing, to discipline themselves in terms of it. They prefer to let it sit unopened, either in their laps or on their shelves. Christians therefore continue to lose the war for civilization.

H. Tom Paine's Demon: The Bible

We know where antinomian (anti-God's law) theology has headed in the past: to Unitarianism, atheism, and bloody revolution. It winds up with the words of Tom Paine: that in consideration of "the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God."⁴⁷

Is the Old Testament the word of a demon? If not, then why do antinomian Christians—liberals and conservatives, neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists—continue to ridicule Old Testament law? They stick their fists in the face of the God of Psalm 119, and shout in defiance of His law: "Is God really nothing more than the abstract, impersonal dispenser of equally abstract and impersonal laws?"⁴⁸ Yes, He is *much* more than this. Among other things, He is the Eternal Slavemaster over those who rebel against Him, the dispenser not of abstract law but of personally experienced agony forever and ever. Hell is real. The lake of fire is real. God is therefore not to be mocked. But He has many mockers, and many of these mockers call themselves by His name. They do not fear Him.

Another major alternative to Paine's sort of outright apostasy is some variation of Marcion's second-century heresy of the two-gods theory of history. He said that an evil god operated in the Old Testament, but a nice god runs the world today. (For more details, see below: "The Continuing Heresy of Dualism.") Robert Davison was cor-

47. *The Age of Reason*, Part I; cited by David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 525.

48. Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," *Christianity Today* (Feb. 20, 1987), p. 23.

rect when he said that a “Marcionite tendency may be fairly traced in much modern discussion of Christian ethics, nor is this tendency confined to scholarly discussion.”⁴⁹

The third alternative is dispensationalism: God used the revealed laws of the Bible to govern people before the advent of Christ, but today we have new laws in operation, meaning vague, undefined personal laws, and no specifically New Testament cultural laws at all. The road to cultural impotence is paved with neat (and ultimately unworkable) solutions to difficult biblical problems. Slavery is one of these difficult problems.

We must search for the moral principle that undergirded each Old Testament law. When we find it, we can then begin to discuss how or to what extent God expects the civil government or some other government to enforce it today. Those who begin with the presupposition that a particular Old Testament law or God-required Israelite practice was innately evil have already taken the first step toward Paine’s view: The Bible is the word of a demon.

Christians today are afraid of the laws in the Bible. They are actually embarrassed by these laws. They do not recognize that biblical law is a two-edged sword of God’s judgment: blessing for the righteous, but cursing for the unrighteous (Rom. 13:1–7). They do not understand that *God’s law-order for society is merciful*. For example, God allows the death penalty for kidnappers (Ex. 21:16).⁵⁰ The death penalty used to be imposed on kidnappers in the United States, and kidnapping was rare. It is no longer imposed regularly, and kidnapping has become a blight. Kidnapping by terrorists in Europe is commonplace in the 1980s in the final stages of European Marxism. Who says that God’s law regarding kidnapping is too harsh? Harsher than kidnapping itself? So it is with *all* of God’s civil laws. They are merciful compared with the effects of unpunished evil. The modern world is learning just how unmerciful a society can be that is not governed by biblical law.

I. “Theocraphobia”: Fear of God’s Rulership

When, in a court of law, the witness puts his hand on the Bible and swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so

49. Robert Davison, “Some Aspects of the Old Testament Contribution to the Pattern of Christian Ethics,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 12 (1959), p. 374; cited by Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1983), p. 23.

50. Chapter 34.

help him God, he thereby swears on the word of God—the *whole* word of God, and *nothing but* the word of God. The Bible is a unit. It is a “package deal.” The New Testament did not overturn the Old Testament; it is a *commentary* on the Old Testament. It tells us how to use the Old Testament properly in the period after the death and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah, God’s Son.

1. *The New Testament and Biblical Law*

Jesus said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise [way] pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17–19). Christ took the Old Testament seriously enough to die for those condemned to the second death (Rev. 20:14) by its provisions. The Old Testament is not a discarded first draft of God’s word. It is not “God’s word (emeritus).”

If anything, the New Testament law is more stringent than the Mosaic law, not less stringent. Paul wrote that an elder cannot have more than one wife (I Tim. 3:2). The king in the Old Testament was forbidden to have multiple wives (Deut. 17:17). This was not a general law, unless we interpret the prohibition of Leviticus 18:18 as applying to all additional wives, and not just to marrying a woman’s sister, as ethicist John Murray interpreted it.⁵¹ If we attempt to interpret Leviticus 18:18 in Murray’s fashion, the question arises: Why specify kings as being prohibited from becoming polygamists if the same law applied to all men anyway? Possibly to prohibit the system of political covenanting through marriage. Certainly, there is no equally clear-cut Old Testament prohibition against polygamy comparable to I Timothy 3:2, which indicates a tightening of the legal requirements for at least church officers. The New Testament appears to be more rigorous than

51. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), Appendix B. Catholic theologian Angelo Tosato agreed with him: “The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 46 (1984), pp. 199–214. They are not followed in this view by most Protestant commentators, nor by Nachmanides, who said that the verse applies only to a woman’s sister: Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman [Ramban], *Commentary on the Torah: Leviticus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), p. 255.

the Old in this instance. Another alteration in marriage law that we find in the New Testament is the abolition of concubinage that resulted from Christ's fulfillment of the terms of the Old Testament's bride price system.⁵² There are no more second-class wives.

Dominion Christianity teaches that there are four covenants under God, meaning four kinds of *vows* under God: personal (individual), and the three institutional covenants—ecclesiastical, civil, and familial.⁵³ All other human institutions (business, educational, charitable, etc.) are to one degree or other under the jurisdiction of one or more of these four covenants. No single human covenant is absolute; therefore, no single human institution is all-powerful. Thus, Christian liberty is *liberty under God and God's law*, administered by plural legal authorities.

What of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28)?⁵⁴ It was given to all mankind through Adam. Unlike the other four, the dominion covenant requires no formal oath by man, for the oath was taken by God on mankind's behalf. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . ." The dominion covenant was imposed on Adam before he was created. It defines man as God's covenantal agent. Men cannot escape from its primary legal requirement: to exercise dominion over the creation.⁵⁵ The dominion covenant precedes and is superior to the other four oath-bound covenants, because it defines man's tasks. The other covenants are governed by the dominion covenant's requirements. It had no negative sanctions in its original form, but its specific application did: the penalty for violating the ban on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

2. Biblical Pluralism

There is no doubt that Christianity teaches pluralism, but a very special kind of pluralism: *plural institutions* under God's single comprehensive law system. It does *not* teach a pluralism of law structures, or a pluralism of moralities, for this sort of hypothetical legal pluralism (as distinguished from *institutional* pluralism) is always either polythe-

52. Chapter 32.

53. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

54. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

55. The command to multiply is specifically directed to the family covenant and is limited to history.

istic or humanistic.⁵⁶ Christians are required to take dominion over the earth by means of all three God-ordained institutions, not just the church, or just the state, or just the family. *The kingdom of God includes every human institution, and every aspect of life, for all of life is under God and is governed by His unchanging principles.* All of life is under God and God's law because God intends to *judge* all of life in terms of His law.⁵⁷

In this structure of *plural governments*, the institutional churches serve as *advisors* to the other institutions (the Levitical function), but the churches can only pressure individual leaders through the threat of excommunication. As a restraining factor on unwarranted church authority, an excommunication by one local church or denomination is always subject to review by another, if and when the excommunicated person seeks membership elsewhere. Thus, each of the three covenantal institutions is to be run under God, as interpreted by its lawfully elected or ordained leaders, with the advice of the churches, not their compulsion.

All Christians are in principle theocrats. All Christians say that God rules the universe. God (*theos*) rules (*kratos*). Theocracy means simply that *God rules*. He rules in every area of life: church, state, family, business, science, education, etc. There is no zone of neutrality. There is no “king’s x” from God. Men are responsible for everything they think, say, and do. God exercises total jurisdiction. Jurisdiction means law (*juris*) and speaking (*diction*). God *speaks* His word. It is a comprehensive word. Anyone who says that God’s law does not apply to some area of life is thereby saying that God does not have jurisdiction in that area: “No law—no jurisdiction.”

3. A Scare Word

The word “theocracy” is a scare word that humanists and frightened Christians use to chase dedicated Christians away from areas of their God-given responsibility. The critics focus on politics and civil government, as if God’s rule in this area were somehow evil. Because almost all humanists today believe in salvation through legislation,⁵⁸

56. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: The Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gdmruler>)

57. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

58. The exceptions to this rule are classical liberals and free market economists like F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, traditional conservatives like Russell Kirk and William F. Buckley, neo-conservatives like Irving Kristol, and outright anarchists like

they necessarily believe that politics is the primary means of social healing.⁵⁹ Marxists have been the most consistent defenders of human transformation through political action: the religion of revolution.⁶⁰ Because Christians are today so used to thinking in these humanistic categories, they seldom think to themselves: “Wait a minute. I know that God rules the family, and the government of my family should reflect this fact. God also rules the church, and the government of my church is supposed to reflect this fact. I know that God rules all civil governments, too. So, why should it be evil for Christians to work hard to see to it that the civil government reflects this fact, just as they do in their families, churches, and businesses?” In short, why should politics be outside the realm of God-honoring Christian action?⁶¹

Humanist critics present Christians with a kind of mental image: a scarecrow that is locked in the stocks of Puritan New England. Every time a Christian walks by this scarecrow, a tape recorded message blares out: “Beware of theocracy! Beware of theocracy!” If the critics meant, “Beware of ecclesiocracy,” meaning civil rule by the institutional church, they would have a valid point, but they mean something different: “Beware of Christians in every area of life who seek to exercise biblical dominion under God by obeying *and enforcing* God’s holy law.”

What “Beware of theocracy!” really means is, “Beware of God’s righteous rule!”

J. De-Funding the Welfare-Warfare State

Those who reject the theocratic ideal are ready to accuse Calvinists of being tyrants. Historian Ronald Wells of Calvin College wrote an attack on Francis Schaeffer, which appeared in a collection of essays that is best described as a neo-evangelical tirade. He pointed to the unfootnoted and unmentioned links between certain aspects of Schaeffer’s social thought and Christian Reconstructionism, and then observed: “This tendency to promote one’s own view by ‘law’ has always

Murray N. Rothbard.

59. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), chaps. 2–5, 8–9, 11. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

60. Gary North, *Marx’s Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos*, rev. ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnmrro>)

61. George Grant, *The Changing of the Guard: The Biblical Blueprint for Politics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/GrantGuard>)

been the dangerous part of Calvinism: one sees Calvinists in power as triumphal and dictatorial. . . . Calvinists in power have wielded that power oppressively."⁶²

I suspect that we Reconstructionists were Mr. Wells' target, for we are the only Christians on earth calling for the building of a biblical theocracy. What I also suspect is that what really disturbs our neo-evangelical academic critics is that we perceive this theocracy as a system of decentralized power. We call for a vast purging of present-day national power, both political and economic. We call for the dismantling of the welfare-warfare state, most notably every aspect of taxpayer-financing for education.⁶³ I have called for a reduction of aggregate taxes to the level required by I Samuel 8: where all levels of civil government *combined* are allowed to collect *less than 10%* of the *net increase* of annual private personal productivity.⁶⁴ The local sales tax should be the primary local tax. I support the abolition of the local property tax and all state and national direct taxation, which includes the graduated income tax, the Social Security tax, the corporate income tax, the capital gains tax, and all sales taxes of citizens, including tariffs. I recommend the abolition of all direct taxation by any agency of civil government above the local township or county. Every other level of civil government would be forced to seek its revenues by taxing the level of civil government immediately below it. Civil governments above the most local would have to live off the revenues collected from other civil governments. This would decentralize power with a vengeance.

The model here is the church. A local church has a right to require a tithe of its voting members. Those who vote to spend the money should share an equal percentage burden in funding the local church. But what if, after paying their tithes to the local church, the members were required to pay an even larger amount to the bishop? And after paying his office, the denomination's council of bishops required an even larger payment? We would see an exodus from hierarchical denominations and millions of newly converted Baptists, Congregationalists, and Pentecostals. Local congregations may be asked by the hier-

62. Ronald A. Wells, "Schaeffer on America," in Ronald W. Ruesegger (ed.), *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1986), p. 237.

63. Robert L. Thoburn, *The Children Trap: Biblical Blueprints for Education* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/ThobrunCT>)

64. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 61. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

archy to fund the hierarchy, but members' direct donations to the hierarchy are voluntary. To argue otherwise is to defend ecclesiastical tyranny. What Christians can easily understand with respect to church government, they reject when applied to civil government: the taxpayer as a sheep to be sheared by separate levels of shearers.

The Reconstructionists' version of theocracy is a decentralized system of multiple competing governments in which the modern messianic state and its economic subsidies would be dismantled. By modern political standards, such a vision of the shrinking of the centralized power civil government is nothing short of utopian.

In short, if the Reconstructionists' version of theocracy were to be voted into operation, the tenured, subsidized intellectual class to which our academic critics belong would experience the end of its taxpayer-financed bonanza. An entire class would have to enter the competitive free market and seek productive employment. Customers would reward former college professors in terms of what customers want to buy, not what state legislatures want to buy. There would be no more compulsory education and no more tax support of existing schools. This fear, rather than the fear of tyranny, may well be the true underlying concern of our critics.

K. Majority Rule

The Bible does not allow the imposition of some sort of top-down bureaucratic tyranny in the name of Christ. The kingdom of God requires a bottom-up society. The bottom-up Christian society rests ultimately on the doctrine of *self-government* under God, with God's law as the publicly revealed standard of performance.⁶⁵ It is the humanists' view of society that promotes top-down bureaucratic power.

The basis for building a Christian society is evangelism and missions that lead to a widespread Christian revival, so that the great mass of earth's inhabitants will place themselves under Christ's protection, and voluntarily use His covenantal laws for self-government. Christian reconstruction begins with personal conversion to Christ and self-government under God's law; then it spreads to others through revival; only later does it bring comprehensive changes in civil law, when the vast majority of voters voluntarily agree to live under biblical blueprints.

Let us get this straight: *Christian reconstruction depends on major-*

65. DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations*, ch. 2.

ity rule. Of course, the leaders of the Christian Reconstruction movement expect a majority eventually to accept Christ as savior. We believe in postmillennialism.⁶⁶ Those who do not share our confidence concerning the future success of the gospel, as empowered by the Holy Spirit, believe that an earthly kingdom must be imposed by force from the top down (premillennialism),⁶⁷ or else they do not believe in an earthly institutional kingdom at all (amillennialism).⁶⁸ Postmillennialists disagree, for several reasons.

Premillennialism and amillennialism both deny that the preaching of the gospel can ever bring a majority of people to faith in Christ, thereby bringing in the earthly kingdom of God in history on a voluntary basis, person by person, culture by culture. Premillennialist author

66. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/dcpardise>); Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1954] 1981); R. J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2001).

67. The accountant and popular dispensationalist author Dave Hunt wrote: "During His thousand-year reign, Christ will visibly rule the world in perfect righteousness from Jerusalem and will impose peace on all nations. Satan will be locked up, robbed of the power to tempt. Justice will be meted out swiftly." Hunt, *Beyond Seduction: A Return to Biblical Christianity* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1987), p. 250. If Satan is unable to tempt mankind, then any evil that calls forth Christ's justice must be man-based evil. In a taped interview with Peter Lalonde, released in early 1987, Hunt said: "Christ himself is physically here. And He has us, the redeemed in our resurrection bodies, that nobody can kill us. And we are helping Him to maintain order. He is forcing this world to behave, and He gives a restoration of the Edenic state, so that the desert blossoms like a rose, and the lion lies down with the lamb, and you've got paradise on earth, once again, with Christ Himself maintaining it and, even better than the garden of Eden, Satan is locked up for a thousand years." *Dominion and the Cross*, Tape One of *Dominion: The Word and the New World Order*, op. cit., 1987. It should be pointed out that Hunt's argument that resurrected saints will return to rule with Jesus during the earthly millennium has long been rejected by dispensational theologians at Dallas Theological Seminary. Resurrected saints will be dwelling in a place called the heavenly Jerusalem, argued J. Dwight Pentecost: "The Relation between Living and Resurrected Saints in The Millennium," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 117 (October 1960), pp. 335–37. See also John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academie, 1979), pp. 86–87.

68. Oddly enough, Hunt also denied that there can ever be an earthly kingdom, even in the dispensational millennium. He said in his taped interview: "What happens at the end of this time, when Satan is loosed? He deceives the nations and like the sand of the seashore, so many—a multitude. They gather their armies and come against Christ in Jerusalem. And, of course, that is when they finally have to be banished from God's presence forever. I believe it's the final proof of the incorrigible nature of the human heart. So, Christ Himself cannot make humanity behave. He cannot by legislation, or by political or military or coercive means, establish this kingdom." *Ibid.*, Tape Two

Dave Hunt went so far as to argue that such a person-by-person extension of God's kingdom is literally impossible for God to achieve.⁶⁹ Thus, in order to produce universal peace on earth, premillennialists have always maintained, Jesus will have to impose a top-down bureaucracy when He comes to reign in person.

In opposition to this view, amillennialists deny the premillennial doctrine that Jesus will ever physically return in history. They insist (as postmillennialism also insists) that Jesus will physically appear only at the end of history at the final judgment. They therefore deny (in contrast to postmillennialism) the possibility of an earthly manifestation of God's comprehensive kingdom of God in history.

Because of their joint denial of the widespread acceptance of the gospel at any point in history, premillennialists and amillennialists alike invariably associate the word "theocracy" with some sort of top-down, power-imposed, widely resisted rule that is imposed by an elite. Premillennialists accept this as a valid system of civil rule, but only if Christ personally and physically runs it from the top of the bureaucratic pyramid. Amillennialists deny that Christ will ever do this in history, so they deny bureaucratic theocracy's legitimacy at any point in the pre-final judgment future.

First, we Calvinistic postmillennialists disagree with both groups concerning the supposed impotence of the gospel in history in changing whole societies, person by person. We believe that the Holy Spirit will *impose* His will on the recalcitrant hearts of huge numbers of people, just as He has always imposed His will on each recalcitrant heart every time He has saved anyone from his sins. God is utterly sovereign in election and salvation. He changes people's hearts, transforming them so that they can respond in faith to the free offer of the gospel. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). This is the only way that anyone has ever been saved, for the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him (I Cor. 2:14). The natural man does not partially receive the things of the Spirit in his unsaved state; he rejects the very idea that such a wrathful God exists. Thus, he needs to be transformed before he can accept the gos-

69. He said this: "In fact, dominion—taking dominion and setting up the kingdom for Christ—is an *impossibility*, even for God. The millennial reign of Christ, far from being the kingdom, is actually the final proof of the incorrigible nature of the human heart, because Christ Himself can't do what these people say they are going to do—New Agers or Manifested Sons." (Verbal emphasis in the original interview.) *Dominion*, Tape Two.

pel.

Second, because we Calvinistic Christian Reconstructionists believe that the Holy Spirit forces hearts to change—the doctrine of irresistible grace—we also believe that human institutions are not allowed to seek to coerce men’s hearts and minds. Such coercion of the human will, meaning its transformation prior to the prior permission of the individual whose will is being transformed, is a monopoly that belongs exclusively to God. We insist that coercion is an inescapable concept in history. It is never a question of coercion vs. no coercion. It is always a question of *whose* coercion. We affirm the power of the Holy Spirit to change men’s souls—to declare judicially that they are saved, and therefore possess Christ’s righteousness—and to change them ethically at the point of their ethical transformation. Those who deny this exclusive power of the Spirit in transforming the lives of covenant-breakers instinctively expect to find coercion somewhere else: in human institutions—either humanist or “theocratic-bureaucratic”—or in a future personal kingdom ruled by Christ in Person.

Third, because we postmillennialists find it taught in the Bible that there will be a future outpouring of this soul-transforming Holy Spirit—the only possible basis of the Bible’s prophesied millennial blessings—we disagree with premillennialists concerning the limited extent of the Spirit’s work in the future. The kingdom will not be brought in by a bureaucratic, international, theocratic regime imposed by Jesus in person, but by the heart-transforming work of the Holy Spirit. We therefore disagree with them concerning the supposed necessity of defining theocracy as a top-down social transformation. God’s kingdom rule is always bottom-up: *self-government under God*. So, we do not call for a theocratic bureaucracy, either now or in the future. Such a top-down bureaucracy is not called for in the Bible, is impossible to maintain without unlawful coercion, and is not necessary to impose to bring in the kingdom. Christian Reconstructionists call instead for a decentralized, international, theocratic *republic*. Such a republic is ethically necessary, now and in the future, and it will be historically possible in the future, when the Holy Spirit begins His visibly triumphant sweep of the nations.

If postmillennialism is incorrect, and the Holy Spirit does not act to bring huge numbers of people to eternal life, then Christians must be content with only partial social reconstruction, and only partial external blessings from God. The earthly manifestations of God’s heavenly kingdom will necessarily be limited. When we pray, “Thy king-

dom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” we should expect God to answer this prayer. But premillennial Christians teach that God will *never* answer this prayer before Jesus comes again physically to rule the world in person. If they are correct, then we will not see the pre-second coming advent of a holy commonwealth in which God’s laws are honored. We must content ourselves with less.

It is not possible to ramrod God’s blessings from the top down, unless you are God. Only humanists think that man is God. Christian Reconstructionists are trying to get the ramrod away from them, and then to melt it down. This melted ramrod could then be used to make a great grave marker for humanism: “The God That Failed.”

L. The Continuing Heresy of Dualism

Dualism teaches that the world is inherently divided: spirit vs. matter, or law vs. mercy, or mind vs. matter, or nature vs. grace. What the Bible teaches is that this world is divided *ethically* and *personally*: Satan vs. God, right vs. wrong, freedom vs. tyranny. The conflict between God and Satan will end at the final judgment. Whenever Christians substitute some other form of dualism for ethical dualism, they fall into heresy and suffer the consequences. This is what has happened today. We are suffering from revived versions of ancient heresies.

1. Marcion’s Dualism

The Old Testament was written by the same God who wrote the New Testament. There were not two gods in history, meaning there was no dualism or radical split between the two testamental periods. There is only one God, in time and eternity.

This idea has had opposition throughout church history. An ancient two-gods heresy was first promoted in the church about a century after Christ’s crucifixion, and the church has always regarded it as just that, a heresy. It was proposed by a man named Marcion. Basically, this heresy teaches that there are two completely different law systems in the Bible: Old Testament law and New Testament law (or non-law). But Marcion took the logic of his position all the way. He argued that two law systems means two gods. The god of wrath wrote the Old Testament, and the god of mercy wrote the New Testament. In short: “two laws—two gods.”

You would be surprised how many Christians still believe some-

thing dangerously close to Marcionism: not a two-gods view, exactly, but a “God-who-changed-all-His-rules” view. They begin with the accurate teaching that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were fulfilled by Christ, and therefore that the *unchanging principles* of worship are *applied differently* in the New Testament, but then they erroneously conclude that the whole Old Testament system of civil law was dropped by God, and *nothing biblical was put in its place*. In other words, God created a sort of vacuum for civil law.

This idea turns civil law-making over to Satan. In our day, this means that civil law-making is turned over to humanism. *Christians have unwittingly become the philosophical allies of the humanists with respect to civil law*. With respect to their doctrine of the state, therefore, most Christians hold what is in effect a two-gods view of the Bible.

2. Gnostic Dualism

Another ancient heresy that is still with us is gnosticism. It became a major threat to the early church almost from the beginning. It was also a form of dualism, a theory of a radical split. The gnostics taught that the split is between evil matter and good spirit. Thus, their goal was to escape this material world through other-worldly exercises that punished the body. They believed in *retreat from the world of human conflicts and responsibility*. Some of these ideas got into the church, and people started doing ridiculous things. So-called “pillar saints” became temporarily popular in the fifth century, A.D. A “saint” would sit on a platform on top of a pole for several decades without coming down. This was considered very spiritual.⁷⁰ (Who fed them? Who cleaned up after them?)

Thus, many Christians came to view “the world” as something permanently outside the kingdom of God. They believed that this hostile, forever-evil world cannot be redeemed, reformed, and reconstructed. At best, it can be subdued by power (maybe). Jesus did not really die for it, and it cannot be healed. This dualistic view of the world vs. God’s kingdom narrowly restricted any earthly manifestation of God’s kingdom. Christians who were influenced by gnosticism concluded that God’s kingdom refers only to the institutional church. They argued that the institutional church is the *only* manifestation of God’s

70. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), pp. 228, 298.

kingdom.

This led to two opposite and equally evil conclusions. First, *power religionists* who accepted this definition of God's kingdom tried to put the institutional church in charge of everything, because it is supposedly "the only manifestation of God's kingdom on earth." To subdue the supposedly unredeemable world, which is forever outside the kingdom, the institutional church has to rule with the sword, they concluded. The institutional church must give orders to the state, and the state must enforce these orders with the sword. The institutional church must therefore concentrate political and economic power. *What then becomes of liberty?*

Second, *escape religionists* who also accepted this narrow definition of the kingdom sought refuge from the evil world of matter and politics by fleeing to hide inside the institutional church, an exclusively "spiritual kingdom," now narrowly defined. They abandoned the world to evil tyrants. *What then becomes of liberty?* What becomes of the idea of God's progressive restoration of all things under Jesus Christ? What, finally, becomes of the idea of biblical dominion?

When Christians improperly narrow their definition of the kingdom of God, the visible influence of God's comprehensive kingdom, which is both spiritual and institutional at the same time, begins to shrivel up. The first heresy leads to tyranny *by* the church, and the second heresy leads to tyranny *over* the church. Both of these narrow definitions of God's kingdom destroy the liberty of the responsible Christian man, self-governed under God and God's law.

3. Manichaeism

The last ancient pagan idea that still lives on is also a variant of dualism: matter vs. spirit. It teaches that God and Satan, good and evil, are forever locked in combat, and that good never triumphs over evil. The Persian religion of Zoroastrianism has held such a view for over 2,500 years. The enormously popular *Star Wars* movies were based on this view of the world: the "dark" side of "the force" against its "light" side. In modern versions of this ancient dualism, the "force" is usually seen as itself impersonal: individuals personalize either the dark side or the light side by "plugging into" its power.

There are millions of Christians who have adopted a very pessimistic version of this dualism, though not in an impersonal form. They believe that God's kingdom is battling Satan's, and God's is losing. His-

tory is not going to get better. In fact, things are going to get a lot worse externally. Evil will visibly push good into the shadows. The church is like a band of soldiers who are surrounded by a huge army of Indians. "We can't win, boys, so hold the fort until Jesus and the angels come to rescue us!"

That does not sound like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and David, does it? Christians read to their children the children's favorite story, David and Goliath, yet in their own lives, millions of Christian parents really think that the Goliaths of this world are the unbeatable earthly winners. Christians have not even picked up a stone.

Until very recently.

Conclusion

We must not come to the Old Testament with a sense of fear and loathing. The Old Testament provides us with a vision of victory and the tools of dominion, namely, God's Bible-revealed laws. These laws are not a threat to us as Christians; they are the foundation of our efforts to reconstruct society.

Christians have not wanted to think about God's Bible-revealed law. It reminds them of their sins of commission. It also reminds them of their sins of omission. They have failed to press the claims of Jesus Christ in every area of life. They have failed to challenge the sins of this age. They have refused to tell the world that God really does have specific answers for every area of life, including economics and politics. Christians have preferred to comfort themselves as they have sat in their rocking chairs in the shadows of history, rocking themselves back and forth, and saying over and over: "I am not a theocrat. I am not a theocrat." What this phrase means is simple: *God does not rule, so neither do I.*

But what if God *does* rule? What if He has given us the unchanging laws by which He expects His people to rule? What if He has given us the tools of dominion, and we have left them in the rain to rust? What will He do with our generation?

He will do just what He did with Moses' generation. He will leave us behind to die in the wilderness.

CONCLUSION

Authority and Dominion

And he [Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient (Ex. 24:7).

The Book of Exodus is the second book in the Pentateuch. Book 1, Genesis, has to do with the sovereignty of God, who is the Creator. Book 2, Exodus, has to do with God as the Deliverer. God is the supreme monarch in a hierarchy of authority. He possesses the authority (right) to deliver as well as the power (ability). The Book of Exodus, like the exodus event itself, was designed to verify this authority and power.

Most of all, Exodus is what Moses said it is, the book of the covenant. It therefore bears the marks of all five aspects of the biblical covenant model: transcendence/immanence, hierarchy/representation, ethics/dominion, oath/sanctions, and succession/inheritance.¹ The first chapter of Exodus indicates that a war between rival covenants was the heart of the dispute between God and Pharaoh. Pharaoh attempted to impose his own alternative covenant on the Hebrews. It, too, had the same five aspects, and this confrontation reveals all five. This covenant structure appears twice in the first chapter: a double witness.

A. The Pharaoh's Covenantal Program

The first presentation of the Pharaoh's covenantal program appears in the Bible's description of his general rule over the Hebrews. First, transcendence/immanence: the book begins with the advent of a false god, the Pharaoh who had forgotten Joseph (Ex. 1:8). Second, hierarchy: this false god immediately established a tyrannical hierarchy over the people of Israel, with "taskmasters to afflict them with their

1. Acronym: THEOS.

burdens" (v. 11). Third, law: he forced them to build treasure cities for him (v. 11). But their afflictions led to even greater growth in their population (v. 12), threatening Pharaoh's program of dominion. Fourth, sanctions: he announced a program of infanticide (v. 16). Fifth, inheritance: he was seeking to destroy their inheritance in the land by killing their male children, but allowing the females to survive—an attempt to capture the inheritance of Israel through future concubinage. Egypt would marry Israel, God's bride, steal the bride's God-granted dowry, and declare her a concubine.²

The second presentation of the Pharaoh's covenantal program appears in the Bible's description of his enforcement of the infanticide decree. To achieve this program of stealing the Hebrews' inheritance, Pharaoh (the self-proclaimed sovereign) assigned this task of infanticide to representative agents, the Hebrew midwives (hierarchy). He gave them a command: destroy the newborn males (law). They disobeyed the command, but instead of being punished by Pharaoh (negative sanction), God blessed them (positive sanction). And the people multiplied (inheritance).

In response to this false Egyptian covenant, the sovereign God of Israel announced to Moses that He was with His people, for He had seen their afflictions and had heard their cries (Ex. 3:7). He then raised up Moses, his representative agent, to serve as the earthly leader of the nation (hierarchy). He gave Moses His laws (law). The people made an oath to God, which they broke, and God brought sanctions against them (oath/sanctions). They then repented, renewed the covenant, and built the tabernacle, which their sons later carried into the Promised Land, the lawful inheritance which had been promised to Abraham (inheritance/continuity).³

B. The Doctrine of Covenantal Representation

The conflict between Moses and Pharaoh was a representative battle between God and Satan. It was a battle over the question of ultimate sovereignty. It was a battle over lawful representation. It was also

2. Chapter 6:D.

3. Critics of Ray Sutton's five-point covenant model can and do continue to deny the appearance of this outline again and again in the Bible. I believe that this blindness testifies to the inability of those who cling to an old paradigm to understand the evidence of the new one. They, of course, will reply that those of us who see the covenant structure clearly in the text are reading our invention into the text. Time and the final judgment will tell whose view is correct.

a battle over the right to impose sanctions and the right to collect the inheritance. But primarily Exodus is a battle over representation: Moses vs. Pharaoh. Who would represent Israel in the court of the gods or God of history, Moses or Pharaoh? Which representative agent would manifest true covenantal authority in the midst of time? The answer of the Book of Exodus is clear: Moses. The Book of Exodus is, above all, a book about representative government in history. It is clearly a book about *hierarchy*, which all government structures must always be.

Exodus 18 is the best biblical example of a civil hierarchy. Moses' father-in-law suggested that Moses establish a system of hierarchical appeals courts, in order to lessen the load on Moses, and also to reduce the time that people had to wait in their quest for civil justice.⁴ Moses, a wise son-in-law, accepted his father-in-law's excellent advice, and he established just such an appeals court system. Having established a bottom-up appeals court system, Moses then came before the people to proclaim the law, the Ten Commandments. Immediately after the words of the tenth commandment, we read:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die (Ex. 20:18–19).

They clearly understood the doctrine of representation, and they affirmed it. More than this: they *insisted* on it. They did not want to come into the presence of a holy God. They wanted another person to go before God, to speak with Him, and to return to speak His word to them. They promised to hear, which in the context of affirming a covenant with God meant that they promised to obey. They would obey God by obeying Moses. They would obey the details of the law that Moses brought from God.

Then God announced case laws to Moses, His hierarchical (mediatorial) representative: "Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them" (Ex. 21:1). These laws began with the law governing Hebrew indentured servitude. The Hebrews broke these case laws repeatedly. They did not take these laws seriously. God therefore placed them in bondage repeatedly: to the Moabites, Midianites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks, and finally the Ro-

4. Chapter 19.

mans. This punishment fit the crime. *The sanction against the crime of disobedience to God is bondage.* In the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15), the ultimate negative sanction, this bondage is personal, direct (unmediated), and eternal. The protective human and institutional hierarchy is removed. When this non-hierarchical form of judgment comes, unlike judgments in history (which are always mediated and hierarchical), no grace accompanies it. In short, *when God's grace is totally removed, all institutional hierarchies are removed.* The evidence of this lack of grace is the absence of any institutional hierarchy. *Without a mediator between God and man, covenant-breaking men inescapably die.* The Israelites fully understood this: “. . . let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

C. The Doctrine of Covenantal Hierarchy

The case laws of Exodus reflect the position of Exodus as the second book in the Pentateuch. It corresponds to the second point of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy. Thus, the bulk of the case law section deals with God's civil appeals court. The book is related to all five points in the covenant, especially point three (the actual laws) and point four (judgment and sanctions), but the legitimate question of civil law and civil sanctions cannot be separated from the question of the institutional structure of God's civil courts. This structure is hierarchical: a bottom-up appeals court.

The message of the Book of Exodus is *deliverance*: from slavery to freedom, from Egypt to Sinai, from work to rest, from Pharaoh's kingdom to God's kingdom. Ultimately, it is the story of Israel's deliverance from wrath to grace. It is not, however, the story of Israel's deliverance from institutional hierarchy. There can be no deliverance from hierarchy in history. Hierarchy is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of hierarchy vs. no hierarchy; it is always a question of which hierarchy.

The case laws reflect this fact of institutional hierarchy. They begin with the laws of bondservice: masters and servants.⁵ They continue with laws governing fathers and daughters,⁶ bridegrooms and concu-

5. Chapter 31:A.

6. Chapter 31:B.

bines,⁷ parents and sons,⁸ kidnappers and victims,⁹ fighters,¹⁰ fighters and bystanders,¹¹ restitution,¹² goring oxen and victims,¹³ criminal negligence,¹⁴ thieves and victims,¹⁵ fire-starters and victims,¹⁶ safekeepers and negligence,¹⁷ seducers and seduced,¹⁸ citizens and strangers,¹⁹ creditors and debtors,²⁰ finders and keepers.²¹ All of these relationships are hierarchical. They all involve authority and subordination. They all involve the imposition of power, and power is inevitably imposed hierarchically. A humanist slogan such as “man must take control of man” really means that some men must take control over all the others—C. S. Lewis’ observation in *The Abolition of Man*.

D. Who Is Our God?

Rushdoony wrote that “in any culture *the source of the law is the god of that society*.”²² The source of biblical law is the God of the Bible. His moral character is revealed in His laws—all His laws, not just the Ten Commandments. Without biblical law at the center of a society’s legal order,²³ its legal order testifies falsely regarding the true source of all morally valid laws, namely, the God of the Bible. It testifies falsely regarding God. A society is in rebellion against God to the extent that its people refuse to acknowledge in the civil realm the Bible-mandated terms of the civil covenant. There is a specific legal order which God requires the state to uphold by force and the threat of force. God is totally sovereign, as manifested by the presence of His required laws and sanctions. A society that denies the continuing judicial validity of

7. Chapter 32.

8. Chapter 33.

9. Chapter 34.

10. Chapter 37.

11. Chapter 38.

12. Chapter 39.

13. Chapter 40.

14. Chapter 41.

15. Chapter 43.

16. Chapter 44.

17. Chapter 45.

18. Chapter 46.

19. Chapter 47.

20. Chapter 48.

21. Chapter 51.

22. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 4.

23. At the center of Israel was the Ark of the Covenant. In the Ark was the law: the two tablets.

Old Testament civil law in general thereby refuses to acknowledge that this world was, is, and ever shall be a theocracy. *God rules*. How does a nation testify in history to this fact? *God's rules*. To the extent that the legal order does not conform to the legal standard that God announces in His Bible, to that extent is a society in rebellion against God.

1. Biblical Law as God's Self-Revelation

This is denied by virtually all Christian denominations and congregations today. They deny that God reveals himself judicially to men in New Testament times as clearly as He did in the Old Testament. Christians should ask themselves: Why would God choose to reveal himself less clearly in the New Testament era by allowing every society except Puritan New England to adopt a law-order that is openly a renunciation of what He has revealed as judicially binding in the Old Testament? The theonomists have an answer to this intriguing question. *God allows this in order to reveal the visible failure in history of all rival law-orders compared to the visible success of His revealed law-order*. This necessarily implies that at some point in the future, there will be such a visible example. The visible failure of rival civil law-orders, meaning rival gods, can then become a worldwide tool of evangelism.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).²⁴

Modern Christians do not take these words seriously. They believe that in this New Testament era of gospel deliverance, God has for some unstated reason removed this judicial tool of evangelism from the church's tool kit of legitimate missionary techniques. For some reason, in this New Testament "age of grace," God has removed a major Old Covenant means of grace, namely, the visible testimony of cul-

24. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

tural success that a covenant-honoring society possesses. He supposedly has removed His positive visible sanctions from faithful covenant-keepers. Worse; God has supposedly reversed the Old Covenant order of visible sanctions. We are assured by premillennialists and amillennialists—but only when pressed very hard to explain their eschatological position—that *God in the “Church Age” rewards covenant-breakers with the earthly blessing of civil authority, and He places the church and individual Christians under this authority*. He does this as a witness to Himself. By placing His people under bondage to covenant-breakers, we are assured by pessimillennial theologians, God has not really reversed the exodus order of wrath to grace. It may look this way, of course. In fact, it *does* look this way. But looks are deceiving. Looks were not deceiving in the Old Covenant era (Deut. 4:4–8), but they are deceiving today. As to why this should be the case, no one wants to say for the public record.²⁵

2. Biblical Law as a Means of Grace

There are many reasons for this peculiar view of God’s shrinking supply of the tools of grace in history, but the main reason, I suspect, is this: *the people of God do not regard God’s Bible-revealed law as a true means of grace, even though Paul affirmed the opposite*.

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceed-

25. Except, of course, they *do* say, if pressed hard enough. Their answer is the supposedly legitimate and supposedly irresistible triumph of democracy in history. You know: *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (rule). This is not seen by non-theonomic Christians as the judicial substitution of a false god for the Bible’s God. Somehow, the voice of the people has become the voice of God, the only legitimate mediatorial voice of God in the civil covenant. And when modern Christians say “the people,” they mean a majority of voters, which at least so far has meant *covenant-breakers*. “The voice of covenant-breakers is the voice of God.”

ing sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin (Rom. 7:7–14).

God has allowed this judicial evangelical testimony to fade time after time in the New Testament era because His people have so seldom maintained or enacted His revealed laws whenever they have gained political influence. This does not mean that He has abandoned His judicial standards, which are revealed in the Old Testament. It means that, so far in history, He has repeatedly allowed His people to depart from His law, just as Israel did, only to find themselves as subordinates to their God-hating enemies. God does not renounce His sanctions in history; He continues to enforce them. God still delivers His people from sociological grace to wrath in direct response to their covenant-breaking acceptance of the civil laws of rival gods. He did this in the Old Testament, and He does it in the New. But so thorough has been the training of Christians in the accredited schools of their cultural conquerors that *God's people have very seldom regarded this deliverance from civil grace to wrath as God's specific negative sanction for their specific sin of denying the legitimacy of the biblical civil covenant*. This punishment fits the crime.²⁶ They do yet not cry out to God in their bondage in the democratic West. They regard their own judicial bondage as true political freedom, as if this bondage were both historically normal and historically normative.²⁷ Pagan taskmasters have done a far better job in educating modern Christians than the Babylonians did with the Hebrew youths (Dan. 1), and so have the ordained Christian collaborators who serve as the paid assistants of the taskmasters, collaborators whose name is legion.²⁸

26. In the late 1960s, I saw a lapel button: "Chastity is its own punishment." I would alter that button as follows: "Pluralism is its own punishment."

27. See, for example, Norman L. Geisler, "A Premillennial View of Law and Government," in J. I. Packer (ed.), *The Best in Theology* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Christianity Today/Word, 1986). Professor Geisler, then of Dallas Theological Seminary, later of Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, was a dispensationalist and a staunch defender of natural law theology. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from a Jesuit university, back when Jesuit universities were scholastic rather than Marxist and "liberationist." At least he is consistent; few other opponents of theonomy are willing to admit that natural law is the only logical alternative to God's law on this side of total relativism or tyranny.

28. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>). See also North, *Backward Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), Part II: "The Enemy." (<http://bit.ly/gnsoldiers>)

3. Christianity's Failure

Christianity's historical failure to extend the gospel "as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14) is in part caused by Christians' systematic and self-assured unwillingness to make effective use of a biblical tool of evangelism, namely, the self-conscious construction of a civil law-order that honors God's revealed civil law by imposing the biblically mandated civil sanctions. They have left the gospel message without a visible witness in civil institutions. Worse; church leaders and theologians have again and again denied that such an institutional testimony is legitimate in the New Testament era. It is legitimate in church affairs, of course, they hasten to affirm; it is also legitimate with respect to the covenantal institution of the family. But God's Bible-revealed standards are not legitimate with respect to the civil government. So Christians have been told for well over a millennium.

The question of questions for Christian applied theology, ethics, and social theory is this one: Why should Christians accept as their long-term earthly goal the establishment of any system of civil law other than the one set forth in the Bible? In other words, why should Christians affirm *in principle* the acceptability of any law-order other than biblical law, in every area of life? Why should they enthusiastically choose second-best, third-best, or even a totalitarian civil order in preference to biblical law? Why is their last choice for civil judicial standards always God's Bible-revealed law? We could search for answers in psychology, sociology, education, and in any other academic specialties. I prefer to begin looking for the answer in the area of ethics: *Christians prefer irresponsibility.*

E. A Preference for Irresponsibility

In the Northern Kingdom from the days of Jeroboam's revolt, there were only two publicly acceptable operating religious systems: the worship of Jehovah by means of Baalist icons and practices (the golden calves: I Kings 12:28) and the worship of Baal by means of Baalist icons and practices (I Kings 18). Elijah challenged the representatives of the people of Israel to choose between Baal and Jehovah, but they answered not a word (I Kings 18:21). Even when they at last declared themselves in favor of God (I Kings 18:39), it was only as a result of God's display of greater supernatural but highly visible power, and their commitment did not last longer than Elijah's ability to repeat such displays on a regular, invariable basis. In their deepest apostasy,

they became disciples of the power religion. They had returned to Egyptian spiritually.

The Northern Kingdom was worse in this regard than the Southern Kingdom was. Judah did have the temple. It had a ritually acceptable religion. It never adopted pure Baalism. God therefore delivered Israel into captivity to the Assyrians more than a century before He delivered Judah (and Assyria) to the Babylonians. Even so, He had graciously waited several centuries to deliver up Israel to her enemies. The Northern Kingdom's religious practices had been corrupt from the beginning, but there are degrees of corruption. For a time, God graciously delays bringing His negative sanctions in history. It is not that He honors corruption; instead, He honors the absence of fully developed corruption. But corruption, like "incorruption," does not remain idle. Corruption either grows or contracts. Both corruption and righteousness are kingdom principles. It depends upon which kingdom we are discussing: God's or Satan's. Each kingdom seeks extension geographically, temporally, institutionally, and psychologically. Each serves as leaven.²⁹ Each recognizes that, in principle, there can be no neutrality. Each therefore recognizes that as time goes on, there will be less and less cooperation possible between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers.

1. Progressive Ethical Self-Consciousness

Covenant-breakers generally recognize the nature of this ethical and institutional conflict much earlier than covenant-keepers do. They see what will happen when covenant-keepers at last become self-conscious in their commitment to God's Bible-revealed kingdom principles. Like the leaders of the Jews who understood that Jesus had prophesied that He would rise again in three days, and so put a stone and guards at the tomb (Matt. 27:62–66), so are the covenant-breakers in history. Similarly, like the disciples who did not understand what Jesus had said, and who therefore departed in despair, so Christians have been in their misunderstanding of Christ's comprehensive challenge to non-Christian society. They have not understood the comprehensive challenge of the gospel.³⁰ Nevertheless, a few disciples eventually re-

29. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), pp. 279–82, 287–89.

30. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action." (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

turned to the tomb, only to find it empty. As time went on, a few more recognized that Jesus' words were true. The word of His resurrection spread among the called-out *ekklesia*. Then the war between the kingdoms began in earnest—earnest in the sense of serious, and also earnest in the sense of God's down payment in history of a future fulfillment. When Christians at last begin to see the comprehensive implications of Christ's ascension to heaven, the war will escalate. (This escalation has been going on since the ascension, but it has been a process marked by many historical discontinuities.)

Once a new phase of the war begins, both sides become increasingly consistent. This has been going on for centuries. The cultural advantage inevitably swings to the covenant-keepers *whenever they honor the external terms of God's covenant*. Their obedience brings visible, external blessings (Deut. 28:1–14), while the rebellious receive visible blessings more and more in terms of their public honoring of the kingdom principles announced by the covenant-keepers. If they refuse to adapt, covenant-breakers grow weak and eventually disappear in history. Those who survive become increasingly dependent on the good behavior and good works of covenant-keepers. This dependence tends to persuade them to reduce their per-secution of covenant-keepers. They hire them because covenant-keepers—*when the latter are adhering to the external terms of God's covenant*—are honest, effective workers. They buy from them for the same reason. Service leads to dominion.

2. *External Standards, External Sanctions*

The law of God is the primary tool of dominion that God offers to all men, irrespective of their personal faith. He gives the Holy Spirit to His people, but if His people refuse for a season to honor the terms of the covenant, while God-rejecting men willingly adopt the external terms of the covenant, then the latter will prosper externally. The best example of this process in recent history is the reversal of economic power between Japan and the United States after 1945. The Japanese, not being Protestants, nevertheless adopted the Protestant ethic of their American conquerors. The Americans, having become the richest people on earth by their adherence to this ethic, steadily abandoned it in the post-War era. They concluded incorrectly that the might of their hands had gotten them this wealth (Deut. 8:17).

Long-term, it requires that God grant special grace (regeneration)

to large numbers of people in order for a society to adhere to the external terms of the covenant.³¹ But in the short run, which can last several generations, the appropriate visible blessings of the covenant can go to those who are committed only externally to particular terms of the covenant. Japan, for example, was the first nation to adopt abortion as a national policy after World War II. In 1988, there were three abortions for every live birth in Japan.³² This reduced the supply of future workers. In 2010, Japan was the most rapidly aging population in the West, and was facing a politically inescapable long-run crisis of a national government budget that will not be able to afford to pay retired people their promised pension fund benefits.³³ Why should the Japanese be uniquely blessed? It is a case of comparative obedience: the Soviet Union and the Chinese also began to promote abortions as national policy; the United States also accepted abortion's legality in 1973, and its intellectual leaders are overwhelmingly pro-abortion. So, God looks at other aspects of the covenant, those related to the economics of dominion: honesty, hard work, precise work, rigorous education, thrift, future-orientation, etc. In these areas, the Japanese excel. They therefore receive the lion's share of the external blessings. If they refuse to convert to faith in Jesus Christ, however, the Japanese will eventually find it impossible to adhere as a nation to the external terms of the covenant. God's negative sanctions will come.

The modern church has abandoned faith in the covenantal cause-and-effect relationship between national external conformity to God's law and His external blessings. The church therefore does not believe in God's sanctions in history. In Old Testament times, yes, but not in New Testament times. *The church today implicitly believes that God gave a clearer revelation of His ethical standards before Jesus Christ came to redeem the world.* Christians implicitly assert with amillennialist Cornelius Van Til that God's system of visible sanctions in Old Covenant history was a mark of His condescension to His people in an earlier era.³⁴ In short, they conclude that Christians and non-Christi-

31. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

32. *Christianity Today* (Dec. 9, 1988), p. 60.

33. "Future Shock: Japan faces demographic nightmare, *International Business Times* (July 21, 2010). (<http://bit.ly/JapanDemo>)

34. He wrote: "In the New Testament God expects his people to live more fully into the absolute future than in the Old Testament. He expects of them that they will be able to sustain the unevenness of the present revelation to the day of their death, since they have a clearer revelation of the new heavens and the new earth. In the Old

ans do not need visible manifestations of the ethical character of God, so He has removed this revelation of Himself by removing His historical sanctions. Covenant-breakers understandably rejoice at this thought, for this hypothetical removal of God's sanctions in history supposedly leaves Satan's sanctions intact: compound cursings in history for the righteous and compound blessings in history for the unrighteous. Unfortunately, Van Til did not believe that this removal is hypothetical.³⁵ Neither do non-theonomic pessimillennialists generally. Van Til never recognized understood that *God's covenantal sanctions in history remain in force today*. Because God's servants so far have chosen not to impose His civil sanctions in New Testament history, Satan's servants have imposed his.

3. Ethics and Eschatology

History is not visibly neutral in any eschatological system that is based on the Bible: *either the gospel message is blessed progressively over the ages or else humanism is*. The Bible is not a dualistic document. It does not teach of an endless conflict between good and evil, between God and Satan. This conflict is bounded by time. It will end at the final judgment. This is why neither ethical dualism nor some version of manichaeism can be successfully defended by means of an appeal to the Bible. The two positions are inevitably connected: eschatology and ethics. The Bible denies both eschatological manichaeism and ethical dualism.

The debate within Christendom over eschatology and ethics has arisen because the majority of those who have ever called themselves Christians have accepted the assertion by the humanists—whether Greek, Newtonian, or Kantian—that there is an inherent ethical dualism in history. There is supposedly no progressive triumph of God's kingdom law over Satan's kingdom law. They have accepted the presupposition that there is a universal system of ethics that is independent of God's revelation of Himself in the Bible, and that it is this universal ethical system which God enforces by means of His sanctions in history. Thus, God's historical sanctions are supposedly not linked closely to the progressive improvements in the church's creeds and its

Testament, on the contrary, God condescends to give an external manifestation of the principle that righteousness, holiness and blessedness belong together." Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), p. 104.

35. For a critique of this view, see North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 3.

improving methods of evangelism throughout history. History therefore is not a visible "earnest" (Eph. 1:14) or down payment on the eschatological triumph of God over Satan in eternity. History, the Greek-influenced church has affirmed, is not a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing; it just looks like it. Or, to cite Meredith Kline: "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."³⁶

F. Case Laws and Kingdom

Rarely in the history of the church have leaders or laymen taken the Old Testament case laws seriously. (Rarely also have they taken seriously the idea of "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Fully consistent dispensationalists refuse to pray this "Jewish kingdom" prayer in this, the "Church Age.") Christians have assumed that Jesus' earthly ministry, or at least Paul's, did away entirely with the case laws. Nevertheless, when pressed to defend some traditional practice of any particular denomination, the groups' in-house theologians usually turn to the Old Testament in search of a legal precedent. This is an aspect of what Rushdoony called *smorgasbord religion*: selectively picking what you like out of a large selection of rules and doctrines. The best example of such selective New Testament shopping is the strict sabbatarian's appeal to every verse in the Old Testament regarding keeping holy the sabbath except one, Exodus 35:2: "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death." When it comes to announcing the legitimate imposition of this most rigorous of Old Testament civil sanctions, capital punishment, the church flees in holy terror.

A biblically required sanction clearly identifies God's attitude toward a particular infraction. The severity of the sanction tells us just how important the infraction is in the overall operation of the kingdom of God. Without sanctions, there can be no civil law, and without civil law there can be no civilization, meaning no identifiable kingdom. But there is always some form of civilization. There are no historical

36. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

vacuums. Thus, we ought to conclude that God has His required sanctions, while self-proclaimed autonomous man has his. God has revealed His required sanctions in His law; man has revealed his required sanctions in his legislation. For as long as there are infractions of a judicial standard, there will be sanctions. The question is: Whose? Whose standards and whose sanctions?

The church has not wanted to face the stark contrast between the two kingdoms. It has wanted to find some rationally acceptable position between theocracy and tyranny and also between theocracy and anarchy. Christian scholars have asserted the existence of neutral, "natural" laws that can serve as the church's earthly hope of the ages, an agreeable middle way that will mitigate the conflict in history between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. The victor in such a naive quest will always be the kingdom of man. *Theoretical neutrality means practical autonomy*: men do not have to consider what God requires or threatens in history.

God brings His sanctions in history, both positive and negative. He can do this either through His people, who act representatively as His agents, or through pagan armies or seemingly impersonal environmental forces. He can choose war, pestilence, or famine. He can even choose "all of the above." But He does bring His sanctions in history. There is no escape from these historical sanctions, any more than there is an escape from His eternal sanctions. The former point to the latter. This is one of the primary functions of historical sanctions: as a witness to the holiness of God.

God's historical sanctions serve as public evidence of His theocratic sovereignty over the creation. This is why Christians who rebel at the idea of theocracy also are tempted to rebel against the idea of God's temporal sanctions.³⁷ The idea of the national covenant repels them, for such a covenant testifies to the existence of a Christian civil hierarchy, Christian civil laws, Christian civil sanctions, and Christian civil conquest in history by means of God's sanctions of blessings and cursings. Thus we find a trio of Christian historians, safe and tenured in their humanist-accredited colleges and universities, who insist on placing the word *Christian* in quotation marks when they speak of

37. They will also prefer to downplay or even deny God's eternal negative sanctions. Twenty-first-century evangelism is notable for its reluctance to discuss hell and the lake of fire. "Fire and brimstone preaching" is mostly a figment of liberal imaginations in this century.

America's "Christian" origins or "Christian" cultures in general.³⁸ They reject the use of this adjective in describing America.

G. God as Cosmic Torturer

This is a grim concept, one which I have deliberately chosen as a means of shocking Christians and non-Christians alike into recognizing the key offense of the Bible: the assertion that God will torture His enemies without mercy forever if they do not submit to Him covenantally in history. It is the doctrine of God as the cosmic Judge which above all repels the covenant-breaker. Even Christians are today hesitant to say in public that the lake of fire is not a cosmic rehabilitation scheme. God is a cosmic torturer, but to say so in public or in print is regarded by Christians as a *faux pas* of the highest order. This testifies against them, not God.

It is because history is an earnest on eternity—simultaneously a promise and a warning—that Christians are required by God to affirm the biblical legitimacy of civil sanctions imposed by the state in the name of God, and therefore a state governed in its severity by His revealed law. The covenantally faithful state, as a hierarchical institution, is supposed to be limited by God's law in order for it lawfully to execute God's judgments. In order to establish a Christian culture, there have to be identifiably Christian laws—biblical blueprints, in other words—by which the national covenant could be judged by God and other nations. Only one idea is more repugnant to modern Christian intellectuals than the idea of judicially binding biblical civil blueprints.³⁹ That idea is the doctrine of an inescapably predestined eternity of personal negative sanctions that will be imposed on everyone

38. Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1983), p. 28. For a refutation, see North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 5.

39. That no such blueprints exist in the field of economics was the assertion of all three of the other authors in the book, *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984). (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>). The fourth view—the explicitly, self-consciously, blueprint-insistent Christian one—was mine. I, of course, challenged all three of the others, calling attention to their self-conscious rejection of any explicitly biblical standards in economic analysis. Not surprisingly, in less than a year, with the book selling well and our royalties adequate, the neo-evangelical liberals who run InterVarsity pulled the book off the market and sold my company the remaining 6,000 copies at 25 cents per copy, just to wash their hands of the whole project. That was when I knew who had won the debate. Liberals would never be so crass as to burn conservative books; they simply refuse to publish them or, once the mistake has been made, they dump them.

God hates. These two hated ideas are linked judicially: *sanctions*. Men do not like to be reminded by Paul that “the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom. 9:17–18). If God did this with Pharaoh, He can do it to anyone. *This means sanctions*.

The comparatively gentle negative civil sanctions of the Old Testament—whipping, restitution, slavery, banishment, and public execution—are light taps on the wrist when compared to an eternity of screaming agony in the lake of fire. Civil sanctions are limited by time; eternity is forever. Men easily understand this distinction. Thus, in order to banish from their consciousness the thought of eternal torture at the hand of an outraged, implacable, non-rehabilitating God, they feel compelled to banish also the idea that God has established civil covenants in history that authorize and require His lawful civil representatives to apply the Old Testament’s minimal negative sanctions. Instead, they have implicitly adopted two other doctrines, the doctrine of autonomous man and the concomitant doctrine, the autonomous state.

The state becomes the sole agency authorized by autonomous man to impose compulsory sanctions. The only alternative to this view is the doctrine of zero civil government, meaning zero compulsory sanctions, a consistent but seldom articulated viewpoint. This outlook is utopian, for it ignores the obvious: a gang-warlord society always develops. Gangs are private armies that bear all the marks of civil governments: hierarchy, law, physical sanctions, and rites of succession. So, in order to assert his autonomy from God, the covenant-breaker always places himself under the authority of a self-proclaimed autonomous state. He prefers to believe that the state’s sanctions are final. The state’s sanctions must be seen as alternatives to God’s final judgment, not evidence for it. He must assert this if God’s final sanctions are to be denied effectively. In order to make such an assumption believable, the state must be given power to impose sanctions far worse than those authorized by the Old Testament.

You cannot beat something with nothing. A Christian who is unwilling to affirm publicly the inescapability of God’s eternal negative covenant sanctions is also unlikely to insist on the *temporal* reality of God’s negative covenant sanctions, for such temporal sanctions are an earnest—down payment—on His final sanctions. Such sanctions-

denying Christians eventually find themselves under the civil (and also intellectual) authority of covenant-breakers who also deny the continuing validity of biblical law, meaning Old Testament sanctions. *You cannot beat something with something less.* Those who assert their defiance of covenant law the most insistently are covenant-breakers who affirm the autonomy of man, or who at least deny the existence of the God of the Bible. Thus, in their quest to avoid thinking about God's eternal torture chamber beyond the grave, Christians have willingly submitted *in principle* to temporal rule by those covenant-breakers who deny the lake of fire with the greatest self-confidence.

On the other hand, those Christians who in history were most willing to affirm God's predestinated, inescapable, eternal sanctions were also the only ones ready to insist on the covenantal necessity of legislating the most feared of God's negative sanctions, public execution, for every crime identified as a capital crime in the Old Testament. I am speaking of the Puritans, who did exactly this when they were given the legal authority in history to do so, in New England: the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641). The Puritans understood that civil liberty begins with the civil government's enforcement of God's required sanctions.

H. Sanctions and Civilization

Kingdom means civilization. It means either the lawful or unlawful exercise of authority in history. In short, kingdom means sanctions. God's kingdom can operate with minimal sanctions in history, meaning a minimal state, only because it is authorized by God and accepted covenantally by people who believe in God's horrifying negative sanctions beyond the grave. The widespread belief in hell and the lake of fire is one of the foundations of Western liberty. It made less necessary for social order men's faith in a state that possesses imitation final sanctions.

The case laws provide an alternative to the messianic state, because they provide sanctions that match the magnitude of the crime. The basic penalty for crimes against property and body is some form of restitution. Crimes against the integrity of God are capital crimes: those convicted of such infractions are delivered into God's court for His direct judgment. As history moves closer to the day of final judgment, society will progressively be conformed to these standards. Democratically, meaning a bottom-up movement of the Holy Spirit,

voters will enact the whole law-order of God. Thus, what the Puritans attempted to do in England was wrong because it was a top-down imposition of God's law. What the New England Puritans attempted to do was valid; there was general agreement about biblical civil law. But immigration and defections within Puritanism after 1660 changed the circumstances.

The critics of theocracy always assume that it has to be anti-democratic. But if the Spirit of God moves a vast majority of men to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and if they return to the Old Testament in search of biblical blueprints, then the resulting theocratic republic will be legitimate in terms of democratic standards, assuming that such standards refer simply and exclusively to techniques of campaigning and voting.⁴⁰

When that theocratic majority appears, you can bet your life that the humanists will then try to subvert it by means of an elitist conspiracy. We read about such a revolt against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16. It was done in the name of the People: "And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" (v. 3). We read about the final such attempt in Revelation 20:8–9, at the very end of history. These voices of the People are in favor of democracy for only so long as they can control a majority of voters by means of a hierarchical elite that pretends to listen to the People—an elite far more subtle than the Communists' one-party dictatorship in the name of the people.

A sovereign agent always acts through spokesmen in a hierarchy. There will always be an elite: intellectual, educational, military, and so forth. The question is never elite or no elite. It is always a question of which elite. It is a question of which sovereign agent. The Bible is clear: God is completely, absolutely sovereign over the creation, and men are subordinately, inescapably responsible for their actions. Thus, the goal of covenant-keepers is to work toward a social order in which every institution reflects this dual sovereignty, absolute and delegated. It is the creation of an entire world order that prays, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

40. Modern democratic theory is far more than a theory of legitimate electoral techniques. It has the character of being a rival religion. Cf. Charles Fergusson, *The Religion of Democracy* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900).

A subset of this broad social goal is politics. Politically, the only legitimate long-term biblical goal is the creation of a worldwide theocratic republic.⁴¹ It is the creation of a bottom-up political order whose civil courts enforce the law of God, and whose people rejoice, not because such a law-order is natural but because it is supernatural.

I. The Restoration of Biblical Covenantal Order

The primary social function of civil law is to persuade God to withdraw His negative sanctions. The state acts as God's agent in imposing sanctions against sin. This is the biblical rationale of civil laws against so-called victimless crimes. Obviously, this purpose relates to the hierarchical nature of all society: the society is under God, meaning under His temporal sanctions.

There is also a secondary goal of civil law: the restoration of social order among men. This, too, is hierarchical. If a person owns a piece of property, then he exercises dominion over it in terms of his subordination to God. He acts as God's agent in a hierarchical system of ownership, which Christians call *stewardship*. When a criminal or negligent person invades this hierarchical system of ownership, God calls the civil magistrate to defend His interests, and therefore also His steward's interests. The system of justice in the Bible is geared to restoration of the original God-assigned hierarchical order.

The issues of crime and punishment are inescapably questions of the appropriate hierarchy. The victim has been victimized by someone who has asserted a judicially illegitimate authority over him. The criminal in some way invaded the victim's legitimate, God-given sphere of personal responsibility. The criminal subordinated the victim's goals and property to his own. He intervened in the hierarchy and placed himself between God and the lawful subordinate. He implicitly declared that God's assignment of property and lawful authority was illegitimate. In short, the criminal decided to play God.

This illegitimate assertion of covenantal authority must be punished by the state, which is required by God to act as His representative. The *status quo ante* must be re-established. The way that biblical civil law achieves this goal is to establish a system of *economic restitution*. The criminal pays double restitution or even more to the victim,

41. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gdmruler>); Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

depending on what biblical law has established as the maximum payment, and also in terms of *victim's rights*: the victim can lawfully reduce the payment. Multiple restitution marks criminal law in the Bible. The negligent caretaker or injurer pays only like-for-like restitution to the victim, what might be called civil law.

The modern messianic state has imitated the criminal. It, too, has disrupted the social hierarchy. It has placed itself between God and the criminal, as if God's sanctions were not binding. It has declared different sanctions. The state has attempted to become a healer of society and ultimately its savior, not by restoring the previous hierarchy and social order but rather by transforming the individual criminal through techniques of rehabilitation. The modern state has generally ignored the victim and his rights in its selection of appropriate sanctions. It has sought to play God as a savior of men. It has substituted a different set of sanctions from those required in the Bible. In doing this, it has received the tacit acquiescence of Christians, and even their public approval, for they self-consciously deny the legitimacy of God's Bible-revealed sanctions in civil government. They have therefore implicitly and even explicitly denied the judicial foundation of Christian civilization. In short:

**No sanctions, no laws; no laws, no social order; no social order,
no civilization; no civilization, no kingdom of God in church history.**

Final Comment

Having burdened the reader with an enormous amount of detailed biblical exegesis and specific applications based on it, it seems appropriate to end this book on a lighter note. It appears that a bank in Canada has intuitively grasped the logic of the biblical concept of restitution, much to the consternation of one malefactor, Mr. Brian McNeilly. The case of Mr. McNeilly was summarized in the *Wall Street Journal* (Dec. 21, 1988), page B1, in the lower left-hand corner. This space is reserved daily for humorous economic oddities. I reprint it here without comment or alteration.

He Shouldn't Complain—At Least They Didn't Charge Him Interest

By John Urquhart, Staff Reporter

OTTAWA—Brian McNeilly wants it known that when he holds up a bank, he is stealing money, not borrowing it.

Mr. McNeilly has had a problem getting this point across to the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Last month, he pleaded guilty to robbing a branch of that bank, as well as to nine other heists in the Ottawa area. Following the trial, Commerce decided to treat him like just another delinquent borrower. It deducted 1,500 Canadian dollars (US\$1,246) from a savings account he had with the bank to make up for the like sum he'd stolen.

'I Won't Stand for It'

Commerce recovered its funds under a banking law known as "the right of offset," which allows banks to deduct money from accounts when the account holders have fallen behind on loan payments. This may be the first time it has been used to recover funds from a robber, bankers say.

Although he couldn't be reached for comment, Mr. McNeilly was recently interviewed on a radio show here and said he is consulting with his lawyer to see if the bank acted legally. "I don't feel the bank has the right to do that," he said. "I won't stand for it." The money in his Commerce savings account, he added, came from an inheritance, not from the robberies. Mr. McNeilly also noted that the court didn't order him to pay back the C\$23,000 he had stolen from the banks. Instead, he was sentenced to six years in jail. So, if the bank had the right to take his funds, he said, "I want some time off my sentence."

The Commerce bank claims that a debt is a debt whether Mr. McNeilly borrowed the money or stole it. "It is just like recovering money owed on an overdue demand loan," says Dan Maceluch, a bank spokesman, who adds that just because Mr. McNeilly was sentenced to jail doesn't mean the debt was forgiven.

Account Closed

Mr. McNeilly has taken steps to ensure that the bank can't relieve him of any more money. He has had his girlfriend close his account at the branch where he banked for six years and where he still has a loan on the books. (According to Mr. McNeilly, the loan is in good standing.)

In the radio interview, Mr. McNeilly also said that since arriving in jail, other bank robbers have told him that they've never heard of banks dipping into robbers' accounts. Ottawa Police Inspector Steve Nadori isn't surprised. "Most bank robbers don't have bank accounts," he says.

End of Volume 4

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AUTHORITY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON EXODUS

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An Economic Commentary on Exodus

Gary North

Volume 5

Appendixes

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APPENDIX A

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF EGYPT'S CHRONOLOGY

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Zij, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD (I Kings 6:1).

This is an important date marker in the Bible. Without this reference and the parallel reference in First Chronicles, it would be much more difficult to establish biblical chronology. Biblical chronology is at war with the chronologies of the textbooks on ancient history. There is no escape from this war.¹

To determine the year in which Solomon began building the temple, we must work backward from a date that we can narrow down to a two-year period: the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. A widely accepted date is 586 B.C. The two other dates are 587 and 588. Most scholars choose either 586 or 587.² I have decided to choose 586, in deference to a seeming majority of specialized scholars.³

Ezekiel informs us that it was 390 years from the division of the monarchy under Rehoboam to the fall of Jerusalem. This is another crucial date marker.

Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the

1. I agree with Floyd Nolen Jones: biblical chronology is one of the three major battlefields of modern biblical warfare. The other two are higher criticism of biblical texts and Darwinian evolution. Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, 15th ed. (Green Forest, Arkansas: Green Leaf Press, 2005), pp. 7–8. I have relied on his book for the presentation in this chapter.

2. Herman H. Hoeh, "When Did Nebuchadnezzar Conquer Jerusalem?" (1976), ed. Paul Finch (2005). (<http://bit.ly/HoehNeb>)

3. Jones accepts this date: *op. cit.*, p. 23.

years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel (Ezek. 4:4–5).

Adding 390 to 586 gives us 976 B.C.⁴ That was the last year of Solomon's reign. Maybe we could argue 977 B.C. It does not matter for this appendix. We know from two passages that Solomon ruled 40 years.⁵ Adding 40 to 976, we get 1016 B.C. for the beginning of his reign. In the fourth year of his reign, he began to build the temple.

Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign (II Chron. 3:1–2).

Subtracting three years (fourth year) from 1016, we get 1013 B.C. This is the anchor date.

First Kings 6:1 is specific: the exodus took place 480 years before. Adding 480 years to 1013, we get 1493 B.C. as the date of the exodus, give or take a few years, depending on the date of the fall of Jerusalem and the dating by month of Solomon's coronation. Again, this variation matters little.

Graetz's *History of the Jews* states that Solomon's reign began around 1015 B.C.⁶ Graetz believed that Solomon began construction of the temple "immediately after his succession to the throne,"⁷ and that it was completed and consecrated in 1007 B.C.⁸ Alfred Edersheim, the late-nineteenth-century Christian convert from Judaism, dated the beginning of construction as 1012 B.C.⁹ Another late-nineteenth-century

4. Jones said it should be 975 B.C. Why? He said this: "inclusive numbering minus 1." *Idem*. My view is that if an author does not precisely explain what he is talking about—"inclusive numbering minus 1"—the reader is entitled to conclude "case not proven." Chalk it up to the reader's ignorance. If an author is not clear, his reader is entitled to his own opinion. The text says 390. I stick with the text.

5. "And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years" (I Kings 11:42). "And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years" (II Chron. 9:30).

6. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891), I, p. 156.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

9. Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History, Old Testament*, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1890]), III, p. 10: chart based on Keil's calculations.

Christian commentator believed that construction began in 1010 B.C.¹⁰

Conservative Bible commentators in the late twentieth century revised these dates downward by about 45 years. This revision was the result of the Edwin Thiele's chronological studies of the later Hebrew kings, beginning with Rehoboam and Jeroboam, whose reigns he dates from 931.¹¹ Thiele was wrong.¹² The older commentators were right.¹³

A. Conservatives and Compromise

A representative summary of the dating problem is found in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1982): "The date of the exodus is one of the most debated topics in OT studies because of the ambiguous nature of the evidence. Although the biblical texts seem to require a date early in the 15th century B.C., archeological evidence seems to point to a date in the 13th cent. B.C."¹⁴ The author, W. H. Shea, then went on for eight two-column, small-print pages summarizing bits and pieces of conventional Egyptian chronology and archaeology. He wanted to hold to the fifteenth-century dating, but his defense was weakened because of his presuppositions concerning methodology. His methodology was based on comparative chronology and comparative archaeology. This, we are supposed to believe, is the objective, neutral scholarship we need in order to make sense out of the Bible.

He affirmed that the mid-fifteenth century is "the only date given for it in the Bible." He was wrong. The early fifteenth century is correct. But consider his reliance upon the category of pragmatism in defending the conservative view: "While it is possible that these [biblical] data could have been corrupted in transmission, the most reasonable approach to them is to examine in more detail the historical context in

10. "Temple," in John McClintock and James Strong (eds.), *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), X, p. 250.

11. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965). Cf. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1977).

12. James B. Jordan, "The Mysterious Numbers of Edwin R. Thiele," *Biblical Chronology*, II (September 1990). (<http://bit.ly/jjthiele>)

13. In the first edition of this book, I adopted Thiele's view. Only when I got to my commentary of First Kings did my study lead me back to the nineteenth-century view.

14. "Exodus, Date of the," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982), II, p. 230. (<http://bit.ly/ExodusDate>)

which they [the data] date the exodus. This biblical date for the exodus has a reciprocal relationship with the events described in exodus as related to Egyptian history. A pragmatic approach to this date suggests a period of Egyptian history that should be examined for a possible relationship to the biblical exodus, and considerable agreement of the evidence from Egyptian and biblical sources pointing to that period supports the accuracy of the chronological datum (480 years) from which that search started."¹⁵ He did his best to show why a fifteenth-century date is viable, but he did not begin with the premise that this must be the case, irrespective of modern interpretations of the Egyptian evidence. He appealed to pragmatism instead.

Roland Harrison, one of the *ISBE*'s associate editors, elsewhere argued for a thirteenth-century dating. Harrison's study was based on a survey of the conclusions of the secular archaeologists, who debate endlessly about the proper dating of the various Bronze Ages (Early, Middle, and Late), a humanistic classification system based entirely on nineteenth-century evolutionary social theory.¹⁶ He mentioned the fact that early in the twentieth century, Bible scholars accepted a late-thirteenth-century date for the exodus. In the 1920s and 1930s, excavations in Palestine, especially Jericho, convinced several archaeologists that the traditional early fifteenth-century dating is correct. But he was not convinced: "The question cannot be settled simply by an appeal to the book of Kings in the light of an arbitrary dating for the fall of Jericho."¹⁷ Notice his subtle shift in argumentation: he tried to overcome the explicit teaching of I Kings 6:1 by means of a brief reference to doubts concerning the reliability of certain archeological excavations conducted early in the twentieth century. But I Kings 6:1 does not mention the fall of Jericho; it does specifically mention the exodus. Harrison's argument is muddled. His recommended chronology specifically rejects the testimony of I Kings 6:1. Yet this is all done in the name of Jesus. Such is the fate of ostensibly Christian scholarship which arbitrarily abandons a so-called "simple appeal" to the explicit testimony of the Bible. It is one more sign of just how much in "bondage to Egypt" twentieth-century Christian scholars became.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

16. On this point, see R. A. McNeal, "The Legacy of Arthur Evans," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, VI (1973), pp. 206–20. McNeal and I were in undergraduate and graduate school together. He sent me a copy of his article. He had no idea that it would prove so useful to my work a decade later.

17. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 175.

The conservative *New Bible Dictionary* (1962) did not even mention the possibility of a fifteenth-century date.¹⁸ The author refused to comment on the explicit chronological framework of I Kings 6:1 in relation to the exodus. He tried to confuse the issue by bringing up the problem of possible overlapping judgeships in order to shorten the period of the judges. It is significant, however, that the author argued that the “problem” of the “long” reign of the Hebrew judges can be solved by an appeal to overlapping reigns.

In Near Eastern works involving chronology, it is important to realize that ancient scribes did not draw up synchronistic lists as is done today. They simply listed each series of rulers and reigns separately, in succession on the papyrus or tablet. Synchronisms were to be derived from special historiographical works, not the king-lists or narratives serving other purposes. An excellent example of this is the Turin Papyrus of Kings from Egypt. It lists at great length all five Dynasties, XIII to XVII, in successive groups, totalling originally over 150 rulers and their reigns accounting for at least 450 years. However, it is known from other sources that all five Dynasties, the 150-odd rulers and 450-odd regnal years alike, must all fit inside the 234 years from c. 1786 B.C. to c. 1552 B.C.: rarely less than two series, and sometimes three series, of rulers are known to have reigned contemporaneously.”¹⁹

This theory of overlapping dynasties, as we shall see, is the best solution to “the exodus problem” of the 480 years of I Kings 6:1, which is the real problem, not the so-called “judges problem.” This theory provides a solution the overall problem of Egyptian chronology.

B. The Problem of Egyptian Chronology

In 1886, historian George Rawlinson began his chapter on Egyptian chronology with this statement:

It is a patent fact, and one that is beginning to obtain general recognition, that the chronological element in early Egyptian history is in a state of almost hopeless obscurity.”²⁰ There are several kinds of chronological documents, including the actual monuments. “The chronological value of these various sources of information is, however, in every case slight. The great defect of these monuments is

18. *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1982), pp. 191–92.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

20. George Rawlinson, *A History of Egypt*, 2 vols. (New York: Alden, 1886), II, p. 1.

their incompleteness. The Egyptians had no era. They drew out no chronological schemes. They cared for nothing but to know how long each incarnate god, human or bovine, had condescended to tarry on the earth. They recorded carefully the length of the life of each Apis bull, and the length of the reign of each king; but they neglected to take note of the intervals between one Apis bull and another, and omitted to distinguish the sole reign of a monarch from his joint reign with others.²¹

The chronology of Egypt has been used to “key” the chronologies of the other ancient empires, including pre-Homeric Greece. Art historian Lewis Greenberg sounded a warning about this in a 1973 essay.

As far back as 1897 Tsountas²² warned scholars not to ignore “the unsettled state of Egyptian chronology” when enlisting the aid of Egyptology in dating Mycenaean products. And as recently as 1960 Cook²³ again reminded students of Greek pottery of the difficulties concerning the establishment of relative and absolute chronologies and their “reconciliation.” Unfortunately, the Egyptian chronology is nowhere near as solid as the architectural wonders which are its hallmark. As a matter of fact, our knowledge of Egyptian events is extensively based upon the disjointed reports of Classical authors, damaged and incomplete written records, and chance records of astronomical phenomena. Even the latter factor has been questioned.²⁴

Velikovsky cited the 1921 statement of O. G. S. Crawford²⁵ that “A system of relative chronology can be established by excavation in any country that has been long inhabited, but it is left hanging in the air until linked up with Egypt, whether directly or indirectly through a third region.”²⁶ Scholars have used a supposedly reliable Egyptian chronology based on inconclusive Egyptian sources as a means of criticizing the Bible’s account of the exodus and conquest of Canaan.

21. *Ibid.*, II, p. 2.

22. C. Tsountas and J. I. Manatt, *The Mycenaean Age* (1897), p. 317n.

23. R. M. Cook, *Greek Painted Pottery* (1960), pp. 261–70.

24. Lewis M. Greenberg, “The Lion Gate at Mycenae,” *Pensée*, III (Winter 1973), pp. 26–27.

25. Crawford, *Man and His Past* (1921), p. 72.

26. Immanuel Velikovsky, “Astronomy and Chronology,” *Pensée*, III (Spring/Summer 1973), p. 38. This was reprinted in *Peoples of the Sea* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 205.

C. Velikovsky's Controversial Reconstruction²⁷

In 1952, the brilliant and controversial Jewish scholar, Immanuel Velikovsky, published *Ages in Chaos*, the first volume of a projected series.²⁸ The later volumes in the series were delayed for a quarter of a century.²⁹ *Ages in Chaos* offered startling evidence that the accepted chronology of the ancient world is deeply flawed. Specifically, there is a 500–700 year gap in conventional chronologies, a gap that never existed. Because of the centrality of Egyptian chronology, he argued, this gap is inserted into other chronologies of the ancient Near East and classical civilization. He labored long and hard to prove his case, and his researches are awesome. His reconstructed chronology has been verified (though not in the eyes of conventional historians and archaeologists) by several of his followers.³⁰

1. The Velikovsky Affair

It is not appropriate to deal with the whole of Velikovsky's works in this appendix. His *Worlds in Collision* (1950) created universal outrage among astronomers. So outraged were certain astronomers at Harvard University that they put great pressure on Macmillan, the publisher, to drop the book, despite its best-selling status. This campaign began before the book had been published, and before any of the critics had read it.³¹ Refuse to suppress it, they threatened, and Harvard University's astronomy department will not offer manuscripts to Macmillan's textbook publishing division. Macmillan eventually capitulated and gave the publishing rights of this best-selling book to Doubleday, a company that had no textbook publishing division.

The book eventually went out of print in the United States and remained unavailable until the mid-1960s, when the counterculture's re-

27. "My work is first a reconstruction, not a theory. . . ." Immanuel Velikovsky, "My Challenge to Conventional Views in Science," *Pensée*, IV (Spring 1974), p. 10.

28. The whole series was to be called *Ages in Chaos*, with the first volume titled, *From the Exodus to King Akhnaton*. The book became so well known as *Ages in Chaos* that the real title never caught on.

29. Velikovsky, *Peoples of the Sea; Ramses II and His Time* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978). These books officially are part of the *Ages in Chaos* series. But as I said in the previous footnote, the general series' title, *Ages in Chaos*, became too closely associated with the title of the first volume, *From the Exodus to King Akhnaton*, a title which nobody except Velikovsky has ever bothered to use.

30. Cf. Israel M. Isaacson, "Applying the Revised Chronology," *Pensée*, IV (Fall 1974); Lewis M. Greenberg, "The Lion's Gate at Mycenae," *ibid.*, III (Winter 1973).

31. David Stove, "The Scientific Mafia," *Pensée*, II (May 1972), p. 6.

volution overturned most of the established tenets of every social science and several natural sciences—the era in which the myth of neutrality died on university campuses throughout the world.³² It was republished and once again became a popular book. A short-lived semi-scholarly periodical, *Pensée*, was begun in the early 1970s to explore his theories in relation to several academic disciplines. Courses in two dozen colleges that relied on some aspects of his research were being taught in 1973, although the colleges were not major universities.³³ A series of small scholarly journals came and went.³⁴ Velikovsky's catastrophism and chronological work are carried on by the Society of Interdisciplinary Studies and several other Websites. This remains a marginal effort in academia. The academic blackout on Velikovsky's work in chronology still exists.

In the early 1950s, outright lies were spread about *Worlds in Collision*, and they were repeated in major book reviews. It was a classic case of academic suppression.³⁵ Harlow Shapley, the Harvard astronomer who helped launch the anti-Velikovsky campaign, was still sending out letters in the late 1960s that referred to him a "fraud" and a "charlatan."³⁶ "The Shapleyist proscription of Velikovsky and his revolutionary astronomical concepts," Horace Kallen wrote, "extended to all who, even though doubting or questioning the concepts, did take them seriously. One such was Gordon Atwater, fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, curator of the Planetarium, and chairman of the department of astronomy at New York's Museum of Natural History, who had read the manuscript for Macmillan. Although Atwater was skeptical of many of Velikovsky's findings, and doubted that Venus could have been ejected from Jupiter, he took the records of worldwide catastrophes in historical times to be evidential. He was dismissed from both his positions with the Museum the night before *This Week* published his review of *Worlds in Collision*, in which he urged open-mindedness toward the book. James Putnam, for 25 years with

32. Gary North, "The Epistemological Crisis of American Universities," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976).

33. A list of these courses appears in *Pensée*, III (Winter 1973), pp. 37–38.

34. *Kronos* (1974–88), *Aeon* (1988–2006), *Sis Review* (1975–98), *The Velikovskian* (1978–95).

35. Alfred de Grazia (ed.), *The Velikovsky Affair* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966). No major publisher would touch this scholarly analysis of the Velikovsky thesis and the protest it produced. (<http://bit.ly/VelikovskyAffair>)

36. Horace Kallen, "Shapley, Velikovsky and the Scientific Spirit," *Pensée*, II (May 1973), p. 36. Reprinted in *Velikovsky Reconsidered* (New York: Warner, 1977), p. 53.

Macmillan and the editor who made the contract with Velikovsky, was immediately dismissed from that establishment."³⁷ Yet the book had attained number-one standing on the best-seller list nationally.

I should state at this point that I do not "believe in Velikovsky." I think we need to consider his chronological reconstruction, but I do not take seriously his astronomical explanations—or Whiston's, for that matter—of such Bible events as the parting of the Red Sea (near-collision with Venus), the manna (hydrocarbons floating down from Venus), or the halting of both sun and moon in Joshua's day (another near-collision with Venus). While there may have been astronomical events of unusual magnitude at the time—although the Bible is silent concerning them—they do not explain the historical events. The quest for naturalistic explanations here seems futile, although not necessarily illegitimate. Velikovsky did not show how Venus could have raised the sea, kept the waters high and the walkway dry for hours (Ex. 14:21), and then allowed the split "mountains" of water to crash down just in time to drown the Egyptians. (The evidence from mythology and literature that Velikovsky presents to buttress his case that Venus is a recent addition to the solar system seems plausible to me, but my competence to judge the scientific astronomical matters involved in such a hypothesis is non-existent.) Nevertheless, I regard Velikovsky as one of the most powerful scholars of this or any century, a man whose thorough command of diverse sources in half a dozen arcane scientific and linguistic disciplines bordered on genius or the occult. He is not to be ignored or dismissed lightly.

2. The Need for Reconstruction

Ages in Chaos never received the attention that *Worlds in Collision* did. It is a less comprehensive theory, limited primarily to chronology and the documentary records relating to chronology. He began with a summary of the obvious: the exodus cannot easily be placed in the dynasty of any Pharaoh whose accepted chronology matches the chronology of I Kings 6:1. The Eighteenth Dynasty, which by conventional dating occurred in the fifteenth century B.C., included pharaohs who were very powerful. The documentary record of their reigns provides no evidence of any successful rebellion of slaves. Scholars have long recognized this problem. If this date cannot be accepted, then what about the period in between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth

37. *Ibid.*, p. 40; *Velikovsky Reconsidered*, pp. 62–63.

Dynasties? No good, said Velikovsky. "Stress has also been laid on the fact that Palestine was under Egyptian rule as late as the disturbances of-1358 [1358 B.C.-C.N.], which put an end to the reign of Akhnaton. [Quoting Sir W. M. Flinders Petrie:] 'Joshua did not find any such Egyptian hold during his conquest.' . . . No reference has been found that could be interpreted as even hinting at an exodus during the interregnum between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, and only the fact that the situation was such as to make an exodus possible favors this hypothesis."³⁸

The next theory reduces the age of the Exodus further: it has for its cornerstone a stele of Merneptah, in which this king of the Nineteenth Dynasty says that Palestine "is a widow" and that "the seed of Israel is destroyed." This is regarded as the earliest mention of Israel in an Egyptian document. Merneptah did not perish in the sea, nor did he suffer a debacle; he obviously inflicted a defeat on Israel and ravaged Palestine. The circumstances do not correspond with the pronounced tradition of Israel, but since it is the first mention of Israel, Merneptah is regarded by many as the Pharaoh of the Exodus (about -1220), and Ramses II, his predecessor, as the Pharaoh of the Oppression. Other scholars, however, consider the mention of Israel in Palestine in the days of Merneptah not as a corroboration, but as a refutation of the theory that Merneptah was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. They argue that if he found Israel already in Palestine, he could not have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

A further obstacle to placing the Exodus in the reign of Merneptah has also been emphasized. If he really was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, then the Israelites must have entered Palestine at least a generation later, about-1190 to-1180; on this theory there remains only a century for the events of Judges.³⁹

Velikovsky then quoted from W. F. Albright, who in turn had been cited by Petrie: "Under any chronological system which can reasonably be advanced, the date of Israel's invasion and settlement falls within the period (1500-1100 before the present era) when the country was ruled by Egypt as an essential portion of its Syrian Empire." Then Velikovsky asked some key questions. "But if this is so, how could the Israelites have left Egypt, and, having left Egypt, how could they have entered Palestine? Moreover, why do the books of Joshua and Judges,

38. Immanuel Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952), p. 8.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

which cover four hundred years, ignore the rule of Egypt and, indeed, fail to mention Egypt at all?"⁴⁰

These are obvious questions, but few conservative Bible commentators, with only a few major exceptions, have even hinted to their readers that such questions exist, let alone have solutions. They have remained silent because they have no answers. In fact, Velikovsky himself never did come up with a final position. When did the exodus take place? Velikovsky was never sure. What he was sure of was that either the chronology of Egypt was incorrect or the biblical account is flawed. He concluded his book with this summary: ". . . we still do not know which of the two histories, Egyptian or Israelite, must be readjusted. At the same time we observed how the histories of other ancient countries and peoples accord with either the Israelite or the Egyptian chronology; and how the histories of Cyprus, Mycenae, and Crete, in correlating with one side or the other, create confusion in archaeology and chronology."⁴¹

3. The Ipuwer Papyrus

If an event as discontinuous and comprehensive as the exodus took place, then we might expect to find references to it in Egyptian history. The absence of such a document need not automatically be assumed to be evidence against the exodus, for documents that old rarely survive, and we can also imagine that any document testifying to such a defeat of Egypt's gods would be destroyed by subsequent Egyptians. But such a document does exist. It is called the Ipuwer papyrus, also known as *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Slave*, the title selected by Alan Gardiner for his 1909 translation. It had been acquired by the Leiden Museum of the Netherlands in 1828, and it was translated and studied in the late nineteenth century. This ancient Egyptian document records a series of catastrophes that befell Egypt. Velikovsky offered fourteen pages of parallel references between this document and the account of the judgments in the Book of Exodus. There are some remarkable parallels, including the most startling, a reference to the Nile: "The river is blood" (Papyrus 2:10).⁴²

The Ipuwer document goes on to say: "Nay, but gold and lapis lazuli, silver and turquoise . . . are hung around the necks of slavegirls.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 338.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

But noble ladies walk through the land, and mistresses of houses say: 'Would that we had something we might eat.'⁴³ I am strongly inclined to agree with Courville and Velikovsky: this document was the product of the exodus. But even if it wasn't, it presents a picture of the shock to the Egyptian mind that such an event must have produced.⁴⁴ The gods of Egypt had been laid low; the order of the universe, which had been guaranteed by Pharaoh, had been overturned.

This document is one of the most important pieces of evidence used by Velikovsky in his reconstruction of Egyptian chronology. It offers evidence of a major discontinuity in the static order of Egypt, a break that deeply affected the writer.⁴⁵ Here is a side-by-side comparison produced by Velikovsky in 1973.⁴⁶

D. SOME PARALLEL TEXTS

Exodus 7:21 . . . there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

Papyrus 2:5-6 Plague is throughout the land. Blood is everywhere.

Exodus 7:20 . . . all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.

Papyrus 2:10 The river is blood.

Exodus 7:24 And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river.

Papyrus 2:10 Men shrank from tasting-human beings, and thirst after water.

Exodus 7:21 . . . and the river stank.

Papyrus 3:10-13 That is our water! That is our happiness! What shall we do in respect thereof? All is ruin!

Exodus 9:25 . . . and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake

Papyrus 4:14 Trees are destroyed.
Papyrus 6:1 No fruit nor herbs are

43. Cited by Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1948] 1961), p. 85. Ipuwer's poem is reproduced by Adolph Erman, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, translated by A. M. Blackman (New York: Dutton, 1927), pp. 94ff.

44. The focus of the poem is "the world turned upside down," in effect. The sage complains that slaves and poor people who formerly had nothing are now rich, while the formerly rich are now poor. The slave girls do not appear to have left the nation in a massive exodus. They remain in the land, with the jewels. If this poem is a product of the Hyksos invasion, it indicates that some wealth was still left to the upper-class Egyptians, since they must have had items of value that were later confiscated by poorer people.

45. Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos*, pp. 22-39.

46. Velikovsky, "A Reply to Stiebing," *Pensée*, IV (Winter 1973-74), p. 39.

every tree of the field.

Exodus 9:23-24 . . . the fire ran along the ground . . . there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous.

Exodus 7:21 And the fish that was in the river died.

Exodus 10:15 . . . there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the fields, through all the land of Egypt.

Exodus 9:3 . . . the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle which is in the field . . . there shall be a very grievous murrain.

Exodus 9:19 . . . gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field.

Exodus 9:21 And he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field.

Exodus 10:22 . . . and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:29 And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon.

Exodus 12:30 . . . there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Exodus 12:30 . . . there was a great cry in Egypt.

Exodus 13:21 . . . by day in a pillar of

found . . .

Papyrus 2:10 Forsooth, gates, columns and walls are consumed by fire.

Papyrus 10:3-6 Lower Egypt weeps . . . The entire palace is without revenues. To it belong (by right) wheat and barley, geese and fish.

Papyrus 6:3 Forsooth, grain has perished on every side.

Papyrus 5:12 Forsooth, that has perished which yesterday was seen. The land is left over to its weariness like the cutting of flax.

Papyrus 5:5 All animals, their hearts weep. Cattle moan . . .

Papyrus 9:2-3 Behold, cattle are left to stray, and there is none to gather them together. Each man fetches for himself those that are branded with his name.

Papyrus 9:11 The land is not light . . .

Papyrus 5:3; 5:6 Forsooth, the children of princes are dashed against the walls.

Papyrus 6:12 Forsooth, the children of princes are cast out in the streets.

Papyrus 2:13 He who places his brother in the ground is everywhere.

Papyrus 3:14 It is groaning that is throughout the land, mingled with lamentations.

Papyrus 7:1 Behold, the fire has

a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.

mounted up on high. Its burning goes forth against the enemies of the land.

From the King James Version

From A. Gardiner's translation of the Leiden Papyrus. He did not observe the similarities.

When was the Ipuwer document written? The Egyptologists disagree. Some historians believe that it was written in the period between the Old and the Middle Kingdoms, while Gardiner believed, as Velikovsky also believed, that it was a document from the Hyksos era, at the end of the Middle Kingdom, meaning at the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty.⁴⁷ Non-“Velikovskiyite” John Van Seeters agreed.⁴⁸ Both eras were transitional eras marked by great disruptions.

Is it proper here to use the word “both”? The conventional chronologies of Egypt assume the existence of two great periods of political and economic chaos in Egypt’s early history, one immediately following the Sixth Dynasty, supposedly beginning about 2150 B.C. (late Early Bronze Age) and lasting for perhaps a century,⁴⁹ and the second period, called the Hyksos period, beginning at the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty (or possibly the Fourteenth), also lasting for at least a century, 1670–1570 B.C.⁵⁰ Courville believed that these two chaotic periods were actually the same period: the era of Amalekite domination, which immediately followed the exodus, i.e., after 1492 B.C. Problem: he estimated the Hyksos rule as lasting 430 years, from the exodus almost to the reign of Solomon.⁵¹ This is a very long estimate.

Could there have been an earlier period of political catastrophe? Could Courville’s telescoping of two sets of records into one era be incorrect? We know that the pyramid-building age ended before Moses’ day, and probably before Joseph’s day. There had been a period of feudalism prior to Sesostri III, who Courville believed was the Pharaoh of the oppression. It is easy to imagine some sort of national political disruption that had broken the power of the pyramid pharaohs.

47. Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos*, pp. 49–50.

48. John Van Seeters, “A Date for the ‘Admonitions,’” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, L (1964), pp. 13–23. Predictably, he omitted any reference to Velikovsky. Cf. *Pensée*, III (Winter 1973), pp. 36–37.

49. Siegfried Schwantes, *A Short History of the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 67.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 76. Some Egyptologists believe this era lasted two centuries or more.

51. Donovan Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, p. 124.

Why not two catastrophic periods? The main reason why not: the Early Bronze Age identification of the Ipuwer Papyrus. This seems to be the period of the exodus.

Another major problem for Courville's thesis is that Ipuwer, who lived in the Sixth Dynasty, addressed his lament to Pepi II. Courville argued that the Sixth Dynasty, the Twelfth Dynasty, and the Thirteenth Dynasty all overlapped, because the kings associated with these "dynasties" often were not pharaohs, but were only officials. Thus, we really should not think of these parallel groupings as dynasties. Courville argues that Pepi II was the last significant king of the Sixth Dynasty, whose personal reign was remarkably long and therefore had to stretch into the era of the Hyksos.⁵² He had to conclude this because conventional historians believe that the evidence from Manetho and the Turin Papyrus indicates that Pepi II reigned from age six to age 100, making him the longest-lived ruler in Egyptian history.⁵³ If the Sixth Dynasty overlapped the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties, then Pepi II's reign must have extended into the Hyksos era, since Ipuwer addressed his poem or lament to Pepi II. Therefore, Courville had to conclude that this king, the son of a very powerful ruler whose monuments are found all over Egypt,⁵⁴ was not the Pharaoh of the exodus, or even a Pharaoh at all. This is a major problem with Courville's reconstruction. Could this powerful man have been a subordinate ruler during the reign of a weak Pharaoh, Koncharis, whose reign ended in the Red Sea? This is another reason why I am not yet fully convinced by Courville's arguments. There may be some other way to unscramble the contradictions of Egyptian chronology. Nevertheless, there is much to be said for his thesis, despite some important problems. Courville's thesis is the place where any self-consciously Christian (i.e., anti-evolutionary) Egyptologist should begin his investigations.

E. Courville's Reconstruction: Overlapping Reigns

Courville was not a well-organized writer. His two-volume work, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, is exasperating. Its index is atrocious, its footnotes are difficult to master, it does not stick to a clear-cut chronological development from the front of the book to the rear, it makes continual references to obscure documents, and it never

52. *Ibid.*, I, p. 225.

53. James Henry Breasted, *A History of the Ancient Egyptians* (New York: Scribner's, 1908), pp. 127–28.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

really summarizes the thesis. As editor of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I asked him to produce a summary essay of his thesis for the journal. He submitted an initial manuscript which was barely more organized than his book, but he graciously consented to rewrite it to my specifications, and the result is a good introduction to his research.

1. *The Conservatives' Dilemma*

The exodus, he pointed out, is the first event in Egyptian history for which there is a chronologically detailed parallel in Hebrew history.⁵⁵ Because of the similarity of names, the Rameses of Exodus 1:11 was linked initially to Rameses II, listed by the pre-Christian Egyptian historian Manetho. This later Rameses was part of the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egypt, which is now conventionally dated 1350–1200 B.C. Rameses II has been assigned dates as late as 1292–1226.⁵⁶ Either date makes the reign of Ramses II too late a date for the exodus, according to I Kings 6:1. Courville dated his reign centuries later yet.

Many conservative scholars therefore switched to the early Eighteenth Dynasty kings. But these were powerful kings, and their tombs and mummies still exist. Furthermore, no king named Rameses is known to be of this dynasty. The kings of this dynasty reigned in Thebes, far south of the Delta region. The Delta region is believed to be the area of the ruins of Pithom and Pi-Rameses, of which Exodus speaks, and the Israelites were enslaved near the king's palace (Ex. 1:15–16). The Pharaoh was close by during all the plagues, indicating that the Delta was his full-time residence area.⁵⁷ Courville wrote:

Both the 18th and 19th dynasty settings suffer from the discovery of the mummies of the pharaohs nominated as the pharaoh of the Exodus. It is thus necessary to either deny the death of the Exodus pharaoh in the Red Sea debacle, which view is contradictory to Psalms 136:15, or to assume that the body was recovered and returned to Egypt for burial. This latter explanation is contradictory to Exodus 15:5. Since the king, above all others in the army, would certainly wear armor, he would be among the first to find his final resting place at the bottom of the sea.

Even more traumatic to the 18th dynasty placement of the Exodus is the failure of the Egyptian inscriptions even to suggest that

55. Donovan A. Courville, "A Biblical Reconstruction of Egypt's Chronology," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975), p. 131.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

there was any significant crisis in Egypt at this time. The power and prosperity to which Egypt was elevated in the reign of Thutmose III continued unabated into the reign of Amenhotep II. The attempts to defend this placement of the Exodus have overlooked one important factor—a factor which, standing alone, is adequate to negate this theory as far as meriting serious consideration. This is the well-recognized fact that it would have required far less than the situation described in Scripture to have resulted in a rapid and easy rebellion on the part of the tribute-paying peoples. There would certainly have resulted a complete loss of any empire that Egypt may have controlled at the time.

The empire of Thutmose III extended to the widest limits in all of Egyptian history. All the evidence points to the total absence of any such crisis at the death of Thutmose III. . . .⁵⁸

The opponents of an infallible Bible have recognized these problems, and they have forced baffled conservative commentators to reduce the significance of the exodus to an event “of more manageable proportions.”⁵⁹ In short, conservative Christian historians have been forced by their own chronological presuppositions to retreat from the exodus as an event of God’s massive judgment—an event that God Himself said would be a warning and a testimony to the whole world (Ex. 9:16). Courville cited E. Eric Peet: “. . . if the numbers of the [Hebrew] emigrants were nearly 2,000,000, which is a legitimate deduction from Ex. 12:37, the movement was one which would have shaken Egypt to its very foundations, and which, even if it had failed to be recorded in one of the numerous monuments which have survived in Egypt, would at any rate have left some unmistakable impression in Egyptian history.”⁶⁰

Though Courville did not use the following metaphor, it is clear to me that the conservative defenders of the Bible are as trapped in the chains of Egyptian chronology as the Israelites were trapped by Pharaoh’s taskmasters. They, too, are afraid to depart from Egypt, with its leeks, onions, and tenured teaching positions, for the wilderness of an unknown chronology seems too great for them.

Courville is the closest thing to a Moses of biblical chronology that my generation has seen. Rather than making Israel’s history the reference point for the chronologies of the ancient world, humanist schol-

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

60. *Idem*. Peet, *Egypt and the Old Testament* (1924), pp. 105-6.

ars have clung to the unquestionably defective chronology of Egypt, a society that rejected the very idea of linear time and meaning for history. They will not subject themselves to the authority of God or His Bible; they prefer the bondage of Egypt. So do most Christian scholars, who are fearful of alienating their methodological masters. But Courville, a retired Ph.D. in chemistry, had nothing to lose. He and Velikovsky, like Moses and Aaron, marched into the camp of the enemy to challenge the priests of their generation. Courville was armed initially only with the "rod" of I Kings 6:1, but it has repeatedly swallowed the chronological snakes of the new Egyptian magicians.

2. The Basis of His Reconstruction

Courville's two-volume reconstruction is incredibly detailed, and it would be beneficial for scholars to study it carefully. But for this appendix, it is only necessary to reprint his two tables that compare the conventional chronology of the dynasties, which are assumed to be consecutive, with his reconstruction which argues that documents that describe Egyptian history describe overlapping reigns and overlapping dynasties. Whole segments of Egyptian history are "counted twice," in other words. The conventional numbering of the dynasties is therefore meaningless, though he retains the conventional numbers for the purpose of making chronological comparisons.

Notice, for example (see the following two pages), that Dynasty XIX was short-lived and was a mere offshoot of Dynasty XVIII. It ended before Dynasty XVIII did. We are now back to the observation made by the contributor to the New Bible Dictionary:

In Near Eastern works involving chronology, it is important to realize that ancient scribes did not draw up synchronistic lists as is done today. They simply listed each series of rulers and reigns separately, in succession on the papyrus or tablet. Synchronisms were to be derived from special historiographical works, not the king-lists or narratives serving other purposes. An excellent example of this is the Turin Papyrus of Kings from Egypt. It lists at great length all five Dynasties XIII to XVII in successive groups, totalling originally over 150 rulers and their reigns accounting for at least 450 years. However, it is known from other sources that all five Dynasties, the 150-odd rulers and 450-odd regnal years alike, must all fit inside the 234 years from c. 1786 to c. 1552 B.C.: rarely less than two series, and sometimes three series, of rulers are known to have reigned contem-

poraneously.⁶¹

Table I
EGYPTIAN CHRONOLOGY
Traditional

| Dynasties by Number | Dates and Notes |
|--------------------------------|--|
| I | There are no dates of general agreement. Dates are assigned by individual scholars as each sees best. Some continue to recognize beginnings from 3400 B.C., others from 2850-2800 B.C. The period for the first eleven dynasties ends with the year 1991 B.C., regarded as astronomically fixed. |
| XI | |
| XII | 1991–1788 |
| XIII | 1788–1688 |
| XV with XVI + XIV | 1688–1588 XV and XVI are Hyksos dynasties. XIV is a native line under Hyksos. |
| XVII | 1588–? |
| XVIII | 1580–1350 |
| XIX | 1350–1200 |
| XX | 1200–1090 |
| XXI | 1090–950 |
| XXII | 950–750 |
| XXIII | 750–718 |
| XXIV | 718–712 |
| XXV | 712–663 |
| XXV | 663–525 |

(reprinted from *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, *op. cit.* pp. 140-41.)

61. *New Bible Dictionary*, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Table II
EGYPTIAN CHRONOLOGY
Reconstruction

| Dynasties by Number | Dates and Notes | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| I | c. 2125–1880 | III is parallel to late I starting about one century later than I. |
| IV | c. 1880–1780 | First half of II is parallel with IV. |
| V | c. 1780–1640 | Last half of II is parallel with V. |
| XII | 1692–1480 | II and V extend briefly into the era of XII. VI is parallel with XII but starts about 75 years later and extends about 75 years past the end of XII. XIII is composed of subrulers and officials under XII. |
| XVI | 1445–1028 | XVI is Hyksos, ruling parallel with XV, also Hyksos. XIV, VII to X were local dynasties ruling by permission of the Hyksos. XVII was composed of the kings during the war of liberation. |
| XVIII | 1028–700 | The dates are for the recomposed XVIII. XIX is but a brief offshoot from XVIII dated 840-790 B. c. XXIII is a line of usurper kings ruling locally, 776-730 B.C. XX overlaps late XVIII as recomposed and was fragmented after the rule of Rameses III. |
| XXI | 710–? | The fragmented rule of XX was in competition with XXI, composed itself of a dual line of High Priests ruling from Thebes, the other at Tanis. Dynasty XXI soon took over the fragments of XX. XXII was Assyrian and competed for control with XXIV, XXV and early XXVI. |
| XXVI | 663–525 | XXIII to XXVI retain the dates as traditionally held. |

Courville claimed that his reconstruction provides solutions to over one hundred chronological problems that now bedevil conservative Old Testament scholars.⁶² "By the reconstruction, the Exodus incident is set at the point of the Hyksos invasion of Egypt. This setting explains the enigmatic statement of Josephus⁶³ to the effect that the Hyksos were able to take over Egypt without a battle. Egypt had been beaten to her knees by the disasters resulting from the plagues. The slaves were gone, the army was gone, the king was gone, and there was not even an heir apparent to take over the control."⁶⁴

Courville offered a comprehensive comparison of the conventional dates of Old Testament history and his reconstructed chronology. It should be used as a guide to both his book and the work of Velikovsky.

One of the more convincing arguments used by Courville to defend his thesis of a single period of political disintegration relates the destruction of Canaan to the chronology of Egypt. The archaeology of Canaan indicates a universal transformation of the various city-states in the *late Early Bronze* period, or about the twenty-first century, B.C., according to conventional chronology. This conventional chronology is erroneously dated, Courville argued; the date of the Early Bronze age should be placed in the mid-fifteenth century, B.C. He discussed this in chapter VI of Volume I. There is a correspondence, Courville argued, of archaeological evidence: the end of the Old Kingdom, and therefore the beginning of the "first" period of disruption, came in *this same late Early Bronze* age, according to conventional chronologies of Egypt. Therefore, he concluded, the period after the exodus is *the sole period of disruption*.

I have already mentioned a difficulty with this argument. The pharaohs of what scholars have called the Sixth Dynasty, especially Pepi I, were powerful kings, according to Egyptian archaeological evidence. Courville had to argue that these Sixth Dynasty kings were actually subordinate officials under the rule of what scholars have called the Twelfth Dynasty pharaohs—Sesostris I, Sesostris III, Amenemhet III, etc.—and he also argued that the Thirteenth Dynasty paralleled the Twelfth. In fact, he argued that the Sixth Dynasty kings actually survived as subordinate rulers under the Amalekites (Hyksos).⁶⁵ That such powerful kings were subordinates who survived the fall of two

62. "Biblical Reconstruction," p. 143.

63. Josephus, *Against Apion*, Bk. I, paragraph 14.

64. Courville, "Biblical Reconstruction," p. 144.

65. Courville, *Exodus Problem*, 1, pp. 225–26.

dynasties, and even the fall of Egypt, is difficult to imagine. We need generations of well-trained Egyptologists and Palestine archaeologists to examine these issues, but without operating *a priori* in terms of the conventional chronologies, and without the evolutionary assumptions that undergird the “Bronze Age-Iron Age” classification system.

F. The Invasion of Canaan

Stan Vaninger wrote a follow-up to Courville’s reconstruction. He surveyed the evidence, as of 1980, concerning Canaanite archaeology. The dating of numerous “digs”—the holes in the ground that constitute the humanist world’s favorite refutations of biblical history—points to a tremendous disruption in the late Early Bronze Age. In city after city, there are signs of burning and destruction, indicating an invasion of the region by a militarily powerful outside army. The conventional dating of this period is 2300 to 2200 B.C. Thus, the scholars continue to point to this disruption as having taken place at least seven centuries before the earliest date possible for the exodus. Furthermore, there is no archaeological evidence of any disruption in the fifteenth century through the thirteenth century, B. C., the conventional dates of the exodus. Thus, the scholars have concluded, the events described in the Book of Joshua as being a momentous victory for the Hebrews are obviously exaggerated. The invasion was a slow process, with the Hebrews being steadily assimilated by the existing Canaanite cultures. This story is given for Jericho, Ai, and Gilgal.⁶⁶ Archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, who did the major work on Jericho, summarized the evidence: “The final end of the Early Bronze Age civilization came with catastrophic completeness. The last of the Early Bronze Age walls of Jericho was built in a hurry, using old and broken bricks, and was probably not completed when it was destroyed by fire . . . all the finds show that there was an absolute break, and that a new people took the place of the earlier inhabitants. Every town in Palestine that has so far been investigated shows this same break.”⁶⁷

Even more revealing is a 1983 article in the conventional quasi-scholarly journal, *Biblical Archaeology Review*: “The Mysterious MBI

66. Stan F. Vaninger, “Historical Revisionism: Archaeology and the Conquest of Canaan,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VII (Summer 1980), pp. 123–24, 128. (<http://bit.ly/Vaninger>)

67. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land* (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 134; cited by Vaninger, *ibid.*, p. 120. He referred to similar statements by G. Ernest Wright and William Dever: p. 120n.

[Early Middle Bronze Age] People.” This period is dated by the author from 2200 B.C. to 2000 B.C. Who were these people? The author, Rudolph Cohen, speculated: “I would suggest that they were a people who migrated slowly, from the south or southwest, into the Central Negev of Palestine. I would further suggest that the dim, historical memory of their journey powerfully influenced the Biblical author who described Israel’s entry into Canaan. In fact, these MBI people may be the Israelites whose famous journey from Egypt to Canaan is called the exodus.”⁶⁸

It is interesting, however, to note that this migratory drift, as I have reconstructed it, bears a striking similarity to that of the Israelites’ flight from Egypt to the Promised Land, as recorded in the Book of exodus. . . . The establishment of the MBI settlements directly over the ruins of the EBII EBIII sites in the Central Negev is consistent with the tradition that the Israelites dwelled in the area previously inhabited by their Amalekite foes (Deuteronomy 25:17–19). The north-eastward migration of the MBI population into Transjordan has parallels in the Biblical recollection that the Israelites remained in Moab before crossing the Jordan River and laying siege to Jericho (Deuteronomy 3:29). In this connection, it is interesting to note that Early Bronze Age Jericho was destroyed by a violent conflagration, and the site was thinly reoccupied by MBI newcomers, who were apparently unaccustomed to urban dwellings.

In the central and northern parts of Israel, the EBIII urban culture flourished. The MBI invaders in the south overwhelmed this urban Canaanite civilization and destroyed their cities but thereafter persisted in a semi-nomadic way of life. This bears a striking similarity to the tradition of Joshua’s devastating campaign against the Canaanite centers in central Palestine and his ban on rebuilding some of them (e.g., Joshua 8:28). Both Jericho and Ai were fortified cities at the end of the Early Bronze Age. According to the Biblical account, they were both destroyed by the Israelites; God specifically instructed that these cities should not be rebuilt. Interestingly enough, after the EBIII destruction of Jericho and Ai, both cities lay in ruins for hundreds of years.⁶⁹

He states that scholars agree that the pottery and other aspects of their culture differ significantly from what went before. These new people were not primarily urban, as their predecessors and followers

68. Rudolph Cohen, “The Mysterious MBI People,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, IX (July/August 1983), p. 16.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

(2000 to 1550 B.C.) were. It was William F. Albright, the author reminded us, who concluded that the pottery of these people resembled more closely the Middle Bronze Age people who followed them than the pottery of those who preceded them.⁷⁰

This is not surprising to those who understand that these MBI people were the invading Israelites, and the MBII people were their more urban descendants. Conventional scholars refuse to acknowledge that the solution to these enigmas is found in the reconstructed chronology of Velikovsky and Courville. The conventional chronology has inserted an extra seven centuries into the record. What took place in the fifteenth century before Christ in Egypt and Canaan took place in the late Early Bronze Age (EBIII) era or early Middle Bronze (MBI).

All Cohen could do was to appeal to the memory of these MBI people in the mind of the writer of the biblical account.

The migration of the MBI population from the southwest and their conquest of the Early Bronze civilization evidently made a very deep impression, and the memory of these events was preserved from one generation to the next. The late Yohanon Aharoni made a similar suggestion when he noted that the Biblical tradition concerning the destruction of the two Canaanite cities Arad and Horma could not be placed, archaeologically speaking, in the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age (there were no cities there then)—although this is the period to which the arrival of the Hebrews is normally ascribed—but had remarkable parallels in MBII, when these two strategic outposts in the BeerSheva basin guarded the country's southern approaches. (Aharoni identified Biblical Arad with MBII Tel Malhata and Horma with MBII Tel Masos.) He maintained that the recollection of these two important sites was perpetuated among the local populace and appeared in the Biblical saga of the conquest. The similarity between the course of the MBI migration and the route of the exodus seems too close to be coincidental, and a comparable process may have operated here. The Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.)—the period usually associated with the Israelites' flight from Egypt—is archaeologically unattested in the Kadesh-Barnea area (as elsewhere in the Central Negev, for that matter), but MBI remains abound and seem to provide a concrete background for the traditions of settlement.⁷¹

70. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

G. Egypt and Crete

We would be wise to understand how modern archaeologists operate, and the extent to which they are tied to Egypt's chronology by way of Charles Darwin. I have discussed the origin of the labyrinth design in Chapter 2 and in Appendix C. The link between Egypt's labyrinth and Crete's is recognized by informed archaeologists. Sir Arthur Evans excavated the "palace" of Minos from about 1902 to 1930. He was an evolutionist. He used the evolutionary speculations of anthropologists Edward Tylor and Lewis Morgan (as did Frederick Engels) to provide a stage theory of historic development. Both of these scholars became prominent in the 1870s.

This stage theory—savagery, barbarism, and civilization—was first developed in the early nineteenth century by Swedish scholar Sven Nilsson, who wrote in the 1830s.⁷² But where did Nilsson get the idea? From Danish scholar Christian Thomson.⁷³ Thomson came up with the idea of the division of ages by construction materials—stone, bronze, and iron. In 1816, he had been given the difficult task of sorting out huge quantities of artifacts possessed by the Royal Commission for the Preservation and Collection of Antiquities. This collection was jumbled together. What came first? He thought about it for three years, and then came up with the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age classification. There were few references to iron implements, he knew, prior to 800 B.C. Copper and bronze were mentioned much earlier. So, the bronze age must have come later. Common sense told him that the stone age was earliest of all. The first scholars outside Denmark who accepted this classification scheme were the Swedes and Germans. At mid-century, British scholars still refused to accept it. A decade later, after Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the idea spread rapidly.⁷⁴

Evans used this assumption of cultural evolution—from primitive to complex, from Bronze Age to Iron Age, from savagery to civilization—to explain the "palace." R. A. McNeal was forthright: ". . . I have said, in effect, that he went out to the hill of Knossos with certain ideas in his head, and that he excavated the site in the light of his previous intellectual commitments. In other words, the objects as they came out of the ground were compelled (by force if necessary!) to fit Evans' prior

72. R. A. McNeal, "The Legacy of Arthur Evans," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, VI (1973), p. 207.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

74. Barry Fell, *Saga America* (New York: Times Books, 1974), pp. 29–30, 43–44.

ideas.”⁷⁵

By now Evans had made two very important assumptions, first that the civilization of the Cretan Bronze Age was a discreet [typo: he meant discrete—G.N.] entity, and second that it could be considered in terms of youth, maturity, and old age. Thus far little has been said about the artifacts, and one may wonder whether they have not become lost in the metaphorical shuffle. The point is, that Evans fitted the artifacts to his particular organic model of reality, and the way in which he did so was perfectly ingenious. Faced with the necessity of forging a link between the guiding abstraction and the artifacts which could be apprehended empirically, he wove into his synthesis another set of ideas, this time concerned with the nature of Minoan art. Evans looked at the artifacts and divided them into three classes corresponding to the tripartite scheme which he already had in mind. . . . In this way Evans connected the biological metaphor with the archaeological artifacts which he pulled from the ground. The result was a sequence, a relative chronology.⁷⁶

He then divided the types of pottery into a scheme: Stone Age; Minoan: Early Minoan, Middle Minoan, Late Minoan; and Iron Age. He did the same with art. As he excavated, the stratigraphic evidence was lost.⁷⁷ McNeal refused to say that this was deliberate, or that Evans falsified the record. Others have cast doubt on his handling of the evidence and his creativity in reconstructing the “palace,” especially the paintings.⁷⁸ As McNeal said of the early archaeologists, “In their rush to construct elaborate evolutionary sequences, they tended to forget the strata. Or, to put the matter another way, there was a regrettable habit of interpreting the strata in terms of sequences previously constructed on solely evolutionary criteria.”⁷⁹

This practice probably arose from the mistaken idea, already noted, that pottery types could be stacked end-to-end like railroad cars. We know now that pottery does not go in and out of existence in just this way. A new style does not necessarily begin where another leaves off. Evans thought that only one style marked a given period. But quite apart from the existence of gradual transitions between different styles, we find totally different types in simultaneous use.

75. McNeal, p. 209.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 216–17.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

78. Hans Georg Wunderlich, *The Secret of Crete* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 79–82.

79. McNeal, p. 219.

Since potters are both conservative and progressive, old styles can be retained long after new ones are in vogue. There is thus a definite danger of refining the relative sequence too much and of marking off stages where no stages ever existed.⁸⁰

Cottrell, however, praised Evans for his attention to pottery and the finely drawn divisions he makes between styles.⁸¹ In this regard, something else needs to be noted: *the dominance of the presumed chronology of Egypt*. Cottrell wrote of this achievement, and he used italics to emphasize the point: "Evans' achievement was to mark off the *three great periods of Minoan civilization which could be correlated with the three great periods of Egyptian civilization*—the Old Kingdom, the Middle Empire and the New Empire."⁸² He immediately cited Evans' own *Palace of Minos* to show that Evans recognized that this was precisely what he had "proven."

Here is the great irony. Evans did not recognize that the "palace" was not a palace, but was a labyrinth structure for the Cretan cult of the dead. Refusing to recognize that the mummy-preserving air vents were not "indoor plumbing outlets," and maintaining that sarcophagi were "bathtubs," he then argued that this "high technology" civilization was unique, with no previous origins in Greek culture, and one that disappeared almost overnight. After all, no subsequent civilization possessed such high technology. He offered several possible explanations for the disappearance of this unique civilization, such as an earthquake, but geologist Wunderlich showed that the geological evidence indicates that this explanation is highly unlikely, and so are his other explanations.⁸³

Evans tried for decades to decipher the "Minoan" language, and failed because he refused to see that it was related closely to Greek. He literally invented a civilization, "Minoan," where no independent civilization ever existed. In short, Evans didn't have any idea of what he was doing. And then, just to make things complete, he imported the erroneous three-kingdom Egyptian classification scheme used by modern Egyptologists to explain Egyptian history, and thereby helped to "prove" his three-stage theory of "Minoan" history. Such is the fate of those who adopt a cultural version of the paradigm of evolution.

80. *Idem*.

81. Leonard Cottrell, *The Bull of Minos* (New York: Rinehart, 1958), pp. 138–39.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

83. Wunderlich, *Secret of Crete*, ch. 11.

Conclusion

The testimony of the Bible is clear: 480 years before Solomon began to construct the temple, Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt. The archaeological evidence points to a late Early Bronze Age/Middle Bronze Age conquest of Canaan by a people who invaded from the southwest. The problem for conventional archaeologists and historians is that their dating of the Bronze Age places the archaeological evidence much earlier than fifteenth-century Egypt and therefore fifteenth-century Mediterranean civilization (which is keyed to Egypt).

The Bible is correct; the conventional scholars are incorrect. They have used the flawed chronological reconstruction of Egypt's history to govern their dating of the metallic ages. They have refused to go to the Bible for their chronological keying device. Instead, they use a mistaken chronology keyed to Egypt. It is therefore time for Christian scholars to abandon Egypt at last, and to head for the Promised Land, even if they must wander in the academic wilderness for a generation or two.

APPENDIX B

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF DECLINE

Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle (Deut. 7:14).

Population stagnation, prior to the fulfilling of the dominion covenant, is a curse. The curse aspect of population stagnation is recognized in almost all societies except the modern humanistic West. As British economist P. T. Bauer pointed out, the word “barren” is universally recognized as unfavorable.”¹ *Population stagnation is a restriction on the ability of men to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant.* Christians should not accept the reigning presuppositions of the humanist intellectuals regarding the supposed evils of rapid population growth. If the society in which such growth is taking place is God-fearing and biblical law-honoring, population growth is a sign of God’s favor and should be regarded as *confirmation of God’s covenant*. It is a blessing.

In contrast to the biblical view of population growth is the message of a fund-raising letter sent out by the lobbying organization, Zero Population Growth, and signed by biologist Paul Ehrlich, author of the best-selling book, *The Population Bomb*. His letter blamed the social evils of our era on population growth. “To name just a few of these dilemmas: food shortages, polluted air, oil shortages, depleted energy supplies, lowered standards of education, escalating crime rates, excessive bureaucracy, economic instability, housing shortages, and inadequate health care. There is one basic condition that contributes to all these predicaments. It’s this: We’re overpopulated.”²

The assumption of Western intellectuals concerning demographics is that population growth threatens per capita income. “More

1. P. T. Bauer, *Equality, the Third World and Economic Delusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 62.

2. Cited in *Review of the News* (August 15, 1979), p. 29.

mouths to feed” means more starvation. But this assumption is not correct. It is not the number of mouths to feed that is significant economically; rather, it is the *productivity* available to feed those mouths. This was a continuing theme in Bauer’s books. He wrote:

Rapid population growth has not been an obstacle to sustained economic advance either in the Third World or in the West. Between the 1890s and 1930s the sparsely populated area of Malaysia, with hamlets and fishing villages, was transformed into a country with large cities, extensive agricultural and mining operations and extensive commerce. The population rose from about one and a half to about six million; the number of Malays increased from about one to about two and a half million. The much larger population had much higher material standards and lived longer than the small population of the 1890s. Since the 1950s rapid population increase in densely-populated Hong Kong and Singapore has been accompanied by large increases in real income and wages. The population of the Western world has more than quadrupled since the middle of the eighteenth century. Real income per head is estimated to have increased by a factor of five or more. Most of the increase in incomes took place when population increased as fast as, or faster than, in the contemporary less developed world.³

Bauer’s focus is on character, attitudes, and institutional arrangements, not natural (physical) resources. How else can we explain the spectacular increase in per capita income that residents of Hong Kong have experienced? “The number of people who can live in any area at the specified standard of living is not determined by the extent of land or of other physical resources available there. It depends very largely on the personal qualities, social institutions and mores and political arrangements of the population, on the state of technology and on external market conditions for imports and exports.”⁴

Thus, the guilt felt by the West’s intellectuals concerning population growth in the Third World is valid, but not because “we” taught the Third World about modern medicine and other life-saving technologies. Unquestionably, we did send them key life-saving technologies. Which technologies? I am not referring here to DDT and other pesticides, important as these may be in extending life expectancy by killing disease-bearing insects (at least until the insect species produce pesti-

3. Bauer, *Equality*, p. 43.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

cide-resistant progeny).⁵ I have in mind the two greatest life-extending technologies that the West has exported to the Third World, the wire-mesh window and door screen (post-1860s) and the elementary public health measure, the separation of latrines from close proximity to community water supplies, a practice known since Alexander the Great,⁶ and one which was required (though without a biological explanation) of the Hebrews, at least with respect to battlefield conditions (Deut. 23:12–13). These technologies should not be the basis of guilt among Western intellectuals. The intellectuals should feel guilty only because they—Western educators, politicians, missionaries, and propagandists—have persuaded Third World leaders that socialism and economic interventionism are the most productive, or at least the most moral, of all forms of social and economic organization. It is socialism, with its denial of personal responsibility—at least the personal responsibility of the poor—that threatened the per capita wealth of underdeveloped nations, not population growth as such.

A. The Ultimate Resources

The ultimate resources for man are God's four gifts: land, life, law, and time. These were God's gifts in the garden, to which regeneration has been added as a gift in the post-Fall world. "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers" (Deut. 8:1). It could not be any clearer. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).⁷ God's covenant establishes the possibility of *positive feedback*, or what is also called *compound growth*.

Population growth is specifically stated to be a covenantal blessing.

5. The "defeat" of malaria-carrying mosquitos by DDT in the mid-twentieth century was apparently only a temporary tactical victory. The disease has bounced back since the late 1960s. It requires a full-time campaign to control the mosquitos. Governments are not always willing to finance such campaigns, especially in Third World nations. Julian Simon argued that the one remedy that may be able to work is high human population density, which reduces the habitat for the mosquitos. Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 253.

6. Peter Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 330.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

To deny this is to deny God's word. There can be no compromise here. Therefore, we should expect to find evidence that population growth is, *in the long run*, accompanied by other economic benefits. Contrary to the assertion of the rebellious former slaves of the wilderness era (Ex. 14:11–12; 17:1–3; Num. 20:3–4), God does not bring His people out into the wilderness to kill them. Contrary to the hand-wringing of ethically rebellious slaves of our day, God does not multiply the seed of righteous mankind in order to bring a population catastrophe upon them.

1. *Simon's Thesis*

Professor Julian Simon of the University of Illinois wrote an influential book, published by Princeton University Press in 1981, called *The Ultimate Resource*. What is this resource? Human creativity. Simon examined the statistical and theoretical evidence of the various "doomsday books" published around the world, but especially in the United States, after 1964. He found all of them to be misleading forecasts: the coming famine, the coming pollution catastrophe (dead seas, dead lakes, cancer-producing air), the population explosion, the coming extinction of natural resources (especially "nonrenewable" resources), the energy crisis, and the economic collapse.

What is the evidence? Food is getting cheaper, and has been for centuries under capitalism. Economic catastrophes do happen, but in the modern world they are almost always the product of government planning and mismanagement. An increasing population, if coupled with capitalist institutions, has invariably brought with it economic advance and an increasing per capita income within two generations and often within one generation. The problem, he said, is not that Western populations are increasing, but rather that *Westerners are not reproducing themselves*. Birth rates in many Western nations are below the reproduction rate of 2.1 children per woman. The bulk of the historical evidence points to the fact that shrinking populations bring with them economic stagnation and declining per capita income.

Here is the main thesis of the book: "It is your mind that matters economically, as much or more than your mouth or hands. In the long run, the most important economic effect of population size and growth is the contribution of additional people to our stock of useful knowledge. And this contribution is large enough in the long run to overcome all the costs of population growth. This is a strong state-

ment, but the evidence for it seems very strong.”⁸ The evidence is very strong—far stronger than anything the zero population growth propagandists have been able to muster. “More mouths” means, eventually, a larger population base from which minds will emerge. *More minds mean more creativity*, despite the short-run limitation that hypnotizes the doom-sayers: “more births mean more mouths to feed” and therefore supposedly also mean reduced per capita investment, leading to low or zero economic growth.

This latter approach is illustrated by the booklet published by the World Bank, an international organization that gives confiscated tax dollars and borrowed money to Third World nations. The booklet announced: “There may historically have been countries which could have been considered under-populated, in terms of the economy’s ability to make effective use of its natural resources. Perhaps the United States was in this position at some point in the past. However, instances when the addition of more people to the labor force led to increases in labor productivity and income per head must have been few in the past and are virtually nonexistent today.”⁹ The words “may,” “perhaps,” and “must have been” indicate how little evidence the author has for any of his conclusions.

2. *Overstating His Case*

On occasion, Simon needlessly overstated his case for economic growth. For instance, he argued that progress has been made in controlling “point sources” of water pollution, such as municipal and industrial sewage and chemical waste.¹⁰ This was true, but it is the non-point sources of water pollution, especially agricultural—topsoil runoff, animal urea runoff—that are the biggest problem. Here, there has been little progress.¹¹ But his main point is correct: that with freedom, future-orientation, and capital to finance human creativity, there probably will be economic growth and increases in per capita output (and therefore income).

Does this mean that there are no limits to growth? He argues that there are in principle none. This is clearly incorrect. The post-Fall world is under a curse. We know there are limits to growth because

8. Simon, *Ultimate Resource*, p. 196.

9. *Population Planning: Sector Working Paper* (March 1972), p. 17.

10. Simon, p. 133.

11. Jerome W. Milliman, “Can Water Pollution Policy Be Efficient?” *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), p. 190. (<http://bit.ly/MillimanWater>)

there are prices. At zero price, there is more demand for than supply of a scarce economic resource, meaning virtually all resources. *To argue for a zero-limits world is to argue for a zero-price world.* This was the eschatological argument of the Communists and “radical” political economists.¹² Simon knew this. Yet his language often points to a zero-price world which has been the dream of revolutionary communist visionaries for millennia.

Sometimes Simon guarded his language. At other times he didn’t. For example, in his conclusion, he wrote that “there are no meaningful limits to the continuation of this process,” meaning a rising standard of living.¹³ He rejected the use of the word “finite” because of the misconceptions associated with it. For instance, “finite” is not meaningful because “we cannot say with any practical surety where the bounds of a relevant resource system lie, or even if there are any bounds.”¹⁴ He was correct: we cannot say where the bounds lie. He was also incorrect: we can say that all resources are bounded. This is why we must pay to gain access to them.

3. *The Irreplaceable Resource: Time*

Simon was a humanist who sought to escape the curse-induced limits to growth. *He was attempting to escape the logic of all growth, for it points to a coming judgment and the end of time.* A 1% per year expansion of today’s human population would produce over 80 trillion people in a thousand years. There are, in short, limits to growth. There is finitude. We are not God; we are limited creatures. Our creativity is the creativity of creatures, a kind of “re-creativity.”

The Bible says that the primary limit in the post-Fall world is time: *God’s final judgment is coming.* Simon categorically and foolishly denied this. Speaking of the increase of total resources over time the product of superior insight, better technology, and capital accumulation, he wrote: “But, you ask, how long can this go on? Surely it can’t go on forever, can it? In fact there is no logical or physical reason why the process cannot do just that, go on forever.”¹⁵ In this sense, Simon was “whistling past the graveyard”—the entropy-bound cosmic grave-

12. “The Unorthodox Ideas of Radical Economists Win a Wider Hearing,” *Wall Street Journal* (Feb. 11, 1972); cf. *Business Week* (March 18, 1972), pp. 72, 74.

13. Simon, p. 345.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

yard.¹⁶ The process cannot go on forever, or anything like forever. The universe is bounded. Furthermore, this earth is bounded, and even 1% per annum growth in the world's population will press against these limits within a few generations. Eventually, population growth will end, thereby fulfilling one aspect of the dominion covenant. Other forms of growth will also end.

Simon's book is an intellectual overreaction. Nevertheless, his arguments are correct within the God-imposed and (humanly speaking) indefinite limitations of the creation. We do not live in an infinite environment, but we do live in an indefinitely limited environment. It is not infinite, but its boundaries cannot be known by a government committee. There are limits on men's creativity, but men do not know where these limits are. God does know, and therefore it is incorrect to deny the limitations of finitude. On the other hand, a state bureaucracy does not know, and therefore it is misleading (and state-enhancing) to speak of the need for limiting growth by political action.

B. Biblical Ethics vs. Stagnation

The answer, then, is to allow men's creativity to flow, and to allow profit-seeking investors to seek out previously undetected opportunities. This fusion of inventive genius and private capital accumulation and investment is basic to the institutional framework of the growth process. But most important of all is the *ethical framework*, which in turn is the source of the institutional framework. Christian economic and social analysis must postulate a relatively close relationship in history between ethics and economic performance. First, there is a relationship between external righteousness and external blessings. This includes population growth. Second, we must never forget the relationship between ethical rebellion and economic stagnation or even "negative income," as the economists like to put it, i.e., between evil acts and falling per capita income for a society. What we should argue, contrary to Simon, is that there are several "ultimate resources": (1) God's gift of life in the creation; (2) His gift to the creation of an assistant made in His image, man, who is subordinately creative (Simon's "ultimate resource"); (3) His gift of land (natural resources)—the creation itself; (4) His gift of time; (5) His gift of law; and (6) His gift of regeneration and sanctification to fallen humanity.

16. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

Simon's thesis, therefore, is flawed by his humanism. Nevertheless, his thesis is not nearly so flawed as his humanist opponents' theory, namely, that compound economic growth is not the proper standard, but is instead some sort of cosmic hubris on the part of man, his defiance of the laws of an entropic cosmos.¹⁷ They assume that finitude is primary rather than ethics, that entropy is the fundamental reality rather than regeneration, sanctification, and blessing. His opponents assume that capitalism is evil because it provides the legal framework for long-term economic growth, and thereby encourages such growth. Capitalism does precisely that, of course, but the Christian response should be that this is one of the reasons why *capitalism is a God-ordained and God-required form of economic organization*. It is not capitalism that is innately evil, but rather the zero-growth ideology.

C. The Legacy of Malthus

Some have termed the fear of population growth "neo-Malthusianism."¹⁸ Thomas Malthus, a late-eighteenth-century cleric, amateur demographer, and economist,¹⁹ wrote his enormously influential (and originally anonymous) book, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, in 1798.²⁰ In it, he made a series of dire analyses and prophecies concerning overpopulation and looming food shortages—prophecies that he revised downward in later editions of his book.²¹ Unfortunately, his nineteenth-century followers ignored his later revisions.²²

The most famous—and erroneous—of Malthus' observations is this: the means of subsistence increases arithmetically ("1, 2, 3, 4, 5. . ."), while all species have a tendency to increase geometrically ("2, 4, 8, 16, 32. . .").²³ There is no evidence for the existence of these numerical relationships.²⁴ Most important, we cannot measure a *fixed*

17. Jeremy Rifkin, *Entropy: A New World View* (New York: Bantam, 1980). For a my refutation of Rifkin, see *Is the World Running Down?*

18. For example, B. Bruce-Briggs, "Against the Neo-Malthusians," *Commentary* (July 1974).

19. In 1804, he became the very first person to hold a chair in political economy, at the newly founded East India College. He filled this post until his death in 1834. William Petersen, *Population*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 142.

20. Like the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), which also became influential, the first edition was published anonymously.

21. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Knopf, 1984), pp. 113–22.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 122–32.

23. See Petersen, *Population*, p. 149.

24. Himmelfarb, p. 127.

“tendency”—and tendencies were all that he ever claimed for his theory²⁵—to geometrical expansion of population in that crucial species, humanity.

Malthus’ theory was refuted in the industrial West by three developments: (1) contraceptive technologies; (2) even earlier, by the very means of restraint he recommended, late marriages; and (3) the rise of scientific agriculture, by which mankind multiplied food even faster than man multiplied himself. Malthus began to recognize this in later editions of his book. He wrote in the final chapter of the last edition: “From a review of the state of society in former periods compared with the present, I should certainly say that the evils resulting from the principle of population have rather diminished than increased, even under the disadvantage of an almost total ignorance of the real cause. And if we can indulge the hope that this ignorance will be gradually dissipated, it does not seem unreasonable to expect that they will be still further diminished.”²⁶ It should also be understood that he was utterly opposed to abortion, contraceptive technologies, and other “mechanical” means of reducing the birth rate. In this sense, “neo-Malthusians” have recommended policies totally at odds with his.²⁷

The influence of Malthus in discussions of population theory has been enormous. Independently, both Darwin and A. R. Wallace came to their theory of “evolution through natural selection” by reading Malthus’ insight that populations are constantly pressing against the means of subsistence.²⁸ In economics, with the exception of Marx,²⁹ the Malthusian perspective led to the “dismal science” (as Carlyle called it). Classical economic theory during the first half of the nine-

25. Antony Flew, “Introduction,” Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (New York: Penguin, [1970] 1982), pp. 19–21.

26. Cited in Warren S. Thompson, *Population Problems*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1942), p. 29.

27. Petersen, *Population*, pp. 150–52.

28. Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Journal of the Linnean Society* (1858); reprinted in Philip Appleman (ed.), *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 83; Wallace, “Note on the passages of Malthus’ ‘Principles of Population’ which suggested the idea of natural selection to Darwin and myself,” *The Darwin and Wallace Celebration held on Thursday, 1 July 1908 by the Linnean Society of London* (London, 1908), pp. 111–18, cited by Sir Gavin de Beer, *Darwin*, p. 71n. See also Wallace’s reminiscences at age 75 in *The Wonderful Century*; cited by Arnold C. Brackman, *A Delicate Arrangement: The Strange Case of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace* (New York: Times Books, 1980), p. 199. For extracts of the writings of both Darwin and Wallace concerning Malthus’ impact on their thinking, see Flew, “Introduction,” *op. cit.*, pp. 49–51.

29. See Flew’s extracts from Marx and Engels, “Introduction,” *op. cit.*, pp. 51–52.

teenth century was firmly grounded on the so-called “iron law of wages,” a corollary to the law of diminishing returns—the belief that the most productive land would be put into production first, and that the demand for food created by an increasing population would be satisfied only at greater and greater cost, as less and less productive land was brought into production.³⁰ This was Ricardo’s intellectual legacy, built on Malthus’ earlier population theory.

Really scientific studies of population came only in the late nineteenth century.³¹ The topic was almost never mentioned in English-language history textbooks until after World War II, if then, and really not until the mid-1950s.³² The scientific study of historical population trends is equally recent. The French have been the pioneers here, yet the discipline of historical demography began no earlier than the early 1950s.³³

Ever since the period after 1960, the neo-Malthusians have dominated the popular press and media. This, too, shall pass. Public opinion concerning the appropriate population growth rate, like the growth rate itself, changes often, and it changes fast. So do opinions concerning optimum family size. Ideas have consequences, however, and the zero population growth rhetoric has had and continues to have serious consequences for the economy of the industrial West and its future. A radically anti-biblical ideology has been adopted by millions of citizens and, from what the evidence indicates, also by a significant percentage of Christian intellectuals and leaders. There is no prominent organization in the United States specifically devoted to persuading people that it is generally beneficial to increase the rate of population growth and the birth rate. In contrast, there are dozens of well-funded organizations that are anti-natalists. There may come a day when the anti-growth promoters will become even more consistent and call for euthanasia—the execution of the “unfit.” Some indications of this exist now, such as the words of pro-abortionist biologist Garrett Hardin:

Pascal wrote: “There is nothing more real than death, nor more terrible.”

To me, there is nothing more false than this statement of Pascal’s.

30. E. P. Hutchinson, *The Population Debate: The Development of Conflicting Theories up to 1800* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), esp. p. 395.

31. David Landes, “The Treatment of Population in History Textbooks,” *Daedalus* (Spring 1968), p. 364. This issue was titled, Historical Population Studies.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 372–78.

33. Louis Henry, “Historical Demography,” *ibid.*, pp. 390–91.

Who's right, him or me? Undoubtedly, that's a bad question. We are different. There is probably no possibility of bringing two such minds into agreement.

The political problem is one of coexistence. Let those who fear death reject abortion and all forms of euthanasia—for *themselves and possibly for the loved ones they control*.

Let those who do not fear death act otherwise in their own lives.

With an embryo, it's *all promise and no memories*.

With the senile, it's all memories and no promise.

Someday, we should be able to find a course of action with respect to the senile that will be acceptable to all non-Pascalians. For the present, I think we are clear only on abortion.³⁴

So far, pro-euthanasia organizations in the United States are not yet openly funded by taxes, the way that the zero population growth "family planning" organizations are. This could easily change.³⁵

D. The Legalization of Abortion³⁶

"Population explosion" was a pejorative phrase in the late twentieth century. Another variant was "people pollution." There will come a day when American historians and social commentators will look back in disbelief and disgust at the billions of tax dollars that were granted to public and private propaganda agencies after 1965 to "spread the word" about the supposed evils that "inevitably" result from the growth of population.³⁷ In industrial nations that are facing literal ex-

34. Garrett Hardin, *Mandatory Motherhood: The True Meaning of "Right to Life"* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), pp. 84–85.

35. In the first edition of this book (1985), I included a detailed critique of Ronald J. Sider's views on government-to-government foreign aid and also his arguments for the wastefulness of eating meat. I called the section "Vegetarian Redemption," (pp. 336–43). (<http://bit.ly/MosesPharaoh>). Sider is no longer a major figure in evangelical circles. He abandoned many of his pro-socialist views in 1997. I have decided to omit the section.

36. For a survey of the history of abortion, from 2050 B.C. (conventional dating), see Part 2 of the essay by Eugene Quay, "Justifiable Abortion—Medical and Legal Foundations," *Georgetown Law Review*, XLIX (Spring 1961).

37. From 1965 through 1976, governments had spent the equivalent of a billion and a quarter dollars to promote worldwide programs of population reduction. Well over \$850 million of this came from the taxpayers of the United States. An additional quarter of a billion had been spent by the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Found-

tion in the long run because the birth rate of their citizens is below the replacement rate of at least 2.1 children per woman, intellectuals are advocating abortion, mass education programs favoring contraception, and similar restraints on births. As of 1975, nations that no longer had fertility rates above the replacement rate included West Germany, Denmark, Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Great Britain, and the United States.³⁸ These nations also erected immigration barriers against newcomers who might at least be able to increase the size of the national populations sufficiently to maintain them in the long run.

In 1973, about a decade after the "population dilemma" propaganda began,³⁹ the Supreme Court of the United States overturned all state laws that outlawed "abortion on demand" in the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Within a few years, between a million and a million and a half now-legal abortions were being performed in the United States each year. Pro-abortionists offer a counter-argument: there were as many as a million illegal abortions in 1960.⁴⁰ Another estimate of the combined legal and illegal abortions in the U. S. in 1972, a year before *Roe v. Wade*, is 1.25 million.⁴¹ A less radical estimate is 587,000 abortions in 1972.⁴² The number, obviously, was high. But the number of abortions increased after *Roe v. Wade*. The *Roe v. Wade* decision, however, led not only to a vast number of abortions but also to a mobilization of Christians and conservatives in opposition.⁴³ By 1976, the number of

ation for this same goal. See Simon, *Ultimate Resource*, p. 292.

38. "People Shortage," *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 23, 1979), chart: "West European Fertility Rates." The peak in the fertility rate in the U.S. was 3.7, in 1957. By 1975, it had fallen to 1.8. See *Population Estimates and Projections: Estimates of the Population of the United States and Components of Change: 1930-1975*, Series P-25, No. 632 (July 1976), p. 2; published by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

39. Philip M. Hauser, *The Population Dilemma* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), copyright by the American Assembly, for whom it was compiled. Trustees of the Assembly included former President Dwight Eisenhower, former Federal Reserve Board Chairman (under President Roosevelt) Mariner S. Eccles, W. Averill Harriman, and Henry M. Wriston (later president of the second-largest bank holding company in the U.S., Citicorp).

40. Garrett Hardin, *Mandatory Motherhood*, p. 11.

41. Helen Dudar, "Abortion for the Asking," *Saturday Review* (April 1973), p. 34. The "teaser" copy which introduces the article reads: "It's still not the same as having a tooth pulled, yet few tears are shed."

42. "Another Storm Brewing Over Abortion," *U. S. News and World Report* (July 24, 1978).

43. Cf. Franky Schaeffer, *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1982), ch. 6. The success of Francis Schaeffer's *A Christian*

legal abortions performed by physicians in the United States exceeded the number of tonsillectomies as the most frequently performed surgical procedure.⁴⁴ The number of abortions performed annually finally peaked (possibly only briefly) in 1982.

The speed of the transformation of people's thinking was remarkable. In the early 1960s, the American public favored the right of a woman to elect to have an abortion if the unborn baby was known to be "defective." Still, only 10% approved of abortion on demand simply on request of the woman.⁴⁵ By 1972, a Gallup Poll showed that 65% of Protestants and 56% of Roman Catholics answered "yes" to this question: "Do you agree that the decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician?"⁴⁶

A grim reminder of the judgment which may be in store for today's aborting societies is the fact that Germany was the first modern Western nation to maintain a policy of mass abortions. This campaign to legalize abortion began prior to the coming to power of the Nazis, but it was under the Nazis that a full-scale policy of legalized abortion began. The parallels between Nazi Germany's disrespect for life and the West's disregard for the unborn are chronicled by William Brennan in two books, neither of which is pleasant to read.⁴⁷

1. Abortion in the Soviet Union

It is also interesting that in 1965—precisely the same time that the "population explosion" propaganda began in the West—a debate began on this topic within the Soviet Union. The official Soviet Marx-

Manifesto (Crossway, 1980) and the moderate success of Franky Schaeffer's anti-abortion movie and his father's book, co-authored by Dr. C. Everett Koop, both bearing the title, *What Ever Happened to the Human Race?* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1976), led to the appointment in 1981 of Dr. Koop as Surgeon General of the United States. This symbolic appointment demonstrated that the Christians had attained at least some degree of influence in national politics by means of this topic. It was the only major appointment during President Reagan's first term that the Christians received. An anti-abortion book bearing President Reagan's name, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation*, was released in early 1984, a Presidential election year, by Thomas Nelson Sons, a Christian publisher.

44. Sullivan, Tietze, and Dryfoos, "Legal Abortion in the United States, 1975–76," *Family Planning* (May/June 1977), p. 116; cited by William Brennan, *Medical Holocausts* (New York: Nordland, 1980), I, p. 322.

45. Hardin, *Mandatory Motherhood*, p. 71.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

47. Brennan, *Medical Holocausts*, *op. cit.*, and *The Abortion Holocaust: Today's Final Solution* (St. Louis, Missouri: Landmark Press, 1983).

ist line had been that there could never be overpopulation in a Marxist nation. It was the West that worried about overpopulation because of the inability of capitalism to produce sufficient food and consumer goods. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had stated the "hard line" in a 1955 speech: "The more people we have, the stronger our country will be. Bourgeois ideologists have invented many cannibalistic theories, including the theory of overpopulation. They think about how to reduce the birth rate and the growth of population. Matters are different among us, comrades. If we were to add 100,000,000 to our 200,000,000, it would be too few."⁴⁸

Nevertheless, in that same year, a decree legalized both contraceptives and abortions. The official excuse was the large number of illegal abortions⁴⁹—a favorite excuse in Western nations, too. The "hard line" prevailed, however, until Khrushchev's removal in 1964. In 1964, there was not a single demographic research institute in the USSR; two had been shut down. As late as 1970, whatever population research that was being conducted was done in separate departments of other kinds of institutions.⁵⁰ In short, the Soviet line, following Marx's lead,⁵¹ was anti-Malthus. They did not worry about overpopulation.

In the 1920s and the early 1930s, the Party line had favored free love and was distinctly anti-family. This was a fulfillment of Engels' observation: "It is a curious fact that in every large revolutionary movement the question of 'free love' comes to the foreground."⁵² The predominant view was that sexual life was supposed to be outside the regulation of the Party⁵³—the only major activity that was still regarded as

48. Speech to settlers departing to the "virgin lands," as translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, VII (Feb. 16, 1955), p. 12; cited in Philip R. Pryde, *Conservation in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1972), p. 167.

49. Norton T. Dodge, *Women in the Soviet Economy: Their Role in Economic, Scientific, and Technical Development* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 24.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

51. *Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb*, ed. Ronald L. Meek (Berkeley, California: Ramparts Press, 1971). It is interesting that the original title of the 1953 edition was the more prosaic *Marx and Engels on Malthus* (New York: International Publishers). International Publishers was an exclusively Marxist publishing house, while Ramparts was a "new left" magazine and publishing house, which went out of existence in the 1970s. But the phrase "population bomb," made famous by Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich, was too good for a profit-seeking radical publishing house to pass up.

52. Cited by Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (New York: Harper & Row, [1975] 1980), p. 33.

53. H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 61.

legitimately autonomous from political control. Easy divorce and free abortions were the rule after 1926.⁵⁴ There were widespread abortions in the early 1930s.⁵⁵ This policy was reversed by law in 1936. At the same time, public money began to be offered for births.⁵⁶ The mid-1930s therefore saw a dramatic reversal in Soviet law toward the family, including a 1934 law against homosexuality.⁵⁷ The anti-abortion law remained on the books until 1955.

Between 1955 and 1965, the total number of legal and illegal abortions increased by a factor of four, according to published Soviet estimates.⁵⁸ A debate over the theory of overpopulation began in the USSR in 1965 and 1966, which indicated a weakening of the older "hard line" position.⁵⁹ A national network of abortion clinics was in operation by the mid-1970s which offered cheap abortions at a price of around \$7 each.⁶⁰ Some 8 million abortions were being performed annually by this time.⁶¹ Abortion became the major form of Soviet population control, three to one over contraception.⁶²

The rulers of the Soviet Union in 1965 faced the demographic and political problem of a stagnant "white Russian" (European) population that confronted a growing Muslim and Central Asian Soviet population.

Soviet demographers expected the 1970 census to produce a figure of over 250 million, with a projection of 350 million by the end of the century. In fact the 1970 total fell 10 million short and the 1979 figure produced only 262,436,000, meaning a population of not much over 300 million in 2000 A.D. What the 1970 census revealed for the first time was a dual birth-rate: low in Slavic and Baltic Russia, high in the eastern USSR, Central Asia and the Caucasus. In the 1960s alone the Muslim population leapt from 24 to 35 million, adding another 14 million in the 1970s, giving a total of about 50 million by the beginning of the 1980s. By this point it was clear that at the turn of the century Central Asia and Caucasia would contribute about 100

54. *Idem.*

55. Dodge, *Women in the Soviet Economy*, p. 9.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

57. Geiger, *Family*, p. 94.

58. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 299, note 25.

59. Pryde, pp. 167–68.

60. "Sexual Revolution in Soviet [sic] Straining Strict Morality," *New York Times* (Sept. 25, 1977).

61. Lapidus, p. 299.

62. *Idem.*, note 25.

million, that is a third, of the total. Even by 1979, the 137 million Great Russians, a markedly ageing population compared to the non-Slavs, felt demographically on the defensive.⁶³

God will not be mocked!

2. *Abortion Worldwide*

The extent of abortion worldwide is, from a biblical standpoint, horrendously large. A United States government publication cited estimates that, by the late 1970s, about 55 million abortions, legal and illegal, were taking place annually, with half of these in the less developed nations. The United States was at the low end of the scale. "In the United States, the 1978 abortion rate as reported by the Center for Disease Control was 23 per 1,000 women of reproductive age. New estimates of induced abortion in China place that country's rate at 25 in 1978. Eastern bloc countries have very high rates. In the U.S.S.R. Union, there are 180 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age in 1970, the latest year for which data are available. There were 88 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age in Romania and 68 per 1,000 for the same group in Bulgaria (1979). The latest data from Japan (1975) show an equivalent rate of 84 per 1,000."⁶⁴

Japan, which legalized abortions early, in 1947, had some 12,000 licensed abortionists in 1980. Almost 600,000 abortions were performed annually, as of the early 1980s. One out of every three Japanese women in the 25 to 40 age group has had an abortion, reported one Japanese feminist organization. Temples are selling statues and rituals to families seeking atonement for the guilt produced by the abortions, and the popularity of these rituals is rising.⁶⁵

Beginning in the early 1970s, China's government began putting tremendous pressure on women to have abortions. Infant girls were killed at birth by parents who wanted sons, a fact confirmed by Premier Zhao Ziyang in his remarks critical of the practice in late 1982. But what else would he expect? The new Chinese population law restricts families to one child, and rural Chinese want a son if that is the only child they will be allowed to bring up. Childless couples are required to obtain a "birth quota" in advance. Very heavy fines are levied on violat-

63. Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*, pp. 711-12.

64. *World Population and Fertility Planning Technologies: The Next 20 Years* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Technology Assessment, 1982), p. 63.

65. Urban Lehner, "Japanese Ceremonies Show Private Doubts Over Use of Abortion," *Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 6, 1983).

ors.⁶⁶ The state, a monopoly employer, can enforce its will on recalcitrants, and does.⁶⁷ Newborn third children were being killed in some hospitals, reports indicated in the early 1980s.⁶⁸ (As I wrote in 1985, “the social effects a generation later will threaten the very fabric of Chinese culture: there will be a scarcity of young women eligible for marriage.”)

Romania, virtually alone among nations, saw the light in the late 1970s and outlawed abortions. This policy was reaffirmed in 1984. Romanian leaders feared the effects of a declining population. They showed greater wisdom than Western intellectuals.

The old argument that illegal abortions are risky to mothers is overblown. In the 1958–62 period, fewer than 375 women in the U.S. died each year as a result of both illegal and spontaneous (non-induced) abortions. By 1972, it was under 100.⁶⁹ Some pro-abortionists knew this all along. Mary S. Calderone wrote in 1960 that in 1957 “there were only 260 deaths in the whole country attributed to abortions of any kind.”⁷⁰ But the lure of the “backstreet butchers” argument has always proven strong. It was used repeatedly in Germany during the Weimar years, and it bore its evil fruit under the Nazis.⁷¹ Besides, why shouldn’t murderers be subject to a little risk? The fact is this: in over 99% of all abortions, half the people involved die. The unborn half.

E. “Christian” Abortion

Given the inroads of humanistic thought into the Christian intellectual community, it should not be startling to learn that late twentieth-century Christian intellectuals and physicians were proposing a program of reduced birth rates—yes, even including abortion, though

66. Steven W. Mosher, “Why Are Baby Girls Being Killed in China?” *ibid.* (July 25, 1983).

67. Steven W. Mosher, *Broken Earth: The Rural Chinese* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), ch. 9. Mosher was dismissed from the Ph.D. program in anthropology at Stanford University not long after the Chinese government protested Mosher’s reporting of the fact that in some rural districts in the late 1970s, Chinese were administering forced abortions. See the editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (July 25, 1983).

68. Michael Vink, “Abortion and Birth Control in Canton, China,” *Wall Street Journal* (Nov. 30, 1981).

69. *World Population and Fertility Planning Technologies*, p. 64, Figure 7.

70. Mary S. Calderone, “Illegal Abortion as a Public Health Problem,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 50 (July 1960); cited in Brennan, *Abortion Holocaust*, p. 13.

71. Brennan, *ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

not infanticide.⁷² Psychiatrist M. O. Vincent offered this assessment: "... the foetus has great and developing value, but it is less than a human being. It will be sacrificed only for weighty reasons."⁷³ As a psychiatrist—a man of science, you understand—he got to "weigh" these reasons: "I find it hard to know how to 'weigh' these reasons, but weigh them I must."⁷⁴ Ah, the responsibilities of becoming a "weigher" on a set of cosmic scales of value that God forbids men to use.⁷⁵ "To abort or not to abort, that is the question": for men in rebellion against God.

It is the responsibility of Christians to study the effects of population growth, we are informed by a professor of sociology who taught in a state university.⁷⁶ You see, population growth creates "complications for the collectivity."⁷⁷ (Isn't scientific language wonderful?) For example, juvenile delinquency is apparently one result of unwanted children.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the government now provides welfare services (an ungodly coercive redistribution of wealth, which our sociologist fails to mention), so that today "billions of tax dollars are spent in an attempt to cope with the results of over-population. . . ."⁷⁹ (If you detect a bit of racism and middle-class resentment here, you are probably not alone.) He referred to only one remaining hold-out in the ideological war against over-population: the Black Power movement of the late 1960s. The Black Power advocates believed that this zero population growth philosophy is, in the sociologist's words, "the imposition of white middle-class standards on the black community, the white desire to limit the number of 'us beautiful blacks,' and the desire of whites to use birth control as an easy way to solve the basic prob-

72. See, for example, several of the essays in the abominable book, *Birth Control and the Christian*, eds. Walter O. Spitzer and Carlyle L. Saylor (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1969). This was a symposium held by the Christian Medical Society and *Christianity Today*. On *Christianity Today*'s co-sponsorship, see Graham A. D. Scott, "Abortion and the Incarnation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XVII (Winter 1974), p. 30.

73. "Psychiatric Indications for Therapeutic Abortion and Sterilization," in *Birth Control and the Christian*, p. 213.

74. *Idem*.

75. This is not a "battlefield" decision on whether to allow a man to die; this is a decision to intervene actively and stop a living person's normal developmental process.

76. Donald H. Bouma, "The Population Explosion: World and Local Imperatives," *ibid.*, pp. 329–39.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

lems of society.”⁸⁰ I can only comment: the blacks he described here possessed more common sense (and better tools of sociological analysis) than a lot of professors of sociology who teach in state universities.

1. Evangelical Ethics, 1984

In the appropriate year of 1984, reminiscent of George Orwell’s book title, came the equally appropriately titled book, *Brave New People*, by a New Zealand professor of anatomy and medical ethicist, D. Gareth Jones, Ph.D. He claimed he was a Christian. His book was published by Inter-Varsity Press, which also claimed to be Christian. The book was a very clever defense of the ethical legitimacy of “therapeutic” abortion.

After spending six chapters discussing the admittedly difficult ethical issues relating to genetic manipulation, the author then introduced his chapter on the not-at-all-difficult moral issue of abortion, the execution of the legally innocent. I call this the “confuse, then corrupt” technique. It has been used successfully by theologically liberal “higher critics” of the Bible for a century and a half. He warned that “there are no slick answers,”⁸¹ which is the typical approach of the morally confused (or morally perverse) but self-proclaimed “honest Christian” who is about to abandon the clear teachings of the Bible.

What does the Bible say about abortion?

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:22–25).⁸²

If it is a capital crime to cause an abortion accidentally, then it is a capital crime to abort a child deliberately.⁸³

Jones wanted Christian parents to make “a responsible decision.”⁸⁴

80. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

81. D. Gareth Jones, *Brave New People: Ethical Issues at the Commencement of Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), p. 7.

82. Chapter 38.

83. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 253.

84. Jones, *Brave New People*.

This decision is, of course, “weighty.”⁸⁵ (We are back to those cosmic scales that pro-abortionists insist we must use in making immoral decisions.) Naturally, “The issues are much more complex than is generally imagined.”⁸⁶ (Be prepared: when Ph.D.-holding Christian “ethicists” start warning you about “complex moral questions,” you are about to be told that you can safely violate the Bible’s clear teachings.) He asked that all-too-familiar question: “When does the fetus become a person?”⁸⁷ When you call an unborn infant a “fetus,” you have already prejudiced the case. You have begun to answer the question. The answer, predictably, was that honest people just cannot agree on the answer to this question, so let us use the alternatives to the Bible that “logic” provides.

2. *No Absolutes*

He cited the Roman Catholic Church’s absolute prohibition against abortion. “The major attraction of the Roman Catholic position for Christians is its high view of human life. It has the strengths of all absolute positions and it places the unborn directly in God’s will. In practice, however, issues are often not so simple, and while we may wish to believe that abortion is always morally wrong, dilemmas abound.”⁸⁸ In short, moral decisions are sometimes costly, and certain “ethicists” recommend not paying the price.

In a remarkable abandonment of both logic and morality, he then accused the Roman Catholic position of irresponsibility. He summarized the implications of the position: “A fetus, once conceived, has the right to develop; this is an expression of natural forces and is a duty allotted to the mother by nature. Taken to its logical conclusion, this leaves no room for human responsibility. Instead, the erratic and impersonal forces of the natural environment are allowed sway. I do not consider this accords with the biblical emphasis on the responsibility God has bestowed upon mankind to control our environment.”⁸⁹

Raising the issue of natural law theory at this point in his argument was a verbal smoke screen, a cheap debate trick. By misdirecting the attention of his readers to a false issue, “impersonal natural law,” he would have them overlook the obvious issue, namely, *the prohibition*

85. *Idem.*

86. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

89. *Idem.*

against murder in biblical law. Jones spent page after page in Chapter 1 to demonstrate that the Bible teaches that all created reality is intensely personal, because God, the Creator, is personal. He denied any impersonality in the universe. “The world God has made is intrinsically personal.”⁹⁰ Then he used a weakness in Roman Catholic epistemology—natural law theory, which is ultimately impersonal—to undermine a great strength in Roman Catholic ethics: the defense of human life.

He argued, incredibly, that by teaching people never to abort the unborn, the Roman Catholic Church has removed the question of abortion from the realm of ethics. On the contrary, the Church has re-affirmed the ethical decision. It is not a question of “to abort or not to abort under which complex, difficult, dilemma-filled situations?” It is a question of “to abort or not to abort, under any situation?” The Church has quite properly called abominable the position defended by D. Gareth Jones, Ph.D., and he felt the heat.

He said that “Abortion for therapeutic reasons demands a serious response by those professing to follow Christ.”⁹¹ Indeed, it does. The serious response is: “Don’t.” The serious reason is: “God says not to.”

3. The “Potential for Personhood”

He said that “each fetus is a human life, representing a potential for personhood from very early in its development. From this early stage it is a potential person, and from about eight weeks onwards has a recognizable individuality as manifested by its circulation and brain activity. It is well on the road to full personhood, and for most practical purposes may be considered to be a person. Nevertheless, I do not wish to draw a line between when a fetus is not a person and when a fetus is a person. Throughout the whole of its development the fetus is potentially an actual person, and deserves the respect and treatment due to a being with this sort of potential.”⁹² This is medical ethics? This is a call to responsible decision-making?

If Mary, a virgin who found herself pregnant, had decided to “take the easy way out” and had aborted her “fetus” in, say, the third month of her pregnancy, would she have eliminated a true Person? Or just a potential Person? D. Gareth Jones offered no principle that would give

90. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

us a clear indication. Instead, he offered language that would have confused her, had she not understood the ethics of the Bible.

He went on, and it got worse. "A fetus is part of a more extensive continuum, the end-result of which is the emergence of an individual human being manifesting, under normal circumstances, the myriad facets that go to make up full personhood. The processes of this continuum, however, do not begin at conception; neither do they end at birth."⁹³ The continuum: here was a key idea in the biological speculations of D. Gareth Jones. First, "A new-born baby is a very incomplete human person. . . ."⁹⁴ Second, "A corollary of the continuum potentiality argument is that there is no developmental point at which a line can be drawn between expendable and non-expendable fetuses, that is, between non-personal and personal fetuses. It may be preferable to carry out abortions early rather than later during gestation, but that is a biomedical and not an ethical decision."⁹⁵ Not an ethical decision? Strictly a biomedical decision? You mean a *strictly technological decision*? This is precisely what he meant. The official justification of this monstrous book was that it brings Christian ethics to bear on biomedical technology, but the end result is the imposition of the satanic ethics of abortion on the consciences of Christians in the name of autonomous biomedical technology.

But what about the unstated third but obvious point? What about a definitional "continuum" for personhood that does not "end at birth," to quote Dr. Jones? In short, *what about euthanasia*, "*mercy killing*"? Is this, too, strictly a biomedical decision? Dr. Jones was not about to say . . . not in 1984. We know what his answer has to be, if he remains consistent to his stated presuppositions in this book. It is no doubt a "difficult" answer, based as it is on "complex" issues. But whenever he gives his answer, pray that no civil government accepts it, and also pray that you are not 85 years old and no longer fully competent mentally or economically.

The arguments he offered in support of a family's decision to abort a child can be used equally well by a family looking for excuses to murder a senile adult. The person is unable to learn. He is unable to take care of himself. He may create terrible psychological burdens for other family members. In short, caring for him is costly, and there is no economic payoff at the end of the road. Such a person is the eco-

93. *Idem*.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

95. *Ibid.* pp. 175–76.

nomic and psychological equivalent of a highly retarded child. He is, in terms of Dr. Jones' analysis, *an expendable elderly fetus*. Kill him. But don't do it thoughtlessly, of course. Do it in responsible Christian love. Also, it should be done only after considerable reflection and the "weighing" of costs and benefits. And don't put your finger on either side of the cosmic scales. That would be cheating. You know what God says about false weights and balances. We need to honor God's ethical principles, after all, however vague they may be. So say the abortion-ists.

4. The Quality of Life

He included a section, "Possible grounds for therapeutic abortion." Biomedically possible, yes. Morally possible, no. But this is not what he concludes. What about the mental health of the mother? Maybe. He was not quite sure. This is "a difficult realm."⁹⁶ "These are not easy issues, and I do not believe there are easy answers to them."⁹⁷ "Fetal preservation is generally the course of choice in Christian terms. . . ."⁹⁸ Generally. Meaning, in short, not always. Maybe in 95% of the cases.⁹⁹ Or 93%. Or 82%. He was just not certain.

Then what are the grounds of decision-making? By what measure do we "weigh" the issue of abortion? Not the Bible. Not God's inscripturated word. No, the key issue is that slickest of slick slogans of the late 1960s: *the quality of life*. He told us this at the beginning of the book. "Biology is power over the living world, and biomedicine is power over human nature. There are numerous consequences of this, and they are already the subject of daily decision-making. These decisions revolve around one crucial issue, namely, the quality of life we demand for the populations of technologically-advanced societies and for individuals within those societies. All other issues, whether at the commencement of life or at the end of life, revolve around this critical

96. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

98. *Idem*.

99. This is what one-time conservative neo-evangelical scholar Carl Henry said of Jones: "This is essentially an anti-abortion book. Ninety-five percent of all abortion would be considered immoral by D. Gareth Jones." *Christianity Today* (Sept. 21, 1984), p. 63. But Jones did not suggest any such concrete figure, nor does his vague ethical system allow such specificity. Henry actually had endorsed this book prior to publication. Known as a Christian conservative, Henry's continual hostility to the legitimacy of biblical law in New Testament times finally led him into the pit of confusion and compromise with evil.

fulcrum.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, “In making the decision, a balance needs to be attained between the pursuit of biological quality and the potential that a deformed child within a family holds out for that family to be humanized and to grow as a loving, human unit.”¹⁰¹ In short, more loving through chemical abortion. Or to reverse a 1960s advertising slogan of the DuPont Chemical Company, “Better Dying Through Chemistry.” As Jones concluded: “Unfortunately some families cannot cope with such a challenge, and a compromise must be reluctantly adopted, namely, termination of the pregnancy.”¹⁰²

Such is the quality of life when it is not defined by the Bible in terms of the ethics of the Bible. Such is the aesthetics of the self-professed autonomous man.

5. *Humanism's Ethics of Sentimentality*

The compromise *must* be adopted, the ethicist tells us, just so long as the decision is made *reluctantly*. This is the ethics of sentimentality, as Schlossberg called it. “If good and evil are purely a matter of sentiment, then no action can be judged, since sentiments remain opaque to outside certification. Only the motives counts, not the action. In this way sentiment, not reason or law, is determinative of right and wrong.”¹⁰³ Schlossberg identified the source of the ethics of sentiment in our day: *humanism*. “Humanism thrives on sentimentality because few religions are more dishonest in their doctrinal expressions. Unable to withstand dispassionate analysis, which would reveal its lack of foundation, it stresses feeling rather than thought. That is what makes sentimentality so vicious.”¹⁰⁴

The incomparable hypocrisy of D. Gareth Jones, Ph.D, is found in the closing paragraph of this chapter: “Decisions relating to the handicapped should always be difficult and will prove too onerous for some to bear. This is the knife-edge along which we walk. But as we do we should be encouraged by the prophecy of Isaiah that, ultimately, ‘then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shout

100. Jones, p. 10.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

102. *Idem*.

103. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation With American Society* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 44.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

for joy' (Isaiah 35:5–6)."¹⁰⁵ *Not if their parents aborted them, they won't.*

Jones said, "There is no slick solution."¹⁰⁶ Oh, but there is. The slickest of all is *the saline solution*. It is this solution which burns the unborn to death. But the heat of such solutions is nothing compared to the heat which awaits the biomedical practitioners of abortion and their morally corrupt apologists. Also, the publishers of their tracts.

We can understand Franky Schaeffer's outrage at Inter-Varsity Press. He went on Pat Robertson's *700 Club* television show in the summer of 1984 and called attention to what should be obvious, namely, that it was the income from his father's books that created the economic base of Inter-Varsity Press in the late 1960s, and they were using that capital base to spew out books like Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* and *Brave New People*.

At the time, I agreed entirely with his response to all the gibberish about complex moral issues. "The real issue is simple. *What do we do now?* It is a choice, not between competing slogans and word games, right or left, but between godlessness and godliness. Between inhumanity and humanity. Between life and death. Between Joseph Fletcher¹⁰⁷ and Jesus. Between the dignity of the individual (whether handicapped, unwanted, born or unborn) and death as a 'liberal' solution for social problems such as poverty, race, and medical costs. Between a sanctity of life ethic and the bestial gaggle of ethicists, judges, and doctors who cry for the blood of the innocent, all in the name of economics and 'compassion,' not to mention convenience. Between freedom and prosperity, or subservience, slavery, and the ever-expanding power of the welfare state."¹⁰⁸

Of course, no Christian ethicist or Christian physician publicly advocates infanticide. Not yet. Christian physicians will not promote infanticide until the humanist medical profession has accepted the practice for at least five years, and even then not unless the net income per execution is significantly higher than performing an abortion in, say, the third trimester of pregnancy. After all, these are men of conscience

105. Jones, p. 184.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

107. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

108. Franky Schaeffer, *Bad News for Modern Man: An Agenda for Christian Activism* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984), p. 84. Schaeffer subsequently rejected his work as a Christian conservative activist. Frank Schaeffer, *Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 2007).

—not as ethical as the Pharaoh of the enslavement, who at least would not have deliberately executed Egyptian infants as he did the Hebrew infants, but good enough in their own eyes.¹⁰⁹

It is gratifying that the Board of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship overturned the decision of the editor of Inter-Varsity Press to publish the book. They pulled this book off the market in September of 1984. They did so reluctantly, under tremendous pressure and the threat of loss of financial support. Their public relations man said, "We did not publish, nor did Dr. Jones write, the book with the intention of supporting abortion in any way. However, the book is being perceived by the Christian public that way."¹¹⁰ Nonsense; the board capitulated to pressures that came because Dr. Jones' book demonstrates every sign of being precisely what it was perceived to be: a tract written in defense of therapeutic abortion. The fact that a book such as *Brave New People* was published in the name of Jesus testifies to the theological degeneracy of influential segments of the so-called "neo-evangelical" movement in the final decades of the twentieth century. Only financial pressure from principled Christians and controversy in the media brought the change. As U.S. Senator Everett Dirksen put it, "When I feel the heat, I see the light." The destroyers much prefer darkness because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). (Sadly, Eerdmans republished it in 1985.)

F. Unholy Crusades

1. *Medieval Crusades*

A standard cliché used against the idea of Christian civilization is this: "What would you do, inaugurate another series of holy crusades?" This sort of comment implicitly assumes that religious warfare is uniquely the product of Christianity, and it also assumes that the crusades characterized Christian medieval civilization. Both assumptions

109. I have included this somewhat lengthy discussion of Christian abortion as part of a consideration of the exodus, because theology must be applied to historical situations, and commentators dare not ignore the theological issues of their eras. Those reading this chapter in a hundred years or a thousand years will not, I trust, be facing anything so preposterous and morally corrupt as Christian abortionism. But in the late twentieth century, it was a problem—one which points to either a coming revival or a coming judgment, or both. God will spew these people out of His mouth, just as He did with the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:16). He will throw out the baby-killers with the bathwater of humanism.

110. *Christianity Today* (Sept. 21, 1984), p. 63.

are false.

First, the term “crusade” was never used in the era in which the four major ones took place, 1096–1204. It is a modern term. “People at that time spoke of the road to Jerusalem, the voyage, the journey, the pilgrimage.”¹¹¹ Second, a crusade was perceived as a defensive war against an expansionist Islamic empire.¹¹² Third, the wars were supposed to be battles between professional armies. Except for the outrageous sack of Constantinople, in the fourth crusade of 1204,¹¹³ common people were not deliberately chosen as victims. The feudal judicial order in Europe was essentially military, and a code of military honor governed warfare. It was considered dishonorable for a soldier to battle against peasants or commoners—a violation of the separation of status groups. Finally, the armies were tiny, and so were the ships that carried them. Green’s summary brings things into perspective:

It would be impossible to talk of a nation in arms in the Middle Ages. Most wars were fought by small armies, costly for those who equipped them, but lacking in the total effort which typifies modern warfare. Kings who started wars had no wish to exterminate or unduly spoil their adversary; they wanted to bring the issue to a successful negotiated conclusion. Wars were rarely national in any modern sense of the word, but conflicts over rights and honour. . . . Moreover the numbers involved were small. The Viking raiders (each of whose ships can hardly have carried more than thirty-five warriors) can rarely have had more than 1,000 men at their disposal. When William of Normandy invaded England in 1066 he cannot have had many more than 5,000 men. . . . The Normans who conquered Sicily started their venture in 1061 with some 160 knights and never in any subsequent campaign appear to have had more than 700 at their disposal.¹¹⁴

2. *The Twentieth Century*

In sharp contrast to the crusades—four limited, brief medieval battles, three of which were battles between small professional armies,

111. Regine Pernoud, *The Crusades* (New York: Capricorn, 1964), p. 13.

112. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–17.

113. The crusaders had only raised half of their expected troops, so they could pay only two-thirds of their transportation bills to the Venetians, who demanded payment. Finally, they sacked Constantinople to get the needed funds. R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 58.

114. V. H. H. Green, *Medieval Civilization in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's, 1971), p. 238.

Christian and Muslim—the twentieth century became the century of mass executions of civilian populations by the civil governments established by God to enforce His law (Rom. 13:1–7).¹¹⁵ Modern warfare has become total, sparing almost no one and few institutions. In World War II, more civilians were killed than combatants.¹¹⁶ The saturation bombing of civilians was standard operating policy by the Germans and the Allies, culminating in the senseless bombing of Dresden, a German city with no military targets, in the spring of 1945, where at least 25,000 civilians, and possibly 40,000, perished in huge fire storms that were created when 1,300 bombers dropped 3,900 tons of incendiary bombs on the defenseless city.¹¹⁷ “Air raids involving the indiscriminate killing of enormous numbers of civilians were the current step in the natural evolution of the art of war. The very concept of the civilian hardly remained valid. The traditional distinction between men setting forth to risk their lives and those who stayed behind out of range of death disappeared in the first half of the twentieth century.”¹¹⁸ Yet there is little evidence that such indiscriminate area bombing contributed significantly to the defeat of Germany.¹¹⁹

The military defense strategy adopted by the United States government during the Kennedy Administration, “mutual assured destruction” (MAD), involved the threat of massive nuclear retaliation as the only defensive posture—in effect, holding the Soviet Union’s civilians captive to our missiles (aimed at urban targets), and allowing the Soviet Union to hold our civilians captive by doing the same thing with their missiles. The Soviets wisely adopted the more traditional approach: targeting military targets, especially our missile silos, as the chosen objectives of a nuclear first strike.¹²⁰

115. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 17.

116. Carroll Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 661.

117. “Bombing of Dresden,” *Wikipedia*. <http://bit.ly/DresdenBombing>

118. Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War: Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (New York: Penguin, [1972] 1981), p. 489.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 508.

120. One vociferous opponent of MAD was retired U.S. Army General Albion Knight, who was also an ordained Episcopalian minister. He wrote: “. . . we have supported the Soviet march to military superiority by the strategic doctrine called Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) whereby, should the Soviet Union’s attack, we would respond by destroying a percentage of the Soviet population. The doctrine requires us to strike cities and avoid military strategic weapon systems, while intentionally leaving our own people unprotected from a Soviet bomber or missile attack. The success of the strategy depends on the Soviet Union taking the same approach so as to make us

Warfare was not the only source of civilian deaths in that grim century. Domestic wars against civilian populations were launched repeatedly by national governments established to defend their people from injustice. The Nazi concentration camps are well known, but they are only one example among many.

The numbers of man-caused deaths in the twentieth century were so huge as to defy calculation. Gil Elliot settled on a total of 110 million, through 1969. He admitted that it could be as “low” as 80 million, but as high as 150 million.¹²¹ China was the great unknown.

To set such a figure against the scale of violence in previous times involves the difficulties of comparing like periods and of allowing for population increase. However, every attempt to do so shows the twentieth century to be incomparably the more violent period.

It is possible—in my view, certain—that in a future perspective this explosion of human lives will be seen as the significant ‘history’ of our period. Yet the events which have accumulated to form this history—millions upon millions of individual violent deaths—are often recorded in the historical footnotes or in quickly read and rather meaningless statistics. Many written histories don’t even mention them, although dealing in detail with the events that led up to and followed them.¹²²

Let me cite an example from his book. It is so obscure that it does not even appear in the book’s index. He simply listed it in a chapter on minor conflicts. It is the Chaco War. Have you ever heard of it? Of course not. Neither had I. It was a war between Paraguay and Bolivia that took place between 1928 and 1935. The number of deaths in that war was 500,000.¹²³ That matched the death toll of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–22, which was going on at the same time as the Russo-Polish war of 1919–21, which claimed 200,000 lives. The Mexican revolution of 1910–20—the first successful socialist revolution in modern times—took 2 million lives.¹²⁴ These were all minor wars in the twentieth century, seldom mentioned in textbooks. On page 155 of his

mutually vulnerable. Thus, according to MAD, few weapons, especially defense weapons, are needed.” Predictably, he pointed out, the Soviets rejected the whole concept. *The Defense of America: From Assured Destruction to Assured Survival* (Houston, Texas: Texas Policy Institute, 1983), pp. 5–6.

121. Gil Elliot, *Twentieth Century Book of the Dead* (New York: Scribner’s, 1972), p. 1.

122. *Idem.*

123. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

book appears the most horrifying statistical chart I have ever seen: “The Death Process”:

| | Individual Identity | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|----|----|----|
| | MEN | MEN WITH SOME WOMEN, say 10% | MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN | TOTAL | | | |
| | Millions of Deaths | | | | | | |
| CAMP PRIVATION | 20 | | | | | | |
| Enclosed ghetto | 4.5 | | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Prisoner-of-war camp | | | | 4.5 | | | |
| Concentration Camp | | 2 | 0.5 | 2.5 | | | |
| Labour Camp | | 12 | | 12 | | | |
| CITY PRIVATION | 16 | | | | | | |
| Unenclosed ghetto | | | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Siege | | | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Occupation | | | 6 | 6 | | | |
| City dislocation | | | 8 | 8 | | | |
| DIFFUSE PRIVATION | 26.5 | | | | | | |
| Transit | 1 | | 1.5 | 1.5 | | | |
| Combat | | | | 1 | | | |
| Economic blockade | | | 2 | 2 | | | |
| Man-made famine | | | 5 | 5 | | | |
| Scorched earth | | | 2 | 2 | | | |
| War dislocation | | | 12 | 12 | | | |
| HARDWARE | 47.5 | | | | | | |
| Big guns | 18 | | | 18 | | | |
| Small arms—formal execution | 4 | | | 4 | | | |
| Small arms—massacre | 1 | | | 4 | 6 | | |
| Small arms—combat | 14 | | | | 14 | | |
| Mixed—demographic | | | | 3 | 3 | | |
| Aerial bombs | | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| CHEMICALS—GAS | | | 1.5 | 1.5 | | | |
| TOTALS: | 42 | 16 | 19 | 77 | | | |
| Men | | | | | | | |
| Women | | | | | 2 | 21 | 23 |
| Children | | | | | | 10 | 10 |
| | 42 | 18 | 50 | 110 | | | |

It was only with the political triumph of modern humanism that systematic mass murder began in earnest in human history. When God became irrelevant in the minds of the world's leaders, the carnage accelerated rapidly. This is humanism's chief legacy to the world. It is a fulfillment of God's warning, "all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36b).

3. The French Revolution

The first modern example of a systematic program of depopulation imposed by a civil government on its own people is the case of the French Revolution. It stood as revolutionary humanism's "preferred model" for the twentieth century: from 1789 to 1795, especially in the final three years. The Reign of Terror was part of a wartime measure to eliminate all enemies of the Revolution. It was also an outcome of the satanic religion of revolution, of regeneration through bloodshed and social chaos. At the end, it was scheduled by Robespierre to become a systematic program of depopulation.

Nesta Webster, in her detailed and deliberately ignored study of the revolution,¹²⁵ discussed this program. She cited the reports and memoirs of several of Robespierre's associates. Robespierre, we must remind ourselves, was the head of the famous Committee on Public Safety, which can also be translated "Committee on Public Salvation" [*salut*].¹²⁶ Courtois' report was seized at Robespierre's house after the latter's downfall in July of 1794. The report said: "These men, in order to bring us to the happiness of Sparta, wished to annihilate twelve or fifteen millions of the French people. . . ."¹²⁷ The population of France at that time was 25 million. A similar story came from Beaulieu, who claimed that a former associate of Robespierre, the Marquis d'Antonne, told him of Robespierre's theory while the two of them were in prison. "He thought, like the greater number of the revolutionary clubs, that, in order to institute the republic on the ruins of the monarchy, it was necessary to exterminate all those who preferred the lat-

125. Conventional historian Crane Brinton gave us one of the few references to Mrs. Webster when he contemptuously dismissed her (without mentioning any of her detailed histories of the period) as "frightened Tories like Mrs. Nesta Webster. . . ." Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage, [1938] 1952), p. 56.

126. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 34.

127. Nesta H. Webster, *The French Revolution: A Study in Democracy* (London: Constable, 1919), p. 424. (<http://bit.ly/WebsterFR>)

ter form of government, and that the former could only become democratic by the destruction of luxury and riches, which form the support of royalty; that equality would never be anything but a chimera as long as men did not all enjoy approximately equal properties; and finally, that such an order of things could never be established until a third of the population had been suppressed. . . ."¹²⁸

The most impressive testimony came from Gracchus Babeuf, the communist revolutionary who became a model for Karl Marx.¹²⁹ Babeuf and his disciple Buonarroti were the great promoters of the religion of revolution. "May everything return to chaos," Babeuf wrote in his *Plebeian Manifesto*, "and out of chaos may there emerge a new and regenerated world."¹³⁰ In 1795, Babeuf gave this account of Robespierre's depopulation scheme in his tract, "Sur le Systeme de la Depopulation, ou La Vie et les Crimes de Carrier": "Maximilien [Robespierre] and his council had calculated that a real regeneration of France could only be operated by means of a new distribution of territory and of the men who occupied it. . . . He thought that . . . depopulation was indispensable, because the calculation had been made that the French population was in excess of the resources of the soil and of the requirements of useful industry, that is to say, that, with us, men jostled each other too much for each to be able to live at ease; that hands were too numerous for the execution of all works of essential utility. . . ."¹³¹

Webster's analysis of the reasons lying behind the socialists' call for systematic depopulation, written in 1919, is as relevant today—the era of the population hysteria—as it was when she wrote it:

But could a nation of 25,000,000 be thus transformed? To the regenerators of France it seemed extremely doubtful; already the country was rent with dissensions, and any scheme for universal contentment seemed impossible of attainment. Moreover, the plan of dividing things up into equal shares presented an insuperable difficulty, for it became evident that amongst a population of this size there was not enough money, not enough property, not enough employment, not even at this moment enough bread to go around; no one would be

128. *Ibid.*, pp. 424–25.

129. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (1848), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1969] 1977), I, p. 134. Cf. George Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 61, 89.

130. Cited in James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 75.

131. Cited in Webster, p. 425.

satisfied with his share, and instead of universal contentment, universal dissatisfaction would result. What was to be done? The population was too large for the scheme of the leaders to be carried out successfully, therefore either the scheme must be abandoned or *the population must be diminished*.¹³²

An odd aspect of the French Revolution was that it was officially “pro-marriage” (and therefore presumably pro-natalist) at the same time that the guillotine was in full force. This was also true for Stalin’s Russia in the late 1930s, when a pro-marriage reformation of the Soviet law code was passed while he was executing millions, either deliberately or indirectly by putting them into slave labor camps. The French Revolutionary Assembly passed a head tax on unmarried persons over thirty years old. There was even a national celebration to honor husbands and wives.¹³³ The Nazi policies of the 1930s imitated this same schizophrenia: pro-family tax policies and subsidies for births, yet death-producing slave labor camps for millions.

4. The Armenian Genocide

The next major example of a deliberate policy of population extermination is the Turkish persecution of the Armenians. It came in two waves, in 1895–96 and two decades later in 1915–16. Mass murders were conducted in the first period, and again in 1909 under the so-called Young Turks. In the final wave, the number of victims was at least 800,000 and possibly as high as two million.¹³⁴ In this case, the victims were long-term residents of the Ottoman Empire, but were considered religious foreigners.

5. The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union did not use the excuse of “foreign populations” residing in the Soviet empire. The recurring Soviet depopulations were ideologically motivated. The first instances of serious food shortages took place during the First World War. But these were minor compared to the results of the forced collectivization of agriculture, first in the “war communism” phase of the early 1918–22,¹³⁵ and second in the

132. *Ibid.*, pp. 423–24.

133. William Petersen, *Population*, p. 148.

134. Dickran H. Boyajian, *Armenia: The Case for a Forgotten Genocide* (Westwood, New Jersey: Educational Books, 1972), p. 1.

135. Lazar Volin, *A Century of Russian Agriculture: From Alexander II to Khrush-*

early 1930s. The program of forced starvation of small landowners (the "kulaks") in the late 1920s and early 1930s led to resistance by the peasants, and Stalin's response was to starve them into compliance. Historian Paul Johnson quite properly refers to this as Stalin's "colossal exercise in social engineering, the destruction of the independent Russian peasantry."¹³⁶ We do not know how many peasants were executed—or as Stalin said, "liquidated"¹³⁷—during the 1928–31 period, but Stalin once remarked to Churchill that ten million peasants had been "dealt with."¹³⁸ The general estimate is: one-third in concentration camps, one-third murdered, and one-third forcibly transported into Siberia or central Asia. Most of the large-scale violence took place over a few months, from the end of 1929 through early 1930.¹³⁹ In 1929, only about 4% of all peasant households were in collective or state farms. In 1930, this had risen to about a quarter of the peasant population. A year later, it was 53%. By 1937, it was 93%.¹⁴⁰

The peasants, in response, burned their crops and ate their horses and cattle, rather than place this property in the collective farms and state farms. Stalin later admitted that in 1929, the Soviet Union had 34 million horses; only 16.6 million were left in 1934—a loss of 18 million. They also lost 30 million cattle (45% of the total), as well as nearly 100 million sheep and goats, two-thirds of the total.¹⁴¹ Wrote historian Robert Conquest: "The famine can be blamed quite flatly on Stalin. The crop in 1932 was about 12 percent below average. This was far from being famine level. But procurements of food from the peasantry were up by 44 percent. The result was, and could not have been other than, large-scale starvation. It is perhaps the only case in history of a purely man-made famine. It is also the only major famine whose very existence was ignored or denied by the governmental authorities, and even to a large degree successfully concealed from world opinion."¹⁴² (The one report on the famine by a foreign journalist was Malcolm

chev (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), ch. 7.

136. Johnson, *Modern Times*, p. 267.

137. *Ibid.*, p. 269. This was the first time that Stalin used the term. It would not be the last.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 271. The reference appears in Vol. 8 of Churchill's *Second World War* (1964), p. 78.

139. *Idem.*

140. Volin, *Russian Agriculture*, p. 211.

141. Isaac Deutcher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (New York: Vintage, [1949] 1960), p. 325. He cited Stalin's *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow, 1945), p. 480.

142. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purges of the Thirties*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1973), p. 45.

Muggridge's, which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* in three installments in March, 1933. He was the only journalist who had been in the famine areas without official supervision. The reaction in Britain to his articles was hostile.)¹⁴³ Volin's estimate of famine-produced deaths is five million.¹⁴⁴

So desperate was Stalin for foreign currency that he began a series of sales of art treasures, including a famous one to capitalist Andrew Mellon in 1930–31; for \$6.5 million, Mellon bought twenty-one paintings that became the basis of the Washington National Gallery.¹⁴⁵

Johnson's explanation concerning Stalin's economic motivation is to the point:

There was no theoretical basis in Marxism, or anything else, for what Stalin now did. But it had a certain monstrous logic. There is no point of stability in a state which is socializing itself. It must go either forward or back. If it does not go forward, the power of the market system, which expresses certain basic human instincts of barter and accumulation, is such that it will always reassert itself, and capitalism will make its reappearance. Then the embryo socialist state will collapse. If socialism is to go forward, it must push ahead with large-scale industrialization. That means surplus food for the workers; and surplus food to export to raise money for capital investment. In short the peasants must pay the price for socialist progress. And since they are unwilling to pay this price voluntarily, force must be used, in ever-growing quantities, until their will is broken and they deliver what is required of them. That is the bitter logic of socialist power which Stalin grasped in the 1920s: there was no stable point of rest between a return to capitalism and the use of unlimited force.¹⁴⁶

Despite the repeated connection between socialism and genocide, this urge to mass destruction is more than mere economics. Stalin's purge of up to a million Communist Party members in the late 1930s indicates that some other motive was involved.¹⁴⁷ The Soviet dissident, Sakharov, wrote that between 1936 and 1939, over 1.2 million Party members went into the camps, and only 50,000 regained their free-

143. Malcolm Muggridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time: Chronicle I: The Green Stick* (New York: Morrow, 1973), pp. 257–58.

144. Volin, *Russian Agriculture*, p. 233–34.

145. Johnson, *Modern Times*, p. 269.

146. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

147. Robert Conquest provides various estimates. that 500,000 to 1,000,000 people were executed: *Great Terror*, pp. 702, 713. For a profound literary account of the purges, see the novel by Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*.

dom.¹⁴⁸ Total arrests of all citizens in 1938 were probably over 7 million, possibly in the 9 million range.¹⁴⁹ This was in addition to the 5 million already in the camps, and this did not include actual criminals.¹⁵⁰ For twenty years of Stalin's reign, 1930–50, at least 20 million people died in the camps or were executed, and this figure is probably too low; it may have been 30 million dead.¹⁵¹ The chapter title of Isaac Deutcher's account of the period is hyperbolic, but more accurate than he really believed: "The Gods are Athirst."¹⁵²

6. Asian Communism

This readiness to execute millions for the sake of Communist doctrine was repeated: in Communist China under Mao and in Cambodia in the 1970s. The Chinese death rate is a mystery. In the first phase (1949–51), as many as 15 million may have died, or as few as a million.¹⁵³ In the second phase, the period of the "Great Leap Forward" (late 1950s), we simply cannot know for certain. Mosher cites evidence that in 1960 alone, the number of famine-related deaths may have been as high as 30 million, or as low as 11 million.¹⁵⁴ In the third phase, the "Cultural Revolution" of the 1966–68, the Red Guards murdered at least 400,000 people.¹⁵⁵ As for Cambodia, a fifth of the Cambodian population, about 1.2 million people, died during the initial Communist take-over, from April of 1975 until early 1977.¹⁵⁶

This has been the application of the biblical truth that all those who hate God love death (Prov. 8:36b). The satanic hatred of the image of God in man leads the most consistent satanic commonwealths to depopulate their own populations. Revolutionary socialism and genocide are linked by common theological doctrines, the religion of revolution and the hatred of God's image in man. The economic issues are relevant to genocide—the "fixed pie" doctrine of wealth and the

148. *Ibid.*, p. 713.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 702.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 708.

151. *Ibid.*, p. 710.

152. Deutcher, *Stalin*, ch. 9.

153. Johnson, *Modern Times*, p. 548.

154. Mosher, *Broken Earth*, p. 264.

155. Johnson, *Modern Times*, p. 558.

156. *Ibid.*, p. 657. This is the estimate of John Barron and Anthony Paul, *Murder of a Gentle Land* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), p. 206. This book provides many anecdotal accounts of the ruthless murders and torturings that went on in 1975 and 1976 in Cambodia.

growing number of “eaters”—but not primary.

Conclusion

The continuing propaganda against population growth is part of a comprehensive program of humanistic social regeneration. The image of God, mankind, is seen as a threat to ethically rebellious men. Population growth is therefore a threat to humanism. First, in a finite universe, such population growth points to the limits of time: a final judgment. Second, in a centrally planned economy, any uncontrolled resource is a threat to the overall economic plan. This creates problems—uncertainty—for the planners. Third, in an economy characterized by zero economic growth or declining output—which socialist economies tend to be—a growing population puts pressure on the total number of available economic resources. This leads to political problems. Nevertheless, the economic arguments are secondary. The primary argument is theological. Satan hates mankind. Those who hate God love death. The war against God ultimately involves the death of God’s image, mankind. Modern humanism, as it has grown more consistent with its own satanic presuppositions, has adopted as an ideal the philosophy of zero population growth and even population decline. Humanism hates God more than it loves man. Its population ideal is spoken of in the Bible as God’s curse.

APPENDIX C

THE LABYRINTH AND THE GARDEN

For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in (Ex. 14:3).

A. The Labyrinth in Egypt

The pyramids are one architectural legacy of the death-obsessed religion of Egypt. Another less well known legacy is the labyrinth. The word is derived from the Greek word, *labrys*, the word for the two-headed axe, the design found throughout Knossos, the massive structure excavated by Sir Arthur Evans on the Island of Crete in the early twentieth century.

S. H. Hooke's study of the history and meaning of the labyrinth traces the origin of this almost universal symbol. It began in Egypt. Specifically, the labyrinth design was used for the plans of palaces, but more importantly, for royal tombs and mortuary temples.¹ The sign appears on mortuary jars and other containers that are found in the tombs.² "The plan of the Old Kingdom seal-sign is also to be found in the pottery 'soul-houses' from the cemeteries at Rifeh of the 9th and 10th dynasties. Some of these 'soul-houses' show a staircase leading to a floor above the tomb-chamber, where there is a throne. These 'soul-houses' indicate that there was an 'abode' above the tomb-chamber, to which the king mounted when he rose from his ritual death."³

It is also highly significant that the Egyptian labyrinths were related to the bull, as was the famous "palace" of Knossos on Crete. The

1. S. H. Hooke (ed.), *The Labyrinth: Further Studies in the Relation between Myth and Ritual in the Ancient World* (London: SPCK, 1935), p. 4. It is significant that Sir Arthur Evans, who dug up and misinterpreted the "palace" of Knossos on Crete, believed that the labyrinth was "the palace sign." *Idem.* Evans wrote this in *The Palace of Minos*, vol. I, p. 359.

2. *Idem.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

bull represented the king-god, and was it brought into the sanctuary on ritual occasions and slain there.⁴ Ritual sacrifice and dancing were connected to the bull-god in the Osirian religion, as was also the case in the legend of Crete's King Minos, the deadly Minotaur ("Minos-bull"), and the sacrifices by Minos of the Athenian youths (the legend of Theseus, Ariadne, and Daedalus).⁵ Similar links between dancing and labyrinths also exist in Cornwall, England and also in Scandinavia and Northern Russia.⁶ It is a dance of death and resurrection.⁷

Hooke pointed out that it was very early in the Egyptian dynasties, in the second dynasty, when kings began to protect their burial places. This had not been true earlier. "Some of these chambers contained the bodies of those who accompanied the king to the after-life, his women and his body-guard who were killed and buried at the time of the royal funeral."⁸ The tomb of King Perabsen of the second dynasty was surrounded by a passage, a new feature, according to Sir Flinders Petrie, who excavated it.⁹ But, as Hooke said, there seems to have been no social or military reason for hiding the bodies of the kings.¹⁰ The pyramids were an extension of this desire to protect the bodies of the monarchs.

The motivation was religious and ritualistic, not defensive. Hooke wrote:

While pyramid and temple must be considered as one complex building, the internal construction of the pyramid became elaborate and labyrinthine in character. Nevertheless, the labyrinth name became attached to the temple, and it seems probable that the greater importance of the temple as the place of ritual, associated with Osiris, Amon or Re, as the case might be, would account for this. In the pyramid, and later in the rock-cut tombs, the body of the king was sealed up in his sarcophagus, and the entrances were blocked up and concealed. Nothing more happened there. But in the adjoining temple everything necessary for his welfare in the after-life was attended to. The plan and construction of the oldest known temple of Osiris at Abydos is interesting, therefore, in connection with the ori-

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 22–24.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–27.

6. Hans Georg Wunderlich, *The Secret of Crete* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 289.

7. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), pp. 329–30.

8. Hooke, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

ginal meaning of the Labyrinth. Especially as [citing Budge] “it is probable that there was a small temple of Osiris attached to every great temple in Egypt, and there is good reason to think that such temples of Osiris were better and more regularly served by the priests than the larger temples.”¹¹

Both Herodotus and Strabo described a huge Egyptian labyrinth at Hawara. It was a two-storied structure, with 1,500 rooms above and 1,500 below. It was excavated in 1888 by Sir Flinders Petrie.¹² Wunderlich wrote: “The purpose of the costly pyramids and mortuary temples involved in the worship of the dead pharaoh was to propitiate Osiris, to win favor of the god of vegetation. The fifteen hundred burial vaults and dwellings for the dead in the labyrinth [on the bottom or underground floor—G.N.] were meant for provincial sovereigns, princes of the blood and similar highly placed personages of the Twelfth Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom. [This would have been the era of the pharaohs from Joseph to Moses’ youth, according to Courville.—G.N.] The labyrinth, therefore, was not a mortuary temple in the strict sense of the word. By that is meant, in Egypt, a structure for the cult of the dead but not a burial place.”¹³

B. The “Palace” of Knossos

Wunderlich traced the interrelationships between Egypt and Knossos, the so-called “palace” of the legendary King Minos, on the island of Crete. This relationship was recognized by the Roman historian Pliny, whose *Natural History* (XXXVI, 13) says that Daedalus, the designer of the labyrinth at Crete, took the design from Egypt.¹⁴ The palace of Minos, which was so lavishly described—a better word might be “invented”—and partially reconstructed by the British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans during the first three decades of the twentieth century, was in fact a giant tomb, not a palace. It was never intended to be inhabited by the living. Its soft gypsum floors that can be scratched by a fingernail, its huge and unmovable pithoi (urns), its dark labyrinthine hallways, its lack of any protecting wall, its distance from agriculturally productive land, its “bathtubs” without drain pipes (sarcophagi), and “indoor plumbing” without drain pipes (circulating vents for mum-

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

12. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, [1969] 1978), p. 70.

13. Wunderlich, *Secret of Crete*, p. 248.

14. Hooke, p. 17.

mies) all point to a vast cult of the dead, not the residence of the king. The supposedly happy and free-spirited people who were called the Minoans by Evans were figments of his vivid imagination. The Minoans were an integral part of the Bronze Age culture—a demonic, fearful, death-obsessed culture.

These “Minoans” mummified their dead, as the Egyptians did, for similar theological reasons, at least with respect to the dead person’s passage through the underworld.¹⁵ As Wunderlich showed, they had trading relations with the Egyptians, who called them the Keftiu.¹⁶ The link with Egypt is testified to by the Egyptian-style clothing of men pictured on the walls of the “palace,” as well as by drawings of these “Minoan” people in a tomb in Egypt. Evans dug up an Egyptian statue in the “palace” which was made in the era of Egypt’s Twelfth Dynasty.¹⁷ Conversely, Egyptian ruins contain examples of pottery that look like the “Minoan” pottery.¹⁸ (On Evans’ misuse of the evidence to make it fit an evolutionary model, see Appendix A: “The Reconstruction of Egypt’s Chronology,” under the subhead, “Egypt and Crete.”)

C. Beyond Crete

The labyrinth is an extremely important symbol. It appears in most of the ancient cultures in one form or another. Sir Arthur Evans discovered numerous coins on Crete that had the Minotaur and labyrinth designs on them.¹⁹ These coins were not contemporaneous with the construction of Knossos, of course; coins began to appear about the sixth century, B.C. Hooke reports that examples of labyrinth designs appear constantly on seals from Asia Minor, Palestine, and Mesopotamia.²⁰ Archaeologists have discovered labyrinths drawn in rocks in Britain and Scandinavia. Hooke recognized this as the probable product of trade between the Mediterranean and the Baltic region.²¹ But what Hooke did not know is that the Knossos labyrinth and Minotaur designs have been discovered in pre-Columbus North America and South America.

15. Wunderlich, ch. 21: “A Visit in the Underworld.”

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 174–80.

17. Leonard Cottrell, *The Bull of Minos* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1958), pp. 136–37.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

19. Hooke, pp. 9–10.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

In rock formations in Oraibi, New Mexico and Cuenca, Ecuador, the labyrinth pattern of Knossos appears. The Minotaur—half bull, half man—is the other famous Cretan design that is closely related to the labyrinth. It has also been found in Texas petroglyphs.²² The explanation of how they got there is the same: trade. Barry Fell, whose books constitute a true intellectual revolution, argued convincingly that these rock carvings are reproductions of coins that were in circulation in North and South America several centuries before Christ.²³ This, of course, points to a system of worldwide trade—trade which Fell's *Bronze Age America* proves was going on in the second millennium B.C., and probably early in the second millennium.²⁴

The labyrinth is likely related symbolically to the garden of Eden, which had the four rivers flowing out of it. It would be a walled or square design surrounding lines resembling a river or rivers. (The wall must have been open only at one place, at the east gate, where God placed the angels: Gen. 3:24.) The later Greek key-pattern of the labyrinth, called a meander,²⁵ is related linguistically to a river in Phrigia, Maiandros, noted for its winding path.²⁶ The English word "meander" is applied to both rivers and labyrinthine passages.²⁷

Pagan versions of the labyrinth imagery include the swastika or twisted cross. Some scholars (along with their native informers) relate the swastika to the tree of life.²⁸ But in the Mediterranean world of the Bronze Age, the labyrinth was associated with death. Wunderlich commented:

... a labyrinth is not a necropolis. By necropolises we mean cities of the dead in which the dead are placed singly or together in dwellings or tombs. Necropolises may be attached to labyrinths. But a labyrinth has, in addition to its primary function of serving as a residence for the dead, quite a few additional functions: it is the spiritual center of the surrounding settlements; a religious site; an assembly point; an arena, an archive and scriptorium; a place of judgment, execution and sacrifice; and so on. The great courts and subsidiary buildings serve these purposes, as well as the prime purpose of holding im-

22. Barry Fell, *Saga America* (New York: Times Books, 1974), pp. 104–5.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14.

24. Barry Fell, *Bronze Age America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982).

25. Hooke, p. 7.

26. *Oxford English Dictionary*: "miander."

27. *Idem.*

28. Clyde Keller, "Tree of Life and Labyrinth," *The Epigraphic Society: Occasional Publications*, V (1978), Pt. 2.

pressive funeral ceremonies, which were accompanied by religious dramas and competitive games complete with music, dancing and banquets. In antiquity the usual meaning of a labyrinth as a structure in which the dead rested in the underground rooms was well understood.²⁹

D. Gnostic Salvation

1. Secret Knowledge

Joseph Campbell related another tale of the labyrinth from the Melanesian island of Malekula. As the soul approaches the way of the dead to the Land of the Dead, having crossed the waters of death, the guardian of the underworld meets him. This guardian is female. She has drawn a labyrinth design in the ground in front of the entrance. As the soul approaches, she erases half the design. "The voyager must restore the design perfectly if he is to pass through it to the Land of the Dead. Those who fail, the threshold guardian eats. One may understand how very important it must have been, then, to learn the secret of the labyrinth before death; and why the teaching of the secret of immortality is the chief concern of the religious ceremonials of Malekula."³⁰ *The labyrinth's way of salvation is therefore the way of secret knowledge.* This is the essence of the heresy of gnosticism: salvation by initiation, meaning salvation by secret knowledge. It is a perpetual alternative to salvation by grace through faith.

Campbell was heavily influenced by the psychological and symbolic theories of C. G. Jung. His assessment of the meaning of the labyrinth is suggestive but not definitive. Nevertheless, the connections that he made are important.

In archaic art, the labyrinth—home of the child-consuming Minotaur—was represented in the figure of a spiral. The spiral also appears spontaneously in certain stages of meditation, as well as to people going to sleep under ether. It is a prominent device, furthermore, at the silent ceremonies within the dark passages of the ancient Irish kingly burial mound of New Grange. These facts suggest that a constellation of images denoting the plunge and dissolution of consciousness in the darkness of non-being must have been employed intentionally, from an early date, to represent the analogy of

29. Wunderlich, p. 249.

30. Campbell, *Primitive Mythology*, p. 69. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1958] 1965), p. 62.

threshold rites to the mystery of the entry of the child into the womb for birth. . . . It is obvious that the idea of death-and-rebirth, rebirth through ritual and with a fresh organization of profoundly impressed sign stimuli, is an extremely ancient one in the history of culture. . . .³¹

We know that the garden of Eden was placed eastward in Eden (Gen. 2:8). When God closed its entrance by placing the cherubim and the flaming sword, they were stationed at the east of the garden (Gen. 3:24). *This means that the garden itself must have been an enclosed space.* Its walls protected it from those who would enter it on any terms except those established by God. Man was not to gain access to the tree of life by breaking into the closed space (Gen. 3:22, 24). From the day of man's expulsion, the only way to the tree of life is through ethical conformity to God's standards. The standard is perfection. Regeneration, not the scaling of physical or symbolic walls, is the foundation of eternal life.

The *walled enclosure* is therefore a significant design—one of the most significant in man's history. Pagan cultures again and again return to it. They invest it with many meanings. The heart of the pagan version, the labyrinth, is a closed space in which a winding pathway is dominant. Men who do not know the secret of the pathway are trapped, condemned to wander helplessly. Only by knowing the way out (or in) through the entrance can man attain his eternal goal. The walls, however, cannot be scaled by man.

2. *Egypt as Garden-Labyrinth*

Egypt was a symbol of the garden. In Abraham's day, it was the place that was spared during the famine (Gen. 12:10). Abraham journeyed to Egypt, but then went back up into Canaan. This was a symbolic resurrection. This was true again in Joseph's day: descent into a "garden," which became a labyrinth or wilderness, and then escape. Jacob wanted his body to be taken up out of Egypt after his death, and buried in the cave in Canaan in which his fathers were buried (Gen. 49:29–32). Joseph wanted his bones dug up and reburied in the promised land (Gen. 50:25). Again, this points to resurrection. So does Joseph's experience in Potiphar's house (the "garden") and his experience in prison ("wilderness-labyrinth"), a walled, enclosed space, from which he was delivered by God into a position of authority.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

Goshen was the best of Egypt, and it was given to Israel by Joseph's Pharaoh (Gen. 47:6). Goshen was a garden. It was partially protected from the plagues of Egypt, at least plagues seven through ten (Ex. 8:22–24; 9:6, 26; 10:23; 12). Goshen was to have served as an Edenic training ground for Israel, a kind of headquarters for dominion. But, by Moses' day, the hearts of the Israelites had been captured by the gods of Egypt, and therefore their bodies had been placed in bondage to the rulers of Egypt. The golden calf in the wilderness testified to their Egyptian faith. They fell once again, just as their father Adam had fallen in his garden environment. The Edenic training ground of Goshen became a wilderness training ground. The Bible's message is clear: *a good environment does not necessarily produce good men*. Men are not saved by manipulating their environment.

Egypt was not seen as a garden by the Egyptians. A garden is a preliminary training ground for redeemed man's dominion in a future-oriented world. This was not the world believed in by the Egyptians. They believed in a static and magical world. Egypt was understood as a labyrinth by Pharaoh. As the children of Israel were escaping, Pharaoh said to his subordinates, "They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in" (Ex. 14:3). The barrier of the Red Sea was considered to be impenetrable. Egypt was an "enclosed space." The only visible outlet passed through the land of the Philistines. But God warned Moses not to go by that route, for it might have meant a battle, and the Israelites were not ready for a fight. They might have returned to Egypt (Ex. 13:17). Thus, it appeared to Pharaoh that the Israelites were trapped, "entangled in the land."

What Pharaoh did not expect was that God would penetrate the labyrinth's walls. God could knock down the walls of any labyrinth, or create a passageway through the Red Sea. This was also to be His strategy with the Jordan River and the city of Jericho a generation later. It was not necessary for the Israelites to go through the gates of the city or around the river. *God's answer was a direct assault on the barrier*. The people were led by God's glory-cloud. When the Egyptian army approached, the cloud went behind them. This cloud then served as a barrier to the Egyptians (Ex. 14:19–20), a source of darkness for the Egyptians and a source of light for the Israelites (v. 20). Like the flaming sword of the garden, the flaming glory cloud served as an unpassable barrier to the enemies of God. *God created a protective enclosed space of His people*. The tabernacle and the temple later symbolized this same sort of enclosed space. *At the heart of this enclosed*

space was ethics. In the case of the tabernacle and temple, the center was the holy of holies, in which the tablets of the law resided.

The last instance we have in the Bible concerning Egypt as a place of refuge prior to a “resurrection unto dominion” is the case of the parents of Jesus. They obeyed the angel which told them to go down into Egypt (Matt. 2:13–14). This was done to fulfill a messianic prophecy (Hosea 11:1), “Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt. 2:15b). After Herod’s death, they returned to Israel (Matt. 2:20–21).³² Herod, the “guardian” at the “gate” of Israel, was no longer a threat.

3. *The Guardian*

Men who would have sought to enter Eden’s garden needed to bypass the angelic guardians. Similarly, in the Melanesian legend of the labyrinth, the supernatural female guardian serves as the destroyer of anyone who does not know the secret of the labyrinth. The Bible teaches that access through the protected gate is not based on secret knowledge; it is based rather on one’s covenantal relationship with the God who assigned the angelic guardians to their place.

Jacob, upon returning from the wilderness experience of labor under Laban, faced a barrier, the Jordan River (Gen. 32:10), and a guardian, his brother Esau. He wrestled all night with a theophany of God who renamed him and gave him a blessing (32:24–29). Moses, upon returning to Egypt with an uncircumcised son named Gershom (from a Hebrew root meaning “driven out”),³³ faced the guardian of the border, an angel, and he was not permitted to pass through until Zipporah circumcised Gershom (Ex. 4:24–26).³⁴ In another Old Testament judicial arrangement, the fugitive from the *ga’al* (kinsman-redeemer/avenger of blood) who fled to the safety of the enclosed space of a city of refuge had to wait until the death of the high priest before he could safely return home, for the *ga’al* was the guardian of the route of escape and could lawfully slay him if he passed through the gates of the

32. That they should have traveled to Egypt is not surprising. A thriving colony of Jews had lived in Alexandria since the days of Alexander the Great, who had attracted them by promising them the same legal rights that Greeks possessed. They prospered and helped the city to become a major commercial center. Henri Daniel-Rops, *Israel and the Ancient World* (New York: Image, 1964), p. 349.

33. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, p. 28, #1644.

34. For a detailed treatment of this deeply symbolic event, see my essay, “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb,” *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

city (Num. 35:12–28).

4. Resurrection

The garden is a sabbath resting place, a place of refreshment. From the garden men are to march forward in victory. *The garden is the symbol or archetype of paradise. The labyrinth, on the other hand, is the archetype of hell*, and was so understood by the ancients. It is a place from which men need to escape. *Escape from the labyrinth is resurrection*. Thus, the pagan rituals associated with the labyrinth are rituals of death and resurrection.

The night before His death, Jesus went into a garden. Gethsemane was His place of prayer to God. He told His disciples to continue to watch with Him (Matt. 26:38), to watch and pray (v. 41). He instructed them three times, but the disciples fell asleep each time. They were not ready to defend the garden from invaders. Then the garden was invaded by the authorities, led by Judas, Satan's man. Satan had invaded the garden once again. Jesus was then expelled from the garden, as if He had committed the sin of Adam. He was brought before the judges, as Adam had been brought before God the judge. He was executed, suffering death, just as God had promised to Adam. Then came the resurrection. *Death and resurrection*, given the sin of Adam, is inescapably linked to the *garden* in biblical imagery and biblical history. The question is: Will it be resurrection unto life or resurrection unto the second death (Rev. 20:14)?

Heaven and hell are temporary locations, just as the garden was. They serve as embarkation points. After the resurrection, the heaven-dwellers are returned to the new earth, while the hell-dwellers are dumped into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15). Thus, physical resurrection at the day of judgment is not the basis of escape from the labyrinth. There is no escape after physical death. The only escape is the covenantal-ethical decision made in time and on earth.

5. Barriers

In one sense, *the barriers to escape or entry are broken by Christ*. The veil of the temple was torn at the death of Christ (Matt. 27:51). The stone barrier placed over His tomb by the authorities was rolled away (Matt. 28:2). Christ spoke of the impending fulfillment and removal of the old covenant's ceremonial barriers with the gentile world when He announced that new wine cannot be contained in old con-

tainers (Matt. 9:17). Israel would no longer serve as a geographical recapitulation of the garden, for sin had turned it into a gnostic labyrinth. Schlossberg remarked:

Combining social purpose with expertise sets the stage for a gnosticism in which only the special few have the key to the secrets of the universe. This is not something that can simply be learned from books, although the cognoscenti are almost invariably well-educated. They must also have the requisite "social purpose," for the knowledge required to run society cannot simply be communicated rationally. They are like the Pharisees who taught that God gave Moses not only a written law but also an oral one, handed down through the generations to only the privileged few. This was the key to the power of the Pharisees: they had the knowledge to unlock the meaning of the Pentateuch, to be the recipients of wisdom had by no others. Not possessing esoteric knowledge, the masses have no choice but to turn their lives over to the elite to be managed. Never ask the enlightened ones about their track record, which is a series of disguised disasters; just accept on faith that they have the secret to life.³⁵

The labyrinthine rules and teachings of pre-Talmudic Judaism had made Israel into a place of death rather than life, a labyrinth rather than a garden. The goal was now to escape the labyrinth. The Christians were warned about 40 years in advance by Jesus not to trust in the walls of Jerusalem when the Roman army encompassed the city, but rather to flee to the hills (Luke 21:20–24). It would mean death to remain, and resurrection to escape. Josephus' account of what happened in A.D. 69–70 offers the horrible evidence of the truth of Christ's predictions concerning Jerusalem. Israel remained a 40-year wilderness experience for the early Jewish-Christian church, one from which they were delivered (forced out) just before the fall of Jerusalem.

On the other hand, *there will always be enclosed sacred space*. The consummated church is described as a walled city (Rev. 21:10–21). Its gates are always open, however (v. 25). There will be no night there, no darkness (v. 25). Today, the church is also a place of refuge, a protected space. We journey weekly to eat with God and be refreshed—what Adam was supposed to have done in the garden. But it is still *a dominion training ground*, which it does not seem to be in the era after the resurrection. It is a place which points to the resurrection of many in

35. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), pp. 194–95.

the future, for it points backward to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

E. Wilderness

Moses' career was a three-stage encounter with the labyrinth and the wilderness. For 40 years, he lived in Egypt, which had become a labyrinth for the Israelites. He fled, for he knew his life was doomed in Egypt (Ex. 2:15). For 40 years, he lived as a shepherd in the wilderness. There, in the "backside of the desert," God confronted him at Mount Horeb (Ex. 3:1). He was drawn out of that wilderness back into Egypt. Then he spent 40 years in a new wilderness, having been driven out of Egypt. In each case, the number 40 was associated with a wilderness experience.

In each case, this experience involved training. Noah's world had become a labyrinth, a spiritual wilderness, a place fit for judgment. The death of Noah's world was accomplished by 40 days of rain (Gen. 7:17), but he escaped in a massive enclosed space—a garden experience, where he cared for the animals. The army of Israel was stymied for 40 days on the battlefield by the Philistines under Goliath (I Sam. 17:16). Elijah fled into the wilderness (I Kings. 19:4), and journeyed 40 days until he reached Mount Horeb (v. 8), where he lodged in a cave (v. 16), an enclosed space. Jesus also spent 40 days in the wilderness, in preparation for His ministry (Matt. 4:1–2). Moses' 40 years in the wilderness after the exodus points to the wilderness as both a labyrinth and a garden. For the older generation, it was a wilderness. They would all die there, except Joshua and Caleb. For the young, it was more of a garden, with the manna and springs refreshing them daily. It was a place of wandering for the older Israelites—a labyrinth from which there was to be no escape—and a place of training for the young. The way out was through the barrier, the Jordan River (Josh. 3:14–17).

At Gilgal, they were circumcised (Josh. 5:2–4); they celebrated the passover (5:10); and on that day the manna ceased (5:12). The wilderness was no longer their garden; the land of Canaan was, if they would remain faithful and conquer it militarily in the name of the Lord. The way through the garden was direct confrontation, city by city, culture by culture, cutting each off, one by one. It was not a labyrinth for them, not a place of wandering and indirect excursions. The pathway was direct.

1. *Broken Walls and Death*

When the Israelites fled Egypt, Egypt died. When they fled the wilderness, the manna ceased, and the wilderness returned to its condition as a place of death. When the Israelites attacked the walled cities of Jericho and Ai, these cities died. The whole culture of Canaan died to the extent that the Israelites remained faithful and conquered the people of the land. But when Israel grew rebellious, various civilizations penetrated their walls (the Book of Judges), and finally Assyria and Babylon completed the process. There was no escape, God through His prophets warned them, no safe way out of the land except through Babylon—to the east. *The east was the place of judgment.* There would be no escape back into Egypt, Jeremiah warned (Jer. 42:19). Those who disbelieved him perished in Egypt when God delivered the Egyptians into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 44:30; 46).

God closed the Old Covenant era with the fall of Jerusalem. Israel had become spiritual Babylon,³⁶ but in Old Testament times, this meant geographical deliverance. Revelation 12 discusses the fate of ethnic Israel, the “woman” who brought forth the man child who became the deliverer (Rev. 12:5–6, 13–14, 17). Israel had brought Babylon back into the land through the Babylonian Talmud and other eastern practices. The destruction of Israel by Rome was the final judgment on geographic Israel. The Israelites were scattered in all directions. Israel would never again serve as a garden place. *God’s garden place today is the institutional church, and only the institutional church.* What seems to be a garden place in our era—modern Israel—is a technological imitation of the garden, not the spiritual place prophesied of old.

2. *The End of Old Israel*

When men rebel against God, they are driven out of the garden. This happened to Adam. It happened to the Israelites when they fled from Egypt. It happened to them again with the invasions of Assyria and Babylon. Finally, it took place under Rome’s dominion in 70 A.D. Biblically, we see that when the dragon invades the garden and men subordinate themselves to him ethically and covenantally, he captures them. The only hope of deliverance is ethical deliverance, but in Old Testament times, this meant geographical deliverance. Revelation 12

36. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985), ch. 21. (<http://bit.ly/dcpardise>)

discusses the fate of ethnic Israel, the “woman” who brought forth the man child who became the deliverer.

And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up into God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. . . . And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. . . . And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:5–6, 13–14, 17).

It is difficult to view the woman as the Christian church in history, since the dragon makes war against her seed when he cannot touch her. It could conceivably refer to the Jewish-Christian church in Israel during the transitional era from Pentecost to the fall of Jerusalem, with the “seed” referring to gentile Christians, who were persecuted in other parts of the Roman Empire. Garden Israel therefore became a wilderness for the Jewish-Christian church. But the wilderness is a place of *temporary residence*, a training ground during a period in which dominion is restricted for the sake of the ethically immature. The problem with identifying the “woman” with the Jewish-Christian church is that this church was not historically impotent. Peter and the apostles had been visited by the Holy Spirit in power. That transitional era church was the headquarters for worldwide evangelism. These are not the activities of a wilderness experience. It therefore seems more likely that the “woman” is ethnic Israel. Ethnic Israel will be regrafted into the olive tree of true faith when the era of the gentiles comes to an end (Rom. 11:11–17, 23–32).³⁷ Thus, ethnic Israel is presently in the wilderness—outside the framework of dominion history during the era of the gentiles.

F. Labyrinth vs. Garden

For the pagan, the labyrinth was forbidden space. It was to be dealt

37. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), II, pp. 75–103.

with through secret initiation and metaphysical manipulation. It represented the nether world, or hell. For the God-fearing man, the garden is the product of ethics, a future goal toward which faithful people labor, first, by self-discipline under biblical law, and second, by external dominion through the imposition of biblical law over every area of life. *The garden is a symbol, not of something foreboding, but of a future paradise. It is heaven on earth, or the new heavens and new earth.*

For the pagan, the labyrinth was marked by its intricate passageways, its endless dead ends, and its enforced wandering. For the God-fearing man, the space within the walls of the enclosed garden is open space. One can go directly to the tree of life, which is in the center of the garden, which is also a city: the new Jerusalem. The garden is the place of righteousness, the place of obedience. "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the trees were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him" (Rev. 22:1–3).

Adam had the power to have gone straight to the tree of life in the garden of Eden. He did not. He allowed his wife to sidetrack him ethically. Pagans view this detour as essentially a lack of knowledge. Salvation, they believe, is through knowledge, especially secret knowledge. This is the gnostic heresy. Thus, the labyrinth is essentially mysterious, not ethical. For paganism, if a man knows the magic words, "open sesame," the closed doors will open. The labyrinth is a place of riddles.

G. The Sphinx

The Sphinx, which is found in Egypt (half lion, half man) and Greece (half lion, half woman), is also associated with riddles in Greek mythology, for it was the Sphinx which asked Oedipus the famous riddle of the creature with four legs in the morning (man, who crawls as an infant), two legs in the afternoon (man, who walks as an adult), and three legs in the evening (man, who uses a cane in old age). The Sphinx was a guardian. The Sphinx challenged travellers to Thebes and asked them this riddle. Anyone who failed to answer the riddle was throttled and consumed by the Sphinx. Oedipus answered it, de-

livered Thebes from its clutches, and was made king.³⁸

The Sphinx in Greek legend is representative of pagan underground demons in general. Jane Harrison commented: "Two special features characterize the Sphinx: she was a Harpy carrying off men to destruction, an incarnate plague; she was the soothsayer with the evil habit of asking riddles as well as answering them. Both functions, though seemingly alien, were characteristic of underworld bogeys; the myth-making mind put them together and wove out of the two the tale of the unanswered riddle and the consequent deathly pest."³⁹ The Sphinx was also a tomb-haunter.⁴⁰

Immanuel Velikovsky identified the historical source of this Greek legend: the Pharaoh Akhnaton. It was not Greece's Thebes that was the original location of these legends; it was Egypt's Thebes. There is strong evidence that Akhnaton committed incest with his mother, Queen Tiy. Furthermore, this queen was associated with the first appearance of a female sphinx. Akhnaton had two sons, Velikovsky speculated, just as Oedipus had. One son, the famous King Tut (Tutankhamen), was buried with great splendor, just as Eteocles was in the Greek legend. The other son, Smenkhkare, was buried ignominiously, just as Polynices was (by his sister Antigone). The uncle of these two sons, Ay, the brother of Queen Tiy, then made himself Pharaoh, just as Creon, the brother of Jocasta, made himself king of Thebes.⁴¹

This is not some crackpot theory. There is no doubt that Akhnaton was incestuous. C. D. Darlington, the geneticist, accepted Velikovsky's basic outline.⁴² So did the distinguished historian, Cyrus Gordon, who called the book a *tour de force*.⁴³ Three anatomists, using a microseriological method, demonstrated that both Smenkhkare and Tutankhamen belonged to the same rare blood group.⁴⁴ This increases the likelihood that these two were brothers, as Velikovsky suggested. The two mummies also had very similar skull structures, two of the

38. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1955), II, p. 10, Sect. 105.e.

39. Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (New York: Meridian, [1903] 1960), p. 207. (<http://bit.ly/Prolegomena>)

40. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

41. Immanuel Velikovsky, *Oedipus and Akhnaton: Myth and History* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960).

42. C. D. Darlington, *The Evolution of Man and Society* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), pp. 118–20.

43. Cyrus Gordon, "Oedipus and Akhnaton," *Pensée*, II (Fall 1972), p. 30.

44. *Nature*, Vol. 224 (Oct. 25, 1969), p. 325.

anatomists, Harrison and Abdalla, have reported.⁴⁵

H. Akhnaton, the Innovator

Recent scholarship on Akhnaton, who was originally named Amenhotep IV (Amenophis IV), has begun to abandon the pre-Velikovsky humanist adoration of the “king who invented monotheism.” Today, we read in utter amazement the early twentieth century assessment of Akhnaton by the otherwise judicious scholar, James Breasted: “In such contemplations he gradually developed ideals and purposes which make him the most remarkable of all the Pharaohs, and the first individual in human history.”⁴⁶ The first individual in history? It gets worse. “. . . he is alike the first prophet and the first wise-man of history.”⁴⁷

Such obvious nonsense could not go unchallenged forever, and hasn’t. Donald Redford’s *Akhenaten: The Heretic King* (1984) is a hostile account. This worshipper of the sun disc was a failure. His experiment in monotheism was rejected by his successors, who defaced his monuments. He regarded Akhnaton as a totalitarian.⁴⁸

Redford did not stress the king’s incestuous relationship with his mother, Tiy; instead, he hints at his incestuous relationship with his daughter, Meretaten, who was married to Smenkhkare.⁴⁹ If Smenkhkare was Akhnaton’s son, then the genetic line, already visibly weakened in Akhnaton,⁵⁰ must have been jeopardized to a remarkable extent. Akhnaten’s wife Nefertiti—this is in addition to his mother Tiy, who was never acknowledged to be his consort—because of the famous bust of her which is housed in the Berlin Museum,⁵¹ is more

45. *Antiquity*, Vol. 46 (February 1972), p. 10.

46. James Henry Breasted, *A History of the Ancient Egyptians* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, [1905] 1908), p. 265.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

48. Donald B. Redford, *Akhenaten: The Heretic King* (Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 235.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

51. The story of how it got there is a classic tale of bureaucracy and bureaucracy-overcoming. After Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, the French controlled all archeological exploration in Egypt. This monopoly was retained after 1904 as a result of a British-French agreement. (Thomas Hoving, *Tutankhamun: The Untold Story* [New York: Simon & Schuster Touchstone Book, 1978], pp. 24–25.) All antiquities exported from Egypt had to be approved by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities. In the 1930s, the Germans filled a room with four decades of uncatalogued junk: broken pottery, fragments, and molds of no value. They had never reported anything of significance in this collection. “Hidden” amongst tables full of junk was the head of Nefer-

familiar to most people than he is, although her prominence appears to have been great only during the first five years of his reign, when he had not yet declared his monotheism or moved his capital from Thebes to what is now called Tell-el-Amarna (Akhetaten).⁵² (It turns out that as an infant, she had been wet-nursed by the wife of Ay,⁵³ who was the brother ["Creon," argued Velikovsky] of Queen Tiy.⁵⁴ Nefertiti was not the wife of King Tut, contrary to popular opinion.) Redford also acknowledged that Smenkhkare and Tutankhamen were brothers, but not that they were sons of Akhnaton.⁵⁵

Akhnaton was narcissistic. Despite the destruction of his monuments by his successors, we still have more clay and stone bas reliefs of Akhnaton and his family than we possess of the kings and queens of England, from William the Conqueror (1066) to Queen Elizabeth II. Many of the carvings are so detailed anatomically that they can be described as exhibitionistic—unique in Egyptian history.⁵⁶

Akhnaton, Tutankhamen, and Smenkhkare were late eighteenth-dynasty monarchs. They followed Thutmose III by at least a century. Velikovsky's reconstruction indicates that Thutmose III was the Pharaoh Shishak, who invaded Israel in the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon.⁵⁷ This was in the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign (II Chron. 12:2). Thus, Akhnaton, the great-great-grandson of Thutmose III,⁵⁸ ruled sometime in the mid-tenth century, B.C., not in the mid-fourteenth century B.C., as the conventional histories insist.⁵⁹ In short, this Egyptian "inventor of monotheism" may even have been a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, at least in the prophet's youth. So much for Breasted's "first prophet" theory.

Breasted's laudatory account of Akhnaton also includes the sculpture of the era. The king's artists were instructed to make the king ap-

tit, which the Germans must have known was a true treasure. Then they informed the director of the Antiquities Department that they intended to send it all back to Berlin. No important find had ever been announced in 40 years, so he sent a young subordinate to inspect the collection for anything of value. The young man did not spot the bust, and Berlin Museum got this treasure. The Egyptians have complained, but to no avail. (Velikovsky, *Oedipus and Akhnaton*, pp. 76-77.)

52. Redford, pp. 78-79.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

56. Velikovsky, *Oedipus and Akhnaton*, p. 78.

57. Velikovsky, *Ages in Chaos* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952), ch. 4.

58. Redford, *Akhenaten*, genealogical chart, p. 13.

59. Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, *Tutankhamen* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, [1963] 1978), p. 105.

pear lifelike, he surmises (correctly, I would guess). "The modelling of the human figure at this time was so plastic that at the first glance one is sometimes in doubt whether he has before him a product of the Greek age."⁶⁰ We are supposed to conclude that in art, as in theology, Akhnaton was also a great innovator. Breasted missed the obvious: the sculptures appear Greek-like because they were contemporaneous with early Greece (Mycenae). Writing of the city of Akhetaton, Velikovsky noted: "Since it was inhabited for only about fifteen years, archaeologists have not had the tedious and often difficult task, encountered in other places, of separating various levels of occupation. Heaps of imported ceramics were found in Akhet-Aton; these came from Mycenae on the Greek mainland, or at least they were of the same manufacture as those found in Mycenae. Archaeologists dubbed a street in Akhet-Aton 'Greek Street' because of the abundance of this ware. On the basis of it, the age of King Akhnaton is established as synchronous with the Mycenaean Age in Greece. . . ." ⁶¹

Conclusion

Egyptian culture was the dominant influence in the ancient Near East well into the era of classical Greece. The cult of the dead, mummification (Crete), polytheism, labyrinths, and ultimately, the divinization of man: all were Egyptian legacies. All were based on the idea that man is saved, not by ethical regeneration, but by the manipulation of his own environment. For the theology of the garden, it is not the knowledge of riddles which saves a person, but rather the knowledge of the Lord. It is covenantal faithfulness which determines access to the garden and the tree of life, not initiatory knowledge. It is ethics, not knowledge, that is central.

The labyrinth was the satanic imitation of the garden. It was a place of terror, a place of confusion. Success in escaping the labyrinth depended on one's initiatory knowledge of its secret passageways. In other words, it was an emblem of *metaphysical religion*, in contrast to the Bible's *ethical and judicial religion*. It was a magical device which promised to give the initiate power over the underworld through magical manipulation. It was more a charm or talisman than a real place in which men might dwell. It was Egyptian to the core.

60. Breasted, p. 279.

61. Velikovsky, *Oedipus and Akhnaton*, pp. 75–76.

APPENDIX D

THE RULE OF LAW AND THE FREE MARKET

By centralizing power, the modern state is re-creating *the pyramid society*, the top-down system of total control—or attempted total control—that destroys the fabric of society. The *caretaker state* steadily replaces the biblical concept of the *night-watchman state*. The most important form of government, responsible self-government under God, is steadily eroded by a new concept of government, the messianic state. Social order also erodes. As the French Catholic social philosopher, Lamennais, wrote in the early nineteenth century, “Centralization induces apoplexy at the center and anemia at the extremities.”¹ Nobody has ever put it more graphically than this.

The biblical social order is utterly hostile to the pyramid society. The biblical social order is characterized by the following features. *First*, it is made up of multiple institutional arrangements, each with its own legitimate, limited, and derivative sovereignty under God’s universal law. *Second*, each institution possesses a hierarchical chain of command, but these chains of command are essentially appeals courts —“bottom-up” institutions—with the primary duty of responsible action placed on people occupying the lower rungs of authority. *Third*, no single institution has absolute and final authority in any instance; appeal can be made to other sovereign agents of godly judgment. Because no society can attain perfection, there will be instances of injustice, but the social goal is harmony under biblical law, in terms of an orthodox creed. God will judge all men perfectly. The state need not seek perfect justice, nor should citizens be taxed at the astronomical rates necessary to sustain the quest for perfect justice.²

1. Cited by Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 115.

2. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974). For an analysis of Fleming’s critique of the modern criminal justice system, see my review

F. A. Hayek made a point, which must be taken seriously by those who seek to explain the relationship between Christianity and the advent of free enterprise capitalism in the West. "There is probably no single factor which has contributed more to the prosperity of the West than the relative certainty of the law which has prevailed here."³ Economist Thomas Sowell's comments are especially graphic: "Someone who is going to work for many years to have his own home wants some fairly rigid assurance that the house will in fact belong to him—that he cannot be dispossessed by someone who is physically stronger, better armed, or more ruthless, or who is deemed more 'worthy' by political authorities. Rigid assurances are needed that changing fashions, mores, and power relationships will not suddenly deprive him of his property, his children, or his life."⁴

Hayek quite properly denied the validity of the quest for perfect certainty, because "complete certainty of the law is an ideal which we must try to approach but which we can never perfectly attain."⁵ His anti-perfectionism regarding the rule of law was also in accord with the anti-perfectionism of Christian social thought in the West.⁶ Christianity brought with it a conception of social order that made possible the economic development of the West.

A. Biblical Law and Capitalism

There is no doubt that *formal legal predictability* was a major factor in the rise of capitalism. By "capitalism," I mean a system of private ownership, which involves the freedom of contract, freely fluctuating prices, and a money economy. I am not speaking of traditional political capitalism, such as the tax-farming capitalism of ancient Rome, or the court-oriented capitalism of Spain in the sixteenth century. This is the distinction used by Max Weber to delineate modern from ancient capitalism.

Weber made a very important observation concerning the relationship between Protestantism and market-oriented capitalism. He sharply distinguished market capitalism from "political capitalism," in

of the book in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter 1975–76).

3. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 208.

4. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 32.

5. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 208.

6. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958). This is an abridged version of Warfield's two-volume study, published by Oxford University Press in 1931, and reprinted by Baker Book House in 1981.

which producers sell primarily to the state rather than to a competitive market.

The closest connection between ethical religion and rational economic development—particularly capitalism—was effected by all the forms of ascetic Protestantism and sectarianism in both Western and Eastern Europe, viz., Zwinglians, Calvinists, Baptists, Mennonites, Quakers, Methodists, and Pietists (both of the Reformed and, to a lesser degree, Lutheran varieties). . . . Indeed, generally speaking, the inclination to join an ethical, rationed, congregational religion becomes more strongly marked the farther away one gets from those strata which have been the carriers of the type of capitalism which is primarily political in orientation. Since the time of Hammurabi political capitalism has existed wherever there has been tax farming, the profitable provisions of the state's political needs, war, piracy, large-scale usury, and colonization. The tendency toward affiliation with an ethical, rational, congregational religion is more apt to be found the closer one gets to those strata which have been the carriers of the modern rational enterprise, i.e., strata with middle-class economic characteristics. . . .⁷

The idea of *the congregational unit*, where men worship God as equals before the law, where God is not a respecter of persons, where the law is read and understood by all members of the group, and where each man receives his calling to labor before God in a holy occupation, produces a mentality favoring *personal responsibility and production for a universal market*. Men's universal understanding of the civil law reduces the arbitrary decisions of the authorities, and this in turn reduces a major area of uncertainty. This reduction in bureaucratic arbitrariness reduces production costs. Fewer economic resources need to be set aside for bribes or court defense costs.

Yet it is not simply the universality of the legal system that is important. Specific aspects of the legal system, such as the honoring of private contracts, the respect for private property, the nondiscriminatory nature of the tax system, and the restriction of the civil government to the preservation of order, primarily by preserving public peace and preventing private fraud and coercion, have made it possible for capitalism to flourish. *All of these aspects are basic to biblical law*. Four such principles of biblical law come to mind. First, the concept of the

7. Max Weber, *Economy & Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press, [1920] 1968), pp. 479–80; *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 93–94.

covenant between God and man undergirds the right of private contract. Second, the commandment against theft is basic to the extension of the rights of private property. Third, the tithe, as a fixed percentage of a man's income, preserves the nondiscriminatory nature of taxation. Fourth, the enforcement of honest weights and measures is indicative of the Bible's view of the civil government as essentially a restraining institution, not a positive, initiating force in economic development, and certainly not a coercive agency of wealth redistribution.

Hayek's summary of the principles of a liberal economic order reveals how closely nineteenth-century liberalism resembled the view of civil government held by the Protestant congregational churches in the United States, Holland, and Britain in the eighteenth century.⁸ In short, *nineteenth-century liberalism was the humanists' version of "work out your salvation with fear and trembling*. When humanism's evangelists and social theorists finally persuaded men (especially leaders) to cease fearing God and trembling in His presence, the classical liberal economic order was doomed. Rather than killing God, classical liberalism killed itself.⁹

B. Whose Law Is Sovereign?

A few modern secular scholars still give lip-service to classical liberalism's idea of the rule of law. The advocates of classical liberalism in the nineteenth century, most notably the English economist and social theorist, John Stuart Mill,¹⁰ and the constitutional scholar, A. V. Dicey,¹¹ believed in the idea of the rule of law. The problem that faced

8. Hayek wrote elsewhere (in language as convoluted as Weber's): "The extension of an order of peace beyond the small purpose-oriented organization became thus possible by the extension of purpose-independent ('formal') rules of just conduct to the relations with other men who did not pursue the same concrete ends or hold the same values except those abstract rules—rules which did not impose obligations for particular actions (which always presuppose a concrete end) but consisted solely in prohibitions from infringing the protected domain of each which these rules enable us to determine. Liberalism is therefore inseparable from the institution of private property which is the name we usually give to the material part of this protected individual domain." Hayek, "The Principles of a Liberal Social Order" (1966), in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 165.

9. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A: "From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty."

10. Mill, *On Liberty* (1859).

11. A. V. Dicey, *An Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 8th ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Classics, [1915] 1982). Cf. Richard Cosgrove, *The Rule*

these legal theorists—a problem that they never overcame—was the problem of the *content* of the law. They frequently accepted the validity of *formal rationalism*, which meant that they wanted to establish formal “rules of the game” for all participants in society to observe. They wanted *legal predictability*. On the other hand, they could not agree on the *substantive principles of law*, meaning the ethical rules and regulations that ought to be imposed on all members of society. They saw the formal rationalism of law as the “universal,” but substantive rationalism—ethics, in other words—resisted treatment by any universally agreed-upon human logic, since the existence of such a universal logic is perhaps the most outrageous myth of human autonomy. It has not existed since the Fall of man. The myth of intellectual or moral neutrality finally died in the final third of the twentieth century, but it enjoyed a long life and a lingering terminal illness.

1. Max Weber

Max Weber, writing of substantive rationality or value rationality, concluded: “There is an infinite number of possible value scales for this type of rationality, of which the socialist and communist standards constitute only one group. The latter, although by no means unambiguous in themselves, always involve elements of social justice and equality. Others are criteria of status distinctions, or of the capacity for power, especially of the war capacity, of a political unit; all these and many others are of potential ‘substantive’ significance.”¹² What is important is that *no system of purely formal philosophical inquiry can determine which of these substantive or ethical systems is valid or universal*. More than this, Weber concluded: formal rationality (legal predictability) will always be in tension with substantive rationality (ethics). Humanist ethics are always pluralistic. There is no unifying set of ethical principles that will unify mankind’s ethical vision; therefore, formal rationalism can never escape a dialectical tension with substantive rationalism.

Humanist scholars have singled out the operations of the free market as an example of this supposedly inescapable perpetual tension. The market is essentially a huge auction. Producers of goods and ser-

of Law: Albert Venn Dicey, Victorian Jurist (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

12. Weber, *Economy & Society*, p. 86. A slightly different translation appears in Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. Talcot Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947), pp. 185–86.

vices sell to those who bid highest in terms of the monetary unit, irrespective of moral criteria, Weber said. Weber, as a liberal social democrat during his most productive years (1904–20), was willing to admit that formal rationality and substantive rationality did fit together quite well from the latter decades of the nineteenth century. “The reasons lie in the nature of the incentives which are set into motion by the type of economically oriented social action which alone is adequate to money calculations. But it nevertheless holds true under all circumstances that formal rationality itself does not tell us anything about real want satisfaction unless it is combined with an analysis of the distribution of income.”¹³

This supposed tension between efficiency and ethics has made the free market, both in terms of practice and theory, vulnerable to ethical criticism, and the critics have been both the socialists and the conservative traditionalists, sometimes joining together in their lambasting of the market.¹⁴ Why this two-sided ethical criticism of economic freedom? Tyrrell’s answer is incisive: both the socialist and the reactionary conservative share *a hatred for the present*. “Today’s socialist is not greatly different, in truth, from the reactionary. The latter idealizes a past that never was. The former idealizes a future that never will be. Both have an unscotchable and irrational yearning to escape the

13. Weber, *Economy & Society*, p. 109; *Social & Economic Organization*, p. 212.

14. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Knopf, 1984), ch. 8: “The Tory Opposition: Paternalism and Humanitarianism”; Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, pp. 25–28. The best example of this is Engels’ use of the famous Sadler Committee’s (1832) criticisms of industrialism’s abuses against children: *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845). The Sadler Committee was headed by Michael Thomas Sadler, a Tory. On Sadler and the “high Tories,” see Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1970), pp. 21–25. See also E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963), pp. 342–43. It was the conservatives under Bismarckian Germany who brought in the first compulsory social welfare programs in the form of insurance schemes for workers, inaugurated in the early 1870s and expanded for almost two decades thereafter: accident insurance funded by employers (1871), sickness insurance (1883), old age insurance (1888): J. H. Clapham, *Economic Development of France and Germany, 1815–1914* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1966), pp. 336–37. This, however, was done as part of an overall anti-socialist program, a means of defusing worker unrest. This anti-socialist program failed to achieve its short-run objectives; the Social Democratic Party continued to grow. In 1890, when Bismarck proposed the desperation policy of abrogating the constitution, shrinking the franchise, and driving the Social Democrats out of existence, the new emperor, William II, threw Bismarck out of office: Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany* (New York: Capricorn, [1946] 1963), pp. 426–27.

present or to destroy it.”¹⁵ Equally incisive is Clarence Carson’s observation that European conservatives and socialists share a common view of the state, that of a *substitute father*. The American tradition was originally very different. Not only did the Constitution’s framers separate church from state at the Federal level, they also separated *parenthood* from state.¹⁶

2. “Ethical” Critiques of the Market

The standard—indeed, nearly inevitable—criticism of the free market offered by socialist and reactionary critics is that, while the free market provides us with inexpensive goods and services, it nonetheless caters to those who have money to spend. Originally, socialists claimed that socialist economic planning is more efficient than decentralized, individualistic market planning. From Marx to the Fabians in Britain, this was their belief. As late as 1949, a British promoter of socialist planning could write of the British experiment in nationalization of industry: “Here at last a practical test of two vast and so far unproven assumptions is taking place. The first is that a planned socialist system is economically more efficient than a private-enterprise system; the second is that within democratic socialist planning the individual can be given broader social justice, greater security, and more complete freedom than under capitalism.”¹⁷ By the 1970s, the proponents of democratic socialism had abandoned the first assumption as erroneous, or at the very least, still unproven. The socialist economies had all failed the test of efficiency in the post-War world. Socialist scholars have grudgingly admitted over the years that free market economic incentives have led to a great outpouring of production. But, they say, this is not enough. They still assert that capitalism necessarily fails the second test, that of social justice. We have to see who gets the wealth. We have to see who is getting rich. We have to see if the needs of the people are being met. Ethics, not efficiency, must be our standard, socialists insist.

This humanistic appeal to ethics is illegitimate. The secular humanist logically cannot appeal to any universal ethical principle in order to criticize any economic outcome of market competition, pre-

15. R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., *The Liberal Crack-Up* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), p. 211.

16. Clarence B. Carson, *The World in the Grip of an Idea* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1979), p. 289.

17. Francis Williams, *Socialist Britain* (New York: Viking, 1949), p. 5.

cisely because *there is no universally agreed-upon humanistic ethical system*, and also because by the standards of rationalism, *we cannot legitimately make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility*. We cannot legitimately, scientifically add up columns of costs and benefits for whole populations.¹⁸ We cannot subtract the “psychological quantity” (if such a thing existed) lost by one person as the result of some market event from the “psychological addition” gained by another person. I cannot estimate just how much I have gained in an exchange, and then compare it with just how much one of my competitors forfeited by not bidding higher than I bid. Therefore, the attempt of the humanists, whether free market defenders, or economic interventionists, or communists, to make scientifically valid statements concerning the success or failure of any economic system to “deliver the goods” for the benefit of mankind, is an attempt that must inevitably fail as a scientific endeavor.¹⁹ *On the basis of scientific economics, no possible comparison of subjective utilities can be made, one participant’s vs. another’s.*

Any supposedly “scientific” evaluation between two rival economic systems is totally deceptive. The evaluator must make several assumptions beforehand about what criteria should be used for evaluating success or failure. Such assumptions are scientifically illegitimate. Why? First, there is no universal set of such standards. Second, if one person disagrees with the proposed standards, science or reason has no way to evaluate which criteria are correct. Third, even if we all agreed about these criteria, we could not be sure our assumptions are correct. Fourth, even if we could agree, and then also discover the truth of our agreed-upon standards, we lack the ability to evaluate the success or failure of any program or system, because we cannot tally up costs and benefits, disadvantages and advantages, losers and winners. *Economists cannot make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility*. This may not sound like a very important observation, but the problem of interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility has undermined the epistemology of every so-called science of economics or social welfare policy. To defend socialistic or free market programs of taxation, coercive wealth redistribution, free trade, or any other economic policy, economists must first scrap the whole structure of modern scientific economics, and then appeal to in-

18. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (New York: St. Martins, 1932), p. 140. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

19. Cf. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

tuition or metaphysics as the basis of their proposed reforms.²⁰ They refuse to admit this, because this would not be in their self-interest. The show must go on.

3. Humanistic Formal Law: A Vain Hope

The quest for a system of *neutral formal law* that also produces universally agreed-upon ethical benefits, and that does not limit the freedom of any of society's members, is a demonic quest. This is why the free market economists and legal theorists can never come to any agreement concerning the extent to which civil governments ought to interfere or refrain from interfering with the operations of the free market. They cannot agree upon the universally valid, or at least universally beneficial, formal legal rules. They certainly have not devised a theory of civil government that preserves the formal freedom of men to change their laws peacefully, yet which simultaneously guarantees full legal predictability to all market participants. This is one reason why nineteenth-century liberalism, which was democratic, decentralist, and free market-oriented, became twentieth-century liberalism, which is bureaucratic, centralist, and interventionist in economic policy. Nineteenth-century liberals wanted to defend political democracy as a means of preserving *peaceful transfers of political power*, yet they also wanted to preserve *legal predictability for market transactions*. As the philosophy of Western social philosophers (and then voters) shifted toward man-directing, bureaucracy-managing evolution, and away from man-responding, market-governed evolution,²¹ the formal rules of political democracy allowed the advent of market-disrupting changes in the "economic rules of the game." *The formal rules of political democracy overcame the formal rules of legal predictability and equality before the law.*

C. Legal Predictability and Judicial Sovereignty

What are some of the basic judicial aspects of a legal order that respects the rule of law? Joseph Raz listed eight convenient guidelines:

20. Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976). For a similar conclusion by radical economists, see Mark A. Lutz and Kenneth Lux, *The Challenge of Humanistic Economics* (Menlo Park, California: Benjamin/Cummings, 1979), pp. 67–69, 97–101.

21. North, "From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty," Appendix A in *Sovereignty and Dominion*.

1. All laws should be prospective, open, and clear. One cannot be guided by a retroactive law that does not exist at the time of action.
2. Laws should be relatively stable.
3. The making of particular laws should be guided by open, stable, clear, and general rules.
4. The independence of the judiciary should be guaranteed.
5. The principles of justice must be observed—open and fair hearings, absence of bias.
6. The courts should have review powers over the implementation of the other principles.
7. The courts should be easily accessible.
8. The discretion of crime-preventing agencies should not be allowed to pervert the law.²²

The emphasis is on legal predictability. However, Raz was overly confident in the courts as protectors of human freedom through the rule of law. What is to prevent the courts from exercising the same sorts of arbitrary rule that are characteristic of legislatures and executives? By establishing the civil court system as finally sovereign, a defender of the rule of law violates the biblical principle of multiple sovereignties. He lodges absolute final sovereignty in a human institution. Freedom can never survive long under such an absolutist system. We have already seen in the United States the creation of what lawyer Carol Kilgore called judicial tyranny,²³ and what Harvard law professor Raoul Berger called government by judiciary.²⁴ As Berger concluded: "Let it not be said of us as Gibbon said of Rome: 'The *image* of a free constitution was preserved with decent reverence. The Roman senate *appeared* to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government.' Here no Senate devolved the policymaking powers on the Court; they are self-conferred only because the American people are unaware that there is a yawning

22. Joseph Raz, "The Rule of Law and Its Virtue," in Robert L. Cunningham (ed.), *Liberty and the Rule of Law* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1979), pp. 7–11.

23. Carol D. Kilgore, *Judicial Tyranny* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1977).

24. Raoul Berger, *Government By Judiciary: The Transformation of the Fourteenth Amendment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977).

gulf between judicial professions and practice.”²⁵

To preserve freedom, there must be constitutional provisions that reduce this grant of sovereignty to the courts. One such reduction specified in the U. S. Constitution is the ability of Congress to limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Congress can determine what sort of cases can be appealed to the Court: “In all Cases affecting Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, and those in which a state shall be Party, the supreme Court shall have original jurisdiction. In all the other Cases before mentioned, the supreme Court shall have appellate Jurisdiction, both as to Law and Fact, with such Exceptions, and under such Regulations as the Congress shall make” (Art. III, Sec. 2). Congress has the authority to limit the Court’s jurisdiction—the “exceptions.”²⁶ This has been an exceptional power in U. S. constitutional history, however, and only occasionally used.²⁷

Another important limitation is the jury system. A jury has the ability to decide both the law and the facts in any case. A “not guilty” decision of a jury is irrevocable under the common law rule against double jeopardy.²⁸ Two historians provided background.

The idea of the sovereign authority of the jury dates from the jury’s earliest appearance. During the Middle Ages the English jury replaced a system that included trials by battle or ordeal, by which the judgment of Heaven was thought to be manifest. The jury system

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 417–18.

26. The Court declared in *The Frances Wright* (1882): “[W]hile the appellate power of this court under the Constitution extends to all cases within the judicial power of the United States, actual jurisdiction under the power is confined within such limits as Congress sees fit to prescribe. . . . What those powers shall be, and to what extent they shall be exercised, are, and always have been, proper subjects of legislative control. Authority to limit the jurisdiction necessarily carries with it authority to limit the use of the jurisdiction. Not only may whole classes of cases be kept out of the jurisdiction altogether, but particular classes of questions may be subjected to reexamination and review, while others are not.” Cited in Congressional Research Service, *The Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation, Annotations of Cases Decided by the Supreme Court of the United States to June 29, 1972* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 752n–753n. Cf. H. Hart, “The Power of the Congress to Limit the Jurisdiction of the Federal Courts: An Exercise in Dialectic,” *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 66 (1953), pp. 1362ff.

27. One example is *Ex Parte McCardle* (1869), where Congress removed the Court’s jurisdiction over habeas corpus during Reconstruction. See Alfred H. Kelley and Winfred A. Harbison, *The American Constitution: Its Origins and Development*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1955), pp. 479–80.

28. On double jeopardy, see Martin K. Friedlander, *Double Jeopardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Jay A. Sigler, *Double Jeopardy: The Development of a Legal and Social Policy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1969).

put the responsibility of judgment squarely upon the representatives of the community. Its sovereignty was emphasized by the familiar characterization of the jury as a "barrier . . . between the liberties of the people, and the prerogative of the crown" [*Blackstone's Commentaries*, V, p. 349]. Its almost plenary authority was evident in its familiar power to determine the law as well as the facts. When nineteenth-century judges began giving instructions on the law, formally limiting the jury's function to resolving disputed facts, juries nevertheless continued to exercise control over the law in certain cases by their acknowledged power to return a general verdict of guilt or innocence or without stated reasons.²⁹

Double jeopardy can and should be seen as an outgrowth of Christian legal procedure.³⁰ It represents an important barrier against the messianic expansion of central power. Local juries can always refuse to convict, which is what happened in the years prior to the American Revolution, especially in cases involving smuggling (violations of the British Empire's import restrictions in the colonies).³¹ This created major enforcement problems for the British bureaucracy. From the very founding of the United States, trial by jury was one of the legal pillars of the republic.³² That the Supreme Court in 1970 unilaterally decided that a six-man jury is adequate, thereby reversing 600 years of common law tradition, was no accident.³³ It was one more assertion of judicial sovereignty.

A related restriction on judicial sovereignty is the pardoning power. The U. S. Constitution grants this power to the President with respect to all Federal crimes, except Impeachment (Art. II, Sec. 2). State constitutions very often grant this pardoning power to the governor. Like jury nullification, this power is only exercised on a case-by-case basis; the decisions do not become binding as precedents.

The biblical principle of *multiple human sovereignties* points to the

29. DaHin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 211. Cf. Mark De Wolfe Howe, "Juries as Judges of Criminal Law," *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 52 (1939), pp. 582ff.; Harry Kalven and Hans Zeisel, *The American Jury* (New York: Little, Brown, 1966), pp. 227-36, 286-97.

30. Greg L. Bahnsen, "Double Jeopardy: A Case Study in the Influence of Christian Legislation," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter 1975-76).

31. Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period in American History*, 4 vols. England's *Commercial and Colonial Policy*, vol. 4 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1938] 1964), pp. 224-26.

32. Berger, *Government By Judiciary*, pp. 399-400.

33. *Ibid.*, ch. 22. The case was *Williams v. Florida* (1970).

necessity of creating *checks and balances* on all branches of civil government, including the judiciary. There should be no unitary institutional final court of earthly appeal for every conceivable kind of judicial dispute. For some sorts of cases, yes, by agreement among the other branches, but not for every type of case. *Plural sovereignties in civil government are basic to the preservation of liberty*. This is the insight of federalism. There must be no Pharaoh in Israel.

D. Law: Man's Discovery or Man's Creation?

The courts have become the law-makers of final appeal. They interpret the law, apply the law, define the law, and overturn the decisions of legislatures and executives. They have become sovereign in the West. They even make new laws retroactively. Legal scholar Gordon Tullock remarked that this writing of new law by the courts is "a bizarre characteristic of Anglo-Saxon law. . . ." ³⁴ He went on to state: "In general, laws should have only future effect, and individuals should not be punished for actions not contrary to the law at the time the actions occurred. The retroactive effect in our law comes from a fact that the judges in mythology were attempting rather to find out what the law actually was than to create new law; hence, when the Supreme Court ruled as to what the law was, this did not create a new rule—it simply made manifest what had already been true. I think this myth is not much longer believed. Unfortunately, the consequence of it—that is, retroactive effect of court decisions—is still with US." ³⁵

Tullock did not discuss the origin of this "myth" of judge-discovered law. The roots of this idea are Christian. Anglo-Saxon common law was originally based indirectly on Old Testament law. Canon law mixed Roman law and Old Testament law extensively. ³⁶ The language of the Old Testament, including Mosaic law, was used to support all the institutions of Christendom. From the very early stages of Anglo-Saxon law, there was a concept of a "higher law," a concept that governed the writing of the U. S. Constitution. ³⁷ Judges and legislators were supposed to search the Bible, and then search the principles of "right reason," in order to find what God requires from the civil gov-

34. Gordon Tullock, "Courts as Legislatures," in Cunningham (ed.), *Liberty and the Rule of Law*, p. 132.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

36. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, p. 204.

37. Edwin S. Corwin, *The "Higher Law" Background of American Constitutional Law* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955).

ernment. Rulers were not to make law; they were to discover *God-made law*—an eternally existing revealed law. This law was believed to be revealed in the Bible and also in the hearts of all men. Rulers were then to apply this law to specific circumstances. But this law was not to be applied retroactively, in the sense of punishing people who had never heard of such law. All men were to know the principles of the law because of their access to instruction in biblical law from priests and magistrates, and also from their own internal reflection based on “right reason.”

Hayek’s account of the origin of “judge-discovered law” indicates that the concept was originally Christian. It was a medieval idea, especially dominant in England. He stated quite openly that “it might also be said that it was because England retained more of the common medieval ideal of the supremacy of law, which was destroyed elsewhere by the rise of absolutism, that she was able to initiate the modern growth of liberty.”³⁸

This medieval view, which is profoundly important as background for modern developments, though completely accepted perhaps only during the early Middle Ages, was that “the state cannot itself create or make law, and of course as little abolish or violate law, because this would mean to abolish justice itself, it would be absurd, a sin, a rebellion against God who alone creates law.” For centuries it was recognized doctrine that kings or any other human authority could only declare or find the existing law, or modify abuses that had crept in, and not create law. Only gradually, during the later Middle Ages, did the conception of deliberate creation of new law—legislation as we know it—come to be accepted. In England, Parliament thus developed from what had been mainly a law-finding body to a law-creating one.³⁹

He might also have added that it was the American colonists’ hostility to the assertion of unlimited Parliamentary sovereignty in making laws that was a major factor in the coming of the American Revolution.⁴⁰ They believed, especially after 1770, that the common law of

38. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 163.

39. *Idem*.

40. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), ch. 5; Edmund S. Morgan and Helen S. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1963); R. J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1964] 2001), ch. 4: “Sovereignty.” (<http://bit.ly/rjrtir>)

England could make void certain acts of Parliament, a doctrine taken directly from the writings of the early seventeenth-century English jurist Sir Edward Coke [COOK], who had greater influence on this point in the thinking of colonial lawyers before the Revolution than the *Commentaries* of Blackstone, who was a defender of Parliamentary sovereignty.⁴¹ The American ideal of the doctrine of judicial supremacy and constitutionalism was not invented by Chief Justice John Marshall.⁴²

Hayek traced the origin of Western legal liberty to the struggles between Parliament and Crown in the Puritan revolution or British Civil War, and subsequently in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.⁴³ There was a concerted effort to secure the independence of judges. The debates from 1641 to 1660 focused on the prevention of arbitrary actions by the civil government. Hayek even noted the influence of Puritan Samuel Rutherford's defense of the rule of biblical law: "Throughout, the governing idea was that the law should be king or, as one of the polemical tracts of the period expressed it, *Lex, Rex*."⁴⁴

This faith in biblical law, and subsequently the faith in independent natural law and right reason, began to wane as a result of rationalism and secularism, especially after Darwin, for Darwin destroyed men's faith in nature, including morality "naturally" in harmony with the forces of nature.⁴⁵ Because there is no longer a doctrine of fixed and infallible revealed law to govern the courts, and no longer any faith in a universal "higher law," the courts have become autonomous law-givers.

"Unfortunately," wrote Tullock, "although legislatures realized a long time ago that they were writing new law, the courts have only very, very gradually come to the realization that they are doing the same thing. Further, when they did realize sometime in the nineteenth century, that they were writing new law, they continued making their decisions retroactive. It is only in the past ten years that the U. S. Supreme Court has begun to act as if it realized it was making retroactive decisions. Up to that time, the Court had always acted as if any de-

41. Randolph G. Adams, *Political Ideas of the American Revolution: Britannic-American Contributions to the Problem of Imperial Organization, 1765–1775*, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, [1939] 1958), p. 141.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

43. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 169.

44. *Idem*.

45. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1969] 2000), p. 7. (<http://bit.ly/rjrbph>)

cision was the discovery of a preexisting law rather than the formulation of new law, although surely judges were aware of the hypocrisy of this position for a least a hundred years."⁴⁶

E. Democracy vs. Bureaucracy

Thus, with the abandonment of faith in revealed law that is open to both judge and jury, citizen and legislature, humanistic civil law has become perverse. Judges instruct juries to decide only in terms of the facts, not the validity of the law, when in fact the juries unquestionably have the authority and the power to interpret and apply both. Legislatures write new legislation, but they cannot easily preserve their own sovereignty; bureaucracies "interpret" these laws and are nearly autonomous in applying the laws in whatever way they want, in the name of the legislatures. *Elitist law dominates*. No layman is supposed to be able to understand the law. He must become subservient to the experts. Democracy, which is supposedly the process of widening the franchise and widening the base of political sovereignty, becomes progressively bureaucratic and elitist. Increasingly, elitist rule is governed by the principle of secrecy, or to reverse President Wilson's dictum, of "closed covenants secretly arrived at." Max Weber described the process well: "Every bureaucracy seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intentions secret. Bureaucratic administration always tends to be an administration of 'secret sessions': in so far as it can, it hides knowledge and action from criticism. . . . Political parties do not proceed differently, in spite of all the ostensible publicity of all Catholic congresses and party conventions. With the increasing bureaucratization of party organizations, this secrecy will prevail even more."⁴⁷ The triumph of secret societies and secret accommodations in twentieth-century politics, both domestic and international,⁴⁸ was a product of the West's waning faith in God's revealed, open, and universally binding law.

We have come full circle. We are back to the pagan concept of true citizenship, based on membership in a clan that possesses secret

46. Tullock, "Courts as Legislatures," in Cunningham (ed.), *Liberty and the Rule of Law*, p. 135.

47. Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 233. The same passage appears in *Economy & Society*, p. 992.

48. Carroll Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

knowledge. The pagan clan of antiquity was a bloodline clan, mitigated only by adoption. Citizens possessed the secret knowledge of the sacred rites—including political rites—through initiation into ritual mysteries. There are only formal differences between the two forms of pagan initiation, ancient and modern. Today, access to membership in the clan is also based on a kind of initiation, namely, the possession of specialized academic degrees or a certificate granted to those who have passed specialized examinations.⁴⁹ All of this has been accomplished in the name of the new religion, democracy, the apotheosis of mankind, but it has led to a new servitude, a new bondage, and to governing by arbitrary rules rather than universal law. The rhetoric of democracy—the sovereignty of the people—has led directly to its antithesis, the sovereignty of elites over the people in the name of the people. Weber wrote:

We must expressly recall at this point that the political concept of democracy, deduced from the “equal rights” of the governed, includes these postulates: (1) prevention of the development of a closed status group of officials in the interest of a universal accessibility of office, and (2) minimization of the authority of officialdom in the interest of expanding the sphere of influence of “public opinion” as far as practicable. Hence, wherever possible, political democracy strives to shorten the term of office by election and recall and by not binding the candidate to a special expertness. Thereby democracy inevitably comes into conflict with the bureaucratic tendencies which, by its fight against notable rule, democracy has produced. The generally loose term “democratization” cannot be used here, in so far as it is understood to mean the minimization of the civil servants’ ruling power in favor of the greatest possible “direct” rule of the demos, which in practice means the respective party leaders of the demos. The most decisive thing here—indeed it is rather exclusively so—is the leveling of the governed in opposition to the ruling and bureaucratically articulated group, which in its turn may occupy a quite autocratic position, both in fact and in form.⁵⁰

Tullock wants something better. He wanted a return to the “good old days” of simple, predictable laws. He knew that he is unlikely to get his wish. “A switch to a system in which the bulk of the law is a code and there is a central body which produces detailed glosses upon it, the whole thing being relatively short and compact, would reduce im-

49. Weber, “Bureaucracy,” pp. 240–44; *Economy & Society*, pp. 998–1001.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 226; *Economy & Society*, p. 985.

mense amounts of legal human capital to worthlessness. Thus, the lawyers have the combination of very strong feeling with which they have been indoctrinated, even stronger material grounds for wanting their present position to remain stable, and practically a monopoly of all decision-making posts in our present system. Under the circumstances, I doubt very much if my arguments here will have any political effect.”⁵¹ He blames the economic self-interest of the judicial elite for our plight, but the problem is far deeper. Our problem is the abandonment of Christianity and biblical law.

F. Hayek’s Dilemma: “Social Justice”

F. A. Hayek (1899–1992), whose intellectual roots were in late-nineteenth-century liberalism, produced a series of books dealing with formal law and market freedom. His most famous and influential book, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), argued that economic intervention by the civil government would eventually destroy the institutions of political democracy, for the bureaucracies created by socialism would eventually concentrate decision-making powers in the hands of the central economic planners. Central economic planning, he argued, would have to result in central planning for everything, since all aspects of human life involve economic choices.

In his later book, *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), Hayek argued for the rule of law. He proposed a system of law that would be universally understood, where the “rules of the game” would be known by all participants in advance, thereby reducing the arbitrariness and unpredictability of the bureaucrats. But he could not guarantee market predictability by means of universally applicable law, as his critics immediately reminded him. Civil law can be changed. The law system may be unfair from the very beginning, discriminating against those who become economically successful.

Hayek devoted the remainder of his distinguished career to the problem of legal order. He asked: How can we insulate the institutions of political democracy from those elements in society that are opposed to formal liberty, formal rationalism, economic inequality, and legal predictability? How can we preserve a working relationship between formal rationalism and substantive rationalism? He never came up with a generally acceptable answer—acceptable to free market defenders, let alone to envy-dominated socialists and Communist revolution-

51. Tullock, in Cunningham (ed.), *Liberty and the Rule of Law*, p. 144.

aries. We therefore need to examine his thinking in detail, for if he could successfully defend the humanistic ideal of the rule of law, then Christians should have much greater confidence in a defense of the Christian ideal of the rule of biblical law.

Hayek did not equate liberalism with formal legalism as such. He said that liberalism also requires specific content to formal rationality, namely, *constitutionally limited civil government*.⁵² Coercion by the civil government must be restricted by constitutional and statute law. Only this will permit the establishment of what he called the “spontaneous order,” or (less felicitously but more revealingly) the “self-generating order” or “self-organizing structures.”⁵³ He wrote: “But if liberalism presupposes the enforcement of rules of just conduct and expects a desirable spontaneous order to form itself only if appropriate rules of just conduct are in fact observed, it also wants to restrict the coercive powers of government to the enforcement of such rules of just conduct, including at least one prescribing a positive duty, namely, the rule requiring citizens to contribute according to uniform principles not only to the cost of enforcing those rules but also to the costs of the non-coercive service functions of government which we shall presently consider.”⁵⁴

Hayek introduced the concept of “non-coercive service functions of government.” At this point, he made at least *formal peace with the welfare state*, and therefore with its system of tax-financed social security. He went on: “Liberalism is therefore the same as the demand for the rule of law in the classical sense of the term according to which the coercive functions of government are strictly limited to the enforcement of uniform rules of law, meaning uniform rules of just conduct towards one’s fellows.”⁵⁵ But what if these “uniform rules” discriminate against a particular economic group? The graduated income tax is one example. There are thousands of others, since virtually all of the modern welfare state’s legislation is economically discriminatory.

52. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, III, *The Political Order of a Free People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

53. *Ibid.*, p. xii.

54. F. A. Hayek, “The Principles of a Liberal Social Order” (1966); reprinted in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 165.

55. Hayek, *Studies*, p. 165.

1. *The Preservation of Social Order: Market or State?*

Hayek was caught in a dilemma. He wanted a social order that actually preserves order. He wanted a society that is rational, both formally and substantively. On the one hand, he wanted legal predictability (formal rationalism). *He wanted equality before the law.* The problem is, market competition produces economic winners and losers. "From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either the one or the other, but not both at the same time. The equality before the law that freedom requires leads to material inequality."⁵⁶ *The losers can and do use democratic politics to redistribute the winnings in the name of social justice.* He then observed, with considerable historical justification, "More than by anything else the market order has been distorted by efforts to protect groups from a decline from their former position; and when government interference is demanded in the name of 'social justice' this now means, more often than not, the demand for the protection of the existing relative position of some group. 'social justice' has thus become little more than a demand for the protection of vested interests and the creation of new privilege. . . ." ⁵⁷

On the other hand, he also wanted the civil government to provide *a safety net*, so that the social order of capitalism can be insulated against revolutionary shocks. He thought civil government can reduce social disorder by violating his earlier principle of "unequal results from equality before the law." *Hayek wanted a minimum welfare state.* "The reasonable solution of these problems in a free society would seem to be that, while the state provides only a uniform minimum for all who are unable to maintain themselves and endeavors to reduce cyclical unemployment as much as possible by an appropriate monetary policy, any further provision required for the maintenance of the accustomed standard should be left to competitive and voluntary efforts."⁵⁸

Which of Hayek's two irreconcilable arguments are we to believe?

56. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 87.

57. Hayek, *Studies*, p. 173.

58. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 302.

Hayek was stuck. Volume two of *Law, Legislation and Liberty* is titled, *The Mirage of Social Justice*. He proclaimed the idea of one law for all men. He proclaimed the benefits of general rules that are written without any attention to the specific individual results of such rules.⁵⁹ As a defender of methodological individualism, he attacked the very concept of social justice. Such a concept presupposes a hierarchy of collective ends. But we cannot as “scientific economists” speak of the “value to society” of any economic good or service.⁶⁰ We can only speak of a service’s value to individually acting men or to an organization. Society is not an organization; it is a spontaneous order. Civil government is an organization; society is not. “And, though the order of society will be affected by actions of government, so long as it remains a spontaneous order, the particular results of the social process cannot be just or unjust.”⁶¹ Thus, it is illegitimate to speak of social justice. Such a concept is anthropomorphic and immature.⁶² Society cannot act for a single purpose.⁶³ To whom can we appeal if we believe that the outcome of spontaneous and therefore unplanned market forces is somehow unjust? There is no answer.⁶⁴ The concept of social justice has meaning only in a command society.⁶⁵ The term itself has become an implement of demagoguery.⁶⁶

Having said all this, he nevertheless called for a state-imposed redistribution of wealth in the name of preserving social order. Yet he opposed socialism and democratic economic interventionism because such coercion is destructive of morality.⁶⁷ And then, as if to confuse everyone (including himself), he denied any belief in absolute morality.

2. Moral Relativism

He rejected the idea of transcendent law, whether “natural” or “personal,” for he was a defender of autonomous man and autonomous spontaneous social evolution. “The evolutionary approach to law (and all other social institutions) which is here defended has thus as

59. Hayek, *The Mirage of Social Justice*, ch. 7: “General Welfare and Particular Purposes.”

60. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

65. *Idem.*

66. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

67. Hayek, *Political Order of a Free People*, pp. 170–71.

little to do with the rationalist theories of natural law as with legal positivism. It rejects both the interpretation of law as the construct of a super-natural force and its interpretation as the deliberate construct of any human mind.”⁶⁸ There is no overarching morality that governs society. “There can, therefore, be no absolute system of morals independent of the kind of social order in which a person lives. . . .”⁶⁹ He even went so far as to argue that if a Westerner discovers a dying, elderly Eskimo who has been put into the snow to die by his people, according to Eskimo customs, he should leave him in the snow to die. It would be “morally wrong” to do otherwise, unless the outsider is personally willing to support him in non-Eskimo society forever.⁷⁰

Hayek’s moral relativism could not sustain a vision of society without adopting pure anarchism, yet he could not bring himself to adopt anarchism, the logical outcome of full-blown methodological individualism. He still wanted the civil government to provide everyone—presumably even that aged Eskimo—with a safety net. “There is no reason why in a free society government should not assure to all protection against severe deprivation in the form of an assured minimum income, or a floor below which nobody need descend.” Why did he say this? Because he wanted to defend *collective self-interest*! Because he wanted to defend *morality*! “To enter into such an insurance against extreme misfortune may well be in the interest of all; or it may be felt to be a clear moral duty of all to assist, within the organized community, those who cannot help themselves.” We are back to two previously forbidden justifications of social justice: collective self-interest and moral duty. “So long as such a uniform minimum income is provided outside the market to all those who, for any reason, are unable to earn in the market an adequate maintenance, this need not lead to a restriction of freedom, or conflict with the Rule of Law.”⁷¹ Question: *How is the civil government going to extract the economic resources needed to provide this safety net without interfering with the spontaneous order of the anarchistic free market order?*

3. A Self-Contradictory System

He was trapped in a logical and moral dilemma. The state must use coercion to obtain the “safety net” money, he argued. But such tax-

68. Hayek, *Mirage of Social Justice*, p. 60.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

70. *Idem.*

71. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

ation is innately immoral, according to Hayek, the anarchist. It also threatens the existence of the spontaneous order.

The predominant view today appears to be that we should avail ourselves in the main of the ordering forces of the market, indeed must in a great measure do so, but should 'correct' its results where they are flagrantly unjust. [This, in fact, is precisely what Hayek himself has argued in the passages I have just cited—G.N.] Yet so long as the earnings of particular individuals or groups are not determined by the decision of some agency, no particular distribution of incomes can be meaningfully described as more just than another. If we want to make it substantively just, we can do so only by replacing the whole spontaneous order by an organization in which the share of each is fixed by some central authority. In other words, 'corrections' of the distribution brought about in a spontaneous process by particular acts of interference can never be just in the sense of satisfying a rule equally applicable to all. Every single act of this kind will give rise to demands by others to be treated on the same principle; and these demands can be satisfied only if all incomes are thus allocated.⁷²

Here is Hayek, the all-or-nothing anarchist, holding forth bravely and decisively against Hayek, the defender of safety-net social justice. He refused to give an inch to the demands of the special-interest groups who would destroy the free market, intervention by intervention, tax by tax, safety net by safety net. But, in not giving an inch here, he could not logically give an inch anywhere else. Yet he did. So, his methodological walls came tumbling down, brick by brick, inch by inch.

The extent to which Hayek's thinking is not just muddled, but self-contradictory, testifies to the innate antinomies of humanist social thought. He had a great mind. He had sixty years to develop his ideas. He was diligent in mastering the scholarly literature relating to these questions. Yet he brought forth a heavily footnoted, self-defeating trilogy, the capstone of his life's work. The third volume is devoted to a classic piece of what he has called "constructivist" rationalism: an historically untested restructuring of the legislative, judicial and executive branches of civil government, complete with a "model constitution" (chapter 17). Here is "Benthamism" at its utopian worst—the same Benthamism that Hayek battled against throughout his long career.⁷³ In the second volume, he proclaimed forthrightly: ". . . we can always

72. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

73. *Ibid.* pp. 19–20.

only tinker with parts of a given whole but never entirely redesign it.”⁷⁴ In the third, he proposed a total redesigning of every nation’s entire institutional system of civil government.

4. *Who Decides?*

We are back to the age-old problem: The rule of *which* law-order? The rule of *how much* civil government? Hayek, in seeking formal rules of civil government—rules that will be applied to all citizens, irrespective of social or economic position—found that the humanistic logic of free market economics cannot be reconciled fully with the humanistic logic of social and political stability.

We are back to Weber’s dichotomy between formal rationalism and substantive rationalism. The ethics of society supposedly demands that the civil government intervene in exactly the way that Hayek says is *most dangerous to freedom*, namely, *to preserve the economic position of a specific special-interest group*. How can this protection be denied to all other special-interest groups that possess sufficient political power to rewrite the legislation? This is Hayek’s problem, and he devoted the second half of his illustrious academic career to a study of *how to insulate a liberal free market society from the effects of the liberal democratic political order*. Human logic did not give him his answer. There are too many logics, too many ethical views, and no way to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.

Modern liberal democracy has eroded market freedom. Hayek’s eloquent defense of freedom in terms of evolutionary law and evolutionary morality has not retarded this erosion; if anything, it has accelerated it. As J. R. Lucas commented concerning Hayek’s defense, “he comes perilously close to a position of moral indifferentism and makes a great virtue of the market’s unconcern with moral merit. But this is, I shall argue, to expose free institutions quite gratuitously to the moral censure of moral men. The reason why the West has become increasingly critical of its economic arrangements is not that it has failed to deliver the goods—on the contrary, it has been spectacularly successful in doing that—but that the theory of them has failed to accord with our moral sentiments about society and has sometimes affronted our sense of justice.”⁷⁵

74. *Ibid.* p. 25.

75. J. R. Lucas, “Liberty, Morality, and Justice,” in Cunningham (ed.), *Liberty and the Rule of Law*, p. 150.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches the rule of law—God’s Bible-revealed law. It teaches that God is sovereign and that all people are under His authority. He has revealed a legal order to men. He enforces sanctions in terms of men’s adherence to these laws. He extends His kingdom by means of grace, but a grace that involves obedience to His law.

The legal order of the West was more committed to the rule of biblical ethics than any other. This produced the legal foundations of the free market social order. But humanists have attempted to explain the advent of the free market social order in terms of a non-revelational idea of civil law. They have stripped civil law of any supernatural origin or sanctions. Having banished God from their cosmos of discourse, they find that are unable to come to any agreement on what constitutes moral law. Without a Creator God, there are multiple gods by default, and most of them want to impose their self-interested law-order on their fellow men. As the fictional Lord Feverstone put it in C. S. Lewis’ novel, *That Hideous Strength*, “Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest. . . .”⁷⁶

It is never a question of law or no law. It is always a question of *whose* law.

76. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-ups* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 42.

APPENDIX E

THE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE SABBATH

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death (Ex. 31:15).

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death (Ex. 35:2).

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind (Rom. 14:5).

I see no way to avoid interpreting the Old Testament sabbath in terms of the explanatory case-law provided in Exodus 31:15 and Exodus 35:2. If we take these words at face value—and I see no way not to and still remain faithful to the text—then we must come to grips with the rigorous nature of the Old Testament sabbath. There were almost certainly exceptions to this universal prohibition against work, such as milking cows (in effect, giving rest to them) or serving as a law-enforcement officer, but the universal condemnation of working at one's occupation on the sabbath bore the strongest of all sanctions: the death penalty.

I also see no way to avoid interpreting the New Testament Lord's day in terms of Paul's injunction that every man should make up his own mind concerning the equality of, or special nature of, any particular day. More than this: If Paul's words are not to be interpreted as referring to the sabbath (along with other Hebrew days of celebration or fasting), then the death penalty still has to be imposed by the civil government on anyone who fails to observe the New Testament Lord's

day as identical to the Old Testament sabbath.

Our explanation of how the sabbath functioned in Israel, and how it should (or should not) be observed today, must be governed by the words of Exodus 31:15 and Exodus 35:2. In short, if we argue that the death penalty is no longer to be imposed on people who work on the Lord's day, as I do, then we must present a case that the requirements of the Old Testament sabbath have been fulfilled by Christ and are now annulled, and that God has substituted new rules to govern the Lord's day, which is what I attempt to do in this appendix. On the other hand, if someone denies that there has been a fundamental break between the Old Testament sabbath and the New Testament Lord's day, then he must demonstrate exegetically how it can be that the God-ordained civil penalty has been abolished, but the moral and even ecclesiastical requirements concerning the observation of the Lord's day have remained essentially the same.

Why did God regard a violation of His sabbath as a capital crime? We have seen the answer in Chapter 24: Violating the sabbath involves a denial of the mandatory nature of rest for mankind. Such a violation involves the implicit assertion of man's autonomy. Such an assertion brings spiritual and eternal death. But why did God wait until after the exodus to announce that working on the sabbath is a capital crime? Probably because He wanted Israel first to understand what it meant to live under the domination of a self-proclaimed god-man who did not allow God's people to rest. In the recapitulation of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, God gave them a different reason for honoring the sabbath: they had been in bondage to Egypt, and God had delivered them from this bondage (Deut. 5:15). He brought death to Egypt's firstborn; He would do the same to them if they failed to honor His covenant with them.

A key question then has to be considered: Why in New Testament times has the church never advocated such a harsh penalty? I hope to answer this question at the end of this appendix. The fundamental answer is that *there has been a shift in the locus of sovereignty for sabbath enforcement*: from civil government and ecclesiastical government to self-government (the individual conscience).

We have come at last to the really difficult issues, the issues of applied theology. We must consider these preliminary issues:

I. What was the Old Testament Sabbath?

- A. What were men supposed to do on the O.T. sabbath?
- B. What were the economic implications of the Mosaic sabbath, especially with respect to the division of labor?
- II. Is the New Testament Lord's day essentially the same as the O.T. sabbath?

A. Is there N.T. evidence of a shift: sabbath to Lord's day?

B. Is the Lord's day legally enforceable by the state today, as it was in the Old Testament?

C. What are the economic implications of the Lord's day, especially with respect to the division of labor?

Once we have a general idea of the answers to these questions, we can go on to other issues, such as the Old Testament's rescheduling of the Passover, and the possibility of rescheduling the New Testament Lord's day for people employed in unique occupations; the priestly exemptions from sabbath observance and their relationship to rescheduled worship in New Testament times; sabbath enforcement and the creation of a one-state world; proper leisure activities in New Testament times; and several other topics. But first, we need to understand better both the Old Testament sabbath and the New Testament's doctrine of the Lord's day.

I. Old Testament Sabbath

The Bible gives us almost no information about the activities of faithful Hebrews on the sabbath. We know something about what people did not do, but nothing for certain concerning what they did do, except on special sabbaths like the Passover, the day of atonement, and so forth.

The experience with the manna in the wilderness, before the law was given in a completed form to Moses, indicates that there was to be no cooking in Israel on the sabbath. The cakes made from the manna were to be cooked the day before the sabbath (Ex. 16:23). After Israel arrived in Canaan, this anti-cooking law may have been relaxed. The Bible does not say.

They were not to engage in commercial activity (Neh. 13:15–18). We know that evil men did not appreciate the sabbath, because they wanted to cheat buyers seven days a week (Amos 8:5). The man who gathered sticks on the sabbath was executed at God's explicit com-

mand (Num. 15:32–36). There is certainly the possibility that a stick-gatherer might be gathering sticks as a commercial venture. Jeremiah warned the people:

Thus said the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bring sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the Lord. But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched (Jer. 17:21–27).

Kindling a fire on the sabbath was forbidden (Ex. 35:3). If this law was disobeyed, God promised to kindle a fire in the gates of the city, meaning the seat of judgment. The gates, as the place of entry into the city, would be destroyed. The city would fall to a conqueror. God was serious about their not starting fires on the sabbath. His promised judgment—fire in the gates—reflected His rigorous standards in this regard.

A. What Were They Supposed to Do?

But what, specifically, were men required to do on the sabbath? They may have celebrated together at some form of formal worship service. The “holy convocations” described in Leviticus 23:3 may have constituted weekly sabbath worship services, although it is not clear that these services were conducted outside the home. “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy con-

vocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings" (Lev. 23:3). Israel's various seasonal feasts (holy convocations) are subsequently described in Leviticus 23, and these were unquestionably public feasts. Thus, it can be argued that the local Levitical priests who resided in each community called the weekly convocations together in some sort of public meeting place. But this is not absolutely clear from the text, and the specific details of these public worship services are nowhere described in the Old Testament.

A. T. Lincoln fairly described our present state of knowledge concerning the celebration of the Hebrew sabbath in Old Testament times: "The sabbath was not a day of total inactivity but was meant to provide rest and refreshment from the regular work of the six other days. It is true that this rest provided opportunity for devotion to the worship of God, that the Sabbath was called a 'holy convocation' (Lev. 23:2-3), that an additional burnt offering was required on every Sabbath (Num. 28:9,10), and that since it was done from obedience to God the resting itself could be considered an act of worship, but cultic worship was not a major focus of the Sabbath institution for Israel as this is reflected in the Old Testament."¹ This is my concern: to discern the major focus of the Old Testament sabbath. It was *rest*, not worship.

The Hebrews were supposed to delight themselves in God. In the oft-quoted words of Isaiah: "If thou turn thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and thou shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking [thine own] words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (Isa. 58:13-14). They were to acknowledge the God-centered nature of creation.

What did it mean, "doing thy pleasure"? We are not told, except in reference to commercial activities and the common household chores of cooking, gathering sticks, and carrying burdens in and out. Idle talk was forbidden. But what kind of talk, specifically, constituted idle talk, "speaking [thine own] words"? We are not told. As far as the written record indicates, neither were the Israelites.

1. A. T. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in D. A. Carson (ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academe, 1982), p. 352.

The law said nothing about the legality, or even propriety, of the following activities: napping in the afternoon, walking in a garden (park), listening to music, going for a (non-commercial) swim, floating in a small boat, and having sexual relations with one's spouse. In short, there are no guidelines in the law concerning the limits of recreation and the beginning of work or "thy pleasure."

1. Recreation (Re-Creation)

When we think back to the garden of Eden, we are confronted with the obvious possibility of a walk through the garden, God's gift to man. This is a form of recreation. To forbid recreation in post-Edenic times seems ludicrous, yet certain problems arise as soon as we admit the legitimacy of recreation but deny the legitimacy of commercial activity.

Consider the rich man. He owns a large garden, a lake, and a boat. He chooses to spend his day of rest walking through his garden, going for a swim, and sailing. Has he broken God's law? Then consider the poor man. He owns no garden, but he has access to a nearby profit-seeking park. (In this book, I choose to avoid the question of the morality of tax-supported public parks. It is a relevant question, however.) There is a profit-seeking lake or swimming pool nearby. A firm will rent him a boat on Sunday afternoon. If the ban against profit-seeking activities includes recreation activities, then the poor man is limited. He cannot afford to buy the tools of recreation, yet he is also prohibited from renting them.

Christians cannot escape this problem. We must ask ourselves at least five questions. First, must we ban recreation on the Lord's day for all people, rich and poor, in order to avoid economic discrimination? Second, must we ban the poor or middle-class citizens from the delights of publicly provided recreation? Third, must we ban rentals of recreation services and implements on the day of rest? Fourth, must we see to it that the state confiscates funds through coercion in order to create "free" recreation services for the poor and middle-class citizens? Fifth, may we look upon sabbatical recreation capital of the rich man as a legitimate covenantal blessing that poorer men do not enjoy, and should not enjoy until God showers similar economic blessings on them?

There is also a sixth possibility. What if the rich invite the poor in to enjoy their wealth? What if the rich donate money to the church, or

some other private charity, in order to create recreation facilities? This could be regarded as a weekly version of the “tithe of celebration” (Deut. 14:26–29).² Rich men could celebrate the sabbath by inviting all men in to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Charity-supported agencies might offer access to gardens, lakes, and so forth. Labor is donated: lifeguards, physicians, police protection, lost children booths, and so forth. Instead of profit-seeking labor, we find works of mercy.

In a predominantly rural society, most people could enjoy the sight of their fields. They could go for a stroll in the “garden.” In an urban society, people can go for a stroll to view front lawns. They can visit friends for a chat. But then we are back to another bothersome question: What constitutes idle talk? Talk about families? Talk about sports events? Talk about politics? Talk about the stock market? We are not told. *Conscience must be our guide. But conscience is difficult to put into concrete legislative proposals.* In fact, it is because men have not universally defined “idle talk,” that they resort to the language of conscience or circumstance.

If we take the Old Testament legislation seriously, we are faced with a conclusion that tends to alienate the guilt-manipulated and socialism-influenced Christian: The rich were allowed to enjoy recreation activities that were legally prohibited to the poor, who were not allowed to lease or rent such recreation implements or opportunities on the sabbath. It might be argued that the law allowed a man to buy a “seven days a week” ticket to recreation opportunities, but if someone had to collect tickets on the sabbath, or in some way monitor his profit-seeking operation on the sabbath, then any judge who understood basic economics would have shut down the operation as a sham, an attempt to escape the clear-cut prohibition on commercial activities on the sabbath. It paid to be rich on the sabbath. (Of course, it normally pays to be rich on the other six days of the week, too.)

Carrying burdens in and out of doors was illegal (Jer. 17:22). Profit-seeking work was illegal. But leisure is a consumer good. It must be paid for by forfeited income—income that is not earned during the leisure period. Leisure could be “stored up” in effect. It was legitimate to enjoy leisure on the sabbath, but only that kind of leisure which could be “stored up” in the form of capital goods: private gardens, private lakes, and so forth. This was clearly a subsidy to the rich.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

2. *"Works of Mercy" in a Rural Society*

Israel was a rural society. Certain daily chores are works of necessity on a farm, such as milking and caring for the animals. But what was done with the milk? Was it thrown away? Was it saved only for other animals? Was it given to the poor? If it was sold at a profit, then milking constituted profit-seeking activity, i.e., engaging in trade. Such sabbath violations would have been difficult to detect.

What about the use of such sabbath-produced milk by the family? This is an important question. If personal family use of the economic output of sabbatical "acts of mercy" (to the cows) is legitimate, then the definition of what constitutes profit-seeking must be narrowed. Engaging in commercial trade would be prohibited, but engaging in intra-household trade would not; one family member milks the cow, another cooks the food, another washes the dishes, and so forth. From the point of view of human action—exchanging one set of conditions for another set—the intra-family exchange seems to be equally profit-seeking, but perhaps not from the point of view of Old Testament sabbath legislation. The milk could be sold the next day. Wouldn't this constitute a violation of the sabbath? It certainly appears that way. But to consume the milk directly thereby increases the family's consumption as surely as the income gained from the sale of the milk would increase it. What is the economic difference, in terms of family income? More to the point, what is the biblical difference, in terms of the specific application of the law of the sabbath?

The strict sabbatarian would have to argue that the milk should be given away. Such a person is a defender of what Lewis Bulkeley called "the marathon sabbath." But is it the sabbath that God required of His Old Testament saints, let alone His New Testament saints? Unquestionably, the Old Testament did not prohibit output of effort as such; cows deserved to be milked, as an act of mercy, an act of giving rest (Ex. 23:12). But what about income that was the byproduct (i.e., unintended product) of such merciful labor? Should it have been given to the poor, or to household animals, but kept away from human family members? Or is giving food to one's own family itself an act of mercy?

If giving milk to one's own family or domestic animals is an act of mercy, then it is an act of mercy that has unintended economic consequences, namely, an increase of consumption that is not paid for by increased output (more milking) or more thrift (reduced consumption) during the days preceding the sabbath. Feeding one's family or

animals with milk produced by sabbath milking would then be understood as being fundamentally different from gathering sticks for a fire on the sabbath, for sticks had to be gathered during the workweek and stored up for use on the sabbath. But wouldn't this "anti-stick-gathering" requirement have applied equally to milking, even though milk in this instance was a byproduct of acts of mercy? A strict sabbatarian would clearly have to insist that milk that is produced as a byproduct of an act of mercy be given to the poor, or spilled on the ground, or fed to farm animals, in order to make certain that such merciful work remained exclusively merciful and not an excuse for profit-seeking (cost-reducing) sabbath violations.

Thomas Gouge a contemporary of Owen and Baxter in seventeenth-century England, praised as shining examples three Christian physicians who refused payment for Sunday labor.³ I ask: Should the civil government make it illegal for people to receive payment for emergency services? And if it does, won't this reduce the number of emergency services offered, and thereby render it more dangerous to suffer an emergency on Sundays? This is the question of full pay for "normal" works of mercy or necessity performed by professionals, including people who are paid by the civil government: police, firemen, military forces, etc. Should those who perform such services on the sabbath be paid for that day's work? Christ defended the right of a man to pull a beast of burden out of a ditch, but does this imply that individuals can legitimately operate "beast-retrieval" companies at a profit on the sabbath? These are questions that strict sabbatarians should eventually deal with. They never do.

B. The Division of Labor in Rural Israel

Modern mass production, with its capital-intensive mechanization, is characterized by a high division of labor. Until the late-nineteenth century, agricultural societies were characterized by a comparatively low division of labor. In such societies, production is initially for the family unit. Surplus goods can be traded or sold, but there is not much surplus. Men work primarily for home consumption.

The workweek is scheduled in terms of the needs of the family. Wives can bake extra loaves on the day before the sabbath without disrupting normal production and distribution patterns. Husbands can

3. On Gouge, see Richard Schlatter, *The Social Ideas of Religious Leaders, 1660–1688* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 129, 137.

cut extra wood for the fire on any day of the week. In ancient Israel, people structured their workweek's rhythm in terms of the sabbath. This did not involve a major interruption of supplies of needed goods and services. Where men are not continually serving each other through production for a market, but where they serve themselves and their families directly through labor, it is far easier to restructure the workweek to honor special feast days or sabbaths. A rural family can schedule its activities to include a day of rest.

In a rural society, it is also far easier to identify commercial activities, because there are fewer of them than in a modern, mass-production society. It is therefore easier to identify sabbath violations. A face-to-face society that is dominated by family and tribal ties offers men the opportunity to observe the daily affairs of their neighbors. While families might have hidden certain kinds of indoor commercial labor, it would have been difficult in ancient Israel to conceal agricultural labor in the fields.

Another important aspect of rural societies is the relative absence of 24-hour-a-day capital equipment, whether public or private. Power generation, telecommunications, repair services, hospitals, and similar services became commonplace in rural areas in the twentieth century, but only in industrial societies, or in urban areas of industrializing societies. The continuing dependence of urban society on such services stands in stark contrast to the traditional rural community, which has a lower division of labor, and which is far more self-sufficient. *The interruption of "vital services" in a modern city could bring paralysis and breakdown.* In a traditional rural community, such an interruption could not take place, because such vital services are not normally available. In other words, services that are vital to a modern urban community are not vital in a traditional rural society. Only in modern rural societies that are fully integrated into urban society through the market and shared public utilities would such services be regarded as vital. *The seasonal and even weekly economic rhythm of a traditional rural society is far different from a modern industrial society.* Traditional rural societies are not characterized by an extensive, even life-sustaining, division of labor.

The economy of Israel was not highly integrated. In the cities, civil rulers were influenced heavily by the Levites. Profit-seeking activities on the sabbath would have been difficult in cities whose civil rulers were highly influenced by sabbath law-enforcing priests. The cities of ancient Israel did not become dependent on a market order character-

ized by a high division of labor. I am arguing that *God's sabbath requirements necessarily prohibited the creation of such an interdependent society*. It is my contention that the annulment of the Old Testament sabbath laws by Jesus Christ was a necessary (though not sufficient) precursor to modern civilization.

If strict sabbatarians believe that I am incorrect in this conclusion, then they have an obligation to show how the authorities today would be able to differentiate between what constitutes an illegitimate sabbath violation and one that is acceptable. It should be clear that the enforcement of strict sabbath legislation in a traditional agricultural society will produce economic effects far different from those produced by such enforcement in a modern industrial economy. Because the effects are different, shouldn't the penalties be different? But the Old Testament did not offer any alternative penalties. It required execution of all sabbath violators—no “ifs, ands, or buts.”

Did the Mosaic law implicitly allow the authorities to redefine a sabbath violation in terms of social settings? Did an act of sabbatical defiance in a rural society become acceptable behavior in an urban setting because of its differing economic effects? Is an act that seems to be visibly (physiologically) the same, but that produces different consequences in different environments, really the same act? Or is it different? And if the act is different, should it be redefined, even though physiologically it is the same act?

If the Mosaic law did implicitly allow the authorities to redefine sabbath violations as non-violations, according to differing economic effects, then what are the distinguishing criteria that officials, whether ecclesiastical or civil, should adopt in order to determine which acts are legitimate, under which circumstances, and where? On the other hand, if the Mosaic law never did permit such redefinitions of a sabbath violation—and I do not believe that it did—then how could the Old Testament economy (meaning the Old Testament system as well as the Old Testament economic order) ever have progressed into the modern industrial West? (For more detailed arguments along these lines, see below: “Mass Production and International Trade.”)

II. New Testament Lord's Day

The various New Testament accounts of Christ's activities on the Hebrew sabbath provide us with evidence concerning the true nature of the Old Testament sabbath. Works of healing were basic to that

sabbath, not as exceptional acts, but as acts that were integral to sabbath observance. Christ healed the withered hand of one man on the sabbath (Matt. 12:10–13). He also healed the crippled man who had been waiting for healing near the pool of Bethesda. Again, this was on the sabbath (John 5:1–17). He replied to those Jews who were critical of His action: “My father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). They were to give rest. His general principle was this: “The son of man is Lord even of the sabbath” (Matt. 12:8). Again, “It is lawful to do well on the sabbath days” (Matt. 12:12b). (The King James English conveys the wrong message here. The Greek word is better translated to “do good,” not “do well.”⁴ Salesmen do well; servants do good.)

What is meant by Christ’s use of the word “work” in John 5:17? *Work as a charitable service* is in view, not work in one’s profit-seeking vocation. The Old Testament sabbath was a break from the ordinary routine of profit-seeking labor. Those activities associated with a man’s income-producing occupation were to be avoided.

A. Blameless Profanation

Nevertheless, there were exceptions to this rule. The obvious Old Testament exception was the routine labor of a priest. Christ replied to His critics: “Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless” (Matt. 12:5). We are not told specifically which activities of the priests profaned the sabbath. They had to sacrifice two yearling lambs every sabbath, along with meal and drink offerings. Also, they had to maintain continual burnt offerings (Num. 28:9–10). Jesus said that they actually profaned the sabbath. This is a strong word to use. It could also be translated “desecrate.”⁵ They violated the requirements of the sabbath in the temple itself. Nevertheless, they were held blameless before God. *The importance of their labor in the sight of God made them blameless.* They were following a higher command. They were offering the blood sacrifices that were required by God to cover the sins of His people.

The context of Jesus’ remarks on the profaning of the sabbath is important. He and His disciples had been criticized for having walked through fields on the sabbath, plucking grain to eat. This was not theft,

4. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 401: “*kalose*, [3].”

5. *Ibid.*, p. 138: “*bebeilao*.”

according to Old Testament law; neighbors had legal access to a handful of the fruit of the ground (Deut. 23:24–25).⁶ Jesus was not criticized for having picked the grain. He was criticized for having taken it on the sabbath (Matt. 12:1–2).⁷

What was Christ's answer? He pointed to David's taking of the showbread from the temple on the sabbath (Matt. 12:3–4). Here was a far more culpable act, for it was not lawful for David or his followers to eat the showbread, because it was reserved for the priests (v. 4). The priest himself had suggested that David take the hallowed bread (I Sam. 21:21–24). Yet God commanded that this showbread be set before Him at all times (Ex. 25:30; Num. 4:7). But the needs of men were more important in this instance, a fact recognized by the priest. On the one hand, the priest had to offer sacrifices. On the other hand, David had to flee from the wrath of Saul. Both requirements were cases of necessity. But the priest told David to eat the showbread. How, then, could the priests of Jesus' day legitimately criticize Him?

Jesus' healing of the man with the withered hand was a work of mercy. Traditional Christian sabbatarianism has always made exceptions of these two works, *necessity* and *mercy*. But necessity and mercy impose even greater pressures on men's actions than merely offering exceptions to the sabbath requirement against labor. *Necessity and mercy require positive action*. This is acknowledged by the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), a pro-sabbatarian document, which forbids men to think "about their worldly employments and recreations," and requires them to take up "the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy."⁸

The priests of the Old Testament profaned the sabbath, yet they were blameless. The office of priest, coupled with a mandatory assignment from God, permitted the profaning of the sabbath. Indeed, it required it. Yet David was not a priest, nor were his men. This points to the truth of Christ's words, that the "Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matt. 12:8). In His incarnation, as the son of man, Christ ruled the sabbath. The account in Mark is even clearer: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (2:27–28). *When human life and health are at stake, the sabbath may be profaned without*

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 58.

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 26.

8. Westminster Confession of Faith, XXI: VIII.

blame. It must be profaned. When an assignment by God to a priest is in question, the sabbath may be profaned without blame. Again, it *must* be profaned. But then we face some very difficult questions: How can we tell when human health and life are at stake? Who is the true priest? What is a God-given assignment?

B. Transformation: The Lord's Day

1. A Different Day

In the New Testament, the first day of the week is called the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10), but it is never called the sabbath. Unquestionably, there was a shift from the seventh day of the week to the first. The evidence also points to a shift from sundown-to-sundown celebration to a sunrise-to-sunrise celebration.⁹ These are very important changes. They involve a radical break with the Hebrew sabbath. F. N. Lee, in his defense of the New Testament sabbath, argued explicitly that the entire system of Mosaic sabbaths and holy days was abolished by Christ. He cited Paul's epistle to the Colossians: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [days]" (2:16). (The last word, "days," was added by the King James translators; it should read simply, "sabbaths.") Lee concluded:

Now these ceremonial sabbaths, listed in Leviticus 23 together with the Israelite Sinaitic weekly sabbath, are all called "feasts" of holy convocation or "holy days"; and all involve the keeping of a "sabbath" day or a "day of holy convocation" on which "no servile work is to be done," or a "day of solemn rest." They were all a shadow of the things to come, namely the benefits of the New Testament in Christ; and they were all blotted out and nailed to His cross. . . . So Paul means exactly what he says. It is useless to argue (as S.D. Adventists do) that St. Paul here means the ceremonial sabbaths by his words "or the sabbath (days)," for St. Paul has just a few words beforehand (in the very same verse) dealt with such ceremonial sabbaths under the blanket term "holy day"—the same term (*heortai*) used in the Septuagint of Lev. 23 to refer to all the (Sinaitic) sabbaths—both the ceremonial sabbaths and the "weekly" sabbath of Israel, Lev. 23:2–3. . . . If it is argued that Paul means (only) the ceremonial sabbaths in Col. 2:16 where he refers to "the sabbath day(s)," then which days is he referring to under the blanket term "holy days" just mentioned previ-

9. See Appendix B.

ously in the very same verse? The two can hardly be synonymous, for Paul would then be repeating himself, saying in effect: "Let no man therefore judge you . . . in respect of a ceremonial sabbath or a new moon or a ceremonial sabbath," when the latter phrase would simply be idle repetition.¹⁰

Lee argues that the day of rest, or sabbath, is part of God's moral law, and therefore it is still in effect. But the Old Testament sabbath is gone. In other words, the theological justification for switching to the first day of the week is that *the older sabbath is absolutely abolished, and a new one is morally binding*. There was a total break at Calvary with the Mosaic law's sabbath.

There seems to be no exegetical way to escape Lee's treatment of Colossians 2:16. *Paul was not speaking of ceremonial sabbaths, but the Mosaic sabbath*. It is gone forever. The fact that the church celebrates a new day should testify to this theological fact. But then a crucial question has to be answered: *How much of the Mosaic legislation has been abolished along with the day of the week and the hours of the day?* A clean break has been established with respect to the day of the week. On what basis, then, can the church recommend that the Old Testament sabbath law be enforced by the civil government? The testimony of almost 2,000 years of church history provides at least a partial answer: The church has not committed itself to a full-scale revival of the Mosaic sabbath legislation.

The principle of interpretation that is supposed to govern Christian orthodoxy is that Christ came to establish, confirm, and declare the Old Testament law. Only if we find an *explicit abandonment* of an Old Testament law in the New Testament, because of the *historic fulfillment* of the Old Testament shadow, can we legitimately abandon a detail of the Mosaic law. But modern Christians reject this principle of interpretation, so they tend to make things up as they go along. Sometimes they just go along, not bothering to make things up.

In the case of the Mosaic sabbath, Paul provides us with full justification for just this sort of abandonment. We no longer enforce the Mosaic provisions, because the Mosaic sabbath ended at Calvary. We have a new day of rest, and we dare not arbitrarily select some of the Old Testament sabbath definitions, restraints, and legal sanctions without taking them all. But we have no exegetical grounds for taking them all, since the very change in the day of celebration, not to men-

10. F. N. Lee, *The Covenantal Sabbath* (London: Lord's Day Observance Society, 1972), pp. 28–29.

tion Paul's explicit teaching regarding the locus of responsibility for enforcement (the conscience), testifies to the break with the past.

The biblical account of what constitutes a week unquestionably establishes as definitive six days of work and a day of rest or feasting. God's originally creative week was a six-one pattern, while Adam's subordinately re-creative week was supposed to be a one-six pattern.¹¹ Adam's rebellion led to a curse: God's imposition on man of a God-imitating six-one pattern, with rest to come only at the end of man's week.

Jesus Christ, by redeeming His people, annulled the six-one pattern of the cursed week. He did not restore the original (pre-Fall) pattern of one-six, because He changed the day on which the Lord's day is celebrated to the day after the Hebrew sabbath—what Christian commentators for at least 1,800 years have called the eighth day. Therefore, He established a *one-six-one* pattern—*rest, work, and judgment*. This judgment comes on the day of the Lord, the archetypal Lord's day. This is why the Lord's day is celebrated in New Testament times on the day following the Hebrews' seventh-day sabbath. *It points to the final judgment and the inauguration of a new week, the full manifestation of the New Heaven and the New Earth.* The first day of redeemed man's week is now the eighth day after the initiation of God's work, not the seventh day after. It represents a re-creation, a new week that re-establishes a one-six pattern, but that also implies the one-six-one pattern as a herald of the total regeneration and re-creation of all things. The shift to the eighth day testifies to Christ's new creation.

2. Conscience: The New Locus of Enforcement

Paul was concerned with the souls and consciences of his readers. The Colossians passage mentions *meat, drink, holy days, and sabbaths*. Paul was doing his best to convince his readers that there had been *a definitive break* from Old Testament law with respect to these four features of Hebrew life. He knew that Judaizers were criticizing the Christian Hebrews for their abandonment of these external tests of faith, and he did not want his readers to feel guilty. No one could legitimately judge them with respect to these four issues. No one could turn to the Mosaic law and confront them with the Mosaic rules, instructions, and regulations regarding meat, drink, holy days, and sab-

11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 6.

baths. This did not mean that the old rules had been evil. It meant that the Judaizers had no right to criticize Christians for no longer adhering to the old forms. New applications of the Old Testament's general principles in these four areas are now binding in New Testament times.

Paul repeated this teaching to the church at Rome. In Romans 14, Paul covers much the same ground. Those who are weak in the faith are not to be distressed by rigid theological criticism. Paul observed that there are debates within the churches concerning the proper foods and the proper holy days. Judgment of each other should not go on in these areas of disputation. Men must decide for themselves which foods to eat or which days to celebrate.

For one believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way (Rom. 14:2–13).¹²

The Lord's day, the first day of the week, has been set apart by Christ for His church as a day of worship, fellowship, and communion. This, above all, is the church's testimony to the day of rest. Members are required to attend a worship service with their fellow believers. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is . . ." (Heb. 10:24–25a). We must not forsake other members. We are to help each other.

Some members may view all days the same. So be it. Good men have taken this position historically. Zwingli was one of them.¹³ But Zwingli attended church on Sunday, because he would not forsake the brethren. The pattern of one day in seven for rest from one's normal labors is formalized in the worship services themselves. We need not badger each other about the specifics of Old Testament law regarding the Lord's day, Paul said, because no one should judge another on this matter. Participation in the required church service or fellowship, which has been on the first day of the week ever since the day of Christ's resurrection, is sufficient testimony.

3. Worship: A New Testament Emphasis

Perhaps strict sabbatarians are unwilling to take Paul's words at face value. Yet the ironic aspect of strict sabbatarianism is this: Without the definitive break with the Mosaic sabbath, the sabbatarian's emphasis on Sunday worship reduces his case's biblical support. How can the sabbatarian consistently argue for full continuity of the Lord's day with the Old Testament sabbath, when *the Old Testament sabbath was primarily a day of rest rather than a day of worship*? The New Testament Lord's day focuses on the worship requirements, not the rest requirements.

The Old Testament sabbath was primarily a day of rest, of cessation from profit-seeking labor. Sabbath worship, if it is mentioned at all, is only mentioned indirectly (Lev. 23:3). There were no prohibitions against recreation. There were only prohibitions against labor. The modern sabbatarian's emphasis on the Lord's day primarily as a day of worship must be drawn from a handful of references in the New Testament that show that the church met on resurrection day to worship. It is possible to make a case against doing "thy pleasure" on the sabbath by appealing to the Old Testament, but it is not possible to make a case for the Lord's day as a day primarily devoted to worship by appealing to the Old Testament.

To define the sabbath primarily in terms of corporate worship, rather than primarily as a day on which no commercial trade is permitted, raises some exceedingly difficult questions for strict sabbatari-

13. Lee, *Covenantal Sabbath*, p. x.

ans. First, if honoring the first day of the week requires that sabbath violations be prohibited by civil law, then the law is being enforced on all people in a particular society. If this is what the New Testament requires, then any sabbath-enforcing society is thereby admitted to be covenanted under God. This is an inescapable relationship: state-enforced sabbath laws and the existence of a covenant. There are many defenders of various sabbath laws today who categorically deny that any New Testament society is ever covenanted under God in the way Mosaic Israel was—a viewpoint not shared by seventeenth-century Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians. This is especially true in the American South, where “blue laws” that prohibit certain businesses from operating on Sunday, or that prohibit certain products from being sold in supermarkets on Sunday, are voted into law time after time by covenant-denying Southern Baptists, Methodists, and Church of Christ members. I cannot explain this; I only report it.

Second, there is the problem of the Lord’s day as primarily a day of worship. If the Old Testament’s sabbath-enforcing civil law is still binding in New Testament times, and if the Lord’s day is understood as predominantly a day of worship (as the Westminster Confession and most Calvinistic pastors assert), then the civil magistrate ought to enforce compulsory worship on all members of a (covenanted) society upon threat of death.

The New England Puritans went at least part of the way down this path. They legislated compulsory worship, and they banished sabbath violators from Massachusetts and Connecticut in the early years. Even this half-hearted attempt to imitate the Old Testament only lasted a few years. There were more and more church absentees, until by the middle of the seventeenth century, the churches of New England could not have held the whole population, had everyone decided to visit on some Sunday morning.¹⁴ Eventually, “blue laws” replaced the threat of banishment for failure to attend church in New England.

Modern sabbatarians have refused to become consistent. They do not pressure the civil government to establish a death penalty for

14. Carl Bridenbaugh wrote: “A consideration of the number and seating capacities of village meeting houses and churches demonstrates the sheer physical impossibility of crowding the entire village populations into their houses of worship. At no time after 1650 does it seem possible for the churches of Boston to have contained anywhere near a majority of the inhabitants; in 1690 little more than a quarter of them could have attended church simultaneously had they been so disposed.” Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625–1725* (New York: Capricorn, [1938] 1964), p. 106.

Lord's day desecrations, and they certainly avoid the obvious conclusion concerning the Lord's day as a day of worship, namely, compulsory church attendance, enforced by the civil government.

4. The New Testament Church's Celebration

What Paul was asserting should be clear to anyone who reads Romans 14. Not only do those outside the church have varying opinions concerning a day of rest, or special holidays; even those inside the church have varying opinions. We see in the twenty-first century that the same situation still exists. The debates went on during the Protestant Reformation, too. The Old Testament sabbath laws were absolute in the sanction involved—the death penalty—and they were negative in effect. They told men what not to do, one day in seven. The New Testament's emphasis shifted on the day of resurrection. The first day of the week is now a day of communion between God and His church. It involves a positive, loving corporate celebration. It involves preaching (Acts 20:7–12), singing (Matt. 26:30; Col. 3:16), praying (I Cor. 14:15), and a communion feast (I Cor. 11).

The testimony of the church is that there is indeed a very special day of celebration, of feasting and sharing the blessings of salvation. If the early church in first-century Israel had wanted rest more than the experience of true communion, it would have met for communion on the Hebrew sabbath, because the Roman authorities acknowledged the right of the priests to require a day of rest. But the early church broke with rest on the first day of the week in order to celebrate communion on the evening of that first day. They rested on the Hebrew sabbath, worked on the Lord's day, and gathered together in the evening. They rested—assuming they did rest, which seems reasonable—on a day different from the day of worship, at least in Israel. In gentile cities in the Roman Empire, they probably could not rest even one day in seven. But they celebrated on Sunday evening after work.¹⁵

The historical circumstances of the early church necessitated compromises with the sabbath principle. Had there been no break from the Old Testament requirement of a full day of rest one day in seven, the church would have been bottled up in Israel, because the Roman Empire did not honor the rest principle. Had the legal obligation of

15. "It is certain that the eucharist was at first an evening meal. The name (*deipnon*) implies this." Wilfrid Stott, in Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday: A Biblical and Historical Study* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 89.

resting on the sabbath been the binding obligation, then the early church, dwelling in Israel, would have had to take two days off: the Hebrews' day (legally binding) and the Lord's day (religiously binding). But this would have violated the more important pattern of one day of rest and six days of labor.¹⁶ *The church, in short, was forced to break with the Hebrew sabbath.* God, in His grace, abolished the Hebrew sabbath on the day of resurrection, so that church members could rest on the seventh day (Saturday) and celebrate on the evening of the first day, which was a working day in Israel. They could do this in good conscience precisely because they knew that God honored their faith. Like the priests who sacrificed on the sabbath, profaning it blamelessly, the early Christians worked on the Lord's day, profaning it, but this was not held against them.

This is not to say that the ideal situation is not the Lord's day as a day of rest and worship, universally recognized, universally respected, except in cases of emergency or merciful labor. But Paul was careful to warn the church at Rome that it should not burden its new members with rigorous regulations concerning a special day of the week. Yes, they were to commune together. But whatever they did on the Lord's day—and in Rome, most of them must have worked—they were to do it in faith. *The sabbath ideal is to grow out of respect for the principle of resurrection, the basis of man's release from sin and eternal death.* The institutional church sets the pattern with its special day of worship, which can be made binding on members (Heb. 10: 25). But it cannot legitimately force its members to honor the one-six pattern of rest. That pattern is built into Christ's kingdom, but Paul made it clear that *the conscience is to guide men to this conclusion, not compulsion.* In fact, he was writing against one man's criticizing another—moral compulsion. If moral compulsion is forbidden, then how much more ecclesiastical compulsion? And how much more than this, compulsion by the civil government?

5. *The Early Church Fathers on Rest vs. Worship*

This distinction between Sabbath rest and Lord's day worship was unquestionably made by the early church fathers. Until the fourth century, church fathers generally condemned the "idleness" of the Jewish

16. I am defining "merciful labor" as that activity which gives rest to others, both animals and humans. I argue in this appendix that it is morally and legally valid to sell merciful labor on the Lord's day.

sabbath, and commanded church members to devote Sunday to worship and acts of mercy. Bauckham commented: "For Tertullian, the meaning of the Sabbath commandment for Christians was 'that we still more ought to observe a sabbath from all servile work always, and not only every seventh day, but through all time.'¹⁷ It is entirely clear that for all these writers the literal commandment to rest one day in seven was a temporary ordinance for Israel alone. The Christian fulfills the commandment by devoting all his time to God. The rationale for this interpretation depended, of course, on a wholly 'religious' understanding of the commandment; no writer of the period betrays any thought of its being a provision for needed physical rest. The Jewish form of observance was therefore 'idleness.' The commandment was really about devotion to God. . . . This was the basic principle from which the Fathers argued that literal Sabbath observance was not required of Christians."¹⁸ In short, "It must be stressed that, outside Jewish Christianity, all second-century references to the Sabbath commandment either endorse the metaphorical interpretation or reject the literal interpretation as Judaistic or do both."¹⁹ The church fathers were so adamant about this distinction that they condemned mere abstinence from normal work as idle. "The Fathers could see no value in inactivity and hardly ever recognized in the Sabbath commandment provision for necessary physical relaxation."²⁰ Bauckham cited the Syriac Didascalia (c. 250?): "Daily and hourly, whenever you are not in church, devote yourselves to your work."²¹

In the fourth century, Christians often began to imitate Jewish customs. Again, citing Bauckham: "This Judaizing tendency was a grass roots tendency that the authorities of the church opposed. The Council of Laodicea (A.D. 380), for example, legislated against a series of Judaizing practices including resting on the Sabbath (canon 29). It seems that while the popular tendency was to imitate the Jewish practice, the authorities often responded by insisting on a specifically Christian kind of Sabbath observance sharply distinguished from the Jewish kind. The Sabbath was not to be observed in 'idleness,' imitating the Jews, but as a day of Christian worship when the New Testament Scriptures were read and as a commemoration of God's creation

17. Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, ch. IV.

18. R. J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," in Carson (ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, pp. 266–67.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

of the world through Christ”²² It was Constantine, in 321, who first legislated Sunday rest. He specified Sunday as “the most honourable day of the Sun.” He may have done so to promote sun worship, as well as to placate Christians.²³ As soon as the state got involved in sabbath legislation, there was theological confusion and compromise.

C. Civil Government

1. Negative Sanctions

What is the proper “sabbatarian” role today of the civil government? One very distinct possibility is this: The civil government should declare null and void any labor contract that requires a person to work seven days a week as a condition of employment. This is *a contract against conscience*, comparable to requiring a woman to commit illicit sexual acts as a condition of employment. Businesses would be compelled to honor the desires of employees to take one day off per week—and that day would probably be the first day of the week. The compulsion here is essentially negative: The state may prohibit economic coercion against people’s consciences, when their consciences are based on an explicit statement of the word of God.²⁴ The Bible is quite explicit about resting from our occupations one day in seven. Nevertheless, Paul acknowledged that some men may not see this, and that apart from required church attendance, they should not be molested or made to feel guilty.

The Bible teaches us about Christian maturity. The Old Testament’s death penalty for sabbath violators was stark and entirely negative. Men were not to be governed primarily by conscience in questions regarding the sabbath. They were to be governed by fear. They were told what could not be done. They were treated as children. With the coming of Christ and the victory He sustained at Calvary, His people have been given *positive requirements* concerning worship on His day. They are to meet corporately to celebrate and worship (as they may have been required to do in the Old Testament: Lev. 23:3). Overnight, the disciples were given a new vision. *Overnight, the com-*

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 261–62.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 280–81.

24. In the summer of 1985, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned state legislation that made it illegal for employers to compel individuals to work on Sunday as a condition of employment. Thus, the Supreme Court has made illegal the one type of Lord’s day legislation that the New Testament implicitly sanctions.

pulsion of the civil government regarding the Lord's day ended. Overnight, the sabbath became primarily a positive requirement of corporate worship, without the civil penalty of execution for working on the sabbath. *Overnight, the question of a day of rest on the Lord's day became a matter of conscience.* It had to; the Jewish leaders were not about to make the Christian equivalent of the sabbath compulsory as a day of rest.

As the theological insight of men improves over time, they will come to recognize the implications of God's creation week (six-one) and covenant man's re-creative week (one-six). They will recognize the necessity of a day of rest—a moral, physical, and economic necessity. When they do, they will make economic decisions and social decisions that will indirectly pressure recalcitrants into honoring the Lord's day. For instance, if Christians refuse to go out to shop on Sunday, there will be no economic incentive to keep stores open on Sunday, except to sell to non-Christians. If most people in a society are eventually converted, or at least honor the Lord's day externally, then there will be almost no economic incentive to remain open on Sunday. But a person's conscience is the guide in New Testament times, not civil compulsion.

Because *the day of the Lord* is now *a day of communion*, Christians will try to see to it that they get time off for Sunday worship whenever possible. They will not work as professional football players. They will not pay money to go to professional football games. They will not watch professional football games on television, nor will they buy the products advertised during Sunday sports events—at least, not because they are advertised during Sunday sports events. Christians will increasingly honor that day as a day of worship for almost all, and therefore of a day of cessation of income-producing labor for almost all. The *new Christian sabbath*—cessation from normal work—is a *byproduct of worship* on the Lord's day. Christians will do their best to schedule their jobs to give themselves a day of rest. As more and more people do this, more and more occupations will find it economically profitable to honor the desires of their maturing Christian employees. Sunday will become most people's day of rest, including professional athletes. Only those occupations that serve the needs of resting people—public utilities, emergency services, and restaurants (where wives get a break from the normal work week)—will still be profitable on Sunday.

The state in New Testament times is to leave men free to act posit-

ively; its role is to suppress lawless acts of violence and fraud. It is not to make men positively good; it is to restrain them from committing evil, public acts. When the God-revealed emphasis of the sabbath changed from a day of no work to a day on which God mandates corporate worship, the state's role also changed. I am not arguing here that there was unquestionably no public, corporate aspect of sabbath-worship in the Old Testament, but only that whatever the nature of this corporate worship may have been, the specifics of such worship services did not receive any attention in the Old Testament. There is no mention of tithes being collected on sabbath-day meetings, or psalms being sung, or a communion meal being shared, or lectures from a Levite. Such events may have taken place, but there is no direct evidence. In the New Testament, such events are mentioned as taking place in corporate worship on the Lord's day. Thus, I am arguing that there is a change of emphasis in the New Testament, and the specifics of biblical revelation testify to this change. Conscience now is to lead men in the decision to rest on the first day of the week or another day, or not rest at all. The state is not to force men to decide. The state is not to be trusted to tell men to take positive steps toward righteousness, such as worship. If God tells men to do something positive (such as worship Him publicly on a particular day and in specific ways), the state must remove itself from the arena of human decision. This is not because societies are not supposed to be formally covenanted to God, but because they are.

2. *Admitted Changes*

The church has admitted the following changes in the day of rest: (1) the seventh day to first (eighth) day; (2) the abandonment of sun-down-to-sundown timing; and (3) the abolition of the death penalty imposed by the civil government. A fourth change may be involved in the addition of required church attendance (communion and worship) to what was previously primarily a day of rest. (This was not a major change if Leviticus 23:3 did involve weekly public worship.) Unquestionably, the church has modified its concept of what constitutes legitimate labor, which we will consider in greater detail in Section C.

These alterations are of monumental importance. *They represent a sharp break with the Mosaic law.* To maintain that such modifications are theologically valid, the church needs New Testament evidence of an announced break. It needs New Testament revelation that specifies

that such a discontinuous transformation has been announced by God through His prophets. If the church is unwilling to take seriously *the radical break announced by Paul in Colossians and Romans*—the abolition of the Mosaic sabbath—then it has only a few scattered references to first-day worship to defend its position. Yet the church has hesitated to use these Pauline teachings to justify the break, because they are so radical in nature. Protestant churches that have clung to at least a watered-down version of the Puritan sabbath—itself a watered-down version of the Mosaic sabbath, because the Puritans did not execute Lord's day violators—have used the Old Testament passages as guides for modern Lord's day-keeping. *They have not wanted to admit that such a sharp break with the Mosaic sabbath has been announced, because the New Testament offers no specific guidelines for rest on the Lord's day.* Furthermore, the New Testament spells out the requirement of weekly corporate worship, and it mentions a communion meal, celebrated in the evening.

Churches have refused to admit that *the kind of rest* we choose for the Lord's day is a matter of *conscience discipline* rather than church discipline. They have not been content to point to the sabbath of Genesis 2:2–3 as a creation sabbath, the one-six pattern for man's week. They have selectively and arbitrarily quoted some aspects of the Mosaic sabbath—but always without the death penalty—as if there were exegetical justification for part of the Mosaic law to be brought into the New Testament era, but not the required Mosaic sanction against sabbath desecration. They often call for some kind of sanctions by the civil government—sanctions never mentioned or contemplated in the Mosaic law—but not the death penalty, which is the civil sanction specifically required by the Mosaic law. To say that the interpretational principles of modern sabbatarian exegetes are muddled is putting it mildly. It is another case of *smorgasbord religion*: taking this or that aspect of biblical revelation, while leaving others alone, all according to personal taste, familiarity, “reasonableness,” and church tradition.

This is not to say that all Mosaic guidelines to what we should not be doing on the day of rest are permanently abolished. The guidelines are there: avoidance of household chores, no profit-seeking commercial ventures, and no idle talk. *It is not the guidelines that have been abolished; it is the locus of the sanctioning agency that has changed.* The conscience, not the civil government, is the earthly locus of Lord's day enforcement in New Testament times. It is the *individual conscience*, not the institutional church, that makes the decision concern-

ing what constitutes idle talk, or a postponable household chore, or the lawful limits of recreation. Pressure can come from sermons, or from patient instruction from the elders. Christians are to be educated concerning the Lord's day principle. They are not to be coerced.

3. *No Compulsion*

Paul warns us that in the area of diet and the Lord's day, different views exist. Discussions about the Lord's day are not to resort to compulsion, social or institutional, in order to settle the issues. Ostracism is not valid. But refusing on Sunday to eat in a restaurant operated by a "Lord's day-violator" is valid, because the potential meal-buyer has decided that such activities as the purchase of a meal on the Lord's day are against his conscience. He is not seeking to punish the "Lord's day violator"; he is seeking to do the Lord's work in his own life.

The church should not be fearful of the weaknesses of human conscience in the areas of the Lord's day and diet. (Actually, the church is quite willing to allow personal choice in the case of diet, but it resists the authority of conscience in the question of the Lord's day.) If the church is to avoid bothering people in these two areas of life, how much more the civil government! Furthermore, it is incorrect to argue that because the state can legitimately establish pure food and drug standards, it (or the church) can therefore legitimately establish sabbath restrictions. Commentators should not make the mistake of equating restrictions against eating certain ritually prohibited foods with the question of restrictions against the sale of chemically or biologically adulterated food. The state is empowered to restrict the sale of adulterated, dangerous products, not on the basis of the dietary laws, but on the basis of the quarantine (Lev. 13, 14):²⁵ a negative sanction against violence—namely, the violence of microbes or poisons against unsuspecting buyers. The state may not tell people what they must eat, but only what they must not sell, because of injuries that such adulterated food can produce in the victims—injuries that can be proven in a court of law to have resulted from the product in question.

The New Testament does mark off certain areas of life and calls them, in effect, either things indifferent or things that are not a matter of compulsion. A thing indifferent, for example, is circumcision. "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the

25. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

commandments of God" (I Cor. 7:19). Yet it is possible to make a case against circumcision, since the resurrection of Christ has made unnecessary the flow of blood in New Testament times: the sacrifices, the firstborn offerings (eighth-day separation from the dams), and circumcisions (the eighth-day marring of male infants). But Paul does not ask us to make an issue of circumcision or noncircumcision. He wants us to avoid confrontations in this area. The confrontations are divisive in this area, and not worth the trouble they cause. If a medical case were straightforward in favoring circumcision, which it was not in the late twentieth century,²⁶ the question of circumcision could become important again, but not for narrowly theological reasons. The same is true of diet. Most Christians understand this in the case of circumcision and diet. They do not understand it in the case of the Lord's day. They refuse to take Paul's words literally in Romans 14:5.

It must also be pointed out that we are dealing here with *specific injunctions in the New Testament*. The proper exegetical principle is this: Mosaic law is still to be enforced, by the church or the state or both, unless there is a specific injunction to the contrary in the New Testament. To place the locus of enforcement concerning Lord's day violations in the human conscience is not a general New Testament principle of social, political, or legal action with respect to Old Testament laws and sanctions. The Bible does not call for a society operated in terms of man-invented sanctions. The reign of conscience is not to become the reign of anarchy. The Bible does not establish antinomianism as a New Testament principle. But in certain specified instances, New Testament writers have removed the locus of enforcement from the church and state, placing it in the conscience. There are not many of these instances, but the Lord's day appears to be one of them.

26. "The Committee on Fetus and Newborn of the American Academy of Pediatrics stated in 1971 that there are no valid medical indications for circumcision in the neonatal period. . . . There is no absolute medical indication for routine circumcision of the newborn. . . . A program of education leading to continuing good personal hygiene would offer all of the advantages of routine circumcision without the attendant surgical risk. Therefore, circumcision of the male neonate cannot be considered an essential component of adequate total health care." Ad Hoc Task Force on Circumcision, reporting its findings in *Pediatrics*, Vol. 56 (October 1975), pp. 610–11. Cf. Editorial, *British Medical Journal* (May 5, 1979), pp. 1163–64. For a summary of many medical arguments against circumcision, as well as bibliographical references, see Paul Zimmer, "Modern Ritualistic Surgery: A Laymen's View of Nonritual Neonatal Circumcision," *Clinical Pediatrics* (June 1977), pp. 503–6.

D. Economic Implications of the Lord's Day

We know that the man caught gathering sticks on the sabbath was tried by God and executed at God's direct command (Num. 15:32–36). This was what was required by Exodus 35:3. *The death penalty was indissolubly integral to the Mosaic laws governing the sabbath.* The fact that the church historically has acted as though the death penalty has been officially removed by God from His law testifies to the church's confusion concerning biblical exegesis and the rule of God's law. *Those who proclaim their allegiance to the Mosaic view of the sabbath must come to grips with the Numbers 15 passage.* They must integrate this passage into their understanding of society and economics. I am limiting my enquiry to the question of economics, although the Mosaic sabbath affected far more than just the realm of economics. I here reproduce (with some minor modifications) a section from my essay on the sabbath that was first published in R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* (pp. 831–36).

* * * * *

The gathering of sticks is a fine example of Hebrew case law as applied in the light of a general requirement of the Decalogue. It shows, perhaps, better than any other instance, the economic implications of the fourth commandment for the Hebrew nation. Consider the economic implications. What was involved in the gathering of sticks? Sticks could be used for at least four purposes:

1. *Heating* the home
2. *Lighting* the home
3. *Cooking* the meals
4. *Selling* the sticks for uses 1–3

As far as actual use of sticks was concerned, the case-law application in Numbers 15 applied more to the daily life of Hebrew women than it did to the men of the family. It is more often the man and his work that are the focus of modern sabbatarian concern, but this was not necessarily the case in a rural, pre-industrial community. The gathering of sticks was more likely to be the task of children; women were to use the sticks for household tasks, once gathered. Men were to reap the benefits of both the gathering and actual use of the sticks, but

in general they would not have much to do with the actual handling of sticks. There could be a few exceptions, of course, but one exception seems to be far more likely, namely, that of the professional stick-gatherer. His work would be most in demand on the sabbath, precisely the day on which the prohibition against work was enforced. A woman who failed to gather sticks earlier in the week could buy some from a professional.

We are not told that the man in Numbers 15 was such a professional, but the severity of the punishment clearly would have made it far more dangerous for such a class of professionals to have come into existence. There was a need for a harsh penalty, men and women being what they are. There is always a delight in violating God's commandments if one is a sinner; if that violation also brings with it certain superficial benefits above and beyond the mere pleasure of defiance, so much the better. Sabbath prohibitions involved heavy costs for the obedient; enforcement of the sabbath required stiff penalties, thus burdening violators with high costs in the form of high risk.

What were the costs of the sabbath? For the man, it was the forfeiture of all income—monetary (less likely in a rural society), psychological, or physical property—for that day. But women also paid. They had to gather all sticks earlier in the week. This meant more work during the week, either in longer days, or by increasing the intensity of the working day, or both. Had the working day not been lengthened or intensified, then other tasks that it was desirable to accomplish would have to have been foregone, and that, as any wife knows, also involves costs (especially if a husband or a mother-in-law notices the failure in question). There would always be a temptation to forgo the gathering of sticks during the week, especially if a professional would come by with a load of wood on the sabbath for a reasonably cheap price. If his price was less than the woman's estimation of the costs involved in gathering the wood earlier in the week, she would set aside funds for a sabbath transaction.

By imposing a rigorous and permanent form of punishment on the violator—death by stoning—the community was able to force up the price of the sticks; risks would be so high that few professionals could survive. How many women could or would pay the costs? It would be cheaper to buy them earlier or to gather them earlier in the week. Stick-gathering was made an unlikely source of profitable employment on the sabbath. Because the market for sticks on the sabbath was restricted because of the high prices for the sticks (due to the risks in-

volved), the opportunities for temptation were thereby reduced to a minimum. It did not pay many people, net after deduction of risk expenses, to violate the sabbath, and it was very expensive to hire someone to violate it.

To the degree that the penalties are weakened in a case like this, to that degree it becomes a matter of conscience as to whether or not someone violates the sabbath or pays someone else to do it. Conscience then stands without the protection of higher economic costs to keep a man acting in a holy fashion. In the mid-twentieth century, rest on Sunday is based primarily on Christian tradition and labor union negotiations; where these restraints are absent, conscience is the only barrier against the violation of the Old Testament application of the sabbath principle. Men who value leisure less than other forms of income will tend to seek out employment on the sabbath.

1. Hiring Others to Sin for Us

If we accept the principle that it is wrong for us to hire another person to commit a crime for our benefit and his profit, then certain implications follow. Sabbath violations were capital crimes. If strict sabbatarians regard Old Testament provisions as binding on Christians, then it is as wrong to hire a man to violate the sabbath as it is to hire someone from Murder, Inc. to kill a neighbor. The execution of the crime and the guilt of the hiring party are in both cases equal. Capital crimes are major ones. If the Hebrew sabbath is legally binding today, then its implications and applications are equally binding.

I have heard Christian people charge their fellow Christians with a violation of the "sabbath" (Lord's day) because the latter have gone out to a restaurant to eat after church services are over. This violation supposedly also holds for those who purchase food in a supermarket on Sunday. Why should this be a violation? Clearly, only on the grounds that it is a violation of the Lord's day to encourage another's violation of the Lord's day by paying him to remain open for business. If the standards of the Hebrew sabbath are still morally binding today, then entering a place of business on the Lord's day is morally a capital crime, and an abomination in the sight of God. Therefore, pastors and elders must tell their flock to refrain from entering into trade of any sort on the Lord's day.²⁷

27. I have worshipped in churches that sold books to worshippers on Sunday, but refused to accept payment until later in the week. To have taken money for the books,

If a man wishes to take seriously the standards even of the Westminster Confession of Faith (a pre-industrial document, it should be pointed out) in all of its pre-industrial rigor, then he should encourage his elders to enforce the provisions. Of course, the provisions of the Confession do not even approach the requirements of Numbers 15, Exodus 31:15, and Exodus 35:2–3, i.e., the true biblical standards in the eyes of a consistent sabbatarian, but at least they are something. If the creeds are valid in their 1646 interpretation, then 1646 standards of enforcement ought to be applied. If such standards are not applied, then it is a clear admission that the church no longer recognizes as valid the 1646 definition of the sabbath.

2. Buying Fuel

Let us pursue the charge against the “restauranters” with rigor. Those same people who make the charge pride themselves on their Lord’s day observance because they do not go out to restaurants on the Lord’s day. They do not shop in supermarkets. They have stored up provisions to eat at home. Prior shopping is quite proper, if one is a sabbatarian, for it is of the very essence of Lord’s day-keeping that one store up provisions in advance of the Lord’s day. But the Old Testament required more than the mere storing up of food. The passage we have referred to, Numbers 15, makes it explicit that not only food but the fuel was to be stored up in advance; fuel for heating the home, cooking the meals, and lighting the room had to be procured in advance. It was a capital offense in the eyes of a righteous and holy God to gather sticks—fuel—on His sabbath.

The modern Puritan-Scottish sabbatarian thinks that his is the way of the holy covenant of God simply because he buys his food early, and cooks it on Sunday, while he regards his brother in Christ as sinning because the latter eats at a restaurant on Sunday. But under the provisions of Numbers 15, both crimes appear to be equally subject to death, for both the restaurant-goer and the meal-cooker have paid specialized fuel producers to work on the Lord’s day. There is this differ-

the pastors believed, would have violated the sabbath. But the book buyer incurred a debt. He had to pay off this debt later on. What is the difference between this transaction and the purchase of gasoline by means of a credit card? Sabbatarians recognize that credit card purchases are economic transactions, as surely as cash payment purchases are. They would prohibit credit card gasoline purchases on Sunday just as firmly as they would prohibit cash payment purchases. Again, Sabbatarians have not thought through the economic implications of the sabbath.

ence, however: The man who enters the restaurant is not self-righteous about his supposed keeping of the Lord's day, and he has made no charges against his fellow Christians. He would seem to have violated the sabbath provisions of Numbers 15, but that is the extent of his guilt. The modern sabbatarians I have met too often violate the Lord's day and the commandment against gossip, or at least they indulge in the "judgment of the raised eyebrow and clicking tongue." They neglect Christ's warning: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what ye judge, ye shall be judged . . ." (Matt. 7:1, 2a).

The very architecture of our churches is a standing testimony to the unwillingness of contemporary Christians to accept the economic implications of the Lord's day. We fill our buildings with all sorts of electrical appliances; we heat and cool the rooms to a comfortable 75 degrees, winter and summer. We often pride ourselves on the efficiency of modern technology, forgetting that people must go to work and operate the machines that provide the power—the fuel—for our gadgets. These workers are committing sabbatarian capital crimes each Sunday, and every Christian sabbatarian who uses these gadgets, apart from some legitimate emergency, implicitly sends people to hell every Sunday, morning and evening, as he sits in the comfort of his air-conditioned church. If the sabbatarian creeds are correct, then sabbatarians are weekly condemning others to the flames of eternal torment, just so that they can sit in 75-degree comfort.

Naturally, sabbatarians can always defend a 75-degree temperature in the name of "works of necessity." Freezing churches would drive away unbelievers in winter; stifling churches would do so in the summer. Possibly this argument is legitimate, if this really is the reason we heat our churches. Or perhaps our bodies really could not stand what our Puritan forefathers went through to establish Reformed worship in America; perhaps we could not bear churches so cold that communion bread would sometimes freeze solid. Possibly we would die if our present technological comforts were to be taken away from us (as pessimists have asserted may be a prospect in the near future). But if mere comfort is our defense of our power-consuming central heating systems, then we are not giving much thought to our sabbatarian creeds. It has become altogether too fashionable to adapt the interpretation of the Lord's day to each new technological breakthrough; sabbatarians cling religiously to standards written centuries ago, while violating the terms of those creeds regularly. It is schizophrenic. The wording of the creeds should be altered, or else sabbatarians should al-

ter their easy acceptance of a radically non-sabbatarian technology.

3. *McCheyne's Accusations*

This plea should not be regarded as something new. It was made by one of the strictest and most consistent sabbatarians in the history of the post-Reformation Protestant church, the Scotsman, Robert Murray McCheyne. He minced no words in his condemnation of his fellow Christians: "Do you not know, and all the sophistry of hell cannot disprove it, that the same God who said, 'Thou shalt not kill' said also, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy'? The murderer who is dragged to the gibbet, and the polished Sabbath-breaker are one in the sight of God."²⁸

Andrew Bonar preserved McCheyne's teachings on the sabbath question in his *Memoirs of McCheyne*, and any self-proclaimed strict sabbatarian would do well to ponder what McCheyne wrote. If the standards of Numbers 15 made no provision for exemptions of specific professions,²⁹ and if these standards are still morally and legally binding in New Testament times, how can a man who proclaims the sabbath escape the thrust of his words? McCheyne saw clearly what the industrial revolution would mean. In 1841, he challenged the right of the railways to run on Sunday, but he was not followed by most of his sabbatarian countrymen in Scotland. They chose, as sabbatarians ever since have chosen, to turn their backs on the implications of their creed, while vainly proclaiming the moral validity of that creed. McCheyne had a word for those who today enjoy, having others work on the Lord's day to provide them with fuel at reasonable prices: "Guilty men who, under Satan, are leading on the deep, dark phalanx of Sabbath-breakers, yours is a solemn position. You are robbers. You rob God of His holy day. You are murderers. You murder the souls of your servants. God said, 'Thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy servant;' but you compel your servants to break God's law, and to sell their souls for gain. You are sinners against the light. . . . You are traitors to your country. . . . Was it not Sabbath-breaking that made God cast away Israel? . . . And yet you would bring the same curse on Scotland now. You are moral suicides, stabbing your own souls, proclaiming to

28. R. M. McCheyne, "I Love the Lord's Day" (1841), in Andrew Bonar (ed.), *Memoirs and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1844] 1973), p. 599. This is a reprint of the 1892 edition.

29. I argue later in this appendix that there were probably exemptions in specific cases: "Rescheduling Worship," Section D.

the world that you are not the Lord's people, and hurrying on your souls to meet the Sabbath-breaker's doom."³⁰

Sabbatarians should heed McCheyne's warning. Those who stand in pride because of their sabbatarian position ought to consider the implications of that position. God will not be mocked! When the provisions of the Westminster Confession of Faith are rigorously enforced, then the sabbath debate can take on some meaning other than the playing of theological games. Then, and only then, will the issues be drawn clearly and honestly.

4. Enforcement Should Begin at the Top

When the elders of the church begin at home to follow the sabbatarian standards of the Old Testament, and when they impose such standards on their recalcitrant wives who enjoy their stoves, their hot running water, and their air-conditioning systems, then non-sabbatarians will be impressed. Let them turn off their electrical appliances, or purchase 24-hour power generators (no "lighting fires," please), or install solar-powered cells on their roofs, in order to provide the power. Let them turn off the natural gas, or else purchase butane in advance. Let them cease phoning their friends for "Christian fellowship," so that the lines might be kept open for truly emergency calls. Let them stop using the public mails on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, so that mail carriers and sorters will not have to miss their observance of the Lord's day. Let them, in short, shut their eyes to the offenses of others until the church, as a disciplinary force, begins to enforce more rigorous requirements on all the membership, starting at the top of the hierarchy and working down from there. Let all self-righteousness be abandoned until the full implications of the economics of sabbath-keeping are faced squarely by the church's leadership. Until then, the debate over the sabbath will remain an embarrassment to Christ's church.

Rethinking the sabbath question will involve a rethinking of the whole of Western industrial civilization. It will certainly involve the questioning of the last two centuries of rapid economic growth. Strict sabbatarians should at least be aware of the possible effects of their proposals. If the world should be conformed to Christian standards of biblical law, and if the standards of the Hebrew sabbath practice are, in fact, still the rule for the Christian dispensation, how would these

30. *Ibid.*, p. 600. See also his "Letter on Sabbath Railways," (1841), pp. 602–5.

standards be imposed on the population at large? Would it not make impossible our modern version of industrial, specialized society? In other words, if such standards had been enforced for the past two centuries, could this civilization, which most modern Christians accept as far as its technological conveniences are concerned, have come into existence? How much of our economically profitable, efficient, "sabbath-desecrating" technology would we have been forced to prohibit by civil law? The costs, I suspect, would be considerable. It is time for strict sabbatarians to count those costs.

* * * * *

Fire has served as man's major technical tool of dominion, and it was challenged as a primary tool only in the twentieth century, first by electricity and then by the electronic computer.³¹ Lewis Mumford has discussed the three-fold uses of fire: light, power, and heat. His culturally evolutionistic interpretation could easily be reworked to conform to biblical imagery. "The first artificially overcame the dark, in an environment filled with nocturnal predators; the second enabled man to change the face of nature, for the first time in a decisive way, by burning over the forest; while the third maintained his internal body temperature and transformed animal flesh and starchy plants into easily digestible food. Let there be light! With these words, the story of man properly begins."³² Thus, fire has been basic to the dominion covenant from the beginning. That the kindling of a sabbath fire was prohibited in the Old Testament is understandable; it is the very essence of work. To kindle a fire, or to gather sticks for a fire, would have symbolized man's autonomy in the dominion process, the essence of lawlessness. Furthermore, as symbolic of God's glory cloud, fire unquestionably served the Hebrews as a reminder of God's power, in addition to being a primary economic tool. Kindling a fire on the sabbath therefore was illegal for more than one reason.

5. "Strange Fire"

There was a fourth use of sticks on the sabbath: lighting a fire, or expanding the intensity of a fire, as a religious testimony. Exodus 35: 3

31. Jeremy Rifkin, *Algeny* (New York: Viking, 1983), ch. 1.

32. Lewis Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922-1972* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 425.

prohibits the kindling of a fire on the sabbath. This seems to mean starting a fire.

The priests of Israel kept a fire burning constantly on the altar (Ex. 29:25; Lev. 1–7). When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered strange fire on the altar, God sent a fire and consumed them (Lev. 10: 1–2). So, it is possible to regard the kindling of a fire on the sabbath as an assertion of sacramental rebellion. For this reason, it has been argued, there was a death penalty for kindling any new fire on the sabbath—an assertion of autonomy from the sacrificial system of Israel.³³ This line of argumentation was pursued by at least one sabbatarian Puritan scholar in the seventeenth century, George Walker.³⁴

One possible piece of evidence for this position is that the Hebrews were not sure what to do with the stick-gatherer in Numbers 15. The law was clear: Violators must be executed. Why didn't they know what to do with him? Why did they seek God's specific pronouncement (Num. 15:34–36)? Doesn't this indicate that they were not sure what to do with him because they had not actually caught him kindling a fire, meaning indulging in a ritual trespass of starting a strange fire? He was working, but he had not kindled a fire. Why didn't they execute him, if merely working on the sabbath was a capital crime? Wasn't their hesitation based on their confusion concerning an unstated warning against strange fire, a confusion that would not have been present if Exodus 35:2 referred to all labor? Gathering sticks was labor, but they nevertheless enquired of the Lord. Doesn't this imply that they did not suppose that God required the death penalty for working in general—the mere gathering of sticks—but that He required it for lighting a fire, something they had not seen him do?

My answer is *no*, it was not any confusion associated with an unstated but implied warning against false ritual that led them to enquire of God. It was a much more basic problem: confusion over the specific transgression. But before I present my reasoning, I need to point out the obvious: *Exodus 35:3 does not speak of strange fire*. It speaks only of fire. The “strange fire” interpretation is roundabout and hypothetical, although biblically possible. It relies on an exclusively symbolic interpretation of otherwise plain words. I prefer to interpret the passage as

33. James B. Jordan, “Sabbath Breaking and the Death Penalty,” *Geneva Papers* (June 1986).

34. George Walker, *The Doctrine of the Holy Weekly Sabbath* (London, 1641), pp. 121–22; cited by James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532–1700* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1983), p. 111.

primarily economic but with implicit symbolic overtones.

It should be clear why a few interpreters have appealed to strange fire as the frame of reference for the imposition of the death penalty for sabbath violations: It gets them out of an embarrassing exegetical problem. With the permanent extinguishing of the temple's fire by the Romans in 70 A.D., the biblical law against kindling a fire on the sabbath ceased to be symbolically relevant. Thus, if the altar's fire was the sole reference point in the discussion of the death penalty for sabbath-breaking—that is, if the death penalty that is required by Exodus 35:2 is to be interpreted exclusively in terms of 35:3, the prohibition against starting fires—then the death penalty cannot sensibly be imposed in New Testament times. This enables the commentators to escape from a highly embarrassing problem, namely, the requirement of the death penalty for working on the sabbath in New Testament times. But this line of reasoning immediately backfires on any “strict sabbatarian.”

If “strange fire” was the sole reference point for the death penalty for sabbath breakers, then what penalty is to be applied today? Excommunication alone? Are we to interpret Exodus 31:14—the cutting off of the sabbath-breaker from the people—as excommunication rather than execution? If this “cutting off” is not the execution demanded by Exodus 31:15—and I argue that it did mean execution for sabbath violators—then an inescapable conclusion results: The civil government has no legitimate sanctions to apply against sabbath-breakers in New Testament times. The only civil sanction specified is execution (35:2), but if this was only for a ritualistic trespass, then there was nothing for the civil government of Israel to do about non-ritual violations. Certainly there is nothing specified for the civil government to do about a now meaningless practice in New Testament times. First, the fires of the temple are long extinguished. Second, hardly anyone in industrial societies gathers sticks to light fires. This highly anti-sabbatarian conclusion concerning civil sanctions is not likely to appeal to modern sabbatarians. Yet so far, this line of reasoning is the only one which any scholar has used in response to my arguments regarding the termination of institutional sanctions against sabbath violators.

Let us return to the problem of why the Hebrews enquired of God about what to do with the stick-gatherer. Why were they unable to decide what to do with him? The text says that it was not declared to them what should be done (Num. 15:34). I interpret this to mean that as a case-law application under either interpretive scheme—either as a work transgression or as a sacramental transgression—it was not clear

to them whether stick-gathering constituted a capital crime. God then said that it did. But the text does not tell us which interpretation governed. Either type of violation constituted a capital crime: false worship or sabbath work. If stick-gathering was the latter type of violation (and I think it was), we then need to ask: What constituted unlawful labor on the sabbath? My answer: (1) commercial labor was prohibited on the sabbath (Ex. 31:15; 35:2), and (2) no household labor that could be done beforehand, e.g., kindling a new fire—was permitted (35:3).

Again, it comes back to capital punishment. This is the issue that sabbatarians have refused to face forthrightly. They implicitly accept the reality of the break between the Mosaic sabbath and the New Covenant's Lord's day.

6. *Nehemiah 13*

What about Nehemiah 13? Here we find a specific case of sabbath-breaking by foreign merchants from Tyre who came into Jerusalem to buy and sell on the sabbath (v. 16). Nehemiah locked the doors of the city on the evening of the sabbath to keep them out (v. 19), but they clustered around the wall. "Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath" (v. 21).

He could have had them executed, in terms of biblical law, but he warned them first. As foreigners, they may not have understood the specifics of the law, and because biblical law had not been enforced in the land for so long, the general public may not have understood the nature of the penalty. In this respect, modern strict sabbatarians are not much different from the people of Nehemiah's day. They proclaim the continuing application of the Old Testament's sabbatarian standards, but they have forgotten about the death penalty. By threatening to lay hands on them, Nehemiah warned them that the full rigor of God's sanctions would be imposed. For good reason, they ceased their violation of the sabbath. This does not testify to a reduced penalty; on the contrary, it shows how great a threat was involved. Once they understood that the civil government was serious about adhering to Exodus 31:15 and 35:2, they ceased selling goods in the city.

The question of strange fire was not raised by Nehemiah. The issue was buying and selling on the sabbath. While stick-gathering could have involved some aspect of outright sacramental rebellion, it didn't

need to in order to call down the death penalty on violators. As far as the Hebrews were informed by God, either working on the sabbath or the kindling of a fire could result in execution. The subtleties of biblical theology or symbolism were of no real concern to them. They simply had to avoid working and also avoid kindling a fire.

E. Mass Production and International Trade

Consider the modern metallurgy industry and its consumption of “sticks.” It takes enormous quantities of power to produce steel or aluminum. Power is expensive, and grew more expensive in the 1970s, as a result of oil price hikes. The cost of shutting down a steel mill for one day and then starting it up again the next day would make the production of steel economically prohibitive. It could be done technically, of course, at some astronomical cost. It would be like the proverbial textbook example of growing bananas at the North Pole. Technically, it can be done; economically, it would involve massive losses—waste of scarce economic resources. Such waste is not tolerated by a free market. Steel could not be manufactured under such conditions. The cost of the power required to reheat a steel plant, not to mention the man-hours wasted in supervising such a wasteful operation, would force steel manufacturers out of business.

If the civil government enforced the Puritan-Scottish Presbyterian interpretation of the Mosaic law against Lord’s day violations on the steel industry, there would soon be almost no domestic steel being manufactured. At that point, buyers of steel would begin to pay foreign manufacturers for their steel—manufacturers who do not honor the Mosaic sabbath. This would place the sabbatarian nation at the mercy of foreign manufacturers. The “Lord’s day-desecrating” foreign firms would be rewarded for their violation; the Lord’s day-honoring domestic manufacturers would go bankrupt. Furthermore, because the supply of steel would be reduced worldwide, as a result of the bankruptcy of the domestic firms, the cost of steel would rise, thereby penalizing marginal purchasers and users of steel, who could no longer afford to buy.

The only way to make steel available domestically apart from rewarding the foreign Lord’s day violators would be to erect tariffs against foreign steel. This would force up the national price of steel to levels that would permit the production of six-day-per-week steel, meaning very expensive and specialized steel. The middle class and

lower class would be effectively cut off from the enjoyment of many products made of steel. In a modern economy, this could produce a breakdown of the division of labor. It could produce an economic collapse, a return to low-productivity subsistence agriculture.

There is no way that steel can be produced that would not involve profits from Lord's day production. If the civil government required all profits (let alone total revenues) from the seventh day of production to be paid as a fine, or paid to the poor, then the price of steel would rise. The income from the other six days would have to cover the losses of the seventh day. The six-day-per-week revenue limitation would make the nation's steel mills uncompetitive in world markets. Again, tariff barriers would have to be placed on imported steel, and the nation in question would find its foreign markets for steel wiped out. The world consumers of steel would turn to the steel produced by "Lord's day-desecrators."

The modern economy involves the whole world in the international division of labor. Manufacturers of hundreds of thousands of products have been drawn into a worldwide market. Transportation costs have dropped steadily in the modern world, so those products that once satisfied only local needs are now facing competition from similar products produced abroad. Also, products that once stayed in a local district can now be sold abroad. The pressures of world competition force all manufacturers to respect world market prices.

In Israel in Moses' day, a predominantly agricultural and tribal society did not involve itself in extensive world trade. There was trade, or course, but this trade was centered on the major cities and port cities. Consider an undeveloped rural economy. Transportation costs effectively insulate interior rural communities from the benefits and competition of world markets. Trade is overwhelmingly aimed at high-value, low-volume products bought and used by the rich, the powerful, and the well-connected. The division of labor is minimal, and output-per-unit-of-resource-input is low. Per capita productivity is low, and therefore per capita income is low.

The Puritan-Scottish interpretation of the Mosaic sabbath laws could be enforced in ancient Israel without wiping out whole segments of the economy only because per capita income was low, economic expectations were low, and the international market for goods did not affect most of the products in use in rural areas. More than this: If the Puritan-Scottish view of the Mosaic sabbath laws had remained in force, the sabbath-honoring economies of the world would probably

still be predominantly rural, characterized by a minimal division of labor. The rhythm of the one-six week is suitable only for rural societies, if that rhythm is mandatory on all citizens on the same day.

Do we want to argue that God has determined that the low division of labor of rural life is a moral requirement forever? Do we want to argue that God has created limits on the development of world trade in the form of a rigid sabbath code that forces all men within a covenantally faithful society into an identical one-six weekly pattern?

As far as I am able to determine, questions like these have not been dealt with by defenders of a New Testament version of the Mosaic sabbath. Those who defend such a view of the Lord's day have seldom been in positions of formulating or enforcing national economic policy. This is why they have been able to avoid the hard reality of sabbatarianism. They have not thought through the economic implications of their position.

When I raised some of these questions in the appendix that appeared in *Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, I expected to see strict sabbatarians respond, to propose answers or at least modifications in their position that would enable them to avoid the obvious implications of their position. I waited twelve years to receive a single letter or see a single refutation in print. None came. Yet Rushdoony's book has been read by many influential theologians and Christian leaders, and critics have attacked its overall thesis concerning the New Testament applicability of Old Testament laws, but sabbatarians have systematically, conscientiously avoided going into print with objections to my original appendix on the Lord's day.

It is now two decades since I wrote this appendix. I have yet to see a published refutation. As I wrote in 1986, the debate has not yet begun. I do not think it will. Strict sabbatarians are few in number. They have chosen not to defend their position. They prefer to maintain the formal language of strictness, despite their inability to assess the fundamental judicial issue: *the locus of sovereignty of sabbath enforcement*. They also ignore the subsidiary task: identifying the details of exactly which practices must be prohibited by law, i.e., by ecclesiastical and civil sanctions.

Silence is not golden.

F. The Puritan Sabbath

The sabbatarian heritage is unquestionably a legacy of the Purit-

ans. It is just about the only theological legacy of the Puritans that still exercises widespread intellectual influence within the Protestant community. It does not exert widespread practical influence, because few people honor the Puritan vision of the sabbath, even though they may honor it verbally.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, a uniquely Puritan document, states: "This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs before-hand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy" (Chap. XXI: VIII). The Larger Catechism amplifies these words: "The Sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful. . ." (A. 117).

We lack a detailed historical study of the Puritan view of recreation. I have never seen even a scholarly article on the topic. I would never advise a doctoral student to adopt such a dissertation topic. The reason should be clear: *The Puritans had no doctrine of recreation*. It was a topic utterly foreign to them. It is exceedingly difficult to take seriously their view of holy rest when they had no doctrine of worldly rest.

1. *The Puritan Obsession*

There is a popular picture of the Puritans that says that they were a dour bunch, that they never laughed, or wrote poetry, or wrote plays, or created great works of art, or in any way delighted in the recreations of life. It has become popular in recent years to dismiss this picture of the Puritans as a myth. It is not a myth. It is rooted in reality—at least the reality of the documentary record.

I spent several years working with the primary sources of the colonial American Puritans, especially their sermons and legislative records. If someone were to tell me that the male Puritans were a fun-loving lot because of their fondness for taverns, I would reply: "How do you know they enjoyed taverns?" There is only one reasonable reply: "Because I read all the laws that the colony passed regulating them." In every town and in the records of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a re-

curing legislative concern was the control of taverns: hours they could be open, the kinds of games that could be played in them. Legislators were obsessed with the evils of shuffleboard, and the laws repeatedly took notice of this notorious deviant behavior, restricting access to taverns by apprentices, and so forth. The legislators did their best to minimize the operations of these dens of iniquity.

What about Puritan poetry? There was Milton, whose reputation as a Puritan is somewhat questionable (though I think on the whole he was in the Puritan camp). There was no one else of comparable reputation. Anne Bradstreet, the poetess of North Andover, Massachusetts, had a collection of her poems published without her knowledge in England in 1650, and 28 years later, a larger collection was published in Boston. By this time, she had been dead for six years.³⁵ The other great colonial Puritan poet was Edward Taylor, who forbade his heirs to publish any of his poems, and which did not see publication until 1939. His manuscript book was not even discovered in the Yale University Library until 1937.³⁶ Not until 1968 was a full-length edition of seventeenth-century American poetry published. Meserole's comments as the editor are appropriate: "In New England particularly, there were strictures against too consummate an attention to poetry. 'A little recreation,' asserted Cotton Mather, was a good thing, and one should not contemplate an unpoetical life. But to turn one's mind and energies wholly to the composition of verse was to prostitute one's calling, to risk opprobrium, and most important, to lose sight of the proper balance God envisioned for man on earth. The sheer quantity of verse that has come down to us proves that these strictures were not completely heeded. It is similarly clear that these strictures had their effect not only in the nature and intent of much of the surviving verse but also in the sparse numbers of poems printed in America before 1725."³⁷

There were the two poems by Michael Wigglesworth, *The Day of Doom* (1662) and *God's Controversy With New-England* (1662). No copy of the first printing of 1,800 copies of *Day of Doom* survives. Meserole says that they were literally read to pieces. These two heavy dirges were obsessed with death and judgment. They were wildly popular in New England, and probably had a great deal to do with the shift

35. Hudson T. Meserole, "Anne Bradstreet," in Meserole (ed.), *Seventeenth-Century American Poetry* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1968), p. 3.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

37. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

in perspective in New England sermons from a more optimistic post-millennialism to a new pessimistic sermon form called the *Jeremiad* by Perry Miller.³⁸ These were formula sermons of imminent judgment that were as predictable as they were ineffective in achieving their goal: repentance and the “affirming of the covenant” by the second and third generations.

There were no Puritan playwrights, no Puritan sculptors, no Puritan painters, no Puritan composers of merit. They were, from start to finish, craftsmen, not artists. Puritans were theologians of artisanship, of diligence in the calling, of self-discipline and lifelong exertions to achieve middle-class output. They achieved their economic goals as no similar group in man’s history ever has. They subdued a howling wilderness in New England, a land of insects, rocky soil, fierce winters, and no minerals of value, a land of which it could truly be said it was devoid of milk and honey. As a substitute, its trees had sap for maple syrup. But New England was a “promised land” of freedom and abundant land. Puritans swapped their way to wealth. “From Puritan to yankee” is a constant theme in history books, for good reason: It was a real transformation.

From beginning to end, they were obsessed with one sin. It was not sexual debauchery, it was not drunkenness, it was not theft or murder or any of the other commandments. It was the sin of *idleness* that obsessed them. In their sermons, their laws, and their pious diaries, they were obsessed with the fear that they were not working hard enough to please God. They did not believe that they could work their way into heaven, but they took seriously the dominion covenant—took it more seriously than any Christian society before or since. It was through work and thrift that they believed they could turn the wilderness into a paradise. Their efforts helped to prepare the religious soil for the industrial revolution a century later. The Methodists of the late eighteenth century were the true spiritual heirs of the Puritans, for they too adopted a theology of work and thrift. The legacy of Puritanism even bears its name: the Puritan work ethic.

One thing they never learned to do gracefully was to rest. They did not understand how they could rest and also please God. They had no developed theology of lawful recreation. They worked from sunrise to sunset six days a week. The men sneaked out to a tavern occasionally, and felt so guilty about it that for decades they elected and re-elected

38. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1953), ch. 2.

magistrates who kept writing unenforced laws regulating their beloved taverns. They had no systematic theology of leisure. They could not deal with the prosperity that their great efforts produced.³⁹ They remind me of the medieval Benedictine monasteries that also could not deal with the wealth they produced, and so suffered periods of recurring internal reform every few centuries.

2. *The Marathon Sabbath*

This obsession with work colored their view of the sabbath. The Directory for the Publick Worship of God, published by the Westminster Assembly, specifies this concerning Sunday activities: "That what time is vacant, between or after the solemn meetings of the congregation in publick, be spent in reading, meditation, repetition of sermons; especially by calling their families to an account of what they have heard, and catechising of them, holy conferences, prayer for a blessing upon the public ordinances, singing of psalms, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, and such like duties of piety, charity, and mercy, accounting the sabbath a delight." To which the modern reader replies: "You've got to be kidding! A delight? An ordeal beyond measure after the pressures of a Puritan workweek."

James T. Dennison's polemical defense of the Puritan sabbath (published in the guise of a master's thesis in history) is a detailed account of the debates concerning the sabbath of this period. Summarizing William Gouge's tract, *The Sabbaths Sanctification* (1641), Dennison wrote: "Duties of mercy consist in those which concern man's soul and those which concern man's body. Ministering to the soul includes: instructing the ignorant; establishing those who are weak in the faith; resolving doubts of the downcast; comforting the troubled; informing those in error; reproving the sinner; and building one another up in the Lord. Ministering to the body includes: visiting the sick and imprisoned; relieving the need; rescuing those in danger; and giving all other succor necessary."⁴⁰ This is in addition to works of necessity: preparing food, washing the body, putting on clothing, putting out fires in houses, closing up flood breaches, fighting in wars, releasing

39. Perry Miller wrote: "... the Jeremiad could make sense out of existence as long as adversity was to be overcome, but in the moment of victory it was confused. ... It flourished in dread of success; were reality ever to come up to its expectations, a new convention would be required, and this would presuppose a revolution in mind and society." Miller, *From Colony to Province*, p. 33.

40. Dennison, *Market Day of the Soul*, p. 113.

animals in danger. He admitted that not all sabbatarians took the following strict sabbatarian positions (though some did): no baking or cooking, walking, any kind of work, or gathering sticks for a fire.⁴¹ Thus, we can appreciate Dennison's summary statement: "It is apparent that the Puritan Sabbath was not a day of idleness. There was as much activity, if not more, on the Lord's day as on any other day of the week."⁴²

The question arises: When did these people rest? The answer: they seldom did. When they did, they had no developed theology to tell them when they had rested too much. So, out of desperation, they avoided rest like the plague.

By the early eighteenth century, Puritanism was fading. Newer religious movements arose that were capable of dealing with success—success that came from the Puritan work ethic. The second and third generations of Puritan heirs failed to affirm the covenant, join the church, and take up the "redeemed man's burden" of endless labor. Puritanism literally worked itself to death.

The Jeremiad sermon warned of God's coming negative sanctions against a faithless society. The problem was, the faithless society got ever-richer. Nevertheless, the forms of the Jeremiad were retained, decade after decade. In the 1730s, ministers were still using its outline, even though it was even less relevant as a formal exercise than it had been eight decades earlier.⁴³ Social and literary forms sometimes survive long after the cultural environment that gave birth to them has disappeared. Even longer lived has been the Puritan rhetoric of sabbath-keeping, a rhetoric that is still maintained by a handful of Calvinist churches whose members have never observed the detailed positive requirements for hard, merciful work that Puritan sabbatarian doctrine established, and who would transfer membership from any church that would actually enforce these requirements, and vote out of office any politician who might attempt to legislate them.

The Puritan view of the sabbath (though not its practice) has been maintained unbroken only by the more rigorous Presbyterians in the Scottish tradition. This tradition goes back to the seventeenth century. In Aberdeen, Scotland, in the 1640s, shops were shut on Thursdays, Saturday afternoons, and of course all day Sunday. On Sundays, the highways were watched to identify absentees. In April of 1646, at the

41. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

43. Miller, *Colony*, p. 484.

height of critical negotiations between Charles I, the Scots and English representative of Parliament, Balmerino, who was travelling to Newark with an urgent message from London, stopped when he was 13 miles from his destination in order not to travel on the sabbath.⁴⁴ The Scottish-Puritan doctrine of the sabbath unquestionably had powerful effects on its adherents—effects that would today be regarded as near-pathological by those who claim that they are still faithfully upholding that very sabbatarian view.

G. General Preaching Creates Specific Guilt

1. Rayburn's Essay

In *Presbyterion*, a journal published by Covenant Theological Seminary, Robert G. Rayburn offers a standard essay on the sabbath. He defends the idea of a day of rest, and his familiar line of argumentation is that of the Presbyterian elder in the Scottish tradition. There is nothing unique about the essay, and nothing uniquely wrong with it. It is *traditionally* wrong, *familiarly* wrong, but not uniquely wrong. It is no different from a thousand other essays on the topic over the last four centuries.

What needs to be pointed out is that in a 15-page essay, he devotes fewer than two pages to the section: "Practical Questions Concerning Sabbath Observance." This, too, is typical. It is traditionally the practical questions that the sabbatarians have avoided dealing with for the last century. From the day the Scots faced the question of Sunday railroads, the commentators (McCheyne excepted) have mumbled. When it comes to public utilities—water, gas, electricity—they do not even mumble. They are stony silent.

Rayburn offered several reasons for the sabbath, all of which are traditional and correct: the dependence of man on God; the glorification of God through worship, especially corporate worship; the biological need for rest in the weekly rhythm. He said that Christ observed the sabbath, and He used it for works of mercy. Equally predictably and equally traditionally, he rejected the clear meaning of Paul's words in Colossians 2:16–17 concerning new moons and sabbaths, arguing that Paul was really concerned about a "teaching which was a mixture of Jewish ritualism and an Oriental Gnostic-type philosophy." He

44. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1967), p. 183.

therefore concluded: "So this passage, as well as two others which do not use the word 'sabbath' but speak of observing days (Rom 14:5 and Gal 4:11), obviously do not refer to the observance of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day, the Christian's sabbath, for Paul observed the first day himself and directed others to observe it by setting aside their offerings to the Lord (I Cor 16:2). He was instructing believers not to attach special significance and sacredness to Jewish religious festivals and thus to pass judgment on those who failed to observe them, but rather to rejoice in their wonderful new-found liberty in Christ. As for the observance of the first day as the Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath, all Christians, Jew and Gentile, kept it."⁴⁵

Where should I begin? First, if this really is the meaning of these passages, then why do churches refuse to insist that the civil government execute sabbath-breakers, as required by Exodus 31:15 and 35:2? If the locus of sovereignty of enforcement has not shifted to the individual conscience, then on what basis do New Testament commentators assert (implicitly or explicitly) that the civil government is no longer the responsible agent of enforcement? Why has the church remained silent about the death penalty for two millennia? After two thousand years, the silence has become deafening. Second, it is not true, as Bacchiocchi's Ph.D. dissertation⁴⁶ makes clear, that all Christians, Jew and gentile alike, worshipped on the first day of the week in Paul's day. Third, just because Paul insisted on corporate worship does not explain why the day of the Lord is to be a day of rest. It only shows that corporate weekly worship is required by New Testament law. Paul emphasized this because there was no equally clear-cut requirement for sabbath worship in the Old Testament.

What did Rayburn say is required? We must glorify God by not making Sunday a day of doing our own personal desires and pleasures. There are no definitions, no examples, no study of what is restful or fun, what is allowed and prohibited. In short, he burdens his readers (should they take him seriously) with a mountain of guilt. They are told to be faithful to God, but they are not told how. This, too, is traditional.

We must make the day a day of rest, he said. But rest really does

45. Robert G. Rayburn, "Should Christians Celebrate the Sabbath Day?" *Presbyterian*, X (Spring-Fall 1984) pp. 83, 84.

46. Sameule Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

not mean rest; it means . . . ? (Marathon sabbath? What?) “Resting on the Sabbath does not mean staying in bed all day or even most of the day, although some rest for the body is certainly appropriate.” But, we should be moved to inquire: What amount of time in bed is appropriate? He did not say. In short, here is another pile of guilt for the reader. How about a one-hour nap? A two-hour nap? Why all this chatter about staying in bed all day? Who on earth ever recommended staying in bed all day? This is a serious article and a serious topic, yet what we are given is exaggeration and hyperbole rather than specific, God-required guidelines. This is all that we ever get from sabbatarian commentators. This is all we have been given for 400 years. We grow tired. We want rest from guilt. We want specifics. When will the sabbatarian commentators give us rest?

Then comes the usual refrain: *evil restaurants*. “Since the obedient believer is to observe the Sabbath as a holy day of rest, he must be careful not to interfere with others having the same privilege. He must not keep others working that he might not need to work. The waitress or cook at the restaurant and the attendant at the filling station have the right to rest also.”⁴⁷ Restaurants on Sunday: Here is the modern Calvinist’s equivalent of taverns in seventeenth-century New England.

This essay is neither better nor worse than a century of similar essays, which stream endlessly from the pens and word processors of theologians who simply will not take seriously the problems of economics and their relationship to the Bible. They just hammer away at the helpless readers, who desperately need specific, God-required guidelines. Neither do the commentators confront Exodus 31:15 and 35:2. They refuse to deal with the problems of public utilities, yet they criticize those who attend restaurants. It is clear why: *they* do not attend restaurants on Sunday. *It is exegesis based on personal convenience and tradition*. Such exegesis is productive of nothing except guilt, and perhaps a late reaction against sabbatarian precepts because of the lack of guidelines. The exegesis never progresses, because it never gets sufficiently explicit in its applications. It still sounds as though it was written in 1825—and even then, such exegesis was running into difficulties with respect to the industrial revolution.

2. Preliminary Conclusion

The New Testament Lord’s day is not the same as the Old Testa-

47. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

ment sabbath. The shift in the day of the week, from Seventhday (Saturday) to Firstday (Sunday), which is in fact the Eighthday, indicates that there are fundamentally new aspects of the Lord's day. This shift enables us to understand better Paul's warning of *a shift in the locus of enforcement* of the "day of rest" principle: from the ecclesiastical and civil governments to the conscience of the individual, meaning the head of the household.

By attempting to impose the workweek rhythms of the sabbath-honoring Old Testament rural society onto a modern industrial economy, the civil government would destroy modern civilization. This fact has been "honored in the breach" by most magistrates and church officials for several centuries, but sabbatarian theologians have yet to present a coherent biblical case that would morally justify this "aversion of the eyes" of civil and ecclesiastical governments. Church leaders see what is going on, yet they remain silent.

It is one thing to say that the conscience governs the selection and enforcement of the day of rest. It is something else to say that the church may not enforce the day of church attendance. The New Testament's emphasis on the Lord's day as a day of worship may have eliminated the role of the civil government in enforcing public rest, but what about the institutional church's unquestioned right to name the day of public worship for its members, and to establish times for worship? Does the church have an obligation to provide alternative times of worship for members who, because of specialized occupations, decide to honor the rest principle by resting on a day other than the first day of the week?

H. Rescheduling Worship

It is not normal in a Christian nation to find that most occupations of necessity involve labor on seven consecutive days. In fact, most of them are five-day occupations, leaving time for goofing off Saturday (that terrible Roman word for Seventhday), to watch televised sporting events all day in violation of God's one-six pattern for the workweek. But a few members are called to occupations that require Sunday work at least occasionally. And, by the grace of God, most pastors say nothing if the practice does not spread.

1. Rescheduling Passover

We find a parallel in the case of the Israelite who was not able to

celebrate the Passover in the specified month, the first month of the year.

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even[ing] they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Num. 9:10–11).

Why would any man be on a journey? What would a Hebrew be doing outside the nation? He might be on some sort of a foreign policy mission, serving as an ambassador of the king. He might have been an evangelist. More likely, he would have been a merchant. His occupation kept him away from Jerusalem in this important month. For those who had a legitimate excuse, the Passover could be celebrated in the second month of the year. Not many people would have had a legitimate excuse. This was no license for missing the Passover feast. “But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in the appointed season, that man shall bear his sin” (Num. 9:13). The penalty was excommunication from the congregation. The first-month Passover was normally binding, but those on journeys were exempted.

The law of God provided a means of satisfying the requirement of the Passover in certain instances when, through no fault of the individual, it was impossible or unlawful for him to enter into the celebration. Old Testament law was not perfectionist. It acknowledged the problems men face in complying with its terms. The law was neither perfectionist nor antinomian. Within the framework of the law, there is no temptation facing man which is insurmountable; God offers a way of escape (I Cor. 10:13).

The normal requirement was that each family should celebrate the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month of the year. There was an institutional arrangement that enabled each man to fulfill the terms of the covenantal celebration. This should convince us that the celebration of the New Testament version of the Passover, namely, the weekly communion feast, normally takes place on the day of rest, but this should not be absolute in every instance.

2. *Worldwide Trade: Passover vs. Dominion?*

The question then arises: What if the Hebrew were on a distant journey? What if he couldn't return to Jerusalem even for the second Passover? If the journey were limited to the Middle East, there could be time available to return. But what if the Hebrew were visiting North America on a trading mission? They did journey this far in the days of Solomon, although conventional historians refuse to face the evidence.⁴⁸ A remarkable piece of evidence for just such a journey is the Los Lunas stone near Los Lunas,⁴⁹ New Mexico. The alphabet used was a North Canaanite script that was in use as early as 1200 B.C., and would have been no later than 800 B.C. Here is what the inscription says:

I am Yahweh your God that brought you out of the lands of Egypt.

You shall not have any other gods beside me.

You shall not make for yourself any graven image.

You shall not take the name of Yahweh in vain.

Remember the day of the Sabbath, to keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the land which Yahweh your God is giving to you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not testify against your neighbor as a false witness.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor anything of your neighbor's.⁵⁰

Here we have evidence of a worldwide trading system. Barry Fell's revolutionary books demonstrate how early this trading system exists.

48. Barry Fell, *Bronze Age America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982).

49. This is the correct name, despite the normal Spanish usage of the article "los" as masculine and "as" suffixes as feminine.

50. Jay Stonebreaker, "A Decipherment of the Los Lunas Decalogue Inscription," *The Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications*, Vol. 10, Pt. 1 (1982), pp. 80–81. Several of the papers in this issue deal with Los Lunas. For a photograph of the stone, see Barry Fell, *Saga America* (New York: Times Books, 1980), p. 167.

ted, especially his book, *Bronze Age America* (1982). There is no doubt that the Hebrews were involved in this trade.

What could a distant Hebrew trader have done about Passover? The Bible does not say, but it seems clear that he would occasionally have missed a Passover celebration. There is no specific release provided in the law, but to have required Passover for every Hebrew, regardless of circumstances, would have restricted the spread of Hebrew culture and trade. The Ten Commandments would have been far less likely to have wound up on a rock in New Mexico. Thus, we have to speculate about the rule of God's law as applied by the priests. Was the "dominion mandate" or dominion covenant to be sacrificed on the altar of formal adherence to ritual requirements? Was the celebration of the Passover more important than the subduing of the earth? Should we not conclude that the laws associated with Passover were flexibly applied in cases where Hebrews had legitimate, world-subduing reasons to be absent from the festival?

The same problem faces modern keepers of the sabbath or Lord's day. What should a pastor do in cases where a church member must work on the traditional day of rest to keep his job, because of the nature of that job? Wouldn't the best approach be to go to the member and see whether he is taking another day for his rest? After all, the early church took Seventhday off in Israel, because it was the law of the land. Would it not be proper for the member to do the same? The priests of the Mosaic era must have taken other days off, family by family. Should we not regard modern laborers as priests? "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people . . ." (I Pet. 2:9a). No doubt, most priests rested on the national sabbath day in Israel. No doubt, most Christians rest on the Lord's day. Would it not be proper to acknowledge the legitimate exceptions—profanations of the Lord's day that are blameless?

3. Rural Life Forever?

We have to ask ourselves this fundamental question: Did God establish the self-sufficient rural society as His perpetual societal standard? Is this standard still morally binding on Christian cultures? The Mosaic sabbath was specifically created as a means of preserving an economy that adhered to a six-one rhythm of the workweek. Even the most seemingly trivial violation of the pattern, namely, stick-gathering, was to be punished by death. It is difficult for us to imagine the smooth

operation of a modern industrial economy within the stated framework of Numbers 15. But the Mosaic law was not perfectionist. It did allow exceptions with respect to Passover. It is likely that similar exemptions existed for other celebrations for Hebrews with unique occupations. But there is no list of exceptional occupations in the Old Testament that proves that such exceptions did exist, other than for the priesthood itself. It should be clear that anyone appealing to the elders for an exemption would have had to prove his case, namely, that his occupation unquestionably required seven-day operations.

It is true that automation is steadily reducing the number of people who must be employed on any given day, but engineers and emergency servicemen must be there to keep the equipment running. The moral issue of using services that require only a few men to violate the Lord's day, simply because there has been a change in technology, is still a question of right and wrong. In any case, could such a technology ever have developed, had Sunday workers been prohibited from the very beginning in the light and power industry?

What the strict sabbatarian is calling for is a drastically reduced material standard of living one day per week, an alteration of modern life styles so radical that its consequences for the economy can barely be contemplated. The Puritan-Scottish interpretation of the Mosaic standard is undeniably rigorous: no cooked meals, no restaurants, no television, no radio, no newspapers delivered on Sunday or Monday morning (Sunday production), no hot water for showers or shaving (unless produced by wood heat, solar power, or bottled gas), no commercial recreation centers, no air conditioning (unless powered by home diesel electrical generators), no gasoline stations open (except one or two stations on a rotating basis, and only for servicing emergency vehicles or aiding legitimate travellers in an emergency—state-certified legitimate travellers), no supermarkets open for business, and endless forms to fill out in any commercial operation in order to justify the emergency nature of the sale, with fines and warnings for buyers and sellers for first violations, and death for repeated violations.

It should be understood that these conclusions are minimal ones; a strict sabbatarian civilization, if it is to remain true to its professed faith, would have to impose these restrictions, and it might very well find other wide-ranging applications of the sabbath principle. That contemporary sabbatarians, or even most of the sabbatarians since 1825, have refused to discuss the comprehensive specific proposals that follow from their position, has led to confusion on the part of

church members. That anything so minimal as not going to a restaurant on Sunday has become the “litmus test” of strict sabbatarianism indicates just how misleading modern sabbatarianism has become. Closing all restaurants on Sunday would be the mere beginning, not the end, of civil legislation in a sabbatarian commonwealth.

I. Proposal for Lord’s Day Reform

What I am proposing is a consideration of the possibility that the Old Testament did make provisions for an alternate sabbath observance schedule for people whose professions, by their very economic nature, require seven-day operations. If so, then the New Testament Lord’s day should also make provision for an alternate day of rest-worship for certain individuals. When some employees must work on the day of normal worship, the church could make another day of the week available for rest and worship. In our era, it would probably be Saturday, when the whole family is at home. If several churches with similar theological views made a single service available for their Sunday workers, the fact that few members per congregation are in need of the alternative day would not be a pressing institutional problem. A few members from several congregations could meet to partake of the Lord’s supper in the evening. In short, the churches should make institutional provisions for those who are required from time to time to work on the day of rest.

Certain professionals, such as policemen and firemen, are already granted a kind of unofficial “Lord’s day-desecration voucher.” They are not brought before the elders for working on Sundays. They are also paid by the civil government for their Lord’s day-desecration activities. But this is an unofficial exemption. Sabbatarian churches, as far as I have been able to determine, make no official institutional alterations for these church members to celebrate communion. These members are simply ignored. Elders “shrug off” the whole problem. Why not face the problem, and rethink the whole question of legitimate employment on the Lord’s day, and legitimate communion meals on other days of the week?

Admittedly, corporations and small firms should see to it that no one employee is stuck permanently with Sunday (Firstday) assignments. This assignment should be rotated, so as not to disrupt men’s worship on a permanent basis. But labor on the Lord’s day is not automatically to be regarded as Lord’s day desecration.

1. Priestly Exemptions

There is always the standard solution to the general problem posed by the steel industry example: the “works of necessity” argument. Perhaps this really is the right approach. The sabbatarian argues that steel is vital to the economy. Such an argument certainly seems reasonable. Then, because there appears to be no way to produce steel on any basis except seven days per week, the steel industry should receive a special dispensation from the church and the state that allows it to go on producing. While the Lord’s day is profaned, the profaners are held guiltless. The owners (share-holding investors), managers, and laborers are treated as Christ said that God treated the priests in the temple. They are held innocent. Those associated with steel production have become “honorary priests.” They are laboring in a vital industry, so this constitutes an assignment from God, comparable to God’s assignment to his priests in Moses’ day. They become exempt from the Lord’s day prohibitions.

The church or state that takes this position has decided to become involved in endless appeals from industries that want to be reclassified as “priestly” in nature: vital to the economy and also innately seven-day operations because of the nature of the markets they face. What predictable, legal criteria would the state use to determine such questions? What constitutes a vital industry? Which industries, now just starting out, will (and should) be allowed by the civil magistrates to become vital? Which industries used to be vital, but are no longer vital? Public utilities? (What about cable television service?) The healing professions? (What about cosmetic plastic surgery?) Should they be allowed to charge a fee for “emergency service”? What is an emergency service?

Having somehow solved the problem of providing legal definitions of vital services and products, the state’s authorities would then have to decide what market pressures really face these industries. Are they really required to operate seven days a week? They may say that they are, but are they? What criteria should be used by civil magistrates to determine the true state of affairs? Which factors determine the economics of any particular profession or industry and its market? Foreign competitors (including competitors across the county line, or state line)? Consumers’ buying habits (including consumers across the county line or state line)?

2. The World State

Perhaps most important, how can we grant such a decision-making authority to the civil government without seeing the creation of a vast, arbitrary, powerful bureaucracy? These questions concerning “works of necessity and mercy” and “true state of market competition” are enormously complex. They cannot even be decided on a local basis, given the worldwide division of labor. They cannot even be decided nationally. They have to be decided by a world state—a state that has the power to enforce its decisions.

The Mosaic sabbath was to be enforced in Israel, whatever its exemptions for specific occupations, despite tribal practices or preferences. With the breaking of the old wineskins of Israel’s economy (taken in the broader sense of “economy”), any church that would impose the Mosaic sabbath laws now faces an enormously more difficult and complex task. How can it define the problem areas? How can it enforce its decisions internationally? And if solutions can be found to these questions, there is always the critical one remaining: How can a world state enforce the Mosaic sabbath without becoming top-heavy, imperial in nature, and a threat to the very idea of decentralized Christian institutions? How can the Mosaic sabbath be enforced in international markets without destroying the legal basis of freedom, namely, predictable law enforced by an impartial civil government?

Will sabbatarians now argue that nations have to come to an agreement on the nature of the semi-priestly offices (e.g., steel workers, physicians, public utility workers) and the nature of the markets facing them? But what if one or more nations will not agree? If there is no enforcement mechanism internationally, will sabbatarians then argue that each nation must decide for itself, in terms of a hypothetical “national conscience”? And once they admit this exception, what is to prevent further extensions of this “conscience” exemption: to the states or provinces, to the counties, to the cities? What about to the churches? And finally, we find ourselves right back where the Apostle Paul began in Romans 14:5, namely, with the conscience of the individual Christian.

If sabbatarians refuse to allow conscience to decide, then the exegetical war will be carried right back up the chain of appeal: to denominational authorities, to the cities, counties, states or provinces, nations, and finally to the world state. Each level of government attempts to impose its view of the Lord’s day on those below it. But the

Mosaic law does not tell men what to do on the sabbath, and the New Testament does not tell men how to rest. Will we need a world state to enforce laws against idle talk (Isa. 58:13)? What will constitute, or should constitute, lawful recreation? Is walking through a garden lawful? How about running through a garden? How about running after a ball in a meadow in front of paying spectators? On worldwide television? And if some nation's rulers decide that playing football (soccer) on worldwide television is immoral, then watching it is equally immoral. Will they set up jamming stations to keep out the satellite broadcasts? (Operating state-owned or state-licensed jamming stations would unquestionably be classified as a sabbatical work of necessity.)

J. Leisure

We do not know for certain how Adam and Eve spent their first sabbath, although it seems likely that they ate of the forbidden fruit on this day. We do not know how they spent their second sabbath, though it probably was outside the garden. We do not know how the sabbath operated from Adam and Eve until the Hebrews experienced the manna that would not come on the seventh day. We do not know how the Hebrews spent their sabbaths. We know a little about what they were not to do, but nothing for certain about what they did.

We know what the early Christians did on the Lord's day: They worked for a living. At the end of the day, they went to a meeting and ate the Lord's Supper.

We have sufficient revelation to know that the normal pattern of the week is to rest one day and work for six. Must we always work six days? The Mosaic law said *yes*, in general, but it also established other feast days and days off. There are problems of applying God's word to specific cases.

These were precisely the problems faced by new Christians in Romans 14:5. They are our problems, too. Which days off are legitimate? Which day should men take off during the week? None? One (Sunday or Saturday)? Two (Saturday and Sunday)? Three (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, given the trade unions' pressure to create three-day holidays whenever an American national holiday rolls around)? What is the answer? What is the incontrovertible, conscience-binding answer that all Christians must respect, because it is so clear exegetically and historically? Which is the morally and legally binding day for rest?

The answer is not so easy to produce. Sunday (the Roman name

for Firstday) is the common day of worship and therefore preferable, although the early church could not always adhere to it as the day of rest. But some members have to work on Sunday, at least part of the day. In practice, the churches tend to acknowledge this economic reality, so long as the individual shows up one Sunday out of three or four. Why make exceptions at all? Why not get every member to quit his job if it requires Sunday labor? Because the church officials are more realistic when they count the tithes than when they read sabbatarian tracts. They do not want trouble. They acknowledge in practice what their tracts deny: Men do have legitimate callings that appear to be seven-day operations by economic necessity. Cows need milking, and churches need tithes.

This raises the question of legitimate leisure. What should men do for leisure? Also—a question virtually never discussed by sabbatarians—what kinds of leisure are legitimate on the other six days of the week? God's law gives no indication that the six days of labor in a normal week were to involve leisure activities. With the exception of national (nonweekly) sabbaths, and the various feast periods (Deut. 14:23–29),⁵¹ men were told to work six days a week. Yet it is obvious that people cannot long sustain a life of zero leisure six days a week—not if they are to maintain their productivity. They sleep, they eat, and they chat. They teach their children (Deut. 6:7).⁵² Presumably, families enjoy some hours of leisure during the day. But the Bible says nothing about such leisure, or when it is legitimate to enjoy it during the week or during the day. It leaves this decision to the individual conscience, within the framework of family schedules and occupational requirements. If idle talk—"speaking thine own words" (Isa. 58:13)—is prohibited on the Lord's day, then is it legitimate on the other six days? If doing "thy pleasure" is prohibited on the Lord's day, then is it legitimate on other days? Or are these things prohibited generally, but especially on the Lord's day?

Bishop J. C. Ryle had answers, or at least strong opinions, in regard to lawful and unlawful leisure on the Lord's day.

When I speak of private Sabbath desecration, I mean that reckless, thoughtless, secular way of spending Sunday, which every one who looks around him must know is common. How many make the Lord's Day a day for giving dinner parties—a day for looking over their accounts and making up their books—a day for reading news-

51. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 35.

52. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

papers or novels—a day for talking politics and idle gossip—a day, in short, for anything rather than the things of God. . . . When I speak of public desecration of the Sabbath, I mean these many open, unblushing practices, which meet the eye on Sundays in the neighbourhood of large towns. I refer to the practice of keeping shops open, and buying and selling on Sundays. I refer especially to Sunday trains, Sunday steamboats, and excursions to sea and country, and the opening of places of public amusement; and to the daring efforts which many are making in the present day, to desecrate the Lord's Day, regardless of its Divine authority.⁵³

This is quite a list of desecrations. But let us add some more. What about watching television on the Lord's day? Not allowed? Then what if we could make video recordings on the Lord's day with our electronically controlled video machines (with automatic timers)? Not even then, by the consistent logic of sabbatarianism, for men and women must labor at power-generating stations and television stations in order to deliver the programs to our lifeless video machines.

What about listening to music? With a church choir, it is obviously legitimate. What about classical music? At the park? Aren't the performers working? What if they are offering their services voluntarily? What if they are amateurs? Possibly legitimate. What if they are professionals who are paid on other days of the week to practice, but who then play on Sunday? Who pays them? The city? This is socialism. A private corporation? This is business (advertising). A charitable organization? Possibly valid.

What about listening to a radio broadcast of classical music? Not if you use public power or public airwaves. Then again, is classical music really valid? Should we regard it as Christian? Would we allow listening to folk music as a Lord's day activity? After all, is folk music or popular music any less secular than Wagner or Beethoven? Choirs sing words, and words are a form of preaching. Choir music is therefore valid on Sunday—music performed “in his sanctuary” (Ps. 150:1); all other music, delivered anywhere but in church, is either suspect or outright illegal, given the Mosaic law.

How do we settle these issues by means of legislation? How do we create an enforcing bureaucracy to police such activities without jeopardizing freedom? How can sabbatarian expositors go on writing tracts without providing plausible biblical answers to these practical, inevit-

53. John Charles Ryle, *Lord's Day or the Christian Sabbath* (London: Lord's Day Observance Society, n.d.), pp. 17–18. He wrote in the late nineteenth century.

able legal questions? How, in short, can we legitimately remove these questions from the area of human conscience and transfer their enforcing to an agency of institutional government, other than the family, where the father's conscience is given legitimate authority over his children? If men must struggle intellectually and morally to discover concrete answers to Lord's day questions for their own lives, businesses, and families, then how can we expect the institutional church or the civil government to come to recognizably valid, freedom-protecting conclusions? In short, how will we design institutional restraints on the bureaucrats?

K. Additional Questions

There are other questions that need practical answers. A corporation or business may permit people employed by it to take a day off each week, yet the firm remains open seven days a week. The example of a restaurant is useful here. The restaurant may remain open on Sunday, helping to make a day of rest available to housewives. Some of the employees must work on Sunday, but their labor makes it easier for families to enjoy a meal together without putting burdens on the wives. Most of the employees are given another day off. They take a day of rest on a day other than Sunday, just as members of the early church did.

1. Is a Business a Person?

Here are some fundamental questions. If the firm splits working schedules for Sunday laborers, allowing them to attend morning or evening worship services, has it profaned the Lord's day blamefully or blamelessly? If workers take another day off, has the firm forced its employees to violate the Lord's day? If so, then everyone who spends money in that restaurant on Sunday is as guilty as the proprietor and the employees. Second, is the firm to be treated as a person? Must a firm remain closed one day each week, even when employees are given alternate days of rest?

The problem exists, especially in an urban, industrial society, because of the high division of labor and high specialization of production. Companies serve the needs of large numbers of people. The rhythm of rural, subsistence farming can be more easily geared to a six-day workweek than the rhythm of an industrial society. *The work-week's rhythm in an industrial society is necessarily flatter*, because its

members are far more dependent upon the availability, moment by moment, of services of other citizens than is the case in a low division of labor rural society. Urban dwellers do not produce many goods for their own personal use; they produce specialized services or goods for sale. If we can legitimately buy natural gas or electricity from a public utility in order to cook our Sunday meal, then why is it illegitimate to buy a meal at a restaurant? Either both acts are blameful violations of the Lord's day, or neither, assuming that the selling firm does not require seven days of consecutive labor from individual employees.

2. Cooking on the Lord's Day

The Mosaic sabbath in the wilderness seems to have required the baking of manna on the sixth day; they ate cold cakes on the sabbath. Will strict sabbatarians call for the death penalty of anyone cooking on the Lord's day? If not, why not?

The issue of cooking on the Lord's day is a difficult one. The Hebrew women probably cooked their manna cakes on the sixth day during the period they spent in the wilderness. We are not told specifically in the Mosaic law that cooking was permanently abolished on the seventh day. At the same time, the experience in the wilderness was to have given them indications concerning the cooking schedule preferred by God, and that schedule involved storing up cooked food the day before the sabbath, just as it involved storing up extra firewood.

When we come to the New Testament, we face a more difficult problem. The Lord's day should be timed from morning to morning.⁵⁴ The communion meal in the first-century church was an evening meal. Must we therefore conclude that this communion meal, the central weekly event in the life of the corporate church, prohibited the eating of freshly cooked food? Does the Sunday evening meal have to be cooked on Saturday night or even earlier on Saturday? Would we not expect the wives in the early church to have prepared their best meal of the week for this night? On the other hand, is the Lord's day to become a day of cooking competition? In modern churches, the existence of Sunday evening church suppers stands as a testimony to sabbatarian confusion.

Meals, whether cooked or leftovers, leave messes behind. What are wives to do, leave the crumbs lying on the table for the benefit of ro-

54. Appendix F.

dents and insects? But if they clean up the table and kitchen in their households, haven't they violated the Lord's day? If so, is this a case of Lord's day desecration comparable to the desecration of the priests, that is, blameless? May they use hot water to wash dishes? Can they legitimately (blamelessly) draw such hot water out of the tap? If so, someone is on duty at the local public utility company, serving the needs of the Lord's day-desecrating wives. It takes power to heat water. It also takes a water company to deliver water that is to be heated.

The modern church has given no systematic thought to these issues. The Protestant churches have their Sunday evening covered dish suppers, and no one goes away feeling guilty about having cooked on the Lord's day or having eaten cooked food on the Lord's day. But the ethical question still remains: Is cooking on the Lord's day a sin?

3. Evading the Problems

These are relevant issues. The fact that they are not discussed seriously by modern defenders of the Puritan-Scottish sabbath is an indication of the political impotence of those who defend it. They write their booklets and preach their sermons, but the authors do not address their tracts to those officials who make decisions, or who might possibly make decisions in the future, in the world of business and government. Their tracts and booklets fail to speak to these issues. They are written as if we were still in the deserts of Palestine, as if paper and ink were not produced for international markets, as if the steel in printing presses could be produced in a six-day workweek. These men are rather like the professional ecologists who decry pollution and then climb into their automobiles to be driven to airports, where they fly on mass-polluting jet planes in order to give their emotion-laden speeches.

The writers of sabbatarian tracts would better spend their time in dealing with the real questions, the questions of conscience. What are the guidelines that pastors should use in counselling guilt-ridden congregation members who realize that they have ignored the one-six pattern of covenant man's week? How should pastors and elders teach the Lord's day, in order not to pressure excessively those who have not fully understood the implications in their own lives of the Lord's day, but who still need instruction? How can leaders deal with ignorance without violating consciences? This is the focus of Romans 14:5. Here is where we need tracts, books, and seminars.

L. Sabbatarian Debates in England

After this appendix was typeset in 1985, I went on vacation. In a Church of England book store in London, I found a copy of John Wigley's *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday*. This book is a scholarly survey of the debate over sabbatarianism from Puritan days until twentieth century, but focused on the nineteenth century. I decided to add a summary of this little-known history to this appendix.

What I learned from the book is that many of the issues that I had raised in this appendix had been discussed at length throughout the period, 1550–1900, and in many cases, the debates had been taken to Parliament for reconciliation. Parliament never was able to reconcile them. Thus, the seemingly hypothetical arguments found in my theoretical discussion of various sabbath issues were far from hypothetical in English history.

Wigley's book presents evidence that the most decisive changes in English attitudes and manners took place between 1780 and 1830, the period of the early industrial revolution. Wigley cited several authorities, including Charles Dickens, to this effect.⁵⁵ Each social group had different values and manners, and all were subject to changes in the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ He argued that English sabbatarianism was the primary influence on the Victorian sabbath, and that it was an integral aspect of English life and history.

The sabbath debates began long before 1780. Sunday amusements were prohibited by law by the Sunday Observance Act of 1677, which was passed not in the Cromwell era but over a decade and a half into the Restoration era of Charles II. A century later, in 1780, Anglican evangelicals were able to pressure Parliament to pass an Act that made it illegal on Sunday to charge admission to places of entertainment.⁵⁷ They wrote in a loophole for themselves, however, which was to be taken advantage of by their opponents a century later: religious organizations were allowed to charge a fee.

1. Elizabethan and Puritan England

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Church of England had no clear-cut teaching with respect to the sabbath. In 1569, Queen Elizabeth au-

55. John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 1.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

thorized certain sports on Sunday: archery, leaping, running, wrestling, and oddest of all, hammer throwing. In 1574, she authorized other sports, but forbade them during church services. Bear-baiting and bull-baiting were prohibited.⁵⁸ A 1580 law against Sunday plays in London pushed plays into Southwark,⁵⁹ an early indication of the problem faced by all strictly local sabbatarian legislation: geographical escape. Then, in 1595, Nicholas Bownde published his strongly sabbatarian book, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*: no saints days during the week, and no recreations on Sunday. Controversy increased from that time until the Puritan Revolution of the 1640s.

In 1618, James I issued his *Book of Sports*, in which he reaffirmed the legality of Elizabethan Sunday sports. His recommended Sunday was recreation-oriented. The English Calvinists, following Bownde rather than Calvin, were outraged. Many non-Calvinists in the Church of England shared their views. Restrictions on Sunday travel were passed in 1625 and 1627.⁶⁰ The debate accelerated after 1633, when Arminian Archbishop Laud promulgated Charles I's rewrite of his father's *Book of Sports*, and required it to be read in the churches. Essentially, the debate was between the "marathon sabbath" Puritans and the "recreation sabbath" traditionalists.

During the Puritan era, 1642–1660, the Parliament abolished all remaining saints' days and holy days, along with Christmas and Easter, and substituted the second Tuesday every month as a holiday for apprentices. Why there was a legitimate exception to "six days shalt thou labor" was not explained. This was the Act of 1647.

The problem of technology arose in this era. What about occupations that seem to be seven-day operations? "In 1657 two Acts forbade between them milling, cloth-making, tallow-melting, baking, brewing, soap-boiling and distilling—trades in which natural contingencies, market pressures and technical considerations made it difficult to avoid Sunday work."⁶¹ But, as the author says, Parliament met on Sundays during emergencies. Furthermore, Cromwell was no sabbatarian.

The debates continued. The rival opinions concerning the proper administration of the sabbath proved to be irreconcilable. Many of the same disagreements persist today. "Even before the Civil War disputes

58. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

about the commandment's meaning had raised disconcerting issues of principle. If the Fourth Commandment no longer applied in its full and original force, did the other nine? If it applied to all men, was a servant right to disobey his master's order to work on the Sabbath? Who should judge in such cases? Now extremists claimed that the Sabbath should be kept from sunset on Friday till sunset on Saturday, mystics believed that Sabbath-keeping destroyed true spiritual religion, the Quakers taught that there should be no distinction of days and the Diggers began to cultivate St George's Hill on a Sunday. No less a person than Milton thought that the only true guide and authority in such matters was the individual's conscience."⁶² The question arises: How can society find rest from these interminable disagreements? How can church and state be governed by God and be blessed by God if God-fearing people have discovered no way, at least so far, to come to an agreement about these issues?

2. The Traditional Sabbath

The Puritan era and its legislation lapsed in 1660, when Charles II came to the throne, but sabbatarian pressures continued. The Sunday Observance Act of 1677 was the king's attempt to forestall a more rigorous bill being considered by the House of Commons. It prohibited all Sunday labor except for emergencies and charity, and prohibited all retail trade, except for the general sale of milk and meat for inns and other restaurants. It severely restricted Sunday travel.⁶³ Opposition began almost immediately, for sabbatarian ideas were beginning to lose their popularity. The Act was more closely enforced in rural areas; in the cities, retail sales were overlooked where custom allowed, except during worship services.

What about honoring the sabbath in the home? Would it be a feast day or a fast day? Different groups took differing positions. Some upper class members ate uncooked meals, banished secular reading, newspapers, horseback riding, needlework, and painting on Sunday. Others used the day for huge feasts, toured the kennels and gardens, and ate a light supper, thereby allowing servants to attend the evening meeting.⁶⁴ For most Englishmen, it became traditional to have the best meal of the week on Sunday. The middle classes followed this tradi-

62. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

tion, but generally avoided recreation. There the matter rested—with regional tradition as the primary guide—for a hundred years.

In the 1780s, sabbatarianism had a revival.⁶⁵ In the 1790s, sabbatarianism was set in contrast to the anti-sabbath ten-day week of the French Revolution. Loyalty to Britain and sabbatarianism became linked.⁶⁶ William Wilberforce, who would soon take up the cause of abolitionism, in the late 1780s became a moderate sabbatarian. Parliament reacted negatively to these views in the 1790s, loosening some of the old requirements of the 1677 law, legalizing bakers' work from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sundays, when they could sell puddings and meat pies (the poor man's Sunday dinner). In a very real sense, the home sabbath made itself felt in the marketplace; the law was revised in order to favor an easier celebration of the home feast. Parliament rejected several attempts over the next 30 years to outlaw Sunday newspapers.⁶⁷

In the 1820s, the sabbatarians emerged as a determined group with a strong sense of mission.⁶⁸ Rev. Daniel Wilson preached a series of sabbatarian sermons in 1827. In 1831, he helped found the Lord's Day Observance Society (LDOS), which still exists. (It published F. N. Lee's dissertation, *The Covenantal Sabbath*, in 1972.) In the 1830s, Sir Andrew Agnew, a one-issue member of Parliament, introduced a sabbatarian bill four times, and it was defeated each time. It is interesting that the bill exempted the labor of servants in households. The fourth commandment, he argued, gave masters complete religious and civil authority over their servants.⁶⁹ This was in defiance of the reason given in Deuteronomy for the sabbath law: The Israelites had been exploited as servants in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Wigley commented: "The Sabbatarians' distinction between 'private' and 'public' behaviour enabled them to avoid a fundamental challenge to the rights of property. They defended the right of the private property owner to use his servants, his horses and his grounds without any interference; but claimed the right to regulate that which was corporately or nationally owned, such as railways and the Post Office."⁷⁰ This represents a continuing compromise, or at least confusion, among sabbatarians. Is the civil government the enforcer inside the family? If not, then the sabbath principle is not primary but secondary to the rights of private

65. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

property, at least in this one area. But if the state can impose no sanctions here, why is it allowed to in “public” property, meaning private property outside the household?

By the 1840s, the 1677 law was close to a dead letter. Fines were small, the authorities preferred not to enforce it, and prosecutions brought by individual citizens did not often lead to convictions.⁷¹

3. Urban, Industrial Society

The 1830s and 1840s were years of rapid development of railroads. The sabbatarians organized politically to keep trains from running on Sundays. Some rail companies tried to honor their wishes. The Liverpool & Manchester restricted Sunday operations and actually inaugurated a scheme whereby sabbatarian shareholders could donate to charity that portion of corporate profits that were generated by Sunday traffic. The North Eastern adopted a similar practice. Most companies restricted traffic during worship hours. Demand was small, so this was reasonable. All refused total closure, however.⁷² This did not satisfy the sabbatarians.

The Post Office Act of 1838 enabled the Postmaster General to compel trains to operate a Sunday mail train, and firms added passenger cars in order to gain some revenues. In 1846, the final attempt to prohibit Sunday rail traffic was introduced into Parliament. It failed.⁷³

The Post Office in 1847 announced its intention to send mail through London on Sundays. The Lord's Day Observance Society began a campaign to reverse this decision, and also to cease Sunday collecting and delivering of the mail. Eventually, Sunday mail delivery ceased, as a result of trade union pressures, long after the sabbatarians had ceased to be a political factor, but the movement of the mail went on. Some Post Office employees, then as now, had to work on Sundays.

Two other sabbatarian societies were formed in this period: the Evangelical Alliance and the Wesleyan Methodists. John Henderson, a Glasgow merchant, began a national essay contest on the benefits of sabbath observance. Other groups followed his lead, and a tradition of annual prizes was begun. Wigley says that these contests and the publication of the essays transformed the controversy. What had been primarily a debate over religion became a debate over practical bene-

71. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

fits of the sabbath. The essays did not ask for legislative action; they advocated total abstention from Sunday amusements.⁷⁴ These essays were generally non-theological in nature; they were practical. Understandably, the LDOS took no part in promoting them.

In 1851, the Great Exhibition opened. This monumental exhibition of the wonders of mid-century technology transformed the thinking of a generation. In 1852, a private company took it over as a business venture, and the firm announced its intention to open it on Sunday afternoons. This created a huge wave of protest. Tracts aimed at every sector of society poured off the presses, with different arguments for each class. The government inserted into the firm's charter the language of the 1780 Act, that no money payment could be collected. This was a victory for the sabbatarians.

There was a loophole in the 1780 Act that was exploited in the late 1860s. The Act exempted religious organizations from restrictions on taking in money. One anti-sabbatarian, Baxter Langley, organized his followers into a "free unsectarian church," registered it under the Toleration Act of 1688, and began selling reserved seats to Sunday evening lectures. The government could not prosecute the group successfully.⁷⁵

In 1855, working men protested a Sunday trading bill that would have permitted open shops. A crowd of 150,000 turned out on Sunday, June 24, to protest the support that Chartist radicals were giving to the bill. The shops remained closed.

The next crisis was provoked by a radical M.P., Sir Joshua Walmsley, who in 1855 and 1856 introduced legislation to allow the British Museum to open on Sundays. It was supposed to be an alternative to Sunday drinking. Sabbatarians were outraged. The bills did not pass. Then Sir Benjamin Hall, Commissioner of Works, began promoting military band concerts in the parks. The sabbatarians were again outraged. This was national desecration. Prime Minister Palmerston later stopped the concerts.⁷⁶ So the theoretical question I have raised concerning music in the park is not hypothetical; it became a serious political issue.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

4. *The Middle Classes*

Wigley argued that the appeal of sabbatarian ideals to middle class people gave it great strength. A new appeal, based on practical benefits rather than an appeal to the Bible, became increasingly prominent within sabbatarian circles. He called this social sabbatarianism. "Social Sabbatarianism was of enormous importance. It moulded and enlivened the controversy for almost fifty years. It allowed the Sabbatarians to avoid authoritarianism and to champion the working classes. It allowed Nonconformists to assuage their consciences and to defend the civil observance of the Sabbath. It allowed M.P.'s to reconcile their laissez-faire principles with their religious values, for no legislation was called for, merely the defense of the status quo."⁷⁷ But it was a departure from the earlier sabbatarianism, and on many occasions, defenders of a religious sabbath refused to join with social sabbatarians in "the great cause." As the pragmatic arguments weakened, especially as the century wore on and more leisure time was made available to workers, the religious sabbatarians recognized the epistemological weakness of social sabbatarianism. "Six days shalt thou labor" became five and a half, and in the twentieth century, five; Sunday amusements also appeared to be beneficial, so the pragmatic arguments no longer carried as much weight. But the religious sabbatarians had been preempted by 1900, and few people listened to them any longer.

The leisure of the high-capital late nineteenth century was not characteristic of the low-capital era of the late eighteenth. There is no doubt that the industrial revolution increased the number of working days in the late eighteenth century. For example, the Bank of England (the private central bank) steadily reduced the number of holidays from 46 in 1761 to 4 in 1836.⁷⁸ The 12-hour, 6-day industrial work-week became the norm as the industrial revolution gathered strength. Sabbatarians could appeal to overwork as one reason for a legislated sabbath. But they steadfastly refused to promote a law that would prohibit masters from working servants on Sundays. The theological justification: acts of mercy and necessity.⁷⁹ This was an exemption for rural lords at the competitive expense of the industrial managers.

Wigley presented the interesting case of W. H. Smith, the Christian founder of the giant book store chain. Smith invoked the "acts of

77. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 74

79. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

necessity and mercy" exemption when he decided to publish the names of the dead and wounded during the Crimean War in 1855. On the other hand, he refrained from walking outdoors on a visit to Canada, to avoid giving the impression of being a sightseer. On the other hand, he complained when his Sunday evening bath was late, blaming the assertive attitudes of Canadian hotel workers.⁸⁰ Convenience, predictably, triumphed over theology.

What about the Sunday operation of profit-seeking public utilities? This is not a hypothetical example. In the 1840s, some private water companies had left parts of London without water on Sundays.⁸¹

In the 1870s, numerous secular organizations formed lecture societies. Libraries began to remain open on Sundays. So did free art galleries.⁸² The sabbatarians opposed all such violations. In 1884, Herbert Spencer, the evolutionist and defender of pure laissez-faire, remarked that a dispute over the opening of a reading room on Sunday could split a mechanics' institute.⁸³

By the late 1880s, sabbatarians had generally lost public support. In 1896, the government finally voted to allow the opening of the British museums and national galleries on Sundays.⁸⁴ There was no opposition from the churches or the denominational newspapers. The twentieth century, especially after World War I, saw the end of most relics of the 1677 and 1780 laws.

Wigley's summary is remarkably similar to my own discussion of the economic questions raised by the sabbath in an industrial civilization, especially with respect to the differing rhythms of the workweek, urban vs. rural. "Sabbatarianism was an inappropriate way to provide rest, for it applied a simple, essentially pre-industrial, religious prescription to a complex, essentially urban, social problem. Sabbatarians avoided the difficulties which a complete cessation of labour would have produced for themselves by requiring servants to work and applying the formula 'acts of necessity and mercy,' but failed to appreciate that society at large similarly needed the work of some railwaymen, shopkeepers and the like, whose work rhythm ran counter to that of the rest of the community. Sabbatarianism thus justified some Sunday work, but regarded the unjustified as sin for condemnation, rather

80. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

than as a problem suitable for social reform.”⁸⁵

5. *Self-imposed Irrelevance*

It is also revealing that the LDOS refused in 1855 to enter into the political question of the half-Saturday movement, which would have required employers to provide the afternoon off. It merely established a committee to look into the subject, and it was not required to report back. One Presbyterian minister argued that anything less than six full days of work was generosity on the part of employers that went beyond God’s justice.⁸⁶ So, the sabbatarian commitment to one day off seemed to imply no rest for the other six days. When, then, would men receive time for recreation, which was banned on Sunday? The sabbatarians have never faced this issue. *Their concern as sabbatarians is not with rest, and their concern as neo-Puritans is with work.*

Frederick Peake, the LDOs’ secretary, made the society’s position clear in a statement in 1895, one that summarized three centuries of sabbatarianism. *The issue is not rest. The issue is enforced religious behavior.* “Anything [on Sundays] that is not distinctly religious is wrong. . . . We should hardly make it purely a question of ‘rest.’ We . . . seek the religious observance of the Lord’s day as the primary thing, and the question of human rest . . . as a secondary matter arising out of that.”⁸⁷

The Sunday school movement had been developed in the late eighteenth century in order to provide religious education for the children of the poor. But some sabbatarians objected when Sunday schools began teaching newly literate children to write, “arguing that it was not necessary to be able to write to understand the Bible, and writing was thus a secular employment, unfit for the Lord’s day.”⁸⁸ The controversy gathered force in the early years of the nineteenth century. The Wesleyan Methodist Conference passed such an anti-writing measure in 1808. This controversy divided sabbatarians. In the 1840s, the sabbatarians had succeeded in most independent congregations in stamping out the practice.⁸⁹

The LDOS became progressively more consistent and progressively out of touch with reality. It criticized Charles Spurgeon for allowing his sermons to be telegraphed to Cincinnati on Sunday mornings.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

It criticized book sales in church. (At least it did not have to deal with the issue of book deliveries on Sunday with payment coming on a work day; churches were not likely to extend credit in this era.) In 1892, the *Quarterly Paper* of the LDOS said that Salvation Army bands “have done untold harm.”⁹⁰ The LDOS thereby forfeited the support of Non-conformist leaders. It also opposed the use of automatic vending machines in the 1880s, despite the fact that no labor was involved.⁹¹ In short, the issue was not rest; the issue was the marathon sabbath—*self-denial for God, not external convenience and rest*. As the Society announced in response to a 1909 attempt to pass a pro-sabbatarian law that had been drafted by the National Hygienic League, “This determination to settle the whole matter on the basis not of Divine Law but of personal convenience, with a flavouring of humanitarian sentimentality . . . a most threatening danger.”⁹²

What the LDOS and strict sabbatarians had accomplished in over a half century of non-cooperation with other “less rigorous” brethren and allies was to demonstrate the political irrelevance of their position. They had taken the “moral high ground”—so high that they were in the heavens and of little earthly use to the cause of restful Sundays. They had adopted the marathon sabbath position of certain segments the non-industrial seventeenth-century English Puritans, and had suffered the consequences.

Conclusion

Several questions should be raised. Did the failure of the Lord’s Day Observance Society come as a result of its political intransigence? If so, was this intransigence biblically valid? Were its leaders correct in refusing to compromise with anything that was not “pure marathon sabbath”? Was the LDOS doomed at the end because of an increasingly secular society? Or was it doomed from the beginning because the “marathon sabbath” is neither biblical nor suitable in an urban civilization?

There really were public debates over the timing of the sabbath, the locus of sovereignty of enforcement (Milton’s locus: conscience), travel on Sunday, feast day vs. fast day, “seven-day-per-week” technologies, railways, public utilities, defining “mercy and necessity,” ser-

90. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

vants' labor on Sundays ("mercy and necessity" . . . for the masters), mail delivery and shipping, newspapers, museums, bakeries, and the appropriateness of cooking on Sunday. There were debates, but there were no definitive answers. *Eventually, people grew tired of debates that could not be resolved, and the honoring of the sabbath became a matter of conscience.* Milton's suggestion became a social reality.

The summary provided by Wigley is accurate, but it indicates the extent to which sabbatarianism brought Christians little credit in English history, even though a day of rest was universally acknowledged at least in principle to be a blessing. The marathon sabbath did not survive, and it is understandable why it didn't.

In the depression-stricken countryside of the 1880s no harvest work was done on Sundays, but the migrant Irish labourers were thought to be heathens because they sang and danced after returning from Mass. Protestant English farmers' children were taught to "remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day." Of course the manservant and the maid-servant had to milk the cows, that was necessary work [but]'. . . Nobody ever read a newspaper or whistled a tune except hymns . . . on Sundays.' [Allison Uttley, *The Country Child* (Penguin ed., 1970), pp. 222, 206.] No wonder the Sabbatarians quoted the Fourth Commandment as given in Exodus and ignored the version in Deuteronomy (5: 14) 'that thy man servant and thy maid servant may rest as well as thou.'

The most characteristic feature of Sabbatarianism and of the Victorian Sunday which it produced was the attempt to proscribe Sunday amusement and recreation, and over the course of the century this had had different effects on each class. By encouraging church and Sunday school attendance, and drawing a picture of domestic comfort, the Sabbatarians had given the lower classes a standard at which to aim. But by doing so they had undermined the festal Sunday tradition in accordance with which the lower classes already cleaned and dressed themselves on Sundays. They wanted a day of abstention, whereas the workers kept a holiday, a feast not a fast.

The abstemious Sunday was better suited to those who spent their week in easy circumstances than to those who labored for their bread. The Sabbatarian standard and the Victorian Sunday were essentially middle class phenomena. They produced a day which had a funeral character, notorious for its symbols—the hushed voice, the half-drawn blind and the best clothes. When adopted by the lower classes these symbols produced the respectable poor. Neville Cardus, the (Manchester) *Guardian's* cricket correspondent, remembered

William Attewell, in 1912 cricket professional at Shrewsbury School: 'Each Sabbath, after our mid-day meal, he put on a hard stiff collar. I recollect his struggles with it. "Cuss it," he would protest, "but ah mun do it; it's the Lord's day."' ⁹³

Conclusion

Questions concerning the proper form of Lord's day observance, not to mention the proper role of the institutional church and civil government in enforcing Lord's day observance, are extremely complex. This is one reason why Paul assigned to the individual conscience the task of sorting out these problems. They are too complex and too disputed for the institutions of government to apply sanctions. This was not the case in rural Israel, when the sabbath was primarily negative—refraining from normal, profit-seeking labor one day per week—and the civil government's role was also negative, namely, prohibiting commercial trade and restricting most of a family's daily routine. When the Lord's day became both a day of rest and a day of corporate worship, its emphasis changed, and the state's role in protecting the Lord's day was radically altered. When the sabbath day, or the Lord's day, became a day that emphasizes positive worship, the state ceased being a legitimate agency of enforcement.

The Lord's day is essentially a day in which *the normal routine of work is broken*—a ritual testimony of a man's reliance upon God's grace rather than his own labor. It is a day of inactivity one day in seven with respect to one's source of income and to one's area of daily responsibility for labor. It is an admission that man is not sovereign, that man rests on God's creative work, that man cannot bring his work to completion apart from God, that man's efforts are limited, and that autonomous man cannot, even with a seven-day workweek, expect to prosper. It is a symbolic announcement that man must rest in the grace of God, and that he can rest one day per week in confidence that God honors His covenant with His people. It takes faith to honor the Lord's day—faith in the terms of the covenant, and faith in the ability of God to fulfill His part of the compact.

The Lord's day of rest-worship forces men to schedule their lives more efficiently, to take time for rest. It forces them to order their workweek carefully, buying in advance, storing up goods in preparation for the Lord's day. It forces wives to get their homes cleaned be

93. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

fore the day of rest. It forces people, in short, to establish budgets, rather like the budgets necessitated by the requirement of the tithe. In this case, however, what is budgeted primarily is time, not money. A family's week is to have a God-honoring one-six rhythm.

The break from the normal work routine was required of the priests of Israel, but other responsibilities forced the priesthood as a whole to maintain seven-day operations. What was required of individual priests was not required of the priesthood as a whole. The corporate body of priests had to offer sacrifices daily; each individual priest could reschedule his workweek to permit him to rest on another day, if it was his day to offer sacrifices on the sabbath. God distinguishes between organizations and the individuals who make up the organizations. A six-day workweek was required of individual priests and their families, but not the priesthood as a unit.

Modern Christians are priests. They are sometimes assigned tasks on the Lord's day that are vital to the economic survival of the firm. The decision as to whether the seven-day workweek is really crucial to the economic survival of the firm is made in terms of several criteria: the decision of the owners; the decisions of employees and potential employees whether they are violating their consciences in working on the Lord's day; and the decisions of customers who decide whether they are violating the sabbath principle in spending their money on the products or services of the Lord's day-profaning company. We are not told how the priests of the Old Testament worked out the mid-week day of rest for those who had to offer sacrifices on the sabbath. We are not told exactly how the sorting out of the Lord's day issue would be done in modern, industrial, post-resurrection societies. Some men regard all days the same. Others regard one or more days as special. Each man should be convinced in his own mind (Rom. 14:5).

What we must understand is this: Paul assigned to the individual human conscience the task of making the decisions concerning rest, leisure, and employment on the Lord's day. This does not mean that all days are the same during the week. Man's conscience must make the decision for man, but this does not mean that God's revelation is not clear regarding the special nature of the Lord's day. It does not mean that the one-six pattern is invalid in New Testament times. It means only that from an institutional standpoint, *Paul removed the civil government and the church courts from the position of decision-makers*. With respect to the day of rest-worship, the external sanction of the Old Testament economy, the death penalty, has been abolished.

It has been abolished along with the duty of the civil government to impose sanctions on individuals or firms that choose to work on the Lord's day.

The fact that individual conscience is assigned the task of decoding the limits of the Lord's day activities has not subjectivised the reality of the sabbath principle of rest-worship. *The sabbath principle of rest-worship is still intact.* But God has determined that the complexity of Lord's day observance is too great for the church or state to enforce. The requirement of honoring one day in seven is still with us, but not all people see this, and hardly any group agrees concerning the exact ways in which any profit-seeking firm or individual must honor the sabbath principle. *God will be the final judge, not the earthly institutions of government.* There are objective standards, but they must be interpreted subjectively, person by person, in the New Testament era. We have been given specific revelation to this effect with respect to the sabbath, and we must honor this revelation.

It solves few if any concrete sabbatarian problems to read into Leviticus 23:3 an Old Testament sabbath version of the New Testament's requirement of positive worship on the Lord's day. The testimony of the Old Testament is clear: Seventhday was generally (and possibly even exclusively) a day of rest except for a few priests in the temple. It is equally futile to read into Exodus 35:3 a highly symbolic and hypothetical interpretation concerning "strange fire." *Clear texts should be used to interpret obscure texts.* Even more to the point, *clear texts should not be turned into obscure texts.* Exodus 35:2 is clear: death for working on the sabbath. Exodus 35:3 is also clear: no kindling of fires. An apologetic for a hypothetical "less rigorously enforced Old Testament sabbath" that is then said to be in continuity with a church government-enforced and state government-enforced New Testament Lord's day—an apologetic based on "strange fire"—is clear to practically nobody, which is why we find no similar line of argumentation in the historic creeds. It also fails to explain the sharp discontinuity that was announced by Paul in Romans 14:5 and Colossians 3:16.

In short, if Paul's words are not taken at face value, a whole series of problems arises. Few churches have been willing to face these problems squarely over the last two hundred years, and none has been willing so far to deal forthrightly with the question of the death penalty in Exodus 35:2. There is no way, biblically speaking, to escape the necessity of imposing the death penalty on persistent sabbath violators, unless we interpret Romans 14 as having changed the locus of enforce-

ment from the civil government to the individual conscience. If Paul was not speaking about the Old Testament sabbath in that passage, then Exodus 31:15 and 35:2 are still morally and legally binding, and Christians must forthrightly call for the civil government to abide by God's sabbatical standards, and to begin executing sabbath breakers.

APPENDIX F

TIMING THE LORD'S DAY

F. N. Lee's book is a comprehensive treatment of the sabbath question. It raises many interesting points. One of them relates to the timing of the sabbath. Three distinct positions have been maintained by Christians historically: the sundown-to-sundown sabbath, the midnight-to-midnight sabbath, which Lee holds,¹ and the sunrise-to-sunrise (approximately) sabbath, which I hold. The inability of commentators to agree on this point obviously poses difficulties for those who might recommend nationwide or civil sanctions against sabbath violators.

The Hebrews celebrated the sabbath of the day of atonement from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32), and we presume that the other sabbaths were similarly celebrated. The sabbath in Jesus' day was begun at sundown (Mark 15:42). The Jews wanted the bodies of the dead to be removed before the evening (John 19:31). Nevertheless, we need not assume that Old Testament practices regarding the sabbath are still binding on the New Testament church, since the change of the day represents a fundamental break with the past. Christian scholars have not generally believed that the New Testament day of rest begins at sundown on Saturday evening, although some, including certain Puritan groups, have argued that it does.

The case for the sundown-to-sundown sabbath is based primarily on Old Testament law.² The case for the midnight-to-midnight sabbath is more problematical, resting on the idea of midnight being the midpoint between evening and morning. Jesus rose before the sun did, since the women came at the dawn to Jesus' tomb (Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:2), and the tomb was already empty. Finally, the firstborn of Egypt were slain at midnight (Ex. 12:29). Deliverance, in other words, was

1. F. N. Lee, *The Covenantal Sabbath* (London: Lord's Day Observance Society, 1972), p. x.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

based on an event that took place at midnight.³

A. Promise and Deliverance

The modern world has cheap clocks. This is one of the main facts of modernity. The mechanical clock changed the West.⁴ In Moses' world, there was sunrise and sunset, assuming that the sky was not cloudy. Any other marker would have been monopoly information of priests. But the farther away from the equator a society is, the more unequal in length days and nights as the seasons approach the two solstices. This makes a sunset or sunrise marker inefficient.

I think the sabbath should be marked by a clock, as Lee does, but I prefer sunrise over midnight as the marker. For one thing, until the advent of home-based clocks with alarm devices, midnight would have had to be announced by the clanging of bells, presumably church bells, at midnight Sunday morning. Kings and nobles would have made that practice highly unlikely. So, instead of sunset-to-sunset as general markers to be used to guide our clock-run society, I suggest a sunrise-to-sunrise New Testament Lord's day. This is based on the theme of promise and deliverance.

The Hebrews were required to begin their celebration of the Passover at sundown. The Passover lamb was slain in the evening (Ex. 12:6), and nothing was to remain by the next morning (12:10). The Passover feast looked in faith to the coming deliverance. The promise of God was sure. The Israelites began the feast in the evening; they had been told that by the next morning, they would be delivered. The basis of deliverance, the death of Egypt's firstborn, came at midnight, but no one could have known this at the time; they had no clocks. The actual deliverance came later, for Pharaoh then called Moses and Aaron by night and ordered the Israelites out of the land. They had to return to the people and convey Pharaoh's message. Then, hastily, the people gathered together their belongings, taking their unleavened (ready for cooking) bread. They had no time for preparing food (12:39). This points to an early morning deliverance.

Long before the exodus, Jacob had wrestled with the theophany of God through the night, fighting for His blessing. They wrestled "until the breaking of the day" (Gen. 32:24). Jacob received the blessing, the

3. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

4. David Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

thigh wound, and his new name, Israel, at daybreak (32:25–28). Thus, Israel's deliverance (the Day of the Lord) came as the sun rose. But the struggle had begun at night (32:22–24).

God's righteousness is equated with the sun in several instances. Perhaps the most forthright is Malachi 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." Again, "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springeth out of the earth by clear shining after the rain" (II Sam. 23:4). "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and the kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. 60:1–3). "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning. . ." (Hos. 6:3a). The righteousness of the faithful is also compared to morning: "The course of the righteous is like the morning light, growing brighter till it is broad day" (Prov. 4:18; NEB; cf. Jud. 5:31). Israel is to be delivered at the rising of the sun, the coming of light when there previously had been gross darkness.

The theme that Israel is delivered with the rising of the sun on the seventh day corresponds with the idea that Adam rebelled on the morning of the seventh day, and that man needs grace early in the morning. The New Testament reveals a similar message. The women came to the tomb at dawn, not at sundown the evening before, when the third day began officially, according to later Hebrew law. Furthermore, the day of Pentecost came seven weeks later, according to Mosaic law (Lev. 23:16). The disciples were meeting together, and the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1–5). Speaking in many foreign languages, they communicated the gospel to a multitude (2:6), each in his own language (2:8). Critics charged that they were drunk with "new wine" (2:13). Peter's response is significant: "For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day" (2:15). In other words, it was about three hours after the dawn. Peter was saying that these men had not had time to get drunk. People were not gathering to hear the gospel three hours after sundown, for then Peter's words would have been meaningless. Obviously, an evening of drinking might have preceded a nighttime outpouring of the Spirit. If we assume that dawn was around six o'clock in the morning, then "the third

hour of the day” would have been about nine A.M. This corresponds to the Roman sun dial, which marked noon as the sixth hour.⁵ The sundial was an appropriate tool during sunlight hours. It was not appropriate in the winter at six a.m.

B. The Communion Meal

There are other pieces of data that point to a sunrise-to-sunrise Lord’s day. Jesus met with His disciples on the evening of His resurrection (John 20:19), eating with them (Luke 24:41–43). This communion meal took place after the sun had gone down. He had already eaten with two disciples at Emmaus, approximately seven miles from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13: Berkeley Version), and this meal took place as the sun was setting (Luke 24:29–30). These two disciples then walked from Emmaus to Jerusalem in order to meet with the other disciples. Then Jesus appeared to the whole group (Luke 24:33–34). Yet this meeting is described as having taken place “the same day at evening, being the first day of the week” (John 20:19a). John was not using the Hebrew day, sundown to sundown, as his measure of the first day.

Paul’s lecture to the church at Troas took place on the Lord’s day. “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7). He departed at the “break of day” (20:11b).

The evening meeting was a communion feast, as was the first evening of Christ’s resurrection. After the day was spent, men gathered together to partake of the Lord’s supper. We know also that Paul criticized the Corinthian church for its drunkenness at the Lord’s table. “For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken” (I Cor. 11:21). They had not been drinking early in the morning, any more than the disciples on the day of Pentecost had been drinking in the morning. The Corinthian church members had been drinking too much in the evening, prior to the communion meal.

We celebrate communion on the Lord’s day. We know that the early church celebrated communion in the evening. There is no evidence that the early church met for communion the night before the Lord’s day, i.e., on “Saturday” evening. The first communion feasts

5. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 158n.

took place on the evening of the Lord's resurrection, at Emmaus and Jerusalem, and in the latter case, the sun must have gone down before the meal. They did not take communion with Christ the day after His resurrection. Communion is taken on the Lord's day. Hence, we should count the New Testament day of rest from sunrise to sunrise ("Sunday" morning to "Monday" morning).

Modern churches have not been rigid in this regard. Few of them ever discuss the matter. Among more sabbatarian denominations, the timing of the beginning of the sabbath is left to the discretion of individual members. Nine o'clock, the hour that the Holy Spirit fell upon the church at Pentecost, is about as early as most churches require attendance.

The Passover celebrated by Jesus and His disciples looked forward to deliverance, just as the Passover meal in Egypt looked forward to deliverance. The communion feast of the church looks back, knowing that deliverance has come, and it dates the Lord's day with the risen sun. The communion feast is the capstone of a day of rest. As such, it then looks forward ritually to a week of work beginning the following day, the continuation of men's efforts to fulfill the terms of God's dominion covenant. *Passover points to dominion*. Christ announced at the Passover, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22: 29–30).⁶

Conclusion

We no longer look forward to deliverance from bondage; we look forward to dominion. Dominion begins with our labor on the day following the Lord's day of rest, just as it was supposed to begin for Adam. The communion meal, like the Passover meal, is to be celebrated in the evening. Also like the Passover meal, it looks forward to the next morning. But the victory is behind us. Deliverance came definitively at Calvary. We are strengthened in our faith the night before we are to go forth to exercise dominion, just as the Hebrews were strengthened in body by their Passover meal the night before God delivered them from bondage.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 51.

APPENDIX G

MACAULAY ON DEMOCRACY

Lord Macaulay, the English historian-statesman of the mid-nineteenth century, was a defender of the classical liberal society, meaning a society marked by constitutionally limited civil government and by private property. In 1857, he wrote a letter to an American, H. S. Randall, in which he discussed his doubts about pure democracy in general and Jeffersonian democracy in particular. He made a number of predictions concerning the fate of private property under a rule of universal suffrage. Some of these predictions have come true in the United States. They did so during the New Deal of the 1930s. Other remarks seem more appropriate in describing his beloved England, especially since the 1930s.

The fundamental political issue, he argued, is the question of *self-restraint*, or as I have put it elsewhere in this book, *self-government*. He despaired at the ability of the poorer members of society to refrain from using their numerical superiority at the ballot box to extort the property of richer men. His arguments, taken individually, are familiar to anyone who has studied the interminable debate over democracy, taxation, and the franchise. What is remarkable was his ability to articulate them in one place, and then apply them to his own era.

He was convinced that those people without wealth will not restrain themselves in the pursuit of other people's money if they ever got the franchise. The problem with this argument is this: Self-restraint regarding other people's money is not a quality limited to those who already possess money. If anything, the addiction grows, which is why Christ warned against Mammon as the chief rival of God (Matt. 6:24–25). Mammon is the great, insatiable god of *more*. The prophets of Israel noted repeatedly that the leaders of the nation were economically corrupt—surely as corrupt any modern special-interest group. When it comes to the politics of plunder, every interest group fears the vote-getting abilities of its rivals, and deservedly so.

Because of the difficulty in obtaining copies of the book in which his letter appeared, I reproduce it in full, except for a brief introductory paragraph, in which Macaulay thanked Randall for his gift of some books on the history of colonial New York State, and a concluding paragraph on Thomas Jefferson. The doubts raised by Macaulay are with us still, and will continue to be problems for stable political orders for as long as: (1) all men can vote; (2) some men have little property; (3) the Christian teachings against envy, covetousness, and theft are not universally honored. (I have taken the liberty of breaking this letter into paragraphs; the original constitutes the longest sustained paragraph I have ever come across.)

You are surprised to learn that I have not a high opinion of Mr. Jefferson, and I am surprised at your surprise. I am certain that I never wrote a line, and that I never, in Parliament, in conversation, or even on the hustings—a place where it is the fashion to court the populace—uttered a word indicating an opinion that the supreme authority in a state ought to be entrusted to the majority of citizens by the head; in other words, to the poorest and most ignorant part of society. I have long been convinced that institutions purely democratic must, sooner or later, destroy liberty or civilization, or both.

In Europe, where the population is dense, the effect of such institutions would be almost instantaneous. What happened lately in France is an example. In 1848 a pure democracy was established there. During a short time there was reason to expect a general spoliation, a national bankruptcy, a new partition of the soil, a maximum of prices, a ruinous load of taxation laid on the rich for the purpose of supporting the poor in idleness. Such a system would, in twenty years, have made France as poor and barbarous as the France of the Carolingians. Happily, the danger was averted; and now there is a despotism, a silent tribune [Emperor Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, supposedly the nephew of the more famous Bonaparte—G.N.], an enslaved press. Liberty is gone, but civilization has been saved. I have not the smallest doubt that if we had a purely democratic government here the effect would be the same. Either the poor would plunder the rich, and civilization would perish; or order and prosperity would be saved by a strong military government, and liberty would perish.

You may think that your country enjoys an exemption from these evils. I will frankly own to you that I am of a very different opinion. Your fate I believe to be certain, though it is deferred by a physical cause. As long as you have a boundless extent of fertile and

unoccupied land, your laboring population will be far more at ease than the laboring population of the Old World, and, while that is the case, the Jefferson politics may continue to exist without causing any fatal calamity. But the time will come when New England will be as thickly populated as old England. Wages will be as low, and will fluctuate as much with you as with us. You will have your Manchesters and Birminghams, and in those Manchesters and Birminghams hundreds of thousands of artisans will assuredly be out of work. Then your institutions will be fairly brought to the test. Distress everywhere makes the laborer mutinous and discontented, and inclines him to listen with eagerness to agitators who tell him that it is a monstrous iniquity that one man should have a million, while another can not get a full meal.

In bad years there is plenty of grumbling here, and sometimes a little rioting. But it matters little. For here the sufferers are not the rulers. The supreme power is in the hands of a class, numerous indeed, but select; of an educated class; of a class which is, and knows itself to be, deeply interested in the security of property and the maintenance of order. Accordingly, the malcontents are firmly yet gently restrained. The bad time is got over with out robbing the wealthy to relieve the indigent. The springs of national prosperity soon begin to flow again; work is plentiful, wages rise, and all is tranquility and cheerfulness. I have seen England pass three or four times through such critical seasons as I have described. Through such seasons the United States will have to pass in the course of the next century, if not of this. How will you pass through them? I heartily wish you a good deliverance. But my reason and my wishes are at war, and I can not help foreboding the worst.

It is quite plain that your Government will never be able to restrain a distressed and discontented majority. For with you the majority is the Government, and has the rich, who are always a minority, always at its mercy. The day will come when in the State of New York a multitude of people, none of whom has had more than half a breakfast, or expects to have more than half a dinner, will choose a Legislature. Is it possible to doubt what sort of Legislature will be chosen? On one side is a statesman preaching patience, respect for vested rights, strict observance of public faith. On the other is a demagogue ranting about the tyranny of capitalists and usurers, and asking why any body should be permitted to drink Champagne and to ride in a carriage, while thousands of honest folks are in want of necessities. Which of the two candidates is likely to be preferred by a working-man who hears his children cry for more bread?

I seriously apprehend that you will, in some such season of ad-

versity as I have described, do things which will prevent prosperity from returning; that you will act like people who should in a year of scarcity devour all the seed-corn, and thus make the next a year not of scarcity but of famine. There will be, I fear, spoilation. The spoilation will increase the distress. The distress will produce fresh spoilation.

Your Constitution is all sail and no anchor. As I said before, when a society has entered on this downward progress, either civilization or liberty must perish. Either some Caesar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government with a strong hand, or your republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth; with this difference, that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman Empire came from without, and that your Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions.¹

This is an eloquent statement. It is easy enough to pick apart some of his specific arguments. For example, the territory of the United States remains predominantly either rural or wilderness, with a very thin population per square mile. The myth of “open spaces” as a factor in reducing class warfare in the United States is just that, a myth² (and certainly as far as God was concerned when He promised the Israelites even more population growth in an already “overpopulated” nation). Overpopulation theories always paint pictures of starving masses, but in the decade following Macaulay’s letter and continuing into the last decade of the nineteenth century, population in the United States doubled, filling the Eastern seaboard with immigrants who did not speak English, and who had little or no formal education, yet economic output quadrupled in this same era, doubling per capita income and lowering prices by 60%.³ The question of per capita wealth does not

1. G. Otto Trevelyan (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), II, pp. 408–10.

2. The American historian whose name is generally associated with this theory is Frederick Jackson Turner, a highly influential teacher at the University of Wisconsin and Harvard in the late nineteenth century, and a man who wrote almost nothing. See Ray Allen Billington (ed.), *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1961). For critical evaluations, see Richard Hofstadter and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds.), *Turner and the Sociology of the Frontier* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

3. Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960* (Princeton University Press and the National Bureau of Economic Research, 1963), charts 3, 8 (pp. 30, 94–95). *Population data: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Commerce, 1960), p. 7, Series A 1–3.

hinge primarily on population growth as such, just as the Hebrews were informed by God. Population growth is a blessing. The relevant factors are such things as the time-orientation of the society, its commitment to biblical law, and its rate of per capita investment. The important question is: What is a society's capital base, which includes above all men's education and ethics?

In this respect, Macaulay misjudged the political life of his own nation, for it was England that first capitulated to the politics of envy, of mass democracy, not the United States. When, on August 10, 1911, the House of Lords voted to abolish its veto power over the House of Commons, under threat of the creation of hundreds of new Liberal Party peerages by the King, the handwriting was on the wall. When, the next day, the Commons passed the Payment of Members Bill, the wall itself collapsed.⁴ No longer would members be required to raise their own funds to serve as politicians. The era of the professional politician had arrived in England.

But Macaulay's warning about the ability of the statesman to withstand the rhetoric of the "tax and spend" demagogue was valid. The history of the twentieth century points to the grim reality of the impotence of any institutional arrangements or formal constitutional restraints, in and of themselves, to reverse the spread of the ideology of socialism. Compulsory wealth redistribution is almost universally accepted in nation after nation, irrespective of the political history of any given society. Furthermore, it has not always been the propertyless masses who have voted to impose socialistic policies; all too often the leadership has come from financially secure intellectuals.⁵ Middle-class voters, simultaneously guilt-ridden and envious, have voted away their own economic futures unknowingly, always in the name of the poor, with the bills supposedly to be paid for by the rich.

So, Macaulay's concern about American institutional arrangements, as distinguished from British institutions, was misguided. Both the British and the American systems capitulated in principle about the same time, from 1900 to the First World War, and both societies experienced increasing collectivism in the 1930s, in the political responses to the Great Depression. After the Second World War ended in 1945, British socialists made far more gains politically than Americ-

4. Barbara Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), ch. 7: "The Transfer of Power."

5. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1942), ch. 13.

an economic interventionists did.

What Macaulay did not perceive was the rise of the middle class. The long-term effect of compound per capita economic growth has been to reduce the percentage of voters who regard themselves as poor. Middle-class voters own their own homes, even though the homes are mortgaged. These voters have a stake in society: property. By the standards of 1850, let alone 1650, the common man today is rich. He thinks of himself as a property owner. He resists additional taxation.

Both nations began to reverse the drift into statism, beginning within a two-year period: Margaret Thatcher in Britain (1979) and Ronald Reagan in the United States (1981). A majority of voters in both nations decided that they had suffered from more than enough from government regulation, bureaucracy, and high marginal tax rates. The welfare state was rolled back at its edges, but not where it counts most, fiscally speaking: the inter-generational redistribution of wealth. In the case of Great Britain, the state-funded National Health Service remains sacrosanct, as does the Medicare program for the elderly in the United States.

The substance of Macaulay's letter has been confirmed in several respects, and in no sense did the twentieth century prove him to be categorically incorrect. The drift toward the welfare state continues, despite intermittent political reversals. Only when the major state programs of inter-generational wealth-redistribution are repealed through the politically concealed bankruptcy of mass inflation or by outright default will this drift be reversed. The West faces this prospect well before the twenty-first century reaches the halfway point.

APPENDIX H

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF SOCIAL COST

Costs and benefits cannot be compared across individuals, even when monetary sums are involved, because of the impossibility of interpersonal utility comparison. This insight is a straightforward application of the defining principle of the Austrian school: radical subjectivism.¹

Since all costs and benefits are subjective, no government can accurately identify, much less establish, the optimum quantity of anything. But even the tort [private law suit over wrongs—G.N.] approach runs up against the immeasurability of costs and benefits: how are damages to be determined?²

Another problem is the lack of a method for calculating the effect of a decision or policy on the total happiness of the relevant population. Even within just the human population, there is no reliable technique for measuring a change in the level of satisfaction of one individual relative to a change in the level of satisfaction of another.³

Introduction

I wrote this appendix in 1989. It appeared in *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* in 1990. I published a re-written version of it as a book in 1991: *The Coase Theorem*. In that year, Ronald H. Coase won the Nobel Prize in Economics. The next year, his disciple Gary Becker won it. I had devoted considerable space in this appendix and my book to Becker's application of Coase's theorem in the area of

1. John B. Egger, "Comment: Efficiency Is Not a Substitute for Ethics," in Mario J. Rizzo (ed.), *Time, Uncertainty, and Disequilibrium* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1979), p. 121. (<http://bit.ly/BairdPollution>). Italics not in original.

2. Charles W. Baird, "The Philosophy and Ideology of Pollution Regulation," *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), p. 303. Italics not in original.

3. Richard A. Posner, *The Economics of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 54. Italics not in original.

crime and crime-prevention.

This is the longest chapter or appendix on a strictly economic topic in any of my volumes in *An Economic Commentary on the Bible*. I regard this chapter as my best single essay on economics. A short version of it was published in *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* in the fall of 2002.⁴

I have challenged the man who persuaded the entire 21-member faculty of the University of Chicago that he was right and they were wrong. He did this in one after-dinner meeting. They were all opposed to his idea on pollution and harm at the beginning of this meeting. At the end of the evening, they were all in favor. This is recorded in the autobiography of one of the participants, Nobel Prize-winner George Stigler.⁵ In 1960, Coase published what is probably the single most influential academic article in the history of the economics profession, "The Problem of Social Cost," in which he defended his after-dinner theory. I am writing this updated version half a century after its publication. Coase is 100 years old. In late 2009, the law school of George Mason University honored Coase with a special conference.⁶ In July, 2010, the law school of the University of Chicago followed suit.⁷ He was honored for two articles: "The Theory of the Firm" (1937) and "The Problem of Social Cost." No other modern economist is so widely honored who wrote so little.

In this appendix, I apply a fundamental discovery of secular economic theory, made in 1932 by Lionel Robbins, who was later made Lord Robbins: *there is no possibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility on a scientific basis*. This seemingly obvious yet obscure technical discovery undermines all claims of scientific policymaking based on economic theory. It especially undermines the Coase theorem. The unwillingness of economists to admit what they know that their theory of economics teaches constitutes *the single most blatant example of willful deception—including self-deception—and arrogance of the economics profession*. It relegates the entire profession into the category of *self-interested con artists*. They admit to self-interest. This is not merely an admission; it is their badge of epistemological honor. But they do not admit to being con artists.

4. Gary North, "Undermining Property Rights: Coase and Becker," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, XVI (Fall 2002). ([http:// bit.ly/CoaseBecker](http://bit.ly/CoaseBecker))

5. George Stigler, *Memoirs of an Unregulated Economist* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 76.

6. <http://bit.ly/CoaseGMULaw>.

7. <http://bit.ly/CoaseChicagoLaw>.

It is a well-known fact that people find it difficult to follow long chains of reasoning. So, let me present my conclusion up front, in a form that does not require a long chain of reasoning.

You cannot prove, scientifically, that your proposed use for my home is of greater value to society than my uses for my home. Even if you could, you would not thereby establish a legal claim to use my home, forcing me to pay you money in order to keep you out, nor could any judge legitimately authorize your claim.

Let me put it even more succinctly. “No Trespassing. Trespassers will be prosecuted.” Is this clear? Do you believe that the sign is morally legitimate? Yes? Very good. You are opposed to Coase’s theorem. You think: “Who wouldn’t be?” I answer: “At least 21 members of the economics faculty of the University of Chicago, now deceased, and most free market economists.”

The fundamental issue of the Coase theorem is this: *the owner’s moral right to exclude access*. Coase denied ownership’s moral relevance. He went on to deny its legal authority.

Without the right to exclude, there is no ownership. There is only the private defense of property rights through individual violence. “Trespassers will be shot.” Coase still does not understand this, Milton Friedman did not understand this, virtually the entire Chicago School faction of the economics profession does not understand this, and at least two law schools do not understand this. You are already way ahead of the experts. In this appendix, I show why you are ahead.

The central *theoretical* issue of Coase’s theorem—as distinguished from both the central ethical issue and the central legal issue—is the question of *economic value*. Coase persuaded the University of Chicago’s economics faculty, one by one, to switch their collective solution to this question: “How can we—society—maximize economic value when dealing with instances of pollution?” This is a heavily loaded question. To begin to answer it, we must understand what modern economists mean—and do not mean—by “economic value.” So, let us begin an exploration. This will take some time and effort. Stay with me.

A. Value and Price

Economists ask a crucial question: “What is the logical relationship between value and price?” For over two centuries, generations of economists have attempted to discover the answer, and it eludes them

today as much as it did in the days of Adam Smith. The difference is, today the lack of any internally consistent answer is covered by far more layers of logical dead ends that were (and are still) described as successful solutions to the problem.

Is value exclusively objective, also known as intrinsic? Or is value exclusively subjective, also known as imputed? The reason why I use the adjective *exclusively* is because humanistic economic theory has yet to show how value can be both subjective and objective. This dualism goes back to the same either/or exclusivity in Greek philosophy. The Greek philosophers asked: "Is an action morally good because of its intrinsic goodness or because either society or individuals say that it is good?" They never did answer this to each other's satisfaction. It is still a dividing issue in ethics. In medieval philosophy, this dualism was manifested in the battle over realism (intrinsic) and nominalism (imputed).

Let us begin the inquiry. Assume that you are interrogating a humanistic economist. You ask: If all economic value is objective, then why do prices keep changing? What is it that makes them change? The economist answers: *Supply and demand change*. You then ask: But why does supply change? He answers: *In response to changes in demand*. But why does demand change? *Because people change their minds*. Why? *Because prices change*. Why do prices change? *Changing supply and demand*.

Wait a minute. We are going in circles. We had better talk about demand apart from price. *Sorry; you are not allowed to talk about demand apart from price, or price apart from demand*. All right, let me ask this: If the people change their minds about economic value because of changes in demand, then isn't the price of everything really based on subjective value? *Yes, that is correct*. Personal subjective value? *Yes, that is correct*. But how is personal subjective value translated into objective value? *It isn't; there is no objective value*. Well, then, how is personal subjective value translated into objective prices? *Through competitive bidding*.

But how can we be sure that the outcome of the objective individual bids reflects the true value to society? *By denying that there is any true value to society apart from the outcome of the objective individual bids*. But what if society disagrees? *There is no such thing as society; there are only individuals*. But what if individuals vote to change the outcome? *That is their legal privilege in a democracy*. Are you saying that democracy is a valid way to achieve social goals? *I am an eco-*

nomist; I can only tell you the outcome of events, given certain causes. Should democracies vote to change the outcome of the bids? I am an economist; there is no ultimate "should" for an economist.

That reminds me: What is the value of economics? Sorry; *economics does not objectively exist; only economists exist.* What is an economist? *An economist is someone who does economics.* I see. Well, then, what is the value of an economist? *That must be determined subjectively.* All right, what is the price of an economist? *All the market will bear.* Are we paying economists too much? *The free market will decide that.* Do we have a free market in economists today? *I'd prefer not to say; I might get fired. I work for a state university. It is not in my self-interest to answer your question.*

In my view, the answer is clear: yes, we are paying economists too much. Is my view correct? That *is* the question.

In this essay, I intend to show that all of modern economics is a gigantic intellectual fraud, an illusion so successful that its practitioners are not aware of the fraud which they are perpetrating. I will show that the procedures that economists say they use are not the ones they actually use, that the presuppositions they say they have adopted are not actually the ones they have adopted, and that their ability to make economic judgments is in fact denied by their very methodology. All you have to do is read the entire essay, paying attention to my arguments as you read.

Am I overstating my case? *You cannot know for sure until you read it.* Is it worth the risk—the time, energy, and mental effort—to find out? *Only you can say.*

Therein lies the problem of modern economics.

B. To Read or Not to Read

What will it cost you to read this essay? You will never know for sure. This question is analogous to a far more important question in life, "What will it cost me to marry this person?" Both questions really mean: "What will I have to give up forever?" While the "foreverness" of the marriage decision is more obvious to us—"till death do us part" is a graphic covenant phrase—the "foreverness" of every decision is analogous, though not of the same order of magnitude.

When I choose *this* rather than *that*, I forever forfeit *that*, as well as all the little *thats* which might have been born later on. Perhaps I can change my mind later on, and buy *that*, but it will not be the same

that which I choose not to buy today. It is a later *that*. Like a high school sweetheart whom you marry only after your first spouse dies, time has worked its changes on both of you. Everything that a person might have accomplished with *that* during the period of "*this* rather than *that*" is gone forever.

We know this: in making any decision, we must forfeit many things that might have been but will never be—indeed, a whole lifetime of things that might have been—but we never know exactly what. Every decision, moment by moment, is to some extent the proverbial fork in the road. We cannot predict the next 20 moves and counter-moves in a chess game: moves that will become reality *in part* because of expectations regarding the next move. So, it is safe to say that we cannot know what life has in store for us just because we do one thing today rather than another.

If you read this essay, it is because you think it will be "worth your time." But what is your time worth? What is your time worth right now? It is worth whatever is the most valuable use to which you can put it. What is the cost of spending your time one way rather than another? The value of the most valuable use you must forego. So, what is your decision? "To read or not to read, that is the question!"

Decisions, decisions. Once our decision is made, we put the past irrevocably behind us. "The moving finger writes, and having written, moves on." We then face the consequences of our decision. But these consequences—these *costs*—are imposed on us *after* the decision, not before. They are costs, but they are not costs that affected the original action. *Expected* costs affected the original action, not the *actual* costs that we in fact subsequently experience. Is this unclear? Ask the person who married the "wrong" spouse to explain the difference between expected costs and resulting costs. James Buchanan distinguished between two kinds of costs: choice-*influencing* costs and choice-*influenced* costs.⁹

C. Unmeasurable Costs

Choice-influencing costs are inherently unmeasurable by any scientific standard. The economist insists that, like beauty in the eyes of the beholder, these economic costs exist only in the mind of the de-

9. James Buchanan, *Cost and Choice: An Inquiry in Economic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 44–45. Buchanan won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1986.

cision-maker. They are subjectively perceived, and *only* subjectively perceived. And yet, and yet . . . there really are beautiful women and ugly women, and just about everyone can discern the difference, including the respective women (*especially* the women). But how is this possible? How can we deny the objective reality of beauty in the name of a “higher” subjective reality, when we know this: in order for our subjective appraisals to have meaning, there had better be an objective reality undergirding them? After all, two and two make four. Or do they? Does the objective answer depend on the subjective evaluator? The modern mathematician is not really sure.¹⁰

1. Buchanan’s Argument

The costs that influence our decisions are always subjective evaluations of future potential consequences. This is Buchanan’s argument. Once we act, however, objective reality takes over, replacing our mental forecasts with cold, hard facts. (And yet, and yet . . . in order to be perceived by us, these cold, hard facts must first be warmed in the microwave ovens of our minds.) Thus, concluded Buchanan: “Costs that are influential for behavior do not exist; they are never realized; they cannot be measured after the fact.”¹¹ The dream becomes reality, but the reality is always different from the dream, at least to this extent: the dream could not be measured; the reality can be. Supposedly. Maybe. We hope.

Buchanan argued that the choice-influenced costs that are subsequently imposed on people as a result of some previous decision are in some sense *objective and measurable*—so many forfeited dollars of income, for example¹²—but these real-world costs did not affect the original decision in any way. Yet even this doffing of the economist’s cap to objective cost theory may be overly respectful, given the presuppositions of modern subjectivist economics. The *meaning* of these objective, choice-influenced costs—e.g., accounting costs—must be *subjectively evaluated* by the person who personally bears them. A number in a ledger is supposed to convey accurate and *economically relev-*

10. Vern Poythress, “A Biblical View of Mathematics,” in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), pp. 159–88.

11. *Ibid.*, p. vii.

12. Even here, who can be sure just how many dollars were actually forfeited as a result of the decision? Would the person’s *perceived* alternative use of his money have been as wise (high return) as the best opportunity the market *objectively* offered at the time?

ant information in order for it to be effective as a summary of past events. The individual who pays an accountant thinks he is getting something for his money. What is he getting? A bunch of numbers on a page? Or information? The individual must interpret the significance of this information. There is no escape from subjectivism.

2. The Roads Not Travelled

Consider your own situation. You are still reading this essay. You still have faith. Let us consider a hypothetical possibility. With the time you spend reading this essay (assuming you stick with it to the bitter or delightful end), you might be able to think of an investment strategy that would make you rich, but because of something you will read here, you will never think of it or have the courage to risk it. On the other hand, you may also avoid an investment that really would bankrupt you. Unlike the man in the story of the lady and the tiger, you have the option of ignoring both doors; instead, you choose to read this essay. But you could have opened a door. Which would it have been, the lady or the tiger? You cannot know for sure. You will never know. You can only guess. So, what is the true cost of reading this essay? Life with the lady or a brief but colorful encounter with the tiger?

If we take seriously the modern economist's discussion of costs and choices, we may find our world disturbing. We never really know what our actions are costing us, assuming that it is true that there is no way to relate our subjective evaluations before we act with objective costs after we act. This disturbing lack of certainty can be relieved, however: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).¹³ But this suggestion is hardly helpful to the modern humanistic economist.

We can of course sit around moaning and groaning about a past cost: the abandoned dream that might have come true. We can worry retroactively about what our decision has cost us. But the cost that really counted—"counted" is in fact misleading, since there was nothing objective to count—at the moment of our decision was imposed at that moment. What is past is past. Paul wrote: ". . . forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which

13. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

are before" (Phil. 3:13). This is what the economist says of all decisions. Decision-makers are necessarily forward-looking. The past is gone forever. We must do the best we can with whatever we have today. This is the doctrine of *sunk costs*.¹⁴

This is not to say that we do not bear the objective costs that are imposed by a previous decision. We do. Even if we do not perceive these costs, we bear them. A madman may not understand that he is not Napoleon, but he bears the social costs of his delusion when he is placed in an insane asylum. This is why there can be no escape from objective costs, any more than from subjective costs. But whether we accurately foresaw these costs or not, they are the *result* of that action, not its cause. These costs are borne by us objectively in history, yet they are always subjectively borne. One person may bear his burden in good cheer; another is utterly oppressed by what objectively (i.e., to an outside evaluator) appears to be the same magnitude of burden. Who is to say whose evaluation is correct? Only the omniscient God can do this, and His evaluation is not objectively measurable by the economist. This does not refute its existence. God imputes. God judges. God renders final judgment. There will be a day of reckoning—of counting and evaluating.

D. Some Odd Conclusions

An exclusively subjectivist view of cost and choice can lead to some very odd conclusions. (So, for that matter, can any other exclusive line of human reasoning.) G. F. Thirlby followed the logic of the one-time decision and concluded: "Cost is ephemeral. The cost involved in a particular decision loses its significance with the making of a decision because the decision displaces the alternative course of action."¹⁵ This is Buchanan's view. Thirlby said emphatically that "the cost figure will never become objective; *i.e.*, it will never be possible to check whether the forecast of the alternative revenue was correct, because the alternative undertaking will never come into existence to produce the actual alternative revenue."¹⁶

14. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 26. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

15. G. F. Thirlby, "The Subjective Theory of Value and Accounting Cost," *Economica*, XII (Feb. 1946), p. 34; cited by Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 31. This essay is reprinted in James Buchanan and G. F. Thirlby (eds.), *L.S.E. Essays on Cost* (New York: New York University Press, 1981). L.S.E. stands for London School of Economics.

16. Thirlby, "The Ruler," *South African Journal of Economics*, XIV (Dec. 1946), p. 264; *ibid.*, p. 33.

1. Should You Fire Your Accountant?

What does this mean for the accounting profession? What does it do to the very concept of personal or corporate budgeting? He did not say, but he did not stop, either. Following the persuasive logic of subjectivism, Thirlby concluded that “The cost is not the things—*e.g., money—which will flow along certain channels* as a result of the decision; it is a loss, prospective or otherwise, to the person making the decision. . . . cost *cannot be discovered by another person who eventually watches and records the flow of those things along those channels*.”¹⁷ Then of what objective use are accountants? Why was the advent of double-entry bookkeeping such a revolutionary event in the history of civilization?¹⁸ He did not say.

Furthermore, what does such a view of budgeting do to the idea of the free market as a social institution for producing economic order—objective economic order? What does such a view do to the idea of the stock market, since money prices for shares are the means by which decision-makers evaluate the past performance of all other participants in the market? What does the price of a share of corporate stock have to do with expected future performance of that corporation’s management? What is the link, if any, between present share prices and future economic performance? How do we get from subjective value to objective share prices and back again? How do we preserve our capital? For that matter, how do we measure our capital? How can we bridge the gap between the world of purely subjective costs and objective market prices? Buchanan insisted: “*Only prices have objective, empirical content. . . .*”¹⁹ Then precisely what empirical content does a price possess or reveal, and how do we discover it or make effective use of it—subjectively and objectively, personally and socially?

In short, *what does an objective price have to do with individual subjective value?* What is the *economic meaning* of a price—individually and socially, subjectively and objectively? (This is the number-one epistemological problem that has beset modern economics since the 1870s.)

17. Thirlby, “Subjective Theory,” *ibid.*, p. 31.

18. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 301. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

19. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 85.

2. *The Realm of Possibility*

Another example: Buchanan made this statement: "Any profit opportunity that is within the realm of possibility but which is rejected becomes a cost of undertaking the preferred course of action."²⁰ But Buchanan neglected any consideration of the economics of a rejected opportunity that is not in fact—*objective* fact—within the realm of possibility. We normally call such an opportunity a *loss*. Wouldn't avoiding a loss be a *benefit* of undertaking the preferred course of action? If the decision-maker's first choice is to reject the objectively impossible (i.e., unprofitable) course of action for whatever reason, and also to reject the second, objectively possible, course of action for whatever reason, won't he remain in the profit column overall? I do not want to press this line of reasoning too hard because it bogs us down too deeply in the philosophical problem of available and unavailable information, but we need to recognize at least the nature of the epistemological problem: *if everything is completely subjective at the moment of decision, what does "the realm of possibility" have to do with anything?* Maybe the decision-maker believes that could achieve something great if he just had the courage of his convictions, when in fact he would have gone bankrupt. Is his true cost the forfeited unattainable greatness or the forfeited inevitable bankruptcy? If all costs at the time of his decision are purely subjective, then his cost must be the forfeited greatness he believed he would attain. This, clearly, is nutty—logical but nutty. So is any theory of cost and choice that is exclusively subjective.

The economist, no matter how hard he tries to tie human decisions exclusively to the action-taker's subjective evaluations, cannot escape the bedrock realm of possibility. Possibility is his measuring rod for discussing cost, a "ruler" without which all economic discussion becomes theoretically impossible. On the other hand, no matter how hard he tries to make objective that realm of possibility, through probability theory and other statistical techniques, he cannot escape the inherent subjectivity of the decision of the acting individual who is responsible for his actions. The economist needs—yes, *needs*²¹—a scientific theory of cost that is both subjective and objective without being eternally dialectical. Such a scientific theory does not exist in hu-

20. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

21. Few concepts are less acceptable to an economist than the concept of *need*. A need is something which is not negotiable, and for an economist, everything economic is defined as negotiable.

manistic theory. This is the heart of my critique of all previous discussions of the problem of social cost.

E. The Persistent Question of Value

Economists, as self-consciously humanistic social scientists, claim to be defenders of a rational academic discipline. Most of them defend their methodology in terms of the assertion that it allows them to make accurate predictions of human actions under limited, specified conditions.²² These predictions are supposed to enable people to make economic decisions that are more profitable than decisions made by flipping a coin, consulting a fortune teller, or throwing darts at a wall covered with slips of paper, with each slip containing a different suggested course of action.

To make their claim believable, economists have to make a myriad of assumptions about reason, the human mind, the powers of observation, the external world, and the interrelationships between the mind and matter. These assumptions are very seldom spelled out by economists.²³ Epistemology, the fundamental question of all philosophy—"What can man know, and how can he know it?"—is not a popular topic within the economics profession.²⁴

1. The Problem of Measurement

The advent of modern economics is generally dated from the early 1870s, when three scholars independently came to the same conclusion, namely, that economic value is *imputed*: the concept of *subjective* value.²⁵ Value, they concluded, is subjectively determined. It is not an objective quantity. The key unit of value is the value (subjective) of the marginal unit. The decision-maker asks himself: "How much (objective) of *this* must I give up in order to obtain *that*?" By 1900, virtually all non-Marxist economists had broken with the older objective

22. Milton Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), ch. 1: "The Methodology of Positive Economics."

23. Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*.

24. Fritz Machlup, "Introductory Remarks," *American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings*, XLII (May 1952), p. 34.

25. The three scholars were William Stanley Jevons (England), Carl Menger (Austria), and Leon Walras (Switzerland). See R. S. Hovey, *The Rise of the Marginal Utility School, 1870–1889* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960); Emil Kauder, *A History of Marginal Utility* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965).

value theories of the classical economists, such as the labor theory of value or the cost-of-production theory of value. By grounding economics on the subjective valuations of individual decision-makers, economists today believe that they have escaped from the intellectual dilemmas that had arisen as a result of classical economics' objective value theory. (The most famous one was Adam Smith's "water-diamond paradox.")²⁶

They are self-deluded. They have not escaped such problems. They have merely created new intellectual problems for themselves—problems that are inescapable, given their commitment to the ancient ideal of humanism: "man as the measure of all things" (Protagoras).²⁷ (The careful economist would add this cautious corollary, "assuming for the sake of argument that there can be such a thing as a measure in economics.")

If man is the measure of all things, and man himself is a subjective, changing, and ultimately "free spirit," then man cannot serve as a measure of anything. Measures must be fixed, but there are no remaining fixed measures in modern thought—not even the speed of light (at least in quantum physics).²⁸ They are no longer fixed in biology: Darwinism's world of process has triumphed over fixed measures.²⁹ Meas-

26. "The things which have the greatest value in use have frequently little or no value in exchange. . . . Nothing is more useful than water: . . . A diamond, on the contrary, has scarce any value in use; . . ." Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776), end of Chapter IV. The paradox: Why is it that something as valuable to human life as water is worth so little in comparison to diamonds, which are not really crucial to mankind? The marginalist-subjectivist's solution: "We never choose between water in general and diamonds in general. We choose between a specific amount of water and a specific amount of diamonds at a specific point in time. In the middle of a desert, someone might choose a drink of water over a bag of diamonds. Normally he wouldn't. Water is abundant compared to diamonds most of the time. Thus, the decision-maker's subjective evaluation at a particular moment of time is crucial, not the hypothetical (and non-existent) objective value of water in general vs. the objective value of diamonds in general."

27. Assertion 5 of Humanist Manifesto I (1933) stated: "Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values." *Humanist Manifestos I and II* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Press, 1973), p. 8.

28. I refer here to the startling theory of subatomic physics, verified by numerous experiments, known as Bell's Theorem, which states that at the subatomic level, all events must be simultaneously related to each other across the entire universe. See Nick Herbert, *Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985), p. 214.

29. Assertion 2 of Humanist Manifesto I stated: "Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process." *Humanist Manifestos I and II*, p. 8.

ures are no longer fixed in morals.³⁰ They are no longer fixed in epistemology.³¹ They do not exist in economics.³² There are no measures at all. There may be discrete, permanent numbers—even this is highly speculative³³—but there are no measures. Everything is on a continuum, nothing is discrete.³⁴ This absence of measures leads, step by step, to radical subjectivism and radical relativism. Heraclitus' river of flux is at last definitively eroding Parmenides' fixed shore line. Chaos looms.³⁵

Having said this, the economist nevertheless resists making the obvious conclusion regarding the relativity of all measurement: *the denial of the possibility of relevant scientific precision*. Vainly, he protests: "There are economists who have propounded the relativity of measure. Apparently, they failed to see that this view saps the entire foundation upon which the economic science rests."³⁶ Sap! He, too, is inescapably one of these epistemologically short-sighted economists.

Consider the question of environmental pollution. A consistent economist—an exceedingly rare creature—must conclude: "One man's polluted stream is another man's profit for the fiscal year, and there is no conceivable scientific way to say which is better for society in general, for there is no scientific way of identifying such an entity as society in general." To admit this, however, would be to commit methodological suicide in public. Modern economics has in fact committed suicide, but it has done so in private. Economists do not leap from tall buildings during their lunch hour. They much prefer to do away with themselves in private—through an overdose of qualifications.

30. In 1973, *Humanist Manifesto II* stated: "Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest." *Ibid.*, p. 17.

31. Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, and Gene Reeves (eds.), *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971).

32. Ludwig von Mises wrote: "The truth is that there are only variables and no constants. It is pointless to talk of variables where there are no invariables." Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 13. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTAH>)

33. Poythress, "A Biblical View of Mathematics," *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, *op. cit.*

34. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), ch. 3.

35. James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987).

36. Georgescu-Roegen, *Entropy Law*, p. 111.

2. *The Great Debate*

In my commentary on Genesis, I discussed the problem of objective and subjective value at considerable length. I analyzed the important critique of Cambridge Professor A. C. Pigou by London School of Economics Professor Lionel Robbins, and then the subsequent debate between Robbins and Roy Harrod.³⁷ To review very briefly, Pigou, in his pioneering study of welfare economics, had argued that because each additional monetary unit's worth of income is worth less to a man than the previous unit, the value of one additional unit of income to a millionaire will necessarily be less than its value to a poverty-stricken man. Thus, Pigou concluded, the state can increase the aggregate social welfare of the community by taking a portion of the rich man's income in the high income brackets and transferring this money to the poor man. This tax will not hurt the rich man very much (he puts so little value on the last bit of money he receives), while the marginal income will greatly benefit the poor man (who has so little income to begin with). Net social utility is increased.

Robbins replied in 1932 that the argument is invalid as a scientific statement. Because all economic value is subjective, we cannot, as scientists, make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. There is no objective column of figures to add up when we are talking about subjective value. (If true, then the science of accounting has no logical connection with either the science of economics or the vocation of business. This obvious conclusion, however, is too radical for most economists even to discuss.)³⁸ Therefore, economists cannot legitimately say anything about the increase or decrease of "social value" which is produced by taking a percentage of the rich man's income in the higher brackets and giving this money to the poor man.³⁹ No one in the economics profession has ever proposed a rational answer to Robbins' argument, yet hardly any economist—I would say no economist—has been able to develop a comprehensive economic theory in terms of this argument, including Robbins.⁴⁰

37. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

38. Gary North, "There's No (Autonomous) Accounting for Taste," *Biblical Economics Today*, XI (June/July 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gntaste>)

39. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (New York: St. Martins, 1932), pp. 136–41. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

40. Richard Posner wrote: "The 'interpersonal comparison of utilities' is anathema to the modern economist, and rightly so, because there is no metric for making such a comparison." Had he let it go at that, he would have been honest. But he knew what

Roy Harrod⁴¹ complained in his rejoinder in 1938 that if Robbins were really serious about this argument, then he would have to abandon the idea that it is possible for the economist, as a scientist, to make *any* recommendations concerning proper economic policy, since any state-imposed policy always hurts some participants and benefits others. If it is impossible to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, then economists must remain forever silent about the aggregate (social) economic benefits and costs of any decision by an individual or the state.⁴²

Robbins was correct in his criticism of Pigou, given the presuppositions of modern, subjectivist economics. Harrod was equally correct in his criticism of Robbins, namely, that *his conclusion would destroy all applied economic science*. Robbins subsequently backed away from this conclusion concerning the inability of economists to say anything about social welfare or the benefits of social policies in general.⁴³ But he never explained how he could logically back away from this conclusion, and he lived until 1985. Even more inconsistently, he also never publicly backed away from his critique of Pigou's argument in favor of graduated ("progressive") income taxation.

The implications of Robbins' position are radical, and economists have long been unwilling to face them, including Robbins. Buchanan

this would mean: the impossibility of formulating any social policy based on truly scientific economics, so he illegitimately added the following unproven and unprovable statement: "But the interpersonal comparison of values, in the economic sense, is feasible, although difficult, even when the values are not being compared in an explicit market." Posner, *Economics of Justice*, p. 79. Apparently, all the economist needs to do is change the word "utility" to "values," and he goes from the impossible to the merely difficult. Let me tell you something about humanistic economists: *they cheat*. Maybe not self-consciously, but the resulting confusion is the same. At the very least, the economics profession is self-deceived.

41. Harrod later became Sir Roy Harrod. He was John Maynard Keynes' hand-picked successor as editor of *The Economic Journal*. Together, they controlled access to England's most prestigious academic economics journal for half a century. Like Keynes, he never received an academic degree in economics. He did study economics with Keynes for one year, 1922–23. Neither of them ever earned a degree above the bachelor's degree: Keynes' was in mathematics and Harrod's was in the humanities. See Don Patinkin, *Anticipations of the General Theory? And Other Essays on Keynes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. xv, xvi. John Neville Keynes, Maynard's father, and Pigou personally paid for young Maynard's salary when they hired him to teach economics at King's College, Cambridge in 1908. Keynes, Sr. was chairman of the department for many years.

42. R. F. Harrod, "Scope and Method of Economics," *Economic Journal*, XLVIII (1938), p. 397.

43. Lionel Robbins, "Interpersonal Comparisons of Utility: A Comment," *ibid.*, pp. 635–37.

once wrote that “it is precisely the problems posed in modern welfare economics that force the economist to come to grips with the basic issues of political and legal philosophy.”⁴⁴ These issues also force the more astute economist to come to grips with the fundamental issue of all philosophy: epistemology. But the ranks of the economics profession are filled with men and women who have no training in epistemology and care nothing about it.⁴⁵ They never answer by means of modern subjectivism the fundamental philosophical question: “What can men know, and how can they know it?” They operate in terms of an implicit though hidden dialecticism between objective and subjective value theory.

3. *Social Cost*

Pigou also raised another issue concerning welfare economics. It is a variant of the earlier problem of wealth redistribution. It has become known in the economics profession as “the problem of social cost.” Pigou argued that there are cases of market failure⁴⁶ in which private benefits from a particular activity impose costs on third parties. Pollution is the obvious example, although there are many others, he said. The benefits to the polluter are immediate and direct, but there is no market-produced incentive for him to cease polluting as long as his costs of operation are less than expected revenues.⁴⁷ Part of these costs are borne by someone else. At most, the polluter bears only part of the costs (stinging eyes, for example), but he reaps all of the rewards (lower production costs). He continues to pollute the environment. Total costs in the community—*social* costs—are therefore greater than his personal private costs. Followers of Pigou’s analysis frequently argue that the state should redistribute this “stolen” wealth back to the original owners, perhaps through a tax on polluters and tax reductions for victims, so as to balance total social benefits (from production) and total social costs.

There is a hidden problem with this line of reasoning, one which was not discovered for almost half a century. Buchanan pointed to it:

44. James Buchanan, “Good Economics—Bad Law,” *Virginia Law Review*, LX (1974), p. 488.

45. An exception is the Austrian School.

46. Tyler Cowen (ed.), *The Theory of Market Failure: A Critical Examination* (Fairfax, Virginia: George Mason University Press, 1988).

47. Yes, yes, I know: “the present value of an expected future stream of income, discounted by the prevailing rate of interest.” But sometimes I prefer to write in English.

"The Pigouvian norm aims at bringing marginal private costs, *as these influence choice*, into line with social costs, *as these are objectively measured*. Only with objective measurability can the proper corrective devices be introduced."⁴⁸ The problem is this: choice-influencing costs are exclusively subjective, according to modern economic theory. Only choice-influenced costs can be "objectively measured" (maybe). How can the judges impose objective costs that will be appropriate—scientifically appropriate—to reduce the existing level of pollution to a socially appropriate level?

This raises many other questions. How can the civil judges know what is the socially appropriate level of pollution? How can they preserve the legal predictability of the courts if they cannot specify in advance the appropriate penalties? How can they be even vaguely confident that "the punishment fits the crime" of polluting? But these questions did not get asked for half a century, although they were implied by Robbins' original critique. What finally got scholars to start asking them was an essay by R. H. Coase.

F. The Coase Theorem⁴⁹

Economists freely acknowledge that this is one of the most important economic essays ever written. It is by far the one most widely cited, and the number of citations has been escalating in recent years. Without warning, it hit both the economics profession and the world of legal theory.

Coase had been the author of an important study of the firm, published a generation earlier in 1937.⁵⁰ For the next two decades, he published very little in professional scholarly journals.⁵¹ In 1959, he published a significant article on the Federal Communications Commission.⁵² Then, like a bombshell, came his essay on social cost. Few es-

48. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 74.

49. R. H. Coase, "The Problem of Social Cost," *Journal of Law and Economics*, III (1960), pp. 1–44.

50. Coase, "The Nature of the Firm," *Economica* IV (1937), pp. 386–405.

51. Coase, "Business Organization and the Accountant," *The Accountant* (Oct.–Dec. 1938), a series of a dozen brief essays written for non-economists; a shortened version is reprinted by Buchanan and Thirlby in *L.S.E. Essays on Cost*; Coase, "The Marginal Cost Controversy," *Economics*, XII (Aug. 1946). A bibliography of Coase's works appears in "On the Resignation of Ronald H. Coase," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XXVI (April 1983). The bulk of his academic articles came after 1960.

52. Coase, "The Federal Communications Commission," *Journal of Law and Economics*, II (1959). This essay is reprinted in Eirik G. Furubotn and Svetozar Pejovich

says that appear in scholarly economics journals ever get cited by anyone else, and certainly not by numerous economists. After five years, a scholarly essay in economics, assuming it ever was noticed, ceases to be cited, except for those regarded as classics.⁵³ Yet this one is cited more widely than any other article, half a century later.

Richard Posner went so far as to argue in his widely read textbook on law and economics that Coase's essay and one by Guido Calabresi⁵⁴ were instrumental in launching an entire academic discipline, law and economics,⁵⁵ "the application of the theories and empirical methods of economics to the legal system across the boards."⁵⁶ The Coase Theorem (he capitalized it, indicating his respect for it) "established a framework for analyzing the assignment of property rights and liability in economic terms. This opened a vast field of legal doctrine to fruitful economic analysis."⁵⁷ Two scholarly journals, both published by the University of Chicago, have been heavily influenced by the Coase theorem: *The Journal of Law and Economics* and *The Journal of Legal Studies*. This is understandable, given the fact that Coase edited the *Journal of Law and Economics* for 19 years, 1965–1983, and the *Journal of Legal Studies* is a sister publication.⁵⁸ As Posner wrote in 1981, "Until recently, then, utilitarianism held sway in legal theory, but overt economic analysis was rare. The position is now reversed."⁵⁹

Coase's essay was perhaps the key one in the revival of interest in the question of pollution and economics, as well as a crucially important contribution to a free market theory of property rights. And, let me say from the outset, it is a dangerously flawed essay. Few economists have seen its flaws. The first professional economist I ever heard even mention a really critical comment against it—essentially, the same cri-

(eds.), *The Economics of Property Rights* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1974).

53. A. W. Coats, "The Role of Scholarly Journals in the History of Economics: An Essay," *Journal of Economic Literature*, X (1972), p. 42.

54. Guido Calabresi, "Some Thoughts on Risk Distribution and the Law of Torts," *Yale Law Journal*, vol. 70 (1961), pp. 499ff.

55. A. Mitchell Polinsky, *Introduction to Law and Economics* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983).

56. Richard A. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), p. 19.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

58. For a survey of this literature, see the footnotes in the article by Elizabeth Hoffman and Matthew Spitzer, "The Coase Theorem: Some Experimental Tests," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XXV (April 1982), pp. 73–98. The rigor of the limiting assumptions made by the authors of this article is much greater than Coase's own formulation; the article is also far less readable or usable.

59. Posner, *Economics of Justice*, p. 51.

ticism I had also come up with—could not get it published in a conventional professional economics journal, and he had to wait three years after he discussed his criticism with me before he saw it in print.⁶⁰

1. Coase vs. Pigou

Coase summarized the state of the debate—it had long ceased to be debated very much—as of 1960. Pigou's statement of the problem had given the problem of social cost its traditional framework. This discussion was categorized under the general rubric of "externalities." The term refers to the imposition of a firm's costs of operation on those who are not owners of the stream of future income generated by the production process. In other words, these victims are *external* to the firm or production unit, but not external to its costs of operation. Almost without exception, the economists' discussion of externalities ended with a consideration of what government measures are appropriate to reduce or eliminate these externalities. The conclusions reached by most economists, based on Pigou's analysis in *The Economics of Welfare* (4th ed., 1932; originally published in 1920), were as follows, Coase summarized: the producer of pollution (smoke, noise, etc.) should (1) pay damages to those injured, or (2) have a tax imposed on his production by the civil government, or (3) have his factory excluded from residential districts.⁶¹ Coase's article broke with this tradition.

Aaron Levine summarized Coase's theoretical breakthrough: "Assuming zero transaction costs and economic rationality, Coase, in his seminal work, demonstrated that the market mechanism is capable of eliminating negative externalities without the necessity of governmentally imposed liability rules."⁶² Furthermore, the theorem leads to the conclusion that "if transactions are costless, the initial assignment of a property right will not determine the ultimate use of the property."⁶³ Free market economists of the Chicago School have increasingly sided with Coase. (What is also rather startling is that traditional Jewish law had adopted the basic features of the Coase theorem many

60. Walter Block, "Coase and Demsetz on Private Property Rights," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 1, No. 2 (1977), pp. 111–15.

61. Coase, "Social Cost," p. 1.

62. Aaron Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law: Aspects of Jewish Business Ethics* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Yeshiva University Press, 1980), p. 59.

63. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, p. 7.

centuries earlier; English law had not.)⁶⁴

The problem is, of course, that *there are and always will be transaction costs*.⁶⁵ Or, I should say, this is *a* problem. The major problem that the Coase theorem assigns zero economic value—and therefore zero relevance—to the sense of moral and legal outrage associated with a willful violation of private ownership. It ignores the economic relevance of the public's sense of moral outrage when there is no enforcement by the civil government of owners' legal immunities from invasion, even if done in the name of some "more efficient" social good or social goal. This is why I conclude that *the Coase theorem is one of the most morally insidious pieces of academic nonsense ever to hit the economics profession*; worse, it has infected—and I do mean *infected*—the thinking of a generation of very bright and very glib free market economists and legal theorists. Coase has served as the Typhoid Mary of Chicago School economists for five decades. His essay has drastically compromised the academic case for liberty. It has imposed private costs on those of us who are attempting to make a case for free market economics. In this sense, Coase's theorem is a form of pollution. But because it is intellectual pollution, those injured cannot take him to court and sue for damages. The best we can do is offer a pollution-control system: proof that his whole argument is specious.

Coase fully recognized from the beginning the nature of the technical economic problem he had raised, namely, *the impossibility of a world in which there are no transaction costs*. The moral issues related to property rights he dismissed without a moment's public hesitation as irrelevant to economic analysis. Therefore, he allowed civil judges to intervene to settle disputes. But there is a problem here: Coase could not escape the nagging problem ignored by Pigou and all welfare economists, namely, *the problem of interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility*. Coase's "scientific" case against Pigou rests on the implicit assertion that men, especially judges, can make such comparisons in their act of formulating social policy.

The only professional response deeply critical of Coase has been made by Austrian School economists, who recognize the weakness of Chicago School presuppositions concerning interpersonal comparis-

64. Yehoshua Lieberman, "The Coase Theorem in Jewish Law," *Journal of Legal Studies*, X (June 1981), pp. 293–303.

65. For a brief introduction to the question of transaction costs, see Oliver E. Williamson, "Transaction-Cost Economics: The Governance of Contractual Relations," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XXII (October 1979), pp. 233–61.

ons. They side with Robbins—the 1932 Robbins—against Coase: no interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. If followed consistently, it would become impossible to defend the idea of government penalties against polluters.

2. The Ethical Pea Beneath the Neutral Shell

The astounding fact about the Coase theorem is that every economist knows that there are no cases of exchanges in which there are zero transaction costs. They also know that the Coase theorem applies *only* where there are zero transaction costs. Yet they do not identify the Coase theorem as an instance of curious but utterly irrelevant academic speculation. Instead, they try to work with his theorem. Richard Posner, an economist and a judge in the U.S. Appeals Court (Seventh Circuit), admitted that the Coase theorem applies only to zero transaction cost situations, yet he devoted most of his academic career to pursuing the economic implications of the Coase theorem in the field of law. Only at age 70 did he abandon all of this and become a Keynesian.⁶⁶ He knew that Coase's initial assumption—that transaction costs are zero—cannot be true in the real world. Posner wrote:

The economist does not merely decree that absolute rights [of ownership—G.N.] be created and then fall silent as to where they should be vested. To be sure, if market transactions were costless, the economist would not care where a right was initially vested. The process of voluntary exchange would costlessly reallocate it to whoever valued it the most. But once the unrealistic assumption of zero transaction costs is abandoned, the assignment of rights becomes determinate. If transaction costs are positive (though presumably low, for otherwise it would be inefficient to create an absolute right), the wealth-maximization principle requires the initial vesting of rights in those who are likely to value them most, so as to minimize transaction costs. This is the economic reason for giving a worker the right to sell his labor and a woman the right to determine her sexual partners. If assigned randomly to strangers, these rights would generally (not invariably) be repurchased by the worker and the woman; the costs of the rectifying transaction can be avoided if the right is assigned at the outset to the user who values it most.⁶⁷

66. Richard Posner, "How I Became a Keynesian: Second Thoughts in the Middle of a Crisis," *The New Republic* (Sept. 23, 2009). (<http://bit.ly/PosnerKeynes>)

67. Posner, *Economics of Justice*, p. 71. For a critique of Posner's approach to the law, see Buchanan, "Good Economics—Bad Law," *Virginia Law Review*, *op. cit.* See also the biting and incisive essay by Arthur Allen Leff, "Economic Analysis of Law: Some

Posner openly admitted that, in some cases, even where transaction costs are low, the worker or the woman in his example would not (i.e., could not afford to) repurchase these rights of ownership. This follows from his definition of value: "The most important thing to bear in mind about the concept of value is that it is based on what people are willing to pay for something rather than on the happiness they would derive from having it. . . . The individual who would like very much to have some good but is unwilling or unable to pay anything for it—perhaps because he is destitute—does not value the good in the sense in which I am using the term 'value.'"⁶⁸ The conclusion is obvious, and he did not hesitate to draw it: "Equivalently, the wealth of society is the aggregate satisfaction of those preferences (the only ones that have ethical weight in a system of wealth maximization) that are backed up by money, that is, that are registered in a market." In short, people's demonstrated preferences—money on the line—are the only ones that possess "ethical weight" in his definition of wealth-maximization. Does this include marriage? Of course. Does this include games of chance? Of course. "Much of economic life is still organized on barter principles. The 'marriage market,' child rearing, and a friendly game of bridge are examples. These services have value which could be monetized by reference to substitute services sold in explicit markets or in other ways."⁶⁹

Question: Who makes the initial distribution of an ownership right to whomever "values it the most"? How does this sovereign agent know scientifically which potential owners "are likely to value them [ownership rights] the most"? In short: *By what standard of value does he make the initial distribution?* Dead silence from Chicago School economists. To say anything at this point would be a public admission that economic science is no longer value-free. The Coase theorem must be seen for what it is: an important component in *a universal academic shell game*. The ethical pea is always concealed beneath the seemingly neutral scientific shell of cost-benefit analysis. Watch what the economist does, not what he says he is doing. He is invariably making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility every time he rec-

Realism About Nominalism," *ibid.*, pp. 451–82. This is a rare and much-needed example of a scholar who recognizes the importance of the late medieval debate over realism vs. nominalism as it applies to the economic issues of objective vs. subjective value theory. Modern economic theory is explicitly nominalist but implicitly realist when it comes to formulating policy.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

ommends a policy decision.

The debate over social costs raises once again the ancient debate between objective and subjective knowledge. It is one of the persistent antinomies in all humanist thought. The epistemological problem of social cost is an *ethical* problem, and as such, humanists cannot solve it “scientifically.”

3. Reciprocal Harm

Coase reformulated the terms of the debate over externalities. “The question is commonly thought of as one in which A inflicts harm on B and what has been decided is: how should we restrain A? But this is wrong. We are dealing with a problem of a reciprocal nature. To avoid the harm to B would inflict harm on A. The real question that has to be decided is: should A be allowed to harm B or should B be allowed to harm A? The problem is to avoid the more serious harm.”⁷⁰

To begin with, *such reasoning is perverse*, if accepted as a methodological standard governing economic analysis in all instances involving economic action. It would be just as easy to say of kidnapping that any restrictions on kidnapping by the state harm the kidnapper, and that a lack of restrictions harms the victims. If we are going to build an economic system in terms of the supposedly “reciprocal nature of harm”—that each economic actor suffers harm when he is restricted from acting according to his immediate whim—then economics becomes positively wicked, not value-free, in its attempt to sort out just how much harm the courts will allow each party to impose on the other.

There are some areas of life—areas governed by biblical morality—in which such “cost-benefit analyses” must not even be contemplated. For example, any attempt to impose cost-benefit analyses on competing techniques of mass genocide, including abortion, is demonic, not scientifically neutral. Whether a genocidal society should adopt either gas chambers or lethal injections for adults, or either saline solutions or suction devices for unborn infants, cannot be solved in terms of comparative rates of cost-efficiency, for the economist always ignores a major “exogenous variable”: the wrath of God. God will efficiently judge those individuals who promote all such cost-efficient systems, as well as societies that adopt them. If legal restrictions against mass genocide harm the potential mass murderers, this is all to the

70. Coase, “Social Cost,” p. 2.

good. Society faces no “reduction in social benefits” whatsoever. Justice does cost something, but the net economic effect is positive, whether the economist sees this or not. There is no reduction in net social benefits as a result of the thwarted goals of the now-restricted (or previously executed) genocidal technocrats.

Coase offered the following example of reciprocal harm. What about cattle that stray onto another man’s property and destroy crops? This, it should be noted, is precisely the issue dealt with by Exodus 22:5. Coase wrote: “If it is inevitable that some cattle will stray, an increase in the supply of meat can only be obtained at the expense of a decrease in the supply of crops. The nature of the choice is clear: meat or crops?”⁷¹

This appears to be correct economic analysis, as far as it goes. It forces us to think about the problem in terms of that which members of the society must give up, meat vs. crops. But his next sentence is the very heart of the problem, and he never showed how economists—or anyone else, for that matter—can, as scientists, make an economically rational (i.e., neutral) choice in the name of society: crops vs. meat. Indeed, humanistic economics cannot possibly answer this question because of the inability of economists, as scientists, to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.⁷²

4. Subjective Value vs. Social Policy

Coase never came to grips with this problem. “What answer should be given is, of course, not clear until we know the value of what is obtained as well as the value of what is sacrificed to attain it.”⁷³ *Value?* As economists, we need to ask ourselves several questions: Value to whom? Society as a whole? The value to the cattle owner? The value to the farmer? Also, how can we make such estimates of economic value, since economic value is subjective? Questions of economic value are the main problems raised by his paper, yet he could not answer them by means of the “scientific economics” he proclaimed. No economist can. Economist Peter Lewin went to the heart

71. *Idem.*

72. In other words, we cannot make scientific comparisons of the utility gained by one person vs. the utility thereby forfeited by another person. There is no unit of “utility measurement” which is common to both. We cannot as neutral scientists legitimately say that one man has gained greater utility (a subjective evaluation on his part) than another man has lost (another subjective evaluation). I discuss this problem in *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

73. Coase, “Social Cost,” p. 2.

of the matter when he writes in a withering critique of Coase that

costs are individual and private and cannot be “social.” The social-cost concept requires the summation of individual costs, which is impossible if costs are seen in utility terms. The notion of social cost as reflected by market prices (or even more problematically by hypothetical prices in the absence of a market for the item) has validity only in conditions so far removed from reality as to make its use as a general tool of policy analysis highly suspect. . . .

The foregoing suggests that any perception of efficiency at the social level is illusory. And the essential thread in all the objections to the efficiency concept, be it wealth effects, distortions, or technological changes, is the refusal by economists to make interpersonal comparisons of utility. Social cost falls to the ground precisely because individual evaluations of the sacrifice involved in choosing among options cannot be compared.⁷⁴

The inability of anyone to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility has once again smashed all the hopes of the free market’s humanist defenders to deal “scientifically” with a problem of social policy. The more astute “anarcho-capitalists” have understood this, and have thereby abandoned the very idea of social utility and social costs. They have also abandoned the idea of civil government.⁷⁵ They have not been able to demonstrate how people can deal successfully with the problems created by such technological developments as the internal combustion engine. But at least they are consistent. They do not search for “fools gold” intellectual solutions to “scientifically” insoluble problems. They do not search for pseudo-market solutions—“What would the correct market price be in the absence of a market?”—or solutions involving the hypothetical (and scientifically impossible) ability of judges to make scientifically valid social cost-benefit analyses in settling disputes. *There can be no scientifically valid answers to such social problems, given the presuppositions of modern, subjectivistic, individualistic economic theory.* Yet the approach used by Coase and his academic followers to deal with these questions assumes that there *are* scientifically valid answers to them.

Since there are no “neutral, scientific” answers, Coase’s whole es-

74. Peter Lewin, “Pollution Externalities: Social Cost and Strict Liability,” *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), pp. 220, 222. (<http://bit.ly/LewinPollution>)

75. “There is no government solution to pollution or to the common-pool problem because government is the problem.” Gerald P. O’Driscoll, Jr., “Pollution, Libertarianism, and the Law,” *ibid.*, p. 50. (<http://bit.ly/ODriscollPollution>)

say is an exercise in intellectual gymnastics: an illusion of scientific precision.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is considered a classic essay: a pioneering work that literally created a new approach in both economics and legal theory. What is revealing is that the economics profession as a whole has refused to face up to this problem, and it took over two decades for a critical analysis based on a 45-year-old observation by Lionel Robbins to be applied to the Coase theorem by an assistant professor (untenured) at an obscure university to be published in a new intellectual journal that had no following within the academic community.⁷⁷ Such is academia: academia nuts.

G. Property Rights

The meaning of “property rights” is this: individuals or associations that are represented by individuals possess a legal right to prevent others from stealing, invading, destroying, or otherwise interfering with their property. Owners therefore possess a legal right *to exclude others* from the use of specified property. This is analogous to covenantal forms of exclusion: the state’s right to exclude non-citizens from voting; the married person’s right to exclude others from sexual access to the partner; and the church’s right to exclude non-members or non-Christians from the communion table. The phrase “property rights” means that there is a legally enforceable “bundle of rights” that is associated with specific forms of property.

Coase’s essay undermines the very concept of private property rights. He offered a detailed, carefully constructed argument concerning the marginal gains to the cattleman vs. the marginal losses to the farmer from a roaming steer. What the essay demonstrates, *assuming that the psychological costs to the farmer of the cattleman’s violation of his property rights are never taken into consideration*, is this: excluding transaction costs and information costs,⁷⁸ as well as assuming perfect

76. This same illusion of scientific precision is at the heart of virtually every professional journal in economics, every mathematical equation, and every call for scientific policy-making issued by members of the economists’ guild. The day an economist admits to himself that no economist can make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility is the day that his public claims of economics’ objective, scientific precision make him a charlatan. The day before, he was simply ignorant.

77. I refer to Block’s essay. In my 1973 book, *An Introduction to Christian Economics*, I briefly referred to “R. H. Coase’s clever sophistry,” (p. 94n), but did not have space to pursue his arguments in detail. Some readers may think I should have let it go at that, or devoted the necessary space in some place other than here.

78. “. . . when the damaging business has to pay for all damage caused *and* the pri-

competition (omniscience), *the gain or loss to society is the same*, whether the cattleman compensates the farmer for the value of the lost crops, should the cattle be left to roam, or the farmer compensates the cattleman for the higher costs of meat production, if the cattle are kept away from the farmer's crops (higher feed costs, costs of fencing, etc.). Again, assuming "conditions of perfect competition," Coase concluded: "Whether the cattle-raiser pays the farmer to leave the land uncultivated or himself rents the land by paying the land-owner an amount slightly greater than the farmer would pay (if the farmer was himself renting the land), the final result would be the same and would maximize the value of production."⁷⁹

Given his initial, unrealistic hypothetical assumptions about free goods—no transaction costs, no information costs, and perfect competition—this conclusion initially appears to be correct, *assuming that farmers have no commitment to a sense of justice concerning property rights*. It also assumes that *members of such a society do not and will not suffer any additional economic losses when the civil government refuses to make cattle owners responsible for the damage their animals cause*. Both assumptions are implicit to Coase's thesis, and both are categorically incorrect. Coase began with an unreal world in which transaction costs are defined away, and from this he drew his equally unrealistic conclusions.⁸⁰

His conclusion initially appears to be correct, i.e., that in a zero-cost world, the outcome of the bargaining process would be the same, the value of cattle vs. the value of crops. Yet in a perceptive essay by Donald Regan, we learn that Coase had no warrant for drawing this conclusion. Coase assumed that the bargaining process will produce the same economic results, but why should it? Regan said that Coase offered no model of how this bargaining process would inevitably produce such identical results *in the absence of specified and enforceable*

cing system works smoothly (strictly this means that the operation of the pricing system is without cost)." Coase, "Social Cost," p. 2.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

80. Wrote Jules L. Coleman: "No term in the philosopher's lexicon is more imprecisely defined than is the economist's term 'transaction costs.' Almost anything counts as a transaction cost. But if we are to count the failure to reach agreement on the division of surplus as necessarily resulting from transaction costs (I have no doubt that sometimes it does), then by 'transaction cost' we must mean literally anything that threatens the efficiency of market exchange. In that case, it could hardly come as a surprise that, in the absence of transaction costs so conceived, market exchange is efficient." Coleman, "Economics and the Law: A Critical Review of the Foundations of the Economic Approach to Law," *Ethics*, 94 (July 1984), p. 666.

property rights. For example, sometimes a bargainer makes economic threats of non-cooperation that must be occasionally enforced in order to persuade the other party that he should take such threats seriously, even if the actual carrying out of the threat may injure the threat-maker in the short run. How could Coase know what the short-run or long-run outcome of a bargaining process will be? He couldn't.⁸¹ This is simply another way of saying that we cannot confidently make social and economic evaluations of real-world events by abstracting economic theory from temporal reality, i.e., by creating a mental world in which there are no costs, no ignorance of present or future opportunities, and no need of threats to achieve our goals.

Coase stated clearly what he thinks the economic problem is. "The economic problem in all cases of harmful effects is how to maximize the value of production."⁸² Furthermore, he was no fool. Later in the essay, he dropped his essay's initial assumption of zero transaction costs, perfect competition, and zero information costs.⁸³ Of course, he admitted, in real life there are transaction costs to settle disputes. For this reason, there is a role for civil government in settling costly disputes.⁸⁴ "All solutions have costs," including solutions imposed by the civil government.⁸⁵ But one underlying presupposition distorts all of Coase's analysis—a presupposition that is all too common (and unstated) in Chicago School economic analysis: the legitimacy of leaving aside issues of right and wrong, of justice, of *equity*. "Of course, if market transactions were costless, all that matters (questions of equity apart) is that the rights of the various parties should be well-defined and the results of legal actions easy to forecast."⁸⁶ Problem: How can we discuss "the rights of the various parties" if we leave aside questions of equity—questions of right and wrong? In short, how can we discuss

81. Donald H. Regan, "The Problem of Social Cost Revisited," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XV (October 1972), pp. 428–32.

82. Coase, "Social Cost," p. 15.

83. There is always the nagging suspicion that once these formal theoretical assumptions are dropped, the whole intellectual performance becomes nothing more than a scholarly puzzle game. Will any of the conclusions concerning the world of the theoretical model still remain accurate, let alone applicable, once we begin to discuss the empirical world? And how can we know for sure? Only through intuition—a non-rational, nonlogical category. See Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, *op. cit.* See also North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, pp. 443–60.

84. Coase, "Social Cost," pp. 15–19.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

“rights” apart from what is *right*?

H. Discounting Moral Outrage to Zero

Questions of equity apart: here is a continuing assumption in the “value-free, morally neutral” economic hypotheses of modern free market economists. They apparently think that questions of equity, being questions of opinion and morality, cannot be dealt with scientifically, nor can economists, as scientists, put a price tag on violations of moral principle. They conveniently ignore the inescapable conclusion of subjectivist economics and methodological individualism, namely, that there is no scientific way to “measure” costs and benefits of any kind, since interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility are impossible for mortals to make. They naively believe that there is a neutral, value-free science of economics, but not of morality. They are correct about the impossibility of neutral morality; they are incorrect about the existence of a value-free economics. Economics deals with economic value, and there is no value-free economic value. The moment an economist raises the question of value—social value, personal value, value of Gross Domestic Product—he has left the hypothetical world of value-free science. Such a world is mythical anyway, but economists have invested so much of their intellectual and professional capital in this myth for so long that they find it difficult to abandon it. If they were to abandon this myth as a sunk cost, their peers would not take them seriously, and they would not get their unreadable and unread essays into professional journals any more.

One of Coase’s academic defenders, Yale Law School’s Guido Calabresi, carried the Coase theorem to distant shores of speculation and social unreality. He said that the Coase theorem demonstrates that “the same allocation of resources will come about regardless of which of two joint cost causers is initially charged with the cost, in other words, regardless of liability rules.”⁸⁷ He repeated Coase’s example of the smoke-producing factory that damages the wheat crop of local farmers.

For example, if we assume that the cost of factory smoke which destroys neighboring farmers’ wheat can be avoided more cheaply by a smoke control device than by growing a smoke resistant wheat, then, even if the loss is left on the farmers they will, under the assumptions

87. Guido Calabresi, “Transaction Costs, Resource Allocation and Liability Rules—A Comment,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, XI (April 1968), p. 67.

made, pay the factory to install the smoke control device. This would, in the short run, result in more factories relative to farmers and lower relative farm output than if the liability rule had been reversed. But if, as a result of this liability rule, farm output is too low relative to factory output those who lose from this 'misallocation' would have every reason to bribe farmers to produce more and factories to produce less. The process would continue until no bargain could improve the allocation of resources.⁸⁸

1. My Response to Calabresi

It sounds so precise, so logical. It also sounds crazy. Here is why it really is crazy. *First*, there are always transaction costs in life. To begin with any other assumption is to begin with utopianism. It makes as much sense as beginning with the assumption of the omniscience of the participants in exchange, which is another familiar assumption in almost all modern economic thought, especially in the professional journals. Without this theoretical ideal of omniscience, economic theory would have no formulas and equations, and professional economists would rather die than give up their formulas and equations. The epistemological problem is this: once the theoretical model is formulated in terms of a hypothetical set of assumptions that cannot exist in the real world, it takes an act of will for the economist to bring the model to bear on real-world problems without importing radical utopianism into his analysis. The debate over the Coase theorem is in my view the classic recent example of an unsuccessful attempt by economists to discard an economic model's utopian initial assumptions, yet still retain it for analytic purposes.⁸⁹ That it should be taken seri-

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 67–68.

89. Calabresi wrote: "Thus, if one assumes rationality, no transaction costs, and no legal impediments to bargaining, *all* misallocations of resources would be fully cured in the market by bargains. Far from being surprising, this statement is tautological, at least if one accepts any of the various classic definitions of misallocation. These ultimately come down to a statement akin to the following: A misallocation exists when there is available a possible reallocation in which all those who would lose from the reallocation could be fully compensated by those who would gain, and, at the end of this compensation process, there would still be some who would be better off than before." *Ibid.*, p. 68. This is one more application of Pareto's optimality theorem, perhaps the most non-optimal and misleading idea ever to get into the literature of economics. It is conceptually a dead end; it is also quite popular. I agree with Lutz and Lux: if it were buried forever, we could place a tombstone over it bearing these words: "Everybody has been made better off and nobody worse off." Mark A. Lutz and Kenneth Lux, *The Challenge of Humanistic Economics* (Menlo Park, California: Benjamin/Cummings, 1979), p. 101. Chapter 5 of their book is delightful: "The New Welfare Econom-

ously by most economists is evidence of the theoretical bankruptcy of modern economics.

Second, the allocation problem and its solutions are not primarily technical and empirical problems but rather ethical and epistemological. Calabresi posed the problem, and then answered it (as Chicago School economists usually do) in terms of the least costly technical solution, not in terms of any visible ethical principle. "The primary implication is that problems of misallocation of resources and externalities are not theoretical but empirical ones. The resource allocation aim is to approximate, both closely and cheaply, the result the market would bring about if bargaining actually were costless."⁹⁰ In other words, the civil judge must to pretend that he can approximate the allocation that a free market would produce, if free markets were costless. This, it should be mentioned, is a denial of the most important of all theorems in economics: scarcity. A civil judge capable of completing this assigned task would be a scarce resource indeed! Of course, he would possess this great advantage: because the initial limiting condition is impossible—zero transaction costs—nobody could produce a model that could prove that his allocation is off the mark.

How would this utopian task best be accomplished? Calabresi combined the false precision of the economist with the real obfuscation of the lawyer in order to produce this problematical conclusion: "This question depends in large part on the relative *cost* of reaching the correct result by each of these means (an empirical problem which probably could be resolved, at least approximately, in most instances), and the relative *chances* of reaching a widely *wrong* result depending on the method used (also an empirical problem but one as to which it is hard to get other than 'guess' type data). The resolution of these two problems and their interplay is *the* problem of accomplishing optimal resource allocations."⁹¹ It surely is!

So, the allocation problem for welfare economics is merely an empirical problem. But this so-called empirical problem cannot be solved scientifically, logically, or technically, for there is no way for the scientific economist to deal with the key epistemological problem: the impossibility of making scientific interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Yet the Chicago School economists babble on in their journals as if more precise measurements could somehow solve what

ics: Value-Free or Value-Less?" Sadly, almost no one has ever heard of this book.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

91. *Idem.*

they admit is *the* allocation problem. It is as if a gunnery sergeant were attempting to hit a target at the edge of the universe by adding just a bit more gunpowder to the load. It is simply a technical problem, you understand. It is as if a sprinter were trying to reduce his time in the 100-meter race to one second flat by shaving a tenth of a second off his time in each preliminary heat. It is an empirical problem, you understand. If he could just get better shoes or a track with better traction!

Calabresi knew all this. He acknowledged that the decision that a judge would reach if the transactions were costless is an "unreachable goal."⁹² He also acknowledged that "the gains which reaching nearer the goal would bring are not usually subject to precise definition or quantification. They are, in fact, largely defined by guesses. As a result, the question of whether a given law is worth its costs (in terms of better resource allocation) is rarely susceptible to empirical proof. . . . It is precisely the province of good government to make guesses as to what laws are likely to be worth their costs. Hopefully it will use what empirical information is available and seek to develop empirical information which is not currently available (how much information is worth *its* costs is also a question, however). But there is no reason to assume that in the absence of conclusive information no government action is better than some action."⁹³

Please get his argument clear in your mind: welfare economics is essentially an empirical science, except that empiricism cannot really solve the issues of welfare economics, so the state will have to decide what is the appropriate allocation of resources, but economists nevertheless hope that the bureaucrats will use empiricism as the means of finding solutions to the specific allocation problems, though only an economically efficient quantity and quality of empiricism should be purchased. In any case, the state's decision will necessarily be based primarily on guesswork—guesswork that cannot be verified or disproved scientifically.

If this explanation resembles a walk through a hall of mirrors, that is because it *is* a hall of mirrors. Yet virtually all essays in welfare economics are little more than guided tours through this conceptual hall of mirrors. The allocation problem of welfare economics cannot be solved by humanist economics, for the economists are overcome by a series of antinomies: the subjective-objective dualism, the individual-society dualism, the problem of fixed law and the endless flux of cir-

92. *Idem.*

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

cumstances, and the overwhelming and unanswered problem of interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. It is all premised on this formula: *dialectics plus intuition equals cost-effective justice*. This formula does not produce anything except additional scholarly articles for professors' vitae—in short, negative social returns.

Third, and far more important for social analysis, there would be a sense of outrage among the victims of the polluting factory if there were no state-enforced liability rules. The initial reaction of one of the victims, if he knows that the civil law does not protect his ownership rights automatically, may be to blow up the factory or murder its owner. The multiplication of acts of violence would be assured under such a non-liability legal order. *The issue of economic efficiency therefore cannot be separated from the issue of judicial equity*. This is what Chicago School economists and legal theorists never show any signs of understanding. When righteous men are thwarted in their just cause by seekers of local "efficiency" who care nothing about the ethics of the solution, there will be serious social consequences. To discuss the efficiency of any given transaction without also discussing the equity of it is to begin to deliver the society into the hands of socialist revolutionaries. Or, to put it in language more familiar to Chicago School economists, *penalizing righteousness in the name of economic efficiency is not a zero-cost decision*.

2. Micro-Efficiency and Macro-Revolution

It is not possible to discover an economically efficient solution to just one transaction. We cannot be efficient in just one pricedure. The question of efficiency is not simply a microeconomic issue; it is also macroeconomic. We cannot discover an efficient solution to any economic problem that does not in some way affect the whole social order. In short, *we cannot do just one thing efficiently*. The system of justice that governs any social order is itself a producer or reducer of both macro-efficiency and micro-efficiency. *Equity cannot be segregated from efficiency*. If our supposedly economically efficient decision at the micro level calls into question the moral integrity of the prevailing legal system, we have not in fact reached an efficient solution to our micro problem. This is why it is astonishing to find economist and Talmudist Aaron Levine siding with Coase: "While the principle of equity is promoted by the selection of appropriate liability rules, economic efficiency is realized when the negative externality is eliminated

by the *least-cost* method. Hence, should it be less costly to avoid crop damage by growing smoke-resistant wheat than by installing a smoke-control device, the former method should be adopted. Whether the farmer or the factory-owner should bear the additional expense of eliminating the negative externality is entirely irrelevant as far as the efficiency question is concerned."⁹⁴ Charge the farmers for the cost of the factory's smoke abatement, and you have violated the principle of justice that governs Exodus 22:5–6. There will eventually be negative repercussions, whether economists believe in God or not.

These economists are anarchists who are brandishing equations rather than bombs. The reductionism of economic logic, even without the equations, has become so great that it has just about eliminated the real-world relevance of the academic discipline of economics, especially its academic journals. That which is obvious escapes these people. They speak of a world of zero transaction costs and zero rules establishing legal liability as if it would not be a world of turmoil, unpredictability, and violence. *It is the establishment of liability rules that makes civil order possible.* Social order is clearly too important a matter to be left in the hands of economists, even Chicago School economists.

I. Rothbard's Critique: Pure Subjectivism

One economist who saw at least some of the implications of Coase's position was Murray Rothbard. Rothbard very early recognized the reality of Robbins' complaint against Pigou, namely, that there can be no scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.⁹⁵ He wrote a critique of the Coase theorem. It underscores some of the points I raised in the original draft of this essay, but before I discovered Rothbard's 1982 essay. He went to the full logical conclusion of the subjectivist school, namely, that *there can be no such thing as social cost*—not simply that economists cannot measure it, but that it does not exist as a category of economics.⁹⁶

94. Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law*, p. 59.

95. Rothbard, "Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics," in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956). (<http://bit.ly/SennholzOFAFE>)

96. The Christian economist must reject this thesis. There are indeed social costs and social benefits. This is one reason why the Bible can and does specify certain social policies. They are beneficial for the covenanted community. But Rothbard's logic is correct: in terms of the presuppositions of modern, subjectivist economics, there is no way to add up subjective costs or benefits. In fact, if the economist were really rigor-

He discussed Coase's example of the farmer whose orchard is burned by sparks emitted by a passing train. His analysis focuses on the farmer's subjective costs that are imposed by the railroad's aggression. Should the state solve this dispute by forcing the railroad to pay the farmer the market value of the lost trees?

There are many problems with this [Coase's] theory. First, income and wealth are important *to the parties involved*, although they might not be to uninvolved economists. It makes a great deal of difference to both of them who has to pay whom. Second, this thesis works only if we deliberately ignore psychological factors. Costs are not only monetary. The farmer might well have an attachment to the orchard far beyond the monetary damage. Therefore, the orchard might be worth far more to him than the \$100,000 in damages. . . .

The love of the farmer for his orchard is part of a larger difficulty for the Coase-Demsetz doctrine: Costs are purely subjective and not measurable in monetary terms. Coase and Demsetz have a proviso in their indifference thesis that all "transaction costs" be zero. If they are not, then they advocate allocating the property rights to whichever route entails minimum social transaction costs. But once we understand that costs are subjective to each individual and therefore unmeasurable, we see that costs cannot be added up. But if all costs, including transaction costs, cannot be added, then there is no such thing as "social transaction costs," and they cannot be compared. . . .

Another serious problem with the Coase-Demsetz approach is that pretending to be value-free, they in reality import the ethical norm of "efficiency," and assert that property rights should be assigned on the basis of such efficiency. But even if the concept of social efficiency were meaningful, they don't answer the questions of why efficiency should be the overriding consideration in establishing legal principles or why externalities should be internalized above all other considerations.⁹⁷

ous, he would admit that this conclusion applies even to the measurement of intrapersonal subjective utilities, since such measurements takes place over time, and therefore we again confront that old nemesis, the index number of satisfaction—an impossibility, given the premises of subjective utility. There has been such an economist: G. L. S. Shackle. He had a disciple: Ludwig Lachmann.

97. Rothbard, "Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution," *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), pp. 58–59. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardPollution>)

1. Rothbard vs. the Idea of Efficiency

In an earlier essay, Rothbard presented perhaps the most comprehensive challenge to the whole economics profession that has ever been written. The reason why I quote him at length is that he is a very clear writer, and he is willing to follow the logic of subjectivist economics to great lengths—not to a biblical reconciliation of objective and subjective value, but at least to the far extremes of subjectivism. In a remarkable essay, “The Myth of Efficiency,” Rothbard rejected not only social costs but the idea of efficiency—an idea second only to the idea of scarcity in the free market economist’s lexicon.

. . . there are several layers of grave fallacy involved in the very concept of efficiency as applied to social institutions or policies: (1) the problem is not only in specifying ends but also in deciding *whose* ends are to be pursued; (2) individual ends are bound to conflict, and therefore any additive concept of social efficiency is meaningless; and (3) even each individual’s actions cannot be assumed to be “efficient”; indeed, they undoubtedly will not be. Hence, efficiency is an erroneous concept even when applied to each individual’s actions directed toward his ends; it is a fortiori a meaningless concept when it includes more than one individual, let alone an entire society.

Let us take a given individual. Since his own ends are clearly given and he acts to pursue them, surely at least *his* actions can be considered efficient? But no, they may not, for in order for him to act efficiently, he would have to possess perfect knowledge—perfect knowledge of the best technology, of future actions and reactions by other people, and of future natural events. But since no one can ever have perfect knowledge of the future, no one’s action can be called “efficient.” We live in a world of uncertainty. Efficiency is therefore a chimera.

Put another way, action is a learning process. As the individual acts to achieve his ends, he learns and becomes more proficient about how to pursue them. But in that case, of course, his actions cannot have been efficient from the start—or even from the end—of his actions, since perfect knowledge is never achieved, and there is always more to learn.

Moreover, the individual’s ends are not *really* given, for there is no reason to assume that they are set in concrete for all time. As the individual learns more about the world, about nature and about other people, his values and goals are bound to change. The individual’s ends will change as he learns from other people; they may also

change out of sheer caprice. But if ends change in the course of an action, the concept of efficiency—which can only be defined as the best combination of means in pursuit of given ends—again becomes meaningless.⁹⁸

Two comments are in order. *First*, we can perceive here the whole corpus of economics steadily slipping through our fingers. If the question of efficiency is meaningless, what have economists been arguing about over the last three centuries? An illusion? The answer must be *yes*, if we hold to a rigorously subjectivist epistemology. Rothbard went on: “Not only is ‘efficiency’ a myth, then, but so too is any concept of social or additive cost, or even an objectively determinable cost for each individual. But if cost is individual, ephemeral, and purely subjective, then it follows that no policy conclusions, including conclusions about law, can be derived from or even make use of such a concept. There can be no valid or meaningful cost-benefit analysis of political or legal decisions or institutions.”⁹⁹ Rothbard demonstrated the intellectual courage to affirm the validity of the implications that Roy Harrod used to frighten Lionel Robbins away from his own denial of the possibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. He denied the possibility of policy-making based on economics.

2. The Problem of Exhaustive Knowledge

Second, we discover in Rothbard’s arguments against the concept of efficiency an argument based on the impossibility of using a concept which is only meaningful in an imaginary changeless world. This is a variation of an antinomy (logical contradiction) of humanism that Cornelius Van Til pointed to in several contexts, namely, that for the anti-theist, it is necessary to know everything exhaustively in order to know anything specifically. The heart of the problem, Van Til said, is that *there is no way for the anti-theist to integrate his timeless model of reality to the ceaseless flux of historical change*.

In contrast to the humanists, Van Til argued, Christians have God’s revelation of Himself and His creation to guide them in making sense of this world, and

it is only by stressing the comprehensiveness and the inexhaustible character of the idea of revelation that the process of learning can

98. Murray N. Rothbard, “Comment: The Myth of Efficiency,” in Mario J. Rizzo (ed.), *Time, Uncertainty, and Disequilibrium*, p. 90.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

have meaning and history have genuine significance. If man is made the final reference point in predication, knowledge cannot get under way, and if it could get under way it could not move forward. That is to say, in all non-Christian forms of epistemology there is first the idea that to be understood a fact must be understood exhaustively. It must be reducible to a part of a system of timeless logic. But man himself and the facts of his experience are subject to change. How is he ever to find within himself an a priori resting point? He himself is on the move. . . . Every effort of man to find one spot that he can exhaustively understand either in the world of fact about him or in the world of experience within, is doomed to failure. If we do not with Calvin presuppose the self-contained God back of the self-conscious act of the knowing mind of man, we are doomed to be lost in an endless and bottomless flux.¹⁰⁰

The economist faces this problem continually; it cannot be overcome logically. Because the Austrian School of economics focuses above all on two fundamental questions—subjective knowledge (e.g., valuations) and purposeful human action (e.g., the market process over time)—Austrian School economists have devoted more space than most economists to discussions of the interrelations between historical change and economic knowledge. Members of the Austrian School understand that the model used to undergird all modern economic theory, namely, the general equilibrium model, hypothesizes a world of perfect foreknowledge, and therefore zero uncertainty, a world in which human action cannot even be conceived.¹⁰¹ As Mario Rizzo put it, “general equilibrium exists in the mind of the economist and not in the real world.”¹⁰² Rothbard agreed: “. . . not only has it never existed, and is not an operational concept, but also it could not conceivably exist. For we cannot really conceive of a world where every person has perfect foresight, and where no data ever change. . . .”¹⁰³

This raises a crucial problem for the economist: *the problem of objective cost*. Buchanan summarized this problem: “One of the central confusions leading to the false objectification of costs has been the extension of the perfect knowledge assumption of competitive equilibri-

100. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, vol. V of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1978), pp. 166–67.

101. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 14:5. For my comments on Mises, see *Sovereignty and Dominion*, p. 449.

102. Mario J. Rizzo, “Uncertainty, Subjectivity, and the Economic Analysis of the Law,” in Rizzo (ed.), *Time, Uncertainty*, p. 82.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 93. Cf. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 98.

um theory to the analysis of nonequilibrium choices, whether made in a market or nonmarket process. Genuine choice is confronted only in a world of uncertainty, and, of course, all economic choices are made in this context.”¹⁰⁴ Take away equilibrium—from men’s thinking, that is; it never has existed in the real world—and you thereby eliminate the economist’s concept of objective cost. Eliminate the concept of objective cost, and you eliminate the possibility of scientifically valid policy-making by economists. Eliminate the concept of objective cost, and you also eliminate that trusty ideological weapon of most free market economists: the idea of the objective efficiency of the free market.

3. *Efficiency for Whose Ends?*

Here is the problem Rothbard was struggling with: How can we discuss the question of efficiency—the coherence of planning and action—in a context of *change*, both with respect to a man’s plans and his environment which he attempts to change and yet also must respond to. Rothbard wanted to believe that he could appeal to what he called “proficiency” in learning, but his critique of efficiency applies equally well to proficiency. Why is human action a learning process? Why does anything we learned a decade, a year, or a moment ago still apply in the now-changed world of the present? Humanists have no answer to this fundamental question, at least none which is consistent with their epistemology of autonomous man.

Rothbard argued correctly that “efficiency only makes sense in regard to people’s ends, and individuals’ ends differ, clash, and conflict. The central question of politics then becomes: *whose* ends shall rule?”¹⁰⁵ He attacked all modern economists, including his mentor Mises, because modern economics is based on *utilitarianism*—“the greatest good for the greatest number”—a system of ethics which assumes that it is possible to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Utilitarianism ultimately asserts that there is a *universal common ethical system* and a *universal hierarchy of values*, for if there weren’t, it would be impossible for social planners to devise and enforce social policies. “For utilitarianism holds that everyone’s ends are *really* the same, and that therefore all social conflict is merely technical and pragmatic, and can be resolved once the appropriate means for the common ends are discovered and adopted. It is the myth of the

104. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 98; cf. pp. 49–50.

105. Rothbard, “Comment,” *Time, Uncertainty*, p. 91.

common universal end that allows economists to believe that they can 'scientifically' and in a supposedly value-free manner prescribe what political policies should be adopted. By taking this alleged common universal end as an unquestioned given, the economist allows himself the delusion that he is not at all a moralist but only a strictly value-free and professional technician."¹⁰⁶

Rothbard gave an example of the problem of social efficiency. What if one group in society wishes to exterminate all members of a rival group? "In these cases of conflicting ends, furthermore, one group's 'efficiency' becomes another group's detriment. So that the advocates of a program—whether of compulsory uniformity or of slaughtering a defined social group—would want their proposals carried out as efficiently as possible; whereas, on the other hand, the oppressed group would hope for as *inefficient* a pursuit of the hated goal as possible. Efficiency, as Rizzo pointed out, can only be meaningful relative to a given goal. But if ends clash, the opposing group will favor maximum *inefficiency* in pursuit of the disliked goal. Efficiency, therefore, can never serve as a utilitarian touchstone for law or public policy."¹⁰⁷

Rothbard's conclusion is extremely important for a study of Christian economics. By systematically destroying the epistemological foundation for efficiency as a concept of subjectivist economics, he was then faced with a major question: What is the proper foundation for social policy? As an anarchist, he did not believe in social policy, meaning a state-enforced policy. He wanted the free market's forces to arbitrate in deciding whose plans become dominant at any point in time. But even these plans cannot legitimately be based on questions of efficiency, as he well knew. He then called for a restructuring of economic thought—a reformation based on *ethics*.

I conclude that we cannot decide on public policy, tort law, rights, or liabilities on the basis of efficiencies or minimizing of costs. But if not costs or efficiency, then what? The answer is that only *ethical principles* can serve as criteria for our decisions. Efficiency can never serve as the basis for ethics; on the contrary, ethics must be the guide and touchstone for any consideration of efficiency. Ethics is the primary. . . .

One group of people will inevitably balk at our conclusion; I

106. *Idem*.

107. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

speaking, of course, of the economists. For in this area economists have been long engaged in what George Stigler, in another context, has called “intellectual imperialism.”¹⁰⁸ Economists will have to get used to the idea that not all of life can be encompassed by our own discipline. A painful lesson no doubt, but compensated by the knowledge that it may be good for our souls to realize our own limits—and, just perhaps, to learn about ethics and about justice.¹⁰⁹

This represents a major break from contemporary economics, even from Austrian School economics. Rothbard was no longer willing to affirm, as Mises the utilitarian affirmed, that “when the superior efficiency of economic freedom could no longer be questioned, social philosophy entered the scene and demolished the ideology of the status system.”¹¹⁰

J. Methodology: Ethics vs. Efficiency

1. Rothbard vs. Mises

Rothbard’s straightforward abandonment of the concept of efficiency, and his call to economists to examine ethics as the source of their policy judgments, are significant intellectual developments. They constitute an admission that there is something dangerously wrong with the economists’ reliance on the rational model of equilibrium. If the idea of economic equilibrium cannot be relied upon to illuminate questions of economic efficiency, then in what way can it safely be used by economists? Rothbard called into question the most important intellectual and technical tool that the economist has at his disposal,

108. Rothbard attributed the phrase to George Stigler, but Kenneth Boulding is better known for its use, by which he means “an attempt on the part of economics to take over all the other social sciences.” Boulding, “Economics As A Moral Science,” *American Economic Review*, LIX (March 1969), p. 8.

109. Rothbard, “Comment,” p. 95. Rothbard was an advocate of a universal ethics based on natural rights. See *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1973] 2006), pp. 4, 19, 31–33, 36, 42, 48–49. (<http://bit.ly/mrfanl>). Not all “Austrians” share his confidence in natural rights and natural law as the basis of a universal ethics, as John Eggar pointed out: “Comment: Efficiency Is Not a Substitute for Ethics,” in Rizzo (ed), *Time, Uncertainty*, p. 119. For critiques of natural law doctrines from a biblical viewpoint, see the essays by John Robbins, Rex Downie, and Archie Jones in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Summer 1978): “Symposium on Politics.”

110. Mises, *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1962), p. 109. (<http://bit.ly/MisesUFES>)

the "ideal type" of the perfectly competitive economy.¹¹¹ Challenge this, and you challenge the epistemological foundation of economic science.

Yet it must be challenged. More than this: *it must be scrapped*. If economics is to be reconstructed in terms of biblical revelation, economists must at last see the implications of Van Til's rejection of metaphysics in favor of ethics. *The search for a timeless rational mental construct as the basis of a science of human action is fruitless*. Even the great Mises was partially sidetracked by this quest. What confidence can we legitimately have in an explanation of market processes that argues that as entrepreneurship becomes successful, it "tends toward" the creation of a world in which human action and human choice is impossible, a world of automatons rather than people? Yet this is precisely the explanatory model used by Mises (and almost all other economists). As he said in *Human Action* concerning his theoretical construct, the Evenly Rotating Economy: "Action is change, and change is the temporal sequence. But in the evenly rotating economy change and succession of events are eliminated. Action is to make choices and to cope with an uncertain future. But in the evenly rotating economy there is no choosing and the future is not uncertain as it does not differ from the present known state. Such a rigid system is not peopled with living men making choices and liable to error; it is a world of soulless unthinking automatons; it is not a human society, it is an ant hill."¹¹² Nevertheless, he stated flatly: "The theorems implied in the notion of the plain state of rest are valid with regard to all transactions without exception."¹¹³ For the modern economist, all human action tends toward a final state in which human beings become omniscient and therefore take on one of the attributes of God.¹¹⁴ The prob-

111. Perhaps the most influential explanation of the use of "ideal types" or hypothetical abstract models in the social sciences was offered by Max Weber. See Weber's book, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, translated and edited by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949), pp. 43–45, 87–105. See also Thomas Burger, *Max Weber's Theory of Concept Formation: History, Laws and Ideal Types* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1976); Rolf E. Rogers, *Max Weber's Ideal Type Theory* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969); Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber* (New York: Pantheon, 1968), pp. 59–70; Raymond Aron, "The Logic of the Social Sciences," in Denis Wrong (ed.), *Max Weber* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 80–89.

112. Mises, *Human Action*, p. 249.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

114. Mises wrote: "No matter whether this thirsting after omniscience can ever be fully gratified or not, man will not cease to strive after it passionately." Mises, *Ultimate Foundation*, p. 120.

lem is, their view of God is that He could not possibly act if He existed. He would be a “rule-following automaton,”¹¹⁵ because “A perfect being would not act.”¹¹⁶

2. Timeless Metaphysical Models

Mises relied on this limiting concept of a hypothetical economy filled with soulless people in order to explain the operations of real world market forces. “This final state of rest is an imaginary construction, not a description of reality. For the final state of rest will never be attained. New disturbing factors will emerge before it will be realized. What makes it necessary to take recourse to this imaginary construction is the fact that the market at every instant is moving toward a final state of rest.”¹¹⁷ He called this movement toward (or “tendency toward”) a final state of rest a *fact*. But this “fact” is precisely what must be demonstrated. It is the ancient pre-Socratic contradiction between Parmenides’ changeless logic and Heraclitus’ ceaseless flow. These two worlds cannot be shown to be connected; they are, however, correlative in the thinking of humanistic scholars.

To explain this intellectual dilemma, Van Til used the delightful analogy of someone who is trying to put together a string of beads, but the string is infinitely long, and the beads have no holes. The imaginary world of timeless logic (Van Til’s “string”), which cannot possibly exist, serves as the *limiting concept* (to use Kant’s terminology for the “noumenal”),¹¹⁸ or *limiting notion* (to use Mises’ term)¹¹⁹ for our understanding of the world which does exist—the world of ceaseless flux (Van Til’s “beads”). This world of timeless logic is, in short, a logical backdrop which cannot ever exist in the real world—and which really cannot even be mentally conceived¹²⁰—which is used to explain the world inhabited by men.

Nevertheless, with absolute confidence (even “apodictic certainty,”

115. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 96.

116. Mises, *Epistemological Problems of Economics*, 3rd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1960] 2003), p. 25. Cf. Mises, *Ultimate Foundations*, p. 3.

117. *Idem*.

118. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s, [1929] 1965), B311, p. 272.

119. *Human Action*, p. 250.

120. How can we imagine a world in which every actor has perfect foreknowledge? Try to explain the meaning of human choice in a world in which everyone knows in advance precisely what the others will inevitably do in the future. We may take such a world on faith; we cannot explain it.

one of Mises' favorite terms), Mises proclaimed that "These insoluble contradictions, however, do not affect the service which this imaginary construction renders. . . ." ¹²¹ Or, even more forcefully: "Even imaginary constructions which are inconceivable, self-contradictory, or unrealizable can render useful, even indispensable services in the comprehension of reality, provided the economist knows how to use them properly." ¹²² That word, "provided," covers a multitude of epistemological sins. So does the word "properly."

Anyone who has ever tried to read an article in such journals as *Econometrica* and *The Review of Economics and Statistics* knows how rarified economic logic can become. ¹²³ It reminds me of what little I know about the formal academic debates carried on by the late medieval scholastics. The number of angels dancing on the point of a needle is a down-to-earth problem compared to stochastic analysis applied to a world of perfect foreknowledge. The *sophistication* of modern econometric analysis is matched ("correlation of at least .9") only by the *irrelevance* of its conclusions.

3. *The Mathematical Games Economists Play*

The non-mathematical economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who was formerly the president of the American Economics Association, exposed the way the game is played, at least in the so-called "general" economics scholarly journals, which are very nearly as unreadable as *Econometrica*. The fact is, hardly anyone in the profession actually reads the highly mathematical essays. "The layman may take comfort from the fact that the most esoteric of this material is not read by other economists or even by the editors who publish it. In the economics profession the editorship of a learned journal not specialized to econo-

121. *Ibid.*, p. 248. He wrote: "The method of imaginary constructions is indispensable for praxeology [the science of human action—G.N.]; it is the only method of praxeological and economic inquiry. It is, to be sure, a method difficult to handle because it can easily result in fallacious syllogisms. It leads along a sharp edge; on both sides yawns the chasm of absurdity and nonsense. Only merciless self-criticism can prevent a man from falling headlong into these abysmal depths." *Ibid.*, p. 237. Question: Self-criticism in terms of what truth, or by what standard? For a critique of this position, see North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, pp. 449–50.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

123. I do not have in mind merely the writings of Nobel Prize-winning economist Gerard Debreu, which do not pretend to deal with the real world. I have in mind investigations into the operation of real-world institutions, such as William S. Landes, "An Economic Analysis of the Courts," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XIV (April 1971), pp. 61–107.

metrics or mathematical statistics is a position of only moderate prestige. It is accepted, moreover, that the editor must have a certain measure of practical judgment. This means that he is usually unable to read the most prestigious contributions which, nonetheless, he must publish. So it is the practice of the editor to associate with himself a mathematical curate who passes on this part of the work and whose word he takes. A certain embarrassed silence covers the arrangement."¹²⁴

From time to time, prestigious economists protest. Paul Samuelson, perhaps the most prestigious of all American economists, 1950–80, and a founder of the highly mathematical “neo-Keynesian synthesis,” remarked in his presidential address to the American Economics Association that the three previous presidents had all criticized the excessive use of mathematical economics, and that the most hostile remarks had elicited a standing ovation of the audience.¹²⁵ But applause is one thing, and a change in habits is another. The professional journals are still mostly exercises in mathematics. Why?

One reason is the success of mathematics in the natural sciences—a correlation which, it should be noted, is so remarkable that there is no rational explanation for it, as a Nobel Prize-winner in physics noted.¹²⁶ There is also the quest for elegance. There is no doubt about it: a mathematical proof appears to be elegant in its precision and sparseness. The problem is, however, that this elegance has a high price attached to it: irrelevance in the real world. *The greater the precision, the greater the irrelevance.* Furthermore, most of the major advances in economic science since World War II have owed little to mathematical economics, including the Coase theorem.¹²⁷

Galbraith offered another explanation: considerations of academic prestige.¹²⁸ Also, mathematical ability is used as a screening device within the profession, as Galbraith observed.¹²⁹ Screening by mathematics was actually recommended as a legitimate professional goal by

124. John Kenneth Galbraith, *Economics Peace and Laughter* (New York: New American Library, 1972), p. 44n.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

126. Eugene P. Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>)

127. Alan Walters, “Frameworks for Thinking About Reality,” *Cato Journal*, VII (Spring–Summer 1987), p. 72.

128. Galbraith, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–42.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Fritz Machlup, an economist who had been greatly influenced early in his career by Mises, and who was never known as a mathematical economist. He argued that proficiency in mathematics can overcome the inferiority complex of the social sciences.¹³⁰ Yet he also called the over-use of mathematics “mathematosis,” and the assumption that science is primarily a matter of measurement, “metromania.”¹³¹

The widespread use of mathematics is more than just a quest for prestige or a graduate school screening device. It is a *religious commitment* to the idea that metaphysics is more important than ethics. The use of mathematics in the development of the theoretical propositions of economics is an elegant, seemingly rigorous assertion of scientific man’s neutrality, his “escape from ethics.” God is to be banished from man’s economic thinking through the use of simultaneous equations.¹³²

130. Machlup recommended requiring higher mathematics for all economics students as a screening device. “Even if some of us think that one can study social sciences without knowing higher mathematics, we should insist on making calculus and mathematical statistics absolute requirements—as a device for keeping away the weakest students.” Machlup, “Are the Social Sciences Really Inferior?” *Southern Economic Journal*, XXVII (Jan. 1961), p. 182. This was Machlup’s presidential address.

131. Machlup, “The Inferiority Complex of the Social Sciences,” in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise*, p. 169.

132. Leon Walras, the Swiss economist, was the first economist to offer a comprehensive analysis of economic theory in terms of simultaneous equations (general equilibrium). He did so in 1871. Writing of the simultaneous discovery of subjective value by Walras, William Stanley Jevons (England), and Carl Menger (Austria), Paul Samuelson wrote: “Jevons, Walras, and Menger each independently arrived at the so-called ‘theory of subjective value.’ And I consider it a lucky bonus for my present thesis that Menger did arrive at his formulation without the use of mathematics. But, in all fairness, I should point out that a recent rereading of the excellent English translation of Menger’s 1871 work convinces me that it is the least important of the three works cited; and that its relative neglect by modern writers was not simply the result of bad luck or scholarly negligence. I should also add that the important revolution of the 1870s had little really to do with either subjective value and utility or with marginalism; rather it consisted of the perfecting of the general relations of supply and demand. It culminated in Walrasian general equilibrium. And we are forced to agree with Schumpeter’s appraisal of Walras as the greatest of theorists—not because he used mathematics, since the methods used are really quite elementary—but because of the key importance of the concept of general equilibrium itself. We may say of Walras what Lagrange ironically said in praise of Newton: ‘Newton was assuredly the man of genius *par excellence*, but we must agree that he was also the luckiest: one finds only once the system of the world to be established!’ And how lucky he was that ‘in his time the system of the world still remained to be discovered.’ Substitute ‘system of equilibrium’ for ‘system of the world’ and Walras for Newton and the equation remains valid.” Samuelson, “Economic Theory and Mathematics—An Appraisal,” *American Economic Review*, XLII (May 1952), p. 61. Samuelson’s appraisal concerning the importance of Walras vs. Menger is exactly the reverse of mine, and so is his appraisal of the

From the very beginning of modern economics in the seventeenth century, the use of hypothetically value-free arguments by economists has been viewed by them as a way to escape questions of right and wrong, of ethics. William Letwin, historian of this early period of economic thought, was correct when he wrote that "there can be no doubt that economic theory owes its present development to the fact that some men, in thinking of economic phenomena, forcefully suspended all judgments of theology, morality, and justice, were willing to consider the economy as nothing more than an intricate mechanism, refraining for the while from asking whether the mechanism worked for good or evil. . . . The economist's view of the world, which the public cannot yet comfortably stomach, was introduced by a remarkable *tour de force*, an intellectual revolution brought off in the seventeenth century."¹³³

The problem with this reliance upon mathematics is that, by removing ethics, it removes responsibility. It removes choice. This has been the complaint of the Austrian School for many decades. Buchanan, more an Austrian than a Chicagoan on this point, argued that the reduction of economics to mathematics is the reduction of man to an automaton. For the Austrian, cost is subjective. "This genuine opportunity cost vanishes once a decision is taken. By relatively sharp contrast with this, in the pure science of economic behavior choice is itself illusory. In the abstract model, the behavior of the actor is predictable by an outside observer. This requires that some criteria be objectively measurable, and this objectivity is supplied when the motivational postulate is plugged into the model."¹³⁴ The scientific ideal of prediction runs head-on into the voluntarist's case for freedom. As Van Til described it, this is the Kantian ideal of science against the Kantian ideal of personality.¹³⁵ It is the mathematical ideal against the freedom ideal. It is the world of science against the world of purpose.¹³⁶ It is Kant's phenomenal against Kant's noumenal.¹³⁷ Ethical dualism

comparative advantages of subjective value theory and marginalism vs. the concept of general equilibrium.

133. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1963] 1965), pp. 158–59.

134. James Buchanan, *What Should Economists Do?* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Press, 1979), p. 46.

135. Van Til, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, vol. 1 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Den Dulk Foundation, 1967), pp. 97–98.

136. Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), p. 81.

137. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

once again raises its ugly, Janus-faced head.¹³⁸

The Christian economist who acknowledges the validity of Van Til's epistemology (and who also understands its application)¹³⁹ sees no hope in the quest either for a rational ethics—an ethics supposedly derived from value-free presuppositions (which are mythical anyway)—or the quest for a reliable hypothetical mental construct which in any way relies on the idea of man, the omniscient. A wholly rational methodological construct along the lines of Parmenides' unchanging logic—with or without mathematics—is apostate man's attempt to find coherence in a changing world apart from God. General equilibrium theory cannot serve as a reliable "limiting concept" that will in turn serve as a basis for judging the performance of a real-world economy of change, responsible decision-making, and uncertainty. But it is understandable that apostate men wish to believe in the potency of such an intellectual tool. As Ludwig Lachmann wrote as early as 1943: "Economists, not unnaturally, prefer to do their fieldwork in a pleasant green valley where the population register is exhaustive and everybody is known to live on either the right or the left side of an equation. Only on rare occasions—and scarcely ever of their own free will—do they embark on excursions into the rough uplands of the World of Change to chart the country and to record the folkways of its savage inhabitants; whence they return with grim tales of horror and frustration."¹⁴⁰

138. Wrote philosopher Richard Kroner: "The mutual dependence of subjectivity and objectivity rests upon the split of man's consciousness into the consciousness of nature, i.e., the objective world and the consciousness of his own self and the realm of persons. It is because of morality and freedom that this split cannot and must not be overcome. The duality of science and action must be preserved at all costs." Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956), p. 75.

139. I do not think that Douglas Vickers, a Keynesian economist who claimed to follow Van Til's epistemology, understood Van Til's writings or their proper application in the discipline of economics. See his book, *A Christian Approach to Economics and the Cultural Tradition* (New York: Exposition Press, 1982), a follow-up to his earlier book, *Economics and Man* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1976). For a critique of Vickers, see Ian Hodge, *Baptized Inflation: A Critique of "Christian" Keynesianism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/Hodge-Bap>)

140. L. M. Lachmann, "The Role of Expectations in Economics as a Social Science," *Economica*, New Series, Vol. X (February 1943), p. 16. Lachmann was the Austrian School economist who was insistent on the danger of relying heavily on general equilibrium models. "Such smooth transition from one equilibrium (long-run or short-run) to another virtually bars not only discussion of the process in which we are interested here, but of all true economic processes. . . . And all too soon we shall also allow ourselves to forget that what is of real economic interest are not the equilibria, even if they exist, which is in any case doubtful, but what happens between them."

K. A Permanent Ethical Model

In contrast to economic models that are supposedly timeless abstractions from the flux of human existence, God offers His law. This ethical law-order was designed by God to govern His creation. His ethical precepts were given to man as a means of subduing reality, including man himself. A perfect man, Jesus Christ, walked the earth and lived His life in terms of this revealed law. God's law is therefore not strictly "otherworldly," in the sense of applying only to a world beyond the human action, nor is it strictly "this-worldly," in the sense of being the product of human speculation. It is supernatural, yet delivered through revelation by God to mankind. It stands as both an ethical foundation of human action and as a tool of dominion. It explains the operations of the world to us, and it gives us power to exercise dominion over the creation.

1. Sanctification: Three Steps

We say that an individual is saved through God's imputation (judicial declaration) of Christ's righteousness to a sinner. This is called *justification*. It is a judicial act, God's declaration of "not guilty" by reason of the penalty which was paid by Jesus Christ. But this judicial act also has moral effects. God simultaneously *sanctifies* a person—sets him apart ethically or morally—in a *definitive* way at the moment of his regeneration. Christ's righteousness is attributed to him as a whole, perfectly. But this definitive sanctification is to serve as the foundation of his *progressive* sanctification over time. He is to conform himself to Christ's perfect humanity through progressively adhering to God's law (through God's grace, of course). Then, on the day of final judgment, redeemed man will attain *final* sanctification—the perfect overcoming of evil. Each redeemed man finally attains the status of perfection which was implicit at the moment of his regeneration. This threefold

Lachmann, "The Market Economy and the Distribution of Wealth," in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise*, p. 186. Lachmann's expressed hope in 1956 has not come true—in fact, the reverse has taken place: "It is very much to be hoped that economists in the future will show themselves less inclined than they have been in the past to look for ready-made, but spurious, coherence, and that they will take a greater interest in the variety of ways in which the human mind in action produces coherence out of an initially incoherent situation" (p. 187). Nevertheless, his Kantian individualism, with the human mind serving as the entrepreneurial provider of coherence to an incoherent world, was as impotent to deal epistemologically with the realities of God's creation as are the defenders of general equilibrium theory.

aspect of moral sanctification—definitive, progressive, and final—is the basis of ethical progress of both the individual and of a civilization.¹⁴¹

What has not been understood by Christian social thinkers in the past, or at least not explicitly discussed, is that this same pattern of personal sanctification—definitive, progressive, and final—also applies to social organizations whose members have covenanted with God. There is the inescapable original covenant between God and Adam and Eve, which all institutions have violated in the original rebellion of Adam. There are also explicitly covenanted institutions that have been established by self-consciously regenerate believers. The most common examples are the family and the historical church. The same analysis applies also to contractual (though not covenantal)¹⁴² institutions such as schools, businesses, and all other institutions that have been explicitly begun in terms of biblical morality. The perfection of Christ is *comprehensive perfection*. The salvation that He offers is *comprehensive salvation*.¹⁴³ It affects every institution. In other words, it affects every area of life in which men have responsibility.

Institutions such as churches and nations are definitively, progressively, and finally *judged* in history. On what basis? On the basis of God's law. Societies usually refuse to adopt an explicit covenant with God, or if they do, they later break it and fail to ask for its restoration. In both cases, they are judged in history. But if some social organizations are judged in history, isn't it equally true that others are blessed by God in history? The obvious example is the historical church. Isn't it blessed in history? Of course. On what basis? On the basis of its covenant with God, which includes permanent standards of ethical performance: biblical law. The church historical has been sanctified by God, i.e., set apart morally for His purposes. Therefore, we should conclude that certain social institutions in history have also been definitively sanctified, progressively sanctified, and will be finally sanctified at the day of judgment. Without this three-fold model of sanctification, how else could we argue for the continuing and guaranteed existence

141. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision Press, [1980] 2010), ch. 2:D:2; ch. 3:C.

142. The presence of a self-maledictory oath under God identifies a covenantal institution: church, state, or family. There is no such oath in a contract.

143. Gary North, "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology of Social Action," in *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer 1981). Reprinted in Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

of the institutional church as a covenantal institution throughout history?

Jesus' perfect fulfilling of the law has effects in history. These effects are personal, but they are also institutional, since institutions, as well as individuals, are under the terms of the covenant. They develop or contract, are blessed or cursed, in terms of the specific terms of God's covenant, which are revealed in biblical law. Institutions, like individuals, cannot "earn" their salvation. They are granted their salvation, or healing, by the grace of God. Men covenant together to perform certain works, and God imputes the moral perfection and moral *accomplishments* of Jesus Christ to these newly covenanted institutions. How else can we explain the success or failure of families? How else can we explain why God visits the iniquity of certain families onto the members of the third and fourth generations (Ex. 20:5)? People make explicit covenants with God or rebel against His implicit covenants, such as the dominion covenant given to all men through our parents, Adam and Eve, and again with our other parents, Noah and his family. They succeed or fail in terms of *covenantal moral standards*. They advance or fall away in time, they grow or decay, *progressively* over time. This process is *ethical* and *covenantal*, not biological.

2. Providential Covenantalism

Here is the biblical solution of the question of social change. Here also is the biblical solution to the dualisms of metaphysical speculation: statics vs. dynamics. Deuteronomy 28, with its covenantal structure of social blessings and cursings, is the *ethical* standard for social science, including economics. This is the biblical alternative to the timeless world of general equilibrium theory, "peopled" with inhuman omniscient beings, passively responding to their nearly infinite number of simultaneous equations. The real world of scarcity, uncertainty, and time is not a world of meaningless flux, but is instead a *providential world*, personally governed by a changeless God who has issued His sovereign decree.¹⁴⁴ The operational link between ethics and social change is *biblical law*. The personal link is Jesus Christ, the perfect man and simultaneously the divine Person who created this world.

Man, created in God's image, has access to knowledge, including economic knowledge, through revelation, both "natural" and "personally revealed." Both kinds of revelation are inescapably personal. Van

144. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 1: "Cosmic Personalism."

Til called this Christian-theistic ethics. Correct knowledge of the way the world works comes only from God's revelation of Himself and His law in the Bible. "The distinction between revealed and natural theology as ordinarily understood readily gives rise to a misunderstanding. It seems to indicate that man, though he is a sinner, can have certain true knowledge of God from nature but that for higher things he requires revelation. This is incorrect. It is true that we should make our theology and our ethics wide enough to include man's moral relationship to the whole universe. But it is not true that any ethical question that deals with man's place in nature can be interpreted rightly without the light of Scripture. For these reasons we prefer the name Christian-theistic ethics."¹⁴⁵

This view of man's knowledge is denied by all humanistic scholarship, and also by most forms of Christian scholarship. Christian apologetics has been corrupted by a Greek concept of autonomous knowledge from the days of the early church fathers.¹⁴⁶ When Christians at last abandon this view of natural revelation, a paradigm shift of monumental proportions will take place that will transform the church, and then will transform the world.

L. Inefficient Humanism

The humanistic economist, like scientists of all kinds, rejects a biblical resolution of the "law-flux" problem. Most economists appeal "scientifically" to mechanistic explanations of human action. There are a few notable exceptions, but they are humanistic John the Baptists, crying in the epistemological wilderness.¹⁴⁷ Far more typical is Stephen Cheung, a rigorously empirical economist, and a rigorously naive technician, who titled his book, *The Myth of Social Cost*. The book is almost as mythical epistemologically as Coase's original essay. He argued that there is no theoretical barrier against making scientifically valid economic settlements where pollution is involved. He admitted that abstracting from transaction costs does lead to problems. "The important conclusion is that the *solution becomes mechanical once the nature and magnitude of transaction costs, together with other con-*

145. Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, p. 16.

146. Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary, 1962).

147. For example, Prof. Kenneth Boulding. See his presidential address to the American Economics Association, "Economics As A Moral Science," *American Economic Review*, LIX (March 1969).

straints, are sufficiently specified."¹⁴⁸ He italicized his words, so he must have regarded them as significant.

What we can and must say, contrary to Professor Cheung, is that *no solution in economics is ever mechanical*, because all solutions involve comparisons of subjective value—*interpersonal* in the same period of time or across time, or *intrapersonal* across time.¹⁴⁹ Admit this, and Galbraith's conclusion is inescapable: "In the name of good scientific method he [the economist] is prevented from saying anything."¹⁵⁰ Thus, the economist is living in an epistemological dream world, a world of hypothetical scientific neutrality, complex formulas, mathematics, and (usually) taxpayer-financed salaries.

Neutrality is the essence of what we might call "economic formalism." Pro-free market economists continually appeal to *efficiency apart from equity*. How can we maximize value, they ask, *questions of equity apart*? This is the perhaps the major persuasion problem that pro-free market defenders have: how to overcome the objections of socialists and other critics of the free market, who point to questions of equity and fairness as the crucial ones, rather than questions of efficiency. Until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the free market's defenders failed to convince the socialists and ethicists that the benefits of economic efficiency are greater than the social and personal costs of competition's "heartlessness," and "economic oppression." Inescapably, the decision as to which is more important—efficiency or morality—is a question of value (subjective and objective), a moral question. But free-market economists have so downplayed moral questions in their "scientific" discussions that they are not skilled competitors in any intellectual marketplace of moral ideas. Unfortunately for them, that is the only marketplace of ideas there is. *Because they have em-*

148. Steven N. S. Cheung, *The Myth of Social Cost* (San Francisco: Cato Institute, [1978] 1980), p. 31.

149. On this point—which utterly devastates all humanistic economics, including Austrian subjectivism—see G. L. S. Shackle, *Time in Economics* (Amsterdam: North Holland Pub. Co., 1958), lecture 1; cf. "The Complex Nature of Time as a Concept in Economics," *Economica Internazionale*, VIII, No. 4. Shackle pushed the logic of pure subjectivism, pure solipsism, and pure autonomy to a preposterous but consistent conclusion: every point in time is unique, incomparable, and autonomous. He called it the "moment-in-being." For an attempted refutation which fails, see Ludwig Lachmann, *Capital, Expectations, and the Market Process* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977), pp. 81–86. Lachmann fell back on the epistemologically hopeless concept of "common experience" to escape Shackle's logic: p. 86. The result of this epistemology is nihilism, or as Lachmann called it, kaleidic.

150. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 150.

phasized efficiency and have excluded or downplayed questions of morality and value, value-free economists have not been efficient competitors in the intellectual marketplace. The religion of economic efficiency turns out to be woefully inefficient.

M. Max Weber's Critique: Dialecticism

Max Weber,¹⁵¹ the great German social scientist (d. 1920), recognized the tension—a permanent tension, he argued—in all humanistic economic systems between what he called “formal rationality” and “substantive rationality.” It is the heart of the debate between capitalism and socialism. This is the question of efficiency vs. ethics.¹⁵² With respect to economic efficiency (formal rationality), Weber argued, capitalism’s critics very often take offense: “All of these [substantively rational, ethical—G.N.] approaches may consider the ‘purely formal’ rationality of calculation in monetary terms as of quite secondary importance or even as fundamentally inimical to their respective ultimate ends, even before anything has been said about the consequences of the specifically modern calculating attitude.”¹⁵³ In short, Weber concluded, “Formal and substantive rationality, no matter by what standard the latter is measured, are always in principle separate things, no

151. Pronounced Mawx Vayber.

152. Weber wrote: “A system of economic activity will be called ‘formally’ rational according to the degree in which the provision for needs, which is essential to every rational economy, is capable of being expressed in numerical, calculable terms, and is so expressed. . . . The concept is thus unambiguous, at least in the sense that expression in money terms yields the highest degree of formal calculability. . . . The concept of ‘substantive rationality,’ on the other hand, is full of ambiguities. It conveys only one element common to all ‘substantive’ analyses: namely, that they do not restrict themselves to note the purely formal and (relatively) unambiguous fact that action is based on ‘goal-oriented’ rational calculation with the technically most adequate available methods, but apply certain criteria of ultimate ends, whether they be ethical, political, utilitarian, hedonistic, feudal (*ständisch*), egalitarian, or whatever, and measure the results of the economic action, however formally ‘rational’ in the sense of correct calculation they may be, against these scales of ‘value rationality’ or ‘substantive goal rationality.’ There is an infinite number of possible value scales for this type of rationality, of which the socialist and communist standards constitute only one group. The latter, although by no means unambiguous in themselves, always involve elements of social justice and equality.” Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), pp. 85–86. This is a translation of Weber’s posthumous *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 4th German edition, 1956.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 86. See a slightly different translation of this passage and the one in the preceding footnote in Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, [1947] 1964), pp. 185–86.

matter that in many (and under certain very artificial assumptions even in all) cases they may coincide empirically.”¹⁵⁴ This dialectical tension is basic to Weber’s sociological analysis.¹⁵⁵

Economists who defend the free market seldom acknowledge the nature of this fundamental debate between the free market’s intellectual defenders and the free market’s critics. Their “value-free” methodology and their methodological individualism blind them to the realities of the debate—a debate over morality, values, and the effects of voluntary economic transactions on society. Free market economists cannot seem to understand those scholars and critics who raise the question of individual morality, let alone social consequences and social values, and who then ignore questions of economic efficiency for the attainment of the economic goals of individuals. The economists dismiss such criticisms as amateurish and irrational; the fact that most people accept the perspective of the critics does not faze the economists, most of whom see this battle as a technical academic debate rather than a life-and-death war for Western civilization. They see all conflicts as in principle resolvable “at the margin, at some price.”

Anti-capitalist critics, of course, really do tend to ignore questions of efficiency, a concept that does have to be considered carefully in any relevant discussion of men’s economic ability to pursue moral goals, both personal and social. Weber recognized this: “Where a planned economy is radically carried out, it must further accept the inevitable reduction in formal, calculatory rationality which would result from the elimination of money and capital accounting. Substantive and formal (in the sense of exact *calculation*) rationality are, it should be stated again, after all largely distinct problems. This fundamental and, in the last analysis, unavoidable element of irrationality in economic systems is one of the important sources of all ‘social’ problems, and above all, of the problems of socialism.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, Weber pointed to a dialectical tension in all humanistic discussions of social systems. Free market economists and capitalism’s critics do not come to grips with each other’s arguments.

The free market economist does have this working for him: socialism really is inefficient. People around the globe want the fruits of free market capitalism, which are only too visible on television and in im-

154. *Ibid.*, p. 108. [*Theory*, p. 212.]

155. Gary North, “Max Weber: Rationalism, Irrationalism, and the Bureaucratic Cage,” in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, pp. 141–46.

156. Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 111. [*Theory*, pp. 214–15.]

ported media, and national leaders are drastically modifying socialist ownership in order to provide access to these fruits. There was a humorous definition in the late 1980s that described the situation in Europe: "Socialist, noun: a capitalist who, for political reasons, cannot admit it publicly." That ended after 1991. Nevertheless, economic pragmatism is not sufficient to serve as the foundation for an entire civilization. Envy still has a large political constituency.¹⁵⁷ There is a desperate need today for a moral and ultimately religious defense of capitalism.¹⁵⁸ It will not suffice to defend the formal efficiency of the free market by means of an appeal to the formal political techniques of democracy. An appeal to formal rationalism from the market to the election booth and back again is little more than the proverbial pair of drunks who lean on each other in order to stay on their feet. Eventually, they tumble together. Weber's dualism between substantive rationalism and formal rationalism is as applicable to democratic theory as to market theory. The spirit of democratic capitalism needs moral content derived from outside market theory and democratic theory.¹⁵⁹ The naked public square needs more than the fig leaf of political and religious pluralism to protect it from the socially destructive elements of revolutionary violence and moral erosion.¹⁶⁰

N. "Weighing Up the Gains and Losses"

Let us return to Coase's arguments—arguments that deliberately ignore the ethical question of private property rights and the losses to those whose rights are violated. "It is all a question of weighing up the gains that would accrue from eliminating these harmful effects against the gains that accrue from allowing them to continue."¹⁶¹ But here is the *real* "problem of social costs": *the economist, as a scientist, has no way to "weigh up" economic gains and losses.*¹⁶²

157. Gonzalo Fernandez de la Mora, *Egalitarian Envy: The Political Foundations of Social Justice*, translated by Antonio T. de Nicholas (New York: Paragon House, 1987), Part B.

158. Paul Johnson, "The moral dilemma confronting capitalism," *Washington Times* (Feb. 21, 1989).

159. Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1982).

160. Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984). Cf. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

161. Coase, "Social Cost," p. 26.

162. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

Coase and all of his followers go on blithely as if all this talk about tallying up costs and benefits—social or individual—had any epistemologically valid theoretical meaning for a methodological individualist, let alone any scientific application. “The problem which we face in dealing with actions which have harmful effects is not simply one of restraining those responsible for them. What has to be decided is whether the gain from preventing the harm is greater than the loss which would be suffered elsewhere as a result of stopping the action which produces the harm.”¹⁶³ *But economists cannot measure social costs and benefits, according to the logic of modern economics, since costs and benefits are exclusively subjective categories.*

Humanistic economists go about their business as if “equilibrium analysis” were anything more than a teaching device, and very often a misleading one.¹⁶⁴ The assumptions of equilibrium analysis deny the possibility of human action in a world in which these equilibrium conditions exist. There is perfect knowledge for market participants in such a universe, and therefore neither profits nor losses. (Yet, even in equilibrium, there would be transaction costs. There are no free lunches in the land of equilibrium; it is just that everyone knows exactly how much everyone’s lunch will cost.) It is a world of automatons, not humans, as Mises wrote. Yet all of the “rigorously scientific” discussions of economic efficiency and optimal distribution are based on the trans-historical model of equilibrium. Peter Lewin has seen this more clearly than most economists have: “The other important assumption underlying the efficiency approach is the absence of significant distortions elsewhere in the economy. The calculation of social costs and benefits is profoundly affected if this assumption is violated. In a world of distortions, where prices are not general equilibrium competitive prices that reflect marginal costs, the imposition of a Pigouvian tax or a liability that would achieve efficiency if distortions were absent may *reduce* efficiency. . . . In more general terms, outside of equilibrium there is no way to know if any move is efficiency-enhancing or not.”¹⁶⁵ He went so far as to say—quite accurately with respect

163. Coase, “Social Cost,” p. 27.

164. Debreau’s mathematical analysis of free market equilibrium won him the 1983 Nobel Prize in economics, but it tells us little about how the real world of supply and demand really works. Gerard Debreau, *Theory of Price: An Axiomatic Analysis of Equilibrium* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1959). This is wood, hay, and stubble.

165. Peter Lewin, “Pollution Externalities: Social Cost and Strict Liability,” *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), pp. 216–17. (<http://bit.ly/LewinPollution>)

to a methodology devoid of the concept of God, revelation, and absolute objective values—that “the notion of efficiency makes little sense outside of general equilibrium.”¹⁶⁶

Coase was unquestionably correct that “In a world in which there are costs of rearranging the rights established by the legal system, the courts, in cases relating to nuisance, are, in effect, making a decision on the economic problem and determining how resources are to be employed.”¹⁶⁷ To the extent that Coase’s article helps judges or others to become more aware of this inescapable reality of economic allocation, it is a useful essay. But how useful is a rarified academic exercise which overlooks that most fundamental of economic costs: *the cost of suffering a violation of justice*? Never forget: he wanted to limit his discussion to costs and benefits, “questions of equity apart.”

O. Optimal Crime and Optimal Punishment

We see the same sort of “add it up” reasoning in a subdivision of law and economics: crime and punishment. Ever since Gary S. Becker’s pioneering article in 1968, University of Chicago-type economists have been analyzing crime and law enforcement in terms of a model that minimizes social losses from crime. This model treats social costs and optimal social solutions as if such concepts had scientific validity in a world of subjectivist economic analysis. Please forgive the following; it was written by an economist.

Optimal policies are defined as those that minimize the social loss from crime. That loss depends upon the net damage to victims; the resource costs of discovering, apprehending, and convicting offenders; and the costs of punishment itself. These components of the loss, in turn, depend upon the number of criminal offenders, the probability of apprehending and convicting offenders, the size and form of punishments, the potential legal incomes of offenders, and several other variables. The optimal supply of criminal offenses—in essence, the amount of crime—is then determined by selecting values for the probability of conviction, the penalty, and other variables determined by society that minimize the social loss from crime. Within this framework, theorems are derived that relate the optimal probability of conviction, the optimal punishments, and the optimal supply of criminal offenses to such factors as the size of the damages from various types of crimes, changes in the overall costs of apprehending and

166. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

167. Coase, “Social Cost,” p. 27.

convicting offenders, and differences in the relative responsiveness of offenders to conviction probabilities and to penalties.¹⁶⁸

This all sounds so scientific, but it is all spurious if economics does not allow the interpersonal comparison of subjective utilities or the aggregating of interpersonal utilities, which it doesn't. But sophisticated, intellectually rigorous analyses such as this certainly do increase the likelihood of academic tenure and personal career advancement—an employment guarantee that some people (myself included) regard as less than socially optimal.¹⁶⁹ Becker won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1992, the year after Coase won it.

The reader should be aware that the practitioners of economics are unhappy with the public's perception of their trade. The economist as a rigorous scientist cannot do without the concept of equilibrium to build his theories, and this concept begins with the presupposition of perfect, zero-cost knowledge. Then he attempts to fit this model onto the error-filled real world, "making appropriate modifications," of course. Problem: *the moment he makes any modification, the model disintegrates*. At best, the equilibrium model is useful as a platform for making intuitive leaps of faith. Intuitive leaps of faith are inescapable aspects of all economic thought, a fact which economists prefer not to discuss.¹⁷⁰

1. Becker's Breakthrough

Becker insisted that his approach to crime and punishment does not "assume perfect knowledge, lightning-fast calculation, or any of the other caricatures of economic theory."¹⁷¹ He was self-deceived; this is exactly what all discussions of socially optimum decision-making must assume. This attempted caricature is in fact the heart, mind, and soul of modern economics as an academic discipline. Without it, there could be no mathematics or equations in economic analysis, and

168. William M. Landes, in Gary S. Becker and William M. Landes (eds.), *Essays in the Economics of Crime and Punishment* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1974), p. xiv. Each of the five authors who contributed the book's six essays was at the time a professor at the University of Chicago.

169. Cf. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Permanent Professors: A Modest Proposal," *Public Interest* (Fall 1965); reprinted in Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1968), ch. 12.

170. North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ch. 5.

171. Gary S. Becker, "Crime and Punishment: an Economic Approach" (1968), in *Essays in the Economics of Crime and Punishment*, p. 9.

without mathematics, one rarely gets into print in the prestigious scholarly economics journals.¹⁷² Certainly, Becker's essay is made nearly unreadable by page after page of pseudo-scientific equations, as are most of his other essays.

Becker insisted that "This essay concentrates almost entirely on determining optimal policies to combat illegal behavior and pays little attention to actual policies."¹⁷³ In this regard, the essay is representative of virtually the whole field of law and economics. Becker preferred equations and equilibrium to the concept of personal responsibility when it came to suggesting what should be done about crime. He and his colleagues have refused to honor Baird's warning: "Since all costs and benefits are subjective, no government can accurately identify, much less establish, the optimum quantity of anything."¹⁷⁴ Admit this, and 90% of what gets published in the professional academic journals would have to be rejected by the editors. Where, under such academically sub-optimal circumstances, would a career economist publish an essay such as Isaac Ehrlich's representative example, "Optimal Participation in Illegitimate Market Activities: A One-Period Uncertainty Model"?¹⁷⁵

Biblical law is the foundation of optimal social and economic policies—the *only* foundation that honors God and can therefore produce long-term benefits: covenantal blessings. This is why we need to adhere to the Bible's system of penalties to be imposed by the civil government; without this, we are flying blind. Otherwise, we will fly as blind as Gary Becker did when he wrote: "A wise use of fines requires knowledge of marginal gains and harm and of marginal apprehension and conviction costs; admittedly, such knowledge is not easily attained."¹⁷⁶ *Not easily attained!* In terms of the logic of subjective economics, such knowledge cannot be attained at all. *We cannot make scientific interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility or disutility.* Professional economists may shudder at the thought of restructuring civil sanctions to make civil law conform more closely to biblical law, but they have nothing to offer in its place except endless self-deception

172. Galbraith, *Economics Peace and Laughter*, ch. 2.

173. *Essays in the Economics of Crime and Punishment*, p. 44.

174. Charles W. Baird, "The Philosophy and Ideology of Pollution Regulation," *Cato Journal*, II (Spring 1982), p. 303.

175. Actually, this was only a subsection in his influential and equation-filled article, "Participation in Illegitimate Activities: An Economic Analysis," in *Essays in the Economics of Crime and Punishment*.

176. Becker, in *ibid.*, p. 28.

regarding the scientific possibility of discovering socially optimal levels of crime and punishment.¹⁷⁷

That Becker's essay does not even consider the possibility of restitution payments by criminals to their victims, but instead focuses on the social benefits of fines paid to the state, indicates how far from common sense these scientific economists are. What mainly disturbed Becker was that with imprisonment, "some of the payment 'by' offenders would not be received by the rest of society, and a net social loss would result."¹⁷⁸ He was so concerned with questions of "net social loss" that he neglected the crucial question of the net *personal* loss suffered by the victim.¹⁷⁹ The word "restitution" does not appear in the index of *Essays in the Economics of Crime and Punishment*. (The book has approximately 170 pages of equations or parts of equations in its 273 pages, with most of the remainder devoted to charts, graphs, statistical regression analysis, brief bibliographies, and the five and a half page index.)¹⁸⁰ Two decades later, Becker was still humming the same old tune: "deterrence, not vengeance," fines, not restitution to victims. Yet he still had discovered no objective answer to the problem he raised: making the punishment fit the crime: "Obviously, it is hard to estimate damages for many company crimes and even harder to determine the probability of conviction."¹⁸¹ Hard? By the standards of subjective value theory, it is theoretically impossible.

Buchanan was correct in his discussion of the economics of crime: "... any costs which the economist may objectify need bear little relation to those costs which serve as actual obstacles to decisions." He was not correct in his next sentence: "Recognition of this fact need not

177. For example, Nobel Prize-winning University of Chicago economist George Stigler's essay, "The Optimum Enforcement of Laws," *ibid*, pp. 55–67.

178. Becker, pp. 24–25.

179. He said that criminal law should deal only with crimes in which victims cannot be compensated. "Thus an action would be 'criminal' precisely because it results in uncompensated 'harm' to others." *Ibid.*, p. 33. I have some questions. First, if someone can serve a prison term or pay a fine to the state, why can't he compensate victims instead? Second, why did Becker refuse to discuss the overwhelming majority of crimes in which there are identifiable victims, preferring instead to fill up pages with equations? Was he conveniently defining away the problem of crime and punishment for the vast majority of crimes? Third, why did he feel it necessary to put quotation marks around *criminal* and *harm*? Is it because such language smacks too much of objective moral norms?

180. For an equally arcane academic treatment, see David J. Pyle, *The Economics of Crime and Law Enforcement* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983).

181. Gary Becker, "Make the Punishment Fit the Corporate Crime," *Business Week* (March 13, 1989).

destroy the usefulness of the economic analysis."¹⁸² Without a scientifically verifiable link between subjective decision-making and objective fines, the economist cannot make a coherent case for any outcome other than judicial chaos. (It should not be surprising that Becker argued that the free market would bring economic order even if all men's decisions were irrational.)¹⁸³ The economist needs a ruler, as Thirlby so accurately identified it. In fact, he capitalized it.¹⁸⁴ The economist does indeed need a Ruler, an "omniscient observer who can read all preference functions," as Buchanan so professionally described Him.¹⁸⁵ But economists have denied His relevance from the beginning of the profession; economics was the first scientific guild to do so. It was this self-conscious separation of economics from both theology and morality that economist William Letwin praised as "the greatest accomplishment of the seventeenth century."¹⁸⁶ (It apparently overshadowed the less significant work of Director of the Mint, Mr. Newton.)

This digression has been necessary in order to demonstrate what the academic field of economics and law is really all about. It is all about making scholarly reputations by making preposterous assumptions. The more preposterous the assumptions, the more scholarly the reputation. And it is all done in the name of optimality: "The main contribution of this essay, as I see it, is to demonstrate that optimal policies to combat illegal behavior are part of an optimal allocation of resources."¹⁸⁷

2. *The Social Benefits of Criminal Behavior*

A unique component of the Becker thesis on criminal behavior is his thesis that the concern of society in prohibiting criminal behavior ought to be the reduction of *net* social cost. This is a very important qualification. In calculating the net cost to society of any criminal act, *Becker insisted that we must count as a positive benefit the gains made by the criminal by committing the crime.* "The net cost or damage to

182. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 93.

183. Gary Becker, "Irrational Behavior and Economic Theory," *Journal of Political Economy*, LXX (Feb. 1962). For my critique of his position, as well as Israel Kirzner's very different critique, see North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, pp. 443–50.

184. Thirlby, "The Ruler," *South African Journal of Economics*, XIV (Dec. 1946), reprinted in *L.S.E. Essays on Cost*.

185. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice*, p. 95.

186. Letwin, *Origins of Scientific Economics*, p. 159.

187. Becker, "Crime and Punishment," *op. cit.*, p. 45.

society is simply the difference between the harm and gain," he wrote.¹⁸⁸ How could he say this? Because of his thesis—the one which undergirds this whole subdivision of economics—that *criminal behavior is no different from any other profit-seeking behavior*. Ethics has no role to play in distinguishing crime from other profit-seeking activities. "The approach taken here follows the economists' usual analysis of choice and assumes that a person commits an offense if the expected utility to him exceeds the utility he could get by using his time and other resources at other activities. Some persons become 'criminals,' therefore, not because their basic motivation differs from that of other persons, but because their benefits and costs differ."¹⁸⁹

Notice, first, that he put the word *criminals* in quotation marks, indicating his fear of making an ethical judgment in a scholarly journal. Second, he hesitated to follow what economists sometimes call the pure logic of choice.¹⁹⁰ He said that *some* persons become criminals "because their benefits and costs differ" from law-abiding persons. Why not use cost-benefit analysis to explain the actions of *all* criminals? Why limit it to only *some*? Why bother to distinguish the non-economic motives of criminals from those of non-criminals? The logic of his argument is that non-economic motives and personal tastes are irrelevant for economic analysis; only costs and benefits are relevant for making predictions regarding people's economic behavior.¹⁹¹ Why not follow the logic of the argument? Why not conclude in print that there

188. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

189. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

190. F. A. Hayek, "Economics and Knowledge," *Economica*, IV (1937), reprinted in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 35, 39, 46–47. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>). See also Richard Fuerle, *The Pure Logic of Choice* (New York: Vantage, 1986).

191. This is how professional economists assess Becker's argument. Wrote Paul H. Rubin: "Becker essentially argued that criminals are about like anyone else—that is, they rationally maximize their own self-interest (utility) subject to the constraints (prices, incomes) that they face in the marketplace and elsewhere. Thus the decision to become a criminal is in principle no different from the decision to become a bricklayer or a carpenter, or, indeed, an economist. The individual considers the net costs and benefits of each alternative and makes his decision on this basis. If we then want to explain changes in criminal behavior over time or space, we examine changes in these constraints. The basic assumption in this type of research is that tastes are constant and that changes in behavior can be explained by changes in prices." But we all know that tastes do change. This is economically irrelevant, say the economists. Why? Because economics cannot yet deal with changes in taste. "Tastes are assumed to be constant because we have absolutely no theory of changes in tastes. . . ." Rubin, "The Economics of Crime," in Ralph Andreano and John J. Siegfried (eds.), *The Economics of Crime* (New York: Wiley, 1980), p. 15.

is no theoretically valid economic difference between profit-seeking activities and criminal acts; there are only differences in net social utility? But he did not go this far. It is almost as if some last remaining trace of common sense and moral values kept Becker from pursuing the logic of his position.

His followers have not been so reticent: "An individual decision to commit a crime (or not to commit a crime) is simply an application of the economist's theory of choice. If the benefits of the illegal action exceed the costs, the crime is committed, and it is not if costs exceed benefits. Offenders are not pictured as 'sick' or 'irrational,' but merely as engaging in activities that yield the most satisfaction, given their available alternatives."¹⁹² Then what of the warning of God in Proverbs? "All they that hate me love death" (8:36b). Of course: just redefine suicidal criminal behavior in terms of the criminal's subjective preference for death, assume the existence of subjective ordinal (or even cardinal) utility in his subjective value preference scale, and economic analysis still holds! Common sense disappears, but economic analysis, like the smile of the cheshire cat, remains. (In all honesty, this kind of economic analysis goes back to the mid-nineteenth century. Jeremy Bentham used a very similar approach based on net pleasure or pain. Mercifully, the academic world had not yet discovered either econometrics or multivariate regression analysis, so his essays were literate and coherent.)

Becker was too timid to pursue his remarkable thesis very far. Let me show you where it leads. What about the net social cost or net social benefit of murder? He wrote that "the cost of murder is measured by the loss of earnings of victims and excludes, among other things, the value placed by society on life itself. . . ."¹⁹³ But this was insufficiently rigorous by the standards of Chicago School economics. He forgot that the victim's ability to earn a living also involves costs. The producer must eat, use public facilities of various kinds, and be a life-long absorber of resources. So, what Becker really meant to say is that the cost of murder is the net loss—discounted by the prevailing rate of long-term interest, of course¹⁹⁴—of the late victim's lifetime earning potential, *minus* net lifetime expenditures (also discounted). This raises a key question in our era of legalized abortion, which may be a

192. Morgan O. Reynolds, "The Economics of Criminal Activity" (1973), reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 34.

193. Becker, "Crime and Punishment," p. 9.

194. See Posner's discussion: *Economic Analysis of Law*, pp. 170-81.

preliminary to legalized euthanasia (as it has been in the Netherlands): *What if the dead victim had been sick, dying, mentally retarded, or in some other way is a net absorber of society's scarce economic resources?* Must we not conclude that the murderer has in fact increased the net wealth of society? Remember Becker's rule: "society's" estimation of net social costs or benefits "excludes, among other things, the value placed by society on life itself." On what economic grounds could a legislator oppose the concept of selective murder, with criminal indictments to be handed down in specific cases only after a retrospective evaluation (by some committee or other) of net costs and benefits?¹⁹⁵ Who is to say? After all, as he says, "Reasonable men will often differ on the amount of damages or benefits caused by different activities."¹⁹⁶

If all this begins to sound like the work of a madman, this is only because it is the work of a technically skilled University of Chicago economist who follows the logic of his position.¹⁹⁷ Bear in mind that Becker's essay on crime is regarded by his peers as a classic in the field, one comparable to (and written with the same presuppositions as) Coase's essay on social cost. One European economist has called Becker's work truly revolutionary. Even more: ". . . Gary Becker is classed among the greatest living American economists."¹⁹⁸

195. Becker also failed to mention the value of life to the late victim, which seems a bit odd, given the fact that Becker also pioneered a subdivision in the economics profession called human capital: Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1964). Fortunately, Richard Posner attempted to rectify this gaping hole in Becker's analysis. He did try to make an objective estimation of the economic value of life to the victim, which he concluded is nearly infinite. He used a hypothetical example of rising economic payment that someone would demand to induce him to get involved in death-producing activities: the more likely death becomes, the higher the pay demanded. If death is sure, the price demanded will approach infinity. (Why, then, do men volunteer for suicide missions in wartime?) This was his surrogate for making a subjective posthumous estimation of life's monetary value to the late victim: Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, pp. 182–86. He drew no important conclusions from this analysis, however, and did not include it in his book's index under "death," for which there is no entry, or under the entries for "murder."

196. Becker, "Crime and Punishment," p. 45.

197. For a brief, intelligent, and methodologically rigorous response to Becker, see G. Warren Nutter, "On Economism," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XXII (October 1979), pp. 263–68. It was in response to Becker's methodology that I wrote my tongue-in-cheek piece, "A Note on the Opportunity Cost of Marriage," *Journal of Political Economy* (April 1968), in which I concluded that male Ph.D.-holding scholars cannot afford to marry women who are not high school drop-outs. Astoundingly, George Stigler (seemingly straight-faced) replied in a subsequent issue that I had not dealt with Adam Smith accurately.

198. Henri Lepage, *Tomorrow, Capitalism: The Economics of Economic Freedom* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, [1978] 1982), p. 161. The chapter is titled, "The Gary

3. *Pin-Stickers and Their Victims*

Becker returned to the age-old question of the pin-sticker and his victim.¹⁹⁹ If a person enjoys sticking pins into other people, and if other people resent this, what should society do? Should we try to construct a measuring device to record the joy of the pin-sticker and then compare it to the pain of his victim? Should society base the decision of whether to identify this act as a crime in terms of the pin-sticker's pleasure minus his victim's pain—"net social utility"? If so, what do we do about the masochist who enjoys being stuck? (Yes, I know: sticking him is a victimless crime, and therefore in theory outside economic policy analysis.)

The biblical view of man rests on the presupposition that there are two kinds of people: covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers. There is also such a thing as common grace.²⁰⁰ When God removes it, people become more consistent with their own ethical presuppositions. Increasing numbers of covenant-breakers turn to crime as an expression of their ethical rebellion against God. The economics of crime and punishment no doubt can be discussed *in part* in terms of criminals' expected costs and benefits, but equally important, if not more important, is the psychological link between crime and certain forms of addiction, especially the addiction to illicit thrills and danger. People's tastes are not stable, contrary to Chicago School economists; people can and do develop an addiction to criminal behavior. They need ever-increasing doses of crime to satisfy their habit. Thus, to analyze all economic actors in terms of the pure logic of expected profit and loss is a fundamental error of modern economic analysis.

Becker disagreed. He wanted to consider only people's perceived costs and benefits, risks and rewards, *net*. The logic of Becker's position seems to infer the right of a criminal to inflict damage as heavy as murder, just so long as he can demonstrate in court through cost-benefit analysis that the particular murder produced net social utility. Coase, writing eight years earlier, was more judicious in his conclusions. He wanted only to assert the right *at some price* of an individual to inflict less permanent forms of damage than murder.

Becker Revolution."

199. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, p. 66.

200. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

P. The “Right to Inflict Damage”

Coase considered an example taken from Pigou’s *Economics of Welfare*. Suppose that it would pay a railroad firm to run a train faster than normal, thereby throwing off more sparks. (The example applies to railroads before the era of diesel engines, but it is still valid as an example.) Suppose also that the sparks set a fire that burns a farmer’s crop. Pigou said that the railroad company should reimburse the farmer for the loss of his crops by paying him the crop’s market value. This, it should be pointed out, is also what Exodus 22:6 says.

1. Net Social Benefits

Coase denied Pigou’s conclusion. “The conclusion that it is desirable that the railway should be made liable for the damage it causes is wrong.”²⁰¹ Why? Because *the economic gains to the total economy*, as revealed by the value of the crops lost vs. the cost of installing spark-arresters on the engine, or the losses to the railroad company if the train was not run at all, *might be greater by allowing the train to emit sparks*. (Might be, might be, might be: How can anyone *know*, given the intellectual tools of modern, subjectivist economics?) The judge should consider the monetary value of the burned crops in relation to the cost of installing a spark-arrester or the monetary losses to the company of running the train more slowly, and then make a decision as to what each party owes the other. In other words, he must consider the *value of total production*. “This question can be resolved by considering what would happen to the value of total production if it were decided to exempt the railway from liability from fire-damage. . . .”²⁰² Coase argued that it might be better for society in general if the farmer’s property rights are ignored, leaving him free to pay the railroad company sufficient money to install the spark-arrester. After all, the value of the crop may be greater than the cost of the spark-arrester.²⁰³

201. Coase, “Social Cost,” p. 32.

202. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

203. Clearly, the damage inflicted on the crops planted close to the tracks by numerous farmers could be high. The costs would be high to organize the farmers together in order to contribute money to finance the installation of the spark arrester. Each farmer would tend to wait for the others to put up the money. Each would prefer to become a “free rider” in the transaction: paying nothing, but benefitting from the spark arrester. The payment to the railroad firm probably would not be made apart from intervention by the civil government to compel all farmers who are benefitted by

What if the farmer had worked for years to build up the soil or build his family's dream home? This labor was unquestionably a manifestation of the dominion covenant. Perhaps he dimly understood that his labor to build the house was in a unique way a moral act under God, meaning his personal conformity to God's injunction to subdue the earth to His glory. His home is not simply a manifestation of his technical competence as a builder; it may also be a manifestation of his self-conscious fulfillment of the dominion covenant. In other words, this house may be in a very real sense a holy thing—a thing set apart for God by the very act of constructing it. This is why people are sometimes “irrationally” committed to a piece of ground. A spark-emitting train is threatening his home's existence, meaning the work of his hands, meaning his dream or vision. Is he entitled to no compensation? Isn't the railway *always* liable for damages? Furthermore, if the court decides that the railway is liable—and Coase denied that the court should automatically decide that it is—is the man's shattered dream worth only monetary compensation for the market value of his crops? Maybe he resents the fact that the railway is reducing to mere dollars his right to safety from fire, and market-determined dollars at that? Shouldn't the engines be fitted with a spark retarder, by law? After all, this is not an accidental, occasional incident; this is a daily threat of fire that is a statistically probable event because of the technology involved in running the trains. In short, what about the *psychic costs* to the victim? Coase's analysis completely ignores this fundamental issue.²⁰⁴

2. “Coase, Get Your Cattle Off My Land!”

What about the farmer who sees the cattleman move in next door? What about the cattleman who sees the sheepherder move in next door to him? If the other man's animals come roaming into his garden or into his pasture, isn't the victim entitled to compensation? What if the “accident” of wandering animals is not an accident, but a regular way of doing business? Shouldn't the offender be required to put a fence around the wandering beasts? Why should the injured party be required by the court to share the costs of fencing? *Are the victim's*

the spark arrester to pay their proportional share. The civil government eventually must decide who pays whom: the railroad firm paying damages to the farmers, or the farmers paying “protection money” to the railroad company.

204. This is Walter Block's main criticism: “Coase and Demsetz on Private Property Rights,” *op. cit.*

property rights of undisturbed ownership not to receive predictable compensation? What I am arguing, in short, is that the victimized property owner has the right to announce: "Coase, get your cattle off my land!"

My land: there is greater value to me in my right to enjoy my land undisturbed than Coase's reductionist economic analysis indicates. To count the market value of the crops that the cattle trampled, and then to compare that value to society with the meat that someone will put on his table, is *to reduce the value of a man's right of undisturbed ownership to zero*. Coase's concept of social costs ignores one of the most valuable assets offered to men by a free market social order: *the right of the owner to determine who will and who will not have legal access to his property, and on what terms*. To think that monetary compensation for damaged goods at a market price is all that matters to an owner is ridiculous. Rothbard is correct, and I cite his statement again: "There are many problems with this theory. First, income and wealth are important *to the parties involved*, although they might not be to uninvolved economists. It makes a great deal of difference to both of them who has to pay whom. Second, this thesis works only if we deliberately ignore psychological factors. Costs are not only monetary. The farmer might well have an attachment to the orchard far beyond monetary damage. . . . But then the supposed indifference totally breaks down."²⁰⁵

Even more important, there must also be compensation for the loss of security that is necessarily involved in every willful violation of another man's property rights. The Bible says plainly that restitution shall be paid with "the best" of the violator's field, "and of the best of his own vineyard." To argue, as Coase did, that as far as society is concerned, it is economically irrelevant to the total economic value accruing to society whether the victim (farmer) builds the fence at his expense or the cattleman (violation) does at his expense is to place zero price on the rights of ownership. *When free market economists place zero economic value on the rights of ownership, they have given away the case for the free market*. This is precisely what Coase and the many academic "economics of law" specialists have done. They have preferred the illusion of value-free economics to the ideal of private property—our legal right to exclude others from using our property.

205. Rothbard, "Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution," *op. cit.*, p. 58.

3. *Theft as a Factor of Production*

Coase explicitly argued that the *ability to cause economic injury* is a *factor of production*. Therefore, the state's decision to deny a person the *right* to exercise this ability involves a social cost: the loss of a factor of production. "If factors of production are thought of as rights, it becomes easier to understand that the right to do something which has a harmful effect (such as the creation of smoke, noise, smells, etc.) is also a factor of production. Just as we may use a piece of land in such a way as to prevent someone else from crossing it, or parking his car, or building his house upon it, so we may use it in such a way as to deny him a view or quiet or unpolluted air. The cost of exercising a right (of using a factor of production) is always the loss which is suffered elsewhere in consequence of the exercise of that right—the inability to cross land, to park a car, to build a house, to enjoy a view, to have peace and quiet or to breathe clean air."²⁰⁶ Coase simply ignored the crucial free market concept that *legal right to exclude others* from invading your property is *a far more crucial factor of production*—the factor of personal confidence in the honesty and reliability of the civil government. Without this confidence, the free market is steadily reduced to little more than black market operations.

Coase wanted us to "have regard for the total effect" of such uses of our so-called capital, namely, the right to pollute the environment.²⁰⁷ But "total costs" are precisely what he has deliberately chosen to ignore: *the right to determine whether or not another person can invade my privacy, wake me up at 2:00 A.M., set fire to my crops, send his cattle to eat in my fields, or, ultimately, sell tickets to people to peek through my window at 3:00 A.M.* The economic value of my right to say "Keep your cattle off my land!"—and my right to demand restitution for the violation of this right—is simply ignored by Coase and all those economists who take seriously his economic analysis of social costs. *He offered economic analysis of the right to inflict damage, but he ignores any economic analysis of the right to deny the damage-producer his so-called right.* More than this: *Coase explicitly denied the right of property owners to have their property defended by predictable law, for he said that any consideration of the right to demand compensation depends on "circumstances."*²⁰⁸ If the right of collecting compensation is

206. Coase, "Social Cost," p. 44.

207. *Idem*.

208. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

not predictable, the right of private property loses its status as a right.

By elevating the "right to inflict damage" to the same level as the right to demand compensation for a violation of a property right, Coase effectively compromised the latter right by making a potential right out of the ability to inflict damage. *The application of Coase's argument would destroy property rights by attempting to extend the status of property right to a man's ability to damage his neighbor's property.* He did not discuss anywhere in the essay *the economic costs to society of compromising the injured party's right to demand and receive by law economic restitution from the offending party.* He did not even seem to understand the implications of his own argument. Most astounding of all, his arguments have been taken seriously by economists who see themselves as defenders of the free market order. Economic reductionism is a kind of occupational affliction for the Chicago School economists.

4. Transaction Costs at the O.K. Corral

Coase's academic colleague at the University of Chicago, Nobel Prize-winning economist George Stigler, extended the Coase theorem. Coase argued that, in the absence of transaction costs, different initial assignments of property rights will lead to the same economic output. In his authoritative textbook, *The Theory of Price*, Stigler took this thesis one step further. He concluded that, if there is perfect competition, meaning perfect foreknowledge, market transactions between the polluter and his victim will lead to the production of exactly the same economic output as would have been produced if one firm had owned both the source of pollution and its sink.²⁰⁹ In other words, the rights of private ownership—the legal right to exclude—and the sense of outrage at an invasion of one's property are economically irrelevant. In a world of perfect competition, amazing things happen. The economic significance of the theft involved in polluting a neighbor's environment is zero.²¹⁰

All we need is to reduce transaction costs. That should not be too difficult. The polluter can pick up a gun, walk over to his neighbor, put the gun to his head, and force him to deed over his property. Presto: the "internalization" of pollution costs! It will not alter economic out-

209. George Stigler, *The Theory of Price*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 113.

210. In complete agreement was Warren G. Nutter, "The Coase Theorem on Social Cost: A Footnote," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XI (Oct. 1968).

put one little bit, Stigler assured us. This surely is a cost-effective way to reduce transaction costs. Unless, of course, one's neighbor also has a gun. That, of course, is the whole point.

What possible objection can a self-proclaimed ethically neutral economist offer to this sort of wealth-transfer? This is the question Leff asked in a perceptive critique of the "economics and law" approach to social theory:

Let us say I am naturally superior to a rich man in taking things, either by my own strength or by organizing aggregations of others (call them governments) to do my will. I am not much of a trader, but I'm one hell of a grabber. That's just the way things are. Is there any way to criticize my activities except from the standpoint of taste (or some other normative proposition)? It would be inefficient to allow violent acquisitions? How can one know that? All of Posner's arguments about the efficiency-inducing effects of private property assume only that someone has the right to use and exclude, not that it be any particular person. If force, organized or not, were admissible as a method of acquisition there is no reason to assume that eventual equilibrium would not be reached, albeit in different hands than it presently rests. After all, as Posner would be the first to tell you, "force" is just an expenditure. If a man is "willing" to pay that price, and the other party is "unwilling" to pay the price of successful counterforce, we have an "efficient" solution.²¹¹

One Nobel Prize-winning economist who did not ignore the transaction costs of an economic approach to law that elevates efficiency over all other considerations was James Buchanan. In a perceptive law review article, he warned the practitioners of both economics and law that the great benefit which the free market offers society is not its efficiency or its maximizing of economic value. What the free market offers is its support for "institutional alternatives which generate less social tension, less evasion of postulated standards of conduct, more general adherence to legal norms."²¹² Yet economists and legal theorists argue that free market economic processes that exist only in an imaginary zero-cost world can and do offer us a cost-effective real-world model: just substitute voluntary market exchanges for enforcement by the state of legal titles. Those who argue this way are not only utopians, they are intellectual arsonists.²¹³ This is the mid-1960s social

211. Leff, "Economic Analysis of Law: Some Realism About Nominalism," *Virginia Law Review* (1974), op. cit., p. 454.

212. Buchanan, "Good Economics-Bad Law," *ibid.*, p. 486.

213. Dahlman was overstating the case against traditional welfare economics when

philosophy of “Burn, baby, burn!” applied not only to the adjacent field but to society itself.

5. The Social Costs of the Coase Theorem

There may be an essay by a professional economist that has inflicted more damage on the case for economic freedom than Coase’s “Problem of Social Cost.” There may be a scholarly essay that has polluted the moral environment of market choice more than Coase’s. I cannot imagine what that essay might be. (Becker’s 1968 essay on “Crime and Punishment: an Economic Approach” comes close, but it is really only an application of Coase’s approach to law.) Coase can always argue that his right to inflict such moral damage is merely a factor of academic production. No doubt this essay advanced his academic reputation after 1960. But for every benefit there is a cost: it surely has inflicted and will continue to inflict damage on human freedom, for it assailed the moral case for private property as no article “within the camp” ever had. It created an intellectually and morally bogus concept of the supposed social economic efficiency of production costs that remain the same irrespective of any initial distribution of ownership. With that seemingly scientific and academically irresistible conclusion, Coase seduced some of the brightest economists and legal theorists of his generation and the next generation. Without a moral case for private property, private property will not survive the attacks, political and intellectual, of its ever-present, ever-jealous enemies.

Q. The Biblical Response

It may seem odd that I have devoted so much space to the obvious. Unfortunately, economists quite frequently spin complex theories and arguments that are internally consistent—to the extent that arguments are capable of internal consistency²¹⁴—but to perform these mental gymnastics, they must ignore, or define away, the obvious. Coase’s essay is regarded by many economists as a classic. It is a classic all right—a classic exercise in rarified and misleading sophistry. Yet it was

he said that transaction costs “are at the heart of the matter of what prevents Pareto optimal bliss from ruling sublime. For if we could only eliminate transaction costs, externalities would be of no consequence. . . .” Carl J. Dahlman, “The Problem of Externality,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, XXII (April 1979), p. 161.

214. I have in mind the layman’s understanding of Gödel’s theorem on the impossibility of arguing both completely and consistently.

taken very seriously by some of those Chicago School economists who had developed the subdiscipline, “the economics of property rights.” It was taken seriously by the committee that awarded him the Nobel Prize in economics in 1991.

The Bible declares exactly who must pay damages: *the initiator of the damage*. If one man sets a fire, and it spreads to his neighbor’s field, he must compensate the neighbor for the accident. If he is an outright arsonist, he is a criminal, and he must pay double restitution—double the market value of the lost crop and equipment. It is not a matter of indifference to the legal system as to who initiated the “nuisance.” The Bible does not teach that “from an economic point of view, a situation in which there is ‘uncompensated damage done to surrounding woods by sparks from railway engines’ is not necessarily undesirable. Whether it is desirable or not depends on the particular circumstances.”²¹⁵ The Bible teaches that the victims of accidental fires must be compensated for their loss. It also teaches that a deliberate violation of another man’s property rights is a crime. This is where we must begin any discussion of social costs.

Social costs and social benefits cannot be calculated by means of scientific economics. *The scientific economist cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility*. We need the Bible to tell us what is right and what is wrong, who pays whom, and whose property should be protected. Society is required by God to adhere to this general principle of justice. The economist has nothing to offer in its place except epistemologically blind intuition.²¹⁶ Neither, for that matter, does the modern legal theorist. *Intuition is undefined and undefinable*. As the old political slogan says, “you can’t beat something with nothing.” Men cannot legitimately fight the Bible’s definition of property rights with an appeal to circumstances, or to the intuitive ability of men to assess total social costs and total social benefits, especially a total cost package that ignores the right, meaning *legal predictability*, of compensation to the victims.

In the case of the problem of social costs, Pigou’s analysis of pollution and restitution was generally in accord with the Bible’s discussion of the problem of social cost. The railroad has the legal responsibility to compensate the farmer for any fire it sets. There will undoubtedly be problems for a jury or arbitrator in assessing exactly what the losses

215. Coase, “Social Cost,” p. 34.

216. North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*.

were. If the fires continue, then the railroad's officers can be sued for criminal misconduct. Like the man whose ox gains a reputation for goring, but is not penned up by its owner, so are the railroad officers who do not take care to protect people from an identified physical hazard. The formerly docile ox that gores someone to death must be killed (Ex. 21:28).²¹⁷ (The engine would at that point be fitted with a spark-arrester or prohibited from the tracks.) But the ox with a bad reputation that kills a man must die, and so must its owner, unless he makes restitution to the heirs of the victim (Ex. 21:29–30).²¹⁸ (The directors of the railroad could be held responsible in a court of law for criminal actions for not taking care to install safety equipment after the fire threat had been pointed out to them by the authorities.) Biblical case laws are to govern the courts, not the speculative conclusions of economists that are opposed to the Bible's explicit statements. Sometimes very bright economists can come up with outrageous hypotheses. The public adopts these "logical discoveries" at its peril. Coase's essay is regarded by academic economists—at least non-Keynesian and non-mathematical economists—as a landmark essay. What it is, on the contrary, is clever sophistry: a land mine essay.

Conclusion

In a brilliant yet almost despairing essay, Arthur Allen Leff described the development of modern legal theory: a war between legal formalism (the "logic of the law") and legal empiricism or positivism ("man announces the law"). The fact is, this debate goes back at least to the Socratic revolution in Greek political thought: the debate over *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (convention).²¹⁹ Wrote Leff: "While all this was going on, most likely conditioning it in fact, the knowledge of good and evil, as an intellectual subject, was being systematically and effectively destroyed." What he called the swamp of historical legal studies was replaced by the desert of legal positivism: the "normative thought crawled out of the swamp and died in the desert."

There arose a great number of schools of ethics—axiological, materialistic, evolutionary, intuitionist, situational, existentialist, and so

217. Chapter 40:C.

218. Chapter 40:D.

219. On the rival conceptions of law, see Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), pp. 29–34. On *physis*, see Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 21–29.

on—but they all suffered the same fate: either they were seen to be ultimately premised on some intuition (buttressed or not by nose counts of those seemingly having the same intuitions) or they were even more arbitrary than that, based solely on some “for the sake of argument” premises. I will put the current situation as sharply and nastily as possible: there is today no way of “proving” that napalming babies is bad except by asserting it (in a louder and louder voice) or by defining it as so, early in one’s game, and then later slipping it through, in a whisper, as a conclusion.²²⁰

There is no way for either law or economics to be conducted without an appeal to good and evil, yet it is this appeal, above all, which is prohibited by the methodological standards of modern academic scholarship. The appeal to efficiency by the legal theorists is simply another example of seeking meaningful content for the ethically empty box of legal formalism. When the search for meaning turns to the criteria of economic efficiency, the searchers are being lured down one more dead-end trail. As Leff wrote, “while you are now working with *is*-terms only (you have escaped the dreaded *ought*), they are, as a matter of fact, very different matters of fact: what indeed *is* of ‘value’ must be known before one rates the ‘efficiency’ of getting there. Thus it is possible that all you have ended up doing is substituting for the arbitrariness of ethics the impossibilities of epistemology.”²²¹

This is the heart of the problem. *Without ethics, there can be no epistemology.* This assertion—which is also a dreaded but inescapable conclusion of modern economics—was the theme that Van Til worked with throughout his career. Economics is a blind science. So is its subdivision, law and economics. Again, Leff zeroed in on the problem faced by the law schools:

It is a most common experience in law schools to have someone say, of some action or state of events, “how awful,” with the clear implication that reversing it will de-awfulize the world to the full extent of the initial awfulness. But the true situation, of course, is that eliminating the “bad” state of affairs will not lead to the opposite of that bad state, but to a third state, neither the bad nor its opposite. That is, before agreeing with any “how awful” critic, one must always ask him the really nasty question, “compared to what?” Moreover, it should be, but often is not, apparent to everyone that the process of moving the world from one state to another is itself costly. If one were not

220. Leff, “Economic Analysis of Law: Some Realism About Nominalism,” *Virginia Law Review* (1974), *op. cit.*, p. 454.

221. *Ibid.*, p. 456.

doing that with those resources (money, energy, attention), one could be doing something else, perhaps righting a few different wrongs, a separate pile of "how ghastly's."²²²

Coase himself admitted as much, though he confined this admission to the narrow confines of the question of transaction costs. "Since property rights can be changed in such a way as to raise as well as lower the costs of transactions, how can one say that a move from regulation to a private property rights system, the use of the market, will necessarily represent an improvement? If the question is put in such a general form, one cannot say that it will."²²³

Christian economists must therefore enter the debate regarding costs, whether social or personal. There is no intellectually consistent way that the humanist economist can legitimately keep Christian economics out of the arena. He has adopted a position of intuitional and arbitrary ethics in the name of value-free methodology. It is all a sham. The more loudly the economist insists that ethics should be left outside the temple of economics, almost as one leaves one's shoes outside a Moslem mosque, the more irrelevant his findings and concealed his own system's ethics. It is better to be open about one's ethics, and the source of one's ethics. The reduction of self-deception is clearly a legitimate intellectual end. The problem is, neither the embarrassed Christian economist nor the self-deceived humanist economist is willing to pay the methodological price. But we should have expected this; it is an ancient problem: "Beware lest any man spill you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:7).

End of Volume 5

222. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

223. Coase, "The Choice of the Institutional Framework: A Comment," *Journal of Law and Economics*, XVII (October 1974), p. 493.

AUTHORITY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON EXODUS

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Gary North

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APPENDIX I

POLLUTION IN THE SOVIET UNION

Fyodor Morgun, head of the State Committee for Environmental Protection, revealed last year [1988] that air pollution in all Soviet industrial centers now exceeds Soviet safety limits and is more than ten times the permitted level in 102 Soviet cities. He also revealed (at the 19th special Communist Party conference last June) that water from the great rivers of Russia, including the fabled Volga and the Don, is now almost unusable for drinking or irrigation.¹

Until the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident in 1986, the West's many anti-capitalist critics had assumed that socialist societies, especially the Soviet Union, had somehow avoided the social costs of pollution. This belief was always entirely mythical. Then *glasnost* opened up the outlets for complaints within the U.S.S.R. In 1991, the Soviet Union's Communist leaders abandoned Communism, shut down the Soviet system, and absconded with the Party's money. The cash nexus proved too alluring. The bloody experiment was over. It had failed economically. It had failed politically. Only then did the Western intelligentsia at last admit defeat. They officially abandoned socialism. The Soviet Union had been their Goliath, and, like the Philistines in David's day, they fled in disarray after their representative was decapitated in full public view.

A. Disappearing Lake

When I wrote this appendix in the final years of the Soviet Union, this information was not widely known. For example, Western reporters had only recently learned of the story of the Aral Sea. This sea in northwest Uzbekistan was steadily disappearing. At one time, it was the fourth-largest inland body of water on earth. It had shrunk by 40% since 1960, leaving behind 10,000 square miles of salty desert. Soviet

1. "The Ecology Crisis," *National Review* (April 7, 1989), p. 28.

developers siphoned off into the cotton fields of Uzbekistan and neighboring Turkmenia the waters of the two rivers that feed the Aral Sea, leaving these rivers little more than slow-moving sewers. The fish cannery at Muinak that had been built on the southern shore became landlocked, 30 miles from the water. No matter: the sea's commercial fishing catch had fallen to zero because of the high concentration of salt, fertilizers, and pesticides. The Muinak area remained off-limits to foreigners, including reporters. Reported the *New York Times* in 1988, "The high concentration of salt and farm chemicals in the rivers and underground water are blamed for universally high rates of stomach and liver disease, throat cancer and birth defects."²

B. Free Pebbles

Almost two decades before this information, like ideological toxic waste, began leaking out of the Soviet Union, Marshall Goldman, in a book-length study of pollution in the Soviet Union, detailed the devastation of the Soviet Union's environment produced by Soviet managers. Consider the Black Sea. It is the nation's prime tourist region, the warmest region of the Soviet Union, and a region close to a large body of water. There is little room for construction in the narrow coastal area, and few construction materials. "To provide the concrete and other materials needed for construction, the contractors used the pebbles and sand located along the beach. Like the Riviera coastline, much of the Black Sea shore consists of small pebbles which would whet any cement maker's appetite. Because they were free for the taking and easily accessible and because obtaining other construction materials would necessitate the extra expense of transport over the mountains, local contractors used the beach materials."³ When men are given the use of a "free good," they are going to waste it. They mined the beach area, beginning in 1930.

What did they build? Seaports, dams, and resort buildings. The beaches began to erode after 1940. For centuries, the pebbles on the beach had acted as buffers to the power of the waves, Goldman pointed out. Now the waves crash against the shoreline, carrying away parts of the beach. The dams cut the supply of new pebbles that had come in from the mountains. In 1967, a crisis occurred near Adler,

2. "Developers Turn Aral Sea Into a Catastrophe," *New York Times* (Dec. 20, 1988).

3. Marshall I. Goldman, *The Spoils of Progress: Environmental Pollution in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1972), p. 156.

when "resort hotels, port structures, hospitals and (of all things) the sanitarium of the Ministry of Defense collapsed as the shoreline gave way. . . . Elsewhere along the eastern shore in places such as Krinshch at the mouth of the Pshad River, the beach which was 100 meters (109 yards) wide in 1950 had shrunk to 15–20 meters (16–22 yards) by 1960."⁴ Hotels in Pitsunda almost washed out to sea in 1970. "Only by mobilizing all the trucks in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in which Pitsunda is located and diverting them to the task of carrying in rocks and other solid fill were the hotels able to survive the inundation."⁵ Even some streets at Yalta are threatened.⁶

"Belatedly," Goldman wrote, "large sums of money are being spent in an effort to restore a semblance of the natural balance to the area. From 1945 to 1960, the Ministry of Transportation spent 40 million rubles to strengthen the coastline, but to no avail. Some specialists have insisted that as much as three times that amount is needed. Gravel is being hauled in from inland mountains, giant cement slabs are being embedded in the sea coast, walls are being built, and man-sized cement blocks are being dumped along the beach to replace with a buffer what has been washed away. Invariably the waves tear such fortifications apart in six to eight years."⁷

C. The Hole in the Mountain

High in the Caucasus mountains lies one of the Soviet Union's most famed resorts, Kislovodsk. Because it is sheltered on three sides by mountains, it escapes the continental weather of the Russian land mass. It is a warm-weather oasis, according to Goldman. The city has 311 days a year of sun, while another city on the other side of the mountain has only 122.⁸ "Sometime after World War II, an unknown but enterprising bureaucrat from the railroad ministry strode into this idyllic scene. His mission was to increase the volume of railroad freight shipments in the area. He discovered that the mountains and hills in the area were rich in limestone. Without asking anyone, he arranged for the construction of a lime kiln at the Podkumok railroad station near the narrow gorge. 'It was a small operation and in the beginning nobody paid any attention to it. When people finally did ask what was

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–59.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 161–62.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 163–64.

going on, it already appeared to be too late to do anything about it. The railroad and kiln operators met all arguments with, "We are a productive enterprise. Our product is sent all over. We have an assignment and we are fulfilling our plan." (*Izvestia*, 7/3/66, p. 5.)⁹ Result: the gorge widened, and the winter weather of the north hit Kislovodsk. The dust level has risen drastically: one and a half times the allowable limit in a *non-resort* city. "On the one hand the state invests millions of rubles in new tourist facilities in Kislovodsk, while on the other hand the state destroys the very thing that makes it attractive. Moreover the destroyers are not only being paid a good salary for their vandalism but they are winning premiums for doing so in the name of 'socialist competition.'"¹⁰

D. Lake Baikal

Lake Baikal is the largest fresh water lake in the world, holding about one-sixth of all the fresh water in the world. It is 45 miles wide and 385 miles long. Until the early 1970s, socialist enterprises used it as a free disposal unit for effluents of all kinds, including human sewage. The fish catch dropped 55% from 1945 until 1957.¹¹ In 1958, a plan to industrialize the Lake Baikal region with pulp and cellulose mills became official. There were a few sporadic pamphlet protests, to no avail. Only in 1962 did these plans become public. Several official agencies protested over the next few years, but the plans went forward. The plants were built, redesigned, and were found uneconomical. They had been built because the lake's water was pure; steadily, this purity dropped. A water treatment facility was built. Costs of construction doubled. The process did not work. Islands of alkaline sewage have been observed floating near the lake's surface—one of them 18 miles long and three miles wide.¹² Russian timber trusts stripped parts of the region bare. Soil washed away. Silt now flows into the lake. No one knows now if this ecological devastation will be reversed. Lake Baikal's crisis was matched by the crisis of the Baltic Sea.¹³

About the time that Goldman's book was published, a serious effort was begun to clean up Lake Baikal. A ban was placed on fishing certain rare fish in the lake, the golomyanka. The result was that two-

9. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 200–1.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

thirds of the human population around the lake had to move. The fishermen could no longer make a living.¹⁴ The trade-off between employment and ecology was as inescapable in the Soviet Union as it is in a free market economy.

E. Bureaucracy vs. Bureaucracy

Protests against ecologically disrupting practices are almost always made by a government or government-run agency. "When a government newspaper decides to publish a letter to the editor or it commissions a writer to publish such an attack, this usually indicates the existence of an interagency squabble." Goldman said these attacks are quite common, but no one is clear about how officials make a decision to protest.¹⁵ "Moreover, there are no independent conservation groups like the Sierra Club or the League of Women Voters, which scrutinize the country like watchdogs looking for such abuses." When a debate emerges publicly, the bureaucratic feuding must already be intense, or else the consequences must be far-reaching.¹⁶

Goldman's summary of the differences between ownership in the two societies is very important. *Private ownership is the first line of defense against pollution.*

In a socialist society it would seem that it would be more difficult to stimulate preventive action in both the case of public and private social costs. Because private land ownership is prohibited in the USSR, the individual has less of a vested interest in fighting the construction of a new factory in his neighborhood or the mining of some raw material in the area. Except when a state-owned factory finds that its operating costs are substantially and directly altered by another factory's pollution, protest must depend on social consciousness, and not on the actions of private property holders who respond out of the fear of a private loss. Of course, social consciousness can be very effective, as has been demonstrated by the success of such groups as the Sierra Club and the League of Women Voters. Nevertheless, the elimination of the private property holder and his accumulating instincts often means the elimination of the first line of defense against the expansion of environmental disruption.¹⁷

Geographer Philip Pryde's assessment of the Soviet Union's anti-

14. Associated Press story, *Tyler Courier-Times* (Feb. 10, 1985).

15. Goldman, *Spoils*, pp. 185–86.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

pollution program was less critical than Goldman's, but it still made the fundamental point: Soviet attempts to clean up the environment were late and discoordinated at best, half-hearted generally, and deliberately reactionary in far too many cases.

First, there is only one effective lobby in the Soviet Union, and that is the fully understood and immutable emphasis on industrial expansion. The voices of conservationists, while present, are weak by comparison, and certainly hold no threat of voting an unreceptive Central Committee out of office.

This represents an important distinction between the United States and the U.S.S.R. If, in the United States, private enterprise displays poor conservation practices, there are still two avenues of recourse open for correcting the situation—public opinion and government regulation. But if the Soviet central planning mechanism is lax in these regards, there is no effective avenue of recourse. The Party-government supervision of both resource exploitation and environmental conservation has strong built-in conflicts of interest, and brings to mind the analogy directed by some toward our own Atomic Energy Commission of “foxes guarding henhouses.”¹⁸

The sheer size of the Soviet planning bureaucracy has inhibited the implementation of new, pollution-control technologies, he concluded.¹⁹ Furthermore, Marxist ideology saw pollution as a problem only of capitalist societies. “On the other hand, it is believed that a socialist economy, faced with the obligation to plan centrally the use of all its resource wealth, will necessarily do so in the wisest possible manner.”²⁰ This attitude, coupled with the Marxist emphasis on economic growth, led to a lack of interest in creating institutional mechanisms—economic, legal, or political—to reduce pollution.

F. The Poverty Factor

Goldman did not mention it, but, by keeping people poor, socialist societies create an atmosphere that is more favorable to pollution, for it is only as men's wealth increases that they believe that they can afford the reduction in per capita output that pollution-control usually involves. Were the Soviets really that poor? Yes. Goldman's statistics

18. Philip R. Pryde, *Conservation in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1972), pp. 162–63.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

on the availability of running water in homes gave us an indication of the tremendous discrepancy between the productivity of the respective economic systems. In 1960, only about 38% of city housing in the Soviet Union had running water, and 35% had sewers.²¹ By the late 1960s, only 50% of the Soviet Union's urban homes had running water that was supplied by a central community source, as compared to 70–75% of U.S. citizens. Most other Americans had electrically operated water pumps for their homes' running water; these were unheard of in the USSR.²²

The newer apartments in the USSR had running water, which indicated the existence of a policy to force people into apartments—a housing policy that was common in socialist nations.²³ If we include apartment buildings in the “urban housing fund,” then 73% of the residential units had running water, and approximately 70% were connected to sewers in the late 1960s.²⁴ On the collective farms, under 3% had running water, and under 2% on the state farms.²⁵

By the end of the 1980s, the Western press began to report on the sorry condition of the Soviet economy. The Soviet economy was much weaker than Western experts had estimated.²⁶ It ran massive budget deficits that had not shown up in official figures or in Western estimates (with a few exceptions).²⁷ By 1989, Judy Shelton's book appeared, predicting a crash.²⁸ She was almost alone in her opinion. That year, the economy did crash, and it never recovered. Two years later, Soviet Union collapsed. This caught the West by surprise. Especially surprised were the economists.

Years earlier, journalist Richard Grenier's description of the USSR had said it best: “Bangladesh with missiles.” His peers in the West did not believe him. They had wanted so desperately to believe that socialism could compete with the free market. Then the Soviet Union did the unforgivable. It committed suicide.

21. Goldman, *Spoils*, p. 106.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

23. On this policy in Sweden, see Roland Huntford, *The New Totalitarians* (New York: Stein & Day, 1972), ch. 12.

24. Goldman, *Spoils*, pp. 107–8.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

26. Nicholas Eberstadt, “The Soviet Economy: Worse Than We Thought,” *New York Times* (Nov. 23, 1988).

27. Igor Birman, “Kremlin Red Ink (And You Thought We Had a Deficit Problem),” *Wall Street Journal* (Nov. 15, 1988).

28. Judy Shelton, *The Coming Soviet Crash: Gorbachev's Desperate Pursuit of Credit in Western Financial Markets* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

Conclusion

The modern socialist states never did demonstrate that they were capable of dealing with the growing problem of pollution in a technological society. The free market creates incentives for people to protest against those who are transferring part of their production costs to private citizens who do not share in the benefits. It allows the creation of independent knowledge-distribution media that can mobilize people. It allows private citizens to challenge polluters. Socialist monopolies were not so easily challenged by private citizens or associations in socialist commonwealths.

APPENDIX J

LOTS OF FREE TIME: THE EXISTENTIALIST UTOPIA OF S. C. MOONEY

Another popular excuse for usury is that it is no different than rent. It is said that “interest” is merely rent on “money,” and that if rent is assumed to be legitimate, then usury would have to be considered legitimate as well. . . . The economic similarity between usury and the rent of property readily is admitted. However, this close connection does not serve to legitimize usury, as Locke et al suppose; but to condemn rents. . . . [I]t is not lawful for one to sell the use of his property (rent).

S. C. Mooney¹

I this appendix, I shall consider the economic logic offered by a promoter of a zero-interest economy. There are two groups of these promoters. Members of the first group say that a zero-interest economy could be attained if people simply loved one another sufficiently. Interest on loans is an example of oppression and needless cruelty, they say. These people are pure utopians. They cannot point to any society in history in which such an economics of love has ever existed. Members of the second group argue that the civil government ought to intervene and punish those who lend at interest.

I have argued in Chapter 49 that the zero-interest promoter is the intellectual equivalent of a self-proclaimed scientist who insists that a perpetual motion machine is possible. The world generally recognizes such a person as the classic literary mad scientist. The second law of thermodynamics testifies against these poor souls. They are considered harmless cranks in a world in which it takes energy to turn a crank. In contrast, a promoter in the second group of zero-interest enthusiasts is far more dangerous than the lovable mad scientist. He is

1. S. C. Mooney, *Usury: Destroyer of Nations* (Warsaw, Ohio: Thopolis, 1988), pp. 172, 173. (<http://bit.ly/MooneyUsury>). Italics added.

like a crackpot physicist who insists that *only* perpetual motion machines should be legal. He is the classic defender of something (the use of an asset over time) for nothing (no rental fee). He says that the world can construct an honest, fair, and productive economy by making interest payments illegal. He says that the state should legislate his utopia.

Again, let me apologize in advance for filling up space in this commentary with arguments against nonsense. If this nonsense, or nonsense quite similar to it, had not been offered in the name of the Bible for about a millennium and a half, I would not bother to comment on it. Life is too short, and this book is too long. But the lure of crackpot theories of interest has been with us for a long, long time; first, under the authoritarian rule of ancient and medieval clerics in an era before economics was an intellectual discipline, and second, under the hoped-for rule of amateurs who resent the very thought of economics as an intellectual discipline, and who have therefore never taken an economics course in their lives.²

Before I begin my analysis, let me also say that, in one sense, it is legitimate to call for a restructuring of economics by revising interest theory. In fact, it is imperative. Böhm-Bawerk's path-breaking *History and Critique of Interest Theories* (1884) certainly set forth economic principles that were instrumental in making possible a major revision of economics. But let me also say that it is insufficient to offer a new theory of interest—or even a revived version of Aristotle's theory, dressed in swaddling clothes—without restructuring all of economics. Like value theory and price theory, interest theory is at the heart of economic theory. In fact, price theory apart from a theory of interest is dead before it begins. It does no good for a self-proclaimed economic revolutionary to offer a wholly new theory of interest and then not explain exactly how his interest theory is to be integrated into the whole of economics. The economist must show that economic reasoning as such is still possible in terms of his proposed interest theory. This is what Böhm-Bawerk did in the late nineteenth century. This is what not even one of the zero-interest theorists has ever attempted.

I wrote the preceding section in 1990. A year later, Mr. Mooney responded in a long, incoherent essay, "Mooney Answers North." I did not see this response until it was posted on the Web. I came across it

2. I suggested to Mr. Mooney in a letter that he had never taken a course in economics in college, and he admitted to me in his written reply that he had not. Some things are obvious on first reading.

sometime around 2008, I think. He ended with these words:

The absence of a comprehensive new economic theory does not prove that my thesis in *Usury: Destroyer of Nations* is wrong. Rather, the biblical soundness of my thesis proves that a comprehensive theory is needed. Nor do I regard the task of producing one as my own toy exclusively. Any one who is committed to a radically biblical approach to all of theoretical thought is qualified to contribute to this work. I would be happy to interact on the many important issues surrounding this task with any, including Dr. North, who would be so motivated. I thank Dr. North for the challenge, and look forward to an economic theory that finally brings glory to God.³

So do I, but such a theory had better not begin with either of these premises: (1) there is no scarcity; (2) time is free.

It is now over two decades since Mr. Mooney's book appeared. He has yet to explain how his theory fits into a general theory of economics. He is like a Dutchman who recommends blowing up all the dikes, but when asked how he proposes to keep the sea from inundating the land, answers that he has no idea, but he is happy to discuss the topic if anyone has some suggestions.

I do not believe that a person has to earn a Ph.D. in a particular field in order for him to have an academic impact in that field.⁴ I do believe that a person needs to demonstrate the same degree of intellectual self-discipline and accomplishment that a Ph.D. degree requires before he thinks himself competent to restructure the whole world from behind his computer. It is not the formal degree that counts; it is the years of thankless work in the shadows that are required to produce a successful paradigm shift. It is this price that the monetary cranks are not willing to pay. They offer us half-finished blueprints for 80-storey skyscrapers before they have built a tree house, and then they demand that the world's architects give them a polite hearing.

A. Mooney on Rent and Interest

I offer my comments for your consideration, not because the Christian public has ever heard of Mr. Mooney's book, nor because the book is coherent in its analysis, which it is not, but because it is one more primary source documenting a very strange phenomenon: Christians who think they are ready to overturn the modern intellectual

3. Posted here: <http://bit.ly/MooneyReply>.

4. Examples: John Maynard Keynes, Roy Harrod, Gordon Tullock.

world with their very first book by announcing outrageous and undeveloped theories with shock value. They offer “fringe” theories, but without any suggestion about how these theories might become the foundation for governing at the center of a society. They offer fringe theories that are destined to keep their disciples—if any—forever on the cultural, intellectual, and perhaps even emotional fringe. They offer preliminary findings that would require a lifetime of disciplined effort in order to make their conclusions even vaguely plausible, and then they stand back and announce: “The world now must refute me, or else I win by default.” Well, the world does not have to refute them; they will not win by default. However, the sake of argument—and for the sake of intellectually immunizing the reader, who may have a fondness for fringe hypotheses (a weakness I occasionally share)—I will offer a few observations.

Mr. Mooney called for an economically just world, one which is devoid of both rents and interest payments, just as John Maynard Keynes did. Since I have responded to the main thrust of Mr. Mooney’s arguments in Chapter 49, there is no need of going over the same material. We need to go right to the “soft underbelly” of his critique of interest. Mooney insisted that, from a biblical perspective, “it is not lawful for one to sell the use of his property (rent).”⁵

1. Rental Income and Interest Income

Say that a person has a sum of money to invest. He sees two possibilities. He can buy a piece of real estate and then lease it out for a decade. Alternatively, he can buy a ten-year bond and get paid by the bond-issuer. Let us say that the rate of interest on the bond is 5%. How much must a would-be renter have to offer him in order to persuade him to rent it to him? Assuming that the property owner expects no entrepreneurial profits from the appreciation of the real estate, the renter will have to offer him something in the range of 5% of the market value of the property. Why? Because in each case, the bidders—the would-be renter and the would-be bond seller—are competing in the market for the use of his wealth. They must offer competitive bids, as with any auction. They bid in terms of a promise: so much future income per annum. This competitive bidding process is why economists have long concluded that the rate of interest on a money loan produces a percentage rate of return that will be competitive with a com-

5. Mooney, *Usury*, p. 173.

parably risky investment in income-producing real estate. In short, *interest income equals rental income on a competitive free market*.

So, Mr. Mooney's argument against the biblical legitimacy of interest income necessarily lives or dies with his conclusion that income from rental property is also prohibited by the Bible. If rental income is allowed, then there seems to be no economic reason why interest income from a collateral-secured loan is not also allowed.

2. *The Jubilee Year*

Mr. Mooney's conclusion that rent is biblically illegitimate is in direct opposition to the economic terms of the jubilee year, which specified that anyone could lawfully rent his life and his property to another person for a period of time. In other words, a buyer could lawfully contract with a seller for the latter to supply him with a stream of income—labor income or agricultural income. In either case, when a kinsman bought the land or the person out of bondage (the contract), he had to pay the leaseholder a *pro-rated price* based on the number of years remaining until the jubilee year. This, it should be obvious, was a rental contract. Not only was it legal, it was legal even for unbelieving resident aliens to buy up to 49 years of future labor services from poverty-stricken Hebrews or 49 years worth of agricultural income.

If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubilee: and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession (Lev. 25:25–28).⁶

And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of ju-

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28.

bilee: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for (Lev. 25:47–51).⁷

When a kinsman-redeemer paid the leaseholder for the land, he deducted the yearly price paid by the leaseholder so far. He then made a cash payment for the time remaining on the lease. A lease is a form of rent. It is rent tied to a contractual time limit. If there was no biblical right of rent, then why did the kinsman-redeemer owe anything to the person controlling the land? Why did biblical law require him to pay off the contract? This contract was biblically illegal, according to Mr. Mooney. Yet biblical law required the payment of a redemption price. If Mr. Mooney was correct, then biblical law sanctioned the payment of that which biblical law prohibited: rent. Mr. Mooney did not see this when he wrote his book, and in his 1991 reply, he did not explain how this was possible under the Mosaic law.⁸ He argued instead that the lease in Leviticus 25 was not rent in the modern sense, because the person selling his land was in a poor condition, whereas a person renting out land today is in good economic condition. In other words, he defined away the analytically identical payments—money paid in advance for the use of property—in terms of comparative wealth. He wrote in 1991, “What we know of as the rental of real property involves a landowner who is wealthy (that is why he has land to for rent) and a poor tenant, who has no land of his own (that is why he must rent from a “lord.”)⁹ Yet a corporation may lease a fleet of cars or a fleet of anything else. This is quite common. Corporations lease property from owners all the time. Middle-class investors can pool their capital and buy railroad freight cars to lease to a railroad. The railroad locks in the use of the cars over a fixed period of time. The economic fact is this: *someone who gives up the use of his wealth without selling it outright asks for payment during the forfeited use period.* The economic analysis of this exchange is not affected by the comparative wealth of the participants. In a free market, buyers compete against buyers. Sellers compete against sellers. Similarly, he who rents out property competes with others who rent out property. He who rents the use of property competes with others who do the same.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 32.

8. Mooney, *Mooney Answers North*, pp. 24–25.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

This economics of exchange has nothing to do with the comparative wealth of the person who rents out the property vs. the person who rents it from him. One party wants money income; the other wants the use of the property. Yet Mr. Mooney argued that, unless the sale is permanent, there can be no biblically valid exchange of money for use. He then applies this argument to the payment of interest. At least he is consistent, which is why I singled him out in 1990. If a reader sees that Mr. Mooney's argument against the legitimacy of rent is logically unsustainable, he may find it easier to see that Mr. Mooney's argument against the legitimacy of interest is equally unsustainable. Anyway, I hope so.

If a man wants 5% per annum, he can do it in either of these two ways: buy a piece of land and rent it out, or buy a bond, and get paid by the seller. The rate of return is the same. If the first transaction is biblically legitimate—and it is—then so is the second.

3. A Strategy of Selective Quotation

It is worth pointing out that Mr. Mooney's book includes comments on Leviticus 25:2–7, 15–16, 35–37, and 39–45. He scrupulously avoided mentioning verses 25–28 and 47–51—verses that refute his conclusion regarding the supposedly biblically illegitimate nature of rental income. He freely admitted that the economists are correct, i.e., that rental income is the same as interest income: a payment for the use of an asset over time, said Böhm-Bawerk, whom he quoted favorably on the question of the equivalence of rental income and interest income.¹⁰ Then he tried to justify his universal condemnation of interest income by laying down an equally universal condemnation of rental income. The problem is, the Bible clearly honors the legitimacy of rental income: a stream of income, either labor income or land income, which one receives when he purchases an income-producing asset for cash (i.e., capitalization). Mr. Mooney's answer to this dilemma is simple and direct: he refused to cite that portion of the Bible that categorically destroys his argument.

He wrote that it is immoral to collect income from any form of property. While Mr. Mooney was sufficiently astute tactically not to spell out the implications of this statement—in this regard, he followed the lead of his predecessor, Mr. Keynes—what he really meant was that it is illegal biblically to seek a positive rate of return by loan-

10. Mooney, *Usury*, p. 172.

ing someone money to buy a house, and it is also illegal biblically to rent him a house. You are morally obligated to give him the use of the loan, interest-free, or the use of the house, rent-free. This is the economics of love.¹¹ It is also a classic crank prescription for creating a society of homeless people.

He wrote the book specifically to refute me, as his footnotes and text reveal. He had read (but had not understood) my view of time-preference as the true origin of interest. He recognized that I am following Böhm-Bawerk and Mises on this point: that there is always a *discount for cash* when you purchase an expected stream of future services. People discount the present value of expected future goods in comparison to the same goods in the present. Because of this, no rational person will pay 1,000 ounces of gold, cash, for a gold mine that is expected to produce 1,000 ounces of gold, net, after mining expenses are deducted, over the next year, ten years, or 1,000 years.

B. The “Present” Is Mostly in the Future

Mr. Mooney argued that there are no future goods but only present goods. In one sense, he was correct. I would put it this way: “The present is all that any man can be certain he has, moment by present moment.” He put it this way: “*Future goods do not exist*. There are only present goods in external reality.”¹² The author believed that he had somehow refuted the concept of the inescapable discount applied to future goods. He did not.

1. No Future Goods

Future goods are not real in the present, he said; therefore, they do not command a cash price. He did not recognize, for one thing (among many, many others), that this non-existence of future goods is a very good reason why there is always a *risk premium* in free market interest rates: the promised future goods may not actually be returned to the lender. So, the lender charges an interest payment to compensate him from this risk of default. Instead of acknowledging this obvious fact, the author concluded: “Since the contemplation of ‘future goods’ is characterized by idealism, one may not actually compare ‘present goods’ and ‘future goods’ for purposes of economic calculation. The

11. This is the assertion of Mr. Mooney and his publisher, Mr. Wiley: *ibid.*, pp. iii, 231–34.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

preference that is dictated by the discount of the 'future goods' cannot be avoided because one cannot possibly call upon an idea in his mind to serve a purpose that only a concrete object can serve."¹³ This is the economics of love. It is also the economics of incoherence.

To the extent that I can make any sense of this argument, I think he was saying that future goods, not being *physically* present, are therefore irrelevant for present decisions. So much for the biblical doctrine of eternal judgment in the afterlife! Mr. Mooney regards the concept of future goods in much the same way as the covenant-breaker regards the concept of eternal punishment. "If it ain't here now, it ain't relevant now." This is a fanatical form of *present-orientation*, the outlook of the lower-class individual.¹⁴ He made himself as clear as he could on this point: "The point is that 'future goods' vs. 'present goods' presents no *real* choice. The two cannot be compared in value as though they were different quantities of the same class of goods. In truth, the choice of goods for meeting one's needs is a choice of presently available goods. One present good compares only to other present goods."¹⁵ The clearer he becomes, the more preposterous he sounds.

2. *What's the Point?*

Fact: the present moment—a "point in time"—is as philosophically and operationally undefinable a phenomenon as a Euclidian point (an infinitesimal, no-dimensional section of a sequential phenomenon, a line). The fact is, we really cannot fully describe the pure instant in time that we call "the present." Anyway, I cannot, and surely Mr. Mooney did not attempt to do so in his book. What we call "the present" is in fact the *relatively more immediate future*. I cannot do everything I would like to do right now. I have to pick and choose my decisions through time. I must order my choices: first, second, and third in the future, and even this ordering process takes time.

Therefore, when I make a decision regarding the present cash value of any good, I make this evaluation moment by moment as I move through time. I make it in terms of whatever value I place on a future stream of services or pleasures that I expect to receive from the

13. *Idem*.

14. See Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 53–54.

15. Mooney, *Usury*, p. 207.

physical or the contractual item.¹⁶ The “front end” of this stream of future services is close at hand; how long it will continue to flow is guesswork. The initial flow of services may in fact be somewhat removed, as indicated by the warning in the fine print on the side of the box, “some assembly required.” The beginning of that expected flow of services may be a day away or a week away or a year away. The point is, *there is just barely a “now” in any economic decision*. There are only present expectations of varying degrees of the future. So, contrary to Mr. Mooney, who insists that there are no future goods in the present, I insist that from a rational decision-maker’s point of view, there are *mostly* future goods in the present—and this “mostly” is very, very close to *only*.

3. Infinite Interest Rates

If everyone were to conclude that the expected future stream of services provided by physical goods is irrelevant for present economic calculation, as Mr. Mooney insisted that it is, then *free market interest rates would approach infinity*, for no one would voluntarily give up present goods for the sake of receiving economically “irrelevant” future goods. Also, the price of durable capital goods and durable consumer goods would fall almost to zero, for no one would value them for the sake of their expected future productivity, meaning any expected value three seconds away. Or two seconds away. Or a split second away. In short, we would say goodbye to civilization. This is the “economics of love.” It is also the economics of existentialism: the philosophy of the autonomous moment.

C. Decapitalization

I single out Mr. Mooney’s analysis because he is the only person I have ever seen who so forthrightly confronts the issue of time-prefer-

16. Mr. Mooney tried to argue exclusively from the physical. But I as a lender may not want to own the physical object, such as a farm. I may prefer to own a promise to pay (mortgage) made by the owner of the farm, with the farm serving as legal collateral should he default on his promise. If he defaults, I will probably try to get someone else to buy the farm and make me another promise. Yes, the contract may be based on the productivity of the farm, as administered by someone, but the focus of my concern may be the promise, not the physical asset itself. Perhaps the person decides to get out of farming and use the property as a resort, or as a consumer good. I care only about the promised payment, so long as his decision regarding the use of the land does not reduce its collateralized market value.

ence in his denial of the moral legitimacy of interest. He offered economic nonsense—incredibly naive nonsense—in his attempted denial of time-preference in human action; to oppose the Fetter-Mises view of interest is necessarily to argue nonsense. It is the stark reality of Mr. Mooney's nonsense that is so impressive. He made it clear that if you refuse to go with Mises on the question of time-preference, you logically must wind up with Mooney's view regarding the economic irrelevance of the future.

If society were to adopt Mr. Mooney's view, and then attempt to enforce it by civil law, it would decapitalize itself. Rushdoony's eloquent explanation of capitalization and his warnings regarding decapitalization should be taken seriously: we must choose between Christianity and existentialism.

Capitalization is the product of work and thrift, the accumulation of wealth and the wise use of accumulated wealth. This accumulated wealth is invested in effect in progress, because it is made available for the development of natural resources and the marketing of goods and produce. The thrift which leads to the savings or accumulation of wealth, to capitalization, is a product of character. Capitalization is a product in every era of the Puritan disposition, of the willingness to forego present pleasures to accumulate some wealth for future purposes. Without character, there is no capitalization but rather decapitalization, the steady depletion of wealth. As a result, capitalism is supremely a product of Christianity, and, in particular, of Puritanism, which, more than any other faith, has furthered capitalization.¹⁷

Today, however, the mood of modern Western man can best be described as existentialist. It subscribes to a philosophy in which the "moment" is decisive. It is not future oriented in that it does not plan, save, and act with the future in mind. The existentialist demands the future now. Some of the causes which concern student rebels may be valid, but their existentialist demand that the future arrive today make them incapable of capitalizing a culture. Existentialism requires that a man act undetermined by standards from the past or plans for the future; the biology of the moment must determine man's acts.

Very briefly stated, existentialism is basically lower class living converted into a philosophy. It is, moreover, the philosophy which governs church, state, school, and society today. The "silent major-

17. *Chalcedon Report* (April 1967). R. J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1991), p. 591.

ity” has perhaps never heard of existentialism, but it has been thoroughly bred into it by the American pragmatic tradition of the “public” or state schools.

Our basic problem today, all over the Western world, is that Western civilization no longer has a true upper class at the helm. Future-oriented men no longer dominate society, politically, economically, religiously, educationally, or in any other way. Instead, dreamers who are basically lower class, who believe that political power can convert today into tomorrow, are in charge. The result is the domination of our politics by an economic policy which is the essence of the lower class mind and which leads to radical inflation. Spending today with no thought of tomorrow is a lower class standard, and this is the essence of our modern scene. The vocal minority and silent majority are both deeply in debt, and they create national economies which are deeply in debt. The growing anarchism of our social life is a product of this same lower class mentality. This popular anarchism is a refusal to submit to law and discipline, and unwillingness to accept any postponement of hopes and dreams. It is closely related to tantrums of a child who demands his will be done now. Every major social agency today, church, state, school, and home is dedicated to creating this anarchistic, lower class mentality.¹⁸

Mr. Mooney’s view of time-preference is existentialist and lower class to the core. He no doubt failed to understand this. His recommended policies would destroy civilization. He no doubt failed to understand this, too. Such is the fate of the compulsory economics of love. The road to economic hell is paved with good intentions.

He said that my views are incorrect because I rely on the Austrian School economists for insights into time-preference. Were he more familiar with the history of economic thought, he would recognize the origin of his own ideas: the worst of Aristotle and the worst—economically, I mean—of John Maynard Keynes.

Conclusion

Every new movement that calls for a transformation of thought or culture will attract its share of fringe figures. The more publishing-oriented it is, the more it will attract people looking for the bogus immortality that the printing press appears to provide. I call this phenomenon the graffiti syndrome. It is the same temptation that persuades people of more limited literary aspirations to carve “John loves Mary”

18. *Chalcedon Report* (August 1970). Rushdoony, *Ibid.*, pp. 716–17.

on public school desks, or limericks on the inside of lavatory doors. The Fabian movement in England is a good example of the sometimes fatal attractiveness of publishing: occultists, vegetarians, free love advocates, feminists, and screwballs of all varieties were drawn to the Webbs like midnight moths to a candle.¹⁹ All of them were looking to become part of the “wave of the future.” Only a few of them survived the test of time, to become remembered as the founders of yet another failed social religion.

Anyone can hang out a sign which announces that he is a Christian Reconstructionist. There is no licensing required. Not many people choose to do this, since to join the tiny band of theonomists today is to become a modern-day John the Baptist, typing in the wilderness. But what should make a reader more than a little suspicious of anyone who claims to be a theonomist is the promoter’s narrow range of concern. Specialization is legitimate, but anyone who claims that he is offering a revolutionary blueprint for this or that aspect of society had better also offer at least a first draft of the overall integrated plan. The old rule of ecology is true: *you cannot change just one thing*. You cannot reconstruct just one aspect of society, or just one aspect of an economy. For example, if you suggest a zoning code that makes sewers illegal, you had better strongly recommend the installation of septic tanks; otherwise, you can expect considerable overflow problems.

Again, I do not expect any society to adopt Mr. Mooney’s baptized Aristotelianism. If it does, it will not remain productive very long. What does concern me is that a lot of well-meaning Christians will take such nonsense seriously, assume that it is “truly biblical” economics, and then try to “spread the gospel” of crackpottery in the name of Jesus. This would be an embarrassment to the kingdom of God generally and Christian Reconstruction specifically. We Christians are already regarded as otherworldly dreamers. Let us not provide additional ammunition to our enemies.

But if you are not convinced by the logic of my presentation, I would like to borrow some money from you, interest-free, for ten years. Or just let me take control over your house, rent-free, for a decade. Either is fine with me. Drop me a note if you are interested. This is the loving thing to do, according to Mr. Mooney, and I would sure love it if you do it!

19. The most uproarious descriptions of the pontificating Webbs are found in Malcolm Muggeridge’s two-volume autobiography, *Chronicles of Wasted Time* (New York: Morrow, 1973–74). He was married to Beatrice Webb’s niece.

APPENDIX K

SLAVERY IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:9–10).

The Western slave system, beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, was based on kidnapping. Western slave traders paid Africans who lived on the West Coast to send their native troops inland and kidnap members of other tribes. The trade existed because the slave traders sold their kidnapped victims to final buyers. These final buyers were, legally speaking, in receipt of stolen goods. In terms of economic analysis, the customers initiated the trade. Had their been no buyers, the trade would not have existed. As surely as the men who purchase sex from prostitutes are the perpetrators, with or without the presence of pimps, so were the buyers of the slaves.¹

The Mosaic penalty for kidnapping was death (Ex. 21:16).² Paul listed manstealing as one of the crimes of the Mosaic law. It therefore carries into the New Testament. If a Mosaic law carries into the New Testament, then so does its civil sanction. So, in terms of the Bible-revealed law of God, everyone connected with the slave trade should have been executed on conviction: tribal chieftains, slave traders, brokers/auctioneers, advertisers, and of course the owners.

1. It is worth noting that one of the most popular songs of Rolling Stones band, always played at their fabulously profitable world tours, is *Brown Sugar*, which celebrates an aging slave owner in ante-bellum New Orleans, who uses teenage slave girls as sexual bondservants. Only because Mick Jagger's enunciation has never been able to be understood has this travesty gone on for four decades. At least, I hope this is the explanation.

2. Chapter 34.

Of course, no one was tried for this crime. It continued for four centuries. A culturally and morally revolutionary change of opinion began with the Society of Friends in England around 1755. The institution of private chattel slavery was successively challenged in the United States by means of Christian ethics, then Unitarian ethics, and then civil war (1861–65). The system ended in the United States in 1865 with the defeat of the Confederacy. It ended in the West in 1888, when Brazil abolished it.

A. The Ante-Bellum Debate Over Slavery

The slave system of the American South made no provision for the slaves to earn their freedom, nor did it allow slaves to go free in the seventh year. The Levitical system of inter-generational slavery for foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46) was definitively abolished by Jesus in Luke 4,³ but no abolitionist invoked this passage. The system did not survive, among other things, the onslaughts of the West's evangelical preaching,⁴ New England's Unitarian abolitionist moralizing, South Carolina's self-immolating secessionist hot-heads, the Confederacy's self-destructive hyper inflation,⁵ mass-produced Yankee weaponry, and the North's superior numbers of soldiers.⁶

The debate over the biblical legitimacy of slavery in the South escalated in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷ But this shift toward abolitionism in the thinking of Christians in the North was not originally the result of changes in orthodox Trinitarian theology. As I mentioned earlier, the first group to change its views was the Society of Friends (Quakers), who certainly did not emphasize the Trinity. It would be much easier to defend the argument that the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century was a far greater factor in the rise of abolitionism than the pioneering efforts of the great theologians

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

4. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969).

5. Richard Cecil Todd, *Confederate Finance* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1954), ch. 3.

6. Richard N. Current, "God and the Strongest Battalions," in David Donald (ed.), *Why the North Won the Civil War* (New York: Collier, 1960).

7. See, for example, Thornton Stringfellow, "A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony of the Institution of Slavery" (1841, 1850). (<http://bit.ly/BriefExam>) See also Erik L. McKittrick (ed.), *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South* (1963) and John L. Thomas (ed.), *Slavery Attacked: The Abolitionist Crusade* (1963), both published by Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

of the world, who never pioneered abolitionism anyway. Cheap mechanical labor no doubt made it less expensive for men whose societies benefitted from these technological developments to consider at long last the possibility of freeing other men's human slaves without suffering substantial decreases in economic production and national wealth. Yet it was the rise of industrialism, especially in the cotton trade, that made Southern slavery vastly more profitable—that, plus the cotton gin.

A team of four historians demonstrated in *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (1986) that the South's morale began to falter after the military defeats of July, 1863 (Vicksburg and Gettysburg), and then accelerated in the fall of 1864. Preachers began to call into question the original righteousness of the Confederate cause. When, in early 1865, the Confederate government voted to allow slaves to be brought into the army, with the understanding that the slaves would have to be promised their freedom if they served faithfully, the case for any supposed "innate slave mentality of the Negro" collapsed. Nobody wants to be defended militarily by men who are innate slaves.

Even before the war ended, the war to defend slavery had been reinterpreted by its supporters as a campaign to defend states rights or white supremacy or Southern honor. Nobody in the South called for the reimposition of slavery after the war ended.⁸ Military defeat by the anti-slavery North, not slavery's alleged economic inefficiency, was what doomed the South's slave system.⁹

While it lasted, however, slavery had positive educating effects for the slaves. The critics of Western slavery are seldom aware of the overwhelming impact of demonism on individuals and cultures. The close relationship between sub-Sahara Africa's animism and its perpetual poverty is not discussed in university classrooms. This is one reason why humanist scholars have such difficulty in explaining why state-to-state foreign aid programs do not produce long-term economic growth in backward nations. An understanding of the demonism-poverty relationship is fundamental to any valid economic, political,

8. Richard E. Berringer, *et al.*, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1986), chaps. 13–16.

9. On the continuing profitability of legalized slavery, so long as the soil of the land owned by the final purchasers of slaves did not become depleted, see the classic essay by Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, "The Economics of Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South" *Journal of Political Economy*, LXVI (April 1958). It has been reprinted many times, most notably in Conrad and Meyer, *The Economics of Slavery* (Chicago: Aldine, [1964] 2007).

and social analysis of primitive cultures. This relationship is denied by most modern scholars, on those rare occasions when it is even considered. Scholars ignore the obvious: *the slaves imported from Africa were savages*. They were the victims of kidnapping by other savages, who then sold them to Arab slave traders in Eastern Africa or to Western slave traders in Western Africa.

The high bids of English-speaking slave-owners can be said to have rescued some of these savages from rival tribal slavery. It also can be said, however, that the high bids increased the demand for slaves, which in turn led to more slaves being hunted and taken. In any case, the slave-buyers should have known what they were doing: *they were buying slaves from kidnappers*. They simply preferred not to think through the economics of customer authority: customers, not sellers, determine prices. *Final demand creates intermediate demand*. They were buyers of stolen goods. *They were the accomplices of kidnappers*. As such, they became subject to the death penalty. God imposed this penalty on the South during the war, over half a century after slave imports from abroad had ceased. The South's slave-owners had ceased being the accomplices of kidnappers in 1808, but had instead become slave farmers: raising people as if they were cash crops, which they were, economically speaking. There were no laws protecting slave families from break-up through sales. Like the enslavement of the Hebrews by the Egyptians, it took two centuries for this judgment to be imposed on the South, but eventually God's patience ran out.

B. Academic Hostility to the Protestant Work Ethic

African blacks were savages who were being delivered by Southern slavery from earthly bondage to demons. They were being given the opportunity to improve their religious commitment, improve their skills, and ultimately achieve spiritual freedom. Scholars do not recognize that *covenantally faithful people who achieve spiritual freedom by the grace of God in history cannot forever be enslaved*. They lose their status as slaves to sin. This new judicial and ethical status eventually is manifested in history. This is a major theme of the Book of Exodus. *Spiritual freedom under Jesus Christ eventually produces political and economic liberty, though seldom in a single generation*. Conversely, spiritual bondage under Satan eventually produces political and economic bondage, though seldom in a single generation. *History is not*

covenantally neutral. There is ethical cause-and-effect in mankind's institutional history, a covenantal fact denied vehemently by humanists and pietists alike. It is this denial which is the foundation of the operating alliance between humanists and pietists,¹⁰ the defenders of the power religion and the defenders of the escape religion.¹¹

There are five steps in the securing of this institutional liberty. They match the five points in the biblical covenant model. The first step is spiritual: faith in Jesus Christ as the sovereign Lord and Savior, the redeemer of men and institutions in history. The second step is the recognition of God's hierarchical covenants: the requirement of faithful labor under guidance from those who possess authority. The third step is covenantal faithfulness to the ethical terms of God's covenant. The fourth step is self-government (self-judgment) with the hope of God's blessings, both in heaven and in history. The fifth step is confidence concerning the long-run earthly effects of one's efforts. This confidence leads to a more efficient management of time and capital. In short, for any people to become liberated, they must change their perception of God, man, law, judgment, and time. They must then discipline their lives in terms of this covenantal worldview. In short, the way to liberty is by means of the Protestant ethic.

Technically oriented economic historians often not only ignore the capacity for self-transformation that the Protestant work ethic possesses, they openly denied it. One historian of ideas did not ignore it, Daniel Rodgers.¹² He wrote of the fusion of the work ethic and economic growth in pre-industrial America: "By the middle of the nineteenth century, the process had created in the American North an expansive, though still largely pre-industrial, economy and an unequaled

10. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Pt. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

11. Part 1, *Representation and Dominion*, Introduction.

12. Daniel T. Rodgers was a student of a powerful triumvirate of American historians: Yale University's David Brion Davis, C. Vann Woodward, and Edmund S. Morgan. Rodgers wrote in his Introduction to his book, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978): "This is at bottom a study not of work but of ideas about work. In particular it is a study of those threads of ideas that came together to affirm work as the core of the moral life. By now reiteration of that claim has dulled its audacity. But in the long run of ideas it was a revolutionary notion. In and of itself work involves only an element of burden and, for most people, the goad of necessity. Few cultures have presumed to call it anything more than a poor bargain in an imperfect world. It was the office of ideas to turn the incapable into an act of virtue, the burdensome into the vital center of living. That presumption—the work ethic—begins in a momentous act of transvaluation" (p. xi).

commitment to the moral primacy of work.”¹³ But economic historians are usually more skillful technicians than “mere” intellectual historians, so they are more readily cursed with the tendency to believe the myth of value-free economic science.

Two skeptics regarding the moral and economic benefits of slaves’ exposure to the Protestant work ethic were economic historians Roger Ransom¹⁴ and Richard Sutch. They reproduced a statement in 1900 by Hollis Burke Frissell, a prominent Southern educator. It is a statement that could hardly be quarreled with, yet they quarreled with it. The first sentence is, admittedly, preposterous: “It is only fair to call attention to the part which the South performed in the education of the barbarous people forced upon her,” but the authors ignored it. Why preposterous? Because the slaves were not educated by “the South,” meaning the vast majority of southerners who were not slave-owners. It is misleading to equate “the South” with the slave system. To some extent these free citizens had the slave system forced on them, or at least “sold” to them by the aristocrats who had always dominated the South. Furthermore, those who did the educating of slaves, prior to 1865, did not have the slaves forced on them; they paid for them, and paid a lot. But the authors did not criticize these words. Instead, they criticized what followed:

The Southern plantation was really a great trade school where thousands received instruction in mechanic arts, in agriculture, in cooking, sewing, and other domestic occupations. . . . The training which the black had under slavery was far more valuable as a preparation for civilized life, than the freedom from training and service enjoyed by the Indian on the Western reservations. For while slavery taught the colored man to work, the reservation pauperized the Indian with free rations; while slavery brought the black into the closest relations with the white race and its way of life, the reservation shut the Indian away from his white brothers and gave him little knowledge of their civilization, language or religion.¹⁵

The critics’ comments reveal a great deal about the attitude of modern scholars towards the Protestant work ethic. “Frissell’s sugges-

13. *Ibid.*, p. xii.

14. One of my graduate school professors of economic history—day in and day out, the best lecturer I ever had in school, and I suffered through a lot of school.

15. Cited by Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The economic consequences of emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 20.

tion that slavery imbued the slave with a work ethic indispensable to success as a free laborer has recently reappeared in the work of Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman. These authors insist that the American slave internalized the 'Protestant work ethic.' Slaves were 'diligent,' 'responsible,' and 'hardworking,' 'virtues' they presumably carried with them into freedom. Upon closer examination, however, Fogel and Engerman's argument has been shown to amount to nothing more than a curious interpretation of the well-known fact that slaves were worked hard."¹⁶ We are once again face to face with reductionism: *nothing more than*. There is always more than. Lots more.

Even if this were true—nothing more than the fact that "slaves were worked hard"—it would be enough. Learning the rigors of disciplined labor is no minor achievement.¹⁷ Being in a culture that expected people to work six days a week, with few vacations and little idleness, provided a competitive model that had its effects on the post-Civil War black freedmen. It is economic reductionism that leads otherwise sensible and painstaking scholars to write that "freedmen worked hard, not because they had actually been imbued with the Protestant work ethic as slaves, but because of the powerful influence of self-interest. The freedmen were the beneficiaries of emancipation, not of slavery."¹⁸

They forgot that emancipation from demonism is the first step toward long-term economic success. The slaves went through two stages of social emancipation: first, when the original Africans were transported by force to the insufficiently Christian South; second, when their heirs were emancipated from their insufficiently ethical masters. Although the original acts of kidnapping were immoral, their long-term results were to the benefit of those victimized Africans who survived the Atlantic passage and the early years of their enslavement.¹⁹ The

16. *Idem*. The authors referred in a footnote to another essay co-authored by Sutch, an essay whose title tells all: "Sambo Makes Good, or Were Slaves Imbued with the Protestant Work Ethic?" in Paul A. David, *et. al. Reckoning With Slavery: A critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

17. The restructuring of the outlook and personal habits of self-reliance of factory workers was necessary to the coming of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. It took a generation for managers and churchmen to accomplish even a rudimentary shift in the habits of the laboring classes. Sidney Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management: A Study of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), ch. 5: "The Adaptation of the Labor Force."

18. Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom*, p. 22.

19. It would be preposterous to deny the benefits of Solomon's wisdom merely because he was the product of a marital union originally based on adultery and murder. The undeniable evil of the latter does not negate the equally undeniable benefits of the

critics also forget that what men regard as economic self-interest varies widely across the globe, culture to culture. Men respond to incentives and opportunities (problems) in different ways. To imagine that the freedmen of 1865–80 responded to their economic environment in approximately the same way that their savage, demon-worshipping, shaman-manipulated forebears would have responded is not only naïve, it is positively denigrating to the economic and spiritual wisdom of the freedmen.²⁰ More to the point, it is all too favorable to their ancestors, not to mention the pagan gods that they worshipped.

Bondage to sin produces bondage in other areas of life, both personal and cultural. Neither judicial emancipation nor slavery is in itself a solution to the bondage of sin. Slavery in tribal Africa would not have solved the black African's spiritual poverty, but slavery in a spiritually compromised Christian culture eventually led to his hoped-for emancipation. Hard work as slaves within the cultural framework of a generally free and generally Christian society was a better training ground for a slave's eventual emancipation than hard work as a slave within some shaman-governed tribe.

Freedom begins with internal regeneration, and then steadily works its effects outward. If spiritual freedom is not allowed by civil rulers to work its way toward political and economic freedom, then God at last breaks the chains of bondage that restrain the covenantal blessings of freedom. This is the message of the Book of Exodus. Antinomian Christians do not believe this, and humanistic scholars do not admit this, but God says that this is the way He runs His world.

C. Economic Self-Interest

A slave is not usually an efficient worker. At times, he must be forced to work. As with draftees, or even volunteers in military service, fear motivates slaves. Yet it is also true that a military unit that is run exclusively by fear is not likely to fight as well as units that also combine honor, loyalty, comradeship, a taste for victory, a sense of purpose, and the possibility of personal advancement up through the ranks, not to mention the prospect of an honorable discharge. An army of perpetual recruits, of perpetual boot camps, is not going to

former.

20. I have no doubt that the proportional representation of saints in heaven is much higher for nineteenth-century American slaves than it is for twentieth-century economists. The bulk of the economists will be spending eternity in the same environment as the Shamans who stayed behind in Africa in the eighteenth century.

win many battles. We are back to reductionism: the idea that people respond to nothing more than fear. Societies that are based on the assumption of any kind of reductionism do not survive. Man and society are more than any single characteristic.

Fogel and Engerman, whose evaluation was so despised by Ransom and Sutch, concluded the obvious, something that any sensible observer might have known before the two began their detailed study of slavery—a study that received a firestorm of criticism from the academic and literary world. They wrote: “While whipping was an integral part of the system of punishment and rewards, it was not the totality of the system. What planters wanted was not sullen and discontented slaves who did just enough to keep from getting whipped. They wanted devoted, hard-working, responsible slaves who identified their fortunes with the fortunes of their masters. Planters sought to imbue slaves with a ‘Protestant’ work ethic and to transform that ethic from a state of mind into a high level of production.”²¹

Slavery was the boot camp that God provided for almost half a million African “draftees”; emancipation gave their heirs a discharge out of “the service.” It was the great historic evil of the slave-masters that slaves had been expected to spend their lives as recruits forever—and productive, loyal, hard-working recruits at that. When slaves became Protestants, in faith as well as ethic, the obvious hypocrisy of their masters must have been even more oppressive. Their masters simply did not take seriously biblical law and the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The military defeat of the South, like the defeat of Israel and Judah, should have served as a lesson in Protestant theology, how God uses the “rod” of an invading army—even an army drafted into service by pagan Boston abolitionists²²—to bring His people to repentance.

The abolition of chattel slavery in the South did not end either racism or the South.²³ It launched a new phase in southern history, one which culminated a century later in the civil rights protests of the early 1960s.²⁴ That Karl Marx believed that the end of slavery would not

21. Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 1547.

22. Otto Scott, *The Secret Six: John Brown and the Abolitionism Movement* (New York: Times Books, 1979).

23. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957); Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

24. David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern*

only destroy the South but also destroy the United States is just one more piece of evidence that Marx was a third-rate prophet, a level of performance that matched the quality of his economic analysis. In 1847, he wrote:

Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the pre-condition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.

Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy—the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations.²⁵

That man simply did not know what he was talking about, and for over three decades, he never stopped talking.²⁶

D. The American South: No Civil Protection

Slavemasters who symbolically violate this principle by inflicting permanent damage on a slave are therefore supposed to be removed from legal authority over the slave. Slavery in the American South violated this principle. Unlimited authority to inflict punishment was given to slave masters by Southern custom. Just as there was no judicially enforced hope of release for the slave, so was there no judicially enforced limit on physical punishment of the slave. The slave system of the South rested on violence. Every slave system does. In fact, both state and family rest on the threat of violence, but not unlimited viol-

Christian Leadership Conference (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–53* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

25. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House [1847]), p. 107. In 1885, Engels added an unconvincing footnote: “This was perfectly correct for the year 1847.” Then what are we to make of Marx’s next statement? “Thus slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed among institutions and people.” This was over a decade after the abolition of slavery in the British colonies. The man was willfully blind. All that education—so little wisdom or even common sense.

26. Gary North, *Marx’s Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1968] 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnmr0r>)

ence. Violence is always supposed to be judicially restrained. This was not the case with Southern slavery.

In plantation management handbook after handbook, owners were told that the slave had to submit unconditionally. John Stuart Skinner's 1840 essay in the *American Farmer* was representative of the mentality of the Southern slave-owner: "Absolute, unqualified authority is asserted and exercised on the part of the master."²⁷ His focus was on the absoluteness of the relationship. "Whenever the authority of the master becomes qualified—whenever his dominion is relaxed, and the submission of the slave ceases to be absolute, the relation between the two loses its homogeneous [sic] distinctness. The one is no longer master, the other no longer slave, in the sense and degree of absoluteness which produces uniformity of action and feeling between them."²⁸

There is no absolute human authority present in man's institutions. Men are not God. Only God establishes absolute relations with others. Only He possesses absolute authority. Thus, the judicial mark of the inherent perversity of Southern slavery was this assertion of absolute judicial authority of master over slave. The Southern slave-owner was allowed to impose any sanctions he chose for whatever reason he deemed significant. Whatever civil laws may have been on the statute books regarding limits on a master's punishment of slaves, they were seldom enforced, just as the dueling laws in the South were seldom enforced. Social custom sometimes differed from judicial forms, and social custom was the operational law of the region.

E. The Whip

Deuteronomy 25:3 specifies 40 lashes ("stripes") as the maximum allowed. To beat a person with more than 40 lashes would make the person seem "vile," in the language of the King James. The New American Standard translates the word as "degraded."

In other words, it would make him seem less than human, meaning someone not protected by law in spite of his imaging of God. The Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641) recognized the degrading aspect of whipping, and specifically protected gentlemen from this form of punishment. "No man shall be beaten with above forty stripes, nor shall any true gentleman nor any man equal to a gentleman be pun-

27. John S. Skinner, "Morality among Slaves in Mississippi," *American Farmer*, 3rd ser. (1840), cited in Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 116.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

ished with whipping, unless his crime be very shameful and his course of life vicious and profligate.”²⁹ This fastidiousness about whipping gentlemen violated the second listed liberty: equality before the law (the rule of Exodus 12:49). “Every person within this jurisdiction, whether inhabitant or foreigner, shall enjoy the same justice that is general for the plantation, which we constitute and execute toward another without partiality or delay. . . .”³⁰ Ex-slave Henry Bibb expressed his position well: “I was brought up in the Counties of Shelby, Henry, Oldham, and Trimble. Or, more correctly speaking, I was flogged up; for where I should have been receiving moral, mental, and religious instruction, I received stripes without number, the object of which was to degrade and keep me in subordination.”³¹ Bibb’s eloquence seems to have been influenced at this point by the very terminology of Deuteronomy 25:3: “stripes without number,” “to degrade me.”

It was considered a mark of personal weakness for a Southern slave-owner to rely too heavily on the whip. Certainly, he was warned by social custom and written manuals to be fixed, predictable, and self-restrained in his exercise of plantation discipline. A gentleman was expected to be in self-control at all times. Bruce summarized the social standard: “The plantation was supposed to be a system in which places were known and rules observed. Regularity and order were to be its main features. The slave’s behavior was to be highly predictable and the master, in turn, was to be predictable in his own actions.”³² This was the ideal. In fact, it was the continual complaint of ex-slaves that their masters had not been predictable in imposing sanctions.³³

Other sanctions were available besides the whip: the demotion of household slaves to the status of field slaves; the denial of passes to leave the plantation temporarily; confiscation of crops in the slaves’ personal gardens; time in the stocks; or even solitary confinement in a plantation jail (some plantations were large enough to have a jail).³⁴ But, in the last analysis, the whip was the key to slave discipline. It was the emblem of the master’s authority.³⁵ It could be used in an orderly

29. Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641), sect. 43.

30. *Ibid.*, sect. 2.

31. Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849), p. 13. (<http://bit.ly/BibbNarrative>)

32. Bruce, *Violence and Culture*, p. 118.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–40.

34. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1956), pp. 172–73.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

manner: more lashes for more serious infractions. Also, there were several kinds of whips, some more painful than others (e.g., rawhide). But the goal of the plantation ethic was to reduce whipping to a minimum.³⁶

F. Limiting Passion

There is no doubt that one of the great concerns of Southern social thought before the Civil War was to place limits on passion. Bruce's book makes this clear. Southerners feared disorder. They wanted limits—judicial, customary, and institutional—placed on men's outward acts of violence. This was one reason why the gentleman class placed such great stress on personal manners. They feared the "natural man," a man of passion and violence. They identified him by his tendency to violence. But when it came to slavery, they defied the fundamental biblical principle of social order: *self-government under God's Bible-revealed law*. They refused to establish a judicial hierarchy, an appeals court that would bring every person under the rule of law, including slave and master. They made the tight little "family" of the plantation into a sovereign judicial entity. The "children"—slaves—were to remain in the status of perpetual children. Their "father"—the master—would retain perpetual and judicially unlimited authority over them. This was a denial of the very foundation of liberty under God, a fact recognized by Jefferson, Madison, and many other Southern spokesmen, but they could not bring themselves to abandon the institution that denied their first principle of government: self-government under law.³⁷

The defenders of Southern slavery could always insist that brutality on the part of masters was not the norm but rather an exception. This was Southern Presbyterian theologian Robert L. Dabney's argument. "Now, while we freely admit that there were in the South, instances of criminal barbarity in corporal punishments, they were very infrequent, and were sternly reprobated by public opinion."³⁸ Dabney was using rhetoric to make his point. There were no acts of criminal barbarity by slave-masters in the South because there were no criminal sanctions against such acts in the South's judicial code. Such acts

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 177–79.

37. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), ch. 12.

38. Robert L. Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia [And Through Her, of the South]* (New York: Negro University Press, [1867] 1969), p. 221.

could not be criminal acts, except in terms of a higher civil law than the South's. Dabney was using the word "criminal" in a general moral sense, i.e., criminal in the eyes of God and men, meaning "socially unacceptable." In any case, how could he know how frequent such acts of "criminal barbarity" were? Intuition? There were no published records for Yankees and other "outside agitators" to appeal to. The system's defenders expected slavery's critics simply to accept their word on the matter. How sternly or frequently public opinion "reprobated" floggers was another question that could not easily be settled by an appeal to reliable public records. What is not open to question is the nature of the sanctions of the South's judicial system against the physical mistreatment of slaves: there were none.

G. Formal Sanctions and Deviance

The same kind of defense could be made regarding the splitting up of slave families: an occasional event. Dabney made it, too. Again, he appealed to the integrity of the court of public opinion: "... when the separation was not justified by the crimes of the parties, it met the steady and increasing reprobation of public opinion." The weakness of this defense is that it fails to acknowledge the heart of the matter, namely, that such supposed deviations on the part of slave-owners were legal. There were no judicially enforceable sanctions against such supposedly deviant behavior.³⁹ Thus, the behavior was not in fact deviant by Southern standards, but at most merely exceptional. *Without judicial sanctions, a society has no formal way of identifying deviant behavior.* There is always a court of public opinion, and its acceptable jurisdiction is more broad than that of civil courts, but if this court is not supported by judicial sanctions, then it is an informal court. The slaves would have found it difficult to make accurate predictions about the degree of safety such informal sanctions could provide. Without a formal court of appeal, the degree of safety would be far more indeterminate.

Deviant behavior requires sanctions to identify it. Sociologist Kai Erikson, in his study of law enforcement in Puritan Massachusetts, offered this useful definition of deviance: the term "refers to conduct

39. Legislation in the American South imposed no penalties on slave owners who physically injured their slaves. Arnold A. Sio, "Interpretations of Slavery," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, VII (April 1965); reprinted in Allen Weinstein and Frank Otto Gatell (eds.), *American Negro Slavery: A Modern Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 316–17.

which the people of a group consider so dangerous or embarrassing or irritating that they bring special sanctions to bear against the persons who exhibit it."⁴⁰ "The deviant is a person whose activities have moved outside the margins of the group, and when the community calls him to account for that vagrancy it is making a statement about how much variability and diversity can be tolerated within the group before it loses its distinctive shape, its unique identity."⁴¹ Those who defended slavery could and did appeal to the supposedly deviant character of its evils and the common character of its benefits. But the key element in defining deviance is establishing the nature of the sanctions against it. It is not the task of biblical civil government to make men perform moral tasks; its job is to restrict them from performing biblically immoral acts. The benefits of slavery should not be the civil government's legitimate concern; reducing the public evils associated with it is its legitimate concern.

Massachusetts' legislation during the first full year of the colony's existence (1630) repeated the biblical standard, although with two modifications: "If any man smite out the eye or tooth of his man-servant or maid-servant, or otherwise maim or much disfigure them, unless it be by mere casualty, he shall let them go free from his service and shall allow such further recompense as the court shall adjudge him."⁴² If the injury was clearly an accident, the servant stayed; this provided an escape clause for the owner that the Bible does not mention. On the other hand, if it was deliberate, the servant not only went free but might also receive additional compensation. This went beyond the biblical penalty. The Massachusetts Puritans, at least with respect to their public law code, were concerned about violating the spirit of the law of slave injuries. They understood this law as prohibiting deliberate injuries by the master, so they relaxed the automatic release provision of the law, yet they also tried to honor another important principle of biblical law, economic restitution. They unquestionably placed owners under the threat of civil sanctions.

It was the absence of judicial sanctions against these evils that made the character of Southern slavery judicially perverse.

The South did not impose formal, public sanctions against those

40. Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966), p. 6.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

42. *Foundations of Colonial America: A Documentary History*, ed. W. Keith Kavenaugh, 3 vols. (New York: Chelsea House, 1973), I, p. 405.

slave-owners who clearly mistreated their slaves. The Bible is clear about the proper response of society to such deviant behavior: for the slave so mistreated, the court's granting him his freedom is the appropriate sanction against the owner.

Because the South's courts refused to impose this biblical sanction on deviant slave-owners within their jurisdiction, God then imposed his sanctions on the courts. The slaves were freed by the courts of the South's conquerors. When self-government fails to produce proper results, external sanctions are appropriate. God brought the South under a kind of temporary servitude that lasted a little over a decade militarily, 1865–77, over half a century politically,⁴³ and just over a century economically, socially, and culturally.

Conclusion

When Martin Luther King, Jr., ended his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 "March on Washington" with the words, taken from an old hymn, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"⁴⁴ he spoke prophetically for the American South, which during the next decade abandoned that distinctive degree of racism, intellectual and judicial, that had kept it separated from the rest of the nation for two centuries. Well could he announce in 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, in a public speech the night before his assassination: "And He's allowed me to go up to the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land."⁴⁵

The welfare state policies that President Lyndon Johnson imposed on the American political order then undermined the African-American family, which was already disintegrating because of the welfare state system created by President Franklin Roosevelt three decades earlier. Racism's most overt and coercive practices died, 1955–70. The price that the blacks' social order suffered at the hands of the welfare state was a heavy price to pay within the community. The state substituted another kind of dependence for the older, private version. The whites pay a small percentage of their income to support this system. The great losers are the blacks. The slave system did not allow blacks to marry. The welfare state pays them not to marry. The slave system's

43. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*.

44. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, p. 284.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 621.

unofficial family was more stable than the present non-family.

Sinners have a propensity to establish slave systems. Their forms vary, but the results are similar: dependence, resentment, and failure.

APPENDIX L

MAIMONIDES' CODE: IS IT BIBLICAL?

A heathen who busies himself with the study of the Law deserves death. He should occupy himself with the (study) of the seven commandments only. So too, a heathen who keeps a day of rest, even if it be on a weekday, if he has set it apart as his Sabbath, is deserving of death. It is needless to state that he merits death if he makes a new festival for himself. The general principle is: none is permitted to introduce innovations into religion or devise new commandments. The heathen has the choice between becoming a true proselyte by accepting all the commandments, and adhering to his own religion, neither adding to it nor subtracting anything from it. If therefore he occupies himself with the study of the Law, or observes a day of rest, or makes any innovation, he is flogged, or otherwise punished and advised that he is deserving of death, but he is not put to death.

Moses Maimonides (1180)¹

The typical non-Jew would imagine that Jews throughout history would have rejoiced whenever gentiles² read the Old Testament in

1. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Judges*, Book 14 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), "Laws Concerning Kings and Wars," V:X:9, p. 237.

2. I do not capitalize "gentile," although the King James translators did, and it is still common for writers to do so. I do not view the gentiles as a separate people in the ethnic or national way that Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, and Jews are. To capitalize the word would imply that gentiles are a separate people, meaning a separate people as contrasted to Jews, who alone are "not gentiles." Such ethnic separation no longer exists in principle: "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Eph. 2:12-13). Jews equate gentiles with heathen, yet they do not capitalize "heathen," for they correctly understand "heathenism" as a spiritual condition rather than an ethnic or national condition. I use "gentiles" in the sense of "not Jews," but not in the sense of a separate ethnic or national group.

search of God's permanent moral and civil standards of righteousness. After all, this would tend to bridge the cultural and judicial gap between Jews and non-Jews. This, however, was precisely the problem in the minds of the rabbis for at least 1,700 years. The rabbis did not want this gap bridged; at most, they wanted external peace and quiet for Jews, meaning they wanted social order in the midst of gentile culture. Sufficient social order within the gentile world is supposedly achieved through their adherence to the seven commandments specifically given to the heathen, meaning gentiles. Six of these laws were first given to Adam, according to Jewish law: the prohibitions against idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, and robbery, plus the command to establish courts of justice. A seventh law was also supposedly given to Noah: the prohibition against eating the limb of a living animal.³ Beyond this minimal list of seven laws, the gentiles—"Noahides" or "Noahites," the descendants of Noah⁴—are not supposed to go in their inquiry into the ethical requirements of Old Testament law, which belongs exclusively to the Jews.

In making this assertion, Maimonides was faithfully following the teaching of the Talmud. He was taking Rabbi Johanan at his word: "R. [Rabbi—G.N.]⁵ Johanan said: A heathen who studies the Torah deserves death, for it is written, *Moses commanded us a law for an inheritance*; it is *our* inheritance, not theirs."⁶ Resh Lakish (third century, A.D.) said that a gentile who observes the Sabbath deserves death.⁷ Why should God have forbidden the gentiles to study His law? The Talmud offers this answer:

R. Abbahu thereupon said: The Writ says, *He stood and measured the earth; he beheld and drove asunder the nations*, [which may be taken to imply that] God beheld the seven commandments which were accepted by all the descendants of Noah, but since they did not observe them, He rose up and declared them to be outside the protection of the civil law of Israel [with reference to damage done to cattle by cattle].⁸

3. Maimonides, *Judges*, "Laws Concerning Kings and Wars," V:IX:1, pp. 230-31.

4. *Ibid.*, V:IX:2, p. 231.

5. When you see brackets inside a direct quotation from the Talmud, they appeared in the Soncino Press edition. I will note any brackets of my own with my initials.

6. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 59a. I am using the Soncino Press edition.

7. *Sanhedrin* 59b.

8. *Baba Kamma* 38a. Bracketed comments are by the editor.

Lest this position seem utterly outrageous to Christian readers, I need to point out that a similar view of the sufficiency of Noah's covenant for non-Israelite civil law was offered by Calvinist theologian John Murray and also by neo-dispensational theologians H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice. In fact, all three of them concluded that there is only one biblically required sanction in Noah's covenant, capital punishment for murder. This, they believed, is the only biblical law that God has required all men to obey throughout mankind's post-flood history.⁹ The Talmud at least adds an additional six laws that God specifically established through Adam and Noah that gentiles are supposed to honor throughout history.

A. How Little Most People Know About Judaism

Maimonides' opinion regarding the immorality of non-Jews who read the Old Testament would probably come as a shock to most Christians, assuming they had ever heard of Maimonides and his *Mishneh Torah*. It might even come as a shock to most contemporary Jews. The average Bible-believing Christian in the United States knows very little about post-New Testament Judaism. He may be vaguely aware that American Judaism is divided into three theological wings: Reform (liberal), Conservative, and Orthodox. He may also be aware that European Judaism has two great ethnic branches: the Sephardim¹⁰ (those whose ancestors once lived in Spain, Portugal, or the Eastern Mediterranean) and the Ashkenazic Jews¹¹ (those who came west from Russia and Poland), who were the Yiddish-speaking Jews in the late 1800s and early 1900s, prior to their linguistic assimilation into Amer-

9. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 118-19; House and Ice, *Dominion Theology: Curse or Blessing?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1988), p. 130.

10. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, [1893] 1945), IV, chaps. 10-13. On the influence of the Sephardic Jews in the U.S., see Stephen Birmingham, *The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

11. Graetz, *History*, IV, ch. 14; V, chaps. 6, 18; V, ch. 1. See also Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1880* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972). On their influence in the U.S., see Stephen Birmingham, "Our Crowd": *The Great Jewish Families of New York* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, [1976] 1983); Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, *How We Lived: A Documentary History of Immigrant Jews in America, 1880-1930* (New York: Richard Marek, 1979).

ican culture. But as to how these Jewish groups overlap,¹² or which group dominates Judaism either in the U.S. or in the state of Israel today,¹³ the average Christian has no idea. Few Christians have heard that there is a third branch, Oriental or Yemenite Judaism (North African), members of which have long complained that they are discriminated against politically in the state of Israel.

Christians are unaware that the medieval Jewish body of literature known as the Kabbalah ("tradition") is not only mystical but closely tied to numerology and occultism.¹⁴ They do not know that the mystical-magical tradition of the Kabbalah had its roots in the Talmud.¹⁵ They have never read anything about the history of Zionism, either pro¹⁶ or con.¹⁷

To the extent that the Bible-believing Christian thinks about Reform Jews generally, he assumes that they are something like Unitarians: politically liberal, skeptical about the Bible, and essentially hu-

12. Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), ch. 4: "The Jews."

13. I refer to the "state of Israel" rather than "Israel" out of respect for the terminology of Orthodox Jews, who sharply distinguish the two.

14. "Kabalah," in Lewis Spence (ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1920] 1960). An example of popular (though underground) magical literature based on the Kabbalah, which has been reprinted generation after generation, is *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*. See also Arthur Edward Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah: A Study of the Secret Tradition of Israel* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1960 reprint); Denis Saurat, *Literature and Occult Tradition*, trans. Dorothy Bolton (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat, [1930] 1966), Pt. III, ch. 2. The pioneering modern Jewish studies of the Kabbalah are by Gershom G. Scholem: *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed (New York: Schocken, 1961) and *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, [1960] 1965). The primary source of Kabbalah is *The Zohar*, 5 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1934). On the influence of the Kabbalah on the gentile world, see Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: ARK, [1979] 1983) and A. E. Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1961 reprint).

15. Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* 2nd ed. (New York: Bloch, 1965).

16. Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972); Ronald Sanders, *The High Walls of Jerusalem: A History of the Balfour Declaration and the Birth of British Mandate for Palestine* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1983).

17. Gary V. Smith (ed.), *Zionism: The Dream and the Reality, A Jewish Critique* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974); Rabbi Elmer Berger, *The Jewish Dilemma: The Case Against Zionist Nationalism* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1945). The major published English-speaking critic of Zionism is Alfred M. Lilienthal: *What Price Israel?* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953); *There Goes the Middle East* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1957); *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1978).

manistic. (Orthodox Jews also view Reform Jews in much the same way.) Christians, however, tend to think of almost all Jews in this way, which turns out to be a statistically correct political assumption; American Jews are consistently liberal in their voting behavior.¹⁸ Conservative Jews are seen by Christians as being somewhere in between Reform and Orthodox: they do not eat pork, but they wear normal clothes; other than this, Christians know little about them.

The Orthodox Jew, in contrast, is assumed by the Bible-believing Christian to be rather like the Christian: he has minority status within the larger Jewish community, he tends to be more conservative politically, pro-family in outlook, and probably anti-abortion. He is in conflict with the Reform Jews, just as the Bible-believing Christian is at war with the liberal defenders of biblical higher criticism. Thus, the Orthodox Jew is assumed to be a kind of Old Testament Christian who wears black clothing and a beard—a quaint, Amish-like figure¹⁹—and who avoids pork. This perception is incorrect. The Orthodox Jew is in fact a self-conscious, self-professed spiritual heir of the Pharisees. His book is the Talmud, the written version of Judaism's oral law, far more than it is the Old Testament.

1. The "Star of David"

Very few people know much about the history of Judaism, including those who identify themselves as Jews. This may seem like an outrageous statement. You can test its accuracy by asking the average gentile or average Jew what the most important symbol of modern Judaism is. He probably will say either the scroll of the Torah or "the star of David," also known as the Mogen David or Magen David. After all, it appears on the state of Israel's national flag. Ask him where the latter symbol originated, and you will get a blank stare. He has no idea.

The fact is, the so-called star of David is a universal pagan symbol, long pre-dating Judaism. It was adopted by Zionists in the late nine-

18. "... Jews in this country have the economic status of white Anglo-Saxon Episcopalians but vote more like low-income Hispanics." Milton Himmelfarb, cited by Irving Kristol, "Liberalism & American Jews," *Commentary* (Oct. 1988), p. 19; cf. Peter Steinfelds, "American Jews Stand Firmly to the Left," *New York Times* (Jan. 8, 1989). Steinfelds reported that polls revealed that four times as many Jews belong to the Democratic Party as belong to the Republican Party, compared to about equal numbers of other white voting groups. Almost two to one, Jews believe in the legal right to abortion.

19. This link is featured in a scene in a movie about a mid-nineteenth century Jew, *The Frisco Kid*, and in a scene in a movie about a modern Amish family, *Witness*.

teenth century. Before then, it was used as a decoration by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It was long called the Seal of Solomon. How many Jews, let alone Christians, have ever been informed of the following information, presented by Jewish scholar and art historian Joseph Gutmann?

The Magen David is a hexagram or six-pointed star. It appears as early as the Bronze Age and is at home in cultures and civilizations widely removed in time and geographic area. Mesopotamia, India, Greece, and Etruria are among the places where it has been found—but without any discoverable meaning. Possibly it was an ornament or had magical connotations. Only occasionally before the 1890s it is found in a Jewish context; the oldest Jewish example is from seventh-century B.C.E. [B.C.] Sidon, a seal belonging to one Joshua ben Asayahu. In the synagogue at Capernaum, Galilee, a synagogue which may date from the fourth century C.E. [A.D.], the Magen David is found alongside the pentagram and the swastika, but there is no reason to assume that the Magen David or the other signs on the synagogue stone frieze served any but decorative purposes.

In the Middle Ages, the Magen David appears quite frequently in the decorations of European and Islamic Hebrew manuscripts and even on some synagogues, but appears to have no distinct Jewish symbolic connotation; it is also found on the seals of the Christian kings of Navarre, on mediaeval church objects, and on cathedrals. As a matter of fact, what is today called Magen David was generally known as the Seal of Solomon in the Middle Ages, especially in Jewish, Christian and Islamic magical texts. In the medieval Islamic world the hexagram was popular and was widely used. Generally known, especially in Arab sources, as the Seal of Solomon, it gradually became linked with a magic ring or seal believed to give King Solomon control over demons. An early Jewish source in the Babylonian Talmud (*Gittin* 68a-b) already mentions it.

The hexagram and pentagram, it should be pointed out, both carried the designation “Seal of Solomon” and were employed in both Christianity and Islam as symbols with magical or amuletic power. On the parchment of many medieval *mezuzot* (capsules placed on the doorposts of every Jewish home) the hexagram and pentagram (Seal of Solomon) were written out and also served as a talisman or had magical powers to ward off evil spirits.²⁰

20. Joseph Gutmann, *The Jewish Sanctuary* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), p. 21. This study is Section XXIII: Judaism, of the *Iconography of Religions*, produced by the Institute of Religious Iconography of the State University Groningen, Netherlands.

The point is, few Jews or gentiles are aware of any of this. That the flag of the state of Israel bears an ancient pagan symbol is not a well-known fact either to those who respect it or who resent it. In short, the vast majority of Christians and many Jews know very little about the history of Judaism. Jews and Christians are aware that their respective religious practices are quite different, yet not many of them know why, and to what extent, their religions differ. People speak of “the Judeo-Christian tradition,” yet they are not quite sure what this tradition is, or if it even exists.²¹

B. Rival Religions

I agree with the incomparably prolific (950 books) Orthodox Jew, Jacob Neusner, whose studies on Jewish law are as close to definitive as the writings of any one person can be.²² He wrote: “Judaism and Christianity are completely different religions, not different versions of one religion (that of the ‘Old Testament,’ or ‘the written Torah,’ as Jews call it). The two faiths stand for different people talking about different things to different people.”²³ He argued that the key differences center on the two rival programs: salvation (Christianity) vs. sanctification (Phariseeism). It is therefore also a debate over the issue of eschatology: God’s kingdom manifested in world history. Christianity is inherently universalistic; Judaism is inherently particularistic. Neusner wrote:

Salvation, in the nature of things, concerned the whole of humanity; sanctification, equally characteristic of its category, spoke of a single nation—Israel. To save, the messiah saves Israel amid all nations, because salvation characteristically entails the eschatological dimension and so encompasses all of history. No salvation, after all, can last only for a little while or leave space for time beyond itself. To sanctify, by contrast, the sage sanctifies Israel in particular. Sanctification categorically requires the designation of what is holy against what is not holy. To sanctify is to set apart. No sanctification can encompass everyone or leave no room for someone in particular to be holy. One need not be “holier than thou,” but the *holy* requires the

21. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Schocken, 1971). J. H. Hexter, *The Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

22. Jacob Neusner, *History of the Mishna Laws*, 5 parts, 43 volumes (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill). He has written 950 books. (<http://bit.ly/JNbooks>)

23. Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1991), p. 1.

contrary category, the *not holy*. So, once more, how can two religious communities understand one another when one raises the issue of the sanctification of Israel, and the other the salvation of the world?²⁴

Christianity, by adopting a view of salvation that necessarily encompasses all the nations of the earth, broke forever with rabbinic Judaism. This was the meaning of Jesus' analogy of new wine. "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved" (Matt. 9:17). Neusner was correct: Christianity is universalistic in scope and vision; Judaism is particularistic.

Neusner also contrasted sanctification with salvation. This is fundamentally incorrect. He missed what should be obvious: *the Bible presents salvation as a process that necessarily involves both progressive personal sanctification and progressive institutional sanctification as history unfolds*.²⁵ Biblical salvation is a comprehensive process.²⁶ This is a major aspect of its universalism. Christianity's doctrine of salvation (soteriology) is inescapably tied to its doctrine of progressive sanctification. This was especially true of Anglo-American Protestant missionary activity until the late nineteenth century.²⁷ Neusner is not alone in this error, however. The institutional-historical aspect of salvation has also been generally ignored by most Bible-believing Christian theologians in the twentieth century. They have not recognized the extent to which biblical soteriology, ethics, and eschatology are intertwined. By failing to grasp this fact, both rabbinic Judaism and modern fundamentalism have adopted ghetto mentalities.²⁸

If the debate between Jews and Christians with regard to the nature of covenantal society is inherently an ethical debate—ethics' sources and applications in history—then the key book in the history of Judaism is the Talmud. Christians need to be aware of it, but very

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

25. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

26. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action." (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

27. J. A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the rise of Anglo-American missions, 1640-1810* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1970).

28. Modern intellectual evangelicalism has generally adopted the prevailing humanist worldview. It has adopted a "we, too" view of social theory. See James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

few are. It is not sufficient to go to the Old Testament to learn about Judaism. Judaism and Christianity both claim to go to the Old Testament; so does Islam. These three religions—not to mention their factions, sects, splinter groups, and offshoots—offer radically different interpretations of the Old Testament. We must therefore look briefly at the Talmud in order to get the sense of the theological and historical differences separating Orthodox Judaism and biblical Christianity.

C. The Talmud: A Closed Book, Even When Open²⁹

Most Christians have never heard of the Talmud. I have never met a Christian who claims to have read all of it, all 34 fat volumes. The Christian who may have heard of it but who has never read in it probably believes that it is a large Bible commentary on the Old Testament. I hope to show here that this assumption is incorrect.

The problem Christians face is that there is no work of serious yet forthright scholarship on the Talmud that is written by a Trinitarian, Bible-believing Christian. Alfred Edersheim, the mid-nineteenth-century convert from Judaism who taught at Oxford and who wrote *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* and *Old Testament History*, could have written such a work, but he chose not to, although his *History of the Jewish Nation* does include a 21-page section on Jewish law in the Talmud and Mishnah.³⁰ Under the section, "Jewish Theology," he admitted: "In attempting to arrange the doctrinal views of the Rabbins, we are bewildered by a mass of erroneous, blasphemous, and even contradictory statements."³¹ I would add: *especially* we find contradictory statements, for dialecticism is the reasoning process of the Talmud. Solomon Schechter's restrained comment in 1901 is accurate: "This indifference to logic and insensibility to theological consistency seems to be a vice from which not even the later successors of the Rabbis—the commentators of the Talmud—emancipated themselves en-

29. Israel Shenker referred to David Weiss' leisurely reading of it on vacations, without Weiss' normal line-by-line analysis, "as though it were an open book." Shenker, "A Life in the Talmud," *New York Times Magazine* (Sept. 11, 1977). Professor Robert L. Wilken of the University of Virginia called the Soncino edition of the Talmud a closed book: *Insight* (May 16, 1988).

30. Alfred Edersheim, *History of the Jewish Nation After the Destruction of Jerusalem Under Titus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1856] n.d.), pp. 361-81. Edersheim was ordained at age 21 in the Scottish Presbyterian Church, and was later ordained an Anglican. He wrote this book at age 30.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

tirely.”³² Or more impishly, “Whatever the faults of the Rabbis were, consistency was not one of them.”³³ Even today, there are remarkably few serious works on the Talmud in English written by Jews, and none of them that I have read even mentions the disturbing material that I will briefly refer to in this appendix.

1. *What Is the Talmud?*

The Babylonian Talmud is an immense compilation.³⁴ It has been well described by Jews as “the sea of the Talmud.” (Sargasso Sea is closer to it.) Jews have called it “the Great Labyrinth” and “Sphinx-like,”³⁵ which is getting even closer, given the occult roots of the labyrinth and its connection with the Sphinx.³⁶ R. Travers Herford, the Unitarian master (yet concealer) of the Talmud, described it as “a great wilderness.”³⁷ Few Christians have ever seen a set; almost no one reads it today, Christians or Jews. An unabridged version of the Talmud became available in English only in the early 1950s—about two generations after the vast majority of English-speaking Jews had ceased to pay any attention to it. It is 34 volumes long, plus a large index volume. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, it had been a hidden book to the English-speaking gentile world. As England’s chief rabbi, J. H. Hertz mentioned in his Foreword, “All the censored passages reappear in the Text or in the Notes.”³⁸ Earlier editions, most notably Michael Rodkinson’s (1903), had been voluntarily censored by their editors.

The Talmud is a compilation of the oral teachings of the rabbis from perhaps 200 years before Christ until the end of the second century, A.D. (Mishnah), plus an additional three hundred years of com-

32. Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, [1901] 1961), p. 15.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 46. Schechter was a leader in the Conservative movement of Judaism: Joseph Gaer and Rabbi Alfred Wolf, *Our Jewish Heritage* (Hollywood, California: Wilshire Book Co., 1957), p. 24.

34. The Jerusalem Talmud is much smaller and has never had impact on Judaism comparable to the Babylonian Talmud.

35. Jacob Schachter, “Talmudical Introductions Down to the Time of Chajes,” in Z. H. Chajes, *The Student’s Guide Through the Talmud* (London: East and West Library, 1952), p. xvi.

36. Appendix C.

37. R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903), p. 1.

38. Hertz, “Foreword,” *Baba Kamma, The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1935), p. xxvii.

mentary (Gemara). The total is almost seven (possibly eight) centuries.³⁹ Those who adhere to the Talmud claim that this oral tradition extends back to Moses. They cite Exodus 24 as proof: "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments" (3a). Then we read, "And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD" (4a). But he did not write the judgments, they say; instead, the judgments became the oral law, taught from rabbi to rabbi down through the ages. An Orthodox Jewish rabbi believes that he can trace his line of teachers back to Moses.

What eventually became the authoritative version of this oral tradition was compiled by several Jewish authorities, but especially by Rabbi Judah, "the Prince," "the patriarch," HaNasi,⁴⁰ or just "Rabbi" (135–210 A.D.). He completed what later became known as the Mishnah sometime around 189.⁴¹ The word "completed" is somewhat misleading. Completed what? Some Jews have insisted that it was not written down in his day because it was considered by the Jews as a crime to do so. Wrote the Jewish historian Graetz: "Christendom had taken possession of the Holy Scriptures as its own spiritual property, and considered itself as the chosen part of Israel. According to the views of the times, Judaism was now possessed of no distinguishing feature, except the Oral Law."⁴² There is obviously some debate about this, however. Hermann Strack, a highly respected gentile German scholar of the Talmud, wrote: "Just how much of it was written by Rabbi himself is a subject of debate."⁴³ He used the verb "written," but he is judicious about referring directly to the writing down of the Mishnah, for that would mean coming to a conclusion, and Prof. Strack avoids conclusions like the plague.⁴⁴ He said that portions of the

39. Schachter, "Talmudical Introductions," in Chajes, *Student's Guide Through the Talmud*, p. xvi (footnote).

40. The Nasi or Prince was the head of the Sanhedrin. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co., [1953] 1963), p. 628.

41. Graetz, *History of the Jews*, II, p. 460.

42. *Ibid.*, II, p. 608.

43. Hermann Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Atheneum, [1931] 1983), p. 20. This book was first published in English by the Jewish Publication Society of America.

44. Anyone trying to read Strack's book will find how useless it is as an introduction. Only the most skilled Talmudic scholar could follow its reams of names without dates or summaries of their thought (ch. XIII), bibliography without evaluation (ch. XIV), and its lack of conclusions about anything. Here was a man who compiled a mountain of notes, and in five editions achieved little more than pasting this mass of notes together. There is hardly a glimmer of insight in any of it. This is Germanic scholarship at its worst: massive scholarly paraphernalia, little substance, and no con-

Mishnah had been written down both by Rabbi Akiba and his pupil Rabbi Meir in the early second century A.D., but not everything had been written down: "Great stress was laid on memorizing and retaining in memory the enormous material; witness the remark of Dosthai ben Jannai in the name of Meir: 'When a scholar forgets a single word of his Mishna, they account it to him as if he forfeited his life.'" ⁴⁵ He said that there had been earlier codifications than Akiba's. Graetz did not exaggerate when he wrote that "Concurrently with the Bible, the Mishna was the principal source of intellectual activity and research; it sometimes even succeeded in entirely supplanting the Scripture, and in asserting its claim to sole authority. It was the intellectual bond which held together the scattered members of the Jewish nation." ⁴⁶ I can think of another criticism of Judaism even more devastating than Graetz's: the Jews later chose the Talmud over the Mishnah, which at least had been vastly shorter.

2. Pharisees vs. Sadducees

The Pharisees were the Jewish rabbis who embraced the oral tradition as equal to the Old Testament; the Sadducees were priests who accepted the oral law's traditions but rejected the Pharisees' claim that the oral law is equally as binding as Scripture. ⁴⁷ The Jewish historian and former priest Josephus, who was alive at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, summarized the differences between the two, and his summary makes it clear why Jesus rejected both groups.

clusions. He labored mightily all his life, and brought forth a mouse. If you think I am exaggerating, you owe it to yourself to sit down and read it. I warn you: you won't make it through the first four chapters—not if you have any sense. You will never make it past the chapter on the Mishna. I prefer to play the role of the little boy who announced that the emperor had no clothes. Prof. Strack had no ideas. That a man's life could be wasted on such a project as futile as this one is pathetic. Hermann Strack is the one of the few scholars about whose book I can honestly say: "It is less useful than biblical higher criticism."

45. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

46. Graetz, *History*, II, p. 462.

47. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "The Sadducees and Pharisees" (1913); reprinted in Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1951); J. H. Hertz, "Foreword," *The Babylonian Talmud*, Seder Nezikin (London: Soncino Press, 1935), p. xiv. Unitarian scholar R. Travers Herford wrote several sympathetic accounts of the tradition of the Pharisees, most notably *The Pharisees* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924); *The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers* (New York: Schocken, [1945] 1962). The standard Jewish work on the Pharisees is Rabbi Louis Finkelstein's study, *The Pharisees*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963).

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers. . . .⁴⁸

. . . the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. They ascribe all to fate [or providence,] and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does co-operate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies,—but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees are those who compose the second order, and take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades.⁴⁹

The Sadducees' influence faded rapidly after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Herbert Danby, whose English translation of the Mishnah is still considered authoritative by the scholarly world, both Jewish and gentile, commented on the undisputed triumph of the Pharisees after the fall of Jerusalem (which lives on as Orthodox Judaism): "Until the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70 they had counted as one only among the schools of thought which played a part in Jewish national and religious life; after the Destruction they took the position, naturally and almost immediately, of sole and undisputed leaders of such Jewish life as survived. Judaism as it has continued since is, if not their creation, at least a faith and a religious institution largely of their fashioning; and the Mishnah is the authoritative record of their labour. Thus it comes about that while Judaism and Christianity alike venerate the Old Testament as canonical Scripture, the Mishnah marks the passage to Judaism as definitely as the New Testament marks the passage to Christianity." Neusner was correct when he served that "the rabbis of late antiquity rewrote in their own image and

48. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. XIII, Ch. X, Sect. 6. William Whiston translation, 1737.

49. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Bk. II, Ch. VIII, Sect. 14.

likeness the entire Scripture and history of Israel, dropping whole eras as though they had never been, ignoring vast bodies of old Jewish writing, inventing whole new books for the canon of Judaism. . . ."⁵⁰

The supremacy of the Mishnah after A.D. 70 meant the triumph of the Pharisees. Similarly, in the modern era, the waning of the Mishnah in Judaism has meant the waning of the Pharisees' spiritual heirs, Orthodox Jews.

Again, the Mishnah is the written version of the Jews' oral tradition, while the rabbis' comments on it are called Gemara. The Talmud contains both Mishnah and Gemara. The rabbinical comments comprise the bulk of the Talmud. Danby's standard translation of the Mishnah is one long volume. The Soncino Press edition of the Talmud is 34 volumes, plus the index.

3. *The Torah*

When Jews speak of "Torah,"⁵¹ they do not always mean the Old Testament or even the Pentateuch. Sometimes they mean something much broader. Christians are generally unaware of this broader usage, which leads them to believe that Orthodox Jews are somehow Christians without Christ, or Unitarians who believe in miracles and angels, i.e., people who believe in the Old Testament by itself. They think of Orthodox Jews as undeveloped Christians, theological first cousins who were publicly disinherited in A.D. 70. They have missed the point of Jesus' absolute challenge to the Pharisees.

Orthodox Judaism constitutes a rival religion that developed alongside the early church. The Pharisees insisted that the oral law is equal to the written law, as surely as Christians insist that the New Testament is as authoritative as the Old Testament, the Muslims insist that the Koran is as authoritative as the Old Testament, and the Mormons insist that the Book of Mormon is as authoritative as the Old Testament. Each group really means that its unique post-Old Testament document is *more* authoritative now than the Old Testament is. No major religion since the fall of Jerusalem has taken the Old Testament as its sole or even primary authoritative document. Only the Karaite sect of Judaism has pretended to.⁵²

50. Neusner, "Two Faiths Talking," *World & I*, *op. cit.*, p. 690.

51. "Direction, instruction, doctrine, law": *Oxford English Dictionary*.

52. The tiny Karaite sect, begun in the mid-eighth century, openly opposed the oral law until the nineteenth century, when Reform Judaism began to take hold of Judaism. The Karaites never became influential. For this entire period, Rabbi Chajes'

The rabbinic Torah is very different from the Old Testament. Danby comments: "It includes the Written Law, the laws explicitly recorded in the Five Books of Moses; it includes also 'the traditions of the elders' or the Oral Law, namely, such beliefs and religious practices as piety and custom had in the course of centuries, consciously or unconsciously, grafted on to or developed out of the Written Law; and it includes yet a third, less tangible element, a spirit of development, whereby Written Law and Oral Law, in spite of seeming differences, are brought into a unity and interpreted and reinterpreted to meet the needs of changed conditions."⁵³ In short, there are three elements that comprise the Torah: the Old Testament, the oral law, and casuistry.⁵⁴

The two primary questions that I am raising in this appendix are these: 1) Is traditional Judaism's casuistry even remotely biblical? 2) Is it the product of an anti-Old Testament perspective?

4. *Dialecticism and Dualism*

Dialecticism is that approach to human knowledge which insists that all truths are inherently opposed to each other. Dialecticism is to human logic what Manichaeism is to cosmology: the assertion of the eternal struggle of opposites. Whenever we discover dialecticism in questions regarding epistemology—"What can man know, and how can he know it?"—we should also begin our search for traces of ethical dualism, the idea that there is one set of ethical standards for the elite, and another set for those on the outside, the "uninitiated." Exodus 12:49 denies the legitimacy of judicial dualism: "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you." The Old Testament placed everyone in Israel under the same law. God required all the people to assemble one year in seven and listen to a public reading of the whole law: "Gather the people togeth-

mid-nineteenth-century assessment is representative of the preceding seventeen centuries of Judaism: "Allegiance to the authority of the said rabbinic tradition is binding upon all sons of Israel, since these explanations and interpretations have come down to us by word of mouth from generation to generation, right from the time of Moses. They have been transmitted to us precise, correct, and unadulterated, and he who does not give his adherence to the unwritten law and the rabbinic tradition has no right to share the heritage of Israel; he belongs to the Sadducees or the Karaites who severed connection to us long ago." Chajes, *Student's Guide Through the Talmud*, p. 4.

53. Danby, Introduction, *Mishnah*, pp. xiii–xiv.

54. For a detailed discussion of these additions to the written law of the Old Testament, see R. Travers Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha* (London: Soncino, 1933), pp. 66–69. Herford was a Unitarian scholar; Soncino Press is the Jewish publishing house that published the official and unabridged English-language Talmud.

er, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it" (Deuteronomy 31:12–13). All people were expected to be able to understand the specifics and the principles of God's law, "the letter and the spirit." All residents were equal under God's law.

The judicial principle of equality before the civil law made Israel unique in ancient history. Other nations, including Greece and Rome, did not grant non-citizens equal status under the law. Foreigners and resident aliens were not members of the families and clans that alone could lawfully participate in the rites of the city; therefore, they were not entitled to protection by the civil law.⁵⁵ Not so in ancient Israel.

This judicial principle of equality before the law is basic to the Bible's *lex talionis* principle of "eye for eye." Rabbinic Judaism denies it. For example, a gentile who so much as strikes a Jew is worthy of death. "R. Hanina said: If a heathen smites a Jew, he is worthy of death, for it is written, *And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian*. R. Hanina also said: He who smites an Israelite on the jaw, is as though he had thus assaulted the Divine Presence; for it is written, *One who smiteth man* [i.e. an Israelite] *attacketh the Holy One*."⁵⁶

This view of the inherent inequality of all men before God's law is a denial of God's command not to respect persons:

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).

To distinguish different proper penalties for striking Jews as opposed to striking gentiles elevates the Jews to a position of an international elite. This is in accord with Talmudic reasoning. The Talmud

55. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, [1864] 1955).

56. *Sanhedrin* 58b.

offers this doctrine of God's common grace to all men: "*All the families of the earth*, even the other families who live on the earth are blessed only for Israel's sake. *All the nations of the earth*, even the ships that go down from Gaul to Spain are blessed only for Israel's sake."⁵⁷

5. *Dialecticism vs. Casuistry*

The Talmud is just about useless for writing a Bible commentary, not simply because it is such a difficult set of books to use by Jews or gentiles, but also because the large number of comments by the rabbis are so often very brief, and so often contradictory to each other. A self-conscious dialecticism underlies the Talmud: endless debate without authoritative or logical reconciliation. Dialecticism is one aspect of Judaism's tradition of deliberate secrecy, a tradition adopted by Maimonides in the style of his *Guide of the Perplexed*.⁵⁸

A good example of this Talmudic dialecticism is the debate over whether gentiles should be allowed to read the Torah (the five books of Moses). Consider the saying of Rabbi Johanan, on which Maimonides' assertion cited at the beginning of this appendix is based: "R. [Rabbi] Johanan said: A heathen who studies the Torah deserves death, for it is written, *Moses commanded us a law for an inheritance*; it is our inheritance, not theirs." Johanan was one of the most prestigious of the rabbis, a disciple of Hillel (late first century B.C.).⁵⁹ Yet in the same paragraph is recorded the saying of Rabbi Meir, an equally prestigious authority, both jurist and preacher, from the second century A.D.: "... even a heathen who studies the Torah is as a High Priest!" So, which is it? Maimonides sided with Johanan, but he could as easily have sided with Meir. This is the main problem in assessing the ethical pronouncements of the Talmud. There is seldom any effective resolution of conflicting viewpoints. This is the characteristic feature of the Talmud: a mountain of brief, sometimes outlandish statements, without any coherent resolution. Paul, a former Pharisee (Phil. 3:5), warned Titus regarding such speculation: "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are

57. *Yehamoth* 63a.

58. "... Maimonides deliberately contradicts himself, and if a man declares both that *a* is *b* and that *a* is not *b*, he cannot be said to declare anything." Leo Strauss, "How to Read The Guide of the Perplexed," in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 2 vols., trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. xv.

59. *Sanhedrin* 59a.

unprofitable and vain" (Titus 3:9). Thirty-four fat volumes of this material is wearying to the soul.

The rabbis were often incredibly obscure, in stark contrast to the clear statements of the biblical texts. This was a major point of conflict between Sadducees and Pharisees before the destruction of Jerusalem: the Sadducees believed that the texts of the Torah are clear.⁶⁰ Writes Lauterbach of the Sadducees: "They would not devise ingenious methods to explain away a written law or give it a new meaning not warranted by the plain sense of the words."⁶¹ The Pharisees disagreed with the Sadducees on this method of interpretation, and the Talmud is the book of the Pharisees. Its comments are often contrary to the biblical text. For example, what are we to make of this comment, obviously an application of Leviticus 18:23 and 21:7, the prohibition on bestiality? "R. [Rabbi] Shimi b. [son of] Hiyya stated: A woman who had intercourse with a beast is eligible to marry a priest."⁶² The footnote by the modern Soncino Press commentator makes it even worse: "Even a High Priest." The Old Testament sets forth this rule for the high priest: "And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife" (Lev. 21:13–14). Are we being asked by the rabbis to regard as a virgin a woman who has committed bestiality?

Major university libraries will generally have a complete set of the Soncino Press Babylonian Talmud. Because very few English-speaking Christians or Jews have ever even seen a set of the Talmud, let alone read in it, they owe it to themselves to locate a set, open at random in any volume, and carefully read five consecutive pages. Just five pages; that will be sufficient. As they read, they will repeatedly ask themselves this question: "What in the world is this all about?" Then will come a second question: "How can anyone make sense of this?" Most of all, this question: "What has any of this got to do with the Old Testament?"

60. Lauterbach, "Sadducees and Pharisees," *Rabbinical Essays*, p. 31.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 32. The Sadducees were not "proto-Christians," however. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, for example, which is why Paul successfully divided the crowd of hostile Jews by claiming that he was being persecuted simply because he accepted the idea of the resurrection (Acts 23:6–10).

62. Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth* 5gb.

6. "You Have Heard It Said"

Orthodox Judaism is not simply "Old Testament theology without Jesus." It is the religion of "You have heard it said." This was Jesus' repeated response to the erroneous oral teachings of the Pharisees. We can do the same as we read the Talmud. For example:

"You have heard it said that gentiles who oppose Israel spend eternity in the nether world being boiled in semen, while Christians spend eternity with Jesus in boiling excrement,⁶³ but I say unto you that the New Testament teaches of a far worse eternity for covenant-breakers."

Or: "You have heard it said that Adam had intercourse with every beast of the field before cohabiting with Eve,⁶⁴ but I tell you that bestiality is a great sin before God."

Or: "You have heard it said that a homosexual who seduces a boy under the age of nine need have no guilt, while others have argued that age three is the minimum,⁶⁵ but I say unto you that anyone who does

63. Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 56b–57a. The text tells a story of a sorcerer, Onkelos son of Kolonikos: "He then went and raised Balaam by incantations. He asked him: Who is in repute in the other world? He replied: Israel. What then, he said, about joining them? He replied: *Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever*. He then asked: What is your punishment? He replied: With boiling hot semen. He then went and raised by incantations the sinners of Israel. He asked them: Who is in repute in the other world? They replied: Israel. What about joining them? They replied: Seek their welfare, seek not their harm. Whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye. He said: What is your punishment? They replied: With boiling hot excrement, since a Master has said: Whoever mocks at the words of the Sages is punished with boiling hot excrement."

What has all this got to do with Christ and Christians? Everything. The entry for "Jesus" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says that the name of Balaam refers to Jesus, who was "the prototype of Jesus." It specifically cites this passage in the Talmud, *Gittin* 56a–57b, and it equates "the sinners of Israel" with Jesus. It says of Onkelos, "He asked Jesus: 'Who is esteemed in that world?' Jesus said: 'Israel.' 'Shall one join: them?' Jesus said to him: 'Further their well-being; do nothing to their detriment; whoever touches them touches even the apple of His eye.'" *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), VII, p. 172.

64. "R. [Rabbi] Eleazar further stated: What is meant by the Scriptural text, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*? This teaches that Adam had inter course with every beast and animal but found no satisfaction until he cohabited with Eve." Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth* 63a. Eleazar was an important scholar of the oral law in the years immediately following the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

65. "Rab said: Pederasty with a child below nine years of age is not deemed as pederasty with a child above that. Samuel said: Pederasty with a child below three years is not treated as with a child above that." Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 54b. The modern commentator's note explains: "Rab makes nine years the minimum; but if one

this should be executed, as required by biblical law.”

Did you read the footnotes? This is only the beginning, but it should be sufficient. You now recognize that the Talmud is not a conventional commentary on the Old Testament, although with certain key New Testament concepts missing. On the contrary, the Talmud's contents are only peripherally related to the Old Testament. The Talmud is a giant exercise in finding ways to escape the Old Testament texts. The Pharisees were in rebellion against God's law, all in the name of God's law. This was Jesus' assertion from the beginning:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness (Matthew 23:24–27).

What the average Christian does not suspect is that modern Or-

committed sodomy with a child of lesser age, no guilt is incurred. Samuel makes three the minimum.” Rab is the nickname of Rabbi Abba Arika (175?–247 A.D.), the founder of the Jewish academy in the Persian city of Sura [Sora], one of the three great Jewish academies in Persia. Samuel was Mar-Samuel (180–257 A.D.), Rab's contemporary and fellow teacher at Sura, a master of Jewish civil law. See Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, II, pp. 512–22.

thodox Jews are the self-conscious and self-proclaimed spiritual heirs of the Pharisees. This is what distinguishes them in their own eyes from Conservative Jews and Reform Jews.

D. Departing From the Old Testament Texts

This tradition of departing from the biblical text was maintained by medieval Jewish commentators. S. M. Lehrman is quite forthright about this: "To the rabbis, it was a trivial criticism that at times their explanations were somewhat remote from the actual literary meaning (*peshat*) of the text they sought to illuminate. Surely, the thing that mattered most was to make the Scriptures a living book with a message for all times."⁶⁶ If this really is what matters most, then the Talmud failed. Men cannot depart from the original meaning of the text without killing the Torah.⁶⁷

David Weiss, formerly an Orthodox Jew but now a professor at the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary,⁶⁸ is a master of the Talmud, the model for the character David Malter in Chaim Potok's novel, *The Promise*. He has devoted his academic career to a detailed study of the various versions of the Talmud in an attempt to piece together the true text. This discipline is what Christians call "lower criticism" when applied to biblical texts. Here is how Weiss describes the effective use of the Talmud: "With one hand you acknowledge God's existence. At the same time, you want to have some maneuverability. Studying critically is contending with God's writ—acknowledging it but using criticism to alter it. Man is powerless vis-a-vis God and powerful vis-a-vis His Torah. *There* he can assert his independence by offering an interpretation different from the one God intended."⁶⁹

It was this approach to Old Testament law that Jesus publicly challenged. This is the heart and soul of Phariseeism. The rabbinic compilers of Jewish oral law or "Unwritten Torah" (Mishnah) understood

66. S. M. Lehrman, *The World of the Midrash* (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), p. 11.

67. What makes the Bible unique among all books is its permanent ethical applicability within a world of historical change. This is because it is the word of God. It applies perpetually because it is valid eternally. No other document in man's history has possessed or can possess this characteristic.

68. "Like the Orthodox, the Conservatives accept the Torah; but, unlike the Orthodox, they do not necessarily accept it as of divine origin." Gaer and Wolf, *Our Jewish Heritage*, p. 25.

69. Israel Shenker, "A Life in the Talmud," *New York Times Magazine* (Sept. 11, 1977).

what they were doing; substituting the speculations of men for the “low maneuverability” biblical texts. The compilers of the rabbis’ comments on the Mishnah (Gemara) also understood what they were doing. The Talmud is the product of their compiling of Mishnah and Gemara. The fundamental premise of the Talmud is incorrect: that it is more meritorious to read the Mishnah and Talmud than to read the Old Testament. “Our rabbis taught: They who occupy themselves with the Bible [alone] are but of indifferent merit; with Mishnah, are indeed meritorious, and are rewarded for it; with Gemara—there can be nothing more meritorious; yet run always to the Mishnah more than to the Gemara. Now, this is self-contradictory.”⁷⁰ This, by the way, is an example of the dialecticism that is basic to the Talmud.

E. A Most Peculiar Book

Orthodox Jews believe that the Talmud is an inspired book. They do not treat it as “folklore.” They treat it as authoritative.

The Old Testament forbade Molech worship. “And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 18:21). This is repeated in Leviticus 20:2–5. What does the Talmud say about this practice?

MISHNAH. HE WHO GIVES OF HIS SEED TO MOLECH INCURS NO PUNISHMENT UNLESS HE DELIVERS IT TO MOLECH AND CAUSES IT TO PASS THROUGH THE FIRE. IF HE GAVE IT TO MOLECH BUT DID NOT CAUSE IT TO PASS THROUGH THE FIRE, OR THE REVERSE, HE INCURS NO PENALTY, UNLESS HE DOES BOTH. [The Mishnah is always in capital letters in the Talmud—G. N.]

GEMARA. The Mishnah teaches idolatry and giving to Molech. R. Abin said: Our Mishnah is in accordance with the view that Molech worship is not idolatry. . . . R. Simeon said: If to Molech, he is liable; if to another idol, he is not.⁷¹

R. Aha the son of Raba said: If one caused all his seed to pass through [the fire] to Molech, he is exempt from punishment, because it is written, of *thy seed* implying, but not all thy seed.⁷² This approach to ethics and civil law has become known as “Talmudic

70. *Baba Mezia* 33a.

71. *Sanhedrin* 64a.

72. *Sanhedrin* 64b.

reasoning.”

Much of the Talmud's space is devoted to diet. For example, it says that eating dates makes a person ineligible to render a legal decision. “Rab said: If one has eaten dates, he should not give a legal decision. An objection was raised. Dates are wholesome morning and evening, in the afternoon they are bad, at noon they are incomparable. . . .”⁷³ To cure swollen glands, eat the dust from the shadow of a privy. “To make the flesh close he should bring dust from the shadow of a privy and knead it with honey and eat. This is effective.”⁷⁴ Bladder stones are dealt with as follows: “For stone in the bladder let him take three drops of tar and three drops of leek juice and three drops of clear wine and pour it on the membrum of a man or on the corresponding place in a woman. Alternatively he can take the ear of a bottle and hang it on the membrum of a man or on the breasts of a woman. Or again he can take a purple thread which has been spun by a woman of ill repute or the daughter of a woman of ill repute and hang it on the membrum of a man or the breasts of a woman. Or again he can take a louse from a man and a woman and hang it on the membrum of a man and the corresponding place in a woman; and when he makes water he should do so on dry thorns near the socket of the door, and he should preserve the stone that issues, as it is good for all fevers.”⁷⁵

It offers very specific explanations of the origins of specific diseases. Consider the causes of epilepsy: “And do not stand naked in front of a lamp, for it was taught: He who stands naked in front of a lamp will be an epileptic, and he who cohabits by the light of a lamp will have epileptic children.”⁷⁶

It offers comments on such seemingly trivial topics as the proper disposal of fingernails, and the consequences of ignoring this advice. “Three things were said in reference to nails: One who buries them is righteous; one who burns them is pious and one who throws them away is a villain! What is the reason? Lest a pregnant woman should step over them and miscarry.”⁷⁷

The Old Testament's teaching on how people should deal with sin is very clear: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

73. *Kethuboth* 11a.

74. *Gittin* 69a.

75. *Gittin* 69b.

76. *Peshaim* 112b.

77. *Moed Katan* 18a.

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil" (Isaiah 1:16). There is no second strategy. The Talmud suggests a second strategy: "For R. Ilai says, If one sees that his [evil] *yezer* is gaining sway over him, let him go away where he is not known; let him put on sordid clothes, don a sordid wrap and do the sordid deed that his heart desires rather than profane the name of Heaven openly."⁷⁸

The wages of sins not recorded in the Book of Judges: "That wicked wretch [Sisera] had sevenfold intercourse [with Jael] at that time, as it says, *At her feet he sunk, he fell, he lay*; etc."⁷⁹

A way to get even with one's enemies: "In R. Judah's opinion the snake's poison is lodged in its fangs; therefore, one who causes it to bite [by placing its fangs against the victim's flesh] is decapitated, whilst the snake itself is exempt. But in the view of the Sages the snake emits the poison of its own accord; therefore the snake is stoned, whilst he who caused it to bite is exempt."⁸⁰

Binding, you may bind: "Raba said: If one bound his neighbor and he died of starvation, he is not liable to execution Raba also said: If he bound him before a lion, he is not liable"⁸¹

Their view of women: "ENGAGE NOT IN TOO MUCH CONVERSATION WITH WOMEN. THEY SAID THIS WITH REGARD TO ONE'S OWN WIFE, HOW MUCH MORE [DOES THE RULE APPLY] WITH REGARD TO ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE."⁸² Maimonides' comments do not make the passage any more acceptable: "It is a known thing that for the most part conversation with women has to do with sexual matters."⁸³ This view is consistent with the Talmud's general view of women: "The world cannot do without either males or females. Yet happy is he whose children are males, and alas for him whose children are females."⁸⁴ At least one section of the Talmud questions the wisdom of instructing women in the law: "How then do we know that others are not commanded to teach her?—Because it is written, '*And ye shall teach them your sons*'—but not your

78. *Mo'ed Katan* 17a.

79. *Nazir* 23b.

80. *Sanhedrin* 78a.

81. *Sanhedrin* 77a.

82. *Aboth*, Chap. I. This is the famous *Pierke Aboth*, or "Sayings of the Fathers."

83. Cited by Judah Goldin, *The Living Talmud* (University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 55.

84. *Baba Bathra* 16b.

daughters."⁸⁵

1. The Question of Circumcision

Most important of all is circumcision, the Talmud says.

It was taught: Rabbi said, Great is circumcision, for none so ardently busied himself with [God's] precepts as our Father Abraham, yet he was called perfect only in virtue of circumcision, as it is written, *"Walk before me and be thou perfect,* and it is written, *And I will make my covenant between me and thee.* Another version [of Rabbi's teaching] is this: Great is circumcision, for it counter-balances all the [other] precepts of the Torah, as it is written, *For after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.* Another version is: Great is circumcision, since but for it heaven and earth would not endure, as it is written, *[Thus saith the Lord,] But for my covenant by day and night, I would not have appointed the ordinances of Heaven and earth.*⁸⁶

Contrast these words with Paul's: "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called everyone, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God" (I Cor. 7:17–19). He warned all men that the issue of life and death is obedience to the God who imposed the requirement of circumcision on the Jews.

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:25–29).

This is why he could write of Christians: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3: 3).

85. *Kiddushin* 29b.

86. *Nedarim* 32a.

It should not be surprising that there has been a conflict of views for almost two millennia between Talmudic Jews and Christians. The two religions are very different. Jesus summarized these irreconcilable differences with His words, "you have heard it said . . . but I say unto you."⁸⁷ Paul, a former Pharisee, was even more blunt:

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (Titus 1:10–16).

2. *Printing Makes a Difference*

When a gentile reads the Talmud or Talmud-related writings, he necessarily enters into Talmudforbidden ground. If study by gentiles of the written Torah itself is forbidden by Talmudic law, then surely the once-secret Jewish oral tradition of the Torah is prohibited. But when the Talmud is made available in vernacular languages by those who are still believers in its sacred character, as has been done in this century, the traditional criticisms against gentiles who read it necessarily fade. Perhaps even more obviously to those who have struggled through as few as three consecutive pages of the Talmud, by making available a comprehensive index, its defenders in principle thereby "opened the book." Its English-language translators, editors, and publisher have moved the Talmud from the world of religion exclusively to the world of open scholarship. This has clearly modified the ancient rules.

Of course, this has always been the dilemma of Talmudic Judaism. Maimonides faced it when he wrote *A Guide of the Perplexed* (1190). Leo Strauss is correct: the *Guide* is devoted to "the difficulties of the Law" or to "the secrets of the law": "Yet the Law whose secrets Mai-

87. I have relied in this section on the summaries and photocopies of 163 passages in the English-language Talmud which was published in *Christian News* (July 25, 1988 and August 1, 1988), a conservative Lutheran tabloid: P.O. Box 168, New Haven, Missouri.

monides intends to explain forbids that they be explained in public, or to the public; they may only be explained in private and only to such individuals as possess both theoretical and political wisdom as well as the capacity of both understanding and using allusive speech; for only 'the chapter headings' of the secret teaching may be transmitted even to those who belong to the natural elite. Since every explanation given in writing, at any rate in a book, is a public explanation, Maimonides seems to be compelled by his intention to transgress the Law."⁸⁸ Maimonides was quite forthright about this need for secrecy:

For my purpose is that the truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed, so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot possibly oppose and which has concealed from the vulgar among the people those truths especially requisite for His apprehension. As He has said: *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him* [Ps. 25:14]. Know that with regard to natural matters as well, it is impossible to give a clear exposition when teaching some of their principles as they are. For you know the saying of [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed: The Account of the Beginning ought not to be taught in the presence of two men* [Babylonian Talmud, *Hagigah*, 11b]. Now if someone explained all those matters in a book, he in effect would be teaching them to thousands of men. Hence these matters too occur in parables in the books of prophecy. The *Sages, may their memory be blessed*, following the train of these books, likewise have spoken of them in riddles and parables, for there is a close connection between these matters and the divine science, and they too are secrets of that divine science.⁸⁹

In speaking about very obscure matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others. Sometimes in the case of certain dicta this necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of another premise contradicting

88. Strauss, "How to Begin to Study The Guide of the Perplexed," in Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, p. xiv. Strauss argues that Maimonides overcame this restriction by adopting literary techniques that made the *Guide* itself a secret writing: p. vx. It was Maimonides' emphasis on secrecy and rigorous writing that influenced the Jewish political theorist Strauss and his followers, of whom Pines is one. Political philosopher and former U. S. Senator John P. East insisted that Strauss "cast himself in the role of a modern Maimonides"; this can be seen in Strauss' book, *Persecution in the Art of Writing* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, [1952] 1973). Cf. John P. East, "Leo Strauss and American Conservatism," *Modern Age*, XXI (Winter 1977), p. 7; Archie P. Jones, "Apologists of Classical Tyranny: An Introductory Critique of Straussianism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Summer 1978), pp. 112–14.

89. Maimonides, *Guide* 3b–4a; pp. 6–7.

the first one. In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means.⁹⁰

There may be Orthodox Jews who will criticize me for going to the Talmud and extracting these embarrassing passages for the purpose of public disclosure and debate. They may say that I am misinterpreting these passages because I am not familiar with another oral teaching tradition that somehow explains away these passages. This would imply that there is a still more secret tradition. Even if this criticism is correct—that a consistent, universally agreed-upon secondary secret oral teaching does exist which explains the primary oral (now translated and printed) once-secret tradition—and even if this additional secret oral teaching does offer interpretations that somehow make these passages in the Talmud appear morally acceptable, all of which I sincerely doubt, Orthodox Jews must then face the reality of any appeal to yet another oral tradition. A tradition of secondary oral explanations and glosses on a 1500-year-old written version (the Talmud) of an authoritative ancient oral tradition is not going to be regarded by outsiders (or even Orthodox Jewish insiders, I suspect) as equally authoritative. What is printed eventually becomes authoritative, especially in the field of civil and criminal law. Lawyers and casuists appeal to known written sources. The Talmud stands as written.

Orthodox Judaism by 1952 had at long last provided the English-speaking public with an officially sanctioned, expensively published version of the Talmud: seemingly unexpurgated, fully annotated, and professionally edited. Until the era of the Industrial Revolution, the Talmud was regarded by all Jews except a handful of Karaites as the sacred oral tradition of Judaism. Orthodox Jews should therefore not object when a gentile reads the Talmud, cites it verbatim, and criticizes it whenever he can demonstrate that it is obviously at odds with non-Talmudic morality. What else did they expect when they published it? They should refrain from criticizing gentiles who are critical of the Talmud's ethics unless they are prepared to discuss these issues in public without appealing to the escape hatch of an even more authoritative secret oral tradition which cannot lawfully be revealed.

3. Debating Ethical Standards

Why should Orthodox Jews be surprised or even upset when non-

90. *Guide* 10b; p. 18.

Jews react strongly against the Talmud's teaching, for example, that it is legitimate for a man to have sexual relations with a little girl, just so long as she is under the age of three? The Mishnah says: "WHEN A GROWN-UP MAN HAS HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH A LITTLE GIRL, OR WHEN A SMALL BOY HAS HAD INTERCOURSE WITH A GROWN-UP WOMAN, OR [WHEN A GIRL WAS ACCIDENTALLY] INJURED BY A PIECE OF WOOD [IN ALL CASES] THEIR KETHUBAH IS TWO HUNDRED [ZUZ]; SO ACCORDING TO R. MEIR."⁹¹ Then the Gemara explains: "It means this: When a grown-up man has intercourse with a little girl it is nothing, for when the girl is less than this [annotation: "Lit., 'here', that is, less than three years old"] it is as if one puts a finger into the eye; . . . "⁹² Should Orthodox Jews really expect Christians to accept the moral validity of such a teaching? Surely the vast majority of Jews today would reject it if they knew about it, which they do not.

As I said earlier, it might be argued that the rabbis were not really arguing for such a seemingly grotesque ethical principle, that it was all some sort of hypothetical debate. This particular debate in the Talmud concerned the kethubah. The kethubah was a deed given by a husband to his bride which specified that if he divorced her, she would receive a monetary payment. The minimum payment was 200 zuzim⁹³ for virgins, but only 100 zuzim for non-virgins.⁹⁴ A defender of the Talmud might argue that what the Mishnah really teaches is the perfectly reasonable principle that very young girls who are subjected to the kinds of intercourse described in the text are to be considered as virgins. While it would be possible to argue that this law's ethical concern focuses only on the innocence of the girl under three year old who is sexually abused, and that the words "it is nothing" refer only to her, and not to her abuser, then the question inevitably arises: What about the girl aged three years and older? Why treat a four-year-old sexually abused girl as a willing fornicator for the purposes of establishing her kethubah price? Furthermore, why treat as a virgin an adult woman who deliberately has had sexual relations with a small boy who is "less than nine years of age,"⁹⁵ as the annotator says?

Christians do not ask such questions today. Therefore, Jews do not

91. *Kethuboth* 11a.

92. *Kethuboth* 11b.

93. The smallest Jewish coin was the zuz.

94. Cf. "Ketubbah," in *The Principles of Jewish Law*, edited by Menachem Elan (Jerusalem: Keter, [1975?]), col. 387.

95. *Kethuboth* 11a.

answer them. The fact is, virtually all modern Christian scholars—at least those who publish—are completely unfamiliar with the passages in the Talmud that I have cited in this essay, and Jews do not try to defend such passages; they remain discreetly silent. There has been a kind of implicit cease-fire agreement regarding the ethical details of the Talmud, and a willingness on both sides to limit all discussions of the ethics of traditional Judaism and especially the Talmud to general ethical principles that have been derived from the less controversial passages. So, over the years, the Talmud has fallen into the shadows. Most Jews do not read it any more. Yet it is only here that we find a detailed account of what Paul calls “the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14).

4. *Concealment and Initiation*

Jews for many centuries hid the Talmud from the eyes of gentiles. They correctly surmised that Christian leaders would be shocked and outraged if they thought that such teachings were the basis of the autonomous civil legal order that Jews enjoyed through most of medieval history. From time to time, the authorities ordered the confiscation and burning of copies of the Talmud. Rabbi Trattner provides a list of about two dozen of these edicts, from 1240 to 1757.⁹⁶ But he misleads his Christian audience (his publisher, Thomas Nelson, published and still publishes predominantly Christian books) when he offers these three reasons why Christian magistrates have been so hostile to the Talmud in the past:

1. Since it forms the main teaching of the Jewish religion, it has been regarded as the supreme obstacle in preventing Jews from being converted to Christianity.
2. Since the *Talmud* interprets the Old Testament by reshaping ancient Biblical laws to meet the needs of post-Biblical times, it has been charged with the falsification of Scripture.
3. Since the *Talmud* is a non-Christian production, it has been accused of harboring an evil and irreverent attitude towards Christ and the Church.⁹⁷

Would he say that teaching that Jesus Christ and His followers will

96. Ernest R. Trattner, *Understanding the Talmud* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1955), pp. 200–1.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

be boiled in hot semen and hot excrement for eternity constitutes a reverent attitude? Are Christians supposed to believe that this is a reverent "attitude toward Christ and the Church"?

He goes on: "For many centuries the *Talmud* was regarded as mysterious and a source of blasphemous statements against Christianity. This suspicion was not only grossly untrue but it was magnified and distorted by ignorance of the *Talmud*. The inability of Christian scholars to read the *Talmud* made matters worse."⁹⁸ An uncensored (as far as we gentiles know) version of the *Talmud* is now in English. Those few of us who bother to consult it still do not find that these ancient suspicions have been calmed. They have in fact been confirmed.

I do not think that Michael Rodkinson was being any more honest than Rabbi Trattner when he wrote these words in the Preface to his expurgated version of the Talmud: "The Talmud is free from the narrowness and bigotry with which it is usually charged, and if phrases used out of their context, and in a sense the very reverse from that which their author intended, are quoted against it, we may be sure that those phrases never existed in the original Talmud, but are the later additions of its enemies and such as never studied it."⁹⁹ Then came the Soncino edition.

It is my belief that mandatory training in the oral law served covenant-breaking Judaism for at least two millennia as a means of initiating its religious leaders into what was basically a secret society. By requiring its brightest adolescent males to go through long hours of memorization and discussion of such material, year after year, if they wanted to become rabbis, Judaism for almost two millennia side-tracked its best and brightest young men into some very peculiar ethical avenues—peculiar at least to the outlook of Christians.

It is also my contention that the unprecedented economic, intellectual, and cultural strides made by Jews in the West could begin, and did begin, only when their young men at last were allowed to become rabbis and leaders within the community without being required to go through this initiatory process. But a price has been extracted by Western society for this advancement. The price has been the steady secularization of the vast majority of Jews, just as Orthodox rabbis have warned their upwardly mobile brethren from the early decades of the nineteenth century until today. Most Western Jews today have become

98. *Idem*.

99. Michael L. Rodkinson, Editor's Preface, *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* (Boston: New Talmud Pub. Co., 1903), I, p. xi.

little more than Karaites without the Pentateuch, or even like Unitarians, though with better business connections.

F. The Erosion of Orthodox Judaism

The heart and soul of Orthodox Judaism is its evolutionary ethical character, not its explicit theology. It is the world's most detailed and self-conscious example of process theology—dialectical, evolutionary, and ultimately open-ended. So radical is this process theology that Orthodox Jews believe that God Himself is continually engaged in a study of His own law, in association with the souls of deceased Jews. This goes on in the Academy on High—a concept so preposterous that modern Jewish scholars downplay it, describe it as merely a metaphor, and refuse to consider the possibility that Jews once took the Talmud and the Old Testament as literally inspired. (Literalism of ancient texts and ancient religious beliefs is simply not permitted to the founders of still-existing Western religions by those who still want the prestige, communal stability, and tenured security provided by the skeptical heirs of these still-literalistic religions.) The uninitiate—a very important word—cannot easily understand this commitment to process. Rabbi Louis Finkelstein was the head of the Jewish Theological Society of America. In his introduction to the reprint of Solomon Schechter's *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1901), he writes:

The view that inquiry into the nature and requirements of Torah is more than a human need, being a cosmic process, is even more difficult to communicate to the uninitiate. Doubtless that is why Schechter did not include in his book any discussion of the fundamental Rabbinic concept of the Academy on High. The belief that study of the Torah is one of the Deity's main concerns, and that God Himself is each day expanding the scope and insight of Torah, engaging in this labor in association with the souls of the saints who have departed mortal life, is a theological metaphor; but for the Rabbinic scholars the metaphor represented reality—the profoundest of all realities.

That the Torah is at once perfect and perpetually incomplete; that like the Universe itself it was created to be a process, rather than a system—a method of inquiry into the right, rather than a codified collection of answers; that to discover possible situations with which it might deal and to analyze their moral implications in the light of its teachings is to share the labor of Divinity—these are inherent elements of Rabbinic thought, dominating the manner of life it recom-

mends.¹⁰⁰

Judaism is a religion that historically has spent very little time on systematic theology and philosophy. "Inherent logical unity can be forced on Judaism only at the cost of distortion," writes Finkelstein.¹⁰¹ Maimonides in this sense was a self-conscious exception to this tradition. This is one reason why Orthodox Jewish scholars have been nervous about Maimonides from the beginning: *Guide of the Perplexed* has always been perceived as just too philosophical for comfort, too Aristotelian for reliability, however tight a grip his *Strong Hand* has maintained on their thinking.¹⁰² This, despite the fact that he warned the reader, "I adjure—by God, may he be exalted!—every reader of this Treatise of mine not to comment upon a single word of it and not to explain to another anything in it save that which has been explained and commented upon in the words of the famous Sages of our Law who preceded me."¹⁰³

Judaism is overwhelmingly a religion defined by a system of evolving rules of conduct. Again, Christians have not understood this, for they mistakenly equate Judaism with the fixed rules of the Old Testament. Danby is correct in his evaluation: "The Mishnah is not a finally authoritative corpus of the beliefs and practices of Judaism: it is of the nature of Judaism that it can have no such thing. 'The Law', which alone is Jewish doctrine, has in it an inherent principle of development which, while holding fast to the foundations laid down in the Mosaic legislation, makes it intolerant of dogmatic definition or set credal forms."¹⁰⁴

1. *Evolving Ethics and Cultural Suicide*

It is this anti-dogmatism and anti-credalism that is the inescapable fact of Judaism's history, which today threatens to overwhelm mainstream Judaism, just as a very similar theological relativism has very nearly overwhelmed mainstream Christianity. But Christianity has always had an institutional advantage over Orthodox Judaism: it is both credal and judicial, both dogmatic and ethical. Its doctrine of the cov-

100. Louis Finkelstein, Introduction to New Edition (1961), in Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, pp. xix–xx.

101. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

102. For example, Maimonides insisted that "this divine science cannot become actual except after a study of natural science." Guide 5a; p. 9.

103. *Guide* 9a; p. 15.

104. Danby, Introduction, *Mishnah*, pp. xv–xvi.

enant proclaims fixed biblical laws at its third point.¹⁰⁵

The revival of Christian casuistry that is presently taking place¹⁰⁶ proclaims self-consciously the authoritative character of the Old Testament's ethical principles and, as my economic commentary indicates, the contemporary applicability of the letter of Old Testament law as well.

The evolutionary judicial character of Judaism has led to the near-destruction of Orthodoxy's influence in Western Judaism. The dual social forces of Western capitalism and secularism established institutional and philosophical foundations that have steadily undermined Talmudic religion and culture. The more ethically evolutionary any particular worldview has been, the more rapidly it has succumbed to this powerful pair of social forces. Judaism was especially vulnerable.

The factor that most threatened Orthodox Judaism was industrial society's growing toleration. In the mid-nineteenth century, when Jews in Western Europe and the United States began to enter the new industrial capitalist world, they found that the older discriminatory legal barriers had been progressively weakened by the new forces of economic competition. An individual's economic productivity in an open ("impersonal")¹⁰⁷ competitive market is judged apart from considerations of his religious affiliation. To the extent that non-market forms of racial or religious discrimination persist, those who discriminate against economically efficient employees or suppliers (or—much more rare—buyers) must pay a price for their actions: reduced income because of reduced efficiency.¹⁰⁸ The free market penalizes economically all those who discriminate on any basis except price and quality of output. Price competition has always been fundamental to the spread of free market capitalism,¹⁰⁹ and Jews became masters of competitive pricing.¹¹⁰ Jews began to move out of the ghetto. The ghetto's walls, both

105. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

106. I refer here to Christian Reconstruction or theonomy.

107. On the proper and improper use of the term "impersonal" to describe market economies, see Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1:E.

108. "The least prejudiced sellers will come to dominate the market in much the same way as people who are least afraid of heights come to dominate occupations that require working at heights: They demand a smaller premium." Richard A. Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), p. 616.

109. Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. Frank H. Knight (New York: Collier, [1920] 1966), p. 230.

110. The common phrase, "he Jewed me down," points to this phenomenon of the

literal and figurative, came tumbling down.

Jewish legal scholar Menachem Elon has argued that it was the Jews' system of separate civil courts that was crucial to the maintenance of the autonomy of Jews as a people. When judicial emancipation began in eighteenth-century Western Europe, this autonomous character of Judaism began to erode. Jews were increasingly entitled to civil justice in secular civil courts, and they took advantage of this revolutionary development. Jewish commercial law and other areas of "secular world" law began to atrophy. This secularism began to undermine the foundations of Orthodox Judaism¹¹¹—a term which itself was the product of the process of change.¹¹² Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch asked the key question which most Jews have refused to face: "What would you have achieved if you became *free* Jews, and you ceased to be *Jews*?"¹¹³ Nevertheless, his own efforts to integrate the techniques and findings of modern science and philosophy with Judaism eventually led to a reduced resistance of Orthodox Judaism to secularism, as surely as Aquinas' analogous efforts had done for Christianity seven centuries earlier.

2. *The Faustian Bargain*

From the New Testament period to the present, the lure of pagan philosophy has proven irresistible to Jews, as it has also for Christians. Out of Greek philosophy came Hellenism, and Hellenism's influence on early rabbinic Judaism was very great.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the impact of

Jew as a price-cutter. If one were to say, "he Jewed me up," it would make no sense. The Jew as the price-cutting haggler is universally recognizable, but not the Jew as the price-gouger. He is resented by people in their capacity as producers and retail sellers, not as consumers. Gentiles are always looking for the elusive "Jewish brother-in-law deal."

It is not random that the four ethnic groups that are thought of as price-cutters have had decidedly biblical backgrounds: the Dutch ("Dutch treat" dates are those in which the girl pays), the Scots, the Armenians, and the Jews.

111. Menachem Elon, "Introduction," in Elon (ed.), *The Principles of Jewish Law* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), col. 35.

112. It was Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch who accepted the term "Orthodox" which had been used as an epithet by secular Jews in the mid-nineteenth century. I. Grunfeld, "Samson Raphael Hirsch—The Man and His Mission," in *Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays from the Writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (London: Soncino Press, 1956), p. xlvii.

113. *Ibid.*, p. xxxix.

114. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenic Period*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974). Cf. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline*

pagan philosophy in Judaism was less direct in the Middle Ages, probably due to the isolation of Jews from the surrounding gentile Christian culture. It is not surprising that the path of Greek philosophy into late medieval Judaism, and then into Christianity, was by way of Islam, especially through Maimonides. Aristotelian Athens came to Paris through Cairo and Spain.

For centuries, Talmudic Judaism resisted the rational categories of pagan wisdom, despite *The Guide of the Perplexed*. But with Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in the mid-nineteenth century, the epistemological barriers began to break down.¹¹⁵ This process of cultural and intellectual assimilation accelerated rapidly in twentieth-century America, especially after the Second World War. The most prestigious American universities opened their doors to all those who could compete academically, and Jews surely could compete. They at last gained equal access to the professional schools—law, medicine, architecture—as well as to the Ph.D.-granting graduate schools. The price they were asked to pay, however, was very high. Too high. The universities offered a Faustian bargain to Jews (and also to Bible-believing Christians): “You may go as high as your brains can carry you, just so long as you leave your religion off campus.” Most academically oriented Jews could not resist this offer.¹¹⁶ Inter-marriage with the gentiles whom they met on campus was also nearly inevitable. Cohen’s remarks are on target: “The Jew, in joining the West, no longer joined a Christian West, for he did not join a church wedded to a society. . . . The Jew joined an already de-Christianizing West, and as part of the bargain he agreed—foolishly—to de-Judaize.”¹¹⁷ What Nazi Germany’s politics had not achieved in the 1930’s, Prussia’s earlier export of the academic state certification system did achieve: the suppression of traditional religion through the enthusiastic co-operation of the suppressed. Secular education is the humanist world’s hoped-for “final solution” for both orthodox Christianity and Orthodox Judaism.

In the twentieth century, the tide has rapidly flowed against

Theology, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), ch. 1.

115. I. Grunfeld, “Samson Raphael Hirsch—The Man and His Mission,” in *Judaism Eternal*.

116. A very effective presentation of this post-1940 transformation of Judaism is found in Chaim Potok’s novel and the movie based on it, *The Chosen*. In the early 1960s, Potok served as editor of the Jewish Publication Society of America’s translation of the Hebrew Bible. Potok, “The Bible’s Inspired Art,” *New York Times Magazine* (Oct. 3, 1982), p. 63.

117. Cohen, *Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, p. 186.

Talmudic Judaism; first the Nazis and then secularism uprooted Orthodox Judaism. Higher criticism of the Bible has produced the same bitter fruit of skepticism and liberalism in Jewish circles that it has produced in Christian circles.¹¹⁸ There was not only bitter fruit but also forbidden fruit to be eaten. By the millions, they have feasted on this forbidden fruit. Solomon Schechter is correct: biblical higher criticism was in fact the "higher anti-semitism," for it obliterated the official foundation of the Jewish experience.¹¹⁹ But this was a case of the hermeneutical chickens coming home to roost, for Judaism had long undermined this original foundation through its everevolving traditionalism.

Traditional Judaism's ethical rules began to change, and therefore the whole religion had to change. Reform Judaism launched a successful intellectual attack on Orthodox Judaism in the early decades of the nineteenth century, leading to the steady isolation of the defenders of old Pharisee tradition, and in the twentieth century, secular Judaism and Conservative Judaism have become the dominant traditions. Orthodox Judaism today retains very little influence outside of the state of Israel. Reform Judaism and conservative Judaism are overwhelmingly dominant in the West. Secular Jews seem to be the norm today, as far as gentiles can discern. (The most memorable description I have ever read regarding the outlook of secular Jews regarding Judaism is Lis Harris' description of her family, "fans whose home team was the

118. The Jewish scholar most responsible for the introduction of higher criticism into Jewish curricula was the extraordinary linguist, Julian Morgenstern, who also served as president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, after 1921. Born in 1881, he was still writing scholarly essays in the mid-1960s in the *Hebrew Union College Annual*. ("The *Hasidim*—Who Were They?" *HUCA*, XXXVIII, 1967.) Indicative of the extent of his life's work was his four-part study, "The Book of the Covenant." Part I appeared in the 1928 issue; Part II appeared in 1930; Part III in 1931-32; and Part IV in 1962. He was elected president of the American Oriental Society in 1928-29 and president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1941. "Morgenstern assumed a position of pre-eminence as a philosopher and theoretician of Reform Judaism. . . . Modern developments, he showed convincingly, are only the latest manifestations of the adjustments that have taken place over and over whenever Judaism has come into contact with a superior culture." Morris Lieberman, "Julian Morgenstern—Scholar, Teacher and Leader," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XXXII (1962), p. 6. Morgenstern was a dedicated humanist and internationalist. Cf. Morgenstern, "Nationalism, Universalism, and World Religion," in Charles Frederick Walker (ed.), *World Fellowship, Addresses and Messages by Leading Statesmen of All Faiths, Races and Countries* (New York: Liveright, 1935). This was his address to the second Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1933.

119. Cited in Cohen, *Myth of Judeo-Christian Tradition*, p. xviii.

Jews.”)¹²⁰ Anti-credalism giveth, and anti-credalism taketh away.

G. Hermeneutics: An Inescapable Concept

Commenting on anything requires a principle of interpretation. This is true of Bible commentaries. Principles of interpretation differ, and sometimes very sharply. This means that rival hermeneutical principles can and do become divisive. That, too, is the price of open inquiry. It is a price that must be paid on both sides. There is no way to reconcile these rival principles of biblical interpretation: 1) Jesus as the sole fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies vs. Jesus as a false prophet and blasphemer, for which He was lawfully executed; 2) the New Testament as the sole authoritative commentary on the Old Testament vs. the New Testament as false prophecy; 3) Christians as the only true covenantal heirs of Abraham vs. Jews as the only true covenantal heirs of Abraham. It is the ancient debate, recently revived politically in the state of Israel, over the question, “Who is a Jew?”¹²¹ It is a debate over the truth of Paul’s assertion: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3: 3). Only theological liberals on both sides of the debate can sensibly play down these differences, since liberals do not accept the truth of either religion’s set of hermeneutical principles.

This essay deals with Orthodox Judaism and its relation with orthodox Christianity. Orthodox Christianity is no longer the dominant stream of Christianity in the West, just as Orthodox Judaism is no longer the dominant stream of Judaism outside of the state of Israel, and which is in sharp political conflict with secular Judaism inside that nation. Always in the background of the life of the orthodox Christian and the Orthodox Jew are the liberals “within the camp.” The Orthodox Christian does not believe that liberal, mainstream Christianity is *really* Christianity, just as the Orthodox Jew does not believe that mainstream Judaism is *really* Judaism.¹²² Van Til is correct in his as-

120. Lis Harris, *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), p. 17.

121. In Judaism, this question is really, “Who is the rabbi?” The rabbi sanctions marriages and therefore the legitimacy of the children.

122. There is a problem here for Bible-affirming Christians. They normally do accept as valid the baptisms of converts out of mainstream churches. They would not accept Mormon baptism as valid. So, to some degree, they do accept mainstream churches as still Christian. For the Orthodox Jew, the determination of who is a Jew is established by examining the training of the Rabbi who circumcised him or circumcised

assessment of the theological unity of the liberal Jew and the liberal Christian:

When Jesus says that all power is given to him by the Father in view of his death and resurrection, and that he will vanquish the last enemy which is death, the modern Jew and the modern Protestant consider this mythology. The modern Jew will gladly join the modern Protestant in speaking of Christ as a Messiah if only the messianic idea be demythologized by means of the self-sufficient ethical consciousness. The modern Protestant theologian is ready and eager to oblige the modern Jew.¹²³

The implicit theological unity that modernism creates between mainstream Christians and Jews—the many shades of Unitarianism in no way reduces the explicit theological disunity between orthodox Christians and Orthodox Jews. The battle over the proper interpretation of the Old Testament still divides the orthodox Christian and the Orthodox Jew, even as it divides Jews from liberal Jews and Christians from liberal Christians. At best, the common “battle for the Text” of Torah-affirming Christians and Jews against the higher critics of the Bible within their respective camps has created pressure for a temporary cease-fire between the besieged camps of the Bible-affirmers. But a temporary cease-fire is not a permanent peace treaty. The war over interpretation is great because of the commitment of both sides to the divine origin of the Old Testament. Again, citing Van Til: “When a Christian worships Christ as the Son of God, he is, says the Jew, an idolater. And he sees his mission as that of bringing such an idol-worshiper back to the God of Abraham and of Moses. In seeking to fulfill his mission in relation to Christian idolaters the Jew must, of course, *oppose* the claims of Christ.”¹²⁴

H. Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition?

The battle over hermeneutics is inescapable. The question then must be raised: If Western civilization was Christian in the era of the exclusion of the Jews, and today is humanist to the exclusion of Torah-believing Christians and Jews, to what extent is it valid to speak of a Judeo-Christian tradition? This leads immediately to a second ques-

her father or husband.

123. Cornelius Van Til, *Christ and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1968), p. 97.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

tion: To what extent are the respective commitments to the divine origin of the Old Testament a unified commitment, and therefore the basis of the Judeo-Christian tradition in Western history? If the two hermeneutics are permanently divided, how can there be a unified tradition?

It is one of the oddest facts of modern Bible-affirming Christianity that the dispensationalist fundamentalists, who categorically deny the continuing authority of Old Testament law in New Testament times, see themselves as the "soul cousins" if not "soul brothers" of Orthodox Jews. They regard any deviation from the West's support of the state of Israel as a theological deviation, not just bad foreign policy.¹²⁵ Yet the only possible basis of a supposed Judeo-Christian tradition would be a mutual commitment to Old Testament legal norms. Yet dispensationalist leaders make statements such as this:

At the heart of the problem of legalism is pride, a pride that refuses to admit spiritual bankruptcy. That is why the doctrines of grace stir up so much animosity. Donald Grey Barnhouse, a giant of a man in free grace, wrote: "It was a tragic hour when the Reformation churches wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds and catechisms and sought to bring Gentile believers into bondage to Jewish law, which was never intended either for the Gentile nations or for the church."¹²⁶ He was right, too.¹²⁷

Thus, to the extent that there has been a Judeo-Christian tradition in the West, the *consistent, well-informed* dispensationalist is forced by his theology to deny that such a tradition is judicially valid. It has to be seen as the product of a spurious, deviant form of Christianity.

The question that the defender of Old Testament judicial standards must then ask himself is this: Has there been a sufficient unanimity between orthodox Christians and Orthodox Jews over the interpretation and application of Old Testament legal norms to have constituted a Judeo-Christian tradition? This is the question that I am attempting to answer in this essay.

Before dealing with this issue, let me ask a question: Is there a Moslem-Christian tradition? The Moslems claim to believe in both the Old and the New Testaments as God-inspired. If the Christian answers

125. See, for example, Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989).

126. He cites Barnhouse, *God's Freedom*, p. 134.

127. S. Lewis Johnson, "The Paralysis of Legalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120 (April/June, 1963), p. 109.

that the Koran (which he has not read) overthrows both the Old and New Testaments, no matter what the Moslem says he believes about the Bible—which in fact is the case—then what about the Mishnah and the Talmud?

1. *An Invention of Modernism*

Arthur A. Cohen, in his provocatively titled book, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, which was published by a respected publishing house that specializes in scholarly Jewish studies, denies that this tradition ever existed. It is an intellectual fabrication, he argues. He has identified the origins of this myth: the Enlightenment and, later, German liberal Protestant scholarship of the late-nineteenth century.¹²⁸ Protestant "higher critics" of the Old Testament were implacably hostile to Old Testament law, so they attempted to disengage the New Testament from the Old. The Jew of the Old Testament was described as being "in bondage to a hopeless legalism. On the one hand the genius of the Hebrew Bible is commended; on the other hand Christianity is set in superior condescension to the traditions of Judaism which survive, like ruins, the advent of Jesus Christ, the new architect of mankind. . . . The Judaism which survives the onslaught of Protestant Higher Criticism is buried under a mountain of historicist formulations, while a pure, virtuous Kantian Christianity—freed from Jewish accretion—is defined. Once more, almost in recapitulation of the Gnostic tendencies of the early Church (though turned this time to a different task), a 'Christo-Jewish' tradition was defined."¹²⁹

This implicit antinomianism of the higher critics was indeed quite similar to the anti-Old Testament perspective of the gnostics. Gnosticism and antinomianism are two sides of the same counterfeit coin. Denying mankind's access in history to a permanent higher law above existing humanist culture, critics of the existing culture face a grim choice: either their absorption into the prevailing culture or their removal from influence, i.e., either assimilation or confinement to a cultural ghetto.¹³⁰ The prevailing culture is seen as the equivalent of ethic-

128. Cohen, *Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, pp. xviii, 196-200.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

130. This dualism between the individual and society is a manifestation of autonomous man's philosophical dualism between the one and the many. If autonomous man is part of the one (unity), he in principle loses himself, his personality, and his individuality. But if he maintains his independence (autonomy), he loses any point of contact with any other individual. To use one of Cornelius Van Til's analogies, he is

al quicksand; one should not seek to walk through it in the pilgrimage of life. But if men dwell in a self-imposed cultural ghetto, they will be tempted to create a psychological zone of internal retreat in their quest for meaning and significance as they wait for death or eschatological deliverance. What else can they do? They see no way to transform the world, for they have no point of ethical or judicial contact with the world. They do not regard biblical law as a tool of dominion, as a lengthy lever capable of moving the general civilization in the direction of God's permanent standards. On the contrary, they see themselves on the short end of this lever: it is the general culture that threatens to move them by law, not the other way around. Their anti-nomianism—their lack of faith in permanent biblical standards and the empowering of the Holy Spirit¹³¹—inevitably produces cultural impotence. This is the legacy of gnosticism, and it is still influential in modern Christianity.¹³²

I. Talmud or New Testament?

The conflict between Bible-believing Christians and Orthodox Jews today has not changed in principle since A.D. 30. It is a conflict over the proper interpretation of the Old Testament. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:45–47). Because contemporary Christians cannot seem to make up their minds about contemporary Jews—whether they are demonic international conspirators or economic and academic supermen who somehow have the favor of God—they have been ineffective witnesses to Christ when in the presence of Jews. Once Christians recognize what Judaism offers to its adherents—the Talmud, or the mystical-magical Kabbalah,¹³³ or the steady erosion of modern secularization—they will

like a bead with no hole that seeks attachment to an infinitely long string. Philosophically speaking, without God's higher law and without man as the created image of God, individuals have no logical point of contact with each other.

131. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp. 185–86.

132. Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Pt. III.

133. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*; Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "The Belief in the Power of the Word," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XIV (1949). See also Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Atheneum, [1939]

better understand the words of Robert L. Reymond: "The Christian should love the Jew, certainly. But the sooner the Christian realizes that the Jew is as hopelessly lost and as hopelessly blind, if not more so (Rom. 11:6–11), than the Gentile, and that to win the Jew to Christ he must crush any and every hope for salvation which is related in any way to the fact that he is a Jew and a 'son of Torah,' the sooner the Christian will honor his Lord by his witness to the Jew and the more effective will his witness become."¹³⁴ There is no valid message of salvation in the Talmud. This was Peter's message to Israel:

Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:10–13).

Orthodox Judaism is at war with the Old Testament. This is the primary thesis of this essay. But, unlike Reform Judaism, which is infected with the same biblical higher criticism that has undermined mainstream Christianity, Orthodox Judaism claims to accept the Old Testament as the inspired word of God. How, then, can anyone rightfully say that Orthodox Judaism is at war with the Old Testament? Only by accepting Jesus' words literally:

I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:43–47).

To demonstrate the accuracy of Jesus' words, I here present a summary of the exegetical methodology of the judicial writings of the most famous and most respected master of the Talmud in the history of Judaism: Moses Maimonides.

1970).

134. Robert L. Reymond, Editor's Preface, to Van Til, *Christ and the Jews*, p. v.

J. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, The Rambam

Few gentile scholars have ever heard of the *Mishneh Torah*, but all medieval historians and specialists in the history of Western philosophy know of Maimonides. Moshe, the son of Maimon, better known as Maimonides (1134–1204), is by far the most famous Jew in medieval history. He was the Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon: RMBM). He lived in Spain and later in Cairo, where he served as the Sultan's physician. He became world-famous as a physician. Copies of at least ten of his medical treatises still survive.¹³⁵ He is best known for his theological-philosophical treatise, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (a better translation than "guide to the perplexed"), completed in 1190. His native tongue was Arabic. He was familiar with the Arabic translations of Aristotle, and he became a major conduit of the flow of Aristotelian philosophy into the Jewish community in Europe, as well as into the Christian community.

What very few non-Jewish scholars are aware of is that he also became the chief classifier of an immense body of Jewish law, which included the Talmud ("study" or "learning"). He wrote a 14-volume study that systematically arranged the teachings of the Jewish rabbis on every aspect of Talmudic law. It was called the *Mishneh Torah* (1180), also known as Maimonides' *Code*.¹³⁶ (It is less well known as "The Strong Hand.")¹³⁷ It has for centuries remained the definitive summary of the commands of Talmudic law.

The words *mishneh Torah* mean "repetition of the Torah" or law. It is the phrase by which Jews have traditionally identified the Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy restated the Mosaic law for the sake of the children of the generation that had died in the wilderness. Their days of wandering were about to end; they would now face the problems of running God's earthly commonwealth. Lerner writes: "Maimonides' *Code* has a similar character; in it he restates the laws of the Torah and of the Talmud without limiting himself to those laws that are applicable to life in the Diaspora. Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, like Moses', is concerned with the practical needs of an actual state, that is, the Jewish state prior to the Diaspora and after the coming of the Messiah."¹³⁸ The influence of this work on medieval and subsequent Juda-

135. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 186.

136. Paul Johnson mentions it, but does not cite it directly.

137. Schachter, Talmudical Introductions, in Chajes, *Student's Guide Through the Talmud*, p. 3n.

138. Ralph Lerner, "Moses Maimonides," in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (eds.),

ism was very great, beginning almost from the day he wrote it.

Jewish legal scholar George Horowitz writes: "The restatement of Maimonides, the *Mishneh Torah* is still the most orderly and logical classification of the Halakah [Jewish law—G. N.] in existence."¹³⁹ He is not alone in his assessment of Maimonides' *Code*. Maimonides specialist Isadore Twersky says that "The *Mishneh Torah*, which was to change the entire landscape of Rabbinic literature, also pushed back the frontiers of Maimonides' sphere of influence and made his fame global as well as imperishable. It transformed him, in the course of a few decades, from the 'light of the East' to 'the light of the [entire] exile.' He almost literally became a major Jewish luminary. . . . In one broad generalization, we may say that the *Mishneh Torah* became a prism through which reflection and analysis of virtually all subsequent Talmud study had to pass. There is hardly a book in the broad field of Rabbinic literature that does not relate in some way to the *Mishneh Torah*."¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, "The *Mishneh Torah* is reputedly second only to the Bible in the number of commentaries and studies it has elicited."¹⁴¹

An incomplete list of 220 major commentaries on the *Mishneh Torah* was made in 1893.¹⁴² Michael Guttman has written: "The *Mishneh Torah* became the center of the whole halachic literature. It acquired the place of a new code of general esteem and acknowledgment, like the Mishna a thousand years before, and the greatest halakhic scholars entered into competition with each other in composing commentaries to Maimonides and settling the difficulties, which the lack of indicating sources left to them."¹⁴³ His fame throughout Europe spread even faster than copies of the *Code*.¹⁴⁴

Why should the *Code* have had such an impact? For one thing, because copies of any book as massive as the Talmud were scarce in the

History of Political Philosophy (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), p. 193.

139. Horowitz, *Spirit of Jewish Law*, p. 16.

140. Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 19–20; cf. 516–18.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 526. Nevertheless, for generations Talmudists refused to mention the *Mishneh Torah* by name: p. 527. This may have been because it enabled laymen to check the decisions of the judges: Johnson, *History*, p. 191.

142. Alexander Marx, *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York, 1969), pp. 38–41; cited by Johnson, *History*, p. 191.

143. Michael Guttman, "The Decisions of Maimonides in His Commentary on the Mishna," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, II (1925), p. 229.

144. Alexander Marx, "The Correspondence Between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides About Astrology," *ibid.*, III (1926), pp. 325–26.

era before modern printing. Maimonides' 14 relatively compact volumes were minuscule when compared to the gigantic Talmud. Furthermore, the *Code* is structured by judicial topics; the Talmud's structure is highly complex and intimidating.

1. Maimonides' Use of the Old Testament

I have interacted repeatedly with Maimonides' *Code* in the footnotes of the text of *Tools of Dominion*. Sometimes he got things correctly, and sometimes he did not. It is my task here to deal with the ways that he got things wrong rather than right, as well as the reasons why. I suppose I would have a much more difficult task in writing a chapter analyzing S. R. Hirsch's commentary on Exodus. I find so often that he got things right.¹⁴⁵ How was this possible, when he, like most Orthodox Jews of his day and earlier, must have relied heavily on Maimonides—not Maimonides the Aristotelian philosopher, who was regarded with suspicion by Jewish scholars from the beginning, but Maimonides the Talmudist?

So, I find that I am critical of many of Maimonides' economic and judicial opinions, and through him, of the Talmud. But how does a gentile scholar say this politely yet effectively, and also avoid the counter-charge of anti-Semitism? I suppose he does this in the same way that a Jewish scholar would discuss Martin Luther's notoriously anti-Semitic book on the Jews,¹⁴⁶ yet remain free of "anti-gentilism." All I

145. Again and again as I wrote this commentary, I found myself turning to Hirsch and citing him. James Jordan has been working on his study of the dietary laws during the period that I have been working on the case laws. He also has noticed this phenomenon: Hirsch frequently makes sense, while the observations in Maimonides' *Code* often seem archaic, superstitious, and irrational. Hirsch sticks to the biblical text far more closely than Maimonides does. Yet he also cites the Talmud, and the conclusions he draws from these citations seem sensible, whereas Maimonides, if he is in fact being faithful to the Talmud (and I find that he seems to be faithful in the cases that I have studied), frequently makes the Talmud seem unreliable. I leave it to Orthodox Jewish scholars to sort out the discrepancies between these two giants of Jewish thought. I have run out of time to pursue the matter.

146. *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), published over the years in cheap, poorly printed paperback editions for the anti-Semitic masses, as well as in an expensive hardback collectors' edition by Revisionist Press, 1982. It appears as volume 47 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 137–306. Luther was not alone in his hostility to Judaism. Two years prior to the publication of his book, his arch-rival, Catholic theologian John Eck, published *Refutation of a Jew-Book*, and two years before this, Calvinist Martin Bucer published *On the Jews*. Luther, however, was typically extreme. He recommended seven steps to be taken by the civil government: 1) burn down every synagogue until not a cinder remains; 2) raze the homes of all Jews; 3) con-

can say is this: what we have here is more than a failure to communicate. It is more than a difference over semantics or semitics. It is a fundamental debate over biblical hermeneutics, and both Orthodox Judaism and orthodox Christianity teach that this ultimate division cannot be overcome in principle. It divides Christians from Jews, and has from the first century, whether A.D. or C.E. Cohen is correct: "I suggest in part, therefore, that the Judeo-Christian tradition is a construct, an artificial gloss of reason over the swarm of fedeist passion. . . . What is omitted is the sinew and bone of actuality, for where Jews and Christians divide, divide irreparably, divide finally . . . is that for Jews the Messiah is to come and for Christians he has already come. That is irreparable."¹⁴⁷

From the day that the English-language translation of Maimonides' *Code* was completed, the terms of this division came to the surface of the academic waters, and have drifted along ever since. That this debate has not previously broken out stems mainly from the fact that the two sides that presumably care one way or the other about the underlying religious issues and therefore the hermeneutical questions—Orthodox Jews and orthodox Christians—have not debated publicly, primarily because the Christians have never heard of the *Mishneh Torah*. Very few have read any of the Talmud, either. Maimonides' *Code* is an unknown book that comments on a closed book.

K. Talmud vs. Torah

Maimonides' *Code* does represent both the letter and spirit of the Talmud. This is not simply my opinion. Orthodox Jews have long believed that the *Code* is faithful to the Talmud. The translator of his introduction to the Talmud, which he wrote at the age of 23, is adamant on this point: "Although he utilized the fruits of his time's researches, every statement of Maimonides is securely grounded and borne from the Torah literature. It is extremely important to bear this in mind. The Torah is the means by which the Rambam saw and explained everything."¹⁴⁸

fiscate and destroy their books and the Talmud; 4) forbid rabbis to teach on the threat of execution; 5) revoke all safe-conduct passes on the highways; 6) forbid them to loan money at interest; and 7) require them to work at manual labor. *Luther's Works*, vol. 47, pp. 268–72. For a study of European life for Jews in the sixteenth century, see Selma Stern, *Josel of Rosheim* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1965).

147. Cohen, *Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, p. xii.

148. Zvi L. Lampel, *Maimonides' Introduction to the Talmud* (New York: Judaica

Horowitz begins his detailed, readable, and nearly indispensable study of Jewish law with this assertion: "Though there are in the laws of Moses not a few specific and literal commands which give emphatic expression to the spirit of that legislation, it is the gradual changes against the letter of Scripture which came about in the course of centuries, that offer the most striking manifestation of the true, the humane spirit of Jewish law."¹⁴⁹ But is this really true? Was the "humaneness" of the Jewish legal order truly increased when the rabbis departed from the letter of Old Testament law? I argue that the self-conscious departure on the part of both Christians and Jews from the revealed law of God has decreased the West's humaneness.

The question I am raising in this essay is this: Does the *Code* represent the spirit of the Old Testament? As we shall see, it clearly does not represent the letter of the Old Testament. But were Maimonides and the Talmudic scholars whose conclusions he summarized and classified able to retain and make practical the spirit of the Mosaic law? My answer is simple: *no*. But I must prove my case. To provide evidence of my assertion regarding Jewish law, I have decided to provide a kind of lawyer's brief against Moses Maimonides—specifically, against his views of restitution to gentile victims by Jewish criminals.

1. *The Double Standard*

Maimonides insisted that biblical law's general requirement that the thief make two-fold restitution to his victim (Ex. 22:7) applies only in the case of Jews who steal from Jews. It does not apply if a Jew steals from a heathen (gentile). Incredibly, it also does not apply in the case of sacrilege: stealing an animal from a Jewish household if the animal has been set aside for sacrifice to God; the thief is exempted from making two-fold, four-fold, or five-fold restitution, "For Scripture says, *And it be stolen from the house of the man* (Ex. 22:6), but not from the house of the sanctuary."¹⁵⁰ This means that it is less of a crime to steal from God than to steal from man—a strange system of ethics on

Press, 1975), p. 9.

149. Horowitz, *Spirit of Jewish Law*, pp. 1-2. This reflects a view quite similar to that expressed by Lauterbach in his criticism of Sadduceism because of its having become "blind slaves of the law without regard for its spirit. It divorced the law from life, in that it made the two absolutely independent of each other." *Jewish Essays*, p. 38.

150. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, Book 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1954), "Laws Concerning Theft," II:II:1, p. 64.

which to build an explicitly theocentric civilization.

A convicted Jew need not pay double restitution to a gentile, either: "If one steals from a heathen, or if one steals sacred property, he need pay only its capital value, for Scripture says, *Shall pay double to his neighbor* (Ex. 22:8)—*to his neighbor*, but not to the sanctuary; *to his neighbor*, but not to a heathen."¹⁵¹

This is an ethical and judicial system based on a double standard. The Talmud is clear on this point: "Where a suit arises between an Israelite and a heathen, if you can justify the former according to the laws of Israel, justify him and say: 'This is *our* law'; so also if you can justify him by the laws of the heathens justify him and say [to the other party:] 'This is *your* law'; but if this can not be done, we use subterfuges to circumvent him."¹⁵² In short, the Jewish lawyer must do whatever he can to keep his guilty Jewish client from being convicted. (In this sense, Jewish jurisprudence serves as the model for all modern jurisprudence: the lawyer's primary task is supposedly to use the law in order to see his client go free, guilty or not.)

A dual standard of justice applies to lost property:

R. Bibi b. Giddal said that R. Simeon the Pious stated: The robbery of a heathen is prohibited, though an article lost by him is permissible. . . . His lost article is permissible, for R. Hama b. Guria said that Rab stated: Whence can we learn that the lost article of a heathen is permissible? Because it says: *And with all lost thing of thy brother's*: it is to your brother that you make restoration, but you need not make restoration to a heathen.¹⁵³

Come and hear: If one finds therein [Soncino Press editor's footnote: "In a city inhabited by Jews and heathens"] a lost object, then if the majority are Israelites it has to be announced, but if the majority are heathens it has not to be announced.¹⁵⁴

WHERE AN OX BELONGING TO AN ISRAELITE HAS GORED AN OX BELONGING TO A CANAANITE, THERE IS NO LIABILITY. WHEREAS WHERE AN OX BELONGING TO A CANAANITE GORES AN OX BELONGING TO AN ISRAELITE . . . THE COMPENSATION IS TO BE MADE IN FULL."¹⁵⁵

151. *Idem*.

152. *Baba Kamma* 113a.

153. *Baba Kamma* 113b.

154. *Baba Mezia* 24a.

155. *Baba Kamma* 37b. Cf. 38a. Reproductions of these passages appear in *Christian News* (Aug. 1, 1988).

In response to such judicial standards, gentiles in the late medieval period over-reacted by forcing Jews into urban ghettos that were surrounded by high walls and locked at night. They did not want to live as geographical neighbors to people who held such a double standard.¹⁵⁶ They chose instead to allow Jews to be governed by their own courts in most matters that involved disputes between Jews. Of course, when it came to Christian rulers (and presumably also private citizens) who defaulted on loans, the Jews may also have occasionally appreciated the walls that protected them from excessive contact with gentiles.¹⁵⁷ (It is also interesting that in the twelfth century, the walled-in Jewish community of Constantinople also had its own wall that separated the 2,000 Talmudic Jews from the 500 anti-Talmudic, "Torah-only" Karaites.)¹⁵⁸

Forced social division is inevitably the curse of a double legal standard in a single society. Neither group trusts the other; both groups seek to exploit the other, or at least tolerate those within their midst who do. This is why the Bible says, "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (Ex. 12:49). This case law appears in the section on the laws regarding strangers and the Passover; it was given to Israel immediately after the exodus itself. This indicates how emphatically God demands that men observe it: even their oppressors, the Egyptians, are entitled to equal treatment before the law.

2. "For the Sake of the Peace"

The rabbis were not fools, of course. They modified this judicial double standard for practical purposes, namely, "for the sake of the peace." Horowitz explains: "Halakot [law] and customs which discriminated against Gentiles and which might, therefore, appear unjust in the eyes of the world, were not to be enforced or practiced though per-

156. The social and political results of this policy were evil: forced urbanization, the creation of a permanently alienated political element within the towns, and the eventual subsidizing of nineteenth-century Jewish radicalism, which was far more common in urban settings than in rural ones.

157. In 1306, Philip IV of France evicted the Jews, repudiated his debts to them, and confiscated their property. England drove them out in 1290, after having taxed them heavily and soaked up their capital with forced loans that were then repudiated. In 1370, they were driven from the low countries. Herbert Heaton, *Economic History of Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948), p. 184.

158. This was recorded by Benjamin of Tudela in his *Book of Travels* (1168); cited in Johnson, *History of the Jews*, p. 169.

haps 'legally' valid, because it might reflect unfavorably on the Jewish people, its morals and its religion. 'For the Sake of Peace' was in effect an equitable principle which modified the strict law, with regard to treatment of Gentiles."¹⁵⁹ This was a belated recognition of the need for a unified legal standard in civil justice and economic dealings. He offers several examples, including this one: "The Talmud seemed definitely to countenance the over-reaching of heathens by Jews in business transactions (*Bava Kamma* 113b). But later authorities held otherwise. 'It is forbidden,' says Maimonides, 'to defraud or deceive any person in business—Jew and non-Jew are to be treated alike. . . . It is wrong to deceive any person in words even without causing him any pecuniary loss (*M. T Sale*, XVIII, i)."¹⁶⁰ Centuries later with respect to an error of a Gentile in overpaying eighteen ducats, R. Benjamin b. Mattathiah declared, 'For the sake of sanctifying the Holy Name a Jew should correct and make good the mistake of the Gentile.'"¹⁶¹

Maimonides put it this way: "The lost property of a heathen may be kept, for Scripture says, *Lost thing of thy brothers* (Deut. 22:3). Furthermore, if one returns it, he commits a transgression, for he is supporting the wicked of the world. But if one returns it in order to sanctify God's name, thereby causing persons to praise the Israelites and realize that they are honest, he is deemed praiseworthy."¹⁶² It is revealing that he cited Deuteronomy 22:3, which refers to the lost property of one's brother, but he made no mention of Exodus 23:4–5, which explicitly deals with the lost property of enemies: "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him."

Obviously, when the legal system allows a Jew to discriminate ethnically and judicially in terms of religion, and when it also repeatedly requires Jews to ignore this principle of judicial dualism, it becomes almost impossible for the individual Jew to know what to do in specific cases. He is to be guided by his conscience, of course, but a conscience informed by which principle, the principle of discrimination or the

159. Horowitz, *Spirit of Jewish Law*, p. 100

160. See Maimonides, *The Book of Acquisition*, Book 12 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1951), "Laws Concerning Sales," I:XVIII, pp. 63–64.

161. Horowitz, *Spirit*, p. 101.

162. Maimonides, *Torts*, "Laws Concerning Robbery and Lost Property," III:XI:3, p. 128.

principle of preserving the peace?

This is the fundamental problem for all casuists: the application of fixed laws to specific circumstances. Horowitz was aware of the problem, at least with respect to biblical law, a problem for which the rabbis have offered no solution: "Thus, paradoxical as it may seem the Rabbis believed that it was their right and duty to make changes in the Biblical law if imperatively required, while maintaining, nevertheless, that the commands of the Torah were unchangeable and might not be added to or diminished."¹⁶³ This is also true with respect to Talmudic law. The key question is this: Which principle of application is dominant in any given case, preserving the peace or allowing a Jewish thief to escape the restitution penalty specified by the Torah? The individual Jew is left without clear ethical guidelines. The rabbis will decide after the fact whether an act is immoral, illegal, or just good business, but that knowledge is of little help to the Jewish decision-maker at the "moment of truth." The predictability of the law and its sanctions—indispensable to social order and also to freedom¹⁶⁴—is thereby drastically reduced.

Nowhere is the double standard more visible than in Maimonides' handling of the crime of murder. He stated categorically in Section One of Chapter One of "Laws Concerning Murder and the Preservation of Life" that "If one slays a human being, he transgresses a negative commandment, for Scripture says, *Thou shalt not murder* (Exod. 20:13). If one murders wilfully in the presence of witnesses, he is put to death by the sword, for when Scripture says, *He shall surely be punished* (Exod. 21:20), we have learned from tradition that this means death by the sword."¹⁶⁵ Well and good. But then comes the double standard: "If an Israelite kills a resident alien, he does not suffer capital punishment at the hands of the court, because Scripture says, *And if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor* (Exod. 21:12). Needless to say, one is not put to death if he kills a heathen."¹⁶⁶ I do not think any additional comment is needed at this point.

163. Horowitz, *Spirit of Jewish Law*, p. 94.

164. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

165. Maimonides, *Torts*, "Laws Concerning Murder and the Preservation of Life," V:I:1, p. 195.

166. *Ibid.*, V:II:1, p. 201.

L. Escaping Restitution

Horowitz asserted that the spirit of Jewish law has been humane because the rabbis have departed from the letter of Mosaic law. (Implicitly or explicitly, this is the same defense offered by Christian theologians when they also depart from the letter of the Mosaic law without specific New Testament authorizations.) One problem with Horowitz's argument is that Maimonides' interpretations are frequently opposed to the spirit of biblical justice precisely because he ignored the letter of biblical law.

For example, Maimonides discussed the case of a thief who stole an animal or a vessel, and who then immediately slaughtered the animal or deliberately broke the vessel—perhaps to conceal the evidence of the crime?—and later is convicted of the theft. What if, in the meantime, the market value of the stolen object has doubled? Does the thief pay double restitution based on the value of the item at the time of the theft or based on its market value at the time of the trial? If he has profited from the transaction, Maimonides said, he must pay restitution based on the stolen object's value at the time of the trial. But what if the thief accidentally lost the animal or accidentally broke the vessel? Maimonides stated, though without presenting any justifying argument, that the negligent thief owes restitution only on the value of the object at the time of the theft.¹⁶⁷

1. Undermining Justice

Such a legal principle would undermine biblical civil justice. First, how is the court to determine whether the loss was accidental? The thief obviously has a financial incentive to lie, since the burden of his repayment will be lighter. Second, what of the victim's added economic loss? Who protects the victim's interests? Why should his loss as a result of the time delay between the theft and the trial not be fully compensated by the thief, irrespective of the latter's quality of stewardship over the stolen goods? What Maimonides should have concluded was that the thief must provide multiple restitution to a victim based on the *replacement cost at the time of his conviction* for the crime. If the animal were still alive, he would be required to return that animal, and the animal would obviously be worth today's market value. Thus, the replacement value for a slaughtered animal is also to be worth

167. "... if, however, the animal dies or the vessel is lost, he need pay only double its value at the time of the theft." *Ibid.*, "Laws Concerning Theft," II:I:14, p. 63.

today's market value, and so is the equivalent proportional restitution payment. This is obvious, this is fair, and Maimonides ignored it. He departed from both the letter of biblical law and its spirit.

He concluded all this by stating that two-fold restitution is not required from any thief who is convicted of stealing bonds, land, or slaves, "because Scripture has imposed the liability for double payment only on movable things that have an intrinsic value, for it says, *On an ox or an ass or a sheep or a garment* (Ex. 22:8)." But aren't slaves movable? Physically, yes, but not legally, he said. "Now slaves are legally regarded the same as land, for Scripture says of them, *And you shall bequeath them to your sons* (Lev. 25:46). . . ." But aren't bonds as valuable as movable stolen goods? No; "bonds have no intrinsic value."¹⁶⁸

2. *Committing Crimes Rationally*

Furthermore, if a person is subject to flogging for a crime involving the theft of money, Maimonides insisted that he need not make any monetary penalty payment whatsoever to the victim, "because one is not subjected to both flogging and paying."¹⁶⁹ Why would a thief be subject to flogging in the first place? Possibly because he had stolen for a second or third time. We would imagine that the victim would receive compensation in the form of a monetary penalty payment, and the civil authorities would also flog the thief as a warning. Not in Maimonides' system. But he did make this clarification: the criminal must become subject to the monetary penalty and the flogging at the same time; if he commits two separate offenses, he can be required to suffer both penalties.¹⁷⁰

What, then, is the economically rational conclusion for thieves?

168. *Ibid.*, II:II:2, p. 64. Yet he admitted elsewhere that "if one burns a creditor's bonds, he must pay the full debt recorded in the bond—for although the bond is not intrinsically money, he has caused the loss of money. . . ." *Ibid.*, "Laws Concerning Wounding and Damage," IV:VII:9, p. 185.

169. *Ibid.*, "Laws Concerning Theft," II:III:1, p. 67. He made this one exception: injuring someone, who then becomes eligible for compensation: *ibid.*, "Laws Concerning Wounding and Damaging," IV:IV:9, p. 173.

170. In the case of robbery—stealing openly by threatening the victim—he said that the restitution payment is mandatory, so there can be no flogging, because "any prohibition the transgression of which may be repaired by restitution does not entail flogging." *Ibid.*, "Laws Concerning Robbery and Lost Property," III:I:1, p. 90. If we are to accept this explanation at face value, then why did he ever bring up the parallel issue of crimes that require monetary penalties in relation to flogging? Shouldn't the requirement of restitution always eliminate the possibility of flogging? There is an inconsistency here.

Steal money, not goods, and be sure you commit a trespass at the same time that will involve flogging if you are convicted.¹⁷¹ Habitual thieves should steal only money, if the automatic added penalty is a flogging.

Along this same line is his insistence that thefts committed on the Sabbath are exempt from the requirement of restitution, since working on the Sabbath was a capital offense in the Old Testament, and he insisted that "if one commits a transgression entailing capital punishment and also a monetary penalty, he need not pay even if he has acted through error."¹⁷² But the two crimes must occur at the same time.¹⁷³ "If one steals an animal and butchers it on the Sabbath or kills it as a heathen sacrifice, even through error, he need not pay fourfold or fivefold, as we have explained."¹⁷⁴ "If one borrows a cow and then butchers it on the Sabbath in an act of theft, he is exempt even from paying double, because the breach of the Sabbath and the theft are done at the same time, and where there is no payment for theft, there can be no penalty for butchering or selling."¹⁷⁵ Who then protects the innocent victim from doubly perverse thieves, who are Sabbath-breakers, too? The more corrupt the criminal, the more judicially vulnerable becomes the innocent victim in Maimonides' system.

We see this especially in his treatment of the thief who is sold into slavery to compensate his victim. Biblical law requires that a thief be sold into slavery if he does not have enough money or assets to compensate his victim: ". . . if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft" (Ex. 22:3b). Scripture protects the victim, not the thief. Maimonides said that if the thief steals a second time, and from a different victim, he may be sold into slavery again, as many times as he steals from a new victim, even a hundred times. "But if he steals a second time from the first person, he may not be sold again, rather whatever he has stolen is counted as a debt against him."¹⁷⁶ A truly vicious criminal who repeatedly steals from a truly victimized citizen does not suffer the required biblical penalty, said Maimonides. Once again, the interests of the victim are sacrificed for the benefit of the criminal.

He wrote that a thief who improves a stolen good, such as fattening a stolen animal, needs to make double restitution only of the value

171. Maimonides did not say what kind of crime would bring a person under both penalties simultaneously. This makes it difficult to know what he had in mind.

172. *Ibid.*, "Laws Concerning Theft," II:III:1, p. 67.

173. *Ibid.*, II:III:1, p. 68.

174. *Ibid.*, II:III:3, p. 68.

175. *Ibid.*, II:III:4, pp. 68-69.

176. *Ibid.*, II:III:15, p. 71.

of the item at the time of the theft. He gets to keep any of the improvements. If the owner had abandoned hope of ever having his goods returned to him, the thief even gets to keep any resulting productivity, such as the offspring of a stolen female animal. Thus, the longer the anguish of the innocent, and the greater his loss of hope, the more likely the thief will profit from his crime.¹⁷⁷

There should be no double restitution penalty imposed on those who use false weights and measures, Maimonides insisted. It is unquestionably theft, as he recognized. Why no penalty payment? He never said. "Although one who measures or weighs falsely steals thereby, he need not pay double but need only pay for the deficiency in measure or weight. Nor is flogging inflicted for breach of this prohibition, since there is a liability to pay."¹⁷⁸ Here is another loophole for thieves: *judicially risk-free theft*. If a man steals and is not caught, he keeps what he has stolen; if he gets caught, he is required to give back only what he stole. Worse: it is risk-free for a form of theft which is extremely difficult for the victims to detect, false weights and measures. In short, the more self-conscious the criminal, and the more vulnerable his intended victims, the less the penalty.

The crime of robbery—theft by force¹⁷⁹—is clearly worse than theft by stealth. The robber steals the object, and he also inflicts fear. True to form, Maimonides exempted the robber from the requirement of making double restitution, which is required from the thief: "If one commits robbery, he must return the very object he robbed, for Scripture says, *He shall restore that which he took by robbery* (Lev. 5:23). If, however, the object is lost or altered, he must pay its value. But he is liable for the repayment of its capital value only, whether he confesses of his own accord or whether witnesses testify that he took it by robbery."¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, "If the owner has abandoned hope of recovery but the property is unchanged, the robber acquires title to any improvement that takes place after hope is abandoned, and he need pay only its value as of the time of the robbery. This rule is on the authority of the Scribes, enacted for the benefit of penitents."¹⁸¹ If the owner has given up hope of ever recovering it, he forfeits both the earnings the property might have produced for him and any improvements

177. *Ibid.*, II:I:11–12, pp. 61–62.

178. *Ibid.*, II:VII:2, p. 80.

179. "Who is deemed a robber? One who takes another's property by force." *Ibid.*, III:I:3, p. 90.

180. *Ibid.*, III:I:5, p. 91.

181. *Ibid.*, III:II:2, p. 94.

made by the robber.¹⁸² In short, *the worse the crime, the less the penalty; the greater the suffering by the victim, the less the compensation due to him.*

M. Kidnapping

If any crime sends fear into the hearts of parents, it is this one. God's law makes the penalty clear: "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:16). But the rabbis could not tolerate this law, so they created a system of judicial requirements that made it virtually impossible to convict anyone. Horowitz wrote: "The crime consisted of four elements: carrying off, detention, enslavement, and selling, which must occur in the order named."¹⁸³ The prisoner must be taken completely from his home. He must be detained on the offender's premises. "If the victim is detained anywhere else, even though he be locked up and completely under the abductor's control, the crime is not made out."¹⁸⁴ He must be made a slave by means of "any service or use however slight which the victim was compelled to render or submit to, e.g. to be leaned on or to be used as a screen against the draft even while he was asleep or unconscious."¹⁸⁵ He must then be sold as a slave, and to strangers rather than kinsmen. He cited *Sanhedrin* 85b. On this basis, none of the sons of Jacob could have been convicted of kidnapping Joseph, for they did not take Joseph from his home, nor did they use him as a slave.

The term "Talmudic reasoning" is attached to logic like that employed by Maimonides—the splitting of hairs in order to make impossible any judicial sanctions against an offender. Maimonides wrote: "If one abducts another and uses him and sells him, but the kidnapped person is still on his own premises and has not been taken onto the premises of the kidnapper, the kidnapper is exempt. If one abducts another and takes him onto his premises and uses him but does not sell him, or sells him before using him, or uses him and sells him to one of the kidnapped person's relatives—for example, if he sells him to his father or his brother—the kidnapper is exempt, for Scripture says,

182. Maimonides cited the anonymous sages to prove that the victim is entitled to the increased market value of the stolen object, if this increase has not come as a result of improvements made by the robber: *ibid.*, III:II:16, p. 97.

183. Horowitz, *Spirit of Jewish Law*, p. 196.

184. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

185. *Idem.*

Stealing any of his brethren . . . and sell him, implying that he must separate him from his brethren and kinsfolk by the sale. Similarly, if one abducts a person who is asleep, uses him asleep, and sells him while he is still asleep, the kidnapper is exempt."¹⁸⁶

Horowitz's concluding remarks are appropriate: "That the Rabbis considered the death penalty too severe for this wrong to society and the individual, seems quite plain from the foregoing rules. But they were bound by the express command of Scripture; hence they devised such requirements as made conviction virtually impossible. There is no record, moreover, that a regular court ever convicted a person of Manstealing."¹⁸⁷ Lest this claim be thought unrepresentative because of a presumed lack of data, bear in mind that the Jewish rabbis from all over the world saved records of their court decisions since the tenth century. Something in the range of 3,000 volumes of these records, with at least 300,000 judgments, have been compiled.¹⁸⁸ While these records until recently were unindexed (they have now been put on computer in Israel),¹⁸⁹ and therefore were usable only by highly trained specialists who possessed astounding memories, the basic conclusions are known. Thus, Horowitz's statement is probably representative of the history of Jewish decisions regarding kidnapping: not one conviction.

Michael Guttman made a similar assessment: "The general principle upon which the Mishnah has to be valued juridically is the endeavor to restrict death punishment to a minimum. The Talmud could not flatly annul the death penalty since a Pentateuchal law could not be abrogated; therefore the requirements pertaining to the giving of evidence and the proof of premeditation were made so severe that a death verdict was almost impossible."¹⁹⁰

One reason for this reticence to impose the penalties established in the Old Testament was that the Jews believed that every Jewish court had to have at least one judge who had been appointed by the laying on of hands (*semikah*) by a preceding judge. Like the rabbi who supposedly could trace his teachers back to Moses, so was the judge. But there was a problem. This laying on of hands could take place only in

186. Maimonides, *Torts*, "Laws Concerning Theft," II:IX:3, p. 86.

187. Horowitz, *Spirit*, pp. 197-98.

188. Elon, "Introduction," in Elon (ed.), *Principles of Jewish Law*, col. 13.

189. "Computer Digests the Talmud to Help Rabbis," *New York Times* (Nov. 24, 1984).

190. Michael Guttman, "The Term 'Foreigner' Historically Considered," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, III (1926), p. 17.

the Holy Land. "A court not thus qualified," wrote Horowitz, "had no jurisdiction to impose the punishments prescribed in the Torah."¹⁹¹

After the Bar Kochba revolt failed in 135, the Romans scattered the Jews throughout the empire; the Diaspora began in earnest. This loss of residence was used as an excuse by the rabbis to abandon the required sanctions of the Old Covenant.

The Rabbis were compelled, therefore, in order to preserve the Torah and to maintain law and order, to enlarge the authority of Rabbinical tribunals. This they accomplished by emphasizing the distinction between Biblical penalties and Rabbinical penalties. Rabbinical courts after the second century had no authority to impose Biblical punishments since they lacked *semikah*; but as regards penalties created by Rabbinical legislation, the Rabbis had of necessity, the widest powers of enforcement. They instituted, accordingly, a whole series of sanctions and penalties: excommunication, fines, physical punishment, use of the "secular arm" in imitation of the Church, etc."¹⁹²

Thus ended, formally, the Old Covenant. It had ended judicially in God's eyes in A.D. 70, but now there could be no mistaking what had happened. *Judaism officially became rabbinic rather than Mosaic*. To "preserve the Torah," the rabbis decided to abandon it. That Rabbi Akiba, one of the early compilers of the oral law, had joined with Bar Kochba and died in this revolt,¹⁹³ was fitting; the defeat of Bar Kochba was to make possible the triumph of the Talmud over the Old Testament and its required sanctions.

Without sanctions, there can be no covenant.¹⁹⁴ Without God's specified sanctions, there can be no covenant under Him, except as a broken covenant. This is the dilemma of Judaism. The specified sanctions in the Old Testament are no longer applicable, Orthodox Jews believe, because Jews are outside the land. The specified sanctions of animal sacrifices are also gone. The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

191. Horowitz, *Spirit of Jewish Law*, p. 93.

192. *Idem*. So serious was being outside the land that one rabbi cited in the Talmud taught that those Jews buried outside the land will not be resurrected. "R. Eleazar stated: The dead outside the Land will not be resurrected; for it is said in Scripture, *And I will set glory in the land of the living*, [implying] the dead of the land in which I have my *desire* will be resurrected, but the dead [of the land] in which I have no desire will not be resurrected." *Kethuboth* 111a.

193. Supposedly he died on the very day of the birth of Judah HaNasi, the compiler of the Mishnah: J. H. Hertz, Foreword, *Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kamma* (London: Soncino Press, 1935), p. xv.

194. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

Yet without these sanctions—against criminals and against animal representatives—there cannot be Old Covenant religion. There can only be a broken covenant.

N. Mastering a Book

There is no doubt in my mind that opening the Talmud does not really open it. Opening Maimonides' *Code*, however, does begin to get the Talmud's conclusions into the open, though not its various modes of reasoning. When Jewish scholars co-operated a generation ago in making available an English-language translation of the *Code*, they performed a service analogous to the translating of the Talmud. But this service, being intellectual in nature, opened the formerly linguistically locked gates. Inquirers today are free to enter the gateway and snoop around at their leisure. They may not do justice to everything they find. Or, from a different critic's perspective, they may do greater justice than some would prefer. But this is the cost of intellectual progress. Debates arise, and they sometimes continue for centuries without resolution. This is especially true of religious debates.

My part-time odyssey through Jewish literature has led me to things that I appreciate (e.g., the exegetical insights of U. Cassuto and S. R. Hirsch) and things that I do not appreciate (e.g., various teachings regarding Jesus and Christians in general that are found in the Talmud). The economic teachings of the Pentateuch are not all that easy to decipher at first glance. I am sure that Jewish commentators have had the same sorts of problems that I have encountered. They have come to their share of inaccurate conclusions. Who is to challenge these conclusions? Jews only? Then are Christians' conclusions equally immune from challenges by Jews? The answer is clear, I think. Anyway, it should be. We must all deal with the texts. If God spoke them, as I believe He did, then we must all seek to understand precisely what He said. Sometimes even higher critics can pinpoint a truth. Surely if they can, then those of us who take the texts seriously as the word of God can comment on them, as well as on each other's comments.

In the Preface to a book on the ethics of Judaism by Unitarian scholar R. Travers Herford, John J. Tepfer lamented: "Over the centuries the many-tomed Talmud, and kindred products of the early Rabbinic mind such as the Midrash, have been subjected to keen scrutiny by numerous learned Christians, mainly, however, with an eye to their

value for Christian faith and dogma. The aims of these men being largely apologetic, they drew invidious comparisons between the two faiths, pointing up what they considered to be the absurdities of Rabbinic law and lore, and demonstrating the superior spiritual worth of the authoritative writings of the Church."¹⁹⁵ I clearly would choose to be numbered among these unnamed Christian critics.

The more I read in Maimonides' *Code*, the more I detect a tendency on his part to give the benefit of the doubt to the thief or the cheat, and therefore to sacrifice the interests of the innocent victim. Consider this example: stealing an animal from a fellow Israelite who has set it aside for a priest. "If one steals heave offering from a (lay) Israelite who has designated it (to be given to a priest), he is not obliged to pay double, for the owner's only right in it is the pleasure of giving it to whom he pleases, and such a right has no monetary value."¹⁹⁶ I should think that any self-respecting Jew would hope that Maimonides was not a faithful compiler and summarizer of traditional rabbinic opinion, for the sake of the reputation of the rabbis, but his defenders insist that he was, and there have been few traditional Jewish detractors of Maimonides who have been visible to gentiles, from his day to the present.

By departing from the letter of the Mosaic law, time after time, the rabbis abandoned the spirit of Mosaic law as well. This is why Jesus began so many of His public lessons with the phrase, "You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you." He was waging war with both the spirit and the letter of Talmudic law, for it violates both the spirit and the letter of biblical law.

This is not to say that Talmudic laws are all corrupt or that the *responsa* (post-Talmudic case law decisions) based on the Talmud are all corrupt. The Jews at least attempted very early to create a unique, distinctly Jewish, systematic body of laws. By viewing their world in terms of law, they involved themselves and their culture in the task of casuistry: applying fixed laws to specific circumstances. They began this process nearly a millennium before the Christians did, and the Christian law codes (Theodosian's, Justinian's) after the sixth century fell into disuse in the West as feudal society steadily replaced Christian Roman rule.

The huge body of materials that their judges had to master re-

195. John J. Tepfer, "Preface" (1962) to R. Travers Herford, *The Ethics of the Talmud*, p. vii.

196. *Torts*, "Laws Concerning Theft," II:II:5, p. 64.

quired feats of memory that are astounding to gentiles of this day. Few of us can imagine the ability of the contemporary Talmud scholar David Weiss, who memorized 200 pages of the Talmud at age five, and who earned money by answering such questions as this one: "If I put a pin through word X on page Y, what words would it pierce on the pages beneath?"¹⁹⁷ Yet there have been many Jews with David Weiss' training and abilities over the centuries. The production of such prodigies has been a Jewish academic specialty for at least two millennia.

Because they had to master "a book," and an immense one, Jewish scholars had to discipline themselves intellectually. They set the example for their followers. Because rabbis were frequently involved in business trades, this led to a unique attribute of Jewish culture. Wrote Paul Johnson: "Rabbinical Judaism is essentially a method whereby ancient laws are adapted to modern and differing conditions by a process of rationalization. The Jews were the first great rationalizers in world history. This had all kinds of consequences as we shall see, but one of its earliest, in a worldly sense, was to turn Jews into methodical, problem-solving businessmen. A great deal of Jewish legal scholarship in the Dark and Middle Ages was devoted to making business dealings fair, honest and efficient."¹⁹⁸ But what if they had concentrated their efforts exclusively on the task of explaining the Old Testament without any of the excess baggage of fables, occultism, and judicial interpretations specifically designed to allow criminals to escape the full consequences of their actions? Think of the commentaries they would have produced! Christians could have learned from them (and they from Christians) the things I am spending my life trying to research from scratch. The modern world would be a very different and far more productive place. But they could not do it and still remain Jews, for Jesus had made their dilemma plain: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46–47). The Mishnah and the Talmud are not what we Christians might have hoped for, and what some Christians have mistakenly believed that they are: commentaries on the Old Testament, but with no mention of the

197. Israel Shenker, "A Life in the Talmud," *New York Times Magazine* (Sept. 11, 1977).

198. Johnson, *History*, p. 172. Quite properly, he cited Irving Agus' remarkable two-volume study of medieval *responsa* or legal decisions: *Urban Civilization in Pre-Crusade Europe* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1968), a book I stumbled across in the library in the late 1960s, and recommended to R. J. Rushdoony. He used it in his *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 788.

Trinity.

Conclusion

If Christians and Jews do not agree about the nature of law and the proper approach to and interpretation of biblical legal texts, even when they officially appeal to the same legal sources, then the Judeo-Christian tradition is a myth. There would have to be a common legal tradition, yet such a tradition does not exist. Modern Christians and Jews, because they are modern, do not recognize the hypothetical nature of this academic construct; they no longer take law or religion seriously enough, especially law. The two religions are no longer viewed by their adherents as being inherently judicial in nature. Thus, the two religions have changed radically, yet this change has been disguised by the self-conscious triumphant humanism of modern culture. Both the Jews and the Christians have enthusiastically sent their children into tax-financed secular schools, and their common enemies have transformed the worldview of their children. The covenantal heirs no longer recognize the extent of the former division between the Christian and Jewish legal traditions because they no longer are aware of the legal revolution that has captured the West over the last century. This revolution, legal scholar Harold Berman argued, now threatens our freedom as no other revolution ever has: the rise of secular, bureaucratic, administrative law.¹⁹⁹

Berman made another important observation: law has broken down in the West because religion has been privatized. "The traditional symbols of community in the West, the traditional images and metaphors, have been above all religious and legal. In the twentieth century, however, for the first time, religion has become largely a private affair, while law has become largely a matter of practical expediency. The connection between the religious metaphor and the legal metaphor has been broken. Neither expresses any longer the community's vision of its future and its past; neither commands any longer its passionate loyalty."²⁰⁰

If there were a Judeo-Christian tradition, there would be a common legal order. What this essay has shown is that there has not been any common legal order uniting Bible-believing Christians and Tal-

199. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 33–41.

200. *Ibid.*, p. vi.

mud-believing Jews, which is why there were Jewish ghettos in medieval European cities and separate Jewish rural communities, especially in Russia. Jews insisted on these separate communities because they insisted on being ruled by their own courts, and Christian rulers gave them their request.²⁰¹ Jews recognized clearly that if they subordinated themselves under the civil laws of Christian states they would lose their covenantal autonomy. In the nineteenth century, they steadily abandoned this view, but only after the gentiles' civil orders ceased being Christian and became secular humanist.

If there were a Judeo-Christian tradition, there would be evidence of a shared legal tradition, especially in the formative years of the Western legal tradition: the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. Berman summarized: "... neither Jewish thought nor Jewish law seems to have had any substantial influence on the legal systems of the West, at least so far as the surviving literature shows."²⁰² One reason for this, he speculates (I think correctly), is what he calls the casuistry of the Talmud. I would call it the dialecticism: "... the intense casuistry of the Talmud may have helped to make it seem alien to Western legal thought, which stressed the systematization of legal principles."²⁰³

We needed to examine some of the legal sources of the Jewish legal tradition in order to determine to what extent there has been or can be a Judeo-Christian tradition. Christian scholars have seldom done this in the past, and the result has been a major intellectual gap and therefore major blind spot in the thinking of modern Bible-believing Christians. But blind spots are not perceived by those who suffer from them unless they are shown to the victims. This essay, I trust, has made this blind spot visible.²⁰⁴

Because I am a Christian Reconstructionist, I am deeply interested in law, specifically biblical law. I am interested in the effects that biblical law and its specific applications have had on Christian civilization. I believe, as Berman does, that there can be no true social revolution

201. Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, [1924] 1972).

202. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, p. 589.

203. *Idem*.

204. The physical blind spot in each eye exists because of the structure of the eye. Discover it for yourself. Get a piece of blank paper, and put an X in the middle of the paper and a dot about two inches to the left. Close your right eye. Keeping your left eye focused on the X, move the paper slowly toward your eye. At some point, the dot will disappear from view. Your brain will continue to "cover" for your eye's failure by filling the visible gap with the color of the paper. The dot disappears.

without a change in a particular society's legal order; without such a transformation, a so-called revolution is merely a *coup d'état*. It takes more than one generation to consolidate a revolution, and the primary manifestation of this consolidation is always legal.²⁰⁵ If it is true, as Ber-
man believed, that we are approaching the end of an era,²⁰⁶ then it is incumbent on Christians to begin to rethink their covenantal heritage. They must begin to offer an alternative to the present collapsing social order, and this alternative must be self-consciously judicial. Christians must become judicial revolutionaries, not simply defenders of the present legal order.²⁰⁷ If we remain on the deck of this sinking ship, claiming that it is in principle conformable with biblical principles, we shall go down with it.²⁰⁸ Sticking with the status quo means sure death by drowning.

205. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

206. *Ibid.* p. v.

207. Gary North, *When Justice Is Aborted: Biblical Standards for Non-Violent Resistance* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnjustice>)

208. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

APPENDIX M

VICTIM'S RIGHTS VS. THE MESSIANIC STATE

I begin with a biblical principle: *all crime is primarily an attack on God*. Only secondarily is crime an attack on an earthly victim. The victim represents God judicially. This is why God requires the civil government to defend the victim. In doing so, the civil government defends God. In this appendix, I will defend this view of crime and punishment.

I begin with the doctrine of hierarchy. This includes the doctrine of representation.¹ This is point two of the biblical covenant model. The Book of Exodus, the second book in the Pentateuch, is primarily concerned with point two of the covenant, for the Pentateuch is itself structured in terms of the biblical covenant's five-point structure. It is appropriate that questions relating to representation should be the focus of several of the case laws of Exodus.

The covenant's representation principle is built into the creation. We know that the visible creation testifies to the existence of the invisible God. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Men, as creatures, cannot strike at God directly. They must act through intermediaries. Men strike some aspect of God's creation in their attempt to strike at God. Men commit crimes against God-created men and the God-created environment, but always in the creation's capacity as reflecting God. Men are creatures, so they must use the creation as the only available means of any attempted attack on God. As Cornelius Van Til wrote in numerous places, the child must sit on the father's lap in order to slap his face.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), pp. 46–47. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

A. God Is the Primary Victim

Biblically and covenantally speaking, the earthly victim of a crime is always the secondary victim; *God is always the primary victim*. Ours is a theocentric universe, not anthropocentric. This means, additionally, that the criminal acts in his own interests secondarily; when committing a biblically prohibited act, he acts primarily as Satan's representative, just as Adam did. This judicial principle—the doctrine of covenantal representation—is not intuitively apparent to those who are not trained to think theocentrically and covenantally. We must learn to think theocentrically and representatively (covenantally) when we think about crime and punishment.

Christians and Jews should therefore begin any consideration of the principles of biblical jurisprudence with this fundamental legal principle: *God is always the primary victim of every sin and every crime*. This leads to a crucial conclusion: *the victims of any crime or unlawful attack become the legal representatives of God*. The victim of a crime is authorized by God, the Author of history, to initiate a covenant lawsuit against the suspected criminal. He and he alone is so authorized. While it is legitimate to speak of primary and secondary earthly victims of crime, we must always bear in mind that the primary cosmic victim is always God.

Because of the somewhat intricate nature of my arguments in this chapter, I think it is best if I state my conclusion in advance, so that the reader will be better able to assess the cogency of my argumentation. The conclusion that I have come to after having studied in detail this and other biblical case laws is that the following judicial principle is dominant in the Bible: *if the victim of a crime fails to initiate this covenant lawsuit, then the other covenantal agents of God must honor this decision*—the civil magistrate, the church officer, and the head of a household. They are not authorized in this instance to step in and prosecute in God's name as God-ordained covenantal judges. They are unquestionably judges.² But because of the principle of victim's rights, they are prohibited from prosecuting if the victim decides to forego bringing the lawsuit, *unless they can show that they themselves have become victims because of the original victim's failure to prosecute*.

In biblical jurisprudence, *it is the victim whose rights must always be upheld*, not simply because he was harmed by the criminal, but also

2. Gary North, *When Justice Is Aborted: Biblical Standards for Non-Violent Resistance* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnjustice>)

because *he served as God's surrogate when he became the victim*. God is the primary victim, and His rights must be upheld first and foremost. His specified judicial sanctions must be enforced by His designated covenantal representatives. His case laws provide mankind with the proper guidelines of how His honor is to be upheld in various cases.

There is another Bible-sanctioned office to consider, the office of *witness*. The witness is authorized to bring relevant information to one of these covenantal judges, so that the judge can initiate the covenant lawsuit against the suspected violator.³ The witness plays a very important role in the prosecution of God's covenant lawsuits. Without at least two witnesses, it is illegal to execute anyone (Deut. 17:6). Also, the affirming witnesses in a capital lawsuit must be the first people to cast stones (Deut. 17:7).

B. The Biblical Hierarchical Structure

Adam was allowed to do anything he wanted in the garden, except eat from the forbidden tree. There was a specific sanction attached to that crime, a capital sanction. This reveals a fundamental biblical judicial principle: *anything is permitted unless it is explicitly prohibited by law, or prohibited by an extension of a case law's principle*. This principle places the individual under public law, but it also relies on self-government as the primary policing device. It creates the bottom-up appeals court character of biblical society. Men are judicially free to act however they please unless society, through its various covenantal courts, has been authorized by God's Bible-revealed law to restrict certain specified kinds of behavior.

The bottom-up appeals court structure of the biblical hierarchy is in opposition to the principle of top-down bureaucratic control. Under the latter hierarchical system, in theory nothing is permitted except what has been commanded. The decision-making private individual is tightly restricted; the centralized state is expanded. This is the governing principle of all socialist economic planning. It assumes the omni-

3. The hostility of siblings against "tattle tales" in a family is easily explainable: youthful law-breakers resent judgment. They resent witnesses whose action brings the dreaded sanctions. But what about parents? Parents who side with the critics of "tattle tales" are thereby attempting to escape their God-given role as judges. They are saying, in principle, "We don't want to know about it. We don't want to serve as judges, despite our position as God's designated representative agents in this family."

science and omnicompetence of distant central planners.⁴

A free society needs predictable law.⁵ The maximum sanction for any crime must be specified in written law or at least in traditional legal precedent. A criminal should know in advance the maximum negative consequences of conviction. He is under law, but so are his judges. The state as well as the criminal are restrained under biblical law. The state is placed under tight judicial restraints, and first and foremost among these restraints is the requirement that crimes and their respective sanctions be announced in advance. There must be no *ex post facto* statutes or sanctions. This reduces the arbitrary authority of judges to apply sanctions or increase sanctions beyond what is specified in the law code. Judges sometimes possess the authority to reduce the specified sanctions, as this chapter argues, but never to increase them. This restriction drastically reduces the growth of arbitrary civil power. By adhering to this biblical principle of responsible freedom under specified law, the West made possible the development of modern capitalism and its accompanying high per capita wealth.

The limits on the biblical state's ability to impose arbitrary sanctions are derived from three case-law principles. First, the God-given authority of the victim to refuse to prosecute, and also his authority to reduce the applicable sanctions upon conviction of the criminal, restricts the power of the civil magistrate. Second, the maximum sanction allowed by existing law keeps the state under restraint. Third, the *pleonasm of execution*—"dying, he shall die"—inhibits the authority of the judges to subsidize outrageous crimes by imposing reduced sanctions in specific cases: whenever the state has lawfully initiated the covenant lawsuit because there is no earthly victim who could initiate it. To deny any of these principles is to promote the advent of the messianic state.

To describe the working of these three case-law principles, we need to begin with the maximum civil sanction: execution. Because public execution is the maximum civil sanction allowed by God's law, it has the most critics.

4. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), Appendix A: "Socialist Economic Calculation." (<http://bit.ly/gnmrror>)

5. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

C. Capital Punishment: Yesterday and Today

One of the complaints against the continuing legitimacy of biblical law is that the death penalty is too rigorous to be applied as a sanction against most of the capital crimes specified by the Old Testament. Therefore, conclude the Mosaic law's critics, execution is no longer a valid civil sanction today, except in the case of murder.⁶ This line of argumentation leads to the peculiar conclusion that, in the Old Covenant era, covenantally faithful people were expected by God to be a lot more rigorous about prosecuting criminals, and were therefore expected to be more willing to see God's civil sanctions enforced. This rigorous "Old Testament attitude" toward criminals is no longer valid, it is said, because of the coming of the New Covenant. But if Christians are to be less rigorous regarding crime and its appropriate civil sanctions, then God also must have adopted a more lenient attitude, which is supposedly reflected in His New Covenant law. A major problem with this line of reasoning is the fact that God's New Covenant standards seem to be more rigorous, e.g., the prohibition of easy divorce (Matt. 19:7–9).⁷ With greater maturity and greater revelation, Christians are supposed to be less lenient about sin. After all, more is expected from him to whom more has been given (Luke 12:47–48).⁸ The New Testament gives Christians greater revelation and assigns us far more responsibility than was the case in the Old Covenant era. Christ's resurrection is behind us. The Holy Spirit has come.

It could be argued, of course, that because greater mercy has been shown to us, we should extend greater mercy. With respect to the judicial principle of victim's rights, I quite agree. The victim should be more merciful, so long as his mercy does not subsidize further evil. He must judge the character of the criminal. But this does not answer the question of designated capital crimes. Is it the state's responsibility to adopt the principle of reduced New Covenant sanctions, despite the explicit revelation of the Old Covenant case laws? Should the state adopt a judicial principle different from that which prevailed in the Old Covenant? I answer no. Furthermore, I also answer that civil judges in Mosaic Israel had the God-given authority to reduce the severity of the specified sanctions under certain circumstances. I develop the evid-

6. For example, see John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 118.

7. Section F: "Divorce by Covenantal Death."

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 3rd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2011), ch. 28.

ence for this conclusion in this chapter.

Critics of capital punishment also argue that righteous and sensitive jury members today are unwilling to hand down “guilty” verdicts against offenders in many cases, because the death penalty is much too harsh. If the death penalty is kept on the statute books, critics argue, serious criminal behavior is therefore indirectly subsidized by victims’ unwillingness to prosecute and juries’ unwillingness to convict. Thus, conclude the critics, we should ignore the Old Testament’s capital sanction in all but the case of premeditated murder. Some Christian critics would even abandon capital punishment in this instance, following the lead of secular humanist criminologists and jurists.

It is my belief that, in the twenty-first century, there are three affirmations, the denial of which best indicates the presence of Christian heresy. Heresy is easy to conceal in a world of endless qualifications and maneuvering. But three affirmations go right to the heart of the neo-evangelical and neo-orthodox rejection of biblical revelation. The first is the inerrancy of the Bible, as delivered in the original manuscripts. The second is the doctrine of eternal punishment. The third is the doctrine of capital punishment, as specified in the Old Testament case laws (unless modified by a specific New Testament revelation). I think the third is related to the second: God’s merciless torturing of His covenant-breaking enemies, and the state’s merciless delivery of capital crime-committing offenders into the court of the eternally torturing Judge. Therefore, the affirmation of the legitimacy of case-law specified capital punishment is an initial step back on the road to Christian orthodoxy.

I devote much of this appendix to a detailed consideration of the key phrase, “shall surely be put to death.” It requires a lengthy excursion in order to deal with some things not intuitively obvious from the text. I begin my discussion by considering the theological basis of all prosecutions by any court, the covenant lawsuit.

D. The Covenant Lawsuit

Adam and Eve had to serve as witnesses and judges in the garden. There was no escape from these two offices. The serpent had forced their hand. They had heard Satan’s temptation, namely, that they could be as God if they disobeyed God (Gen. 3:5). They had become witnesses. They could not escape from their knowledge of the ser-

pent's words. He had spoken in their presence.⁹ They could stand with God and God's law by obeying God's word concerning Himself, the forbidden fruit, and the promised sentence of execution, or they could stand with Satan and his word concerning God, the forbidden fruit, and the promised execution. But when called upon by God to testify in His court, they would be required to testify, either against themselves if they stood with Satan or against Satan if they stood with God.¹⁰ They both sought to escape self-incrimination. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Still, there was no available judicial escape. Their fig leaves testified against them. They knew they were guilty, and their wardrobes testified to their sense of guilt.

They also had to serve as judges. They could issue a condemnation of God by eating the forbidden fruit, or they could issue a condemnation of Satan, either by eating of the tree of life, or by eating from any tree except the forbidden one, or by not eating anything at all. But they could not avoid serving as judges. They had to *decide*. They had to *act*. They had to *render judgment*.¹¹

The two offices, witness and judge, were inherent in their position as God's authorized representatives on earth (Gen. 1:26).¹² Because of Satan's rebellion and his temptation of them, they were forced to decide: *Against whom would they bring the required covenant lawsuit, God or Satan?* They brought it against God. They served as Satan's agents. They implicitly claimed to be the victims of God's discriminatory restrictions against them, for God had denied them access to the forbidden fruit, and He had obviously lied to them concerning His power to enforce His will. They must have regarded His promised sanctions as a lie. Why else would anyone commit automatic suicide for a bite of forbidden fruit? They brought their covenant lawsuit

9. This assumes that Adam was at Eve's side when the serpent spoke. If he was not, then only Eve heard him speak. She should then have gone to Adam for confirmation, and he would have had to ask the serpent to repeat his claim. As I argue in my study of the incident, in order for Satan to gain the biblically specified pair of witnesses against God, they both had to act against God's law. I think that Adam was next to Eve when the serpent spoke. Adam let her act in his name. He allowed her to test the serpent's claim.

10. This is the theological foundation of the idea of the subpoena. The state has a legitimate right to compel the appearance of an individual in court, as well as compel his truthful testimony. This right is denied by some libertarians. Cf. Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, rev. ed. (<http://bit.ly/mrfanl>)

11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), Appendix E: "Witnesses and Judges."

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

against God *in absentia* by partaking of the forbidden fruit in the presence of Satan, thereby indulging in a satanic sacrament, an unholy communion service. They ate a ritual meal in the presence of the prince of demons. This is what Paul warned against: eating at the table of demons (I Cor. 10:21).

From the day that the serpent tempted Adam and Eve by testifying falsely concerning God's revealed word, there has been a designated victim of all criminal behavior: God. Satan needed to recruit human accomplices in his war against God. He needed two witnesses, the required number to prosecute anyone successfully for a capital crime (Deut. 17:6). But the moment that Adam and Eve brought their false testimony into God's court, they became subject to the penalty for perjury: suffering the same punishment to which the falsely accused victim was subject (Deut. 19:16–19).¹³ If their testimony had been true, then God must have lied about who is truly sovereign over the universe. He would have given false testimony against the true god, man. God would have been guilty of calling man to worship a false god, which is a capital offense (Deut. 13:6–9). He would also have been guilty of false prophesying, another capital offense (Deut. 13:1–5). Adam and Eve had sought to indict God for a capital offense; they were subsequently executed by God. So are all their heirs who persist in refusing to renounce the judicial accusations of their parents, who represented them in God's court.

In His grace, God offered them a judicial covering, a temporary stay of execution, which was symbolized by the animal skins (Gen. 3:21). This symbolic covering required the slaying of an animal. God offered them time on earth to repent. He offered them a way to make restitution to Him: the blood sacrifice of specified animals. He did this because He looked forward in time to the death of His Son on the cross, the only possible restitution payment large enough to cover the sin of Adam and his heirs.

His Son's representative death is the basis of all of God's gifts to mankind in history. *Grace is an unearned gift*, meaning a gift earned by Christ at Calvary and given by God to all men in history. Christ's restitution payment serves as the basis of *common grace* to covenant-breakers in history and *special grace* to covenant-keepers in history and eternity.¹⁴ The words of Christ on the cross are the basis of com-

13. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

14. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress*

mon grace in history: “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Ignorance of the law is no excuse, but Jesus Christ grants grace to the ignorant anyway. He paid God’s price; He suffered God’s sanctions; so, He has the right to grant temporal (common) forgiveness on no terms at all, and eternal (special) forgiveness on His own terms.

E. Criminal and Victim as Covenantal Representatives

Adam and Eve served as Satan’s representatives when they had communion with him, thereby bringing a covenant lawsuit against God. Had they refused to take Satan’s advice, they would have served as God’s representatives against Satan. The point is, *representation is an inescapable concept*. The issue is never this one: “To serve or not to serve as the covenantal representative of a supernatural being.” The question is rather: “Which supernatural being shall I represent covenantally?” There is no escape from this decision and its consequences.

What does the word *covenant* mean biblically? God has created a legal relationship to man, one which is based on a legal *bond*. There is no personal relationship between God and man apart from this legal bond. The covenant structure has five parts:

1. Transcendence yet presence of God
2. Hierarchy (representative authority)
3. Ethics (law)
4. Oath (judgment and sanctions)
5. Succession (inheritance and continuity)

By combining the first letters, we get an acronym: THEOS, the Greek word for God. God’s three covenantal institutions are governed in terms of this five-point structure. These institutions of God-authorized government are: church, state, and family. *The covenant structure is an inescapable concept*.¹⁵

When a man sins, he thereby brings a covenantal lawsuit against God. His action violates all five points of the covenant. First, he denies that God is who He says He is: the Law-giver and eternal Judge. Second, he declares himself no longer under God’s hierarchical authority. Third, he says that God’s ethical standards do not apply to

(Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

15. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, *op. cit.*

him. Fourth, he denies that God can or will apply His sanctions, either in history or eternity. Fifth, he asserts that covenant-breakers shall inherit the earth.

1. Hierarchy

Let us consider in greater detail point two: hierarchy. By rebelling against God, he thereby places himself under the hierarchical authority of Satan. *He becomes Satan's representative.* This is why Christ spoke to Peter so harshly when Peter denied that Christ would soon go to His death: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23a). Men's actions are always representative. This is why God judges between the saved and lost, between sheep and goats, on judgment day (Matt. 25:32). The eternal life-and-death question on that great and terrible day will be: *Which sovereign did you represent and serve on earth, God or Satan?*

It is clear that Adam and Eve sinned directly against God. More specifically, they sinned against the God who walked in the garden (Gen. 3:8). This is the character of all sin: a denial of God's word, His authority, His ethical character, His sanctions, and His ability to disinherit covenant-breakers. *Sin is a representative denial of God's covenant:* His transcendence, His authority, His law, His judgment, and His inheritance. Man sins against God covenantally. He would steal the very throne of God if he could. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13–14). What will be the result of this attempted theft of God's glory? "Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit" (Isa. 14:15).

2. The Trial of Jesus

Jesus Christ was the judicial victim of a corrupt Jewish court, false witnesses, and a corrupt civil government. The Jewish leaders, in their capacity as the God-ordained representatives of the Jewish people, had brought a false covenant lawsuit against Jesus.¹⁶ They had convicted Him of a capital crime: claiming to be God. There were two ways that He could be exonerated: if there were no witnesses who could prove that He had made the claim, or if proof were presented that His claim

16. Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

was true. They had hired false witnesses and had not proved that His claim was false.

The Roman state acted as the sanction-imposing agent of the Jewish people. The people had chosen Barabbas as the recipient of their mercy rather than Christ (Matt. 27:21). The Jewish leaders had been faithful representatives of the people's will. Jesus would die on the cross.

Ultimately, there is no escape from a decision either for or against Jesus Christ, Israel's only true messiah and mankind's only true savior. The old truth of Christian evangelism is correct: "No decision is still a decision." Either men vote against Jesus Christ as covenantal representatives of the Jews and Rome, or else they vote with Jesus Christ as their covenantal representative against the Jews and Rome. Either the decision of the Jews and Pontius Pilate represents their views, both intellectually and judicially, or else God's affirmation of His Son represents them. Men bring a covenant lawsuit either against Jesus, as the Jews did, or against those who crucified Him, as Peter did (Acts 3). There is no escape. *Men must bring a covenant lawsuit in this life.* They must designate both the criminal and the victim at the drama on Calvary. Their designation will reflect their covenant status as either covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers.

F. Divorce by Covenantal Death

I have argued that *sin is always a representative act*. It is the act of bringing a covenantal lawsuit against God. A crime is a special kind of sin: a publicly verifiable act against God's civil law. It is an act of defiance against God's civil covenant with either an individual or some aspect of the environment as God's representative agent.

We can see the principle of victim's rights more clearly by focusing on marital divorce as a covenant lawsuit. Jesus set forth this law regarding divorce: "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matt. 5:31–32).

In this chapter, I do not want to cover all the theological ground that Ray Sutton covers in his book, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage*.¹⁷ I agree with his argument that divorce is

17. Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987. (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

above all a covenantal act, and that any crime listed in the Old Testament as a capital offense constitutes legal grounds for divorce today. Jesus did not abrogate the Old Testament case laws that governed divorce and remarriage, except to make them more rigorous. The principle of New Testament divorce is the same as it was in the Old Testament: *divorce by covenantal execution*. There may also be physical execution involved, but in both Old and New Testament law, *covenantal execution is primary*; eternal execution in God's heavenly court is of greater consequence than physical execution by the civil government's court. Biblically speaking, physical execution is simply the God-ordained legal consequence of specific forms of covenantal execution. This has also been argued by R. J. Rushdoony¹⁸ and Greg Bahnsen¹⁹ with respect to divorce. I do not try to prove this argument in this chapter; I begin with the assumption that it is biblically correct. Those who disagree should consult these other sources.

This line of reasoning from the Old Testament's case laws raises an important practical and legal issue. When a spouse commits an act that produces covenantal death—judicial death in the eyes of God—and when this is proven in one or more of God's authorized earthly courts, ecclesiastical and civil, either by the injured spouse or by other witnesses, the covenantally dead person becomes subject to covenantal sanctions. In a systematically biblical civil government, the maximum penalty attached to many of these crimes would be death. This would lead to divorce by physical execution because there has *already been* divorce by covenantal execution.

G. John 8

The standard response from those who reject such a "harsh" (i.e., God-established) penalty is an appeal to John 8, the case of the woman who was taken in adultery. I believe that this passage was in the original Bible text. Biblical "higher critics" and many orthodox Christians deny this, because most of the older Greek manuscripts do not include John 7:53–8:11.²⁰ Most modern translations of the Bible provide a marginal note to this effect. But if this passage is not in the Bible, then surely the Old Testament's capital sanction against adultery has not

18. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 401–15.

19. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984), pp. 105–16.

20. See Appendix P: "The Hoax of Higher Criticism."

been altered. If John 8 is not in the biblical canon, then there is no other passage that supports the case for an alteration of the capital sanction against adulterers except Joseph's forgiving Mary, which we will examine in detail later.²¹

1. Adultery

John 8 deals with a woman who was discovered in the very act of adultery (v. 4). Her accusers (witnesses) brought her before Jesus, challenging Him to render judgment. This was clearly an attempted trap on their part, for Jesus was neither a civil nor an ecclesiastical official. The woman's accusers were also judicially corrupt. They were law-breaking deceivers, for they were being highly selective: *her partner was not brought before Jesus*. (Might he have been one of their ecclesiastical or professional associates?)

Jesus challenged them: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (v. 7b). Then He stooped down and wrote something in the dirt (v. 8)—the only instance recorded in the New Testament of His writing anything. (Might He have written the names of women who were well known—biblically speaking—by the woman's accusers?) We do not know what He wrote. We do know that her accusers immediately decided to leave. Discretion was the better part of valor, in their view. They did not continue to press charges against her. Thus, *without the presence of two witnesses, she could not be legally convicted of a capital crime, according to Old Covenant law* (Deut. 17:6). The witnesses had to cast the first stones (Deut. 17:7), but they all had departed. So, Jesus asked her an obviously rhetorical question: "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (vv. 10b–11).

Jesus knew she was guilty as initially accused. He told her to go and sin no more, making clear to her that He knew she was guilty. But adultery is a civil matter. *Without witnesses, she could not be lawfully convicted*. She acknowledged Him as Lord in her own words; He warned her not to do this thing again.

There are millions of short-sighted, instinctively law-breaking and

21. The loss of this supposed defense of a New Testament alteration in the adultery sanction would be a bitter pill to swallow for neo-evangelicals, far too many of whom are prone to accept the hoax of higher criticism, and virtually all of whom spend their intellectual careers seeking exegetical ways around the Old Testament case laws and their sanctions.

covenant-denying Christians who argue that this incident proves that adultery is no longer a capital crime. They invariably point to Jesus' words, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." They challenge those who affirm the law: "You see, we [meaning *you*] are not to judge anyone unless we [meaning *you*] have no sin." This interpretation of Christ's words is utter lunacy. Its implications are preposterous. If pressed, these "he who is without sin" interpreters will admit that the New Testament does allow the state to enforce penalties against criminals (Rom. 13:1–7).²² But then their whole argument collapses. He who is sinful *must* cast the first stone, for all people have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). If their argument is taken seriously, then John 8 prohibits all capital punishment, and probably all punishment by anyone, any time. If true, this principle of interpretation would make all covenantal sanctions impossible to enforce: family, church, and state. It would mean the end of all human government. It cannot possibly mean this.

In the Old Testament, God established the death penalty for various crimes. Were Old Covenant judges and witnesses without sin? Obviously not. So, what did Jesus really mean?

2. *This Particular Sin*

The most obvious explanation is that He meant "He that is without *this particular sin*, let him cast the first stone." Then He started writing something in the dirt. The witnesses immediately departed. The biblical judicial principle is this: those who have committed a particular crime, but who have not been tried and convicted by a lawful court, or who have not privately offered to make restitution, and who have therefore not been forgiven by the victim, are not fit to serve as witnesses or judges of those who are accused of having committed the same crime. This is a reasonable interpretation, and a reasonable view of justice. It does not necessitate the scrapping of all civil law, all capital sanctions, and the sanction of death for men who commit adultery with other men's wives.

When Jesus told her to go and sin no more, did He really expect her to be able to avoid all sin for the rest of her life? Of course not. But what He did expect her to be able to do was to avoid the sin of adultery. He did not have *sin in general* in mind in this passage when He

22. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

used the word *sin*, but rather the *particular sin of adultery*. Thus, it is totally misleading for people to use this passage as a proof text that Jesus established a new civil penalty, or even no penalty at all, for the civil crime of adultery. He did not abandon the Mosaic law in John 8. On the contrary, He followed the Mosaic law's procedural requirements to the letter. *She was publicly innocent in terms of the procedural requirements of the Mosaic law*. Thus, He did not execute His historical wrath upon her in His capacity as perfect humanity. Only the witnesses were allowed to do that, and they had departed. He would deal with her later as God, the perfect Witness, on judgment day in His court; until then, she was granted time to repent and reform her ways. So are all the rest of us.

Obvious, isn't it? Yet for several generations, pietists and antinomians (those who reject biblical law) have persuaded Christians that John 8 represents some remarkable break with the Old Testament. Christians who hate God's law also hate the New Testament, so they do whatever they can to distort it and misinterpret it, even when their misinterpretations lead to obviously preposterous conclusions. They do not worry about preposterous conclusions; they worry instead about a sovereign God who threatens individuals and society with judgments in history for sin. They are in principle adulterers themselves, and they are looking for an escape from God's authorized civil sanctions against adultery, should they someday fall into this sin. They are looking for loopholes—civil, ecclesiastical, and psychological.

3. Witnesses as Unauthorized Prosecutors

There is another aspect of this incident that must be considered. Jesus dealt directly with the sins of the witnesses. He did not focus on questions of legal procedure. He did not point out that they should have gone immediately to a civil court. He did not ask them rhetorically, "Who made me a judge over you?" He did not remind them that the other guilty party was missing. It is clear that His main concern was not with the procedural details of the incident; He preferred instead to deal positively with the sinful condition of the accused woman. She was the focus of His concern, not her accusers. He acted to remove them from His presence, so that He might restore her to moral and judicial wholeness. This was His tactic in all of His public confrontations with His accusers. He did this with Israel in 70 A.D. He removed Israel from His presence, so that He might restore the gentiles

to moral and judicial wholeness. (When He has accomplished this, He will then redeem Israel: Romans 11.)²³

He could also have asked these two questions: "Where is the victim? Why is the victim not here to press charges?" More to the point, He could have asked: "By what authority have you, the witnesses, substituted your judgment for the victim's? Who made you the authorized prosecutors of this covenant lawsuit? On whose behalf are you acting?" He did not ask these questions, not because they were irrelevant to the situation, but because they were secondary to His main concern: dealing positively with the sin of the woman.

Did the Mosaic law give to witnesses an independent authority to prosecute the covenant lawsuit as agents solely of the state? If so, then the state has the right to prosecute despite the decision of the victim not to prosecute. This would clearly compromise the judicial principle of victim's rights. I am arguing in this chapter that *the state possesses no independent authority to prosecute if the victim voluntarily decides not to prosecute*, an argument based heavily on Joseph's decision as a just man to put Mary away privately. (See Section K: "The Victim's Decision.") The victim's decision is final until God intervenes directly—sickness, calamity, death, or at His Second Coming—to bring His own covenant lawsuit. Thus, the witnesses in John 8 were violating yet another principle of the Mosaic law. The whole incident was one of utter lawlessness and rebellion, which is the characteristic feature of every challenge to the God-given authority of Jesus Christ.

H. Extending Mercy

As the cosmic lawgiver, God has the right to set the penalties for crimes. Biblical law provides every society with God's specified penalties. What is crucial to understand is that the biblical principle of *God as the victim who names the penalty* leads to a derivative principle: the earthly victim of the prohibited act is also allowed to name the penalty to be imposed on the criminal, so long as it does not exceed the limits specified by the Bible.

There is one exception to this rule, argue some biblical scholars: if the specified penalty is death, and if a particular phrase appears in the text, then the state must enforce whenever it unilaterally prosecutes and convicts the criminal. The phrase is: "surely he shall die" or "dying, he shall die." This phrase, which biblical scholars call a *pleonasm*, ini-

23. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 7.

tially appears to be an identifying mark of infractions of God's law that inescapably require the death penalty. I argue that this is an incorrect interpretation of the use of the pleonasm, but I could be wrong. This is why we need to explore the usage of this pleonasm in the section below, "Dying, He Shall Die." First, however, we must consider the principle of victim's rights.

We know that sanctions against non-capital crimes are to be imposed by the civil government at the discretion of the victim. He can refuse to accept any restitution payment or a reduced restitution payment. He can lawfully cancel the debt owed to him (Matt. 18:23–35).²⁴ I argue that this principle of forgiveness also applies to capital crimes in which there is an identifiable human victim who is capable of bringing a covenant civil lawsuit against the criminal. We see this judicial principle in action at the crucifixion. Jesus requested that the Father not immediately destroy His executioners. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34a). He extended additional time to them. This was His unmerited favor or gift to them, just as God had extended life to Adam, Eve, and Cain. As both the primary victim (God) and the secondary victim (perfect man), Jesus Christ possessed the right to extend temporal mercy to His enemies, even for this capital crime. His divinity authorized this extension of mercy. So did His perfect humanity, for He was the victim of a rigged trial. I argue that as the victim, He could lawfully extend mercy only before He physically died.

The question is: Are victims allowed to extend mercy in cases where the state appears to be required by the presence of the pleonasm, "surely he shall die," to execute the convicted criminal? We know that in his capacity as a lawful prosecutor of God's covenant lawsuit, the earthly victim does possess the right—the legal authorization from God—to extend mercy to a convicted criminal for any crime other than a capital crime. He can lawfully forgive the restitution payment owed to him. Why not also in the case of a capital crime?

I. The State as God's Prosecutor

In order to answer this question, we need to understand that the victim is not the only one who can lawfully initiate a covenant lawsuit against a suspected criminal. *God has more than one covenantal agent in society.* Witnesses can bring incriminating information to an au-

24. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 37.

thorized agent of covenantal government, and this agent can lawfully institute covenant lawsuit proceedings against any criminal, *but only if there is no earthly victim of the crime who is capable of bringing charges*.²⁵ If there is an identifiable earthly victim, then he alone becomes the exclusive agent who is authorized to initiate a covenant lawsuit against the suspected criminal. This restriction on state's authority to initiate a covenant lawsuit is an implication of the doctrine of victim's rights. The victim possesses the right to forgive. The state is not authorized to ignore or supersede this right.

The interests of the community are upheld by identifying the criminal or member of the criminal class. Remember, God is the primary victim of crime; He has authorized *representatives* to defend the integrity of His name. If a community refuses to do this—if church, state, and family governments break down—God threatens to bring His negative sanctions through other agencies: war, pestilence, and famine (Deut. 28:15–68). This is why an unsolved murder in a field required a public blood sacrifice by the nearest city's civil magistrates, not the priests (Deut. 21:1–9).²⁶

1. A Legal Claim

Who acts as God's authorized agent in the bringing of a covenantal civil lawsuit? The victim, the witnesses, or those who are authorized agents of the civil government. If the initiator of the lawsuit is the victim, he is not acting primarily on his own behalf, but as an agent of God because of his position as the victimized intermediary between the criminal and God, the ultimate victim. He is acting secondarily on his own behalf, for any restitution payment will go to him. Similarly, witnesses who bring evidence to the state for use in prosecuting the covenant lawsuit are acting as representative agents of God through the civil government. They do not act on their own behalf, for they have *no legal claim* on the resources of the person who is being charged with the crime, should he be convicted. Witnesses are not victims. They are acting in the name of God as authorized and oath-bound agents of the state when they testify in a civil court. *Where there is no direct legal claim, there is no direct covenantal relationship.*

25. For a list of capital crimes and an identification of those cases in which the state is authorized to initiate the covenant lawsuit, see the subhead at the end of this chapter: "Addendum: Cases to Which the Pleonasm Is Attached."

26. Clearly, the Epistle to the Hebrews has annulled this practice in the New Covenant era.

Thus, witnesses are acting as indirect agents of God as participants in the civil commonwealth.

Because crimes are always crimes against God, the state has a law-enforcement role to play, for the state possesses God's authorized monopoly of the sword: the imposition of physical sanctions. The state in turn implicitly delegates the office of witness to those who view a crime or who have information relevant to the state's prosecution of a covenant lawsuit. (This is the judicial basis of what in English common law is known as "citizen's arrest," although it is seldom invoked today.) This is why the state can lawfully compel honest testimony from a witness: the witness is under the authority of the state. It is in fact unlawful to withhold evidence of a crime when subpoenaed. While the state may offer a reward for the capture and conviction of a criminal as a way to privatize prosecution expenses, this is at the discretion of the state. The witness who seeks an announced reward has a claim on the state, not on the criminal.

The most important example in history of a reward-seeking witness is Judas Iscariot, who collected 30 pieces of silver from the Jewish court to witness against Jesus Christ. He later returned the money, not because it is inherently wrong to accept money as an honest witness, but because he knew he had been a false witness in a rigged, dishonest trial. The Jewish leaders self-righteously replied, "What is that to us?" (Matt. 27:4b). They felt no sense of guilt, so why should he? They also recognized the tainted nature of the money, which was the price of blood, and as true Pharisees, they refused to accept his repayment (Matt. 27:6). Committing murder by rigging a court was irrelevant in their view, a means to a legitimate end; getting paid for false witness-bearing, however, was seen by them as a sin. This is the essence of Pharisaism, the classic historical example of Pharisaism in action. They were happy to serve as the most corrupt court in man's history, but they judiciously refused to accept money for their efforts. (What is not recognized by most Christian commentators is that the testimony of a witness in a Jewish court was invalidated, at least by the law of the Pharisees, if he had received payment for testifying.)²⁷

What is my conclusion? Only this: *witnesses have no legal claim on the criminal*. The authorized agents of God in the prosecution of a covenant lawsuit are officers of one of the three courts—church, state, and family—and the victim of the crime.

27. *Bekhoroth* 4:6, in *The Mishnah*, ed. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. 534.

2. The Right of Refusal

If the authorized biblical penalty is economic restitution, then the victim whose covenant lawsuit is successfully prosecuted by the civil government has the right to refuse payment, or the right to take less than what biblical law authorizes. Like the creditor who has the right to take less in repayment, or to extend the debtor more time to repay, or even to forgive the debt, so is the victim of a criminal who has been convicted in a court of law. The nineteenth-century Jewish commentator S. R. Hirsch remarked that the victim of a theft "can renounce altogether his right to repayment by the sale of the malefactor, and content himself with a signed promise to pay as soon as the circumstances of the thief improve."²⁸ He was correct.

What if the victim refuses to prosecute? I see no warrant in most cases for the state then to prosecute. The court can lawfully serve as the agent of the victim in certain exceptional cases. Two examples would be victims who are orphaned minors or mental incompetents. Nevertheless, under normal circumstances, a decision not to prosecute by a victim who is legally competent to initiate a covenant lawsuit is a binding decision. He thereby loses his legal claim on any future restitution payments by the convicted criminal. If he is willing to suffer this loss, then the state must honor his or her decision. The individual, not the state, is the victim; the principle of victim's rights is binding on the state. Only if the criminal act in some way also injured the state or society could the state then prosecute, but only on its own behalf.²⁹

The case of Judah and Tamar is representative. Judah refused to prosecute Tamar for whoredom when she brought tangible evidence that he was the guilty party and that she had merely been claiming her legal right to the levirate marriage (Gen. 38:26). On the other hand, the victim also escapes the threat of a counter-lawsuit from the accused if the latter should be declared innocent by the court. Again, the case of Judah and Tamar is representative. Judah did not want to be convicted of false witness-bearing, for he had committed the crime with her, and he was therefore not authorized to bring accusations against her in his own name. As the head of both his family and the local civil govern-

28. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained*, translated by Isaac Levy, 5 vols., *Exodus*, 3rd ed. (London: Honig & Sons, 1967), p. 295: at Exodus 21:6.

29. Treason that also involves theft would be an example. The victim of the theft might not prosecute, but the state could, for treason is an act of attempted murder against the society.

ment, he dropped all charges.

3. Civil Sanctions

Old Testament law specifies that criminals are subject to several types of civil sanctions: corporal punishment—lashings, but with no more than 40 lashes (Deut. 25:3) and the slicing of a woman's hand in one instance (Deut. 25:12)³⁰—economic restitution, banishment, and the death penalty.

The punishment of lashing is curious. No crime in the Bible is specifically said to require lashing. The language of the King James Version indicates an exception to this rule: the required scourging of a bondmaid who is betrothed to one man and who then commits fornication with another man (Lev. 19:20).

However, the Hebrew word translated as “scourge” does not necessarily mean physical scourging; it is better translated as “punishment,” or even “inquiry.” Nevertheless, the lack of any reference to specific crimes with which this physical sanction is associated does not mean that no public crime is subject to lashing, or else there would be no prohibition against imposing more than 40 lashes. This is a sanction to be imposed at the discretion of the judges in cases where there is *no identifiable victim who has suffered either economic loss or physical or verbal abuse*. Presumably, this sanction is appropriate for such acts as public nudity by adults, prostitution, public drunkenness, repeated disturbances of the peace, and public acts prohibited by God, but for which no identifiable victim can be found. The victim of such “victimless crimes”—God—is entitled to restitution: lashes. *Eternal punishment is the model: God is repaid through the suffering of the criminal.*

In the Old Testament era, if the restitution payment to the victim was larger than the criminal or his kinsman-redeemer could afford to pay, the criminal was sold into slavery. The purchase price went to the victim. This was the only way that a Hebrew could become an involuntary lifetime slave in Israel, and even in this instance, it was lifetime slavery only if he could not earn enough to meet the restitution payment or if his kinsman-redeemer refused to pay. Non-criminal Hebrew debt slaves were to be released in the seventh, “sabbatical” year

30. The language of the King James makes it appear that the woman's hand is to be cut off. This is incorrect: it is permanently injured, but not cut off: James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 118–19. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

(Deut. 15); voluntary jubilee year slaves were to be released in the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:39–41).³¹ The criminal became a slave to another person because he had been a slave to sin—specifically, he had committed a criminal act that had seriously damaged someone else's property or body.

4. *The Death Penalty*

Some crimes are so great that God authorizes the death penalty. This produces the criminal's immediate deliverance into God's court. This in turn leads to his subsequent delivery into permanent slavery in hell and the lake of fire unless he repents prior to his physical execution by the civil government. This removal of temporal life is restitution to God for a criminal's major transgression of God's covenant laws. *The death penalty points clearly to God's position as the primary victim.* It also points to His status as eternal Judge.

In cases of murder, the state becomes the victim's delegated representative before God. The deceased obviously cannot initiate the covenant lawsuit. The state therefore initiates it on behalf of both the deceased and God. No restitution payment is possible to the deceased; thus, God must judge the criminal directly in His court. The state is required to deliver the criminal's soul immediately into the hands of God, who is the primary victim and also the legal representative of the deceased victim. The state must not allow a murderer to escape immediate entry into God's court—physical execution—by the payment of a fine: "Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death" (Num. 35:31).

Christ's resurrection is the basis of man's escape from God's immediate and direct imposition of the death penalty, both the first death (physical death) and the eternal second death (Rev. 20:14). Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, His previous grant of temporary forgiveness to Rome and Israel received God's sanction. It was also on the basis of this resurrection that God had granted a stay of execution to Adam and Eve. But judgment eventually comes in history: Adam and Eve died, and Israel and Rome fell. The question then arises: Does the resurrection of Jesus Christ also serve as the basis of a man's legitimate escape from the death penalty from a civil court? If so, in which cases

31. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

and on what judicial basis?

J. “Dying, He Must Die”

We need to deal with a problem of interpretation that confronts us over and over in Old Testament case laws. It is a phrase that occurs in many passages.³² A person convicted of a specified crime “shall surely be put to death.” As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew phrase is what scholars call a pleonasm: “dying, he shall surely die.” It is emphatic language. We find it in Exodus 21:12: “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.” James Jordan commented in 1984: “The emphasis means that the death penalty cannot be set aside by any payment of money.”³³ But because of a series of problems in interpretation, he subsequently changed his mind about the meaning of this pleonasm.³⁴

1. *What Is the Problem?*

Why should the interpretation of this pleonasm of execution be such a problem? Because the same phrase appears in the case of crimes that we normally would not think would involve automatic capital punishment. These include crimes that have no immediate human victims: sabbath-breaking (Ex. 31:14–15) and bestiality (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15–16). These also include crimes in which no one dies: assaulting parents physically (Ex. 21:15) or verbally (Ex. 21:17), adultery that involves another man’s wife (Lev. 20:10), blasphemy against God (Lev. 24:16), and wizardry and witchcraft (Lev. 20:27). One crime to which this pleonasm is attached is often regarded by modern societies as a capital crime: kidnapping (Ex. 21:16).³⁵

To survey the nature of the exegetical problem, let us consider in greater detail the case of adultery that involves a man with another man’s wife: “And the man that committeth adultery with another man’s wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:10). The pleonasm of execution appears here: “shall surely be put to death.” Capital punishment for both of the adulterers can legitimately

32. These verses are displayed under the subhead at the end of this chapter: “Ad-dendum: Cases to Which the Pleonasm Is Attached.”

33. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, p. 96n.

34. They are not the same objections that I raise in this chapter.

35. Chapter 34.

be imposed at the insistence of the victim, the woman's husband. Why? *Because the government of the covenantal family was broken by adultery.* The injured party, meaning the head of the household, is the lawful covenantal representative of God. He is authorized to bring charges against the adulterers as the injured party and also as the head of the family unit. Because the Bible specifies adultery as a civil crime, he also brings this lawsuit in civil court.

The victimized husband can lawfully file the covenant lawsuit in up to three covenantal courts: family, church, and state. A covenant lawsuit is first presented by the victimized husband to the suspected partner, and then (at the discretion of the victimized husband) it is presented in the appropriate court or courts. The institutional church has a legitimate role to play if either of the marriage partners is a member. It pronounces the sentence of covenantal death against the offending party. Thus, adultery can sometimes affect all three covenantal institutions. The victim declares that the covenantal bond of marriage has been broken, and that the adulterers have now come under God's wrath. If the suspected adulterous male partner is married, his wife can also file appropriate lawsuits against her husband. Biblical law makes it clear, however, that *the husband of the adulterous wife has primary authority to specify the penalty.* It is his covenantal household office as the head of the family that has been attacked by the adulterers. If he decides on the death penalty for his wife, as we shall see, the criminal consort cannot escape her fate. As the officer of his family's government, the victimized husband specifies the penalty; the wife of the adulterer cannot stay the hand of the civil magistrate.

Two questions arise. Can the husband legally grant mercy to the wife if she is convicted, that is, can he specify a lesser punishment? Furthermore, if he can, and if he does this, must he show equal mercy to the convicted man?

2. No Respect for Persons

The example of Jesus on the cross indicates that the victim can lawfully spare the criminal. He asked His Father to forgive them, meaning Jews and Romans (Luke 23:34). He spared both of the "adulterers," Israel and her consort, Rome. Israel again and again in Old Testament history committed spiritual adultery with foreign gods and nations, yet God always spared the nation until A.D. 70.³⁶ The

36. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*

Book of Hosea centers on this theme of the husband's forgiveness of an adulterous wife. Romans 11 indicates that genetic Israel will someday be re-grafted into the church through mass conversion,³⁷ so God has still withheld the death penalty from Israel as a covenantal people (though not necessarily as the modern political unit that we call the state of Israel).

What is the problem here? The pleonasm appears in Leviticus 20:10, "dying, they shall die." If the language of inescapable death is accepted at face value, then the husband of the adulteress cannot lawfully request a reduced penalty, such as the forfeiture of her dowry to him, rather than insist on her execution. But is he so restricted? God spared Israel time after time. It would seem reasonable that the injured husband might prefer a lesser penalty, just as God did with Israel. Maybe he still loves her. Maybe this is her first transgression. He feels deeply injured, but not enough to have her executed. Perhaps she is a good mother. Perhaps he wants to keep her as his wife. Perhaps not. What if he wants a divorce? This would be granted by the state. He could also require her to transfer her dowry to him.

By showing mercy to his wife, he must also show mercy to her consort. In the case of adultery involving another man's wife, the two adulterers must receive the same negative sanction. The judges are not permitted to show partiality to persons in rendering official judgment. The victimized husband who decides to prosecute is acting as a judge, for if the adulterers are convicted, he specifies the penalty. If he wants total vengeance against the man, he must also demand the same penalty for his wife. If he shows leniency to her, he must show the same leniency to him. Why? Because, in their capacity as God-ordained judges, men are not to show partiality, or as the Bible says, "respect of persons" (Deut. 1:17; 16:19; II Sam. 14:14; Acts 10:34). When Joseph decided as a just man to put Mary away privately, he necessarily also decided not to seek civil justice against any suspected consort.

The Bible does not directly discuss the question of leniency by the victim. The pleonasm "dying, they shall die" is attached to this crime of adultery (Lev. 20:10). Nevertheless, I am arguing that the victim can specify a lesser penalty for the adulterers. If I am correct, then in such cases, the criminals do not "surely die" at the hands of the court. But if

(Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

37. This postmillennial position has been defended by such Calvinist commentators on Romans 11 as Charles Hodge, Robert Haldane, and John Murray. The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith also teaches it: Answer 191.

they are not automatically executed upon conviction, then what does the presence of the pleonasm mean? Why is it found in some biblical texts specifying capital punishment, but not in all of them? The pleonasm is there for emphasis, the lexicographers say.³⁸ Then what exactly does it emphasize? Not the absolute necessity of the death penalty in every case in which it appears, if I am correct in my reasoning. It does not apply in cases where the victim shows leniency. The victim decides.

3. The Victimized Wife

The Old Testament specifies the death penalty for wives who commit adultery. It does not specify the death penalty for a husband who commits adultery. Is this an oversight? Or does this indicate that God does respect persons, leaving victimized wives more vulnerable than victimized husbands? Does the Mosaic law in fact show respect for persons, discriminating against victimized wives?

The answer is found in the nature of the lawsuit. The victimized husband brings the lawsuit in his capacity as head of his household. The family is one of God's three covenantal governments. It is marked by a covenantal oath. Thus, the death penalty as the maximum for an adulterous wife places the decision in the hands of a covenant head. It is not that the Bible discriminates against victimized wives. It simply places the primary authority for prosecuting the covenant lawsuit in the hands of the covenantal head of the household.

If the adulterous wife could be executed at the discretion of the wife of her adulterous consort, then the primary authority to impose the penalty would be removed from the head of the household and transferred to the subordinate member of another household. The victimized husband who had decided to keep his wife would lose her if the wife of her consort prosecuted, saw her husband convicted, and asked for the death penalty. Because the court is not allowed to discriminate, it would also have to execute the adulterous wife. Thus, the adulterous wife's husband would lose control over the sanction.

The victimized wife can lawfully sue for divorce. The judges are authorized to grant this. Even if the husband of the adulterous wife does not insist on a divorce, the victimized wife is allowed to gain legal

38. *Genesius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, [1910] 1974), sect. 113n, p. 342; cited by Jordan, *The Death Penalty in the Mosaic Law* (Tyler, Texas: Biblical Horizons, 1988), p. 9.

separation. Why, if there must be equality of negative sanctions placed on both adulterers? *Because the judges' announcement of the divorce is not the imposition of a negative sanction; it is simply a legal announcement of a broken marriage.* The marriage was covenantally broken by her husband's act of adultery; the wife is simply declaring her formal acceptance of her new legal status as an unmarried woman. She asks the court to make this declaration public. Biblical law always protects the innocent party. She is not compelled to re-adopt her husband back into the marriage. But she cannot lawfully insist on physical execution of her adulterous husband. The wife of an adulterous husband has only secondary rights as a victim because in this two-party sin, she is the secondary earthly victim. She is not the head of her household. She cannot lawfully seek the execution of the victimized husband's wife by insisting on the execution of her husband.

The Bible is silent regarding the execution of an adulterous husband who commits adultery with an unmarried woman. It is clear, however, that his wife is the primary earthly victim. The wife, as the primary earthly victim, then gains the legal authority to prosecute the two adulterers to the limit of the law. She can require the execution of both partners if they are convicted of adultery by a civil court.

If I am correct about this, then we now know why there is no civil sanction against prostitution specified in the Old Testament, except for the required execution of the daughter of a priest who becomes a prostitute. "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21:9). If the victimized wife can have her convicted husband executed for having committed adultery with a prostitute, then the prostitute is required to share his fate. Thus, there is no need for an explicit civil sanction against prostitution. The victimized wife decides. The threat of the capital sanction would tend to confine prostitution to unmarried persons. It would therefore reduce prostitution's assault on marriage.

K. The Victim's Decision

What would it take to get a victim to accept a reduced penalty? The criminal would make a public confession of guilt and repentance, and then offer to pay restitution to the victim. This might work. Then again, it might not. *The key to the criminal's escape from death is the decision of the victim.* The victim cannot lawfully demand a penalty

greater than the one specified in the case law, but he can accept something less.

In a later essay, James Jordan took another look at the pleonasm, "surely he shall die."³⁹ He cited Numbers 35:30–31: "Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death." The law specifically says that there can be no substitute payment. The question then arises: Which is more authoritative, the pleonasm's language or the automatic penalty attached to murder? Is murder unique? Is it only in murder cases that the state must invariably impose the death penalty? Or is the death penalty the inescapable consequence of the pleonasm? Does the presence of the pleonasm indicate the idea of "accept no substitutes" wherever it occurs, or is it merely emphasis? If merely emphasis, what exactly does it emphasize?

If adultery always requires the death penalty (Lev. 20:10), Jordan asked, then why did Joseph decide to put Mary away quietly rather than prosecuting her (Matt. 1:19)? My answer: *victim's rights*. The primary earthly victim always has the legal right not to prosecute. This was Joseph's decision. The civil government was not to intervene, nor was the priestly government. Similarly, the decision to forgive was also Christ's decision at the cross, although He had earlier warned the Jewish leaders that He would eventually bring judgment on them (Luke 21), which He did in A.D. 70.

Joseph forgave Mary. This was clearly a decision made under the terms of Old Covenant law. The New Covenant had not yet been established. Thus, when the text identifies Joseph as a just man, its frame of reference is the Old Covenant law. *Joseph was not violating any principle of the Mosaic law when he showed mercy to Mary and refused to prosecute*. He chose to put her away quietly in order to avoid having to bring a civil covenant lawsuit against her. In his capacity as the betrothed husband, Joseph decided to break off the betrothal. Only if Mary's family had protested—unlikely, given the apparent circumstances of her pregnancy and the capital sanction involved (Deut. 22:20–21)—would he have been required to pursue his accusation in a civil or ecclesiastical court in order to defend his decision to break the betrothal.

39. Jordan, *Death Penalty*, p. 9.

The first question is this: If the victim does decide to prosecute, and the person is convicted, can the victim then specify a lesser penalty? I think the answer is yes. I offer this explanation: the principle of victim's rights still applies, but in the case of murder, the victim cannot volunteer to accept a reduced penalty; thus, the state must impose the maximum penalty. This leads me to a general principle: *When the state becomes the prosecuting agent of case laws where this pleonasm occurs, it must enforce the death penalty on conviction.* There are no exceptions.

The second question is this: If the victim decides not to prosecute, can any other court intervene and prosecute in God's name? The case of Joseph and Mary indicates that Joseph's decision would have been authoritative and final. Her pregnancy would have been visible to all, yet if he had chosen not to prosecute, she could remain free of concern about any other court bringing charges against her. Had she actually been an adulteress, and had her consort been married, then the victimized wife could bring charges against them, but she could gain only a divorce: the court's declaration of a broken marriage. She could not require civil penalties against Mary, and therefore also not against her husband. Joseph, not the victimized wife, was the primary earthly victim and therefore the one who possessed the option of freeing his betrothed wife from any civil penalties.

L. What Does the Pleonasm Emphasize?

The pleonasm identifies *crimes that are the highest on God's list of abominations*. The normal penalty for these crimes is death; anything less than this that the victim specifies is a manifestation of great mercy. By upholding the principle of victim's rights, biblical law also creates incentives for criminals to deal less harshly with victims during the actual crime. If the victim is not brutalized, he may decide to show leniency if the criminal is later convicted. This protects the victim. *Biblical law is designed to protect the victim.*

1. Judicial Discretion

Must civil judges impose the *maximum penalty* allowed by biblical law when the state is the victim, or when by law the state is God's designated agent to protect the community by upholding God's rights and enforcing His sanctions? Not always. The principle of victim's rights governs the imposition of civil sanctions. Judges have the God-given

authority to impose a reduced penalty according to circumstances. The only exceptions to this rule are those cases in which the pleonasm occurs; the judges cannot reduce the sanctions in such cases. This is the meaning of the pleonasm: *the elimination of judicial discretion in imposing sanctions when the state initiates the lawsuit.*

Consider two alternative lines of reasoning. First, if we argue that the judges must impose the *maximum* penalty in *all* cases that specify the death penalty, irrespective of the presence of the pleonasm, then the emphasis aspect of the pleonasm disappears judicially. If all capital crimes require the death penalty, of what purpose is the pleonasm? This would indicate that the pleonasm has some function other than judicial emphasis. I cannot imagine what this other function might be. The presence of the pleonasm must indicate *the legitimacy of judicial discretion in cases where the pleonasm is missing.* By requiring judges to impose the maximum penalty in all cases, judicial discretion disappears. The judicial principle of victim's rights would therefore disappear.

Second, if we argue that the judges can in *all* cases legitimately impose a *lesser* penalty, then the emphasis aspect of the pleonasm also disappears judicially. Cases that are governed by the pleonasm would then become indistinguishable from those that are not. The pleonasm would lose its force.

My conclusion is this: if the pleonasm of execution is understood to have any judicial effect in distinguishing capital cases, and if the principle of victim's rights is also to be honored in all cases, then the pleonasm should be interpreted as *eliminating judicial discretion in applying sanctions in all cases in which prosecution has been lawfully initiated by the civil government.* The judges must not reduce the sanction of execution in any case in which (1) the state lawfully initiates the lawsuit, and (2) the sanction is marked by the pleonasm.

Thus, the pleonasm applies *only* to a unique set of capital crimes: where there is no identifiable human or institutional victim who could specify a reduced sanction. The victim is God alone. The state therefore is authorized to initiate the covenant lawsuit. *There is no earthly victim who has the authority to reduce the sanction.* The community through the civil government is called upon to execute the convicted criminal. In short, in the so-called "victimless crimes" in which the pleonasm of execution applies, civil judges have no choice in deciding on the appropriate sanction. The sanction is always execution. *"Dying, he shall die" binds the judges in capital crimes where the state acts as the*

covenant lawsuit's prosecutor without the presence of an intermediary or representative human victim.

The pleonasm is not a denial of the principle of victim's rights, because God, as the primary cosmic victim, has specified the appropriate sanction. This sanction must be imposed by the state in the absence of any secondary victim—a victim who is always authorized to speak in God's name. In the absence of such a representative, the pleonasm takes effect. The pleonasm must therefore *not* be understood as a limitation on the judicial principle of victim's rights. It limits the discretion of civil judges in those cases where there is no identifiable earthly victim, but it does not limit the discretion of the victim. Biblical law allows the victim, as God's representative, to reduce the penalty.

2. *Rabbinic Law*

Rabbinic law also recognizes the legitimacy of the victim's option of reducing or forgiving a criminal, as S. R. Hirsch's previous comments indicate, but not in capital crimes. While he did not refer to the pleonasm, Hirsch summarized the principle of Jewish law with respect to capital crimes. "The whole idea of the right to grant clemency or mercy was entirely absent in the Jewish Code of Law. Justice and judgment is [sic] the prerogative [sic] of God not Man. When the very precisely defined Law of God,—giving Man no scope for his own judgment or arbitrary discretion—ordains death for a criminal, the carrying out of this sentence is not an act of harshness to be commuted for any consideration whatsoever, it is itself the most considerate atonement, atonement for the community, atonement for the land, atonement for the criminal. . . ." ⁴⁰

The Christian cannot legitimately speak of atonement through a criminal's execution, but he can and should speak of delivering the

40. Hirsch, *Exodus*, p. 306: at Exodus 21:14. Hirsch immediately abandoned this rigorous judicial principle in his discussion of kidnapping. The Talmud sets up so many extra stipulations regarding the definition of kidnapping that it is virtually impossible to execute a kidnapper under Jewish law. Hirsch said that the kidnapper is to be executed only "if he has made the man feel that he is being treated as an object, a thing" (p. 306). This sounds more like Immanuel Kant than the God of the Bible. Jewish lawyer and Talmudic scholar George Horowitz commented on the Talmudic view of kidnapping: "That the Rabbis considered the death penalty too severe for this wrong to society and the individual, seems quite plain from the foregoing rules. But they were bound by the express command of Scripture; hence they devised such requirements as made conviction virtually impossible. There is no record, moreover, that a regular court ever convicted a person of Manstealing." Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co., [1953] 1963), pp. 197–98.

criminal directly into God's court, thereby placing him under God's sanctions rather than placing the community under God's sanctions for its unwillingness to obey God's law. The community that allows a criminal convicted of a capital crime to live is like a community that offers sanctuary to someone who is supposed to be tried in God's court. The community is required by God to extradite him. It cannot legitimately offer the evil-doer sanctuary. The text of Exodus 21:14 is clear: ". . . thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die." If a criminal is not to be granted sanctuary from a human civil court at the very altar of God, then surely a human civil court cannot legitimately grant him sanctuary by refusing to extradite him to God's heavenly court by executing him.

M. Noah's Covenant and Execution

Noah's covenant is rarely mentioned by New Testament scholars, for it was a recapitulation of the dominion covenant of Genesis 1:26–28). He and his sons were told to exercise dominion (Gen. 9:1–3). This means that the dominion covenant was not limited to the pre-Fall world. There is continuity in the dominion covenant. It extends into history. It has not been annulled. But what of the death penalty? That was part of God's covenant with Noah.

1. House and Ice

Dispensational authors H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice presented a weak case for their speculations regarding the pre-New Covenant legal order as it applied to the nations. They insisted that "Nowhere in the nations is capital punishment obligatorily extended beyond the penalty for taking human life. . . ." ⁴¹ They asserted, though did not prove, that *none* of the Mosaic law's sanctions ever applied directly or even was intended in principle to apply to the nations, except the capital sanction for murder. This unique sanction is binding on all men always, they argued, so its authority came from Noah to Moses; it in no way went from Moses to the nations.

This was a clever attempt to escape the suggestion that in the New Covenant era, Christians have a responsibility to pressure civil governments to impose specific sanctions against specific crimes on the basis of biblical revelation. Such a view of "Noahic biblical law," if correct,

41. H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), p. 90.

would allow Christians to avoid personal responsibility in civil affairs, because they could not speak authoritatively in the name of the Lord when it comes to specifying civil crimes or penalties. The price of such a theological position regarding biblical law is, predictably, the cultural, political, and judicial irrelevance of Christianity. This is why dispensationalism is in principle culturally retreatist and culturally irrelevant, and why no dispensationalist in over a century and a half has published a book on Christian social ethics during the so-called "Church Age."

House and Ice went on to say that "in Israel this penalty [execution] was exacted for various crimes. . . ." ⁴² If they meant merely that in Israel, the maximum sanction of execution could be required by the victim in several capital crimes, then they were correct. If they meant that in those cases where the state lawfully prosecuted in God's name as His designated representative, and where the pleonasm "dying, he shall surely die" was attached to the biblical sanction, then they were also correct. If this is all they meant, however, then they had not said anything very significant. They did not show that God restricted these judicial principles to Old Covenant Israel.

The judicial principle of a *maximum allowable sanction for any given crime* was also in principle God's requirement for the nations. Without this God-imposed judicial restriction, the state can lawfully become all-powerful, messianic, and therefore demonic. There will always be sanctions imposed by civil government. The only question is: Whose law establishes the specified judicial limits of state-imposed sanctions, God's or self-proclaimed autonomous man's?

To answer, as House and Ice did, that it depends upon when and where you live in God's world, is to abandon the concept of universal biblical ethics and therefore also to abandon the principle of universally restricted civil governments. Any attempted distinction between the Old Covenant nations and Mosaic Israel that is based on a theory of differing judicial sanctions for the same civil crimes is misguided. Civil sanctions are always specified by God because *God always wants limits on the state and always wants to see victims protected*. In other words, He always wants judicial limits on the pretensions of autonomous man. God killed nations under the Old Covenant, just as He kills New Covenant nations, because they failed to apply His civil sanctions in history. If this was not the message that Jonah brought to Nineveh,

42. *Idem*.

what was?

The principle of *victim-imposed sanctions* is also God's requirement for all nations in this New Covenant era, now that the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, plus the sending of the Holy Spirit and the creation of the church, have extended *God's now-resurrected law-order* to the nations. The New Covenant is truly new; its Bible-specified laws and sanctions have been *universalized definitively in history* by the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is behind us. Surely the sanctions of God's law for the nations are no less binding today than before Christ arose from the dead and incorporated His church! Yet House and Ice insisted that the Mosaic sanctions are even less binding, for the Mosaic law does not even bind national Israel any longer, and so the law has no visible geographical example and testimony, as it had in the Old Covenant era (Deut. 4:5–8).⁴³

House and Ice did their dispensational best to create a false dichotomy between the God-required social laws of nations and the Mosaic social laws of Israel. They also try to create a dichotomy between New Covenant social laws and the Mosaic social laws. They want to place all Christians under the penal sanctions of the Noahic covenant (as the Calvinist ethicist John Murray sought to do before them),⁴⁴ both in the Old Covenant era and in the New Covenant era.⁴⁵

2. Noah's Covenant: Low Content

Why this preference by modern conservative theologians for Noah's covenant? Because in Noah's covenant *only one civil infraction* is specified: murder; and *only one penal sanction*: execution (Gen. 9:5). This absence of judicial specifics allows the civil government to specify as criminal whatever behavior it disapproves of, and also allows it to impose whatever sanctions it wants to, without any mandatory reference to any other biblical law or sanction. This political perspective is basically an application of pre-Darwinian humanism's social contract or social compact theory of the state, pioneered by Thomas Hobbes in

43. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

44. Murray wrote: "It is conceivable that the progress of revelation would remove the necessity for the penal sanction [in the case of murder]. This is the case with the death penalty for adultery. And the same holds true for many other penal sanctions of the Mosaic economy. Does the same principle apply to the death penalty for murder?" John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 118. He goes on to argue that the sanction of execution is still valid because "murder is the capital sin." *Idem*.

45. "The Noahic covenant is perpetual. It serves as a basis of God's relationship and the standards imposed upon the nations." House and Ice, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

Leviathan (1651) and developed by John Locke (1690) and Rousseau (1762). This older viewpoint was originally a secularized version of, and reaction against, the Puritans' biblical covenant theory of civil government.⁴⁶ It imputes primary sovereignty to the people rather than to God and His revealed law.⁴⁷

What is judiciously not discussed by the defenders of the "Noahic covenant theory of the state" is that *the pre-Darwin social contract theory relied completely on the concept of natural law, and in Locke's case, natural rights*. This epistemologically naive view of civil law has been refuted from two sides: by Darwinism's view of the evolving universe and by Van Til's presuppositional apologetic. Without the doctrine of natural law or some version of natural rights theory to govern their theory of the state, *defenders of the "Noahic covenant" theory have implicitly granted judicially unlimited power to the modern state*, no matter how much they protest against such a development. They may be political conservatives personally; it makes no difference. Their personal political preferences become just that: personal preferences. Their personal political preferences are self-consciously and explicitly unconnected with any biblical-theological system of social ethics and political theory.⁴⁸

Such a view of Noah's low-content covenant grants enormous authority to self-proclaimed autonomous man and his representative, the messianic state. The power-seeking covenant-breaker is as pleased with such a view of the state as the responsibility-freeing Christian pietist is. This is why there is now and always has been *an implicit judicial alliance between antinomian Christians and humanist statist*s. Here is an ideal way to silence Christians in all judicial matters except murder: insist that "The Bible doesn't offer a blueprint for civil law!" With this judicial affirmation, antinomian, responsibility-fleeing Christians sound the retreat, and secular humanists and other covenant-breaking power-seekers sound the attack. The victim is in principle victimized even further by this view of Noah's drastically restricted covenant, and the messianic state is unchained by it. *All this is ac-*

46. A. D. Lindsey, *The Modern Democratic State* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1943] 1959), ch. 5.

47. Rousseau's version of the sovereignty of the General Will might best be described as the Cole Porter theory of the state: "Anything Goes."

48. I studied systematic theology under John Murray. In private, he was an anti-New Deal conservative. In public, he was politically mute. Both Wayne House and Tommy Ice were political conservatives. In terms of a developed social and political theory, however, they were equally mute.

completed in the name of a "higher" view of theistic ethics than the Mosaic law supposedly offered to the Israelites.

This supposed dichotomy between Noah's covenantal sanctions and Moses' covenantal sanctions, and also between Moses' covenantal sanctions and Jesus' covenantal sanctions, cannot survive a careful examination of the biblical principle of *victim's rights*, which is also the principle of the *judicially limited state*. The biblical judicial principle is this: victims of criminal acts possess the God-granted legal right to specify no penalty or any penalty up to the maximum limit allowed by God's Bible-revealed law. Neither the state nor the humanistic sociologist is entitled by God to increase or reduce this victim-specified penalty. But in order to keep the principle of victim's rights from becoming tyrannical, God's law specifies maximum penalties. Men must be restrained by law. This includes. To argue that there ever was, ever is, or ever will be a time when men are not under God's specified judicial sanctions is to argue that they are under sanctions imposed by autonomous man, meaning the self-proclaimed autonomous state. In short, to argue this is inescapably to argue also that God has in history authorized either the tyranny of the unchained state or else the implicit subsidizing of criminal behavior through the state's unwillingness to impose God's specified sanctions. In either case, victims lose. This is what antinomians of all varieties refuse even to discuss, let alone answer biblically.

There will always be sanctions. The relevant questions are: Which sanctions? What laws? Who judges? There will always be *judicial chains*, either attached to Satan (Rev. 20:1–2), his demonic host (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6), and his covenantal earthly representatives, or else attached to the righteous victims of Satan's covenantal representatives (Acts 12:7; 21:33). The modern antinomian Christian and the modern power-seeking statist want to break God's judicial chain, His revealed law. The result is the victimization of the judicially innocent and the expansion of the messianic state.

Conclusion

All sins are against God and God's law. All sinners are criminals in the hand of a temporarily merciful Victim. God sits on His throne as final Judge and even temporal Judge (e.g., He slew Ananias and Sapphira: Acts 5:5, 10). But to sin against God, men usually must sin

against something in the creation.⁴⁹ The Bible provides case laws that define those sins against any aspect of the creation which constitute civil, familial, or ecclesiastical infractions. Where a sin does constitute an infraction, *the victim must represent God by becoming a plaintiff against the sinner*. He upholds the integrity of the injured party and also seeks restitution. In some cases, restitution is made only to the victim; in other cases, it must also be made to God through a payment to His church (Lev. 6:1–7).

The Bible provides five remedies for criminal behavior: (1) flogging (up to 40 lashes), (2) the slashing of a woman's hand; (3) economic restitution, which can be large enough to require (4) up to a lifetime of bondage, and (5) execution. The goals of these penalties include: (1) upholding God's interests by enforcing His law (civil worship)⁵⁰; (2) penalizing criminal behavior, sometimes by removing the criminal from this world (vengeance); (3) warning all people of the eternal judgment to come (evangelism); (4) protecting civil order (deterrence); and (5) protecting the interests of victims (justice). Ultimately, all of these goals can be summarized in one phrase: *upholding God's civil covenant*.

Notice that there is no mention of imprisonment. Hirsch wrote a century and a half ago: "Punishments of imprisonment, with all the attendant despair and moral degradation that dwell behind prison bars, with all the worry and distress that it entails for wife and child, are unknown in Torah jurisprudence. Where its power holds sway, prison for criminals does not exist. It only knows of remand custody, and even this, according to the whole prescribed legal procedure, and especially through the absolute rejection of all circumstantial evidence, can only be of the shortest duration."⁵¹

Biblical law upholds the victim's interests. The criminal is to make restitution to his victim. The victim has the right to extend mercy, but that is his decision, not the judge's. Judges are to serve as agents of the victim, who is God's primary earthly representative in criminal affairs. The primary goal of criminal justice theory should be to discover and enforce civil penalties that uphold victim's rights within the guidelines established by Scripture.

49. An exception could be mental sins, yet in a sense even these are sins against the creation: a misuse of man's gift of reason.

50. If civil magistrates are ministers, as Paul says they are (Rom. 13:4), then there is an element of worship in their enforcement of God's law. Sanctions are imposed in God's name.

51. Hirsch, *Exodus*, p. 294: at Exodus 21:6.

When the victim refuses to prosecute, the other covenantal courts are required by God to honor this decision. The criminal is not to be prosecuted by any covenantal court without the co-operation of the victim. When the state is the victim, or when a victim cannot be identified (e.g., a speeding violation), the judges are allowed to impose penalties up to the limit of God's Bible-revealed civil law, or when a penalty is not specified by the Bible, up to the limit of the written statute.⁵² They can also impose reduced penalties, except where the pleonasm occurs. Where the pleonasm occurs, and where the state is not itself the victim, the judges must act as God's agents and impose the penalty that the pleonasm requires. This is the judicial function of the pleonasm of execution: *a restriction on leniency by civil judges when punishing "victimless crimes."* The judges must execute the convicted criminal without mercy. God requires him to be delivered speedily into His court.

Those who reject my thesis regarding the pleonasm must answer some very difficult questions. *First*, on what legal basis other than victim's rights did Joseph, said by the text to be a just man, fail to prosecute Mary either in a priestly court or a civil court? Had the law's sanction been changed by God before the birth of Jesus Christ? What is the evidence for such a view of the law's sanctions? *Second*, on what legal basis other than victim's rights did Jesus announce the temporal forgiveness of those who had crucified Him? *Third*, on what legal basis other than victim's rights had God refused to execute Israel for her adulteries? Put differently, what was the judicial basis of the Book of Hosea? *Fourth*, on what legal basis other than victim's rights did God divorce Israel when He transferred His kingdom to the church (Matt. 21:43), yet also allowed her to survive another generation after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the incorporation of the church by the Holy Spirit? Not until critics provide consistent, well-developed, Bible-supported answers to these and related judicial questions should they abandon the Mosaic law's principle of victim's rights.

52. The Bible does not specify the amount of a proper fine for a speeding violation. It lays down the general principle of protecting potential victims. The civil authorities must then decide what the fine should be by balancing the risks to people as pedestrians vs. the benefits to people as drivers. Fines should vary according to speed and also according to geographical safety considerations such as school zones. See Chapter 37: "Criminal Law and Restoration," under the subhead, "Fines Should Compensate Victims."

Addendum: Cases to Which the Pleonasm Is Attached

I have put in bold face those case laws in which the state in Old Testament Israel was required to initiate the prosecution, and therefore those cases in which the convicted criminal had to be put to death.

He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death (Ex. 21:12).

And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death (Ex. 21:15).

And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death (Ex. 21:16).

And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death (Ex. 21:17).

Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death (Ex. 22:19).

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people (Ex. 31:14).

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death (Ex. 31:15).

Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones (Lev. 20:2).

For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him (Lev. 20:9).

And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death (Lev. 20:10).

And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his

father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:11).

And if a man lie with his daughter in law, both of them shall surely be put to death: they have wrought confusion; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:12).

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:13).

And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast (Lev. 20:15).

And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:16).

A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:27).

And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death (Lev. 24:16).

And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death (Lev. 24:17).

I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die (Num. 14:35).

For the LORD had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun (Num. 26:65).

And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death (Num. 35:16-18).

But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait,

that he die; Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him (Num. 35:20-21).

Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death (Num. 35:31).

No instances of the pleonasm appear in the Book of Deuteronomy. I do not think that this has any biblical-theological significance. The biblical hermeneutical principle of the continuity of a God-revealed law is this: unless a law or its sanction is repealed by a subsequent biblical revelation, it is still judicially binding. The pleonasms did not have to be repeated in Deuteronomy in order for them to be binding in the land. God's laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers were not exclusively "wilderness laws," with the laws of Deuteronomy alone to serve as the law of Israel in the land. In any case, the severity of God's sanctions tends to increase over time as men's maturity increases. This is a basic principle of biblical jurisprudence: *men's knowledge of God increases over time, and so does their personal and corporate responsibility*. "The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:46-48). Because they were required by God to exercise greater responsibility in the Promised Land, as testified to by the ending of the miraculous agricultural subsidy of the manna (Josh. 5:12), the law's civil sanctions did not decrease in rigor; if anything, they increased. The pleonasm was still judicially binding in Canaan. The equivalent phrase in Deuteronomy is, "so shalt thou put [purge] evil away from you" (Deut. 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7).

APPENDIX N

COVENANTAL LAW AND COVENANTAL LOVE

But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:34–40).

The New Testament is a commentary on the Old Testament, in the light of the new revelation given by Christ and the Holy Spirit. We need to understand the New Testament by referring to the Old Testament, and we need to look at the New Testament in order to understand the Old Testament. It is not that the New Testament revelation is in opposition to the old. Jesus categorically denied such a possibility (Matt. 5:17–19).¹ What the New Testament does is to specify more clearly the *general principles* that undergird Old Testament law, and to specify which of the Old Testament's laws were fulfilled by Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Christ did not annul *the principles* of the law, but in certain cases He annulled the *ritual form* in which those principles had been set forth by God to His people.

A. Jesus and the Pharisees

We should not expect that Jesus would announce a revision of the Old Testament law's fundamental teachings. The Pharisees clearly did not expect Him to say that the law—meaning the Ten Command-

1. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984), ch. 2.

ments—is no longer applicable. Had they expected such a statement, they would not have asked Him which one of the laws is most important. What the lawyer probably intended to do was to drag Jesus into a detailed, “Pharisaical” argument over which of the ten was most fundamental. Then, with the skills of a legal professional, the lawyer no doubt believed that he could make Jesus’ answer look incomplete. “What about this other law? And what about still another law? Haven’t you undercut the very law itself, etc. etc.” In short, it was one more example of the Jewish leaders unsuccessfully trying to tie Jesus up in the details of the law. It was another “leading question.”

Jesus invariably responded to their leading questions in such a way as to expose the spiritual rebellion of those who asked such questions. This is why they fell silent every time He answered one of their questions. In this instance, He shifted the discussion to the ultimate aspect of all biblical religion: the *theocentric* nature of all true worship. The greatest of the commandments is that commandment which demands that we worship God with every aspect of our being. He cited Deuteronomy 6:5 to prove His point.

He could have stopped right there. He had answered the lawyer’s question. This is the greatest of the commandments. To have denied Jesus’ answer, or quibbled with it in any way, the lawyer would have had to say that some other law is the all-encompassing law, of which this one is simply a partial derivative. But there is no such law. All the laws of the Bible are applications and extensions of this great theocentric principle. We must begin with acknowledging our absolute responsibility to worship God with everything we have as creatures—not just our goods, but with ourselves. Could the lawyer have appealed to one of the Old Testament sacrifices as more important? Hardly; they involve giving up only goods. But the biblical principle which Jesus sets forth here, which Paul illuminated in a different context, is this: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

Nevertheless, Jesus went on. He gave the second greatest commandment: to love our neighbors as ourselves. This was Jesus’ way of nailing down the argument. The lawyer was now in no position to respond, “Yes, but what about the specifics of the laws that Moses gave? What about our day-to-day dealings with men?” He might not have asked this. If he wanted to appeal to the crowd, however, he might have. “What about our obligations to man? What law gets our first at-

tention?" Jesus' response headed off all such questions. The second principle is analogous to the first. Men are made in God's image. We should therefore love our fellow man. But how much love is proper? Certainly, not the love we show to God. We owe him everything. But a good test of how much we love another creature is to estimate how much we love ourselves. Jesus assumes that each man wants to do his best for himself. Men are always "looking out for Number One." So, He said, look out for your neighbor just as you look out for yourself. You are a man; he is a man; both of you deserve the same consideration, for both of you are made in God's image.

B. Love and the Law

The question related to the law. The answers spoke of love. Are these two in opposition? Obviously not. Jesus always dealt faithfully with the questions of his questioners. This is why they were always struck dumb. They were incapable of replying, precisely because Jesus' answers were flawless. There was never anything more to say without either agreeing with Him or winding up in opposition to the Old Testament. Therefore, when Jesus answered the lawyer's question concerning the greatest of the laws, He was saying clearly and unmistakably that all the laws of God are a working out of the principle of love—theocentric love first of all, and neighborly love second. If these laws are applications of the principle of love, then how can they be in opposition to love?

The lawyer recognized this. He did not reply. By focusing on the loving aspect of love, Jesus removed the question from the realm of legalistic debate. You love God with everything you are and have; *therefore*, you also must love your neighbor as yourself. But how do we love our neighbors? Clearly, by treating them as faithfully as we treat ourselves. By giving them the same "benefit of the doubt" in a dispute that we give ourselves. In short, this is the so-called *golden rule*: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). This is the biblical version of the more common phrase (which is not found in the Bible): "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

1. The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus' sermon on the mount is a commentary on God's "sermon"

on the mount to Moses. This is what modern Christians have failed to recognize. There is a deeply rooted tradition of interpreting Jesus' words as if they stood in opposition to the law which God delivered at Mount Sinai. This tradition is wrong. It is perhaps the most dangerous heresy in twenty-first-century Christianity. It flies in the face of Jesus' warning: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise [way] pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17–20).

Who were the scribes? They were the Jewish lawyers. In Mark's account of the lawyer's question to Jesus, it says that he was a scribe (Mark 12:28). This scribe apparently had not heard Jesus' original statement at the "Sermon on the Mount," or if he had, he had forgotten about it. Jesus did not vary His views. *Doing righteously to other men is the essence of biblical law, for we do our righteous acts representatively unto God* (Matt. 25:34–40). His first answer to the lawyer did help to clarify the theocentric foundation of the law commanding neighborly love. But the Pharisees should have understood already that it was not, a particular Old Testament law which was the focus of His ministry, but the *underlying principle of all God's laws*. This, in fact, was what *distinguished Jesus' teaching from the common culture's first principles*. The common doctrine in Israel was that men should love their friends and hate their enemies.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans [tax collectors] do the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans do so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:43–48).

Notice His frame of reference here. *Your* enemies. Those who use *you* spitefully. Jesus was not saying that the enemies of God should be allowed to escape the lawful punishment of their crimes against man and God. He was not repudiating the Ten Commandments, which He had affirmed categorically a few moments before (vv. 17–19). What He was saying is this: *in your judicial dealings with all men, treat them as you would treat your friends*. If your friends violate God's law, you do not repudiate the law. If your friend commits murder, you do not allow that murder to go unpunished, if you have information that would convict him. To do so would be to become an accomplice to the crime. Jesus is taking this principle of law enforcement right to the heart of each man. If you yourself commit murder, you must turn yourself in to the civil authorities, just as you would turn in your worst enemy. *You must honor God's law*. Paul announced this principle forthrightly when he was in court: "For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die" (Acts 25:11a). To refuse not to die is to love God, and to love the righteousness of God, more than you love your own life. This is the essence of conversion: "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

The New Testament tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to deal with them in terms of God's law. We *owe* them such fair dealing. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). But what is "ill"? It is unrighteous dealing. How do we test what is "ill" and what isn't? By the standard of the law of God. This is why love fulfills the law. It is not that love overcomes the law, or annuls the law, or abrogates the law. Love *fulfills* the law, just as Jesus Christ fulfilled the law. He did not go on to deal unlawfully with men. How could He? He was the *author* of the law. Nor should we go on to deal unlawfully with men.

Jesus was not denying the legitimacy of biblical law. On the contrary, He was *affirming* biblical law. We love God first; God commands us to keep His word; therefore, we must enforce the law on ourselves. We start with ourselves because we have more knowledge of ourselves and more responsibility over ourselves. This is the meaning of *progressive sanctification*. Jesus was not calling us to ignore biblical law; He was calling us to enforce it first on ourselves, before we enforce the same laws on others.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye

shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7:1–5).

Notice what He did *not* say. He did not say that it is all right to go through life with motes (small chips) in our eye. The eye is the most sensitive organ in the body. A mote in an eye could blind it, or seriously interfere with our vision. Jesus did not condone sin in any form. Sin is a horror; it jeopardizes our very existence. It should not be allowed to remain in your eye, and we are required by God to do what we can to help remove chips from our neighbors' eyes. We are to use biblical law to assist them. What Jesus was saying is that we need to be constantly on the lookout for motes in other people's eyes, so that *we can help them remove them*. But to accomplish this, we must first get rid of the beams in our own eyes. We must be able to go to the other person and tell him: "Look, I used to have a really bad beam in my eye, and it blinded me. But through the grace of God, I was able to remove it. I see that you're suffering from the same thing. Let me show you how God's word speaks to your minor problem, just as it spoke to my major one." In other words, "I've been there. I know what it is. *It leads to blindness and agony.*"

This is the approach of the most successful alcoholic rehabilitation program, Alcoholics Anonymous. When a man at last chooses to become sober, and is faced with a terrible craving to drink, he calls his sober friends who were former alcoholics. He goes to those who have suffered what he is suffering. He doesn't telephone his Aunt Tilly, who never touched a drink in her life, unless Aunt Tilly has a known prayer life which produces healings and near-miracles whenever she prays. Besides, he probably already asked Aunt Tilly to pray for him, and he still got drunk. So he calls the men who suffered from beams (Jim Beams?) and who successfully solved their problem.

There is a tendency in twenty-first-century fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and pietism for law-hating, responsibility-avoiding Christian people to piously assert, "It is not our responsibility to judge. We must show mercy to everyone. We are sinners, too." This is the worst kind of hypocrisy. What they are *really* saying is that they judge not, because they do not want to be judged. They want perpetual mercy for

their *continuing* sins, so they therefore avoid criticizing others. But this is evil. The goal of redeemed man's life is ethical perfection (Matt. 5:48). The means by which redeemed people *approach* this goal is *self-government under God's law*, what we also call progressive sanctification. We *want* to be judged by God's law. This is our affirmation of the sovereignty of God. We *want* the law of God to rule over every man's actions, every institution, throughout history. Such honoring of God's law is the basis of the dominion covenant. But to see God's law universally honored, we must do everything that we can to honor it in our own lives.

The "judge not" verse warns us not to judge others by any standard other than the one we want to be used in judging us. But the converse is equally true: once we have judged ourselves, and have disciplined ourselves in terms of God's standard, it is our moral obligation to begin to apply this same law to every area of life over which we have a God-given authority. This is why the Bible sets forth rigorous standards for becoming an elder or deacon (I Tim. 3). They must achieve self-discipline and then discipline over their families before they are allowed to discipline other church members. Similarly, if we are eligible to vote, we must get registered. If we are registered, we should take time to study the issues. Then we should vote accordingly. The "judge not" passage is not a license for pietistic retreat from the world. The context of the "Sermon on the Mount" shows clearly that *the "judge not" passage is a call to dominion*. It instructs us to begin with ourselves, so that we can then work to extend the principles and enforcement of God's principles to areas of life over which we have lawful authority.

C. Exercising Judgment

The "judge not" passage is a *positive command* by implication: a command to *judge righteously in terms of biblical law*. We are called by God to exercise judgment. This is the inescapable reality of man (Gen. 1:28). Man judged in the garden, but he judged rebelliously. Redeemed men will eventually judge the angels (I Cor. 6:3). If we are never to judge on earth, then when will we get the ability? Will God grant the gift of good and godly judgment to men who have fled this responsibility all their lives? This is unlikely.

If we do not exercise good judgment, then how can we fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant? The historic response of the "judge

not” pietists—the defenders of the *escapist religion*—is to deny the existence of this covenant. But if Christians deny the existence of a law-covenant—if they deny that all men are under God’s dominion covenant—and if they deny that there are eternal laws that serve as standards by which all men are required to perform, then how is the sinner to be confronted with the reality of his sin? If Christians are incapable of helping unregenerate men see their sins, and if they are therefore incapable of assisting newly regenerate men to overcome their newly perceived sins, then what happens to church discipline? The institutional answer of the pietists has been *to deny the necessity of church discipline*. The consistent ones go so far as to deny the legitimacy of much of civil government, too. They deny the death penalty for capital crimes. Some of them do everything possible to promote the State as a substitute parent, but a parent without a rod of discipline. Others simply deny all civil law whatsoever—and therefore are compelled to deny the continuing authority of the Old Testament.²

The power-seeking religionists understand the centrality of judgment and discipline, but they have substituted the state in God’s place. Thus, they seek to expand the centralized power of the State, and to extend the state’s power over every area of life. They seek to worship their God, human power, by incorporating it into a political monopoly. They understand the fixed relationship between *sovereignty, power, and judgment*. As agents of collective mankind, they seek to become agents of the power state. They seek ever-increasing opportunities to exercise judgment.

This is why the power religionists always find allies with the escapist religionists. The escapist religionists point to the power of humanist man, who is ultimately satanic man, and they conclude that this power

2. Mark McCulley, “Faith and Freedom: A Fifth View of Christian Economics,” *Nomos*, II (Winter 1984). McCulley called his anti-Old Testament, anti-civil government position the “economics of Christian exile.” This is well-named. *Exile* is the essence of the escapist religion. He ends his article with a partial citation of John Wesley: “earn all you can; give all you can.” He deliberately ignored Wesley’s third principle, *save all you can*, which is the foundation of economic growth and linear development unto dominion. McCulley was hostile to such a view, for he understood the thrift principle well enough to see where it leads in principle, and where it has led in the past: to modern industrial capitalism. He did not hate capitalism, unlike so many of his Anabaptist colleagues; he hated growth-oriented industrial production. This is why he praised as followers of Jesus’ New Testament ethic “Ballou, the Hopedale community, and a few ‘come-outers’” in the post-Civil War Christian era. “Down on the farm” communalism has long been the final resting and retreating place for pacifist Anabaptists. The revolutionary Anabaptists have generally headed for the cities, in order to consolidate power.

is an aspect of Satan's control over the earth until Jesus comes again. When these escapist religionists are confronted with the responsibilities associated with the dominion covenant, they recoil in horror. Dominion, in their eyes, is too much like autonomous man's power. To adopt such a view of Christianity would mean that they would have to become involved in a head-on, lifetime confrontation with Satan's earthly kingdom of power. They would have to begin to exercise judgment. They prefer to stay in the shadows of history in the name of a "higher spirituality" or a "higher calling" from God. They prefer to avoid the visible, *civilizational* confrontations. Thus, the power religionists can enlist the retreatists as allies in their war against covenantal religion.

The standard ploy of the theological liberals in the United States from the late nineteenth century until they consolidated ecclesiastical power in the 1920s and 1930s in the North, and in the 1950s and 1960s in the South, was to criticize all heresy trials—where they were going to be the victims—in the name of institutional peace and toleration. They directed this incomparably successful appeal to the weak-hearted souls in the churches. These people wanted institutional peace above all. Until the liberals gained complete control and shoved them aside, these conservative battle-avoiders had a majority in every major denomination. Decade by decade, the liberals quietly consolidated power: in seminaries, in colleges, and in the churches' various boards, especially the missions boards. When the theologically committed conservatives finally realized what had happened, it was too late. They could no longer gather theologically committed troops for a fight. The theology of a majority of the conservatives was "peace at any institutional price." So they paid the highest possible price: the capture of their churches by the opponents of biblical Christianity. In the churches with a strong hierarchy, the liberals eventually pushed out the orthodox pastors, with the exception of the Missouri Synod Lutherans.³ In the decentralized associations, they simply isolated the orthodox men from the seats of power. This has always been the humanists' strategy. With only a few exceptions, it worked superbly. The archetype was the capture of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (Northern).⁴

3. Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977).

4. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996). (<http://bit.ly/>

D. Social Co-operation

When Christian men treat non-Christians as men deserving of the benefits of biblical law, they become **evangelists**. The benefits of the law become visible to covenantal outsiders. The law is to be a tool of evangelism (Deut. 4:6–8). But this program of evangelism requires God’s people to keep the law (Deut. 4:9).

Because Jesus made it plain that all men are to be extended the *courtesy* of the law, as well as the *restraining authority* of the law, Christianity has become an international leaven. It has risen up in pagan cultures and has replaced many of the worst features of the old paganism. The Old Testament also required God’s people to deal righteously with other men, but the empowering of the Holy Spirit and the church’s first-century exodus out of Palestine universalized the declaration and manifestation of biblical law in a new way.

Consider the concept of the contract. When Christians are commanded to deal with non-Christians righteously, they are placed under the terms of biblical law. To the extent that they obey biblical law, other people can make better predictions concerning the performance of Christians in voluntary associations. The law is an open book. It is easily read and understood. Children are to be taught biblical law (Deut. 6:7; 31:12). It is suitable for children, in other words. Thus, non-Christians should find it less risky to co-operate in economic ventures with Christians, *if Christians respect biblical law*. By reducing the risk (uncertainty) of working with Christians, biblical law thereby *increases the non-Christians’ demand for Christians to associate with*. The price of co-operation drops when uncertainty drops. As the price drops, more of the good is demanded. The “good” in question is the honest labor and insight of the covenant man. More people want it.

This is another impetus to Christian dominion. Christians become the people other men prefer to work with and deal with. Their opportunities for increasing their own authority are increased because of this added readiness of non-Christians to work with them. The unbeliever hopes to benefit personally from the relationship. This could be called the “Laban” strategy, or the “Potiphar” strategy: make it beneficial for covenant-breakers to co-operate with covenant-keepers.

This does not mean that Christians are to become “doormats.” They are not to become “pushovers.” They are to honor God’s law, both when it benefits them personally and when it doesn’t. There are

times when enforcing biblical law decreases the unbeliever's capital or opportunities—sinful opportunities. In such cases, Christians are to abide by biblical law. The terms of God's covenant must govern the Christian's enforcement of the terms of a contract.

Honesty is the best policy, Ben Franklin said. He was correct. As men perceive that Christians are honest and can be trusted, honest men will seek them out. Those non-Christians who have been given the common grace of honesty will want to work with Christians, *if Christians honor biblical law*. This puts Christians in association with honest people, who are also following the best policy. This puts dishonest people at a competitive disadvantage, for Christians can take advantage of the increased productivity of the division of labor by working with honest non-Christians. Christians increase their authority and capital by associating with, and learning from, skilled honest people, whether Christian or non-Christian.⁵ This is a major economic benefit of honoring the golden rule.

E. Antinomianism, Anarchy, and Tyranny

What I have argued throughout *An Economic Commentary on the Bible* is that biblical law is the ideal foundation for social order. Only to the degree that societies conform to the standards of biblical law can they experience the blessings promised by the law (Deut. 28:1–14). This does not mean that a society needs to become explicitly Christian, nor does it mean that all or a majority of its members must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. It means only that the written standards of God's law be honored.

I have also argued that it is inconsistent for non-Christian societies to retain allegiance to the standards of biblical law. Over time, they will become more consistent with their covenant-breaking presuppositions. Special grace is therefore necessary in the long run to sustain a society's commitment to the standards of biblical law. Nevertheless, during that historical period in which the law's externals are honored in deed, and possibly even in word, the society in question will become the beneficiary of the external power that the law delivers. Examples in the Bible of such external power and blessing are Egypt under Joseph's counsel, Nineveh after the preaching of Jonah, and Medo-Persia under Daniel's counsel. It is true that the law eventually brings death (Rom.

5. Gary North, "Competence, Common Grace, and Dominion," *Biblical Economics Today*, VIII (June/July 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gnccgad>)

7), for it testifies to man's rebellion and curse, and this is why covenant-breaking societies cannot remain faithful to the externals of biblical law forever. They must either abandon God's law or be converted to the gospel.

We also find examples of Christian societies that steadily abandon the externals of biblical law, and in doing so, grow culturally impotent. Americans have lived in such a society for over a century. We find that those who should proclaim a dominion religion have become adherents of the escapist religion. Meanwhile, the most consistent and ruthless advocates of the power religion in the history of man, the Communists, threaten to overwhelm the West. The Christians have become subservient to one group of law-hating humanists, who in turn have proven to be no match ideologically or militarily for the consistent humanists behind the Iron Curtain. It appears to be a replay of Israel's experience in the era of the judges: when the nation began to worship the gods of the Philistines, God delivered them into the hands of the Philistines. They learned just what it is like to live under foreign gods.⁶

Christian leaders for a century have consistently denied the continuing validity of Old Testament social and political law. This has led Christians to abandon God's tool of dominion, His law. God delivered them into the hands of the progressive educators and Darwinists, the political salvationists, and the welfare statist. Conservative Christians in dispensational churches, liberal Christians in mainline denominations, and Calvinist Christians inside tiny, invisible denominations have stood arm in arm theologically on the question of the authority of biblical law today. It has no continuing authority today, they affirm. Such a doctrine has played into the hands of the humanists, who also affirm this doctrine.

In 1984, the increasingly liberal InterVarsity Press published a collection of four essays and responses, *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics*. I was one of the participants, the defender of the free market approach. There was a socialist, a Keynesian, and a socialist who pretended to be a defender of voluntary communalism. His chapter was misleadingly labeled, "Decentralist Economics."

This latter position is the only significant alternative to free market Christianity, either intellectually or theologically, within American evangelical circles. The popularity of Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an*

6. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), pp. 40–41. (<http://bit.ly/jjjjudges>)

Age of Hunger (1977), also published by InterVarsity Press, is indicative. (In Roman Catholic circles, especially in Latin America, Sider's brand of Christian socialism was regarded as soft-core and irrelevant; the liberation theologians there were Marxist revolutionaries. Sider was content merely to send the Nicaraguan Sandinistas money through his Jubilee Fund;⁷ he was not yet willing to adopt their rhetoric. Too risky for a Baptist seminary professor.)

Art Gish, the Sider surrogate in the published debate, was forthright in his moral outrage against capitalism and Western Civilization. Why did Gish hate Western Civilization and capitalism? Because he hated biblical law, and Western Civilization and capitalism are the social products historically of biblical law. He was a devout antinomian. "The answer to our problems is not biblical law but God's grace, the saving grace of Jesus Christ expressed in a new order, God's kingdom. The law cannot bring salvation. Neither will the capitalist doctrine of salvation by works lead to life."⁸

The startling aspect of this statement is that it has become the theological "coin of the realm" in Protestant circles. The reason why the old-time fundamentalists have been unable to counter Sider and his followers—the reason why tens of thousands of young Christians have been converted to their view of capitalism—is that the conservatives have adopted the same view of biblical law. Therefore, to counter Sider and the radicals, they have only conservative humanist arguments, and these do not have the emotional and rhetorical appeal for college students that warmed-over liberal rhetoric has. Furthermore, politically liberal students are in rebellion against their socially unconcerned and culturally impotent fundamentalist origins. So they respond positively to Sider and Gish because these "radical Christians" seem to be offering them relevance, but without breaking with the familiar "grace vs. law" theology they have brought with them to college or seminary. The old-time fundamentalists have lost the fight; they simply cannot compete with the radicals in terms of the "grace vs. law" theology.

Gish went on: "In the New Covenant we are offered something much better, the grace of going beyond greed and revenge and therefore the need of law. . . . As Christians, our lives can be governed by

7. *The Other Side* (September 1979), p. 41.

8. Art Gish, "A Decentralist Response," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 75. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

God's love and grace instead of law."⁹ At last, he got to the point. Well, not quite. He was not yet ready to go the whole distance. So, he laid down the theological foundation of his unstated but inescapable conclusion: *the abolition of all government*. This has to be the conclusion, for without law there can be no government.

This conclusion is that same old demonic position which has accompanied radical revolutionaries and anarchism throughout history: the "truly free" man and the "truly free" society is lawless. Mankind has no need of law. In short, the "new mankind" is perfect. There is no need for civil government. There is also no need for church government. The next step, historically, has always been taken by the radicals, though not normally until they set up a local "kingdom of the saints": there is no need for *family government*.

Gish was an Anabaptist. His theology is the theology of the Anabaptists. In the sixteenth century, Anabaptist revolutionaries began to terrorize Europe. They gathered mobs together, set up city-states, adopted free love (or polygamy for the rulers) and socialism. They tore down churches. They murdered opponents. And they did it all in terms of the freedom of the Holy Spirit. Igor Shafarevich, a Soviet dissenter, wrote a chapter on this revolutionary heritage in his excellent book, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (Harper & Row, 1980). The chapter is titled, "The Socialism of the Heresies." David Chilton devoted an appendix to the same subject in his *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*. It summarizes Shafarevich and adds more historical data: "Socialism, the Anabaptist Heresy."

Where does such a theology lead? To tyranny. In the name of zero-law, the "saints" impose tyranny. Law is a means of self-government first, and a means of restricting tyranny secondarily. Biblical law, when enforced, restrains sin's public manifestations. Without it, men are left at the mercy of people who categorically deny the need for outward law because they have been "purified" by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the theory of anarchy and antinomianism invariably results in tyranny. This is why it is so misleading to label Gish's position "decentralist economics." It may appear to be decentralist, but it inescapably leads to tyranny by way of antinomianism.

In condemning Gish, I am simultaneously condemning all forms of antinomianism, including the antinomianism of modern dispensationalism and modern pietism. The difference between the typical Baptist

9 *Idem*.

preacher's message and Gish's message is a matter of personal taste and financing. It is not a difference in theology. The Baptist minister might be fired if he started preaching sermons that sounded like Gish's chapter. Gish was already safely down on his communal farm (at least until its economic principles drive it into bankruptcy), and he had a constituency of faithful "poverts" who could survive financially and send him money because they were employed by free market institutions or government institutions that are financed by taxes collected from free market institutions. Gish could afford to pursue his Anabaptist heritage somewhat more faithfully than the typical antinomian pastor. In short, the difference between antinomian conservatism and antinomian liberation theology is more a matter of style and constituency than it is a matter of theology.

What is my thesis? Very simple: anyone who contrasts the love of God with the law of God is an implicit defender of tyranny.¹⁰

Conclusion

This is not the place to conduct an extended discussion of the relationship between grace and law. That topic has been covered in depth by Greg Bahnsen in *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* and in Part II of my book, *75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won't Ask* (1984).¹¹ The issue here is the relationship between covenantal love and covenantal law. God saves His covenanted people by grace. This is an act of love. How does He do this? He looks at the *law-conforming* life, the *law-required* death, and *animal sacrifice-annulling* resurrection of Jesus Christ, and He counts Christ's righteousness as the righteousness of Christ's covenant people. He *imputes* Christ's righteousness to them *judicially* (definitive justification) and *morally* (definitive sanctification).¹² In short, God imputes definitively to the regenerate the absolute perfection of biblical law.

As men progressively work out their salvations with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12b), they are to be guided by God's law, since God's imputation to them of Christ's perfect keeping of this law is the only foundation of their salvation. They are to *judge* their own acts, both internal (mental) and external, in terms of this standard. They are to

10. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), Part II. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

11. Tyler, Texas: Spurgeon Press. (<http://bit.ly/75bible>)

12. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), pp. 43–51.

judge the external acts of other people by this same standard. *What other standard could regenerate men possibly use?* We must constantly ask ourselves, and endlessly ask the critics of the New Testament authority of Old Testament law: By what *other* standard? If we love Christ, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15).

Only if Christ's commandments were different from the commandments God gave to Moses could we legitimately conclude that the love of Christ is different from the love of God. Only then could we conclude that obedience to Christ is different from obedience to God. But there can be no difference; the God who created everything is the divine Logos, who was incarnated as the perfect human, Jesus Christ (John 1). Thus, any attempt to create a dualism between God's Old Testament law and Christ's New Testament law is simultaneously an attempt to offer *a two-God theory of history*, with the Old Testament God different from a New Testament God. This was attempted by Marcion in the second century, and he was condemned as a heretic. An implicit two-God theory has been proclaimed for centuries by Christian mystics and Anabaptists, and also by modern fundamentalists and evangelicals. The results have been culturally disastrous: the *anti-dominion principle in action*.

There is no contradiction between the ten commandments and the sermon on the mount. God's love is manifested to us in the law, which is the law of life. There is grace in God's law.

APPENDIX O

SOCIAL ANTINOMIANISM

Antinomianism—the denial of the validity of the concrete application of Old Testament law in this era—has influenced modern Christianity to such an extent that virtually no Christian seminary even teaches a single course against it. Anglo-Israelite sects do pay attention to biblical law, which is, I believe, the reason that Garner Ted Armstrong’s “The World Tomorrow” had such a huge radio audience and why he was more interesting than any orthodox Christian broadcasting in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He could comment successfully on the collapse of modern culture because he had concrete alternatives to offer.

Social antinomianism makes itself manifest in many ways. In the Reformed Protestant circles, the Dutch Calvinist movement associated with the name Herman Dooyeweerd was briefly influential in this regard, 1965–75. Always searching for the “true Christian attitude,” the radical young neo-Dooyeweerdians proclaimed almost complete freedom from the restraining hand of concrete biblical law. Thus, attitude is substituted for obedience to revealed law. The non-Dooyeweerdian churchmen were unable to refute the radicals precisely because they held a similar, though less rigorous, antinomian philosophy. Their instincts may have been conservative, but their operating presuppositions did not allow them to challenge successfully the young radicals. The leaders of the neo-Dooyeweerdians, located primarily at the Free University of Amsterdam and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, combine a preference for government intervention and orthodox Christian language. The following article criticizes this combination. Troost’s answer appeared in the same issue (Oct. 1967) of the *International Reformed Bulletin*. It did not convince me. Similar terminology and identical antinomianism have become universal in the “radical Christian” Anabaptist circles.

A. My Response to Troost

In the issue of the *International Reformed Bulletin* for Jan./April, 1966, an article written by A. Troost [TROWST, not TRUEST] appeared, "Property Rights and the Eighth Commandment." Troost, the article informs us, is a professor of social ethics at the Free University of Amsterdam, and as such he seems to be representative of an increasingly large number of Dutch Reformed scholars who claim to be building upon the foundation laid down by Herman Dooyeweerd. It is my belief that the basic implications of Troost's essay are ultimately antinomian, and for this reason it deserves an extended analysis.

The problem which faces the Christian scholar in the area of social philosophy is a very great one: he must make an attempt to outline policies for social reconstruction that are in accord with the biblical framework, and at the same time he must make use of a vast quantity of scholarship which has been produced by non-Christian thinkers. In other words, he must acknowledge that common grace has enlightened the unregenerate scholar to the extent that some of his endeavors may be useful to the Christian, but at the same time the Christian must sift and choose from this scholarship in the light of Reformed, biblical standards. Clearly, it is not a simple task, and some errors are bound to creep into the work of even the most careful Reformed thinker. Yet part of the heritage of the Reformation is the rejection of perfectionism, and the fact that some errors are inevitable does not relieve us of the task of working out the implications of our Christian position.

The Bible, in short, is absolutely fundamental in this work of social criticism. Without it, the Christian is left without a basic frame of reference by which he can evaluate the various proposals for social change. Bearing this in mind, the reader may be able to understand my hostile reaction to Troost's starting point: "As we saw in section 12, the Bible does not provide us with data, points of departure or premises from which to draw logical conclusions relevant to modern society's socio-economic problems, including property relations" (p. 32). The question immediately arises: By what standard are we to evaluate the validity of any particular political or social proposal? If, as Christians, we cannot approach the special revelation presented in the Bible in the hope of finding our standards for social action, then where are we to go? It is Troost's position (and the position of many of his fellow Calvinist scholars) that the Bible gives us no data, no concrete

recommendations, by which we can judge political programs; the task of ushering in the Kingdom of God is apparently to be accomplished without the guidelines of special, concrete revelation.

Nevertheless, Troost can assert that "The message of the Bible reveals something to us!" What is it which the Bible reveals? It gives us the story of the coming kingdom, of "the re-establishment of all things, to the total reconciliation, liberation and renewal of life by the person and work of Jesus Christ through his cross and resurrection." Even more than this, "The cross and the resurrection promise to our practice of property relations a complete liberation from the powerful grip of the sins of injustice and lovelessness" (p. 32).

Apparently, there *are* standards of "injustice and lovelessness." What are they, the Christian must ask, and where do we find them? So far, all that we know is that the Bible cannot provide them, at least not in the socio-economic realm. Troost reaches an impasse at this point. He has proclaimed a vague pietism in the name of Reformed scholarship. Unless he can find concrete standards of judgment that are somehow self-evident and eternally valid apart from the Bible, he leaves us without any basis for decision-making.

In spite of the fact that he has eliminated the Bible from the realm of social affairs, he now refers back to the book of Acts: "These first Christians did not abolish property, nor yet the means of production (e.g., landed estates). No, they put ownership and property rights back into the place where they belong, back into their proper function. 'Not a man of them claimed any of his possessions as his own, but everything was held in common' (Acts 4:32) . . ." (p. 33). Two preliminary observations should be made with regard to the interpretation of this passage. First, the decision to enter into such common ownership was voluntary, and anyone was permitted to hold his private property out of the common stock (Acts 5:4). Peter, in other words, proclaimed the right of private ownership as a perfectly legitimate Christian practice. Second, it is also relevant that the Christians in Jerusalem were expecting the fulfillment of the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20ff.), and any application of the early church's practice of common ownership should be interpreted in this light. In times of social catastrophe (and in times of the confiscation of property by the State), it may be a wise decision for Christians to hold some common property, especially property which is mobile and easily hidden. But is it a general law?

The real issue, however, goes much deeper than either of these two

criticisms. Troost argues from this passage in the following manner: "Thus did the practice of this church confirm the preaching of the gospel with signs and powers. Property relations were set free from their natural self-willed self-assertion and employed for loving service of God and neighbor" (p. 33). Now what are we to conclude from all of this? The Bible, Troost has argued, does not give us any "data, points of departure or premises from which to draw logical conclusions relevant to modern society's socio-economic problems, including property relations." Nevertheless, we are now told that the early Christians "put ownership and property rights back in the place where they belong," and Troost obviously expects us to take this example seriously. But on his grounds—on the presuppositions upon which he began his analysis—why should we pay any attention to what the early church did? Troost wants us to make an application of the church's practice in today's world, but why should we, if the Bible is not relevant to present-day economic and social problems? Does he mean that we should create a society in which property is held in common (socialism) and yet at the same time believe that we are not living under socialism (since property, he says, was not "abolished")? The whole argument is vague, but it appears that this is Troost's conclusion. If it is not, then I do not understand what he is talking about.

He refers to the fact that the early church "did not abolish property, nor yet the means of production (e.g., landed estates)." Private property was preserved in the sense that it was not sold to the State, true enough. They sold some of their fixed assets to non-Christians and deposited the wealth in the common treasury. They also gave some of their other goods directly to the Christian community. But this means that in order to follow their example in our day, we must sell our goods to unbelievers, thus making ourselves perpetual wage-earners and salaried laborers. It means that as private individuals, we can no longer own fixed capital goods like land and especially machinery. We are to become, in other words, a sort of huge Christian co-operative movement, at best employed by each other, but more probably employed by the unregenerate world. And if we are not to draw such conclusions, then why did Troost bring up the subject in the first place? Either it is a concrete example to be followed, or else the whole incident is irrelevant. Again, we can admit that under social conditions comparable to those faced by the early church, something like this might be necessary, but as a prescription for all eternity it seems silly, especially in light of the fact that Peter did say that a total

contribution to the common treasury was not required. Since Troost does not think that the Bible provides us with concrete data concerning economic affairs, it does not seem logical for him to bring up the matter at all. If he means simply that Christians should, on occasion, be willing to give up some of their private wealth to the Christian community, then he has not said very much.

Troost then mentions the fact that "the New Testament is not socially revolutionary" in the eyes of some Christians. He says that the New Testament, at least on its surface, "does not radically condemn the situation in which its authors preached and wrote" (p. 33). It even accepted slavery as an institution, as Paul's epistle to Philemon indicates. Troost realizes that the New Testament is, in this practical sense, profoundly conservative—it did not attack directly the social fabric of Roman society. This disturbs him, and therefore he returns to his old theme: "It would, however, be entirely at variance with the spirit and intention of the gospel, with the Message, if from the above we were logically to draw up socio-economic conclusions which would then have to be applied in practical politics. Not a few Christians perpetuate in this way an *economic* and *political conservatism*. The same goes for progressivist-socialistic conclusions from biblical 'data' . . ." (p. 34). Common property in Acts 4:32 is somehow relevant today; conservative elements in the Bible are not. He reasserts himself once again: "The biblical message of the kingdom of God does not *directly* address itself to the betterment of human society which includes, among other things, property relations. But, to be sure, it does indeed affect them!" To be sure of *what? How* does it affect them? In his answer, Troost arrives at a position of total antinomian mysticism: "In order to exercise our property rights in everyday life in the right manner, and to handle our possessions before the face of God in a way pleasing to him, nothing less is required than the merciful intervention of God, from above, through the Holy Ghost. Unless regenerated, common sense will change nothing. Renewal must come from the top down; it will not come up by itself from the bottom. Our natural reason can achieve nothing here" (p. 34).

Consider what Troost is saying. The Bible, he has said, does not provide any concrete data—no applicable kind of special revelation—in the area of economic and political affairs. Yet he is also saying that "Our natural reason can achieve nothing here." Not only is there no special revelation in social affairs, there is no general revelation on which we can rely. And so we must sit quietly and wait for the mystical

intervention of the Holy Spirit to guide us in all of our private community decisions; God has seen fit to leave us without any concrete standards in such matters. This, I am compelled to conclude is antinomianism. It is strangely like the mystical brand of Christianity that is called Penielism. I am unable to see how it is even remotely Reformed.

This does not mean that Troost has no recommendations for the contemporary world. Naturally, he does not derive them from the Bible, and apparently the "common sense" of the unregenerate world has given him no aid. In fact, he does not specify any source for his recommendations. Nevertheless, he is able to conclude that "It is part of our *religion* to engage whole-heartedly in the battle for a just distribution of income (nationally, but also internationally, through foreign aid), for just property relations, and for a just economic order. It is part of our religion because we are called to it by Him who gave his life for this world . . ." (p. 35). Unfortunately, he does not specify which sphere of life is involved here. Does he mean merely that the church should give private charity (a teaching made explicit by the Scriptures), or does he mean that as Christians we are obligated to promote the political projects of land redistribution and foreign aid sponsored by our civil governments? If he means simply private charity, then he is saying nothing new. If he means public projects of political coercion, then he must show us on what grounds such a conclusion is justified; certainly the Bible teaches no such doctrine, and even if it did, Troost does not accept the Bible's testimony in such matters.

He goes on: "The World Council of Churches itself is sponsoring a study on a large scale dealing with society and social problems, in connection with which a book is to appear entitled *The Theological Foundation of a Christian Social Ethics*. Unfortunately it appears to me that historic Reformation Christianity ('Calvinism') is not making much of a contribution to this study and reflection" (p. 36). Naturally, the World Council can engage in such activities; it is a humanistic organization which is not bound to work within the framework of limits established by the Bible. It has no difficulty in producing all the humanistic, secular documents that it wants to distribute. But given the presuppositions which Troost holds, that the Bible offers no concrete social proposals, and that "common sense" of the fallen world is equally helpless in aiding the thinker in his work, how could we possibly hope that "historic Reformation Christianity" would make any contribution? Troost denies the only two foundations upon which such contributions can be made: concrete special revelation on the one

hand, or natural revelation granted by God in common grace. We are left without standards. Troost offers us a classic example of the truth proclaimed by the late C. S. Lewis: we castrate our men and then bid them to be fruitful.

Finally, we are told this truth by Troost: "However, it is plain, inevitable, and imperative that in our society more and more limitations be put on private property rights by social law and economic law, both in the domain of public law as well as in private community law such as internal industrial law" (p. 39). There is *absolutely nothing* in Troost's essay that would indicate that such a requirement is either plain, inevitable, or imperative. Troost does not seem to be aware of the fact that he is inserting conclusions made by modern, secular socialists and Marxists into his essay, and that he is doing it in the name of "historic Reformation Christianity." It is possible that he does not mean that socialistic legislation is increasingly imperative, although his language certainly implies this. The reason that it is not possible to say for certain what Troost means is that he stops at this point and refuses to elaborate! He gives no examples of concrete cases, and he offers us nothing to show where such limitations on private property are needed.

Troost has attempted to destroy the biblical foundations of conservatism (and, he meekly asserts, of socialism), yet he then proceeds to make what is inescapably a highly socialistic pronouncement in the name of Christianity. Worst of all, he then uses the "disclaimer" approach, so that he will not have to elaborate: he modestly says that he is unqualified to go on. "Here the theologian must stop, for we landed in the thick of concrete socio-economic problems. As a *theologian* I was allowed to go beyond sections 16 and 18 where I tried to sketch the task of the *church* and her *preaching* with respect to our subject. But now I too have come to the limit of my own competence; beyond this I am not qualified to speak" (p. 41). Troost is a professor of social ethics at the Free University of Amsterdam, and in this capacity he has denied the possibility of concrete biblical revelation in aiding us in our task of Christian social reconstruction. Yet beyond this, he says, he is not qualified to speak. He adds, of course, that we must promote some undefined "economic justice," increase foreign aid, and put even more restrictions on private property in an already frighteningly socialistic era. It is as if a professor of engineering were to tell his Dutch students that the dikes should be blown up, but in regard to any substitute for them, he protests that he is not qualified to speak.

He criticizes conservatives thusly: "One of the causes giving the church a conservative mentality—and the same holds for Christian social organizations—can be that her members keep on thinking in traditional, outdated concepts" (p. 39). But in destroying the only possible foundation for concrete Christian alternatives to such "outdated concepts" (i.e., concrete biblical revelation), Troost leaves the Christian world with nothing but mysticism. He offers us in the name of historic Reformed Christianity the whole amorphous, planless, interventionist ethic of the Dutch economy. It is a decision made on the basis of his personal preference, yet proclaimed in the name of God's kingdom; he denies, nevertheless, that those pronouncements can be based upon the special revelation of the Bible. In short, Troost's conception of Christian social ethics is without foundation, either from the point of view of the Scriptures (which he rejects as a source of data concerning social affairs) or from the point of view of modern economics and politics (which is based upon the logic of the unregenerate world, which he also rejects). Yet because this system is totally without a foundation, we are expected to accept it as "modern" and "Christian," and not part of some "traditional, outdated" world. Because it is without roots, we Christians are to call it our own.

The magnificent theoretical criticism of secular thought which Dooyeweerd began has been eroded away. Dooyeweerd cut the intellectual foundations from under all secular thinkers, but Troost and other Calvinists who stand with Troost are unwilling to replace their secular foundations with concrete scriptural examples and requirements. They have left themselves without any foundations at all. But even this is not quite true, since men cannot think or speak without some foundation. Troost and those who support him have brought back the teachings of the secular world (and, more specifically, the socialist secular world) in the name of Dooyeweerd. That such antinomialism in the social spheres can be considered a part of the Reformed heritage testifies to the loss of the Puritan vision in the modern world.

B. Troost's Response¹

In the issue of *International Reformed Bulletin* which published my critique of Troost's essay (October 1967), Troost was afforded an

1. This appeared as an appendix in *The Sinai Strategy: Economics, and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/gnsinai>)

opportunity to reply. His response was titled, "A Plea for a Creation Ethic." I have waited long enough to respond to his attempt to escape my criticisms. The reason why I am bothering to respond at this late date is that I am trying to point out the flaws in a certain kind of approach to economics. Troost was never a significant figure in the debate, either in the U.S. or in Holland, but several of his arguments and slogans have appeared in recent "liberation theology" books, even though it is highly unlikely that any prominent liberation theologian has ever heard of Troost. It is the so-called "climate of opinion," especially left-wing neo-evangelical opinion, which is the focus of my concern. This climate change began to appear in the mid-1960s, and Troost was one small gust in the hurricane of error.

One thing annoys me exceedingly. I see Christian scholars who adopt phrases such as "creation law" or "creation ethics," yet they refuse to affirm their commitment to a literal six-day creation, with 24-hour days, hours being measured as we measure them today (give or take a few nanoseconds per day). In short, they wrap themselves in the language of biblical orthodoxy, and then they climb in bed with the evolutionists. They reject explicit biblical laws in the name of a vague "creation law," and then they reject the six-day creation in the name of some sort of vague age-day hypothesis, or "framework" hypothesis, or whatever the latest "creative evolution" buzzwords are in evangelical academic circles. They believe in neither the biblical doctrine of law nor the biblical doctrine of creation. They are, in short, hypocrites. We need to understand this from the beginning. They are compromisers. Their self-appointed task is to deceive the faithful.

Troost begins with the standard response: "In the preceding article of Mr. Gary North there is what appears to me to be a misunderstanding that is as serious as it is tragic." This is the old "misunderstanding ploy." Then he goes on to demonstrate that I understood him only too well.

He rejects my accusation that he is an antinomian. Then he appeals to his defense of the *cosmonomic idea* to prove that he is a good, law-abiding Dutch Calvinist Christian. In short, he appeals to his membership in the school of Herman Dooyeweerd, the Dutch Calvinist philosopher. This, he supposes, should relieve the fears of his Dutch audience. Understand that his reply was first published in the Dutch Christian newspaper which had run a translation of my critical essay. His essay and mine only later were published in the *International Reformed Bulletin*.

1. *Dooyeweerd's Antinomianism*

My response is straightforward: *Dooyeweerd was an antinomian, too*. This is why his thought was immediately adopted by a group of radical Christians who used his philosophical system to defend the idea of Christian medieval guild socialism, or worse. The "Toronto School" of neo-Dooyeweerdians was, from the mid-1960s onward until it began to fade in the early 1970s, at the center of an anti-capitalist revival. They broke new rhetorical ground that Ronald Sider and other non-Dutch liberation theologians later travelled over. These neo-Dooyeweerdians were subsequently superseded on campus by the neo-evangelicals, but they held very similar ideas. The heart of their critique against the West and the United States in particular was that the West was built in terms of free market competitive capitalism.

Dooyeweerd never publicly broke with his radical North American followers. Thus, they have been able to wrap themselves in the flag of the "cosmonomic idea" school of philosophy, for whatever that is worth. (Outside of very tiny Calvinist intellectual circles, primarily Dutch, it is worth nothing.) At best, this is not much of a protective covering, since from the beginning, Dooyeweerd's system was successful only as a negative critique of humanists who proclaimed neutrality. It was unquestionably a brilliant and detailed critique of this pretended autonomy, but Dooyeweerd was from the beginning a dedicated antinomian, meaning a critic of Old Testament law in New Testament times. He could build nothing positive precisely because his system is strictly a negative critique.² It is revealed as another brand of natural law-common ground philosophy whenever it is used to construct a positive program. Ironically, he and his disciples believed that they were forever destroying the intellectual foundations of all natural law, common ground philosophies.

I was privately arguing along these lines as early as 1965. Subsequently, Dooyeweerd's essay in the collection of essays edited by E. R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971), revealed just how hostile he was to biblical presuppositionalism. He replied to Van Til's criticism of his work as not going far enough in its confrontation with "natural law" doctrines. He, too, used the same old tactic: ". . . you have misunderstood what I mean . . ." (p. 74).

2. H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1953–58). Pronounced: DOUGH-yeh-vehrd.

No, Dr. Van Til understood precisely what Dooyeweerd meant—a magisterial accomplishment, given the frequently obscure nature of Dooyeweerd's verbiage. (I agree entirely with Nash's observation regarding Dooyeweerd: "Good thinking is never complimented by and should not be accompanied by poor communication."³)

Dooyeweerd's system is a collection of philosophically empty "self-attesting" boxes (categories supposedly derived from logic, not the Bible) into which anyone can pour any content whatsoever. This is especially true of the political and economic categories. Nash is correct: "Apart from his presupposition that the cosmos is a divinely created world order, it might be objected that his law spheres are only fabrications of his own mind."⁴ Most of his followers have poured socialism and antinomianism into these empty boxes. In fact, I contend that it was the very emptiness of Dooyeweerd's categories which attracted his followers—and his verbiage, which they have developed into an art. (Doubt me? Take a look at almost any book published in Canada by Wedge Books.)

Van Til put his finger on the problem when he wrote that "the entire transcendental method hangs in the air except for the fact that it rests upon the fullness and unity of truth accepted on the authority of Scripture."⁵ Dooyeweerd's system hangs in the air because it does not *begin* with the presupposition of the necessity and adequacy of biblical revelation for all philosophical inquiry. In short, argued Van Til, either you start with the Bible as your standard, or you begin with man's mind as the standard. You will inescapably end up with whatever you began with presuppositionally. Dooyeweerd's whole system does not begin with the self-attesting authority of the Bible.

Therefore. . . .

Dooyeweerd was upset by this "therefore." Yet his response shows perfectly well how accurate Van Til's criticism had been. He categorically denied that any critique of humanism's presuppositions should begin with a confession of Christian presuppositions: "... this transcendental critique is obliged to *begin* with an inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience *as such* and *not* with a confession of faith. In this first phase of the critical

3. Ronald H. Nash, *Dooyeweerd and the Amsterdam Philosophy: A Christian Critique of Philosophical Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1962), p. 105.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

5. This criticism appeared in the little-known syllabus by Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict*, Volume II, Part 3, "Biblical Dimensionalism," a 59-page, single-spaced critique of Dooyeweerd and the Amsterdam school.

investigation such a confession would have been out of place" (p. 76). He begins with the autonomous mind of man. This is why Dooyeweerd was a scholastic in his methodology, despite his attempt to refute all medieval scholasticism by means of his critique. He shared humanism's methodological presuppositions concerning the obligation of good, rational men to begin debating without any reference to the Bible and the God who wrote it. Dooyeweerd's use of a non-biblical concept of the "heart" was the very heart of his humanism and antinomianism.⁶ Van Til's response to Dooyeweerd's essay returns to his original theme, namely, that Dooyeweerd had given away the presuppositional case for biblical truth by his methodological starting point.

Troost argues that he had written his dissertation against the antinomianism of situation ethics. The question is: Did he simply substitute another Iprand of antinomianism? My answer was (and is), "Yes, he did." Either you affirm revealed biblical law as a permanent standard,⁷ or you affirm humanistic laws, of whatever variety. It is this radical dichotomy which humanists, dispensationalists, and Dooyeweerdians prefer not to accept. It is their common ground.

2. *Troost's Jargon*

The heart, mind, and soul of the Dooyeweerdian brand of humanism can be seen in the following paragraph in Troost's response. Be

6. It is not simply that Dooyeweerd's exposition is incomparably verbose and filled with jargon; it is that it is devoid of revelational content, including biblical law. But Van Til was not concerned about Dooyeweerd's implicit antinomianism; he was concerned about the lack of biblical content for Dooyeweerd's philosophical categories. Sadly, Van Til was himself almost as weak on the question of biblical law as Dooyeweerd was. He was not a theonomist, which is why he was always unwilling to promote publicly the writings of Rushdoony, and why he expressed reservations in private concerning Rushdoony's approach—and, by implication, the approach of the whole Christian Reconstruction movement. Rushdoony was taking Van Til's presuppositionalism into areas that made Van Til nervous; Van Til carefully avoided topics outside of traditional apologetics. Christian Reconstruction did not exist in a finished outline in 1971, when *Jerusalem and Athens* was published; not until Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* appeared in 1973 did the capstone of the system appear. Van Til was always enthusiastic about Greg Bahnsen's apologetics, but he remained judiciously silent about Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977). Van Til's writings were necessary for the creation of the Reconstruction movement (presuppositionalism), but not sufficient (biblical law). In this sense, the Reconstructionists have criticized Van Til in much the same way as Van Til criticized Dooyeweerd: he did not go far enough in his adherence to biblical revelation.

7. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

prepared for the usual incoherent jargon; Dooyeweerdians are incapable of writing, either in English or Dutch, without this jargon. It serves them as “ink” serves the escaping squid: a cover which hides them from their attackers.

As for so-called social ethics, let me explain it in the following way: The question of what justice is in the concrete case and of what love to my neighbor means, cannot any longer be viewed as a meta-physical ‘given’—as all forms of idealistic ethics suggests. However, the content of justice and love in the concrete case *hie et nunc* is not found literally in the Bible as a recipe for all time. But here the biblical-a[p]riori of faith in the divine creation order must *function* in the philosophical and social investigation. In so far as this has in broad lines and outline form led to preliminary results in the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, this philosophy has shown that in the concrete giving of form to justice and love cultural-historical basic possibilities and the regulating function of faith always play roles in a normative way (p. 54).

Got that? Let me assist you. First, there are Troost’s “pre-theoretical presuppositions”:

1. I am a member of a church which believes in the Bible.
2. If the elders suspect that I do not believe in the Bible, I might get myself excommunicated. This would not be good; it would take away my influence.
3. I teach in a humanist institution; so if I go around talking about the eternal standards of biblical ethics, I might get fired, and I would unquestionably be ridiculed. This would also not be good.
4. If I adopt a lot of Dooyeweerdian verbiage, I can get out of my dilemma. After all, he got out of his.

We are now ready for a translation of the verbiage:

1. There are no eternal standards of right and wrong.
2. The Bible does not literally speak to concrete historical situations in terms of fixed ethical standards because there are no fixed ethical standards applicable to concrete historical circumstances.
3. There is a “creation order.” It is an empty box. Into it I am entitled to pour anything that appeals to me, as a respectable, tax-financed intellectual.

4. The “cultural historical basic possibilities” tell me how much socialist drivel I can get unsuspecting Christian laymen to swallow in the name of Jesus.

It should be clear why Troost and the cosmonomic idea enthusiasts have had no influence anywhere outside of a very restricted circle of Dutch readers. Dutch-Christian intellectuals respect academic scholarship, especially pseudo-Germanic scholarship, almost to the point of idol worship. They frequently model their writing style after German pagan scholars. Herman Ridderbos’ orthodox book, *Paul* (1975), is a good example. Dooyeweerd and his followers have fallen into the Germanic verbal bog. Their style is best described as a form of verbal constipation. They are enmeshed in verbiage which cannot be translated into English, let alone translated into action. They have no consistent economic program. They just have verbiage.

Troost can wax incoherent—he thinks he is waxing eloquent—promoting jumbled economic programs that are borrowed from modern Keynesian socialism, but to what effect? He is unable to distance himself from the run-of-the-mill political liberalism of our era. He is worse than speechless; he is a motor-mouth. Noise keeps coming out, but nothing principled. His program will be swallowed up in the flux of historical change. He offers nothing uniquely Christian, uniquely socialistic, or uniquely anything positive.

Do I exaggerate? Am I unfair? Judge for yourself:

A detailed elaboration of this is not given in my essay. I did cite certain results: i.e., that we, under the guidance of what we learn in Holy Scripture, must see and experience our earthly property rights as *relative* both in regard to God as well as in regard to our fellow men. In other words, in our ‘unraffling’ we have to maintain a religious distance, or, as it is better phrased, as not possessing our possessions (I Corinthians 7:29–31). However, one cannot deduce from this religious *basic attitude* any concrete right of property, as many ‘progressive theologians’ think they can do. This can be done neither in civil property rights, nor in public government rights, nor yet in rights of private enterprise. These concrete and temporal relations of justice lie on the niveau [?] of our temporal earthly life in which that which is concretely just *hic et nunc* and that which is love for neighbor *in concreto* is co-determined by the normative social, economical and other principles. These principles are not—as the natural law tradition thinks—*given* as positively formulated prescriptions but must be searched out from the complex normative *structures* of the situation (p. 54).

Do you remember the story of the king who was led by his own vanity to buy a set of “invisible clothes” by a bunch of “con artists”? Then he went out in his new clothes to lead a parade. No adult in the awe-struck crowd would admit that the king was stark naked. Finally, a little boy asked his father why the king was wearing no clothes. His father saw the light, and yelled, “The king has no clothes!” The king’s vanity was given a decisive blow by the howls of laughter that followed the innocent lad’s remark. Dooyeweerd, for all his competence in exposing the myth of neutrality in humanists, philosopher by philosopher, was the self-deceived victim of his own academic pride. He adopted a non-biblical starting point—a reference point devoid of biblical content, which he called the “heart”—and he also adopted humanism’s hostility to biblical law. So have his followers. Troost is a good example. I prefer to serve as the little boy for the petrified crowd of Dutch Calvinists who stand in awe of the Dooyeweerdian verbiage, and who seem incapable of saying out loud: “These academic con men are naked!”

Conclusion

Troost feels inhibited by Mosaic law. So do all sinners. But instead of repenting, and calling for the reconstruction of society in terms of God’s law, Troost rejects biblical law. It is not normative in his system. “What is normative is the *ethical-religio basic attitude* of early Christianity, because this is required everywhere in the great love commandment of the Bible, including the Mosaic legislation” (p. 56). A man can get away with murder in the foggy mists of the “ethico-religio basic attitude” of *any* religion or philosophy. But Troost does not want to get away with murder. He wants to get away with guilt-manipulation: “But in this Bible history we have to do with a *fundamental religious attitude of christian mentality* which must be ready *every* day and under *all* circumstances to make a happy and voluntary renunciation of money and goods on behalf of those who are in need . . .” (p. 56). Under *all* circumstances? How are we to know *when*? These proponents of progressive taxation and opponents of the 10% tithe never tell us—the better to manipulate us.

Troost’s original essay is irrelevant. It was irrelevant in 1966, and it is irrelevant today. It was simply symptomatic of a crisis in Western civilization. Those who should be preparing an intellectual and moral framework for comprehensive reform along biblical lines have joined

the enemies of Christ, and have marched in the parade of statism. Why? Because they hate biblical law more than they hate humanism. This, above all, constitutes the crisis of twentieth century Christianity. Christians have dressed themselves in the rags of humanism and have imagined themselves in robes of splendor.

Update: 1985

I have included this appendix in order to call the reader's attention to a type of economic analysis which has become extremely popular since 1966. There is almost nothing in Troost's essay which was not implicit or explicit a decade later in Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. The argumentation is almost identical: moralistic, vague, guilt-inducing, statist, and explicitly antinomian. Troost's essay is an example of a genre which has become the standard fare in neo-evangelical circles, whether in *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, or some other pro-state, pro-enforced wealth redistribution magazine published in the name of Jesus.

What should also be apparent is that my response in 1967 is almost identical in approach to David Chilton's response to Sider in *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981). The emphasis is on the specific revelation of God in the Bible, especially in Old Testament law. Troost's rejection of biblical law and of the whole concept of Bible-based blueprints for economics is exactly the line pushed by Sider, Evangelicals for Social Action, and the other neo-evangelical liberation theologians.

It is clear why Troost and his neo-evangelical clones are so hostile to the idea of biblical blueprints: the Bible unquestionably promotes free market institutional arrangements. This is why the three other authors in Clouse's book, *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (InterVarsity Press, 1984)⁸ all agreed that the Bible must not be appealed to with respect to specific social and economic institutional arrangements, and why my essay kept returning to the theme of the ethical requirement of abiding by Old Testament principles. I was derided in the symposium for appealing to the Book of Deuteronomy (p. 66). Anyone who has read Deuteronomy should understand why I was derided: it promises economic and other external blessings to societies that conform to the external requirements of Old Testament law.

8. <http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>.

In short, the terms of the debate have not changed in four decades, nor are they likely to change in the next two hundred years. The issue is clear: God's word or man's word, God's law or man's law, God's blueprints or man's blueprints. Take your pick. Or as Elijah put it, choose this day whom you will serve. It is clear enough to see who serves God in this century, and who serves Baal. It shows even in the mundane academic discipline of economics.

APPENDIX P

THE HOAX OF HIGHER CRITICISM

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:46–47).

It is not just Jews who refuse to take these words seriously; it is also the vast majority of those who graduate from theological seminaries today. With few exceptions, seminaries are staffed by professors of literature rather than professors of Christ. They have adopted a view of the Bible which says that the biblical texts reveal gross errors on the part of the Bible's writers and editors. The critics refer to the Bible as a myth-filled book. These classroom skeptics and their intellectual predecessors have labored for over a century to remove Christians' confidence in the accuracy of the Bible. Their personal goal, above all other goals, is to escape the final judgment of the God who has revealed Himself clearly. They comfort themselves while discomforting their Bible-believing students with this syllogism: "No permanent Bible, no permanent law; no permanent law, no permanent judgment." But this absence of God's judgment must also be asserted with respect to history; higher criticism of the Bible plays a role in this dogma, too.

There is little doubt that the successful assault on Christianity in the late-nineteenth century came from two sources: Darwinism and higher criticism of the Bible. The latter was exported primarily from German universities. The Christian West has been under guerilla attack by German scholarship for about two centuries. Prussians invented the government-supported kindergarten and the Ph. D degree, two of the most insidious inventions of the modern world. (I have long appreciated the observation by literary critic Edmund Wilson regarding the absurdity of the oppressive Ph. D system. The world would be far better off today "if, at the time of the First World War, when we were renaming our hamburgers Salisbury Steak and our sauerkraut Liberty

Cabbage, we had decided to scrap it as a German atrocity.”)¹

Academic higher criticism of the Bible was nourished in its maturity in the same European corner of the academic world. It was promoted most successfully by intellectually disciplined German scholars in the nineteenth century. These men were dedicated to the destruction of orthodox Christianity. Their primary goal was to discover defects in the existing texts of Scripture, as well as to discover internal inconsistencies in the Bible’s overall message. This strategy was designed to discredit the Christian world’s faith in a permanent standard of righteousness. Higher criticism was the spiritual legacy of the Enlightenment, as one of its spiritual heirs frankly admits: “The rationalist Enlightenment radicalized the claim of reason and history; as a result it placed the claims of religion outside the realm of reason. In this division Orthodox theology lost its foundations in history. The cleft between reason and history triumphed among the learned—including theologians—and removed the basis of orthodoxy’s epistemology.”²

A. A War for English Civilization

What is not generally recognized, however, is that biblical higher criticism had its origin in the English-speaking world. It was English Deism rather than German scholarship that laid the intellectual foundation of modern higher criticism. Even before Deism, certain aspects of the critical attack on the Bible, especially the Old Testament, had begun with Renaissance humanism.³ R. K. Harrison traced back to mid-seventeenth-century rationalist political philosopher Thomas Hobbes the idea that the Pentateuch was compiled from much earlier sources written by Moses.⁴ Edgar Krentz was an enthusiastic defender of higher criticism against what he describes as the dogmatic church’s “fear of change, fear of losing the basis for certainty of faith, and fear of posing questions in the area of authority.”⁵ He, too, identified English Deism as the source of this intellectual development. “The eighteenth-

1. Edmund Wilson, *The Fruits of the MLA* (New York: New York Review Book, 1968), p. 20. The MLA is the Modern Language Association.

2. Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975] 1977), p. 21.

3. A little-known and unfortunately neglected study of the history of higher criticism is Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, [1980] 1984), Pt. I.

4. Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1969] 1974), pp. 9–10.

5. Krentz, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

century Deists treated the Bible with freedom when it did not, in their lights, accord with reason. For example, they argued that Isaiah was composite, the Gospels contradictory, and the apostles often unreliable.”⁶

The Deist’s attack on the divine authority of the Bible was not simply a product of the scholar’s dusty study. It was closely associated with warring social and intellectual movements of the day. James Barr’s observations are very important in understanding the roots of higher criticism and also in understanding the revival of biblicalliteralism as a social force in the United States, especially after 1960. The link between social action and biblical hermeneutics has been missed by most historians. Barr, following Reventlow’s lead, did not make this mistake:

Church and state formed a single continuum, and political and theological questions were seen as interdependent. Questions about power and legitimacy rested in a high degree upon exegetical and interpretative ideas. In this the Old Testament—Reventlow’s own specialism—was of primary importance. Even if the New Testament was the document of the earliest Christianity, the way in which the other collection of books form a yet older age, the Old Testament, was related to it. For it was the Old Testament, as it seemed, that offered guidance about king and state, about a commonwealth organized under divine statutes, about law and property, about war, about ritual and ceremony, about priesthood, continuity and succession. All of this was a disputed area from the Reformation onwards: because these were controversial matters in church and state, they generated deep differences in biblical interpretation. It was precisely because the Bible was assumed on all hands to be authoritative that it stimulated new notions about its own nature. It was because men sought answers to problems of life and society, as well as of thought and belief, that the Bible stimulated ‘critical’ modes of understanding itself.⁷

The heart of English Deism’s attack on Christian orthodoxy was its faith in Newtonian natural law and hostility to Old Testament law and Old Testament prophecy. “If one could write off the Old Testament as testimony to a pre-Christian religion and vindicate the New Testament in another way (e.g. through its accord with the law of nature) Christianity could still be defended, albeit as a pedagogical means to the moral illumination of mankind.”⁸ Once the denial of the indissol-

6. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

7. James Barr, Foreword, in Reventlow, *Authority of the Bible*, p. xiii.

8. Reventlow, *ibid.*, p. 398.

uble unity of the Bible became common, the next step was easy: the denial of the need for an infallible New Testament in Christianity.

Reventlow provided evidence of the political aspects of the war for and against the infallibility of the Bible. He provided over 400 pages of text and 200 pages of endnotes to demonstrate, among related themes, that "the political thought of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continually sought its models and arguments within the Bible, and the approach of each particular thinker in question provided the real criterion for the analogies drawn between the reconstructed biblical model and the principles which were normative for shaping the society of his time."⁹ The Deists launched their war on the Old Testament in an attempt to substitute natural law for biblical law. Anyone who fails to understand the ethical nature of this intellectual conflict does not understand the history of biblical higher criticism. The attack on the Old Testament was a fundamental aspect of the coming of modern humanist civilization.

Only as a result of the attack by Deists on the authority of Scripture (preparations for which were made, against their own intentions, by Latitudinarians, Locke and Newton), an attack which they made step by step, did the legacy of antiquity in the form of natural law and Stoic thought, which since the late Middle Ages had formed the common basis for thought despite all the changes of theological and philosophical direction, remain the one undisputed criterion. This produced a basically new stage both in the history of ideas and in the English constitution. This position already contains the roots of its own failure, in that the consistent development of the epistemological principles of Locke and Berkely [sic] by Hume soon showed that its basic presuppositions were untenable. However, two irreversible and definitive developments remained, which had made an appearance with it: the Bible lost its significance for philosophical thought and for the theoretical foundations of political ideals, and ethical rationalism (with a new foundation in Kant's critique) proved to be one of the forces shaping the modern period, which only now can really be said to have begun.¹⁰

Reventlow pointed out that higher criticism has faded in importance since the end of the Second World War. In the immediate post-war era, biblical criticism was an important aspect of Protestant colleges and seminaries. No longer. "Given a predominant concern with

9. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 413–14.

the present and its seemingly urgent practical problems, which claim almost exclusive attention,” he writes, “historical criticism and exegesis have come to take very much a back place.”¹¹

B. Burying the Dead

Why, then, should I devote an appendix to this topic? Because of a parallel process: while modern humanism has visibly begun to fragment, taking with it modern liberal theology, there has been a recovery of interest within the evangelical world of real-world questions that are best summarized under the general heading, “Christian worldview.” The implicit dualisms of modern fundamentalism—Old Testament vs. New Testament, law vs. grace, letter vs. spirit, church vs. state, Israel vs. the church, eternity vs. history, heart vs. mind, dominion vs. rapture, culture vs. kingdom—have begun to be either discarded or at least seriously criticized from within the camp.¹² The Christian world’s recovery of a vision of ethical unity, of a comprehensive world-and-life view, is basic to any workable strategy of Christian reconstruction. In this intellectual and emotional process of recovering Christianity’s lost unity of vision, we are required to return to the original source of the problem: men’s loss of faith in the unity of God’s word.

There is an old political slogan, “You can’t beat something with nothing.” Throughout the twentieth century, the Christian world has found itself in the position of battling something—self-confident humanism—with nothing: a philosophy of ethical dualism, a kind of Christian gnosticism.¹³ This was obvious to everyone after the Scopes’ “monkey” trial of 1925.¹⁴ (In the early church, this dualistic philosophy which pitted the Old Testament against the New Testament was correctly identified by the church as heretical: Marcionism.) But the roles are now being reversed. Ever since the assassination of John F.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

12. On the Israel-church dichotomy, see William E. Bell, *A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology* (Ph. D dissertation, New York University, 1968). See also John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academie, 1988). This book sold over 100,000 copies in hardback within a year of its publication. The survival of the older dualism is best represented by Dave Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1988).

13. Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986).

14. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), ch. 10: “The Great Reversal.

Kennedy in November of 1963, Western humanism has steadily lost both its vision and its “can-do” confidence.¹⁵ A similar loss of confidence also appeared in the mid-1980s behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains. The implicit and inescapable dualism of all post-Kantian thought—fact vs. meaning, science vs. ethics, *phenomenal* vs. *noumenal*¹⁶—became a growing intellectual problem after the 1880s, and it could not, like Humpty Dumpty, be put back together again.¹⁷ The social and political effects of this accelerating intellectual disorientation became clear to most social observers after 1963. Meanwhile, the appearance of Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics in the mid-1940s¹⁸ the revival of biblical creationism after 1960,¹⁹ and the preliminary recovery of the Puritan vision of the earthly victory of God’s kingdom have combined to produce a new intellectual perspective: Christian reconstruction.

Basic to this reversal has been the recovery of confidence by Christians in the reliability of the whole Bible. They have been presented with a growing body of evidence that Darwinism is a hoax. It is time for them to recognize that biblical higher criticism is an even older hoax, though related philosophically to Darwinism.

C. Techniques of Higher Criticism

“Lower criticism” is the technical literary exercise of determining which of the existent ancient manuscripts of the Bible are authoritative and therefore belong in the canon of Scripture. Higher criticism, using similar techniques of analysis, and going mad in the process, argues that nothing in the canon of the Bible is what it appears to be, that the Creator God did not directly or uniquely inspire any of it, and that the scribes who assembled its component parts centuries after the fact were pathetic louts who were unable to follow the logic of any argument, or keep names straight for three consecutive pages, or even imitate the style of the previous lout who first made up some imagin-

15. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), Introduction. (<http://bit.ly/gnsprits>)

16. Richard Kroner, *Kant’s Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956).

17. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (New York: Knopf, 1958).

18. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1946).

19. Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961).

ary story and included it in an earlier manuscript. All of these “discoveries” are reached by means of supposedly precise literary techniques.

These textual critics regard the Bible as a kind of novel, so they apply to the study of the Bible techniques that are used in the literary criticism of fiction. Again, let me cite Wilson’s comments on the absurdity of these techniques when applied to novels, let alone the Bible. He refers to an edition of Hawthorne’s *Marble Faun*, edited by the University of Virginia’s specialist in Elizabethan bibliography, Fredson Bowers. He did not spare Mr. Bowers.

But the fourth volume of the Centenary Edition of the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, which contains only *The Marble Faun*, is the masterpiece of MLA bad bookmaking. I have weighed it, and it weighs nine pounds. It is 9 x 6½ inches, and 2¾ inches thick. . . . *The Marble Faun*, since it is mainly Mr. Bowers’s work, embodies the spirit of Mr. Bowers as no other of these volumes does. Of its 610 pages, the 467 of Hawthorne are weighed down by 89 pages of “Textual Introduction” and 143 pages of “Textual Notes.” There are 44 pages of historical introduction preceding the textual introduction. We are told in these introductions, in accordance with the MLA formula, that, in the course of writing the book, the author, as novelists often do, changed the names of certain of the characters; and that many of the descriptions in it—as has been noted, also a common practice—have been taken from his Italian notebooks. This information is of no interest whatever. Nor is it of any interest to be told that Hawthorne’s wife corrected certain inaccuracies in the Roman descriptions and otherwise made occasional suggestions, which Hawthorne did not always accept. It has evidently been trying for Mr. Bowers to find that, in the original manuscript, the author had been so inconsiderate as usually to make his changes “by wiping out with a finger while the ink was still wet and writing over the same space.” But the places where these smudges occur have been carefully noted and listed. (It seems to me that this whole procedure meets an insurmountable obstacle when no corrected proofs survive that show the revisions of the author.)²⁰

Wilson then asked the obvious question: “Now, what conceivable value have 276 pages of all this? Surely only that of gratifying the very small group of monomaniac bibliographers.” He concluded, “The indiscriminate greed for this literary garbage on the part of universities is a sign of the academic pedantry on which American Lit. has been

20. Wilson, *Fruits of the MLA*, pp. 18–19.

stranded."²¹

All of this is both accurate and amusing. But these same techniques of literary and textual criticism, when applied to biblical texts by monomaniacal German pedants and their epigone Anglo-American imitators, have for over a century undermined people's faith in the integrity of the Bible all over the world.²²

D. Criticizing Textual Criticism

The methods used by higher critics are circular: they use their colleagues' reconstructed literary texts to reconstruct the biblical past, and they use their own newly reconstructed biblical past to further reconstruct the biblical texts. On and on the academic game goes, signifying nothing except the futile purposes to which very dull people's minds can be put.

These literary techniques are highly complex, yet amazingly shoddy. The practitioners agree on very little; they reach no testable conclusions; and their required techniques absorb inordinate quantities of time to master. Liberal Bible scholar Calum Carmichael put it mildly when he warns his readers:

Historical and literary criticism is undeniably useful when working with ancient sources, but not only has it limitations, it sometimes leads nowhere. One manifest restriction in its application to most biblical material is that the historical results hypothesized cannot be corroborated. The speculative character of most such results is easily overlooked because the historical method is so deeply entrenched in scholarly approaches. With a little distance, we can see just how shaky the historical method is. . . . The procedure is a dispiriting one, dull to read, difficult to follow, and largely illusory given the paucity of the results and the conjectured historical realities dotted here and there over a vast span of time. Its most depressing aspect is the no doubt unintentional demeaning of the intelligence of the lawgiver who was responsible for the presentation of the material available to us. E. M. Forster, struck by the cavalier way in which we treat the past, attributed the attitude to the fact that those who lived then are

21. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

22. Krentz freely admits of literary criticism that "The four-source theory of Pentateuchal origins and the two-source theory of the Synoptic interrelationships are its major results. Literary (source) criticism has achieved a more sharply contoured profile of the various sources and books, and the authors who stand behind them. It is indispensable for any responsible interpretation of the Bible." Krentz, *Historical-Critical Method*, p. 50.

all dead and cannot rise up and protest.²³

He was being much too kind. The scholars' "demeaning of the intelligence of the lawgiver who was responsible for the presentation of the material available to us" is all too intentional, for that Lawgiver is God Almighty, who will judge every man on judgment day. Higher critics are determined to deny that such a cosmic Lawgiver exists, and they do their best to make His laws seem like an incoherent collection of disjointed and self-contradictory pronouncements, a judicial jumble compiled by a series of editors who apparently could not keep clear in their minds anything that was written in the text in front of them that was farther back or farther forward than three lines. Somehow, these deceptive ancient masters of language and textual subtleties could not keep any argument straight, or remember the plot line of even a one-page story. Their heavy-handed attempts to revise the ancient texts for their own contemporary purposes were so badly bungled that they succeeded only in so distorting the text that no careful reader could possibly believe that God had revealed the Pentateuch to one man, Moses.

It is not the Pentateuch that is disjointed. It was not the hypothetical "later editors" who could not keep things straight in their minds. Rather, it is the paid professional army of higher critics. I appreciate C. S. Lewis' comments, as a master of medieval and early modern English literature, regarding the ability of textual critics to understand their texts: "These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight."²⁴

E. Apostate Deceivers

The higher critics present the Bible as a poorly assembled patchwork of lies and myths, and then they add insult to injury by arguing that their debunking operation somehow elevates our view of the Bible. For example, the internationally respected (unfortunately) Bible scholar G. Ernest Wright and his co-author argue that in the Bible,

23. Calum M. Carmichael, *Law and Narrative in the Bible: The Evidence of the Deuteronomistic Laws and the Decalogue* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 14.

24. C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), p. 157. The essay is titled, "Modern Thought and Biblical Criticism."

“What is important is what this great Lord has done.”²⁵ But as soon as anyone raises the obvious question, “What exactly has God done?” the authors run for the cover of symbolism and supposed myth, in order to escape the Bible’s detailed account of what God has done:

This furnishes a clue to our understanding of the prehistoric material preserved in Genesis 1–11. These traditions go far back into the dim and unrecoverable history of Israel; they are the popular traditions of a people, traditions which in part go back to a pre-Canaanite and North Mesopotamian background. For this reason there is little question of objective history here. We are instead faced with the question of why the old traditions were written down. What was the purpose of the writers who preserved them for US?²⁶

Notice the shift in their argument. They tell us on the one hand that the Bible is a historical book, unique in the ancient world. The Bible’s view of God rests squarely on what God has done in history. But when the key chapters that describe the creation of the universe and the Fall of man are brought up, as well as the Noachic flood and the tower of Babel, the authors immediately shift their focus away from what the Bible says about God; they shift their concern to what the Hebrews came later to *believe* about God. Their focus shifts from God to man. This is the essence of humanism. The fact is, their focus *began* with man rather than God-autonomous man.

The humanist scholar insists that we cannot deal with God, who is not an objective fact of history that can be studied. We can only deal with *men’s recorded thoughts about God*, which are objective facts of history that can be studied. Van Til has summarized this humanistic impulse: “Men hope to find in a study of the *religious consciousness* something that has never been found before. They hope to find out what religion really is. The claim is made that now for the first time religion is really being studied from the inside.”²⁷ Man’s religious consciousness becomes determinative in history, not the acts of God. Wright and Fuller should have titled their book, *The Book of the Surviving Early Writings of Two Religious Groups, Judaism and Christianity, Regarding the Acts of a God Who Does Not Really Interact With History*. Had they done so, of course, their academic charade would

25. G. Ernest Wright and Reginald H. Fuller, *The Book of the Acts of God: Christian Scholarship Interprets the Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 36.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

27. Cornelius Van Til, *Psychology of Religion*, vol. IV of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971), p. 7.

have been obvious from the beginning.

1. Historical Resurrection and Final Judgment

It is not only the creation of man and his subsequent fall from grace that must be discreetly covered up by the blanket of hypothetically objective history; it is also the resurrection of Christ. Both sin and redemption must be discussed apart from biblical revelation, for if the Bible's account of sin and redemption is taken seriously, then the issue of God's final judgment once again becomes a fundamental problem. This is the problem that autonomous man wishes most of all to avoid. So, the resurrection is relegated to the mythic past, and once again the authors focus on what a small group of people have thought about this non-historical event.

Finally, what shall we say about the resurrection of Christ, as understood in the New Testament? This cannot be an objective fact of history in the same sense as was the crucifixion of Christ. The latter was a fact available to all men as a real happening, and pagan writers like Tacitus and Josephus can speak of it. But in the New Testament itself the Easter faith-event of the resurrection is perceived only by the people of the faith. Christ as risen was not seen by everyone, but only by the few. Easter was thus a reality for those in the inner circle of the disciples and apostles. That is not an arena where a historian can operate. Facts available to all men are the only data with which he can work, the facts available to the consciousness of a few are not objective history in the historian's sense.²⁸

They distinguished the "real happening" of the crucifixion from the "faith-event" of the resurrection, which was an event of a very different character. Only "facts available to all men"—meaning facts that are implicitly possible for all men to have seen—are "real happenings." This means that the resurrection was somehow not a fact that in principle all men might have seen and verified, in the same way that they could have seen and verified the crucifixion. In other words, the resurrection was not a "real happening," although the calculating deivers who wrote *The Book of the Acts of God* were too wise to say this blatantly, for fear of tipping their hand. They argue that the resurrection was therefore not an objective historical event, not "an objective fact of history."²⁹

28. Wright and Fuller, *Acts of God*, p. 25.

29. On the anti-historical concept of the resurrection-event or faith-event in mod-

The Bible tells a very different story. The fact of Christ's resurrection was sufficiently objective that Paul appealed to it as a commonly known fact when he defended himself in King Agrippa's court: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26: 8). He went on to remind skeptical Festus: "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). And when Paul finished, Agrippa said to him: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). But the higher critics are not even remotely persuaded. They see their man-appointed task to confuse Christians about the reliability of the orthodox faith, as well as to confuse non-Christians who might otherwise be persuaded.

2. A New Terminology

So, the critics have invented new terminology, the better to muddle the perceptions of their readers. For example, following the lead of Immanuel Kant's Protestant prophet Karl Barth, they substitute a grotesque hyphenated word like *faith-event* for the decisive and incriminating word, *fact*. "Hence we have to view the resurrection in the New Testament as a faith-event, unlike other events, which is nevertheless real to the Christian community. It testifies to the knowledge that Christ is alive, not dead. The living Christ was known to be the head of the Church; and his power was real. The process, the how of Christ's transition from death to the living head of the new community, and the language used to describe that transition ('raised the third day,' 'Ascension,' 'going up,' 'sitting on the right hand of God')—these are products of the situation. They are the temporal language of the first-century Christians. To us, they are symbols of deep truth and nothing more, though they are symbols that are difficult to translate."³⁰

Of course these are difficult symbols to translate, meaning *difficult to translate into historical categories that are acceptable to liberal humanism*, because "raised the third day" and "going up" meant exactly the same thing to a first-century Christian as they mean today. These hell-bound apostate scholars suffer from the problem Felix suffered when he heard the gospel from Paul, *fear*, for Felix trembled (Acts 24:25). They want to avoid thinking about the Bible's message of salva-

ern neo-orthodox theology, see Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), pp. 92–113.

30. Wright and Fuller, *Acts of God*, p. 25.

tion, for it is also the message of God's inevitable final judgment. The biblical message of salvation is the only alternative to the biblical message of eternal torment.³¹

The higher critics have become the ultimate myth-makers by proclaiming the existence of a set of high ideals that are somehow associated with biblical myths (i. e. , hoaxes). After telling the reader that the early chapters of Genesis are not historical, but simply symbolic, the authors assure us concerning the story of Adam's fall: "But let us not be deceived by the simple story form of presentation. The greatness of this story is its insight into the inner nature of man and the simple manner in which it presents that insight."³² They first present evidence that, if true, any sensible reader—i. e. , any non- Ph. D.-holding higher critic—would recognize clearly as evidence that the Bible is a gigantic hoax, and then they speak as though this "new, improved" understanding of the Bible will lead society to higher ideals and moral righteousness. They are classic examples of C. S. Lewis' description of modern humanist culture: "In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."³³

What the higher critics want us to believe in is the world according to Immanuel Kant, a dialectical realm composed of two utterly separate worlds: the phenomenal world of historical facts—meaningless historical facts apart from man's interpretations of them—and the trans-historical noumenal world of human meaning—utterly timeless, non-cognitive meaning—that is completely distinct from the phenomenal world of measurable cause and effect.³⁴ Autonomous man stands at the intersection of these two dialectical realms, and somehow creates meaning for himself. God is given homage only as the unknown god of the Greeks (Acts 17:23), and even worse, as the inherently *unknowable* god. An unknowable god is the only god who is acceptable to modern autonomous man, for an unknowable god presumably will not bring final judgment to inherently uninformed and uninformable finite mankind. We must never forget: *the primary goal of self-proclaimed auton-*

31. Gary North, Publisher's Epilogue, in David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

32. Wright and Fuller, *Acts of God*, p. 61.

33. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, [1947] 1965), p. 35.

34. Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung*.

omous man is to escape God's final judgment. So, in order to escape this judgment, the higher critics spin a web of pompous verbiage that they hope and pray—well, at least they hope—will protect them from the eternal consequences of their God-defying rebellion.

3. Who Is the Hoaxer?

Our authors ask three rhetorical questions, and then give their hapless readers a bowl of lukewarm mental mush in reply. First, the questions: "Yet there is always the final lurking question: Is the Bible true? What is truth and what is just symbolic? Cannot I have anything that is absolutely certain?" Then the mush: "The answer must be that the symbol is the truth. We have no other truth. We know it is not literal truth, but we know that the biblical portrayal is the relationship between the unknown infinite and ourselves here and now. No precise dividing line can be drawn between the ultimately real and the poetic symbol, because God has not made us infinite."³⁵ In short, they argue that because I am not infinite, and therefore not God, I need not fear an infinite God, for my very finitude keeps me from knowing God. To which Paul answered many centuries ago:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [back] the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:18–20).

The Bible of the higher critics cannot possibly be what it says clearly that it is: the revealed word of the Creator and Judge of the universe. Now, if the Bible really isn't what it says it is, then it must be a hoax. Once the implicit though politely unstated accusation of hoaxing is made, the question then arises: Who is the true hoaxer, God or the higher critic? There should be no doubt in our minds: the literary critic is the myth-maker. Literary higher criticism of the Bible is a hoax. No other word does it justice. It is a fraud, a lie, a denial that God's revealed word is what it says it is.³⁶ Wright and Fuller made a classic

35. Wright and Fuller, *Acts of God*, p. 37.

36. Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1943] 1949). I appreciate the book's subtitle, reminiscent of the nineteenth century: *A Reexamination of the Modern Theory that the Pentateuch Is a Late Compilation*.

Freudian slip when they used the word *forged* for “hammered out” (as in “crucible”), when it is far easier to interpret *forged* as “falsified” (as in “forged signature”): “It is quite legitimate to use the methods of historical and literary criticism which were forged during the liberal period in order to reconstruct the underlying history.”³⁷ Forged indeed! Higher criticism rests on the presupposition that all morality is relative to historical time and place, and that the laws of the Bible, a strictly historical human document, are also relative. It denies the unity and moral integrity of the Bible.

F. Textual Indeterminacy Equals Ethical Indeterminacy

The real motive of higher criticism is ethical. This, too, has been Van Til’s assertion: covenant-breaking man’s problem is not a lack of knowledge about God; rather, it is his *lack of obedience* to God. The higher critics seek to confuse men by blurring the universal ethical requirements of God’s holy word. If they were correct, then there could be no final judgment, for God’s sanctions require God’s permanent stipulations. To deny God’s judgment, His stipulations must be presumed to be incoherent, unclear, and limited to the individual conscience, rather than coherent, clear, and universal in every human conscience.

Karl Barth was a defender of just such a radically individual ethics, an ethics which matched his thesis of a radically dialectical, incoherent, creed-denying, God-man encounter—a noumenal encounter beyond nature and history. He denied as “untenable” the assumption of the universality of God’s ethical commands, for “the command of God . . . is always an individual command for the conduct of this man, at this moment and in this situation. . . .”³⁸ In short, on Barth’s basis there cannot be a God-revealed permanent Christian ethics, nor civil statutes that conform to fixed biblical principles. Statutes and creeds

ation from Diverse and Conflicting Sources by Authors and Editors Whose Identity Is Completely Unknown. See also Allis, *The Old Testament: Its Claims and Its Critics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972); Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, with revisions by Edward J. Young (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1959); Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957).

37. Wright and Fuller, *Acts of God*, p. 237.

38. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. A. T. Mackay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), Vol. 3, Part 4, p. 11; cited by Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1983), p. 25.

are supposedly only the inventions of men, not the appropriate human responses to God's fixed and reliable revelation of Himself in a God-inspired historical document. Barth thereby proclaimed the triumph of Kant's noumenal trans-historical realm of randomness over Kant's phenomenal historical realm of scientifically predictable cause and effect, all in the name of higher ethics and higher critical insights. This was Barth's assertion of the triumph of historical and ethical relativism over the Bible. This was his announcement of the triumph of covenant-breaking man over God, and above all, over the final judgment. Autonomous man seeks to impose his temporal judgments on God by denying the historic validity of God's revelation of Himself. This, of course, was precisely what Adam attempted to do in the garden by eating the forbidden fruit in defiance of God's explicit revelation. The results are equally predictable.

1. Permanent Standards for Eternal Judgment

A righteous God who judges men eternally does so only on the basis of a *unified ethical system*. Only because the ethical standards never change could the punishment never change. If the texts are not ethically unified, then there is no threat to man from the God of the Bible. Thus, the "prime directive" of higher criticism is to affirm the lack of unity in the Bible. This is the "higher" critic's operating presupposition when he begins to study the Bible.

He adopts a five-step process. First, he *assumes* that the books of the Bible are textually jumbled. Second, he tries to *prove* that the books of the Bible are textually jumbled. Third, he *assumes* that through creative myth-making, he himself can produce a meaningful reconstruction of what the ancient authors ("redactors") really wanted to convey to all mankind, despite each one's short-term goals of political or bureaucratic manipulation. Fourth, he tries to present a "*deeper*" message for modern man that transcends the Bible's unfortunately jumbled texts. Finally, the higher critic offers *his version of the Bible's true transcendent ethical unity*. Somehow, this newly discovered transcendent ethical unity always winds up sounding like the last decade's political manifesto for social democracy, or else it sounds like Marxism.

A good statement of this operating presupposition of textual disunity is J. L. Houlden's remark that "There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as 'the X of the New Testament'. . . . It is only at the cost of ignoring the individuality of each, in thought and expression, that the

unified account can emerge. . . . There can be no initial assumption of harmony.”³⁹ So, it is supposedly illegitimate to speak of “the X of the New Testament.” Well, how about a *heavenly Author* of the New Testament? How about solving the equation as “X = God.” Sorry, said Houlden implicitly, we cannot begin with any such assumption. Well, then, how about “the *grammar* of the New Testament”? We will posit “X = grammar.” Houlden was then silent, as befits a man who has implicitly denied the grammatical coherence of New Testament Greek. If he followed the logic of his statement, Greek grammar disappears, and with it, grammar in general. The coherence of the universe of rational discourse disappears, not to mention coherence of the universe itself. Once you play these sorts of verbal games, their self-contradictory nature swallows up your vaunted neutral scholarship.

Contrary to Mr. Houlden, we must begin our Bible studies (and every other kind of study) with the presupposition of the self-contained ontological Trinity and His creation of the universe out of nothing. We must begin with the Creator-creature distinction, as Van Til affirmed throughout his career. We must begin with the assumption of the unity and harmony of God’s expression of Himself in the word of God, the Bible. If we do not begin with this set of presuppositions, we will find ourselves as intellectually impotent as the scholarly higher critics of the Bible, who find it difficult to make sense of anything.

The higher critics are always alert to any hint of defection from the Party’s line concerning ethical relativism. Hans Jochen Boecker criticized the Postscript of another German scholar, H. D. Bracker. Herr Doctor Bracker made an academic gaffe by concluding in 1962 that “Israel’s law by far surpassed the other three [Babylonian, Hittite and Assyrian] in its ethical purity and in its humanity.” Such a conclusion is “highly suspect,” Herr Doctor Boecker assured his readers.⁴⁰ Why is this conclusion “highly suspect”? Because it breaks with the supposed academic neutrality and ethical relativism of modern scholarship, especially modern biblical scholarship.

Young scholars are informed subtly from the outset of their careers as undergraduates that they must always begin with the assumption that all religious faiths are equal (except for fundamentalism,

39. J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1973), p. 2; cited by Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 13.

40. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, [1976] 1980), p. 16.

which preaches an infallible Bible), all political systems are equal (except for Nazi Germany's, of course, mainly because the Nazis lost the war, and South Africa's, which is not based on the politics of black Africa: "one man, one vote, one time only"), and all nations are equal (except for the United States, which occasionally dares to call the Soviet Union into question). What this kind of worldview produces is men without spines who cannot distinguish truth from falsehood, righteousness from perversion, or a cause worth dying for from the latest political slogan. It is only by the common grace of God that they can distinguish AIDS from scarlet fever, except that they probably think that people with scarlet fever should be quarantined.

So, in order to prove all this, higher critics self-consciously spend their myopia-inducing lives searching for internal evidence that denies the unity of that historical document. I agree with Walter Kaiser's observation of the crucial link between higher criticism and men's loss of faith in the unity of the biblical message (including its ethical requirements): "For many it is too much to assume that there is consistency within one book or even a series of books alleged to have been written by the same author, for many contend that various forms of literary criticism have suggested composite documents often traditionally posing under one single author. This argument, more than any other argument in the last two hundred years, has been responsible for cutting the main nerve of the case for the unity and authority of the biblical message."⁴¹

G. Higher Criticism and Evolution

Higher criticism is based on an evolutionary model of human morality and human history. It assumes, and then seeks to prove, that the texts of the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, were self-consciously altered by later scribes and "redactors" in order to make the Bible's message conform to the latest ethical and economic principles of the day. It helped to create the early nineteenth century's intellectual climate of opinion that was so favorable to Darwinism after 1859. Ethical relativism is an idea that has had pernicious consequences. Someday, some enterprising scholar is going to write a monograph tracing at least one of the historic roots of Nazism back to German higher criticism. Nazism has been traced back to just about everything else in German history, but this possibility has been regarded as off-

41. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 26.

limits by secular historians; it comes too close to home, theologically speaking. D. F. Strauss' *Life of Jesus* could easily serve as a starting point in such an investigation. Arthur Cohen has suggested this historical connection, and it deserves a detailed study.⁴² Cohen's warning should be taken seriously: it is dangerous to separate ethics from faith, which is what higher criticism did. "Nineteenth-century theologians had, indeed, succeeded: the ethics of the Hebrew Bible were winnowed by the Gospels and the ethics restored to Christian conscience were ethics for the 'between time,' when history awaited the return of Christ. The purge of Christianity of its Jewish elements was disastrous."⁴³

A representative academic example of the spoiled fruits of higher criticism is presented by the economic historian Morris Silver, who spent an entire volume painstakingly trying to collate and make coherent an immense body of archeological, economic, and higher critical textual evidence in order to prove what higher critics assume, namely, that the Book of Deuteronomy was written many centuries after the exodus. "A central hypothesis of this book is that Deuteronomy represents an attempt to revise and expand the old divine-law code *and thereby the legal practices of the Israelite state* in the light of the circumstances of a much more affluent society."⁴⁴ That his presentation of the evidence is painful to follow, let alone remember, should come as no surprise: he combined a false initial hypothesis with hundreds of disjointed citations from far too disjointed a body of scholarship.

There is another major intellectual goal of higher criticism besides re-dating the giving of God's laws in order to relativize them: re-dating every document in which a specific prophecy later came true. The author of the prophecy must have written it after the prophesied event took place. Thus, the so-called prophecy is regarded as merely a convenient lie on the part of a redactor, i. e. , a myth. Even when this tactic of re-dating is not invoked, higher critics remain skeptical of all future-predicting prophecies. Jeremiah prophesied the death of the false prophet Hananiah, and Hananiah died later that year (Jer. 28:15-17). Silver asked rhetorically: "Does this story represent myth, hypnotic suggestion, coincidence, or political assassination?"⁴⁵ What it could

42. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 199-200.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

44. Morris Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983), p. 230.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

not possibly represent, in his worldview, is a fulfilled prophecy.

If a person derives ethics from history, and then scrambles the historical data by means of an erroneous chronological scheme, both his ethics and his historiography will flounder.⁴⁶ He will write such nonsense as this: "... the indispensable agricultural-fertility aspect of Baalism⁴⁷ had long ago become a traditional part of Yahweh worship, taken for granted even by Amos and Hosea. It is a naïve misconception to suppose that the latter had achieved its final form even at the time of Moses and the Exodus. As Morgenstern⁴⁸ well noted, the Jewish religion is the product of historical evolution to meet the needs of the Jewish people 'from the remote desert period to the present day.' The only 'pure Yahwism' is a dead Yahwism."⁴⁹ The book's bibliography is impressive, but its conclusions are trivial on those occasions when they are correct. Such is the endlessly repeated fate of two centuries of higher critical scholarship and historical studies based on higher criticism: the academic trumpets sound, and a mouse marches out, dragging behind him a mountain of jumbled chronologies and footnotes to obscure, unread, and unreadable journal articles, leaving behind him a trail of droppings for other busy mice to follow.⁵⁰

Higher criticism is today a backwater academic discipline that serves the needs of humanism by keeping linguistically skilled but stylistically handicapped scholars fully employed. It also serves to keep educated Christians confused about the legitimacy of their God-given marching orders. Christian scholars pay a great deal of attention to the latest findings of higher critics, filling their own unread academic journals with vaguely conservative modifications of, and an occasional

46. There are few intellectual tasks more pressing on Christian historians of the ancient Near East and classical Greece and Rome than to rethink the various chronologies prior to about 750 B. C. See Appendix A.

47. Citing Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Near East* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, [1943] 1967), p. 172.

48. Julian Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth, Marriage, Death and Kindred Occasions Among the Semites* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1966), p. 64. If any single individual was most responsible for corrupting American Judaism by means of higher criticism, it was the remarkable, long-lived Julian Morgenstern. For a summary of his life, see Morris Lieberman, "Julian Morgenstern—Scholar, Teacher and Leader," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XXXII (1961), pp. 1–9.

49. Silver, *Prophets and Markets*, p. 124.

50. The best definition of modern theology that I have come across is the one given by David Chilton to his seminary professor, Greg L. Bahnsen, when Prof. Bahnsen asked him why he was not taking his class on the theology of Pannenberg: "Modern theologians are like a pack of dogs who spend most of their time sniffing each other's behinds."

refutation of, some unread essay in a higher critical academic journal. In contrast, secular scholars today pay very little attention to higher criticism's methods or its findings. This speaks far better of secular scholars than for neo-evangelical scholars who have succumbed to the siren song of certified academic respectability, and who have adopted an attitude of "me, too, but not quite so radical, at least not yet."⁵¹

Conclusion

Christians have made the mistake of regarding the debates over higher criticism as being the peculiar habit of linguistic specialists and theologians. The fact is, from the very beginning of the rise of humanism, there has been a war between those who defend the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and those who reject this testimony. This debate throughout most of its history involved all of culture, what we call today a conflict between comprehensive world-and-life views. It is only in the hands of modern scholars that the debate has been narrowly focused on the technical issues of textual analysis. Earlier generations recognized that the debate was far more important than modern scholars are willing to admit.

The task of the Christian scholar in defending the Bible as the word of God must not be narrowly focused. The debate did not originate in the university library; it originated in the social conflicts of the day. The participants understood that the outcome of this academic debate over the textual integrity of the Bible would determine who would gain and retain control of the seats of power. This conflict was a life-and-death matter for English culture in the early modern period, and it was recognized as such by the participants.

This perception of the magnitude of the debate has been lost on modern Bible scholars. Humanists have rewritten history in order to downplay the importance of the Bible in Western thought and culture. Evangelical Christians have generally agreed to this view of Western history, almost by default. Members of the evangelical scholarly world have been trained by the humanists who control access to the major

51. I do not deny that an occasional linguistically gifted scholar such as Robert Dick Wilson, O. T. Allis, or Edward Young should devote a lifetime to refuting the best and most influential of the higher critics' presentations. This is a subdivision of apologetics—the intellectual defense of the faith. But surely there is little need for Christians to subsidize the bulk of what passes for academic Old Testament studies today: narrowly focused essays that prove or disprove theses that no one considers relevant, theses that will almost surely be abandoned in less than five years, in those rare instances that anyone adopts them in the first place.

institutions of higher learning (i.e. , trade union certification). At the same time, laymen in the pews have also accepted the humanists' view of the peripheral nature of the Bible's influence in the early modern history because such a view of the Bible's lack of relevance in history conforms to the mind-set of what has been called the left wing of the Reformation: Anabaptist pietism. This tradition has been at war with Old Testament law from the beginning. Indeed, this movement was one of the forerunners of higher criticism, for it contrasted the Bible with the inner testimony of man's spirit, and elevated the latter over the former.⁵² This legacy of the internalization of the word of God triumphed in the modern church through the influence of twentieth-century fundamentalism: grace over law.⁵³ Once again, we see evidence of the implicit alliance between the power religion and the escape religion.

It is time for Christian scholars of the Old Testament to stop their fruitless shadow-boxing with higher critics who will no more listen to Bible-defending scholars than they have listened to Moses and Christ. It is time for orthodox Bible scholars to go to the Pentateuch to find out what it says, not to discover some new bit of evidence that Moses really and truly did say it. There is no doubt a place in the division of intellectual labor for linguistically skilled Christians to defend the integrity of the Bible against the incoherent slanders of higher critics, but this technical task should be put on a low-priority basis. What we do need is a great deal of research on the chronology of the Pentateuch—not on when Moses wrote the Pentateuch, but on what was going on in the surrounding nations at the time of the exodus. We need a reconstruction of ancient chronology, one based on the presupposition that the Bible gives us the authoritative primary source documents, not Egypt or Babylon. Such a project would keep a lot of linguistically skilled scholars productively busy for several generations.

Meanwhile, let the higher critics drown in their own footnotes, the way that Arius died by falling head-first into a privy.⁵⁴ Let the dead bury the dead, preferably face down in a scholarly journal.

52. Reventlow, *Authority of the Bible*, ch. 3.

53. Reventlow, Frank, *Less Than Conquerors*.

54. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1969] 1998), p. 15. (<http://bit.ly/rjrfs0>)

APPENDIX Q

THE RESTORATION OF BIBLICAL CASUISTRY

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients) because I keep thy precepts (Psalm 119: 99–100).

We need to take David's words seriously. He defines personal progress in history in terms of a better understanding of God's revealed laws. He can measure his progress beyond anything achieved by those who have preceded him, not in terms of better study techniques, or improved means of communication, or greater per capita wealth, but in terms of his mastery of God's precepts.

Modern man regards such an idea of historical progress as preposterous. Sad to say, so does the modern Christian. This is why modern society is headed either for an enormous series of disasters or an enormous and culturally comprehensive revival. God will not be mocked. His covenantal sanctions—blessings and cursings—still operate in history. This book deals with God's covenantal case laws from an economic point of view. This strategy is theologically appropriate in the late twentieth century, for modern man worships at his own shrine in the hope of achieving unbroken compound economic growth per capita.

Authority and Dominion is a work of casuistry: the application of conscience to moral decisions. The conscience needs a reliable guide: biblical law. Casuistry has not been a popular academic endeavor within Bible-believing Protestantism since the late seventeenth century. The only works I can think of that are anything like this series of economic commentaries in scope are Richard Baxter's enormous study, *A Christian Directory*, written in 1664–65 and first published in 1673, and Samuel Willard's equally massive commentary on the Westminster-

ster Shorter Catechism, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726). Richard Baxter's goal was basically the same as mine: "I do especially desire you to observe, that the resolving of *practical Cases of Conscience*, and the reducing of Theological knowledge into *serious Christian Practice*, and promoting a *skilful facility* in the faithful exercise of universal obedience and Holiness of heart and life, is the great work of this Treatise; . . ."¹ Unlike Baxter, I had access to my library when I wrote my book; he did not, having been barred from his pulpit by the State (after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660), and having to write most of it from memory, only subsequently checking the original sources.

A. Ignoring the Case Laws

The major problem I had in writing this book is that there are very few books that even explain the case laws, let alone take them seriously. There are at least three approaches to (or, more accurately, justifications for the rejection of) the case laws.

1. *The Case Laws as Annulled*

This is the standard Christian view. It has been the common viewpoint almost from the beginning of the church. This is why theonomy appears to be a major break with broad church tradition. Basically, the position boils down to this: a compromise with late classical philosophy's natural law theory began in the early centuries of the church. Christian scholars appealed to universal human reason as the source of rational man's universal knowledge of civil law. This law was seen as natural, meaning that it is implicitly in the common possession of all rational men. There was an early recognition on the part of church scholars and leaders that an appeal to Old Testament case laws could not be conformed intellectually to natural law theory. They understood the obvious question: "If these laws were universally binding on all men, then why did God have to reveal the specifics of His law to the Hebrews, and only to them?" This, in fact, is a very good Christian rhetorical answer to those who declare the universality of natural law. The answer is simple: *there is no such thing as a universal system of rational natural law which is accessible to fallen human reason*. But this answer was too radical to suit scholars and apologists in the early

1. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory: Or, A Summ of Practical Theologie, and Cases of Conscience* (London: Robert White for Nevil Simmons, [1673] 1678), unnumbered page, but the second page of Advertisements.

church, just as it has been too radical for Christians ever since. It involves a sharp break with the doctrine of natural law.

The early commentators were sorely tempted to seek a way out of their common-ground apologetic difficulty by interpreting Paul's language regarding the annulment of the law's eternal death sentence against redeemed mankind to mean that the Old Covenant's legal order is in no way judicially binding on New Testament society. They abandoned the concept of God's historical sanctions as applicable in New Testament history. They lumped together Israel's civil case laws with the Old Covenant's laws of ritual cleanliness, and then they dismissed both varieties. This tradition lives on in modern conservative Christian theology.

2. The Case Laws as Antiquarian

Christian Bible commentators pass over these laws on the assumption that they are only of antiquarian interest. Commentators almost never attempt to explain how these laws might have worked in ancient Israel. They never discuss how they might be applied in the New Testament era. Also, the commentators are unfamiliar with even the rudiments of economic theory, so their comments on the economic implications of these verses are almost nonexistent. Their few brief observations are what the reader could readily have figured out for himself. Another major problem is that far too often, the commentators compare the biblical text with fragments of the legal texts of the surrounding Near Eastern cultures. This is not an evil practice in itself, but it is when they make the unproven assumption that Israel must have borrowed its legal code from these pagan cultures. They never discuss the possibility that Israel's law code preceded these pagan extracts, which once again raises the question of the need for the reconstruction of biblical and Near Eastern chronologies.²

3. The Case Laws as Mythical

Liberal humanist Bible scholars are so enamored with biblical "higher criticism" that they pay little attention to the meaning of the biblical texts. They prefer instead to spend their lives inventing multiple authors for each text, re-dating subsections in order to make the Book of Exodus appear to be a composite document written centuries

2. Appendix A.

after the exodus event (which many of them downplay anyway).³ When commentators believe that the oldest laws are remnants of some “primitive nomadism” or else imports from pagan law codes, they have no incentive to think through how these laws should be applied today. When they view most of the case laws as late developments that were inserted retroactively into older biblical texts for political reasons, they have little incentive to understand them as specific historical applications of permanent general principles. Jews and gentiles alike are afflicted with Bible scholarship that relies on the principles of higher criticism.

B. Useless Commentaries

The Dominion Covenant is not a typical Bible commentary. The typical Bible commentary judiciously avoids the really difficult questions, especially in the area of ethics. It also neglects all but the most obvious of the economic principles involved. It is hard to believe how little practical information is provided by the typical modern Bible commentary. It is understandable why people seldom use them after having bought them. Reality does not meet expectations when it comes to Bible commentaries. What is not understandable is that people continue to buy them. They sit unused on most pastors’ book shelves. Maybe their primary use is decorative. I gave up on most Bible commentaries years ago. I use them mainly to keep myself from making major linguistic or textual errors. This is why you will find very few references to Bible commentaries in my footnotes. I long ago stopped wasting my time trying to find economic and judicial information in them. Or, as the economist would say, “the marginal return on each additional invested unit of my time spent in reading them was consistently below the marginal cost.” In short, the information costs were too high per unit of relevant data.

1. Jewish Commentaries

If Christian commentaries are unhelpful, what about commentaries written by Jews? Not much better. I did not find the traditional

3. In recent years, this has been changing to some degree. The arcane intricacies of the many rival textual reconstructions have led to such a cobweb of complexity that scholars prefer to avoid trying to untangle it. Thus, scholars are sorely tempted to do what was once considered a breach of faith: treat the text as a unit when searching for its meaning.

Jewish commentaries useful in writing this commentary, including the Talmud. Until only about a century and a half ago, Jewish scholarship focused almost exclusively on the Talmud, which was completed around A. D. 500, parts of which extended back to several centuries before Christ in the form of oral tradition.⁴ Traditional Jewish commentaries on ethics often deal with highly specific legal cases involving economic disputes between men, or academic disputes among the rabbis, but there is seldom an attempt to spell out the general economic principles guiding any decision of a Jewish court. At best, the rabbis may try to explain why certain forms of restitution are imposed in certain cases, but nothing beyond a kind of common-sense view of economic justice. Thus, Jewish religious scholars until very recently did not bring their great skills of erudition and detailed scholarship to bear on the modern world. "Secular" topics did not interest them, and even today, those Jews who have become illustrious academically in so many fields display little or no interest in the Talmud.

There is a very important reason why the writings of Jewish legal scholars and judges prove to be of little assistance: Jewish courts after the Bar Kokhba revolt of 135 A. D. were not allowed to impose specifically biblical sanctions. Very few gentiles are aware of this, and I suspect that few Jews are, either. When the Romans captured Jerusalem and burned the Temple in A. D. 70, the ancient official Sanhedrin court came to an end. The rabbis, under the leadership of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, then took over many of the judicial functions of the Sanhedrin.⁵ They established as a principle that every Jewish court must have at least one judge who had been ordained by the laying on of hands (*semikah*), and who could in principle trace his ordination back to Moses. This laying on of hands could take place only in the Holy Land. Legal scholar George Horowitz comments: "A court not thus qualified had no jurisdiction to impose the punishments prescribed in the Torah."⁶ After the Bar Kokhba revolt, the Jews were scattered across the Roman Empire in the diaspora. "The Rabbis were compelled, therefore, in order to preserve the Torah and to maintain law and order, to enlarge the authority of Rabbinical tribunals. This they accomplished by emphasizing the distinction between Biblical penalties and Rabbinical penalties. Rabbinical courts after the second

4. See Appendix L: "Maimonides' Code: Is It Biblical?"

5. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co. , 1963), pp. 92–93.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

century had no authority to impose Biblical punishments since they lacked *semikah*; but as regards penalties created by Rabbinical legislation, the Rabbis had of necessity, accordingly, a whole series of sanctions and penalties: excommunications, fines, physical punishment, use of the 'secular arm' in imitation of the Church, etc."⁷ Thus, by the time of the Mishnah, which was Rabbi Judah the Prince's authoritative late-second-century compilation of rabbinical laws, Jewish courts had already abandoned Old Testament sanctions. Thus tied intellectually and ethically to the Mishnah, to the massive Talmud (completed around A. D. 500), and to the literature produced in terms of this ancient tradition, Jewish commentators have never attempted to produce anything like the kind of Bible commentary that *The Dominion Covenant* represents. I am aware of no Jewish compilation of Old Testament case laws that is organized in terms of the Ten Commandments or any other biblical organizational principle (e.g., the covenant model) which is comparable to R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*, and no apologetic comparable to Greg L. Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. Furthermore, despite the intellectual dominance of economists who are Jews,⁸ there is as yet no body of scholarship known as Jewish economics.⁹ This is in sharp contrast to the Islamic academic community, which has produced a growing body of self-consciously Islamic economic literature, especially since 1975.¹⁰ With the

7. *Idem*.

8. Murray Rothbard, an agnostic Jew and a defender of free market economics, once made the observation that "The fate of Western Civilization will be determined by whether our Jews beat their Jews." He presumably had in mind Ludwig von Mises, F. A. Hayek, and Milton Friedman (in his anti-regulatory writings) vs. Karl Marx, Paul Samuelson, Lawrence Klein, etc.

9. The two titles that might be offered as examples of such scholarship are quite recent: Aaron Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Yeshiva University Press, 1980); Meir Tamari, "With All Your Possessions": *Jewish Ethics and Economic Life* (New York: Free Press, 1987). Neither study is particularly theoretical or detailed in its practical applications. They are more like introductory surveys of a handful of themes in the Talmud that are related to economics.

10. See Muhammed Nejatullah Siddiqi, *Muslim Economic Thinking: A Survey of Contemporary Literature* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1981); Muhammed Akram Khan, *Islamic Economics: Annotated Sources in English and Urdu* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1983). A cursory list of English-language examples of this literature includes the following: Ibnul Hasan (ed.), *In Search of an Islamic Economic Model* (London: New Century Publishers, 1983); Afzal-Ur-ahman, *Economic Doctrines of Islam*, 4 vols. (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications Limited, 1974–82); Muazzam Ali (ed.), *Islamic Banks and Strategies of Economic Cooperation* (London: New Century Publications, 1982); Mohammed Muslehuddin, *Insurance and Islamic Law* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1969); Muslehuddin, *Economics and Is-*

exception only of Professor Israel Kirzner, I can think of no contemporary academically recognized Jewish' economist¹¹ who might agree with Rabbi Chajes' mid-nineteenth-century pronouncement: "Allegiance to the authority of the said [oral] rabbinic tradition is binding upon all sons of Israel, since these explanations and interpretations have come down to us by word of mouth from generation to generation, right from the time of Moses. They have been transmitted to us precise, correct, and unadulterated, and he who does not give his adherence to the unwritten law and the rabbinic tradition has no right to share the heritage of Israel; he belongs to the Sadducees or the Karaites who severed connection to us long ago."¹²

2. Orthodox Judaism

During the last century in the West, Orthodox Judaism has almost disappeared from sight, so widespread has been the defection of millions of Jews who have been assimilated into modern society; by Chajes' definition, there are today few Jews remaining in the world, except in the State of Israel. Even the term "Orthodox Judaism" indicates the nature of the problem; it was originally a term of derision used by liberal Jews in the nineteenth century against their traditionalist opponents. Grunfeld wrote: "The word 'Orthodoxy', on the other hand,

lam (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1974); Alhaj A. D. Ajijola, *The Islamic Concept of Social Justice* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1977); Muhammed Nejatullah Siddiqi, *Banking Without Interest* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1983); Siddiqi, *Issues in Islamic Banking: Selected Papers* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1983); Siddiqi, *Partnership and Profit-Sharing in Islamic Law* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1985); M. Dmer Chapra, *Towards a Just Monetary System* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1985); Waqar Masood Khan, *Towards an Interest-Free Islamic Economic System* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1985); Raquibuz M. Zaman, *Elimination of Interest from the Banking System in Pakistan* (Karachi: State Bank of Pakistan, 1985). I do not believe that Shaikh Mahmud Ahmad's book, *Economics of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ashraf Press, 1947), is representative of recent Islamic economic thought in general; the book is a socialist polemic in the name of Islam.

11. Kirzner was not a prominent academic figure, but he was the only "Austrian School" economist who has a reputation among academic economists. Kirzner's dual mastery of the Talmud and the works of Ludwig von Mises is not visible in his writings; the two fields are kept by Kirzner in hermetically sealed separate academic compartments. Few professional economists are aware that he is known as a rabbi in Orthodox Jewish circles. See Aaron Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law*, p. xi.

12. Z. H. Chajes, *The Student's Guide Through the Talmud* (London: East and West Library, 1952), p. 4. The Karaites were a sect of Judaism established in 767 A. D. By Jews in Babylon. They did not accept the Talmud or the idea of an oral tradition stretching back to Moses.

which was applied by the Reformers to what they called 'Old-Timers' or 'Old-Believers' (AltgHiubige), was taken from the sphere of Christian theology and does not fit Judaism at all, in which the main stress is laid on action or law and not on 'faith', as the Greek term orthodox would express. Nevertheless, once the word 'Orthodoxy' had been thrown at Hirsch and his followers in a derogatory sense, he accepted the challenge with the intention of turning that word into a name of honour."¹³ Notice his assertion regarding Judaism that "the main stress is laid on action or law and not on 'faith.' " This is indeed the main stress of orthodox Judaism, which nevertheless has an underlying theology: *salvation by law*. Wrote Robert Goldenberg: "Classical Judaism, drawing indirectly on its biblical antecedents, tends to emphasize act over intention, behavior over thought. Righteousness is chiefly a matter of proper behavior, not correct belief or appropriate intention."¹⁴ In contrast, Christianity stresses salvation by faith in Christ. But this faith means faith in Christ's *representative perfect obedience to God's perfect law*; Christian orthodoxy should never lead to a denial of the validity and moral authority of that perfect law which Christ obeyed perfectly.

C. Revolution and Law

I am convinced that both the West and the Far East are about to experience a major transformation. The pace of social change is already rapid and will get faster. The technological possibility of a successful biological warfare attack on the Western societies grows daily. So does the threat of a banking crisis. Threats to civilization may prove in retrospect to be devastating, but they are certainly perceived today as threats. Added to these grim possibilities is the much more predictable threat of an international economic collapse as a result of the vast build-up of international debt; this in turn could produce domestic political transformations. Also possible is the spread of terrorism and Marxist revolution. Drug addiction is spreading like a plague. Changes in the weather as a result of the use of fossil fuels (the "greenhouse effect") are in the newspapers because of international drought. Agri-

13. I. Grunfeld, "Samson Raphael Hirsch—The Man and His Mission," in *Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays from the Writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (London: Soncino Press, 1956), p. xlvii.

14. Robert Goldenberg, "Law and Spirit in Talmudic Religion," in Arthur Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 232.

cultural output may be endangered, long term, by weather changes and also by soil erosion. We are not sure. What Christians should be certain of is this: *God has been plowing up the ethically erosion-prone world since World War I, and this process is accelerating.*

This has created a unique opportunity for Christian revival, but this time revival could lead to a broad-based cultural transformation. In short, revival could produce an international revolution: family by family, church by church, nation by nation. For a true social revolution to take place, there must be a transformation of the legal order. This transformation takes several generations, but without it, there has been no revolution, only a *coup d'état*.¹⁵ There is today an international crisis in the Western legal tradition.¹⁶ This, far more than the build-up of nuclear weapons or the appearance of AIDS, testifies to the likelihood of a comprehensive, international revolution—not necessarily violent, but a revolution nonetheless. The Holy Spirit could produce such a revolution without firing a shot or launching a missile. This is my prayer. It should be every Christian's prayer.

Harold Berman's point is correct: without a transformation of the legal system, there is no revolution. This is why I am devoting so much space to explaining the case laws of Exodus. It is these laws, and their amplification in the Book of Deuteronomy, that must serve as the foundation of any systematically, self-consciously Christian revolution. Natural law is a dead mule; it was always a sterile hybrid, and Darwinism has long-since killed the last known living specimens.¹⁷ (Anti-theistic conservative philosophers and a handful of traditional Roman Catholic and Protestant college instructors and magazine columnists still visibly cling to one or another of these taxidermic specimens, each proclaiming that his specimen is still alive.) Thus, there is nowhere for Christians to turn for guidance in developing a believable social theory and workable social programs except to the case laws of the Old Testament. Once the myth of neutrality is abandoned—really abandoned,

15. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 20.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–41.

17. R. J. Rushdoony wrote: "Darwinism destroyed this faith in nature. The process of nature was now portrayed, not as a perfect working of law, but as a blind, unconscious energy working profligately to express itself. In the struggle for survival, the fittest survive by virtue of their own adaptations, not because of natural law. Nature produces many 'mistakes' which fail to survive and become extinct species and fossils. The destiny of the universe is extinction as its energy runs down." Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1969] 2000), p. 7.

not just verbally admitted to be a myth—then the inevitable question arises: By what standard? Christians who have abandoned faith in the myth of neutrality have only one possible answer: “By *this* standard: biblical law.”¹⁸

D. The Conflict Between Two Kingdoms

What I am attempting to do with my life is to publish Christian worldview materials that will lead to the steady replacement of the humanist intellectual foundations of modern civilization. The arena of conflict is nothing less than world civilization. The issue is the kingdom of God, both in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). There are many books that deal with the kingdom of God, but my view of the kingdom of God as it is visibly manifested in history is simple: it is God’s authorized and morally required *civilization*. It is simultaneously internal (world-and-life view), ethical (a moral law-order), and institutional (covenantal judicial relationships). Raymond Zorn begins his book on the Kingdom of God with these words: “In the broadest sense God’s Kingdom refers to the most extended reaches of His sovereignty. As Psalm 103:19 puts it, ‘The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.’”¹⁹ The kingdom of God is all-encompassing, in the same sense that a civilization is all-encompassing.²⁰ I agree in principle with the Jewish scholar, I. Grunfeld,

18. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

19. Raymond O. Zorn, *Church and Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), p. 1. Zorn, an amillennialist, stresses the kingdom as the reign of God rather than the sphere or domain of His rule (p. 1). Greg Bahnsen’s response to this sort of argument is correct: it is ridiculous to speak of the reign of a king whose kingdom has few if any historical manifestations that are as comprehensive in scope as his self-proclaimed sovereignty. Such a limited definition of God’s kingdom and kingship is in fact a denial of God’s kingdom. Bahnsen, “The World and the Kingdom of God” (1981), reprinted as Appendix D in Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gdmplreduction>)

20. The reader should not misinterpret what I am saying. I am not saying that the kingdom of God is the primary theme in the Bible, or in the message of Jesus. His primary theme is the same as the whole Bible’s primary theme: *the glory of God*. I agree with Geerhardus Vos’ statement: “While thus recognizing that the kingdom of God has an importance in our Lord’s teaching second to that of no other subject, we should not go to the extreme into which some writers have fallen, of finding in it the only theme on which Jesus actually taught, which would imply that all other topics dealt with in his discourses were to his mind but so many corollaries or subdivisions of this one great truth. . . . Salvation with all it contains flows from the nature and subserves the glory of God. . . .” Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom*

when he wrote that “true religion and true civilisation are identical. It is the view of the Torah as the civilisation of the state of God—where Torah is coextensive with life in all its manifestations, personal, economic, political, national.”²¹

Nothing less than this *comprehensive replacement* of humanism and occultism with Christianity will suffice to please God. We are called to work for the progressive replacement of humanist civilization by Christian civilization, a replacement that was definitively achieved with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and manifested by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We are to *replace* Satan’s humanistic kingdoms. “Kingdom” is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of kingdom vs. no kingdom; it is always a question of *whose* kingdom. Rushdoony was correct in his evaluation of mankind’s inevitable quest for utopia, the final order, which only God can inaugurate and bring to pass: “The church accordingly has never been alone in history but has rather faced a multiplicity of either anti-Christian or pseudo-Christian churches fiercely resentful of any challenge to their claim to represent the way, truth and life of that final order. The modern state, no less than the ancient empire, claims to be the vehicle and corporate body of that true estate of man. As the incarnation of that final order, it views family, church, school and every aspect of society as members and phases of its corporate life and subject to its general government. It is in terms of this faith, therefore, that the state claims prior or ultimate jurisdiction over every sphere, and steadily encroaches on their activity.”²²

and the Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 11. I am saying only that the kingdom of God is inherently all-encompassing culturally. In fact, I am convinced that the best biblical definition of “kingdom” is civilization. The kingdom of God is the civilization of God—internal, external, heavenly, earthly, historical, and eternal.

21. I. Grunfeld, “Samson Raphael Hirsch—the Man and His Mission,” *Judaism Eternal*, I, p. xiv. Obviously, I do not agree with Grunfeld’s next sentence: “This concept is applicable, of course, only when there is a Jewish State, or at least an autonomous Jewish Society, which can be entirely ruled by the Torah.” This statement provides evidence of the accuracy of Vos’ analysis of Jewish teaching concerning the Kingdom of heaven: “The emphasis was placed largely on what the expected state would bring for Israel in a national and temporal sense. Hence it was preferably thought of as the kingdom of Israel over the other nations.” Vos, *Kingdom and the Church*, p. 19.

22. R. J. Rushdoony, Foreword, in Zorn, *Church and Kingdom*, pp. xix–xx.

1. Comprehensive Revival

Christian Reconstructionists are self-consciously attempting to lay new intellectual foundations for a comprehensive moral and therefore intellectual, social, political, and economic transformation of the world. Not until at least the preliminary steps in this theological and intellectual transformation are accomplished can we expect God to send worldwide revival. If the coming revival is not comprehensive in its effects, it will no more change the world permanently than earlier revivals have changed it permanently. The regeneration of people's souls is only the first step on the road to comprehensive redemption. Christian philosopher Cornelius Van Til, who died in 1987, issued a warning: "The temptation is very great for the believers in these times when the Church is in apostasy, and its conquest of the world for Christ seems to be losing out, that they shall spend a great deal of their time in passive waiting instead of in active service. Another danger that lurks at a time of apostasy is that the few faithful ones give up the comprehensive ideal of the kingdom and limit themselves to the saving of individual souls."²³ We need a *comprehensive revival* that will produce *comprehensive redemption*.²⁴

We must understand from the beginning that the message of the kingdom of God rests on a concept of *salvation which is supernaturally imparted*, not politically imparted. The kingdom of God is categorically not a narrow political program of social transformation; it is rather a supernaturally imposed salvational program that inevitably produces world-changing political, social, legal, and economic effects. The amillennial theologian Geerhardus Vos was correct: "The kingdom represents the specifically *evangelical* element in our Lord's teaching. . . . Jesus' doctrine of the kingdom as both inward and outward, coming first in the heart of man and afterwards in the external world, upholds *the primacy of the spiritual and ethical* over the physical. The invisible world of the inner religious life, the righteousness of the disposition, the sonship of God are in it made supreme, the essence of the kingdom, the ultimate realities to which everything else is subordinate. The inherently ethical character of the kingdom finds

23. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), p. 122.

24. Gary North, "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action," in North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

subjective expression in the demand for repentance.”²⁵

The primary need today, as always, is the need for widespread personal repentance before God. We therefore need a Holy Spirit-initiated Christian revival to extend the kingdom of God across the face of the earth. If we do not get this revival soon, my work and the work of those who are involved in the Biblical Blueprints project will remain curiosities, and then become antiquarian curiosities, until the revival comes.

2. Blueprints and Responsibility

Without a bottom-up religious transformation of civilization, the policies that we Christian Reconstructionists recommend will at best have only a peripheral influence on society. The reader should understand, however, that we expect the revival and this bottom-up transformation, if not in our own lifetimes, then eventually. The Bible’s blueprints for society will eventually be universally adopted across the face of the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9).²⁶ Christian Reconstructionists regard this as historically inevitable. This confidence is what makes the theonomic postmillennial worldview so hard-nosed and uncompromising. We annoy almost every Christian who has doubts about the earthly triumph of God’s kingdom, which means that we initially alienate just about everyone who reads our materials. Our antinomian Christian critics call us arrogant. Bear in mind that the word “arrogant” usually means “a confident assertion of something I don’t approve of.”

Christians who doubt the future earthly triumph of God’s kingdom tend to be less confident and less sure about the practical reliability of the Bible’s blueprints. Sometimes they even deny that the Bible offers such blueprints. If it does offer such blueprints, then evangelical Christians have major responsibilities outside the sanctuary and the family. This prospect of worldwide, culture-wide responsibility frightens millions of Christians. They have even adopted eschatologies that assure them that God does not hold them responsible for anything so comprehensive as the transformation of today’s sin-filled world. They do not believe that God offers to His church the tools, skills, and time necessary for such a generations-long project of social transformation.

25. Vos, *Kingdom and the Church*, pp. 102–3.

26. J. A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions, 1640–1810* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1970).

Therefore, they adopt the philosophy that says that Christians should not even try to reform society, for such efforts are futile, wasteful, and shift precious resources from the only legitimate tasks of the church: preaching individual salvation to the lost, and sustaining the converted spiritually in a time of inevitable cultural decline. They equate social reform programs with polishing brass on a sinking ship. As dispensationalist newsletter writer Peter Lalonde remarked concerning Christians who possess such a vision of God's world-transforming kingdom in history, "It's a question, 'Do you polish brass on a sinking ship?' And if they're working on setting up new institutions, instead of going out and winning the lost for Christ, then they're wasting the most valuable time on the planet earth right now, and that is the serious problem."²⁷

E. Doubt vs. Dominion

Christians, paralyzed by their own versions of eschatological pessimism, have not taken advantage of the growing self-doubt that is progressively paralyzing their humanistic opponents. Christians should recognize the extent of the despair that has engulfed those who have rejected the idea that the Bible is the infallible word of God. An example of such despair is the following:

We live in a time in which old perspectives informing our understanding of the world have been seriously shaken by events of modern times. In many cases these old perspectives have collapsed; they no longer hold as our centers Against the backdrop of such events, an erosion of traditional values has taken place—an erosion which has left us feeling that we [are] adrift in a sea of relativity in which anything, including such evils as the holocaust or nuclear war might be rationalized as "necessary." It is with this experience that we know that the cultural foundations have been shaken. We know that we are no longer guided by a vision of coherence and relatedness concerning our individual existence. We know that we are no longer bound together by a set of values infused with a common sense of destiny. Our sense of destiny, if any, is dominated by an uneasiness and sense of foreboding about the future. The future itself is now feared by many as the ultimate danger to the fragile hold we have on whatever security we have achieved in the present. All of this has left some to question the meaning of their endeavors, while it has left many with a sense of isolation and loneliness. The irony is that this

27. Tape One, *Dominion: A Dangerous New Theology*, in *Dominion: The Word and the New World Order*, a 3-tape set distributed by the Omega-Latter, Ontario, Canada, 1987.

new sense of insecurity has come at a time when the material well-being of those in the advanced industrial nations has reached a height hitherto undreamed of.²⁸

This is precisely what the Book of Deuteronomy predicts for a society that has covenanted with God, has been blessed with external wealth, and then has forgotten God in its humanistic confidence (Deut. 8:17): "... the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life" (Deut. 28:65b–66). This sort of widespread pessimism leads either to cultural collapse or relentless bureaucratization, or else to revival. The first is taking place visibly,²⁹ the second is a growing possibility, and the third, revival, is also becoming more likely. Sociologist Robert Nisbet asked this question: "[W]hat is the future of the idea of progress? Any logical answer must be that the idea has no future whatever if we assume the indefinite, prolonged continuation of the kind of culture that has become almost universal in the West in the late twentieth century. If the roots are dying, as they would appear to be at the present time, how can there be shrub and foliage?"³⁰ But, he then asked, "is this contemporary Western culture likely to continue for long? The answer, it seems to me, must be in the negative—if we take any stock in the lessons of the human past." He makes no absolute prophecies—much of his academic career has been devoted to reminding us that such comprehensive cultural prophecies are always overturned by the facts of the future³¹—but he was correct when he says that "never in history have periods of culture such as our own lasted for very long." He saw "signs of the beginning of a religious renewal in Western civilization, notably in America."³²

1. *Guilt and Social Paralysis*

This should not be a time for pessimism among Christians. Yet it is. They are missing an opportunity that has not been seen since the

28. Howard J. Vogel, "A Survey and Commentary on the New Literature in Law and Religion," *Journal of Law and Religion*, I (1983), p. 151.

29. Patrick J. Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower* (New York: Duane/St. Martins, 2011).

30. Robert A. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 355–56.

31. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 And All That," *Commentary* (June 1968).

32. Nisbet, *History*, p. 356.

late eighteenth century, and possibly since the resurrection of Christ. A universal world civilization now exists for the first time since the Tower of Babel. It is disintegrating morally as it grows wealthy. It is ripe for the harvest.

A successful harvesting operation requires tools. To take advantage of this unique historical opportunity, Christians need tools of dominion—blueprints for the reconstruction of the world. But Christians today do not see that God has given them the tools of dominion, His revealed law. They agree with the humanists who in turn agree among themselves, above all, that the Bible offers society no specific legal standards for comprehensive reform and reconstruction. They agree with such statements as the one made by the editor of *The Journal of Law and Religion*, who was also a professor of Constitutional law at a Catholic law school:

First, I assume that the Bible is not a detailed historical blueprint for American society, and that it does not contain much concrete guidance for the resolution of specific political conflicts or constitutional difficulties such as slavery and racism, sexism and equal opportunity to participate in society. The biblical traditions are not to be viewed as an arsenal of prooftexts for contemporary disputes. Contextual leaps from the situations in which the biblical authors wrote to the situations with which we find ourselves faced are likewise to be avoided.³³

Notice that he raised the controversial issue of slavery. So did a professor of Hebrew scriptures at Notre Dame University in Indiana: "Then there is the larger hermeneutical issue of the Christian appropriation of Old Testament law and the binding nature of biblical norms and stipulations in general. Who today, for example, would be prepared to argue that laws concerning the conduct of war or slavery retain their binding authority for the Christian or for anyone else?"³⁴ Who would? I would, and so would those who call themselves Christian Reconstructionists. This is why Christian Reconstruction represents a radical challenge to modern antinomian Christianity and modern humanism.

The enemies of God continue to bring up the issue of slavery in their war against Christianity. They seek to make Christians feel guilty

33. Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr., "Of Covenants Ancient and New: The Influence of Secular Law on Biblical Religion," *Journal of Law and Religion*, II (1984), pp. 117–18.

34. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Biblical Law and Hermeneutics: A Reply to Professor Gaffney," *ibid.*, IV (1986), p. 98.

regarding Christianity's theological and historical legacy. Christianity unquestionably condoned and even sanctioned chattel slavery until the nineteenth century. The enemies of Christianity then trace this judicial sanctioning of chattel slavery back to the Old Testament. In this way, they seek to create a sense of guilt and doubt in their targeted victims. They understand that guilt-ridden people are not effective opponents of the prevailing messianic social order. Rushdoony was correct when he wrote that "The reality of man apart from Christ is guilt and masochism. And guilt and masochism involve an unbreakable inner slavery which governs the total life of the non-christian. The politics of the anti-Christian will thus inescapably be *the politics of guilt*. In the politics of guilt, man is perpetually drained in his social energy and cultural activity by his overriding sense of guilt and his masochistic activity. He will progressively demand of the state a redemptive role. What he cannot do personally, i. e. , to save himself, he demands that the state do for him, so that the state, as man enlarged, becomes the human savior of man."³⁵

That the Christians failed for many centuries to challenge chattel slavery is a black mark in the history of the church. But to lay the blame at the doorstep of the Bible is either a mistake or an ideological strategy, as argued in Part 3. If this book persuades Christians that this doubt-inducing accusation against the Bible regarding its supposed support of chattel slavery is false, then it will have achieved a major success.

F. Pietism vs. God's Law

What we find in our day is that Christians despise biblical law almost as much as secular humanists do. These Christians have begun to adopt arguments similar to those used by the English Deists. For example, they attack the very thought of stoning drunken, gluttonous sons—not young children, but adult sons who are living at home with their parents, debauching themselves—as some sort of "crime against humanity," when stoning them is specifically a civil sanction authorized by God (Deut. 21:18).³⁶ The very idea of execution by public stoning embarrasses Christians, despite the fact that public stoning is by far the most covenantally valid form of execution, for God's law re-

35. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1970] 1978), p. 9.

36. Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, "Apocalypse Now?", *Policy Review* (Fall 1986), p. 20.

quires the witnesses to cast the first stones, and it also requires representatives of the entire covenantal community to participate directly, rather than hiding the act in a sanitary room in some distant prison. The Bible is clear: "The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you" (Deut. 17:7).

1. Stoning

Stoning was a communal activity, an aspect of the civil covenant sanctions. It took place outside the town (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35–36; I Ki. 21:13). "If sentence was passed with the help of eye-witnesses, the witnesses had to begin the execution (Deut. 17:7). This was to discourage frivolous testimony in court."³⁷ Boecker argued that it was a form of excommunication, and that those stoned were not entitled to burial in the family plot, but he cites no Scriptural evidence. "For the ancients, the criminal was possessed of a real guilt which jeopardised the community. By covering the evil-doer with stones outside the town, the evil that he could spread was banished."³⁸ This argument is ridiculous, a liberal's self-conscious attempt to reinterpret the Bible's covenantal concepts as magical. The execution of the evil-doer was sufficient to stop the spread of his evil. The pile of stones was intended rather to serve as a covenantal reminder. Each pile of stones testified to the reality of covenant sanctions, a monument to God's judgment of cursing in history, just as the stones from the River Jordan were made into a memorial of God's judgment of the deliverance of Israel (Josh. 4:7–8).

Public stoning forces citizens to face the reality of the ultimate civil sanction, execution, which in turn points to God's ultimate sanction at judgment day. Stoning also faithfully images the promised judgment against Satan: the crushing of his head by the promised Seed (Gen. 3:15). Because most people, including Christians, do not want to think about God's final judgment, they prefer to assign to distant unknown executioners the grim task of carrying out God's judgment in private. This privatization of execution is immoral; it is itself criminal. It is unjust to the convicted criminal,³⁹ and it is unjust to the surviving vic-

37. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, [1976] 1980), p. 40.

38. *Idem*.

39. Public stoning would allow a condemned man to confront the witnesses and his executioners. The idea of a private execution where the condemned person cannot

tims, who do not see God's justice done in public. The *systematic impersonalism of capital punishment* is the problem, not capital punishment as such. This deliberate impersonalism has corrupted the entire penal system today.⁴⁰

The growth of impersonalism has been a problem for the West from the beginning. Even in the days of public executions, several centuries ago, the axeman wore a face mask. The Bible does not allow the establishment of a professional, taxpayer-financed guild of faceless executioners who, over time, inevitably either grow callous and impersonal toward their awful (full of awe) task, or else grow sadistic. Instead, the Bible imposes personal responsibility on members of society at large for enforcing this ultimate sanction. But people in the Christian West have always refused to accept this God-imposed personal responsibility. They prefer to make a lone executioner psychologically responsible for carrying out the sentence rather than participate in this covenantal responsibility, as God requires. This refusal to accept personal responsibility by citizens has led to a crisis in Western jurisprudence in the twentieth century. Decade by decade, the more consistent haters of God's law have become politically dominant. They have used the same kinds of arguments against capital punishment in general that embarrassed Christians had accepted in their rejection of public stoning. Step by step, society eliminates capital punishment. Men's hatred of God's law is steadily manifested covenantally in modern civil law.

have a final word to those who have condemned him is anything but liberal-minded. It was long considered a basic legal privilege in the West for a condemned person to have this final opportunity to speak his mind. The sign of the intolerance of the "liberal" French Revolutionaries was their unwillingness to allow King Louis XVI to speak to the crowd at his execution. The judges had ordered drummers to begin drumming the moment he began to speak, which they did. Leo Gershey, *The French Revolution and Napoleon* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1933), p. 238.

40. Whereas men used to be flogged in public or put in the stocks for a few days, we now put them in hidden jails that are filled with a professional criminal class (as well as with AIDS-carrying homosexual rapists). This impersonalism of punishment has been paralleled by a steady bureaucratization and institutionalization of the penal system. The guards in prisons tend to become as impersonal and callous as their prisoners. Bukovsky wrote of Soviet prisons: "There's no real difference between the criminals and their guards. Except for the uniforms. The slang is the same, the manners, concepts, psychology. It's all the same criminal world, all joined by an unbreakable chain." Vladimir Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle—My Life as a Dissenter* (New York: Viking, 1978), p. 334.

2. Economic Restitution

A considerable percentage of this book is devoted to a defense of the biblical concept of penal restitution. *Convicted criminals are supposed to make restitution payments to their victims.* This “revolutionary” idea is at last being taken seriously by a few judges in the United States.⁴¹ But behind the ability of today’s civil courts to impose the sanction of restitution lies a greater threat to the criminal: *imprisonment*. This is the “dirty little secret” of those atheists, pietists, and antinomians who ridicule the biblical system of slavery: they have accepted the horror of unproductive imprisonment in place of the biblical institution of penal labor servitude, out of which an industrious slave could purchase his freedom. If the criminal in ancient Israel was financially unable to pay his victim, his sale to a slave-buyer was what provided the victim with his lawful restitution payment. The prison system has always been the Bible-hater’s preferred substitute for the Old Testament’s system of law-restricted labor servitude. In short, in order to enforce the Bible’s principle of economic restitution to victims by criminals, there always has to be a more fearful support sanction in reserve: death, imprisonment, whipping, banishment, or indentured servitude. But only one of these reserve sanctions raises money for the victims: indentured servitude. The critics of biblical law just never seem to remember to mention this fact.

G. The Fear of God’s Law

This hatred of God’s law has affected millions of Christians who sing the old hymn, “O How Love I Thy Law.” Even when they do not actively hate it (and most do), they are simply afraid of God’s law. They have not studied it, and they have been beaten into intellectual submission by humanists, Christian antinomians, and those who fear personal and cultural responsibility. A discouraging example of this is Dr. James Dobson, whose books, films, and daily radio broadcasts on Christian family issues have inspired millions of Americans, and who by 1988 had become the Protestant evangelical leader in the United States with the largest and most dedicated following.⁴² He led the fight

41. For example, Lois G. Forer, *Criminals and Victims: A Trial Judge Reflects on Crime and Punishment* (New York: Norton, 1980).

42. Pat Robertson, by resigning from the ministry and also from his “700 Club” television show in his quest for the Presidency in early 1988, inescapably exchanged his office of religious commentator for that of political activist. After his defeat in the Republican Party primaries, he returned to television, and he still had a large follow-

against abortion and pornography, and the fight for home schooling and the re-establishment of godly disciplining of children in the home. Yet in a pamphlet against abortion, he rejected as inapplicable the single most important passage in the Bible that deals with abortion, one which makes abortion a capital crime, Exodus 21:22–25. In response to a preposterous misinterpretation of this passage by a state-licensed, profit-seeking “Christian” murderer (a pro-abortion gynecologist), Dr. Dobson did not refute the misinterpretation, but instead dismissed the Old Testament case laws as inappropriate guides for contemporary Christian righteousness. He asked his critic rhetorically:

Do you agree that if a man beats his slave to death, he is to be considered guilty only if the individual dies instantly? If the slave lives a few days, the owner is considered not guilty (Exodus 21:20–21)[?] Do you believe that we should stone to death rebellious children (Deuteronomy 21:18–21)? Do you really believe we can draw subtle meaning about complex issues from Mosaic law, when even the obvious interpretation makes no sense to us today? We can hardly select what we will and will not apply now. If we accept the verses you cited, we are obligated to deal with every last jot and tittle.⁴³

What we see here is an attempt to avoid dealing with “every last jot and tittle” of God’s inspired word. Yet it was Jesus who warned His people: “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise [way] pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18). Are we to ignore this? Dr. Dobson does. Admittedly, it is possible to argue that “heaven and earth” here mean the Old Covenant order, and that the fall of Jerusalem did fulfil the law. It is also possible to argue, as James Jordan has argued, that the death of Christ buried the law, and that His resurrection restored it in a new form, with the various dietary and ritual cleansing laws fulfilled (and therefore annulled in history) by the resurrection (Acts 10; I Cor. 8). But this does not absolve us from the difficult task that so disturbs Dr. Dobson, namely, selecting “what we will and will not apply now.” To retreat from this task of applied Christianity is to turn over the running of the world to pagan humanists and their theological allies, Christian antinomians. *It is to turn the medical world over to the God-hating abortionists who are opposed so vigor-*

ing, though smaller than when he left. His leadership role was probably perceived even by his most admiring followers as being different from what it had been before he entered politics.

43. James Dobson, “Dialogue on Abortion,” in Dobson and Gary Bergel, *The Decision of Life* (Arcadia, California: Focus on the Family, 1986), p. 14.

ously by Dr. Dobson. Yet this is precisely what every publicly visible Christian leader did throughout the twentieth century, and what almost all of them did after the late seventeenth century. It is universally assumed by Christians that the case laws of Exodus are null and void, and *should* be. It is this assumption which this book is designed to challenge.

The tools of dominion, God's law, sit unused and generally unread by those who call themselves Christians. They are the best weapons that Christians possess for moral self-defense, since the best defense is a good offense, yet they steadfastly refuse to use them. To use God's Bible-revealed law effectively would require them to become intimately familiar with its many subtleties and complex applications, and even less appealing, to discipline themselves in terms of it. They prefer to let it sit unopened, either in their laps or on their shelves. Christians therefore continue to lose the war for civilization.

H. Tom Paine's Demon: The Bible

We know where antinomian (anti-God's law) theology has headed In the past: to Unitarianism, atheism, and bloody revolution. It winds up with the words of Tom Paine: that in consideration of "the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God."⁴⁴

Is the Old Testament the word of a demon? If not, then why do antinomian Christians—liberals and conservatives, neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists—continue to ridicule Old Testament law? They stick their fists in the face of the God of Psalm 119, and shout in defiance of His law: "Is God really nothing more than the abstract, impersonal dispenser of equally abstract and impersonal laws?"⁴⁵ Yes, He is *much* more than this. Among other things, He is the Eternal Slavemaster over those who rebel against Him, the dispenser not of abstract law but of personally experienced agony forever and ever. Hell is real. The lake of fire is real. God is therefore not to be mocked. But He has many mockers, and many of these mockers call themselves by His name.

44. *The Age of Reason*, Part I; cited by David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 525.

45. Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," *Christianity Today* (Feb. 20, 1987), p. 23.

They do not fear Him. For now. But eventually God will stick His fist in their faces. People may choose to ignore God's law; they will not be able to ignore social crises much longer.

Another major alternative to Paine's sort of outright apostasy is some variation of Marcion's second-century heresy of the two-gods theory of history: that an evil god operated in the Old Testament, but a nice god runs the world today. (For more details, see below: "The Continuing Heresy of Dualism.") Robert Davison was correct when he said that a "Marcionite tendency may be fairly traced in much modern discussion of Christian ethics, nor is this tendency confined to scholarly discussion."⁴⁶

The third alternative is dispensationalism: God used the revealed laws of the Bible to govern people before the advent of Christ, but today we have new laws in operation, meaning vague, undefined personal laws, and no specifically New Testament cultural laws at all. The road to cultural impotence is paved with neat (and ultimately unworkable) solutions to difficult biblical problems. Slavery is one of these difficult problems.

We must search for the moral principle that undergirded each Old Testament law. When we find it, we can then begin to discuss how or to what extent God expects the civil government or some other government to enforce it today. Those who begin with the presupposition that a particular Old Testament law or God-required Hebrew practice was innately evil have already taken the first step toward Paine's view: that the Bible is the word of a demon.

Christians today are afraid of the laws in the Bible. They are actually embarrassed by them. They do not recognize that biblical law is a two-edged sword of God's judgment: blessing for the righteous, but cursing for the unrighteous (Rom. 13:1–7). They do not understand that *God's law-order for society is merciful*. For example, God allows the death penalty for kidnappers (Ex. 21:16). The death penalty used to be imposed on kidnappers in the United States, and kidnapping was rare. It is no longer imposed regularly, and kidnapping has become a blight. Kidnapping by terrorists in Europe is commonplace. Who says that God's law regarding kidnapping is too harsh? Harsher than kidnapping itself? So it is with *all* of God's civil laws. They are merciful

46. Robert Davison, "Some Aspects of the Old Testament Contribution to the Pattern of Christian Ethics," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 12 (1959), p. 374; cited by Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1983), p. 23.

compared with the effects of unpunished evil. The modern world is learning just how unmerciful a society can be that is not governed by biblical law.

I. “Theocraphobia”: Fear of God’s Rulership

When, in a court of law, the witness puts his hand on the Bible and swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him God, he thereby swears on the word of God—the *whole* word of God, and *nothing but* the word of God. The Bible is a unit. It is a “package deal.” The New Testament did not overturn the Old Testament; it is a *commentary* on the Old Testament. It tells us how to use the Old Testament properly in the period after the death and resurrection of Israel’s messiah, God’s Son.

Jesus said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise [way] pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17–19). Christ took the Old Testament seriously enough to die for those condemned to the second death (Rev. 20:14) by its provisions. The Old Testament is not a discarded first draft of God’s word. It is not “God’s word (emeritus).”

If anything, the New Testament law is more stringent than the Mosaic law, not less stringent. Paul writes that an elder cannot have more than one wife (1 Tim. 3:2). The king in the Old Testament was forbidden to have multiple wives (Deut. 17:17). This was not a general law, unless we interpret the prohibition of Leviticus 18:18 as applying to all additional wives, and not just to marrying a woman’s sister, as ethicist John Murray interprets it.⁴⁷ If we attempt to interpret Leviticus 18:18 in Murray’s fashion, the question arises: Why specify kings as being prohibited from becoming polygamists if the same law applied to

47. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), Appendix B. Catholic theologian Angelo Tosato agreed with him: “The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 46 (1984), pp. 199–214. They are not followed in this view by most Protestant commentators, nor by Nachmanides, who said that the verse applies only to a woman’s sister: Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman [Ramban], *Commentary on the Torah: Leviticus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), p. 255.

all men anyway? Possibly to prohibit the system of political covenanting through marriage (Solomon is a good example here). Certainly, there is no equally clear-cut Old Testament prohibition against polygamy comparable to I Timothy 3: 2, which indicates a tightening of the legal requirements for at least church officers. The New Testament appears to be more rigorous than the Old in this instance. Another alteration in marriage law that we find in the New Testament is the abolition of concubinage that resulted from Christ's fulfillment of the terms of the Old Testament's bride price system (see Chapter 6). There are no more second-class wives.

Dominion Christianity teaches that there are four covenants under God, meaning four kinds of vows under God: personal (individual), and the three institutional covenants: ecclesiastical, civil, and familial.⁴⁸ All other human institutions (business, educational, charitable, etc.) are to one degree or other under the jurisdiction of one or more of these four covenants. No single human covenant is absolute; therefore, no single human institution is all-powerful. Thus, Christian liberty is liberty under God and God's law, administered by plural legal authorities.

1. *Biblical Pluralism*

There is no doubt that Christianity teaches pluralism, but a very special kind of pluralism: *plural institutions* under God's single comprehensive law system. It does *not* teach a pluralism of law structures, or a pluralism of moralities, for this sort of hypothetical legal pluralism (as distinguished from *institutional* pluralism) is always either polytheistic or humanistic.⁴⁹ Christian people are required to take dominion over the earth by means of all three God-ordained institutions' not just the church, or just the State, or just the family. *The kingdom of God includes every human institution, and every aspect of life, for all of life is under God and is governed by His unchanging principles.* All of life is under God and God's law because God intends to *judge* all of life *in terms of His law.*⁵⁰

In this structure of *plural* governments, the institutional churches serve as *advisors* to the other institutions (the Levitical function), but

48. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

49. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: The Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gdmruler>)

50. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

the churches can only pressure individual leaders through the threat of excommunication. As a restraining factor on unwarranted church authority, an excommunication by one local church or denomination is always subject to review by another, if and when the excommunicated person seeks membership elsewhere. Thus, each of the three covenantal institutions is to be run under God, as interpreted by its lawfully elected or ordained leaders, with the advice of the churches, not their compulsion.

All Christians are in principle theocrats. All Christians say that God rules the universe. God (*theos*) rules (*kratos*). Theocracy means simply that *God rules*. He rules in every area of life: church, State, family, business, science, education, etc. There is no zone of neutrality. There is no “king’s x” from God. Men are responsible for everything they think, say, and do. God exercises total jurisdiction. Jurisdiction means law (*juris*) and speaking (*diction*). God *speaks* His word. It is a comprehensive word. Anyone who says that God’s law does not apply to some area of life is thereby saying that God does not have jurisdiction in that area. “No law—no jurisdiction.”

2. A Scare Word

The word “theocracy” is a scare word that humanists and frightened Christians use to chase dedicated Christians away from areas of their God-given responsibility. The critics focus on politics and civil government as if God’s rule in this area were somehow evil. Because almost all humanists today believe in salvation through legislation,⁵¹ they necessarily believe that politics is the primary means of social healing.⁵² The Marxists are the most consistent defenders of human transformation through political action: the religion of revolution.⁵³ Because Christians are today so used to thinking in these humanistic terms, they seldom think to themselves: “Wait a minute. I know that God rules the family, and the government of my family should reflect this fact. God also rules the church, and the government of my church

51. The exceptions to this rule are classical liberals and free market economists like F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, traditional conservatives like Russell Kirk and William F. Buckley, neo-conservatives like Irving Kristol, and outright anarchists like Murray N. Rothbard.

52. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), chaps. 2–5, 8, 9, 11. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

53. Gary North, *Marx’s Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos*, rev. ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnmrnr>)

is supposed to reflect this fact. I know that God rules all civil governments, too. So why should it be evil for Christians to work hard to see to it that the civil government reflects this fact, just as they do in their families, churches, and businesses?" In short, why should politics be outside the realm of God-honoring Christian action?⁵⁴

Humanist critics present Christians with a kind of mental image: a scarecrow that is locked in the stocks of Puritan New England. Every time a Christian walks by this scarecrow, a tape recorded message blares out: "Beware of theocracy! Beware of theocracy!" If the critics meant, "Beware of ecclesiocracy," meaning civil rule by the institutional church, they would have a valid point, but they mean something different: "Beware of Christians in every area of life who seek to exercise biblical dominion under God by obeying and enforcing God's holy law."

What "Beware of theocracy!" really means is, "Beware of God's righteous rule!"

J. The Dismantling of the Welfare-Warfare State

Those who reject the theocratic ideal are ready to accuse Calvinists of being tyrants. Historian Ronald Wells of Calvin College wrote an attack on Francis Schaeffer, which appears in a collection of essays that is best described as a neo-evangelical tirade. He pointed to the unfootnoted and unmentioned links between certain aspects of Schaeffer's social thought and Christian Reconstructionism, and then observed: "This tendency to promote one's own view by 'law' has always been the dangerous part of Calvinism: one sees Calvinists in power as triumphal and dictatorial. . . . Calvinists in power have wielded that power oppressively."⁵⁵

I suspect that we Reconstructionists were Mr. Wells' target, for we are the only Calvinists calling for the building of a biblical theocracy. What I also suspect is that what really disturbs our neo-evangelical academic critics is that we perceive this theocracy as a system of decentralized power. We call for a vast purging of present-day national power, both political and economic. We call for the dismantling of the welfare-warfare State, most notably every aspect of taxpayer-financing

54. George Grant, *The Changing of the Guard: The Biblical Blueprint for Politics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/ggguard>)

55. Ronald A. Wells, "Schaeffer on America," in Ronald W. Ruegsegger (ed.), *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1986), p. 237.

for education (except for the national military academies . . . maybe).⁵⁶ I have called for a reduction of aggregate taxes to the level required by I Samuel 8: where all levels of civil government *combined* are allowed to collect *less than 10 percent* of the *net increase* of annual private personal productivity.⁵⁷ I support the abolition of the local property tax, and all state and national direct taxation, which includes the graduated income tax, the Social Security tax, the corporate income tax, the capital gains tax, and all sales taxes. I recommend the abolition of all direct taxation by any agency of civil government above the local township or county; every other level of civil government would be forced to seek its revenues by taxing the level of civil government immediately below it. Civil governments above the most local would have to live off the revenues collected from other civil governments. This would decentralize power with a vengeance. The Reconstructionists' version of theocracy is a decentralized system of multiple competing governments in which the modern messianic State and its economic subsidies would be dismantled. By modern political standards, such a vision of the shrinking of the centralized power civil government is nothing short of utopian.

In short, if the Reconstructionists' version of theocracy were to be voted into operation, the tenured, subsidized intellectual class to which our academic critics belong would experience the end of its taxpayer-financed bonanza. An entire class would have to enter the competitive free market and seek productive employment. Consumers would reward former college professors in terms of what consumers want to buy, not what state legislatures want to buy. There would be no more compulsory education and no more tax support of existing schools. This fear, rather than the fear of tyranny, may well be the true underlying concern of our critics.

K. Majority Rule

The Bible does not allow the imposition of some sort of top-down bureaucratic tyranny in the name of Christ. The kingdom of God requires a bottom-up society. The bottom-up Christian society rests ultimately on the doctrine of self-government under God, with God's

56. Robert L. Thoburn, *The Children Trap: Biblical Blueprints for Education* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.y/ThoburnCT>)

57. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 61. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

law as the publicly revealed standard of performance.⁵⁸ It is the humanists' view of society that promotes top-down bureaucratic power.

The basis for building a Christian society is evangelism and missions that lead to a widespread Christian revival, so that the great mass of earth's inhabitants will place themselves under Christ's protection, and voluntarily use His covenantal laws for self-government. Christian reconstruction begins with personal conversion to Christ and self-government under God's law, then it spreads to others through revival, and only later does it bring comprehensive changes in civil law, when the vast majority of voters voluntarily agree to live under biblical blueprints.

Let's get this straight: *Christian reconstruction depends on majority rule*. Of course, the leaders of the Christian Reconstruction movement expect a majority eventually to accept Christ as savior. We believe in postmillennialism.⁵⁹ Those who do not share our confidence concerning the future success of the gospel, as empowered by the Holy Spirit, believe that an earthly kingdom must be imposed by force from the top down (premillennialism),⁶⁰ or else they do not believe in an

58. DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations*, ch. 2.

59. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/dcpardise>); Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1954] 1981); R. J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2001).

60. Dave Hunt writes: "During His thousand-year reign, Christ will visibly rule the world in perfect righteousness from Jerusalem and will impose peace on all nations. Satan will be locked up, robbed of the power to tempt. Justice will be meted out swiftly." Hunt, *Beyond Seduction: A Return to Biblical Christianity* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1987), p. 250. If Satan is unable to tempt mankind, then any evil that calls forth Christ's justice must be man-based evil. In a taped interview with Peter Lalonde, released in early 1987, Hunt said: "Christ himself is physically here. And He has us, the redeemed in our resurrection bodies, that nobody can kill us. And we are helping Him to maintain order. He is *forcing* this world to behave, and He gives a restoration of the Edenic state, so that the desert blossoms like a rose, and the lion lies down with the lamb, and you've got paradise on earth, once again, with Christ Himself maintaining it and, even better than the garden of Eden, Satan is locked up for a thousand years." *Dominion and the Cross*, Tape One of *Dominion: The Word and the New World Order*, *op. cit.*, 1987.

It should be pointed out that Hunt's argument that resurrected saints will return to rule with Jesus during the earthly millennium has long been rejected by dispensational theologians at Dallas Theological Seminary. Resurrected saints will be dwelling in a place called the heavenly Jerusalem, argued J. Dwight Pentecost: "The Relation between Living and Resurrected Saints in The Millennium," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 117 (October 1960), pp. 335–37. See also John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academie, 1979), pp. 86–87.

earthly institutional kingdom at all (amillennialism).⁶¹ Postmillennialists disagree, for several reasons.

Premillennialism and amillennialism both deny that the preaching of the gospel can ever bring a majority of people to faith in Christ, thereby bringing in the earthly kingdom of God in history on a voluntary basis, person by person, culture by culture. Premillennialist author Dave Hunt went so far as to argue that such a person-by-person extension of God's kingdom is literally impossible for God to achieve.⁶² Thus, in order to produce universal peace on earth, premillennialists have always maintained, Jesus will have to impose a top-down bureaucracy when He comes to reign in person. In opposition to this view, amillennialists deny the premillennial doctrine that Jesus will ever physically return in history. They insist (as postmillennialism also insists) that Jesus will physically appear only at the end of history at the final judgment. They therefore deny (in contrast to postmillennialism) the possibility of an earthly manifestation of God's comprehensive kingdom of God in history.

Because of their denial of the widespread acceptance of the gospel at any point in history, premillennialists and amillennialists alike invariably associate the word "theocracy" with some sort of top-down, power-imposed, widely resisted rule that is imposed by an elite. Premillennialists accept this as a valid system of civil rule, but only if Christ personally and physically runs it from the top of the bureaucratic pyramid. Amillennialists deny that Christ will ever do this in history, so they deny bureaucratic theocracy's legitimacy at any point in the pre-final judgment future.

61. Oddly enough, Hunt also denied that there can ever be an earthly kingdom, even in the dispensational millennium. He said in his taped interview: "What happens at the end of this time, when Satan is loosed? He deceives the nations and like the sand of the seashore, so many—a multitude. They gather their armies and come against Christ in Jerusalem. And, of course, that is when they finally have to be banished from God's presence forever. I believe it's the final proof of the incorrigible nature of the human heart. So, Christ Himself cannot make humanity behave. He cannot by legislation, or by political or military or coercive means, establish this kingdom." *Ibid.*, Tape Two.

62. "In fact, dominion-taking dominion and setting up the kingdom for Christ—is an impossibility, even for God. The millennial reign of Christ, far from being the kingdom, is actually the final proof of the incorrigible nature of the human heart, because Christ Himself can't do what these people say they are going to do—New Agers or Manifested Sons." (Verbal emphasis in the original interview.) *Dominion*, Tape Two.

1. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*

First, we Calvinistic postmillennialists disagree with both groups concerning the supposed impotence of the gospel in history in changing whole societies, person by person. We believe that the Holy Spirit will *impose* His will on the recalcitrant hearts of huge numbers of people, just as He has always imposed His will on each recalcitrant heart every time He has saved anyone from his sins. God is utterly sovereign in election and salvation. He changes people's hearts, transforming them so that they can respond in faith to the free offer of the gospel. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). This is the only way anyone has ever been saved, for the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him (I Cor. 2:14). The natural man does not partially receive the things of the Spirit in his unsaved state; he rejects the very idea that such a wrathful God exists. Thus, he needs to be transformed before he can accept the gospel.

Second, because we Calvinistic Christian Reconstructionists believe that the Holy Spirit forces hearts to change—the doctrine of irresistible grace—we also believe that human institutions are not allowed to seek to coerce men's hearts and minds. Such coercion of the human will—its transformation prior to the prior permission of the individual whose will is being transformed—is a monopoly that belongs exclusively to God. We must recognize that coercion is an inescapable concept in history. It is never a question of coercion vs. no coercion. It is always a question of *whose* coercion. We affirm the power of the Holy Spirit to change men's souls—to declare judicially that they are saved, and therefore possess Christ's righteousness—and to change them ethically at the point of their ethical transformation. Those who deny this exclusive power of the Spirit in transforming the lives of covenant-breakers instinctively expect to find coercion somewhere else: in human institutions—either humanist or "theocratic-bureaucratic"—or in a future personal kingdom ruled by Christ in Person.

Third, because we postmillennialists find it taught in the Bible that there will be a future outpouring of this soul-transforming Holy Spirit—the only possible basis of the Bible's prophesied millennial blessings—we disagree with premillennialists and amillennialists concerning the limited extent of the Spirit's work in the future. The kingdom will not be brought in by a bureaucratic theocratic regime, but by the heart-transforming work of the Holy Spirit. We therefore disagree

with them concerning the supposed necessity of defining theocracy as a top-down social transformation. God's kingdom rule is always bottom-up: *self-government under God*. So, we do not call for a theocratic bureaucracy, either now or in the future. Such a top-down bureaucracy is not called for in the Bible, is impossible to maintain without unlawful coercion, and is not necessary to impose to bring in the kingdom. Christian Reconstructionists call instead for a decentralized, international, theocratic *republic*. Such a republic is ethically necessary, now and in the future, and it will be historically possible in the future, when the Holy Spirit begins His visibly triumphant sweep of the nations.

If postmillennialism is incorrect, and the Holy Spirit does not act to bring huge numbers of people to eternal life, then Christians must be content with only partial social reconstruction, and only partial external blessings from God. The earthly manifestations of God's heavenly kingdom will necessarily be limited. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," we should expect God to answer this prayer. But many Christians teach that God will never answer this prayer before Jesus comes again physically to rule the world in person. If they are correct, then we will not see the pre-second coming advent of a holy commonwealth in which God's laws are honored. We must content ourselves with less.

It is not possible to ramrod God's blessings from the top down, unless you are God. Only humanists think that man is God. Christians are simply trying to get the ramrod away from them, and to melt it down. This melted ramrod could then be used to make a great grave marker for humanism: "The God That Failed."

L. The Continuing Heresy of Dualism

Dualism teaches that the world is inherently divided: spirit vs. matter, or law vs. mercy, or mind vs. matter, or nature vs. grace. What the Bible teaches is that this world is divided *ethically* and *personally*: Satan vs. God, right vs. wrong, freedom vs. tyranny. The conflict between God and Satan will end at the final judgment. Whenever Christians substitute some other form of dualism for ethical dualism, they fall into heresy and suffer the consequences. That is what has happened today. We are suffering from revived versions of ancient heresies.

1. Marcion's Dualism

The Old Testament was written by the same God who wrote the New Testament. There were not two Gods in history, meaning there was no dualism or radical split between the two testamental periods. There is only one God, in time and eternity.

This idea has had opposition throughout church history. An ancient two-gods heresy was first promoted in the church about a century after Christ's crucifixion, and the church has always regarded it as just that, a heresy. It was proposed by a man named Marcion. Basically, this heresy teaches that there are two completely different law systems in the Bible: Old Testament law and New Testament law (or non-law). But Marcion took the logic of his position all the way. He argued that two law systems means two gods. The god of wrath wrote the Old Testament, and the god of mercy wrote the New Testament. In short: "two laws-two gods."

You would be surprised how many Christians still believe something dangerously close to Marcionism: not a two-gods view, exactly, but a "God-who-changed-all-His-rules" sort of view. They begin with the accurate teaching that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were fulfilled by Christ, and therefore that the *unchanging principles* of worship are *applied differently* in the New Testament, but then they erroneously conclude that the whole Old Testament system of civil law was dropped by God, and *nothing biblical was put in its place*. In other words, God created a sort of vacuum for State law.

This idea turns civil law-making over to Satan. In our day, this means that civil law-making is turned over to humanism. *Christians have unwittingly become the philosophical allies of the humanists with respect to civil law*. With respect to their doctrine of the State, therefore, most Christians hold what is in effect a two-gods view of the Bible.

2. Gnostic Dualism

Another ancient heresy that is still with us is gnosticism. It became a major threat to the early church almost from the beginning. It was also a form of dualism, a theory of a radical split. The gnostics taught that the split is between evil matter and good spirit. Thus, their goal was to escape this material world through other-worldly exercises that punish the body. They believed in *retreat from the world* of human conflicts and responsibility. Some of these ideas got into the church,

and people started doing ridiculous things. So-called “pillar saints” became temporarily popular in the fifth century, A. D. A “saint” would sit on a platform on top of a pole for several decades without coming down. This was considered very spiritual.⁶³ (Who fed them? Who cleaned up after them?)

Thus, many Christians came to view “the world” as something permanently outside the kingdom of God. They believed that this hostile, forever-evil world cannot be redeemed, reformed, and reconstructed. At best, it can be subdued by power (maybe). Jesus did not really die for it, and it cannot be healed. This dualistic view of the world vs. God’s kingdom narrowly restricted any earthly manifestation of God’s kingdom. Christians who were influenced by gnosticism concluded that God’s kingdom refers only to the institutional church. They argued that the institutional church is the only manifestation of God’s kingdom.

This led to two opposite and equally evil conclusions. First, power religionists who accepted this definition of God’s kingdom tried to put the institutional church in charge of everything, since it is supposedly “the only manifestation of God’s kingdom on earth.” To subdue the supposedly unredeemable world, which is forever outside the kingdom, the institutional church has to rule with the sword. The institutional church must give orders to the State, and the State must enforce these orders with the sword. The institutional church must therefore concentrate political and economic power. *What then becomes of liberty?*

Second, escape religionists who also accepted this narrow definition of the kingdom sought refuge from the evil world of matter and politics by fleeing to hide inside the institutional church, an exclusively “spiritual kingdom,” now narrowly defined. They abandoned the world to evil tyrants. *What then becomes of liberty?* What becomes of the idea of God’s progressive restoration of all things under Jesus Christ? What, finally, becomes of the idea of biblical dominion?

When Christians improperly narrow their definition of the kingdom of God, the visible influence of this comprehensive kingdom (both spiritual and institutional at the same time) begins to shrivel up. The first heresy leads to tyranny *by* the church, and the second heresy leads to tyranny *over* the church. Both of these narrow definitions of God’s kingdom destroy the liberty of the responsible Christian man,

63. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), pp. 228, 298.

self-governed under God and God's law.

3. Manichaeism Dualism

The last ancient pagan idea that still lives on is also a variant of dualism: matter vs. spirit. It teaches that God and Satan, good and evil, are forever locked in combat, and that good never triumphs over evil. The Persian religion of Zoroastrianism has held such a view for over 2,500 years. The incredibly popular "Star Wars" movies were based on this view of the world: the "dark" side of "the force" against its "light" side. In modern versions of this ancient dualism, the "force" is usually seen as itself impersonal: individuals personalize either the dark side or the light side by "plugging into" its power.

There are millions of Christians who have adopted a very pessimistic version of this dualism, though not in an impersonal form. God's kingdom is battling Satan's, and God's is losing. History is not going to get better. In fact, things are going to get a lot worse externally. Evil will visibly push good into the shadows. The church is like a band of soldiers who are surrounded by a huge army of Indians. "We can't win, boys, so hold the fort until Jesus and the angels come to rescue us!"

That does not sound like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and David, does it? Christians read to their children the children's favorite story, David and Goliath, yet in their own lives, millions of Christian parents really think that the Goliaths of this world are the unbeatable earthly winners. Christians have not even picked up a stone.

Until very recently.

Conclusion

We must not come to the Old Testament with a sense of fear and loathing. The Old Testament provides us with a vision of victory and the tools of dominion, namely, God's laws. These laws are not a threat to us as Christians; they are the foundation of our efforts to reconstruct society.

Christians have not wanted to think about God's law. It reminds them of their sins of commission. It also reminds them of their sins of omission. They have failed to press the claims of Jesus Christ in every area of life. They have failed to challenge the sins of this age.

They have refused to tell the world that God really does have specific answers for every area of life, including economics and politics. Christians have preferred to comfort themselves as they have sat in

their rocking chairs in the shadows of history, rocking themselves back and forth, and saying over and over: "I am not a theocrat. I am not a theocrat."

What this phrase means is simple: *God does not rule, so neither will I.*

But what if God *does* rule? What if He has given us the unchanging laws by which He expects His people to rule? What if He has given us the tools of dominion, and we have left them in the rain to rust? What will He do with our generation?

Just what He did with Moses' generation: He will leave them behind to die in the wilderness.

APPENDIX R

WHAT IS COVENANT LAW?

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me. that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations. which shall hear all these statutes. and say Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).

These verses teach clearly that the law of God is a tool of world-wide evangelism. The nations of the earth will recognize the justice that is provided by God's revealed law, as well as see the external blessings that inevitably come to any society that covenants itself to God, and subsequently adheres to the ethical terms of God's covenant. It is crucially important to maintain that these blessings will be visible (Deut. 28:1–14). The Bible is insistent: *there is an inescapable cause-and-effect relationship between national covenantal faithfulness and national prosperity*. Adherence to biblical law *inevitably* produces visible results that are universally regarded as beneficial. Why do covenant-breakers recognize this? Because all men have the work of God's law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15), so they can and do perceive the blessings of God. This, God promised, would be the visible sign of Israel's wisdom, visible to the ends of the earth.

It is not remarkable that humanists deny the existence of this covenantal and historical cause-and-effect relationship, for such a relationship points beyond history to the existence of a sovereign Creator and Judge who will hold them eternally responsible on judgment day. They hold back the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). What is remarkable, however, is that this view of revealed biblical law as pres-

ently applicable to society is not widely believed by Christians. They believe that the cause-and-effect relationship between obedience to God's law and His positive blessings in history is just barely true within the socially and culturally narrow confines of the local church congregation and the Christian family. With respect to the authority of God's law in society, fundamentalist Christians deny it, neo-evangelical scholars deny it, and even traditional Reformed theologians deny it, and for the same reason: such a view of God's law makes Christians personally and corporately responsible for obeying God, for receiving the promised external blessings, and for using this real-world capital for the fulfillment of God's dominion covenant¹—extending His kingdom (civilization) across the face of the earth.

In contrast, Christian Reconstructionists loudly affirm biblical law as a means of both evangelism and dominion. Indeed, *the affirmation of a long-term relationship between covenant-keeping and external blessings in history, as well as covenant-breaking and external cursings in history, is the heart and soul of the Christian Reconstructionist position on social theory, its theological identifying mark.*² This overwhelming confidence in the long-term historical efficacy of the biblical covenant is the reason why Christian Reconstructionists self-consciously claim to be the most consistent of all covenant theologians in history. It is also why we are confident that our view of the biblical covenant will eventually be triumphant in history. After all, God blesses covenant-keeping in history, and covenant-believing is surely an integral aspect of covenant-keeping. No doubt our confidence makes us insufferable in other theological circles, but such is always the effect of faith in God's covenant. Pharaoh found Moses insufferable, and he banished Moses from his presence (Ex. 10:28). The Hebrew leaders had earlier tried to do the same thing (Ex. 5:19–21). Bear in mind that Moses refused to leave Egypt until he took the people with him. Christian Reconstructionists have the same attitude.

A. God's Sanctions and Positive Feedback in History

God's visible, external covenantal blessings serve as a means of confirming His people's confidence in the reliability of His covenant.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

2. There are other marks, of course, but this is its unique mark. No other theological movement proclaims this ethical cause-and-effect relationship in society. Indeed, all other Christian positions explicitly deny it.

Christians are required to affirm the existence of a normative, covenantal relationship of *positive feedback in history*. God intends His covenant to work this way: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, *that he may establish his covenant* which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18). In short: more obedience, more blessings; more blessings, more confirmation; more confirmation, greater obedience. This is covenantal positive feedback in history. This is Christianity’s standard of ethical performance, both personally and corporately.³ God brings His sanctions in history, positive and negative, in terms of men’s public conformity to His revealed law.

We have read that the power to get wealth is one of God’s positive covenant sanctions in history.⁴ This is a New Testament teaching, too: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). How is this steadfastness of God revealed in history? By the predictability of His historical sanctions in response to men’s responses to the unchanging principles of His covenant law. Conversely—much to the outrage of political liberals and most academic neo-evangelicals—long-run poverty is one of God’s negative sanctions in history.⁵ Such a view of history is unacceptable to the Christian world generally, and especially to university-trained Christian intellectuals. Why? Because such a view is utterly hostile to the God-denying worldview of Darwinism, which contemporary Christians have adopted far more than they are aware of. Darwinism teaches that there is no supernatural force in history. Until the advent of man, there was no direction to history, no morality, and no purpose. Only with the appearance of man in history does cosmic personalism appear. Man proposes, and man disposes.⁶ Man extends dominion in the

3. These sanctions apply more clearly to corporate bodies than to individuals, rather than the other way around, contrary to what pietism teaches. We know that righteous individual covenant-keepers can suffer cursings in history, as the Book of Job teaches. What the Bible teaches is that *in the aggregate* (corporately), and *in the long run*, God’s covenant sanctions are reliable and predictable.

4. Gary North, “Free Market Capitalism,” in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views on Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), pp. 27–65. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWap>)

5. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnspirits>)

6. This was actually stated by Frederick Engels, the co-founder of Communism: “. . . man no longer merely proposes, but also disposes. . . .” Engels, *Herr Eugen Diihring’s Revolution in Science* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1878] 1934), p. 348.

name of the human species. Man, and only man, brings meaningful sanctions in history. Autonomous man is the sovereign judge in history, not God. This man-centered theology is the heart of Darwinism, not its technical discussions about genetic or environmental changes.⁷

This view of history is basic to all of modern scholarship, and the vast majority of those teaching social theory and social ethics in Christian colleges have adopted the basic anti-covenantal perspective of this worldview, at least with respect to New Testament era history. The assertion that nations remain poor because they are breaking the external terms of God's covenant outrages the modern Christian intellectual. It was not random that in its hatchet job on the Christian Reconstructionists, *Christianity Today* ran a clever (though a bit malicious) cartoon of me brandishing a giant dripping pen (blood rather than ink) with my statement nearby: "The so-called underdeveloped societies are underdeveloped because they are socialist, demonist, and cursed."⁸ I really did say this, I have defended it in print,⁹ and author Rodney Clapp cited it because he apparently regarded it as the most offensive statement that he could locate in his rather cursory examination of my writings. He recognized that the neo-evangelical audience of *Christianity Today* would take great offense at such a statement.¹⁰

What I am arguing here is simple: those people who truly believe that God's multi-institutional covenant is binding also necessarily believe that it is *historically and judicially* binding with respect to all three covenant (oath-bound) institutions: family, church, and State. Conversely, if people do not believe that God's covenant is historically and judicially binding with respect to nations and local civil governments, then they have denied the relevance of Deuteronomy 4:5–6. They implicitly believe that the biblical doctrine of God's national covenant is some kind of New Testament theological "limiting concept," a kind of theoretical backdrop to history that no longer has any point of contact with the actual realm of historical cause and effect. Such a

7. North, *Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, Appendix A: "From Cosmic Impersonalism to Humanistic Sovereignty."

8. Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," *Christianity Today* (Feb. 20, 1987), p. 23.

9. North, *Unholy Spirits*, ch. 8. This chapter also appeared in the original version of this book, *None Dare Call It Witchcraft* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1976).

10. Keynensian William Diehl took offense at this cause-and-effect explanation of *culture-wide* poverty, citing in response Jesus' denial of this relationship in the case on an *individual* blind man (John 9:1–3): "A Guided-Market Response," in Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty*, pp. 71–72. Art Gish was also upset: *ibid.*, p. 78.

view of God's covenant I call *antinomian*: a denial of the law's effects in history. It reflects what I call halfway covenant thinking.

B. "Pro-nomianism" Defined

What do I mean by the term "antinomian"? To answer this, I need to offer a description of "pro-nomianism," meaning a defense of what God's law is and what it accomplishes, especially in history. I begin with a survey of Ray Sutton's discovery of the five-point biblical covenant model.¹¹ Sutton argues that the biblical covenant model has five parts:

Transcendence (sovereignty), yet immanence (presence)
Hierarchy/authority/representation
Ethics/law/dominion
Oath/judgment/sanctions (blessings, cursings)
Succession/continuity/inheritance

While this terminology is slightly different from that which he adopted in his book, it is an accurate representation.¹² This model has become an integrating framework for the entire *Dominion Covenant* economic commentary.

I use this model to develop the "pro-nomianism" of Christian Reconstruction. It is the basis of my definition of anti-nomianism. I use the biblical covenant model as the source of definition because I have long maintained that language as well as everything else must be governed by the Bible. As I wrote in 1973, "Neutrality does not exist. Everything must be interpreted in terms of what God has revealed. The humanistic goal of neutral language (and therefore neutral law) was overturned at the Tower of Babel. Our *definitions* must be in terms of *biblical revelation*."¹³

As a representative example of the structure of the biblical covenant, I have selected Isaiah 45. From it we can get some sense of how the covenant works in history. We can also discuss the covenant's relation to biblical law.

11. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

12. A correspondent to Sutton sent in the new version because it can be used to create an acronym: THEOS.

13. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 843.

1. Transcendence/Immanence

We must begin where the Bible does: the creation of all things by God (Gen. 1:1). We must maintain an absolute distinction between the Creator and the creature. God is the absolutely sovereign Master of all that comes to pass in history. Nothing takes place outside His sovereign decree. "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things" (Isa. 45:7).¹⁴ "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded" (Isa. 45:12). "For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else" (Isa. 45:18).

Isaiah uses the familiar (but extremely unpopular) biblical imagery of the potter and his clay: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd [strive] with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? Or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begetteth thou? Or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?" (Isa. 45:9–10).¹⁵ These words became the basis of Paul's argument regarding the absolute sovereignty of God in choosing to save one person and not another. It is the classic argument in the Bible for the doctrine of *election*. Paul says of Pharaoh: "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Rom. 9:17). This explains the words in Exodus: 'And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said' (Ex. 7:13). But this means that God keeps some men from responding positively to the universal offer of salvation. This keeps them from obeying His law.

The believer in free will (a degree of human autonomy outside of God's eternal decree) then asks: "How can any sinner therefore be personally responsible for his sin?" Paul well understood this line of reasoning, to which he replied:

14. This does not mean that God is the author of sin. This verse speaks covenantally: God brings evil times to those who defy Him.

15. I have used brackets to indicate the italicized inserted words of the King James translators. Normally, I do not do this, preferring instead not to disrupt the flow of biblical language. But my arguments here are sufficiently controversial that I do not want critics saying that I relied on the translators to make my points.

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will [have mercy], and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed [it], why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? (Rom. 9:19–21).

Paul appealed directly to the biblical doctrine of creation—the imagery of the potter and the clay—in order to cut short every version of the free will (man’s autonomy) argument. There is no area of chance or contingency in history. None. It is unlawful even to appeal to this line of reasoning, Paul said: “Who art thou that thou repliest against God?” The doctrine of the moral and legal responsibility of man before God must always be understood in terms of the absolute decree of God; it must never be defended in terms of the idea that man has a zone of uncontrolled decision-making at his disposal. Man’s responsibility must be understood therefore in terms of the biblical doctrine of creation.

The biblical doctrine of creation teaches the sovereignty of God in electing some people to salvation. This is why so few Christians accept the biblical doctrine of the six-day creation, and why they are ready to compromise with this or that version of evolution. They want to affirm the partial sovereignty (partial autonomy) of man. They do so in terms of the pagan idea of *chance*: a realm of decision-making, of cause and effect, outside of God’s absolute providential control and absolute predestination. They refuse to accept the words of Paul in Ephesians: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:4–5).

The biblical doctrine of creation leads directly and inescapably to the biblical doctrine of the absolute providence of God. God creates and sustains all things in history. Speaking of Jesus Christ, Paul writes: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether [they be] thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:16–17). Nothing lies outside the sovereign providence of God. There is no area of contingency. There is no area of neutrality. There is no area that is outside the eternal decree of God or the law of God. This is the

biblical doctrine of creation. Humanists hate it, and so do the vast majority of Christians today.

God as Creator brings all things to pass. When He says, "It shall come to pass," it comes to pass. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times [the things] that are not [yet] done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). God does not simply know the future that He predicts; He causes the future to take place. There is no element of chance anywhere in the universe.

Consider the greatest crime in history: the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The act of betrayal by Judas was predetermined by God; nevertheless, Judas was still held fully responsible for this act. "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). And what of those who unlawfully, defiantly condemned Jesus Christ to death? They were all predestined by God to do it.

The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:26–28).

So, the Bible teaches man's personal responsibility and God's absolute predestination. If God was willing to predestinate the greatest crime in history, holding the criminals fully responsible, then surely He is willing to bring to pass all the other relatively minor crimes in history, also holding each criminal responsible. God's law touches everything, and each man is fully responsible for his thoughts and actions; he must obey the whole of God's law.

God did not create the world and then depart, leaving it to run by itself until the final judgment (Deism's god). He is present everywhere, but specially present with His people. He delivers them. But He also gives His law to them. He runs everything, yet men are made in His image, and they have the ability to understand the external world. They are responsible to God because God is totally sovereign. He has laid down the law, both moral and physical. His word governs all things. No appeal to the logic of autonomous man (free will) can change this.

2. *Hierarchy/Authority/Representation*

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and [there is] none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth [in] righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isa. 45:22–23). In these verses we find four points of the covenant: sovereignty (point one), oath (point four), righteousness (point three), and hierarchy. Every knee shall bow. There is hierarchy in this world.

But knees shall also bow to Israel, if Israel remains faithful to God. “Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God” [“no other God”: New King James Version] (Isa. 45:14). Israel represents God in history, and the nations will, *if Israel remains covenantally faithful*, become Israel’s bond-servants.

This means that men who disobey God’s law are required to do what they are told by those officers who declare God’s law as His lawful covenantal representatives. These representatives speak in God’s name through *covenantal institutions*. There is inescapable corporate responsibility in history. Nations will obey God and His representatives, said Isaiah, even if their citizens must be brought to judgment in chains.

In Israel, civil law was enforced hierarchically: a bottom-up appeals court system (Ex. 18). This is also true of church courts (Matt. 18:15–18). Thus, officers speak *representatively*: God’s representatives before men, and men’s representatives before God. This doctrine of representation is the basis of mankind’s *corporate* dominion over nature (Gen. 1:26–28). Men are under God and God’s law corporately; they are to exercise dominion corporately by bringing the whole earth under God’s law. Thus, biblical law is a tool of dominion.

Hierarchical representation is also the basis of covenantal governments’ corporate responsibility before God: church, State, and family. Collective units are given laws to enforce; God holds them responsible to Him through representatives. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed; Egypt and Babylon were destroyed. Israel and Judah were scattered. Classical Greece and Rome fell. There is both personal and corporate responsibility before God.

3. *Ethics/Law/Boundaries*

“Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it” (Isa. 45:8). The whole cosmos is described here as being filled with righteousness. Righteousness is the basis of man’s dominion over the earth.

But righteousness must be defined. This is what God’s law does. It establishes *boundaries* to our lawful actions. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was “hedged in” by God’s law. Adam and Eve were not to eat from it, or as Eve properly interpreted, even touch it (Gen. 3:3).

These ethical boundaries are not exclusively personal; they are also corporate. There are biblical laws given by God that are to govern the actions of families, churches, and civil governments. Autonomous man would like to think that God’s law has nothing to do with his institutions, especially civil government, but autonomous man is in rebellion. God’s law is not restrained by autonomous man’s preferred boundaries. It is not man who lawfully declares: “Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand [for] the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest” (Jer. 5:22–24).

Notice the development of God’s argument, which is in fact a *covenant lawsuit* brought against Judah by His prophet, Jeremiah. God sets boundaries to the sea, the seasons, and the harvest. The implication is that He also sets *legal and moral boundaries* around people, both as individuals and nationally. Men are to fear this God who sets cosmic boundaries. How is this required fear to be acknowledged? The prophets answered this question over and over, generation after generation: *by obeying God’s law*.

4. *Oath/Judgment/Sanctions*

“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth [in] righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isa. 45:23). His word is sufficient. He

will not go back on His word. He has sworn by His own name. God has therefore taken a covenantal oath that in the future, every human knee shall bow, and every human tongue shall swear. There is no escape from God's authority; and therefore all mouths shall swear—they shall acknowledge His sovereignty, either on earth or in the afterlife. Even in the lake of fire, they must eternally swear that God is who He says He is.

God's law is our standard, both individually and corporately. There are covenantal institutions that are bound by the revealed law of God: church, State, and family. These are the three covenantal institutions that God has established to declare and enforce His law. All institutions must obey, but these are those that are exclusively governed by formal oaths before God.

What is an oath? It is the calling down on one's head the negative sanctions of God. If a person or covenanted institution disobeys the law of God, then God comes in wrath to punish the rebels. He comes in history. This was the warning of the Old Testament prophets. On the other hand, if men repent and obey, God is merciful and will bless them. "Your iniquities have turned away these [things]," Jeremiah warned Judah regarding the rain and the harvest, "and your sins have withholden good [things] from you" (Jer. 5:25). The prophets came in the name of God as covenantal representatives, calling individuals, as well as representative kings and priests, to repent, to turn back to God's law and thereby avoid God's negative sanctions in history.

The passage above all others in the Bible that describes the historical sanctions of God is Deuteronomy 28. Verses 1–14 describe the blessings (positive sanctions), and verses 15–68 describe the cursings (negative sanctions). Understand, these are *historical* sanctions. They are not appropriate sanctions for the final judgment. In this sense, they are *representative sanctions* of eternity's sanctions, what Paul called the "earnest" or *down payment* of God in history on what must inevitably come in eternity (Eph. 1:14).

5. Succession/Continuity/Inheritance

"In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (Isa. 45:25). Because God is the Creator, His people will inherit the earth: "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). (This is point one of the covenant.) Psalm 25:12–13 provides the covenantal promise:

What man [is] he that feareth the LORD? Him shall he teach in the way [that] he shall choose (v. 12). His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (v. 13).

God is to be feared (point one). God teaches man (subordination: point two) the required way (point three). The man's soul shall dwell in ease (point four), and his heirs shall inherit (point five). These two brief verses set forth God's covenant model, and in these verses we can see the outline of God's plan of history for covenant keepers. This is so simple that a child can grasp it. Unfortunately, as we shall see, very few theologians have.

My point is that these verses refer to history. The fear of God is historical. God's instruction to man is historical. The law applies in history. The man is spiritually blessed in history: his soul is at ease. His heirs shall inherit.

Some commentators might agree regarding the historical reference of points one through three, but object to my view of point four. Perhaps the focus of the verse is exclusively internal. After all, the covenant-keeper's soul is what is spoken of. Perhaps the blessings are not visible in history. My response is to ask a question: Why should point four—spiritual ease—be confined to only the inner person? If the inheritance is historical, then the spirit's ease must refer to contentment regarding the past, present, and future. Only if the inheritance will be post-historical could the ease of the soul be legitimately confined to the internal realm. The covenant-keeper is at ease in history because he is confident about the future success of those who share his faith. It is his *seed* that will inherit.

If the inheritance of the whole earth is merely symbolic of the inheritance of God's resurrected people, then why refer to the inheritance delivered to a man's seed? In eternity, this inheritance will be his, too. In short, the primary focus of the passage is *on* history, not eternity. Fear God *now*. Learn from God *now*. Obey God's law *now*. Experience spiritual contentment *now*. Why? Because your spiritual heirs will inherit in the *future*: in time and on earth.

Yet there are theologians, especially Calvinists in the Continental (Dutch) tradition, and all Lutherans, who insist that this promised inheritance is strictly limited to the post-final judgment world of eternity. The first point—the fear of God—is historical, but personal rather than corporate. The second—being taught by God—is historical, but personal rather than corporate. The third—obeying the law of God—

applies in history, but is exclusively personal, familial, and ecclesiastical—never civil. The fourth—spiritual ease—is historical but exclusively internal. Why these restrictions on the first four points? Because the fifth—inheriting the earth—is seen as exclusively post-historical.

Summary

The definition of pro-nomianism must begin and end with the biblical concept of the covenant. All five points of the biblical covenant must be included in any valid definition of biblical law. We should not expect to be able to define biblical law without first considering the Bible's primary revelation of God's law: the structure of the various covenants God has made with men.

Thus, I define "pro-nomianism" in terms of God's covenant model:

The belief that God, the sovereign, predestinating Creator, has delegated to mankind the responsibility of obeying His Bible-revealed law-order, Old and New Testaments, and promises to bless or curse men in history, both individually and corporately, in terms of this law-order. This law-order and its historically applied sanctions are the basis of the progressive sanctification of covenant-keeping individuals and covenantal institutions—family, church, and State—over time, and they are also the basis of the progressive disinheritance of covenant-breakers.

This leads us to the question of the biblical definition of antinomianism, the antithesis of this definition.

C. "Antinomianism" Defined

We have seen that the biblical definition of God's law is governed by the structure of God's covenant. Thus, the biblical definition of antinomianism must also be governed by the structure of God's covenant. If being an antinomian means that you are against the law, then it must also mean that it is God's law that you are against, and God's law is always covenantal.

To understand what antinomianism is, we can do no better than to consider the first revelation in the Bible of the original antinomian: Satan. Satan came to Eve with a proposition: "Eat of the forbidden fruit, and you will become as God" (Gen. 3:5). "Run an experiment, and see if this isn't the case," he tempted Eve. "See whose word is authoritative, mine or God's." He offered her a covenantal argument, a

perverse imitation of the biblical covenant:

1. God is not sovereign.
2. You need not obey Him.
3. His law is not authoritative.
4. The promised negative sanction will not come.
5. [implied:] You will keep the inheritance.

I choose to analyze the biblical definition of antinomianism in terms of Satan's temptation of Eve. This line of satanic reasoning is the heart of all antinomianism.

1. Transcendence/Immanence

Who is God? Satan was asking Eve to decide. Who lays down the law? Whose word is authoritative?

Obviously, the Creator is God. Then who is the true creator, man or God? This is what Satan was asking mankind, God's chronological and judicial representatives. If man answered anything but "God is the Creator, and His word alone is authoritative," then Satan would inherit the earth. Man would die unless, of course, God should later send His Son, the second Adam, to inherit it, but Satan chose either to ignore this possibility or to act against what he knew would happen in the future.

The first step in becoming an antinomian is to deny the absolute sovereignty of God. It usually begins with a denial, implicit or explicit, that God created the world. This usually begins with a softening of the doctrine of the six, literal, 24-hour-day creation. This is how the seeds of Darwinism were sown: denying the literal character of God's chronology in Genesis 1.¹⁶

The next step is to deny the obvious implication of the doctrine of Creation: that since God created the world, He also controls the world. In other words, men deny the absolute sovereignty of God or providence of God. They deny the doctrine of predestination.¹⁷

Why is a denial of predestination inherently antinomian? Because it means that events in history come to pass outside of God's decree. They are therefore random events in terms of His decree, what philosophers call contingent events. An element of contingency is thereby

16. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix C: "Cosmologies in Conflict: Creation vs. Evolution."

17. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1932] 1965).

brought into the universe. If A takes place, B may not take place. It may or may not. It depends. On what? On something other than what God has decreed.

This means that there must be gaps in historical causation. These gaps are inherently contingent with respect to the decree of God. A providential cause is separated from its eternally decreed effect. God therefore does not bring all things to pass; man brings some things to pass. The more element of contingency there is in history, the greater man's autonomy from God's providential control of the universe. That modern science has steadily adopted chance events as the basis of modern quantum physics is not itself a random historical event.¹⁸ This conclusion of quantum physics is the product of a humanistic worldview that denies any decree of God and His creation of the universe. That chaos has become the "hot new topic" of modern physical science is also not random.¹⁹ The ethical rebellion of humanist man is increasing.

If God does not control everything that comes to pass, *then His word is not authoritative over everything that comes to pass*. This was the logic of Satan's temptation: to believe that a specific cause (eating the forbidden fruit) would not *inevitably* lead to a specific event (death). Somehow, Satan was arguing, there is contingency in this world. This is also the argument of all those who would use the concept of contingency to defend the idea of the free (semi-autonomous) will of man. This is why we are morally required to abandon any trace of the free will argument. Nevertheless, most Christians today hold to some version of the free will argument. *Hence, most Christians today are in principle antinomians*.

2. Hierarchy/Authority/Representation

Satan went to Eve first. He was implying that she, not her husband, was sovereign. God had spoken to her husband regarding the forbidden fruit. Presumably, he had told her, as God's representative. "Obey me, not your husband," Satan said. And by disobeying her husband, she disobeyed God. She ignored the hierarchy of authority over her. She ignored her representative before God: Adam. She acted autonomously.

18. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

19. James Gleik, *Chaos: The Making of a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987).

Who must man obey, God or his own autonomous mind? This was Satan's implicit question. He asked Eve to disobey God, all in the name of a cosmic experiment. What would happen if she disobeyed? Good things, he promised.

"Trust me," Satan said. "Take my word for it." In other words, "I lay down the true law." Man thinks that he is disobeying God on his own account, in his own authority, but in fact, man must serve only one master. Ethically, he subordinates himself to Satan when he refuses to obey God. He comes under the hierarchical rule of another master. Man may think he is acting autonomously, but he in fact is simply shifting masters. God or Baal? This was Elijah's question (I Ki. 18:21). God or mammon? This was Jesus' question (Matt. 6:24).

But neither God nor Satan normally appears to an individual. Each sends human representatives. Men represent God in positions of corporate responsibility. God has established three monopolistic institutions: church, State, and family. The head of each can serve God or Satan, and those under him are sanctified (set apart) institutionally.

Soldiers live or die in terms of decisions made by their superiors. Nations rise and fall in terms of the decisions of their national leaders. An individual's success or failure in history cannot be discussed without reference to the institutional hierarchies above and below him, and their success or failure. Thus, to deny that God's law applies to your covenantal superior is another way of saying that it really does not apply to *you*. "I was just following orders!" says the subordinate who has sinned. In other words, "I was under someone else's authority—someone other than God."

Uriah the Hittite was a righteous man. He died because he was so righteous. Unrighteous King David told unrighteous General Joab to be sure that Uriah died in battle, and Joab carried out the order (II Sam. 12). In short, *covenantal hierarchy* is important.

David later decided to number the people. This was against God's law. Joab warned him about this, but David insisted, so Joab carried out the order. God's prophet then came to David and announced one of three judgments: seven years of famine, three months of David's fleeing before his enemies, or a three-day pestilence. Take your pick, the prophet said. David was too proud to accept the mild but personally humiliating second sanction, so he gave God the choice. God sent the worst one, nationally speaking: a plague that killed 70,000 people (II Sam. 24). (Anyone who teaches that God does not send sickness to His people has a real problem in explaining this passage.) In short,

covenantal representation is important.

There are theologians today who say that God's law applies only to individuals, that nations are not under God's law. They deny the very possibility of a national covenant in New Testament times. Such a covenant was only for ancient Israel. National leaders are not representatives of their subordinates before God, theologians insist, and national leaders are surely not God's representatives before their subordinates. God's law has nothing to do with politics, they insist. There is no hierarchy of appeal based on God's law. *There is no national covenant*: this is a basic philosophy of all modern secular political theory, and few Christian scholars disagree. And those few who are willing to affirm the legitimacy of a national covenant gag on the idea of a future international covenant. International covenants are unthinkable for them. Not so for Isaiah (19:18–25).²⁰

3. *Ethics/Law/Boundaries*

"Forget about the law against eating this fruit," Satan told Eve. "Go ahead and eat."

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law," announced the self-proclaimed early twentieth-century magician, Aleister Crowley, who also called himself the Beast and 666.²¹ The ethical positions are the same. The results are also the same.

"We're under grace, not law." This is the fundamentalist Christians' version of the same ethical position. So is, "No creed but Christ, no law but love!" They do not mean what Paul meant: that Christians are no longer under the threat of the negative eternal sanctions of the law. They mean rather that God's law no longer applies in any of the five aspects of the covenant, eternally or historically.

Christian social thinkers, especially neo-evangelicals in the Wheaton College-InterVarsity Press-*Christianity Today* orbit, prefer to muddy the ethical waters by using fancier language than the fundamentalists use. Examples:

The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay-out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we

20. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

21. Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (New York: Castle, n.d.), p. 193. A short biography of Crowley is Daniel P. Mannix, *The Beast* (New York: Ballentine, 1959).

are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way.²²

Since koinonia includes the participation of everyone involved, there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers.²³

There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy.²⁴

“Blueprint” is the code word for biblical law for those who do not want to obey biblical law. Second, “God’s principles” is the code phrase for fundamentalists who are nervous about appearing totally antinomian, but who are equally nervous about breaking openly with the teachings and language of dispensationalism, i.e., “we’re under grace, not law.” Finally, “God’s moral law” is the code phrase for the evangelical and Reformed man who does not want to be branded an antinomian, but who also does not want to be bound by the case laws of the Old Testament. In all these cases, the speaker rejects the idea of the continuing authority of the case laws.

It all boils down to this: Satan’s rhetorical question, “Hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1). The proper response is, “Yes, God hath said!” He is the sovereign Creator. He has laid down the law.

4. Oath/Judgment/Sanctions

There are two kinds of sanctions: blessings and cursings. God told Adam that in the very *day* he ate of the tree, he would surely die. (“Dying, you shall die”: the familiar biblical pleonasm.)²⁵ This means a negative sanction in *history*. Satan told Eve that she would not surely die. Instead, she would know good and evil, as God does: a positive sanction. Which would it be? “To die or not to die, that is the question.”

Satan was a liar, but not so great a liar as to deny the idea of predictable sanctions in history. He simply denied God’s negative sanction and promised Eve a positive one. Would that modern Christian theologians were as honest as Satan! Instead, they deny the very exist-

22. William Diehl, “The Guided-Market System,” in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

23. Art Gish, “Decentralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 154.

24. John Gladwin, “Centralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 183.

25. Appendix M.

ence of predictable covenantal sanctions in New Testament times. They write such things as: "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."²⁶ This muddled prose matches an equally muddled concept of ethics and history. In English, this statement means simply that *there is no ethical cause-and-effect* relationship in post-crucifixion history.

Biblical case laws are still morally and judicially binding today. This is the thesis of *Tools of Dominion*. Kline's theology explicitly denies this. Second, Kline's argument also means the denial of God's sanctions—blessing and cursing—in New Testament history. It is the denial of any long-term cause-and-effect relationship between covenantal faithfulness and external blessings—positive feedback between covenant-keeping and *visible* blessings. It is also the denial of any long-term cause-and-effect relationship between covenantal unfaithfulness and external cursings. Thus, when I refer to "antinomianism," I have in mind the hostile attitude regarding ethical cause and effect in society—social antinomianism²⁷—but also a deeper and more fundamental hostility: a denial, implicit or explicit, of the reliability of the covenantal promises (sanctions) of God in history.

5. Succession/Continuity/Inheritance

If you die, you do not inherit. If you die without children, someone else inherits. Who would inherit in history if Eve listened to the serpent and did what he recommended?

(I need to add something at this point. I believe that it really was a serpent who tempted Eve. He acted as a conscious, covenantal agent of Satan. He communicated in words. He brought God's curse on his posterity. Satan did not use him as a sort of hand puppet.)

If Satan was successful, he would inherit in history. Adam and Eve would die, as he well knew. He was a liar. He knew who is sovereign, whose word is law, and who will bring negative sanctions in history: God. Satan knew that he might inherit as a subordinate steward if

26. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on the Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

27. Appendix O.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God, or at the very least, this would keep Adam and his heirs from inheriting. He would thwart God's plan. This prospect was enough to please Satan.

But Satan's hopes were shattered by the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who bore the law's negative sanctions so that God's adopted children (John 1:12) might inherit the earth and gain eternal life as well. Rather than seeing Satan inherit the earth through his earthly representatives, God has created an inheritance system *governing history*: positive feedback for covenant-keepers and negative feedback for covenant-breakers. Notice that the question of the inheritance was clearly historical: Satan never had any possibility of inheriting heaven.

Antinomians deny the existence of this inheritance system in history. This antinomian viewpoint regarding the systematic long-term outworking of God's visible covenantal judgments in the Christian era leads directly to what F. N. Lee has termed *pessimillennialism*, referring to both premillennialism and amillennialism. Covenant-keeping people will not progressively inherit the earth before Christ comes again physically, we are told. In contrast, Christian Reconstructionists affirm God's visible sanctions in history. If there is predictable long-term positive feedback (external blessings) in history for covenant-keeping, which Deuteronomy 28:1–14 insists that there is, and if there is long-term negative feedback (external cursings) in history for covenant-breaking, which Deuteronomy 28:15–68 insists that there is, then those who obey God must *inevitably* extend their external dominion over time, while those who disobey God must *inevitably* have external dominion removed from them.

God's sanctions in history still exist. This was John Calvin's view,²⁸ but modern Calvinists have abandoned it. God's covenantal law-order *inevitably* leads to the *external cultural triumph* of God's covenantally faithful people. This, of course, is postmillennialism.²⁹ This combination of covenant sanctions in history and postmillennial eschatology is what distinguishes the Christian Reconstructionist worldview from all

28. John Calvin, *The Covenant Enforced: Sermons on Deuteronomy 27 and 28*, ed. James B. Jordan (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

29. While Calvin did not see this as clearly as modern Reconstructionists do, there were still elements of postmillennialism in his theology. On this point, see Greg L. Bahnsen, "The *Prima Facie* Acceptance of Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Winter 1976–77), pp. 69–76. I argue that there were both amillennial and postmillennial arguments in Calvin's writings: "The Economic Thought of Luther and Calvin," *ibid.*, II (Summer 1975), pp. 102–6.

others today.³⁰

Those who deny postmillennialism usually also deny the New Testament reality of God's law-governed historical sanctions. To this extent, premillennialists and amillennialists have generally been social antinomians. They have erred in the development of their view of God's law and its sanctions in history. They have allowed their eschatologies of historical defeat to shape their doctrine of law, i.e., making it impotent in its historical effects. This triumph of pessimistic eschatological views over biblical ethics is one of the most devastating theological problems that the modern church faces.

Thus, antinomianism is defined as that view of life which rejects one or more of the five points of the biblical covenant as they apply to God's revealed law in history. They deny that God, the sovereign, predestinating Creator, has delegated to mankind the responsibility of obeying His Bible-revealed law-order, Old and New Testaments, and promises to bless or curse men in history, both individually and corporately, in terms of this law-order. This law-order and its historically applied sanctions are the basis of the progressive sanctification of covenant-keeping individuals and also covenantal institutions—family, church, and State—over time, and they are also the basis of the progressive disinheritance of covenant-breakers.

D. Definitions and Paradigms

Some readers may not accept my definition of *antinomian*, but every reader should at least understand how and why I am using the term. The biblical definition of God's law must include all five of the points of the biblical covenant model. Deny anyone of these five doctrines, and you have thereby adopted an antinomian theology. Deny them, and you necessarily must also deny the continuing authority of Deuteronomy 28 in the New Testament era. Yet an implicit and even explicit denial of these doctrines (and the relevance of Deuteronomy 28) has been a basic tactic of the vast majority of Christian theologians for over a millennium.³¹ Thus, they have attempted to define away the case laws and historical sanctions. What I am saying is that it is theologically invalid to attempt to define away the continuing authority of Deuteronomy 28. I therefore see the inescapable theological necessity

30. Postmillennial Puritans generally shared this view, which is why Reconstructionists regard themselves as neo-Puritans.

31. The major exceptions were the Puritans: *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Winter 1978–79): "Symposium on Puritanism and Law."

of restoring the biblical definition of biblical law and therefore anti-law.

I fully realize that my definition of *antinomian* is not the accepted usage. This common usage exists primarily because theological antinomians who have rejected one or more of the covenant model's five points have previously defined the word so that it conforms to their pessimistic historical outlook: the long-term cultural impotence of God's redeemed people in history. They argue that antinomianism is merely the denial of one's *personal* responsibility to obey God's moral law (undefined).³² This deliberately restricted definition implicitly surrenders history to the devil. What I am saying is this: anyone who denies that there are cause-and-effect relationships *in history* between the application of biblical case laws and the success or failure of social institutions has also inevitably and *in principle* adopted the idea that the devil controls and will continue to control this world. Why? Because the devil's *representatives* are said to be able to maintain control over the social institutions of this world throughout history (point two of the covenant: representation). It does no good for a person to answer that he is not an antinomian just because he respects God's law in his personal life, family life, and church life. He is still saying that God's law is historically impotent in social affairs, that covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking offers rewards and curses only to individuals and only after the final judgment.

Yes, I am offering a more comprehensive definition of "antinomian." My major goal in life is to lay additional foundations for a major theological paradigm shift that has already begun. I am self-conscious about this task. Readers deserve to know this. One inescapable aspect of a new movement or new way of viewing the world is the creation of new terms (e. g., "theonomy"), and the redefining of old terms. Einstein, for example, redefined several of the terms used by Newton.³³ Clearly, this is what the Barthians did with the vocabulary of trinitari-

32. "It refers to the doctrine that the moral law is not binding upon Christians as a way of life." Alexander M. Renwick, "Antinomianism," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1960), p. 48.

33. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 101–2, 149. Kuhn wrote: "Since new paradigms are born of old ones, they ordinarily incorporate much of the vocabulary and apparatus, both conceptual and manipulative, that the traditional paradigm had previously employed. But they seldom employ these borrowed elements in quite the traditional way." *Ibid.*, p. 149.

an orthodoxy, or as Van Til remarked, they did it “under cover of an orthodox-sounding theology.”³⁴ (Rushdoony has correctly identified Barth as an implicit polytheist.)³⁵ It is not wrong to redefine terms; it is wrong to define words or use them in any way other than the Bible defines and uses them.

Those who pioneer a new worldview must break the near-monopoly strangle hold over useful terms that existing intellectual guilds have gained for themselves. An objection to my definition of the word “antinomian” simply because it does not conform precisely to past usage is also to a large extent also an objection to the alternative worldview that I am proposing.³⁶ This implicit theological hostility is masked by an explicit appeal to supposedly neutral grammar. But Van Til has taught us well: *nothing is neutral*. “Every bit of supposedly impersonal and neutral investigation, even in the field of science, is the product of an attitude of spiritual hostility to the Christ through whom alone there is truth in any dimension.”³⁷ This surely includes language. As I wrote in 1973, “Neutrality does not exist. Everything must be interpreted in terms of what God has revealed. The humanistic goal of neutral language (and therefore neutral law) was overturned at the Tower of Babel. Our *definitions* must be in terms of *biblical revelation*.”³⁸

I am doing my best to help establish effective theological terminology for future use by those who have adopted a theonomic worldview. Christian Reconstructionists need not be limited in our critical analysis by the inherited vocabulary of our theological opponents. Besides, the winners in history get to write the dictionaries as well as the textbooks. More to the point, dictionaries always reflect common usage

34. Van Til, *The New Modernism* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1947), p. 27. He later wrote: “It is at this point that the question of ‘traditional phraseology’ has its significance. The ‘simple believer’ is all too often given new wine in old bottles. It is our solemn duty to point out this fact to him. The matter is of basic importance and of the utmost urgency.” Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), p. 2.

35. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 20.

36. By a new worldview, I mean a new packaging of theological doctrines that have always been accepted by representative segments of the orthodox church. But by adopting the five-point biblical covenant model to present these doctrines, I have been forced to reject existing theological systems which unsystematically and unself-consciously reject this model by substituting other interpretations of one or more of the five points.

37. Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), p. 145.

38. Gary North, “In Defense of Biblical Bribery,” in Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 843.

after the paradigm shift. We are preparing for this shift well in advance.

Antinomianism as I define it has been the ethical preference of much of the church almost from its beginning. A philosophical compromise with Greek categories of hypothetically neutral natural law began in the second century,³⁹ and it still continues.⁴⁰ In politics, this compromise is known in our day as pluralism. Just about every Christian accepts the idea of pluralism, either implicitly or explicitly. By defining antinomianism in terms of opposition to the Old Testament case laws, Christian Reconstructionists (theonomists) have alienated Christians in all camps, for almost all Christian groups oppose the enforcement of Old Testament laws. No Christian likes to be called an antinomian. Christians generally retaliate against such an accusation with the counter-accusation, "Legalist!"

This book is designed to help answer the question: Who is an antinomian and who is a legalist, biblically defined?

Conclusion

I have offered a comprehensive view of what the pro-nomian position teaches that biblical law is. We see biblical law as an integrated, unbreakable whole, an explicitly *covenantal* system of biblically revealed law. Antinomianism is a denial of this integrated system, yet in many cases, it offers as an alternative a perverse mirror image of this system. Satan had to use the biblical covenant model in order to refute it. He thereby honored the old political principle: "You can't beat something with nothing."

The older definitions of "antinomian" were devised by those who, if my version of God's law is correct, were themselves antinomians. They did not adhere to all five points of the biblical covenant model. They may or may not have denied all five points, but they refused to affirm all five points, and then derive their definition of law and anti-law in terms of all five points.

So, for the sake of clarity, let me repeat my compact definition of pro-nomianism:

The belief that God, the sovereign, predestinating Creator, has deleg-

39. Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict* (mimeographed; Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962).

40. Rex Downie, "Natural Law and God's Law: An Antithesis," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Summer 1978), pp. 79–87.

ated to mankind the responsibility of obeying His Bible-revealed law-order, Old and New Testaments, and promises to bless or curse men in history, both individually and corporately, in terms of this law-order. This law-order and its historically applied sanctions are the basis of the progressive sanctification of covenant-keeping individuals and covenantal institutions—family, church, and State—over time, and they are also the basis of the progressive disinheritance of covenant-breakers.

Deny this, and you are an antinomian.

APPENDIX S

WHAT ARE THE CASE LAWS?

For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. (I Cor. 9:9–10).

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward (I Tim. 5:17–18).

This book is designed to press the case for biblical ethics, for it deals with a much-neglected portion of Scripture, the case laws of Exodus. These are the specific applications of the “lively oracles” that God gave to Moses (Acts 7:38). The case laws of Exodus appear in the chapters following the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20, especially in chapters 21–23. They are generally ignored today by Christian commentators, as surely as they were ignored in Moses’ day. James Jordan’s *Law of the Covenant* (1984)¹ is one of the rare exceptions to this established tradition of neglecting the case laws by Bible-believing scholars as well as liberal higher critics.

Christians are supposed to take the Old Testament’s case laws seriously. As Paul’s use of them indicates, they set forth in an encapsulated form fundamental principles of justice. They provide guidelines for the specific decisions of day-to-day life, and from them we are supposed to become skilled in discovering and then developing their underlying moral and judicial principles. The early church understood this, although the church’s compromises with the pagan concept of natural law disguised the importance of biblical case laws in the compiling of

1. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

early medieval law codes. These case law principles have long served as a major component of the judicial foundation of Western civilization. As Western civilization steadily departs from the legal principles that the case laws set forth, we walk closer toward the precipice of God's judgment, oblivious to the mortal danger that faces us. Men have forgotten that God judges nations and cultures in history. Biblical law warns them of this reality (Deut. 28:15–68), but Christians generally, not to mention the pagans who dominate this civilization, pay no attention to biblical law, especially its sanctions.

A. Case Laws and the Resurrection

It is with the case laws of Exodus that the Christian Reconstructionists' hermeneutical rubber inescapably meets the historical road. It is here that the Old Testament first presents detailed social applications of the fundamental principles of the Mosaic law and, equally important, the Mosaic law's required civil sanctions. Theonomists argue that Christians cannot legitimately proclaim the continuing moral validity of the Ten Commandments without also proclaiming the continuing judicial validity of the Mosaic case laws. Furthermore, Christians cannot legitimately affirm the binding nature of the Mosaic case laws apart from these laws' specified sanctions, unless the New Testament has annulled these sanctions individually.²

What must be understood from the very beginning is the following theonomic principle of biblical interpretation: it was with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of God in heaven that the entire world was placed historically under the full requirements of biblical law. From the creation, God placed the work of the law in the hearts of all men (Rom. 2:14–15). God later made a covenant with Noah, and this covenant necessarily involved law as a tool of dominion (Gen. 9:1–17). He made a covenant with Israel, and He gave laws to Israel that all nations would recognize as being holy and just (Deut. 4:5–8). *But it was with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ that biblical law burst the Old Covenant wineskin of national Israel and flowed judicially across all nations.* It was not the ministry of Moses that accomplished this; it was the ministry of Jesus Christ.

This being our position, any attempt to refute the theonomic posi-

2. This has been the case with the death penalty for sabbath-breaking: chapter 24, Appendix E.

tion by arguing that the Old Testament case laws were intended by God to apply only to Old Testament Israel misses a key theological point: *God's revealed law was resurrected to newness of life with Jesus*. Old Testament law, mediated and restored through Jesus Christ and preached by His church, has in New Testament times become judicially obligatory nationally on a worldwide basis. All nations will be judged finally in terms of God's law, as Jesus warned: "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:32). This means that the biblical case laws are now judicially obligatory for the nations, for where there is no binding law, there can be no valid sanctions.

B. Biblical Law and Civilization

Though it may seem strange to introduce the problems dealt with in this chapter with an extended citation from an Orthodox Jewish scholar, I have decided to do so anyway. Rarely has any commentator better understood the importance of biblical law for the full flowering of society than I. Grunfeld, the translator of Samson Raphael Hirsch's remarkable study, *Horeb* (1837). Grunfeld wrote in 1962:

Indeed, the leaders of Christian opinion in Europe, and their Jewish imitators, conscious or unconscious, have often 'hit the law of Moses with their fists'; but it seems that in doing so they have done more harm to European civilization than to the law of Moses.

The separation of law and religion has proved to be one of the greatest disasters in the history of human civilization. It has done untold harm to law and religion alike. It has robbed law of its sacred character and thereby of its strongest moral incentive; it has deprived religion of its legal element and, with that, of its influence over the greatest social movements of our time. Law alone can be the regulator of organized human life. The rejection of law as a religious discipline means, therefore, of necessity, the flight of religion from the world and its realities, a denial of the value of life and a state of detachment and capitulation on the part of religion. Hence originates the deplorably small influence which organized religion has wielded in the daily affairs of life, especially in its social and economic spheres, where religious activity should be at least as predominant as in the sphere of faith and morals. This aloofness of organized religion from the problems and difficulties of social life has alienated the best and noblest spirits among the social reformers and has paralysed the

influence which organized religion could and should have had in the social and political advancement of the world.³

A study of the case laws of Exodus gives us legitimate grounds of belief in the intensely practical nature of biblical law in social and economic life. The asserted dualism between biblical law and society cannot be maintained without denying the continuing validity of the case laws of Exodus. It should not surprise anyone that these three chapters of the Book of Exodus have been ignored by biblical commentators for two centuries, because this era has been the age of philosophical dualism: the estrangement of religion from the “real world” of scientific cause and effect. The triumph of biblical “higher criticism,”⁴ the triumph of the dualistic humanist philosophy of Immanuel Kant,⁵ and the triumph of inward-looking, world-rejecting pietistic Christianity have been closely related events.

C. The Case Laws and Slavery

The case laws of Exodus begin with rules governing slavery (actually, temporary indentured servitude). This is appropriate, for two reasons. First, as I have written in my general introduction to this series,⁶ the Pentateuch is structured in terms of the five-point biblical covenant model: transcendence, hierarchy, ethics, judgment, and inheritance.⁷ Exodus, the second book, is concerned with the question of hierarchy. It asks this crucial question: *Which God should man serve?* The Book of Exodus presents God as the God of history who delivers

3. I. Grunfeld, “Religion, Law and Life: An Historical Vindication of the Horeb,” in Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb: A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observances* (New York: Soncino Press, 1962), pp. cxxxii–cxxxiii.

4. See Appendix P: “The Hoax of Higher Criticism.”

5. Richard Kroner, Kant’s *Weltanschauung*, trans. John E. Smith (University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956). Kroner was correct when he wrote that “No one before Kant had ever exalted man so much; no one had ever accorded him such a degree of metaphysical independence and self-dependence. Within himself man creates and preserves the supersensible as that excellence which distinguishes him from all other beings. The supersensible is precisely that trait which makes man what he is or rather what he ought to be. The idea of mankind and the idea of God are indeed so near to each other here that they almost coincide. Even God is dependent upon the moral law instead of the law being dependent upon him” (pp. 36–37).

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), General Introduction, Section H.

7. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). This five-point structure can be remembered by the mnemonic device, THEOS: transcendence, hierarchy, ethics, oath, and succession.

His people from oppression. In this sense, Meredith G. Kline's identification of the second point of the covenant is appropriate: historical prologue.⁸ The breakdown of an older order inaugurates a new order. The breakdown of Egyptian political and military sovereignty led to the rise of Israel. But once God has identified Himself historically, along the lines of an ancient suzerain's covenant treaty, men's response becomes the central issue. They must then ask themselves this question: *Under whose hierarchical institutions should we operate?* This is the vassal's appropriate response after he hears of what the suzerain has done for him in the past. Ray Sutton's identification of the second point of the covenant as hierarchy correlates closely to man's response to God's historical prologue.⁹

The second reason why the case laws begin with laws governing bondservice is that the Israelites had just been delivered out of permanent slavery. They were ready to hear about laws governing servitude. We should recognize the obvious: civil laws making slavery as oppressive as the system that had governed them in Egypt would not have been laws imposed by the God of liberation on a nation that had suffered years of unjust oppression. Thus, we should recognize that these laws were a loosening of the bonds of servitude, not a tightening. Furthermore, as I argue later on, any attempt by antinomians, either Christian or anti-Christian, to ridicule the case laws of Exodus that govern bondservice is in effect a call for a return to Egyptian bondage, namely, bondage to the autonomous State. *Bondage is an inescapable concept.* It is never a question of "bondage vs. no bondage." It is a question of "bondage to whom."

1. Hierarchy

Let us begin with the first reason why the case laws begin with the laws of servitude: the biblical covenant model. The Book of Exodus occupies the second position in the Pentateuch, and is therefore best understood in terms of hierarchy, meaning the structure of covenantal authority. Exodus opens with the account of the subjection of the Israelites to a king who did not acknowledge the covenant that his royal predecessor had made with Joseph and his brothers (Ex. 1:8). He

8. Meredith G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 52–61; cf. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 53–57.

9. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

placed the Hebrews in permanent slavery. He attempted to replace the God of the Bible as the sovereign lord of the Hebrews. As a self-proclaimed divinity, Pharaoh asserted the right to rule over them without answering to the God of Abraham. Thus, the early chapters of Exodus are devoted to the story of God's subordination of Egypt to Himself through the judgment of cursing—plagues, death, and military defeat—and the subordination of Israel to Himself through the judgment of blessing: their deliverance from bondage.¹⁰ The old order was marked by the Hebrews' enslavement by Pharaoh; the new order was to be marked by their service to God.

Exodus is the Bible's premier "book of the covenant" (Ex. 24:7). The Book of Exodus is itself structured in terms of the five-point covenant model. First, transcendence: Who is the *sovereign God* over nature and history, God or Pharaoh? Answer: the Creator God who delivered His people from Egypt (chapters 1–17). Second, hierarchy: What is the proper mode of *judicial organization* that reflects God's hierarchical chain of command over His people? Answer: a bottom-up appeals court structure (Ex. 18). Third, what are the *laws* by which God governs mankind and God's authorized representatives govern the covenantal institutions of family and civil government? Answer: the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20) and the case laws (Ex. 21–23:13). Fourth, how is the *covenantal oath* between God and His people manifested? Through a covenant meal (Ex. 23:14–19). What is the judgment that God brings on those who rebel against Him? National destruction: deliverance into the hands of the enemy (Ex. 23:20–3). Exodus 24 records the covenantal oath that Israel made with God. "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do" (v. 3). Fifth, what is the *sign of inheritance* or continuity? Answer: the tabernacle that will go with them through the wilderness, and then into the promised land. Its blueprint appears in Exodus 25–31; its actual construction is described in Exodus 35–40.

Exodus 32–33 deals with Israel's rebellion with the golden calf and God's judgment of them, a recapitulation of Adam's Fall. In Exodus 34, God re-establishes Israel's covenant with Him, with Moses acting as the representative or intermediary in this hierarchy. Exodus 34 is therefore a section on *covenant renewal*, an aspect of historical con-

10. Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

tinuity.

The second reason why slavery becomes the initial focus of concern in the case laws is that the Israelites had just been delivered out of bondage. The whole book deals with the theme of deliverance from bondage into sabbath rest.¹¹ Thus, having just been delivered from slavery, God caught their attention by beginning the case law section with laws governing servitude. He confronts people “right where they are” in life. Where the Israelites were was in the wilderness, *in transition spiritually and culturally* from Pharaoh’s slavery to God’s servitude. Biblical servitude is one of God’s authorized modes of transition from wrath to grace (blessing), both personally and culturally. Pagan slavery, in contrast, is one of God’s ethically unauthorized but historically imposed modes of transition from grace to wrath (cursing) for His people: bondage in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Becoming a slave-master over God’s people is prohibited, yet God raises up such tyrants as a form of judgment against His people and the tyrants themselves (Jer. 25). What the New Testament says of Judas applies to slave-masters generally: “And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22).

2. *Liberals Protest*

Because the case law section begins with bondservice, liberal scholars are immediately repulsed by it. In general, they react negatively to biblical law as a whole. It is not that they ignore the law. Liberal theologians have produced a large number of detailed studies of Old Testament law. What is notable about these academic studies is their almost self-conscious uselessness. Specialized scholarly journals in the field of Old Testament studies have been created by the dozens to serve as outlets for essays so narrow in focus, so irrelevant in conclusions, and so boring in style that not even publishers of scholarly books are willing to print them. The extent of the uselessness of these highly rarified, heavily footnoted studies cannot readily be appreciated by the average Christian, who reads his Bible, and then does his best to take its teachings seriously. Even in the world of formal academic scholarship, which specializes in the production of painstakingly documented irrelevance, Old Testament scholars are regarded by their colleagues as highly specialized, multi-lingual masters of useless historical details and even more useless literary speculation. (If Old Testament higher

11. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, p. 75.

criticism were pornographic, it could not be published in the United States, for in order to publish pornography legally, the publishers of such material must be capable of demonstrating in court that it has at least some socially redeeming value.)

Modern Bible scholarship has been governed by one overriding concern: to make the Old Testament seem archaic, irrelevant to the modern world, and in no way connected to man's final judgment by the God whose word the Old Testament is. Indeed, the bulk of all modern scholarship in every academic discipline has this as the primary goal: *to deny the biblical doctrine of final judgment*. This was the theological reason why Darwinism flourished so rapidly after its introduction in 1859,¹² and it is why it still flourishes today. People know that their deeds are evil, so they adopt an eschatology that conforms to their preferred eternal state, an eschatology without final judgment by a personal Creator God. Secular humanists therefore insist that mankind must be viewed as a randomly evolved being who is headed nowhere in particular, but especially not toward God's final judgment. Covenant-breakers seek substitutes for God's final judgment: either the heat death of the universe or the endless oscillating cycles of creative explosion, expansion, contraction, and cosmic crushing.¹³ Either is deemed preferable to the eternal lake of fire, which is undoubtedly the place of residence for covenant-breakers.

A much better alternative is a return to covenant-keeping. This involves knowing what the ethical terms of the covenant are.

D. The Book of the Covenant

It has been my self-appointed task to study the "Book of the Covenant," Exodus 21–23, with the operating presupposition that these few pages of legal texts are consistent, coherent, sensible, and authorit-

12. Wrote liberal cleric Rev. James Maurice Wilson in 1925: "The evolution of man from lower forms of life was in itself a new and startling fact, and one that broke up the old theology. I and my contemporaries, however, accepted it as fact. The first and obvious result of this acceptance was that we were compelled to regard the Biblical story of the Fall as not historic, as it had long been believed to be. We were compelled to regard that story as a primitive attempt to account for the presence of sin and evil in the world. . . . But now, in the light of the fact of evolution, the Fall, as a historic event, already questioned on other grounds, was excluded and denied by science." Wilson, "The Religious Effect of the Idea of Evolution," in *Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge: A Collective Work* (London: Blackie & Son, 1925), pp. 497, 498.

13. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

ative; and that they are judicially applicable as case laws to every culture in every era of history. These case laws deserve careful attention, not in order to discover why they are supposedly inapplicable today, but rather to discover how they *are* applicable today. These laws represent a significant portion of mankind's God-given and God-required tools of dominion. They are essential to a unique law-order that alone enables God's people to subdue the whole earth to His glory.

The case laws of Exodus constitute the second-longest passage in the Bible that deals with the specific laws of the civil government, the longest being Deuteronomy 13–27. (A considerable portion of Leviticus 18–21 is concerned with permanent judicial regulations, and not just the temporary laws of cleanliness.) Yet Exodus 21–23 is a brief section of the Bible. As the reader can see from the thickness of this book, a great deal of economic material can be gleaned from these three chapters; nevertheless, they fill only a few pages of the Bible. The implications of these case laws are wide-ranging; they constitute a major substantive foundation of Western law.¹⁴ Thus, we must view them as part of an all-encompassing system of law.

James Jordan has made an incisive observation concerning the use of biblical law in Protestant theology: "Protestant theology has traditionally held to three uses of the Law of God. The use of the Law in justification is that it provides a legal indictment against fallen man, and drives him to Christ. The use of the Law in sanctification is that it provides a moral standard for the life of renewed man. The use of the Law in dominion is that it delineates the rule which is to be implemented by the adopted sons of God over His creation. In the past, theology has tended to neglect the dominical use of God's Law. . . ." ¹⁵ Such neglect has been debilitating for the church and also for civilization. It is the dominical aspect of biblical law that this commentary series, and specifically this volume, is intended to examine.

1. The Case Laws

What are case laws? How are we to understand them? Are Christians to work politically to get them enacted into civil law today? Even

14. In terms of a formal foundation of Western law—case laws taken verbatim from the Old Testament—this statement would be more difficult to prove. An academic series of historical studies on these explicit references would be of great importance.

15. James B. Jordan, *Slavery in Biblical Perspective*, unpublished master's thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia (April 1980), p. 4.

those scholars who believe in the Bible as the infallible word of God disagree over the answers to these questions. Greg L. Bahnsen devotes only two sentences to the case laws in a study of biblical law that is over 600 pages long: "The ten commandments cannot be understood and properly applied without the explanation given them throughout the case laws of the Older Testament. The case law illustrates the application or qualification of the principle laid down in the general commandment."¹⁶ This is not what you would call a detailed study of the case laws. Rushdoony's two-volume *Institutes of Biblical Law* does not even have an entry in the index to "case laws" or "law, case," yet the combined work is over 1,600 pages. This does not mean that *Institutes* totally ignores the case laws, although a more detailed discussion would have been helpful. It means that the people who compiled the two indexes either did not notice the topic or else did not perceive its importance. The volumes' incomplete indexes makes it difficult for the reader to trace down this important aspect of biblical law.

Rushdoony breaks biblical law into three aspects: general law, case law, and prophetic commentary on the law. "First, certain broad premises or principles are declared. These are declarations of basic law. The Ten Commandments give us such declarations. The Ten Commandments are not therefore laws among laws, but are the basic laws, of which the various laws are specific examples."¹⁷ Then there is "a second characteristic of Biblical law, namely, that the major portion of the law is *case law*, i.e., the illustration of the basic principle in terms of specific cases. These specific cases are often illustrations of the extent of the application of the law; that is, by citing a minimal type of case, the necessary jurisdictions of the law are revealed."¹⁸

The case laws are necessary in order to focus our concern on specific violations. The specific nature of the case laws is what keeps the Ten Commandments relevant in history. "Without case law, God's law would soon be reduced to an extremely limited area of meaning. This, of course, is precisely what has happened. Those who deny the present validity of the law apart from the Ten Commandments have as a consequence a very limited definition of theft. Their definition usually follows the civil law of their country, is humanistic, and is not radically

16. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984), p. 313. His other brief references to the case laws only assert that they are still in force.

17. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 10.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

different from the definitions given by Moslems, Buddhists, and humanists.”¹⁹

James Jordan speaks of four manifestations of biblical law. First, there is “the Greatest Commandment,” as he calls it: “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5; cf. Matt. 22:37). On this point, Rushdoony is in agreement, and he begins Chapter 1 of the *Institutes* with a discussion of Deuteronomy 6:5.²⁰ The command is: *love God*. Jordan says that this covenant has two sides: structural (submit to the law) and personal (willing acceptance). “This Greatest Commandment comprehends (includes) every other commandment.”²¹

Second, there is the commandment to love our fellow man as we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). This commandment divides the Greatest Commandment into two parts: duty to God and duty to men. “We should notice that these two Great Commandments are not found in any special place in the Bible, but are placed among the ‘small’ particular laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.”²²

Third, there are the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue. “The Ten Commandments break the Greatest Commandment into ten parts. Each of the Ten Commandments relates to God, and each relates to our fellow men, but some relate more specifically to God and others relate more specifically to man.”²³

“*Fourth*, there are the case laws. The case laws of the Old and New Testaments break the Greatest Commandment into many parts. As we have seen, any given case law may be related to more than one of the Ten Commandments, and so it would be an error to try to pigeon-hole the case laws under one Commandment each. In reality the case law as a whole comes under the Ten Commandments as a whole. Some laws fit rather nicely under one or another of the Commandments, but most case laws seem to combine principles from several of the basic Ten.”²⁴ This is a very important point. It would be a mistake for us to seek to categorize each case law as being an application of one and only one of the Ten Commandments. The theologically innovative insight by Rushdoony that each of the case laws can be subsumed under a particular commandment in the Decalogue must not blind us to the

19. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

21. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, p. 21.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

23. *Idem.*

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

fact that a case law may also be able to be subsumed under several of them.

E. Casuistry: The One and The Many

The case laws allow us to understand the scope of other fundamental laws in the Bible. They enable us to see how these fundamental principles are to be interpreted and applied in concrete cases. The case laws enable us to combine the *one* of general law with the *many* of historic circumstances. Every system of law possesses both features—general and specific, one and many²⁵—but the Bible gives us reliable revelation concerning the proper balancing.

The case laws are specific applications of more general biblical legal principles. We are to use case laws as the Apostle Paul used the case law that prohibits the muzzling of an ox while it treads the grain in the field (Deut. 25:4). Paul derived two ecclesiastical applications from this case law: 1) that the Christian minister is worthy of his hire (I Cor. 9:9–14); and 2) that he is worthy of a double honor (I Tim. 5:17–18). These are both examples of the general principle to avoid stealing.²⁶ The case law, the general law, and the New Testament application of the law are all equally valid today, no less so than in the days of Moses. If this case law were no longer judicially binding today, then why would Paul cite it? If it is judicially binding, then on what basis can all other case laws be dismissed as inapplicable in New Testament times?

Any principle of biblical interpretation (hermeneutic) is dangerous which argues that unless an Old Testament case law is specifically repeated in the New Testament, it is automatically annulled in New Testament times. Anyone who argues this way is going to run into major problems. For example, bestiality is not specifically mentioned in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it is listed as a capital

25. Wrote legal scholar Max Rheinstein: “Even less irrational is judicial case law in the sense of judge-made law, as occurring particularly, but by no means solely, in the Common Law. Consistency, which indeed is the essence of rationality, is required by the very principle of *stare decisis* [legal precedent—G. N.]. As no case is ever completely identical with any other, we can never follow precedent in any way other than by trying to follow its *ratio decidendi*, i.e., the principle, broad or narrow, upon which we find, or believe, it to be based.” Rheinstein, Introduction, Max Weber, *On Law in Economy and Society*, edited by Rheinstein (New York: Clarion, 1967), p. xlviii. He then added this *obiter dictum*: “With much justification the judicial process of the Common Law has been characterized as reasoning by example in the Aristotelian sense.” The judicial process in the pre-modern Common Law should rather be described as reasoning by example in the Mosaic sense.

26. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, pp. 11–12.

crime (Lev. 18:23). How are we to regard bestiality in the New Testament? As a “victimless crime”? As an example of cruelty to animals? As creative humanism’s version of animal husbandry? Or as a capital crime? If the act is still a moral crime in the New Testament (derived from, say, the law regarding adultery—unless the interpreter has also abandoned John 8:1–11), is it also a matter for the civil courts? If it is, is the death penalty still in force? Can you carry over the Old Testament’s definition of the act as criminal and yet not carry over the Old Testament’s penal sanction? On what hermeneutical basis?²⁷

1. Which General Law?

The problem for biblical casuistry is that the case laws do not always reveal to us which one (or more) of the fundamental ten laws is directly involved. This is Jordan’s point.²⁸ There is no simplistic way to place every case law under one (and only one) of the Ten Commandments. The search for a specific and primary principle that undergirds any given case law can sometimes be frustrating. No such principle may initially call attention to itself. This is why human intuition, trained by long periods of Bible study and the discipline of *casuistry* (the application of general laws to specific cases), coupled with regeneration by the Holy Spirit, is necessary for a proper understanding of biblical law.

The art of Protestant biblical casuistry faded in the late seventeenth century, with the deaths of men like Jeremy Taylor, Richard Baxter, and especially after the death of Samuel Willard in 1707. After them, the secular vision of natural law once again overwhelmed Christian thinkers, as it had in the late Scholastic era, only this time, the vision became more and more self-consciously autonomous from the Bible and religion. It has only been since 1973, with the publication of Volume I of Rushdoony’s *Institutes*,²⁹ that a handful of younger Protestant scholars began to publish preliminary exercises in the ancient discipline of casuistry, but without any reliance on the quicksand of natural law theory. My specifically economic commentary on the Bible, which I began in 1973 in the *Chalcedon Report*, is an obvious example. This self-conscious break with natural law theory was Cornelius Van Til’s crucially important intellectual legacy to the Christian

27. Gary North, *75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won’t Ask*, (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), Question 26. (<http://bit.ly/gn75bible>)

28. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, pp. 22–23.

29. And also with the audio tapes that preceded the *Institutes* from about 1968.

Reconstructionists.³⁰

2. *By What Other Standard?*

Are these case laws still in force? Bahnsen says yes: "Since the case law's principles *define* the Decalogue, the case law's principles (in their full scope: personal and social, ecclesiastical and civil) are as *perpetual* as the Decalogue itself."³¹ Others in the Christian Reconstruction "movement" agree: unless specifically abrogated through Christ's fulfillment of a specific case law in the New Testament (extremely rare), they are still morally and judicially binding.

There are many Christians who categorically deny this. They reject the judicially binding character of Old Testament laws. In response, Reconstructionists ask the question that served as the title of Rushdoony's first book: *By what standard?* What judicial standard is sovereign in New Testament times? More specifically, by what other standard than the word of God are men required by God to select and enforce civil laws? By some hypothetically universal natural law (which almost nobody believes in, including theoretical physicists, now that Darwinism is the reigning philosophy)?³² By process philosophy, the shifting standard bequeathed by scientific Darwinism?³³ By existentialism's shifting standards?³⁴ By the shifting ethical standard of humanistic positive law (whatever the legislature this week says is law, *is* law)? *By what other standard?* Be specific. Prove your case. *And prove it in terms of the Bible, if you please.* Please cite chapter and verse.

Chapter and verse: no words anger the compromised Christian intellectual more than these. Chapter and verse: he is thrown back on the Bible as the ultimate judge of his speculations. Chapter and verse: this allows no autonomy for the mind of man. Chapter and verse: his humanistic colleagues will laugh at him. Worse than facing Almighty God on judgment day, the Christian antinomian intellectual fears ridicule 'by his humanistic peers. Chapter and verse: he *has* no chapters

30. For example, Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), ch. 8: "Natural Theology and Scripture."

31. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), p. 318. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

32. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, ch. 1.

33. Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, Jr., and Gene Reeves (eds.), *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971); Ewert H. Cousins (ed.), *Process Theology: Basic Writings* (New York: Newman Press, 1971).

34. William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1958] 1962).

and verses. So he shouts his defiance of the laws of the Bible. He ridicules the laws of the Bible by ridiculing specific biblical law-based recommendations of the Christian Reconstruction movement. He sets himself up as the standard of interpretation. He clings to his 1968 (or 1948) classroom notes from the State University that granted him his advanced degree. "Here lies all truth, at least for the moment, and momentary truth is all we can hope to discover," he proclaims.

Not the Old Testament! Never, ever the Old Testament! After all, Christ has annulled the Old Testament. And even if He hasn't, State University has. This is the morally corrosive process that has been labeled so perceptively by Herbert Schlossberg, using a metaphor derived from the world of ruptured nuclear reactors: the evangelical meltdown.³⁵

F. The Lack of Procedural Details

There is one problem that Christians need to recognize as a major problem to be solved in each society that attempts to rewrite civil legislation and jurisprudence in terms of the Old Testament case laws. This is the problem of legal procedure. The Bible is almost silent concerning civil and ecclesiastical judicial procedure.

J. J. Finkelstein made this observation in his fascinating monograph, *The Ox That Gored* (1981). (This is the single liberal source that proved really indispensable for this book—the fix that got me hooked again,³⁶ vainly hoping that some other liberal document would prove as useful. None ever did.) He spent many years of his life in a careful study of ancient Near Eastern legal texts. He found a crucial contrast between biblical texts and the compilations of law in rival Near Eastern societies: *the biblical texts reveal almost nothing about legal procedure*. "The contrast between the biblical and the Mesopotamian legal corpora is underscored even further by the almost total absence in the former of normative rules, that is, formulations of the proper procedures governing commerce and economic life in general. The legal sections of the Pentateuch betray what amounts to complete indifference to the formalities without which the most elementary social institutions could hardly be said to function. This silence applies not only to contracts and obligations, but also to the normative forms by which

35. Herbert Schlossberg, Review of David Chilton's *Paradise Restored*, in *American Spectator* (March 1987), p. 42.

36. See below: Section H.

family life is ordered, such as marriage, family property rights, and inheritance. The Mesopotamian legal corpora dwell on these themes at great length; biblical law touches upon them only in the most cursory way, and then often within the framework of a narrative where it typically is a question of the unusual rather than the normative procedure. This is clearly illustrated by the petition of the daughters of Zelophehad for inheritance rights in the absence of male heirs."³⁷

He gives some good reasons for this contrast. 'One is that the climate of Palestine is inhospitable to the survival of parchment and papyrus. In contrast, Mesopotamian collections of tablets and sealed rolls have been found in profusion during archeological digs. "The bulk of the written remains from ancient Mesopotamia is accidental in the sense that all of it has been recovered by legitimate or illicit excavation."³⁸ It may be that attempts to impose coherence on the "incoherent assemblage of data of widely disparate dates" may be misleading. In the late 1970s, I heard a lecture by the editor of the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, David N. Freedman, who informed us that only about 10 percent of the tablets for any culture or archeological site are ever translated. There is always another discovery to catch the fancy of the archaeologists, and they eventually grow bored with the translation of seemingly similar commercial records and tax records. Furthermore, there are not that many specialists in the ancient languages, and fewer still who are social or legal theorists. They go on to new tablets instead of spending a lifetime interpreting the tablets they have already translated.

Finkelstein does not emphasize these more technical aspects of the differences between biblical and Near Eastern texts. The really important difference in the rate of survival, he says, was theological. "The Israelite nation was bound by an ancient and sacred pact with its deity to organize and conduct its life, both personally and institutionally, in accordance with the divinely ordained prescriptions. Directly or indirectly, whatever is included in the Old Testament by way of 'historical'

37. J. J. Finkelstein, *The Ox That Gored* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), p. 42. Boecker writes: "There are no OT 'rules of court.' We must remember above all that in its basic message the OT is not interested in conveying a picture of legal processes in Ancient Israel. Its concern lies elsewhere. Its purpose is to report God's activity in and with Israel and to demonstrate Israel's answer to this activity." Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, [1976] 1980), p. 28.

38. Finkelstein, *ibid.*, p. 44.

information is meant to reinforce that central thesis; the vicissitudes of the people through the millennium embraced by the biblical time span serve as hardly more than a barometer of the nation's fidelity to, or perfidy against, its pact with Yahweh. Everything is subordinated to this overriding purpose, and whatever did not contribute to this 'transcendent' end was not considered for inclusion, no matter how fundamental it was to the pursuit of daily life. As a consequence norms and regulations governing trade, property, the crafts, family law, and the like—the institutions that constitute the very fabric of daily life—were of little concern to the biblical authors and redactors."³⁹

I would add a third aspect of this structure of biblical revelation: the intention of God to provide a covenant document for all of human history rather than a temporary law code for professional use by Hebrew lawyers. The whole of God's revealed law had to be read every seventh year to all the residents of Israel (Deut. 31:10–13). Law had to be understandable by them. God's law was (and is) to be enforced primarily by *self-government under God*, not by formal agencies of government, whether civil or ecclesiastical. The law was (and is) to be *lived*, not broken into minute technical parts and rolled up in scrolls on lawyers' shelves. The inescapable technical and professional disputes of lawyers were peripheral to the fundamental point: *the restoration of the broken covenant of Adam*. God's revealed law was given to serve as a guide for the restoration of God's mandated kingdom, meaning the earthly, historical manifestation of God's cosmic civilization—"in earth, as it is in heaven." This meant (and still means) the restoration of God's law-order.⁴⁰ It was this law-order, not the technical terms of professional disputation within an elite guild of lawyers, that was the focus of concern in the Old Testament's texts relating to biblical law.

G. Formal Law and Ethics

Biblical law gives us God's fixed ethical standards. It also gives us warning: there will be a final judgment, eternal in its effects, awesome in its magnitude, and perfect in its casuistry. All the facts will be judged by all the law. Yet there is little said about how this final courtroom drama will be conducted. Any discussion of the technical details of God's formal legal procedure is irrelevant. We know only

39. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

40. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 12.

that there will be at least three witnesses against us, violation by violation: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.⁴¹

The quest for perfect earthly justice is socially debilitating. It is a demonic quest. Whenever lawyers dominate a society—usually during the society's final years—they steadily substitute formal procedure for ethics. (This is also true of many other academic guilds.) They adopt a theology of salvation by law, or at least continued employment by law. The practice of law replaces the law itself; "law" becomes case laws, precedents, and procedures, but without any thought or hope concerning an integrated law-order that provides meaning to the law in general. Law becomes what men say it is, and men do not agree. Humanism's implicit *judicial polytheism* then leads to the disintegration of civil law: jammed courts, endless litigation, plea bargaining, and all the other aspects of twentieth-century judicial tyranny that we have become numbed into accepting as normative.⁴²

The Bible is concerned with ethics, not formal courtroom procedure. The New Testament's few rules for church courts (Matt. 18:15–18) are representative of the entire Bible's view of legal procedure. Without reliable ethical standards, formal procedure is the judicial equivalent of wood, hay, and stubble. Paul chastised the church at Corinth for having allowed its members to seek justice in the Roman courts of his day. Better, he said, to seek justice from the least esteemed member of the local church (I Cor. 6:4).

It is the mark of a culture in the process of disintegration that it substitutes procedure for ethics, the letter of its law for the spirit of its law. Even more important than the letter of the law is the *bureaucratic machinery* that defines the letter of the law. This is where the West is in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Techniques of judicial interpretation are considered more fundamental than the substance of the law. Such an attitude invariably transfers authority from the people to a self-certified elite, the interpreters. It creates a secular priesthood. This is the basis of modern education, where formal examinations and formal academic degrees have been substituted as standards of performance in place of performance on the job as evaluated by a master craftsman in a free market setting. Such bureaucratic formalism is the antithesis of the Reformation doctrine: every man a priest.

41. Gary North, "Witnesses and Judges," *Biblical Economics Today*, VI (Aug./Sept. 1983). Reprinted as Appendix E in North, *Sovereignty and Dominion* (1987).

42. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Carrol D. Kilgore, *Judicial Tyranny* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1977).

H. A Lifelong Affliction

This book suffers from a deliberately imposed defect: the footnoting of utterly irrelevant and/or utterly erroneous scholarly material. I attended seminary and graduate school, and I picked up some burdensome habits. One of the great weaknesses of modern Christianity is that prospective ministers are often required to attend seminary, and seminary students are often required by seminary professors to spend an inordinate amount of time reading the theological drivel produced by higher critics. In fact, this general rule governs seminary curricula: the better the seminary's academic reputation, the greater the quantity of assigned drivel. Higher criticism confuses students in conservative seminaries, forcing them to waste precious time that could otherwise be used in studying the Bible. It leads students into apostasy in liberal seminaries. Professors in conservative seminaries frequently structure their classes as if an important pastoral task is to keep up with the latest theories of liberal theologians, so they train their students to become familiar with the defunct theories of long-forgotten German theologians. In the spring semester of 1964, I put this sign on my door at Westminster Seminary: "Help stamp out dead German theologians: Attend classes regularly."⁴³

Conservative Bible scholars spend their lives shadow boxing with liberals, despite the fact that the liberals pay little or no attention to them, and are barely aware of their existence. (An exception was Cornelius Van Til's published criticisms of Karl Barth. "That man hates me!" Barth was once overheard to say when Van Til's name was mentioned. But Barth never responded to Van Til in print, any more than Ron Sider responded in print to David Chilton.⁴⁴ Liberals prefer not to expose their intellectual wounds in public, especially when these wounds are mortal.) In any case, liberals revise their theses so often that by the time the conservative has painstakingly refuted what had been the latest liberal fad, the fad is regarded by the liberals as ancient history.⁴⁵

43. The problem with the theological seminary is that it is an institution that is supported by donors primarily because they expect it to train ministers, when it is all too often a graduate school in theology staffed by men whose real interest is technical theology, and who have never themselves pastored churches. It is another example of procedure (formal academic certification) triumphing over substance (producing pastors).

44. Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984).

45. A good example of such a fad was the "death of God" movement, which lasted

Nevertheless, this practice of citing liberal scholars, even if confined to footnotes only, is like a nasty habit picked up in one's youth; it is very difficult to overcome once you are afflicted. It usually becomes a lifelong addiction. You can spot the addict easily: as he reads the final manuscript version of his book, just before he sends it to the typesetter, he scans the footnotes, making sure that there are a sufficient number of German works cited, even if only in translation. If there are none, the author's hands begin to shake uncontrollably, like a heroin addict suffering withdrawal symptoms. He rushes back to make one more set of revisions, frantically scanning the latest theological journals in search of a handful of citations—any citations—just to make his book appear academically respectable. "One more fix; just one more fix! Then I'll quit forever!" But the pathetic addict knows he can't quit. Even when he is ashamed by his habit, he returns to the sins of his youth. He pretends that the drivel he reads in scholarly theological journals is significant. In time, he risks being remade in their image.

The works of modern theologians are overwhelmingly useless, yet occasionally one of them will randomly offer some vaguely useful insight, so the addicted scholar keeps plowing through their books, hoping for a footnote or two. *Tools of Dominion* displays occasional evidence of being the product of this bad habit picked up in my youth. But at least you will find no trace of ethical relativism in this book's thesis.

Conclusion

The case laws of Exodus provide us with fundamental legal principles that God has established in order to provide His people with a means of gaining His external, historical blessings. These case laws are mankind's God-given tools of dominion. Without them, and without faith in the God who gave them, rebellious mankind cannot long sustain the external blessings of God.⁴⁶

from 1966 until (maybe) 1969. The "hot" theologians who promoted this short-lived fad were Gabriel Vahanian and Thomas J. J. Altizer. This is an affliction I call Altizer's disease: two years after people get it, they forget all about you. See Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966). Altizer was teaching at Emory University, a Methodist school in Atlanta, Georgia; Westminster Press is mainline Presbyterian. See also Altizer and Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). Vahanian's book had been published half a decade earlier, but did not immediately catch on: *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1961).

46. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

The modern world, including the Christian world, does not believe this. People think that they can have freedom without Christ, and prosperity without adherence to the external requirements of biblical law. They really do believe in the autonomy of man. They really do believe that “my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17). The problem is, God has warned us that when we say this, judgment is near (Deut. 8:18–20).

We find Christians who argue vehemently that “Christians can live under *any* economic or political system!” True, so we reply: “Even the Old Testament legal system?” And we are told emphatically, “*No!* Christians can live under any economic and political system *except* the Old Testament legal system.” Anything is acceptable, therefore, except what God requires. So they reply, as Satan replied to Eve, “Hath God said?” Yes, God *hath* said!

Cornelius Van Til once wrote that if a covenant-breaking man could tune in his radio to only one station that did not testify of God to him, he would listen only to that station. No such station exists, Van Til says.⁴⁷ The whole creation testifies to the Creator (Rom. 1:18–23). We can extend this insight to social theory: if antinomian Christians could live under any system of politics and economics that did not testify to them of what God *really* requires, they would choose to live only under that system. They have said so repeatedly. But they cannot escape the voice of God. They cannot escape the requirements of Old Testament law. In short, they cannot escape the Bible. They are inevitably under the covenant’s blessings and cursings.

It is time for Christians to place themselves consistently and forthrightly under the ethical terms of the covenant, and affirm the continuing judicial validity for all societies of the case laws. They can begin with the case laws of Exodus.

End of Volume 6

47. A variation of this analogy appears in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1954] 1974). pp. 53–54.

BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 1

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BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 1

GARY NORTH

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Leviticus**

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This book is dedicated to

R. C. Sproul

who was never one to rest on his a posteriori.

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FOREWORD

In the fall of 1991 I began a series of sermons on the first several chapters of Leviticus. My decision to preach on an obscure and difficult book (in the morning service, no less!) runs against the grain of contemporary pastoral theory. . . . Early on in my series, in fact, I spent most of one sermon explaining why a study of Leviticus is valuable for Christians. I am convinced that Leviticus is not only valuable but essential to a proper understanding of the New Testament. But anyone who preaches on Leviticus to an American congregation at the end of the twentieth century owes somebody an explanation.

Peter J. Leithart¹

The Book of Leviticus, more than any other biblical book, has kept readers from getting to the biblical books that follow it. Leviticus calls to mind the old Negro spiritual: “So high, you can’t get over it; so low, you can’t get under it; so wide you can’t get around it.” But we should recall the conclusion: “So, hear the word of the Lord.” The problem is, Leviticus has to be taken as a unit. It is a very difficult book. Therefore, lots of people quit reading. Some make it through the five types of sacrifice. Others actually get through the consanguinity laws. But not many people finish the book. Many are called, but few are chosen.

Boundaries and Dominion is the full-length version of *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary*, which was published in hardback in 1994.² The digital version of this book initially served as a back-up for *Leviticus*, with more detailed arguments. It has now replaced it.

A. Why an Economic Commentary?

You may be thinking: “Why should anyone write an economic commentary on the Bible?” My answer: “Because there is no neutral-

1. Peter J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1993), p. ix.

2. Gary North, *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gnlevit>)

ity.” This is another way of saying that all knowledge is based on some view of morality, which in turn provides a concept of historical cause and effect. The Bible teaches that God brings positive sanctions in history to those who obey His law (Lev. 26:3–13). Our knowledge advances, individually and corporately, as we increase both our understanding of His law and our covenantal obedience to His law: *word and deed*. This is also the basis of our success in history, long term. But the modern church only rarely preaches this message.

The Bible speaks authoritatively in every area of life. This means that every area of life must be explored and then disciplined in terms of revelation in the Bible. We need specialized commentaries that apply biblical law to specific tasks: our occupations (jobs) and our callings (unique services) before God. As we study the Bible from the perspective of modern academic disciplines, we will increase our knowledge of the Bible and also these academic disciplines. We will gain insights that were unavailable to commentators in earlier eras. That is to say, *there is supposed to be intellectual and moral progress in history*. (Any widely heralded “biblical world-and-life view” that is not supported by detailed Bible commentaries on applied theology is either a sham or is in the very early development stage: a slogan rather than a reality.)

The church’s knowledge of the Bible is not static. This is why we should expect biblical exegesis to improve as time moves forward. The church will become progressively more alert to the interaction of biblical texts with specialized knowledge in all fields of study, but especially those dealing with man and his institutions. As history advances, our knowledge regarding our personal and corporate responsibilities will increase. With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).³

This means that the church’s knowledge of the Bible cannot remain static. Only by sealing off culture from biblical ethics could the church’s knowledge of the Bible remain static. This is an impossible goal, for the ethics of the world that surrounds an ethically isolated, culturally defensive church eventually makes inroads into the thinking of its members. Ecclesiastical isolation is therefore an illegitimate goal. Nevertheless, a sealed-off church and a sealed-off external culture are the twin cultural goals of pietism.⁴ *Pietists seek to place an exegetical*

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

4. J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” *Princeton Theological Review*,

boundary around the arena of Christian responsibility. The narrower this boundary is, the pietist believes, the better.

This commentary is designed to show that the church as an institution and Christians as individuals have far more responsibility than Protestant pietistic churches have taught for over four centuries. More to the point, these responsibilities will grow over time. But God's grace in history will also grow over time. This is the meaning of progressive sanctification, both personally and corporately.

There are a lot of laws in Leviticus. As in the case of my previous commentaries, I ask two questions of each law that I consider: (1) How was this law applied in ancient Israel? (2) How should it be applied today, if at all? A few commentators ask the first question about a few Mosaic laws. Hardly anyone since the year 1700 has bothered to ask the second, let alone answer it clearly. The art of Christian casuistry faded: applying God's law to specific cases.

B. This Book Called Leviticus

In a humorous book about psychologically afflicted people who cannot resist buying books, especially used books—I am one of these people—the author provides a brief history of what book reviewing might have been like before the invention of the printing press. Here is how he imagines an early book industry report on the sales of *Leviticus*:

Highly publicized diet book published under the title *Leviticus*. Sales flop. "Too many rules, too depressing, not enough variety, not enough attention to cholesterol," cry the critics. "And for crying out loud, give it a decent title."⁵

This parody is not too far from the opinion of the average reader who has started but not finished *Leviticus*. He sees it as a kind of "healthy living" diet book. It isn't.

Then what is *Leviticus* all about? It is a book about limits: *boundaries*. There are a lot of boundaries laid down in the Book of *Leviticus*. Some of these limits are liturgical. Others are familial. Some are tribal. Some are dietary. There are also limits that have to do with the status of the Promised Land as God's holy place of residence. Finally, a lot of these laws establish economic limits. I discuss these applications at

XI (1913), pp. 4–5. (<http://bit.ly/MachenCaC>)

5. Tom Raabe, *Biblioholism: The Literary Addiction* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 1991), p. 39.

considerable length, especially the economic ones. That is why this commentary is even longer than volume 3 of my Exodus commentary, *Tools of Dominion*.

I offered several pages of reasons to justify the length of *Tools of Dominion* in its Introduction. I have adopted what I call a “fat book” strategy. A movement that seeks to change the world cannot make its claims believable with only short books. The world is much too large and much too complex to be capable of being restructured in terms of large-print, thin paperback books—the only kind of books that most Christians read these days. The best that any movement can expect to achieve if it publishes only short books is to persuade readers that the world cannot be changed.

C. Applying the Bible’s Texts Today

I am writing for an audience that is not yet in existence. This nonexistent audience is the future leadership of Christianity. At some point, there will be an unprecedented Christian revival. The Holy Spirit will make His worldwide move.⁶ Many will be called, and many will be chosen.⁷ One of the results of this worldwide revival will be the revival of the ideal of **Christendom**: *the civilization (kingdom) of God in history*. Christianity will eventually possess sufficient judicial authority, by means of Christian candidates’ popular election to political office or their appointment to judicial office, to begin to apply God’s Bible-revealed laws to civil government. That victorious generation and the generations that will follow it will need a great deal more than a 200-page commentary. Those future generations will need many commentaries like this one: comprehensive within a specialized field of study. I want this commentary to become a model for those future commentaries in such fields as education, social theory, and political theory. Until such studies exist, and exist in profusion, Christianity will not be taken seriously as a religion with answers to the world’s problems. Christianity will continue to be dismissed as simply one more experiment in mystical personal escape and well-organized fund-raising.

6. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

7. Few have been chosen so far over the history of mankind’s time on earth; this does not prove that few will be chosen in every generation. On the meaning of “few are chosen,” see Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40:D.

A short commentary that offers only conclusions is not going to be taken seriously as a book for restructuring economic theory and practice. Two hundred or so pages of brief conclusions can be dismissed as a list of unsubstantiated speculations. I wrote this large book in order to substantiate my opinions. A commentator should include reasons for his exclusions: why he rejected other possible interpretations and applications. He must show what he believes to be true, but he must also show clearly what he is *not* saying, so as to avoid confusion after he is dead and gone. This requires large commentaries. Those who are serious about understanding the Bible and then applying it to this world require books as large as this one. Those who are not equally serious are not my targeted audience. Besides, such people will not read a book this large.

Boundaries and Dominion does things that normal Bible commentaries seldom do. First, it applies biblical texts to the modern world—specifically, to economics and law. Second, it cites the opinions of non-Christians who have reached either similar or rival conclusions regarding the judicial issues that Leviticus deals with. Third, it offers examples from history about how societies have enforced or failed to enforce these laws, and what the results were. Fourth, it offers the logic and evidence that led to practical conclusions. The reader can evaluate for himself my reasoning process, law by law.

The Book of Leviticus is not understood by Christians, not obeyed by Jews, and not taken seriously by anyone else. For example, Christians do not understand the five Levitical sacrifices, Jews do not offer them, and everyone else thinks of them as archaic, barbaric, or both. Then there is the factor of the higher criticism of the Bible, which first began getting a hearing by a handful of New England scholars in the United States in the first half of the 1800s. But interest in higher criticism faded in New England during the Civil War (1861–65).⁸ Then, independent of the moribund New England critical tradition, it revived in the mid-1870s and spread rapidly among German-educated American theologians.⁹ Today, most of the very few scholars who pay attention to Leviticus adhere to the interpretive principles of higher criti-

8. Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 8.

9. Thomas H. Olbricht, "Rhetoric in the Higher Criticism Controversy," in Paul H. Boase (ed.), *The Rhetoric of Protest and Reform, 1878–1898* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), p. 285; Walter F. Petersen, "American Protestantism and the Higher Criticism," *Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*, L (1961), p. 321.

cism. They assume that the Old Testament is the product of several centuries of highly successful forgers.¹⁰ I do not.

But the question remains: How should we interpret this difficult book? Are there principles of interpretation—a hermeneutic—that enable us to understand it correctly and apply it to our social problems?

1. Five Examples

There is more to the texts of Leviticus than meets the eye on first reading, or even second reading. The size of this commentary indicates just how much more. Let me offer the five Levitical sacrifices as examples. Here are a few one-sentence conclusions stemming from the five Levitical sacrifices. As you will see from these summaries, conclusions are not sufficient. Exegesis is required.

Whole Burnt Offering. There are limits on man's sacrifice, yet a perfect sacrifice is required. There is no autonomy of possessions. God imposed an economic loss: a sacrifice. God's mercy requires sacrifice on the part of the recipient. There is a hierarchy of debt in life: I owe God; someone owes me; therefore, he owes God. These debt laws remain in force in the New Covenant. Economic theory must begin with the Bible if the—is to be restrained.

Meal Offering. Being a priest adds to a man's responsibility. Authority is hierarchical. Leaven was prohibited on the altar: a symbol of completion in history. Salt was mandatory on the altar: a symbol of permanent destruction.

Peace Offering. The peace offering was the premier boundary offering. Leaven was required. Eating fat was a blessing. Leaven, law, and dominion are linked. The peace offering was not the predecessor of the Lord's Supper. The peace offering was voluntary. The New Covenant is more rigorous than the Old Covenant. Offerings above the tithe are peace offerings.

Sin (Purification) Offering. This sacrifice points to corporate responsibility. Priestly sins are the greatest threat to a biblically covenanted society. Biblical authority is through the people. This sacrifice mandated a theocratic republic. Modern political theory dismisses adultery as politically irrelevant. The church is more important than the state.

Guilt (Reparation) Offering. The tithe is the equivalent of share-

10. See Appendix I: "Conspiracy, Forgery, and Higher Criticism."

cropping. God favors private ownership. The free market pressures producers to count costs. God's economic sanctions are proportional to personal wealth.

I consider many other applications in chapters 1–7. Thirty chapters plus 9 appendixes follow these initial seven chapters. This is not the place to summarize all of them, but, as in the case of the five Levitical sacrifices, there are many practical applications that follow from these case laws. These applications are not intuitive. People who want to understand ancient Israel must become familiar with these case laws and their applications. So do people who want to be faithful to God today.

2. *A Question of Trust*

Because I really do expect some parts of Leviticus to be applied to modern life some day, I could not adopt the standard commentator's implicit assurance to his readers: "Trust me." The stakes are too high. A serious reader of a serious subject should not be asked to take the author's word for anything. This rule applies to Bible commentaries. The author should be expected to spell out in detail both his reasoning and his evidence; conclusions alone are not sufficient. Only if a commentator expects nothing in a biblical text to be applicable in the real world should he expect his readers to trust him.

The problem is not simply that the reader has been asked previously to trust the commentators. He has also been told to distrust the Mosaic law. First, dispensational commentators have argued that the Mosaic law is in a kind of suspended animation until Jesus returns in person to establish His earthly millennial kingdom. This exclusion includes even the Ten Commandments.¹¹ Second, higher critics of the Bible for over two centuries have argued that the Pentateuch is unreliable judicially because Moses did not really write it; instead, lots of anonymous authors wrote it. Third, Protestant theologians for almost five centuries have denied that the Old Covenant provides moral and judicial standards for personal and corporate sanctification. Fourth, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologians for a millennium and a half have substituted the legal categories of Greek philosophy, either Platonic (before the eleventh century) or Aristotelian (after the eleventh century in the West), for Old Testament law. Thus, Christi-

11. S. Lewis Johnson, "The Paralysis of Legalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 116 (April/ June 1963).

ans have been told for almost two millennia: “Don’t trust the Mosaic law!” So, most Christians do not trust it. Most Christian leaders not only do not trust it; they hate it. They are outraged by it. The Mosaic law is an insult to their sense of justice. They are relieved to learn that Jesus supposedly had nothing to do with it. So, it would be silly for me to say, “Trust me; the theologians are all wrong about the Mosaic law,” and then offer a 200-page commentary as evidence. Who would believe me? (Not many of them will believe this fat commentary, but at least it will be more difficult for honest critics to dismiss it as obviously incomplete.)

D. Short Commentaries and Judicial Relativism

There are at least three reasons why we have short Bible commentaries today: (1) modern Christian readers do not read very much, and certainly not long books filled with detailed arguments, let alone footnotes; (2) modern Christian scholars do not expect their conclusions to be applied to society, so they announce their conclusions rather than defend them in detail; and (3) nobody wants the responsibility of applying biblical texts to the contemporary world.

In a time of widespread apostasy and imminent judgment, silence is the preferred stance of God’s people: “And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” (I Kings 18:21). Why such silence? Because God’s covenant people see themselves as outnumbered: “Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men” (I Kings 18:22). God’s people do not like the visible odds, nor did prophets. Judicial silence seems safer, though not for prophets. The covenant-keeper asks himself: “Why bring a covenant lawsuit against a majority of voters? It is better to remain silent, even if this means booking passage on a summer cruise to Tarshish.”

One result of this outlook is short Bible commentaries. I did not write this commentary to meet the needs of those readers who prefer short commentaries. If Christians are ever to become doers of the word and not hearers only, they need someone to tell them exactly what the word requires them to do, and why. Leviticus tells Christians what they should still be doing.

“That’s just your opinion,” some critic may respond. Yes, sir, it is

indeed my opinion. The far more relevant question readers need to answer is this: *Is it also God's opinion?* If every controversial statement in this commentary is automatically dismissed as “just one person's opinion,” this implies that all controversial opinions in this life are judicially irrelevant. How about this controversial opinion? “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17–19). Or this one? “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). But, as the Pharisees said in effect to Jesus: “That's just your opinion. Who are you to say?” This persuaded them that God's judgment was not coming. But in A.D. 70, judgment finally did come.¹²

E. Homosexuality and Hermeneutics

There can be no doubt that the Bible is absolutely hostile to homosexuality. Jewish author Dennis Prager has minced no words: “. . . my religion not only prohibits homosexuality, it unequivocally, unambiguously, and in the strongest language at its disposal, condemns it.”¹³ He correctly pointed to the Bible's absolute break with any conception—literal or figurative—of God as a sexual being. “The first thing the Hebrew Bible did was to desexualize God: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’—by His will, not through any sexual behavior. This was an utterly radical break with all religion, and it alone changed human history. The gods of virtually all civilizations engaged in sexual activity. The gods of Babylon, Canaan, Egypt, Greece, and Rome were, in fact, extremely promiscuous, both with other gods and with mortals.”¹⁴ In the case of Egypt, he said, homosexuality with a god was the mark of a man's lack of fear of that god. One Egyptian coffin text reads: “Atum has no power over me, for I copulate between his buttocks.”¹⁵ This attitude of defiance—the professed lack of any fear of God—is basic to all homosexuality.

12. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>); *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

13. Dennis Prager, “Homosexuality, the Bible, and us—a Jewish Perspective,” *The Public Interest* (Summer 1993), p. 61.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

15. David Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), cited in *ibid.*, p. 64.

1. *Gomes vs. Moses*

The *New York Times* remains the most prestigious newspaper in the United States. It is sometimes referred to as America's newspaper of record. This identification is accurate. It is a thick, politically liberal,¹⁶ rhetorically bland,¹⁷ well-indexed newspaper. Its published index may be its primary strength, even more important than its widespread availability on microfilm. Historians become dependent on indexes, and the *Times* has always provided the best index of any American newspaper. Therefore, historians quote the *Times*. Therefore, it has become the nation's newspaper of record.

On the page opposite the editorial page—the famous Op-Ed page—appear essays by famous and not so famous people, usually liberals. On August 17, 1992, an article by Peter J. Gomes appeared: “Homophobic? Re-Read Your Bible.” Gomes, who died in 2011, was an ordained Baptist minister and a professor of Christian morals at Harvard University, the most prestigious university in the Western hemisphere. He is also minister of the university's Memorial Church.

Within a year of the appearance of his Op-Ed essay, the publishing firm of William Morrow/Avon paid Rev. Gomes a \$350,000 advance on royalties to write a book on conservative Christianity's distortions of the Bible. Nine of the largest publishers in the United States had bid in a competitive auction for the rights to acquire this as-yet unwritten book.¹⁸ Consider the economics of such a payment. If the book sells for \$20, and if Gomes received the standard author's contract of 10% of the book's retail price, the publisher will have to sell 175,000 copies—an unheard of number of copies for an unheard-of academic theologian—just to get back its advance on royalties, not counting forfeited interest income. To achieve this many sales—best-seller status—the publisher will probably have to spend far more on advertising than the author's advance, and even then the book is unlikely to sell 175,000 copies unless the media deliberately subsidize it by giving the author

16. Herman Dinsmore, *All the News That Fits* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1969). Dinsmore was the editor of the international edition of the *Times*, 1951–60. His book's title comes from the words on the masthead of the *Times*: “All the News That's Fit to Print.” The word “liberal” in the United States has meant “statist” since the late nineteenth century. It meant the opposite prior to the 1890s. The transition can be dated: the 1896 Presidential campaign of Presbyterian fundamentalist and populist William Jennings Bryan.

17. Sometimes referred to as “The good, gray lady.”

18. Don Feder, “Literary limits on the right side,” *Washington Times* (Sept. 6, 1993), p. F4.

free television time and laudatory book reviews in prominent journals. Either Morrow/Avon was rewarding Rev. Gomes for his opinions, or else, like the other publishing houses, the firm expected substantial support from those inside the media who share Rev. Gomes' view of homosexuality, the Bible, and conservative Christianity. *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* did become a best-seller. The media gave it lots of coverage, especially after Prof. Gomes revealed in the book that he was a homosexual. The book sold 250,000 copies within 10 months.¹⁹

Professor Gomes referred in his Op-Ed essay to various anti-homosexual initiatives on state ballots in 1992. He said that such initiatives are defended by Christians, who appeal to the supposedly clear texts of the Bible that condemn homosexuality. But these Christians have moral blind spots, he implied. "They do not, however, necessarily see quite as clear a meaning in biblical passages on economic conduct, the burdens of wealth and the sin of greed." An intelligent reader knows by now what is coming, and it does.

Gomes said that four biblical passages are customarily cited: Deuteronomy 23:17, I Kings 14:24, I Kings 22:46, and II Kings 23:7. He said that these passages refer to prostitution, not homosexuality. Quite true; this is why these passages are *not* customarily cited, contrary to Professor Gomes. The passages that *are* customarily cited are these: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Lev. 18:22). "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (Lev. 20:13).

2. Leviticus: Automatically Dismissed

These two passages presented a problem for Professor Gomes. He referred to them in his next paragraph. But he had an answer: they are both in Leviticus, and you know what Ph.D.-holding Harvard theologians think about Leviticus! These two passages "are part of what biblical scholars call the Holiness Code. The code explicitly bans homosexual acts. But it also prohibits eating raw meat, planting two different kinds of seed in the same field and wearing garments with two different kinds of yarn. Tattoos, adultery and sexual intercourse during a woman's menstrual period are similarly outlawed." He assumed that

19. Gomes gave this statistic in an interview on the C-SPAN television network's show, "Booknotes." *Booknote Transcripts* (Sept. 21, 1997).

this list somehow ended the argument. He then went to the New Testament. Such is the state of theological scholarship today in America's most honored university, founded in 1636 by Calvinist Puritans.

The holiness code was not taken seriously by Professor Gomes as a guide to modern behavior. I think it is safe to say that it is not taken seriously by Harvard University. What is very likely true is that it is not taken seriously by well over nine-tenths of the evangelical Christian community. This is the one of the problems that *Boundaries and Dominion* seeks to overcome.

Chapters 18 to 20 of Leviticus present the most detailed list of laws in the book. This section forbids sexual contacts between close relatives (18:6–20). Are these laws annulled today? Leviticus prohibits child sacrifice: passing through Molech's fire (18:21). Has this law been annulled because Molech is no longer worshipped? Leviticus prohibits theft and lying (19:11), defrauding a neighbor (19:13), and rendering unjust judgment (19:15). Are these laws also annulled? It prohibits making a prostitute of one's daughter (19:29). It prohibits the mistreatment of resident aliens (19:33–34). It prohibits false weights and measures (19:35–36). It prohibits children from cursing parents (20:9). It prohibits bestiality (20:15–16). Are these, too, merely "holiness code" artifacts?

On what biblical basis can a Christian speak of legitimate civil sanctions against homosexuality if the Book of Leviticus is automatically dismissed? Natural law? But the ancient Greeks accepted the legitimacy of homosexuality with only a few restrictions, something that is not yet taught in history textbooks,²⁰ yet they (the Hellenistic-era

20. Socrates, in the *Symposium*, praised the love between adult males and adolescent boys as the highest form of love, i.e., the love extended not toward very young boys "but intelligent beings whose reason is beginning to be developed, much about the time at which their beards begin to grow." This true love is demonstrated by older men's faithfulness to their adolescent lovers as the young men mature into adulthood. Socrates insisted that "the love of young boys should be forbidden by law, because their future is uncertain; they may turn out good or bad, either in body or soul, and much noble enthusiasm may be thrown away upon them; . . ." That is, adult male lovers may waste their emotions on such youths; this should be prohibited by law. Nevertheless, there should be no laws against pederasty between older men and adolescents, "for surely nothing that is decorously and lawfully done can justly be censured." He praised the laws of Elis and Boetia that governed relations among post-pubescent males, where "the law is simply in favour of these connexions, and no one, whether young or old, has anything to say to their discredit; . . ." He disparaged the laws in Ionia "and other places, and generally in countries which are subject to the barbarians, [where] the custom is held to be dishonourable. . . ." Hostility to man-adolescent homosexuality is regarded in such barbarous societies—Israel was one such society—as

Stoics) invented natural law theory. So, the Christian world has a problem. The average evangelical suspects—though he is really not quite sure—that the Bible authorizes civil sanctions against homosexuality. The sanction required by Leviticus is public execution. Already, the evangelical is growing nervous. But if he repudiates the civil sanction established by Leviticus, on what biblical basis can he assert that some other civil penalty should be imposed? *By what **other** standard?*²¹ If he can lawfully play “pick and choose” from the texts of Leviticus, not to mention the whole of the Mosaic law, then why should he be upset with Professor Gomes? But he is.

3. Antinomianism: Liberal and Pietist

The evangelical knows there is something wrong with Gomes’ arguments. He recognizes Gomes’ rhetoric as theologically liberal: “To recover a liberating and inclusive Christ is to be freed from the semantic bondage that makes us curators of a dead culture rather than creatures of a new creation.” He knows that he and his beliefs are Gomes’ target: “Religious fundamentalism is dangerous because it cannot accept ambiguity and diversity and is therefore inherently intolerant.” Such intolerance is “dangerous” and “anti-democratic.” Anti-democratic? This begins to sound bad. The evangelical begins to shift in his chair nervously. His discomfort increases when he reads: “The same Bible that the advocates of slavery used to protect their wicked self-interests is the Bible that inspired slaves to revolt and their liberators to action.” This is a true statement regarding the history of slavery. How can a Bible-believing Christian explain what seems to be moral blindness on the question of slavery (Lev. 25:44–46)? Yet he knows there is something wrong with this statement:

threatening to political tyranny. Pederasty fosters close attachments, Socrates said, that are inimical to tyranny. “And, therefore, the ill-repute into which these attachments have fallen is to be ascribed to the evil condition of those who make them to be ill-reputed; that is to say, to the self-seeking of the governors and the cowardice of the governed; . . .” Plato, *Symposium*, sections 181–82, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, [1892] 1937), I, pp. 309–10. Aristotle was somewhat less tolerant: he objected to homosexuality between older and younger men, though not between adult males generally, so long as they were not related by kinship ties. These limited objections, Barker argues, depended on “contemporary Greek notions and practices. . . .” Ernest Barker (ed.), *The Politics of Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1946] 1958), p. 46n. Comment on 1262a.

21. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

And the same Bible that on the basis of an archaic social code of ancient Israel and a tortured reading of Paul is used to condemn all homosexuals and homosexual behavior includes metaphors of redemption, renewal, inclusion and love—principles that invite homosexuals to accept their freedom and responsibility in Christ and demands that their fellow Christians accept them as well.

What can the typical evangelical say in response? He, too, believes that Leviticus promoted “an archaic social code.” It also established laws that seem to have been annulled, such as the laws of separating seeds in the same field or avoiding clothing made of both wool and linen. Is the social code of Leviticus inextricably tied to such laws of separation? If so, how can this social code be honored today? If not, how can we separate the still-valid social code from the annulled laws? Gomes put it well: “The questions are, By what principle of interpretation do we proceed, and by what means do we reconcile ‘what it meant then’ to ‘what it means now?’” Here he was on target. These are the two absolutely fundamental questions of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) that I have sought to answer in this commentary and in my previous commentaries. These are the two questions that deliberately have been left unanswered by Protestant commentators on the Old Testament ever since the Reformation. It is time to begin answering both of them.

4. Michener vs. Moses

On March 30, 1993, best-selling American novelist James Michener followed up on Gomes’ essay with a similar one: “God Is Not a Homophobe,” which also appeared on the Op-Ed page. This article was published two months after newly inaugurated President Bill Clinton announced his intention, as Commander-in-Chief, to remove all restrictions against homosexuals serving in the military. Michener, like Gomes, cited Leviticus 20:13. He, too, dismissed this law as no longer relevant. He invoked the same line of reasoning: changing times. The Hebrews “lived in a rude, brutal, almost uncivilized place where abominations abounded. To read the list of the things the Jews were enjoined to stop doing is to realize that God had to be unusually strict with such an undisciplined mob.” Their society was in “deplorable disarray.” He continued: “As order was installed, the extreme penalties advocated in Leviticus were relaxed in the civilized nations that followed. . . . Western society, reacting in its own way, has advanced far

beyond the primitive days of Leviticus.” Pity the primitive Israelites!

It was the residents of the city-states of Canaan who practiced such abominations, just as the Athenian Greeks did in Plato’s era, over a millennium later. It was not because Israel was “primitive” that God declared His law and its morally appropriate civil sanction. Israel was not primitive. Israel was God’s agent to establish a new civilization in Canaan. God announced this law because He despises homosexuality and homosexuals. He hates the sin and also the unrepentant sinner. He does not hate the sin and love the sinner. He hates the sin and hates the sinner. This is why there is a hell: God hates unrepentant sinners. God is indeed a homophobe. He hates the practice and those who practice it, which is why He destroyed Sodom. God warned Israel: practice such an abomination, and the land will vomit you out, just as it vomited out its former inhabitants (Lev. 18:24–29).²² But modern God-haters pay no attention to the written text of God’s revelation, except to ridicule it or reinterpret it to confirm their immoral ways. God’s revealed law is irrelevant in modern times, they insist. Christians answer that AIDS is not irrelevant.

Michener went on: “So when zealots remind us that the Bible said male homosexuals should be put to death rather than be admitted to the armed forces, it is proper to reply: ‘You are correct that Leviticus says that. But it also has an enormous number of edicts, which have had to be modified as we became civilized.’” Here we see cultural relativism applied to ethics: a form of social evolutionism. But is Michener’s line of reasoning different in principle from the arguments of Christian antinomians who dismiss the laws of Leviticus with an almost equally intense hatred? Is his hermeneutic fundamentally different from theirs? More to the point, is his hermeneutic fundamentally different from yours?

F. Dispensationalism’s Dilemma: Bahnsen or Gomes?

Modern fundamentalists are generally dispensationalists. They argue that Old Testament laws are no longer in force, unless the New Testament reaffirms them. This has led to numerous problems for dispensational theologians in the field of ethics.

22. Chapter 10.

1. The Feinbergs

Dispensational scholars John and Paul Feinberg issued a hermeneutical challenge in 1993: “The evangelical must decide which rules as stated in Scripture apply to our own day, and he must know how to decide which apply.”²³ They were correct; the evangelical is morally bound to do this. He will resist doing this as long as he can, however. Evangelicals sense where such questions lead: toward self-conscious antinomianism, or self-conscious compromise with humanism, or self-conscious theonomy. The more socially relevant they want to be, the more the first choice is closed to them. They did not want to join dispensational author Dave Hunt in a spiritual and intellectual campground for Protestant pietists and mystics.²⁴

As dispensationalists, the Feinbergs denied any mandatory judicial continuity between the Old Testament’s civil law and today, since New Testament life “is not life under a theocracy.”²⁵ This is the most important statement for social ethics that any anti-theonomic Christian can assert. But until it is proven exegetically, it remains only an assertion. I ask: Would any Christian assert the same anti-theocratic²⁶ thesis with respect to the family covenant under God and the church covenant under God? If not, then on what judicial basis is such a statement correct regarding the civil covenant under God? An appeal to Western history since, say, 1788 (United States) or 1789 (France), begs the judicial question. What must be proven is their assertion that the New Testament “assumes that believers will be under the political rule of non-believing rulers. . . .”²⁷ That the New Testament *makes provision* for such a calamity there can be no doubt; but what is the evidence that Jesus and the New Testament authors assumed that this is an eschatologically permanent condition throughout history? Where is it implied in Scripture that Nero’s Rome—or Julian the Apostate’s—is inevitable eschatologically and therefore binding judicially (or vice versa), whereas Constantine’s Rome—or Theodosius’—is a departure from New Testament judicial standards? Why should John Calvin’s

23. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1993), p. 33.

24. On Hunt’s pietism, see Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gdmplreduction>)

25. Feinbergs, *Ethics*, p. 36.

26. *Theocracy* is defined as “God rules.”

27. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Geneva be dismissed as a covenantal deviation in civil government? Is Stalin's Russia to be accepted on principle as having conformed far closer than Calvin's Geneva to the covenantally binding New Testament standard with respect to its official source of civil law? These are not merely rhetorical questions. They deserve straightforward answers, but I do not think I will see any straightforward answers in the books and journals of Christian political pluralists.²⁸

The Feinbergs argued: "It is inconsistent to say the Church is governed by the New Covenant when it comes to salvation, but by the Mosaic Code (and Covenant) when it comes to law."²⁹ This is quite true—as true as it is irrelevant to the theological point they are trying to make. I ask: What orthodox Christian theologian has ever argued that the Old Covenant had a way of salvation different from the New Covenant? Paul cited Habakkuk 2:4: "The just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11b). Lutheran scholar and theologian Robert G. Hoerber put the issue well: "... there is no evidence in the Old Testament or in Judaism that Jews believed that good works merit salvation. . . . The Jews observed the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament in order to belong to God's people, not to earn salvation."³⁰ The Feinbergs continued: "A discontinuity position avoids this problem"—a non-existent, utterly bizarre theological problem of their own invention—"by claiming that the Church is governed by the New Covenant as to salvation and by the Law of Christ as to law."³¹

2. *Judicial Content*

The three-fold ethical problem that a "discontinuity theologian" has to answer (and steadfastly refuses to) is this: (1) show exegetically why, where, and how "the Law of Christ" is different in content from the law of Moses; (2) discuss the biblically binding judicial content of this new law-order; (3) do this without abandoning the very concept of a unique biblical ethics, i.e., without surrendering civil law to covenant-breakers. The Christian world has been waiting patiently since 1830 for a dispensational theologian to write a book on New Testament social ethics—a book based exclusively on "the Law of Christ." This is a long time to wait. Frankly, I do not think the book is ever go-

28. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

29. Feinbergs, *Ethics*, p. 37.

30. Robert G. Hoerber, "Minors and Majors," *Christian News* (Oct. 4, 1993), p. 19.

31. Feinbergs, *Ethics*, p. 37.

ing to appear.

The Feinbergs understood their problem: identifying the biblical source of judicial content. Is it in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or both? They asserted: “Where the content of the Mosaic Law, for example, and the Law of Christ overlap, appeal to the OT is proper.”³² This appeal to overlapping content is judicially and theologically irrelevant on dispensational terms. There is no reason, given their view of the law, to appeal to Moses if Christ has affirmed a particular law. The Mosaic law is superfluous, dispensationally speaking. It is either annulled or else merely supplemental and non-binding. I ask: Exactly where are these New Testament principles of civil law affirmed and developed in detail comparable to the Mosaic case laws? The Feinbergs knew: nowhere.

They repeatedly tried to escape this embarrassing problem. For example, they tried to identify a New Testament passage that forthrightly affirms capital punishment. They appealed to Romans 13:1–7 (which does not mention capital punishment) and also appeal back to Noah (Gen. 9:5–6).³³ But what, on their presupposition, has Moses got to do with either passage? Dispensationalists House and Ice rejected all appeals to the Mosaic law in search of capital crimes; they appeal solely to the Noachic Covenant. The nations are (they used the present tense) under the Noachic Covenant, not the Mosaic.³⁴ But the only crime mentioned to Noah was the shedding of human blood. Try to build a civilization on just one civil law. It cannot be done.

3. *Hermeneutics and Abortion*

In their desire to become socially relevant dispensationalists—a self-conscious break with American dispensationalism, 1925 to 1975—the Feinbergs could let the matter rest here. They wanted to say something biblically relevant against abortion. They therefore broke with Dallas Seminary and Talbot Seminary, both of which had remained deathly silent on this topic. They turned to a case law of Exodus to affirm their commitment to the anti-abortion movement. They had a problem: the only place in all the Bible that clearly sets forth a law against abortion is Exodus 21:22–25. So, rather than declare their hostility to abortion based on an unswerving commitment to a Mosaic

32. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

33. *Idem.*

34. H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), p. 130.

law, they declared their willingness to accept a Mosaic law because of their hostility to abortion.

For example, nowhere in the NT does one find the specific regulations of Exod 21:22–25 that protect pregnant women and their unborn children. Those ordinances are part of the Mosaic Code but are not part of the NT Law of Christ. On the other hand, as we shall argue when discussing abortion, proper understanding of that passage shows it to be one of the strongest passages of Scripture defending the rights of pregnant women and unborn children. Given that fact, it seems proper to appeal to it as indicating God's attitude toward any kind of harm to the unborn, including abortion. Since nothing in the NT suggests that God's attitude toward the unborn has changed, the OT passage is relevant for determining God's attitude toward the unborn and for demanding protection of them.³⁵

This surrendered their hermeneutic. They began this section of their book by rejecting Bahnsen's statement of the theonomic position, namely, "that unless Scripture shows change with respect to OT law, NT era believers should assume it is still in force."³⁶ Bahnsen did indeed teach this; this is his theonomic hermeneutic: *the presumption of judicial continuity*. Yet they defended their appeal to a Mosaic case law on this same basis: "Since nothing in the NT suggests that God's attitude toward the unborn has changed, the OT passage is relevant for determining God's attitude toward the unborn and for demanding protection of them." That is to say, *they adopted Bahnsen's hermeneutic as the only one that could deliver them, in the name of the Bible, into the camp of the pro-life movement.*

In July, 1970, over two years before the United States Supreme Court handed down the *Roe v. Wade* decision, which legalized abortions on demand, Rushdoony challenged the church to return to Exodus 21:22–25 as the basis of its opposition to abortion. Anything less, he warned, has led in the past to compromises with paganism on this question. He wrote:

Among the earliest battle-lines between the early Christians and the Roman Empire was the matter of abortion, Greek and Roman laws had at times forbidden abortion, even as they had also permitted it. The matter was regarded by these pagan cultures as a question of state policy: if the state wanted births, abortion was a crime against the state; if the state had no desire for the birth of certain children,

35. Feinbergs, *Ethics*, p. 39.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

abortion was either permissible or even required. Because the state represented ultimate order, morality was what the state decreed. To abort or not to abort was thus a question of politics, not of God's law. Plato, for example, held that the state could compel abortion where unapproved parents proceeded without the approval of the state.

Very early, the Christians accused the heathen of murder, holding that abortion is a violation of God's law, "Thou shalt not murder." It was also a violation of the law of Exodus 21:22–25, which held that even accidental abortion was a criminal offense. If a woman with child were accidentally aborted, but no harm followed to either mother or child, even then a fine was mandatory. If the foetus died, then the death penalty was mandatory.

Because the law of the Roman Empire did not regard abortion as a crime, the early church imposed a life sentence as a substitute: penance for life, to indicate that it was a capital offence. The Council of Ancrya, 314 A.D., while making note of this earlier practice, limited the penance to ten years. There were often reversions to the earlier severity, and for a time, in later years, the administration of any draught for purposes of causing an abortion were punishable by death. The Greek and Roman influence tended to weaken the Christian stand by sophisticating the question, by trying to establish when the child or foetus could be considered a living soul. The Biblical law does not raise such questions: at any point, abortion requires the death penalty.³⁷

The leaders of conservative Protestant churches in the United States remained prophetically silent when *Roe v. Wade* was handed down on January 22, 1973. The conservative seminaries also remained silent. (They still remain silent.) When, half a decade later, a few fundamentalist leaders began, very tentatively, to get involved in the pro-life movement, they sought a biblical justification for this move into social activism. This raised a major theological problem, one which none of them is ever forthright enough to admit in public. By acknowledging that Exodus 21:22–25 is the only biblical law prohibiting abortion, they would have had to admit that Rushdoony had already pre-empted the position because of his view of the continuity of the Mosaic law. *They understood that to appeal to Exodus 21:22–25 is to invoke the theonomic hermeneutic.* They have generally feared to do this. The Feinbergs were an exception, and the results were intellectually em-

37. *Chalcedon Report* (July 1, 1970). Reprinted in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1991), p. 710.

barrassing. They offered no explanation for their abandonment of dispensationalism's hermeneutic: *the presumption of judicial discontinuity*.

Today, many Christian anti-abortionists blithely assert that "abortion is murder." We theonomists ask them a question: *What is the biblically mandatory civil penalty for murder?* They see a terrifying chasm opening up before them. They refuse to combine their pro-capital punishment stance with respect to murder—a biblically correct connection—with their rhetoric about abortion's being murder. If they did, they would have to call for legislation demanding the future execution of physicians, nurses, and former mothers who have been lawfully convicted of having participated in an abortion. So, they either remain silent or judicially schizophrenic on this issue. They do not take the Bible's mandated sanctions seriously. They do not even take their own rhetoric seriously. Not surprisingly, the politicians see no need to take them seriously. Abortion continues to be legal.

The self-contradictory hermeneutic of the two Feinbergs is a visible result of the fundamentalists' long-term judicial dilemma. They want judicial continuity when convenient (e.g., anti-abortion), while rejecting judicial continuity when inconvenient (e.g., anti-Bahnsen). They cannot have it both ways. Step by step, fundamentalists and evangelicals are being forced to choose between Bahnsen's hermeneutic and Gomes' hermeneutic. They are willing to do almost anything, such as write theologically befuddled books, to defer this decision.

Conclusion

In 1993, Simon & Schuster, a major publishing firm, released an updated version of Ernest Sutherland Bates' 1936 expurgated version of the King James Bible. The text is 1,248 pages long. Approximately two and a quarter pages comprise Leviticus. It is the shortest book in Bates' text until he reaches the minor prophets.

Boundaries and Dominion is longer than Bates' text for the entire Bible. Why should anyone struggle through a book as large as this one? It is not easy reading. It surely was not easy writing. What possible benefits are likely to offset the large investment cost of forfeited time: mine (past) and the reader's (future)? For most readers, the costs are far higher than the prospective gains. They will not even begin.

Few people are sufficiently interested in the Bible to read it cover to cover. Of those who are this interested in the Bible, few are inter-

ested in the Old Testament. Of those interested in the Old Testament, few (including pastors) are interested in theology.³⁸ Of those who are interested in theology, few are interested in biblical law. Of those who are interested in biblical law, few are interested in Mosaic laws that are no longer in force. In this commentary, I show why most of the economic laws in Leviticus are no longer in force.

Then why spend so much time, space, and money to prove my point in a period of history in which hardly any Christian assumes that any of these laws are still in force? Answer: because Christians need a principle of biblical interpretation to sift through the laws of the Bible. Without such a sifting principle—a hermeneutic—Christians risk falling into one of two disastrous errors: legalism-Phariseeism or antinomianism. A careful study of no other biblical book is better calculated to force Christian interpreters to discover and then apply a principle of biblical judicial interpretation. Leviticus is the hard case, judicially speaking. Get through Leviticus intact, and the other 65 books of the Bible become comparatively smooth sailing.

There is another issue to consider. Some of the laws of Leviticus are still binding. Which ones? This is a difficult question to answer, but Christians need to find the correct answer. This, too, requires a hermeneutic: a consistent, coherent principle of biblical judicial interpretation that enables us to study other books of the Bible and other case laws. A serious Bible commentary on the Mosaic law should instruct the reader on how to do this work of interpretation. Very few commentaries on the Old Testament do this.

There is an old saying: “Give a man a fish, and you have fed him for a day. Teach him to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime.” This principle of feeding always holds true, at least until the fish give out. In biblical interpretation, the fish will never give out. Finite minds will never succeed in exhausting the potential of infinite projects. The work of interpretation and application must go on. It is therefore not sufficient for me to present a series of conclusions. The reader deserves to know how a commentator reached his or her conclusions. This is why *Boundaries and Dominion* is so large. I show you how I came to my conclusions. Go, and do thou likewise.

Let me state the obvious: this is a Bible commentary. It is not a treatise on economics. It was written one chapter at a time; it should be read the same way. A commentary is supposed to throw light on

38. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993).

specific verses or passages. Because the Book of Leviticus is structured in terms of a unifying concept—boundaries—this commentary can be read cover to cover, but most readers will probably confine themselves to specific chapters.³⁹ In any case, the reader should recall what I wrote about my original commentary on Exodus 21–23, *Tools of Dominion*: you eat an elephant one bite at a time.

This commentary is aimed at economists, who in my day are unlikely to pay any attention. It is aimed at pastors, who rarely read long books, especially on economics. Most of all, it is aimed at intellectually serious Bible students who have not yet decided what their callings in life should be.⁴⁰ I hope this book will give them a larger picture of what full-time Christian service really is. They, too, can devote their lives to discovering what God requires from His people, and then try to persuade Christians to believe a word of it—a seemingly foolish task, indeed, *if there were not covenantal sanctions in history*. But there are: positive and negative. The positive sanctions are wonderful, but seeking to avoid the negative sanctions is imperative.

I know, I know: that's just *my* opinion.

39. This is why there is occasional repetition in subsequent chapters. Few commentaries ever get read cover to cover. This one, being digital, does not even have covers.

40. They may have occupations. These jobs are rarely their callings. I define a person's calling as follows: "The most important lifetime service that he can render to God in which he would be most difficult to replace."

PREFACE

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh (Eccl. 12:12).

When I began writing my economic commentary on the Bible in the spring of 1973,¹ I did not imagine that it would take me over two decades just to begin Numbers. When I escalated my time commitment to the project in the fall of 1977 to 10 hours per week, 50 weeks per year, I also did not imagine that it would take this long. I did not imagine that I would write such lengthy appendixes as *Dominion and Common Grace, Is the World Running Down?, Political Polytheism, and Millennialism and Social Theory*. But most remarkable of all, I did not imagine that a 27-year task to complete the Pentateuch turned out to be the world's longest footnote to another man's thesis: Ray Sutton's 1987 elaboration of the Bible's five-point covenant structure.² The five points of the biblical covenant model are:

1. Transcendence/immanence/sovereignty
2. Hierarchy/representation/authority
3. Ethics/boundaries/dominion
4. Oath/judgment/sanctions
5. Succession/inheritance/continuity

The acronym in English is THEOS, the Greek word for God.

I am not alone in my surprise. When I hired David Chilton to write a commentary on the Book of Revelation, neither of us imagined that his *Days of Vengeance* (1987) would also wind up as an eloquent footnote to Sutton's *That You May Prosper* (1987), but it did.³ Prior to Sut-

1. The first chapter was published in the *Chalcedon Report* in May, 1973.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

3. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

ton's application, Chilton had been totally bogged down for over a year, unable to complete the book's manuscript. After he heard Sutton present his discovery at a Wednesday evening Bible study that he and I attended in 1985, Chilton re-structured the manuscript, added some new material, and completed it within a few months. Today, a quarter century after its publication, critics have not yet attempted to refute Chilton's book, let alone Sutton's. (Note: a brief negative book review is not a refutation. Rather, it is a public notice of the need for one.)

While I have never been bogged down with any volume in this set of economic commentaries, there is no doubt that *Tools of Dominion*, *Boundaries and Dominion*, and *Inheritance and Dominion* would have looked very different if Sutton had not made his discovery, and I had not grasped its importance for my work. The five points of the biblical covenant are crucial for understanding Leviticus.

A. The Pentateuch's Five-Point Covenant Structure

As far as I am aware, what no one had seen—or at least no one had published—when I began this commentary project in 1973 is this: the Pentateuch is structured in terms of the Bible's five-point covenant model. I recognized this structure of the five books of Moses only after I had finished reading (as I recall) the third draft of Sutton's manuscript. My discovery forced me to think through my strategy for the entire commentary. I wrote a Preface at the last minute for *The Sinai Strategy* (1986),⁴ introducing the five-point model. Then I wrote a General Introduction to the entire economic commentary series in the second edition of *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (1987).⁵

Honest critics who reject Sutton's thesis will eventually have to take into account my commentaries and the support volumes I have published. (Dishonest critics will, as usual, murmur in private to their students that nothing has been proven, that this model is all smoke and mirrors. But I am confident that they will not go into print on this, also as usual.)⁶ Here is the five-point outline of the Pentateuch:

1. Genesis

Genesis clearly is a book dealing with God's transcendence. Tran-

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2: *Decalogue and Dominion* (1990).

5. Now titled *Sovereignty and Dominion* (2012).

6. See Appendix I: "Critics of the Five-Point Covenant Model."

scendence is point one of the biblical covenant model. The opening words of Genesis affirm God as Creator, testifying to God's absolute *transcendence*, the foundation of the Creator-creature distinction: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). God established a *hierarchy* through His covenant: mankind over nature (Gen. 1:26–28), each man ruling over his wife (Gen. 2:18). He gave them a *law*: no eating from the prohibited tree (Gen. 2:17a). He promised to bring *judgment* against them if they disobeyed (Gen. 2:17b). They violated His law, but out of His grace, God promised them an *heir* (Gen. 3:15). Here are the five points of the biblical covenant model.

What is the story of Abraham all about? It is the story of a promise that was sealed by a covenant act and sign (circumcision). Tribal Israel's story is one of covenant-breaking, God's negative sanctions, and the renewal of Abraham's covenant. Genesis ends with Jacob's verbal blessings and cursings on his sons. Jacob transferred the inheritance, tribe by tribe. Then he died. But, above all, Genesis is the story of God the absolutely sovereign Creator and providential Sustainer of history, the transcendent God who has revealed Himself to His people.

2. *Exodus*

Exodus is clearly the book of the covenant itself. "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). "And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant" (II Kings 23:21). God established His authority over the Israelites by delivering them out of Egypt. This is what Kline calls historical prologue: point two of the covenant.⁷ But what did the historical prologue of an ancient covenant treaty affirm? Hierarchy: the power of the king over all of his rivals. Exodus was written to prove that God was above Pharaoh in history. Hierarchy, not historical prologue, is the heart of point two of the biblical covenant model.

God brought visible historical sanctions against Egypt. This was evidence of His covenantal authority in history. Deny God's predictable covenantal corporate sanctions in New Covenant history, and you

7. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 52–61: "Historical Prologue: Covenant History, 1:6–4:49."

necessarily deny the historical prologue aspect of the New Covenant. You reduce the rule of the God of the New Testament to the status of a supreme ruler of a priestly hierarchy. You deny His kingly authority. This is what Kline did with his theory of the Mosaic Covenant as an *intrusion*—an ethical discontinuity—that pointed to God’s final judgment, therefore (???) having no judicial relevance in the New Covenant era. Specifically, the covenant’s negative sanctions, revealed in the imprecatory psalms, led to Kline’s neo-dispensational ethical theory.⁸ This leaves Christians at the mercy of a divine State—the divine rule of politics. It leaves them without any possibility of constructing either a systematically biblical political theory or a broader Christian social theory.⁹

One important implication of point two is that God has established the hierarchical principle of *judicial representation*. The principle of representation began in Exodus with God’s call to Moses out of the burning bush, telling him to go before Pharaoh as His representative. God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, and then He met with Moses, their representative, at Sinai. In Exodus 18, Moses established a hierarchical civil appeals court system, whereupon God met with Moses as Israel’s representative and delivered His covenant law. The Book of Exodus is a book about rival kings and rival kingdoms, God vs. Pharaoh.¹⁰ Men must subordinate themselves either to God or Satan through their covenantal representatives.

The Book of Exodus is easily divided into five sections: (1) the intervention of God into history to deliver His people; (2) the establishment of Israel’s civil judicial hierarchy; (3) the giving of the law; (4) the judgment of Israel after the golden calf incident; and (5) the building of the tabernacle, which they would carry with them into Canaan. Also,

8. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 161–67. Kline argues that God’s sanctions in history today are covenantally unpredictable. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

9. This is why pietists and dispensationalists of all kinds, including Kline’s followers, are so hostile to theonomy. It is not just because of theonomy’s theology of the covenant but also because of its necessary application: the construction a revelational social theory based on God’s corporate sanctions in history and theonomy’s demand that the state impose the Mosaic civil sanctions. This is an affront to the modern state and modern politics, and Protestant pietists have had an operational alliance with modern politics for over three centuries based on Roger Williams’ theory of pluralism and the secular state. On this alliance, see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gn-polpol>)

10. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1: *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

the Ten Commandments are divided into two sets of five points, each set paralleling Sutton's five-point model.¹¹ The first commandment, honoring God, is paralleled by the sixth commandment, the prohibition against murdering man. Man is made in God's image. The fifth commandment, honoring father and mother (household priests), has to do with succession: that we may live long lives in God's land. The tenth commandment, the prohibition against covetousness, also has to do with succession: not desiring to appropriate another person's inheritance.

3. *Leviticus*

Leviticus is the book that established Israel's ritual and moral boundaries. It is therefore a book about dominion, for boundaries in the Bible are always associated with dominion. The third point of the biblical covenant model deals with boundaries. Similarly, the third commandment deals with the proper use of God's name in our dealings with each other, thereby affirming an ownership boundary surrounding God's name, implying *dominion through ethics*,¹² and the eighth commandment parallels the third, for it is law three in the second list of five. "Thou shalt not steal" is a command regarding legal boundaries.¹³ The eighth commandment indicates that the concept of boundaries is basic to economic ethics, the third point of the covenant.¹⁴ The fifth commandment is "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." This is a law of inheritance: point five.¹⁵

Gordon Wenham commented on Leviticus' place in the Old Testament's covenant-treaty structure: "(3) The centerpiece of every treaty was the stipulations section. In collections of law, such as Hammurabi's, the laws formed the central section. The same holds for the biblical collections of law. In the treaties a basic stipulation of total fidelity to the suzerain may be distinguished from the more detailed stipulations covering specific problems. In this terminology 'Be holy' could be

11. *Ibid.*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion*, Preface.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

14. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

15. I conclude that the Catholic and Lutheran structuring of the Ten Commandments is incorrect. Calvin was correct: "honor thy father and mother" is the fifth commandment.

described as the basic stipulation of Leviticus. The other laws explain what this means in different situations.”¹⁶ Leviticus is literally the center of the Pentateuch: two books precede it; two books follow it.

God *sets apart* His people and their worship. He makes them *holy*—set apart. He places ritual boundaries around them. “Leviticus centers around the concept of the holiness of God, and how an unholy people can acceptably approach Him and then remain in continued fellowship. The way to God is only through blood sacrifice, and the walk with God is only through obedience to His laws.”¹⁷ The issue is sanctification, and this requires boundaries: “The Israelites serve a holy God who requires them to be holy as well. To be holy means to be ‘set apart’ or ‘separated.’ They are to be separated *from* other nations *unto* God. In Leviticus the idea of holiness appears eighty-seven times, sometimes indicating ceremonial holiness (ritual requirements), and at other times moral holiness (purity of life).”¹⁸ R. K. Harrison wrote that the first 15 chapters deal with sacrificial principles and procedures relating to the removal of sin. “The last eleven chapters emphasize ethics, morality and holiness. The unifying theme of the book is the insistent emphasis upon God’s holiness, coupled with the demand that the Israelites shall exemplify this spiritual attribute in their own lives.”¹⁹ Holiness means *separation* from the heathen.²⁰ It means *boundaries*.

4. Numbers

Numbers is the book of God’s judgment against Israel in the wilderness. Judgment is point four of the biblical covenant model: God’s response to oath-keeping or oath-breaking. God judged them when they refused to accept the testimony of Joshua and Caleb regarding the vulnerability of Canaan to invasion (Num. 14). They rebelled against Him, and He punished the nation by delaying their entry into Canaan until they were all dead, except Joshua and Caleb. “Numbers records the failure of Israel to believe in the promise of God and the resulting

16. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 30.

17. *The Open Bible: Expanded Edition* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 95.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

19. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 14.

20. Jacob Milgrom, “The Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System: Food and Faith,” *Interpretation*, XVII (1963), p. 295.

judgment of wandering in the wilderness for forty years.”²¹ Furthermore, “Israel as a nation is in its infancy at the outset of this book, only thirteen months after the exodus from Egypt. In Numbers, the book of divine discipline, it becomes necessary for the nation to go through the painful process of testing and maturation. God must teach His people the consequences of irresponsible decisions. The forty years of wilderness experience transforms them from a rabble of ex-slaves into a nation ready to take the Promised Land. Numbers begins with the old generation (1:1–10:10), moves through a tragic transitional period (10:11–25:18), and ends with the new generation (26–36) at the doorway to the land of Canaan.”²² I titled my commentary on Numbers, *Sanctions and Dominion* (1997).

5. Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the book of Israel’s inheritance, point five of the biblical covenant model. “It is addressed to the new generation destined to possess the land of promise—those who survived the forty years of wilderness wandering.”²³ The children of the generation of the exodus renewed their covenant with God and inherited Canaan on this basis. Moses blessed the tribes (Deut. 33), a traditional sign of inheritance in the Old Testament (Gen. 27; 49). Moses died outside the land, but before he died, God allowed him to look from Mt. Nebo into the promised land (Deut. 34:4). He saw the inheritance. The book closes with the elevation of Joshua to leadership, the transitional event of inheritance or succession (Deut. 34:9–12). I titled my commentary on Deuteronomy, *Inheritance and Dominion* (1999).

Those who reject Sutton’s thesis need to present an alternative model of the Pentateuch, one which fits it better, and one which also fits the Ten Commandments better, since they are also structured in terms of the five-point model: 1–5 and 6–10. Critics need to pay attention that old political aphorism: “You can’t beat something with nothing.” It is not enough to mumble that “Sutton’s book tries to prove too much,” or “There are lots of different models in the Bible.” There are indeed lots of proposed biblical models, among them the Trinity, the seven-day week, and the biblical covenant model.²⁴ But when we come

21. *Open Bible*, p. 127.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

24. In my Publisher’s Preface to Sutton’s 1987 first edition, I wrote: “. . . the author has discovered the key above all other keys to interpreting the Bible, from Genesis to

to the question of *God's formal judicial relationships with men*, we always come to the covenant. It is a five-point structure. Accept no substitutes!

B. The Five Levitical Sacrifices

Most Christians have trouble remembering the required sacrifices of Leviticus. When people have difficulty remembering something, it is usually because they have no handle, no model by which to classify what appear to be unconnected facts.²⁵ This has been the problem with the five Levitical sacrifices.

Five sacrifices. "Oh, no," moan the critics. "Here it comes. He's going to argue that they conform to Sutton's five-point covenant model." Exactly!

1. *The Whole Burnt Offering (Lev. 1)*

This offering had to be completely consumed on God's altar, except for the hide, which belonged to the officiating priest (Lev. 7: 8). None of the food portion could be retained, either by the priest or the donor. The animal had to be perfect: without blemish. The Hebrew word *olaw*, "burning," means "going up," as in smoke. It was a holocaust. Hartley called this the main sacrifice under the Mosaic sacrificial system.²⁶ "As an atoning sacrifice the whole offering was offered not so much for specific sins but for the basic sinfulness of each person and the society as a whole."²⁷ The entire offering went to God, a sym-

Revelation. . . " (xi). But what about the doctrine of God? It is included in the first point of the biblical covenant model. The covenant model is more comprehensive than the doctrine of God. It includes hierarchy—God > man > creation—law, sanctions, and eschatology. What about the doctrine of the Trinity? What about creation? The Trinity and the doctrine of the Creator-creature distinction (creation) are guiding presuppositions of orthodoxy, as reflected in the creeds. Nevertheless, the Trinitarian doctrine of God, like the doctrine of creation, appears in very few texts in the Bible. The Trinity is a doctrine derived from a comparative handful of texts in the New Testament. In contrast, the covenant structure is found in hundreds of texts and even whole books of the Bible, including Leviticus. The traditional Christian exegetical exercise called "find the implied but camouflaged Trinity in the Old Testament," is far more difficult and far less persuasive than "find the implied or explicit covenant model in the Old Testament."

25. This is why military history is so demanding, and why so few academic historians work in the field.

26. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4 of the *Word Bible Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1992), p. 17.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

bol of the total sacrifice required by God of every man.²⁸

There was a strict law for the priests: "And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out" (Lev. 6:12–13). Why so strict? Because this fire testified to the nature of God. The Book of Hebrews calls God a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). This is the God who must be feared above all other gods, all other fears. This is the God who consumes sacrifices on His altar.

This transcendent God is an immanent God. He meets men at His altar. If men fail to offer an appropriate sacrifice, God will consume them with fire. *This is the presence of God in fiery judgment.* "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Ps. 139:7–8). This is a sovereign God: transcendent and immanent.

2. *The Grain Offering (Lev. 2)*

The King James Version has this as a *meat offering*. This is incorrect. It was a grain offering. There are two keys to understanding this offering. First, it had to be of unleavened grain (Lev. 2:4, 11). Second, it was required when Aaron was anointed high priest (Lev. 6:20). Commentators presume that this sacrifice was required also at the anointings of subsequent high priests.

First, the requirement of unleavened grain points back to the exodus. The Passover mandated unleavened bread, too. This was God's memorial of His deliverance of His people out of bondage. They were to bring none of Egypt's leaven out of Egypt or into the Promised Land. This sacrifice pointed back to what Kline identifies as the historical prologue of the exodus: God's sovereign acts in history to deliver His people.²⁹ This means that this grain sacrifice is linked to point two of the covenant: historical prologue.

Second, the requirement that the sons of Aaron offer this sacrifice at the anointing of the high priest points to ecclesiastical hierarchy. The high priest was the most important officer in Israel. He met God in the holy of holies once a year. He was the primary mediator between

28. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

29. Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, p. 53.

God and Israel. This also points to point two: hierarchy/ representation.

3. *The Peace Offering (Lev. 3)*

This offering was voluntary. It was not part of the system of atonement. Hartley translated it the offering of *well-being*. So did Milgrom.³⁰ There were three types of peace offerings: praise offering (Lev. 2:15), vow (votive) offering (Lev. 7:16), and freewill offering (Lev. 7:16). Hartley wrote: "A primary aim of this sacrifice is for the offerer and his family or class, including invited guests, to eat the meat returned to them in a festive meal."³¹

The significant judicial fact of this offering was its openness. The offerer joined in a meal with his family and God. This indicates that the judicial barriers that always exist between God and sinful man were reduced. The participants' sins had already been dealt with judicially by another sacrifice. The sacrifice of well-being was a communion meal. The meal's participants were visibly identified as holy before God, set apart to praise Him and rejoice in His grace. The boundaries separating the offerer and this sacrifice were minimal compared to the boundaries around the other offerings. The offerer received back most of the offering. This points to point three of the covenant: ethics/boundaries.

4. *The Purification Offering (Lev. 4–5:13)*

This is called the *sin offering* in the King James Version. This was the sacrifice governing unintentional sins committed by the high priest, the civil ruler, the congregation as a whole, or individuals. "It describes behavior that violates the community's standards."³² Without the purification offering, the whole community was endangered. These sacrifices were required to avoid God's negative sanctions in history. They were offered to escape "a religious judgment on deviant behavior."³³ Hartley cited a 1989 article by A. Marx, who argued that this sacrifice was required on three formal occasions: the investiture of Levites (Num. 8:1–36), the ordination of Aaron (Lev. 8:1–36; Ex. 29:1–

30. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 217.

31. Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 38.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

33. *Idem.*

37), and the consecration of the altar (Lev. 8:11, 15; Ex. 29:36–37). The Nazarite had to make a purification offering at the termination of his vow (Num. 6:13–20).³⁴

David's concern is illustrative: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Ps. 19:12–13). In other words, if we are careful about the small sins, we will not fall into the great ones. If the high priest, the civil ruler, the whole congregation, and the individual all took such precautions, then God's wrath would not fall on Israel.

One sin that had to be dealt with by means of the purification offering was the false oath. "And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity" (Lev. 5:1). Also, "if a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these" (Lev. 5:4). Here is the penalty: "And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin" (Lev. 5:6). This is a trespass offering, or reparation offering (point five), but in the case of false oaths heard in secret or pronounced in ignorance, it is the judicial equivalent of the purification offering: "a sin offering." Point four of the biblical covenant model deals with oaths: the formal invoking of God's negative sanctions, the self-maledictory oath. Such an oath calls down upon the oath-taker God's curses, should the oath-taker break the law of the covenant.

The law of purification stated that the vessels in which the animal's remains were cooked had to be broken (clay pots) or thoroughly scourged (metal utensils) (Lev. 6:28). Again, the ritual concern is judgment. The concern, therefore, is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.

5. *The Reparation Offering (Lev. 5:14–6:7)*³⁵

This is called the *trespass offering* in the King James Version. This

34. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 72–86.

sacrifice was required in cases of theft: an illegal appropriation of another man's inheritance, a violation of the tenth commandment (point five). A man uses deception to gain ownership of another man's goods. Then he lies to the victim and the civil authorities. To restore the legal relationship after the criminal voluntarily confesses the crime and the two false oaths, he must pay the victim the value of the item stolen plus a 20% penalty (Lev. 6:5).³⁶ He also has to offer a ram as a trespass offering to make atonement (Lev. 6:6–7).

There should be no confusion about what is involved in the sacrifice. First, the lost inheritance is restored to the victim, plus an extra one-fifth. The judicial relationship between the victim and the criminal is thereby restored, making it possible to gain the advantages of social cooperation. Second, God is repaid because of the criminal's false oath in civil court. The criminal avoids being cut off by God: disinheritance. The goal is continuity: survival and covenantal prosperity in history. This is point five of the biblical covenant model: succession.

Conclusion

The requirement that God's people be holy is still in force. There will never be an escape from this requirement. It is eternal. To understand at least some of the implications of this ethical requirement—point three of the biblical covenant model—Christians need to understand the Book of Leviticus. They need to understand that it is a very practical book, many of whose laws still have valid applications in modern society. We ignore this book at our peril.

The Pentateuch is itself revelatory of the five-point structure of God's covenant. My economic commentary on the Pentateuch is therefore a commentary on a covenant. I call it the dominion covenant, for it is the God-given, God-required assignment to mankind to exercise dominion and subdue the earth that defines mankind's task as the only creature who images God the Creator (Gen. 1:26).³⁷

36. Had he not confessed, and had he been convicted, the penalty was at least two-fold restitution.

37. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

INTRODUCTION

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy. Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:1–4).

The book of Leviticus is the Bible's premier book of holiness. The biblical meaning of "holy" is "set apart by God." It is related conceptually to "sanctify," "sanction," and "saint." It refers to any person, place, or thing with a God-ordained covenantal boundary around it. Everything inside such a boundary is sacrosanct. For example, we correctly speak of holy matrimony. This does not mean that every marriage is Christian. It means that God has placed a special judicial boundary around every marriage.

The book of Leviticus is the Bible's premier book of boundaries. There is an element of separation in every boundary, just as there is in holiness: *separation by sanctions*.¹ The Book of Numbers is the Pentateuchal book of sanctions, but the civil sanctions of Leviticus have alienated Christians and have outraged pagans. That certain sexual acts are forbidden in Leviticus is generally acceptable to most Christians, but the specified civil sanctions are a terrible mental burden for them. They will do almost anything, including dismissing the continuing validity of all the laws in Leviticus, in order to escape any personal or corporate responsibility for pressuring civil rulers to enforce the Levitical civil sanctions. Christians would rather deny all of the Levitical separations than affirm any of the Levitical civil sanctions. In short, they would rather deny the ethical terms of the Levitical system of holiness than affirm the judicial terms of Levitical civil justice.

1. See "Holiness," *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), II, p. 395.

A. Escaping Cultural Relevance

Here is a major dilemma for the modern church. Christians confidently affirm that “the Bible has answers for all questions.” But one question is this: What relevance should Christianity have in culture? Modern antinomian Christians emphatically deny the judicial foundation of Christianity’s cultural relevance in history: biblical law and its biblically mandated sanctions. Most Christians prefer pietism to cultural relevance, since civil responsibility accompanies cultural relevance. So, they seek holiness through withdrawal from the prevailing general culture.

This withdrawal has forced them to create alternative cultures—ghetto cultures—since there can be no existence for man without culture of some kind. The Amish have achieved a remarkable separation from the general culture, though not so radical as tourists in Amish country like to imagine, by abandoning such modern benefits as electricity in their homes and the automobile. But they travel in their buggies on paved highways, and they use electricity in their barns. They are always dependent on the peace-keeping forces of the nation. Pietistic Christians have longed for a similar separation, but without the degree of commitment shown by the Amish. They send their children into the public schools, and they still watch television. The result has been catastrophic: the widespread erosion of pietism’s intellectual standards by the surrounding humanist culture, and the creation of woefully third-rate Christian alternatives. I offer as evidence the quality of American Christian radio broadcasting, especially contemporary Christian popular music. It is better than hard rock “music” and rap “music,” no doubt, but compare it to classical music. Compare it to Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven. Compare hymns written after 1920 to those written by Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley.

The ultimate form of personal Christian withdrawal from culture is mysticism: placing an emotional and epistemological boundary between the Christian and the world around him. But there is a major theological risk with all forms of theistic mysticism. The proponents of theistic mysticism again and again in history have defined mysticism as union with God. By defining mysticism as metaphysical rather than ethical, mystics have frequently come to a terribly heretical conclusion: their hoped-for union with God is defined as metaphysical rather than ethical. They seek a union of their *being* with God. Meister Eckhart, the heretic of the early fourteenth century, concluded in his 28th

Sermon that “God and I are One.”² This is a representative expression of the pantheism found in most forms of mysticism.³ The mystic’s quest for unity with God denies the Bible’s definition of holiness: the separation of God from the creation.

B. The Creator/Creature Distinction

The ultimate boundary is the one separating God from man: the Creator/creature distinction. While man is made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26), he is not God, nor does he participate in God’s being. Man is commanded to be holy, for God is holy (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2), but man is also warned not to seek divinity for himself (Gen. 11:6; Deut. 29:29; Job 38–41). Man is commanded to seek ethical unity with the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, but man cannot attain ontological unity with God. A permanent boundary is placed between God’s being and man’s being. *The unity between God and man is to be ethical, never ontological or metaphysical.*

The doctrine of the Creator/creature distinction has enormous consequences for social theory and practice. A contemporary Jewish political scientist has correctly observed: “The boundary between God and man is His supreme safeguard against social chaos. For what would men not do to one another if they were to claim ultimate authority?”⁴ When covenant-breaking men have sought to erase this divine-human boundary, they have reaped their appropriate reward: social chaos followed by tyranny. Twentieth-century Europe is a monument to this reality: World War I, Communism, Nazism, Italian Fascism, World War II, the Cold War, and the break-up of Yugoslavia in civil war after 1990. In addition to the politics of despair have come existentialism, nihilism, the self-conscious meaningless of modern art, pornography, the drug culture, and the mindlessness of hard rock music. The laws of Leviticus were designed to remind men not to erase

2. Meister Eckhart: *A Modern Translation*, trans. Raymond Bernard Blakney (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1941), p. 232.

3. R. M. Bucke provided extracts of dozens of passages to this effect in the teachings and writings of numerous religious thinkers, from Buddha to Plotinus to the homosexual, nineteenth-century American poet, Walt Whitman. R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: Dutton, [1901] 1969), Part 4.

4. Aaron Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama, 1984), p. 97. Professor Wildavsky died before I completed this manuscript. I had hoped to send him a copy of the book. He was one of the great conservative academic scholars in the second half of the twentieth century.

the divine-human boundary. The Mosaic law was designed to avoid social chaos and tyranny. It established laws—boundaries—governing the relationships between men in order to remind men of the ultimate boundary between God and man.

This leads me to a very important point: any attempt to define Christian “relationships” apart from biblical law is a form of rebellion. *Relationships apart from God’s revealed law and its mandated judicial sanctions are inherently antinomian.* It is common for modern Protestant evangelicals to blather on and on about “relationships” while denying the continuing validity of biblical law. This way lies tyranny. And adultery.

The fundamental boundary in history is the one between God and His creation. A subordinate boundary in history is the one between the state and the individual. Modern conservatism ignores the first boundary and therefore finds itself incapable of maintaining the second, either theoretically or institutionally. Rushdoony described the importance of biblical boundaries for biblical political theory: “Man’s realm is on earth, and, since every man’s heart is alien ground to every other man, he must rule by force in order to gain total dominion. God’s realm and sovereignty is [*sic*] universal as Creator. He is on home ground everywhere in the universe, as much in command in the heart of every man as in heaven. For God, there is no alien ground, and hence no compulsion: He simply exercises His will over His own domain and creation in every crevice of the universe, and in every man’s heart. Wherever the state moves beyond its God-appointed grounds, it is on alien ground, as indeed all men and institutions are wherever and whenever they transgress their appointed bounds.”⁵

C. Israel’s Boundaries

As we shall see in this commentary, most of Israel’s economic boundaries were based on geography (land laws), tribal membership (seed laws), and ritual requirements (laws of sacrifice). These economic rules constituted a covenantal unity. As Americans say, they were a “package deal.” These rules were temporary boundaries designed to shape the nation of Israel in very special ways. These judicial boundaries maintained the land and the people as a special province of God. The land of Israel became like the garden of Eden: a temporary resid-

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House [1970] 1995), p. 42. (<http://bit.ly/rjrpopag>)

ence uniquely under God's revealed law and uniquely under His historical sanctions. The land of Israel, like the garden of Eden, was to serve as a training area for covenant-keeping men. It was also to serve as an example for covenant-breaking men (Deut. 4: 4–8).⁶ It was to serve both as God's boot camp and as His general headquarters for worldwide evangelism and cultural conquest.

The laws of Leviticus were designed to keep the leaven of evil outside of the land of Israel, but they were also designed to push the leaven of righteousness into the world around Israel. Levitical law was both defensive and offensive. One problem with virtually all commentaries on Leviticus is that they emphasize the defensive aspects of the Levitical laws: separation and exclusion. In this book, I do my best to point out the inclusive aspects of some of these laws. There were *laws of inclusion*, at least to the extent of placing the gentile world under the Ten Commandments and therefore inside the zone of predictable external blessings: positive sanctions in history. This was Jonah's message to Nineveh: God's covenant lawsuit. Had all of God's revealed laws been solely exclusionary, Jonah would not have been sent by God on his missionary journey. As I argue in this commentary, some of the Mosaic laws were cross-boundary laws that governed other nations, and are still valid today.

D. The Book of Priestly Holiness

Behind Jonah's prophetic ministry was a nation of priests. As Jacob Milgrom pointed out in the introduction to the first volume of his extraordinarily learned, extraordinarily large, and extraordinarily unreadable commentary on Leviticus, Leviticus is not about the tribe of Levi. It is about the priesthood. The Book of Numbers rather than Leviticus deals in detail with the laws governing the Levites. The reason why the book is called Leviticus is because in Hellenic times, when the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament appeared (the Septuagint), the term "Levites" meant priests.⁷

Milgrom wrote: "Theology is what Leviticus is all about. It pervades every chapter and almost every verse. It is not expressed in pronouncements but embedded in rituals."⁸ But what is the focus of the

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

7. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 1.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

book's theology? *Holiness*. Leviticus is pre-eminently the Old Covenant's book of holiness. To be holy is to be *set apart* by God: judicially, ethically, culturally, and in the case of the Old Covenant people of God, geographically. God establishes boundaries. Leviticus is the Pentateuch's book of boundaries.

Leviticus also is the book of life. "Because impurity and holiness are antonyms," Milgrom wrote, "the identification of impurity with death must mean that holiness stands for life."⁹ The book's rituals and ethical injunctions point to *separation from evil*, which is the sole basis of life in God's world. Adam's wilful violation of a verbally identified boundary in the garden brought universal death into history. Man's continuing imperfections also point to death. But the perfect honoring God's boundaries therefore brings life. Thus, the ritual and judicial rigors of Leviticus point to man's need of redemption by means of a perfect substitute whose death brings life to the boundary violator. *God's law kills those who are already under the sentence of death; on the other hand, it provides a better life for those who are alive*. The pre-eminent example of this truth is Jesus Christ, who contrasted His own ministry with that of a thief: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Israel's boundaries were established in terms of God's unique presence among His people: "And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:11–12). The Book of Leviticus rests on the assumption that God's unique covenantal presence among His set-apart people had geographical implications. *The Mosaic Covenant was a geographical covenant*. God's covenant with Abram (renamed Abraham: "father of nations") involved *land* because it involved *seed*: "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18).

God's goal in all of His laws is to place men under certain moral and judicial boundaries. Men are to acknowledge God's absolute sovereignty over them by accepting the authority of His covenant's hierarchy. The stipulations enforced by His hierarchical institutions serve as the legal boundaries of covenant-keeping man's existence. Men are to learn to live within these boundaries. *There is both inclusion and*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

exclusion in establishing and enforcing all boundaries. God in effect puts a “no trespassing” sign around something, and man is required to honor the stipulations of that sign. If he refuses, God threatens to impose negative sanctions on him in history and perhaps even eternity. God is not mocked at zero cost.

E. The Book of the Kingdom

Leviticus is also the book of the kingdom. God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, a false kingdom. In doing so, He gave them an opportunity to gain land for a new kingdom. The next generation did inherit this land. The generation of the exodus did not. They died in the wilderness. Because of their rebellion and lack of faith, their boundary was the wilderness. They could not return to Egypt, nor could they enter the Promised Land. The kingdom grant of land could be claimed only by their children, and only after their covenant renewal at Gilgal (Josh. 5).

Leviticus presents the rules governing this kingdom grant from God. This land grant preceded the giving of these rules. *Grace precedes law in God's dealings with His subordinates.* We are in debt to God even before He speaks to us. The land grant was based on the original promise given to Abraham. That promise came prior to the giving of the Mosaic law.¹⁰ This is why James Jordan said that the laws of Leviticus are more than legislation; the focus of the laws is not simply obedience to God, but rather on *maintaining the grant*.¹¹ The basis of maintaining the grant was *ethics*, not the sacrifices. Man cannot maintain the kingdom in sin.¹² The fundamental issue was sin, not sacrifice; ethics, not ritual. God told them this repeatedly through His prophets:

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward (Jer. 7:22–24).

10. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 8. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

11. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isa. 1:11–17).

F. The Book of Property Rights

The Book of Leviticus is also the book of property rights in the Pentateuch. The grant of the kingdom was in the form of a land grant. The land itself was the visible manifestation of the historical reality of the kingdom. So was the promised economic prosperity. *Leviticus is the book that presents the ethical foundations of prosperity* (Lev. 26: 3–10). It also presents the legal foundations of *judicial peace with God*, the only long-term basis of prosperity. God begins with a gift to His people, and then He sets forth the ritual and legal foundations for maintaining this gift. He promises to uphold this grant if they obey Him. God's promise cannot be separated from their requirement of obedience. Jordan wrote:

God's covenant Word is always first and foremost promise, and then command based on promise. Point three has to do with God's grant of the Kingdom, His gift and promise, and then our duties consequent thereto. God's Word is always both promise and command, and in Reformed theology, promise comes first. (In Lutheran law/gospel theology, law comes first to drive us to Christ; but in Reformed theology, grace comes first to put us in the Kingdom, and then the law is given as guidance for our Kingdom duties.)¹³

Respect for the property of others clearly connects largely with the third zone of the five-fold covenant structure, because the third area is that of the distributed grant. We have to respect what God has granted to others. Also, disobedience to any part of God's law is

13. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

regarded as a trespass or more literally a “debt,” as we see it in the Lord’s Prayer. Thus, any lawbreaking is a form of theft, creating indebtedness, which must be covered by a Trespass or Compensation Sacrifice. Theft has to do with boundaries, which is why it is equivalent to trespass. Leviticus is the book of boundaries, of who is allowed to go where, and of how to become cleansed once you have trespassed.¹⁴

The Book of Leviticus is book three of the Pentateuch. It is the book of property. The eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” is the third law of the so-called second table of the law, i.e., the third law in the second group of five covenantally structured laws. The third commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain,” establishes a boundary around God’s name. God’s name is His property, and He in effect licenses the use of His name only for specific uses. The parallels should be obvious. Point three of the biblical covenant model establishes boundaries. Leviticus is the book of property because it is the book of boundaries.

G. A Holy Walk Before the Lord

We now come to a topic that is never discussed by the commentators. I have never seen any commentator devote as much as one page to it, yet it is more important for understanding the unique nature of the economic life of ancient Israel than any other topic. I am not trying to exaggerate; I really mean this. Here is the question that demands an answer: **How did they have time to earn a living?** The mandatory sacrifices ate up time as well as crops. Whatever answers to this question that Israel came up with were fundamental to the life of the nation for almost 14 centuries, yet we honestly do not know how Israel answered it. As far as I know, nobody has discussed in detail the economics of the festival journeys. The rabbis who compiled the Mishna and Talmud in the four centuries after the fall of Jerusalem forgot their ancestors’ answers, and Christians have never thought to ask the question.

In Exodus 23, we read: “Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) And the feast of har-

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

vest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD" (Ex. 23:14–17). Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles: three feasts a year were required of every adult circumcised male if he was inside the land's boundaries. Every adult male had to journey to a central location and participate in a festival (ritual feast) three times a year. A parallel passage promised that during their absence from their homes, no invaders would disturb them: "Thrice in the year shall all your men children [males] appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year" (Ex. 34:23–24). God promised to bless the land when they honored these requirements. The nation's circumcised adults were on the march three times each year.

1. Centralization

This geographically centralized system of ritual sacrifice was what motivated Jeroboam to create a pair of false worship centers at Bethel and Dan in his newly created northern kingdom (I Kings 12:25–29). He did not want the people of Israel journeying to Judah to worship, for fear that this would divide their loyalty politically (v. 27). He set up a rival altar and a rival Passover celebration at Bethel (v. 32).

We need to understand just how central, and how centralizing, these mandatory sacrifices were. We need to remember this: *there was only one lawful altar in Israel*. Unless there was a way for local religious and civil leaders in a community to represent the entire community at these feasts, which the Bible's texts do not indicate there was, this meant that the entire adult male population—or at least those eligible for numbering for military service—came to Jerusalem a minimum of three times a year, not including their participation in any of the five special sacrifices discussed in Leviticus 1–7.

Most of them had to walk. A few may have had donkeys. Horses cost too much feed and do too little work for small farms to support. There are few references to horses in Israel. They are always spoken of in a military context: the possession of foreign armies. Perhaps some people had donkeys, but riding two hundred miles on a donkey is no picnic. Think about it. Despite rain, mud, dust, and bad weather, three

times each year every adult male had to walk or ride a donkey to the tabernacle-temple. In David's day, this meant Jerusalem. Some sections of the nation were located over a hundred miles from Jerusalem "as the crow flies." Winding highways would have added to this estimate. At an average speed of three miles per hour, this would have required up to four or five eight-hour days of walking, each way, plus whatever time was spent in Jerusalem, three times a year. Not every Israelite had to spend this much time on the road, but members of some tribes did.

2. *The Walk: Physical and Spiritual*

When God spoke of a holy walk before Him, He really meant it. It was an judicial walk, but it was also a literal walk. *The difficulty of the physical walk was to reflect the difficulty of the spiritual walk.* Life in Israel was to be a kind of boot camp experience—a temporary period of preliminary training for worldwide dominion. In Eden, Adam had been told to *keep away* from a tree: a physically easy task. In Israel, they were told to *journey to* a central location: a physically difficult task. If they walked faithfully, He promised, the land of Israel would make them rich.

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land (Lev. 26:3–6;¹⁵ cf. Deut. 28:8–13).

God promised to intervene in the operations of nature in order to make good on His promise. The heavens would deliver rain in due season. But to obtain these blessings, Israelites had to sacrifice—not just offer sacrifices, but sacrifice a large portion of their lives to the boredom of walking. This nation, more than any other non-nomadic nation in history, was to be on the move. Like a literal army, they were to march a minimum of three times a year. Marching was to keep them in good shape, both physical and spiritual, as God's holy army.

At Passover, entire families journeyed to the tabernacle city and

15. Chapter 33.

later to Jerusalem. Families were required to celebrate the Passover (Ex. 12). They could not celebrate the feast at home, for they were required to slay the Passover lamb on the night Passover began (Ex. 12:6). This had to be done at the appointed national place of worship after they entered the Promised Land (Deut. 16:2–6). There were about 625,000 adult males when they entered the Promised Land (Num. 26:51, 62). This means that about two million people would have arrived in one city at the same time, to spend a week.¹⁶ Imagine four million people arriving. Or perhaps 10 million if the population grew. This did not happen, for God withheld the blessing of population growth, but until the sacrificial system changed, this long walk was required. Then they all walked home.

Mothers today complain about the trouble involved in planning a day's drive or a plane ride, plus a week's visit in a motel. Think about organizing a family for a week's walk, a week's stay, probably camping out in a tent. Bear in mind, there was no running water, no indoor plumbing, no toilet paper, no disposable diapers, and no fast food restaurants. This was no picnic. Then, after a week of jammed masses of humanity and assembly-line sacrifices, they walked home. Less than two months after arriving home, all the men walked back to celebrate another feast, which we call Pentecost: the firstfruits offering. This was Israel's celebration the anniversary of God's giving of the Ten Commandments.¹⁷

During Pentecost ("weeks") and Tabernacles ("booths"—the feast of ingathering), those eligible to serve in God's holy army arrived in the central place of sacrifice in order to offer their individual sacrifices. The feasts' celebrations were family-centered, with each family inviting in Levites and strangers to share in the festivities (Deut. 16:13–17). During Tabernacles, the altar was used the whole week during the day-time for mandatory national sacrifices (Num. 29:13–34). Pentecost (*pentekoste* is Greek for *fiftieth*) was different; the festival's formal sac-

16. The average Israelite family had approximately two children at this stage in the nation's history. The number of adult males had been almost the same when they left Egypt (Num. 1:46; 3:43), which meant they had experienced zero population growth. Stable population growth requires a little over two children per family: 2.1 children—one male, one female on average (in monogamous societies). This means that Israel had a national population of about 2.4 million people at the time of the conquest. See Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1: *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1.

17. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services As They Were in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1874] 1983), p. 261.

rifices were completed on one day—day 50 after Passover (Lev. 23:16). So, the special five sacrifices of Leviticus 1–7 could have been conducted after Pentecost ended. The costs of making the journey were high; the time in Jerusalem was brief; perhaps many people stayed behind to offer these special sacrifices. But Pentecost was a summer festival, when agricultural time is most valuable. For as long as Israel remained predominately agricultural, there would have been economic pressure to return home immediately after Pentecost. Also, the pressure of so many visitors at any festival would have raised food and housing costs. Less busy periods were less expensive, but to take advantage of this, the sacrificer would have been required to make another journey to the temple. In short, the costs of sacrifice were very high. Conclusion: faithful people would have been very careful to obey the details of God's law, just to avoid an extra journey to the tabernacle-temple to make a sacrifice for having violated some detail. In the phrase of modern political theory regarding men's exodus from tyranny, Israelites voted with their feet. They marched for liberty. In their case, however, they voted *for* God's covenant order with their feet, not against it.

3. *The Challenge to Tribalism*

There is another aspect of the three marches, but especially Passover, that must be considered: the mitigating effects on tribalism. The three feasts were national celebrations. Clans and tribes from across the nation were required to meet together in one city: the earthly dwelling place of God where the sacrifices had to be conducted. Loyalty is ultimately to God and His law. This cross-tribal loyalty was to be demonstrated at the national feasts.¹⁸

When all the families of Israel journeyed to Jerusalem, young adults of marriageable age could meet each other: those of the opposite sex who were members of different tribes.¹⁹ Marriage was not limited to members of the same tribe; it was limited only confessionally. The one judicial pressure to marry inside a tribe was the unique case law that applied only to a family of daughters. They could inherit their father's land, but only if they married within the tribe. This was for the

18. The feast still promotes unity across judicial boundaries, acknowledged or not: at the communion table.

19. The denominational college or Bible college has long served a similar function: a place for people of the same accent (in the broadest sense: confession and culture) to send their children to meet and marry others who are outside the local church community.

sake of the preservation of land ownership within the tribe, not for theological or spiritual reasons (Num. 36:7).²⁰ (The existence of the bride price/dowry system was another factor loosening the power of the tribe and the clan. Daughters did not carry title to land with them when they left their fathers' households; instead, they carried transportable capital: gold, silver, jewels, etc. Because this capital was transportable, marriage could cut across clan and tribal boundaries.)²¹

In a tribally based society, the power of the clan is very great. Ethics tends to be associated with the tribe. "My brother and I against our cousin; my cousin and I against the world." The tribal outlook is "brotherhood over otherhood," insiders over outsiders. Justice is owed only to insiders. The universalism of fixed moral law is denied by such tribal brotherhoods. This is why Mosaic Israel was not primarily tribal; it was confessional-judicial. It was a society based on the historical acts and the revealed laws of a universal God. The tribes had a temporary role to play because of the tribal identification (Judah) of the prophesied Seed-Messiah, Shiloh (Gen. 49:10). The structure of landed inheritance kept citizenship loosely associated with the tribes inside the Promised Land, as we shall see,²² but the absence of judicial restrictions on marriage outside the tribe, the bride price/dowry system, and the central feasts mitigated the effects of tribalism-clannism.

H. Who Paid? Who Benefitted?

The costs of travel, lodging, food, and forfeited time required to participate in the three festivals were very high. We can only guess at the rents charged in Jerusalem when the city experienced a massive influx of participants. Even upper rooms would have come at a premium price. The farther away from Jerusalem a man lived, the higher these festival expenses were. The festivals took place in the months of agricultural labor, not in the dead of winter. That is, they occurred during periods of very valuable time for agricultural laborers. The value of the alternative uses of a farmer's time was high; thus, the costs of the festivals were high. As we shall see, it is reasonable to estimate that the total costs associated with making sacrifice in Israel were five

20. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

21. The Mosaic law did not specify who would inherit the wife's dowry upon her death. It is easy to imagine that such funds would go to unmarried sons (bride price assets), daughters (dowries), or unmarried grandchildren.

22. Chapters 15, 17, 25, 30.

percent (near Jerusalem) to 15% (distant) of a family's annual income. To this must be added the costs of the sacrifices themselves, plus tithing, gleaning, and giving to the poor. This does not count morally mandatory, zero-interest charitable loans (Deut. 15: 7–11).²³

Edersheim said that the rabbis of the post-Old Covenant era estimated the expenses associated with the required sacrifices and payments, not counting forfeited travel time and personal expenses, at one-quarter of gross income.²⁴ This does not count the farmer's reduced income when the land rested during the sabbatical year. While this estimate of 25% may be too high, there is no doubt that 15% is a reasonable estimate, not counting travel and lodging costs, and not counting forfeited labor time. All of this was required before civil taxes, and not counting the sabbatical year. It is likely that the combined costs of the sacrificial system, plus the system of morally compulsory charity, plus civil taxes at 10% (I Sam. 8:15, 17) would have been in the range of one-third to one-half of an agricultural family's income. This is comparable to the middle-class member's tax burden in the early twenty-first century—a very high-tax era. In the modern world, most of this money goes to various levels of the state. In ancient Israel, most of it went to the priestly tribe and the poor. Theirs was a far better system, but it was expensive. I know of no society in the ancient world with anything like these external costs on the average farmer-citizen.

An Israelite could have chosen to live in a city located closer to Jerusalem, but this would have led to higher real estate prices in those cities. What a man saved in travel costs he paid for in housing costs. The costs of sacrifice had to be borne. There should be no question about it: Old Covenant Israel was an expensive place to live, especially for Israelites.

I. The Farming Subsidy to Resident Aliens

This brings us to a controversial but inescapable conclusion: non-Israelites, who did not have to pay these temple-based costs, had a tremendous economic advantage as farmers in Israel. Except for one year in seven (Deut. 31:10–12), they were not required to attend the feasts. They could invest their time and money into farming while the Israel-

23. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

24. Edersheim, *Temple*, p. 379.

ites were on the march. They were allowed to lease agricultural property from Israelites for up to 49 years (Lev. 25:47–52). This means that there was an indirect economic subsidy in ancient Israel for foreigners and covenant-breakers to occupy the agricultural areas, with the Israelites occupying the cities. Covenant-breakers would have paid rent for rural land to the Israelites who moved to the cities.

The larger that Israelite families became, the smaller and less economically efficient each generation's share of the original family plot. If the jubilee laws were enforced, this must have led to the creation of professionally managed farms along the lines of modern corporate farming. It is likely that non-Israelites eventually would have managed most of these farms, especially in regions remote from Jerusalem, where the implicit subsidy to aliens was greatest, i.e., relief from the costs of the most expensive journeys.

Consider the Jew who lived on one of Israel's distant borders. If he leased his land to a foreigner across the border, he may have been able to afford to move to a city closer to Jerusalem. As a city dweller, he could become a craftsman or trader. His thrice-yearly trips to Jerusalem could have become business-related. He could seek out new goods, new markets, and new business contacts. The division of labor would have been extended. So would the transfer of information. For an urban producer, the festivals could have become economically productive. Economically speaking, there is little doubt that the sacrificial system and the gleaning system (which was strictly agricultural)²⁵ subsidized the transfer of land stewardship to covenant-breakers, especially near the borders of the nation.

I am not arguing that foreigners actually did occupy most of the rural land in pre-Jeroboam Israel. I do not think they did. I am arguing that if this did not happen, it was because the Israelites ignored biblical laws, especially the jubilee land law. We know they did not obey the sabbatical-year law to rest the land (II Chron. 36:21). Perhaps they did not pay all of the temple fees, or perhaps they paid corporate representatives to attend some of the festivals. Maybe they did not pay their tithes, or else refused to participate in any of the five Levitical sacrifices.

Whatever the case, *the ceremonial laws were designed to move most Israelites off the land and into cities*. If the Israelites as a nation remained on the land, it was because they broke some of these laws, or

25. Chapter 11.

else they were willing to suffer very high worship-related costs—a very doubtful proposition, given their subsequent behavior.

As far as I know, I am the first commentator to discuss the land ownership aspect of Israel's sacrificial system, and I discovered it only after I had completed two-thirds of the manuscript pages of this book. Having spent almost two decades writing an economic commentary on the first three books of the Bible, at age 51, I finally noticed what should have been obvious all along to any thoughtful investigator: *the festival system subsidized gentiles in the nation*. I say this, not in a self-congratulatory tone, but in shocked humility. What else haven't I figured out? How much don't we know about the actual operations of biblical law in Old Covenant Israel? A very great deal, I suspect. I ask myself: Why don't Bible commentators think economically? Why did it take two thousand years for someone to observe what should have been obvious? Am I completely off the mark about the costs of sacrifice and its economic implications? If so, what am I overlooking? If not, why did it take two thousand years for someone to write about it? If someone else has written about it, why haven't his observations found their way into any standard Bible commentary or history of Israel?

J. The Import-Export Business

For a farmer in a tribe on the fringes of the nation, the festivals brought immediate costs rather than immediate economic benefits. Only if he became a part-time specialist could he have made these journeys pay at least part of their cost. The obvious means of making the festivals pay would have been to become a middleman in foreign trade. If he purchased high-value, low-volume items from gentiles living across the border, he could sell these in the festival city. High-volume, low-value agricultural goods would have been much less profitable because of transportation costs. He probably would not have been able to sell his own agricultural products to nearby foreign nations in exchange for manufactured goods. They had the same climate. Those nations that were close to Israel's borders would have been "free riders" on the good weather God promised to bring on the land when the nation obeyed Him. The very high ecclesiastical costs of living in Israel would have placed the Israelites at a competitive disadvantage in relation to those foreign farms located close to Israel's border. If anything, Israelites living on the borders of the nation would have had to

become manufacturers, trading their goods for imported food and other manufactured goods. Conclusion: inside Israel, journeying Israelites would have been encouraged to exchange manufactured goods or services for other manufactured goods. This would have made Jerusalem a center of trade and information: goods and information brought from the edges of the nation's borders.

In summary, the required feasts created economic incentives for Israelites who were located close to foreign borders to import goods from abroad in exchange for goods produced in Israel, and then use these imports to pay for their mandatory journeys. But they would not have exported any crop that was not unique to Israel: *no comparative advantage*. Israel must have imported goods from abroad in cases where transportation costs were low, especially in regions close to the Mediterranean Sea or close to foreign borders. Why? Because of specialization and the division of labor. Foreign traders could find a ready market for their goods because of the Israelites' costs of attending the festivals. They would have been looking for goods to trade at the festivals. Foreigners who lived close to roads into Israel or the sea had an economic advantage over other nations that were farther from Israel's borders. It should be clear that *the Mosaic law was designed to move economic activity away from farming toward trade, especially international trade*. The Israelites were then to move out of the land as traders and evangelists across the entire globe.

There would have been an economic incentive for those living near highways to go into the tavern and lodging business. They would therefore have been in the barter business, selling prepared food and lodging for whatever goods the travellers had to offer in exchange. These highway businessmen would have become the local region's middlemen for imported goods.

Those who know anything about late-nineteenth century United States history think of the early immigrant Jews as peddlers, which some were. Jews in medieval Europe were also traders and peddlers. But, given the costs of sacrifice in Israel, a lot of them must have become at least part-time peddlers in ancient Israel. Men try to decrease the net loss from mandatory tasks. Trade would have been one way to achieve this.

K. The International Division of Labor

If a majority of Israelites were not supposed to remain strictly agri-

cultural producers and rural residents, then what were they to do for a living? Where would they live? As population grew, they would have become urban manufacturers, international traders, and specialists in finance: exactly what Jews became when the second diaspora began in A.D. 135, after Bar Kochba's failed rebellion. Rome forced the Jews to move out of Palestine. But from the beginning, Israelites were supposed to become involved in international commerce, both as a national center of trade for visitors and as men sailing across oceans. The economics of centralized sacrifice made this economically likely: cross-border importing and exporting. The laws of Passover allowed those on journeys to celebrate Passover a month later (Num. 9:10–11). This would have been during the harvest season but after winter storms on the Mediterranean. This exception to Passover's laws was a sign of what God wanted for them. They were to take the message of Jehovah's sovereignty and grace to every land, just as Jonah took it to Nineveh. They were to trade and preach. They were to do well while doing good.

Passover alone among the three mandatory festivals had a second date so that travelers could attend. Someone returning to Israel might have been caught in a winter storm. The Mosaic law acknowledged this possibility. This indicates that the other two festivals were not mandatory for Israelites who were outside the nation's geographical boundaries. For those who lived far from the central place of worship but inside the land, and for those living close to the Mediterranean, there was a lawful way to avoid the economic burden of these two festivals' time and travel expenses: become involved in international commerce. The traveler could arrange his affairs to be on a business trip when the two festival dates occurred. The festivals were held in the spring and the fall, when the Mediterranean was suitable for travel.

The extension of God's message of salvation to the rest of the world was inherent in the original covenant. Foreign nations were supposed to learn of God's grace in granting Israel His law (Deut. 4: 4–8)?²⁶ Foreign commerce of one kind or other would have facilitated the spread of the word of God. This was God's conditional promise to them: "[T]hou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow" (Deut. 28:12b)²⁷—a blessing better understood by modern Japan than modern America.

Did God really expect the Jews to evangelize the whole world? Yes.

26. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

27. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

But how? What about the Americas? Hadn't God condemned the Western hemisphere to spiritual darkness merely by placing its residents across the Atlantic Ocean? No. Here I must break with the textbook accounts of exploration. On this point, we have been misled.

L. World Trade Before Jerusalem Fell

Rome was a trading nation in the era of the fall of Jerusalem. An important trade existed between Rome and China, based on the exchange of silk for raw materials. Frederick Teggart's extraordinary book, *Rome and China* (1939), discussed this international trade connection,²⁸ but the topic still receives scant or no attention whatever in the textbooks. In any case, this trade is presumed to have been exclusively overland trade. What the textbooks never discuss is cross-Atlantic trade prior to Columbus. This is a mistake that has only begun to be rectified, most notably by Barry Fell and the diligent members of his Epigraphic Society.

Jews were probably trading in North America as early as Jesus' time, and perhaps centuries earlier. There were traders from Europe in North America in the early second millennium B.C., so this should not be surprising.²⁹ There is evidence—automatically dismissed as fraudulent (“forgeries”) by establishment scholars³⁰—that someone brought the message of God's Ten Commandments to the American southwest before the time of Jesus, possibly centuries before. I refer to the inscription, written in a Hebrew “stick” script,³¹ which records the decalogue. It was written on a boulder weighing 80 tons, located 30 miles southwest of Albuquerque, New Mexico, near the town of Los Lunas.³² (This is the correct spelling. The masculine *los* does not match the feminine *lunas*.) The script (alphabet) dates from the twelfth century B.C.³³ Professor Robert Pfeiffer of Harvard University's Semitic Mu-

28. Frederick J. Teggart, *Rome and China: A Study of Correlations in Historical Events* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, [1939] 1983). Teggart traced the tight correlation between barbarian invasions in Northern Europe, 58 B.C. to 107 A.D., and (1) Rome's wars on its eastern frontiers and (2) China's wars on its western frontiers. When wars disrupted the silk trade, barbarian invasions soon followed.

29. Barry Fell, *Bronze Age America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982).

30. See “Los Lunas Attracts Epigraphers,” *Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers*, XII (Aug. 1985), p. 34.

31. Donald Cline, “The Los Lunas Stone,” *ibid.*, X:1 (Oct. 1982), p. 69.

32. David Allen Deal, *Discovery of Ancient America* (Irvine, California: Kherem La Yah, 1984), ch. 1.

33. Barry Fell, “Ancient Punctuation and the Los Lunas Text,” *Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers*, XIII (Aug. 1985), p. 35.

seum first translated the inscription in 1948.³⁴ A more recent translation than Pfeiffer's is as follows:

I [am] Yahve your God who brought you out of the land of the two Egypts out of the house of bondages. You shall not have other [foreign] gods in place of [me]. You shall not make for yourself molded or carved idols. You shall not lift up your voice to connect the name of Yahve in hate. Remember you [the] day Sabbath to make it holy. Honor your father and your mother to make long your existence upon the land which Yahve your God gave to you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery or idolatry. You shall not steal or deceive. You shall not bear witness against your neighbor testimony for a bribe. You shall not covet [the] wife of your neighbor and all which belongs to your neighbor.³⁵

It mentions two Egypts, an obvious reference to the two regions of Egypt, upper (close to the head of the Nile) and lower (close to the Mediterranean).³⁶ As to when the inscription was made, George Morehouse, a mining engineer, has estimated that this could have taken place as recently as 500 years ago and as far back as two millennia.³⁷ A "revisionist" who has studied the inscription in detail believes that the text may be from the era of the Septuagint, i.e., over a century before the birth of Jesus—surely no comfort for conventional textbook authors. The stone's tenth commandment prohibiting covetousness mentions the wife before property, a feature of the Septuagint text.³⁸

Evidence of the ancient world's advanced tools, maps,³⁹ international trade, and highly sophisticated astronomical and observational science⁴⁰ never gets into college-level world history textbooks. The

34. A photocopy of Pfeiffer's translation appears in Deal, *Discovery*, p. 10.

35. L. Lyle Underwood, "The Los Lunas Inscription," *Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers*, X:1 (Oct. 1982), p. 58.

36. *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1982), p. 302.

37. George E. Morehouse, "The Los Lunas Inscriptions[:] A Geological Study," *Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers*, XIII (Aug. 1985), p. 49.

38. Michael Skupin, "The Los Lunas Errata," *ibid.*, XVIII (1989), p. 251.

39. Charles Hapgood, *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1966).

40. O. Neugebauer and A. Sachs (eds.), *Mathematical Cuneiform Texts* (New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 1945); Neugebauer and Richard A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3 vols. (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1960); Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, 2nd ed. (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1957); Livio C. Stecchini, "Astronomical Theory and Historical Data," in *The Velikovsky Affair: The Warfare of Science and Scientism*, ed. Alfred de Grazia (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966), pp. 127–70. See also Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time* (Boston: Gambit, 1969).

evidence is automatically rejected or downplayed by conventional—and woefully uninformed—historians because it breaks with the familiar tenets of cultural evolution. Time is supposed to bring science, technology, and cultural advance. Cultural evolution, not cultural devolution, is supposed to be mankind's legacy to future generations. The thought that international trade across the oceans existed five centuries before Columbus, let alone five centuries before David,⁴¹ is an affront to cultural evolutionists. This is probably why a book like Patrick Huyghe's *Columbus was Last* (1992) had to be published by an obscure New York company, Hyperion. It also explains why there is so little awareness regarding amateur archeologist Emilio Estrada's 1957 discovery of buried Japanese pottery on the coast of Ecuador: Japan's Jomon-era stone-age pottery.⁴² Scholars do not want to face the obvious question: How did it get there? And why are there artistic similarities between the China's Shang dynasty and the Mesoamerica Olmec culture—large cats (sometimes without their lower jaws), the dragon, and the use of jade—which overlapped each other from the fifteenth to the twelfth centuries, B.C.?⁴³ Why were the implements and techniques used by the Mayans to make bark paper five centuries before Christ so similar to the implements and techniques used by the Chou dynasty in the same era? Of 121 individual traits, the two systems shared 91, half of which were non-essential, and the other half, while essential, had alternative approaches available.⁴⁴ Why didn't the Mesoamerican techniques match papermaking techniques used by cultures in other parts of America?⁴⁵ Why do Mayan stone art works after 500 B.C. shift from earlier forms to match Asian art forms of the same era?⁴⁶

Meanwhile, at the other end of the hemisphere, slate technologies have been discovered in burial sites of the ancient Red Paint (red ochre) People in Maine and Labrador. These artifacts match slate technologies in Scandinavia. The era of conjunction was some 4,000 years ago.⁴⁷ Huyghe wrote: "The principal deterrent to the notion of

41. Fell, *Bronze Age America*.

42. Patrick Huyghe *Columbus was Last* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), ch. 2.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87. See Paul Tolstoy, "Paper Route," *Natural History* (June 1991).

45. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–91. See Gunnar Thompson, *Nu Sun* (Fresno, California: Pioneer, 1989). Thompson is director of the American Discovery Project at California State University, Fresno.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–54.

historical contact is the widespread belief that ancient man was incapable of making ocean voyages in primitive boats. But there is no doubt that Europeans had oceangoing watercraft quite early. Bronze Age rock carvings in Europe show plank-built ships were sailing Atlantic coastal waters more than 4,000 years ago."⁴⁸

How many people know that the Carthaginians were sending trading ships to North America in the late fourth century B.C.? Throughout the eastern United States, Carthaginian coins that date from the era of 325 B.C. have been discovered near navigable rivers and off the Atlantic coast.⁴⁹ Beginning in the late eighteenth century, farmers in New England started digging up hoards of Roman coins⁵⁰. When did these coins arrive? Conventional historians do not bother to ask.

Few people know that numerous commercial bronze replicas of Assyrian deities have been discovered in Cuenca, Ecuador. The Phoenicians were producing these replicas on Cyprus as early as 600 B.C. Carthage, an offshoot of Phoenecia, exported them to barbarian peoples.⁵¹ We know that after 300 B.C., Carthage began to mint electrum coins: mostly gold, but with some silver. Where did Carthage get the gold? These fake deities in South America are evidence that Carthage imported gold from South America through the sale of these replicas.⁵² These trips would also explain where Carthage got the pine lumber for building huge warships⁵³ until the end of the First Punic War with Rome in 241 B.C.⁵⁴ (In that war, 264–41 B.C., Carthage lost 334 of these giant ships.)⁵⁵ Barry Fell speculated that before the defeat, they had brought trees as ballast from North America, which is why we discover bronze coins here. They bought lumber from the Indians.⁵⁶ After 241 B.C., Carthage concentrated on building her army, not her navy. Carthaginian trade with the Americas ceased. So do late-era coins discovered here.

Roman trade replaced Carthaginian trade in North America.⁵⁷ Paintings of Roman-Iberian coins appear on cave walls in Arkansas

48. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

49. Barry Fell, *Saga America* (New York: Times Books, 1980), pp. 25–26, 62, 64.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 27. Cf. Huyghe, *Columbus Was Last*, pp. 97–98.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

53. Quinquiremes: five rowers per oar, 250 rowers, 120 marines plus officers: 400 men per ship. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

57. *Ibid.*, chaps. 6, 7.

and as far west as Castle Gardens, near Moneta ("money"), Wyoming.⁵⁸ There were Iberian-based banks all across North America in the time of Jesus. These contacts continued, and they left traces. "In 1933, an astonished Mexican archeologist excavated a terra-cotta head of a Roman figurine of the third century A.D. from an undisturbed ancient grave sealed under the Calixtlahuaca pyramid, thirty-five miles southwest of Mexico City."⁵⁹

The Carthaginians and Romans were late-comers. The Scandinavians were trading in North America during the Bronze Age, possibly as early as 1700 B.C.⁶⁰—the era of Joseph in Egypt. A visiting Norwegian sailor-king left an account of one of these visits in what is now called Petroglyph Park in Peterborough, Ontario, in Canada. He had an inscription chiseled into rock, written in a nearly universal alphabet of the ancient world, *ogam consaine*,⁶¹ and another alphabet, equally universal, *Tifnag*, an alphabet still employed by the Tuaregs, a Berber tribe in North Africa. The Norse inscription was accompanied by a comment written by an Algonquin Indian scribe in a script common among the pre-Roman Basques, but using a form of the Algonquin language still understood.⁶² The inscription was discovered in 1954.⁶³

This same Basque script was also employed by the Cree Indians well into the nineteenth century. It was not known to be related to Basque until Fell transliterated into Latin consonants a document written in this "Indian" script. The document had been sent to him by a Basque etymologist who had been unable to decipher it. When it was transliterated, the Basque scholar recognized it as a pre-Roman dialect of the Basque tongue, one which was still in use in the medieval period.⁶⁴ Some of the words are virtually the same in both the Algonquin and ancient Basque tongues.⁶⁵ (Fell also read Greek, Latin, German, French, Danish, and Gaelic; he had a working knowledge of Sanskrit, Kufic Arabic, and several Asian and African languages.)⁶⁶

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 134–35, 144, 148–49, 159–60.

59. Huyghe, *Columbus Was Last*, p. 98.

60. Fell, *Bronze Age America*, ch. 1. The dating is calculated by the zodiac data in the inscription: ch. 5, especially pp. 127, 130.

61. Said to be a gift to man from the Gaulish god Ogimos, god of the occult sciences. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 36. For additional information, see Huyghe, *Columbus Was Last*, ch. 5.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 146. Comparisons of the North American Indian script and the ancient Basque script appear on pages 148–49.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

66. Huyghe, *Columbus Was Last*, p. 59.

A thousand years before the birth of Jesus, Celtic traders⁶⁷ were serving as missionaries in North America, bringing the stories of their gods across the continent: central and Western Canada, and as far south as Nevada and California. The petroglyphs of this era reproduce Norse gods whose names are in ogam.⁶⁸

Needless to say, none of this information has moved into college history textbooks. Textbooks include only certain kinds of texts. Textbook authors dismiss all such petroglyph evidence as “forgeries”—the same way they dismiss the texts of the Bible that challenge their concept of chronology. But this is beginning to change. A few academic specialists are beginning to admit that there is something of value in Fell’s work.⁶⁹ We can therefore predict the traditional three stages of academic surrender: (1) “It isn’t true.” (2) “It’s true, but so what?” (3) “We always knew it was true.” As of the first decade of the twenty-first century, we are still in stage one.

If Celtic traders were able bring their gods to North America, so were Jewish traders. God expected them to do this. To some extent, they did, as the Los Lunas stone indicates. But they did not do it on a scale that matched the Celts. The requirement that they return for Passover each year must have inhibited their journeys. This was a barrier to world evangelism. It was a temporary barrier. Israel’s old wineskins would inevitably be broken because the geographical boundaries of the Mosaic law would eventually be broken if God’s law was obeyed. Population growth would have seen to that. So would the cost of journeying to Jerusalem, especially for international Jewish traders. But even if the Mosaic law was disobeyed, those wineskins would be broken. This is what took place definitively with Jesus’ ministry, progressively with the establishment of the church, and finally in A.D. 70.⁷⁰ The fire on God’s earthly altar was extinguished forever.

When, 60 years later, Bar Kochba revolted, the Romans crushed the revolt in 135. There is a continuing stream of archeological discoveries indicating that some of the survivors fled to Tennessee and Kentucky. An early find in Bat Creek, Tennessee by Smithsonian field assistant John Emmert in 1889 is a five-inch stone inscribed with eight Hebrew characters. The significance of this was denied by the Smith-

67. Fell, *Bronze Age America*, ch. 14.

68. *Ibid.*, chaps. 7–13.

69. Cf. David H. Kelley, “Proto-Tifinagh and Proto-Ogham in the Americas,” *Review of Archeology*, XI (Spring 1990).

70. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

sonian's curator, who claimed this was Cherokee syllabic script. As the saying goes, "Nice try, but no cigar"—he had read it upside-down. Over half a century later, Hebrew scholars turned it right-side up and discovered these consonants: LYHWD. In the early 1970s, Brandeis University's Hebraicist Cyrus H. Gordon identified the era of the style of these letters: Bar Kochba's. He translated the phrase: "A comet for the Jews," which was a standard phrase during the revolt. Similar coin finds from this era had been made in Kentucky, which Gordon believed had not been faked.⁷¹

None of this is in the textbooks. Neither is any reference to the massive 1,375-page two-volume bibliography, *Pre-Columbian Contacts with the Americas Across the Oceans*, which contains over 5,500 entries.⁷² For those of you who want to spend a lifetime following the trails into and out of America, here is the place to start.

M. Jesus' Liberation Theology: More Net Income

Commentators should not ignore the economic burdens for Israelite covenant-keepers prior to Jesus Christ's liberation of His people. When Jesus substituted the mandatory tithe and voluntary offerings for all of the economic burdens of Israel's sacrificial system, He liberated His people. That the vast majority of Christians have always resented paying the tithe shows that they are rebellious at heart. They regard the liberation of the tithe as a threat to their economic autonomy. Their hoped-for economic autonomy is an extension of their hoped-for moral autonomy. The theology undergirding the familiar slogan, "we're under grace, not law," has delivered them into the hands of the tax collectors. The rapacity of today's tax collectors is on a scale undreamed of by the tyrants of the ancient world. Yet Christians continue to re-elect their masters. They cannot discern the difference between tyranny and liberty. They have rejected the authoritative standard by which to judge the difference: God's Bible-revealed law.

I have never seen these economic aspects of Israel's sacrificial system and tithe system discussed by any Bible scholar. This may be because I have not read enough commentaries and academic journals written by higher critics and liberals. I suspect it is because Bible com-

71. Huyghe, *Columbus Came Last*, pp. 98–99. See Cyrus H. Gordon, *Before Columbus: Links Between the Old World and Ancient America* (New York: Crown, 1971).

72. Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1989. Compiled by John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish.

mentators are not trained to think economically.

Contrary to the great Edersheim, who wrote that “the Law seems to regard Israel as intended to be only an agricultural people,”⁷³ the Mosaic law pressured Israelite families off their farms and into the cities. The eschatological task of filling of the earth is for mankind to bring all of nature under man’s dominion: the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28). So was the economic pressure of Mosaic Israel. Mosaic laws that dealt with the land, the tribes, and the sacrifices were designed to be temporary. As the population of Israel grew as a result of God’s covenantal blessings,⁷⁴ the Israelites would have had to move out of the land into the cities, and then out of Israel into the world: away from Jerusalem. The centralized structure of temple sacrifice and worship would have become impossible to maintain. The Mosaic laws governing worship and sacrifice pointed to their annulment: the sooner, the better for a growing, prospering, urbanized population.

Conclusion

The Book of Leviticus is the book of holiness. It is the book of boundaries: ethical, familial, tribal, liturgical, cultural, and geographical. It is the book of ownership, property, and sacrifice. It probably is the most difficult book in the Bible to explain, verse by verse. That a commentary devoted only to the economics of Leviticus should be this large testifies to the problem. That my commentary is the first one ever written on this aspect of Leviticus also testifies to the problem. The commentators have ignored Leviticus for too long. Their prudence has come at a very high price.

Israel was to be a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). The priests lived and worked in the holy city, just as the Levites lived in walled cities (Lev. 25:32–33). The earth is to be filled by city-dwellers. Nature is to be subdued by the nearby presence of myriads of men: the domestication of nature. To reverse a popular slogan of the ecology movement: “In wildness is the damnation of the world.” The people of God are to dwell in the city of God. This does not mean that there should be no gardens in cities. The tree of life is in the midst of the perfect city (Rev. 22:2). But it does mean that the city is fundamental; the garden is sup-

73. Edersheim, *Temple*, p. 379.

74. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1: “Population Growth: Tool of Dominion”; ch. 55: “The Curse of Zero Growth”; Appendix B: “The Demographics of Decline.”

plemental.⁷⁵

The economic pressure on Israelites to move from the farm to the city was basic to Levitical law. The closer that a man lived to Israel's holy city, the less time he had to spend on the road. If he had to spend time on the road, he might as well become a traveling salesman. The Israelites were pressured economically by the laws of the festivals and the sacrifices to become a nation of traders. The economic laws of Leviticus also pressured the farmers of Israel to move into the cities. The residents of cities were in turn pressured to become international traders. This does not mean that there were to be no Israelite farmers in Israel, but there can be no doubt that the general thrust of the economic incentives under the Mosaic law's system of costs and benefits was to move God's covenant people off the farms and into the cities. They were to become a nation of manufacturers, shopkeepers, traders, and bankers—an early version of what England became in the nineteenth century. They were also to become a nation of foreign missionaries. If there is a unique thesis found in this commentary, this is it. I break definitively with the standard interpretation of the Hebrews as a rural people, which implies that their laws were not designed for an urban society.

In this book, I refer to laws, case laws, and statutes. Following Rushdoony's lead in *Institutes of Biblical Law*, I define a biblical case law as a Bible-revealed statute that applies a general principle of biblical law to a specific case. Rushdoony wrote that "the law, *first*, lays down broad and basic principles," but there is also "a *second* characteristic of Biblical law, namely, that the major portion of the law is *case law*, i.e., the illustration of the basic principle in terms of specific cases. These specific cases are often illustrations of the extent of the application of the law; that is, by citing a minimal type of case, the necessary jurisdictions of the law are revealed."⁷⁶ God has provided us with *case laws in advance* in the form of *legally binding statutes*. A case law illustrates a general legal principle, making this principle clearer by making it specific. God, as the sovereign Legislator, is also the sovereign Judge.

75. Christianity is at war with paganism. "Pagan" means "rustic, villager." Christianity triumphed in the cities of Rome; rural villages resisted. "Pagan," *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971). Rural people clung to belief in animistic local gods. The public resurrection of occultism in the West after 1965 has been accompanied by the resurrection of earth worship, animism, and a self-consciously pagan environmentalist movement.

76. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 11.

Thus, biblical laws are simultaneously statute laws and case laws.

This usage does not conform to legal terminology in the United States. The modern humanist legal theorist defines a case law as a judge-made law that serves as a legal precedent. He regards case laws as the products of specific legal disputes, in contrast to statute laws enacted by legislatures. The modern dichotomy between case laws and statute law reflects the dichotomy between humanistic English common law, which floats on legal precedents announced by self-proclaimed autonomous judges, and Continental Europe's humanistic Napoleonic code, which floats on legal enactments announced by self-proclaimed autonomous legislatures.⁷⁷ Ultimately, this dichotomy reflects the autonomy in all humanist thought between historical flux and fixed principles of logic: Heraclitus ("all is in flux") vs. Parmenides ("logic is constant"). Neither approach solves the problem of discovering binding fixed principles of law that can be applied to a changing world. The Bible provides this; humanistic law schools do not.

77. Cf. A. V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 8th ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty/Classics, [1915] 1982), esp. Chapter 12.

I. Sacrifices (Lev. 1–7)

INTRODUCTION TO PART I

And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring. This shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations. And thou shalt say unto them, Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers which sojourn among you, that offereth a burnt offering of sacrifice, And bringeth it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer it unto the LORD; even that man shall be cut off from among his people. And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood (Lev. 17:7–12).

Sacrifice is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of “sacrifice vs. no sacrifice.” It is always this question: Sacrifice to whom? And also this subordinate question: Which kind of sacrifice?

The Bible makes it clear that fallen man owes his sacrifices to the God of creation. This is the absolutely sovereign God who rules in heaven and on earth, in eternity and time. The five sacrifices of Leviticus 1–7 were required because of the absolute holiness of an absolutely sovereign God. Men have broken God’s law. As unholy covenant-breakers, they are in need of means of covenant renewal. The first point of the biblical covenant model, *transcendence/immanence*, appears in Leviticus in the section that presents laws establishing the five types of common sacrifice. These five sacrifices were not the mandatory corporate sacrifices associated with the national covenant renewal

festivals of Passover, Pentecost (firstfruits), and Tabernacles, but rather the sacrifices of personal and familial covenant renewal that were available to the faithful.

Because the judicial foundation of covenant renewal between God and man is ethics rather than ritual precision, the prophets made it clear that God would pay no attention to the sacrifices of covenant-breakers who persisted in their rebellion. “Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?” (Jer. 7:8–10). Micah added rhetorically, “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:6–8). *Ethics is primary*; this is why the laws governing the sacrifices are found in book three of the Pentateuch: Leviticus, the book of holiness. They are not found in book four: Numbers, the Pentateuch’s book of sanctions.¹

A. Holiness and Sacrifice

Before we begin an analysis of the meaning of the five sacrifices of Leviticus 1–7, we must have an understanding of the role of the tribe of Levi in Mosaic Israel. The Levites were the guardians of the sacramental boundaries (Num. 18). The family of Aaron within the tribe of Levi served as the priests, i.e., those who actually performed the sacrifices. They had legal access to the inner area of the temple that was closed even to the Levites. The high priest once a year had access to the holy of holies (Ex. 30:10). Thus, the ultimate boundaries in Mosaic Israel were judicial-spatial.² The temple, the place where the Ark of the Covenant resided—the royal residence of the God on earth—was supremely holy, geographically speaking.³ Inside the Ark were the two

1. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point five Press, [1997] 2012).

2. These boundaries ended forever with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

3. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1980),

tables of the law: the Ten Commandments (Deut. 31:9, 26). The holiest place on earth was where the original records of God's covenantal law rested. The *judicial links* among God's written law, Israel's national and cultural boundaries, Israel's holiness, and the priestly tribe of Levi constitute the central message of the Book of Leviticus.

What about the economics of Leviticus? We begin with this observation: based on God's ownership of both the land (Lev. 25:23) and the Israelites (Lev. 20:26), He established a unique set of property rights over Israel and inside Israel. As is true in all cases of property rights, these rights were marked by a series of legal boundaries. The Book of Leviticus, the third book in the Pentateuch, is most closely associated with these boundaries.⁴

B. The Five Year-Round Sacrifices

There are five year-round sacrifices in Leviticus. Like the three mandated festival-feasts (Lev. 23),⁵ all five sacrifices had to be offered to God at a central location. To get to this central location, most of the Israelites had to walk.

All five of these Levitical sacrifices had to be cut into pieces or divided before they were placed on the altar. Only the Passover lamb was placed on the altar whole. Its flesh was first penetrated, allowing the blood to flow out (Ex. 12:7), but there is no mention that it was to be cut into pieces before roasting.⁶ This is consistent with the New Testament's identification of Jesus Christ as the Passover lamb (I Cor. 5:7): His body was not broken by the Roman guards, although one of them pierced His flesh with a spear (John 19:32–37).

The first section of Leviticus, chapters 1–7, deals with ritual offerings and the labor of the priests. James Jordan has divided Leviticus into five sections: (1) the sacrifices, five in number⁷ (Lev. 1–7); (2) the cleansing of God's house (Lev. 8–16); (3) holy living before the Lord

pp. 39–42.

4. The third commandment establishes a boundary around God's name: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" (Ex. 20:7a). The eighth commandment (the third in the second table of the law) establishes property rights: "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15).

5. Introduction, pp. 12–19.

6. "And they roasted the passover with fire according to the ordinance: but the other holy offerings sod they in pots, and in caldrons, and in pans, and divided them speedily among all the people" (II Chron. 35:13).

7. Burnt offerings (Lev. 1), cereal offerings (Lev. 2), peace offerings (Lev. 3), purification offerings (Lev. 4:1), and compensation offerings (Lev. 5:14, 6:1).

(Lev. 17–22); (4) holy times or feasts (Lev. 23); and (5) the historical perspective (Lev. 24–27).⁸ I divide Leviticus differently:

1. The five sacrifices (Lev. 1–7)
2. The priestly, hierarchical cleansing of God's house and man's house, including the land—a means of deliverance (Lev. 8–16)
3. Laws of separation (Lev. 17–22)
4. Covenant-renewal festivals and covenant-breaking acts (Lev. 23–24)
5. Inheritance (Lev. 25–27)

The five-fold system of sacrifices parallels the five-point covenant model that Ray Sutton has elaborated.⁹ Wrote Jordan: “The sacrifices that occupy the first seven chapters are themselves arranged by this pattern. The first section, chapters 1–3, concerns the relationship between God and man directly: The Burnt Offering affirmed God's transcendence, the Cereal or Tribute Offering affirmed the Israelite's fealty to God, and the Peace Offering affirmed God's fellowship with man. The Purification Offering had to do not with cleansing the individual sinner, but with cleansing God's house, society at large, which was symbolically defiled by the presence of sinners. The house of God was the place of *mediation*, so appropriately the Purification Offering is discussed next. The Compensation Offering had two purposes: to deal with theft (point three) and with perjury (point four). finally, the last point of the covenant/re-creation sequence has to do with succession, the appointment of servants to continue the work begun by the master.”¹⁰

By structuring the five offerings in terms of the five points of the

8. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 15–17. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>). It is interesting that John E. Hartley has found a five-part message in Leviticus: God's holiness, presence, covenant, sacrifice, and continuity with the New Testament. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4 of *Word Bible Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1992), pp. lvi–lxiii. Using Sutton's five-point covenant model, I would rearrange the list: God's presence (as in transcendence/presence), covenant (which Hartley identifies with God's deliverance of Israel from bondage, i.e., historical prologue), holiness (boundaries), sacrifice (sanctions), and continuity with the New Testament. Hartley sees a six-part division in Leviticus: *ibid.*, p. xxxiv. He also refers to rival theories: two sections, four sections, and nine sections. *Ibid.*, p. xxxii. He does not mention five sections.

9. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1995). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

10. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence*, p. 22.

biblical covenant model, God reminded the Israelites of their covenantal obligations. Let us review this structure.

First, except for the hide, which was retained by the priest (Lev. 7:8), the whole burnt offering was completely consumed; none of the edible portion remained in the possession of men, either the priests or the offerer. This pointed to God's complete *transcendence*. The hide, like the hides in which God wrapped Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21), testified to God's *presence* with them in history.

Second, the grain offering represented point two of the covenant. This offering pointed back to the *historical prologue* (associated with point two)¹¹ of the nation: the exodus events. As with the Passover meal of the exodus, this offering could not be leaven (Lev. 2:4). Point two is also associated with the *covenant* itself, just as Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch, is called the book of the covenant (Ex. 24:7). The grain offering was the unique offering of the covenant, for it was associated with salt, a mineral used to flavor or preserve something or else destroy it, e.g., salting the land (Jud. 9:45): *the salt of the covenant*. Salt was specifically associated with the grain offering. "And every oblation of thy meat [meal] offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat [meal] offering; with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. 2:13).

Third, the peace (well-being) offering, dealt with *boundaries*: how covenant-keeping man can lawfully cross the boundaries and come into God's presence in a shared meal. The priests—guardians of the boundaries of holy places and things—ate part of it (Lev. 7:14–15, 32–34). The offerer ate part of it, so long as he or she was ritually clean (Lev. 7:19). To violate this rule was to create a new judicial boundary: "But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Lev. 7:20).

Fourth was the sin (purification) offering. It was offered in order to avoid God's *sanctions*. The vessel in which it was prepared was either smashed or scoured afterward (Lev. 6:28).

Fifth, there was the trespass or reparations offering. The priest kept the skin of the animal (Lev. 7:9). Animal skins were also God's gift

11. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 52–61. See also Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 53–57.

to Adam and Eve just before they were cast out of the garden (Gen. 3:21). These skins were the coverings that would preserve them: a testimony to God's grace to them by providing a *future*.

C. Atonement for Sin, Not Food for God

Milgrom points out that all the food sacrifices were to be performed where laymen could view them: on the outer altar in the open courtyard.¹² This courtyard was open to all Israelites.¹³ These sacrifices were public acts. Speaking of the altar of incense, which was inside the tent or tabernacle, God said: "Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon" (Ex. 30:9). The sacrifices were for the benefit of the nation. They were not for "the care and feeding of God"—a fundamental error of Mesopotamian religion generally.¹⁴

The sacrifices atoned for men's sins. This also meant cleansing. "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD" (Lev. 16:30). By appeasing God through sacrifice, the nation was enabled to escape God's wrath in history. But the fundamental sacrifice is always ethical: avoiding sin after payment to God has been made. That is to say, the essence of acceptable sacrifice is ethical holiness, just as the judicial foundation of holiness is sacrifice.

12. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 59.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 148. He provided a suggested sketch of the outer court, which was separate from, but contiguous to, the tent and the inner court: p. 135.

14. *Idem*.

1

SACRIFICE, STEWARDSHIP, AND DEBT

And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him (Lev. 1:1–4).

To understand any biblical law, we should first seek to discover its theocentric meaning. The theocentric meaning of every law governing sacrifice is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. The Law of the Sacrifices

What does this law have to do with God and His relation to man? James Jordan argued that the whole burnt sacrifice symbolized *the death of the sacrificer*. This death was imputed judicially to the animal.

What actually happens is that the animal becomes dead. It is death, the penal judgment for sin, that is put on the animal. The man is given life, a new beginning, because the animal takes the death he deserves. The effect of the sacrifice of the animal is that the believer's guilt and sin are removed, but what is transferred to the animal is the sinner's liability to death.

Death is both primordial and eschatological. Adam rejected the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Tree of Life in order to commit sin, so he chose death before he sinned. Death is also the eschatological punishment for sin—those who choose death are given death. Man's death-nature is the well-spring of his sin, so death must be dealt with before sin is. To put this in systematic-theological language: justification comes before sanctification. Justification is initial, juridical *life*, which leads to a life of holiness, and culminates in glorification: eschatological *life*.

What the sacrifice removes is not sin but death, the judgment for sin. Death having been removed, it is now possible to live a righteous life.²

Leviticus begins with the law governing the burnt offering. "A male without blemish" was required, which was also the requirement for the Passover lamb: "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats" (Ex. 12:5). The phrase, "without blemish," is repeated throughout Leviticus.³ The blemish-free sacrificial animal symbolized God's requirement of a final sacrifice that alone serves as a legal ransom payment (atonement)⁴ to God for man's sin. Peter wrote:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God (I Peter 1:18–21).

The requirement of a blemish-free sacrifice meant that the individual who was seeking a legal eradication of the legal effects of sin could not expect to attain it at a discount. He had to forfeit something of obvious value. He could not offer an imperfect, less valuable animal

2. James Jordan, "The Whole Burnt Sacrifice: Its Liturgy and Meaning," *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper*, No. 11, p. 4.

3. Leviticus 1:10; 3:1,6; 4:23,28,32; 5:11,18; 6:6; 9:2-3; 14:10; 22:19; 23:12,18. It also appears repeatedly in Numbers.

4. Wenham said that the Hebrew word *kippur*, "to make atonement," may be derived from one of two words. One means "ransom price," and the other means "to wipe away." The ransom price was the money a legally condemned man could pay to escape the death penalty (Ex. 21:30; Prov. 6:35). In some passages, the former seems more appropriate (Ex. 30:15; Num. 31:50). The latter seems more appropriate in passages that deal with the altar (Lev. 15:33). Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 28.

and still expect to please God. The offering had to cost him something: an animal with higher market value than a blemished animal. David later declared: "Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver" (II Sam. 24:24).⁵ A later generation of Israelites broke this law by offering blind, lame, and sick animals (Mal. 1:8).

The same principle of costly sacrifice applied to the grain offerings: "And when any will offer a meat [meal] offering unto the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon" (Lev. 2:1). (This rule did not apply to sacrifices involving birds, presumably for the sake of the poor.)⁶

B. A Blemish-Free Sacrifice

I begin with the question: In what way does this law reflect the character of God? Second, in what way does this law reflect God's relationship with man, especially fallen man?

The whole burnt offering was the first of five Levitical sacrifices. This sacrifice established two legal principles. First, God deserves the best we have to offer: a blemish-free male sacrifice. Second, God places limits on our mandated sacrifices: men owed God only one animal. So, while the blemish-free male sacrifice testified to the Israelites' *total* indebtedness to God, the requirement of only one animal placed *limits on the sense of guilt* and obligation. We are not supposed to become paralyzed by the thought of our total depravity. We are not asked by God to burn up everything we own in a hopeless quest to placate Him with acts of personal sacrifice. We owe Him far too much for such futile acts of self-sacrifice to repay our massive debts.

When we offer a blemish-free male sacrifice to God, God acknowledges this as a *representative act of our total submission* to Him as absolutely sovereign. A blemish-free male sacrifice publicly symbolizes our acknowledgment of our total dependence on His absolutely sovereign mercy. In Leviticus 1, this blemish-free male sacrifice was a bull. In the New Covenant, this male sacrifice was Jesus Christ (Heb. 9).

As we shall see in this chapter, any attempt to offer a blemished sacrifice is a judicially representative assertion of man's own partial

5. David paid 600 shekels of gold for the land (I Chron. 21:25). The 50 shekels were the price of the oxen.

6. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 167.

autonomy: a denial of man's total depravity and also God's absolute sovereignty. On the other hand, any attempt to offer more than what is required is also an assertion of man's partial autonomy: a declaration that men are capable of paying God everything they owe Him out of their own assets.⁷

Whenever men seek to evade either principle of the law governing the first Levitical sacrifice, they will soon find themselves in bondage to a god of their own making. This god will always establish boundaries. Those who dwell inside these boundaries will receive the god's mercy; those outside these boundaries will receive the god's wrath. This god will become progressively merciless toward some and indulgent toward others. In our day, this god is the state. The modern state is progressively merciless toward covenant-keepers and progressively indulgent toward covenant-breakers.

C. Substitute Sacrifices

We are incapable of buying our own salvation. We are therefore required to acknowledge ritually the purchase of our salvation by the Son of God. This ritual sacrifice is not economically empty, however; it involves suffering a loss. Biblically, it involves the whole of our lives: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).⁸ The required animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant were merely token payments—judicial and economic representations—of man's required sacrifice of his whole life.⁹

The Israelite was told that he had to bring a blemish-free animal to God's altar. He was not permitted to substitute a less valuable animal. God would not tolerate anything but the best of the flock. Wenham wrote: "Only the best is good enough for God."¹⁰ This pointed to the magnitude of God's own sacrifice: the best of His "flock," the very Lamb of God.

From the day that Cain offered an agricultural sacrifice rather than

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3: *Tools of Dominion* (1990) ch. 56.

8. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

9. The Communists in their formative years fully understood this biblical principal of sacrifice, a fact reflected by the title of Communist defector Benjamin Gitlow's study of American Communism, *The Whole of Their Lives* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948).

10. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 51.

an animal sacrifice, men have attempted to substitute unacceptable sacrifices of their own choosing. This substitution symbolically asserts man's sovereignty in the transaction. Man also sometimes offers "discount" sacrifices. God rejects them. "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen" (Mal. 1:13–14).

A prohibited sacrifice might also be an expensive sacrifice. Cain did in fact bring something to God's altar; for all we know, it was the best of his crop. But it is not simply the *value* of the sacrifice that God has in mind; it is the *specific character* of the sacrifice. In Cain's case, God required a blood offering. When a blood offering was required, there could be no lawful substitution of a less valuable animal, let alone a forbidden animal or a grain offering.

God did eventually accept a physically blemished sacrifice, a sacrifice with stripes or welts. It was an *ethically clean* sacrifice but a *physically blemished* one. As Isaiah said, "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53: 5). This unique sacrifice was born blemish-free, lived blemish-free, but died visibly blemished. This sacrifice alone in history was lawfully brought to God's altar in a blemished condition: lawfully for God, but unlawfully for the courts that tried Him.¹¹ These blemishes represented the results of man's sin—negative sanctions imposed by a court (Matt. 27:26)—and Jesus Christ on Calvary became sin for us representatively. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21).

By offering anything except the best of his flock, the Israelite was declaring ritually that his sin was really not so great in God's eyes, and therefore the price that God would ask the Messiah to pay in man's stead would not be excessive. This was another way of saying that the

11. That which was evil for men to do—offering a blemished sacrifice—resulted in that which was not only acceptable before God but actually predestined by God from the beginning. This two-fold character of the atonement process was also present in Judas' betrayal: "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22).

negative sanctions that God imposes on sin are not really absolute. In short, *this was an assertion of man's ability to pay for his own sins*. By offering a substandard, prohibited sacrifice, the atonement-seeker was saying that the magnitude of his own sin was not so great that the leftovers of his flock could not serve as a lawful payment in God's court.

Except in the case of birds, the texts required that the sacrificed animals be unblemished, meaning valuable. Nevertheless, the whole burnt offering was a limited sacrifice: only one animal was required, not the whole flock. Mosaic man was reminded that he dare not try to cheat God by offering a blemished sacrifice, for he owed God everything; nevertheless, he was not to deceive himself by offering everything he owned in a vain attempt to buy his salvation.

D. Public Sacrifice and Implicit Stewardship

Because a covenant-keeping man in Israel offered the best of his flock as a token of God's absolute ownership of both him and his flock, *he thereby retained lawful title in God's court to everything that remained in his possession*. His life and his possessions were no longer tainted, for his representative sacrificial act removed God's curse in history. By sacrificing the best of his flock, he re-established his claim of legitimate ownership in God's court. Because he personally bore the economic loss, he established lawful title to future benefits from his property. Only someone who has the legal authority to *disown* a piece of property can accurately be said to own it.¹² An Israelite disowned his representative animal—the best of his flock—by sacrificing it. He publicly acknowledged in principle that he owed God everything he owned, and that whatever he retained, he retained by God's grace as a steward in history. His sins were judicially covered in God's historical court, and therefore his remaining property was to be retained under his lawful control as God's steward.

Had he sacrificed a low-value animal, he would have been symbolically asserting that God had lawful title to only the dregs of his capital assets, the leftovers. This would have constituted a rebellion on his part: the theft of God's property, meaning the public repudiation of his delegated position as God's steward. *But this stewardship cannot legally be repudiated*. Man is still held responsible by God for the faithful

12. F. A. Harper, *Liberty: A Path to Its Recovery* (Auburn, Alabama, Mises Institute, [1949] 2007), p. 106. (<http://bit.ly/HarperLiberty>)

administration of God's property. Stewardship is therefore an inescapable concept. It is never a question of "stewardship vs. no stewardship"; it is always a question of *stewardship for whom*. This is why Jesus warned, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).¹³ But we cannot serve no master, either. We have to serve someone or something: point two of the biblical covenant model.

When we identify the sovereign agent for which men work as economic stewards, we have identified the god of that particular society. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, the right wing of the Enlightenment¹⁴ proclaimed the free market as the institutional master, which in the twentieth century was labeled consumers' sovereignty,¹⁵ but which is more accurately described as *customers' authority*. Sovereignty is an aspect of the judicial order (legal ownership), not the economy (asset allocation). Producers are property owners and therefore equally sovereign. But they possess far less economic authority than customers, who own the most marketable commodity: money. Also beginning in the eighteenth century, the left wing of the Enlightenment proclaimed the state as the institutional master (citizens' sovereignty). In each case, the Enlightenment proclaimed *autonomous man* as the judicial sovereign: the ultimate owner.¹⁶ The question then became: Which institution best represents this new sovereign: the free

13. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14: "Rival Masters, Rival Kingdoms."

14. The Scottish Enlightenment: Adam Ferguson, David Hume, Adam Smith, etc. See Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C: "Adam Smith's Theory of Economic Sanctions."

15. The man who coined the phrase was the British-born South African economist William H. Hutt. See Hutt, "The Nature of Aggressive Selling," *Economica* (1935); reprinted in *Individual Freedom: Selected Works of William H. Hutt*, eds. Svetozar Pejovich and David Klingaman (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1975), p. 185. Ludwig von Mises adopted it: "The economic foundation of this bourgeois system is the market economy in which the consumer is sovereign." Mises, "The Economic Foundations of Freedom," *The Freeman* (April 1960); reprinted in Mises, *Economic Freedom and Interventionism*, ed. Bettina Bien Greaves (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1990), p. 4. The idea is consumer supremacy. "What matters is not the behavior of the entrepreneurs but the supremacy of the consumers." Mises, "Inequality of Wealth and Incomes," *Ideas on Liberty* (May 1955); reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 46.

16. Chapter 4:O.

market or the state?¹⁷ Christians ever since have chosen sides between these rival humanist viewpoints. They have not gone to the Bible in search of another approach. This is why my economic commentary represents a radical break with the past.

Consider the comparative political appeal of these rival doctrines of final earthly sovereignty. The state rules by the monopolistic sword, while the market is dependent on this sword to adjudicate and then enforce disputed contracts.¹⁸ The state concentrates power; the market diffuses power. The state's representation of sovereign power is publicly visible;¹⁹ the market's representation of subordinate power is confined to such emblems as profit-and-loss statements, balance sheets, and share prices on a stock market. The state's manifestation of power is easily understood by the average man; the market's manifestation of power is understood only through complex chains of highly specialized economic reasoning. In the struggle to gain public allegiance, and therefore moral legitimacy, the state has most of the advantages most

17. A parallel argument took place after Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). Social Darwinism was divided between the defenders of the free market social order and the statist. The former—most notably Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner—based their defense on the competitive nature of free market capitalism, which, they argued, is analogous to a ruthless, unplanned, directionless, evolving nature. Autonomous nature is to be the model for society, they believed. The statist—most notably Lester Frank Ward—counter-argued that human society has now superseded the rule of once-planless nature, just as the brain of man has superseded all other brains in nature, and therefore a scientific elite can successfully direct the social evolutionary process through the application of state power. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

18. Bruce L. Benson presents a case for a society without civil courts: *The Enterprise of Law: Justice Without the State* (San Francisco, California: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 1990). The judicial problem is that some disputes can be resolved only through the imposition of sanctions or the threat thereof. Who has the authority to impose such sanctions within a geographical area? Which laws are legitimate? Which sanctions are legitimate? What is to prevent the development of a warlord society if the principle of civil sanctions is not honored?

19. There is a link between totalitarianism and military symbols. The two major totalitarian societies of the mid-twentieth century, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, had annual parades where tanks rolled and soldiers marched. Sociologist Robert Nisbet wrote: "The final attribute of totalitarianism that tends to be emphasized in conservative analyses since Burke is the militarization of culture and society. . . . Once Trotsky took on the responsibility of transmuting the Czarist into the Red Army, military symbols began to burgeon. The military tunic received a value in society it had never held before; so did military rank in all councils of government. . . . Far more important than actual war in mobilizing a population is war-society, irrespective of outbreaks of war." Robert Nisbet, *The Making of Modern Society* (Brighton, Sussex: Wheatsheaf, 1986), pp. 202–3.

of the time. *If the state is not restrained by a theology of God's primary sovereignty, it will threaten man with servitude in history.* What man grants to the state theologically he will pay for economically.

The whole burnt offering symbolized God's primary ownership and man's stewardship under God. Whatever man owns has been granted to him by God. *Whenever the doctrine of sovereignty is transferred from God to the state, so is the concept of primary ownership.* The state is then regarded as the absolute owner. Individuals become stewards of the state. They own only what the state allows them to retain. A grant of tax exemption by the state is regarded as revocable at any time. *This is why a successful defense of freedom must begin with the doctrine of God's sovereignty and permanent restraints on those covenantal agencies that represent God in history.* The permanent economic limit on the church is the tithe: 10% of a person's net output (= net income).²⁰ The permanent economic restraint on civil government is also the tithe: all combined levels of the state may not lawfully claim so much as a tithe (I Sam. 8:15–17).²¹

Whenever men deny God's absolute sovereignty, they also deny His right to place economic and judicial limits on those institutions that represent Him judicially. This leads inevitably to an attempt by men to transfer final sovereignty in history: from God to some human agency, usually the state. The state then seeks to place boundaries around God's revealed word, the Bible. The alternative is to admit that God's revealed word has placed boundaries around the state. *Boundaries are an inescapable concept.* The questions are: Who creates them? Who lawfully announces them? What are they? How are they enforced? How are they modified over time? The one who successfully commands sacrifice is the god of the society, the law-giver.

E. Debt Relief

This law made it plain to all that there is a price to be paid for sin. Man must pay this price. There is no escape. God imposes it and then collects it. The question is: How high is this price? If it is higher than any sin-corrupted man can pay in history, must all men pay the penalty throughout eternity? If not, who can and will pay it?

20. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

21. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

1. Buying God's Favor

This passage could easily be misinterpreted apart from a clear understanding of its theocentric foundation. It would be easy to conclude that fallen man can purchase the favor of God, or at least temporary legal standing before God, through the payment of a price. By forfeiting the ownership of a valuable asset, fallen man might conclude that he can buy God's blessing or avoid God's wrath. Salvation would then be understood as a period of healing in between sacrifices: the outcome of a payment by fallen man to a powerful God. He might conclude: "My offer of a sacrifice *buys time* from God." This has been the view of religions throughout history, at least those that acknowledge the reality of time.²²

The Bible teaches that fallen man is incapable of offering anything to God that is sufficiently valuable to placate His wrath for man's sin. Fallen man has nothing of value to offer God. Isaiah 64:6 informs us: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;²³ and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." The moral corruption of man has tainted the whole creation; it, too, is under the curse of death.²⁴ All of our offerings are inescapably tainted. Therefore, it is impossible for the blood of animals, in and of itself, to placate the God of the Bible. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Shed blood did defer God's wrath in history. How? *Because the animal's death was judicially representative: part of a hierarchical system of authority.* The shedding of the blood of certain

22. Biblical religion also requires a redeeming sacrifice. Were it not for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in history, to which God looked forward in time, Adam would have been executed on the day he sinned (Gen. 2:17). The difference between biblical religion and pagan religion with respect to sacrifice is that Christianity teaches that the sole acceptable sacrifice before God is the single, representative, *judicial act* of the life of an *ethically perfect man*, Jesus Christ. Covenant-keeping man is to redeem the time—buy it back—through a Holy Spirit-empowered, progressive ethical conformity to God's law. The biblical concept of salvation is therefore both judicial and ethical. Paul's injunction to redeem the time appears in the middle of an intensely ethical passage. "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:14–16).

23. Literally: menstruous rags. Hebrew root word meaning woman's period: *ayd*. See Strong's Hebrew #5708: James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

24. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 12: "Scarcity: Curse and Blessing"; North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), pp. 8–11. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

specified animals was covenant-keeping man's public acknowledgment of his *subordination* to God and his *legal debt to God*.

Hierarchy and representation—point two of the biblical covenant model—lead us to the issue of ownership: point three. The necessity of representative sacrifice involves the necessity of economic loss. Adam violated God's boundary; God therefore imposed a cost on Adam and his heirs. Adam stole what was God's; God therefore imposed restitution payments on Adam and his heirs. Adam denied God's absolute sovereignty (#1) and revolted against God's authority (#2) by violating God's property (#3). God's sanctions (#4) are mandatory. Who pays? Under the Mosaic law, the owners of sacrificial animals paid with their valuable animals, and the animals paid with their lives. This chain of events raises some fundamental questions.

2. *Substantial Losses*

Why was there a Levitical requirement of blemish-free sacrifices? Why did God impose a system of sacrifice on fallen man, whether blood sacrifice or economic, if the specific sacrifice is insufficient to cover sin? Why require a high-value, blemish-free animal? Because man is made in the image of God, and his acts are supposed to reflect God's acts. This raises the question of God's acts.

God has offered a sacrifice to Himself: a high-value, ethically blemish-free sacrifice. To meet His own judicial standards, God forfeited in history the most valuable Lamb of His flock, His own Son. It is not what fallen man pays to God that repays God for sin (a trespass or boundary violation); it is *what God pays to Himself*. The blemish-free animal in the Mosaic sacrificial system symbolized (i.e., judicially represented) this perfectionist aspect of lawful atonement. Even closer symbolically than slain animals was God's announcement to Abraham that he would have to sacrifice Isaac, a payment for which God later mandated a substitute: the ram (Gen. 22:13). The faithful Israelite of the Old Covenant acknowledged ritually and economically that such a sacrifice by God would be substituted by God in the future; until then, he would have to bear earthly economic losses in order to regain lawful standing before God. Isaiah made it clear that the coming Messiah would be the one to pay God's full price (Isa. 53:2–12).

It was not that the faithful Israelite could legitimately expect to pay for his sin through the forfeiture of a blemish-free animal. It was only that *God required him to suffer a large loss*. God's negative sanctions

against sin impose inescapable costs on man and beast (Gen. 3:17–19;²⁵ Rom. 8:19–22²⁶). Man is required to acknowledge the existence of these costs, as well as the judicial necessity of his bearing such costs, either personally or through his representative legal agent.

3. *The Hierarchy of Debt*

These costs, however, are greater than mankind's total wealth. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).²⁷ This lack of sufficient funds was the message of Jesus' kingdom parable in Matthew 18: a servant who owed a gigantic amount to his master was conditionally forgiven of this debt by his master. Then the servant demanded the immediate repayment of a comparatively tiny amount from a poor debtor, and when the poor man could not pay, the steward had him thrown into debtors' prison. Then the master revoked his mercy and delivered the servant to debtors' prison. "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:32–35).²⁸

If we are to take this parable as a representation of God's judicial relationship with fallen man, we must conclude that *God's forgiveness of a man's debts is conditional*.²⁹ The former debtor must forgive the debts owed to him by his neighbor. The neighbor, according to the parable of the good Samaritan, is that person who walks the same road we do who has been harmed along the way through no fault of his own (Luke 10:30–37).³⁰ When we help him, we should not insist on repay-

25. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 12.

26. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

27. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 35.

28. *Ibid.*, ch. 37: "A Hierarchy of Indebtedness."

29. Ray R. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

30. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21: "The Good Samaritan and

ment. Similarly, when I lend to him for commercial purposes, I should not expect him to repay me if I have had my debts forgiven. My continuing legal status as a forgiven debtor is conditional on my granting the same status to those who owe me anything.

Why should this be true? Because the debt-credit relationship is inescapably hierarchical. The borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7).³¹ When God grants me credit, and I in turn grant someone else credit, that person has become God's servant through me. This is why biblical law recommends that God's people become creditors to covenant-breakers, but not become debtors to them (Deut. 28:12).³²

What commentators rarely (if ever) mention is that the poor debtor owed the money to the rich master. The steward had merely served as an economic and legal middleman. The steward had advanced the poor person money that did not belong to the steward; it had been borrowed from the master. The steward had legal control over the money *temporarily*; he did not own it. This is the definition of all stewardship: temporary legal control over the use of another person's asset. This leads to an important conclusion: *the master's legal annulment of the debt owed to him by the steward was therefore also a legal annulment of the debts of all debtors under the steward's economic authority*. In other words, the debt structure was hierarchical: from the poor man to the master through the steward.³³

Why was the steward unjust? His sin was more than ethical injustice to a poor person; it was judicial rebellion against the master. By trying to collect payment from the poor man, the steward was saying: "I am no longer a middleman, now that my debt has been forgiven. I am now the owner of assets. The credit I extended with borrowed money is still owed to me irrespective of my previous obligations. I am therefore no longer a steward. I am no longer under hierarchy. I can now collect what is lawfully mine from those who are under me." His refusal to cancel the debt that *had been owed to the master through the steward's lending* was a rebellious declaration of independence. He became a thief and a usurper, for he was trying to collect for his own account assets that, economically speaking, had belonged to the master. He was trying to profit from the master's mercy. He refused to ac-

the Concept of Neighbor."

31. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 67.

32. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 37.

33. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 37.

knowledge the *economics of forgiveness*. The master had implicitly released the poor man from his debt, which had been owed to the master by way of the servant, the day the master released his steward from his obligation. The unjust steward refused to acknowledge the legality of this indirect (representative) release. He held to the letter of the law—the terms of the original debt contract—rather than to the underlying economics of the transaction: hierarchical representation and lawful subordination. So, the master reimposed the debt in order to remind the steward that he was still nothing but a steward, that he was still under the master's lawful authority.

However, by consigning the unjust steward to prison, *the master was implicitly reimposing the debt on the poor man*. The master in the parable did not order the release of the poor man. Why not? Because such a unilateral act of debt release would have been theft: stealing from the steward, i.e., taking away an asset that the steward could use to repay his debt. *The master could forgive the poor debtor only by forgiving the steward's debt by the same amount*. The steward's wife or heirs were legally empowered to collect everything owed to him in a vain attempt to pay off the master.

The day of reckoning—an accounting concept—had come for both the steward and the poor debtor. Time had run out for both of them. Their debt pyramid had toppled. The hierarchy of debt repayment would now be felt up and down the chain of obligations. Those foolish enough to have indebted themselves would now be reminded of the hierarchical nature of debt. The master had at last pressed his lawful claims. *By indebting himself to an unjust steward, the poor man brought the master's judgment on his own head*.³⁴ Covenant-keepers should learn this lesson well: do not become indebted to covenant-breakers. "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43–44).³⁵ When God periodically collects His debts from covenant-breakers in history, all those obligated to them or dependent on them feel the economic pain, including covenant-keepers.³⁶

34. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 37.

35. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 37.

36. Anyone who doubts this should consider carefully what happens to debtors and everyone who sells goods and services to debtors during a deflationary economic depression.

4. *Representative Forgiveness*

There was one reasonable hope for the unjust steward: his kinsman-redeemer. Legally, the steward was still the head of his household, but economically, his kinsman-redeemer was in authority. Only if someone possessing legitimate authority would show mercy in his name could he escape. There were only three ways for the kinsman-redeemer to help: (1) pay off the debt; (2) offer to replace the steward in prison; (3) pay off the poor man's debt and then plead for mercy from the master on the basis of this *representative act of mercy*. If the steward publicly consented to this third action on the part of his kinsman-redeemer, he might receive mercy from the master. But if the steward remained adamant against the poor man, he himself would remain in debtors' prison. This much is sure: the poor debtor's fate was not in his own hands. He required mercy to escape: from the master or from his kinsman-redeemer.

When God granted the grace of additional time to fallen mankind, He thereby also granted the grace of time to the creation that was (and is) under man's lawful authority. The covenant's hierarchical authority structure remained (and remains) in place. Fallen man still owes the restitution payment to God. Nature is still under God's authority through man, and therefore is under God's curse on man. Fallen man is told to treat those under his authority with mercy analogous to the mercy shown by God to fallen man. What is the evidence of God's mercy? A system of representative blood sacrifice.

Why did God require animal sacrifices? What had the animals done to deserve this? Biblically, the answer is simple: *they fell with their commander, Adam*. Their representative fell, and they came under a curse. This is why certain animals could serve as sacrificial offerings acceptable to God. The animal had to be slain before it was placed on the altar. This symbolized the death of a cursed being, fallen man. After death comes fire with salt.³⁷ The sacrifice announced symbolic-

37. "And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. 2:13). "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee" (Num. 18:19). "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt" (Mark 9:47-49).

ally: “Either the dead animal roasts in history or else the dead sinner roasts in eternity.” In order to preserve man’s relationship with God, man must offer sacrifice. Old Covenant man had to offer animal sacrifices. These sacrifices also preserved the animal world’s relationship with God. The sacrificed animals represented both the animal world and fallen man’s world.

The animals came under God’s judgment when Adam did. When God annulled the debts of all those who will ever come representatively under the debt protection of His Son Jesus Christ, He also annulled the sacrificial system that had previously governed His set-apart covenant people. Animals today need no representative sacrifices by other animals, since their debts, like the debts of God’s covenant people, have been paid representatively by Jesus Christ. When covenant-keeping men’s debts were forgiven, so were the debts of the animal world, debts that had been paid representatively from Abel’s day by the sacrifice of certain animals. This debt cancellation took place definitively with the crucifixion of Christ and finally with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

There can be no mercy without a sacrifice. God’s mercy to mankind as a whole is demonstrated in his willingness to sacrifice His Son, a perfect man.³⁸ Men’s mercy to the animal kingdom as a whole under the Mosaic system was demonstrated by the Israelites’ willingness to sacrifice their own blemish-free animals. The fact that God was willing to sacrifice His Son testifies to His protection of mankind. Similarly, covenant-keeping men’s willingness to sacrifice their most valuable animals testified to their hierarchical obligation to protect the creation. God’s required sacrifices are testimonies to His mercy. When men refuse to offer God’s mandatory sacrifices, they become progressively merciless³⁹. In the New Covenant, the blood sacrifices are no more. There is only one sacrifice: the death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:12). But all men are required by God to acknowledge this sacrifice: verbally,

38. Jesus did not die to save all men from hell, but His death provided the legal basis of the gift of life in history: common grace. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

39. The animism and the pantheism of the modern ecology movement are denials of the God of the Bible and His required system of sacrifice. If this movement’s stipulations are enforced by international civil law, we can expect tyranny on an international scale. Men will seek to overturn the Bible’s hierarchical system: God > man > nature. Mankind will be sacrificed to nature. For a defense of just this sort of sacrifice, see Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989).

ritually, ethically, and financially, i.e., the tithe.

Man's debt to God was not forgiven under the Old Covenant economy; its repayment was only deferred. In a sense, the sacrifices could at most meet the required "interest payments" to God; they did not repay the principal. Analogously, whenever Israel quit paying because of her rebellion, these missed payments were added to the principal owed. Israel's debt to God grew ever-larger.⁴⁰ Finally, in A.D. 70, God called in the debt.⁴¹ Israel went bankrupt publicly. "Forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12) is no idle phrase.⁴² The presence of the required sacrifices in the Mosaic economy testified to the continuing presence of the debt in God's account books, and also to each man's need to repay God in the future. The cosmic Creditor will eventually demand repayment of everything owed to Him. On that final day of reckoning, every person will have to produce one of two things: sufficient funds to repay his debt (impossible) or evidence that he had already accepted the generosity of the Kinsman-Redeemer who had repaid his debt. At the final judgment, the books are forever closed. So is the exit from the ultimate debtor's prison.

By forgiving a sin against us, we symbolically and legally forgive *a debt owed to God* through us. This is why one version of the Lord's prayer says "forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4), while the parallel in Matthew says "forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12).⁴³ By extending forgiveness as God's representative agents, we are showing God's mercy to God's debtors in God's name. Offering up a scarce economic resource to God as a *sacrificial offering* is economically the same as *forgiving a debt* legally owed to us.

Consider the words of Jesus, the long-awaited representative who offered up Himself to God as a holy sacrifice: the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer. He prayed to God from the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). He legally annulled this horrendous sin for those who had truly acted out of ignorance—most obviously, the Ro-

40. In real estate, this is called a *backward-walking mortgage*: the missed monthly mortgage payment is added to the principal owed, so the subsequent payments must be larger.

41. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

42. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 12.

43. Protestant churches that place heavy emphasis on liturgy (i.e., sacrifice-oriented) often pray "forgive us our trespasses." This is closest to the covenantal focus of Leviticus: boundaries and their violation.

man guards who gambled for His clothing. His death and His words annulled *these specific debts* to God the Father. These men had sinned against God the Father by sinning against Jesus. When He forgave them, He did so as the victim. The principle of victim's rights allows such forgiveness.⁴⁴ He thereby also forgave them on His Father's account, as God's legal heir and representative agent.

The loss of the value of a sacrifice made to God symbolizes two things: (1) God's payment of His own Son, the Messiah, and (2) the patience that we have shown to those who had sinned against us. We are stewards, not owners. When we forgive others, we offer up a sacrifice to God: extending grace to sinners by forfeiting whatever they legally owed to us. Of course, we are gaining heavenly resources by doing this. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).⁴⁵

5. New Covenant Burdens

Because Jesus' perfect sacrifice is behind us, we are no longer required by God to offer periodic animal or vegetable sacrifices. This removes from us an economic burden that the Old Covenant saint owed to God. Does this mean that we are not under comparable economic burdens? In some sense, *yes*. The costs of offering sacrifices have been eliminated. We no longer walk three times a year to Jerusalem. But, in another sense, analogous economic obligations do remain in the New Covenant era. We still owe to God-fearing men what Old Covenant saints owed to God-fearing men. In some cases, we owe more.

Consider the morally mandatory charitable loan.⁴⁶ In the Mosaic economy, a person who had been extended a zero-interest charity loan was under the threat of involuntary servitude that would last until the next national sabbatical year (Deut. 15:1–7).⁴⁷ Bankruptcy was expensive in those days. One did not just declare oneself bankrupt and escape the obligation of restitution through indentured servitude. Not so today. "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for

44. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33.

45. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

46. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 36.

47. This did not apply to a non-compulsory, interest-bearing loan: North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35).⁴⁸ Understand: the loan in this commandment is not a business loan; it is a charity loan. Jesus did not tell us that we have a moral obligation to make business loans to our rich enemies whenever they ask, and then suffer meekly when these debtors refuse to repay. That would deliver us economically into the hands of covenant-breaking masters. Jesus was talking about acts of mercy: charitable loans. We are to offer zero-interest loans, not for our gain, but in order to help the *deserving poor* escape from circumstances that afflict them.⁴⁹ We are not to loan money to drunks on the street to finance their drunkenness. We are not to subsidize evil.⁵⁰ We are to show *intelligent mercy*.⁵¹ When a truly impoverished debtor *cannot* repay, due to forces beyond his control, then we are to forgive the debt. In doing so, we make a sacrificial offer of forgiveness.

God will not collect what we owe to Him if we acknowledge publicly that Jesus has paid our gigantic debt.⁵² Because of the shift in covenants, people no longer are required by God to spend money for, or forfeit income from, animals or grains offered as sacrifices. We nonetheless are required to suffer losses when God extends financial mercy through us to impoverished debtors: the legal right of a poor man to declare bankruptcy, thereby escaping his obligation to repay beyond the market value of his assets, which he forfeits. *This is why bankruptcy laws are a legitimate aspect of a Christian society.* That a person in the United States is allowed this God-granted privilege once every seven years is a dim reflection of the Mosaic Covenant's law of sabbatical release (Deut. 15:1–7). Since the late nineteenth century, there have been no debtors' prisons in the West. In the United States, if a debtor is willing to forfeit all his assets except the clothes on his back and the tools of his trade, he has identified himself as an impoverished person. He therefore is allowed to escape the demands of his creditors by declaring bankruptcy. If he is wise, however, he will later

48. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 10.

49. On the idea of the deserving poor, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Knopf, 1984; London: Faber & Faber, 1984).

50. R. J. Rushdoony, *Bread Upon the Waters* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig, 1969), ch. 3: "Subsidizing Evil." (<http://bit.ly/rjrbread>)

51. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?"

52. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

repay his creditors if he can. Because he owes so much to God, he should not seek to profit from the sacrifices borne by those who willingly extended credit to him.⁵³

F. Mandatory Sacrifices and Free Markets

Covenant-breaking man instinctively looks to the works of his own hands as the basis of his redemption. He believes that the work of his hands will placate God. He exhibits this faith in two ways. First, he seeks to offer a public sacrifice of reduced value. Cain's offer of agricultural produce rather than a slain animal is representative of man's search for an alternate sacrifice. He proclaimed ritually that he believed that his blood (life)⁵⁴ was not on the line. Second, man repeatedly places himself under the covenantal jurisdiction of false divinities that time and again claim total sacrifice. This is why *the quest for autonomy from the God of the Bible has led politically to the divinization of the state*, no matter how strong the technical case against the omniscient state may be. Autonomous man returns to the theology of the messianic state like a dog to its vomit. *That which can command unlimited sacrifice is seen as the savior of man and society.*

1. A Just-So God

Covenant-breaking man is schizophrenic. He seeks a divinity in history powerful enough to bless the works of his hands, yet not so powerful as to constitute a threat to his autonomy. This is why,

53. I am not speaking here of civil governments. Anyone so unwise as to extend civil governments credit should not complain when these debtors declare bankruptcy, either directly or through mass inflation. Also, any Bible-affirming new administration in a civil government should feel no moral compunction against declaring the government's bankruptcy if previous administrations unwisely pledged the government's obligation to repay. Defaults on loans made to governments by foreign governments or foreign commercial banks are especially productive in this regard. Periodic bond defaults by civil governments are healthy for capital markets: they remind creditors not to loan money to institutions that are as wasteful and corrupt as modern civil governments. Investors should loan their money to productive enterprises, not governments, except in emergency situations such as wartime (maybe). The only other justification for lending to civil governments is in cases where private debtors are even less reliable.

54. Blood and life are linked biblically: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). "For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off" (Lev. 17:14).

whenever and wherever God's required public sacrifices⁵⁵ are either ignored or denied by society, we can expect to see increasingly successful attacks on the legitimacy of private property. Put differently, whenever and wherever the limits (boundaries) placed by God on man's required sacrifices are ignored, we can expect to see the state substitute itself as a new god which in principle requires unlimited sacrifice. Whatever property that the state allows men to retain under their personal control will be understood as due to the present grace of the state, or due to the state's present political inability to confiscate everything, or due to the state's present perception that individuals acting as taxpaying stewards can more efficiently expand the state's capital base. What God has delegated to the family in history, the Molo State will eventually attempt to confiscate.⁵⁶

This is the reason why an intellectual defense of economic freedom, if it is to be culturally successful over the long run, must be paralleled by the church's successful proclamation of the gospel of redemption—the buying back of individuals and institutions—through Christ's once-only sacrifice. The professed universalism of modern economic theory is no more valid than the professed universalism of Unitarianism. No matter how brilliant the technical intellectual defenses of specific aspects of the free market may be, and no matter how visible the failures of socialist economic planning may become,⁵⁷ the

55. The Lord's Supper is public. It is not mandated by the state; it is mandated by God.

56. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 25.

57. In 1989, these failures at last began to be acknowledged by intellectuals in the West because of the public admission by Communist officials of the economic breakdown in Communist nations. The intellectuals of the West once again took their cues from public statements by the tyrants who were running the Soviet Union. The West's economists had long been much better informed in this regard, yet even they continually overestimated the productivity of the Soviet economy. One of the few mainstream economists who recognized the magnitude of the USSR's weakness earlier than his peers was Harvard's Marshall I. Goldman, *USSR in Crisis: The Failure of the Soviet Economic System* (New York: Norton, 1983). As an outsider, I had concluded this by 1968. After surveying the critical analyses of Western economists through 1967, I concluded my appendix, "Soviet Economic Planning," with these words: "... it seems clear that without decentralization economically and the advent of a consumer society based on private ownership and profit, the basic issues will remain unsolved. The economy will shift back and forth between planning at the top and localism, growing more and more irrational as the complexity of the planning task grows ever greater. The system, in good Marxian terminology, contains the seeds of its own destruction." Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1968), pp. 225–26. Reprinted by the Institute for Christian Economics, 1989, p. 231. (<http://bit.ly/gnmr>)

judicial foundation of the free market society and the epistemological foundation of economic science both must begin with the public proclamation of the covenantal reality of God's curse in Eden and the covenantal reality of God's redeeming sacrifice at Calvary. Economic theory is no more autonomous than society is. If a believable theological justification of economic theory and policy is not produced, the power-seeking state will revive and flourish once again. The theological appeal of statism will eventually overcome technical criticisms of economists. Men want to worship something more powerful than the textbooks' supply and demand curves. The visible sanctions of the state are more easily understood and more readily feared than the complex sanctions of the free market. The visible hand of the state, however spastic or grabbing it may be, is more readily believed in and feared than the invisible hand of the free market.

2. The Moral High Ground

Politicians and judges are the ministers of the civil order (Rom. 13:4); they alone can lawfully impose physical sanctions outside a family. The scribes known as economists⁵⁸ can offer nothing that can permanently thwart the expansion of the state, for the economists' sanctions are intellectual, not physical. The economists' worldview is overtly technical, not moral. (In fact, their covert worldview is intensely theological: the religion of autonomous man in an autonomous universe.) Economists naively deny the legitimacy of morality in their formal pronouncements.⁵⁹ They have been doing so ever since the late seventeenth century.⁶⁰ The politicians affirm morality in their judgments. What is incorrectly perceived as the moral high ground eventually triumphs. The state enforces its power-based sovereignty over the

58. On economists as priests of the modern world, see Robert H. Nelson, *Reaching for Heaven on Earth: The Theological Meaning of Economics* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991). This book is a brilliant exposition of a conceptually flawed thesis: "Roman" (Stoic, Catholic, rationalistic, corporate) economics vs. "Protestant" (individualist, non-rational) economics. The proper classification is realist economics vs. nominalist economics—in permanent dialectical tension—with covenantal economics as the biblical alternative.

59. This is the myth of value-free economics. For a critique, see North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H: "The Epistemological Problem of Social Cost." A shortened version is North, *The Coase Theorem: A Study in Epistemology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992). See also North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

60. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1963).

free market.

If the illusion of occupying the moral high ground becomes widespread among the defenders of the statist order of self-proclaimed autonomous man, then only an economic cataclysm born of inherently irrational socialist economic planning can place anything like a permanent boundary on the state's expansion. The free market may triumph temporarily, as it did in England from 1845 to 1875, but eventually the moralists will once again invoke their god, the state, and the people will worship at its temples. The state possesses monopolistic power (negative physical sanctions). Infuse it with the messianic morality of the modern welfare state (positive sanctions), and it will either buy control of the free market (Keynesianism) or else suppress it (socialism).

Without explicitly biblical foundations, free market economic thought will remain merely a technical application of right-wing Enlightenment philosophy: knowledge without power. Free market social theory will remain the intellectual plaything of a minority of professional economists, most of whom are employed by the state in tax-funded universities. Without its epistemological grounding in sacrifice and sanctions, economic analysis will begin, at best, with an acknowledgment of the visible effects of God's curses in Genesis:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:17–19).⁶¹

What must become central to economic analysis is the underlying theology of the five-point covenant that preceded God's imposition of negative sanctions against the creation.

1. The integrated doctrines of the special creation, the sovereignty of God as Creator, and therefore His absolute ownership of the creation (Gen. 1:1);
2. The doctrine of God's delegation of secondary ownership of the creation to man (Gen. 1:26–28);

61. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 12.

3. The doctrine of the law of God, which appears in the form of an exclusive (and therefore exclusionary) property boundary (Gen. 2:17a);
4. The doctrine of God's negative sanctions against the person who violates His law and His property (Gen. 2:17b);
5. The doctrine of the promised negative historical sanctions against Satan through God's promised Seed (Gen. 3:15).

The acknowledgment of the reality of God-cursed economic scarcity is necessary but not sufficient for the reconstruction of economic analysis. We must also discover in God's word *and apply covenantally* the judicial foundations of economic reconstruction: the progressive removal in history of the effects of God's curse.⁶²

Conclusion

By sacrificing to something sovereign over him (point 1), man acknowledges his debt to this higher authority (point 2). He seeks to draw a boundary of safety or immunity around himself, his works, and his property (point 3). He believes that his sacrifice will enable him to avert the wrath and/or gain the blessings of this higher authority (point 4), enabling him to leave a valuable legacy to his heirs (point 5). Offering sacrifice is a ritual acknowledgment of someone else's sovereignty and one's own economic subordination: stewardship.

Covenant-keeping man in the Mosaic Covenant era was told by God to sacrifice animals from his flock. The animal had to be the best of his flock: *blemish-free*. This pointed symbolically (representatively), as had Abraham's sacrifice of the ram in place of Isaac, to the ultimate sacrifice: God's ethically blemish-free Son. At the same time, God did not require total sacrifice from His holy people. That which would constitute total sacrifice from fallen man is insufficient to pay the required bill to God. Thus, the person who presented the sacrifice to the priest was proclaiming ritually and publicly that he in principle owed everything to God (i.e., the best of his flock), but at the same time, all that he owned would not suffice to repay God (i.e., one animal only). The individual sacrifice was to be of high value but not total.

God placed specific limits—boundaries—on the required sacrifices.⁶³ These sacrificial boundaries put man in his proper place. They

62. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, chaps. 8, 9.

63. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 56.

also allowed him to retain the majority portion of the wealth under his jurisdiction. In order lawfully to keep what he owned, he had to acknowledge ritually that it was all a gift from God. He acknowledged that his property was a *residual*: things left over for his use after God had taken His fair share. This same theology of residual ownership undergirds the tithe.

Mosaic sacrifices were representative. They represented the death of man and the death of nature. Both man and nature are under the curse of death because of Adam's rebellion. When God extended grace to man through Jesus Christ, He also extended grace to nature. No longer does God require animal sacrifices. Men may lawfully keep their blemish-free animals, and the blemish-free animals now keep their lives. Because God the Father has definitively extended grace to man and nature in history through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, there is no further need for man to shed blood in order to placate God.

Economically, bankruptcy laws acknowledge the Bible's view of debt forgiveness. When a man declares bankruptcy, he hands over all his assets to his creditors, including all debts owed to him. Henceforth, he can no longer demand payment of debts owed to him. Whatever had been owed to him is now owed to his creditors. This acknowledges the hierarchical nature of stewardship and forgiveness.

The Bible's definitive limitation on blood sacrifice has placed a definitive limit on mandatory economic sacrifice. Neither the state nor the church possesses an unlimited claim to our wealth. The tithe sets the maximum limits of both institutions in New Covenant times. This is a great blessing from God; under the Mosaic law, the combined burden was far greater—at least twice as great.⁶⁴ But when men refuse to sacrifice to God, they eventually wind up sacrificing far more to the state. God graciously limits His economic demands on us. The state, representing the collective god, autonomous man, is not equally gracious. This is why widespread moral rebellion always brings high taxes and inflation. The state demands to be placated. It claims the moral high ground by proclaiming the economics of confiscation. It robs the productive and gives to the unproductive. This is Satan's political economy: the disinheritance of the righteous. To thwart this satanic system of wealth redistribution, men must place God's boundaries around the state, but this means that they must pay their tithes to their local institutional churches.

64. See the Introduction, Section H.

2

PRIESTLY REPRESENTATION

And when any will offer a meat [meal] offering unto the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon: And he shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests: and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof; and the priest shall burn the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: And the remnant of the meat [meal] offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire (Lev. 2:1–3).

The theocentric principle governing the interpretation of this passage is the need for representation before God: point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. The Priesthood

Fallen man does not have direct access to God. He must have an ecclesiastical mediator: a priest. This priest represents God before man and man before God. In the New Covenant, the ultimate and final high priest is revealed: Jesus Christ, the messiah.²

This sacrifice was the second of the five Levitical sacrifices, and was associated with point two of the biblical covenant model: *hierarchical authority*. This sacrifice is called the *allegiance gift* by the rabbis.³ As we shall see, it was uniquely associated with the doctrine of the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. The Epistle to the Hebrews is the central book for the development of the New Covenant priesthood.

3. See the comments of S. R. Hirsch, the mid-nineteenth-century founder of what is today called Orthodox Judaism. He refers to this sacrifice as “a gift by which the giver recognises the receiver as the arbiter of his fate, and by the gift acknowledges and

covenant, for it was the hierarchical (*hieros*: Greek for priest) sacrifice.

Of the five Levitical sacrifices, this one had the least to do with economics. Yet in other contexts, the actual Hebrew word had much to do with economics. The Hebrew word translated as *meat offering* by the King James translators, *minkhaw* (Lev. 2:4–11), is the word for *tribute offering*. This is what Jacob gave to Esau when he passed through Esau's territory (Gen. 32:13, 18); it was the "present" that Ehud promised to deliver to the tyrant Eglon (Jud. 3:15); it was what the Moabites brought to David (II Sam. 8:2) and the Syrians brought to David (II Sam. 8:6). This tribute payment was used by those under another's authority to purchase the favor of those ruling over them.

Significantly, it was this *minkhaw* or tribute offering which was brought to a priest by a husband in cases where the husband accused his wife of adultery: the offering of jealousy (Num. 5:15). When the wife had falsely sworn that she was innocent, her eating of this offering would cause her thigh to rot and her belly to swell (v. 22). More than any other Mosaic priestly ritual, this one produced a predictable, immediate, judicially binding result: a physiologically revealed falsehood—the closest thing to traditional magic in the Mosaic law. The priest could gain access to knowledge that was normally closed to judges. God responded immediately to this jealousy offering, intervening in history to identify a guilty wife, but only in cases of adultery: the supreme representative act of spiritual rebellion (Hosea 2). God's refusal to intervene visibly was legal evidence of the wife's innocence (Num. 5:28).

In Leviticus, the meal or tribute offering was closely associated with the priesthood, although common Israelites could bring this offering. This offering accompanied the inauguration of the Aaronic priesthood. The day Aaron was anointed, he and his sons had to offer a meal offering (Lev. 6:20). This had to be done with every anointing of a new priest, for it was a permanent statute (Lev. 6:22). At these Aaronic anointings, the meal offering could not be eaten; it had to be burned on the altar (Lev. 6:23). This fully consumed sacrifice represented the death of the priest for whom it was offered. As the administrator of the consuming fire of the altar, he had to be reminded that he, too, was under the threat of God's eternal fire.

The meal offering established the principle of priestly sacrifice at

expresses his dependence on, and bondage and subjection to, the receiver of the gift." Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, 5 vols. (Gateshead, London: Judaica Press, [1867–70] 1989), III:1, p. 51.

the time of each priest's anointing. When the authority of the priestly office was transferred to any male heir of Aaron, he and his sons had to offer this sacrifice. This sacrifice reminded them of their unique position of representation. They represented the nation before God. Those under them were at risk. The priests' moral conduct had to be exemplary because of their representative function. Also, their official conduct in offering the various sacrifices had to conform to the requirements of the covenant. Both moral purity and ritual precision were required of them, but the greater requirement was moral purity. One sign of this greater priestly responsibility was the law's requirement a priest's daughter who became a prostitute had to be burned alive (Lev. 21:9). This sanction did not apply to any other prostitute. The daughter of a priest represented her father's household; she was therefore under greater condemnation. Whoredom was representative (symbolic) of false worship: whoring after other gods.

When an Israelite brought a meal offering to the priest, the major part of this offering belonged to the priests: "And the remnant of the meat [meal] offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire" (Lev. 2:3). The priests burned a handful of the meal on the altar as their portion of the offering and then ate the remainder (Lev. 6:15–16). This had to be eaten in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation (v. 16). No females could participate in this common meal (v. 18). This is because priestly activities are uniquely representative of God, and God is exclusively male.

B. Leaven and Fire

This offering could not include leaven (Lev. 2:4–5). The reason for this is that part of it had to go on the altar. Leaven was not allowed on the altar (Lev. 2:11). Unleavened bread was required during Passover (Ex. 12:15). Unleavened bread symbolized Israel's radical break with Egypt, the symbol of pagan religion and tyranny. It was not that unleavened meal represented righteousness as such; rather, it represented Israel's discontinuous break in history from evil. Unleaven represented *historical discontinuity*—the transition from wrath to grace—prior to the oath-bound establishment of a covenantal nation.

The meal offering served as the priests' acknowledgment of their subordination to God and their break with the religion of Egypt. Thus, "It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it unto them for their

portion of my offerings made by fire; it is most holy, as is the sin offering, and as the trespass offering" (Lev. 6:17). Leaven was not allowed on the altar, but not because it somehow represented evil as such. It represented a fully risen or completed product, as did honey, so it could not be burned on the altar. Leaven symbolized *historical continuity*. But men are still in history; their work is not yet completed. Thus, leaven was not symbolically proper on the fiery altar.

Part of this meal offering had to be burned on the altar:

And thou shalt bring the meat [meal] offering that is made of these things unto the LORD: and when it is presented unto the priest, he shall bring it unto the altar. And the priest shall take from the meat offering a memorial thereof, and shall burn it upon the altar: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And that which is left of the meat offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire (Lev. 2:8–10).

The fire on the altar was God's permanent, day-and-night testimony of His wrath. The animal and agricultural sacrifices placed on this fire produced a sweet savor for God (Lev. 1:9; 2:2; 3:5; 4:31). God delighted in the ritual burning of representative animals and meal. This symbolized (represented) God's delight in the eternal burning of His enemies, angelic and human (Rev. 20:14–15). This particular delight of God ought to be the terror of man. The smoke ascending day and night from God's altar was to serve as a reminder to man of what awaits covenant-breakers in eternity. This was God's testimony in history to the wrath that awaits covenant-breakers beyond history.

C. The Salt of the Covenant

The meal offering, more than the other sacrifices, was the sacrifice of the covenant. It was the one sacrifice in which salt was specifically mentioned: "And every oblation of thy meat [meal] offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering; with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. 2:13). This phrase, *the salt of the covenant*, ties this sacrifice to the Bible's system of covenantal subordination.

Why salt? First, it is an agency of incorruption, keeping things from spoiling.⁴ Second, salt imparts flavor. Third, and most important

4. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services As They Were in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1874] 1983), p. 109.

with respect to sacrifices, it is an agent of permanent destruction. It was used by armies to destroy permanently the fertility of their defeated enemies' land (Jud. 9:45). Salt is therefore associated with God's wrath in eternity: "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt" (Mark 9:47–49).⁵ It is also associated with God's covenantal wrath in history. God warned Israel at the time of the nation's act of covenant renewal, just before they entered the promised land, regarding Sodom's burning and Sodom's salt. Sodom had so thoroughly broken the terms of God's covenant that it was doomed to be salted over: final judgment.

So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the LORD hath laid upon it; And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, **and salt**, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath: Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have **forsaken the covenant** of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt: For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them: And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book (Deut. 29:22–27).

The conclusion: "Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do" (Deut. 29:9).

The threat of God's covenant sanctions was not limited to the nation; it also included the individual. God warned what would happen to the covenant-breaking individual. Notice the language of smoke, which accompanies burning. "And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add

5. For a discussion of this passage in the light of the New Testament's doctrine of eternal punishment, and the background of the Old Testament's sacrifices, see Gary North, "Publisher's Epilogue," in David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 171–95. (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law" (Deut. 29:19–21).

D. Firstfruits (Pentecost)

The meal offering is associated in the text with the firstfruits offering, another meal offering (Lev. 2:12, 14). Firstfruits was a mandatory annual offering (Ex. 23:16, 19). This offering was a man's public acknowledgment that God must be paid "off the top." That is, the farmer owed God the best of his field and the first portion of his crop. He was not to pay God last; he was required to pay God first. Firstfruits was one rare case in the Bible where God taxed capital rather than the net increase. The farmer did not deduct the replacement seed before offering the firstfruits; whatever came up was God's. But it was a small offering—a token offering.

The firstfruits payment was mandatory. This was his public acknowledgment of his subordination to God through the Aaronic priesthood. When the blessings of God's bounty appeared in his field, the owner was required to acknowledge the source of this bounty by bringing a meal offering to God.

According to rabbinic tradition, the tithe was paid on what remained after the firstfruits offerings and after gleaning had taken place.⁶ This interpretation of the tithe is consistent with the idea that the tithe is paid only on that which is at the lawful disposal of the owner. We do not owe the church a tithe on that which has been lawfully appropriated by others. Counting all the required tithes (including the tithe of celebration: Deuteronomy 14:23),⁷ the sacrifices, and the gleaning laws, the rabbis estimated that about one-quarter of the agricultural productivity of the land would have been transferred to others, not including civil taxes.⁸ Many of these offerings beyond the tithe

6. Edersheim, *Temple*, p. 379.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

8. Edersheim, *Temple*, p. 379. The rabbis assumed that the third-year and sixth-year festival tithes of Deuteronomy 14:26–29 were additional tithes.

did not burden non-agricultural occupations.⁹ This is additional evidence that biblical law indirectly subsidized urban employment by penalizing farming. Contrary to Edersheim, who wrote that “the Law seems to regard Israel as intended to be only an agricultural people,”¹⁰ the Mosaic law did a great deal to move Israelite families off the farm and into the city, as I explained in this book’s Introduction.

Exodus 23:17 indicates that the public offering of the firstfruits, like the feast of ingathering (Tabernacles), was mandatory for all the men of Israel: “Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD.” Because the firstfruits offerings were explicitly agricultural, the products of other occupations were exempt. Still, in a predominantly agricultural society, the crowds entering Jerusalem would have been immense. Edersheim said that the later rabbinical estimate of the size of the original temple indicated that 210,000 people could worship there.¹¹ We ask ourselves: How did the priests handle the immense flow of individual sacrifices? Where did the people stay? How long did these round-trip journeys take? What expenses along the road did the travelers incur? This traveling expense would have been considerable, in contrast to the value of the firstfruits’ representative grain offering.

These festivals were acts of covenant renewal. They were expensive and time-consuming. They would have required a great deal of patience, such as standing in long lines for many hours. God required the men of the nation to go through these ceremonies, despite the costs involved. Why? Because they were a nation of priests (Ex. 19: 6).

Of all the festivals, firstfruits was the one least likely to have been attended by women. It was held 50 days after Passover (Lev. 23:15). Passover was a family celebration (Ex. 12). Women who had just walked home from the central location would have been tired of travelling with children. The men were required to attend; the women were not. Firstfruits would have tended to be a more male-oriented festival, analogous to the meal offering, which was exclusively masculine (Lev. 2:18).

Conclusion

This sacrifice was an aspect of point two of the biblical covenant

9. *Idem.*

10. *Idem.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

model. Bear in mind that Exodus is the second book in the Pentateuch. First, the phrase “salt of the covenant” (Lev. 2:13) parallels the Book of Exodus’ identification as the book of the covenant (Ex. 24:7). Second, the prohibition of leaven points back to the exodus: the definitive break in Israelite history from bondage to false gods. All of Egypt’s leaven had to be left behind. None could be brought into the Promised Land. This sharp break with the evil of Egypt was celebrated at the Passover meal, which also excluded leaven (Ex. 12: 15). Third, the meal sacrifice was the second of the five sacrifices of Leviticus. Fourth, this sacrifice had to do with the priesthood: hierarchy.

The meal offering pointed to Israel as a nation under a covenant. It was under hierarchical authority, both civil and ecclesiastical. The meal offering more than the other four pointed to this hierarchical system of representation. The priests were required to make a meal offering at the time of their anointing. The common Israelite, when he had committed an unnamed infraction, brought a meal offering to the priest for sacrifice.

What was the nature of this transgression? We are not told, but we can deduce the answer. The transgression had no victim, or else the fifth sacrifice would have been appropriate: the trespass or reparation offering. It was not an unintentional sin, since the fourth sacrifice was not involved: the sin offering or purification offering. It was not a peace offering, which was voluntary and was not part of the atoning sacrifices. The whole burnt offering was associated with man’s total submission to God. Thus, I conclude that the meal offering had something to do with a known infraction of a priestly law—what we call today ceremonial law.

The Israelite was a member of a nation of priests. As a household priest, he was under rigorous requirements regarding washing, bodily discharges, bodily contact, and so forth. To maintain his purity, he had to follow certain rules. A violation of these priestly rules brought him under the threat of sanctions. The meal offerings pointed to his position as a subordinate officer in a national priesthood.

For a man outside the temple’s priesthood, the cost of bringing this sacrifice to Jerusalem was far greater than the value of the food sacrificed. This was true of all of the national festivals. These transportation and participation costs testified to God’s sovereignty over Israel. They also imposed special economic burdens on agricultural production. This is evidence that God intended the Israelites to be urban people, with most farms in the land being managed in the name of ori-

ginal owners by specialists. The management of agriculture would have been representative, much as modern agriculture is.

The meal offering was priestly. It was associated with Israel's status as priest of the nations. The common Israelite was held responsible by God for honoring the priestly laws of separation from the nations. This sacrifice atoned for violations of the laws of separation.

3

LEAVEN AND PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

And if his oblation be a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offer it of the herd; whether it be a male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. . . . It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood (Lev. 3:1, 17).

And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he shall offer unto the LORD. If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour, fried. Besides the cakes, he shall offer for his offering leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offerings. And of it he shall offer one out of the whole oblation for an heave offering unto the LORD, and it shall be the priest's that sprinkleth the blood of the peace offerings. And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day that it is offered; he shall not leave any of it until the morning (Lev. 7:11–15).

The theocentric focus of these judicially unified passages is the possibility of bringing to an end a state of war between God and fallen man.

A. The Terms of Surrender

Man must seek peace on God's terms, not on his own terms. God does not seek peace on man's terms. Here are the terms of peace: unconditional surrender.¹ The question is: Must man surrender unconditionally to God, or must God surrender unconditionally to man? The irreconcilable conflicting answers to this question constitute the es-

1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010).

sence of the war between Christianity and humanism.

The Mosaic sacrificial system testified to the possibility of peace. The peace offering was the third of the five Levitical sacrifices. It corresponded to point three of the biblical covenant model because it dealt with boundaries: the boundary separating God from man.² In Mosaic Israel, this boundary principle applied above all to the temple-tabernacle.

The goal of this sacrifice was peace with God: a goal for all seasons. When an Israelite sought to establish special peace with God, he brought a sacrificial animal to the priest. This offering had to be blemish-free, as was the case in the other offerings. The blemish-free animal was the mark of the best a man could offer God. As we shall see, this is also why leaven had to accompany the peace offering. But the offering had to include unleavened bread as well. This mixture of leaven and unleaven creates a problem for the commentator. What did each of these offerings symbolize? They seem contradictory, yet both were required in the same offering.

B. The Peace Offering

The peace offering was not tied to a vow or an oath. We know this because the Israelite was not allowed to eat this sacrifice over a period of two days (Lev. 7:15), unlike a votive (vow) offering, which could lawfully be eaten the second day (Lev. 7:16). An unclean person who ate the peace offering had to be excommunicated: cut off from the people (Lev. 7:20), i.e., the creation of a new boundary. This sacrifice, more than the other four, involved boundaries (point three): lawful and unlawful crossing into God's presence.

The peace offering was the third of the five Levitical sacrifices. It corresponded to point three of the biblical covenant model because it dealt with boundaries: *the boundary separating God from man*. In Mosaic Israel, this boundary principle applied above all to the temple-tabernacle.

This sacrifice is designated by the Hebrew word transliterated *ze-hbakh*. Milgrom said that this word always means "slain offering whose meat is eaten by the worshipper." He cites as particularly revealing Jeremiah 7:21: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel;

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 3.

Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices [*zehbakh*], and eat flesh.”³ I conclude that the common person could eat part of this offering because of the laws governing uncleanness. The law stated that an unclean person could not lawfully eat this sacrifice (Lev. 7:20–21). But this law of uncleanness always applied to priests. If this law applied only to priests, there was no need to mention this requirement. By singling out the possibility that a clean person could enter the sacrifice (priestly) area, this law identified this sacrifice as a shared meal in which the common offerer could participate. This sacrifice was unique among the five in that it allowed a common Israelite or circumcised resident alien to eat a ritual meal in the presence of God.

The view that this sacrifice was a shared meal is conventional.⁴ This sacrifice was, in the words of Rabbi Hirsch, “a meal to be eaten in company with others; . . .”⁵ He referred to the sacrificer’s desire of “getting nearer to God on account of the necessity to raise the standard of the holiness of one’s activities. . . . [T]o enjoy this life on earth in the Presence of God is the highest service of God.”⁶ The basis of this access to God, this “eternal bridge up to God,” as Hirsch put it, is joy, not trouble.⁷ This is a profound insight.

The priest collected part of this offering for his own use (Lev. 7:14). This indicates, though does not prove, that the priest ate the meal with the sacrificer and his family and friends.

Where was it eaten? Milgrom argued that it was eaten inside the sanctuary’s boundaries. He refers to the sacrifice of the sanctuary in Shiloh: “And the priest’s custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice [*zehbakh*], the priest’s servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither” (II Sam. 2:13–14).⁸ This sacrifice was a *zehbakh*: a shared meal. The offerer’s sacrifice was boiled on the sanctuary premises. There were probably special halls for eating the

3. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 218.

4. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4 of *Word Bible Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1992), p. 42.

5. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, 5 vols. (Gateshead, London: Judaica Press, [1867–78] 1989), III, pp. 73–74.

6. *Ibid.*, III, p. 75.

7. *Idem.*

8. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 223.

sacrificial meal, he concluded (I Sam. 9:22; Jer. 35:2). This is why there were rules governing the offerer's uncleanness, he said.

C. Neither Blood Nor Fat

One boundary involved the sacrificed animals. The Israelites were not allowed to eat fat or blood during this sacrifice. Unlike the prohibition against fat, the prohibition against drinking blood was universal: "Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Lev. 7:27). Life is associated with blood (Gen. 9:4). "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh" (Deut. 12:23). In many pagan religions, drinking blood ritually is an affirmation of the continuity associated with a blood covenant.⁹ The drinker signifies his faith that the life, spirit, and power of the slain person or beast is transferred to him through the blood. Quite frequently, blood-drinking is associated with demonic possession.¹⁰ This Old Covenant prohibition exists in the New Covenant (Acts 15:29). Another ritual of covenantal blood-drinking is required, however: the drinking of symbolic blood (wine) in the communion meal.¹¹

The prohibition against eating fat was not universal; it applied only during ritual sacrifices. In this shared ritual meal, fat was reserved to God because it was the most desirable portion. In their private feasting, Israelites were allowed to eat fat. Fat, including bulk carried on men's bodies, in the Bible is viewed as a sign of God's blessing. Rushdoony wrote: "Fat in Scripture both literally and symbolically usually represented wealth. . . . In Scripture, fat is the sign of healthiness and vigor, of prosperity."¹² Of course, in pre-modern societies, hard physical labor was the rule. People burned off excessive fat. Their diets were heavy on grains and vegetables rather than meat, a luxury, or refined

9. Article on "Blood," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), II, p. 716. The author cited Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*, pp. 126–34.

10. *Idem*.

11. "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:53–54).

12. R. J. Rushdoony, "Fat," *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Philip E. Hughes (Marshallton, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972), IV, p. 179.

sugar, which was non-existent. In modern times, excessive weight is regarded (often incorrectly) as a sign of a person's insufficient self-discipline, not his prosperity. In fact, obesity today is a combination of genetic inheritance, nearly unbreakable eating habits begun in childhood, and historically unprecedented food supplies, especially wheat and grain products. Such "inputs" were not easily affordable for most people prior to the late nineteenth century. Isaiah prophesied regarding the coming millennial era: "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25:6). Moses sang of God's covenantal blessings to Israel:

So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape (Deut. 32:12–14).

When the Israelites returned to the land in Nehemiah's day, the priests read the law to them. Then they told the people that this was a time for rejoicing, a time to eat fat.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved (Neh. 8:8–11).

The prohibition against the ritual eating of fat was a way of separating the sacrificer's portion from God's portion during all the sacrifices. God placed a "no trespassing" sign around the fat during the peace offering, when He came close to the sacrificer during this shared meal. Man was reminded once again that God's holiness is always marked off by a boundary. In Old Covenant Israel, the tabernacle-temple was the primary boundary. Crossing this boundary under the

Mosaic Covenant was lawful for an Israelite during the peace offering, but another boundary immediately appeared, one that did not exist outside the boundary of the temple: the prohibition against eating fat. God refused to share fat with His holy people within His special dwelling place, but He gave fat to them as a blessing outside that boundary.

D. Offerings from the Field

The Israelite brought more than an animal to the priest for the peace offering; he brought the fruit of the field, too. He brought baked cakes, both leavened and unleavened. The peace offering testified publicly that God had blessed him in his fields and his barns; he was bringing to God representative samples of the best of his produce. This is why leaven had to be part of the sacrifice of the peace offering. Leaven is the symbol of expansion in history: God's blessings compounded over time. Leaven was the best that an Israelite was able to offer God from his field.

We discover here a very important theological principle: *the close association between law and dominion*. Leaven is a physical agent of expansion. The issue of boundaries, of holiness, in Leviticus is associated with the leaven of the peace offering, the third sacrifice. The message conveyed by this symbol is that *God's leaven progressively replaces Satan's leaven in history*. This cultural replacement process—the dominion covenant's process—is associated more closely with holiness (moral set-apartness) than it is with transcendence, hierarchy, sanctions, or inheritance. Point three of the biblical covenant model is law.¹³ Leaven, dominion, and biblical law were linked.

Because of the importance of this covenantal principle of growth, and because a common theological error in twentieth-century evangelicalism was the association of leaven with evil, I focus on the principle of leaven in this chapter. I need to explain why leaven is not a principle of evil; rather, it is the principle of *compound growth in history*. It is associated with progressive sanctification, both personal and corporate.

What of unleaven? It always symbolizes a discontinuity. In the context of the Passover meal, unleavened bread was mandatory. Unleavened bread marked the historical discontinuity between Egypt and the Promised Land. None of Egypt's leaven was to be carried out of Egypt. This discontinuity was specifically religious and cultural: the break with Egypt's religion and civilization. The Passover meal was to

13. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 3.

symbolize a covenantal break with Egyptian thought and culture, not a break from the establishment of culture as an outworking of God's covenant. This is why the peace offering required leaven. It reminded the Israelites of their kingdom requirements.

E. The Two Rival Leavens¹⁴

We can better understand the biblical meaning of leaven when we recognize that leavened bread was also offered as the firstfruits of the Lord, meaning the *best* of a family's productivity: "Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first-fruits unto the LORD" (Lev. 23:17). *Leaven is the best that man has to offer, the bread he eats with pleasure.* It is man's offering to God. (The festival of firstfruits in the New Testament is associated with Pentecost: Acts 2.)

This has not been a common interpretation. A far more familiar interpretation teaches that leaven represents man's corruption. The rabbinical tradition has long associated leaven with man's evil propensities.¹⁵ Also, the high priest in Rome in Plutarch's day was forbidden to touch leaven.¹⁶ Milgrom referred to "an older and universal regard of leaven as the arch-symbol of fermentation, deterioration, and death and, hence, taboo on the altar of blessing and life."¹⁷

This traditional interpretation is incorrect, as I hope to show. The reason why leaven was prohibited is that it would have been a mature burnt offering, like honey, which was also prohibited (Lev. 2:11). *Leaven symbolizes progressive sanctification through history.* It does not symbolize definitive sanctification at a point in time, i.e., historical discontinuity. Leaven also does not symbolize final sanctification at the end of time, i.e., history's completion. As a symbol of growth through time with continuity, leaven was kept from the fiery altar because God will not bring His all-consuming fire until the end of time. Leaven was not burned on the altar because it was a symbol of *growth moving toward completion*. Leaven has no ethical connotation; it does not represent any taboo.

14. This section is a modification of my book, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 282–84, 289–92

15. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 189.

16. *Idem.*

17. *Idem.*

1. Passover

The Passover feast prohibited leaven. During the Passover, people ate bitter herbs with their unleavened bread (Ex. 12:8). This bread and the bitter herbs symbolized the hard times of captivity in Egypt, the world out of which God had delivered them. Baking unleavened bread on that first Passover night avoided the need for the additional time required for yeast to rise. Unleavened bread was therefore a symbol of a major historical discontinuity: God's overnight deliverance of His people from Egypt. *Unleavened bread symbolized God's overnight deliverance*, since it was not the best of what man can offer God under the best of circumstances. Leaven was. God broke into the daily affairs of His people and delivered them from Egypt's bitter herbs. God delivered them out of bondage overnight. He led them to a land flowing with milk and honey, a land in which men have the wealth and time to bake and eat leavened bread. Once in the promised land, they were to offer this bread to God in thankfulness. Unleavened bread was a symbol of discontinuity: from wrath to grace. Leaven was a symbol of continual growth through time: dominion.

Why were the Israelites required to get rid of all leavened bread in Israel for a week before the feast (Ex. 12:15)? Because the original Passover had been celebrated in Egypt. Again, it was *Egypt's* leaven that had to be purged out of their midst before they left the land. Leaven in the context of Passover was a symbol of Egypt's culture and therefore of Egypt's religion. Leavened bread was representative of the good life in Egypt: all the benefits in Egypt that might tempt them to return. So, God required them to celebrate *a discontinuous event*: their overnight deliverance from bondage. They were to take no leaven with them—none of Egypt's gods, or religious practices, or diabolical culture—to serve as “starter” in the Promised Land.

Once they entered the land of Canaan as conquerors, they were *required* to eat leavened bread and offer it as a peace offering to God. This was the reason for the leavened bread of the peace offering (Lev. 7:13) and the Firstfruits offering (Lev. 23:7). This is also why Christians are supposed to eat leavened bread when they celebrate Holy Communion. It is a symbol of conquest. *We are now on the offensive, carrying the leaven of holiness back into Egypt, back into Babylon.* We are the leaven of the world, not corrupting the unleavened dough, but “incorrupting” it—bringing the message of salvation to Satan's troops, tearing down the idols in men's hearts. God's holy leaven is to replace

Satan's unholy leaven in the dough of history.

Leaven is therefore not a symbol of sin and corruption, but a symbol of growth and dominion. It is not a question of an "unleavened" kingdom vs. a "leavened" kingdom; it is a question of *which* (whose) leaven. It is not a question of "dominion vs. no dominion"; it is a question of *whose* dominion. The dough (history) is here. Whose leaven will complete it, God's or Satan's?

2. *The Kingdom as Righteous Leaven*¹⁸

The kingdom of God is like leaven. Christianity is the yeast, and it has a leavening effect on the pagan, satanic culture around it. It is designed to permeate the whole of this culture, causing it to rise. *The bread produced by this leaven is the preferred bread.* In ancient times—indeed, right up until the nineteenth century—bread was considered the staff of life, the symbol of life. It was the source of men's nutrition. "Give us this day our daily bread," we are to ask God (Matt. 6: 11). The kingdom of God is the force that produces the fine quality bread that men seek. The symbolism should be obvious: Christianity makes life a joy for man. It offers the cultural benefits that most men acknowledge as the best (Deut. 4:5–8).¹⁹

Leaven takes time to produce its positive effect. *Leaven requires historical continuity.* Men can wait for their leavened bread, for God gives them time sufficient for the working of His spiritual leaven. They may not understand how it works, how its spiritual effects spread through their culture and make it a delight, any more than they understand how yeast works to produce leavened bread, but they can see the bread rising, and they can see the progressive effects of the leaven of the kingdom. They can look into the oven and see risen bread.

If we really push the analogy—pound it, even—we can point to the fact that the dough is pounded down several times before the final baking, almost as the world pounds the kingdom; but the yeast does its work, *just so long as the fires of the oven are not lit prematurely.* If the full heat of the oven is applied to the dough before the yeast has done its work, both the yeast and the dough are burnt, and the burnt mass must be thrown out. But given sufficient time, the yeast does its work,

18. For a more detailed exegesis, see Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 12:F–H.

19. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

and the result is the bread that men prefer.

What a marvelous description of God's kingdom! Christians work with the cultural material available, seeking to refine it, to permeate it, to make it into something fine. They know that they will be successful, just as yeast is successful in the dough, if it is given enough time to do its work. That is what God implicitly promises us in the analogy of the leaven: *enough time to accomplish our individual and our corporate tasks*. He tells us that His kingdom *will* produce the desirable bread. This will take time. It may take several poundings, as God, through the hostility of the world, kneads the yeast-filled dough of man's cultures, but the end result is guaranteed.

F. Free-Will Offering and Covenant Renewal

The peace offering in Leviticus 7 was what in modern English phraseology would be called a free-will offering.²⁰ This language is found in Psalm 119:108: "Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments." The peace offering was brought by the individual of his own free will; that is, he was not required by law to do this because of a particular sin. It was not a legal payment for sin. *It was a token of his appreciation for the grace that God had shown to him*. It was this Mosaic Covenant sacrifice that Paul had in mind when he wrote this injunction to Christians: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1–2). Paul was not calling men to offer their lives as payments for their sins.²¹ This had been done by Jesus Christ at Calvary once and forever (Heb. 9). He was instead calling men to a life of peace with God through sacrificial service.

The peace offering was a public act. It renewed the special friendship between God and a particular individual. It was an acknowledgment on the part of the sacrificer that he was completely dependent on God for everything he had been given. It was *a ritual confession* that God is the sustainer of the covenant. As the covenant sovereign, God

20. Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1846] 1966), p. 131.

21. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

deserves tokens of subordination beyond the tithe and ransom payments for sin, yet He does not demand them. He places men under the terms of the covenant, and these requirements are light (Matt. 11:30).²² He lawfully could demand much more. He could demand more than everything a man possesses. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). In His grace, however, He restricts His demands. God possesses the authority to compel men; therefore, we are warned, we should go the extra mile voluntarily. “And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (Matt. 5:41).²³ The person who “goes the extra mile” with God is publicly announcing his acceptance of God as the sovereign Lord of the covenant and himself as a *covenant vassal*.

One form of the peace offering involved a formal vow of some kind (Lev. 7:16). The other form did not (v. 15). Both involved a meal shared in the presence of God. Both required that the sacrificer be ritually clean (v. 20). Both involved boundaries: inclusive (a meal eaten in God’s presence) and exclusive (no ritually unclean people). Both therefore were aspects of point three of the biblical covenant model—holiness—more than point four: oath/sanctions.

G. New Testament Applications

At this point, I shift from Old Covenant applications to New Covenant applications. The primary Old Covenant applications were these: the lawful crossing of a boundary (the temple sacrificial area), the shared meal (God, family, and [probably] priest), the prohibition of fat (a prohibition unique to this feast: God’s assertion of primary ownership), the principle of unleaven (discontinuity from sin), the principle of the leaven (progressive sanctification), and the mark of the faithful vassal (performing service beyond what is required). I devote the remainder of this chapter to New Testament applications.

Conservative Protestants who have bothered to comment on economic and political theory have for over two centuries been adherents of right-wing Enlightenment thought, mainly Scottish rationalism. This was especially true of the Princeton theologians, from Archibald Alexander to Charles Hodge to J. Gresham Machen. They were Scottish common sense rationalists in their apologetic methodology.²⁴

22. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

24. Mark A. Noll, “Introduction,” Noll (ed.), *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921*

They began their social theory with the presupposition of methodological individualism.²⁵ They made no exegetical effort to show how their methodological individualism conformed to the Mosaic law's account of man's corporate responsibility. They rarely appealed to any Mosaic law when presenting their economic ideas.

In contrast, promoters of the liberal Social Gospel after 1890 did acknowledge corporate responsibility, but decade by decade, they interpreted this increasingly as state responsibility. They made no effort to show how their presupposition of collective responsibility conforms to the biblical account of exclusively individual responsibility on judgment day. They made no reference to the Mosaic law's defense of private property and Samuel's definition of a tyrant as a king who would collect 10% of men's income (I Sam. 8:15, 17).²⁶ The two groups could not communicate with each other or persuade each other, for there was hermeneutical no point of contact between them. Neither side considered the third alternative: covenantalism.

The dualism between methodological individualism and methodological collectivism still persists in today's Protestant world. Meanwhile, nobody in the muddled middle offers exegetical solutions as to how either extreme can be avoided. Only the theonomists avoid both positions as well as the muddled middle because they appeal systematically to the texts of the Bible in order to derive their social and economic theories.

Any appeal to the Mosaic law makes all of the other factions very nervous. Every member of every faction knows that if he were applying for a teaching position, and those with the authority to hire him knew that he not only defends the Mosaic law and its civil sanctions, he is ready to teach this in the classroom, he would never be hired. The employment factor has shaped the economic worldview that economists adopt. (Reward and response!) It did in my case, too. I decided to retain my theonomic worldview and earn my living outside of academia. That was the price I knew I had to pay. The problem is, collegiate academics who write summaries of contemporary views of economics have been shaped by their choice of worldviews. Their worldviews de-

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1983), pp. 30–33.

25. See, for example, William Brenton Greene, Jr., "The Bible as the Text-Book in Sociology," *Princeton Theological Review*, XII (Jan. 1914). (Greene was Professor of Apologetics from 1893 until 1928, when Cornelius Van Til replaced him for one year before leaving to join the faculty of Westminster Seminary.)

26. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

termine who gets discussed in their essays and who gets conveniently blacked out. This is why my economic commentary on the Bible receives very few footnotes from the rival economic factions within the Protestant community. It is tied too closely to the Mosaic law. An academic blackout is operating.²⁷

My New Testament applications of the principle of the leaven are fundamental to an understanding of the dominion covenant. I dare not pass over them in silence on the assumption that most Christians will automatically make the theological connections between the principle of the leaven and the concept of Christendom's tasks in history. Most Christians have never even thought about such matters.²⁸

H. The Lord's Supper

Because the peace offering was a covenant act requiring the services of a priest, we need to ask this question: Is there a connection

27. For example, Calvin College economist John Tiemstra, whose self-announced comprehensive 1993 review of recent literature in Christian economics, referred to only one of my works, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (1973). John P. Tiemstra, "Christianity and Economics: A Review of the Recent Literature," *Christian Scholar's Review*, XXII (1993), pp. 227, 228. This essay purported to be a survey of the literature from 1978 to 1993. Tiemstra was well aware of my later exegetical works, since he cited Craig M. Gay's 1992 essay in the same journal, which unfavorably cited *The Sinai Strategy* (1985) and *Inherit the Earth*, (1987) as well as David Chilton's *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981), and then dismissed them all as right-wing liberation theology in which "human existence has been reduced to the material and economic and the gospel has been thoroughly immanentized." Craig M. Gay, "When Evangelicals Take Capitalism Seriously," *ibid.*, XXI (1992), p. 358. Gay offered no support for his rhetorical outburst: no Bible texts and no books that have offered biblical refutations. Tiemstra referred repeatedly to Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, but he never mentioned Chilton's detailed refutation. Blackout! He criticized Ronald Nash's defense of Austrian economics as not being exegetically based, which is quite correct; it wasn't, and self-consciously so. Nash denied that there can be an explicitly Christian economics, so why should he appeal to the Bible? I have criticized Nash for many years for just this epistemological weakness. Having dismissed Nash as the Austrian School's only cited representative, Tiemstra then announced: "The Christian writers who have opted for the Austrian approach have so far failed to connect their work very firmly with the basic biblical principles . . ." (p. 241). He did not mention my name in this context or in any other epistemological context. Blackout! This does the serious Christian reader a great disservice. It keeps him away from sources of biblical exegesis. Tiemstra's blackout strategy is representative of conservative Protestant scholarship generally, from Dallas Seminary to Calvin College, from fundamentalism to neo-evangelicalism. Refusing to take the Old Testament seriously, these men pretend that nobody else should, either. They refuse to interact with the Pentateuch or anyone who does. The Mosaic law appalls them. They will not try to learn from it, let alone agree to submit to it.

28. Note to any Jews who are still with me: neither have most Jews.

between this sacrifice and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper involves participants in a formal act of covenant renewal. It cannot be an offering for sin, since the taking of communion must be preceded by inner confession of personal sins of omission and commission, and also by formal acts of restitution for crimes involving a victim.²⁹ The emphasis is on self-examination: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (I Cor. 11: 28–29). The peace offering was a meal eaten by the donor, the only shared meal in the Levitical system's five sacrifices.³⁰ The Lord's Supper is also a shared meal. But is the Lord's Supper an act of covenant renewal analogous to the freewill offering of Leviticus 7? I think not. The Lord's Supper is judicial. It is an aspect of the covenant oath (point four).³¹ Regular participation in the Lord's Supper is required from God's covenant vassals, just as the Passover feast was. It is not optional. It is a regularly scheduled public event. Any church member who refuses to take this sacrament, or who has been excluded from the table by the church, receives a formal declaration from God: "Guilty!" This public declaration takes place every time the Lord's Supper is served by the church. This is one reason why it should be offered weekly: to bring under God's judicial condemnation all those who are not participating, whether inside the church or outside. Calvin believed that the Lord's Supper should be offered *at least* weekly.³²

In contrast to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which is analogous to the Mosaic Covenant's sacrament of Passover, the peace offering was optional. It was a self-conscious additional act of sacrifice, "beyond the call of duty."

I. Living Sacrifices

Extra sacrifice in the New Covenant is not morally optional. Paul called men to present their bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1).³³

29. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33; see also Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

30. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 79.

31. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

32. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), IV:XVII:43.

33. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

This is his concept of minimal service, not service beyond the call of duty. This is another piece of evidence that *the New Testament's moral and legal requirements are more rigorous than the Old Testament's requirements*. To those who have been given more by God, more is required by God (Luke 12:47–48).³⁴

It is a serious (but common) mistake today to imagine that Jesus somehow reduced the degree of responsibility of His followers in the New Covenant era. On the contrary, He increased it. Anyone who argues to the contrary had better have a good explanation for the fact that modern Christians are not supposed to become polygamists, which was permitted in the Old Covenant era.³⁵ He had also better be ready to explain why the legal grounds for divorce are more rigorous in the New Covenant era. “They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:7–8).³⁶ What was exceptional for the Mosaic Covenant saint—the peace offering—becomes the required way of life for the New Covenant saint. When the temple’s barriers came down, the covenant-keeper’s degree of responsibility went up. Symbolically, this took place when the veil of the temple was torn at Christ’s death.

The emphasis in Romans 12:1 is on the Christian *way of life*. It refers to the *moral* realm rather than to the judicial. Presenting one’s body as a living sacrifice is fundamental to a life of *progressive sanctification*, not a discrete formal act of legal justification. In contrast to progressive sanctification, the Lord’s Supper is specifically and uniquely judicial, a legal status shared only with the sacrament of baptism. *The Western church has always regarded the sacraments as uniquely judicial*.³⁷ The Lord’s Supper is a formal announcement of

34. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

35. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

36. *Ibid.*, Appendix A: “Divorce and Remarriage.”

37. Notice, I did not write “solely judicial.” There is an element of mystery in the sacraments, and no single attribute suffices to encompass their meaning. See Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1953] 1982). But the Western church has always called these rituals sacraments, not mysteries, which is what Eastern Orthodoxy calls them. The word sacrament was adopted by the church from the Latin word *sacramentum*, a military oath of enlistment. The judicial and covenantal aspect of these rites is emphasized by the Western church. The New Testament does not use the word *sacrament*, nor is the

“guilty” or “not guilty” in the name of God by God’s representative agents, church elders. This is why personal confession of sin must be made in advance of the sacrament, a fact testified to by the churches’ historic use of congregational prayers of public confession. People are required to confess “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” to God prior to taking communion.

Paul compares progressive sanctification to running a race: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (I Cor. 9:24–25). He said: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). The Epistle to the Hebrews says: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). The imagery is that of a step-by-step lifetime race against runners who are not equally committed to obeying God. We beat them by persevering in the race.

The goal of progressive sanctification is to reduce one’s level of sinfulness over time. This is the meaning of progressive sanctification: *a progressive reduction of sinful thought and behavior*. We are to conform ourselves progressively to Christ’s example of perfect humanity (though of course not His divinity). “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). Paul introduced his discussion of communion with this imperative: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11: 1).³⁸ By doing so,

Greek word *mysterion* applied to either rite or any outward observance. See “Sacrament,” *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols., eds. John McClintock and James Strong (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), IX, p. 212.

Calvin rejected as irrelevant of this Roman military view of the meaning of the word “sacrament.” Calvin, *Institutes*, IV:XIV:13. He stressed the mystery aspect instead. But by ignoring the self-maledictory covenantal oath aspect of both sacraments, he was led to identify several Old Covenant manifestations of God’s promises as sacraments: Noah’s rainbow (a non-maledictory oath: no universal destruction by flood), Abraham’s light in a smoking pot (Gen. 15:17), the watery fleece on dry ground and dry fleece on damp ground (Jud. 6:37–38), and the backward-moving shadow on Hezekiah’s sundial (II Kings 20:9–11). *Institutes*, IV:XIV:18. His interpretation of these events as sacraments has not been followed by Calvinists or other Protestants.

38. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 14.

we are to reduce the number of evil thoughts and acts that we must confess prior to communion. The increase in progressive sanctification is therefore related to communion (legal justification), but the two are not the same.

One manifestation of our personal quest for peace with God is the presentation of gifts and offerings above the mandatory tithe. These constitute the New Covenant's version of the animal sacrifice of the peace offering. When the pastor calls publicly for "tithes and offerings," meaning money for the church, he is calling for the peace of God. Tithes are obligatory payments.³⁹ Offerings in this context are peace offerings that are analogous to the sacrificial peace offering of Leviticus 7.

J. Progressive Corporate Sanctification

Sanctification in the modern pietistic church is understood as an exclusively personal spiritual transformation. When pressed, however, the defenders of this view will probably admit that there has been progressive sanctification of the church. They will assert that their favorite theological system is far superior to anything understood by the early church. It may or may not be superior, but at least they regard it as such. Except for those in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, most will admit freely that the church's confessions are more detailed and rigorous than the early creeds. Most Christians will also admit that science and technology have made the world a better place to live in, except for the threat of modern war, terrorism, and pollution.⁴⁰

Therein lies their theological problem. *First*, if the world is inevitably heading toward accelerating moral corruption—the explicit view of most premillennialists and amillennialists⁴¹—then why should there have been so much progress in Western history? Are we to conclude that accelerating theological apostasy and moral rebellion produce economic, social, and political progress? Where is this taught in the Bible? Or, *second*, should we begin to look more closely at the relationship between the progress in Christian theology and church creeds and progress in society? Could these two seemingly independent de-

39. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

40. On pollution, see Appendix G:I, and North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendixes J, K.

41. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

velopments be related positively rather than inversely?⁴² This is a topic that is almost never discussed by Christians, including seminary professors. Why not? Because it raises major questions regarding Christians' corporate responsibility for external progress or retrogression in the wider community.

Pietistic Christians do not want to consider the practical implications in their lives of either of these possibilities, so they do their best to avoid thinking about the cultural aspects of the churches' progressive corporate sanctification. They define away the problem by limiting to the human heart the Holy Spirit's process of sanctification over time. This is the heart of pietism. If this process of progressive sanctification should ever escape this arbitrary boundary, there is no telling where it would stop. It might end up by encompassing everything.⁴³ If it did, Christians *as a corporate community* would become responsible for every area of life.⁴⁴ This would mean that God's dominion covenant is still in force.⁴⁵ This is precisely what pietists are trying to avoid.

The problem is, the Spirit's process of corporate sanctification keeps breaking pietism's arbitrary barriers. First, it spills over into the church and family. We baptize our children.⁴⁶ We catechize them. We are supposed to send them to Christian schools.⁴⁷ In doing these things, we admit that we have institutional responsibilities. But if we have these responsibilities before God, then He must be willing to im-

42. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 2007). (<http://bit.ly/rjrfs0>)

43. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action." (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

44. This thought is too horrifying for modern schools of Protestant social thought to consider, with these exceptions: the Social Gospel, Christian Reconstruction, and liberation theology. The Social Gospel has been fading in popularity throughout the post-World War II era, although many of its tenets have been adopted by academic neo-evangelicals: the *Sojourners*, Evangelicals for Social Action, Wheaton College, Calvin College, *Christianity Today* axis. With the spectacular collapse of the ideology of Marxism, 1989–91, liberation theology has now had its ideological props knocked out from under it. See Joel McDurmon, *God versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

45. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps 3–4.

46. David Chilton, "Infant Baptism and Covenantal Responsibility," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, IV (Winter 1977–78), pp. 79–86.

47. Robert L. Thoburn, *The Children Trap: The Biblical Blueprint for Education* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), co-published by Thomas Nelson Sons, Nashville, Tennessee. (<http://bit.ly/ThoburnCT>)

pose sanctions in terms of our obedience to His laws. Second, we must seek to change the world by imposing God's Bible-specified sanctions as His legal representatives in history. Few Christians today are willing to affirm that all of God's directly imposed sanctions are exclusively limited to heaven and the day of final judgment. They want sanctions exercised in the Christian family, for example. Nevertheless, the vast majority of contemporary Bible-believing Christians draw a defensive boundary against God's negative sanctions around the state and the external, "common grace" society.⁴⁸ The state and society generally, they insist, are to be protected from an invasion by the biblical covenant, with its revealed laws and negative civil sanctions.⁴⁹ "This far, but no farther!" they proclaim. But they cannot say exactly why, biblically speaking.

1. Restricting the State: Biblical Casuistry

If people believe that the political order is immune from God's negative sanctions in history, they will tolerate or even encourage the state's officers to impose the state's autonomous sanctions over all other institutions. The state will then seek to impose legal boundaries on every other institution.⁵⁰ It is never a question of "sanctions vs. no sanctions" in history. It is always a question of *whose* sanctions and *which* sanctions in terms of whose law.⁵¹ There is no neutrality. There are no political vacuums.⁵²

The state, like every other institution, must be captured for God. It is to be restricted to its judicially proper boundaries by God's law and by other Christian institutions. *The state is not to place its autonomous limits on the institutions of the world; the world's institutions are to place God's Bible-revealed limits on the state.* This means that in order for political liberty to flourish, the whole world must be reformed by

48. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 7.

49. Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Touchstone-Simon & Schuster/American Enterprise Institute, 1982); Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984). For a critique of this position, see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

50. It is worth noting that the United States Congress long exempted itself from many of its laws, such as quotas (sexual or racial) on staff hiring and firing, and the United States Postal Service monopoly. Congress has its own post office system.

51. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 8.

52. North, *Political Polytheism*, p. xi.

means of the preaching of the gospel and by the working out and application of the principles of God's law in history—the ancient moral discipline of casuistry.⁵³ This time, however, casuistry must be Bible-based, not Greek philosophy-based by way of Thomas Aquinas.

Modern Christian pietists reject such a notion of an explicitly biblical casuistry, just as modern humanists do. They say that the reform of this world is impossible, and therefore a waste of time even to try. They announce to the Christian world, as dispensational theologian John Walvoord announced: “We know that our efforts to make society Christianized is [sic] futile because the Bible doesn't teach it.”⁵⁴ They announce, as amillennial theologian Herman Hanko announced, “In the first place, many who strongly advocate Christian social involvement almost always fall into the error of post-millennialism. That is the error of teaching that the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is realized here in this present world by a slow but steady process of social, economic and political evolution.”⁵⁵ All that we can hope to accomplish, they insist, is to create pockets of resistance (Christian ghettos): defensive efforts that will inevitably be almost completely overcome by Satan's earthly kingdom, unless the Rapture takes place (pre-tribulational dispensationalism) or the final judgment does (amillennialism).⁵⁶ Legions of non-predestinarian Christians argue that Bible-based reform efforts are inevitably doomed to failure.⁵⁷ God has decreed this, we are assured—just about the only decree that Arminians acknowledge. They are content to achieve a stalemate with humanism, Islam, and the other alternatives to Christianity. They have adopted the stalemate men-

53. Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952); Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); Kenneth E. Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry*, rev. ed. (London: Longmans, Green, [1936] 1948).

54. John Walvoord, symposium on “Our Future Hope: Eschatology and Its Role in the Church,” *Christianity Today* (Feb. 6, 1987), p. 5–I. See my comments in North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism is Paralyzed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnrapture>)

55. Herman Hanko, *The Christian's Social Calling and the Second Coming of Christ* (South Holland, Michigan: South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, 1970), pp. 1–2. For a critique of Hanko's position, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), Appendix A: “Cultural Antinomianism.” (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

56. Gary North, “Ghetto Eschatologies,” *Biblical Economics Today*, XIV (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

57. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 8.

tality.⁵⁸ They cannot successfully defend this culturally retreatist position in terms of the Bible—especially by any literal reading of the confrontational lives and reform message of the Old Testament prophets—but they still refuse to accept the idea that this world can significantly be reformed by Christians acting as Christians in society. All they can say is what Dallas Theological Seminary professor Harold Hoehner said in 1990: “I just can’t buy their [the Coalition on Revival’s] basic presupposition that we can do anything significant to change the world. And you can sure waste time trying.”⁵⁹ It never occurs to them that they are wasting a significant part of their lives by not trying, and also by openly discouraging others from trying. Having identified New Testament history as a sinking ship, they refuse to polish any brass. They huddle next to the lifeboats, praying that the Captain will issue the “abandon ship” order in time. There are two common forms of this affliction: Rapture fever (dispensational)⁶⁰ and pre-parousia paralysis (amillennial).⁶¹

K. Covenant Sanctions and Social Progress

It is clear from the Old Covenant that there was a predictable relationship between (1) corporate obedience to the *civil* stipulations of the national covenant and (2) visible corporate progress—so visible that even covenant-breaking nations would recognize it:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5-8).⁶²

58. Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? A Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), ch. 11. (<http://bit.ly/gnsoldiers>)

59. “Is Christ or Satan Ruler of This World?” *Christianity Today* (March 5, 1990), p. 43.

60. North, *Rapture Fever*.

61. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, chaps. 4, 5, and 9.

62. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8: “Evangelism

What was the basis of this predictable relationship? God's covenantal promise. But what was its *temporal judicial mechanism*? It was the civil magistrate's enforcement of God's negative sanctions against public evil-doing. When civil rulers enforced God's law in Mosaic Israel, they removed the judicial basis of God's corporate wrath against the nation. Then the positive acts of obedience to God's Bible-revealed law by millions of individuals could be blessed by God directly.

Thus, a system of *positive feedback over time* was designed by God to overcome the negative effects of sin. The ultimate manifestation of this overcoming of the effects of sin was the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is why Christ's literal resurrection is supposed to be the model for all Christian social thought,⁶³ just as His bodily ascension to the throne of judgment at the right hand of God is supposed to be the model for all Christian political thought. The fact that neither of these doctrines is applied to modern social and political thought by Protestants is one major theological reason why there is no body of explicitly Protestant social and political thought.⁶⁴ (The other major theological reason is Protestantism's rejection of the judicially binding character of biblical law.)

Modern conservative Christian thought, both Protestant and Catholic, rests on the presupposition that God does not bring His negative sanctions against evil nations in New Testament history, at least

Through Law."

63. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

64. Catholic social and political thought has disintegrated as a result of the rise of liberation theology in the Church since 1965. Catholic social theory was primarily a product of Thomism's natural law categories; it survived well into the twentieth century. It went through a slow transition after 1900, with liberalism making constant inroads. The traditional American hostility to Catholicism in political life was voiced by a liberal Catholic, Paul Blanshard, in two best-selling books: *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, 2nd ed. (1958) and *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power* (1951), both published by the Unitarian publishing firm, Beacon Press, located in Boston. With the election to the Presidency in 1960 of John F. Kennedy, a charming secular humanist (and an almost daily adulterer, the public learned two decades later), the old hostility to Catholics in American politics faded rapidly. So did the old Catholicism. On the American Church's transformation see Garry Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy, and Radical Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972). Wills was himself transformed from traditional Catholicism to political radicalism, 1965–69. Wills' statement on page one regarding the election of 1960 is to the point: "The Catholics' hour had come, though they did not seem to know it; had come, too late, just as their church was disintegrating." On the international Church's transformation, 1965–1970, see Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

not after 70 A.D.⁶⁵ In wartime, predictably, this belief is conveniently forgotten by church members and even occasional attendees, but with the coming of peace, it invariably revives.⁶⁶ But if God does bring sanctions in history in terms of His revealed law, then there must be greater progress in those societies that uphold His social laws than in those that reject them. This would make progress in history a function of societies' adherence to the legal terms of God's covenant. The foundation of social progress would have to be understood in terms of a biblical covenantal standard. This would require a radical break with pluralism, the dominant political ideology of the West.⁶⁷ So far, the West has not considered such a possibility.⁶⁸

Economist and legal theorist F. A. Hayek (d. 1992) made an exceedingly important admission in his multi-volume study, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*. As a classical liberal and a dedicated evolutionist,⁶⁹ he rejected the legitimacy of specific civil laws that interfere with personal liberty. He proclaimed the need for a system of civil courts in which only general rules that apply to everyone equally could receive the sanction of civil law. The very generality of abstract law would protect the rights of individuals, he insisted, and civil courts in such a world would protect our liberties. This means that there should not be laws against private, immoral behavior that does not physically harm others, i.e., "victimless crimes." But he added this proviso: "At least

65. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 7.

66. That the unprecedented and rapid visible retreat of Soviet Communism from Eastern Europe in the second half of 1989 came in large part as a result of prayer by Christians and resistance by a handful of churches was not considered a serious possibility by the vast majority of political commentators. It was only Communism's incomparable economic failure—itsself a very late discovery for liberals, though widely accepted by them astonishingly quickly—that supposedly made this retreat inevitable.

67. North, *Political Polytheism*.

68. When Islam was literally at the gates of Europe in 732 (Arabs) and again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Turks), Christians would have understood the inescapable implication of political pluralism: the opening of the gates to those who would then make Christianity illegal, as their heirs do in every Islamic country today. Now that the disciples of Islam are well inside the gates of Europe, and reproducing at high rates, the future of political pluralism is clear: the conquest of Western Europe by its most ancient foe, i.e., the overcoming of Charles Martel's successful defense of Europe in 732. The demographic war against Western civilization is being conducted in the bedrooms of Europe and those Islamic nations bordering Europe, and the physical heirs of Martel are losing. In Western Europe, only Ireland has a birthrate high enough to maintain a stable population: 2.1 children per family. Population growth will be restored in Western Europe if present trends continue within the Islamic ghettos, however; but then these nations will no longer be either Western or pluralist.

69. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix B.

where it is not believed that the whole group may be punished by a supernatural power for the sins of individuals, there can arise no such rules from the limitation of conduct towards others, and therefore from the settlements of disputes.”⁷⁰ He assumed, as all humanists must assume, that a sanctions-bringing supernatural power does not exist. This assumption is incorrect. If it were correct, an explicitly Christian social theory would be impossible to develop. *Christian social theory in a world without God's predictable corporate sanctions would be merely some variety of baptized secularism.* Unfortunately, for over three centuries, Christian theologians have assumed precisely this. They have accepted Hayek's presupposition: God brings no corporate covenantal sanctions in history. They have therefore rejected the whole of the Old Covenant's description of God's sanctions, from the garden of Eden to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They have agreed to an implicit alliance with the humanists based on a mutual rejection of God's sanctions in history.

Here is another reason why Christianity has lost so much influence. Its defenders—and the very concept of “defenders” points to the problem—cannot legitimately expect to beat something with nothing, yet they keep trying. They proclaim God's total sanctions at the end of time after having denied the existence of His sanctions in our own time. They have denied God's “earnest” (Eph. 1:14) in history. The humanist correctly assumes that any God who refuses to bring sanctions in history can hardly be taken seriously as the cosmic imposer of sanctions outside of history. Jesus understood this perspective. He offered proof to His contemporaries that He could pardon sin eternally by healing bodies historically: “And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house” (Matt. 9:4–7). What contemporary evidence of the coming final sanctions does today's church offer? Only its own self-proclaimed inevitable cultural defeat on this side of Jesus' Second Coming. In short, it seeks to prove God's eternal negative sanctions against covenant-breakers by proclaiming God's historic negative sanctions against covenant-keepers.⁷¹

70. F. A. Hayek, *Rules and Order*, vol. 1 of *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 101.

71. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 9. See also Gentry, *He Shall Have*

Some gospel! Some good news!

L. Total Victory: Final Judgment

Does God expect Christians to be culturally victorious? Yes. Does He expect to achieve perfect victory in time and on earth? No. He does not offer total victory in history to definitively redeemed mankind. Their progressive redemption will not become final in history. Only by transcending the historical process will God's great discontinuous event bring final redemption. Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church spells this out in considerable detail. Those living at Jesus Christ's final return will be changed, in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor. 15:52). The final discontinuous event—the ascension of the saints (sometimes called the “Rapture” by those who do not regard its timing as final) and their instant transformation into perfect humanity—brings the final judgment and the presentation of a cleansed and fully redeemed New Heaven and New Earth. (The New Heaven and New Earth definitively arrived in an imperfect, historical form with the kingdom of Christ.)⁷² The final judgment is that *final oven* in which the heaven-filled, risen kingdom is baked. Peter wrote:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (II Peter 3:10–12).

The whole earth is going to be consumed eschatologically, thereby producing a new loaf. The whole earth is subject to that final, cataclysmic, *discontinuous* transformation. This implies that the whole earth will at that point have been filled with the leaven of the gospel—not perfect, but ready for the oven. Then our bodies will be transformed, glorified, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (I Cor. 15:50). *The continuity of history is finally interrupted*. This will mark the end of this world. But this is my point: it will be at the end of the *whole* world. Ask

Dominion, Appendix B.

72. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 96–106. On the historical reality of the New Heaven and New Earth, see Isaiah 65:17–20.

yourself: What area of life will avoid this final conflagration? None. Which part of the leavened dough will be untouched by the blinding heat of the oven? None. Which part of the loaf will be left unbaked? None of it. Time will end at the final judgment. There will be nothing left for the gospel to accomplish in history. Christ's redemption is comprehensive. This does not minimize either the gospel or its effects in history. On the contrary, it affirms both.

M. Boundaries After Calvary

Who owns this world? God does (Ps. 24:1). But because of Adam's fall, Satan became Adam's legal heir: a rebellious, cheating leaseholder under God. From Joshua to Jesus, Satan controlled all parts of the earth that were not controlled by the Israelites. Ever since the defeat of Satan at Calvary, however, the legal boundaries of God's kingdom have been the boundaries of the whole earth. The second Adam, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:45), has inherited the worldwide inheritance that had been appropriated by Satan after the rebellion of the first Adam. Christ has delegated management responsibilities over this kingdom to His redeemed people. Their historical task is to buy back—i.e., *redeem*—the whole world. They are not to take it by physical force, except in historically unique cases (e.g., settling a nearly empty land when local tribes resist by force).⁷³ Extending these legal boundaries in history is a

73. The biblical concept of private land ownership was steadily imposed on land that had been controlled by tribes whose concept of property was either nomadic or tribal-communal. North American Indians fought as tribes and lost as tribes, before and after the "white tribes" arrived. The whites understood this. The English and Dutch used the Iroquois as a buffer against the French, who had a treaty with the Algonquins, the implacable foes of the Iroquois. Individual Indians did not hold title to land; they did not buy and sell land to each other, certainly not irrespective of tribal loyalty. There were sometimes sales of land to whites by tribal chiefs, who may not have understood that the white settlers believed they were buying perpetual rights to the land, but surely the chiefs did not concern themselves about the non-existing property rights to land held by tribe members. The famous purchase by Dutch settlers in 1626 of the land that later became New York City was representative of the Dutch settlement strategy: *purchase whenever possible*. The settlers had received instructions from home stating this explicitly; the Indians "must not be expelled with violence or threats. . . ." Cited by Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr. and Hugh Talmage Leffler, *Colonial America* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 176.

The English (except Roger Williams) were less scrupulous about existing tribal property rights to the land than the Dutch were. They simply imposed the Indians' view of the land on them: "The rules regarding land are lawfully made by those tribes that can successfully hold it by force." *Idem*. This military conquest of Indian land does not, of course, affirm the legitimacy of the United States government's subsequent breaking of peace treaties with them. The other major judicial failure of the

task that cannot legitimately be avoided. We cannot legitimately point to whole portions of the unleavened cultural dough and say: "Well, that's not the responsibility of Christians. The dominion covenant doesn't cover that zone. The law of God doesn't apply there. Neither do His sanctions. Satan owns that section: lock, stock, and barrel. His disciples will have to leaven it."

What does Satan own? Nothing. The very gates of hell cannot prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18). Satan does not hold legal title to anything. Adam had been disinherited by God. Satan occupied territory through Adam's default. Satan visibly lost legal title to this world at the cross. Jesus announced in the vision given to John: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18). *Satan is today a lawless squatter*. The world belongs to God, and He has designated it as the inheritance of Christians. But Christians are told to subdue it, *to lease it back from God*, by demonstrating our commitment to the judicial terms of His peace treaty with us. We are to conquer the world progressively by the preaching of the gospel of salvation and either the purchase of the world from our opponents or their conversion to God's kingdom as fellow heirs. Our sword is the *sword of the gospel*.⁷⁴ It is still our assignment to subdue the earth, and by the sword of the gospel we can and will conquer in history. This is the dominion covenant. It is mankind's inescapable legacy and obligation. It cannot be evaded. God holds men responsible, both individually and corporately, for its fulfillment.

N. The Question of Continuity

What is the meaning of leaven? The imagery is obvious: *growth and expansion*. But the obviousness of this imagery has become a problem for theologians because of the debate over eschatology. The premillennialist affirms that leaven means growth, but then says that this applies only to Satan's kingdom. He also denies that leaven refers

North American whites was that they acquiesced to the Indians' concept of collective property on the Federal reservations. They did so as white chiefs, and so was born the longest experiment in compulsory socialism in United States history. That this has been the most notoriously corrupt bureaucratic failure in United States government history should surprise no one.

74. The following description is not to be taken literally: "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (Rev. 19:15).

to the historical continuity of the visible kingdom of God in history. The amillennialist, in contrast, affirms historical continuity, but then he denies growth, if by growth we mean a visible expansion of the gospel's cultural effects outside of the narrow confines of the institutional church. Both hermeneutical schools are united with each other against the postmillennialists' interpretation that leaven symbolizes both visible growth and historical continuity, a position which *only* the postmillennialist can defend exegetically with respect to the visible kingdom of God in history.

Jesus spoke forthrightly of His kingdom in terms of leaven. "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13:33). What does leaven do in dough? It raises it. Then the risen dough is baked. But before it is baked, it must rise. There must be no premature removal of the yeast before the hour of baking. History is to be transformed in every area of life by the gospel before the final conflagration.

The dispensationalist, because of the requirements of his premillennial theological system, cannot accept the parable of the leaven at face value. If he did, he would have to abandon premillennialism. He cannot allow the leavening process in history to apply to the kingdom of God. On the contrary, the only leavening process in history that he affirms is the kingdom of Satan. Leaven in the older dispensational system is exclusively evil. This is why Leviticus 7:13 and Matthew 13:33 are such painful thorns in the dispensationalist's side.⁷⁵

Jesus in Matthew 13 gave a series of parables regarding the kingdom of God. They are parables that describe historical continuity. The parable of the leaven appears shortly after Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow togeth-

75. Appendix C: "Leaven as Exclusively Evil."

er until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matt. 13:24–30).⁷⁶

The disciples questioned Him about the meaning of this parable. He provided a literal explanation—one so clear that anyone could understand it, except someone using dispensationalism’s “literal” hermeneutic:

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matt. 13:37–43).

But for dispensationalists to hear, they would have to abandon dispensationalism. They prefer not to hear.

When did the kingdom begin? According to this parable, it began with Jesus Christ’s first advent: “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.” What is the field? Not the church, surely: “The field is the world.” The institutional church is not even mentioned here. When does the co-mingling of wheat and tares end? At the end of history, Christ’s second advent: “The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.” *There is no third advent.* The events of the so-called Rapture must therefore correspond to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in final judgment. This is God’s promise: *the visible Kingdom of God will enjoy historical continuity.* God’s kingdom will expand over time.

There are two competing leavens: righteous and unrighteous. There are two competing kingdoms: God’s and Satan’s. Satan does not have to be physically present in history in order for his kingdom to be real in history. Neither does Jesus Christ. The expansion of one king-

76. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

dom in history necessitates the contraction of the other. The question is: Whose kingdom expands in history? The dispensational premillennialists say “Satan’s,” at least in the so-called Church Age (pre-Rapture). While this is incorrect, it is at least consistent. Amillennialists have not been equally consistent.⁷⁷ Members of the Dutch-American tradition have sometimes adopted the language of expansion and victory for Christ’s kingdom while denying both with respect to history. They internalize and spiritualize the victory.⁷⁸ This abandons culture and law to the devil in the name of spiritual victory.

O. Settling Accounts With God: Definitively and Progressively

Men are supposed to seek peace with God. This peace comes only after they have settled their legal accounts with God by publicly proclaiming their faith in the death of His Son at Calvary as their representative wrath-bearer. In the Mosaic Covenant, there was a special tabernacle-temple sacrifice that expressed this quest for peace. In the New Covenant, this quest is expressed by one’s lifelong service to God. We are supposed to become living sacrifices.

The distinction between legal justification and moral sanctification is seen here. Men cannot legitimately expect to pay a ransom to God by means of their own works. This payment is available only through faith in Jesus Christ’s substitutionary atonement: an act of judicial restitution to God. This personal acceptance of Christ’s substitutionary atonement must be manifested publicly: first, by a profession of faith in the saving judicial work of Christ; second, by his subsequent baptism;⁷⁹ and third, by his participation in the Lord’s Supper. Justification is not earned; it is *imputed* judicially by God—His declaration, “Not guilty.” God declares a person legally justified in His sight on the basis of Christ’s atoning work, and He then makes this transformation a reality. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). Sanctification, while also a gift of God, is not exclusively a product of God’s imputation. *Definitive* sanctification is exclusively an

77. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, chaps. 4, 7, 9.

78. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), pp. 123–26. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

79. This includes the legally representative act by his parents in the case of a baptized infant.

act of God: the imputation of Christ's moral righteousness to an individual. *Progressive* sanctification in history is not imputed; it is the product of the individual's moral acts of righteousness.⁸⁰

The Bible makes it clear that this process of progressive sanctification overflows the boundary of the human heart. What a man is in his heart he will become externally.

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:17–20).⁸¹

Thus, everything he does is supposed to mark him as a redeemed person. This means that institutions owned, controlled, and operated by redeemed people are supposed to be reformed as surely as individuals are. These institutions are to be visibly transformed over time. God promises to bless these institutions compared to institutions run by non-redeemed people by anti-biblical principles.⁸²

Conclusion

The peace offering involved the lawful crossing of a boundary. Man and God could eat a meal together. *This meal required the eating of leaven*. Leaven is the biblical symbol of growth. It represents the expansion of a kingdom in history. God calls His people to extent His kingdom, thereby replacing Satan's.

How is this to be done? First, by preaching the gospel. Second, by conforming ourselves to God's ethical standards: biblical law. The close association among biblical law, cultural dominion, and holiness is visible in the peace offering's requirement of leaven. Third, by imposing the civil law's required negative sanctions on law-breakers before God imposes negative sanctions on society.

This is why any consideration of God's law cannot legitimately avoid a consideration of the law's mandated sanctions. God brings His sanctions, positive and negative, in history. These sanctions are not

80. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 50–52.

81. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 18: "By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them."

82. The problem of analysis comes when non-redeemed people run their institutions more closely to the external standards of the covenant, while Christians run their institutions by non-biblical standards. The work ethic of the Japanese compared with that of people in the United States is a case in point. God blesses Japan.

limited to individual human beings. They affect every institution. Greg Bahnsen's assessment is correct:

The reign of Christ—His Messianic kingdom—is meant to subdue every enemy of righteousness, as Paradise is regained for fallen men by the Savior. As Isaac Watts poetically expressed it: “He comes to make His blessings flow, Far as the curse is found.” Everything touched by the guilt and pollution of sin is the object of the Messiah's kingly triumph—everything. The kingdom of Christ not only brings forgiveness and new heart-love for God; it also brings concrete obedience to God in all walks of life. Those things which stand in opposition to God and His purposes and His character are to be overthrown by the dynamic reign of the Messianic King. The effects of Christ's dominion are to be evident on earth, among all nations, and throughout the range of human activity.⁸³

God progressively brings His kingdom to fruition over time in terms of His covenant's standards. He makes His kingdom visible in history as surely as He makes His people visible in history: through (1) their public professions of faith and subsequent actions and (2) His visible responses to them. The visible boundaries of Christ's earthly kingdom are progressively extended in history by means of the preaching of the gospel, by men's responses to this preaching, and by their subsequent external and internal obedience to the ethical boundaries of God's Bible-revealed law. This is all grace: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8–10).

The leaven of the Mosaic Testament's sacrifices symbolized this process of progressive sanctification in history. Men brought the best of their fields to God in leavened form. This leavened offering symbolized the full development in history of the best gifts they had received from God. Today, we do the same with our lives. Representationally, this process of moral sanctification in history has an ecclesiastical manifestation in men's *gifts and offerings above the ecclesiastically mandatory tithe*. We no longer bring an animal to be sacrificed; we bring the fruits of our labor, embodied in the form of money. We bring our voluntary offerings.

83. Greg L. Bahnsen, “This World and the Kingdom of God” (1982), in Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), p. 355. (<http://bit.ly/gdmplreduction>)

God rewards this faithfulness in history. He brings positive sanctions to His covenant people in history. This is the basis of the expansion of His kingdom progressively over time. Any attempt to deny the covenantal relationship between faithfulness and blessing in history is necessarily an attack on the idea that God's kingdom steadily replaces Satan's in history. It does not deny the leavening process in history; it asserts instead that Satan's leaven triumphs in history. Any denial of the success of the leaven of the gospel in history is necessarily and inescapably also an assertion of the success of the leaven of satanic rebellion in history. There is no neutrality. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, but beware also the hypothetical unleaven of pessimillennial eschatologies.⁸⁴

84. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, chaps. 4, 7.

4

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering (Lev. 4:1–3).

When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; Or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish: And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it is a sin offering (Lev. 4:22–24).

The theocentric message of these two judicially unified passages is God as the sanctions-bringer. Sanctions refer to point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Placating a Holy God

God must be placated for sin. When He is not placated by sinners under His authority, He threatens negative corporate sanctions against them. Those people who are innocent of open rebellion will nevertheless suffer the consequences merely by assenting to the transgression through inaction. To avoid negative corporate sanctions, societies must conform to God's mandatory means of placating Him publicly through formal repentance.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2010), ch. 4.

In the Mosaic Covenant, the sin offerings were the mandatory means of placating God.² They are also known as the *purification* offerings. These offerings, more than any other offering in Leviticus—and perhaps more than any other passage in Scripture—established the judicial principle of corporate responsibility. They raised the issue of hierarchical representation (point two), but in the context of corporate sanctions (point four). The judicial issue is *oath-breaking*.

The purpose of the purification offerings (“sin offerings”: KJV), the fourth sacrifice, was the restoration of sinful people to the presence of God after a covenantal oath had been broken through sin. Without these offerings, the Israelites could not lawfully cross the boundaries associated with God’s sanctuary: local (tabernacle) and regional (nation). The people needed double protection: from their own sins and from the sins of their covenantal representatives, the priests and princes. Rulers had to offer sacrifices for their own sins in order purify the boundaries in which God resided: the temple-tabernacle and the nation.

The sins in question were unintentional. C. Van Dam argued that this unintentionality has a specific meaning: to wander or go astray.³ Van Dam cited Leviticus 4:13: “And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty.”

The context of these verses is *the legal relationship between the people and a ruler*. To speak of going astray within a context of judicial hierarchy has the implication that someone in authority has taken the lead: the biblical shepherd and sheep relationship. It is never said anywhere in the text precisely what these sins were. Presumably, they were not major, self-conscious sins on the part of the congregation, since the atoning rituals listed in this passage applied to unintentional sins. Yet even a minor sin committed by a priest threatened the whole community.

The required offerings in Leviticus 4:1–3 were called purification offerings.⁴ They had to do with the tabernacle and temple, God’s

2. In the case of Nineveh, fasting and sackcloth were the required means (Jonah 3:5).

3. C. Van Dam, “The Meaning of *Shegagah*,” in *Unity in Diversity*, ed. Riemer Faber (Hamilton, Ontario: Senate of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1989), pp. 13–23.

4. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,

dwelling place, the geographical location around which He had drawn a boundary. Wenham wrote: “Under the Levitical laws the blood of the purification offering was used to cleanse the tabernacle from the pollution of sin. . . . [T]he primary purpose of this purification was to make possible the continuing presence of God among his people.”⁵ Sin, if it was not judicially dealt with according to God’s holy standards, would drive God away from His place of residence among His covenant people. This in turn would open the nation to invaders, for God would no longer defend the nation’s boundaries. Israel would be invaded and oppressed by foreigners dwelling in the land, or worse, invaded and then dragged into captivity. This was the threat that made mandatory a series of acts of ritual cleansing.

The house of God was a place of mediation.⁶ The purification offering was therefore also associated with God’s hierarchical authority over man.⁷ The priest, as the representative of the nation, was required to make atonement in order to protect society. He was the person who had legal access to the place of hierarchical mediation between God and His people.

B. Broken Oaths

Leviticus 4 is entirely devoted to the various atoning rituals for unintentional sins: by priest, congregation, civil ruler, and common citizen. It begins, significantly, with the sin of the priest. The New American Standard Version translates the introductory clause of verse three as follows: “if the anointed priest sins so as to bring guilt on the people. . . .” The New English Bible translates it exactly the same way. The Revised Standard Version reads: “if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people. . . .” There is no doubt that the priest could commit a sin which in some way brought into jeopardy all those who were under his authority. It was not just that he sinned on his own behalf; he sinned *representatively*. In contrast, this high degree of corporate responsibility for unintentional sins did not rest upon the civil ruler, as we shall see.⁸

1979), p. 84.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

6. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 22. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

8. I am not speaking here of intentional sins of a civil ruler, such as in the case of David, who intentionally numbered the people in peacetime, against the advice of Joab

How could the priest's unintentional sin bring the people under visible judgment? Because of the structure of the biblical covenant. Responsibility is covenantal, which means that it is imposed *hierarchically*. Human accountability is simultaneously upward and downward. God is at the top of the hierarchy; nature is at the bottom. In between, God gives men and women varying degrees of accountability, depending on their ordained offices, their economic positions, and their social roles.

Because the idea of the covenant is foreign to the thinking of modern Christians, they have tended to become supporters of a spurious humanist individualism, both philosophically (nominalism)⁹ and politically (right-wing Enlightenment thought),¹⁰ though frequently in the name of Christianity. It is therefore necessary to explore the concepts of corporate responsibility and judicial representation at considerable length in this chapter. There is no way to understand Leviticus 4 correctly if we rely on individualism as either our ethical presupposition or our epistemological presupposition.

Unfortunately, because of the influence the anti-covenantal individualism of modern fundamentalism, evangelical Christians are not accustomed to thinking in terms of biblical covenantal corporatism, either ecclesiastically or politically. This is why Leviticus 4 is so important for the establishment of a systematically biblical social theory: it establishes beyond question *the representative character of covenantal office-holding*. The dual covenantal oaths of allegiance, civil and ecclesiastical, can be broken through sin, and there must be a means of restoring covenant loyalty. This must be done through acts of sacrifice: *covenant renewal*. These dual covenants are not strictly personal, as modern individualism would have it. As Milgrom said, Leviticus presents a picture of corporate responsibility. If sin is not checked, people risk coming under God's negative sanctions in history when God brings His wrath against the evildoers: ". . . when the evildoers are punished they bring down the righteous with them. Those who perish with the wicked are not entirely blameless, however. They are inadvertent sinners who, by having allowed the wicked to flourish, have also contributed to the pollution of the sanctuary."¹¹

(II Sam. 24).

9. See the definitions of nominalism and realism in Chapter 6, footnotes 19 and 20.

10. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C: "Adam Smith's Theory of Economic Sanctions."

11. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York:

This indicates that those who are judicially subordinate to a lawful office-holder have a moral responsibility before God to call a halt publicly to the evil committed by that office-holder—a prophetic responsibility. If they fail to exercise this responsibility, the nation will be brought under God’s negative sanctions. It is crucial for any biblical theory of institutional government to understand this point: if God did not back up His prophets with predictable negative corporate sanctions in history, the prophetic office would have very little power. Modern pietists, whose name is Legion, and modern political pluralists, whose name is *vox populi*, insist that God no longer imposes predictable sanctions in history in terms of His covenant law and its specified sanctions. They have therefore implicitly denied the legitimacy of the prophetic function, and have therefore also denied the legitimacy of the judicial principle of biblical republicanism: bringing rulers to account for their actions. This leaves them with some version of humanism as the basis of their self-professed republicanism: natural law theory. But natural law theory does not provide statutes (case laws): authoritative guidelines for the application of its supposedly universal judicial principles.

This passage has ramifications far beyond the Mosaic Covenant’s sacrificial system. We need to explore some of these ramifications.¹² We need to understand how the representative priest-nation relationship was archetypal for other covenantal relationships in the Old Covenant. To understand this judicial relationship more readily, let us begin with that most crucial of all representatives in Old Covenant history, Adam.

Doubleday, 1991), p. 49; cf. p. 261.

12. The problem with conventional Bible commentaries that are written by Bible-believing scholars is that they focus almost exclusively on the narrowly theological implications of a passage, while ignoring its implications outside the seven loci of seventeenth-century Protestant scholastic theology: God, man, sin, salvation, Christology, the church, and the last things. At best, there may be some attempt to identify the events chronologically. In contrast, Bible commentaries written by liberals devote extraordinary amounts of space on determining which anonymous (mythical) writer—J, E, D, or P—wrote the verse, and for what purposes. But at least they sometimes do attempt to discuss the political, social, economic, or judicial aspects of the verse. The conservatives write as if these passages did not raise major questions for social theory and practice. Because of this long tradition of circumscribed commentating, it sometimes may appear to readers that I am using Bible verses to spin whole systems of speculative applications. Speculative they may be at times. Relevant to the text? Yes—just not familiar or intuitive to those who have been conditioned to think scholastically and pietistically rather than covenantally.

C. Original Sin and Covenantal Hierarchy

Adam broke covenant with God. He committed sacrilege (church), treason (state), and attempted parricide (family).¹³ Adam in his rebellion was seeking three offices: high priest, king, and founding father—not as a creature under God but as the Creator. He sought original control of the apex of power over all three covenantal hierarchies, a position occupied exclusively by God. This act of judicial rebellion led to his formal disinheritance by God. This was an appropriate response by a father to a son who had attempted to gain the inheritance early by bringing formal accusations of criminal behavior against the father.

By disinheriting Adam, God also disinherited Adam's biological descendants. Thus, the sin of Adam had judicial repercussions on his children and children's children. It also had repercussions in the creation. The world was brought under a curse (Gen. 3:18). "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will" (Rom. 8:20a, NASB). The effects of Adam's sin spread downward: down through time and down through the creation. Adam, as the delegated covenantal head of church, state, and family, brought the negative sanctions of God against him and all those under his covenantal authority.

1. *Inherited Sin*

Covenant-breaking man resists such a hierarchical concept of responsibility. He wants to believe that he sins only on his own behalf. The doctrine of inherited (original) sin—his legal status as *God's disinherited heir*—thwarts man's doctrine of human autonomy. Self-proclaimed autonomous man sees himself as the sole source of his own broken covenant, assuming that he even admits the existence of any covenant. *This view of sin asserts that each person implicitly possesses*

13. Attempted parricide—executing a parent—was inherent in Adam's decision to listen to Satan's accusation against God: that God was a liar, that Adam would not surely die by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:4). If true, then God was not who He said He was: God the enforcer, the sanctions-bringer. This would mean that God had lied about the nature of Deity; He was asking men to worship a false god. Such a request was a capital crime under the Old Covenant (Deut. 13:6–11). This was the one execution in which a family member could lawfully participate in the stoning; he had to cast the first stone (Deut. 13:9). Satan needed two witnesses to bring this accusation against God, for two witnesses are required to press a capital crime in a biblical court (Num. 35:30). The two witnesses committed perjury, so they became subject to the punishment that would have applied to the victim: death (Deut. 19:16–19). See Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), Appendix E: "Witnesses and Judges."

the power of sin-free living. A person may sin, but this sinning is supposedly of his own free will. Each person repeats the fall of Adam, it is asserted; without this morally contingent, case-by-case repetition of Adam's sin, all individuals would automatically gain heaven as God's lawful heirs. Such a view of sin rejects the biblical doctrine of *corporate disinheritance*. Mankind as a whole has been lawfully disinherited by God. All men are brothers in the flesh apart from regeneration: disinherited sons.¹⁴

This doctrine of *uninherited sin* was first formulated by the British monk Pelagius in the early fifth century, A.D. Calvinist theologian B. B. Warfield summarized the core of Pelagianism: "It lies in the assumption of the plenary ability of man; his ability to do all that righteousness can demand,—to work out not only his own salvation, but also his own perfection. This is the core of the whole theory; and all the other postulates not only depend upon it, but arise out of it."¹⁵ This meant a denial by the Pelagians of God's grace in salvation. Of the theology of the Pelagians, Warfield wrote on the next page: "It was in order that they might deny that man needed help, that they denied that Adam's sin had any further effect on his posterity than might arise from his bad example."

2. Hierarchical Responsibility

Because of the existence of covenant sanctions, the doctrine of covenantal hierarchy leads us to conclude that responsibility is both upward and downward. Those who are under the legal authority of a covenantal officer are under the historical sanctions of God, both positive and negative, which God applies to them through this ordained agent and also sometimes because of him. *Authority is always hier-*

14. The liberals' refrain about "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" is superficially biblical. The phrase means the opposite of what they think it means. The fatherhood of God is based theologically on the literal creation of man by God, a doctrine that liberals reject. "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:24–26).

15. B. B. Warfield, "Introductory Essay on Augustin and the Pelagian Controversy," in Philip Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. V, *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1887] 1971), p. xiv.

*archical. It is therefore necessarily representative.*¹⁶ No one can legitimately claim judicial innocence based merely on his claim of autonomy. Participation in any covenantal institution is inevitably a form of assent to representative authority, though always limited by God's law in the degree of required obedience.¹⁷

The example of an army under the authority of a military commander is an easily understood example (i.e., "representative") of the principle of collective sanctions. If he makes a serious mistake, the army is defeated, with negative consequences for civilians back home. If he does well, the army is victorious. In the first instance, the defeat of the troops and the subsequent subjection of the civilians may have no immediate connection to the specific nature of their own personal sins, but there is surely a *mediate* connection. They are brought under judgment because of the representative character of military authority. Similarly with the positive sanction of military victory: it is mediated through the commander.

We readily understand this principle with regard to military commanders. Few people today understand it with respect to New covenant priests (clerics),¹⁸ yet Mosaic law emphasized the representative sins of priests far more than the representative sins of military commanders.

D. Covenantal Allegiance

To participate in a specifically covenantal institution—church, state, or family—the individual must agree to obey those holding lawful office above him. This agreement is either explicit, as in the case of a naturalized citizen, or implicit, as in the case of minor children within a family, or the case of resident aliens living within the borders of a civil jurisdiction. There are sanctions, positive and negative, attached to such covenant membership. These sanctions are inherent in the very nature of the covenant; they cannot lawfully be evaded. What are sanctions? They are blessings and cursings legally applied by representative authorities to a special, set-apart people, i.e., a *sanctified* group.¹⁹

16. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

17. Gary North, *When Justice Is Aborted: Biblical Standards for Non-Violent Resistance* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnjustice>); cf. *Christianity and Civilization*, Nos. 2 and 3 (1983): *The Theology of Christian Resistance*, (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>) and *Tactics of Christian Resistance*. (<http://bit.ly/CRtactics>)

18. A cleric does not offer atoning sacrifice, unlike an Old Covenant priest.

19. In the New Testament, saints are God's sanctified people: holy (set apart) and under His unique covenant sanctions.

1. Definitive Allegiance

Covenantal allegiance is definitive: it begins at a particular point in time. A person swears an oath in the presence of other men—God’s officially sanctioned, representative, covenantal officers in history—that he will abide by the terms of a particular covenant. Even in the case of family and civil covenants that are officially secular, the person administering the oath still administers it as God’s designated agent in history, whether the particular society recognizes this subordinate legal status or not. *Judicially speaking, the most important aspect of government is the content of the oath.* The oath is central. The oath invokes the covenant: sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and inheritance. This is why, in seeking to understand the actual operations of any covenantal organization, the researcher must always do two things: *follow the money* and *examine the oath*.

In the church covenant, baptism is the definitive oath-sign that establishes the covenant. In the Old Covenant era, this visible covenantal act was circumcision.²⁰ This was normally a representative act, though there were sometimes voluntary conversions by adults. Circumcision also was applied representatively to household foreign slaves (Gen. 17:12–13). In the New Covenant, this act of definitive covenantal bonding is established directly through adult baptism, but also representatively in the case of infant baptism or the baptism of mentally incompetent children who are under the judicial authority of a baptized parent.²¹ God places a legal claim on those who are baptized. He places them under the threat of covenant sanctions, both positive and negat-

20. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968), ch. 3.

21. Only one baptized parent is necessary to establish the legal ground for baptizing a child. One baptized parent establishes the *legal status* of holiness for the child. This is the legal basis for household baptisms (Acts 16:14–15, 33): not the conversion (saving faith as such) of all those family members being baptized, but their special legal status in history as members of a God-sanctified household. The presence of one converted spouse brings God’s special blessings to that household. This is the biblical doctrine of *household sanctification*. “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy” (I Cor. 7:14). Neither the unbelieving spouse nor the child is automatically regenerated on the basis of the saving faith of the saved spouse, but they are made beneficiaries of the covenant in history. God places his legal claim on the baptized person as the beneficiary of His blessings, whether or not the person knows of his subordinate legal status. Ray Sutton, “Household Baptisms,” *Covenant Renewal*, II (Aug. 1988).

ive.²²

In the civil covenant, citizenship may be gained either by birth or by legal naturalization. Those who possess citizenship are beneficiaries of certain blessings, but they are also placed under unique obligations. There is usually a public oath of allegiance administered to naturalized citizens, but the same oath-covenant is representatively binding on all citizens. They may be required to take a public oath at certain times, such as when they join the armed forces or when they are elected to public office, but the terms of the civil covenant (e.g., a constitution) are still binding on them, whether or not they verbally and publicly profess allegiance to it.

In the family covenant, the definitive covenantal act takes place when the officer of either church or state declares a couple legally married.²³ Family allegiance by children to parents takes place *representatively and definitively* at conception. God deals providentially with individuals before their birth: Paul wrote: “And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:10–13). This is why parents become legally responsible for the protection of their children at conception, not at birth.²⁴

22. Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, ch. 5.

23. In Western law, a single act of sexual bonding—consummation—must subsequently affirm the public declaration of marriage in order for the marriage to be legally binding.

24. This makes abortion an act of covenant-breaking: rebellion upward against God and downward against the murdered infant. God holds the parents responsible, and also their medical accomplices. If the mother has the abortion against the father's wishes, then God holds her, the physician, and his assistants responsible. This is why abortion, being murder, is a capital crime in God's eyes. Any society that refuses to legislate and enforce capital punishment against every convicted abortionist and every convicted ex-mother will eventually fall under God's negative corporate sanctions. Because most Christians who are anti-abortionists today are also theological pietists, they refuse to call for the execution of convicted abortionists, let alone the murderous parents. By rejecting God's law and its required civil sanctions, they have renounced the prophetic function. They have therefore reduced themselves to the status of just one more special interest political pressure group, where fund-raising and political coalitions with covenant-breakers count for more than integrity before God. Their intense hatred of biblical law makes them lovers of political compromise. They write “Abortion is Murder” on posters, but they do not really believe it, for they do not affirm the Bible's civil penalty for murder. They have sent misleading signals to the abortionists and to the civil authorities. God is not mocked. Judgment is coming.

2. Progressive Allegiance

Covenantal allegiance is also progressive in church and state: covenant renewal continues as time passes. *First*, in the church: the Mosaic Covenant's mandatory acts of ecclesiastical covenant renewal were Israel's annual assemblies—above all, participation in the Passover meal. In the church, taking Holy Communion is the act of formal covenant renewal. This publicly places the church member under the sanctions of the covenant, which is why Paul warned members of the church at Corinth that they must examine themselves—exercise self-judgment—prior to taking the communion meal (I Cor. 11:28).

Second, in the state: various acts of citizenship mark state covenant renewal, most notably the act of voting. Under Mosaic law, the public assembled to ratify the anointing of a new king (I Kings 1:39–40; II Chron. 23). In short, individuals in their legal office as citizens *ratify* or *sanction* a leader or group of leaders. The civil covenant extends through history by means of these public acts of re-ratification. Citizens reaffirm their allegiance to the original civil covenant by formally sanctioning their leaders from time to time.²⁵ In many countries today, the adult male citizen's appearance in response to military conscription constitutes covenant renewal.²⁶

In contrast to church and state, there is no biblically sanctioned judicial act of covenant renewal for the family; only death, either covenantal or physical, breaks the marital bond.²⁷ Covenant renewal within the family is exclusively moral rather than judicial.²⁸ This is an important distinguishing feature of the family covenant from both church

25. In many modern tyrannies, it is legally mandatory for citizens to vote. Negative sanctions are imposed on those who refuse. The tyrants know that the national covenant needs periodic ratification by the people. These public acts of ratification create temporary legitimacy for the rulers; they reinforce the obligation of the people to obey.

26. This may appear to have been the case in ancient Israel (Ex. 30:13–14). It was not, however. This census-taking was allowed only in preparation for holy war. The adult males had to pay blood money to the priests. See Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58. Thus, it appears that this was not an act of civil covenant renewal but rather priestly renewal.

27. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), chaps. 2, 4. (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

28. There is no judicial equivalent of Holy Communion for the family. This is why any attempt to equate the legal status of the family with the legal status of the church is mistaken. They are separate jurisdictions, covenants, and institutions. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), chaps. 1, 6. (<http://bit.ly/tithing>). See also Appendix B, below: "Rushdoony on the Tithe: A Critique."

and state covenants. It points to different structures of authority, as we shall see.²⁹

E. Responsibility: Collective and Hierarchical

The biblical doctrine of collective responsibility is an aspect of the biblical doctrine of hierarchical responsibility. We need to ask: In what way?

We know that God brought judgments against nations under the Old Covenant; the testimony of the prophets is clear about this.³⁰ He also showed mercy to Nineveh because the entire city repented when Jonah preached. This raises an important question: Did God ever punish a collective group solely because of the sins of the group's rulers? The plagues of Egypt indicate that God did do this. The rigorous theocratic bureaucracy of Egypt brought the entire nation under the wrath of God. But at least with respect to the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, God offered a way of escape to every Egyptian household: blood on the doorposts. That no Egyptian household took this path to life (Ex. 12:30) indicates that they all agreed with their supposedly divine political ruler. They did consent in principle to what the Pharaoh was doing.

There is another issue that we need to consider: limiting the state. Consider the biblical law governing the state's imposition of the capital sanction: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16). This is a restriction on civil government. Were there any exceptions to this under the Mosaic Covenant? Yes: the military action known as *hormah*—the destruction of an especially evil enemy society during wartime. *Hormah* was the representative example, and named accordingly: a place set

29. It is nothing short of heresy to equate the family with the institutional church. They are separate jurisdictions, separate covenants. The church does not develop from the family. The church survives the final judgment; the family does not: no marriage or giving of marriage (Matt. 22:30). The church is therefore the central institution in a covenant-keeping society, not the family. Any attempt to fuse the two institutions by viewing the church as an aspect of the family is at bottom a return to clannism. Jesus warned about elevating the family above the church: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:34–38).

30. I am not yet raising the question of New Covenant history.

aside by God for total destruction.

And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah³¹ (Num. 21:2–3).

1. A Priestly Army

James Jordan concluded that this activity of total destruction was “a priestly act, issuing from the flaming swords of the cherubic (priestly) guardians of the land, a revelation of God’s direct fiery judgment against the wicked. Not every city was to be destroyed in this fashion, but certain ones were, as types of the wrath of God.”³²

Speaking of the city of Bashan, Moses said: “And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children, of every city” (Deut. 3:6). The same curse of death was placed on Jericho and on anyone who would rebuild its walls: “And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it” (Josh. 6:26)—a prophecy fulfilled by Hiel: “In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun” (I Kings 16:34).³³ While this was not the normal rule of warfare (Deut. 20:14), it did apply in certain cases. The children of the enemy perished with their parents.

31. There was a second Canaanitic Hormah in Zerephath, the one destroyed by Judah and Simeon (Jud. 1:17). The Hebrew root word for Hormah (*charam*) meant a thing dedicated—set aside—by God for total destruction: “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary,” James Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance*, p. 43, #2767, #2763; *Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. H. B. Hackett, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1869] 1981), II, p. 1089. Wrote Jordan: “*Hormah* means ‘placed under the ban, totally destroyed.’ To be placed under the ban is to be devoted to death.” James B. Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), p. 10. (<http://bit.ly/jjudges>)

32. Jordan, *Judges*, p. 11.

33. Presumably, this meant that the walls of the city had not been rebuilt. The city was apparently occupied in David’s day: “When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return” (II Sam. 10:5). Perhaps this was a name given to the immediate vicinity of Jericho, but not to an actual city.

Israel became God's sanctioning agent against societies that had corrupted worship and morality. Israel in a sense became the military equivalent of the angel of death. When assembled for battle, they became a holy army engaged in holy warfare, meaning a war to impose God's negative sanctions in history.³⁴ So outraged was God against the Canaanites that He hardened their hearts, just as He had hardened Pharaoh's heart against doing good,³⁵ so that they would not seek peace with Israel. He wanted to judge them.³⁶

Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses (Josh. 11:18–20).

2. *A Judicial Restraint on Civil Government*

We return to Deuteronomy 24:16: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." This law was judicially binding within the land of Israel. Yet we know that in the case of Leviticus 4, the sin of the priest could bring God's sanctions against the whole people. Does this mean that the judicial restraint of Deuteronomy 24:16 applies to the civil government but not to God? I think this is the proper explanation.

Why does God refuse to bind Himself in history by this same judi-

34. On Israel as a holy army, see *Judges*, p. 93. Jordan pointed out that Deborah's (and Barak's) song includes a verse (Jud. 5:2) that refers to the fact that "long locks of hair hung loose in Israel," a reference to one aspect of the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:5). He is using the alternative (margin) translation of the New American Standard Bible.

35. "And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said" (Ex. 7:13). "And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses" (Ex. 9:12). "And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him" (Ex. 10:1) "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go" (Ex. 10:20). "And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land" (Ex. 11:10).

36. Jesus said that God deliberately hardens people's hearts so that they will not believe on Him and be saved: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (John 12:40).

cial principle? Why does He reserve the right to enforce collective judgment against the publicly non-participating sons of law-breaking priests? *First*, because of the doctrine of original sin: in His eyes, all men stand judicially condemned from conception forward. Only His special grace saves some people from eternal wrath. Thus, what protects mankind in general from God's wrath in history is His grace, i.e., His merciful self-restraint. This common grace is manifested by God in His extension of physical life to men in history.³⁷ He therefore distinguishes between judicial guilt in His eyes and judicial guilt in the eyes of sinful civil rulers. As a testimony to God's common grace to all men, and also as a testimony to their own guiltiness before God, sinful rulers are to be restrained from executing civil judgment against those who are judicially innocent of public crimes. God, however, is not under a similar judicial restraint. *Second*, God knows that the sins of the civil and ecclesiastical rulers reflect the preferences of the people. In this sense, all citizens stand condemned, at least with respect to their private thoughts and acts. Public toleration of the rulers' particular sins is the result of the people's willingness to tolerate sin in the camp, in order to avoid similar public sanctions against their own sins. In short, they are not judicially innocent in God's eyes. He knows their hearts. *Third*, sinful civil magistrates need judicial restraints if righteousness, peace, and freedom are to be protected; God does not need similar restraints.

It is not that sons do not die for the sins of their fathers; they do. We all do. The doctrine of original sin teaches that all people die because of the representative sin of their father, Adam. Romans 5:14 declares: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." Biblical law teaches only that the state is not to execute sons for the sins of their fathers. Yet, even in this case, there was an exception in ancient Israel: sacrilege.³⁸

F. Ritual Cleansings

Was the sin of Leviticus 4 unintentional sacrilege? This does not appear to be the case, for it is difficult to imagine what unintentional sacrilege might be. Sacrilege is *the* crime in history; those who commit

37. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

38. Appendix A: "Sacrilege and Sanctions."

it do so with a high hand against God. Adam sinned wilfully (I Tim. 2:14). So did the people who told Aaron to build the golden calf (Ex. 32). So did Saul when he sacrificed the animal in Samuel's absence (I Sam. 13:9). So did Uzziah when he entered the temple to burn incense (II Chron. 26:19).

The atoning ritual requirements for the priest were specific: a bullock (young bull)³⁹ had to be slain and its blood used to wipe away the sin.

And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the LORD. And the priest that is anointed shall take of the bullock's blood, and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation: And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LORD, before the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall take off from it all the fat of the bullock for the sin offering; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards (Lev. 4:4–8).

The atoning ritual requirements of the congregation were similar, and the sacrificial animal was the same.

And if the **whole congregation** [Hebrew word: *'edah*] of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the **assembly** [Hebrew word: *qahal*], and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the **congregation** [assembly—Hebrew word: *qahal*] shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the LORD: and the bullock shall be killed before the LORD. And the priest that is anointed shall bring of the bullock's blood to the tabernacle of the congregation: And the priest shall dip his finger in some of the blood, and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD,

39. A young bull is not vicious. Its temperament is still sweet. Its character changes when it becomes mature. See Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 122. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

even before the veil. And he shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar which is before the LORD, that is in the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall pour out all the blood at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall take all his fat from him, and burn it upon the altar. **And he shall do with the bullock as he did with the bullock for a sin offering, so shall he do with this:** and the priest shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them. And he shall carry forth the bullock without the camp, and burn him as he burned the first bullock: it is a sin offering for the congregation (Lev. 4:13–21).

1. Congregation and Assembly

The question arises: What was the “whole congregation,” and what was “the assembly”? Here, Gordon Wenham and James Jordan disagreed on the definitions. Wenham argued that the congregation was a smaller body within the worshipping assembly. This smaller group possessed representational and legal functions. Thus, when the congregation had committed an unintentional sin, and the leaders of the assembly later learned of this, the assembly brought the bullocks an offering.⁴⁰ If this thesis is correct, then there was an added degree of hierarchy in the relationship: priest, congregation, assembly. The assembly, the larger body, brought the offering for the sake of its representative body. Jordan saw it the other way around: the congregation [*edah*] was the nation as such; the assembly [*qahal*] was the formal gathering.⁴¹ He saw this gathering as primarily sabbatical.⁴² I think he makes the stronger case. On this point, he has agreed with Rushdoony’s conclusion: “*Congregation* has reference to the whole nation in its governmental function as God’s covenant people. G. Ernest Wright defined it as ‘the whole organized commonwealth as it assembled officially for various purposes, particularly worship.’”⁴³

In either case, *there was a unique covenantal link between the priest and the people*, a link identified by the identical nature of the appropriate atoning sacrifices: a bullock. This covenantal link was judicially grounded in the designation of Israel as a kingdom of priests (Ex.

40. Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp. 98–99.

41. James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), Appendix A. (<http://bit.ly/jjchurch>)

42. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

43. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 85. Wright’s statement appears in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, II, p. 468.

19:6). The high priest was a priest to the other priests; they in turn were priests to the priestly nation of Israel; and the nation of Israel served as priests for the entire pagan world.⁴⁴ Thus, as Milgrom said, "The high priest assumes responsibility for all Israel."⁴⁵

2. *Civil and Ecclesiastical Representation*

In contrast to the priest, who had to sacrifice a bullock, the tribal leader⁴⁶ who sinned unintentionally had to bring a male goat without defect for his offering (Lev. 4:23). The common man who sinned unintentionally had to bring a female goat without defect (Lev. 4:28). He could also bring a female lamb without defect (Lev. 4:32). The symbolism is obvious: *masculinity under the Mosaic Covenant was associated in the civil covenant with rule, femininity with subordination*.⁴⁷ In neither case—civil ruler or citizen—was a bullock an appropriate sacrificial animal, for the bullock was associated with priestly authority.

The sin of the priest and the sin of the whole congregation were of similar consequence in God's eyes: major (bullock). Likewise, the sins of the ruler and the lone individual were comparable: minor (goat). The sacrificial link between priest and people indicates that the priest had sufficient representative authority for his unintentional sin to bring the people under God's negative sanctions. The civil ruler did not possess comparable representative authority.

What is indicated in Leviticus 4:1–3 is that *there was a much closer judicial link between the priesthood and the covenanted society than there was between the civil ruler and the covenanted society*. This is why we must conclude that *the church was covenantally more important in Israel than the state was*. The unintentional sin of the priest was treated by God as comparable to the unintentional sin of the whole congregation. The unintentional sin of the ruler was treated on a par

44. This is why 70 bullocks had to be sacrificed each year at the feast of ingathering (booths or tabernacles) during the first eight days (Num. 29:13–36). These were representative atoning sacrifices for the whole gentile world, symbolized by the 70 nations. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, p. 190.

45. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 54.

46. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 99.

47. The abolition of all required ritual sacrifices in the New Covenant (Heb. 9) has removed the male-female distinction in the civil covenant. Without civil sacrifices, there is no legitimate judicial restriction on women participating in civil rulership. The male-female distinction is maintained in matters of the church's ordained elders only because a male must represent a male God in the administration of the sacraments and the covenantally authoritative declaration of God's word (I Cor. 14:34–35). This exclusion of females has nothing to do with sacrifices.

with the unintentional sin of the average citizen.⁴⁸ Conclusion: the laxity of the priesthood regarding their personal sins threatened greater direct negative consequences for the citizens of Old Covenant Israel than the moral or judicial laxity of the civil authorities.⁴⁹

G. Corporate Sanctions and Authority: The People

This raises the question of the *locus of authority* for the initiation of corporate sins. Temporally and functionally, this infraction was initiated by the priests, who were in repeated contact with the holy implements of the tabernacle-temple. But the corporate nature of God's negative sanctions indicates that primary institutional responsibility lay elsewhere. The priests were legal representatives placed by God between Himself and His people. As representatives, they did in fact *represent*. A representative, judicially speaking, is legally the initiating agent, but his acts must be sanctioned by those represented. His actions are to reflect the wishes of those whom he represents.⁵⁰ *Their continuing consent is the basis of his authority*. Thus, the priest was required by God to offer a sacrifice because of this representative infraction that he unknowingly had initiated.

The representative represents both God and society. If society does not bring negative sanctions against evil representatives, then God will. *God delegates authority to the people to serve as His covenantally sovereign agents, meaning those who bring lawful sanctions in His name*. If the people refuse to act as God's representatives, then He acts on His own behalf against both the rulers and the people. This covenantal threat is to serve as their motivation for imposing positive and negative sanctions against their rulers. This is the theological foundation of what has become known in Protestant political theory as the doctrine of interposition.⁵¹

48. Economically speaking, the king's sacrifice was less burdensome than the commoner's, for a female goat can produce offspring and milk. The male animal was symbolically more important in the ancient world, but not economically.

49. Cf. Jordan, *Judges*, on Judges 17–21.

50. This is not true, short-term, in tyrannies, but tyrannies do not indefinitely survive a change in heart in their subjects.

51. On this political-judicial concept in Western history, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), IV:XX:XXXI. Cf. Michael Gilstrap, "John Calvin's Theology of Resistance," *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 2 (1983), pp. 180–217. (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>); Tom Rose, "On Reconstruction and the American Republic," *ibid.*, pp. 285–310.

We see an example of this when Saul announced sanctions against his son Jonathan. The people intervened to prevent him from carrying them out. "And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not" (I Sam. 14:45). The word translated as "people" refers to a collective unit, such as a tribe. The army was in battle. This was not mob action; it was organized with the co-operation of the military commanders. They *interposed* themselves between Saul and Jonathan. The biblical text is clear: they *rescued* him.⁵²

Was this an act of rebellion? No, it was an act *against* rebellion. Saul was the rebel; the people interposed themselves in order to prevent an unrighteous act on the part of the king, their representative. It was the people who had called for a king (I Sam. 8); it was they who could lawfully interpose themselves between the king and his victim. On this occasion, Saul heeded their judgment.

The fact is, kingship in Israel was a product of the people's lawfully delegated authority under God. John Frame wrote: "The kingship comes as God's response to a demand from the people. The people's motives in making their request were largely sinful (I Sam 8; cf. Deut 17:14; Judges 9), but God had planned to raise up kings for his people (Deut 17:14–20) and had given them in the law a proper method of choosing one. It is important to note that in Deuteronomy 17, the king is to be chosen by the people (v 15). As with the appointment of Moses and that of at least some of the judges, there is a human choice to be made. This choice certainly does not prevent God from playing a direct role in the selection process, but it does necessitate a human choice in addition to whatever role God may himself choose to play."⁵³ Again, "The kingship is both a charismatic office and a popular one: that is, both God and the people play roles in its establishment and continuance."⁵⁴ The people have the legal authority to reject the leadership of

52. If there is an example in the Bible of the lawful rescue by citizens of an innocent person from the unlawful act of a senior civil magistrate, this is it. Such organized resistance must have the blessing of church officers or local magistrates; otherwise, it would not be biblically lawful. But with that support, people have a right to challenge even a king who is about to execute his child. See North, *When Justice Is Aborted*.

53. John Frame, "Toward a Theology of the State," *Westminster Theological Journal*, LI (Fall 1989), p. 211.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

a king (Rehoboam) “who will not rule according to their desires.”⁵⁵ This places enormous authority into the hands of the ruled. Here is the judicial basis of Israel’s existence as a theocratic republic, despite the presence of kings, beginning during Samuel’s prophetic ministry.

H. The Priestly Office

It is clear from Leviticus 4 and from many other texts in the Bible that those who are at greatest risk in relation to the imposition of God’s covenantal sanctions in history are those who are the primary sanctioning agents of the specific covenant: the people rather than their covenantal representatives. We discover in this principle a fundamental rule of all biblical social authority: *those who are threatened as the primary recipients of God’s national covenantal sanctions are the society’s primary sovereign agents*. From him to whom much is given, much is expected (Luke 12:48). Again and again in the Old Testament,

55. *Idem*. A similar view of the sovereignty of the people under God appeared in the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, published in Latin anonymously in 1579, which became a touchstone for Protestant political theory almost from the day it first appeared. It was *the* Huguenot tract of that century, published seven years after the St. Bartholomew’s massacre of the Protestants by the French monarch. These ideas had been discussed before the massacre, but this book put them in final form. The book asserted the duty of the people to rise up and overthrow a king who was flagrantly disobeying God.

These ideas on the right of rebellion can be traced back to the School of Salamanca, the sixteenth-century political economists who are without doubt the most important neglected political theorists in the post-medieval West: free market economists, subjective value theorists, and defenders of republican liberties. Samuel Rutherford cited Luis de Molina, Francisco Suarez, and Fernando Vasquez in four of the first seven footnotes in *Lex, Rex, or the Law and the Prince* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle, [1644] 1980), pp. 1, 2. He cited Francisco de Vitoria (he referred to him as Victoria) and Domingo de Soto on page 3. On their economic theories, see Marjorie Grice-Hutchison, *The School of Salamanca: Readings in Spanish Monetary Theory, 1544–1605* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). (<http://bit.ly/mghschool>); Murray N. Rothbard, “Late Medieval Origins of Free Market Economic Thought,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975); Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith* (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1995), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/mrecon1>); Alejandro Antonio Chafuen, *Christians for Freedom: Late-Scholastic Economics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986). Chafuen preferred to call them Hispanic Scholastics (p. 23). There is very little historical scholarship in English that traces the origins of republican political theory to the School of Salamanca; the relationship is better known in European scholarship, especially German. See Bernice Hamilton, *Political Thought in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963). Quentin Skinner devoted a chapter to them in *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), II, ch. 5: “The Revival of Thomism.” Their work was a great deal more than just the revival of Thomism. It reshaped political theory in the Protestant West.

God's capital sanctions fell on the people rather than the kings and the priests.⁵⁶ This indicates that *it was the people who possessed primary institutional authority, not their representatives*. This is why Israel was a theocratic republic. The Bible's **holy commonwealth ideal** necessarily involves the establishment of an **oath-bound civil covenant**. In this ideal civil covenant, the corporate people possess primary responsibility and therefore primary authority. In this sense, *the republican ideal is biblical*. Authority extends downward from God to the people and upward from them to their representatives. *God validates civil rulers in the name of the people*.

Modern democratic theory (popular sovereignty) is a secularization of this biblical holy covenant ideal (delegated sovereignty), in which the people exercised judicial authority under God because of the covenant they had made with God. The evils of democracy, familiar from Aristotle's era to today, are no worse than the evils of any other political system. The evils stem from an attempted divinization of the state, not from democracy as a political arrangement. Whenever the political order is viewed as beyond earthly appeal—the **divine right of politics**—politics will become progressively tyrannical, no matter which authority structure the state adopts: oligarchic, democratic, bureaucratic, or monarchical (today a defunct ideal).

The priest had to sacrifice a young bullock in order to turn back the negative sanctions of God against those who were under the priest's authority. These sanctions threatened not only the priest; they threatened that segment of the covenanted community under his lawful jurisdiction. The atoning sacrifice had to take place at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. "And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the LORD" (Lev. 4:4). The very place of sacrifice is designated by God as the *congregation's tabernacle*, i.e., a dwelling place. This was the place where God met the congregation. "This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee" (Ex. 29:42). This was the dwelling place of God, but it was also the dwelling place of the congregation. Although the people were not allowed bodily into the presence of God, the furniture

56. The Levites killed 3,000 after the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:28). Aaron was not executed. Numbers 25:8 records the death of 24,000 by plague. In II Samuel 24:15, we read of 70,000 who died in a plague.

of the tabernacle symbolically represented them. *The tabernacle was the place where the **dual citizenship**—heaven and earth—of both man and God was publicly revealed.* Covenant-keepers in history are not citizens merely of earth (Phil. 3:20), and God in history is King not merely in heaven. The whole creation is His kingdom, and to prove this, He brings His sanctions in history, both directly and representatively.⁵⁷

Sacrilege is the theft of God's property. Adam's sin involved such theft. This sin is essentially priestly: *a sacramental boundary violation.* Adam's priestly sin extended downward to his heirs, bringing death. In a similar sense judicially, a priest under the Mosaic Covenant possessed delegated authority, thereby enabling him to place the covenanted community under God's condemnation. An unintentional sin committed by the priest was a greater threat than an unintentional sin committed by the king. Conclusion: *the judicial link between the priest and the people was more binding covenantally in Israel than the link between the king and the people.*

This is evidence that the church is more fundamental than the

57. The most obvious theological link joining premillennialism with amillennialism is their joint denial of God's visible, earthly, sanctions-bringing kingdom in history prior to the second coming of Christ. In both systems, Jesus Christ must be bodily present in order for Him to impose public sanctions. In short, pessimillennialism insists there are no representative civil sanctions in the New Covenant era. Pessimillennialism argues that prior to Jesus' bodily appearance in judgment, His kingdom is sharply circumscribed to: (1) redeemed hearts, (2) orthodox churches, and (3) families in which at least one of the parents is a Christian. See Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), chaps. 7, 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>). Given this view of God's historic sanctions, the state is understood as lawfully imposing only humanist or pagan sanctions in history. In fact, many of these theologians insist, God intends that the state *should* impose sanctions based exclusively on humanist ("neutral") civil law; it would be morally wrong for the civil magistrate to enforce Bible-revealed law. Cf. Norman L. Geisler, "A Premillennial View of Law and Government," *The Best in Theology*, ed. J. I. Packer (Carol Stream, Illinois: Christianity Today/Word, 1986), vol. I. Politics must therefore be pluralist rather than Christian: Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1983), p. 134; cf. essays by Gary Scott Smith, Paul G. Schrottenboer, Gordon J. Spykman, and James W. Skillen, in Gary Scott Smith (ed.), *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1989). For a refutation of this view of God's kingdom in history, see Greg L. Bahnsen, "This World and the Kingdom of God," in Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), Appendix D. (<http://bit.ly/gdmpreduction>). For a refutation of this view of politics, see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnppolpol>)

state in the political economy of the Bible. The church is central to society: not the state and not the family.⁵⁸ The family and the state have been more universal in time and place; neither has been central in history. It is the ancient error of natural law theory that has led pagan and Christian social theorists to assume that the *geographical universality* of family and state implies the *social centrality* of one or the other. On the contrary, the formal preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments—inclusion and exclusion—are central in history because they are central in eternity. (Note: the word *sacrament* is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum*, a military oath of enlistment.⁵⁹ Sacraments are an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model: oath-sanctions.⁶⁰) This does not imply that the institutional church is at the top of a single institutional hierarchy in society; no such single hierarchy exists. It *does* imply the institutional church is the most important institution in history, for the Bible calls it called the Bride of Christ. The Christian family and the Christian state are not so designated.

The atoning sacrificial bullock of both priest and congregation had to be slain *at* the door of the congregation, i.e., next to the altar itself, on the north side. It was not slain on the altar. It had to be dead before it was placed on the altar. The altar was the symbolic door to heaven. This door marked a fundamental boundary in Israel. To contain God's wrath and keep it from flowing from the holy of holies through the tabernacle's door to the people, the priest had to make atonement for his sin at the door of the tabernacle. Conversely, in order for the sin of the people to be contained outside the tabernacle, so that it would not invade the holy of holies, thereby forcing God to depart from the dwelling place,⁶¹ the priest had to make an identical sacrifice for the

58. The church perseveres institutionally in the resurrected world beyond the final judgment (Rev. 21, 22). The family surely does not: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). The state apparently does not, since its judicial function is to bring negative sanctions against public evil. Public evil will end at the final judgment.

59. "Sacrament," in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, eds. John M'Clintock and James Strong, 12 volumes (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), IX, p. 212.

60. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

61. Wenham wrote: "Lev. 4 makes explicit that sin defiles the sanctuary: it makes it impossible for God to dwell among his people." Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 102. James Jordan calls attention to Ezekiel 8–11 as an example when God departed from the temple because of the people's abominable sacrifices. "The Jews had treated the Temple and the Ark as idols, and so God would destroy them, as He had the golden calf. Ezekiel sees God pack up and move out of the Temple, leaving it empty or 'desol-

congregation at the door of the tabernacle. The blood of the bullock was representational in both cases. It defended the integrity of the boundary between God and His people.

I. The Priestly Function

Church officers lawfully control access to the public signs of eternal life: the sacraments.⁶² The three priestly functions are these: (1) the formal, weekly, public proclamation of the message of eternal life; (2) the administration of the institutional monopoly of the sacraments; and (3) the imposition of church discipline, with the authority to deny a person access to the sacraments as its ultimate negative sanction. All three are *representative* judicial acts. What is formally announced by the church on earth, Jesus said, should be assumed by men to be judicially binding in heaven. “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt.18:18). The institutional church’s power of excommunication is declarative—as declarative as baptism and the Lord’s Supper are.⁶³ That is, *formal excommunication represents God in history*. This was Calvin’s view of church authority; it

ate.’ The abominations have caused the Temple to become desolate. Once God had left, the armies of Nebuchadnezzar swept in and destroyed the empty Temple.” James B. Jordan, “The Abomination of Desolation: An Alternative Hypothesis,” in Gary DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), p. 240. (<http://bit.ly/gdmdebate>)

62. Therefore, any attempt by the civil authorities to interfere with public excommunications is a form of sacrilege. This is not to say that a person who is slandered by a church official should not have legal recourse in a civil court, but in a biblical social order, the church itself could not lawfully be sued; only the officer could be sued, and only as a private individual. This immunity from suits by its own members and ex-members is a manifestation of church sovereignty. To allow the state to prosecute the church would be to place the church under the general sovereignty of the state.

A similar immunity from suits is implicitly granted by the United States Constitution to the Federal government. The Federal government may not be sued except by its own permission. Wrote the Library of Congress’ Congressional Research Office: “*Immunity of the United States From Suit*.—In pursuance of the general rule that a sovereign cannot be sued in his own courts, it follows that the judicial power does not extend to suits against the United States unless Congress by general or special enactment consents to suits against the Government. This rule first emanated in embryo form in an *obiter dictum* by Chief Justice Jay in *Chislm v. Georgia*, where he indicated that a suit would not lie against the United States because ‘there is no power which the courts can call to their aid.’” *The Constitution of The United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 716.

63. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, p. 163.

was not some peculiar invention of Roman Catholicism.⁶⁴

This view of church discipline is denied by those who adopt a nominalist definition of the Lord's Supper: a *memorial* rather than a judicially binding declaration in God's name that the participants are allowed in God's holy, *judicial* presence. This memorial view of the Lord's Supper leads to the transfer of primary social sovereignty either to the family or the state. It reduces excommunication to the status of a mere memorial—a sanction without much judicial clout.

The difference between the authority of a cleric and the authority of the head of a non-covenantal organization can be seen in the differing methods of financing. The income of non-covenantal institutions is not mandated by God's law. The income of the church is: the tithe.⁶⁵ This difference in financing is based on the presence of the sacraments in the church. The cleric represents—mediates judicially—God and His people. He administers the sacraments in an organization that possesses the God-given authority to compel its *voting* members to tithe.⁶⁶ The fact that modern churches are antinomian and pay no attention to the judicial theology that undergirds the tithe does not disprove the theology. It merely starves these churches financially.⁶⁷

The specified financial support of the priest in Israel was the tithe. The people tithed a tenth of their *net increase*⁶⁸ to the Levites; the Levites in turn tithed a tenth of their increase to the Aaronic priests (Num. 18:21–27). The Levites were entitled to the tithe because the

64. Here is Calvin's view of church discipline: ". . . Whoever, after committing a crime, humbly confesses his fault, and entreats *the Church* to forgive him, is absolved not only by men, but by God himself; and, on the other hand, whoever treats with ridicule the reproofs and threatening of *the Church*, if he is condemned by her, the decision which men have given will be ratified in heaven." John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1558] 1979), II, p. 358 (Matthew 18:18). Calvin argued that the fear of God must be added to the fear of church discipline in order to terrify "obstinate and haughty men [who] are strongly inclined to despise the decision of the Church on this pretence, that they refuse to be subject to men—as wicked profligates often make bold appeals to the heavenly tribunal. . . ." Therefore, "Christ, in order to subdue this obstinacy by terror, threatens that the condemnation, which is now despised by them, will be ratified in heaven." *Ibid.*, II, p. 359.

65. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

66. Non-voting members should not be compelled to tithe. To compel them to tithe as a condition of receiving the sacraments would be equivalent to selling the sacraments.

67. North, *Covenantal Tithe*, ch. 5.

68. God does not normally tax capital (property). He taxes income. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, pp. 56–57. For a list of the handful of Mosaic exceptions, see Chapter 5:B.

people were not allowed to come near the tabernacle of meeting where the Levites labored (Num. 18:21–22). The existence of this temple boundary separated the Levites from any inheritance in rural land (v. 24).⁶⁹ Presumably, this same principle of *sacramental separation* governed the Levites' tithe to the priests. The even more rigorous barrier in between the two areas of sacramental service—the tabernacle of meeting vs. the holy of holies—was the basis of the Levites' mandatory tithe to the priests. The Levites could legally not draw near to the holy of holies; they were required to tithe to those who could. The tithe is therefore grounded in a judicial principle: *representation before the heavenly throne of God*.

The tithe also proclaims an economic principle. The economic principle of the tithe is simple to state and readily understood: *eternal life and access to the sacraments are not to be offered for sale to the highest bidder*. Neither are church offices.⁷⁰ The monopoly position of the church with respect to the sacraments is manifested by the legitimate monopoly claim of the church to 10% of the net increase that God grants to individual church members. The judicial principle of the tithe is less readily understood: *the existence of sacramental boundaries*. The first boundary separates church members from non-members: only the former have lawful access to the sacraments. The second boundary separates the officers who administer the sacraments from unordained members. The mandatory tithe identifies the church as possessing a unique covenantal monopoly.⁷¹ This is as true under the New Covenant as it was under the Old Covenant.

God's grant of *monopoly sacramental authority* to His church places the cleric in a special intermediary position in between God and men. The sacraments are a means of bringing God's judgment into the

69. There were two rare exceptions (Lev. 27:20–21). See Chapter 36.

70. Simon the magician tried to purchase the Apostles' ability to lay hands on people so that they could receive the Holy Spirit. Peter condemned him: "But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20). The term "simony" is applied to someone who buys a church office for money in order to lay legal claim on future income from tithes and offerings. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

71. This implies that no one who refuses to pay a tithe to the local church is entitled to hold ecclesiastical office or exercise ecclesiastical sanctions. There has to be a distinction between communicant voting members and communicant non-voting members (children, imbeciles, and non-tithers.) See Gary North, "Two-Tiered Church Membership," *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 4 (1985), pp. 120–31. (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>). A modified version of this essay appears as Chapter 3 of *Tithing and the Church*.

midst of the assembly. The *saints* are *sanctified*—set apart judicially—and therefore they are subject to the ecclesiastical *sanctions*. The Old Covenant priest administered these sanction-producing sacraments. In ancient Israel, the whole nation was sanctified as a collective political and geographical unit; therefore, the sins of the priests threatened to bring the whole nation under God's negative sanctions. It was the Old Covenant church's sacramental function that entitled it to the tithe, beginning with Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18, 20). It was not, contrary to Rushdoony, the Levites' cultural services that were the basis of their support by the tithe. It was their sacramental office.⁷²

In the humanists' world of cosmic impersonalism, there is no priestly function except by, and in relation to, autonomous man. The priest is regarded as an intermediary between: (1) autonomous individual man and autonomous collective man; or (2) autonomous collective man and the autonomous cosmos. The priest may officially minister to mankind in the name of a god, however man or the cosmos is defined, but only in the name of the authority of the evolving species, mankind. Collective Man is the one true God.⁷³

J. The Quasi-Priestly Function

The biblical state, as a provider of life-sustaining services—defense and protection against domestic violence and fraud—is also to be supported (and restrained) by the tithe principle: a publicly announced percentage (less than 10%)⁷⁴ of one's net income after tithes and offer-

72. Appendix B.

73. This is not true of libertarian anarchism, where only individuals are gods: a theology of pure polytheism.

74. For the state to take as much as 10%, Samuel warned, is a mark of tyranny (1 Sam. 8:15, 17). The principle of the "graduated tithe" or "progressive" income tax is morally monstrous. It compels individuals with higher incomes to pay a greater proportion of their incomes than poorer people pay in order to receive state protection. If the Mafia required this, it would be designated as a "protection racket," yet most economists and moralists, not to mention the voters, applaud the graduated income tax. The graduated income tax is inherently socialistic, for it encourages the majority of men to accept an ever-increasing state authority over the economy by voting for programs that richer people, always a political minority, will supposedly pay for. Yet even the great free market economist Ludwig von Mises refused to call the progressive income tax socialistic. See Mises, *Nation, State, and Economy: Contributions to the Politics and History of Our Time* (New York: New York University Press, [1919] 1983), pp. 201–2. (<http://bit.ly/MisesNSE>). Marx and Engels knew that it was socialistic; it was the second step in their ten-point program to establish Communist rule, right after "Abolition of all property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848),

ings is to be taken by the entire state apparatus, bottom to top, in order to support its operations. The state must be limited in its claims because it, too, possesses a God-granted monopoly: *the monopoly of violence*. Such sovereign power is always placed by God within judicial and other boundaries. The state is not merely one additional institution among many, with its departments competing against other organizations on a free market governed by what economists call consumer sovereignty.⁷⁵ The free market offers open bidding for scarce resources. Most people perceive clearly that the courtroom decisions of a civil judge must not be governed by the free market's principle of "high bid wins."⁷⁶ They recognize that this principle of pricing in a courtroom is a form of bribery.

Those who control access to the means of temporal life take on a quasi-priestly role. Society acknowledges this by placing judicial restraints on those who are in a monopoly position to sell the implements of life to the highest bidder, e.g., physicians. People somehow sense that biological life, like eternal life, should not be sold to the highest bidder by monopolists.⁷⁷ They perceive that the free market principle of "high bid wins" is sometimes a morally inappropriate pricing method.⁷⁸

For example, consider the case of a physician who stops to examine a critically injured victim of an accident. The victim is still conscious. The physician persuades the victim to pay him the monetary value of the victim's whole estate in exchange for emergency treat-

in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), VI, p. 505.

75. Biblically speaking, we should speak of customer *authority* rather than consumer *sovereignty*, since the free market is not an oath-bound covenantal agency, and does not possess sovereignty in the biblical sense.

76. A rare intellectual defense of a competitive, non-legislative, exclusively free market legal system, written by a legal theorist, is Bruno Leoni, *Freedom and the Law* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1961). Three decades later came Bruce L. Benson's *The Enterprise of Law: Justice Without the State* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 1990). The problem is this: identifying which court has jurisdiction in a specific territory. Who possesses the superior jurisdiction?

77. Actually, physicians are more like oligopolists: semi-competing groups of monopoly rent-seekers.

78. It is the quasi-priestly function, and not merely the monopoly grant of power by state and local governments, that leads to the phenomenon of price discrimination, i.e., different prices being charged for the same service to different buyers. On the role of government coercion against unlicensed health providers as a factor in medical pricing, see Reuben A. Kessel, "Price Discrimination in Medicine," *Journal of Law and Economics*, I (1958), pp. 20–53. (<http://bit.ly/KesselMed>)

ment. He even writes up a contract to this effect. The victim signs it. This conceptually voluntary transaction will not be upheld, either by a civil court or a jury of the physician's peers, nor should it. The physician could even be stripped of his legal right to practice medicine. The fact that this exchange of medical treatment for money was technically and legally a voluntary transaction between consenting adults is not given credence in the civil courts, nor should it be. The role of the physician as a healer has always militated against a purely free market, "high bid wins" approach to the provision of life-saving service, at least in emergency circumstances where only one supplier of healing services is immediately available to the patient. The grant of semi-monopoly status by the state to state-licensed physicians in the twentieth century was given on condition that the economic beneficiaries would not use this authority to strip patients of all of their wealth (just a lot of it on certain occasions).

That the buyers of medical services are called *patients* rather than *consumers* is indicative of the distinction between medicine and other occupations. A patient is someone who waits patiently, a characteristic feature of buyers of medical services. It is understood by all participants that buyers of medical services will be forced to wait—to "line up"—which is a universal feature of pricing systems that are not based on the free market's "high bid wins" principle. But socialism makes lines much longer by mandating fees that are too low to encourage a large supply of services.⁷⁹ This is why the imposition of medical price restraints retroactively by juries should be limited to life-threatening situations in which the victim had no opportunity to shop for a lower price. This ought to be a power rarely invoked; otherwise, the supply of conventional medical services will become artificially restricted by law.

The office of quasi-priest became a growth industry in the twentieth century. There are today numerous candidates for the office of social redeemer, each with its own priesthood. The state is frequently regarded as the only legitimate candidate for savior of society, and therefore it is honored as an agency possessing a priestly function. Politicians and bureaucrats are its priests, and public school teachers are the Levites.

Psychology is often regarded as possessing redemptive (healing) power. The needs of the unconscious, either individual (Freud) or col-

79. Gary North, "Step to the Rear, Please," *The Freeman* (March 1975).

lective (Jung), have called forth a quasi-priestly response. Psychiatrists (M.D.'s) are the priests; psychologists (Ph.D.'s) are the Levites.

Trade unions for several decades were regarded by the public as agencies of social salvation. They are supported by a compulsory dues system that is in part governed by the tithe principle. Union leaders were long seen the priests; local organizers were the Levites.⁸⁰

Sports have been regarded by the public as a means of social redemption: in ancient Greece, in the Mayan culture, in England beginning in the early nineteenth century, and in the United States beginning in the late nineteenth century. Fans of soccer (football) in Europe become religious in intense loyalty. So do sports fans in other nations. Behavior that in ancient Rome was called Saturnalian—lawless, irrational, sometimes violent—is tolerated before, during, and after major games.⁸¹ Athletes are the priests; today, television announcers are the Levites. Amateur sports are not supposed to be promoted in terms of free market pricing.⁸² Professional athletics, however, are price-competitive, which means that they are not economically priestly. But because they compete with churches for attendance on Sunday, they do take on a priestly aspect.⁸³ It is revealing that professional basketball

80. Philip D. Bradley (ed.), *The Public Stake in Union Power* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959); Sylvester Petro, *Power Unlimited: The Corruption of Union Leadership* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959). (<http://bit.ly/PetroPower>)

81. After the Chicago Bulls basketball team, led by international sports idol Michael Jordan, won the National Basketball Association championship in 1992, fans began a two-day riot in Chicago. The rioting was worse a year later when the Bulls won again. In England, gangs exist only to follow their local soccer teams from city to city, drinking and rioting during and after the games. These gangs are not youthful; members' ages range into their thirties. See Bill Buford, *Among the Thugs* (New York: Norton, 1992).

82. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its rival associations penalize colleges that pay too much money in order to recruit superior athletes, i.e., money or bonuses above scholarship aid and minimal funds for room and board expenses. As economist Benjamin Rogge [ROEguee] once pointed out, this is a form of monopoly behavior designed to reduce price competition from the most successful teams. Professional sports leagues in the United States have been granted similar price restraints, such as rules against a player's selling his services to a new team ("jumping") without the first team's permission, for which the original team's owners must be compensated by the second team's owners. The first team's owners are therefore given property rights to future increases in the value of their players' assets, i.e., the players' marketable skills. Some modifications have been made in the older rules, but these are marginal, applying only to players whose contracts have expired.

83. Televised sports programs in the United States are frequently viewed at home by groups of men who get together to eat pizza and drink beer. This social fellowship is modern man's Sunday substitute for church and the Lord's Supper. Pastor Joseph Welch pointed this out to me.

and football leagues in the United States try not to compete directly with the scheduling of those particular college sports from which they recruit their players.⁸⁴ This is especially true of American football, where collegiate games take place on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons. Professional football games are usually held on Sunday. Professional football leagues care a great deal about infringing on amateur collegiate football games; they care nothing about infringing on public church worship. Neither do their fans.

There is generally only one international high priest in modern sports: the world heavyweight boxing champion, and only if he becomes a celebrity.⁸⁵ He engages in an activity that is designed to inflict physical injury. A boxer is allowed by law to kill his opponent in the ring with his fists. The heavyweight champion is the boxer who is most physically capable of killing someone in the ring. Professional boxers in some states in the United States are required to register their fists as lethal weapons. Outside the ring, they are not allowed to inflict physical damage on others, i.e., *outside a sanctified boundary*.⁸⁶

There are other would-be claimants to quasi-priestly authority, but they are price competitive, and therefore they cannot be regarded as priestly.

In the opinion of modern man, a priest possesses far less authority than a political ruler does. The priest does not exercise comparable visible power, and modern humanism is overwhelmingly a power religion. The state is visibly the most powerful single institution in modern society. Because of this concentration of visible power, *the indispensable sacraments* for modern man are political, the most basic of which is the exercise of the franchise: to provide legitimacy to the state. The church, in contrast, has little visible power. The suggestion that an ecclesiastical priest could somehow commit a private sin that

84. This is not true of American baseball, which operates its own profit-seeking "farm" clubs to train its players. High school and college baseball is a minor sport, attended by few and rarely televised.

85. The most famous athlete on earth for over a decade (1963–80) was Muhammad Ali, in large part because he converted to a peculiar American variant of Islam, but also because on religious grounds he refused to register for the draft during the Vietnam War.

86. That this activity takes place in a circumscribed area—a ring—is indicative of its supposedly sacred character. Outside the sacred ring, the same activity would be illegal. A boundary rope transforms the common into the sacred. Biblically speaking, the ring possesses no sacred status; boxing to the death is a biblically illegal act. Boxing is the last remaining legal equivalent of the duel, and therefore a decidedly anti-Christian activity. On dueling, see North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 35:D.

might in some way bring those under his authority into danger, assuming this sin remains exclusively private, would be regarded as preposterous. It would not be a topic fit for serious public discussion.

K. The Authority of the People

The people as a collective unit exercised greater judicial authority in Mosaic Israel than the priesthood, who merely represented the people before God. It was the people who were derivatively sovereign under God, in both church and state, not their representatives. This should be obvious: *the judicial function of representatives is, after all, to represent*. The representative's judicial authority is based solely on his occupying a mid-way position between God and the covenanted assembly that he represents. *God therefore held the people of Israel corporately responsible for the official actions of the priests*.

This leads to an important covenantal conclusion: *it is the moral character of the people that determines the public character and historical fate of society*. The collective nation is represented in church and state by ordained individuals whose acts necessarily have covenantal consequences in history because of God's sanctions; nevertheless, it is the people who will receive the brunt of God's judgment, for it is they who possess greater authority under God.

If my thesis on the primary connection between priest and people is correct, then the fundamental political thrust of Old Testament covenant theology was toward *theocratic republicanism*: the political authority of formally covenanted citizens. In both church and state, *the locus of institutional authority in Old Covenant Israel flowed upward*: from the people to their legal representatives. The moral integrity of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was of greater importance for the survival of a biblically covenanted society than the political hierarchy's integrity was.

In church and state, those people who possess initiatory earthly authority—church members and citizens—are those who are under the formal jurisdiction of superiors who possess *derivative* authority: officers. The officers' authority is derived from above—God—but also from below, i.e., those who are under their oath-bound authority. Those people who are under the visible sanctions of these two covenantal institutions are those who are required by God to exercise institutional sanctions: positive and negative. Formal acts of covenant renewal periodically manifest this God-derived sanctioning authority of

the people.⁸⁷ This is why there are no acts of covenant renewal for the family: there are no formal sanctioning powers held by those who are under the authority of the head of the household.⁸⁸ Authority is delegated downward by God to the head of the household, not upward from his wife or children.

It is important to note at this point that this system of republican representation was not (and is not) true of the family. The father was (and still is) the source of initiatory authority in the family. The reason for the difference between family authority and authority in both church and state is that the household unit of parents and children is temporary: adult sons leave the household of the parents in order to set up their own households (Gen. 2:24). Prior to their departure, the children are not held by God to be legally responsible agents. Thus, the representative character of covenantal authority must flow from the father, as the head of the household, to minor children, who are not legally independent agents. Sons in Israel became legally independent at age 20, when they became subject to the draft, i.e., military numbering (Ex. 30:13–14).⁸⁹ Wives and those unmarried daughters who remained in their fathers' households did not obtain legal independence, as testified by the fact that their vows had to be sanctioned within 24 hours by the male head of the household in order to become legally binding before God; only widows could take a vow independently as heads of their household (Num. 30:9).⁹⁰

87. The negative sanction may be imposed by leaving the jurisdiction of the particular institutional authority. This is called "voting with your feet."

88. Minor children are not legally allowed to flee the jurisdiction of the head of the household. Civil governments are required to return runaway children to their parents unless the civil authorities can prove in civil court that the parents have broken the family covenant by child abuse, either moral or physical. On the other hand, adult children cannot legally be compelled to return to their parents' household. This is why the parent-authorized, forcible "de-programming" of adult cult members is biblically illegal; it is a form of kidnapping.

89. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 58.

90. I disagree strongly with John Frame's assertion that "state authority is essentially family authority, developed and extended somewhat by the demands of number and geography." Frame, "Theology of the State," *op. cit.*, p. 216. He made this family-state connection the basis of his call for Christian civil government, even going so far as to call this institution a "family-state" (p. 218). Such a position is incipient political patriarchalism, a denial that state and family are established by separate covenants.

The democratic state is marked by acts of covenant renewal, e.g., voting; what can be called political anointing. The family has no formal acts of covenant renewal. Those under the authority of the head of the household do not vote on the continuing authority of this God-designated agent. There is no institutional means for subordinates

L. The Authority of the Priest

The priest who committed an unintentional sin brought the covenanted nation of Israel under the threat of God's negative sanctions. He had to sacrifice a bullock to atone judicially for this sin. Similarly, if the people *as a covenanted nation* committed an unintentional sin, the priest had to sacrifice a bullock to atone for their sin. Because the people could not know of a priest's sin, he had to guard himself carefully. Their ignorance was no automatic safeguard to them, any more than the ignorance of the 36 victims of the first battle of Ai regarding Achan's sin safeguarded them (Josh. 7:5).

The atoning sacrifice was killed at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. This ritual barrier was a two-way barrier: keeping the polluting effects of the priest's sins contained inside the tabernacle until he could offer a sacrifice, and containing the pollution of the people's sin outside the tabernacle, so that God would not depart from the holy of holies. *The doorway was the place of judgment, just as it had been on the night of the first Passover.* It was the barrier against God's sanctions, just as it had been on the night of the first Passover.⁹¹ This threat of God's departure accentuated the importance of boundaries. These boundaries could not be violated with impunity.

The Mosaic Covenant's sacrificial system announced that the integrity of the priests and the people regarding unintentional sins was of greater consequence in relation to God's negative covenant sanctions than was the integrity of the civil authorities. It is incumbent upon theologians, whether liberal or fundamentalist, who assert that there is no comparable relationship in the New Covenant era, to prove their case from Scripture.

M. The Social Atomism of Christian Individualism

Wenham's comment on the purification offerings is typical of the modern Christian mindset: an implicit denial of God's sanctions against the community as a result of an individual's sins. Wenham individualized the New Testament meaning of the purification offerings. "For the NT writers it is the blood of Christ which cleanses from

in the family to bring lawful sanctions against the head of the household without an appeal to officers in either church or state, except in cases where their lives are immediately threatened.

91. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, Appendix F.

the defilement of sin. . . . Thus the cleansing from sin that was secured under the old covenant through the purification offering is effected under the new covenant by the death of Christ. Whereas in the Levitical laws it was the place of worship that was purified, under the new dispensation it is the worshipper himself."⁹² Wenham makes his position inescapably clear: the threat of God's negative sanctions today is aimed solely at the individual Christian.

Lev. 4 makes explicit that sin defiles the sanctuary: it makes it impossible for God to dwell among his people. Though Israel was still the chosen people, when it sinned it no longer enjoyed the benefits of God's presence (cf. Exod. 32; Lev. 10; Num. 14, etc.). In a similar way the Christian is warned not to "grieve the Spirit" (Eph. 4:30) by sin. God's presence is now mediated by the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer (Eph. 2:22); that is why Christ's death has to purify our "conscience" or "heart." There is the continued threat in the NT that sin can drive the Spirit from the believer just as under the law God could be driven from the tabernacle. The Christian is told to walk in the Spirit and be filled with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25; Eph. 5: 18).⁹³

There is no suggestion in his comments on this passage regarding the threat of corporate sanctions. He clearly did not believe that there is any such threat, despite Revelation 2 and 3. This is a shared assumption of modern Christianity and modern humanism.

The problem with this internalizing of the New Covenant's ethical concern is that it assumes that the national covenantalism of the Old Testament is no longer judicially binding or relevant. The national sanctions supposedly no longer apply. God does not threaten to depart from a nation, since He supposedly never establishes any unique *judicial presence* in a nation.⁹⁴ God apparently establishes covenants only with individuals.⁹⁵ This individualistic view of God's covenants is basic to the pietist-humanist alliance. This alliance asserts that there is no role for biblical law in the political order. There is supposedly no relationship between adherence to biblical law and national blessings.⁹⁶

Wenham rested his case for the New Testament's internalization

92. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 101.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.

94. See fundamentalist theologian Albert J. Dager, *Vengeance Is Ours: The Church In Dominion* (Redmond, Washington: Sword, 1990), pp. 205–34.

95. What about families? What about churches? Wenham does not raise either question.

96. For a detailed study of the intellectual foundations of this alliance, see North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*.

of ethical concern with a two-step argument: (1) in the Mosaic era, the polluting effects of sin were geographical rather than personal; (2) in the New Covenant era, the situation is reversed. He was incorrect on both points. First, in Old Covenant Israel, both the individual and the place of worship were polluted by sin, which is why God threatened to leave the sanctuary. This threat was made not merely because of the pollution effects of sin geographically; it was the pollution of individuals *within the geographical boundaries of His national covenant* (Deut. 8:19–20).⁹⁷ Both the individual and the place of worship were cleansed by the offering.

Second, on what New Testament basis can we say that this two-fold effect of sin and purification is not equally true today? Surely within the church the same effects of moral pollution continue, which is why God threatens negative sanctions. “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:14–16). This is the New Testament era’s equivalent of the land’s spewing-out process in the Mosaic Covenant: “Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out” (Lev. 20:22). The land was said figuratively to serve as God’s sanctioning agent.⁹⁸ “That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you” (Lev. 18:28). This warning regarding the previous inhabitants of the land was a variation of Deuteronomy 8:19–20: “And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.”⁹⁹ There was a close relationship between individual sins and corporate judgment: if the community did not collectively offer ritual atonement, God promised to act against the family, city, tribe, or nation as a whole.

It could be argued that this relationship between minister and

97. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

98. Chapter 10.

99. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

people holds only for the institutional church, but this line of argumentation refuses to deal with the question of national covenants under God, which are to be the result of the Great Commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19–20). Nations are to be baptized. They are to be brought formally and publicly under God's covenant sanctions.¹⁰⁰ The Great Commission is opposed to Christian individualism. It is also in direct opposition to the modern humanist concept of political pluralism.¹⁰¹

N. The Moral Atomism of the Enlightenment

We now come to the application of all this to the field of political economy. The following material is too important to consign to an appendix, yet it is complex. For those unfamiliar with Western political theory, it will be difficult. It will seem out of place in a chapter on the purification sacrifices. Nevertheless, what I have argued so far has been preparatory for this delayed exercise in applied theology. The biblical concept of corporate responsibility, imbedded in the purification sacrifices, has extensive implications for political theory, which in turn affect economic theory. Later in this commentary I will begin to draw out the positive implications of Leviticus for biblical political economy.

100 . Hal Lindsey, the "pop dispensationalist" author, clearly saw the threat to dispensational theology of this clear teaching of Scripture; therefore, he argued that the Greek word for *nations* means only *individuals*, not nations. "You don't disciple nations, you disciple individuals, so the Greek word translated *nations* should be understood in its most frequently used sense—*gentiles*." Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989), p. 49. He assumes—but does not attempt to prove and cannot possibly prove—that the use of the word "gentiles" throughout the Bible (including the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) means individual gentiles rather than covenantal nations of gentiles. I challenge any professionally trained theologian to defend such a view of the Greek word *ethnos*. The entry in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* states that "In most cases *ethnos* is used of men in the sense of a 'people.' Synon. are: *phulei* (people as a national unity of common descent), *laos* (people as a political unity with a common history and constitution) and *glossa* (people as a linguistic unity)." Entry for "*Ethnos* in the NT," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), II, p. 369. The same is true of the Septuagint's use of *ethnos*: *ibid.*, II, pp. 364–69. While Lindsey is an easy target, intellectually speaking, virtually all of modern fundamentalism and pietism implicitly assumes the truth of what Lindsey has written about the meaning of *ethnos*.

101. North, *Political Polytheism*.

1. Bible vs. Enlightenment

Before we get to these passages, however, we must recognize a crucial fact: *the Bible is at war with the Enlightenment*. For developing a systematically biblical political theory and biblical economics, a full understanding of this statement is crucial. The problem is, Protestantism, especially Anglo-American Protestantism, has been heavily influenced by the Enlightenment. What I call the right wing of the Enlightenment, also known as the Whig tradition, has been unhesitatingly absorbed into Protestant political theory, beginning in the late seventeenth century. Thus, very few Protestant evangelicals are aware of the degree that they have been compromised by the presuppositions of the Enlightenment. They have repeatedly used the formative ideas of the Enlightenment's right wing to challenge the Enlightenment's left wing. This dependence on the categories of the right wing has undermined their commitment to biblical judicial categories. This has weakened the case for Christianity. For example, Christians rarely understand that Darwinism is a product of the Enlightenment's right wing, not the left wing. The doctrine of evolution through natural selection is an extension into biology of the Scottish Enlightenment's concept of social evolution: society as the product of individual human action but not of human design.¹⁰² They do not understand the terms of surrender to the Enlightenment, terms which they have virtually all implicitly signed in their legal capacity as voters: the substitution of Enlightenment contractualism—agreement among equals—for biblical covenantalism, which is an agreement among men under God's authority, law, and sanctions.¹⁰³ It was this shift from covenantalism to contractualism that transformed New England Puritanism into Unitarianism, beginning in the late eighteenth century.¹⁰⁴

Western social philosophy for over three centuries has been a systematic attempt to replace a covenantal interpretation of all three institutional governments: church, state, and family. Yet this biblical model is inescapable; it is built into the creation (Gen. 1:26–28).¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, because Western civilization was self-consciously Christian

102. F. A. Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), ch. 6. Cf. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix B: "The Evolutionists' Defense of the Market."

103. North, *Political Polytheism*, Part 3.

104. Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History*, XX (1951), pp. 41–42, 49–55.

105. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, chaps. 3, 4.

until the late eighteenth century, its political theory has always been colored by the categories of Christian theology. Thus, in order to maintain intellectual continuity between the past and contemporary culture, the opponents of covenant theology have had to substitute a series of theoretical alternatives to the categories of the biblical covenant—sovereignty, hierarchy, law, sanctions, and continuity—but with autonomous man as the new source of political order.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, secularism outside of political philosophy made its initial appearance: in science,¹⁰⁶ ethics,¹⁰⁷ and economics.¹⁰⁸ (Machiavelli a century earlier had already performed this service for political philosophy.) The heart of this new worldview was its rejection of *teleology*. Teleology views whatever exists as the result of design. It sees the world as being pulled toward something. Modern humanist man asserts that the ultimate “something” toward which the world must not be moving is the day of final judgment. This anti-teleological outlook is comprehensive in its denial of final causation: not a trace of such causation can be admitted to exist anywhere in the universe prior to the advent of man.

2. Science Without Teleology

The new science of the West after Galileo systematically rejected both the medieval and classical Greek doctrines of final causation.¹⁰⁹ Scientific causation denied temporal “pull” and affirmed temporal “push” as the exclusive form of physical causation. Physicist Fred Wolf summarizes the Newtonian outlook: “For every effect, there had to be a known cause. For every cause, there had to be accountable effects. The future, therefore, became a consequence of the past. It seemed there was little anyone could do to alter the world. Even our thoughts were to be explained somehow by Newton’s machine.”¹¹⁰ All of modern science has been premised on this anti-teleological faith, but this did not become self-conscious in the biological sciences until Darwin’s

106. The Royal Society, created by charter by King Charles II in 1661, was the archetype.

107. Louis I. Bredvold, *The Brave New World of the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), ch. 2: “The New Promise of Science.”

108. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1963).

109. E. A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, [1931] 1954), pp. 98–104.

110. Fred Alan Wolf, *Taking the Quantum Leap* (New York: Harper & Row, [1981] 1989), p. 42.

Origin of Species (1859).¹¹¹

Science today “modestly” and agnostically affirms its procedures as being so narrowly circumscribed that the scientific disciplines are incapable of leading men to any legitimate conclusion regarding the inherently unscientific thesis that history is moving toward God’s final judgment. This is another way of saying that *God’s final sanctions are scientifically irrelevant*—unverifiable, transcendent, and transhistorical—because they are beyond measurement by scientific techniques of investigation. The scientific discussion of cosmic origins and eschatology (i.e., the Big Bang and the heat death of the universe) is conducted in terms of discussions of processes and rates of change that either exist today or else can be inferred by means of evidence interpreted in terms of today’s rates of change (i.e., uniformitarianism). This is how modern science attempts to transform the transhistorical and personal into the historical and impersonal. Modern scientists conclude that there can be no final causes in nature, only prior causes. This viewpoint regarding final causation has in fact defined modern science for over three centuries. Quantum physics has gone a step further, however: to begin to deny causation altogether.¹¹² God is not mocked!

This modern scientific model has greatly influenced Western historical thinking. Cause and effect in history are said to be exclusively historical: events in the past have alone made the present possible. Some event must happen in the present in order to make possible something specific in the future. Nothing happens in the future that makes the present possible, nor does any force in nature propel nature toward a predestined future. There can be no predestined future until such time as man is capable of predestinating it. Man subdues nature (including himself)¹¹³ in a supposedly contingent, chance-dominated universe that is somehow governed by scientifically absolute laws.¹¹⁴

3. Ethical Effects

This “push, not pull” view of causation has had a revolutionary

111. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

112. Norwood Russell Hanson, *Observation and Explanation: A Guide to the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 34–35.

113. That is, some men subdue others.

114. The dialecticism between chance and law is the essence of all nonbiblical thought. See Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960), pp. 36–52.

effect on ethics. Because the new science rejected the scientific legitimacy of final causation in nature, it also repudiated as scientifically useless any concept of a God who intervenes historically in the cosmos in terms of positive and negative sanctions based on ethical standards. Ethics is understood to be grounded on the doctrine of the autonomy (self-law) of man; therefore, science officially has nothing to say about ethics. Thus, the more authority that the scientific worldview has gained in men's thinking, the less that ethics has been said to be relevant to the affairs of man. *The denial of final causation was the cause; ethical relativism was the effect.* Wrote A. D. Lindsay in 1943: "The new sciences which came into being in the seventeenth century and have gone on growing in prestige ever since began with a repudiation of final causes. That repudiation is the denial of the authority of ethics in science. The new sciences were as energetic as the new politics in denying the supremacy of morality."¹¹⁵

The rejection of final causation and all ethical authority based on final causation was only part of the new science's paradigm. Lindsay continued: "The scientific revival of the seventeenth century not only repudiated final purposes. It revived atomism."¹¹⁶ This scientific atomism, with physics as the model, then reshaped political theory. "When men are regarded as objects of scientific inquiry so conceived, they are regarded as atomistic individuals, not as personalities. Society is regarded as analysable into a collection of independent, isolable, alike atoms."¹¹⁷ This is the humanistic philosophy of cosmic impersonalism. It leads to the adoption of the perverse definition of the individual that Arthur Koestler attributed to Communism in his novel on Stalin's purge trials of the late 1930s, *Darkness at Noon*: one million men, divided by one million.¹¹⁸

If carried to its logical conclusion, which few scientists have been willing to do in public, this seemingly neutral assertion regarding the nature of cause and effect denies the possibility of either personal responsibility or human freedom, except insofar as philosophy adopts dialecticism or irrationalism in place of strict materialistic causation when dealing with man and nature.¹¹⁹ The ethical implications of a de-

115. A. D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1943] 1959), p. 78.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

117. *Idem.*

118. Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 257.

119. Lindsey, pp. 42–46; cf. Sidney Hook (ed.), *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science* (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press,

terministic cosmology have not been universally perceived, but over the last three centuries there has been a steady erosion of confidence in the decision-making ability of individuals and a steady increase in the denial of personal responsibility.

O. The Enlightenment's Two Wings

The Western tradition of political and moral philosophy since the late seventeenth century has been divided between two rival wings: left-wing Enlightenment thought and right-wing Enlightenment thought. The second tradition is more self-consciously individualistic and contractual. The defenders of both Enlightenment traditions base their speculations on a hypothetical contract among men that created the political community in the past. The right-wing Enlightenment saw this compact as requiring voluntary acts of renewal from time to time, or at least implicit formal acceptance, in order to provide legitimacy to the civil order. Standard histories of modern political philosophy usually begin with either Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) or John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1690). The origin of this worldview is at least two centuries earlier: the humanism of the Renaissance. Nisbet's summary of Renaissance individualism goes right to the heart of the matter: the rejection of Christianity.

What the humanists did wish to serve, as their lives and writings make plain enough, were the power and wealth of the princes around them and a conception of religion that is highly subjective and individualistic. The individualism that is to be seen in the flamboyance, cultivated eccentricity, bravado, and diverse color of the Italian Renaissance can be seen in different but related form in the preoccupation with self and the innumerable states of consciousness of self. Rarely in history has there been an age comparable to the Renaissance—not only in Italy but in France and other parts of the West—in its dedication to the individual and the most individualistic types of thought and conduct. . . .

We must not overlook what is central here: the erosion of the

1958). In the twentieth century, more social scientists were willing to argue in this fashion. Behavioral psychologists were the most vocal examples. See the works of John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, especially Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971). For a libertarian, "free will" critique, see Tibor R. Machan, *The Pseudo-Science of B. F. Skinner* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1974). See also R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963), ch. 16: "J. B. Watson: Science and Utopia."

sense of religious community. It does not matter that the Renaissance may be associated in our minds with some of the most vital and creative qualities of mankind, not to mention literary and artistic works of boundless importance. We are concerned with the fate of the Christian community during this early-modern period. And we can hardly escape the conclusion that everything serving the interests of the secular and the subjective, no matter how brilliant and lasting in the history of Western culture, was bound to militate against that communal and corporate conception of Christianity born of Augustine which became the very cornerstone of medieval civilization.¹²⁰

Both Hobbes and Locke began their speculations with the assumption of the autonomy of the individual. Each author created a self-consciously hypothetical history¹²¹ in which autonomous men in a hypothetical state of nature met together and voluntarily transferred a portion of their authority to the king, as representative of the body politic. In this Enlightenment political tradition, *authority moves upward, from the citizen to the representative*. An individual in the pre-political state of nature was supposedly originally sovereign: possessing the autonomous power to establish the civil covenant. He voluntarily delegated political authority to those above him. Statecraft in this view is ultimately grounded in the sovereign will of individuals, who in turn maintain the political order through obedience to their representatives. These representatives do not in theory need to be elected, although ever since Locke, democratic theory has predominated in the West. The people are regarded as *sovereign*—possessing power to originate the civil covenant—and not just bearers of primary authority within the civil covenant.

Left-wing Enlightenment thought, which is self-consciously collectivist, is conventionally dated with the publication of Rousseau's *Social Contract* in 1762. Contrary to textbook accounts of the French Revolution, Rousseau and his now-famous book had very little influence in France or anywhere else during his lifetime and for at least two decades thereafter¹²². Rousseau, like Hobbes and Locke, began with a hy-

120. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers: Community and Conflict in Western Thought* (New York: Crowell, 1973), pp. 194–95.

121. On hypothetical history, see Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), ch. 4.

122. Only one reprint appeared after 1762: in 1791. Joan Macdonald examined 1,114 pamphlets published in 1789–91; she found only a dozen references to it. She concluded: "It is necessary to distinguish between the cult of Rousseau and the influ-

pothetical history that grounded politics in the acts of autonomous men. In his *Essay on Inequality* (1755), he stated clearly that all previous political philosophers had felt it necessary to offer a theory of the state of nature, yet not one of them, he insisted, had discovered it. Rousseau recognized the cause of their difficulty: the Genesis account of the origin of society. “[I]t is clear from the Holy Scriptures that the first man, having received his understanding and commandments immediately from God, was not himself in such a state; and that, if we give such credit to the writings of Moses as every Christian philosopher ought to give, we must deny that, even before the deluge, men were ever in the pure state of nature; . . .”¹²³ He then chose to ignore Moses by adding the classic foundational statement of the hermeneutics of hypothetical history: “Let us begin by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question.”¹²⁴ Western political man has been laying the Mosaic facts aside ever since.

Rousseau, in distinction from Locke, equated the general will of the post-“state of nature” society with the decisions of enlightened national rulers of a post-revolutionary era, not necessarily with a temporary political majority. Modern totalitarianism is an outworking of Rousseau’s theory of the general will: the collective, unified will of all men in society as it would be able to manifest itself if there were no intermediary institutions and loyalties between the citizen and the central political order.¹²⁵ If men were allowed institutionally to be the social atoms that they are in principle, Rousseau taught, their general will would manifest itself exactly as it does in the will of the rulers. Nisbet was correct: Rousseau “saw goodness in popular will only to the extent that it had become liberated from all possible influences of traditional society. For Rousseau, the general will could exist, and could be invariably right in its judgments, only when its wielders, the people, had become purged of all social and cultural influences stemming from family, local community, guild, church, or other social elements. It was in-

ence of his political thought.” Macdonald, *Rousseau and the French Revolution* (1965), cited in Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 7.

123. Jean Jacques Rousseau, “A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind” (1755), in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, ed. G. D. H. Cole, Everyman’s Library (New York: Dutton, [1913] 1966), p. 161.

124. *Idem*.

125. Robert A. Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1968), ch. 1: “Rousseau and Political Community.” Cf. Nisbet, *The Making of Modern Society* (Brighton, Sussex: Wheatsheaf, 1986), chaps. 5, 6.

deed this aspect of the matter that rendered Rousseau's doctrine of the general will the single most revolutionary doctrine in the history of political thought. Popular sovereignty was, as we observed, for Rousseau a means of permanent revolution in the social order."¹²⁶ Few ideas have been more productive of evil in the modern world.¹²⁷

P. Enlightenment Thought and Corporate Responsibility

It is easier for those in the left-wing Enlightenment tradition to acknowledge some concept of corporate responsibility than for those in the right wing. By adopting some version of Rousseau's general will as manifested in the decisions of the civil rulers, they have been able to equate civil government with the collective will of the people, meaning people bound together only in their capacity as citizens—the only legitimate form of corporate bonding in the view of the left-wing Enlightenment.¹²⁸ The decisions of the rulers are said to be in fact the decisions of the collective people.

Those in the right-wing Enlightenment political tradition have historically been more ready to deny the possibility of corporate responsibility, for such a concept seems to be at odds with the individualistic tradition. This was especially true of political philosophy prior to the transformation of political thought by the American Progressives in the late nineteenth-century. The Progressives adopted a form of Darwinism which offered as its ideal a centrally planned state run by scientists.¹²⁹ Atomism in right-wing Enlightenment thought allows for

126. Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, p. 400.

127. The doctrine of the collective, tradition-free will of the sovereign people has only begun to lose its appeal among Western intellectuals with the breakdown of the Communist economies in the late 1980s, and with the slaughter of the Chinese students by China's 27th Army in June of 1989, an event visible internationally by satellite.

128. Communist theory simply internationalized the French Revolution's concept of citizen: "Workers of the world, unite!" This internationalism had already been made explicit in the Masonic ideal of fraternity.

129. I refer here to the writings of Lester Frank Ward and the whole Progressive movement in the United States, 1890–1920. The earlier Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner was radically individualistic. See Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1955); Sidney Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General Welfare State: A Study of Conflict in American Thought, 1865–1901* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956); Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880s* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1950), ch. 10.

legitimate multiple bondings based on criteria other than political order as such. It therefore allows pluralism; indeed, it requires it.¹³⁰ Atomistic individuals must not be prohibited by the state from making contracts among themselves even if these contracts are not inherently political, although contracting individuals are necessarily under an overall political jurisdiction.¹³¹ Unless a contract explicitly says otherwise, contracts are regarded as enforceable by the state. So, even in the right-wing Enlightenment tradition—except for the anarchist tradition—politics remains the common bond among the various secondary bonds.¹³² *Political power is honored as the final court of appeal, the social order's ultimate sanctioning mechanism.*

Both wings of the Enlightenment therefore acknowledge some version of corporate responsibility. This responsibility is interpreted in terms of a worldview that assumes that the political universe is self-contained, meaning that mankind is politically autonomous. *Both wings see contractualism as the ultimate foundation of social order:* an original political contract (Hobbes and Rousseau), multiple economic contracts (Adam Smith), or implicit social contracts (Edmund Burke). In Enlightenment political theory, *contractualism replaced covenantalism*. The Enlightenment rejected biblical covenantalism's doctrine of responsibility: individual and corporate moral responsibility under a sovereign personal God who establishes fixed moral standards (boundaries) and who also brings sanctions in history—blessings and cursings—in terms of these standards.¹³³ In short, the Enlightenment rejected Moses, both as historian and law-giver. Modern evangelical Christian social theory rejects the continuing authority of Mosaic civil law. Evangelicals have adopted Enlightenment social theory, in effect baptizing it. This has been going on for three centuries.

Q. Adultery in High Places

Mosaic law specifies that unintentional sins of ecclesiastical officers can have consequences for the life of the collective nation. In contrast, the Renaissance-Enlightenment tradition denies the idea that

130. Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, pp. 418–29.

131. The left-wing Enlightenment model does not admit the existence of any zone of life that is not inherently political. Contracts are therefore political.

132. There are no legitimate secondary bonds in the left-wing Enlightenment model. To the extent that such bonds do exist in practice, they exist only at the discretion of the state.

133. Smith and Burke acknowledged that God will bring sanctions in eternity.

the exclusively private sins of rulers can have any visible effect on society in general. Of course, all branches of this tradition would freely acknowledge that there can be national repercussions if a ruler has a mistress who happens to be a spy or the carrier of a venereal disease. However, few, if any, would acknowledge that there will be corporate repercussions if a ruler has a disease-free secret mistress who is never discovered, or whose relationship with the ruler is suppressed by the press,¹³⁴ assuming that he is not paralyzed by sexual guilt (which modern rulers never seem to be). The discussion of the public effects of a representative's private immorality would be limited, in the Renaissance-Enlightenment tradition, to considerations of such things as psychology, politics, medicine, and the military.¹³⁵

The issue here is private intentional sins, not unintentional sins. If the public dismisses such obviously intentional sins as if they were the equivalent of unintentional minor infractions, God's corporate negative sanctions will come in history. Modern humanism's social ethics relegates private ethics, especially sexual ethics, to the realm of *adiaphora*: things irrelevant to the public good. The fornicators and adulterers who formulate social ethics prefer to dismiss such matters. The public has begun to think of sexual sins as irrelevant, i.e., of less concern than even unintentional sins. The old disdain for adultery attributed to the British upper classes has become nearly universal: "Do anything you wish in private, but don't disturb the horses."

Earlier in this chapter I wrote that "even a minor sin committed by a priest (though not the civil magistrate) threatened the whole community." A major private sin—a high-handed sin—by a civil ruler does threaten the whole community. The covenantal question is this: Does the community acknowledge the known sin as major, taking steps to place negative sanctions on the ruler, or at least pray that he depart from his wicked ways? If not, the community is threatened. It has treated a major sin by a civil ruler as if it were an unintentional sin by a

134. This was in the era before the Watergate affair (1972–74) declared "open season" for reporters on the other sorts of affairs by United States Presidents.

135. This tradition of dismissing sexual sins as the least important of all sins can be seen in Edward Gibbon's masterpiece of Enlightenment historiography, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–82). This study was a defense of the grandeur of that tyrannical empire. Gibbon argued that adultery committed by rulers, so long as it was a private affair, was no threat to the civil order. Effeminacy was dangerous only because it created softness in rulers—a potential military weakness. For citations, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome And the Triumph of the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 58–60.

priest. In fact, this is the very conclusion of rebellious clerics, who say nothing in public against the known sins of the ruler. The clerics thereby become the civil ruler's accomplices. God then applies negative corporate sanctions.

R. Transmission Belts

Combining half of the dualistic epistemology of Kant (the phenomenal realm only)¹³⁶ with the organizational theory of Lenin,¹³⁷ modern social thought assumes that there must be institutional transmission belts in order for the private sins of rulers to have social consequences. These transmission belts must in principle be traceable by means of systematic techniques of investigation. That is, if video recordings or other records of the particular chain of events were available to investigators, these investigators could explain the historical results in terms of specific historical records. God, of course, cannot be recorded. He is "outside the loop." The very concept of a "chain of events" is indicative of this humanist mindset.¹³⁸ Any aspect of the sinful life of a ruler that could not in theory be traced through such historical records is not regarded as historically relevant to society. Put another way, the only historically significant events are those that can conceivably leave historical records, even if actual participants do not leave them in particular situations.

In short, no modern discussion of politics would begin with the suggestion that there can be negative sanctions brought against the nation as a whole as a result of the private sins of national rulers, assuming that these sins have no physical, informational, or judicial connection to the society. To discuss such a possibility necessarily would involve the consideration of a *supernatural sanctioning agency* that is above and outside the society. This supernaturalism means that a covenantal organization's representative is responsible upward to God

136. Richard Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1916] 1956), ch. 4.

137. John P. Roche, *The History and Impact of Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory: "Useful Idiots," "Innocents' Clubs," and "Transmission Belts"* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1984).

138. This mindset is being challenged in our day by the rise of chaos theory, which asserts that even in the most rigorous of natural sciences, such cause-and-effect relationships are not completely knowable, even in principle. Causes and effects are no longer seen as part of an unbreakable chain. See James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987). Irrationalism is once again challenging the assertions of rationalism.

and not just downward to the people. Such discussions would be considered improper, not just intellectually but even aesthetically. They would involve a breach of social etiquette. The modern world has thoroughly internalized the Enlightenment's worldview. American church historian Sydney Ahlstrom announced this universal principle of interpretation: "Providence cannot be invoked as an explanatory principle. Supernatural sources of insight or knowledge can not be claimed; . . ." ¹³⁹

Modern social thought has nevertheless transferred judicial sovereignty to numerous representative agencies, just as the ancient world did and the medieval world did. *There is no escape from the covenantal doctrine of representation and hierarchy.* The primary difference between the modern world and the preceding worlds is the doctrine of the *autonomy of man*. Mankind is now regarded as independent of any personal forces in history other than those created by other men. Apart from mankind's own efforts, the only historically significant influences in man's environment supposedly are impersonal biological and environmental forces. This is modern man's doctrine of cosmic impersonalism. ¹⁴⁰

S. Sacramental Priesthood and Civil Congregation

The Old Covenant's system of sacrifices was based on man's need to atone for his sin. Adam broke his covenant with God. He violated his implicit oath of allegiance to God by disobeying the covenant's stipulations. Adam acted as a representative judicial agent for all mankind. Co-responsibility for Adam's sin is inherited from Adam; therefore, every person begins life at conception disinherited by God. Only adoption by God can overcome this automatic legal condition. The mark of adoption in the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision; in the New Covenant, it is baptism.

1. Corporate Sins, Corporate Sanctions

Adam's rebellion made mandatory a system of blood sacrifices in order to reconcile God and man. The fourth category of Israel's sacrifices, purification offerings, involved unintentional corporate sins,

139. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Problem of the History of Religion in America," *Church History*, XXXIX (1970), p. 233.

140. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012).

either representatively or collectively (assembly and congregation), and therefore the threat of negative corporate sanctions.

The Bible places primary institutional authority on those who are primarily threatened by God's negative sanctions in history. In civil government, primary authority is lodged in the *congregation*: the corporate, judicially sanctified people who publicly covenant under God (Ex. 19). The people delegate authority to civil officers. This is why the Bible establishes a theocratic republic as the ultimate model for civil government. Kings came later (I Sam. 8).

If we follow Kline and assume that God no longer imposes predictable corporate sanctions in history,¹⁴¹ then we will find it very difficult—I would say impossible—to identify authoritatively the God-ordained locus of primary authority in civil government: king, legislature, judges, or people. Such a view of God's historical sanctions—the triumph of *operational indeterminacy*—makes impossible the development of an exclusively biblical standard for Christian social theory,¹⁴² Christian economics, and Christian political theory. It is because God threatens predictable negative corporate sanctions in history that He delegates to individuals, churches, families and civil governments the judicial sovereignty to impose sanctions in his name, so as to avoid having to impose them more directly. On Kline's basis, it is not possible to identify who is at greatest risk of God's negative sanctions in history. Without a concept of God's predictable sanctions in history, it becomes impossible for Christians to use the Bible to correctly identify covenantal sovereignty and the loci of authority within this sovereignty. This is why Kline's doctrine of God's humanly indeterminate sanctions in history becomes the theological foundation for pluralism, both intellectual and political. It transforms the ideal of Christendom into a heresy.¹⁴³ Kline understood this; so do his published disciples.

While the Levitical sacrifices have been annulled (Heb. 9), the principle or representational authority revealed by the reparation offering has been in force since Adam's covenant. Through Adam death entered the world (Rom. 5:12). The obedience of the Pharaoh of Joseph's day brought God's corporate blessings on the Egyptians. Sim-

141. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

142. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, chaps. 7, 8.

143. Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>)

ilarly, the rebellion of the Pharaoh of the exodus brought God's corporate cursings on the Egyptians. While the Israelite sacrificial system has been annulled, the principle of corporate responsibility and representation has not been annulled. Such corporate responsibility was manifested by the law of the purification sacrifice, not inaugurated by it.

2. Priesthood and People

The required sacrifices of Leviticus 4 reveal a tighter judicial link between priest and people than between king and people. The priest sacrificed a bullock for his sin. A bullock also atoned for the sin of the congregation (vv. 14–15). Civil rulers and private citizens brought lesser sacrifices. The civil ruler brought a male goat (vv. 22–26). The individual brought a female goat or lamb (vv. 27–35). This indicates that the congregation was sacrificially closer to the priesthood than it was to the civil ruler. *The congregation possessed primary authority in civil government because the threat against them was great; hence, the more holy the required sacrificial animal.* The king operated by the authority delegated to him by the congregation (I Sam. 8). His required sacrificial animal was less holy—less associated with priestly sacrifice.

This tight covenantal relationship between sacramental priesthood and civil congregation still exists. God expects men to honor it. Nothing in the New Covenant has changed it. Without specific New Testament revelation to the contrary, there is judicial continuity from the Mosaic covenant to the New covenant: the Ten Commandments, the statutes, and their required civil sanctions. This is both the testimony and the offense of Christian Reconstruction. The New Testament's standard for civil government has to be the same as in Old Covenant law: *a theocratic republic*. The biblical concept of civil authority mandates republicanism: public consent by representatives of the nation to certain laws and forms of rulership (Ex. 19). A theocratic republic preceded kingship in Israel. Theocracy—i.e., rule by God—is established today through a biblically mandatory Trinitarian civil oath. The alternative is either another god's theocracy (e.g., Islamic nations and the State of Israel) or political polytheism, i.e., religious pluralism.¹⁴⁴ All liberals and most fundamentalists agree: political polytheism is morally mandatory for every nation. The fundamentalists except only the State of Israel. Orthodox Jewish Israelis agree with them, but most Jews do

144. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 7.

not.¹⁴⁵ The worldview of religious and political pluralism is governed by a self-conscious rejection of the ideal of Christendom.

The theocratic status of a civil government is also manifested by the presence of a priesthood. The congregation is a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6); so is the New Covenant church (I Peter 2:9). This broad Melchizedekan priesthood is represented before God in the church by a sacramental priesthood, one which is responsible for administering baptism and the Lord's Supper. The covenantal faithfulness of this sacramental priesthood—though not a sacrificing priesthood—is more important for the preservation of continuity and peace in society than the faithfulness of the politicians. (If God's blessings on society hinged primarily on the covenantal faithfulness of politicians, all would have been lost by Nimrod's day.)

3. *The Centrality of the Church*¹⁴⁶

Christians are required by God to affirm the social centrality of the church. This presupposition must govern Christian social theory. The New Covenant church is the fulfillment of the promise of God to establish a kingdom of priests. Peter wrote: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peter 2:9). In this sense, God regards the church as a nation. Jesus prophesied to the leaders of Israel: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Like the priests of Israel, the ordained priests of the new temple must protect the assembled saints by not committing unintentional sins. Similarly, the assembled saints must not commit unintentional sins, in order to protect the society around them.

I conclude: *what is central to biblical social order is the preservation of Bible-based judicial sanctions inside the church. The church is more important than the state.* A society's creeds are more important

145. Jacob Neusner (b. 1932) is a Jewish conservative and the author, translator, or editor of about 950 books. (<http://bit.ly/Neusner950>) (This is two books a month for 40 years.) He reminded his readers: "We cannot build a decent society on secular foundations. Islam knows that; Judaism knows that; why should Christians say any less?" Jacob Neusner, "Who's Afraid of the Religious Right?" *National Review* (Dec. 27, 1993), p. 37. Yet he, too, called for a political alliance among Christians, Jews, and Muslims: political pluralism.

146. Peter J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1993).

than its civil constitution.¹⁴⁷ The sacraments are more important than the franchise. The tithe is more important than taxes. This is why combined taxes should not equal the tithe (I Sam. 8:15, 17). Until the twentieth century, with its messianic humanistic state and its endless, power-centralizing wars,¹⁴⁸ taxes in the West were below 10% of net capital increases plus income. The evidence of God's civil judgments on the once-Trinitarian West is the historically unprecedented escalation of wars and taxes in the twentieth century. There are predictable sanctions in history. (You have a choice: believe Meredith Kline¹⁴⁹ or believe your tax bills.)

What goes on inside the church sets the standard for the world. If the church refuses to enforce biblical law, then the state will surely also refuse. If moral corruption is the standard in the church, then moral corruption will be the standard in the state. Why is there this sociological pre-eminence of the church? Because the *priest-people relationship* is far more vital for social order than the *civil ruler-people relationship*. God has established His institutional church as the primary ethical model, not the family or the state. Neither the family nor the state—the bringer of exclusively negative sanctions—enters the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth; the church does (Rev. 21). But whenever the church refuses to preach and enforce God's revealed law on its own members, the ethical and judicial standards of the political realm will become dominant in the church and family. This is the underlying motivation behind humanism's war against the authority of the church. This is why the state insists that the church does not possess an equal jurisdiction and therefore equal immunity from lawsuits. This is why the enemies of the church promote lawsuits against churches that excommunicate members for such public sins as adultery. (Another reason is income for lawyers.)¹⁵⁰ The humanists have a better grasp of the sociological implications of biblic-

147. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998). (<http://bit.ly/rjrfs0>)

148. Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robert Nisbet, *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), ch. 1; Jonathan Kwitny, *Endless Enemies: The Making of an Unfriendly World* (New York: Congdon & Weed, 1984).

149. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," p. 184.

150. J. Shelby Sharpe, "The Nuclear Attack on Christianity in America Has Begun in Earnest," *Chalcedon Report* (Nov. 1990), pp. 2–9.

al covenantalism than the Christians do.¹⁵¹

Conclusion

The purification offerings linked ordained rulers to God's covenant people. The representatives of the people in both church and state were bound to the people through the details of God's law. There are no unacknowledged private sins on the part of ordained rulers that do not threaten the safety of the holy commonwealth. The corporate implications of private sins were the reason why rulers had to offer public sacrifice for their unintentional private transgressions of God's law.

The institutional church in the Mosaic social order was basic to the survival of that order. The church was also crucial for the successful defense of liberty. The state possesses concentrated power; without the church's unique power of the gospel, the sacraments, and the threat of excommunication from the Lord's Supper, neither the family nor the institutional church can successfully resist the concentrated power of the modern state. Men's only reasonable hope in such a sanctions-free ecclesiastical world is in the collapse of the existing civil order because of its own incompetence—again, a kind of self-inflicted (autonomous) judgment: the bureaucratic suicide of the existing state.¹⁵² But the problem still remains for reconstruction during the post-collapse era: *By what standard?* Whose sanctions will be enforced, God's or self-proclaimed autonomous man's?

The political theorists of the Enlightenment's right wing, most notably John Locke, lodged ultimate sovereignty in the individual. The right wing of the Enlightenment was therefore morally atomistic. This is the legacy of the Whig tradition. This philosophical individualism has greatly influenced Protestantism, especially Anglo-American Protestantism. Protestants do not feel comfortable with doctrines of cor-

151. The leaders in Jerusalem felt compelled to set up a guard in front of Jesus' tomb in order to keep the disciples from stealing His body and claiming that He had risen from the dead (Matt. 27:62–66). Meanwhile, the disciples had scattered. The covenant-breakers understood the specifics of Jesus' prophecy; the disciples did not. This has been a continuing curse on the church from the beginning.

152. In Eastern (now Central) Europe in the final quarter of 1989, the collapse of Communist rule was in part an act of either treachery against Communism on the part of the ruler or else a highly risky deception of the West—Gorbachev, for whatever reasons, refused to send in the tanks—and in part the prayerful work of the national churches. In this revolt, the churches were recognized as the friends of the people, not the allies of the rulers and the targets of the revolution's rulers, as had been the case in the French and Russian revolutions.

porate responsibility. The biblical doctrine of the covenant, especially the civil covenant, disturbs them. But without comprehensive biblical covenantalism, the state is freed from the restraints of biblical law and biblical sanctions. The church is then left to create a tenuous alliance with the family against the state. But the state, with its promise of endless money for education, health, and retirement, eventually lures away the support of families until the state finally goes bankrupt. In nations where the churches are funded by taxation, the allegiance of the churches to God is also compromised. This is why we need a doctrine of the covenant, with God's law at the center, and the church as the primary counselor and therefore the primary institution. But this does not alter the primary locus of God-delegated authority in both church and state: the people, who are at greatest risk of God's historical sanctions. The purification offerings testified to this fact.

5

PROPORTIONAL PAYMENTS TO GOD

And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin. And if he be not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring for his trespass, which he hath committed, two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, unto the LORD; one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering (Lev. 5:6–7).

But if he be not able to bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, then he that sinned shall bring for his offering the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense thereon: for it is a sin offering. Then shall he bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it, even a memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: it is a sin offering (Lev. 5:11–12).

The theocentric principle that undergirds this law is God as a law-giver and a sanctions-bringer. The offering covers the sin of a previous boundary transgression.

A. Purification Offerings

This passage extends the law of purification offerings. This was a special form of purification offering that applied to a specific kind of sin: a *sin of omission* (vv. 2–4). A sin of omission is a hidden sin. God sees it and judges it. Wenham wrote: “When the man starts to see the curse coming true, he feels guilty and then brings his offering.”¹ A purification offering was required to purify the tabernacle or the temple, so that the worshipper could enter into the presence of God. A

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 100.

burnt offering was the means of reconciling God and man through the sinner's re-dedication.² In the case of the turtledoves, one was for the purification offering, while the other was for the burnt offering.³ Both the sinner and God's sanctified environment had to be cleansed.

Why was a female animal required? James Jordan argued that this was because "The animals represented Israelites in terms of their social or symbolic order." Laymen were regarded as the social brides of God, so their representative sacrifices had to be female.⁴ This was a sign of their subordination.

The law granted to the one bringing a sacrifice the right to make a substitution: a less expensive animal for a more expensive animal, or meal for the less expensive animal. The word of the individual regarding his ability to pay was acceptable to the priest unless there was evidence to the contrary. This means that *self-government under God* was the operational assumption of the laws of sacrifice. God delegated considerable authority to the individual to decide how much he could afford to pay, even in the case of a violation of God's law by the individual, although a minor violation.

To understand why this substitution was allowed by God, despite its low price to the sacrificer, we must first recognize the principle of proportional payment to God. This means that we must first understand the tithe, for it is through the tithe that God announces the principle of proportional payment. We shall then move from a discussion of the tithe to a discussion of civil taxation. Then we shall return to the economics of this sacrifice. This is a roundabout excursion, but it is necessary if we are to grasp the underlying coherence of God's mandated economy. Modern man violated this economy throughout the twentieth century, and even conservative theologians have accepted—sometimes quite enthusiastically—the legitimacy of some of these violations.

B. The Taxation of Capital

What is important for purposes of economic analysis is the fact that this sacrifice to God was proportional to the wealth of the trans-

2. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 100. Birds were not used as guilt (reparation) offerings; the second passage therefore must be dealing with purification: *ibid.*, p. 104.

4. James Jordan, "The Whole Burnt Sacrifice: Its Liturgy and Meaning," *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper*, No. 11, p. 2.

gressor. Milgrom called this a graduated purification offering.⁵ Because of the deliberately non-proportional nature of the modern income tax—those in higher income brackets pay a higher percentage of their income than those in lower brackets—the use of the term “graduated” is misleading. The required payment was proportional. This element of proportionality was analogous to God’s required system of ecclesiastical financing: the tithe. The tithe to God is a fixed percentage—10%—of a person’s net income from his labor or his net increase from investing. This percentage payment to the local church—and *only* to the local church⁶—was made under the Mosaic law on the basis of the increase that God gives to a rural land owner: “Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year” (Deut. 14:22).

There were cases in which God did require payment on gross income, irrespective of costs of production. One case was the firstfruits offering. Firstfruits was a tiny representative payment, small enough to be carried by a man who walked to Jerusalem. The cost of delivering this payment to the temple was vastly higher than the value of the firstfruits offering itself. Second, the poor were paid out of gross production when they gleaned. Third, a payment was required for the firstborn (Num. 18:15–17). Fourth, when the nation was numbered, all men over age 20 who were eligible to serve in the armed forces paid half a shekel to the priests (Ex. 30:12).⁷ But these were either very small payments or infrequent. The major ecclesiastical tax, the tithe, was paid out of net income. In the New Covenant, only the tithe remains as a mandatory payment, so God no longer taxes capital, except in the sense that the sabbath principle must still be honored: forfeited income one day in seven.

Let us consider the case of a modern farmer. When a farmer begins his career, he has a stock of “after-tithe” seed corn. From this point on, when he saves the *same quantity* of seed corn from a harvest

5. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 312.

6. The institutional church is a monopoly institution which alone can lawfully offer the sacraments and which alone collects the tithe on the basis of this sacramental monopoly. See Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58. Cf. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 3. ([http:// bit.ly/gntithing](http://bit.ly/gntithing)). See Appendix B, below.

7. For a summary of these payments, see Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services As They Were in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1874] 1983), p. 379.

and plants his next crop with it, there is no tithe required on the land's fruitful replacement of that original capital investment. Whatever quantity of seed and other inputs that it took to plant this season's crop is not subject to the tithe. So, if a farmer had to pay wages to his workers through the year, the tithe begins only after he has replaced the equivalent of the wages paid. God taxes only the increase on capital invested. Except for the previously listed payments, there was to be no taxation of gross income in Israel's economy; there should be none today.

This is true for the church's tithe; it is also true for the state.⁸ Both church and state must be supported by proportional levies based on income rather than property. A farmer who makes no income in a bad year, but is instead forced to consume capital and borrow, is not to face the threat of the confiscation of his inheritance by either church officers or tax collectors merely because he holds legal title to land and equipment. The same objection applies to a head tax or a poll (voting) tax.⁹ God's monopolistic ministries of church and state are to prosper economically only to the extent that their members do. God authorizes both church and state to tax success at a low, common, fixed rate, with the combined taxes of all branches of the state at less than the tithe (I Sam. 8:15, 17). Neither institution is authorized to tax the capital that makes success possible.

1. Off the Top

God is entitled a tithe on our net productivity. His share comes "off the top." But the modern state in many cases demands this initial payment, leaving the church with a tithe on whatever remains. This is wicked but common. In the United States, the taxpayer is allowed to deduct payments to charitable organizations before the United States government assesses an income tax on whatever remains. But this is not the case with the Social Security (old age pension) payroll tax, which is euphemistically called a contribution. The United States gov-

8. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 283.

9. God did not impose a head tax. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 58. In the fall of 1990, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of England was forced to resign from her position by her own political party. The Conservative Party had suffered a serious decline in popularity as a result of decision to add a kind of head tax to the existing property tax. (Had she not strongly opposed England's entry into the European Community, she might have retained her office.)

ernment collects its tax on total wage income—no deductions allowed. Most nations fail to grant tax deductions for donations.

The question arises: Does the Christian owe God a tithe on his pre-tax net income? He does if the state does not collect the tax first. But if the state collects the money “off the top” and does not allow the taxpayer to deduct his tithe payments from his gross income before estimating his income tax obligation, the answer is clear: the tithe is 10% of whatever remains after the tax collector has collected the state’s immorally extracted tax. The state has stolen from God: sacrilege. This is not the tithe-payer’s responsibility. He is a victim. If the tithe-payer had to pay a tithe on his pre-tax income, God would be taxing what the tithe-payer never received. This would constitute a tax on capital. Put another way, God does not tax us on that portion of our net crop that the locusts eat. Tax collectors are the economic equivalent of locusts.

On the other hand, if the state allows us to deduct our tithe payments before it computes our taxable income, we owe the tithe on our pre-tax income. God should always get paid first. If a man takes in a hundred ounces of gold a year, net, and he pays his tithe, the state should tax him on the remaining 90 ounces. If it collects a tax equal to the tithe—immoral (I Sam. 8:17)—it receives 9 ounces. An even more immoral state will collect 10 ounces, leaving the tithe-payer with 90 ounces of gold after taxes. He then pays 9 ounces to the church. In both examples, he retains 81 ounces. In the first example, the church collects 10 ounces and the state collects 9; in the second example, it is the reverse. The first example is closer to God’s standards than the second.

2. Sharecropping

We can understand this better if we think of the pre-twentieth-century agricultural practice of sharecropping. Land owners owned land and capital. (Capital is the product of land and labor over time).¹⁰ After slavery was abolished, they no longer owned people. Instead, they hired people.¹¹ Rather than paying them wages, land own-

10. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 5:4.

11. In the American South, 1865–80, sharecropping became a way of life for ex-slaves and ex-slave owners. It was a cost-effective system for a defeated post-war society with minimal financial capital. Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The economic consequences of emancipation* (New York: Cambridge Univer-

ers leased to sharecroppers tools and land. Owners concluded that it was less expensive to monitor economic results—a local crop—than it was to monitor the productivity of their employees' labor inputs to the production process, requiring them to specify a wage for these labor inputs.¹² What mattered to land owners was results, not labor inputs. They understood: "Activity is no substitute for production."

Hourly wages are based on the average productivity of a particular class of workers. An above-average producer in any given class is usually much better off to become a sharecropper, a piece-rate worker, or a commissioned salesman. He is paid in terms of his measurable net productivity, not in terms of his membership in a class of laborers. The lower the percentage of the crop owed contractually to the owner, the better this arrangement is for the efficient producer. To gain the services of such workers, owners are willing to take a lower percentage of the crop: a smaller percentage of a much larger pie.

God is the owner; covenant-keepers are His sharecroppers as household priests. He does not tax capital today for the same reason that the land owner does not tax his own land and tools. They are being used by the sharecroppers to produce a crop. The land owner collects a fixed percentage of the crop after the replacement of seed and tools. So does God. God demands a low percentage of our net output—10% to the church;¹³ less than 10% to the state (I Sam. 8:14–18)¹⁴—in order to encourage us to work efficiently. He does not have to monitor our inputs except for prohibiting our labor one day a week. He authorizes His agents, meaning ordained ministers (church and state), to monitor our net output and collect God's mandated share.

This system of taxation is appropriate to a decentralized economic order. It is consistent with God's system of representative government. God's kingdom, unlike Satan's, is not a top-down commonwealth. God delegates tremendous authority and responsibility to the individual. He treats us as sharecroppers: people who are responsible for final results, not bureaucratic wage-earners. This structure of ownership and

sity Press, 1977).

12. The cost of monitoring people's behavior is fundamental in the evolution of economic and political institutions. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 55–56, 65–66, 111–12, 215–26. See Sowell's index for more entries: "Monitoring."

13. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

14. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

taxation is why a Christian social order rewards economic growth rather than time-serving. God as the owner is paid in terms of our net productivity, not a fixed tax. We sharecroppers keep the lion's share of our crop: above 80% in a society that honors God's law. The twentieth century did not honor it. It suffered wars, taxation, inflation, regulation, and socialist impoverization as its appropriate reward. God is not mocked.

C. Costs of Ownership

What this means is that God has assigned the ownership of most property to individuals, families, business partnerships, and corporations. These *profit-seeking* economic agents act in God's behalf as stewards. Their God-assigned, market-driven task is to increase the productivity, and therefore the market value, of the property under their lawful management. This is the economic process of *adding value*. God allows men to retain 90% of the pre-tax increase that their efforts produce.¹⁵ He requires a tithe as a means of sustaining the work of His institutional church, but also as a token (representative) sacrifice to Him by His stewards: the public mark of their subordination to Him. As in the case of the first sacrifice listed in Leviticus, God must be paid first—men's public acknowledgment of His absolute sovereignty—but not paid very much: the sign of our inability to buy His favor with our own wealth.¹⁶ Paying the tithe is man's public denial of his own autonomy.

God's long-term economic goal is to use the tithe-financed expansion of His church to bring the whole earth under His public authority through the extension of private, tithe-paying ownership. He is *redeeming* (buying back) the earth *in history*. The extension of private, tithe-paying ownership is God's authorized *and required* means of enabling His people's reclaiming title to the land—land that was previously appropriated in history by Satan through Satan's successful cov-

15. A godly civil government does not impose income taxes on money given to charity. It taxes income only after tithe payments have been made to a church. But some civil governments are perverse. They tax gross income before the individual or the business gives away money. In such societies, men are not required to tithe on what the tax collector has already appropriated. If this were not the case, then God would be taxing capital. For example, if the state collects 100% of a person's income, for God to extract an additional 10% would involve the taxation of capital. God does not tax capital; He taxes only the increase. He does not tax what the "locusts" eat before the harvest.

16. Chapter 1.

enantal subordination of Adam and Eve.¹⁷ Each self-proclaimed sovereign master of the universe, God and Satan, exercises ownership representatively. Each claims ownership of the earth. Each establishes *ownership boundaries* that are to be defended by his covenantal subordinates.

1. Private Ownership

Why does God assign ownership primarily to profit-seeking private owners? Because it is *only* through the private ownership of the means of production, especially capital assets, that it becomes possible to count the costs of operation. Without private ownership, there cannot be competitive pricing. Without market-established prices, especially prices for capital goods, there cannot be rational accounting. All economic allocations made under socialist ownership are inherently irrational, a fact proven theoretically by Ludwig von Mises as early as 1920¹⁸ and revealed to the world publicly in 1989 with the public acknowledgment by Soviet Premier Gorbachev of the utter collapse of the Communist economies.¹⁹ Mises for decades was not believed by Western intellectuals, including economists.²⁰ They much preferred to believe the utopian promises of socialist dictators. They still generally

17. Amillennialists categorically deny that God's redemption of the earth will take place historically. This is the heart of their position. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), chaps. 4, 9. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>). In fact, they even say that Satan's subordinates will reclaim most of what pathetically little Christ has transferred to His people since His ascension. Nevertheless, amillennialists should be willing to acknowledge that this process of redeeming the earth is God's economic goal for His people, even if Christians fail to achieve it in history.

18. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920); in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1953), ch. 3; the essay was reprinted by the Mises Institute, Auburn, Alabama, in 1990. (<http://mises.org/econcalc.asp>) Cf. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1948] 1949), chaps 7–9. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>); T. J. B. Hoff, *Economic Calculation on the Socialist Society* (London: Hodge, 1949). (<http://bit.ly/HoffCalc>); Don Lavoie, *National Economic Planning: What Is Left?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1985).

19. I know of no equally monumental and rapid shift in public opinion, including academic opinion, in the history of Western thought. Virtually overnight—1988–89—Communism as an economic system lost its defenders except those with academic tenure in American universities. Only when the chief Soviet Communist admitted publicly that Communist economic planning had totally failed did the West's intellectuals at last accept the proposition that Communism does not work.

20. Oscar Lange and Fred M. Taylor, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, [1938] 1965).

refuse to acknowledge the accuracy of Mises' theoretical case.²¹ Robert Heilbroner, a socialist who made millions of dollars from his best-selling book on the great economists, did admit in 1990 that Mises had been correct after all, that his generation had been completely wrong on this point, and socialism as an ideal is dead unless it can come to power through the ecology movement, which he still hoped will happen.²² This admission came late and under extreme duress: the collapse of Soviet Communism. Mises was not mentioned once in Heilbroner's book, but there was room for chapters on the utopian socialists, on Karl Marx, and on Thorstein Veblen.²³ It was only when the tyrants who ruled the Communist slave state known as the Soviet Union publicly admitted the total economic failure of Soviet Communism²⁴ that Western intellectuals began to parrot these critical views, although without understanding the theoretical case behind the reality. Prior to this overnight shift in the Communist Party line, Western intellectuals had steadfastly defended both socialism and Communism as valid economic systems. This included the vast majority of academic economists.²⁵ Intellectuals are like sheep; they move in herds, with a

21. Mises was equally hostile to "middle of the road" socialism, which the intellectuals have yet to abandon. See Mises, "Middle-of-the-Road Policy Leads to Socialism," in Ludwig von Mises, *Planning for Freedom*, 3rd ed. (South Holland, Illinois, [1950] 1974. (<http://bit.ly/MisesPFF>))

22. Robert Heilbroner, "Reflections: After Communism," *New Yorker* (Sept. 10, 1990), pp. 92, 100. This is not an academic journal; it is a magazine aimed at intellectuals.

23. Robert Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953).

24. "Gorbachev Calls for a Strike Ban, Saying Economy Is Near Collapse," *New York Times* (Oct. 3, 1989).

25. The best example is Paul Samuelson, the first American to win the Nobel Prize in economics (1970). In the 13th edition of his best-selling textbook, published in 1989, he wrote: "The Soviet economy is proof that, contrary to what many skeptics had earlier believed, a socialist command economy can function and even thrive." Paul A. Samuelson and William D. Nordhaus, *Economics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), p. 837. Mark Skousen's study of the ten major American economics textbooks in the late 1980s reports that several of them "are surprisingly sympathetic toward Karl Marx, the ideological founder of modern socialism." Mark Skousen, *Economics on Trial: Lies, Myths, and Realities* (Homewood, Illinois: Business One Irwin, 1991), p. 208. He said also that "Most of the top 10 textbook writers accept the conventional view that the Soviet Union and other countries with command economies have achieved a highly developed stage based on accepted GNP statistics." *Ibid.*, p. 213. Textbooks rapidly become almost worthless because publishers require authors to update them every three years to destroy competition from used textbooks, which are rarely kept by students after final exams. But late-1980s economics textbooks may become collector items, for they document the incomparable foolishness of their authors regarding so-

handful of skilled sheep dogs keeping them moving. From time to time these sheep get sheared by reality; in totalitarian societies, they get slaughtered by tyrants.

To be successful in a free market, resource owners must steadily increase the economic value of their assets' *customer-satisfying* output. They must also keep down the costs of operation. This forces owners to *count the cost* of their actions—a biblical injunction (Luke 14:28–30).²⁶ Through private ownership of the means of production, those who make mistakes in allocating producer goods to meet expected consumer demand are the people who bear the cost of their own actions. The dominion covenant is therefore accomplished progressively over time through this process of *profit-driven economic growth*. Through private ownership of the means of production, more and more of this world's abundant resources are brought under the control of mankind.²⁷ Entrepreneurs continually seek out ways to satisfy consumer demand without proportionately increasing the consumption of capital and therefore the proportionate destruction of capital value. The whole world becomes a potential capital asset. By discovering new ways to satisfy buyers, producers raise the value of God's creation. This is exactly what God requires from His stewards (Matt. 25:14–30).²⁸ Again, this is the process known as *value-added production*. Man's efforts add value to the resources that God has provided for him. It is human creativity, therefore, not raw materials, that is the creation's most important scarce resource.²⁹ But this is derived by God's grace (Deut. 8:16–18). Economic growth is the dominion covenant in action, the fulfilling of Adam's original task to dress the garden and guard it.

2. *Voluntarism vs. Compulsion*

For the church or the state to interfere with this value-adding expansionist economic program by confiscating privately owned capital—as distinguished from taxing the net economic fruits of capital at low rates—is to interfere with the God-assigned task of dominion.

cialism and Communism.

26. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

27. Julian L. Simon and Herman Kahn (eds.), *The Resourceful Earth: A Response Global 2000* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

28. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49:M.

29. Julian L. Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Neither the church nor the state is a profit-seeking institution; both are God-ordained monopolies that are supposed to be financed by a fixed percentage of the net economic increase that God gives to His people, i.e., the principle of the tithe.

The tithe principle's restriction—no consumption of existing capital—applies only to compulsory wealth transfers. To consume voluntarily one's existing capital assets at any rate above zero is to reduce future economic growth; it is to consume one's tools of dominion. It is legal in God's eyes to do this, but it does impose costs: reduced opportunities to increase future wealth through profitable investing. The owner-consumer will pay the price in the forfeited future income that the capital might have produced. There is therefore an element of *negative feedback* in this private property system. The present beneficiary knows that he or his heirs risk suffering a reduced level of future income if he consumes capital today. He has an incentive to refrain from consuming his capital base.

To consume other people's capital assets by moral or legal compulsion is also to impede the fulfillment of the dominion covenant. Worse, it encourages private owners to consume them before the tax collectors arrive.³⁰ The threat of confiscation changes the private owner's view of the future, including his personal responsibility for the future. The taxation of capital transfers assets from those agents who are production-oriented to political institutions that are inherently present-oriented and consumption-oriented, and which, because they are monopolies, are insulated from the free market pressures of consumer choice. Those people who act as capital confiscators are immediately enriched; they increase their control over scarce economic resources. Those who are God's assigned stewards of capital suffer immediate economic losses—the reduction of their present wealth—as well as any forfeited future productivity that the confiscated capital might have provided, if it had been put to consumer-satisfying uses. Those who bear the costs—capital owners—are not those who benefit from the wealth transfer. Thus, there is very little visible negative economic feedback on the state's consumption of capital. There is only political negative feedback.

Any monopolistic institution that compels the transfer of capital is a seed-corn-eating institution. It is inherently present-oriented. It is a

30. This is what happened in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s during Stalin's forced collectivization of agriculture. Peasants slaughtered their animals and ate them rather than turn them over to the new collective farms and state farms.

lower-class institution.³¹ It is an institution that fosters a short-run view of time and human decision-making (high time preference, high interest rates) rather than a long-run view of time and decision-making (low time preference, low interest rates).³²

D. The Ability to Pay

All sin is an affront to God. The rich man's sin as well as the poor man's sin enrages God. But there is this distinction: the rich man has sinned in the face of greater blessings from God. He therefore owes more to God than the poor man does in absolute terms. Making restitution to God is supposed to hurt, but one man's economic pain is another man's economic destruction. Thus, sinners are to make restitution to God in terms of the proportional benefits they expected to gain from their sin.

1. *Wealth and Responsibility*

A fundamental biblical principle is invoked at this point: *from him to whom much is given, much is expected*. The context of this rule is the imposition of God's eternal sanctions.

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:42–48).³³

31. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), ch. 3.

32. T. Alexander Smith, *Time and Public Policy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), chaps. 4–6.

33. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

If this system of proportional sanctions is true throughout eternity, then it surely must be true in terms of the restitution payments in history owed to God by men. Marx's principle of expectation and economic remuneration is therefore wrong: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"³⁴ The first half of the statement is correct; the second half is true only in the case of the physically or mentally incompetent, or those who in the England were for centuries called "the deserving poor."³⁵ The general rule is this: "To each according to market value of his *actual production*." We know this from the parable: "And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath" (Luke 12:42–44).

2. Misused Slogans

The slogan, "the ability to pay," throughout the twentieth century was used by politicians to justify taxation policies that extract widely differing percentages of men's income as taxes. Sales taxes, "sin" taxes (cigarettes and liquor), luxury taxes, and property taxes were imposed by means of a fixed percentage of the sales price or estimated value. Income, in contrast, is taxed at varying rates the rates escalate as the income level rises.³⁶ The graduated or "progressive" income tax is not a proportional system of taxation but rather a system of *disproportional* taxation. "Paying one's fair share" is a slogan used mainly by those policy-makers who plan to use state coercion to see to it that they themselves—or at least their political constituents³⁷—pay a lower per-

34. Karl Marx, *The Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875); in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), III, p. 19. Marx stole this phrase from Morelly's *Code de la Nature* (1755–60).

35. Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain, 1700–1914* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 26.

36. This also applies to "death duties," meaning inheritance taxes.

37. A rich politician may very well promote a high progressive income tax if he has his money invested in nontaxable wealth, or if he derives more pleasure from being re-elected by envious voters than from spending his income. This is why the very rich are so often socialists or dedicated Keynesians their wealth is in real estate, trusts, or tax-exempt bonds, and they have so much money already—especially inherited wealth—that they find it more gratifying to wield political power than to retain another million in after-tax income. Show me a multi-millionaire who inherited all of his money from Daddy or Grandpa, and I will show you a politician dangerous to both political and economic freedom.

centage of their income to the state than others do, especially their main political opponents. The word *fair* is never defined. The politicians and their ideological apologists appeal to the envy of those who believe they are poorer. Envy justifies the extraction of a higher proportion of income from those they perceive as richer.³⁸ This policy is a consistent application of the socialist's version of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The ludicrousness of such a view—that a graduated income tax is consistent with the biblical principle of the ability to pay—can be seen in the recommendation of Protestant liberation theologian Ronald Sider. Sider called for a *graduated tithe*. But the biblical tithe is 10%. The term "graduated tithe" leads to both terminological and conceptual confusion between the mandatory tithe, which is owed to the institutional church, and voluntary offerings above the tithe. His recommended system is this: the more income a person makes, the higher the incremental percentage of his giving should be. But, he hastens to add, "Obviously it is not the only useful model. Certainly it is not a biblical norm to be prescribed legalistically for others."³⁹ So, what Sider recommended is not really a tithe; it is a recommended but not compulsory system of offerings.

There is a hidden problem here, however. Sider repeatedly called on the church to become the model for the world.⁴⁰ This means the political world. But the political world is governed by compulsory taxation, not by the church's system of morally mandatory tithes and voluntary offerings, let alone the "give whatever the Spirit leads" system of antinomian giving.⁴¹ When, in our 1981 debate, I challenged Sider twice to name the percentage of one's income above which the state cannot morally extract, he twice refused to suggest a figure.⁴² The an-

38. Gary North, "The Politics of the Fair Share," *The Freeman* (Nov. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/gnfairshare>)

39. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 175. Sider abandoned this concept in the twentieth-year anniversary version of this book. Cf. Gary North, "The Economic Re-Education of Ronald J. Sider," Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, [1999] 2012), Appendix F.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 111, 170.

41. If you give under 10% to your local church, you are breaking God's law. On the other hand, if you do not know what God's maximum *required* percentage is, you may feel guilty when giving 30%.

42. This debate took place at Gordon-Conwell School of Theology. Audiotape cassettes of this debate are available from Covenant Media Foundation: www.cmfnow.com.

swer, Samuel tells us, is something under 10%, i.e., the tithe; anything as high as the tithe is political tyranny (I Sam. 8:15, 17). Even this level of taxation would drastically shrink the modern state,⁴³ but men like Sider have no intention of shrinking the modern state. On the contrary, their demands for social justice can be met only by a vast expansion of the state and taxes.⁴⁴ Sider's views shifted dramatically in his 1997 edition, half a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He became more moderate and guarded in his critique of capitalism. He even adopted some of Chilton's arguments. But nowhere in the book is any reference to *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*. He blacked out Chilton.

E. Discontinuities of Sacrifice

When men were required by God to sacrifice animals as substitutes, the priests faced a problem: How were the required restitution payments to correspond with the sinner's ability to pay? When the tithe was owed, this payment could be estimated easily: so many pieces of silver or so many units of grain. It could also be done in terms of so many animals. "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD. He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it and if he change it at all, then both it and the change thereof shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed" (Lev. 27:32–33). The animals would be lined up randomly and passed under a rod; every tenth animal was culled out of the flock to be given to the Lord. If a man saw that a favorite animal was lost to this procedure, he could redeem it by paying its market value plus 20% (Lev. 27:31). If he in any way tampered with the lining-up process, he could not subsequently redeem the animal. Thus, God created risks for tampering with the flock; if the herdsman miscalculated in his prohibited calculations, he could lose a cherished animal.⁴⁵

The animal sacrifice system created a problem that did not exist to the same degree in the case of the tithe. A tithe was proportional to net

43. The average rate of overall taxation in most modern nations is about 40% from 33% in the U. S. to 50% in Sweden. Joseph A. Pechman (ed.), *Comparative Tax Systems Europe, Canada, and Japan* (Arlington, Virginia: Tax Analysts, 1987), p. 1.

44. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas Institute for Christian Economics, [1986] 1990). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>)

45. Chapter 38.

increase. A net increase could be measured or at least estimated fairly well. But offering an animal sacrifice was not the same as paying God a fixed proportion of net income. A specific kind of sin required a specific sacrifice. The nature of the sin determined the nature of the sacrifice. Then how could God maintain the principle of *proportional pain*? Had the sacrifice been a specified amount of money, either the rich man would have paid too little proportional to his economic benefits in life or the poor man would have paid too much. The penalty would not have been proportional.

There is no way to sacrifice one-third of an animal without killing it. This is the problem of *sacrificial discontinuity*. Thus, proportional restitution to God is not possible in a world that requires a single type of animal sacrifice. If killing a lamb or goat is the only legitimate way to placate God, then both the rich man and the poor man have to pay it. But this would violate the biblical principle of greater responsibility on the part of those possessing greater wealth.

The problem of sacrificial discontinuity is reflected in the specified sacrificial animals in Leviticus 5: lambs or goats, a pair of birds,⁴⁶ or fine flour and oil. The payment for sin to God (as distinguished from an earthly victim) was not to be made in terms of money, except by someone who was willing to pay an extra 20% to buy back (redeem) the animal. The wealth (capital) of the sinner was to determine which animal he was to sacrifice, or even if he was to sacrifice an animal. The poor man could legitimately sacrifice fine flour and still meet the judicial requirement, but the sacrifice had to impose pain on the sinner. The sacrifice was to reflect or represent the intensity of the negative sanction he was avoiding, on earth and in eternity.

F. Rich Man, Average Man, Poor Man

The tripartite division that we commonly make in class analysis—upper, middle, and lower—is reflected in this passage. The idea that each wealth group was bound by differing ritual obligations pointed to the biblical principle of *present obligations* in terms of *prior benefits*. If the rich man imagined that he could escape God's condemnation by the payment of a trifle, he did not understand God's analysis of the nature of the specific infraction. The earthly restitution payment to God was to be a token of the required eternal payment, what Paul

46. One for a purification offering and the other for a burnt offering: Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 100.

called an *earnest* (Eph. 1:14), meaning a down payment. God promises to inflict great pain for sin in eternity; the pain endured by sinners in history is to reflect this coming pain. The sanctions of Israel's sacrificial system were designed to teach this lesson before it was too late for repentance.

On the other hand, had the poor man been expected to pay a rich man's obligation, he would have lost sight of the reality of differing sins: any sin would bankrupt him. Such a restitution system would economically subsidize the worst sins by poor people. Why not commit really serious infractions if the end result in history is the same for great and minor infractions, i.e., bankruptcy and enslavement? To impose an impossibly high penalty on all crimes or sins is to make it equally expensive to commit all crimes or all sins. Man being what he is—totally depraved apart from God's grace—this system of sanctions would be a subsidy to his depraved nature. It would be comparable to imposing the death penalty for murdering a policeman and also for stealing a bicycle. It would result in extreme danger for any policeman attempting to arrest a bicycle thief. The thief would know that killing the policeman would not result in any greater earthly penalty. This assessment of comparative risk would eventually lead to very high expenses for the arrest of suspected bicycle thieves. Squads of police would have to be allocated to the arrest every suspected bicycle thief. Meanwhile, someone calling the police department's emergency phone number in order to stop a murder might find that there were very few police left to respond; too many of them would be assigned to arresting some armed and dangerous bicycle thief.

G. Interpersonal Comparisons of Subjective Utility

My interpretation of this law returns to an issue raised by economist A. C. Pigou in the early years of the twentieth century. In his book, *The Economics of Welfare* (1912), Pigou offered a scientific justification of the graduated income tax. He argued that one additional monetary unit of income for a rich man meant little to him compared to what that same monetary unit of income would mean to a very poor man. Therefore, a net increase in aggregate social utility could be attained by taxing the income of rich men at rates higher than those imposed on poor men. This argument has persuaded many economists. But in 1932, Lionel Robbins challenged it in his book, *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science*. He insisted that we cannot, as scientists,

make interpersonal comparisons of other men's subjective utility. Scientifically, no one can say what value a rich man places on an additional unit of income compared to a poor man's valuation. There is no common scale of psychic valuation. Scientifically, he was correct. No economist has ever refuted this objection.

I have surveyed this theoretical problem elsewhere.⁴⁷ We are not dealing here with scientific economic policy. We are dealing with a law established by an omniscient God who is fully capable of making interpersonal comparisons of every person's subjective utility. Second, the right to substitute a less expensive animal applied only to the purification offering. The principle of the tithe is simple to state: a fixed percentage paid by all income recipients. Proportional payment—the judicial principle of the tithe—also underlies this sacrifice. But one animal, unlike grain or money income, cannot be precisely divided proportionately without killing it. Nevertheless, this law does honor the proportional principle. Thus, it would be analytically perverse to use the law governing this sacrifice to defend a graduated income tax.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches the principle of proportional tithing and proportional restitution to God. The problem with animal sacrifices in the Old Covenant was that they could not be precisely proportional: men cannot slay just half an animal. Thus, God imposed a system of different sacrifices for people of varying wealth.

The priests collected the sacrifices, and they could lawfully use them personally: "And the priest shall make an atonement for him as touching his sin that he hath sinned in one of these, and it shall be forgiven him: and the remnant shall be the priest's, as a meat offering" (Lev. 5:13). But these sacrifices were not part of a predictable stream of income. These payments were the result of specific sins. These penalties were not based on income but on the sinner's total wealth; they were specific restitution payments. They were the economic equivalent of sin taxes—*literal* sin taxes to God through His church. This system enabled men to reduce these sin taxes by sinning less frequently.

The market value of these sacrifices was limited by the wealth of the sinner. This was to make certain that every sinner felt the appro-

47. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix J:E–F; North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 50.

priate pain of economic loss; it would remind him of the eternal loss to come. There were “different strokes for different folks” only to make sure that all the folks felt an appropriate degree of economic pain. Had the sacrificial system been strictly a system of fines, the proportionality of the sanctions would have been easy to maintain. Because a living animal is not divisible on the same basis as monetary fines, God established a system of differing sacrifices for the same transgression, so that all transgressors were to feel a similar psychological burden for their transgressions irrespective of their net worth.

6

SACRED, PROFANE, AND COMMON

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the LORD; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering: And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him. And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist it not [unaware], yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him. It is a trespass offering: he hath certainly trespassed against the LORD (Lev. 5:14–19).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is that there are varying degrees of sin in trespassing God's boundaries. This law governs the transgression of a sacred boundary, which profanes sacred space.

A. A Trespass Offering

Some sins are committed in ignorance. The two greatest sins in history were committed by some of the participants in ignorance: the Fall of man—Eve was ignorant (I Tim. 2:13b)—and the crucifixion of Christ: the Roman soldiers were ignorant (Luke 23:34). Nevertheless, ignorance is no defense. Reparation for transgression is still necessary.

This is the fifth sacrifice: a guilt (reparation) offering.¹ As the fifth

1. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 319.

offering, it was associated with point five of the biblical covenant model: succession or inheritance. It had to do with *continuity*. To be restored to the legal status that he had enjoyed before the transgression, the trespasser had to offer a sacrifice. The transgression had been individual. The judicial implication of the passage is this: the sanctions God would apply to the transgressor would be personal, not corporate. His sin was not representational. He had transgressed a holy thing or a holy commandment. Thus, the appropriate institutional sanction was ecclesiastical: excommunication. This would cause him to lose his inheritance in Israel: his land, but more important, his citizenship.² To continue as a free man in Israel—to leave an inheritance to his children—he had to offer a sacrifice.

A 20% penalty was applied to a transgression of a holy thing. Not so with a transgression of one of God's commandments. Here is the theological question: Why the difference?

The King James translators translated the Hebrew word *'asham* as *trespass*. The English word "trespass" is readily associated with a boundary violation, as in "No Trespassing." The New American Standard Bible translates *'asham* as *guilt*. So did the medieval Jewish commentator Nachmanides.³ Grammatically, this is the more precise translation. What is described here is a guilt offering. A person in ignorance commits a transgression of God's law, later recognizes this infraction, and then offers sacrifice to pay for his transgression. He recognizes his own guilt, and he then offers a sacrifice as his acknowledgment. Nevertheless, the King James Version comes closer to the theological meaning of the type of transgression involved: a trespass—a boundary violation—in the same sense that Adam's sin involved a transgression of the judicial boundary which God had placed around the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve were indeed guilty, but their guilt was based on a literal trespass.

Adam's trespass remains the archetype of all sin. Eve's transgression, however, was closer to the sin covered by this passage: one committed in ignorance. Paul wrote: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (I Tim. 2: 14). Representatively, she was under Adam's jurisdiction, so she came under Adam's more comprehensive judgment: death. But God distinguished between the two degrees of sin, so He imposed separate sanctions.

2. Chapter 31.

3. Ramban [Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman], *Commentary on the Torah: Leviticus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1974), p. 55.

Eve's punishment was pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16): an occasional event. Adam's punishment was to sweat daily as he worked to subdue a world now filled with resisting thorns and weeds (Gen. 3:17–19).⁴ Mankind as a species is defined by the work of dominion (Gen. 1:26–28), but the male's labor is more closely associated with this task; the woman's is more closely associated with assisting her husband and extending the human race.⁵ She comes under the general curse primarily through her judicially subordinate position.

B. Holy Things and Holy Commandments

This passage rests on a distinction between holy things of the Lord and holy commandments. A transgression of *holy things* in ignorance required a 20% penalty plus the offering of a ram (vv. 15–16). In contrast, a transgression of *a commandment* in ignorance required only the sacrifice of the animal (v. 18). This seemingly minor distinction becomes the basis of the analysis of the present long and highly detailed chapter—specifically, acknowledging the biblical distinction between the sacred and the common, but denying the legitimacy of a far more widely accepted distinction: *sacred vs. profane*. As we shall see, one of

4. The technological progress of man in history has begun to overcome God's curses. Air conditioning is one such example. Today, air conditioning in most of the industrial world has overcome the literal application of this negative sanction. (The cultural substitute has been stress, a kind of internalized sweating.) This progress can be seen as a blessing: greater rewards in response to progressive obedience to the external principles of responsible private ownership and the social and intellectual division of labor. It can also be seen as a prelude to widespread cursing following a collapse of the social division of labor as a result of war, terrorism, or mass inflation.

5. Judicially, the New Testament's sanction of baptism has broken down the middle wall of partition between male and female. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27–28). Thus, Paul wrote immediately following his discussion of Eve's transgression, "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (I Tim. 2:15). The progressive removal of Eve's Genesis sanction indicates that under the New Covenant, women will progressively work more closely with men in the broader tasks of dominion, thereby breaking down the occupational division of labor. We find that as the division of labor has been extended since the Industrial Revolution of the 1780s, women have found employment in salary-earning occupations—tasks other than household services—although they still tend to fill those jobs that are traditionally male-support jobs. There are very few male secretaries, especially serving female executives. Women still leave the work force to rear children in greater numbers than men do. Felice N. Schwartz, *Breaking With Tradition: Women and Work, The New Facts of Life* (New York: Warner, 1992), ch. 3.

the most serious errors that has resulted from a misunderstanding of the biblical categories of sacred, common, and profane is the false distinction between what is sometimes called full-time Christian service and secular employment. Full-time Christian service is regarded as sacred; secular employment is seen as common when not actually profane. This theological confusion has led to the retreat of Christians from leadership in the arts, industry, and most other fields. I consider this subject in greater detail later in this chapter.

Protestant Christians have generally been far more concerned about violations of God's ethical commands than His ritual boundaries. They rarely concern themselves with the crime of sacrilege, which was the ultimate sin of Adam.⁶ Part of their lack of concern is legitimate: the sacred spaces of the Mosaic covenant ended definitively with the death of Jesus and finally with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But part of their lack of concern is illegitimate, such as their denial of any national covenant in the New Covenant era and their downplaying (or outright denial) of the judicial aspect of the sacraments.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, however, things were very different. An inadvertent violation of God's commands was settled by paying the victim whatever he had lost as a result of the transgression. The ethical transgression covered by this law must have been a transgression of one of God's verbal boundaries; no human victim is identified here. God did not impose a 20% payment in addition to the sacrifice of a ram for the violation of a commandment (Lev. 5:17–18). But when someone violated a sacred space or sacred object, he violated God's word (the law) as well as the actual thing or space (Lev. 5:15–16). *The transgression was a double boundary violation: word and place.* The penalty was therefore greater.

C. Sacred Boundaries

There is so much confusion over the relationship between the sacred and the common that interpreters have tended to misrepresent the relationship. *They have confused the common with the profane.* This false interpretation has undermined Christian social and ethical theory whenever it has appeared. It makes the common appear as if it were a realm "naturally" opposed to grace and ultimately beyond grace—legitimately so in history. *This places a boundary around grace.* The interpreters have not understood that every created thing begins as com-

6. Chapter 4:C.

mon and remains common unless judicially sanctified: actively set apart by God or His law. Nothing begins as profane; it must *become* profane, just as something becomes sanctified. This may seem like a minor point, but it is not, as we shall see.

The sacred here refers to the sacramental, i.e., having to do with the twin covenantal signs of ecclesiastical subordination: in the Mosaic Covenant, circumcision and Passover; in the New Covenant, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The word *sacrament* comes from the Latin word *sacramentum*, a military oath of enlistment.⁷

Anything that violates these holy things of the Lord is considered profane. In contrast, anything that violates a non-holy thing is not considered profane. Such a violation is illegal, but it is not profane. This is the heart of my thesis in this chapter: the association of the biblical concept of *profane* with *unique acts of violation*, namely, violations of a boundary surrounding a judicially holy place or holy object. Profanity in the broadest sense is a breach of a judicial wall of separation between the holy and the common.

Leviticus 5:14–19 offers evidence of a judicial distinction between the sacred and the common, but this difference is minimal in the case of unintentional transgressions: a 20% penalty for violating either a sacred object or sacred space (vv. 15–16). What kind of boundary had been transgressed? Was it geographical? This seems unlikely. We know that the common Israelite was not permitted to enter the inner core of the temple, on threat of death (Ex. 28:43). He would never have been in a position to commit a tabernacle or temple trespass in ignorance. Furthermore, no common priest in his right mind would have tried to enter the holy of holies. He could not have committed such a transgression ignorantly. So, the element of the sacred here must refer to something broader in scope than the performance of temple rituals.

James Jordan wrote that the trespass offering “desanctified Israelites who contacted a holy thing and thereby came under the specially strict laws of the priesthood—a dangerous position to be in unless you had been consecrated as a priest. Since its purpose was to remove this ‘priestly’ danger, it was always a male sheep (ram).”⁸ Judicially, this was Eve's problem. Adam was the priest, yet she approached the tree and

7. “Sacrament,” in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, eds. John M'Clintock and James Strong, 12 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), IX, p. 212.

8. James Jordan, “The Whole Burnt Sacrifice: Its Liturgy and Meaning,” *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper*, No. 11, p. 2.

ate first, whether or not he was present, whether or not he was an accomplice (as Jordan believes he was). When a *judicially non-sanctified agent* comes into contact with something explicitly set apart by God, he has committed a trespass. For this trespass, a special offering is required by God. Under the Mosaic law, this was a ram.

If we are properly to understand the nature of each type of transgression in Leviticus 5:14–19—each type of boundary violation—we must first understand what the idea of the sacred meant under the Old Covenant. Then, and only then, can we begin to understand the meaning of the Bible’s concept of the profane.

D. Profane Violations of the Sacred

What “the sacred” refers to is something pertaining to *the ecclesiastical activity of the priesthood in its broadest sense*. Something that belongs to God must not be misused or appropriated unlawfully. Something delegated for exclusive use by God’s priesthood must not be used by an unauthorized agent, or used in an unauthorized way by an authorized agent.

1. False Interpretations

To understand what this improper (profane) usage might have been, we need first to consider what it could not have been. To do this, we must consider false interpretations—some ancient, some modern—of the biblical distinction between sacred and common. But before we consider these false interpretations, it is imperative that we recognize that in the Bible, the contrast between sacred and profane is never a contrast between a sacred object or place and a geographically separate object or place. The biblical contrast of sacred vs. profane is between a sacramental object or place and something common, i.e., something non-sacramental, that is *unlawfully inside* a sacred boundary.

Both realms on each side of the boundary are judicially legitimate: the sacred realm and the common realm. The contrast in Leviticus 5:14–16 is not between the sacred and the common; it is the contrast between sacred and profane. Christians can better understand the biblical distinctions between “sacred vs. common” and “sacred vs. profane” by considering the difference between a communion meal held during a worship service in church and a family meal eaten at home by a Christian family. Both meals are equally religious. Both meals are le-

gitimately introduced by prayer. But only one meal is sacramental: the church's communion meal. What must be understood from the beginning of our discussion is this: *the family meal is not profane. It is common, but it is not profane.* Also, it is religious despite its legal status as common.

Gordon Wenham offered this useful pair of contrasts: common vs. holy (adjectives); profane vs. sanctify (verbs). "'Common' (*hol*) is likewise the reverse of 'holy' (*qadosh*), just as to 'profane' (*hillel*) is the converse of to 'sanctify' (*qiddesh*)."⁹ To profane and to sanctify: these are acts. This accurate pair of contrasts must itself be contrasted with a common error. The sacred is generally understood as a special thing or place (correct), while the profane is also said to be a thing or place (only partially correct and too often misleading).

Why is a thing or place identified as either sacred or profane? For example, a Mosaic priest could *become* profane by marrying a prostitute or a divorced woman (Lev. 21:7, 14). This was because he was judicially sanctified (set apart) by ordination. A prohibited marriage violated a sacred boundary: his office as a priest. Yet even skilled translators have been confused about the biblical meaning of *profane*. This grammatical confusion is a product of theological confusion: a failure to recognize "the profane" as a *violated boundary* of "the sacred," not a common place or thing.

It is incorrect to contrast an inherently sacred place with an inherently profane place. A sacred place has been made sacred by the *judicial declaration* of God or by a priest acting in God's name. It has been sanctified: *set apart judicially*. It is neither naturally nor metaphysically sacred. Similarly, there can be no naturally or metaphysically profane place in the way that there can be a naturally common place. A *profane place* is a *violated sacred place*. It has been the victim of an illegal trespass. The Hebrew word translated most frequently as "profane" (*khaw-lawl*) is usually translated as "slain."¹⁰ It is sometimes translated as "wounded" (I Sam. 17:52). This Hebrew word means *pierced*. It conveys the sense of some-one's having violated a boundary. The word is not used in the sense of a common place that just sits there being common. A common place cannot become profane, for it possesses no sacred boundary to trespass; only a sacred place can become profane.

9. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 19.

10. Num. 19:16; 19:18; 23:24; and dozens of other verses.

There is considerable confusion over the proper English translation of a Hebrew word related to *khaw-lawl*: *khole*. This word is defined by Strong as “common, profane (place), unholy.” It does not appear frequently in Scripture, unlike *khaw-lawl*. It was translated by the King James translators as “unholy” (Lev. 10:10),¹¹ “common” (I Sam. 21:4–5),¹² and “profane” (Ezek. 22:26¹³ 42:20,¹⁴ 44:23;¹⁵ 48:15¹⁶). Modern translators translate *khole* almost randomly as “common,” “ordinary,” “profane,” and “unholy.” There seems to be no clear pattern of Hebrew usage in the texts. Ezekiel 42:20 and 48:15 are the only Old Testament passages in which *khole* is used with respect to space. The word should not be translated in these verses as “profane,” but rather as “unholy” or “common.” The biblical usage of “profane” points to a boundary violation. This usage does not apply in the two Ezekiel passages.

11. The King James reads: “And that ye may put difference between holy and **unholy**, and between unclean and clean” (Lev. 10:10). The Revised Standard Version agrees. The New American Standard translates it as “profane.”

12. The King James reads: “And the priest answered David, and said, There is no **common** bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy [*kodesh*], and the bread is in a manner **common**, yea, though it were sanctified [*kodesh*] this day in the vessel” (I Sam. 21:4–5). The Revised Standard Version agrees. The New American Standard translates *khole* in verse 4 as “consecrated”; in verse 5 as “ordinary.” The historical context was the shew-bread.

13. The King James reads: “Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and *profane*, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them” (Ezek. 22:26). The Revised Standard Version translates it as “common”; the New American Standard Version as “profane.”

14. The King James reads: “He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the **profane** place” (Ezek. 42:20). The Revised Standard Version translates it as “common”; the New American Standard Version as “profane.”

15. The King James reads: “And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and **profane**, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezek. 44:23). The Revised Standard Version translates it as “common.” The New American Standard Version translates it as “profane.”

16. The King James reads: “And the five thousand, that are left in the breadth over against the five and twenty thousand, shall be a **profane** place for the city, for dwelling, and for suburbs: and the city shall be in the midst thereof” (Ezek. 48:15). The Revised Standard Version translates it as “ordinary.” The New American Standard Version translates it as “common.”

2. *The Sacramental*

What is “the sacred,” biblically speaking? It is not merely the religious sensibility in man, a need analogous to the need for food or sex, as modern academic usage would have it.¹⁷ Rather, it has to do with the church’s sacraments. In its narrowest sense, the sacred refers to *formal ecclesiastical acts of covenantal subordination*: applying the covenant mark (circumcision, baptism) and partaking of the covenant meal (Passover, Lord’s Supper). That which pertains to the sacred is formally under the authority of an ordained church officer. This officer’s task is to restrict certain people’s access beyond certain specified judicial boundaries. These boundaries are always legal and are sometimes spatial.

There is a biblical distinction between the sacred and the profane, yet they are always linked. A sacred act involves the lawful crossing of a sacred boundary, meaning *a boundary guarded by ordained priests*. A profane act is the unlawful crossing of a priestly boundary, meaning *a judicially segregated* area of atonement. The transgressor has either invaded sacred space or has misused a sacred object that has been set aside by God for a particular use. The essence of the distinction between sacred and profane, biblically speaking, is judicial rather than metaphysical. The profane act is *ritually unauthorized*, either because of the legal status of the transgressor (a non-priest) or because of restrictions placed by God against specific acts by even a priest. It is *the crossing of the boundary* that constitutes the profane act.

The key theological questions regarding the Old Covenant’s liturgically sacred spaces or objects are these: Was the specified ritual a means of (1) imparting *independent metaphysical power* to the parti-

17. Philosopher Allan Bloom argued that modern American thought, under the influence of German sociology, has replaced the ideas of God and religion with the all-embracing idea of “the sacred.” Wrote Bloom: “This entire language, as I have tried to show, implies that the religious is the source of everything political, social and personal; and it still conveys something like that. But it has done nothing to reestablish religion—which puts us in a pretty pickle. . . . As the religious essence has gradually become a thin, putrid gas spread out through our whole atmosphere, it has gradually become respectable to speak of it under the marvelously portentous name *the sacred*.” Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), pp. 214–15. He was on target: “These sociologists who talk so facetiously about the sacred are like a man who keeps a toothless old circus lion around the house in order to experience the thrills of the jungle.” *Ibid.*, p. 216; cf. 230. The popularity of this theme, according to Mircea Eliade, began with the publication in 1917 of Rudolph Otto’s *Das Heilige* (*The Sacred*): Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1957] 1961), p. 8.

cipants; or (2) *symbolically identifying* members of an ecclesiastically separate community; or (3) publicly identifying the *legal status* of those who were covenantally bound together? Put another way, was “the sacred” metaphysical, symbolic, or covenantal? We can ask the same question about New Covenant rituals, too.

There are three (and only three) internally consistent answers. A person’s answer, if followed consistently, will strongly influence his social theory.¹⁸ First, the sacred ritual act or the sacred space is autonomously, metaphysically powerful; to violate it unleashes cosmic or supernatural forces (*realism*).¹⁹ Second, the sacred ritual act or sacred space is merely symbolic: it serves only to manifest the ethical condition of the participants (*nominalism*).²⁰ Third, the sacred ritual act or sacred space is judicially protected by God: a boundary that invokes (calls forth) God’s sanctions, both historical and eternal, in terms of His Bible-revealed law (*covenantalism*).²¹

E. Adam’s Transgression

The best way biblically to answer this debate over the nature of the sacred is to consider Adam’s transgression. When God announced a judicial boundary around the forbidden tree, did He invest the tree and its fruit with special properties that would automatically produce certain results if touched or eaten? Or was the tree merely symbolic, hav-

18. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 34–39. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>). I want to write a book called *Sanctions and Social Theory*, which will consider in detail these three perspectives. I probably won’t.

19. Realism asserts that there is a fundamental unity of being throughout the universe. Everything is inherently connected. In other words, “as above, so below”: the reigning view of all magical systems. Plato was the great philosopher of realism, as were the neoplatonists after him.

20. Nominalism asserts that everything is inherently unconnected in the universe. The connections that appear to exist are merely conventional, i.e., thinking makes them so. David Hume was the great modern philosopher of nominalism, and before him, William of Occam.

21. Covenantalism asserts a fundamental distinction between the being of God and the being of creation: the Creator-creature distinction. God literally spoke creation into existence: a fiat act (Gen. 1). He holds creation together by a continuing act of will. All of the connections within the creation are based ultimately on the judicial decrees of God. Because these connections are ultimately judicial, all of nature was cursed when Adam rebelled (Gen. 3:17), and looks forward to redemption (Rom. 8:22). John Calvin was the great theologian of covenantalism; Cornelius Van Til was his most philosophically consistent heir. Johannus Althusius (c. 1600) was the only major—in my opinion, the only—modern political philosopher of covenantalism until Rushdoony appeared.

ing no express judicial relationship with God, but only giving Adam an opportunity to prove himself faithful or not? Or was the tree set apart as a unique place of communion, a place declared by God as off-limits to Adam? We need to consider the three views of the sacred and their respective analyses. The first two answers conform to the philosophical categories of realism and nominalism. Both are incorrect. The third position conforms to the biblical category, covenantalism.

1. *Metaphysical Boundary*

We know that their eyes were immediately opened after they ate. They recognized their own nakedness and guilt. Was the fruit itself the source of their discontinuous change of perception? Was the tree a gateway to cosmic forces of illumination, a “cosmic tree,” to use the language of pagan mythology?²² Did it mark “the center of the world,” the supreme sacred space?²³ Could Adam and Eve somehow manipulate these cosmic forces to gain further knowledge or power? Was the forbidden tree a microcosm that offered man power over the macrocosm, analogous to the voodoo doll’s supposed power to produce analogous effects in the thing represented by the doll? Could Adam and Eve achieve “unity of being” with the universe through subsequent forbidden feasts? Could they achieve self-transcendence? In short, could they become mini-gods, as Satan had promised Eve (Gen. 3:5)?

The Genesis account of their transgression informs us that immediately after their eyes were opened, the forbidden tree was no longer the focus of their interest. They did not seek additional fruit. They did not invoke cosmic forces to protect them or do their bidding. They paid no further attention to the tree. They did not act as though they believed the tree possessed any special properties other than its fruit, which was admittedly good to view and good to eat. Even the serpent

22. The cosmic tree was related to the idea of the cosmic mountain: the *axis mundi* or axis of the world—the line drawn through the earth which points to the pole star. It was the link between heaven and earth. See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), p. 111; cf. 266–67, 271, 273–74. On the *axis mundi*, see the extraordinary, complex, and cryptic book on ancient mathematics, myth, and cosmology, *Hamlet’s Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time*, by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend (Boston: Gambit, 1969). It should be obvious what the source of these cosmic tree and cosmic mountain myths was: the garden of Eden, itself located on a mountain or raised area, for the river flowing through it became four rivers (Gen. 2:10).

23. Eliade wrote: “The tree came to express the cosmos fully in itself, by embodying, in apparently static form, its ‘force’, its life and its quality of periodic regeneration.” *Patterns*, p. 271.

said nothing further to them. There was no need for him to say anything. His words and work were over. Adam and Eve had performed the profane act. It was an act of judicial transgression: a trespass.

It is clear that their new-found self-awareness was the product of *self-judgment*: they had evaluated their act of rebellion in the light of their new interpretation of God's word.²⁴ They did not rush to discover a chemical formula for an antidote to poison fruit. They also did not rush to discover a magical formula to protect themselves from the cosmic forces that the fruit had unleashed. They correctly understood that the fruit was not their problem; God's promised judgment was. The tree had meaning to them only in terms of God's legal boundary around it, which they had transgressed. The fruit was of no further interest or use to them. They referred to it again only under God's subsequent cross-examination. Any assessment of the fruit as a metaphysical object is erroneous. This brings us to the next possibility: the fruit as a symbolic boundary between God and man.

2. Symbolic Boundary

What about the tree's unique symbolic status? Was the response of Adam and Eve merely the product of an increase in their self-awareness, a perception induced solely by their act of transgression? In other words, was the tree merely a symbolic agency in the transformation of their own self-awareness, something like an ethical mirror? Was the *transformational power* of the tree merely psychological? In short, had the transformational power of the tree merely been *imputed* to it by Adam and Eve?

If the tree served solely as a symbol of man's ethical condition, then on what basis did the radical and discontinuous increase of their mutual self-awareness take place? What was it about eating forbidden fruit that produced their perception of nakedness? Their immediate concern was not that they feared that God would bring judgment against them sometime in the future; it was that they were immediately discomforted by their own nakedness. It was not that the now-partially denuded tree pointed symbolically to their completely denuded judicial condition in the eyes of God; it was that they experienced shame in their own eyes as judges. God had assigned a necessar-

24. That it was a new interpretation is seen in their response: sewing fig leaf aprons rather than confessing their sin in prayer and seeking God's forgiveness.

ily judicial task to them when He told Adam to guard the garden.²⁵ Adam's task was to announce preliminary judgment against Satan, for Satan had testified falsely regarding the character of God. "Hath God said?" the serpent had asked. But Adam and Eve had served instead as false judges, rendering judgment implicitly against God and explicitly against God's word.²⁶ Immediately, they recognized that they were wearing no "robes"—the mark of lawful judicial authority. They were *judicially uncovered* before each other. Their perceived dilemma had nothing further to do with the tree. Now the primary symbol of their spiritual condition was their own naked flesh. They sought to cover this revelation with fig leaves.

God was not physically present in the garden immediately after their sin. He did not shout out a warning to them: "I said not to touch that!" He gave them time to respond, either as covenant-breakers or covenant-keepers. They responded as covenant-breakers. They knew that His negative sanctions were coming, but their immediate concern was not their nakedness in His eyes; it was nakedness in their own eyes. Later, they hid themselves from God when they heard Him coming; in the meantime, they felt a compulsive need to hide their flesh from each other.

They reacted as though the psychological effects of eating from a merely symbolic tree—their sense of shame regarding their own personal nakedness—could be successfully covered by the leaves of another fruit-bearing tree. A representative of the plant kingdom had been a crucial aspect of this crisis of perception, so they covered themselves with leaves. They did not slay the serpent or some other animal in their quest for a covering. *They dealt with their sin symbolically*: the tree had become to them a symbol of their transgression, and so their required coverings should be of a similar kind. They were wrong. *Their problem was judicial, not symbolic*. They had not transgressed a symbol; they had transgressed the boundary surrounding God's only restricted property. They had been involved in a *boundary violation*. It is not that some sacred object serves as man's ethical mirror; it is instead God's law that serves as the mirror.²⁷

25. "And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep [*shaw-mar*: guard] it" (Gen. 2:15).

26. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: [1987] 2012), Appendix E.

27. "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [mirror]: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into

3. Judicial Boundary

“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen. 3:7a). The use of the passive voice here is significant. *By whom* were their eyes opened? Either by God directly or by their own consciences as God’s image-bearers. We are not told. What we are told is that prior to their act of transgression, their eyes were not open; afterwards, they were. This must mean that “open eyes” in this sense was *judicial*. They *saw* what they had done. They *evaluated* their new condition in the light of God’s warning. They *understood* at least some of the consequences. But, being in sin, they misjudged what would be required to cover the effects of their sin. They twisted their own self-judgment. They made it seem less important than it was, as if it were a sin suitable for self-atonement.

The tree served as a symbol only to the degree that it was *set apart* (sanctified) by God as His exclusive property. The tree did not reflect man or man’s psyche; it represented God as sovereign owner of the cosmos. Its status as a visible symbol (i.e., *judicial evidence*) of man’s covenant status was relevant only in terms of its own designated status as a sanctified object. It had been judicially and verbally set apart by God. The tree was therefore *sacred*. It was not to be touched or eaten by man until God removed the restriction. To violate this sacred object was to *profane it*. To eat from it meant death, not in the sense of a poison apple, nor in the sense of a prohibited metaphysical doorway to overwhelming cosmic forces, nor in the sense of a means of man’s self-realization of his own inherent evil, but in the sense of inevitable historical and eternal sanctions imposed by an absolute personal God. Eating from the tree changed man’s judicial status. This was a profane act. Adam became profane: entering the judicial status of God’s declaration, “Guilty as charged.” He became *sacrilegious*.²⁸

F. Sacred Objects, Sacred Space

Sacred objects and sacred space are familiar themes in the Old Testament. The Ark of the Covenant is an example of a sacred object: it was not to be touched. It had rings on its sides through which poles were to be inserted, so that no one would need touch it when moving it (Ex. 25:14). Furthermore, only the Levites were permitted to carry it

the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:23–25).

28. Appendix A.

(Deut. 10:8). When one man dared to reach out to steady it as it was being moved, God struck him dead (I Chron. 13:9–10). When the Philistines brought the Ark into their territory, God struck down the image of their god, Dagon, and struck them with boils (I Sam. 5). They sent the Ark back to Israel on a cart pulled by oxen. They also placed gold objects into the cart as a trespass offering (I Sam. 6:8).²⁹ God dealt even more harshly with the Israelites at Beth-Shemesh, who dared to look into it. For this act of sacrilege, God struck over 50,000 of them (I Sam 6:19).³⁰

The interior of the Ark itself was sacred space. No one was allowed to look inside it. It was housed in the holy of holies, a sacred room inside the tabernacle and temple. Only the high priest was allowed to enter this space, and only once each year (Lev. 16:2). He had to sprinkle the interior with blood as a ransom payment for himself and the people (Lev. 16:14–15). In short, this most sacred of objects was surrounded by sacred space—in fact, layers of sacred space, beginning at the national borders of Israel.

What is easily misunderstood is *the judicial character of these sacred objects and spaces*. It is easy to misinterpret sacred objects and sacred spaces as metaphysical-magical, i.e., power-bearing and power-granting. This was the theme of the enormously popular movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and its second sequel, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, which was another in a long Western heritage of fantasies regarding the holy grail.³¹ Through techniques of ritual manipulation—a variant of environmental determinism—the bearer of such objects supposedly achieves not only supernatural power but also self-transcendence. At the very least, he achieves mystical illumination.³² Crossing the bridge or gateway between heaven and earth is supposed-

29. That the profanation of the Ark of the Covenant was unintentional on their part is proven by the fact that they called their priests and divines to explain the cause of the visible judgments (I Sam. 6:3). They also placed the Ark on a cart drawn by oxen; the animals' selection of the path would tell them whether the Ark belonged back in Israel. By the terms of their test, if the oxen did not return to Israel, the Philistines could safely conclude that the simultaneous presence of the Ark and their boils was a coincidence (I Sam. 6:9).

30. It is not clear that He killed them.

31. The holy grail is popularly imagined as the chalice from which Christ and the disciples drank at the Last Supper. Occultists view it as the equivalent of the philosopher's stone: a means of self-transcendence, the escape from creaturehood. See, for example, Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny* (New York: Bantam, [1973] 1974), p. 49.

32. The word used by Indiana Jones' archeologist father in *The Last Crusade* describing his experience with the grail was "illuminating."

ly achieved through possession of such objects and the ritually precise manipulation of them. The hypothetical chain of being between man and God is manifested through the possession of sacred objects or entry into sacred space. The primary concern of the manipulator is with precise ritual rather than ethics. His thinking is governed by the magical formula, “As above, so below.” E. M. Butler described the goal of magic; it is also the goal of modern social engineering: “The fundamental aim of all magic is to impose the human will on nature, on man or on the supersensual world in order to master them.”³³

This metaphysical interpretation of the sacred misses the point. The identifying feature of any sacred object is its unique judicial character. The sacred object brings man into the judicial presence of the covenant God who judges in time and eternity.

Inside the Ark of the Covenant were the two tablets of the law (Deut. 31:26). The Ark served as the earthly throne of God, the place where the high priest annually placated His wrath. This is why the holy of holies in which the Ark was housed was so holy. The biblical formula from which the magical formula is derived is overwhelmingly ethical and judicial: “On earth, as it is in heaven.” This phrase appears in the Lord’s Prayer as part of the identification of *God’s name as holy*—hallowed—and a call for *kingdom justice in history*: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9–10).³⁴

Sacred space is not magical space; it is *judicially sanctified space*. It has been hallowed—made holy, meaning set apart—by God. When a man enters it, he draws close to God judicially. God’s place of residence is His place of judgment. He sits on a throne of judgment. Sacred space is *holy space*: space which is *legally marked off* by God as the

33. E. M. Butler, *Ritual Magic* (San Bernardino, California: Borgo Press, [1949] 1980), p. 1.

34. It is significant that the call for the coming of the kingdom appears early in the Lord’s Prayer, prior to “give us this day our daily bread.” What we need to recognize is that this prayer is a covenant document structured in terms of the familiar five points: (1) transcendence (Father who is in heaven, holy name); (2) hierarchy (kingdom come: king rules); (3) law/dominion (God’s will—law—be done on earth as it is in heaven); (4) sanctions (daily bread, forgiveness of sins); (5) continuity/eschatology (deliverance from evil; hence, kingdom, power, and glory forever). Notice that the call for the kingdom to come on earth (#2), manifested by obedience to His law (#3), precedes the request for daily bread (#4). God’s kingdom on earth is therefore not to be regarded as exclusively eschatological; it is identified as historical and progressive, just as God’s provision of our daily bread is.

place of required covenantal ritual, where man meets God judicially on a regular basis. Without such lawful access, sacred space becomes a threat to man.³⁵ It is a place of *judgment*. Entering sacred space requires special acts of judicial separation by man. We read in Exodus: "And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. 3:4–5). The soil within the boundary lines of God's place of residence was not ritually polluted for Old Covenant man; hence, wearing shoes was not ritually (judicially) appropriate. You removed them as your public acknowledgment that you were entering God's place of special judicial presence.³⁶ You had crossed a judicial boundary, so your normal behavior had to change.

If God moves His place of earthly residence—the place of *legal communion* with man—sacred space necessarily moves with Him. Sacred space can move from place to place, just as the tabernacle was moved by the priests in response to God's glory cloud.³⁷ Sacred space may also be a fixed geographical area, as the temple was in ancient Israel. In the New Covenant order, sacred space moves with the sacraments; the place where the sacraments are lawfully offered is sacred space. Judicially to transgress this space or misuse the objects of the sacramental meal is to commit sacrilege. The threat of profanity was always judicial. Under the Mosaic covenant, this judicial threat was

35. The garden of Eden was such a sacred space. Because the tree of life was within its boundaries, God sealed off its boundaries with a flaming sword and angels. This meant that man was not permitted to come into God's presence there, for it was a place of absolute judgment. To eat sacramentally of the tree of life in an unlawful manner would have meant the attainment of perpetual temporal existence apart from covenantal obedience, i.e., hell.

36. This is still required in Islamic mosques.

37. Meredith G. Kline wrote: "God's theophanic glory is the glory of royal majesty. At the center of the heavens within the veil of the Glory-cloud is found a throne; the Glory is preeminently the place of God's enthronement. It is, therefore, a royal palace, site of the divine council and court of judgment. As royal house of a divine King, the dwelling of deity, it is a holy house, a temple. Yet the Glory is a not static structure, but mobile, for the throne is a chariot-throne, Spirit directed and propelled through the winged beings, a vehicle of divine judgment, moving with the swiftness of light to execute the sentence of the King." Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1980), pp. 17–18. Kline's concept of God's judgments in New Covenant history abandons all traces of the chariot-throne imagery and power. See Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978). For my response, see North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 7.

primarily manifested geographically, i.e., an invasion of protected space. The judicial aspect of sacred space was understood far less clearly during the Old Covenant era.

G. Sacred Space in the New Covenant Era

The primary boundaries of life are legal-covenantal. This is more evident today. The New Covenant has drastically reduced the element of the sacred in geographical boundaries, except insofar as there is legal ownership of property by a church. *Sacrilege* today does not mean the physical invasion of sacred space; it means the transgression of the church's rights of ownership, i.e., the *legal immunities* associated with ownership, most importantly, *the church's legal right to exclude*. This may include the right to exclude certain people from a church building under certain conditions,³⁸ but it means primarily the rights associated with the exclusion of people from the sacraments. For example, any attempt by the state to infringe on the right of a Trinitarian church to declare someone excommunicate is an act of sacrilege: a challenge to the lawful authority of the church. It is a profane act: a boundary violation.

A profound change came to the gentile world through the New Covenant. The covenantally unique judicial-geographical boundary system of ancient Israel's theocratic kingdom was extended to embrace all the nations through the church. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Other nations—judicial collectives—are now told to establish a formal covenant with God. Jesus' Great Commission says: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19–20). This is a comprehensive, world-transforming commission.³⁹ The invocation of these national covenants involve boundaries (nations), a covenant sign (baptism), covenant law ("observe all things"), a covenant promise (God's judicial presence),

38. An example would be the invasion of the Faith Baptist Church of Lewisville, Nebraska, by the local sheriff and his men in 1982. See H. Edward Rowe, *The Day They Padlocked the Church* (Shreveport, Louisiana: Huntington House, 1983).

39. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

and a time frame (to the end of the world).

1. *Removing Boundaries*

Other changes have taken place. In the New Covenant era, the ground is no longer cursed. The whole earth has been definitively cleansed by the historical death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Today we wear shoes in order to protect our feet, not because the ground is ritually cursed and therefore a threat to judicially holy people, as was the case in the Old Covenant. Unlike Muslims in mosques and worshippers in pagan temples, we do not take off our shoes when we come into the presence of God at church. During the Old Covenant era, from at least Abraham's time (Gen. 18:4), dirty feet meant defilement (Song of Solomon 5:3). Before entering the tabernacle, every person had to wash his feet (Ex. 30:20–21). Jesus told the apostles at the Last Supper that because He had washed their feet, they should wash each other's feet (John 13:14). Yet very few churches continue to practice the foot-washing ceremony of Christ's day, and none has substituted a shoe-shining ceremony. Why not? Because the ground is no longer cursed. Shaking the dust off one's feet is no longer a symbol of God's wrath, as it was in Jesus' day. There is no special dwelling place of God outside of the place of His special *judicial presence* during formal church worship: ceremonies bounded by time, space, and law, but not bounded by ritual standards of clean and unclean objects or clean and unclean people.

In the Mosaic Covenant, pork was prohibited. So were other kinds of flesh. (There were never any "clean-unclean" distinctions within the vegetable realm.) The Israelites were required to eat lamb at the Passover. Blood had to be shed, but not the blood of unclean animals. In the New Covenant, no meat is eaten at the communion meal. Products of the vegetable realm—bread and wine—are required. Why no meat? Because the shedding of judicially atoning blood is behind us. That any Christian could even hint at the possibility of the future re-establishment of the ritual slaying of lambs for a re-enacted Passover meal testifies to the failure of the modern church to preach the progressive conquest of nature by grace in history. The church is failing to preach the progressive restoration of all things through the judicial power delivered to Christians by means of Christ's ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ Judicial peace between God and grace-redeemed man

40. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview*

has definitively come, though not finally. We still await the day when lambs will sit down with lions (Isa. 65:25a); we do not await the restoration of temple sacrifices.

2. Nature and Grace

The removal of sacred boundaries in the New Covenant does not imply that nature (the common) is somehow swallowing up grace (the sacred). It is not that nature is pushing grace into ever-smaller corners of man's existence. The Bible teaches that all of nature is sustained by God's grace, i.e., God's unearned gifts to men, beasts, and even demons. He gives us life, time, knowledge, and power, none of which is in any way autonomously deserved by the recipients. Ours is a providentially sustained world. In the New Covenant, as in the Old, nature does not swallow up grace. *Both the sacred and the common are under grace.*

God's special grace to His people—and only to His people—is the foundation, judicially (justification) and ethically (sanctification), of comprehensive transformation, both personal and cultural. Special grace is *marked publicly* by the presence of church sacraments. After baptism, grace is *empowered spiritually* by the Lord's Supper, but it is not restricted to (bounded by) the Lord's Supper. Special grace also operates in the realm outside the institutional church: in family and state covenants, and in all the other social institutions that are under the lawful jurisdictions (plural) of family and state.

Not only does nature not swallow up grace in history, the realm of common grace is steadily transformed by special grace, either through widespread conversions or by example and imitation by the unconverted for the sake of the external positive sanctions associated with external covenant-keeping.⁴¹ To deny that common grace is affected by what takes place in the realm of special grace is necessarily to deny the covenantal basis of New Covenant history: progress or decline in terms of covenant-keeping. The directionality of history then loses its character as biblically progressive; its events becomes random, covenantally speaking. *History is then seen as linear but not progressive.*⁴² This is the theological error of amillennialism. It is seen in its most

(Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

41. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

42. This is Meredith G. Kline's view of New Covenant history: "Comments on an Old-New Error," *op. cit.*

consistent form in the theology of the tiny Protestant Reformed Church, a Dutch-American denomination, which denies the existence of common grace and aggressively rejects postmillennialism.⁴³ It also remains silent on biblical law and its sanctions.

H. Profanity, Priesthoods, and Pagans

I have argued that the fundamental distinction between sacred and common has to do with the *judicial status* of the object or space in question. The distinction between sacred and common is not “magic vs. convention” or “religious vs. secular.” It is rather the distinction between sacramental and non-sacramental. The separation between sacred and profane is a very different kind of distinction from the distinction between sacred and common. The distinction between sacred and profane is the distinction between that which is *authorized sacramentally* and that which is *unauthorized sacramentally*. Adam became profane in his act of rebellion. He violated a sacred boundary.

Because we enter into *the judgmental presence of God* during the worship service, Christians do enter sacred space. But this space is sacred because of the judicial presence of God, not because any special attribute attaches to a geographical area. *Sacred space and sacred time lose their sacred character when formal corporate worship ends*. These acts of worship are sacred only because they are performed in the judicial presence of the ultimate sacred space, the throne of God. The discontinuity—the *boundary*—between sacred and common is *judicial*. This discontinuity is radical. This is why Paul warns potential participants in the Lord’s Supper to judge themselves before partaking. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (I Cor. 11:28–30). No other meal kills people judicially.

This emphasis on the radical discontinuity between sacred and common raises an important question: Why was there only a 20% additional penalty for unpremeditated profane transgressions of the sacred in Leviticus 5:16? This relatively minimal penalty does not seem to reflect the magnitude of the judicial distinction between sacred and common. On the other hand, if the 20% penalty is the judicial standard

43. David J. Engelsma, *Christ’s Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, California: Reformed Witness, 2001).

of this differentiation, is there a more fundamental distinction than “sacred vs. common”? To answer these questions, we need to understand the biblical meaning of profanity.

1. Profanity

The use of “profane” in the Bible occurs most frequently with respect to *the misuse of God’s name*. Verbal profanity, as distinguished from verbal obscenity, is sometimes an unauthorized invocation of a judicial oath: the curse of God. Ultimately, it is a *self-maledictory oath*: “May God destroy me if I do not fulfill the terms of His covenant.” This is the verbal transgression of a judicial boundary: he who is common is using a sacred means of bringing sanctions—a verbal act that is judicially sanctioned by God only for the ordained holder of a covenantal office. Profanity involves either the misuse of God’s name for one’s own purposes or the performance of ritual acts that misrepresent God. It always involves a boundary violation. This is why the third commandment—“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Ex. 20:7)—is third: it prohibits the transgression of a boundary (point three of the biblical covenant model). Transgressing a covenantal boundary produces a new judicial status in the transgressor: guilty.

What kind of boundary is this? It is a verbal or ritual boundary that publicly manifests the covenant. This is an act of *formal* covenant-breaking—not just the transgression of one of the stipulations of the covenant, but the covenant itself.

And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD (Lev. 18:21).

And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:12).

And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name (Lev. 20:3).

They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy (Lev. 21:6).

Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they profane not my holy name in those things which they hallow unto me: I am the LORD (Lev. 22:2).

Something has been *set apart* by God for His own use. It is therefore *holy*. It is *sanctified* or *hallowed*. God places special boundaries around these objects, and these boundaries can lawfully be penetrated only on God's publicly specified terms. The name of God is one of these holy objects. Since only the priest—a man who has been set apart judicially by God so that he can draw close to God's place of judgment—is authorized to pass through these boundaries, any violation of these boundaries is inherently a priestly act. Violators become profane.

2. Priesthoods

Profanity in the Old Covenant era, and also in the New Covenant era, was primarily a *priestly misrepresentation of God*, either in sacramental word or sacramental deed, such as offering one's child to another god in an act of formal covenant-breaking with Israel's God. In short, *profanity is a covenant-breaking or covenant-denying priestly act*. Profanity is distinguished judicially from non-sacramental violations of God's moral law. It is a violation of God's priestly law.

Those under the jurisdiction of God's ecclesiastical covenant—i.e., under His *spoken legal word*—are uniquely authorized by God to speak and act in particular ways. This means that they are bound—i.e., under *judicial boundaries*—to speak and act in these specified ways. They have been granted a covenantal monopoly. It is a monopoly—*special legal status*—in both the positive and negative sense: special duties, special penalties. Certain acts must be done in certain ways by certain people. These acts are *representative* acts. They are *hierarchical*, as in priestly (*hierus*).⁴⁴ At the same time, being legally representative, only representatives are allowed to perform them. These acts must be done by someone (inclusive), and they must not be done by someone else (exclusive). These acts are therefore mediatorial.

As God's designated legal representative on earth and in history, the Mosaic Covenant priest's language and conduct had to represent God faithfully. His special legal status carried greater legal liability. Ignorantly speaking or acting in an illegitimate but non-sacramental

44. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), III, pp. 257–65.

fashion necessarily invoked (“called forth”) a particular penalty. Ignorantly speaking or acting illegitimately in a sacramental fashion invoked a marginally greater penalty: one-fifth. Why only marginal? *Because the marginal difference between the sanctions that distinguished the sacred from the common pointed judicially to the near-sacred character of everything in Israel.* It testified to the special judicial status of the promised land as a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). *Legal access to sacred judicial space* is the key to a correct understanding of the sacred-common distinction and the sacred-profane distinction.

(a) Distinctions Within Perfection

Let us return to the archetype example: the heaven-hell distinction. Better yet, consider this: the post-resurrection new heavens, new earth (Rev. 21) vs. the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15). Dwelling in the post-resurrection new heavens and new earth, there will be nothing but perfect humans. This includes Jesus Christ. The perfect humanity of Jesus Christ will possess greater holiness than the perfect humanity of everyone else. By the intervention of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived in perfection, unlike all other post-Adamic humans, and then sustained His salvation through His perfect obedience to God’s law. Nobody else can do this in history. He now lawfully sits beside God the Father on the throne; no one else does. But the difference in the degree of holiness (set-apartness) between Jesus Christ’s perfect humanity—not His divinity—and the resurrected saint’s perfect humanity will be of far less magnitude than the disparity between the resurrected covenant-keeper’s perfect humanity and the resurrected covenant-breaker’s morally perverse humanity. The resurrected saint will have eternal legal access to God’s throne of grace; the resurrected covenant-breaker will not.

Similarly, the priest’s judicial holiness in ancient Israel was greater than the common Israelite’s holiness, but the magnitude of judicial separation between an ordained priest and an Israelite was far less than the difference between an Israelite and an uncircumcised person living outside the land. Priests and Israelites participated in Passover. Uncircumcised men and the women under the authority of uncircumcised men did not.

(b) Degrees of Holiness

Leviticus 5:14–19 deals with transgressions committed in ignor-

ance. Thus, the distinction here between sacred and common was not intended to focus on the radical difference between heaven and hell. It was intended to distinguish *priestly activities* in Israel from *routine activities* in Israel. Because so much of Israel's daily life was judicially closer to God than the same activities performed outside the land, i.e., acts performed by those who were not under the Mosaic covenant, *it was easier to commit a boundary violation inadvertently within Israel*. The Israelites were all far closer to God judicially than were uncircumcised pagans who lived outside the boundaries of the land. The Israelites served as priests to the whole world: representative agents between God and pagan mankind.⁴⁵ They were guardians of a boundary. The priests served as God's representative agents mediating between Israel and God. They, too, were guardians of a boundary. The magnitude of the covenantal separation of the second boundary was not nearly so great as the magnitude of the first.

There were degrees of culpability and responsibility under the Mosaic Covenant. This fact was reflected in the *degrees of official holiness*—holiness of office and holiness of behavior—that were required as one approached the holy of holies, the place where God dwelt judicially. The high priest could go into the holy of holies to offer sacrifice only once a year. He was under tight restrictions; if he performed his task in an unauthorized fashion, he would be struck dead (Ex. 28:33–35). The closer someone came to God's geographical place of judgment, the more vulnerable to God's sanctions he became (Num. 3).⁴⁶ A series of judicial boundaries marked one's movement away from the holy of holies and out of the land.⁴⁷ These boundaries marked *a reduction in monopoly legal status* as men moved away from the temple and toward the world of paganism.

3. Pagans

It is common to speak of the religious condition of the pagan as profane. Everything he does supposedly is profane. But this raises a theological problem: How can his legal status be profane if he is so far from God judicially? If it is true that profanity, biblically speaking, is

45. This is why they sacrificed 70 bullocks at the feast of trumpets (Num. 29): to offer atonement for the 70 nations (the world).

46. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3.

47. James Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), ch. 15. (<http://bit.ly/jjneweyes>)

legally a violation of some *priestly aspect* of covenant law, how can the pagan accurately be said to be a profane person? In the Mosaic Covenant era, sacred objects and sacred space were exclusively inside the geographical boundaries of Israel. The pagan could violate no priestly boundaries if he was outside the land of Israel. How could the pagan have committed a profane act? To answer this question, we need to discuss the legal status of the pagan.

The pagan in the Mosaic-era Covenant was an uncircumcised male, or a female not under the lawful jurisdiction of a circumcised male,⁴⁸ who lived outside the covenant: no legal access to Passover. Most pagans lived outside the geographical and cultural boundaries that God had drawn around His people as their protected area of dominion. Within these judicial boundaries, a unique system of law prevailed.⁴⁹ The question then arises: How unique? This raises the fundamental issue of *theonomy*.

The pagan was under a temporal and eternal obligation to obey all of God's civil laws except those that applied explicitly to the administration of the land of Israel, which means primarily the jubilee land laws (Lev. 25)⁵⁰ and the laws of ritual defilement and cleansing: the laws marking the *holiness*—i.e., *set-apartness*—of the Israelite nation of priests. God did not give to the pagan nations a judicial revelation of His holiness comparable to that which He gave to those inside the land. The Israelites were unique: greater revelation, greater responsibility.

This does not mean that pagan nations of the Mosaic era were legitimately under different moral standards, i.e., not under the moral requirements *and civil sanctions* of the Ten Commandments. Bahrensen's comments are appropriate: "The fact that God was dealing with Israel in a redemptive and covenantal fashion, and not setting His electing love upon any other nation (cf. Amos 3:2),⁵¹ did not introduce a disparity or difference in moral standards between Israel and the nations. All those who wander from God's statutes—indeed, all the wicked of the earth—are condemned by God, according to Psalm

48. An exception was a widow or divorced wife of an Israelite. She had the authority to take a vow without confirmation by husband or father (Num. 30:9).

49. The link between law, boundaries, and dominion is basic to the biblical covenant model: point three.

50. These laws were an aspect of the original conquest of the land, i.e., the military spoils of a one-time event.

51. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

119:118–119.”⁵² This passage in Psalms reads: “Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.”

The Mosaic-era pagan was always under the *non-geographical and un-priestly* stipulations of God’s covenant law. This means that he was not under the rules that applied to the ecclesiastical priests of Israel. He did not possess their priestly status. He did not come close to Israel’s sacred spaces. Then how could he have been profane? Only as *a son of Adam*. What Adam imparted to his heirs was his judicial status as a covenant-breaker, that is, a *sacred boundary violator*. Adam served as a legal representative for all mankind. He was mankind’s high priest. He administered lawful access to the two sacred trees. These two trees were the only sacred objects in the garden. They grew in the sacred places where man could eat a sacred meal of communion with his God. Only one tree was prohibited to him: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam violated the boundaries—physical and temporal—of this prohibited tree, i.e., *profaned* it. By eating of it *prematurely* and in direct violation of God’s law, Adam ate in communion with his god, Satan. He thereby became a profane man—the most profane man in history.⁵³

Every pagan son of Adam is profane in a general sense: as God’s image-bearer who broke the covenant. As a covenant-breaker on his own, he is not testifying accurately in word and deed to the moral character of the Creator. He begins life as a covenant-breaker: an heir of Adam, the high priest who committed sacrilege representatively for all mankind. Because he is born with this judicial status, he does not *become* a profane person by his self-consciously profane acts. He merely *identifies* himself as a judicially profane person in history. He progressively works out in history the legal status he was born with—a kind of perverse form of progressive sanctification. He *sets himself apart* from God both judicially and morally as time goes on: negative progressive sanctification. (Perhaps we should call this process *regressive sanctification*.) Nevertheless, the Old Covenant era pagan was not profane in a Mosaic priestly sense. He was not a designated priest of

52. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp. 237–38. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

53. Some might argue that Judas Iscariot’s profanity exceeded Adam’s. His act of rebellion against the person of Jesus Christ was committed in defiance of greater revelation than Adam had been given.

God.⁵⁴ He was outside the formal boundaries of God's covenant with national Israel. So, in a general *Adamic* sense he was a profane person; in a specific *Mosaic* sense, he was not.

I. What Constituted “Ignorant Profanity”?

It has taken me considerable space—none of it sacred—to get to the question of what, exactly, the law of Leviticus 5:14–19 referred to. A profane act under the Old Covenant necessarily involved the church, for it involved some aspect of the sacraments, i.e., the priesthood. To violate the office of priest, either as a priest or as a layman, was considered profane. If done in ignorance, there was an added penalty of one-fifth.

There was an ownership principle involved. God had established legal boundaries around the sacraments: spatial boundaries and liturgical boundaries. These were ultimately *ownership boundaries*, analogous to the boundary He placed around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *That which belongs exclusively to God is specially protected by law.* Jesus' distinction between God and Caesar would apply here: render to each what is lawfully claimed by each (Matt. 22:21).⁵⁵ God is sacred; Caesar is common. (It was this confession that later became the legal basis of the Roman Empire's persecution of Christians.) Jesus' distinction between God and mammon would not apply here: no one should ever serve mammon. No one should ever be profane (Mammon: false worship). What was established in Leviticus 5:14–19 was a legal distinction between sacred and common, not between sacred and profane. *That which is common cannot be profaned.*

What did the church in the Mosaic Covenant require? The sacrifice of unblemished animals, for one thing. What if a man had ignorantly offered an animal with a defect—a disease, for example? He had

54. Prior to the Mosaic law, there were such priests: e.g., Melchizedek, Jethro, and Balaam. Balaam was the last of them, a transitional figure who apostatized in his confrontation with Moses, yet who still possessed powers and insights given to him by God. These priests, who were outside the ethnic boundaries of the people of Israel, had been granted their legal status by God prior to the establishment of the geographical boundaries of national Israel.

55. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 44. Because God places Caesars on the throne who unlawfully claim far more than a tithe, we are usually to obey even the unlawful claims. God brings such men to power in order to judge us. However, God allowed Jeroboam to revolt against Rehoboam in protest against Rehoboam's taxes (I Kings 12).

mistakenly brought the wrong animal to the altar. He owed another animal, plus a penalty payment of one-fifth. Since he could not kill one-fifth of an animal, a monetary equivalent according to the shekels of the temple was allowed. To offer a blemished animal was the equivalent of stealing from God—profaning His table-altar (Mal. 1:8–12). God’s warning was clear: “But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible” (Mal. 1:12).

What else would have come under the law against profanity? Tithes. The tithes were to be set aside to God. They were His property, collected and administered solely by the Levites. To refuse to pay a tithe to the local Levite was the legal equivalent of stealing from God (Mal. 3:8–9). If a person discovered in retrospect that he had earned more net income than he had originally calculated, he owed more to God. This would have been an unintentional transgression. He now owed the tithe, plus an animal sacrifice, plus an extra 20% on that portion of the tithe that he had neglected to pay. If he had earned an additional ten ounces of silver, he owed, first, an additional ounce to the Levite. He would also have been required to offer an animal sacrifice, plus pay an additional one-fifth of an ounce to the Levite.

A person might also have made a complicated vow to God. If he neglected to fulfill all of its terms, he would have owed the extra payment.

J. New Covenant Sanctions

In the New Covenant era, as in the Mosaic era, the *general status* of priest, which is inherited by all men from Adam through physical birth, must be distinguished from (1) the *special status* of priest, which is inherited from Jesus Christ, the second Adam (I Cor. 15:45), through legal adoption (Eph. 1:3–6), and also from (2) the *judicial office of priest*, which is obtained only through ecclesiastical ordination. The first distinction between the priesthoods—special priest vs. general priest—reflects the fundamental difference between heaven and hell: saved and lost. The general priesthood is profane (heirs of Adam’s transgression); the special priesthood is not profane (heirs of God’s redemptive grace). This is not a marginal distinction. It marks a radical judicial distinction that far exceeds the distinction between the ordained church officer and the layman. The eternal sanctions are very different, so the degree of violation is different.

The second distinction is marginal: *ordained* special priest (guardian of the sacraments) vs. *non-ordained* special priest (guardian of the kingdom). The differing sanctions of Leviticus 5:14–19 reflect this marginal difference. In the Mosaic era, a profane act of transgression of the *holy things* committed in ignorance was of marginally greater magnitude than a violation of the commandments committed in ignorance. The first required a ram plus a 20% penalty (Lev. 5:16); the second did not: ram only (v. 18).

Today, pagans and priests are mixed together geographically. How could a covenant-breaker (“Adamic priest”) commit an unintentional act of sacrilege? There are no animal sacrifices today. He is not covenantally under the church. He does not pay tithes. He does not make vows to the church. There seems to be no easy way for him to commit an unintentional profane act. One example would be the case of a person who takes communion without being a church member, not understanding that to do so lawfully, he needs to be under church authority as a member. (Churches that practice open communion lure ignorant people into profanity.) But what would be the penalty? An additional one-fifth of what? Another example would be verbal profanity: calling down God’s negative sanctions against another person. Only ordained priests may do this publicly. In a culture in which such language has become common, this practice can become habitual, i.e., unintentional. It can go on only where biblical law is not enforced.

The civil government of every nation should impose sanctions against public verbal profanity, which is a form of assault. *The third commandment is binding on all nations.* No one is allowed by God to transgress the boundary placed around His name. No civil government ought to tolerate such transgressions. The inherited general status of priest to which all men are born as sons of Adam brings all men under God’s civil laws regarding profanity. It is on this legal basis, among others, that the civil government of a formally covenanted Christian nation could and should bring sanctions against certain practices of cults and rival religions: their public transgression of God’s sacramental boundaries. *Sacrilege is a civil offense.*

This fact is denied by defenders of religious pluralism, who regard pluralism as the civil manifestation of the sacred in history. This is why pluralism is in principle a violation of the third commandment. A refusal to defend God’s sacred boundaries places the civil magistrate,

who acts as an ordained representative of both God⁵⁶ and society, in the legal position of an accomplice of those who do transgress them. Pluralism is a civil order that is established judicially by taking God's name in vain: the invocation of an oath to a false god who threatens to impose non-biblical sanctions.⁵⁷

Unintentional sacrilege seems far less likely in a modern nation that is not formally covenanted to God. That it could take place in Old Covenant Israel is clear. It is far less clear how laws against unintentional violations of priestly boundaries would apply today.

With this understanding of the sacred, we are now ready to investigate a series of false distinctions: ancient and modern, sectarian and academic, and fundamentalist-pietist. They must all be avoided if we are to do justice to the biblical distinction between sacred and common.

K. False Distinctions: Ancient and Modern Religion

There is no doubt that the realm of the sacred in ancient Israel was located inside specified geographical boundaries. The Bible does not even remotely suggest, however, that the larger realm outside these special geographical boundaries was an *inferior* place in terms of its inherent "being." If anything, the closer a man dwelt to sacred space in the Mosaic Covenant era, the more vulnerable he became to God's judgments. This is why an unpremeditated and unintentional violation of God's holy things bore an additional penalty of 20% – not overwhelming, but nonetheless a penalty. The sacred was a zone or object of greater ritual precision and deeper foreboding. It was something surrounded by a judicial boundary. What was to be feared here was the possibility of committing a profane act.

This biblical distinction between the *judicially sacred* and the *judicially common* has been subtly transformed by those affirming very different theological categories. Those who promote counterfeit covenants have attempted to shift the *sacred-common distinction* to

56. On the ministerial office of the civil magistrate: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. 13:3–4). Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

57. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/polpol>)

either a *magical-metaphysical* view (realism/organicism) or a *symbolic-psychological* view (nominalism/mechanism). Both approaches are theologically incorrect.

1. Realism: Sacred vs. Profane (Re-defined)

The Bible's judicial distinction—ritually and *representatively*—between the sacred and the non-sacramental (i.e., common) has almost universally been redefined as a contrast between the sacred and the profane, with anything that is not sacred defined as inherently profane. This is a very serious misunderstanding of the Bible's distinctions: sacred vs. common and sacred vs. profane. Adopting the familiar but erroneous distinction of sacred vs. profane, Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* comments:

The etymology of the word "profane" (lit. "before *or* in front of the shrine") may give us a certain amount of guidance because of its spatial suggestiveness. There immediately arises in our minds the idea of a walled or fenced enclosure within which only peculiarly precious objects and specially privileged persons may remain, and outside of which there is a world of rigorously excluded persons and things having lesser assigned worth than those within. . . . Another idea, related to the foregoing and also suggested by the spatial etymology of the word 'profane,' is that of absolute, abrupt, and rigorous separation between the sacred and the profane. The sacred enclosure is definitely separated by [a] wall or some other effective protection from the profane world, and access from the one world to the other is only through a rigorously-guarded portal.⁵⁸

According to this view, the barrier marking off sacred space from profane space may be verbal, spatial, temporal, ritual, or a combination. A taboo marks the dividing line—*line* in this case may be metaphorical—between the two realms. The priesthood becomes a separate class of people based on their God-given access to the holy or set-apart objects. "Everywhere also elaborate ritual is accompanied by the most zealous care for the separation of the priestly class from the ordinary community."⁵⁹ The priests dwell in sacred space. Everyone else dwells in profane space.

The space outside of sacred space is seen as "the profane world." It is therefore unclean, cursed, or in other ways a second-class place of

58. "Profanity," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, 12 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), X, pp. 378, 379.

59. *Ibid.*, X, p. 380.

residence. Those who live there are themselves second-class citizens. There is supposedly a *chain of being* linking the higher realm of the sacred to the lower realm of the profane. Those dwelling in the “upper story” of the sacred possess more power and authority than those in the “lower story” of the profane. The sacred realm of “grace” is contrasted with the profane realm of “nature.” Grace is seen as metaphysically superior to nature, but it is the dwelling place of the few: the priesthood. Nature is seen as the dwelling place for the masses, where popular culture prevails.

The Bible denies all this. It presents the entire world as under the grace of God, from the day that God clothed Adam in animal skins and sent him out of the garden. The garden was too holy for Adam and his heirs because it contained the tree of life, but the realm beyond the garden’s boundaries was in no way profane. It was common when compared to the garden; it was not profane. Both the garden and the world outside were equally part of nature: the created realm. The garden, however, was off-limits judicially because the tree of life was off-limits, just as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been off-limits. Adam had defied the earlier verbal boundary; this time, God placed angels and a flaming sword at the gate of entry (Gen. 3:24). The garden was holy; the world outside was common; but the world outside was not in any way profane.

(a) *Nature and Grace*

Given a false, metaphysical view of the sacred and the profane, men erroneously believe that *nature swallows up grace* in the realm of popular culture. Because nature is supposedly the larger realm outside the narrowly circumscribed sacred boundaries, it then becomes the dominant force in culture. Its laws are less rigorous, which means that its standards—ethical or ritual—are lower. Nevertheless, the realm of nature is inevitably dominant in culture, for its domain is far larger geographically and encompasses most people. In short, *that which is inferior metaphysically becomes dominant culturally*.

This false distinction between the sacred as a realm of existence for a religious elite and the profane as a separate realm of existence for the masses is an important key to a proper understanding of all non-Christian religions. In them, nature always swallows up grace. There is no hope for the masses of men. Nature controls them, even though they may seek to control nature. The *historical* power of the *historical*

resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ is denied by such religions. That which is identified as the realm of grace—assuming such a realm is even admitted to exist—is believed to have authority and power only within the necessarily narrow boundaries of the sacred. *Covenant-breaking man's goal is to restrict the influence of the sacred.* Why? Because of its supernatural power and because of its superior moral authority. The sacred implies transcendent law, and transcendent law implies transcendent judgment. *Covenant-breaking man's primary goal in life is to avoid transcendent judgment.* He re-invents physical reality in order to further this goal.⁶⁰ In order to remove the sacred from his presence, he is also willing to redefine the biblical categories of sacred and profane, making the sacred a superior but completely separate realm which is closed to most people.

(b) *Escaping Grace*

Covenant-breaking man frequently seeks to deny the existence of grace. Men deny the relevance of *God's grace in history* because they deny the relevance of *God's wrath in eternity*. One cosmological approach denies the existence of the permanent judicial boundary separating history from heaven. The other approach denies the existence of eternity. The best example of the first is Hinduism. The best example of the second is humanism.

Hinduism is normally viewed as a deeply spiritual religion. It is deeply spiritual; it is nevertheless anti-grace. For the Hindu, nature is the realm of the masses; it is also the realm of illusion (*maya*). The true spiritual master is self-consciously involved in a lifetime pilgrimage—indeed, several thousand lifetime pilgrimages—to escape from the illusion of nature by becoming one with the non-historical Ultimate, in which all spatial and temporal distinctions disappear. But there is no grace in the system; the process is rigorously governed by *karma*—the impersonal ethical law of reincarnation. The spiritual goal is total escape from history.

The other representative way of denying grace is modern humanism. Men are told that there is no escape from history, meaning no grace that transcends it. The humanist's universe is a closed system: closed to God. There is only death, both individual and cosmic (the heat death of the universe).⁶¹ In both systems—spiritual Hinduism and

60. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, pp. 63–64.

61. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

materialist humanism—grace is not seen as a culture-transforming power in history. In the first system, God pays no attention to history, not having any conscious attention to pay. In the second system, there is no God to pay attention.

The gods of ancient paganism were either animistic or civic. They were either gods of the household, including the fields within the household's boundaries, or else they were gods of the *polis*. They were not universal gods, except to the extent that a king might extend his personal power across geographical boundaries. The great chain of being encompassed warring gods and warring men. *The gods manifested their power through specific men or cities*. When a city lost a war, its gods also lost the war.⁶² Thus, the realm of the sacred was reflected in the affairs of the supposedly profane. It was believed by all except the Hebrews that mankind could call upon no god that is simultaneously personal and absolute.⁶³ Nature alone was seen as absolute, but impersonal. Nature eventually would swallow up grace. Stoicism and Epicureanism are examples of later classical ethical-philosophical systems in which grace disappeared.

2. Nominalism: Religious vs. Secular

Biblically speaking, everything is at bottom religious, for the whole creation is under God, both metaphysically (being) and covenantally (judicially). God created the cosmos, which is forever distinct from the unique being of God. *There is a Creator-creature distinction*.⁶⁴ Everything is therefore supposed to be formally and publicly acknowledged as being under God covenantally. But covenant-breaking man refuses to acknowledge that he lives under such a covenantal requirement. He seeks other gods to serve—gods that will respond to his authority and his ritual manipulations.

62. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), III:XV.

63. Wrote theologian John Frame: "The non-Christian, of course, can accept an absolute only if that absolute is impersonal and therefore makes no demands and has no power to bless or curse. There are personal gods in paganism, but none of them is absolute; there are absolutes in paganism, but none is personal. Only in Christianity (and in other religions influenced by the Bible) is there such a concept as a 'personal absolute.'" John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), p. 17.

64. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, vol. V of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1961] 1978), pp. 11–12.

Covenantal subordination is built into the creation.⁶⁵ There is an inescapable hierarchy in all existence. There is no escape from some form of covenantal subordination, meaning *religious* subordination; men serve either God or mammon (Matt. 6:24).⁶⁶ Men see themselves and the world around them through religiously tinted spectacles. They view the world as covenantal subordinates of God or Satan.⁶⁷

In contrast, very few of life's activities are sacred. That which is sacramental is narrowly defined by God; it refers exclusively to the church of Jesus Christ in its unique, monopolistic capacity as the guardian and administrator of the sacraments. The church's administration of the sacraments corresponds to the priestly activities of circumcision and Passover in the Mosaic Covenant. While the head of the household was involved in both rituals, he administered the rites only in his judicial capacity as a household priest. He was always under formal ecclesiastical sanctions.

(a) Kant's Dialectic: Phenomenal/Noumenal

In modern thought, including modern fundamentalism, there is a familiar theme of "religious vs. secular."⁶⁸ That which is secular is defined as non-religious. The term "secular" is used as a substitute for man's autonomy. Secularism is inherently atheistic. Secular man assumes that atheism is the antithesis of religion, when it in fact is a deeply religious worldview.⁶⁹ This usage is colored by the presupposition of modern man that *religion* is the way of the *subordinate* person, who labors under non-scientific, non-physical restrictions, while the *secular* is the equivalent of *autonomous*. This dualism is basically a development of Kant's dialectic between the phenomenal and the noumenal.⁷⁰ The phenomenal realm is non-religious, autonomous, and secular: the deterministic realm of impersonal scientific cause and effect. The noumenal is the realm of the spiritual, the ethical, the irra-

65. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

66. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 14.

67. Jordan, *Through New Eyes*.

68. Gary North, "Publisher's Foreword," *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology*, by Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. xii–xix. (<http://bit.ly/gbkghouse>)

69. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993).

70. Richard Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956).

tional, the “uncaused,” i.e., human freedom.⁷¹

In both realms, noumenal and phenomenal, man is understood to be spiritually autonomous. Insofar as he dwells in the noumenal, Kantian man is responsible only to himself. Insofar as he dwells in the phenomenal, he is not responsible at all. He is the impersonally determined, cosmically irresponsible product of this world’s cause-and-effect forces. *In neither case is he responsible to a Creator God.* The “religious” realm is just another side of autonomous man: the nonrational side. It is to this extent inherently *secular*. Thus, modern usage misleads us: *the “religious” in Kant’s world is as autonomous as the secular.* The noumenal and the phenomenal represent two different, dialectical sides of man’s autonomy.⁷²

(b) *The Denial of Hierarchy*

What modern man denies with all his heart is the existence of a realm of *judicial subordination* to a God who judges men both in time and eternity. It is this condition of judicial subordination that Jesus warned His disciples to consider: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Modern man rejects such a hierarchical view of man’s place in the cosmos. This rejection of God’s sanctions has colored modern thought so completely that even Christians are doubtful that God brings predictable sanctions in history, and some Christian scholars actually deny that He does.⁷³

Nevertheless, there is no escape from hierarchy. It is a *chain of command*, not a chain of being. Man is under God; nature is under man; but God is not part of the “being” of man or nature. The God of the Bible is in no sense the god of pantheism. He is a covenantal God who issues commands through judicial representatives. Man will never become God, issuing orders as an ultimate sovereign, for man cannot evolve into God or replace God through revolution. The Mormons have a slogan: “What God is, man will become; what man is, God once

71. Quantum physics represents the invasion of the phenomenal by the noumenal. See North, *Is the World Running Down?*, ch. 1; Fred Alan Wolfe, *Taking the Quantum Leap: The New Physics for Non-Scientists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989). So does the newly developing chaos theory, pioneered by mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987).

72. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), pp. 63–64.

73. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 7.

was.” This is incorrect. What God is, man can never become. But here Christianity breaks with both Judaism and Islam, for Christianity teaches that what man is, the Son of God once was in history, and more than what man is: perfectly human, yet also divine, without intermixture. So announced the Athanasian creed (c. 430 A.D.).⁷⁴

Covenant-breaking man denies this chain of command, preferring instead the idea of a chain of being.⁷⁵ The chain-of-being philosophy of ancient paganism is reincarnated in modern humanism. Modern man simply inverts the chain-of-being hierarchy that prevails in pagan religions. Unlike the older pagan view, where the sacred was viewed as superior to the profane, for Enlightenment man the religious is subordinate to the secular. The “real world” is the realm of science and mathematics, of stock market profits and physical fitness exercises—what Sorokin called sensate culture.⁷⁶ The not-so-real world is said to be the realm of religion: prayers, rituals, dreams of heaven to come, and “pie in the sky by and by”—contemptuously dismissed as the realm of children and old women (of both sexes). It is the realm of symbols: meaningful only to those who believe in them, unlike the supposedly universal authority of reason and mathematics.⁷⁷ Those who dwell in the religious realm are generally thought of as failures: people who could not compete successfully in the real world, and who fled to the symbolic in search of “higher” meaning—a meaning that cannot be expressed in real-world categories, but which is invented by the very participants.

The great German sociologist Max Weber was caught on the horns of this dilemma—this inherent *philosophical dualism*—of modern humanism. He contrasted the sublime with the rational, yet he regarded the sublime as the realm of the weak. First, the *sublime*: “The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualiza-

74. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/rjrfs0>)

75. Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1936] 1960).

76. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age* (New York: Dutton, [1941] 1957), ch. 3.

77. As to why mathematics, which is a construct of the human mind, should have any relationship to the physical world, let alone govern any aspect of the cosmos, humanists cannot say. Nobel Prize-winning physicist Eugene Wigner has pointed this out: Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>)

tion and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’ Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.” Then, a few lines later, the *weak*: “To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him. After all, they do not make it hard for him. One way or another he has to bring his ‘intellectual sacrifice’—that is inevitable. If he can really do it, we shall not rebuke him.”⁷⁸ On the contrary, from the rationalists of the Enlightenment to *Humanist Manifesto II*,⁷⁹ those who do return to Christianity’s supernaturalism are severely rebuked. Being dismissed as a weakling and a coward is a form of rebuke.

(c) *Sacred and Secular*

The humanist insists that there is no essential (metaphysical) distinction between the secular and the religious. The realm of religion is regarded as a realm of man’s invention. It is “merely” a realm of symbol and myth, of mystery and imagination. The many distinctions between the religious and the secular realms are explained as strictly *nominal*: named by men rather than real. Modern man believes that the noumenal is merely nominal. Modern man is usually a nominalist, not a realist. The realm of grace is understood as being no different at bottom (metaphysically) from the realm of nature, and therefore the realm of grace is an illusion: *secularizing the sacred*. If the reality of the bizarre intrudes on the boundaries of science so that a few scientists on the fringes of science can no longer ignore the evidence, they can stretch the definition of nature so as to include the attributes of the oc-

78. Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (1918), *From Max Weber: Essays on Sociology*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 155. (<http://bit.ly/mwscience>). Within two decades of Weber’s call for the emotionally weak to return to the traditional churches, the Protestant churches had been completely corrupted morally by their compromises with Hitler, who required all Germans to greet each other with a public salutation, “heil Hitler”—salvation Hitler. After World War II, the German Protestant state church became completely liberal theologically.

79. “Humanist Manifesto II,” *The Humanist*, XXXIII (Oct. 1973); reprinted in *Humanist Manifestos I and II* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, [1973] 1985), pp. 13–23.

cult and abnormal.⁸⁰

But there has long been an underground humanist alternative to this strategy: *sacralizing the secular*.⁸¹ The believer in magic sees a link between man and the cosmos that is based on ritual formulas rather than scientific formulas. This view of man is called realism. What man does on earth mirrors the realm above man and invokes the powers thereof. But there is a metaphysical continuum: the chain of being. Man is not fundamentally different from nature and the supernatural. He is seen as the supreme link between nature and the supernatural. He does not name nature (nominalism)—does not define it through the power of his reason—but he commands both nature and the supernatural through the power open to him through special knowledge possessed by the adept. The goal of the magician, like the goal of the scientist, is control over nature. This is why the two realms of ritual magic and of scientific humanism are not inherently separate realms.⁸²

One's choice between these two options makes little difference for the Bible's theology of redemption. Both views—nominalism and realism—are anti-covenantal. They both rebel against the idea of an absolute judicial hierarchy: God over man. The Bible teaches that nature cannot swallow up grace in history, for God is over nature and sustains it by grace. In contrast, whether occult forces invade nature by cloaking themselves in the garb of the Kantian noumenal realm,⁸³ or whether the Kantian phenomenal realm of rationally defined *and constructed* impersonal nature pushes back the mysterious to the edges of man's existence, nature always swallows up grace.

The god of deism is too far away to transform man or nature. The god of pantheism is too immersed in nature to transform man or nature. The gods of animism are at best local forces, too weak to guarantee man's salvation. In the world of atheism, God does not exist, nor does the realm of grace. There is only the realm of nature. Therefore,

80. Thelma Moss, *The Probability of the Impossible: Scientific Discoveries and Explorations in the Psychic World* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1974); Lyall Watson, *Supernature* (Garden City, New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1973). Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *Impossible Probabilities* (New York: Stein & Day, [1968] 1971) seems more occult than scientific, but the book is structured as a popular scientific work.

81. Stephen A. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

82. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/gnoccultism>)

83. An example of this is Freudian psychology and especially Jungian. Man's subconscious or unconscious—personal (Freud) or collective (Jung)—becomes the doorway of the occult, both in theory and practice.

in all covenant-breaking thought, nature inevitably swallows up grace.⁸⁴

This view of history is not limited to humanism. A similar view exists in modern Christianity. It begins with the same false nature/ grace distinction. It confuses the Bible's common/sacred distinction with nature and grace. It equates common with nature, sacred with grace.

L. False Distinctions Within Modern Academia

A strictly spatial or cultural distinction between the sacred and the profane is too "primitive" a distinction to suit modern humanist man. Modern humanist man has abandoned the concept of the profane, except for certain acts that are seen as *politically* profane. Nazism, for example, is regarded today as politically profane, when it in fact was biblically profane: a pagan religion.⁸⁵ Modern man has invented another distinction to satisfy his need to distinguish between the sacred and the common. He contrasts the sacred with the secular. In this, he shares the belief of modern fundamentalism. In this section, I survey an example of modern humanistic scholarship's re-definition of biblical categories: sacred and profane.

I need to repeat myself: *the realm of the sacred should not be contrasted with a [hypothetical] realm called the profane*. The sacred or sacramental realm is properly contrasted to the common or non-sacramental realm. Anything that is profane is the result of a boundary violation of the sacred by something that is common.

A great deal of confusion about this point has been generated by two separate sources within modern academia. First, standard historical and anthropological accounts of religion have been written from the point of view of a false dualism between sacred and profane: the magical realm of the priest, the shaman, or the possessed vs. the secu-

84. Even in animist systems, the gods are part of nature, affected by what goes on in history, using nature as their means of imposing sanctions. The idea of a sovereign Mother Nature generally lies behind the local gods of animism.

85. On the anti-Christian aspects of Nazi theology, see Thomas Schirrmacher, "National Socialism As Religion," *Chalcedon Report* (Nov. 1992). He pointed out that the "heil" of "Heil Hitler!" meant *salvation*. It was required by law as a public greeting. Small children at school were told before each meal: "Fold your hands, bow your heads and think about Adolph Hitler. He gives us our daily bread and helps us out of every misery." Schirrmacher offers many other examples of Nazi theology. Modern scholarship has produced a huge quantity of studies on Nazi politics; it has produced almost nothing on Nazi religion.

lar realm of the non-initiated.⁸⁶ Second, a similar distinction is basic to modern sociological theory: sacred vs. secular.⁸⁷ This distinction in twentieth-century sociological thought was pioneered by Émile Durkheim, who was Numa Fustel de Coulanges' most famous disciple.⁸⁸ His influence on this point has been enormous, a fact rarely recognized by the international academic community, which still lives under his spell and the spell of his many disciples in many fields.⁸⁹ Nisbet wrote: "Of all concepts and perspectives in Durkheim the sacred is the most striking and, given the age in which he lived, the most radical."⁹⁰

1. Durkheim's False Dualism: Sacred/Profane

Durkheim established the terms of sociological discourse on the sacred-profane dichotomy in 1912, in Book I, Chapter I of his book on Australian aboriginal religion, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: "All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane* and *sacred*. This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought; . . ."⁹¹ Durkheim did not qualify or tone down this dichotomy in any way, writing that "*it is absolute*. In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another. The traditional

86. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964).

87. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 222.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 226, 243–51.

89. Nisbet wrote: "More than any other figure in the history of sociology, Émile Durkheim seems to embody what has proved to be conceptually most distinctive in the field and most fertile in its contribution to other modern disciplines. Durkheim, it might be said, is the complete sociologist." Nisbet, "Introduction," *Émile Durkheim* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 1. He continued: "That he was a masterful teacher is witnessed by the long list of important works in almost every field of scholarship—history, economics, psychology, law, government—written by men who acknowledged him as their teacher." *Idem*.

90. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, p. 243.

91. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, [1915] 1965), p. 52.

opposition of good and bad is nothing beside this; for the good and the bad are only two opposed species of the same class, namely morals, just as sickness and health are two different aspects of the same order of facts, life, while the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common."⁹²

The problem for the sociologist or anthropologist who accepts Durkheim's classification of sacred and profane is to identify the operational and theoretical boundaries between the two realms. What is the nature of such boundaries? How can anyone pass between them without becoming ritually polluted? How can anyone ever escape living in the realm of the profane? Durkheim understood the problem: "This is not equivalent to saying that a being can never pass from one of these worlds into the other: but the manner in which this passage is effected, when it does take place, puts into relief the essential duality of the two kingdoms."⁹³ Authorizing a person's move from the profane realm into the sacred realm is the basis of ritual initiation, he argued. The individual is *metaphysically* transformed by means of ritual: from a profane being into a religious being. "Does this not prove that between the profane being which he was and the religious being which he becomes, there is a break of continuity?"⁹⁴

Durkheim had the biblical categories of sacred and profane almost exactly backwards. What he described is the metaphysical dualism hypothesized by theories of ritual magic. In the Bible, it is nowhere asserted that a person is profane prior to his ritual transformation, becoming sacred—a "religious being"—by means of the ritual. On the contrary, in biblical religion, an inescapably religious being—man—becomes profane *but remains religious* when he violates a boundary separating the judicially sacred from the judicially common. In the Old Covenant, he profaned "sacred space" when he crossed such a boundary, and in doing so, became profane himself. There was and is nothing profane about the realm outside the boundary of the sacred. Whatever is *inside* the boundary can become profane—ritually polluted—when someone who is not authorized to enter the sacred space crosses the boundary. That which is *sacred*, meaning that which is associated with the *sacraments*, can become profane only through a ritually prohibited act of trespass. What must be understood from the beginning of soci-

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

94. *Idem.*

ological analysis is this: in biblical religion, *everything outside and inside the boundary is equally religious*. Everything is under covenantal subordination to the Creator God.

2. Religious vs. Secular

One result of Durkheim's false classification of sacred and profane has been the reinforcement of that other false dualism: the religious vs. the secular. We can see the connection between these two false dualisms in this statement from Durkheim: "The two worlds are not only conceived of as separate, but as even hostile and jealous rivals of each other. Since men cannot fully belong to one except on condition of leaving the other completely, they are exhorted to withdraw themselves completely from the profane world in order to lead an exclusively religious life."⁹⁵ He identified monasticism and mystical asceticism as examples of this withdrawal.⁹⁶

This "religious-secular" dualism, like the "sacred-profane" dualism, also falls into contradictions. Again and again, the supposedly autonomous secular realm is found to be infused with religion or even undergirded by it.⁹⁷ This mixing of the two realms points back to Durkheim's original theoretical error: a false dualism between the sacred as a realm vs. the profane as a separate realm. Biblically, the sacred is one judicial realm; the common is another. The sacred is distinguished from the common by the *unique judicial presence of God*. The profane is not a separate realm. It is *violated sacred space*.

Some recent scholars have recognized that Durkheim's sharp antithesis between the sacred and the profane cannot be maintained, either conceptually or historically.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, this false dualism is sometimes imported into Christians' discussions of society. It reinforces the other dualism: *religious vs. secular*. This false dualism has undermined Christian social theory for almost a millennium. I refer to the common view of ecclesiastical service to God as the only truly full-time Christian service. It goes back to the medieval church's view of the ordained ministry as superior morally and not just institutionally.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

96. *Idem*.

97. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, pp. 229–31.

98. Cf. W. E. H. Stanmer, "Reflections on Durkheim and Aboriginal Religion" (1967); reprinted in *Durkheim on religion: A selection of readings and bibliographies*, ed. S. F. Pickering (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 291–96.

M. “Full-Time Christian Service”

One of the most debilitating errors of modern fundamentalism is its specific misinterpretation of the distinction between sacred and common. There is a legitimate distinction between them, as we have seen: a distinction relating to the office of priest. In the New Covenant order, the ordained church elder is worthy of double honor (I Tim. 5:17).⁹⁹ He is a minister. He does not offer sacrifice, but he still maintains the Mosaic Covenant’s priestly function: guarding access to the sacraments.¹⁰⁰ The distinction between priest and non-priest in the New Covenant era is based on election to office. It is an explicitly *judicial* distinction.

Because of modern fundamentalism’s acceptance of humanism’s false metaphysical dualism—*religious* (grace/sacred) vs. *secular* (common/nature), i.e., noumenal vs. phenomenal—the fundamentalist speaks of a unique specialized calling: full-time Christian service. Only an *elite minority* can be involved in such service: the realm of grace. This minority is to that extent regarded as sacred, even though the fundamentalist definition includes non-ministerial callings in its classification of full-time Christian service. The Protestant doctrine of “every redeemed man a priest” is abandoned. This dualism implies that full-time work outside of the ministry is not full-time Christian service. It implies that all occupations besides that of the ordained priest-minister are somehow not expressly Christian, or at best, less deeply Christian. This creates a major theoretical problem: how to explain women as being lawfully eligible to become involved in full-time Christian service, since most theologically conservative denominations refuse to ordain women as ministers.

Biblically speaking, these are unquestionably *common* occupations, i.e., they are not sacramental.¹⁰¹ But almost nothing in life has ever

99. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

100. This is why the office of chaplain can become biblically perverse if the civil covenant is elevated over the church covenant. If the chaplain is required by the armed forces to baptize the child of any serviceman who presents the child for baptism, irrespective of the serviceman’s church membership or outward conduct, then the chaplain is being told to break the church’s covenantal boundary. The same criticism can be applied to any pastor in a state-established church who is required to baptize any child merely because of its parents’ political citizenship. To do so would be a profane act.

101. Writing this commentary is not sacramental. Neither is editing it, proofreading it, typesetting it, printing it, or writing advertising copy for it.

been sacramental. Even in the garden of Eden, only two trees were sacramental. Everything else in the garden and the world was common. All of the creation was religious, however. Administering the creation lawfully mandated full-time, covenant-keeping service. All of life was under God's covenant. In this sense, nothing fundamental has changed; only the boundaries have shifted.

The fundamentalist's distinction between full-time Christian service and, presumably, part-time Christian service implies that *everything outside the institutional church is secular*. A person is said to be in full-time Christian service only when he withdraws from this secular world. Such an outlook results in a drastic narrowing of the definition of the kingdom of God: a kingdom that supposedly operates only in the realms of the internal and the ecclesiastical. Only within the individual Christian heart and the four walls of some church building does the kingdom of God supposedly manifest itself. The definition of full-time Christian is usually widened to include non-profit activities in parachurch ministries, though no explanation is ever offered about how such a widened definition is theologically legitimate. The family may be included, but the state is always excluded. The state is seen as the realm of the natural, the common: *natural law*. The state is therefore exempted from the revealed law of God and removed from the realm of grace. There can be no redemption of the state. "Politics is dirty" pietists insist—inherently dirty. Problem: because the state is thereby granted judicial autonomy, it steadily swallows up grace by applying its common sanctions: against personal religious freedom, the independent church, and the Christian family.

That such a dualistic view of life can easily lead to mysticism should not be surprising. While the average fundamentalist might understand that covenantally faithful kings, soldiers, and even farmers under the Mosaic covenant were all involved in full-time service to God, he finds it difficult to grasp the fact that these same occupations today, plus all others not explicitly identified as immoral, require full-time Christian service. Fundamentalism's dualistic view of man's labors militates against the idea of any explicitly Christian concept of culture until after the second coming of Christ.¹⁰² In practice, it always means a withdrawal from culture.¹⁰³ This is pietism's theological leg-

102. The best-selling 1980s fundamentalist defender of this dualistic view of culture was Dave Hunt, e.g., *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1988).

103. The willingness of modern American fundamentalists after about 1975 to get

acy.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

A non-deliberate trespass of a holy thing required a 20% penalty payment plus a slain ram. A non-deliberate trespass of God's commandment required only a slain ram. The trespass of a holy thing was the greater (i.e., worse) trespass. The importance today of these two Levitical laws governing these two guilt offerings lies in their distinctions and varying penalties. The Levitical distinctions between "the holy things of the Lord" and "the commandments of the Lord" enable us to discern a fundamental distinction between the sacred and the non-sacramental (i.e., the common or conventional). The common is obviously not profane, for this realm includes God's commandments. There is surely nothing inherently profane about "the commandments of the Lord" or the comprehensive realms of life governed by them. What *is* profane is any transgression of "the holy things of the Lord." These Levitical laws therefore reveal the error of the standard textbook distinctions drawn between "sacred and profane" and "religious and secular."

The biblically valid distinction between the sacred and the non-sacramental reminds us that *all of nature is under grace*, either special or common. Without the unearned gifts (grace) of life, law, time, and knowledge, and power, there could be no history.¹⁰⁵ The processes of nature have been definitively redeemed by Jesus Christ by His death, resurrection, and ascension.¹⁰⁶ This is equally true of culture. The Bible is clear: nature is sustained by God's common grace and is progressively sanctified in history in response to His extension of special grace to the church. *Grace progressively redeems nature in history because Jesus Christ definitively redeemed nature at Calvary.* Nature is therefore sanctified in history: definitively, progressively, and finally. This is the biblical concept of corporate sanctification. It is essential for developing biblical social theory.

It is the task of Christians to work out progressively in history the

involved in cultural and political activities explicitly as Christians indicates a breakdown of the older theological viewpoint. If this continues, it will produce a major restructuring of fundamentalist theology, especially pretribulationist dispensationalism. See North, "Publisher's Foreword," *House Divided*, pp. xviii–xix.

104. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 4.

105. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*.

106. North, *Is the World Running Down?*

implications of what these definitive transformations have already accomplished judicially. *Whatever God has declared judicially, He requires to be manifested progressively.* This dominion assignment to His people involves extensive personal responsibility, which is why dominion theology is resisted so adamantly by pietists. But the church has been given a written Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the division of labor (I Cor. 12)¹⁰⁷ to enable Christians to extend God's dominion covenant. This historical task is huge, but our tools are more than adequate. There is also plenty of time.¹⁰⁸

Sadly, most Christians in my generation prefer intellectual slumber and life in a cultural ghetto, living on "hand-me-downs" from the world of humanism. They, too, have adopted the false dualisms of humanism: sacred vs. profane, religious vs. secular, nature vs. grace. They, too, have adopted the view that without Jesus' bodily presence in history, nature swallows up grace. They are also pessimillennialists.

Nature should not be contrasted with grace, for it is part of God's common grace and can be renewed (healed) over time through comprehensive covenantal faithfulness. *Nature should be contrasted with the sacramental: a judicially segregated realm. Both realms are equally under grace.* Therefore, nature (the common)—families, businesses, civil government, etc.—can be healed progressively in history by special grace. This is one application of the doctrine of the bodily ascension of Christ: overcoming death in history.

In contrast to the biblical view of nature and grace stand all forms of anti-Christianity. *In all non-Christian systems, nature swallows up grace in history.* Tragically for the history of the church, both amillennialism and premillennialism necessarily adopt this non-Christian view of nature and grace in history (i.e., the period prior to Jesus Christ's bodily return). The world supposedly remains under the accelerating curses of God, deteriorating both ethically and physically (the entropy process). The common blessings of God in history are progressively overwhelmed by the common curses¹⁰⁹.

107. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

108. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

109. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 4. How there can be both economic growth and population growth over several centuries, including increasing per capita wealth, in a world of declining special grace and therefore (presumably) declining common grace, is a theoretical problem which amillennialists and premillennialists

Nature does not swallow up grace. Nature is not separate from grace; nature is under grace. For example, all Christian service is under God's special grace. All Christian service is in this sense redemptive. When a Christian engages in any honest labor, he is engaged in full-time Christian service. But he is not engaged in full-time sacred service. Sacred service is limited to the performance of the formal duties of an ecclesiastical ministry: preaching the gospel in worship services, serving the sacraments, anointing the sick with oil (James 5:14), etc. Formal church worship involves an added layer of holiness, i.e., judicial separation. This is why the sacred can be profaned.

There is remarkably little discussion of the ascension of Christ in modern orthodox theology.¹¹⁰ This topic inevitably raises fundamental historical, cosmological, and cultural implications that modern premillennial and especially amillennial theologians find difficult to accept, such as the progressive manifestation of Christ's rule in history through His representatives: Christians.¹¹¹ In a world in which grace is believed to be progressively devoured by nature, there is little room for historical applications of the doctrine of the historical ascension. Covenantal postmillennialism alone can confidently discuss the doctrine of Christ's ascension, for postmillennialism does not seek to confine the effects of Christ's ascension to the realms of the internal and the trans-historical.¹¹² That is to say, postmillennialism does not assert the

prudently ignore, given their view of history, wherein nature steadily swallows grace. The theonomic postmillennialist can point to the spread of social attitudes and civil laws in the West—right-wing Enlightenment thought: constitutionalism, contractualism, and capitalism ("common grace principles")—that are consistent with biblical law. External cultural obedience has brought external blessings, even in the face of a compromised and weakened church. In contrast, the systematic refusal of premillennialists and amillennialists to comment on this ethical-cultural relationship has left them incapable of affirming the details, or even the possibility, of an explicitly biblical social theory. This has been their dilemma for over three centuries. On the decline of Protestant casuistry—the application of general principles to concrete judicial cases in history—since the late seventeenth century, see Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity During the Seventeenth Century* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), pp. 32–36. Roman Catholic casuistry began to fall into disfavor in the same era: Albert R. Johnson and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), Pt. V.

110. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 227–29.

111. No theological or eschatological school denies that there can be prolonged set-backs in this manifestation of Christ's rule. Conversely, none would totally deny progress. I know of no one who would argue, for example, that the creeds of the church prior to the fourth century were more rigorous or more accurate theologically than those that came later.

112. This is why amillennialism drifts so easily into Barthianism: the history of

existence of supposedly inevitable boundaries around the effects of grace in history. On the contrary, it asserts that all such boundaries will be progressively overcome in history, until on judgment day the very gates (boundaries) of hell will not be able to stand against the church (Matt. 16:18).¹¹³

mankind for the amillennialist has no visible connection with the ascension of Jesus Christ. Progressive sanctification in this view is limited to the personal and ecclesiastical; it is never cultural or civic. The ascension of Christ has no transforming implications for society in amillennial theology. The ascension was both historical and publicly visible; its implications supposedly are not. The Barthian is simply more consistent than the amillennialist: he denies the historicity of both Jesus' ascension and His subsequent grace to society. Christ's ascension, like His grace, is relegated to the trans-historical. See North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 111–13.

113. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, chaps. 12, 13.

GUARDIAN OF THE CIVIL OATH

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour; Or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the LORD: and it shall be forgiven him for any thing of all that he hath done in trespassing therein (Lev. 6:1–7).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is that theft is a transgression against God.

A. God as the Victim of Crime

God is here identified as the primary victim of crime: “If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD. . . .” This principle of jurisprudence is fundamental to biblical law. Therefore, it is not sufficient for a thief to make restitution to his earthly victim; he must also make restitution to God.

This passage continues the laws governing trespasses and guilt (reparations) offerings. The sin in this instance is high-handed, unlike the sin of Leviticus 5:15.¹ It is said to be a sin against the Lord, yet what is

1. “If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the

described is a sin against a neighbor. God mandated a 20% penalty plus the sacrifice of a blemish-free animal.

The text identifies the presence of a false oath in conjunction with crimes against property. The question is: Was the false oath the basis of the 20% penalty payment? I argue in this chapter that it was not. The false oath made mandatory the animal sacrifice, but the theft itself, confessed prior to the trial, was what invoked the 20% penalty. My line of reasoning rests on what I have previously identified as God's economic subsidy for early confession of crime, i.e., reduced restitution penalties.²

Deception is here singled out as a sin against the Lord. This includes deception regarding: (1) keeping an item entrusted for safe-keeping or keeping a pledged item (collateral for a loan), (2) robbery, (3) extortion, and (4) keeping someone's lost item.³ Theologically speaking, every sin is a sin against the Lord, to be judged in God's final court. The *victim* of every crime becomes God's *legal representative*, for he is an earthly target of man's rebellion against God's standards.⁴ He is the victim, therefore, of a *boundary violation*. But this passage specifically identifies four transgressions as trespasses against God, whereas other trespasses listed in the Bible are not specifically identified as such. Why not? No ram offering was required for those other sins. Why not, if every sin is judicially a trespass against God? Why single out deception?

B. The Presence of a False Oath

The answer lies elsewhere than in the enumerated sins themselves. It is the transgressor's *false verbal testimony to the victim* regarding these *crimes against property* that serves as the differentiating factor: either lying to the neighbor directly or swearing falsely to a civil court. Writes Wenham: "By abusing the oath, a person took God's holy name in vain, and trespassed against his holiness. Therefore a reparation offering was required to make amends."⁵ The sin is two-fold: a violation

LORD; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering" (Lev. 5:15).

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3: *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43:C.

3. The New American Standard Version makes these crimes clearer than the King James Version does.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33:A.

5. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,

of a neighbor's property rights (point three of the covenant: boundaries), coupled with a violation of either personal verbal assurances to the victim or the violation of a formal judicial oath (point four: oath).

Because a crime against property is involved, *the lie or deception becomes a judicial oath*. The victim becomes God's covenant agent, the one who initiates a lawsuit against the thief.⁶ The oath violation takes a specific form: the implicit (though not legally explicit)⁷ misuse of God's name. This is a boundary violation: the third commandment (Ex. 20:7). This oath implicitly and inescapably invokes God's negative sanctions, as all unlawful oaths must.⁸

In a court, there must be interrogation of the suspects. God in the garden publicly interrogated Adam and Eve regarding the facts of the case. It is a crime to testify falsely in God's court or in man's. False testimony is intended to deflect God's justice. Offering it implies that God can be deceived, or at the very least, He can be deterred from bringing His negative sanctions in history. False testimony rests on a man's self-confidence in his ability to deceive God's representative agents in history. He believes that he can deflect or delay God's judgment in history by means of misleading information. This faith in false testimony rests on a theology that assumes that God is non-existent, or not omniscient, or not omnipotent, or does not bring significant negative sanctions in history. It assumes that heaven's court is non-existent, or that God is forgetful, or that time, apart from restitution, pays for all sins (universal salvation), i.e., that God does not bring negative sanctions in eternity. It assumes, at the very least, that God's negative sanctions outside the earthly court (in history and eternity) are minimal compared to the negative sanctions that can be imposed by the court, i.e., double restitution to the victim (Ex. 22:4). This law denies all of these assumptions.

C. Restitution and Atonement

Two separate sins were involved: one formal-covenantal (false

1979), p. 108.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 43.

7. Jesus warned men not to make oaths to each other: "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Matt. 5:37). He was not speaking of civil or ecclesiastical trials, in which an oath was legitimate because both state and church have been entrusted with the authority to bring God's negative sanctions in history.

8. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

oath), one conventional-economic (theft or fraud). Therefore, there had to be two separate acts of restitution. The first form of restitution—sacrificing a ram—was paid to God to compensate Him for the oath-taker's attempt to thwart God's civil court. This was necessary to satisfy God in His capacity as both High Priest and King of the heavenly court. The second—return of the stolen item, plus a 20% payment—was required by God's law to satisfy the earthly victim in his legal capacity as a victim. Both the victim and the priest served as *covenantal agents of God*: the first civil, the second ecclesiastical.

The penalty for unconfessed theft is double restitution (Ex. 22:4). This is reduced to the restoration of the stolen property plus a 20% penalty if the thief confesses his crime before either its discovery or his conviction, as we shall see. *The 20% penalty payment constituted a double tithe.*⁹

Why impose a 20% penalty, the equivalent of a double tithe? What did the tithe have to do with restitution to the victim? James Jordan suggests that it was because guardianship is associated with Levitical office, and so is the tithe. Numbers 18 established the Levites as the guardians of sacred space and sacred things. “And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die” (Num. 18:2–3). They were required to keep the common Israelites away from the sacred spaces of the tabernacle. This entitled them to a tithe as their lawful inheritance.¹⁰ Conclusion: *the tithe and the Levitical protection of sacred space were linked judicially.*

And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the

9. Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1846] 1966), p. 109.

10. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance (Num. 18:21–24).

Death was the civil penalty for invading the temple's sacred space, which was protected by the Levites (Num. 18:7), just as an invasion of the Aaronic priests' sacred space by the Levites would bring God's death sentence (Num. 18:3). The penalty for other invasions of sacred areas was the 20% penalty: a double tithe. A vow to a priest was redeemed by paying a 20% commission (Lev. 27:19). Refusal to pay this redemption price resulted in the permanent loss of the property, even rural land (Lev. 27:20–21).¹¹ Unintentional boundary violations of sacred things also required a double tithe penalty: "And if a man eat of the holy thing unwittingly, then he shall put the fifth part thereof unto it, and shall give it unto the priest with the holy thing" (Lev. 22:14). "Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed" (Num. 5:6–7).

In the same sense that every man is a priest through Adam, every man is a Levite through Adam. He is a designated guardian of God's property: a Levitical function. The property owner is inescapably God's steward because God owns everything: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).¹² All ownership is necessarily representative. It is therefore stewardship. This judicially bounded sphere of economic responsibility is not to be invaded unlawfully: the eighth commandment (Ex. 20:15).¹³ Adam is the archetype. He was established as a guardian of God's property—a Levitical function—even before he acted as a priest. He was told to serve as a guardian on the day of his creation (Gen. 2:15). His profane, sacrilegious act of priestly defiance—eating a prohibited communion meal in the presence of an invading serpent—took place later (Gen. 3:6).

11. Chapter 37.

12. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

13. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 28.

D. Thwarting Civil Justice

The lie or false oath had been intended to deflect either the economic victim or the court from discovering the truth. In this sense, it was an affront to God's kingly justice. It was an attack on the integrity of both His heavenly court and His representative earthly civil court. The false testimony may or may not have put someone else under suspicion; we are not told. What we are told is that there were two separate forms of restitution: (1) the return to the victim of the full value of whatever had been stolen, plus a penalty payment of 20% (a double tithe); (2) a ram to be sacrificed by a priest.

The connection between the false oath and the civil court is easy to understand. The court enforces justice in the name of God and on behalf of the victim. It *sets things straight* judicially and economically by declaring guilt or innocence. That is, the civil court practices judicial *orthodoxy*: straight speaking. It defends its own integrity. Why, then, is the court not authorized by God to collect for itself the extra 20%, or allowed to impose some additional penalty? Why does the entire restitution payment appear to go to the victim,¹⁴ since the false oath was made to impede the proper functioning of the court?

1. The Victim Becomes a Judicial Agent

We can find the answer to this question by first observing that the initial lie was made to the neighbor, not to the court: "If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour; . . ." This preliminary section of the passage does not mention any formal court proceeding, yet the criminal still owed a ram to God. This indicates that the victim, to whom the criminal lied, was in fact an agent of the civil court, even though the court had not been called into session. It was the victim who possessed lawful authority to call the court into session. He was gathering preliminary facts regarding the violation. *The victim was acting therefore not only on his own behalf but also as an agent of society's primary institution of civil justice, the court.* The lie to the neighbor was therefore judicially an oath to a covenantal institution. It had a unique binding character that conventional falsehoods do not possess.

14. See below: Section I.

The victim, in seeking justice, does not represent only himself. Biblical jurisprudence recognizes the earthly victim as a representative of God. A sin against him is always in his legal capacity as God's representative; *the ultimate target of the sin is God*. The sinner in history attacks various aspects of the creation in his attempt to defy God, since God cannot be attacked directly. The sinner violates God-established earthly boundaries in his judicial rebellion against God. The archetype act of rebellion was Adam's. Adam could not attack God directly, for God was absent from the garden; instead, Adam violated the boundary that God had placed around the forbidden tree.

This leads us to a significant conclusion: *the very existence of an earthly victim calls God's heavenly court of justice into session*. If the existence of a boundary violation becomes known to the victim, this discovery automatically invokes an earthly civil court of justice.¹⁵ This invocation may not be a formal public act, but God, as the sovereign king of the commonwealth, calls it into session historically. Whenever the victim learns of the violation, he is supposed to begin a search for incriminating evidence. This is because crimes are not supposed to go unpunished in God's social order, for all crimes are inherently attacks on God. Crimes are to be solved in history whenever the costs of conviction are not prohibitive, i.e., whenever too many resources are not drained from the victim or the court in solving a particular crime.

2. Scarcity and Justice

The world is under a curse: a cursed form of scarcity (Gen. 3:17–19).¹⁶ There are limits to anti-crime budgets. In a world of scarcity, including scarcity of accurate knowledge, there cannot be perfect justice. Justice in history is purchased at a price.¹⁷ The price of perfect justice institutionally is too high; any attempt by a court to achieve it will bankrupt the institution that finances the court. This quest for exhaustive knowledge and perfect justice paralyzes the institutions that pursue them. Therefore, if the victim thinks it will take too many of his

15. If someone other than the victim first discovers the violation, he is to inform the victim or the person most likely to be the victim. To fail to do this is judicially to become an accomplice of the criminal.

16. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

17. The ultimate price of perfect justice was paid by Jesus Christ's act of comprehensive redemption at Calvary. Without this representative payment, God's perfect justice would have demanded the end of the Adamic race at the conclusion of Adam's trial.

own resources to identify and convict the criminal, or if he thinks his accusation could be turned against him later for lack of evidence gathered by the court, he has the option of refusing to pursue the matter. He can let God settle it in eternity. He can rest confident in God's perfect justice. Rushdoony said it well: "History culminates in Christ's triumph, and eternity settles all scores."¹⁸

God nevertheless wants criminals brought to justice in history. The Bible places the responsibility of pursuing justice on the individual who is most likely to want to see the criminal brought to justice: the victim.¹⁹ Because the crime was ultimately against God and His mandated social order, the victim becomes God's primary representative agent in pursuing justice. The victim is also uniquely motivated to begin this search for incriminating evidence, since he is the loser, and he will receive a restitution payment upon confession by, or conviction of, the criminal. As I have argued elsewhere, if he refuses to pursue the criminal or bring charges against him, the civil court is not to intrude on the case, unless he is a minor or legally incompetent.²⁰ Unless the criminal has threatened the victim with reprisals, thereby making the court his victim, the court is to abide by the decision of the victim. Thus, when the victim begins his investigation of the crime, he is serving as God's primary covenantal agent. His task is to gather information to be used in a lawsuit against the criminal. He is acting as an agent of two courts: God's heavenly court and His earthly civil court. In a sense this does not do full justice to the victim's unique legal position. *The civil court is to some degree the economic agent of the victim.* The victim, in his legal capacity as a victim, is a representative of God. The problem is, the court does not know who the victim is, plaintiff or defendant, until after the presentation of the evidence and cross examination.

E. Allocating the Costs of Civil Justice

Court costs and legal fees are very high in modern American society because of its demonic quest for perfect earthly justice.²¹ Thus, one

18. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 123.

19. In this sense, this singling out of a prosecutor parallels the Mosaic Covenant's authorization of the blood avenger (kinsman-redeemer) to pursue and execute a person suspected of murder of the blood avenger's nearest of kin (Num. 35:19–27).

20. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33:G.

21. For examples of this growing paralysis in the American legal system, see Mack-

legitimate way for society to reduce the number of cases placed before its civil courts is to require the prosecutor—either the plaintiff or the prosecuting attorney’s office—to pay for all court and legal expenses if the defendant is declared innocent. The risk of a “not guilty” verdict should be borne by the prosecutor: the cost of an unsuccessful prosecution. Today, this risk is entirely born by the defendants in societies, such as the United States, where those declared innocent are not reimbursed for their defense costs. The risk of bearing these costs should be shifted from the defendant to the one bringing the accusation.

It is true that poor people could not afford to prosecute if they had to bear all of the risk of paying for all court costs and legal fees. But there is another side to this problem. It is equally true that poor people cannot afford to defend themselves. This is why, in the United States, the civil government must by law provide poor people with a defense lawyer when the state brings a poor person to trial.²² The only thing that protects a poor person from a private plaintiff is his poverty: there is nothing to collect. But if the state still enforced slavery for economic offenses by those who have no assets, the poor man would again be a target.²³

What of the middle-class defendant? He can be destroyed financially by a wealthy plaintiff, such as a large corporation, or by an agency of civil government. This is unjust: bankrupting the innocent person by means of the trial process. The rule of law should provide that neither the plaintiff nor the defendant be given an economic advantage in a civil court. I shall explain the implications of this later in this chapter.

1. Civil Law and Criminal Law

When I say civil court, I mean criminal court. Modern humanist law distinguishes between criminal law and civil law. Civil law cases

lin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

22. The case was *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963). A movie was made about this case, *Gideon's Trumpet*.

23. The United States Constitution does allow enslavement for criminal convictions: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place under their jurisdiction” (Amendment 13 [1865], emphasis added.) Early in the twentieth century, three Supreme Court cases negated state laws authorizing peonage for default on private debts: *Peonage Cases* (1903), *Bailey v. Alabama* (1911), and *United States v. Reynolds* (1953). The Court has never voided peonage for criminal convictions, but local governments never enact such statutes.

are formal debates between two private parties that are decided by a court. Somebody owes something to another private individual; the court decides who owes what. Criminal law is between the state and an accused person. Criminal law refers to cases tried in a court because of the criminal's transgression of a statute. In modern terminology, the criminal owes a debt to society.

The Bible does not distinguish between civil law and criminal law. All cases are criminal cases, since all are argued in a civil court. (The language here is confusing because of the humanists: the criminal law vs. civil law distinction.) So-called civil cases, when brought before a civil magistrate—the minister of the sword—are brought because one party (the defendant) has defrauded another (the plaintiff) or because one party (the plaintiff) is trying to defraud the other (the defendant). A self-proclaimed victim brings his accusations against someone by means of the state. That another person has refused to pay him what is owed necessarily makes the dispute a criminal case, biblically speaking. Someone is defrauding the other. Someone therefore must be threatened by the sword: civil government. The refusal to pay what is owed is a criminal act, biblically speaking. The serpent's seduction of Adam and Eve was not merely a civil matter between him and them. It was a criminal matter. There are no cases in the Bible of private disputes that go before the King or an Israelite court that do not become criminal matters, i.e., matters decided by the monopoly of violence, the state.

Once a public accusation is made by one party against another, the issue of criminality—false witness—cannot be evaded. Someone may be lying. That person, biblically speaking, is a criminal. *All civil court cases are inescapably criminal cases, biblically speaking.* All call for restitution by a false accuser (Deut. 19:14–19). In such cases, the person who brought the accusation and then loses the case, if he can be shown to have lied, must pay all court costs and make restitution to the victim equal to the value of whatever he sought to extract from him (Deut. 19:19).²⁴

If neither party is proven a false witness, then the loser should pay the court costs of the winner, as in the British common law system. This upholds the principle of victim's rights, the fundamental principle of biblical justice. *The innocent party should experience no penalty, including his defense costs.* Once a society acknowledges this principle, it

24. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

must seek ways to structure its court procedures to see to it that victims are protected. In all modern societies, this would require a major restructuring.

2. *Who Is the Accuser?*

The plaintiff alone determines whether or not to initiate the prosecution of a lawsuit; the court is to support his decision. The question is: Must the court press charges solely on the testimony of the victim? If the victim is poor, for example, and cannot afford to hire a lawyer, or if he fears the economic consequences of having brought charges that a jury refuses to support, should the court intervene and prosecute on behalf of the victim? In other words, if the court believes that there is sufficient evidence of criminal wrongdoing to warrant a trial, can it lawfully begin proceedings if the victim fears to do so on his own behalf?

The legal issue here is victim's rights. The officers of the state are not sure who is telling the truth. The rights of the victim must be upheld, but who is the victim? Only a trial can determine this. The question is: Should there be a trial? If, as in the British legal system, the one who loses the case pays for all court costs, the victim may be afraid to seek justice in the courts. The victim could be either the accuser or the accused. How can the court see to it that God's justice is maintained if either party is afraid to go to trial even though he believes himself to be the innocent victim?

If the plaintiff agrees to press charges, the court has no decision to make. The officers open the court to the rival parties. The jury decides. The loser pays the winner's legal costs. But there is a limit on what he owes to the winner, as we shall see: whatever he spent for his own defense. If the plaintiff is unwilling to take this risk, but the court decides that prosecution is warranted in the name of justice, should the plaintiff be allowed to transfer the risk of loss to the court? That is, should the court be allowed to act as the agent of the plaintiff, pressing charges on the basis of the evidence, but relieving the plaintiff of all risk of loss if the jury decides otherwise? If so, and the court does press charges, who should pay whom if the accused is declared innocent by the jury? Second, who should be paid if the jury finds the accused guilty?

3. *Who Pays?*

Let us consider the first case: the plaintiff decides to accept the risk. He decides to press charges. The civil court should not have the option of refusing to prosecute. The trial takes place. The loser pays his own lawyer (if any) and the defendant's lawyer. The state provides the service for free. This is what the state is supposed to do: provide justice for all.

Without limiting what the loser pays, there is a problem: the potential threat of a defendant who tells the plaintiff that he intends to hire a very expensive lawyer. "If I win," the defendant says, "you will be sold into slavery to pay my legal expenses. And with this lawyer, I will probably win. You can't afford to hire anyone equally good." This weighs the scales of justice against the plaintiff. He may be too fearful of bringing legitimate charges. Of course, it could be the reverse: a wealthy plaintiff threatens the defendant with the post-trial cost of paying a high-priced lawyer. *The solution is to require the guilty party to pay the victorious party only as much money as he himself paid his own lawyer.* This way, there is pressure on the two parties to come to an agreement in advance regarding total legal expenses, but neither party can use the threat of post-trial legal expenses to scare the other into a settlement.

In a case between a rich man and a poor man, the poor man would probably argue his own case. That would reduce his legal expenses to zero. This is what takes place in local small claims courts in the United States. He would owe nothing to the defendant if he loses but is not convicted of false witness. But the defendant does not have to bear major legal expenses if the two go before the judge as individuals. If the initiator decides to forego the use of a lawyer, the case can be settled rapidly. This reduces the society's cost of justice. It also reduces income for lawyers, therefor reducing the supply of lawyers.

The second case is more difficult case. The plaintiff believes he is a victim, but he refuses to bear the responsibility of losing. Perhaps he is poor. Should the state be allowed to grant him immunity from post-trial expenses? Yes. Justice should not be available only to individuals who can afford to lose. The state can afford to lose. Nevertheless, the state may choose not to prosecute if it thinks the plaintiff's case is weak. If the legal system provides an option that the accused automatically has all of his defense expenses paid by the court, then the civil court's officers may lawfully refuse to press charges if they believe that

the plaintiff is likely to lose and the plaintiff is unwilling to bear the risk of loss. Like the United States Supreme Court, which is not compelled by law to review every case sent to it by lower courts, so is the local court. It can refuse to prosecute.

If the court grants immunity to the plaintiff for court expenses, it must do the same for the accused. The court must not tip the burden of loss in favor of either party. If the court decides to prosecute, and the defendant loses, the defendant is required to pay the victim, but he is not required to pay the court. The state provides its services to the disputants for free. Taxes pay for the court.

In a biblical civil order, the state acts as the agent of a victim. It cannot be sure in advance who the victim is. I have argued in *Tools of Dominion* and *Victim's Rights* that the state may not prosecute anyone in its own name unless a state agency has been defrauded or unless the injured party is incompetent: a child, a moron, or some other person with no one to speak on his behalf. The most important of these silent victims is a murder victim. The state is God's agent of vengeance by way of a victim, although the state can sometimes be the victim.²⁵

I argue here that the state is also authorized to act as the plaintiff's agent when the plaintiff seeks post-trial economic immunity. In seeking such immunity, the plaintiff transfers the decision to prosecute to the court. In modern American society, a grand jury serves as the decision-maker. So does a district attorney. There is no question that fewer cases would be brought before grand juries by district attorneys if the district attorney's office had to bear the costs of both the defense and the prosecution.

If the plaintiff, having received post-trial immunity, is subsequently convicted of being a false witness, does he owe the state anything? Not if justice is to be provided by the state for free, which the Bible says it should. He owes his victim whatever the victim would have owed him, had the victim been convicted (Deut. 19:14–19). He does not owe the court anything beyond the sacrifice required in Leviticus 6:1–7.

4. *The State Should Pay Basic Legal Fees*

In order to protect the innocent accused person, the state should

25. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33:G; North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 35–41. (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

pay all court costs when it prosecutes. The modern United States court does this in the case of poor defendants only. This discriminates against the non-poor defendant. Even the poor are cheated: they must pick from court-appointed attorneys who are not paid very much. The defendant is not provided with funds equal to the funds made available to the prosecution. *The state should offer a defendant the same amount of money that the state's prosecuting attorney pays to prosecute the case.* The state's prosecuting attorney would then have to estimate the total costs of prosecution in advance and pay himself and his staff no more than his half. In effect, he would be required to contract with the court for services rendered.

In such a system of justice, there would be no independent salaries or free rental space for the prosecutor and his staff. This way, the court can estimate in advance what it will cost to prosecute a case. Far more important, so can the defendant. A case's prosecution costs are not hidden in a collective annual budget for the prosecutor's office. The defendant would receive the same amount of money to hire his defense. This would mean that a defendant would have to accept this amount as his limit, too, unless he were willing to forego reimbursement by the state for expenses above this amount if he should win. In a sense, this is a recommendation for state-funded defense payments: each side receives from the local court a minimum amount of money to conduct its case before the court. The defendant can pay more if he wants to, but the state would not reimburse him.

This system would place limits on the state's risk of losing a case. It would also place limits on the state's economic ability to prosecute a case. A prosecutor would hesitate before launching a case. There would be no financially open-ended cases. Prosecutors could not afford to pursue perfect justice. They would have to count the costs (Luke 14:28–30).²⁶

5. Spending Caps

Without a pre-paid system with mutual spending caps and also with state liability to pay all of the innocent defendant's legal expenses (victim's rights), a wealthy defendant could hire a very expensive law firm, and the state would have pay all of his fees if the accused is declared innocent. The state might not be willing to prosecute: too much

26. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 34.

risk—the more expensive the defense team, the more the state’s risk. *But biblical civil justice demands that both plaintiff and accused should “have his day in court” irrespective of their personal wealth.* Men should not be allowed to buy their way out of court, since they will not be allowed to buy their way out of God’s court on judgment day.²⁷ This is why a pre-paid legal expenses system is needed with a spending cap on both the prosecution’s total expenses and the defense’s reimbursable legal expenses. The prosecution decides how much it is willing to spend to achieve justice, but not irrespective of the defense’s expenses. It provides the same amount of money to the defendant for paying his lawyer. The case would be more likely to be decided in terms of its merits rather than the comparative economic resources available to attorneys.

This system would retard the demonic, bankrupting quest for perfect justice. A prosecuting attorney whose cases repeatedly result in major losses for the court would find himself in trouble at the next election. There would be negative political sanctions for high expenses because of negative economic sanctions.

This payments system does not subsidize the prosecution. In this sense, it acts as an economic restraint on the state. The state must prove its cases, not gain men’s consent through imposing the threat of bankruptcy on innocent people who may be able to win in court. The growth of the messianic state in the twentieth century was heavily subsidized by the courts’ payments system. The growth of administrative law, which legal historian Harold Berman regards as the greatest single threat to human freedom,²⁸ was funded by the present payments system.

6. *Intercession as a Model*

Is there biblical evidence for state-funding of lawyers on both sides? Direct evidence, no; indirect evidence, yes: the biblical doctrine of intercession. *Intercession is always judicial in Scripture*, though not always exclusively judicial. It is formal pleading before the throne of God. God prophesied of the coming Messiah: “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was

27. They should be allowed to buy the best defense lawyer they can afford after a trial has begun. They should not be given the ability to buy their way out, pre-trial.

28. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), Introduction.

numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). Because God knew that Judah was guilty, Jeremiah was warned: “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee” (Jer. 7:16).

In the New Testament, God the Father has established a model for justice: providing His people with a free defense attorney, the Holy Spirit. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26–27). The Holy Spirit acts in the name of Jesus, who serves as the supreme defense attorney. “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). *Jesus Christ has paid the legal defense costs for His people.*

God does not provide an attorney for the guilty. But because God is omniscient, there is no function for a defense lawyer on judgment day,²⁹ just as there was no need for defense counsel for Judah in Jeremiah’s day. However, because men are not God, they are not omniscient. Men do not know in advance who is innocent or guilty. Thus, the state, as the earthly representative of God’s heavenly court, should provide every defendant it prosecutes with money to hire a defense lawyer whenever it provides state-financed prosecuting attorneys.

F. Priestly Agents of God’s Heavenly Court

When the plaintiff brings a lawsuit in his own name, he inevitably also brings it in God’s name, for God is the primary victim of crime. If he was a victim, he is acting as God’s agent. The civil court is required to examine the evidence and announce judgment, but this judgment is made in the name of the two victims: God and the earthly victim, either the plaintiff or the defendant. The civil court is an agent of the victim in a way that the ecclesiastical court is not. The civil court acts to defend the victim’s rights, whereas the priest acts to defend the civil court’s authority in the case of a false oath.

29. Seen on a Tee-shirt: “There will be no plea-bargaining on Judgment Day.”

The required animal sacrifice served as an atonement for a crime against God's civil court. This sacrifice wiped away the sin ritually. It was a public acknowledgment of a transgression against God's civil court. What is significant here is that *an ecclesiastical act was required to atone for a civil transgression*. The verbal cover-up (false witness) required a ritual payment.

This raises a key question: Why was there a ritual connection between a civil court and the priesthood? Because of the two-fold character of God's judgment. The civil court always represents God's heavenly court in a subordinate fashion, analogous to the victim, who in his legal capacity as a victim also represents God subordinately. The *civil court* acts on behalf of the victim, but only in its judicial capacity as the *minister of kingly justice* (Rom. 13:4), as the institution that lawfully bears the monopolistic sword of vengeance.³⁰ But God requires more than civil sanctions to placate His wrath against the criminal. He sits on His throne as both High Priest and King; on earth, these offices are divided except in two unique cases: Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18) and Jesus Christ. *God must be placated in both of His offices*. This is why no single earthly court can lawfully offer two-fold atonement to a criminal. God therefore requires a priestly sacrifice.

1. New Testament Sacrifice

In the New Testament, this priestly sacrifice was made by Jesus Christ at Calvary. The various animal sacrifices in the Old Testament representationally prefigured this ultimate sacrifice (Heb. 9). A question legitimately can be raised: Is any post-Calvary public mark of contrition lawfully imposed by the church on the perjurer? If so, on what legal basis?

If the perjurer is a church member, he has partaken of the Lord's Supper throughout the period following his false testimony to the court. This placed him in jeopardy of God's negative sanctions (I Cor. 11:30). He ignored this threat, thereby implicitly adopting the same false theology of God's minimal sanctions, previously described. The church's officers deserve to know of the transgression, and can lawfully assign a penalty. This penalty should not exceed the value of a ram in the Mosaic economy.

If the perjurer is not a church member, he is still dependent on

30. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

continuing judgments by the church to preserve God's common grace in history. The state can lawfully function in non-Christian environments, but only because of the common grace of God mediated through His church and its sacraments. Offering these representative sacrifices is the permanent responsibility of God's church. This is why Israel had to offer 70 bullocks annually (Num. 29:12–32) as sacrifices for the symbolic 70 pagan nations of the world (Jud. 1:7), plus a single bullock for herself on the eighth day (Num. 29:36).³¹

2. The Church: Guardian of the Civil Oath

What this means is that the church is the guardian of the covenantal civil oath. This is an inescapable conclusion from the fact that *only the church has the authority to accept the perjurer's sacrifice in atonement for the false oath*. The state cannot offer this release from guilt. The oath involves the formal calling down of God's negative covenant sanctions on the oath-taker. *He who uses God's name in vain in a formal judicial conflict must then seek judicial cleansing from the church*. The reason why the oath is guarded by the church is that the church alone can lawfully invoke the eternal negative sanctions of God against an individual (Matt. 18:18). *Thus, by invoking the oath in a civil court, the criminal necessarily brings himself under the judicial authority of the church*.

The modern practice of allowing atheists to "affirm" to tell the truth in court, but not to swear on the Bible or in God's name, is a direct affront against God and against the church as the guardian of the oath. It is also inevitably *an act of divinizing the state by default*. The state becomes the sole enforcer of the public affirmation. In such a worldview, there is no appeal in history beyond the state and its sanctions. *The atheist's affirmation is therefore a judicial act demanding the removal of God from the courtroom*. Thus, it requires the creation of a new oath system, with the state as the sole guardian of the oath. The state acts not in God's name but in its own. Rushdoony's comments are on target: "If a witness is asked to swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth without any reference to God, truth then can be and is commonly redefined in terms of himself. The oath

31. When Israel fell in A.D. 70, she had become like all the other pagan nations. She could no longer offer efficacious sacrifices for them or for herself. From that point on, only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary could serve as any nation's atonement—covering or ransom—before God.

in God's name is the 'legal recognition of God'³² as the source of all things and the only true ground of all being. It establishes the state under God and under His law. The removal of God from oaths, and the light and dishonest use of oaths, is a declaration of independence from Him, and it is warfare against God in the name of the new gods, apostate man and his totalitarian state."³³

The biblical state can lawfully impose negative sanctions against a perjurer, but only on behalf of the victim. The state cannot lawfully pronounce the permanent negative sanctions of the oath against anyone. *The state lawfully requires an oath, but it is not the institutional enforcer of this oath.* The presence of the *oath to God* is a public acknowledgment of the *non-autonomy of the state*. God is above the state, and the church stands next to it as the guardian of the oath.³⁴

This means that theocracy is required by God's civil law. Without the God-given authority to require an oath, the state would lose its covenantal status as a lawful monopolistic institution with the authority to enforce physical sanctions against evil-doers. It would lose its status as a covenantal institution. Yet by imposing an oath, the state inescapably places itself under the protection of the church, for the church is the defender of the oath. As the great seventeenth-century jurist Sir Edward Coke put it, "protection draws allegiance, and allegiance draws protection."³⁵

A lawful covenantal oath is always *self-maledictory*: it calls down God's negative sanctions on the oath-taker if he lies. This includes *eternal negative sanctions*. The state acts only on behalf of victims: God's primary representatives in criminal cases. It cannot act on its own behalf in a priestly capacity in God's heavenly court. The state cannot lawfully act as an autonomous priestly intermediary between God and man. To argue that the state imposes the oath as a lawful agency under God but apart from the church is *to anoint the state as a priestly intermediary between God and man*, an institution possessing the power to declare God's negative eternal sanctions. *Such an assertion by a state identifies the state as messianic.*

The church alone is empowered by God to act as the guardian of

32. T. Robert Ingram, *The World Under God's Law* (Houston, Texas: St. Thomas Press, 1962), p. 46.

33. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 115.

34. The state, in turn, is responsible for the preservation of the legal environment that protects the church. The church is not institutionally autonomous, either.

35. Cited by Rebecca West, *The New Meaning of Treason* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 12; in Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 118.

the civil oath. The presence of a required payment to the priest is proof of this conclusion. Those political pluralists who today call for an absolute separation between church and state are implicitly calling for the elevation of the state into the office of lawful priestly mediator between man and God, or else they are denying God and His sanctions altogether, thereby deifying the state by default. In either case, they are abandoning biblical covenant theology. Political pluralism inescapably defends the establishment of a messianic state, but in the name of dis-establishment: the separation of church and state.³⁶

G. Confession and Restitution³⁷

Once a person commits a theft, he automatically owes the victim at least a 20% payment in addition to the return of the stolen item or its present monetary equivalent. The case does not have to come to trial for this penalty payment to be owed by the thief. I derive this conclusion from the Exodus 22's case laws regarding theft, but also from the example of the archetypal theft: Adam and Eve's stealing of God's forbidden fruit. The moment they touched it, they were guilty. They owed God at least a ritual apology. In the Mosaic Covenant, anyone who touched a forbidden (unclean) thing was himself unclean until evening (Lev. 11:24–25). I think this is because God had originally returned in judgment to the garden "in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8), meaning at evening. It did not reduce God's net asset value for them to have merely touched the fruit, but it was a violation of His law, His ethical boundary.

They went beyond mere touching; they stole the fruit and ate it. This was theft. It was corrupt caretaking. It was also the equivalent of eating a forbidden sacrifice, for it was a ritual meal eaten in the presence of the serpent. The penalty for this in ancient Israel was separation from God's people: "But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people. Moreover the soul that shall touch any unclean thing, as the unclean-

36. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

37. This section, with minor modifications, is an extract from *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 45:E. I reprint it because not all readers will have access to *Tools*. Also, the problem of determining the proper application of the 20% penalty is so complex that I decided that a footnote to *Tools* would be insufficient. The exegesis of this passage was the most difficult single exegetical task I encountered in *Tools of Dominion*.

ness of man, or any unclean beast, or any abominable unclean thing, and eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which pertain unto the LORD, even that soul shall be cut off from his people” (Lev. 7:20–21). This penalty pointed back to the garden, where God separated Adam and Eve from Himself by casting them out of the garden.

God, however, is merciful to sinners. Why else would He have created the sacrificial system? Thus, had Adam and Eve come to God as He entered the garden, admitting their sin and pleading for mercy, He would have spared mankind the ultimate penalty of eternal separation from Him. In fact, had they prayed a prayer of confession rather than spending their time sewing fig leaves for themselves, they would have escaped the death penalty—full restitution payment to God. This very act would have constituted a pre-trial confession of guilt. It would have been an act of symbolic communion with God—a judicial, sanctions-governed act of repentance. But instead, they tried to cover the visible effects of their guilt through their own efforts: sewing fig leaves. God therefore announced His sentence of death against them: dust to dust. Those who wait until the end of the trial must make full (multiple) restitution.

My conclusion is that a pre-trial confession of guilt by the criminal is punished less rigorously than a crime in which the criminal is convicted on the basis of the judge’s inquiry. A person is always encouraged by God to confess his sins. If these sins are public sins, then his confession must also be public, if not to a court, then at least to the victim. For example, if a worker steals cash from his employer, but later replaces it before the theft is discovered, he still must confess his crime to the owner. The fact that no human being detected the crime does not affect the question of guilt and sanctions in God’s eyes. The thief did impose the *risk* of permanent loss on the victim, even though the victim suffered no known loss; the victim therefore deserves compensation. This upholds the biblical principle of victim’s rights. The victim, like God, should strive to be merciful, but biblical law teaches that he is entitled to be informed that mercy is now in order.

H. A Subsidy for Early Confession

The Bible subsidizes early public confession. If a man confesses, he can escape the multiple restitution requirement: he is required only to repay the stolen principal, plus 20%, as this passage teaches.

There appears to be an inconsistency in the law at this point. The

penalty for theft is here stated to be 20%, yet in other verses, restitution for theft in general is two-fold, and sometimes four-fold or five-fold (Ex. 22:1–4). Why the apparent discrepancy? We know that Leviticus 6 is dealing with cases in which the guilty person has sworn falsely to the victim or to the authorities. Later, however, he voluntarily confesses the crime and his false oath. I conclude that *the double restitution penalty is imposed only in cases where a formal trial has begun*. The provision in Leviticus 6 of a reduced penalty is an economic incentive for a guilty person to confess his crime before the trial has begun, or at least before the court hands down its decision.³⁸

The thief has testified falsely to the authorities, either before the trial or during it. This is why he owes a trespass offering to the priest (Lev. 5:1–13; 6:6). I argue here that he can lawfully escape the obligation to pay double restitution if he confesses after his initial denial but before the trial begins. He cannot lawfully escape paying double restitution and making the trespass offering if he swears falsely during the trial. He has to confess before the oath is imposed and the trial begins. At the very least, he must confess before it ends.³⁹

As always, we should search for a theocentric principle lying behind the law. There is one in this case: the correlation between this *reduced criminal penalty* for voluntary, public confession of sin, when accompanied by economic restitution, and God's offer of a *reduced (eliminated) eternal penalty* for people who make public Christian confession of sin prior to their physical death, if this confession is also accompanied by economic or other kinds of restitution.⁴⁰ If we wait for

38. I believe the confession had to come prior to testimony from any witness or the presentation of physical evidence. In American jurisprudence, testimony of the suspected criminal before a grand jury, which has the authority to indict a person, is the judicial equivalent of the Old Testament court's preliminary inquiry. Once the trial begins, it is too late to escape double restitution. This reflects the principles of God's court of permanent justice: once the accused is standing before the throne of judgment, there is no possibility of escaping the maximum sentence. The counter-argument is that prior to the decision of the jury, the confession would reduce the costs of the trial and reduce the risk of handing down a "not guilty" decision to a criminal.

39. Achan confessed to his theft of the forbidden items after the trial had begun, and he was then executed (Josh. 7:20). However, this case may not be a relevant example; he confessed only after Israel had suffered a military defeat, with the loss of 36 men (Josh. 7:5). His trespass required life for life at that point, confession or no confession. Thus, I do not appeal to this test case to defend my thesis. Still, I could be wrong about this. It may be that even after the trial begins and the oath is imposed, but prior to the decision of the jury or the judges, he has an opportunity to repent. But once the court hands down its verdict, he is trapped.

40. I am not arguing that salvation is by works. It is by grace (Eph. 2:8–9). But let

God's formal trial at the throne of judgment, we are assured of being forced to pay a far higher restitution penalty.

Why do I believe that Leviticus 6 refers to a pre-trial voluntary confession? Because of the context of Leviticus 6. Leviticus 5 deals with sins against God that must be voluntarily confessed: "And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing" (Lev. 5:5). The sinner in Israel then brought a trespass offering to the priest (Lev. 5:8). This made atonement for the trespass: "And he shall offer the second for a burnt offering, according to the manner: and the priest shall make an atonement for him for his sin which he hath sinned, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 5:10). Why would he make such a public confession? Because of his fear of the ultimate penalty that God will impose on those who offer false testimony in His courts.

We then note that Leviticus 6 also deals with trespasses against God. It is specifically stated in Leviticus 6:2 that the 20% penalty payment applies to "a trespass against the LORD" in which the sinning individual has lied to his neighbor about anything that was delivered to him by the neighbor for safekeeping. The context indicates that the sinner has voluntarily confessed his crime against God and his neighbor, just as he voluntarily confessed his trespass against God in Leviticus 5.

I. Restitution Plus a Trespass Offering

Here is the problem the commentator faces. The text in Exodus 22 states that the court is to require double restitution from the neighbor who has "put his hands to" his neighbor's goods. He is therefore to be treated as a common thief. But if double restitution is the required penalty, then what is the 20% penalty of Leviticus 6:5 all about?

1. *A Rabbinical Court?*

It has been argued by some Jewish commentators that the 20% penalty in Leviticus 6:5 is to be imposed only in cases where there has

us not forget Ephesians 2:10: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." I am arguing that without obedience, our faith is dead. James 2:18 says: "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." And in James 2:20, we read: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" The outward obedience of the criminal is supposed to be demonstrated by his willingness to make restitution to his victim.

been a public oath before a rabbinical court. They argue that the penalty payment does not apply to cases of voluntarily confessed theft as such, meaning secret or even undetected thefts, but only to cases of forcible robbery in which the thief is identified, arrested, and brought before an *ecclesiastical* (i.e., synagogue) court, where he gives a false oath of denial, and later admits this lie. Writes Jacob Milgrom: "Since the point of this law is to list only those cases that culminate in the possessor's false oath, it would therefore be pointless to include the term 'theft' which assumes that the possessor-thief is unknown."⁴¹ He goes so far as to argue that the Leviticus passage deals only with religious law, not civil law. "All that matters to the priestly legislator is to enumerate those situations whereby the defrauding of man leads, by a false oath, to the 'defrauding' of God. The general category of theft in which the thief remains unidentifiable is therefore irrelevant to his purpose."⁴² Eight centuries earlier, Maimonides wrote that the thief who confesses of his own accord owes only the value of the asset he stole, not double restitution. He did not mention the 20% penalty.⁴³

If Milgrom's view were correct, this would mean that there would be no court-imposed restitution penalty payment from criminals to victims in (oathless) cases of pre-trial, self-confessed theft. Why wouldn't there be such compensation? Because the one-fifth penalty is assumed by Milgrom to be applicable only in cases where there has been a false oath to a rabbinical court. This interpretation therefore eliminates the 20% penalty payment for pre-trial, self-confessed crimes.

2. *Victim's Rights*

While this judicial implication follows the premise, it is not in accord with the biblical principle of victim's rights. The victim has been deprived of his property, and he has suffered a sense of loss, assuming that he had actually discovered that the stolen item was missing, yet the Bible supposedly makes no provision to compensate him for these obvious burdens. On the face of it, this conclusion seems highly unlikely, yet it follows inevitably from the initial claim that the 20% pen-

41. Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The "Asham" and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), p. 100.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–1.

43. Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Torts*, vol. 11 of *The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1180] 1954), "Laws Concerning Theft," II:I:5, pp. 60–61.

alty only applies to cases where there has been a false oath to an ecclesiastical court.

Why do I believe that this rabbinical court interpretation is unlikely? Because the Bible is emphatic that *victims are to be protected*, and that *criminals are to suffer losses in proportion to their crimes*. The thief who confesses before a trial is not on a par judicially with a neighbor who has, through negligence, lost or inadvertently ruined an item placed in his safekeeping. The negligent neighbor pays only for what he lost; the self-confessed thief has to pay more. The principle of *lex talionis* applies here as elsewhere: the penalty must fit the crime.⁴⁴ To argue that the penalty is the same for theft and negligence—merely the return of the stolen item or its equivalent value—is to deny *lex talionis*.

If thieves were granted the legal option of returning stolen goods whenever it appeared to them that they might be discovered, but before they are put under formal oath, then it would be far less risky to steal. If there is a 20% penalty only after a false oath is given but before a trial, then a theft that is confessed before the oath is administered would become virtually risk-free for the thief. He could escape any penalty simply by confessing his crime and by returning the stolen property. The option of self-confession would remain as an escape device whenever the authorities began to close in. If God's law did not impose penalties on theft, it would implicitly be subsidizing criminal behavior. God does not subsidize rebellion.

The express language of the passage militates against Milgrom's interpretation of Leviticus 6. After listing all sorts of theft and deception, the text says, "he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto" (v. 5). To whom must this penalty payment be paid? To the victim: "Or all that about which he hath *sworn falsely*; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and *give it unto him to whom it appertaineth*, in the day of his trespass offering" (v. 5; emphasis added).

At this point, I depart slightly from the original text in *Tools of Dominion*.⁴⁵ When I wrote that book, I had not yet perceived that the thief's violation of another person's property is judicially analogous to a trespass of a holy place or thing, thereby mandating the economic equivalent of a double tithe. The tithe was paid to a Levite. Thus, the trespass made the stolen property judicially holy, and thereby made its

44. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 37.

45. *Idem*.

owner, a guardian of God's property, the economic equivalent of a Levite.

I had originally linked the 20% payment penalty to the false oath. The problem with this interpretation is that it disregards the biblical reward for confession prior to a trial. If a false oath automatically invokes the penalty, then what would be the penalty for the crime if the thief voluntarily confesses before lying to the owner? Nothing besides the return of the object stolen? This would subsidize theft. God does not subsidize theft. But if double restitution were automatically imposed, then where would be the economic subsidy for a voluntary pre-trial confession? Thus, the 20% penalty must be the minimal restitution payment for theft, not a payment for the false oath. The payment goes to the victim as a Levitical guardian agent.

Each of the victims of these crimes is to be compensated by a 20% penalty payment. The crimes are separate acts; thus, translators used the English word "or" in listing them, indicating that any one of these criminal infractions automatically invokes the 20% penalty. But what of the false oath? Consider the context of this passage: the five major sacrifices. The false oath is covenantal and therefore self-maledictory. It invokes its own independent penalty payment: the trespass offering, a ram without blemish (Lev. 6:6). So, the criminal must pay the victim 20% even if he confesses before he is convicted, with or without the presence of a false oath. This law's *economic penalty* applies only to a specific time frame: *pre-trial confession*. The false oath to the court adds an additional requirement: a sacrifice administered by a priest. In the New Covenant, the thief owes payment to a church. The payment is equal in value to a blemish-free ram.

J. Calculating the Required Restitution

Leviticus 6 is not in opposition to Exodus 22:9. Exodus 22:9 requires double restitution either from the false accuser who perjured himself (Deut. 19:16–19) or from the criminal neighbor (thief).

1. Payment to the Victim

Assume that the criminal neighbor swears falsely before the judges in order to avoid having to pay double restitution to his victim; if successful in his deception, he then collects double restitution from the victim.

If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double. If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges, to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour (Ex. 22:7–9).⁴⁶

What if he then repents of his false oath before it is discovered? He still owes the original double restitution, plus the return of the falsely collected double penalty, plus a 20% penalty payment on everything. Thus, if the stolen object is worth one ounce of gold, the restitution payment owed to the victim by a now-confessed perjured thief would be 4.8 ounces of gold: 2 ounces (the original double restitution payment),⁴⁷ plus 2 ounces (the falsely extracted penalty) plus .2 times 4 ounces, meaning .8 ounces = 4.8 ounces.

What about the perjured thief who refuses to admit his guilt and who is later convicted of this perjury? Because he had been paid double restitution by his victim, he now owes him *six-fold restitution*: double whatever he had stolen (2×1) plus double whatever he had unlawfully collected (2×2). This threat of six-fold restitution serves as an economic incentive for the perjured thief to confess to the court that he had offered false testimony earlier. We see once again that *biblical law rewards timely confession*.

Exodus 22:9 establishes double restitution for stolen sheep and oxen, not four-fold or five-fold.⁴⁸ This is because the stolen animals had not been slaughtered or sold. What if the court does not have proof that the accuser testified falsely against his neighbor, yet also does not have sufficient proof to convict the neighbor? The thieving neighbor escapes paying two-fold restitution. What if he then repents and confesses? He owes his neighbor a 2.4 restitution penalty (2×1 , plus $2 \times .2$). What if his crime is discovered later? He owes four-fold restitution for perjury: double what he would have owed if he had been convicted originally.

46. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 45.

47. This assumes that the criminal cannot return the original item to the victim.

48. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 45.

2. Payment to the Temple

What would he have owed to the temple in the case of unconfessed perjury? If the trespass offering was one animal if he had confessed after having made a false oath or oaths, presumably the penalty was double this.⁴⁹ This follows from my thesis that *there is an escalation of penalties*. At each step of the legal proceedings, he can confess and bear a reduced penalty. For each level of deception, there are increased sanctions. God is honored by the very act of self-confession, when such confession has a penalty attached to it. Oath or no oath, the two primary goals of laws governing theft are the *protection of property* (boundary rights) and the *compensation to the victim* (victim's rights). Earthly civil courts are to safeguard the property rights of the victims, making sure that the appropriate penalty is extracted from the criminal and transferred to the victim. There is no requirement of an additional money penalty payment to the civil court because of a false oath regarding theft. A trespass or guilt offering must be paid to the church.

The false oath before God invokes the threat of the ultimate penalty: the eternal wrath of God, preceded by the physical death of the criminal. Unless a person confesses his false oath in this life, makes appropriate restitution to his victim, and brings a transgression offering, God will collect His own restitution payment, and it is far greater than 20%. Ananias and Sapphira lied to church authorities concerning the percentage of their economic gains that they had voluntarily donated to the church. When asked individually by Peter if what they had told the authorities was true, they lied, and God struck each of them dead on the spot, one by one (Acts 5:1–10).⁵⁰ This served as a very effective warning to the church in general (v. 11). Presumably, they could have confessed their crime at that point, paying all the money from the sale into the church's treasury, since God was the intended victim of their lies (Acts 5:4). They chose instead to lie. So, God imposed His more rigorous penalty.

K. After the Accusation, but Before the Trial

What if the thief stole an animal, especially a sheep or an ox, and

49. It could be argued that the penalty was death: a high-handed false oath that was not confessed.

50. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

then sold it? If the civil authorities have brought the thief to trial, but the trial has not been held, would he be given the opportunity to confess to the victim, and then go to the buyer, confess his crime, buy it back at the purchase price plus 20%, and return it to the true owner, plus 20 percent? This would seem to be a reasonable conclusion. His confession would reduce the cost of prosecuting him and convicting him. Understand, however, that the thief has committed two crimes: the original theft and the defrauding of the buyer. The buyer was led to believe that the thief possessed the legal right of ownership, which was being passed to the new buyer.⁵¹ Thus, the defrauded buyer is also entitled to a 20% penalty payment, as well as the return of his purchase price. This would make the total penalty 40%, since he had defrauded two people: the first by means of the theft and the second by means of his lie.

The thief's confession reduces the possibility that a guilty man will go free and his innocent victim will remain defrauded. Apart from his admission, the judges might make a mistake, especially if the thief commits perjury during the trial. His confession eliminates this judicial problem.

The modern judicial system has adopted an analogous solution: plea bargaining. A criminal confesses falsely to having committed a lesser crime, and the judge accepts this admission and hands down a reduced penalty. This is the way that prosecuting attorneys unclog the court system. The Bible rejects this approach. Plea bargaining leaves the main crime officially unsolved, and it allows the guilty person to appear less of a threat to society than his behavior indicates that he is. The Bible does recognize the institutional problem, however: the risks and costs of gaining a conviction. Instead of having the criminal plead guilty to a lesser crime, it encourages him to plead guilty to the actual crime before the trial, and thereby receive a reduced penalty.

L. Civil Identification of a True Church

The question arises: To which church does he owe the payment? I suggest the following. If he belongs to a local church, he owes the payment to that congregation, for he has disgraced it. If he does not belong to a church but the victim does, then he pays the penalty payment to the victim's church: the congregation of God's prosecuting agent. If neither of them belongs to a church, then it would be sensible to alloc-

51. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 43:C:3.

ate the money to the congregation nearest geographically to the residence of the criminal, for he is living inside that church's jurisdiction: the regional boundary in which its prayers are regularly offered.

There is no question about the unbreakable legal relationship between this law and civil theocracy. This law mandates a trespass offering, which means that the law mandates that the civil government enforce an economic payment to a local congregation: either the criminal's, the victim's, or the one closest to where the crime was committed. This raises an inescapable legal question: *What is a true church?* Answer: one that confesses the Trinity. This law therefore mandates some form of Trinitarian oath-bound civil order, with confessional churches serving as the guardians of the civil oath: the oath required by the civil government in a trial. To put it in terms of traditional United States court practice, when a person swears on a Bible in a court of law, there must be a guardian of this oath. The courtroom Bible is not limited to the Old Testament. Because this law was not annulled by Christ's resurrection, it indicates that the church, not the state, is the lawful guardian of the civil oath, and therefore is entitled to a trespass offering when this oath is violated. The payment goes to a church, not to the civil government.

This law requires that the local civil government identify the local ecclesiastical guardians of the oath. It must identify those congregations that are confessionally orthodox and therefore eligible to receive the trespass offering. This authority to identify confessionally orthodox churches implies that members of associations not so identified as orthodox cannot legally be granted the legal status of citizens. In short, the state is a confessional, oath-bound, covenantal institution. It is required to establish what constitutes a valid civil oath, but only after consultation with churches. Churches are confessional, covenantal institutions, separate from the state. They may lawfully impose added confessional requirements beyond the civil oath for their members and officers, but if they do not confess the Trinity, they are not to be recognized as guardians of the civil oath.

1. Religious Pluralists Object

To escape the Bible's requirement of a civil theocracy—a confessional civil government—Christian political pluralists must deny the New Covenant validity of this law. They must also give up the idea that there is a guardian of the oath other than the state. They must deny

that the church has the authority lawfully to call down God's negative sanctions against those civil orders that refuse to repent by refusing to re-constitute themselves judicially under a Trinitarian oath. But they fail to specify by what New Testament legal principle this Levitical law has been annulled.

If the state identifies which churches are orthodox, doesn't this make the state the ultimate guardian of the oath? No; God has identified His church as the guardian—the agency that alone has a lawful claim on the trespass offering. Any state that identifies a guardian other than Trinitarian churches within its jurisdiction will come under God's historical sanctions. Nevertheless, the state is not under the church. It is a legally separate jurisdiction. The Bible does not teach ecclesiocracy: the civil empowerment of the church. The state is bound by its own Trinitarian oath.

If God did not impose His sanctions in history, then either the church or the state would eventually exercise final sovereignty in history, imposing its confession on rival institutions. Because the state possesses greater temporal power than the church does, assuming the absence of God's sanctions in history, this denial of God's sanctions in history necessarily leads to the establishment of a rival theocratic order: Islamic theocracy, Israeli theocracy, tribal theocracy, Shinto theocracy, humanist theocracy (Communism,⁵² Nazism,⁵³ political pluralism⁵⁴), or whatever. *The guardians of the civil oath become the new priesthood.* There is no escape from theocracy. Theocracy is an inescapable concept. In every society, some god must rule. Some priesthood must represent this god.

52. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnmrro>); F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1974).

53. Let us remember that the phrase "Heil Hitler" is literally translated "Salvation Hitler." See Thomas Schirrmacher, "National Socialism as Religion," *Chalcedon Report* (Dec. 1992), pp. 8–11. The most forthright declaration of this religion that I have come across is by James Larratt Battersby, *The Holy Book of Adolph Hitler* (Southport, England: German World Church of Europe, 1952). Battersby announced: "Nordic man, with whom walks eternally the Spirit of Adolph Hitler, stands on the Rock of the Redeeming Blood of his Race" (p. 15). On the suppression of the German churches, see J. S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–45* (New York: Basic Books, 1968). On Lutheranism's roots and theological liberalism's roots of the surrender by the German churches, see Paul B. Means, *Things That Are Caesar's: The Genesis of the German Church Conflict* (New York: Round Table Press, 1935), Part I.

54. North, *Political Polytheism*.

2. Denial and Consequences

Churches today do not teach this view of the civil oath. If they ever heard of the church's God-given legal status as the guardian of the civil oath, they would deny it. The church has sought to abdicate its responsibility in this area. This illegitimate abdication of authority does not eliminate binding theocratic civil oaths in history; it merely allows representatives of some other god to establish a rival theocratic civil order. There is no neutrality.

Churches today find themselves persecuted by fee-seeking lawyers and the state.⁵⁵ What else did they expect? Did they really believe in the myth of neutrality, that highly convenient judicial immunity for humanist power-seekers, that boundary of deception? The non-revolutionary branches of the Mennonites (post-1535), Baptists, and Lutherans have always believed in it, of course, but why did Calvinists ever take the bait? Did they really believe in the existence of some permanently neutral civil arena between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers? The myth of neutrality should not appeal to the most judicial of theologians in the religion second only to Judaism in its concern for judicial details. Yet for four centuries, Calvinists have adopted natural law theory and its corollary, the myth of neutrality.

Bible-believing churches publicly proclaim, "We're under grace, not law." This proclamation is utter nonsense; *Christians today are in fact under humanist lawyers*: a judgment of God that should be obvious to all Christians but which is acknowledged by very few. Because God's church is unwilling to serve as the guardian of the civil oath, the state imposes a rival law-order in terms of a rival oath. The state's goal is clear: to disinherit the church.

Conclusion

We see in this law an application of the Bible's fundamental principle of civil justice: victim's rights. The twin issues in this case involve the defense of a pair of judicial boundaries: private property and the civil oath. The ecclesiastical issue is this: What is the meaning of the trespass offering? I argue that the trespass offering is tied judicially to the defense of the civil oath against the criminal who falsely declares his innocence. That is, *there is more to a legitimate defense of the civil oath than the imposition of civil sanctions*.

55. J. Shelby Sharpe, "The Nuclear Attack on Christianity in America Has Begun in Earnest," *Chalcedon Report* (Nov. 1990), pp. 2–9.

The primary victim of the theft is God, against whose majesty the theft is committed. The secondary victim is the earthly victim. He then becomes the primary agent of God in this legal dispute between God and the criminal. God brings a lawsuit against the criminal in His heavenly court; He authorizes the victim to bring a lawsuit in a civil court. This is the biblical principle of victim's rights.

An important goal of the criminal justice system is to gain a confession from the criminal before a trial is held or a verdict is handed down. This reflects the desire of God to gain a public confession from the sinner before his death, and therefore before his heavenly trial begins.⁵⁶ To gain early confessions, God's law imposes escalating penalties for each formal judicial stage transgressed by the criminal's deceptive activities. Put another way, each time the criminal transgresses one of these legal barriers—these judicial opportunities for public confession—the penalties increase.

The court defends the rights of the victim. The church defends the integrity of the court, i.e., its right to be told the truth by the criminal. The criminal's transgression of ownership boundaries sanctified—set apart judicially—the stolen property. The lying criminal owes the victim double restitution because of the theft if the court convicts him. He owes him full restoration if he admits his guilt before the court tries him. He also owes the victim a double tithe (20 percent) because the act of theft sanctified the stolen goods. Finally, he owes God a sacrifice through the mediating institution of the priesthood because of his false oath in civil court.

The 20% penalty payment to the victim is still in force in New Testament times. It was not tied uniquely to the Promised Land or the Mosaic Covenant priesthood. There has to be a double-tithe (priestly) penalty payment in order to de-sanctify the stolen property. He pays this penalty to the victim, not to the church.

If the criminal confesses his sin to the victim before the trial begins, he escapes the threat of double restitution. A 20% penalty payment to the victim is sufficient, plus the return of the asset or its present market value. In Mosaic Israel, if he had also lied to the court regarding his theft, he had to offer the sacrifice of a ram. Today, he would confess to church authorities and make whatever sacrifice they

56. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9–10).

impose on him, not to exceed the comparable value of a ram in the Mosaic economy.

II. Cleansing (Lev. 8–16)

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy (Lev. 11:44–45).

God here identifies Himself as a holy God. He also identifies Himself as the God who had delivered the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt. This self-identification as the God who delivered His people in history is the identifying aspect of point two of the Mosaic Covenant: historical prologue.¹ In Leviticus 11:45, God identifies Himself as possessing lawful authority over His people: hierarchy.

Leviticus 8–16 is concerned with the priesthood in general,² but with cleansing in particular. The priesthood was in charge of identifying and attending to the marks of ritual and physical uncleanness in society: food laws, childbirth laws, leprosy, discharges of the flesh, and the day of atonement.³ This section begins with the ritual washing of the priests: Aaron and his sons (Lev. 8:6). It ends with the day of atonement, which is specifically identified as a means of cleansing: “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (Lev. 16:30).

Ritual cleanliness was mandatory for a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6) that had been set apart (sanctified, made holy) by God as His special people. This national separation was the heart of the Mosaic Coven-

1. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 53–57.

2. The Greek word for priest is *hierus*, as in hierarchy.

3. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 16. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

ant. Cleanliness laws were temporal boundary devices that had a covenantal function for as long as the Mosaic Covenant was valid. To enforce them, there had to be a priesthood for the nation of priests. Like the nation of priests, these ordained priests had boundaries placed around them as a separate family (Aaron) in a separate tribe (Levi). It was their task to identify holiness and unholiness, cleanliness and uncleanness (Lev. 10:10). As we find in the laws governing leprosy, their very physical presence inside the boundary of a house made unclean a house infected with the disease. It was not legally unclean until a priest crossed its boundary. This was analogous to the moral uncleanness of Canaan, which became judicially unclean—and subject to God's corporate negative sanctions—only after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan river and entered the land.

8

WINE AS A BOUNDARY MARKER

And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses (Lev. 10:8–11).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is that God has the authority to establish boundaries that temporarily separate a holy person from a blessing.

A. Wine as God's Property

The wine in this passage is analogous to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This prohibition applied to the priests only while they were inside the tabernacle or temple. There is no reference to the Levites. For a priest to drink wine inside the tabernacle constituted a boundary violation. The tabernacle-temple was God's place of residence in Israel. It was there that He manifested His judicial presence. This law had something to do with the special presence of God and the holiness of God. It also had something to do with the office of priest. It had nothing to do with a general prohibition against wine.

There can be no doubt that the average Israelite was allowed to drink wine. He was specifically authorized by God to drink it at the third-year feast. "And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household" (Deut. 14:26).¹ Wine is described in the Bible as a blessing from

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deutero-*

God:

And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee (Deut. 7:13).

That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil (Deut. 11:14).²

And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly (II Chron. 31:5).

God even goes so far as to say that the *absence of wine* is a sign of His *covenantal curse* against a covenanted nation: “And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee” (Deut. 28:51). In the New Testament, we read of the spirit of prohibitionism—the prohibition of God’s gifts.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer (I Tim. 4:1–5).

This raises a theological question: Why this unique Mosaic covenantal prohibition for the priests? Wenham understood that there is a problem here. “The commands given to Aaron, however, are strange. Why should a ban on drinking alcohol be introduced here, and then be coupled with instructions about teaching the Israelites?”³ He correctly

nomy, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

3. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 158.

identified both aspects of the prohibition: (1) clear-headed officiating over the administration of the sacrifices, and (2) the teaching function of the priests. But he avoids discussing a very difficult and all-too-obvious problem: teaching by the priests that took place outside the boundaries of the tabernacle and the temple.

Why did the prohibition against wine cease when the priest left the tabernacle? Wasn't clear instruction in the word of God just as important outside the temple's boundaries as inside? The ban did not apply to the Levites, yet they also had a teaching function. Their office was lower than the priestly office. They did not speak with comparable authority. Was this additional authority of the priesthood an aspect of the ban?

The solution is found in what should be the central presupposition of biblical economics: *God's ownership of the world*, which is an implication of His creation of the world.

The boundary of the tabernacle involved a prohibition regarding their personal use of wine. Wine was required in the sacrifices. The wine of Mosaic sacrifice was to be poured out exclusively to God and never consumed by the priest. It was not burned on the altar because, like leaven, it was a fermented product.⁴ Wine accompanied the offerings. "And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt offering or sacrifice, for one lamb" (Num. 15:5). "And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the LORD for a drink offering" (Num. 28:7). Like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, wine was specially reserved for God in the Mosaic sacrifices. *The wine of sacrifice was exclusively His property*. Also like the boundary in the garden, this was not intended to be a permanent boundary, but it was a requirement of that dispensation. Contrary to the anti-alcohol heresy,⁵ it was not that God despised wine; it was that He regarded it as exclusively His possession in formal worship ceremonies. He saved the best for Himself.

B. Sobriety and Sanctuary

The priest was the person who offered sacrifices, but he was also

4. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 189.

5. For a critique of this heresy, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *God Gave Us Wine: What the Bible Says About Alcohol* (Lincoln, California: Oakdown, 2001). See also North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix G: "Strong Drink."

the person who authoritatively interpreted and applied the law of God in formal judgment. This authority to pronounce judgment was also a possession of the king, who was also prohibited from drinking wine. “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted” (Prov. 31:4–5). This advice—it was not a Mosaic law—governed the highest civil magistrates: kings and princes. The identifying issue for the king was the enforcement of justice. The king was the final civil court of appeal. Was this high-court status also the issue for the priests within the tabernacle? In some cases it was, when the priest declared the law and then imposed sanctions on someone who had come to bring a sacrifice or during one of the required feasts. Some legal counseling may have gone on. But the imposition of sanctions was not what the text refers to. The two stated reasons for this priestly prohibition were related to two priestly tasks: distinguishing clean from unclean and teaching the people God’s law.

1. Boundary Marker

The priest knew the details of the sacrificial system. He acted as a representative agent: a *boundary* (mediator) between God and the people of Israel, but also between Israel and the world. Wine might disorient him. Such self-inflicted disorientation was not permitted. Therefore, if the priests failed to officiate correctly at the sacrifices, God would bring sanctions against both priesthood and people. These boundaries had to be respected. This required sobriety, but it also required the priests to respect God as the sole owner of the drink offerings. More was involved here than the mere sobriety of the priests. This law rested on the distinction between holy and unholy. In this case, the priest, as a fallen man and fallen mankind’s agent, was unholy or unclean. He could not touch wine within the confines of the tabernacle. God is holy; wine was His exclusive property inside the tabernacle. This did not change during the period of the Mosaic Covenant. Only in the New Covenant era, after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, did wine again become lawful for laymen in worship, as it had been for Abram (Gen. 14:18).

Within the tabernacle, there could be discussion and study, just as there was later in the temple (Luke 2:46). When discussing God’s law, men are to be alert. It is their proper service before God, their calling.

But the prohibition applied only to the tabernacle. Why not outside? Because the focus of concern was not the teaching of the law as such; *it was the teaching of the law in a holy place*. A holy place is a sanctuary: a place sanctified by God. The declaration of the law from within the tabernacle had far greater authority than the declaration of God's law outside the tabernacle. God dwelt with Israel inside the tabernacle. His presence was judicial: throne-related (the mercy seat: Ex. 25:17–22). Any declaration of His law from within His own house had the force of supreme law. The law declared here was not mere advice. It could not be appealed. This was Israel's highest ecclesiastical court of appeal. *The priest was acting as a boundary guard on holy ground*. This was the boundary. It was not simply that his office was holy; his environment was holy. Jesus did not apply a whip to the backsides of the moneychangers outside the temple, but only inside. It was here that God was most offended. The temple was a house of prayer, the place where men brought their cases before God and sought God's authoritative pronouncements.

2. *The Third Book of the Pentateuch*

This interpretation is consistent with the structure and role of the Book of Leviticus. It is the third book in the Pentateuch. It is associated with the third point of the biblical covenant model. That point refers to biblical law: moral and judicial boundaries. It also relates to geographical boundaries. *Private property is the outworking of this principle of lawful boundaries*. God marks off certain boundaries, and then He assigns these marked parcels to specific individuals as His lawful stewards. The eighth commandment, which prohibits theft, is the third in a series of five kingly commandments.⁶

The priest within the tabernacle was a student of biblical law. He was a *boundary guard* for the people in their role as God's dominion agents. As God's dwelling place, the tabernacle was the place of God's judgment. The tabernacle was therefore *sanctified*—set apart judicially by God. When in the geographical-judgmental presence of God in the Mosaic Covenant era, the priest had to avoid anything that would make him lightheaded, meaning artificially lighthearted. The priest was also the one who offered sacrifices as a boundary guard whose

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2: *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 28.

efforts placated the wrath of God. Offering sacrifices was the crucial official activity within the tabernacle. If the priest was not alert to the ritual requirements of the sacrifices, he risked bringing under judgment both himself and those represented by him.

There was a secondary consideration. If the priesthood as a whole failed to declare and observe God's law correctly, this would undermine all lawful judgment: self-judgment, family judgment, civil judgment, and ecclesiastical judgment. This would in turn undermine the dominion activities of the family, the primary agent of dominion in history (Gen. 1:26–28).⁷ The priest was therefore to listen to God's word carefully, for it is a word of judgment. This word included His liturgical word. He was required to adhere to it precisely, just as men are to adhere to His written word precisely. The priest's actions in the tabernacle were therefore representative, which is why Jesus was so outraged by what was going on in the temple (Matt. 21:13).⁸

The king was analogous to God. The king brought negative sanctions in history. He was required to study the law daily (Deut. 17:18–20), but he also had to execute judgment. His task was more closely associated with point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions. Thus, the king was under a sort of double prohibition. He was unwise ever to drink wine, whereas the priests could lawfully drink wine outside the boundaries of the tabernacle.⁹

3. Permanent Prohibitions?

The question arises: Are these prohibitions still in force? The fundamentalist insists that every redeemed person is now a priest. Because of the annulment of Israel's feasts, Christians supposedly are no longer authorized to drink strong drink. The prohibition against drinking wine inside the temple has now been extended to the whole world, the fundamentalist insists. The New Testament is therefore

7. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

9. R. K. Harrison did not discuss the "inside-outside" aspect of the prohibition. He relates the prohibition to the teaching function of the priesthood, as well as the ritual function, ignoring the obvious: most of this priestly public teaching would have been conducted outside the tabernacle. But there the absolute prohibition did not apply. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), pp. 114–18.

seen as far more hostile to wine than the Old Testament was.

The problem with this viewpoint is that wine was legitimate for the priest outside of tabernacle services, unless he had taken a Nazarite's vow (Num. 6:20; Jud. 13:7), which also prohibited grape juice and even raisins—an aged grape product not on the fundamentalists' list of innately evil products. Why should the extension of the priesthood to every Christian require the removal of wine from the tables of the land? It is the essence of Christianity's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that all believers who are members in good standing are allowed to enter the temple and partake of the communion feast of God. God's full table is now open to us. He now shares with us by His grace the wine that had been ritually poured out exclusively to Him under the Mosaic Covenant. The entire priesthood can now lawfully partake of this wine inside the temple.

The Roman Catholic Church has reversed the Mosaic Covenant's prohibition in formal worship: only the priest may drink communion wine, since it supposedly becomes Christ's literal blood.¹⁰ The Catholic layman is denied access to the full table. Outside of worship, the Catholic Church teaches, wine is as legitimate today as it was in the Mosaic economy.

In contrast to both positions, fundamentalist and Roman Catholic, the Reformed or Lutheran Christian says that this Mosaic restriction on the priest was annulled by the establishment of the Lord's Supper, which commands all followers of Christ to take wine. Presumably, the New Covenant king is also allowed to drink wine, since the King of kings made wine at the wedding at Cana. Jesus made wine, not grape juice. The reason why it was customary to serve the less expensive wine later in a feast (John 2:10) was that people's sense of taste would have been impaired by the previous consumption of wine. A declining sense of discriminating taste is not a problem with the consumption of grape juice. (I have never heard of "discriminating taste" regarding grape juice. International grape juice competitions are quite rare. The product is seldom advertised.)

10. On what legal basis are Catholic layman allowed to eat Christ's body? What is so special about the blood?

C. The Boundary of the Heart¹¹

The Mosaic Covenant required that the tablets of the law be placed in the Ark of the Covenant. They were written on stone. The New Covenant is different. Now the law is written on the hearts of regenerate people. The old sanctuary is no more. The Epistle to the Hebrews announces with respect to the annulment of the Mosaic Covenant and the Mosaic sanctuary:

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. **Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.** For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the **sanctuary**. **And after the second veil,** the tabernacle which is called **the Holiest of all;** Which had the golden censer, and **the ark of the covenant** overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant (Heb. 8:7–9:4).

The contrast here is between the Old Covenant and the New, between the old tabernacle and the new. The main issue in this passage is *the erasure of physical boundaries* that had separated the Mosaic Covenant worshipper from the tablets of the law and the exclusive

11. "And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:6). "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (Jer. 4:4).

area of the high priest's annual sacrifice. After the invasion by Babylon, the Ark of the Covenant was lost forever. But the veil of the temple performed the same separating function. This ended with the death of Christ. "And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mark 15:38). The Mosaic Covenant that God made with their fathers has been superseded. The boundary that had kept the vast majority of Israelites from exercising righteous covenantal judgment had been the barrier in their hearts. The Holy Spirit has now come and has circumcised the hearts of God's New Covenant people (Rom. 2:29). The Mosaic Covenant's laws of sacrifice also no longer apply. The *preservation of justice* is now based primarily on the *presence of God's covenant law in the hearts of God's people*. Covenant law moves outward from the heart to every human institution. In this sense, the New Covenant broke the institutional boundaries of the Mosaic Covenant. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). That sovereign Lord rules in terms of His law.

One physical boundary between man and God in the Mosaic Covenant was wine. The priest could not drink it during worship. It was a ritual barrier. Wine in worship visibly represented a judicial boundary between God and man, just as the tree of knowledge did in the garden. Wine still does, but in a totally different way. *The sacraments physically mark the boundary between God and man*. This is the reason for the ritual use of wine in New Covenant times. Those who do not have legal access to this wine are warned by the very existence of the ceremony that they are judicially separated from God. The *wine boundary* keeps covenant-breakers outside the special protection of God—His positive sanctions—but God requires covenant-keepers to partake of it.¹² This includes covenant-keeping kings.

D. The Supreme Civil Ruler

Then what of the strong advice against the civil ruler's use of alcohol? "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted" (Prov. 31:4–5). Did this advice cease with the extension of the kingship to the New Covenant citizen? Or does the advice now extend to the New Covenant citizen because of his additional authority?

12. An exception is valid for former alcoholics: weaker brethren (I Cor. 8:9).

To discover the answer, let us first examine the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. All New Covenant citizens are required to partake. This includes all civil rulers. They may refuse to accept the terms of church membership, but, morally speaking, they are supposed to.¹³ The exclusion of the common people of God from the holy (legally separated) food of the sacrament is no longer valid. The priest is no longer given special access to the table and the shewbread; the wine is no longer to be poured out as an offering. The primary threat of wine in temple service was not that it can cause drunkenness; the primary threat was based on a ritual (judicially representational) boundary between man and God. The threat to the priest was his violation of a sanctuary boundary, not his drunkenness as such.

This was not the case with the supreme civil ruler during the Mosaic economy. Here, the threat was said to be drunkenness. That threat still exists. Drinking wine was advised against by Proverbs 31, but this had nothing to do with ritual participation in temple worship, to which kings did not have legal access. The warning of Proverbs 31 is therefore not annulled today. The question today is: What was the nature of the restriction? The answer is not found in the Mosaic law itself. The prohibition does not appear among the case laws. It appears in the wisdom literature. This does not mean that it may be safely ignored by civil rulers. It means only that there are no predictable, covenantal, negative civil or ecclesiastical sanctions attached to it.

In ancient kingship, the office was inseparable from the person. There was no boundary between his person and his office. In the modern world, this is no longer true. There are no modern kings who possess supreme judicial power by virtue of their persons, except in a few small, backward, tribal nations. In modern judicial theory, all supreme rulers can be deposed. They are not "to the office born." There is no doctrine of the divine right of kings, meaning an office beyond which there is no earthly legal appeal.

The drinking habits of the Mosaic Covenant era king had to be placed under tight control, and this control was mainly self-control. There was no higher earthly judicial authority for men to appeal to except the priesthood or a prophet when a king failed to exercise lawful judgment. Kingship was not an occupation; it was a lifetime position. There was often a public anointing of the king. So, his self-control had

13. Judicially speaking, too. See Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

to be superior to that exercised by common men or even priests except when they were officiating inside the temple's boundaries. The senior civil ruler was not supposed to drink wine, because drunkenness in him was too great a threat to the whole commonwealth, not just to him. He was the final civil court of appeal. The alcohol issue for him was both judicial and representational. He held a monopoly judicial position, and he held it for life. *Remove the equation of office and person, and you remove the judicial basis of the Proverbs prohibition.* Life-time control over the highest judicial office in the land did bring with it a unique degree of personal responsibility, but kings are no more. Civil authority is deliberately divided in modern governments.

Today, we legally separate the office from the person who occupies it. A *legal boundary* is present that separates the civil office from its holder. No one has discussed this post-medieval development more profoundly than Max Weber. Writing after World War I, Weber observed: "It is decisive for the modern loyalty to an office that, in the pure type, it does not establish a relationship to a *person*, like the vassal's or disciple's faith under feudal or patrimonial authority, but rather is devoted to *impersonal* and *functional* purposes. . . . The political official—at least in the fully developed modern state—is not considered the personal servant of a ruler."¹⁴ The ruler's word is not law. His word is governed by law. He answers to courts and voters. They can bring judicial sanctions against him if he violates the law. They can remove him from office.

Thus, in a world without kingship, there is no longer any binding prohibition against alcohol. In any case, this law never did apply to civil rulers generally. It only applied to the king. The king was analogous to the high priest. Both were at the top of their respective judicial hierarchies. Today, there are neither high priests nor kings. European kingship formally disappeared at the end of the First World War, but in Great Britain, it disappeared judicially in the late seventeenth century when Parliament asserted final sovereignty during the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89.

Then who today is the king? To whom does the law apply? To no one specifically, but to everyone in his capacity as judge. Today, all citizens exercise civil rule when they vote. The Reformation's doctrine, "every (redeemed) man a priest," becomes the modern democratic principle of secular humanism, "every citizen a king." But of course no

14. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, [1924] 1968), p. 959.

citizen is a true king. There are no true kings any longer. There is no supreme civil authority, except perhaps during wartime, when one man is designated commander-in-chief.¹⁵ Then on what basis today can a citizen-civil ruler boundary distinction based on alcohol be maintained? The threat of excessive alcohol consumption is now everyone's threat: "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:17–18). The Holy Spirit fills each of God's covenant people, not just the civil rulers. To be drunk with wine threatens this supernatural filling. The biblical issue here is the righteous exercise of wisdom. It was in the Mosaic Covenant, too.

Negative sanctions against civil magistrates who drink during their assigned hours for rendering judgment are not specified in the Bible. These sanctions could be political, although there are few indications that drunkenness has in any significant way reduced the electoral success of politicians. When Christian political activist Paul Weyrich in 1989 challenged the appointment of former United States Senator John Tower to the office of Secretary of Defense because of Tower's reputation as a heavy drinker and womanizer, Weyrich was initially challenged by the committee of United States Senators who were responsible for recommending to the entire Senate the vote to approve or disapprove the President's nomination. At first, it looked as though no one in high office would take Weyrich seriously. Only weeks later did public pressure build against Tower, officially because of his financial connections with the armaments industry. The Senate eventually refused to confirm the nomination. The President had to nominate someone else. But former Senator and former Presidential nominee Barry Goldwater ridiculed Weyrich's objections. Referring to the capitol city of Washington, D.C., he said: "If they had chased every man or woman out of this town who had shacked up with somebody else or gotten drunk, there'd be no government."¹⁶ From time to time, scandals will lead to a politician's demise, but seldom is drunkenness alone sufficient grounds of the public's wrath. This sin is too easily covered

15. Winston Churchill drank heavily throughout his tenure as Prime Minister of England during World War II. He began drinking in late afternoon and continued until late at night, yet this did not seem to impede his judgment. John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory—A Political Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), p. 549.

16. John G. Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), p. 330. Tower died in a plane crash a few months after this book was published.

up by his colleagues.

E. Breaking Cultural Boundaries

Grape juice cannot expand until it begins to ferment. It then loses its character as grape juice. The kingdom of God broke the boundaries of the Old Covenant, just as new wine breaks old wineskins (Matt. 9:17). The imagery of broken wineskins testifies to a new, expanding kingdom that is no longer confined by old geographical and cultural boundaries. The new kingdom means a new mentality: dominion-oriented, expansionist, and comprehensive in its scope. This imagery was present in Old Covenant Israel, as the use of wine indicates: wine was not universally prohibited, and prior to the Mosaic economy, it was even allowed to the priesthood. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18). Isaac's blessing of Jacob demonstrates the link between wine and dominion:

Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee (Gen. 27:28–29).

The boundary of wine for the priests testified that Israel was under temporary constraints geographically. The Mosaic element of world-wide dominion was not operable to the same extent as it is in the New Covenant.

The worldview of fundamentalism denies the reality of an expanding kingdom in history, meaning before Christ returns in person to set up an earthly kingdom. The kingdom of God is said to be limited to the family and the church. In some extreme formulations, the kingdom of God is equated only with the church; even the family is understood to be outside it. Wrote English Baptist pastor Peter Masters: "God is especially concerned with His people. He will not give His kingdom to the world, nor will He give the world to His kingdom. The kingdom of God is the church. . . ."¹⁷ In such a formulation, the state and society in general do not qualify even as aspects of the kingdom of God. The fundamentalist does not believe that there will ever be a time

17. Peter Masters, "World Dominion: The High Ambition of Reconstructionism," *Sword & Trowel* (May 1990), p. 18.

in church history when God's kingdom will transform social institutions. Masters went on in this vein: "Where Christians have previously attempted to construct even a very limited Christian society their efforts have been sadly frustrated."¹⁸ According to this view of history, a millennium of medieval society was either at bottom religiously neutral or else it was not really a society. This is the history of Western civilization according to Voltaire, Diderot, and the Enlightenment generally. It is fundamentalism's worldview, too, which is why there is a continuing operational alliance between pietism and humanism.¹⁹

Grape juice is the pietist's preference: a sweet, red liquid that looks like wine but has no bite, bubble, or joy to it. Fundamentalists do not use wine in any form because wine can be misused by undisciplined people. (They are not equally wary about their diets and their weight. It is fermented sugar that arouses their wrath, not unfermented.)²⁰ The imagery of broken wineskins also does not appeal to pietistic fundamentalists. They want to keep those old wineskins intact. The thought of cultural wine that breaks the institutional structures of society is foreign to their thinking. Like wine, cultural and political power can be abused, so they reject it as a matter of morality. Thus, Christians are supposed to shun power, influence, and culture in the same way that they are to shun wine. Culture means dirty movies and perversion; people who even study cultural affairs are risking being engulfed by a morally polluting worldliness. Rev. Masters was emphatic about the relationship between "endless discussion of social, economic, educational and political theories" and the enjoyment of art, which is inescapably worldly. "In many cases it leads in a subtle way to worldliness. (After all, if Christians are commissioned to take dominion over the arts, and so on, they had better start by participating in them and enjoying them.)"²¹ Understand, this is *Dr. Masters*—theologically con-

18. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

19. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 43–44, 135–36, 144, 147, 151, 179–80, 258, 277–78. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

20. Typical of the fundamentalist mindset is the concordance at the back of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1909). If you are trying to locate Deuteronomy 21:20, "And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard," you can find it by looking up the word "drunkard," but not "glutton." Similarly with Proverbs 23:21: "For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." There is no reference at all to "glutton" in the concordance.

21. Masters, "World Dominion," p. 19.

sistent Dr. Masters—not some raving backwoods preacher of the early nineteenth-century American frontier. As the institutional heir to Charles Spurgeon, Masters nevertheless abandoned the broad cultural learning of his Calvinistic predecessor, who had no college degree but did have a wide-ranging interest in society and culture.

Pietistic fundamentalists do not have confidence in those fellow Christians who would exercise public authority in the name of Christ and in terms of His law. They prefer to be ruled by pagans. Similarly, they have no faith in culture.

F. Boundaries of Work and Play

The biblical office of king no longer exists; therefore, neither does the judicial prohibition against alcohol. The subordinate civil offices do exist, but the prohibition never did apply to them (Deut. 14:26). What about any other basis of prohibition? The author of Proverbs tells us that “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). There is also “A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace” (Eccl. 3:8). There are times to celebrate and times to exercise judgment. These times are not the same. Thus, when the subordinate ruler exercised judgment under the Mosaic Covenant, he was presumably not supposed to drink, just as the priest was not to drink wine when officiating. The key factor here is *officiating*—to exercise the office. Why should we imagine that this has changed? It hasn’t.

It is clear why liquor and justice do not mix. The ruler is required by God to render judgment in His name. This judgment must apply the general principles of biblical justice to specific infractions. This work takes considerable skill. A person who is under the influence of alcohol in this task is to that degree not under the influence of God’s law. But why should this not be true in every other instance? Why is the decision-making of civil law crucial? The answer: because the civil magistrate renders judgment in God’s name.

Whenever good judgment is required for the safety of others, equally rigorous standards are required. Pilots of airplanes are not allowed to drink liquor for hours prior to flights. Were it not so common for automobile drivers to drink before driving, thereby making it difficult for prosecutors to get juries to convict drunk drivers, harsh economic sanctions would be applied to those driving while intoxicated. Other people are at risk; thus, the person under the influence of

alcohol or drugs is a threat to society.

But what about after work? Why should alcohol be prohibited, if the person does not subsequently drive? What about relaxation? There is no biblical prohibition. The enjoyment of conviviality is sometimes enhanced by the loosening of inhibitions that alcohol produces. This is the “merry heart” phenomenon: the reduction of worldly cares that interfere with interpersonal relationships. The merry heart is a legitimate goal when one’s work is completed. “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works” (Eccl. 9:7). Anyone who would translate the Hebrew word for wine as “grape juice” in this passage is personally unfamiliar with the merrying effects of wine—and proud of it!

Modern fundamentalism views the God of the Old Testament as horribly harsh. For example, God’s law requires witnesses to stone those convicted of a capital crime. “The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you” (Deut. 17:7). Such judicial barbarism is not required today, they tell us. “We’re under grace, not law.” (In fact, Christians are today universally under covenant-breakers and their laws.) Yet at the same time, they view the God of Israel as far too morally lax, allowing people to drink alcohol. In both cases, Mosaic law is a great embarrassment to them. They do not consider an alternative viewpoint, namely, that pietistic fundamentalism is a great embarrassment to God.²²

Conclusion

Is the prohibition against wine judicially relevant in New Testament times? No. The offices to which the prohibition applied—priest and king—no longer exist. The average citizen has legal access to the offices of minister and senior civil ruler, if he meets certain specified judicial criteria. Neither office is attained through inheritance in modern society. The Mosaic priesthood has not been inherited since its demise at the fall of Jerusalem.

The prohibition against wine for priests was limited by the boundary of formal worship before God’s throne. The issue here was the *ritual monopoly over wine* possessed by God. He refused to share this

22. Reformed pietism is also equally embarrassed by the Old Testament. Its defenders are repulsed by the thought of the capital sanction of stoning, but some of them do enjoy drinking.

wine with the people or their representatives. Holy Communion changed this: ministers and members can and must partake of God's blessing. The prohibition applied to kings because of the unique judicial boundary of their own persons. The issue here was the proper rendering of judgment, not ritual exclusion.

The warning to the king is still with us: when rendering formal judgment or performing actions that place others under risk, wine and strong drink are still prohibited. Wine is for celebration after daily work is over. A mild alteration of the senses in this case is legitimate, for the responsibility of rendering daily judgment is past. This points to a view of life that renounces the stress of perpetual, inherited responsibility—the kind of responsibility appropriate only to Old Covenant kings. The pressures of New Covenant responsibility ebb and flow; they are not to become continual. The internally stressful lives of modern men point to their violation of the biblical rhythm of responsibility and celebration. Instead of hard work followed by relaxation, men today adopt killing stress and worry alternating with mindless, addictive escapism: distilled liquor, drugs, and television.

We are not to become either alcoholics or workaholics. We are also not to become either abstainers or slothful. Alcoholism is a denial of personal responsibility. Abstaining from all liquor is also a denial of personal responsibility: "If I take one drink, I'll become an alcoholic."²³ Both are wrong. Workaholism is a denial of God's sovereignty. It is the attitude of autonomy: "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17b).²⁴ Slothfulness is a denial of man's responsibility.

The New Testament prohibition against drunkenness is a boundary against alcoholism (Eph. 5:17–18). But God also mandates fermented wine for His Supper, a judicial rejection of the mentality of the absolute prohibition against liquor, which in turn leads to the withdrawal from culture and its responsibilities. Similarly, the law of the sabbath is an affront to workaholics: a judicial barrier. It is also an affront to the slothful: six days we are to work.

Responsibility involves the recognition *and honoring* of the boundary between hard work and addiction to work. It also involves recognizing *and honoring* the boundary between feasting and gluttony, between making merry and getting drunk. Jesus' enemies accused Him

23. This may be true for recovered alcoholics. They are under a God's physiological curse because of their former rebellion.

24. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

of having transgressed both of these boundaries: “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children” (Matt. 11:19).

Modern man thinks of himself as wise, but he is foolish. He refuses to recognize God’s boundaries. He ignores them and then risks falling into personal addiction, or else he creates absolute but artificial boundaries where none exist in God’s word, and he then falls into a cramped personal legalism that frequently produces cultural irrelevance. Man finds many ways to deny God’s boundaries. These ways are all illegitimate.

9

BIBLICAL QUARANTINE

And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be (Lev. 13:45–46).

The theocentric principle here is a boundary that is imposed by God as a means of judgment: biblical leprosy.

A. Leprosy as a Curse

We come now to the longest passage in the Bible that deals with a specific law. This is the law of plague or leprosy. It fills two very long chapters in the Bible, Leviticus 13 and 14. Leviticus 13 presents the law as it applied to the priest: examining whether or not a person had been afflicted with plague or leprosy. Leviticus 14 deals with the specified sacrifices that enabled a person who had been healed from the plague or leprosy to be cleansed judicially and then re-enter the congregation of the Lord. Leviticus 14 also deals with the extremely peculiar phenomenon, namely, plague of garments and houses.

The theocentric meaning of this law is that Mosaic-era leprosy was a sign of God's curses in history and eternity. God's curses separate some men from others. Mosaic-era leprosy testified to the ultimate separation of heaven from hell, of the New Heaven and New Earth from the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15). Community is therefore evidence of God's grace. Autonomy, as a theory of separation, is a demonic social theory. God's final curse against self-professed autonomous man is eternal separation.

This law was given by God directly to Moses and Aaron (v. 1). The priesthood enforced this law, not the Levites (v. 2). This means, first of all, that there was a civil function for the priesthood. The civil magis-

trate had to enforce the declaration of the priest. Second, while the text does not say so, this law indicates that a priest had to reside in every city. He did not offer sacrifice there. Jerusalem was the exclusive place of official sacrifice after David captured the city. The priesthood performed a civil function: declaring people and things unclean within the boundaries of a city.

I argue in this chapter that the leprosy of Leviticus was not a communicable biological disease but rather a judicial affliction. It was not what is known today as Hansen's disease. The quarantine law governing this affliction applied only within a city. Thus, it was a very peculiar disease.

B. The Plague on a House

Instead of going into great detail about the nature of either plague or leprosy as it affected the individual human being, I want to discuss the plague on a house. The plague was not simply inside the confines of the house; it was literally on it. By beginning here, I focus on what I believe is the crucial point: *this plague was judicial in its frame of reference, not biological*.¹ We can recognize this more clearly in the case of inanimate objects. The house law, which was given in the wilderness period, specified that when the people came into the land of Canaan, and built houses or inherited houses, those houses would sometimes be subjected to the curse of plague. It began: "When ye be come into the land of Canaan, which I give to you for a possession, and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession. . . ." (Lev. 14:34). This law was restricted to Canaan, as we shall see.

God said that He would put the plague of leprosy on a house. When the owner of the house discovered an outbreak of mold in the house's walls, he was required to go to the priest and inform him of the fact:

And he that owneth the house shall come and tell the priest, saying,
It seemeth to me there is as it were a plague in the house: Then the

1. The rabbis interpreted this law as applying only to Israelites and proselytes, not to resident aliens. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 772. This view is called into question because Naaman, a Syrian military leader, contracted the disease (II Kings 5). He was not an Israelite or a proselyte. The Syrians had invaded Israel (v. 2); this boundary violation may have been the basis of his leprosy, despite his honor before God (v. 1). Naaman's cure was to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River, the boundary that separated Israel from the world (v. 14).

priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest go into it to see the plague, that all that is in the house be not made unclean: and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house: And he shall look on the plague, and, behold, if the plague be in the walls of the house with hollow strakes, greenish or reddish, which in sight [are] lower than the wall; Then the priest shall go out of the house to the door of the house, and shut up the house seven days (Lev. 14: 35–38).

1. *The Sanctity of the Priest*

It is important to understand that before entering the house, the priest saw to it that everything movable inside the house was first removed. It is specifically said that this would keep everything inside the house from becoming unclean. “Then the priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest go into it to see the plague, that all that is in the house be not made unclean: and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house” (Lev. 14:35). After the house was emptied, the priest would go into the house. This indicates very clearly that the problem was not the spread of disease inside the house, but rather *the judicial sanctity of the priest*. If this sanctified agent were to enter the house when the house was under suspicion, this would make all of the implements and furniture of the house unclean if the house was found to be unclean. *The boundary here was primarily judicial rather than biological*. The house was not judicially unclean until the priest crossed its doorway boundary. He himself would not become unclean. When he did cross it, if he then corroborated the symptoms, everything inside the house at the time of his entrance would become unclean: walls, floors, ceilings.

The text does not say that the things inside the house would *become* unclean after the priest entered the house only if the house itself was biologically unclean. The text says that everything in the house would become legally unclean merely by the priest’s entering into the house in order to inspect it. This indicates that *it was the priest’s legal status, as an agent of God, that produced the unclean judicial status of the things inside the house*. The house itself was only under suspicion. Everything in the house therefore came under suspicion. It was the entrance of the priest into the house that transformed suspicion into the actual legal status of being unclean.

When the priest crossed the boundary of the house—that is to say, when he crossed the door or threshold—his legal status as a holy agent

of God created the unclean status of everything inside. Conclusion: *these two chapters are primarily concerned with **legal status** rather than biological condition.* If this was not the case, then why wasn't it mandatory to burn the furniture that had been moved outside the house? Why wasn't the furniture contagious? Because this plague was not biologically transmitted. It was judicially transmitted.

2. A Week of Testing

The priest, upon finding signs of the plague in the interior stones of the house, would then shut the house up for seven days. At the end of this period, he would return and look again. If the plague had spread in the walls of the house, then the priest had the afflicted stones removed and cast into an unclean place. This meant outside the city. Then the stones in the house near the now-missing stones would be scraped, and the dust scraped from these stones would also be cast outside the city into the specified unclean place. Then the owner would replace the missing stones. If the plague returned after the first stones had been removed, the priest would come again to see if the plague had spread into the walls of the house. If it had, the priest would then break down the walls of the house, the stones, the timber, the mortar, and everything that constituted the house, and all these materials would then be carried outside the city and cast into the unclean place (14:39–45).

The person living in the house during its time of testing became unclean every time he entered the house. He was required to wash his clothes daily. Anyone eating inside the house also became unclean, and was required to wash his clothes daily (14:47). This indicates that the problem of the house was not biological; it was judicial. Washing one's clothing was not a biological defense; it was a *ritual* defense. People in ancient Israel did not contract biologically transmitted diseases to which houses were equally vulnerable.

Even the thought of a house's being vulnerable to a disease indicates the judicial nature of these chapters. Houses today do not get diseases. Clothing does not get diseases. We are not required to burn clothing because some kind of visible mold or disease has broken out in the clothing. We may wash it or boil it or dispose of it, but we are not required by law to burn it. "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which

all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?" (Col. 2:20–22). Similarly, we do not find instances where houses come under attack by such dangerous spores or microbes that it becomes necessary to tear down the house and throw the remains outside the city. Yet it is obvious that such external afflictions were, if not common, at least possible in Old Covenant Israel. This indicates that these afflictions were part of the burden of being covenanted to God—in close proximity to the house of God, or to the covenanted people of God—and therefore greater responsibility was inescapable for the person residing inside the cities of Israel.

It was the priest's declaration of a suspected house that would make ritually unclean everything inside the house at the time that he entered it. It was not a biological organism that would make everything inside the house unclean. Individuals who entered the house would become ritually unclean, which is why they had to wash their clothes (14:46–47). It was *legal status* that was in question, not biological status. The proof of this is the requirement that a house that had been pronounced unclean and re-plastered, when found to be healed, had to have a ritual cleansing. The priest cleansed the house with two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop (14:49–53). He killed one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water. He took the cedar wood and the hyssop and the scarlet and the living bird and dipped them into the blood of the slain bird and in the running water then he would sprinkle the house seven times. The text actually says that the house was cleansed by the blood of the dead bird, the running water, the living bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet (14:52). The legal status of *unclean* went from the house to the dead bird, and from there to the live bird. The priest then was to let the living bird out of the city into the open fields, thereby making an atonement for the house, in order to make it clean (14:53). An unclean thing could not legally remain inside the city. The bird flew away, carrying the unclean legal status of the house. Conclusion: *the threat was judicial; so was the cure*. Thus, all attempts to turn this law into a law of physical cleanliness are misguided.

C. The Diseased Individual: Separation or Inclusion

Walls, clothing, skin: they are all boundaries. They separate the inside from the outside. Mold that was visible from the outside marked

the house, clothing, or person as legally unclean. If the problem was not dealt with ritually, it altered the legal status of whatever was inside the boundary.

With this background in mind, let us turn now to the diseased individual. It is very easy for the commentator to spend a lot of space describing the details of the physical afflictions. R. K. Harrison spends several pages on such details.² It is easy for a person to believe that these physical details are in some way related to the details of diseases in our day—easy, but incorrect. The leprosy spoken of in these chapters was not what we call leprosy today, or Hansen's disease.³ It was something entirely different. The treatment required by the text applies to no known skin disease, which would not disappear in a few weeks; the Bible's quarantine test period would have been medically ineffectual⁴. Therefore, Milgrom concludes, "these rules are grounded not in medicine but in ritual."⁵ It was an aspect of the impurity system; it was associated with death, as we see in the case of Miriam: "Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb" (Num. 12:12).⁶

Milgrom concludes that this skin disease was inflicted because of rebellion against God: religious rather than civil crimes.⁷ The problem is, the text does not say this explicitly, although the sins of Miriam (Num. 12:14–15), Gehazi (II Kings 5:27), and Uzziah (II Chron. 26:17–21) did result in their affliction.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this plague was the law governing the degree of affliction. "Then the priest shall consider: and, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague: it is all turned white: he is clean" (Lev. 13:13). What this says is that if an individual was *completely covered with leprosy*, turning his flesh entirely white, he was then pronounced *clean*. This means that he had legal access to the tabernacle or to any other element of corporate worship in Israel. He posed no threat to his

2. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1980), pp. 140–47.

3. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 816. Harrison, rare among modern commentators, denied this: *Leviticus*, p. 138. Milgrom traced this confusion to the ninth-century Arab physician, John of Damascus: *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 816.

4. Milgrom cited Marvin Engel, a dermatologist: *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 817.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 818.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 819.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 821.

neighbors, either ritually or biologically.⁸ He was not contagious. We would normally think of the leprosy as being an affliction that required him to be totally separate, permanently. This is not the case. A *partial affliction* of leprosy did require his separation. So did all of the other sores and discolorations of the flesh that are described in Leviticus 13. Nevertheless, *the individual who was completely afflicted became legally clean.*

This fact is additional evidence of my thesis that the fundamental issue was not biological, but rather judicial. Rabbi S. R. Hirsch believed that this disease was sent directly by God.⁹ Surely this was true in the case of a plague-infested house. "When ye be come into the land of Canaan, which I give to you for a possession, and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession" (Lev. 14: 34). The legal issue was not biological contagion; it was obedience. "Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you: as I commanded them, so ye shall observe to do. Remember what the LORD thy God did unto Miriam by the way, after that ye were come forth out of Egypt" (Deut. 24:8–9). She had sinned by challenging the prophetic office of Moses (Num. 12:1–2). She was shut out of the camp for seven days (Num. 12:15)—not because of the leprosy, which had been total, but because of her rebellion (Num. 12:14).

When an individual was so completely afflicted by the whitening of his skin, *he became like God*: pure white (Dan. 7:9; Rev. 1:14). This is why God discusses man's sins as scarlet, and promises that they will be white as snow: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). The red splotchy marks on the body made the individual legally unclean. If the white leprosy replaced those marks, he became legally clean.

This means that the individual could be restored to his status as clean in one of two ways: either by becoming totally afflicted by the leprosy or by becoming totally unafflicted by any of the diseases of the skin. *What would otherwise have been regarded as total affliction became a means of judicial liberation.*

In my opinion, this points directly to Christ's suffering on the

8. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 203.

9. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, trans. by Isaac Levy, 5 vols., 2nd ed. (Gateshead, London: Judaica Press, [1867–78] 1989), III, p. 331: Leviticus 13:2.

cross. He became totally afflicted, yet this led to his death, resurrection, and ascension, and it also led to the liberation of His people. Bearing the comprehensive judgment of God in his flesh, He liberated mankind. In a much more limited sense, the Israelite who bore the total affliction of leprosy in his own flesh liberated himself judicially from the penalty of exclusion from the city.

D. Mandatory Atonement

What must be stressed here is that this law was *not* based on considerations of public biological health; it was based on public judicial health. For the individual to be restored to full communion within the congregation, he had to make four of the five sacrifices of Leviticus: the burnt offering (14:13), the cereal offering (14:10), the sin offering (14:19), and the guilt offering (14:13). Only the voluntary peace offering was absent.¹⁰

1. Reparation and Adoption

The main problem here is to explain the guilt offering. The guilt offering was a reparation offering: the settling of a debt. Why did leprosy involve a debt to God? The commentators have trouble with this question.¹¹ I see the answer in the way in which this offering was to be administered: anointing the right ear lobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe with oil (v. 17). The boring of the man's ear to the doorpost was the bondservant's mark of his *voluntary adoption as a permanent household servant in another man's family* (Ex. 21:6; Deut. 15: 17). The amputation of the right thumb and right big toe was *a mark of a defeated warrior* (Jud. 1:7), leaving him with reduced balance and with the greatly reduced ability to draw a bowstring. The person anointed with oil had his ear, thumb, and toe symbolically restored. *He re-entered the army of the Lord and could lawfully remain inside the camp of God's holy army.* Because he had been outside the camp, and therefore outside the priestly army of the Lord, he had to demonstrate that he was willing to pay a kind of priestly re-entrance fee—a fee analogous to the payments required of those who sought adoption into the family of Levi (Lev. 27:2–8).¹² The reparation offering constituted this payment. The alien seeking adoption had to be circumcised.

10. Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp. 209–10.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

12. Chapter 36.

Because this barrier did not exist for a formerly leprous Israelite, he was required to cross a different barrier.

2. *Disinheritance*

This indicates that these specified diseases were primarily regarded as judicial afflictions rather than biological afflictions. *They marked covenantal death: disinheritance.* Furthermore, the requirement that the individual be cast out of the congregation means that he would have to be forced outside the boundaries of any city. On the other hand, a diseased person who lived in a rural area (as did most of the inhabitants of Israel at the beginning) would not have to leave his home or his family. He was not eligible for the army, however, being excluded from Passover in Jerusalem and also from the holy camp during wartime, but he could remain in his home. He became the judicial equivalent of an uncircumcised resident alien: a stranger in his own land.

This law was a major threat to those residents who owned no land in Israel, or whose land had been leased to another family until the jubilee year. Such individuals had no legal claim to any place of residence. They could not enter a city during a time of a foreign invasion. Without lawful access to Passover, held in a holy place (the tabernacle or temple), they lost their citizenship. They became charity cases in need of mercy.

There was another resident of the city who, above all, would have been threatened by the laws governing plague and leprosy. This was the individual who had fled to a city refuge in order to escape the judgment of the blood avenger (kinsman redeemer) (Num. 35).¹³ Only with the death of the high priest could he safely venture outside the city (Num. 35:28). Thus, for an individual who was residing in a city of refuge in order to escape death at the hands of a blood-avenger, exile from the city was the equivalent of a death sentence. Partial leprosy was one way that God could bring judgment to a man who had committed premeditated murder, but who had persuaded the judges in the city of refuge that the death of the other individual was an accident. God would merely have to bring the plague of partial leprosy on him, and the priest would require him to leave the protection of the city of refuge.

13. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 21.

E. Legal Status, Not Medical Status

The text does not tell us that an individual afflicted by any of these diseases was inherently evil. There is no indication that he must have committed any kind of sin in order to be afflicted in such a way. The disease would come upon him at the discretion of God. The priest was not to inquire regarding a potential trespass on the individual's part. Nevertheless, in order for the individual to be restored after the disappearing of the disease, he did have to make a trespass offering (sacrifice four) along with three other sacrifices. The priest in his capacity as a leprosy inspector was therefore neither a religious counselor nor a public health official in the modern sense, i.e., biological defense. He was the individual who *declared* a person legally clean or legally unclean. He declared a person's *judicial status* in the eyes of God. The individual who was declared unclean was then sent outside the city. He was required to tear his clothes, to leave his head bare, and to put a covering on his upper lip. He also had to cry "Unclean, unclean" (Lev. 13:45). The rending of one's garments was an indication of mourning (II Sam. 1:11).¹⁴ Job's three friends came to mourn with him; they tore their garments in his presence (Job 2:12). When the person afflicted with leprosy tore his garment, he was testifying to his legal status, not his biological status. His legal status was reflected in his biological status, not the other way around. Leprosy was a sign, therefore, of *covenantal death*: the judicial status of a dead man, which authorized his legal and physical separation by an official, in this case a priest. "To live outside the camp was to be cut off from the blessings of the covenant."¹⁵

F. Economic Costs

From an economic standpoint, the most significant aspect of all of these laws is that neither the state nor the church was required by God to support the afflicted person financially. An individual could lose his house. Nevertheless, the state was not required to rebuild a new house for him. Similarly, an individual would lose his job, his place of residence, his access to the fellowship of the saints in corporate worship, and almost everything else that an urban resident would enjoy. Nevertheless, neither the state nor the ecclesiastical hierarchy was required

14. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 200. He cites Ezekiel 24:17, 22: covering the moustache while mourning for the dead.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

to provide any kind of relief or other aid to this individual. This does not mean that voluntary charity was not appropriate. Obviously, it was very appropriate. Nevertheless, the state was not enjoined to compensate the individual for the losses that the individual would sustain. He sustained the losses, not because he was a biological threat to society, but because he was a judicial threat to society. He was a person whose legal status before God had changed. This change had manifested itself as a biological affliction: the mark of covenantal death.

1. Judicial Containment

No other diseases in the Bible came under the same exclusion rules. This indicates that these diseases were to be regarded as the direct hand of God against an individual. It was not assumed that an individual had caught the disease from another individual. It was not assumed that this individual could pass on the disease to another individual. It was assumed that if the priest, acting as a judicial agent of God, did not declare the individual unclean, and if the community did not take steps to remove the individual from the protection of the city, then God might allow the plague to spread. This spreading, again, was fundamentally judicial, not biological. This was true of plague in general in the Mosaic community. Plague was seen as a direct judgment of God against the people for their sins. That is to say, these public health measures were judicial measures.

The reason why we know this to be the case is that the individual who lived in the countryside was not under the same restraints. Because the individual's presence in the countryside was not a threat to his neighbors, there is reason to believe that the curse of God had something to do with the presence of the city. We may not be able to understand all of these ramifications. The point is, the individual was not quarantined inside the city; he was quarantined by removing him from within the city. The one exception to this was King Uzziah (II Chron. 26:21). He was forced to dwell in a separate house, and he was cut off for the rest of his life from the house of God. This judgment had come upon him immediately after his presumptuous sin of offering sacrifice in the temple. It was clear from this incident that the judgment was regarded as judicial—coming directly from the hand of God—and not biological. As the king, he was granted immunity from exclusion from David's city, but only by means of a boundary separating him from the city.

There is no question that quarantine was legal for those dwelling inside the cities of Israel. Men were cut off from their homes, their families, their livelihood, and especially from the household of faith. They could not participate in the covenant rituals and feasts of Israel. This was the ultimate civil quarantine in ancient Israel, other than execution. It meant excommunication from Passover and the loss of citizenship.

2. Quarantines Today

The question then arises: Is priestly quarantining biblically legitimate today? There is no indication that any of these named diseases survived the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There is also no indication that the laws of quarantine by a priest continue into the New Covenant. On the contrary, they could not have survived the demise of the priesthood. The quarantine laws were part of the Levitical laws of the Mosaic Covenant, and, I think, to some degree were connected to jubilee land laws of Leviticus 25. These laws all perished with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. With the collapse of the judicial boundaries of the nation of Israel, there was a collapse of those ritual boundary laws that had governed the people of Israel even before they entered into the land of Canaan. There was no longer any tabernacle to be excluded from, and there was no unclean place outside either the camp or the city to which anyone could be banished. In other words, these laws related to plague, and plague in Mosaic Israel was judicial rather than biological.

In New Testament times, we can study biological afflictions as a separate class of phenomena, and we can also see them as the judgments of God. We do not have the ability to identify the specific sin, either corporate or personal, that leads to most sicknesses, with the exception of venereal diseases. Neither did the priest of the Mosaic Covenant in most cases. The priest was not asked to identify the sin that had led to the individual's affliction. The priest was required only to identify the affliction and deal with it judicially. We can therefore say that in New Testament times, afflictions of a biological nature can be dealt with either through medical techniques or by public health techniques. Contagious people can either be cured or they can be quarantined. The quarantining process, however, is based on considerations of the contagious nature of the disease, not the judicial status of the individual. Public health laws in the modern world are to be governed by

statutes, and statutes must be predictable. Individuals must know in advance the penalties or sanctions that will be imposed for specific kinds of behavior. Thus, an individual who comes down with a disease cannot be said to be a threat to the community merely because he has come down with a disease. The judicial diseases of the Mosaic Covenant are no longer with us. Therefore, the diseases that afflict us today are like the common diseases that afflicted people inside and outside of Mosaic Israel. They are to be dealt with in similar ways: by medical care, by quarantine, by prayer, or by anointing by the elders (James 5:14).

3. To Protect the Public

The idea of quarantine in the 13th chapter of Leviticus is based on the need to protect the public. The spread of the disease, or other forms of God's judgment, was to be halted by removing the afflicted individual from within the city. The concern was public health, but it was not a concern about biological contagion. It was concern about the willingness of God to afflict other individuals with the disease or other afflictions because of their unwillingness to enforce His law. Thus, the quarantining process of Leviticus 13 was primarily judicial. In fact, it would probably be safe to say that it was entirely judicial. Only by the extension of the principle of the protection of others within the city is it legitimate to classify today's diseases as being subject legally to the Bible's quarantining process.

Does this qualification alter the legal status of the civil government? For example, does this mean that in modern times the civil government is required to finance an individual who has been quarantined? The state has brought sanctions against him in the name of the health of the community. This was also the case in Mosaic Israel. The state has put him under quarantine because he is biologically contagious. This was not the case in the Mosaic Israel. Does the shift from judicial affliction to biological affliction change the legal requirements of the civil government? Does the change from the contagious legal status of the individual to his contagious biological status change the requirements of the civil government? In other words, do the quarantine laws of the civil government go through a fundamental transformation between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant?

It is part of English common law that when a city is on fire, the authorities have the right to knock down an individual's house in order

to stop the spread of that fire. It is also part of common law that the city and the community do not owe anything to the individual who has had his house knocked down in this way. It is presumed that the fire would have destroyed the house anyway. It is also assumed that by destroying the individual's house, other houses within the community will be protected. This law was for generations basic to the protection of cities. If the fire-fighters had to worry about the cost of repayment each time they knocked down a house, it is unlikely that they would have had the same kind of incentive to knock down the houses. Obviously, if the price of an action goes up, less of it will be demanded. In this case, it means that the city would have been less likely to be protected from the "plague" of fire because of legal obligations to repay those people who were unfortunate enough to be caught in the line of fire, and whose houses, if knocked down, would have allowed the creation of a fire break. It was assumed that the safety of the city was of greater importance than the loss to the individual. Because the house probably would have burned down anyway, it really was not a net loss to the owner.

Consider a contemporary individual who has contracted a contagious disease. He has become a threat to the community. If the community is required by law to finance this individual until such time as he recovers biologically from the disease, it is less likely that the community will take the necessary steps to isolate him. Common law therefore does not require the civil government to compensate the quarantined individual. Neither does biblical law. This is why quarantine is a devastating event in the life of the individual. Historically, quarantined people have not been permitted to leave their homes. Others have not been able to come into those homes without falling under the ban. While it is assumed that charity will be forthcoming to help the quarantined individual in his time of need, it has been assumed until very recently that the state has no legal obligation to support that person during the period of his confinement. To do so would raise the cost of confining individuals, and it would therefore lead to an unwillingness on the part of public health officials to confine them. This would increase the risk of contagion and disease in the community.

The contagious nature of the disease, in effect, is a form of violence. It is violence conducted by a third party, namely, the biological organisms that transmit the disease, but it is still a form of violence. The carrier places other people at risk. Thus, common law determined

that an individual who becomes a threat to the community must be removed from the community so as to reduce the likelihood of this indirect form of violence. Public health measures are directed against the disease primarily and against its carriers secondarily.

G. Civil Authority

There can be little doubt that the priest in this instance did possess civil authority. He could declare a person judicially unclean. Because God threatened the whole community with judgment, the state was required to enforce the decision of the priest. Because he was entrusted with the legal authority to act as God's agent in this case, his word had to be obeyed. There are few other cases of similar priestly power in the Old Covenant. This indicates that there was something other than public health considerations involved in this form of leprosy. There was a *special judicial condition* that the word of a public health official could not deal with successfully. Yet a transgression of these boundaries was a real threat to the community, which is why the civil power of the city was invoked.

That no similar provision exists in the New Covenant era indicates that this plague was not biological but judicial. The special boundary condition of the nation of Israel ended with the fall of Jerusalem. When the walls of the temple were torn down, the judicial boundaries of the cities of Israel lost their special status. With the end of the Mosaic priesthood, the urban quarantine laws of the Mosaic Covenant ceased. Had the laws been directed against an essentially biological threat to the health of the community, there is no reason why the local civil magistrate could not have assumed the priest's policing function. But with the rending of the curtain of the temple at the death of Christ (Matt. 27:51), the need for a physical barrier between God and man ceased except insofar as the elements of the sacraments are physical. The judicial barrier still exists, but legal access to the presence of God is now exclusively sacramental. The priesthood of all believers is a judicial reality. The state no longer has any valid legal authority to enforce any aspect of the now-annulled distinction between clean and unclean—a distinction that was judicial rather than biological. The Levitical quarantine laws were finally annulled at the same time, and for the same reason, that the Mosaic dietary laws were annulled: A.D. 70.

The boundary laws of clean and unclean were based on the physic-

al holiness of God's dwelling place. The Ark of the Covenant was physically set apart in the holy of holies, His place of residence. He was unwilling to remain with His people if they transgressed certain physical boundaries, since these boundaries were representative of His covenantal authority over them. The concentric boundary rings around the Ark represented God's hierarchy of authority: the closer that a person was allowed to come to the Ark of the Covenant, the higher his judicial authority. This is why the high priest possessed greater authority than the king, and therefore also greater responsibility.¹⁶ These concentric geographical boundaries ceased to exist at the crucifixion of Christ when the veil of the temple was torn. God departed from Israel definitively (judicially) at the crucifixion; He departed progressively (culturally and politically) over the next generation (the Book of Acts); He departed finally in A.D. 70. God would no longer dwell in the temple. All other holiness boundaries in Israel therefore ceased. They no longer served any judicial purpose. This included the judicial boundaries of clean and unclean (Acts 10).

The plagues of the New Covenant era are communicated biologically, not judicially. Plagues can no longer be stopped by a priest who takes immediate defensive action and skewers a pair of mixed-covenant fornicators with his spear (Num. 25:6–8).¹⁷

Conclusion

Wenham summarized the Levitical laws of quarantine. He correctly related them to the Levitical holiness laws.

It seems likely that even in OT times "skin diseases" and their treatment were regarded as symbolic of sin and its consequences. When a man was afflicted with a disfiguring skin disease he did visibly "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), the glory that he had been given in his creation (Ps. 8:6 [Eng. 5]). His banishment from human society and God's sanctuary was a reenactment of the fall, when Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden (Gen. 3). The infection of garments and houses with "skin disease" served as a reminder of the interaction of man and his environment. . . . The laws of Leviticus were not abrogated by Jesus; in fact he tells the healed "lepers" to observe them (Matt. 8:4; Luke 17:14). But the new era of salvation made obsolete the idea that the diseased should be banished from human and divine society. Jesus' ministry and that of his disciples (Matt.

16. Chapter 4.

17. This act had been authorized by Moses, as the supreme civil ruler (Num. 25:5).

10:8) was one which brought reconciliation between God and man. Therefore the old laws isolating men because of their unsightly appearance had become inappropriate and out of date. Like the rules about unclean animals, they did not fit in with the new program, which was to climax in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, in which men of every class and nation would be redeemed (Rev. 7:9).¹⁸

The quarantine laws of Leviticus had more to do with *quarantining the people from the presence of God* than they did with quarantining sick people from healthy people. The blemished person had to be kept away from God's presence in the temple. The laws of leprosy were related to the temple's laws of purity far more than they were to modern public health laws. This is why any conclusions that we attempt to draw from these laws must be done by analogy, not directly.

What can we say with confidence? First, the civil government did possess lawful authority to enforce a priest's decision to remove people from their homes in order to protect others in the community from the judgment of God. This judgment came in the form of plague. The contagion was judicial, but the threat did exist.

Second, the priest possessed the civil authority to remove houses and people from a city. His judicial declaration as an ecclesiastical agent had to be enforced by the civil magistrate.

Third, the victim of the plague had to bear the expenses associated with the results of the quarantine. Because there was no command in the Old Testament that the state support quarantined individuals, it is not possible to derive from this law any biblical injunction for state welfare programs. The only legitimate conclusion to draw from this law by analogy is that there is no state welfare function. The job of the civil government is to protect people from violence, not support people who have been afflicted, either naturally or judicially. To argue any other way is to make the state into an agency of healing rather than an agency of protection. The state is an agency that is supposed to bring negative sanctions against evil-doers. *There is no biblical warrant for the concept of the state as a healer.* The job of the state is to prohibit behavior that threatens other individuals physically. If this threatening behavior is breathing upon others, then the state must see to it that the individuals who are a threat to others are not put into close contact with those who might be injured as a result.

If the state in the Mosaic Covenant was not told by God to support

18. Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp. 213, 214.

those who fell victim to diseases that mandated quarantine, then there is no biblical case for the state as an agency of tax-financed healing today. If the victim of leprosy in the Mosaic Covenant was forced out of his home by the state, and made to wander outside the city, and still the state was not responsible for his financial support, then the case for modern socialized medicine cannot be based on any biblical text.¹⁹ It must be based on the argument from silence. It must be based on the conclusion that there has been a fundamental change in the function of civil government in the New Testament: from protector (Old Covenant) to healer. We have yet to see the exegetical case for such a change. While the presuppositions of the modern political order favor such a view of the state—as did the presuppositions of the ancient pagan world—humanist presuppositions are not a valid substitute for biblical exegesis.

19. When I raised this argument in my debate with Ron Sider in the spring of 1981 at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, his rhetorical response was clever. He cried, “Unclean, unclean!” He then admitted that he had never heard anything like this before. But he made no attempt to answer my argument exegetically.

III. Separation (Lev. 17–22)

INTRODUCTION TO PART III

Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and do them: I am the LORD. Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD which hallow you, That brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD (Lev. 22:31–33).

Separation: this is the heart of the Book of Leviticus, the third book of the Pentateuch. The biblical meaning of *holiness* is to be *set apart* by God, i.e., *hallowed*. Separation and holiness are inescapably linked; or, we might say, inescapably *bound*. Leviticus 17–22 presents the laws of separation.

Leviticus 22:31 speaks of profaning God's name in relation to obeying the commandments. This points back to the third commandment, which prohibits the taking of God's name in vain (Ex. 20:7). God places a boundary around His name; to violate this boundary is to profane it. That this law is recapitulated in a passage mandating obedience to God's commandments should not be surprising. Point three of the biblical covenant model, ethics, is related to the third commandment. It is also related to the eighth commandment, "thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15), the Bible's supreme affirmation of the rights of private property, i.e., the right of individuals to own, use, and sell (disown) property.¹

The separation described in Leviticus is multifaceted. Separation was judicial: sacred, common, and profane. It was geographical: the holy of holies in relation to the temple; the temple area in relation to the rest of the nation; each tribe of Israel in relation to the other tribes;

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 28.

walled cities in relation to the countryside; the very land of Israel in relation to the land outside the boundaries. Tribal separation was in turn prophetic, relating to the promised Seed (Gen. 3:15; 49:10). Separation was priestly: Aaron and Levi; Levi and the other tribes; Israel and the nations. Separation was chronological: the three mandatory yearly feasts, the sabbatical year, and the jubilee year. It was biological: breed vs. breed. It was dietary: clean and unclean. It was physical: clean and unclean. It was ritual: clean and unclean. It was economic: rich and poor. It was political: citizen and non-citizen. It was above all ethical: good and evil.

It is in these chapters that the hermeneutical problem with Leviticus—and with the Mosaic covenant generally—presses the commentator. Which of these laws were cross-boundary laws? Which ones applied both inside and outside the nation of Israel? The geographically cross-boundary laws were universal moral laws, and as such, their binding character has crossed over into the New Covenant. To use a New Covenant metaphor, these laws were resurrected with Jesus.

10

THE PROMISED LAND AS A COVENANTAL AGENT

Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people (Lev. 18:24–29).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is that God is the Lord of history. He brings judgments in terms of His covenantal law. History is theocentric. It is therefore to be understood in terms of the covenant.

God, the supreme authority of the covenant (point one), possesses the power to impose sanctions directly (point four), but He usually chooses to use agents in this task (point two). In this passage, He uses an agent to separate covenant-breakers from the society of covenant-keepers (point three).

A. Geography and Obedience

Leviticus 18, more than any other chapter in the Bible, connects a society's obedience to biblical law and its geography. This chapter describes the land as vomiting out those who disobey God's laws: separation. This graphic metaphor is that of a geographic area that literally forces out of its presence all those who disobey these laws.

The vomiting land of Canaan is one of the most peculiar meta-

phors in the Bible. Bible commentators do not go into detail on just why it was that the land should be described here as vomiting people from its midst. The reason for the commentators' silence is that they have not recognized that this language is more than metaphorical; it is covenantal. It has to do with a system of boundaries and oaths. The land of Canaan was a covenantal subordinate in a hierarchical system of authority, just as the whole earth has been since the creation of Adam. This language is therefore *judgmental*. It describes a unique hierarchical-judicial relation among God, the land of Israel, and those who lived inside the land's boundaries. The pre-Fall hierarchical relationship—God > covenant-keeping man > nature—has been distorted because of sin, although the hierarchical requirement remains the same. The earth brings forth thorns and weeds to thwart mankind; the land of Israel vomited out its inhabitants.

B. The Promised Land as the Enforcer

Israelites were warned to obey God's laws, "That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you." The land is described as serving as *God's sanctioning agent*. Like the hornets that went before the Israelites as they removed the Canaanites (Ex. 23:28), so would the land spew them out if they committed the same sorts of sins that the Canaanites had committed. Historically, the Assyrians and Babylonians spewed them out of the land under the Mosaic Covenant. Yet the land was spoken of as the covenantal agent in the Mosaic Covenant, while the ascended Jesus is spoken of as the agent of spewing in the New Covenant: "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). The language is both covenantal and symbolic in each case. The land did not have a literal stomach and a literal gullet. Jesus does not literally spew out churches. Yet the language of vomiting is used in both cases. The imagery of vomiting is appropriately disgusting, and it is used throughout the Scriptures to describe sin and its consequences.

He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again:
God shall cast them out of his belly (Job 20:15).

The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy
sweet words (Prov. 23:8).

As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly (Prov.

26:11).

The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit (Isa. 19:14).

For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean (Isa. 28:8).

Make ye him drunken: for he magnified himself against the LORD: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision (Jer. 48:26).

But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (II Peter 2:22).

This imagery is that of a man who has eaten something that he should have avoided, and his stomach rebels. This unpleasant event is supposed to remind him: don't eat this again. The metaphor's message: "Go and sin no more." Israel never learned this lesson. Israel went and sinned a lot more.

The imagery of the land's vomiting is closely connected to the Mosaic dietary laws, as we shall see. When those dietary laws ceased to have any covenantal relevance—definitively in Acts 10; finally in A.D. 70—the Promised Land ceased to perform this covenantal task. No other land replaced the Promised Land.

1. Special Promise, Special Claim

The strategic reality of the symbolism (rhetoric)¹ of the land's spewing out the Canaanites was that *Israel possessed a unique legal claim on the land as a result of God's promise to Abraham*. Israel was authorized by God to commit genocide, or mandate total expulsion, against the land's existing inhabitants. God brings negative sanctions in history. He did so with the firstborn of Egypt, and again when Egypt's army perished in the Red Sea. He had shown no mercy to those who rebelled against Him. He would tolerate no mercy on the part of the Israelites against the inhabitants of Canaan. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine

1. Rhetoric is used as a means of persuasion. It is the third biblical interpretive principle: grammar (grammatico-historical), (theo)logic, and rhetoric (symbolism). The medieval educational Trivium was a manifestation of this three-fold system of biblical hermeneutics.

eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee” (Deut. 7:16). Why no pity? Because of the abomination of their gods. God’s warning: similar worship inside the land will bring similar military sanctions (Deut. 8:19–20).² God subsequently raised up Assyria and Babylon to perform an analogous service for Him, which is why this passage warned of a future spewing forth.

The land specified as God’s agent was the Promised Land, not Egypt or any other plot of ground. Only the land inside *God’s covenantal boundary of separation served as His agent of negative military sanctions*. This leads us to a conclusion: because the Promised Land could serve as a prosecuting witness against Israel, it was unique. The witness for the prosecution is required to cast the first stone (Deut. 17:7). The earthquake is the obvious example of stone-casting by the land (Isa. 29:6; Zech. 14:5). “The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining” (Joel 2:10). “The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein” (Nahum 1:5). This quaking is the language of covenantal judgment. Israel’s covenantal agent, Moses, had already experienced this. “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly” (Ex. 19:18). It took place again at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (Matt. 27:51). Conclusion: If the land’s office as *witness for the prosecution* still exists, then its office as *stone-caster* still exists. Because the resurrected Christ appears as the vomiter in New Covenant imagery, I conclude that He is the witness who brings judgment against societies. His agency of sanctions today is social and biological rather than geological.

What about this prophecy in the Book of Revelation? “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

Lamb" (Rev. 6:15–16). The reason such language applied to that event is because the prophecy was intended to be fulfilled a few years after it was written. This prophecy of looming covenantal judgment was fulfilled in A.D. 70: the fall of Jerusalem.³

2. *Military Sanctions*

The Mosaic Covenant's symbolic use of the land as God's agent of negative sanctions represented military conquest: Israel vs. the Canaanites, Moab vs. Israel (Jud. 3), Canaan vs. Israel (Jud. 4), Midian vs. Israel (Jud. 6), Phoenicia and Ammon vs. Israel (Jud. 10; 13), Syria vs. Israel (II Kings 5:2). In the cases of Assyria vs. Israel and Babylon vs. Judah, the Israelites were actually removed from the land. If someone should argue that the New Covenant has transferred to the earth in general the symbolic authority to serve as an agent bringing negative sanctions, meaning that God still raises up nations to bring military sanctions against His people, he must also insist that genocide is still authorized by God as the mandatory strategy of covenantal conquest by His people. But genocide is not the way of the gospel; persuasion, not military conquest, is its means of evangelism. Conclusion: the land no longer serves as a covenantal agent under the New Covenant except in the general Adamic sense (Gen. 3:17–19).⁴ That is, the *symbolism* of the land as God's covenantal agent is no longer valid; *the arena of covenantal conflict is no longer the military battlefield*.

Similarly, if land marked off by a New Covenant-bound nation still possesses this Mosaic judicial authority, then the Abrahamic promise regarding the land must somehow extend into the New Covenant. If so, then so do the dietary laws. Contemporary British Israelites may choose to believe this regarding the dietary laws, but the church historically has emphatically dismissed all such suggestions. Conclusion: the land no longer serves as a covenantal agent under the New Covenant. One sign of this alteration is the New Testament's annulment of the Levitical dietary laws and its substitution of a new form of dietary law: the Lord's Supper.⁵

3. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 196–97. (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

5. I suggest that there will be a tendency for those who hold that the Mosaic dietary laws still are judicially binding to search for evidence that there was an increase in the frequency of earthquakes in the morally rebellious modern world. Rushdoony, for example, regarded as judicially significant the escalation of reported earthquakes,

With the abolition of the unique covenantal status of Old Covenant Israel, God ceased to speak of the Promised Land as His covenantal agent. Remember, it did not act as a covenantal agent until the Israelites crossed into the land from the wilderness. Egypt had not spewed out God's enemies. The idea that the land is in some way the bringer of God's military sanctions against covenant-breakers was valid only under the Mosaic Covenant, and only within the boundaries of national Israel.

C. Law and Life in the Promised Land

The issue was ethics, point three of the biblical covenant model. The focus was geography: the Promised Land.

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD (Lev. 18:2–5).

The laws that God's people must follow should not be the laws of either Egypt or Canaan. While the text does not specifically mention it, it is clear that *God's historical sanctions were involved*. The Israelites had already seen the sanctions that God had brought against Egypt. First, there were plagues inside the land. Second, the Egyptians had given precious gems and precious metals to the fleeing Israelites. Third, the Israelites had been expelled from Egypt as God's means for providing deliverance and liberation. The Egyptians lost their slave labor force. Similarly, God tells them in this chapter that there will be comprehensive negative sanctions imposed against those who presently dwell in the land of Canaan. The Canaanites will someday be vomited out by the land, i.e., by the invading Israelites. The imagery of *vomiting out* symbolized a military phenomenon—*invasion of the land*—and the cultural phenomenon of *replacement by a new nation*. The operational factor here was ethics. God promised them that when they

1950–1963: ten instances, compared to eight, 1900–49. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1969] 2000), p. 60. (<http://bit.ly/rjrbph>). This was in the late 1960s, while he was writing *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, that he first decided that the Mosaic dietary laws are still binding.

entered the land and established residence, the plagues of Egypt would be removed from the land, *if* they remained covenantally faithful (Deut. 7:15). The God of *liberation* they understood as the God who brings *positive and negative sanctions in history*. What is unique about this chapter is that the land itself is described as imposing negative sanctions against law-breakers. The Promised Land would become God's covenantal agent after they invaded Canaan.

In verse five, long life and the law are linked. The text does not specifically use the word *abundant*, but this is the implication of the passage. The individual who obeys God's law is the individual who receives life, meaning abundant life. This does not refer to eternal life; it refers to *life in history*. The passage does not teach eternal salvation by man's own works, but it does teach that God brings positive sanctions in history to those who consistently obey His revealed word. The issue raised by this passage is this: *how to preserve abundant life in the abundant new land* (see also Deuteronomy 8). The Canaanites had not obeyed God; therefore, they were no longer going to be allowed to live in the land. Their abundant inheritance would be transferred to the invaders, as had been promised to Abraham. But the Israelites were warned that if they disobeyed God's law in the future, they would also be removed from residence in the land.

The Promised Land was going to become the arena of covenantal conflict when the Israelites entered the land. It was not yet such an arena when Moses delivered the law to Israel. It had not yet vomited the residents out of its presence. In this sense, the Canaanites were analogous to the furniture inside a house that had been infected with biblical leprosy. The furniture and everything inside did not become judicially unclean until the priest entered it (Lev. 14:36).⁶ The people of Israel were the priests of the ancient world.⁷ When they entered the land of Canaan, their presence would bring everything inside the land into a condition of legal uncleanness.⁸ The land was defiled because of the sins of the Canaanites, but the priests had not yet entered it. When the conquest began, the invasion would judicially identify the land as polluted. When the people of Israel penetrated the boundary of the land, they brought both it and the Canaanites under the judicial sanc-

6. Chapter 9.

7. James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), pp. 101–2. (<http://bit.ly/jjchurch>)

8. This could take place only after they were circumcised (Josh. 5): a mark of Israel's priestly judicial status.

tions of God. These sanctions would remain as a judicial threat to the land and its inhabitants for as long as the Israelites retained their priestly relationship with God. Do not commit such sins, they were warned, “That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you” (Lev. 18:28).

D. The Land as a Surrogate for Man

The land of Canaan was analogous to both God and man in two senses. First, the land was omniscient within its boundaries. It saw every act of rebellion, even inside the family. Second, for everyone inside the land, the land was omnipresent. There was nowhere that someone could go within the land in which he would not be under the threat of the sanctions imposed by the land. Obviously, God is the viewing agent, but the language of the text drives home the point: no more could the nation of Israel escape being seen and judged by God in history than a man can escape standing on the ground beneath his feet.

Because the land of Canaan is described here as being under God’s sanctions, it was also analogous to man. The land had refused to obey God. It had not yet brought a covenant lawsuit against transgressors within its boundaries. The land therefore was about to come under judgment. “And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants” (Lev. 18:25). When the land comes under judgment, the text says, it will then act under this pressure to enforce the law of God. It will vomit evildoers out of its presence.

The sanctions of God would be directed against the defilement of the land. First, the resident nations would be cast out by God (v. 24). This would be a corporate sanction against them. Second, the land itself would be punished (v. 25). This also was a collective sanction. When the people of Israel entered the land, these same collective sanctions would be imposed *by God and by the land* in order to avoid the defilement of the land.

The text does not say that the sanctions would be imposed to prevent the defilement of the *people* who live in the land; they would be imposed in order to avoid the *defilement of the land itself*. This indicates that the land was legally represented in some way by those who dwelt in the land. When they acted in an evil manner, the land itself was legally defiled. This is an extension of the principle which we find

in Genesis 3:17–19. Adam sinned, and the land came under a curse. *Adam represented the land in God's court, and by violating God's law, he brought the land under a curse.*

We therefore need to understand the biblical doctrine of representation. There is a hierarchical relationship that links God to man and man's environment. When Adam rebelled against God, he disrupted this cosmic hierarchy. Adam defiled the land because he himself became judicially unclean. Sin inverts the hierarchy between God and man. Originally, man was given dominion over nature. When Satan rebelled against God by using the creation (the serpent and Adam and Eve), he brought God's curse against the serpent and Adam and Eve. When man rebelled against God by using nature as his instrument (the forbidden tree), he brought God's curse against nature, and therefore against him, for nature was his resource. Nature therefore became God's implement of cursing against mankind. God did to man what man had attempted to do to Him: use nature as a weapon. Nature in this sense was used as a rod of wrath.

E. Theocratic Order in the Promised Land

All the residents in the land were under God's laws (v. 26). The civil covenant required that the state bring sanctions against the violators: cutting them off (v. 29). This was a form of covenantal death. God issued a divorce decree against the persons who committed the prohibited act. There had to be a public announcement of this divorce by church, state, and family.

1. Judicial Separation

The individual lost his membership in the fellowship of the saints. In modern terms, he was *excommunicated*. He lost his civil citizenship as well. Finally, he lost his position as a family member, which means he would lose his legal inheritance in the land. Under the old covenant, the jubilee land laws required that he be cut out of the right of reversion of his father's land during the jubilee year.⁹ (Under the New Testament, this would no longer be the case, since the jubilee land laws no longer apply.) The head of the household was required by God to disinherit the individual who had transgressed any of these laws.

What about the foreigner? The foreigner was not officially married

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012) Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 54:E:2.

to God. He could not be excommunicated from the fellowship of the saints, since he did not belong to the fellowship of the saints. Yet negative sanctions warned him not to violate the laws governing marriage and sexual contact (Lev. 18:6–23). Violators would be expelled physically from the nation. There can be no other meaning of the phrase, “cut off.”

What about the resident alien? At the first infraction, he would have had his status shifted to that of foreigner. He would no longer have been under the same degree of protection by civil law that other resident aliens enjoyed. What were these protections? They were treated as Israelites except in two respects: (1) they could not hold the office of civil magistrate; (2) they could not inherit rural land. They were not allowed to bring negative civil sanctions against Israelites, since a resident alien was not formally covenanted to the Old Covenant church. The resident alien was not under God’s ecclesiastical sanctions, so he was not legally entitled to bring God’s negative civil sanctions in the holy commonwealth.¹⁰ Because he could not inherit rural land, he could not become a freeman. The threat of permanent slavery would always face him (Lev. 25:44–45).¹¹

In all other respects, the resident alien was entitled to the same benefits that an Israelite was. When an Israelite fell into poverty, and approached one of his brothers for a zero-interest loan, the brother was not to be hard-hearted against him (Deut. 15:7–10). When the resident alien fell into poverty and sought a charitable loan from an Israelite, the resident alien also had a moral claim on the loan (Lev. 25:35–37).¹² The foreigner who had no stake in the land did not possess such a claim. Second, the Israelite lender could extract usury from the foreigner (Deut. 23:20),¹³ which he was not allowed to collect from a poverty-stricken fellow member of the covenant or from a resident alien (Lev. 25:35b–36).¹⁴ The foreigner did not benefit from the year of release for charity debts (Deut. 15:3).¹⁵ The resident alien did. His permanent presence in the land gave him special immunities and benefits. He was not of the covenant judicially, but he was inside the boundaries of the land of the covenant as a permanent resident.

10. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

11. Chapter 31.

12. Chapter 29.

13. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 55. ??

14. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49:C.

15. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 36.

2. *The Land and Sanctions*

Because the threat of God's divorce stood against the transgressors, the text speaks of the land as divorcing them. *The Promised Land is described here as a covenantal agent of God.* The land would cast out the nations of Canaan. In contrast, the land of Egypt had not cast out the Egyptians. This points to the unique judicial position of the Promised Land: first, because of the promise to Abraham; second, as the homeland of the Israelites. Only those residents who lived in the Promised Land would come under the sanctions of the land.¹⁶ The land was a place of *sanctions*. It therefore was a *sanctuary*—a sanctified place, a *judicially set-apart place*. It had been established by God as a special dwelling place for His people. It had specific boundaries. It was holy (set-apart) ground because it was the special dwelling place of God. It was the dwelling place of the saints (those sanctified by God) because they dwelt spiritually with God. The land was uniquely guarded by God, so that during the three annual festivals when the men journeyed to Jerusalem, God removed covetousness from the enemies of Israel (Ex. 34:24).

The land is said here to be under God's sanctions. This means that the Promised Land was a *represented* agent. The archetype here is the curse of the ground in Genesis 3:17–19. The creation still groans in expectation of the final judgment and full restoration (Rom. 8:22).¹⁷ Furthermore, the land of Canaan was entitled to a sabbath rest every seventh year (Lev. 25:1–7).¹⁸ When the people of Israel came into the land, they failed to give the land its rest (II Chr. 36:21). When it was represented unrighteously, it suffered.

The land was also to be punished by God as a *representing* agent. Earlier, the dual witness of the land and the shed blood of the innocent had brought a covenant lawsuit against the guilty party. Cain was punished by the ground (Gen. 4:9–12). We are told that he was driven from the face of God and also from the face of the ground (Gen 4:14). The “face of the ground” must have referred to the land in the immediate proximity of the garden: holy ground. (Obviously, we can never escape the face of the physical ground unless we reside off the planet.) The closer that Cain came to the garden, the closer he came to the

16. Those Israelites who journeyed outside the land had to return annually to Israel, so they were brought under dual sanctions: Passover and land.

17. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

18. Chapter 24.

place of God's judgment. Thus, he was driven from the place of God's earthly residence and judgment—in one sense a curse (not being close to God), but in another sense a blessing (not being subject to immediate execution, thereby giving him time to repent).

This equating of the *face of God* and the *face of the land* is important for understanding the covenant nature of the Promised Land. The land was punished for its failure to bring this covenant lawsuit against the Canaanites. This is peculiar language, but it is basic to understanding the nature of the threat against those who would subsequently violate God's law within the confines of the land. God regarded the Promised Land as His agent. The land therefore responds as the Israelites approach it in judgment. The Canaanites are driven out when the Israelites cross its boundaries. The text says, first, that God expels them (v. 24); it also says that the land expels them (vv. 25, 28). This language is reminiscent of the prophecy in Exodus 23:28: "And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee." God and nature cooperate in the expulsion of the Canaanites. As in the case of the face of God and the face of the land, the expulsion of the Canaanites is discussed both as an *act of God* and as an *act of the land*.

The Egyptians had not been driven out of Egypt. Why not? Because Egypt was not holy ground. It was not a permanent sanctuary, although it was repeatedly to play the role of a temporary sanctuary for Israel, culminating in its service as a sanctuary for Jesus and His family in Herod's day (Matt. 2:13–15). Because the land of Canaan had been set apart by God's promise to Abraham, it drove out those who violated the judicial terms of the covenant, once the time came for God to fulfill His promise. The Canaanites as a civilization were driven out of the land during the conquest. When Israel came into the land, the vomiting process began: *conquest = spewing*. Centuries later, both Israel and Judah were driven out by God during the exile.

F. Strangers in the Land

During the post-exilic era, the same degree of civic evil in the land did not defile the land in equal measure as it had before the exile. There are several reasons for this. Most important, *the exile marked the end of the Davidic theocracy*. Kingship was never again restored politically inside the boundaries of Israel. The highest civil appeals court lay outside the boundaries of the land. The post-exilic period

was the era of the empires: Medo-Persia, Macedonia, and Rome. Cyrus of Persia was God's designated anointed agent (Isa. 45:1). This transfer of kingship beyond the land's boundaries led to a fundamental judicial change inside the land. Resident aliens could now inherit rural land permanently (Ezek. 47:23). Also, Greek and then Roman military forces remained in the land. The Samaritans, brought in by the Assyrians after the Northern Kingdom fell, remained as permanent residents within the original geographical boundaries of Israel, accepting a deviant theology that was loosely related to authorized worship (John 4:19–25).

1. The Temple's Centrality

The central judicial manifestation of the sanctuary status of the Promised Land was the temple. There was a *judicial centrality* of worship in the post-exilic era that was even greater than during the pre-exilic era. The Israelites never again indulged themselves in the worship of the gods of Canaan. The purity of the temple, the sacrificial system, and the national synagogue system was primary. *The land is no longer said to be a covenantal agent after the exile.* It did become a covenantal threat one last time in A.D. 70, but this was after the establishment of the New Covenant. The fall of Jerusalem marked the transfer of the kingdom of God to the church (Matt. 21:43): the final annulment of the Promised Land's covenantal status. There were strangers in the land after the Babylonian exile, and these strangers exercised lawful civil authority, but this no longer threatened the sanctuary status of the nation. What would threaten it was the presence of strangers in the temple.

The metaphor of vomiting symbolized a successful military invasion of the land and its subsequent conquest. After the exile, God's people were no longer sovereign over civil affairs in the land. The threat of invasion by a strange nation was no longer a covenantal threat to Israel's civil order, which was not governed by God's covenantal hierarchy. In this sense, a boundary violation of Israel's borders was no longer a major theological problem. Being vomited out of the land was no longer a covenantal threat, except in response to their unsuccessful rebellion against pagan civil authorities who were already in the land.

When Antiochus began to persecute the Jews in the second century B.C., he did so by God's sovereignty as the agent who imposed

negative sanctions. There had been covenantal rebellion in the land. This rebellion was initiated by Jews who broke the covenant with God and attempted to covenant the nation with Hellenism and the Greeks. A foreign athletic hall was built in Jerusalem. Circumcision ceased (I Macc. 1:11–15). It was only then that the persecution by Antiochus began. First, he subdued Egypt; then he returned to conquer Israel. He established false worship in the temple (I Macc. 1: 54–55). Again, the threat was to the temple, not to Israel's civil order. Their repeated rebellions had broken the terms of the Mosaic civil covenant so thoroughly that God no longer trusted them to administer the civil covenant inside the boundaries of the land. This was a curse against them, as it is in every biblically covenanted social order.

2. The Church as the New Temple

In the New Testament, the church replaced the old temple order. Local churches also replaced the local synagogue order. There is a new Bride for God. There must therefore be a new form of covenantal divorce. Christ is said to spew lukewarm churches out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16). There must be no mixing of God's old and new brides. We know this because we know that *God is not a polygamist*. The Jews understood this, which is why they persecuted the church in Jerusalem, Israel, and in all the cities in which the synagogues had been built outside of Israel. The church left Jerusalem in 69 A.D., just prior to the invasion of the land and the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus.¹⁹ This was the exodus event of the New Covenant order.

The rebellion against Rome by the Jews led to the scattering of the Jews: the diaspora. First, it led to the 70 A.D. invasion of the temple by gentiles, followed immediately by its destruction. This led to the triumph of the Pharisees over the Sadducees, who had been the dominant influence in the temple.²⁰ Second, six decades later, another revolt led by Bar Kochba resulted in the second wave out of the land. After the defeat of this rebellion in 135, the Romans forced most of the Jews out of the land of Palestine, but by this late date, the land possessed no covenantal status.

The Jews did not believe this regarding the land. After they were expelled from the land by the Romans, they believed that they had to

19. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III:V.

20. Herbert Danby, "Introduction," *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

restructure Judaic law. They could lawfully receive the laying on of hands (*semikah*) only inside the land. Because this was no longer possible, they believed that they could no longer impose the Mosaic law's sanctions to settle their disputes. They believed that they had lost the judicial anointing that had allowed them to impose such sanctions. Jewish legal scholar George Horowitz wrote: "This chain of traditional ordination broke down completely after the rebellion of Bar Kokeba and the consequent persecutions by the Roman emperor Hadrian (c. 135 A.D.). The Rabbis were compelled, therefore, in order to preserve the Torah and to maintain law and order, to enlarge the authority of Rabbinical tribunals. This they accomplished by emphasizing the distinction between Biblical penalties and Rabbinical penalties. Rabbinical courts after the second century had no authority to impose Biblical punishments since they lacked *semikah*; but as regards penalties created by Rabbinical legislation, the Rabbis had of necessity, the widest powers of enforcement. They instituted, accordingly, a whole series of sanctions and penalties: excommunication, fines, physical punishment, use of the 'secular arm' in imitation of the Church, etc."²¹ This led to a restructuring of sanctions within the Jewish community, and it also led to the creation of a ghetto culture. They needed to separate themselves from the gentile culture in order to have the authority to impose the sanctions of what later became known as Talmudic law.²² They became strangers in other lands.

G. The Replacement of the Promised Land

The kingdom of God cannot be confined geographically in New Testament times. Any nation can lawfully covenant with God today.²³ Israel was the single covenanted nation of Old Testament, which alone acknowledged the sanctions of God and the revealed law of God, and which alone required circumcision of all its male citizens. Only one other nation briefly covenanted under God, Assyria (under Jonah's preaching), but this covenant was soon broken.²⁴ Today, however,

21. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co., [1953] 1973), p. 93.

22. On the Talmud, see North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

23. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gdmruler>)

24. This seems to have been a common grace covenanting process—formal public obedience to the outward civil laws of the Bible—since there were no covenantal heirs remaining at the time of Assyria's conquest of Israel. Also, there is no indication that they were circumcised as part of their national repentance.

there is no monopoly of the Promised Land. All nations are required by God to covenant with Him.²⁵ Their law structures are supposed to be biblical. They are to turn to the whole Bible in search of civil laws and civil sanctions.

In today's world, the various covenanted lands replace the Old Testament's land of promise. The Promised Land's covenanted status has come to the nations. It becomes a sanctuary by means of the national covenant. Covenant Land legal status becomes a universal promise to all nations rather than a restricted promise to one nation. Where the preaching of the gospel is, there we find a nation being asked to become judicially holy ground. The gospel has universalized the promises of God.

The whole earth has been judicially cleansed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The geographical boundaries between sacred and common have moved from national boundaries to ecclesiastical boundaries: the New Testament equivalent of the covenantally sacred space of the temple after the exile. There are sacred (i.e., *sacramental*) ecclesiastical acts—holy baptism and holy communion—but no sacred civil space. We no longer reside in sacred space. We no longer measure men's distance from God's kingdom by means of geography. We measure it by their church membership: personal confession, ethical behavior, and judicial subordination. The land of a covenanted nation is no longer God's covenantal agent, except in the sense that it is the place to which men's bodies return after death. The land has always been a covenantal agent in this general sense in the post-Fall era (Gen. 3:19). But in the sense of *an agent with a jurisdictional boundary*, land is no longer a covenantal agent.

The land of Israel ceased to be an agent of vomiting when the Old Covenant ended in A.D. 70. After A.D. 70, earthquakes and other geographical phenomena ceased to be relevant covenantally within Palestine, i.e., ceased to be predictable in terms of corporate ethics. This is not to say that earthquakes, like any other kind of disaster, are not signs of God's wrath in general against mankind in general, but there is very little biblical evidence that earthquakes are still part of God's *predictable* covenantal sanctions in history. Jesus is now the agent of judgment, seated on the throne beside God. The geological land of Israel is no longer an instrument for separating coven-

25. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

ant-breakers from covenant-keepers. While nations can lawfully covenant with God in the New Testament order, the lands so constituted judicially are not part of the Abrahamic promise, a promise geographically limited to what Abraham could see and walk through (Gen. 13:15–17). Thus, it is fruitless to search the historical records of earthquakes in covenant-keeping nations and covenant-breaking nations in the expectation that a predictable pattern will be discovered.²⁶

If I am incorrect about this, then the land still mediates between God and man. We do have such a case in the Old Testament: Cain's curse. "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Gen. 4:12). This was a sanction against Cain, whose brother's blood had penetrated the land and testified against Cain (Gen. 4:10). The promised sanction was not active but rather negative: the absence of positive sanctions. The curse in Genesis 4 was agricultural: the land would no longer yield its fruit to Cain. So, Cain built a city (Gen. 4:17). He had been a tiller of the soil; he became a resident of a city. He was not threatened with an earthquake; he was threatened with personal famine. He avoided personal famine by building a city and becoming a trader or other non-agricultural producer. He escaped the curse of the ground by switching occupations and residency: rural to urban.

Cain's curse did not speak of earthquakes: the active stone-casting that the land later brought against Israel at the close of the Old Covenant order in A.D. 70. While I believe that God will reveal to covenant-keeping societies techniques that minimize the effects of earthquakes, I do not believe that He will predictably alter their number and intensity in relation to the degree of the societies' obedience to His law.

The last great wave of such covenantal speculation took place in the aftermath of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755.²⁷ When rational men concluded that they could make no ethical sense of that momentous event, they ceased searching for such covenantal connections in history. Their initial error in expecting to find specific ethical relevance in the 1755 earthquake led to a rejection of a covenantal worldview in

26. One earthquake that struck a sin center was the 1994 southern California earthquake, which centered in the Canoga Park-Chatsworth area. This was the center for pornographic movie production in the United States. Models who appear in such movies temporarily became less enthusiastic about their work, according to one agent for these performers. "It's put the fear of God into them." *Christianity Today* (March 7, 1994), p. 57.

27. T. D. Kendrick, *The Lisbon Earthquake* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1956).

general, a rejection that enhanced the universal triumph of Newtonian rationalism in the late eighteenth century.²⁸ If earthquakes are irrelevant covenantally, rational men concluded, then so are all the other natural disasters of life, which is why we call them *natural* disasters. This was also Solomon's conclusion in the midst of his existential period: "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath" (Eccl. 9:2). What we should affirm is this: *the arena of God's predictable historical sanctions has moved from geography to society.*

Let me give an example of this move from geography to society. Jesus announced that God does not send more or less rain on a society in terms of its theology or its ethical standards. On the contrary, God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45b).²⁹ The positive effects and negative effects of sun and rain fall indiscriminately on the righteous and the wicked. The positive effects of sun and rain are accentuated economically by societies that pursue God's law. Similarly, the negative effects of too much sun and too much rain are minimized in societies that pursue God's law. I believe that Matthew 5:45 is a statement regarding God's general laws of covenantal cause and effect; the statement applies to earthquakes as well as to sun and rain. In other words, people who build homes in flood plains or on top of major seismic faults will not see their property protected from the effects of flooding or earthquakes merely because they pray a lot or give money to the poor. The best they can legitimately expect from God is better information about controlling floods or better construction methods that resist Richter-7 quakes. Increased percentages of adultery will not produce increased percentages of Richter-9 quakes.³⁰

28. Voltaire included a section on the Lisbon earthquake in *Candide*.

29. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000], 2012), ch. 10.

30. The Gutenberg-Richter law of earthquakes informs us that, worldwide, in any time period, as the magnitude of earthquakes increases, their probability decreases by a constant factor. This law is a member of a class of laws called power (exponent) laws. This law is good news for Westminster Seminary (West), which is located on an earthquake fault in a region of the world noted for its adultery.

Conclusion

Under the Mosaic Covenant, God dwelt in Israel in a unique way. As men approached God's earthly throne room, they approached holy ground. The extreme edges of this series of concentric holy boundaries were the nation's geographical boundaries. The land of Israel therefore acted as God's covenantal agent. In the New Covenant era, there is no holy ground separate from common ground. We do not take our shoes off when we enter a church, as God required of Moses when he stood on holy ground (Ex. 3:5), and as some Eastern religions and Islam require. We do not have ritual foot washings. The land of the New Covenant no longer serves as a covenantal agent. It no longer brings predictable sanctions in history. It is no longer tied covenantally to military affairs.

Leviticus 18 establishes the family as a unique covenantal institution, and protects it by civil law. The sanction associated with the violation of these requirements was to be cut off from the people. This means *a cutting off from the covenant*, which in turn means *excommunication*. This excommunication was not merely ecclesiastical but also civil and familial. A person moved from being either a covenanted Israelite or a resident alien, and he became the legal equivalent of a foreigner who was in the land for purposes of trade. Covenant-breaking foreigners were permanently expelled from the nation.

Prior to the exile period, the land was spoken of in terms of its covenantal position as God's representing and represented agent. The land was represented by man, but it also represented God when it came time for God to bring His negative sanctions against covenantally rebellious residents inside the land's boundaries. The Promised Land was analogous to God in the sense that it is said to vomit the nations out of the land, just as God is also said to be the one who drives the nations out of the land.

In the New Testament, we no longer legitimately speak of the land's vomiting out its inhabitants. Instead, we read of the kingdom and its worldwide expansion. Because the self-consciousness and consistency of the individual is supposed to be greater under the New Covenant than under the Old, the New Testament does not speak of the land as analogous to both God and man. We read instead of the sword of the Lord, meaning the word of God that proceeds out of the mouth of God. "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron:

and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (Rev. 19:15).

One reason why the land is no longer spoken of as vomiting out its inhabitants is that the progress of the gospel is no longer conducted by means of military conquest. There is no longer a God-sanctioned system for covenant-keeping people to replace covenant-breaking people by means of expulsion. Today, they replace covenant-breakers through performance and productivity. They are to replace them in positions of cultural and political leadership—not by force but by performance.

Covenant-keepers are also to conquer covenant-breakers by means of preaching. Men are to be brought into the “Promised Land” today by bringing them into the church, and then by bringing the whole nation under the biblical civil covenant through a democratic vote. This does not equate the visible church with the Promised Land, but it acknowledges that the kingdom of God is primarily manifested in history by the church, and all those who profess to be Christians are supposed to be members of the church. Thus, the land is not the primary agent of enforcement; Jesus Christ is. By purifying the church, He enables His people to purify themselves and to begin the conquest of the earth by means of the preaching of the gospel. He draws men to Himself rather than casting them out of the land. He does not need to remove covenant-breakers from the land in order to make room for His people. Instead, *the kingdom of God is the Promised Land*, in history and eternity, and by preaching the gospel, we invite all men to enter into that Promised Land. Ultimately, it is the goal of Christianity to bring the whole earth under the dominion of Christ.³¹ This means that it would do no good for the land to vomit the inhabitants out because, ultimately, there is no contiguous land to vomit them into. The New Covenant’s strategy is *conquest by conversion* rather than conquest by destruction and expulsion.

End of Volume 1

31. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 2

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BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 2

GARY NORTH

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Leviticus**
Volume 2

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11

GLEANING: CHARITY WITHOUT ENTITLEMENT

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:9–10).

I covered certain aspects of gleaning in *Tools of Dominion* (1990).¹ I think it is appropriate to reprint the bulk of that material in this chapter (though not in the same order), since readers may not have easy access to *Tools of Dominion* or the replacement volume, Part 3 of *Authority and Dominion* (2012).

The theocentric principle that undergirds this law is this: God shows grace to man in history by allowing mankind access to the fruit of God's field, His creation. Put another way, God allows mankind *inside the boundaries* of His field. Fallen man is in the position of the poverty-stricken, landless Israelite or stranger. God does not exclude externally cursed mankind from access to the means of life in history. Neither were land owners in post-conquest Mosaic Israel to exclude the economically poor and judicially excluded residents of the land.

A. Gleaning: A Moral Model

Gleaning was a form of morally compulsory charity. It remains the primary *moral* model for biblical charity, but, as I hope to show, it is **not** a *literal* model for modern charity. Most men today live in a non-agricultural society. Perhaps this may change someday, perhaps during a temporary economic or military apocalypse, but life is primarily urb-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 53:D–E.

an today. *In a non-agricultural society, gleaning cannot become a literal model for charity.* Morally, however, gleaning is to be our guideline for charity: those in the community who have been called in the West “the deserving poor” are to be allowed to do hard work in order to support themselves and improve their condition. God expects the more successful members of a community to provide economic opportunities for such willing laborers—opportunities for service.

As with every biblical law, this law is ultimately theocentric. The beneficiaries of this law were God’s representatives in history, just as victims of crimes are representatives of God. *Crime is primarily an assault on God by means of a crime against man, who is made in God’s image.*² Crime is man’s attempt to bring unlawful negative sanctions against God by bringing them against one of His representatives. Charity is analogous to crime in this respect, but with this difference: the sanctions are both lawful and positive. Jesus warned of the words of God at the final judgment:

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:32–40).

B. A Lawful Claim: Moral or Legal?

God announced that the poor people and resident aliens in Israel were to be invited in by the land owner so that they could harvest the corners of the field and the fallen grain. This meant that, as a class, they had a moral claim on the “droppings” of production. This also meant that they had no legal claim on the primary sources of income

2. *Ibid.*, Appendix M:A.

of an agricultural community. They were *invited* in. There was no state-financed welfare in Israel.

It would have been difficult for a judge or a jury to identify which individuals in the community had the legal right to bring charges against the land owner as the legal victims of his refusal to honor the gleaning laws. The text specifies no negative institutional sanction that had to be imposed on a land owner who refused to honor the gleaning laws. God is indirectly revealed as the agent who would bring negative sanctions against a land owner who refused to honor the gleaning laws. The state was not authorized by the text to bring these sanctions. This implies that *the sanctions were individual rather than corporate*. God did not threaten the community with negative sanctions. But without the threat of God's negative sanctions against the whole covenanted community, there was no justification for civil sanctions. Civil sanctions were imposed in Israel in order to substitute the state's subordinate wrath for God's more direct wrath against the community. Furthermore, in case of a violation of the gleaning law, there would have been no easy way to determine legitimate restitution. *Where there are no civil sanctions, there is no crime*.

Were the sanctions implied by the general legal precept of victim's rights?³ It is difficult to imagine the basis by which appropriate sanctions could be devised by the civil judges. *Lex talionis* ("eye for eye")? The land owner had inflicted no damage on the poor person. Double restitution? Double what? How much could the potential gleaner have gleaned from the field? How many local potential gleaners could sue? All of them? Did each of them have a lawful claim against the land owner, no matter how small his fields? There was no way predictably to assess restitution.

Without predictable negative sanctions, there is no legitimate biblical role for civil government. The state's monopoly of violence is too great a threat to freedom, too great a temptation for those who would play God. The civil government had no jurisdiction over gleaning in the Mosaic economy.

God instructed owners to allow poor people to glean. This land was His (Lev. 25:23); the whole earth is His (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 24:1⁴). As the permanent owner, God can tell His stewards how to administer His property. But God is the disciplining agent. He acts either as Kinsman-

3. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix M.

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, 2012), ch. 5.

Redeemer or as Blood Avenger, depending on the legal status of the land owner. The law is in the form of a positive injunction, and biblical civil law is negative in scope: forbidding public evil. The priests, not the civil magistrate, would have had the responsibility of enforcing this law.⁵

Because God is the ultimate sanctions-bringer, and because it is difficult to specify the precise nature of the harm and the precise size of the restitution payment owed, the implication is that God would bring a curse against the owner, but the text does not say this. The further implication is that God would bring the curse of poverty against the harvester who attempted to cheat the poor by taking from the corner of the field or by picking up whatever had fallen to the ground. God would see what was being done, and He would assess an appropriate penalty.

So, the gleaning law was morally compulsory, but it was not clearly part of the Israelite civil code. *Without a specified negative civil sanction or without a way for the judges to assess damages, no law could be part of the nation's civil code.* But this law was part of God's law code. He would bring negative sanctions against the individual land owner. The civil code of Israel assumed that God is the sanctions-bringer in history and eternity, and therefore it was not regarded as foundational to civil society that the civil code legislate against every evil in history. The state was therefore not seen as messianic. This is no longer the case in the modern humanist world, where belief in the God of the Bible is not regarded as the public foundation of social order. The state today is seen by most people as the only relevant sanctions-bringer in history; thus, evil is defined as anything the state prohibits. On the other hand, all crimes are regarded as crimes against society. Criminals are expected to "pay their debt to society," meaning the state. They supposedly owe nothing to the individual victims.⁶

C. Bread and Wine

This law applied specifically to the field and the vineyard. It did not apply to any occupation except agriculture. It specifically speaks of the harvest, which indicates grain, and it also identifies grapes. This should alert us immediately to the symbolic point of reference,

5. Chapter 22.

6. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

namely, the main products of grain and grapes: *bread and wine*. The sources of the two foods that God invites us to eat with Him in the holy meal of the church are identified here as being under the authority of the gleaning law. This law pointed forward in time to the grace of the New Covenant. It had eschatological implications. It established as holy—judicially set apart—the ground that produces the two holy foods of the communion meal of the New Testament.

The communion meal is holy in the New Covenant era. The land of Canaan was holy in the Mosaic Covenant. That is to say, a holy meal is judicially set apart by God today, just as a holy land was judicially set apart in the Mosaic Covenant. This is why there were judicial limits placed on the applicability of the gleaning law. *The gleaning law identified the special boundaries of God*. These boundaries were historically unique. This is why we must be careful to avoid extending the gleaning law to areas that it did not cover in the Mosaic Covenant.

There is another consideration. *In the Bible, there is an eschatological movement from the garden to the city*. Genesis 2 begins in a garden. The tree of life is in the garden. Revelation 20 and 21 end in a city. This city has the tree of life in its midst (Rev. 22:2). We see a fusion of the city and the garden in the final chapters of the Book of Revelation.⁷ In the Mosaic Covenant, we see a greater emphasis on rural life than we see in the New Covenant, but the New Covenant does not exclude the imagery of the garden.⁸ The law of gleaning was an aspect of this earlier social order.

The question is: Do the terms of this law still apply in the New Covenant? To answer this, we first need to know the extent of gleaning in the Mosaic Covenant era.

7. Presumably, as time goes on, we shall see a fusion of the two images in society. This process may be about to begin in the United States. The suburban culture in the late twentieth century was being threatened by the economic and moral breakdown of the large inner cities that spawned suburbia. The next great migration may be out of suburbia toward more rural areas, but with imported technology as the basis of the new economy. See Jack Lessinger, *Penturbia* (Seattle, Washington: SocioEconomics, 1991).

8. In 1975, Patrick Boorman, who studied under Wilhelm Röpke and who translated his *Economics of the Free Society* into English (Chicago: Regnery, 1963), told me of an exchange between Röpke and an unnamed humanistic, free market economist. The economist was visiting Röpke's home outside of Geneva. Röpke had a garden. "That is not an efficient way to produce food," his visitor said. Röpke's reply was classic: "It is an efficient way to produce men." A variation of this story is repeated by Russell Kirk, who says that the visitor was Ludwig von Mises. I do not recall hearing this from Boorman. Russell Kirk, "Foreword" (1992), Wilhelm Roepke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, [1942] 1992), p. ix.

D. The Economics of Gleaning: Who Paid, Who Benefitted?

What was the economics of the gleaning law? In a sense, the requirement that the land owner and professional harvesters leave a small portion of the crop for the gleaners made this portion analogous to the manna that God had supplied to the Israelites during the wilderness wandering. That miraculous though predictable food was a pure gift of God. Similarly, both the produce of the land and God's grace in establishing the requirement that the land owners and harvesters share with the gleaners were signs of God's continuing grace to the poor. The gleaners were visibly dependent on God's grace for their survival. This had also been the case for the whole nation in the wilderness.

Gleaning laws were exclusively agricultural laws. God commanded the harvesters of the field and the vineyard to be wasteful—wasteful in terms of their personal goals, but efficient in terms of God's goals. They were to leave part of the produce of both the vineyard and the grain field for gathering by the poor.

This law indicates that *the leftovers of the Promised Land belonged to God*. God transferred the ownership of these high harvesting cost economic assets from the land owner and the harvester to the poor and the stranger. The owner in one sense did benefit, at least those owners who paid their field hands wages rather than by the supply harvested, i.e., piece-rate payment. The obedient owner did not have to pay salaried harvesters to collect marginal pickings. This lowered his labor cost per harvested unit of crop. But the net income loss as a result of gleaning did lower his return from his land and planting expenses. There is no doubt that this economic loss of net revenue constituted a form of compulsory charity. It was a *mandated positive sanction*. This should alert us to the fact that this law was *not* a civil law. It was rather a church-enforced law. The church, not the state, is to bring positive sanctions in history. The church offers Holy Communion, not the state.

The gleaning law was also to some extent an advantage to the piece-rate harvester because he was able to achieve greater output per unit of time invested. He was not expected to spend time gathering the marginal leftovers of the crop. *Marginal* returns on his labor invested were higher than they would have been had it not been for this law. Nevertheless, both the owner of the land and the piece-rate harvesters did suffer a loss of *total* income because of this law. The harvesters

saved time but gathered less. They did suffer a loss of income compared to what they would have earned apart from this law.

How did piece-rate harvesters suffer a loss of total income? Because they could not lawfully gather the total crop of the field or the vineyard. Each worker had to leave some produce behind, which means that his income suffered. This also means that the poor of the community were in part funded by the *slightly less poor*: the piece-rate harvesters. The harvesters were reminded of the burdens of poverty. This in effect became an *unemployment insurance* program for the harvesters. They knew that if they later fell into poverty, they would probably be allowed to participate as gleaners sometime in the future. They forfeited some income in the present, but they did so in the knowledge that in a future crisis, they would be able to gain income from gleaning. Both the land owner and the piece-rate worker financed a portion of this compulsory insurance program.

The law placed a burden on the landowner. Yet this burden was in fact a form of liberation *if* he acknowledged the covenantal nature of the expenditure. It was analogous to the tithe. By honoring it, he was acknowledging God's sovereign ownership of his land. This act of sharing placed him visibly in the service of the great King. That King was his protector, for he was a vassal. As with rest on the sabbath, the owner could rest confidently in the knowledge that the King would defend his interests as a vassal if he abided by the terms of the King's treaty.

There was another benefit to the faithful owner, according to Aaron Wildavsky, one of the most informed experts in the world on the history of taxation.⁹ He was also a student of the Mosaic law. He wrote of the gleaning law that "Compulsiveness easily converts to fanaticism. The farmer who harvests not 99% of his crop but every last little bit becomes consumed by his compulsion. Soon enough excess—getting it all—becomes an overwhelming passion."¹⁰ He quite properly identifies fanaticism as idolatry.¹¹ The gleaning law restrained the idolatry of greed. It reminded rich men that they did not need to keep everything they managed as God's stewards in order to remain successful. It restrained them from the passion of autonomous man:

9. Carolyn Webb and Aaron Wildavsky, *A History of Taxation and Expenditure in the Western World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).

10. Aaron Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), p. 30.

11. *Idem*.

defining themselves in terms of their wealth rather than their obedience to God.

E. Hard Work

The gleaner had to work harder than the average worker did in order to gain the same quantity of crops. The “easy pickings” were gone by the time the gleaner was allowed into the fields. This means that he had high marginal labor costs. That is, he had to invest more labor per unit of crop harvested than the piece-rate harvester did. Assuming that the harvester’s goal was a higher return on labor invested, it was preferable to be a piece-rate worker than to be a gleaner. To be a gleaner was to be in a nearly desperate condition.

In the case of both piece-rate work and gleaning, most of the labor costs of harvesting were borne by the poor. The rich man did not work in the fields. But there were degrees of poverty. By far, the greater cost per unit harvested was borne by the gleaners. In modern terminology, this might be called a *workfare* program instead of a welfare program. The gleaner was not a passive recipient of someone else’s money. He had to work. Furthermore, marketing costs may actually have been borne by the poor. It would have been legal for the poor individual to take whatever pickings he gained from the field and go to a store owner or other purchaser of the crop. The owner of the land did not have the right to compel the gleaner to sell the gleanings to him. This means that the gleaner was enabled to obtain a competitive market price for the output of his labor. Of course, this would have been extra work and risk for the gleaner, and it involved specialized knowledge of markets. Nevertheless, it was a right that the gleaner possessed.

The poor were invited into the unharvested fields only in the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:4–7).¹² They had to earn every bit of the produce they collected. It was not a chosen profession for sluggards. But for those who were willing to work, they would not perish at the hands of men who systematically used their competitive advantage to create a permanent class of the poor.

There was another great advantage to this form of morally enforced charity: it brings hard-working, efficient poor people to the attention of potential employers. There is always a market for hard-working, efficient, diligent workers. Such abilities are the product of a righteous worldview and a healthy body, both of which are gifts of

12. Chapter 24.

God. It always pays employers to locate such people and hire them. In effect, employers in Mosaic Israel could “glean” future workers from society’s economic “leftovers.” Gleaning appears initially to be a high-risk system of recruiting, for it required land owners to forfeit the corners of their fields and one year’s productivity in seven. Nevertheless, God promises to bless those who obey Him. Gleaning really was not a high-risk system. Israel’s gleaning system made charity local, work-oriented, and a source of profitable information regarding potential employees. Thus, the system offered hope to those trapped in poverty. They could escape this burden through demonstrated productivity. This is how Ruth, a stranger in the land, began her escape: she caught the attention of Boaz (Ruth 2:5).

F. More Food for Everyone

Under this system of charity, more of the crop got harvested than would otherwise have been the case. Professional harvesters entered the field first and got the easy pickings. The labor time of the professional harvester was devoted to the high-yield sections of the field or vineyard. This was economically efficient. Skilled harvesters devoted a greater portion of their time to the high-yield sections of the land, leaving the low-return portions of the field for the lower-skilled gleaners.

Furthermore, it was difficult for the owner to police this charity law as it applied to the harvesters. How could he watch every harvester to see that he really did leave the fallen grain on the ground? This is why the harvesters were required by God to exercise self-restraint in the amount of the crop that they harvested. They had to leave behind some leftovers. But there was an economic incentive for them to do this. Their time would be spent more productively by gathering the easy pickings. This means that a greater percentage of the crop would have been harvested under the gleaning law, for two reasons. First, the harvesters would have tended to harvest a larger percentage of the crop, hour for hour, than the gleaners did. Second, the gleaners were highly dependent on this food. This means that they would have exercised great diligence and care to strip the field of any remaining grain after the professional harvesters had done their work.¹³ This was a be-

13. It is true that humanistic economic science cannot legitimately draw such a conclusion from economic theory alone. To do so would involve making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, a practice which Lionel Robbins exposed as non-scientific as early as 1932: *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed.

nefit for the community as a whole, since the community gained access to a larger quantity of food. There was less waste of the crop in the aggregate because of the *marginal* waste that was imposed by God's law on the land owners and the piece-rate harvesters.

There were also higher costs with this system. The extra labor expended by the inefficient gleaners was a true cost. The labor time of the gleaners could have been used to produce other products. The net economic return of the products and services that gleaners would otherwise have produced was the cost to consumers of the greater supply of food. *The gleaning system did subsidize food production at the expense of other products.* We shall consider the reasons for this later in this chapter. Suffice it to say here that one reason for this subsidy was connected with the accent on decentralization and localism that the land ownership system of Old Covenant Israel fostered.

Why weren't these poor people hired to harvest the crop in the first place? What was wrong with them? Answer: they were not the most efficient harvesters in the community. They were high-cost employees. But God wanted these people to learn how to work. He wanted them to become better servants. So, He set up a system that subsidized them as field laborers. This was the simplest work skill to learn, though not the most productive. They had to start at the bottom of the scale, since their skills had put them so far at the bottom that they were outside of the labor force. They had to become the lowest-paid field hands in the community.

We must be careful to distinguish total benefits from net benefits. If this system of compulsory charity was productive of net benefits on its own, then we should expect to see gleaning preached in New Testament times. We do not find this, however. So, are we to conclude that this system was economically productive then but not today? Do economic laws change? Do we find that by ignoring this law today, and allowing land owners to harvest all of their crops, the community is richer, yet by obeying this law, Israel was richer than it would have

(London: Macmillan, 1935), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>) I am assuming, contrary to what humanist economics officially allows, that very poor people will work harder and more thoroughly to harvest the crop's leftovers than comparatively well-fed harvesters will work to harvest leftovers. The motivation of the poor man to harvest leftovers is normally greater than the motivation of the professional harvester to harvest leftovers. On the question of interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, see Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H: "The Epistemological Problem of Social Cost."

been if it had not obeyed? This is a dilemma for the Christian economist.

Part of the answer is found in Leviticus 26, where God's positive sanctions are promised to the nation if the people obey Him. The economic order was not autonomous. The economist would say that the system was not endogenous. It was exogenous. Something from outside the economy added wealth to it: *God's grace*. The required charity in the Mosaic Covenant that was tied to the land itself was based on the special relation that God had with both the land and the people. This relation to the land was changed at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. There had been preliminary alterations centuries before this, such as the post-exilic law that strangers in the land could inherit as part of the jubilee law (Ezek. 47:22–23).¹⁴

When God ceases to require obedience to a particular law, the grace (net benefit) attached to that law disappears. Thus, the land owner today can harvest all of his crop and not suffer God's negative sanctions (net losses) in history. He need not adhere to the gleaning law. The community is not harmed. As techniques of modern agricultural production change and net output increases, the increase of food production more than compensates for the loss of the older system and its net benefits. Costs per harvested plot of ground drop, and output per harvested plot increases. The free market in agriculture does not harm the community.

In the Promised Land, however, the special relation between God and the land led to higher output of food when this law of gleaning was honored. There were net benefits to the community based on obedience to this law. But this law was not intended to be permanent. It was also not intended to be universal. This law applied only in the land of Israel because it applied only to the land of Israel and those who owned and worked it. As we shall see in the next two sections, this restriction was due to two factors: (1) the tribal basis of land ownership in Old Covenant Israel; (2) the judicial designation of the land as God's agent of judgment.

G. The Two-Fold Basis of the Law of Gleaning

Is becoming a low-paid field hand God's universally required on-the-job training system? No. God no longer expects poor people to

14. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

learn how to become field laborers. In Old Covenant Israel, however, it was important that men learn to serve Him locally. He wanted to preserve localism and tribalism.

1. Subsidizing Localism

The tribal system was important for the preservation of freedom in Israel. Tribalism and localism broke down attempts to centralize the nation politically. Thus, the gleaning law was part of the social order associated with Old Covenant Israel. It reinforced the tribal system. It also reinforced rural life at the expense of urban life—one of the few Mosaic laws to do so. The land owner was required by God to subsidize the rural way of life. Local poor people were offered subsidized employment on the farms. Had it not been for the gleaning system, the only alternatives would have been starvation or beggary in the country. They would have moved to the cities, as starving people all over the world do today.

The jubilee land inheritance laws kept rural land within the Israelite family. This land inheritance was the mark of civil freemanship for every tribe except the Levites. If a daughter inherited land because there was no brother, she could not marry outside her tribe if she wanted to keep the land. “Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance” (Num. 36:9).¹⁵ While a rich man might move permanently to a city, the poor person was encouraged by the gleaning law to stay closer to home.

Cities would inevitably have become the primary dwelling places for most Israelites if they had obeyed God as a nation. Population growth would have forced most people into the cities. The size of family farms would have shrunk as each generation inherited its portion of the land. But until Israel’s corporate covenantal faithfulness led to population growth and increased per capita wealth, each tribe’s poor members were to be subsidized by the gleaning law to remain close to the tribe’s food supplies. This law was a means of retarding the growth of an unemployed urban proletariat. The countryside was to be the place where the poor man received his daily bread. He would have to do simple agricultural labor to receive his food.

15. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

(a) Localism vs. Bureaucracy

The locus of both the enforcement and the concern of the gleaning law was local and tribal. Local people were the ones who gleaned the fields. This showed God's concern for tribal brethren in the local community. It also showed His concern for the strangers in the land who were willing to live under His laws. They, too, were local residents.

Why this concern with localism? Because biblical social order is supposed to reflect the cosmic personalism of the creation.¹⁶ Personalism is the antithesis of bureaucracy. So is localism. Biblical law works against the creation of large bureaucracies. So does localism. Biblical law establishes primary responsibility at the local level. It is based on an appeals court system that begins at the local level (Ex. 18).¹⁷ Bureaucracies lodge initiatory authority at the top, where the common rule book sets forth what is to be done, how, when, and under which conditions. Social coordination is supposed to be achieved through a detailed coordinated rule book. Local initiative thwarts the coordinated application of the rule book's rules.

Charity is not a profit-seeking activity. It is not governed by the market's system of matching supply with demand through the entrepreneur's profit motive. Charity is not restrained by the requirements of a profit-and-loss statement, although it is restrained by the supply of available funds. Without the restraining factor of the profit-and-loss statement, the administration of charity needs other formal guidelines for appropriate action. It needs a *book of order*. Charities are inherently bureaucratic: governed by the book, not by the free market; by the donor, not the consumer.¹⁸

All bureaucracies have to be managed "by the book," and the book's standards are inherently impersonal. The larger the bureaucracy is, and the more distant its headquarters are, the more general and therefore the more impersonal the book. *Bureaucracies tend to become more impersonal as they grow*. Localism is necessary to overcome at least partially the inherent move toward bureaucracy in all non-profit management systems.¹⁹ Mosaic localism was designed to be

16. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 1.

17. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 19.

18. Except insofar as we consider donors as consumers: buyers of good feelings, self-worth, and future economic benefits should they fall on hard times.

19. There are in principle only two management systems, profit management and bureaucratic management. The difference between them is the financing. Bureaucratic management does not depend on the voluntary market responses of consumers to

highly personalistic.

Because biblical civil law places negative sanctions on specific public actions, it allows freedom to do anything else. Men know in advance what is prohibited. This legal code is the only lawful, formal civil restraint on the public actions of men. *Everything else is allowed by the civil government.* We see this principle in operation most clearly in the garden of Eden. Adam was permitted to do anything except eat from one tree. In contrast, a perfectly bureaucratic social order allows only what the ever-growing law book permits. This requirement strangles individual initiative. People are forever having to ask permission from a bureaucrat—a person who is motivated above all by the fear of making a mistake, a person governed by a book of human laws, many of them conflicting. Thus, his instinctive answer to all requests is *no*. He can always retreat from *no*, and everyone will be happy. He cannot retreat from *yes* and make the requester happy. This system is the antithesis of personal responsibility under God, who says *yes* unless there is a good reason to say *no*. The steady extension of civil bureaucracy into market affairs is therefore the antithesis of biblical dominion.

(b) No Subsidy for Evil

Another important reason for localism was the concern of God that His resources not be used for evil purposes. Either the provider of this agricultural charity had to reside locally or else his specified agent had to. Local residents in rural Mosaic Israel were more likely to be well known to the land owners. Presumably, the cause of their poverty was also well known to the land owners, or at least this could be discovered without much difficulty. The gleaning system reduced the subsidy of evil. The poor person who was poor as a result of his own bad habits did not have to be subsidized by the land owner and the professional harvesters who worked his fields. The land owner had the right to exclude some poor people from access to his fields. Gleaning was therefore a highly personal form of charity, since the person who was required to give this charity was also the person who screened access to the fruit of the land.

This means that the gleaning law was a form of *conditional* charity in each individual recipient's case, although the loss was compulsory from the point of view of the land owner. *Biblical charity is always*

offers made by entrepreneurs. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944). (<http://bit.ly/MisesBUR>)

conditional.²⁰ Charity is not to subsidize evil. Rushdoony's comments on this point are striking:

In the name of Christian charity, we are being asked nowadays to subsidize evil. Every time we give in charity to anyone, we are extending a private and personal subsidy to that person. If through our church we help an elderly and needy couple, or if we help a neighboring farmer with his tractor work while he is in the hospital, we are giving them a subsidy because we consider them to be deserving persons. We are helping righteous people to survive, and we are fulfilling our Christian duty of brotherly love and charity.

On the other hand, if we help a burglar buy the tools of his trade, and give him a boost through a neighbor's window, we are criminal accomplices and are guilty before the law. If we buy a murderer a gun, hand it to him and watch him kill, we are again accessories to the fact and are ourselves murderers also.

Whenever as individuals in our charity, or as a nation in that false charity known as foreign aid and welfare, we give a subsidy to any kind of evil, we are guilty before God of that evil, unless we separate ourselves from the subsidy by our protest.²¹

The local member of the land owner's tribe was the primary recipient of charity, but he was not the only one. The other recipient of the grace of gleaning was the stranger. These strangers were presumably resident aliens who had fallen on hard times. They might have been hired servants who could not find employment. They were people who did not want to go back to their home country. They were therefore people who wanted to live under the civil law of God in the Promised Land. These people were entitled to the same consideration that the poor Israelite was entitled to. It is clear that this arrangement would

20. Ray R. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

21. R. J. Rushdoony, *Bread Upon the Waters* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1969), p. 5. A good example of this sort of government charity is the case of the United States State Department's public insistence, a week before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, that the Congress should not cut off the American government's subsidies to the government of Iraq. The State Department had been taking this line from May onward, despite Hussein's public statement in late February that the United States was an imperialist power. The economic aid, State Department spokesman John Kelly insisted, would enable the United States to exercise a stabilizing influence on Hussein. See "Kuwait: How the West Blundered: The signals that were sent—and the one that wasn't," *Economist* (Sept. 29, 1991), pp. 20, 22. The United States attacked Iraq on Jan. 16, 1991. The war lasted one month.

have increased the emotional commitment of the resident alien to the welfare of the community. He was treated justly.

2. *The Land as God's Covenantal Agent*

When Israel invaded the land under Joshua, this priestly act invoked the land's status as God's agent.²² This special judicial office of the land was unique to the Mosaic era. The land was described as being under God and over man in a unique way in Israel. This was because of God's special presence in the temple. When this special presence of God ended in A.D. 70, the land of Israel lost this special judicial status. The land laws ended, including gleaning. This included the jubilee land laws and their applications.

Those few Christian social theorists who have taken gleaning seriously have tended not to acknowledge the close relationship between gleaning laws of the Old Testament and the presence of the people of Israel in the Promised Land. The original distribution of property in Old Testament Israel was based on a concept of a legitimate war of conquest. So was the land's status as God's covenantal agent. The land that families received after the Canaanites were defeated by Joshua's generation was part of a one-time-only national spoils system. The transfer of wealth was from the Canaanites to the Israelites. (Note: this involved the transfer of wealth from previously poor Canaanites to newly rich Israelites. God is not on the side of the poor, contrary to liberation theologians. He is on the side of the righteous. His covenantal goal is not that His people remain poor, let alone become poor. His goal is that His people become rich through covenantal faithfulness.)²³ God commanded and directed the execution of the various Canaanite societies. This is why God is again and again identified as the owner of the Promised Land. It was God who had given them their military victory, so He also had the legal right to specify how the land would be divided, inherited, and used. God established the terms of their leaseholds. As the owner, He had this right.

22. Chapter 10.

23. Gary North, "Free Market Capitalism," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984). (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>). Reprinted in Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Appendix E.

H. A Law of the Land, Not the Workshop

The gleaning law did not apply to non-agricultural businesses or professions. It originated from the fact that God declared Himself as the owner of the land—not land in general, but the Promised Land. He did not verbally claim an equally special ownership of businesses. The land, not business, was identified as God's covenant agent that brought God's covenant lawsuits in Old Covenant Israel.²⁴ God's legal relationship to the land was special. The land of Canaan, not existing Canaanite businesses, was divided up through the casting of lots after the conquest (Num. 34:13).²⁵ This allowed God to enter directly into the land-distribution process by controlling the lots. This was not an auction system of "high bid wins," as a free market is. This division of the land was an aspect of the spoils of military conquest. The gleaning law was therefore closely related to the jubilee land laws of Leviticus 25, which were also based on the spoils of the original military conquest of the land. The Promised Land occupied a unique place in the legal structure of Old Testament Israel. Business did not.

1. Urbanization and Specialization

In both agricultural and non-agricultural societies, non-agricultural occupations tend to be more specialized than agriculture. In the city, it is common to have many competing businesses and opportunities, each with its own talents, requirements, training, and traditions. Urban life enables society to achieve a greater division of labor and hence greater specialization in both production and consumption. This means that the urban economy achieves greater per capita wealth than a rural economy does.²⁶ But this high specialization requires more capital per worker.

A greater variety of occupations is available to potential workers in the city, which means that there is a far greater number of occupations available for an apprentice to master. He has to choose. He cannot do everything. This reminds him that he is not God. He has to find a teacher to train him in some specialized occupation. Parents in a pre-

24. Chapter 10.

25. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 14.

26. The development of nanotechnology, fiber optics, and other technological breakthroughs may in the future bring urban productivity to rural communities, at least until population growth makes such communities more urban. But there is still the question of corporate worship. The division of labor in a local church cannot be divorced from the size of the local church and the number of nearby churches.

industrial era agricultural society could train their own children on the farm. Non-agricultural workers must be trained by specialists. But there were not many masters to train other men's children in specialized urban occupations. Most people had to stay on the farm. Until the twentieth century, the apprenticeship system generally was much more common for urban businesses than for agriculture.²⁷ Only with the rise of the modern university and the spread of public education, both funded primarily by taxes, has bureaucratic education replaced apprenticeship.

2. *Management Costs*

There were higher management costs for the owner of land during the gleaning operation. Gleaners had to be screened by the owner or by his representative or operations manager. This increase in management costs would have been especially true in urban occupations, had the requirements of gleaning applied to them. It would have been much more difficult for a non-agricultural business owner to monitor all the operations of a team of gleaners than would have been the case on a farm. The gleaner on the farm simply went into the field and picked up a recognizable agricultural product. He put it into a container and either took it to the owner for sale or took it home for personal use or resale. It is much riskier for the owner of a specialized occupation to bring untrained workers into his shop and have them gain something of value through gleaning. There is greater risk that a thief could steal a valuable product or tool from the shop. There is little of value to steal in the middle of a field except the crop, and that was the gleaner's property.

The gleaning law applied only to agricultural land. Any attempt to derive a modern system of charity, public or private, from the gleaning law faces this crucial limitation. It was not intended to apply outside a farm. About the most that we can hope for is to discover principles of giving that do not violate the principles underlying gleaning. The principles of gleaning show modern man what should not be done generally, not what should be done specifically. They are universal principles

27. It was a practice of the New England Puritans to send their children no later than age 14 into other homes in order to get their occupational training. Historian Edmund Morgan suggested that one reason for this custom is that the Puritans did not trust their own commitment to discipline their children sufficiently to make them reliable workers. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 77.

of voluntary giving, not laws that God imposes on a specific class. God does not threaten to bring negative sanctions against a giver who ignores the principles of gleaning and chooses other ways to give. A man who gives cash to a deserving poor man is not in trouble with God. He does not have to make the poor man work in the giver's corn field. But if he thinks that the poor man may not be reliable with money, he has the right to require the man to submit to various tests, including setting up a budget. The basic principle is this: biblical charity is conditional.

I. Conditional Charity: Moral Boundaries

The owner of the farm had to acknowledge the sovereignty of God by obeying the gleaning laws. These laws were a reminder to him that *biblical authority always has costs attached to it*. The owner of the land had been given capital that other people lack. He therefore had an obligation to the local poor as God's agent, for the land itself was pictured as God's agent. His obligation was to supply the land's leftovers to the poor.

In making this demand, the gleaning law placed decisive limits (boundaries) on both the poor rural resident and the state. It limited the moral demands that the poor could make on economically successful people in the community. The poor had no comparable moral claim against the successful non-agricultural businessman. This law also limited the demands that the state could make on the community in the name of the poor. Biblical law specified that the man with landed wealth should share his wealth with the deserving poor, but not the poor in general. The deserving poor were those who were willing to work hard, but who could not find work in the normal labor markets. *In short, the gleaning law had conditions attached to it*. The idea of morally compulsory, non-conditional charity was foreign to the laws of the Mosaic Covenant.²⁸ The gleaner had to work very hard, for he

28. It is equally foreign to the law of the New Covenant. This assertion appalled Timothy Keller. See Keller, "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections," in William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (eds.), *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 273–79. He called for initially unconditional charity to all poor people. He argues that anyone in need anywhere on earth is my neighbor, thereby universalizing the moral claims of all poor people on the wealth of anyone who is slightly less poor. He wrote: "*Anyone* in need is my neighbor—that is the teaching of the Good Samaritan parable." *Ibid.*, p. 275. He rejected the traditional Christian concept of the deserving poor (pp. 276–77). He concluded: "I am proposing that the reconstructionist approach to biblical charity is too conditional and restrictive." *Ibid.*,

reaped only the leftovers. This means his income was lower than would have been the case if he had been a professional harvester. Gleaning provides a lesson to the poor: *there are no free lunches in life*. Someone always has to pay. The economic terms of the gleaning system established that only destitute members of the community would have become gleaners. If there had been any other source of income besides begging, they would have taken it. The hard work and low pay of gleaning was an incentive for the individual to get out of poverty.

Gleaning provided the poor person with an opportunity to demonstrate publicly his capacity for hard work under difficult personal conditions. First and foremost, he had to admit that he was in a tight financial condition. Pride would work against him. He had to humble himself before God and other men. He had to ask for help. Without this, there can be no salvation, either spiritual or economic. Pride goes before the fall; it often continues after the fall. Second, the gleaner was not asking for a form of charity that involved no work on his part. He was not claiming charity as either an unconditional legal right or an unconditional moral right. He was not claiming an entitlement.²⁹

Gleaning was conditional. All charity is conditional. There is always more demand for aid than there is supply. Resources are scarce; they must be allocated in terms of conditions. The question is: Which conditions are biblically appropriate for charity? The state-mandated welfare system imposes bureaucratic conditions: forms, income tests, and placating local welfare bureaucrats. Gleaning was conditional in terms of the standards of the person who actually provided the opportunity with his own assets, the land owner. The gleaner was asking for an opportunity to do a lot of hard work at a low rate of return. The owner could exclude lazy or immoral workers from his field. We are once again back to the issue of boundaries: *inclusion and exclusion*. This authority of the land owner meant that not only did the gleaner

p. 278. For my response, see North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 271–73. (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>). See also Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" in North (ed.), *Theonomy*, ch. 9.

29. The word "entitlement" refers to a legal claim on government money or services, or on money or services from private sources mandated by the government. It means "legal right to," as distinguished from "legal immunity from." The word seems first to have appeared in a United States government document in 1974. It has become a widely used substitute term for "public welfare" ever since the first year of Ronald Reagan's Presidency: 1981. Norman Ornstein, "Roots of 'Entitlements,' and Budget Woes," *Wall Street Journal* (Dec. 14, 1993), p. A16. See Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton Wary of Cutting Entitlements," *New York Times* (Dec. 14, 1993), p. A12.

have an opportunity to demonstrate his capacity for hard work, he almost had to demonstrate it in order to gain continued access to the field. The owner of the field was not required to subsidize lazy people.

The gleaning system provided a *labor recruiting opportunity* for land owners. Boaz is the best example of this in the Bible (Ruth 2). He saw in Ruth a dedicated worker and a loyal daughter-in-law. He saw that she was ethically upright. She distinguished herself first in the fields. The opportunity to locate good workers is a valuable asset. The gleaning system was ideal in this regard. The owner was in close proximity to the gleaners. They were given a way to please the owner by working hard and efficiently. The owners of these fields could see which gleaners performed well under adverse conditions. This was an important aspect of the labor market. Owners who honored the gleaning laws were given access to very important information. This information enabled them to determine who among the poor would have been best qualified to be hired as regular field harvesters. This means that gleaners could move up to a higher income level if they were successful in being hired as full-time workers. This provided the gleaner with greater incentive to arrive early and work hard and efficiently.

This institutional escape hatch out of poverty was also a great incentive for the gleaner to take orders from the person who was over him in the fields. Gleaning was part of a system of subordination. Hierarchy is basic to all institutions, and those individuals who acknowledged this and made good use of it were enabled to get out of poverty in Old Covenant Israel. The way out of poverty for the agricultural worker was to be hired full-time. Work was the way of escape. This included obedience.

One of the important rules of management is that the best way to become a good manager is to be trained by a good manager. We could also say that the best way to become rich is to be trained by someone who has become rich. The land owner was successful. This was the best person to supervise the system that taught the poor man how to become successful. Furthermore, gleaning was a system that created incentive for the owner to provide a system to teach the poor man. The owner wanted skilled, effective workers to do the harvesting. The gleaning system was a specially designed means of locating and training hard-working people. To this extent, therefore, the gleaning system was really a system of local education in personal self-management by the poor, and also a system for the economically successful to

locate productive employees. This system of relief for the poor rested on a system of hierarchy.

We must always remember that the gleaning laws operated within the framework of the jubilee land laws. The poorest Israelite in the community at some point would inherit from his father or grandfather a portion of the original family inheritance. The size of that portion of land depended on the number of male heirs. Its value depended on the economic productivity of local residents who could legally bid to lease it. The more productive the heir, the more likely that he would be able to retain control over it.³⁰ Gleaning gave the poor Israelite an opportunity to gain management and other skills as a land owner prior to the time that he or his children would be given back the original family land grant through the jubilee land law. The gleaning law provided training that could in the future be converted into family capital. The gleaning law was designed to keep poor people in the local agricultural community.

J. Unconditional Charity: Political Boundaries

The law governing gleaning was not a civil law. This means that it was not compulsory. No individual gleaner had an enforceable legal claim on any land owner. The gleaning system was therefore not part of a civil government entitlements program.

1. Entitlements

An entitlement is a legal claim, enforceable in a civil court. A welfare entitlement program is backed by the threat of civil sanctions. It will eventually transform the character of any welfare program: from a scheme established to help humble people climb out of poverty into a program that keeps pride-filled people and people without initiative in lifelong poverty. An entitlement is neither charity nor temporary; it is a permanent legal claim based on coercive law. It is a state-mandated system of permanent subsidies to people who refuse to work and who resent every suggestion that this refusal is either unwise or immoral. The government pays people if they remain poor. Legally and economically, this cannot be distinguished analytically from paying people *to* remain poor.

The market responds to rising demand by increasing the supply of

30. This legal right to inherit the family's land did not extend to the stranger until after the exile (Ezek. 47:22–23). North, *Restoration and Dominion*, ch. 22.

the item demanded: in this case, poverty. The more money the state pays to keep people poor, the larger the number of poor people produced by the system. This law of the market has not been violated in the field of entitlements: growing numbers of poor people appear on the scene in response to increases in entitlements.³¹ There are moral repercussions that are associated with these increases. Professional welfare administrators advance their careers only if the demand for their services increases. In the wonderfully descriptive phrase of Shirley Scheibla, *poverty is where the money is*.³² Thus, welfare administrators have an economic incentive to locate poor people and get them into the programs. A professionally managed entitlement system steadily removes the stigma of poverty from the thinking of the later generations of recipients and substitutes arrogance. The recipient knows that if he conforms to the welfare rule book, or appears to, the power of the state will extract his monthly income from taxpayers. He will get his money irrespective of any change in his behavior. In fact, evil behavior gets rewarded. Illegitimate children are added to the Aid to Dependent Children welfare rolls. Or: a riot—looting, arson—in which over four dozen people are killed leads to huge payments from the government.³³

31. When the United States government's War on Poverty program began in 1965, the emphasis was on eliminating poor people's dependence on public assistance. Problem: the official poverty statistic does not measure progress toward this goal. To get around this limitation, Charles Murray defines the "latent poor" as those who show up below the officially defined poverty level, plus those who are above the poverty line only because they receive government assistance. Thus defined, latent poverty went from one-third of the United States population in 1950 to 21% in 1965. Under President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" programs, this figure dropped to 18.2% by 1968. Then it started back up under President Nixon. It reached 22% in 1980—higher than where it had been when the War on Poverty began. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 64–65. This poverty statistic counts only money transfers. If we count in-kind transfers (e.g., food stamps), we get a "net poverty" figure. In 1972, the net poverty figure was 6.2% of the United States population. Over the next seven years government welfare expenditures for in-kind assistance doubled. In 1979, the net poverty figure was 6.1%: no progress. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

32. Shirley Scheibla, *Poverty Is Where the Money Is* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968).

33. The riot in south central Los Angeles in early May, 1992—a Presidential election year—lasted almost a week. The population of this section of the city is almost entirely black. Over 50 people died during the riot, killed by rioters, not the police or National Guard troops. By the end of the week, President George H. W. Bush, who was campaigning for re-election, joined with Congress to promise over \$600 million in tax money to the area. (Gold was around \$350 per ounce.) A national poll conducted during the riot revealed that some 61% of those polled said the nation was spending

Resentment is created on both sides of these coercive transactions: the recipient thinks he should get more as a matter of right, both legal and moral, while the taxpayer thinks he should get less. The welfare recipient is not required to learn the skills and adopt the mentality of hope that are basic to any permanent escape from poverty. A permanent welfare class is created, thereby justifying the maintenance of a permanent welfare administration. Entitlements for the poor create employment entitlements for the Civil Service-protected bureaucrats who administer the system until the economy collapses, leaving many of the former taxpayers poor. Entitlements are the closest thing to economic entropy that a political order can legislate: a one-way street to chaos.

2. *Effects on the Family*

The erosion of the two-parent family in the United States has paralleled the rise of welfare entitlements. In 1970, 87% of all United States families were two-parent families. In 1980, this was down to 79%. In 1990, it was 72%. Mothers were usually the heads of these one-parent families: 12% out of 13% in 1970; 19% out of 22% in 1980; 24% out of 28% in 1990. Among black families, the erosion has been most serious. The percentage of two-parent families fell from 64% (1970) to 48% (1980) to 39% (1990). Mothers have been heads of household in the 96% to 97% range throughout this period.³⁴ Nicholas Davidson has called the rise of the single-parent, mother-headed family America's greatest social catastrophe.³⁵

A breakdown in morality has also paralleled the rise of the post-World War II welfare state. This can be seen most clearly in the rise of illegitimacy, which constitutes a social revolution. This revolution has taken only one 40-year generation. Among American teenagers, the increase has been horrendous. In 1960–64, the premarital birth rate among young teens of all races, 15 to 17, was about 33%; in 1984–89, it was over 80%. Among 18 to 19 year olds, the figure was under 17% in

too little on improving the conditions of black Americans, up from 35% in 1988. Some 63% said the Federal government was not paying enough attention to the needs and problems of minorities, up from 34% in 1988. "Los Angeles Riots Are a Warning, Americans Fear," *New York Times* (May 11, 1992). In 1965, a riot that began in Watts, also in south central Los Angeles, led to the deaths of over 30 people. This took place at the beginning of the War on Poverty. The Federal government then spent about \$2.4 trillion on welfare programs nationally, 1965–1992.

34. "Family Demographics," *American Enterprise* (March/April 1991), p. 93.

35. Nicholas Davidson, "Life Without Father," *Policy Review* (Winter 1990).

1960–64; 59% in 1984–89. Illegitimate births among women age 15 to 34 were under 13% in 1960–64; they were above 28% in 1984–89.³⁶ This annual report ceased covering this statistic by 2010. Other statistics were available. For women of all ages, in 1980 the rate of births to unmarried women was 18%. In 1990, it was 28%. In 2000, it was 33%. In 2008, it was 40%.³⁷

There were significant differences among races. Those racial groups that were less likely to be on state-funded welfare programs had lower illegitimacy rates. Of all births to black women, 57% were not married at the survey date in 1990; among whites, 17%.³⁸ Taking the 15 to 34 age group, we find regarding first births: Blacks: 70% (1984–89) vs. 42% (1960–64); Hispanics: 37.5% (1985–89) vs. 19.2% (1960–64); Whites: 21% (1985–89) vs. 8.5% (1960–64); Asians or Pacific Islanders: 15.5% (1984–89) vs. 13.3% (1960–64), i.e., almost no change.³⁹ By 2000, the rate for whites was 38%. By 2007, it was 48%. For blacks, the rate in 2000 was 70%. In 2007, it was 73%. For Asian or Pacific Islanders, in 2000 it was 21%. In 2007, it was 27%.⁴⁰ These figures indicate a social revolution, 1960 to 2007.

The moral reality is much worse: these figures do not include aborted babies after 1973: about 1.5 million per year. Taking the figures back to 1950, under two percent of white babies were born illegitimate; it was almost 17% for blacks.⁴¹ By 1990, the white illegitimacy rate was at the black rate of 1950.

This was not a uniquely American phenomenon. Similar rates of increase in crime, illegitimacy, and family breakdown took place at the same time in Western Europe. Francis Fukuyama called this the Great Disruption.⁴² Comparing 1980 with 2006–8, the illegitimacy figures indicate a social revolution. France: 11% to 52%; United Kingdom: 11% to 44%; Italy: 4% to 17%; Spain: 4% to 32%; Netherlands: 4% to 41%;

36. Amara Bachu, *Fertility of American Women: June 1990*, Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics, Series P-20, No. 454 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce, 1991), p. 7.

37. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2011* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2011), p. 840, Table 1334. (<http://bit.ly/BirthStats>)

38. *Fertility of American Women*, p. 3.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

40. *Statistical Abstract, 2011*, p. 68, Table 85. (<http://bit.ly/BirthStats2>)

41. Andrew Hacker, "Review of Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992)," *New York Times Book Review* (March 29, 1992).

42. Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: Free Press, 1999), chaps 1–3.

Ireland: 6% to 33%. Scandinavian countries did not experience this, only because they were high in 1980: from about 33% to 50%. It was worse than it looks. The rates for Muslims were much lower. So, for the old European stock, the rates were higher. Only one major nation avoided this, Japan. It went from 0.8% to 2.1%.⁴³

Despite trillions of entitlement program dollars spent by the national government of the United States in the quarter of a century after the War on Poverty began, plus hundreds of billions spent by state and local governments, there has been no solution to the poverty problem of the inner cities. There is a small but seemingly permanent underclass of people who will not act to escape their poverty. Crime in these districts continues to rise, educational levels continue to fall, and the family continues to disintegrate within this underclass.⁴⁴ Their behavior is properly described as pathological. The decisive issue is not race.⁴⁵ The issue is morality and worldview.⁴⁶ Entitlement programs, coupled with the secular humanism of the local public school systems and the demise of the traditional churches, has accelerated this pathology. The government has financed the severing of the moral links between generations by rewarding bastardy. It has subsidized evil.

K. Few Modern Applications of the Gleaning Law

How could the gleaning law apply in the modern world? As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, the jubilee land laws were fulfilled judicially by Christ's earthly ministry (Luke 4:16–21),⁴⁷ and they were historically annulled at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The jubilee land laws had reference only to the conquered land of Canaan, which was held by Israelite families only on the basis of their ancestors' original military conquest of the land. Nevertheless, even if we did not argue that the gleaning law was lawfully annulled with the annulment of the jubilee land laws, we would still have to say that the law applies exclusively to agricultural pursuits. Therefore, in the twentieth century, the worldwide mass movement of population from the farm to the city

43. *Statistical Abstract*, 2011, p. 840, Table 1334.

44. William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

45. William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

46. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Failure of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970).

47. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

would effectively have abolished the widespread economic relevance of this law. The law was never intended to apply to urban occupations.

1. Urban Life

Today, we find that in urban, industrialized nations, there are very few desperately poor people without jobs who live in rural communities. This is especially true in capitalistic countries. Human harvesters of the fields are mostly migrant workers or people who work part-time in the rural communities. Usually they have other jobs during the year, but they gain extra income during the harvest season. The main exceptions to this generalization are teenage children of migrants who go to school in the off-season.

The gleaning law could still be applied where hand-picking of crops is still common. This would mean primarily on farms producing vegetables and in fruit orchards (Deut. 24:20). But even here, machines are steadily replacing human labor, although this switch has been forced on employers by government-mandated minimum-wage laws, migrant labor unions, immigration laws, and other restrictions on hiring agricultural labor.

There is some question about the gleaning law's relevance to gardens. A garden in ancient Israel would probably have been planted for use by the family, not commercial farming: small plots harvested by family members, not professional harvesters.

Most of the value of modern farming in the United States is produced by grain farming. Machines harvest grain crops; workers don't. This limits the relevance of the gleaning law mainly to small farms. There are very few of these small farms left in the modern world, since they are too inefficient to compete. The cost of labor is too high in a modern economy.⁴⁸ This is why so many of the fruits and vegetables eaten in the United States are imported from Mexico.⁴⁹ In areas where

48. One way to make these small truck farms pay is for the owners to invite the public in to pick the crop and pay for the privilege. This is economically feasible in areas within a few miles of a city. This arrangement would make it very difficult for the owner to police the gleaning requirement. The owner who required the paying customers to leave part of the crop would find himself with fewer paying customers.

49. In early 1991, the United States government sought to lower tariffs on imported crops from Mexico, and United States farmers protested. The idea of consumer choice was not challenged directly, but the law's opponents found ways to attack this reduction of government taxation and interference with consumer sovereignty. See the anti-free trade article by United States Senator Ernest Hollings of South Carolina, "No More Uncle Sucker," *New York Times* (March 26, 1991), Op Ed page.

the primary source of income is agriculture, this means that there are very few local residents who could participate as gleaners.

Furthermore, there is too little productivity today in grain-gleaning by hand. The price of the grain is too low. This also is a result of the enormous efficiency of mechanized grain farming. There are so few people who live close to farms today that gleaning under the best of circumstances could not provide a way out of poverty for the masses of poor individuals. Most people live in cities, not in the country. There are better economic opportunities for people in cities than in rural areas. The poor migrate into the cities to take advantage of these opportunities. This has been going on in the West since at least the eleventh century, A.D. It has accelerated since the early eighteenth century.

There is waste in commercial agriculture, as there is in every business. A 1993 United States Department of Agriculture estimate of the value of food wasted in the United States was \$31 billion,⁵⁰ with the figures broken down as follows. Consumers wasted \$16 billion (over 50%); harvesting loss: \$5 billion; storage: \$2.2 billion; transport \$400 million; processing: \$400 million; wholesaling and retailing: \$6.2 billion.⁵¹ The total loss was about 20% of the \$150 billion worth of food produced in the United States. This means that the value of food lost in the fields was about 3% of the value of agricultural output—not a high percentage. Even if all of this \$5 billion in harvesting waste could have been recovered by gleaning, this would not significantly have relieved poverty in what was at the time a \$6 trillion national economy.

2. Agricultural Productivity and Urbanization

We have to understand that it is the vast productivity of modern agriculture that has enabled the growth of urban areas. Without the low cost of food, not many people could afford to move to the cities. What we have seen since the early eighteenth century, beginning in Great Britain, is the steady urbanization of civilization. After 1700, the proportion of Englishmen living on farms dropped for sixty years, stabilized until 1800, and then started dropping again.⁵² This was made

50. With gold at about \$350/oz.

51. Jonathan Eig, "Waste Not, Want Not," *Dallas Morning News* (Sept. 27, 1993).

52. N. F. R. Crafts, "Income Elasticities of Demand and the Release of Labor by Agriculture During the British Industrial Revolution: A Further Appraisal," in Joel Bokyr (ed.) *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 159–61.

possible because of the steady increase in the output of agricultural labor per unit of invested capital. At some point, this increase will stop, or else there will eventually be no human laborers on the farms at all—an unlikely prospect. But for almost three centuries, this increase in the marginal efficiency of invested capital in agriculture has not been halted by the law of diminishing returns: it pays land owners to buy more equipment rather than hire more workers. This increase is also the result of greater productivity in the city. The tools of agricultural production keep getting more efficient. The division of labor is greater in urban areas, and the minds of many resourceful people have been applied to the problems of agriculture.

The increased output of the cities has also increased the living standards of the rural resident. Nothing was more effective in producing this increase in rural living standards than the coming of electricity.⁵³ This made possible an increase in rural productivity, but also an increase in the availability of consumer goods comparable to those enjoyed by urban residents. Yet the movement of population into the city and the suburb has continued nonetheless. Modern man has preferred to live in the city or town. All of this militates against the idea that a system of agricultural gleanings could be a major factor in reducing poverty in the modern industrial world. Any attempt to decrease rural poverty by anything except more investment (especially in education), transferrable urban production techniques, high-technology agriculture, advanced telecommunications, and better care of the soil, is doomed to failure.

Farming has never been more successful than today in producing economic value. The public wailing over the supposed “demise of agriculture” is a political ploy of an ever-shrinking number of inefficient

53. This does not mean that the United States Federal government was economically justified in having provided cheap electricity to rural areas. It means only that this was an economically beneficial subsidy, as government subsidies go, from the point of view of the recipients. Private power companies would eventually have provided this service to those farmers whose output would have justified the cost, but it would have taken decades longer. Urban taxpayers in the late 1930s and early 1940s funded most of the rural electrification projects in the United States east of the Mississippi. This subsidy did not halt the outflow of people from the farms, nor did it “save” the small family farm. It did make large corporate farms possible in regions where the lack of electrical power had kept them out. It launched today’s large corporate agriculture. Cheap power made heavily capitalized farming productive in rural areas. Cheap electricity was the missing link—the missing complementary factor of production—in the triumph of mechanized agriculture. It made possible the economies of scale of large-scale agriculture. Small farmers moved to the cities. So did their children.

producers. The cries of distress by “farmers” are in fact cries of outrage by less efficient farmers against successful, heavily capitalized agricultural producers. The demand for *parity* prices⁵⁴—government-mandated price floors for agricultural products—is in fact a cry for prohibitions against voluntary exchange. These critics of free-market pricing want the Federal government to pass laws against allowing the more efficient, price-competitive farmers to get together with consumers and their agents in order to make exchanges at low monetary prices. In the United States, this cry for government interference is always made in the name of free enterprise.⁵⁵ The fact is, there has been no “crisis in agriculture” in capitalist countries: no famines in over two centuries.⁵⁶ *The so-called “crisis in agriculture” is a crisis only for the less efficient producers.* The consumers of agricultural products have been the winners. They define what constitutes a crisis in agriculture, not inefficient producers. On this basis, there has been no agricultural crisis. There has been a cornucopia.⁵⁷ It has been produced by an ever-shrinking number of agricultural laborers.⁵⁸ This has been a worldwide phenomenon. Economist D. Gale Johnson wrote in 1984: “In the past three decades a world food system has been created. This system is now capable of making food available to almost every person in the world. This was impossible just a few years ago.”⁵⁹ He predicted that “the prospects for the long run are in the direction of continuing gradual declines in the real prices of the primary sources of calories for poor people.”⁶⁰ The next two decades proved him correct.

There are very few human harvesters of crops today, especially grain crops. Fruit pickers do still exist, but they tend to be at the bottom of the barrel economically. There are few workers poorer than the migrant fruit and vegetable pickers. People who are willing to work for

54. Charles Walters, Jr., *Unforgiven: The Biography of an Idea* (Kansas City, Missouri: Economics Library, 1971).

55. Walters' *Unforgiven* was co-published by the Citizens Congress for Private Enterprise.

56. Ireland in the 1840s was the one exception, but Ireland was not an industrial, capitalist economy in the 1840s.

57. John A. Prestbo (ed.), *This Abundant Land* (Princeton, New Jersey: Dow Jones & Co., 1975).

58. Wayne C. Rohrer and Louis H. Douglas, *The Agrarian Transition in America: Dualism and Change* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

59. D. Gale Johnson, “World Food and Agriculture,” in *The Resourceful Earth: A Response to Global 2000*, eds. Julian L. Simon and Herman Kahn (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 67.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

even less money than the migrant workers are very unlikely to stay in rural areas in the modern world. If gleaning were a permanent requirement for charity, this would raise the question of the legitimacy of modern commercial agriculture. After all, its efficiency has destroyed the applicability of the gleaning law. Is modern agriculture illegitimate because it is so efficient? This would be an odd way to argue: the illegitimacy of a vastly increased supply of bread—the very thing that we are instructed to pray for in the Lord’s prayer. Is modern agriculture illegitimate because it has freed people from life on the farm? Is there something inherently preferable about life on the farm? If so, then it is odd that the post-resurrection world is described as a city (Rev. 21:2).

There is another problem associated with the application of the gleaning law in modern times, one which is technical in nature. Mechanical harvesters are so efficient in the gathering of crops that they cannot easily leave gleanings. It is more difficult for harvesting machine operators to leave the corners of the fields bare because the machines are difficult to maneuver. There is no easy way to leave part of the crop in the main portion of the field unless the driver deliberately avoids harvesting a section of the field. The gleaning law told the harvesters not to pick up fallen grain; it did not tell them to avoid harvesting the crop, except at the corners of the fields.

The modern world quite properly ignores the gleaning laws of the Old Testament. It does so in more ways than one. Some of these reasons are legitimate, but others are quite illegitimate, such as the many attempts by the welfare state to create entitlements to government handouts as a substitute for “workfare” systems analogous to gleaning. The main reason why gleaning is no longer required is that the gleaning laws were part of the jubilee laws, which are no longer in force.

L. The Modern Welfare State

The modern world, including the academic Christian world, has reversed the Old Testament criteria of wealth and poverty. There is today a latent suspicion among tenured academics that anyone who is wealthy has achieved his status by unethical means. At the same time, the poor individual is almost universally assumed to be poor by reasons other than his own incompetence or moral rebellion.⁶¹ This means

61. A widely popular statement of this position is Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*, co-published by InterVarsity Press and the Paulist Press in 1977. For a reply, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute

that in the modern world, the welfare state and its apologists (of all faiths) have created a system in which the subsidizing of evil is required by law. Negative civil sanctions are threatened against all tax-paying citizens who refuse to subsidize evil.

In the modern system, the whole society is taxed in order to benefit the poor. Additional centralized power is created by the state in order to impose negative sanctions against those who will not pay taxes. The rules of wealth redistribution also become centralized, and they become impersonal. The administration of these rules is exclusively bureaucratic. Unlike the Mosaic Covenant land owner, who had the right to exclude the undeserving poor from access to the fields, it is almost impossible for the modern welfare agent to exclude people from the welfare roles. If the welfare recipient gives at least surface indication that he is looking for work, he is legally entitled to the benefits. The very phrase *entitlements* is indicative of the judicial shift.

In every system there must be a hierarchy. In the Mosaic economy, the land owner was at the top of the hierarchy of the welfare redistribution system. Today, a new class of paid administrators has been created. This class, because it is paid to administer the programs, has no direct economic interest in overcoming the problem of poverty on a permanent basis. Unlike the land owner, who personally financed the gleaning operation, the salaried administrator of the welfare system does not spend his own money in order to benefit the poor. Furthermore, this bureaucratic class absorbs the bulk of the funds that are raised in order to help the poor. In this system, the poor are penalized for seeking to escape poverty through work because they are penalized economically when they get a job. They lose the tax-free income they could have received by not working. The welfare state pays people not to work. It also pays farmers not to farm. This was not true under the gleaning system, since gleaning was very hard work.

In contrast to the Old Testament's system of gleaning, the modern welfare system penalizes work and subsidizes unemployment. The poor can continue to receive money only through obedience to the new class of bureaucrats. This class of bureaucrats does not operate personally but impersonally, so the poor must meet endless criteria that are established through bureaucratic channels and in terms of the needs and preferences of those who occupy the offices. The poor find it difficult to escape the inevitable hierarchy: being poor and cared for

by others. Unlike the poor person under the Old Testament's system of gleaning, which rewarded him for escaping poverty, the modern poor person grows to resent the whole system that keeps him in poverty.

The poor are well aware of this aspect of the welfare state. In the Old Testament, the gleaning system was seen by a poor person as a benefit because it was his means to support himself and possibly escape his poverty by becoming part of the agricultural work force. Today, however, there is neither the appreciation of the welfare system on the part of the poor, nor are there structured avenues of escape that are presented by the administrators of the system to the poor. It is a self-reinforcing system of permanent poverty. The system as a whole responds predictably to the system of financing that sustains it. We are paying poor people not to work, and we are paying bureaucrats to keep themselves employed by paying these people not to work. The welfare system is not irrational; its participants respond quite rationally to the rewards and punishments that the politicians have imposed on the system. In today's welfare systems, all over the industrialized world, poverty is where the money is. The market responds with ever-growing numbers of self-declared and government-certified poor people.

M. We Are All Gleaners

Because each person is in bondage to sin, God has made gleaners of everyone. He cursed the ground, making it to bring forth thorns and thistles. This in effect put us all in the position of people who are not entitled to the best of the field. God removed the "easy pickings" from mankind as a result of mankind's rebellion. But at least he did not destroy the field (the world). He promises not to interfere directly with it until the final judgment (Matt. 13:29–30, 49).⁶² We must work harder than before the curse, but God graciously grants us access to the field. Those who are not content with second-best are given an opportunity to escape their economic bondage through faith in the great Gleaner, Jesus Christ, who served God faithfully unto death, buying our way out of spiritual bondage. God observes us, to see who is efficient and who is a sluggard. He uses history as a giant gleaning operation for recruiting servants for eternity. Those who do not demonstrate faithfulness under adversity are not given access to the fields of the post-judgment

62. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

world, but instead are cast out into the fire.

In a very real sense, biblical evangelism prior to the great millennial outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a form of gleaning. We reap small harvests. We get the spiritual and cultural leftovers, after the local tyrants, the humanist school system, the cults, and the drug dealers have passed through the field and have picked off "the best and the brightest." Visible successes on foreign mission fields seem minor; meanwhile, the biological reproduction of God's enemies is now becoming exponential. We seem to be falling behind. We have few reliable models to imitate. Evangelism seems futile. But, like gleaning, this condition is supposed to be temporary. Unfortunately, whole theologies are built in terms of "gleaning as a way of life."

To become a gleaner may tempt a person to accept second-best as a way of life. The gleaner may not recognize or appreciate his God-given opportunity. He may not see that he is being called into the Master's field in order to demonstrate his competence in the face of adversity. He may view his plight as something he does not deserve, not recognizing that after Adam, all that any man deserves is death and eternal wrath. He does not recognize the stripped field as a garden of opportunity. He imagines that all that he can hope for is a sack of leftover grain. His time horizon is too short. His future-orientation suffers from a lack of vision, and also a lack of faith in God's grace. He forgets how few and far between faithful workers are, and how the opportunity to glean the leftover harvest is a God-given way to demonstrate his character as a man with a future precisely because he has confidence in the future.

Because the church has seen so few examples of successful evangelism, and because even the successful examples seem to fall back into paganism within a few centuries, Christians have come to adopt eschatologies that deny liberation for gleaners.⁶³ They see themselves and their spiritual colleagues as people who are locked in a vicious "cycle of impotence," to borrow the language of paganism's modern welfare economics.⁶⁴ They see no hope beyond the stripped field. Life only offers minimal opportunities for harvesting souls, they believe. "What we have today as gleaners is all that we or our heirs can expect in history." They lose faith in the jubilee principle, when the land of their fathers reverts to them. They lose faith in the ability of the heav-

63. Gary North, "Ghetto Eschatologies," *Biblical Economics Today*, XIV (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

64. The so-called "cycle of poverty."

only Observer to identify and hire good workers and to place them in new positions of responsibility. So, Christians have invented eschatologies that conform to their rejection of any vision of temporal liberation: eschatologies of the stripped field. Men with battered spirits preach that nothing Christians can do as spiritual gleaners will ever fill the sacks to overflowing. They see no covenantal cause-and-effect relationship between gleaning and liberation. They preach a new gospel of God's kingdom in history: *the kingdom of perpetual leftovers*. They do not recognize that there is a purpose for our evangelical gleaning: the public identification of those bondservants who actively seek liberation and who pursue every legitimate avenue of escape from bondage, especially by hard work.

Conclusion

The gleaning law was part of an overall system of political economy. Many of the details of this political economy were tied to the Promised Land and the sacrificial system of that land. The economic laws of Leviticus were more closely attached to the Promised Land and the sacrifices than the laws of Exodus and Deuteronomy were. *The Levitical land laws were part of a temporary system of landed familism, tribalism, and localism.*

Localism and tribalism were both basic to the application of the gleaning law in Mosaic Israel. The authority of the local land owner to chose who would glean and who would not from among various candidates—the boundary principle of inclusion and exclusion—transferred great responsibility and authority into his hand. This kind of personalized charity is no longer taken seriously by those who legislate politically grounded welfare state policies in the modern world. Such a view of charity transfers too much authority to property owners, in the eyes of the politicians, and not enough to the state and its functionaries. But it is not the principle of localism that changes in the New Testament era; it is only the landed tribalism that changes. When the kingdom of God was transferred to a new nation (Matt. 21:43), meaning the church, the Levitical land laws were abolished.

Gleaning no longer applies in the New Covenant era. The jubilee land law was annulled by Jesus through: (1) His ministry's fulfillment of the law (Luke 4:16–27); (2) the transfer of the kingdom to the church at Pentecost (Matt. 21:43; Acts 2); and (3) the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Can we learn anything from the gleaning law? I

think we can, but these lessons are essentially negative. They show us what should not be done, not what must be done, to avoid God's negative sanctions.

The first lesson that we learn from gleaning is positive, however: *all charity is based legally on the fundamental principle that God owns the earth.* "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). Primary ownership belongs to God. He can do what He pleases with that which He owns. He lawfully can establish requirements of property management that His legal subordinates must follow. This is the theocentric aspect of all ownership. God delegates to His subordinates the legal and economic responsibility of managing His property in His name. God is the primary owner. All other ownership is secondary and derivative.

All charity involves the transfer of this secondary ownership (the individual's) to a third party. This leads to the second principle of biblical charity. *A third party has no legal civil claim on any asset that he does not own.*⁶⁵ The one exception is restitution: a case in which the recipient has been positively harmed by a previous action of a judicially convicted person. The third party has no comparable legal claim in a civil court if he is asking for aid. The gleaning law is therefore crucially important for what it tells us about what is *not* involved in charity: a legal claim enforceable in a civil court. The poor person had a claim before God in God's court under the Mosaic Covenant's land management system, assuming that he could demonstrate that he was part of the deserving poor. But it was the land owner who was the lawful enforcer of this claim in history, not the state. This means that the land owner had to obey God apart from civil sanctions. He had to honor God's law. God would hold him accountable in His court.

If the strongest claim that anyone in the Mosaic Covenant had on the property of another was limited to this extent, then it is not biblically legitimate for any society to legislate state-enforced wealth redistribution in the name of charity. *The Mosaic Covenant did not establish state sanctions against those people who refused to show mercy.*⁶⁶

65. In Old Covenant Israel, a second party had the right to pluck grapes and corn from a neighbor's fields, though only what he could carry in his hands (Deut. 23:24–25; Luke 6:1). North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 59; North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 8. This law increased the likelihood of travel and communications, since visitors would not have to return home to eat or carry food with them everywhere. The economic benefit of being located close to a road—cheap transportation of farm commodities—was partially offset by this open access law.

66. The other comparable claim was the poor borrower's access to a non-interest-

God was the poor man's defender, not some state bureaucrat. No modern principle of charity should violate this fundamental principle. Charity should be voluntary, i.e., not subject to civil penalties for non-compliance. It should strengthen the recipient's will to seek a way out of poverty.

Third, charity should not create a permanent dependence on the part of the recipient. Fourth, charity should not subsidize evil. Fifth, it should involve hard work except in cases where the recipient is medically incapacitated. Sixth, it should not provide living standards that are higher than the poorest workers in society are able to earn. Charity should not be a system of positive sanctions that pays people not to work. At best, it should persuade its recipients that work is preferable to charity. Charity should make an escape available.

The fundamental principle learned from the gleaning laws is this: *charity in a biblical social order must not be based on the idea that the state is a legitimate institution of salvation.* The state is not a biblically legitimate agency of social healing. It is an agency of public vengeance (Rom. 13:1–7). It possesses a lawful monopoly of violence. It therefore cannot be entrusted with the authority to take the wealth of successful people in order to reward the poor. If it is allowed to do this, its agents become the primary beneficiaries of the confiscated wealth. Its political and bureaucratic agents will gain power over both the poor and the economically successful. These agents will become permanent spokesmen for the official beneficiaries of the wealth, namely, the poor. They will have no incentive to get poor people as a class permanently out of poverty. A system of legal entitlements for the poor becomes a system of legal entitlements to full-time jobs for those who administer the system. This is the antithesis of the gleaning system of the Mosaic Covenant. In that system, participants had an economic incentive to get the poor back to work: the land owners, the piece-rate harvesters, and the poor themselves.

bearing loan. As the year of release approached, the prospective lender was warned by God not to harden his heart against his poor brother (Deut. 15:9–10). There is no indication that anyone could be prosecuted in a civil court for his refusal to lend on these terms.

12

VERBAL BONDS AND ECONOMIC COORDINATION

Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:11–12).

The theocentric principle supporting this law is the protection of the name of God. This passage of Scripture is clearly an application of the third commandment. The third commandment prohibits the profaning of the name of God.¹ That is, *it places a sacred judicial boundary around the name of God*, a boundary that must not be transgressed without permission. The name of God is the protected asset. Like a brand name in advertising, the name of God is strictly licensed by its Owner.

A. False Swearing

Men are not to swear falsely by the name of God. Swearing in this case is an illegal imitation of a formal act of oath-taking. This form of the violation—swearing falsely—is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions.²

Stealing, false dealing, and lying are prohibited. So is swearing falsely by God's name. The latter is worse because it invokes God's name and authority to defend fraud. It compounds the infraction. The passage begins with a judicial boundary that facilitates interpersonal

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 23.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

relations: the boundary around private property.

Nevertheless, the primary focus of this text is the profanation of God's name: a *verbal boundary transgression*. This places the law under point three of the biblical covenant model, just as the third commandment is under point three.³ Additional evidence is the fact that this passage tells us not to defraud a neighbor or rob him. This is a prohibition against theft. The eighth commandment parallels the third commandment.⁴ They are both aspects of point three of the biblical covenant model. The theocentric basis of this law is the absolute integrity and inviolability of God's name.

This commandment's focus of concern is theft, which includes false dealings. The theocentric reference point of this law is the name of God and the prohibition against profaning that name. A profane act is an act that transgresses a sacred boundary, either judicial or geographical.⁵ Therefore, in the Bible, the laws against theft are part of the general law of God that protects His name and His property from any unauthorized invasion.

This commandment has implications that extend beyond the courtroom. Men are not to lie to each other in order to further their own ends at the expense of others. Even when not under oath, their words are to be reliable; other people will plan their own activities in terms of what is said. For example, a physician is not supposed to tell his patients that they are sick when they are healthy, nor is he to tell them they are healthy when they are not. The same rule applies to economic transactions.

B. Bonds and Promises

"A man's word is his bond." This maxim is a familiar one in Western history. The word "bond" points to a legal transaction. In the Bible, a covenantal bond establishes a formal legal relationship under God. While a promise does not possess the judicial authority of a covenantal bond, since it lacks a lawfully imposed self-maledictory oath, a promise is nevertheless analogous to a covenant bond. It is a verbal contract.

In modern finance, a bond is a promise to pay. A person gives up money in the present in exchange for a specified stream of money in the future, with the return of the principal at a stated date, which will

3. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 23.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

5. Chapter 6.

complete the transaction, thus ending the legal relationship.

Promises are a form of inventory. They serve as substitutes for physically stored assets. Instead of accumulating assets, a producer relies on another person to deliver the goods, literally or figuratively.⁶ A broken promise here is the economic equivalent of an empty storage facility that was thought to be full. Worse; someone had guaranteed that it would be full. The missing good or service creates a kind of falling domino effect: delayed production all down the line. The person who fails to deliver on time produces losses for the person who became dependent on him.

The person who promises to deliver goods or services puts his reputation on the line. The better his reputation, the more business he will generate, other things (such as price) being equal. It pays a person to gain a reputation as one who keeps his word. He tells the truth, and when other people plan their actions in terms of what he says, they are not disappointed. "LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Ps. 15:1–4). This person lowers the cost of doing business with him. By lowering the price of anything, the seller increases the quantity demanded. This is why a person who keeps his word has increased his market value.⁷

The fraudulent person is like a thief who steals the assets stored in a warehouse, and who then swears that the warehouse is full. He posts a verbal bond. Like a bonded warehouse illegally emptied by its manager, the violation of this verbal bond is regarded by God as theft. The promise-giver owes double restitution to his victim.

In this case, the promise-giver has used God's name in his false bonding. This involves an additional infraction. The bond-giver has invoked God as his personal bonding agent. This is a major violation of God's law. "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt

6. In the 1980s, the advent of inexpensive computers and the spread of overnight air cargo delivery companies made possible the development of "just in time" manufacturing. Manufacturers can time the delivery of raw materials and parts so that they do not have to invest in large inventories. This has made manufacturing far more efficient.

7. The market value is an asset's present price. This price is the asset's expected stream of future income, discounted by the prevailing rate of interest.

thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19: 12). By doing this, the false swearer has placed himself under the sanctions of God.

What is said here of individuals is equally true for nations and societies. False swearing invokes God’s negative sanctions. A nation that cannot be trusted to adhere to its public commitments will gain few allies in a crisis unless those who represent the nations around it are equally corrupt and unreliable.

C. The Illegal Transfer of Private Property

What this law prohibits is the illegal transfer of private property. It prohibits a direct transfer in the form of robbery. The law says that we must not steal. There is also an indirect form of theft that is prohibited: fraud. Fraud is false dealing. It involves giving a false report to a buyer. First, fraud means a refusal to abide by one’s previous word to another individual. Second, it means the deliberate camouflaging of one’s word: to appear to say one thing but in fact mean something else. This is done in order to gain legal control of something that is not lawfully one’s own. The other person transfers ownership voluntarily but in confusion. The classic example in the Bible is Satan’s deception of Eve: the promise that she would become as God (Gen. 3:5). Third, false dealing is the outright defrauding of the individual. An example of this form of fraud is simple lying. A person says that he is going to do something, but he never intends to do it, and if all the facts were available, it could be proven that he never intended to do it. The deliberate writing of a check drawn against insufficient funds would be such an act of fraud.⁸ So would posting as collateral for a loan an asset known by the holder to be worth less than what he insists it is worth. So would gaining multiple loans on the basis of one piece of collateral: fractional reserves.⁹

This indirect transfer of wealth can be achieved through false swearing. It is a false form of fraudulent dealing in which God’s name is misused. It would be difficult to get away with such an act in a biblical covenant society because of the prohibition against taking God’s name in vain. In a society in which the third commandment is not enforced, it is much easier for an individual to swear falsely in God’s

8. In most states in the United States, this act constitutes a felony.

9. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49:J; North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Sons, 1986), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>)

name. The obvious case in modern society in which this is done would be in a court of law. The person taking the false oath might be swearing in God's name in a formal sense, but his intention is to lie and to use that lie to gain an economic or other advantage from the victim. False swearing is mentioned in this passage, and therefore false swearing is considered to be an act of theft. It is first and foremost the public misappropriation of the name of God. This is an attempt by an individual to transfer the authority of God to himself for his own illicit purposes. He swears by the name of God in order to impress his listeners. This act can also be a formal oath that is taken in front of a court, which will accomplish the same thing.

D. The Problem of Economic Coordination

The economic issue that must be explained is the problem of the coordination of individual plans. How is this best accomplished: By state compulsion or market coordination? It is clear from both the eighth commandment and the tenth commandment that private property must be honored. Men must neither steal nor covet their neighbor's property. This means that biblical economics rests on the ideal of the legitimacy of private property. "Christian socialism" is an oxymoron.

In a market economy, individuals make plans about the future, and then they act in terms of these plans. They buy or sell or hold in terms of their individual plans. The question then is: How are the millions of individual decisions integrated with each other so that men can participate together in the division of labor? This is the problem of the revision of economic plans. How do people change their plans and expectations in response to the decisions of other individuals? This is the problem of feedback: information coupled with sanctions. In what form does information come to an individual that other participants in the market approve or disapprove of what he is doing or not doing? This is the problem of economic sanctions.¹⁰

1. Promise and Dependence

The importance of the division of labor has been emphasized in modern economics ever since Adam Smith wrote his famous first

10. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

chapter on the production of pins.¹¹ A highly skilled individual craftsman cannot produce a great number of pins in one day, Smith observed. On the other hand, a small group of relatively unskilled workers can produce thousands of pins if they are given the proper capital equipment. He pointed to the division of labor as the explanation—a fundamental biblical concept (Rom. 12; I Cor. 12).¹² The division of labor allows the increase of output per unit of scarce resource input. Cooperation produces greater wealth than economic autarky can. It is the division of labor which enables us to pool our talents in order to gain much greater output together than we could possibly have achieved as individuals acting in isolation. Because increased cooperation increases individual productivity, it also increases per capita wealth. This increase—a positive sanction—is the incentive for men to cooperate economically with each other. It is a very important aspect of the preservation of society. It allows the pooling of individual talents, and it allows the pooling of capital. This capital can be of three kinds: economic, intellectual, and moral.

Cooperation requires a degree of predictability. First, it requires the predictability of *timing*. Let us consider a business that manufactures a particular product. To do so, it requires resource inputs. Because people's knowledge of markets is limited, and because it is expensive to go out and buy exactly what you want exactly when you want it, businesses carry inventories of raw materials and spare parts. These inventories compensate for men's imperfect knowledge of the future. An inventory of raw materials and spare parts enables the business to expand production without a great deal of warning. An inventory of finished products enables the business to meet the demand without increasing the price of the product. It allows the business to continue operating if there is an interruption of the delivery of materials. In other words, inventories create a production system in which there are fewer bottlenecks. Bottlenecks create "ripple effects," both in the company and in some cases in the economy as a whole. Inventories smooth production. But they must be paid for. They must be "carried." They tie up resources.

Second, the producer seeks predictability in the *pricing* of his re-

11. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 9; North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

source inputs as a means of gaining predictability of production. If an individual agrees to sell you an item, and you then make plans in terms of the price of that item, you have become dependent on him. Similarly, you have agreed to pay him a money price at a particular time. He has therefore become dependent on you. The free market economy produces a system of independence legally (individualism) and mutual dependence economically (coordination of plans). We are legally free to make our voluntary decisions; therefore, we are judicially independent. At the same time, because of these voluntary agreements, we become mutually interdependent in our economic activities. This is why pricing is so important. It enables us to make decisions rationally in terms of existing conditions of supply and demand.

Third, predictability of *quality* is also important. This one is more difficult to police. What level of quality is good enough at a particular price? This is difficult for the buyer or the seller to specify in a written contract. We seek ways of gaining this information inexpensively, both as buyers and sellers. The existence of brand names is important in lowering the costs of people's estimates of quality. Pricing also plays an important role. We are used to the idea that an item which costs five times more than another item is probably of higher quality. We believe that the product will not break readily, and therefore our time won't have to be spent taking the thing in to be repaired. Brand names enable us to make better predictions about the performance of both services and goods.

This is an aspect of the third point of the biblical covenant. God protects His name from profanation. In a similar way, we protect our own names from misuse. We have a property right to our names: other people are not allowed to use our names to promote their ends without our agreement. This is why the existence of brand names and the legal right to property established in a brand name are so important in a society, in order to reduce the uncertainty of the future. People can make decisions based on price and name with respect to the quality of the good or the service.

2. *Contracts*

Contracts are a crucial part of this system of economic interdependence. God's goal is greater cooperation among men and a reduction of coercion in economic affairs: peaceful exchange. Peace on earth is a biblical goal. Contracts enable people to specify their own per-

formance more precisely. At least when all parties understand the terms of the contract, contracts reduce the cost of cooperation, and hence increase the quantity of cooperation demanded.

There are always inherent limitations on contracts. One limitation is the difficulty of specifying the conditions of performance. This is why, as societies become more complex, contracts tend to grow longer and in ever-smaller print. Lawyers are the ones today who speak to each other about the nature of the conditions; the actual participants in the contract are rarely able to understand. This has created a new priesthood of lawyers. They speak to each other, and their supposed employers—clients—have to accept on faith what it is that they have just signed.

Language has limitations. Every possible condition cannot be included in a contract; hence, mutual trust is mandatory. This trust can be abused by one party. So can the contract's language. God serves as the final arbitrator in all contracts. He knows each person's intentions.

Another limit on contracts is the existence of clogged civil courts. A contract may specify exactly what the other individual is supposed to do, but if you cannot get that person into court, the contract does you very little good. This is why mutual trust is important. Nevertheless, people who trust each other should still write contracts in order to settle differences later. Even if the two parties presently agreeing to act together do not get involved in a dispute, their heirs may later get involved in a dispute. Still, we cannot expect contractualism to substitute for trust and moral responsibility. We should not expect words apart from intentions to protect us in all situations. We should not trust the letter of the law to protect us from evil intentions and the skilled misuse of language.

3. Mutual Trust

The society in which mutual trust is increasing is more likely to be a productive society. Men seek others who will deal honestly with them.¹³ The cost of policing contracts is reduced as mutual trust increases. This is a form of *self-government* instead of civil government

13. "And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned" (Gen. 21:22–23).

which becomes dominant. We have appeals courts in a society: both church and state. Less pressure is placed on these courts when mutual trust is increasing. This enables a society to achieve its goals with less expenditure than a society in which there is very little mutual trust.

There is another aspect of mutual trust that is important: *historical experience*. When, over a period of time, we have gained the trust of another person, this becomes an asset to us and to him. He has created a mutually beneficial asset. As the record of the participants' past performance becomes available, it makes it less expensive for other individuals to enter into agreements with these individuals.¹⁴ Therefore, a society which has a good record of performance has increased other societies' trust in doing business with it. This is an important aspect of increasing the international division of labor.

E. Trinitarian Social Theory

From an economic standpoint, the problem of the coordination of the economy is an aspect of the more general problem known as the one and the many.¹⁵ Let us first consider the theological origins of this philosophical and organizational problem. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that there are three persons in the Godhead, yet there is only one God. Theologically, there are two concepts of the Trinity, both of which are true. The first is the doctrine of the *ontological* Trinity. This doctrine states that there is an equality of being and glory among all the persons of the Trinity. An implication of this is that there is an equality of knowledge, meaning that each of the persons of the Trinity has exhaustive knowledge of the other two, as well as of the universe.

There is also the doctrine of the *economical* Trinity. This doctrine deals with the relationships established among the three persons of the Trinity. The relationship of God the Father to God the Son is clearly hierarchical. "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Nevertheless, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). Both statements are true. The first relates to the economical Trinity; the second to the ontological Trinity. Each person of the Trinity has separate functions in relationship to each other and to the creation. There is *voluntary coordination* of the activities of three persons of the Trinity in order to

14. A word that increases advertising response is "proven."

15. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007). (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

produce any effect in history. This is why we speak of one God and three persons. So perfect is the coordination process among the three persons of the Trinity that the actions of God are the actions of a single being. With this theological context in mind, let us consider two applications of the doctrine of the Trinity: social theory and economic theory.

There are three (and only three) types of social theory: collectivism, individualism, and covenantalism.¹⁶ These parallel the three types of philosophy: realism, nominalism, and biblical creationism. Trinitarianism proclaims the equal ultimacy of the one and the many. This is not true of either individualism or collectivism.

Individualism. Corresponding to the idea of God as three equal persons rather than as one being is a society based on philosophical individualism. Individualism emphasizes the plans and decisions—economic and political—of responsible moral agents. What individuals do and think in relationship to each other is the starting point of all individualistic or atomistic social thought. The key social idea of individualism is the concept of atomism. The individual is the irreducible social unit. Society is said to have no existence apart from the social atoms that compose it. The social whole cannot be of greater consequence than the sum of its parts. Society is seen as the result of human action but not of human design (Adam Ferguson).¹⁷ The key political doctrine of individualism is the right of voluntary contract, both constitutional and economic. The participating many are sovereign, not the social one.

Collectivism. In contrast to individualism is collectivism. It is an extension of the idea of a purely monotheistic God. Collectivism asserts that the social whole is primary, not the individuals who compose it. The collective entity and its organizational needs are viewed as if the collective entity were a single being, a being represented judicially by specific agents. The key social idea of collectivism is that the social whole is of greater consequence than the sum of its parts. The key political doctrine of collectivism is the subordination of voluntary contracts to the decision of political representatives. The social one is sov-

16. On the three kinds of social theory, see Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 34–37. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

17. F. A. Hayek, “The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design” (1967), reprinted in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), ch. 6.

ereign, not the participating many.¹⁸

Covenantalism. In contrast to both individualism and collectivism is covenantalism. Covenantalism sees society as a collection of individual judicial agents. They have judicial relationships under God. These relationships establish the corporate nature of society. Individualism emphasizes contracts. Collectivism emphasizes organic or biological unity. Covenantalism emphasizes judicial covenants that are established among individuals publicly under God. The difference between covenantalism and its rivals is its emphasis on the Triune God as the initiator of the covenant. It is God who is sovereign, not the individual and not the collective society. God is the ultimate resolution of the one and the many, and therefore society can accurately reflect this resolution only when it is obedient to God and formally covenanted under God.

F. Trinitarian Economic Theory

The problem of the one and the many also manifests itself in economic theory. As in the case of social theory, there are three types of economic theory: individualist, collectivist, and covenantal. The theoretical issues are similar: explaining how the economic decisions of individuals are coordinated with each other. How are economic plans devised and revised?

Individualism. The individual decisions facing men are seen as the foundation of economic theory. This is called microeconomics. The microeconomist begins with the decisions of the individual in a world bounded by economic limits: scarcity. The individual seeks his own benefits. In his economic interaction with others, his motivation is self-interest. He wishes to achieve his ends with a minimal forfeiture of scarce economic resources. He wants to buy low and sell high.

The emphasis of individualistic economic analysis is on the productivity made possible by means of the voluntary agreement or contract. The division of labor increases the wealth of the participants if they are allowed to “truck and barter” with each other. There is no “so-

18. This strict monotheism is the reason why Unitarianism has become politically statist. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams did not follow the logic of their unitarian theology. The political and intellectual influence of Trinitarianism was still too great in their day. This influence began to wane after 1825. Unitarianism proclaims an undifferentiated God who is represented by men who are not totally depraved by nature. It is the religion of humanity. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1965] 2001), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/rjrns>)

cial welfare” in such a view; there is only the welfare of each individual. Economic individualism’s most consistent school of thought is the Austrian school, whose principles were first articulated by Carl Menger in 1871.¹⁹ The Austrian School’s most comprehensive theorist was Ludwig von Mises (1881–1973). Its most famous modern defender was Mises’ disciple, F. A. Hayek (1899–1992).²⁰

Collectivism. In contrast to microeconomic theory is macroeconomic theory. This approach to economic theory argues that the overall operation of the aggregate economy is primary, not the decisions of individuals or firms. These macroeconomic processes have a life of their own beyond the individual decisions of acting men. Not only is the market a force separate from the individuals whose voluntary decisions shape it, the state is a force separate from individuals who provide the state with its legal sovereignty. Both the market and the state are viewed as forces with lives and laws of their own. Scientifically trained state bureaucrats are regarded as competent to give indirect orders to producers by means of monopolistic fiscal and monetary policies. Economic coordination is understood as a top-down process based on coercion: taxation, monetary manipulation, debt (fiscal policy), and regulation.

Covenantalism. This view of economics rests on a concept of God’s absolute sovereignty over creation. It begins with the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of creation. God has established a system of subordinate authority for individuals and institutions. Three institutions are established by covenantal oath, meaning a verbal bond invoking God’s negative sanctions: church, family, and state. The individual and the family are seen as the agents of production. Both church and state must be supported by a small portion of the net productivity of profit-seeking individuals, families, and derivative associations: partnerships, corporations, etc. This places primary earthly authority into the hands of individuals, not institutions. Because of the doctrine of the final judgment, the individual is regarded as the locus of primary earthly authority. Because of the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty—omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence—the results of

19. Carl Menger, *Principles of Economics* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1871] 2007). (<http://bit.ly/Menger>).

20. Gerald P. O’Driscoll, Jr., *Economics As a Coordination Problem: The Contributions of Friedrich A. Hayek* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1977), reprinted by the Liberty Fund. (<http://bit.ly/Odriscoll>). Cf. Eamonn Butler, *Hayek: His Contribution to the Political and Economic Thought of Our Time* (London: Temple Smith, 1983); John Gray, *Hayek on Liberty* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

men's decisions are understood as being under the control of God and subject to his predictable covenantal sanctions in history.

G. Economic Coordination: State or Market?

The fundamental question for humanist economists is this: Which of these two institutions possesses primary sovereignty in the process of economic coordination, the state or the free market?

The microeconomist identifies the free market as the sovereign agency possessing the final say over what gets produced and sold. His faith is in the self-interested individual, who knows his own desires and productive capacities better than any outside observer or enforcer can. Microeconomic analysis lodges responsibility with the individual because he has better knowledge of local (individual) conditions. The profit-seeking entrepreneur is best able to match supply and demand. The impersonal free market is seen as the only morally and politically neutral coordinator, and therefore the only institution worth trusting in man's war to overcome the boundaries imposed by scarcity. The "invisible hand" of the market²¹ is not attached to any self-interested individual. The market is autonomous and therefore far more trustworthy than the state, a monopoly always dominated by special interests.

The macroeconomist insists that the state is the final court of economic appeal. Only if endowed with civil power can an elite planning corps gain access to coercively extracted information: statistics. Only through the use of statistics can central economic planners even pretend to see "the big picture." But given the repeated failure of socialist and Keynesian systems to "deliver the goods"—to match supply with demand—this faith in the state is based on a religious faith that is far more than pragmatism. The collectivist's faith rests on a humanistic version of *cosmic personalism*, with man—elitist, scientific man—as the sovereign agent. The macroeconomist's commitment to a concept of collective representation that is personal rather than impersonal.²²

The macroeconomist's concept of sovereignty is ultimately judicial rather than pragmatic. The voters have voted for the state's representatives, and therefore these representatives supposedly possess greater legal authority than anyone in the free market. These political repres-

21. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 423.

22. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A: "From Cosmic Personalism to Humanistic Sovereignty."

entatives can then hire scientific economists who somehow can see “the whole picture,” as well as respond to it, apart from self-interest. The free market can often fail as a system, the collectivist says, despite the desires and plans of acting individuals. The state must rectify these failures. In short, the market process is seen as unable to harmonize the conflicting plans of acting men. The market’s process of coordination is imperfect, according to the macroeconomist. The underlying premise of the macroeconomist is that the state—i.e., politicians and tenured bureaucrats—must intervene to take coercive actions that will offset the evils and inefficiencies of contractualism. Without state intervention, the collectivist assures us, the free market economy will eventually collapse. Marxism and socialism emphasize macroeconomics. So does Keynesianism.

What the macroeconomist says is that officials of the state can see “the big picture” better than individual market participants can. These state officials supposedly represent the true needs of the political majority better than the market does. These representatives are supposedly capable of rising above their own self-interest. They are also capable of designing and implementing positive and negative sanctions that can motivate producers to meet the true needs of a majority of the population—“true needs” being defined by the politicians and the bureaucrats. There is little awareness of the self-interest of the state’s employees in pursuing their goals through the application of state power.²³

H. Economic Coordination: Covenantal

The individualist says that the best economy is the result of human action but not of human design. The collectivist says that any economy that is the exclusive result of human action but not of human design is an imperfect economy. It needs the coercive power of the state to right wrongs, correct imbalances, and achieve high employment and sustained economic growth without inflation.

The covenantalist insists that the economy is the result of God’s

23. On personal self-interest in the decisions of politicians and bureaucrats, see the literature produced by the “public choice” school of economists, most notably James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock (who is not a degree-holding economist). Buchanan and Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962); Buchanan, *The Limits of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). Buchanan won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1986; Tullock, never having taken a course in economics, did not.

absolute sovereignty through delegated authority. The economy is designed by God. When the human actions of large numbers of the members of society conform to His law, the general economic results will be good, conforming to God's promises (Lev. 26:4–5, 9–10). When men's actions are rebellious, the economic results will be bad (Lev. 25:20, 22, 26). The collective results are determined by God's responses to widespread covenantal faithfulness or rebellion.

This means that there is an all-seeing, omnipotent agent who oversees the “big picture.” He does not require or even permit men to usurp His role as overseer. He delegates to individuals the responsibility of planning for the future. He delegates to individuals the authority to bring evil-doers to the attention of civil magistrates. He relies on the individual's self-interest in both cases: the entrepreneur's quest for profit²⁴ and the victim's quest for restitution.²⁵

This system rests on the concept of the honest word: the producer's promise to buy, the seller's promise to sell, and the oath-bound witness' promise to tell the truth to the court. It also rests on the idea of God's predictable corporate sanctions in history: economic, military, and biological-medical.²⁶ God takes care of the “big picture”; He delegates to individuals and voluntary associations the responsibility of administering the “local picture.” This is the biblical doctrine of responsible (hierarchical) stewardship, which is always accompanied by the covenantal doctrines of law, judgment, and inheritance. This worldview is utterly foreign to the economists, whether individualistic or collectivist. It is far too cosmically personal for them.

I. Economic Representation

This debate is inescapably a debate over the nature of legitimate representation. The humanistic microeconomist says that the market process is generally the most reliable representative of the people—an impersonal force that is the product of millions of individual economic decisions. The Keynesian macroeconomist says that the state is needed to complement the market by offsetting the market process in selected

24. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>); Israel M. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

25. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33. See also Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

26. In Old Covenant Israel, there was another sanctioning agency: the land itself, i.e., the environment. See Chapter 10.

cases. The state is supposedly *a personal, caring* force that protects the weak while simultaneously increasing the wealth of the vast majority of people.²⁷ Both systems recognize the inescapability of economic representation.

So does covenantal economics. The representative of the people is God Himself: Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God. This cosmic agent of both God and man has announced His laws in the Bible. He has also designated earthly representatives of His three covenantal law courts: church, family, and state. The covenantal alternative to both individualism and collectivism is a system of economics that begins with the stipulations of biblical law. There was no covenantal “school of economic thought” in the twentieth century. The triumph of secular humanism in economics is total. It has been ever since the seventeenth century. In fact, the very origins of the modern science of economics was grounded in a self-conscious attempt to replace all theological and even moral opinion by the categories of neutral reason.²⁸

Covenantal economics asserts the existence of an original natural harmony of economic interests, but only in the garden of Eden. Since the fall of man, there has not been a harmony of interests. *There can be no permanent harmony of interests between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers.* There can, however, be temporary cooperation in history based on mutual self-interest. The tares are not uprooted in history; neither is the wheat (Matt. 13:18–23, 36–43).²⁹ Their cooperation is based either on the willingness of the wheat to abide by the stipulations that are established by the tares or on the willingness of the tares to abide by the stipulations established by the wheat: biblical law. It cannot be based on neutral civil law, since there is no neutral law. There is no neutrality. There is only covenant-breaking and covenant-keeping.

Conclusion

The prohibition against theft and false dealing is here linked to the prohibition against profaning God’s name. This points to the parallel

27. This assertion regarding socialism is no longer taken seriously except by college professors in the West. The Keynesian version—meaning its rhetoric of state aid and legitimate representation—is still believed by a majority of voters.

28. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1963).

29. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

between the eighth commandment against theft and the third commandment against taking God's name in vain. The issue in the third commandment is misusing God's name in a formal oath. The issue here is lying. Swearing by God's holy name is prohibited; therefore, so is false dealing and lying.

Men must not deal falsely with each other. In economics, such a law increases the possibilities for cooperation. The division of labor and the specialization of production make possible greater output per unit of resource input. Honest dealing enables men to increase their productivity and their wealth.

"A man's word is his bond." This phrase points to the covenantal grounding of society: a legal bond between God and man, and among God and men, based on a self-maledictory oath. A contract is analogous to a covenant. Men may not use God's name in vain, so they may not swear by God in a contract. But there is an element of self-malediction: the contracting parties agree to submit themselves to an arbitrator or a civil magistrate when signing the contract.

Because of promises, men can cooperate with each other over time. The future becomes less uncertain because of the existence of promises. Thus, if we wish to overcome the economic uncertainties of life, we can enter into agreements with others. But each party to the agreement must deal honestly with the others; otherwise, men's plans regarding the future are undermined by the non-performance of others. The coordination of men's plans then becomes disrupted.

The West has generally been faithful to this law. The result has been the proliferation of contracts, culminating in the highly organized securities markets. These markets have led to a vast increase of wealth in the West. Men have been able to pool their assets, making possible the capitalization of present goods. Capitalization involves placing a present price on an expected future stream of income. If all men were liars all of the time, such capital formation would be impossible.

Because God has delegated authority and responsibility to men, they can cooperate. His system of hierarchical authority is a bottom-up system: men are free to do anything not specifically prohibited. Court systems settle disputes between individuals. This is the structural foundation of a free market economy: local responsibility, voluntary cooperation, and hierarchical judgments after the fact. This is the opposite of bureaucracy: a top-down system of controls in which a central planning agency announces goals and standards, modifies

them repeatedly, and then evaluates the performance of subordinates in terms of the previous announcements. If all men were liars most of the time, bureaucracy is the system mankind would be stuck with. It is Satan's system, for he deals with liars. Therefore, when society is marked by widespread lying and fraud, it will either move toward autarky or toward bureaucratic centralization. Productivity suffers.

13

PROTECTING THE WEAKEST PARTY

Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:13–14).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is two-fold. First, God pays us what He has agreed to pay us, and He pays us on time; therefore, so should His people. Second, God protects those who cannot protect themselves; therefore, so should His people. This has to do with sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

This is a single law, yet it has two parts. The two parts condemn three crimes: fraud, robbery, and the withholding of wages. The two parts are judicially and economically linked. The links between them are two-fold: (1) God's desire to protect the weakest members of society; (2) God's establishment of rules to overcome the inherent limits on men's knowledge, especially limits on judges' knowledge.

This raises an important judicial question. If we are to defend the deaf and the blind because they cannot defend themselves, isn't this a violation of the fundamental judicial principle of Leviticus 19:15, namely, that God does not respect persons? On the contrary, this case law affirms that the deaf and the blind are entitled to the same protection from cursing and tripping that anyone is. But because they cannot bring a lawsuit on their own behalf, a righteous person must do it for them. This upholds the universal authority of God's law.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Part 1: Withholding Wages

The previous section of Leviticus 19 deals with theft through fraud: the deliberately deceptive use of words (vv. 11–12).² The first half of verse 13 repeats this warning. The second half adds another form of fraudulent wealth transfer: the withholding of a worker's wages overnight. This act is specified as fraud, and it is also specified as robbery. The question is: Why? If the worker agrees in advance to wait longer than a day for his pay, why should the law of God prohibit the arrangement? Or does it?

It is always helpful in understanding a case law if we can first identify the theocentric principle that undergirds it. Verse 13 deals with paying a debt. The employer-employee relationship reflects God's relationship to man. God provides us with an arena: life and capital. Similarly, the employer supplies an employee with capital that makes the employee more productive. Man is dependent on God. Similarly, the laborer has worked for a full day; the employer is required to pay to him at the end of the work day. The context is clear: *rapid payment for services received*. God employs us as His stewards. He gives us the tools that we need to serve Him and thereby serve ourselves. He always pays us on time. So should the employer.

The employer who withholds wages from his employees is making a symbolic statement about God's relationship to man: God supposedly delays paying man what is rightfully owed to him. This symbolism is incorrect. It testifies falsely about God's character. This case law makes it plain that the employer owes payment before the sun goes down, a reference back to the creation: the division of day and night (Gen. 1:3–5; cf. Matt. 20:8).

God delays settling all accounts with mankind until the end of man's week in history, the final Day of the Lord.³ Man is *definitively* in debt to God, for God did not slay Adam on the day of transgression. Man is *progressively* in debt to God, for God has given to man far more than man has given God.

God's refusal to settle accounts with men in this life is testimony of His grace to each man—an undeserved extension of credit—and also of a final judgment to come. Man is *finally* in debt to God. God graciously gives gifts to all men until the day of judgment: common grace

2. Chapter 12.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five press, [1982] 2012), ch. 6.

to all and special grace to His elect.⁴ So, by implication, it is legitimate for an employer to pay his workers in advance, for this testifies to the true debt relationship of man to God. Man, the employee, owes much to God, the employer, who has advanced wages to man so that man may work out his salvation or damnation in fear and trembling. *This grace on God's part places mankind increasingly in God's debt*—a debt that is growing ever larger as time extends and God's common grace compounds. If men do not repent, there will be hell to pay, i.e., there will be God to pay in the ultimate debtor's prison (Matt. 18:34).⁵

A. A Position of Weakness

The wage earner in verse 13 is in a position of comparative weakness. He is assumed by God to be in a weaker economic position than the individual who is paying his wages. This employer-employee relationship reflects God's supremacy as the sovereign employer and man's subordination as a dependent employee.

If the wage earner is not paid immediately, then he is being asked by the employer to extend credit to the employer. The employer gains a benefit—the value of the labor services performed—without having to pay for this benefit at the end of the work day. The Bible allows this extension of such credit during daylight hours, but not overnight⁶ This law teaches that the weaker party should not be forced as part of his terms of employment to extend credit to the stronger party. God acknowledges that there are differences in bargaining power and bargaining skills, and He intervenes here to protect the weaker party. This is one of the rare cases in Scripture where God does prohibit a voluntary economic contract.

What if the worker says that he is willing to wait for his pay if he is given an extra payment at the end of the period to compensate him for the time value of his money (i.e., interest)? This would be an unusual transaction. The extra money earned from two weeks of interest would be minimal in comparison to the amount of the wage. In any case, to abide by the terms of this law, such a voluntary agreement would have to be *a legal transaction publicly separate from wage earning as such*.

4. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

6. By implication, the night laborer is under the same protection: he must be paid before the sun rises. The idea is that he must be paid by the end of the work day.

There would have to be a public record of its conditions. It would constitute an investment by the worker. But the worker would have to pay his tithe and taxes on this money before he could legally lend it to the employer. There is no biblical law that prohibits a poor man from earning interest on his money. Usury is defined as the taking of interest from a poor man who has requested a zero-interest charitable loan.⁷ Usury is not the same as an interest-paying loan to a rich man from a poor man who wants to make some extra money.

The law here specifies that an employer who hires an individual to work for a period of time has to have the money available to pay that individual on a daily basis at the end of each work day. This is the employer's standard requirement. There would be no confusion about this in a Christian covenanted society. There is no doubt that in the modern world, such an arrangement is not economically efficient. Checks must be written, checks must be delivered to individuals, account books must be kept, and so forth. If this had to be done daily, it would add to the expense of running a firm.⁸ The larger the firm, the more difficult such an arrangement would be. Nevertheless, the employer is required by God to abide by this law. The question is: Can he lawfully substitute a more convenient payment scheme and still meet the requirements of this law?

B. Debt and Credit: Inescapable Concepts

If the employer decides that it is too much trouble to pay each worker at the end of each work day, he must advance the funds for the period of employment prior to the next payday. Thus, if the average period of employment between paydays is two weeks, the employer must bear the risk of paying an individual for work not yet received. The employer must extend credit to the worker. This is another way of saying that *the worker must assume a debt obligation*: two weeks of agreed-upon labor services.

Payments for a stream of continuous services cannot be simultan-

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012) Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

8. In the final stages of the German inflation in 1923, workers were sometimes paid cash in the morning. Wives would accompany them to work, take the cash, and rush to spend it on anything tangible before it depreciated during the day. This inflation devastated workers and employers alike. On the daily payment of wages in the second half of 1923, see Adam Fergusson, *When Money Dies: The Nightmare of the Weimar Collapse* (London: William Kimber, 1975), pp. 149, 191. (<http://bit.ly/WhenMoneyDies>)

eous, although this limitation will change when the use of electronic cash becomes widespread.⁹ Therefore, one of the two parties in this transaction must go into debt in this system, while the other must extend credit. *There is no escape from debt and credit without the technology of continuous payments.* What this law authorizes is an extension of credit by the worker to the employer for a maximum of one work day. At the end of the work day, the account must be settled; credit is no longer extended by the worker, so he receives his day's wage.

What if the transaction is different? What if the worker is paid in advance for a week or two of labor? He then necessarily becomes a debtor to the employer. He is required to deliver the work that he has been paid to perform. This places the worker in a debt position, but it is not a long-term debt. It is not considered a form of slavery, but there is no doubt that the worker has voluntarily accepted payment in advance, and this creates an obligation on his part. This debt position is limited, however. The law's presumption is that the employer is not going to pay a person in advance for months of work except in very rare circumstances.¹⁰

It is clear that debt and credit are inevitable in an economy that is based on the division of labor. One party must extend credit to the other for some period of time. The other party therefore must become a debtor. The period of the debt in a labor contract may be brief, but it does exist. The inescapable questions are: (1) who will be the creditor, (2) who will be the debtor, and (3) for how long a period of time? *The idea of a debt-free economy is utterly utopian.* It is not economically possible to establish such an economy unless payments are simultaneous, moment by moment.¹¹ Such a payment system is too expensive

9. It is technically possible to deposit money electronically into a worker's account on a moment-by-moment basis, just as it is possible for him to spend it on the same basis, but the cost of doing so is too high to make it feasible. This cost constraint will probably change in the near future as computer technology and the cost of using computer networks both decrease. Kevin Kelly, "Cypherpunks, E-money, and the Techniques of Disconnection," *Whole Earth Review* (Summer 1993).

10. One of these circumstances is found in the book publishing industry. An individual is sometimes paid in advance to write a book manuscript. This is one of the highest-risk transactions in the business world. The best way to keep an author from finishing a manuscript is to pay him in advance. As a publisher, I learned this lesson after much experience.

11. I am reminded of the scene in the film *America, America*, where the suspicious Greek buys passage on a ship to the United States. He holds out his money to the ticket salesman behind the counter, but he refuses to release his grip until the salesman places the ticket in his other hand. They let go simultaneously.

for any organization to establish today. It would destroy the labor market if it were required by law.

The Bible teaches that we are not to become indebted to others: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8).¹² This must not be interpreted in an absolutist fashion. We know this because every person is in debt to God, and also to the perfect man, Jesus Christ, as a result of Christ’s atoning work at Calvary.¹³ This rule of debt-free living should be interpreted in a non-utopian sense. It means that *we are to avoid debt contracts that threaten our continuing legal status as free men*. It does not mean that we are to become hermits who separate ourselves from a division-of-labor economy. (It surely does not mean that we are required to become household slaves.)¹⁴ Free men in Mosaic Israel were those who had not been sold into slavery to repay a debt. Free men had an inheritance in the land. This means that large debts today should be collateralized, e.g., a mortgage. A man can lose his home if he defaults on the mortgage, but he does not lose his freedom. The creditor reclaims the collateral rather than placing the debtor in bondage or selling him into bondage.

The restraining factor against the extension of too much credit by the stronger party is the employer’s fear that the worker will either quit before his term of service ends or else not produce competent work. It is too expensive for the employer to sue the average worker for damages; court expenses plus his own time in court exceed the money owed.¹⁵ The economic judgment of the employer is the re-

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 12.

13. This debt always involves common grace; sometimes it also involves special grace. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, *op. cit.*

14. A Christian perfectionist, as a result of reading tracts against fractional reserve banking, once offered me the opportunity to hire him as a permanent indentured servant if I would agree to feed, clothe, and house him on a zero-cash basis. He recognized that Federal Reserve Notes and checking accounts are both money and debt instruments, and he wanted to be totally separated from any contact with either cash or checks. He felt too guilty to continue as a free man. He was willing to become a household slave to someone who was not equally concerned morally about using Federal Reserve Notes or checking accounts, and who would pay him in kind (i.e., goods). In short, he was willing to subordinate himself for life to someone whom he perceived as not being equally moral, so that he himself could live in technical moral purity. He wanted a protective boundary around him, and he was willing to give up his freedom to attain this. But this brought him into conflict with Paul’s injunction to indentured servants to take freedom whenever it is offered (I Cor. 7:21).

15. God does sue workers who default on His advance payments. Some are sued in

straining factor. He suspects that he will not be repaid if he extends too much credit. Nevertheless, there is no biblical law that says that the employer must not extend credit in the form of wages paid in advance. He has to make the decision whether it is worth the risk to do this, given the organizational difficulties of making payments at the end of every work day.

What this text does specify is that the *worker* must not be asked to work for a week or two in order to receive his wage. There is always a risk of default on the part of the debtor, whether he is the employer or the worker. This law specifies that the risk of default for this form of debt beyond one work day must be born by the employer, not by the worker.

The employer must not become a thief by withholding anyone's wages. By forcing the employer to make restitution to his employed workers who had seen their wages withheld, the law reduces the amount of oppression of those unseen by the judges: future workers who are too weak even to compete for the delayed-payment job.

C. Worker vs. Worker

There are some workers who might be willing to work for a period longer than a day before receiving their pay. In a modern capitalist economy, this procedure is accepted by all concerned, since it is the policy of most employers to offer severance pay to dismissed workers.¹⁶ The worker who plans to quit usually informs his employer of the fact that he will soon be leaving. The employer knows that the worker may become somewhat distracted in the final days of employment. The employer may decide to allow the worker to take his paid vacation at the end of his term of employment. So, the modern worker is paid by the employer for services not rendered when he leaves the job, not at the beginning of the term of employment. At the beginning of the contractual relationship, the modern worker renders services to the employer for which he is not paid at the end of the work day. This practice is what the Bible prohibits.

history; all are sued on the day of judgment. Court costs are irrelevant to God.

16. There are also state-run compulsory programs of workers' compensation; any worker who is fired can receive payments from the state. Employers are required to pay taxes into these insurance funds. This is a morally corrupt system that penalizes employers who want to fire inefficient workers in order to improve customer service and/or increase profits that can be used to reward its investors. It also subsidizes unemployed workers to stay out of work until the benefits run out.

In a poor nation, which the whole world was until the nineteenth century, an offer to accept delayed payment would have given these capital-owning workers a competitive advantage over destitute workers who needed payment immediately. This law establishes that competition among workers must not involve the employer's acceptance of such an offer by any worker. The biblical standard of payment is specified: payment at the end of the day. There may be payment in advance but not delayed payment, unless there is an interest-paying savings plan involved, as mentioned earlier.

Where this law is enforced, destitute workers in the community are not replaced in the labor force by less destitute workers who can afford to forego immediate payment. All workers are to be allowed to compete for jobs, irrespective of any worker's possession of reserves sufficient to tide him over until the next payday. So, one idea behind this law is to make job opportunities available to the destitute workers in the community. Everyone who is physically able to work is to be allowed to compete for a job on a basis independent of his asset reserves. *The destitute man's poverty is not to become the basis of his exclusion from the labor market.* His competitors are not allowed to use their ability to extend credit to an employer as a way to offset his only assets: his willingness and ability to work.

It should be clear that this law is far more applicable to a poor society than to a modern capitalist one. Very few people in a modern capitalist society are so poor that they cannot wait for a paycheck in two weeks. But the principle should still be honored. It is unfair for an employer to force workers to extend him credit as the price of getting that first job assignment. To do so is to offer the robber's option: "Your money or the job!"

This law prohibits robbery: by the employer and also by the employer's accomplice, i.e., the worker who can afford to accept a delayed-payment contract, thereby excluding the poorest workers from the labor market.

D. A Case of Theft and Indirect, Non-Criminal Oppression

Whenever we analyze a voluntary contract from the point of view of the ethical question of "oppressor and oppressed," we need to ask the economic question: *Who wins and who loses?* Few moral analysts have had training in economic analysis. This is why they often miss the

point. They incorrectly identify the oppressors and the oppressed.

This law prohibits two parties from profiting from delayed payment: the employer and the worker who possesses sufficient assets to survive a delay in payment. Why does the employer delay payment? One reason is that he seeks to avoid risk. He wants to be able to fire the worker without losing the value of the labor that the worker still owes him because of the money that he paid the worker in advance. God grants the employer the legal right to avoid this risk of default, but only if he pays wages daily. The employer may lawfully assess the worker's net productivity, day by day. If the worker is producing unacceptably low output, the employer does not have to hire him the next day. The worker's contract is good for only one day or less, depending on what he agreed to in advance. But when the employer seeks to retain the worker for a longer period than one work day, he must pay the worker in advance. This is what God's law teaches.

1. The Weaker Party

The worker needs protection. An employer might hire him for a period and then dismiss him without pay. Jacob's complaint against Laban was that Laban had changed his wages repeatedly, meaning retroactively (Gen. 31:7). To protect the worker from this sort of robbery, the Bible requires the employer to bear the risk of longer-term default. He bears the risk that the worker may turn out to be inefficient and will have to be fired before he has fulfilled his contract. The worker may even cheat the employer by walking off the job before his term of employment is over. That is the employer's problem. He can minimize this risk by paying workers at the end of each day. In doing so, he does not allow them to become indebted to him. If he chooses to have more infrequent pay periods, then he must bear the risk of paying people in advance who turn out to be inefficient or corrupt workers.

There are workers who are willing and able to bear the risk that they will be cheated by an employer. They will accept delayed wage payments. If there were not such workers, this law would not be necessary. The employer could not rationally expect to be able to pass on this risk of hiring people to the people being hired unless he believed that there were workers who were willing to accept a delayed payment work contract. We know that such workers exist by the millions today. They have always existed.

This case law prohibits such an arrangement, whether initiated by

an employer or a worker. The law specifies in advance exactly what each worker should expect: payment at the end of the work day. *This law discriminates against all those workers who are willing and able to compete against other workers by accepting delayed wages.* It is not simply a law against the robbery of destitute workers by employers; it is also a law against the indirect, non-criminal oppression of destitute workers by other workers.

2. The Weakest Party

It is not immediately apparent that this law deals with the robbery of the poor by the somewhat less poor. This law seems to have only the employer in mind as the agent of theft. But the employer cannot act alone in this act of theft. He needs accomplices, even if they are unaware of their economic status as accomplices. An employer who wants to discriminate against destitute workers in this way cannot do so without the voluntary cooperation of other workers. He cannot hire people to work without daily wage payments unless some workers are willing to work on these terms.

The text identifies this practice as illegal, but it is not merely the robbery of those workers who voluntarily agree to accept the terms of the contract; it is also the oppression of those workers who cannot afford to offer their labor services on these terms. It is above all the oppression of those who are *excluded* from the employer's work force, not those who are included. But it requires some knowledge of basic economics to discover this fact. This law's protection of the destitute worker's ability to bid for jobs is implicit in the text, not explicit.

On what legal basis does this law apply to the free market? Why should a voluntary contract—delayed payment—be prohibited by civil law? What makes the practice of delaying payment judicially unique, and therefore legitimately subject to interference by the civil government?

3. The Priestly Factor

It is the vulnerability of the weakest seller of labor that makes this law necessary. God imposes this law because of what I call the priestly factor in free market pricing. This factor is seldom if ever discussed by free market economists. When human life is at stake—beyond the modern economic principle of marginalism—unrestricted free market competition is in some instances not morally valid. All real-world soci-

eties recognize this fact, but free market economists rarely do, since they are committed to a hypothetically value-free (ethically neutral) analysis.

Here is an example of priestly pricing: a physician who bargains sharply with a seriously injured man at the scene of an accident. He cannot lawfully charge “all the traffic will bear” under such conditions. He is not allowed to charge significantly more than what is customary for treating that kind of injury in cases where the patient can be taken to any of several emergency treatment facilities. If he does drastically overcharge the victim, a civil court will not enforce the contract. The medical profession has ethical rules against such uninhibited pricing practices. Most people, unlike trained economists, have at least a vague understanding that human life, like eternal salvation, is not to be sold to a dying man on the basis of the free market’s familiar auction principle of “high bid wins” unless there is sufficient time for the injured person to seek a second opinion and negotiate a second price quote.¹⁷

The law against delaying the payment of wages is an application of the ethics of priestly pricing. A destitute worker is not to be excluded from any labor market by an employer’s policy of delaying payment. Delayed payment is a policy of excluding workers.

Why would an employer want to exclude workers from bidding for a job, i.e., lowering his labor costs? Normally, he would not want to exclude them, but it takes considerable familiarity with economics to understand why this policy discriminates against destitute workers. This law prohibits such a practice. God expects men to obey His law even when they do not understand all of its ramifications. Obedience is primary, not intellectual understanding. Men are to show good faith to

17. Priestly pricing is based on ability to pay, e.g., the tithe. Economists call this practice price discrimination: one monetary price charged to members of one group; another price charged to members of a different group. The economist’s standard explanation for this phenomenon is that there are government-imposed barriers to entry, e.g., licensing. The classic presentation of this view is Reuben A. Kessel, “Price Discrimination in Medicine,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, I (Oct. 1958). I wrote to Kessel in the mid-1970s and suggested the priestly role of physicians as another factor in price discrimination. He wrote back politely and said this had never occurred to him. He did not say that he thought I had discovered anything significant.

A legitimate question is this one: Why do civil governments create such barriers to entry? The political self-interest of the legislators is not the only possible explanation. Legislators and judges seem to recognize the priestly role of physicians. Some kinds of voluntary but life-and-death contracts are not enforceable in the courts, and should not be.

God by obeying God's law as best they can, so that He will reward them. One of these rewards is greater understanding, thereby enabling men to obey God even better.

E. Competition: Discrimination = Exclusion

This law does not prohibit other forms of competition among workers. It prohibits only this one, which reflects the character of God in his gracious dealings with men in history. There is no law in the Bible against one worker's willingness and ability to offer to work for less per day or less per hour than another worker presently does. Any offer to serve another person on terms that are better for him than the terms presently being offered is an offer to *discriminate*: an act of *exclusion*. The offer discriminates against the person who has previously benefitted from the arrangement under the existing terms. The right¹⁸ to make a better offer is inherent in the biblical requirement that we become more profitable servants. This right is basic to human freedom. It is also basic to economic growth and advancement.

1. *The Economics of Persuasion*

We never know all of the available alternatives in life. We learn about better ways of achieving our goals through better offers that are made to us. We frequently need to be persuaded to do the wise thing. Wisdom is not automatic. Neither is accurate knowledge automatically acted upon.¹⁹ This is an epistemological application of Paul's ethical principle that knowing the good is not the same as doing it: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). This is why advertising must be persuasive; in fact, persuasiveness is more important for successful advertising than conveying technically accurate information.²⁰ People seek persuasion. They are willing to pay for it.

There is market competition for accurate information and for effective persuasion (i.e., motivation). Neither information nor persuasion is a free good. Both parties to a voluntary transaction are buyers of both information and persuasion. While we do not normally think

18. By "right," I mean "immunity from legal challenge."

19. Israel M. Kirzner, *Perception, Opportunity, and Profit: Studies in the Theory of Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), ch. 9.

20. Israel M. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 159–63.

of persuasion as something that buyers purchase, it must be purchased. We reward those who provide it by buying whatever it is they are selling. Advertisers pay for specialized courses on how to become more persuasive.²¹ Consumers act when they are persuaded to act. This indicates that they want to be persuaded to take action. Their spending patterns reflect this desire on their part. Advertisers therefore respond accordingly: they adopt techniques of persuasion—what scholars have for millennia called *rhetoric*. Persuasion is not a free good. It must be paid for by those consumers who want it.

The structure of competition for information and persuasion is no different from any other form of market competition: *buyers vs. buyers* and *sellers vs. sellers*. A person who thinks he can sell me an alternative approach to solving my problem comes to me and says, in effect: “Include me in your production process. Exclude someone else. I have discovered a better way.” *The offer to include him is inevitably an offer to exclude his competitors*. There can be no possibility of inclusion inside a boundary without the possibility of exclusion; otherwise, there would be no boundary.

2. Competition Without Oppression

This should alert us to a biblical fact of economic life: *economic oppression* is in fact a form of *discrimination*. Economic oppression can also be used as a means of *competition*. Most forms of discrimination are morally valid and legal.²² Therefore, so are most forms of competition.

This case is an exception. Why does God prohibit this form of competition among workers? I think it must be the *all-or-nothing* aspect of this form of competition. An excluded worker may be too destitute to survive easily without pay. He is at the bottom of the barrel

21. The components of a direct-marketing advertisement are the same as the components of biblical hermeneutics and the medieval trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. The ad must have a promise (grammar), proof (logic), and persuasion (rhetoric). In 1992, I presented this thesis before two conferences on direct-marketing techniques, and the professionals in attendance told me that they agree with my analysis. Biblical hermeneutics employs the same methodology: grammatico-historical (grammar), theology (logic), and symbol (rhetoric). I presented this thesis at the Colleyville Presbyterian Church, Colleyville, Texas, on June 29, 1992. On the medieval trivium, see Dorothy Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning” (1947): <http://bit.ly/SayersTools>.

22. Economist Walter Williams said that when he married his wife, he discriminated against all other single women. He was not so naïve as to say that he thereby oppressed all other single women.

financially. He might be able to work for a bit less money per day, but he cannot afford to work for nothing for several days or weeks. He is in a desperate situation, so God intervenes and gives him what he needs to compete: *time*. His skills are not to be removed permanently from the marketplace just because he is too destitute to accept a job that delays payment for work completed beyond one work day.

The Bible correctly assumes that the employer is in a stronger bargaining position than the destitute employee in the community. God's law therefore places limits on the time that the employer can withhold the wages of the employee. It says specifically that withholding wages beyond the end of the work day constitutes oppression. God establishes this formal standard, and Christians should acknowledge its existence and obey it. *There are biblical judicial limits on voluntarism*. This fact does not constitute a legitimizing of an open-ended socialism, including some modernized version of medieval guild socialism. Biblical law, not socialist slogans, is the source of our knowledge of such limits on voluntary exchange. No employment contract contrary to this law is legal in God's eyes. The civil laws of every nation should prohibit such delays in the payment of wages.

F. Bargainers: Strong, Weak, and Weakest

Because so few people are trained to think economically, they do not perceive the “things hidden”: in this case, the identification of the primary victim and the primary beneficiary of this prohibited labor contract. We need to think through the effects of such a contract by means of “Levitical” reasoning, meaning *boundary* reasoning: inclusion and exclusion. The traditional pair of questions posed by economists —“Who wins?” and “Who loses?”—becomes: “Who is included?” and “Who is excluded?”

In the absence of this law, there is an implied threat to the potential worker who is unwilling or unable to extend this credit. If he refuses to extend credit to the employer, he will not get the job. This is a major threat. By contrast, the employer suffers very little by paying wages in advance. He loses a small interest return on his money. This interest *presumably* is not worth a great deal to him, especially if he is a small-scale employer, which most employers in history are.

Why only *presumably*? Because of an inescapable epistemological limit on economic science. Technically, the economist cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, so he cannot say scien-

tifically that the employer's gain is psychologically smaller than the worker's loss. The psychological loss or gain of the two individuals cannot be computed. There is no scientific way to measure the psychological loss to the worker of forfeiting the interest by extending credit, nor is there a way to compute the psychological loss to the employer if he is required by law to forfeit the interest by extending credit.²³ It is not necessary for us to make such a numerical computation; we can still identify the primary victim and the primary beneficiary whenever this law is violated.

We need to consider three parties in our economic analysis: the employer, the employed worker, and the excluded worker. The text does not speak of the excluded worker, nor is the average Bible commentator likely to consider him, but he is crucial to the analysis. A less destitute worker may decide to accept the terms of employment: delayed payment. A destitute worker cannot afford to accept it. *The excluded worker becomes the primary victim of a delayed-wages contract.* He cannot afford to take the job. The less destitute worker takes the job. He would of course rather be paid early, but his willingness to accept delayed payment is a form of competition on his part that gives him an advantage over very poor people in the community. The Bible calls this form of competition *oppression*.

The primary economic beneficiary of this form of oppression is not the employer, for whom the interest gained by delaying payment is minimal, but rather the worker who can afford to have his wages delayed, and who therefore gets the job. He excludes his competition through oppression. *The employer here acts as the economic agent of the employed worker.* This representational relationship is not readily understood. No one without economic training will blame the employed worker for the unemployment of the destitute worker. If anyone is blamed, it will be the employer. The employer *is* to blame, judicially speaking, for he imposes the illegal terms of employment, which this law identifies as robbery. God's law designates the employer as the initiator of an evil contract, and hence *judicially liable*, as we shall see. The fact remains, however, that the worker who takes the job on these terms becomes the agent of economic oppression, while the excluded worker is the primary economic victim. The employer gains a small interest return and a small risk-avoidance return. The worker gains the

23. On the question of interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, see North, *Dominion Covenant*, ch. 4. Cf. Gary North, *The Coase Theorem: A Study in Epistemology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992).

promise of a wage, bears some risk of not being paid, and forfeits a small interest payment. The excluded worker, too poor to accept the contract, gains nothing. The person who appears to be the victim—the worker who takes the job—is in fact the primary economic beneficiary of this labor contract. He obtains what both of the competing workers had wanted: the job.

G. What Did the Employer Steal?

The appropriate civil sanction is not specified, as is also the case in other laws governing oppression. But in most other cases, the absence of any civil sanction points to the absence of civil jurisdiction because of excessive limits on the judges' knowledge. Not so in this instance. Restitution in this case is technically possible to compute. If victims prosecute and the courts convict, the practice will disappear from public view.

The primary judicial question is: How much does the convicted employer owe the victim? Answer: the victim's costs of prosecution plus the restitution penalty.²⁴ There are two approaches to establishing what restitution payment is owed by the employer: (1) by considering the forfeited interest; (2) by considering the forfeited daily wage. I believe the second approach is valid. We must examine the first approach in detail in order to see why it is not valid. The key question that we need to answer is this: What constitutes the thing stolen? Is it the interest or the wage?

1. Interest

A withheld wage requires a worker to extend credit to his employer. For a week or two, or perhaps even a month, the worker has extended credit, day by day, to the person employing him. The employee has therefore forfeited the interest that he might have earned day by day, had he been able to put this money in the bank rather than spending it on necessities. It is obvious that the interest payments foregone would not be very much money; nevertheless, it is possible to compute what double restitution of that forfeited interest would be. However, only a very skilled person could have made this computation prior to the widespread knowledge of mathematics.²⁵ The average employer

24. If the victim's court costs are not paid by the convicted criminal, very few victims will be able to sue, so the practice of discrimination will not be reduced.

25. Consider how difficult this would be apart from the use of the zero (a decimal

could not have computed this payment easily in Moses' time, let alone the average employee.

The cost to the worker of this forfeited interest would be higher to him than the cost to the employer. I am speaking here of the actual rate of interest, not psychological cost. The worker has to forfeit goods that the wages would have bought in the interim. There is no doubt that a modern worker can borrow the money to buy these goods, repaying the loan at the end of the working period. (Prior to World War I, small consumer loans from banks were unavailable to workers.) The difficulty is, a worker is not in a position to borrow money at the same low rate of interest that the employer can obtain. The poverty-stricken worker is a high-risk borrower. He can easily be trapped in a cycle of debt. When this law is honored, an employer has greater difficulty in forcing the employee into debt servitude.

Computing the forfeited interest would be difficult even today. In Moses' day, it would have been very difficult. How many judges would have been able to establish this implied forfeited payment? Not many. So, we must look for a better solution. We must turn from the technical economic concept of forfeited interest to the concept of forfeited wages.

2. *Wages*

It is not implied in the text that double restitution of the forfeited interest should be paid, since this is not what is specified as the thing stolen. In fact, the text does not specify the thing stolen. What *is* identified in the text as an act of theft is the refusal of the employer to pay the agreed-upon wages in a timely manner. We conclude that *the withheld wage is the thing stolen*. Thus, a civil judge can rightfully impose a much higher penalty on the employer than double the employer's forfeited interest. The thief would not simply pay double restitution on the forfeited interest; he would pay double restitution on any wages unpaid at the end of each work day.

Why so high a penalty? After all, the worker forfeited only the interest that his money might have earned. Why impose double restitution based on the entire daily wage multiplied by the number of days

point followed by a zero is needed to compute percentages under 10%), which came to the medieval West only through contact with Islam. The Arabs in turn learned of it in India. There is no evidence that the zero was known to any culture prior to the ninth century, A.D.—the West's era of Charlemagne. The Mayans and the Indians discovered it independently or else were in contact with each other.

of delayed payment? Because God's law defines the act as *theft*.

The act is also a form of oppression, but the oppressor here is the worker who accepts the contract. He is not identified as a thief. He is not subject to criminal charges by the invisible excluded workers who cannot afford to wait to be paid.

We need to examine the employer's motivation. If his primary goal is not to earn a little extra interest by delaying wages, then what is it? Most employers adopt a policy of delaying wages today because their rivals do. This policy is almost universal in modern advanced economies. Employers give little or no thought to the practice. But what if they did give thought to it? What would their primary motivation likely be?

H. The Limits of Economic Knowledge

The Marxist would probably argue that the employer's goal is to place local workers in a totally dependent position. The poorer they are, the more desperate their economic condition. The more desperate their economic condition, the cheaper they are willing to work. If the employer can maintain what Karl Marx once called the industrial reserve army,²⁶ i.e., the unemployed, he can force down local wages. His theft is therefore deliberate. One problem with this line of reasoning is that it assumes that the employer understands a complex chain of economic reasoning. He probably doesn't. Another problem is that employers like to have qualified workers competing against each other.

The key word here is *qualified*. As a former employer, I believe that the typical employer is trying to minimize his risk when he hires competent workers rather than substandard workers. He delays payment because he wants to see each new worker prove himself before getting paid. This delay in payment pressures workers with little capital to quit early or never even apply for the job. *The practice of delaying wages is therefore primarily a screening device.* It favors workers who have capital in reserve. These capital reserves serve the employer as a substitute for other screening techniques. The employer's economic problem is his lack of knowledge about the competence of the new worker. *The employer uses a delayed payment scheme in order to minimize his search costs in estimating the competence of new workers.* Accurate knowledge is not a zero-price resource. Employers try to obtain such knowledge as cheaply as possible. They use the new worker's will-

26. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867), XXV:3 (New York: Modern Library, [1906] n.d.), pp. 689–703.

ingness to accept delayed payments as a cost-effective substitute for more detailed information regarding the worker's abilities and his willingness to work.

I. The Limits of Judicial Knowledge

Here we have a situation where the law seems unjust. I have argued that the primary economic beneficiary of delayed payments is the worker who can afford to extend the credit and therefore gets the job. I have identified the primary economic victim as the excluded destitute worker. Yet the law identifies the employer as the robber, and the only way for a judge to impose negative sanctions is for him to require the employer to pay the employee. In other words, the *judicial* victim is not the primary *economic* victim. Why does God give the employee a lawful claim against the employer? Because this worker is the only *judicially visible* victim. He is a weak bargainer when compared to the employer. He is stronger than the destitute excluded workers, but he is still weak compared to the employer. This law is meant to protect the weak from the strong. It protects the weakest party only indirectly: by threatening the employer with penalties for robbing the weaker. Judges are not omniscient; they cannot identify the weakest workers, i.e., those who never even bothered to apply for the job because of their lack of capital. Judges provide protection to the weakest only indirectly.

The judicial problem is this: How can the judges identify the actual victims of this form of discrimination? The primary economic victim of a delayed-wage contract was the excluded worker who could not afford to take the job. He has been oppressed by the worker who took the job on the illegal terms. Exactly which workers were the excluded ones? That is to say, which workers would have gained employment had the delayed-payment system not been in force? This is virtually impossible for civil judges to determine. Knowing the harsh terms of employment, some destitute workers may not have bothered to apply. Any seemingly destitute worker might later complain to the civil authorities that he had never bothered to apply for the job because of the delayed payment feature. So, by what means can such a law be enforced? How can legitimate, predictable sanctions be imposed? What, if anything, should be done to indemnify the primary victim? This is why economic oppression is rarely a crime. The civil magistrate cannot specify the illegal criteria, the victims, or the appropriate restitu-

tion.

How can a restitution payment to the employed worker help a destitute worker who was too poor to accept the terms of employment in the first place? The judge does not restore anything to him. Nevertheless, the penalty does help the excluded worker: not as a payment to compensate him for *past* oppression but as a threat against *future* oppression. This law reduces future injustice to the weakest members of the work force by forcing the oppressing employer to pay the visible victim—the worker whose wages were withheld—instead of paying the invisible victims whose claims cannot be precisely identified or resolved judicially. The agent of oppression, namely, the worker who took the job, is rewarded by the court, not for being an oppressor (which he was) but because he was the victim of a criminal act.

Part II. The Deaf and the Blind

Verse 14 deals with the deaf man and the blind man: “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD” (v. 14). Neither one of them can defend himself against the specified evil. The deaf man cannot hear the curse; the blind man cannot see the stumbling block. The person who takes advantage of their condition of weakness has broken the law of God. These are case laws. They are specific applications of more general principles. We are supposed to deduce the general law from the specific conditions described in the case law. What are these conditions? Let us consider the easiest case first.

A. Tripping the Blind

The blind man must not be tripped, since there is no way that he can adjust for the obstacle. It is not his fault that he cannot see. There is nothing that he can do about his condition. It is not a moral weakness on his part that he is blind (John 9:1–3).

The context of this law is the payment of wages (v. 13). The case law of verse 14 means that the stronger party must not use another person’s inherent weakness in order to pay him less than a market wage. By implication, he must not cheat the illiterate man or the mentally retarded person. He must acknowledge the existence of the other person’s weakness and not use it to take advantage of him. Where the other person is *biologically unable to compensate for his weakness*, the employer is not to profit from the other person’s incapacity.

Why would anyone deliberately trip a blind man? Children do such things to the handicapped outsiders among them, but why? Why is it that handicapped children—even blind children²⁷—seem to draw persecution from other children? Why do we expect our children to stop doing such things as they grow older? Why do adults regard such acts as immoral?

Or do they? The mental image of a small group taunting the village idiot is not so very foreign to us. We can imagine a group of lower-class people laughing at the distress of some poor handicapped wretch. Someone in the group might gain a few laughs by tripping a blind man. The motivation is not clear, but God's law does acknowledge the existence of the temptation. The person who trips a blind person has broken God's law.

B. Cursing the Deaf

A curse under the terms of the Mosaic law was an act of assault.²⁸ It still is. Modern societies still have laws on the books identifying curses as illegal, although these laws are rarely prosecuted by victims in our day. The Bible regards a verbal curse as a judicial act with consequences in history, just as it regards a verbal blessing.

This outlook is foreign to modern man, both humanist and pietist. Modern man does not believe that God's blessings or curses are called down on others in history because a representative covenantal agent pronounces blessings or curses. The third commandment is clear: God's name must not be taken in vain. The frame of reference is the misuse of God's holy name—a boundary violation—by someone who is not authorized to invoke that name judicially.

Cursing a deaf man is a double violation: calling down God's curses illegitimately, and cursing someone who cannot respond judicially. The deaf man is unaware of the boundary violation. Because God's name has been misused, or at least the violator has judicially misused language, society is at risk. The agent who has been authorized by God to press charges in God's name in an earthly court—the victim—is unaware of the violation. This transfers responsibility for

27. Robert V. Hine, *Second Sight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 84.

28. The curse in this case means "make light," which connotes deliberate humiliation or abuse. Herbert C. Brichto, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1963), pp. 120–22. James Jordan provided me with this reference.

invoking a lawsuit from the victim to the witness.

The deaf victim must be informed of the infraction, and the blind person must be informed of the identity of the person who tripped him. The blind person cannot press charges. He did not see who tripped him. Similarly, a deaf person cannot respond to a curse against him, since he did not hear it. Through no fault of their own, these victims cannot bring a lawsuit against the evil-doers who have broken God's law.

But God can. So can His lawfully appointed courts if a representative of the victim either informs the victim or, if the victim cannot press charges himself (e.g., a mental defective), the representative presses charges in the name of the victim.

Victims in these cases need spokesmen to act in their behalf. As in the case of a crime, God is the primary victim.²⁹ The witness serves as a spokesman for both God and the victim. This law makes it plain that God expects others in the community to take action and serve as covenant agents in the name of the victims. How else could such public infractions of this law be prosecuted? A verbal curse is a public act in defiance of God's law. Such public acts must be prosecuted, not just because they are morally wrong—many immoral acts cannot legitimately be prosecuted under biblical law—but because they are public. The public character of this form of cursing places the integrity of the society on trial, for the victim cannot hear and respond as God's designated agent. If no witness intervenes to bring formal charges, then God will take action against the evil-doer and the society that has failed to protect the handicapped victim from his persecutor.

C. The General Legal Principle: Protecting the Weakest Party

I argue that verses 13 and 14 are linked. This link is not grammatical. Then what is the link? It is two-fold. First, God wishes to protect the weakest parties in society. Second, there are limits on men's knowledge. Courts are not omniscient. Both of these laws implicitly call for agents to bring civil lawsuits against law-breakers who harm the weakest members of society. The private prosecutors must have incentives to bring their lawsuits if the evil practices are to be minimized. Because the nature of the crimes is different, the incentives are different: positive in the case of weak but employed workers, negative in the case

29. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix M:A.

of fearful witnesses.

To trip a blind person or curse a deaf person is to commit an active assault, either physically or verbally. The law-breaker has actively assaulted a victim who cannot prosecute. This was a public act. Thus, the crime is relatively easy to prove if two witnesses testify that someone committed the crime. The weakest victim is easy to identify.

Not so in the case of an employer who withholds wages beyond one day. First, there is no active assault. There is only a refusal to pay. Second, the weakest worker is the unemployed person who cannot afford to live without wages. He is being oppressed by both the employer and his employee. Judicially, it is not possible for a court to identify the specific worker who would have taken the job had the employer paid in advance. Therefore, in order to remove this form of indirect oppression from society, God grants to the weaker worker—the employed worker, who himself is an oppressor (though probably unknowingly)—the authority to press a covenant lawsuit in the courts on his own behalf. A small portion of the wealth of the weak worker had been transferred to the employer. This wealth transfer can be calculated for purposes of judicial restitution. Because the defrauded worker presses charges, the weakest worker is indirectly protected. The weaker worker, acting on his own behalf judicially and economically, acts as an economic agent for the weakest workers. He probably does not perceive that he is in fact acting as the economic agent of his competition. A more economically sophisticated worker would probably not press charges against his employer, since the delayed payment system excludes his competition, but there are never very many economically sophisticated workers (or anyone else, for that matter). Some workers will press charges, so the oppressive practice will be reduced.

Like the weakest excluded worker, the blind or deaf victim needs a legal agent to press charges. No one benefits economically for serving as this agent. Therefore, God warns the potential agents to press charges. How? By announcing His name: “I am the LORD” (14b). Their fear of God and their desire to uphold His law provide the motivation to press charges, not their personal economic gain. They desire to avoid God’s wrath. The threatened sanction is negative.

The reason why these two passages are linked is this: *the inability of the courts to protect the weakest victims*. The courts can take action only when someone brings a lawsuit against a perceived law-breaker. The weakest victims cannot act on their own behalf in these two types of cases. The excluded worker cannot prove that he was a victim. Sim-

ilarly, the victimized blind or deaf person cannot prove that the crime took place. A biblical court system requires an agent to bring a lawsuit against the law-breaker. These case laws provide the necessary incentives for agents to bring these lawsuits.

Conclusion

Grammatically, verses 13 and 14 are not linked; ethically and judicially, they are. The links are: (1) God's protection of the weakest members in society; (2) ways to overcome the limits on men's knowledge, especially the limits on the judges' knowledge. So, the judicial cases are different—*theft vs. public assault*—but the general prohibition is the same: *do not harm the weakest parties*.

These case laws prohibit the victimization of the poorest and weakest members of the community. The case law in verse 13 deals with *theft from economically weak workers* and also *indirect economic oppression of the most impoverished workers in the community*. The most impoverished workers are those who cannot afford to extend credit to their employer. They need to be paid at the end of the work day. The employer is required to do this or else pay them in advance for a longer term of service.

This law proves that Mosaic Israel was not a debt-free society. There were creditors and debtors. A legitimate biblical goal is to reduce long-term debt, but God's civil law does not mandate absolutely debt-free living. Debt is basic to society, for society implies a division of labor. Debt will exist in a division of labor economy until such time as an economically efficient means of making moment-by-moment wage payments becomes universal.

The employer who delays payment to his workers is defrauding them. Verse 13 says this. But to do this, he is inescapably providing an opportunity for some workers to oppress their competitors. The worker who can afford to work without pay for a period is given an opportunity by the employer to steal a job away from a worker so poverty-stricken that he cannot survive without payment at the end of the day. This form of competition is illegitimate, this passage says ("fraud, robbery"). It is unfair competition. God's civil law makes it illegal for an employer to act as the economic agent of any employee against a destitute competitor. There are very few cases of unfair competition specified in the Bible, but this is one of them.

Verse 14 prohibits the active assault on the deaf and blind. We are

not to attack defenseless people. The text specifies this. This case law also implicitly condemns all those who sit idly by when others *publicly* assault these defenseless people. We are required by God to become covenantal agents of those victimized people in our presence who are inherently incapable of defending themselves judicially: the deaf and the blind. We are to act as the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind whenever we hear or see others assault them. In short, we are to accept our role as covenantal witnesses. God reminds us of who He is: "I am the LORD" (14b).

The state has no means of imposing sanctions against those who see but do not report the crime, unless it can establish that the silent witnesses were accomplices or conspirators. *God's civil law cannot legitimately compel men to do good things*. Its role is exclusively to keep people from doing evil things. But God is not bound by the laws that bind the state. He can bring His sanctions against silent witnesses. He can act as an agent of the victims. He will act as their agent on judgment day, and perhaps in the lives of those who refuse to act as His agents in history.

Leviticus 9:14 is not a biblical injunction for the state to become a welfare agent: a dispenser of positive sanctions. The state is not to provide free hearing aids for the deaf or free seeing-eye dogs for the blind. This law legislates against assault (cursing the deaf) and battery (tripping the blind). It implicitly commands witnesses to become legal agents of the defenseless person when someone actively, verbally assaults or physically batters him. Cursing a man is an act of assault; tripping a man is an act of battery. These acts are unquestionably illegal. It is every person's task to defend in court those who are inherently incapable of prosecuting their assailants.

The delay of payment overnight is described in the text as robbery: a crime. A judge can impose a restitution penalty on the perpetrator. There is also a hidden element of oppression: the excluded workers. To become subject to civil law, oppression must be identifiable as a criminal offense. There must be definable criteria that make the act a crime. The indirectly oppressed, excluded worker is not the victim of a crime. Ironically, the one who has oppressed him, the employed worker, is the victim of a crime: delayed payment. Even more ironically, if the oppressor brings a lawsuit against his assailant, the employer, he thereby makes it less likely that he and his employer will be able to oppress the weakest party: the excluded worker. This is why I think the excluded worker or the state acting on his behalf can bring a lawsuit

against the employer to have the practice stopped.

The oppressive character of the contract should be recognized, and no legislation should ever be passed that imitates the “delayed payment” contract, with its exclusionary side effects.

IMPARTIAL JUSTICE VS. SOCIALIST ECONOMICS

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).

The theocentric meaning of this law is that the state is to imitate God by doing what God does: judge all people without respect to their persons, i.e., their class, status, or power. This is an aspect of rendering judgment, part four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. The Rule of Law

This law is one of the two most important laws in the Bible that deal with civil government. The other verse is Exodus 12:49, which insists that civil judgment in the land of the covenant must apply to all men equally, whether strangers or Israelites: “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.” Exodus 12:49 confirms the judicially binding nature of the civil law of God: biblical civil laws are to be applied equally to all people residing within the geographical boundaries of a biblically covenanted society. The same civil laws are to be applied to everyone residing in the land, regardless of race, color, creed, or national origin.² These binding civil laws have been revealed by God directly to mankind in the Bible, and *only* in the Bible.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

All those who reside within modern geographical boundaries are under a particular state's sanctions,³ but not all of these people are citizens. This means that they are not being represented judicially as members of an earthly court. They are not part of the civil hierarchy even though they are under the law. If they were part of it, they could apply judicial sanctions for or against these representatives by voting. What God's law requires is that civil magistrates, as *agents of God's heavenly court*, represent these people. The judges represent God in man's courts, and they represent men under their jurisdiction in God's court. This is why civil authorities are called *ministers* by Paul (Rom. 13:4, 6). They possess *ministerial authority*. Judges must therefore apply the Bible's civil laws impartially to residents who are inside the geographical boundaries of a covenanted society but who are outside the judicial hierarchy. The publicly visible evidence of the judges' representative authority in God's heavenly court is their faithfulness in applying God's law impartially.

Almost every legal theorist in Western society accepts the principle of equality before the law. This ideal is one of the bedrock foundations of Western civilization. It comes from the Bible, not from Greek and Roman law, both of which explicitly denied the concept of equality before the civil law. Classical law protected only citizens: males who had lawful access to the religious rites of the city. Women (half the adult population), slaves (one-third of all males), and foreign-born residents were excluded. The ultimate manifestation of the biblical principle of equality before the law in history was God the Father's willingness to place His incarnate son, Jesus Christ, under the negative sanction that had threatened Adam. Paul writes: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Among these things that God gives is liberty. It is a product, along with other judicial factors, of the ideal of equality before God's law. (It is not, contrary to the textbooks, a product of Classical Greek political theory or practice.)⁴

B. Natural Law Theory: Ethical Dualism

The issue of the absolute authority of God's specially revealed civil law challenges the competing theoretical structure of natural law, nat-

3. The modern exceptions are people who reside in foreign embassies and the ambassadors themselves, even when outside their embassies. They are under their own nations' legal orders inside the boundaries of their embassy buildings.

4. Appendix D: "Greek Mythology: The Myth of Classical Politics."

ural reason, and natural revelation. We need to ask: Can these three *theoretical ideals* serve as sufficient guides for establishing God's legal requirements? Or is direct revelation from the God of the Bible mandatory covenantally in the civil realm?

Let us take the easiest case to analyze. God told Adam that he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If natural law, natural reason, and natural revelation were sufficient to inform mankind of the judicial boundaries established by God, then why did God reveal to Adam this single binding law and its single negative sanction? Adam was morally perfect. His eyes were not yet blinded by sin. The creation was without blemish in Genesis 2. It did not yet provide misleading information to mankind. But God nevertheless revealed His law verbally to Adam. Why? *Because natural law, natural reason, and natural revelation alone are not sufficient to enable men to know God's binding covenant law in its entirety.* If this was true for Adam, then it is surely true today, since men possess only fallen reason, and the creation itself is under a curse.

Had God's civil laws been revealed in some way other than through direct verbal revelation to Moses by God, such as through the universal reason of mankind, there would have been no need for God to require that the whole law be read publicly in Israel every seventh year (Deut. 31:9–13).⁵ Men would already have known this requirement “rationally.” But they did not know.⁶ Then what do men know? They are responsible before God, so they must know *something* about God's law. Men always know enough about God's covenant law to get themselves condemned by God eternally—the *work* of the law (not the law itself) written in their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15)⁷—but not enough to enable them to build the kingdom of God in history. This is why those Christians who affirm natural law rather than biblical law as the sole authoritative moral standard for society almost always also explicitly deny that it is either possible or required by God that Christians build

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

6. If this analysis is true, then the ideal of political pluralism is anti-biblical. See Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

7. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959), I, pp. 72–76. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

the kingdom of God in history as God's designated judicial agents.⁸

The inherent ethical dualism of natural law theology has had catastrophic effects in history. The dualism between Bible-revealed personal Christian ethics and religiously neutral, universally perceivable civil law inescapably demobilizes Christians in society and simultaneously anoints pagans as the lawful interpreters of natural law. Ethical dualism inevitably places God's designated judicial agents—Christians—under the civil and cultural authority of Satan's designated judicial agents. Why? Because it places natural law, natural revelation, and natural reason above God's revealed law, His progressively restored creation,⁹ and the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16).¹⁰ *There is no neutrality; there is always judicial hierarchy.* Some law-order must be on top. Some transgressors of this law-order must be on the bottom. Christian natural law theorists in principle place a hypothetically neutral natural law on top and Christians on the bottom.

8. I have in mind all Protestant ethical dualists, from Martin Luther to Norman Geisler. Luther was amillennial; Geisler was premillennial-dispensational; both denied that God's kingdom can triumph in history through the Spirit-backed efforts of Christians. On Luther's ethical dualism between Christian ethics and civil ethics, see Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundation of Luther's Social Views," in John H. Mundy, *et al.*, *Essays in Medieval Life* (Cheshire, Connecticut: Biblo & Tannen, 1955); Gary North, "The Economics of Luther and Calvin," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975), pp. 76–89. See also Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution, II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2003), pp. 73–77. On Geisler's equally dualistic ethics, see Norman L. Geisler, "Natural Law and Business Ethics," in Richard C. Chewning (ed.), *Biblical Principles and Business: The Foundations* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989), pp. 157–74. Geisler explicitly identified the work of the law (Rom. 2:14) with natural law: *ibid.*, p. 158. God holds all men responsible for their acts; hence, Geisler concluded, if some men do not know about God's revealed law, God cannot lawfully condemn them. "If there is no natural law," Geisler said, "God is unjust." *Ibid.*, p. 160. Geisler misunderstood biblical justice. Natural law, natural reason, and natural revelation are sufficient to condemn every sinful person to hell and the lake of fire, but they are insufficient to enable people to build the kingdom of God. God's system of sanctions for the reprobate is simple and clear: "Heads, I win; tails, you lose." For proof, see Romans 9:10–21.

9. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

10. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2. The mind of Christ is imputed to His people at the time of their conversion, and it is progressively revealed in history, both individually and corporately, through their covenantal faithfulness. Anyone who denies this progressive, corporate, intellectual sanctification must also deny the progress of the church's various theological confessions. I know of no Christian who is willing publicly to deny the progress of the confessions at least through 1647 or 1788.

In the early stages of this cultural conquest by covenant-breakers, natural law theory is a highly useful tool for covenant-breakers in their epistemological and political disarming of Christians. The infiltrators applaud ethical dualism: separate ethical standards for believers and skeptics, but a common civil law-order for all. This common law-order must not be based on some “narrow” appeal to standards uniquely revealed in the Bible, an ethical handbook for covenant-keepers only. Dualism keeps Christians happily subservient to politically successful pagans in the name of Jesus. That is to say, *dualism keeps Jesus covenantally subordinate to Satan on earth and in history*. When Norman Geisler asks, “Whose ethical standard shall we use?” and immediately answers, “a moral law common to all men”¹¹—natural law for the natural man—he has in principle delivered society into the hands of Satan’s designated judicial agents in history. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14).¹² Therefore, the ethical dualist is logically compelled to affirm, the Holy Spirit has nothing judicially binding to say or do with society and politics. If He did, then the natural man, not being able to receive the things of the Spirit, would be spiritually unreliable to exercise civil authority. Political pluralism rests philosophically on ethical dualism, for it asserts the legitimacy of common citizenship based on religiously neutral civil law. *Ethical dualism necessarily asserts the judicial irrelevance of the Holy Spirit to both social theory and political theory*. For almost two millennia, ethical dualism has been the dominant outlook of the church’s main spokesmen. The main exceptions historically were the New England Puritans of the first generation, 1630–60. They were self-consciously theocratic in their outlook.¹³

There is no neutrality. The ethical dualist denies this with respect to civil law. By elevating natural law, natural reason, and natural revelation above God’s inspired word for the purpose of establishing social and political theory, the Christian ethical dualist has anointed the covenant-breaker as the lawful master of the covenant-keeper in every area of life outside the four walls of the Christian church and the Christian family. But the consistent covenant-breaker is not about to honor these two fragile, judicially unprotected institutional boundar-

11. Geisler, “Natural Law and Business Ethics,” p. 157.

12. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 2.

13. On their theocratic legal theory, see Charles Lee Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York: University Press of America, [1960] 1985).

ies, any more than Pontius Pilate honored the innocence of Jesus Christ against the Pharisees' court.

Here is the problem: Christian ethical dualists keep insisting, century after century, that the Pilates of this world are judicially reliable. The Pilates of this world are supposedly not in need of personal regeneration and the revelation of the Bible in order to carry out their lawful and judicially neutral cultural mandate in history. On the contrary, we are assured, they need only be faithful to "ancient Hindu, Chinese, and Greek writings," to cite Dr. Geisler's recommended primary sources.¹⁴ This is why Christian ethical dualists are at war with biblical civil law, biblical civil sanctions, and covenantal postmillennialism.¹⁵ Christian natural law theorists implicitly offer this daily prayer to God: "Thy kingdom not come, thy will not be done in earth as it is in heaven." (Unless, of course, they become really consistent and argue that natural law in principle should rule in heaven, too. Then their prayer becomes: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in heaven as it is on earth." We do not find such consistent ethical dualists.)

C. Sanctions: Evaluation and Imposition

Biblical civil justice must seek to apply written laws to public acts. Neither the social status nor the economic class of either the victim or the accused is to be considered in judicial proceedings. The pronouncement by the judge or the jury regarding the fit between the law and the public act of the accused is to be based solely on the law and the evidence. Justice is never impersonal; it is wholly personal: the law, the act, the evidence, and the court's judgment.

Judgments should involve the imposition of sanctions: blessings (on the victim) and cursings (on the criminal). There is no neutrality. *Any failure to impose biblical sanctions, apart from the permission of the victim, is necessarily the imposition of unbiblical sanctions.* Biblical sanctions are limited. There must be the application of sanctions, but the victim always has the right to reduce the sanctions. Biblical sanctions are always based on the principle of restitution: to God and the victim.¹⁶ The victim is to gain back what he lost plus a penalty payment. But biblical sanctions must not exceed what is legally appropriate to the crime. This places limits on the judges. The judges are not to

14. Geisler, "Natural Law and Business Ethics," p. 158.

15. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 12. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

16. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix M.

declare greater sanctions than God's law allows. The judges therefore are under a legal boundary.

The imposition of the sanctions restores the judicial *status quo ante*. Judicially, at the end of the trial and after the sanctions have been imposed, both the victim and the criminal are restored to their original judicial status. Their *economic* status has changed. This is because of the restitution payment. The victim is richer than before the commission of the crime. The convicted criminal is poorer than before the commission of the crime. This fact categorically denies the ideal of economic equality. The economic positions of the two individuals are not equal after the sanctions have been enforced. On the other hand, the judicial positions of the individuals are equal after the sanctions have been imposed. Therefore, *judicial equality before the law* has to mean *economic inequality after the sanctions have been imposed*. The civil law determines the maximum extent of the change in economic positions. The victim is entitled to reduce the penalty.¹⁷ Also, under the Mosaic Covenant, the kinsmen-redeemer was entitled to pay the victim in the name of the convicted criminal. If this was not the case, then Jesus Christ, the archetypical Kinsman-Redeemer, cannot lawfully pay for our sins against God. The Mosaic kinsman-redeemer became poorer than he would have been had the crime not been committed. Once the restitution payment was made by anyone, the judicial status of each party was restored to what it had been prior to the commission of the crime. Both the victim and the criminal could return to honest work. Their legal status was restored to what each had been prior to the commission of the crime.

D. No Respect for Persons

Leviticus 19:15 is an application of Exodus 12:49. Exodus 12:49 insists that the same laws must apply to everyone. Leviticus 19:15 specifically identifies two groups that must be treated equally in civil courts: the poor and the mighty. While Exodus 12:49 refers to covenantal rivals—the stranger in the land and the Israelite—Leviticus 19:15 refers to the legitimate differentiation of wealth and power. *This verse formally legitimizes the simultaneous existence of degrees of power and degrees of wealth within the holy commonwealth.* The poor man is to be judged by the same law as the rich man.

The focus here is not simply on the law itself, but on the person

17. *Ibid.*, Appendix M:G, J.

who is actually bringing formal judgment as a member of the court. This is the *judicial agent* who determines the validity of a particular lawsuit. Men are not to respect persons in rendering judgment.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).

Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts (II Chron. 19:7).

These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment (Prov. 24:23).

For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:11).

But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons (Col. 3:25).

But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (James 2:9).

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear (I Peter 1:17).

E. The Theology of the Poor; or, Poor Theology

From the late 1960s through the late 1980s, a movement known as liberation theology had considerable influence on the thinking of highly educated—i.e., humanist-certified—North American evangelical Christians and Latin American Roman Catholic priests.¹⁸ This movement developed out of a self-conscious attempt by Communists and far-Left heretical Christian groups to fuse Marxist social diagnoses and solutions with biblical rhetoric.¹⁹ This phrase became the rallying

18. The major English-language publishing house for liberation theology is Orbis Books. The major ecclesiastical organization is the Roman Catholic Maryknoll order.

19. Introductory books, critical of the movement, are Michael Novak (ed.), *Liberation North, Liberation South* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1980); Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *Liberation Theology: The Church's Future*

point of the liberationists: "God is on the side of the poor." Is this phrase true? No, and Leviticus 19:15 is the most obvious passage in the Bible demonstrating the phrase's falsehood. Hardly less powerful in this regard is Psalm 62:9: "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity." Conclusion: "Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Ps. 62:10). In short, judge righteously.

The Bible says specifically that God is on the side of the righteous. Occasionally, the Bible does say that God identifies with certain members of the poor. The poor who are poor, not by their own fault, and especially those who are poor because of oppression by others, become identified with God by God's grace. God does care for the righteous. But the Bible makes it clear that God is not on the side of the poor in general. This is why liberation theology is heretical when it is not actually apostate.²⁰

In his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), Ronald J. Sider devoted a chapter to the topic "God and the Poor." This book established Sider as the primary "theologian of the poor" in the American evangelical Protestant community.²¹ The peculiar fact about Sider is that he understands the meaning judicially of Leviticus 19:15. He understands that the Bible insists that no one should be partial to a poor man in his law suit. Sider said, "God instructs His people to be impartial because He Himself is not biased." He even cited Exodus 23:3: "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause." But then he went on to deny the meaning of the texts he had just cited. In the extension of his remarks, he transforms biblical theology into a form of liberation theology. "The most crucial point for us, however, is not God's impartiality, but rather the result of His freedom from bias."²²

Shock (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Library Press, 1984); James V. Schall, S.J., *Liberation Theology in Latin America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982); and Ronald Nash (ed.), *Liberation Theology* (Milford, Michigan: Mott Media, 1984) A neo-orthodox critique is J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology: An Evangelical View from the Third World* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1979).

20. Most of the time it is apostate. It is too often merely baptized Marxism. Its adherents now face a spiritual crisis: since 1989, Marxism has become terribly passé. For them, this is a far greater psychological blow than mere apostasy.

21. In England, John R. Stott held this position after 1970.

22. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 83. This book was co-published by the liberal Roman Catholic publishing house, The Paulist Press. I cite his 1977 edition rather than his updated, 1984 edition. The later edition was his attempt to escape the devast-

Note the phrase: “not God’s impartiality,” meaning not God’s *judicial* impartiality. Sider focused instead on what he says are the economic *results* of this impartiality—the economic results of God’s “freedom from bias.” He did not explore the implications of the *impartial application of biblical law*; instead, he invokes God’s care for the poor. “The text declares Yahweh’s impartiality and then immediately portrays God’s tender care for the weak and disadvantaged.”²³ Immediately? Tender care for the poor? Nothing like this appears immediately after Exodus 23:3, Leviticus 19:15, or Deuteronomy 1:17, the only texts he cites on impartial justice. The text he then cites is Deuteronomy 10:17–18.²⁴ His concept of “immediately” is textually unique.

Having referred in passing to Leviticus 19:15 and two confirming texts, he then rejects their message. His exposition makes clear what the nature of his objection to Leviticus 19:15 really is: *he wanted specific economic results rather than impartial civil justice*. This is the judicial heart of the dispute between free market capitalism and socialism. This has always been the judicial heart of the dispute. The civil courts can judge impartially, case by case, or else they can hand down decisions that consistently reward the poor. They cannot do both. Sider was correct: we must choose which kind of civil justice we want, impartial justice or class justice. He wanted the latter. Unfortunately for his theological position, the Bible demands the former.

ating critique of his book offered by David Chilton in *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1985] 1990). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>). Sider never mentioned Chilton’s work (and about a dozen other free market critics) in his 1984 edition, despite its promise on the cover that it responded to his critics. The 1984 edition disappeared from Christian bookstores in short order, indicating that the Sider fad was over. The first edition of Chilton’s book in 1981 completely destroyed the credibility of Sider’s economic views among conservatives, and the Left later moved to “excommunicate” Sider when he publicly identified homosexuality as a major sin. Caught in the ideological crossfire, he then disappeared from public view except for an occasional interview published in some small-circulation magazine. The 1990 edition of his book was rarely seen in bookstores. In 1997, the fourth edition appeared, in which he abandoned most of the anti-capitalistic rhetoric of the earlier editions. He even adopted some of David Chilton’s views. Still, he failed to mention Chilton’s book, which indicates just how badly it had injured him. By 1997, the Sider fad was over, even for Sider. See North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F: “The Re-Education of Ronald J. Sider.”

23. Sider, *Rich Christians*, (1977), p. 83.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

F. Two Kinds of Equality

The same inescapable choice confronts all those who proclaim the moral and judicial legitimacy of the goal of equality. Which kind of equality do we want? Free market economist and legal theorist F. A. Hayek made it very clear that we can choose between two kinds of equality, but we cannot gain them both simultaneously. We can pursue *equality under the law*, or we can pursue *equality of economic results*, but we cannot rationally pursue both simultaneously. He wrote in 1960: "From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either the one or the other, but not both at the same time. The equality before the law which freedom requires leads to material inequality."²⁵

The Bible requires equality before the law. *The inescapable result of impartial civil justice is economic inequality*. This fact is an affront to all socialists and semi-socialists (i.e., defenders of the corporate State).²⁶ They want to redistribute wealth by state compulsion, either through state ownership of the means of production (socialism) or through adjusting the incentives of the economy, even though legal ownership remains with private individuals or organizations (fascism, Nazism, and Keynesianism).²⁷ Always, the socialists focus on the supposed need for *specific economic results* rather than the need for an impartial declaration of impartial law and the impartial application of predictable sanctions. Therefore, Sider concludes, "the God of the

25. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 87.

26. George Reisman, *The Government Against the Economy* (Ottawa, Illinois: Caroline House, 1979).

27. The two systems were linked from the beginning. Keynes admitted in his Preface to the 1936 German language edition of his *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*: "The theory of aggregate production, which is the point of the following book, nevertheless can be much easier adapted to the conditions of a totalitarian state than the theory of production and distribution of a given production put forth under the conditions of free competition and a large degree of laissez-faire. This is one of the reasons that justifies the fact that I call my book a *general* theory." A side-by-side translation of the Preface in the original German edition is found in James J. Martin, *Revisionist Viewpoints* (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Press, 1971), pp. 203, 205. The citation appears in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973), VII, p. xxvi.

Bible is on the side of the poor just because he is *not* biased, for he is a God of impartial justice.”²⁸

Notice what Sider did. He said that God is uniquely on the side of the poor because He is not biased. In other words, God is on the side of the poor because He is a God of impartial justice. Logically, this has to mean that the poor are poor in history because of other people’s unrighteousness. If his statement does not mean this, then the impartial application of biblical law would not consistently reward the poor as a class. But Sider called for judicial impartiality and *therefore* the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. This means that, in Sider’s universe, the poor are necessarily victims of unjust oppression. This oppression is what makes them poor. Therefore, “Salvation for the rich will include liberation from their injustice.”²⁹ He equates “the rich” with “injustice.”³⁰

This perspective on poverty is basic to all socialist thought. The socialist blames poverty on the capitalist system, not on scarcity and not on immoral behavior on the part of the poor. The phrases that Sider and his colleagues used again and again are “structural injustice”³¹ and “structural evil,”³² meaning unjust institutions. It is therefore not cursed mankind (Gen. 3:16–17) and cursed nature (Gen. 3: 18–19) that bring poverty, the socialist insists.³³ Widespread poverty as a social phenomenon is always explained by capitalism’s critics as the result of unjust institutions that are in turn the product of politically powerful rich men who successfully exploit others. This is a vision of a universe not under a curse, not populated by sinners, and not under God’s judgments in history—factors that would frequently bring

28. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 84.

29. *Idem*.

30. With no explanation, later in the book he identifies poverty as a “curse” and wealth as “good and desirable.” *Ibid.*, p. 127. Never defining justice as impartial application of biblical law, he then says: “The crucial test is whether the prosperous are obeying God’s command to bring justice to the oppressed.” *Ibid.*, p. 128. This is formally correct, but it is meaningless unless there are standards of civil justice and economic oppression independent of mere wealth or poverty.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

32. *Ibid.*, ch. 6: “Structural Evil & World Hunger.”

33. Mises wrote: “Most social reformers, foremost among them Fourier and Marx, pass over in silence the fact that the nature-given means of removing human uneasiness are scarce. As they see it, the fact that there is not abundance of all useful things is merely caused by the inadequacy of the capitalist mode of production and will therefore disappear in the ‘higher phase’ of communism.” Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 644n. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

people under the negative sanction of poverty. Proverbs 19:15—another 19:15 verse that is despised by the socialists—tells us: “Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.” The socialist discounts this message almost to zero.³⁴

G. Which Poor?

The biblical question is not whether God is on the side of the poor. The question is this: Why is God on the side of *some* of the poor? The liberation theologians never ask this question. They ought to ask another one, too: Was God on the side of poor people in Egypt when he killed the firstborn sons in all of the Egyptian families? Was God on the side of the Canaanites when He told the Israelites to destroy all of them (Deut. 7:16)? Was God on the side of the poor in Assyria and Babylon when he brought judgment against them: Assyria being destroyed by Babylon, and Babylon being destroyed by the Medo-Persian empire? What about all the poverty-stricken people who came under God’s wrath under the Old Covenant? Above all, *what about all the poor who perished in the Noachic Flood?* Why was God not on their side? Why didn’t God defend them against His own vengeful hand? Why did God pull down the very waters of the heavens and raise up the oceans against the whole population of mankind if it is true that God is on the side of the poor?

The answer is quite simple: God is *not* on the side of the poor. *God is on the side of the righteous.*

Time and again, God brought the poor of Old Covenant Israel under judgment. He brought them under foreign domination by a whole series of invaders, from Phoenicia to Rome. He had no mercy whatsoever for them just because they were poor. Rich and poor alike in Israel were repeatedly brought under judgment: this is the crucial judicial point. It was not that God was on the side of the poor; it was that God was totally opposed to the population of Israel, and later the popula-

34. So, by the way, did fundamentalist C. I. Scofield, of the *Scofield Reference Bible* fame. Sider quoted him at the beginning of Chapter 9: “The present social order is the most abject failure the world has ever seen. . . . Governments have never learned yet to so legislate as to distribute the fruits of the industry of their people. The countries of the earth produce enough to support all, and if the earnings of each was fairly distributed it would make all men toil some, but no man toil too much.” Scofield, *Our Hope*, X (August 1903), pp. 76–77. Scofield, a dedicated defender of the dispensational escape religion, is found to support Sider, a defender of the statist power religion. This should surprise no one; pietism and authoritarianism are usually in an operational alliance against dominion religion. Cf. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1.

tion of Judah. *God was on the side of God.* God was on the side of His law and His righteousness. All those who opposed His law and His righteousness by disobedience to His covenant came under His righteous indignation. He did not respect persons. He did not respect classes. He did not respect the social status of anyone. He brought them all under judgment because all but the remnant had rebelled against Him. This included the exploited poor in Israel. When Israel was in rebellion, there is no doubt that rich men exploited poor men, but exploiters and exploited alike went into captivity.

When God speaks of being on the side of the poor, it means that He is on the side of *the poor in spirit*. Blessed are the poor, Christ promised. Blessed are the meek. But this means *poor in spirit* and *meek before God*. It does not mean that poverty-stricken people who are poor because of their own economic or moral mismanagement are going to inherit the kingdom of God. It does not mean that people who are professionally meek are going to inherit the kingdom of God. The text does not say that the wimps shall inherit the kingdom of God; it says that the meek shall inherit, and it always means *meek before God and therefore active before men*. Wrote radical theologian John C. Raines of Calvin's view of man: "Calvin understood the Christian life not as 'a vessel filled with God' but as an active 'tool and instrument' of the Divine initiative. But this is precisely our point. Active toward the world, the Christian knows himself as utterly passive and obedient toward God, whose Will it is his sole task to discover and obey."³⁵

Covenant-breakers, refusing to become meek before God, cannot indefinitely sustain an active attitude toward the external world. Many Western intellectuals since 1965 have been ready to accept the passivity of pantheism, if not its theological presuppositions. If the Creator God of the Bible is not above the creation, with mankind beneath Him and over the creation, then mankind becomes merely part of the creation, without a meaningful appeal beyond it. This leads to passivity in the face of the creation. The "deep ecology" movement is evidence of this trend from humanistic activism to passivity. Deep ecology theory places man under the dominion of nature.³⁶ For example, forest fires caused by non-human events are supposed to be left alone and allowed

35. John C. Raines, "From Passive to Active Man: Reflections on the Revolution in Consciousness of Modern Man," in *Marxism and Radical Religion: Essays Toward a Revolutionary Humanism*, eds. John C. Raines and Thomas Dean (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 114.

36. For a non-scientist's defense of "deep ecology," see Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989).

to burn themselves out, since they are natural phenomena. Fire fighting is not natural. The long-popular American government cartoon figure, Smokey Bear, is not appreciated by deep ecologists. Smokey's slogan, "Only *you* can prevent forest fires," is the essence of ecological activism, which deep ecologists reject except insofar as it can be used as a justification for mandatory human population control by the state: fewer people to start unnatural forest fires. The United States National Park Service adopted a let-burn policy in 1987. It led in 1988 to the disastrous million-acre fire at Yellowstone National Park: almost half the park. Yellowstone was the world's first national park (1872). From 1972 to 1987, only 34,000 acres had burned. By the time the National Park Service reversed its let-burn policy, after one month of fires (late June through late July), it was too late. The Park Service's prediction of August rains did not come true. The fires raged out of control until September 10, when it rained. They cost \$120 million to fight. But the Park Service seems to have persuaded the American press that its let-burn policy is sound ecological science.³⁷

H. The Rich

Is God on the side of the rich? Consider this: God promises great blessings of wealth and prosperity to those who are covenantally faithful, but warns them not to forget Him, "Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 8:12–14).³⁸ God does the same in Proverbs 11:28: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch."

The Bible's picture of God's blessings in history to those who are covenantally faithful is a picture of widespread prosperity. The idea of being *covenantally faithful* is connected covenantally to the idea of *getting rich*. This does not mean that every covenantally faithful person does get rich in history, because there are covenantally unfaithful people who from time to time are allowed by God to become oppressors: "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man

37. Micah Morrison, *Fire in Paradise: The Yellowstone Fires and the Politics of Environmentalism* (New York: Morrow, 1993). The United States Forest Service, a rival bureaucracy, wanted to fight the fires.

38. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness" (Eccl. 7:15). This is true when covenantally faithful people are a tiny minority in a society that is overwhelmingly perverse. The best example of that in Scripture is the family of Lot. Lot was vexed (II Peter 2:7) because he was living in a society that was covenantally rebellious. God removed him from that society and immediately brought total historic judgment against that society. *But God favors wealth; He does not favor poverty.* God favors the wealthy *if* they are wealthy because of their previous righteousness—righteousness being defined as living in conformity to God's Bible-revealed law. God favors the triumph of the righteous in history, and part of this triumph is their accumulation of wealth. The Bible says specifically that the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22b).³⁹ *Wealth is not laid up for the poor; it is laid up for the just.* The wealth of the wicked is going to be removed from them because of their wickedness, and transferred to the just. The poor in spirit and the meek before God will inherit the earth.

I. The Middle Class

Is God on the side of the middle class? That is to say: Is middle class income God's economic goal for most people throughout history? *Yes.* Most people should pray Solomon's recommended prayer: "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9). Most individuals are supposed to strive for conventional comforts, but not for great wealth. Individuals are also to do what they can to stay out of poverty. This indicates that there will always be conventional standards of wealth and poverty. This also indicates that there will always be the rich and the poor. Normal Christians are supposed to strive to be in the middle so as to become defenders of righteousness, and not be tempted to do evil either as rich men or poor men. Like any other quest for special blessings from God, *the quest for wealth is not to be attempted for its own sake.* We are to seek first God's kingdom, and all these things will be added unto us (Matt. 6:33). This refers primarily to covenantal blessings corporately experienced.

39. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 41.

1. Corporate Blessings

This doctrine of *progressive corporate sanctification* and its resultant corporate blessings is why Christians should strive mightily to live in the midst of an increasingly wealthy society that is enjoying the compound external blessings of God because of the progressive economic sanctification of the vast majority of at least its employed members—a sanctification forced on them by intense worldwide competition. A stock market investment proverb says, “A rising tide raises all ships,” i.e., an individual stock will go up in value when all stocks do. Middle-class people get richer over time in an era of collective blessings. They do not need the best things in life in order to regard themselves as blessed. Economic growth is a valid biblical goal. We should not forget that prior to the rise of Puritanism in late sixteenth-century England, with its defense of biblical law and covenantal postmillennial eschatology, no civilization had ever adopted a doctrine of long-term economic growth. Long-term economic growth was not believed to be possible.

The middle-class orientation of the Bible therefore does not mean that there should not be rising wealth for most or even all members of society. Certainly in the late twentieth century, poor people in the West were far richer in goods than the vast majority of kings ever were in the history of man. This is especially true if the king contracted a disease like cholera.⁴⁰ The advancement of twentieth-century public health programs is the best testimony to the wealth of the poorest man in a rich, blessed, formerly covenantally faithful nation.⁴¹ Falling infant

40. Peru, which experienced an outbreak of cholera in 1991, was also the victim of the Shining Path Marxist guerrillas, massive socialist intervention, bureaucratic corruption, and widespread addiction to the coca leaf. It is a poor nation because its people are committed to ethical rebellion. Only after 1991 was there a reversal in Peru. Fujimori, a candidate supported by Christian evangelicals, won the presidential election and began freeing up the economy.

41. Public health programs are part of the state's lawful authority to resist invaders: bacteria, germs, and so forth. The state is a defensive agency authorized by God to bring negative sanctions against invaders. The bacteria do not honor household boundaries. They must be placed under quarantine—if necessary, by placing their carriers under quarantine: a biblically legitimate action of the civil magistrate (Lev. 13, 14). The invaders must be thwarted by collective action. Man's war against the mosquito is a representative example. It takes a co-ordinated campaign analogous to a military campaign to reduce the threat of mosquito-borne diseases. Gordon Harrison, *Mosquitos, Malaria, and Man: A History of the Hostilities Since 1880* (New York: Dutton, 1978), chaps. 15–27. The only absolute victory over a disease of man has been the eradication of smallpox in the 1970s, whose microscopic agents now exist only in a few laboratories. Public health programs are not the same as socialized medicine, which involves the

mortality rates are the single best sign of God's blessing today. Most newborn babies are expected to live long enough to become adults; two centuries ago, they were not. Similarly, kings before 1846 did not have anesthetics during surgery. Who today would trade places with one of them when the surgeon wields his scalpel? Kings did have treasuries of gold and silver, meaning shiny pieces of metal that might buy them some extra time in a crisis or extra food in a famine. But very wealthy people were always at risk. There could be famine, plague, fire, flooding, and the general burdens of life prior to the industrial revolution. Kings and oligarchs did not have television to entertain them, inexpensive books to inform them, video disks or other digital technologies to record images of their children to view in their old age, or any of the myriad of benefits that the poor can buy today. Consider what this would have been worth to almost anyone on the face of the earth as recently as the late nineteenth century. What a king's ransom would have been available to the person who could go into a household for just one day to record the activities of that household: a permanent electronic memory for the wealthy. Gold? Silver? Lots of it. Shiny pieces of metal in exchange for permanent electronic memories? What rich person wouldn't have traded?

The biblical economic ideal is middle-class prosperity for individuals and a rising standard of living for all. This ideal is always limited to individuals who are actively seeking the will of God and obeying it. As they become more competent, as they become better judges, as they become more economically productive, they are expected by God to get richer. The Bible tells us that through corporate covenantal faithfulness, society's technical knowledge and therefore its wealth can and should produce a rising tide of per capita prosperity. By breaking God's covenant, society smashes the cornucopia. But this may not be visible overnight: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11).

2. Avoiding Spiritually Unnecessary Temptations

The Bible is clear: there are great temptations associated with both wealth and poverty, and the righteous man should strive to remain in the middle of these two conditions, so that he does not subject himself to extensive temptation. The Bible affirms middle-class morality,

state's distributing of positive sanctions to some individuals at the expense of others.

middle-class values, and middle-class income. These standards have long been openly ridiculed by humanist intellectuals. This is ironic, given the middle-class origins of most intellectuals. Liberation theologians were especially contemptuous of the middle-class morality of most evangelical Christians. That was one of the anomalies of late twentieth-century “Christian” thought.

The average Christian is to pray for middle-class status precisely because he is average. He is average in terms of productivity; he is average in terms of his ethical conformity to God’s law; and he is average in terms of his earthly expectations. He probably does not want to pay the price of great wealth, either an ethical payment or a payment in terms of great wealth’s high costs of added responsibility. He does not want to become an over-achiever precisely because he does not want to pay the price of becoming an over-achiever. He recognizes the truth Jesus proclaimed: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48b).⁴²

What is true of wealth is equally true of every other area of performance and reward. For example, the classroom instructor should not encourage all of his students to earn a straight-A average. Few students can achieve this, few should achieve this, and few will achieve this.⁴³ There is no reason to encourage frustration by calling all students to strive for comparative perfection. All students are nevertheless required by God to strive to raise their individual performance at the margin. If obeyed, this command will raise the average level of the group’s performance, even though fewer than half of them can beat the class average. Like runners in a race, only one person can come in first, but all of them may be capable of beating the previous record.⁴⁴

The general principle is this: we are to strive to become profitable servants, even though sinful men can never become profitable (net)

42. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

43. It is possible, however. If the test is graded numerically so that the student with the highest score (say, 100 points) gets an A, and an arbitrary percentage of this score is defined as failure (say, 60% or below, i.e., 60 points), and the difference (40 points) is divided up in equal portions (10 points per grade, A through D), every student could receive an A if each scores higher than 90 points. This is the grading system I adopted when I taught. I learned it from my high school civics teacher, Wayne Roy.

44. A few weeks after I wrote the original draft of this chapter, this happened at the 1991 world track and field championships in Tokyo. At age 30, Carl Lewis broke the world record in the 100-meter dash, and the runner-up also broke the old record, which he had set three months earlier. (<http://bit.ly/LewisBurrell>)

servants in history. The principle of the division of labor determines that some people will be better at some things than most other people (Rom. 12:4–8;⁴⁵ I Cor. 12⁴⁶). There will be winners and losers in every competition. Nevertheless, as individuals and also as a covenantal corporate unit, Christians are to strive for mastery over sin and mediocrity.

J. The Righteous

God is on the side of the righteous. There are few principles in the Bible that are of greater judicial and economic importance. In verse after verse, book after book, the Bible testifies to the fact that God is on the side of the righteous. I reproduce a long list of supporting verses in the hope that readers will acknowledge the extent of God's commitment to the righteous. Both amillennialism and premillennialism deny the relevance of these verses as they apply to history.⁴⁷ But these verses *do* apply to history: "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner" (Prov. 11:31). There are dozens of these verses, all ignored by liberation theologians. I have decided to cite many of them in order to make my point and also to maintain Ronald Sider's silence. (My favorite is Psalm 58:10, although I do not interpret it literally. It is the thought that counts.) Read them all, so as to drill the basic point into your ethical decision-making: there are predictable covenantal sanctions in history.

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes (Gen. 18:23–26).

Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the

45. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

46. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of First Corinthians* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

47. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 6.

righteous (Ex. 23:7–8).

If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked (Deut. 25:1).

Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness (I Kings 8:32).

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Ps. 1:5–6).

For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield (Ps. 5:12).

The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry (Ps. 34:15).

The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles (Ps. 34:17).

Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all (Ps. 34:19).

For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous (Ps. 37:17).

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever (Ps. 37:29).

But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble (Ps. 37:39).

Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved (Ps. 55:22).

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked (Ps. 58:10).

So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth (Ps. 58:11).

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a ce-

dar in Lebanon (Ps. 92:12).

Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance (Ps. 112:6).

The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous (Ps. 146:8).

He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly (Prov. 2:7).

The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked (Prov. 10:3).

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish (Prov. 10:28).

The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead (Prov. 11:8).

When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting (Prov. 11:10).

Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered (Prov. 11:21).

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch (Prov. 11:28).

The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand (Prov. 12:7).

The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out (Prov. 13:9).

Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed (Prov. 13:21).

The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want (Prov. 13:25).

The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous (Prov. 14:19).

In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble (Prov. 15:6).

The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous (Prov. 15:29).

The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion (Prov. 28:1).

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn (Prov. 29:2).

When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall (Prov. 29:16).

There is no escape from this conclusion; the texts are clear: *God is on the side of the righteous as such, not the poor as such*. Why should God be on the side of the righteous? Because He announced to His people: "For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). *Holiness is the same as righteousness*. God is righteous; so, His people should be righteous. God is righteous; so, He brings blessings in history to His people who are righteous. God is righteous; so, He brings negative sanctions against those who are not righteous. God is righteous; so, *some people are deservedly poor*. This is what the social-ist does not want to consider.

For centuries in the West, Christian theology was manifested in civic poor laws that distinguished between what was known as the deserving poor and the undeserving poor.⁴⁸ There were some people who were poor, not through their own fault, but through external circumstances. For example, one of the great economic threats to man has been fire. Without fire insurance, an eighteenth-century invention, a fire could reduce a rich man to absolute poverty in an evening. Such a victim would have been regarded, other things being equal, as a member of the deserving poor. Such people deserved better, and society was required by God to treat them better, but for the moment they were poor.

The deserving poor who deserved aid were always contrasted with the undeserving poor. It was well understood by Christians throughout history that *some people deserve to be poor*. In fact, some people deserve death. God, however, in his mercy sometimes allows people who are deserving of death to suffer poverty instead. He gives them more time, but He does not give them extensive positive blessings. Every so-

48. Brian Tierney, "The Decretists and the 'Deserving Poor,'" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, I (1959), pp. 360–73. Cf. Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Authority and Its Application in England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 52. This view also was basic to Puritanism. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (New York: Atheneum [1965] 1968), p. 217.

ciety understands this. Every theologian when pressed would probably admit this, but there is a question of emphasis. The liberation theologians almost never talk about the undeserving poor, i.e., those who do not deserve open-ended assistance because to give them assistance would be to subsidize evil. The liberationists almost never talk about the fact that a righteous society must bring economic sanctions against its unproductive members. They do not talk about the fact that a society that is totally equal economically would be the most unrighteous possible society. Such a society could only be established by means of coercive wealth distribution from the productive rich to the deservedly poor.

Then what of the poor? In a godly society, there should not be a vast horde of poor people. As a society progresses in its covenantal faithfulness to God, the total wealth of a society is expected to increase. God brings His covenantal judgments in a positive fashion in history: the blessings outnumber the curses most of the time. History moves forward. Mankind is given ever-increasing supplies of capital in order to subdue the earth. As this capital growth process takes place, per capita wealth increases. Nevertheless, there will always be people who fall into the lowest third of national income. The only way that we could escape from this in history would be if hell were a society based on equality. If hell brought equal negative sanctions to everyone inside its boundaries, it might be theoretically possible to speak of an egalitarian society in history. If all sins were equal in God's eyes, and if sanctions were equally applied, then equality in hell would be a reality. Yet, even in hell, there is no equality (Luke 12:47–48).⁴⁹ Clearly, there is no equality in heaven (I Cor. 3:8–15).⁵⁰ So, the ideal of the *equality of results* is entirely mythical. It is a lie of the devil, who understandably wishes it were true.

K. Sanctions and Inequality

Because God does not respect persons, He rewards and punishes people in terms of their actions and thoughts in history. He rewards individuals in time and eternity in terms of their conformity to His law. He rewards societies in terms of their outward conformity to His law. He brings positive and negative sanctions in history. Therefore,

49. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

50. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

there is no aspect of God's creation that displays equality of results. There is no area of God's final judgment that displays inequality of judgment before the law.

1. Impartiality and Inequality

The *impartiality* of God leads to *disparities of rewards*. Those who achieve a great deal are given great rewards. Those who achieve average results are given average rewards. Those who achieve below-average results receive below-average rewards. Those who are out of covenantal favor with God are said to have nothing, and what they have is taken away from them (Matt. 13:12).⁵¹ That is to say, they are cast out of the presence of God and tortured eternally without mercy.⁵² But they are not tortured equally (Luke 12: 47–48).⁵³

Inequality of results is an inescapable outcome of the *inequality of men's productivity*, given the existence of impartial justice. Put another way, impartial justice—justice that does not bring sanctions or evaluate public actions in terms of a person's economic status or legal status—inevitably produces inequality of economic results. When the judge imposes double restitution on the criminal, he inescapably creates inequality of economic results. This is exactly what God does in history. When God brings His judgment into history, there will be unequal economic results.

It is basic to the socialist perspective of all liberation theologians to deny this principle. They seek equality of results, and therefore they inescapably recommend policies that are a flat denial of the biblical principle of impartiality of justice. *Liberation theology is a self-conscious rebellion against Leviticus 19:15*. Its defenders seek to confuse their followers and their readers on this point. Impartial justice that is applied in a world made up of people with differing capacities and differing degrees of righteousness will inevitably produce inequality of economic results. It is this outcome of biblical law which enrages and outrages almost all modern Christian theologians, especially those who are either neo-evangelical college professors (outside of the natural sciences) or liberation theologians. They call for the state to use the threat of violence to steal the wealth of the successful and transfer it to

51. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 27.

52. Those Christians who are squeamish about the word "torture" may prefer to substitute the word "torment." See Matthew 18:34 and Luke 16:24.

53. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

the unsuccessful. They call for socialism: the state's control over resources through bureaucracy. They prefer the political sanctions of bureaucrats to the economic sanctions of consumers.

2. Politically Correct Thought

There is a socialist-approved exception to this socialist ideology of equality of results, however: the classroom. Marxists, feminists, and assorted Left-wing ideologues teach in colleges and seminaries. They are lawfully sanctioned classroom tyrants who hand out sanctions: grades. Any student who challenges their heretical or apostate theology is risking a D, an F, or even dismissal from the campus.

Imitating their secular peers, theological liberals have hired and fired faculty members for generations in terms of this principle: no professor is to suggest that biblical law should be enforced. They have screened the entire Christian academic community in terms of this principle. They impose vengeance: sanctions without mercy. They have sought to establish entire faculties that do not deviate from humanism's party line. To achieve this, they have imposed inequality of standards and have produced unequal results: students who are coerced for ideological reasons and fellow faculty members who are humiliated into silence. This same policy went on without an institutionally significant challenge in secular institutions until 1990.⁵⁴ It is today difficult to find an American institution of higher education that mandates that the Bible be used to judge the both the content and structure of every academic discipline. Some would say it is impossible. It was impossible yesterday, too—all the way back to the University of Paris in the twelfth century.

The law of God testifies against the legitimacy of any society that seeks the equality of results. God's law testifies against any society that uses the power of the civil government to redistribute wealth on any basis except one: the proportional restitution payment from a criminal to his victim.

54. Charles J. Sykes, *Profscam: Professors and the Higher Education Game* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1988). Regnery, a small conservative publishing firm, had no influence, nor did Sykes' brilliant book. After the collapse of Communism in 1989 came Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990); Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America* (New York: Viking, 1990); Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991). These books were published by major publishers.

The Bible is quite clear. There must be no respect of persons. Because individuals have different abilities, there must be inequality of economic results if God's law is enforced without respect of persons. The only justification for the state to intervene to take wealth from one individual and give it to another individual is that the first individual has been convicted in a civil court due process of law for having committed a crime against the second individual. *The quest for restitution for a specific crime or broken contract is the only legitimate way for an individual to seek the economic intervention of the state against another individual.*

In contrast to this principle of civil justice is the socialist ideal: the equality of economic results. This equality is pursued by using civil power to take wealth from those who have legally gained it through competition in a market with open entry, and to redistribute it to those who have done nothing to receive it other than being statistically classified as poor. Nevertheless, the poor are still with us. So is a growing horde of middle-class bureaucrats who administer the government-mandated anti-poverty programs. The United States' Federal bureaucracy extracts as administration expenses at least half of the Federal government's total expenditures on welfare programs.⁵⁵ This is why there is an entrenched high-income voting bloc in support of these programs, despite the taxes required to pay for them.

Formally educated, state-certified members of the middle class staff the state's wealth-redistribution system, which vastly increases their wealth and status at the expense of both the rich and the poor. The welfare state has been the great rewarder of middle-class and upper-middle-class people who have gained access to those government positions involved in the welfare distribution process. In a perverse way, these people have sought the middle-class position that the Bible says that the average person should pray for, but these people have not prayed; they have preyed. They have preyed on the rich; they have preyed on the poor. They have kept the rich in a position of permanent anxiety about taxation, and they have kept the poor in permanent status as poor, with almost no hope of escaping the clutches of the welfare system.⁵⁶ Yet this system is defended (with the obligatory "it is admittedly unfortunate that. . .") by the vast majority of Christian

55. James L. Payne, *The Culture of Spending: Why Congress Lives Beyond Our Means* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1991), p. 51.

56. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

academics in the late twentieth century, all in the name of biblical theology. Sometimes, as in the case of Ronald Sider, it is even defended in the name of Leviticus 19:15.

L. The Rejection of Biblical Economic Blueprints

The biblical standard of civil justice is simple to state: one law-order for all men, with judges acting impartially to apply God's revealed laws to specific cases. The judicial principle is this: "No respect for persons."

1. The Bible vs. Socialism

With this as the judicial standard, it is impossible to obey God's law and simultaneously promote the idea of socialism. The socialist ideal is a society that manifests economic equality apart from market performance: the satisfaction of consumers. The socialist state's ideal is to enforce a wealth transfer from the rich to the poor, with the poor formally represented by the state. The owners of capital are to be forced by the state to give up either ownership (socialism) or control (fascism) of the tools of production: land, labor, and capital.

The socialist aims at *equality of economic results*. The Bible insists on *equality before God's law*. The two standards cannot be reconciled. To enforce the law impartially in a world filled with people who possess different goals, talents, and capital is to make impossible the equality of economic results. *The socialists' economic ideal and the Bible's judicial ideal are irreconcilable*. This is why Christian socialists and economic interventionists categorically reject biblical law. They deny that the Bible offers blueprints for economics. They deny that it offers permanent economic or political models. They insist that the Bible is open-ended with respect to economics, making the Bible useless as a guide to political economy. They do this because the Bible very clearly establishes principles of legal order that outlaw all forms of socialism, and the critics hate free market capitalism. So, they make statements such as these:

[Keynesian:] The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of

Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way.⁵⁷

[Communal socialist:] Since koinonia includes the participation of everyone involved, there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers.⁵⁸

[Socialist:] There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy.⁵⁹

The goal is equality of economic results: “Championing the cause of the poor will lead us to labor for justice and a greater degree of equality for all people.”⁶⁰ Notice his language: “all people”—righteous and unrighteous, workers and drones, wise and foolish, Christians and atheists, and above all, covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. This is Satan’s initial lure: equality for all. And then, when his covenantal disciples gain control, Christians discover the truth: the systematic oppression of covenant-keepers by covenant-breakers. It is a replay of the creation of government-funded day schools that were promoted in the United States by Unitarian radicals from the 1830s onward. These schools initially were defended on the principle of “equal time for all views.”⁶¹ What we subsequently found was the institutional triumph of the religion of autonomous man: no time for Jesus.

It is always the same with the advocates of “no biblical blueprints.” First, they tell us: “The Bible does not *require* free enterprise.” We then ask these anti-blueprint Christian socialists: “Then does the Bible at least *allow* free enterprise?” Their answer is immediate: “No; never the free market. Something else; anything else; but never the free market.” So, the Bible apparently does provide an *anti-blueprint*: no free market.

The problem is, the handful of Christian scholars who write against socialism generally refuse to defend their opposition in terms

57. William E. Diehl, “The Guided-Market System,” in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1984), p. 87. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

58. Art Gish, “Decentralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 154.

59. John Gladwin, “Centralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 183.

60. Robert G. Clouse, “Postscript,” *ibid.*, p. 224.

61. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History and Philosophy of Education* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1963]).

of the Bible. They rely on atheistic and agnostic free market economists to carry their water in their refutations of the writings of atheistic and agnostic socialist economists, whose works the Christian socialists have cited (if any) in search of academic support. Thus, we find Reformed Theological Seminary professor Ronald Nash (a follower of Calvinist philosopher Gordon Clark) defending the familiar academic party line of epistemological neutrality:

This book is not an attempt to produce a system of Christian economics. There is no such thing as revealed economics. There is no such thing as positive Christian economics.⁶²

Attempts to deduce any political or economic doctrine from the Bible should be viewed, initially at least, with skepticism. After all, the Bible is no more a textbook on economics than it is on astrology or geology. There is no such thing as revealed economics.⁶³

If the Bible really is not a textbook for economics and politics, and if there really is no such thing as Bible-revealed economics, then all attempts to deduce political and economic doctrines from the Bible must be met with something more than mere initial skepticism. Such attempts should be met automatically with a full-scale frontal assault, i.e., total rejection, not to mention outrage. After all, such deductions are inescapably heretical if it is true that the Bible does not reveal morally *and academically* binding principles of economics. Dr. Nash was altogether too wishy-washy. It was not sufficient for him to dismiss *The Other Side, Sojourners*, InterVarsity Press, and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company in a chapter called "The Christian War Against Economics."⁶⁴ He should also forthrightly have led his assembled academic troops in a second campaign: "The War Against Christian Economics." He should have faced the fact that he was conducting a two-front war: the Evangelicals for Social Action on his left; the Institute for Christian Economics on his right. It was time for him to prove, argument by argument and verse by verse, why the works of the Institute for Christian Economics are at best misguided and at worst heretical. He has to show why Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* is wrong and Volume 1 of Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* is worse.

62. Ronald Nash, *Poverty and Wealth* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1986), p. 12. Reprinted by Probe Books, Richardson, Texas.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

64. *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

Here is a secondary question: How are Christians to defend the six-day creation from the evolutionists if the Bible does not provide the authoritative revelational foundation for textbooks on geology and biology? Also, what about sociology, education, and every other social science? Is the Bible's revelation regarding God, man, law, causation, and time not authoritative? This self-conscious denial of the existence of biblical blueprints is inescapably a surrender to the covenant-breaker in every area of academic life. But those Christians who wish to teach in tax-funded state universities, as Nash did through most of his career as a professor of philosophy and religion at Western Kentucky University, or in private secular humanist universities face a painful choice: (1) reject the suggestion that the Bible provides authoritative blueprints as well as content for their chosen academic discipline; (2) devote their lives to teaching in class what they do not believe is true: officially neutral, and therefore anti-biblical, courses; (3) get fired for teaching religious dogma. Needless to say, the first decision is the path of least resistance. Those who take it can retain their academic respectability as well as their paychecks. This is exactly what the secularists pay them to do, and they do it remarkably well. Even when they leave the employment of the state, they rarely recant their earlier academic presuppositions.

2. Blueprints: An Inescapable Concept

Blueprints are an inescapable concept. It is never a question of "blueprints vs. no blueprints." It is always a question of *whose* blueprints. Blueprints establish boundaries. They include and therefore must also exclude. Rival systems of law and economics are excluded by blueprints. *There has to be a blueprint.* This is why there is a biblical economic blueprint.⁶⁵ Either this blueprint excludes the various forms of socialism or else it includes socialism and excludes the free market. There is no halfway house in between, no permanently mixed economy. There are biblical economics and biblical civil justice, and there are all the other covenant-breaking rival positions.

3. Christian Professors vs. the Bible

This assertion is rejected almost automatically by the vast majority of Christians who hold teaching positions as economists in secular in-

65. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

stitutions. Typical are the arguments of Ian Smith, a lecturer in economics at St. Salvator's College in St. Andrews University in Scotland. In a *Festschrift* to Carl F. H. Henry, America's leading neo-evangelical social theologian after 1945, Smith surveyed various attempts by non-theonomic Christian economists to present a Christian alternative to secular economics. He found all such attempts "rather limited" and "pedestrian." He continued: "Perhaps this is inevitable. The Bible does not furnish us with specific and authoritative economic models that can be directly applied to contemporary society. Some authors have disputed this observation and sought to devise a biblical economics based on the Old Testament law. However, a reliance on the Mosaic legislation to provide a blueprint for reconstructing the modern economy is theologically dubious and culturally anachronistic."⁶⁶ The idea of a biblical blueprint was anathema to him. ("Anathema," of course, is far too judicial a word for such men to employ. It implies permanent negative sanctions.)

Without so much as a footnote to even one book by a theonomist, he dismissed "Rushdooney" (misspelled), North, and Bahnsen.⁶⁷ He admitted that "The Pentateuch is also the richest biblical resource in terms of economic content. . . ." He also admitted that "Much more detailed and precise analyses and proposals have been forthcoming from the theonomists than from other Christian camps."⁶⁸ But he nevertheless dismisses theonomy as misguided. He spoke representatively for the whole of the modern Christian academic world: "The corollary of this position that I am affirming is that none of the Mosaic legislation per se is binding as independent *lex*. New covenant believers are not obliged to obey it, not one jot or tittle; on the other hand, they do fulfill it by living in conformity with the new covenant to which the old covenant points. In short, Christians live under the stipulations of the New Testament and interpret the Old christologically."⁶⁹

Having dismissed the entire Old Testament as judicially non-binding, he then concluded that Christian economics is "perhaps" inevitably pedestrian. In short, having stripped Christianity of its binding legal content, he then found Christian economics pedestrian. He was like a man who first removes all the black marbles from an urn filled

66. Ian Smith, "God and Economics," in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 178.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

68. *Idem.*

69. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

with black and white marbles, and then discovers that all the marbles are boringly white. Christian academics prefer pedestrian academic alternatives to contemporary humanism. This way, they can continue in good conscience to receive their above-market, taxpayer-subsidized paychecks from state universities. They can continue to be members in good standing of covenant-breaking secular faculties. They can continue to sell their birthrights for a mess of tenure.

Nevertheless, in order also to maintain their good standing in evangelical local congregations, they rush to affirm their verbal commitment—a highly deceptive commitment—to the Old Testament. Smith wrote: “However, this does not preclude studying the Old Testament social system as a rich ethical resource, so long as it is not appealed to as normative—that is, divinely ordained as authoritative for today.”⁷⁰ He could as easily have appealed to the Koran or the Talmud as a “rich ethical resource.” This is cafeteria ethics: you select whatever you like and leave the rest behind. Smith’s verbally gushing praise for God’s supposedly non-binding revealed word was a polite way of saying, “If I were unmarried, I could commit bestiality if I felt like it, since there’s no New Testament law prohibiting it.” Such Christian scholars are quite willing to defend the economics of perversion in the name of Jesus. Their name is legion.

4. *The Economics of Perversion*

The existence of biblical economic blueprints is loudly denied by Douglas Vickers, a Keynesian economist and defender of the “mixed economy” who has presented his case against Christian economics in the name of the Bible and Cornelius Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics. In his secular calling, Vickers wrote a post-Keynesian money and banking textbook.⁷¹ His two Christian economics books are open in their rejection of the continuing validity of Mosaic law, including the Bible’s economic laws. He is consistent when he rejects: (1) the ideal of a judicial theocracy,⁷² (2) the ideal of the possibility of reconstructing society along biblical lines,⁷³ (3) the ideal of a free market

70. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

71. Douglas Vickers, *Money, Banking, and the Macroeconomy* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985).

72. “. . . Christian economics cannot proceed as though it was in some sense legislating for the economic structure of a theocracy.” Douglas Vickers, *Economics and Man: Prelude to a Christian Critique* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1976), p. 73.

73. “It is accordingly improper to speak of the fact or the possibility of a Christian society. For society at large is apostate, inherently and structurally pagan.” *Ibid.*, p. 363.

economic order,⁷⁴ and then proclaims as the Christian economic standard an even greater extension of the range of state economic intervention than is promoted by the twentieth century's principle of the mixed economy.⁷⁵ Vickers acknowledged that the Mosaic economy stands against the graduated income tax system of the modern world. His response was to reject the ideal of the Mosaic economy. "If, of course, we were legislating for an ideal society, or, again, for a theocratic order of an earlier kind, then a strictly proportional tax, such as the tithe, would probably be all that would be required."⁷⁶ He regarded John Maynard Keynes, the homosexual Cambridge economist (B.A., mathematics; no Ph.D.), whose *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936) established the overwhelmingly dominant economic outlook of the modern era, as having "brought something of morality back into economics."⁷⁷ Dr. Vickers was a believer in the economics of perversion.⁷⁸ So are most of his fellow Christian academics in the social sciences. This is why they are adamant: *no biblical law!* Biblical law precludes socialism, fascism, and the Keynesian mixed economy.

M. Legislating Morality

Are Christians required by God to oppose socialism in all forms? Yes. Are they then required to pressure the state to pass civil laws that sanction private property? Yes. Are they morally required to elect political representatives who then repeal all laws that restrict the use of private property except in cases that the Bible prohibits specific uses

74. "But there has been, nevertheless, throughout the nineteenth century and down to the present time, notwithstanding the historical testimony of the debacles of slump and inflation and depression and boom, a yearning for the intellectual simplicities of the *laissez-faire* theory, and for an espousal of the economic proposition that that government governs best which governs least." *Ibid.*, pp. 349–50.

75. "In the outcome, we have seen that a Christian perspective on the economic problem will necessarily fragment into a number of operational objectives in the kind of mixed capitalist economies with which we are familiar in the Western democracies. And we have seen, without recapitulating any detail at all at this point, that it is possible to set against these operational objectives a range, a wider range than might initially have been imagined, of legitimate economic policy instruments and options." *Ibid.*, p. 352.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

78. Ian Hodge, *Baptized Inflation: A Critique of "Christian" Keynesianism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/HodgeBap>). This is a detailed critique of Vickers by a non-economist who, unlike Vickers, understands free market economics.

(e.g., homosexual prostitution and pedophilia)? Yes. Does this mean that Christians are required to legislate morality?⁷⁹ In the sense that they are to legislate against certain forms of public immorality, yes. There is only one alternative to legislating morality: legislating immorality. But doesn't this mean the establishment of religion? Yes. *All civil legislation is the establishment of some religion*. Thus, the Bible requires this legislation to be explicitly biblical: Old and New Testaments. Every nation is required by God to become formally, judicially Trinitarian. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:18–19). Civil government is not exempted from the Great Commission.⁸⁰

On the contrary, we are assured by those who reject biblical blueprints, the Bible also does not provide a blueprint for establishing a theocracy, i.e., the rule of God over civil government. Then does the Bible at least allow theocracy as one option among many? "No; theocracy must be avoided, although all other political systems are conformable to the Bible's non-blueprints." So, the Bible supposedly provides an *anti-blueprint*: no theocracy. And so it goes. What the Bible categorically requires, these critics "inside the camp" deny as illegitimate even as an option in a supposedly open-ended world. Why? Because if the Bible really does provide judicial blueprints, there is no biblically legitimate possibility of a judicially or institutionally open-ended world. *There is no morally legitimate "process" outside the limits of the Bible's judicial blueprints*. This conclusion appalls them. They would rather surrender three-fourths of the Bible than accept such a conclusion. And so they have done, generation after generation. They believe that the Old Testament is "God's word, emeritus."

Conclusion

Leviticus 19:15 establishes a fundamental principle of justice: the impartial application of God's legal standards to all men, irrespective of their wealth or status. It proclaims the judicial principle of equality before the law. This biblical principle of civil justice is the antithesis of

79. George Grant, *Legislating Immorality: The Homosexual Movement Comes Out of the Closet* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993).

80. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

all socialism. The socialist proclaims the need for the equality of economic results, not equality before the law. There is no way to achieve the former without abandoning the latter, and vice versa. Logically, the socialist has to deny the legitimacy of Leviticus 19:15; logically, the defender of Leviticus 19:15 has to deny socialism. People are not always logical, however. What we find is that defenders of Christian socialism either ignore the existence of Leviticus 19:15 or else reinterpret it to mean the opposite of what it says. They interpret it, as Sider interprets it, to mean that the judge must uphold the poor man in his cause. But upholding the poor man in his cause is as great a sin as upholding the mighty in his cause. The text says so.

The response of Christian socialists and welfare statisticians has been to deny that the Bible offers biblical blueprints for economics. Any appeal by a Christian economist to the Mosaic law is rejected as illegitimate. This has to be their response, since the legal order of the Mosaic Covenant, if obeyed, would inevitably produce a free market social order. Without the Mosaic law, however, it is not possible to say what kind of social and economic order would have to develop from Christianity. Thus, in order to leave the social order biblically open-ended, the Christian defenders of the welfare state are forced to deny that the Bible offers any blueprints at all. Then they tell us what kind of economic order they would like to see established in God's name (by way of Keynes, Marx, or no economist at all).⁸¹

The issue of wealth redistribution through taxation is never discussed by Christian defenders of the welfare state in terms of Samuel's warning in I Samuel 8: a tyrannical king is marked by his willingness to extract as much as 10% of his subjects' net income. To return to such a "tyrannical" tax rate, every modern industrial nation would have to cut its average level of taxation by 75%. Yet Christian defenders of the welfare state insist that far too much money is left in the hands of today's citizens. We need more "economic justice" in the name of Jesus, they say. We need greater taxation of the wealthy—and the not-so-wealthy. We need a "graduated tithe."

The biblical solution is to restrict total personal and corporate taxation—national, regional, and local taxation *combined*—to less than 10% of net income, just as the tithe lawfully collected by the combined levels of a national church's hierarchy is limited to 10%. But this Old Covenant limit on taxation is too confining for welfare statisticians.

81. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty*: the absence of economists.

The state today asserts an implicit claim to be the primary judicial agent of God in history. The mark of this presumed primary sovereignty is the lack of biblically revealed limits (boundaries) on the wealth that it is authorized by God to extract from those under its jurisdiction. This is the political doctrine of the divine right of the people—an assertion of the voters' God-granted moral authority to steal from each other by means of the ballot box. "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The doctrine of equality before the law was one of the reasons why the West grew rich. This legal inheritance came from the Old Testament, not from democratic Athens or non-democratic Rome. Modern Christians have imbibed deeply on the socialist legacy of equality of results rather than equality before the civil law. The result has been the creation of enormous civil governments that are ruthless in their pursuit of money, power, and control. In the modern era, this began with the confiscation of church properties by Renaissance monarchs of the sixteenth century, most notably Henry VIII.⁸² The Protestants supported this, and some of them participated in the distribution of the loot.

The use of civil government as an agency of political plunder has made thieves of us all. It is bad enough that we participate as recipients of stolen goods. It is worse that we call for more. Christian defenders of the welfare state never cease to call for more taxation, more confiscation, more *social justice*, by which they mean more government agents' guns in the bellies of everyone with wealth that exceeds the per capita wealth of the special interest voting bloc in whose name the activists generate the donations that support them in upper-middle-class comfort. Their worldview, when legislated and enforced, undermines the rule of law and thereby undermines economic growth, which alone can raise the poor out of their poverty.

82. Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 2.

15

LOCAL JUSTICE VS. CENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).

Leviticus 19:15 deals with more than just the principle of impartial civil justice.¹ It also deals with the locus of civil judicial sovereignty: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou *judge thy neighbour*.” This law established the requirement that the citizens of Israel from time to time be required to serve as civil judges in their communities. Jethro had told Moses: “Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee” (Ex. 18:21–22).² The focus of Leviticus 19:15 is on civil courts within the local community, although the principle of equality before the law also applies to ecclesiastical courts. The verse specifically says, “in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor.” There is a very strong emphasis on *ethics*: righteousness. There is also a very strong emphasis on *localism* in this verse: judging a neighbor.

Two issues are fundamental in this verse: equality before the law

1. Chapter 14.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

and judicial participation. First, *equality before the law*: this points back to Exodus 12:49, where the law of God is identified as the binding judicial standard for all civil judgment, irrespective of the national and covenantal origins of residents within the land.³ Second, *local judicial participation*: the law is given to people in a particular community. Law enforcement is always to begin with *self-judgment*. The formal exercise of covenantal judgment then extends to local covenantal institutions: church, family, and state. This indicates that jurors and judges in the first stage of civil court proceedings must be recruited from the local community. Their attitudes will inescapably be shaped by that community. Acknowledging both the reality and the legitimacy of this institutional arrangement, Leviticus 19:15 emphasizes the necessity of righteousness. It is this fusion of *God's universal standards* with honest and impartial judgment according to *local customs and circumstances*—the one and the many—that is the basis of the development of the godly civil order.⁴

A. Judicial Localism

Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, who served as the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives in the 1980s,⁵ once described the nature of American politics: “All politics is local.” This undoubtedly reflects the bias of a member of the United States House of Representatives (435 members, each elected to represent a single geographical district), but his observation is correct regarding biblical civil government. In a political order that is structured in terms of biblical standards, politics is inherently local. The reason why this is true is that politics is an aspect of the civil judicial order. Politics is an aspect of civil judicial sanctions. It is the means by which those who are lawfully represented in the civil realm are given an opportunity periodically to sanction their judicial representatives: legislators, judges, and governors. This is the Bible’s authorized means of allocating lawful civil authority. This is why all politics is inherently a form of the judiciary. *Politics is an outworking of the civil office of judge.*

In the area of civil justice, however, it is clear that the average citizen still possesses more authority on a jury than he does in any other civil office. Unless he holds elective office or is a judge, his office as jur-

3. See Chapter 14.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

5. This office is sometimes regarded by political analysts as the second most powerful in the United States after the Presidency.

or is the most influential civil office that he will hold. The jury is the local institution that has the authority to declare a person innocent. Its judgment is final in the case of a declaration of innocence. So, judicial sovereignty is overwhelmingly local with respect to the declaration, "Not guilty."

Biblical politics is at bottom local because biblical courts are at bottom local. Judicial authority moves from the bottom to the top (local jurisdiction to the more distant center) in a biblical civil order (Ex. 18). *Biblical civil justice is exclusively negative*: bringing negative sanctions against those who initiate or commit acts that violate fundamental law and its appropriate legislation. An individual defies the legislation by committing a prohibited act. The biblical judicial model places primary responsibility for applying the law within the community in which the prohibited act took place, since the victim was injured while residing under the jurisdiction of a local court. The judicial process of bringing negative sanctions therefore must begin with an investigation of the facts of the case in a particular place and at a certain time. It is least expensive in most judicial conflicts to obtain accurate information about local events in the local jurisdiction. It is also least expensive to obtain accurate information about the local community's interpretation of the law in the local jurisdiction. The legal issue is *jurisdiction*: speaking (diction) the law (juris). Who possesses the initial right and responsibility for speaking the law in society and then enforcing it? The words of Exodus 18 are clear: local civil magistrates.

The preservation of freedom in Israel's civil order relied on local jurisdiction. Local tribal units helped to maintain this localism. There had to be permanent legal boundaries between each tribe. These boundaries protected Israel from political centralization. Political scientist Aaron Wildavsky wrote: "Moses' strategy was to divide the Israelites to keep them whole. Treating the people as a collective unit exposed them to collective punishment."⁶ He gave the example of the Levites' slaying of 3,000 members of other tribes who had participated in the idolatry of the golden calf (Ex. 32:27–28). "If Moses had not shown that he would punish at least some of the people, the Lord, in whose eyes all were equally guilty, would have done them all in. So Moses had to separate some to save others."⁷ Wildavsky could also have offered the example of the tribe of Benjamin, whose rebellion led

6. Aaron Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama, 1984), p. 112.

7. *Idem*.

to the military destruction of almost the entire tribe by the other tribes (Jud. 20). Sin was contained. Israel's tribal boundaries served as restraints against the spread of covenantal rebellion. In this sense, tribal boundaries had a *primary defensive* judicial aspect: preserving the authority of local jurisdictions and outlooks.

These boundaries also had a *secondary expansive* judicial aspect. A local jurisdiction could begin to apply God's law in a new way, and this new application might prove beneficial to the local community. Localism leads to experimentation. A tribal unit could become a kind of judicial laboratory. The rest of the nation could see if God blessed this experiment. (This presumes that God did bring predictable, visible, positive corporate sanctions in history in response to corporate covenantal faithfulness.) At the discretion of the local community, the new judicial practices of another tribe could be imported. But the importing initiative was local, unless the nation's supreme civil authorities mandated the change in the name of God's law. If the nation's appeals court used the local guideline as a judicial standard, it would become a national standard.

Localism in Mosaic Israel was offset in part by the presence of Levites: local advisors who rarely had an inheritance in rural land.⁸ Instead, they had income from the tithe (Num. 18:20–21)⁹ and urban property (Lev. 25:32–34). They served as specialized judicial agents of God. The tribe of Levi was the only cross-boundary national tribe: the tribe that publicly spoke God's law. So, there was both localism and universalism, the many and the one, in the judicial structure of Mosaic Israel.

B. The Division of Judicial Labor

The organizational problem that Moses faced in applying God's revealed law to specific cases was that there were too many disputes to settle.

1. *The Final Voice of Earthly Authority*

Moses was God's only authorized voice of civil authority within

8. There were two exceptions: (1) land that had been vowed for use by a priest but then was leased by the vow-taker to someone else; (2) land that had been vowed for a priest which was then voluntarily forfeited by the heirs at the time of the jubilee (Lev. 27:20–21). Chapter 36.

9. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

the nation, as Korah and Dathan learned the hard way (Num. 16).¹⁰ His word was the final earthly court of appeal in Israel. He therefore became the central civil judicial institution, which is another way of saying that he became the pinnacle.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to inquire of God: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the is not statutes of God, and his laws. And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone (Ex. 18:13–18).

The problem was this: Moses, despite his ability to declare the most reliable civil judgments in the land (or in the world, for that matter), had become an impediment to obtaining widespread justice. The reliability and predictability of civil judgment in Israel was no better than the ability of the disputants to get to the front of the line. This allocation system for civil justice rewarded those who were willing and able to stand in line. But standing in line is expensive. It uses up the only truly irreplaceable economic resource: *time*. Jethro saw the problem and recommended a solution.

Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves (Ex. 18:19–26).

This solution was based on the economic principle of the division of labor. It necessarily relied on the judicial principle of localism. The authority to impose civil and ecclesiastical sanctions *moved upward judicially* (i.e., *inward geographically*, toward the tabernacle, and later, once they were in the Promised Land, toward Jerusalem) from the local jurisdiction to a more distant jurisdiction.¹¹ This means that the broadest judicial authority in Israel was local. This was where the resident of Israel first encountered God's civil law. Jethro reserved the judicial system's scarcest economic resources—those people who possess progressively better-informed judgment—for the progressively more difficult cases.

Judicial resources, being scarce, had to be allocated by means of some principle. This was not the free market principle of "highest bid wins." Civil and ecclesiastical justice may not lawfully be purchased. But without price allocation, there was only one other alternative means of rationing civil justice: standing in line. Jethro's system transformed the single long line in front of Moses' tent into tens of thousands of shorter lines. Rashi,¹² the late eleventh-century French rabbinic commentator, estimated that in Moses' day, there would have been 78,600 judges in four levels.¹³

11. The "inner circle" of influence or power is therefore at the top of the organizational pyramid, if not formally, then at least informally. See Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Covenant, [2002] 2012), Introduction.

12. Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo) Yizchaki.

13. His reasoning: 600 at the top—judges of thousands (600,000 men divided by 1,000); 6,000 in the upper middle—judges of hundreds (600,000 men divided by 100); 12,000 in the lower middle—judges of fifties (600,000 men divided by 50); and 60,000 lower court judges—judges of tens (600,000 men divided by 10). *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum, translators, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, [1934] 1985 [Jewish year: 5745]), II, p. 95. Rashi served as a rabbinic judge, and difficult cases were continually sent to him from Germany and France. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, [1894] 1945), III, p. 287.

2. The Intellectual Division of Labor

Localism is extremely important for the advancement of what I call the division of judicial labor. The concept of the division of labor is basic to the Bible. We see it in a primarily negative sense in the scattering of families at the Tower of Babel.¹⁴ We see it in a positive sense in Paul's injunction that the simple man or the man of one primary skill not feel bad because he does not possess a skill that a more prestigious individual has. In both I Corinthians 12¹⁵ and Romans 12,¹⁶ Paul was speaking of the church as a body. No individual member of the body should feel that he is less important than any other member of the body. The body is governed by its head, Jesus Christ. Therefore, so long as the entire body is honoring its head, no member of the body should feel as though he is less important than any other (I Cor. 12:4–27).

The idea of scarcity is the most fundamental idea of modern economics: "There is no such thing as a free lunch." Scarcity is defined as follows: at zero price, there is greater demand for a scarce resource than there is supply. Modern economics asks the question: How can men reduce the level of scarcity? This is the question of wealth or economic development. Modern economics began with the observation that the division of labor is society's most important means of reducing scarcity. We date the advent of modern economics with the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. Smith began Book I, Chapter I, which is titled "Of the Division of Labour," with these words: "The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour." His statement refers to the productivity of labor, but it applies to every area of human endeavor in which cooperative service is beneficial. He was saying that there is a greater output of goods and services for any single input of labor resource when individuals cooperate voluntarily in a division of labor economy.

The application of a biblical truth—the division of labor within the

14. Not entirely a negative sanction. See my comments in *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 19.

15. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

16. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

institutional church—is not limited to the church or to economics. It also has important ramifications for politics, social institutions, and all other aspects of life in which men and women cooperate for personal gain, and whose cooperative efforts lead to greater social benefits. The principle is this: through cooperation, the *specialized knowledge* of individuals can be applied more effectively to those areas of life in which this knowledge is most appropriate. Thus, it is possible for individuals to achieve greater output because their unique skills and unique knowledge are most effectively applied to the specific and narrow tasks at hand. This means that through the division of labor, there is a greater output of socially valuable wisdom from a given input of individual knowledge. It is the free market economic order alone that permits the widespread co-ordination of individual plans.¹⁷ By bringing together many minds to deal with particular problems, society gains the benefit of obtaining greater wisdom at any given expenditure—in this context, judicial cases. It also means that there will be a greater number of cases settled by courts when this division of labor is operating. Many courts and many cases mean greater justice within the community (Ex. 18).

3. Committees and Representation

A committee is a means of pooling knowledge: division of intellectual labor. The ultimate committee—the Trinity—is an *economical* Trinity as well as an ontological Trinity. There is a hierarchy of tasks and responsibilities despite the three Persons' equality of Being. It is not sufficient to say that the three Persons of the Trinity are equal in substance and glory (the ontological Trinity). We must also distinguish their interrelationships and their specific tasks (the economical Trinity). The Holy Spirit is sent by both the Father (John 14:26) and the Son (John 16:7). The Spirit goes where He is sent. There is no escape from hierarchy, not even in the Trinity. But this subordination is functional and relational, not in terms of God's being or substance.¹⁸ God is the ultimate committee: unified yet plural. There is a division of labor within the Godhead.

17. Friedrich A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), chaps. 2, 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>). Cf. Gerald P. O'Driscoll, Jr., *Economics as a Coordination Problem: The Contributions of Friederich A. Hayek* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977). (<http://bit.ly/Odriscoll>)

18. Augustine, *On the Trinity* (A.D. 400), Bk. V; in Philip Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1887] 1978).

Human committees do not possess omniscience or perfect unity. There are institutional limits on men's division of intellectual labor. We see this most notably in the operations of committees. After leaving a committee meeting, Nobel Prize-winning economist George Stigler remarked that Charles Lindburgh's 1927 feat of flying across the Atlantic alone from New York to Paris seems less impressive when we consider the difficulty he would have faced had he made the same flight under the direction of a committee.¹⁹ There is a familiar saying: "A camel is a horse designed by a committee." This saying recognizes a fundamental problem with committees: they are seldom creative, despite the division of intellectual labor.

Why is this the case? Because of the difficulty of establishing individual responsibility and therefore of applying appropriate sanctions, either positive or negative. It becomes more expensive to monitor individual performance and reward it appropriately as the size of any organization increases.²⁰ A committee's productivity stems primarily from its collective knowledge in judging plans submitted by responsible individuals. A committee pools individual judgments. A committee is far better able to determine why something has not worked properly in the past than what will work best in the future. It is an institution far more suitable for imposing negative sanctions against the managers of poorly functioning operations than for producing original institutional designs leading to productive future operations.²¹ In short, *a committee is most productive when it delegates authority to a representative*. It then brings either positive or negative sanctions against its representative in terms of specific performance criteria.

A committee sets general policy. More to the point, it elects a representative agent who devises and then proposes general policy. He

19. Cited by Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 24. The remark is sometimes attributed to Charles F. Kettering, the inventive genius at General Motors in the 1920s. When informed that Lindburgh had flown the Atlantic alone, he supposedly replied: "Let me know when a committee does it." Kettering was an extreme individualist who did not fit into Alfred Sloan's brilliantly conceived organizational structure. His enormous productivity bought him independence from Sloan's task-based system of management. Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 411.

20. Sowell, *ibid.*, p. 56.

21. The creativity of the United States Constitutional Convention of 1787 was unique. It was closed to the public, and its attendees were oath-bound not to discuss its deliberations during their lifetimes, which none of them did, including the anti-Federalists who had attended. Far more representative of the productivity of political committees were the results of the various constitutional conventions of France, 1789–92.

submits his plan to the committee, which then accepts, modifies, or rejects the plan of action or policy. Having set (approved) general policy, a committee retains a veto over decisions made by its representative agent. A committee that attempts to do more than veto decisions made by innovators will strangle the host organization. A committee loses efficiency when it seeks to impose its general policies at the local level. We readily understand this in the case of military operations: one person is in command over his troops, but he answers to a senior officer, all the way up to the Joint Chiefs of Staff or its equivalent. We also understand that the greater the distance from the central command, the greater the local commander's knowledge of the battlefield. The military command's problem is to fuse the one and the many: the overall plan of battle with battlefield tactics.²² We could call this *military casuistry*: local application of the general's laws.

The organizational problem that a human committee faces is the task of establishing *clear-cut boundaries of individual authority and responsibility*. Each division must possess its own appropriate tasks, regulations, and sanctions, both positive and negative. As economist Thomas Sowell writes, "the most basic decision is *who* makes the decision, under what constraints, and subject to what feedback mechanisms."²³ The success of any committee is almost always a direct result of the committee's ability to assign institutional responsibilities: *representative* authority. The committee's decisions therefore tend to become the decisions of the committee chairman, subject to a veto by the committee. The alternative is impersonal decision-making by less easily identified individuals who are more interested in escaping individual responsibility than in creating positive programs in the name of the committee.

4. *The Worldwide Extension of God's Law*

Adam Smith made an extremely important observation in Chapter 3 of the *Wealth of Nations*. Chapter 3 is titled, "That the Division of Labour is Limited by the Extent of the Market." This statement is one of the most important insights in the history of economic analysis. It presents the case for a wide market in which individuals offer for sale

22. The development of a small, unpiloted drone plane equipped with a television camera, a technology deployed first in the 1982 Israeli war in Lebanon, in a war primarily fought between Syrian and Israeli tanks, was a milestone. Central headquarters could see the entire battlefield on screen.

23. Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions*, p. 17.

the output of their labor: goods and services. The wider the market, the greater the specialization of production and therefore the greater the output per unit of input. Per capita wealth increases.

The same principle applies to the market for civil justice. The division of judicial labor is also limited by the extent of the market. This leads to three very important implications. *First*, the law of God was always intended to extend beyond the geographical boundaries of ancient Israel, i.e., *geographical extension*. The goal was always to obtain greater knowledge of God's principles of civil justice, so that all men would be able to better understand those principles as applied in specific situations. This is why Jonah's missionary venture into Assyria was an important aspect of achieving greater justice within national Israel. The idea behind missionary ventures is to bring more and more people under the authority of God's law, and therefore to gain greater and greater wisdom about the legitimate and necessary applications of God's law to concrete situations in history. Christendom in this way brings more and better minds to bear on the specific cases in the courts, not just nationally, but internationally.

Second, biblical law still applies in the New Testament era. Not only was God's revealed law always intended to spread geographically across the face of the earth, it was also expected to extend chronologically throughout history. This *chronological extension* means that judicial precedents set by courts over long periods of time are supposed to accumulate. We are supposed to gain ever-accumulating wisdom about the applicability of God's law to specific disputes in history by means of our knowledge of these precedents. This is the judicial application of the biblical principle of *progressive sanctification*. A definitively revealed legal structure is to be applied with ever-increasing precision in men's judicial decisions in history.

We see this development clearly in the history of rabbinic law, specifically with respect to that body of law called the Responsa.²⁴ In the State of Israel today, something in the range of 300,000 decisions²⁵ by earlier Jewish courts have been entered into computers.²⁶ These precedents have come as a result of some 1,500 years of decisions. They are regarded as legal precedents in the state of Israel. This is a tre-

24. Irving A. Agus, *Urban-Civilization in Pre-Crusade Europe*, 2 vols. (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1965), is a study of these cases in the medieval period.

25. Introduction, *The Principles of Jewish Law*, ed. Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter, [1975?]), col. 13.

26. "Computer Digests the Talmud to Help Rabbis," *New York Times* (Nov. 24, 1984).

mendous advantage that the Jews have, compared to the Christians. They have a larger and older body of judicial precedents, and this body of law is focused by means of an agreed-upon set of principles of judicial interpretation.²⁷ In short, there is a far greater division of intellectual labor in rabbinic law than in any other legal system in the world.

Third, this principle of the judicial division of labor implies that Christendom as an ideal is binding in New Testament times. The rule of God is supposed to be acknowledged by men as universally binding. A self-conscious application of God's universally binding law in history is to be extended in every area of life. This is the meaning of the concept of Christendom: a universal civilization based on a single, definitive legal order, but applied locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally in a series of hierarchical civil courts.²⁸ This common law-order is the judicial equivalent of a common language with regional accents. Without a common grammar and common vocabulary, there can be little communication across linguistic barriers.²⁹ Biblical law is the "common grammar" that God has given His church in order to bring cultural unity: Christendom. Historically, the philosophers of the church have appealed to natural law concepts, either Greek or Newtonian, in their quest for a common judicial order and therefore common civilization. This has been an importation of an alien judicial grammar, one which is at bottom cacophonous. The presence of similar words—the "vocabulary" of justice—has masked the existence of rival "grammatical" structures: covenant-keeping vs. covenant-breaking. Van Til wrote:

As part of the saving plan of God the law was absolutely other than the code of Hammurabi or any other law that expressed "tribal experience" up to that time. We will not seek to debate about the similarities and dissimilarities between the law that Moses gave and the laws of other nations. We expect a great deal of similarity. We could hold again that even if there had been existing somewhere a code identical in form to the code of Moses, the two would still have been

27. This inheritance broke down in the twentieth century, as Reform Judaism and even Conservative Judaism departed from Talmudic law.

28. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

29. The sign language of the plains Indians of North America was such a cross-boundary social institution. Members of widely dispersed tribes could communicate with each other by means of the limited grammar and vocabulary of hand signs. This language was still in use in the early twentieth century. The United States Army's master sign linguist in the World War I era was Col. Tim McCoy, who in the 1930s went to Hollywood and became a "star" in B-grade Westerns.

entirely different as to their meaning and interpretation. As a matter of fact, there is no law formulated among the nations outside the pale of Israel that demands absolute obedience of man, just as there is nowhere a story that tells man simply that he is the creature of God and wholly responsible to God. Thus the absolute otherness of Moses and Christ's interpretation of the past and of the present can only be cast aside by those who are bound to do so by virtue of their adherence to a metaphysical relativism.³⁰

C. Judges and Jurors

Localism is the foundation of the biblical judicial system. The primary authority to declare judgment under biblical law is the local court. *The fundamental agency of corporate judgment is the local court, whether civil or ecclesiastical.* This is an extremely important principle for any system of law designed to resist the centralization of power.

The civil judge in the Mosaic Covenant declared the sentence: negative sanctions. Capital sanctions were carried out by the people, beginning with the witnesses (Deut. 17:6). Case by case, the civil court was to declare judgment. As the cases grew more difficult, they would work their way up the appeals court system.

1. The King

The most difficult civil cases ended up in Jerusalem in the king's courtroom. The king was the Supreme Court of the Israelite civil order. This is why he was commanded to read the law daily (Deut. 17:18–19).³¹ Yet even the king could not lawfully declare absolutely final earthly judgment, imposing final earthly sanctions, for there is no final, *institutionalized*, earthly court of appeal in a biblical civil order. Only one person can lawfully declare the final judicial word of the Lord: Jesus Christ. Therefore, the people as a whole could lawfully intervene to restrain the king, as they did when Saul attempted to carry out his judgment against his son Jonathan (I Sam. 14:45). The people placed a judicial boundary around the king, and they were willing to place a physical boundary around him. He relented. On what basis could they overturn the king's sentence? Only as *authorized jurors* who refused to

30. Cornelius Van Til, *Psychology of Religion*, vol. IV of *In Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971), p. 149.

31. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42:G.

convict Jonathan because the king's verbal legislation on the battlefield had been foolish and therefore unconstitutional. Their declaration of "not guilty" was final, and Saul accepted it.

Nevertheless, the king did lawfully serve as the highest civil judge in Israel. This was the great authority of kingship: exercising the power of speaking in God's name as the single individual who could declare God's final earthly judgment, unless the people lawfully revolted under the direction of the lower magistrates.³² David's rebellious son Absalom began his revolt by serving as a lower judge in the gates (II Sam. 15:2–6). But his was a messianic impulse: "Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" (II Sam. 15:4). He promised justice to all.

To restrain this messianic impulse, the king was not allowed by vGod to multiply horses (offensive weapons), wives (alliances), or precious metals (Deut. 17:16–17). He was required to study biblical law daily (Deut. 17:18–19). He had to be placed under judicial and institutional restraints in order to restrict the development of a messianic impulse based on concentrated civil authority.³³ *Legitimate authority was not to become illegitimate power.* It is this move from multiple authorities to a single authority—from legitimate, decentralized social authority to centralized state power—that is the essence of the move from freedom to totalitarianism.³⁴ Biblical law places boundaries around centralized political authority in order to prevent this development.

When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne

32. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV:xx:31.

33. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 41.

34. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), ch. 5.

of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel (Deut. 17:14–20).

2. The Civil Priests

What, then, was the basis of a judge's authority? We can answer this best by asking: "Biblically, who declared the law in ancient Israel?" The priests did. Yet this office was not limited to ecclesiastical affairs. Israel was a kingdom of priests. "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:6). This was an office held by all adult circumcised males (age 20+)³⁵ and all adult women under the authority of a circumcised male.³⁶

There were both civil and ecclesiastical priests. The elders in the gates in ancient Israel were empowered by God to make the civil judicial system function. The elders in the gates imposed the negative sanctions of God's civil law. The priests were advisors to the elders.

If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And

35. Exodus 30:14.

36. The best example is Deborah (Jud. 4).

all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously (Deut. 17:8–13).

The point is, *civil rulership was plural because priestly rulership was plural*. This has not changed. Who are the civil priests—citizens who exercise lawful civil sanctions—in New Testament times? Biblically speaking, in a formally covenanted nation—which all nations are required by God to become³⁷—only those adults who are church members and are therefore under church authority.³⁸

3. *The Jury*

The fundamental agency of the local court—both civil and ecclesiastical—is the jury. It is the jury that announces guilt or innocence after having heard the arguments of conflicting parties in the courtroom. Its members evaluate the cogency of the arguments and the “fit” between the law and the evidence. The jury places limits on the judge’s authority to decide the case. This is especially true in the United States. Writes legal historian Lawrence M. Friedman: “The modern European law of evidence is fairly simple and rational; the law lets most everything in and trusts the judge to separate good evidence from bad. But American law distrusts the judge; it gives the jury full fact-finding power, and in criminal cases, the final word on innocence or guilt. Yet the law has distrusted the jury almost as much as it has distrusted the judge, and the rules of evidence grew up as a counter-vailing force. The jury hears only part of the story; that part which the law of evidence allows. The judge is bound too. If he lets in improper evidence, the case may be reversed on appeal. Hence the rules control both judge and jury.”³⁹

In modern American law, the formal presentation of the evidence is under the direction of the judge, and this authority has been used increasingly to restrict the jury’s access to evidence. The familiar words of the lawyer, “Objection, your honor,” is the heart of this control. The judge can sustain or overrule the lawyer’s request to withhold evidence in the court. This seemingly arbitrary power was not always the case, but it has become such since the early 1800s through the development

37. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gdmruler>)

38. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

39. Lawrence M. Friedman, *A History of American Law* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), p. 135.

of rules of evidence and courtroom order.⁴⁰ The judges have done their best to extend their authority over all aspects of courtroom procedure. The jury system is the last major resistance point.

The jury system is a necessary outworking of a biblical legal order. It did not appear overnight in the early church, even as slavery was not condemned overnight. But it had to develop in a Christian legal order, even as slavery had to be abolished.⁴¹ *The jury's legal basis is the priesthood of all believers.*⁴² The jury is a Christian institution. This is not to say that it is exclusively a Christian institution. Ancient Athens and Rome both had trial by jury.

4. Popular Sovereignty in Athenian Democracy

Athens' judicial system was inaugurated by Solon in the sixth century, B.C. Aristotle said that, by this act, Solon introduced the principle of democracy into Athens. His successors attempted to flatter the people by expanding the power of the courts, and thereby "transformed the constitution into its present form of extreme democracy."⁴³ Originally, Aristotle speculated, Solon had not intended to transfer this much power to the people. "He gave them simply the rights of electing the magistrates and calling them to account; and if the people do not enjoy these elementary rights, they must be a people of slaves, and thus enemies to the government."⁴⁴ Aristotle implied that Solon understood the connection between the jury, the election of magistrates, the ability to call them to account, and political freedom. The covenantal issue is the same in all cases: *sanctions*.

The Athenian judicial system failed because of its doctrine of popular sovereignty. By the mid-fifth century, Athens relied on huge

40. Friedman wrote: "There is good reason to believe that the law of evidence tightened considerably between 1776 and the 1830s. Judging from surviving transcripts of criminal trials, courts had rather loose attitudes toward evidence around 1800. . . . Opposing counsel did not meekly wait their turn to cross-examine. Rather, they broke in with questions whenever they wished." *Ibid.*, pp. 134–35.

41. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gntools>)

42. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 232. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

43. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1274a. *The Politics of Aristotle*, translated by Sir Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, [1946] 1958), p. 88. Cf. John P. Dawson, *The History of Lay Judges* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 13. Cited by Daniel C. Murphy, "The Effect of Recent Developments Upon the Political Function of Trial by Jury," M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1981, p. 5.

44. *Politics*, 1274a; *ibid.*, p. 89.

courts (*dikasteria*) with hundreds of juror-judges: 201, 301, 401, or 501 per court. Each court heard hundreds of cases per year, with each case taking no more than one day to decide.⁴⁵ Based as they were on the theology of the omnipotence of the people, the jurors were subject to very few laws or restrictions. Glotz, an admirer of the system, summarized it: "Armed with an arbitrary power the people, the sovereign justiciary, admitted of no restriction either upon its severity or upon its mercy; but it placed its omnipotence more often at the service of its constant humanity than of its sudden and short-lived passions. Above all it freed itself from the tyranny of forms and fixed rules in order that individual rights might prevail and equity be discovered."⁴⁶ Glotz praised the Athenian judicial system, for it did not remain "superstitiously attached to ancient customs and ancient laws. . . ."⁴⁷ This was jury-made law, not the enforcement of predictable laws. As with any system of final earthly authority, when one institution achieves monopolistic power, it abuses this power.

This faith in the sovereignty of the autonomous Athenian people was paralleled by the rise of the Athenian empire and continual warfare.⁴⁸ Within a century, the Athenians were downplaying marriage as a mere convention and had adopted infanticide.⁴⁹ These views were widely shared throughout Greece; the region began to suffer depopulation.⁵⁰ Alexander the Great's conquests destroyed the ideal of the *polis*, the autonomous city-state. The ideal of the sovereignty of the people died in the classical world where it began. This took only two and a half centuries: from the mid-sixth to the late fourth. The glory that was Greece was short-lived.

5. *The Biblical Jury*

The goal of the biblical jury system is not to create new laws but

45. Gustave Glotz, *The Greek City and Its Institutions* (New York: Barnes & Noble, [1929] 1969), p. 246.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 256. The jurors had to swear in advance not to cancel any private debts, redistribute lands and houses of Athenians. They also swore not to readmit anyone sent into exile, vote for a tyrant or an oligarch, or accept a bribe. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 263. Aristotle wrote: "The people, who had been the cause of the acquisition of a maritime empire during the course of the Persian wars, acquired a conceit of themselves; and in spite of the opposition of the better citizens they found worthless demagogues to support their cause." *Politics*, 1274a.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 296–98.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 299–301.

rather to apply fixed biblical laws to specific cases. The function of the jury is to bring a small number of individuals into court so they can hear the disputes between individuals who have not been able to settle their disputes outside of the civil court. This is the principle of the division of labor. Many minds are focused on the details of a single case. After hearing both sides, the American jury is sequestered into a private room where members can discuss the case secure from interference or the threat of subsequent retaliation against any individual jury member. Neither the judge nor the agents of the disputants are allowed to enter this room when the jury is in session. This is a sign of its sovereignty. When the common law rule against double jeopardy is honored, the American jury becomes the final court of appeal when it issues a “not guilty” verdict.

The jury publicly announces civil judgment: guilty or innocent. This is the same judicial principle that operates in democratic balloting. It is a manifestation of point four of the biblical covenant model: the imposition of sanctions. The Anglo-American institution of the secret jury rests on the legal principle that no outside agent is authorized to bring pressure of any kind against the decision-makers who sit on that jury. No kind of public pressure, no kind of economic pressure, and no kind of threat is legal to be brought against a jury. Tampering with a jury is a criminal offense. By sequestering the jury—by placing a judicial and physical boundary around the members in their collective capacity as jurors—the judge pressures the members of the jury to focus all of their attention on the details of the particular case, rather than worrying about what their opinions or decisions will produce in response within the community.

This is indirect evidence that the modern political practice of the secret ballot is analogous to the sequestered jury.⁵¹ When individual citizens bring formal political sanctions against their rulers in a democracy, they are to be left free from subsequent retaliation by politicians. The secret jury and the secret ballot are both basic to the preservation of the institutional independence of the sanctioning agents, and therefore to the preservation of the impartiality of the decision.

51. The practice first began in Great Britain in 1662, when the Scottish Parliament voted secretly (in disguised hand) on the Billeting Act. This act was repudiated by Charles II. The Secret ballot was not used again by the Scottish Parliament until 1705. In the United States, the use of the secret ballot was introduced in the New England colonies, and in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the two Carolinas at the time of the American Revolution, beginning in 1775. See “Ballot,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1910), III, pp. 279–81.

D. Double Jeopardy

Another fundamental principle of biblical civil order is that when the jury declares an individual “not guilty,” this individual may not lawfully be tried by any other jury for the same offense. This is known in western jurisprudence as the prohibition against double jeopardy. The jury’s decision is final whenever it declares an individual not guilty. This is analogous judicially to God’s definitive declaration of an individual as being not guilty. When that declaration is made, no one can ever lawfully bring the same charge against the individual whom God has declared not guilty. “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

1. *The Innocence of Jesus*

Obviously, the definitive example that we have in all of history is God’s declaration of Jesus Christ’s innocence, declared publicly by means of the resurrection. When God declared Jesus Christ “not guilty” and raised Him from the dead, this testified to all mankind that no judicially valid accusation could ever be brought again against Jesus Christ. The same is true of all people whom God has declared not guilty. Unlike his power in the Old Covenant era (Job 1:6–12), Satan can no longer bring formal accusations in heaven against those to whom God has transferred Jesus Christ’s judicial innocence. “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:9–10).

Yet this protection from a second trial works both ways. The condemned person is only required to pay once: either economic restitution to the victim or final earthly restitution to God directly (execution). He is not to be brought before the court for the same crime, once he has made restitution. This principle is grounded in the judicial principle of the substitutionary atonement. Bahnsen wrote:

It is uniformly recognized that Scripture prohibits a double infliction of punishment (e.g., the substitutionary atonement of Christ rests on this cardinal point with respect to eternal judgment). Therefore, double trial (i.e., double jeopardy) is ruled out; a man once tried and sentenced is not to be subjected to further trial for the same offense. Otherwise the biblical restriction of forty stripes (Deut. 25: 3) would be senseless; through retrial for the same crime a man could *repeatedly* be given sets of forty stripes. Thus double trial is forbidden. Now, if this protection is extended even to the guilty, to those convicted of offense, *how much more* should the protection be afforded to those who are acquitted as innocent? To grant this security to the convicted and withhold it from the innocent would indirectly constitute showing respect unto the wicked and a double standard of treatment (cf. Deut. 25:13–16). Therefore, to violate the prohibition of double jeopardy is to run counter to underlying principles of biblical justice.⁵²

He cited II Samuel 14:4–11, where David was tricked by Joab (vv. 2–3) into granting protection from further legal action to a man (mythical) who had supposedly slain his brother in a fight. David's honoring of the principle of double jeopardy was the judicial basis of his decision.

The principle of protection against double jeopardy is to bring a solution in history to a formal dispute that could not be otherwise solved. The accused, brought before the court and then declared not guilty by the jury, knows that he will not have to worry in the future about defending himself against that particular accusation. Because the jury's declaration of innocence is final, it leads to a reduced number of appeals to higher courts. Only those cases in which a jury has declared an individual guilty do we see a stream of appeals to higher courts.

This protection against double jeopardy does not apply to church courts. First, church membership is voluntary. Second, court costs are minimal. Third, and most important, unlike American civil government, local church government is not divided into judicial, legislative, and executive branches. A church court is unitary. There must be a way to overturn the decisions of such a unitary local power. A local congregation's declaration of "not guilty" can be overturned by a higher court. If this were not true, no liberal clergyman could be removed from office when declared innocent by his liberal congregation, pres-

52. Greg L. Bahnsen, "Double Jeopardy: A Case Study in the Influence of Christian Legislation," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter, 1975–76), pp. 44–45.

bytery, or synod. The protection of biblical preaching and the sacraments is more important than the preservation of double jeopardy protection.

2. *Justice and Scarcity*

If this protection were not available, then agents of the state, funded by compulsory taxation, could bring the same accusation against someone until a jury would convict. This would bankrupt the accused. The negative sanction of bankruptcy would replace the negative sanction of a declared penalty.⁵³ The jury system places a legal boundary around the state. The state cannot lawfully bring further economic sanctions against a person who has been declared innocent by a jury of his peers.

We live in a world of limited resources. We have only so much time, so much money, and so many lawyers to defend us. By making the jury's declaration of "not guilty" a final declaration, we announce that we cannot spend unlimited resources to convict an individual. This acknowledges that we must live with *imperfect* justice.⁵⁴ It acknowledges that we must live with *cheaper* justice. Finally, it acknowledges that one of our goals is *swift* justice. We can get these cases settled, though not perfectly. This also means that the local jury's power of the veto in civil justice always remains at the local level. This is recognized in Anglo-American civil jurisprudence. No court, no king, no civil magistrate can overcome this veto under common law.⁵⁵ This makes the jury the most important single Anglo-American civil institution for the preservation of liberty against unwarranted exten-

53. When a grand jury decides to indict someone, it is in effect declaring him guilty. It will cost him a small fortune to defend himself. Only if the prosecuting agency of civil government were compelled by law to reimburse him for his expenses if he is subsequently declared innocent, including the value of his lost time, would the present legal order be just.

54. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice: The Adverse Consequences of Current Legal Doctrine on the American Courtroom* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

55. Anglo-American admiralty law is different. The British in the eighteenth century used admiralty law in their attempt to avoid local colonial juries that refused to convict smugglers—a problem that the central government had encountered as early as the reign of Henry VIII. Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, 4 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1938] 1964), IV, *England's Commercial and Colonial Policy*, pp. 223–24. This battle began in earnest in the colonies in 1696 with Parliament's passage of "An Act for preventing Frauds and regulating Abuses in the Plantation Trade," which extended the jurisdiction of the vice-admiralty courts in the colonies. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 160.

sions of power by a central government.

By placing fundamental power in the hands of local juries and local courts, biblical law increases the likelihood that the principles of the law will be best known and best applied at the local level, where they will be applied first. It also means that local citizens have a great responsibility to understand and master the application of biblical legal principles to historical circumstances. *The local citizen who applies the universal principles of biblical law to his local circumstances is the linchpin of the whole biblical justice system.*

The presence of judicially well-informed local jurors leads to a greater predictability of the outcome of disputes. It also leads to greater self-government as a necessary consequence of this law. It means that these individuals in a local community will have much greater knowledge—accurate knowledge—of how a particular court case will result. What it means is that individuals who are unwilling to settle their disputes out of court, because of their lack of knowledge of the likely decision of that court, will be pressured to settle their disputes before coming into the court if each of them is fairly confident that he knows what that outcome will be. The individual who suspects that the outcome will be against him has a much greater incentive to settle the dispute out of court for that reason. Again, this reduces the case load in the court, and it also reduces the cost of achieving justice in the community.

We have seen that the civil jury is a fundamental agency—perhaps *the* fundamental agency—of political freedom.⁵⁶ We have seen why it keeps tyrannical bureaucracies at a distance. We have also seen why the presence of the jury reduces the cost of civil government. It also reduces the cost of settling disputes outside of courts. The jury system is central to the preservation of liberty, and it accomplishes this task on a cost-effective basis.

For this system to function properly in history, judges and jurors must be bound by a single set of universal standards. These standards are the foundation of civic righteousness. The Old Testament affirmed these standards and presented them in a form which the average citizen could understand merely by listening carefully (Deut. 31:10–13).⁵⁷

56. Magna Carta's principle of trial by a jury of one's peers (1215) antedated by over six centuries the principle of universal suffrage by secret ballot. The American territory of Wyoming gave the vote to women in 1869. Wyoming became a state in 1890.

57. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 74.

This was crucial if the average citizen was to exercise self-government under law, and it was also crucial if the average citizen was to serve either as a juror or a judge. The New Testament affirms universal legal standards. The New Testament also affirms that all Christians in the community are to be ready to serve as judges in the community.

E. “Judge Not!”

One of the most famous New Testament verses, in one of the most misunderstood passages, is Matthew 7:1: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” What antinomians fail to recognize is that Matthew 7:1 is followed by Matthew 7:2: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” We must raise this crucial question: What if we *do* want to receive righteous judgment? *Then we must judge righteously*, not abstain from judging. Matthew 7:2 establishes the legitimacy of the quest for righteous judgment. So do Matthew 7:3 and 7:4. “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?” Then comes Matthew 7:5: “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

The idea behind Matthew 7:1–5 should be very clear: *it is legitimate and even mandatory that we seek righteous judgment if we do not want to be brought under civil judges who exercise unrighteous judgment*. First, we are to exercise self-judgment: identifying the beam in our own eye and then removing it. Second, we are to exercise legitimate and righteous judgment of our brother: warning him of the mote in his eye. In both cases, clear vision is mandatory. But the popular interpretation by Christian antinomians is that this passage prohibits making judgments. On the contrary, it make mandatory righteous judging by the saints. It also makes trial by jury mandatory: first in the church (Christian vs. Christian: I Cor. 6); then in civil government.

Can you imagine a society that would attempt to run its army or police forces in terms of the antinomians’ interpretation of “judge not”? This would produce social chaos for the righteous and a free ride for lawbreakers. Nevertheless, pious Christians insist that Christians should never criticize others. If this were accepted as a valid judicial principle, it would turn over all civil government to covenant-breakers.

Christians would not even be allowed to vote, for voting is a formal means of judging: the bringing of negative sanctions against poor performers in the political realm.

We should also ask: Why the metaphor of the eye in this passage? The eye in the Bible is used time and again as the metaphor of exercising judgment: *evaluation* and *execution*. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31a). "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee" (Deut. 7:16). The eye perceives the facts around us. The eye is the metaphorical agency by which we sort the reality around us. *The eye is the metaphorical agency of righteousness judgment*. This is why we are told if we are lured into some sin by the eye, we are to rip the eye out (Matt. 18:9). This is not to be taken literally, but it is to show us how important it is not to misuse God's gift of vision to man.

We are no more to say "Judge not, in order that you be not judged!" than we are to say "See not, in order that you be not lured into sin!" These verses teach the very opposite: "Judge righteously, in order that you may be judged righteously," and "sin not, in order that you may see clearly." *It is by means of the metaphorical eye that we are to exercise judgment in history*. Yes, the Scripture says to rip our eyes out, but this instruction is given in order to persuade us to exercise incorruptible vision. Sin is worse than blindness; hence, we are told by implication, "sin not," *not* "see not." Yes, the verse says "judge not that ye be not judged," but the goal is not to persuade us either to close our eyes or to stop judging. The goal is to persuade us of the importance of always exercising righteous judgment in terms of God's Bible-revealed law. What the passage really says is this: when we *seek* righteous judgment we must do so by always *exercising* righteous judgment. This refers to our individual circumstances, meaning self-judgment. It also refers to our civil actions as either jurors or judges in the community.

F. Confession and Plea-Bargaining

There is always the possibility of self-confession. Such a confession must be based on a frank and true admission of the facts. The individual must not be a mental deficient. He must also not be a known seeker of publicity. There are individuals who testify again and again to the police that they committed a particular crime, when in fact the po-

lice know that it would be impossible for this person to have committed the crime. More important, there must be no torture of an individual in order to gain a confession or information regarding criminal behavior.

Torture in the West was introduced by the Greeks and passed into Roman law.⁵⁸ It was not common in the Medieval era. It reappeared in Europe during the early Renaissance—specifically, during the Inquisition of the thirteenth century. This had been preceded by the legal revolution of the twelfth century, when Roman civil law was reintroduced into Europe.⁵⁹ This was part of a four-fold Renaissance rediscovery process: the reintroduction of Roman civil law, torture, widespread chattel slavery,⁶⁰ and occultism.⁶¹ The use of torture is exclusively an attribute of God. It is confined to the life hereafter. The individual is to testify to the truth. An individual who is being tortured has a tremendous incentive to admit to anything in order to stop the pain. Thus, torture is inherently against the law of God. It encourages people to testify to falsehoods: bearing false witness.

Second, there must be no promise by the civil authorities of leniency as a result of the criminal's confession. The victim of a crime may lawfully specify a reduced penalty in his quest for a conviction, but not the state. The victim may promise to reduce the penalty, but only if the criminal confesses to the actual crime, not a lesser crime. The practice of confessing to a lesser crime in order to escape prosecution for a greater one is known in the modern world as plea bargaining. An individual should not be not allowed to testify to a lesser crime in order to save the state the cost of prosecuting him in order to convict him of a greater crime. *An individual is to be brought to justice, not injustice.* The state is the victim's agent, who is in turn God's agent. The victim is assigned the responsibility of bringing a covenant lawsuit into court against the suspected criminal. The state must therefore prosecute to

58. Edward Peters, *Torture* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), ch. 1.

59. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. Peters wrote: "The legal revolution took more than a century to be accomplished. It appears that its new procedure was generally in place before torture became a part of it." *Ibid.*, p. 45.

60. This began on the Atlantic islands in the mid-1400s: sugar production. William D. Phillips, Jr., "The Old World background of slavery in the Americas," in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ch. 2.

61. Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London: Warburg Institute, 1958); Francis A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage, [1964] 1969).

the limit of the law.⁶²

When someone plea bargains by confessing to a lesser crime, the state then announces publicly that it is satisfied. The public is not informed regarding the true degree of the individual's guilt. The degree of danger to the public is underestimated by such a public announcement by the state. Thus, the state is offering false witness. While it is true that those who commit greater crimes may escape judgment because the state does not have sufficient evidence to convict them of those crimes, it is also true that the state is not to bear false witness against a suspected criminal. The state is not to imply that the criminal committed a greater crime than he did, nor is the state entitled to insinuate that the criminal committed a lesser crime than he did. In the prosecution of the law, there is not to be a move either to excessive leniency or excessive severity: "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32). The law is to be prosecuted in terms of the suspected acts of the individual.

G. Rendering Judgment: A Voice of Authority

Someone must pronounce judgment after the trial ends. Only a lawful authority may do this. This is the second point of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy/authority.⁶³ A voice of authority is inescapable in the judgments of men. The creation was spoken into existence: "Let there be. . . ." God's law was spoken into existence. We know this because the Bible says repeatedly that "God commanded Moses to say"—i.e., announce God's laws. God spoke His sovereign word—the ultimate and primary word—and Moses repeated it as a secondary witness. The lawmaker acts *re-creatively*: discovering and announcing God's word or else denying it. He is inescapably a witness: either to the truth of God's word or against it.

God is identified in the Bible as the word (John 1:1). *There is no escape from the speaking of God's word in history*. Men are representative agents, so they cannot escape this obligation. There must be a voice of authority that does pronounce judgment: guilty or not guilty. It is never a question of pronouncing judgment vs. not pronouncing judgment.

62. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

63. Rendering authoritative covenantal judgment is a covenantal act, and therefore civil judgment conforms to the five points of the biblical covenant model. See Appendix E: "The Covenantal Structure of Judgment."

It is always a question of who pronounces judgment and the judgment pronounced. Silence on the part of the authority is nevertheless a judgment. The authority cannot escape responsibility by remaining silent.

Conclusion

The Bible specifies the locus of primary judicial sovereignty: the local court. This court has the benefit of better knowledge of the facts and circumstances of any alleged crime. It has a tradition of judicial decisions (precedents) that is familiar to jurors. It is made up of people who speak God's law—jurisdiction—with a familiar local "accent." This enables local residents to forecast more accurately what is expected of them. This reduces forecasting costs.

The jury is the culmination of a long tradition of Christian history. The jury makes possible a greater division of judicial labor. A jury is less likely to be arbitrary than a lone judge. Men can obtain justice less expensively because of the greater efficiency of a jury's collective judgment. The authority of the jury at the local level provides a counter to the decisions of professional bureaucrats.

By lodging in local courts the final authority to declare an accused person "not guilty," God's law provides a check to the centralization of political power. A distant civil government cannot impose its will on local residents without a considerable expenditure of time and money, possibly risking the public's rejection of the central government's legitimacy, the crucial resource of any government.

16

THE STATE'S MONOPOLY OF VENGEANCE

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; I am the LORD (Lev. 19:18).

The theocentric focus of this law is this: only God can know a person's heart (Jer. 17:9–10). Therefore, only God is entitled to judge a person's heart. Because a civil judge is not God, he cannot legitimately claim to be able to search another person's heart in his quest for civil justice. The affairs of the heart and mind are off-limits to the state. There can be no lawful civil sanctions against thoughts or attitudes. We must conclude that the prohibition against holding grudges (Lev. 19:18) cannot be an aspect of the Mosaic civil law.¹ Such a civil law is inherently unenforceable.

A. Love Is Unenforceable

Civil law also cannot enforce an attitude of love; hence, civil law is not the focus of the command to love one's neighbor, except insofar as love is defined judicially: treating the neighbor legally, i.e., love as the fulfilling of God's law (Rom. 13:10). But even in this case, there would have to be an infraction of a specific civil law or an act against another person's rights—lawful immunities (protected boundaries)—in order to enforce this law of compulsory love. Hence, this law, too, is inherently unenforceable by the state.

Nevertheless, this verse begins with a prohibition against individu-

1. This is why all polygraph or "lie detector" exams must be submitted to voluntarily. A civil court cannot lawfully use the results of a compulsory lie detector examination as evidence against an individual, nor may any civil court use a person's refusal to submit to such a test as evidence against him. The same principle applies to the use of hypnotism.

al acts of vengeance. This is clearly an aspect of civil law; the relevant Mosaic case law is the requirement that any man who injures another man in a fight must pay restitution to him (Ex. 21:18–19): no private vengeance.² But why is this verse’s negative injunction attached to two other injunctions that are clearly individual moral injunctions—aspects of self-government rather than civil government? By prohibiting personal grudges and requiring personal love, this verse makes it clear that the concern of the civil portion of this civil law is the elimination of privately imposed vengeance. The civil prohibition against taking vengeance applies only to individual actions. This prohibition does not apply to the state. Civil law applies negative sanctions to individuals who commit specified prohibited acts; hence, it applies to individual acts of vengeance. Vengeance is legitimate when imposed by the state.

The parallel verse in Deuteronomy is used by Paul in his epistle to the Romans to introduce his discussion of the civil magistrate. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19; cf. Deut. 32:35a). Paul’s message is *not* that there should be no vengeance in history. On the contrary, he immediately launches into a discussion of the civil magistrate’s lawful administration of vengeance: “. . . for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4b). It is a mistake to see Paul’s prohibition of vengeance in these verses as applying to the institution of the state, any more than “thou shalt not kill” applies to the state.³ What Leviticus 19:18 does is to establish the state as the lawful monopolist of covenantal vengeance in history.⁴ The Bible is neither pacifistic nor anarchistic; it affirms the legitimacy of the state in seeking public law and order. But both the law and the order must be God’s—a covenantal, oath-bound law-order.⁵

B. Monopoly Control Over the Sword

The Bible makes it clear that the judicial role of the state is derived directly from God. The civil government is a covenantal institution,

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3: *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 35.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

4. The family is not an agency of vengeance. It is an agency of justice only within the boundaries of a covenanted household.

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 12. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

along with the family and the church. The state is an agency that applies negative physical sanctions in addition to enforcing restitution. This authority to bring negative physical sanctions is granted by God to fathers (the “rod”) and to the state (the “sword”). The family lawfully brings positive sanctions; the state does not. The family creates wealth; the state protects wealth, but does not create it.⁶

1. The Sword

The Bible establishes the civil government as God’s monopoly of vengeance. Individuals must be protected from vengeance by anyone except a civil magistrate. A trial is required by God before vengeance is imposed. There are two archetypes of such a trial: the historical trial of Adam, Eve, and the serpent (Gen. 3), and the final judgment (Matt. 25). There must be a public declaration of the court’s decision before there can be a lawful imposition of vengeance. Vengeance, being judicial, must be preceded by a public declaration of guilt. *The imputation of guilt is always a covenantal act*. It is never lawfully an individual act, nor is the subsequent imposition of negative penal sanctions.⁷

This covenantal aspect of penal sanctions places judicial and institutional boundaries on the spread of violence. God delegates to officers of the state the sole authority to declare guilt and impose vengeance. The investiture of such judicial authority is the civil equivalent of the church’s anointing or laying on of hands. In modern democracies, an implicit priestly authority of individual voters is the humanistic covenantal basis of this political anointing.

Civil sanctions must be exclusively negative. They are *penal* sanctions. They punish those who have violated the protected legal boundaries. Any attempt to transform the state into an agency that lawfully

6. The major exception seems to be highways. In the Mosaic Covenant, a few highways were compulsory as physical avenues to justice for those guilty of accidental manslaughter (Deut. 19:3). There were no doubt positive economic side-effects of these roads, but their function was judicial, not economic. With the New Covenant’s annulment of the law of the kinsman-redeemer, state-financed highways can be defended biblically only by implication: the provision of less expensive access to legal centers.

State-funded roadways have negative effects as well as positive. What is virtually never discussed publicly is the major economic reason why there is such pollution-creating urbanization today: the existence of huge, taxpayer-financed highway systems leading into cities and criss-crossing through cities. The largest of these highways are called “freeways” in California. They are not free.

7. This is why the office of kinsman-redeemer must have been a civil office. See subsection 5: “The Kinsman-Redeemer.”

dispenses positive sanctions is an aspect of political messianism. A messianic state is regarded as a healer, meaning an agency that is a legitimate source of wealth rather than the absorber of the wealth of the citizen-priests who constitute it judicially.

One politician who saw the implications of such a view of the state was Frédéric Bastiat. In 1848, the year of the European revolutions,⁸ Bastiat, a free trade polemicist and member of the French Legislative Assembly, had his essay, "The State," printed in the *Journal des débats*. A master of analogies, he compared the state with a pair of hands:

The fact is, the state does not and cannot have one hand only. It has two hands, one to take and the other to give—in other words, the rough hand and the gentle hand. The activity of the second is necessarily subordinated to the activity of the first. Strictly speaking, the state can take and not give. We have seen this happen, and it is to be explained by the porous and absorbent nature of its hands, which always retain a part, and sometimes the whole, of what they touch. But what has never been seen, what will never be seen and cannot even be conceived, is the state giving the public more than it has taken from it. It is therefore foolish for us to take the humble attitude of beggars when we ask anything of the state. It is fundamentally impossible for it to confer a particular advantage on some of the individuals who constitute the community without inflicting a greater damage on the entire community.⁹

What one hand giveth, the other hand taketh away . . . plus an extra percentage for administration. (In the United States in the late 1980s, this extra fee amounted to 100%: half went to the beneficiaries, half to government bureaucrats.)¹⁰

2. *Judicial Conditions of Wealth-Creation*

The state makes wealth-creation possible for individuals by protecting private property, i.e., by protecting individuals who own property. The state is required by God to enforce the decisions of property owners to exclude others from using their property. The state is there-

8. Jean Sigmann, *1848: The Romantic and Democratic Revolutions in Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Frank Eyck (ed.), *The Revolutions of 1848–49* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972).

9. Frédéric Bastiat, "The State" (Sept. 25, 1848), in Bastiat, *Selected Essays on Political Economy*, ed. George B. de Huszar (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1964), p. 146. (<http://bit.ly/BastiatState>)

10. James L. Payne, *The Culture of Spending: Why Congress Lives Beyond Our Means* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1991), p. 51.

fore to enforce legal boundaries that are established by private contract. Property owners are given legal immunities—*rights*—by God in history, and these immunities are to be defended by the state whenever the victim of an unauthorized invasion appeals to the civil magistrate. The state is to defend the rights of stewards over the property that God has assigned to them by covenant (lawful inheritance) or by contract. As Rushdoony wrote, “All property is held in trust under and in stewardship to God the King. No institution can exercise any prerogative of God unless specifically delegated to do so, within the specified area of God’s law. The state thus is the ministry of justice, not the original property owner or the sovereign lord over the land.”¹¹

This means that property rights are human rights. With one exception, any attempt to distinguish property rights judicially from human rights is inherently statist and anti-biblical. That exception is the subset of rights that can be called *priestly rights*: worship and life. Sacrilege and murder are to be defended against, even at the expense of violations of other legal immunities. Where an individual is threatening one of these priestly rights, the state must intervene to protect the victim. In some cases, God authorizes another individual to intervene if the state refuses. Apart from these two priestly exceptions, however, the distinction between human rights and property rights is a subversive attempt to legitimize state power in its interference with a person’s stewardship over the property assigned to him by God and for which he is held responsible by God. *Property rights are inescapably an aspect of human rights*. It is true that property rights are not absolute—nothing since the closing of the canon of Scripture is absolute—but they are on the same judicial level as any other human rights except those associated with worship and life. Property rights are not impersonal and therefore are not judicially subordinate to personal rights; property rights are both personal and judicial. The familiar dualism between human rights and property rights should always be resolved in terms of stewardship under God. The key question is this: To whom has God delegated the authority to exercise representative control His property? A discussion of the rights of property should begin with a consideration of God’s rights to property.

11. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 504.

3. *Positive Benefits Through Negative Sanctions*

By remaining exclusively negative judicially, a biblically restricted state serves as a beneficial agency of government within society. This is the only way that it can remain an exclusively positive force in society, given its source of funds. The state is financed by the collection of taxes.¹² Taxes, like the church's tithe, apply legitimately only to individual income and net increases in an individual's wealth (capital gains). This means that neither the church nor the state can lawfully tax capital, meaning property. This also means that the state cannot lawfully tax church property. Property, biblically speaking, is tax-immune—not just the church's, but all wealth-producing assets. The fruit may be taxed, not the tree. The state is an economically dependent institution, not an economically creative institution.

The state has a God-given right to collect taxes by threat of violence. It is therefore not authorized by God to become an agency of positive sanctions, for that would involve asserting its authority as a compulsory agency of healing.¹³ There is no *compulsory*, earthly, covenantal agency of healing in history. Churches and families, while covenantal agencies of healing, are voluntary institutions.¹⁴ The state is compulsory. It can reward one group only by imposing penalties on some other group. God has therefore placed it under strict judicial boundaries. It is not to be regarded by anyone as a creative institution. It is instead exclusively protective. It is a monopolistic agency of vengeance against wrongdoers (Rom. 13:1–7).¹⁵ Its task is not to make men good; rather, it is to penalize biblically identified evil acts. To this end, God has given it the sword.

12. It can print fiat money, which is a form of taxation: compulsory wealth redistribution from those who gain access to the fiat money before prices rise, from those who gain access to money later in the process. The state can also borrow, but this only transfers wealth from lenders to the state. The state can gain access to credit only by promising to repay the lenders. This means that it must impose taxes (including the inflation tax) later.

13. This is not a denial of the state's legitimate role in public health: defense against contagious diseases. See chapter 14.

14. How can the church be an agency of healing if its only God-mandated income is the tithe? Isn't its dependent condition analogous to the state's dependence on taxes? Doesn't the church also have only two hands: a gentle one and a rough one? This analysis overlooks the positive aspect of the church's covenantal sanctions: the sacraments. Only the church can lawfully confer the sacraments on its members. In contrast, the state is not a means of special grace. It is an agency that administers common grace only to the extent that it confines itself to punishing evil acts.

15. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

God is the original source of lawful violence—negative sanctions—in both history and eternity. The state is God's designated monopolistic agent of lawful violence against convicted criminals. God brings negative sanctions; so does the state. God's negative sanctions are physical, in time and eternity. The state's ultimate negative physical sanction is the right of execution: excluding people from continuing access to the blessings of God in history. By executing a person, the state transfers the person's soul into God's heavenly court for final judgment. The state's court thereby becomes the agency of next-to-the-last judgment. God's court brings the final judgment.

4. Self-Defense

This does not mean that only the state can lawfully possess and use deadly weapons. *The person who kills another in self-defense is acting as a lawful agent of God.* There are civil laws governing this God-granted authority to kill another person. The case law of Exodus 22:2 allows a householder to kill a burglar if the owner catches him while the intruder is breaking in. The intruder has no legitimate reason to be inside the house. The resident has a legitimate role as a defender of his household's boundaries. God has delegated this authority to him. The occupant cannot know for sure why the invader has entered his home without permission, so he is allowed by God's law to assume the worst: the invader is a potential murderer. He can lawfully be killed by the person who resides there. The mere transgression of the home's boundary is sufficient to remove the protection of God's civil law from the invader. If caught by the homeowner and threatened with a weapon to prevent his flight before the police arrive, the invader is not protected by God's law from execution should he attack the homeowner. Those lawfully inside the house are protected by God's law; therefore, the invader is not. The thief may be struck while breaking in. If he attempts to flee, the resident is not supposed to kill him, for he is no longer breaking in. But the benefit of the doubt is always with the defender. This execution of an illegal invader is not an act of personal vengeance; rather, it is an act that defends a lawful boundary. The defender acts in the name of the state and is authorized by the state because no policeman is available to enforce the law.

By implication, this case law establishes the judicial plea of self-defense. The person who is given cause to believe that an assailant is ready to kill him is entitled to kill the assailant. The civil government is

required by God to investigate the reasons for any killing of a human being.¹⁶ The judges must examine the evidence in order to determine whether a murder trial should be held.¹⁷ The person who faces a life-threatening assault must decide which risk is greatest: (1) death from the assailant if no action is taken; (2) death from the assailant in a failed self-defense; (3) death from the state for murder of the assailant. There is a slogan used by American defenders of their Constitutional right to own and use guns.¹⁸ "I would rather be tried by twelve than carried by six." When a person is faced with a life-threatening attack, a jury in his future is preferable to pallbearers.

The plea of self-defense is in fact a plea of the right to defend oneself as an authorized agent of the state. Self-defense is not an autonomous act of violence. It is not an act of vengeance. It is a boundary defense.

What is clearly prohibited is vengeance by the victim after the suspect has fled from the scene of the crime. In such a case, there can be no claim of self-defense if the suspect dies as a result of the attack. The victim faces no life-threatening attack. His response is therefore limited to bringing a lawsuit. He may lawfully seek out the civil magistrate as a public avenger, but he is not allowed to impose vengeance unilaterally.¹⁹

16. The passage that establishes this requirement is Deuteronomy 21:1–9, which requires a special sacrifice when a body is found outside a city, and the elders cannot discover who committed the crime.

17. In common law, this authority to decide to hold a trial belongs to the grand jury, which hands down an indictment. Then the trial is held.

18. This is the Second Amendment of the Constitution: part of the original Bill of Rights. More than any other Constitutional guarantee, this one is under political assault. It was imposed on the Federal government in the 1790s because citizens had achieved parity of weaponry with the state. They were determined to keep this parity, which they recognized as the means of enforcing boundaries on the state. Parity in eapony was the technical basis of the advent of modern democracy. Carroll Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 34–35. Quigley was an expert in the history of warfare and weaponry and their relation to politics.

19. Some legal codes authorize people to pursue a criminal who is fleeing from the scene of a crime. This is the doctrine of citizen's arrest. Civil government may lawfully authorize such a practice. This law in effect makes the citizen a deputy of the state. If the suspect is injured by the citizen-arrester under such circumstances, the citizen would be at legal risk if the suspect is not subsequently convicted for the crime in question.

5. The Kinsman-Redeemer

This restriction did not apply in the Mosaic economy to a family's blood-avenger (kinsman-redeemer). The nearest male relative was empowered by law to execute anyone suspected of having murdered his relative, even if the death was an accident (Deut. 19). In this unique instance, the kinsman-redeemer became a lawful agent of the tribal civil government. On the one hand, Deuteronomy 19 delegated to the nearest male kinsman the state's authority to impose vengeance, i.e., to the person most likely to have the emotional incentive to impose it. On the other hand, it placed judicial boundaries around the spread of clan vengeance in the following ways. First, only one person could lawfully perform this act of vengeance. Second, he could not pursue his target into a city of refuge. Third, if cleared by the judges of such a city of refuge, the suspect could return home in safety at the death of the high priest. Fourth, if the suspect was caught and executed by the blood-avenger before he reached the city, the dead man's family could not lawfully seek vengeance against the blood-avenger. By implication, it was not legal for the fleeing person to kill the blood-avenger in self-defense, any more than he was authorized to kill a civil magistrate. Of course, the fleeing person might prefer to be "tried by twelve rather than carried by six." He might subsequently claim that he did not know the pursuer was in fact the dead person's blood-avenger. But in a small, face-to-face community, this excuse would not have carried much weight.

The New Covenant has annulled the office of earthly high priest (Heb. 7), which was central to the office of kinsman-redeemer (Num. 35:28). The New Testament therefore has annulled the family as an agency empowered by the state to bring this negative physical sanction. It also annulled the geographical monopoly of certain tribes over specified regions in Israel. The laws governing the blood-avenger/kinsman-redeemer are no longer in force. This includes the laws of the levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–10).²⁰

God's law places boundaries around men's lives. The state may lawfully deprive a person of his life if the person is convicted of a capital crime, but otherwise he is to be protected. The law is an innocent person's defensive shield because the law is the state's offensive weapon against boundary violators.

20. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

C. The Warlord Society

The state possesses a monopoly of vengeance and violence, although in some instances the individual acts as an agent of the state in defending himself and those under his authority. What is the rationale for the creation of such a monopoly? To limit the number of people seeking violent vengeance, i.e., *boundary violators*.

These state-“anointed” agents can be identified. The agent has the authority to announce himself as an agent of the state. He is usually marked in some way: uniform, badge, or credentials.²¹ It is illegal for anyone not so authorized (oath-bound) to wear or bear such marks of authority. The authority to act in an official capacity as God’s minister of vengeance is circumscribed by God’s law. This limits the number of instances in which violence becomes likely. The goal of any monopoly is to reduce the quantity supplied of some scarce economic resource. In this case, the item to be limited is violence.

By limiting the amount of lawful violence in a society, the law of God channels violence. Residents in a covenanted nation know what to expect from the state. They can identify the lawful uses and applications of violence, and therefore they can identify the unlawful uses. There are far fewer lawful uses than unlawful uses. Biblical law specifies the boundaries of lawful violence and thereby identifies unlawful violence. It includes some violent acts and therefore excludes all other violent acts.

It is less costly to specify the legitimate agents of violence than to identify every possible illegitimate agent. By identifying the primary agency of coercion, i.e., the state, biblical law places this institution under greater public scrutiny. By lowering the number of legal public acts, biblical law lowers the cost of publicly scrutinizing the state. More limits are placed around the state as a result of these lower costs of scrutiny. As the agency of violence, the state is feared; a feared agency is likely to be scrutinized more closely by its potential victims. Citizens covenant under God to establish state authority; they monitor the state’s activities because of their fear that the state’s officers will exceed their lawful boundaries. This is especially true in societies where the state has not become a functional agent of healing. The more acceptable the messianic claims of the state, the less incentive there is for citizens to scrutinize it and limit it. The power to tax is the

21. His vehicle may be similarly marked. Drivers of state-authorized vehicles alone have the right to use flashing red lights and sirens.

power to destroy, and the costs of healing must be paid for by higher taxes. The healer state becomes the destroyer state.

The state is required by God to operate under God-revealed biblical law. This biblical law-order is quite specific. The state must apply sanctions specified by the victims. These sanctions are specific. The state is under judicial limits.²² It is also governed by written law. These laws are supposed to be understood by citizens, which is why the whole law had to be read to the assembled nation every seventh year (Deut. 31:10–13).²³ Citizens are expected by God to know the boundaries that God has placed around them as individuals and also around the state.

This means that the state's sword is to be used sparingly. It is governed by God's civil law. The state is not authorized by God to impose negative sanctions outside the limits of the law. The law circumscribes the application of the sword. Put another way, the magistrate's use of violence cannot lawfully be extended to areas that have not been authorized by the law, either explicitly or as extensions of a case law or a judicial principle. In short, *whatever is not prohibited by law is allowed*. This legal principle is derived from God's original command to Adam regarding judicial boundaries placed around a particular tree. Everything else was permitted to Adam; hence, no negative sanctions were threatened in these areas.

D. Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, Individualism

There are three general judicial ideals: Trinitarianism, unitarianism, and individualism. The first is covenantal, the second is holistic, and the third is atomistic. Their representative philosophical views are covenantalism, realism, and nominalism. Their representative civil views are theocracy, statism, and anarchism. Their representative economic views are morally bounded capitalism,²⁴ socialism, and anarcho-capitalism.

Trinitarianism establishes the legitimacy of four judicially circum-

22. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix M.

23. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 75.

24. Free exchange and free pricing of anything except morally prohibited acts or commodities, e.g., prostitution, pornography, and the use of addictive drugs in quantities that distort perception enough to produce actions that endanger the individual's life or the lives of those around him.

scribed, oath-bound covenants under God: individual, ecclesiastical, familistic, and civil. Trinitarianism affirms the equal ultimacy of the one and the many: in the Godhead, in history, and in eternity. God is absolutely sovereign; therefore, no single institution is granted final earthly sovereignty.

By establishing limits on the authority of all levels of civil government to tax individuals at a rate equal to or greater than 10% (the tithe), biblical law prohibits socialism. The state is placed under extreme limits. Socialism—the government’s ownership of, or control over, the means of production—is an explicitly anti-biblical ideal.

By establishing the civil government as a monopoly institution for imposing vengeance, biblical law prohibits anarchism. The judicial ideal of modern libertarianism is: (1) the lawful imposition of negative sanctions handed down solely by private law courts; (2) the abolition of all compulsory taxation. Anarchism is an explicitly anti-biblical ideal.

1. Unitarianism and a One-State World

Unitarianism is more than a theology; it is a covenantal system. It has political implications. It is possible to identify unitarian thinking as a separate judicial tradition, as a rival of federalism, which is a judicial development of Trinitarianism: the equal ultimacy of the one and the many. In the eighth edition of his famous study, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (1915), the English jurist A. V. Dicey wrote of unitarianism as a legal ideal: “Unitarianism, in short, means the concentration of the strength of the state in the hands of one visible sovereign power, be that power Parliament or Czar. Federalism means the distribution of the force of the state among a number of co-ordinate bodies each originating in and controlled by the constitution.”²⁵ He was also correct when he observed: “Federal government means weak government.”²⁶

Federalism, Dicey concluded, also means the free market economy. “Federalism, as it defines, and therefore limits, the powers of each department of the administration, is unfavourable to the interference or to the activity of government. Hence a federal government can hardly render services to the nation by undertaking for the national

25. A. V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 8th ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, [1915] 1982), p. 87.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

benefit functions which may be performed by individuals. This may be a merit of the federal system; it is, however, a merit which does not commend itself to modern democrats, and no more curious instance can be found of the inconsistent currents of popular opinion which may at the same time pervade a nation or a generation than the coincidence in England of a vague admiration for federalism alongside with a far more decided feeling against the doctrines of so-called *laissez faire*.²⁷

Were we to develop unitarianism to its logical conclusion, we would arrive at the modern (and also very ancient) ideal of the one-State world. A unitary, centralized civil government possessing all political authority would replace local, regional, and national civil governments. Between the citizen and the central government no intervening civil authority would be allowed to intrude. This is not simply the ideal of a one-world state, meaning a central civil government serving as a supreme appeals court and arbiter between rival nations. It is the ideal of a single unitary state that governs all men: a one-State world. It is the judicial ideal that motivated the builders of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11).²⁸

2. Anarcho-Capitalism as Regional Warlordism

There have been very few intellectual defenses of this libertarian judicial position.²⁹ The practical issues associated with the theoretical ideal of private law courts and private police forces are almost as difficult to resolve as the organizational problems of national defense in a society without a national government—a nation surrounded by hostile national governments, most of which must be presumed to be capable of a military invasion. These issues are, in fact, the very same covenantal issue. The issue is the identification and limitation of the institutional authority to impose negative sanctions against all those who have transgressed certain publicly identifiable boundaries, i.e., invaders.

If no single agency has the monopolistic authority to impose neg-

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

28. R. J. Rushdoony, "The Society of Satan," *Christian Economics* (July 7, Aug. 4, 1964), reprinted in *Biblical Economics Today*, II (Oct./Nov. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/rjrsos>). Cf. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 19.

29. The most detailed exposition is Bruce L. Benson, *The Enterprise of Law: Justice Without the State* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 1990).

ative sanctions, then society must face this crucial question: How can peace be maintained? The free market is voluntaristic. Its negative sanctions are not physical. They involve such actions as refusing to buy a product or complaining publicly about a poor product. But if there is no agency whatsoever that is authorized by the community as a whole to specify and then identify certain acts as violent or fraudulent, then the violence of mankind is removed from publicly agreed-upon, legally *sanctioned* boundaries. Acts of aggression by sinful men are thereby removed from all civil restraints through the abolition of civil government.

To defend themselves, individuals must then become defensive warriors and avengers. They will voluntarily contract with other men in defensive alliances. If these contractual alliances are not to become civil governments—monopolies of violence—they must not exercise territorial sovereignty. This is another way of saying that they cannot mark out areas of territorial sovereignty: the monopoly authority to include and exclude. They are alliances within a territory, competing with other alliances within the same territory. They lose all covenantal status. There is no means of anointing these alliances or their rulers. There is no civil equivalent of the laying on of hands. There is no way to gain non-coercive agreement from non-participants in the contractual alliance regarding which court or system of courts has lawful jurisdiction over non-participants.

These contractual alliances could take on the character of insurance companies. They might become arbitration societies. They might become gangs. Whatever their legal structure or market positioning, attached to some of these companies will be police forces. Competitive companies in a world without civil sanctions would have to employ appropriate means to enforce sanctions in order to enforce their decisions. The issue of negative physical sanctions cannot be avoided. All people are not peaceful all of the time. Some people will impose negative physical sanctions on others. Negative physical sanctions are therefore an inescapable concept. The decision is not: “negative physical sanctions or no negative physical sanctions.” The question is: *Whose* negative physical sanctions?

3. Conservatism as International Warlordism

Warlordism is the ideal for international relations for both the right-wing Enlightenment and right-wing Anabaptism. It assumes that

there can never be a way to settle international disputes other than by delay, war, or surrender. The Trinitarian ideal of Christendom—clearly, an internationalist ideal—is categorically rejected by both the Enlightenment and Anabaptism. The eighteenth-century's right-wing Enlightenment thinkers denied that there should be a supreme civil court internationally. President Washington's 1796 Farewell Address—a newspaper article, not a speech—is the best example of this view of international affairs. Nations are expected to avoid all legal involvement with each other except when they need military help from each other, as in the case of the crucial 1777 French treaty with the English North American colonies. There is no positive ideal of international relations; only a negative one. This outlook is consistent with the right-wing Enlightenment's ideal of autonomous man.

To the extent that the right-wing Anabaptist tradition has become dominant in Protestant Christianity, there has been an equally strong rejection of the ideal of Christendom, which would include an international system of appeals courts, both civil and ecclesiastical. This outlook parallels the Anabaptists' ideal of the judicially autonomous local congregation.

Internationally, warlordism is today's world system: the strongest military power gains judicial legitimacy wherever it can extend its will. The territorial warlordism of pre-Communist China, where warlords' domains were separated by dialects, or great rivers, or high mountains, is today replicated internationally. Judicial Trinitarianism is opposed to warlordism, both national and international. But the warlord standard dominates international law.

Because statism is the heresy of this age, men assume that politics is primary. It isn't. *Church order is primary*. Because Jesus set forth the covenantal ideal of a *single worldwide church*, there is no escape from the covenantal ideal of a *one-world state*. Jesus made the ideal of ecclesiastical unity inescapably clear in His prayer of intercession: "That they may all be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:21–22). Ecclesiastical unity—a single confession of faith in the Trinitarian God—is the ideal for eternity; it is also the ideal of history. It is basic to evangelism, Jesus said: "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." But a one-world state is not the same as a one-state world. There are separate denominations. So are there separate states. But there is a biblical ideal of

an appeals court in both church and civil government. Disputes are to be settled apart from war.

The world has become a warlord society because the church is not institutionally unified by a common legal confession. But it is unified in the sense that the whole church participates in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. This covenantal unity cannot be denied in principle; it can only be delayed in history. But if all men are required by God to have a unified confession of faith in order to gain lawful access to God's judicially unified sacraments, then the ideal of a one-world legal order, and therefore also a one-world state, is a corollary. The civil magistrate is also a minister of God (Rom. 13: 4).³⁰

Because the modern church has rejected postmillennial eschatology, its spokesmen cannot conceive of a confessionally unified international church. They are therefore unable to imagine a confessionally unified international world government. They cannot imagine unity and diversity in one international social order. They have rejected social Trinitarianism.

E. Covenantalism vs. Contractualism

No single agency of law enforcement or defense can gain universal legal authority in any territory by means of private contract exclusively. It must have the authority to impose its standards on those who are unwilling to sign the contract. Social order cannot be attained when individuals do not adhere to the same legal standards. Without a monopoly agency to impose justice, the differing concepts of justice, coupled with unjust, violent people, would produce a warlord society. Fallen man's war of all against all would develop into a series of shifting alliances and conflicts among those individuals who command the most powerful private police forces. No single legal order would dominate a territory.

This is why the Bible is incompatible with all forms of anarchism. The Bible specifies a single legal order as the ideal standard for the whole world. This means that there must be an agency that lawfully possesses a monopoly of violence, biblically speaking. The alternative is the warlord society in which a voluntary alliance may gain temporary power to impose its legal order in a particular territory. It cannot attain legitimacy as the enforcing agent of a single, unified legal order without becoming a civil government.

30. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 11.

This does not mean that there is no right of rebellion against tyrants. Biblical law demands a hierarchy of judges (Ex. 18).³¹ Lower magistrates have legitimate authority, and they can lawfully lead a rebellion against tyranny, as the case of Jeroboam's God-authorized revolt against Rehoboam's high taxes indicates (I Kings 12). Jeroboam served as God's anointed agent of bringing negative sanctions against the central government's tyranny. What the Bible sets forth as an ideal is a one-world state, *but not a one-state world*. A one-State world is an illegitimate unitarian ideal and an eschatologically impossible goal. The fifth and final kingdom (Dan. 2:35) is Christ's; no other will ever appear.³² The Bible requires civil governments at the local, regional, and international level. It specifies a chain of civil appeals courts, each operating in terms of biblical law, and each subject to reversal by a higher civil court. But a supreme civil court indicates a single state: *a civil chain of command under a single legal standard, the Bible*.

The movement of history is toward a one-world civil government, either humanist or Christian. This parallels the movement of culture either toward humanism's "global village" or Christendom. It moves toward either a top-down command system or a bottom-up appeals court system. But one thing is sure: it is not moving toward a system of justice based on competing legal orders, despite the flare-ups of tribalism and regionalism as humanism breaks down and messianic religions gain new authority. As the gospel spreads, these rival religions will be replaced. There will be winners and losers in the competition for men's covenantal allegiance, but there will not be any illusion or assertion of judicial neutrality as time goes on. Neutrality is a humanist myth, not a biblical principle. There is no neutrality; hence, a one-world state (but not a one-State world) is a biblical ideal.³³ There can be no authority apart from hierarchy.³⁴ But Exodus 18 makes it clear that this civil government has layers, each with legitimate authority.

31. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

32. This is why any prophecy of a future one-State world, or a future one-world humanist state, is a false prophecy.

33. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

34. Even the equality of being within the three persons of the Trinity is qualified by the theological doctrine of the economical Trinity: hierarchy with respect to function.

F. All Nations Formally Under God

There are several layers of civil government, and in modern Western jurisprudence, several branches within each layer: legislative, executive, and judicial. The delegation of God's unified judicial authority to mankind is always marked by a division of powers, sometimes described as a system of checks and balances.

The existence of a civil covenant, marked by a self-maledictory oath of allegiance, is proof that anarchism is not a biblical ideal. Civil government is a separate jurisdiction from the free market, which is an extension of family government. The state has the God-given authority to settle disputes by force of arms. The free market does not. To argue that it does is to adopt judicial warlordism. But to argue that no one has the right to impose physical sanctions is to adopt utopian pacifism. It is to reject the idea of God's negative sanctions in history through representative agents. If actually legislated, pacifism would lead to tyranny by Satan's representatives in history: evildoers (Rom. 13:1–7). While there can be lawful private arbitration organizations, they do not possess the covenantal authority to impose the sword, that is, the right to declare guilt and impose mandatory penal sanctions. On the other hand, the existence of multiple levels of civil authority (Ex. 18) is proof that judicial centralism is not a biblical ideal. The biblical system of civil government is Trinitarian, not unitarian or atomistic.

There are two theoretical alternatives to social Trinitarianism: political unitarianism and judicial warlordism. The confessional unitarians—which include Orthodox Jews and orthodox Muslims—deny the doctrine of the Trinity. Unitarianism does not affirm the equal ultimacy of the one and the many. It affirms the ultimacy of the one. A consistent application of this view of God leads to the ideal of a top-down centralized state.³⁵ God mandated the tribal land ownership system for Mosaic Israel in order to restrain the development of a unitary state, for Israel's confession was, on the surface, unitarian: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4).³⁶ Of course, it was ultimately Trinitarian, for God spoke of Himself as plural: "Let us go down. . ." (Gen. 11:7). Social unitarianism rejects the ideal of a decent-

35. This may be why Jews continually embrace the state, to their long-term disadvantage. On this political tradition, see Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). While there are a few free market economists who are also Orthodox Jews, they generally do their technical economic analyses as secular economists, not as Orthodox Jews.

36. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 15.

ralized theocratic order that is unified by a common confession, where the power to tax the individual directly is exclusively local, and the jury system is also local.

Judicial warlordism, in contrast, rejects the ideal of a central civil government. It offers a theory of truncated courts: no lawful court of appeal above the person of the warlord unless the warlord consents to it. In judicial warlordism, there is only temporary power for imposing order in the case of disputes; there is no legitimate central authority. One form of theoretical warlordism (anarcho-capitalism) ends the appeals system with the most militarily powerful individual or with the court of the most powerful private police force in a system of private, competing courts. In the version of truncated courts known as nationalism, appeals end with a national civil court. Both of these truncated judicial systems are associated with the right-wing Enlightenment model. These are polytheistic judicial models: many laws, many gods. Rushdoony wrote: "The premise of polytheism is that we live in a multiverse, not a universe, that a variety of law-orders and hence lords exist, and that man cannot therefore be under one law *except* by virtue of imperialism."³⁷

Biblical law, being universal in scope, is not polytheistic. It is also not imperialistic. The top-down judicial order of imperialism is Satan's perverse imitation of God's kingdom. Both systems are comprehensive in their claims, but they are structured differently. God's kingdom is a bottom-up system of appeals courts based on binding covenantal oaths. But the biblical system of appeals courts cannot be limited, for the universalism of God's mandatory covenantal oaths cannot be limited. There is no zone of neutrality, no place of refuge outside the jurisdiction of God.

Judicial Trinitarianism proposes the ideal of Christendom. Why? Because it envisions the extension of God's universal kingdom in history, it affirms a confessionally unified pair of appeals systems—ecclesiastical and civil—that transcends national borders. Judicial Trinitarianism is necessarily internationalist because the kingdom of God transcends political borders.³⁸ Modern Christianity, being antinomian, rejects the ideal of this international kingdom. The churches deny the possibility of internationalism because they deny the universality of God's law. Modern Christianity is politically polytheistic.³⁹ Rushdoony

37. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 17.

38. North, *Healer of the Nations*.

39. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Insti-

is correct: "To hold, as the churches do, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist, and all others virtually, that the law was good for Israel, but that Christians and the church are under grace without law, or under some higher, newer law, is implicit polytheism."⁴⁰ This antinomian outlook turns over judicial authority to polytheistic humanist kingdoms as surely as the pacifism of the Menonite sects causes them to turn over the law-making power, police power, and military authority to others. Thus, modern Christians hail as biblically valid the truncated court systems of modern nationalism. They reject the ideal of Christendom on two accounts: its commitment to universal Christian legal standards and its denial of humanistic nationalism as anything more than a temporary stopgap measure analogous to the scattering at the Tower of Babel. They do not regard Babel's scattering as God's curse on covenant-breakers' confession of autonomy: to make themselves a name. Rather, they see judicial Babel as inherent in the human condition, even if all men were to covenant with God.

Nevertheless, the creation of such a supreme judicial civil court must not precede the creation of a supreme ecclesiastical court. The church is the model for the state, not the state for the church. The church continues into eternity; the state does not (Rev. 21; 22). No agency will then be needed to impose civil sanctions: no sin! Conclusion: to begin to create a supreme civil world court before creating the covenantal foundation of a free world society—Christendom—is to attempt the creation of a secular one-world order. It represents a return to Babel.

The inherently international ideal of Christendom is denied by right-wing judicial Anabaptists, but they cannot escape the theoretical problem of social order. Traditionally, they have appealed to civil judicial neutrality—the ideal of either Stoic or Newtonian natural law—in their attempts to deny the ideal of Christendom. They become like the Amish, the archetypal right-wing Anabaptists: trapped in the humanists' judicial order as it moves toward either the one-State world or judicial warlordism. To put it in familiar terms, we find ourselves moving toward either the humanists' New World Order or Balkanization.

tute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

40. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 18.

Conclusion

Vengeance is God's, but He delegates limited authority to the civil government to impose negative sanctions against law-breakers. The Bible establishes a judicial ideal: the supply of vengeance must be placed under the restraint of Bible-revealed law. This is accomplished biblically by making the state the sole lawful supplier.⁴¹ In the case of negative physical sanctions, except for parental punishing of children, the state is to be the sole supplier of the service.⁴²

Biblical law establishes a monopoly of vengeance. The economic function of a monopoly is to reduce the quantity of output of some good or service. The "service" in this case is potentially negative for society: vengeance. There is some socially optimum quantity of this service, but because of the tendency toward autonomy and lawlessness among men, the unrestrained free market would create an oversupply.

The state is required by God to protect private property. The state must honor God-established property rights, i.e., *legal immunities*—boundaries—against invasion. Stewards over property are to have their rights protected by threat of violence by the state against invaders. *Property rights are human rights.* By limiting the number of authorized agents of vengeance, society limits the spread of violence. This also places the state under public scrutiny. *The more limited the state, the less it has to be scrutinized.* The state establishes a hierarchical system of appeals courts (Ex. 18). This system parallels the ecclesiastical court of appeals. The church, not the state, is the model for society. When the church rejects the covenantal ideal of an international, hierarchical system of appeals courts, both ecclesiastical and civil, it necessarily adopts a rival judicial model: tribalism, regionalism, or nationalism. The biblical goal is world government under God's law, for both church and state. But until the church establishes this in practice, the quest for world civil government under common world law is messianic and a threat to freedom. There must be a common confession among men before there can be a lawful appeals court, and only one confession is valid: Trinitarianism.

41. In the Old Testament, the kinsman-redeemer was lawfully authorized to act as the state's agent.

42. Personal self-defense should be interpreted as an act of state. The state delegates to the individual the authority to impose this sanction in unique circumstances. It is analogous to "citizen's arrest."

THE PRESERVATION OF THE SEED

Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed; neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee (Lev. 19:19).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is the meaning of the entire Book of Leviticus: God's boundaries must be respected.

A. The Test Case

Vern S. Poythress, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, stated that this passage is exegetically "the test case" or case law for theonomists.¹ He wished to know what theonomic principles of interpretation govern the New Testament's understanding of this Mosaic case law. As I shall argue, the primary hermeneutical principle that applies to this case law is the principle of the seed. This case law applied only in Mosaic Israel. It was an aspect of Jacob's messianic prophecy regarding Judah (Gen. 49:9–10). This law is indeed a test case for theonomy—and also for every other system of biblical interpretation.

This case law establishes three boundaries, each referring to a specific economic activity: animal husbandry, agriculture, and textiles. Except for the products of mining and metalworking, these were the primary categories of economic goods in the ancient world. Leviticus 19:19 established rules for all three areas. That world is long gone. Beginning no later than the fifteenth century, A.D., and accelerating rapidly in the late eighteenth century, a series of improvements in all three areas transformed the traditional economy of Europe. The mod-

1. Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 110.

ern capitalist system—with its emphasis on private ownership, the specialization of production, and the division of labor—steadily replaced the older medieval world of the common fields. This comprehensive economic transformation was accompanied by the violation of at least the first two, and seemingly all three, of the statutes of Leviticus 19:19.

This raises an important covenantal issue: the predictability of the external corporate blessings of God in history. A civilization-wide violation of these Levitical laws has produced (or at least has been accompanied by) an historically unprecedented increase in wealth: the West's agricultural revolution. We must therefore conclude one of three things: (1) the laws of Leviticus 19:19 are no longer binding because of a change in covenantal administration (my view); (2) these laws are still morally binding, but the covenantal link between corporate obedience and corporate blessings no longer holds in New Testament times (Kline's view);² or (3) these laws and God's corporate sanctions are still judicially binding (Rushdoony's view).³ If Rushdoony's view is correct, then the modern world must be headed for a horrendous covenantal judgment of God because of systematic violations of this three-part Mosaic law.

B. The Industrial Revolution

We come now to the most important unanswered question in all of human history: *How did it come about that, beginning around 1800 in Great Britain, economic growth of about 2% per annum extended for the next two centuries?* This has changed the world in ways inconceivable in 1800. It had done so by 1880. The rate of economic growth did not decrease after 1880. All this has taken place within the span of three generations, although long generations.⁴

The industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century visibly began to transform the traditional European economy. This is not to say that industrialism appeared overnight. It did not.⁵ But to character-

2. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 255.

4. In December 2010, I interviewed Dr. Lyon Tyler, the grandson of John Tyler, who was President of the United States from 1841 to 1845, who was born in 1790, the first full year of George Washington's Presidency. Dr. Tyler's younger brother often utters this show-stopping one-liner: "As my grandfather said to Thomas Jefferson. . ."

5. John U. Nef, *The Conquest of the Material World: Essays on the Coming of In-*

ize England as the first industrial society would not have been accurate much before 1780. After 1820,⁶ it was an appropriate designation, widely acknowledged. European observers recognized that something fundamentally new was taking place in England.

1. No Persuasive Explanation

The industrial revolution in England was not initially industrial. It was initiated by a series of transformations in the traditional sectors of agriculture,⁷ animal husbandry,⁸ textiles,⁹ and metallurgy.¹⁰ Improvements in metallurgy were made possible by improved coal mining.¹¹ Commerce and industry accelerated as economic output increased.¹² The revolution in steam power that was a characteristic feature of the industrial revolution was made possible by the improvements in metallurgy and coal, and the steam engine in turn made mining less expensive by pumping water out of the mines, which was essential for deep mining technology.¹³ Machines were also applied to textile production.¹⁴ But the reality was this: the industrial revolution took place after 1760 in England and after 1800 elsewhere because of prior transformations in agriculture, animal husbandry, textiles, and to a lesser extent, metallurgy and mining.¹⁵

The changes that first became visible in Britain were not confined to that island empire. The fundamental change—a change in property rights—had taken place throughout Western Europe for several centuries preceding the industrial revolution. The growth of towns, the growth of markets, and the growth of commerce had begun in Western Europe at least by the eleventh century, and this growth continued.

dustrialism (New York: Meridian, 1964).

6. This date of origin was defended by economic historian Angus Maddison (<http://bit.ly/Maddison>).

7. Herbert Heaton, *Economic History of Europe*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1948), pp. 310–14, 407–13. Heaton was one of my instructors.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 404–7, 413–16.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 314–16.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 316–17.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 317–19. In England, the wood supply began to shrink in the second half of the eighteenth century. The English had to rely more and more on coal, which it had in abundance. Brinley Thomas, "Toward an Energy Interpretation of the Industrial Revolution," *Atlantic Economic Journal*, VIII (March 1980).

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 319–28.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 494–97.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 489–93.

15. After 1750 in England, coal mining became significant.

After the fifteenth century, the gunpowder revolution made defense, and therefore civil government, progressively the responsibility of the king and the nation rather than the local lord of the manor. Loyalties shifted accordingly, especially in the cities. Lampard writes: "The result was a new social division of labor in which property rights played a more decisive role than personal obligations in determining the division of the social product. Property rights as a claim on the material means of existence provided the institutional foundation, if not the psychological mainspring, for a commercial, acquisitive society."¹⁶ This institutional transformation was not confined to Great Britain. Because of this long-term judicial extension of the concept of private ownership, once England had shown the way, the industrial revolution spread within two generations throughout Northern and Western Europe, and also to North America. By 1830, it was a common Northern European and North American phenomenon.

2. Population Growth

The most statistically relevant aspect of the era of the industrial revolution in England was the growth of population. In the year 1700, there were about five and a half million people in England and Wales. By 1750, it was six and a half million. By 1801, it was about nine million, an unprecedented increase of over 38% in half a century. By 1831, population had reached fourteen million. This was not due to an increase in the birth rate.¹⁷ It was also not due to immigration. On the contrary, during the eighteenth century, as many as a million people left Great Britain for the colonies.¹⁸ The cause of the increase in population, 1750–1800, was an unprecedented reduction in the death rate.¹⁹

The question is: Was it the industrial revolution that produced this increase? This seems not to have been the case. A growth of population was also taking place in other European nations and in North America—nations that had not yet experienced an industrial revolution.²⁰ This points to the possibility that the slow but steady increase in

16. Eric E. Lampard, *The Industrial Revolution: Interpretations and Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Service Center for Teachers of History, American Historical Association, 1957), p. 12.

17. T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760–1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 4.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

19. Peter Razzell, *Essays in English Population History* (London: Caliban, 1993).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 6. Cf. Shepard B. Clough, *The Economic Development of Western Civilization* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 241–42.

agricultural productivity outside of England had been more important in increasing Europe's population than England's industrial revolution. Agricultural productivity did not rise in England after 1750. England became an importer of food, selling its industrial products abroad to pay for these imports.²¹ This means that other areas in Europe and the colonies were producing agricultural surpluses.²² Successful agricultural techniques discovered in one region were imitated throughout Western Europe. This leads us back to the problem of Leviticus 19:19 and the corporate blessings of God.

3. *Innovation*

The fundamental change in the West's traditional economy was the appearance of widespread innovation. As never before in man's history, innovation began to reshape economic production. Entrepreneurs gained access to capital, and this capital allowed them to test their visions of the future in the competitive marketplace. Either they met consumer demand more efficiently than their competitors, thereby gaining short-term profits until other producers imitated their techniques, or else they failed. The winners were the consumers, whose economic decisions steadily became sovereign in the economy. Rosenberg and Birdzell have described the process as well as anyone has: "The immediate sources of Western growth were innovations in trade, technology, and organization, in combination with accumulation of more and more capital, labor, and applied natural resources. Innovation emerged as a significant factor in Western growth as early as the mid-fifteenth century, and, from the mid-eighteenth century on, has been pervasive and dominant. Innovation occurred in trading, production, products, services, institutions, and organizations. The main characteristics of innovation—uncertainty, search, exploration, financial risk, experiment, and discovery—have so permeated the West's expansion of trade and the West's development of natural resources as to make it virtually an additional factor of production."²³

Entrepreneurship was the key to the West's economic growth. En-

21. Brinley Thomas, "Food Supply in the United Kingdom During the Industrial Revolution," in Joel Mokyr (ed.), *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 142.

22. A surplus does not necessarily mean abundance, and surely did not mean this in the eighteenth century. A surplus is merely an asset that its producer regards as less valuable to him than the item he receives in exchange.

23. Nathan Rosenberg and L. E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 20.

trepreneurship is defined as the act of forecasting an inherently uncertain economic future, and then purchasing the services of men and capital over time in order to meet future consumer demand with the least expenditure of money or resources. Profits are an economic residual: whatever remains after all factors of production have been paid for. Profit stems from an entrepreneur's ability to forecast the future and meet its demands with less expenditure than his competitors. He can "buy low" today only because his competitors have not accurately forecasted future consumer demand; hence, they fail to bid up the price of today's scarce resources. The lure of profit is the motivating factor in the capitalist's decision to bear the uncertainty of producing future consumer goods.²⁴

Innovation was the key to Europe's economic growth and social change, yet Leviticus 19:19 seems opposed to innovation, especially with respect to animal husbandry. There is to be no scientific interbreeding of animals, the law declares. The same restriction appears to hold true for the seeds of the field. If the key to Western prosperity has been economic and scientific innovation, then why did God establish laws for agriculture that restrict innovation in two major areas of modern agricultural output?²⁵ Are any of God's laws opposed to economic development? If so, which ones? And why?

C. Leviticus 19:19 and Economic Development

The transformation of the first three sectors of the European economy involved what appear to be explicit violations of Leviticus 19: 19. Men developed new strains of plants, new breeds within species, and new combinations of textiles.²⁶ Agricultural productivity as a whole went through something like a revolution, 1600–1750. It accelerated vastly after 1800. By 1900, modern agriculture had become capital intensive and scientific. Hybrid seeds would soon become the foundation of this revolution in agricultural output. Gregor Mendel, a monk living in what became Czechoslovakia after World War I, discovered

24. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>); Israel M. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

25. The third law, prohibiting the wearing of mixed cloth, was a restriction on domestic use, not on output as such.

26. As early as the fifteenth century, Europe was benefiting from fustian: various cloths that were a combination of linen and cotton. Heaton, *Economic History*, pp. 215, 232–33.

the laws of genetics in 1865 and published his findings in 1866, "Experiments With Plant Hybrids," in an obscure local journal. This article attracted no attention. It was rediscovered in 1900, and his discovery began to reshape the modern world—a transformation that is now accelerating through genetic engineering.

Animal breeding was the least important factor in this agricultural transformation.²⁷ Wrote economic historian Peter Mathias: "The first main innovations were mainly in improving rotations and crops, seed-yields and strains in plants. Advances in animal breeding and the widespread substitution of the horse for the ox on the farm followed mainly in the wake of these improvements. This also was not accidental. The new animals demanded more efficient, better feeding. The old styles of unimproved stock remained a natural and appropriate response to poor pasture, waterlogged fields in the winter and scanty winter feed. Neither sheep nor draught-animals could serve a specialized function: the ox was eaten when it could no longer draw."²⁸

The question must be asked: If the modern world had remained faithful to Leviticus 19:19, would we have escaped the narrow economic boundaries of the pre-modern world? Would we still be facing famines, starvation, poverty, high infant mortality rates, and all the other curses of poverty in the world prior to 1800? The answer is obvious: yes. So, the question arises: Was Leviticus 19:19 itself an economic curse? Second, is it still in force? If it is, then isn't our high per capita wealth today—seemingly a great blessing from God—judicially illegitimate?

More specifically, is the defender of free market capitalism forced into an untenable ideological position if he also defends the continuing authority of biblical law? Is the modern world's wealth an example of God's perverse blessing on antinomian Christianity and humanism, generation after generation? Or is the modern world's abandonment of Leviticus 19:19 legitimate because this case law was annulled by the New Covenant? If abandoning Leviticus 19:19 is legitimate, then does this fact itself constitute a theological justification for announcing the annulment of all of the Old Testament's case laws? This is a hermeneutical question. These questions deserve a serious response from theologians.

Before we seek answers to these questions, another historical

27. Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain, 1700–1914* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), pp. 78–80.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 77–78.

factor must be considered: the enclosure movement. There is no doubt that the genetic specialization of herds and crops was made possible economically by the steady enclosure of the medieval common fields, i.e., commonly tilled soil. When an owner could identify and legally defend his crops and herds on his land, he could better afford to experiment. He would be allowed to claim as his property any increased output. Common fields restricted such innovation. Only mutually agreed-upon innovations were permitted in common fields. Risks had to be low; any increased output had to be shared. Radical innovations were unlikely.

The enclosure movement began early in England, certainly by the thirteenth century.²⁹ It accelerated in the sixteenth century.³⁰ After 1760, Parliament authorized specific enclosure by private acts.³¹ It was the steady partitioning of the common fields into private plots that made possible the so-called agricultural revolution in England. (A revolution that takes well over a century is evolutionary by modern standards, though not by pre-modern standards.) Professor Ashton wrote: "Progress in agriculture was bound up with the creation of new units of administration in which the individual had more scope for experiment; and this meant the parceling out and enclosure of the common fields, or the breaking up of the rough pasture and waste which had previously contributed little to the output of the village."³² What was required, in short, was the establishment of new boundaries.

These legal boundaries established the private ownership of, and therefore personal responsibility over, the crucial means of production in an agricultural society: specific units of land. Because of these judicial boundaries, the fruits of one's capital and labor inputs could be more easily identified and claimed. This created economic incentives to improve the land and to introduce new crops, including the bleating crop known as sheep. Specialization of agricultural production and the resulting increase in output per unit of resource input increased both wealth and population in early modern England. This in turn led to the industrial revolution. My point is that the increasing precision of the legal claims of private owners of land, enforceable in civil courts, was the crucial change that made possible the agricultural revolution. The development of new crops and new breeds was the result, not the

29. W. E. Tate, *The Enclosure Movement* (New York: Walker, 1967), pp. 60–61.

30. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

32. Ashton, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 18.

cause, of a social and legal revolution. In short, the new boundaries—geographical but especially legal—led to greater dominion.

D. Poythress' Challenge

As I mentioned earlier, Dr. Poythress challenged the defenders of theonomy to deal with the hermeneutical (interpretational) problems associated with Leviticus 19:19. He knew that theonomists are defenders of free market economics and modern capitalism. How, then, can theonomists escape the dilemma of Leviticus 19:19? He began his analysis-criticism of theonomy with a consideration of this verse. He regarded the exegetical problem of Leviticus 19:19 as exemplary of the theonomists' larger hermeneutical problem of distinguishing judicial continuity from discontinuity in the two testaments. This is why he calls it "the test case."

1. *Bahnsen vs. Rushdoony*

Poythress' challenge is legitimate. He did raise important issues regarding the principles of biblical interpretation as they apply to the case laws of the Old Covenant. The command not to mix seeds is an expression of God's will, he correctly observes. It is therefore relevant to us as expositors. Does this particular case law express a universal standard, or is it uniquely a law of a distinct kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6)? Was it part of Israel's laws of unclean foods? If it was part of Israel's priestly laws, how does it apply to the church as a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9)? The Mosaic food laws are abolished, he correctly observes. Yet we are still not to mix good and evil. "How do we decide how Leviticus 19:19 applies to us?"³³ This is indeed the question.

Poythress said that Greg Bahnsen thought this law no longer needs to be observed literally.³⁴ Bahnsen was correct on this point, but Poythress was not persuaded by Bahnsen's general explanation. He cited Bahnsen: "We should presume that Old Testament standing laws continue to be morally binding in the New Testament, unless they are rescinded or modified by further revelation."³⁵ Poythress added: "Strict, wooden application of this principle would appear to imply the con-

33. Poythress, "Interpretive Frameworks," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 104.

34. Poythress does not cite a source for this assertion: *ibid.*, p. 106.

35. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp. 345–46. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

tinuation of Leviticus 19:19 in force.”³⁶ He noted in a footnote that Rushdoony argues that Leviticus 19:19 still applies, making all hybrids immoral.³⁷ Therefore, Poythress implied (correctly), those theonomists who reject Rushdoony’s interpretation of Leviticus 19:19 need to produce specific evidence of a judicial discontinuity between the testaments that has annulled the literal application of this law. Poythress said that this law can be regarded as part of the Mosaic food laws and hence abolished.

The Mosaic laws of separation no longer apply, Bahnsen said.³⁸ Poythress asked: “But how do we tell in practice what counts as a ‘separation’ principle? How do we tell what elements in Mosaic statutes are shadows and in what way are they shadows? How do we tell what is ceremonial and what is moral?”³⁹ We know that all the laws in Leviticus 19 are moral, he said. They functioned in some way to separate Israel from the nations around her. Second, he said, it is easy to argue that “keeping the types of seed distinct is a principle of separation based on creation and therefore of permanent validity. Third, the immediate context of Leviticus does not provide decisive information about the permanence of this statute.”⁴⁰

The more that Poythress looked at the specifics of this case law, the more its New Testament meaning seemed to get lost in the Mosaic law’s shadows. This is true of almost every civil law in the Mosaic Covenant that he examined in detail, as he repeatedly demonstrated in his book, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (1991).

How can we faithfully solve these exegetical problems? He offered this exegetical imperative: “We are supposed to determine the classification of any statute by first understanding its primary function. Understanding its function reveals whether it primarily defines sin in a universally binding way or whether it primarily articulates the way of salvation in a way conditioned by the redemptive-historical context. We therefore determine in what respects it is permanently relevant to our redemptive-historical situation. The primary remaining difficulty is that it is not always easy to determine the primary function, particularly because several functions may sometimes be interwoven.”⁴¹

I agree with this statement regarding the requirements of exegesis.

36. Poythress, p. 106.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 106n. He cited Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 255.

38. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, p. 346.

39. Poythress, p. 106.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9.

It is therefore mandatory on me or on another defender of theonomy's hermeneutic to do what Poythress said must be done: (1) identify the primary function of an Old Covenant law; (2) discover whether it is universal in a redemptive (healing) sense, or whether (3) it was conditioned by its redemptive-historical context (i.e., annulled by the New Covenant). In short: What did the law mean, how did it apply inside and outside Mosaic Israel, and how should it apply today? This exegetical task is not always easy, but it is mandatory. It is a task that has been ignored or denied by the vast majority of Christian theologians for almost two millennia.

The question Poythress raised is the hermeneutical problem of identifying covenantal continuity and covenantal discontinuity. First, in questions of covenantal continuity, we need to ask: What is the underlying ethical principle? God does not change ethically. The moral law is still binding, but its application may not be. Second, this raises the question of covenantal discontinuity. What has changed as a result of the New Testament era's fulfillment of Old Covenant prophecy and the inauguration of the New Covenant? A continuity—prophetic-judicial fulfillment—has in some cases produced a judicial discontinuity: the annulment of a case law's application. A very good example of this is Leviticus 19:19.

2. *Hermeneutical Questions*

I begin any investigation of any suspected judicial discontinuity with the following questions. First, is the case law related to the priesthood, which has changed (Heb. 7:11–12)? Second, is it related to the sacraments, which have changed? Third, is it related to the jubilee land laws (e.g., inheritance), which Christ fulfilled (Luke 4:18–21)?⁴² Fourth, is it related to the tribes (e.g., the seed laws), which Christ fulfilled in His office as Shiloh, the promised Seed (Gal. 3:16)? Fifth, is it related to the “middle wall of partition” between Jew and gentile, which Jesus Christ's gospel has broken down (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14–20)?⁴³ These five principles prove fruitful in analyzing Leviticus 19:19.⁴⁴

42. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

43. This application is especially important in dealing with Rushdoony's theory of “hybridization.” See Appendix G.

44. There are several other hermeneutical questions that we can ask that relate to covenantal discontinuity. Sixth, is it an aspect of the weakness of the Israelites, which Christ's ministry has overcome, thereby intensifying the rigors of an Old Covenant law (Matt. 5:21–48)? Seventh, is it an aspect of the Old Covenant's cursed six day-one day

Let us ask another question: Is a change in the priesthood also accompanied by a change in the laws governing the family covenant? Yes. Jesus tightened the laws of divorce by removing the Mosaic law's exception, the bill of divorcement (Matt. 5:31–32).⁴⁵ Similarly, the church from the beginning has denied the legality of polygamy even though there is no explicit rejection of polygamy in the New Testament except for church officers: husbands of one wife (I Tim. 3:2, 12). Polygamy is implicitly rejected by the church because of the rule of law: an equal burden of divorce, husband vs. wife.⁴⁶ Did other changes in the family accompany the New Covenant's change in the priesthood? Specifically, have changes in inheritance taken place? Have these changes resulted in the annulment of the jubilee land laws of the Mosaic economy? Finally, has an annulment of the jubilee land laws annulled the laws of tribal administration?

E. The Traditional Three-fold Division

The Westminster Confession (1646) offers a tripartite division of biblical law: *moral*, *ceremonial*, and *judicial*. The moral law is said to be permanently binding (XIX:2). The ceremonial law is said to have been abrogated by the New Covenant (XIX:3). The judicial law is said to have applied only to national Israel and not to the New Covenant era, except insofar as a law was (is) part of something called the "general equity" (XIX:4). This formulation assumes that the judicial law applied only to Israel's "body politic."

This assumption raises a fundamental question: *What about the family?* The family is a separate covenantal administration, bound by a lawful oath under God. Which civil laws in Israel protected the family? To what extent have these laws been annulled or modified (perhaps tightened) by the New Covenant? And why?

I am here suggesting the need for the addition of another tripartite division: *civil*, *ecclesiastical*, and *familial*. James Jordan believed that

work week rather than the one day-six day pattern of the New Covenant's now-redeemed week (Heb. 4:1–11)? Eighth, is it part of legal order of the once ritually polluted earth, which has now been cleansed by Christ (Acts 10; I Cor. 8)?

45. Here, I disagree with Bahnsen, who dismissed the relevance of the bill of divorcement, which he said "the Mosaic law mentioned only in *passing*. . . ." Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacodoches, Texas: Covenant Media Foundation, [1977] 2002), p. 101. The bill of divorcement was God's law for Mosaic Israel. Jesus annulled it.

46. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

the Confession's three-fold division applies across the boards to the three covenantal institutions. The moral law applies to all three: civil law, canon law, and family law. The ceremonial law applied to all three: oaths, sacraments, and marriage. The judicial law applies to all three: execution and restitution, excommunication, and divorce-disinheritance. He also noted that the Confession's tripartite division conforms to the five points of the biblical covenant model.⁴⁷ The ceremonial category is derived from points one and two: transcendence and hierarchy. The moral category is derived from point three: law. The judicial category is derived from points four and five: sanctions and succession.⁴⁸

In short, the Westminster Confession's divisions can and should be applied to the Bible's tripartite covenantal-institutional divisions. There are continuities (fixed principles) and discontinuities (redemptive-historical applications) in all three covenantal law-orders. It is the task of the interpreter to make clear these distinctions and interrelationships. The church has been avoiding this crucial task (exegetical and applicational) since A.D. 70. The result has been the dominance of ethical dualism in Christian social theory: natural law theory coupled with pietism and/or mysticism.

F. Case Laws and Underlying Principles

Leviticus is the Bible's book of holiness. Boundaries are basic to biblical holiness. So, it is wise to approach passages that make little sense to the modern reader in expectation that in many of them, the issues can be clarified by discovering the underlying principle of holiness, which is a principle of separation.

A law governing agriculture, animal husbandry, and textile production had to be taken very seriously under the Mosaic Covenant. The expositor's initial presumption should be that these three laws constitute a judicial unit. If they are a unit, there has to be some underlying judicial principle common to all three. All three prohibitions deal with mixing. The first question we need to ask is the crucial one: What was the covenantal meaning of these laws? The second question is: What was their economic effect?

The fundamental judicial principle undergirding the passage is the

47. On the five points, see Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

48. Jordan's comments to author: Sept. 1992.

requirement of separation. Two kinds of separation were involved: tribal and covenantal. The first two clauses were agricultural applications of the mandatory *segregation of the tribes* inside Israel until a unique prophesied *Seed* would appear in history: the Messiah. We know who the Seed is: Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "Now unto Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). The context of Paul's discussion is *inheritance*. Inheritance is by promise, he said (Gal. 3:18). The Mosaic law was given, Paul said, "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3: 18). Two-thirds of Leviticus 19:19 relates to the inheritance laws of national Israel, as we shall see. When the Levitical land inheritance laws (Lev. 25) ended with the establishment of a new priesthood, so did the authority of Leviticus 19:19.

What was Paul attempting to prove? This: eternal life (the ultimate inheritance) is obtained by God's promise, not by God's law. God's law cannot impart life.⁴⁹ That is to say, the *means* of the recipient's eternal life is not obedience to God's revealed law. Paul was not, contrary to the argument of the Judaizers, attempting to set biblical law in opposition to the principle of inheritance by promise.⁵⁰ He was arguing that there is only one pathway to eternal life: by God's promise. It is this promise of *new life*, which is a *new inheritance*, that is central to Leviticus 19:19.

The second form of separation is more familiar: *covenantal separation*. The final clause of Leviticus 19:19 deals with prohibited clothing. This prohibition related not to separation among the tribes of Israel—separation within a covenant—but rather the separation of national Israel from other nations.

Because their frame of reference is not intuitively recognized, the first two clauses must occupy our initial attention.

49. Moises Silva, "Is the Law Against the Promises? The Significance of Galatians 3:21 for Covenant Continuity," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 158.

50. Meredith G. Kline argued that this was Paul's contention: *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 23. Moises Silva said that Kline was incorrect on this point. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 160. In fact, Silva said, Kline's interpretation—the radical contrast between law and promise—is the same as the Judaizers' argument. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

G. Boundary of Blood: Seed and Land

The preservation of Israel's unique covenantal status was required by biblical law. The physical manifestation of this separation was circumcision. A boundary of blood was imposed on the male organ of reproduction. It was a sign that covenantal life is not obtained by either physical birth or through one's male heirs. Rushdoony wrote: "Circumcision witnesses to the fact that man's hope is not in generation but in regeneration. . . ." ⁵¹ Unlike the ancient Greeks, who believed that a decent life after death could be obtained only through an unbroken series of rites performed by one's male heirs, ⁵² the Israelites knew that physical generation within the family unit has nothing to do with one's life after physical death. They had a doctrine of creation; the Greeks did not. This made a tremendous difference, as Fustel remarked so long ago: "[I]f we reflect that the ancients had no idea of creation, we shall see that the mystery of generation was for them what the mystery of creation is for us. The generator appeared to them to be a divine being; and they adored their ancestor." ⁵³ Ancestor worship is not the message of the Old Covenant. The theology of the Old Covenant is creationist: *the Creator-creature distinction*. The Creator placed the generator, Adam, under a covenant. Adam served as the judicial representative of all his heirs. The generator then broke the terms of the covenant. Mankind is therefore under a curse, both in history and eternity. Ancestor worship has never been a temptation in Christian cultures. To escape Adam's legal status as a covenant-breaker, a man must re-covenant with God, a human response made possible by God's absolutely sovereign act of regeneration. The mark of this covenant in ancient Israel was circumcision. Ultimately, this separation was *confessional*. It involved an affirmation of the sovereignty of Israel's God.

1. Tribal and Family Boundaries

The nation of Israel was separated from non-covenanted nations by geographical and covenantal boundaries. Furthermore, tribal and family units separated the covenant people within Israel. This separation was always to be geographical, usually familial, ⁵⁴ but never confes-

51. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 43.

52. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book I.

53. *Ibid.*, I:IV, p. 36.

54. There could be inter-tribal marriages. Daughters received dowries rather than

sional. Every tribe confessed the same confession: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:4–5).⁵⁵ Israelites were not divided tribally because they had different ancestors, which was the case in ancient Greece. They were divided tribally because they would have *different heirs*. Only one tribe would bring forth the promised Seed. *Tribal separation was based on differences in inheritance.*

Here I need to make something very clear. Unless stated otherwise, when I speak of seed laws and seed sanctions, I have in mind those laws and sanctions that applied exclusively to Mosaic Israel because of Jacob's prophecy of a *tribal boundary* around the coming Seed, the Messiah. There are broader aspects of God's covenantal seed laws: applications of God's covenantal promises to Abraham, such as population growth for faithfulness. These broad covenantal promises apply to the New Covenant sons of Abraham: the church, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Because they apply across the two covenants, they were not exclusive to Mosaic Israel.

Israel's tribal divisions had political implications. They guaranteed localism. This localism of tribal inheritance was the judicial complement of the unity of national covenantal confession. Speaking of the case laws (Ex. 21–23) that follow God's delivery of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20), political scientist Aaron Wildavsky remarks: "The social legislation that follows—laws protecting property, strangers, widows, the poor, on and on—is also predicated on acceptance of an authority that cannot be disobeyed. These boundaries, which emphasize keeping relationships whole, each partaking only of what properly belongs to its class, are of special social significance in a tribal society. Each tribe is to be kept whole. No tribe is to transgress against another. What better guarantee that tribal borders (so carefully demarcated before entry to Israel) will be sacrosanct is there than a system of classification—from food to clothing to marriage—that stresses wholeness and separation from top to bottom?"⁵⁶ Tribal boundaries were part of an overall structure of covenantal unity.

Family membership and rural land ownership in Israel were tied together by the laws of inheritance. A rural Israelite—and most Israel-

landed inheritance. Dowries could cross tribal boundaries; land could not.

55. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 15.

56. Aaron Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama, 1984), p. 97.

ites were rural⁵⁷—was the heir of a specific plot of ground because of his family membership. There was no rural landed inheritance apart from family membership. Unlike the laws of ancient Greece, Mosaic law allowed a daughter to inherit the family's land if there was no son. But there was a condition: she had to marry within the tribal unit (Num. 36:8).⁵⁸ The landed inheritance could not lawfully move from one tribe to another (Num. 36:9).⁵⁹ A man's primary inheritance in Israel was his legal status: freemanship and congregation membership. This was part of his family name.

2. *Family Land and Family Name*

Land was tied to name. The land of Israel was God's; His name was on it. The family's land was tied to the family's name. So important was this principle of inheritance that a brother who lived on the family's land with a married brother who died without children had to obey the levirate marriage law and procreate children through the brother's widow (Deut. 25:5–10).⁶⁰ Their children would inherit the family's name (Deut. 25:6). To refuse to perform this requirement was to be disgraced publicly. The wife could challenge the brother publicly, announcing before the elders, "My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel. . ." (Deut. 25:7).

Tamar became a childless widow when Er, her evil husband, was killed by God (Gen. 38:7). Judah sent Onan, now his oldest son, to become her levir husband. Onan refused to procreate a child with her. He deliberately spilled his seed (*zarah*) on the ground, "lest that he should give his seed to his brother." This was not just an act of defiance against Tamar; it was a ritual act of defiance against God. God killed him for this ritual act (v. 10).

When Tamar bore twins to Judah, she named the second-born son Zarah. He was the child who had the scarlet thread around his wrist, who had almost been the firstborn (v. 30). He disappears after Genesis 46:12. He was not Judah's seed of the promise. His brother Pharez be-

57. This is not to say that God intended them to remain rural. On the contrary, the covenantal blessing of God in the form of population growth was to move most Israelites into the cities as time went on. See Chapter 24, section on "The Demographics of the Jubilee Inheritance Law."

58. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

59. The exception was when rural land that had been pledged to a priest went to him in the jubilee year if the pledge was violated (Lev. 27:20–21). Chapter 36.

60. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 64.

came the line of Judah into which Ruth the Moabite married (Ruth 4:12). So, the covenant line of Judah led to the kingly line of David through Ruth, for Boaz performed the office of the levir when Naomi's nearest of kin refused for fear of losing his inheritance (Ruth 4:6). David is listed as the tenth generation after Pharez (Ruth 4:18–22), making David's generation the first generation of Judah's line that could become citizens (Deut. 23:2) and lawfully become judges, for Pharez had been a bastard born illegally of Judah.⁶¹

The name Pharez comes from the Hebrew word for breach. God placed him as the head of the family line. Pharez was born abnormally, but he nevertheless inherited: sovereign grace.

3. Till Shiloh Come

Jacob had promised Judah that his blood line would rule until the promised heir (Shiloh) should come (Gen. 49:10). Thus, the integrity of each of the seed lines in Israel—family by family, tribe by tribe—was maintained by the Mosaic law until this promise was fulfilled. The mandatory separation among the tribes was symbolized by the prohibition against mixing seeds. The prohibition applied to the mixing of seeds in one field. The field did not represent the whole world under the Mosaic Covenant; *the field represented the Promised Land*. The husbandman or farmer had to create boundaries between his specialized breeds and between his crops.

The boundaries separating animals had to be there because of the normal sexual bonding that takes place among pairs within a species. So, too, was it normal for members of the same covenantal confession to marry. But Mosaic law established an *artificial barrier* between the tribes. This artificial barrier was both legal and economic: *landed inheritance*. Tribal separation decentralized Israel's economy and politics. The Levites were scattered across the land, living in walled cities or in Levitical cities in which the jubilee land laws did not apply (Lev. 25:29–30, 32–34). Levites provided religious leadership, including judicial advice, for every tribe. But the Levites had no inheritance in the land, so they could not buy up rural landed property or gain it through intermarriage, thereby centralizing the economy. Neither could the king, as the conflict between Ahab and Naboth indicates (I Kings 21).

61. On the incomplete genealogy of the Davidic line, see Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11:G.

There was to be continuity of theological and judicial principles, one tribe to another. Plots of land could not be merged beyond the jubilee. Kings and Levites—the national enforcers of God’s law—could not pursue judicial centralization through either land purchase or inter-marriage. This prevented what Pharaoh and the priests had done under Joseph (Gen. 47:20–22)—a curse on Egypt consistent with Egypt’s theology of the divine Pharaoh.⁶²

Thus, the prohibition against the interbreeding of animals and the mixing of seeds had to do with *keeping separate artificially what is normally mixed*. Fenced family fields inside Israel reflected the nation’s tribal boundaries. Such tribal separation was abnormal, not normal. What is abnormal is the separation of breeds within a species and the separation of crops within a single fenced field. What is also abnormal is the tribal separation of a biblically covenanted people. It was this abnormality that was essential to the maintenance of the tribal structure in Israel. Inheritance in the land was by tribal separation, but only until Shiloh at last arrived. The internal boundaries would disappear once Shiloh came.

4. *Inheritance: Generation vs. Adoption*

Another application of the seed laws was the prohibition of a foreign eunuch’s access to citizenship (Deut. 23:1). If a man was cut off in the stones, he was genetically cut off from the possibility of lawful inheritance in the land. He had no genetic future; he could therefore not become a citizen of Israel. Not even the laws of adoption could overcome this ecclesiastical and civil law.

Under the New Covenant, the laws of adoption have annulled this Mosaic law. The obvious New Testament example of its annulment is the encounter of Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch. As soon as the eunuch professed faith in Jesus Christ, Philip baptized him (Acts 8: 37–38). Covenantal inheritance in the New Testament is by public profession of faith, public baptism, and public obedience; it is not by genetics. Inheritance is by adoption, not by biological reproduction. This is a testimony to the fact that *covenantal faithfulness is more fundamental in history than biology*. It always has been, as God’s adoption of Israel as a nation testified (Ezek. 16). But because of the *historic* importance of the prophesied Seed of Israel, the seed laws predominated over

62. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 32:C.

the adoption laws in the Mosaic economy.

The advent of Jesus Christ restored adoption to visible primacy. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). *With the death of Jesus Christ and the annulment of the Old Covenant, the Levitical seed laws ceased.* They were not resurrected with Christ. There was no further need to separate seeds within Israel; the prophecy had been covenantally and historically fulfilled. So had the Levitical land laws (Lev. 25). *The mandatory judicial link between physical seed and land ceased for all time.* Those family and tribal boundaries within the land, like the boundaries establishing the judicial holiness (separateness) of national Israel from the world, were covenantally annulled by the New Covenant. The new wine of the gospel broke the old wineskins of Israel's seed laws.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the letter to the Hebrews. It begins with an affirmation of Christ's inheritance: God the Father "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2). Christ's inheritance is expressly tied to His name: "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Heb. 1:4). Jesus is the high priest of an unchangeable priesthood (Heb. 7:24). His priesthood, because it is after the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:9–11). This has changed the Levitical laws: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). This includes the laws of tribal separation. Jesus, as high priest, has transcended the Mosaic Covenant's laws separating the tribes of Israel: "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7:14). Because He transcended the tribal boundary laws, He also transcended the land laws and seed laws. A new priesthood now inherits the earth.

H. Sacrifice: Seed vs. Land

The connection between land and seed in the ancient world was very close, not only judicially but also ritually. When the Israelites came into the land of Canaan, they were told by God that they must not sacrifice their children to the gods of the land. They were not permitted to pass their children through any ritual fire. "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through [the fire] to Molech, neither shalt

thou profane the name of thy God: I [am] the LORD" (Lev. 18:21). Molech was the god of the Ammonites; it was identified as an abomination (I Kings 11:7). Notice that God called such a practice a profanation of His name (Lev. 20:3). The nation's name, the family's name, and God's name were all interlinked ritually.

Why would anyone have done such a thing? In a civilization such as the West's, which was originally built on judicial theology rather than magic, such a ritual act seems irrational. But sacrifices must be made in this life. Men understand this principle, which is why they speak of sacrificing the present for the future. The ancient Canaanites sent their children through the ritual fires in order to identify the survivors as the heirs. Also, by placating Molech, they hoped to gain external blessings, which meant primarily agricultural blessings. *By literally sacrificing their children, they hoped for increased agricultural fertility.* This is why we refer to Canaanitic religions as fertility cults.

Only specialists in ancient religion and mythology are aware of origins of the this theology of child sacrifice. Children were regarded as innocent and therefore suitable to placate Molech, identified as Kronos,⁶³ and therefore Saturn, the god of the original golden age and regenerative chaos, cannibal of his own children and father of Jupiter/Zeus.⁶⁴ The Phoenicians carried this fiery worship throughout the Mediterranean coasts. It became institutionalized in Carthage.⁶⁵ Acton wrote that such worship flourished where astrology was supreme, "and where the sun was worshipped as the life-giver and the life-destroyer—the god who renewed the earth in spring, burnt it up in summer, and himself suffered in winter, to be restored and to restore the world in spring. These two powers of production and destruction were gathered up in Astarte, the goddess of fertility, and Kronos, the devourer of his own offspring."

What was the origin of this theology of human sacrifice? Acton knew what only a handful of academic specialists today have ever heard of: the magical link between bloody ritual and cosmic regeneration. Acton wrote: "The union of bloodshed and licentiousness had one of its roots in the physical philosophy of the old world, which considered generation and destruction, like night and day, to be necessary

63. John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, "Human Sacrifice" (1863), *Essays in Religion, Politics, and Morality*, in *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1988), III, p. 405.

64. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time* (Boston: Gambit, 1969), pp. 146–48.

65. Acton, "Human Sacrifice," p. 407.

and mutually-produced successions of being, caused by the eccentric motion of the *primum mobile* in the ecliptic.”⁶⁶ The slow “wobble” of the axis of the rotating earth is the reason why the pole stars change every few thousand years during the what the ancients called the Great Year: about 26,000 solar years. This wobbling axis is the source of the legend of Hamlet’s cosmic mill: the wobbling universe of stars and constellations, i.e., the precession of the equinoxes.⁶⁷ This cosmology explained the fall of man and the loss of Eden as the result of the disruption of the heavens. It made personal regeneration and social regeneration the effects of ritual rather than ethical transformation. Fertility, sexual license, and human sacrifice were linked together cosmically. The religious practices of classical and Hellenic Greece, as well as Rome’s Republic and Empire, relied on human sacrifice.⁶⁸ The origin of Rome’s gladiatorial battles to the death lay in this theology of sacrifice.⁶⁹

The religion of Israel was in open conflict with all fertility cult religion. God warned Israelites against putting their hope in the land or the gods of the land. The seed laws of Leviticus 19:19 were an aspect of this prohibition. These laws restricted genetic experimentation in Israel. There would be no specialized animal breeding; there would be no mixing of seeds in any field. Why not? For the sake of the inheritance, i.e., for the *promise*. This promise was more important than any hoped-for productivity gained through genetic experiments. Families were required to forfeit some degree of potential wealth for the sake of faithfulness to the promise. The preservation of each family’s seed (i.e., *name*) was more important than increased agricultural output. *The religion of Israel was thus in complete opposition to the fertility cults of Canaan.* This opposition imposed economic costs on the Israelites.

Leviticus 19:19’s prohibition of genetic experimentation was an aspect of the preservation of the national covenant, which included the tribal boundaries. In the *economic trade-off* between the *land’s seed* (increased wealth from genetic experimentation) and the *promised Seed* (which required the maintenance of tribal boundaries), the promised Seed had priority. Jacob’s prophecy was more important than agricultural production. *We must interpret the seed laws as ritual laws.* Israel had to sacrifice some degree of wealth in order to honor ritually

66. *Ibid.*, p. 408.

67. Santillana, *Hamlet’s Mill*, pp. 58–59.

68. Acton, “Human Sacrifice,” pp. 412–18.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

the principle of the promised Seed. Far better this sacrifice than passing one's children through the fire: ritually honoring the family's land more than the family's seed.⁷⁰

In one particular, there was still the sacrifice of a son. Levi served as the firstborn son in Israel (Num. 3:12).⁷¹ This means that Israelite families were not required to set apart (sanctify) their firstborn sons for service to God at that first numbering of the nation, as would otherwise have been required (Ex. 13:2). The other tribes did not have to make a payment to the priests except for money in place of the 273 firstborn in excess of the Levites' 22,000 members (Num. 3:39, 46–47). The tribe of Levi became a lawful substitute.⁷² God claimed the Levites as His special possession (Num. 3:45). They could not usually inherit rural land in the Promised Land. They were disinherited because they were like dead men (sacrifices). They were judicially holy (set apart). A boundary was placed around them in the Levitical cities, where the jubilee laws did not apply (Lev. 25:32–34). Levi was separated until Shiloh came.

Leviticus 19:19 is part of the Mosaic Covenant's laws governing the preservation of the family's seed (name) during a particular period of history. It was an aspect of the necessary preservation of genetic Israel. The preservation of the separate seeds of Israel's families was basic to the preservation of the nation's legal status as a set-apart, separated, *holy* covenantal entity. This principle of separation applied to domesticated animals, crops, and clothing.

I. Animals

Let us begin with the law prohibiting the mixing of cattle. Did this refer to bovines only? The Hebrew word is transliterated *behemah*, the same word that we find transliterated as behemoth in Job 40:15. In every reference to cattle in Leviticus, this Hebrew word is used. Did this law apply only to cattle? What about other domesticated species? A case can be made both ways. Nevertheless, I believe that *cattle* in this case refers to *all domesticated animals*. The parallel prohibition against mixing crops was genetic. Also, the Hebrew word *behemah* is used generically for all domesticated animals in the laws against bestiality (Lev. 18:23; 20:15). This prohibited activity was less likely to be

70. Chapter 20.

71. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 4:A.

72. *Ibid.*, ch. 4:D.

performed with bovines than other, smaller beasts.

Another reason for translating *behemah* broadly as domestic animals in general is found in the law identifying the Levites as a special tribe, God's firstborn. In setting aside the Levites as a separate, holy tribe in the midst of a holy nation of priests, God also designated their animals as representatives of all the animals in Israel. At that first census of Israel, the people did not have to make a payment for the firstborn animals as part of the required sacrifice of the firstborn males (Num. 3:41, 45). The Hebrew root word for cattle in this verse is *behemah*. The payment to the temple in Numbers 3:49–51 does not mention a payment for the animals. This absence of payment indicates that the "cattle" of the Levites represented all the domesticated animals, not just bovines, so no payment was owed.⁷³

The case law governing the interbreeding of animals is analogous to the case law prohibiting owners from muzzling oxen as they worked the fields (Deut. 25:4). The prohibition against muzzling an ox while it treads out the corn applies in principle to paying appropriate wages to people (I Cor. 9:9–12)⁷⁴ and honoring church officers (I Tim. 5:17–18).⁷⁵ In these case laws, animals are representative of human beings. In short, *the animals of Leviticus 19:19 were representatives of the nation of Israel as a holy people*. Identifiable breeds were to be kept separate from each other, just as Israel's tribes were.

The plain teaching of the passage indicates that the breeds of animals that were common in the Promised Land at the time of the conquest were to be allowed to reproduce. The breeds had to be kept separate, however. There was to be no active breeding of new specialized breeds in order to produce animals that had different characteristics from the land's original breeds. There was to be no man-directed genetic manipulation of animals in Mosaic Israel.

The Mosaic law prohibiting the interbreeding of animals was never part of the creation mandate. It was a temporary law that illustrated an eschatological principle: the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham regarding the world's deliverance through the Seed. This event had not yet come to pass in Mosaic Israel. The Mosaic seed laws did

73. This argument is an argument from silence: the absence of any reference to a payment for the firstborn animals. The text specifically mentions payment for 273 firstborn sons. It does not mention another payment.

74. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

75. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

not in any way reduce the authority of the promise to Abraham; they merely governed the administration of rural families' landed inheritance until that promised Seed should come. The authority of God's promise established the authority of the promised Seed. The Seed *was* the promise in Old Covenant Israel. Jesus Christ fulfilled that promise. In doing so, He annulled the Levitical seed laws. These laws no longer had any eschatological purpose. Their only purpose in Mosaic Israel was eschatological.

The technical possibility of mixing breeds always exists. Mixing will happen without active interference from man. If members of a species are not deliberately kept separate, they will breed together. Thus, to preserve an existing breed genetically, a husbandman must take active steps to keep the breeds separated. He must either build fences or hire drovers to keep them apart.

A law prohibiting random intermixing of breeds really was superfluous. No profit-seeking owner would allow a pair of specialized breeds to intermix randomly. Such progeny would rarely command the same price or produce the same level of output as the progeny of the separate breeds. Even if a more productive offspring would occasionally be produced, this would do the owner no long-term economic good, for he was prohibited from interbreeding the resulting pairs. So, this law was really a prohibition against scientific breeding aimed at producing a new breed with unique characteristics. It meant that whatever common animals existed when they entered the land—"mongrels"—could mix freely with other similarly undistinguished animals.

What if the free market began to register demand for a particular kind of animal? This demand would have applied to: (1) a breed that they had brought with them into the Promised Land, (2) a breed already within the land when they invaded, or (3) an imported breed from outside the land after they conquered it. These breeds would have been the modern equivalent of registered animals.

The husbandman would have kept these animals separate from other existing breeds. Obviously, he would have had an economic incentive to do this. To sell into a specialized market, his animals would have had to be kept away from others not of the same type. So, this law commanded what the economy would have required anyway: separation. *It would have applied only to owners who had begun programs of experimental breeding to produce a separate breed.* The preservation of an existing breed was lawful.

The seed of each breed had to be separated. To obey this law as it applied to “non-mongrels,” an Israelite would have had to construct a holding area or pen for each specialized breed. This means that a specific seed or line was associated with a specific place at any point in time. Owners could lawfully move animals to new locations, but there was always to be a geographical boundary associated with each breed (seed). *This boundary established a connection between land and seed.* This connection was mandatory for both man and beast.

J. Crops

The law stipulated, “thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed.” This means that a specific field had to be devoted to a specific crop at any given point in the growing season. Like the pens for animals, the seeds of the crop had to reside in a particular place. Seed and land had to be linked.

Policing this law would have been easy. The person who planted two crops in an organized way within the confines of a specific field (boundary) would soon face the visible evidence of his violation: rows of mixed crops. a priest or a Levite could easily identify a violation.

Modern grain farming tends to be mono-crop agriculture: one crop in a field at a time. This specialization of agriculture has been economically efficient in terms of reducing the cost of harvesting the crop and also by maximizing output per unit of land. Still, there are unique costs associated with mono-crop agriculture. These crops are more vulnerable to blight and insects. We have learned through experience that the mixing of seeds in a field can be beneficial, especially in terms of resistance to pests and disease.⁷⁶ It takes less insecticide to produce a large crop by relying on a mixture of plants to defend a particular field. So, it may be that for less specialized economies, mixed-crop agriculture is more productive. Yet this practice was prohibited in Mosaic Israel.

What about genetic experimentation? The same judicial prohibition applied. There could be no lawful, systematic mixing of seeds. An Israelite was not to apply his ingenuity to the creation of new species of plants. Hybrid animals and seeds were illegal to develop. They could be purchased from abroad, but since most hybrids are either sterile (e.g., mules) or else they produce weak offspring, there was little eco-

76. Roger B. Yepsen, Jr. (ed.), *Organic Plant Protection* (Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale, 1976), ch. 5: “Protecting Plants with Other Plants.”

conomic incentive to import hybrids except as a one-generation consumer good. Such imports were legal: *with no “inheritance” possible, there was no symbolic threat from hybrids*. A hybrid was not prohibited because of its status as a hybrid. It was illegal to produce them deliberately because of the prohibition against mixing seeds, which was fundamental. The practice of seed-mixing was illegal, not hybrids as such.

This law did not apply to the familiar practice of grafting the branches of one species of fruit tree into the trunk of another.⁷⁷ Leviticus 19:19 was specific: it dealt with seeds planted in a field, not with branches grafted into an adult tree. The tree’s trunk is the primary agent, symbolic of the covenant itself. The branch would become part of the older tree. It was not a competing seed. The removed branch was “adopted” by the older tree. This was always a legal option in Israel, as the marriages of Rahab and Ruth indicate. The technique of grafting was symbolic of conversion, which was why Paul used this imagery as the archetype in discussing the fate of the old branch of Israel and the grafting in of the gentiles (Rom. 11:17–21).⁷⁸ So, tree grafting symbolized covenantal inclusion—adoption by conversion and confession—not tribal mixing.

Some crops do better when mixed, such as fodder. In the modern-day State of Israel, Jewish farmers deal with this problem in a Rabbinically approved way. One man makes a pile of seeds in a public place and covers it with a board. A second person piles up a second seed crop on top of the board. A third person comes along and announces, in front of witnesses, “I need this board.” He removes it. Finally, a fourth man comes along and is instructed to sow the field with the now-mixed crop.⁷⁹

K. Clothing

Mixed clothing made of linen and wool was under a different kind of prohibition. It was illegal to wear clothing produced by mixing these two fibers. There was no law against producing mixed cloth for export, however. Why was wearing it wrong but exporting it allowed? In bib-

77. Rabbinic opinion on this verse forbade grafting. See Nachmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, the Ramban), *Commentary on the Torah: Leviticus* (New York: Shiloh, [1267?] 1974), p. 295. He cited the Talmud: *Kiddushin* 39a.

78. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

79. Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press, 1994), p. 45.

lical law, if something is not prohibited, it is allowed.

1. Mixed Fibers

No other form of mixed-fiber clothing was prohibited by the Mosaic law. Did this case law by implication or extension prohibit all mixed fibers? This seems doubtful. It would have been easy to specify the more general prohibition rather than single out these two fibers. Deuteronomy's parallel passage also specifies this type of mixed fabric (Deut. 22:11). Then what was the nature of the offense? Answer: to wear clothing of this mixture was to proclaim symbolically the equality of Israel with all other nations. This could not be done lawfully inside Israel. But, as we shall see, it could be done by non-Israelites outside Israel.

Linen was the priestly cloth. The priests were required to wear linen on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:30–34). Linen was to be worn by the priest in the sacrifice of the burnt offering (Lev. 6:10). During and after the Babylonian captivity, because of their rebellion in Israel, the Levites and priests were placed under a new requirement that kept them separate from the people: they had to wear linen whenever they served before the table of the Lord. They had to put on linen garments when they entered God's presence in the inner court, and remove them when they returned to the outer court. No wool was to come upon them (Ezek. 44:15–19). The text says, "they shall not sanctify the people with their garments" (Ezek. 44:19). Priestly holiness was associated with linen.⁸⁰

Additionally, the laws of leprosy were associated with linen and wool. The test to see whether leprosy was present was to examine wool

80. On this point I disagree with James Jordan and all of the authorities he cited, both gentiles and Jews. Their argument is this: because the high priest's clothing was colored, it had to be a mixture of wool and linen because linen is difficult to dye. Jordan cited Exodus 28:5–6. But this passage says that even the thread had to be linen (v. 6). I can find no passage that indicates that the priests wore anything but linen when they brought sacrifices before God. This includes Exodus 39:29, which Jordan also cited. This is unquestionably the case in the post-exilic period. I think it is safer to go with the language of the texts than with a theory of ancient dyeing techniques. Jordan and several of the authorities he cited claim that the mixture of fabrics was itself holy, so non-priests could not lawfully wear such mixed clothing. I argue the opposite: pure linen was holy, so the wool-linen mixture was forbidden. See James Jordan, "The Law of Forbidden Mixtures," *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper No. 6*, pp. 3, 6. In any case, the issue was holiness. It had to do with the separation of priests from non-priests: within the land of Israel and between the priestly nation of Israel and the non-priestly nations.

or linen garments (Lev. 13:47–48, 52, 59). The question arises: Why linen and wool? Why were they singled out?

2. No Sweat

Wool is produced by sheep, while linen is a product of the field: flax. Linen was used by the high priest in the sacrifice of the burnt offering (Lev. 6:10). Why? It probably had something to do with sweat as man's curse (Gen. 3:19). Linen absorbs moisture. The priest was required to wear a garment of pure linen. He was therefore to wear a garment that absorbed sweat. His judicial covering was to reduce the amount of sweat on his body. Wool, in contrast, is produced by the same follicle that produces sweat in a sheep.⁸¹ Wool tends to retain human sweat on the wearer's body.

Clothing covers a person. This is symbolic of God's judicial covering of Adam and Eve. They wanted a covering of the field (fig leaves); God required a covering from a slain animal. This means that to mix wool and linen was to mix ritual opposites. *The wearing of such a mixture was symbolic of the mixing of priests and non-priests.* It was all right for a nation of non-priests to wear such a mixture; it was prohibited to a nation of priests. This is why the export of this cloth was not prohibited. The recipient nations had no priestly status in God's covenant, and hence the mixture would have had no ritual meaning.⁸² God did not threaten non-priestly nations with negative sanctions if they violated some ritual requirement for priests in Israel. Their sacraments had no power to invoke God's sanctions, positive or negative. Had some group or nation been circumcised under God, then these clothing restrictions would have applied.

Inside a priestly nation, such a mixture was a threat to the holiness of the priests when they brought sacrifices before God. As between a priestly nation and a non-priestly nation, this section of Leviticus 19:19 symbolized the national separation of believers from unbelievers. Deuteronomy 22:11 is the parallel passage: "Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts: [as] of wool and linen together." Its immediate context is another case law, one which we know from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians refers to people, not just animals: "Thou shalt not plow an ox and an ass together" (Deut. 22:10). Paul wrote: "Be ye not unequally

81. "Wool," *Software Toolworks Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Grolier Encyclopedia) (1990).

82. That is to say, the sacramental sanctions were absent.

yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14). It is legitimate to apply the principle of "unequal covenantal yoking" to Leviticus 19:19c, but *only* insofar as it applied to *national* separation.

Inside the boundaries of Israel, however, the law symbolized sacrificial separation: the tribe of Levi was set apart as a legal representative before God. In this *intra-national* sense, this law did have a role to play in the separation of the tribes. This is why it was connected to the two seed laws in Leviticus 19:19.

3. A Change in the Priesthood

It is still prohibited to mix covenantal opposites in a single covenant: in church, state, and family. Is the wearing of this mixture of these two fabrics still prohibited? No. Why not? Because of the change in the priesthood. We must return to Galatians 3.

Our new covering is Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3: 27–29). Here it is again: inheritance is by God's promise to Abraham. The sign of this inheritance is no longer circumcision; it is baptism. This is our new clothing. The old prohibition against wearing a mixed cloth of wool and linen is annulled. The new priesthood is under a new covering: Jesus Christ.

Because of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, the curse of the ground no longer threatens us ritually, only economically. Thus, man's sweat is no longer a matter of ritual purity. The prohibition against wearing a mixed cloth of wool and linen is no longer nationally relevant: priestly vs. non-priestly nations. There are no longer any negative sanctions attached to this unique mixture of fabrics.

The ritual curse of the ground was finally removed at Jesus Christ's resurrection. The land is no longer under ritual sanctions, nor does it act as an agent of God, vomiting out covenant-breaking inhabitants, as the Promised Land did with the Canaanites (Lev. 18:28). The vomiting land no longer threatens us as it threatened the Israelites (Lev. 20:

22).⁸³ Jesus Christ vomits out lukewarm churches (Rev. 3:16).⁸⁴

The physical and economic curse is being progressively removed in history, including the curse of sweat. Men increasingly do not work by the sweat of their brows. The air conditioner is one of the wonders of modern life, enabling men to escape from the oppression of heat and humidity. This enables them to work more efficiently. Workers who work indoors—the primary place of work in modern economies—in tropical climates can now compete with workers in temperate climates.

L. The Question of Jurisdiction

Was this a civil law or an ecclesiastical law? To identify it as a civil law, we should be able to specify appropriate civil sanctions. The text mentions none. The civil magistrate might have confiscated the progeny of the interbreeding activities, but then what? Sell the animals? Export them? Kill them and sell the meat? These were possible sanctions, but the text is silent. What about mingled seed? Was the entire crop to be confiscated by the state? Could it lawfully be sold? Was it unclean? The text is silent. This silence establishes a *prima facie* case for the law as ecclesiastical.

The mixed clothing law refers to a fact of covenantal separation: a nation of priests. The Israelites were not to wear clothing made of linen and wool. This symbolic mixing testified to the legitimacy of mixing a nation of priests and a common nation. This is why wearing such mixed cloth was prohibited. This aspect of the case law's meaning was primarily priestly. Again, the *prima facie* case is that this was an ecclesiastical law and therefore enforced by the priesthood.

The maximum ecclesiastical sanction was excommunication. This would have marked the law-breaker as being outside the civil covenant. He faced the loss of his citizenship as well as the disinheritance of his sons unless they broke with him publicly. Instead of a mere economic loss, he faced a far greater penalty. This penalty was consistent

83. Chapter 10.

84. For this reason, I believe that the predictable relationship between covenantal cursings and blessings is no longer applicable to floods and earthquakes. God's covenantal blessings and cursings are imposed by men as God's covenantal agents in New Covenant history. Men now exercise dominion over a creation that no longer acts as a covenantal agent. This is another reason why I am a preterist: the earthquakes described in the Book of Revelation completed God's judgment against national Israel. These land-applied, covenantally predictable curses are no longer an aspect of the New Testament judicial order. They ceased being covenantally predictable in A.D. 70.

with the status of this law as a seed law. The prohibition of mixed seeds was an affirmation of tribal separation until Shiloh came. An attack on tribal separation was an attack on Jacob's messianic prophecy. The appropriate penalty was ecclesiastical: removal from both inheritance and citizenship within the tribe.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to answer three questions: What did Leviticus 19:19 mean? How was it applied? How should it be applied today? This is the challenge of biblical hermeneutics.

1. What Did the Verse Mean?

Specialized breeds of animals could be imported and used by the Israelites. These breeds could not be lawfully produced by design or neglect (unrepaired fences) in Israel. Their use was legal; their production was not. In contrast, the mixed fiber cloth could be produced in Israel but not worn within Israel's boundaries. It could lawfully be exported or used for purposes other than clothing. The language of the clothing law was specific: "neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woolen come upon thee."

These differences in the laws point to different symbolic meanings. Leviticus 19:19 is a case law that illustrated a single principle: *the necessity of separation*. First, the separation of the tribes of Israel: the prohibition against (1) genetic mixing of animals and (2) the simultaneous planting (mixing) of more than one crop in a single field. Second, section three illustrated the holy (separated) condition of Israel as a nation of priests: mandating the separation of wool and linen in an Israelite's garment. These two fibers are at cross purposes with respect to man's curse: sweat. They were at cross purposes ritually with respect to priestly sacrifices. Therefore, they could not be cross-woven into clothing intended for use by residents of Israel. The cloth could be exported to members of non-priestly nations. It did not matter what they did with it. No lawful sacrifices could be offered in their lands.

The first two laws governed what was done in a man's fields. The fields were under his control. Thus, whatever separation the breeding laws required had to be achieved by establishing boundaries within a man's property. If there was a functional distinction within a species, these breeds had to be physically separated from each other, presumably by fences. Similarly, the seeds of several crops had to be kept sep-

arated. Each crop needed its own field at any point in time. This is why the first two laws symbolized the situation inside the national boundaries of Israel. Whatever was outside a family's landed property—its inheritance—was not under its authority. These laws applied inside the boundaries of the inheritance.

This is evidence that the seed laws did not symbolize the covenantal separation between Israel and the world. Israelites had no covenantal authority over the world outside of Israel. They did have authority inside Israel's boundaries, just as they had control over their own fields. So, the separation of their fields symbolized the separation among the tribes. This tribal separation was not genetic but rather *prophetic*. It had to do with inheritance and the promised Seed. The tribes had the same confession (unity maintained); except by forfeiting their landed inheritance, they could not mix maritally (diversity maintained). To keep their names in the land, families had to be separated tribally.

In contrast to the mixed-seed prohibition, the prohibition of mixed-fiber clothing did symbolize the separation between Israel and its neighbors. The judicial issue here was what was lawful for priests to wear. In relation to the world, Israel was a nation of priests. This law was an aspect of Israel's unique covenantal status. This law did not apply to non-priestly nations. Thus, the cloth could be exported. It was not its production that was prohibited, merely its use as clothing within Israel.

This three-fold law was temporary. It ended with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, or, at the latest, at Pentecost. *Spiritual adoption has overcome tribalism as the basis of inheritance in the kingdom of God.* The gift of the Spirit is the basis of Christians' inheritance, not physical reproduction. National Israel was disinherited in A.D. 70.⁸⁵ The kingdom of God was taken from national Israel and given to a new nation, the church (Matt. 21:43). The jubilee land laws (Lev. 25) have ended forever. So have the prohibitions against genetic mixing and mixed crops. When people are baptized into Christ through the Spirit, this new priesthood puts on Christ. The older requirements or prohibitions regarding certain types of garments have ended forever. What remains is the judicial boundary between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers. This separation is eternal (Rev. 20:14–15).

85. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

2. How Were These Laws Applied?

Earlier, I asked the question: Was Leviticus 19:19 itself an economic curse? In some respects, yes. It restricted the development of newer, specialized herds and crops. But these could have been imported. The law did reduce innovations in animal breeding inside national Israel. On the other hand, this law may have encouraged crop rotation. Since one crop had to be planted in one field, it was likely that after the harvest, a different crop would have been planted in that field. Crop rotation benefits agricultural productivity by replenishing the soil. As for wool-linen clothing, it has never gained popularity. Fustian was a mixture of wool and cotton. This was not prohibited. In any case, linen in the summer and wool in the winter would have been the choice fibers for those who could afford both of them.

This law imposed few costs, although it imposed some costs. That was the whole point: there was a trade-off between the *seed of the land* and the *seed of the name*, between landed wealth and tribal promise. Bearing these minor costs was an easy test of Israel's obedience. It symbolized the separation of the tribes in the land until the promised Seed arrived, transferring His inheritance to His people, a new nation of priests.

3. How Should These Laws Be Applied Today?

The biblical principle of not mixing seeds, whether of animals or crops in a single field, applies to us only indirectly. The basic judicial application is that we must be faithful to Jesus Christ, the promised Seed, who has come in history. In Him alone is true inheritance. But there is no application with respect to tribal boundaries. The tribes of Israel are gone forever. Thus, there is no application of this verse genetically. We are allowed to breed animals and plant various crops in the same field at the same time.

The other application of the principle of separation in this verse prohibited the wearing of mixed fiber garments. This applies to us today through baptism, for by baptism we have received our new clothing in Christ. This principle of separation still holds nationally, for it is covenantal, not tribal. It refers to the distinctions between priests and non-priests, between priestly nations and non-priestly nations. It refers to the distinction between Christendom and every other world system. But it has nothing to do with fabrics any longer.

18

COVENANTAL FRUIT

And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal. And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:23–25).

When we consider a biblical case law, it is best to begin theocentrically. God established this prohibition, so it must have had something to do with His relation to the land through His agents, men. The problem that the commentator faces is to specify three things: (1) what this relationship involved; (2) which men it applied to, men in general or the Israelites of the Mosaic covenant; (3) its proper application today. Was it a universal prohibition, or did it apply only to the Promised Land under the Mosaic economy?

A. Seed Laws and Separation

This is a seed law. *The seed laws were laws of separation.* That is, they placed judicial boundaries around living organisms. We need to determine what this law meant. Because this statute invokes the language of circumcision, it has to refer symbolically (i.e., representatively) to the covenantal separation between circumcised and uncircumcised people. Tribal or family separation within Israel is therefore not in question here. What kind of separation was involved? Did this law refer to the legal boundary separating circumcised and uncircumcised men dwelling in Israel? Did it refer to the separation between circumcised and uncircumcised nations? Or was there some other separation involved?

I argue that it referred to a unique form of covenantal separation,

one which is represented by no other law in Scripture: a separation whose origins were in Israel's past. This separation was the 40-year period of wandering in the wilderness in which the Israelites of the exodus generation refused to circumcise their sons. I need a whole chapter to prove my point.

This law applied to orchards. God marked off the fruit of newly planted trees for His own purposes. He set this fruit outside of covenant-keeping man's lawful access. That is, He placed a "no trespassing" boundary around the fruit of newly planted trees for three years after they began to bear fruit. Then he announced that the fruit of the fourth year was holy: set aside for him. This was analogous to what He had done in the garden with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: setting it aside for a period, keeping men away from it.

The question is: Why?

B. Temporarily Forbidden Fruit

Two facts need to be noted. *First*, this prohibition applied to the first four years of fruit borne by a tree that was planted in the Promised Land after the land had come under the control of the Israelites. As we shall see, the prohibition did not apply to fruit from trees that had been planted by the Canaanites just prior to the invasion of Canaan by Israel. It was not "trees as such" whose fruit came under this ban; it was trees that had been planted after the conquest.

The seeds or cuttings that would serve as the parents of Israel's first crop would have come from the existing trees of Canaan. The new trees' fruit was to be set aside for three seasons and offered to God in the fourth. This indicates that there had to be a discontinuity between the trees and seeds of the old Canaan and the trees and seeds of the new Canaan. Like the leaven of Egypt that had to be purged out during the first Passover, so were the firstfruits of Canaan. The leaven (yeast) of Egypt could not be used as "starter" for the leaven of the conquered Canaan. It was different in the case of Canaan's trees. They had to be used as "starter" for Israel's new orchards. Thus, God prohibited access to their fruit for a period, thereby emphasizing the covenantal discontinuity between the old Canaan and the new Canaan.

Second, God called "uncircumcised" the forbidden fruit of the first three seasons. This is a peculiar way to speak of fruit. Circumcision was the visible mark of the Abrahamic Covenant: the *visible legal boundary* separating the heirs of the promise from non-heirs. That is,

circumcision determined inheritance (point five of the biblical covenant model: succession/inheritance). In Mosaic Israel, circumcision separated those who had lawful access to the Passover meal from those who did not (point four: oath/sanctions). The legal basis of separation was inclusion vs. exclusion inside the formally covenanted people of God (point three: boundaries). Incorporation into the covenanted nation was by covenantal oath-sign (point four). The uncircumcised individual was institutionally outside God's covenantal boundary. He was therefore *judicially unholy*, i.e., not set apart legally. He would profane a ritually holy place by crossing its legal boundary. But who was this uncircumcised person? Was he a resident alien? If so, what did the mandatory three years of separation have to do with him?

A judicial separation of this kind implied a threat—negative sanctions—to the violator of the boundary. Whom did the forbidden fruit threaten? Not the birds or other beasts of the land. They had lawful access to the fruit during the first three years. The fruit was not poisonous, obviously. Then why was it prohibited to an Israelite? Why was there a legal boundary placed around it? What did this boundary symbolize?

It could be argued that mankind poses a threat to young trees or to the orchard itself. Perhaps the law was ecological in intent rather than ritual. But then why was the new fruit of young trees that had already been planted in Canaan at the time of the conquest not placed under the ban? And why was the covenantal-legal language of circumcision invoked?

C. Uncircumcised Fruit

The language of the law is clear: "And when ye shall come into the land, and **shall have planted** all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised." The trees of Canaan that were already bearing fruit at the time of Israel's conquest of Canaan were not under any prohibition. They were to be considered by the invading Israelites as part of the spoils of war. "And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat" (Josh. 24:13). This verse does not say that young trees were excluded; it does imply that the whole land was God's gift to Israel. Where a prohibition was placed around spoils, which was uniquely the case with the city of Jericho, God warned them in no uncertain terms

through Joshua (Josh. 6:17–19).

1. A Legal Issue, Not Ritual

Uncircumcised fruit was analogous to an uncircumcised male or a woman who was under the family jurisdiction of an uncircumcised male: outside the covenant. This was a legal issue, not ritual: incorporation. The fruit of the Canaanites' existing orchards was not identified as judicially uncircumcised. It could immediately be consumed or sold by the land's new owners. So, the prohibition had nothing to do with any supposedly ritually polluting effects of the land of Canaan. In fact, the reverse was the case: the land was holy, but the Canaanites were not. The land was part of Abraham's legacy to his heirs (Gen. 15:16). It was judicially holy land. God's promise had made the land *definitively* holy. Subsequently, the land had been *progressively* polluted by the Canaanites:

Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you (Lev. 18:24–28).¹

The Canaanites' ethically perverse behavior had defiled the holy land, i.e., *profaned* it. They were unholy men dwelling inside a holy boundary. Finally, the land purged itself of those who had defiled it. It was a holy land, so it vomited out those who were unholy. But why didn't the land do this long before Joshua's generation? Because the cup of iniquity of Canaan ("Amorites") had not been filled up (Gen. 15:16b). A progressive process of profanation had to take place first, just as a progressive process of holiness had to take place among the Israelites. By Joshua's day, this progressive profanation by the Canaanites had reached its fullness (final profanation), as had the progressive sanctification of Israel. It was time for the land to begin vomiting, i.e., time for Israel to invade. The land became *finally* holy at the time of the invasion by a judicially holy nation. *It was circumcised Israel's*

1. Chapter 10.

presence in the land that made the land a finally holy place. The judicially mandatory cleansing process began. The separation was to be total: the annihilation of the Canaanites (Deut. 7:16).

When the land attained its status as finally holy, it gained its status as *ritually holy*. The finalization of the land's holy status in history came only with the circumcision of Israel inside the land (Josh. 5). The Israelites had been ritually unholy until they were circumcised at Gilgal. Their circumcision anointed them as a nation of priests, and they could then lawfully offer sacrifice: Jericho, Israel's firstfruits offering to God (Josh. 6:24). The battle of Jericho marked the beginning of the land's vomiting process. The land began serving as God's covenantal agent: "And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee" (Ex. 23:28). *It was the presence of the circumcised nation of Israel in the land that made the land and its existing fruits holy.* Except for Jericho, which served as the firstfruits for the Lord, none of the land and its fruit was declared off-limits to covenant-keepers. The land had become totally off-limits to the covenant-breaking Canaanites who were residing in it.² When the Israelites inherited the land, the land gained a unique judicial and ritual status as God's dwelling place. It became the land of the tabernacle and, later, the temple. It was the only place on earth where lawful sacrifices to God were offered by God's corporately covenanted people.

2. *Who Planted Which Trees?*

Why, then, was the early fruit of newly planted trees identified as uncircumcised? *Uncircumcised* means unholy: not set apart by God, i.e., *not incorporated*. How could the land, which had been made finally holy by the invasion of the Israelites, produce unholy or uncircumcised fruit? Clearly, the new fruit was declared uncircumcised, but the land could not have been at fault. Conclusion: *if it was not the land that was the source of the new fruit's unholy status, then it must have been the Israelites.* But why?

To find the answer, we need first to ask: What was judicially or ritually different about fruit trees that had been planted by the Israelites in the Promised Land, as distinguished from young trees that had

2. The exceptions, of course, were the Gibeonites (Josh. 9), who lost their land and citizenship, becoming slaves to the Levites (Josh. 9:23, 27), who also owned no land outside cities.

been planted by Canaanites immediately prior to Israel's invasion of the land? When an Israelite was the agent who planted seeds in the land, the judicial status of the fruit of the trees changed. The fruit was placed inside a legal boundary for four years. It was declared off-limits. Normally, we would expect any set-apart status to be called *holy* by God, but in this case the fruit was called *uncircumcised*. This is peculiar. What was special about the fruit of young trees planted by Israelites? What was the point, ritually and judicially?

Trees and edible fruit pointed back to the initial test of mankind in the garden. Adam was prohibited from eating the fruit of a specified tree. It was off-limits to him. This is not to say that it was to be kept away from him forever. What Adam should have done was to eat from the tree of life before he went to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. His spiritual maturity was supposed to be based on his participation in a meal from the tree of life, not on his access to instant knowledge. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil served as a reminder to Adam that God is sovereign, for He places lawful boundaries around anything He chooses. He does whatever He chooses with everything that belongs to Him, and no one can call Him to account.³ He calls His creatures to account, not the other way around.

What was God's reason for calling the fruit of the first three years *uncircumcised*? What did circumcision have to do with fruit? Biologically, nothing at all; symbolically, everything. In Israel, not to be circumcised was to be judicially unholy, i.e., common or "gentile." Those people who were holy had been set apart judicially by God: incorporated into the covenant people. The new fruit was identified by God as *judicially unholy*—not ritually unclean, but judicially unholy, meaning *common*. The unholy or gentile judicial status of the fruit was not produced by the land, which was itself holy; it therefore had to be produced by the Israelites who did the planting. Conclusion: *the judicial status of being uncircumcised came from men who were circumcised*. Why was this the case?

D. History and Eschatology

Obviously, there was nothing unholy about the judicial status of the circumcised Israelite at the time that he planted an orchard. What was it about judicially holy men that produced an opposite judicial status in the fruit of young trees? Here is the dilemma: the Israelites'

3. This is the primary message of the Book of Job.

present judicial status at the time of planting was holy; the land's present judicial status was also holy; yet the fruit would be judicially unholy for three years. The judicial question has to be turned away from the Israelites' present judicial status in Mosaic Israel to their past, their future, or both.

The frame of reference surely was not eschatological in the way that the seed laws of Leviticus 19:19 were. The orchard statute had nothing to do with tribal separation, the way Leviticus 19:19 did.⁴ The law of uncircumcised fruit did not refer Jacob's promise to a specific tribe of Israel, nor did it mandate the permanent separation of tribal inheritance until the Promised Seed appeared. I therefore conclude that this statute's primary frame of reference was historical. The anomaly of two holy things—land and circumcised planter—producing something temporarily unholy points back to the generation of the conquest of the land: the fourth generation after Abraham's covenant (Gen. 15:16). Why do I conclude this? First, because that generation was temporarily unholy. Second, because of the *representative* numerical relationship between 40 days (the time the twelve tribal spies spent in the Promised Land: Numbers 13), 40 years (the time of the wilderness wandering), and four years (the period of the two-fold boundary around the fruit).

1. 40 Years

For four decades, the Israelites of the exodus generation had wandered in the wilderness without circumcising their sons. Why 40 years? Because the spies had been in the land for 40 days:

Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness 40 years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness. **After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye**

4. Chapter 17.

bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die (Num. 14:28–35).

Except for Joshua and Caleb, the men of the exodus generation had been designated by God as unholy because of their disbelief and rebellion. They could not enter the land, which would become finally holy at the time of their sons' mass circumcision at Gilgal. They could not lawfully cross this boundary; to have done so would have been a profane act. Thus, that first generation had to be kept outside the land by God. They were not allowed to profane the holy land by violating its boundaries.

When they were all dead, as prophesied, their sons were allowed to cross that boundary. But they, too, were unholy. They had never been circumcised. So, Joshua had them circumcised at Gilgal after they came into the land (Josh. 5:6–12).

The male children in the wilderness should have been circumcised on the eighth day after each was born. Their parents had refused to do this. The text does not say why. I think the most likely economic explanation is that the parents thought they might return to Egypt at some point. They were “keeping their options open” covenantally with respect to their children. The children were not formally placed under the covenantal protection and obligations that God requires of His people. That is, their parents did not incorporate them into the nation.

The parents had been told by God that they would not enter the land (Num. 14:23). They regarded their possession of the land of Canaan as the only meaningful public validation of God's covenant; their deliverance from bondage in Egypt was not sufficient in their eyes. They were basically announcing: “No immediate payoff in real estate; so, no mark of covenantal subordination in our sons.” They wanted an immediate payoff, just as Adam had desired in the garden; they were unwilling to trust God with respect to the inheritance of the land by their children. So, God kept that uncircumcised younger generation in the wilderness until the exodus generation died, except for Joshua and Caleb.

There may also have been a judicial reason for their refusal. The nation had rebelled against Joshua and Caleb, and then against God when they attacked the Amalekites and Canaanites against God's specific command (Num. 14:39–44). The 10 cowardly spies had been

killed by God through a plague (Num. 14:37). The nation had become unholy: separated from the definitively holy Promised Land for one generation. The fathers may have concluded that they had lost their status as household priests. So, they refused to circumcise their sons, or have the Levites circumcise them. Whether this was at God's command is not revealed in the text. But these people were cowards, and they had seen what happened to the 10 cowardly spies. They may have decided that discretion was the better part of valor with respect to circumcising their sons.

After entering the land, the sons who had been born in the wilderness were immediately circumcised. At that point, they celebrated the Passover with the existing fruit of the land (Josh. 5:11). Immediately, the miraculous manna ceased. The people lived off the fruit of the land from that time on (Josh. 5:12). They had moved from miraculous food to miraculous warfare (Jericho). After the conquest of the land, they moved to non-miraculous planting.⁵

To recapitulate: Canaan's conquerors had been uncircumcised for up to 40 years. The close of the wilderness period came with their celebration of the Passover as *household priests*: heads of their own households. Then the conquest began. The firstfruits of the conquest was the city of Jericho, which had to be burnt as a whole offering to God. None of its treasure was to be taken by the Israelites personally; everything was either to be burned or used to make the treasures of the tabernacle (Josh. 6:19). Jericho was to be cut off completely: a fore-skin.

2. Four Years

We return to Leviticus 19:23–25. The fruit of newly planted trees was off-limits to them until the fourth year. “But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal.” The question is: What were they required to do with the fruit in year four? Were they to take it to the priest, as they were required to with the firstfruits offering (Lev. 23:10–11)? Or was it analogous to the required third-year tithe feast in Jerusalem (Deut. 14:22–23)?⁶

Because the forbidden fruit is called uncircumcised, it is best to treat the fourth-year harvest as analogous to the Passover feast. Only

5. There would still be one remaining miracle: the triple harvest just before the seventh sabbatical year (Lev. 25:21).

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 35.

after circumcision was Passover legal. This fourth-year feast provided each family with the first lawful occasion for enjoying the fruits of their own labor—the trees they had planted and nurtured—in the Promised Land. What had been uncircumcised fruit and therefore forbidden to them became *circumcised in the fourth year*, and therefore eligible to serve as *food for a mandatory holy feast*. They would have had to invite the Levites to the feast, and presumably also widows and orphans, just as they were required to do in the third-year festival: “And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest” (Deut. 14:27–29).⁷

3. Historical References

It is time to make some connections. We have to ask ourselves: What did this prohibition represent?⁸ First, young fruit trees are immature. So were the children born in the wilderness. Such fruit was designated as uncircumcised. The children in the wilderness era had been uncircumcised.

Second, the “harvesting” of Canaan militarily began after 40 years. The unrestricted harvesting of fruit trees began lawfully after four years of fruitfulness.

Third, there is the question of inheritance. Caleb said that he had been 40 years old in the year that he had been sent in to spy out the land (Josh. 14:7). This was one year after the exodus (Num. 10:11–12; 13:17–20). Israel wandered for 39 years after the spying incident before entering Canaan. Caleb was 79 (40 + 39) when the invasion began, and 85 when it ended (Josh. 14:10).⁹ So, it took Israel six years to conquer Canaan. The text says that the land then had rest from war (Josh. 14:15). This means that there was rest from war in the seventh year—a

7. *Idem*.

8. The issue of *symbolism* in the Bible is *judicial representation*, point two of the biblical covenant model. We seek to learn what a particular symbol represented judicially.

9. James B. Jordan, “The Chronology of the Pentateuch (Part 6),” *Biblical Chronology*, VI (Aug. 1994), pp. 3–4.

sabbatical symbol. Therefore, during the *fifth decade* after the exodus, Israel took possession of the whole land as its inheritance. Similarly, the *fifth year* of fruit was the first year in which the fruit of the trees belonged to the individual.

There is a parallel between the wilderness years the uncircumcised generation of the conquest and the ban on eating the fruit of new trees planted in Canaan. The fruit did not belong to the owner until after the holy feast of year four. That is, he took possession of the fruit in year five. This parallels Israel's taking possession of Canaan during decade five. This four-year prohibition pointed symbolically back to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness: four decades of deferred possession. This seed law for orchards referred back to the unique historical experience of the conquest generation: Israel's seed.

4. *Eschatological References*

Yet in several ways, this law also typified the ministry of Jesus Christ. In this sense it was eschatological. Jesus did not begin His public ministry until He was 30 years old: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23a). Thus, for three decades—the years of Jesus' youth—the nation of Israel did not have access to His ministry. In the beginning of His fourth decade, then, Jesus began to preach.

His ministry seems to have lasted three years.¹⁰ Then, in the fourth year, He was tried and crucified. This took place immediately after the Pharisees' and Galileans' Passover ("Thursday" evening: Nissan 14) and just before the Sadducees' and Judeans' Passover ("Friday" evening: Nissan 15).¹¹ This tree of life never again bore fruit for Old Covenant Israel. Jesus was the Passover lamb. If I am correct in suggesting an analogy between the fourth year's holy fruit and the Passover, then it can be said that the Jews symbolically took the Passover fruit and had the Romans nail it back on a tree. The Jews, given a choice, chose unholy fruit (Barabbas) in place of the holy fruit:

And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them, Ye have brought this man

10. *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, eds. John M'Clintock and James Strong, 12 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), IV, p. 881; *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1939] 1943), III, p. 1629.

11. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1977), p. 89.

unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, **Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:** (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him (Luke 23:13–21).

The theme of three years and a fourth year is clear in Jesus' parable of the fig tree:

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down (Luke 13:6–9).¹²

If the tree failed to bear fruit in the fourth year, it was fit for burning. That was Old Covenant Israel in Christ's day. God publicly burned this barren fig tree in A.D. 70.¹³

E. Initially Confusing Economics

Gordon Wenham has very little to say about this law. He sees it as part of the laws imposing personal economic sacrifice: giving one day in seven to God, tithing, and the dedication of the firstfruits. This makes sense both economically and theologically with respect to the fourth year's crop, but it makes no sense with respect to the first three years. Why should God want men to offer Him the less valuable fruit of a tree's life cycle? Wenham's confusion escalates when he begins to discuss the economics of the prohibition. "In the case of fruit trees, however, little fruit is borne in the early years, and this law specifies that it is the fourth year's crop that counts as the firstfruits and must be dedicated to God. Old Babylonian law (LH 60) also reckons it takes

12. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 30.

13. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

four years for an orchard to develop its potential. Similarly sacrificial animals may not be offered till they are at least eight days old (Exod. 22:29 [Eng. 30]) and boys are not circumcised till the eighth day (Gen. 17:12)."¹⁴ His assumption is this: *youth = less value*; hence, the Israelites had to wait for a time before offering such reduced-value sacrifices, including circumcision.

Wenham refers to the Hammurabi Code, but this passage presents formidable problems to anyone who would identify this law with the law of uncircumcised fruit. The law reads: "If, when a seignior gave a field to a gardener to set out an orchard, the gardener set out the orchard, he shall develop the orchard for four years; in the fifth year the owner of the orchard and the gardener shall divide equally, with the owner of the orchard receiving his preferential share."¹⁵ First, this referred to the time of growth for the trees, not the first four years of actual fruit-bearing. Second, the gardener was not prohibited from appropriating fruit in years one through four; he could. Only in the fifth year did he have to divide the crop with the owner. In other words, the gardener, as the subordinate, kept whatever the trees produced in years one through four; beginning in the fifth year, the owner was entitled to half. That is, in the trees' lean years, the gardener kept it all. But the Levitical law established the opposite system: the gardener kept nothing in years one through three of actual production. Only in year four did the firstfruits principle go into effect: a joint feast. God received it all ritually in that year. Afterward, He took only the tithe.

There is clearly an economic element in all this. The owner of the land (God's "gardener") did without for at three years. In this sense, he did make an economic sacrifice. But why did God impose this economic sacrifice? Why did He declare the less valuable fruit off-limits? He did this in no other formal sacrifice in the Old Covenant. To offer a less valuable asset to God as a lawful sacrifice seems to testify falsely to the value of the ultimate sacrifice for sin: the death of His Son. So, what we have to conclude is that leaving the young fruit to drop and rot on the ground was not an aspect of the laws of formal sacrifice. As we have seen, this prohibition was a symbolic negative sanction against them for their uncircumcised status in the wilderness. The three-year delay was not a ritual sacrifice, although the fourth-year

14. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 271.

15. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 169.

feast probably was.

F. Rabbinical Interpretations

Rabbinical commentators have pointed to the obvious fact that this case law imposed a cost on the owner, namely, forfeited fruit. They have not traced the origin of this law back to a specific Israelite rebellion: Israel's refusal to challenge the Canaanites for control over the land and the refusal to circumcise their sons. They have not seen the law as God's subsequent imposition on that generation's heirs of a *restitution payment* to both the land itself (the environment) and God. Instead, they argue that there is something instructive in this law regarding man's general moral condition. Rashi,¹⁶ the late eleventh-century commentator, cited Rabbi Akiba, who had lived over nine centuries earlier.¹⁷ "The Torah says *this because it has man's* evil inclination in mind: that one should not say, 'Behold, for four years I must take trouble with it for nothing!' Scripture therefore states *that the result of your obedience will be* that it will give you its produce in larger quantities."¹⁸ Rashi identified mankind's universal time-preference—discounting the future value of scarce economic resources compared to their present value—as "man's evil inclination."

S. R. Hirsch, the mid-nineteenth-century defender of what has become known as Orthodox Judaism, also placed the meaning of this law within the boundaries of man's evil (animal-like) preference for present gratification. He, too, transformed the prohibition into a general moral issue: "The Jew waits three years before he enjoys the fruit for which he has planted the tree. And in refraining from using the fruit at God's command, he strips himself of the rights of property before God, and so for three years he practices by this restraint the self control which is so necessary for keeping enjoyment within the limits of morality. . . . [H]e learns to bring even the enjoyment of his senses out of the chains of animal greed into the sphere of self-controlled, God-remembering and God-serving happiness, and so remains worthy of being a human being and near to God also in the enjoyment of his

16. Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo) Yizchaki.

17. Akiba is sometimes suggested as the successor to Gamaliel. He participated in the disastrous Bar Kokhba rebellion against Rome in the early 130s, A.D. He was the first compiler of the Mishna, or Jewish oral tradition.

18. *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum, translators, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, [1934] 1985 [Jewish year: 5745]), III, p. 89a.

senses.”¹⁹

What the rabbis have criticized is the phenomenon of time-preference: the preference of all acting men for immediate gratification compared to deferred gratification, *other things being equal*. Time-preference is an inescapable aspect of man’s existence. If I offer you, free of charge (including any storage or insurance costs you may have to pay), the choice between a gift received today or a year in the future, you will take it today, assuming that you expect other things to remain equal. You prefer to begin receiving the psychic income stream from the gift immediately rather than a year from now. Besides, you have no assurance that you will even be alive a year from now.

The rabbis have argued that this universal preference for goods in the present vs. the same goods in the future is somehow evil. They are wrong. Time-preference is not something evil; it is a rational response to man’s inescapable judicial status as *an agent who lives in the present and who is responsible for taking action in the present*. A person’s present decision counts for more ethically and judicially than some future decision. He is responsible for actions taken now. *To live is to act*. To act is to make choices.²⁰ No one can evade this responsibility except through death. Man’s judicial status imposes economic costs on him. One of these costs is the *reduced present value* of expected future assets compared with the same assets possessed now.

This inescapable fact of life does not imply that the future is economically irrelevant. It also does not mean that the present value of expected future goods is zero. The covenantally faithful man looks to the future, especially his resurrection and the world beyond the resurrection (Dan. 12:1–4). But to equate man’s time-preference with evil or animal-like behavior is a very serious mistake, both exegetically and economically.²¹ Time-preference is a fact of life, not a moral factor. It is what a person does in terms of his time-preference that makes a covenantal difference.

19. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, translated by Isaac Levi, 5 vols. (Gateshead, London: Judaica Press, [1867–78] 1989), III, p. 546.

20. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven: Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949). (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

21. For a consideration of mistakes that can follow, see Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix J: “Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney.”

G. Forfeited Income and Class Position

There is no doubt that one economic effect of this law was to force the orchard's owner to forego three years' worth of the orchard's output before he could celebrate before the Lord in year four. No doubt this law did pressure obedient men to count the costs of their decision: planting an orchard vs. planting something else (or planting nothing). But being required to count the costs of our actions is not in and of itself an incentive to become more future-oriented. *No law can force men to become more future-oriented.* The function of biblical civil law is not to make men positively good; it is to reduce the level of public evil. This law merely sorted out those who were more future-oriented (less present-oriented) from those who were less future-oriented (more present-oriented). Those residents of the holy commonwealth who were more future-oriented were more likely to plant orchards. Those who were less future-oriented were more likely to plant a crop that was not under a temporary harvesting restriction. Each man made his choice. So, there was no necessary connection between this case law and a general increase in men's future-orientation. But there was a necessary connection between future-orientation and the kinds of crops individual decision-makers planted.

Edward Banfield has linked time perspective with class position. An upper-class person is someone with low time-preference, i.e., a future-oriented person.²² A society that views an increase in future-orientation as a virtue—and the Bible indicates that it is a virtue²³—does pressure individuals to become more future-oriented. But civil law cannot accomplish this.²⁴ Then what does? Such psychological factors as fear, education, and moral persuasion. At best, widespread obedience to the uncircumcised fruit law would have enabled local residents to identify families whose heads of household were (or had been) fu-

22. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 48–50. On the middle class, see pp. 50–53. On the lower class, see pp. 53–59. On the importance of Banfield's book, see Thomas Sowell, "The Unheavenly City Revisited," *American Spectator* (Feb. 1994).

23. At the margin, of course. An increase to total future-orientation is not possible, for we must eat, drink, and be clothed in the present.

24. This includes tax policy. Lowering capital gains tax rates, for example, does not make someone more future-oriented. It merely raises the after-tax return of future profits. The fact that a person can legally keep more in the future than less in the future will affect his present investment decisions, but this change has nothing to do with a change in his time-preference: the discount of future value in relation to present value.

ture-oriented. The presence of an orchard on a person's land so identified such an individual, or at least such a family.

In the moral environment of covenantally faithful Israel, the presence of an orchard became a kind of status symbol. The orchard took on the characteristic of a consumer good. Like a very expensive automobile in today's world, the orchard testified to someone who had "made it" because of his (or his father's) diligence and willingness to defer gratification by planting the orchard. In this sense, the uncircumcised fruit law may have indirectly promoted future-orientation, but only because this outlook on deferred gratification was already widely acknowledged to be positive—a sign of character in a person or family. The presence of an orchard became a visible manifestation of a desirable character trait. In short, "if you've got it, flaunt it!"

There is a secondary aspect of transgression associated with time-preference. When God says "Wait!" men are supposed to wait. This imposes a cost on man and therefore requires faith, for there is no escape from time-preference, meaning a discount of future vs. present economic value. There is, however, a very high present value on waiting when God commands us to wait (Ps. 27:14; 37:34; Prov. 20:22). *Avoiding God's wrath is a fundamental component of rational cost-benefit analysis.* So, the benefits of waiting are in such cases greater than the costs. Men are supposed to believe this and then *act* (i.e., do something else besides the prohibited act) in terms of this fact.

The fruit of trees planted in the Promised Land by the priestly people of Israel was completely off-limits to the covenant-keeping Israelite for three years. The fruit of a young tree was protected. That is to say, this young fruit was reserved by God for Himself, just as the forbidden fruit in the garden had been. He allowed the birds and animals of the field to eat it, but not His human covenantal agents. Each tree planted after the conquest was to receive care from the husbandman without having to produce income for him in the short term. The gardener had to wait.²⁵ At the very least, this was a reminder to covenant-keeping man that he should not plan for a rapid return on his investment. The lure of legal short-term profits was removed from this

25. This requirement to wait was imposed even on Jesus. It is significant that Mary first identified the resurrected Jesus as a gardener (John 20:15). As the Second Adam, He was God's new designated gardener of the world. He had to wait until His resurrection before He was allowed to celebrate the firstfruits of His ministry. This shared meal took place on the fourth day after He had celebrated Passover (Luke 24:41–43). He now shares this firstfruits feast only with His designated priesthood: the church, His true bride.

aspect of agriculture. The person who planted trees had to have a longer-term outlook on the economic fruits of investing than the person who planted only a grain field.

When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he was announcing by his action that he was unwilling to wait for God's decision to allow him lawful access to such judicial knowledge. Adam's act was a premature grab for the robes of judicial authority. It was not primarily his present-orientation as such that was his fault; it was his unwillingness to celebrate with God in a communion meal at the tree of life. Adam's act was an assertion that the terms of life and death are based on man's autonomous knowledge of good and evil: a false assertion. It was the other way around for Adam. He could not attain eternal life through specialized knowledge of the law. He could gain an *indeterminate extension* of his life on earth only through obedience to the one law that he had been given. He could gain the blessing of eternal life only by eating from the tree of life, avoiding the forbidden fruit.²⁶ Adam violated God's "no trespassing" sign and became a sacrilegious thief. It was not simply that he was unwilling to wait on God in order to receive lawful access to the tree of knowledge; it was that he was unwilling to subordinate himself to God and accept first the grace of lawful access to the tree of life. The primary judicial issue was not Adam's degree of time-preference; the issue was his willingness to submit to God.

H. Which Decalogue Commandment?

Rushdoony wrote that this law was an aspect of the sabbath laws of the land. He discusses it in a chapter on the fourth commandment. "This law clearly is linked with laws previously discussed which bear on soil conservation, the fertility of the trees, and respect for the life of all creation."²⁷ If he was correct, then this law also governed the non-priestly nations besides Israel: a cross-boundary law. It is therefore universal and still in force. As part of the laws of the sabbath, it refers to the legitimate rest that the land deserves, all over the world.

26. It is worth noting that Adam and Eve were kept outside the garden after their rebellion in order to keep them from eating from the tree of life (Gen. 3:22–23). What had been not only legal for them but expected of them before their rebellion became illegal afterward. Similarly, the Israelites were expected to conquer the land immediately after the giving of the law, but when they rebelled against the testimony of Joshua and Caleb, they were kept outside the land until they died.

27. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 147.

1. *Unique to Israel*

I argue that this law was unique to the history of Israel. It was imposed by God on the whole nation because of the restitution that was owed to the land of Canaan by all of Israel, including the heirs of the exodus generation. The land had to be compensated for the extra generation of living under the authority of the Canaanites: an extra generation of slavery. This law imposed costs on the heirs of that rebellious generation.²⁸ This law was not a cross-boundary law. It was exclusively a Mosaic seed law: the uncircumcised sons of the exodus generation and their heirs' uncircumcised fruit. It was tied exclusively to the Promised Land, and even more narrowly: to the Promised Land after the circumcision of Israel (Josh. 5). Rushdoony subsumed this law under the wrong commandment. It had nothing to do with the sabbath.

The land of Palestine no longer enjoys a unique covenantal status before God. That status finally ended with the land's purging of the Israelites in A.D. 70. What God warned in his law came true: the land vomited them out. Just as the Israelites had been the agents by which the Promised Land spewed out the Canaanites, so the Romans became the agents by which the land spewed out covenant-breaking Israel. The Israelites had used Roman law and Roman power to crucify Jesus; Roman law and power were then used to crucify tens of thousands of Jews in A.D. 70. Josephus' contemporary account records that five hundred a day were crucified.²⁹ He said that over a million people died in the siege, with 97,000 taken captive.³⁰ Michael Grant said that this figure is probably an exaggeration, but the losses were "appallingly high."³¹ Some 30,000 captives were sold at auction.³² At Caesarea Philippi, 2,500 Jews were slaughtered in gladiatorial games in honor of the birthday of Titus' younger brother Domitian. Later, at Berytus, to celebrate the birthday of their father Vespasian, his sons burned to death even more than this.³³ These doomed Jews became living sacrifices—burnt offerings, in fact—to the military hero of Rome who had just become emperor. Four decades earlier, we read, "they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I

28. This included resident aliens in the land. It applied to every resident, not just Israelites.

29. Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book V, Chapter XI, Section 3.

30. *Ibid.*, VI:ix:3.

31. Michael Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (New York: Dorset, [1973] 1984), p. 202.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

33. *Idem.*

crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). Power religion giveth, and power religion taketh away.³⁴

2. Annulment

When the temple’s sacrifices ended, and God no longer dwelt in the Promised Land, Leviticus 19:23–25 was annulled by God. The land of Palestine today is no longer owed any restitution payment. It no longer spews people out of its boundaries. Its unique covenantal status ended in A.D. 70.

This law was never part of the sabbath rest laws. It was part of the restitution laws. It therefore came under the general category of theft laws: the eighth commandment. But the Promised Land’s owner was God; thus, this law relates also to the third commandment: the boundary around God’s name. God placed a “no trespassing” boundary around the fruit of young trees, just as He had placed such a boundary around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He had originally placed no such boundary around the tree of life. It was not trees in general or fruit in general that came under the original ban in Eden; it was only one tree. This Edenic prohibition had nothing to do with soil conservation. It was not universal. It was in fact a temporary ban. So was the Mosaic law’s ban on uncircumcised fruit. At the very least, that law ceased to have any judicial authority when circumcision ceased being a covenantally relevant mark (I Cor. 7:19).

The church has lawful access to the tree of life through baptism and holy communion. “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Rev. 22:14–15). There is no need to delay in partaking of the holy meal of communion. There is no temporal barrier today. But there is a judicial barrier: only those who have been baptized have legal access to God’s holy meal.

The rite of circumcision is annulled. Therefore, there is no longer any legal status of fruit known as “uncircumcised.” What had been forbidden to Israelites in the Mosaic Covenant on the basis of the circumcision laws is today ritually and judicially irrelevant:

34. Cursed be the name of power religion.

Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God (I Cor. 7:18–19).

Conclusion

The law governing the harvesting of fruit from a young tree was a law unique to ancient Israel. It was not intended for the nations around Israel, for it was part of the seed laws and land laws that applied only to Israel as a holy nation. This law was a negative sanction imposed on Israel by God because of the wilderness rebellion. God imposed this law as a negative sanction because of the failure of the exodus generation to invade the land of Canaan after hearing reports and military analysis from Joshua and Caleb. The land of Canaan had deserved deliverance from the Canaanite rule 40 years before the children of the exodus generation invaded the land. It therefore was owed restitution by the heirs of the exodus generation. This law had nothing to do with biological health, contrary to Rushdoony.³⁵

This law was also an aspect of the parents' failure to circumcise their sons in the wilderness. This is why the new fruit was called uncircumcised. This was to remind them of the sons' own temporary status as unholy—*culturally unfruitful*—during the 40 years of wilderness wandering. This law was never designed as a universal statute; it was a specific negative sanction on the people of Israel and a positive sanction on the Promised Land itself. It was not a cross-boundary law.

This law's underlying judicial foundation is still in force, however. That foundation is God's declaration regarding legal access to particular trees. In the garden of Eden, only one tree was prohibited: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After Adam's rebellion, a "no trespassing" boundary was placed by God around the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Because of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, the fruit of the tree of life is now available to covenant-keeping men. Because of this, God has removed the "no trespassing" sign from every tree.

What had been a prohibition under the Old Covenant has become a positive injunction under the New Covenant. God's covenant people are commanded to come to the communion table; this is not an option on their part. Like the tree of life, which was open to covenant-keeping man before Adam ate from the forbidden fruit, so is the communion

35. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 87.

table open today. Baptized people can lawfully celebrate the modern Passover feast without having to wait.

A proper understanding of the judicial connection between the food laws and seed laws of the Mosaic Covenant and the communion table in the New Covenant leads to an acknowledgment of the New Covenant's annulment of the Mosaic Covenant's seed laws and food laws. God places only one boundary around food: the communion table. It is open only to Christians. There are no other food restrictions (Acts 10).³⁶ It is therefore wrong to continue to honor the specific terms of Leviticus 19:23, a law that applied only to national Israel. When a young tree bears fruit, we are to enjoy it. But we must also pay our tithe to the local church on whatever we harvest.³⁷

36. James B. Jordan, *Pig Out? 25 Reasons Why Christians May Eat Pork* (Niceville, Florida: Transfiguration Press, 1992).

37. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

MEASURING OUT JUSTICE

And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:33–37).

The theocentric meaning of this law is equality before God's law. This includes strangers. The general principle is the familiar guideline known as the golden rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.¹

A. Theocracy = Sanctuary

God reminded the Israelites in this passage that He had delivered them from Egyptian bondage, where they had been strangers. This deliverance had been an application of the fundamental theme of the Bible: the transition from wrath to grace.² The God who delivered His people in history (point two of the biblical covenant model: historical prologue) is also the God who lays down the law (point three).

One judicial application of God's historical deliverance of His people is the creation of a civil sanctuary: a place set apart judicially by

1. Jesus said: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 16.

2. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), p. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

God for those who seek liberty under God.³ The establishment of a boundary is an aspect of point three. In this case, the boundary was geographical. It was to serve as a judicial model for the whole world (Deut. 4:4–8).⁴ Strangers in the land were expected to tell “the folks back home” of the benefits of dwelling in God’s sanctuary. God prepared a place for strangers to live in peace through justice. This system of justice did not give strangers political authority, for they were outside the ecclesiastical covenant. But the system provided liberty. Conclusion: political pluralism is not biblically necessary for civil liberty.

There is no valid biblical reason to believe that God’s ideal of sanctuary for strangers in a holy commonwealth has been annulled by the New Covenant. On the contrary, the sanctuary principle has been extended across the globe through Christ’s universal gospel of deliverance (Matt. 28:18–20).⁵ Nation by nation, the whole world is to become such a sanctuary.⁶ But a biblical sanctuary is a theocratic commonwealth. That is to say, the extension of God’s theocratic commonwealth means the extension of God’s civil sanctuary: the transition from civil wrath to civil grace. The judicial evidence of this biblical civil grace is equality before the civil law. To maintain the blessings of liberty, all residents of a holy commonwealth are required to obey the Bible-revealed law of God. God made it quite clear: without corporate obedience to God’s Bible-revealed law, no nation can maintain the blessings of civil liberty.⁷

B. Judicial Love

There are three commands in this passage: to avoid vexing a stranger, to love the stranger, and to use honest weights and measures.

3. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

6. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

7. Those people who seek to defend the ideal of civil liberty—sometimes called “civil liberties”—apart from an appeal to God’s Bible-revealed law-order are indulging their preference for humanism: Stoic natural law theology or Newtonian natural law theology. In either case, they have abandoned the Bible’s explicit method of retaining the blessings of liberty: Trinitarian, covenantal, oath-bound constitutionalism.

1. Three Laws

We begin with the first. Leviticus 19:33 is a recapitulation of Exodus 22:21: "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." This is followed by the law commanding Israelites to love the resident alien (v. 34). One command is negative: do not vex. The other command is positive, or seems to be: exercise love. This positive injunction is followed by the phrase, "I am the LORD your God." This was a reminder to Israel of the sovereignty of the ultimate Enforcer.

The third law governs weights and measures. The question is: Are the vexation law (negative) and the weights and measures law (negative) two separate laws? Presumably, they are one law, for they are found in the same section. There is at least one link: the text's stated justification for each of these laws is historical, namely, the Israelites' experience in Egypt and their deliverance by God from Egypt. But these laws seem to be dealing with different issues: (1) the general public's vexing of strangers; (2) sellers' cheating of the general public.

The second law initially appears not to be a civil law, for it commands civility: "Thou shalt love him as thyself." That is, it seems to command a certain attitude toward someone. But biblical civil law does not command righteous behavior; it is limited to forbidding certain kinds of unrighteous behavior. It does not seek to compel goodness; it imposes negative sanctions against certain evil acts. That is to say, biblical civil law is not messianic. It establishes no positive civil sanctions for showing love to resident aliens. But without positive civil sanctions for righteous behavior, there is no civil law promoting righteous behavior: no sanctions = no law. Thus, if we interpret the command to love someone as meaning the inculcation of a positive attitude toward someone, this command is not a civil law. Also, no civil sanctions are attached to this law.

In apparent contrast, the third law is at the very heart of civil law: the enforcement of universal public standards of weights and measures. It forbids a public evil: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment." This is a restatement of Leviticus 19:15: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." The principle of the rule of law is publicly displayed in the enforcement of just weights and measures.

2. The Example of Egypt

The text's historical references to Egypt are two-fold: residence in Egypt and deliverance out of Egypt. The Israelites had not been loved in Egypt. The mark of that lack of love was their enslavement. They had been vexed by their one-time hosts, whose fathers' lives Joseph had saved. They had not been treated fairly. So perverse were the Egyptians—so unloving—that God intervened to deliver His people. In doing so, He imposed negative historical sanctions against the Egyptians. The warning in this case law is clear: those who refuse to honor God by loving their neighbors will be placed under God's negative historical sanctions.

But this raises a question: If the sin of the Egyptians in not loving the Israelites was their act of enslaving the Israelites, rather than a mere negative attitude toward the Israelites, was the focus of the anti-vexation law judicial rather than psychological? This is my interpretation of the law. Love in this case can legitimately be understood as treating people lawfully—as Bahnsen put it, “showing love to our fellow men (by protecting them from theft, rape, slander, abortion, sexual deviance, etc.). . . .”⁸ If so, then the two laws are doubly linked: both prohibit evil public actions; both are justified in terms of the Israelites' experience in Egypt.

C. Negative Sanctions: The State as Intermediary

What about the state's negative civil sanctions? What does God's law establish as the proper negative sanction for refusing to love a stranger, in the sense of love as a positive attitude toward him? None is listed. This is to be expected, for civil government is authorized by God only to enforce laws prohibiting public evils. God does not authorize the state to enforce laws promoting the welfare of specific groups or individuals. An example of the distinction between positive and negative sanctions is the distinction between public health programs and socialized medicine. Tax-funded public health programs repel “invasions” of the entire community by specific germs, bacteria, or whatever. Socialized medicine transfers money from one person to pay for the medical treatment of someone else. It imposes a negative monetary sanction against one person in order to grant a positive monetary sanction—minus about 50% for handling—to another person (actu-

8. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), p. 205. (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

ally, two people: the patient and his physician). Frédéric Bastiat wrote in 1850 that civil law is “the collective organization of the individual’s right to legitimate self-defense.”⁹ “Thus, as an individual cannot legitimately use force against the person, liberty, or property of another individual, for the same reason collective force cannot legitimately be applied to destroy the person, liberty, and property of individuals or classes.”¹⁰ The state is a defensive institution. The exercise of state power must be restrained by law and custom. Why? There are two reasons.

1. Savior State, Plundering State

The state is not to become messianic: a Savior State. The monopolistic authority of violence which the state lawfully possesses must be limited to preserving the peace. A judicial boundary must be placed on the exercise of such monopolistic power. If this is not done, then the state inevitably becomes an agency of political plunder. It is this development which threatens the judicial foundation of civil liberty. It creates the politics of revenge: getting even. This means either the politics of jealousy (wealth redistribution) or the politics of envy (wealth destruction).¹¹ Bastiat described the nature of the political problem:

It is in the nature of men to react against the iniquity of which they are the victims. When, therefore, plunder is organized by the law for the profit of the classes who make it, all the plundered classes seek, by peaceful or revolutionary means, to enter into the making of the laws. These classes, according to the degree of enlightenment they have achieved, can propose two different ends to themselves when they thus seek to attain their political rights: either they may wish to bring legal plunder to an end, or they may aim at getting their share of it.

Woe to the nations in which the masses are dominated by this last thought when they, in their turn, seize the power to make the law!

Until that time, legal plunder is exercised by the few against the many, as it is among nations in which the right to legislate is concen-

9. Frédéric Bastiat, “The Law” (1850), in Bastiat, *Selected Essays on Political Economy*, translated by Seymour Cain; ed. George B. de Huszar (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1964), p. 51. (<http://bit.ly/BastiatState>)

10. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

11. Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora, *Egalitarian Envy: The Political Foundations of Social Justice* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).

trated in a few hands. But now it becomes universal, and an effort is made to redress the balance by means of universal plunder. Instead of being abolished, social injustice is made general. As soon as the disinherited classes have obtained their political rights, the first idea they seize upon is not to abolish plunder (this would suppose in them more wisdom than they can have), but to organize a system of reprisals against the other classes that is also injurious to themselves; as if, before justice reigns, a harsh retribution must strike all, some because of their iniquity, others because of their ignorance.

No greater change nor any greater evil could be introduced into society than this: to convert the law into an instrument of plunder.¹²

Within three decades after Bastiat warned his fellow Frenchmen against the politics of plunder, itself a legacy of the French Revolution (1789–94), political plunder had spread to the English-speaking world. The free trade era in Great Britain, which had begun with the repeal of the corn laws in the mid-1840s, was steadily undermined after 1870 by a return to the older vision: empire.¹³ This was paralleled by the political triumph of Bismarck and his conservative welfare state policies in the new nation of Germany after 1871, and by the political dominance of the Republican Party in the United States after 1861: high-tariff and (after 1890) pro-regulation.¹⁴ The visible sign of this ideological transformation was the race for naval dominance. The First World War destroyed classical liberalism's policies of low taxes, low national debt, the international gold standard, free trade, and the free movement of peoples. The national passport became a way of life internationally. Under Nazism and Communism, so did the internal passport.

2. *The Primacy of Grace*

The exercise of state power must be restrained by law and custom. The state must not be allowed to become messianic: the Savior-Healer

12. Bastiat, "The Law," p. 55.

13. This new vision was promoted in word and deed by Cecil Rhodes and his successor, Alfred Milner. The Round Table group, begun in England and exported to other English-speaking nations, was the spearhead. John Marlowe, *Milner: Apostle of Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976); Carroll Quigley, *The Anglo-American Establishment: From Rhodes to Clivedon* (New York: Books In Focus, 1981).

14. The Democratic Party, under President Grover Cleveland (1885–89; 1893–97), continued to defend classical liberalism, but then, under the influence of fundamentalist Presbyterian William Jennings Bryan after 1896, who failed three times to be elected President, it became even more interventionist than the Republican Party, and has remained so ever since.

State. There is no need to use the threat of negative state sanctions to promote individual welfare, for God's grace is greater than man's depravity, total though this depravity may be in principle.¹⁵ All that is needed for righteousness to triumph culturally is for public evil to be suppressed by the state, including the public evil of messianic statism. Grace is primary; sin is secondary. This was true under the Old Covenant, but it is even more true today. Satan was definitively defeated at Calvary. The Holy Spirit has come. God extends His worldwide dominion representatively through His people, the church. Satan suffers progressive territorial and cultural losses representatively as the gospel, empowered in history by the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ is extended by the church in history.¹⁷ Yet even under the Old Covenant, grace was primary. God is greater than Satan; God's covenants are more blessed than Satan's. There was never any need for a savior state.

Because of the primacy of grace, God does not use the threat of negative civil sanctions against any corporate body in order to promote good deeds by individual members. He therefore does not use civil law to pressure men to do good. He uses civil law only to repress designated forms of evil. God in the garden did not threaten to impose negative sanctions for men's failure to dress the garden; He threatened to impose negative sanctions only for a violation of the judicial boundary around one tree. Similarly, biblical civil law imposes negative sanctions on those who commit prohibited acts. It does not offer positive sanctions to those who obey.

The list of biblical civil prohibitions is relatively short. A list of positive dominion acts is inherently limitless. Again, this is because grace is primary and sin is secondary. Grace is judicially unbounded; sin is judicially bounded. Example: Adam could lawfully eat from any

15. The totality of man's depravity is judicial rather than historical. If man's total depravity were historical, society would be impossible. Total depravity refers to man's judicial condition before God as a covenant-breaker. James described it well: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Guilty of all: total depravity.

16. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp. 195–97. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

17. Grace is primary in eternity, too. The final resurrection leads to either the sin-free New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21, 22) or the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15). While both are eternal in duration, the New Heaven and New Earth allow expansion and development, as covenant-keepers work out their salvation with neither fear nor trembling. They will increase their knowledge of God and thereby increase their glorifying of His greatness. There is no ethical development for those in the lake of fire. They begin their existence here with impotence, which never ends.

tree of the garden (unbounded) except one (bounded). Biblical civil justice cannot be established through an attempt to create a limitless positive law code; the list of representative crimes (case laws) must be kept short enough to be publicly read to the people on special occasions (Deut. 31:10–13).¹⁸ Thus, the state's job is not to threaten men for not doing good works, which would make the state as unbounded in its jurisdiction as good works are. Its task is to threaten men for committing a finite number of illegal acts, which places a boundary around the state.

This means that the failure of individuals to take active steps to love their neighbors attitudinally is not a threat to the social order. God does not threaten His covenant organizations with negative sanctions for the failure of individual members to perform positive acts of kindness. God may not bless those individuals who refuse to perform positive acts of charity, but He does not threaten the other members of covenant organizations. Thus, the state has no role as an intermediary between God and man in cases concerning men's failure to act positively. God does not authorize, let alone require, the civil magistrate to step in and compel such acts of charity in the name of God, in order to avoid God's negative covenant sanctions.

D. Corporate Sanctions

The state imposes negative physical sanctions as God's delegated agent in history. If Israelite magistrates failed in this task with respect to individual law-breakers, God would raise up other agents of His justice to impose negative sanctions on the whole society. For example, when Judah refused to honor the sabbatical year of rest for the land, God raised up Babylon—strangers—to carry His people into captivity, so that the land would receive its long-awaited lawful rest. God's law had specified this as the appropriate negative sanction:

And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it (Lev. 26:32–35).

18. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 75.

Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. . . . To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years (II Chron. 36:17, 21).

The biblical justification for the state's imposition of negative sanctions against individual law-breakers is God's threat to impose negative corporate sanctions against the entire society if His Bible-revealed civil law is not enforced by civil magistrates. This is the distinctive principle of biblical civil government. I keep returning to this theme because it is central to biblical political economy. God's negative historical sanctions will be applied. The question is: By God or by the civil magistrates? Those in society who are innocent of a particular crime deserve protection from God's corporate sanctions.¹⁹ The state is therefore authorized to impose negative sanctions on convicted law-breakers.

Biblical civil law is supposed to settle disputes between conflicting parties. The state intervenes and acts as God's representative agent for one or more parties—the victims—and against others.²⁰ But what about a case in which there is no victim to press charges? What about the so-called "victimless crimes"—the sale of hard drugs, pornography, and homosexual "favors"? If the state were not acting to deflect God's greater judgments on the entire society, there would be no justification for civil laws against victimless crimes, for there are no disputing private individuals who come before the civil court in such cases. As libertarian economist and legal theorist F. A. Hayek reminds us: "At least where it is not believed that the whole group may be punished by a supernatural power for the sins of individuals, there can arise no such rules from the limitation of conduct against others, and therefore from the settlement of disputes."²¹ Covenantally, however, there will

19. This is why, in the case of an unsolved murder in a field, civil magistrates from the nearest city were required to kill a heifer and have the priests sacrifice it in a nearby valley (Deut. 21:1–9). The blood covering had to be made, either by the shed blood of the convicted murderer or by the heifer.

20. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix M; North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

21. F. A. Hayek, *Rules and Order*, vol. I of *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 101. It is interesting that the politically

be future victims of unprosecuted crimes of this type: judicially innocent members of society who will become recipients of God's corporate negative sanctions in history. Like the righteous prophets who went into the Babylonian captivity of Israel, so will the innocent be in God's day of corporate wrath in history.²²

E. To Love the Imperfect Stranger

"Thou shalt love him as thyself." Why does this positive injunction to love the stranger appear in a list of civil laws? There are no non-judicial criteria listed that indicate how the covenant-keeping individual can show love to the stranger. There are no negative civil sanctions for a refusal to perform positive acts of charity, let alone for not displaying a positive mental attitude toward strangers. Therefore, love in this case law must be interpreted judicially: treating the stranger lawfully, as if he were a full citizen of the holy commonwealth. It is the same meaning that Paul attributed to love: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Fulfilling the terms of the law is the public manifestation of love. This is what the civil law requires of the covenant-keeper.

What was the representative illegal act of not showing love in Israel? The oppression of strangers, widows, and orphans. How men treated the least powerful members of society served as a representation of their covenantal status before God,²³ just as Jesus warned regarding the final judgment:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in

liberal Anabaptist theologian, Ronald Sider, took the line promoted by libertarians regarding victimless crimes: "... persons should be free to harm themselves and consenting associates ... as long as they do not harm others or infringe on their rights." Sider, "An Evangelical View of Public Policy," *Transformation*, II (July/Sept. 1985), p. 6; cited by Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, p. 214.

22. Meredith G. Kline and his disciples have denied the existence of predictable corporate sanctions of God in New Covenant history. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184. Cf. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 8. Kline and his disciples have thereby implicitly denied the biblical justification for civil laws against "victimless crimes."

23. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 48.

prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:34–40).

But was there a specific representative public act in Israel that defined a prosecutable oppression? Yes. The next case law identifies it: using rigged weights and measures. A seller of goods was not allowed to use one set of weights for buying goods and another set for selling these goods. He was not allowed to use one set of weights for some customers and another set for other customers. To do so would have testified to the existence of a God who imposes His law's standards in a partial manner. That is, it would have pointed to a God who shows favor to certain persons: one law for one group, another law for a different group. Again and again in Scripture, this is denied emphatically.²⁴ The essence of God's moral character, and therefore of His character as a judge, is the consistent application of His law.

Accompanying this law was an affirmation of God's character as a consistent judge, which also served as an implicit warning to the nation of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt." God had brought negative sanctions against the Egyptians for their unrighteous behavior; He would do the same to Israel. He said this explicitly just before the next generation entered the land of Canaan: "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:19–20).²⁵

F. Open Access and Impartial Justice

When God delivered the laws governing the Passover to Moses in Egypt, He made it plain that the essence of biblical law is **impartiality**: "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him

24. See the citations in Chapter 14:D.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:48–49).²⁶ There would be one law governing access to the Passover; thus, there would be the rule of law in the nation. Access to the Passover was the archetype; predictable civil law was the manifestation of the more general judicial principle. That is to say, equal legal access to the means of grace is the standard of all biblical law: open to all men in history, and on the same terms. Therefore, all men within a society that is in covenant with the God of the Bible should have equal access to civil justice.

The Mosaic law’s definition of what it meant to be an Israelite was this: lawful access to the Passover. But any adult male who consented to circumcision in Israel could gain lawful access to Passover.²⁷ This made illegal any racial definition of “Israelite”; the definition was covenantal-legal, not racial. The establishment of the judicial category of a covenanted people was followed by a command to enforce the same legal order law on all residents of the nation. If anyone could become an Israelite, then there could be no permanently closed caste of citizens (Deut. 23:2–3). This also meant that there could be no permanently closed caste of civil rulers. Anyone under the jurisdiction of that law was a potential Israelite. Today’s victim of injustice could become tomorrow’s civil magistrate.²⁸ There was to be open access upward politically; the rulers were warned to impose God’s civil law impartially. This was designed to prevent the politics of revenge.

G. Just Measures and a Just Society

The familiar Western symbol of justice is the blindfolded woman holding a balance scale. The blindfold symbolizes the court’s unwillingness to recognize persons. The scale symbolizes fixed standards of justice: a fixed law applied to the facts of the case. Justice is symbolically linked to weights.

26. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

27. The Mosaic law did not specify how a woman could gain access apart from a circumcised male head of household.

28. “Tomorrow” is here meant in a figurative sense: it took 10 generations for Moabites and Ammonites to become full citizens (Deut. 23:3), i.e., men entrusted with the authority to impose civil sanctions.

1. Quantification

Justice cannot be quantified,²⁹ yet symbolically it is represented by the ultimate determinant of quantity: a scale. An honest scale registers very tiny changes in the weight of the things being weighed. A scale can be balanced only by adding or removing a quantity of the thing being measured until the weights on each side are equal, meaning as close to equal as the scale can register.³⁰ Even here, the establishment of a precise balance may take several attempts. An average of the attempts then becomes the acceptable measure.

The ability of men to make comparisons is best exemplified in the implements of physical measurement. The language of physical measurement is adopted by men when they speak of making historical or judicial comparisons. For example, the consumer balances his checkbook. This does not mean that he places it on a scale. Or he weighs the expected advantages and disadvantages of some decision.

The economist constructs an index number to compare “prices”—meaning prices of specific goods and services—in one period with those in another period. He assigns “weights” to certain factors in the mathematical construct known as an index number. He says, for example, that a change in the price of automobiles—Hondas rather than Rolls-Royces, of course—is more important to the average consumer than a change in the price of tea. This was not true, however, in Boston in 1773. So, the economist-as-historian has to keep re-examining his “basket of goods” from time to time: Which goods and services are more important to the average person’s economic well-being? But there is no literal real-world basket of goods; there is no literal real-world average consumer; there is no means of literally weighing the importance of anything. Yet we can barely think about making comparisons without importing the symbolism of weights and measures.

The language of politics also cannot avoid the metaphor of measurement. The political scientist speaks of checks and balances in the constitutional order of a federalist system. These are supposed to reduce the likelihood of the centralization of power into the hands of a clique or one man. That is, there are checks and balances on the exercise of power. These are institutional, not literal.

29. See below: “Intuition and Measurement.”

30. There are physical limits on the accuracy of scales. The best balance scales today can measure changes as small as one-tenth of a microgram. Grolier Encyclopedia (1990): “Weights and Measures.” God’s civil law calls for equal justice, not perfect justice. Cf. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 19.

The language of measurement is inescapable. This is an implication of point three of the biblical covenant model: standards.³¹ As surely as societies create bureaus that establish standards of measurement, so God has established permanent judicial standards. Both kinds of standards must be observed by law-abiding people.

2. The Representative Case

The preservation of just weights and measures in the Mosaic Covenant was important for symbolic reasons as well as economic reasons. As a case law, it represented a wider class of crimes. It was important in itself: prohibiting theft through fraud. But there was something unique about the case law governing weights and measures: it was representative of injustice in general. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.” The language of unrighteousness and judgment has a wider application than merely economic transactions. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15). This states the fundamental principle of all biblical justice.

To understand why weights and measures were representative of civil justice in general, we need to understand what was involved in the specific violation. The seller could better afford the specialized weighing equipment of his trade than the individual buyer could. He was therefore in a position to cheat the buyer by rigging the equipment. But the narrowly defined crime of using rigged measures was representative of the whole character of the civil order: a violation of justice at the most fundamental level. Analogous to the businessman, the judge was not to use his specialized skills or his authority to rig any case against one of the disputants. The legal structure was regarded as a specialized piece of equipment, analogous to a scale. No one in charge of its operations was allowed to tamper with this system in order to benefit any individual or class of individuals. To do so would constitute theft. Injustice is seen in the Bible as a form of theft. This was Samuel’s message to Israel.

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and gray-

31. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

headed; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness (I Sam. 12:1–5).

Injustice is also linked with false weights and measures. Isaiah made all these connections clear in his initial accusation against the rulers of Israel: “Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them” (Isa. 1:22–23). False measures in silver and wine; princes in rebellion against God but companions of thieves; universal bribe-seeking; oppression of widows and orphans: all are linked in God’s covenant lawsuit brought by the prophet. It was all part of a great spiritual apostasy—an apostasy that would be reversed by the direct intervention of God: “Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isa. 1:24–26). When the rulers of Israel’s northern kingdom remained unwilling to enforce God’s law representatively, generation after generation, God raised up Assyria to bring corporate negative sanctions for Him (Isa. 10:5–6).

Because weights and measurements are representative of the moral condition of society in general, the prophets used the metaphor of weights and measures in bringing their covenant lawsuits against individuals and nations. The Psalmist had set the example: “Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity” (Ps. 62:9). Micah castigated the whole society, warning of judgment to come, for they honored “the statutes of Omri” and did the works of his son Ahab (Mic. 6:16).

The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it. Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the **scant measure** that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the **wicked balances**, and with the bag of **deceitful weights**? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth (Mic. 6:9–12).

The essence of their rebellion, Micah said, was the injustice of the civil magistrates: “The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up” (Mic. 7:2–3).

Daniel's announcement to the rulers of Babylon regarding the meaning of the message of the handwriting on the wall is perhaps the most famous use in Scripture of the imagery of the balance. “And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan. 5:25–28). Corrupt measures are a token—representative—of moral corruption. To be out of balance judicially is to be out of covenantal favor. The representative civil transgression in society is the adoption of false weights and measures.

H. Intuition and Measurement

“Add a pinch of salt.” How many cooks through the centuries have recommended this unspecific quantity? There are cooks who cannot cook with a recipe book, but who are master chefs without one. Their skills are intuitive, not numerical. This is true in every field.

1. Analogical Reasoning

There are limits to measurement because there are limits to our perception. There are also limits on our ability to verbalize or quantify the measurements that we perceive well enough to act upon. Oskar Morgenstern addressed this problem in the early paragraphs of his

classic book, *On the Accuracy of Economic Observations*.³² Our economic knowledge is inescapably a mixture of objective and subjective knowledge.³³ That is to say, we think as persons; we are not computers. We do not think digitally. We think analogically, as persons made in God's image. We are required to think God's thoughts after Him. To do this, we need standards provided by God that are perceptible to man. God has given us such standards (point three of the biblical covenant model). We also need to exercise judgment in understanding and applying them (point four). This judgment is not digital; it is analogical: thinking God's thoughts after Him. We are required by God to assess the performance of others in terms of God's fixed ethical and judicial standards.

In order to achieve a "fit" between God's standards and the behavior of others, we must interpret God's objective law (a subjective task), assemble the relevant objective facts (a subjective task), discard the irrelevant objective facts (a subjective task), and apply this law to those facts (a subjective task). The result is a judicially objective decision. At every stage of the decision-making or judgment-rendering process,

32. Oskar Morgenstern, *On the Accuracy of Economic Observations*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963). Morgenstern wrote a book on game theory with John von Neumann, one of the most gifted mathematicians of the twentieth century. Morgenstern was aware of the limits of mathematics as a tool of economic analysis. A more recent treatment of the problem is Andrew M. Kamarck's *Economics and the Real World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). See also Thomas Mayer, *Truth versus Precision in Economics* (Hampshire, England: Elgar, 1993).

33. Morgenstern wrote: "All economic decisions, whether private or business, as well as those involving economic policy, have the characteristic that quantitative and non-quantitative information must be combined into one act of decision. It would be desirable to understand how these two classes of information can best be combined. Obviously, there must exist a point at which it is no longer meaningful to sharpen the numerically available information when the other, wholly qualitative, part is important, though a notion of its 'accuracy' or 'reliability' has not been developed. . . . There are many reasons why one should be deeply concerned with the 'accuracy' of quantitative economic data and observations. Clearly, anyone making use of measurements and data wishes them to be accurate and significant in a sense still to be defined specifically. For that reason a level of accuracy has to be established. It will depend first of all on the particular purpose for which the measurement is made. . . . The very notion of accuracy and the acceptability of a measurement, observation, description, count—whatever the concrete case might be—is inseparably tied to the use to which it is to be put. In other words, there is always a theory or model, however roughly formulated it may be, a purpose or use to which the statistic has to refer, in order to talk meaningfully about accuracy. In this manner the topic soon stops being primitive; on the contrary, very deep-lying problems are encountered, some of which have only recently been recognized." Morgenstern, *Accuracy*, pp. 3–4.

there is an inescapably personal element, for which we are held personally responsible by God.³⁴

2. Objective Facts Interpreted Subjectively

When we speak of objective facts, we often invoke the language of physical measurement. This is because we think analogically. Making subjective judgments is analogous to measuring things objectively. Yet we never measure things objectively, meaning exclusively objectively. It is men who do the measuring, and men are not machines—and even machines have limits of perception. We ask: “Is the balance even?” “Is the bubble in the level equidistant between two points?” At some point, we say: “It’s a judgment call.” Analogously, we ask of other men’s offers: “Is this on the level?” Discovering the answer is a judgment call: an evaluation based on one’s observation of something that is beyond the limits of one’s ability to perceive distinctions.

Consider the task of an umpire or referee in any sport. He is a person. He makes judgment calls. In modern philosophy, we find that the major schools of thought are analogous to the umpire’s standard explanations of his decision. In baseball, the umpire “calls a strike.” He announces that the pitched baseball passed within the strike zone of the batter’s body (a variable in terms of his height) and above home plate. The batter protests. It was a “ball,” he insists: either outside his strike zone or not above home plate. The umpire offers one of three answers. These three answers are expressions of the three dominant views of Western epistemology.

“I call ’em as they are.” (Newton)

“I call ’em as I see ’em.” (Hume)

“They are what I call ’em.” (Kant)³⁵

To make a biblically valid judgment regarding the public record of the event under scrutiny, judges must perceive the limits of the law and the limits of the records. The public record of the event must reveal (represent) an act that took place within the “strike zone” of God’s law. The actor must clearly have violated that zone—that boundary—of God’s law. In the language of the common law courts, it must have violated that boundary “beyond reasonable doubt.” The language of

34. See Appendix E.

35. There is a fourth possible reply: “Shut up. You’re only a figment of my imagination.” (Berkeley)

the law is imprecise here because the act of rendering judgment is imprecise. Yet juries decide, judges hand down punishments, and society goes on.

3. *Intuition and Creation*

Intuition cannot be verbalized, catalogued, or quantified, for by definition it possesses no rational structure, but it exists nevertheless. Every philosophical system ultimately must appeal to intuition to bridge the chasm between mind and events.³⁶ Without such a bridge, according to humanists, human choice and therefore personal responsibility disappear into one of three kinds of universe: a chaotic cosmos, a deterministic cosmos of mechanical-mathematical cause and effect, or a dialectical cosmos: mechanism infused by randomness, and vice versa.³⁷ (All three are said to be governed by the second law of thermodynamics and are headed for the heat death of the universe.)³⁸

There is a fourth possibility: a covenantal, providential, created cosmos. Here is the biblical solution to the problem of human knowledge: the doctrine of creation. The world was created by God so that men, made in God's image, may exercise dominion over it. This theory of knowledge also relies on intuition: biblically informed intuition. Intuition is an inescapable concept. It is never a case of "intuition vs. no intuition." It is always a case of whose intuition according to whose standards.

Spiritual maturity is the ability to make biblically well-informed judgments. Christians must presume that intuitive judgments that come after years of studying God's Bible-revealed laws and making decisions in terms of them will be more reliable—i.e., more pleasing to God—than intuitive judgments that come from other traditions or that are the products of unsystematic approaches. There is no way to test the accuracy of this presumption except by observing God's sanctions in history on those groups that are under the authority of specifically covenanted judges.³⁹

36. For case studies of this assertion in the field of economics, see Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), ch. 5.

37. James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987).

38. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

39. If God's sanctions in history are random in the New Covenant era, as Meredith G. Kline insists that they are, then there is no way to test this presumption. Intu-

I. Objective Standards

God has decreed everything that happens. History happens exactly as He decreed it. He evaluates it, moment by moment, in terms of His permanent standards. This judgment is objective because God makes it, and it is subjective because God makes it.

1. Subordination

Man is responsible for thinking God's thoughts after Him. Man must obey God by conforming his thoughts and actions to God's law. Men do not have the ability to read God's mind (Deut. 29:29), but they do have the ability to obey. Men do not issue valid autonomous decrees, nor does history follow such decrees. God proposes, and then God disposes.⁴⁰

The same is true of weights and measures. There are objective standards, and these are known perfectly by God. This knowledge is a mark of His sovereignty. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" (Isa. 40:12). Man must seek to conform his actions and judgments to these objective standards. He does so by discovering and adopting fixed standards. Physical standards are the most readily enforced. The archetypal standards are weight and measure. Even the passage of time is assessed by means of a measure. In earlier centuries, these measures were frequently governed by weight, such as water clocks or hourglasses filled with sand.⁴¹ Measures have been perfected over time, most notably measurements of time itself.⁴² As measures improve, buyers and sellers benefit: reduced un-

tion-based decisions would become as random in their effects as God's historical sanctions supposedly are.

40. The radical humanism of Marx's partner Frederick Engels can be seen in his statement that "when therefore man no longer merely proposes, but also disposes—only then will the last alien force which is still reflected in religion vanish; and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect." Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (Anti-Dühring) (1878), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), vol. 25, p. 302.

41. The sun dial was an exception, but it could not be used at night or on cloudy days.

42. It can be persuasively argued that improvements in the measurement of time in the late medieval and early modern eras were the most important physical advances in the history of Western Civilization, without which few of the other advances would have been likely. See David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of*

certainty.

Occult man sees ritual as a means of gaining supernatural power for himself. Christian man sees ritual as a means of worshiping God and gaining dominion over himself and his environment, to the glory of God. Similarly, occult man sees measurement as a means of obtaining supernatural power.⁴³ Christian man sees measurement as a tool of dominion, beginning with self-dominion. The West is the product of such a view of measurement. A man wearing a wristwatch is someone under the influence of the Christian view of time. In the ancient pagan world, priests were the monopolists of calendars; this control was a major factor in maintaining their power.⁴⁴ In the West, very few educated people understand the details of the astronomical basis of calculating time, let alone modern cesium atom clocks, but virtually everyone has ready access to a calendar and a clock with an alarm. No longer does an elite priesthood exercise power through its monopolistic knowledge of the astronomical calendar. The advent of cheap printed calendars transferred enormous power to the individual.⁴⁵ Cheap calendars and clocks decentralized power, but thereby made individuals more responsible for the use of time, man's only irreplaceable resource.

The universality of personal time pieces makes it impossible for employers or sellers to cheat large numbers of people regarding time. Because access to information is cheap, time-cheating becomes more difficult. In fact, the employee is far more able to cheat the employer.⁴⁶

the Modern World (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1983).

43. The design and construction of the Cheops pyramid stands as the most stupendous surviving manifestation of this faith in weight and measure. See (with reservations) Peter Tompkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* (New York: Harper Colophon, [1971] 1978); Piazzzi Smyth, *The Great Pyramid: Its Secrets and Mysteries Revealed*, 4th ed. (New York: Bell, [1880] 1978).

44. This was especially true of ancient agricultural dynasties that were dependent on rivers. Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1957] 1964), pp. 29–30. For an extraordinary examination of ancient man's priestly mastery of both astronomy and time, see Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time* (Boston: Gambit, [1969] 1977).

45. Benjamin Franklin made himself famous throughout the American colonies with *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

46. The most graphic recent examples of such cheating in the modern office are computer games that allow a player to tap a key on the keyboard so that a fake spreadsheet appears on the screen. When a supervisor approaches the player, he taps the key, and it then appears as though he has been studying some intricate aspect of the business: above all, a numerical aspect.

The employee is the seller of services. If he is paid by the hour, he is tempted to find ways to collect his pay without delivering the work expected from him. The salaried employee cheats more easily on his time account; the commissioned salesman cheats more easily on his expense account.

2. *Specialized Knowledge*

The biblical law of weights and measures teaches that the seller—the receiver of money—is identified as legally responsible. This requires an explanation. The buyer (consumer) has legal control over the distribution of the most marketable commodity: money. He possesses greater flexibility and therefore greater economic authority in the overall economy. We speak of consumer's sovereignty in a free market.⁴⁷ Then why is the seller singled out by biblical law as the potential violator? Doesn't greater responsibility accompany greater authority (Luke 12:47–48)?⁴⁸

The legal question must be decided in terms of comparative authority in specific transactions, not comparative authority in the economy generally. A seller of goods and services possesses highly specialized knowledge regarding his market. Cheating by a seller of goods and services is therefore more likely than cheating by a buyer, because the seller has an advantage in information. This is why biblical law singles out weights and measures as the representative implements of justice. Physical implements of measurement can be created more easily than other kinds of evaluation devices. The existence of a precise (though never absolute) physical standard makes it relatively easy to create close approximations for commercial use.⁴⁹ The availability of devices

47. See below, "Competition and the Margins of Cheating."

48. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

49. The United States National Bureau of Standards (founded in 1901, but in principle authorized by the United States Constitution of 1787) establishes key lengths by using a platinum-iridium bar stored at a specific temperature. This, in turn, is based on a not quite identical bar stored by the International Bureau of Weights and Measurements in Sèvres, France. These bars do not match. Also, when cleaned, a few molecules are shaved away. Scientists now prefer to measure distance in terms of time and the speed of light. A meter is defined today as the distance a light particle travels in one 299,792,458th of a second. Time is measured in terms of the number of microwave-excited vibrations of a cesium atom particle when excited by a hydrogen maser. One second is defined as the time that passes during 9,192,631,770 cesium atomic vibrations. Malcolm W. Browne, "Yardsticks Almost Vanish As Science Seeks Precision," *New York Times* (Aug. 23, 1993).

and techniques to specialists employed as agents of the civil government, in the name of the buyers, allows the operation of checks and balances on the checks and balances. The state therefore has a greater ability to police the sellers in this area than in most other areas.

On what biblical basis can magistrates police weights and measures? Where is the victim? Where is the court case? The problem here is analogous to the problem of measuring pollution or noise. The victims are not easy to identify, for they may not know that they have been cheated. The extent of the cheating cannot easily be ascertained by the victims in retrospect. The cost of gathering this information is too high. As a cost-saving measure (the language of measurement is inescapable) for past victims and potential victims, the state imposes public standards, and sellers are required to conform. As in the case of protecting potential victims of speeding automobiles, the state establishes boundaries in advance. The police impose negative sanctions for violations of speed limits, even though the speeder's victims have not publicly complained against this particular speeder. The speeding driver did increase the statistical risks of having an accident, so there were victims.⁵⁰ They are represented by the police officer who catches the speeder.⁵¹

J. Competition and the Margins of Cheating

The International Bureau of Standards was established by the General Conference on Weights and Measures in 1875. National governments covenanted with each other by the Treaty of the Meter. The nations' governments are pledged to honor the standards agreed upon. These standards did not originate in 1875, however, nor did they originate with civil government. It does not require a treaty to establish such standards. There can be official standards, but unofficial standards are far more widespread. The free market can and does establish such standards. In fact, the more technologically innovative a society is, the less likely that a civil government will be the primary creator or enforcer of the bulk of the prevailing standards. When it comes to establishing standards, the state's salaried bureaucrats are usually play-

50. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 41:B.

51. Fines should be used to set up a restitution fund to pay victims of drivers who are not subsequently arrested and convicted. Idem. The history of civil law in the West since the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 has been the substitution of fines for restitution: Bruce L. Benson, *The Enterprise of Law: Justice Without the State* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 1990), ch. 3.

ing catch-up with profit-seeking innovators. The market establishes initial standards. Bureaucrats then ratify them by committee.

1. Standards and Boundaries

All standards have boundary ranges. Market standards are likely to be less precise technically than civil standards, for participants in markets understand that the development, selection, and enforcement of standards are not cost-free activities. The degree of variance from a precise model or standard depends upon the costs and benefits of enforcement. It also depends on the locus of sovereignty of such enforcement: the consumers. In a free market, it is the buyer of goods and services (i.e., the seller of money) who is sovereign, not the seller of goods and not the state. The consumer has greater economic flexibility to take his money elsewhere than the entrepreneur or politician does. That is to say, the cost to him of seeking and obtaining an alternative offer for what he wants to sell (money) is normally far lower than the cost to the seller of specialized goods or services to seek and obtain an alternative offer. The seller of money has maximum liquidity. Money has been accurately defined by Mises as the most marketable commodity;⁵² hence, the consumer, as the seller of money, is sovereign economically.

The seller uses implements to make measurements. No seller can do without such implements, even if he is selling services. At the very least, he will use a clock. The seller is warned by God to make sure that he uses these implements consistently as he goes about his business. Yet this is not quite true. The seller is not to supply less than the standard determines; he may lawfully give more. If he gives any buyer less than he has said he is giving, he steals from him. If he gives a buyer more than he says, he is not stealing. He is offering charity, or giving a gift, or being extra careful, or building good will to increase repeat sales. So, the business owner is allowed to give more than he has indicated to the buyer that the buyer will receive; he is not allowed to give less. The seller need not tell the buyer that he is giving an extra amount, but he is required to tell him if he is giving less.⁵³ The boundary, therefore, is a seller's floor rather than a ceiling.

Sellers compete against sellers; buyers compete against buyers.

52. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1912] 1953), pp. 32–33. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>)

53. A manager or employee must be precise: to give more is to steal from the owner; to give less is to steal from the buyer.

This is the fundamental principle of free market competition, one which is not widely understood. The buyer is playing off one seller against another when he bargains, even if the second seller is a phantom;⁵⁴ the seller is playing off buyer against buyer. Buyers compete directly against sellers only when both of them have imperfect information regarding the alternatives. No one knowingly pays one ounce of silver for something that is selling next door for half an ounce. The seller will not sell something to a buyer at a low price if he knows that another buyer is waiting in line to buy at a higher price. Neither will a buyer buy at a high price if he knows that another seller waits across the hallway to sell the same item at a lower price.

This being the case, it should be obvious why sellers who use false scales find themselves pressured by market forces to re-set their scales closer to the prevailing market standard. Their competitors provide a greater quantity of goods and services for the same price. It may take time for word to spread, but it does spread. Buyers like to brag about the bargains they have bought. Even though their tales of bargains increase the number of competing buyers at bargain shops, and therefore could lead to higher prices in the future, they do like to brag. This bragging gets the word out.⁵⁵ A seller who consistently sets his scales below the prevailing competitive standard risks losing customers. This pressure does not mean that all or even most scales will be set identically, but it does lead to a market standard of cheating: competitive boundaries. The better the information available to buyers, the narrower the range of cheating. None of this assumes the existence of a standard enforced by civil government.

2. The Scales of Justice

Much the same is true of the scales of civil justice. Word spreads about the availability of righteous civil justice. If there is open immigration, as there was supposed to be in Mosaic Israel, it is possible for those suffering injustice to seek justice elsewhere. (This is a major ad-

54. The phantom buyer may walk in this afternoon. The seller is not sure. Neither is the buyer.

55. There are limits to this. If the buyer has found an exceptionally inexpensive seller, especially a small, local seller who may be ill-informed about market demand, and if he expects to return to make additional purchases, he may not say anything to potential competitors. He does not want to let the seller know that there are many buyers available who are willing to pay more. There is a "bragging range." That is, there are boundaries on the spread of accurate information. Accurate information is not a free good.

vantage of federalism: those living in one state can move to another if they disapprove of the prevailing local situation. This allows the testing of ideas regarding the proper role of civil government.) The Bible assumes that word about national justice does spread:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).⁵⁶

The existence of a righteous nation in the midst of a fallen world of nations can lead to a competitive uplifting of civil justice in those nations that experience a net migration out. Emigration pressures unjust nations to revise their judicial standards. This is why totalitarian regimes place barriers at their borders. The threat of the loss of “the best and the brightest,” also known as the brain drain, is too great. The barbed wire goes up to place a boundary around the “ideological paradises.”

The tearing down of the Berlin Wall in late 1989 was a symbolic event that shook Europe. It was the visible beginning of the rapid end of the legacy of the French Revolution of 1789: left-wing Enlightenment humanism. We can date the end of that tradition in the West: August 21, 1991, when the Soviet Communist coup begun on August 19 failed. Boris Yeltsin and his associates sat in the Russian Parliament building for three days, telephoning leaders in the West, sending and receiving FAX messages, sending and receiving short wave radio messages, and ordering deliveries of Pizza Hut pizza. So died the French Revolutionary tradition. Sliced pizza replaced the guillotine’s sliced necks. It was a sign that the economically devastating effects of Marxist socialism were the inevitable product of injustice.⁵⁷ People in Marx-

56. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

57. This was the message of F. A. Hayek in his book, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), which became an international best-seller. Western intellectuals scoffed at its thesis for over four decades, though in diminished tones after 1974, when he won the Nobel Prize in economics. The scoffing stopped in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union’s economy. A few months before he died in 1992,

ist paradises wanted to escape. Given the opportunity, they would "vote with their feet." With the Berlin Wall down, there was an immediate exodus from East Germany. Simultaneously, Western justice began to be imported by East Germany. This leavening effect was positive. Within months, East and West Germany were legally reunited.

For this emigration process to serve as a national leaven of righteousness, there must be sanctuaries of righteousness. There must be just societies that open their borders to victims of injustice, including economic oppression. This is what Mosaic Israel offered the whole ancient world: sanctuary. This was God's means of pressuring unrighteous nations to become more just. He imposed a cost on evil empires: the loss of productive people to Israel.

On the other hand, widespread immigration can pressure a just society to become less just if the newcomers gain political authority. If they are allowed to vote, they will seek to change some aspects of the sanctuary nation's legal structure. For example, they may seek to legislate compulsory welfare payments: politically coerced subsidies paid to immigrants by the original residents.⁵⁸ It is not God's intention to pay for a rising standard of justice in evil empires by means of falling standards of justice in covenanted sanctuary nations. His goal is to raise standards of justice everywhere. So, political pluralism is prohibited by God's law. Suffrage (the vote) is by covenantal affirmation and church membership, not mere geographical residence. This is why the biblical concept of sanctuary requires a biblical judicial boundary: covenantal citizenship.⁵⁹

If justice produced indeterminate economic effects, and if injustice

Hayek was awarded the United States medal of freedom. He had outlived the Soviet Union. He also had outlived most of the original scoffers. As he told me and Mark Skousen in an interview in 1985, he had never believed that he would live to see the acclaim that came to him after 1974. (Few men who move against the intellectual currents of their eras live long enough to see such vindication. He died in March, 1992, at the age of 92, receiving international acclaim: "In praise of Hayek," *The Economist* (March 28, 1992); John Gray, "The Road From Serfdom," *National Review* (April 27, 1992). As *The Economist* noted, "In the 1960s and 1970s he was a hate-figure for the left, derided by many as wicked, loony, or both." By 1992, no one remembered such scurrilous attacks as Herman Finer's *The Road to Reaction* (1948). Milton Friedman, who was on the same University of Chicago faculty as Hayek and Finer, wrote that Hayek "unquestionably became the most important intellectual leader of the movement that has produced a major change in the climate of opinion." *National Review*, op. cit., p. 35.

58. Gary North, "The Sanctuary Society and Its Enemies," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 13 (Summer 1998), pp. 205–19. (<http://bit.ly/SanctuarySociety>)

59. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 2.

produced indeterminate economic effects, there would be no economic pressure on totalitarian regimes to tear down the boundary barriers. But justice does not produce indeterminate economic effects. Similarly, if the social world were what Meredith G. Kline insists that it is—a world in which God's visible sanctions in history are indeterminate for both covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking—then there could be no historical resolution of the competition between civil righteousness and civil perversity. This quasi-Manichean conclusion is the implicit and sometimes explicit assumption of amillennialism.⁶⁰ The leaven of justice in such a world would have no advantage over the leaven of injustice. But there is no neutrality in life; in a world of totally depraved men, such cultural neutrality could not be maintained for long. The leaven of evil would triumph. Yet it does not triumph, long term. Pharaonic tyrannies have all collapsed or become culturally impotent over the centuries. This fact testifies to mankind that God's sanctions in history are not indeterminate. Honesty really is the best policy, as Ben Franklin long ago insisted. In the competition between good and evil, the leaven of righteousness spreads as time goes on. Its visible results are so much better (Lev. 26:1–13; Deut. 28:1–14).

3. The Forces of Competition

The tremendous pressure of international economic competition cannot be withstood for long. It brought down Soviet Communism. Marxist tyrannies could not gain the economic fruits of righteousness without the moral roots.⁶¹ They could not permit a modern economy based on computers, data bases, FAX machines, and rationally allocated capital in their rigged, corrupt, fantasy world of central economic planning and fiat money.⁶² The reality of the Russian workers' saying under Communism could not be suppressed forever: "We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us." That inescapable reality led to a falling standard of living and the eventual collapse of European Communism.

The international free market has no universally enforceable standards of weights and measures, yet it operates more successfully

60. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 76–92; ch. 5.

61. Konstantin Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society: The Secret World of Soviet Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

62. On the truly fantastic nature of the Soviet economy, see Leopold Tyrmand, *The Rosa Luxemburg Contraceptives Cooperative: A Primer on Communist Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

than any other economic system in history. Private arbitration sometimes is invoked. Usually, national standards are closely observed by market participants. There are great and continuing debates over which standards should be adopted internationally, especially as international trade increases. But even without formal political resolutions to these debates, the international market continues to flourish. In the medieval world, there was an internationally recognized "law merchant," and it has been revived in modern times.⁶³

4. Gresham's Law

But what about Gresham's Law? "Bad money drives out good."⁶⁴ This is the pessimillennial view of history as applied to monetary theory. But Gresham's Law is misleading. It has an implied condition, but only people who understand economics recognize the unique nature of this condition. The law only applies when a civil government establishes and enforces a price control between two kinds of money. Then the artificially overvalued money remains in circulation, while the artificially undervalued money goes into hoards, into the black market, or is exported. Bad money drives out good money only when governments pass laws that attempt to override the free market's assessment of relative monetary values. This is not to say that there should not be civil laws against counterfeiting, but it does mean that counterfeiters must be very skilled to compete in a free market order.

The same is true of religion. Christians contend with cults, but cults are imitations of Christianity. Today, we see no fertility cults that self-consciously imitate the older Canaanite religions. Bacchanalia festivals are no longer with us, at least not in a self-consciously cultic form.⁶⁵ New Age advocates may seem numerous, especially in Hollywood and New York City, but there are very few openly New Age congregations of the faithful. Religious counterfeits must take on the characteristic features of Christianity in order to extend their influence

63. Benson, *Enterprise of Law*, pp. 30–35, 62, 224–27. See also Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), ch. 11. The Jews who dominate the international diamond trade make bargains without public contracts, and they never appeal to the state to settle disputes. These merchants have their own courts that settle disputes. It seems likely that they do not pay income taxes on every profitable trade.

64. "Bad money drives out good money," the law really states. Yet in a very real sense, the familiar formulation is correct: bad money does drive out good. It creates black markets, cheating, and many other evils.

65. Mardi Gras and Carnival are holdovers of chaos festivals.

beyond traditional borders. The rites of Christianity have many imitations around the globe, but the rites of Santeria do not.⁶⁶

A wise counterfeiter will not try to pass a bill that has a picture of Marilyn Monroe on it. Successful counterfeits in a competitive market must resemble the original. This is why there is, over time, a tendency for covenant-breakers to conform themselves to the external requirements of God's law until they cannot stand the contradiction in their lives any longer.⁶⁷ Then they rebel, and God imposes negative sanctions, either through His ordained covenant representatives or through the creation.⁶⁸

K. A Final Sovereign

The Bible identifies judges as covenantal agents of God. Unlike the free market, where consumers are sovereign, the state requires a voice of final earthly authority. This does not mean that one person or one institution has final authority. Biblically, no institution or person possesses such authority in history; only the Bible does. But there must be someone who announces "guilty" or "not guilty." Someone must impose the required sanctions. Civil sanctions are imposed by the state.

This means that legal standards must not fluctuate so widely that men cannot make reasonable predictions about the outcome of trials. If there is no predictability of the outcome, then there will be endless trials. Conflicting parties will not settle their disputes before they enter the courtroom. A society should encourage predictable outcomes; otherwise, individuals cannot be confident about receiving what the law says they deserve.⁶⁹ It is because the outcomes of trials are reasonably predictable that conflicts are settled before they come to trial.

Hayek's comments in this regard are extremely relevant. He announced a conclusion, one based on decades of study of both economic theory and legal history: "There is probably no single factor which

66. Bill Strube, "Possessed with Old Fervor: Santeria in Cuba," *The World & I* (Sept. 1993). This African-Cuban voodoo cult is closely associated with homosexuality. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

67. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

68. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

69. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison" (Matt. 5:25). Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

has contributed more to the prosperity of the West than the relative certainty of the law which has prevailed here. This is not altered by the fact that complete certainty of the law is an ideal which we must try to approach but which we can never perfectly attain." He then went on to make this observation, one that relies on the concept of the thing not seen: "But the degree of the certainty of the law must be judged by the disputes which do not lead to litigation because the outcome is practically certain as soon as the legal position is examined. It is the cases that never come before the courts, not those that do, that are the measure of the certainty of the law."⁷⁰ In other words, self-government is basic to all government, but predictable law, predictable enforcement, and predictable sanctions must reinforce self-government if a society is to remain productive. The clogged courts of the United States in the final third of the twentieth century were testimonies to the breakdown of the certainty of civil law, as well as to the effects of tax-financed law schools that had produced over 700,000 lawyers.⁷¹

1. Justice in Flux

There is little doubt that the proliferation of lawyers in the United States in the latter years of the twentieth century was a sign of a major breakdown of its moral and legal order. In 1990, there were 18 million civil cases in the United States: one case per 10 adult Americans. The United States in 1990 had some 730,000 lawyers—70% of the world's total. In 1990, Japan had 11 lawyers per 100,000 in population; the United Kingdom, 82; Germany, 111; the United States, 281. Japan had 115 scientists and engineers per lawyer; United Kingdom, 14.5; Germany, 9.1; United States, 4.8. Economic output per hour, 1973–90: Japan, 4.4%; United Kingdom, 3.3% Germany, 2.8%; United States, 2.3%.⁷² The idea that the state can provide perfect justice is a costly myth.⁷³

After 1870, throughout the West, the view of the state as an agency of compulsory salvation spread. It escalated rapidly after 1900, when Social Darwinism moved from its "dog-eat-dog" phase to its

70. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 208.

71. In the case of lawyers, Say's famous law holds true: production creates its own demand. The old story is illustrative: when only one lawyer lives in town, he has little work. When another lawyer arrives, they both have lots of work from then on.

72. "Punitive Damages," *National Review* (Nov. 4, 1991).

73. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

state-planned evolution phase.⁷⁴ Wheaton College economics professor P. J. Hill described the process: the decline of predictable law and the rise of the transfer society. “The idea of the transfer society is a society where property rights are up for grabs.” So many people start grabbing.

We’ve become a society in which the rules are in flux, thereby prodding people to spend a large amount of their time and resources trying to change the rules to their benefit. Our book⁷⁵ argues that in the beginning the Constitution was a set of rules for a few areas that pretty much encouraged the entrepreneurial type of person to go out and make better mousetraps, to create wealth. Somewhere around the 1870s the constitutional climate started changing dramatically, not by call amendment but by interpretation. The Constitution became interpreted in a more casual way. There was a rise in what we “reasonable regulations;” the Supreme Court said the state legislatures could pass any sort of regulations they wanted about economic affairs so long as they were “reasonable.”

That meant, of course, that people spent a lot of time trying to get regulations written to their advantage or to the disadvantage of their competitors, because there was no clear-cut standard. And today almost nothing in the economic arena is unconstitutional. . . .

Today, much of the economic game is in the political arena. It is played by getting rules on your side, or making sure that somebody else doesn’t get the rules on their side against you. The action is in Washington, D.C.

It’s interesting to look at the statistics of many large companies and see how much of their time goes into lobbying, where their business headquarters are, who the big players are, etc. It turns out that it’s just as important to try to make sure that the rules favor you as it is to produce better products. Any society in which the rules are not clearly defined, whatever they are, is at risk. You need a society of stable, legitimate and just rules in order to have people productively engaged.

I would put it this way: Theft is expensive. In a society where theft is prevalent people will put a lot of their efforts into protecting themselves—into locks and police guards, etc.

74. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

75. Peter J. Hill and Terry Anderson, *The Birth of a Transfer Society* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1989).

Government can prevent theft, but can also be an agency of theft. If this is the case, then people will look to government to use its coercive arm to take from other citizens. In such a world of "legal theft" people will devote resources to protecting themselves and to getting government on their side.⁷⁶

2. *Open Entry vs. Open Access*

Open entry to economic competitors on a free market is not the same thing as open access to political competitors in a civil government. The free market is not a covenantal institution possessing a lawful monopoly as an ordained representative of God. Civil government is. Allowing open access for office-seekers within a single governmental structure is not the same as allowing rival governmental structures within the same sphere of political authority. There has to be a hierarchy of authority, meaning a chain of command, in all three covenantal governments: church, family, and state. There is no such hierarchy in a free market. The consumer's decision is sovereign on a free market: to buy or not to buy. He is not comparably sovereign in a covenantal institution: to obey or not to obey apart from the threat of lawful sanctions. He is under external authority.

Civil government must enforce certain physical standards of measurement, if only for purposes of tax collection. The idea that a free market can provide profit-seeking courts as a complete substitute for the final earthly sovereignty of a civil court (assuming its widespread acceptance by family and church courts) is a myth of libertarianism. The essence of a free market system is that it does not and cannot make final declarations. Why? Because the essence of the free market is that anyone can step in at any time and announce a higher bid. The market, if it is truly free, cannot legally keep out those who offer higher bids.⁷⁷ Therefore, there can be no final, covenantally binding bid in a free market, since the market system allows no appeal to a superior, covenantally binding institution. If voluntary agreements are sub-

76. Hill, "The Transfer Society," pp. 1–2. See also Gary North, "The Politics of the Fair Share," *The Freeman* (Nov. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/FairSharePolitics>)

77. Biblically, if some offer is inherently immoral, price is irrelevant. Prostitution services aimed at married people can lawfully be suppressed by the state, but not in terms of price. No offer is allowed. There is no open entry, for there is no legal market. Any discussion of whether prostitution is lawful or unlawful between unmarried individuals must begin with the specific case law: "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21:9).

sequently broken, there must be an agent economically outside of the free market and judicially above the free market who can sovereignly enforce the terms of the agreement. The free market is open-ended because it offers open entry; open entry is the heart of a free market. The resolution of disputes requires the presence of a representative covenantal agent who can dispense justice in God's name. Disputes are usually resolved before they reach this final declaration, but only because of the presence of this agency of final declaration. This final court of appeal must be able to appeal to a higher court: God's. This means that it must declare God's law.

L. Victim's Rights and Restitution

The fundamental principle of biblical civil jurisprudence is victim's rights. The state is to act as the agent of injured parties. If the injured party is unwilling to prosecute, the state is not to prosecute.⁷⁸ Does this mean that the state may not prosecute the seller who is discovered cheating by means of false weights and measures? If not, why not?

There are criminal cases in which there is no identifiable victim. The classic example is the case of a driver who exceeds the speed limit and does not injure anyone, but who thereby imposes risks on other drivers and pedestrians. The state in this case is allowed to impose fines on the convicted speeder. The money should be used to provide restitution for those who are injured by a hit-and-run driver who cannot subsequently be located or convicted.⁷⁹

What about the seller who uses rigged scales? The state cannot prove when this practice began; it can only prove when the practice was discovered. It probably cannot identify who was defrauded. This means that many of the victims cannot sue for damages. Should the seller not suffer negative sanctions?

One possible way to resolve this dilemma is for the state to require the seller to provide discounts for a period of time to all of his past customers. The discount would be determined by the degree of scale-tampering: double restitution. If the scales were 10% off, then he must offer 20% discounts. To make sure he does not simply raise his retail prices before he starts offering the discounts, the state would fix his retail prices as of the day the infraction was discovered. Any customer who could show a receipt from the store would have access to the dis-

78. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix M.

79. *Ibid.*, chaps. 37:D, 41:C.

counts.

Because of modern packaging and mass production, not many stores would come under this threat. The butcher in the meat section of a supermarket would be one seller whose scales would be basic to the business. But, on the whole, modern technology transfers responsibility back to the companies that sell the packaged products to retail outlets. How, then, could the law be enforced on them? To require them to offer a discount to a retailer does not benefit the consumer; it provides a profit to the retailer. One way would be for those who have receipts for a product to be able to buy that firm's products for a period at a discount. The firm would then be forced to reimburse the retailer for the difference. This is a sales technique used by manufacturers in gaining market share in supermarkets: discount coupons. It could be imposed by the state as a penalty.

This would reward those consumers who save their receipts. If this procedure is too complicated for the victims to be fairly compensated, because of the nature of the product—a "small-ticket item"—then the firm could be required to offer discounts across the board to all future buyers of that specific product for a period of time. The firm would also be required to identify on the packaging of that product an admission of guilt, so that the discounts would not be regarded as an advertising strategy. Finally, the discount reimbursements to retailers would not be tax-deductible as a business expense to the seller.

M. Evangelical Antinomianism and Humanism's Myth of Neutrality

For a scale to operate, it must have fixed standards. If it is a balance scale like the one the famous lady of justice holds, it must have fixed weights in one of its two trays. There is no escape from the covenantal concept of judicial weights. This is the issue of ethical and judicial standards: point three of the biblical covenant model. Mosaic law stated that within the boundaries of Israel, honest (predictable) weights were mandatory. It did not matter whether the buyer was rich or poor, circumcised or not circumcised: the same weights had to be used by the seller. Israel was to become a sanctuary for strangers seeking justice. The symbol of this justice was the honest scale.

Which judicial standards were mandatory? The Bible is clear: God's revealed law. National Israel was not some neutral sanctuary in which rationally perceived natural law categories were enforced. That

unique sanctuary was where biblical law was enforced. Those seeking sanctuary in Israel had to conform to biblical civil law. The metaphorical weights in the tray of civil justice's scale were the Mosaic statutes and case laws.

1. Antinomianism

Because the modern Christian evangelical world is self-consciously and defiantly antinomian—"We're under grace, not law!"—Christians emphatically deny the New Covenant legitimacy of the concept of biblically revealed laws. They assume that men can develop universal, religiously non-specific moral standards in the same way that the world has developed universal physical weights and measurements. They prefer to ignore what the Bible reveals about covenant-breakers: those who hate God love death (Prov. 8:36b). The closer that covenant-breakers get to the doctrine of God, the more perverse they are in rejecting the testimony of the Bible. They interpret God, man, law, sanctions, and time differently from what the Bible specifies as the standard. They affirm rival covenantal standards.

A holy commonwealth would establish the law of God as the civil standard, but modern evangelical Christians hate the revealed law of God above every other system of law. First, they affirm as the binding standard the myth of neutrality: religiously neutral natural law. Second, they affirm their willingness to submit themselves to any system of law except biblical law. They announce: "A Christian can live peacefully under any legal or political system," with only one exception: biblical law. Modern Christians see themselves as perpetual strangers in the perpetual unholy commonwealths of covenant-breaking man. They deny that liberty can be attained under God's Bible-revealed law. God's revealed law, they insist, is the essence of tyranny. They seek liberty through religious neutrality: the rule of anti-Christian civil law. They seek, at most, "equal time for Jesus" in the satanic kingdoms of this world. They forget: the "equal time" doctrine is the lie that Satan's servants use while dwelling in holy commonwealths. When Satan's disciples gain civil power, they adopt a new rule: "As little time for Jesus as the tate can impose through force."

2. Geisler's Norm

Norman Geisler, a fundamentalist philosopher with a Ph.D. issued by a Roman Catholic university, and a devout follower of Thomas

Aquinas,⁸⁰ insisted that all civil law must be religiously neutral. We must legislate morality, he said, but not religion. This means that civil morality can be religiously neutral. "The cry to return to our Christian roots is seriously misguided if it means that government should favor Christian teachings. . . . First, to establish such a Bible-based civil government would be a violation of the First Amendment. Even mandating the Ten Commandments would favor certain religions. . . . Furthermore, the reinstitution of the Old Testament legal system is contrary to New Testament teaching. Paul says clearly that Christians 'are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14). . . . The Bible may be informative, but it is not normative for civil law."⁸¹ The suggestion by those whom he calls "the biblionomists" [biblionomy: Bible law] that God's law still applies today is, in Geisler's words, a "chilling legalism."⁸²

We need legal reform, he insisted. "What kind of laws should be used to accomplish this: Christian laws or Humanistic laws? Neither. Rather, they should simply be just laws. Laws should not be either Christian or anti-Christian; they should be merely fair ones."⁸³ There is supposedly a realm of neutral civil law in between God and humanism: the realm of "fairness." This means that Mosaic civil law was never fair. Those who believe that the Mosaic civil law was unfair refuse to say explicitly that this is what they believe. It sounds ethically rebellious against the unchanging God of the Bible, which it in fact is. Nevertheless, this rebellious outlook was universal within Protestantism in the twentieth century; it had been since at least the late seventeenth century.

This theory of neutral civil law denies Christ's words concerning the impossibility of neutrality: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).⁸⁴ "He that is not with me is against me; and he that

80. Aquinas, he said in 1988, "was the most brilliant, most comprehensive, and most systematic of all Christian thinkers and perhaps all thinkers of all time." Angela Elwell Hunt, "Norm Geisler: The World Is His Classroom," *Fundamentalist Journal* (Sept. 1988), p. 21. This magazine was published by Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty University. Geisler was at the time a professor there. The magazine has ceased publication. Geisler resigned from the school in 1991.

81. Norman L. Geisler, "Should We Legislate Morality?" *ibid.* (July/Aug. 1988), p. 17.

82. *Idem.*

83. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

84. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 14.

gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30). The neutralists insist that Christ’s denial of neutrality does not apply to the civil covenant. Geisler wrote: “God ordained Divine Law for the church, but He gave Natural Law for civil government.”⁸⁵ They insist, as Geisler insists, that true civil justice can be obtained only by removing all visible traces of Christianity from civil government. This is not humanism, he insists; this is merely neutral civil justice.

But there is no neutrality. There has never been a neutral kingdom of civil law, and there never will be. Facing the reality of this historical fact, this question inevitably arises: Which is worse, secular humanism or God’s law? When push comes to shove, Geisler identified the greater evil: biblical law. “Thoughtful reflection reveals that this ‘cure’ of reconstructionism is worse than the disease of secularism.”⁸⁶ Christians supposedly must content themselves with living as strangers in a strange land until Jesus personally returns in power. A question for premillennialists: Will Jesus enforce the Mosaic law or a system of neutral natural law during His premillennial kingdom? Premillennial defenders of natural law theory refuse to address this question in print. If they answer “Mosaic law,” they have admitted that it is intrinsically morally superior to natural law. If they answer “natural law,” they sever the God who declared the Mosaic law from that law. They prefer to remain silent.

The Christian antinomians’ view of civil law has implications for their doctrine of eschatology. This is why virtually all amillennialists and premillennialists defend natural law theory and political pluralism, while attacking theonomy. They see themselves as God’s people as losers in church history.⁸⁷ The most they hope for is a cultural stalemate.⁸⁸ They prefer to live meekly and impotently inside cultural ghettos rather than fight a cultural war in the name of Christ.⁸⁹ They do not believe they can win; therefore, they deny the basis of fighting in such a war, namely, a uniquely biblical judicial alternative to human-

85. Geisler, p. 17.

86. Norman L. Geisler, “Human Life,” in William Bentley Ball (ed.), *In Search of a National Morality* (Baker Book House [conservative Protestant] and Ignatius Press [conservative Roman Catholic], 1992), p. 115.

87. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, chaps. 7–9.

88. Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1984] 1988), ch. 11. (<http://bit.ly/gnsoldiers>)

89. Gary North, “Ghetto Eschatologies,” *Biblical Economics Today*, XIV (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

istic law. They deny the legitimacy of Bible-revealed judicial standards that would make possible an explicitly Christian social order during the era of the church. Their antinomian social ethics is a corollary to their pessimistic view of the church's future. God has granted them their desire: they live at the mercy of their enemies, who control the various social orders of our day. But the walls of their ghettos have holes in them: public schools, television, movies, rock music, the internet, and all the rest of humanism's lures.

Unlike the Israelites in Egypt who cried out to God for deliverance (Ex. 3:7), today's Christians prefer life in Egypt to life in the Promised Land. God cursed the exodus generation: death in the wilderness. But He did not allow them to return to Egyptian bondage. Today's Christians may grumble about certain peripheral aspects of their bondage, but they do not yet seek deliverance from their primary bonds, most notably their enthusiastic acceptance of religious and political pluralism, natural law theory, and the first-stage humanist promise of "equal time for the ethics of Jesus." They hate the very thought of their responsibility before God to establish covenanted national sanctuaries.

Conclusion

"Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity" (Job 31:6). The imagery of the balance scale is basic to understanding each person's relation to God, either as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. Weights and measures are also representative biblically of the degree of civil justice available in a society. If those who own the measuring instruments of commerce tamper with them in order to defraud consumers, either specific groups of consumers—especially resident aliens—or consumers in general, they have sinned against God. They have stolen. If the civil government does not prosecute such thieves, then the society is corrupt. The continued existence of false weights and measures testifies against the whole society.

There are limits to our perception; there are limits to the accuracy of scales. This applies both to physical measurement and civil justice. Society cannot attain perfect justice. There must always be an appeal to the judge's intuition in judicial conflicts where contested public acts were not clearly inside or outside the law. This does not mean that there are limits to God's perception and God's justice. Thus, there will be a day of perfect reckoning. Over time, covenantally faithful individuals and institutions approach as a limit, but never reach, the per-

fect justice of that final judgment. This process brings God's positive sanctions to covenant-keeping individuals and institutions, making them more responsible by making them more powerful. Progressive sanctification, both personal and corporate, necessarily involves an increase in God's blessings and also personal responsibility.

The state is required by God to enforce His standards. The free market social order—a development that has its origins in the twin doctrines of personal responsibility and self-government—requires civil government as a legitimate court of appeal. But the bulk of law enforcement has to be individual: “Every man his own policeman.” No other concept of law enforcement will suffice if a society is not to become a society of informants and secret police. Secondarily, law enforcement must be associative: market competition. Buyers and sellers determine the degree of acceptable fluctuation around agreed-upon standards. Only in the third level is law enforcement to become civil. Here, the standards are to be much more precise, much more rigid, and much more predictable. Representative cases—legal precedents—are to become guidelines for self-government and voluntary associative government.

INHERITANCE BY FIRE

Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones. And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name. And if the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not: Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off, and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people (Lev. 20:2–5).

The theocentric principle governing this statute is God's jealousy against all rival gods. More specifically, God in the Old Covenant era held the office of "Father of the sons of Israel." The nation of Israel was His son (Ex. 4:23), adopted by His grace. So, God as Father demanded that the sons of Israel acknowledge this fact ritually by circumcising their sons.

A. Fatherhood and Sonship

The practice of sending children through a ritual fire was a denial of God's fatherhood and therefore also Israel's sonship. This two-fold ritual denial called forth the threat of disinheritance by God. The required means of this disinheritance was public execution by stoning, a penalty that outrages modern Christians, who regard it (and, by implication, the God who required it) as barbaric. The penalty was not execution by fire—or, for that matter, by drinking hemlock.

Godly inheritance in history is always by fire. This fire is covenantal: placing God's people in trials and tribulations—historical sanctions—in order to purge them of their sins (Isa. 1:25–26). The imagery

is that of metal-working (Isa. 1:22a). One pagan version of this imagery of metal-working was alchemy.¹ Another was the practice of passing children through a fire.

The sanction of execution makes it clear that this was a civil law. As a civil law, it applied to all those residing within the jurisdiction of the state. It applied equally to covenanted Israelites and “strangers that sojourn in Israel” (v. 2). If the civil magistrate refused to prosecute, or if the civil judges refused to convict, or if the capital sanction was not imposed, God threatened the practitioner with excommunication: cutting off (v. 5). Since this would be God’s act rather than the priests’ act, the implication is that God would intervene directly to kill him.

Here is another seed law, or so the language indicates: “any of his seed.” This seed law applied to a parent’s dedication of a son or daughter to a specific foreign god, Molech.² First, the seed laws were part of the laws governing inheritance and disinheritance. Second, as a seed law, it was part of the laws governing the land. These land laws were necessary because of the presence of God’s temple within the land. The temple had to be protected from defilement. Third, this statute was part of the laws prohibiting blasphemy: prohibiting the profanation of God’s holy name. The judicial boundary around God’s name was as important as the physical boundaries around the temple and its environs. This boundary extends into the New Covenant, unlike the land-based boundaries of the Mosaic Covenant.

B. The Nature of the Prohibited Rite

Molech was the god of Ammon, the incest-conceived, bastard cousin of Israel (Gen. 19:38). “Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon” (I Kings 11:7). His name came from the Hebrew word for king, Melek. This deity was also known as Milcom and Milcham. He was a fire god, essentially the same as the Moabites’ deity, Chemosh (I Kings 11:5; cf. v. 7).³ Stephen referred to Molech as a god worshipped by the Israelites

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1956] 1971).

2. Kronos (Greece), Saturn (Rome): John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, “Human Sacrifice” (1863), *Essays in Religion, Politics, and Morality*, in *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1988), III, p. 405.

3. “Molech,” in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, eds. John M’Clintock and James Strong, 12 vols. (New York: Harper Bros., 1894), IV, p.

in the wilderness: "Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Molech, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon" (Acts 7:42–43). Molech was a major rival god in the history of Israel.

Molech required a specific form of dedication: passing children through a fire. "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:21). Israel ignored this law, among many others, and God cited this in His covenant lawsuit against Jerusalem. Jerusalem would pass through the Chaldeans' fire: fire for fire (Jer. 32:29, 35). This indicates that God's negative sanctions against this crime were not limited to the family that practiced it. As with all ritual abominations, if the civil authorities allowed the practice to continue unopposed, God would bring His corporate sanctions against the nation as a whole. But it was this ritual abomination that was identified by God through Jeremiah as the representative evil in the land. Their crimes were comprehensive: "Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Jer. 32:32). Their worship of Molech was representative: "And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin" (Jer. 32:35).

Molech required the shedding of innocent blood. The Israelites worshipped Molech as he required: "Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood" (Ps. 106: 37–38). "Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through

the fire for them?” (Ezek.16:20–21). “That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them” (Ezek. 23:37). “Moreover he [King Ahaz] burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel” (II Chron. 28:3). This was not an occasional practice in Israel; it became a way of life through death.

This law raises at least five questions. First, exactly what did “giving one’s seed to Molech” involve? Was it a formal dedication service comparable to circumcision? Second, why did the ritual offering of a child defile the sanctuary of God? Why was this a uniquely profane act? Third, why was this forbidden to resident aliens? The specified negative sanction, death by stoning, if ignored by the judges, would be followed by God’s intervention against that family and all those who joined with that family. The law here says nothing about a threat to the Israelite community at large. Why, then, should resident aliens be prohibited from performing such a rite? Fourth, was this law a law governing false worship in general, or was it confined to Molech worship only? Fifth, does it still apply in New Covenant times? Was it a cross-boundary law? Let us consider each of these questions in greater detail, one by one.

I. Rites of Dedication

There is no question that some sort of cultic rite was involved in this crime. It was a formal, covenantal transgression of the first commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). The legal question is: Did this act become a crime only when committed outside of a household? No; it was a crime for an Israelite no matter where it took place. False worship within an Israelite household was a capital crime in Mosaic Israel.

If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him;

neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you (Deut. 13:6–11).

1. Proselytizing

This law against intra-family proselytizing did not apply to resident aliens, who were assumed by the law to worship in private the gods of their families or their nations. Proselytizing was not a crime within a household that had not formally covenanted to Jehovah. This anti-proselytizing law applied only to Israel's citizens and those eligible to become citizens.⁴ It was understood that anyone who was not formally covenanted through circumcision was probably not a worshipper of Jehovah. The resident alien was not allowed to seek converts to his god in Israel, but he was also not expected to enforce the worship of Jehovah within his own household.

A Israelite father might decide to allow such idolatrous proselytizing, but the state was required by God to step in and prosecute. The father's authority in his household had limits; it was not absolute. The family member who was subjected to the lure of false worship by another family member deserved protection. The terms of God's covenant had to be enforced. If they were not, the state stepped in to protect the victim or victims. The law governing false worship within an Israelite family reveals an important principle of the Mosaic law: the state was superior to the head of an Israelite household when it came to protecting the members of his family from the lure of false worship. In matters of correct worship, the citizen of Israel was under the protection of the State in Israel. The resident alien was not. What went on ritually inside the home of an Israelite was a matter of civil law. This was not true of the resident alien's home, unless the ritual threatened the life of the child. In short, an Israelite's home may have been his castle; it was not his private sanctuary.

4. This includes families that would not be eligible until the tenth generation (Deut. 23:2–3).

2. False Worship Generally

The law governing family worship was a defining law: it represented all false worship by those formally covenanted to God. This can be seen in the application of another law governing false worship:

If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, And hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded; And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you (Deut. 17:2–7).

The phrase, “hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven,” indicates that the transgressor was an Israelite. The stranger within the gate was assumed to be a worshipper of false gods within his own household. He did not go to serve them; he came serving them. What was explicitly forbidden was the breaking of God’s covenant through false worship by an Israelite.

3. The Theology of Circumcision

In all worship, man must make a sacrifice. In biblical worship, the sacrifice is total: the whole of one’s life. “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5).⁵ This comprehensive sacrifice is personal, not insti-

5. Any commitment other than the commitment to God is the demand of a false religion. This is why Communism was a messianic false religion. It was a school of darkness, to cite the title of ex-Communist Bella V. Dodd’s 1954 autobiography. It demanded the whole of their lives, to cite the title of ex-Communist Benjamin Gitlow’s 1948 autobiography. It was ultimately the God that failed, to cite the title of Richard Crossman’s 1949 collection of autobiographies by ex-Communists.

tutional. Ritual sacrifices are limited by God's law.⁶ The demand for total sacrifice is based on fear. Men must fear this God: "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. 10: 12). Men must also obey Him: "Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway" (Deut. 11:1).

How is the mandatory fear of God connected to this law? Because obedience brings descendants: "In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deut. 30:16). The covenantal blessings of God extend to the thousandth generation: "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9). Here was the spiritual meaning of covenantal rite of circumcision: "And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:6).

As a sign of the parents' obedience to God, they marred their male heirs physically. The mark of circumcision was placed on the male heir's organ of reproduction. It was a symbol of covenantal death: anti-generation. Circumcision announced ritually that there can be no legitimate covenantal hope in the future based on mere physical generation.⁷ What is needed is spiritual regeneration: the circumcision of the

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, [1990] 2012), ch. 56. See Exodus 25:3–8; 36:5–7.

7. The Greeks and Romans placed their personal hope for their future beyond death in the maintenance of family rituals down through time. The eldest son was the priest of these family rituals. He had to administer them properly in order to sustain peace for his departed ancestors. The family was therefore central to religious life in the classical world. Private family law existed prior to the city and its laws. This is why fathers had the legal authority to kill their sons. See Numa Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book I, chaps. IV, VIII. Fustel wrote: "For when these ancient generations began to picture a future life to themselves, they had not dreamed of rewards and punishments; they imagined that the happiness of the dead depended not upon the life led in this state of existence, but upon the way in which their descendants treated them. Every father, therefore, expected of his posterity that series of funeral repasts which was to assure to his manes [sur-

heart. The organ of generation was physically cut as a testimony to the need for the heart to be cut by God Himself:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer. 31:31–33).

Just as God had written the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, so would He write His law in the hearts of His people. This is the meaning of the circumcision of the heart. Such circumcision is intended to produce obedience.

4. The Theology of Testing by Fire

Molech's required ritual was a perverse imitation of Jehovah's. Instead of physically marring the organ of generation as a symbol of physical death but also covenantal life, the child was actually passed through a literal fire. The child who survived this ordeal was therefore assumed to be blessed covenantally by Molech. He had passed the deadly initiation rite by means of supernatural intervention. This ritual was covenantal, but rather than being ethical in its focus, it was magical. Its mark of supernatural power was the survival of the child.⁸ If the child died, the parents had to regard this as the god's required sacrifice. Thus, the idea of covenantal inheritance in Molech worship was magical rather than ethical. Molech religion was the archetype of power religion.

In both dominion religion and power religion, the seed is central to the rites of initiation. The seed represents the future. The seed is the means of expansion. If there is no growth, there can be no expansion. If the seed does not grow, or does not reproduce itself, the covenantal

viving spirit] repose and happiness" (I:3; p. 49).

8. In modern times, the peculiar practice of fire-walking has again become a popular initiatory rite, this time among business executives. Certain management training programs end with the participants' walking over hot coals as a sign of their confidence in themselves and their new-found ability to manage other people through techniques of power. The fire-walkers never attempt to walk on sheet metal placed on top of the hot coals; metal is a very efficient heat transmitter.

future is cut off. In biblical religion, children are seen as children of God ethically. He who obeys God's law is the true son of God. In power religion, children are seen as children of god ritually. He who observes the details of the rites is the true son of the god. Such a view is antithetical to biblical religion:

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:6–8).

To remove the child from the covenantal authority of Molech-worshipping parents, the state was required by God to execute the parents. A child who survived this rite of fire would become an orphan when the mandatory civil sanction attached to this law was applied by the civil magistrate. God's law made it clear: better to become an orphan and live under the authority of covenantally faithful foster parents than to live under the authority of Molech-worshipping parents. The family's inheritance was immediately transferred to the child or children (if there were older siblings) for this sin by the parents. This transfer was a positive side-effect of this statute; it was not a specified goal of the law. This means that the covenantal authority of the parents was never absolute in the Mosaic economy. The parents were to be disinherited by execution because of their false theology of inheritance, ritually manifested in strange fire. The Israelite family was not autonomous. The father's authority was bounded.

II. Strange Fire: Defiling the Sanctuary

A murder in Israel defiled the land, which is why God required certain rites of purification in cases where the murderer could not be located (Deut. 21:1–9). But a murder committed outside God's sanctuary did not defile the sanctuary. The question arises: Why did this ritual offering of a child defile God's sanctuary? The act took place away from the sanctuary. Why was this a uniquely profane act?

There are at least two reasons. First, because this form of ritual murder, or potential ritual murder, involved the use of a fiery altar, meaning a rival to God's altar. Second, because it was an assault on the

Seed, meaning the prophesied future Messiah.

1. The Altar

From Adam's transgression onward, sin threatened mankind's survival. The very survival of Adam in history testified to God's grace to Adam, and it also testified to a future sacrifice that would atone for what Adam had done. Without such lawful sacrifice, there is only death for the transgressor.

The altar is an instrument of sacrifice. Men bring their sacrifices to the altar. It need not be an animal sacrifice. Jesus warned: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23–24).⁹

The worshipper offers something to God that he does not expect to get back. This act of forfeiture is a testimony that God is sovereign. The worshipper may expect some sort of return in the future, but not the actual item he brings to the altar. He acts in faith: the God of the altar is sovereign and will reward him, in time and/or eternity, or will not bring negative sanctions against him.

On God's Old Covenant altars was fire. This fire was a consuming fire. It testified to God's sanctions. A slain animal sacrificed to God on that fire became a substitute for the giver. The man who offered this sacrifice acknowledged that he deserved such fire. God's fire is ethical: it is deserved because of the individual's transgression of covenant law. If there is no substitutionary sacrifice, the transgressing individual faces God's fire. To survive, the individual must bring a sacrifice.

The fire on the temple's altar was to be perpetual, i.e., as perpetual as the Mosaic Covenant itself: "The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out" (Lev. 6:13). Day and night, God's flame was to burn. Day and night, God offers men a way to burn away their sins ritually. The perpetual nature of the flame pointed to the permanence of both God's grace and His final negative sanctions. Those who refuse to submit to God in history become in death the sentient sacrifices on God's perpetual altar: "For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt" (Mark 9:49). The judicial alternatives are clear: either sacrifice lawfully in history or be lawfully sacrificed in

9. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

eternity. Put more bluntly: roast or be roasted. When Israel rebelled for the last time, God brought the Roman army as His agent of judgment, which set fire to the temple.¹⁰ This ended the Old Covenant order forever. (This is why Judaism, which was developed by the Pharisees after the destruction of the temple,¹¹ is not and never was the religion of the Old Covenant.¹²)

The law warned the priests: "They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy" (Lev. 21:6). When the sons of Aaron deviated from the prescribed ritual, God set them on fire (Lev. 9:24–10:3). There could be no deviation from the required procedure without God's express permission. The reason for this was not magical. It was not the procedure that was sacrosanct. Holiness was sacrosanct: God's and the priest's. God had placed a series of boundaries around His presence in the holy of holies because to be in His presence required that the sacrifice-offerer be holy. To offer sacrifices in any way different from what

10. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

11. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "The Sadducees and Pharisees" (1913); reprinted in Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1951); J. H. Hertz, "Foreword," *The Babylonian Talmud*, Seder Nezikin (London: Soncino Press, 1935), p. xiv. The standard Jewish work on the Pharisees is Rabbi Louis Finkelstein's study, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962).

12. This was openly acknowledged by Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner, the author of 43 volumes of commentaries on the Mishnah, the Pharisees' post-temple text regarded as sacred by Orthodox Jews. Neusner wrote: "While the world at large treats Judaism as 'the religion of the Old Testament,' the fact is otherwise. Judaism inherits and makes the Hebrew Scriptures its own, just as does Christianity. But just as Christianity rereads the entire heritage of ancient Israel in light of 'the resurrection of Jesus Christ,' so Judaism understands the Hebrew Scriptures as only one part, the written one, of 'the one whole Torah of Moses, our rabbi.' Ancient Israel no more testified to the oral Torah, now written down in the Mishnah and later rabbinic writings, than it did to Jesus as the Christ. In both cases, religious circles within Israel of later antiquity reread the entire past in light of their own conscience and convictions. Accordingly, while the framers of Judaism as we know it received as divinely revealed ancient Israel's literary heritage, they picked and chose as they wished whatever would serve the purposes of the larger system they undertook to build. Since the Judaism at hand first reached literary expression in the Mishnah, a document in which Scripture plays a subordinate role, the founders of that Judaism clearly made no pretense at tying up to scriptural proof texts or at expressing in the form of scriptural commentary the main ideas they wished to set out. Accordingly, Judaism only asymmetrically rests upon the foundations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and Judaism is not alone or mainly 'the religion of the Old Testament.'" Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xi.

God required was an assertion of man's autonomy. It was a public denial of both the absolute sovereignty of God and the absolute holiness of God.

The fire of the altar was a means of both purification and destruction. Fire was representative of the final judgment. A living being was not allowed on the altar. The sacrificial animals had to be slain away from the altar before they were placed on the altar. Biblical worship is always representative. Redeemed man does not die for his own sins; someone else must die for his sins. Biblical worship in the Old Covenant era made it clear that the sacrifice is representative: the altar's fire consumed that which was already dead. This is the spiritual condition of fallen man as he approaches the altar: living death. To place a living thing on the altar is an illegitimate sacrifice. It testifies to a different condition of man. Only one living sacrifice ever possessed true life: Jesus Christ. His perfect sacrifice was legitimate for the symbolic altar of the cross, for only He did not approach the altar as a spiritually dead man.

The offer of one's child to any god was an act of moral rebellion. To make a child pass through a literal fire as a rite of initiation was the non-priest's equivalent of offering strange fire: an unauthorized sacrifice. Thus, it was a profane act.¹³ It violated God's judicial boundary around His name. It violated the exclusiveness of God's sanctuary by establishing a rival sanctuary within the land. This was the worst possible boundary violation for any non-priest under the Mosaic Covenant. (The worst for the priest was offering strange fire on the altar.) God threatened to intervene directly with His fire in response. The non-priest had no access to the temple's altar; thus, he offered his sacrifices with strange fire away from the temple. The civil penalty was death by stoning.

2. Cutting Off the Future

The second reason why this crime was so perverse an act was that it placed the future of the seed in the hands of demonic forces. The child would either die in the flames or be initiated into the service of a false god. This was a perverse imitation of the biblical covenantal process of inheritance/disinheritance: point five of the biblical covenant

13. Acts are profane: sacred boundary violations. Things or places can be profaned by profane acts; they are never inherently profane. Only sacramental places can be profaned. Common places cannot be profaned. See Chapter 6.

model.¹⁴ Those who would inherit were those who had been protected from the flames by occult forces: a protective boundary.

If the death penalty had been confined to Israelites, this seed law could be subsumed under the laws governing the coming of the promised seed. But this law prohibited resident aliens from participating in Molech's initiatory rites. Why? First, because of the degree of violation of God's sanctuary. Second, because human life was protected in Israel. Third, because of the possibility of adoption. Through adoption, a resident alien could become part of the covenant line, as both Rahab and Ruth did (Matt. 1:5). This offer to the resident alien of full participation through adoption into the three institutional covenants—ecclesiastical, familial, and civil—was unique to Israel in the ancient Near East. This was a sign of God's grace. The lives of alien children had to be preserved for the sake of the opportunity of conversion and adoption.

Residents from Ammon and Moab had the most rigorous restriction placed on this participation: 10 generations (Deut. 23:3). Technically, this was probably because of their origins: born of incestuous unions between Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:37–38). The bastard could not enter the congregation (i.e., attain citizenship) until the tenth generation (Deut. 23:2). But another reason for the prohibition may have been that Molech and Chemosh were the gods, respectively, of Ammon and Moab. This fire god was the great rival to God and His altar. The resident alien from Ammon or Moab was more unwelcome in Israel than any other nationality, and the mark of this alienation was the mandatory waiting period of nine generations. To break covenant with Molech and Chemosh took nine consecutive generations, plus a formal break, presumably no younger than age 20 (Ex. 30:14), of the tenth-generation heir.

III. Resident Aliens and Biblical Pluralism

This law specified that a stranger in the land was to be executed by the citizens of Israel if he was caught performing a specific rite of Molech worship: giving his seed to Molech. The reason why strangers were under this law is stated clearly in the statute: such an act defiles God's sanctuary and profanes His holy name. No one inside the boundaries of Israel was allowed to do this. But God regarded house-

14. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

hold false worship by resident aliens as peripheral to the national covenant. Only when the stranger ritually threatened the survival of his own child did he defile God's sanctuary. The judicial foundation of the rights of resident aliens—their immunity from state sanctions—was the possibility that they or their children might covenant with God. Justice in Israel was a major form of evangelism, both inside and outside the land (Deut. 4:4–8).¹⁵ Allowing aliens to see God's law in action was a way to persuade them of the righteousness of God. Israel's system of civil justice was unique in the ancient world: a single legal order for all residents.¹⁶

Today, we call such a judicial system pluralistic, but biblical pluralism has limits. All pluralism has limits. Pluralism can never be unbounded; someone's religious principles or practices will always be threatened by one or another aspect of any society's legal order. The resident of Israel could not lawfully claim religious freedom as authorization for exposing his children to the risk of death, even though his god required such a rite. The ideal of biblical pluralism extended to the resident alien the right to worship family gods in peace within the boundaries of their homes, but it did not authorize heads of households the right of literally sacrificing their children. The seal of a household's religion could not lawfully be death or the risk of death. The household in Israel was a limited sanctuary: a place set aside, protected judicially from outside interference from the state. There was a boundary on state power. But passing a child through Molech's fire was regarded by God as strange fire: a transgression of His sanctuary's monopoly. There was no right—no legal immunity from the sanctions of civil government—for anyone to light a strange fire in Israel: a ritual fire that literally invoked death as a means of sanctioning a covenant.

IV. The Limits of Biblical Pluralism

The state was required to intervene and execute any Israelite who could be proven to have attempted to lure one of his family members into a rival covenant (Deut. 13:6–11). “And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (v. 10). The general crime was false worship, but

15. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

16. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

the specific reason given was God's deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt. This clearly had nothing to do with resident aliens. False household worship was not generally a crime for resident aliens, who were not expected to adopt true religion.

Specifically, false worship was a crime if they participated in a ritual offering of a child to Molech. Even if the child survived the ordeal, the parent or parents were to be executed. The crime was not murder or attempted murder; it was the profanation of God's boundary: the altar of sacrifice. The attempted sacrifice of a child on such an altar was a capital crime. It was this crime that God specified through Jeremiah as the crime of Israel and Judah, leading to their captivity in Babylon. This was the abomination that God would not tolerate when His covenant people did tolerate it (Jer. 32:35).

1. Negative Sanctions

The modern Christian defender of religious pluralism would recommend civil sanctions against such a practice on some legal basis other than the profanation of God's sanctuary. If the child died, the law of murder can be invoked. If the child survived, the law of attempted murder can be invoked. But in no Western society is the penalty for attempted murder execution.¹⁷ This creates a problem for the Christian pluralist. If he defends the imposition of a civil sanction in cases where the child survives, he cannot do so explicitly on the basis of biblical law. In any case, he cannot do so explicitly on the basis of this law.

A defender of biblical law could argue that this law is annulled under the New Covenant because the seed laws have been annulled. Or he could argue that the unique status of God's temple sanctuary ended when the land lost its status as judicially holy at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But there remains this problem: the holiness of God's name. The justification for this law was not merely that this Molech initiation rite defiled God's sanctuary; it also profaned His holy name (Lev. 20:3). Nothing in the New Covenant has removed the boundary of holiness from God's name. The question is: How serious is God in the New

17. As a high-handed sin, it should be a capital crime, if the prosecution can prove that the accused did attempt it. But because the victim is still alive, he has the right to declare mercy or demand a lesser penalty, such as the payment of a fine. The reason why murder is always a capital crime is that the victim is not alive, and hence cannot extend mercy to the criminal. The state must impose the maximum penalty. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pp. 306, 308.

Covenant about defending His name? This leads to another question: Is the defense of God's name legitimately part of a Christian civil government's code? Finally, what would be a New Testament justification for God's lack of interest in defending His name?

2. The First Table of the Law

There are Christian pluralists who deny that the so-called First Table of the Law is to be enforced by the civil government in the New Covenant era.¹⁸ If taken literally, this assertion would include the law to honor parents: the fifth commandment (part of the so-called First Table). Children could not be compelled by the civil government to care for their aged and infirm parents. This conclusion has been taken seriously by defenders of the modern welfare state. In the United States, compulsory, tax-financed Social Security and Medicare payments have replaced children as the sources of mandatory support of the elderly. Children in my era have welcomed this economic and judicial release from personal responsibility, despite the ever-increasing tax burden involved.¹⁹ But I have never seen any Christian social theorist proclaim the legitimacy of compulsory Social Security as a complete substitute for the responsibility of children. I conclude that what Christian pluralists probably mean by their denial of civil sanctions to enforce the First Table is this: the first four commandments of the Decalogue are no longer legitimately enforceable by the state. The term "First Table of the Law" is shorthand for "the first four commandments" (or first three for Lutherans).

For a Christian to argue this position—the negation of civil sanctions for commandments one through four—he must appeal to natural law and natural revelation, meaning revelation neither secured by nor interpreted by God's Bible-revealed law. Bahnsen challenged this interpretation of natural revelation:

... natural revelation includes the moral obligations contained in the first table of the decalogue (our duty toward God), just as much as it contains those of the second table. Paul taught that natural revelation condemned the pagan world for failing to glorify God properly and for idolatrously worshiping and serving the creature instead (Rom. 1:21, 23, 25). . . . The fact is that all of the Mosaic laws (in their moral

18. For a refutation, see Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 202–5. (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

19. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 25.

demands) are reflected in general revelation; to put it another way, the moral obligations communicated through both means of divine communication are identical (Rom. 1:18–21, 25, 32; 2:14–15; 3:9, 19–20, 23). Scripture never suggests that God has two sets of ethical standards or two moral codes, the one (for Gentiles) being an abridgement of the other (for Jews). Rather, He has one set of commandments which are communicated to men in two ways: through Scripture and through nature (Ps. 19; cf. vv. 2–3 with 8–9).²⁰

The two forms of God's revelation, special (written) and general (natural), are not in conflict with each other. When the Bible specifies a penalty, this is not in conflict with natural revelation. Written revelation makes clear today what was originally clear in natural revelation. This lack of clarity in natural revelation today is the product of two factors: the noetic effects of man's rebellion and the physical effects of God's curse on nature. Written revelation is superior to natural revelation because it is clearer and more precise. The biblical principle of textual interpretation is this: the clear passage is to interpret the less clear. This is also the biblical principle of judicial interpretation. Written revelation is authoritative.

The theonomist insists that the Bible's revelation is authoritative over general revelation. The Christian pluralist insists that general revelation, as interpreted by the covenant-breaker, is authoritative over special revelation. There is no way to reconcile these rival principles of interpretation. Unlike general and special revelation, these two hermeneutic approaches are mutually exclusive.

3. Christian Pluralism's Hermeneutic

Hermeneutics is an inescapable concept. Everyone must have a principle of interpretation. The Christian pluralist insists, implicitly if not explicitly, that whatever is more generally believed or understood possesses authority over that which is less universally believed or understood. That is to say, the Christian pluralist is a defender of the methodology of democracy in hermeneutics as well as politics. The Christian pluralist, siding with covenant-breakers, who in my era vastly outnumber covenant-keepers, refuses to acknowledge that natural revelation conveys the moral principles of the first five commandments of the Decalogue. He argues instead that these commandments are unclear in, or even absent from, natural revelation. Thus, he con-

20. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, p. 206.

cludes, special revelation is less universal than general revelation, and hence subordinate and secondary to general revelation. The Christian pluralist regards the Bible's judicial principles of interpretation as subordinate to the judicial interpretations of covenant-breaking natural men. For purposes of public relations within the Christian community, he does not state his position in this way, but this is his position nonetheless.

The Christian pluralist is inescapably an ethical dualist. He believes in the existence of two sets of valid moral standards, as well as two sets of valid civil laws. He says that the biblical set of laws was valid only for the nation of Israel during the Mosaic economy, while natural law is valid for every other society and every other time period. He always favors the adoption of the covenant-breaker's interpretation of the supposedly religiously neutral, "natural" civil law-order. Whatever the covenant-breaker claims to have intuited from natural revelation is what the Christian pluralist says the content of natural revelation must be: natural revelation as seen with covenant-breaking eyes. The pluralist refuses to allow Spirit-renewed Christians to use the Bible to modify the judicial content of natural revelation as understood by pagans; only other pagans are allowed to make these modifications. Aristotle is allowed to challenge Plato's communism, but Moses is not.²¹ Aristotle's word carries weight for the Christian pluralist; the Mosaic law does not. In short, natural revelation regarding the so-called First Table of the Law is understood by the Christian pluralist as having been provided by God in order to enable the New Testament-era covenant-breaker to move the covenant-keeper away from the Bible in matters judicial.²²

21. I have noticed that whenever scholars discuss the communism of the Socratic dialogues, Plato gets the blame. Western scholars prefer not to consider the possibility that the "divine Socrates" was a communist. But it matters little whether we begin with Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle; we wind up with statism: salvation through political participation. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>). On the tyrannical implications of both Platonic philosophy and Aristotelian philosophy—culminating in Hegelianism—see Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols., 4th ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963).

22. Fundamentalist Christians who see the threat in the area of geology and biology, or even psychology, nevertheless give away the case when it comes to civil law. They reject Darwin and Freud, but they accept John Locke and James Madison. In this, they agree with Leonard Levy, who begins his book *Blasphemy* with a citation from Madison. Levy, *Blasphemy: Verbal Offense Against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. ix. The same citation appears on page xii of his earlier book, *Treason Against God: A History of the Offense of Blasphemy* (New York:

4. Blasphemy

This law is part of the laws against blasphemy. But there is no operational concept of biblical blasphemy in the worldview of the Christian pluralist. The distinguished historian of law, Leonard W. Levy, has titled his study of the history of blasphemy laws in the West, *Treason Against God*. This is exactly what blasphemy is. As Rushdoony wrote in his discussion of the Moloch State: "Because for Biblical law the foundation is the one true God, the central offense is therefore treason to that God by idolatry. Every law-order has its concept of treason. No law-order can permit an attack on its foundations without committing suicide. Those states which claim to abolish the death penalty still retain it on the whole for crimes against the state. The foundations of a law-order must be protected."²³

The Christian pluralist is embarrassed by these biblical concepts of civil law and blasphemy. There can be no public treason against the God of the Bible in the theoretical world of the Christian pluralist, for treason implies the necessity of negative civil sanctions, and the pluralist denies the legitimacy of such sanctions in questions of religion. The Christian pluralist allows the protection of God's name only as a by-product of civil laws that protect the names of all other gods: religion in general. This definition of blasphemy is inherently humanistic: public protection for every man's concept of god. The most dangerous form of blasphemy in the mind of the Christian pluralist is biblical theocracy: the denial of the public sovereignty of any God other than the biblical God. There are as many gods to be politically protected as men choose to defend, the pluralist insists.

Consider the argument against public blasphemy presented by Christian pluralist Gordon Spykman: "I would not allow public blasphemy because it offends other people."²⁴ That blasphemy offends God is politically irrelevant to such an outlook; its offense in Spykman's view is that it offends other people. This places fallen man at the center of judicial analysis. Harold O. J. Brown echoed Spykman: "Public blasphemy as well as false swearing should also be punishable by law. It would be logical to accord protection from insults to all religious

Schocken, 1981).

23. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 38.

24. Spykman, "Questions and Answers," in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), p. 274.

groups, forbidding the mockery of things that people hold sacred.”²⁵ Then what would Brown say about Elijah’s comments at Mt. Carmel concerning the god of the court priests? “And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked” (I Kings 18:26–27). Could Elijah legitimately have been arrested by King Ahab at that point for having committed a verbal assault on the religious sensibilities of the priests? Was Elijah a blasphemer? Was he deserving of death? By whose standard?

What of Elijah’s subsequent actions? “And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there” (I Kings 18:40). Was Elijah the organizer of a mob? A conspirator in mass murder? A revolutionary? At the very least, was he an ecologically insensitive polluter? By whose standard?

What of King Josiah? “And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left” (II Kings 22:2). He was the most faithful king in Israel’s history. “And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him” (II Kings 23:25). What did he do? “And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men’s bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem” (II Kings 23:19–20).²⁶ Another polluter, this time of air!

Elijah, the great prophet of direct confrontation, and Josiah, the most faithful king, provide serious problems for Christian pluralists, who need a biblical principle of judicial discontinuity to defend their

25. Harold O. J. Brown, “The Christian America Position,” *ibid.*, p. 141.

26. Also worth noting: “And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove” (II Kings 23:7).

pluralism. Pluralists assume what they need to prove, namely, a biblical basis of this judicial discontinuity. Their failure to provide a biblically derived justification for this presumed judicial discontinuity has led them to redefine blasphemy in such a way that Elijah and Josiah have become blasphemers in retrospect. They have failed to understand that a common-ground definition of blasphemy—"a public assault on any god"—has placed them in the camp of the Roman emperors, who had a similar view of the sacrosanct position of the politically correct gods of the Roman pantheon. Their problem should be obvious: blasphemy is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of "blasphemy vs. no blasphemy." It is always a question of "blasphemy against which god?"

The text is clear: offering one's child to the fire god Molech was a capital crime. The justification for the law is equally clear: to uphold the sanctity of God's sanctuary and His name. Here was a crime: subjecting a child to an initiatory rite that was life-threatening. By participating in a system of inheritance and disinheritance that relied upon demonic powers to determine the survivors of the ordeal, the covenant-breaker committed a boundary violation so heinous that God required his execution by public stoning. The resident alien was subject to this law. In short, the God of Mosaic Israel was not a pluralist. This is why the Mosaic law is a profound embarrassment for the Christian pluralist.

V. Is This Law Still in Force?

What principle of interpretation would lead us to conclude that this law is not still in force? The Bible-affirming expositor who claims that there is a total judicial discontinuity between the two covenants with respect to this law needs to identify the biblical basis of this alleged discontinuity.

The covenantal principle of inheritance teaches that the heirs of covenant-keepers will inherit the earth progressively over time. "His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 25: 13). This is clearly one aspect of the seed laws, which were all fulfilled in Christ. Covenant-breakers are progressively disinherited. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9). The practice of Molech initiation reverses this principle of inheritance: infanticide, either physical or covenantal. It is therefore an abomination before God.

To the extent that the initiatory practice relies on demonic intervention to protect the child, this ritual will kill off more and more children as the demonic realm becomes weaker. When demons can protect no child from the fire, the participants will disinherit themselves. Presumably, this will reduce the number of participants over time. Also, the death of a child would subject the parent(s) and any cooperating priests to the civil law against murder. So, we would not expect to find large numbers of participants in such a religion. But the question still remains: What is the valid civil sanction against a participant whose child survives intact? If the rite really did threaten the survival of the child, what is the appropriate civil sanction?

Biblically, the answer is obvious: public execution by stoning. How much clearer could God's law be? But God's word is not taken seriously in this matter. Its very clarity constitutes an embarrassment for those who call themselves Christians. They would much prefer a bit of vagueness. Despite these preferences, the profaning of God's holy name is still the judicial issue: a special profaning far worse than mere verbal profanity. The issue is blasphemy and its appropriate civil sanction.

C. Citizenship and Separation

Then what of religious toleration? This raises the question of the existence of civil laws that are in no way religiously intolerant—religiously neutral laws. Such laws are not even conceptually possible, let alone practical. But if this is the case, then what happens to the concept of citizenship?

Citizenship is inherently covenantal.²⁷ The citizen acknowledges the legitimacy of a sovereign, subordinates himself to the agents of that sovereign, agrees to obey the laws of that sovereign, swears allegiance to that sovereign, and inherits in terms of that sovereign. The Israelites were told by God that the Canaanites could not lawfully occupy the land even as resident aliens. There could be no lawful toleration of Canaanites within the land, for this would have meant toleration of the previous regional gods of the land. Only aliens from outside the land were to be allowed to dwell in the land. They could not become citizens except by becoming Israelites: through circumcision.

27. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 12.

1. *The Gods of the Land*

This was a prohibition against Canaanitic gods, not the gods of immigrants. Why the distinction? Because of pagan theology in the ancient world. Except in Israel, a god in the ancient world was regarded either as a household god or the god of a particular nation.²⁸ There was always a danger that the Israelites would succumb to this false theology; thus, the gods of Canaan were to be destroyed, along with their representatives (once). Immigrants' gods were clearly regarded by their adherents as household gods, not gods of the land. Immigrants had left their respective homelands. They had to view their idols as possessing power only within the boundaries of the household. Immigrants were welcome in Israel, but the price of immigration was the forfeiture of the right to proselytize among the Israelites. The household gods of immigrants could not lawfully leave their households. They could not become public gods in Israel. That is, they could not lawfully take on the status of national gods. There was to be no public polytheism in Israel, political or otherwise.

2. *The God Who Imposes Boundaries*

Rushdoony's discussion of laws of separation is correct: "God identifies Himself as the God who separates His people from other peoples: this is a basic part of salvation. The religious and moral separation of the believer is thus a basic aspect of Biblical law."²⁹ Separation can be achieved in several ways, however. First, the believer can join other believers in a religious ghetto. This ghetto can be geographical, as in the case of certain Amish and Mennonite sects. It can be cultural, as in the case of much of modern fundamentalism and immigrant religious groups. It is always psychological, what Rushdoony has called the permanent remnant psychology.³⁰ Second, the believer can seek the physical removal of unbelievers from the community, either through exe-

28. We can see this false theology of local divinities in the disastrous analysis of Ben-hadad's advisors: "And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they" (I Kings 20:23). "And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD" (I Kings 20:28).

29. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 294.

30. R. J. Rushdoony, *Van Til* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), p.

cution or expulsion. This physical removal of covenant-breakers was God's required method with respect to the Canaanites.

The problem here is honoring the biblical judicial concept of "the stranger within the gates": preserving liberty of conscience without opening the social order to a new law-order, which means a new god. The radical Anabaptists in Münster in 1533–35 and the Puritans in New England, 1630–65,³¹ made the mistake of exiling residents for their failure to adhere to the community's religious and ecclesiastical confession. This practice denied the biblical legal status of the resident alien. Third, separation can be achieved covenantally: the removal of unbelievers from citizenship. This is what the New Testament mandates for covenant-keeping nations.

D. Intolerance: An Inescapable Concept

Political pluralism suggests a fourth path: ecclesiastical separation, partial cultural and intellectual separation,³² and civil cooperation. This requires a concept of a legitimate civil law-order that is formally independent from the revealed civil law-order in the Bible. Political pluralism requires the adoption of some version of natural law theory, either explicitly or implicitly.³³ This is a form of philosophical dualism: one law for God's covenant people as isolated (segregated) from the general culture, and another system of civil law for the judicially integrated community.

1. Rushdoony on Pluralism

Rushdoony in 1973 denied the biblical legitimacy of pluralism's de-

31. A 1662 letter from Charles II to Massachusetts established liberty of conscience. It was not read in the Massachusetts General Court until 1665. In that year, the General Court repealed all laws that limited the vote to Congregational church members. The Court determined that citizens in the colony henceforth did have to be "orthodox in religion" and "not vicious in conversation," but they could be "of different persuasions concerning church government. . . ." Cited in Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966), p. 135.

32. Though not much: consider, for example, that virtually all American neo-evangelical colleges and seminaries willingly subordinate themselves to humanistic accreditation associations, humanistic professional associations, and so forth. There is no question who is in charge and who is subordinate in these relationships. On the lack of separation, see James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

33. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

fense of toleration; a decade later, he reversed his position.³⁴ He wrote in the *Institutes*: “Segregation or separation is thus a basic principle to religion and morality. Every attempt to destroy this principle is an effort to reduce society to its lowest common denominator. Toleration is the excuse under which this levelling is undertaken, but the concept of toleration conceals a radical intolerance. In the name of toleration, the believer is asked to associate on a common level of total acceptance with the atheist, the pervert, the criminal, and the adherents of other religions as though no differences existed.”³⁵

His statement is accurate, but it misses the main point. It is not separation with respect to private associations that is central to biblical covenantalism; rather, it is the segregation of the franchise. The non-Christian wants access to the franchise, i.e., to citizenship: the authority to participate in the defining and enforcing of civil law through the application of sanctions. Once he gains this, he moves to the state enforcement of integration of private associations. Having gained for himself legal toleration in the sharing of citizenship, he moves on to compulsory integration. He makes toleration mandatory: the denial of others’ right to separate themselves from the humanist agenda. In short, there is no neutrality. The ideal of universal tolerance is a myth; it is always a question of whose views get tolerated, whose do not, and on what terms.

There can and must be mutual toleration in history, God has announced, but the rival definitions of what constitutes toleration are irreconcilable. Toleration always means: “Toleration of my system’s definition of toleration.” Rival definitions of sovereignty cannot be reconciled. God’s Bible-revealed law establishes that covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers cannot lawfully join in a covenantal civil bond;

34. *Ibid.*, Appendix B: “Rushdoony on the Constitution.” It is worth noting that Rushdoony after 1973 progressively emphasized his view of the continuing New Testament authority of the Mosaic dietary laws, which was the same period in which he progressively abandoned his earlier views on the original, orthodox American ecclesiastical tradition as theocratic, anti-revivalist, anti-pluralist, and anti-independency. On the shift, 1964–1979, in his views on the American ecclesiastical tradition, see Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), p. 80n. (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>). A separate diet, rather than participation in the Lord’s Supper, became the basis of his personal segregation, not only from pagan culture but also from local church membership. In 1992, he declared the Chalcedon Foundation a church and began celebrating communion after a lapse of over 20 years.

35. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 294.

at best, they can honor a temporary cease-fire.³⁶ This is why those who defend Christian political pluralism invariably reject the continuing authority of biblical civil law.

Covenant-breakers eventually refuse to submit to God and His kingdom in history. This is why Satan's representatives rebel against God's people at the end of history (Rev. 20:7–9). Covenant-breakers cannot abide by the legitimate rule of covenant-keepers and the Bible's definition of civil toleration: the judicial concept of strangers within the gates. Biblical toleration is based on the necessity of biblical covenantal separation. Covenant-breakers must be separated from the civil franchise.

2. Intolerant Humanists

Biblical covenantal separation is not tolerated by covenant-breakers, who correctly perceive that God is going to separate them from the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth. They will receive the eternal second death in lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15). This ultimate separation is an affront to them. Separation in eternity is based judicially on the rival theological content of men's faiths and their public confessions in history. Saving faith divides men from each other in history because it divides men from God in history and eternity. Saving faith is therefore an affront to covenant-breakers, who deeply resent the Christian doctrine of separation based on God's ethical terms and by His eternal sanctions.

The nineteenth-century atheist, Ludwig Feuerbach, clearly understood this Christian doctrine of mankind's separation by God's covenant, and he assailed it. This doctrine, for the humanist, is the unforgivable sin: the Christian denies that man is God, and as a direct result of this blasphemy against man, the Christian begins to make distinctions between those who believe in God and those who do not. Feuerbach wrote: "To believe, is synonymous with goodness; not to believe, with wickedness. Faith, narrow and prejudiced refers all unbelief to the moral disposition. In its view the unbeliever is an enemy to Christ out of obduracy, out of wickedness. Hence faith has fellowship with believers only; unbelievers it rejects. It is well-disposed towards believers, but ill-disposed towards unbelievers. In faith there lies a malignant

36. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

principle.”³⁷ Frederick Engels reported over four decades later that with this book, Feuerbach converted an entire generation of Hegelians to materialism, he and Karl Marx included.³⁸

3. *Biblical Tolerance*

Toleration is biblically mandatory, but our definition of toleration must be biblical. There is no neutrality in language; Christians’ definitions must be based on the Bible, not on some hypothetically neutral language. The Bible is intolerant of covenant-breakers’ definitions disguised as supposedly neutral definitions. A Christian civil order should tolerate non-Christians in the same way that Israel was required to tolerate resident aliens: strangers in the gates. In response, non-Christians are required by God to show toleration to Christians, who progressively extend their rule over non-Christians until judgment day. That is, covenant-breakers are required by God to remain tolerant of the kingdom (civilization) of God in history.

Furthermore, if covenant-breakers remain merely tolerant, God will send them into His eternal torture chamber forever. God does not tolerate them beyond the grave. They must remain content in history to be non-citizens, living under the civil sanctions of the holy commonwealth. For the sake of receiving the positive sanctions of a godly civil order, they are required by God to tolerate their subordinate position as strangers in God’s land. If covenant-breakers remain tolerant of God’s kingdom in history as it extends its rule over them in every area of life,³⁹ His people are supposed to remain tolerant of them. Christians will progressively rule in history; non-Christians must progressively obey God’s civil laws. This is the only toleration that God establishes for His kingdom. But this statement is an affront to every rival religion, as well as to Christian pluralists. They much prefer rule by secular humanists.

37. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1841] 1957), p. 252.

38. Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), III, p. 344.

39. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

Conclusion

The law prohibiting the dedication of children to Molech through initiation was a seed law. It was a law that governed inheritance and disinheritance, for it dealt with a pagan rite governing inheritance and disinheritance. Because of the presence of the temple sanctuary in the holy land of Israel, this law was also a land law. It was required to restrain the creation of alternative centers of worship: specifically, it prohibited strange fire. Strange fire defiled the sanctuary, even at a distance. Next, this law reduced the likelihood of the profanation of God's name. It was therefore a blasphemy law. Finally, because the child's life was placed at risk, it was a law against attempted murder. As a seed law and a land law, it is no longer judicially binding in New Covenant times. As a law against blasphemy, it is still judicially binding. But if the law is still binding, so is the biblically specified sanction: death by stoning.⁴⁰ The blasphemy aspect of the law takes precedence over at-

40. God's mandated method of execution—public stoning by the witnesses whose words condemned the criminal—is regarded as perverse even by those few Christians who still defend the legitimacy of the death penalty. They do not believe that God requires the trial's hostile witnesses to cast the first stones. But He does: "The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you" (Deut. 17:7). Like twentieth-century humanists, Christians today regard God's mandated sanctions as barbaric; in this case, public execution by citizens. Why is this regarded as barbaric? The critics do not say. They do not think that have to say. "Everyone can see that such a thing is barbaric!" And so is God.

This law, if enforced, would place enormous responsibility into citizens' hands, both literally and figuratively. Christians today want to avoid such a fearful responsibility. They want the execution performed by some faceless bureaucrat behind closed doors, which is what God's law prohibits. Christians do not want the witnesses—those whose public words condemned the person to death—to suffer the psychological pressure of having to enforce their own words of condemnation. The witnesses' public judicial words are not to be enforced by their public judicial sanctions. Their words killed the person judicially, but the work of their hands is not supposed to kill the person biologically. The witnesses must not be burdened by the enormous emotional pressure of having to act out in public the judicial implications of their words. Word and deed are to be kept radically separate. The dirty work is to be done by a hireling, a professional executioner paid by the state.

God's law identifies the witnesses as God's agents, as well as the victim's agents. They are His agents both in their capacity as bringers of a lawsuit and as public executioners. They are to deliver the condemned person into God's heavenly court. In contrast, modern jurisprudence sees the witnesses as agents solely of the state. Then the state hires its own sanctions-bringer to execute judgment. The state consolidates its power by relieving the citizenry of their responsibilities. Not all of these responsibilities are economic.

Once the citizen is relieved of his judicial responsibility to cast stones against criminals, he can then take the next step: confiscate his weapons. Step by step, hu-

tempted murder. God is the intended victim of blasphemy: treason against God. The victim of attempted murder can refuse to press charges. He can specify a lesser penalty than God's law allows. Not so with blasphemy. The mandatory penalty is clear.

The sanctions attached to this law were sufficiently severe to reduce the likelihood of its widespread practice, if the law was enforced. It was not enforced, so God delivered the nation into the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. It is worth noting that the negative sanction that was imposed by the pagan Nebuchadnezzar on the three youths who refused to obey his blasphemous law was a fiery furnace.

Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? (Dan. 3:15).

The result was the opposite of what the king expected: the youths survived inside the fire, but their escorts perished when they drew near to the fire: "Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego" (Dan. 3:22). The king, seeing this, repented:

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the province of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it

manism's civil authority lodges at the top of the hierarchy. First, stoning by witnesses is eliminated. This removes the mark of judicial sovereignty from the citizen-witness: God's mandated sanctions-bringer. Second, God is eliminated by removing self-maledictory oaths under God by the witnesses. This makes the state the new god: defender of the oath. Third, gun control laws are legislated: the visible monopolization of sovereignty in the state. The state is no longer confessionally in between God and the oath-bound citizen. It is over the citizen and under no one.

good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation (Dan. 3:28–4:3).

Christian pluralists have yet to advance theologically as far as Nebuchadnezzar did. He saw who had inherited by fire, and then drew the proper conclusion: men should not defy the God of Israel. Christian pluralists do not believe that God's predictable historical sanctions are still in force. Therefore, they do not believe that the Bible's mandated civil sanctions are still in force. In short, they do not believe in inheritance through covenantal fire. The result of the triumph of Christian pluralism in religious thought and in the political theory of the West after 1700 has been the progressive disinheritance of Christians.⁴¹

41. North, *Political Polytheism*, Part 3.

21

INHERITANCE THROUGH SEPARATION

Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out. And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine (Lev. 20:22–26).

The theocentric foundation of this law was God’s act of covenantal separation: “I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people” (v. 24b). The Creator God has separated His people from all other people. This separation is not only historical; it is eternal. It is above all covenantal. It has ethical and judicial implications. The fundamental issue is holiness: the set-apartness of God and also of His people. This law was one of these implications of holiness. Some of these implications are still in force judicially; others are not. It is the task of the expositor to sort out—separate—these implications in terms of the biblical principle of holiness.¹

A. A Separate Land for a Separate Nation

This law recapitulates the warning in Leviticus 18:28: if they commit the evil acts that the Canaanites committed in the land, the land

1. Rival principles of interpretation have divided me from Rushdoony at this point: the interpretation of the dietary laws.

will vomit them out. They were required to obey God's revealed law. I have argued that this threatened negative sanction was an aspect of the land laws of Israel, confined geographically to the Promised Land, and annulled in A.D. 70 with the final annulment of the Old Covenant.² The office of "covenantal vomiter" has been taken by the resurrected Christ (Rev. 3:16). The land no longer acts as a covenantal mediator between God and man, either in Palestine or elsewhere. It does not provide covenantally predictable sanctions in the New Covenant era. But the Promised Land did do this under the Mosaic Covenant.

1. National Boundaries

In this passage, we find four basic themes of the Book of Leviticus: obedience to God's revealed law, covenantal separation, national holiness, and the inheritance of the land. Actually, the third theme, national holiness, is another way of expressing the first two themes. God compares the religious boundary around the people of Israel with the geographical boundary around the land itself. The continuing covenantal separation of the nation of Israel could be secured only by obedience to God's law, not by a strictly military defense of the nation's geographical boundaries. Secure geographical boundaries for Israel would be the product of covenantal faithfulness, not military strength as such.

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God (Ps. 20:7).

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! (Isa. 31:1).

The Promised Land's geographical boundary had formerly surrounded the nation—singular—that had occupied the land. The Canaanite nations are spoken of here in the singular, as a single culture: "ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation." According to the definition in Strong's Concordance, the Hebrew word translated here as "nation," commonly transliterated as *goy* (more accurately, *go'ee*), is apparently derived from the same root as the Hebrew word for massing: "a foreign nation; hence a Gentile; also (fig.) a troop of animals, or a flight of locusts: Gentile, heathen, nation, people." It is the most

2. Chapter 10.

commonly used Hebrew word for “nation” in the Old Testament.

2. Removing the Evil Stewards

For four generations, the Canaanites had been serving as stewards of the land in preparation for the conquest of the land by Israel. The land had been promised to the heirs of Abraham: “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). This inheritance was historically assured. Meanwhile, the Canaanites built houses, tilled fields, and planted orchards. This was useful labor for themselves and their heirs, but it was ultimately a process of building up an inheritance for the Israelites. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22). The great-grandchildren of the Canaanites of Abraham’s day lost their inheritance to the Israelites. But in the meantime, the Canaanites had acted as God’s dominion agents, subduing the beasts of the field. It was better that covenant-breakers maintain authority over the animals than that the animals of the land roam free. God had made this promise to the Israelites in the wilderness:

And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little **I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased**, and inherit the land. And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. **Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me:** for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee (Ex. 23:28–33).

In Leviticus 20:22–26, we find the same two themes: Israel’s inheritance of the land and their absolute covenantal separation from the existing inhabitants of the land.

B. Sustaining Grace

The Promised Land was already a land flowing with milk and honey when the Israelites arrived. This material wealth had been set aside by God in Abraham’s day as His gift to Abraham’s heirs. The

land contained raw materials of great value: original capital. “For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass” (Deut. 8:7–9).³

Furthermore, it contained secondary capital: marketable wealth, which was the product of other men’s thrift and vision over several generations. “And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full” (Deut. 6:10–11). This combined capital value—land plus labor—could be maintained intact long-term only by obeying God:

Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth (Deut. 6:12–15).

So, the capitalized value of the land was part of God’s promise to Abraham. It was therefore not earned by the Israelites. It was an unmerited gift: the biblical definition of grace.⁴ But, once delivered into the hands of Abraham’s heirs, possession of the land could be maintained only by national covenantal faithfulness, as manifested by the Israelites’ outward obedience to God’s statutes. Public obedience to the Mosaic law was to remain the mandatory manifestation of their service to Him and fear of Him.

The familiar Christian hymn, “Trust and Obey,” expresses the ethical nature of covenantal inheritance: “for there’s no other way” to maintain this inheritance. (This hymn is sung enthusiastically by Prot-

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 19, 20.

4. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), p. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>). By unmerited, I mean unmerited by the recipient. It was merited by Jesus Christ.

estants whose churches officially deny its theology of sanctification.) Abraham was told to trust God. This meant trusting God's promises. His heirs were also to trust these promises. The outward manifestation of this trust was circumcision. Without this outward act of obedience, the Israelite ceased to be an Israelite, and therefore he removed himself and his heirs from the promised inheritance. So, the inheritance of the land was a pure gift from God, but to remain the beneficiary of this unmerited legacy, the recipients of the promise had to obey the terms of the covenant. It was not that their obedience was the legal foundation of the promise. The promise of God was its own legal foundation. But obedience was the legal basis of their remaining in the will of God, in both senses: the moral will and the testamentary will. A refusal to place the mark of the covenant—a symbolic boundary—on the flesh of all one's male heirs was an act of self-disinheritance. Excommunication became mandatory: a cutting off from the people, i.e., a kind of judicial circumcision of the nation. Covenant-keepers who broke this commandment were to be treated as foreskins.⁵

The primacy of God's redemption does not nullify the mandatory nature of man's secondary response: obedience. After all, we do not sing, "Trust and Disobey," despite the fact that antinomian theologies implicitly affirm the theological legitimacy of such a view of the promises of God. God's promise initiates; man's obedience reciprocates. Both are equally aspects of grace. As Paul wrote: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10).⁶ The redeemed person's lifetime of positive ethical responses is as completely foreordained as his initial regeneration is, and therefore equally a gift from God. This was (and remains) true of national covenantal redemption and response. Redemption is primary; obedience is secondary; both are aspects of grace.

C. The Dietary Laws

The prohibition against eating certain foods was part of the land laws of Israel. This passage makes it clear that the reason why God im-

5. Saul's demand that David provide a bride price for Michal of a hundred Philistines' foreskins points to this judicial meaning of the foreskin (1 Sam. 18:25).

6 It is worth noting that twentieth-century American fundamentalists have committed Ephesians 2:8–9 to memory, but rarely if ever mention verse 10.

posed the food laws was to preserve the nation's separation. "Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean" (v. 25). These animals had not been prohibited before God led them out of Egypt. The distinction between clean and unclean had been present in Noah's day (Gen. 7:2, 8), but no prohibition against eating unclean beasts was announced at that time. In this sense, the clean-unclean distinction was prophetic for Noah. The distinction was established so that Noah would take seven times as many pairs of clean beasts into the ark (Gen. 7:2). The distinction had significance for the future of Israel—the increased likelihood of the survival of clean beasts—but not for Noah's day. Otherwise, the detailed food laws of Leviticus would have been given to Noah. But they weren't. "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things" (Gen. 9:3).⁷ Abraham was under no dietary restrictions; God's promise of the land did not involve dietary separation. Joseph was under no dietary restrictions in Egypt. Clearly, the dietary laws were not cross-boundary laws.

A society's diet separates it from other societies almost as completely as its language does. It is very difficult for overweight people to lose weight permanently because of people's almost unbreakable eating habits. To change a society's eating habits takes generations, even assuming extensive contact with foreigners (which Israel did experience because of her open borders). Immigrants, or the children of immigrants, slowly adopt the foods of their host nation. The Mosaic dietary laws forced a major cultural break with the home nation for all those who became circumcised resident aliens in Israel.

1. Covenantal Separation or Biological Health?

Covenantal separation inside the Promised Land was the goal of these laws, not dietary health as such. What about outside the Promised Land? The young Israelites in the court of Nebuchadnezzar re-

7. Given his insistence of the authority of the Mosaic food laws in the New Testament, Rushdoony should have commented on Genesis 9:3 in *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973). There is only one reference to this verse, in the middle of a block quotation from another author (p. 36). The verse is not even cited in the Scripture Texts index in volume 2, *Law and Society* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1982).

fused to eat any food prepared by the Babylonians except vegetables and water. These self-imposed restrictions had not been mandated by the dietary laws of Leviticus. It was the king's choice food and wine that they refused to eat, not unclean or abominable animals. Wine had not been prohibited to them by the Mosaic law, but they refused to drink the king's wine (Dan. 1:8). Despite their diet of vegetables and water—no fat—the four Israelite youths looked fatter at the end of 10 days than those Babylonian youths who had been eating from the king's menu (Dan. 1:15). This was nothing short of miraculous. That, of course, was the whole point: a visible demonstration of the sovereignty of God in the lives of the four youths. The prescribed food of the supposedly divine king of Babylon produced a less healthy appearance in his servants than the uncharacteristically restricted diet produced in the four judicial representatives of Israel.

There are vegetarian cultists today who point to this incident as proof of the superiority of vegetarianism. This is a misapplication of the text. What the Hebrew youths and their captors all knew was that the diet decreed by the king was superior fare by conventional Babylonian and Mosaic standards, yet it produced visibly inferior results. The fundamental issues in this unique case were separation (holiness) and the sovereignty of God, not the comparative caloric or nutritional content of the rival diets. The four youths demonstrated publicly that their God, not their diet, was the source of their physiological advantage.

The events of the next chapter in Daniel escalated the competition between rival covenants: the comparative ability of the representatives of each covenant to interpret dreams. In chapter three, the competition between covenants escalated again: the incident of the fiery furnace. Covenantal separation was the basis of their physical preservation: this was the lesson of both incidents involving the young men. The Babylonian king's ultimate negative sanction could not overcome God's deliverance of His representatives. For a while, at least, the king honored this covenantal reality. In chapter four, he relates his final confrontation with God—a unique chapter in the Bible, written in Aramaic by an uncircumcised author.

Why didn't the four youths insist on a conventional Levitical diet? Had the issue been comparative nutrition, this would have been the public test of the two diets. But they did not request such a test. They simply wanted their rulers to see that a minimal diet—not a uniquely Levitical diet—would produce visibly superior results in the lives of covenant-keeping people. Insisting on a Levitical diet would have been

an act of religious and political rebellion: the preservation of a defeated nation's diet. That was not their point. It was not that the Israelites possessed a uniquely healthy diet that had to be preserved outside the land; rather, it was the preservation of their covenantal commitment to the God of Israel, whose sovereignty extended beyond the land. While the young men did not request food that was prohibited by Leviticus, they also did not request the blessings—"fat"—of the Levitical diet: the best of the land. This should warn us: the Levitical dietary laws were laws furthering covenantal separation inside the Promised Land, not universal laws of health. To misunderstand this is to misunderstand covenant theology. To deny this is to deny covenant theology and replace it with "taste not–touch not" religion (Col. 2:20–23).

If the captive Israelites were required to honor the Mosaic dietary laws outside the Promised Land, how did Esther conceal her identity from her husband and Haman? Or was she in rebellion? Did God deliver His people from their enemies by means of a woman who openly defied God's law? Or is there a theologically simpler answer, namely, that the Israelites lawfully ignored the dietary law's requirements when they were in captivity outside the land, i.e., under the God-ordained authority of a rival civilization?

2. A Temporarily Marked-Off Nation

The dietary laws were imposed by God before the nation came into the Promised Land, but after the Israelites had left Egypt. These laws were given early in the wilderness experience. Throughout the 40 years, the people ate mostly manna. They were forced to refrain from newly prohibited foods, whatever their dietary tastes had been in Egypt. Therefore, these food laws were preparatory for the invasion. Manna, coupled with the food laws, forced the younger generation to grow up completely unfamiliar with the taste of covenantally prohibited animals. The manna ceased when they entered the land. After they conquered the land, they would have no eating habits to overcome, and therefore no gastronomical temptation to mix with any of the remaining tribes of Canaan.

These laws marked off the Israelites gastronomically, just as circumcision marked them off physiologically. The Levitical dietary laws were no more permanent than the Passover law—and no less permanent. In captivity, they could not journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the mandatory feasts. Abraham had been instructed to circumcise those

males under his household authority, but he received no instruction regarding his diet. Why not? Because he did not dwell in the land of Canaan as a permanent owner. He was still a stranger in a strange land. He was a pilgrim. A pilgrim has no geographical headquarters, no geographical home. Abraham's earthly home was eschatological. God told him that his family's inheritance of the land would not take place until the fourth generation after him (Gen. 15: 16). So, he did have to honor the law of circumcision, for circumcision identified who his heirs were: a law of covenantal separation. The Israelites in Joshua's day crossed the Jordan, camped at Gilgal, were circumcised, and celebrated the Passover in the land (Josh. 5:2–10). Then they ate the corn of the land: the spoils of conquest (v. 11). They thereby also claimed their inheritance. They thereby claimed their national headquarters. "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year" (v. 12). At that point, they had the option of violating the dietary laws that Moses had announced four decades earlier. Their testing began at Gilgal.

The laws governing Passover had been given in Egypt before they crossed the boundary out of Egypt to enter the wilderness (Ex. 12). Passover's laws were primary in Mosaic Israel. They established the rite that would henceforth celebrate their deliverance from Egypt. Passover was celebrated inside Egypt. Passover announced symbolically points one and two of the biblical covenant: the sovereignty of God and His authority over the gods of Egypt. The dietary laws were secondary to the Passover laws, for they were given in the wilderness after the Israelites had crossed over Egypt's boundary. Like the laws of clean and unclean beasts for Noah, these laws were prophetic: tied to the fulfillment of Abraham's promise. These dietary laws had little immediate relevance in the wilderness; the nation survived on manna. Only when the Israelites crossed over the Promised Land's boundary, and were circumcised, did the manna cease. At that point, the dietary laws became relevant. This is why I argue that the dietary laws were tied to the land and the Levitical laws of inheritance. The dietary laws lost all covenantal relevance once the land of Canaan ceased to be an aspect of the Abrahamic promise: in A.D. 70.

The dietary laws reinforced point three of the covenant: covenantal boundaries. For as long as the boundaries of the Promised Land remained intact covenantally, Israelites were required to honor the dietary laws. The Levitical dietary laws were expressly historical: honor-

ing the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham regarding the land. They were laws that reinforced the Levitical laws governing landed inheritance. When the Levitical inheritance laws ceased, meaning when the jubilee land laws definitively ceased, the dietary laws also ceased. This is why Jesus laid down a challenge to the Pharisees, who were the defenders of the dietary laws: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:11–14). There would soon be a rooting up of the nation of Israel.⁸ The old nation of priests (Ex. 19:6) was about to be replaced by a new nation of priests (I Peter 2:5, 9). A change in covenantal law is accompanied by a change in the priesthood (Heb. 7:12). This is why Peter was told repeatedly by God in a vision to eat unclean foods (Acts 10:15). The covenantal separation between Jews and gentiles had ended forever (Eph. 2). A new covenantal separation had arrived: Christian vs. non-Christian. A new dietary law accompanied this new form of covenantal separation: the Lord's Supper—a new dietary boundary.

Covenant-keeping man's defilement by unclean or abominable meats ceased as soon as the Lord's Supper replaced Passover. Gentiles outside the land were never under its restrictions. There was nothing intrinsically evil or unclean in any food (I Cor. 8:4).⁹ There was only temporary uncleanness—as temporary as the covenantal status of the boundaries of the Promised Land. When Jesus announced that there has never been anything intrinsically unclean or defiling about any food, He was also announcing that there was nothing intrinsically sacrosanct about the boundaries of geographic Israel.

The Jews of Jesus' day thought that Israel's dietary laws, like Israel's geographical boundaries, would last forever. Today, Jews and Anglo-Israelites suppose that the Mosaic dietary laws are still binding. But the covenantal significance of Israel's geographical boundaries and the dietary laws ended together: the demise in A.D. 70 of national Israel and

8. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

9. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

the temple sacrifices. As Paul wrote to a gentile church, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col. 2:20–23). Apart from national Israel under the Mosaic law, such commandments regarding unclean food have always been “the commandments and doctrines of men.” When the temple’s veil was torn immediately after Christ’s death (Matt. 27:51), de-sanctifying the holy of holies, the Mosaic Covenant’s dietary laws became the commandments and doctrines of men. Honoring the dietary laws today is only “a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body.” This is false wisdom and false humility.

When the promised Seed arrived (Gal. 2:16), instituting His new covenant, the circumcision law was annulled, replaced by the rite of baptism. Similarly, when the Holy Spirit arrived, the Lord’s Supper replaced Passover and its ancillary dietary laws. Covenantal separation was not annulled; its Abrahamic Covenant ritual marks were annulled. Then God announced to Peter the annulment of the dietary laws (Acts 10:15). This marked the end of the Mosaic land laws and the end of Israel as national headquarters. Henceforth, there would be no national headquarters for God’s covenant people. The church replaced Israel as headquarters. Henceforth, the pursuit of the Great Commission would no longer be restricted by national headquarters or dietary restrictions.

D. Rushdoony on the Dietary Laws

Because of a theological division within the Christian Reconstruction movement, I need to devote a little space to Acts 10. In a vision, God announced to Peter His definitive annulment of the Mosaic dietary laws:

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping

things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven (Acts 10:9–16).

Rushdoony's comment on Acts 10 asserts, but does not prove, his opinion that the dietary laws are still in force. He writes: "Acts 10 is commonly cited as abolishing the old dietary restrictions. There is no reason for this opinion. . . . There is no evidence in the chapter that the vision had anything to do with diet; . . ." ¹⁰ Notice his rhetorical flourishes: "no reason," "no evidence" and "anything to do with diet." Rhetoric is not a valid substitute for theology and exegesis. I wrote a detailed essay challenging his theory in 1970; I reprinted it in 1984; Rushdoony never responded to it. ¹¹ If his position were theologically defensible, he should have replied.

Rushdoony insists that the Mosaic dietary laws are still mandatory as health laws. "The various dietary laws, laws of separation, and other laws no longer mandatory as covenantal signs, are still valid and mandatory as health requirements in terms of Deuteronomy 7:12– 16." ¹² Mandatory means required by God. That is, obedience to the dietary laws are tests of a Christian's covenantal faithfulness to God, whether or not Rushdoony was willing to include the food laws explicitly under the category of covenantal laws. They must be obeyed if they are mandatory.

He asserted that God's command to Peter to eat unclean foods (Acts 10:15) had nothing to do with food, but rather with the Great Commission. ¹³ This misses—i.e., evades—the covenantal point: the Mosaic food laws had never been health laws but had always been laws of national covenantal separation: part of the Levitical land laws. The dietary laws had been imposed by God in order to restrict the Israelites' intimate contacts with foreigners at meals. This restriction only applied during the period in which the Promised Land was God's holy sanctuary and covenantal agent; it had not been imposed on Noah or Abraham. The Great Commission of the New Covenant accompanied

10. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 301.

11. Gary North, "The Annulment of the Dietary Laws," *ICE Position Paper No. 2* (Nov. 1984), a reprint of a 1970 paper, privately distributed.

12. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, p. 702.

13. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 301.

the negation of this temporary judicial position of the land; hence, God commanded Peter to eat foods formerly banned. That is, God commanded Peter to break the Mosaic food laws. The text is quite clear: "And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:15). All food at that point in time became clean for all covenant-keepers. This vision was God's graphic revelation of His definitive annulment of Mosaic Israel's land laws: the end of its position as God's sanctuary. The final annulment came in A.D. 70.

It is worth noting that Rushdoony broke sharply with Calvin on this crucial covenantal point. Calvin stated emphatically in his comments on Acts 10 that anyone who today establishes distinctions among foods based on the Mosaic law has adopted a position of "sacriligious boldness. Of this stamp were the old heretics, Montanus, Priscillianus, the Donatists, the Tatians, and all the Encratites. . . . We must always ask the mouth of the Lord, that we may thereby be assured what we may lawfully do; forasmuch as it was not lawful even for Peter to make that profane which was lawful by the Word of God."¹⁴

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Rushdoony ceased taking the Lord's Supper in any local church around 1970. He only began taking it again in 1992, when he announced that Chalcedon, a non-profit educational institution chartered by the United States government, had somehow become a church, and he was its pastor. Thus, his theory of the dietary laws—something he did not honor in his own household prior to the late 1960s—paralleled his departure from membership in a local church.¹⁵

Conclusion

The inheritance of the land by the Israelites was part of God's promise to Abraham. To maintain this inheritance, the Israelites were required to obey God's laws. This was the basis of their inheritance. The covenantal mark of such obedience was circumcision. They also had to honor Passover and the dietary laws. These were laws of separation. A separate land required a separated people. But this Mosaic separation was temporary.

14. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1560] 1979), I, pp. 422–23.

15. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

God is holy—set apart—from all other gods (Ex. 20:2–3).¹⁶ The people of Israel were therefore set apart by God from all other nations on earth. Israel's national boundaries were sacred. That is, they were tied to the sacrificial system. A series of boundaries surrounded (marked off) the temple in which God's authorized sacraments were performed by His authorized agents.¹⁷ God established three separate covenantal jurisdictions—ecclesiastical, civil, familial—to be maintained within these national boundaries. The Israelites were given a sanctuary from the rest of the world: a place where God's judicial sanctions would be applied in terms of His law.

Their ethical, judicial, and geographical holiness was to be manifested by what they ate and did not eat: primarily at the Passover meal and secondarily by the dietary laws. This holiness or separation was ritually reinforced by the Passover meal and the special dietary restrictions. The Passover laws were both positive and negative. At the Passover, Israelites were required to eat certain foods and forbidden to eat leavened bread. The dietary laws were exclusively negative. Neither of these food laws was a civil requirement. The Passover laws and the dietary laws were to be enforced only by family and ecclesiastical governments.

With the abrogation of the Old Covenant order came the abrogation of the Mosaic food laws: Passover and the “pork” laws.¹⁸ This abrogation ended with the abrogation of the Promised Land's historically unique position as an agent of God's sanctions. That is to say, the positive and negative sanctions associated with the Abrahamic promise regarding the land ceased to be relevant in history. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Promised Land was said to spew out evil-doers: symbolically, disgorging something that should not have been eaten. This meant that the land was an arena of covenantal confrontation: sanctions that were primarily military in nature. The Israelites would drive out the Canaanites; if they subsequently rebelled, other nations would drive them out.

After A.D. 70, the land of Israel lost its special covenantal status.

16. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1: *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1.

17. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3.

18. James B. Jordan, *Pig Out? 25 Reasons Why Christians May Eat Pork* (Niceville, Florida: Transfiguration Press, 1992).

The Mosaic sacrificial system was cut off.¹⁹ In no sense—militarily or environmentally—is land to be regarded today as a covenantal agent. Under the New Covenant, common grace and common curses have completely replaced special grace and special curses with respect to the climate: sunshine and rain, drought and flooding. God the Father “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45).²⁰ Only to the extent that climate is directly influenced by man’s science and practices does it manifest covenantally predictable sanctions: blessings and cursings.

19. One result of this was the appearance of a new religion, Judaism.

20. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

IV. Covenantal Acts (23–24)

INTRODUCTION TO PART IV

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts (Lev. 23:1–2).

And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death (Lev. 24:15–16).

Leviticus 23 and the first section of Leviticus 24 are concerned with corporate religious feasts. The second half of Leviticus 24 deals with blasphemy. The judicial link between these passages is point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions. The first section deals with covenant renewal through participation in corporate covenant-renewal celebrations. The second section deals with individual covenant-breaking by oath.

Leviticus 23 lists the three national covenant-renewal celebrations: Passover (vv. 4–8); Firstfruits (vv. 10–21); and Tabernacles or booths (vv. 23–44). Verse 22 is seemingly a textual anomaly: “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God.” I discuss in Chapter 22 the reason why the gleanings law of Leviticus 19:9 is recapitulated in the middle of the section on the three feasts.

Covenant is an inescapable concept. A man must affirm a coven-

ant of some kind. He is, in Meredith G. Kline's words, by oath consigned. Covenantal affirmations in the modern world are usually implicit rather than explicit. Civil covenants are not normally established by explicit public oath except for political office-holders and members of the military. Marriage is today regarded as a contract rather than an oath-bound institution under God's sanctions in history. Baptism is also not regarded as an oath-sign, nor is the Lord's Supper regarded as an act of covenant-renewal. People make and break covenants without knowing what they are doing.

MUTUAL SELF-INTEREST: PRIESTS AND GLEANERS

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 23:22).

The gleaning statutes reflected the theocentric principle of God as the absolute owner of the land, who possessed the authority to set the terms of management for His “sharecroppers,” the Israelites.

A. The Festival of Pentecost

This passage comes in between sections on two required national feasts: Pentecost or “weeks” (vv. 15–21) and Tabernacles or “booths” (vv. 34–43). Pentecost was the celebration of the harvest. It took place 50 (pentekosté: fiftieth) days after Passover. As in all the other national festivals, sacrifices to God were required. What made this feast unique were two things: it was a one-day festival rather than a full week, and it mandated the use of leavened bread (v. 17).

Passover prohibited all leaven (Ex. 12:15). Leaven’s symbolism of growth is the reason for both the prohibition and the subsequent requirement at Pentecost. It was Egypt’s leaven that was prohibited at Passover: the covenantal necessity of ethical discontinuity with evil. It was Israel’s leaven—the product of the Promised Land—that was mandated at Pentecost: the covenantal necessity of ethical continuity with righteousness.

Pentecost was understood by the rabbis as the anniversary of the giving of the Ten Commandments.¹ It was a third-month feast. The

1. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services As They Were in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1874] 1983), p. 261.

law was given to Moses in the third month (Ex. 19:1) on the third day of the week (Ex. 19:16). Tabernacles was a seventh-month feast (Lev. 23:24). It completed the annual cycles of three feasts. This structure parallels the week of purifications for the person who had come in contact with a dead body: third-day purification and seventh-day release (Num. 19:11–12).²

Pentecost was closely associated with the harvest.³ It was a grain-related feast. The festival required the following: “Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD” (v. 17). These loaves were separate representative offerings made by the priests. All of Pentecost’s offerings had to take place on one day. To offer 1.2 million loaves of bread before (not on)⁴ the altar in one day was not possible. Also, in addition to the loaves were required seven lambs, two rams, and a young bullock (v. 18), plus a goat kid and two more lambs (v. 19).⁵ These animal sacrifices were corporate sacrifices. There is no way that these offerings were required from every family.

Edersheim says that the temple’s doors were opened at midnight. The offerings had to be made before sunrise: the time of the mandatory morning offering.⁶ He does not say how the rabbis determined the midnight hour, which makes his hypothesis less plausible. Men were required to bring free will offerings (Deut. 16:10). Presumably, during the period from midnight to sunrise, they brought these offerings into the tabernacle or temple.

A family’s main cost of the feast of Pentecost was not the value of the free will offering. It was the cost of the journey itself.

2. James Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 57. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

3. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 304.

4. Leaven was not allowed on the altar (Lev. 2:11).

5. The Jews doubled the number of sacrifices by offering separately those required in Numbers 28:26, 27, 30 and Leviticus 23:18. On this point, Josephus’ first-century observations and Maimonides’ evaluation of rabbinical texts agree. “Pentecost,” *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols., eds. John M’Clintock and James Strong, 12 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), VIII, pp. 925–26.

6. Edersheim, *Temple*, p. 263.

B. Gleaning, Again

Leviticus 23:22 is a recapitulation of the gleaning law of Leviticus 19:9.⁷ The question is: Why did God here remind the Israelites of the land owners' responsibility to the landless poor, at the end of the passage that set forth the laws governing Pentecost ("weeks")? This question has baffled orthodox Bible commentators. S. H. Kellogg offers comments on Pentecost (vv. 15–21), but then skips verse 22 to begin commenting on the convocation of trumpets (vv. 23–25).⁸ Andrew Bonar referred back to Leviticus 19:9 and concludes: "In this manner, love to man was taught in these thanksgiving feasts, at the very time that love to God who so kindly gave them their plenty was called forth and increased." He then went on to offer an allegorical interpretation, with the gleaners as members of a remnant: gentiles in the Old Covenant, Jews in the New Covenant. "A feast is coming on that will unite Jew and Gentile in equal fulness."⁹ But this does not explain why the gleaning law for the fields was repeated here, or perhaps more to the point, why it first appears in Leviticus 19:9 rather than here. Gordon Wenham thought that the connection between Leviticus 19:9 and 23:22 may be the requirement to care for the poor: the Levites, the poor, and the stranger. There may be a link here: shared poverty.¹⁰ But why should the Levites and priests have been poor? They received the tithes and sacrifices of the tribes. They could also own real estate in the cities. The commentators are confused about the reason behind the recapitulation.

There is a reason for this recapitulation: a shared economic link. There is also a reason for the confusion of the commentators. The reason is their lack of knowledge about, or interest in, economic theory. This lack of knowledge has left gaps in our understanding of biblical law.

C. Laws of Inheritance

To begin to understand the relationship between the gleaning laws and the feasts, we first need to recognize that the land of Israel was an inheritance from God. Land ownership in Israel was part of the origin-

7. Chapter 11.

8. S. H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock & Klock, [1899] 1978), pp. 459–61.

9. Andrew Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (London: Banner of Truth, [1846] 1966), p. 411.

10. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 305.

al spoils of war. Only those who fought the Canaanites could claim an inheritance in the land (Num. 32:16–23). Before the conquest began, God set forth the laws governing land ownership after Israel took possession. These laws were laws of landed inheritance. The Levitical priesthood possessed the authority to declare these laws and apply them to specific cases.

The special judicial status of the nation of Israel depended on the presence of an absolutely sovereign God (point one of the biblical covenant model).¹¹ The Levites and priests were God's primary representatives (point two)¹² because the priesthood had the primary responsibility of defending the moral purity of the land (point three).¹³ The priests possessed only one final sanction: excommunication (point four).¹⁴ They could disinherit covenant-breakers (point five).¹⁵ Inheritance is the key to a proper understanding of the economic link between the priesthood and the gleaners. The poor had been temporarily disinherited by economic events or some other reason: no income from their family land. The Levites and priests had no landed inheritance in rural Israel; their inheritance was the tithe. Between the two groups there was a shared economic goal: the maintenance of income from rural land. The gleaners were poor; the Levites and priests did not want to become poor. The gleaners wanted a share of the crop; the Levites and priests wanted a share of the crop. Because of the structure of the laws governing gleaning, each group helped the other to achieve its economic goal.

God mandated gleaning in Israel. A land owner's refusal to honor the gleaning law, like his refusal to honor the tithe, was an excommunicable offense. The threat of this shared negative sanction—reduced income—is what linked the Levitical priesthood to the gleaners.

D. Economic Motivation

The land owner sent his harvesting crew into the fields before the gleaners gained access. Gleaners got only the leftovers. Land owners were required by God's law to honor the laws of gleaning. They could

11. Transcendence/presence. See Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

12. Hierarchy/representation. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

13. Ethics/boundaries. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

14. Oath/sanctions. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

15. Succession/inheritance. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

not lawfully have their economic agents harvest the corners of the fields. That portion of the crop belonged by law to the gleaners. The poorest members of the able-bodied community had a legal right to this portion of the crop.

The question is: Which covenantal agency possessed lawful authority to enforce this law? Was it the state or the church? I have already announced my opinion: this legal right of the poor was not to be enforced by the state.¹⁶ The state was not an agency of charity under the Old Covenant. It was an agency of compulsion: negative sanctions. It was not an agency authorized by God to bring positive sanctions. To gain ownership of assets, or the power to allocate assets, which was necessary for bringing positive sanctions to one group, the state would have had to threaten negative sanctions against others. This was not allowed by God's law: the same laws had to apply equally to all residents of the nation (Ex. 12:49). Civil judges were not to discriminate between rich and poor (Lev. 19:15). The church, however, can lawfully bring positive sanctions as the agency of reconciliation—man and nature's reconciliation to God—and as an agency of healing: man and nature.

1. Self-Interest and Law Enforcement

My assertion of the designation of the priests as the enforcers of the gleaning law raises the question of economic motivation. While there may be individuals who at times place the interests of the community, or some segment of the community, above their own personal self-interest, no society can safely be constructed which relies exclusively on the widespread voluntary suppression of personal self-interest among those who are given monopolistic authority to impose negative sanctions on others. Liberty and justice require that the legal order acknowledge the fact that the personal self-interest of judges must be dealt with institutionally. Negative sanctions must be brought against those officials who make decisions that favor their interests at the expense of segments of the general public.

This institutional guideline is true for non-profit organizations, not just civil governments. I would not go so far as to say that it is equally true of priesthoods, since priesthoods formally are committed to a doctrine of sanctions beyond physical death, either a final judgment imposed by a divinity or the judgment of the impersonally ap-

16. Chapter 11:B.

plied moral laws of karma: an extension of the results of personal behavior through reincarnation. Thus, a priest may have a concept of personal self-interest that is longer or more apocalyptic than that adopted by a civil judge, or even more to the point, by a twentieth-century academic economist. But even non-profit organizations and priesthoods must acknowledge the potential conflict of interests between the power to impose negative sanctions and the public interest. Rewards and punishments must be built into the institutional system in order to reduce the profitable exploitation of such conflicts of interest, since the public interest will normally be sacrificed in these conflicts.

2. *Public Choice Theory*

In order to understand and then predict the decisions made by sanctioning agents, we need to consider the influence of self-interest. If we want to increase the likelihood that people will act in a particular way, we must see to it that they are rewarded for performing in the preferred way and punished for deviating. This includes government officials—those who possess the right to impose sanctions. This was the insight by economist James Buchanan that won him a Nobel Prize in economics in 1986. Buchanan and his associate, legal theorist Gordon Tullock, pioneered a specialty in economics called public choice theory.¹⁷ This economic approach to understanding institutions assumes that (1) all institutions, including political and judicial institutions, are the product of individual decisions, and (2) official decisions of organizations are based on the personal self-interest of those vested with the institutional authority to make them. In an introductory economics textbook committed to public choice theory, Gwartney and Stroup wrote: “The government is not a supraindividual that will always make decisions in the ‘public interest,’ however that nebulous term might be defined. It is merely an institution through which individuals make collective decisions and through which they carry out activities collectively.” They continued: “The basic postulate of all economics is that changes in expected costs and benefits will cause decision-makers to alter their actions in a predictable way. Specifically, as

17. James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962). Tullock did not win the Nobel Prize with Buchanan in 1986, he believes, because he had never taken an economics course. I discussed this with him in 1988 at an Eris Society meeting in Aspen, Colorado.

the personal costs of an event increase (and/or the benefits decline), decision-makers will be less likely to choose the event. As costs decline and benefits increase, the opposite tendency will be true. This postulate will be maintained throughout our analysis of market behavior. Similarly, it will be utilized to yield insight on the organization and functioning of the public sector.”¹⁸

This insight on at least one set of human motivations governing institutional action—costs and benefits—must be respected by the social theorist. We must apply this insight to the behavior of those people who have been invested by God with covenantal authority. We therefore need to pursue the question of law-enforcement in Old Covenant Israel. If the Levites and priests were in fact the covenantal agents assigned by God to enforce the gleaning laws, then we should not expect God’s law to rest on the assumption that the Levites and priests would normally carry out this assignment against their personal self-interest. We should expect rather to find judicial safeguards that protected their interests as they went about their judicial assignments. This is exactly what we find in the case of the gleaning laws.

E. How to Pay Judges

Judges should not take bribes. “And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous” (Ex. 23:8).¹⁹ “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deut. 16:19).²⁰ Judges should declare God’s law and apply it to specific cases that come before them. This is a basic operating premise of biblical jurisprudence. The availability of personal gain is not to influence the judges’ decisions. Having said this, we should also acknowledge the bribery law’s economic corollary: judges should not suffer losses because of their decisions. Their decisions should not make them poorer. Thus, we conclude, judges’ income should not be affected positively or adversely by their decisions. This is why they should be paid agreed-upon salaries by the sanctioning institution irrespective of their decisions for as long as

18. James D. Gwartney and Richard Stroup, *Economics: Private and Public Choice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 75.

19. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3: *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 52.

20. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 40.

they are employed by that institution. This rule governs both church and state.²¹ This is also why they should not be allowed to judge cases in which they are uniquely in a position to gain or lose because of their decision.

The question then arises: Were the Levites and priests threatened economically by their honest enforcing of the gleaning law? If they did enforce it, did they or the priesthood in general risk a loss of income? Even more to the point, would their income automatically have been reduced? Specifically, did the enforcement of “gleaner’s rights” reduce the priesthood’s portion of the crop collected from the land owners? If their income would have been automatically reduced by their commitment to upholding the gleaning laws, then we must conclude one of two things: (1) Mosaic Covenant law rested on the assumption that judges would consistently hand down impartial decisions that were against their economic self-interest, or (2) the Levites and priests were not the authorized covenantal agents to enforce the gleaning laws.

Leviticus 23:9–22 makes it clear that the Levites and priests were not threatened economically by the enforcement of the gleaning law. Their share of the crop during the two feasts was not reduced by whatever percentage was harvested by the gleaners. The land owner had to bring a specified quantity of the best of his crop as an offering to God, by way of the priesthood. This payment was owed to the Levites irrespective of the percentage of the crop harvested by the land owner’s crew.

This payment was not part of the tithe; it was a separate offering. To understand the implications of this fact, consider the collecting of the tithe. Enforcing the gleaning law would not have threatened the

21. The idea that a church member can legitimately reduce his tithe in retaliation against church officers is one of the most pernicious ideas in the modern church. This idea is the product of either of two errors. Error number one: a Christian can legitimately pay less than a tithe to God. Error number two: a Christian can lawfully pay less than a tithe to his local church if he redirects all or part of his tithe to another non-profit Christian agency. The former error is common to antinomian Christianity. See Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 52:C. 791–93; cf. North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), Pt. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>). The latter is most prominently defended by R. J. Rushdoony, who wrote: “The tithe does not belong to the church or to any Christian agency, although it may be given to them. In whosoever hands it is, it belongs to the Lord. . . . Since the tithe is ‘holy unto the Lord’, it is our duty as tithers to judge that church, mission group, or Christian agency which is most clearly ‘holy unto the Lord’.” Rushdoony, “To Whom Do We Tithe?” in Rousas John Rushdoony and Edward A. Powell, *Tithing and Dominion* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1979), p. 30. For a critique of Rushdoony’s views, see Appendix B: “Rushdoony on the Tithe: A Critique.”

church's income from tithes, since gleaners also owed a tithe, just as land owners did. A Levite's insistence that the gleaners be given access to the fields would not have threatened that portion of the tithe paid by gleaners. The gleaners would have understood to whom they owed the enforcement of this law. Furthermore, the Levite's enforcement of the gleaning law would have tended to ensure the collection of the tithe from the land owners. The requirement of gleaners on a farm created a class of outside agents who had knowledge of the size of the land owner's crop. This would have helped solve a fundamental problem for all agricultural tax collecting: cheating. Gleaners would have been potential monitors for the church's interests. Any land owner would have known this. In short, there was a meshing of economic interests between the Levites and honest gleaners in the case of tithe-collecting. The more gleaners in the fields, the more likelihood that two or more of them would have told the truth to the church's officers about the size of the crop.

F. Reducing the Costs of Monitoring Cheaters

If a land owner did not allow any gleaners to glean, one or more of them could lawfully complain to the Levites. This would alert the Levites to the possibility of an infraction: if the land owner was willing to cheat God by cheating the gleaners, he was perhaps equally willing to cheat God by cheating the Levites of their tithe. The presence of gleaners meant the presence of monitoring agents whose self-interest coincided with the priesthood's self-interest.

These agents were not paid by the priesthood. This points to the priesthood as the authorized agency for enforcing the gleaning laws. Why not the local civil magistrate? Because the Levites received a greater percentage of the crop than a God-honoring civil magistrate would. The Levites lawfully received a full 10% of the increase in the crop; only a corrupt king would demand this much (I Sam. 8:15, 17).²² The Levites had to give only 10% to the priests, retaining 90% for themselves (Num. 18:26–28). There was no similar kingly guarantee for the percentage retained personally by local magistrates. Thus, local Levites had a far greater economic incentive under Mosaic law to monitor the output of the fields than the local civil magistrates did. The Levites had the greater economic incentive under biblical law to

22. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

seek out zero-price agents to monitor the output of the farms. This incentive structure indicates that the church was where God lodged the judicial authority governing the gleaning law. The church could do very well—collect the full tithe owed to it—by doing good: defending the gleaners.

The recapitulation of the gleaning law in the section of Leviticus dealing with two fixed-payment grain offerings—the firstfruits—also points to the priesthood as the agency of enforcement for the gleaning law. The priests are identified in this passage as being guaranteed a fixed payment at the feasts, irrespective of the size of any farm's crop. As judges, their economic self-interest was in no way threatened by the gleaners. The Levites and priests could enforce the gleaning law without worrying that their very diligence would automatically reduce their income. The costs of the gleaning program would be borne by the land owners.

What we have here is a system of mutual self-interest between the priestly tribe and the gleaners. The Levites and priests gained allies among the gleaners during the season of the tithe—zero-price (to the priestly tribe) monitors in the fields—while being exposed to no economic threat from their allies during the seasons of the feasts. Simultaneously, the gleaners gained allies—a priesthood with the power to excommunicate uncooperative land owners—during the season of the tithe, while being exposed to no economic threat from their allies during the seasons of the feasts.

This mutually beneficial arrangement worked well in normal years. It broke down, however, during sabbatical years (Lev. 25:4–5, 20). In sabbatical years, the priesthood had a short-term financial interest in seeing a normal harvest rather than idle (resting) land. Priests and land owners did not acknowledge the long-term agricultural productivity benefits of resting the land one year in seven. Their shortened time perspective persuaded them not to honor the sabbatical year of rest for the land. This seems to me to be the most likely reason why the sabbatical year of rest for the land was not enforced in Israel for almost five centuries (II Chron. 36:21). The Levites defected. But it was the priesthood, not the state, that was to enforce the gleaning law.

G. Church or State?

The recapitulation of the gleaning law appears at the end of the passage that sets forth the laws governing a pair of mandatory agricul-

tural payments to the Levites. This placement identifies the priesthood as the agency of enforcement of the gleaning law, not the state. The land owner was reminded by these laws that he owed God for his wealth. His payment to two groups was his public acknowledgment of his debt to God. These two groups were the priesthood (vv. 15–21) and the gleaners (v. 22).

Let us consider the other possibility: the state as the agency of enforcement. To argue this way is to argue that the state is an agency that lawfully imposes positive sanctions—an error, biblically speaking. But I will not begin with this presumption. Instead, let us consider economic incentives for long-term obedience to this law and cooperation among all parties.

If the state had been the enforcing agency, this arrangement would have created specific incentives for both the land owners and the gleaners to use politics to defend their interests. To give the rural poor any benefits, the state would first have had to extract wealth from the land owners. The threat of violence would have been involved. This would have made adversaries of land owners and poor gleaners. It would have reduced the gleaning law to politics. A political struggle would have ensued, with control over the state as the target. The land owners probably would have won this contest.

A political battle would have been far less likely to ensue with the priesthood as the enforcing agency. No one except a member of the tribe of Levi could become a Levite or a priest. Thus, it was far more difficult for either land owners or gleaners to pressure the priesthood one way or the other. There was no way for either side to “buy into” the agency of enforcement if the priesthood had this authority. This made the politics of compulsory wealth redistribution far less likely to emerge over the gleaning issue.

The gleaning law was more likely to be honored if the priesthood enforced it. First, both the poor and the priesthood had lawful claims on a small portion of the production produced by the land owners’ assets. This did not eliminate the state as a lawful claimant, and therefore as a potential enforcer, for the state could lawfully tax the net production of the land. But the church had a lawful claim to a larger portion than the state did: the tithe. It therefore had a greater economic incentive than the state did in serving as the defender of the gleaners. Why? Because the gleaners served as tithe-monitoring agents for the church. The church in turn served as the judicial defender of the gleaners. Both the church and the gleaners had mutual self-interest in

the church's status as defender. Second, neither the priesthood nor the gleaners were threatened economically by each other. Positive benefits accrued to both groups through the arrangement, and there were no offsetting negative aspects. The likelihood of attaining honest judgment was therefore enhanced.

The civil magistrate might also have used gleaners as monitors. If the state taxed each group at the same rate, the gleaners had an incentive to report on the size of the crop to either enforcing agency, church or state. But which authority would the gleaners have trusted most: church or state? The state could more easily confiscate a person's inheritance, as Naboth learned (I Kings 21). The priesthood did not possess comparable power. Neither the land owner nor the gleaner had as much to fear from the priesthood as from the state. It was much more likely that each would cooperate with the Levite than turning such power over to the state.

This arrangement is additional evidence that the state was not an agency of compulsory charity under the Old Covenant. It was not authorized as an intermediary to collect taxes from one group in a program of wealth redistribution, nor was it to serve as an agency of enforcement for direct transfers of wealth from the rich to the poor. The poor in the community had a legal claim on a local land owner's left-over portion of a crop only as God's designated agents of collection; the agency of enforcement was the church. The appropriate negative sanction was therefore excommunication, not imprisonment or exile.

This is not to say that excommunication was the only negative sanction. Excommunication would necessarily have been followed by the civil disenfranchisement of the lawbreaker. Those outside the church covenant could not be citizens in Israel.²³ It would also have led to the loss of the family's landed inheritance for those heirs who refused to break publicly with the head of the household over the practice that had led to his excommunication. Covenantal death is both familial and civil.²⁴ Both state and family, as covenantal institutions, were required to support this decision by the Old Covenant church. The way that this support was demonstrated was for the state to remove all those under its jurisdiction and also the excommunicant's

23. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

24. On civil death, see North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 54:E:2. On familial death, see Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

heirs from the threat of future negative judicial sanctions by the excommunicant. He could no longer serve as a civil judge or sit on a jury. His heirs could break with him publicly on the issue that led to his excommunication without suffering his negative sanction: disinheritance. Because excommunication was the church's announcement of his covenantal death, he no longer possessed an inheritance in the land to pass on.

Conclusion

The gleaning law was recapitulated in this section because it follows the laws of the feasts. It points to the priests and Levites as the agents of enforcement. There was a mutually beneficial relationship between the priesthood and the gleaners. The gleaners could serve the Levites as monitors of the size of the land owner's crop. This assured the priesthood of getting a more honest tithe. The gleaners had to pay the tithe, but they had allies in the Levitical priesthood. Their priestly beneficiaries possessed the power of declaring a person excommunicate, including a cheating land owner or a land owner who refused to honor the gleaning law.

The arrangement was mutually beneficial. The priestly tribe had an incentive to see to it that gleaners received access to the leftovers of the crop, and the gleaners had an incentive to see to it that the local Levites were appraised of the size of the crop if cheating was going on. This mutually beneficial economic arrangement placed information boundaries around cheaters.

This arrangement also kept the state under appropriate boundaries. The local agents of enforcement, the priests, could not normally inherit rural land.²⁵ This reduced the threat of confiscation for both land owners and gleaners. It also tended to keep the politics of plunder at bay. With the priesthood as the agents of enforcement, no one was tempted to seek political power in order to increase his group's share of the plunder.

End of Volume 2

25. For the two exceptions, see Leviticus 27:20–21. Chapter 36.

BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 3

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BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 3

GARY NORTH

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Volume 3

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V. Inheritance (25–27)

INTRODUCTION TO PART V

And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family (Lev. 25:10).

The fifth section of Leviticus begins with Chapter 25, which lists the laws governing the jubilee year: inheritance inside the land's boundaries. The remainder of Leviticus deals with inheritance.

Modern evangelical theologians remain totally hostile to the theonomists' principle of biblical interpretation: any Mosaic law not annulled by the New Covenant is still judicially binding on church, state, or family. Nevertheless, prominent evangelical social commentators—though not the theologians—of the far right and the far left remain fascinated with the jubilee laws of Leviticus 25.

This is a very curious phenomenon. The jubilee laws were explicitly tied to the Promised Land. They were laws governing the sale of real estate and people. They were not revealed by God prior to the exodus, and they applied to no region on earth prior to the conquest of Canaan. Why should evangelical Protestant social commentators who denounce theonomy's hermeneutic of judicial continuity also proclaim the benefits of the jubilee laws? Is there some hidden agenda at work here?

There are two approaches taken by the evangelical commentators. Right-wing evangelicals argue that the jubilee's 50-year cycle was related to inherent limits on debt. Thus, we should in some way honor the jubilee's principle of debt limits. If we fail to do this through some sort of national bankruptcy law, a built-in economic cycle of economic

depression and bankruptcy will do it for us. Far-left evangelicals argue that the jubilee law governed ownership in the broadest sense, not just real estate. Mosaic civil law specified that every rural plot be returned to its original family every 50 years. They conclude from this that the modern state should legislate a massive, compulsory redistribution of capital from the wealthy to the poor.

Both groups are wrong. Neither group comes close to the specifics of the jubilee law. Neither group comes close to the meaning of this law. This is because neither group actually goes to the actual jubilee law with the assumption that every aspect of this law *as well as its Mosaic judicial context* is judicially binding in the New Covenant. Neither suggests a principle of judicial continuity. Each side has an economic agenda, and each misuses the texts of Scripture to promote this agenda.

First, with respect to the right-wing analysis, the jubilee year had very little to do with debt limitation except insofar as a 50-year lease for land is a form of debt. How relevant is it today? Hardly anyone today signs a 50-year lease. This law had nothing to do with consumer debt or business debt for capital equipment, or anything besides Israelite bondservants, land outside of walled cities, and Levites' houses.

Second, with respect to the left-wing analysis, the jubilee law rested legally on God's mandate that Israel invade Canaan and wipe out all of its inhabitants. That is to say, *the jubilee law rested on genocide*. It was an aspect of the original spoils of war. It had nothing to do with a government program of systematic wealth redistribution from the rich to the poor. The jubilee law established that the conquering families of Joshua's era would permanently retain title to their land. This law was announced four decades before the conquest began. The return of rural land to the heirs of these original families every 50 years was not statist wealth redistribution; rather, it was *the judicial defense of original title*. It was therefore a defense of private property. God set the original terms of ownership. The civil government was supposed to uphold this original contract.

A. The Meaning of the Jubilee

The Mosaic law guaranteed that the Israelites would multiply if they obeyed God's law: longer life spans (Ex. 20:12) and zero miscarriages (Ex. 23:26). But a multiplying population leads to ever-shrinking land holdings. As time passed and the population grew, each family

plot in Israel would shrink to the point of near-invisibility. Given the fact that the average family allotment at the time of the conquest was under 11 acres, a population that doubled every quarter century (3% growth per annum) could not remain an agricultural society for very long. Every 24 years, the average family's share of the farm would shrink by half. The average allotment would have been down to a little over an acre within a century with a population growth rate of 3% a year.

The jubilee law had nothing to do with the equalization of property except in the peculiar sense of eventually producing plot sizes so tiny that the value of any given family's landed inheritance was so small that it really did not make any difference. In today's world, an inheritance worth two dollars is twice as large as an inheritance worth one dollar, but in terms of what either inheritance will buy, the percentage difference between them really does not matter.

Then what was the jubilee law all about? First, it was a law that decentralized politics: every heir of a family of the conquest could identify his citizenship in a particular tribe because every family had an inheritance in the land. Ownership stayed inside the tribes. Second, it restricted the accumulation of rural land holdings by the Levites, who could never buy up the land. This geographically dispersed urban tribe would remain dispersed. Third, it kept the state from extending its land holdings on a permanent basis. Fourth, it kept foreigners from buying permanent residences outside of walled cities where homes were not under the jubilee law. Fifth, it pressured the nation to move into walled cities or emigrate out of Israel when population growth had its effect on farm size.

There was an overall economic principle at work here: those outside the covenants—civil, familial, and ecclesiastical—should be kept economically and numerically subordinate to those inside the covenants. This is not discussed by commentators.

If Israel remained covenantally faithful as a nation, the life style of the typical Israelite would not remain agricultural. A few generations after the conquest, the nation would have become an urbanized center of commerce. More than this: the old wineskin of the original grant of territory to Joshua's generation could not long hold the new wine of population growth. The Promised Land's boundaries would be breached. The Israelites would spread beyond the nation's borders.

Having said all this, now I must prove it. But there really isn't very much to prove regarding the fundamental economic aspect of this law.

It is simple to comprehend. The economic value of each family's plot would have decreased over the generations, as covenant-keeping families multiplied. Yet for over two millennia, the commentators have ignored the obvious: a growing population will eventually fill up the land.

There is a reason for this error: those who write Bible commentaries rarely take the Mosaic law seriously. They pay little attention to the coherence of its details. They refuse to ask themselves the crucial question: *How did each law actually work in relation to the other laws?* The liberals assume that the judicial system could not have functioned coherently because multiple authors wrote the Pentateuch. A coherent system of law would undermine their presupposition of judicial incoherence. They discover what they assume: a patchwork of uncoordinated laws. They do not seek to discover the meaning of any law in terms of the whole. Meanwhile, the conservatives feel justified in ignoring the details of the law because they assume that the Mosaic law isn't relevant under the New Covenant. This almost contemptuous attitude toward the Mosaic law has hampered Christian scholarship. It is time for this contempt to end. It is time to search the law in depth to discover what God expects from us, just as David did (Ps. 119). The jubilee law is a better place than most to begin because it is clearly a coherent series of laws with many ramifications.

B. A Matter of Holiness

God required the nation of Israel to hallow—set apart—the fiftieth year. This identified the fiftieth year as uniquely holy. It was the jubilee year. It was to be inaugurated by the blowing of the trumpet on the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9). The jubilee year was to be the year for claiming one's inheritance: of land, but far more important, of legal status as a citizen. Those circumcised men who were heirs of the original holy army that had conquered Canaan could not legally be disenfranchised except through the loss of their landed inheritance outside a walled city, or, in the case of the Levites, of their homes in Levitical cities.

Citizenship (freemanship) in Mosaic Israel was based on three religious factors: confession, circumcision, and lawful participation in God's holy army. One mark of citizenship was ownership of a share of the land once possessed by a conquering family under Joshua. This was not the only proof of citizenship, but it was the most universal. A man who had been judicially severed from ecclesiastical participation

in the congregation could not retain his family's landed inheritance beyond the next jubilee. He became disinherited. His property would go to his next-of-kin: his kinsman-redeemer. He could legally buy title to a residence in a walled city, since this property was not governed by the jubilee law, but he might have to sell it in a crisis. It was risky to be excommunicated.

As an excommunicate, he was no longer an Israelite. He was a resident alien. As such, he became subject to the threat of lifetime servitude. So did his minor heirs (Lev. 25:44–46). He was no longer a free man. In an economic crisis, he might also lose his status as a free man.

If Israel did not honor God's law, God threatened national disinheritance (Deut. 8:19–20). This placed every Israelite in jeopardy of becoming a slave. Slavery was a permanent sanction. A slave could not buy his way out of slavery. There were only three ways for a slave to escape his legal condition and still remain inside the land: (1) manumission, (2) liberation by an invading foreign army, or (3) adoption, either by his owner or some other Israelite.

The legal issue of *inheritance* is, in the final analysis, the theological issue of *adoption by God* (Ezek. 16). So is the legal issue of liberty. In this regard, consider the New Testament's doctrine of adoption through God's grace (John 1:12; Eph. 1:5): an act of the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

C. Enforcement

Was the jubilee law actually enforced? It is not clear from the historical sections of the Bible whether or not Israel ever observed the jubilee year. The Bible's silence indicates that it may not have been enforced, but we cannot be certain about this. Consider Ahab's theft of Naboth's land (I Kings 21). On the one hand, Naboth refused to sell his land to King Ahab. This is evidence of one man's commitment to the Mosaic law's principle of jubilee inheritance. On the other hand, the fact that Ahab thought he could permanently steal the land from Naboth by having him executed indicates that the enforcement of the jubilee was sporadic or nonexistent in his day. Surely, Ahab was not Naboth's kinsman-redeemer. The incident reveals no clear-cut evidence with regard to the entire history of Israel.

The Mosaic law provided economic incentives for those who possessed the authority to declare the jubilee year to do so: the Levites. Because the homes of the Levites in Levitical cities were governed by

the jubilee (Lev. 25:32–33), the Levites had an economic incentive to declare the jubilee on schedule twice per century—far stronger than the incentive for them to declare a sabbatical year. Did they nevertheless defect? If so, why?

Conclusion

The jubilee year was a year of liberty for all the inhabitants of Israel (v. 10). But there was an exclusionary clause in the jubilee law: the enslavement of heathens (vv. 44–46). The best way to avoid slavery was to become a citizen of the holy commonwealth. Unlike the other ancient nations, citizenship in Israel was open to any resident alien, or at least to his heirs (Deut. 23:2–8). The blessings of liberty could be secured through confession of faith in God, circumcision, and eligibility to serve in God’s holy army. This was the Mosaic law’s incomparable promise to all resident aliens. But to attain citizenship, a family would have to remain economically productive until the heirs of the promise could secure their claim. This promise was conditional: remaining productive and avoiding being sold into servitude.

The jubilee law pointed to the conditional nature of Israel’s very existence as a nation: God’s threat of disinheritance, which was a threat of servitude to foreigners. There were conditions attached to citizenship: covenantal stipulations. The jubilee law’s stipulations (Lev. 25)—point three of the biblical covenant—were immediately followed by a list of promised sanctions (Lev. 26): point four.

Every true prophet of Israel came before the nation to bring a covenant lawsuit. This reminded them of the ethical basis of liberty. Israel’s supreme prophet would bring Israel’s final covenant lawsuit. He would declare liberty for the enslaved and slavery for the rebellious slavemasters. He would serve as the final *go’el*: the kinsman-redeemer and the blood avenger. He would adopt many and disinherit others. He would bring sanctions. He would announce the final jubilee year: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19).¹ **Fulfilled!**

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Covenant, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

23

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat (Lev. 25:1–7).

The theocentric meaning of the sabbatical year was God as the source of productivity. Land owners could rest for a year, yet they would prosper.

A. Sabbath and Capital Preservation

This law is a recapitulation and extension of the sabbath laws of Exodus 23:10–12. It was not in origin a law of the jubilee, although it was tied to it; it was a law of the sabbath. This leads us to an important implication: *the law of the jubilee was an extension of the sabbatical principle of rest*. The sabbatical year law was primary; the jubilee land laws were secondary. *The sabbatical year law was more fundamental than the jubilee land laws*.

We begin our study of the jubilee laws with a consideration of the meaning of the sabbath: rest for land as well as for man. We need to discover the meaning of “rest” in the context of the sabbatical year. We also need to recognize that this law was a Mosaic land law: an aspect of

the land as God's covenantal agent (Lev. 18:25, 28).¹

The law of God is theocentric. Whatever secondary applications it may have, a law's primary application always relates to God. This law focused on the mandatory resting of the land of Israel, but its ultimate reference point was the sovereignty of the Creator God of the covenantal promise.

The Bible introduces the subject of the sabbath in relation to the story of the creation. God created the world in six days; then He rested (Ex. 20:11).² Whenever the Israelites observed this law, they were acknowledging the sovereignty of God as both the Creator and the original owner. Bonar comments: "It has been well said that by the weekly Sabbath they owned that they themselves belonged to Jehovah, and by this seventh-year Sabbath they professed that their land was His, and they His tenants."³

God deals with men as an absentee landlord deals with leaseholders who use his property. He gave Adam an assignment; then He left the garden. This is a continuing theme in the Bible. The Book of Job pictures God as normally distant from man. Jesus used the theme of the absentee landlord in several of His parables. While God dwells in the midst of men judicially, especially during ecclesiastical feasts, He does not dwell in their midst physically. The dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28)⁴ is supposed to be fulfilled by men acting as responsible managers, not as supervised coolies in a field. The managerial model in the Bible is that of a sharecropper or tenant farmer who pays 10% of his net income to the landowner.

1. *The Terms of the Lease*

Leasing land is a very difficult proposition for a landlord. For an absentee landlord, it is even more difficult. The problem is to establish leasing terms that preserve economic incentives that achieve three goals: (1) keeping a competent lessee on the property by allowing him to maximize his income; (2) maintaining or increasing the capitalized value of the land; (3) maximizing the landlord's lease income. The ab-

1. Chapter 10.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2: *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

3. Andrew Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1846] 1966), p. 446.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3–4.

sentee landlord must discover a way to achieve all three goals without a great expenditure on local monitors. Inexpensive monitors are valuable.

God established the laws governing the Promised Land because He delivered it into their hands. As its owner, He had the authority to establish the terms of the leasehold. If the people did not like the terms of the lease, they could live elsewhere. So, one foundation of this law is God's ownership. (The other foundation is the principle of sabbath rest.)

The terms of God's lease are generous to the lessee, who keeps nine-tenths of the net income of the operation. This is the principle of the tithe. The tithe must be paid to God's designated agency of collection, the institutional church. The church acts as God's accountant and crop-collector. The payment of the tithe is a public acknowledgment by the lessees of God's ultimate ownership of the original capital: land (rent) plus labor (wages) over time (interest). This original grant of capital is also accurately described by John Locke's three-fold classification: life, liberty, and property.⁵

2. God's Land Grant

Consider the grant of capital in the form of developed land. God gave His people the Promised Land as their inheritance. This was an aspect of the promise given to Abraham (Gen. 15:13–16). Also included were existing houses and fields. "And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat" (Josh. 24:13). They inherited the capitalized value of the houses and planted fields of the Canaanites. The Canaanites had unknowingly served as stewards of the land, building up its value until the fourth generation after Israel's descent into Egypt (Gen. 15:16).

Having delivered a capital asset into their hands, God specified that they must, as a nation, rest the land every seventh year. This was to be a national year of rest. The law applied only to agricultural land.

5. He never used this phrase exactly as quoted. He wrote of property in general as "life, liberty, and estate." John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (1690), paragraph 87. He spoke of "life, liberty, or possession" in paragraph 137. Exactly one century later, Edmund Burke wrote of "property, liberty, and life." *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), paragraph 324. The United States Constitution adopted "life, liberty, or property" in Article V of the Bill of Rights (1791), and also in Article XIV:1 (1868).

It did not restrict commerce, manufacturing, equipment repair, or anything except planting and harvesting by owners. Urban occupations were not under the terms of this law. This law granted a year of rest from field work to all those under the household authority of landowners, including hired servants.

The year of rest was an acknowledgment of the limits on man's knowledge. Man cannot know everything about the land. He therefore was not allowed to treat the land indefinitely as if it were a mine. The "mining" of the soil could go on for six years in seven, but not in the seventh year. He was not allowed to strip the soil of its productivity. The seventh year was a rest period for the land in the broadest sense, including worms, bugs, birds, weeds, and every other living creature that dwelled on or in the land. *This would preserve the land's long-run value.*

This limitation on the landowner's extraction of present income from the land was a means of preserving the capitalized value of the land over time. This placed a limit on both man's greed and ignorance. It forced the landowner to honor the future-orientation of God's covenant. It preserved the landed inheritance for future generations. God's sharecroppers in one generation were not allowed to undermine the future value of the land by overproduction in the present. God, as the land's ultimate owner, was thereby able to maintain a greater percentage of the land's original capitalized value.

The Israelites did not always enforce the provisions of the sabbath land law prior to the exile. In other words, they did not enforce the terms of the original lease. God allowed this infraction to continue for almost five centuries. Then He collected payment from a later generation. "And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (II Chron. 36:20-21).⁶ Two generations of sharecroppers then learned a

6. By the time of Jeremiah, the Israelites had been in the Promised Land for almost eight centuries. Of this period, 490 years (70 x 7) had been spent without a sabbatical year. Jeremiah did not say when this period of law-breaking began. I presume that it began 490 years before the Babylonian captivity, i.e., sometime late in Saul's kingship. I am using James Jordan's chronology: "The Babylonian Connection," *Biblical Chronology*, II (Nov. 1990), p. 1: 3426 Anno Mundi = 586 B.C. The accession of Saul was 2909 AM. Jordan, "Chronologies and Kings (II)," *ibid.*, III (Aug. 1991), p. 2. Computation: 586 + 490 = 1076 B.C., i.e., 3426 AM - 490 AM = 2936 AM. David came to the throne

judicial lesson in Babylon: God has a long memory for the details of His law. Those who violate it will eventually pay restitution to Him by paying restitution to their victims. In this case, they paid to the land, which rested.

B. A Year of Gleaning

There appears to be a problem with the translation in the King James Version. Actually, there is no problem, but there is a problem for interpreters who do not take the text literally. Verse 5 says: “That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.” Conclusion: someone was prohibited from reaping the fields. The next two verses are translated as follows: “And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat” (vv. 6–7). Conclusion: the produce of the field served as food for someone. But if the increase is identified as meat (i.e., food),⁷ then what about the prohibition? “That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed.” How could the increase serve as food if the crop could not lawfully be harvested?

To solve this problem, the New American Standard Version inserts a word in verse 6: *products*. “And all of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food. . . .” The Revised Standard Version translates it as follows: “The sabbath of the land shall provide food for you. . . .” None of this is satisfactory. Why not? Because the text of verse 5 is too specific: “That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed.” Someone was prohibited from harvesting. The question is: Who?

The solution is found in the word *thy*. The law was addressed to landowners. It applied to those identified in verse 4: “Six years thou shalt sow *thy* field, and six years thou shalt prune *thy* vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof.” Those who owned the fields and vineyards were not allowed by God to reap them in the seventh year. This pro-

in 2949 AM, i.e., 1063 B.C.

7. The Hebrew words translated as “meat” in verses 6 and 7 both can be translated as “food.”

hibition did not apply to their hired servants, strangers in the community, poor people, and the beasts of the field. "But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard" (Ex. 23:11). *The prohibition did not apply to those who did not own the land.*

What this law established was *a year of unlimited gleaning*. Hired harvesters were not allowed into the fields and vineyards as employees of the landowners. Instead, they were given free access as independent agents. On the one hand, landowners did not invest any money or time in seeding the fields, pruning the vineyards, or caring for the land. This cut their expenses in year six. On the other hand, they reaped no crops. The crops were reaped in year seven by non-owners. Like the leftovers that were collected by the gleaners annually, so were the crops that grew by themselves. The land's rest was specific: rest from the activities of its owners, not rest from harvesting by non-owners.

What was the point? Rushdoony argues that this law was not humanitarian, meaning (I give him the benefit of the doubt) uniquely humanitarian, because gleaners had access to the fields every year.⁸ This interpretation is incorrect. This law was obviously a humanitarian law, for it singled out the poor and strangers. They would receive something from the landowner that otherwise would have been kept by him. A transfer of wealth was involved. The sabbatical land law was as much a humanitarian law as the annual gleaning law was. It treated the beasts of the fields as if they were gleaners. It treated them as servants on the weekly sabbath. In other words, the sabbatical rest forced landowners to let the land alone and allow human and animal gleaners into the fields. The landowners were not allowed to use land, man, or beast for their purposes. Non-owners were allowed by God to do whatever they wanted: to glean or not to glean. It was not that they were required to rest from self-employment as harvesters. They were not to be compelled by economic circumstances to work for landowners. God provided them with a source of income to offset the absence of wages. This was a compulsory wealth-redistribution program: from landowners to non-owners. The question is: Who imposed the negative sanctions? Answer: the Levites.⁹

In the sabbatical year, all charitable, morally obligatory, zero-in-

8. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 140.

9. See below: Section E.

terest loans had to be canceled (Deut. 15:1–7).¹⁰ This means that the debtor who had been forced to labor for another landowner because he had gone into debt and then had defaulted on this charitable loan had to be released from bondage. But this release from bondage did not relieve him from the personal economic necessity of participating in the harvesting of the crop of his former creditor and perhaps harvesting part of his own land's crop, which was also to lie fallow. He achieved his release from debt in a year of heavy national dependence on God. There was not supposed to be any planting in the season prior to the sabbatical year. The land was to receive its rest. So, the released debtor faced a problem: how to get enough to eat.

He would have faced high demand for food from the free market. If he could harvest anything, he could either consume it or sell it. He would possess a valuable asset—food—in a year of above-average scarcity. This was an advantage for him. But without the landowner to serve as his intermediary, the newly debt-free Israelite would begin to regain his confidence as a free man. He would be forced to learn marketing in the year that he would plant the eighth-year crop on his own land, except in jubilee “weeks,” when the law also prohibited planting in the year after the sabbatical year. The year of his release from debt or even servitude would also be a difficult year economically. It was a year in which Israelites were supposed to rely on God's grace and their own previous thrift. This was why the newly released Israelite had to be liberally provided with food (Deut. 15:13–14): to get him through the sabbatical year. The fruit of his own field would belong to non-owning harvesters and beasts.

The sabbatical year was a system for forcing men to become self-consciously dependent on God's grace. Dependent on Him, they were to become dominion-minded. *Subordinate to God, they were to become active toward the creation.* This is the mandated hierarchical pattern for the dominion covenant: *those who are meek before God will inherit the earth.* The year of debt release was to be the year of open access to the fields for non-owners. It was a year of hard work for harvesters, for they harvested on their own and for their own. A new master told them to do this: the market.

If independent harvesters were given free access to the land's unassisted production one year in seven, they would have had an incentive to recommend land management practices that would maximize out-

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

put in the seventh year: crop rotation, fertilization, irrigation, etc. This does not mean that landowners were required to follow the suggestions of the full-time harvesters, but to the extent that owners deferred to harvesters in gathering information and assessing its value, the sabbatical year law encouraged agricultural practices that did not strip the land of its long-run productivity. This law, when enforced, created a class of preferred workers who had an incentive to act as *economic agents of the land*, and therefore as *economic agents of the future*.

We do not know for certain whether the gleaners would have received more income as secondary harvesters in a year following an investment of capital or as primary harvesters in a year following an investment of zero. As I hope to show, it is likely that the total output of the fields was greater in a normal harvest year than in a sabbatical year.¹¹ We know that when this law was enforced, the land received its rest, and the poor had access to the fields. God therefore placed self-interested monitors in the midst of the community. The question was: Would these monitors possess sufficient power or influence over landowners through the priesthood? The answer for 490 years: *no*.

C. The Pressure on Landowners to Save

When the law was enforced, landowners had considerable economic incentive to plan for a year of no agricultural income. They had to save enough food to get them through the seventh year. They also had to realize that the seed corn of the sixth year would be needed at the end of the seventh year in order to provide a crop for the eighth year. This would have to be put aside late in year six to plant late in year seven. Owners had to plan and organize for six years to prepare for the sabbatical year. If they did not save enough food to get them through the sabbatical year, they would be tempted to eat their seed corn during the sabbatical year. They had to overcome this temptation. In short, they had to save.

Saving requires future-orientation. Without future-orientation, we would consume everything today. Societies and communities that are characterized by what Ludwig von Mises called high time-preference¹² are marked by low amounts of capital and low production. People in such societies value present goods over future goods so highly that

11. See below, Section E.

12. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 485–90. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

they consume almost everything today. No society that is completely present-oriented could survive except through charity from outside. The harsh reality of the cursed effects of scarcity (Gen. 3:17–19)¹³ forces members of every society to plan for the future, to save some percentage of today's goods for tomorrow's needs and wants.

The law of the sabbatical year added another incentive to become more future-oriented. Those landowners who neglected to store food for a coming year of zero agricultural income would find themselves in a bind in the sabbatical year. They might be forced to borrow enough food to feed themselves. They would therefore become debt slaves. They might even be forced by a lease agreement to leave their farms until the next jubilee year. They might have to become landless wage earners or even gleaners. Someone who was more thrifty would then become the land's administrator. That is, in what was designed by God to be a year of release for Israel, improvident, present-oriented landowners would fall into poverty and servitude. This sabbatical system kept control of the land in the hands of future-oriented, efficient people.

The landowner had to forfeit income in the sabbatical year. Resting the land was mandatory. Was this a civil law? The text does not say. If it was—and I presume that it was¹⁴—the state was required by God to act as the land's agent. Owners were not allowed to oppress the land. So, this civil law suppressed a specific evil action: the exploitation of the land. It brought unspecified negative sanctions against evil-doers.¹⁵ But there was another aspect of this law: mandatory gleaning. The landowner had to allow hired servants and poor people into his fields to glean in the sabbatical year. Was this a case of a civil law that imposed positive sanctions for one group at the expense of another? Was it a state-enforced welfare program?

To answer this question, we first need to determine if this law established a property right for the local poor. The fruit of the land was to become the property of the gleaners in the sabbatical year. Which local gleaners possessed an enforceable legal claim? The judicial problem—which gleaners would be allowed into which fields—still remained, as it did with everyday gleaning. The law did not give specific

13. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 12.

14. A civil law is justified biblically because God threatens a society with corporate negative sanctions for disobedience. These sanctions came: the Babylonian captivity.

15. One possible civil sanction: two years of rest for the land as the victim, i.e., double restitution.

legal claims to specific gleaners. This indicates that the state was not the enforcing agency with respect to the gleaners, even though it was the enforcing agency with respect to the protection of the land. This was not a state welfare program.

What agency was to defend the claims of the gleaners? The priesthood. Priests had the authority to excommunicate landowners who refused to allow gleaners into the fields. Priests could lawfully bar covenant-breakers from the Passover. They policed the sacramental boundaries. The priests could serve as wealth-transfer agents in this case—defenders of the poor. It was God's land, and He wanted His delegated owners to allow gleaners into His fields. Gleaners as a class had ecclesiastically enforceable legal claims to access to the unplanted, fallow land. But without local agents to enforce these legal claims, specific gleaners could not gain access to land owned by someone willing to break this law.

This law's effects were not entirely negative on landowners. First, the long-term productivity of the land was retained by the sabbatical year. Second, it did give landowners a year of rest. They could concentrate on other business ventures, perhaps even going on a missionary-trade journey. Third, it increased the economic pressure on landowners to exercise thrift in years one through six.

The discipline of thrift—future-orientation—is not natural to fallen man. It must be learned. Where it is learned, and where its requirements become habitual, the individual becomes the owner of a major capital asset. *The psychology of thrift is a very valuable resource.* In the category of “human resource” or “human capital,” the habit of thrift rivals the importance of the famous Protestant work ethic. In fact, thrift is basic to this ethic. Max Weber wrote in 1905 regarding the Protestant ethic that “Old Testament morality was able to give a powerful impetus to that spirit of self-righteous and sober legality which was so characteristic of the worldly asceticism of this form of Protestantism.”¹⁶ Thrift has been a crucial aspect of this worldly asceticism, he wrote: “When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save.”¹⁷ The sabbatical land law pressured Israelite landowners to master the discipline of thrift.

16. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [1905] 1958), p. 165.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

D. The Threat of Debt

In the seventh year, all charitable, zero-interest loans to poor Israelites became null and void (Deut. 15:1).¹⁸ Creditors could not legally collect from impoverished debtors. Meanwhile, the economy grew tight: reduced food production. Improvident landowners went looking for loans to get them through the year. There would have been greater-than-normal demand for interest-bearing loans, i.e., higher interest rates. This would have tended to squeeze the weakest borrowers out of the loan market. Lenders prefer to lend to those who are likely to repay. On the other hand, if an evil man wanted to trap a weak debtor in order to gain control over his labor if he defaulted, the year of national gleaning would have been an ideal time. The recently liberated debtors would have known this. Their memory of their previous bondage was to keep them from succumbing to this temptation. The poor had access to the untilled fields of the landowners. They were expected to take advantage of this unique situation and stay out of debt. They were not to “return to Egypt” by going into debt and risking another round of bondage.

Any landowner who had not planned carefully would face a crisis in year seven. Without sufficient thrift in the previous six years, he might have been forced to enter the debt market to save his business. But he would have come to a lender as a businessman, not as a poverty-stricken brother in the faith. There was no moral pressure on anyone to lend to him. Such moral compulsion to lend applied only to loans to the poor (Deut. 15:7–10). A land-secured loan threatened the borrower greatly: to default the loan meant the forced sale of his land until the loan was repaid or until the next jubilee year.

Lenders would have been more ready to lend to landowners than to most poor men: secure collateral. This gave landowners an advantage in the loan markets. But there was great risk for the debtor. There was also the embarrassment of having to mortgage the family’s property. The present-oriented landowner would then face the need to repay the loan, making preparation for the next sabbatical year even more burdensome. The debt trap loomed much larger to the person who fell behind. This is the grim reality of debt.

The sabbatical year was therefore a major burden on landowners. There is little doubt that they would have preferred to avoid this burden. If this law was going to be enforced, there had to be an agency of

18. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 36.

enforcement that had an economic incentive to do so. Which agency was it? And why did it fail to enforce the law prior to the Babylonian exile?

E. The Defection of the Levites

We know that this law was not enforced for centuries prior to the exile. Jeremiah identified their failure to honor the year of release as the cause of the exile: "At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear" (Jer. 34:14).

The enforcing agents, the Levites (gleaning law) and civil magistrates (land law), did not assert their authority. Why not? We do not know. This may be one of those cases in which they had a short-term incentive not to enforce the law. In a normal year, they were entitled to tithes and taxes from landowners and gleaners. In a sabbatical year, only the gleaners paid. The landowners harvested nothing for their own account. Perhaps the collectors of tithes and taxes did not consider the soil's long-term output, allowing landowners to plant and harvest.

I conclude that the total output of the land in a normal year was greater than during a sabbatical year. Levites and civil magistrates received a larger tithe in non-sabbatical years. Thus, they had less short-term economic incentive to see that the sabbatical year law was enforced. They had to enforce the law because God required them to do so, not because they were paid to do so. The tribe of Levi was to cooperate with the local monitors: hired hands, the poor, and strangers. Levites were required to see to it that the sabbath year's gleaning law was enforced. They refused. They forfeited their position as sanctioning agents on this issue. As a result, the nation went into captivity. After their return, Israel honored this law (I Macc. 6:49, 53). Ezekiel had prophesied that heathen residents in the land would participate in a new allocation of land (Ezek. 47:21–23), but we do not know if the jubilee laws were honored.

Which gleaners fared best? It is understandable that the hired harvesters were content with their arrangement during normal years. They were paid to work. They probably would have preferred to work for landowners in the sabbatical year had the owners planted the crops

in year six. The poorer members of the community, however, probably fared better comparatively during the sabbatical years. Perhaps the total harvest going to them would have been larger in sabbatical years than with conventional gleaning in normal years, despite the fact that no one would have planted crops in year six. We cannot know for sure. What we do know is that this law was not enforced for half a millennium. The land was not given its rest.

There were no monitors in positions of authority with a clear-cut economic incentive to see that the law was enforced. Those who might have had this incentive would have been the poorest members of the community, or, in the case of strangers, non-citizens: men with little authority. So, the law went unenforced until after the return from Babylon. Only after God had demonstrated that He would bring negative sanctions through a foreign invasion did Israel obey the law. In the days of the Maccabees, they still honored it. It was their fear of God and His negative historical sanctions, not positive economic incentives, that changed their behavior.

F. In Search of an Explanation

We now come to a comment made by Robert North, a liberal Jesuit scholar, whose voluminous study of the jubilee law is as unreadable as it is theologically perverse. He cited Germanic sources throughout, and he imported their presuppositions. He even invokes the classic assertion shared with equal enthusiasm by theological liberals and neo-evangelicals: the Bible is not a textbook of []. “Though the Pentateuch was not meant as a textbook of economics, still if a universal fallow can be shown to have been economically impossible, then according to sound hermeneutic principles it is legitimate to seek some other explanation for the text.”¹⁹ He then cites a page and a half of Germans who have concluded that fallow land on a national basis could not have taken place in the same year. He adds that “a fallow without plowing would be useless and positively detrimental; . . .”²⁰ If this interpretation is correct, then God was clearly being a bit of a tyrant for having sent the heirs of these people into bondage for their having neglected to do what was not only economically impossible but agriculturally detrimental. This sounds like an unwise conclusion, even

19. Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954), p. 115.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

for a theologically liberal Jesuit.

He cited another German—there are always plenty of German academics to cite in support of any argument—that perhaps there was sufficient agricultural productivity for the Israelites to save enough food to feed themselves in the seventh year.²¹ He then moved from a discussion of thrift to a discussion of the need for miraculous crop yields, either annually or in the sixth year, to produce this surplus.²² He never said which theory he prefers.

The real goal of the sabbatical year, he said, was care for the poor. This means that a policy of rotating one-seventh of the crop would have met this criterion.²³ (This highly practical suggestion comes from a rarity in his text, an American scholar.) Of course, this would not include the number-one criterion of the text: a national year of rest. He admits as much: “Obviously our interpretation runs counter to the surface-sense of certain expressions of the sacred text, though for many of these we have already defended an acceptable alternative.”²⁴ Conclusion: there was no true fallow; it was a rotating fallow.²⁵

The modern state of Israel pretends to honor this law, and has since the 1880s. Every seventh year, the farmland of the nation is transferred by the Minister of Internal Affairs to the Chief Rabbinate, which sells title to an anonymous gentile, usually an Arab, who retains formal ownership for one year. Then he sells it back. By Rabbinic law, he is outside the sabbatical year’s requirements, so he does not enforce this law. He sells back the land to the Chief Rabbinate at the end of the sabbatical year, which in turn returns formal ownership to the *de facto* owners. “If we were to stop marketing our products to Europe even for one year, we’d be finished,” according to the Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture.²⁶ Non-Zionist Orthodox Jewish rabbis refuse to go along, however, since by Jewish law, Jews are not allowed to sell land in Palestine to gentiles.²⁷ They organize special shops in sabbatical years that sell fruits and vegetables grown by Arabs on Arab land.²⁸

21. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

24. *Idem.*

25. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

26. Clyde Haberman, “The Rabbis’ Almanack of Seventh-Year Farming,” *New York Times* (Dec. 10, 1992). The year 1992 was the sixth year in the cycle.

27. Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press, 1994), p. 43.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 108, n. 17.

(A similar strategy is used during Passover week. The law requires all leaven to be removed from every Jewish household. This makes it difficult for grain merchants. Solution: observant Jews sell all of these prohibited substances to the local rabbi, who sells them to the Chief Rabbinate, which sells them to a gentile for a week. Then he sells them back. By a special dispensation, these multiple sales are presumed to include the leavened substances of non-practicing Jews, too.)²⁹

G. New Testament Applications

The jubilee laws are important for Christians because of Jesus' first public announcement concerning the nature of His ministry:

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4: 17–21).

Jesus' application of Isaiah's language of liberation indicates that He saw His ministry as the fulfillment of the jubilee year.³⁰ This is consistent with the New Testament's judicial theology of rest. Jesus' work in history is the judicial foundation of man's sabbatical rest; His kingdom is the definitive basis in history for man's future rest (Heb. 4:1–11).

1. Abrogation

There is a great deal of confusion in modern Christian circles, both fundamentalist and liberationist, regarding the applicability of the jubilee laws in the New Covenant era. Furthermore, Christians can gain little from a study of the rabbinical sources dealing with the jubilee, since very few of these texts deal in detail with these post-temple applications of the jubilee laws. There is no treatise on the jubilee in

29. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

30. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

either the Mishna or the Talmud, perhaps because the rabbis considered the jubilee laws abrogated from the era of the Babylonian exile until the coming of the Messiah.³¹ This is not to say that the Talmud does not mention the jubilee. It does. So did the Geonim, the principals of the Jewish academies in Babylonia in the medieval era. But the information they conveyed is not consistent.³²

The question arises: Is the sabbatical year law still in force? This is another way of asking: What in the New Testament may have annulled it?

First, the model for the sabbatical year was the weekly sabbath: a day of rest at the end of the week. In the New Covenant, the locus of authority of sabbath enforcement has shifted from the state and church to the individual. This is the judicial basis for the annulment of the death penalty for violating the weekly sabbath (Ex. 31:14–15).³³

Second, the law in Israel established a national sabbatical year governing both agriculture and charitable debt. This was possible to impose because the Israelites had entered the land as conquerors at a specific point in time. That historical starting point no longer exists.

The absence of a fixed sabbatical year could be changed today through civil legislation, but is there biblical justification for this? Only in the name of ecology. The individual is to enforce the weekly sabbath, not the state.³⁴ The same is true of any seventh-year sabbath. Is the individual still duty-bound by God to honor the sabbatical year? Does God threaten negative sanctions, corporate or individual, against those who refuse to honor its provisions? Or was the sabbatical year limited to the Mosaic Covenant?

Were the sabbatical year laws exclusively part of the jubilee system? No. The law was given first in Exodus 23:10–11. It was given primarily for the benefit of the poor in the land and secondarily for the beasts of the field (v. 11). The context was the sabbath in general (v. 12), not the jubilee system.

The identification of the beasts of the field as recipients of the benefit of rest leads to the broader question of just which beasts God has

31. This is the suggestion of Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 87–90.

32. A. Löwy, *A Treatise on the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee* (New York: Hermon, [1866] 1974), pp. 3–4.

33. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

34. *Ibid.*, Appendix E.

in mind. Did He mean domestic animals only? Or is the wildbeast also included? What about the worm and the insect?

2. Ecology

Man has creaturely limits on his knowledge. He is not omniscient, nor will he ever be. He can harm land through mono-crop agriculture and other techniques that can prove to be exploitative over time. Overuse of pesticides in modern times may prove to be a cause of major ecological damage. Scientists do not presently agree on this. Eventually, a majority of them may agree, although it may take a crisis to produce such agreement, or else generations of additional agricultural productivity. The question is: Is a compulsory year of rest for the sake of the land established by God's law? Should the state compel the owner of every farm, every garden, and every vineyard to cease cultivating his land one year in seven—not necessarily all enterprises in the same year, but each enterprise one year in seven? Alternatively, should land-use enforcers be sent out to police every farm, determining that one-seventh of each plot under cultivation be left fallow each year? The regulatory nightmare that would result from either interpretation suggests an answer: *no*. But is the potential cost of regulation a sufficient reason for abandoning this law? No. There has to be a judicial reason for ignoring any of God's Old Covenant laws, not mere pragmatism or presumed convenience. The familiar refrain is not sufficient: "God's Old Testament laws applied only to an ancient agricultural economy." That is an invalid objection covenantally; it is also weak in this instance. This happens to be an agricultural law. If the law's primary goal was ecological—rest for the creatures of the field and soil—then the New Covenant can be said to have changed this law's validity only if it established a new relationship among God, man, and the land. Did it? Yes. The land ceased to be a judicial agent of God.

3. Sanctions and Sanctification

First, we have already considered one major change in relation to the land's function as a judicial agent for God. The Promised Land vomited out the Canaanites (Lev. 18:28). This judicial act is now performed by Jesus Christ (Rev. 3:16).³⁵ The land no longer serves as the judicial agent of God. Second, the curse of the land was definitively

35. Chapter 17.

overcome by the New Covenant. Men are no longer polluted ritually by the land. This is why foot-washing is no longer ritually mandatory in the post-resurrection, post-temple era. Progressive sanctification, individually and corporately, steadily removes the restraints of the land's scarcity. This has been happening rapidly for at least two centuries. The price of agricultural commodities compared to the price of labor has steadily dropped as the jurisdiction of the free market economy has advanced.³⁶

The exploitation of the land, net, may still be going on. We may be facing an agricultural calamity as a result of our techniques of agricultural production and land management. Or we may not. The ecological evidence is unclear; well-informed people can be found on both sides in this debate.³⁷ The price evidence, however, is clear: no agricultural calamity is foreseen by those whom we reward to forecast such possibilities. The industrial revolution has also been an agricultural revolution.³⁸

The covenantally significant question is: Can we legitimately attribute a supposedly looming agricultural calamity to our failure to rest the land? Had we required a year of national rest for the land, would this have offset all the other commercial farming practices that supposedly erode the land's long-term productivity? There is no way to know. We are comparing a conjectural future (famine) with a conjectural past (the rate of land erosion under the sabbatical year). So, in order to understand the sabbatical land law in the Mosaic economy, we have to decide in terms of biblical judicial issues, not ecology.

This is not to say that resting the land will not prove to be a means of increasing long-term agricultural output, and therefore income, but the test must be profit and loss under free market conditions. The gen-

36. Julian L. Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), ch. 1; Simon and Herman Kahn (eds.), *The Resourceful Earth: A Response to 'Global 2000'* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984); E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1990), ch. 7.

37. The erosion school is best represented in the United States by the tabloid *Acres, USA*; the conventional view by the United States Department of Agriculture and university agricultural schools.

38. If the nanotechnology revolution ever becomes a reality, as I believe it will, mankind's food supply will be able to be produced by microscopic machines using molecular raw materials. K. Eric Drexler, *Engines of Creation* (Garden City, New York: Anchor/ Doubleday, 1986). The debate over a looming agricultural productivity crisis will probably shift from the misuse of the land to the misuse of "free" resources, mainly moving fluids that cannot easily be assigned to owners.

eral law of the New Covenant sabbath must prevail: the decision of each individual landowner operating under the sovereign jurisdiction of his conscience. We dare not move from the annulled jubilee year laws to the sabbatical land law in New Covenant times, nor dare we move from the New Covenant sabbath to a national year of rest. This leaves the landowner in charge. Paul wrote: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it” (Rom. 14:5–6a).³⁹ The same covenantal principle of individual jurisdiction also applies to the sabbatical year of rest.

Conclusion

The judicial foundations of the sabbatical year of rest were twofold: (1) the sabbath rest principle; (2) God’s original ownership of the land. At the time of the conquest, God transferred control over the land to families that held legal title on a sharecropping basis, operating under specific terms of the original leasehold agreement. The lease provided a payment to God (the tithe), i.e., a high percentage return to God’s authorized sharecropper-owners (90% before taxes), and a provision for the maintenance of the long-term capital value of the land (the sabbatical year). Those residents in Israel who did not own the land had legal title to the output of the land: unrestricted harvest in sabbatical years. The legal title of the gleaners was to be enforced by the Levites and priests on land owners.

The judicial issue of the sabbatical year was rest: rest for the land, hired workers, and animals. This also included release from the requirement to repay charitable debts (Deut. 15). By “rest,” the law meant *a respite for the landless from the requirement to work for the landed*. This law governed agricultural land and those who worked it. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that it governed any nonagricultural occupation.

This law pressured landowners to plan and save for the sabbatical year. They had to store up both food corn and seed corn. When this law was enforced, it forced them to develop the habit of thrift, i.e., future-orientation. The law also required landowners to forfeit the automatic (though not “natural”) productivity of the land in the seventh

39. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

year. The poor, the stranger, the field animals, and the regular harvesters all had a legal claim on this production, if they were willing to do the work to glean it.

The Levites were the enforcers of this law as it applied to the gleaners' lawful access to the fruits of the land. The Levites refused. This indicates they had little or no short-term economic incentive to enforce it. This in turn indicates that their tithe income was greater when the land was planted and harvested. Finally, this indicates that there was less net agricultural output in the seventh year than in the other six.

This law was good for the land and all the creatures great and small that inhabited it. Owners were restrained in their use of God's land. Agricultural practices that overworked the land were restrained by this law. The land, as God's judicial agent, deserved its rest. This law mandated it. If this land-protecting aspect of the law was enforced by the state, as I believe it was, it rested on the legal status of the land as God's judicial agent, not on the state as an agency of wealth redistribution to the gleaners. This law is no longer in force in the New Testament era because the land ceased to be a covenantal agent in A.D. 71.

The sabbatical year law was enforced after the Babylonian exile. The fear of God is a great incentive. During the exile, God had substituted His negative sanctions in history for the failure of the priesthood and the state to enforce the sabbatical year law. Exile was God's partial disinheritance of Israel. It warned Israel of *comprehensive disinheritance*, should the nation continue to rebel. The exile altered land tenure: a new distribution replaced the original distribution under Joshua. The exile severed the judicial link between each family's plot and the conquest generation. The jubilee land laws had been established by genocide, but genocide was neither authorized by God nor possible after the exile. The jubilee's heathen-slave laws remained in force, but the residents who participated in any post-exilic distribution were to become immune to the threat of permanent servitude by Israelites.

The sabbatical land law was an extension of the law of the sabbath. It was not a subset of the jubilee land laws. On the contrary, the jubilee land laws were temporary applications of the sabbath law's principle of rest. If there are any New Testament applications of the sabbatical year of rest for the land, they are based on ecology or the general authority of sabbath rules, not on the jubilee's military conquest. This transfers the locus of authority to the landowner: individual, not corporate.

BOUNDARIES OF THE JUBILEE LAND LAWS

And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession (Lev. 25:8–13).

The theocentric meaning of the jubilee law was God's ownership of both the land and the people. He reserved the right to dictate the terms of inheritance to the Israelites. This inheritance included rural land, heathen slaves, and homes owned by Levites in Levitical cities. It also included citizenship.

A. The Jubilee Cycle

First, we begin with the problem of identifying the jubilee cycle. Rabbis from at least the completion of the Talmud (c. 500 A.D.) taught that the jubilee year was scheduled every fiftieth year.¹ Most Christians have agreed with this view through the centuries, but not all. A few have thought that the forty-ninth year was counted as the fiftieth.²

1. A. Löwy, *A Treatise on the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee* (New York: Hermon, [1866] 1974), pp. 7–9. He cited numerous sources.

2 2. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

Among those commentators who accept the fiftieth year as the jubilee year, there has been debate over the first year in the next cycle. Most Jewish commentators have argued that the fifty-first year constituted the first year in the next cycle. This was the prevailing opinion of the contributors to the Talmud. Maimonides agreed.³ Other Talmudic Jews have believed that the jubilee year itself counted as the first year.⁴ There have been other theories held by a handful of scholars.⁵

The idea that the fiftieth year served as the first year in the next sabbath cycle suggests a parallel: the shift from the Old Covenant's seventh-day sabbath to the New Covenant's eighth-day sabbath, which itself served as the inauguration of a first-day sabbath, i.e., the shift from the Old Covenant's week (6–1) to the New Covenant's week (1–6).⁶ Jesus' resurrection took place on the eighth day, i.e., the day after the Jewish sabbath, a sabbath that took place on the Sadducees' Passover that year.⁷ Sunday is the first day of the week for most Christians: the symbolic equivalent of the eighth day. The theory of the fiftieth year as the first year in the next cycle is certainly appealing to the Christian (and also to the Talmud's Rabbi Jehudah),⁸ but we cannot appeal to historical records of the jubilee as empirical tests of this theory, because there is no biblical record or any other ancient contemporary record of Israel's ever having celebrated a jubilee year.⁹

B. The Timing of the Jubilee

Second, we need to consider the timing of the day of jubilee. It is not generally recognized that there were two calendars in ancient Israel: priestly and kingly, sanctuary and land. They corresponded to the

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–16.

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 6.

7. Jesus celebrated Passover on Thursday evening, Nissan 14, the Pharisees' Passover, and was tried and crucified the next day. The Judean dating, used by the Sadducees, was different. They celebrated Passover beginning on Nissan 15 (Nissan 14, as calculated by the Sadducees), a sabbath night, so they refused to enter the Praetorium when they took Jesus before Pilate, lest they be defiled for Passover (John 18:28b). They called for the Romans to remove the dead bodies because the sabbath that year corresponded to the Judean Passover (John 19:31). On the distinction between the Pharisees' and the Sadducees' respective Passover dates, see Harold W. Hohner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1977), ch. 4, especially the chart on page 89.

8. Löwy, *Sabbatical Cycle*, pp. 23–24.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

two shekels: sanctuary (Lev. 27:3, 25) and ordinary. James Jordan believes that the *two calendars* corresponded to two separate government systems.¹⁰ The *religious year* began in the spring: the first month, Nisan (Esth. 3:7), when Passover was celebrated (Ex. 12). The *civil year* began in the fall: on the first day the seventh month of the religious calendar (called Tishri in the Talmud).¹¹ This was marked by a day of sabbath rest (Lev. 23:24–25). Ten days later, the day of atonement took place (Lev. 23:27–28).¹² As we shall see, the jubilee was tied to the civil (land) year. This is why the jubilee was a predominantly civil event. It launched the next cycle of inheritance. This inheritance was predominately civil: a matter of citizenship. Those who were heirs of the generation of the conquest were citizens; the jubilee restored them to their judicial tokens of citizenship: their land. On the fifteenth day, the feast of booths or Tabernacles took place (Lev. 23:34–36, 39–43).

In the jubilee year, trumpets were to be blown throughout the land on the tenth day of the seventh month. This marked the great year of release. It was also a day of rest because it was the day of atonement (Lev. 23:28). The next day, men dwelling near the borders of Israel had to begin their walk to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles (Booths). In no more than four days, they had to complete their journey. This time requirement restrained any major extension of the geographical boundaries of Israel. On the day above all other days in Israel's life that was tied to geographical boundaries—jubilee's day of landed inheritance—the timing of the jubilee and Tabernacles established tight limits on the size of the nation. *Israel could never become an expansionist territorial empire and still honor the day of atonement (rest), the jubilee year (inheritance), and the feast of Tabernacles (celebration)*. When the Israelites walked to Jerusalem in the jubilee year, all but the Levites went as rural land owners and citizens, even urban dwellers who had leased out their land to others. But they could never lawfully walk from an inheritance located very far from Jerusalem. If Israel ever became an empire, Israelites living near the outer boundaries would forfeit their inheritance in the original land.¹³

10. James Jordan, "Jubilee, Part 2," *Biblical Chronology*, V (March 1993), p. 1.

11. *Rosh. Hash.*, 1:3; cited in "Month," *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, eds. John M'Clintock and James Strong, 12 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1876), IV, p. 547.

12. Jordan noted that the official first year of the reign of a king of Judah ran from the first day of the seventh month of the religious year to the last day of the sixth month of the next religious year.

13. The reader may think: "This is obvious. What is the big deal?" Try to find any

C. The Day of Atonement

The year of jubilee was to begin on the day of atonement (*yom kippur*). The theological significance of this timing is readily apparent: the day of atonement was the day on which the people of Israel made a formal public acknowledgment of their dependence on the grace of God in escaping from God's required punishment for sin. There had to be an animal sacrifice as part of this formal worship ceremony. It was a day of affliction: death for an animal and public humility for the participants. No work was allowed on that day. *The day of atonement was a day of rest—the ultimate day of rest in ancient Israel, symbolizing covenant-keeping man's rest from the curse of sin.* It was a day set apart for each person's examination of his legal state before God and the self-affliction of his soul.

For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever. And the priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall consecrate to minister in the priest's office in his father's stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen clothes, even the holy garments: And he shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make an atonement for the tabernacle of the congregation, and for the altar, and he shall make an atonement for the priests, and for all the people of the congregation. And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. And he did as the LORD commanded Moses (Lev. 16: 30–34).

Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people. Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings (Lev. 23:27–31).

commentary on Leviticus that discusses the relationship between the timing of the day of atonement-jubilee and the growth of empire. The silence of the commentators is testimony to their unwillingness to take the Bible's literal texts seriously (theological liberalism) or to take political theory seriously (theological conservatism).

Once each half century, the day of affliction was to become the day of liberation. The meaning of the Hebrew verb for “afflict” is submission or humility. An example of *submission* is found in the incident in which Hagar had fled from Sarai, and the angel then confronted her. “And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands” (Gen. 16:9). An example of *humility* is where God brought low the children of Israel in the wilderness period for their failure to submit to Him: “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Deut. 8:2–3). In both instances, the covenantal issue was *covenantal subordination*: point two of the biblical covenant model.¹⁴

The day of national liberation and family inheritance took place on the day of formal subordination to God. The imagery is obvious. *Only through submission to God can man experience liberation*. Autonomy is not liberation. This is why modern humanism’s free market economic theory, which is both agnostic and individualistic, is not the source of the free society that its defenders proclaim. If we begin our economic analysis with the presupposition of the autonomous individual in an autonomous cosmos, we begin with a hypothesis that cannot lead to liberty and maintain it.

D. A Question of Subordination

The year of jubilee began with the blowing of a trumpet, a trumpet announcing the day of atonement. The ram’s horn, *yobale* (Josh. 6: 4–5), is the origin of the English transliteration, *jubilee* (Lev. 25:10– 13). The jubilee year followed a sabbatical year of rest for the land, a year in which the agricultural poor, the stranger, and the beasts of the field did not harvest the fields for the fields’ owners; they worked for their own direct benefit.

14. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

1. *The Hierarchy of God's Grace*

The sabbatical year temporarily broke the economic hierarchy linking the agricultural employer, his employees, and the land. The sabbatical year was to be a year of release for employees from direct and personal economic subordination to employers. It was also to be a release for the land, which was not to be planted in the sixth year. The owner of the land, God, for one year transferred the fruit of His land to non-owners, i.e., a different set of sharecroppers who could lawfully retain 90% of whatever the land, under God's direct administration, might produce. They became dependent on God's grace rather than the owners' sowing of the fields and care of the land. Like the wilderness that had brought forth manna six days out of seven, so was the land of Israel to become in the sabbatical year: *the visible arena of God's grace*. God promised to bless Israel with an added measure of grace: the miraculous sixth-year crop, the "manna" preceding the jubilee year.¹⁵

2. *The Hierarchy of Market Competition*

Hierarchy is an inescapable concept. There is no escape from subordination. There can be movement from one form of subordination to another, but not its abolition. The market that governed the agricultural employee indirectly through the decisions of his employer six years out of seven would, in a sabbatical year, bring its pressures on him directly. His six years as a subordinate to land-owning masters were intended to prepare him for a year of service to an impersonal master: the competitive market. Consumers bring their judgment upon producers through the dual sanctions of profit and loss. The employee, when he became the master of his own production unit in the jubilee year, would have to learn to meet the demands of both nature (food for his family) and the market. He would find that he was still under authority. The system of sabbatical years was designed to give every landless field hand the opportunity to become familiar with this economic pressure. For one year in seven, he was to learn about subordination to the market.

Then, in the year following the seventh cycle of the sabbatical weeks of years, the landless employee was to receive his reward: the return of his landed inheritance in the jubilee. The day of atonement that began the jubilee year brought Israelites as individuals under the afflic-

15. Chapter 27.

tion of God: voluntary submission. It simultaneously released them from direct economic subordination. In that year, members of poor Israelite families repossessed their portion of the larger family unit's land. Having submitted to God, they would no longer have to submit to landed administrators. They would become landed administrators. They would then have to submit to consumers directly, without a land owner above them telling them what to do.

3. Dominion Through Subordination

The covenantal basis of dominion is formal, oath-bound subordination to God. The jubilee year began with the sound of a trumpet: the audible symbol of the final judgment. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I Cor. 15:52). The day of atonement was to remind the Israelite nation of its unique corporate subordination to God. This ritual subordination was to serve as the foundation, both judicially and psychologically, of each Israelite's tasks of leadership. Humble before God, they were to be aggressive toward the world. This is the meaning of the New Testament's statement, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). They are *meek before God*, not meek before covenant-breaking men.¹⁶ To be compelled to be meek before covenant-breaking men is evidence of God's temporary chastisement of His covenant people. It is to be forced to adhere to an illegitimate civil oath.¹⁷

On the day above all other days of the year in which each Israelite publicly manifested his subordinate position before God, the *day of atonement* also served, twice per century, as the *day of inheritance*, the day on which a man's inheritance in rural land was returned to him. He would henceforth regain *legal authority* over a piece of land. He would then have an opportunity to discover whether he had the necessary skills and foresight as an entrepreneur—a future-predicting planner and executor of plans¹⁸—to retain *economic authority* over his inheritance as an economic representative of God, his own family, and the

16. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix D:D–E.

17. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

18. Ludwig von Mises, "Profit and Loss" (1951), in *Planning For Freedom*, 3rd ed. (South Holland, Illinois: Libertarian Press, 1974), ch. 9; (<http://bit.ly/MisesPFF>) Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>) Cf. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 32.

consumers in the marketplace. He became a legal representative of God as owner, which required economic representation.

4. *Rest and Subordination*

The meaning of sabbath rest is subordination. Man, a creature, had the whole creation delivered to him by God on the sixth day of the first week. Man was to exercise dominion under God: a subordinate who was created explicitly to rule. To acknowledge his subordinate position under God, he was supposed to rest on the seventh day of God's week, which was the first full day of man's week.¹⁹ He rebelled instead. He illegitimately imitated God by prematurely grabbing for the robes of authority (Gen. 3:5). One aspect of Adam's curse was to have his day of rest postponed. This day of rest is definitively reached only through the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Heb. 4:9–10). Progressively, rest is attained through covenantal obedience to God: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). This rest from all labor in history is attained only at death: "Rest in Peace," we write on tombstones. Those who die disinherited by God in history do rest from their labors, but they have no peace forever.

Because of the nature of Adam's transgression, the Mosaic Covenant established its mandatory sabbath day as day seven. Old Covenant man was allowed to rest only after his labors were finished for the week. "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates" (Ex. 20:9–10).²⁰ Even as he had to work for his dinner, Old Covenant man had to work for his rest. Having played the rebel in his quest to become as God, man was made to suffer the burden of cursed work before his day of rest. This had not been the original design for man's work week. The six-one pattern of work and rest was a curse, even though weekly rest was grace that man does not deserve. The one-six pattern was the original Edenic model. Man was designed to begin his

19. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 6.

20. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

week with celebration—a covenant renewal meal—and rest.

Adam rebelled against his assigned day of rest. The mark of covenant-breaking man is his assertion of primary sovereignty, meaning autonomy. God did not rest the first day. Imitating God, covenant-breaking man refused to rest on his first day. Instead, he participated in a satanic communion meal at the forbidden tree. Then he sewed fig leaves to cover himself. He became a tailor. Adam's denial of his need for a day of rest was a denial of his subordinate position, metaphysically and judicially, under God.

So it was in Mosaic Israel. To work on the day of atonement—the day of man's required public acknowledgment of his subordination—was suicidal. It called down the negative sanction of spiritual death, directly imposed by God. "And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people" (Lev. 23:30). It was therefore an excommunicable offense: the loss of inheritance in the land and therefore also citizenship.

This is the judicial background of the year of jubilee. It was required to be held in the year following the seventh sabbatical year, i.e., year 50. The sabbatical year was a required year of rest for agricultural land. It came at the end of six years of harvesting. The year of jubilee followed the "sabbath" of a "week" of sabbath years. This constituted a second sabbath year: a double rest period. *This was a double testimony to man's subordination to God.*

E. The Spoils of War

"In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession" (Lev. 25:13). This provision applied to rural land. It did not apply to property in walled cities (Lev. 25:29–30). It did not apply to non-agricultural property.

1. Winners Take All

What was the historical origin of this law? Judicially, it was an application of the Mosaic sabbath (Ex. 23:10–12).²¹ Historically, it was an aspect of the promised spoils of war. God offered land only to those families that would participate in the military conquest of Canaan. Families that refused to join the battle could not participate in the post-conquest distribution of land. This was never stated explicitly, but we

21. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 53.

can safely conclude that this was the case because of Joshua's dealing with the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh. These tribes had already inherited property outside the Promised Land, across the Jordan River. This inheritance was an aspect of the spoils of war. Moses had announced: "And when ye came unto this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, came out against us unto battle, and we smote them: And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh" (Deut. 29:7–8). However, for them to inherit this recently promised land, Joshua insisted, they would have to fight the Canaanites alongside the other tribes, despite the fact that they had already fought Sihon and Og for their land, and Moses had passed title to them. In short, *there would be no transfer of lawful title prior to the final battle*. That is to say, there would be no rest for any until after the labor of war was over for all. What had been given to these tribes definitively could not be claimed by them finally until after the conquest was over.

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it. And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spake Joshua, saying, Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD'S servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising. And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses (Josh. 1:10–17).

If militarily victorious tribes had to wait for the transfer of title to land already verbally promised—land located across the Jordan and therefore not part of God's promise to Abraham—then what of lawful title to land within the boundaries of the Jordan? Surely the basis of

landed inheritance inside the Promised Land would also be based on military conquest. Yet it is unheard of for any commentator to discuss the jubilee year in terms of its historical basis: the distribution of spoils after the military conquest of Canaan.²² This is why the jubilee inheritance laws are so frequently misinterpreted, including their various applications to areas completely outside of the jubilee land law's agricultural frame of reference.

2. Genocide and Burnt Offerings

For the Israelites to inherit the land, they were required to kill everyone who had previously occupied the land. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee" (Deut. 7:16a). Note that the key issue was theology: the gods of the land's previous owners. The people of Israel were to be kept away from these alien gods.

God required a bloody burnt sacrifice as the covenantal foundation of the national inheritance: the genocide of the residents of Jericho and the city's subsequent burning. This mandatory ritual sacrifice²³ was to be followed by the total annihilation of all other residents of the Promised Land. To the degree that the Israelites in any way pitied the existing inhabitants, they would thereby compromise their inheritance. They would have to share the land with others.

Recent commentators have attempted to apply the jubilee laws to the modern world as if these laws had not been grounded in genocide. The original promise had been given to Abraham, but it was conditional on the heirs' continuation of the ritual of circumcision: a bloody rite symbolizing the cutting off of a man's biological heirs.

Consider a rate of population growth of 3% per annum, which was sustained by many agricultural nations in the twentieth century. This rate of increase would have doubled the size of the population in a quarter of a century. By the first jubilee, the average farm would have been down to just under three acres (11 divided by 4). By the second jubilee, the average farm would have been under .7 acre. And so on.

22. Robert North's seemingly exhaustive and mentally exhausting study, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954), is a good example of modern scholarship. Based on higher critical assumptions and methodology, it never mentions the jubilee in relation to the conquest of the land.

23. Achan and his entire family, including their animals, were executed for his having thwarted this required burnt offering. See Appendix A: "Sacrilege and Sanctions."

This is why the generation of the conquest had to be circumcised before the conquest could begin (Josh. 5). Commentators who do not trace the origin of the jubilee to the Israelites' genocidal conquest of the land also refuse to discuss the jubilee in terms of the unique, one-time nature of the conquest and the subsequent distribution of military spoils. To discuss the jubilee laws without also discussing the God-mandated genocide that implemented these laws is the equivalent of discussing the Christian ideal of heaven without discussing the cross, hell, and the lake of fire. The legal issue is the same: eternal genocide and eternal burnt offerings—not *by* covenant-breakers; rather, *of* covenant-breakers.²⁴

F. Dominion, Ownership, and Rest

Notice the phrase, "The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land" (Josh. 1:13b). *Rest was associated with lawful inheritance.* These two and a half tribes had fought and won their land outside of the Promised Land, but they would now have to fight and win again in order to seal their lawful inheritance: "Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you" (Josh. 1:15a). *To seal the tribal promise, there had to be a national victory.* Only a comprehensive military victory would bring the nation the rest that would become the basis of tribal inheritance. *Only on the basis of military peace can private property be secured.* This is an eschatological reality: when the implements of war disappear, God's covenant people will then possess lawful title to their property in peace. This can come only when nations universally conform themselves to the terms of God's covenant law.

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every

24. Gary North, "Publisher's Epilogue," in David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it (Mic. 4:1–4).

There are three primary goals of war: victory (dominion), spoils (inheritance), and peace (rest). The greatest of these is peace, if the peace is secured on God's terms. Permanent peace can be attained only when the law-order of the victors replaces the law-order of the losers. Victor's justice is the only form of justice after the war ends. But without a change in law, there has been no victory. There has only been assimilation by the defeated culture. The classic examples of this in Western European history were the military victories by the Goths over Rome. The Goths were steadily assimilated both theologically and judicially by the Christian order that had prevailed in Rome. Legal scholar Harold Berman put it well: without a change in the legal system, there is no revolution, only a successful *coup* or rebellion.²⁵ It takes more than one generation to produce a genuine revolution, he said.²⁶ In Israel, it took two generations: the generation of the exodus, all but two of whom died in the wilderness, and the generation of the heirs, 40 years spent growing up in the wilderness. Because God ordered the total annihilation of the Canaanites, this revolution in law was not supposed to take another generation. Canaan could not be persuaded by the law, so it was to be destroyed by the law's designated sanctioning agent: the land itself, operating through the nation of Israel. God's grace to the Israelites mandated His wrath to the Canaanites.

All three goals—victory, spoils, and peace—were encapsulated in the conquest of Canaan. The conquest of Canaan did not rival the exodus as the archetype of God's dealings with His people, but it did govern that most crucial aspect of a rural civilization: the inheritance of land. The specific terms of land ownership and inheritance in Israel, which in turn established the judicial basis of citizenship, did not derive from the Old Covenant era prior to the exodus, but were announced after the exodus and were ratified in history by the conquest.

Berman quoted Goethe: a tradition cannot be inherited; it must be earned.²⁷ This was surely the case with Mosaic Israel. But before the promised Abrahamic inheritance could be delivered to the heirs—the fourth generation—there had to be an act of covenant renewal. The

25. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 19–20.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

conquest was closely associated with point four: covenant renewal. The conquest began with the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 4): a boundary violation. As had been true of Moses' crossing out of the wilderness into Egypt with his uncircumcised son (Ex. 4:24–26), this boundary violation required an act of covenant renewal. Like Moses' son, the sons of Israel had not been circumcised in the wilderness. There followed the mass circumcision at Gilgal (Josh. 5:2–8) and a Passover meal of the corn of Canaan (Josh. 5:11). The manna then ceased; the fruit of the land replaced it (Josh. 5:12).

James Jordan speculates that the entire period constituted a five-point covenantal sequence: (1) the sovereign call out of Egypt by God; (2) the establishment of a judicial hierarchy (Ex. 18), which constituted a judicial sanctuary; (3) the moral development of the inheriting generation for 40 years; (4) the conquest itself, which brought mass sanctions against the Canaanites; (5) the occupation of the land. Evidence for this is the close association of the conquest with the oath-signs of circumcision and Passover.

G. The Demographics of the Jubilee Inheritance Law

The year of jubilee nullified all existing rural land lease contracts. On what legal basis? *Assertion of original title*. God, as the primary owner, transferred the leaseholds back to the heirs of the original conquering families. God announced in advance of the conquest the terms of His leasehold contracts. These leases were to be periodically re-established with members of the families of the original invasion and conquest. There could be no other lawful basis of inheritance in the Promised Land. Eventually, a future generation of those families whose members were unwise enough not to honor these terms would find itself dispossessed through captivity (Lev. 26:33–35).

The terms of the leases created a monopoly of family ownership. No foreigner prior to the exile could ever hope to establish a landed inheritance outside of a walled city except by adoption into an Israelite family. This law tended to keep foreigners inside cities. They would have been restricted to such occupations as merchants, craftsmen, and bankers. They could become landed heirs outside the cities only through adoption by an existing Israelite family.²⁸ On the other hand,

28. This included adoption through marriage for women, as the cases of Rahab and Ruth indicate.

they themselves could become the inherited property of Israelites, for the jubilee land law established permanent, inter-generational chattel slavery for foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46).²⁹ The jubilee laws therefore made it difficult for foreigners to achieve a permanent cultural presence in the land. It kept them as outsiders, except as temporary leaseholders, hired workers, slaves, and residents of walled cities.

1. Population Growth

Simultaneously, the jubilee inheritance law created demographic pressure for expansion beyond the boundaries of the Promised Land. No commentator ever discusses this obvious aspect of the jubilee. First, Mosaic law established the possibility of zero miscarriages: “There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil” (Ex. 23:26). It therefore established the possibility of high birth rates. Second, it established the possibility of longer life spans: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Ex. 20:12).³⁰ Third, the law allowed the adoption by Israelites of circumcised foreigners, a practice that had taken place widely in Egypt before the persecutions began.³¹ This was a covenantal formula for blessings that would produce “explosively” high population growth.³² The rapid population growth they had experienced in Egypt, which had so terrified the Pharaoh of the oppression (Ex. 1:7–10), was the model.

When a high population growth rate is combined with a fixed supply of land, societies become progressively urbanized and progressively engaged in foreign trade. The model in the early modern period of Europe is the tiny nation of the Netherlands. The twentieth-century model was the even tinier nation of Hong Kong.³³ If residents of a small, formerly rural nation are unwilling to become urbanized, they must emigrate to less densely populated nations. The homeland fills up.

2. Small Farms and Large Families

In ancient Israel, the land was to be transferred back to the original

29. Chapter 31.

30. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 25.

31. *Ibid.*, ch. 1:D.

32. Populations do not explode except when bombed. The language of modern growth theory has attached the metaphor of explosives to the metaphor of growth.

33. Alvin Rabushka, *Hong Kong: A Study in Economic Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

families. The geographically bounded nation was small when they invaded, yet they came in with at least two million people. There were 601,730 adult males at the time of the conquest (Num. 26:51), plus 23,000 Levites (Num. 26:62). Since this was approximately the same number that had come out of Egypt (Ex. 12:37), there had been no population growth for 40 years. This meant that they were reproducing at the replacement rate level: 2.1 children per family. (Some children do not marry, which is why the replacement rate is not 2.0 children.) So, there must have been about 2.4 million people at the time of the exodus: two adult parents and about two children per family.³⁴

They entered a land of about six and a half million acres.³⁵ This meant that the average family, had there been no cities, would have owned about 11 acres.³⁶ Not all of this land was arable. Some of it was taken up by cities, where the Levites lived. Over time, the number of acres per “nuclear” family unit³⁷ would have declined as population rose. If Israel had remained faithful to God’s law, miscarriages would have ceased. The early Egypt-era rate of growth of Israelite nuclear families would have resumed. No nuclear family could have inherited more than a declining number of acres as time went on. Eventually, no farm would have been large enough to support all the heirs. This would have forced the creation of extended family agricultural corporations, with one or two nuclear families (or even foreign sharecroppers) running the farm in the name of the extended family’s members, most of whom would have moved to cities or abroad. There would be no mass exodus back to the original family plots of the conquest era. Only moral rebellion could have kept the land of Israel sufficiently empty of residents to have allowed each family’s return to the family plot.

Any discussion of this law as if it were a way to maintain small family farms must discuss in detail how very small these farms would have been within a century or two of rapid population growth. The point is, this law did not guarantee the continuation of agricultural life for a significant percentage of the population. There was no way for any law to

34. North, *Authority and Dominion.*, ch. 1.

35. The land was no more than 10,330 square miles. Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 25. There are 640 acres per square mile. This means 6,661,200 acres.

36. 6,661,200 acres divided by 601,730 families = 10.98 acres per family. This was comparable to the 4 to 15 acres owned by the average Roman farmer around 200 B.C. “Agriculture, history of,” *Software Toolworks Illustrated Encyclopedia* (1990). This is *Grolier’s Encyclopedia* on a CD-ROM disk.

37. Contrasted with the extended family.

assure such a way of life to a growing population in a very small nation. What the jubilee inheritance law did was *to cut off all reasonable hope that a family had any economic future in farming*, except in those periods in which the nation was in rebellion, when God would respond by sending plagues, famines, miscarriages, and other negative demographic sanctions. But in such deplorable ethical conditions, it would have been highly unlikely that the jubilee inheritance law would have been honored anyway. The system of covenantal law and covenantal sanctions in Mosaic Israel points to a conclusion that the commentators never mention: *the anti-rural implications of the Mosaic law*. It did not despise farming; it simply made clear that hardly anyone in a God-honoring society is expected to be a full-time farmer. The urban family garden, not the family farm, is the biblical ideal.

3. Declining Per Capita Farm Income

The jubilee inheritance law was a way to guarantee every head of household a small and declining share of income from a family farm. Most heirs would have become urban residents in Israel or emigrants to other nations. The promise of God regarding population growth—being fruitful and multiplying—was a guarantee that covenantal faithfulness would lower the proportion of per capita family income derived from farming. The law made it plain to everyone except modern Bible commentators that if the nation's numbers grew as a result of God's blessing, Israelites could place little hope in the possibility of supporting themselves financially as farmers. Far from being a guarantor of egalitarianism, *the jubilee inheritance law was a law forcing covenant-keeping people into the cities or out of the nation*. This is rarely or never mentioned by commentators. Instead, they talk about rural Israel and its annulled rural laws, which were cultural.

Real estate located inside walled cities did not come under this law. Neither did property owned or leased outside the boundaries of Israel. This law warned them that *a covenantally faithful nation would become an urbanized nation and/or a nation of emigrants*. The law made it plain that their lives as farmers could continue only if they were not faithful to God's law. If the nation remained primarily agricultural, this was God's visible curse against them.

The jubilee land inheritance law was designed to force the Israelites to plan for a very different future. They were to become city dwellers as a people within the Promised Land, and traders, bankers, and skilled

manufacturers outside the land. There could be no legitimate hope in remaining farmers in the Promised Land. The boundaries of the land were fixed; their population size was not. There would eventually have to be expansion beyond the boundaries of Israel, and there would have to be a concentration of population in Israel's cities. Like the garden east of Eden, the family-owned farms of Israel would be temporary dwelling places of preliminary training for worldwide dominion. The faster the population grew, the faster their life as farmers and animal herders would disappear. What the West has experienced since the late eighteenth century is what God had in mind for Israel from the time of the conquest, namely, *rapid growth*—of population, cities, specialization, manufacturing, trade, emigration, and per capita wealth. To the extent that they did not experience this, they would know that they were under God's national curse.

The jubilee inheritance law was designed to promote emigration out of Israel and into urban occupations inside the land that relied on foreign trade. The rural land inheritance law promoted contact with foreigners. This was an aspect of the dominion covenant. It was to serve as a means of evangelism. The story of Israel, her laws, and her God was to spread abroad:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).³⁸

4. *The Blindness of the Commentators*

R. K. Harrison's comment on the jubilee inheritance law indicates his concern with what he supposes are its economic effects. He paid no attention to demographics and its effects, which is a common characteristic of virtually all commentators on this law. "An emphasis on humanitarianism and social justice is a pronounced feature of the legislation in this chapter, and it should be noted that the tenor of the laws

38. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

pursued a middle course between the extremes of unrestricted capitalism and rampant communism.”³⁹ A middle course between communism and capitalism? This misreading of the text is so total that it is difficult to understand how anyone who has read the Pentateuch could write it. So powerful has been the Fabian socialist ideal⁴⁰ of the so-called Keynesian “mixed economy”—halfway between capitalism and communism, but with limits always set by the state—that modern Bible commentators have read Fabianism’s worldview into biblical texts. The condition of most intellectuals prior to the astounding overnight collapse of both Soviet Communism and socialist ideology in 1991 was well described in 1979 by historian Clarence Carson: the world in the grip of an idea.⁴¹ That idea was either a variation of Keynesian economics or outright socialism. This outlook has colored even conservative biblical exegesis.

There was no possibility whatsoever of communism under the Mosaic Covenant. The jubilee laws were aimed at preserving private ownership, even including the private ownership of foreign-born slaves. There was no “middle course” between communism and capitalism, since communism was never an option. *The ownership system was entirely capitalistic*. God, the land’s owner, from the beginning established leasehold arrangements with those who would occupy His land after the conquest. This is the essence of capitalism: a voluntary contract between owners and managers or tenants.

What Harrison might have written is that the law promoted a variety of rural familism. Yet even this minimal statement would have been true only when there was no population growth, i.e., only when the nation was under God’s curse. Otherwise, the jubilee inheritance law

39. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 229.

40. The most famous popular presentation of this ideal was made by British playwright George Bernard Shaw: *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (New York: Brentano’s, 1928). The best critical histories of the movement are Margaret Patricia McCarren, *Fabianism in the Political Life of Britain, 1919–1931* (Chicago: Heritage Foundation, 1954) (<http://bit.ly/mpmfabians>) and Rose L. Martin, *Fabian Freeway: The High Road to Socialism in the U.S.A., 1884–1966* (Chicago: Heritage Foundation, 1966). (<http://bit.ly/rmfabians>) This is a condensation of Sister McCarren’s privately circulated manuscript, *The Fabian Transmission Belt*, which her ecclesiastical superiors ordered her to withdraw in the early 1960s. She was the daughter of U.S. Senator Pat McCarren, who headed the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee in the early 1950s.

41. Clarence Carson, *The World in the Grip of an Idea* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1979). His book was based on articles he wrote for *The Freeman* (Dec. 1968–July 1969; Jan. 1977–Sept. 1979).

made it clear that the only way for families to derive any meaningful economic benefit from their landed inheritance was to create some sort of corporate family ownership with delegated management—something like the modern corporate farm. Farm income would have been in the form of dividend payments: a declining percentage of family income as the families grew in number and their income from non-farming sources increased. The terms of the jubilee rural land inheritance law destroyed any hope in rural landed wealth in a society marked by a growing population. Wealth would have to become increasingly urban in origin, derived from manufacturing, services, foreign trade, and all the other occupations of the modern, distinctly urban, distinctly capitalist world.

What is astounding to me is that I have yet to read another Bible commentator or historian of ancient Israel who mentions any of this. I am aware of no commentator who has gone to the passage that promises the elimination of miscarriages and then to the passages that promise long life spans in his attempt to calculate the demographic effects of a growing population on rural land tenure. The commentators have systematically ignored those biblical texts that relate to God's historical sanctions—in this case the positive sanction of population growth. Only with anti-covenantal blinders firmly attached do they begin making observations on the meaning and implications of the jubilee laws. This approach to Leviticus 25 is as common among conservative Bible commentators as among the liberals. The result has been the utter failure of the commentators to make sense of the jubilee.

H. The Myth of Jubilee Egalitarianism

In the mid-1970s, Jeremy Rifkin and other humanist radicals organized the People's Bicentennial Commission. This organization was set up to take advantage of the national bicentennial celebration in the United States of the Declaration of Independence (1776). William Peltz, the Midwest regional coordinator of the Peoples Bicentennial Commission, at a meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, argued that conservative Christians could be turned into promoters of revolutionary politics if radicals would just show them that the Bible teaches revolution. Peltz cited Leviticus 25 as a key passage in promoting compulsory wealth redistribution.⁴² This theme subsequently became popular

42. *The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial, The People's Bicentennial Commission, Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal*

among numerous radical Christian groups. It was promoted heavily in Ronald Sider's 1977 book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, and also in *Sojourners* magazine. It has even become a familiar theme in certain fundamentalist groups.

Those who defend this interpretation have not understood that the jubilee was an aspect of military conquest, an economic incentive to fight that was given to each Hebrew family before Israel invaded Canaan. They also have not recognized that the jubilee was fulfilled in principle by Jesus (Luke 4)⁴³ and abolished historically when Israel as a nation ceased to exist. But, most of all, they have not bothered to tell their followers that if Leviticus 25 is still morally and legally binding, then lifetime slavery is still morally and legally valid, for it is only in Leviticus 25 that the Hebrews were told that they could buy and enslave foreigners for life, and then enslave their heirs forever (Lev. 25:44–46).⁴⁴

Ron Sider wrote in 1977: "Leviticus 25 is one of the most radical texts in all of Scripture. At least it seems that way for people born in countries committed to laissez-faire economics. Every fifty years, God said, all land was to return to the original owners—without compensation! . . . God therefore gave his people a law which would equalize land ownership every fifty years (Lev. 25:10–24)."⁴⁵ First, the law could not possibly have equalized land holdings; families are not all the same size. The larger the family was, the smaller the individual inheritance was. That Sider ignored this obvious implication of the jubilee law indicates how little attention he paid to the context or the text of this law. Second, like Harrison, Sider ignored the fact that this law did not equalize urban land ownership in walled cities, which is where most people would have been living in Israel after a few generations of population growth. Sider went on to note that landed wealth is basic to an

Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 94th Congress, Second Session (March 17 and 18, 1976), p. 36.

43. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

44. Chapter 30.

45. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Wheaton, Illinois: Inter-Varsity, 1977), p. 88. This book was co-published by the liberal Paulist Press (Roman Catholic). A second edition was published in 1984, one which promised on the cover to respond to Sider's critics. Inside, there was no reference to David Chilton's refutation, or to a dozen other published critics. Sider simply stonewalled; his influence began to disappear almost immediately. A third edition came out in 1990, a fourth in 1997, a fifth in 2005. In that edition, he reversed himself on many issues, and abandoned his socialist rhetoric. See North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F.

agricultural economy. True, but covenantally irrelevant; Israel was not supposed to remain an agricultural economy. It was to become intensely urban. Sider wrote: "But the means of producing wealth were to be equalized regularly."⁴⁶ There were two exceptions to this law of equalization, however: in rural areas and in urban areas. He never mentioned either of these exceptions.

Then Sider got to the point: an attack on private, voluntary charity, and a defense of state-mandated wealth redistribution, which he called justice: "That this passage prescribes justice rather than haphazard handouts by wealthy philanthropists is extremely significant. The year of Jubilee envisages an institutionalized structure that affects everyone automatically. It is to be the poor person's *right* to receive back his inheritance at the time of the Jubilee. Returning the land is not a charitable courtesy that the wealthy may extend if they please."⁴⁷ He moved without a missing a beat from the jubilee law's narrow *judicial* category—heirs of the families that had originally received the land as part of the military spoils system—to the broad *economic* category of "the poor." He conveniently neglected to mention three groups—permanent chattel slaves (Lev. 25:44–46), the urban poor, and poor strangers in the rural communities—none of whom participated in the jubilee law's inheritance. If the goal was, as he has insisted, the care of the poor, then why not all of the poor? This question points to Sider's problem: *the jubilee's goal was not wealth-redistribution to the poor*. Any explanation of the jubilee law in terms of care of the poor leads to a dead end. We can partially explain the sabbatical year in terms of care of the non-urban poor, but not the jubilee year.

Sider then moved from the historical and geographical boundaries of the Promised Land to the modern world. "Actually, it might not be a bad idea to try the Jubilee itself at least once. . . . We could select 1980 as the Jubilee year in order to give us a little time for the preliminary preparations. In 1980 all Christians worldwide would pool all their stocks, bonds, and income producing property and businesses and redistribute them equally."⁴⁸ This recommendation, understand, did not come from someone who owned any stocks, bonds, or income-producing property. It came from a tenured (no risk of being fired), salaried college professor with a pension plan. At worst, he would have had to forfeit his pension under his recommended plan to honor the jubilee

46. *Idem.*

47. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

year principle. At least he admitted: “There would undoubtedly be a certain amount of confusion and disruption.” Such confusion of results would be the product of Sider’s confusion of exegesis.

What he was advocating was the transfer of ownership of non-agricultural productive capital to pagans. Christians, he concluded, should surrender their legally valid claims over the productive economic resources of capitalism and become servants without claims: *strangers in the land*. This program of economic surrender to paganism, Sider argued, is an extension of the jubilee principle. But what was the jubilee principle, as described a few pages earlier by Sider? It was a legal prohibition against the permanent sale of a family’s long-term capital to someone else, especially strangers (pagans) in the land. In other words, Sider’s recommended modern application of the jubilee year principle would produce results exactly opposite of what he had described as the original jubilee year’s goal. Yet Sider’s book sold very well, and was widely acclaimed in academic Christian and neo-evangelical circles as a model of relevant Christian scholarship.

Sider’s book initially appeared to be based on Mosaic law. This was an illusion. On the page following his suggested program of economic surrender to paganism, he wrote: “Still, I certainly do not think that the specific provisions of the year of Jubilee are binding today. Modern technological society is vastly different from rural Palestine. . . . We need methods appropriate to our own civilization. It is the basic principles, not the specific details, which are important and normative for Christians today.”⁴⁹ This is the standard antinomian argument: the details of God’s revealed law are irrelevant today; let us therefore glean and apply only the principles. But there is a major problem with this approach: Without our obedience to the specified details, how can we be confident that our application of the underlying principle is valid? How can we discover the underlying principle if we automatically toss out the specified applications? In short, what good are Bible’s case laws without the actual cases? Paul argued that the case law prohibiting the muzzling of oxen while they labored in the field (Deut. 25:4)⁵⁰ can be applied two ways: (1) the Christian has legitimate confidence in the positive outcome of his labors (I Cor. 9:9–10);⁵¹ (2) elders are deserving

49. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

50. Chapter 23.

51. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

of double honor (I Tim. 5:17–18).⁵² He did not add, however, that since we now live under the New Covenant, we can lawfully muzzle our working oxen because we are bound only by the principles of the case laws, not the details thereof.

I. Aliens and Inalienable Land

We can discover the fundamental jubilee principle by beginning with God's own statement regarding the reason for the jubilee law: "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). Problem: God owns all the earth, then and now. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).⁵³ Yet this very ownership of the world is what led to the special position of the land of Canaan and its conquerors: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:5–6). It was the Israelites, and *only* the Israelites, who were to be owners of rural land in Israel—not the immigrant stranger, and surely not the Canaanite.

Only the Israelites were strangers and sojourners with God. Therefore, for as long as God dwelled uniquely in the land, only His covenant people were allowed to remain agricultural owners. They would police the land's boundaries, keeping strangers out except on God's terms: inside walled cities, inside Israelite households as slaves, as leaseholders, and as free agricultural laborers. Far from being sojourners in the sense of "wanderers in the land," Israelites were to become the only permanent owners of rural land. They might be strangers and wanderers outside the Promised Land, but permanent owners inside. The Promised Land was to serve as "home base" in a worldwide program of trade and evangelism. To be a perfect stranger to the covenant-breaking world outside the geographical boundaries of Israel, one had to be: (1) a covenanted member of an Israelite family that had participated in the conquest, or (2) an adopted member of a walled city's tribe. This was the meaning of "strangers and sojourners with me": strangers to the world but perpetual land owners inside rural Israel. Then as now, the concept

52. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

53. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

of *stranger* was an inescapable concept. A person was either a stranger *with* God or a stranger *from* God. The physical mark of circumcision and lawful inheritance inside Israel identified a man as being a stranger with God.

So, God set apart the Promised Land as His holy dwelling place. He sanctified it. He placed boundaries around it. Thus, the fundamental covenantal principle of the jubilee law was holiness: the separation of *covenantally unequal* people from each other.

God established His people as owners of the land through an historically and judicially unique program of genocide. The covenantal principle of the jubilee is simple: those who worshipped false gods within the geographical boundaries of Israel could not own agricultural land. The original Canaanites had to be killed, God insisted, while future immigrants from pagan nations would have to be confined geographically. For as long as they dwelt within the land's geographical boundaries under the terms of the original distribution, Israelites had to keep strangers from inheriting agricultural land.⁵⁴ Strangers could inherit houses only inside walled cities. The walls were symbols of the covenantal restraints on them. They could also lawfully be enslaved on a permanent basis if they ever sold themselves to an Israelite family. This means that the primary economic concern of the jubilee laws was not the equalization of property, or even equality of opportunity; it was, on the contrary, the establishment of the principle of *inequality of opportunity* for those outside the covenant.

The economic principle is clear: those who did not worship the God of the Bible, as well as the heirs of those who had not proven their devotion to God by participating in national genocide, had to be restricted economically (no landed inheritance) or geographically (inside walls). There was a corollary: the vast majority of the covenantally faithful nation would eventually move into walled cities, which would have made it less likely that strangers would become economically influential there. *The fundamental economic principle of the jubilee laws was that those outside the covenants—civil, familial, and ecclesiastical—should be kept economically and numerically subordinate to those inside the covenants.*⁵⁵ Does Sider regard these principles as morally binding today? I think not. (I also wonder if he believes that they

54. This restriction ended after their return from exile (Ezek. 47:21–23). See below, Section N.

55. They were always subordinate politically: North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 2: "Sanctuary and Suffrage."

were morally valid during the Mosaic era. I would like to see him write an article defending these principles as they applied in Mosaic Israel.) But this raises a fundamental question: How can we apply these jubilee principles in New Covenant times?

J. Citizenship

Let me re-write Sider. "Leviticus 25 is one of the most radical texts in all of Scripture. At least it seems this way for people born in countries committed to pluralist democratic politics." In ancient Israel, citizenship was by formal covenant.⁵⁶ It was not by property ownership. The stranger could be circumcised, but he could not inherit rural land. He could therefore not become a judge in the Promised Land as a member of the congregation unless he was adopted into an Israelite tribe (walled city) or family. Only if adopted could he become eligible to serve in God's holy army, which was the mark of citizenship.

The strangers' economic and cultural influence was to be offset by a growing concentration of Israelites living in walled cities. The walled cities were places of refuge for immigrants (as cities become in nations that open their borders to immigrants), but walled cities were not to become strongholds of foreign influence, either political or economic. Any city in Israel that covenanted with a foreign god was to be totally destroyed (Deut. 13:12–17).

The interactions between foreign cultures (plural) and domestic culture (singular) would take place mainly in the walled cities of Israel and in the commercial cities of other societies. The kingdom (civilization) of God was to overwhelm the kingdoms of all other gods. Cities would be the places where the confrontation between God's kingdom and all others would take place. The jubilee inheritance law, when coupled with a rising Israelite population, insured that there would be a strong and growing presence of covenant-keepers in the walled cities of Israel.

K. Geographical Holiness

Jesus spoke of a coming transfer of His kingdom: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). He spoke of new wine in old wineskins: "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles

56. *Idem.*

[askos: leather bag]: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved” (Matt. 9:17). The New Covenant would soon break the limits of the Old Covenant. The church would soon replace national Israel. This is why Paul speaks of the church as “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

With the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Promised Land lost the final remnants of its judicial holiness.⁵⁷ The land of Israel was no longer uniquely the place of God’s residence. This change in covenantal administration had been made visible when the veil separating the holy of holies from the holy place was torn at the time of Christ’s death. This destruction of the temple’s physical barrier between man and God was immediately verified by the destruction of that most fundamental of all boundaries in history, the boundary of the grave. “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matt. 27:50–53).

This destruction of the key geographical boundary in Israel—God’s set-apart dwelling place in the temple—led to the judicial destruction of the other geographical boundaries: Levitical cities vs. walled cities, walled cities vs. fields, Israel vs. the world. *With the end of national Israel’s covenantal holiness came the end of geographical Israel’s holiness. This annulled the jubilee land laws.*

L. The Promise of Sanctuary

The law required that “ye shall return every man to his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family” (Lev. 25:10b). This was why it was illegal to enslave an Israelite permanently. *The family plots served as legal sanctuaries.* An Israelite’s legal claim to eventual freedom and his legal claim to landed inheritance were both aspects of the same covenantal grant. An Israelite could not legally alienate his freedom, his heirs’ freedom, or his share in the land.⁵⁸ Civil freedom and rural land ownership were linked. Any unwillingness on the part of the

57. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

58. The one exception involved the transfer of ownership to a priest (Lev. 27:20–21). See chapter 36.

civil magistrates to enforce the jubilee land laws was implicitly *a denial of sanctuary* to the heirs of the Abrahamic promise and also a denial of the original terms of the conquest.

The legal justification for the right of the Israelites to buy resident aliens on a permanent basis (Lev. 25:44–46) was the fact that resident aliens were not citizens of the commonwealth. They could not serve as civil judges or as warriors in God's holy army. They were outside the civil covenant. They were guaranteed sanctuary from pagan lands, but not sanctuary within the land. They could be sold into slavery to pay their debts, including especially debts to victims of their crimes.⁵⁹ Their heirs—the fruit of their loins—were sold with them.⁶⁰

A family's original grant of land at the time of the conquest established a legal claim to sanctuary from permanent enslavement for its heirs. The land was holy, sanctified by God's presence. The Israelites were holy, sanctified by God's promise to Abraham and also by their obedience to the requirement of the covenant: circumcision.⁶¹ The family plots were sanctuaries, sanctified by God's original ownership of the land and by the terms of his leasehold with Israel at the time of the conquest.

When Jesus declared the jubilee fulfilled by Him (Luke 4:18–21), He granted universal sanctuary. The land of Israel would no longer serve as a place of sanctuary in history, sanctified by the special presence of God. The kingdom of God has become the New Covenant's place of sanctuary—not merely the institutional church, but the civilization of God. The whole world of paganism is required by God to seek sanctuary in Christ's church. This substitution of a new sanctuary annulled the jubilee land laws, and thereby also annulled the jubilee's permanent slave law.

The alternative to this interpretation of the New Covenant is the long-held defense of slavery made by Christian commentators. Their interpretation—never explicit but necessarily implicit—is that the annulment of the jubilee land laws did not also annul the slave law. This leads to the conclusion that God's law no longer makes provision for

59. It was therefore very risky for foreigners to commit major crimes in Israel. Making restitution could lead to his children's permanent enslavement if the criminal could not buy his way out before he died.

60. Adult male children of pagans presumably were not sold into slavery with their parents. Neither were married daughters and aged parents. Adults had already established separate family jurisdictions. But those children who were still under the covenantal jurisdiction of alien parents went into bondage with them.

61. The promise was obviously conditional.

those seeking geographical sanctuary. In other words, when national Israel ceased to offer sanctuary to the lost or the righteous foreigner, geographical sanctuary ceased in history. The argument runs as follows: “The Israelites no longer possessed a guarantee of jubilee liberty; therefore, the liberty announced by Christ must have constituted the annulment of Mosaic liberty. God has annulled the land-sanctuary-liberty connection, but nothing has taken its place. Thus, slavery is validated as a universal institution.”

The only New Testament-based alternative to this unpleasant interpretation is to conclude that liberty has been validated by the work of Jesus Christ, and the mark of this validation is the abolition of slavery in Christian nations. The church has never publicly acknowledged the abolitionist implications of Jesus’ fulfillment of the jubilee law. His announcement was not, to my knowledge, ever cited by any abolitionist of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But after 1780, pressure to abolish slavery increased within many Anglo-Saxon Protestant churches that were located outside of the slave-owning regions. By the end of the 1880s, chattel slavery had been abolished in the West.⁶²

Meanwhile, national sanctuaries for the oppressed and poor were opened: free emigration and immigration. But, after World War I, this open access was steadily closed by legislation. Immigration barriers were erected everywhere. The modern passport is one of humanism’s important covenantal marks: a progressive contraction of international sanctuaries. Political liberals as well as political conservatives have affirmed the legitimacy of these immigration barriers.⁶³ When nations are no longer covenantally Christian, i.e., when they adopt religious pluralism and other marks of citizenship besides church membership, and when they replace voluntary charity with welfare state entitlements, the Christian evangelist’s call to the lost in the name of Christ steadily fades. “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” is replaced by “Keep out those welfare-seeking bums!” Finally, when mandatory identification cards are issued by the state to every resident in order to “reduce welfare fraud,” all of the remaining sanctuaries tend to disappear: in churches, regions, and families.⁶⁴

62. David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

63. The ultimate immigration barrier is abortion.

64. Gary North, “The Sanctuary Society,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 13 (Sum-

M. Citizenship and Land Ownership

Under the initial distribution of the land under Joshua, no non-citizen could own rural land. Not every citizen had to own rural land—most notably, a circumcised immigrant or his heir who was eligible to serve in the army—but every rural land owner had to be a citizen. This law ended with the exile (Ezek. 47:21–23),⁶⁵ when the land vomited out the Israelites.

1. Rural Land Was Special

Why should land ownership in any nation be limited to its citizens? If the uses of the land are under civil law—and land can hardly be moved outside this jurisdiction—then what does it matter who owns it? The rent will be the same, no matter who owns the property, since owners cannot unilaterally establish rent in a free market. Rent payments are established in terms of competition: owners vs. owners, renters vs. renters. I ask: What is the *covenantal* justification for civil restraints on real estate sales to foreigners? Land ownership confers no right to vote—citizenship—to owners. It therefore has nothing to do with the civil covenant. Restrictions on land sales to foreign residents constitute restrictions against the maximization of an existing land owner's wealth. Why should the civil government be given such control over the sale of land? It is not sufficient to cite the jubilee agricultural land laws; these laws applied only to land that had been transferred by God to the families that participated in the conquest of Canaan.

The idea that a person can somehow disinherit his heirs merely by exchanging land ownership for the ownership of money is a peculiar notion. It may be a valid concern in a statist society that places legal restrictions on the purchase of real estate—"once sold, always sold"—but in a free market social order, the idea is ridiculous. Such a view is culturally derived, not economically or judicially derived. Disinheritance is surely not limited to land ownership. Neither is inheritance. To imagine that the sale of land to another family or to a business, foreign or not, is somehow a means of disinheritance is to adopt a magical view of land. Such a view is not a New Covenant view, for the Mosaic covenant has been abrogated by the New Covenant.

There is nothing either covenantal or magical about land. The

mer 1998). (<http://bit.ly/NorthSanctuary>)

65. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

once-powerful myths of “blood and soil”—pagan family myths and pagan agricultural myths, both of which are pagan fertility myths—have long served as rival religions to Christianity. The Latin root word for *pagan* means *villager*. Rural areas were where the gospel met its greatest resistance from the beginning of the church. The most recent national revival of these dual myths took place in industrial Germany under Nazism: the work of a dictator who had self-consciously adopted the symbolism of soil and the occult as a tools of public mobilization.⁶⁶ One of the great benefits of free market capitalism and its consequent urbanization has been the cultural undermining of these fertility myths. In response, the defenders of the old pagan order openly reject the idea of progress as a rival and erroneous myth. This is consistent with ancient paganism’s cyclical theory of time.

While there can be legitimate traditional or sentimental feelings about the land in some societies, these feelings possess no unique judicial authority in a private property-based social order.⁶⁷ As with any scarce economic resource, the land owner must meet the demands of the highest-bidding consumers or else suffer net economic losses (e.g., forfeited rent). Land ownership is unique only in land’s physical immobility. Its uses are easier to control by law. Real estate is also less liquid economically than other assets, since extensive knowledge of a particular property’s location and condition is required to assess its value.

2. Inheritance and Mobility

In a nation such as the United States, in which almost one-fifth of the population moves to new residences every year,⁶⁸ an attempt to de-

66. Leni Riefenstahl’s Nazi propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will* (1935), records the Nazi Party conference of 1933. The film has scenes of organized rural residents, spades used as symbols of the soil, and happy peasant types. On the occult, see Dusty Sklar, *The Nazis and the Occult* (New York: Dorset, 1977).

67. The agrarian worldview expressed in *I’ll Take My Stand*, the 1930 manifesto written by a dozen American Southern literary figures, remains personal sentiment or personal aesthetic taste unless backed up by civil law. If backed up by civil law, the manifesto means *I’ll Take My Stand Against Economic Freedom*—not just “yankee industrial capitalism,” but the free market a social order. The paganism of the modern “deep ecology” movement is another extension of the myth of the soil. It is deeply hostile to science, progress, and economic freedom. Man’s problem is not his environment, urban or rural; man’s problem is sin. Delivery from sin is not through a change in the environment.

68. About 18% of the population moved residences, 1987–88: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, Bureau of the

fend restricted land ownership in terms of the Bible is most peculiar. Primogeniture (eldest son inherits the family's land) and entail (prohibition on sale of the family's land) were never major aspects of New England Puritanism, and both faded rapidly in the late eighteenth century in Virginia. While laws authorizing both practices were on the books in most of the American colonies up until the American Revolution (1776–83), there are few court records indicating that such laws were ever seriously enforced.⁶⁹ When enforced, these laws reduced the authority of parents to control their children, especially with respect to marriage.⁷⁰ Without the covenantal authority of tribal organizations to direct the line of inheritance, laws restricting the sale of land restrict both parental authority and social mobility. This restriction on social mobility was also present in Mosaic Israel, although population growth and urbanization would have overcome much of this restricted mobility. God placed these restrictions on landed inheritance for the sake of the promised messianic seed; in A.D. 70, God destroyed the tribes and abrogated the tribal land laws.

The dominion covenant requires mobility: the conquest of society by the gospel. The ownership of the world was transferred definitively to Jesus at Calvary, and from Him to His people in history. The spread of the gospel is God's authorized means of progressive conquest—inheritance—by His people. The idea of covenantally restricted land ownership is foreign to the idea of mobility (dominion) in New Testament times. The covenantal threat of land ownership by a foreigner no longer exists under biblical law. Only those nations, such as the United States, that perversely sanction citizenship based on residence or birth in the land are threatened by foreign-born owners of land. There is no covenantal or political threat whatsoever from ownership by foreign corporations.

The tremendous social and economic mobility offered by modern capitalism cannot be separated from the freedom to buy and sell land. A cry to legislate a policy of limiting land ownership to a nation's citizens, especially in a large country, indicates the degree to which voters are uninformed about (1) economic theory (rent), (2) economic facts

Census, 1990), Table 25.

69. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Social Impact of the Revolution," in *America's Continuing Revolution: An Act of Conservation* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1975), p. 80. Nisbet regarded the post-Revolution abolition of primogeniture and entail as symbolically important, not judicially important.

70. Edmund S. Morgan, *Virginians at Home: Family Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1952), pp. 34–35.

(freedom of contract), and (3) social theory (social mobility). A cry to limit land ownership to citizens in the name of the Mosaic jubilee land laws adds ignorance about the Bible to the three other forms of ignorance. This raises the question of land ownership by foreigners.

N. Land Ownership by Foreigners: Then and Now

One misguided idea that began to circulate in conservative American Christian circles in the late 1980s was the suggestion that citizens and corporations of a foreign nation should not be permitted to buy land in the United States. The theological defense of this suggestion has been an appeal to the jubilee land laws. The purchase of American land by foreigners has not been a problem, nor has it been much of a phenomenon, except possibly in Hawaii, where Japanese companies have bought land to build golf courses to be used only by Japanese players. Because a single golf course membership in the best club in Tokyo cost over \$3 million in late 1989 (up from \$769,000 in 1986),⁷¹ plus \$4,000 for a member to play one 18-hole game, it became cheaper for Japanese golfers to pool their funds, buy a Hawaiian golf course or build it, charter a jet over the weekend, fly to Hawaii, play two rounds, and fly home. But this “golfing invasion” hardly constituted a threat to American national interests. Tight money and a falling stock market in Japan ended speculative golf course investments after 1989.

The most prominent American theologian to articulate this view of restricted land ownership is Rushdoony, who in most cases is a firm defender of property rights. But in the case of land ownership, he appeals back to the land laws of Mosaic Israel. He wrote that “Scripture is very clear about the alien *within* the country; he must be treated the same as a covenant man, even if an unbeliever. As a believer, he is free to intermarry with covenant families. The alien *outside* the covenant country has no property rights within the land. Ownership is a form of responsibility, and responsibility within the covenant land is to the covenant of God; hence, he cannot buy into the land. The first fruits of the earth, and the tithes on agricultural and commercial increase, belong to the Lord.”⁷² This was indeed true of agricultural land in Mosaic Israel, but the land laws of Mosaic Israel died with the transfer of God’s kingdom to the church in A.D. 70. They were not resurrected. To argue other-

71. *The Strait Times* (Singapore) (Nov. 23, 1991). The price later fell to \$2 million in 1991 as a result of the drop in Japanese real estate prices.

72. R. J. Rushdoony, “Ownership,” Position Paper, *Chalcedon Report* (April 1990), p. 17.

wise is to allow the redistributionist jubilee theology of Ronald Sider to enter in through the back door, as well as Simon Legree: the re-introduction of inter-generational slavery (Lev. 25:44–46).

The primary legal issue for rural land ownership in Mosaic Israel was adoption, not confession. Both the confessing resident alien [*geyr*] and the non-confessing resident alien [*nok-ree*] could buy inheritable residential real estate inside walled cities. Confession had nothing to do with urban residential ownership. On the other hand, covenant-keeping converts to the faith had no access to rural land ownership apart from their adoption into a family of the conquest generation. The resident alien's orthodox confession had nothing to do with inalienable rural ownership except insofar as such confession was likely for adoption into an Israelite family.

Rushdoony's comment on the lawfulness of land ownership by immigrants is even less accurate with respect to the post-exilic period. He did not mention the relevant passage, Ezekiel's prophecy of a new law that would prevail after their return to the land: "So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 47:21–23). The prohibition against permanent rural land ownership by the circumcised resident alien ended after the exile. This had nothing to do with marriage to an Israelite. The circumcised stranger was the covenantally faithful resident alien [*geyr*], from whom it was illegal to take interest (Lev. 25:35–37), not the resident who was not part of the covenant [*nok-ree*], from whom it was legal to take interest (Deut. 23:20).⁷³

The civil enforcement of property rights to land in the New Covenant era has nothing to do with either theological confession or bodily residence. The jubilee land laws of Israel have all been annulled. They were never cross-boundary laws; they applied only to the land and heirs of the conquest. No judicial appeal to any of those laws is valid today. Those who appeal to them risk placing us in bondage: the revival of permanent chattel slavery or the imposition of permanent slavery to

73. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 57.

the messianic welfare state.

Conclusion

The jubilee year began with the day of atonement. This was a day of public submission to God, invoking His grace: a positive sanction. The judicial issue of the day of atonement was man's subordination to God. There could be no profit-seeking work on that day. Men had to rest contentedly in God's grace.

The jubilee year was the culmination of the cycle of sabbatical years. Sabbatical years were mandated by God in order to train landless Israelites and poor strangers how to produce for a market. The Mosaic law identified harvesters as landless or impoverished people who worked as harvesters or gleaners in six years out of seven. In sabbatical years, they became dependent on whatever it was that God would allow the fields to produce apart from cultivation. In those years, harvesters learned to make decisions without a land owner or his supervisor ruling over them.

The jubilee inheritance law applied to rural land inside the boundaries of Israel. It did not apply to houses within the walled cities of the nation except Levitical cities (Lev. 25:32–33). It also did not apply to property outside the Promised Land. This law had been given to the people by God because He was the owner of the land (Lev. 25:23). It was part of the terms of God's lease under which they held rights of administration as sharecropping tenants, with 10% of any increase owed to God through the Levites and priests. It was also part of the spoils of war.

God is owner of all the earth, not just the Promised Land. Why did the jubilee laws not apply to all other nations? Because these laws applied only to His special dwelling place. They were an aspect of God's holiness, which is why the jubilee laws appear in Leviticus, the book of holiness. The Promised Land was to be kept holy: set apart judicially from all other nations. How? Initially, this separation began with God's promise to Abraham: definitive holiness, i.e., definitive sanctification.

The second phase of the process of separation began with the conquest: progressive holiness, i.e., progressive sanctification. God cleansed the land of His enemies by means of total war: the annihilation of His enemies. He required the extermination of the gods of Canaan by means of an original program of genocide. He promised to dwell in the land that contained the tabernacle and temple; He would not permit

any other god to be worshipped publicly in Israel. Thus, the gods of the land had to be removed from public view. To achieve this initially, the Israelites were told by God to exterminate or drive out every person dwelling in the land. Only Rahab and her family would be allowed by God to escape this judgment, for she had established a pre-invasion covenant with God.⁷⁴

Third, His holiness was to be defended by enforcing a law that kept post-conquest immigrants from ever owning property in Israel except inside Israel's walled cities. The families of the conquest received an in-heritable lease that could not be alienated beyond 49 years. Later immigrants could sublease rural property if they were sufficiently productive, but they could not leave an inheritance beyond the jubilee year.

Fourth, God established a law that removed from the majority of the population any legitimate hope of remaining farmers in Israel if His blessings were forthcoming in response to their covenantal faithfulness as a nation. They surely knew that, as Israel's population expanded, no branch of any extended family could retain economic control over of a particular plot of rural land apart from the compliance of all the other members of the family, except perhaps as a small recreational property (a consumer good). If they wanted income from the land, they could attain it only through its productivity. Small, isolated plots are not very productive. If they wanted to maximize their passive income from their portion of the extended family's land, they would have to cooperate with other members of the extended family in selecting representative managers, either from within the extended family or from outside its legal boundaries. If any nuclear family unit wanted to farm all of the original "eleven acres" for the others, it would have to meet the competition of any other members of the extended family who might offer to serve as the family's representatives on the farm.

Fifth, wealthy immigrants and strangers in the land would have tended to dwell in walled cities, where they could own homes. This is where the population of the Israelites was intended by God to be channeled over time. This process was intended to keep strangers and foreigners from gaining too much influence in their 48 cities. They

74. It is worth noting that members of Rahab's family never formally voiced their individual support of this covenant, but by remaining silent before she made it, when the civil authorities had questioned her regarding the spies (Josh. 2:3), they became lawful residents of Israel through their adherence to the external demands of Rahab's covenant. If they remained inside their section of the wall, despite the collapse of the remainder of the wall, they could remain in the Promised Land (2:19).

would have been outnumbered by immigrants from rural areas.

Sixth, God kept the geographically dispersed Levites from gaining political control through land purchases. Their cross-tribal boundary judicial influence was advisory. The jubilee land law made it impossible for Levites to centralize land ownership. They could only rarely inherit rural land (Lev. 27:20–21).⁷⁵ But to make sure that they would not abandon their support of the jubilee year because of their desire to inherit rural land, they were given jubilee privileges in the cities: reversion in the jubilee year (Lev. 25: 32–33). When enforced, this aspect of the jubilee land laws would have tended to confine their political power to cities, but it also balanced the jubilee law's economic costs and benefits for them. Over time, their influence would grow with the population, as more people congregated in cities, assuming that they could find ways of maintaining the people's theological allegiance in a progressively urbanized culture. Ultimately, cities would have become economically dominant, and therefore politically dominant, just as they have become all over the world in modern times. But the Levites were not supposed to centralize political and economic power during the rural phase of the Israelite kingdom.

The primary covenantal issue of the jubilee laws was holiness. The jubilee inheritance law had little or nothing to do with assuring economic equality, except in times of national covenantal cursing: stagnant population. The law had everything to do with the mandating of political and cultural *inequality*: giving a permanent head start to heirs of the conquest over immigrants, even those immigrants who became members of the covenant through circumcision, but not members of land-inheriting families. Only through adoption, either directly or through marriage (for females), could immigrants gain this advantage.

75. Chapter 37.

ECONOMIC OPPRESSION BY MEANS OF THE STATE

And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God (Lev. 25:14–17).

The theocentric message of this passage is that God is not an oppressor. Though He is the author of the law, as well as the final judge, He does not use His authority to do injustice. He does not seek unfair advantage. Neither should those who act in His name as His stewards.

A. Terms of the Lease

God was the owner of the land of Israel: *special ownership* as distinguished from general ownership of the earth. He established the terms of ownership and leasing within Israel's boundaries. His *permanent sharecropping tenants* were required to honor these terms. More specifically, they were required to imitate God: *no oppression*. The terms governing leaseholds in some unique way reflected God's dealings with His people. As an aspect of the jubilee land law, this law was a specific application of the general law prohibiting oppression.

In buying and selling, both parties were required to honor the limiting factor of the jubilee year. This raises important questions. First, what is oppression, biblically speaking? Second, is oppression here merely the failure to write contracts whose provisions ended with the advent of the jubilee year? Third, did this warning refer only to rural

land sales?

The context indicates that rural land was the thing being bought and sold. But the legal restriction on the leasing of land would also have applied to the leasing of men. If, for example, an Israelite was sold into bondage because of his failure to repay a business debt, his term of servitude could not extend beyond the jubilee year.¹ The law required that “ye shall return every man to his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family” (Lev. 25:10b). Business debt could not be collateralized by land beyond the jubilee.

The first question is more difficult to answer. What is *oppression* in this context? Has it anything to do with pricing? The text indicates that it has everything to do with the *period of time* in which the terms of the contract will apply. Time has something to do with pricing, but what? “According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof.” The question arises: Increase the price from what? What were the *price floor* and *price ceiling* that governed the pricing of additional years? How were they established? To answer this question in the absence of historical records, we need to understand something about modern capital theory.

We need to think very carefully about how prices are formed in a free market society if we are to discuss the meaning of economic oppression. If we do not understand how prices are established in a free market society, we may be tempted to accuse sellers of goods and services (i.e., buyers of money) of having oppressed buyers (i.e., sellers of money). Warning: he who brings a lawsuit against another should first determine if an infraction of God’s law has taken place. The Bible is clear: he who testifies falsely against another and is subsequently convicted of having made a false accusation must suffer the same penalty that his intended victim would have suffered (Deut. 19:15–21).² Historically, there have been a great number of would-be economic theorists who have made such accusations against an entire class of people. There have been politicians and bureaucrats who have imposed socialistic programs onto society in the name of such conscience-driven economic analyses. They have shown zeal without knowledge. The result has been economic exploitation through state coercion on a massive scale, always in the name of economic justice and frequently

1. If he was being sold to repay a zero-interest charitable loan, his term of servitude could not extend beyond the sabbatical year (Deut. 15:12).

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

in the name of social salvation.³ Where such policies have been widely enforced, God has brought His curse: low productivity and low income.

B. Pricing a Factor of Production

The text speaks of *the years of the fruits*. “According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee” (v. 15). This is a very important economic concept. Capital theory is dependent on it. Land and labor produce fruit over time. This is what makes land and labor valuable. Modern economic theory, beginning with the marginalist (subjectivist) revolution of the early 1870s,⁴ attempts to explain the relationship between the market value of the fruits of production and the market value of the economic inputs that produce these fruits.

What does modern economic theory teach? First and foremost, it teaches that all economic value is *subjective value*. Economic value is imputed, i.e., it is subjectively determined.⁵ Economic value is not the product of labor; on the contrary, labor is valuable because of the value of labor’s output.⁶ Economic value is also not the product of objective costs of production. The classical economists, from Adam Smith to Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill, argued for objective value theory—labor theory of value or cost-of-production theory of value—but the marginalist or subjectivist revolution rejected this approach to value theory.⁷ The classical economists did not trace market exchange, production, and the formation of prices solely to the actions of con-

3. Jack Douglas, *The Myth of the Welfare State* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Transaction Books, 1989).

4. The simultaneous and independent work of William Stanley Jevons, Leon Walras, and Carl Menger. See *The Marginalist Revolution in Economics: Interpretation and Evaluation*, eds. R. D. Collison Black, *et al.* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1973).

5. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix B.

6. Any scarce economic resource with a market price is in part the product of labor. If it is not yet the product of labor, such as a waterfall, it will have to have labor (including intellectual labor) added to it before its fruits can be appropriated. Before any asset can be appropriated and used by an owner, he must perform some kind of labor.

7. Mark Skousen, *The Structure of Production* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), ch. 2.

sumers. They did not construct a general theory of value.⁸

1. Customer Authority

The subjectivists concluded that economic inputs possess value only in relation to the value of their output. The question immediately arises: *Value to whom?* Concluded the subjectivists: value is imputed subjectively by an imputing agent—the customer—to the fruits of production. In his *Theory of Money and Credit* (1912), Ludwig von Mises wrote that “in the last resort it is still the subjective use-value of things that determines the esteem in which they are held.”⁹ In short, “the only valuations that are of final importance in the determination of prices and objective exchange-value are those based on the subjective use-value that the products have for those persons who are the last to acquire them through the channels of commerce and who acquire them for their own consumption.”¹⁰ The persons who are the last to acquire anything are called *consumers*. They do not act as intermediaries for other buyers. If all potential consumers were to refuse to pay for some asset’s fruits of production, these fruits would have no economic value.¹¹ Neither would the specific factor of production, assuming that all producers recognized that no future consumer will ever pay for this output. Thus, “The consumers determine ultimately not only the prices of the consumers’ goods, but no less the prices of all factors of production.”¹² Regarding capital goods, Mises wrote: “The prices of the goods of higher orders are ultimately determined by the prices of the goods of the first or lowest order, that is, the consumers’ goods. As a consequence of this dependence they are ultimately determined by the subjective valuations of all members of the market society.”¹³ This is why he concluded: “The pricing process is a social process.”¹⁴

But don’t producers have more money than final consumers? Can’t

8. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 63. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

9. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 102–3. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>)

10. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

11. In another place, I have discussed why value theory in economics requires the doctrine of an imputing sovereign God in order to avoid the incoherence produced by pure subjectivism’s theory of autonomous man. See Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

12. Mises, *Human Action*, p. 271.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

they impose their will on final consumers? On the contrary, producers have far less money than final consumers do, which is why producers are vulnerable to shifts in consumer demand. Producers own inventories of highly specialized consumer goods and even more specialized producer goods (capital equipment). Final consumers own the most marketable commodity, money. They have the competitive advantage. Think of a producer of shoes. If consumers decide they do not like the style of these shoes, what can the producer do with these shoes? Spend a fortune on advertising to change consumers' minds? I am in the advertising business; let me assure you, *most producers do not have sufficient funds to change the minds of many consumers*.¹⁵ All the shoe manufacturer can do is lower the price of his inventory, even if he does not regain his costs of production. After all, some income is better than no income. Some money is better than a pile of unsold shoes that must be stored somewhere.

Final consumers can buy many things with their inventory of unspecialized money; producers cannot buy many things with their inventory of specialized goods. This is why final consumers are *economically sovereign* over producers, even though customers and producers are equally sovereign legally. The hierarchy of control under capitalism is economic. Final consumers "hold the hammer": money (the most marketable commodity) plus the legal authority to buy or not to buy from any producer.

Market theory rests on the insight that the final consumer is *economically* sovereign,¹⁶ even though the owner of a tool of production is *legally* sovereign. The owner lawfully can do whatever he pleases with his property, so long as he does not physically injure someone else, but *he cannot thwart the final consumer at zero cost*. If he thwarts the demand of the highest-bidding final consumer by not selling the capital good's final output to him, he thereby forfeits the extra amount of money which that consumer would have paid him. The owner's inventory cost is not just the cost of storage and insurance, but also the

15. The classic example is Ford Motor Company's introduction of the Edsel automobile, 1958–60. Ford could not sell enough cars to make a profit.

16. The phrase "consumer sovereignty" is generally attributed to W. H. Hutt. Hutt, "The Nature of Aggressive Selling" (1935), in *Individual Freedom: Selected Works of William H. Hutt*, eds. Svetozar Pejovich and David Klingaman (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 185. Biblically speaking, this sovereignty is delegated from God: hierarchical authority. Humanistic economists do not believe in either God or delegated sovereignty. So, they refer to the final consumer as sovereign. I prefer to speak of customer authority.

forfeited income.¹⁷

The free market, with its lure of profit, encourages the specializing of risk-bearing (insurance) and uncertainty-bearing (entrepreneurship).¹⁸ Capitalism allows final consumers safely to transfer to producers both the risk and the uncertainty of deciding what to produce and when, since the legal system places in the hands of consumers the authority to say “no” to those products and services that they do not wish to buy at the prices offered. The final consumers therefore hold the hammer over producers, despite the fact that the producers appear sovereign because they decide what gets produced. What they cannot control is what gets sold at what price.

2. *Economic Imputation*

So far, there is something missing from this explanation of the structure of capitalist production and distribution. (Note: this is an integrated system; production is not separate from distribution.)¹⁹ What is missing is imputation. We have seen that production takes place over time. So, a question arises regarding the valuation of capital goods, raw materials, labor inputs, and land. How does the present value of any scarce economic resource relate to the value of its final output? That is to say, how do present prices relate to future prices?

To answer this, we need to apply Mises’ theory of entrepreneurship to capital goods theory. *Producers act as the economic agents of future consumers.* Producers forecast future market demand as well as they can. They study historical records of previous market demand (perhaps only a few minutes old), and then they guess what future demand (consumers) and future supply (their competition) will be. That is, they guess what the market price will be for a particular product.²⁰ As Mises wrote in 1922 in his monumental refutation of socialism, the capitalist “must exercise foresight. If he does not do so then he suffers losses—losses that bring it about that his disposition [control] over the factors of production is transferred to the hands of others who know

17. The cost of production is not an aspect of economic cost. What is spent is sunk costs. Once spent, the producer’s past costs are irrelevant to the crucial question: What can I get for my stock of goods?

18. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), p. 244. (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

19. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 7:2:C, ch. 9:5.

20. Mises, *Human Action*, p. 333.

better how to weigh the risks and the prospects of business speculation.”²¹

University of Chicago economist Frank Knight²² agreed with Mises on the role of entrepreneurship, although he rejected Mises’ theory of interest and capital. Knight understood that the consumer is sovereign under capitalism, and the entrepreneur-producer is his servant. He noted the amazing fact that today’s consumer does not know exactly what he will want to buy in the future or what he will be willing to pay. Therefore, “he leaves it to producers to create goods and hold them ready for his decision when the time comes. The clue to the apparent paradox is, of course, in the ‘law of large numbers,’ the consolidation of risks (or uncertainties). The consumer is, to himself, only one; to the producer he is a mere multitude in which individuality is lost. It turns out that an outsider can foresee the wants of a multitude with more ease and accuracy than an individual can attain with respect to his own. This phenomenon gives us the most fundamental feature of the economic system, *production for a market*. . . .”²³

In the expectation that a particular piece of capital equipment will produce something of value to future consumers—something they will pay for—producers today impute value to capital equipment. They do the same with land, labor, and raw materials. *They do this as present economic agents of future consumers*. (I keep repeating this because non-economists simply do not grasp it, including thousands of non-economists who hold Ph.D.’s in economics.) Mises described land ownership by a farmer in a market economy: “He does not control production as the self-supporting peasant does. He does not decide the purposes of his production; those for whom he works decide it—the consumers. They, not the producer, determine the goal of economic activity. The producer only directs production towards the goal set by the consumers.”²⁴

Understand, however, that these consumers are not present consumers, for production is always aimed at the future. *The consumers who control production are in the minds of the producers*. A particular

21. Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, trans. by J. Kahane, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1932] 1951), pp. 140–41. (<http://bit.ly/MisesSOC>) First German edition: 1922.

22. He taught the more famous student, Milton Friedman. He studied under the more famous teacher, Max Weber, and translated Weber’s 1919–20 lectures: *General Economic History*.

23. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, p. 241.

24. Mises, *Socialism*, p. 41.

producer—the capitalist entrepreneur—may discover later that the actual consumers do not act in the way that his mental consumers did. He will then suffer losses, either because he has to sell his output for less per unit than he planned, in order to unload his inventory, or else he sells it at the expected price per unit, but then discovers that he could have charged more.²⁵ In either case, he experiences a loss.

The producer can consult present prices, meaning the most recent historical record of *publicly published* prices. This does not tell him anything secure regarding the future. Mises wrote in *Human Action* that “the prices of the factors of production are determined exclusively by the anticipation of future prices of the products. The fact that yesterday people valued and appraised commodities in a different way is irrelevant. The consumers do not care about the investments made with regard to past market conditions and do not bother about the vested interests of entrepreneurs, capitalists, land-owners, and workers, who may be hurt by changes in the structure of prices. Such sentiments play no role in the formation of prices. . . . The prices of the past are for the entrepreneur, the shaper of future production, merely a mental tool.”²⁶ A good’s present price is only a starting point for the producer’s inquiry into the possible range of a similar good’s future prices. These prices are set by competition: producers vs. producers, consumers vs. consumers.

3. Factors of Production

Land and labor are original factors of production.²⁷ Capital is not an original factor of production; it is the product of land (raw materials) and human labor over time.²⁸ Thus, the producers of capital equipment (producers’ goods) act as present economic agents of future buyers and renters of producers’ goods, i.e., future *consumers* of producers’ goods. The producers of capital goods impute value to present

25. An interesting epistemological question can be asked at this point: If the producer and his competitors never discover that he could have charged more, has he suffered an economic loss? If pure subjectivism is true, and if God’s omniscience is not part of the theoretical explanation of value, then on what basis can the economist say that the producer has suffered a loss? If there is no objective value, then there cannot be an objective loss. But if there is no subjective perception on the part of the producer or his competitors that he has sustained a loss, has he in fact sustained it? This is an unsolved theoretical dilemma of modern humanistic economics.

26. Mises, *Human Action*, p. 334.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 634.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 635.

raw materials and labor. They enter the markets for raw materials and labor and bid against each other to buy legal control over these scarce economic resources. That producer whose imputations of the present value of these resources are the highest, and who then bids up the price until no bidders remain to bid against him, wins legal control of specific resources. Producers give up the ownership of present goods (money) in order to buy future goods—the output of whatever resources they have bought—that can later be sold for more money than they paid for them, they hope. A present purchase of original factors of production costs a producer the ownership of presently owned consumer goods (i.e., money that could buy consumer goods) *over time*. What it costs him, in other words, is *interest*.

What about owners of land? The same process of imputation takes place. Land contains raw materials. Coupled with labor, these raw materials can be fashioned to produce goods. The present value of land is therefore imputed to it by men who are acting as economic agents for future consumers. If the net value of a piece of land's output is zero or less, and is expected to remain zero or less, then the value of the land is zero or less.²⁹ It can rise above zero only when the expectations of imputing agents change.

C. An Expected Stream of Net Income

When a person purchases a piece of property, he is buying legal ownership over what the text in Leviticus calls the years of its fruitfulness. The buyer is buying an expected *stream of production* when he buys a piece of land, but he cannot know for sure that this stream of income will persist in the future. As Knight wrote in 1933, "The basic economic magnitude (value or utility) is service, not good. It is inherently a stream or flow in time. . . ."³⁰ To put it bluntly, *streams can dry up*. This is what happened to Israel in the three years of drought when Elijah fled the nation (I Kings 17).

29. An example of a piece of land that is worth less than zero would be a toxic waste site whose present owner is told by the government to clean it up at his expense.

30. Knight, "Preface to the Re-issue," *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, p. xxvi. Mises rejected the whole concept of a stream of income: "There is in nature no such thing as a stream of income. Income is a category of action; it is the outcome of careful economizing of scarce factors." Mises, *Human Action*, p. 390. The stream of income concept has nevertheless proven useful in discussing the discounting process of time-preference or interest: a discount applied to expected income over time. We speak of time as flowing; the same language of continuity applies equally well to the arrival of income over time.

The jubilee law limited its discussion of fruits to agricultural land located in Israel, but the same principle of ownership always governs the purchase of any scarce economic resource: the owner has purchased legal control over an expected stream of net productivity (a capital good) or over an expected stream of passive income (a bond).

If a person buys a capital good for a cash payment, he becomes its permanent owner. If he rents it for a specified period of time, he becomes a lessee. Because the capital good is physical, people without training in economics tend to think of it differently from the way they think of a promissory note. But the present value of the note is not derived from the physical piece of paper or a blip in a computer memory device; rather, it is derived from the estimated value of the money it promises to repay in the future, discounted by the prevailing rate of interest.³¹ Similarly, the present value of a capital good is not derived from its physical make-up; rather, its present value is the estimated value of what it is expected to produce, discounted by the prevailing rate of interest. *The economic issue is value, not physical make-up.* The economic issue is the market's present imputation of future value, discounted by the prevailing rate of interest. Thus, the same process of imputation (valuation) applies equally to promissory notes, land, and capital equipment.³² Prior to the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, it also applied to human labor. We call this imputation process *capitalization*.

Consider the case of a person who leases a piece of equipment. His lease contract permits him to sublease it to someone else. A second person agrees to make a cash payment or else a periodic payment to the person who leased the equipment first. The person who leased the asset first has now become a recipient of money income. It is now the same as if he had purchased a bond in the first place instead of leasing a piece of equipment from someone else. He now owns a piece of paper issued by a third party who promises to pay him in the future. So, there is no *economic* difference between buying a stream of *net future income* in the form of a piece of capital equipment or a written promise to pay (IOU).

31. On the interest rate (time-preference), see Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 6:2.

32. On the discounting process, see *ibid.*, ch. 7.

D. Economic Oppression

The text warns against becoming an economic oppressor. What must be recognized from the beginning is that in the case of buying and selling rural land in Israel, *economic oppression was a two-way street*. Whether a person was a seller of land (buyer of money) or a buyer of land (seller of money)—i.e., whether a lessor or lessee—he could become an oppressor, according to this passage. “And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour’s hand, ye shall not oppress one another” (Lev. 25:14). This should warn us against any thought that the potential oppressor is always a buyer of some asset, or that a seller is always the potential oppressor.

This is especially relevant with respect to buyers of labor services (sellers of money) and sellers of labor services (buyers of money). It has been assumed by those who favor civil legislation that “protects labor” that employers are almost always the oppressors. Similarly, it has been assumed by those who oppose trade unions that the unions are normally the oppressors. Neither assumption is valid. What is valid is the conclusion that when the civil government interferes in the competitive market process of making voluntary contracts, *the group favored by the legislation becomes the economic oppressor*. This oppression is established by positive sanctions (subsidies) and negative sanctions (restraints against trade). The element of *civil compulsion* is the most important aspect in identifying the Bible’s concept of *economic oppression*.

Let me explain my reasoning by a discussion of the economics of labor unions. If the state threatens violence against an employer who refuses to hire trade union members, or refuses to pay the wages demanded by trade union members, the employer is being oppressed economically. But it is not just the employer who is victimized. If he capitulates to the state, then he must fire (or refuse to hire) those workers who are not union members. They are no longer legally employable by him. They are now forced by law either to look elsewhere for employment or join the local trade union, which may not be possible because of unofficial restrictions against entry.³³ What the voters

33. Trade unions gain their economic ability to extract above-market wages from employers by their legal authorization from the state to exclude non-union members from the auction for labor services. If all trade unions opened their membership to all applicants, the unions could no longer exclude competing laborers, and the unions’ ability to extract above-market returns would then disappear. Unions adopt non-price means of excluding members: race, nationality, and especially the absence of family

and the politicians had regarded as economic oppression—an employer's refusal to hire one group of workers—was in fact a decision by the employer to hire *a different group* of workers: those who did not belong to a trade union. But very few legislators ever consider the effects of their law on those excluded. The legislation is called “pro-labor,” but it is in fact discriminatory against specific laborers. *Such legislation oppresses non-union members.*

The challenge for the economist is to use economic reasoning to explain what cannot be seen. The public can literally see specific people working for higher wages than they were offered before, and so the public concludes that the legislation has “helped labor.” The public cannot literally see those workers who have been forced by law to seek employment elsewhere. The voters do not readily consider the secondary effects of this “pro-labor” legislation, for these secondary effects are not visible. These effects are only perceived through economic reasoning—a skill that must be developed. The belief that “labor” in general has been helped by legislation making trade unions compulsory *in certain industries* and *in certain regions* is an example of what the mid-nineteenth-century French essayist Frédéric Bastiat called the fallacy of the effects not seen.³⁴

Furthermore, it is not just the employed labor union member who benefits. Those employers who can now afford to hire the excluded laborers, but who could not have afforded to do so at the wages previously offered to these laborers, before the law was passed, receive a subsidy: lower-priced labor services. So, civil legislation to “help labor” and to “stop exploitation by employers” by making trade unionism compulsory necessarily winds up helping some laborers at the expense of others, and also *helping some employers at the expense of others.*

It takes only the simplest level of economic analysis to understand the economic effects of such legislation, but virtually no college-level economics textbook discusses the legislation in this forthright manner, and no high school textbook does. Neither do the history textbooks. There is a good economic reason for this omission. The vast majority of textbooks are sold to tax-funded schools, and these schools are subject to political pressure from well-organized trade unions, most not-

connections. See Gary S. Becker, “Union Restrictions on Entry,” in Philip D. Bradley (ed.), *The Public Stake in Union Power* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), ch. 10. Becker won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1992.

34. Frédéric Bastiat, “What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen” (1850), in *Selected Essays on Political Economy* (Irvington, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, [1964] 1968), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/BastiatSeen>)

ably the high school teacher unions. It is not in the unions' interest to have students exposed to the idea that their teachers' income is based in part on the political exploitation of other potential teachers who are willing to work for less but who are excluded through a threat of government violence against the school system's Board of Trustees. After several generations of such textbooks, even the trustees fail to understand the economics of legislated violence.

E. The State and Economic Oppression

The text in Leviticus warns against exploiting others economically. The person who leases a piece of land from an owner can become an oppressor, but so can the owner who leases it. The ethical and judicial question is this: What is economic oppression? This is not so easy to answer as Christian social commentators and humanistic legislators have sometimes imagined.

In my commentary on Exodus, I argued that neither the Bible nor economic theory provides a legally enforceable definition of economic oppression that is based on price. I argued that the state creates the conditions for economic oppression: injustice. This is affirmed by Psalm 82, which refers to rulers of the congregation, which was the nation as a whole.³⁵ "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 82:1–4). Here is what I wrote in my Exodus commentary.

* * * * *

Economic theory provides no definition of the concept of "economic oppression" in the case of voluntary transactions. Only where coercion is involved—the threat of physical violence—can the economist be confident that oppression is involved. This does not mean that a definition of oppression is impossible, but it does mean that no appeal to modern humanistic economic theory can provide a clear-cut definition. The use of the coercive power of the civil government to extract resources from other people can be regarded as oppression in most instances, but there are no clearly defined criteria of oppressive

35. James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), Appendix A: "Biblical Terminology for the Church." (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

voluntary transactions made in a free market. The mere presence of competitive bargaining between unequally rich or unequally skillful bargainers does not constitute economic oppression, as the bargain between Jacob and Esau indicates (Gen. 25:29–34).³⁶ Nevertheless, there *are* acts of economic oppression, even if conventional economic theory cannot state the criteria scientifically (neutrally).³⁷ . . .

In the case of voluntary economic transactions, the Bible gives no specific guidelines as to what constitutes economic oppression, apart from oppression in the form of commands to perform a civil crime (e.g., adultery, prostitution). There are laws that prohibit false weights and measures or other crimes involving fraud, but these are general rules for the whole population. They are not laws designed specifically to protect widows, the fatherless, and strangers. Apart from the law regarding weights and measures, *the Bible does not authorize legislation or court decisions against perceived cases of economic oppression*.³⁸ There are no biblical (or economic) guidelines that define “price gouging” or “rent-racking,” or similar unpopular practices. The attempt of governors and judges, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to go beyond the enforcement of specific laws against fraud is necessarily an expansion of arbitrary rule. Legal predictability suffers, and therefore human freedom also suffers. The power-seeking state expands at the expense of individual freedom.

This is not to argue that such evil economic practices do not exist. No doubt they do exist. The question is: What, if anything, is the civil government or a church court supposed to do in any formal case of alleged oppression? The problem that freedom-seeking Christian societies must deal with is the preservation of the judicial conditions necessary for maintaining personal liberty. How can a society avoid oppression by unjust civil magistrates if the legal system offers great latitude for civil judges to define arbitrarily and retroactively what constitutes an economic crime? Civil government is a God-ordained monopoly of violence. Allow arbitrary and unpredictable power here, and the entire society can be placed under the bondage of oppressors—oppressors who legally wield instruments of physical punishment. In contrast, economic oppression is an individual act by a specific person against a

36. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 26.

37. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48:C.

38. The laws requiring gleaning and prohibiting interest-bearing charitable loans to fellow Israelites had no civil penalty attached to them.

handful of people locally. It is a temporary phenomenon, limited at the very least by the continuing wealth of the oppressor, the continuing poverty of the victims, and the lifespans of both the oppressor and the oppressed. There are no comparably effective restraints on oppression by those who control the administration of civil justice. Society-wide, monopolistic, state-enforced sin is generally a far greater threat to potential victims of oppression than localized, privately financed sin.³⁹

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F. Oppression and the Jubilee Land Law

We now return to the text of the jubilee land law. Who is likely to become the victim of oppression? Answer: the person with less reliable information about alternative offers and future economic *and* legal conditions. This can be either party. In an overwhelmingly agricultural community, both parties probably have equally good information about the value of the fruits of production. The person who wants to lease the land probably has somewhat poorer information about the physical details of the property. On the other hand, the land owner may have fallen into debt. Perhaps he is not a good manager of his money. He may be a poor farmer. He may have poor information about the value of the stream of *net* income from the land. So, the text does not specify one of the two parties as the more likely oppressor.

To identify the oppressor here, we need to identify the person who uses the state, or his knowledge about the most likely future actions of the state, in order to gain a competitive advantage over the other person in a voluntary transaction. It is rare for biblical law to specify pricing as *judicable* economic oppression except in life-and-death situations—what I call “priestly pricing.” Biblically defined economic oppression through price-setting is usually based on a person’s efficient use of illegitimate power by the state. The oppressor and the civil magistrates act in collusion to oppress someone or some group.

1. A Question of Knowledge

The law of the jubilee was clear: in year 50, Israel’s agricultural land was to revert to the original owners or their heirs. This leads me to ask: On what basis could anyone not have known what to pay for or charge for leasing the land? All land was not equally valuable. To the

39. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 48:E.

extent that one piece of land was more productive, net, than another, to that extent the lease price would have been higher than less productive land. For example, a farm with a well-developed orchard would have brought a higher price than a farm whose income was dependent on farming that required higher inputs of labor and capital. The net income from the fruit of the orchard probably would have exceeded the net income from grain farming. So, the existence of variously priced annual leasehold rents was not necessarily evidence of economic oppression by anyone.

Then what was? A cash payment or long-term annual rent agreement that was either too high (an exploiting lessor) or too low (an exploiting lessee) for the number of years remaining before the jubilee. But since everyone knew the number of years remaining, how could there be any doubt about this? The answer should be clear to anyone who has followed my logic so far: *one of the parties knew that this statute would probably not be honored by the civil magistrates when the year of jubilee arrived.*

Which of the two would become the beneficiary if only one of them knew the truth? In the case of an advance cash payment for the full term of the lease, the party making the payment would have benefited. The person giving up control over the property would have asked a price on the assumption that the property would return to him or his heirs in the jubilee year. But this price was too low if the person gaining control would not in fact be required to relinquish control at the jubilee.

In the case of a long-term lease arrangement, however, the person agreeing to pay the existing owner an annual payment until the next jubilee year would have taken on an obligation longer than he had suspected. If the civil courts enforced the payment of the terms of the lease, but refused to enforce the jubilee, the person obligated to pay could become the oppressed party. If the land became less productive or its fruits less valuable in the market, the person who leased the land was stuck. The owner would collect his rental payment indefinitely.

2. The Civil Magistrates as Enforcers

The decisive factor, then, was the covenantal faithfulness of the civil rulers. Their decision to neglect the enforcement of the jubilee year would create conditions for economic oppression by one of the two contracting parties. Each party in the transaction was therefore

warned in advance by God: do not become an oppressor, *even if corrupt civil magistrates make such oppression possible* by refusing to enforce the terms of the jubilee land law. God warned everyone to abide by the jubilee law even if the civil rulers did not enforce it.

If I am correct in my analysis of this passage, then we have additional evidence that *economic oppression in a free market is usually the result of civil magistrates who refuse to enforce God's Bible-revealed law*. It is rarely the process of voluntary pricing in a free market that constitutes economic oppression; it is rather pricing in a society in which civil magistrates favor a particular individual or class by means of economically discriminatory legislation or economically discriminatory court decisions. *State subsidies of all kinds enable people to oppress each other economically*. The incentive to oppress others in this way is universal. The ability to do so is very limited when the civil magistrates restrict their actions to enforcing the laws of God by imposing the sanctions specified by His law. The state initiates economic oppression by creating the legal conditions in which such oppression is profitable. In short, *the state subsidizes economic oppression*. As in the case of any state subsidy, this increases the supply of the item being subsidized: economic oppression.

G. The Legitimacy of Both Rent and Interest

This law provides evidence of the existence of rental agreements in ancient Israel. A lease is a rental agreement. A potential lessee approaches the land owner and makes an offer to take control of the land, meaning *the fruits produced by the land over time*. "Land" here is defined as everything on the land or under the land, including houses, streams, ponds, fish, metals, and anything else specified by either the lease or local custom. The lessee can pay this rent in advance, or annually, or by a combination of the two. The terms of the lease are negotiable. What was not negotiable in ancient Israel was an extension of this lease beyond the beginning of the next jubilee year. The sound of the ram's horn in year 50 would end all agricultural leases.

Let us assume that the ram's horn has sounded. How would Israelites have estimated the value of a new lease? Let us begin with a hypothetical situation in which an heir has just inherited his land. He is an international trader by profession. He has no interest in farming. Neither do his sons. What he wants is cash, so that he can make purchases for the next voyage. He advertises that he is willing to lease the

property to anyone who wants it: high bid wins.

Let us assume that those who might be interested in leasing the land are all of equal forecasting ability and equal ability as farmers. They all have cash, and they all want to farm. How will they calculate the value of the lease?

1. Capitalizing Future Income

First, they will make forecasts regarding the *average net income* that can be derived from the fruit of the land over the next 49 years, including those initial six sabbatical years in which there is neither income nor a miraculous triple crop.

Second, they will seek information on what the correct rate of interest is for long-term loans. (Let us assume that a developed market for commercial loans did exist in Israel.) The person with money to invest can invest in a farm for a period of time or lend the money into the loan market. The lender makes adjustments for comparative rates of risk, and then he decides where to invest in terms of the highest available rate of return. Will he invest in the land's lease or a bond? If his goal is money income, it will make no difference to him where the money will come from. He seeks the highest rate of return. He cares nothing about getting his hands into "the good earth," nor does he become ecstatic when clipping coupons. He simply wants the highest rate of return on his invested money. He can pay the land owner cash and receive lawful access to a stream of future agricultural income, or he can pay a borrower cash and receive a stream of future money income.

Let us consider a specific example. If the lessor's land is expected to produce an ounce of gold per year, net of all expenses, and the bond-issuer promises to repay the creditor an ounce of gold per year, *the present price of the lease will equal the present price of the bond*. Why? Because the rate of interest—the discount applied to the price of future goods in relation to the price of present goods—is applied equally to both streams of income. Once he has adjusted for comparative rates of risk regarding repayment, the man with gold to invest is not comparing a piece of paper (an IOU) with acres of dirt; he is comparing gold held in the present vs. gold received in the future.

If there was no organized market for such loans in ancient Israel, then each of the prospective lessees would have had to estimate what his own rate of discount was. This discount is not on money as such; it

is on time itself. (I shift to the present tense.) Each potential lessee asks himself: “How high do I discount the value to me of future income in relation to cash held today?” If he expects to gain from the farm a net income of one ounce of gold per year,⁴⁰ including forfeited income during six sabbatical years, he will not offer the farm’s owner 49 ounces of gold, cash, even if he has that much available to invest. Why not? Because he already has 49 ounces of gold. Why should he give up 49 ounces today in order to get back one ounce per year over a 49-year period? *A bird in hand today is worth more than a bird in hand 49 years from now.*⁴¹ The 49th ounce of gold that he owns today is worth a great deal more to him than the 49th ounce of gold he expects to receive 49 years in the future. The discount that he applies to the value of each year’s ounce of gold is his rate of interest.

2. Interest and Rent

There are some contemporary commentators who claim that the Old Testament’s prohibition against interest from charitable loans to the poor—“thy poor brother” (Deut. 15:9)—also applied to commercial transactions. Rarely or never are these critics professional theologians, let alone economists. This interpretation of “usury” is incorrect. The two types of loans were (and are) morally and legally different.

The Hebrew word translated as *usury* in the King James Version means *interest*. Interest was prohibited when it was derived from a morally obligatory charitable loan to a poor person, either brother in the faith or a righteous resident alien. It was not prohibited when it was from a business loan, which was not morally obligatory. The charitable loan was morally compulsory (Deut. 15:9–10); the commercial loan was not. The charitable loan was cancelled in the seventh year (Deut. 15:1–7); the commercial loan was not. The borrower who did not repay a charitable loan on time could be sold into indentured servitude; this servitude lasted until the debt was repaid or until the year of national debt relief (Deut. 15:12–13). In contrast, the borrower who failed to repay a commercial loan suffered whatever penalties the contract specified. This collateral could legally involve indentured servitude beyond the seventh year, but not beyond the beginning of the

40. This sounds about right for an 11-acre farm in the United States today; in ancient Israel, it would have been too much, except possibly in the inflationary era of Solomon’s reign, when gold poured into his personal treasury (I Kings 9:14, 28; 10:10, 14).

41. Especially if you are 49 years old.

year of jubilee, when every person had the right to return to his own land. The jubilee year was to break the bonds of every citizen in Israel, meaning every person who had an inheritance based on the conquest of Canaan.

Interest is familiar to most people: a payment made to a creditor by a debtor for the use of money over time. The money is then spent by the borrower in order to buy a factor of production or on consumption. But why should this definition of interest be limited to money? The addition of money to the transaction does not alter the economic nature of the transaction: *payments made over time for the use of a scarce resource over time*. It results from a discounting process: services today are worth more than the same services tomorrow. Today's value of a bird in hand is greater than today's value of a guaranteed bird in hand in the future. (I am not speaking here of comparative risk.)

Why is a resource valuable? Because it generates *rent*: a stream of income over time. To gain legal access to this stream of income, the renter must pay rent to the owner.⁴² As people's knowledge of economic alternatives improves, rental payments made to the owner of a production factor will more closely approximate the market value of that factor's output. Because the term *rent* has for so long been applied to land, people think of it exclusively as a factor payment to land. This limited definition is valid only in the case of a narrow theoretical discussion of the original factors of production: land (rent) and labor (wage).⁴³ But a wage is a rental payment for human labor. The analytic concept of rent—a stream of income—applies to every factor of production.

In terms of economic theory, the payment of rent is made to maintain legal control over any factor of production. A consumer today can rent a car or a tool or almost anything else that can be purchased. What if I want to buy a stream of income for a period of time? I can go into the market and offer a cash payment. How much will I offer? If I am well informed, I will offer no more than the expected stream of income *discounted by the rate of interest*. I can buy land this way. I can buy tools. I can buy a contractual stream of money: a bond. Because of market competition, the cash price I must pay to buy the rent (passive income stream) from land will equal the cash price I must pay to buy the rent (passive income stream) from a bond (money contract), as-

42. This assumes that he is not a sharecropper.

43. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, pp. 367–69.

suming everyone expects them to produce equal streams of passive income. Unless I am misinformed (or remarkably charitable), *I will not pay more to buy the same passive income stream from different sources of equal risk*. Stated differently, the interest rate (discount for time) applies equally to rental income from all sources.

If I want to gain legal control a piece of land that will provide me a passive income stream over a period of time, I can do it in either of two ways: (1) borrow the money and pay cash in advance for the use of the land, paying *interest to the creditor*; (2) lease the land weekly or monthly, paying *rent to the owner*. Legally, the terms of the two contracts are different. Economically, they are the same.

This leads us to an important conclusion: if paying interest for the use of money over time is illegal biblically, then paying money for the use of land over time is also illegal biblically. We call such payments for land *rent*. I will put it another way. If I were to borrow money at a rate of interest and then go out and use this money to pay cash for the use of a piece of property over the same period as the loan period, it is no different economically from going to the owner of the property and guaranteeing him monthly rent for that period. I can either guarantee to pay the creditor who loaned me cash a monthly rate of interest until I repay the principal *or* guarantee to pay the property owner a monthly rental payment until the lease expires. Legally, I am equally obligated to pay. Economically, it will cost me the same amount of money in a competitive market.

Very few of those people—never are they trained economists—who claim that all interest payments are immoral understand that their negative judgment against interest must apply equally to rent.⁴⁴ A denial of the legitimacy or legality of interest payments over time is also a denial of the legitimacy or legality of rental payments over time, i.e., a lease.

The critic of all interest payments who says that he opposes interest payments “because the Old Testament does” has a major problem with Leviticus 25:14–17, i.e., the law governing long-term land

44. One of my critics who understood this was S. C. Mooney. He wrote: “The economic similarity between usury and the rent of property readily is admitted. However, this close connection does not serve to legitimize usury, as Locke et al suppose; but to condemn rents.” Mooney, *Usury: Destroyer of Nations* (Warsaw, Ohio: Theopolis, 1988), p. 172. (<http://bit.ly/MooneyUsury>). For my detailed critique of Mr. Mooney’s utterly bizarre theory of interest and his equally bizarre applications, see *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix J: “Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney.”

leases. If a *lease* is legitimate, then *rent* is also legitimate, for a lease is a long-term rental contract. If rent is legitimate, then *interest* is also legitimate, for interest in a modern capitalist market is a rental contract for the use of money—an agreement entered into only because borrowers have uses for things money can buy. There is a lender and a borrower in each case. There is an agreement to pay money in installments over time for the use of goods over the same period of time. The lender (a person who gives up money or goods for a period of time) forfeits the use of the things that the cash would buy. The borrower (a person who gains control over money or goods for a period of time) gains access to the things money can buy by means of his promise to repay money or goods in the future. In each case, the lender will not lend unless he receives more money or more goods in the future than he gives up today; otherwise, it would be irrational to give them up, except as an act of charity.

Conclusion

The jubilee land law prohibited oppression in the writing of land lease contracts. Oppression resulted when one of the two parties to the transaction used specialized knowledge to take advantage of the other. The kind of knowledge was quite specific: *knowledge of future decisions by the civil magistrates not to enforce the terms of the jubilee land law.*

Either party to the transaction could become an oppressor under this definition. The land owner might persuade the lessee to agree to a contract in which the lessee promised to make regular payments until the jubilee year was declared. If it was not declared, and the magistrates refused to allow him to escape from the terms of the contract, the lessee would find himself locked into the contract. Under some economic conditions (e.g., a long-term fall in the money price for agricultural products), this would defraud the lessee. On the other hand, the lessee might be able to get the land owner to accept a cash payment in advance for legal control over the land's production. If the jubilee land law was not enforced, the lessee would be able to extend his control over the land indefinitely. This would defraud the land owner. Conclusion: the state was the source of the opportunity for oppression.

Both parties were warned to honor the terms of the jubilee land law whether the civil magistrates did or not. God placed the primary responsibility for law enforcement on the contracting parties. He

warned them both: "Honor the terms of the leasehold that I have made with Israel for control over My land."

The issue of economic oppression in this law was not the actual pricing of the factor of production: land. This decision was left to the contracting parties. Each looked at the expected future stream of income from the land. Each would apply the prevailing market discount of the price of future goods in relation to present goods to this stream of income: interest. Then they would decide what to offer each other. The agreed-upon price, however, had to take into consideration the irrevocable date for the termination of the contract: the jubilee year.

The existence of a law governing land leases in Israel testifies to the error of interpreting the Bible's prohibition against usury in charitable loans as a prohibition against all forms of interest. The decision to make a cash payment in order to acquire legal ownership of a stream of resource-generated income over a fixed period of time is identical economically to making a cash payment to buy an interest-paying bond with the same expiration date as the lease. This means that a prohibition against all interest payments must also be a prohibition against all rent payments. Yet this law establishes the legality of rent. I therefore conclude that the Bible does not prohibit interest in non-charity loans.⁴⁵

There is no evidence that the jubilee laws were ever enforced in Israel. This may indicate that the jubilee laws sometimes were not enforced. Probably they were not enforced prior to the exile, for the seventh year of release was not honored, which is why God sent Israel into exile (II Chron. 36:21). Thus, every Israelite could safely assume that other laws beside the jubilee land law would govern leasehold contracts. Other civil laws would provide differing authority to magistrates to decide which leases would be honored and which would not. The magistrates of Israel arrogated authority to themselves to disobey God regarding the sabbatical year. How far could they safely be trusted to honor the terms of other laws? The opportunities for economic oppression must have increased, compared to rule by the sabbatical law and the jubilee land law, for there would have been less certainty about the enforcement of the civil law. The greater the degree of judicial uncertainty, the greater the amount of resources necessary to protect oneself: better lawyers, larger bribes, and higher expenditures on searching out information regarding the integrity of one's trading part-

45. The aforementioned Mr. Mooney has yet to reply to this argument, which I also offered in *Tools of Dominion* in 1990.

ners and also the moral integrity of their legal heirs. These were long-term lease contracts.

FOOD MIRACLES AND COVENANTAL PREDICTABILITY

Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store (Lev. 25:18–22).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is that God sustains His people, and more than sustains them. He offers them plenty. They are required to acknowledge this fact by trusting His promises. They display this trust through their obedience to His law. This is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model: sanctions.¹

A. Universal Benefits: Peace and Food

This passage begins with a re-statement of the familiar cause-and-effect relationship between corporate external obedience to God's covenant law and corporate external blessings. We know that the frame of reference is corporate blessings because of the use of the first person plural: "What shall *we* eat the seventh year? behold, *we* shall not sow, nor gather in our increase." In this case, the text focuses on two blessings: peace and food. "Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2010), ch. 4.

the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety (vv. 18–19).” This is a repeated theme in the Bible. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it” (Micah 4:4).

If this dual promise of peace and food were found only in Leviticus 25, it could be discussed as an aspect of the jubilee laws and therefore no longer in force. But the list of God’s positive sanctions in Leviticus 26:3–15 indicates that this pair of positive sanctions was not uniquely tied to the jubilee. The promise of peace and food is more general than the jubilee law, since it refers to “my statutes” and “my judgments.” God refers Israel back to His revealed law-order. It is their covenantal faithfulness to the stipulations of this law-order which alone serves the basis of their external prosperity. Without obedience, they can have no legitimate confidence in their earthly future in the land. This law has a broad application. It undergirds the observation by David: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25). The link between obedience to God’s statutes and eating is reflected in David’s observation: righteousness and the absence of begging.

Why is this passage found in the jubilee statutes? Because of the unique place of both the land and the harvest in the jubilee laws. Preceding this section are laws that deal with the transfer of a family’s land to the heirs: the return—legally, though not necessarily physically—of each man to his father’s land (v. 13). This was *a testament of liberation*. Because of this law, there could be no permanent legal enslavement of Israelites inside the land.² The jubilee law also established an obligation for all leasehold contracts to be based on the jubilee year’s requirement of rural land’s reversion to the original family (vv. 14–17). Following the announcement of the dual blessing of peace and food is another promise: a triple crop in the sixth year of the seventh cycle of sabbatical weeks of years (vv. 20–22).

The promise of peace and food points the reader’s attention to the

2 2. The law applied to all Israelites. Aliens could become heirs of this promise through adoption, either into a family (rural) or tribe (walled city). Excommunication removed an heir from his landed inheritance. Excommunication also removed him from citizenship. This is why a excommunicant’s adult sons had to break publicly with him and his rebellion in order to preserve their own inheritance. Although there is no law governing this, I presume that minor sons of an excommunicated father could inherit upon their majority at age 20 if they broke with their father publicly when they turned 20. The goal of biblical law is restoration.

author of the law. God is sovereign. He promises to bring them national prosperity in response to their adherence to His laws. This promise is conditional: no obedience, no prosperity. This fact of covenantal life becomes clear in the next chapter of Leviticus. In order to demonstrate the reliability of His promises on a year-to-year basis, He promised a manifestation of His supernatural sovereignty: a miracle year.

B. The Miracle Year

To the jubilee year was attached a miracle. God promised to deliver a triple crop in the sixth year of the seventh sabbatical cycle of years. “And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store” (vv. 20–22). This triple portion was God’s way of announcing His presence with His people. They would be given sufficient crops to sustain them through the sabbath year and the jubilee year. Then, at the end of the jubilee (eighth) year, they were to plant for the next year.

In the wilderness period, they had been given the almost daily miracle of the manna. The exception to this miracle was itself an even greater miracle. On the day before the sabbath, they could gather a double portion. The manna in jars would not rot on the sabbath (Ex. 16:22). On every other day of the week, any manna that was left in a jar overnight would rot (Ex. 16:20).

As I have written in my commentary on Exodus, the manna had a function beyond the mere provisioning of the people with their daily bread. It was given to them in order that they might develop confidence in God as a sovereign provider. His provision of manna was miraculous. It was also regular. They had to trust God to bring the manna the next day, for it could not be stored overnight. Then, once a week, the regularity of the miracle was manifested in a different way: the miraculous rotting of the manna miraculously ceased. They could store it overnight, so that they would not have to labor to harvest it on the sabbath. So, the miracle was to teach them about the regularity of God’s provisioning, as well as their total dependence on His grace.³

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985),

When they came into the land, the manna ceased forever: “And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year” (Josh. 5:12). The fruit of the land would henceforth sustain them. But this did not mean that they were any less dependent on God for their food. Now, however, their food would come predictably in terms of their corporate covenantal conformity to His law: the greater their obedience, the more predictable their food.

In order to remind them of their continuing need to obey Him, as the sovereign provider of food, God did not totally remove His miracles from the land. Twice per century, God promised to provide them with bread in a miraculous way: the triple crop of the sixth year in the seventh cycle of the sabbatical week of years. This would be the equivalent of manna.

C. The Self-Discipline of Thrift

In a normal cycle of seven years, the Israelites had to save enough grain over six years to get through the seventh (sabbatical) year and half way through the eighth year, until the eighth-year crop could be harvested.⁴ But this was not the case in jubilee year periods. In the sixth year would come a triple crop. That crop would feed them in the second half of year six, all of year seven (sabbatical), all of year eight (jubilee), and half way through year nine.

This means that in the six years prior to a jubilee year, farmers did not have to store up crops in order to carry themselves through the sabbatical year, the jubilee year, and half way through the ninth year until the crop came in. This triple crop was Old Covenant Israel's equivalent of the manna of the wilderness: a miraculous gift from God. It was the bread of life.

In escaping the production restraints of a normal sabbatical cycle, they acknowledged their dependence on the grace of God. The thrift that was agriculturally necessary during normal sabbatical periods was not required during the jubilee's week of years. Each farm could safely consume or sell one-sixth of each year's crop during the final sabbatical cycle. This income would otherwise have had to be stored or sold for cash and retained in that form in preparation for the sabbatical year.

ch. 18.

4. *Ibid*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 53:C:1.

This pre-jubilee miracle would have made it possible for thrifty farmers to increase their purchase of farming tools, or make investments in urban industries, or make foreign investments. This extra marketable output of food would have tended to lower the price of food in Israel during jubilee periods, thereby stimulating the export of food to nations where food prices were higher.⁵ Meanwhile, not-so-thrifty Israelites could have enjoyed more food, or else they could have sold the agricultural surplus in order to buy urban-produced consumer goods or imported consumer goods. To both the thrifty and the less thrifty, God promised six consecutive years of relief from the pressure to save for the normal sabbatical year.

To take advantage of this miraculous gift from God, the Israelites had to trust God to deliver on His promise to the nation. If they refused to save for six years in preparation for the arrival of a sabbath year of rest and the jubilee year, back to back, a refusal of God to deliver the triple crop would have created near-famine conditions by the ninth year. Many people would have been forced to sell their family lands or even sell themselves into slavery—in the very period that God set aside for the recovery of family lands and the release of bondservants. Thus, they had to exercise faith that the triple crop would arrive on schedule.

On the other hand, if God delivered on His promise, but the people then refused to honor the sabbatical year and/or the jubilee year, planting and harvesting instead, this would have constituted a misuse of the jubilee miracle. It would have constituted theft from God through the economic oppression of hired harvesters, strangers, and gleaners. It is clear from the message of Jeremiah that the nation did not honor the sabbatical years for 70 sabbatical cycles, or 490 years. This is why they were sent into captivity. “To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years” (II Chron. 36:21).

There is no unambiguous biblical record that the jubilee law was ever honored in Israel. We know that the sabbath year of release was not honored for 490 years prior to the exile. Since they did not honor the sabbath year of release, it is highly doubtful that God ever gave them the promised triple crop in the seventh sabbatical cycle. Without the triple crop, perhaps they chose to ignore the jubilee law. The Bible

5. Because of the high cost of ground transportation, these exported crops would normally have gone by boat.

does not say.

D. Miracles, Sanctions, and Mysticism

When Jesus announced His fulfillment of the jubilee year (Luke 4:18–21), He was announcing the end of the miraculous jubilee year.⁶ Under the New Covenant, there is no triple crop in the sixth year of the seventh “week of years.” The faith of New Covenant-keepers has been stripped of a national miracle that demonstrated the reliability of God’s providential and *law-bounded* covenantal order, just as a similar faith during the wilderness era was stripped of a daily miracle when the manna ceased upon the nation’s entry into Canaan. As the spiritual maturity of covenant-keepers advances, miracles steadily cease.⁷

1. Obedience and Blessings

The question arises: What about the covenantal cause-and-effect connection between corporate external obedience and corporate blessings? Are covenant-bound societies still promised peace and agricultural prosperity if they adhere to the external requirements God’s revealed law? Was this annulled by Jesus in His fulfillment of the jubilee year? No. In Leviticus 26, which appears after the close of the jubilee laws, we read: “And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land” (Lev. 26:6). This recapitulation of the promise of Leviticus 25:18–19 indicates that this aspect of the jubilee law was broader than an aspect of the jubilee law. But was it a cross-boundary law? Did it apply outside the Promised Land? The recapitulation in Leviticus 26 is paralleled in Deuteronomy 28, and is mentioned as a testimony to the nations:

The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

7. This has been the case in the history of Christianity. In the early church, the miracles of healing and exorcism were important in evangelism. Today, both of these gifts are far less evident in advanced industrial nations, although both still are used by some fundamentalist missionaries working in primitive societies or in societies deeply in bondage to a rival supernatural religion.

thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall shalt keep establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee (Deut. 28:7–10).

Why should they be afraid of Israel if they did not interpret the visible predictable sanctions in Israel as proof of God's unique presence with Israel? Did this fear apply only to the risks of invading Israel? Were the nations not also to fear a counter-invasion by Israel?⁸ Deuteronomy 20:10–20 lists the laws of siege. These laws did not apply to Israel's invasion of Canaan, for they established legitimate terms of surrender, which were not options during the conquest. Therefore, these military laws had to apply to warfare outside the land. They were cross-boundary laws. Since Israel was to be feared by foreign nations, the corporate covenantal sanctions visible to foreigners inside the land had to be presumed by them to apply outside the land, too (Deut. 4:4–8).⁹

Without the miracle of manna or the miracle of the triple crop, New Covenant Christians are thrown back on their faith in God's revealed word. The compelling evidence of God is supposed to be God's word. This always was the case, but the miracles were added to overcome the Israelites' weakness of faith. Old Covenant believers in the wilderness had daily edible reminders of God's presence. In the Promised Land, these reminders were reduced numerically to twice per century. In the New Covenant, the miracle of food is restricted to the Lord's Supper. This miracle—co-participation in heavenly worship by the earthly church and the heavenly church—must be accepted on faith.¹⁰

8. Israel was not to initiate foreign wars. The Mosaic festival laws made empire impossible. There was no permanent payoff in launching foreign wars because of the distance of foreign nations from the central city where sacrifices were offered.

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

10. New Covenant Christians have gone in three directions to explain this miracle. Roman Catholics have turned to philosophical realism: the literal, bodily presence of Christ in the sacrament. The Lutherans also are realists, defending the body and blood of Christ as being substantially present: Formula of Concord (1576), Art. VII, Sections 1, 2. Anabaptists have adopted nominalism: the Lord's Supper as a mere memorial. The biblical view is neither realism nor nominalism but covenantalism: God's special *judicial presence* in the eating of the meal. It is a meal eaten on the Lord's Day, or Day of the Lord, or judgment day.

2. Covenantal Predictability

Has God reduced His covenantal predictability in history along with His reduction of miracles? For instance, does it take longer today than it did in Mosaic Israel for God to bring his negative sanctions in history? No evidence that I am aware of suggests this. Sometimes, the negative sanctions came soon. God was angry with Israel, so He moved David to take an illegal holy census (I Sam. 24:1).¹¹ David's sin in numbering the nation brought an immediate plague on 70,000 people (II Sam. 24:15). Rapid judgment was the threat that Nineveh faced; the nation therefore repented. Covenant-breakers outside the land understood the cause-and-effect connection between corporate sin and God's wrath in history. In other cases, judgment was delayed for centuries. In Mosaic Israel, the nation violated the sabbatical year laws for centuries. Not until Jeremiah's day were they told that God would soon bring His corporate wrath against the nation for this long-term act of rebellion by sending them into captivity (I Chron. 36:21).

While miracles steadily disappear, the covenantal promise of God's predictable corporate sanctions remain in place. If this were not the case, the sanctions aspect of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:30) would be transferred completely out of history. While a man's verbal oath and the physical sacraments are part of history, the oath is taken under God, who is in eternity. Some of the personal sanctions are both predictable and eternal, but corporate negative sanctions are exclusively historical (no sin beyond the resurrection). On what exegetical basis can the sacrament's sanctions be said to be predictable only outside of history and apply only to individuals?

This raises the question of civil oaths. Nations take oaths (Ex. 19). Are these oaths enforced exclusively by men rather than God? Political pluralists are logically compelled to answer *yes*: no God enforces corporate civil oaths with covenantally predictable historical sanctions invoked by the oaths. If pluralists were to answer *no*, thereby affirming God's predictable, corporate, covenantal, historical sanctions, they would have to abandon their pluralism. Their religion forbids them to answer otherwise: no supernatural frame of reference for civil oaths.

If God's predictable, corporate, covenantal sanctions in history were to disappear, just as predictable corporate miracles such as manna and the triple crop have disappeared, Christianity would necessarily be progressively absorbed into the larger covenant-breaking cul-

11. The census was to be taken prior to holy war (Deut. 20).

ture. Whatever regularity in corporate sanctions that might be said to exist in history would be based on shared, universal categories of social and political ethics, e.g., natural law theory. There would be no way for the kingdom of God to manifest its presence among men except through the verbal testimony of individuals regarding totally invisible, subjectively discerned patterns of predictability, e.g., "I feel all tingly when I pray." For those people who have no desire to feel tingly, or who are content to take niacinamide whenever they want to feel tingly, such verbal testimony carries no weight. Christian culture could be differentiated from pagan culture only through the personal mysticism of its members. But mysticism is inherently without theological and judicial content—beyond the realm of creeds and intellectual categories. So-called Christian mysticism cannot be distinguished judicially from pagan mysticism. In short, if neither revelational ethics and its attached sanctions nor miracles identify the historical presence of the kingdom of God, the institutional church ceases to have a role to play in history that is visibly different from any other charitable or salvationist organization. This lack of distinction overtook most evangelical churches in the twentieth century. Christianity is regarded by covenant-breakers as just one more ameliorative-mystical tradition among thousands.

The way to restore the church to its position as society's central institution is to preach a separate biblical worldview based on biblical law and biblical sanctions. The other avenue for distinguishing the church from the world—the quest for miracles or continuing revelation—in the twentieth century became the differentiating mark of pentecostals and charismatics.¹² The third path is mysticism.

Covenantal corporate predictability in history is mandatory if Christians are to reconstruct social theory. If such regularity did not exist in New Covenant history, then society could not be reformed on a uniquely Christian basis. The church would then seek to avoid social transformation. It would retreat from the world (discontinuity) or conform itself to the world (continuity). It would become either fundamentalist-mystical or liberal. This is generally what happened in the United States, 1900–1975. As Rushdoony said, the fundamentalists believe in God but not in history, while the liberals believe in history but not in God. In either case, the world is abandoned to the covenantal representatives of Satan. There is no neutrality.

12. Katherine Kulhman, *I Believe in Miracles* (New York: Pyramid Books, [1962] 1964).

E. Miracles of Feeding

The law of God is given to all men so that they will learn to obey the God of the Bible. If they live in societies that are marked by widespread obedience to the external laws of God, they will experience widespread external blessings, among which are peace and food.

To prove that this promise can be trusted, God on occasion has established *miracles of feeding*. The first time was in the wilderness period: the manna. When they entered the Promised Land, they initially lived off the crops of their defeated enemies. Then, as they began to plant and reap, they were to become thrifty: saving, not for a rainy day, but for the sabbatical year. But in the seventh cycle of sabbatical years, God promised to give them a miracle: the triple crop of the sixth year. This was to allow them to save for six years and not be forced to consume their savings in the seventh and eighth, or consume what would normally have been saved for six years and not be penalized for their consumption.¹³

The triple crop was also to remind them that God's blessings are predictable in history. It would remind them that the source of their prosperity was not thrift as such, but thrift within the framework of God's covenant. They were warned not to draw a false conclusion, one based on the humanist presupposition of the autonomy of man: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).¹⁴ Covenantal blessings are given to confirm the covenant.

Conclusion

The miracle of the triple crop was promised to Israel in order to confirm visibly: (1) the sovereignty of God over nature; (2) the predictability of God's covenant-based blessings in history. The Israelites were not to capitulate to the temptation of worshipping another god, either a god of nature or a god of history—the only two kinds of idols available to covenant-breaking man.¹⁵

13. The prophets used the miracle of feeding on numerous occasions. The pagan widow of Zerephath had two containers that filled daily, one with oil and the other with meal, when Elijah lived in her home (I Kings 17:14–15). In the New Testament, Jesus used the miracle of feeding on two occasions.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

15. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confronta-*

Modern covenant-breaking man denies the miracles. He wishes to divinize either nature or history or both (Darwinism). To do this, he must deny all traces of God's authority over nature and history. Modern man has chosen evolution as his god, meaning his source of law. Evolution is said to govern both nature and historical process. Evolution is regarded as impersonal except when man, meaning elite men, learns the secrets of evolution and then directs both nature and history.¹⁶ A major appeal of evolution is power.

Modern Christians reject evolution in its humanist form. They insist that God is still sovereign over history, although Augustinians and Calvinists alone insist that God predestines everything that comes to pass in history. There are virtually no visible traces of Catholic Augustinianism and very few traces of Calvinism. Furthermore, most modern Calvinists have explicitly or implicitly denied the existence of covenantal predictability in New Covenant times. They openly reject the idea of a national civil covenant under God. They are political pluralists.¹⁷ They do not believe that God brings predictable corporate sanctions, positive or negative, in terms of a nation's obedience to God's Bible-revealed law.¹⁸

This belief leaves them without any miracles with which to challenge humanists and other covenant-breakers. This belief also provides them with a theological explanation for the seeming helplessness of Christianity to transform culture by establishing the civilization of God in history: God's kingdom. This in turn creates a deep psychological need to find personal solace in the midst of inevitable cultural defeat: pietistic ecclesiastical ghettos. Finally, their widespread acceptance of life in these ghettos has led to the development of ghetto eschatologies.¹⁹

Without a concept of God's covenant in history, Christians have not been able to develop an explicitly Christian social theory. They have relied on imported pagan natural law concepts to develop what few social ideas they possess. All of this has been the product of the

tion with American Society (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

16. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

17. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), chaps. 3–5. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

18. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

19. Gary North, "Ghetto Eschatologies," *Biblical Economics Today*, XIV (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

widespread acceptance of the original theological assumption, namely, that God in the New Covenant era has annulled the covenantal predictability of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. With neither widespread faith in the miracle of covenantal predictability nor the presence of earlier covenantal miracles of food and healing, modern Christians have become almost totally defensive in their thinking. Ideas have consequences.

THE RIGHT OF REDEMPTION

The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land (Lev. 25:23–24).

We begin with a theocentric analysis of this passage. This passage has to do with inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

The prohibition against the permanent sale of rural land was connected to the nation's judicial status as strangers and sojourners with God. What did this mean? God began to dwell in the land of Israel when the conquest began, i.e., after the nation had crossed Canaan's border. This means that He lived among them *judicially*. He did not take up residence with them physically. His unique judicial presence in the land was marked physically by the presence of the two tablets of the law inside the Ark of the Covenant. Even this testimony had to be taken on faith; no one was allowed to look inside the Ark. When this law was violated by the men of Bethshemesh, God killed 50,070 of them (I Sam. 6:19). Negative corporate sanctions came immediately after God allowed the corporate infraction to take place.²

A. Covenantal Inheritance

This law identified the Israelites as strangers and sojourners with God. The meaning here is “strangers from the world in the land.” This was in contrast to strangers and sojourners who might come into the land. These would become strangers and sojourners in the land, but

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 5.

2. Had the first three or four people who looked inside the Ark immediately been stricken with leprosy, as Miriam was stricken in the wilderness (Num. 12:10), the infraction would have ceased.

without God, i.e., not members of an Israelite family.

To be a stranger and sojourner with God under the Mosaic Covenant had a specific judicial meaning: one's heirs would inherit a portion of a particular plot of land in Israel. To inherit, a person had to be a member of an Israelite family that had participated in the conquest. The Israelites' righteous shedding of the blood of that generation of Canaanites had been a covenant sign for Israel. No one who was not biologically or judicially (through adoption) an heir to one of those families that had participated in that original ritual sacrifice could own rural land on a permanent basis in Israel until the law was changed by God after the exile (Ezek. 47:21–23).

The special judicial presence of God among them had been manifested historically to Israel by the genocide of the Canaanites. God had used His people—a royal priesthood (Ex. 19:6)—to bring negative historical sanctions against His enemies. They had served in a holy army. They had inherited the land of God's enemies. This was *inheritance through corporate execution*. Their landed inheritance began with their obedience in committing genocide.³ It ended with their national disinheritance at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

To be a covenantal stranger with God meant that you possessed permanent legal title to a plot of land. This land could not be permanently alienated. Title could not be legally transferred to another family by a leaseholder in any generation. God held original title; families held secondary title. This was a guarantee to Israel: for as long as the nation remained obedient to God, its original families would not be disinherited. There was only one way for corporate disinheritance to take place: *God's public execution of the nation of Israel*. "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient

3. None of this is visible in W. Brueggemann's book, *The Land* (London: SPCK, 1978). He wrote the following: "But Israel's Torah is markedly uninterested in a religion of obedience as such. It is rather interested in care for land. . ." (p. 60). Thus, he interprets the Mosaic law's universally acknowledged concern for ethics as a concern for ecology. You would be hard-pressed to find any interpretation of the Pentateuch more bizarre and misleading than this one. Then he quotes Joshua 1:7–8, God's command to be strong and courageous in the conquest of the land. Concludes Brueggemann: "The rhetoric is peculiar because it is an imperative to martial bravery and courage. But what is asked is not courage to destroy enemies, but courage to keep Torah" (p. 60). It is not the Bible's rhetoric that is peculiar. What is peculiar is Prof. Brueggemann's hermeneutic.

unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:19–20).⁴ This took place at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁵ The inheritance was transferred to another corporate people, just as Jesus had promised: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This was God's act of *covenantal execution*, not literal execution.

B. Redemption on Demand

Why would an Israelite have voluntarily leased out his land? The obvious reason was that the owner believed that he had better uses for the money than for the land. Perhaps he preferred to live in a city. Perhaps he was involved in commerce and wanted capital. Perhaps he was involved in some infraction that required an immediate payment to a victim.

An involuntary lease was used to raise money to pay off debts: victims of crimes or lenders in some business transaction in which the land had been used as collateral. The repayment of interest-free charitable loans was not governed by the jubilee law but by the more frequent sabbatical year law (Deut. 15:1–10). Charitable debts were cancelled every seventh year. But charitable loans were not collateralized by land; they were collateralized by the debtor's willingness to go into bondage for up to six years, should he default.

The existence of an interest payment in a loan agreement identified the loan as non-charitable, non-compulsory, and therefore more risky for the debtor, for the sabbatical year of release (Deut. 15:7–10) did not apply to business loans. The man who began as a poor man when he borrowed money in an emergency did not put his land on the line, assuming that he still owned any land. In contrast, the man who became a poor man after going into debt in order to finance a business venture or a consumer purchase did have to forfeit his land if his land was the collateral he had agreed to provide the lender.

The jubilee law specified that the collateral could be redeemed at any time. The lender who had repossessed the collateral of the family's inheritance was permitted to use it as a productive asset until one of two things took place: (1) the jubilee year began; (2) the poor man or his kinsman-redeemer paid back the principal.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

5. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubile: and in the jubile it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession (Lev. 25:25–28).

C. The Kinsman-Redeemer

The person who is identified in Leviticus 25 as the person with the authority to buy back a poor man's land is the kinsman (Lev. 25:25–26). The same root word in Hebrew is used for the verb for purchasing: "And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile" (Lev. 25:30). "And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubile: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel" (Lev. 25:33).

1. A Messianic Model

The office of kinsman-redeemer was based on a messianic model: "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight" (Ps. 72:11–14). The kinsman-redeemer was the same office as the blood-avenger, the *go'el* (sometimes transliterated as *ga'awl*). "But if the man have no kinsman [*go'el*] to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him" (Num. 5:8). "The revenger of blood [*go'el*] himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him" (Num. 35:19). God identified Himself as Israel's kinsman-redeemer: "Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem [*go'el*] you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments"

(Ex. 6:6).

The blood avenger was the nearest of kin. It was he who had the responsibility of pursuing and then slaying anyone suspected of having murdered his kinsman. The cities of refuge were built in order to provide a place for suspected murderers to flee. The city of refuge was a legal boundary into which the authority of a blood avenger from outside the city did not extend. "And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment" (Num. 35:12). Outside the boundaries of a city of refuge, "The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him" (Num. 35:19). After a trial in the city, a man convicted of murder (as distinguished from accidental manslaughter) was placed outside the city, to be executed by the blood avenger (Num. 35:25). A man convicted of accidental manslaughter could lawfully be killed by the blood-avenger at any time outside the city of refuge, until the high priest died. Here the language of release is the same as the language of the jubilee year: returning to the family's land: "Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession" (Num. 35:28).

In the captivity of Israel, God acted as their kinsman: "Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob" (Isa. 48:20). In doing so, God acted as blood-avenger: "And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob" (Isa. 49:26).

2. Why Redeem Another Man's Land or Person?

The kinsman-redeemer was the agent authorized by God to buy back the property of a close relative. The question is: What was the benefit for him? Why would any relative do this? It would have been a major capital outlay unless the jubilee was near. David Daube has offered a plausible explanation: the kinsman-redeemer bought the use of the land for himself until the jubilee year or until his relative could purchase the land from him, whichever came first. In other words, the

kinsman-redeemer became the new master of the property.⁶

It was also a benefit to the original owner when his kinsman-redeemer leased back the property. First, the land would probably be taken care of more carefully by a relative, i.e., there would be less “strip mining” of its productivity. Second, the kinsman-redeemer might be willing to allow him to work the land as a sharecropper. The original owner would come under the authority of a relative rather than a stranger. The relative might treat him better; he, in turn, would have family pressures on him to perform more efficiently as a caretaker. These are economic arguments. Third, the land would remain in the family—an important aspect of family authority in Israel. This is a social factor rather than economic: a matter of status. It was an embarrassment for a family to have an insolvent member in its midst. This was a way for the family to demonstrate its willingness to “care for its own.”

The text does not indicate that the land had to be returned immediately to the original owner. The economics of the case does indicate that without the kinsman-redeemer’s right to use the land for his own benefit until either the jubilee or the land’s redemption by the relative, there would have been little likelihood that this law would have been honored in practice.

The same principle of transferred authority applied also to the redemption of an Israelite brother from servitude in the household of a resident alien. “And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger’s family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him” (Lev. 25:47–48). Better to be a servant in the household of a relative than in the household of a foreigner. Better to be under the temporary authority of a covenant-keeper with sufficient money to redeem you than under the authority of a covenant-breaker. But the poverty-stricken man had still fallen into poverty. He was still stricken. The best way to return him to full productivity was to train him in the ways of productivity. The necessary hierarchy of master and servant was not broken by this form of redemption. The poor man still had to learn the techniques of serving the consumer. He needed an intermediary to teach him these techniques: his more prosperous kins-

6. David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (1956), p. 272, cited in Donald A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to Ruth* (Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack, 1974), p. 93.

man-redeemer.

When God redeems us, He does not turn us loose to do whatever we want; He becomes our new master. The standard antinomian refrain—"We're under grace, not law"—is incorrect. Men in history are always under both grace and law. The question is: Which kind of grace and which kind of law? Every society has laws and sanctions. Non-biblical laws and sanctions are an aspect of common grace; biblical laws and sanctions are an aspect of special grace.⁷ Without grace, there would be social chaos: hell's down payment ("earnest") in history. If there were no predictable covenantal sanctions in history for obedience and disobedience, there could be no social predictability. We would then live in moral and social chaos. The greater the chaos, the less social order.

Man's autonomy is never a valid theoretical option. God remains the original owner of us and our property. This fact receives confirmation every time someone dies. The old question—"How much did he leave behind?"—is always answered: "All of it." Men are inescapably stewards of God's property.⁸ The question is: Who should teach us the principles and practices of responsible stewardship? The jubilee law made this plain: the kinsman-redeemer, the Israelite family's agent of redemption and judgment. Only when the jubilee land laws ended with the establishment of a New Covenant did this system of family redemption and training end.

D. Walled Cities

The law of redemption applied inside the walled cities of Israel in a different way: the seller or his kinsman had only one year to redeem a home (dwelling place). Once this year had passed, the buyer became a permanent owner. "And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile" (Lev. 25:29–30). Notice: this law applied only to homes. It did not apply to other kinds of urban real estate. Only a res-

7. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

8. Remove God from theology, and death points to another principle of ownership: the land owns man. The land stays; men depart. Man becomes a steward *for* the land, not *of* the land. This is the view of the radical ecological activist groups.

idence was protected by the year of grace. Title to other real estate passed at the time of sale. Title to urban real estate was *alienable*: for sale to aliens.

1. The Right of Redemption

Outside the boundary of the wall, the Israelite's right of redemption was universal, bounded by a 50-year limit. "But the houses of the villages which have no wall round about them shall be counted as the fields of the country: they may be redeemed, and they shall go out in the jubile" (v. 31).

Was it legal for subsequent generations to build walls around unwalled cities? Yes. Would this new wall have changed the legal status of the heirs of the original families? No. An unwalled city of Joshua's day, with the exception of the cities of the Levites, came under the jubilee's rural land law. The inheritance left by the original generation could never be alienated by contract.⁹ The inheritance could only be alienated by God, through corporate covenantal execution. So, a wall could be built for the sake of military defense, but this would not have changed the legal status of the heirs of the original families. No alteration of the inheritance of the original families was allowed; the defensive wall was not a judicial wall.

Citizenship could not be revoked for any reason other than excommunication. This means that the priests, through their delegated authority to the Levites, could alone revoke citizenship. This is the mark of a biblical civil order. The civil order does not autonomously establish or enforce the criteria of citizenship. Citizenship is creedal, and the church enforces the content of the creed. A biblical civil order cannot become autonomous; biblical political theory reflects this fact.

Any Israelite family would have had the right to participate in the distribution of rural land. This would have been that family's permanent inheritance. Who would have chosen to live in a walled city in the era of the conquest? Urban residents would then have been made up of the following: (1) land-owning Israelites who became absentee landlords; (2) permanent resident aliens who had been adopted into the tribe of a city; (3) permanent resident aliens who had not been adopted by an Israelite family or tribe; (4) traders who would reside there relat-

9. Rabbinical opinion was that only the walled cities in the era of Joshua's conquest were exempted from the jubilee rural land law. *Arakhin* 9:6; *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. 553.

ively briefly; (5) Levites who were not residents of a Levitical city; (6) soldiers or other officials from the central government; (7) Israelites who had been excommunicated (i.e., circumcised strangers: *nok-ree*); (8) convicted Israelite criminals who had been sold into servitude to someone in a walled city.¹⁰

2. *One Year's Grace*

The period of redemption was limited to one year. Why? Again, nothing explicit is said about this. We have to deduce reasons from our knowledge of the Bible and our knowledge of men's motivations.

The idea of a period of grace applied only to the seller of the house. The seller's interests were defended by this law. The buyer remained uncertain for a year. He did not know if he could remain in his new house; it could be redeemed at any time. Perhaps he left his previous house empty, forfeiting rental income. Perhaps he subleased it to someone for a year. If the buyer of the new house was evicted before the sublease on his original residence had expired, he had to find temporary living quarters under difficult circumstances: rapid eviction. Such a threat of eviction would have raised the price of a move in pre-exilic Mosaic Israel. The more numerous the buyer's possessions, the more expensive the move. In the words of a modern proverb: "Two moves equal one fire." Each transfer of ownership of a house in a walled city would have tended to go to a richer person than the one who was selling it. Why? Because wealthy people could more easily have borne the risks of eviction. The existing owner probably had a greater "need to sell" than the buyer had a "need to buy."¹¹

Why would anyone have sold? A business setback is one obvious

10. The Bible does not say whether convicted criminals were part of the jubilee land law's primary benefit: a judicial return to the family's land, i.e., liberation from bondage. This would have meant freedom for all criminals in the jubilee year. This, in turn, would have created a subsidy to crime as the jubilee year approached: a conviction would not have led to a high price for his sale into bondage, since the time of potential servitude was steadily shrinking. The victims would have been short-changed. Because God defends the victim, it seems safe to conclude that there were two exceptions to the jubilee law of liberation: the apostate who had forfeited his inheritance and the criminal who was still under the requirement to pay off his victims or the person who bought him, with the purchase price going to the victims. This conclusion follows from two general principles of biblical law: (1) God does not subsidize evil; (2) victim's rights. If this is correct, then the criminal who was released from bondage would have had to wait until the next jubilee year to reclaim his land.

11. The concept of *need*, beyond mere physical survival, should never be discussed apart from the question of price.

reason, especially if the business involved debt. The Bible teaches that the debtor is servant to the lender: “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7). The Bible discourages servitude, which is why the jubilee law existed: God’s redemption of His servants as their kinsman-redeemer—the owner of all the land—by mandating their right to return to their ancestral plots.

In walled cities, however, this redemption process did not exist, except for the one-year grace period. In the case of loans collateralized by homes, there were greater incentives to lend in walled cities than in rural areas, and greater risks for borrowing. A person who took a loan secured by the collateral of his rural inheritance knew that the closer the year of jubilee came, the less money he could expect to borrow against his collateral. The lender would lose whatever net income the land might produce in the year beyond the jubilee. He would be allowed to keep all of the triple crop in the sixth year, but in the seventh he could not farm it. In the eighth year, he lost it. In contrast, an urban dweller knew that if he went bankrupt, he would have only one year to raise enough cash to redeem his house. After that, it was lost forever unless he could persuade the buyer to sell it back—unlikely at the price he had been paid: the value of the loan. Thus, his risk was comparatively much greater that he would lose his urban inheritance than his rural.

In walled cities, the Israelites would experience the continual temptations of debt: rich resident aliens enthusiastic to lend money, hoping that the debtor would default. This would be a comparatively easy way to buy up property in urban Israel. If the loan was repaid, the lender received his normal *urban* rate of return.¹² If the loan was not repaid, he received a revocable lease on the house plus the possibility of permanent possession one year after the original owner transferred title. This would have been the preferred way for wealthy aliens to give their heirs a permanent stake in Israelite society.

Any Israelite who borrowed significant sums on these terms would have been either a “high roller”—a person willing to bear a lot of risk—or a very present-oriented consumer, like the prodigal son in Jesus’ parable. A very confident entrepreneur might think he had a unique opportunity, probably connected to an invention or trade. He might be willing to risk his inheritance for the capital to develop it. But a less risk-oriented person would have preferred invested capital—selling a

12. The rate of interest in walled cities would have tended to be lower than elsewhere in Israel: better collateral, with more rich people seeking to lend money.

share of ownership—to debt financing.

This limit of one year on the right to redeem an urban house would have channeled urban investment into higher-risk debt ventures or moderate-risk joint ventures. A resident alien (or anyone else) who was looking for a permanent home to buy in Israel would have sought out (advertised for) Israelites who were willing to accept debt financing for high-risk projects that other investors had already shunned. The lender's offer would have amounted to this: "Win, and I win with you; lose, and you're out in the cold. I won't be."

The text does not speak of a deferred payment, i.e., a mortgage beyond one year. The right of redemption was one year. There is no indication that this meant anything except one year from the time that the transfer of ownership took place. Ownership is a judicial concept: the identification of the legally responsible agent. The owner has the right to disown the property.

Could there have been home mortgages under such a legal system? Yes, but the original owner had only one year to reclaim his property unless the buyer subsequently defaulted on his payments. He would have had to repay to the new buyer whatever the new buyer had paid him during the interim. The purchaser had to forfeit the use of the item or money that he used to buy the house. This is what the seller owed him if the former wanted to reclaim the house.

3. *A Stake in Society*

No explicit reason is provided in the Bible to explain this judicial difference: wall vs. no wall. The judicial boundary established by the city's wall provided an exemption from the jubilee land law after 12 months.¹³ Inheritance there was based on secondary purchase rather than original conquest. It was based on economics rather than ecclesiastical confession. This made possible a place for resident aliens or post-conquest converts to the faith to gain what is sometimes called a stake in society. A stake is a marker that establishes the edge of a boundary in land, but it is used here more broadly: a permanent residence or a permanent possession of value that is tied to a specific place. A stake in society is therefore a *legal claim*, something that at some price is worth defending, either in a court or on a battlefield.

Would resident aliens have been required to fight to defend the

13. Though not interest-free: see above. There is no escape from the phenomenon of interest: a discount of future goods as against those same goods in the present.

city? Not unless they were citizens. They did not possess membership in an Israelite family. The military numbering process would not have touched them (Ex. 30). Presumably they could volunteer, but only if they professed the required national confession of faith, the *shamaw Israel*: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut. 6: 4). There were many instances of foreign soldiers in Israel’s holy army, Uriah the Hittite being the most famous. Citizenship was probably a reward granted to circumcised resident aliens who volunteered for military service. If you could be legally numbered, you were a citizen; conversely, if you could not legally be numbered, you were not a citizen.¹⁴

Was confession, circumcision, and eligibility for service in the Lord’s army sufficient to establish an inheritable claim of citizenship? Yes. Was this citizenship inalienable? Yes. Citizenship was covenantal. Covenantal inheritance was by confession, circumcision, and eligibility to bring sanctions: as a holy warrior and therefore as a judge.¹⁵ Once a citizen of Israel, a person could not become a permanent bondservant under Mosaic law.

4. Post-Exilic Israel

This raises an extremely important point: the alteration of land ownership after the exile. Ezekiel prophesied that after Israel’s return from exile, strangers in the land would participate in a second division of the land by lot. These strangers would gain permanent possession in the land. Strangers who resided within the jurisdiction of a particular tribe at the time of the reclaiming of the land by that tribe would become part of a new land allocation (Ezek. 47:21–23). They could not be disinherited. But if that was true, then they could not be enslaved.

There is no indication that the jubilee’s heathen-slave law was annulled after the exile. Jesus announced His ministry in terms of jubilee liberation (Luke 4:18–21).¹⁶ This assertion rested on the continuing authority of the jubilee slave law. That aspect of the jubilee was related to family inheritance, not the original distribution of land under Joshua.

14. Chapter 29:H.

15. Deborah, a prophetess, also served as a judge (Jud. 4:4). She served functionally as a holy warrior: senior in command (Jud. 4:8). As the sanctions-bringer against Sisera, Jael also served as a holy warrior (v. 22). Neither was circumcised, but both were under legal authority of circumcised males: husbands.

16. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

But a new land allocation would free participating heathen families from any threat of inter-generational bondage. Those who resided in the land at the time of the return could not lawfully be enslaved.

This was the source of the lawful continuing presence of Sam-arit-ans in the land. These foreigners had been brought into the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians to replace the captive Israelites. The returning Israelites were not authorized to kill or exile these people. There would never again be a lawful program of genocide to establish original title in Israel. Rather, the resident alien at the return would receive an inheritable grant of rural land. The worship of Canaanite gods and religion never reappeared. The gods of Canaan had been gods of the land, meaning gods of the city-state. Those gods were no longer relevant in a nation under the authority of Medo-Persia, then Hellenism, and finally Rome. In contrast, Persian dualism, Hellenism, and Talmudism were not bound by geography. These became the main threats to biblical orthodoxy.

The returning Israelites took centuries to reconquer the land. The reconquest was never completed, nor was Mosaic civil authority ever re-established. The tribes did not re-establish their original borders, nor were they ever again free from foreign civil rule. But the Jews did come close to re-establishing their pre-exilic political power and national boundaries in the decades prior to Rome's invasion, which led non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine to welcome the Romans.¹⁷ Because the physical boundaries of the Promised Land had been breached during the exile, never to be healed, and because the pre-exilic judicial boundaries were never again established, the original land distribution of the era of the conquest lost its judicial relevance. Israelite citizenship therefore lost most of its judicial relevance except during periods of civil revolt. Confession, circumcision, and adoption remained the basis of this much-reduced citizenship. God's holy army had ceased to exist.

5. *Urban Citizenship*

Ammonites and Moabites could become members of the congregation after 10 generations (Deut. 23:3). This was citizenship, for the same 10-generation limit applied also to Israelite bastards (Deut. 23:

17. The one city that refused to submit to the Jews was Pella. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 19. It was to Pella, located beyond the Jordan, that the Jerusalem church supposedly fled just before the siege of the city by Rome in A.D. 69. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III:V.

2). The question is: Where would these new citizens have exercised their judicial powers? I think it must have been inside walled cities. The cities were tribal affairs. They had been parcelled out to the tribes under Joshua (Josh. 13:23–32; 15). Citizenship in a city must have been tribal. But judges in cities probably resided in those cities. Local urban residents possessed knowledge of local affairs.

The question is: Was real estate ownership required to be an urban citizen? Did an urban resident lose his citizenship if he lost ownership of his home? That could happen in one year. Was the threat of disenfranchisement hanging over the head of every urban real estate owner who did not have an inheritance in rural Israel? The Bible does not say. Any answer is speculative. But since lawful participation in holy warfare seems to be the best way to define the mark of citizenship, my conclusion is that aliens could become eligible for citizenship as adopted members of the tribes governing walled cities. Citizenship did not require the ownership of a home in a walled city. Urban citizenship was by confession, circumcision, and eligibility for holy war. It was not based on landed inheritance.

For an alien to become a citizen in Israel meant that he became a free man. Israelites were not allowed to own Israelite slaves as inheritable property (Lev. 25:46b). By becoming a citizen, the alien permanently established his legal claim as an Israelite.

This raises the question of access to citizenship. Deuteronomy 23 is the main section dealing with this. The context is that of an outsider wanting in. Deuteronomy 23:1 lists the eunuch. I think this refers to a foreign eunuch, not an Israelite.¹⁸ If an Israelite warrior, for example, received such an injury, was he expelled from the congregation? Did he cease to be an Israelite? Did he become a heathen subject to permanent bondage? This does not seem reasonable. The passage refers to outsiders wanting in, including bastards, i.e., outsiders to the covenantal family. The context is not of an insider who is being forced out. In any case, adoption into an Israelite family could always overcome this restriction.¹⁹ Caleb, the son of a Kenizite (Num. 32: 12), was surely a citizen. He must have been adopted into the tribe of Judah (Num. 13:6), the tribe of Jacob's messianic promise (Gen. 49: 10).²⁰

18. Rushdoony argues that it was an Israelite who became a eunuch. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 84.

19. The adoption of the Ethiopian eunuch—a foreigner—into the New Covenant church (Acts 8:26–40) is indicative of the law of adoption.

20. He may not have been adopted into a family. This took place prior to the conquest of Canaan, so the issue of family adoption and landed inheritance was not yet

Circumcised resident aliens were not citizens unless they were eligible to serve in God's holy army: adoption into the tribe under whose authority they fought. They did not otherwise possess the legal right to impose judicial sanctions as judges in Israel. Only citizens possessed this right. In other words, resident aliens could never become citizens except by adoption: the implicit or explicit acceptance of military service. Urban adoption was tribal, not familistic.

Uriah was called a Hittite. This may have meant that he was not a third-generation circumcised resident, and therefore not normally eligible for citizenship. But he was a warrior in God's holy army. This indicates that the resident alien could become a citizen through military service in the defense of Israel during wartime, even if he was not a third or tenth generation circumcised resident. If a circumcised alien was willing to risk dying for God in defense of Israel's boundaries, and if his offer to serve was accepted by the military, this made him a citizen: a man with the right to the office of judge—a sanctions-bringer.

6. The Sociology of Home Ownership

Poor people rent; rich people own; middle-class people pay off mortgages. Economic freedom produces incentives for owners to build housing for poorer people to rent. Poor people rent new quarters when they grow richer. People move to better quarters when they grow richer. Only the richest sons of the richest families stay put, decade after decade. They move from their palatial summer homes to their palatial winter homes. They are mobile; ownership is not. Permanent landed estates are an important mark of "old money." The dispersal of landed estates in Europe in the twentieth century through the drastic taxation of large inheritances was an aspect of class warfare: the middle classes, in the name of the poorer classes, voted away the wealth of the landed classes, whose heirs could no longer afford to inherit.

In walled cities, the kinds of people who would have wound up as owners of urban housing would have been the same kinds of people who own urban property today. Richer people would have been dominant home owners. That is, those who were the most productive people in the economy would have been most likely to buy a home and retain a stake in society. This property right, irrespective of a family's creed or ritual, to buy and inherit housing in Mosaic Israel's walled cities was an important way for Israel to attract and keep very productive

people from abroad. It would have made Israel's walled cities centers of entrepreneurship and trade. Innovative, creative businessmen from the Mediterranean region would have immigrated.

Turnover of ownership would initially have been much more rapid in walled cities than in rural settings or in unwalled cities. Nineteenth-century American capitalism's story of "poor man to rich man to poor man" in three generations would have been much more common in Israel's walled cities than outside them, at least until population growth shrank the size of the average farm.²¹

The walled cities of the Canaanite era became the walled cities of Israel. Which cities would have been the walled cities of Canaan? First, cities that housed cultures with military aspirations: city-state empires. Second, cities with wealth to protect from invasion: trade centers. Third, cities with unique religious icons or practices that served the needs of a particular region: religious centers. Walled cities would have tended to be cities on the crossroads of trade. Their architecture, water systems, and similar "infrastructure" would have been suited to trading centers. Thus, their character as crossroad cities would not have been radically altered by Israelite civilization. This means that walled cities would have become cosmopolitan: world (cosmos) cities (polis = city). This raises the question of citizenship. It also raises the question of pluralism.

7. Pluralism: Cultural, Not Judicial

The walled city would have been the preferred place of residence for wealthy aliens and wealthy covenant converts who were not heirs of the generation of the conquest. These cities would have been the centers of cosmopolitan life, where ideas and customs from outside the land would have intermingled. This means that the ideas and customs of a particular foreign god would always have had competition from people who had faith in other gods. This would have created a true cultural pluralism within the legal framework of a biblically covenanted community. The walled cities would have been testing areas—social laboratories—for many ideas and practices, but always within the judicial boundary of God's law.

These testing areas were sealed off judicially from the land outside

21. Tocqueville commented on the United States in the 1830s: "But wealth circulates there with incredible rapidity, and experience shows that two successive generations seldom enjoy its favors." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, [1835] 1966), I:3, p. 54.

their walls. This seal was not absolute. Resident aliens could lease agricultural property outside the walls, but they had no assurance of being able to renew these leases, nor could they pass on legal access to rural land to heirs. The jubilee was designed to cut short any attempt by foreigners to colonize the land of Israel. Even urban colonization would have been restricted to ideas and customs that were not in violation of the laws of God. Urban aliens were not citizens. They could not serve as judges.

Not being citizens, resident aliens could not impose judicial sanctions in Mosaic Israel. They could not lawfully seek converts to their imported religions. Only the non-confessional expressions of these imported religious worldviews were legal in the public square. This is why cultural pluralism is not the same as judicial pluralism. Cultural pluralism within a holy commonwealth is stripped of theological confession and judicial sanctions.

The modern humanist world has made politics formally as pluralistic as culture is. This has created a situation in which politics has become polytheistic.²² Beginning at the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Western nations have imposed immigration barriers in order to keep out foreigners, for fear of losing both culture and politics to hordes of aliens. The expansion of the welfare state has made such restrictions even more important: keeping aliens away from the public treasuries. But “alien” is not defined covenantally; it is defined culturally. National boundaries become walls barring too great a disruption of the established culture, however pluralistic it may already be. Barbed wire has replaced theological confession as the preferred means of discouraging immigrants.

In Mosaic Israel, foreign culture was bounded by urban walls, physiological walls (circumcision), and confessional walls. When the Mosaic law was enforced, immigrants from foreign cultures (plural) could not become threats to Israel. God’s word alone had judicial authority, so imported cultures had to conform to the covenant. The ethical and judicial terms of the covenant became filtering devices for sifting through the wheat and the chaff in every cultural import. There was no need for immigration barriers. There is no evidence that such barriers ever existed. Mosaic law does not authorize them, precisely because it does not authorize political pluralism.

Lest we forget: the ultimate immigration barrier is abortion.

22. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

E. The Levites' Cities

There was one additional aspect of the jubilee land law: Levitical cities. There were 48 of these cities, six of which were cities of refuge (Num. 35:6–7). “Notwithstanding the cities of the Levites, and the houses of the cities of their possession, may the Levites redeem at any time. And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubile: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. But the field of the suburbs of their cities may not be sold; for it is their perpetual possession” (Lev. 25:32–34).

The Levites were therefore likely to be urban dwellers at any point in Israel's history. They could not become owners of rural land, which was the inheritance of other tribes.²³ Their presence in a region would have been concentrated in a local tribal city. At the same time, they were dispersed as a tribe throughout the land, just as their cities were. This kept all of the tribes in close proximity to specialists in covenantal law and ritual. This also kept the nation free from priestly attempts to centralize rural land ownership, except in periods in which the jubilee inheritance laws were not enforced. Even in such rebellious periods, there was always the possibility that some subsequent generation would enforce the law. Anti-jubilee legal title was always at risk.

The Levites would have been urban residents. They advised rural people, but they lived primarily in cities. Their “home base” was urban. This fact should tell the commentators something, but none of them ever mentions it. *Israel's legal structure was designed to produce an urban society*. Covenant-keeping would bring rapid population growth. In a growing economy, wealth is increasingly based on intellectual labor and creativity, not on raw materials.²⁴ As agriculture becomes more efficient, fewer people need to work the land, or can afford to. Thus, the structure of jubilee ownership led the Levites to live in cities, which is where a growing percentage of the population of covenant-keeping Israel was expected by God to dwell as time went on—and outside the Promised Land, also in cities. The Levites would become the major urban real estate owners except in non-Levite walled cities. Most people would have to rent or lease housing from them.

23. Priests occasionally could. See chapter 37.

24. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981); Warren T. Brookes, *The Economy in Mind* (New York: Universe, 1982); E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1990).

Let us not mistake what this would have meant: *the accumulation of urban wealth by one tribe*. Urban wealth would increasingly have become the dominant form of wealth in a growing economy, as it is today. Unless Israel conquered new lands, Israelites had only four places to go if they wanted to escape rural life: the original walled cities, unwallled cities, Levitical cities, and other nations. They could not permanently own homes in unwallled cities: a disadvantage. In the original walled cities, the influence of the Levites as advisors would have been strong. In Levitical cities, they would have been the predominant home owners, renting space to poorer residents. *Thus, the structure of land ownership favored the Levites above all other tribes in times of righteousness*. They were the most mobile tribe, the most urban tribe, and the most educated tribe. They had the greatest number of personal contacts across the nation. They would steadily have become the dominant tribe and the wealthiest tribe in a covenantally faithful society.

Why did God subsidize the Levites in this way? One economic reason was the fact that the Levites had an incentive to make sure that the jubilee laws were enforced. They had the authority to excommunicate civil rulers who refused to enforce God's civil law. Levitical families would receive back their homes in the same year that the other tribes' families received back their lands. But did they do this? It seems more likely that they refused to pressure civil magistrates to enforce the jubilee. If they did refuse, there would have been a class of homeless Levites who had to rent housing in their own cities. This would have led to class division within the priestly tribe. If the civil authorities enforced the jubilee only in Levitical cities, there would have been widespread resentment among the other tribes.

Conclusion

This law had to be temporary. The tribal structure was not designed to be permanent; its purpose would end after Shiloh (the Messiah) had come: a member of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). When the redeemer came, the right of redemption would end. The ideal of the city of God would then replace the ideal of the land of God.

The structure of land ownership under the jubilee system was clearly a wineskin destined to be broken, either through God's blessing—urbanization and/or the conquest of new lands—or God's cursing: conquest by other lands and dispersion. The inheritance of Joshua's

day would fade into insignificance: (1) through urbanization; (2) through the extension of the boundaries of Israel outward, beyond the original land grant and the jubilee law; or (3) through emigration, either voluntary or forced. In any case, the importance of the right of redemption would fade.

The right of redemption meant different things to different people in ancient Israel. For the rural land owner, it meant that he could collateralize a business loan or lease his property without the risk of disinheriting his children. An urban home could become the property of the lender if the borrower defaulted. It could become part of the lender's permanent legacy to his children. Also, an urban house was located in a commercial center. The benefits of lending to the urban real estate owner were greater than lending to a rural family with the land as collateral. This meant that a rent-seeking lender might not lend him so much, or at so low an interest rate, as he would lend the home-owning resident of a walled city.

The resident of a walled city lived in an economically active trading center that was cosmopolitan. Resident aliens could buy permanent ownership of homes in such cities. They could even become citizens. The influence of resident aliens in Israel was concentrated here, for only here could they buy homes and pass them to their children. The buying and selling of homes would have concentrated home ownership into the hands of rich families irrespective of their religion. There would have been considerable turnover in ownership, with successful merchants buying or foreclosing on the homes of the less successful. It would have been difficult for any family residing in a walled city to retain ownership of a home through several generations. In other words, home ownership in a walled city in Israel was far more like the modern world than home ownership was elsewhere in Israel. As we have seen, a growing Israelite population would have pushed the population out of rural Israel and into walled cities or outside the nation.

For the Levite, the jubilee redemption law was limited to Levitical cities. This would have tended to tie Levitical families to certain cities. A Levite could also buy a permanent home in a walled city, although he had no competitive advantage over any other buyer. He had no inheritance in the land outside the cities. This structure of inheritance would have made the Levite primarily an urban figure. If the economy and the population grew, the Levites would become the principal Jewish home owners in Israel. But since God's law is not designed to favor

one family over another, long-term, we can safely conclude that the jubilee inheritance laws were not designed to be permanent. They would end when the Kinsman-Redeemer finished His work. As it turned out, it was in His office of Blood-Avenger that He ended the jubilee laws: in A.D. 70.

POVERTY AND USURY

And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase. I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God (Lev. 25:35–38).

The theocentric basis of this law was God’s role as the liberator. Men are to fear God. This fear of God should overcome men’s fear of nature and history. Fear of God is liberating; fear of the creation is paralyzing. Liberation is an aspect of point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Usury Defined

This law is an extension of Exodus 22:25: “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.”² The Hebrew word translated here as *usury* means *bite*. “And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died” (Num. 21:6). In both Exodus and Leviticus, the borrower is described as being a poor brother in the faith, i.e., under God’s covenant. The heart of the matter in Leviticus 25:35–38 and Exodus 22:25 is the establishment of judicial conditions for charitable, interest-free

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

loans: poverty, covenantal brotherhood, and geographical proximity. As we shall see, these conditions had to be legally identifiable in order for the prohibition against usury to be enforced by a civil court. It was this aspect of conditionality that medieval theologians failed to recognize when they issued prohibitions against taking interest in all loans. The biblical texts are clear; it is the theologians who have been muddled.³

What is usury? Both texts are quite clear about the definition: *usury is any positive rate of return taken from a loan*. There is no universal prohibition in the Bible against interest. This is clear from the text in Deuteronomy that authorizes covenant-keepers to make interest-bearing charitable loans to covenantal strangers. "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deut. 23: 19–20). In fact, God encourages His people to lend to those outside the faith; it is a means of subduing them. "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6).⁴ Lending at interest is an aspect of the dominion covenant. Biblically, there is no universal prohibition against this.

Medieval Christian expositors concluded, following Aristotle rather than Moses, that interest is always prohibited.⁵ It is not. What was prohibited under Mosaic law was interest taken from a poor

3. The non-theologians have been even more muddled. See, for example, S. C. Mooney, *Usury: Destroyer of Nations* (Warsaw, Ohio: Theopolis, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/MooneyUsury>). For my response, see North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix J: "Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney."

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 70.

5. The prohibition against interest (usury) began with the Council of Nicea (325): clerics were prohibited from making interest-bearing loans. J. Gilchrist, *The Church and Economic Activity in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 1969), p. 155. This prohibition was gradually extended by the theologians after 800. *Ibid.*, p. 63. The Second Lateran Council (1139) was especially hostile, going so far as to prohibit usurers from being granted Christian burial. *Ibid.*, p. 165. The Council at Vienna (1311–12) mandated the excommunication of civil rulers who permitted usury within their jurisdictions. *Ibid.*, p. 206. Gilchrist's excellent book did not receive the audience that it should have. It includes translations of the texts of the general councils. This makes it invaluable.

brother in the faith or a poor resident alien who had subordinated himself to the civil covenant, presumably by submitting to circumcision. The lender, then as now, was not to take advantage of certain poor people: those who had submitted themselves to the terms of the covenant. He was required by God to make a charitable loan. He would thereby forfeit the interest he might have earned from a business loan. Forfeited interest was the charitable component of his act. *If interest were universally prohibited, then all legal loans would be charitable.* There would then be no economic distinction between charity loans and business loans, or between dominion by restoring the covenant-keeping poor and dominion by subordinating the covenant-breaking poor. The Bible teaches otherwise.

B. Charity: Conditional vs. Unconditional

Charitable loans are part of God's program to provide help to honest, covenant-keeping people who have fallen on hard times. These loans are not supposed to subsidize sloth or evil. God does not want us to subsidize evil with the money or assets that He has provided for us.⁶ In this sense, *biblical charity is necessarily morally conditional.*⁷ Biblical charity is never a judicially automatic "entitlement," to use the terminology of the modern welfare state: a compulsory redistribution of wealth from the successful to the unsuccessful (minus approximately 50% for "handling" by government bureaucrats⁸). It is this element of covenantal conditionality which distinguishes biblical charity from humanist compulsion.⁹

The modern welfare state does not distinguish judicially between faith and unbelief, or between righteousness and moral rebellion, as primary factors underlying both wealth and poverty. The Bible's ethics-based correlation is an implicit denial of the very foundation of hu-

6. R. J. Rushdoony, "Subsidizing Evil," in Rushdoony, *Bread Upon the Waters* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1969), ch. 3.

7. Ray R. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gnthelon>) Sutton was responding to Timothy J. Keller, "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1990), ch. 12.

8. James L. Payne, *The Culture of Spending: Why Congress Lives Beyond Our Means* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1991), p. 51.

9. Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1992).

manism's welfare state. The welfare state rests on two rival theories of the origin of wealth and poverty, held together dialectically in most humanist explanations of economic inequality: (1) the chance distribution of economic assets and personal skills; (2) the exploitation of the poor by the economically and politically successful. The state is seen as the most powerful agency that possesses a moral and legal obligation to offset the effects of either chance or exploitation. The welfare state therefore in theory looks only at the numbers, not at the moral condition of the recipients of state money: their reported income in relation to statute law. Being bureaucratic, the West's welfare state must by law ignore moral criteria and respond strictly in terms of formal criteria: so much income; so many children in the household under age 18, irrespective of the mother's marital status; and so forth. *The welfare state is to biblical charity what fornication is to biblical marriage.* It literally subsidizes fornication by subsidizing the bastards who are produced by fornication, thereby swelling the ranks of the government-dependent children of the morally corrupt.¹⁰ This creates lifetime employment for the next generation of welfare state bureaucrats—the unstated but inevitable goal of the welfare state. Yet so powerful is humanism today in the thinking of academically trained Christians that they have become open defenders of the legitimacy of the modern welfare state's system of compulsory wealth redistribution, despite the fact that it rests on a theory of unconditional legal entitlement.¹¹

C. Reducing Our Fear of the Unknown

Biblical charity is essential for building God's kingdom on earth, for it reduces our fear of the unknown. We are not to live in fear of the unknown. We are to live in the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Intense fear of any aspect of the creation tends to paralyze men, to keep them in bondage to the creation. Fear and paralysis are what the biblical covenant was designed to overcome.

10. Charles Murray, "The Coming White Underclass," *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 29, 1993), editorial page.

11. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical View* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977). For a line-by-line refutation of Sider, including his revised second edition (1984), see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1985] 1990). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>) Sider did not reply to Chilton in either his second or third edition (Waco, Texas: Word, 1990). The fourth edition (1997) recanted much of what the first three editions had proclaimed in the name of biblical ethics. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F.

Perfect love casts out fear (I John 4:18).

Bad things can and do happen to good people from time to time, while good things happen to the unrighteous (Ps. 73). The world sometimes appears to be governed by a system of perverse historical sanctions. Schlossberg is correct: "The Bible can be interpreted as a string of God's triumphs disguised as disasters."¹² Covenant-keepers are not immune from the corporate curse that God has placed on the creation. We are also not immune to the corporate curses He places on the covenant-breaking society in which we live. So, as a way to reduce our fear of the unknown, God commands us to be generous to others in the faith during their time of need.

Biblical charity is a form of social insurance—not state insurance, but social insurance: provided through voluntarism without any threat of civil sanctions. Biblical charity begins with those who labor in the work of building God's kingdom on earth, who in turn voluntarily support other covenantally faithful people who share in this work. Biblical charity is therefore part of God's system of corporate covenant sanctions—in this case, positive sanctions, beginning with covenant-keepers and extending to covenant-breakers only after those inside the household of faith have been assisted.

Charity creates dependence. This dependence is to be temporary except in cases of permanent physical or mental helplessness. The biblical goal is dominion by covenant, not by permanent dependence. This is why state charity is so dangerous to biblical dominion and therefore to liberty. It creates a permanent political base of dependents and also a permanent corps of state-funded welfare agents whose income depends on the maintenance of poverty to relieve. For this corps of welfare agents, poverty is where the money is.¹³ The positive sanction of charity is not to be provided by the state, which must impose compulsory negative sanctions (taxes) on some people in order to extend positive sanctions (welfare) to others. The state is to promote the general welfare only by punishing criminals and defending the nation from invasion. A biblical positive sanction—the general welfare—is the social result of the state's exclusively negative sanctions.

The state is required by God to defend the legal boundaries that establish private property, not invade these boundaries in an illegitim-

12. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 304.

13. Shirley Scheibla, *Poverty Is Where the Money Is* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968).

ate messianic quest to bring positive sanctions to the poor. The civil magistrate is figuratively to stand inside the boundaries beside of the property owner to defend him against any threat of invasion by a non-owner. He is not to stand outside the boundaries by the side of the non-owner, threatening to invade. Defenders of the welfare state reject this view of the civil magistrate. Because so many of these defenders are orthodox theologians and church leaders, Christian social theory today is either non-existent (baptized humanism) or undermined by humanism.

D. The Stranger and the Sojourner

This text says that we are to relieve the stranger and the sojourner. The text in Deuteronomy 23:20 says that we may lawfully charge strangers interest. How can this apparent contradiction be resolved? Answer: by going to the Hebrew text. At this point, I reprint a portion of a chapter, "The Prohibition Against Usury," which appears in my commentary on the case laws of Exodus, Part 3 of *Authority and Dominion* chapter 49, Section C.

* * * * *

The text in Leviticus 25, the chapter on the jubilee year, is clear: "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger [*geyr*], or a sojourner [*to-shawb*]; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase" (Lev. 25:35–37). It begins with the determining clause: "If thy brother be waxen poor."

The interpretation of the Leviticus 25 passage initially seems difficult because of the King James translation of Deuteronomy 23:20: "Unto a stranger [*nok-ree*] thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it." We must begin with the presupposition that God's revealed law is not inconsistent. But here we have what appear to be two rules regarding the stranger: you may not lawfully charge the stranger interest, yet you may lawfully charge him interest. How can we reconcile these two statements?

The answer is that the Hebrew word used in Leviticus 25:35, trans-

literated *geyr* [*gare*], is not the same as the Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 23:20. Similarly, “sojourner” [*to-shawb*] is related to *yaw-shab*,¹⁴ meaning “sit,” and implying “remain,” “settle,” “dwell,” or even “marry.”¹⁵ *To-shawb* therefore means *resident alien*. The stranger [*nok-ree*] referred to in Deuteronomy 23:20 was simply a foreigner.¹⁶ Two different kinds of “stranger” are referred to in the two verses. Thus, if the resident alien was poor, and if he was willing to live in Israel under the terms of the civil covenant, then he was entitled to a special degree of civil legal protection. What was this legal protection? If he fell into poverty, he was not to be asked to pay interest on any loan that a richer man extended to him. With respect to usury, he was to be treated as a poverty-stricken Hebrew. Not so the foreigner.

What must be understood is that the economic setting is clearly *the relief of the righteous poor*. The recipient was any poor person who had fallen into poverty through no ethical fault of his own, and who was willing to remain under God’s civil hierarchy.

There is a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 15. Deuteronomy 15 lists the economic laws governing Israel’s national sabbatical year. In this national year of release, the text literally says, all debts *to neighbors* are to be forgiven: “At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD’S release” (Deut. 15:1–2).¹⁷ The text is clear: the neighborly loan is the focus of the law.

At least one kind of loan was explicitly exempted by the text: loans to non-resident foreigners. “Of a foreigner [*nok-ree*] thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release” (Deut. 15:3). This could have been a traveller or foreigner who owned a business locally. It could have been a business contact in another country. It was not a poverty-stricken resident alien, who was treated by biblical civil law as a neighbor.

14. Strong’s *Concordance*, Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary, p. 123.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

16. This is the translation given in the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version. The alien and the sojourner were equivalents judicially in the Mosaic law. The NIV translates Leviticus 25:35 as “an alien or a temporary resident.”

17. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 36.

E. Who Is My Neighbor?

Because all debts to a neighbor are to be forgiven, the legal question legitimately arises: “Who is my neighbor?” This was the question that the lawyer asked Jesus (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered this question with His parable of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan finds a beaten man on the highway. The man had been robbed. He looked as though he was dead. He was in deep trouble *through no fault of his own*. He was on the same road that the Samaritan was traveling. The Samaritan takes him to an inn, pays to have him helped, and goes on his journey. He agrees to cover expenses. He shows mercy to the injured man who was incapable of helping himself. He is the therefore true neighbor of the person on the road. The lawyer admitted this (Luke 10:37).

So, the context of the parable is not simply geographical proximity in a neighborhood. It is *proximity of life*. Samaritans did not normally live in Israel. They had very little contact with the Israelites. But this Samaritan was walking along the same road as the beaten man, and he was in a position to help. He saw that the man was a true victim. The latter was in trouble through no visible fault of his own. He therefore deserved help—morally, though not by statute law—but the priest and the Levite had refused to offer him any help. The Samaritan was being faithful to the law.

This parable was a reproach to the Jews. They knew what Jesus was saying: they were too concerned with the details of the ceremonial law to honor the most important law of all, which the lawyer had cited. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27). What they also fully understood was that Jesus was predicting that the gentiles (Samaritans) who did obey this law of the neighbor would eventually rule over the Jews, for this is what Deuteronomy 15 explicitly says. *He who shows mercy to his neighbor will participate in his nation’s rule over other nations*. “Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee” (Deut. 15:5–6). Notice also that the means of exercising this rule is through extending them credit.

This is a very significant covenantal cause-and-effect relationship.

If a nation is characterized by the willingness of its citizens to loan money, interest-free, to their poverty-stricken neighbors, including resident aliens, who are stricken by poverty, not immoral pursuers of poverty by their lifestyles, the nation will eventually extend its control over others by placing them under the obligation of debt. “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7). This is why it was legal to take interest from the foreigner who was living outside the land. It was a means of subduing him, his family, and his God-defying civilization. It was (and is) a means of dominion.

[Added in 1994:] This does not mean, as Timothy Keller insisted that it means, that my neighbor is anyone in need anywhere on earth. He wrote: “*Anyone* in need is my neighbor—that is the teaching of the Good Samaritan parable.”¹⁸ No, that is the teaching of the modern welfare state and its international embodiment, the United Nations Organization, a would-be reincarnation of the Roman Empire, but on a much wider scale: the incarnation of humanism’s New World Order.¹⁹

F. Moral Obligation

Because these charitable loans were supposed to be cancelled in the seventh year, the national sabbatical year, there was an obvious temptation to refuse to make such loans as the sabbatical year of release approached. God recognized this temptation, and He warned against it.

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not

18. Keller, “Theonomy and the Poor,” p. 275. For my critique of this position, see Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 271–80. (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>)

19. R. J. Rushdoony, “The United Nations,” in Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1965] 2001). (<http://bit.ly/rjrns>); Rushdoony, “Has the U.N. Replaced Christ as a World Religion?” in *Your Church—Their Target*, compiled by Kenneth W. Ingwaldson (Arlington, Virginia: Better Books, 1966), ch. 10; Rushdoony, “The United Nations: A Religious Dream,” in Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilty and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), pp. 184–199. (<http://bit.ly/rjrpogap>). See also Chesley Manly, *The UN Record: The Fateful Years for America* (Chicago: Regnery, 1955); V. Orval Watts, *The United Nations: Planned Tyranny* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1955); G. Edward Griffin, *The Fearful Master: A Second Look at the United Nations* (Boston: Western Islands, 1964); Robert W. Lee, *The United Nations Conspiracy* (Boston: Western Islands, 1981).

a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto (Deut. 15:7–10).

This indicates that God placed a moral obligation on the heart of the more successful man, who was supposed to lend to his neighbor. But this was not statute law enforceable in a civil court. God would be the avenger, not the state.

The context of the obligatory loan of Deuteronomy 15, like the zero-interest loan of Exodus 22:25–27, is poverty. There will be poor people in the promised land, Moses warned. Because of this, these special loans are morally mandatory. There must be a year of release, “Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it” (Deut. 15:4). Does this mean that these loan provisions would eventually be annulled? No. “For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deut. 15:11). Everything in Deuteronomy 15 speaks of poverty and biblical law’s means of overcoming it. *Deuteronomy 15 is not dealing with business loans; it is dealing with charity loans.* There was no statute law that imposed sanctions on anyone who refused to make an interest-free loan.

G. Defining Poverty by Statute

Why was this not a statute law? Because biblical civil law imposes only negative injunctions. It prohibits publicly evil acts. Biblical civil law does not authorize the state to make men good. It does not authorize the state to force men to do good things. It does not authorize the creation of a messianic, salvationist state. The state cannot search the hearts of men. God does this, as the Creator and Judge, so the state must not claim such an ability. The state is only authorized by God to impose negative sanctions against publicly evil acts. It is not authorized to seek to force men to do good acts. In short, the Bible is opposed to the modern welfare state.

1. Defining Poverty

There is no way for biblical statute law to define what poverty is apart from the opinions of those affected by the law, either as taxpayers, charitable lenders, or recipients of public welfare or private charity. “Poverty” is too subjective a category to be defined by statute law. The state needs to be able to assign legal definitions to crimes, in order that its arbitrary power not be expanded. Economic definitions of wealth and poverty that are not arbitrary are not available to the civil magistrates for the creation of positive legal injunctions. Thus, God’s civil law does not compel a man to make a loan to a poor person.

Nevertheless, the civil law does prohibit taking interest from certain categories of poor people. How can the law do this without creating the conditions of judicial tyranny through arbitrariness? If the magistrates cannot define exactly what poverty is for the purpose of writing positive civil injunctions, how can they define what a charitable loan is? How can the state legitimately prohibit interest from a charity loan if the legislators and judges cannot define poverty with a sufficient degree of accuracy to identify cases where a charity loan is legally obligatory for the potential lender?²⁰

The lender decides who is deserving of his loan and who is not. This is his moral choice. God will judge him, pro or con, not the state. However, once the lender grants this *unique, morally enjoined charity loan*, he may not extract an interest payment. This is a negative injunction—not doing something which is forbidden by law—and therefore it is legitimately enforceable by civil law, as surely as the civil magistrates in ancient Israel were supposed to enforce the release of debt slaves²¹ in the seventh (sabbatical) year (Deut. 15:12–15). The requirement to lend to a needy brother under the terms specified in biblical law is a positive injunction. It therefore comes under the self-government provisions of the conscience and the negative sanctions of God. This positive injunction is not under the jurisdiction of the civil courts. On the other hand, the prohibition against charging interest on these unique loans, being a negative injunction, does come under the enforcement of both civil courts and church courts.

20. This is the question that S. C. Mooney raised in his attempt to remove any distinction between charity loans and business loans. Mooney, *Usury*, pp. 123–27.

21. A debt slave was a person who had asked his neighbor for a morally mandatory, zero-interest charity loan, and who had then defaulted. He was then placed in bondage until the sabbatical year, or until his debt was paid.

2. *Bondservice*

The key to understanding the Bible's civil definition of poverty is the loan's contract. There must be a mutually agreed-upon contract, explicit or implicit, in order to establish a legally enforceable loan. If the borrower came to the lender and called upon him to honor Deuteronomy 15:7–8, then the borrower admitted that his was a special case, a charity loan, and it was governed by the civil law's terms of the sabbatical year and the prohibition against interest. The borrower made his request a matter of conscience.

In so doing, he necessarily and inescapably placed himself under the terms of biblical civil law. *If he could not repay his debt on time, he could legally be sold into bondservice.* This was not a collateralized commercial loan. The borrower was so poor that he had almost no collateral except his land. He chose not to use his land as collateral—or was forced to because he had already leased his land. Yet he was still in dire need. All he could offer as collateral was his promise, his cloak, and his bodily service until the next sabbatical year, should he default. Thus, the borrower admitted that he in principle had already become a bondservant. He admitted through the loan's contractual arrangement that the borrower is servant to the lender. If he could not repay, he would go into bondservice until the next sabbatical year, or until his debt was repaid, whichever came first.

How would the civil magistrate in Israel know which kind of loan was in force, commercial or charitable, and therefore whether interest was valid or illegal? By examining the nature of the loan's collateral. If a loan went to an individual who, if he should default on the loan, would be placed in debt slavery, then this was a charitable loan governed by the provisions of Deuteronomy 15. This is why the year of release applied to both kinds of servitude: debt servitude and bodily servitude that arose because of a man's default on a charity loan.

Furthermore, if it was a loan with the individual's cloak as security, then it was also a zero-interest loan. The collateral described in Exodus 22:25–27 insured little more than that the individual was a local resident—he had to come to the lender to get it back each evening—and that the loan was temporary. (It also made multiple indebtedness more difficult.)²² It would have been a very small loan. This was clearly not a business loan. A business loan would have a different kind of collateral: property that was not crucial to personal survival on a cold

22. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49:J.

night. If the borrower defaulted on a commercial loan, he would forfeit the property specified in the loan contract. He would not forfeit his freedom or his children's freedom. In short, the Old Testament's texts governing lending specify that certain kinds of loans would have certain kinds of collateral, and wherever these unique forms of collateral appeared, the lender could not legally demand an interest payment.

Biblical civil law is exclusively negative law—prohibiting evil public deeds—not positive law, which enjoins the performance of righteous public deeds. An example of this distinction is the enforcement of the tithe: church courts can legitimately require voting members to tithe as a condition of maintaining their voting church membership; the state cannot legitimately require residents to tithe to a church or other organization on threat of civil punishment.

Once the contract was made, the lender was placed under the limits of the civil law. He could not extract interest from the borrower, even a resident alien. But the borrower also was placed under limits: if he defaulted, he could be sold into bondservice. Each party was under limits. Each had decided that this was a true poor loan situation. Each agreed to a unique set of contractual obligations by entering into this arrangement.

Thus, once the contract was made, either implicitly or explicitly, the state had a legal definition of poverty. If the borrower was legally subject to the possibility of being sold into bondservice for defaulting on the loan, then the lender could not lawfully extract interest from him. On the other hand, if the borrower was unwilling to place his own freedom in jeopardy, then he was unwilling to define himself as a poor man for the sake of the civil law's definition. Thus, he had to pay interest on the loan, *and his obligation to repay the loan extended beyond the sabbatical year*. If he was not under the threat of bondservice, he was not under the protection of the sabbatical year or the zero-interest provisions against usury.

* * * * *

Today, the state does not recognize the legitimacy of temporary servitude in order to repay loans. The modern state has annulled the defining legal condition under which God established the Mosaic law's morally compulsory charitable loans.

What about the New Covenant? Jesus set forth this rule: "And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sin-

ners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:34–35).²³ The law has been extended to God's covenantal enemies even when the threat of servitude for default has been eliminated. The law is broader and more rigorous in the New Covenant. But it is still conditional: no subsidy of evil. It is part of God's judgment: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20).²⁴

H. Interest and Inflation

In *Authority and Dominion*, I went into considerable detail about the economics of time-preference: the originary interest rate. I also discussed the thousand-year history of the church's false interpretations of the usury prohibition as a universal prohibition against all forms of interest. I do not need to reprint the entire chapter here. Those readers who want a detailed treatment may consult that chapter. Warning: it is a long chapter.²⁵

The interest rate is a universal category of human action. It is not a purely monetary phenomenon. It results from the inescapable discount that acting men place on the future. For example, a brand new Rolls-Royce automobile is worth more to me today than the same Rolls-Royce delivered a year from now is worth to me today.²⁶ A bird in hand today is worth more than the same bird in hand in a year.²⁷ This *rate of discount* of future goods vs. physically identical goods that are in our possession today is the *rate of interest*.²⁸ It does not apply to money alone, just as the text in Leviticus indicates; it applies to food and, by extension, all goods and services. Interest on charitable loans is prohibited in the case of money, services, or goods—a recognition in

23. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

24. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

25. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

26. I use the Rolls-Royce example because its style does not change very often, and older models retain their market value.

27. This assumes that the bird's species is not known to be facing extinction or some tremendous fall in numbers next year.

28. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

God's law of the universality of the interest rate. The rate of interest is a discount for time across the entire economy.

In a period of rising prices (i.e., falling value of money), an astute charitable lender prefers to lend food (“victuals,” or “vittles,” as the word is pronounced)²⁹ rather than money. He cannot lawfully charge interest on such loans. A loan “in kind”—a consumer good rather than money—means that the lender will receive back the physical equivalent of whatever he gave up temporarily to the borrower. He will not suffer an additional loss from the debtor's repayment of the loan in money of reduced purchasing power. Since he cannot lawfully charge interest, he does not tack on what is called an *inflation premium* to the loan: an extra payment to compensate him for the fall in the value of money. There is little doubt that price inflation in Israel would have increased the number of loans in kind compared to money loans. A charitable loan made in money would have produced a loss of more than the forfeited interest; it would have meant the loss of capital.

On the other hand, in a time of falling prices (rising money value), either as a result of an economic depression or because of added economic output, an astute lender would prefer to lend money rather than goods. He would then receive an implicit interest return on the loan: added capital (purchasing power) despite the numerical equality of the monetary units repaid. The Bible allows this. In times of falling prices, an astute borrower will prefer a loan in goods rather than money, but he is not in a position to demand such a loan. “Beggars can't be choosers,” as the saying goes. However, in most periods in history, this added return on money loans is very low, since prices rarely fall rapidly except following a period of high monetary inflation. Economic output grows slowly most of the time; prices therefore fall slowly.

There is no question that the lender's decision to loan in money or in goods is heavily dependent on the civil government's monetary policies. Because monetary policy cannot achieve economic neutrality,³⁰ to some extent there will always be profits and losses in debt arrangements. Either the lender loses or the debtor loses, depending on the terms of the contract and monetary policy. The key judicial issue, however, is that in a covenanted Trinitarian nation, the contract for a

29. The word is seldom used outside of backward rural areas.

30. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), p. 818. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

charitable loan must not impose an explicit interest payment.

Conclusion

Usury from the poor brother is prohibited by the Bible. In the Mosaic Covenant, this poor person had to be willing to risk going into bondservice for up to six years if he defaulted on such a zero-interest loan. The civil courts were required to enforce this provision of a charitable loan. This bondservice provision was assumed in every zero-interest loan, which the court could safely assume was a charity loan. It was this willingness on the poor person's part to risk bondservice that identified him as a needy person. Accepting such a loan was a last resort. It was this degree of poverty, and *only* this degree of poverty, that created a moral obligation on the lender to lend to a deserving poor person.

This usury prohibition has nothing to do with interest on business loans or consumer loans, whether or not they are collateralized, although large loans normally will be. Commercial loans possess no element of moral obligation. Such interest-bearing loans in Mosaic Israel were not under the cancellation provisions of the sabbatical year, but the collateral for the loan could not be perpetual bondservice, for only heathens could be enslaved permanently in Israel. The Israelite bond-servant had to be paid a wage, enabling him to buy his way out.³¹

The Pentateuchal texts are clear: covenant-keepers do not owe interest-free charitable loans to those who are not under the jurisdiction of either God's ecclesiastical covenant or God's civil covenant. This means that Christians who live under a civil government in which citizenship is not based on taking or implicitly accepting a formal Trinitarian oath owe no loans to resident aliens, i.e., non-believers. Why not? Because, covenantally speaking, *Christians have become the resident aliens*. We are the strangers in a strange land. We live as Abraham lived in Canaan, not as Joshua's heirs lived in Israel.³² The difference is, Abraham looked forward to deliverance and victory during Joshua's generation (Gen. 15:16). Today, the vast majority of Christians praise their permanent resident-alien status as God's plan for the New Covenant era: political pluralism.³³ What Jews in Jesus' day correctly re-

31. Chapter 30.

32. Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

33. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

garded as civil tyranny—subservience to Rome’s pantheon of gods, incarnated in the state—today’s Christians regard as political freedom. Even Calvinists, Protestantism’s historic defenders of theocracy, from Calvin’s Geneva through Cromwell’s England to Puritan New England, have fallen into this humanist mind-set.³⁴ The Greek rationalism of the medieval university’s curriculum has triumphed over whatever biblical elements had been sporadically tacked on by wishful Scholastic thinkers.

The New Testament has broadened the net of those who have a legitimate moral claim on our charitable loans: from poor brothers to poor covenant-breakers. But the law is still conditional. We are not to subsidize evil. We lend to very poor people who are not poor because of their own moral flaws. We are not even to lend in the hope of regaining our principal, let alone interest (Luke 6:34–35). The charitable loan law is more rigorous in the New Covenant, but it is not unconditional.

34. An example is Gary Scott Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870–1915* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian University Press, 1985).

PROMISE, ADOPTION, AND LIBERTY

And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God (Lev. 25:39–43).

The theocentric principle is clear: God is the master. He sets the terms for bondservice.

A. Bondservants

What was a bondservant in Mosaic Israel? The Hebrew words used in this passage cannot be distinguished by grammar. In verse 39, the Hebrew translated as bondservant is *'abodah*. It is used in many ways in the Old Testament, sometimes referring to honorable labor, sometimes not. The word is found in the description of Israel's bondage in Egypt: "And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour" (Ex. 1:14). It is also used with respect to priestly service: "This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the tabernacle of the congregation, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest" (Num. 4:33). It is used to describe work prohibited on the sabbath or other festival days: "And on the seventh day ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work" (Num. 28:25). There is no ethical pattern here. The word simply means *service*.

In Leviticus 25:42–43, another Hebrew word is used, *'ebed*. This

word is used twice: “For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God.” The first sense is honorable; the second is dishonorable. Grammar does not tell us anything that would enable us to distinguish the two legal conditions: servants to God vs. slaves to men. Context must determine its interpretation. In this respect, both of these Hebrew words—*‘abodah* and *‘ebed*—are analogous to the Greek word *doulos*, which is sometimes translated *slave* and other times as *servant*.

We must therefore turn from grammar to context in our search for meaning. The context of this passage is twofold: poverty and permanent slavery. The preceding section in Leviticus 25 deals with zero-interest charitable loans to poor people, either Israelites or resident aliens (vv. 35–38). The succeeding section deals with inter-generational slavery: a legal condition exclusively of non-Israelites (vv. 44–46). In between is this section: how to treat a poor Israelite.

B. Two Forms of Bondservice

In the previous chapter, I argued that the identifying mark of a person who was morally entitled to consideration for a zero-interest charitable loan was his willingness to become a bondservant if he did not repay the debt on schedule. In the sabbatical year, charitable debts as well as bondservice that resulted from a debtor’s inability to repay a charitable loan (Deut. 15:12) were to be cancelled nationally (Deut. 15:1–7).¹ The reason for this was that the two obligations were linked judicially. When the legal obligation to repay a charitable loan ceased, so did the obligation to serve as a bondservant for having defaulted on a charitable loan.

Leviticus 25:39 states that an Israelite could be sold into bondservice. He would not automatically go free until the jubilee year. The sabbath-year release did not apply to him. I call this *jubilee* bondservice, in contrast to *sabbatical* bondservice. I argue in this chapter that both forms of bondservice were likely to have been legal penalties for personal bankruptcy. There was always the threat of debt bondage in Mosaic Israel. The differences between the two forms of bondservice were the results of two different types of loans: charitable vs. non-charitable. There was a much greater threat of long-term bondage for

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

having defaulted on a non-charitable loan than a charitable loan. A person entered a business debt contract with open eyes. A poor man who sought a charitable loan was under greater external constraints. God imposed reduced risks of servitude on him.

A man's unwillingness to bear the risk of up to six years of bondservice for his failure to repay a loan established the loan as a morally compulsory, zero-interest, charitable loan. Unless the poor borrower was willing to take this risk, he had no moral claim on the lender. Yet it is clear from the text that Israelites could lawfully be sold into servitude until the next jubilee year. This bondage was a means of debt repayment. So, if servitude of up to 49 years was possible, why did the threat of no more than six years of bondservice judicially identify a morally compulsory charitable loan?

The answer is found in the issue of legal access to the inheritance. A man who was so poor that he was willing to risk bondservice until the next sabbatical year, but who was unwilling to put up his land as collateral, had a moral claim on a zero-interest charitable loan. He had a property to return to. He was poor, but he was obviously not so present-oriented or risk-oriented that he would use his inheritance as collateral. His poverty was temporary. He had an inheritance to return to in the sabbatical year after a period of bondservice. His post-crisis goal was liberty and dominion: self-government. So, he used his own potential servitude as collateral to secure the charitable loan.

The borrower who was willing to use his inheritance as collateral in a business loan, or one who had already leased out his land until the next jubilee year, was not equally protected by the Mosaic law. He had no moral claim on a zero-interest charitable loan. Either this was a business loan, in which the element of moral obligation was not involved, or else the person was economically incompetent: he had already leased his inheritance, yet he still wanted a loan. For this person, the time limits on bondservice that were offered by the sabbatical year of release were inoperative. He could be placed into bondservice until the next jubilee year.

Access to the inheritance served as the debtor's sanctuary. If he had not leased out his land, or if he had not lost it because he had used it as collateral to secure a non-charity loan that later went bad, he could not be placed in bondservice for longer than six years. God reminded the debtor that retaining possession of his inheritance was very important in God's eyes. Debtors who were willing to place their inheritance at risk to secure a business loan, or who had already leased

out their land, were regarded by the Mosaic law as second-class debtors. They had no moral claim on a zero-interest loan. They also did not possess a sanctuary from bondage: they could serve beyond six years, i.e., until the next jubilee trumpet sounded.

C. Bondservice and Boundaries

An impoverished Israelite who had been sold into jubilee bondservice was not to be treated as a bondservant by a fellow Israelite; instead, he was to be treated as a hired servant. This passage indicates that being a hired servant was preferable to being a bondservant. An Israelite was not to *compel* a fellow Israelite to serve as a bondservant. We need to ask: What was the difference between a bondservant and a hired servant?

There were exclusionary boundaries on hired servants and sojourners that did not apply to bondservants: “There shall no stranger eat of the holy thing: a sojourner of the priest, or an hired servant, shall not eat of the holy thing. But if the priest buy any soul with his money, he shall eat of it, and he that is born in his house: they shall eat of his meat” (Lev. 22:10–11). A sojourner and a hired servant could not eat a holy meal with a priest; the priest’s household bondservant could. What was different between the two? The sojourner and hired servant were not owned, and therefore they could leave the household; the household’s boundary did not restrict them. The slave could not leave; the boundary did restrict him. He therefore had legal access to the ritual meal of the priest’s household. He was judicially inside the household’s boundary.

The shared judicial status of sojourners and hired servants in Mosaic Israel seems to have been two-fold: first, they could leave the household of the employer; second, in some instances they were uncircumcised. We see this in the law of the Passover: it prohibited strangers and hired servants from eating, yet it allowed circumcised strangers to eat.

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man’s servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a

stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof (Ex. 12:43–48).

The defining judicial issue in the Passover law was an individual's circumcision, not his right of mobility. In contrast, the definition of "sojourner" and "hired servant" applicable to Leviticus 25:40 is based on the existence of a household boundary. The sojourner and the hired servant could legally leave the jurisdiction of the household at the end of their voluntary, contractual service. The bondservant could not. The jubilee law did not require the Israelite to treat his impoverished brother as an uncircumcised person. It therefore must have required the owner to treat his fellow Israelite as well as he would treat a geographically mobile person. The poor Israelite was to be protected.

D. Who Were the Poor in Israel?

The poor man had no money or marketable assets except his labor. This is an economic definition. There is no biblical text that reveals such a definition. It is not suitable as a legal definition. The Mosaic law applied to *legally identifiable* classes of individuals. It prohibited certain forms of behavior regarding the treatment of the poor: "thou shalt not." But there is no economic definition of poverty offered by the Bible. This case law had a judicial definition rather than an economic definition.

A man was defined as legally poor in terms of his willingness to risk bondservice if he defaulted on a charitable loan. Access to one's inheritance assured liberation from debt servitude, either in the sabbatical year (where the land was not pledged) or the jubilee year (where the land might be pledged). The jubilee law did not make economic poverty illegal. It did not equalize wealth. It did not equalize opportunity. What it did was place maximum limits on debt servitude, and therefore maximum limits on debt: six years (zero-interest charitable loans) and 49 years (interest-bearing business loans). The jubilee law restricted the discounted market value of a loan collateralized by a man's inheritance. In year 50, the land would return to him. Lenders beware!

There was no guarantee that a plot of ground would be economically valuable through the centuries. The jubilee law made no legal guarantee of anyone's economic condition. The Bible is not a hand-

book of statist wealth redistribution. It is a handbook of covenantal liberty: *God's handbook for man's redemption*, i.e., a transformation of his judicial status in God's court: from guilty to innocent.

If my explanation of the Mosaic law's judicial definition of poverty in this case law is correct, then this case law no longer applies under the New Covenant. The definition was tied to inheritance within the Promised Land. With the annulment of the Promised Land's special covenantal status, this case law's definition of poverty ceased to be judicially relevant.

E. To Buy a Brother

This passage governs the treatment of an Israelite who has been sold to another Israelite. He had to serve the purchaser until the jubilee unless his kinsman-redeemer bought him out of bondage.

This means that he was not under the protection of the sabbatical year of release (Deut. 15). Why not? Because he was not in his predicament as a result of his inability to repay a zero-interest charitable loan. Such loans were cancelled in the sabbatical year. Also, the person who was sold into bondage because of his failure to repay a charitable loan had to be provided with capital when he departed during the sabbatical year: "And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him" (Deut. 15:13–14). This is not specified as a requirement here: "And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return" (Lev. 25:41). Yet in both cases, the justification for the law was the former condition of the Israelites in Egypt: "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day" (Deut. 15:15). "For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen" (Lev. 25:42).

1. A Judicial Distinction

What is the judicial distinction between the two conditions of household servitude? The Bible is not explicit, but the difference appears to relate to lawful immediate access to rural land. The poor man

in Deuteronomy 15 was to be sent away with sheep, grain, and wine. This indicates that he had a home to return to. The poor man in Leviticus 25 was to be sent back to his land only with his family. Nothing is said of his buyer's responsibility to provide him with any economic resources. His judicial status as a free man was his primary resource; his landed inheritance was his economic resource; and his family went free with him. This distinguished him from both the poor man who had defaulted on a zero-interest, morally mandatory charitable loan (Deut. 15:12) and the pagan slave who never departed, and whose children became the property of the Israelite who had bought him (Lev. 25:45–46).²

The poor man in Leviticus 25 had already been legally stripped of immediate access to his land. Until the jubilee, he became as a poor resident alien in the land. He did not own a home in a walled city. He was landless. But this landless condition was economic, not judicial. *His judicial status as a free man was guaranteed by his legal claim to his landed inheritance.* The jubilee year would reinstate him as owner and legal occupier of his family plot. He had no claim to his family's land in the present, but he had permanent title. The year of jubilee guaranteed this. But if he became a bondservant, he forfeited his judicial status as a freeman until he was released. He could no longer respond to a call to be numbered without his master's permission.

Unlike the foreign slave, who was the property of the family that bought him or inherited him, the temporarily landless Israelite in bondage had to be paid a wage by his Israelite master.³ At the very least, he had to be treated as well as a hired man was treated. The hired man could walk away from a tyrant. The permanent slave could not. So, the master was not allowed to treat his Israelite servant in the way that he was allowed to treat his permanent heathen slaves.

But this distinction between freeman and slave does not explain why this case law required the owner to treat him as a hired servant. What was the distinguishing mark of the hired servant? Answer: he could walk away from the household of the man who hired him. To re-

2. Chapter 31.

3. The resident alien did not have to pay him a wage. This law did not apply to the resident alien, who was no brother. This gave the resident alien a competitive position in the market for Israelite servants. He could pay a higher price for the net value of expected stream of income, since the net was higher: no wage expense. This was not a civil law. Civil laws had to apply equally to all residents (Ex. 12:49). Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

tain his services, the renter of his labor services had to pay him a wage.

2. *Wages*

This means that in order to obey this law, an Israelite master must have had to pay a wage to an Israelite bondservant. The master was to this extent not an owner but a renter of services. Yet the servant had been sold into servitude. We must examine the apparent discrepancy between these judicial conditions: owner vs. renter; bondservant vs. hired servant.

The wage was crucial to the servant. If saved, it was this money or goods that would serve as his source of re-capitalization in the year of jubilee. He did not have to be given anything at the time of his departure in the jubilee year, unlike the land-owning poor Israelite who had defaulted on a charitable loan (Deut. 15:14–15). He had to be paid a wage, also unlike the Deuteronomic (sabbatical) bondservant. The jubilee bondservant was under bondage for a much longer period than the Deuteronomic bondservant, except in the seventh cycle of sabbatical years that preceded the jubilee. He could amass more wealth through thrift because he had more years of bondservice in which to save.

This arrangement raises a significant question. If the buyer could go into the open market and hire an Israelite for a day, or a month, or a year, why would he buy a full-time hired servant? The latter had to be cared for in bad times, whereas a hired servant could be dismissed. The buyer's expected stream of net income had to reflect the costs of feeding, clothing, and housing the servant, in good times and bad, and also paying him a wage. Why would anyone bother to buy such a servant? Answer: the buyer was securing a permanent hired worker who could not legally depart in search of higher wages elsewhere or better working conditions elsewhere. What the buyer was securing was a hired servant who could not be bid away from the buyer's household. The servant could not leave at will. *He was placed within a legal boundary*: the household of the family that had purchased him. The buyer was buying a stream of labor services until the jubilee. The servant could not lawfully cut off this stream of service by walking away.

Did the owner-renter have to pay the bondservant a wage equal to that paid to a hired servant? The text is not explicit on this point. It says only that the Israelite must be treated as a hired servant. If a hired servant could leave at any time in response to a better offer, did the

owner-renter have to match every offer? This seems unlikely, given the status of the bondservant as a member of the household until redemption. The bondservant gained security; this always comes at a price. The price of security is the loss of entrepreneurial opportunities—in this case, the future prospects of renting one's services to another employer. So, the wages paid would have been discounted to compensate the owner-renter for the "lifetime (jubilee) employment contract" costs of employing the servant.

The legal option of liberty was always open: buying one's way out of bondage. But would he do this? This decision depended heavily on the owner's treatment. If his wages were high enough, he might do this. I conclude that wages that would not have enabled a man to buy his way out of servitude before the jubilee would have been judged as too low by a church court. But there was another factor that limited his personal exodus. The jubilee Israelite bondservant had no land to return to. He probably would have preferred the security of servitude, given the fact that his wages could accumulate to serve as his capitalization in the year of jubilee.

He was protected by law from exploitation. It is not clear whether the court with jurisdiction was civil or ecclesiastical. With respect to the requirement that he pay the servant a wage, it was ecclesiastical. The Bible does not designate the state as an agency that lawfully imposes positive sanctions. The state protects people from force and fraud by others.

F. "If He Be Sold Unto Thee"

The passive language indicates that the individual did not sell himself; he was *sold to* the buyer. Who would do this? A previous owner? No; the law stipulates that "he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile." He had to be taken care of. *He was not a commodity to be bought and sold at will.* He had been a local resident: "thy brother that dwelleth by thee." He did not expect to be sent away from the neighborhood.

The likelihood is that the man had been sold in order to pay a debt, but not a charitable debt, which would have been governed by Deuteronomy 15. Perhaps he had moved into a walled city to live. Perhaps he got involved in a business transaction that involved debt. The venture failed, and he was sold to pay off the debt. He would have been sold to the highest bidder, but the bidders would have been restricted

by the market to residents of the walled city or the immediate surrounding area, or to someone living in the neighborhood close to the man's family plot. These were the people who knew him and his capacities. There was not to be a large-scale market for Israelite servants in Israel. Servitude was personal, just as God's system of servitude is. Owners were supposed to know something about those whom they purchased.

It is possible that the man sold himself to the buyer in order to put aside money for his return to his land. This form of voluntary servitude was something like that of the voluntary servant of Deuteronomy 15: "And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maid-servant thou shalt do likewise" (Deut. 15:16–17). The difference is that the jubilee form of bondservice allowed the servant to return to his land at the jubilee.

G. An Exception to the Law: Criminal Trespass

Wenham argued that the reason why a man was sold to another was to pay off a debt.⁴ I agree. He cited as proof Exodus 22:3, a case law governing a criminal trespass: "The sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." I disagree with this proof text for Leviticus 25:39–43. The reason why I disagree is this: *God does not subsidize evil*.

1. No Escape from Restitution

A criminal, seeing the approach of the jubilee year, might think to himself: "If I get away with this crime, I will benefit. If I do not get away with it, I will not have to remain in another man's service for very long. The larger the value of what I steal, the better the risk-reward ratio is." The closer to the jubilee year, the better the risk-reward ratio for crimes against property, if Wenham's interpretation is correct. The criminal's victim could not expect anything like double restitution from the sale of a criminal if the jubilee year was near. The stream of expected labor services would be cut off by the jubilee. Thus, the sale

4. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 322.

price of the criminal would be low. If the criminal was to be liberated at the jubilee, this legal arrangement would not only subsidize theft, it would subsidize high-value thefts. The victims would be penalized because of the liberation aspect of the jubilee year.

My conclusion is that the year of jubilee did not apply to convicted criminals. Neither did the law mandating owners to treat Israelite bondservants as hired workers. Criminals were sold into slavery in order to repay their victims and meet God's judicial requirements. The most important issue was not the liberation of the criminal; rather, it was the maximization of the criminal's selling price, so that the victim would receive double restitution. The law of God does not discriminate against victims of crime in the name of liberation. The principle of victim's rights lies at the heart of the Bible's criminal justice system.⁵ The criminal must have remained outside the protection of the jubilee, and therefore *outside the judicial status of citizen*, until he repaid his debt to his victim. He could regain his citizenship only when his debt was paid. His adult sons, however, could return to the family's land at the time of the jubilee. Their inheritance was not forfeited by their father's crime, for the sins of the father do not transfer to his children (Deut. 24:16). As redeemers, they might even have paid off his debt.

The biblical warrant for this interpretation is Israel's experience in the Babylonian captivity. God removed most of them from the land for 70 years. They had violated His sabbath year of release and the land's rest for 490 years (II Chron. 36:17, 21). God did not allow them to return to their individual patrimonies in the normal jubilee year. They were under criminal sanctions, repaying their victim: the land itself. They could not return to their patrimonies until the debt was repaid. They temporarily lost their judicial status as judges in the land.

2. *The Price of Redemption*

If my view is correct, then the closer the jubilee year, the larger the market for buying convicted criminals. As the legal term of service shortened for Israelite bondservants, and their market prices dropped accordingly, those in the market for long-term bondservants would have been forced increasingly to enter the market for heathen slaves and Israelite criminals.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, chaps. 34, 37–40, Appendix M. See also Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

Second, if I am correct about the unique inapplicability of the law governing the treatment of Israelite bondservants, the net return on an Israelite's investment in buying a convicted criminal would have equalled the return available to resident alien purchasers, who were not under the terms of this law. The price for criminals would have tended to be higher than the price of other Israelite bondservants, assuming that the criminal was not violent. The price-depressing aspects of buying a criminal would have been offset in whole or in part by the higher rate of return: no requirement to pay him a wage. This, too, was a benefit to the criminal's victim: a higher sale price was more likely to assure him of his double restitution payment.

The questions arise: What was the proper redemption price? How long would he have to serve? Did he become a lifetime slave? If his kinsman-redeemer wanted to buy him out of bondage, how much did he owe the buyer? The prorated price of the jubilee year did not apply if he was not entitled to go out in the jubilee.

Let us consider modern business practice. If a man buys an interest-paying instrument at face value in order to receive a guaranteed income, and if the company issuing the bond possesses the right of redemption, the company must repay the face value of the bond in order to cancel the debt. The buyer has received guaranteed income from the asset in the meantime.

The economic difference between a bond and a bondservant is that the buyer is not sure how much net income the bondservant will produce. The bond pays a guaranteed rate of return. It is purchased at a discount from its face value. The discount is based on the prevailing rate of interest. The face value—redemption price—of the bond and today's rate of interest are known in advance. The price and the rate of return can be calculated.

There is no guaranteed rate of return for a bondservant. The buyer must estimate the future net income from a bondservant. Then he must discount this by the prevailing rate of interest. The higher the estimated net income, the higher the market price. But how long will he retain control over the bondservant? Unlike a bond, there is no fixed time period. Unlike a bondservant under the protection of the jubilee, there is no fixed time period. There must be a way to reduce the number of variables, so that the victim gets paid. But how?

The higher the estimated value of the criminal's productivity as a servant, the higher the price he will bring. This means that a criminal with a good work ethic is less likely to be able to escape servitude; his

redemption price will be too high. This is contrary to biblical law: a subsidy for evil. There must be a way around this anomaly. But what?

The solution solves both problems: (1) too many variables and (2) the subsidy for evil. His legal redemption price must be limited by the payment to the victim. The kinsman-redeemer must be allowed to buy him out of servitude for this payment. If a bidding war pushes the criminal's market price above this maximum restitution payment, who receives the extra money? Not the victim; he is not entitled to it. Not the state; it is not entitled to it. It must go to the criminal's account—money for his redemption. This puts a ceiling on the market price of criminals. A buyer is less likely to continue to bid if he knows that the criminal can use the money above the restitution payment to shorten his time of service. The extra money will make it less expensive for the man's kinsman-redeemer to put up the difference and buy him out of servitude. Conclusion: the purchase price of a convicted criminal on the competitive market for bondservants will not be significantly higher than the money owed to his victims. When this limit is reached, bidding will tend to cease as bidders drop out. This is as it should be: the punishment (servitude) should be proportional to the crime (damages produced).

But if he has no kinsman-redeemer who is willing to pay off his debt, he will remain in bondage forever. He cannot buy his way out. He has no assets and no way to earn any. The message is clear: an enslaved criminal needs a kinsman-redeemer who has both the assets and the willingness to sacrifice his own interests on behalf of his relative.

H. Holy War, Citizenship, and Liberty

A citizen is a person who has the authority to serve as a civil judge, declaring innocence or guilt. The Israelite bondservant's judicial status as a temporary slave removed his judicial status as a citizen. He could not serve as a civil judge during his period as a man bound to another man's household. He did remain an Israelite. He did possess post-jubilee title to his land. No text says the following, but my biblical law-immersed intuition tells me that for a man to become a bondservant was judicially the equivalent of having become a minor. An Israelite had become a slave in another man's house, under another's temporary authority. *Judicially, he had become a child.*

Citizenship in a holy commonwealth is the legal authority to de-

clare or bring negative civil sanctions in God's name. The pre-eminent manifestation of this authority in pre-exilic Israel was service in the military: God's holy army. The army had the task of defending the boundaries of the land, i.e., keeping it holy, secure from foreign invaders. The army had to keep the land from being *profaned* by invaders: boundary violators. To be a member of the army required the payment of redemption blood money at the time of the numbering of the nation immediately prior to a holy war (Ex. 30:12–13).⁶ Circumcised Israelite males became eligible to serve at age 20 (Ex. 30: 14).⁷

The Israelite slave had to be treated as “as an hired servant,” the text says. He had to be paid a wage by his Israelite master. He therefore had money to pay the redemption blood money to the priests. Did this give him the right to serve in the army? No; he was judicially a child even though he was over age 20. Only with his owner's permission could he serve in the army. He was not a free man; he was not a citizen.

Was a gentile slave who paid his redemption blood money and also fought for Israel in a holy battle subsequently released from bondage? Abram had fighting men (Gen. 14:14), but they did not receive automatic freedom. However, this was before the Abrahamic covenant was established (Gen. 15). It may be that in pre-exilic Israel, the willingness of a slave to risk his life in holy battle gained him his freedom, though not landed inheritance.⁸ He became a citizen in a walled city. If nothing else, manumission might have been a bonus offered to him by his master. This view helps explain the considerable number of foreigners listed among David's 30 mighty men (I Chron. 12:3–6). It may also explain the presence in David's army of the most famous foreign officer of all, Uriah the Hittite.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

7. My presumption is that David was under age 20 at the time of his confrontation with Goliath. This would explain why his brother regarded him as an observer rather than as a warrior at risk (I Sam. 17:28). David had not paid his redemption blood money. He was then authorized by Saul to serve as the army's representative in battle, but there is no mention of the required payment. This may have been an oversight on Saul's part, or perhaps Saul paid it for him. We are not told.

8. It is one of the most interesting facts about the American Civil War (1861–65) that in its final months, Southern leaders and generals began to discuss the possibility of granting freedom to any Negro slave who was willing to enlist in the Confederate army. But the South had gone to war to defend the region's right to slavery. With this public discussion, the war effort began to collapse. If the slaves could be trusted to defend the Confederacy, then the old myth of their innate status as children in need of supervision had been ludicrous. This called into question the legitimacy of the “peculiar institution” and the war to defend it. See Richard E. Berringer, *et al.*, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), ch. 15.

What we do not know is whether these gentile slaves would have been required by law to wait until the jubilee year in order to receive their freedom. They surely could not have become citizens unless they continued to attend Passover, even though, as household slaves, they would automatically have been circumcised (Gen. 17:11–13). Circumcision was necessary but not sufficient to make an adult male a citizen. Attendance at Passover was mandatory. My view is that they and their families would have been released immediately after the cessation of military hostilities. This release had nothing to do with the jubilee. The release provisions of the jubilee year were uniquely associated with inheritance in the land, and the released gentile bondservant had no inheritance in the land. In any case, his owner would have had to consent in the first place to his enrollment in God's holy army.

The same rule governed the Israelite bondservant, whether a bankrupt or a convicted criminal. His owner had to consent to his military service. The owner may have had to pay his blood money fee for him—certainly this was the case with a criminal. I do not think any bondservant could be called into service by the state unless his owner consented. He was not his own man. He was the lawful property of another man until his debt was paid.

I. The Basis of Liberty

As New Covenant people, we have difficulty understanding the degree of importance associated with landed inheritance under the Mosaic economy. The connection between land and inheritance was extremely close. The question is: Was it unbreakable?

The section on the jubilee ends with these words: "For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 25: 55). The legal status of later generations as *God's covenantal bondservants* rested on their ancestors' historical experience in the days of Moses: deliverance from bondage in Egypt. It also rested on the next generation's participation in the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. This participation was the legal foundation of landed inheritance in Mosaic Israel. From everything we find in this section of Leviticus, inheritance was the legal foundation of *every* aspect of the jubilee law. I see no exceptions. Even in the case of the enslavement of heathens (vv. 44–46), the judicial issue was perpetual inheritance, though not landed inheritance.

This raises a whole series of questions. Commentators rarely ask them, let alone answer them. This is why there has been so much confusion regarding the jubilee year among conservative evangelicals, and why liberation theologians have gotten away with exegetical murder.

1. Freemanship

First, who was a free man under the Mosaic law? There were degrees of freedom. Every resident of Israel was free from arbitrary law. The same civil law code applied to all men: “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49).⁹ But it is obvious that this principle of equality before the civil law did not apply to the jubilee law. The jubilee made a fundamental distinction between the resident who did not have an inalienable legal claim to landed inheritance and the resident who did. The resident who did have such a claim was identified by God as His servant.

There was only one way that someone who had not participated in either the exodus or the conquest could become God’s servant, so defined: by adoption. God adopted Abram and his covenantal heirs, but the promised inheritance was not secured until Joshua’s day. That is, *God’s promise to Abraham was not fulfilled until Joshua’s day*. The fulfillment of this promise (Gen. 15:16) was God’s proof in history of the reliability of His covenant and its promises. Adoption, promise, and inheritance were linked judicially in the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic Covenant.

2. Naturalization

Second, there were two forms of adoption: into a tribe (walled city) or into a family (rural land). The circumcised resident alien was offered the promise of citizenship for his heirs (Deut. 23:3–8): tribal adoption. The tenth-generation heir of a bastard Israelite was offered citizenship (Deut. 23:2): access into God’s holy army. The supreme example was David, the ultimate holy warrior, the tenth-generation heir of Judah and Tamar (Ruth 4:18–22).¹⁰

Adoption for males was not automatic, except (probably) for those

9. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

10. On gaps in this genealogy, see Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11:G.

who volunteered for military service during a war. Presumably, three generations constituted the standard period of testing for most resident aliens (Deut. 23:8). This adoption must have been made in the name of the congregation, presumably by the local tribal congregation inside a walled city, but not by a specific family. Had citizenship been available only through adoption by a family, the naturalization laws would have forced a dilution of the landed inheritance of specific families. This would have been a mandatory program of economic disinheritance. No such program was mandated by the Mosaic law.

3. *Criminals*

Third, what about the criminal? The criminal lost his citizenship until the debt was repaid. He could not be numbered to fight in God's holy army until his debt was repaid; hence, he was not a citizen during this period. He was not a free man; hence, he was not a citizen. Having had civil judicial sanctions brought against him, he did not possess the right to participate as a civil judge, bringing the state's judicial sanctions on others. This restriction is not found any text, but it is inferred by the nature of citizenship: the lawful authority to bring God's civil sanctions against lawbreakers. Until the victim was repaid, or the buyer whose purchase had provided the funds was repaid, the judicial status of the criminal was that of non-citizen.

I argue that he also lost his claim to his family's land, and therefore lost his right to participate in the jubilee. That is, he did not automatically return to his land at the jubilee. This legal status did not apply to his adult male children. They could go back to the land at the jubilee if they broke with him publicly regarding his crime. They could then become his kinsman redeemers, which is another reason why they were allowed to return to the family plot. In this sense, *he could be adopted by his son or sons*. That is, he regained access to his forfeited inheritance through an act of redemption in his behalf.¹¹ Otherwise, the judicial status of the criminal as an heir in the jubilee was forfeited until his debt was repaid. Because he received no wage, his kinsman-re-

11. This is the judicial basis of the re-established inheritance of a portion of the sons of Adam. A son of Adam who was not under the negative sanction of forfeited citizenship had to break publicly with the crime of His earthly father, thereby reclaiming the inheritance on behalf of those whom He has chosen to redeem. This was the act of the supreme Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the last (second) Adam (I Cor. 15:45).

deemer had buy him out of servitude.¹²

J. Possession or Confession?

Another problem case is the adopted immigrant. When an Israelite adopted an immigrant, he was conveying a kind of manumission to him: *manumission prior to enslavement*. The covenantally faithful adopted person and his heirs could not be lawfully enslaved permanently after the adoption except on the same basis that an Israelite could lose his citizenship and his inheritance, i.e., excommunication. This act of grace cost the adopting family something: the dilution of the sons' economic inheritance. It was a major step for a father with sons to adopt another son, at least in the period in which a few acres meant something economically to the heirs. This means that if God's covenantal blessings continued, and families grew large, the economic cost of adoption would decrease, since the economic value of the dilution of acreage would have been minimal.

The circumcised immigrant could become a citizen, or his heirs eventually could, through adoption by a tribe, probably in a walled city, but he had no claim to land distributed at the conquest. Only adoption into an Israelite family could provide land. The jubilee year therefore offered no unique economic benefit for him. Did it confer any judicial benefit? Yes. The heathen slave law was part of the jubilee law. The heathen slave law expressly stated that all inheritable slaves had to be purchased from heathens (Lev. 25:44–45).¹³ This was the magna carta for the naturalized citizen. By breaking covenantally with heathendom, and by becoming a full citizen ready to serve as a holy warrior, the immigrant received a perpetual grant of manumission from inter-generational servitude. He could not be permanently enslaved inside Israel. The jubilee year therefore functioned as a year of release for every citizen, even those with no inheritable property.

The naturalized citizen could not hope to indebt himself by means of the collateral of an inheritable plot of land unless an Israelite family had adopted him. To this extent, he was less able to gain access to the market for loans. But with respect to his liberty, he could not lawfully be enslaved. Leviticus 25 does not say that the landless immigrant citizen would be released from debt bondage. The language is that of a

12. The New Covenant warns us: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23). We are in need of grace from a kinsman-redeemer.

13. Chapter 30.

return to the family's land. But because the slave law made it illegal to enslave an Israelite on an inter-generational basis, the jubilee year of release must have applied to the non-inheriting naturalized citizen. The trumpet announced release from bondage for every Israelite except the criminal.

K. Cross-Family Adoption

There were three ways out of slavery for gentiles. First, there was manumission, either as payment for physical brutality by his owner or through voluntary manumission by his owner, but this would not automatically have freed his family (Ex. 21:2–4).¹⁴ Second, there was legal adoption by his owner. This would have freed his family from the threat of bondage forever. There was a third way out: *adoption by another Israelite family*. This act of grace would have transferred the right of inheritance to him. He and his family would then go out in the jubilee.

This aspect of the Mosaic law is never discussed by the commentators, yet it was fundamental to the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. *Adoption by one household head could liberate other men's slaves*. In fact, if one man had been willing to divide his sons' landed inheritance to the point of no economic return, he could have freed every slave in Israel. He would not even have been required to purchase the liberated slaves in order for them to receive their freedom at the jubilee. The moment he adopted them, they would have become *heirs of his estate*, meaning heirs of his judicial status. They would have become *citizens of Israel* at the next jubilee. No heir of the conquest could be legally kept in slavery beyond the jubilee year. This act of universal adoption would have made the liberator very unpopular, as we can easily imagine, but it was always a legal option under the Mosaic covenant. The most likely candidate to do this was a man with abolitionist sentiments and without biological heirs.

Would he have owed the slave owners anything? Only for the time remaining until the jubilee. This prorated payment would have become progressively smaller as the jubilee year approached. In the year of jubilee, he would have owed them nothing. There was only one exception to this rule: the criminal who had been sold into slavery to pay his victim. In this case, his owner had to be repaid fully before the slave could be released. The buyer had paid a price based on the amount of

14. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 31.

restitution the criminal owed to the victim, not the prorated value of his services until the jubilee. The criminal was not protected by the jubilee. God's law does not subsidize crime. So, in order for the redemption to be secured through adoption, the adopting redeemer would have had to pay to the owner whatever the owner had paid to the criminal's victim.

It is understandable why Israel may never have invoked the jubilee. *Had it been honored, almost every slave owner's investment would have been at risk.* All it would have taken to free all the gentile slaves in Israel was for one lawful heir to decide that the per capita economic value of his children's landed inheritance was worth forfeiting for the sake of a single mass adoption.

There was such a man. His name was Jesus. He publicly declared the judicial intent of His ministry by announcing the availability of liberation through adoption into His family (Luke 4:18–21).¹⁵ The result was predictable: the slave-owners and their accomplices killed Him. With the death of the Testator came the inheritance: judicial liberation.¹⁶ But because of the jubilee law, this deliverance had to await the blowing of the trumpet at the next jubilee year: on the tenth day of the seventh month, the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9), *yom kippur*. I agree with James Jordan that this final jubilee year came three years after the crucifixion, in the same year as the inauguration of Paul's ministry to the gentiles.¹⁷ On that historic *yom kippur*, God released from judicial bondage every gentile slave in Israel who had publicly professed faith in, and subordination to, the New Covenant's head of household.¹⁸ Be-

15. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

16. "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Heb. 9:16–17).

17. James B. Jordan, "Jubilee, Part 3," *Biblical Chronology*, V (April 1993), p. 2. (<http://bit.ly/jbjub3>)

18. It would not surprise me in heaven to learn that Stephen's stoning took place on the day of atonement. Christ, the slain Passover lamb, asked God to forgive His executioners (Luke 23:34). Similarly, Stephen's last words were: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). If he was in fact the symbolic purification offering for the day of atonement (Lev. 16), Stephen's words would have been appropriate, paralleling the words of the symbolic Passover lamb. As required by the laws of sacrifice governing the day of atonement, the Jews killed one goat, Stephen, but the scapegoat, present at the execution, was soon to wander into the wilderness, bringing the message of liberation to the gentiles: Paul.

Lest it be thought that no execution could lawfully take place on the day of atonement, consider Joseph ibn Migash, a Jewish judge who had an informer executed on a

cause Old Covenant Israel refused to honor this adoption, having killed the adopter instead, God destroyed Old Covenant Israel.¹⁹

As I said, there was one exception to manumission through outside adoption: the criminal who had been sold into slavery to repay his victim. The adopter would have had to pay the owner's purchase price plus anything still owed to the victim. In the case of Jesus Christ, He made this supreme payment to the victim, God the Father, who had placed all of mankind into servitude because of man's rebellion in the garden.

This should end the debate over whether a man needs to profess the Lordship of Christ in order to be saved. A regenerate person has no choice but to profess Christ's comprehensive lordship. He cannot lawfully partake in the jubilee inheritance without this profession. But because of God's mercy, this oath can be taken for him representatively, either by his parents when they offer him for baptism as an infant or when he voluntarily consents to baptism after infancy. Whether the oath is verbally professed or not, it is an inescapable aspect of God's covenant. There is no lawful inheritance apart from this subordination to the head of the church. There is therefore no liberation apart from such a confession.

To keep Christian slaves in bondage beyond that final jubilee year was a crime. Furthermore, all slaves who claimed Jesus' universal offer

day of atonement that fell on a sabbath. A modern Jewish legal scholar remarks that this action "shows how sacred a duty the elimination of informers was conceived by great judges." Haim H. Cohn, "Informer," *The Principles of Jewish Law*, ed. Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter, [1975?]), col. 508. An informer is defined as "a Jew who denounces a fellow-Jew to a non-Jew, and more particularly to non-Jewish authorities, thereby causing actual or potential damage. . . . It is no defense to a charge of informing that the person denounced is a sinner and wicked, or has caused the informer grief or harm—no informer will ever have a share in the world to come." *Ibid.*, col. 507.

Immediately preceding his execution, Stephen had publicly charged the Jews with murder because of their betrayal of Jesus to the Romans. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). In other words, *Stephen charged them with having been informers to the Romans, betraying a fellow Jew to the gentiles*. This is one reason—I believe the main one—why they took the risk of breaking Roman law by executing him themselves without a Roman trial. To have taken him to the Roman authorities would have constituted an act of informing, thereby confirming his accusation against them. As historian Michael Grant has written, they participated either in the equivalent of an unauthorized lynching or a deliberately illegal execution by the Council of Jerusalem. Michael Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (New York: Dorset, 1973), p. 116.

19. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

of adoption into His family after this jubilee year would have to be released at the next jubilee. But the fall of Jerusalem 37 years after this final jubilee year ended the temple's Passover system and the land inheritance system established by the Mosaic covenant. There would never again be a God-authorized jubilee. Thus, the fall of Jerusalem ended the legality of Mosaic slavery forever.

Conclusion

The jubilee law established protection for poor Israelites who were sold into servitude. This servitude was mild, requiring the masters to pay wages to their Israelite servants. It required them to treat these people as they would treat a hired servant who could leave an employer who was abusive.

The jubilee law established a legal distinction between a free man and a heathen slave. The pre-exilic heathen slave had no right to jubilee freedom, for he was not eligible for military service. He was outside the civil covenant. The legal basis of citizenship was adoption, either by a tribe or a family. A woman was adopted by marriage to an Israelite, e.g., Rahab and Ruth. This was adoption into a family. Citizenship was automatic with adoption.

Citizenship was possible for male gentile converts to the covenant. This judicial promise was carried out by tribes. This might take as long as ten generations (Deut. 23:2); it might take as few as three (Deut. 23:7–8). Once they became citizens, they could not be permanently enslaved (Lev. 25:44–46).²⁰ The heathen slave law served as a magna carta of liberty for the naturalized immigrant. He could achieve full legal status as a citizen despite the fact that he had no inheritance in the land. Citizenship was by confession, circumcision, and numbering in the holy army. But it was not granted overnight by a tribe.

Jesus Christ was the ultimate Heir, the promised Seed (Gal. 3:16), the One for whom the Mosaic system of tribal inheritance had been created. It was He who announced the jubilee year (Luke 4:18–21). It was He who offered men adoption into His family (John 1:12). It was He who paid the debts of the criminals He adopts into His family. Instead of a hole in the ear drilled by an awl at the doorway of an Israelite's household (Ex. 21:6), baptism is the new mark of adoption. The New Covenant's jubilee year of release was the final jubilee for Old Covenant Israel.

20. Chapter 30.

SLAVES AND FREEMEN

Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour (Lev. 25:44–46).

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is simple to state, but difficult for modern man to accept: God is the cosmic slavemaster. This is the issue of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Permanent Slaves

The text must be taken literally. First, Israelites could buy slaves from other nations. These people were already slaves according to the laws of their own nations. The Israelites did not make them slaves; they merely changed the slaves' residence: new boundaries. Second, the Israelites could buy slaves from among strangers residing in the land. But there was no authorization to buy slaves from other Israelites. This means that slaves in one Israelite family could not be sold to another family. They became part of a family's permanent inheritance.

There is no question about it: Mosaic law legalized inter-generational slavery. If Leviticus 25:44–46 is still binding, then the enslavement of those who not part of the covenant by those who are is legal in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

God's eyes. Enslaved converts who make a profession of faith after their enslavement, or the descendants of slaves, would still remain permanently bound. But no Bible commentator today wants to conclude such things, unlike almost all commentators, Jews and Christians, up to the 1750s. The exegetical question facing every Bible commentator is this: Has this law been explicitly annulled by the New Covenant? If not, then on what explicitly biblical ethical basis is it no longer binding?

Modern man rebels against this thought, just as he rebels against the thought of an eternal lake of fire: no exit from God's cosmic torture chamber. Even Christians are squeamish about this. They prefer not to think about its implications. They also do not like to think about the fact that God's Mosaic law authorized slavery, but it did. In fact, the decline of Western man's faith in the reality of eternal damnation loosely paralleled the decline of his faith in the moral legitimacy of slavery.

Prior to the 1750s, virtually the whole world believed in the moral legitimacy of slavery. The ideal of abolition came quite late to Western Civilization, in the era of the Enlightenment.² Yet it was not Enlightenment rationalists who proposed the idea. It was only with the decision of a handful of members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) that the ideal of abolition as morally obligatory began to be spread by an identifiable organized group. This began at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758. The group agreed to cease doing business with members who bought or sold black slaves. In 1761, the London Yearly Meeting ruled that Quaker slave dealers should be disowned. Professor Davis comments on the remarkable speed with which slavery fell out of favor after millennia of acceptance:

As late as the 1770s, when the Quaker initiative finally led to a rash of militant antislavery publications on both sides of the Atlantic, no realistic leader could seriously contemplate the abolition of New World slavery—except, on the analogy with European slavery and serfdom, over a span of centuries. Yet in 1807, only thirty-four years after a delegation of British Quakers had failed to persuade the Lord of Trade to allow Virginia to levy a prohibitive tax on further slave imports, Britain outlawed the African slave trade. Twenty-six years later, Britain emancipated some 780,000 colonial slaves, paying 20 million pounds compensation to their supposed owners. Only ninety years separated the first, cautious moves of the Philadelphia Quakers

2. In some cultures, most notably Islamic, the idea has yet to take deep root.

from the emancipation edicts of France and Denmark (1848), which left Brazil, Cuba, Surinam, and the southern United States as the only important slaveholding societies in the New World. It was barely a century after the founding of the London Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1787), sixty-one years after the final abolition of slavery in New York State (1827), that Brazil freed the last black slaves in the New World. . . . From any historical perspective, this was a stupendous transformation. . . . From the distance of the late twentieth century, however, the progress of emancipation from the 1780s to the 1880s is one of the most extraordinary events in history.³

In *Tools of Dominion*, I devoted over one hundred pages to a discussion of the biblical theology of slavery.⁴ It would be unwise for me to reproduce that chapter here. It was appropriate to include such a discussion in a book dealing with the case laws of Exodus, because the case laws begin with a consideration of the purchase of a slave (Ex. 21:2–6). Slaves on their way out of a generation of servitude and into freedom would have been interested in a law governing slavery. I here reprint part of that chapter, but with modifications noted by the brackets.

* * * * *

B. The Economics of Israelite Slavery⁵

The jubilee land tenure law, *when enforced*, made it impossible for any family to amass permanently large land holdings. It is usually assumed by commentators that the jubilee land law was never enforced, but this is debatable. The sabbatical year of rest for the land was clearly not enforced, which was the reason God gave for sending Israel into captivity (Jer. 50:34; I Chron. 36:21).⁶ The jubilee land law was tied to the sabbatical year: it was to follow the seventh sabbatical year (Lev. 25:8–9). Nevertheless, the repeated unwillingness of Israelites to sell their land to those outside the family, most notably Naboth's refusal to

3. David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 108.

4. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gntools>)

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–44.

6. The sabbatical year was honored in the inter-testamental era. In 162 B.C., during his brief one-year reign, King Antiochus V (Eupator) “made peace with the people of Bethsura, who abandoned the town, having no more food there to withstand a siege, as it was a sabbatical year when the land was left fallow” (I Macc. 6:49, NEB).

sell his land to King Ahab (I Kings 21), indicates that the state must have enforced some sort of prohibition against the permanent sale of a family's land. Ahab stole Naboth's inheritance. Jezebel had him accused of blaspheming God and the king (I Kings 21:13), but this would not have been sufficient to disinherit Naboth's children or at least his nearest kinsman. The king had to steal the land (vv. 15–16). What may have taken place was the continuing refusal of greedy owners to rest their land one year in seven, but also the insistence of heirs that the jubilee year be honored, at least with respect to the redistribution of family land. Both decisions are consistent with the assumption of land hunger in a predominantly agricultural economy.

1. Small Plots of Land

A family could lease a neighboring piece of property for up to half a century, but then it reverted to the original family. We know that large families are a sign of God's covenantal blessing (Ps. 127:3–5). The larger that Israel's families grew in response to the nation's covenantal faithfulness to God, the smaller each family's inherited land holding would become. This made it economically impossible for any branch of a family to amass a large number of heathen slaves during periods of God's covenantal blessings, for it was illegal to amass permanently the large tracts of land that were necessary for the support of slaves.⁷

Thus, at the beginning of each jubilee year, when all land holdings reverted to the heirs of the original land-owners, most [rural] heathen slaves would have been released [or sold] by their owners, whether or not the law allowed them to retain ownership of them indefinitely. Heathens were allowed to buy homes in walled cities, where the jubilee land laws did not apply (Lev. 25:29–33). Those heathens who remained in slavery would have been parceled out among inheriting Israelite children when the heirs returned to their share of the family's traditional lands, thereby reducing the possibility of large-scale slave gang labor. It would also have increased the likelihood of manumission: freedom for slaves whose economic productivity, without large land holdings, would have dropped sharply. In other words, by reducing Israel's per capita capital (land), the jubilee land tenure law was designed to reduce agricultural labor productivity in Israel.⁸ This was the whole

7. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, [1868] 1957), p. 118.

8. The law of diminishing returns applied to labor: too much labor in relation to land.

idea: *to encourage covenantal dominion outside the land by encouraging Israelite emigration.*

This economic link between the size of land holdings and the economic feasibility of large-scale gang slavery is the simplest explanation for God's inclusion of the heathen slave laws within the section of Leviticus that presents the jubilee land tenure laws. One possible reason why the Bible offers no example of the nation's honoring of the jubilee land distribution laws is that politically influential owners of large slave gangs recognized that the economic value of their slave holdings would be reduced drastically if they had to return their land to the original families. Thus, any significant increase in the inter-generational slavery of heathens would have testified to a refusal by the judges to enforce the original jubilee land distribution agreement that had been agreed to by all the tribes prior to the conquest. A growing population of permanent foreign slaves would therefore have been a visible warning to Israel that they were disobeying God's law. This was the same visible warning that God had given to Egypt (Ex. 1:12, 20).

Slavery very clearly was not supposed to become a major institution in Israel. The larger the population grew—a promised blessing of God—the more valuable the land would become: increased demand. The more expensive the land became, the less would be the return from economic rents produced by an investment in slaves. Free laborers and tenant farmers would compete to work at low wages and low returns. By lowering the economic return from slaves, this law was designed to reduce the demand for slaves.

[There was a way around this limitation: some form of cooperative agriculture. If family members pooled their rural inheritances operationally, allowing a common administrator to employ slaves, larger plots could have been maintained. But the gangs of slaves that were common to the American South prior to 1865 were employed only on large plantations, which could not exist in Israel when the jubilee was enforced.]

Without cheap land, or increasingly productive land, permanent agricultural slavery is unlikely to be maintained long term.⁹ Under circumstances of increasing land scarcity, the reasons for holding slaves would then be more consumption-oriented than production-oriented: slaves as status symbols, i.e., consumer goods rather than producer goods.

9. Evsey D. Domar, "The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis," *Journal of Economic History*, XXX (1970), pp. 18–32.

2. *The American South's Fertile Land*

Because chattel slavery remained profitable in the American South prior to 1860, there is no need to resort to the thesis of slaves as merely status symbols. They were status symbols, surely, but they were also profitable. Where, then, was the South's cheap land, if this economic thesis is correct? There is evidence that it was the continuing development of the fertile lands in the West South Central region of the South—Alabama to east Texas—that kept slave prices high throughout the South, since slave owners who owned less fertile lands could profitably export slaves to the region with more fertile lands.¹⁰ But if cheap land is basic to profitable slavery, did the slave owners in the British West Indies suffer losses when land became scarce? The tentative answer is yes, since it was only when new land could be brought under cultivation that the Caribbean economies grew. The Genoveses wrote: "Thus, as early as the period 1670–90, overproduction plunged the sugar economies of Brazil and the Caribbean into crises that ruined both planters and their creditors. The pattern recurred many times. . . . When Caribbean sugar production ran afoul of market gluts, the ensuing crises led to a shift of resources to fresher land in newly developed colonies. Thus, one factor, 'land,' alone accounted for the regional economy's ability to survive the periodic purges of the market generated by the tendency toward overproduction."¹¹ They concluded: "So long as land remained available at prices unthinkable low by European standards—so long as colonial settlers faced empty spaces or spaces that could be emptied by a controlled dose of genocide—resources would be shifted, and the grim wastefulness of the system as a whole would remain disguised."¹²

What we must recognize is that the whole economic thrust of the jubilee land tenure laws, when coupled with God's promise of popula-

10. This was an important aspect of the argument by Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer in their classic 1958 article, "The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South," Part III, *ibid.*, reprinted many times. There is not much debate about this: Stanley L. Engerman, "The Effects of Slavery upon the Southern Economy: A Review of the Recent Debate," in Hugh G. J. Aitkin (ed.), *Did Slavery Pay?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), pp. 318–20. Both essays are reprinted here, as they are in Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *The Reinterpretation of American Economic History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

11. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 45–46.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

tion growth for national obedience, was *to push the Israelites out of the Promised Land*, and therefore outside the geographical boundaries where the jubilee land law, including its slave laws, operated. The jubilee law's goal was world missions and covenantal dominion, not the permanent enslavement of heathens inside tiny Israel.¹³

Neither the Roman Republic nor the Roman Empire, as a pagan society already in spiritual bondage, came under the terms of the jubilee land tenure law. That law applied to Israel because of the specific terms of the *military spoils system* of land distribution that families had agreed to prior to Israel's invasion of Canaan (Num. 36). Rome developed the *latifundia*, the huge family land holdings that apparently supported the slave gang system. The Roman land tenure system may not actually have produced slave gangs, if land holdings were divided into smaller units within the *latifundia*. Scholars still debate the issue. In any case, a legal order that permits the long-term amassing of inheritable land, and does so through such restrictions on inheritance as *primogeniture* (eldest son inherits) and *entail* (the prohibition against the permanent sale of a family's land), makes economically possible the creation of huge plantations.¹⁴ Such permanent, inheritable land holdings, if accompanied by a legal order that permits lifetime slavery, can lead to the creation of slave gangs whenever market conditions make gang labor profitable. On the other hand, whenever the legal principle of "all sons inherit" or "all children inherit" is enforced, it becomes nearly impossible to create an agricultural economy that is based on the widespread *family* ownership of large gangs of slaves. Such was to have been the case in ancient Israel, for the eldest son was limited to an inheritance of only a double portion of his father's assets (Deut. 21:17). . . .

C. Slavery and Hell¹⁵

The doctrine of perpetual slavery is nothing special when compared to the doctrine of eternal damnation. In fact, perpetual slavery is an institutional testimony to the reality of eternal damnation. It should direct the slave's attention to the fate of his eternal soul. (It should also

13. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1.

14. So, for that matter, does corporate ownership of land, either by ecclesiastical or state agencies, or by a corporate distribution of share ownership.

15. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pp. 166–68.

direct the master's attention to the same issue.) *Slavery was designed by God to be a means of evangelism in the Old Testament*. The question can therefore legitimately be raised: Is it a means of evangelism in New Testament times? For instance, why did Paul send the runaway slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon (the Epistle to Philemon)? But anyone who dares raise this obvious question today faces the verbal wrath of Christian pietists and antinomians everywhere, not to mention secular humanists.

Slavery embarrasses Christians, yet earthly slavery can sometimes offer hope. Eternal slavery is hopelessness incarnate. Eternal slavery—without productivity, without hope of escape, and with perpetual pain—is a good description of hell. Is it any wonder that the doctrine of eternal damnation is de-emphasized in preaching today? Is it any wonder that God is spoken of mostly as a God of love, and seldom as the God of indescribable eternal wrath? D. L. Moody, the turn-of-the-century American evangelist, set the pattern by generally refusing to preach about hell. He made the preposterous statement that “Terror never brought a man in yet.”¹⁶ That a major evangelist could make such a theologically unsupported statement and expect anyone to take him seriously testifies to the theologically debased state of modern evangelicalism. It has gotten no better since he said it.

Consider the theological implications of Moody's statement. God created the place of eternal terror. He revealed His plans concerning final judgment in the New Testament, unlike the Old, which is very nearly silent concerning the details of the afterlife. If God does not intend that the terror of final judgment bring people to repentance, then hell is exclusively a means of God's vengeance, for supposedly it in no way brings anyone to repentance this side of death. Moody was implicitly arguing that there is no grace attached in history to the doctrine of hell; therefore, hell must be exclusively a means of punishment. But nothing in the creation is exclusively a means of punishment for those still living. There is grace to living men in every act of God and in every biblical doctrine. There *is* grace attached to the doctrine of hell; people sometimes *do* get scared into repentance. Any warning of imminent judgment before God's final judgment can serve as a means of personal or institutional restoration. All judgments in history are simply testimonies to the coming final judgment, and therefore all of

16. Cited by Stanley N. Gundry, *Love Them In: The Proclamation Theology of Dwight L. Moody* (Chicago, 1976), p. 99.

God's temporal judgments offer both cursing and blessing.¹⁷

God punishes deceased covenant-breakers forever, not in order to reform them, but because they refused to be reformed by God's saving grace in history. Hell is not a reform school; it is a place of eternal retribution.¹⁸ God therefore holds ethical rebels in perpetual slavery. God is in this sense *the Cosmic Slaveholder*. Rebels beyond the grave do not work in order to please this Cosmic Slaveholder; they are stripped of the power to work, for labor is an aspect of dominion. They serve Him exclusively as recipients of His incomparable wrath. We may not like the idea, but this is what He says He has done and will do. No one ever escapes God's eternal slave system if he departs from this life as a moral slave to Satan rather than a moral bondservant to God. There is no "underground railroad" out of slavery in hell. This is why Christians offer the gospel of salvation to rebels against God: to enable them to escape eternal punishment and eternal slavery to the Sovereign Master of the eternal fiery whip.

In history, we are either involuntary slaves to God or voluntary bondservants to God. Both conditions are permanent beyond the grave. We either serve Him willingly in history, openly acknowledging our status as unprofitable servants in His covenantal household,¹⁹ or else beyond this life we will experience perpetual lashes from His judgmental whip as eternal slaves without hope. There is no middle ground. There is no alternative scenario. Being a bondservant to God is the essence of freedom. Being a slave to God is the essence of hell. Choose this day which condition of servitude you prefer. . . .

D. Jesus' Annulment of the Jubilee Land Laws²⁰

The fulfillment of the jubilee year by Jesus at the outset of His ministry (Luke 4:17–21) made plain the liberating aspects of the rule of Christ in history.²¹ He announced His ministry with the reading of Isaiah 61, "to preach delivery of the captives" (Luke 4:18). His intention

17. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 4.

18. I have written in greater detail regarding the biblical doctrine of hell in my Publisher's Epilogue to David Chilton's book, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

19. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17: 10). See North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 41.

20. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pp. 144–47.

21. Gary North, *Liberating Planet Earth: An Introduction to Biblical Blueprints* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gnlpe>)

was clearly the spiritual liberation of His people, and this leads to progressive maturity in the faith, which in turn is supposed to lead to liberation out of chattel slavery, *if offered by the owner* (I Cor. 7: 21b). We have our “ears pierced” (Deut. 15:17) spiritually by Christ; we become permanent adopted sons of His household. Yet even in the case of Leviticus 25, God’s goal was always liberation. These pagans were being purchased out of their covenantal slavery to demonic religion. They were being *redeemed* (bought back). They were being given an opportunity to hear the gospel and see it in operation in households covenanted to God. They were being given an opportunity to renounce paganism and thereby escape eternal slavery in the lake of fire.

Obviously, if the legal provision that allowed Israelite families to retain the lifetime services of heathen slaves, as well as to transfer ownership of the heathens’ children to the Israelites’ children, is severed from the jubilee land tenure law, then the economic possibility of establishing slave gangs becomes a reality. The legal restriction against the permanent amassing of land disappears. Thus, to argue that the lifetime slave-holding provisions of Leviticus 25 were not an integral part of the jubilee land tenure system is to argue that the history of chattel slavery in the West was in principle sanctioned by the Bible. I am arguing the opposite: *the lifetime slave-holding provisions of Leviticus 25 were an integral aspect of Israel’s jubilee land tenure laws, and therefore when God annulled the latter, He also annulled the former.* By transferring legal title to His kingdom to the gentile world (Matt. 21:43), and by visibly annulling Israel’s legal title to the land of Palestine at the time of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70,²² God thereby also annulled the Israelite land tenure laws. What had been a God-approved spoils system for a unique historical situation—the military conquest of Canaan by Israel—became a dead letter of biblical law after the fall of Jerusalem.

Constantine announced in 315 that slaves who had been condemned to work in the mines or as gladiators were to be branded on the hands or legs, not on the face.²³ This act of comparative charity led the owners, who had formerly branded their slaves, to have metal collars put around their slaves’ necks. Clearly, Constantine was no aboli-

22. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>). Cf. Chilton, *Great Tribulation*.

23. *Theodosian Code* 9:40:2; cited in Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking, 1980), p. 127.

tionist. Later legislation under Christian rulers in Rome and Byzantium was not noted for any tendency toward abolitionism.

The Christian West did not honor God's abolition of permanent slavery through Christ's fulfillment of the jubilee year. The Renaissance revived the example of the Roman Empire: reinstituting slavery to farm sugar plantations—a new agricultural development—in the second half of the fourteenth century.²⁴ The Western hemisphere's plantations from the fifteenth century onward, and especially the American South in the nineteenth century, made slave gang agriculture profitable again. The church did not recognize that God no longer allows His people and those under His civil covenant the legal right to amass slaves and deed them to the next generation.

It was the creation of huge land grants in Virginia especially, but also in other southern colonies in the United States, from the late seventeenth century through the eighteenth, that initially made economically possible North American Negro slavery, with its extensive use of gang labor. The Virginia legislature repeatedly made land grants to politically favored families of many thousands of acres per family.²⁵ In New England, the towns did not make such huge land grants. They multiplied towns rather than allowing individual families to amass huge tracts of land.²⁶ Without large plantations, slave gang labor was not economically feasible in the New England area. While New Englanders were heavily involved in the slave trade as owners of shipping facilities and as investors in the sea trade, they were seldom owners of slaves.²⁷ In 1652, Rhode Island actually passed a law against Negro slavery, but there is no evidence that the law was ever enforced. Newport, Rhode Island, became the center of the slave trade in the next century.²⁸

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24. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, pp. 59–66.

25. Leonard Woods Larabee, *Conservatism in Early American History* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press Great Seal Books, [1948] 1962), pp. 32–36.

26. John W. Reps, *Town Planning in Frontier America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1965] 1969), ch. 5; Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1963] 1965), chaps. 2, 8, 9; Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 10–13, 70–72.

27. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 66–71.

28. Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, 4 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1936] 1964), II, p. 30.

E. The Ethics of Slavery

An Anglo-American economic historian is tempted to dwell on the economics of Anglo-American slavery and Anglo-American abolitionism in relation to Anglo-American capitalism, topics whose scholarly literature seems to grow exponentially year by year.²⁹ But the far more important and more lasting question is the relationship between Christianity and slavery, which in the context of the post-medieval West, is related to the question of Christianity and racism. Here is a blot on the church of Jesus Christ that appears, in retrospect, to be the product of an incomparable moral blindness, yet for many centuries it was not recognized as such by Christianity. Of course, it was also not recognized to be a blot on Judaism, Islam, or any other major religion. Slavery throughout man's history was universal until the nineteenth century. But because the United States fought a civil war over the question of the constitutional legality of abolitionism (1861–65), and also because the United States was (and remains) the nation in which Protestant fundamentalism has had the largest representation, the issue of the close connection between Bible-affirming Protestantism and Negro slavery refuses to go away. Forrest G. Wood, a dedicated and self-conscious secular historian and the son of a conservative Protestant family, has described this Christian racist mentality well: the arrogance of faith.³⁰ What went wrong?

What went wrong, as I argued in *Tools of Dominion* and also argue here, was the refusal of Christians to take seriously the full implications of Jesus Christ's annulment of the jubilee laws (Luke 4). When the jubilee ceased, the only legitimate biblical justification for permanent servitude also ceased. But Christians have not taken seriously

29. Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1980); David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Roger L. Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise: The Political Economy of Slavery, Emancipation, and the American Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Barbara L. Solow (ed.), *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989). A week before I completed this chapter, Fogel was awarded half of the one million dollar 1993 Nobel Prize in economics, which he shared with economic historian Douglas North (no relation).

30. Forrest G. Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1990). On his self-conscious secularism, see page xx.

either the jubilee year or its New Covenant annulment. Those few who do take it seriously, if only as an ethical model, generally deny that it has been completely annulled forever. This blindness toward the Mosaic law, its context, and its functions led to the near-universal acceptance by the church of the moral legitimacy of slavery.

1. *A Southern Baptist Defends Slavery*

In 1856, less than a century after the decision of the Philadelphia Quakers to place negative economic sanctions on those members of their fellowship who owned slaves or trafficked in them, Rev. Thornton Stringfellow, a Baptist from Virginia, wrote a widely distributed essay, "A Scriptural View," in which he appealed to the Bible in defense of slavery. Rev. Stringfellow appealed to Abraham's ownership of servants, Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians during the famine, and Job's ownership of servants. He also appealed to Leviticus 25:45–46. He noted that not one prophet arose in Israel to challenge the legitimacy of involuntary heathen slavery.³¹ He went on to argue: "It is from God himself; it authorizes that people, to whom he had become *king and law-giver*, to purchase men and women as property; to hold them and their posterity in bondage; and to will them to their *children as a possession forever; and more, it allows foreign slaveholders to settle and live among them; to breed slaves and sell them.*"³²

This is correct but misleading. Leviticus 25 did not authorize the breeding of slaves for sale by citizens of the holy commonwealth. When an Israelite household bought a slave, that slave had to remain in the household of that family until he died, or was released voluntarily, or was disfigured through battery by the owner, or was adopted by another Israelite household. The same was true of the slave's children. Leviticus 25:44–45 is clear: Israelites could buy slaves only from foreigners, either outside the nation or resident aliens dwelling inside the nation's borders. Thus, even on the assumption that this law was still in force, no one in the American South who claimed to be a United States citizen could lawfully appeal to this text to justify breeding slaves for sale.

Stringfellow saw that the previous Levitical law, which prohibited the Israelites from compelling their fellow Israelites from serving as

31. Thornton Stringfellow, "A Scriptural View of Slavery" (1856), in *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South*, ed. Eric L. McKittrick (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 92.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

permanent bondservants, is proof that the heathen slave could be treated differently under the Mosaic law's provisions. The Israelite servant went out in the jubilee.³³ Having said this, Strinfellow then went to the New Testament: "I affirm then, first, (and no man denies,) that Jesus Christ has not abolished slavery by a prohibitory command: and second, I affirm, he has introduced no new moral principle which can work its destruction, under the gospel dispensation; . . ."³⁴ He referred to several passages in Peter's and Paul's epistles that give rules to servants.³⁵ He ignored Luke 4:18–23.

2. Judicial Continuity

A hundred and one years later, Professor John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary wrote this Politically Incorrect statement: "But though slavery as the property of one man in the labour of another is not intrinsically wrong, it does not follow that we ought to seek to perpetuate slavery. Though the Scripture exercises an eloquent reserve in refraining from the proscription of the institution, and though it does not lay down principles which evince its intrinsic wrong, nevertheless the Scripture does encourage and require the promotion of those conditions which make slavery unnecessary."³⁶ Lest he be mistaken for a would-be confessor to Simon Legree, he wrote in a footnote: "The thesis that slavery is not intrinsically wrong does not in the least justify the 'gigantic evils' frequently accompanying the institution." He praised William Wilberforce and his evangelical Clapham Sect of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³⁷ But Murray's exposition is, theologically speaking, a mild-mannered, guarded, but nonetheless unmistakable condemnation of nineteenth-century abolitionism: the only abolitionism that any American remembers. On the question of slavery, Wilberforce was an absolutist; it was his moral absolutism that attracted his followers and steeled their will to do political battle in England for over four decades, despite seemingly impervious political resistance. The Clapham Sect would have rejected Murray's exposition as in principle on the side of the slave holders. Abolitionism's goal, after all, was abolition. It was not the reform of

33. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–97.

36. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1957] 1964), p. 100.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 101n.

slavery that Wilberforce called for, but its permanent, universal abolition by civil law.

Murray did not refer to Leviticus 25. Had he done so, he would have raised a whole series of issues that he was not prepared to discuss in a short chapter on labor. The main issue that he did not choose to raise was the question of *judicial continuity*. If slavery has not been judicially annulled by the New Testament, then by what judicial standard should civil judges evaluate the legitimacy or illegitimacy of any particular instance of permanent slavery? He stated plainly that the abolitionist impulse is not biblical. This question then becomes theologically inescapable: *By what standard?* By what standard are specific cases of slavery to be judged?

Murray was skirting the issue, just as several generations of Christian ethicists have skirted it. Prior to the American Civil War, the Calvinist scholar Moses Stuart of Andover Seminary in 1835 appealed to Leviticus 25:44–46 as the proof text that refuted the Christian abolitionists' claim that slavery is sinful in itself.³⁸ Yet Stuart personally regarded slavery as an institution that should and would gradually fade away without legislative pressure. His position was morally ambiguous.³⁹ He was not alone in his ambiguity.

During the Civil War, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, the Andover journal, published three essays by Elijah P. Barrows, whose exegetical strategy was to ignore the Old Testament texts on slavery and then claim that the New Testament's ethic was against it. He moved from the text to an alleged Gospel spirit.⁴⁰ This was close to the Christian abolitionists' pre-War view.

Charles Hodge, the leading conservative Presbyterian theologian in America, 1825–1877, author of *Systematic Theology* (1871–72), took an even more neutral position than Stuart's prior to the War: slavery as not sinful in itself, but subject to legislative reforms to do away with certain evil aspects of slavery as then practiced.⁴¹ When the Southern congregations in 1861 seceded from the Northern Presbyterian Church, both the Old School and the New School denominations, thereby matching the secession of the Southern states from the United

38. Robert Bruce Mullin, "Biblical Critics and the Battle Over Slavery," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, LXI (Summer 1983), p. 215. Cf. J. H. Giltner, "Moses Stuart and the Slavery Controversy: A Study in the Failure of Moderation," *Journal of Religious Thought*, XVIII (1961), p. 31.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 216–17.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 218–19.

States, Hodge wrote five *Princeton Review* essays critical of Southern slavery, calling for its abolition, but still he refused to say that the Bible condemns slavery. He appealed to nationalism instead.⁴² This theological compromise led to the destruction of Old School Presbyterianism after its reunion of the pro-abolition New School wing in 1869.⁴³ In 1875, biblical higher criticism began to invade the United States and its theological seminaries. Mullin wrote of the Unitarians' response to the Calvinists' exegetical ambivalence on slavery: "Bound by their dogmatic presuppositions and their belief that the Bible contained a perfect moral law, they were unable to deal with the biblical ambivalence towards slavery. The obvious solution . . . was to abandon the belief in the infallibility of Scripture, and instead to acknowledge the historical relativity of the biblical record."⁴⁴

Here is the exegetical problem: if there is unmodified judicial continuity between the Mosaic law and today, then there is no biblically legitimate justification for the compulsory abolition of chattel slavery. This conclusion would also involve pulling into the New Covenant era all the other laws governing slavery. The ethicists shudder at this prospect. Most of them remain prudently silent. Others search for a principle of judicial discontinuity, but they never find it. Why not? Because they do not analyze contextually the only law in the Bible that authorizes inter-generational chattel slavery. What is its context? The jubilee laws.

F. The Jubilee Context

It is my contention that the laws governing permanent heathen slaves were an unbreakable part of the jubilee laws. If I am correct, this means that the exegetical case in favor of the annulment of the heathen slave laws rests on the New Testament's annulment of all of the jubilee laws. It is also my contention that if the heathen slave laws are not subsumed under the jubilee laws, then there is no New Testament case for the abolition of chattel slavery. On the contrary, abolitionism itself would be anti-biblical, since the Mosaic law clearly authorized slavery. Abolitionism's universal condemnation of slavery would then go against the Bible's authorization of a certain type of inter-genera-

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 221–22.

43. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

44. Mullin, p. 222.

tional chattel slavery. Abolitionism would then be sinful, which John Murray refused to write but obviously believed.

There are Christian social analysts today, on the right and the left, who call for the reintroduction of the jubilee laws. The conservatives want the jubilee's law regarding debt repudiation, while the liberationists want its laws of land redistribution, which they think should be applied to all forms of privately owned (but never state-owned) property. No one, however, is publicly calling for the restoration of inter-generational chattel slavery. This is a typical example of smorgasbord Christianity: "A little of this, a little of that, but not *that* over there, certainly; I never touch the stuff."

To understand the law of inter-generational heathen slavery, we first must understand the purposes of the jubilee law. Its overriding purpose was judicial: to create an inter-generational link between the families and tribes of the conquest with their heirs, culminating in the advent of the promised Seed.

Citizenship was by covenant: by circumcision and by participation in the national feasts, especially Passover. But this was not sufficient; household slaves also were circumcised (Gen. 17:12–13) and participated in the Passover (Ex. 12:44). *What identified a citizen in Israel was his eligibility for numbering in the army of Israel.* This made him a free man, or as citizens are often called, a freeman. Who was eligible? Adult circumcised men who were: (1) members in good standing in the church, and (2) not under bondage. This would have included circumcised men who lived in walled cities, whether or not they owned real estate, and heirs of the original families that conquered Canaan. *An inheritance in rural land was a covenant-keeper's guaranteed legal status as a freeman.* He could permanently lose this civil status only through ecclesiastical excommunication, i.e., covenant-breaking.

The naturalized citizen was no less a citizen. He could not be enslaved even though he had no inheritance in the land. The inheritance proved that a man was a citizen, but it was not necessary that every citizen have an inheritance. The inheritance was proof of citizenship; it was not the only proof. Proof of adoption was equally valid.

What this points to is *the centrality of the doctrine of adoption in Israel's civil order.* The doctrine of adoption was placed by Ezekiel's revelation at the center of Israel's history. Israel had been adopted by God as His wife.

Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time

was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and brodered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 16:8–14).

For the convert to Judaism, adoption was the only way into guaranteed legal status as a free man. This could be family adoption. An Israelite family could adopt him and give him a portion of the family's inheritance. This is why the Jews were furious with Jesus' gospel of redemption: *it offered full legal status as free men to any person through adoption*. They understood exactly what He was doing legally. Paul wrote of his brethren in the flesh: "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 9:3–5). The Jews had been the adopted ones, and now the gentiles would be, too. All of this liberating judicial inheritance would come to the gentiles through adoption by Christ. He was offering them liberation through His redemption. *He was buying them out of slavery*—slavery to sin above all, but also slavery in the broadest sense.

Christians should acknowledge that *Jesus Christ was the ultimate abolitionist*. He paid the slaves' ultimate Owner the price required: the sacrifice even to death of a perfectly righteous man. But because those redeemed by Christ have been legally adopted, *they can never again fall into the ultimate judicial status of servitude: sin and eternal death*. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom

he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:28–29). The issue is *judicial immunity*: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33–34).

G. Slavery as a Model of Sin

Heathen residents of Israel could be permanently enslaved to repay their debts. The presence of permanent slaves in Israelite households was a visible testimony of what it means to be outside the inheritance of God. Slave status was like a permanent sign in front of a person's eyes: "No Exit." This was the representative mark of eternal punishment. There is no exit for Adam's heirs apart from adoption into the family of God through Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son. The Seed—the culmination of the Abrahamic promise—lawfully inherited the land. Elect gentiles are heirs of this promise. But the focus of this promise is liberation from sin. Those who trust in the law for their inheritance are disinherited, replaced by those adopted by grace. This is why Jesus' message outraged the Jews. Paul spelled out the message in its judicial context: *promise, inheritance, and seed*. He began his discussion with the redeemed person's escape from the imputation of Adam's sin.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father law, but Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no

transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be (Rom. 4:8–18).

It was Jesus Christ who sacrificed His lawful inheritance in the Promised Land in order to bring His brethren through adoption into the family of God. The son of David abandoned His lawful inheritance for the sake of His elect. In doing this—delivering to them the promised inheritance—He gave them their irrevocable judicial status as freemen.

It is worth noting that the judicial precedent for this act was Joseph's decision to forfeit his status as the namesake of a tribe of Israel for the sake of his Egyptian sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48). His father Jacob acquiesced to this transfer of inheritance: the name. Jacob thereby adopted into his household the foreign-born sons of an Egyptian mother: gentiles. Thus, even prior to the announcement regarding the promised Seed, Shiloh (Gen. 49:10), there had been an adoption by the patriarch which disinherited his son for the sake of this beloved son's gentile sons. Joseph, the kinsman-redeemer of Israel/Jacob, was the primary redemptive model in the Old Covenant for Jesus, the Kinsman-Redeemer of the New Israel in the New Covenant.

H. Outraged Slave Owners

This had always been the threat to slave owners in Israel: a man might adopt another man's slave as his own son, thereby providing him with a lawful inheritance. This legal status as an adopted son could not be taken away except through ecclesiastical excommunication, and even then, his sons would inherit.⁴⁵ At the sound of the trumpet in the jubilee year, the adopted slave would go free. It was the

45. To inherit, the sons of an excommunicated man would have had to renounce their father's act of rebellion. In the case of a man who became a eunuch while in slavery, the law is silent regarding his sons. It seems to me that their father's legal status at the time of their conception would have been legally determinative. They would have inherited at the jubilee.

sound of the trumpet in the jubilee year that invoked every heir's legal status as a free man.

There was nothing that a slave owner could do to prevent this. If a lawful heir to the original conquest was willing to dilute his descendants' *economic* inheritance, he could share with anyone an undiluted *legal* inheritance. The point of the jubilee land law was not that it promised the heir a guarantee of some sort of economic future. Rather, it identified him and his descendants as free men. This was the ultimate form of civil liberation that any foreigner could hope for: to be an adopted son of a citizen of Israel. This grant of liberation could be offered to any slave. But there was no way that the slave could purchase this judicial grant of liberty. He had nothing of his own to give in exchange. His liberation was the result of an act of grace on the part of a head of an Israelite household.

The possibility of "formerly heathen" slave liberation always existed, but we have no record of any non-Levite who reduced his sons' economic inheritance for the sake of liberating his own slaves or other men's slaves through adoption. This indicates that God's covenant blessing of population growth was not granted for very long, and men clung to their few acres of land in the expectation that it was really worth more than the liberation of other men's slaves.

The slave, of course, could refuse this offer of liberation. He might prefer bondage to liberation, servitude to inheritance. If you regard this possibility of refusal as being so unlikely that it must be the speculation of a madman, consider the response of millions of sin-cursed slaves to the message of the gospel. They will not accept Christ's offer of liberation. They know that there are three conditions attached to this offer of freeman's status: acceptance of the adopting man's name; lifetime subordination to a priesthood; taking personal responsibility for one's actions. So it would have been in Mosaic Israel. First, the adopter would have a bad reputation among slave owners: the destroyer of the value of the lawful inheritance of slave-owning families. Second, the legal status of a freeman in Israel could be lost through excommunication. Third, his economic condition could sink quite low if he was incompetent.

But wouldn't a gentile slave have regarded these conditions as mild compared to lifetime servitude for himself and his heirs? Probably. Then what about an Israelite slave? But how could there have been any Israelite slaves? Didn't the jubilee law protect them from slavery? Not if they suffered excommunication and then fell into servitude through

an economic crisis or some other negative sanction. This scenario is exactly what Jesus was threatening the Jews with if they rejected His offer of adoption: *excommunication, negative sanctions, and slavery*. He was the true High Priest who could lawfully excommunicate God's enemies, an authority that He demonstrated when He used whips against the money changers in the temple. Did the Jews heed His warning? Not many did. Did they assent to being adopted by Him? Not many did. But gentiles did.

I. Biblical Law: Death and Resurrection

At this point, I ask myself: Could there be any Christian who has read this far and still not understand what the jubilee law was all about? Then I ask myself: Why do the commentators emphasize the jubilee law's economic inheritance and its supposed ramifications, applications, and implications? Why have expositors who are masters of Hebrew, with years of experience, failed to recognize what is so incredibly obvious that it screams at the reader? The moment anyone puts three obvious pieces together, he concludes that any predominantly economic interpretation of the jubilee is ridiculous. The three pieces are: (1) God's covenantal blessing of population growth; (2) a fixed supply of rural real estate; (3) an ever-shrinking economic inheritance in rural land under the conditions of covenantal blessing. I ask myself: Why has this not been obvious? Why (as far as I know) am I the first expositor who has seen all this?⁴⁶

The most important factor in exegeting specific Old Testament laws is a presupposition: *the Mosaic law is a coherent system that culminates in the work of Jesus Christ*. Some Mosaic laws were buried with Him; others were resurrected with Him. Seed laws, food laws (priestly), and land laws stay buried. They are replaced, respectively, by the law of spiritual adoption, the Lord's Supper, and the worldwide kingdom of God. Once a person understands this simple preliminary set of hermeneutical rules, it takes only a little imagination and some attentive Bible reading to make sense of God's law.

This is not to say that making the real-world applications is easy. This may take a lifetime of study in just one field. But the judicial principles are easy to understand, and not very difficult to become familiar

46. If there have been others, their observations have not been picked up by the major commentators.

with.⁴⁷

Conclusion

My conclusion in Chapter 4 of *Tools of Dominion* is my conclusion here, which I reprint below. I must add here an observation regarding freemanship. A freeman was eligible to serve in God's holy army. A slave was not a freeman. The jubilee law identified freemen: heirs of the original conquest. But they were not the only freemen in Israel. Circumcised resident aliens could be adopted by the tribes governing walled cities and by rural families.

Economically, the jubilee inheritance law, if enforced, would have tended toward the manumission of heathen slaves. The net cost of owning slaves would have grown high as the size of inherited agricultural parcels shrank in response to a growing population. The same would also have been true in walled cities. Thus, we must regard the judicial aspect of the heathen slave law as more important than the economic: the Mosaic law's identification of freeman status for land-owning heirs of the conquest, so long as they remained members of the ecclesiastical covenant.

When Jesus annulled the jubilee laws, He annulled the heathen slave law. He removed the judicial basis for inter-generational slavery. In this sense, Jesus was an abolitionist. While it took the church over 17 centuries to begin to preach abolition, this legal and moral position was nevertheless implied by the abolition of the jubilee law. When covenantal freemanship no longer tied in any way to landed inheritance within the boundaries of Israel, but came exclusively through spiritual adoption into God's family, there was no longer any covenantal purpose for inter-generational heathen slavery. There was also no longer any covenantal purpose for geographical Israel.

As for the economics of the heathen slave law, the Conclusion in *Tools of Dominion* suffices.⁴⁸

* * * * *

Servitude exists because sin exists and because God's judgments in history and eternity also exist. This was Augustine's argument a millennium and a half ago, an argument that was old when he offered it:

47. This is why God required that the Mosaic law be read to the assembled nation one year in seven (Deut. 31:10–13).

48. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pp. 203–6.

slavery is one of God's penal sanctions against sin.⁴⁹ Richard Baxter warned slave owners in 1673: "If their sin have enslaved them to you, yet Nature made them your equals."⁵⁰

Covenant theology teaches that slavery is an inescapable concept. Slavery's positive model is the indentured servant who buys his way out of poverty, or who is released in the sabbatical year or jubilee year. He learns the skills and worldview of dominion. He becomes self-governed under God, a free man. Slavery becomes a means of liberation when coupled with biblical ethics. The fundamental issue, as always, is ethical rather than economic. His ability to buy his way out is indicative of a change in his ethical behavior.

Slavery's negative model is God's judgment of covenant-breakers throughout eternity. He consigns them first to hell and then, at the resurrection, to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15). God places people on the whipping block, and then He flogs them forever. Of course, what they actually experience for eternity is far more horrifying than the comparatively minor inconvenience of an eternal whip. I am only speaking figuratively of whips; the reality of eternal torment is far, far worse than mere lashes. Thus, the legal right of some people to enslave others under the limits imposed by God's revealed law is based on the ultimate legal right of God to impose eternal torment on covenant-breakers. Biblical servitude is a warning to sinners as well as a means of liberation.

What I am arguing is simple: *it is not chattel slavery as such that appalls most covenant-breakers and their Christian ideological accomplices; rather, it is the doctrine of eternal punishment.* The denial of the New Testament doctrine of eternal punishment, above all other denials, is the touchstone of modern humanism. It is this doctrine, above all others, that humanists reject. They stand, clenched fists waving in the air, and shout their defiance to God, "You have no authority over us!" But He does. They proclaim, "There is no hell!" But there is. And the lake of fire will be even worse.

For all his protests, modern man nevertheless still accepts the legitimacy of slavery. Humanists understand implicitly that the right to enslave others is an attribute of God's sovereignty. They declare the

49. Augustine, *City of God*, Book 19, Chap. 15. Cf. R. W. Carlyle and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Medieval Political Theory in the West*, 6 vols., 2nd ed. (London: Blackwood, [1927] 1962), I, p. 113.

50. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (London: Robert White for Nevil Simmons, 1678), Part II, *Christian Oeconomicks*, p. 71. The first edition appeared in 1673.

state as the true God of humanity, and then they proclaim the right of the state to enslave men.⁵¹ They have created the modern penal system, with its heavy reliance on imprisonment, yet have rejected the criminal's obligation to make restitution to the victim. They allow murderers to go free after a few years of imprisonment or incarceration in a mental institution, to murder again, for humanists are unwilling to allow the state to turn the murderer's soul over to God as rapidly as possible, so that God may deal with him eternally. They regard man as the sovereign judge, not God. They have invented the slave-master institution of the modern prison, while they have steadily rejected the legitimacy of capital punishment. Better to let murderers go free, humanists assert, than to acknowledge covenantally and symbolically that the state has a heavenly judge above it, and that God requires human judges to turn murderers over to Him for His immediate judgment, once the earthly courts have declared them guilty as charged.

The humanist abolitionist tries to put God in the dock. He tries to put the state on the judgment throne of God. What he hates is the Bible, not slavery as such. The question is never slavery vs. no slavery. The question is: *Who will be the slave-master, and who will be the slave?* Autonomous man wants to put God and His law in bondage. On judgment day, this strategy will be exposed for the covenant-breaking revolution that it has always been. The abolitionists will then learn what full-time slavery is all about. It is a lesson that will be taught to them for eternity.

The spiritual heirs of Pharaoh's Hebrew agents (Ex. 5:20–21) are with us still. Christians are in spiritual and cultural bondage to the theology of the power religion, and therefore to the state. They must prepare for another exodus, meaning they should be prepared to experience at least a share of the preliminary plagues, just as the Israelites of Moses' day went through the first three out of 10. It is nevertheless time to leave Egypt, leeks and onions notwithstanding.

We must be prepared for numerous objections from Pharaoh's authorized and subsidized representatives inside the camp of the faithful. They owe their positions of influence to Pharaoh and his taskmasters, and they will not give up their authority without a confrontation. They will complain that their potential liberators are at fault for the increased burdens that Christians suffer (Ex. 5:20–21). They will contin-

51. Libertarian anarchists are exceptions to this rule, since they do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the state.

ue to sing the praises of the welfare state. They will continue to sing the praises of tax-supported “neutral” education. They will tell the faithful that humanist slavery is freedom, and biblical freedom is barbaric. They will attract many followers within the camp, for there will always be camp followers close by any army. Choose this day whom you will serve.

31

MANDATORY REDEMPTION UPON PAYMENT

And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption. And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight. And if he be not redeemed in these years, then he shall go out in the year of jubile, both he, and his children with him. For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 25:47–55).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is that deliverance out of bondage is an act of God's grace. The central figure in biblical redemption is the *kinsman-redeemer*, who in the Mosaic Covenant was the closest relative to the person who has been sold into bondage. The kinsman-redeemer was also the blood avenger (Num. 35:12). He was an agent of sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ As an

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia:

agent, he was part of a hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant model.² The two points are always linked.

A. Payment and Liberation

The universal redemption of Israelite freemen out of bondage was to be automatic in the fiftieth year, the jubilee year. On the day of atonement in the jubilee year, the day on which the ram's horn sounded, no Israelite heir of the original conquest could lawfully be kept in bondage except for criminals and those who, through renunciation of the covenant or by excommunication, had lost their judicial status as freemen.

This law added another way of escape for the Israelite bondservant: *redemption by his kinsman-redeemer*. The first form of redemption—the jubilee—required no payment to the slave owner; the second did. The first was based on judicial inheritance; the second was based on personal grace by the nearest of kin.

Why would anyone have sold himself to a resident alien? Because he had finally run out of income. This raises another question: Had he already leased his land to another? I think he had. The sabbatical year system of morally mandatory interest-free charitable loans would have protected a person with a farm to return to. Defaulting on this kind of loan, he would have sold himself to another Israelite to repay it. His temporary owner then had to care for him and his family, although without paying him wages, and then was required to give him food and animals in the sabbatical year (Deut. 15:14–15). This implies that the man in year seven owned his own land to return to with his new flock. But the man in Leviticus 25 was in such desperate straits that he had to sell himself and his family into bondage until the next jubilee year. He would not be entitled to assets out of his master's capital at the end of his term of service. He had become a stranger in the land. This was only permitted by God until a kinsman-redeemer bought him back, or until he could buy his way out of bondage, or until the jubilee's trumpet sounded. But the foreigner was under no obligation to pay him a wage. This made the Israelite slave especially helpless.

B. God's Designated Agents

The kinsman-redeemer was God's designated agent of family re-

American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Sutton, ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

demption. He was the one who had the primary authority to buy back a close relative who had been forced to sell himself into bondservice.³ That someone in his family had been reduced to such a desperate, humiliating act was a mark of family shame. It was such a shameful thing that a kinsman-redeemer would have felt some degree of moral obligation to make the purchase. But, as we shall see, there were also economic incentives involved.

An Israelite was supposed to serve God as God's designated agent in Old Covenant history. If an Israelite fell under the family authority of a resident alien, this would interfere with his service to God. A covenant-breaker would become an economic intermediary standing between God and the Israelite.

Then why was the resident alien allowed to buy an Israelite? Because he had been economically successful. Verse 47 identifies the nature of his success: "And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee. . . ." His wealth not only enabled him to buy an Israelite; it authorized him to do so. The Mosaic law recognized that covenant-breakers sometimes possess skills that are more effective in meeting the demands of consumers than those possessed by covenant-keepers. These skills may be able to be imitated. By subordinating themselves to the authority of a rich resident alien, the poor Israelite and members of his family were placed in an educational relationship under an economically productive family. The Mosaic law acknowledged that it was better to be under the authority of an economically successful covenant-breaker than to live a life of economic failure, i.e., bankruptcy.

This indicates that God wants His people to be economically productive. He was willing to have covenant-keepers subordinate themselves to covenant-breakers as a means of educating covenant-keepers in the techniques of wealth accumulation. This education was a positive sanction of bondage.

C. Customer Authority

Nothing is said in this passage that would have prohibited another Israelite from buying the poor man. What is affirmed is that the resident alien could also enter the market. He was authorized by God's law to become a competitive bidder in the market's auction for the poor Israelite's labor services. This raised the market price of these services. Why did God allow this? First, in order to allocate scarce labor services

3. I use the word *slavery* to refer to the permanent enslavement of heathens.

according to the demand of customers. Second, in order to enable the poor Israelite to become a more efficient economic agent of customers. He had to become the subordinate agent of a covenant-keeper—a rich one. He would have to hew wood and draw water in a covenant-breaker's household until the day of his redemption. He would learn from the most aggressive bidder in the local market.

The covenant-breaker, acting as the *economic* agent of customers was allowed to purchase the capitalized labor services of covenant-keepers in order to meet the demands of customers. The scarce economic resource of labor would then be channeled into goods and services that were demanded by customers. What this means is that *preserving customer authority in Israel* was more fundamental in God's law than preserving freeman legal status of bankrupt Israelites, at least until redemption took place or the jubilee's trumpet sounded. In this case, that which served consumers most efficiently was authorized by God's law. A bankrupt Israelite's legal status as a freeman was not to be defended, free of charge, at the expense of the consumer.

The kinsman-redeemer could lawfully buy back the servant's legal status as a freeman, but this involved a risk on his part. He would probably have had to take over the care of the man and his family, for they had no land to return to. Freemanship was not a free gift to a landless Israelite until the day of jubilee. Someone had to pay: the kinsman-redeemer.

A man in bondage retained the right to buy his freedom: "... or if he be able, he may redeem himself." Where would he get the money to redeem himself? Probably from an inheritance. A relative died and left him the purchase price of his redemption.

D. A Stronger Competitor

The resident alien had no obligation to pay a wage to an Israelite who had been sold into bondage. In contrast, the Israelite who purchased another Israelite had to pay a wage (Lev. 25:39–40).⁴ In both cases, the bondservant would go free in the jubilee year. Since the buyer was buying an expected stream of net income until the jubilee, which buyer could expect a larger stream of net income? Presumably, the resident alien. He did not have to pay a wage; the Israelite buyer did.

The resident alien was in a stronger bidding position than an Is-

4. Chapter 30.

raelite buyer, but the Israelite might decide to outbid the alien in order to avoid the shame in Israel of the sale of an Israelite to a resident alien. Altruism and religious pride have limits, however; at some price, the Israelite bidders would have dropped out of the auction. This means that those Israelites who defaulted on the largest sums would have been most likely to serve in the households of resident aliens. The resident alien could better afford to bid a higher price for purchasing a debtor.⁵ Also, in the jubilee year, the Israelite departed without capital from the household of a resident alien. Had he been under the authority of an Israelite, he could have saved his wages. Conclusion: the more money a man owed, the more likely that only a resident alien could afford to buy him to discharge the man's debt. It was therefore better to owe less money than more money, in the hope that an Israelite would buy you in a crisis, out of charity. Charity has limits.

The greater the man's debt had been, the longer his years of servitude. This system of bondage was therefore a model of hell. Greater debts resulted in more burdensome servitude. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).⁶ The difference was this: Israel had the jubilee year for those Israelites who were heirs of the conquest and who were still members of the ecclesiastical covenant. Hell has no jubilee year of release. There is no longer a jubilee year. Jesus Christ, the cosmic Kinsman-Redeemer, abolished it: definitively (Luke 4:18–21),⁷ progressively (through the adoption of gentiles: Paul's ministry), and finally (A.D. 70). Apart from His redemption, there is no escape from eternal servitude.

This means that the greater the debt, the more money the kinsman-redeemer would be required to pay to redeem his relative, or else the longer the man would have remained in bondage. The greater the

5. Once the auction price of the bondservant matched the debt he owed, any additional money raised by the bidding process went to the bondservant. This would have placed a loose cap on the bidding, since the additional money could be used by the bondservant to buy his way to freedom. The buyer was then subsidizing a reduced return on his investment: a shorter term of service.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

debt, the greater the price of redemption; the greater the debt, the greater the grace of redemption.

E. A New Master

The Israelite who had been purchased from a resident alien was subsequently to be treated by his relative as a hired servant. He was to be paid a wage: “And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight” (v. 53). This means that the kinsman-redeemer was leasing his relative’s labor services, not simply liberating him. The poor man had no land to return to. Until the jubilee year came, he was tied to the kinsman-redeemer unless the latter voluntarily released him.

Then why buy him at all? First, to overcome the shame of the family: to liberate a brother from bondage in the household of a foreigner. Second, to keep the resident alien from profiting at the expense of an unpaid Israelite servant. If the price of labor had risen since the day that the stranger bought the man, the resident alien was reaping an entrepreneurial profit. The unexpected rise in the value of labor services was being pocketed by the foreigner. The jubilee law authorized the kinsman-redeemer to buy the future labor services of his relative, which would run out at the next jubilee. He paid the original purchase price minus the years already served. The value of these labor services was higher than when the alien purchased the Israelite, but the purchase price per year of servitude remaining was fixed by the jubilee law. The kinsman-redeemer was in a position to re-claim from the alien all remaining entrepreneurial profits in an agricultural venture, should they continue. The tithe on these profits would then revert to the Levites.

1. An Economic Return

The kinsman-redeemer would have had to pay his kinsman a wage. This leads us to the third point: the presence of an economic return. What was the nature of this return? The kinsman-redeemer could always hire labor services on a piece-rate basis. Why, economically speaking, would he commit himself to buying an Israelite, who would be owed a wage? Answer: to reduce his risk. The kinsman-redeemer might buy his relative for the same reason that producers buy goods to put into an inventory. If a producer has very little time to get delivery of the particular resource input, he has to pay a higher price to

buy it “off the shelf”—some seller’s shelf. Instead, he puts it on his own shelf.⁸ Keeping an inventory is a substitute for knowing the future perfectly, just as holding cash is. If we knew the future perfectly, we could time production and sales so well that we would need neither inventories nor cash in reserve.⁹

By purchasing his kinsman out of bondage, the kinsman-redeemer would have secured a permanent employee for himself until the jubilee year. The relative was still a bondservant who was not allowed to walk away. He was legally tied to the household of his redeemer until he could afford to redeem himself or the jubilee came. But he was at least out from under the authority of a resident alien. He would henceforth receive a wage. He was better off.

The kinsman-redeemer could buy his relative out of bondage at a price commensurate with the years remaining until the jubilee: a prorated price that dropped as the jubilee approached (v. 50). When the alien paid for the Israelite, the redemption price was locked in by civil law. The alien could not readily sell the capitalized services of the Israelite to the highest bidder, who probably would have been another resident alien. The price paid by the original purchaser established the maximum price that a kinsman had to pay to redeem his relative, and this price steadily dropped as the jubilee year approached. It is unlikely that any subsequent buyer would pay the original purchaser more than the redeemer’s price, for he would have risked seeing the kinsman-redeemer buy the man out of bondage at a price based on the original owner’s purchase price. It was legal for a resident alien to buy an Israelite servant, but the jubilee law placed limits on this market.

2. Capitalized Value

The terms of redemption were the same for Israelite bondservants as for rural land (Lev. 25:14–16). It was a prorated redemption: the redeemer had to pay only for the time remaining before the jubilee. This means that the purchase price would be averaged on an annualized

8. Prior to widespread computerization of inventories in the 1980s, and prior to Federal Express and other overnight delivery private mail firms, inventories in American business were larger. The “just in time” techniques of computerized production did not exist, or existed only in a few firms.

9. If no one needed cash in reserve, there would be no cash; its value would fall to zero. Transactions would be by barter only. We cannot really imagine such a moneyless world, for it is a world of man’s omniscience, which is neither possible nor conceivable (Deut. 29:29). This is a major problem for economic theory, which assumes omniscience in the creation of such theoretical constructs as equilibrium.

basis: from the time of purchase to the jubilee.

This means that the original buyer took a risk. If he “bought low,” when the expected value of the land’s output or the servant’s output was low, on the assumption that prices for these services would rise, he could lose his entrepreneurial profit if a redeemer came to claim his right of purchase. The original buyer would be repaid whatever was owed to him based on the original purchase price, not on the new, higher value of the expected stream of services. On the other hand, if he “bought high,” when the expected returns were high, and then the value of the services fell, the land or bondservant would be less likely to be redeemed, since the redeemer would have to pay a prorated price based on the original purchase price, which was high. This means that the original buyer was more likely to suffer losses than enjoy profits if the market value of the expected stream of services changed.

This was even more true of land redemptions. The kinsman-redeemer could re-purchase his kinsman’s land from a buyer at a fixed price: whatever the buyer had paid prorated according to the years remaining till the jubilee. He had no wages to pay. When he bought a relative out of bondage, he had to pay him a wage. Not so with land.

What is clear is that the purchase of either rural land in Israel or an Israelite bondservant was a lease agreement. Because of the jubilee year’s limits on both rural land transfers and Israelite servitude, this was not a purchase; it was a lease. It was not a lease with an option to buy; it was a lease in which an outsider—the kinsman-redeemer—had the option to redeem the lease. The lease was a rental arrangement in which the redeemer could interrupt the long-term rental agreement by making a prorated payment to the lessor. God was the owner of the land and the Israelites; He set the terms of trade. This price system would have restricted the market for Israelite bondservants and rural land.

F. Utopian Populists

On the fringe of many political movements, both right wing and left wing, are populist utopians who claim that a world without interest on business loans is both morally obligatory and economically possible. This is the economic equivalent of claiming that perpetual motion is possible in this world. It is rarely pointed out that this was the position promoted by John Maynard Keynes, the most influential

economist in the world in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Because of the medieval commentators' confusion over interest from business loans (biblically valid) and interest from charity loans to fellow believers (biblically prohibited), they prohibited all interest, which they regarded as a single phenomenon. This religious tradition has led many subsequent monetary cranks—Protestants, Catholics, and cultists—to claim that their position is biblical.¹¹ Let me point out one more time that those people who preach the ideal of a world of zero interest rates cannot defend their system biblically.

Rent is the economic return produced by some scarce resource over a specified time period. The resource may be land, but it could also be labor. What is the present value of this stream of income? We cannot know until we know the rate of interest: the time discount applied by economic actors to all streams of income. The origin of interest is human action: time preference. Rents will, through competition, tend to equal the rate of interest.¹² Thus, the defender of a zero-interest economic system must, if he follows the logic of his system, deny the moral legitimacy of all rental contracts. (There are very few populist analysts who have understood this implication of their system.)¹³ But this section of Leviticus clearly affirms the legitimacy of such rental contracts. This poses an insolvable theoretical problem for those people who argue that, biblically speaking, rental contracts are

10. Keynes wrote that "a properly run community . . . ought to be able to bring down the marginal efficiency of capital in equilibrium approximately to zero within a single generation; . . ." Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 220. If the marginal efficiency of capital is zero, then the price of capital has to be zero, since the value of any asset's output under equilibrium conditions is equal to the value of the final (marginal) unit produced, which in his example is zero. Zero multiplied by anything is zero.

11. Calvin Elliott, *Usury: A Scriptural, Ethical and Economic View* (Middlesburg, Ohio: Anti-Usury League, 1902); C. F. Parker, *Moses the Economist* (London: Covenant, 1947), pp. 55–60. For "usury" defined as "interest which is higher than is requisite," see J. Taylor Peddie, *The Economic Mechanism of Scripture: The Cure for the World Crises* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1934), p. 156. For a critique of the Social Credit movement's suggested reform, the abolition of private banking and interest-bearing loans, see Gary North, *Salvation Through Inflation: The Economics of Social Credit* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993). (<http://bit.ly/gnsti>)

12. Chapter 26, subsection on "Interest and Rent."

13. S. C. Mooney, a defender of interest-free business loans, is one of the few populists who have understood this. He insists that "it is not lawful for one to sell the use of his property (rent)." S. C. Mooney, *Usury: Destroyer of Nations* (Warsaw, Ohio: Theopolis, 1988), p. 173. (<http://bit.ly/MooneyUsury>)

illegitimate. They deal with this problem by ignoring it.¹⁴

1. On the Fringe of a Movement

The populist, being a fringe figure, appeals to people on the fringe of a movement who are ideologically committed but untrained in economic reasoning. They have a taste for ideas that are outrageous and even bizarre. They are tempted to push beyond the ideological limits of the movement to which they are loosely attached. If something sounds new, unique, or controversial, they have a tendency to believe it. There are many such ideas in life that deserve a hearing, despite the opposition of establishments. There are establishments in life; indeed, scholarship and science are impossible without establishments. These establishments do suppress the public discussion of certain ideas.¹⁵ But every anti-establishment hypothesis must be examined very carefully in order to determine whether it makes sense logically and also corresponds to the data it seeks to explain. Fringe ideas must be tested. Those who gravitate toward them are rarely able to do the necessary testing. They are true believers, not careful scholars.

Economic analysis involves long chains of reasoning. A recommended policy must be analyzed in terms of its effects, as they spread through the economy. Few people are equipped intellectually or by training to examine long chains of reasoning. Therefore, as Hazlitt said in the opening sentence of Chapter 1 of *Economics in One Lesson*, “Economics is haunted by more fallacies than any other study known to man.”¹⁶ He then explains why this is the case: “*The art of economics consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of any act or policy; it consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups.* Nine-tenths of the economic fallacies that are working such dreadful harm in the world today are the result of ignoring this lesson.”¹⁷ Crackpot economics always breaks this chain of reasoning.

People who are attracted to populism do not understand that

14. Mooney refused to comment in his book on Leviticus 25:25–28 and 25:47–51. For a critique of Mr. Mooney, see Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix J: “Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney.”

15. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

16. Henry Hazlitt, *Economics in One Lesson* (Norwalk, Connecticut: Arlington House, [1946] 1979), p. 15.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

when some writer denies the legitimacy of interest from business loans, he is also denying the legitimacy of the economic category known as rent. They do not understand that anyone who denies the legitimacy of interest and rent then must explain how a world without interest would operate. They take the populist's word on faith. Commitment to crackpot economics can easily become a substitute for orthodox religion,¹⁸ or at least a false corollary to orthodox religion.

I will say it one more time: economics becomes crackpot when it claims that the economic world can operate apart from a rate of interest. It is crackpot to the same degree that physics becomes crackpot when it affirms the possibility of perpetual motion.

2. *The Unity of Economic Theory*

The phenomenon of interest affects every aspect of economic theory and practice. It is the discount that every rational person places on future goods as against present goods: the free gift of a Rolls-Royce automobile delivered next year vs. the Rolls Royce delivered this afternoon. Better sooner than later, other things being equal. The anti-interest utopian therefore has an intellectual and moral obligation to reconstruct all of economic theory in terms of his radical hypothesis. No one has ever done this, in the millennia in which anti-interest hypotheses have been offered, from Aristotle to the present.

When Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk's monumental *History and Critique of Interest Theories* was published in 1884, he understood that all of capital theory had to be reconstructed in terms of his theory of interest as a discount of future goods as against present goods. He then wrote *The Positive Theory of Capital*, equally monumental, which appeared in 1889. Then he spent years writing *Further Essays on Capital and Interest*, a book defending the first two volumes. Certain problems in Böhm-Bawerk's theory led his student Ludwig von Mises to write *Theory of Money and Credit*, published in 1912. From there, Mises went on to write *Socialism* (1922) and *Human Action* (1949), each book extending his theory of capital, interest, and money. The point is, you cannot legitimately announce that an economy can and should operate without interest payments on business loans and leave it at that. Yet this is what the populist utopians do.

18. North, *Salvation Through Inflation*.

Conclusion

The jubilee was the year of redemption in Israel. It reunited judicially the dispossessed Israelite and his landed inheritance. The maximum time limit placed by God's law on Israelite bondservice was therefore the same as the limit on the leasing of rural property: the next jubilee year.

The possibility of immediate redemption was available in both cases: land and labor. The kinsman-redeemer could buy his relative out of bondage by making a prorated payment to the buyer based on the original purchase price. This payment was based on the years remaining until the jubilee: the original purchase price divided by the number of years until the jubilee multiplied by the number of years remaining.

The presence of this law in the Mosaic law indicates how important the ideal of customer authority is in God's eyes. An Israelite who found himself in dire straits economically could lawfully sell himself to a resident alien. The economic success of the resident alien was legitimate. He had met the demands of customers. The Israelite had failed to meet the demands of customers. The resident alien was authorized to buy the Israelite until the next jubilee year. So important were the twin ideals of efficiency and profit that God was willing to see some of His people in temporary bondage to covenant-breakers within the boundaries of the Promised Land. Perhaps these less efficient Israelites would learn to become more efficient producers, thereby improving the options available to consumers.

Because the resident alien did not have to pay a wage to an Israelite bondservant, while Israelites were required to pay him a wage, this law gave a competitive advantage to the resident alien in the market for Israelite bondservants. It made it clear what the consequence of bankruptcy was likely to be: long-term bondage to covenant-breakers.

What was illegal for an Israelite—the refusal to pay a wage to his Israelite bondservant—was not illegal for resident aliens. Why not? Because bondage to resident aliens was a model of hell: the wrath of God. It served as a reminder to the Israelites of their need for a kinsman-redeemer. They were all in debt to God. They could not afford to buy their way out of Adam's bondage. Only God's grace of the fulfilled jubilee offered the nation long-term hope, and only God's grace in the interim as their kinsman-redeemer offered short-term hope. God's designated Kinsman-Redeemer is Jesus Christ, who announced the

fulfillment of the jubilee principle when He began his public prophetic ministry (Luke 4:18–21).¹⁹

This law rested on a required wage payment, but there were no specifics regarding the amount of the wage. This made law enforcement difficult for the magistrates, and therefore also made legal predictability difficult for Israelite masters. I conclude that this law was enforced by the Levites, not the civil magistrate. They would have had more leeway in working out equitable arrangements with the masters. This law did not prohibit an evil act, i.e., the legitimate function of civil government. It mandated positive sanctions, and only for Israelite masters. It therefore discriminated economically against Israelite masters. But Mosaic civil law was to be equal for all (Ex. 12: 49).²⁰ So, this must have been an ecclesiastical law.

19. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

20. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

NATURE AS A SANCTIONING AGENT

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land (Lev. 26:3–6).

The theocentric message here is that God is the sovereign sustainer of the creation, who personally intervenes into the realm of nature in terms of His covenant. Because His covenant with Israel was judicial, the land was uniquely under His law's sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ This law was not purely impersonal-mathematical; it was ethical: point three of the biblical covenant model.² These two points are always linked.

A. Covenantal Blessings

The covenantal blessings of Leviticus 26:3–6 were corporate. Rain in due season was promised by God for all the land within the boundaries of national Israel, not just for the land belonging to covenant-keeping individuals. The individual Israelite would receive these blessings only as a resident of a covenanted nation: inside the national covenant's geographical boundaries. These boundaries were primarily judicial and secondarily geographical. Only within these covenantal

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Sutton, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

boundaries could the promised blessings be successfully invoked in God's name, generation after generation, and only if those living within these boundaries were actively conforming themselves to the ethical boundaries of God's revealed law. Only inside the land of promise—a covenanted nation—were there sufficient numbers of covenant-keepers and also publicly law-abiding covenant-breakers to call forth these promised blessings through the generations.³ These were not cross-boundary laws.

As I shall argue later in this chapter, the covenantally predictable sanctions of rain and sunshine were exclusive to Mosaic Israel's economy. They were *land sanctions*, which are no longer God's means of imparting predictable blessings and curses. The New Covenant has transferred God's predictable sanctions from climate to society. What a society does in response to the terms of God's Bible-revealed law determines God's predictable blessings and cursings. Nature's climatic processes are no longer covenantally predictable, and hence are no longer covenantal sanctions. It is what society does in response to God's revealed law that will determine whether nature's covenantally unpredictable climatic processes become blessings or curses.

Does this mean that none of the Mosaic covenant's system of corporate sanctions applied outside of the boundaries? No, but it does mean that only inside Israel's boundaries was there any legitimate hope that positive blessings could be sustained long term. *The basis of God's blessings is always judicial: God's grace.* The nations outside the land could become the recipients of God's common grace, but only if they outwardly obeyed the terms of God's revealed law. But apart from special grace, common grace cannot be maintained long term. The covenant-breaking recipients of common grace will eventually revolt against God and His law. The blessings are not sufficient rewards to persuade them to remain outwardly faithful indefinitely. Large numbers of covenant-breakers must be converted to saving faith if they are

3. It is a theologically and psychologically disastrous misinterpretation of God's promises of wealth to place them within an exclusively personal or individual framework. The individualism of the "positive confession" charismatic movement is an example of just such a false interpretation of covenantal, corporate promises. God's blessings are not successfully invoked verbally; they are invoked corporately and ethically. Individual Christians are not supposed to "name it and claim it." Instead, we are to do the following: obey God personally by following His law; pray for the widespread movement of the Holy Spirit in what is called revival; work toward a corporate, constitutional, and civil affirmation of the absolute authority of the God of the Bible; and hope for the best until these covenantal requirements are met. Only after this can we be confident about predictable, sustainable corporate blessings.

not to rebel.⁴

The best example of this process of moral backsliding under the Mosaic Covenant economy is Nineveh, capital city of Assyria. The fact that God threatened Nineveh with destruction in 40 days indicates that the Levitical system of negative corporate sanctions was in operation outside the land of Israel. These were not Mosaic seed and land sanctions. These were cross-boundary sanctions. Nineveh repented on a corporate but external basis in the face of Jonah's preaching of imminent negative sanctions. Why do I say *external* sanctions? Because no one was required to become circumcised in order for God's wrath to be withdrawn. This was common grace, not special (soul-saving) grace. The nation escaped external destruction because their flagrant sinning ended. Eventually Assyria revolted against God, invaded Israel, and carried off the residents of the Northern Kingdom. Then Babylon destroyed Assyria.

Common grace cannot be sustained apart from special grace. Covenant-breakers eventually return to their outward rebellion. God then gives them up to their lusts (Rom. 1:18–22).⁵ Apart from circumcision, there was no possibility of special grace under the Old Covenant after Abraham.⁶ There could be no inheritance of covenantal blessings beyond the third and fourth generation of those who hated God (Ex. 20:5).⁷

B. Sanctions and Representation

The blessings listed here are agricultural and social: bread, wine, and peace. These are positive sanctions.⁸ Ten righteous representatives of Sodom would have kept God from bringing total negative sanctions against that city, but only because of Abraham's negotiation with God

4. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

6. This is why Egypt was not brought to saving faith under Joseph. We know this because there was no covenantal succession; every Egyptian family suffered the death of the firstborn at the exodus. Egypt's faith was a common grace faith.

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22:C:1.

8. Peace might be considered the absence of war, but given the condition of mankind after Adam's rebellion, it takes God's active grace to bring peace to man. Peace is not normal even though it is normative. Peace is not passive. War and sin are the passive condition of covenant-breaking man (James 4:1).

(Gen. 18:24–32). But what about positive sanctions in Israel? What had to be done in Israel in order to gain bread, wine, and peace? The people as a covenantal unit were told to obey God. The Bible never mentions a specific percentage of the population that must obey God in order for God's positive, visible sanctions to become predictable in history. This is why the absolute predictability of God's sanctions in history is an unobtainable ideal. But absolute *anything* in history is unobtainable by men, so this should not deter us in our quest to gain His positive sanctions. What the Bible teaches is that the number of active covenant-keepers must be large enough to represent the nation judicially. The society must be marked by widespread obedience to the civil laws set forth by God. Blessings apart from faithfulness are a prelude to negative sanctions on a comparable scale.

God promised covenantal blessings to the residents of the nation of Israel in response to individuals' covenantal obedience. Obedience is always in part individual, for individuals are always held responsible by God for their actions. This responsibility is inescapable in history and at the day of final judgment.⁹ Nevertheless, there is no doubt that God's promised historical responses to individual obedience were corporate sanctions. The question is: How many people in Israel had to obey God's law in order for the nation to receive these promised visible blessings? This is the question of covenantal representation.

In the bargaining process between Abraham and God over the fate of Sodom, Abraham persuaded God to drop the minimum-required number of righteous men to only 10 as the condition of avoiding total negative sanctions against the city (Gen. 18:24–32). These threatened corporate sanctions were both negative and total. There is nothing in the Mosaic law to indicate that a remnant of only 10 men would have preserved the nation of Israel from lesser negative sanctions, such as invasion or captivity. God told Elijah that He had kept 7,000 men from bowing the knee to Baal, but God did not on their account promise to spare Israel. On the contrary, He used Elijah as His agent to anoint Hazael the Syrian, who would then bring negative sanctions against Israel. This revelation from God came as a unit:

And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou

9. The law's visible sanctions are more predictable at the final judgment.

anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him (I Kings 19:15–18).

Abraham's bargaining was based on a theory of covenantal representation. Ten righteous men in Sodom could have served as representatives for the entire city, even though the city's population was perverse. This is an indication of the magnitude of God's grace. But His grace is not without ethical conditions. There did have to be 10 righteous men in Sodom in order for God to display His grace to all the other inhabitants. The 7,000 covenant-keepers of Elijah's day served as covenantal representatives who kept Israel from being totally destroyed, Sodom-like, but their presence in the land did not protect the nation from lesser negative sanctions. God's grace sometimes temporarily offsets a widespread decline of faith, as it did in the days of Hezekiah (II Kings 20:1–6), but if there is no widespread repentance during this period of grace, God's specially imposed negative corporate sanctions will inevitably come on a rebellious society. These are predictable in history. The New Covenant has not altered this cause-and-effect relationship.

Who was responsible for gaining these blessings? The text does not identify any single representative. Could a single agent represent the nation as a whole? In some cases, yes. God spared Judah for the sake of Hezekiah's repentance. The crucifixion of Jesus definitively proves the point.¹⁰ By bringing Him under the negative sanction of public execution, Israel's representatives brought the whole nation under God's negative sanction of public execution in A.D. 70.¹¹ In Israel, covenantal representatives included the high priest, priests in general, Levites, civil rulers, prophets, and heads of households.¹² The people of Israel were to serve the world as a royal priesthood (Ex. 19:6). They

10. "And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:49–52).

11. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

12. In most cases, this would have been a circumcised male. In the case of widows and divorced women, they became the heads of their households, for they were required to fulfill their vows without initial approval by a male (Num. 30:9).

represented other nations.¹³ The Mosaic law did not single out civil officers as the nation's primary legal representatives. The office of high priest was far more important than the office of king. National Israel could and did exist without a king; it could not exist without a high priest. It is a sign of the modern world's perversity that the civil ruler is regarded as possessing the crucial form of sovereignty.¹⁴ This same error governed pagan men's thinking in the ancient world.¹⁵

God's promises to a corporate entity do not mandate that there be a representative *political* agency to serve as His primary economic agent. This means that a central agricultural planning bureau should not be created by the state, nor should such an agency make the decisions about what to plant, where, and when. There must be no civil "Department of Bread and Wine." Neither it nor any another political agency should decide which crops to sell, at what price, and to whom, except during wartime, and then only because the state takes on a priestly function, when its corporate decisions are literally life-and-death representative decisions.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the question remains: If God makes men responsible collectively, as His covenantal promises indicate that He does, then what kind of representative human authority should be established in order to monitor the arena—the boundaries—in which the sanctions are applied, both positive and negative?

C. Stipulations and Representation

God's covenantal promises in the Mosaic law were ethical, not magical or technical. They were governed by God's stipulations: the boundaries of legitimate behavior. Were these stipulations exclusively

13. During the feast of tabernacles, Israel sacrificed a total of 70 bulls for the 70 nations (Jud. 1:7), plus one for Israel (Num. 29:13–36).

14. A representative discussion is Bertrand de Jouvenal, *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). The author was a conservative. This book was a companion volume to his equally political study, *Power: The Natural History of Its Growth*, rev. ed. (London: Batchworth, 1952).

15. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), chaps. 3–5. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

16. Even during wartime, politicians should strive to let the market allocate resources in most instances. Fiscal policy—taxing and spending—not monetary inflation coupled with a system of compulsory rationing, should be the primary control device. This enables producers to make rational decisions about what to produce. The profit system motivates producers to create the most efficient weapons. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 34, sect. 2. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

civil? No. Were they predominantly civil? No. The Mosaic laws matched the four covenants, i.e., the four biblically legitimate self-maledictory oaths: individual, familial, ecclesiastical, and civil. The problem in any covenanted society is to discover which agency has primary jurisdiction in any specific instance. No human agency has final, total authority. Only God possesses absolute authority, an authority that He transfers in history only to His incarnate living Word, Jesus Christ,¹⁷ to the Holy Spirit,¹⁸ and to His incarnate written word, the Bible.¹⁹

1. Self-Government Under God's Law

The primary form of biblical government is always self-government. The primary agency of jurisdiction is the individual conscience. It has to be: only at this level does the individual law-enforcer have sufficiently accurate and detailed information regarding both his motivation and the results of his actions. Furthermore, only the individual can search his own heart, and even then, such knowledge is flawed. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:9–10). This is why God threatens eternal sanctions, positive and negative, on individuals: to persuade them to focus their attention in history on the requirement of obedience.

Adam was given a positive injunction: to dress and guard the garden (Gen. 2:15). He was also given a negative injunction: to avoid eating the fruit of a specific tree (Gen. 2:17). The first was a task of personal dominion. The second was a warning against false worship: eating a forbidden meal. Both stipulations necessarily involved corporate responsibility: familial (dominion) and ecclesiastical (communion). *Corporate responsibility flows from individual responsibility.* The point

17. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1–3).

18. Jesus said: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26). "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (John 16:13).

19. Jesus said: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Paul wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16).

is, responsibility does flow outward from the individual. There is more to biblical responsibility than personal responsibility because *personal responsibility in a covenantal order is necessarily representative*. The representative models of the principle of representation are Adam and Christ.

The Mosaic law reflects this judicial fact of life, especially in Leviticus, the premier book of stipulations. Leviticus begins with ecclesiastical stipulations: priestly laws governing the representative sacrifices and laws governing the enforcement of covenantal boundaries, i.e., excommunication from the assembly. The feasts and ritual sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant are obvious examples of priestly laws.²⁰ Next in number and importance are the family-related statutes, mainly laws controlling sexual deviation (Lev. 18; 20), personal ethics and land management (Lev. 19), and inheritance (Lev. 25). Civil statutes and civil sanctions are a distant fourth in both number and importance.

Obedience must be representative when God's sanctions are corporate. Certain individuals represent a larger body of individuals. The word *body* is covenantally appropriate: a head represents the other members.²¹ This judicial principle provides us with no specific information regarding corporate ownership. The Mosaic law does, however. Leviticus 25 says a great deal about Old Covenant corporate ownership: it was familial. The jubilee law centered around a man's family inheritance, which was based in turn on God's original distribution of the land of Canaan to the Israelite conquerors. The crucial inheritance was judicial: the legal status of freeman. The far less important inheritance was geographical: a specific plot of ground. The primary role of civil government in Israel with respect to landed inheritance was to enforce the terms of the jubilee law.

The jubilee law was the most important corporate civil law in Mosaic Israel, for it established freemanship. This is what identified a free man, a man who could not be sold into permanent servitude with his family. There were other civil laws, but this was the archetype. The jubilee was not a law guaranteeing a specific economic income. It was instead a law establishing a legal right: an enforceable boundary around his legal status as a freeman.

20. In the New Covenant, the one feast is the Lord's Supper, which is the heir of the Passover and the other Mosaic Covenant feasts.

21. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

2. Jubilee and Legal Rights

The jubilee law served Mosaic Israel as a model for all civil legislation. It was primarily a *defense of legal rights*, not a promise of positive economic sanctions. It was God alone who promised positive economic sanctions, not the state. These positive sanctions came to individuals primarily through their families. The economic success of individuals and families determined the size of the tithe: positive sanctions to the church and state. Families also provided charity to the poor, under threat of church sanctions. The gleaning law served as the model of this form of charity: if a man did not work, neither did he eat. Men also received positive sanctions from the church through the Levites. Presumably, people received positive sanctions from voluntary, non-ecclesiastical organizations that served the poor, but there are no biblical injunctions in this regard.

Finally, there were civil sanctions, which were exclusively negative: to protect the nation from God's corporate negative sanctions in history. Faithfulness by the civil government in executing these negative sanctions would bring God's positive sanctions, most notably peace. It is the civil government's task to insure peace: defensive boundaries placed around violent people within the nation—economic restitution, public flogging,²² and public execution—and a geographical defensive boundary placed around violent people outside the nation. Peace is God's national blessing: a successful quarantine against violence. This quarantine begins with the work of the conscience: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1). It moves outward from the individual to the other covenantal institutions, and from there to all of society. It is the responsibility of civil magistrates to suppress external violence. This results in external peace. But without the grace of God in regenerating the souls of men, the civil suppression of violence cannot be maintained indefinitely. The fundamental form of government is self-government, not civil government.

D. Common Grace

The question arises: Did the covenantal promises of Leviticus 26 perish with the other land laws of Israel? The law promised predictable

22. The limit is 40 lashes (Deut. 25:3). It is worth noting that Noah's flood came from 40 days of rain, and Christ's encounter with Satan came after 40 days of temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:2).

blessings: “If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit” (vv. 3–4). The New Testament seems to establish another principle, that of common grace: the rain falls on everyone indiscriminately, irrespective of covenantal status. The context of the New Testament teaching is individual behavior, but the sanctions are corporate:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:43–48).²³

The context of this passage is the rule of law: *love thy neighbor*. Here is the biblical principle of love: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).²⁴ We are to treat friends and enemies lawfully. This is the personal application of the Mosaic law’s principle of equality before the law: “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49).²⁵ Nature’s patterns affect all men the same in New Covenant history, sending rain and sun on good men and evil men. We are therefore to treat all men justly. In this passage, *our righteous judgment is the equivalent of God’s gift of rain and sun*.

1. God’s Justice

The focus of Jesus’ discussion of the rain and sun in the Sermon on the Mount is *God’s unmerited gift of justice*: every man is to be the recipient of justice. Antinomian commentators shift the focus of this passage from our righteous treatment of other men to another topic:

23. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

24. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 12.

25. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

God's universal distribution of blessings in history. These blessings are indeed universal, *but they are also conditional*. They are as conditional as the positive sanctions of God's law. *The impartiality of God's justice mandates the conditionality of the blessings of justice*. Every decision on our part must be ethically conditional, even the positive sanction of charity.²⁶ The context of the passage is the mandatory distribution of our justice. It is not, as Meredith G. Kline argued, the general unpredictability of God's corporate sanctions in New Covenant history.²⁷ Rather, the point that Jesus was making is that men must be utterly predictable in administering civil justice. All negative sanctions must match those mandated by God. They are ideally to be as predictable as the universality of both rain and sunshine. *These sanctions must be predictable because they are conditional*. Where does God prescribe these civil sanctions? Where else but in His revealed law? Hope for a peaceful and prosperous land has been universal in man's history.

But there is a problem: the question of the rain. There is no explicit indication that the Levitical promise of rain in due season—a unique positive sanction in the Mosaic law—continues into the New Covenant era. Kline correctly recognized that this indicates a shift from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Kline then extrapolated from Jesus' announcement of the visible randomness (i.e., covenantal unpredictability) of the *rain* in the New Covenant to the visible randomness of *all* the promised sanctions in the Mosaic law. What Kline did was to assume that the rain, which was an aspect of the land laws, represents all the corporate sanctions in the New Testament. This assumption is incorrect. If it were correct, there could be no uniquely biblical system of social theory.²⁸ This is why we must pay considerable attention to the positive covenantal sanction of rain in due season.

26. Ray R. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" in Gary North (ed.), *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

27. "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways." Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

28. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), chaps. 7, 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

2. *Rain in Due Season*

The Levitical positive sanctions listed in the text are peace, wine, and bread. Rain in due season is a means of producing grain and grapes, meaning bread and wine. The rain is a blessing only insofar as it produces crops. Obviously, rain was no blessing in Noah's day. Too much rain ruins crops. So, the promise was for rain *in due season*. It would be just the right quantity of rain to produce the positive economic sanction of agricultural productivity.

The New Testament's teaching is that rain and sunshine fall on all men. This is God's common grace. The New Testament's emphasis here is on a common blessing. As I have already argued, the twin blessings of sunshine and rain are representative of God's blessing of *righteous judgment*, which His covenant people are to emulate. But both rain and sunshine can become common curses: rain becomes flooding; sunshine becomes drought. The question we must get answered is this: Is nature under the New Covenant a means of God's *predictable* covenantal sanctions in history? It was in Moses' day, at least inside the boundaries of the Promised Land. The land had vomited out the Canaanites.

Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you (Lev. 18:24–28).²⁹

But after the Promised Land ceased to be a kingdom boundary,³⁰ did climate still play this judgmental role? No. Jesus today spews out His enemies, not the land. "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). *Climate in the New Covenant has ceased to be a means of predictable covenantal judgment*. What determines the fruitfulness of the field

29. Chapter 10.

30. Jesus warned the Pharisees: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

today is adherence to God's laws, including his laws of ownership. Put another way, a Christian nation whose civil government imposes socialist ownership will not enjoy the large number of external blessings experienced by a pagan nation whose civil government defends free market ownership. Also, if the two nations were to reverse their systems of ownership, there would be no *predictable* long-term reversal of rainfall and sunshine patterns within their respective geographical boundaries. *The New Covenant moved from climate to society with respect to the locus of predictable sanctions.* More to the point, this shift culminated a shift that had begun at the time of the conquest of the land. The earlier shift in the locus of sanctions had been a far more radical shift: from *predictable manna* outside the Promised Land to *predictable inheritance* without manna inside the Promised Land. When the Israelites crossed the boundary from the wilderness into Canaan, the source of their bread ceased to be manna. "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year" (Josh. 5: 12).

3. Coals of Fire

If rain in due season is a blessing, and if all of God's gifts are ethically conditional, then what is the nature of climate's conditionality? I have argued that the blessings of climate are analogous to—representational of—the blessing of God's predictable justice in history.³¹ God tells His people to give good gifts—render impartial justice—to covenant-breakers, just as He sends rain and sunshine on sinners. There is an ulterior motive in such unmerited common grace: an escalation of their condemnation. In the section on justice in Romans, Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21–22. The passage in Proverbs reads: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee." Here is how Paul applies this biblical principle of condemnation through mercy: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:19–21).

31. Such justice ceases to be a blessing for covenant-breakers in eternity.

At the very least, the common blessings of nature bring covenant-breakers under greater eternal condemnation. This is because of the principle that there is a link between God's blessings and man's responsibilities. "But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48).³² But what about in history? In what way is nature's ethically random distribution of gifts ethically conditional in history? We can be sure that those who receive such undeserved gifts heap up coals of fire on their unrepentant heads in eternity. What about in history?

Paul wrote: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21). The goal here is the overcoming of Satan's kingdom. This victory is not confined to eternity. Satan's kingdom is obviously going to be overcome in eternity, with or without mercy from Christians in history. So, Paul's frame of reference in this passage has to be history. By showing mercy in history, Christians accomplish two things: they weaken some covenant-breakers' resistance to the truth, and they strengthen other covenant-breakers' resistance to the truth. That is, covenant-breakers' reactions to the gift of mercy vary in history. If their negative reactions to mercy always strengthened their resolve to defy God and His kingdom, and also always strengthened their ability to resist, or even left such strength "neutral," then how could showing mercy to evil men lead to the overcoming of evil with good? Wouldn't mercy in this case be counter-productive, strengthening evil men's will to resist and also their ability to resist God's kingdom? Wouldn't showing mercy then subsidize evil? Yet the Bible does not recommend that covenant-keeper subsidize evil.

This is why Paul did not presume that mercy always strengthens evil men's ability to resist the expansion of God's kingdom. On the contrary, he assumes that our showing mercy—dealing lawfully with sinners—leads to an expansion of the kingdom of God in history. In Romans 11, Paul prophesies an era of great blessings in history. Speaking of the future conversion of the Jews, Paul wrote: "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom. 11:12).³³ Romans 12 continues his message of victory in history. Good will over-

32. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

33. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 8.

come evil. This means that the merciful gift of God's civil justice in history will strengthen God's kingdom in history.

God's unmerited gifts in nature produce analogous effects. They progressively condemn covenant-breakers and bless covenant-keepers. While the rain in due season in the New Covenant era does not fall only on covenant-keepers or only on covenant-keeping societies, it does have kingdom-expanding effects in history. It brings covenant-breaking societies under God's condemnation. Jesus Christ will impose negative sanctions against them in history. *Long-term rebellion increases the quantity of judgmental fire on their corporate heads.* What is different in the New Covenant is that climate no longer imposes the negative sanctions. In Elijah's day, God withheld rain in Israel for several years in order to strengthen Elijah's position and weaken Ahab's resistance (I Kings 17:1). This is no longer God's method of bringing negative sanctions in history. Climate is no longer God's covenantal agent. But, contrary to Kline in particular and amillennialists in general, this does not mean that God no longer brings predictable sanctions in history. His sanctions are no less real just because they are no longer delivered through climate. They are delivered through society.

The language of Leviticus 26:3–6 is not only covenantal, it is in part sacramental. By identifying the vineyard and bread as the blessed products of the land, the Mosaic law invoked the language of Abrahamic Holy Communion: bread and wine (Gen. 14:18). The visible proof of God's communion with His people—His residence inside Israel's boundaries—was the four-fold blessing of peace and land, bread and wine.

E. Two Forms of Representation

The ultimate issue was this: *Who owns the land?* The Bible is clear: God owns the land and everything on it. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10). The secondary question is this: Who acts as God's lawful agent in the administration of any given plot of land? It is this question that has divided Christians from very early days.

God delegates two forms of limited sovereignty to man: judicial sovereignty and market sovereignty. The first we call *ownership*; the second we call *customer authority*. Each has its own respective doctrine of representation. The jubilee land law makes it clear that the heirs of the families of the conquest possessed judicial authority over

Israel's rural land. This does not mean that these families possessed economic authority over the land. Control over any economic resource must be defended in the market. The person who owns a scarce economic resource—a resource that commands a price—either serves those consumers who offer the high bids for the asset's fruits of production or else he must content himself with a reduced level of income. If he experiences reduced income, he thereby pays for the privilege of serving consumers other than those who offer the high bids. There is therefore a cost of serving low-bidding consumers: forfeited income. Over time, control of scarce resources moves, through the competitive bidding process, to those economic agents who most efficiently serve the customers who offer the high bids. The profitable producers (customer agents) buy productive assets from those who are less profitable.

The jubilee land law governed the leasing of rural land, and there is no question that resident aliens and converts to the faith could buy and sell individual plots of land for up to 49 years. Thus, economic authority over the land remained in the hands of consumers. They could, through their decisions to buy or not buy, establish who their economic representatives would be. Those economic agents who were more responsive to the demands of consumers would prosper more than those who were less responsive. Those agents who prospered would be in a strong position to lease the key agricultural resource: land. The heirs of the conquest retained long-term legal sovereignty over the land as God's agents. The more productive farmers could nevertheless purchase economic authority over the land as the consumers' agents. In 42 years out of 50, consumers were authorized by God to exercise primary authority—economic authority—through their agents: the more efficient farmers.

The primary mark of economic representation in Mosaic Israel was the lease. God delegated far more economic authority to the efficient producer than to the original owner. This points to the minimal economic impact of the jubilee land law. This law was not primarily economic; it was primarily judicial. It established freemanship, not a guaranteed income. In a free society, only consumers can establish a land owner's income, and consumers are notoriously fickle. They guarantee nothing to any of their representatives. "What have you done for me lately?" is their rallying cry. "What will you do for me now, and at what price?" is their battle cry. The authority of the consumer rests on his right to change his mind until he signs a contract.

Conclusion

God's covenantal sanctions in history are corporate. Positive sanctions rest on the obedience of individuals: *representatives*. The boundaries of Mosaic Israel were primarily judicial and secondarily geographical. Within these boundaries, climate itself was bound to the stipulations of God's national covenant. The rain would fall in due season if the nation's representatives remained faithful. These representatives included the high priest, priests in general, Levites, civil rulers, and heads of households.

The positive sanctions listed in this passage are land and peace, bread and wine. The Levitical laws governing ownership prove that it was not the civil government which was the primary representative agent in Mosaic Israel. It was not the state which was to create national economic planning for agriculture. The success or failure of Israel's agriculture depended on the obedience of the people, manifested publicly in the behavior of their representatives, i.e., their leaders. The primary form of government is self-government, and the leaders had to begin with self-government, as did every other Israelite. Corporate responsibility flows from individual responsibility.

The promised sanction of rain in due season was unique to Mosaic Israel. It was not a cross-boundary sanction. In the New Covenant, the universality of common grace governs the climate, just as it did outside of the place of residence of the Israelites under the Old Covenant. Rain and sunshine fall on covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers without distinction in the New Covenant. Climate is no longer God's agent of judicial sanctions. God's law governs man's legal relationships, and obedience to His law-order is what determines predictable corporate sanctions in New Covenant history. Societies can overcome the restraints (boundaries) of climate through obedience to God's law.

The doctrine of representation is inherent in any system of biblical authority. The judicial representatives of the land were the heirs of the conquest. The economic representatives of the consumers were those who were willing to buy their continued control over the land. Control over the land was to be maintained by those who used the land least wastefully in serving those who offered the high bids for the fruits of the land: consumers. It was the consumers' authority over the land that Mosaic law defended in 49 years out of 50.

The covenantal promise of bread and wine has sacramental overtones. It points to the communion of God and man at a meal: the mar-

riage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9). Israel was also promised land and peace. From an economic standpoint, land is not nearly so crucial as freedom in producing the largest possible quantities of bread and wine. The law of God provided freedom; the land was secondary. The law was given at Sinai before the generation of wandering. The stipulations would remain basic to continued prosperity in the land. Obedience was the foundation of the promised positive sanctions. Corporate prosperity is therefore ethically conditional.

LIMITS TO GROWTH

For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you. And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new (Lev. 26:9–10).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is easy to summarize: God, who is the author of life, establishes the covenantal laws governing life. These are boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. A Biological Promise

The biological promise in verse 9 is two-fold: the multiplication of *obedient* covenant-keepers in history and the equal or greater multiplication of their crops. This two-fold promise is covenantal. It is therefore ethically conditional.

The dual positive sanctions of a growing population and growing food supplies are tied to the law of God. As in the case of every positive covenantal sanction, there is an unstated assumption: the threat of negative sanctions. In this case, the negative sanctions match the positive sanctions: (1) zero population growth or even population decline; (2) hunger. Corporate disobedience calls forth these negative sanctions.

Were these two sanctions part of what I have called seed and land laws? No. A seed law, in the sense that I am using it in this commentary, was tied to the promised Seed, the Messiah, the prophesied son of Judah. It had to do with maintaining the tribal divisions in Mosaic Israel until Shiloh came (Gen. 49:10). The earlier promise given to Abra-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

ham regarding the multiplication of his heirs through the Seed, Jesus Christ (*seed*, in Paul's sense)² was not a seed law sanction in the sense that I am using the term, i.e., Jacob's later prophecy. Jacob's prophecy governed the promise up to the coming of the Seed: the end of the Old Covenant. God's promise to Abraham regarding the multiplication of his seed—heirs—applies to both Old and New Covenants: a cross-boundary covenant and promise (Gen. 15:5). Its mark in the Old Covenant was circumcision (Gen. 17:10). This was a covenantal stipulation in the sense of *confession* rather than geography: a visible boundary separation from covenant-breakers rather than geographical boundary separations among biological units (tribes). Leviticus 26:9 is an application of the Abrahamic covenant, not Jacob's tribal prophecy.

Broadly covenantal sanctions applied outside of the land of Israel. That is, these covenantal sanctions were *common grace sanctions*. Societies that obeyed the covenant's external laws would prosper; those that rebelled would not. The promise of high population growth in this passage was an implicit threat of reduced population for rebellion. The archetype of this threat was Noah's Flood: a pre-Abrahamic sanction. God will not again bring a flood to cut off all mankind, but He does reduce the populations of rebellious societies, primarily through the covenantally predictable effects of social organization in a particular natural environment.

B. The Curse of Hunger

Hunger is a major covenantal threat in God's law. "Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee" (Deut. 28: 47–48). Again, "They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field" (Lam. 4:9).

Food is therefore a major covenantal blessing. This blessing is stated in Leviticus 25:10 in a way that is easily recognized by an agricultural people: "And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new." The time of greatest potential crisis for an agricul-

2. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

tural society is the period immediately preceding the harvest. The old store is running low; the new store has not yet arrived. The word for “old” is used with regard to the stored produce in the year following the jubilee year. “And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store” (Lev. 25:22). God’s promise is not slack. Israel need not fear famine; the stored crop will not be entirely consumed before the new crop is harvested.

This means that the covenantal blessing of “fruitfulness” was comprehensive, applying equally to the fertility of obedient covenant-keeping families and to their crops. The rate of human population growth inside the boundaries of Israel would be matched by the rate of population growth in the fields. In this way, God promised to confirm His covenant publicly. He promised a growing population in Israel: the application of Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 9:7 to His covenant people, the true heirs of the promise. This means that God’s corporate, covenantal standard for the expansion of covenant-keeping families is above 2.1 children per family, which is the biological replacement rate.

The modern world understands hunger as a threat to humanity—not a curse, which is personal, but a threat. Unlike the Bible, a majority of modern humanist intellectuals and their accomplices within Christianity have contrasted the blessing of food with population growth. They have argued since the mid-1960s that in order for the world’s poorest people to attain sufficient food supplies, they must be willing to reduce the size of their families. These intellectuals have also frequently argued that the West, which has abundant quantities of food, must give away food to the world’s poor. This means having Western governments give food away to the governments of Third World (aid-receiving) nations. Such political food transfers have been going on throughout the post-World War II era.

Anti-population growth proponents refuse to admit that there is no specter of famine haunting the vast majority of humanity, and where it does haunt a handful of small, backward nations, all located in Africa, this is the result of government policies, such as: (1) war, especially civil war; (2) a government monopoly on the purchase of food from farmers, with prices set far below market prices; or (3) government intervention into the local agricultural economy.³ That is to say,

3. An example: the decision by Western nations in the late 1960s to dig water wells in sub-Saharan Africa, which led the nomads to locate their herds close to the “free” water. This produced overgrazing and famine in the mid-1970s. See Claire Sterling, “The

people face food shortages because the free market is not allowed to function.⁴

C. Physical Limits to Growth

Boundaries are limits. In a finite world, there are limits to every promise of growth. These limits may be geographical or they may be economic, but there are limits to growth. This is the inescapable reality of finitude. The process of compound physical growth cannot go on forever in a finite world. Growth has temporal limits.⁵

1. Population Growth

God calls for population growth because He calls for covenantal obedience. He wants to see positive growth in covenant-keeping societies. *Long-term compound growth is a moral imperative in God's covenantal universe.* Long-term stagnation is a sign of God's curse. Yet there are unquestionably limits to growth. This is why God's call for population growth points to God's final judgment at the end of history and the transformation of mankind into a host like the angels: fixed numbers, either in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15) or in the resurrected New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21:1–2).

Covenant-breakers who do not wish to think about the final judgment have become advocates of zero population growth: an exchange, either compulsory or voluntary, either natural or political, of a compounding human population for extra eons of time. The growing acceptance by intellectuals in the West of the zero-population growth movement⁶ and the zero economic growth movement,⁷ which became

Making of the Sub-Saharan Wasteland," *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1974).

4. Appendix G: "Malthusianism vs. Covenantalism."

5. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970). (<http://bit.ly/NorthCurve>). Reprinted in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

6. Lincoln H. and Alice Taylor Day, *Too Many Americans* (New York: Delta, [1963] 1965); William and Paul Paddock, *Famine—1975! America's Decision: Who Will Survive?* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1968); Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Biological Time Bomb* (New York: World, 1968); *Population and the American Future*, the Report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (New York: New American Library, 1972). For an economist's critique, see Jacqueline Kasun, *The War Against Population: The Economics and Ideology of World Population Control* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

7. Ezra J. Mishan, *The Costs of Economic Growth* (New York: Praeger, 1967); Mishan, *The Economic Growth Debate: An Assessment* (London: George Allen & Unwin,

a unified cause and intellectual fad almost overnight in the mid-1960s, testifies to the presence of widespread covenant-breaking and philosophies to match. In 1970, the world's population could have been housed in American middle-class comfort in a city the size of Texas and New Mexico—15% of United States land—with a population density no larger than what one-third of Americans experienced. If people had been content to live in a city as crowded as New York City, they could all have fit in the state of Montana.⁸ Yet intellectuals became fearful of the “population bomb.”

2. *Living Space*

At some point, even covenant-keepers will run out of living space if they continue to grow in number. They will reach environmental limits: boundaries beyond which man's dominion cannot extend. We need to consider three facts regarding man's limits to growth. *First*, any rate of growth, if compounded, eventually becomes exponential. The population of any multiplying species approaches infinity as a limit. But environmental finitude makes its presence felt long before population infinitude is reached. The environment places limits on growth. No species can maintain a positive growth rate indefinitely. *Second*, mankind, unlike the angels, is not a numerically fixed host in history. Yet mankind is ultimately limited by the environment. This fact points to the ultimate limit to growth: time. At some point, mankind will reach its maximum population. *Third*, and by far the most significant fact, this point in time of maximum population is reached when God returns in final judgment. What must be understood is that *this maximum population limit is covenantal more than environmental*. It comes because God runs out of mercy for covenant-breakers, not because mankind runs out of living space or food.

The limits of nature and the reality of compound growth indicate a point in history when mankind reaches a maximum. We do not know where this point is—it is in this sense indeterminate—but we know

1977); Donella Meadows, *et al.*, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972); E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Mancur Olson and Hans H. Landsberg (eds.), *The No-Growth Society* (New York: Norton, 1973); Leopold Kohr, *The Overdeveloped Nations: The Diseconomies of Scale* (New York: Schocken, 1977). For a critique, see E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1990).

8. Robert L. Sasone, *Handbook on Population* (Author, 1972), p. 98.

that the environment does impose limits. The economist's evidence for this is the rising price of some goods in relation to others. One thing cannot grow forever. It is governed by what the economist calls the law of diminishing returns.⁹ But this "Newtonian" insight is significant only insofar as it warns rational covenant-breakers of the reality of finitude and the limits to growth. The reality of finitude is not nearly so significant a limit as the reality of covenantal rebellion. It is not mankind's fertility in general that presses our species toward its *biological limits*; it is rather covenant-breaking man's rebellion that reaches God's *judicial limits* in history. While the logic of finitude does warn scientific man of autonomous mankind's limits—the destruction of all meaning in the heat death of the universe (absolute zero)—this insight can be misinterpreted by covenant-breakers. They can (and have) proposed technical solutions to a covenantal problem. One such proposed solution is the zero-growth ideology.

3. *Limits: Newtonian vs. Covenantal*

According to a strictly Newtonian interpretation of the environmental limits to growth, the faster the rate of compound growth, the sooner growth will cease or time will run out. The greater the blessings of growth, the shorter the time remaining before time runs out or mankind ceases to grow. Man's limits are regarded as exclusively environmental.

The Bible speaks of other limits as more fundamental. God brings final judgment in response to a final rebellion of human covenant-breakers against human covenant-keepers (Rev. 20:7–10). The discussion of the limits to growth needs to be framed in terms of the Bible's covenantal limits—moral, judicial, and eschatological—rather than in terms of Newtonian environmental limits: mathematical, physical, and biological.¹⁰

9. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 30.

10. There are some journalists and social thinkers who prefer to substitute quantum mechanics for Newtonian mechanics as a model for social theory. They want to escape the Newtonian world's determinate limits to growth by means of an appeal to the indeterminacy of the quantum world: physical indeterminacy, not merely conceptual. The two most prominent American authors who take this approach are George Gilder and Warren Brookes. At the time of his death in December of 1991, Brookes was working on a book developing this idea. He and I had spent hours on the phone discussing this issue. He had presented an early version of his thesis in *The Economy in Mind* (New York: Universe Books, 1982), ch. 1. He was a Christian Scientist

The growth of population points either to the limits of growth or the limits of time. Because the Bible affirms that the limits to covenant-keeping man's population growth are covenantal rather than biological, the Bible affirms that there will be a final judgment. The Bible's promise of growth in one segment of the human population—covenant-keepers—is a testimony to the end of history. Men are expected to obey God's law; if they do, God promises to extend to them the positive sanction of growth. Therefore, time will run out. But, the Bible also tells us, time will run out before mankind presses against unyielding environmental limits. The primary limit to growth in history is covenantal. The environmental limits to growth are merely theoretical—not hypothetical, but *determinate physical limits* that are *indeterminate in man's knowledge*.

D. Social Limits to Growth

The more fundamental limits to growth are social. This is the economic manifestation of the covenantal principle of hierarchy. Not everyone can attend the best universities, drive the finest automobiles, and wear the latest fashions. These goods are limited in supply. We cannot produce many more of them, so competition to use or own them is intense. Fred Hirsch used the analogy of the person at a sporting event who wants to see the game more clearly. He stands up. But eventually, others also stand up. Then one person stands on tiptoe. Others do the same. Eventually, the tallest people with the strongest lower leg muscles get the best view. So, society informally agrees to sit down at sporting events and in concert halls, since this is less taxing on everyone's leg muscles, and in the long run, nobody can overcome his height limits. Hirsch's point: in this case—seeing over everyone's head—what a few people can do, not everyone can do *at the same time*. He

and leaned toward accepting non-physical explanations of man's condition. Gilder outlines his thesis in *Microcosm* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989). Eloquent as Gilder is regarding the exponential increase in the power of computers, he cannot apply his thesis to population growth. Bodies cannot escape into the realm of the quantum in order to evade the limits to growth. Gilder invokes Moore's Law, which says that the number of transistors on commercial microchips doubles every 18 months. This law has held true since the late 1960s. The law seems to overcome certain physical limits. But Moore's Law does not overcome the limits on biological growth. Moore's Law was discovered by Gordon Moore, the co-founder of Intel, the largest American microchip producer. On Moore's Law and its astounding implications, see Raymond Kurzweil, in *The Law of Accelerating Returns* (March 7, 2001). (<http://bit.ly/KurzweilSingularity>)

calls such goods and services *positional goods*.¹¹ As economic growth continues, more and more people can afford to buy these goods, so more will be produced. When this happens, these goods lose their initial character: providing the owners with status, i.e., position. Other goods and services, more fixed in number, are then sought by those seeking status. There will always be positional goods.

1. *Barriers to Entry*

One of the ways that the rich defend themselves from new competitors is to create government barriers to entry. They get laws passed to keep “the unwashed” middle classes and successful entrepreneurs at a safe distance. Their problem is that the free market system extends wealth to many people. As economist Thomas Sowell describes it, the poor can outbid the rich collectively; there are so many of them. Land developers start buying of formerly unoccupied land in order to sell condominiums and other smaller property units to the upper middle class. Businessmen serve the needs of the less rich because the world of the less rich is where the money is. The less rich collectively bid valuable property away from the rich. This is especially true of scarce resources such as beachfront property and wilderness areas located within driving distance of commercial airports. In response to this competitive threat to their “free ride”—scenery they do not own or are afraid their rich neighbors’ heirs will sell to developers—the rich seal off land adjacent to their valuable property in the name of preserving the environment. They do this by having the state legislate limits on all new real estate development.¹²

2. *“Old Money”*

Members of the wealthiest class in the United States—what some analysts have called “Old Money”—have for over a century regarded themselves as the trustees of the nation’s beautiful things: art and scenic land. By trustees, they have in mind those special people who can properly maintain these assets, mainly for themselves and their

11. Fred Hirsch, *The Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 11.

12. Thomas Sowell, “Those Phony Environmentalists,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* (March 23, 1979); reprinted in Sowell, *Pink and Brown People and Other Controversial Essays* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), pp. 104–5. See my summary in North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 44:J.

own social class. As the value of these scarce positional goods has increased, these self-appointed trustees have sought government intervention to enable them to keep the middle classes away from these treasures.

Nature is regarded by the Old Money as the means of an ordeal process (i.e., initiation rite) which the young males of this class are supposed to experience as a means of both health and maturation.¹³ For example, at the age of 23, future author Francis Parkman (*The Oregon Trail*, 1849) was sent west by his wealthy Boston family for his health just prior to the California gold strike that launched the great gold rush. Over the next half century, he was followed by many others of his class.¹⁴ Among them was the Old Money's most famous career model, Theodore Roosevelt, who spent much of his youth in the West shooting game, and who, as President of the United States (1900–1909), became the legendary promoter of conservation and Federal land control through a system of national parks.¹⁵

A new paganism has appeared, and members of the Old Rich have been its dedicated promoters. As Nelson Aldrich, one of their own, wrote in 1988: "Nature worship today is laying the spiritual and institutional groundwork for the closest thing to a widespread social religion (as opposed to the individualistic religion of success) that Americans have ever had. Nature is sacred to millions of people in America. . . ." ¹⁶

We have now entered the political battle for control over nature, he said, a battle that is both religious and economic. "The social religion of Nature, which began with rich kids going outdoors for their health, ends in political action against the market—the condo developers, the shopping-mall impresarios, the army of entrepreneurs whom Old Money (and not Old Money alone) imagines to be despoiling Arcadia."¹⁷ As Aldrich's book makes clear, the Old Money deeply distrusts and sometimes even despises the open-entry system known

13. Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr., *Old Money: The Mythology of America's Upper Class* (New York: Knopf, 1988), pp. 158–69. Aldrich was the great-grandson of the U. S. Senator who in 1912 introduced the original version of the legislation that created the Federal Reserve System (1913), the quasi-private U.S. central bank. The original Aldrich became fabulously wealthy as a pay-off from the business and banking interests that controlled him throughout his career, as this book chronicles without remorse.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

as the free market, for the free market transfers economic power to the masses. This is why Old Money supports such organizations as the Nature Conservancy, the Wilderness Society, and the Sierra Club.¹⁸ These groups are using their tax-exempt foundation status to buy up and seal off millions of acres of land across the nation. They use tax money to do it.

The system works approximately like this. First, these organizations target certain prime wilderness areas. Second, individuals in the know buy land near these targeted areas, thereby locking up property that, in Warren Brookes' words, is ideal for "profitable upscale adjacent residential development that is then used to finance still more acquisition."¹⁹ Third, they use tax-deductible money to buy up the prime land that makes the nearby developed areas valuable. Fourth, they sell these prime parcels—but not the land designated for development—to the United States government, thereby halting any further development inside the newly "socialized" boundaries. Fifth, they develop their privately owned parcels. Presto: a marvelous legal monopoly, purchased at low prices in part with taxpayers' money. A similar process works internationally. Large New York banks—protected by the United States government's bank deposit insurance system and also by the policies of the quasi-private Federal Reserve System—are making debt-for-nature swaps, exchanging their now-depreciated Third World debt certificates for prime land in those nations.²⁰ This process also can be used to remove prime land from development by those other than the favored few.

Aldrich wrote: "The roots of Old Money environmentalism go back to the most fiercely protected of all the treasures of Old Money, the summer places on the coast of Maine, their 'camps' in the Adirondacks, their ranches out West."²¹ An early operational model of this plan was designed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. He bought a summer home on Mt. Desert Island in Maine. This unique island became the summer center of America's Establishment—the place where elites from different fields—finance, industry, journalism, foreign policy, and

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 222–23. For a brief survey of these three groups, see Jo Kwong Echard, *Protecting the Environment: Old Rhetoric, New Imperatives* (Washington, D.C.: Capital Research Center, 1990), Appendixes 8–10.

19. Warren Brookes, *Washington Times* (Jan. 29, 1991), cited by Larry Abraham and Franklin Sanders, *The Greening* (Atlanta, Georgia: Soundview, 1993), p. 93.

20. Abraham and Sanders, *Greening*, pp. 51–53, 59–61, 93.

21. Aldrich, *Old Money*, p. 223.

religion—met and mixed with each other.²² Rockefeller and Edsel Ford, along with other affluent neighbors, over a period of years bought up 5,000 acres on the island and then turned this property over to the National Park Service in 1916. This became the first national park in the eastern states.²³ Two pairs of favorable biographers insist that this was in no way a self-serving act because Rockefeller then went on to promote national conservation all over the country.²⁴ On the contrary, this conservation impulse is enormously self-serving. Buying up geographically unique and aesthetically desirable land for personal use and then placing the surrounding property under government control is part of a systematic elitist strategy. The rich maintain the “unspoiled” wilderness which lies on the fringes of their spacious retreats—“unspoiled” in this case meaning “legally cut off from the less rich.” The less rich may be allowed to hike in, but they are not allowed to buy land, build cabins, and in other ways permanently “spoil nature.” This process of selective exclusion through government control accelerated as the twentieth century moved forward.

E. Angelic Hosts Are Fixed; Races Are Not

Living species multiply. Angels do not. The angels constitute a fixed host. In heaven and hell, the number of angels remains constant. This fact of life is rarely discussed by theologians and never by social theorists. It should be. It is fundamental to understanding the ultimate origin of the zero population growth ideology.

Satan rules representatively, just as God does. He rules hierarchically. But, unlike God, Satan is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. His decree is that of a creature: under God’s decree. This has organizational consequences for the way he exercises power. He is dependent on the supply of information flowing to him, whether from demonic beings or from other sources. This flow of information is limited. It contains “noise,” just as it does for humans. God is omniscient; Satan is not. He gets confused. He has trouble monitoring the thoughts and activities of those under his covenant.

22. William R. Hutchison, “Protestantism as Establishment,” in Hutchison (ed.), *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 10.

23. Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Rockefellers: An American Dynasty* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), p. 147.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 148; John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson, *The Rockefeller Century* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988), p. 200.

This flow of information is finite. So is his power to make decisions and enforce them. To the extent that his sources of information and power depend on the activities of those under his command, he faces a problem. The more people he needs to monitor, the greater the flow of accurate information necessary to his empire. The greater the number of people, the more strain this places on the resources at his disposal. In short, Satan's host is put under ever-greater pressure as the human population under their covenantal authority grows. This is even more true of the pressures brought by those under God's covenantal authority. The more covenant-keepers on earth, the more the breakdown of Satan's control. Like a juggler who has to keep a growing number of oranges in the air, so is Satan.

People are a threat to Satan. They multiply; his demonic host does not. Even covenant-breakers pose a problem: the coordination of Satan's plans becomes more difficult as mankind's numbers increase. Then there is the eschatological threat: a major move by the Holy Spirit could adopt large numbers of covenant-breakers into the family of God. When this happens, Satan's fixed host will have their hands full, to use a non-angelic expression. More than full: they will find control over events slipping through the equivalent of their fingers.

The increase of mankind's numbers poses no threat to the host of heaven, for God is absolutely sovereign. God is not dependent on His angels for information. God does not suffer from information overload. There is no noise in God's perception. The angels of heaven need not rely on their own mastery of history. They rely on God. Thus, for the angels, the multiplication of humanity poses no organizational threat. They outnumber Satan's host by two to one. Stars and angels are linked symbolically in Scripture. We read: "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born" (Rev. 12:3-4).²⁵ Two-thirds were loyal.

A growing population creates problems for any creature who would seek to control history. The addition of more humans creates problems for Satan and his host. Men necessarily must represent either God or Satan in history. Those who represent Satan are rebels,

25. The numbers of the judgments on earth described in Revelation 8 also indicate a two-to-one advantage.

just as he is. They cannot be trusted, just as he cannot be trusted. Thus, Satan benefits from a growing population only insofar as he can keep them under his covenant and entrap them. The threat of their rejection of his covenant grows ever-greater over time. More humans will join God's forces, and more likelihood that God will send His promised days of blessing.²⁶

This is why the zero population growth movement and the abortion movement can be accurately described as satanic. These movements are not ethically neutral responses to widespread sociological forces that threaten mankind's survival. They are religious movements that are opposed to the positive blessings of God, which in turn promote His kingdom.

F. Israel's Limits

The question for Israel was this: When these limits to population growth were reached inside the nation's geographical boundaries, how did God expect the Israelites to overcome these population limits? There were either geographical limits or population limits. Walking to the feasts placed geographical limits on Israel, but without limits on Israel's population, Israel's geographical limits would be breached. Conclusion: God mandated another exodus beyond the borders of Israel when He established population expansion as His covenantal standard. The Israelites were expected to move outside of the geographical boundaries of Israel. This was the meaning of Christ's metaphor of new wine in old wineskins (Matt. 9:17): the fermenting new wine would burst its inflexible container. His people were always intended to inherit the earth, not just the land of Israel.

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD,
they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in
the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be
cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).

Inheritance in Israel implied growth for obedient covenant-keep-

26. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd. ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit/klghshd>)

ers: growth in the number of heirs and growth in the value of their individual inheritances. But geographical limits—family land, tribal land, national land—were judicially fixed by the terms of the conquest. A growing number of heirs necessitated a declining per capita landed inheritance within the Promised Land. This pointed to the eschatological nature of God's covenantal laws of inheritance: a transcending of Israel's geographical boundaries. The promised inheritance of covenant-keepers pointed to the breaking of the boundaries of the Promised Land. The limits to growth of *confessional Israel* would not be the boundaries of *geographical Israel*. The original conquest of Canaan would cease to be a limiting factor in the extension of God's covenantal boundaries.

G. Entropy

There is a trade-off between population growth and time remaining to mankind. The covenant-breaker understands this trade-off. Above all else, he wishes to escape final judgment, and understandably so. Thus, he seeks to find some way around the covenantal implications of population growth. One way of doing this is to deny that mankind's growth will continue in history. It will stop, covenant-breakers insist, but this will not end history. Another way of doing this is to deny that history will end as a result of God's Second Coming in final judgment. Instead, the universe itself will bring impersonal judgment to the processes of time: the heat death of the universe. This is the final judgment of the second law of thermodynamics: the one-way movement of kinetic (potential) energy into heat. Entropy will smother all life and motion, including time itself, in its frozen grip of absolute zero.²⁷

The covenant-breaker prefers this view of universal impersonal death to the Bible's view of personal death, meaning the second death: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15). Better the "heat death" of the universe—frozen wastes—than the eternal heat death of covenant breakers.

Any attempt to place an absolute environmental limit around mankind's long-term population growth, while simultaneously affirm-

27. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down?: Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

ing the extension of time beyond this absolute limit, is necessarily an attempt to deny or deflect the biblical doctrine of final judgment. It is the inevitability of some final physical limit to the population growth of covenant-keepers that points to one of two things: (1) the future breaking of the corporate covenant, but without God's temporal judgments against covenant-breakers, and without the subsequent restoration of His people, i.e., (a) a steady-state, zero-growth population or (b) a shrinking population; or (2) the end of history, either because of (a) God's final judgment or (b) the death of mankind as a species.

In order to affirm both the reliability and inevitability of God's corporate, covenantal promises (i.e., His positive biological sanctions) in history, the Christian has to insist on the covenantal inevitability of the final judgment, when mankind will at last become a fixed host: covenant-keepers (New Heaven and New Earth) and covenant-breakers (lake of fire). Either man's corporate growth will cease in history or history will cease. God's covenantal promises point to the second option. The promises of God insist that corporate growth will not cease where men keep God's covenant law-order. These promises include the restoration in history of a formerly covenant-keeping society after its people have broken God's law.

And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city (Isa. 1:26).

For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after (Jer. 30:17).

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times (Dan. 9:25).

H. The Malthusians

When Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus wrote his anonymous first edition of his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), he accelerated a great debate over the desirability of population growth. Although in later editions of his famous essay he modified the stark environmentalism of the original, it is his original words that have been

cited again and again: "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio."²⁸ Put another way, the population of the species *man* grows at a geometrical rate, while the populations that man consumes grow at an arithmetical rate. This indicates that man is something special in creation: a species limited by its environment in a unique way. Also, geometrical (exponential) growth being what it is, mankind reaches its environmental limits a lot faster than any other species does. How, then, can mankind keep growing? Why, by 1798, had not mankind long since reached its limits to growth? Why was the population of Europe accelerating rapidly by the time Malthus wrote his essay? There are no obvious answers, which may be why Malthus abandoned this now-familiar phrase in the many subsequent editions of the essay.

From 1798 until today, there have been avid followers of some version of Malthus' error. They regard man as a cancer on a benign host, nature. Western man is the most cancerous of all. Western man is dominion man, and this spells the end of nature, said "deep ecologist"²⁹ Bill McKibben: "We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence *is* its meaning; without it there is nothing but us."³⁰ He is correct: the Western world still lives intellectually in the shadow of Genesis 1:26–28. "The idea that the rest of creation might count for as much as we do is spectacularly foreign, even to most environmentalists."³¹ Man is seen by deep ecologists as a uniquely destructive species in nature.

The question of man's population growth is connected to the question of time. If man's population growth remains positive, then either time or space will run out eons before the heat death of the universe brings its impersonal judgment on the universe. The humanist decries the first outcome—mankind's filling up of his environmental space—because he recoils in terror at the thought of the second. But man will fill the earth. This will fulfill a major aspect of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:28). After that comes the final rebellion and the final

28. Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (New York: Penguin Books, [1798] 1982), p. 71.

29. The deep ecologists go beyond ecologists who want scientific planners to protect the environment in the name of mankind's higher interests. The deep ecologists want nature to govern man, or at the very least, want scientific planners to sacrifice mankind's desires in the name of nature's autonomy and therefore its authority over the wants of men.

30. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 58.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

judgment (Rev. 20:7–9). This eschatological scenario alienates humanists of both persuasions: mechanical and organic. It rests on a presupposition: the environment is under man. If true, then nature is not autonomous.

The autonomy of nature implies the near-permanence of nature. For the humanist, man's meaning must be subordinated to nature's permanence. To save man from God's judgments, man must submit to nature's. McKibben wrote: "The chief lesson is that the world displays a lovely order, an order comforting in its intricacy. And the most appealing part of this harmony, perhaps, is its permanence—the sense that we are part of something with roots stretching back nearly forever, and branches reaching forward just as far. Purely human life provides only a partial fulfillment of this desire for a kind of immortality. . . . But the earth and all its processes—the sun growing plants, flesh feeding on these plants, flesh decaying to nourish more plants, to name just one cycle—gives us some sense of a more enduring role."³² It is nature's cyclical processes within a temporally unbounded universe that supposedly provide meaning to man, who alone in the universe perceive nature's meaning. If time is essentially unbounded but the environment is not, then man's population must be made bounded. A growing human population is a threat to this worldview: a worldview bounded by physical limits rather than temporal. Temporal limits are too dangerous, for they imply a God beyond time who breaks into time, bringing final judgment.

The Malthusians challenge the possibility and therefore the legitimacy of temporally unbounded compound growth. The idea that God rewards covenantally faithful societies with expansion—numerically, economically, and geographically—appalls the Malthusians. The growth-oriented secular economist is willing to challenge the Malthusian vision, but only because he refuses to discuss biological limits as absolute limits.³³ But there *are* biological limits, even though the human population may reach 30 billion or 40 billion or 500 billion before these limits are reached. The fact is, the biological limits to mankind's growth on earth are measured in centuries, not eons. The limit of the speed of light restricts man's geographical extension. This brings covenant-breaking man face to face with one of two limits: biological expansion or temporal extension.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

33. Economists rarely discuss absolute limits. To them, all limits are marginal and relative.

Conclusion

The fundamental economic issue is not population growth. It is not the increase of food per capita. It is not capital invested per person. The fundamental economic issue is ethical: *God's covenant*. Nevertheless, the language of Leviticus 26:9–10 is agricultural. Why? Because in an agricultural society, the mark of God's blessing is food. God promised to provide bread for all. He also promised to increase their numbers.

This does not mean that He promised nothing else to them. He promised an agricultural people access in history to the city of God, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21). The city of God is the image of a regenerate society. The city is therefore not inherently evil. Urban life is not inherently depersonalizing. Covenant-breaking is evil and depersonalizing. Covenant-breaking is made less expensive in cities because of the higher costs of gathering information about individual actions, as well as the higher costs of imposing informal social sanctions. The anonymity of urban life makes social pressures to conform to moral standards much less effective than they are in rural or small-town regions. But covenant-breaking is not uniquely inherent to cities. It can be overcome through God's grace.

If this were not the case, then the promise of population growth would be a threat to the covenant. A covenantal blessing would inevitably become a covenantal curse. The grace of God would necessarily produce the wrath of God. This is the operational viewpoint of both premillennialism and amillennialism regarding church history, but it is a false view of history.³⁴ While covenantal blessings can and have led to corporate covenant-breaking, just as God warns (Lev. 26; Deut. 8; 28), they do not inevitably lead to them. The covenant's blessings are conditional; they do not continue indefinitely irrespective of corporate obedience. God's negative corporate sanctions come in history, and then society is given another opportunity to repent and rebuild: "And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (Isa. 61: 4).

The biblical view of history is growth-oriented. It not only proclaims the possibility of population expansion and increasing wealth per capita, it also establishes these as mandatory corporate goals in

34. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), chaps. 4, 5, 9. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

history. Until mankind becomes a fixed host at the end of history—covenant-breakers in the lake of fire eternally (Rev. 20:14–15), covenant-keepers developing the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22)—covenant-keeping mankind is expected by God to grow in numbers, wealth, and influence.

GOD'S ESCALATING WRATH

I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright. But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you (Lev. 26:13–17).

The theocentric issue here is the fear of God, which is related to His law and its negative sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Sanctions and Succession

This passage introduces that section of Leviticus 26 which lists the types of negative corporate sanctions in history that Israel could expect if God's covenant people violated God's law. As is true of Deuteronomy 28, a parallel passage on corporate sanctions, the negative sanctions greatly outnumber the positive sanctions. The Israelites were to understand the theocentric basis of wisdom: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

This section on sanctions appears in the fifth section of the Book

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2010), ch. 4.

of Leviticus. The fifth point of the covenant deals with succession. Why does a section on sanctions appear here? Because sanctions are linked covenantally to succession. This is why eschatology cannot be separated covenantally from theonomy, i.e., God's law and its biblically mandated sanctions. Sanctions determine who will inherit what: inheritance and disinheritance. God identifies Himself as the God of the covenant: deliverer, law-giver, and sanctions-bringer. God's threat of temporal wrath is to redirect the attention of citizens of a holy commonwealth to the possibility of disinheritance in history: wrath as the prelude to corporate disinheritance.

B. The Fear of God

The passage begins with a reminder: the God who threatens these historical sanctions is the God of corporate grace in history. He led them out of bondage in Egypt. They had been bent under the yoke of slavery, but He had broken their yoke and made them walk upright. This upright physical walk was analogous to an upright ethical walk. The language of walking before God is the language of covenantal obedience, both individual and corporate.² The morally crooked walk is mirrored by the bent walk of the slave who is under a yoke.

The temptation is always disobedience to God's standards (point three of the biblical covenant model). "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant." This necessarily involves the threat of negative sanctions (point four). "I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart." The essence of this sanction is disinheritance (point five). "And ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it." Invaders will inherit: "And I will set

2. "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). "And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them" (Lev. 20:23). "In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made" (II Kings 17:6–8).

my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you." So fearful will God's people become that they will flee when none pursue.

The covenantal issue is the fear of God. When men refuse to fear God, He raises up others who will terrify them. Covenant-breakers will thereby learn to fear God's human agents of wrath, so that they might better learn to fear God. The point is this: God is worth fearing even more than military invaders. If the stipulations of the Creator are widely ignored, then military invaders will become increasingly difficult to ignore. In this regard, the covenant-breaking adult is as foolish as a child. A father spansks a child when the child runs into a busy street. The real threat to the child is the street's traffic, but the child is fearless before this external threat. He must learn to fear his father in order to learn the greater fearfulness of the street. He fears the lesser threat more than the greater threat. Similarly, the sinning covenant-breaker loses his fear of the Father—the far greater threat—and must be reminded to fear God by a lesser external threat. The magnitude of God's wrath is manifested by the magnitude of the threat of military sanctions: God's wrath is more of a threat than a military defeat. The lesser threat is imposed by God in order to remind men of the greater threat.

C. Softening Their Resistance

The first negative sanction is both psychological and physical: terror and consumption. This will produce sorrow. This defensive mentality is the mentality of the slave and the prisoner. The second threatened negative sanction is military defeat. If this threat fails to persuade them to repent, the sanctions will escalate further. "And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins" (Lev. 26:18). The stated punishment is drought. God's wrath is manifested by His destruction of the covenantal nation's food supply. This was a major threat to a pre-modern agricultural society. "And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits" (Lev. 26: 19–20). Drought was God's means of softening up the resistance of King Ahab against Elijah's message (I Kings 17:1).

1. Inheritance

As in the case of Egypt, the next sanction involved the children: “And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate” (Lev. 26:21–22). God sent beasts against those children who mocked the prophet Elisha: “And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare [tore] forty and two children of them” (II Kings 2:23–24).

The judgments are again military: “And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied” (Lev. 26:23–26). Enemies laying siege outside the gates, pestilence and hunger inside the gates: so shall covenant-breakers be reminded of the importance of God’s law.

But even this may prove futile. “And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat” (Lev. 26:27–29). This was fulfilled in the days of Elisha, during Ben-hadad’s siege of Samaria:

And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the LORD do not help thee,

whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress? And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh (II Kings 6:24–30).

2. *Captivity*

Destruction would come upon all the land, rural and urban. If men refused to honor the sabbatical year of release, God promised to give the land its rest through the captivity of the nation.

And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it" (Lev. 26:31–35).

The captivity of the people of Israel would be a negative sanction against the people and a positive sanction for the land:

The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes (Lev. 26:43).

This judgment was imposed by God in the days of Jeremiah:

And they [the Chaldeans] burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years (II Chron. 36:19–21).

The people were to eat the fat of the land of promise. This was God's promised positive sanction. They would feed on the land. In contrast, the negative sanction of captivity was pictured as another kind of feast: the eating of the people by a foreign land. "And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them" (Lev. 26:38–39).

Step by step, sanction by sanction, God would bring them face to face with the magnitude of their rebellion. The goal was their repentance: "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land" (Lev. 26:40–42). Negative corporate sanctions in history are designed to restore covenantal faithfulness on the part of God's people. They are not judgments unto oblivion but judgments unto restoration.

Conclusion

God's escalating wrath in history serves as a means of restoring dominion by covenant. These negative sanctions are positive in intent: restoring faithfulness and, in the case of captivity, providing rest to the land itself. These sanctions were part of the covenantal law-order of Israel. This is why the section listing the sanctions ends with these words: "These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses" (Lev. 26:46). There is no doubt that the sanctions were part of the stipulations. There was no way for Israel to obey God's law without imposing the required negative sanctions. If the authorities refused to impose the stipulated negative sanctions, God would impose His stipulated negative sanctions. These negative sanctions would become progressively more painful. God's negative sanctions were designed to persuade men of the integrity—the seamless—of God's revealed law. If the people refused to learn from one set of punishments, God threatened to impose worse punishments.

The principle underlying this escalation of negative sanctions is simple to state: "But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48).³ The escalating sanctions in Israel were a form of covenant-affirmation: establishing the social predictability of God's law. The reliability of God's law was visible in the escalation of God's corporate sanctions, both positive and negative.

Modern Christian theologians assume that the Mosaic Covenant's divine sanctions no longer operate in the New Covenant era.⁴ From this idea (or at least paralleling it), they conclude that the Mosaic Covenant's civil sanctions are no longer valid. This is logical, given the incorrect presupposition. The divine sanctions undergirded the Bible-revealed familial, civil, and ecclesiastical stipulations; if the authorities refused to impose these mandatory sanctions, God would then impose His sanctions. If the threat of God's corporate sanctions are removed, then the sanctions undergirding the institutional sanctions are absent. Without sanctions, there is no law. *Biblical sanctions are inseparable from biblical stipulations: no sanctions = no law.* Remove God's corporate sanctions in history, and the legal order becomes judicially autonomous in history.

The autonomy of society from God's Bible-revealed law is the agreed-upon agenda of an implicit alliance between the humanists and the pietists. The humanists assume that God's corporate sanctions have always been mythological. Christian pietists assume that these sanctions have been annulled by the New Covenant. This pair of false assumptions serves as the judicial basis of the humanist-pietist alliance against the ideal of God's theocratic kingdom in history: Christendom.

If God's sanctions did not operate predictably in history, it would be impossible to produce a self-consciously biblical form of social theory. Christians would have to rely on some version of pagan natural law theory in order to construct their social theories. This is what they have done for almost two millennia. With the collapse of natural law theory after Darwin, Christian social theory has floundered. Darwin's target was William Paley's providential and teleological order; he hit

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

4. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

his target.⁵ Everyone standing behind this target has been epistemologically defenseless ever since.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), pp. 347–48.

THE PRIESTHOOD: BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation. And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels. And if it be from five years old even unto twenty years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male twenty shekels, and for the female ten shekels. And if it be from a month old even unto five years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male five shekels of silver, and for the female thy estimation shall be three shekels of silver. And if it be from sixty years old and above; if it be a male, then thy estimation shall be fifteen shekels, and for the female ten shekels. But if he be poorer than thy estimation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to his ability that vowed shall the priest value him (Lev. 27:2–8).

The theocentric basis of this passage is that the God of the covenant does allow vows. Vows are oaths. Oaths are associated with point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Vows and Succession

The question is, what kind of vow is in view here? This is one of the most peculiar passages in the Mosaic law. The rabbinical commentators do not do a better job than the Christians in explaining it, and the Christians are universally perplexed. It is obvious that vows were involved. Money payments were also involved. We need to an-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

swer two questions: What was the nature of the vow? What was the function of the money payment?

To begin to sort out this pair of problems, we must answer this question: What is a vow? Biblically, a vow is a lawful invocation of God's covenantal sanctions, positive and negative. To escape God's corporate negative sanctions, there must be individual vows of repentance: *covenant renewal*. Covenant renewal involves a public reaffirmation of God's covenant: His sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and triumph (historical and eschatological). These are the five points of the biblical covenant model.² A lawful public affirmation of God's covenant always comes in the form of a vow. In order to set oneself apart judicially before God, one takes a vow. Vows necessarily involve sanctions. They are *self-maledictory oaths* that invoke God's sanctions, positive and negative. Formal judicial separation is based on a vow; it always points to God's sanctions in history. This is why holiness (point three of the biblical covenant model) points to judgment (point four).

The vows in this instance were ecclesiastical. The Hebrew word that describes these vows, *pawlaw*, is translated here as "singular." The translation itself is singular: *pawlaw* is translated as "singular" in the King James Version only in this singular verse. It is elsewhere translated as "marvelous," "wondrous," or "separate." Lawful vows are always out of the ordinary, and these vows were very special vows among vows. They were marvelous vows. The question is: In what way?

Commentators argue about the possible reasons for the placement of this chapter at the end of Leviticus. Why should a section on vows appear at the end of a book on holiness? Gordon Wenham wrote: "It is a puzzle why ch. 27, which deals with vows, should appear in its present position, since ch. 26 with its blessings and curses would have made a fitting conclusion to the book."³ He offers two possible explanations, neither of them convincing.

I suggest the following explanation: the end of Leviticus marks a transition from a book that centers on point three of the biblical covenant model—holiness, boundaries—to a book that centers on point four: oaths, sanctions. But what about part five of the book, inheritance? Here is the central theme of this passage: the loss of inheritance in one tribe in exchange for inheritance in another tribe.

2. Sutton, chaps. 1–5. North, chaps. 1–5.

3. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 336.

The previous chapter, Leviticus 26, deals with God's positive and negative corporate sanctions in history. The move from an emphasis on point four of the biblical covenant model—sanctions—in Chapter 26 to point five—succession—in Chapter 27 is appropriate.⁴ Negative sanctions in the context of Chapter 26 have to do with disinheritance. Chapter 26 presents a catalogue of God's corporate covenantal sanctions. Chapter 27 begins with rules governing a particular type of personal vow. This in turn raises the issue of covenantal continuity. Jordan wrote: "Payment of vows relates to the fifth commandment, as we give to our Divine parent and thereby honor Him, and to the tenth commandment, since payment of vows and tithes is the opposite of covetousness. Thus, this final section of Leviticus has everything to do with continuity."⁵ The passage is where it belongs: in part five. The vow relates to inheritance: family continuity over time.

B. Devoted to Temple Service: Irreversible

The text does not tell us what stipulations governed this type of vow. The text also does not provide a context. This is why the commentators get so confused. The old line about "text without context is pretext" is applicable. The law was addressed to priests: "the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation." Whose estimation? The priests. Anything dedicated to the Lord is assumed by commentators to have been dedicated to or through the priesthood. The text is silent about the nature of the dedication; it speaks only of pricing. A gift of individuals was in some way involved because specific prices are associated in the text with specific genders and ages.

Wenham discussed this law as symbolic of a man's willingness to pledge himself or those under his authority as temple slaves. The vow-taker could not really serve God in this way, Wenham argues. Access to the temple was reserved to Levites and priests.⁶ Once the vow was made, Wenham said, the person who had made it was required to redeem himself and any other people under the vow's authority by making an appropriate payment to the temple. These singular vows specifically invoked mandatory payments. "To free themselves from the vow, they had instead to pay to the sanctuary the price they would

4. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 17. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

6. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 338.

have commanded in the slave market.”⁷ Once made, the vow had to be paid. He cites Psalm 116: “I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people” (Ps. 116:14–18).⁸ This was David’s affirmation of the law of vows, which states: “But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth” (Deut. 23:22–23).⁹

We need to answer two questions. First, was Wenham correct about the exclusively symbolic nature of this type of vow? Second, was he correct about the payment as a substitute for literal temple service? Most commentators have agreed with Wenham on this point. I do not. I argue that the terms of the vow were not symbolic, and the payment was not a substitute.

1. Devotion: Change in Legal Status

In the case of heathen slaves, Israelites possessed lawful title to the slave and the slave’s heirs (Lev. 25:44–45).¹⁰ There is no reason to assume that an Israelite could not transfer ownership of his slave to an individual priest or to the temple. The tabernacle-temple already employed permanent pagan slaves: the Gibeonites. They were the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the assembly; hence, they were involved in religious service. This permanent temple slavery had been specifically imposed on them by Joshua as a curse: “Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God” (Josh. 9:23). They were permanently set apart—*devoted*—for temple service. This was the result of their deception in gaining the vow of peace from Joshua (Josh. 9). The covenantal blessing—peace in the land—because of the Gibeonites’ deception became their covenantal curse: permanent slavery under the priests. They had escaped God’s

7. *Idem.*

8. *Idem.*

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 58.

10. Chapter 31.

covenantal ban of *hormah*—either their total destruction or their permanent expulsion from the land—but they could not escape His covenantal ban of temple servitude. Hormah (*chormah*) means “devoted.” Its frame of reference was God’s total destruction: “And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah” (Num. 21:3). A city devoted to total destruction was under *hormah*: a total ban. This destruction was a priestly act.¹¹

We conclude that there is nothing in the Mosaic Covenant to indicate that pagan slaves could not be assigned to temple service even though they could not lawfully assist with the sacrifices. They were not allowed inside those temple boundaries that were lawfully accessible only to priests, but they still could work for the priests outside these boundaries. Thus, a symbolic transfer of ownership of a pagan slave to the priests is not the concern of this passage. The deciding issue contextually cannot be priestly ownership as such. The issue is also not the dedication or sanctification of household slaves. There was nothing special in Israel about the dedication of household slaves—nothing “singular.” It has to be something more fundamental: *service within the normally sealed boundaries of the temple*.

Then who were the vow-governed individuals of Leviticus 27:2–8? *They were family members under the lawful authority of the vow-taker*. The vow was a specific kind of vow, a vow of devotion. Devotion here was not an emotional state; it was a change in judicial status.

2. Devotion vs. Sanctification

At this point, I have to introduce a crucial distinction of the Mosaic law: devotion vs. sanctification. A sanctified item was set apart for God’s use, though not necessarily on a permanent basis. A devoted thing was set apart permanently for priestly service or sacrifice. This distinction is based on the law that appears later in this section of Leviticus:

Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death (Lev. 27:28–29).

11. On “hormah,” see James B. Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), pp. 10–12. (<http://jjjudges>)

Death here was not necessarily physical death; it was, however, necessarily *covenantal death*. This meant that the devoted item was placed within the irreversible boundaries of God's ban. This form of covenantal death meant that the item was *beyond human redemption*. The devoted object came under God's absolute control. In many passages in Scripture, the Hebrew word for "devoted" (*khayrem*) is translated as "accursed" or "cursed." Such a cursed item could not be used for anything other than sacrifice to God. If it was subsequently misused—violated or profaned, in other words—the person who violated God's boundary himself came under the ban: beyond human redemption.

And the city [Jericho] shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it (Josh. 6:17–18).

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the *accursed thing*: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel (Josh. 7:1).¹²

But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal (I Sam. 15:21).

It is worth noting that this Hebrew word is the very last word that occurs in the Old Testament, in the passage that prophesies the coming of Elijah (John the Baptist), the man Jesus identified as the last man of the Old Covenant.¹³ "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he

12. Because Achan had violated the holy ban that God placed around Jericho's spoils, he placed his whole household under the ban. It was legally possible for a father to place his family under God's ban—disinheritance from the family's land and legal status—through covenantal adoption into the priesthood. But in this case, Achan placed his family under *hormah*: God's absolute ban of destruction. As the head of his household, he went through an adoption process: not into the tribe of Levi, but rather into covenantal Jericho. Thus, it was mandatory that the civil government execute his entire household, including the animals, and bury all his assets with them (Josh. 7:24). See Appendix A: "Sacrilege and Sanctions."

13. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16).

shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5–6). This was God's threatened negative sanction: *covenantal disinheritance*—fathers vs. sons—that involved God's curse on Old Covenant Israel. As Jesus later warned: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34–36).

The devoted item could not be redeemed by the payment of a price. It had been permanently transferred covenantally to God as a sacrificial offering. This is the meaning of the singular vow. *The singular vow was a vow whose stipulations were irrevocable.* The devoted item was placed within the confines of an absolutely holy boundary: beyond human redemption. The vow was voluntary; the resulting transfer was irrevocable: a singular vow.

3. Devotion Through Adoption

Could an Israelite lawfully devote his child to priestly service? Yes; as we shall see, Jephthah's daughter was so devoted by her father. Once a person was adopted into the family of Aaron specifically or into the tribe of Levi, he could not re-enter another Israelite tribe by a subsequent act of adoption. He had been devoted to the temple: beyond redemption. So had his covenantal heirs. If I am correct about this, then in the context of marriage—another form of legal adoption¹⁴—there was no option for an Israelite father to buy back his daughter from her priestly husband by returning the bride price to his son-in-law.¹⁵ Similarly, there was no way for a man to buy back himself, his wife, or his children from formally devoted service to God. In short, there was no redemption price for this kind of vow. This is why the vow was *pawlaw*: "singular."

There is no indication that a man could place his adult male children into mandated priestly service. An adult son was not eligible for compulsory adoption. He was a lawful heir to the land and the legal status of his tribe and family. He could not be disinherited at his father's prerogative. The crucial legal issue for identifying adulthood

14. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 31:B.

15. The dowry remained with the wife in any case; it was her protection, her inheritance from her father.

for men was military numbering. An adult male was eligible to be numbered at age 20 to fight in a holy war: “This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD” (Ex. 30:13). At age 20, a man came under the threat of God’s negative sanctions: going into battle without first having paid blood money to the temple.¹⁶ Once he became judicially eligible for numbering as a member of his tribe, he became judicially responsible for his own vows. He became, as we say, “his own man.” He became a member of God’s holy army. A father could no longer act in the son’s name.

A daughter could not legally be numbered for service in God’s army. Thus, an unmarried daughter could be delivered into a priestly family, as we see in the peculiar case of Jephthah’s daughter (Jud. 11:34–39).¹⁷ Jephthah’s vow to sacrifice the first thing to come out of his house could not legally be applied literally to a person. He could not lawfully burn a person, nor could the priests; therefore, any person who came under the terms of such a lawful vow had to be devoted to God in temple service.¹⁸ Jephthah had made a singular vow. It was irreversible. This means that his daughter had to be disinherited.¹⁹ She was beyond redemption.

There was a distinction in Mosaic law between someone or something *dedicated* (sanctified) to the priesthood and someone or something *devoted* to the priesthood. The former could be redeemed by the payment of the market price plus a premium of one-fifth (Lev. 27:13, 15, 19).²⁰ The latter could not be redeemed.

Disinheritance was permanent in Old Covenant Israel. This could only be by covenant: specifically, by covenantal death. This is why disinheritance was a form of devoted giving. The head of the household publicly gave his heirs over to God. He²¹ publicly broke the family’s covenant with such a person. There were only three means of lawful disinheritance in Old Covenant Israel: civil execution for a capital

16. *Ibid.*, ch. 58.

17. I accept the standard interpretation of this story: she was not literally executed by her father.

18. Jordan, *Judges*, pp. 204–13.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

20. Chapter 38.

21. Or, in the case of a widow (Num. 30:9), she. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

crime, expulsion from the congregation for an ecclesiastical crime, or adoption into another family or tribe. All three involved broken covenants: civil, ecclesiastical, and familial. In the third instance, the broken family covenant was simultaneously replaced by a new family or tribal covenant. A daughter was normally disinherited by her father in this way, and if she was to become a wife rather than a concubine, she was to receive a dowry from her father.²²

Jephthah's daughter was disinherited in a unique way: by legal transfer into a priestly family. She bewailed her virginity (Jud. 11:37) because this was the mark of her unmarried condition, and therefore of her eligibility for transfer into the tribe of Levi apart from her own will. The standard interpretation of the story of Jephthah's daughter rests on the assertion that as a temple servant, she would have had to remain a virgin.²³ I am aware of no evidence from the Book of Leviticus or any other biblical text regarding the mandatory and therefore permanent virginity of female temple servants. Then why did she bewail her virginity? Not because she was bewailing her supposed future virginity, but because she was bewailing her present virginity. It was her virginity that bound her to the terms of her father's vow; otherwise, her husband's authority would have negated the father's vow.

Jephthah's daughter was, as the phrase goes, "her daddy's girl": a dynasty-coveting power-seeker. When her virginity cost her the inheritance of her father's political dynasty, she bewailed her virginity. Her heart was not right with God. What was an enormous honor—adoption into the tribe of Levi, the spiritual counsellors of the nation—she saw as a thing to bewail in the mountains for two months (Jud. 11:37).

Jordan raised a question: "Why didn't Jephthah substitute a money payment for his vow? These monetary substitutes are set out in Leviticus 27:1–8."²⁴ He said that commentators who have addressed this question have no easy explanation for it. He refers to Leviticus 27:28–29: "Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death." Thus, he concludes, Jephthah's daughter could not be redeemed. "Since Jephthah vowed to offer this person as a whole burnt sacrifice, we realize that he

22. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 32.

23. Jordan took this approach: *Judges*, p. 210.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

was ‘devoting’ him or her to the Lord, and thus no ransom was possible.”²⁵ This is the correct interpretation.²⁶ But this answer raises a more important question: If she could not legally be redeemed from this vow of temple service, how could anyone be redeemed from a vow of temple service? If the answer is that no person could be redeemed from such a singular vow under Mosaic law—and this *is* the correct answer—then what are we to make of Leviticus 27:2–8? What was the meaning of all those prices?

C. Not a Redemption Price

In the section of Leviticus 27 that follows this one, we read of the redemption price of animals that are set apart (sanctified) to be offered as sacrifices (vv. 9–13). Then, in the section following that one, we read of the redemption price of a house sanctified to the priesthood (vv. 14–15). Finally, in the next section, the laws governing sanctified fields are listed (vv. 16–25). In the second and third cases, the term “sanctify” (*kawdash*, holy) is used.²⁷ In all three cases, the redemption price was the market price at the time of the redemption plus 20% (vv. 13, 15, 19).

Then comes Leviticus 27:26: “Only the firstling of the beasts, which should be the LORD’S firstling, no man shall sanctify it; whether it be ox, or sheep: it is the LORD’S.” This law specifically denies the legitimacy of sanctifying the animal. This means that no redemption of the animal was legal. It was a devoted animal, not a sanctified animal. *Sanctification* in this context meant “set apart until redeemed.” This legal condition was less rigorous than devotion. *Devotion* meant that the legal boundary around the object was permanent. The same is true of the vow of Leviticus 27:2–8. In this passage, there is no mention of a supplemental payment of one-fifth. This is evidence that what is being considered in verses 2–8 is not a series of redemption prices. Then

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 206–7.

26. Jordan pointed out to me that the only other use of *pawlaw*—“singular,” as in singular vow—in the hipil voice is found in Numbers 6:2, which relates to a Nazirite vow: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk” (Num. 6:2–4).

27. In the first case, sacrificial animals, the cognate term for “sanctify” is used: *kodesh*, holy (vv. 9, 10).

what does this section refer to?

The preliminary answer was given in 1846 by Andrew Bonar. He concluded that the list of prices in Leviticus 27:2–8 is not a list of redemption prices. “There seems to me a mistake generally fallen into here by commentators. They suppose that these *shekels of money* were paid in order to free the offerers from the obligation of devoting *the person*. Now, surely, the whole chapter is speaking of things truly devoted to God, and cases of exchange and substitution are referred to in ver. 10, 13, 15. As for *persons devoted*, there was no substitution allowed. The mistake has arisen from supposing that this amount of money was ransom-money; whereas it was *an addition* to the offering of the person, not a *substitution*.” He pointed to the case of Jephthah’s daughter as evidence.²⁸

Bonar explained the additional monetary payment in terms of the giver’s gratitude. A person who was really grateful to God, he said, would add money to the transfer. This misses the judicial point. What we have here is an *entry fee*: a payment analogous to a *marriage dowry*. A person who desired to transfer himself or a member of his family into the tribe of Levi had to provide a “dowry”—not to the family, but to the temple.²⁹ Why a dowry? Because, theologically speaking, the bride of God is not a concubine. She is a free wife. The free wife in Israel had to be provided with a dowry. Judicially speaking, the Levites were freemen in Israel. For anyone within another tribe to become a member of the tribe of Levi, the person’s family—the head of the household—had to offer an additional payment. This payment was judicial. It established the person’s *legal status*: a freeman (wife) rather than a slave (concubine).

Members of the tribe of Levi could not normally own rural land outside of 48 specified cities (Num. 35:7).³⁰ Thus, any person who was delivered by a vow and payment into temple service lost his or her claim to his or her ancestral land. We see this in the case of Jephthah’s

28. Andrew Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1846] 1966), p. 497.

29. This does not mean that the money could never go to the adopting family. Officers of the temple might choose to transfer the funds to an adopting family for various reasons, such as the education of young children who had been adopted, or the care of older people.

30. There were two exceptions: (1) when a family dedicated a piece of land to the priesthood and then refused to redeem it before the next jubilee year; (2) when a family dedicated a piece of land to the priesthood but then leased the whole property to someone else (Lev. 27:16–21). Chapter 37.

daughter, in an incident that has confused Bible commentators for centuries. As his only child (Jud. 11:34), she was the lawful heir of his land and its accompanying legal status, but only so long as she did not marry outside his tribe (Num. 35:6–9).³¹ By being adopted into the tribe of Levi, she could not thereafter marry outside of the tribe of Levi. Thus, she had to forfeit her inheritance from Jephthah. She could not extend her father's dynasty, a point Jordan makes.³² A father alienated his family's inheritance forever from his heirs if his male children were under age 20 or his daughters were unmarried at the time he made his vow. This did not mean that they lost their legal status as freemen; Levites possessed freeman status. But the heirs did lose their claim on the family's land.

Could the priest annul the vow? Yes. There was no compulsion that he adopt someone into his family. The vow was analogous to the vow of a daughter or married woman: it could be annulled within 24 hours by the male head of the household (Num. 30:3–8). The priests, acting in God's name, as the heads of God's ecclesiastical household, could lawfully annul someone's vow of adoption into the tribe. But if the vow was accepted by a priest in authority, the vow-taker and any other members of his family covered by his vow were then adopted into the tribe of Levi if they could pay the entry fee. Once adopted by the priest's family, there was no way back into non-Levitical freeman-ship in Israel. At the time of the adoption, the adopted family's original inheritance had been forfeited to the kinsman-redeemer, the closest relative in their original tribe (Num. 27:9–11).³³ They could retain their status as freemen only as members of the tribe of Levi. Their family land was no longer part of their inheritance. But the makes were still members of God's holy army. They were still citizens.

D. The Restrictive Function of Price

These prices were not market prices. They had nothing to do with comparative rates of economic productivity. They were instead barriers to entry into the tribe of the priests. Primary judicial authority in Israel was supposed to be inside the tribe of Levi, for the Levites had unique access to the written law of God. They were the spiritual *and therefore the judicial* counsellors in Israel.³⁴ It was not easy to gain ac-

31. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 22.

32. Jordan, *Judges*, p. 205.

33. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 15.

34. This is why Paul speaks of the double honor of those who labor in the word:

cess to this position of honor and authority. Adoption into the tribe of Levi was legal, but it was not cheap.

The entry price for an adult male was set at 50 shekels of silver.³⁵ The price for an adult female was 30 shekels.³⁶ The male child's price was 20 shekels; the female child's was 10 shekels. Very young children's prices were lower: five shekels (male) and three shekels (female). For the elderly, the prices were 15 shekels (male) and ten shekels (female).

The formal prices of the sexes differed. Males were priced higher than females in every age group. Similarly, old people were priced higher than very young children, but less than children age 5 to 20. Why? Did this have something to do with market pricing? These were not cases of pure market pricing, but can the differences in formal prices be explained in terms of expected productivity, just as market prices can be explained? Yes, but such an explanation is misleading.

Prices always serve as barriers. The question is: Were prices in this instance barriers to entry or barriers to escape; that is, were they entry prices or redemption prices? Were they based on the value of services to be redeemed or were they tests of authority to be honored?

1. Explanation: Economic Productivity

If we regard the prices as redemption prices, we are tempted to explain the price differences in terms of the varying market value of the individuals. By adopting this explanation, we misunderstand the legal nature of the transaction; nevertheless, we can make a plausible economic case. We can interpret the passage in terms of the repurchase value of the person whose services had been handed over to the temple.

If economic redemption was the meaning of the price structure of

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17). Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

35. This was the same as another judicial price: the formal bride price owed by a seducer of a virgin to her father. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 47:D. It rests on an interpretation of the false accuser's penalty of Deuteronomy 22:19: "And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days." One hundred shekels was double restitution.

36. The same price that was owed to the owner of a gored slave (Ex. 21:32)

Leviticus 27:2–8, then the vow became a peculiar symbolic ritual: people were being handed over to God verbally, but then repurchased from the temple economically. Such a ritual would have converted an otherwise simple monetary donation into the formality of a sacred vow. A lawful vow invoked God's name and God's sanctions in history. Why should God's name have been formally invoked? Why didn't the person wishing to give money to the priests just give it? A strictly economic analysis misses the judicial point: *the singular vow produced a permanent alteration of someone's legal status*. The prices listed in the text were not redemption prices; they were transfer prices analogous to dowries.

Still, it is quite tempting to think of these prices as redemption prices. This is the way men think in a century dominated by various forms of economic determinism, whether left wing (e.g., Marxism) or right wing (e.g., the pure logic of choice).³⁷ If we begin with this assumption of economic determinism, we are easily tempted to conclude that these prices were shadows of market prices. Here is how we might reason:

Why were adult males priced highest of all? Because they are at the peak of their economic value. Their training was behind them. They had a lifetime of productive service ahead of them. In order to buy himself back from lifetime service, the vow-taker had to pay a very high price.

What about the lower price for females in each age group? This would also seem to have been governed by the principle of productivity. For some reason or reasons, females were less valuable economically than males. (See next paragraph.) But females produce children. Weren't these children assets? If they had become the permanent, inheritable property of the owner, yes. This low formal price for women is evidence that the duration of the vow's conditions did not extend beyond the jubilee year. At that time, every heir of the conquest's generation returned to his land. All servitude ended for them. So, the children born of women protected by the jubilee law would not have been equally as valuable as inheritable slave children. The period available for capitalization was shorter.

Even in the late twentieth century—an era of federally legislated “equal pay for equal work” laws—the economics of motherhood have not changed significantly. Women still are paid less than men. Why? Because their expected net economic returns are lower than men's.

37. Richard D. Fuerle, *The Pure Logic of Choice* (New York: Vantage, 1986).

They have children who must be cared for. From 1981 through 1985, 30% of American women with paid maternity leave or other benefits did not return to the labor market after six months, while 56% of women without maternity benefits did not return to work.³⁸ The free market places a lower value on capital invested in women in the work force. This lower return on investment is compensated for by lower wages paid to women. Any attempt to mandate equal wages by civil law will produce unemployment for women in general, while subsidizing women with good looks or academic credentials.³⁹

Why would older people be more valuable than very young children? Because they are on average more productive. Very young children are net absorbers of scarce economic resources. It takes time for the present losses to be compensated by future returns. The net flow of expected future income discounted by the prevailing interest rate is low because the expected positive income stream is too many years in the future. This was not true of those over age 4. The payoff would be faster. Why the difference? Those above age 4 are expected to become net producers sooner than those younger than 5. An older person was less valuable than a child above age 4. The older person has skills and experience, but he or she also can be expected to have infirmities. The expected net income stream is less for this reason and also because of shortened life expectancy.

So, one can argue on the basis of economic analysis that these were redemption prices. That is to say, one can see a loose correlation between the price differentials of Leviticus 27:2–8 and the free market's pricing of labor services in the late twentieth century, and then conclude that the Mosaic law's stipulations were reasonably consistent with market forces. The evidence of varying prices seems to fit the economic reality of age-specific and gender-specific economic productivity. A person who believes in the continuing validity of this Mosaic statute, and who adopts this approach to explaining Leviticus 27:2–8, is forced to conclude that these gender-related and age-related price differentials are permanent in New Covenant history, with or

38. Felice N. Schwartz, *Breaking With Tradition: Women and Work, The New Facts of Life* (New York: Warner, 1992), p. 59. She cited Martha O'Connell, "Maternity Leave Arrangements: 1981–1985," *Work and Family Patterns of American Women*, Current Population Reports, series P–23, no. 165 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, March 1990).

39. Gary North, "The Feminine Mistake: The Economics of Women's Liberation," *The Freeman* (Jan. 1971); reprinted in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 24. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

without human bondage (i.e., the capitalization of expected lifetime net income). If the price differentials are based on productivity differentials, these productivity differentials have to be assumed to be permanent—part of the human condition. This means that technological changes and educational changes can never overcome productivity differentials, especially gender-based differentials.

The initial assumption of this line of economic reasoning is incorrect. The context of this law was not labor productivity, but rather *priestly holiness*. The focus of concern was not the capitalization of economic productivity but rather *the necessity of restricting access into the priesthood*. God placed judicial boundaries around the temple. God's presence in Israel was marked by a series of "no trespassing signs"—restrictions on physical access—which became more rigorous as men approached the holy of holies. These boundaries were judicial. Lawful access across each boundary was based on a person's judicial status, not his economic status.⁴⁰ Vows marked a person's move across these judicial boundaries.

2. Explanation: Submission to Authority

Let us begin with another assumption: these prices were dowries, not redemption prices. Why was the highest entry price required of an adult male? Because the adult head of a household was a man who was used to exercising family authority and perhaps other kinds of civil authority. By placing a high entry price on his adoption into the tribe of Levi, God protected His priestly servants from invasion by two groups: (1) power-seekers seeking to extend their authority into the church; (2) poor people seeking a guaranteed income as members of the tithe-receiving tribe. The power-seekers first had to abandon all legal claim to their original inheritance and also had to provide a considerable entry fee. Married men also had to pay for their wives' and minor children's entry into the tribe of Levi. This further restricted entry into the priestly class.

God established an entry fee higher for aged people—age 60 and over (v. 7)—than for very young children: under age 5 (v. 6). Why? Because old people tend to be more set in their ways, more used to deference from younger people, even priests. They would be more trouble to govern than very young children. The very young child would grow up in the presence of the Levites and the priests. He would learn to re-

40. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 3.

spect authority. He would not be a major threat to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. There was less need for a monetary barrier to his entry into the household of the church.

God established lower prices for old men than for male children ages 5–19 (v. 5). The prices for females, young and old, were the same: 10 shekels. Why? The issue was authority: males had more authority than females did. Children of this age group reflected their parents' attitudes. The boys would have been more difficult to control than aged men. Young girls and old women were judged of equal difficulty. So, the discrepancies in these dowry prices can be explained in terms of *expected resistance to ecclesiastical authority*. But what about the lower price for females in each age group? This is also consistent with the hypothesis that this law was imposed by God in order to reduce the Levite adoptees' resistance to ecclesiastical authority. Israelite women were accustomed to obey male heads of household. They were more likely to respect hierarchical authority. Thus, they were less of a threat to the established ecclesiastical order. The payment could be smaller because the need to establish a barrier to entry was less.

E. Sonship Is Judicial

It was an honor to be a member of the tribe of Levi. This tribe guarded the law of the covenant, a guardianship symbolized by the two tablets of the law inside the Ark of the Covenant (Deut. 31:26). The priests were in charge of guarding the Ark. That is, the priests policed the boundaries between the Ark and the world outside.

Adoption is always an aspect of God's law. This included adoption into the tribe of Levi, and even the family of Aaron. Sonship is judicial. Biblical sonship must always place covenantal faithfulness above biological relationships. When Eli elevated his sons to the priesthood, judicially ignoring the presence of faithful servant Samuel, God cut off Eli's inheritance by executing his sons. Eli had warned both of them what would happen, but they had refused to listen: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them" (I Sam. 2:25). Eli refused to impose the negative sanction of disinheritance through excommunication, so God disinherited them through execution. He did this by subjecting the whole nation to a military defeat by the Philistines. A man of God warned Eli of what was about to happen

(I Sam. 2:27–36), but Eli refused to take effective steps to evade God's wrath. He could have adopted Samuel from the beginning, had his mother consented, which she was obviously ready to do, having dedicated him to God for life (I Sam. 1:11). At any time, Eli could have adopted Samuel in place of his sons, making him a priest at age 30.⁴¹ Instead, he honored biological sonship above adoptive sonship. Adoption is fundamental in establishing covenant-keeping sonship; biology is not. Eli had decided to maintain a boundary between Samuel and the altar; God therefore placed a boundary between Eli and his inheritance. Samuel could have become Eli's heir; by honoring his sons, Eli chose to disinherit his family's name.

Eli's decision cost Israel dearly, as priestly rebellion always does. Because Eli had made his sons the priests of Israel, Samuel later became a prophet who brought God's covenant lawsuit against Saul (I Sam. 15). Samuel, not the high priest, anointed David (I Sam. 16). Had Samuel been a priest, the priesthood would have retained more of its temporal authority. God honored Samuel more than He honored the civil authority of the priesthood.

F. The Kinsman-Redeemer

Leviticus 27:2–8 is the passage governing the conditions of adoption into the tribe of Levi. There had to be a payment—the equivalent of a dowry—to the temple.⁴² In the case of a slave, his owner had to provide the funds. If the adoptee was the head of a household, he had to make the payment on his own behalf, or find someone to make it for him.

Who was the most likely person to make the payment for him if he could not afford to pay? Both judicially and economically, there is little doubt: the kinsman-redeemer. He would inherit title to the land left behind by a newly adopted family. The entry price was high; no one else was likely to have the same incentive to make so large a payment.

41. Age 30 was the minimum age of service in the temple (Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 40, 43, 47).

42. I do not think the price was paid to Levite families. Had the money gone to individual families, there would have been a strong motivation for Levites to recruit new members of the tribe. The entry fee was to serve as a barrier to entry, not a motivation to recruit new members. If the money went directly to the temple, local Levites would have had far less incentive to recruit non-Levites into the tribe. Aaronic priests would have possessed a veto over adoption: the men with the greatest authority in Israel. Adoption in this case was tribal, not familial, analogous to circumcised resident aliens who were adopted into tribal cities if they were accepted to serve in God's holy army.

This points to the work of Christ as the Kinsman-Redeemer of Israel and mankind. He has paid the fee for all those who are adopted into the New Covenant priesthood. No one else has either the incentive or the ability to pay this price. In His case, the incentive is not economic, for two reasons. First, Jesus Christ already is God the Father's lawful heir in history and eternity. He will inherit everything. Second, the entry price is too high—far beyond the very high price of 50 shekels in Old Covenant Israel. The price is the death of the Kinsman-Redeemer. His motivation was grace, not profit. Christians inherit as heirs of their Kinsmen-Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Everyone else is eternally disinherited.

Verse 8 reads: "But if he be poorer than thy estimation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to his ability that vowed shall the priest value him." The high priest, Jesus Christ, has paid the maximum price for each of His saints—those set apart by God judicially for priestly service. Entering with nothing of our own, we do not need to plead before a priest for a lower entry fee. The high priest has paid it all.

Conclusion

If this analysis is correct, then it should be obvious that this law has been annulled with the New Covenant's change in the priesthood. The passage's variations in price—young vs. old, male vs. female—have nothing to do with economic productivity. They are irrelevant for the economic analysis of labor markets. They were equally irrelevant for such analytical purposes under the Mosaic Covenant.

The prices listed in Leviticus 27:2–8 were not redemption prices; they were entry barrier prices. They were not based on the expected economic productivity of people who were then immediately redeemed out of God's ecclesiastical service; they were based on the need to screen power-seekers and security-seekers from access to ecclesiastical service. They were not market prices; they were judicial prices. They were not barriers to *escape from* ecclesiastical service; they were barriers to *entry into* ecclesiastical service. Thus, rather than applying economic analysis to the productivity of the groups specified in Leviticus 27:2–8, we should apply economic analysis to the question of the judicial boundary separating the tribe of Levi from the other tribes.

THE REDEMPTION-PRICE SYSTEM

And if it be a beast, whereof men bring an offering unto the LORD, all that any man giveth of such unto the LORD shall be holy. He shall not alter it, nor change it, a good for a bad, or a bad for a good: and if he shall at all change beast for beast, then it and the exchange thereof shall be holy. And if it be any unclean beast, of which they do not offer a sacrifice unto the LORD, then he shall present the beast before the priest: And the priest shall value it, whether it be good or bad: as thou valuest it, who art the priest, so shall it be. But if he will at all redeem it, then he shall add a fifth part thereof unto thy estimation. And when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy unto the LORD, then the priest shall estimate it, whether it be good or bad: as the priest shall estimate it, so shall it stand. And if he that sanctified it will redeem his house, then he shall add the fifth part of the money of thy estimation unto it, and it shall be his (Lev. 27:9–15).

The theocentric meaning of this passage is simple: God is to be honored by sacrifice. Sacrifice is related to part four of the biblical covenant model: sanctions.¹

A. Gifts to Priests

A person could give an animal or a piece of real estate to God through the priesthood. If he changed his mind later and decided to buy it back, he paid a redemption fee of one-fifth above the estimated value of the gift. The recipient, the priest, made this original estimation. God was willing to allow men to change their minds regarding previous sacrifices, but not at zero price. Once offered as a sacrifice, the property did change ownership: from the original owner to the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2010), ch. 4.

priest. Whatever benefits the owner received from making the sacrifice—self-esteem, public acclaim, etc.—were purchased upon redemption: an additional payment of one-fifth.

This passage deals with the re-purchase of animals and houses that had been given to priests either for ritual sacrifice or for resale by the priests. Later in this chapter, I will consider the third redemption payment: fields. In each case, the cash redemption price required an additional 20% payment.² This was what distinguished a redemption price from the previous passage's payment structure, which was not a redemption price but rather an entry fee into the tribe designated by God for holy service. The visible difference between the two forms of voluntary payment to the priesthood—dedication and devotion—was the presence of a penalty payment. The dedicated item did not become *hormah*: God's whole burnt offering. With dedication there was a possibility of economic redemption: de-sanctification.

B. Pricing and Penalties

A beast was designated by its owner as a sacrifice. The owner brought it to the priest. The beast was then identified as having become holy (*kodesh*). To be holy is to be set apart judicially, i.e., sanctified (*kawdash*). But the degree of separation was less than in the case of an offering that was devoted to God: it did not come under the ban.

The priests were Israel's agents of formal sanctification. They possessed the authority to set apart certain beasts for sacrificial purposes. The individual could not sacrifice his animal on his own authority if he expected to establish it as a judicially valid offering; he had to bring it to the priests. This dependence on the priesthood to validate sacramental offerings to God reinforced the social and legal authority of the priesthood. This arrangement did not limit men's ability to make economically significant offerings to God, but such unsanctified offerings were not sacramental. Laymen could show good faith, but they did not have the power to invoke God's sanctions authoritatively.³

2. There was an exception, as we shall see: a lessee paid a cash redemption price, but no 20 penalty.

3. One of the fundamental institutional differences between magical religion and biblical religion is seen in this distinction between sanctified offerings and unsanctified offerings. The person who invokes magic believes that his formal incantations and rituals allow him to manipulate supernatural power directly and authoritatively. Biblical religion denies such authority to all those who have not been anointed, either by birth or adoption (Old Covenant priesthood or prophetic anointing) or by the laying on of hands (New Covenant ministry-priesthood). The priest in the New Covenant

Once it had been dedicated—sanctified—the beast’s owner had the right to change his mind about sacrificing this particular beast. For whatever reason, he could choose to spare the life of this animal. The priest would then estimate the value of this beast according to its market price. An additional 20% had to be paid by the owner: a redemption (buy-back) price. This specific redemption price is not established in the text, in contrast to verses 2–8, where specific prices are stated. This is because *the prices for sacrificial animals were not judicial prices; they were market prices*. They varied according to market conditions. The redemption price of an animal was tied to its market price. This was also the case in the price of a house dedicated to the temple (vv. 14–15).

The priest had the authority to fix the redemption prices of dedicated items (vv. 12, 15, 19) other than fields. If he set a price too high, the owner would not redeem the item. The priest would then wind up owning an asset worth only what the free market determined, when he could have had a market price plus 20%. He would thereby have forfeited the opportunity to enjoy what speculators call a quick turnaround. He was allowed to obtain the market price for the animal by selling it back, keeping the extra 20% for himself. *The presence of the 20% payment kept the priest’s pricing relatively honest*, i.e., in close approximation to market prices. So, in this instance, the extra payment imposed in the redemption of sanctified items was not a penalty payment. It was more of a “keep the priests’ redemption price valuations honest” payment. We should probably think of it as a transaction fee. The giver proved his dedication to God by dedicating the beast to a priest and then paying a 20% transaction fee in order to redeem it.

C. Priests and Fields

The jubilee law applied to houses in the 48 cities of the Levites and to the common land surrounding them (Lev. 25:32–33; Num. 35:7). These homes could not be permanently alienated from the families of the Levites. “Notwithstanding the cities of the Levites, and the houses of the cities of their possession, may the Levites redeem at any time. And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubile: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the chil-

does not offer a sacrifice to God (Heb. 9); rather, he offers to church members the sacramental means of covenant renewal: the Lord’s Supper.

dren of Israel" (Lev. 25:32–33). The jubilee law of inheritance applied to the Levites' homes in Levitical cities and to rural land in Israel. The Levites could not lawfully be excluded from their inheritance, but they were excluded from the other tribes' inheritance. To maintain their own inheritance, they had to defend the inheritance of the other tribal families. They had to preach the jubilee law. God gave them an inheritance in their cities; this served as an economic incentive for them to declare the jubilee year.

Priests could not normally own rural land; it was not part of their inheritance at the time of the conquest of Canaan. When enforced, the jubilee law made it impossible for the priesthood to extend its political influence into the other tribes apart from the exposition and application of the Mosaic law. *The jubilee law was designed to keep a centralized ecclesiocracy from being formed.* The jubilee land law was primarily a law of citizenship. It was designed to provide a permanent judicial veto for the tribes. The tribal system, when reinforced by the jubilee law, decentralized political power in Israel.

Levites could lease rural properties. They could also receive rural properties as gifts until the next jubilee year. They were not prohibited from subleasing these sanctified fields. These fields would have provided them with a stream of income. Within a predominantly rural economy, this stream of income may have been significant, depending on the size and productivity of the dedicated plots.

The jubilee law's restriction on Levitical ownership of rural land was not primarily economic. The jubilee law itself was not primarily economic; it was judicial: a mark of freeman status for the heirs of the conquest. But there were economic incentives tied to the preservation of political freedom. A small but relevant aspect of these incentives was the law of the unredeemed field. Priests could in rare instances become permanent owners of rural land when an owner or his heirs failed to redeem a reclaimed dedicated plot. But in order for this transfer of title to take place, the jubilee year first had to be declared publicly throughout the nation. "And if he will not redeem the field, or if he have sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed any more. But the field, when it goeth out in the jubile, shall be holy unto the LORD, as a field devoted; the possession thereof shall be the priest's" (Lev. 27:20–21).

The existence of a law that tied the jubilee year to a permanent transfer of rural land to priestly members of the tribe of Levi delivered an important tool of influence into the hands of covenant-keeping rur-

al land owners. If covenant-keeping men suspected that the civil authorities and the priests had conspired to avoid proclaiming the approaching jubilee year, they had a way to encourage the ecclesiastical authorities to proclaim the jubilee year on time. All the land owners had to do was dedicate some fields to the priests and then reclaim the fields for themselves, refusing to redeem these fields with cash plus a 20% payment. To inherit these fields at the jubilee, the priests would have to proclaim the jubilee year. The Mosaic law therefore provided the other tribes with a legal way to bribe otherwise dishonest priests into covenant-keeping with respect to the proclamation of the jubilee year.⁴ This was an expensive way to persuade priests to honor the jubilee year; effective bribes normally involve considerable losses. At least until the plots shrank in size and value through population growth, this transfer of land could be significant.

D. Establishing the Redemption Price

The law governing sanctified fields provides one of the few cases of a specified price in the Mosaic law. This law identified a single crop as the economic measure: barley. This law applied to a single case: a field voluntarily dedicated to a priest.

And if a man shall sanctify unto the LORD some part of a field of his possession, then thy estimation shall be according to the seed thereof: an homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver. If he sanctify his field from the year of jubile, according to thy estimation it shall stand. But if he sanctify his field after the jubile, then the priest shall reckon unto him the money according to the years that remain, even unto the year of the jubile, and it shall be abated from thy estimation. And if he that sanctified the field will in any wise redeem it, then he shall add the fifth part of the money of thy estimation unto it, and it shall be assured to him (Lev. 27:16–19).

What was the redemption price of a piece of land? If sanctified land had been treated as if it had been any other capital asset, the free market would have informed owners and priests of its value. But this

4. On the moral legitimacy of bribing corrupt judges, see Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), Appendix 5. "A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth" (Prov. 17:8). "A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath" (Prov. 21:14). Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 67.

unique case was not to be decided by an appeal to the free market. Instead, the calculation had to begin with an estimation of a quantity of barley seed. As we shall see, the appropriate unit of measurement to define the limits of a dedicated field was the field's output: one homer of barley seed per year. Nevertheless, the grammar of the text does not specify whether "seed" in this case law refers to input (seeds planted) or output (seeds harvested).⁵ Because of input-output ratios, I accept the "output" interpretation (see below). Also, because prices are established in terms of the *expected value* of a resource factor's *future output*, I accept the output view's interpretation of "seed."

This case law specifies a particular crop: barley seed. It also specifies a unit of volume: *homer* (pronounced "khomer"). It refers to a unit of money: a shekel of silver. It refers to a number: 50. We must now seek to make sense of the passage: the redemption value of the land.

1. A Perplexing Translation

From Leviticus 27:2–8, we know that 50 shekels of silver represented a great deal of money. It was sufficient to serve as a major barrier against an adult male's entry into the tribe of Levi (Lev. 27: 3).⁶ Fifty shekels of silver bought an adult male slave in the ancient Near East.⁷ The average wage of a worker was one shekel of silver per month.⁸ We must bear this in mind as we study verse 16.

The literal text of the pricing clause of verse 16 is somewhat obscure: *seed of homer of barley at fifty shekels of silver*. The standard interpretation of this clause links the price of a homer of barley to the jubilee year. The difficult question is this: To what does the phrase "at fifty shekels of silver" refer? There is a sharp division of opinion between translators and commentators. Translators link the 50 shekels to the unit of measurement: the price of one homer of barley seed. Commentators link the 50 shekels to the jubilee cycle: the combined

5. Some commentators believe that this referred to the amount of seed the field would produce (output view). Others think it means the amount of seed that a field would absorb (input view). Wenham, who follows R. de Vaux (*Ancient Israel*): "seed" referred to the field's output of barley seed, not its input of barley seed. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 340n. I agree with this view.

6. See Chapter 36.

7. Wenham, p. 338, citing I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery In the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 117ff.

8. Wenham, *idem.*, citing Mendelsohn, *ibid.*, p. 118.

prices of an annual homer of barley seed through the cycle.

I side with the commentators. Here is my reasoning. It has been estimated that in Mesopotamia, the familiar price of barley was one shekel of silver per homer.⁹ Because the jubilee year occurred every fiftieth year, it is tempting to conclude that the text really means output (or perhaps input) per land unit of one homer of barley a year for 50 years. A homer is variously estimated at between 29 gallons and 59 gallons.¹⁰ Wenham said that a field yielding (output) a homer of barley seed was valued at one shekel, or 50 shekels per jubilee period. Harrison takes the view that “seed” means input: “The land being vowed was valued by the priest in terms of the amount of seed required for sowing it annually, each *homer of barley* representing a price of fifty shekels for the forty-nine year period. This is comparable to Mesopotamian practices, where a homer of barley cost a shekel.”¹¹ The comment by Rashi¹² is similar: “. . . an area requiring a Khor of barley seed . . . is redeemable by fifty shekels. . . .”¹³ All agree: 50 shekels per jubilee cycle.

There is one minor problem with this interpretation: the maximum legal planting period was not 50 years or 49 years but 42 years. The seven sabbatical years were supposed to be honored. In the year prior to the sabbatical year of the jubilee year there would be a triple crop (Lev. 25:21), so the total output was the equivalent of 44 years of crops. If we figure from seed inputs, then the total is less: 42 years. The presumption has to be that a particular plot of ground that *on average* either can sustain (input view) a homer of barley seed or else can produce (output view) a homer of barley seed each year is to be valued at the beginning of the 49-year period at 50 shekels of silver. This seems to be a reasonable interpretation of the 50-shekel requirement.¹⁴

9. *Ibid.*, p. 340. Wenham cites R. P. Maloney, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (1974), pp. 4ff; P. Garelli and V. Nikiprowetsky, *Le Proche-Orient Asiatique: Les Empires mésopotamiens, Israël* (University of Paris, 1974), pp. 273–74, 285–86.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

11. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 237.

12. Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo) Yizchaki (1040–1105).

13. *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum, translators, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, [1934] 1985 [Jewish year: 5745]), III, p. 131b.

14. *Reasonable* as in “more reasonable than the alternative.” The fact is, paying 50 shekels of silver in cash at the beginning of the jubilee cycle for 44 years of output meant paying far too much. The buyer-redeemer was forfeiting the interest that could have been earned. The market value of the final harvested homer of barley 48 years later was a small fraction of the value of a homer of barley at the beginning.

2. *Output or Input?*

My interpretation of the passage is that it refers to the crop's output of seeds rather than input of seeds. I begin with contemporary units of measurement. There are 8 gallons to the bushel. If the biblical homer was 59 gallons—the high estimate—this was about 7.3 bushels of barley. With modern agricultural techniques, an acre of land can produce up to 50 bushels of barley, or 6.8 homers.¹⁵ In the Old Testament era, the land's output would have been far lower. At one-quarter of today's productivity, this would have been under 13 bushels per acre, or slightly under two homers. Using the high estimate of what a homer of barley was, we conclude that the land required to grow one homer was about half an acre. Using the lower estimate of 29 gallons per homer, or slightly over three bushels, this output would have required a quarter of an acre. For a small farm—say, 10 acres—this seems like a reasonably sized plot to dedicate to the priesthood.

If we are discussing seed inputs, a modern farmer can get almost a 20-to-one increase from seeds planted. This ratio of output to input would have been far less in ancient Israel, but still the amount of acreage necessary to seed (input) one homer of barley would have been quite small. It therefore seems more likely that the text refers to output rather than input: the land required to produce one homer of barley.

3. *The Economics of the Translators' Version*

Were the King James and other versions' translators correct? Does the reference to 50 shekels mean "50 shekels per homer" rather than "50 homers of barley per jubilee cycle," i.e., one shekel of silver times 50? If the translation is correct, this redemption price was astronomical: 50 times the average market price of a homer of barley, plus 20%. But this would have been only the beginning of the redemption burden. The field's potential output of barley per year was then multiplied by 44: the years of production remaining until the next jubilee year. So, the total number of homers of barley that a field could produce was multiplied by 44 years, and this gross output figure was then multiplied by 50 shekels. There was a prorated reduction in price in terms of the number of years remaining until the jubilee, but with these huge payments, such prorating would have been economically irrelevant to

15. I say this on the authority of the highly efficient farmer who leased the Institute for Christian Economics' farm in Maryland.

most Israelites.

What was the redemption payment all about? It covered the case of a person who had vowed to transfer a field or a field's output to a priest. At some point before the jubilee, the original owner decided to reclaim the field for himself. To do this lawfully, he had to pay a cash redemption price to the priest at the time of the reclaiming. If the formal redemption price was established at 50 shekels per homer of barley, as the familiar translations suggest, then the typical owner could afford to redeem his field only in the final sabbatical year before the jubilee, when the unseeded output of the field would be minimal, or in the jubilee year itself.¹⁶ If he or his surviving heirs decided not to redeem it, his family lost the field forever. The translators' interpretation of the 50 shekels—applying to a homer of barley—would lead us to the conclusion that the details of the prorated redemption payment structure were merely symbolic, for almost no one could have afforded to redeem his field much before the jubilee year.

If the conventional translation is correct, we are led inexorably to this unpalatable conclusion: once the owner dedicated the field to the priesthood, he could not expect to redeem it until the jubilee year. The price would have been far too high. This seems to be too radical a requirement: a redemption price totally disconnected from the market price. Conclusion: the reference to 50 shekels of silver refers to the fixed judicial price of a field that would produce *one homer of barley per season* through the *entire jubilee cycle*. The closer to the jubilee year, the lower the field's remaining redemption price. In short, the redemption price of a field capable of producing one homer of barley per year was 50 shekels of silver at the beginning of the jubilee cycle, plus 20%.

My conclusion is that the commentators' conventional interpretation, not the translators' conventional translation, is correct: the prorated redemption price was one shekel of silver per year remaining until the jubilee year per homer-producing unit of land. This means that translators should abandon the familiar translation: "[a] homer [of] barley seed [shall be priced at] fifty shekels [of] silver." It should be translated as follows: "[A field producing a] homer [of] barley seed [per year shall be priced at] fifty shekels [of] silver [at the beginning of the

16. Legally, the crop could not be harvested. Probably this would have been interpreted as a crop of zero output. If the estimation was made in terms of barley seed used for planting, the price had to be zero, since it was illegal for anyone to plant in a sabbatical year or a jubilee year.

jubilee cycle].” The problem is, such a translation imports so much interpretive material into the text that translators probably will never accept this translation. They will try to stick with the sparse Hebrew text as closely as possible. But when they do this, they destroy the economic relevance of the prorated land-redemption system. They create a text that misinterprets the law.

E. Priestly Inheritance

We now return to the unique law governing the inheritance of rural land by priests: “And if he will not redeem the field, or if he have sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed any more. But the field, when it goeth out in the jubile, shall be holy unto the LORD, as a field devoted; the possession thereof shall be the priest’s” (Lev. 27:20–21).

There were only two ways that a priest could acquire rural property in Israel. The first case is easy to understand: the land’s owner had dedicated the field to the priesthood. He or his heirs then refused to pay the priest its output, year by year, and also refused to pay the redemption price. The priest’s family automatically inherited it by default in the jubilee. On the other hand, if the priest took immediate control of the dedicated plot, working the land himself or leasing it out, the owner would automatically receive it back at the jubilee. Here was a risk for the owner. When the priests or their agents took immediate control over dedicated land, they had a short-term economic incentive not to declare the jubilee year. They might prefer to keep working these dedicated lands for themselves indefinitely. But they would incur a long-term economic penalty for such lawlessness: land owners would be unlikely in the future to dedicate land to the priesthood. The priesthood would also lose respect in the eyes of the nation.

The second case—leased land—is more difficult to understand. The passage is no longer clear to us grammatically. There are two ways of interpreting it. *First*, a man dedicated a field to a priest, but then he sold (leased long term) the field to another man. If we understand the economics of the dedicated field as a gift of the output of the field, with the owner of the field cultivating the land and giving the produce to the priest after each harvest, then the subsequent lease appears to be a case of a default on the original pledge. The defaulting individual had leased his pledged field to another man. This lease contract was honored by the priest, but in the year of the jubilee, the field reverted

to the priest.

The *second* interpretation assumes that a man who had already leased out his land to another person then dedicated a plot of ground to the priest. The lessor's contract with the lessee was honored by the priest. The lessee was allowed to use the field during the years remaining until the jubilee, but then ownership was transferred permanently to the priest.

In both interpretations, the claim of the lessor (land owner) took immediate precedence over the claim of the priest, but the priest became a permanent beneficiary in the jubilee year. I think both interpretations are plausible, but the first one seems more plausible. The land owner indebted himself to the priest: an implicit promise to farm the property for the priest's benefit. He subsequently sought to escape this debt burden without paying the field's prorated redemption price (including the 20% penalty) before leasing the land to another person. The new penalty was the permanent forfeiture of the field. The original owner thereby disinherited his heirs of the value of this property. The heirs still owned the remaining (non-dedicated) fields, but the economic value of the judicially sanctified field had been permanently removed from them.

F. Disinherited Sons and Priestly Heirs

The claims of the original owner were primary until the jubilee. He could evict a priest or the priest's agent from previously dedicated land. In times of famine, for example, an owner might decide to evict the priest or stop paying the priest the output of the dedicated field. But if, by the time of the jubilee, he had refused to redeem the land by the payment of one shekel of silver for every year of the eviction, plus 20%, he lost ownership of the land.

The priests had the possibility of inheriting rural land if the vow-designated land was not redeemed by the vow-taker. In such cases, the potential beneficiaries obviously had an economic incentive to oppose the debasement of the shekel (Isa. 1:22). A shekel of falling value would have made it less expensive for those who faced the permanent loss of their land to redeem it prior to the jubilee.

Would the owner of rural land ever have dedicated all of its output to a priest? Not unless he was willing to risk disinheriting his sons. If he was subsequently forced by economic pressures to reclaim the land's output, and then he or his sons failed to redeem the land at the

mandatory price, plus 20%, all of his land would go to the priest in the jubilee year. Thus, there was an economic restraint on the over-commitment of land to the priesthood. The heirs of the conquest were to this degree protected. The only person who would have committed most or all of his land's output to a priest would have been a very rich absentee landlord who made his money in commerce. But to dedicate all of one's land in a grand display of wealth was risky. This person might subsequently fall into economic distress and be compelled to lease his property to another. The heirs of this individual would then have lost ownership of all the dedicated land. If their father had pledged all of their land, they would have lost their guaranteed status as freemen. Thus, the high risks of default would have tended to reduce the number of such large-scale pledges to priests.

Nevertheless, the possibility of disinheritance did exist. If a father was so distressed by the ethical rebellion of all of his sons, he had the ability to disinherit them. He could not disinherit one son among many in this way, but he could disinherit all of them. He could do this by dedicating all of his landed inheritance to a priest. He would then do one of two things: lease this land to someone else, or reclaim the land's output for himself. If his sons refused to redeem the land before the jubilee, or could not afford to, they lost their inheritance forever. The priest could not transfer the land back to the original owner. To do so would have meant disinheriting the tribe of Levi. The Mosaic law made no provision for such repatriation to the original owner's family. Once a piece of rural land passed into the possession of a priest, it had to remain there until he died. Then it passed to his nearest of kin. Unredeemed dedicated land became devoted land at the jubilee. It could never again lawfully leave the jurisdiction of the priesthood.

We have no historical example of this in Old Testament, but we have the archetype example in the New Testament: the transfer of title of the kingdom of God from the Jews to the church. How was this accomplished? First, Jesus announced that God the Father had promised the kingdom's inheritance to His new priesthood, the church. "Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This was a formal announcement of God's dedication of the Promised Land. But such a transfer of ownership could be made only to a priest. Rural land could be lawfully transferred from the family of one tribe to the family of another tribe only in this unique case: the formal dedica-

tion of the land's output to a priest followed by a failure to deliver this output and a failure to redeem it.

This New Testament transfer of ownership was not to be to a single family of the priesthood; rather, it was made to a new nation. That nation is the church, which constitutes a new priesthood: a kingdom of priests (I Peter 2:9). The representative priest of this nation of priests was the High Priest. The High Priest is Jesus Christ (Heb. 9). This public dedication was legally secured for the church by the death of Jesus Christ, i.e., *the death of the Testator*. "For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Heb. 9:17). The publicly visible evidence of the transfer of the High Priest's inheritance to His heirs came when the Holy Spirit fell on the church at Pentecost (Acts 2).

Old Covenant Israel had refused to honor this dedication. They crucified the new High Priest. They did not redeem the land. Prior to the next jubilee, the output of the land was not delivered to the new priests, nor was the mandatory 20% redemption payment. That is, *the dedicated output of the land was not redeemed by the heirs whose legal title had been at risk*. The Jews not only did not pay the new priesthood the mandatory redemption price of 20%; they persecuted the church. *This secured the irrevocable transfer of the kingdom to the new priesthood*.

When was the next jubilee year after the dedication? When did the transfer of legal title to the heirs of the High Priest take place? James Jordan's study of New Testament chronology dates Jesus' death in A.D. 30 (Jewish year: 3960). Paul was converted shortly thereafter, after Pentecost. The next year, Jordan concludes from his study of the calendar after the exiles' return from Medo-Persia, was the seventh sabbath year in the final jubilee cycle.¹⁷ The jubilee came in 3962, the year that Paul's ministry to the gentiles began.¹⁸ This, I conclude, was the date of the transfer to the church of legal title to the kingdom of God: the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 21:43.

Old Covenant Israel's failure to redeem this dedicated land was God's means of disinheriting all of His rebellious Israelite sons. They

17. If Jordan is correct that Jesus was sacrificed in the year prior to the seventh sabbath, this would have been the year scheduled by God for the miraculous triple harvest. This was the year of the largest firstfruits offering, which was delivered to the priesthood at Pentecost.

18. Jordan, "Jubilee, Part 3," *Biblical Chronology*, V (April 1993), [p. 2]. (<http://bit.ly/jbjub3>) See also, "Chronology of the Gospels," *ibid*, IV (Dec. 1992). (<http://bit.ly/jbjgospels>)

could be legally disinherited only as a family unit; selective disinheritance by a father was not possible. As long as any of the family's land remained in the father's possession, all of his sons would have a piece of the inheritance. Disinheritance would not remove them from their tribe. Tribal membership secured their legal status as freemen. Thus, disinheritance was in this case economic, not judicial. The sons would have no lawful claim on any portion of the land. In A.D. 70, the self-disinherited sons of God were evicted by Rome from the temple. After Bar Kochba's rebellion of A.D. 133–35, they were evicted by Rome from the land. The diaspora began.

The idea so prevalent in modern fundamentalism that the modern State of Israel is in some way biblically entitled to God's original grant of land to Abraham, which was secured by Joshua during the conquest, is inescapably a denial of the authority and binding character of God's revealed law. The Old Covenant sons of God forfeited forever their legal title to the Promised Land and their guaranteed citizenship in the kingdom of God by their persecution of the New Covenant priests, the heirs of the dedication: the church. The covenantal heirs of these disinherited sons can reclaim their citizenship in the kingdom only as adopted sons, i.e., as members of God's New Covenant church. There can never be a repatriation of either the Promised Land or the kingdom of God to the Jews. Once a dedicated piece of land passed into the possession of a priest at the jubilee, there was only one way for it ever to be transferred back to the original owner. The original owner had to become a priest, and not merely a priest: the nearest of kin to the priest who had been given the land. *He had to be adopted by that priest.* Only through the death of this adopting kinsman-priest could the original owner legally regain possession of his former inheritance.

The Kinsman-High Priest made this offer of adoption to every Jew as well as to every gentile. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). He still makes it. There is no other way to secure a piece of the now-devoted inheritance in history, which is mandatory in order to secure it in eternity.

This means that the land comprising the modern State of Israel is not the Promised Land of the Old Covenant. It also has no judicial connection to the kingdom of God or any prophecy regarding this kingdom. The kingdom of God had been connected to the land prior to Jesus' ministry and death, but the legal transfer of the kingdom took place at the time of the final jubilee, when the Jews redeemed neither

land nor kingdom from the church. God transferred to the church, the new priesthood, lawful title to the kingdom at the resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 28:18–20), but He allowed the Jews to stay in control over both the land and the temple until A.D. 70. When they failed to redeem the land from the church prior to the next (and final) jubilee, title automatically transferred to the new priesthood. The land ceased to have any covenantal relevance in A.D. 70, when it came under God's vengeance.¹⁹

G. Lessees: Exempt from Earthly Negative Sanctions

It was not just the original land owner who had the option of rewarding the priests by a temporary donation of his land's net output. So could the person who had leased land from an original owner. But his situation was judicially unique: he was spared the 20% redemption penalty. "And if a man sanctify unto the LORD a field which he hath bought, which is not of the fields of his possession; Then the priest shall reckon unto him the worth of thy estimation, even unto the year of the jubile: and he shall give thine estimation in that day, as a holy thing unto the LORD" (Lev. 27:22–23). This law specified that the field would return to the original owner in the jubilee year (Lev. 27:24). The law protected the original land owner from the consequences of vow-breaking by the lessee. The lessee could not transfer ownership of something he did not own: land beyond the jubilee.

The lessee also escaped the penalty of disinheritance. A lessee who broke his vow of dedication and reclaimed the land was not threatened by the loss of the land in the jubilee. In fact, this law specifies no penalty at all. It does not state that the lessee must forfeit an equivalent quantity of his own land. This means that there was far greater likelihood that he would break his vow of dedication, compared to an original owner. The question arises: Why was the lessee exempt from the 20% penalty? If he was not subject to the threat of losing the dedicated land—it was not his land—then why wasn't the redemption penalty even greater than 20%? Why were no penalties imposed? The text does not say. We can only guess. Let us guess intelligently.

The lessee owed the original owner regular payments unless he had already paid the owner in advance. This placed him in a weaker

19. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

economic position, other things being equal, than the original land owner. Either he bore greater contractual risk than an original owner would have borne or, if he had already paid the owner in advance, he had less cash available to redeem the land from the priest. Since the goal of a land-dedication vow was to reward the priests, excessive economic barriers to redemption would have been a disincentive for such vows. Thus, the priest bore greater risk of having his plans disrupted by a lessee than by an original owner. The lessee was more likely to reclaim the dedicated property than an original owner was.

If he paid no 20% penalty for breaking his vow to the priest, what would have protected the priests? *They were protected by the inescapable phenomenon of interest.* The present value of future goods is less than the present value of identical present goods. This discount is called the rate of interest.²⁰ The priest could lawfully demand an immediate cash payment of all the shekels remaining to be paid until the jubilee. But the present value of the money to be accrued in the future is less than the present value of the same number of monetary units paid today in cash. So, the lessee paid a penalty to the priest: the difference between the present value of the cash shekels and the present value of those shekels to come. This was not the 20% penalty, but it was nonetheless a penalty.²¹

The fact is, however, the law provided no explicit earthly negative sanctions for a priest to impose on a lessee who reclaimed previously dedicated land. The priest had to rely on the conscience of the lessee not to reclaim it. We see here that the long-term sanctity of the *land as inheritance* judicially outweighed the short-term sanctity of the *land in priestly dedication*. Only original owners could bring this unique sanction of disinheritance on their heirs.

H. A Judicial Price: Fixed by Law

Why not use a free market price in establishing the redemption price of dedicated land? Why did the text specify a specific price (50 shekels of silver) and a specific crop (barley)? Samson Raphael Hirsch, the early nineteenth-century Orthodox Jewish commentator, offered this explanation: this case “was the one unique case, standing quite by

20. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

21. Those who deny the universal phenomenon of time-preference (interest) will have to seek for another explanation of how the priests were protected from disruptions in their plans: forfeited vows by lessees.

itself, where a field could be sold and the purchase ultimately become permanent. Hence for buying back, for the redemption of such a field which could eventually become a permanent purchase there could be no market price ascertained, so that the fixing of a universal fixed value was a necessity.²² I do not accept his explanation, but I do accept his identification of the uniqueness of this fixed price—a non-market price.

When a specific price is established by the Mosaic law, it becomes a judicial price, not a market price. Hirsch acknowledged that this was not a market price. What is not plausible is his argument that the market price in this case would have been difficult to ascertain. At the beginning of a jubilee cycle, it would have been only slightly higher than the lease price. The effect of discounting an income stream on years beyond half a century is to reduce its present value greatly.

There was another reason for a judicial price in this instance. The underlying problem was *the threat of monopolistic exploitation by the priest*—the possible misuse of his authority to declare arbitrarily a redemption price. The judicial price of 50 shekels protected the original owner. It was the priest's responsibility in all the redemption cases to declare the price, to which a 20% payment was added. In this unique case, however, the priest was given an opportunity to take permanent possession of land belonging to a member of another tribe. The temptation to cheat would have been very high. If the priest deliberately set the price too high, the original owner or his heirs could not afford to redeem the field until the jubilee year or the sabbatical year immediately preceding it. In those two years, the input of the land was zero—no seeding was legal—and the output was not legal for harvesting. Thus, even a supposed 50-shekel per homer price would not have been a barrier to redemption. The legal market price of the crop was still zero. But economic conditions might change prior to the jubilee year. The head of the family might be tempted later to lease it out if he needed money. The family would then lose the property forever at the jubilee year. The terms of redemption were therefore specified by law, so that there could be no doubt on the part of the field's redeemer or the civil and ecclesiastical authorities concerning exactly what was owed by the redeemer to the priestly family.

22. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch: Leviticus* (part II), trans. Isaac Levy (Gateshead, England: Judaica Press, [1878?] 1989), p. 825.

I. Restricting the Accumulation of Priest-Owned Land

In the European Middle Ages, deathbed transfers of land to the church were common. The church and especially its monastic orders accumulated huge tracts of land over the centuries as a result of these and other forms of land transfer.²³ In contrast, a deathbed legacy of land to the priesthood on a permanent basis was almost impossible to make in Israel. A dying man might dedicate a plot of land to a priest, but the man's heirs could redeem it early or else wait for the jubilee year. The only possible deathbed transfer that could permanently have alienated land was a deathbed legacy from an owner—probably debt-ridden—who had leased out his plot of land and who then dedicated it to a priest. This assumes that the second interpretation of the leased land default is correct, which I do not accept. If that interpretation is correct, then economically incompetent men were the most likely sources of such permanent transfers of rural land in ancient Israel. But it was the wealthy medieval landowner, not the poor peasant, who was the source of deathbed legacies.

C. W. Previté-Orton commented on the two-fold threat to the medieval church in the twelfth century: too many lax men joining the monastic orders and too much wealth donated to these orders. "The extraordinary growth of monasticism new and old in the century of Church reform undoubtedly brought too many into the cloister, whether as converts or oblates, who had no true or lasting vocation for the ascetic life; and the enormous landed wealth lavished on them by the laity, either in devotion or in fear of Judgment Day, proved a dangerous ally of laxity and degeneration."²⁴ This was not true in Mosaic Israel. First, the entry price system of Leviticus 27:2–8 reduced the likelihood of the influx of poor people into the tribe of Levi. Second, the jubilee law, when coupled with the price of 50 shekels per barley-producing land unit at the beginning of the jubilee cycle (Lev. 27:16) and the permanent transfer law of Leviticus 27:20–21, reduced the likelihood of deathbed transfers of land. Such a transfer was a penalty, not a righteous gift.

23. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1940] 1961), pp. 208–9; R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 261–63.

24. C. W. Previté-Orton, *The Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: At the University Press, [1952] 1966), I, p. 506.

Conclusion

The redemption price of dedicated rural land was a judicial price, not a market price. It was somewhat arbitrary, although not excessively so, given the conventional Mesopotamian price of one shekel of silver per homer of barley. It provided a rough means of estimating the redemption price of a piece of land.

The presence of a penalty payment of 20% identified as redemption prices three of the four prices in this passage: beasts, houses, and owner-dedicated fields.²⁵ These three penalty payments also served to keep the priests honest in making their estimation of the redemption price of any property. If the priests estimated the price above the market price, the potential redeemer would not buy it back, so the priest would forfeit the 20% bonus available to him.

The law governing the redemption of sanctified fields created a unique opportunity for the priests: the right to inherit rural land. If the sanctified plot was subsequently reclaimed by the owner but not redeemed, it became the inheritance of the priest in the jubilee year. This law served as the land owners' means of bribing a corrupt priesthood into announcing the jubilee year. The priests could not inherit unredeemed sanctified land unless they proclaimed the jubilee year. Set apart once by vow, the land could not be reclaimed—de-sanctified—by the vow-taking owner except by a cash redemption payment plus a 20 penalty.

This law placed a major restriction on the ability of a land owner to leave land to a priest. His heirs had the right to redeem the land. Thus, deathbed transfers of rural land were highly unlikely. The land owner would have had to sanctify the land on his deathbed without his heirs' paying an ever-smaller redemption price as the jubilee year approached. The priests would not become owners of property among the other tribes.

25. The fourth, exceptional price was the field dedicated by a leaseholder. He had to pay in cash the fixed shekel payments remaining on the property until the jubilee year, a price not discounted by the rate of interest.

TITHING: THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD. He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it: and if he change it at all, then both it and the change thereof shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed (Lev. 27:30–33).

We come at long last to the final and shortest exposition in this commentary. The theocentric meaning of this passage is that God, as the owner of all things, deserves a tithe. This is an aspect of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. A Holy Tithe

The tithe is described here as being holy (*kodesh*). It was judicially set apart for God by the Levites. That is, the tithe was sanctified. The tithe was not under the ban (see below). We know this because the 20% redemption payment was present in this law. The Levites enjoyed the tithe as God's representatives.

In a purely monetary society, the redemption law of the tithe is irrelevant. No one is going to pay a 20% payment to buy back his monetary tithe. This law is relevant only in a society in which income in kind is common: income measured in something other than money. In such societies, goods are sometimes retained by their producers to be used or enjoyed for themselves, not sold into the market for money.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

Why would someone pay a commission to redeem an object? Only if that object has special meaning or importance for him. If the quality of grain in a tithed sack is identical to the grain in the other nine sacks, the tithe-payer is not going to pay a commission to buy back the tithed sack. The assumption behind this law is that the impersonal collecting of the tithe may produce a personally significant loss for the tithe-payer. In order to enable him to minimize this loss, the law allows him to pay a 20% commission to buy back the special item.

There is no indication that this law has been annulled by subsequent biblical revelation. It applies only to agriculture, as the text indicates—primarily to herds of animals.

B. A Tithe on the Net Increase

The text reads: “And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD. He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it: and if he change it at all, then both it and the change thereof shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.” The tithe was collected from the increase of the herd. It was not imposed as a tax on capital. It was a tax on the increase. This increase was a net increase. If one animal of the herd had died since the time of the most recent payment of the tithe, the herd owner was allowed to set aside a replacement from the animals born since the last payment.² Had this not been the case, then losses from a disease that killed half a man’s herd could not be deducted when assessing the net annual increase. This would constitute a tax on capital.

This law reveals that God gave the benefit of the doubt to the herd owner. An old beast that had died could lawfully be replaced by a young beast without the payment of a tithe. Presumably, this exchange would have benefited the owner, since the newborn animal would have had many years of productivity ahead of it. There would have been an increase of net productivity for the herd but not a net increase in the size of the herd. In some cases, however, the older beast would have been more valuable, especially a prize animal used for breeding or a trained work animal. God, as sovereign over life and death, imposes net losses or gains on a herd’s productivity, irrespective of the number

2. This is the economic equivalent of allowing a farmer to set aside from this year’s crop an amount equal to last year’s seed. A person pays the tithe on net output only once. He does not keep paying on capital, i.e., replaced producer goods.

of beasts in the herd.

What was not tolerated by God was any attempt by the owner to pick and choose from among the newborns. The owner could not lawfully select the best of the newborns to replace the dead animals, using the less desirable newborns to pay his tithe, thereby cheating God. Presumably, the birth order of the newborns would govern the replacement of any dead beasts. The first newborn after the death of another member of the herd would have been segregated immediately from the other newborns as not being eligible for the tithe.

C. Under the Rod

Those newborn beasts that remained after the owner had replaced any dead animals constituted the net increase of the herd. In this case law, the herd owner lined up the newborns, probably in a pen, and drove them one by one past the Levite. Each beast passed under a rod. Every tenth beast was taken by the Levite. The herd owner was not allowed to walk the beasts under the rod in any pre-planned order. The same law that governed the voluntary sanctification of beasts governed the involuntary sanctification of beasts: "He shall not alter it, nor change it, a good for a bad, or a bad for a good: and if he shall at all change beast for beast, then it and the exchange thereof shall be holy" (Lev. 27:10). The owner was allowed to buy back any sanctified beast, but only by paying the redemption price commission.

The herd owner was given the benefit of the doubt at the end of the line. Only the tenth beast was holy. If as many as nine of the final group of beasts passed under the rod, the herd owner owed no tithe on those nine beasts. Where the product could not be divided without destroying the life or value of the item, the tithe applied only to discrete items. All those animals that passed under the rod after the final group of 10 had been counted escaped the sanctification process.

Because God gave the benefit of the doubt to the tithe-payer, it was especially evil for him to arrange in advance the collection of the tithe, with or without the collusion of the Levite. The assembling process was to be humanly random. Neither the tithe-payer nor the Levite was to manipulate the crop or the herd to his own advantage, or to the other's advantage. God owned the tenth; He alone was authorized to arrange the collection process. Any attempt by man to arrange the process was not only theft from God, it was an assertion of man's autonomy. It was an attempt to manipulate the created order in a way

prohibited by God.

D. The Ban

What if a tithe-payer defied God and manipulated the tithe-collection process? The tithed items came under the ban: “if he change it at all, then both it and the change thereof shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.” The tithed item became *hormah*: devoted to God. This degree of sanctification was absolute; once within the boundaries of God’s possession, it could not lawfully be removed.

Why would a person manipulate the outcome of the collection process? Because he was trying to cheat God. He was unwilling to risk paying the 20% commission that would be imposed if he subsequently wanted to buy back a specific item. What was the penalty for this act of theft? Permanent loss. The very process of altering the outcome made the tithe holy—not holy as in sanctification, but holy as in devoted. The right of redemption ended.

There is no ban today—no *hormah*. That is because the New Covenant has annulled the sacrifice of animals. This aspect of the law is also annulled.³

Conclusion

The tithe was paid on the net increase of the herd. The owner of the herd paid his tithe only out of the newborn animals that remained after he had set aside replacement beasts for the ones that had died during the year. He was required to run the remaining newborns under a rod. He could not lawfully order the line of newborns so that the outcome of the tithe could be known in advance. The tenth beast became the property of the Levite. As in all cases of redemption, he could buy back that beast for a payment of its market value plus an additional payment of one-fifth.

If the owner violated this law by arranging the order of the beasts as they lined up, he could not buy back any of the animals. They became devoted to God—beyond redemption.

There is no New Testament evidence that the economics of this law has been altered. The tithe on the increase of a herd should still be honored.

What about the rod? Was its use tied exclusively to the office of

3. By extension, the law of the military annihilation of all enemy males is also annulled (Deut. 20:13): no *hormah*.

Levite? The association with Moses and the rod indicates that its use was in some way tied to the Mosaic covenant. Aaron's rod was in the Ark of the Covenant (Heb. 9:4), but the Ark has disappeared. My conclusion is that there need be no rod in the process, but there must be a random distribution of the herd during the tithing process. We are not allowed to cheat God. If a prize animal gets tagged for collection by the church, the owner can pay its market price plus 20%. The presumption is, however, that prize animals of breeding age will be segregated in advance. The tithe on the net increase in prize animals must come from the segregated herd of prize animals. Such segregation was not lawful in Mosaic Israel (Lev. 19:19).⁴

If, after counting everything owed, there are up to nine beasts left over, no tithe is imposed. God still gives herd owners the benefit of the doubt.

What about the ban? Today, we do not sacrifice animals to God. Thus, to place an animal under the ban is to misinterpret this law. The owner can buy back the beast at a market price, but probably at public auction. Then he pays an additional 20% to the church. No cheating is allowed; whatever he pays for the animal, and however he obtains it, he pays 20% of what the purchase price had been at the time of the auction or its initial sale by the church.

4. Chapter 17.

CONCLUSION

Thrice in the year shall all your men children [males] appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year (Ex. 34:23–24).

This was God's ultimate visible evidence of His covenantally predictable defense of Israel. The very boundaries of the land would become sacrosanct—sacred and set apart by God—during the three mandated annual festivals. God promised that during the Israelites' numerous corporate journeys to Jerusalem, which was the only authorized place of sacrifice on earth, their enemies would not even want to invade the land. In their times of greatest military vulnerability, when the unarmed army of the Lord was marching to Jerusalem, the nation would be sheltered by the divine intervention of God. The nation was holy: set apart by God. This included the land itself. The sacrilege of military invasion during the mandatory feasts could not take place for as long as God maintained His covenant with Mosaic Israel. Israel would not be profaned. The sign of God's rejection of Israel would be a military invasion during a feast, especially Passover.

In A.D. 70, during Passover, the Roman legions surrounded the holy city and laid siege to it.¹ This event was that which had been forecast by Jesus (Luke 21:20–24): the Great Tribulation.² When the city fell, the Romans set fire to the temple. What would have been the ultimate boundary violation under the Mosaic Covenant—the ultimate sacrilege—was not only permitted by God, it had been prophesied by God. It was God's answer to a heavenly prayer:

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto

1. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, VI:IX:3.

2. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled. And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:8–13).³

The fall of Jerusalem to the Romans was God's final sign that the Jews' rebellion had terminated the Mosaic Covenant. Israel's national boundary was definitively and permanently breached by Rome during the nation's final Passover. The temple's sacred boundaries were eliminated. The sacrifices ended. These boundaries ceased to have covenantal relevance because the Mosaic Covenant had ceased to have any authority. God's predictable, covenantal, negative corporate sanctions were thoroughly applied to that nation which had broken His covenant. Divine protection for the boundaries of the land would never again defend Israel's residents.

A. Government and Sanctions

This raises a major question of biblical interpretation: What about those aspects of the Mosaic law that applied to Israel's civil government? Were they all annulled with the annulment of Israel's geographical boundaries? Were any of those laws cross-boundary phenomena? That is, did any of them serve as binding judicial standards for foreign nations? Deuteronomy 4:4–8 indicates that at least some of them did.⁴ Does this mean that these have been extended by God into the New Covenant era? Are they still covenantally binding and therefore judicial ideals toward which all nations should strive, and in terms of which all nations are judged in history? My answer is the answer which

3. See David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 193–95. (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

is sometimes said to be the ultimate summary of all sociological theory: *some are, some aren't*. This answer in turn requires an additional principle of interpretation, a theological means of separating: (1) the cross-boundary Mosaic Covenant civil standards that are still judicially binding on men and nations from (2) the temporally and geographically bounded Mosaic standards. In short, the correct answer requires a hermeneutic: a principle of interpretation. The Book of Leviticus forces serious Christians to search for this biblical hermeneutic. Without this hermeneutic, Leviticus becomes a snare that traps antinomians in their total dismissal of all of its laws, and traps legalists in their total acceptance.

In order to apply the Bible judicially to the governmental realm—personal, church, state, and family—we require two things: *a principle of institutional exclusion* and the presence of *negative sanctions* to enforce this exclusion. Exclusion and inclusion are two sides of the same fence. Every boundary has an inside and an outside. So it is with membership in God's authorized covenantal institutions.

1. By Oath Consigned

Let us begin with the initial requirement for covenantal membership: the oath. There can be no lawful covenantal participation apart from a binding self-maledictory oath under God. A covenant is established only by a binding oath under God. People are, in the words of Meredith Kline, by oath consigned.⁵ They are consigned by God⁶ to heaven or hell in terms of a personal oath⁷ of allegiance⁸ and also by their lifelong adherence—"the perseverance of the saints"⁹—to its judicial stipulations.¹⁰

Let us consider political theory. People are consigned by an oath, either implicit or explicit, to membership in one state or another. The primary jurisdiction of the civil government is geographical. Everything within the boundaries of a particular state is under its jurisdiction, although this jurisdiction is always shared in certain ways with the other two covenantal institutions and usually shared also with re-

5. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968).

6. Point one of the biblical covenant: sovereignty.

7. Point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.

8. Point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.

9. Point five of the biblical covenant: inheritance.

10. Point three of the biblical covenant: law.

gional civil governments within the jurisdiction of the larger civil government. But one civil government has final civil jurisdiction, short of lawful rebellion by lower levels of civil government—the Protestant Reformation’s doctrine of interposition.¹¹

In contrast to their automatic subordination by implicit oath of obedience to the state on the basis of geography or birth, people may or may not be consigned by implicit oath to a church or a family. Those people who refuse to accept as binding on them the ethical and judicial terms of the covenantal oath in question cannot lawfully be part of the covenantal institution in question. Those who refuse to take this oath are not allowed in, and those inside who break the terms of this oath must be expelled: negative sanctions. There cannot be lawful government apart from oath and negative sanctions. The person’s oath may be implicit,¹² but if the institution’s sanctions are exclusively implicit, then there is neither a covenant nor a government: *no sanctions, no government*.

2. The Adamic Covenant

Inclusion into God’s special covenant of redemption is by adoption. But there is another covenant, a more general covenant: the post-Edenic Adamic covenant. It was marked eucharistically (“graciously”) by God’s provision of animal coverings for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). This general Adamic covenant also has laws and sanctions. It brings men under condemnation in eternity. The covenantally disinherited sons of Adam are still under its laws in history. Therefore, in order to pursue a better world, covenant-breakers must conform themselves to God’s general covenantal law-order. The entire pre-Flood world should have repented. Similarly, Sodom should have repented. Nineveh was also required to repent. There is no doubt that God through Jonah threatened Nineveh with negative corporate sanctions in history, just as He threatened Sodom through Abraham and the angelic visitors. *The threat of such sanctions against non-covenanted nations testifies to the existence of covenantally binding laws.* That is, the sanctions

11. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), IV:xx:31. See also Michael R. Gilstrap, “John Calvin’s Theology of Resistance,” *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 4 (1983), pp. 180–217; Tom Rose, “On Reconstruction and the Federal Republic,” *ibid.*, pp. 285–310. (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>)

12. In the United States, a person born in the United States or born of one United States parent need not take a formal oath in order to vote as American citizen at age 18.

testify to the existence of *general covenant laws* that nations break at their peril.

The Ten Commandments and many of the Mosaic Covenant's case laws applied to the entire ancient world: cross-boundary laws. This was a form of covenantal inclusion. It was not inclusion within God's unique covenant of redemption, but it was inclusion within the general post-Eden Adamic covenant of temporal preservation: common grace. This grace is not given for the sake of covenant-breakers but for the sake of covenant-keepers.¹³

The existence of these general covenantal laws is affirmed by Paul's words: "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 2:14–16; NASB). The work of the law is written on all men's hearts—not the law itself, which resides only in the hearts of Christians (Heb. 8:10), but the work of the law.¹⁴ If this were not true, on what legal basis could God condemn all covenant-breakers on the day of judgment and still remain faithful to His covenant with Adam? The existence of the universal sanction of death testifies to the continuing authority the laws of the Adamic covenant (Rom. 5:12–14).

This does not mean that Spiritually unaided human reason can discover the laws of the Adamic covenant. There is no such thing as Spiritually unaided human reason. God aids all men's reason to some degree in history. God grants varying degrees of common grace to men so that they can sense some aspects of His general social laws. He restrains their moral and intellectual rebellion. But the mind of covenant-breaking man is in rebellion; so, as men become more perverse—more consistent with their covenant-breaking presuppositions—they rebel against the knowledge they possess by common grace. They suppress the truth that God constantly reveals to them in nature (Rom. 1:18–22). Therefore, covenant-breaking man's logic cannot be trusted to persuade him of the truth. It can be trusted only to condemn him before God. His logic is as corrupt as his morals are. He has

13. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

14. On the difference between these two operations, see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959), I, pp. 72–76.

a flawed epistemology (theory of knowledge) because of his moral rebellion.¹⁵ This is why all natural law theory rests on an illusion: the illusion of logically shared moral standards and sanctions among all mankind. Natural law theory is the creation of covenant-breaking men: Stoics of the late Classical period and Newtonians of the modern era.

Covenant-breaking man is by Adamic oath consigned to hell. He is from conception an oath-breaker in Adam, his legal representative before God (Rom. 5). He is a disinherited son: in time and eternity. He has been excluded from eternal life *in history*. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). To the extent that he and his fellow covenant-breakers live consistently in history with their broken oaths, they will become progressively more rebellious and progressively more threatened by God's predictable corporate negative sanctions in history.

Political pluralists emphatically deny this. They deny any legitimate New Covenant judicial relationship between God's righteous exclusion of covenant-breaking men in eternity and a civil government's righteous exclusion of them from citizenship in history. They affirm the civil legitimacy another standard and another oath. To which theologians reply: By what other standard?¹⁶ By what other oath?

3. *Theocracy: Trinitarian vs. Non-Trinitarian*

In the New Covenant, every civil oath must be Trinitarian, for the New Covenant reveals that the God of the covenant is a Trinitarian God. There is no other God whose oath is binding in history and eternity. The Great Commission requires that Christians work to see to it that all nations are baptized into Christ (Matt. 28:18–20).¹⁷ God requires that every nation on earth be brought under His civil covenant's administration through corporate affirmation: a Trinitarian oath. Civil magistrates are all supposed to be Christians.

A civil oath invokes God's laws and sanctions in history. The state's jurisdiction is geographical and therefore comprehensive within

15. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969).

16. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

17. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

its boundaries—no separate jurisdictions. The only exceptions to this rule are foreign embassies. Inside their boundaries their home nations' laws prevail. I argue that no such grant of judicial immunity to any non-Trinitarian nation's embassy is biblically valid within a Christian nation. Every non-Christian nation must come to God's nations "on bended knee," to this extent: it is not entitled to a separate jurisdiction within the geographical boundaries of one of God's covenanted nations. Any attempt to renounce the requirement of a Trinitarian civil oath is necessarily an attempt to invoke another god's covenant. But there can be no covenantal neutrality in history. Thus, inclusion in and exclusion from civil citizenship are required by God to be based on public Trinitarian confession. Citizenship—the authority to render binding judgment in a civil court, which includes the ballot box—must be based on restricted church membership (ecclesiastical boundaries) and a restricted franchise (civil boundaries).¹⁸ It is this assertion regarding the civil oath which distinguishes Trinitarian theocratic movements (few and far between) from the broad range of post-Newtonian Christianity, i.e., political pluralism based on a shared confession of faith.¹⁹ This usually becomes a confession of faith in autonomous civil government.

Second, there must be the imposition of negative institutional sanctions in history to defend the stipulations of this oath. These negative sanctions are specified in the Mosaic covenant: formal warning or excommunication (ecclesiastical) and either economic restitution, public whipping, loss of citizenship, or public execution (civil). Modern Christians do not readily accept these general exclusionary requirements as legitimate if done in the name of Jesus Christ. Modern churches rarely excommunicate members. Many churches celebrate the Lord's Supper so infrequently that there is hardly anything to be excommunicated from.²⁰ It should therefore come as no surprise that Christians who are unwilling to excommunicate theologically deviant members are also hostile to any concept of citizenship based on a pub-

18. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

19. The problem for the American churches today is this: the United States of America is officially covenanted constitutionally to the god of humanism, i.e., religious neutrality (Article VI, Section III). *Ibid.*, pp. 385–92.

20. The Church of Christ denomination, following Alexander Campbell's rejection of Presbyterianism's closed communion, holds the Lord's Supper weekly, but then it denies the Supper's covenantal relevance by refusing to exclude anyone from participating.

lic, Trinitarian oath of allegiance. In this crucial judicial sense, *modern Christians have become inclusivists*. They have become civil Unitarians—belief in any god as sufficient for civil oath—and even civil atheists: binding civil oaths without reference to God. That is, they have become pluralists.²¹ This ecclesiastical and civil inclusivism has steadily been extended from modern politics—which is accompanied by a common civil religion²²—into theology. Evangelical leaders have begun to abandon the biblical doctrine of hell and then lake of fire: the ultimate place of exclusion.²³

B. Natural Law Theory

While modern Christians accept in theory the legitimacy of formal excommunications, however rare excommunications may be in our day—surely not a testimony to widespread exemplary living by Christians in our day—they do not believe in civil excommunication from the civil franchise on the basis of creedal confession. Protestant Christians for over three centuries, and Anglo-American Roman Catholics for at least a century, have adopted political pluralism as their civil ideal. This has required the adoption of *a common-ground judicial confession*: natural law philosophy. Today, however, only Christians and a tiny handful of secular scholars still defend natural law theory.

Natural law theory is a defunct world-and-life view in modern humanism. Charles Darwin and his followers by 1880 had destroyed the epistemological foundations of natural law philosophy.²⁴ Darwinism has enshrined the doctrine of *environmental determinism*. Binding biological laws at any moment in history are explained as the result of

21. North, *Political Polytheism*, Part 3.

22. Russell E. Ritchey and Donald G. Jones (eds.), *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Robert V. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Crossroad, 1975); Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1988).

23. In 1989, at a conference of almost 400 evangelical American Protestant theologians, a majority refused to affirm the doctrine of hell. *World* (June 3, 1989), p. 9. See below: Appendix G, “The Covenantal Structure of Judgment,” footnote #1.

24. Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), pp. 6–7; Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

the conflict for survival: individuals vs. individuals, species vs. species, and species vs. geological environment. Similarly, binding social laws at any moment are explained as the result of competitive social groups and their physical and social environments. There are therefore no permanently binding social or moral laws in the worldview of Darwinism. The triumph of the Darwinian worldview has been almost universal, even among groups that do not accept Darwin's doctrine of exclusively biological evolution.

Faith in ancient Stoicism's theory of a shared common-ground philosophy that unites all rational men is now fading even among Christians—its last defenders. This has left modern Christianity *judicially mute*: judicial salt without savor, fit for being trampled underfoot politically. This is exactly where God's enemies want us.

What Christians need is an authoritative foundation for their knowledge. Without this, those who represent Jesus Christ in history will remain incapable of defending the judicially binding character His oath. They will remain impotent to bring God's covenant lawsuit against covenant-breakers in every area of life. In short, they will continue to refuse to invoke God's corporate sanctions in history.

C. The Laws of Leviticus

How does Leviticus fit into a program of covenantal sanctions? Can Christians confidently invoke the corporate sanctions of Leviticus (Lev. 26) as God's continuing corporate historical sanctions, both positive and negative?

This commentary focuses on the narrow topic of economics. I have surveyed the Levitical laws governing economics. I have also distinguished temporary Mosaic laws of the land from permanent covenantal laws that crossed Israel's geographical boundaries during the Mosaic era and then passed into the New Covenant. It is appropriate here to review these laws.

1. Land Laws and Seed Laws

Land laws and seed laws were laws associated with God's covenantal promises to Abraham regarding his offspring (Gen. 15–17). There was a chronological boundary subsequently placed on the seed laws: Jacob's prophecy and promise. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). After

Shiloh came, Jacob said, the scepter would depart from Judah. The unified concept of *scepter and lawgiver* pointed to the civil covenant: physical sanctions and law. Jacob prophesied that the lawful enforcement of the civil covenant would eventually pass to another ruler: Shiloh, the Messiah.

The Levitical land laws were tied covenantally to the Abrahamic promise regarding a place of residence for the Israelites (Gen. 15:13–16). These land laws were also tied to the Abrahamic promise of the seed. “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18). The mark of those included under the boundaries of these seed laws was the covenantal sign of circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14). Circumcision established a personal covenantal boundary. There were also family and tribal boundaries tied to the laws of inheritance. The ultimate inheritance law was above all a land law: the jubilee law (Lev. 25).

The fall of Jerusalem and the abolition of the temple’s sacrifices forever ended the Mosaic Passover. The five sacrifices of Leviticus 1–7 also ended forever. There can be no question about the annulment of the inheritance laws by A.D. 70. *But with this annulment of the inheritance laws also came the annulment of the seed laws.* Once the Messiah came, there was no further need to separate Judah from his brothers. Once the temple was destroyed, there was no further need to separate Levi from his brothers. There was also no further need to separate the sons of Aaron (priests) from the sons of Levi (Levites). Therefore, the most important Mosaic family distinction within a single tribe—the Aaronic priesthood—was annulled: the ultimate representative case. *The tribal and family boundaries of the Abrahamic covenant ceased to operate after A.D. 70.* This annulled the Mosaic law’s applications of the Abrahamic covenant’s land and seed laws. The land and seed laws were aspects of a single administration: the Mosaic Covenant. The New Covenant—based exclusively and forthrightly on the covenantal concept of adoption²⁵—replaced the Mosaic Covenant.

25. Infant baptism is not a confirmation of covenantal inheritance through biological inclusion but rather its opposite: the confirmation of covenantal inheritance through adoption, i.e., adoption into the family of God, His church. The one who baptizes is an agent of the church, not an agent of the family. This was true under the Abrahamic covenant, too: the male head of the household circumcised the males born into that household, but as an agent of the priesthood.

(a) Land Laws

Biblical quarantine (Lev. 13:45–46). This law dealt with a unique disease that came upon men as a judgment. Only when a priest crossed the household boundary of a diseased house did everything within its walls become unclean. This quarantine law ended when this judicial disease ended, i.e., when the Mosaic priesthood ended.²⁶

Promised land as a covenantal agent (Lev. 18:24–29). The land no longer functions as a covenantal agent. That temporary office was operational only after the Israelites crossed into Canaan. That office was tied to the presence of the sanctuary: the holy of holies.²⁷

The laws of clean and unclean beasts (Lev. 20:22–26). This was a land law, for it was associated with the land's office as the agent of sanctions. These laws marked off Israel as a separate nation. This is true of the dietary laws generally, which is why God annulled them in a vision to Peter just before he was told to visit the house of Cornelius (Acts 10).²⁸

The national sabbatical year of rest for the land (Lev. 25:1–7). This was an aspect of the jubilee year. The law was part of God's original grant of leaseholds at the time of the conquest. There is no agency of enforcement today. There has been no national grant of land.²⁹

The jubilee law (Lev. 25:8–13). This law applied only to national Israel. It was a law uniquely associated with Israel's conquest of Canaan. It was in part a land law and in part a seed law: inheritance and citizenship. It was more judicial—citizenship—than economic. The annulment of the jubilee law was announced by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:17–19). This prophecy was fulfilled at the final jubilee year of national Israel.³⁰ This probably took place in the year that Paul's ministry to the gentiles began, two years after the crucifixion.³¹

The jubilee law prohibiting oppression centered around the possibility that the priests and magistrates might not enforce the jubilee law (Lev. 25:14–17). Thus, those who trusted the courts when leasing land would be oppressed by those who knew the courts were corrupt.³²

26. Chapter 9.

27. Chapter 10.

28. Chapter 21.

29. Chapter 23.

30. Chapter 24.

31. James Jordan, "Jubilee (3)," *Biblical Chronology*, V (April 1993), [p. 2]. (<http://bit.ly/jbjjub3>)

3232. Chapter 25.

The jubilee year was to be preceded by a miraculous year bringing a triple crop (Lev. 25:18–22). This designates the jubilee year law as a land law with a blessing analogous to the manna. The manna had ceased when the nation crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan.³³

The prohibition against the permanent sale of rural land (Lev. 25:23–24). This was a land law. This law did not apply in walled cities that were not Levitical cities.³⁴

The law promising rain, crops, peace in the land, and no wild beasts in response to corporate faithfulness (Lev. 26:3–6). This was a land law. Nature's predictable covenantal blessings were tied to the office of the holy land as the agency of sanctions.³⁵

(b) Seed Laws

Gleaning (Lev. 19:9–10). The gleaning law applied only to national Israel, and only to farming. It was an aspect of the jubilee land laws: inheritance and citizenship. It was a means of establishing a major form of charity in tribe-dominated rural regions. This law promoted localism and decentralization in Mosaic Israel.

The moral principle of gleaning extends into New Covenant times as a charity law, but not as a seed law. The moral principle is this: *recipients of charity who are physically able to work hard should*. This law is not supposed to be applied literally today. There were no applications in civil law. This law was enforced by the priesthood, not by the state, for no corporate negative sanctions were threatened by God, nor would it have been possible for judges to identify precisely which poor people had been unlawfully excluded.³⁶ This principle of interpretation also applies to the re-statement of the gleaning law in Leviticus 23:22.³⁷

The laws against allowing different breeds of cattle to interbreed (Lev. 19:19). This was a temporary seed law. It reflected the laws of tribal separation. So did the law against sowing a field with mixed seeds. Also annulled is the prohibition against wearing wool-linen garments.³⁸

The law against harvesting the fruit of newly planted trees for three

33. Chapter 26.

34. Chapter 27.

35. Chapter 32.

36. Chapter 11.

37. Chapter 22.

38. Chapter 17.

years and setting aside the fourth year's crop as holy (Lev. 19: 23–25). This was a seed law. It was a curse on Israel because of the failure of the exodus generation to circumcise their sons during the wilderness wandering. It is no longer in force.³⁹

The law governing the enslavement of fellow Israelites (Lev. 25: 39–43). This was a seed law, although by being governed by the jubilee law, there was an aspect of land law associated with it. There is no longer any long-term indentured servitude bringing a family under the authority of another family for up to 49 years.⁴⁰

The law governing the permanent enslavement of foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46). This must have been a seed law rather than a land law, for it opened the possibility of adoption, either by the family that owned the foreign slaves or by another Israelite family.⁴¹

The law governing the redemption of an Israelite out of a foreigner's household by the kinsman-redeemer (Lev. 25:47–55). This was a seed law.⁴²

2. Priestly Laws

The laws of five sacrifices (Lev. 1–7). These were all priestly laws. They are no longer in force.⁴³

The law prohibiting wine drinking by priests while they were inside the tabernacle or temple (Lev. 10:8–11). This law was exclusive to priests as mediatorial agents. The wine belonged to God. It had to be poured out before the altar. This law was tied to the holiness of the temple. It did not apply to Levites or priests outside of the temple's geographical boundaries.⁴⁴

The law establishing the official prices of people who take vows (Lev. 27:2–8). This was a law governing access to the priesthood. These vows governed those who were devoted—irrevocably adopted—to priestly service.⁴⁵

The law establishing vows to priests and the inheritance of rural land (Lev. 27:9–15). This law was primarily priestly but secondarily a seed law: an aspect of inheritance. This law placed the negative sanc-

39. Chapter 18.

40. Chapter 29.

41. Chapter 30.

42. Chapter 31.

43. Chapters 1–7.

44. Chapter 8.

45. Chapter 35.

tion of disinheritance on those who vowed to support a priest through the productivity of a dedicated plot of land and then refused to honor the vow. The land went from being dedicated to devoted: beyond redemption.⁴⁶

The final abolition of the Mosaic priesthood at the fall of Jerusalem ended the authority of all of these laws forever. They were holiness laws for the holy land. The holy land is no longer holy.

3. Cross-Boundary Laws

Cross-boundary laws are still in force under the New Covenant. These are properly designated as Deuteronomy 4 laws: designed by God to bring men to repentance through the testimony of civil justice within a holy commonwealth.

Fraud and false dealing (Lev. 19:11–12). The laws against theft still prevail. They had no unique association with either the land or the promised seed.⁴⁷

The law against robbing an employee by paying him later than the end of the working day (Lev. 19:13). This law protects the weakest parties from unfair competition: the ability to wait to be paid.

The law against tripping the blind man and cursing the deaf man (Lev. 19:14). The weaker parties are to be protected by civil law.⁴⁸

The prohibition against enforcing laws that discriminate in terms of wealth or power (Lev. 19:15). This law had no unique association with Israel's land or seed laws. Its theological presupposition is that God is not a respecter of persons: a theological principle upheld in both covenants.⁴⁹

The prohibition against personal vengeance (Lev. 19:18). This establishes the civil government as God's monopoly agency of violence.⁵⁰

The law prohibiting judicial discrimination against strangers in the land (non-citizens) (Lev. 19:33–36). This law an aspect of the just weights law. Laws governing justice were not land-based or seed-based.⁵¹

The law against offering a child to Molech (Lev. 20:2–5). This was a law governed by the principle of false worship, although it appears to

46. Chapter 36.

47. Chapter 12.

48. Chapter 13.

49. Chapter 14.

50. Chapter 16.

51. Chapter 19.

be a seed law (inheritance) or perhaps a land law (agricultural blessings). It had to do with identifying the source of *positive sanctions* in history: either God or a false god. God's name is holy: *sanctified*.⁵² This will never change.

The jubilee law prohibiting taking interest from poor fellow believers or resident aliens (Lev. 25:35–38). This law was an extension of Exodus 22:25. It was included in the jubilee code, but it was not derived from that code. In non-covenanted, non-Trinitarian nations, however, Christians are the resident aliens. Thus, the resident alien aspect of the law is annulled until such time as nations formally covenant under God.⁵³

The law promising fruitfulness and multiplication of seed (Lev. 26:9–10). This law was covenantal, not tied to the holy land or the tribal structure of inheritance. It was a confessional law, but because of its universal promise, it was a common grace law.⁵⁴

Negative corporate sanctions (Lev. 26:13–17). These were promised to Israel, but they were not tied to either the holy land or the promised seed. The governing issue was the fear of God, which is still in force.⁵⁵

The law of the tithe that applied to animals passing under a rod (Lev. 27:30–37). This law still applies, though it is no longer very important in a non-agricultural setting. God still prohibits individuals from structuring tithes in kind (goods) from pre-collection rearrangements that favor the tither.⁵⁶

D. The Principle of the Boundary

I have argued that Christians need a Bible-based hermeneutic in order to interpret correctly the applications of the laws of the Old Covenant in the New Covenant era. This is also Professor Poythress' argument.⁵⁷ By now the reader should understand what this biblical principle of judicial interpretation is: the principle of the boundary.

This is a very long commentary. Most of it has been devoted to an explanation of laws that are no longer binding: seed laws, land laws,

52. Chapter 20.

53. Chapter 28.

54. Chapter 33.

55. Chapter 34.

56. Chapter 37.

57. Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1990), ch. 5.

and priestly laws. Why devote so much time, money, and space to a study of things no longer relevant? Answer: in order to be confident about the laws that are still relevant.

A scholar spends most of his life examining records, experiments, books, and articles that do not apply to his immediate concerns. Scholarship is the process of sifting through what is, for a scholar, mostly irrelevant information. He sifts in terms of a principle—a hermeneutic—which leads to scientific and intellectual breakthroughs. So it is with the New Covenant student of the laws of Leviticus. Our problem today is that there is no agreement among Christians regarding the proper principle governing this judicial sifting process.

Theonomists have a general principle of judicial interpretation: unless an Old Covenant law is in principle or specifically annulled by the New Testament, it is still in force. Bahnsen wrote: “The *methodological* point, then, is that we presume our obligation to obey any Old Testament commandment unless the New Testament indicates otherwise. We must assume continuity with the Old Testament rather than discontinuity.”⁵⁸ That is, the theonomist announces with respect to all Old Covenant laws: “Innocent until proven guilty.” An unchallenged Old Covenant law is said to have been granted citizenship automatically by the New Testament. No additional proof of citizenship is required by law. Unless its citizenship has been revoked by the New Testament, a Mosaic law automatically crosses the boundary between the two covenants. The law’s adoption into the New Covenant kingdom of God is automatic. The representative rhetorical hard case for this principle of interpretation is the law’s mandated stoning of rebellious sons (Deut. 21:18–21).⁵⁹

All other schools of Christian biblical interpretation assert a rival judicial hermeneutic: any Old Covenant law not repeated in the New Testament is automatically annulled. The non-theonomist announces with respect to every Old Covenant law: “Guilty until proven innocent.” An Old Covenant law is automatically turned back at the border of the New Covenant unless it has had citizenship papers issued by the New Testament. Its disinheritance is automatic unless it has been explicitly adopted into God’s New Covenant kingdom. The representat-

58. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), p. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

59. By mandating the execution of rebellious adolescents and adult sons, this case law declared war against any criminal class. The enforcement of this case law means that a criminal class cannot easily come into existence. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 185–91.

ive rhetorical hard case for this hermeneutic is bestiality (Lev. 18:23; 20:15–16).⁶⁰

A majority of the economic laws of Leviticus were turned back at the covenantal border. But this rejection was not automatic. The geographical and tribal promises that went to Abraham's seeds (plural) were fulfilled with the coming of the prophesied Seed (singular: Gal. 3:16)—the Messiah, Shiloh, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God—who announced His ministry's fulfillment of the judicial terms of the jubilee year (Luke 4:16–21). This fulfillment was confirmed through His death and resurrection—the ultimate physical liberation. Israel's permanent disinheritance was prophesied by Jesus: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This transfer of the kingdom's inheritance to this new nation took place at Pentecost (Acts 2). The visible manifestation of the permanent revocation of the Abrahamic inheritance to his biological heirs was the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Israel had failed to keep the terms of the covenant. The predictable negative corporate sanctions came in history.

E. Discontinuity and Continuity in the Levitical Sacrifices

The whole burnt offering was annulled by the New Covenant. There is no evidence that its underlying principle of sacrifice was annulled: unblemished animal, the best of the flock, but only one. This was a high-cost sacrifice, but it was nevertheless limited. Conclusion: *man cannot pay God all that he owes*. This judicial principle was illustrated by the whole burnt offering, but it was not limited to it.

The meal offering was annulled, but not its underlying principle of the hierarchical authority of the priesthood. The salt of this earthly sacrifice is no longer lawfully administered by any priest; the eternal salt of the covenant (Mark 9:47–49) is administered by the High Priest, Jesus Christ. The judicial principle of the meal offering still is in force: if you do not bring a satisfactory offering to be salted and consumed by the fire, then you will become that offering.

The peace offering is no longer eaten by the offerer at a meal held inside the boundaries of the temple. But the *economic* principle of the

60. See my response to Dan G. McCartney: Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 211, 214. (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>)

heaven—the best a man can offer God from his “field”—has not been removed from the New Covenant’s voluntary offerings. Neither has the *cultural* principle of leaven: expansion over time.

The related principles of corporate responsibility and corporate representation are no longer manifested in the sin offering, i.e., purification offering. Nevertheless, they are clearly revealed in the Adamic covenant and the New Covenant. The biblical principle of the delegation of earthly authority—from God to the people to their representative—was illustrated in the purification offering, but it was not inaugurated by this offering. It therefore did not perish with this offering. Also, we no longer bring an animal to serve as our trespass or reparation offering for a sin of omission, but the principle of the sacrifice proportionate to one’s wealth still applies, in church and state.

A thief’s reparation offering is no longer made by presenting a ram without blemish. But there is no indication that an offering comparable in value to a ram in the Mosaic economy should not still be presented to a church by the self-confessed thief, nor should his victim be denied the return of the thing stolen plus a reparation payment of 20%. The judicial boundary between sacred and common still exists. A violation of such a boundary still constitutes a profane act. But sacred boundaries in the New Covenant are overwhelmingly judicial-ecclesiastical rather than geographical.

The annulment of the Levitical sacrifices has not annulled the principles that underlay these sacrifices, any more than the annulment of the Mosaic priesthood has somehow annulled the principle of sacrifice. The High Priest’s office still exists, but only one man holds it: the resurrected Jesus Christ. The mediatorial role of the Old Covenant priest in offering a bloody sacrifice has been annulled by Christ’s perfect, one-time sacrifice (Heb. 9). This does not mean that the ministerial, judicial, and educational role of the Levites has been annulled. The diaconate has replaced the Levites’ social role. Melchizedek, the priestly king of Salem, offered Abraham bread and wine, and Abraham paid his tithe to him (Gen. 14:18–20). The annulment of the Mosaic priesthood did not annul this Melchizedekan ecclesiastical role. This is the inescapable message of the epistle to the Hebrews, which is the New Testament’s book of priestly discontinuity.

There is both judicial continuity and discontinuity in the transition between Old Covenant and New Covenant. Both of these principles must be forthrightly proclaimed and defended exegetically. This commentary is long because Christians have too often only intuitively re-

cognized which features of the Mosaic law have been annulled and which are still binding. They have not applied a consistent hermeneutic. It is long because it is exegetical. Most of all, it is long because we require casuistry to make sense of Leviticus: the application of general law to specific cases, and the investigation of specific case laws to discover the general legal principle governing any of them. Casuistry is a tiring, highly detailed process of discovery that must continue in every generation if God's kingdom is to be extended. John Frame insisted in 1990, "*all* the exegetical work remains to be done!"⁶¹ Not all. A great deal, no doubt, but not all. It is also worth noting that the modern "school of the non-prophets," which asserts an absolute judicial discontinuity between the whole of Leviticus and the New Covenant, has a great deal of work ahead of it, too.

I have said my piece regarding Leviticus. It has been a long piece. It is now my critics' turn to say theirs. Then we shall see just how much discontinuity they can prove, and what the moral and cultural effects of these alleged discontinuities will be. I suggest that they begin with the Levitical case laws governing bestiality. One thing is sure: if they turn to pre-Kant natural law as their suggested alternative to the Mosaic law, they will have to show why Hume was wrong, Kant was wrong, Hegel was wrong, Darwin was wrong, and existentialism is wrong. If the only civil stipulation they leave us with is the death penalty in Genesis 9, they have not left us with much.⁶² They have in fact left us judicially defenseless. If we cannot appeal to God's justice, as manifested in His Bible-revealed law, to what should Christians appeal? The dispensationalist answers, "the Rapture." The amillennialist answers, "the end of history." But what happens to us if either event is delayed?

I answer: if we cling to a hermeneutic of personal judicial discontinuity only, *we should prepare for negative corporate sanctions*. "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke 14:34–35).

61. John Frame, "The One, the Many, and Theonomy," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 97.

62. H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), pp. 127, 130. For a reply, see Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 93–96. (<http://bit.ly/gbkghd>)

Conclusion

For three decades, the critics of theonomy have issued this challenge: "Prove your case exegetically." Rushdoony's first volume of *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973) was theonomy's frontal assault. He suggested hundreds of ways in which Mosaic case laws still apply. He used the Ten Commandments as his integrating principle. Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977) provided a technical apologetic defense of theonomy, written in the arcane language called "theologian." It has received more attention—most of it negative—from the theologians than Rushdoony's *Institutes* because Bahnsen wrote fluently in their adopted tongue, which the rest of us have difficulty following without a dictionary and a grammar handbook. I showed in *Tools of Dominion* (1990) how the case laws of Exodus still apply to economics and civil justice. These books all emphasized continuity.

Our critics have not been satisfied. They have continued to complain: "You say that you have a hermeneutical principle of discontinuity. Let us see it in action." They have implied that theonomists possess no hermeneutic of discontinuity, other than the obvious annulment of the laws sacrifice by the Epistle to the Hebrews. If our critics are honest—a gigantic *if*—we should now begin to see a muting of this criticism, or at least a mutating. I am not counting on this, however. I first published this in 1994. So far, no response.

A challenge appeared in the Spring, 1993, issue of the *Bulletin* of the Association of Christian Economists. Westmont College economics professor Edd S. Noell, in a well-balanced summary of the theonomic (i.e., my) approach to economic analysis, concluded with this challenge to theonomists (i.e., to me): "They must more carefully delineate the Old Testament laws that are abolished by the New Testament and the exegetical basis for their position in this regard. They must consider more extensively the issue of the context of the ancient agrarian economy of Israel in which the Mosaic law was given. There is more work to be done to convince fellow Christian economists of some of the specific exegetical conclusions they reach (in regard to monetary reform as well as other policy applications)."⁶³

An Economic Commentary on the Bible is my response to this criticism. So are my *Introduction to Christian Economics* (1973) and two of my books in the Biblical Blueprint Series: *Honest Money* (1986) and

63. Edd S. Noell, "A Reformed Approach to Christian Economics: Christian Reconstruction," *Bulletin* (Spring 1993), p. 16.

Inherit the Earth (1987). So is my critique of Social Credit economics, *Salvation Through Inflation* (1993). So is my chapter in the book edited by Robert Clouse, *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (1985). So are 20 years of my newsletter, *Biblical Economics Today*—over 1,600 double-spaced manuscript pages. There is, of course, always more work to be done, more Bible passages to consider. There are always more typesetting and printing expenses to pay. I plan to do the work and pay the expenses. But I think it is fair for me to ask my critics in 2011, as I asked in 1994: “Where have all the other Christian economists been for the last 40 years? Unlike me, they are being paid good salaries by colleges and universities to write books and articles. Where are all those explicitly Christian economics books and articles?”

The Association of Christian Economists has been around since the mid-1980s, but so far as I know, no other member has produced even one volume of an economic commentary on the Bible. I also have seen nothing like my book, *The Coase Theorem* (1992): an expressly Christian critique of a Nobel Prize-winning secular economist. Other than the ill-fated attempts by Keynesian Christian economist Douglas Vickers to refute my approach to the Bible and to economics,⁶⁴ no other Christian economist has challenged me exegetically on the issues I have been raising. No one has addressed the foundational epistemological questions that I raised as long ago as 1976.⁶⁵ Noell comes close to admitting as much: “Outside of the Reconstructionist literature, one searches in vain for more than a handful of thoughtful, Biblically-based critiques of non-Christian economic methodology.”⁶⁶ Christian critics have made it clear that they do not like my approach to economics, but not one of them has offered a systematic, integrated methodological alternative that he is willing to defend exegetically. The critics face the old problem of practical politics: they cannot beat something with nothing.

64. Douglas Vickers, *Economics and Man: Prelude to a Christian Critique* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1976). This was followed by his brief book, *A Christian Approach to Economics and the Cultural Situation* (Smythtown, New York: Exposition Press, 1982), which in fact did not specify what this “Christian approach” is. For a response to Vickers, see Ian Hodge, *Baptized Inflation: A Critique of “Christian” Keynesianism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/HodgeBI>)

65. Gary North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), ch. 5.

66. Noell, p. 10.

In this commentary, I have shown how the twin Mosaic principles of land and seed—ultimately, laws of inheritance—were limited both by time and geography. From the beginning, there were boundaries placed by God around all those laws that were judicial applications of the Abrahamic and Mosaic laws governing land and seed. There were also priestly laws that perished with the New Covenant, taking parts of Leviticus with them.

Let me cite once again my comments in Chapter 17, “The Preservation of the Seed.”

* * * * *

It is therefore mandatory on me or on another defender of theonomy’s hermeneutic to do what Poythress said must be done: (1) identify the primary function of an Old Covenant law; (2) discover whether it is universal in a redemptive (healing) sense or whether (3) it is conditioned by its redemptive-historical context (i.e., annulled by the New Covenant). In short: What did the law mean, how did it apply in ancient Israel, and how should it apply today? This task is not always easy, but it is mandatory.

The question Poythress raises is the hermeneutical problem of identifying covenantal continuity and covenantal discontinuity. First, in questions of covenantal continuity, we need to ask: What is the underlying ethical principle? God does not change ethically. The moral law is still binding, but its application may not be. Second, this raises the question of covenantal discontinuity. What has changed as a result of the New Testament era’s fulfillment of Old Covenant prophecy and the inauguration of the New Covenant? A continuity—prophetic-judicial fulfillment—has in some cases produced a judicial discontinuity: the annulment of a case law’s application. A very good example of this is Leviticus 19:19.

I begin any investigation of any suspected judicial discontinuity with the following questions. First, is the case law related to the priesthood, which has changed (Heb. 7:11–12)? Second, is it related to the sacraments, which have changed? Third, is it related to the jubilee land laws (e.g., inheritance), which Christ fulfilled (Luke 4:18–21)? Fourth, is it related to the tribes (e.g., the seed laws), which Christ fulfilled in His office as Shiloh, the promised seed? Fifth, is it related to the “middle wall of partition” between Jew and gentile, which Jesus Christ’s gospel has broken down (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14–20)? These five

principles prove fruitful in analyzing Leviticus 19:19.⁶⁷

Let us ask another question: Is a change in the priesthood also accompanied by a change in the laws governing the family covenant? Jesus tightened the laws of divorce (Matt. 5:31–32). The church has denied the legality of polygamy. Did other changes in the family accompany this change in the priesthood? Specifically, have changes in inheritance taken place? Have these changes resulted in the annulment of the jubilee land laws of the Mosaic economy? Finally, has an annulment of the jubilee land laws annulled the laws of tribal administration?

* * * * *

I hope the reader recognizes by now that there are principles of interpretation that are applicable to the laws of the Mosaic Covenant. *The ultimate hermeneutic principle in the question of the continuity of the Old Covenant legal order in the New Covenant era is the principle of the boundary. Such a boundary does exist.* There is discontinuity. But other boundary principles allow us to determine whether a law has been resurrected with Jesus Christ in the New Covenant. Those case laws that have been resurrected with Christ and adopted into the New Covenant law-order provide Christians with their tools of dominion.

End of Volume 3

67. There are several other hermeneutical questions that we can ask that relate to covenantal discontinuity. Sixth, is it an aspect of the weakness of the Israelites, which Christ's ministry has overcome, thereby intensifying the rigors of an Old Covenant law (Matt. 5:21–48)? Seventh, is it an aspect of the Old Covenant's cursed six day-one day work week rather than the one day-six day pattern of the New Covenant's now-redeemed week (Heb. 4:1–11)? Eighth, is it part of legal order of the once ritually polluted earth, which has now been cleansed by Christ (Acts 10; I Cor. 8)?

BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 4

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BOUNDARIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS

VOLUME 4

GARY NORTH

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Leviticus**
Volume 4

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Appendix A

SACRILEGE AND SANCTIONS

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day (Josh. 7:22–26).

Achan appropriated forbidden objects in Jericho. These objects had been previously set aside by God for His temple. “But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD” (Josh. 6:19). This holy (set-aside) property is what Achan had appropriated. His was therefore an act of sacrilege. Sacrilege is a profane act, but a specific form of profanity: theft from a temple or a holy place.¹ Jericho was to be offered as the firstfruits sacrifice to God on God’s fiery altar. The entire city was to be burned. Its confiscated treasures were to be set aside for God’s temple.

1. The Greek word for “sacrilege,” *hierarsuleo*, means “to rob a temple.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 374. New Testament examples: “Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?” (Rom. 2:22). “For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither **robbers of churches**, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess” (Acts 19:37).

Because of Achan's act of sacrilege, God killed 36 Israelites in the first battle of Ai (Josh. 7:5). They were not responsible for his act of sacrilege, but God nonetheless imposed capital sanctions on them. This event was later used by Joshua in his strategy to take the city of Ai: "For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them" (Josh. 8:6). Nevertheless, the 36 dead men were dead because of a sin committed by a man in secret, a man who was not a representative civil ruler in Israel. Judicially, why did God kill them? Because of Achan's representative position as a priest (Greek: *hieros*) of God in the national hierarchy (Greek: *hierarch* = high priest).

A. Achan's Priestly Role in a Holy War

In his capacity as a warrior-priest, Achan had committed sacrilege. Jordan is correct: "All of Israel were [*sic*] a nation of priests, and it is the priests who prosecute holy war. God Himself had established a parallel between the war camp and the Tabernacle, both holy places. . . ." ² As a member of God's holy army, Achan had been ordered to bring burning judgment against Jericho. His was not simply a run-of-the-mill capital crime of a father in his role as father; it was the sin of a man who had personally appropriated forbidden objects that were to be set apart for God, i.e., *holy* objects. His disobedience was a priestly act. The nation burned the remains of Achan and his family. God's direct sanction against false worship by a priest was fire (Lev. 10:2); it was also His punishment for a non-priest who offered incense illegally (Num. 16:35). ³

1. Sacrilege

The crime of sacrilege in the Old Covenant era carried with it a biblically unique degree of covenantal responsibility. The sanctions imposed by God and by the state against this crime seem to have extended to all those who were under the criminal's legal jurisdiction.

2. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), p. 93. (<http://jjjudges>)

3. Prostitution was not specified as a capital crime in Israel, except when committed by a priest's daughter. "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21:9). This indicates that a connection to the priesthood placed special restrictions on individuals, and violations brought a unique sanction: execution by fire.

This analysis in turn suggests that Adam's primary crime was also sacrilege.⁴ He had eaten a prohibited communion meal by appropriating fruit that had been explicitly set aside by God. Sacrilege was the original crime that brought all of humanity under God's negative sanctions. Adam's sons and daughters have received a death sentence because of the sins of their father. This sanction appears to be a unique judicial aspect of sacrilege in Adam's case and Achan's.⁵

The penalty imposed by Joshua and the court was the public execution of Achan, his family, and his entire inheritance. Even the stolen goods had become polluted through sacrilege, and therefore had to be burned with fire, along with the corpses (Josh. 7:25). God instructed the people of Israel to do with Achan what they had been instructed to do with Jericho. Worse; not even the silver and gold were to be salvaged for the tabernacle. The fire would be all-encompassing.

2. Fathers and Sons

There is no doubt that God sanctioned the execution of Achan and his household, for He immediately withdrew His anger and His negative sanctions (v. 26). Yet the targets of this public execution were Achan's family members. The crucial question is: *Did they partake in their father's sin?* If not, was this execution in violation of Deuteronomy 24:16? That text announces: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." Why were the sons and daughters executed for the sin of the father? The text in Joshua does not say that they knew of the crime, although they may have. It does speak of the burning of his tent. This indicates that the goods had been buried inside his tent. Those inside may have known what was going on. It is not stated specifically that some of the children were too young to know, nor does it state that some were old enough to be in their own tents. The point is, *inside the judicial boundary of Achan's tent, everything had been polluted*. The tent rep-

4. Wrote Sir Henry Spelman in the seventeenth century: "Thus it appeareth that Sacrilege was the first sin, the master-sin, and the common sin at the beginning of the world, committed in earth by man in corruption, committed in paradise by man in perfection, committed in heaven itself by the angels in glory; . . ." Spelman, *The History and Fate of Sacrilege* (1698); Eades edition (London: John Hodges, 1888), p. 1; cited by R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, vol. 2 of *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1982), p. 33.

5. A fiery sword was placed by God at the entrance of the garden to keep out the sacrilegious priest and his heirs (Gen. 3:24). Achan's remains were burned (Josh. 7:25).

resented the judicial boundary of Achan's authority as a household priest. Everything inside that boundary had become profane as a result of his unauthorized and self-conscious trespass of holy objects. Everything inside was fit for destruction.

Surely the animals did not know. Why were even the animals under his administration executed? What had these animals done to deserve stoning? They had done nothing more than the animals had done in Adam's representative Fall, yet they, too, had suffered the consequences, as have their descendants. A cursed form of death entered the animal kingdom as a judgment from God. The subordinates suffered as a result of their master's act of defiance.

Because the text of Joshua 7 is not specific regarding the knowledge of Achan's sons and daughters regarding their father's act of sacrilege, we cannot be sure that they did not know and understand what their father was doing. The fact that the family's animals were stoned does indicate that a comprehensive ban—*hormah*—had been placed by God on his whole household, irrespective of their knowledge or consent. If Deuteronomy 24:16 is accepted as a universally binding standard for Israel's civil government, then we must conclude that they both knew and understood. If they did not know and understand, then we must conclude that Deuteronomy 24:16 did not apply in cases of sacrilege. The text of Joshua 7 does not definitively prove one interpretation over the other, but the execution of the animals does suggest that sacrilege was a unique crime and therefore outside the judicial boundary of Deuteronomy 24:16 regarding innocent sons and guilty fathers.

3. Holy War

The issue at stake was the conquest's judicial character as a uniquely holy war. God had directed the Israelites to destroy all the families inside the boundaries of Canaan. "And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deut. 7:2; cf. 7:16). They were not allowed to show mercy, except to Rahab and her family, because she had covenanted with Israel before the holy army entered the land. Once the army had crossed over the boundary of the land, no other mercy was to be extended to the inhabitants within that boundary. The normal rules of holy warfare did not apply. Israel was not allowed to offer terms of surrender to any

Canaanite city, unlike wars outside the land (Deut. 20:10–11).

By stealing holy objects in Jericho—goods that God had appropriated for Himself—Achan had not only stolen from God; he had also united himself and his family covenantally with Jericho. By stealing part of God's required first-fruits offering, *Achan became a citizen of Jericho*. He also became profane: the violator of a sacred boundary placed by God around the city of Jericho. He was therefore required to suffer the judgment of every citizen in Jericho: death. *Achan's covenantal citizenship extended down to his children and his property: the animals and the stolen goods*. Just as Rahab had become a citizen of Israel by hiding the spies and placing the red string publicly in her window, so did Achan become a citizen of Jericho by hiding the banned goods. Just as Rahab's family had survived because of her covenant, so did Achan's family perish because of his covenant. Achan and his family became Canaanites, and therefore the entire family came under the covenantal ban: *hormah*.

B. Aaron and His Sons

Aaron built the golden calf and thereby brought sin on the people (Ex. 32). All of the people had initiated his representative priestly sin, so three thousand of them suffered the deadly consequences as representatives of the nation (Ex. 32:28). By serving as executioners against them, the Levites removed from their tribe the curse of Jacob (Gen. 49:7), becoming the priestly, holy, set-aside, first-born tribe (Num. 1:47–53).

In contrast to their father, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu initiated their own sins. God brought direct sanctions against them: "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace" (Lev. 10:1–3). Then Moses warned their father and their priestly successors not to display any sign of grief, lest the people be subjected to God's wrath. The people *were* to bewail God's sanctions against the two priests.

And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from

before the sanctuary out of the camp. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD hath kindled. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses (Lev. 10:4–7).

C. David's Numbering of Israel

Another example of a near-sacrilegious⁶ crime in which there was a representative legal relationship was David's numbering of the people. This census-taking was allowed by God only when the nation was being set aside for holy war to bring God's capital sanction against His enemies (Num. 1:3). Thus, David could act legally only in his capacity as *senior military priest*. He misused his civil authority as king to number the people, despite Joab's strong warning (II Sam. 24:3).

The people were at fault for numerous crimes, but not David's particular crime, which was only possible for Israel's senior military leader to commit: high military priest of the holy army. But because there was no imminent holy war, David's act was an act of theft: treating God's holy army as if it were the king's army. David's priestly act of sacrilege would bring all those under his jurisdiction under the threat of God's wrath. The text says that God wanted to punish Israel, and David was God's means to that end. "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah" (II Sam. 24:1).⁷ The use of the metaphorical verb *kindled* points to His holy ban against them. It was nevertheless David's personal sin that he numbered them, for he was not preparing

6. "Near-sacrilegious" may be too weak a designation. The event has the marks of sacrilege, if I am correct in my thesis that numbering the people was a priestly act.

7. The intermediary agent between God and David was Satan: "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel" (I Chron. 21:1). Satan bore responsibility for this action, as did David, but the Bible clearly says that God moved David to do it. Those who seek to assert a philosophical contradiction between God's will and David's actions need to listen to Paul's warning against such a misuse of moral philosophy: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:19–21).

for holy war.

He soon recognized that he had sinned. “And David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly” (II Sam. 24:10). He asked God for forgiveness, and God offered him the choice of one negative sanction among three. David told God that He should decide. That was what God had been waiting for and aiming toward: “So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men” (II Sam. 24:15). Only men died in this plague. Clearly, it was a judicial plague, not biological—analogous to the death of all the firstborn of Egypt, who also were not contagious. Public health measures would not have reduced the death rate.

The Bible does not say that all 70,000 men deserved the negative sanction of death. Some surely did; some probably didn’t. Men live in societies, and as members of covenant-bound collectives, they become subject both to God’s negative sanctions and His positive sanctions. Jeremiah and Ezekiel went out in the Babylonian captivity, yet both had remained faithful to God. *Individuals cannot always escape the negative sanctions associated with corporate responsibility simply by their own righteous behavior.* Good men can suffer in unrighteous societies, while bad men can prosper in righteous societies (Ps. 72). In any case, they did not deserve death for the crime of sacrilege; if anyone did, David did, yet he was not punished directly. He was punished representatively: through the decimation of his army. His kingdom was reduced by 70,000 men. Like the stolen goods in Achan’s tent that could never be used in the temple, so were these 70,000 potential holy warriors. David had sought confirmation of his power as king through the census. God reduced the nation’s power by 70,000 potential holy warriors. They had become sacriligious. They suffered the consequences.

D. Jeroboam and the Priesthood

Consider Jeroboam’s revolt against Rehoboam. The revolt itself was not illegal. The subsequent problem for the Northern Kingdom was that Jeroboam committed sacrilege after the secession, and the people consented. He appointed new priests to administer the sacri-

fices. He appointed the dregs of society to these offices. "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth" (I Kings 13:33–34). Once again, we see that sacrilege leads to the disinheritance of the offender's sons, even though they had not committed the original crime. Why was his decision an act of sacrilege? What had Jeroboam stolen from the temple? Jeroboam had stolen the actual rites of the temple; he had stolen God's lawful worship. He had violated the monopoly of worship that God had established for the entire nation, not just the Southern Kingdom.

He had also stolen God's holy army of priests. Jeroboam removed God's holy army from the highways of the nation. No longer would the holy army of Israel march three times a year to Jerusalem. The people implicitly consented to Jeroboam's sacrilegious decision: they could have walked to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices, but most chose not to. They preferred Jeroboam's local golden calves (II Kings 10:29). What the people saved in travel expenses and trouble, however, they more than lost when God brought negative sanctions against them. Meanwhile, the lawful priesthood departed from Israel:

And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehobam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon (II Chron. 11:13–17).

Jeroboam brought negative sanctions against the lawful priests; God therefore brought negative sanctions against the Northern Kingdom. The northern tribes of Israel accepted the representation of politically appointed, profane priests, who in turn committed sacrilege daily. The Northern Kingdom of Israel did not recover from these priestly acts of sacrilege. It was burdened by kings who were far more corrupt and tyrannical than Judah's kings, and it went into captivity

under a vicious nation, Assyria, over a century before Judah fell to the more tolerant Babylonians. Israel's land was inhabited from then on by the Samaritans: foreigners who were brought into the land by the Assyrians to replace the captive Hebrews.

For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof (II Kings 17: 22–24).

The people were at risk in the rebellion of their king, for the king placed them under the rule of a new priesthood. By consenting to the decision of Jeroboam, the people became sacrilegious. It was their continuing consent to sacrilege rather than Jeroboam's initial act of sacrilege that eventually brought God's permanent sanction of captivity upon the Northern Kingdom.

E. New Testament Biblical Theology: The High Priest

The primary sin in history is sacrilege. The penalty for sacrilege is fire; so is the final negative sanction (Rev. 20:14–15). The representative nature of sacrilege is the primary message of the gospel: from the first Adam to the second Adam, the curse of death was revealed in all men. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the second Adam, revealed that He has representatively atoned for that original sin, which had brought all of mankind under the curse. Paul wrote: "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:18–19).

The New Testament does not speak of the atoning work of Jesus Christ in His capacity as king, but rather in His capacity as high priest. "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but

by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:11–12). It was in His representative office as high priest, not as king, that Jesus Christ established the link between Himself and the covenant people, the saints of God: those people who have come under God's eternal positive sanctions because Jesus Christ came under God the Father's negative sanctions.

F. Sacrilege in English History

Until the advent of the modern worldview, it was a common belief among Christians that sacrilege is always visited by God's negative sanctions. An old English proverb appeared in several versions: "Evil-gotten goods lightly come and lightly go." "Ill-gotten goods will not last three crops." "Ill-gotten goods would not last to the third heir."⁸ It is therefore appropriate to refer at this point to the work of Sir Henry Spelman.

Spelman wrote a popular book against laymen who impropriated tithes, which are owed exclusively to the institutional church: *De non temerandis ecclessis* (1613). It went through four editions. It emphasized divine judgments against the sacrilegious. In 1632, he began a study of the families that bought or inherited the church and monastic properties that had been confiscated by Henry VIII in 1546. He limited his research to ex-monastic estates within a 12-mile radius of Rougham in Norfolk.⁹ This study was published posthumously in 1698: *The History and Fate of Sacrilege*. Webb and Neale in the mid-nineteenth century carried forward this suggestive research. They found that of 630 families that inherited these lands, only 14 families still survived, and that 600 had clearly come under special judgment. They asserted that there was a statistically significant factor in the disasters that befell the 600.¹⁰ A similar though shorter study was written by Sir Simon Degge in 1699.¹¹ Thomas remarks that "Degge's conclusions

8. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 97.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

10. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, ch. 7. Rushdoony's strong endorsement of Spelman's thesis on sacrilege and its sanctions is curious, given Rushdoony's firm commitment to the view that tithes do not belong to the institutional church, and that the layman can lawfully give it to any kind of Christian charity. Rushdoony, "To Whom Do We Tithe," in Rushdoony and Edward A. Powell, *Tithing and Dominion* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1979), ch. 7. See Appendix B: "Rushdoony on the Tithe: A Critique."

11. Degge, *Observations upon the possessors of monastery-lands in Staffordshire*.

were, like Spelman's, regarded as too dangerous to be published at the time, and only appeared in print in 1717."¹²

Nevertheless, throughout the seventeenth century, similar warnings had been offered by Catholic controversialists and many leading Anglican scholars, including John Whitgift, Francis Godwin, Lancelot Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor, Joseph Mede, Isaac Basire, and Robert South.¹³ There were also political leaders who warned their children against purchasing church lands: William Cecil (Lord Burleigh), Edward Hyde (Lord Chatham), and Thomas Wentworth (Earl of Straf-ford).¹⁴ Others, including John Milton, denied any such a punishment for those who bought and sold "monkish lands."

Two families that had profited from the confiscations and which still survived in Spelman's day were the families of Oliver Cromwell, Puritan England's Lord Protector, and his contemporary John Winthrop, the first governor of the Puritans' Massachusetts Bay Colony. Ironically, Winthrop's ancestor, who had purchased from King Henry in 1544 the land of the monastery at Bury St. Edmunds, was named *Adam* Winthrop—appropriate, if his crime was indeed sacrilege.¹⁵

Richard Williams, Oliver Cromwell's ancestor, took the name Cromwell from his uncle, Thomas Cromwell, "hammer of the monks" and the architect of the English Reformation. Richard had acted as Cromwell's agent in the suppression of the monasteries, and his reward was great: three abbeys, two priories, and the nunnery of Hinchinbrooke, which alone was worth some £2,500 per year, an immense fortune. The fortunes on both sides of young Oliver's family had been founded on the spoliation of the church.¹⁶ But the extravagances of Sir Oliver Cromwell, young Oliver's uncle, who lived for almost a century, led to the dissolution of much of the main family's fortune, and Hinchinbrooke was sold in 1627, the year before young Oliver's first election to Parliament.¹⁷ In any case, Oliver's side of the family had not owned Hinchinbrooke, but it did own smaller, less productive former church lands.

Doctoral dissertations are seldom useful to anyone, let alone useful

12. Thomas, *Religion*, p. 99.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

15. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 1.

16. Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1970] 1972), p. 37.

17. Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell: The Lord Protector* (New York: Knopf, 1974), p. 13.

to the kingdom of God, but a series of detailed dissertations on the fate of the families that bought these monastic lands, compared to the fate of families that did not, would be eminently useful. It would be a very difficult task, however, given the carnage and disruptions of the Puritan Revolution, 1642–59, and its aftermath in 1660, the restoration of Charles II.

Conclusion

We have considered the crime of sacrilege at some length. There is no question that it invoked God's direct sanctions, which immediately extended to those under the authority of the priestly transgressor: from Adam to his heirs, from Achan to his heirs, and from David to 70,000 Israelites. Achan's case indicates that the civil magistrate was required to impose the capital sanction against the transgressor's whole household, including animals. That there were Old Covenant corporate sanctions applied by God in history in response to a representative agent's sin is an inescapable conclusion, at least in the case of sacrilege.

If *unintentional* sins by the priests brought the assembly under God's negative sanctions,¹⁸ then how much greater was the corporate threat of sacrilege? Sacrilege is far worse. This leads us to a political conclusion that breaks definitively with the Enlightenment: if God ever provides the historical circumstances in which His saints become the founders of a new civil society or the inheritors of an old one, they must maintain the sanctioning authority which God has publicly entrusted to them. They must guard against acts of sacrilege in both the ordained priesthood and the public at large. Sacrilege is not merely sin in general or an improper profession of faith; it is a specific kind of sin: *stealing God's property*. Those who believe that God will sit back indefinitely while the modern state or modern witches commit atrocities against the property of the church of Jesus Christ do not understand Leviticus 4: God's judgment will come in history.¹⁹ The state is still required by God to defend the church against sacrilege. The state is not neutral.

As in the Old Covenant era, the moral integrity of the people, not their rulers, is judicially primary. The priests and civil rulers will even-

18. Chapter 4.

19. The Soviet Union persecuted the church. Robert Conquest (ed.), *Religion in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Praeger, 1968); Gerhard Simon, *Church, State and Opposition in the U.S.S.R.* (London: C. Hurst, [1970] 1974). In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed in a blood-free act of political suicide.

tually reflect the moral condition of the people, for priests and civil rulers are the people's ordained representatives. Those citizens who remain covenantally faithful to God by obeying His law through His grace (Eph. 2:8–10) will find that their enemies are eventually brought under God's negative sanctions. The covenant-breaker, if he is consistent, is eventually driven to commit sacrilege. At the banquets of covenant-breakers, the holy treasures of the temple will be used as common plates: profanity. When this happens, the handwriting is on the wall for the rulers and the social order they represent. They will be replaced (Dan. 5).²⁰

Because the function of civil government is to apply negative temporal sanctions against convicted transgressors in order to protect the entire society from God's negative temporal sanctions, the sacrilege laws are still in force in the New Covenant era. This means that the death penalty must still be imposed on people who commit sacrilege. On the other hand, the *hormah* of the Mosaic Covenant—a priestly act of total destruction within the boundaries of geographical Israel—was required by God only during the original conquest of Canaan. It did not apply after Israel's return from the exile, when strangers living in the land were to be protected by the jubilee land laws (Ezek. 47:21–23).

Sons and daughters can escape the fate of their father by declaring themselves no longer his sons. The New Testament emphasizes God's gracious adoption as more powerful in history than Adam's sacrilege and subsequent disinheritance. The sins of the sacrilegious parent do not extend to the children in the New Covenant era if the children break publicly with their father when they learn of his sacrilege. Furthermore, there is no evidence that this was not also the case in the Old Covenant. But what of a child too young to have understood what his father had done, or one who did not discover the crime until after his father's conviction? To escape execution, he would have to have been adopted by another family. All those who remained within the family of the sacrilegious agent had to suffer the same penalty. This is still the way of escape for the sons of Adam: adoption by a family whose head is untainted by the crime of sacrilege. There is only one such family: the family of God, redeemed by the Second Adam, Jesus Christ.

20. In the twentieth century—perhaps throughout modern times—the events in the Soviet Union of August 19–21, 1991, best illustrate this principle of replacement. The astoundingly inept attempted *coup* by the old guard Soviet leaders failed in a nearly bloodless series of events. The experiment in atheism, 1917–1991, had failed.

Appendix B

RUSHDOONY ON THE TITHE: A CRITIQUE

And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die (Num. 18:21–22).

The text is clear: the Levites as a tribe were entitled to the entire tithe. That is, they had a legal claim on it: “all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance.” This inheritance was as secure legally in God’s eyes as the landed inheritance of the other tribes. Of course, it was far less secure operationally; the men of Israel did not always pay their tithes. Those who refused to pay their tithes to the Levites were guilty of robbing God. As surely as it was theft to steal title to another man’s land, so was it theft to withhold any part of the tithe from the Levites. The first form of theft was active; the second form was passive; but both were theft. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation” (Mal. 3:8–9).

The context is equally clear regarding the legal basis of this entitlement: the Levites’ service as guardians of the tabernacle/temple’s sacramental boundary. They were required to stand at this sacramental boundary and restrain (probably execute) anyone who trespassed it (Num. 18:1–22).¹ The Levites’ entitlement and the Levites’ task as

1. On the debate within modern Jewish scholarship on the Levites as executioners—Jacob Milgrom vs. Menahem Haran—see James B. Jordan, “The Death Penalty in the Mosaic Law,” *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper No. 3* (Jan. 1989), Pt. 3. Milgrom argued that the Levites were armed guards; Haran denies this. Jordan agrees with Milgrom.

boundary executioners were explicitly linked by the Mosaic law.²

There can be no doubt: the Levites were entitled to the whole tithe. I ask again: On what legal basis? The text answers: their service in the temple. But which form of service: Sacramental or social? I answer: sacramental. Rushdoony's answer: social. On this seemingly minor issue, the Christian Reconstruction movement divided in 1981. It will remain divided until one side or the other gives up its view of the judicial basis of the tithe, or until one of them disappears. Contrary to those people who blame all institutional divisions on personality conflicts—even God vs. Satan, I suppose—the dividing issue here is ecclesiology: the doctrine of the church, and has been since 1981.³

A. Church and Tithe

I have presented my view of the tithe in my book, *The Covenantal Tithe*.⁴ I have defended it in another book, *Perspectives on Tithing: Four Views*.⁵

The theology of the tithe is not a minor issue; it is central to biblical ecclesiology. It is also important for a proper understanding of the covenant—specifically, the church covenant.⁶ The tithe is an aspect of judicial authority in the church, i.e., point two of the biblical covenant model, hierarchy-representation, which Sutton argued in Chapter 2. This representation is both substitutionary (“Who or what in history dies in my place?”) and judicial (“Who in history declares me judicially acceptable before God?”).

The proper performance of this representative ecclesiastical office does mandate certain social services—charity, for example—but the covenantal-judicial basis of the eldership is not social; it is sacramental (point four of the biblical covenant model: oath-sanctions).⁷ A man is

2. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

3. For a detailed study of the sacramental basis of the tithe, plus additional information on the background of Rushdoony's theology of the tithe, see Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

4. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

5. Gary North, “The Covenantal Tithe,” in David A. Croteau (ed.), *Perspectives on Tithing: Four Views* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2011).

6. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 10, 11. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

7. Similarly, the office of civil magistrate, called “minister” by Paul in Romans 13:4,

not a minister of the gospel just because he calls himself one or because he is charitable. He is a minister only because he has been ordained by a lawful church. Ordained ministers guard the sacraments against profane acts: boundary violations. That is, they control lawful access to the sacraments. They include some people and exclude others. The following four aspects of a church are judicially linked: the formal ordination of ministers by other ministers (i.e., no self-ordination or ordination exclusively by laymen), hierarchical authority (an appeals court system), ministerial control over legal access to the sacraments, and the local institutional church's exclusive authority to collect *and distribute* all of its members' tithes in God's name. To deny any one of these aspects of the church is to call into question all four. So it was under the Mosaic Covenant; so it is under Christ's New Covenant. Rushdoony has implicitly denied the first two points by defending ecclesiastical independency, and he has emphatically denied the other two. He is consistent (or at least he was until 1992).⁸ His theological critics had better be sure their theological positions are equally consistent.

B. The Doctrine of the Church in Christian Reconstruction

The major dividing issue within Christian Reconstruction has been the doctrine of the institutional church. Officially, the movement split in 1981⁹ over Rushdoony's outrage regarding a minor theological point in an essay I submitted as my monthly column in the *Chalcedon Report*. I had relied on a passage in James Jordan's 1980 master's thesis.¹⁰

is also based on point four: sanctions, in this case, negative sanctions. He punishes evil-doers (v. 4).

8. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 10.

9. My last year as editor of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* was in 1981.

10. Jordan's master's thesis had been accepted by Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). The offending passage—on the circumcision of Gershom by Zipporah—appears on pages 85–86. An expansion of this observation was later published by Jordan in his book, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), Appendix F, "Proleptic Passover." (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>) Rushdoony initially demanded that I defend my observation in greater detail, which I did. He then said my defense was insufficient. He then fired me as editor of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*. I later published a larger version of this defense: "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>). No other critic has ever written to Jordan to challenge his essay as heretical. I have never received a single letter from anyone other than Rushdoony, pro or con, regarding my essay. The whole incident was officially based on a trifle. In this appendix, I deal with what I regard as the unstated dividing

Rushdoony had made a very similar observation in the *Institutes*, which he probably had forgotten making.¹¹ I find it difficult to believe that this blow-up on Rushdoony's part was based merely on a brief section in Jordan's master's thesis. Jordan had sent him a copy of it over a year before the blow-up; he had remained silent about it. I believe that the real offense was our view of the institutional church, which we had begun to promote vigorously through the fledgling Geneva Divinity School. There was an irreconcilable division over the correct answer to this question: *What is the fundamental institution in the long-term process we call Christian reconstruction?* Rushdoony has repeatedly answered: "the family," along with its subordinate agency, the Christian school. The "Tyler wing" of the Christian Reconstruction movement answered: "the church." There is no way to reconcile these views.

If this dispute were simply over the percentage of men's income owed to God, it would not be a major dividing issue in our day. There is nothing unique about Christians today who dismiss as "legalism" any suggestion that they owe 10% of their net income to God. But Rushdoony, as the co-founder of Christian Reconstruction, could hardly take this antinomian approach to the question of the tithe. The Bible is clear about the tithe's mandatory percentage: men owe 10% of their net income to God.¹² The argument is not over the tithe's percentage; the argument is over which agency (if any) possesses the God-given authority to collect it and then distribute it. The debate within Christian Reconstruction is over this question: *Where is the locus of God's delegated sovereignty over the allocation of tithe:* In the tither or the institutional church? I answer: with the institutional church. Rushdoony answered: with the tither.

1. Church and Tithe

From 1965 until the publication of his two-volume *Systematic Theology* in 1994, Rushdoony sporadically attempted to cobble together his doctrine of the institutional church in order to support his view

point: Rushdoony's view of the institutional church.

11. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 427–29. On the close connection between Rushdoony's comments and my own, see North, "Marriage Supper," p. 218.

12. There is a subordinate question: the third-year tithe and the poor tithe. Were these separate, additional tithes? Rushdoony argues that they were. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 53.

of the tithe. His view of the tithe is that Christians can lawfully send the tithe anywhere they wish; therefore, the institutional church has no lawful claim to any portion of the tithe, or at least not above the tenth of a tenth that went to the Aaronic priesthood under the Mosaic law. He needed a doctrine of the church in order to defend such a thesis theologically. In this appendix, I examine the connections between his view of the tithe and his view of the institutional church.

This has not been an easy task. Rushdoony never wrote a book on the doctrine of the church, for reasons that will become clear as you read this appendix. (This refusal to go into print was even more true of his defense of the continuing authority of the Mosaic dietary laws: not so much as one full page of exegesis devoted to the topic, despite its great importance for him personally as a distinguishing mark of his theology.)¹³ There is no issue of Chalcedon's *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* devoted to the doctrine of the church. I assure the reader, this was not my decision as the editor of the first fifteen issues, 1974–1981. In Tyler, I participated in a symposium on “the Reconstruction of the Church” in 1985, which my monetary offering above my required tithe financed.¹⁴ Rushdoony forbade me to publish any issue of the journal devoted exclusively to the church. This was the only rule that he ever set forth for my editing.

2. Church and Family

Late in his career, Rushdoony attempted to trace the institutional church back to the family—not just chronologically but covenantally. This theory of ecclesiastical origins is the heart and soul of this, his most important theological error. He wrote: “The father of the church was Abraham, with whom God made a covenant (Gen. 15), and through whom the covenant sign, circumcision, was instituted (Gen. 17). The covenant with Israel in Exodus 20 is a continuation of the same covenant, a covenant of grace and law. The church thus began as a family, and the structure of both the covenant nation and congregation retained this same character.”¹⁵ The church began as a family,

13. He never commented on I Corinthians 8: “Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (vv. 7–8).

14. James B. Jordan (ed.), “The Reconstruction of the Church,” *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 4 (1985). (<http://bit.ly/CAC1985>)

15. R. J. Rushdoony, “The Nature of the Church,” *Calvinism Today*, I (Oct. 1991),

Rushdoony said; hence, the family in both his theology and his social theory is the central institution: the master covenantal model. Rushdoony's social theory is *familiocentric*. He regarded the institutional church as an extension of the family.¹⁶ In his view, the great war for the minds of men is the war between family and state. The Bible teaches otherwise.

Rushdoony failed to recognize that the priesthood did not originate with Abraham. It originated with Melchizedek. Abraham paid his tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), and he received bread and wine from him (Gen. 14:18). Christ's high priestly office was grounded in Melchizedek's primary priesthood, not Levi's secondary and judicially subordinate priesthood (Heb. 7:9–10). Here is the fatal flaw in Rushdoony's *familiocentric* argument: *Melchizedek had no parents* (Heb. 7:3). I take this literally: Melchizedek was therefore a theophany. At the very least, he had no genealogy; his authority was not derived in any way in the family. Melchizedek is the refutation of Rushdoony's ecclesiology and his *familiocentric* social theory.

C. The Biblical Position: Ecclesiocentrism

I disagreed with Rushdoony on the centrality of the family in Christian society. The fundamental institution in history is not the family; it is the church, which extends beyond the final resurrection as the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21). The family does not: there is no marriage in the resurrection (Matt. 22:30). Jesus made it plain: the false ideal of the sovereign family is a far greater threat to Christianity than the false ideal of the sovereign state. Jesus never spoke this harshly regarding the state:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me (Matt. 10:34–37).

p. 3. This journal is published in England: P. O. Box 1, Whitby, North Yorkshire YO21 1HP.

16. I would call any social theory *emanationist* which traces the origin of church, state, or family to one of the other institutions. Christian social theory must be Trinitarian, insisting on the covenantal uniqueness of each of the three institutional covenants.

The family is temporary, limited to history: no marriage in the resurrection. "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). The state is temporary, also limited to history: no suppression of evil (Rom. 13:4) in the post-resurrection, sin-free world. But the church is eternal. *The church is therefore the central human institution.* The family and the state are legitimate covenantal institutions in history, but they do not possess the most important authority given by God to any institution: the power to excommunicate. Why is this the most important sanction? Because it alone is binding in eternity. Breaking the family bond by death or divorce is not binding in eternity; physical death through execution is not binding in eternity. In contrast, lawful excommunication is binding in eternity. Christian social theory must affirm without compromise or qualification that the true sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are more important in history than the democratic state's imitation sacrament of voting or the family's imitation sacrament of sexual bonding.

Rushdoony understood the relationship between church authority and excommunication, so in order to defend his sociology of familism, he denied that the church possesses the authority to excommunicate, as we shall see. *He thereby denied the existence of the keys of the kingdom*—the judicial authority of the institutional church in history (Matt. 16:19). He did this in the name of Christian orthodoxy, as we shall see.

D. The Conservatives' Position: Familiocentrism

Why do social and political conservatives traditionally identify the family as the central institution of society? There are two primary reasons. First, because they reject the liberals' assertion that the central social institution is the state. In this they are correct. Such a view is necessary but not sufficient for accurate social theory. Second, because conservatives adopt natural law theory. We must examine both assumptions: one incomplete and the other incorrect.

1. Anti-Statism

Conservatives regard the family as the only institution with sufficient authority and respect to challenge the state successfully on a long-term basis. One of the strongest statements to this effect was written by G. K. Chesterton. The family, he wrote, "is the only check

on the state that is bound to renew itself as eternally as the state, and more naturally than the state.”¹⁷ They view the social function of the institutional church as an adjunct to the family, just as liberals see the church as an adjunct to the state. Conservatives rarely view the institutional church as a covenantally separate institution possessing superior authority to both family and state. This is a serious error.

The authority to excommunicate is the greatest judicial authority exercised in history. The lawful negative sanctions of the rod (family) and the sword (state) are minor compared to the sanction of excommunication (Matt. 16:19). But because formal excommunication does not impose bodily pain in history, modern man dismisses the church’s authority in both history and eternity. This includes modern conservatism. It also includes most Protestant churches, who refuse to honor each other’s excommunications. They thereby deny Jesus’ words: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The only agency in history that lawfully announces a person’s condemnation to hell—short of repentance before physical death—is the institutional church. This authority is implicitly recognized by the modern Western state. A condemned criminal on his final walk to the place of execution cannot legally be accompanied by his spouse or his political representative; he can be accompanied by a minister.

The battle between patriarchalism and statism in the West has been going at least since the rise of the Greek city-state, an outgrowth of clans and family sacrifices.¹⁸ The problem is, the family always loses this battle as a covenant-breaking society advances over time because the family does not have the power possessed by the state: the monopoly of life-threatening violence. *Step by step, the state replaces the family in the thinking of most members of covenant-breaking society.* The state possesses greater power; in the power religion of humanism, this justifies the expansion of the state.

The family fights a losing defensive battle when it fights alone. Its authority is steadily eroded by the state. For example, the divorce rate

17. Chesterton, “The Story of the Family,” in *The Superstition of Divorce* (1920); *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 4 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 256. His reference to eternity betrays his confused social theology: neither the human family nor the state is eternal; the church is (Rev. 21, 22).

18. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955).

risks when the state replaces the family's functions, especially its welfare functions. Therefore, if the familio-centric view of the church were true—the church as an adjunct to the family—the church would inevitably lose alongside of the family. This view of the church is widely held today. Result: those people inside various church hierarchies who seek power have increasingly allied themselves and their churches with the state.¹⁹

2. *Natural Law Theory*

An implicit natural law theory undergirds conservatism's social analysis: belief in the existence of moral absolutes that are discoverable by universal logical principles. This faith in moral-logical universals undermines the judicial authority of the church. The Trinitarian church is not universal in human history; the state and family are. "Religion" and "the sacred" are undeniably universal in history; the church is not. Because the family and the state appear to be the universal institutions, and because the church exists only where Christianity has made inroads, conservatives conclude that the war for liberty can be won only if the family is strengthened against the state. The church is regarded by conservatives as a useful ally in the family's battle against the state. The church serves as social cement; this is preferred to political cement. Whenever the church claims more than this subordinate role for itself, American conservatives become leery. This is why the primary authors of the U.S. Constitution—right-wing Enlightenment humanists²⁰—were willing to mouth words of praise for "religion," but never for Jesus Christ as the incarnate Second Person of the Trinity, nor for His church.²¹ Religion in general is elevated; the church in par-

19. C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975). (<http://bit.ly/SingerUA>) This book is a detailed history of the Federal Council of Churches and its successor, the National Council of Churches.

20. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

21. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln spoke of religion and morality as great benefits for society. Neither of them was willing to profess personal faith in the work of Jesus Christ as the sole pathway to eternal life. Religion in their view is instrumental rather than foundational. See Paul F. Boller, *George Washington & Religion* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963). Washington refused to take the Lord's Supper: self-excommunication. Lincoln avoided commenting publicly on his religion except in the 1846 Congressional campaign, when he issued a handbill admitting that he was not a church member, but assured voters that they should not vote for a man who scoffs at religion. "Handbill Replying to Charges of Infidelity," *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey:

ticular is demoted.

This view of the church implicitly places world history above church history because the institutional church has been narrower in its influence than mankind up to this time. The most widely accepted opinions and logic of “mankind in general”—the covenantal sons of Adam—are assumed by natural law theorists to be the legitimate moral and judicial standards for all societies. This implicit and sometimes explicit humanism of natural law theory is contrary to the Bible’s revelation of God’s work in history through His covenant people. Covenant-breakers are adjuncts to covenant-keepers in history, just as the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10) will be an adjunct to the culmination of the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21:1) in eternity. Covenant-keepers rather than covenant-breakers are the focus of history. Israel was central to the ancient world, not the great empires. The exodus is central to human history, not the fall of Troy. The angel of death is central to human history, not the Trojan Horse. The Pentateuch is central to human history, not *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Aeneid*. Moses is central to human history, not Plato and Aristotle. Special grace is central to history, not common grace.²² Natural law theory, whatever its specific ethical content may be—on this crucial point, natural law theorists disagree—is the outworking of common grace. *Bible-revealed law, not natural law, is central to history*. Looking back from eternity, all men will recognize this. Men are required by God to evaluate history in terms of what He has revealed about eternity, not evaluate eternity in terms of what men assume about history. Humanism denies this. So does natural law theory.

E. Rushdoony’s Ecclesiology

Rushdoony subordinated the doctrine of the church to the doctrine of the family. In doing so, he adopted familiocentrism, though not natural law theory. This abandonment of theonomy in favor of traditional conservatism undermined the covenantal foundation of his theology. His view of church and family was an anomaly in his original theology—an error no larger than a man’s hand. Like Elijah’s cloud, it grew into a mud-producing storm after 1981.

Rutgers University Press, 1953), I, p. 382. See also his “National Fast Day Proclamation” (Aug. 12, 1861), where he spoke of “the Supreme Government of God.” *Ibid.*, VI, p. 482.

22. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

Rushdoony systematically avoided developing a doctrine of the institutional church. He offers one chapter in the *Institutes* (XIV) and one in *Systematic Theology* (XII), but both are incomplete. Neither addresses in detail the judicial issues of the ordination of ministers and public excommunication by ordained church officers. This is especially absent in *Systematic Theology*, completed in 1984 but not published until mid-1994. He had broken not only with the Westminster Confession of Faith (which he officially had to affirm until he resigned from the ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1970) and the 39 Articles of Episcopalianism (which he officially affirmed after 1973), but with all of Trinitarian orthodoxy from the Council of Nicea forward.

Critics of the church's lawful, God-ordained claim on every individual's lifetime commitment again and again seek to elevate "Christianity" and dismiss "the church," as if there could somehow be Christianity without the church and its mandated sacraments. One sign of a person's move away from historic Christianity's doctrine of the church to conservative humanism is his adoption of the pejorative word, *Churchianity*.²³ The person who dismisses "churchianity" is often a defender of his personal ecclesiastical autonomy: a sovereign individual who judges the churches of this world and finds them all sadly lacking. In his own eyes, all the churches fall short of his almost pure and nearly undefiled standards. No church announces God's authoritative word to him; rather, he announces God's authoritative word to the churches. No church officer represents him before God; instead, he represents himself. Like the foolish defense lawyer who hires himself as his own advocate in a court of law, so is the man who is contemptuous of "churchianity." He confidently excommunicates all churches for failing to meet his standards. All congregations have failed to measure up, except (should he deign to begin one) his own. He ignores the obvious: *a self-excommunicated person is no less excommunicated*.

Rushdoony's views on the institutional church became adjuncts to his theory of the tithe. Prior to his assertion in 1991 of the Chalcedon Foundation's status as a church (initially, he called it a chapel)²⁴ as well as a governmentally chartered educational organization, his views on

23. For a good example, see Rushdoony's editorial, "Copycat Churchianity," *Chalcedon Report* (June 1992).

24. *The Chalcedon Report* (Jan. 1992) published an article by Rushdoony, "The Life of the Church: I Timothy 5:1-2." That essay was introduced as follows: "Note: *The Life of the Church* was a communion sermon at the Chalcedon Chapel evening service, October 27, 1991."

the tithe were fully consistent with his views regarding the visible church. They constituted a single, consistent, and monumental error. This error, if applied retroactively to the conclusions of Volume 1 of *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, would destroy the covenantal basis of Rushdoony's theology and therefore also his social theory.

The fact is, his three-fold error came late in his career. This shift in theology began shortly before he left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1970, but it was not completed until the early 1980s. In other words, what Volume 1 of *The Institutes* hath given, Volume 2 need not take away. Only small traces of his error are visible in Volume 1; this error can and must be separated from that foundational book. Because of this, I find it necessary to challenge the book that he and Edward Powell co-authored, *Tithing and Dominion* (1979).²⁵ The chapters are identified as to which author wrote which. I refer here only to Rushdoony's chapters. (Rushdoony broke decisively with Powell shortly after he broke with me and Jordan.)

F. Tithing and Dominion

With respect to dominion the Bible teaches, first, that the dominion covenant was established between God and the family. God has assigned to the family the primary dominion task in history (though not in eternity): to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:27–28)—a biological function.²⁶ Second, as we shall see, the tithe is a mandatory payment from man to God through a covenantal institution: the church. Therefore, if the tithe were the basis of dominion, God's law would mandate a tithe to the family, the agency of dominion. But there is no God-specified mandatory payment to the family, i.e., no legal entitlement. On the contrary, it is the productivity of individuals, families, and other voluntary associations that is the source of both tithes and taxes. This is inevitable: *the source of the funding cannot be entitled to funding*.²⁷ The individual²⁸ or family is the source of the funding. The tithe is

25. Edward A. Powell and Rousas John Rushdoony, *Tithing and Dominion* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1979).

26. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, n Economics, 2012), ch. 4.

27. There are parent-child economic requirements, but these are intra-family relationships.

28. This would include those fictitious legal individuals known as corporations. One way to solve the problem of tithing on retained earnings would be for 10% of the common shares of all new corporations to be assigned to a specific church from the beginning. The church would automatically participate in all dividends and capital

therefore owed to the institutional church by the individual or the family.

Rushdoony defended the tithe as the foundational basis of biblical dominion. He also described the church as an unproductive organization, as we shall see. Conclusion: *if* the tithe is foundational to dominion, and *if* the church is unproductive, then *it is the tithe rather than the church which is the source of Christianity's cultural productivity*. In terms of such a perspective, the institutional church's importance in the dominion process is secondary to the tithe's importance. This is exactly what Rushdoony began saying publicly after 1973.²⁹

It is not clear to me whether his doctrine of the church and his doctrine of the tithe originally stemmed from his decision to redirect his own tithe money into the Chalcedon Foundation and to remove himself from the authority of any local church, or whether his shift in theology came first. These events surely paralleled each other chronologically.³⁰ He did not bother to articulate his views until the late 1970s. By 1991, however, it was clear that his published doctrine of the church was an extension of his published doctrine of the tithe. He constantly wrote about the tithe. Until his 1991 essay in *Calvinism Today*, he steadfastly refused to write clearly about the institutional church.

In June, 1994, his two-volume *Systematic Theology* appeared.³¹ The manuscript had been completed in 1984. Chapter 12, "The Doctrine of the Church," was more radical and confrontational against Calvin's doctrine of the church than had been Chapter 14, "The Church," in *Institutes of Biblical Law*. But what came later, in the early 1990s, was more radical and confrontational than *Systematic Theology*.

Sometime in the late 1960s, Rushdoony warned me of not dealing early with a heresy in one's career. He used the example of a Calvinist publisher and amateur economist, Frederick Nymeyer, who paid for translations of the works of the Austrian economist, Eugen von Böhm Bawerk. From 1953 to 1960, he published a low-circulation magazine, originally called *Progressive Calvinism*, but later called *First Principles*

gains.

29. When I served as a Board member of the Chalcedon Foundation in 1975, Rushdoony was directing his own tithe into Chalcedon, as he told me. I was a paid staff member at the time. He did not ask me to follow his lead, nor did I volunteer to do so. I have no reason to believe that he subsequently re-directed his tithe to a local church, since he did not belong to a local church.

30. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 10.

31. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1994).

In Morality and Economics. It was an attempt to present the economics of Böhm-Bawerk as being consistent with Christianity. There was a lot of good material in this magazine, but it was far more Austrian than Christian. Then, in 1967, he wrote and published a book called *No Civil War in the Cave*. Rushdoony regarded it as Pelagian. He told me, “If a man does not deal with a heresy early in his career, it will dominate his thinking as he grows older.”

G. Church and Sanctions

In contrast to the family, both state and church are lawfully entitled to economic support from those who are under their respective covenantal authorities. The state’s jurisdiction is territorial (e.g., over non-covenanted resident aliens) and judicial (e.g., over its covenanted citizens who live outside the state’s territory³²). The church’s jurisdiction is equally judicial, though not (in Protestant societies) territorial. Both institutions have lawful covenantal claims before God over a small portion of the net productivity of all those who live voluntarily under their jurisdiction. Their God-given authority to impose negative sanctions against those who refuse to pay is the outward mark of their covenantal sovereignty. *To deny the right of either church or state to bring such sanctions is a denial of their God-delegated covenantal sovereignty.*

1. Tithe Revolt

Rushdoony understood this with respect to the state; he therefore opposed the tax revolt or “patriot” movement.³³ But he denied that any payment is automatically owed to the institutional church. No church can lawfully compel its members to pay it their complete tithe or even any portion thereof, he insisted. “It is significant, too, that God’s law makes no provision for the enforcement of the tithe *by man*. Neither church nor state have [*sic*] the power to require the tithe of us, nor to tell us where it should be allocated, *i.e.*, whether to Christian Schools or colleges, educational foundations, missions, charities, or anything else. The tithe is to the Lord.”³⁴ He then cited Malachi 3:8–12. With re-

32. United States. citizens living outside the country must pay income taxes on their salaries. As of 2012, the first \$91,500 was exempt.

33. R. J. Rushdoony, “The Tax Revolt Against God,” Position Paper 94, *Chalcedon Report* (Feb. 1988), pp. 16–17.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

spect to the tithe, Rushdoony believed in *the divine right of the individual* with respect to the institutional church: no earthly appeal beyond conscience. This was not an error of logic on his part; it was a consistent application of his ecclesiology.

The existence of a mandatory payment to the church is evidence of a covenantal relationship: *a legal bond established by a self-maledictory oath*³⁵ which each church member takes either explicitly or representatively (by parents). The church has a lawful claim on a tithe of every member's net increase in income.³⁶ Unlike the state, which is ruthless in collecting taxes owed, the church rarely enforces its lawful claim. This is not surprising: the modern church rarely enforces anything under its lawful jurisdiction.³⁷ The state has arrogated power to itself in the face of the churches' defection. In our day, most Christians regard this as normal and even normative. They prefer to think of the church as judicially impotent. They prefer to think of the state's physical sanctions as the greatest possible sanctions. They refuse to regard formal excommunication as threatening them or anyone else with eternal consequences. Like the humanists, they prefer to fear men

35. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, pp. 83–91. Rushdoony refused to discuss the self-maledictory oath as the judicial basis of all four biblical covenants: personal, church, state, and family. He defined the covenant as God-given law rather than as oath-invoked God-given law. This unique judicial oath formally invokes God's sanctions. Without this formal invocation, there is no redeeming covenant bond possible. There is only the general, Adamic covenant bond: a broken covenant. Rushdoony's definition does not acknowledge this fact. He wrote: "In the Biblical record, covenants are laws given by God to man as an act of grace." Rushdoony, "Covenant vs. Contract," *Chalcedon Report* (June 1993), p. 20. If correct, this definition would make the covenants universal, since biblical laws govern everything in history, as he argued for years. But if he were to discuss the sanctions-invoking oath as basis of the four covenants, he would have to discuss oath-breaking in the church and its formal sanctions: the doctrine of excommunication. He would also have to discuss in detail Article VI, Section III of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits religious test oaths for Federal (national) office. This is why the U.S. Constitution is an atheistic, humanistic document—a fact which Rushdoony refused to accept for over three decades. See North, *Political Polytheism*, Appendix B: "Rushdoony on the Constitution."

36. This obligation does not apply to gifts from husbands to wives and vice versa; nor does it apply to intra-family gifts to minors. Parents who feed their children need not set aside a tithe on the food so consumed. The obligation is covenantal, and the institutional payment of the tithe by the head of the household serves as a representative payment for all of its members.

37. At worst, a pastor who is convicted of adultery is suspended for a year or two. I know of at least one case where an admitted adulterer was asked by his presbytery only to transfer to another presbytery. The members' idea of negative sanctions was limited to "Not with our wives, you don't!" He voluntarily left the ministry. I bought part of his library.

rather than God. They stand in front of the local church and in effect chant the child's challenge: "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names ['excommunicant'] can never hurt me!"

Neither the state nor the church is a profit-seeking organization. This is why both possess lawful claims on a small part of the net productivity of their members. Therefore, they cannot be primary agencies of dominion in history. They are secondary agencies of dominion. This is why the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 is not strictly an extension of the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:26–28. A small portion of the fruits of dominion are brought to the institutional church. The church is not the source of these fruits. The institutional church, through its authority to declare someone as an adopted son of God, brings covenant-breakers formally into the eternal household of God, but the institutional church is not itself a family. It possesses greater authority than the family. Thus, the tithe cannot be a primary aspect of dominion. It is a secondary aspect.

2. Productivity

This is not to say that church and state are not economically productive. They are the source of God's authorized covenantal sanctions: the negative sanctions of the sword (state) and the positive and negative sanctions of the keys of the kingdom (church). Rushdoony's language is seriously misleading when he wrote that "church and state are not productive agencies."³⁸ This is the language of secular libertarianism, not Christianity. Nevertheless, he made an important point: "The state is a protective agency whose function is to maintain a just *order*, to insure *restitution* for civil wrongs, and to *protect* the people from external and internal enemies. . . . The church's function is *protection and nurture* by means of its ordained ministry."³⁹ What is the biblical meaning of "protection"? Civil protection means *the defense of boundaries*—judicial rights against invasion, either by individuals or by the state itself. Protection by the state is achieved by its enforcement of negative sanctions against evil-doers (Rom. 13:1–7).⁴⁰ Biblically speaking, the state provides no lawful positive sanctions, e.g., nurture. Protection by the church is also achieved through its imposition of negat-

38. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, Vol. 2 of *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1982), p. 129.

39. *Idem*.

40. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

ive sanctions (e.g., I Cor. 5). Nurture by the church is the product of positive sanctions (e.g., II Cor. 8).

Rushdoony mistakenly contrasted these beneficial covenantal functions with what he calls "productivity." His view of productivity is incorrect. These covenantal functions are basic to productivity, but they cannot be financed unless those under their authority remain productive. The income of both church and state must come from the outside: from God through the individual and the corporate entities that are under the respective jurisdictions of church and state.

Rushdoony discussed the non-productivity of the church in a chapter on the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion). He made a catastrophic theological error by denying the sacramental basis of the church. "The problem in history has been the unhappy sacramentalization of church and state."⁴¹ He rightly castigated the idea of a sacramental state, but then wrote: "Similarly, the church sees itself as the sacramental body and preempts Christ's role. Communion is thought of as a church rite rather than Christ's ordinance." This contrast implicitly assumes that Holy Communion is not a church rite, i.e., not a biblically mandatory ritual: a false theological assumption if there ever was one. He reduced communion to a "feast of charity" or a "love feast."⁴² He never acknowledged the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a *divinely empowered covenant-renewal ceremony of the institutional church*, a ceremony that invokes God's positive and negative sanctions in history and eternity.

The institutional church has only one ultimate means of discipline: excommunication, i.e., excluding a person from the rite of the Lord's Supper. Without the positive sanction aspect of the Lord's Supper, the negative sanction of exclusion is judicially meaningless. Those who hold a *nominalist* view⁴³ of the Lord's Supper strip the institutional church of its disciplinary authority. Calvin wrote that "it is certainly a highly reprehensible vice for a church not to correct sins. Besides, I say our Lord will punish an entire people for this single fault. And therefore let no church, still not exercising the discipline of the ban, flatter itself by thinking that it is a small or light sin not to use the ban when necessary."⁴⁴ He also wrote: "But this is not to say that an individual is

41. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, p. 128.

42. *Idem*.

43. The nominalist acknowledges no judicial authority beneath the words that define the sacraments. Thus, the sacraments become a mere memorial. This was Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper. It is also the Baptist view.

44. John Calvin, "Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the

justified in withdrawing from the church whenever things are contrary to his will."⁴⁵ Calvin was not a defender of the individual's autonomy in relation to the institutional church. He fully understood what the sole basis of a declared Christian's judicial separation from the institutional church has to be: excommunication.

H. The Sacraments

The sacraments are means of bringing God's sanctions in history on His people: blessings and cursings. They are covenant signs. They are oath signs. Rushdoony insisted that the sacraments are family rites, not rites administered under the exclusive jurisdiction of the institutional church. He replaced the sacramental church with the sacramental family.

1. Baptism

Rushdoony saw baptism as a covenant sign, which it is. But affirming covenant in general is not sufficient. *A covenant sign must be administered.* Which institution has been granted this monopoly by God: church, state, or family? For two almost thousand years, the church's answer has been clear: the church. This opinion, Rushdoony said, is a sign of the hardening of the church's arteries. "Baptism is a covenant fact. The church has converted it into an ecclesiastical fact. Circumcision in the Old Testament is a family rite, because the family is the primary covenant institution; the family gives birth to and rears the child."⁴⁶ But physical birth is Adamic; Adam's sons need adoption.

Was circumcision a family rite? No; it was an ecclesiastical, priestly rite. The head of a household may have administered this rite as a household priest in a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). If so, was this done in his judicial office of father or priest? The issue here is covenantal authorization. The question of covenantal authority is easy to decide. Answer this question: *Who possessed the sole authority to annul the rite of circumcision by the excommunication of covenant-breakers?* The answer is obvious: a Levitical priest, not the father. Covenant-breakers were to be cut off from the church and therefore from citizenship by

Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists" (1544), in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ed. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1982), p. 65.

45. Calvin, *Treatises*, p. 65.

46. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 732.

excommunication.

How do we know that the father did not possess this authority? Because *excommunication* mandated family *disinheritance*. But a father had no authority to disinherit his son. "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut. 21:15–17). If he could not disinherit the hated wife's son, surely he could not disinherit the loved wife's son. Rushdoony commented on this passage several times in *Institutes of Biblical Law*, but he failed to make the judicial connection linking circumcision, excommunication, and disinheritance. All were exclusively priestly acts.

As a household priest, the father may have circumcised his sons. We are not told this specifically regarding the Mosaic era. Surely, without specific revelation, we should not draw revolutionary ecclesiastical conclusions from the mere possibility that the father circumcised his son. But if he did, he did so a delegated agent of the Levitical priesthood. He did not retain the authority to excommunicate, i.e., judicially revoke the covenant. This points to the two-fold judicial reality of circumcision. It was priestly in two senses: general and special. First, the father representatively invoked the covenant oath in the name of his son through the rite of circumcision. He had a lawful role as a father: a general Israelite priest (Ex. 19:6). Second, in invoking the covenant oath, he affirmed the law of the covenant. As a general priest, perhaps he could lawfully do this. But a special priest of the tribe of Levi, not the head of the household, would determine whether the circumcised son met the stipulations of the covenant: confession of faith and outward obedience to God's law. This identifies both sacraments as ecclesiastical.

Having defied the entire history of the church by proclaiming baptism as a family rite, Rushdoony then condescendingly announced: "Having said all this, let me add that much of the church's teachings on baptism are [*sic*] very important. The error has been to limit its im-

plications to the society of the church, and membership therein.”⁴⁷ This was as persuasive as a statement from some dedicated socialist: “Having said all this, let me add that much of the Austrian School economists’ teachings on the free market are very important. Their error has been to ground their system on the idea of private property.”

2. Lord’s Supper

Having announced the transfer of the authority to baptize from the church to the marital family, he immediately moved to a discussion of the Lord’s Supper. He began: “As we have seen, baptism is in to [*sic*; he means *into*] the covenant of our God.”⁴⁸ This was never a matter of dispute. What is a matter of dispute is which covenantal agency possesses the right to baptize. This is a dispute between Rushdoony and (in round numbers) all the theologians in the history of the church. He then moved to the Lord’s Supper: “Like baptism, the Lord’s Table or communion is rooted in the Old Testament, in the Passover.”⁴⁹ He appealed to Jesus: “Our Lord’s institution of this rite came with the Passover celebration and with His interpretation of the meaning of Passover as fulfilled in Himself.”

Let us pursue this assertion for a moment. The move from Passover to the Lord’s Supper came in the upper room on the night before Jesus’ crucifixion, as Rushdoony affirmed in *Institutes of Biblical Law*.⁵⁰ Let me ask an obvious question: Where were the wives and children of the apostles? Peter had a mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14); presumably, he also had a wife. His wife was not in the upper room, nor was his mother-in-law, who dwelt in his household. Unless Rushdoony is ready to affirm the celibacy of the apostles, he faces a monumental problem: *Passover was in no way a family rite in the sense of a marital family*. The Head of a new household of faith administered the rite that night. This household was *confessional*. Something radical had taken place in the exterior form of Passover that night, but not judicially. *Jesus did not violate the Mosaic Passover*.

Unless the Lord’s Table was a judicially radical break with Passover—which Rushdoony denied—then this change in outward form points to an inescapable conclusion: the judicial-covenantal agency of final authority over the Passover was never the marital family. To the extent

47. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 734.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 735.

49. *Idem*.

50. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 46.

that the family administered certain aspects of this rite, it did so, as in the case of baptism, under authority delegated from the priesthood.

The Lord's Supper honors this judicial fact. The special priesthood of the institutional church still possesses authority over the rite; the general priesthood is still subordinate. This was always the case judicially in Mosaic Israel; the Lord's Supper makes this visible. Rushdoony remained silent about the implications of this transformation of outward celebration. Had he ever discussed the change in celebration, he could not readily have come to this conclusion: "As we examine the Lord's Table or eucharist from the perspective of Scripture, we must recognize that it is the Christian Passover. The Passover of Exodus is a family rite; it was oriented to admitting the smallest child able to speak and understand into the joy of salvation and the meaning of salvation (Ex. 12:21–27). It is no less a family celebration in the New Testament; the family is now Christ's family."⁵¹ In the *Institutes*, he called this a family service.⁵²

Judicially, this statement is correct, but it proves the opposite. The Lord's Supper is no less a family celebration than Passover was under Mosaic law because, judicially speaking, *Passover never was a rite under the authority of a marital family*. It was always a rite of *God's adopted family*: the institutional church. This is why all the families of Israel had to journey to a central location to celebrate Passover (Deut. 16:6–7). Passover in Israel was never celebrated at home. It was celebrated outside the geographical jurisdiction of a family's tribe because it was celebrated under another tribe's authority. This authority was national because it was Levitical: the tribe of Levi. *It was therefore under the authority of the special priesthood*. The 12 non-priestly tribes could not claim any originating authority over Passover. This means that the general priesthood of Israel, i.e., members of the 12 non-Levitical tribes, could not lawfully administer Passover apart from the presence of the special priesthood: the Levites. Like King Jeroboam (I Kings 12:25–33), Rushdoony ignored this. Jeroboam, however, was not a familist.

We return to the question of excommunication. No one who had been excommunicated could lawfully attend Passover. The physical mark of circumcision was judicially irrelevant; the officially declared judicial status of the excommunicate was the only relevant legal issue. Only the Levitical priesthood had the authority to excommunicate.

51. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 736.

52. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 752.

Furthermore, the father or other household head did not have the authority to invite an excommunicated son or daughter to celebrate the Passover. The excommunicate was considered covenantally dead. (Some Orthodox Jewish sects continue to this day to have public burials of those sons who have converted to a rival religion.)

Rushdoony's view of the local church affected his doctrine of the sacraments. He neglected—and his exposition necessarily denies—the sacramental basis of the local church's authority to collect the tithe. "As against an empty rite, Christian fellowship in Christ's calling, around a table, is closer to the meaning of the sacrament."⁵³ But if the judicial rite of the Lord's Supper is not backed up (sanctioned by) the promise of eternal sanctions, both positive and negative, then it is truly an empty rite: *judicially* empty—the nominalist-fundamentalist-memorialist view of the sacraments: Anabaptism.⁵⁴

Rushdoony's post-1973 published view of the church is non-covenantal: the church as a fellowship without judicial sanctions rather than an institution possessing the judicial keys of the kingdom. He even insisted that a church has no lawful authority to discipline those members who refuse to attend its worship services: "We are urged not to forsake 'the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is' (Heb. 10:25), but the church is *not* given authority to punish those who do."⁵⁵ Then who is? Only God, apparently. There is supposedly no appeal beyond the individual's conscience: the "divine right" of a non-attending church member. Then what judicial authority does the institutional church possess? In Rushdoony's view, none. What meaning does church membership have? Less than membership in a local social club, which at least requires the payment of dues for membership. In Rushdoony's theology, a local flower arrangement society possesses more authority over its members than a local church possesses over its members.

Rushdoony's view of church discipline represents a fundamental break from the history of the church, including the theology of the Protestant reformers and especially Calvin. Rushdoony insisted (without any citations from the Bible) that a Christian has the God-given authority to remove himself indefinitely from a local congregation and cease taking the Lord's Supper, but without ecclesiastical judicial consequences. This necessarily implies that self-excommunica-

53. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, p. 129.

54. On this question, Zwingli was an Anabaptist.

55. Rushdoony, "The Nature of the Church," *Calvinism Today*, I (Oct. 1991), p. 3.

tion, which is a form of excommunication, is not an actionable offense within the church. This is a denial of Holy Communion, for it is a denial of excommunication.

3. *From Calvinism to Autonomy*

Calvin was clear about the keys of the kingdom in history. He cited Matthew 16:19: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." He then commented that "the latter applies to the discipline of excommunication which is entrusted to the church. But the church binds him whom it excommunicates—not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. . . . Therefore, that no one may stubbornly despise the judgment of the church, or think it immaterial that he has been condemned by the vote of the believers, the Lord testifies that such judgment by believers is nothing but the proclamation of his own sentence, and that whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven."⁵⁶ This is why the sacrament is a monopoly, the church is sacramental, and the tithe is owed to the church. Rushdoony denies all three conclusions.

Rushdoony had ceased being a Calvinist by the late 1970s. He became a *predestinarian Congregationalist without a local congregation* (until he announced his own in 1991), a man who holds a Baptist view of church hierarchy: "Another aspect of jurisdiction is this: every church, small or great, is Christ's congregation, not man's. Its loyalty must be to God in Christ, and to His law-word, *not* to a denomination nor a sister church."⁵⁷ Late in his career, Rushdoony began to issue his Baptist anathemas against all church hierarchies: "There is in this an implicit and sometimes unconscious *heresy*. Heresy is a strong word, but nothing less can describe the problem. This authoritarian attempt to control other churches is revelatory of a lack of faith in the triune God and an unseemly faith in the power of man. It assumes the virtual non-existence of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁸ Those who hold a hierarchical view of church government are members of a modern Sanhedrin, he said.

56. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), IV:xi:2. Edited by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II, p. 1214.

57. Rushdoony, "Nature of the Church," p. 3.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

“We must separate ourselves from modern Sanhedrins.”⁵⁹

This is a strange line of theological reasoning from someone who retained the title of minister of the gospel only through his ordination by a tiny Episcopalian denomination (total number of congregations in the denomination: two, both of them located hundreds of miles away from Rushdoony). During his years of ministry in this officially hierarchical denomination (“sanhedrin”?), he refused to attend any local church. He continued to avoid taking the Lord’s Supper. He clearly abandoned Calvin’s doctrine of the church. This is why Calvinists who started out with him in the early 1970s (or in my case, the early 1960s) have been excluded from his presence. Their view of the church is, in his eyes, anathema, and so are they. He did not tolerate opposition on this point.

I. Defining the Institutional Church

The church possesses the authority to include and exclude people from the sacraments: “binding” and “loosing.” The Bible teaches that the tithe is judicially grounded solely in the covenantal authority of the church, which in turn is grounded on its unique sacramental monopoly. We see this connection between tithing and sacramentalism in the first biblical example of tithing: Abraham’s tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of Salem, who gave Abraham bread and wine (Gen. 14:18). It was not Melchizedek’s office as king of Salem that entitled him to Abraham’s tithe; it was his priestly status, which authorized him to distribute the positive sanction of Holy Communion: bread and wine. Rushdoony discusses Melchizedek briefly, but only with respect to the authority of the priesthood generally; he does not mention the tithe or Holy Communion.⁶⁰

What is noticeable about Rushdoony’s avoidance of any clear definition of the church is that he long refused to define the institutional church as the exclusive source of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Instead, he focused on the church in the broadest sense, i.e., the kingdom of God. He wrote in *Law and Society*: “*Second, the church is the City or Kingdom of God. It is thus more than any church (as we call it) or state can be. The boundaries of God’s church include every ‘church,’ state, school, family, individual, institution, etc. which is un-*

59. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

60. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, p. 368. He did not mention Melchizedek in Volume 1 of the *Institutes*.

der Christ's royal law and rule. But it includes far, far more."⁶¹ Notice that he placed *church* in quotation marks when referring to institutional churches—organizations possessing the authority to excommunicate. He did not do this with the following words: state, school, family, individual, institution. Do these quotation marks indicate an underlying contempt for local institutional churches?

What, then, of the lawful role of the institutional church? Until *Systematic Theology*, he had avoided dealing with two crucial issues: a judicially binding ecclesiastical hierarchy and the uniquely sacramental nature of the church. The real issue is this: *the church as an oath-bound, covenantal, hierarchical institution whose elders possess the power to excommunicate those who rebel against church authority*. Rushdoony carefully avoided a covenantal-judicial definition of the church, substituting a functional definition. "It should be apparent by now that our concern is less with the church as an institution and more with the church as the witness to and the evidence of the life and the work of the triune God in history."⁶² In *Law and Society*, he wrote: "Very clearly, the church in Scripture means the Kingdom of God, not merely the worshipping institution or building. . . . It includes godly men and their possessions, and the earth they subdue in the name of the Lord."⁶³ He then launched into a chapter titled, "Church Imperialism." It is a long attack on bishops and church hierarchy, which he insisted are pagan in origin: "ecclesiastical totalitarianism."⁶⁴

J. Familism

In Chapter 75, "Kingdom Courts," he returned to his fundamental social theme: familism. He had already equated the church with the kingdom of God. "In the Kingdom of God, the family is in history the basic institution."⁶⁵ The unique, central social institution is not the institutional church, he insists; rather, it is the family. The family possesses an authoritative court, he insisted—indeed, *the* authoritative court in history. In contrast, Rushdoony rarely discussed in *Law and Society* the existence of authoritative church courts except in the context of family courts, which possess superior authority, he said, since the pattern of all government is based on the family. Jethro's hierarch-

61. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

62. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 777.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 343.

ical appeals court in Exodus 18 “utilized an already existing family office, the eldership. The elders are mentioned *before* Jethro speaks, in Exodus 18:12. They were heads of families, clans, and tribes.”⁶⁶ Notice that Rushdoony adopted the term *elder*, used in the New Testament to designate an ecclesiastical office, to identify what he insists was a “family office, the eldership.” This was a denial of what he had written in the *Institutes*: “The elder, *first*, was what the name indicated, an order man in a position of authority. The elder was comparative, so it could mean a man ruling over his household.”⁶⁷ What it *could* mean, he said in 1973, it *always* means, he said in 1984. He went on: “Scripture gives us the basic ingredients for success: the godly family, and the system of elders.”⁶⁸ In his chapter, “The Theology of the Family,” he wrote that “the family is a community, the central community. . . . The family is the Kingdom of God in miniature when it is a godly family. . . .”⁶⁹ It is God’s civilization.

1. No Evidence Offered

To prove this, he offered no evidence. There is no verse in the New Testament that refers to *elder* as the head of a family. Luke 15:25 refers to an older son. *Presbuteros* usually refers to a church office. Bauer’s definitive lexicon offers no example of *presbuteros* as a head of family, either in the New Testament or Greek literature. The word means what it means in English: older.⁷⁰ This grammatical assessment is supported by the long entry in Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.⁷¹ Rushdoony in 1984 rested his argument on an assertion for which there is no grammatical evidence.

He then compounded his error: “Another office, that of *deacon*, is the name for a family servant.”⁷² Not according to Bauer or Kittel, it isn’t. It means simply *servant*. It usually refers in Greek literature to someone who waits on a table, just as its context indicates in Acts 6. The author in Kittel lists six general uses for the term in the New Testament: waiter at a meal, servant of a master, servant of a spiritual

66. *Ibid.*, p. 368.

67. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 740.

68. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 369.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

70. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1952] 1957), pp. 706–7.

71. Kittel, vol. VI, pp. 651–83.

72. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 683.

power, servant of Christ, servant of God, servant of the church. He offers no example of household servant.⁷³ It is always dangerous to base an important theological point on an appeal to grammar. It is sometimes legitimate, but risky. When you do this, make sure there is at least some grammatical evidence.

2. *Training in the Family*

Why should the family be regarded as the “kingdom of God in miniature”? Why not the state? Why not the church? The fact is, there is no “kingdom of God in miniature”—no single institution that uniquely represents God’s kingdom. The kingdom of God is the holy realm of God’s dominion in history through formal covenanting by His people and their faithfulness in extending this dominion.

Rushdoony insisted on the judicial separation of the New Testament office of elder from the institutional church. “Moreover, there is no reason to restrict Paul’s counsel concerning the election of elders (or bishops) to the institution for worship. Paul’s *church* is the Kingdom of God, the assembly of the redeemed. His counsel sets forth the requirements for eldership in every realm, church, state, school, etc.”⁷⁴ With such a broad definition of elder as a ruler in general, the eldership loses its sacramental character. This was Rushdoony’s oft-stated goal: *the de-sacramentalization of the institutional church*.

There are two enormous theological risks inherent in such a view of the church: (1) the attempted de-sacramentalization of society, i.e., secular humanism; (2) the attempted sacramentalization of either state or family. The fact is, *sacramentalization is an inescapable concept*. It is always a question of which institution becomes elevated to sacramental status. Unfortunately, Rushdoony did not understand that sacramentalization is an inescapable concept. He sought to de-sacramentalize the institutional church, but he remained silent about any substitute. He did not see the Lord’s Supper as an ecclesiastical matter, but rather fundamentally a family matter: “The central sacrament of the Christian faith is a family fact, a common sharing of bread and wine from the Lord’s Table.”⁷⁵

Which institution becomes the prime candidate for sacramentalization in place of the church? In Rushdoony’s theology, there is no pos-

73. Kittel, vol. II, pp. 88–89.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 368–69.

75. R. J. Rushdoony, “The Life of the Church: I Timothy 5:1–2,” *Chalcedon Report* (Jan. 1992), p. 15.

sibility of the sacramentalization of the state, but why not the family? Rushdoony moved dangerously close to this conclusion. In between his assertion of the family as the kingdom of God in miniature and his discussion of the office of elder as “first of all a family office,”⁷⁶ this disconcerting statement appears: “Our regeneration establishes a union with the Lord. Our every sexual act is an essential step which makes us a member of the other person.”⁷⁷

Rushdoony needed to qualify his language covenantally. It is legitimate to describe Christ’s love for His church as the love of a husband for his wife, as Paul does in Ephesians 5:23–33, *but not when you begin with a theory of the church as an extension of the family*. Also, not when you personally refuse to take the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, for this refusal raises the issue of a substitute sacrament. Biblically, there is no form of covenant renewal for the family except through membership in the institutional church and participation in the Lord’s Supper. But if the uniquely sacramental character of the institutional church is denied, then what is to prevent the substitution of sexual bonding for the Lord’s Supper?

There is no court of earthly appeal beyond the family, Rushdoony said. Here is his defense of patriarchy—and therefore of *clannism*. “The strength of family government is that the godly family, while having numerous problems and disputes, settles these within its own circle. The family is the institution of strength. To go outside the family is to deny the family and to break it up.”⁷⁸ This means the *divine right of the family*—no earthly appeal beyond it, either to church or state. Although he never mentioned the word, this is the *divine right of the patriarch*. He presented this novel thesis as an exegesis of I Corinthians 6:1–8, where Paul enjoins members of the Corinthian *church* not to go before pagan civil courts. In short, he argued for the divine right of the individual against the institutional church (the tithe issue), but not against the hierarchical family.

3. *The Family as the Central Institution*

His *Systematic Theology* makes his familiocentrism explicit. “The family is central to the covenant and therefore to every Christian institution, church, state, school, and all things else.”⁷⁹ Rushdoony again

76. *Law and Society*, p. 389.

77. *Idem*.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 345.

79. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 678. The chapter seems to have been writ-

cited Exodus 18 to prove his contention that the family is the central institution. Exodus 18 established a hierarchical chain of appeals courts. The problem for Rushdoony's argument is that *this was civil government*. It did not apply explicitly to Aaron, the priest. It applied to the tribes. Rushdoony insisted that "both the synagogue and the church were ruled by elders; obviously both saw this as God's requirement."⁸⁰ With no footnote, he inferred from unnamed extra-biblical sources that only elders served as leaders of the synagogue. There is no biblical evidence about the synagogue, presumably a post-exilic institution. But even if this eldership was required, this does not lead to his conclusion, namely, "The office of elder was more than tribal: it originated in the family; the head of the family was its elder. God thus ordained that the family be the nucleus of government."⁸¹ Where does it say in the Bible that only family heads may be civil rulers? Nowhere. Rushdoony did not cite a single biblical law to support his contention. Fact: *Samson was an unmarried civil judge for many years*.

What about the church? Here, there is biblical evidence that a man must be a successful ruler of his own household before being ordained by a church as a minister of the gospel, a point Paul made clear (I Tim. 3:1–11).⁸² This no more makes the family the nucleus of all government than a requirement that a man must be able to read in order to vote in a civil election makes literacy the nucleus of all government. The family is a training ground for learning how to govern. There is nothing revolutionary in this observation. The church is to use the family as a surrogate. If a man cannot rule well in his family, Paul said, do not make him a leader in the church. The odds are against his success. That this requirement governs ordination to the pastorate is clear to everyone except seminary professors and churches that ordain unmarried seminary graduates. They have substituted term papers for family rule as the screening criteria. This has been disastrous for the church.

First Timothy 3 does not make the family the nucleus of all government. *Self-government is the nucleus of all government*. This is why there will be a day of final judgment in which each person will be judged by God. God will not ask where your parents are, or your chil-

ten prior to 1984.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 680.

81. *Idem*.

82. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

dren, or your ministers, or your rulers. God will ask only what you thought of His son, Jesus. The reason why Paul specified the family as the screening institution is that family government makes visible a man's skills of self-government in the context of a nearly universal hierarchy. There are more heads of families than heads of civil government. If the family were the nucleus of all government, somewhere in the Bible there would be a law making marriage a requirement for civil office. Nowhere does such a law appear. But Rushdoony's commitment to patriarchy was greater than his commitment to biblical law. Hence, he wrote in 1984: "The biblical form of government requires that men and the families be trained to govern. The basic government is on the family level, and all other forms of government rest thereon."⁸³

In *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (1970), he wrote: "The basic government is man's self-government. Other governments of man include the family, the church, the school, his business, and many private associations as well as public opinion."⁸⁴ This was the ideal of government that had attracted his early associates. In *Institutes of Biblical Law*, he also began with self-government under God. "Government means, first, self-government, then the family, church, state, school, calling, and private associations as well as much else."⁸⁵ But later in the book, and perhaps three years later in terms of when he wrote this passage, he began to modify his earlier position. "The basic government of man is the self-government of Christian man."⁸⁶ A hint of a shift in his perspective immediately followed: "The family is an important area of government also, and the basic one. The church is an area of government, and the school still another."⁸⁷ Notice: he used the word *basic* for both self-government and family government. This equality could not survive indefinitely. In *Systematic Theology*, he moved the family to first place. *This was a major shift away from his original theology.* He now placed an institution at the center of both his social theory and his theology; before, his social theory had rested on the principle of self-government under God's law. This proposed central institution is not the church. It is the church's oldest rival, the one Jesus had warned against most strongly (Matt. 10:34–37).

83. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 681.

84. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), p. 144. (<http://bit.ly/pogap>)

85. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 240.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 772.

87. *Idem.*

K. The Rhetoric of Contempt

Rushdoony in 1991 delivered a lecture, "Reconstructing the Church," at the Third International Conference on Christian Reconstruction, held in England. He briefly summarized the traditional Protestant and Reformed three-fold definition of the church: orthodox preaching, administering the sacraments, and disciplining. He called this definition "reductionism."⁸⁸ Its limitation, he said, is that it focuses on the institutional church, not the members and their responsibilities. He then quoted William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army—a worldwide parachurch organization that closely resembles a church but does not offer the sacraments. Rushdoony favorably cited Booth's description of the late-nineteenth-century church in England as a "mummy factory."⁸⁹ This was a clever remark made by a "General" whose organization's publicly recognized symbols are neither the cross of Christ nor a communion cup but instead are: (1) a large bass drum beaten by a lady wearing a funny hat; (2) a black cooking pot and a hand-wrung bell jingling for our cash each Christmas. Let me say it early: the church has never been a mummy factory. This truth was learned by the Pharaoh of the exodus, who never became a mummy. He drowned instead. Local churches may produce some spiritual mummies in certain eras, but the church is God's bride. Rushdoony's rhetoric here is suicidal.

What is extremely significant is this: in his earlier days, Rushdoony had forthrightly affirmed the familiar three-part definition of the church, defending all three points as crucial in the war against humanism. In his 1983 book, *Salvation and Godly Rule*, he included a chapter on "Outlaw Cultures." The essay's internal evidence indicates that it was written in 1972.⁹⁰ Rushdoony wrote eloquently and to the point

88. R. J. Rushdoony, "Reconstructing the Church," *Calvinism Today*, II (July 1992), p. 24.

89. *Idem*.

90. Whenever Rushdoony included newspaper citations, the date of the latest citation is probably close to the time he wrote the essay. Prior to his move to Vallecito, California, in 1975, he threw out his lifetime collection of newspaper clippings. (What I would have paid for this collection had I known in advance he intended to trash it!) The chapter cited a local Southern California newspaper, *The San Gabriel Tribune*: June 26, 1972. He had many disciples in the San Gabriel Valley in this period. One of the attendees of his evening lectures in Pasadena (in the San Gabriel Valley), held in the late 1960s, probably sent him the newspaper clipping. There is no footnote reference in the book to anything published later than 1973. So, I think it is safe to conclude that the chapter was written no later than the publication date of Volume 1 of *The Institutes*: 1973. That he could write these chapters in the early 1970s, several ap-

that “the marks of a true church, i.e. a body of worshippers, have been defined for centuries as the faithful preaching of the word of God, the faithful administration of the sacraments, and the application of Biblical discipline. Without these things, we are not talking about the church in any historical or theological sense. Instead, a purely humanistic ideal of a denatured church is given us. Such a church is simply a part of the City of Man and an outlaw institution at war with the City of God.”⁹¹

I agree completely with his excellent summary of the marks of a true church and the humanistic implications of any denial of it. The problem is, nineteen years after he wrote it, eight years after he published it, *Rushdoony openly repudiated it, and more than repudiated it: became contemptuous of it, ridiculing it*. The transformation of his theology during the 1980s was extensive—a fact not widely perceived by his followers or his critics. He replaced his original commitment to the theology of Calvin and the Protestant reformers with something resembling Anabaptism—and, in some cases, theological liberalism, as we shall see. This transformation centered in his doctrine of the church, but it was not confined to it.

In 1977, Rushdoony adopted sharp rhetoric regarding amillennial though theologically orthodox churches. In a 57-page book titled, *God's Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, he referred to the mythical “Orthodox Pharisees Church” (p. 9), whose initials were OPC, the same as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Rushdoony had openly begun to burn his ecclesiastical bridges behind him. He never stopped burning them. This is what I call the Roger Williams syndrome: no church meets his standards. He finds himself worshipping in smaller and smaller settings, always led by himself. At the end of his life, it was only family members and employees of Chalcedon who regularly attended his Bible studies—or, as he had called them

parently in late 1972 and early 1973, while he was completing the manuscript of *The Institutes*, indicates his continuing productivity in 1970–73 period.

Compare the tightly written chapters in Volume 1 with those in Volume 2, *Law and Society* (1982), whose newspaper citations cluster noticeably around 1976–77. These post-1973 chapters are shorter, relying heavily on footnote references to Bible commentaries and religious encyclopedias, with few references to scholarly journals and scholarly monographs: a visible contrast with the footnotes in his pre-1974 books. The theological structure and integrating theme of *Law and Society* are difficult to discern, unlike Volume 1. With 160 brief chapters plus appendixes, it could hardly be otherwise.

91. R. J. Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1983), p. 160. (<http://bit.ly/rjrsagr>)

only after late 1991, church worship services.

Having invoked the phrase “mummy factory” with respect to the modern church, he then rallied to the defense of parachurch ministries, referring to “the common and contemptuous use of the term *parachurch*. . . . People who rail against parachurch activities want to limit Christ’s work to what they can control.”⁹² Well, that all depends. If the particular parachurch ministry deliberately and self-consciously conducts pseudo-worship meetings but without the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper during the hours when churches normally conduct worship meetings—the Salvation Army comes to mind, as does Chalcedon’s Bible studies (1968–1991)—then the critics have a legitimate complaint. Also, if a parachurch ministry actively solicits tithes that belong solely to the institutional church, then the critics have a legitimate complaint: opposing the theft of the tithe by interlopers. The issue is to be decided by an appeal to God’s revealed word, not to rhetoric, i.e., the institutional church as a “mummy factory.”

L. A Question of Jurisdiction

What Rushdoony ignored after 1973 should be obvious to anyone with any familiarity with the West’s judicial theology and Reformation history. Protestantism’s definition of the church as an institution was a means of *identifying the church’s lawful jurisdiction*. That is to say, the traditional Protestant definition places *judicial boundaries around the church as an institution*—a major goal of the Protestant Reformation, especially the limiting of the sacraments to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Like the U.S. Constitution’s limitation of the national government’s jurisdiction, this traditional Protestant definition was designed to place boundaries around what the institutional church could rightfully claim as its area of legitimate covenantal authority. It is no more meaningful to criticize the familiar three-fold definition of the institutional church—i.e., that this definition does not describe what church members should do—than it is to criticize the U.S. Constitution because it does not specify what citizens are supposed to do. The judicial question is this: *What is the institutional church authorized by God to do as His designated monopoly?*

It is therefore misleading—I would call it deliberately, self-consciously subversive—for a theologian of Rushdoony’s stature to criticize the traditional Protestant definition of the institutional church on

92. R. J. Rushdoony, “Editorial,” *Chalcedon Report* (April 1993), p. 2.

this basis: that the definition does not tell us what church members are supposed to do. Church members can and should do lots of wonderful things; but they can also avoid doing lots of wonderful things and still remain members in good standing—and not be contemptuously dismissed as mummies. The judicial issue is what is crucial here: defining what the institutional church *must* do in order to be a faithful covenantal organization under God. At this absolutely crucial point in his theology, Rushdoony in 1991 abandoned historic Protestantism's judicial theology in favor of a definition of the church based on "fellowship" and "good works"—the traditional view of theological liberalism.

Having misled his readers on this point, Rushdoony then went on to mislead them even more. He said that the church must perform the Great Commission: establish the crown rights of King Jesus, baptize nations, and teach them to obey God's word. Notice: *not one reference to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper*. While Matthew 28:18–20 mentions only baptism, the establishment of the church requires the Lord's Supper. Any theologically accurate discussion of the Great Commission must assume the accuracy of the three defining judicial marks of the institutional church. But if you have just ridiculed the institutional church as a mummy factory, your reader may not notice what you are really doing: *removing respect for the judicial authority of the institutional church as the sole legitimate source of the sacraments*. Was this Rushdoony's goal in 1991? I think it was. Rushdoony in mid-1991 had not taken the Lord's Supper, except when lecturing at some distant church, for over two decades.⁹³

93. You cannot take the Lord's Supper if you do not attend a local church. Rushdoony attended no local church except as a guest lecturer after he ceased preaching for the Anglican Orthodox Church in the mid-1960s. I attended Chalcedon's Sunday meetings from the beginning, though irregularly, 1965–71. I was employed by Chalcedon, 1968–81, and I spoke at its meetings each month, 1973–75, as did Greg Bahnsen. Not once did Rushdoony offer the Lord's Supper at a Chalcedon meeting when I was in attendance during the years that I attended them or spoke at them. David Graves, who tape recorded every Chalcedon weekly meeting from 1972 to 1981, stated in writing that never was the Lord's Supper served at any Sunday Chalcedon meeting. I reprinted Mr. Graves statement in *Tithing and the Church*, p. 150. I mention this in response to Rushdoony's insistence that there is no evidence for any accusation against his ideas regarding communion, and that those people who say such critical things must "provide evidences of the charges," and if they refuse, they should be denounced "as liars and slanderers, because they cannot produce the evidences." Rushdoony said that he would no longer answer questions about this matter. Rushdoony, "Random Notes," *Chalcedon Report* (Oct. 1993), p. 31. I can hardly blame him for not answering: the truth is embarrassing.

M. The Legal Basis of the Tithe

The judicial foundation of the tithe is not its supposedly primary role as an aspect of dominion; it is rather based on *the church's covenantal role as the monopolistic guardian of the sacraments*, which establishes its possession of the keys of the kingdom. In this sense, the church's authority is the same as the Levites' authority under the Mosaic covenant: guardian of the holy. Its ultimate means of discipline is excommunication: separating former members from the communion table. There is no church authority apart from the sacraments. *Remove respect for the sacraments, and you thereby remove respect for church discipline.* This has been the pattern of modern fundamentalism, and *Rushdoony was in this regard a dedicated fundamentalist*, not a Calvinist. Calvinism is not merely a belief in predestination. Luther believed in predestination (*The Bondage of the Will*), but he was surely not a Calvinist. Luther and Calvin divided over the issue of the Lord's Supper: a sacramental issue. Calvin devoted the longest section of his *Institutes* to a study of the church: Book IV. Break with Calvin on his doctrine of the church, and you have broken with Calvin. This is what Rushdoony did. This is a major reason why Rushdoony's theology is rejected without a fair hearing by pastors and theologians within the Calvinist world. They see him for what he was after 1980: an *ecclesiastical independent* who happens to believe in predestination and infant baptism.

N. Dominion and Subordination

The requirement to exercise dominion is a requirement to seek a profit. On this point, see Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–31),⁹⁴ which immediately precedes His description of the final judgment. The tithe is paid out of the net increase of our efforts. In short: *no increase = no tithe*. Individuals and families produce net increases; churches, at best, invest excess funds in profit-seeking, non-church endeavors. The family, not the church, is the primary agency of dominion, and because of this, the family is not granted any economic entitlement by God. The church is entitled to the tithe; non-church agencies are not. Dominion has nothing to do judicially with the God-given authority to collect the tithe. Dominion does have something to do with *paying* the tithe, however: a public acknowledgment of one's in-

94. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

stitutional subordination to God's church.

That Rushdoony wrote of tithing and dominion as judicially linked, and then announced that the church is not a productive institution, points to his anti-ecclesiastical conclusion: a denial that the institutional church has a legitimate claim on the tithe. But the fundamental topic is not *tithing and dominion*. Rather it is *tithing and subordination*. When we get this clear, and only then, should we begin to consider the next topic, *subordination and dominion*.⁹⁵ Only to the degree that Christians are subordinate before God through membership in His institutional church are they fully empowered by God to extend His comprehensive dominion. Subordination (point two of the biblical covenant model) precedes dominion (point three). Rushdoony denied this covenantal reality in his writings and his actions after 1974.

Rushdoony defended his view by separating the Levites' sacramental function from their cultural and social functions. He argued that the Levites performed many social services, "providing godly education, music, welfare, and necessary godly assistance to civil authorities."⁹⁶ Thus, Rushdoony concluded, it was their provision of these social services that justified their collection of the tithe. They did not possess a legal claim on the tithe, Rushdoony argued. If they failed to provide these cultural services, Israelite church members had an obligation to cut them off financially. They still do, he insisted.

It is worth noting that this view of church authority is shared by the modern American liberal. The modern liberal's acceptance of the idea of tax exemption is based on his theory of useful social services. The liberal allows the state to grant tax exemption to churches on the same basis that it grants tax exemption to non-profit, government-chartered charitable foundations such as Chalcedon. The liberal categorically rejects any suggestion that the Trinitarian church is automatically tax-immune, based on its separate covenantal status as a God-ordained government—a government that possesses the authority to impose judicial sanctions.⁹⁷ Analogously, Rushdoony regarded the church as having no lawful claim to Christians' tithes based on its separate covenantal status as a God-ordained government that pos-

95. Gary North, "Dominion Through Subordination," *Biblical Economics Today*, XV (Aug./Sept. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/gndts1993>)

96. Rushdoony, "The Foundation of Christian Reconstruction," in *Tithing and Dominion*, p. 9.

97. A former employee of Chalcedon, Rev. Douglas F. Kelly, made the case for the church's tax immunity: "Who Makes Churches Tax Exempt?" in *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 3 (1983). (<http://bit.ly/CRtheology>)

sesses the authority to impose judicial sanctions. In his theology, the church has no legal claim on members' money greater than their desire to support it because of the social services it provides them. In short, *Rushdoony's theology of the church's claim on the tithe is the same as the liberal's theology of the church's claim to tax exemption*. They both ask the church the same question: "What have you done for society lately?"

"This tithe belongs to God, not to the church, nor to the producer."⁹⁸ This observation is irrelevant for any discussion of the tithe. Of course the tithe belongs to God; everything belongs to God (Ps. 50: 10). The question is this: What *institution* possesses the God-given monopolistic authority to collect the tithe from covenant-keepers? That is, which *institution* possesses the God-given authority and responsibility to revoke voting membership for any head of household who refuses to pay a tithe? The biblical answer is obvious: the church. Rushdoony disagreed with this answer. He wanted to remove from the institutional church any legal claim to the tithe.

He raised the spurious issue of an apostate church in order to destroy the legal claim of all churches: "It cannot be given to an apostate church without being given thereby *against* God, not to Him."⁹⁹ This is quite true; it is therefore an argument for a person to leave an apostate church. In fact, the best indicator to a church member that he should transfer his membership to another church is that he can no longer in good conscience pay the tithe to the church that now possesses lawful authority over him. The individual has the God-given authority and responsibility to decide which church to join; he does not have the authority to decide not to tithe to this church. But in a world filled with non-tithing Christians, Rushdoony's doctrine of church and tithe finds many supporters.

O. Church and Kingdom

Rushdoony argued that the individual has the God-given authority to decide where his tithe money should go. As a statement of the God-delegated authority of the believer, this is true, but only in a very specific and limited way: his authority to transfer his membership to another congregation. But Rushdoony was not talking about this form of

98. Rushdoony, "Tithing and Christian Reconstruction," *Tithing and Dominion*, p. 3.

99. Idem.

conscience-based authority before God. The decision Rushdoony speaks of is a decision made not on the basis of where the Christian chooses to have his local church membership, but rather on the basis of the Christian's assessment of the broadly defined cultural performance of the church's officers. "The priests and Levites, to whom it [the tithe] was originally given, had charge of religion, education, and various other functions."¹⁰⁰ The tithe, he said, must constitute the financing of every aspect of Christian reconstruction, not just the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments: "But the law of the tithe makes clear it is God's money and must go to God's causes, to Christian worship, education, outreach, and reconstruction. . . . And the tithe must bear the whole burden of Christian reconstruction."¹⁰¹

This is clearly incorrect. Everything that a person owns is supposed to be devoted to Christian reconstruction: heart, mind, soul, and capital. The tithe is only one-tenth of one's net increase. It is a token of our subordination as a holy priesthood to God as the Cosmic Owner, not the primary fund for reconstruction. He continued: "What we must do is, *first*, to tithe, and, *second*, to allocate our tithe to godly agencies. Godly agencies means far more than the church."¹⁰² The Levites provided education, music, and so forth. "The realm of the godly, of the Christian, is broader than the church. To limit Christ's realm to the church is not Biblical; it is pietism, a surrender of Christ's kingship over the world. The purpose of the tithe must be to establish that kingship."¹⁰³

It is clear why Rushdoony refused to cite the texts in Numbers that established the legal basis of the claim of the Levites to the tithe. These passages explicitly link the tithe to the office of ecclesiastical guardian. It was not the Levites' social services that entitled them to the tithe; it was their boundary service as the tabernacle's and temple's agents of execution: guardians of what was sacramentally holy.¹⁰⁴

1. A Comprehensive Kingdom

Rushdoony made a valid Protestant point: the kingdom of Christ is larger than the institutional church. As he said, limiting the kingdom to the institutional church is indeed the essence of pietism. But he cre-

100. *Idem*.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

102. Rushdoony, "The Foundation of Christian Reconstruction," *ibid.*, p. 9.

103. *Idem*.

104. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 3.

ated great confusion in his own mind and his followers' minds by equating the *tithe* and *charitable giving to the broader kingdom*. This view of the tithe is equally pietistic: it limits the financing of the kingdom. *The kingdom of Christ in history is comprehensive*. It must be extended by every bit of productivity at the disposal of covenant-keepers.¹⁰⁵ When a Christian makes a profit or earns a wage, all of this is to be earmarked for extending the kingdom of Christ, broadly defined: education, entertainment, the arts, leisure, capital formation, etc.

The kingdom of Christ is *not* extended primarily by charitable institutions. The kingdom of Christ is extended through dominion, and this is financed by Christians' net productivity. Rushdoony understood this "net productivity" principle with respect to taxation: the state may not lawfully tax capital, only net income. This is why he long opposed the property tax as anti-Christian.¹⁰⁶ But he did not acknowledge that this same principle also applies to the tithe. Neither tithes nor taxes are the basis of dominion; productivity is. That is, *growth is the basis of dominion*. Where there is no doctrine of progressive dominion in history, there is no doctrine of economic growth.¹⁰⁷ This growth of God's kingdom comes primarily through two processes: (1) the confiscation of Satan's assets through God's adoption of Satan's human disciples; (2) the economic growth enjoyed by God's human disciples, which enables them to redeem the world through purchase.¹⁰⁸

The kingdom of Christ, broadly defined, must be equated with the *total* efforts of covenant-keepers: heart, mind, and soul. What is my conclusion? First, all of the tithe goes to the local church. Second, gifts and offerings can go to other charities. Third, the kingdom of Christ is extended by total productivity, including economic productivity.

105. Through common grace, it is extended even by covenant-breakers. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*.

106. He wrote in 1967: "The property tax came in very slowly, and it appeared first in New England, coinciding with the spread of Deism and Unitarianism, as well as atheism. Such anti-Christian men saw the state as man's savior, and as a result they favored placing more and more power in the hands of the state. The South was the last area to accept the property tax, and it was largely forced on the South by post-Civil War era, conservative elements limited it to the county and retained the legal requirement that only owners of real property could vote on the county level." Rushdoony, *Chalcedon Newsletter* #24 (Sept. 1967). Reprinted in Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1991), p. 606.

107. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

108. There is a third way: military conquest. But this method of dominion is not primary. It lawful only when it is the result of successful defensive campaigns that produce comprehensive victory in wars launched by God's enemies.

Fourth, total economic productivity, not charity, is the primary economic means of extending God's kingdom in history. This is why God promises long-term economic growth to covenant-keeping societies (Deut. 28:1–14).¹⁰⁹ More wealth per capita should come from covenant-keeping men than is used up by them.¹¹⁰ Covenant-keepers should leave a positive economic legacy to their grandchildren.¹¹¹ “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).

2. Sovereignty

If you want to find out where sovereignty lies in any social system or social theory, you must do two things: (1) identify the sacraments; (2) follow the money.¹¹² In Rushdoony's theology, the kingdom of God is based on a *compact* between God and the individual Christian. The institutional church is without covenantal authority in this God-and-man compact. Church officers must take whatever they receive from church members and be thankful to the donors for whatever this is. Rushdoony's ecclesiology allows church officers no legitimate institutional sanctions to impose on those members who send all or a portion of their tithe money elsewhere.

The judicial question surrounding the tithe is this: *Who lawfully retains sovereign control over the allocation of the tithe?* Rushdoony's answer: the individual Christian, not the officers of the church. “The Christian who tithes, and sees that his tithe goes to godly causes, is engaged in true social reconstruction. By his tithe money and his activity he makes possible the development of Christian churches, schools, colleges, welfare agencies, and other necessary social functions.”¹¹³ (And, he might have added, non-profit educational foundations, but this would have appeared self-serving.) He did not mean that Christi-

109. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 68.

110. E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1990).

111. This is one reason why a Christian should instruct his heirs not to put him on a life-support system once two physicians say that it is unlikely that he will recover. The capital of most estates in the U.S. is used up in the last six months of an aged person's life. It is better to die in bed at home six months early and leave capital behind. Christians must buy back the world, generation by generation. This requires a growing supply of capital.

112. North, *Political Polytheism*, p. 553.

113. Rushdoony, “Foundation of Christian Reconstruction,” *Tithing and Dominion*, pp. 8–9.

ans retain ultimate control over the allocation of their tithes by choosing which local congregation to join; rather, they retain immediate allocational authority in their capacity as church members or even as non-church members.

If this were true, then Rushdoony might have asked: What if the Christian can locate no agency that meets his standards of social action? Can the Christian then lawfully tithe to himself in order to fund the doing of his own good deeds? Why not? More to the point, can he set up his own church and tithe to it? As of 1991, Rushdoony apparently believed that this is the case. He claimed that Chalcedon had somehow become a church. (Then what are the members of what was formerly its Board of Trustees: Ruling elders? There was never any restriction against women serving on Chalcedon's Board of Trustees; Rushdoony's wife Dorothy so served when I was a Trustee in the 1970s. Can women now become elders in his new church? Or have Chalcedon's By-Laws been rewritten to exclude women?)

I have argued that tithe money can and should go to all kinds of charitable services, but it is church officers who are invested with the God-given authority to decide which of these endeavors to support and in what proportion.¹¹⁴ Rushdoony asserted that it is the tithepayer's God-given authority to make these decisions. "Since the tithe is 'holy unto the Lord', it is our duty as tithers to judge that church, mission group, or Christian agency which is most clearly 'holy unto the Lord'."¹¹⁵ Rushdoony did not define the holiness of the recipient organizations as *legal holiness*—a formal, judicial, covenantal, setting apart by God through His written revelation—but rather as *social holiness, to be judged by individual tithers*. In Rushdoony's ecclesiology, the church cannot bring judgment against individuals who refuse to transfer to the church 10% of their net income; on the contrary, they bring judgment against the church by withholding these funds and sending them elsewhere, such as to a non-profit, Federally tax-exempt, incorporated educational foundation located in central California.

Here is where the rubber of Rushdoony's anti-ecclesiastical worldview¹¹⁶ meets the covenantal road. The primary issue here is *authority over money*. In Rushdoony's published theology, lawful authority over

114. Because churches have refused to do this, they have forfeited enormous influence and authority in modern culture. See Gary North, "Royal Priests, Tin Cups in Hand," *Biblical Economics Today*, XIV (June/July 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnrptc>)

115. Rushdoony, "To Whom Do We Tithe?" *Tithing and Dominion*, p. 30.

116. Pre-1992. He did not put into print what he believed regarding the institutional church after 1991.

the distribution of the tithe lodges in the individual Christian. He who pays the piper calls the tune, and the piper-payer in Rushdoony's theology of the tithe is the individual Christian. Rushdoony's theory of the proper financing of the kingdom of God is therefore individualistic, despite his affirmations to the contrary.

3. *High Priest and King of Kings*

The New Testament affirms that Jesus Christ is both King of kings and High Priest. His absolute sovereignty is revealed institutionally in history through the existence of biblically compulsory payments to two covenantal institutions: state and church. The state has a lawful claim on a portion—under 10% (I Sam. 8: 15, 17)—of the productivity of those under its jurisdiction. Why? Because the civil magistrate is a minister of God (Rom. 13:4). The church has a legal claim on 10% of its members' net income. Why? Because church officers are ministers of God. *In both cases, the officers' ministerial function is what identifies these two institutions as sovereign.* Compulsory taxes go to the kingly institution; members' compulsory tithes go to the priestly institution. Both institutions are covenantal. Both are entitled to a portion of our income. A person can no more legitimately allocate his tithe than he can legitimately allocate his taxes. He does not have the authority to do so; in both cases, he is under the threat of institutional sanctions, meaning he is under the threat of God's sanctions.

It is a major weakness of Rushdoony's social theory that he failed to identify anywhere in his writings the judicial *and economic* distinctions between Christ as High Priest and Christ as King of kings. The Bible teaches clearly that the tithe is mandatory. It goes to the church, *and only to the church.* Why? Because Jesus Christ is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7). *In Rushdoony's social theory, Christ's office as High Priest has no institutional sanctions.*

In one limited sense, he is correct. The church technically cannot excommunicate people who, like Rushdoony, refuses to join a local congregation or take the Lord's Supper. But the church does not need to bring formal sanctions against those who are self-excommunicated.¹¹⁷ *Self-excommunication is excommunication.* It is sufficient that the church publicly identify self-excommunicated people as excom-

117. I am not referring to Rushdoony's 1992 anointing of Chalcedon as a church. I am speaking of his published theology and his two-decade absence from a local church and its communion table until 1992, when he began serving communion to himself and his family.

municates. (Rarely does any local church do this.) Church officers who serve the Lord's Supper to such self-excommunicated individuals have denied their holy offices as guardians of the sacraments. It is not surprising that a loose view of the sacraments is normally accompanied by a loose view of the church and a loose view of the tithe.

4. *The Chalcedon Foundation*

Rushdoony for decades paid his tithe to his own educational foundation, Chalcedon. He did not belong to any local church until early 1991, when he declared Chalcedon to be a church. Problem: his published theology of the tithe rests on a fundamental confusion between the sacramental function of the church and its educational and nurturing function. His published theology of the tithe does not acknowledge the judicial requirement of the individual Christian to finance the sacramental aspect of the kingdom by means of his tithe, and the dominion and kingly aspects by means of voluntary donations above the tithe to non-ecclesiastical organizations.

Prior to 1991, Chalcedon, like the Institute for Christian Economics, was kingly rather than priestly in its calling.¹¹⁸ Neither organization was entitled to any portion of the tithe except at the discretion of churches that collect tithes and then donate the money to either organization. (As the saying goes, "Don't hold your breath.") The donor owes his local church his tithe; he does not possess the authority to allocate his tithe money (priestly, sacramental money) to other organizations. Chalcedon, ICE, and all other parachurch and educational ministries owe it to their supporters to warn them never to send in donations unless they first tithe to a local church.¹¹⁹ This limitation would keep most of them quite tiny to the extent that they are financed by tithes, since very few Christians tithe. Rushdoony in the late 1970s invented a theology of the tithe that justified Chalcedon's collection of part or all of Christians' tithes. This self-interested theological confusion undermined his theology of the kingship of Christ and the dominion covenant.

Rushdoony's theology of the tithe rests on an *economic* distinction within the calling of the Levites: sacraments vs. social works. The Mosaic tithe, he said, was owed primarily because of the socially import-

118. The ICE was legally chartered as a charitable trust, not a foundation.

119. On this point, see my response to John R. Muether in Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 289–92. (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>)

ant services that were performed by the Levites. Only the 1% going to the priests directly constituted the sacramental portion; 9% went for social services. "Only a handful of Levites were engaged in temple service, as against the vast numbers whose work was instruction (Deut. 33:10)."¹²⁰ Note: his focus is on instruction. This is consistent. Chaldeon until 1991 was a strictly non-profit, government-chartered educational institution.

He has made his views clear, that "nowhere in Scripture is man or the church given the power to require or enforce tithing."¹²¹ On this weak theological reed he built his theology after 1979. (Ironically, it was my tithe to my church that was used to finance the publication of *Tithing and Dominion*.)

P. A Single Storehouse

The Bible does not speak of multiple storehouses of the tithe; it speaks of only one storehouse. If a society violates this single storehouse principle of the mandatory tithe, it brings itself under God's negative corporate sanctions. If it obeys this principle, it gains God's positive corporate sanctions.

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts (Mal. 3:8–12).

Note that the word is storehouse (singular), not storehouses (plural). But this is not how Rushdoony summarized the text: "The tithe was given to the Levites, who stored the animals and grain in storehouses (Mal. 3:10) until they could either be used or sold. It is a silly and self-serving modernism which leads some clergymen to insist that the *storehouse* is the church. . . . The Levites had very broad functions in Israel: they were the teachers (Deut. 33:10), the musicians, the

120. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, p. 127.

121. Rushdoony, "The Nature of the Church," *Calvinism Today* (Oct. 1991), p. 3.

judges at times, the medical authorities and more; superintending foods and their cleanliness was a part of their duty.”¹²² But the issue is not, in Rushdoony’s phrase, “self-serving modernism.” *The issue is the actual text of Scripture.* Men must not become self-serving when they read the text of Scripture—liberals or conservatives. The text speaks of a storehouse: singular.

What Rushdoony always ignored in this connection was that the Levites protected the place of sacrifice. While they did indeed provide legal advice and other services, the office of Levite was defined in connection to the tithe as a judicial office: guardian of the temple. He then calls *self-serving* and modernist all those theologians who have identified the storehouse with the church: the receptacle of the tithe. Almost three decades of sending his own tithe to Chalcedon was presumably not self-serving, in his opinion. But those who say that the tithe belongs only to the local church are modernists and pietists. You know: modernists such as John Calvin, who commented on Malachi 3:10 by describing any withholding of the tithe from the priests as a form of sacrilege: “They had been sufficiently proved guilty of rapacity in withholding the tenths and the oblations; as then the sacrilege was well known, the Prophet now passes judgment, as they say, according to what is usually done when the criminal is condemned, and the cause is decided, so that he who has been defrauded recovers his right. . . . *Bring*, he says, to *the repository* (for this is the same as the house of the treasury, or of provisions) *all the tenths*, or the whole tenths. We hence learn that they had not withholden the whole of the tenths from the priests, but that they fraudulently brought the half, or retained as much as they could; for it was not without reason that he said, *Bring all*, or the whole.”¹²³

Calvin understood exactly what crime against God was involved in withholding the full 10% from the Levites: *sacrilege*. Paying the priests their tenth of the tithe was not sufficient to avoid the crime of sacrilege, Calvin said. They had to pay the entire remaining nine-tenths to the Levites. Sacrilege is an attack on God’s sacramental institution, the church—an attack on the sacraments. Calvin also understood clearly that the tithe went to the Levites and priests because of their judicial offices as guardians and administrators of the sacraments. This economic entitlement was grounded judicially in the sacraments, and *only*

122. Rushdoony, “The Tithe in Scripture,” *Tithing and Dominion*, p. 17.

123. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1559] 1979), V, p. 588.

in the sacraments. Any other duties performed by the Levites and priests were incidental to their administration of the sacraments. Calvin never referred to these supplemental social activities. Rushdoony, in sharp contrast, categorically denies any sacramental authority to the institutional church. He has abandoned the theology of Calvin and the Puritans in the name of Calvin and the Puritans. *Rushdoony has moved from Calvinism to Anabaptism*. Nowhere is this clearer than in his published view of the tithe.

Q. Rushdoony's Social Gospel

We can see Rushdoony's break with Calvinism in his false distinction between the Levites' task as educators and the place of sacrifice, the sanctuary. "Education was one of the functions of the Levites (not of the sanctuary)."¹²⁴ To prove this supposed separation of religious education from the sanctuary in the Levitical calling, he would have to identify the judicial basis of the Levites' separation from the other tribes in terms of their provision of social services. This cannot be done textually. Numbers 18 is clear, as we have seen: *the separation of the Levites from the other tribes was based on their unique access to the temple and its sacrifices*. This separation was based on a *geographical boundary*—legal access to the tabernacle/ temple—and not on their provision of social services, especially educational services.

Is the education of children lawfully a function of the church, the state, or the family? Rushdoony always denied the legitimacy of education by the state, but he was ambivalent regarding the educational authority of church and family. "The Christian school is a manifestation of the visible church, and at the same time, an extension of the home."¹²⁵ But which one possesses institutional sovereignty? *Economically*, the answer is clear: the agency that funds education. What about *judicially*? On this point, Rushdoony was ambivalent. But this much is clear: if education was the function of the Levites, and this function was separate from the sanctuary (i.e., the sacrifices), as he insisted was the case, then the Levites as educators were under the authority of families if families paid for education by allocating their tithes. This is exactly what Rushdoony's theology of the tithe concludes. This means that *pastors as Levite-educators (i.e., as tithe-re-*

124. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 55.

125. Rushdoony, *Intellectual Schizophrenia: Culture, Crisis and Education* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961), p. 42.

ceivers) are under the authority of families. Since he denied the sacramental character of the church, he stripped the church of all covenantal authority. It cannot impose sanctions for non-payment of tithes. Once again, we are back to familism-clannism.

Rushdoony's voluntaristic view of the tithe is shared by most of the modern church and most of its members, which is why the modern church is impotent, both judicially and economically. This is why statism has visibly triumphed in our day. Rushdoony admitted this when he wrote that "the abolition of the tithe has opened the way for truly oppressive taxation by the state in order to assume the social responsibilities once maintained by tithe money."¹²⁶ But he erred once again: the fundamental issue is not money; it is the sacramental character of the church. *The fundamental issue is the judicial basis of the local church's claim on 10% of the net productivity of its members.* This claim is sacramental-judicial, not social-economic.

Rushdoony always discussed the primary role of the church ("Levites") as a social agency, openly denying its sacramental character. He was wrong, and this single error has produced more harm for the Christian Reconstruction movement than anything else in his writings. He had no respect for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and it shows. *Without covenantal sanctions in history, there could be no covenant: church (keys), state (sword), or family (rod).* He tried to strip the institutional church of her lawful negative sanction—excommunication—by stripping divine sanctions from the Lord's Supper. He wrote himself out of the church, 1970–1991, in order to justify his self-excommunication from the church.

In this respect, Rushdoony became a consistent defender of a social gospel. His pietist critics have recognized this, although their view of the tithe is rarely better than his, and their view of the sacraments is only slightly better. Rushdoony's theology does defend gospel preaching as a function of the church, thereby avoiding the liberal version of the social gospel. But the institutional church has three aspects: the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the authority to police access to the sacraments, i.e., church discipline (the keys of the kingdom). *One searches in vain in Rushdoony's writings for even one page devoted to a theological exposition of the discipline of the church.* He steadfastly refused to discuss the meaning of the keys of the kingdom. This is why he never published so much as a chapter on the

126. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 57.

doctrine of the church: sacraments, tithe, and discipline.

Rushdoony's view of the church is not even remotely Reformed. He used Calvinist phrases, but he long ago abandoned Book IV of Calvin's *Institutes*. Rushdoony's ecclesiology is completely wrong.

R. The Fatal Flaw in Rushdoony's Theology

Rushdoony began to develop the rudiments of his theology of the tithe in the late 1960s, after Chalcedon had received its tax-exempt status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. In *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973), he wrote: "Moreover, the modern church calls for tithing to the church, an erroneous view which cuts off education, health, welfare, and much else from the tithe."¹²⁷ He understood that his view of the tithe transfers power to the members, who are supposedly under no judicial requirement to pay their tithes to the church: "If the church collects the tax, the church rules society; if the state collects the tax, the state rules society. If, however, the people of God administer the tithe to godly agencies, then God's rule prevails in that social order."¹²⁸ The central legal issue is *administration*: Who has the God-given authority to allocate the tithe? The Bible is clear: the church. Rushdoony was equally clear: the tithe-payer.

1. Judicial Representation

Notice Rushdoony's implicit assumption: because God says that He is entitled to a tithe, a godly society is determined *economically* by the agent who distributes it. The biblical fact is very different: the judicial status of a godly society is determined *covenantally* in terms of which agency collects and then distributes the tithe, for this identifies which god rules in society by which representatives. A Christian society is identified biblically by the widespread presence of churches that collect the tithe, i.e., churches that possess and exercise their God-given authority to impose negative sanctions against members who refuse to pay the tithe.

My view is that the proper negative sanction to be used against non-tithing members is their removal from the list of voting members. They would not be allowed to impose sanctions on church officers.¹²⁹ God blesses covenantally faithful societies. Tithing to God's church is a

127. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 513.

128. *Ibid.*, p. 514.

129. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 3.

primary mark of covenantal faithfulness. Cause and effect move from law (boundaries) to sanctions (blessings and cursings). But the judicial issue is God's delegated authority: Who owes what to whom? In short, *who lawfully holds the hammer?* Is the fundamental authority of the kingdom of God primarily economic, with Christian individuals holding the hammer, or is it primarily judicial, with church officers holding it?

Christians have always acknowledged that individuals owe taxes to the state. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, Jesus said (Matt. 22:21). The individual does not lawfully decide how his taxes will be spent; the state's officers do. Christians have always acknowledged that Children owe support to parents. This is not optional. Even priests must pay, Jesus said. No priest can escape this obligation by crying, "corban," as if this obligation were a voluntary gift (Mark 7:11–13). (*Corban* is the Hebrew word used in Leviticus 2:1 to describe the meat [meal] offering, i.e., the second sacrifice.)

Then what about the church? Does the tithe-payer have the God-given authority to decide to pay the tithe to any organization other than the institutional church? No. Paying the tithe to the institutional church is each church member's legal obligation before God. In all three covenantal institutions, paying money is not a matter of choice; it is a matter of legal obligation. The allocation of the money so collected is not the decision of those who pay.

2. *Economics or Oath?*

Rushdoony misidentified this authority structure. In his view, economics, not God's covenantal law of the church, is determinative: a godly society, he said, is financed by the tithe. Again, his libertarian presuppositions are obvious. He was not exaggerating when he announced on national television in 1987: "I'm close to being a libertarian. . . ."¹³⁰ As he saw it, the success or failure of God's non-profit kingdom institutions will be determined by God's sovereignty by means of the decisions of individual Christians regarding where to pay their tithes—decisions made without any legitimate threat of institutional sanctions from the recipients. Sanctions—positive or negative—are imposed by individual Christians on the recipient institutions; the institutions have no legitimate negative sanctions of their own. The in-

130. Bill Moyers, "God and Politics: On Earth as It Is in Heaven," Public Affairs Television (1987), p. 5.

stitutional church is described by Rushdoony as being little more than an income-seeking business that competes for the consumers' money. This view of church financing removes the power of the keys from the church. This conclusion is completely consistent with Rushdoony's pre-1991 view of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper: a rite without covenantal sanctions.

3. *Individualism or Familism*

Rushdoony's libertarianism and individualism are both visible in his view of the tithe. On this topic, Rushdoony was an economic determinist. He said, in effect: "He who controls the allocation of the tithe controls Christian society. The individual Christian lawfully controls the allocation of the tithe, so he should control Christian society. The institutional church has no lawful authority to compel such payment by any threat of sanctions. Hence, the individual is *judicially autonomous* in the allocation of the tithe. Only God can impose negative sanctions against him." This is the libertarian theology known as *the divine right of the individual*. Divine-right theology always rests on a presupposition that someone—the king, the legislature, or the individual—is beyond legitimate institutional sanctions in history. Rushdoony's radical individualism is clearly seen here. He rejected covenant theology in favor of Anabaptist theology.

Rushdoony wrote repeatedly that individualism always leads to statism. The humanist state can compel payment of taxes, can demand obedience, and therefore it possesses divine rights. That is, the humanist state claims autonomy from (and therefore authority over) every rival institution. To challenge such a view of the state, there has to be an appeal to another authority with authority that is equal to the state's in many areas and superior to it regarding the collection of funds from its members. In short, the authority of the church to collect tithes from its voting members prior to the tax collector's extraction of money from church members must be affirmed in civil law. The church must have legal priority over the state's authority in the involuntary collection of money.¹³¹ Only if some other covenantal insti-

131. This is acknowledged implicitly judicially in the U.S. tax code. The taxpayer is allowed to deduct tithes and offerings from his gross income before estimating his income tax (though not his FICA or Social Security tax). He pays income taxes only on the money that remains after charitable giving. This is not true in most European countries, where the state has primary claim on income, with the church taking whatever remains.

tution possesses comparable authority over its members' money can we identify an agency with comparable covenantal authority.

Rushdoony's theology of the tithe denies such authority to the church. This leaves only the family as a rival covenantal institution. But, biblically speaking, the family possesses neither the sword nor the keys of the kingdom. *This is the fatal flaw of Rushdoony's social theory.* Rushdoony's anti-ecclesiastical theology can offer only two futile alternatives to the divine right of the state: radical individualism or patriarchalism-clannism. The state historically has overcome both of these alternatives, from ancient Greece to the present. He pointed this out in *The One and the Many*. "In early Greek and Roman cultures, paternal power was religious power, a power continuous with all being and essentially divine, requiring duties of the father and conferring him with authority. The father, as Fustel de Coulanges has shown, in *The Ancient City*, was under law; but, it must be added, he was not only under law but a part of that law and continuous with it in the chain of being. He was thus to a degree the law incarnate, in that he possessed a measure of the ultimate law in his person. This manifestation of law moved steadily from the father to the state, so that the state, originally the creature of the family and of the fathers, made itself the father, and the source of law, with the family turned into its creature."¹³²

By rejecting a sacramental defense of both the church and the tithe, *Rushdoony converted his theology into a conservative version of the social gospel.* The legitimacy of the church, manifested in Rushdoony's ecclesiology only by its ability to persuade church members to donate money to it, is grounded on the good deeds that churches perform in society. This is the U.S. Internal Revenue's view of non-profit status, the liberal's only reason for allowing the church to escape the tax man.

Rushdoony's view of the church was libertarian. He viewed the church strictly as a voluntary society. In his view, the church is not founded on a self-maledictory oath before God, for such an oath would transfer judicial authority to church officers as God's monopolistic agents. They could then lawfully compel payment of the tithe by members.

His view of church authority creates a divine right of the individual

132. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), p. 130. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

church member. The individual alone supposedly is God's designated agent who lawfully controls the distribution of the tithe rather than the church's ordained authorities. Beyond him there is no ecclesiastical appeal.

The alternative to a Christian view of society that places the church covenant at the center of its social theory is either a statist view of society or a patriarchal view of society. Rushdoony, faithful to an Armenian heritage that did not survive the second generation of immigrants—his generation—chose the latter view. Patriarchalism cannot survive for even three generations in a society that prohibits arranged marriages and allows easy divorce.

It also cannot survive the biblical view of marriage. It was Roman law, with its intense patriarchalism, that kept the clans alive. The English common law heritage was, from the twelfth century onward, utterly hostile to the revived Roman law's view of marriage and family authority, which steadily gained new respect and power on the Continent.¹³³ That Rushdoony should be regarded as soft on divorce, which in some cases he was,¹³⁴ is ironic: nothing undermines a patriarchal society—the family as sacramental—faster than the widespread acceptance of divorce on demand. His own sad experience with his first marriage, like the similar experiences of his brother and his sister, should have warned him.

Conclusion

The Levitical cultural and social services that Rushdoony lists as the basis of the Levites' reception of the tithe were all subordinate aspects of their primary judicial function: to guard the sacramental boundary around the tabernacle/temple. Secondarily, Levites were to declare God's law and to help the priests administer some of the sacrifices and some of the liturgies of worship—what Rushdoony dismissed as mere "rites." Numbers is clear: the tithe was based on the Levites' sacramental separation from the people—in other words, their *holiness*. "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest

133. Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300–1840* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), ch. 7: "Who Controls the Marriage Decision?"

134. See North, *Tithing and the Church*, pp. 156–57.

they bear sin, and die" (Num. 18:21–22). I comment on this in Chapter 10 of *Sanctions and Dominion*.

The New Testament has not abrogated the Old Testament. The church's hierarchical authority is grounded on the same judicial foundation that the Levites' authority was under the Mosaic law: their God-ordained service as guardians of a sacramental boundary. The requirement of each church member to tithe exclusively to the institutional church that lawfully administers the sacraments rests today, as it did in the Mosaic law, on the uniquely sacramental character of the church. The mark of the church's institutional sovereignty is its control over lawful access to the sacraments. This control necessarily involves the enforcement of a boundary: the right to exclude. The church's authority to exclude people from the Lord's Supper is the ultimate judicial basis of its discipline. Excommunication means exclusion from Holy Communion: the Lord's Supper. Because the institutional church possesses this sacramental monopoly, it alone possesses the authority to collect the full tithe of every member.

This authority to exclude is imparted to church officers by means of their possession of the keys of the kingdom. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). Without access in history to the keys of heaven, there can be no kingdom of Christ in history: *no heavenly keys = no earthly kingdom*. The keys invoke heavenly sanctions; often, they invoke visible earthly sanctions. A king without sanctions in history is not a king in history. The most important sanctions in history are in the hands of those who control the keys to the kingdom: officers of God's visible church.

Rushdoony poured out his verbal wrath on the institutional church in his attempt to broaden the definition of the church to include the family and non-profit educational institutions, and, in his words, "far, far more."¹³⁵ This is why Rushdoony's view of the visible church has undermined his theology of the kingdom of God in history. Volume 2 of *The Institutes of Biblical Law* undermines Volume 1. What was a flaw no larger than a man's hand in Volume 1 became a whirlwind in Volume 2. It stripped him of his doctrine of the church covenant—a covenant grounded in an oath before God (baptism)—for every covenant must have negative institutional sanctions. His theo-

135. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, p. 337.

logy allows no formal negative sanctions for the church. If a Christian can, without consequences, decide not to take the Lord's Supper in a local church for 25 years, then what threat is excommunication? The correct answer is: he cannot do this without consequences. It is an answer Rushdoony refused to accept until 1991.

Rushdoony's view of the tithe stripped him of his Calvinism, for it led to his rejection of the authority of the institutional church. This was a heavy price to pay. It is not easy to be taken seriously as a Calvinist theologian when you promote an Anabaptist or patriarchal view of the Lord's Supper, a Baptist ecclesiology, and a social gospel definition of the church. It would have been far cheaper for him just to have paid a tithe to some local congregation and have been done with it from 1964 until 2001—cheaper, that is, for a person willing to submit himself to another pastor. But, after 1964, Rushdoony refused to do either.

Rushdoony paid a heavy price: the bulk of his life's work is conveniently and illegitimately dismissed by serious churchmen as the work of a theological and personal screwball. By cutting his ties in 1970 with any denomination that was more than a few years old, he forfeited his ability to transfer his intellectual inheritance to someone of his choice. Only the institutional church survives intact until the day of judgment. Only the institutional church offers God-guaranteed covenantal continuity in history. *If the institutional church rejects a man's work, then that work cannot stand the test of time.* It will be weighed in the balance and found wanting.

To the extent that Rushdoony's work does survive, it will survive only because of the continuity provided by those who remain inside the institutional church, pay their tithes to the institutional church, and receive the Lord's Supper from men who have been lawfully ordained by other lawfully ordained men: the laying on of hands. This is true of every Christian's legacy. *If the institutional church refuses to incorporate and develop a man's ideas in history, these ideas will not come to positive fruition in history.* If a Christian's spiritual heirs remain peripheral to the institutional church, his legacy will remain peripheral in history. This truth may not seem relevant to a premillennialist or amillennialist who sees the cultural effects of the gospel in history as marginal, but it is extremely relevant to a postmillennialist, or should be.

Contempt for God's institutional church is theologically fatal. God's church is not now, nor has it ever been, a mummy factory. The institutional church, for all her flaws, is God's bride. God has no other.

Appendix C

LEAVEN AS EXCLUSIVELY EVIL

Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened (Matt. 13:33).

*The Dominionist interpreters constantly emphasize the Bible's elaborate system of symbols. This is the foundation of their whole method of interpretation. But they depart from their own principle when it doesn't serve their purpose. They try to make the symbol of **leaven** in this parable refer to the Kingdom of God and how it will spread to take dominion over the earth. However, there's one big problem with that interpretation—**leaven in the Bible is always used as a symbol of evil's explosive power to spread**. It is never used as a symbol of good.*

Hal Lindsey (1989)¹

Yeast is a biblical symbol of continuity. It symbolizes growth over time, both of good and evil. If leaven in the Bible referred exclusively to the development of evil, then it could not be a defining characteristic of the kingdom of God. But Matthew 13:33 says that it is such a defining characteristic. Conclusion: it is not, contrary to the dispensationalists, invariably a symbol of evil. Late in his career, Dallas Seminary theologian J. Dwight Pentecost admitted this in the carefully concealed revision of his 1958 book, *Things to Come*.² But Hal Lindsey is not about to give up this crucial pillar of dispensationalism.

There is a very good reason for Lindsey's emphatic yet theologically insupportable assertion regarding the meaning of leaven. The dispensationalist must deny that the kingdom of God acts in a leaven-like fashion because of his view of the future of the church. If the kingdom

1. Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989), p. 47. As an aside, Bantam is located at 666 Fifth Ave., New York City.

2. See below, "Dr. Pentecost's Carefully Concealed Revision."

of God grows steadily over time, yeast-like, reaching its consummation with Christ's Second Coming at the final judgment, then what of the timing of the so-called "secret rapture" of the church into heaven? This discontinuity is said by dispensationalists to be scheduled a thousand and seven years before the final judgment.³ This is why Dr. Pentecost's revision of *Things to Come* represents a remarkable surrender of a crucial element of the dispensational position.

In contrast, amillennialists and postmillennialists deny that this bodily resurrection into the heavens will be secret. Second, they place it at the end of time, immediately prior to the final judgment. They appeal to Matthew 13, a chapter that utterly destroys the theological case for dispensational premillennialism, for it undermines dispensationalism's principle of historical discontinuity.

A. Continuity and Discontinuity

Matthew 13 denies the central pillar of dispensationalism's view of the future: the *cosmic discontinuity* of the bodily "rapture" of the saints up to heaven before the millennium, the period in which Jesus will supposedly reign from a throne in Jerusalem. The essence of the New Covenant kingdom in history is *continuity*, according to Matthew 13; therefore, the monumental historical discontinuity of the premillennial secret rapture⁴ cannot be made to fit within this kingdom continuity.

Consider Christ's parable of the tares and wheat, which is only one part of Matthew 13's defense of the New Covenant era of historical continuity:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reap-

3. In pre-tribulational premillennialism, by far the most widely held view. In post-tribulational premillennialism, 1,000 years.

4. Hereafter referred to as the Rapture.

ers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matt. 13:24–30).

This parable confused the disciples. They asked Jesus to explain it to them. He did, making it clear that there will be no discontinuity (“Rapture”) before the His Second Coming in final judgment:

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matt. 13:37–43).

Loraine Boettner, a postmillennial theologian, in 1958 devoted an entire chapter to this obvious problem in dispensationalism’s exegesis.⁵ He commented forcefully on the clear teaching of Matthew 13: 33, the parable of the leaven: *gradualism*.

The parable of the leaven teaches the universal extension and triumph of the Gospel, and it further teaches that this development is accomplished through the gradual development of the Kingdom, not through a sudden and cataclysmic explosion. . . . The Kingdom of heaven, like leaven, transforms that with which it comes in contact. All the meal was transformed by its contact with the leaven. Similarly, Christ teaches, society is to be transformed by the Kingdom of heaven, and the result will be a Christianized world. Premillennialists cannot admit this. To do so would contradict their whole system. Hence they seek another meaning, and where Christ says *the Kingdom of heaven is like leaven*, they say that the leaven is not symbolical of the Kingdom of heaven, but of evil.⁶

He then chided dispensational commentators—self-proclaimed defenders of a literal hermeneutic—for their obvious “spiritualizing” of the plain teaching of Scripture: “We are at a loss to understand how any one professing to take the Bible at face value, particularly those

5. Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958), ch. 18.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

who lay great stress on literal interpretation, can deliberately contradict the words spoken so clearly and unequivocally and make them mean the exact opposite, in this case, false doctrine. These are the very people who protest so strongly against ‘spiritualizing.’ Anyone who can so change the meaning of Scripture can make it mean anything that he pleases.”⁷

Without doubt, this is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible for the premillennial views of the Bible. To answer him, dispensationalists need at least a detailed volume. A brief, off-hand remark or two is not sufficient, yet this is all they bother to provide. They do not publicly acknowledge the existence of Boettner’s chapter. Since there is no answer to their exegetical problem except adopting either post-millennialism or amillennialism, one can hardly blame them. (This same criticism—no eschatological discontinuity in the future—applies to all premillennial systems.)

B. The Kingdom as Righteous Leaven⁸

The kingdom of God is like leaven. Christianity is the yeast, and it has a leavening effect on the pagan, satanic culture around it. It is designed to permeate the whole of this culture, causing it to rise. *The bread produced by this leaven is the preferred bread.* In ancient times—indeed, right up until the nineteenth century—bread was considered the staff of life, the symbol of life. It was the source of men’s nutrition. “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are to ask God (Matt. 6: 11). The kingdom of God is the force that produces the fine quality bread that men seek. The symbolism should be obvious: Christianity makes life a joy for man. It offers the cultural benefits that most men acknowledge as the best (Deut. 4:5–8).

Leaven takes time to produce its positive effect. *Leaven requires historical continuity.* Men can wait for their leavened bread, for God gives them time sufficient for the working of His spiritual leaven. They may not understand how it works, how its spiritual effects spread through their culture and make it a delight, any more than they understand how yeast works to produce leavened bread, but they can see the bread rising, and they can see the progressive effects of the leaven of the kingdom. They can look into the oven and see risen bread. If we

7. *Idem.*

8. For a more detailed exegesis, see Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 12:G–I.

really push the analogy—pound it, even—we can point to the fact that the dough is pounded down several times before the final baking, almost as the world pounds the kingdom; but the yeast does its work, *just so long as the fires of the oven are not lit prematurely*. If the full heat of the oven is applied to the dough before the yeast has done its work, both the yeast and the dough are burnt, and the burnt mass must be thrown out. But given sufficient time, the yeast does its work, and the result is the bread that men prefer.

What a marvelous description of God's kingdom! Christians work with the cultural material available, seeking to refine it, to permeate it, to make it into something fine. They know that they will be successful, just as yeast is successful in the dough, if it is given enough time to do its work. That is what God implicitly promises us in the analogy of the leaven: *enough time to accomplish our individual and our corporate tasks*. He tells us that His kingdom *will* produce the desirable bread. This will take time. It may take several poundings, as God, through the hostility of the world, kneads the yeast-filled dough of man's cultures, but the end result is guaranteed.

C. Dr. Pentecost's Carefully Concealed Revision

Dallas Theological Seminary long-time professor J. Dwight Pentecost's book, *Things to Come*,⁹ is the standard academic book in Bible prophecy within dispensationalism. He reversed his views on just this point. Without telling the reader why he reversed himself, or even that he did reverse himself, he abandoned the traditional dispensational interpretation of the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33).

His earlier interpretation had followed the lead of C. I. Scofield and all other dispensational theologians of the twentieth century: the key rebuttal of the continuity eschatologies of postmillennialism and amillennialism. Without this theologically crucial rebuttal, it is impossible to defend premillennialism's eschatological discontinuity: the Rapture.

In the original edition (1958) and subsequent editions until the 1987 edition, he defended the traditional dispensational view of leaven as evil. In the original edition, he argued for the eventual triumph of unbelief in this, the "Church Age." He wrote that Jesus' parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31–32) points to the expansion of an *evil* tree in history, "a monstrosity. . . . The parable teaches that the enlarged

9. Dunham Publishing Co., distributed by Zondervan.

sphere of profession has become inwardly corrupt. This is the characteristic of the age" (p. 147). In his exposition of the parable of the leaven, he argued: "This evidently refers to the work of a false religious system. . . . This figure is used in Scripture to portray that which is evil in character. . ." (p. 148). Summarizing, he wrote: "The mustard seed refers to the perversion of God's purpose in this age, while the leaven refers to a corruption of the divine agency, the Word, through which this purpose is realized" (p. 148). Pentecost's focus here was *ethics*: the progressive triumph of evil through time, during the "Church Age." This could at least serve as the foundation of a dispensational philosophy of history: *the defeat of the saints*.

Three decades later, he abandoned this view, but very few of his followers are aware of the fact. The 1987 reprint is not a reprint but *a strategically revised edition*. It is nowhere identified as such. Dr. Pentecost had the typesetter carefully superimpose a crucial revised section. The switch is almost undetectable, yet it is a devastating admission for dispensationalism. Here is his revised exposition of Christ's kingdom during the "Church Age." *Mustard Seed*: "This part of the parable stresses the great growth of the kingdom when once it is introduced. The kingdom will grow from an insignificant beginning to great proportions" (p. 147). There is not a word about its ethical corruption. *Leaven*: "When leaven is used in Scripture it frequently connotes evil. . . . Its use in the sacrifices that represent the perfection of the person of Christ (Lev. 2:1–3) shows that it is not always so used. Here the emphasis is not on leaven as though to emphasize its character, but rather that the leaven has been hidden in the meal, thus stressing the way leaven works when once introduced into the meal" (p. 148). In short, *there is now no focus on ethics*: not one word about any evil effects of either the mustard seed or the leaven. Today his focus is on the growth of the kingdom of Christ in history—a postmillennial focus: "The parable of the mustard and the leaven in meal, then, stress the growth of the new form of the kingdom" (p. 148).

If Christ's kingdom is not being corrupted in our dispensation, then it is either ethically neutral (the kingdom of Christ as ethically neutral!?) or positive. Pentecost's theological problem is obvious: *there can be no ethical neutrality*. If the necessarily expanding kingdom of Christ is not being steadily undermined by theological and moral perversion, then it must be growing in righteousness. This interpretation is the postmillennial view of the kingdom of God: expansion over time. Matthew 13 is not discussing Satan's kingdom; it is discuss-

ing Christ's. Dr. Pentecost has very quietly overthrown the heart and soul of the traditional dispensational system's account of the inevitable progress of evil in what dispensationalists call the "Church Age."¹⁰ Yet no one inside the dispensational camp has been willing to discuss in public the implications of this radical alteration by Pentecost, or explain exactly why it has not, if correct, overthrown the dispensational system.

D. The Parables of Growth

The parables of growth point to a fulfillment of God's plan, in time and on earth. They point to *a steady expansion of the leaven of the gospel*. They point to an expansion of God's kingdom, in time and on earth, as the leaven makes something edible of the *fallen dough* of creation. *The fallen dough will rise*. It takes leaven. It takes kneading. It takes time. But the fallen dough of the cursed creation will rise. God promises this. But Christians still refuse to believe it. When Christ announces "The kingdom of God is like unto. . .," they reply, "Oh, come on, it couldn't be like that. No, it is really like this. . ."

Premillennialists substitute a parable of uprooted wheat (the Rapture). In "pop-dispensationalism," the uprooted wheat is returned to the field seven years later and is replanted, though fully mature and perfect, alongside of the still-maturing tares, and alongside of newly planted wheat.¹¹ Amillennialists, who do believe in historical continuity, have rejected this vision of a premature uprooting, but they have no confidence in Christ's earthly leaven, either. They wind up arguing for the cultural triumph of Satan's earthly leaven. Satan's leaven will steadily push out Christ's cultural leaven, we are told. Only at the final judgment will Christ's return in power instantaneously remove Satan's leaven and instantly fire up the oven, leaving His earthly leaven, the church, to do its work instantly, raising the dough in the midst of the oven. In other words, their view of the leaven of the church violates the parable's analogy, that is, the steady rising of the dough before the oven's final baking.

10. Gary DeMar spotted this shift in early 1992. He looked up Pentecost's section on leaven in the 1987 edition. He found that it was not what Kenneth Gentry had quoted in a newsletter. He telephoned Gentry, who looked it up in the 1958 edition. The two versions differed.

11. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 152, 255–56, citing Thomas D. Ice and Dave Hunt. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

Both of these millennial approaches are widely held today. Both provide theological justifications for the seeming inability of the church to grow more rapidly than Satan's kingdom does, and also the seeming inability of Christians, as Christians, to provide leadership in any field.¹² Whichever of these two substitutions a man accepts, he has abandoned the analogy of the holy leaven. He has abandoned the principle of godly growth over time. He has abandoned Christ's explicit teaching concerning the true nature of His kingdom. He may deny the continuity of growth (the uprooted wheat scenario). He may deny the continuity of victory (Satan's leaven wins). In either case, Christ's people must fail in their dominion assignment, in time and on earth.

In the second view, Satan's leaven triumphs, and God doesn't even bother to go through the premillennialists' "breathing robot" stage of the church, with the direct rule of Christ, in Person, through His bureaucratic hierarchy of breathing robots. God simply scraps history at the end, wiping out Satan in a cataclysmic example of historical discontinuity. God redeems the earth in an instant, makes His people into fully redeemed, fully perfect dominion men, who now can exercise dominion over a fully redeemed creation. In short, God's people in history never learn how to rule. The garden of Eden was a failure as a training camp for dominion; the land of Canaan was equally a failure as a training ground for dominion; and finally, the church of Jesus Christ, the New Jerusalem, winds up an historical failure as a training ground for dominion. Nothing that God does through His people has worked or can work culturally, given the power of evil in history, so God will at last—at *the* last—scrap the failed program in an instant and intervene graciously to give His people their comprehensive cultural victory on a platter. Here is a revised version of the New Testament's parable of the mustard seed: just add instant judgment (since time, God's law, and the ethical subordination of Christ's church to the Master obviously failed, and since the preaching of the gospel failed, and since Christian institutions failed), and presto: *an instant mustard tree*. So much for continuity.¹³

E. John Walvoord's Silence

John Walvoord was the major dispensational theologian of the

12 . The one major exception is the Wycliffe Bible translation organization's linguistics program.

13. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 6.

twentieth century. He wrote 30 books and served as president of Dallas Seminary from 1953 to 1986. He died in 2002 at age 92. It is not an accident that he refused to comment on Matthew 13:33 anywhere in his book on the Rapture. Neither did he offer any exposition on the meaning of the word "leaven." He had a major problem: explaining the Rapture's discontinuity. He ignored the problem. He wrote that "the truth about the church as the body of Christ has not yet been introduced, as this is not mentioned until Matthew 16:18. Further, the doctrine of the Rapture has not been introduced either, and the disciples were unaware of the truth of the translation of the saints at the end of the church age. Accordingly, the truth presented in Matthew 13 deals with the whole period between the First and Second Advents."¹⁴ In short, the continuity of history predicted in Matthew 13 was annulled by later revelation. Let us put this argument more graphically: *Jesus deliberately misled His disciples in Matthew 13*. Later, He showed them the truth. This sort of argument is common among theological liberals; it is sad to see a conservative expositor invoke it.

One wonders how Walvoord would answer a Jew who might question him about the doctrine of the Trinity and its apparent absence in the Old Testament. Walvoord probably would reply, "The revelation of the Trinity came after the Old Testament." But that is the Jew's whole point. Such a response does not deal with the fundamental dividing issue. The chronological sequence of revelation is not the issue here; the issue is theological consistency. The key hermeneutical question in both examples—the Trinity and the dispensational Rapture—is this: "Does some later Bible teaching categorically *contradict* an earlier teaching of the Bible?" The appropriate response for a conservative Bible scholar is to demonstrate that an earlier revelation is not contradicted by subsequent revelation.

This was not Walvoord's approach. He simply asserted that Jesus' teaching on the kingdom came, well, *later*. But we know that, Dr. Walvoord! That isn't the point. The point is this: the dispensationalists' Rapture doctrine categorically contradicts the plain teaching—*literal*, I hasten to add—of Matthew 13. The Rapture doctrine asserts the existence of a *radical historical discontinuity* between Christ's first advent and His coming again in final judgment. Matthew 13 denies such a possibility. *This is premillennialism's number-one exegetical problem*. It is comparable to amillennialism's inability to explain the Old Testa-

14. John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1979), p. 183.

ment's main passage that deals with the New Heaven and New Earth (also mentioned in Revelation 21), Isaiah 65: 17–23.¹⁵

Walvoord wrote that “the truth presented in Matthew 13 deals with the whole period between the First and Second Advents.” Post-millennialists and amillennialists agree entirely: “Second Advent” refers to Christ’s bodily, visible Second Coming at the final judgment. It refers to the end of sin-cursed time. But this cannot be its meaning for dispensationalists, since sin-cursed time does not end during the millennium, even though Christ is said to reign on earth during the millennium. Then what did Walvoord mean by “Second Advent”? The phrase is not listed in the book’s index. We do find “Second Coming,” especially “in contrast to the Rapture,” but unfortunately this reference takes us to the book’s endnotes (pp. 277–78): no comments, just a bunch of assorted notes. The entry for “Second Coming” refers us to page 61, where we read: “At the Second Advent, indeed, there is a gathering together of the church from heaven and the Old Testament saints in resurrection along with elect angels as well as elect on the earth. All elect of all ages converge upon the millennial scene.” This is a reaffirmation of *a major discontinuity before the final judgment*, when all the dead will be raised from the grave. But we do not need reaffirmations to persuade us; we need detailed exegesis.¹⁶ He provides none.

So, rather than discuss Matthew 13, which is the single most important continuity passage in the New Testament, and which on the face of it categorically denies the possibility of the premillennial Rapture, Walvoord just ignored the problem. The premillennial Rapture doctrine was first presented in the New Covenant, he said, with the doctrine of the church, which itself was tacked onto the kingdom doctrine by Jesus three chapters later, in Matthew 16. So much for Jesus’ teaching on His kingdom’s continuity. Jesus’ supposedly definitive teaching in Matthew 13 regarding the continuity of His kingdom

15. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 96–106.

16. For over 35 years, the theological leaders of the dispensational movement have contented themselves with a series of brief reaffirmations. Since the late 1970s, they have not given us very many of these. Ever since 1988—no Rapture, yet the 40th anniversary of the founding of the nation of Israel—we have heard very little at all. Since Bahnsen and Gentry destroyed House and Ice’s *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), we have heard nothing. See Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gbkg-house>). See also Gary North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism Is Paralyzed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993). (<http://bit.ly/gnfever>)

barely survived for three chapters. Walvoord's exegetical strategy does not encourage anyone's confidence in dispensationalism's supposedly literalistic hermeneutic: "literal whenever convenient."¹⁷ The viewpoint's defenders declare that they are hermeneutical literalists, but when pressured, they also invoke symbolism.

F. C. I. Scofield's Denial

Walvoord was following C. I. Scofield's lead. Scofield's comment on the parable of the field is almost beyond belief. Jesus said: "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one" (v. 38). Message: *the field is the world*. Scofield said: "The parable of the wheat and tares is not a description of the world, but of that which professes to be the kingdom."¹⁸ Message: *the field is not the world*. Scofield was saying that Jesus was wrong. This is a very difficult position for a Bible-affirming author to take, but Scofield was a lawyer. He was presenting a typical lawyer's brief. "If the jury must be misled in order to win your case, this is the price a successful lawyer must pay." Lawyers pay it all the time.

1. Denying Christ's Continuous Kingdom

Scofield knew exactly what he had to do: deny the historical continuity of Christ's kingdom. He did this by denying that Jesus had said what Jesus had clearly said, namely, that *the historical arena of Satan's deception is the world*. Scofield's approach is the corrupt lawyer's tactic of the deliberate misrepresentation of fact. The preposterous nature of his comment should not be regarded as evidence of Scofield's intellectual incompetence. Lawyer Scofield was smart; he was also consistent: driven to this deceptive tactic by the inescapable logic of his position. He understood his jury. The jury for almost a century has remained silent about this obvious misrepresentation. His successors have not deviated from his interpretation. The dispensational theologians who edited the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967) left this note intact, word

17. Some reader may ask in a generation or two: "Why is North kicking this dead theological horse?" Answer: because in my day, this horse is indeed theologically brain-dead at the seminary level, but its body—local churches comprising millions of fundamentalists—is still kicking. I am trying here to give it a decent Christian burial. I am burying it with Scripture.

18. C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1909] 1917), p. 1015n.

for word.¹⁹ They could not give up this note without abandoning the whole dispensational system. If the field is the world, then the world will never experience any discontinuity in the middle of New Covenant history so radical as the premillennial Rapture: the tearing out of the wheat, dispensationalism teaches (in open contradiction of the text), rather than the tares. They abandoned a great deal in their revisions of Scofield's notes, but not this. The price was too high.

The meaning of leaven is continuity and growth. This dual process refers to history: the kingdom of God. Yet this is what has always been denied by dispensationalism. The traditional dispensational view is that while leaven does refer to growth, this growth is *the growth of evil*. If good also grows, then a central pillar of dispensational theology collapses, and with it *the* central pillar of dispensational social ethics (meaning a theologically rigorous absence thereof). If good increases, then the Christian social theorist must answer two questions: (1) What is the *legal* basis in society of this progressive social good? (2) How is this progressive social good to be achieved? Dispensationalists shy away from asking either question. Both questions lead to theonomic answers.

2. Scofield and His Revisers

I need to cite Scofield here at considerable length, in order to make clear the nature of the exegetical debate. The exegetical debate centers around the question of the effects of the gospel in history. The dispensationalist assumes that the gospel must fail to transform the world in history, i.e., the era of the church prior to Christ's secret Rapture of the saints and His subsequent physical return to earth to establish an earthly kingdom. This is premillennialism's eschatological presupposition. The failure of the gospel to transform society is supposedly an inescapable prophetic truth: *predestinated by God*.

With this view of church history as his operating presupposition, Scofield then applied it to the interpretation of Matthew 13:33, which reads: "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Scofield recognized his primary theological problem in this passage: postmillennialism. So, he devoted his note to a refutation of . . . amillennialism. He had to deflect the

19. *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1015n.

jury's attention from the really hard nut to crack in this passage: its postmillennial implications, i.e., the growth of Christ's kingdom in history. Scofield wrote the following convoluted passage:

That interpretation of the parable of the Leaven (v. 33) which makes (with variation as to details) the leaven to be the Gospel, introduced into the world ("three measures of meal") by the church, and working subtly until the world is converted ("till the whole was leavened") is open to fatal objection: (1) It does violence to the unvarying symbolical meaning of leaven, and especially to the meaning fixed by our Lord Himself (Mt. 16.6–12; Mk. 8.15. See "Leaven," Gen. 19.3; Mt. 13.33 note). (2) The implication of a converted world in this age ("till the whole was leavened"), is explicitly contradicted by our Lord's interpretation of the parables of the Wheat and Tares, and of the Net. Our Lord presents a picture of a partly converted kingdom in an unconverted world; of good fish and bad in the very kingdom-net itself. (3) The method of the extension of the kingdom is given in the first parable. It is by sowing seed, not by mingling leaven. The symbols have, in Scripture, a meaning fixed by inspired usage. Leaven is the principle of corruption working subtly; is invariably used in a bad sense (see "Leaven," Gen. 19.3, refs.), and is defined by our Lord as evil doctrine (Mt. 16.11,12; Mk. 8.15). Meal, on the contrary, was used in one of the sweet-savour offerings (Lev. 2.1–3), and was food for the priests (Lev. 6.15–17).²⁰

Garbled, isn't it? Note: when a Bible expositor writes garbled prose, you can be fairly confident that he is having trouble explaining the text.

Scofield's view is affirmed, though in more readable English, by the *New Scofield Bible*: leaven as evil.

Leaven, as a fermenting process, is uniformly regarded in Scripture as typifying the presence of impurity or evil (Ex. 12:15,19; 13:7; Lev. 2:11; Dt. 16:4; Mt. 16:6,12; Mk. 8:15; Lk. 12:1; 1 Cor. 5:6–9; Gal. 5:9). The two wave loaves, representing Israel and the Gentiles as forming the Church, contained leaven in recognition of imperfections in the believers (see Lev. 23:17, note). The use of leaven in the three measures of meal seems intended likewise to represent evil within the kingdom of heaven. The teaching that leaven in this parable represents the beneficent influence of the Gospel pervading the world has no Scriptural justification. Nowhere in Scripture does leaven represent good; the idea of a converted world at the end of the age is contradicted by the presence of tares among the wheat and bad fish

20. *Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1016n.

among the good in the kingdom itself.²¹

Then the editors added an afterthought, one not found in Scofield's original notes. They threw a sop—a single introductory clause—to those Christians who by 1967 desperately wanted to see some influence for good in history as a result of the gospel, that is, as a result of their personal efforts. This brief genuflect in the direction of social concern reflected the beginning of the end for traditional dispensationalism: “*Although Biblical truth has a beneficial moral influence on the world,*”²² the mingling of leaven is not the method of divine salvation or enlargement of the kingdom. Tares never become wheat.”²³

Some questions must be raised at this point. First and foremost, how in the name of Scofield can there be a visible, historically meaningful, beneficial moral influence of the gospel in this world prior to the Rapture? On what basis? Common grace, perhaps? If so, then post-millennialists can use this crucial admission to explain a great many things about the growth of God's kingdom in history. It was postmillennialism above all that Scofield had to refute in his note on Matthew 13:33—the task he discreetly avoided. On the other hand, if this beneficial influence is neither visible nor historically meaningful, why mention it at all? What emotional good would such an impotent influence in the “Church Age” do for one's followers? Why should one's followers care? They did not care in Scofield's day. By 1967, however, the emotional support for dispensationalism's social pessimism had begun to fade. A decade later in the United States, it faded rapidly, when American fundamentalist Christians re-entered the world of politics after half a century of withdrawal.²⁴

3. *Smoke Screens*

An argument found in both Scofield Bibles rests on the undeniable fact that there will still be tares at the end of history. I admit: not

21. *New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1015n.

22. Emphasis added.

23. *Idem*.

24. The withdrawal came in 1925, after the defeat in the media of fundamentalist spokesman William Jennings Bryan during the world famous Scopes “monkey trial.” The case centered on the teaching of evolution in tax-financed schools below the collegiate level. See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), ch. 21.

everyone will become a Christian. This admission would be a great deal more devastating if there had ever been any theologian in history—let alone an entire school of interpretation—who argued that when Christ returns there will be no one found on earth except born-again Christians.²⁵ That the Scofieldians thought it worth including this argument in their notes indicates their need for convenient stick men to refute. Space for notes in a Bible is extremely scarce. It is my contention that an expositor does not waste precious note space in a study Bible in order to refute nonsense unless he is trying to deflect the reader's attention from his own nonsense. He burns stick men in public in order to produce smoke.

The heart of the Scofield notes' argument, however, is the assertion that *leaven always means corruption*. This is a highly dangerous argument. It can very easily sink the theologian who rests his case on it. The familiar logician's tool is true: "A universal negative is refuted by a single positive." Such a positive example unquestionably exists, and our expositors knew this, which is why they refused to cite this key passage in their long list of supposed negative examples: "Besides the cakes, he shall offer for his offering leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offerings" (Lev. 7:13). Leaven was mandated by God for use in peace offerings. How could a symbol of ever-growing evil serve as a sacrifice mandated by a holy God?

4. *The Peace Offering*

Elsewhere, Scofield offered a note on Leviticus 7:13. He acknowledged that this was a peace offering to God.²⁶

The use of leaven here is significant. Peace with God is something which the believer shares with God. Christ is our peace-offering (Eph. 2:13). Any thanksgiving for peace must, first of all, present

25. I wrote a book to deal with this very question of wheat, tares, and the final rebellion of Satan's forces at the end of time in a Christianized world: *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>). The answer is remarkably simple: the spread of the gospel increases the common grace of God in history. To gain God's external covenantal blessings, men must obey God's external covenantal laws. Men want these blessings, so they will obey. The external cultural blessings will come, as God has promised (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The world will be progressively transformed. The rebels therefore have something big to rebel against.

26. *Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 134n. Amos 4:5: "And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD."

Him. In verse 12 we have this, in type, and so leaven is excluded. In verse 13 it is the offerer who gives thanks for his participation in the peace, and so the leaven fitly signifies, that though having peace with God through the work of another, there is still evil in him. This is illustrated in Amos 4.5, where the evil in Israel is before God.

The leaven supposedly represented the evil peace-offerer. The unleaven supposedly represented Christ. This note was reprinted without alteration in the *New Scofield Bible*.

If we take Scofield at his word, then something *symbolically evil* was somehow a *satisfactory offering to God*. What verse could be appealed to in order to substantiate this thesis, namely, that an unclean thing was ever acceptable to God as an Old Covenant sacrifice? The dispensationalists do not attempt to offer such evidence. I cannot imagine what sort of evidence could be offered. The very context of this passage warns against such a conclusion:

And the flesh that toucheth any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burnt with fire: and as for the flesh, all that be clean shall eat thereof. But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people. Moreover the soul that shall touch any unclean thing, as the uncleanness of man, or any unclean beast, or any abominable unclean thing, and eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which [pertain] unto the LORD, even that soul shall be cut off from his people (Lev. 7:19–21).

Even to touch an unclean thing and then eat the peace offering meant excommunication from the congregation. Yet dispensationalists—those writing prior to the 1980s—wanted us to believe that leaven is exclusively a symbol of evil. But then they turned around and declared that this inherently evil symbol was acceptable to God as the basis of establishing peace with Him. (Those writing after 1980 have yet to replace this obviously untenable line of argument, but at least they no longer defend it.)

The whole point of a peace offering was to admit publicly that the person offering the peace offering was *judicially clean*. His sins had been forgiven. The peace offering was not a required sacrifice for wiping away sin. *It was a voluntary sacrifice that acknowledged that the person's sin had already been wiped away*. It was a public act of covenant renewal.

Nothing was placed on God's fiery altar that was not representa-

tionally clean. The sacrifice was a *legal substitute*. It pointed to a future legal substitute, Jesus Christ. To have a judicially impure object on God's altar would necessarily have pointed to the doctrine of Christ's humanity as fallen. Scofield understood this, so he identified the unleavened cakes as the symbol of Jesus Christ. But this approach destroys any doctrine of representation for the leaven. If the peace-offerer was represented by something impure, he had no legal basis for making the peace offering. His sacrifice of leaven would have condemned him publicly if leaven always meant evil exclusively. But if leaven is not always a symbol of evil, how are we to explain it? This is a problem facing all expositors.

G. The Leaven of the Pharisees

What is strange is the fact that within the Reformed tradition, there have been examples of interpretations of Leviticus 7:13 that are similar to Scofield's. Premillennialist Andrew Bonar²⁷ wrote in 1846: "His sins are all forgiven; there is peace between him and his God. There is in the worshipper no *uncleanness* now. But this reconciliation does not declare that there is no corruption left remaining in the worshipper. Perfect pardon does not imply perfect holiness. There is a remnant of evil left. But here we see that remnant of evil brought out before the Lord. The '*leavened cakes*' intimate the corruption of the offerer; . . ." ²⁸ Amazingly, Rushdoony followed Bonar's lead.²⁹ The fact that dispensationalists have not been alert to the covenantal implications of this interpretation is not surprising; that covenant theologians have been equally inattentive to the covenant is very surprising.

Perhaps covenant theologians have been led into the dispensationalist ditch of muddled symbolism because of Jesus' warning regarding leaven of the Pharisees.

Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye

27. On Bonar's premillennialism, see Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), p. 195.

28. Andrew Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1846] 1966), p. 132.

29. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 82–83.

among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees (Matt. 16:6–12).

The disciples, initially committed to popular Jewish hermeneutical literalism and therefore frequently incapable of understanding Jesus' analogies, made a similar mistake. Jesus then told them what He meant. He was condemning the leaven of the Pharisees. They recognized that Jesus was talking about the *Pharisees' false doctrine*. The text does not say false doctrine as such, but only the *Pharisees' false doctrine*. The problem today is that modern theologians still have not understood the implications of the disciples' subsequent understanding of Jesus' warning. All leaven is not evil. The Pharisees' leaven was evil, so it had to be avoided. There was nothing wrong with leaven as such. It does not symbolize evil as such. Sometimes it symbolizes good, which is why it served as a mandatory peace offering. It symbolizes growth, not evil. Growth in evil is to be avoided; growth in righteousness is to be pursued.

Conclusion

The brief kingdom parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:33 rests on an understanding of leaven as a symbol of growth and continuity, not leaven as exclusively evil. If leaven is understood as exclusively evil, then Satan's kingdom must be viewed as triumphant in church history. This is exactly what premillennialism asserts with respect to the history of the church, i.e., the period prior to Jesus' bodily return to the earth. But the parable identifies the kingdom of heaven as leaven: growth.

We see in the discussion of leaven by dispensationalists an example of how eschatology can influence and even determine exegesis. What the passage speaks plainly about—the kingdom of heaven—the dispensationalist must deny. This is why J. Dwight Pentecost's admission in the latest edition of *Things to Come* is so devastating. He has abandoned the "leaven is always evil" exegesis. But it is discouraging to read the discussion of leaven by Bonar and Rushdoony (especially

Rushdoony, a dedicated postmillennialist), who retain traces of the older dispensational view of leaven.

Leaven is an inescapable concept in the New Covenant era. Something must grow over time: either good or evil. Let it be good. We must therefore seek to purge the old exegetical leaven of eschatological defeat for the gospel and substitute the new leaven of eschatological victory.

Appendix D

GREEK MYTHOLOGY: THE MYTH OF CLASSICAL POLITICS

The great aim of the struggle for liberty has been equality before the law.

F. A. Hayek¹

One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you (Ex. 12:49).

The heritage of the biblical covenantal ideal of equality before the civil law made possible Western civilization. This tradition entered the West through the church. It did not come from Classical Greece. The argument that it did is part of the myth that Classical civilization is the foundation of Western liberty. It is one of the more successful myths of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.² Rushdoony identifies the origin of the myth: “Greece: The Humanist’s Homeland.”³ He begins his chapter, “The Unity of the Polis,” with this crucial observation: “The importance of Greek thought in Western history cannot be understood by a reading of the works of specialists in the field, because the prevailing approach is neither philosophical nor historical but religious. . . . The majority of scholars turn to Greek culture, not for its own sake, but to find a heritage and a homeland to buttress their anti-Christianity.”⁴

A college textbook by F. Roy Willis is typical in its laudatory as-

1. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 85.

2. For a detailed study of the humanists’ continuing fascination with pagan Rome, see Peter Bondanella, *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), p. 67. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

4. *Idem*.

assessment of the Greeks' legacy to the West: "Athens was an attitude of mind and an achievement of the mind, a unique combination of the physical and the intellectual. And Western civilization owes an important part of its character, perhaps the finest part, to its nourishment for centuries from the Greek achievement that reached its height in Athens."⁵

What the introductory level textbooks invariably neglect to mention is that Athenian male society, like Greek society generally, was favorable toward homosexuality, especially between older men and young teenage boys.⁶ Women were known to complain about this, but they had no legal standing. Classical civilization, Greek and Roman, also practiced human sacrifice, a fact known to Lord Acton a century ago.⁷ This fact was systematically suppressed by the academic world in his day, just as it is today. Slavery was widespread in the classical world, in contrast to the ancient Near East. This fact is downplayed in the textbooks.

In assessing the legacy of the classical world, our model should be Charles Norris Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture*, not Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way*. We should take seriously Otto Scott's suggestion: Christians should study Classical history and culture, not in order to exaggerate the virtues of Classical civilization, but to understand why it collapsed.⁸

A. The Dual Philosophical Legacy of Greece

This is not to say that there has been no legacy from Greece. There have been two important philosophical aspects of this legacy: rationalism and irrationalism. As with all forms of humanism, the two are in fact one: the inescapable dialecticism of all of autonomous man's speculations.⁹ One side is the legacy recorded in the textbooks; the other

5. F. Roy Willis, *Western Civilization: An Urban Perspective*, 2 vols., 3rd ed.. (Lexington, Massachusetts: Heath, 1981), I, p. 53.

6. Hans Licht (pseud.), *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece*, trans. J. H. Freese (New York: AMS Press [1932] 1972), pp. 411–98; Robert Flacelière, *Love in Ancient Greece* (New York: Crown, [1960] 1962), ch. 3. There is today a scholarly journal called *The International Journal of Greek Love*. It prints articles on Greek homosexuality on a regular basis.

7. John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, "Human Sacrifice" (1863), *Essays in Religion, Politics, and Morality, in Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1988), III, pp. 395–442.

8. Otto Scott, "The Distortions of Classicism," *Chalcedon Report* (Sept. 1992), p. 3.

9. Cornelius Van Til spent his career exposing this humanist dialecticism.

has been recorded in obscure monographs. The textbooks downplay the religious side of the Greeks by discussing the myths of Olympus as if they were fairy tales that no influential Greek ever believed. This was in fact the case; there is little evidence that anyone in authority took seriously the Olympian myths except as political rituals. The Olympian gods were political creations: gods that the families of a city-state might formally worship. Without formal worship and collectively celebrated rites, there could be no civil law in Classical civilization.¹⁰

1. Academic Blackout: Occult Greece

What the textbooks ignore almost entirely is the other side of Greek religion, the dark, fearful, awesome side: the gods of the underworld. Both legacies were recovered by the Renaissance, but the occult side of the Renaissance is also the province of obscure monographs—though more of them today than existed in 1960. Since 1965, as the West has been invaded by Eastern mysticism and popular occultism, this neglected Greek legacy has begun to receive some academic attention, but the full story is still not found in the introductory textbooks, four decades later.

The supreme primary source of the rational side of the legacy is Plato's version of Socrates. While few people ever read Plato's major work, *The Republic*, and fewer still his other dialogues—which were not dialogues but were in fact monologues thinly disguised as dialogues—the rationalist side of Socrates has become legendary. Not many people know that Athens convicted Socrates of false religion—his appeal to occult gods: "Socrates is guilty of crime, because he does not believe in the gods recognised by the city, but introduces strange supernatural beings; he is also guilty, because he corrupts the youth." He was convicted by a majority of 60 votes in a jury of 501 men.¹¹ Bury, the great historian of Greece, offered this highly conventional assessment of Socrates' legacy:

When the history of Greece was being directed by Pericles and Cleon, Nicias and Lysander, men little dreamed either at Athens or elsewhere that the interests of the world were far more deeply concerned in the doings of one eccentric Athenian who held aloof from public affairs. The work of Pericles and Lysander affected a few generations

10. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955).

11. J. B. Bury, *A History of Greece* (New York: Modern Library, [1913]), p. 565.

in a small portion of the globe; but the spirit of that eccentric Athenian was to lay an impress, indelible forever, upon the thought of mankind. The ideas which we owe to Socrates are now so organically a part of the mind of civilised men, so familiar and commonplace, that it is hard to appreciate the intellectual power which was required to originate them. Socrates was the first champion of the supremacy of the intellect as a court from which there is no appeal; he was the first to insist, without modification or compromise, that a man must order his life by the guidance of his own intellect, without any regard for mandates of external authority or for the impulses of emotion, unless his intellectual [*sic*] approves. Socrates was thus a rebel against authority as such; and he shrank from no consequences.¹²

This assessment is conventional but ultimately erroneous. It neglects the irrationalist and mystical side of Socrates. He believed that a god (daimon) had spoken to him all of his adult life, telling him what to avoid.¹³ The conventional textbook assessment also places Socrates in the category of a rebel against authority as such. To the extent that Plato accurately reflected Socrates' viewpoint, Socrates was not a man at war against authority; he was a man in favor of displacing the existing authority with a new tyranny so powerful that it involved systematic lying, total state control over education, and communism for political leaders. When philosopher Karl Popper devoted the first volume of *The Open Society and Its Enemies*¹⁴ to an analysis of Plato as a mystic and a totalitarian, he did the academic world a great service—one which gained him the lasting hostility of Plato's many modern disciples.

The textbooks are filled with the legacy of Greek rationalism. Greek irrationalism is seldom mentioned, let alone emphasized.¹⁵ Students are given the stories of the Olympian gods. They are not told that these gods were politically constructed composites of a darker realm: gods of the underworld, the *chthonic* gods of Greece. These an-

12. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

13. In the *Apology* 31, he said: "You have heard me speak at sundry times and in divers places of an oracle or sign which comes to me, and is the divinity which Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child; it always forbids but never commands me to do anything which I am going to do. This is what deters me from being a politician." *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated by B. Jowett, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, [1892] 1937), I, p. 414.

14. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols., 4th ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963). It was first published in 1945.

15. An exception is the monograph by E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951).

imistic gods were believed to inhabit the fields of every household, threatening hauntings and revenge against any male head of household who failed to maintain the proper rituals and sacrifices. A wife was assigned the task of keeping the household hearth-altar burning, from which we derive the phrase, “keep the home fires burning.” The study of these gods has been confined to academic specialists—one might call them eccentrics—in fields such as archeology and art history. The detailed researches of Cambridge University archeologist Jane Ellen Harrison and her disciples in the early decades of the twentieth century are known to very few historians.¹⁶ Some of these books appeared in the United States only when University Books, a publishing house specializing in reprints of scholarly materials related to the occult and the paranormal, and its adjunct Mystic Arts Book Club, reprinted them in the early 1960s.¹⁷ References to these extraordinary materials rarely appear even in specialized monographs on classical civilization.

Has this blackout been deliberate? Yes. Those scholars who have known the truth have generally kept their mouths shut. Consider Werner Jaeger, author of the multi-volume masterpiece on Greek education, *Paideia*. Hugh Nibley, the remarkable Mormon scholar and linguist, studied under him at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1930s. In an autobiographical essay, Nibley told of his studies in Hebrew and Arabic (he could learn a new language in a few weeks). “The most illustrious visiting scholar of the time was Werner Jaeger, who favored me with long chats and frank revelations over the teacups (my refusal to drink the stuff made an indelible impression on him and his wife). Professor Jaeger knew very well, he told me, that the Greeks were part of a wider Oriental complex, but he had to bypass all that in his study of the Greek mind, because it tended to disturb the neatness and balance of his great work on Greek Education.”¹⁸ That “wider Oriental complex” was both mystical and occult, as Jaeger well knew. It was a powerful underground stream in both Greek and Renaissance

16. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1922] 1991). The first edition appeared in 1903. (<http://bit.ly/jehptsogr>)

17. Harrison, *Epilogomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1921) and *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (first edition, 1912; third, 1922), (New York: University Books, 1962). John Cuthbert Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (New York: University Books, [1910] 1964).

18. Hugh W. Nibley, “An Intellectual Autobiography,” in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley*, vol. 1 (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), p. xxiii.

philosophy, and without which both would have dried up.¹⁹ The two traditions were united on one presupposition: man is the creator in history.

2. *Academic Blackout: The Renaissance*

A similar academic blackout has operated with respect to the Renaissance's recovery of Greek culture. The rational side of the Renaissance is the textbook account. Only since the mid-1960s has the occult side been rediscovered. The major figure in this reconsideration of the occult side of the Renaissance has been Francis Yates, who held no academic position in the British university system during her years of publishing.²⁰ Stephen McKnight's 1989 monograph on Renaissance thought is to the point: recent studies of the Renaissance have made mandatory a reconsideration of the origins of modernity. Secularization, the main theme, must be complemented by its opposite, sacralization. It was not just the secular tradition of Classical civilization that Renaissance scholars revived; it was also the magical-mystical side. Professor McKnight wrote: "In addition to the humanist revival of the *studia humanitatis*, the Neoplatonists rediscovered the *prisca theologia*. These materials, which were regarded as the earliest and purist non-Christian revelations, led Ficino and his followers to a new understanding of human nature. *Sacralization* is the term used to characterize this view of man as a terrestrial god capable of controlling the natural world and perfecting society."²¹ None of this was taught in my undergraduate days in the early 1960s, and it is still not in the Western Civilization textbooks.

B. The Standard of Written Law

We come now to another representative example of conventional scholarship's assessment of the legacy of Greece. Bruno Leoni, a professor of both legal theory and political science at the University of

19. Thomas Molnar, *God and the Knowledge of Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

20. Her best-known work is *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage, [1964] 1969). Cf. Yates, *Theater of the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (New York: Methuen, 1986); *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (New York: Methuen, 1983); *Collected Essays*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

21. Stephen A. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 109.

Pavia, offered this bit of Greek mythology: "The ideal of a written law, generally conceived and knowable by every citizen of the small and glorious towns scattered all along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and inhabited by people of Greek descent, is one of the most precious gifts that the fathers of Western civilization have bequeathed to their posterity."²² He then cited Aristotle as one source of this legal tradition.²³

This is propaganda, not historical scholarship. First, there were comparatively few citizens in any of those Greek towns. Classical legal theory established separate legal orders for citizens, resident aliens, women, and slaves. Only citizens—males who could lawfully participate in the religious rites of the city—possessed legal rights.²⁴ At least one-third of the population was composed of slaves.²⁵ This is a vastly higher percentage than anything in the ancient Near East.²⁶ In all Greek and Roman establishments larger than the family, manual labor was done by slaves.²⁷ The written law did not defend their liberty. The principle of written law may have helped citizens, but it gave little protection to the majority of residents.

From the point of view of the slaves, the Greeks' defeat of Darius' Persian army in 490 B.C. at the battle of Marathon was a disaster. So was the defeat of Xerxes' fleet at the battle of Salamis in 480. Liberation from slavery had been imminent. The textbooks never consider this possibility. The Greeks are viewed as defenders of liberty and culture; the Persians are seen as barbarian tyrants. But Persia allowed the Israelites to return to their land and worship God openly (Ezra, Nehemiah). Christian students seldom connect the two accounts. It is as if the Persians were two different societies: one tolerant (the biblical account) and the other barbarian (the Greek version).

Second, the principle of a written body of law that is knowable to

22. Bruno Leoni, *Freedom and the Law* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1961), pp. 73–74.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

24. On this point, see Fustel, *Ancient City*, Bk. III, chaps. XI–XII. Leoni dismisses Fustel's observation on the Greek concept of freedom as being fundamentally different from ours. Fustel has been "successfully revised in recent times," Leoni said, but he offers no footnotes to prove his point (p. 79).

25. M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking, 1980), p. 80. It was one-third in Athens: A. H. M. Jones, "Slavery in the Ancient World," *Economic History Review*, Second Series, IX (1956), p. 187.

26. Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery In the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 119.

27. Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, p. 81.

all residents of a commonwealth had been the gift of God to Israel over a millennium before Aristotle taught political philosophy to the world-class conqueror Alexander the Great. God inscribed His law on tablets of stone—a graphic way of communicating the principle of written law. The Mosaic law required that every seventh year the entire law be read to the assembled nation: men, women, children, and resident aliens (Deut. 31:10–13).²⁸ To argue that Aristotle was the source of this tradition in the West is nothing short of ludicrous. It is, however, typical of humanist scholarship.

Written law in Greece, yes. Freedom? Not for many and not for long. Political success in Athens was based on a man's ability as a public speaker. This led to the rise of the Sophists, who sold the skills of rhetoric to the highest bidders—the superlawyers of their day. Historian Morton Smith wrote that “Athenians were litigious, and any man might find himself compelled to argue for his fortune, if not his life, before a court of several hundred of his fellow citizens. It was necessary to speak for oneself, though a writer might be hired to prepare the speech. By their studies of rhetoric, argument (whence logic), and grammar, the sophists laid the basis of Greek higher education, from which was to come the mediaeval university program. By their immediate teaching, however, they—intentionally or unintentionally—obscured the traditional patterns of Greek morality and raised up a generation of skeptics prepared to argue for any action which seemed to their own interest.”²⁹ Otto Scott is even more to the point: “These *sophistae* (teachers of wisdom) taught young adults, for the first time in history. They charged enormous sums: Protagoras demanded 10,000 drachmas (\$100,000—or the equivalent of a modern university [education]) for the education of a single pupil. The Sophists introduced civilization's first ‘enlightenment’ which questioned tradition, religion, morals and all values.”³⁰ In short, they were the law school professors of their day: they undermined moral law.

The decline of traditional morality, accompanied by increasing Athenian wealth and political power, led the city into a series of military confrontations with Sparta, culminating in the Peloponnesian war, beginning in 431 B.C., a war that Athens lost. It was in this period of

28. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

29. Morton Smith, *The Ancient Greeks* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 72.

30. Otto Scott, “The Death of Socrates,” *Chalcedon Report* (Aug. 1991), p. 3.

defeat and despair that Athens executed Socrates in 399 B.C. He had been perceived by many critics as a Sophist. They were essentially correct: he was, in fact, a sophisticated dialectician who defended the existence a hypothetical realm of absolute knowledge, but also insisted that no one, including himself, had been able to enter it—a sophist's ploy if there ever was one. He was also a political authoritarian.³¹ In terms of his philosophical undermining of Greek religion, the Athenians' perception of Socrates was correct. He was guilty as charged. (He was also a defender of pederasty with adolescents, but that did not bother Athenians any more than it bothers his apologists today.)³²

C. Demythologizing the Greeks

War characterized Greek life as much as democracy and written law. War was a way of life, especially among the smaller city-states.³³ This includes civil wars, which were frequent outside of Athens and Sparta.³⁴ Then there was judicial and cultural inequality. The world-renowned Classical historian Moses Finley wrote: "In this society of unequals, the elite who dominated all activities, political, military, athletic, and cultural, constituted a single group. . . . The acceptance by 'the many' of this perpetual domination by 'the few' is a significant fact in classical Greek history, even in Athens during its most democratic period, from the time of Pericles to the time of Alexander the Great."³⁵

Something else characterized Greek political life: the absolute power of the state. There was no appeal beyond it. Finley has accurately summarized the nature of Greek politics: "In political terms, the power possessed by the community was total. That is to say, within the limits imposed by 'rule of law', however that was understood, and by certain taboos in the fields of cult and sexual relations, the sovereign body was unrestrictedly free in its decision-making. There were areas or facets of human behaviour in which it normally did not interfere, but that was only because it chose not to, or did not think to do so. There were no natural rights of the individual to inhibit action by the state, no inalienable rights granted or sanctioned by a higher authority.

31. Popper, *Open Society*, vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato*.

32. Plato, *Symposium*, sections 181–82.

33. M. I. Finley, "Introduction," *The Legacy of Greece*, ed. M. I. Finley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1981] 1988), p. 15.

34. Finley, "Politics and Political Theory," *ibid.*, p. 25.

35. Finley, "Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 15.

There was no higher authority."³⁶

1. *The Legacy of Pericles*

To prove his case for Greece as a major source of Western legal theory, Leoni cited Pericles' funeral oration of 430 B.C., which was eloquent in its defense of the political freedom of Athenian citizens.³⁷ This oration was wartime rhetoric from Athens' senior politician, delivered in the first year of the war with Sparta. This speech is regarded as one of the classic documents in Western civilization. The textbooks laud both Pericles and his speech (as reconstructed by Thucydides). Rarely are students told what followed. A year after Pericles gave his famous speech, a great plague hit maritime Athens, though hardly at all in Sparta and the inland cities of the Peloponnesian alliance,³⁸ and this led to the destruction of Athenian civil religion and personal morality.³⁹ Pericles' two sons died in the plague. Athens then sought peace with Sparta, which Sparta rejected. Pericles was suspended from his post and put on trial for a minor offense. He was subsequently re-elected to the post, having eloquently defended the necessity of empire, especially since the other city-states regarded it as immoral; it was too risky to quit now, he warned them. They responded to his call, and Athens' imperial war raged on. He died a year later.⁴⁰ The war continued for the next 25 years. Sparta won. Some Periclean legacy!

The rule of written Athenian law may have applied within the city, but not beyond its borders. Whenever it was regarded as necessary to extend Athenian control, Athenians ruthlessly suppressed the liberties of the lesser cities of the Athenian empire (the Delian League), which lasted from 478 B.C., the year after the second Persian invasion was repulsed by the allied city-states, until 404 B.C., when Athens was defeated by Sparta. For example, under Pericles' political leadership in 454 B.C., Athens moved the League's treasury from Delos to the

36. Finley, "Politics," *ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

37. Leoni, *Freedom and the Law*, p. 78.

38. Bury, *History of Greece*, p. 390.

39. Thucydides wrote: "No one was eager to persevere in the ideals of honour. . . . They thought that it made no difference whether they worshipped God or not, as they saw all alike perishing; no one expected to live to be brought to trial for his offences, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them all and hung ever over their heads, and before this fell it was only reasonable to enjoy life a little." Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, edited in translation by Sir Richard Livingstone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), II:53, p. 122.

40. Bury, *History of Greece*, p. 391.

Athenian Acropolis. This was done in the name of a required religious payment to Athena, Athens' official goddess. The records indicate that one-sixtieth of the funds collected were registered as payments to the goddess.⁴¹ Some of these funds were then siphoned off to help finance Athens' gigantic public works construction programs: the famous statues and architectural glories of Periclean Athens. Bury admitted that it was bad imperial politics for Athens to extract these funds, however minimal, from the other cities in the league.⁴² When challenged by Thucydides regarding this policy, Athens voted to ostracize Thucydides, thus ending any significant political opposition to Pericles. The voters were swayed by Pericles' argument that the other cities had nothing to say about it, just so long as Athens defended them. The League's members supposedly had no right to interfere with the allocation of these funds, however large or small.⁴³ No accounting to the cities was necessary. In effect, this was a form of forced tribute to Athens. Athens also forced the other cities to withdraw their coinage and substitute Athenian coins.⁴⁴ Athens sent "inspectors," established garrisons, and sent small colonies of Athenians to the subject cities.⁴⁵ Yet Periclean Athens supposedly was the source of the ideal of written civil law in the West. So said Professor Leoni. He has not been alone in this opinion.

It was this growing Athenian empire that led Sparta into its own confederation. The city-states of Greece deeply resented Athens' violations of their religious and legal autonomy. Historian David Greene summarized the fundamental issue raised by Athenian tyranny: "By what right had Athens virtually obliterated the external autonomy of the various states which had originally joined her League of Delos against the menace of a recurrent Persian invasion? This was the out-spoken question or indignant charge put by every state outside the Athenian sphere of influence. . . . There is no doubt that, in exercising control over the external affairs of her confederate allies, Athens was outraging the accepted code of international Greek morality as it had existed from before the Persian wars."⁴⁶

41. J. K. Davies, *Democracy and Classical Greece* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), p. 78.

42. Bury, *History of Greece*, p. 356.

43. *Idem.*

44. Davies, pp. 87–88.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 88–90.

46. 46. David Greene, *Greek Political Theory: The Image of Man in Thucydides and Plato* (University of Chicago Phoenix Book, [1950] 1965), p. 43. Originally published as

Thucydides explained the growth of the Athenian empire as a kind of natural or inevitable force rather than as one city's blatant grab for centralized power, but his words did not make it so. His explanation does, however, closely fit the presuppositions of modern historians and political theorists, who see the march of democracy and the rise of a secular one-world state as intertwined events. They love Thucydides. He seems so much like one of them.⁴⁷ So does Thucydides' version of Pericles, who has become a kind of precursor to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the eyes of modern American scholars. Greene's description of Pericles deserves wider circulation: "Yet the democracy whose dynamic was greed and fear and whose might was the offspring of that greed and fear was held in check by a single autocrat whose rule it accepted because he was not as other men were. In this voluntary acquiescence of the vulgar, in this submission to the statesman who neither flattered nor feared them but who put heart into them or made them tremble with the witchcraft of his own aloof certainty. Thucydides may have seen the transcendence of the materialism in which he believed. Here was power as it truthfully was, based on fear, pride, and greed, yet it touched something too magical for measurement."⁴⁸

The political reality undergirding Pericles' rhetorical flourish did not survive the fall of Athens to Sparta, and the fall of both to Macedonia over the next 75 years. Academic defenders of this classic Greek mythology need to demonstrate the connection between (1) what a handful of Greek philosophers, mostly followers of Socrates, believed about civil law in the fourth century B.C., during which "Greece's" (Athens') relatively brief experiment with democracy was rapidly fading, and (2) the historical reality of Greek law in the city-states. The connection does exist, but it is publicly embarrassing for most defenders of Greek democracy—politically incorrect, we might say. One thing is certain: the Athenians of Socrates' day had very little in common with him and his students. Aristophanes' comedy, *The Clouds*, had Athenians howling derisively at the antics of Socrates and members of his academy. They condemned him to death in 399 B.C.

Yet there was a crucial connection between Athenian politics and Socratic political theory—something the textbooks always fail to mention. They shared a political opinion, as Finley has so accurately pointed out: *political man, irrespective of the desires of the gods, can do*

Man in His Pride: A Study in the Political Philosophy of Thucydides and Plato.

47. He was no democrat; he preferred oligarchy. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

whatever he can get away with.⁴⁹ There was no infallible revelation, written or verbal, in Greek religion.⁵⁰ Political man therefore had to fear other men, not the gods. Athens feared Socrates, whose commitment to Athenian citizenship was so strong that he preferred hemlock to exile.⁵¹ This presupposition of unbounded political authority is what connects the Athenian Greeks with today's disciples of human autonomy and political salvation.

Modern textbooks fail to mention the following two facts. First, it was not Socrates who persuaded the Greeks of this political worldview; he merely shifted its basis of authority from political tradition to political philosophy. Second, authors fail to admit openly that their textbooks are written in terms of this same philosophy of autonomous man, and usually also in terms of political salvation: the corporate healing power of politics. All of the other supposed connections between classical Greece and the modern world—judicial, analytical, or aesthetic—are either fanciful or else subordinate applications of the presuppositional one: political man is autonomous, and man is fundamentally political.

2. The Judicial Legacy

Leoni did not bother to show the Greek legal tradition was passed along to the Christian West. Contrary to Leoni, the Greeks of Periclean Athens left no judicial legacy to the West. Historian Joseph R. Strayer wrote: "But whatever their constitution, they did not develop a legal tradition that persisted in the West. The Greeks were deeply concerned with law, but since each small community had its own laws, tailored to fit the needs of that community, it was hard to develop general principles applicable to all of the Greek-ruled areas. By the time that the Greeks had developed such principles, they had been swallowed up by the Hellenistic monarchies, which, in turn, were swallowed up by Rome."⁵²

49. Finley, "Politics and Political Theory," pp. 23–24.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

51. Contrary to Plato's immortal but second-hand account at the end of the *Phaedo* dialogue, hemlock burns the mouth and abdomen. Nausea and vomiting are common. Hemlock drinkers do not wax philosophical as they slowly fade away. See William B. Ober, *Boswell's Clap and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), ch. 10; cited by Otto Scott, "The Death of Socrates," *Chalcedon Report* (Aug. 1991), p. 4.

52. Joseph R. Strayer, "The Rule of Law," in *Aspects of American Liberty: Philosophical, Historical, and Political* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society,

Bury wrote much the same thing: contrary to Pericles' funeral oration, Athens did not become the school of Greece until after the collapse of the empire. Athens became influential through its philosophers and through its new position as a clearing house of cosmopolitan influences—in short, through its Hellenism. In fact, he argued, Athens had more influence through its theater than through anything else.⁵³ It was Hellenism, with its cosmopolitanism, that produced the famed Athenian individualism. The Athenian's covenantal bond to his city—his *polis*—had been broken. "The citizen of Athens has become a citizen of the world."⁵⁴ That is to say, he had become no citizen at all—no civic oath, no democratic sanctions, and no political or judicial legacy to pass on to posterity. Instead, he and his peers, to the extent that they left a judicial legacy to the future, did so by abandoning their inheritance from the past: the judicial ideal of the *polis*. The politically minded intellectuals among them—and there were fewer and fewer of them as the fourth century progressed—adopted a new ideal.

D. Stoic Natural Law Theory

This later Hellenistic intellectual development was Stoic natural law philosophy, which was the product of the collapse of the Greek city-states. Natural law theory was not the foundation of Athenian democratic politics. Stoic natural law theory was used to justify the new world empires of Macedonia and Rome. The Stoic concept of the rule of universal law was exclusively philosophical, not judicial. The foundation of Stoic philosophy was a denial of the Creator-creature distinction. Its outlook was summed up by Epictetus: "When a man has learnt to understand the government of the universe and has realized that there is nothing so great or sovereign or all-inclusive as this frame of things wherein man and God are united . . . why should he not call himself a citizen of the universe and a son of God?"⁵⁵

Stoicism offered no basis for political theory. Stoic man, as a citizen of the universe, did not regard participation in politics as the means of maintaining his universal citizenship. This citizenship was granted to him by natural law. Wolin has identified the elitism of such

1977), p. 17.

53. Bury, *History of Greece*, p. 560.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

55. Epictetus, *Discourses*, I:9; cited by Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), p. 80.

a view of citizenship, “a kind of invisible church of rational beings.”⁵⁶ Wolin cites the Stoic emperor (and persecutor of the church),⁵⁷ Marcus Aurelius, who defended the existence of common reason, common law, and common citizenship. This rational ideal became the foundation for empire, a one-world state and one-state world: “For of what other common political community will any one say that the whole human race are members?”⁵⁸

Citing the same passage, C. N. Cochrane is even more forthright regarding the pretensions of this absolute religion of reason: “In point of fact, it constitutes an audacious anthropomorphism, a kind of sky-writing⁵⁹ which projects upon the cosmos a merely human rationality and translates it into an account of nature and of God.”⁶⁰ Stoic natural law theory was a pagan attempt to restructure the universe in terms of man’s reason. It was the antithesis of biblical law, which places man under God’s absolute sovereignty, mediated by His revealed law. Stoicism’s command was “follow nature.”⁶¹ This means following autonomous reason.⁶² In contrast, the Bible’s command is “follow God” by obeying His law. By following nature, Classical man found himself divided, for nature was seen as an unstable combination of chance and luck on the one hand and impersonal necessity and fate on the other.⁶³ He was trapped either by the non-politics of anarchy or the submissive politics of passivity. In contrast, by following God by obeying His law, Christian man attaches himself judicially (covenantally) to the sovereign Creator of the universe in whom there is neither chance nor impersonal fate. The politics of justice becomes both a possibility and a moral imperative.

E. The Medieval Synthesis

The West derived its crucial judicial ideal of equality before the

56. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p. 80.

57. Justin Martyr died under his reign.

58. *Idem*.

59. An advertising device of the 1930s and 1940s in which a small airplane, spewing white smoke, would spell out words in the sky. In the 1939 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, there is a scene where the witch sky-writes *Dorothy* in black smoke from her broom.

60. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957), p. 167. (<http://bit.ly/cnccacc>). Reprinted by Liberty Press.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–59.

law from the Bible. Much later, in medieval legal theory, Roman jurisprudence (especially in the writings of the twelfth-century canon lawyers, the Decretists),⁶⁴ Aristotelian philosophy (especially in Aquinas: *d.* 1274), and Stoic natural law theory were added to justify this biblical ideal. But Western legal theory today denies the original theological foundation which undergirded the explicitly biblical idea of equality before the law: specially revealed law.

Under the influence of Greek philosophy, especially Stoicism, and Roman law, a new guild of Western legal theorists appeared in the twelfth century. They were early academics. They moved from the acceptance of customary tribal laws (civil) and penitential law (ecclesiastical) to the ideal of universal natural law in the guise of a revival of Roman imperial law.⁶⁵ This judicial transformation was accompanied by a parallel development among philosophers: an attempted fusion of the Greek concept of autonomous reason and the biblical ideal of God's revealed law. Scholasticism promised that Classical wisdom would be tamed by Christianity. But the conquest of Classicism by Christianity was not to be; the reverse was increasingly the case in intellectual affairs. Rationalist heresies invaded the universities, and they could not be removed.⁶⁶ Bolgar is correct: "Men found that they could not simply sort out the good and the bad, to treasure the former and discard the latter."⁶⁷

Scholasticism's philosophical synthesis was inherently both epistemologically and ethically unstable, and from the fourteenth century onward, it steadily disintegrated. Scholasticism left the church vulnerable to William of Ockham's nominalist dualism between reason (with authority over the realm of civil affairs and science) and revelation (with authority confined to the soul and the cloister).⁶⁸ Professor Eta Linnemann, a former defender of the higher criticism of the Bible and

64. Brian Tierney, *Religion, law, and the growth of constitutional thought, 1150–1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), ch. II. They were called Decretists because they were commentators on *Gratian's Decretum* (*Concord of Discordant Canons*, c. 1140).

65. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

66. Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World, 1100–1350* (New York: World, [1961] 1962), chaps. 9, 10.

67. R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries: From the Carolingian Age to the End of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1954] 1964), p. 205.

68. Gordon Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1957).

a new convert to the faith, describes Scholasticism's attempted fusion of the Bible and Greek philosophy: "Scholasticism undertook 'to bring the new rational knowledge into agreement with the articles of faith'—an effort which set the tone for all the theological exertions of the High and Late Middle Ages. But it had made a weighty and fateful decision! Instead of bearing in mind that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3), it was assumed that man requires the worldly wisdom of paganism right alongside God's Word in order to make real intellectual progress. God's Word was reduced to just one of two focal points for determining wisdom and knowledge. The Bible came to be regarded as authoritative only in those areas touching on redemption and the Christian life. Aristotle, in contrast, became the source of all valid knowledge of the world, that is, for the realm of natural sciences, social analysis, and so on. From then on, in other words, God's Word was no longer regarded as reliable for these areas of knowledge. Later, Aristotelian philosophy would be replaced by newly developed sciences that hastily blamed the cosmological errors of Aristotle on God's Word."⁶⁹

F. The Modern Savior State

Natural law theory became secularized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From this secularized version of natural law theory in the late eighteenth century the West's constitutional theory moved to *positive law*: law as the voice of the sovereign People, as interpreted by officials of the state. But positive law has long been regarded as sovereign only within national boundaries. Traces of natural law theory have survived only in international law theory, which has few agreed-upon sanctions and is seldom honored by the more powerful nations when cases go against them. International law had no common agent of enforcement until the twentieth century. International order is today seen as an evolutionary development, not as the culmination of fixed principles of natural law.⁷⁰ The moral and institutional demands of the internationalists are therefore unbounded and open-

69. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 24.

70. "International *organization* is a process; international *organizations* are representative aspects of the phase of that process which has been reached at a given time." Inis L. Claude, Jr., *Swords Into Ploughshares: The Problems and Progress of International Relations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 4.

ended.⁷¹ President John F. Kennedy stated the following messianic premises forthrightly in 1961 at the memorial service of Dag Hammarskjöld, the deceased Secretary General of the United Nations: "Political sovereignty is but a mockery without the means of meeting poverty and illiteracy and disease. Self-determination is but a slogan if the future holds no hope."⁷² The judicial link between political sovereignty and positive sanctions of physical and intellectual healing is explicit in Kennedy's statement; unless the state can heal, it has no legitimacy. *The state must become a savior.*

The issue is therefore final sovereignty. The international state becomes King of kings. In the absence of a higher court, the final earthly court of appeal necessarily must claim divine sovereignty, i.e., *divine right*: the final word beyond which there is no meaningful earthly appeal in history. The world state becomes the voice of authority. Today, this means the divine sovereignty of politics. This has been the career of natural law theory in the West: from the divine sovereignty of natural law to the divine sovereignty of politics—the voice of the people. President George H. W. Bush announced to the U.S. Congress in the fall of 1990:

A new partnership of nations has begun.

We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled

71. The New World Order, incarnated judicially in the League of Nations and then the United Nations, was proclaimed throughout the twentieth century by various humanists. This international legal order has not been defended theoretically in terms of natural law theory—which limits the state—but rather in terms of either the needs of man, which are inherently unlimited, or national self-interest, which is left undefined. Write two academic defenders of the United Nations regarding the failure of the League of Nations: "Yet for a decade and a half people throughout the world looked to the League as the instrument by which it might be possible to establish peace and stability in the world and to assist mankind in its uneven progress toward greater freedom and happiness." Leland M. Goodrich and Edvard Hambro, *Charter of the United Nations: Commentary and Documents*, 2nd ed. (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1949), p. 3. Peace and stability, progress and happiness: these are unbounded goals. Wrote a prominent academic defender of international political order: "International organizations exist simply because they are needed; we belong to them simply because it serves our national interest to belong—and because it would damage our national interest to remain aloof." Richard N. Gardner, *In Pursuit of World Order: U.S. Foreign Policy and International Organizations* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. xi.

72. John F. Kennedy, "An Address to the United Nations" (Sept. 25, 1961), in *The United States and the United Nations*, ed. Franz B. Gross (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 283.

times, our fifth objective—a new world order—can emerge: a new era, freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, east and west, north and south, can prosper and live in harmony.

A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born. A world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.⁷³

The Messianic State becomes covenant-breaking man's hoped-for lord and savior. Whenever it appears in history, the biblical concept of freedom is put on the defensive. But the Messianic State creates a series of problems that are unsolvable, given the presuppositions of autonomous man. Strayer has sketched some of the dilemmas of modern salvational politics, from the Renaissance to today. We are headed, he said, toward the breakdown in law, but in the name of law. "As in the sixteenth century, the state is intervening in areas that it had not touched before, but this time it is doing so not because it seeks to increase its power but because it is trying to satisfy its citizens. As in the sixteenth century, the new liberties are not yet merged with the old liberties, and it is difficult to reconcile the two. Is it proper, for example, to interfere with the right of free speech in order to advance the rights of minorities? The rule of law is threatened by the burdens that we place upon the law. We expect the laws to solve our problems when we ourselves have not agreed on acceptable solutions. We expect the laws to impose patterns of common responsibility for the welfare of a society so complex that no one knows what those patterns should be. We expect the laws to make us good, when the most that the law can do is to make it possible for us to seek the good. The result is complication, confusion, uncertainty in understanding the law, and intolerable delays in the administration of justice. This situation invites, as it did in the sixteenth century, arbitrary administrative decisions that by-pass ordinary legal procedures. It would be ironic if the forces that led to the establishment of the rule of law should be forces that lead to the breakdown of the law. But history is full of such ironies, and no so-

73. "Text of President Bush's Address to Joint Sessions of Congress," *New York Times* (Sept. 12, 1990).

ciety can be sure that it will escape them."⁷⁴

One society can be sure of its ability to escape such destructive dilemmas: a biblical covenant society that remains faithful to the theological, moral, and judicial terms of the covenant. But modern man does not want to consider this option. He prefers the historical uncertainties and eternal certainties of a broken covenant.

Conclusion

Leoni argued that written civil law was the great legacy of Greece to the modern world. What he really meant was a particular kind of written civil law: *written civil law in the absence of written revelation that is authoritative over civil law*. He should have been more forthright. So should his humanist peers. The idea that law can and should be written down is quite ancient. The idea comes from a far more fundamental idea, namely, that God has revealed Himself to His people by means of law—first verbal, then written. God has spoken an authoritative primary word; man should therefore speak a secondary word that is in covenantal conformity to God's primary word. This assertion was the judicial foundation of ancient Israel. This was Israel's legacy to the Christian church, and this became the church's legacy to the West.

This legacy was challenged at the beginning of the church by the remnants of Classical Greece's essentially political legacy, but disguised as autonomous, philosophically neutral rationalism: *the political autonomy of man and the primacy of politics*. The Stoics abandoned this political faith, but only by seeking an escape from politics in an era of Roman tyranny. They capitulated intellectually.

The war in history between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man is still being fought in terms of these rival creeds, these rival views of written civil law. It is a war over the correct way of salvation: through politics or grace. This war will continue until the final judgment.

74. Strayer, "Rule of Law," *Aspects of American Liberty*, p. 36.

Appendix E

THE COVENANTAL STRUCTURE OF JUDGMENT

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).

A. Judgment: Analogical vs. Autonomous

We are called in this verse to exercise righteous judgment. This means that God has given us standards of righteousness. All judges are to be judged by the cosmic Judge of judges. We are required to regard God as the final Judge. When we exercise judgment, whether in the sense of self-government or in the sense of civil judgment, we must bear in mind that God is watching and recording all that we do. *The creation of a righteous civil order is necessarily based on a presumption of God as the final Judge.* The rejection of this presumption leads inevitably to the destruction of the judicial foundations of a righteous civil order.

Put another way, the ideal of civil theocracy—the public authority of God’s Bible-revealed law over the civil order—is an extension of the doctrine of God’s absolutely sovereign rule over history and eternity. This is why secular man rejects biblical theocracy; he prefers democracy: the rule of autonomous man. This is also why Christians who reject civil theocracy as a judicial ideal generally reject the Calvinist doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God and increasingly reject any strong emphasis in preaching on the doctrine of eternal punishment.

The triumph of the Renaissance-Enlightenment ideal of autonomous man and autonomous politics has captured the minds of the vast majority of Protestant Christians. They are totally ashamed of the ideal of civil theocracy and somewhat embarrassed by the doctrine of hell.¹

1. An example of the post-World War II drift away from the Bible took place in

Christ is acknowledged as King of kings and Judge of judges, but only in the world beyond the grave. Until then, they affirm, man is at least partially sovereign over history ("free will") and totally sovereign over politics.

The social order is not a product of the civil order. It is the product of religion.² It is much broader than politics. But the social order must be defended by law. This is why the civil order must be structurally and judicially consistent with the social order. If such consistency is lacking, there will be social conflict, leading ultimately either to tyranny or anarchy: the radical one or the radical many. There is such consistency in a biblical social order, which rests on the doctrine of the Trinity: the equal ultimacy of the one (the Godhead) and the many (three Persons). Rushdoony wrote of the Chalcedon creed (451 A.D.): "Thus the equal ultimacy of the one and the many was further defended. The truth about life was neither unity nor particularity, neither social atomism nor totalitarianism, but rather the equal importance of both the one and the many. The Trinity, three persons, one God, made impossible any legitimate Christian totalitarianism or atomism: the one and the many are equally ultimate in the triune God."³ This is why it is a denial of the biblical foundations of social order to allow those who do not publicly affirm by formal oath the existence of the God of

May, 1989, at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, near Chicago, Illinois. Trinity, with assistance from the National Association of Evangelicals, held a conference of 385 theologians, Christian leaders, and laymen: "Evangelical Affirmations/89." The goal of conference organizers Carl F. H. Henry and Kenneth Kantzer was to develop a document defining the word "evangelical." See *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kantzer and Packer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1990).

At this conference, a debate broke out over the doctrine of "annihilationism," also known as "conditionalism," a doctrine held by Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, etc. It teaches that there is only annihilation for unregenerate sinners in eternity—no hell or lake of fire. Theologian J. I. Packer adamantly pressed the assembly to adopt a statement affirming the traditional creedal position of eternal punishment, but to no avail. The voice vote was split, but the chairman declared that those refusing to include a positive statement (i.e., that hell exists) on such a negative idea (i.e., that God torments covenant-breakers) had been in the majority. In the section of the book that lists the evangelical affirmations, under "Second Coming and Judgment," there is no reference to the lake of fire. It states merely that "Unbelievers will be separated eternally from God" (p. 36). For an account of this conference, see *World* (June 3, 1989), p. 9.

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998). (<http://bit.ly/rjrfso>)

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), p. 173. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

the Bible to impose political and judicial sanctions on those who do.⁴

To understand the true nature of any social order, we must understand the covenantal structure of judgment. Because the biblical covenant has five parts, the structure of judgment is in five parts. This essay presents the biblical model that should be used to evaluate the judicial orders of rival societies.

B. The Absolute Sovereignty of God in Judgment

God is transcendent. He is not an aspect of the creation. He is present with it; He is not immanent or immersed in it. This is point one of the biblical covenant model: transcendence. God created the universe. It is dependent on Him. God is the final Judge because God is the Creator. He is sovereign over creation because He produced creation out of nothing. The autonomous power of His sovereign creative word created all things: "Let there be. . . ." Therefore, the autonomous power of His sovereign judicial word governs all things. The denial in the West of God's six-day creation, beginning in the eighteenth century, was followed decade by decade by a denial of God's law and sovereign judgeship. This development should surprise no one. That neo-evangelical theologians who never affirmed the six-day creation are today equally unwilling to affirm the doctrine of hell should also surprise no one.⁵

The structure of the creation reflects the very being of God: it is both one and many.⁶ The creation is diverse, yet it is unified under the sovereignty of one God. The creation was originally undeveloped, though originally perfect.

The creation is sustained by God: the doctrine of providence. Nature is not impersonal. It is totally personal.⁷ Men are to begin with God as the foundation of their social theories.

C. Constitutional Legitimacy

The second point of the biblical covenant model is hierarchy/ authority. God possesses lawful authority over man because God is the

4. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

5. See footnote #1.

6. Rushdoony wrote that "we have a temporal one and many in the created universe." Rushdoony, *The One and the Many*, p. 10.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

Founder. He is the Founder of the covenant. He announces a binding covenant in history. In political theory, we call this fundamental covenant a *constitution*. The constitution sets forth the fundamental law of the society: point three of the biblical covenant model. The covenant is, in the words of Meredith G. Kline, the treaty of the great king.⁸ This constitution is the legal foundation of all subsequent legislation and judicial interpretation. It is the positive source of legitimacy of all civil government.⁹ It serves as a negative restraining factor in the administration of civil justice.¹⁰ That is, it provides *judicial boundaries* on state officials. It also provides the rules of interpretation that must govern all of the courts and juries in the land. These rules of interpretation are two-fold. First, they are *moral*: good vs. evil. Second, they are *procedural*: predictable vs. unpredictable.

There must be consistency between these two aspects of the judicial rules, and there must be widespread confidence in this consistency if people are to exercise self-government. On the one hand, if they believe that the judicial system is predictable (formally rational) but ethically corrupt, they will exercise self-government in ways that are inconsistent with the stated goals of the social order. They will seek ways to “beat the system” legally by using the formal rules of the judicial system to achieve their own personal ends—ends that are in conflict with the society’s stated ethical goals. A classic example of this was Vladimir Bukovsky’s successful attempt in the early 1970s, as a prisoner in a Soviet concentration camp, to use the camps’ formal rules of written protest to paralyze the operation of the camp.¹¹ On the other hand, if they perceive the legal system as ethical (substantively rational) but ju-

8. Meredith G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963).

9. According to Max Weber, “First, and in a positive sense, government must have a legitimate basis for its own jurisdiction; a modern government exercises its functions as a ‘legitimate’ jurisdiction, which means legally that it is regarded as resting on authorization by the constitutional norms of the state.” Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, [1924] 1968), p. 644. This is the English translation of the fourth edition of Weber’s incomplete and posthumously published work, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.

10. Weber continued: “Secondly, and in a negative sense, the limitations on the power of the state by law and vested rights create those restraints upon its freedom of action to which it must adjust itself.” *Idem*.

11. He told this story in his book, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissident* (New York: Viking, 1979), pp. 37–40. I summarize this incident in my book, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19:C.

ditionally unpredictable and arbitrary, they will be unable to exercise self-government consistent with the stated goals of the social order. They will not trust the civil courts. They will not be able to understand the operations of the judicial system and its behavioral requirements for public order. They will not know what to expect from fellow citizens, since everyone is in the dark regarding what the courts will or will not enforce. Conclusion: for the maintenance of long-term social order, there has to be consistency between the fixed ethical requirements for social order and the court system's rules of procedure. Biblical law alone provides the judicial foundations of such a consistent legal order. Secularism does not.¹² Biblical law must provide legitimacy.

The issue of legitimacy is the most important aspect of social theory, political theory, and legal theory. Everything hinges on it. A social order cannot long exist without legitimacy: public confidence that the order is in basic conformity to fundamental ethical principles. Also needed is public confidence that *right makes might*, i.e., that righteousness will triumph institutionally in the long run. There must be widespread faith in the inherent rightness of the existing legal framework of society, and therefore faith that the social order will persevere through history as a result of its inherent rightness. In other words, there must be faith in the *covenantal coherence* of the social order: (1) a sovereign force (personal or impersonal) guarantees that *if* (2) those judicial agents who in history represent simultaneously both the force and the citizenry are faithful to (3) the force's revealed fundamental laws and norms, (4) bringing the state's negative sanctions against evil-doers, *then* there will be (5) long-term survival and prosperity for those under the society's jurisdiction. Where any of these aspects is lacking, or believed to be lacking, the social order suffers a decline in legitimacy. So

12. It was Max Weber's insight, as the premier humanistic social theorist of the twentieth century, that in modern secular society, there is no consistency possible in judicial rationalism. Substantive (ethical) rationalism is in permanent and irreconcilable dialectical tension with formal (procedural) rationalism. This is true not just in the legal order; it is equally true of the economic order, he argued. On his dialectical legal theory, see Weber, "Formal and Substantive Rationalization—Theocratic and Secular Law," *Economy and Society*, pp. 809–38. On the twin developments of capitalism and its relationship to a formal legal order vs. socialism and its relationship to a substantive legal order, see *Economy and Society*, pp. 100–7, 111, 224–25, 165, 856. On the whole question of Weber's dialectical analysis, see Gary North, "Max Weber: Rationalism, Irrationalism, and the Bureaucratic Cage," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), pp. 141–46.

does the political order that represents it judicially.¹³ (Amillennialism teaches *right makes impotence*.)

This is why constitutional theory is central to both social and political order. The constitution enunciates the covenantal principles of the society. It is inescapably a judicial document. Moses, as the supreme representative agent, made a constitutional declaration in Deuteronomy 4. This declaration presented the legal foundations of Israel's legitimacy, both nationally and internationally (Deut. 4:1–10).

D. The Establishment of Legal Boundaries

A law necessarily excludes certain actions. It establishes moral boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant model—ethics. The biblical legislative model is the law which prohibited Adam's access to the tree in the garden: "No Trespassing!" When Adam violated this boundary, God extended its boundaries: the edges of the garden. "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). This boundary removed from Adam the ability to transgress it without dying on the spot. Both of these boundaries restricted Adam's legal sphere of action. The initial boundary served as a test of his covenantal faithfulness. The second one did not, or at least not to the same degree. The tree had no visible negative sanction attached to it; the doorway to the garden did.

1. Exercising Judgment

As the covenant-keeper matures judicially, he is supposed to apply the details of God's revealed law more self-consciously. Every area of life is to be brought progressively under covenant-keeping man's dominion. Why everything? Because of this inescapable fact: everything we think or do apart from redeeming grace is under the reign of sin. *Therefore, everything we think or do is going to be judged at the final judgment.* Nothing in history is outside of God's final judgment. Not what we do: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl.

13. Communist societies in Eastern (Central) Europe suffered a monumental and unprecedentedly rapid (for peacetime) public breakdown in late 1989, to a large degree because of the public's loss of faith in all five aspects of the covenantal order. Power alone could no longer maintain the Communist system. Might was visibly in conflict with right.

12:14). Not what we say: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36). Not what we think: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

But if everything is going to be judged by God at the end of time, then everything is under His comprehensive law today. There cannot be an infraction apart from a law against the act. Paul wrote: “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which [was ordained] to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:9–12). *God’s law is inherently unbounded*: geographically, psychologically, institutionally. It applies to all of life. *Redemption is also necessarily unbounded*, just as sin is unbounded apart from grace. God’s grace is comprehensive—surely as comprehensive as sin’s present reign.¹⁴

This presents a problem. God’s law is concise. Life is infinitely complex. The written law does not and cannot spell out every conceivable application to every circumstance in history. Yet it applies to all of life. Thus, there will sometimes be a public action that appears to transgress the law when in fact it does not transgress it. Conversely, some acts may look legal when they are not. How can we make sense of this?

2. Gapless Law

To argue that every thought, word, and deed of every person in history is under God’s final sanctions is to argue that God’s law is gapless law. Nothing is outside it; everything is covered. Everything is inside the judicial boundaries established by God’s law. All acts are necessarily judicial acts; they are therefore inescapably personal acts. The law-order by which they are evaluated is equally personal. The law is binding on man because man is made in God’s image.

For a secular view of law to match biblical law’s comprehensive

14. Gary North, “Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action” (1981), in North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>); Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

nature, it must assert the existence of an impersonal, uncreated, yet fully developed system of generalized legal propositions. Weber describes the nature of this assertion: "According to present modes of thought it represents an integration of all analytically derived legal propositions in such a way that they constitute a logically clear, internally consistent, and, at least in theory, gapless system of rules, under which, it is implied, all conceivable fact situations must be capable of being logically subsumed lest their order lack an effective guarantee. Even today not every body of law (e.g., English law) claims that it possesses the features of a system as defined above and, of course, the claim was even less frequently made by the legal systems of the past; where it was put forward at all, the degree of logical abstraction was often extremely low."¹⁵

The modern form of this systematization, he said, was derived from Roman law.¹⁶ When Roman law was revived in the late medieval era, "it strengthened that tendency of the legal institutions themselves to become more and more abstract, which had begun already with the transformation of the Roman *ius civile* [civil law] into the law of the Empire. As Ehrlich has properly emphasized, in order for them to be received at all, the Roman legal institutions had to be cleansed of all remnants of national contextual association and to be elevated into the sphere of the logically abstract; and Roman law itself had to be absolutized as the very embodiment of right reason. The six centuries of Civil Law jurisprudence have produced exactly this result. At the same time, the modes of legal thought were turned more and more in the direction of formal logic."¹⁷ Step by step, brilliant summaries of the law were stripped of their context of specific cases and "raised to the level of ultimate legal principles from which deductive arguments were to be derived."¹⁸ A new ability was needed in order to apply this abstract law: the ability to "construe" the situation in a *logically* impeccable way.¹⁹ "In this way that conception of law which still prevails today and which sees in law a logically consistent and gapless complex of 'norms' waiting to be 'applied' became the decisive conception for legal thought."²⁰

To make plausible the existence of such a legal order, the logical

15. Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 656.

16. *Idem.* Weber did his earliest academic work in the field of Roman law.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 854.

18. *Idem.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 855.

20. *Idem.*

processes of the minds of judges have to be assumed to correspond on a one-to-one basis with the acts of men. There must be no gaps: within logic or between logic and the context of the specific act. That this requires a messianic view of man—or at least mankind's human judges—should be obvious. It means that the abstract principles of law must be as exhaustive as the contexts of all human action in every period and region, and the judge's mind must be equally exhaustive. That such a view of universal, abstract law was closely associated with the rise of the Roman Empire should not be surprising. Messianic men invariably attempt to establish messianic kingdoms. The assertion of man's exhaustive knowledge leads to the assertion of man's exhaustive authority, and vice versa.

There is also the problem of historical development. If the law is gapless, how can there be change? We are back to the old antinomy between Parmenides' unchanging, comprehensive reason and Heraclitus' ever-changing historical process. Long ago, Sir Henry Maine pointed to the legal fiction of gapless English law.

With respect to that great portion of our legal system which is enshrined in cases and recorded in law reports, we habitually employ a double language and entertain, as it would appear, a double and inconsistent set of ideas. When a group of facts come before an English Court for adjudication, the whole course of the discussion between the judge and the advocates assumes that no question is, or can be, raised which will call for the application of any principles but old ones, or of any distinctions but such as have long since been allowed. It is taken absolutely for granted that there is somewhere a rule of known law which will cover the facts of the dispute now litigated, and that, if such a rule be not discovered, it is only that the necessary patience, knowledge, or acumen is not forthcoming to detect it. Yet the moment the judgment has been rendered and reported, we slide unconsciously or unavowedly into a new language and a new train of thought. We now admit that the new decision has modified the law. The rules applicable have, to use the very inaccurate expression sometimes employed, become more elastic. In fact they have been changed. A clear addition has been made to the precedents. . . . The fact that the old rule has been repealed, and that a new one has replaced it, eludes us. . . .²¹

It is all a convenient legal fiction. "We do not admit that our

21. Sir Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society and its Relation to Modern Ideas*, 5th ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1864), p. 30. (<http://bit.ly/MaineLaw>)

tribunals legislate; we imply that they have never legislated; and yet we maintain that the rules of English common law, with some assistance from the Court of Chancery and from Parliament, are coextensive with the complicated interests of modern society.”²² There is no way theoretically to reconcile the theory of gapless law and the reality of historical development except by an appeal to the Creator as Lawgiver. Eventually, men reject what Maine calls a legal fiction. They adopt other explanations for the reliability of the “fit” between civil law and historical change: the sovereignty of the Parliament, or the Supreme Court, or the vanguard of the proletariat. Such is the fate of any legal theory that does not begin with the doctrine of cosmic personalism: the doctrine of creation.²³ The impersonal laws of the universe are said to produce the first true person in history: autonomous man.²⁴ Then man becomes the new god who legislates both morality and reality.²⁵ In legal theory, this leads to the idea of the sovereign lawmaker: either as legislator or judge. The absolutely sovereign law-giver is immanentized, and woe unto those who defy his will! The law-giver becomes totally arbitrary and highly personal. The only remotely consistent theoretical alternative is the ideal modern law-giver described by Weber: the judge as “an automaton into which legal documents and fees are stuffed at the top in order that it may spill forth the verdict at the bottom along with the reasons, read mechanically from codified paragraphs. . . .”²⁶ From cosmic impersonalism to judicial personalism and back to impersonalism: this is the vicious circle of judicial humanism. Such is the fate of any theory of gapless law in an autonomous universe. The only secular alternative is a theory of gap-filled law, which leads to the acceptance of the inevitability of judicial arbitrariness. Someone must fill the gaps.

This leads us to the next question: Who will fill these gaps in the civil law?

E. Fitting the Law and the Act

The jury or the judge must determine the closeness of the fit between formal legislation and a public act. This is point four of the biblical covenant model: sanctions. As I have said, written law cannot

22. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

23. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 1.

24. *Ibid.*, Appendix A.

25. North, *Is the World Running Down*, ch. 1.

26. Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 979.

be exhaustive. Jurors determine this fit re-creatively; God determines it creatively. Jurors must exercise judgment in God's name. They must act representatively. They cannot act mechanically, for the law is not mechanical. They cannot act "digitally," as a computer does, for man thinks analogically: as a creature who images God.²⁷ More to the point, a computer program is not in danger of eternal damnation; man is. Personalism is inescapable in all civil judgment. This stems from the fact that there is an inescapable cosmic personalism in every aspect of history. Everything is under the historical decree of God and the absolute sovereignty of God.

How can men impose their judgments personally yet judicially? How can they "make the fit" between God's revealed law and a person's public action? No event is identical to any other; no point in history is identical to any other. Thus, establishing a "perfect fit" between ever-changing history and God's unchanging legal principles is impossible for a creature who is not omniscient. Judicial perfection eludes man. Alternatively, no historical act or event is totally unconnected with any other. There is no autonomy in the universe. The decree of God and the revealed law of God tie all events into a common history. How, then, can judges "make the fit"?

27. One of the most impressive intellectual failures in history was the attempt by mathematical genius Alan Turing to specify the conditions of a digital mechanical logic that would "think" as a human brain thinks. He died a suicide in 1954, although his homosexuality also probably contributed to his psychological demise. A comprehensive biography is Andrew Hodges' *Alan Turing: The Enigma* (New York: Touchstone, [1983] 1984). See especially Chapter 7. In debating with Turing, mathematician M. H. A. Newman appealed to man's analogical thinking in describing the role of imagination in mathematics. *Ibid.*, p. 451.

1. *Casuistry and Intuition*

Casuistry is the art of applying general law to specific cases. Biblical casuistry declined rapidly in Protestant cultures after 1700, as rationalism spread into every area of life, especially judicial life.²⁸ Yet no one can avoid casuistry. We live under law—either God’s or someone else’s. We apply general rules to specific circumstances all day long. It is never a case of “casuistry vs. no casuistry.” It is always a case of some system’s casuistry.²⁹ Rendering judgment is always overwhelmingly an intuitive process, though grounded in some view of law and action. We do not think about the relationship between law and action in every decision we make daily. We act habitually. But our habits are shaped by an implicit casuistry.

A covenant-keeping individual is required by God to have extensive familiarity with the specific details of God’s law. He must also gain experience in making judgments in terms of this law. *Judging begins with self-judgment.* Making judgments is similar to making bread, making houses, or making anything else. Many of the skills—probably most of them—are too complex to be verbalized or written down. For example, there are no handbooks telling us how to ride a bicycle—safety requirements, yes, but not the actual skills. The skilled craftsman is in a position to exercise his skills in a way that an unskilled craftsman cannot, even though the unskilled craftsman may have read a lot of books on the topic, and the skilled craftsman may be illiterate. There are no handbooks that show people how to become professional craftsmen or athletes, as distinguished from amateurs. These unique *differentiating* degrees of skill can be gained over long periods of practice. They cannot be measured except by actual performance. Similarly with juries: in fitting a specific law to the actual public act that is being brought into consideration by the jury, the jurors must exercise an *informed intuition* in order to declare a person guilty or not guilty. This skill is not formally obtained in daily life, yet juries do their work effectively. How? Because Western civilization was originally Christian, and centuries of preaching on judicial Bible texts helped to transfer the fundamentals of biblical judicial intuition—wisdom in its widest sense—to large numbers of people. By applying God’s law in the family and the church, we are to become more skilled in serving as coven-

28. Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952).

29. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 50:C.

antly faithful civil jurors. This is the art of biblical casuistry.

Men must rely on intuition in order to make righteous judgments—casuistical judgments. Intuition cannot be rationally specified. There are creaturely limits on man's thinking and his language. There will never be a limitless creature. Only the Creator is limitless. Nevertheless, we can describe the effects of intuition's operations. We can glimpse it by looking at where it isn't. Intuition is that undefinable area in between semi-fixed habit and action, between judicial law and action, between moral principle and action—an area that cannot be specified logically or verbally. Why not? Because we cannot specify every step in any logical procedure or "chain of reasoning." The logical chain is not made up of discrete, interconnected "links." The "links" are not in fact interconnected, one to another. The chain of logic is not really a chain; it is a series of discrete, identifiable logical "markers" that we are capable of recognizing and manipulating, and which we assume are connected by inconceivably small units of logic that we cannot specify. These supposedly infinitesimal units we believe "fill in the gaps" between our leaps of reasoning, point to point. We have faith that there is a continuum linking the small mental steps that we can identify and connect analogically. The mathematician assumes that the structure of the arithmetical continuum is that of "beads on a string, but *without the string*."³⁰ He assumes what he cannot really prove or describe. So does the humanist legal theorist. There is continuity in life. This includes judicial life: law and action. This is what makes predictable law enforcement possible. The question is: What is the basis of this continuity? The Calvinist says: "The comprehensive decree of an omniscient, absolutely sovereign God." The humanist answers: "The evolving intuition of the hypothetical mind of sovereign collective man in an evolving universe."³¹

There is also discontinuity in life. Each action is to some degree—a *scientifically unmeasurable* degree—different from any other. This means that there is a discontinuity between actions. Also, each law is unique. This means that there is a discontinuity between laws. The "gap" between our discontinuous actions, as well as the "gap" between discontinuous laws, is the area that we must judge intuitionally. For

30. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 65. See his discussion of the continuum, time, being and becoming, mind, and "simple infinity": pp. 64–76.

31. The Arminian does not answer, since he does not bother himself with such "unspiritual" academic questions.

civil laws to judge the actions of individuals, there must be a “fit”: a comparative absence of gaps. The smaller the gap, the more predictable the judgment. The larger the gap, the more power is transferred to the state: arbitrary law enforcement. It is the jury’s task to decide behind closed doors and then publicly declare whether a particular judicial gap is sufficiently small to authorize a conviction.

(It is also the American jury’s task to determine the legitimacy of the law under which the state has brought its case, although American judges no longer instruct juries on this point and have not since the late nineteenth century. In fact, judges sometimes instruct jurors falsely, telling them that a jury has no right to judge the law, a lie that jurors tend to believe.³² Judges rarely allow defense attorneys to tell this to juries at any point in the proceedings.³³ A defense attorney can be held in contempt of court for ignoring the judge’s instruction to him to cease informing the jury of its Constitutional right to determine the legitimacy of any law. What was originally known as *jury nullification*—the common law authority of juries to nullify the application of a law in specific court cases—has been transformed to mean the right of judges to nullify the authority of juries in defiance of common law.³⁴ Excessive authority has thereby been transferred illegitimately to legislators, prosecutors, and judges. This process has accompanied and intensified the centralization of political power.)

2. *Casuistry and Biblical Wisdom*

Knowledge is a scarce economic resource. That is to say, at zero price there is more demand for it than the supply of it. Many, many errors in economic and social analysis rest on an unstated assumption

32. In a common law jury room, no one can tell the jury what to do. It is as autonomous legally as the U.S. Supreme Court.

33. The closing statement of Paul Newman in the movie, *The Verdict*, in which he reminds the jury of its right to consider the legitimacy of the law, was highly dramatic and altogether fictional. No judge would have permitted him to continue. The judge would have instructed the jury to disregard Newman’s remarks, not because they were false but because they were true.

34. In a Texas county courtroom in which I had been called as part of a large group to be a candidate to serve on a jury, the judge asked each prospective juror to stand up if he or she believed that a jury has the right to decide the law as well as the facts. He threatened to dismiss any juror who stood up. I refused to stand up because he had no moral authority before God to make such an inquiry. Any American juror has the right to remain silent until he gets into the jury room, and he then has the right to “hang” the jury—no verdict—if he believes that a law is immoral or unconstitutional. The juror is sovereign, not the judge.

that accurate knowledge is a zero-price resource.³⁵ On the contrary, it is expensive. This is why the advent of the computer and low-cost data storage, retrieval, and transmission has been a monumental breakthrough in men's pursuit of wealth. Management theorist Peter Drucker—arguably America's most insightful observer of trends, 1939–2005—has written: "The greatest challenge of the computer industry is to learn how to build information bases, not databases."³⁶ He is correct about something else, a secular adaptation of what the Bible announced in Solomon's day: "Today, the real and controlling resource and absolutely decisive factor of production is neither capital nor land nor labor. It is knowledge."³⁷

But we need more than knowledge; we need wisdom. Wisdom is grounded in the ethics of the word of God. We need more than techniques to convert the computer's digitally stored data into man's analogically interpreted information. Drucker comments: "We need an economic theory that puts knowledge into the center of the wealth-producing process."³⁸ The Austrian theory of entrepreneurship comes closest to performing this task. (Drucker was an Austrian economist, but not an Austrian School economist.) Yet even the Austrian theory of entrepreneurship, most notably Israel Kirzner's extension of it, places *nonrational insight*—Kant's noumenal realm—at the heart of the economic process. This noumenalism has become self-conscious irrationalism in the writings of G. L. S. Shackle and Ludwig Lachmann.³⁹ We need a breakthrough in man's ethical knowledge to accompany the technological breakthrough in digitally stored data-in-to-information. We need *biblical casuistry*—the application of biblical law to historical circumstances—and we need God's grace to conform our thoughts and actions to what we know to be true. If we do not get this, and on a widespread basis, then we face God's wrath in history:

35. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). I regard this book as the single most important work in political economy of my generation. It shows the importance in so many different areas of the idea that there is a price for knowledge. Solomon's injunction, "get wisdom," is not a zero-price injunction. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Prov. 4:7). "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!" (Prov. 16:16). "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" (Prov. 17:16).

36. "According to Peter Drucker," *ASAP* [As Soon As Possible] (March 29, 1993), p. 90.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

38. *Idem.*

39. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

from those to whom much knowledge has been given much is expected (Luke 12:47–48).

3. *Judicial Review*

Because the constitution is the source of legitimacy for all subsequent legislation, there is no escape from the legal principle known as judicial review: point four of the biblical covenant model.⁴⁰ Someone in the hierarchy must announce the legitimacy or illegitimacy of specific pieces of legislation and also the legitimacy of the decisions of lower courts. Someone must act as the interpreter of the principles set forth as fundamental law in the constitution. There is no escape from final judgment after history, nor is there escape from the principle of judicial review in history.

The Founder has chosen a representative agent in history. This delegated agent is man. Man alone is made in God's image. He is a true, personal reflection of God. This is why he is the agent to whom God has delegated legitimate sovereignty. In calling Adam to serve as judge, God called a perfect man in history to serve as His agent. But that perfect man was immature. This means, among other things, that he was *judicially immature*. He had only one law that he had been given in order to serve as a restraint against him. That law was that he could not eat from a particular tree. God set a *legal boundary* around that tree. In order to gain maturity, Adam had to learn self-government under God. He needed time in order to mature judicially. He needed obedience to mature judicially. He needed experience to mature judicially. *Obedience is a product of self-government under God.* Experience to some extent must be based on one's learning the principles of judging others in one's capacity as a judge. Adam was put at the head of a household. He was given authority to exercise judgment in history over others. There can be no development of judicial maturity in history without holding some kind of office. This is why the church requires that elders in the church must be lawful rulers over their families (I Tim. 3:4–5).⁴¹

There is only one final judgment. There is only one final court of appeal. But both of these are outside of history. Thus, any judicial spokesman in history cannot be absolutely sovereign. His word cannot

40. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 10.

41. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

be final. No single earthly court can legitimately command absolute obedience. This is why the biblical doctrine of judicial review, being Trinitarian and therefore plural—family, church (local, regional, national, international), and state (local, regional, national, and international)—does not lead to the creation of absolute civil government. The decision of any supreme court can be appealed to the courts in the other lawfully sovereign realms. The decision of a final supreme court should be capable of being overruled by a combination of the legislative and executive powers. *Whenever man seeks to create an institutionally unified earthly court that possesses a final word on the law, he acts messianically.* The quest for a single supreme world court beyond which no appeal is legal, like the quest for a single national supreme court beyond which no appeal is legal, is a messianic quest: the quest for perfect justice.⁴² It inevitably leads to a widespread disrespect for law and subsequent evasion, tyranny, revolution, and judicial breakdown.

F. Judicial Precedents and Legal Predictability

If the court is not to become arbitrary in its judicial pronouncements, it must be under restraints. Restraints include the following: (1) the clarity and generality of the constitution; (2) the clarity and constitutional consistency of the written statutes; (3) the irreversible sovereignty of the jury in deciding innocence; (4) the threat of judicial review. But there is another restraint, one which is especially important in common-law countries: *legal precedent*. Judicial decisions are supposed to be cumulative and consistent. They are supposed to provide information to litigants regarding the ways in which courts have applied the law to specific past cases.

1. Concealed Legislation

Because the Anglo-American common law system is primarily law based on judicial precedents by judges, it is sometimes called judge-made law.⁴³ Selecting from judicial precedents becomes a disguised means of legislating. No one has stated this more forcefully (and perhaps cynically) than the great English legal historian, A. V. Dicey. "But

42. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice: The Adverse Consequences of Current Legal Doctrine on the American Courtroom* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

43. Walter F. Murphy and C. Herman Pritchett, *Courts, Judges, and Politics: An Introduction to the Judicial Process*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 5.

the appeal to precedent in the law courts merely is a useful fiction by which judicial decision conceals its transformation into judicial legislation; and a fiction is none the less a fiction because it has emerged from the Courts into the field of politics or of history. Here, then, the astuteness of lawyers has imposed upon the simplicity of historians."⁴⁴ This fiction was maintained for many centuries in Great Britain and the United States. Write Murphy and Pritchett: "It was not until well into the nineteenth century that either the British Parliament or the American Congress began to pass many statutes dealing with the everyday affairs of private citizens."⁴⁵ It took centuries before Parliament dealt with such matters as trespass, property, wills, contracts, and obligations between employers and employees.⁴⁶

It was assumed by the founders and practitioners of the common law that the law, while not gapless, could be determined by judges by a careful study of past decisions. The "fit" between a general legal principle and the specific case could be filled in by precedents stemming from similar cases. In other words, *history has continuity*. There is an evolutionary development over time: law becomes more precise and more predictable as cases pile up. The assumption, of course, is that the pile of cases is itself coherent, at least in the aggregate. The judge can therefore make judicially significant connections between the facts of the case before him and the results of many similar cases in the past. The past cases are assumed to be consistent. They are presumed to be an orderly pile, not chaos in the brickyard. But modern thought affirms only chaos in the brickyard.⁴⁷ The orderliness of the pile is now assumed to be the product of the judge's mind; there is supposedly no inherent order in the facts themselves. Judicial facts are regarded as no more coherent than any other facts. Any perceived coherence is the product of the human mind. This has made an epistemological jumble of legal precedents. They serve as a model of Heraclitus' dictum: everything flows. But where?

2. Time and Eternity

We find here a manifestation of an ancient philosophical antinomy: facts vs. logic. Common law formally clings to the legal fiction

44. A. V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 8th ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, [1915] 1982), p. cxxxvii.

45. Murphy and Pritchett, *Courts*, p. 5.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

47. Bernard K. Forscher, "Chaos in the Brickyard," *Science* (Oct. 18, 1963), p. 339.

of the autonomous relevance of historical fact. Civil law, meaning Roman law, clings to the legal fiction of the autonomous comprehensive mind of the statute writer. The war between the two concepts is as total as the war between Heraclitus' concept that "all is flux" and Parmenides' concept that "all is fixed logic." It is the war between timeless logic and changing history. This is one of the continuing themes in the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til. As Van Til asks with respect to the relationship between timeless principles and historical flux: "How then could you expect that time should suddenly be able and willing to submit to the ways of eternity? On the other hand, how could you expect that Eternity should suddenly feel at home when taken into the realm of time? Far easier could you bring under one roof an old bachelor and an old maid, both of them accustomed to a life of abstraction from one another, and expect that they would get along in harmony. . . ?"⁴⁸ Common law vs. Roman law: it is the age-old humanist epistemological war between the flowing stream and the ice cube.⁴⁹ Either the river freezes, ceasing to flow, or the ice cube melts, ceasing to exist as a separate entity.

At the heart of Roman civil law was the belief that "law was precisely what that term meant, a system, closed, self-contained, and self-sustained, a neatly ordered body of principles hierarchically arranged, with the less fundamental principles logically deduced from the more fundamental. Any judicial tampering with this system, even if only a charitable effort to ease the law's commands in a particular case, was bound to do more harm than good in the long run by destroying the intellectual integrity of the entire corpus."⁵⁰ But the threat to such a "corpus" is *rigor mortis*: unchanging bodies are dead. How can the fixed principles of law be made relevant in history? How can an unchanging hierarchy of hypothetically rational, gapless law be applied in ever-more predictable and ever-more ethical ways to a hypothetically gapless river of ceaseless, judicially undifferentiated change? Secularism provides no consistent answer.

Secular legal theory cannot solve the problem of judicial intruders and defenders. The Roman law statute-makers resented the intrusion of the judges. The common law judges in turn resented the intrusion of the statute-makers. According to legal historian Lawrence Fried-

48. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. II of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Den Dulk Foundation, 1969), p. 41.

49. Van Til's ice cube analogy is found in *ibid.*, p. 35.

50. Murphy and Pritchett, *Courts*, p. 4.

man, "For a long time, the proud judges looked at statutes with great suspicion. Statutes were unwelcome intrusions on the law, and were treated accordingly. In Continental law, all law (in theory) is contained in the codes. In common law many basic rules of law are found nowhere but in the recorded opinions of the judges."⁵¹

3. *Sanctification*

The biblical solution to this dilemma is the doctrine of sanctification: definitive, progressive, and final. There is not only definitive sanctification in history—the morally perfect life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ—there is also progressive sanctification: the increasing conformity of individuals and collectives to the fixed, gap-less legal order established by the Creator. Through the judicial maturation of covenant-keeping men, empowered by the Holy Spirit, society progressively conforms itself to the judicial requirements of God. What Paul said of the individual applies also to collectives.

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Rom. 8:24–34).

The biblical view of civil law is that legislators may lawfully change

51. Lawrence M. Friedman, *A History of American Law* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), pp. 17–18.

existing statutes, and courts may lawfully alter the body of precedents, but only if such nullification or modification is necessary to make an existing law or custom conform to the requirements of God's revealed law. Covenant-breaking formal rationalism—predictable evil laws—is not a valid substitute for biblical law. Neither is a legal system based formally on biblical law in which judges have the authority to refuse to apply it. The institutional hope, then, is for juries to be composed of well-informed, covenant-keeping people. We call such a civil order a theocracy.⁵²

Conclusion

Rendering civil or ecclesiastical judgment is a covenantal act. It rests on the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of man as the image of God. Man is capable of thinking God's thoughts after Him. This makes it possible for men to establish connection among: (1) general principles of biblical law (the Ten Commandments), (2) the biblical case laws, (3) judicial precedents, (4) assessing historical acts that are suspected of being crimes, and (5) restitution/restoration.

The theory of gapless law is correct, but only when applied to the mind of God. He alone is omniscient, which is the underlying presupposition of a theory of gapless law. To think analogously to God, men must use intuition that is the product of two things: their study of the Bible-revealed law of God and their experience in applying God's law to specific judicial cases involving public acts. This is why only judicial covenant-keepers, meaning church members, are allowed by God to serve as civil judges in a formally covenanted holy commonwealth. This is why theocracy—the rule of God—has political implications. The citizen is a judge. He must render civil judgment. Only covenant-keepers are allowed to do this in a covenant-keeping society. Any theory of citizenship that denies this is necessarily also a theory of civil justice that denies the continuing authority of God's Bible-revealed civil law in the New Testament era.

Christian legal theory is equally at war with common law and Roman law. Common law theory assumes that coherence will emerge from a long string of judicial precedents: the sovereignty of judges in history. Roman law theory assumes that coherence is imposed by the statute-makers: the sovereignty of legislators in history. Neither assumption is correct. Coherence in legal affairs in history begins with

52. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 2.

God's omniscience and ends with God's final judgment. Without the assumption of an omniscient God who imposes His ongoing judgments over time and eternity, autonomous man's hope for coherence and justice cannot be progressively realized. Without access to the God's constitution of liberty—His written revelation in the Bible—mankind will not escape bondage to tyrants.

Appendix F

RUSHDOONY ON “HYBRIDIZATION”: FROM GENETIC SEPARATION TO RACIAL SEPARATION

For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:11–13).

The New Covenant announces the restoration of the original judicial unity of covenant-keeping mankind. Under the New Covenant, the Mosaic barriers between Jew and Greek are erased forever (Acts 10). The unity of Trinitarian confession erases the *judicial relevance* of all other cultural and racial diversities among covenant-keepers. The unity of Trinitarian confession is the fundamental unity of the redeemed in history, for it will be their fundamental unity in eternity.

There is a great divide separating men: conflicting confessions. Men are either covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. This division extends into eternity. All other disunities are secondary to this one: rival confessions regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Men seek other forms of unity besides Trinitarian confession. There are rival confessions regarding religion, politics, language, and culture. But the most powerful of all rival unities through the ages is racial unity. This unity is declared as primary again and again in history. Skin of different colors, hair of different types, eyes differently shaped: here are the building blocks of racist social theories. Even the attraction between the sexes—a powerful biological drive—is said to be secondary to the importance of race. Interracial marriages are called “mongrelization,” as if men were animals.¹

1. The theology of the 1960s racist cult leader Wesley A. Swift is typical of this outlook. He wrote that “mankind violated the courses of divine law, by mongrelizing his

A. Confession Is Supreme

Christianity subordinates sexual bonding to confession. Racism subordinates sexual bonding to race. The Christian insists that a confusion of parental confessions places the children in eternal jeopardy. The racist insists that a confusion of parental races places the children outside the bounds of acceptable society: the half-breed as cultural nomad. The Christian announces a confessional covenant. The racist announces a blood covenant. The Christian denies the legitimacy of a blood covenant, save one: the judicial covenant based on Christ's shed blood. The racist may hedge his language in an attempt to make his blood covenant sound acceptable in a world of confessional covenants, or more important in modern times, political covenants. But the appeal of the racist's blood covenant continues through the ages, while other covenants rise and fall, save one variety: confessional covenants.

It is strategically crucial today for Christian Reconstructionists to affirm this principle of confessional covenantalism because of Reconstructionism's commitment to biblical law. The other movement similarly committed to biblical law is the Identity-Destiny-British Israel movement. These groups believe that white Anglo-Americans are the biological heirs of the 10 lost tribes of Israel, and this supposedly genetic covenant is still binding: the judicial basis for honoring biblical law today. Thus, these groups are tied to the idea of a blood covenant. In the more radical Identity groups, such as the white supremacist Aryans, this blood covenantalism can turn violent against members of other races, especially Jews and blacks. In the first major academic

races. . . ." Swift, *In the Beginning God*, p. 1. Sermon, Feb. 5, 1967, published by the New Christian Crusade Church, Hollywood, California. The Mongolian race, he said, appeared 660,000 years ago; the Negro race appeared 73,000 years ago; and the white race appeared 7,400 years ago. Swift, *God's Call to Race* (Hollywood, California: New Christian Crusade Church, n.d.), p. 2. "After the fall of Lucifer, the areas of retrogression have generally been marked by their integration and mongrelization. The Negroid is one of the lowest species on the face of the earth, because he fell the furthest, and because, when he came to earth under the Luciferian design, he was used for the mongrelization of the ancient Asiatics and the interference with other races." *Ibid.*, p. 5. Then what of the great flood in which all but one family perished? Swift's answer: there was no universal flood. Lots of other races survived the local flood in Noah's day. "There weren't any Negroes involved in the flood." Swift, *Were All the People of the Earth Drowned in the flood?* (Hollywood, California: New Christian Crusade Church, n.d.), p. 25. Swift's covenant was a racial covenant: "We think, when people understand these things, they will understand their divine responsibility which is to preserve their race and to carry out the directions of God." *Idem*.

study of the Identity movement, Michael Barkun correctly separates Reconstruction from Identity, but then offered a warning:

The theme of Bible-centered law cannot be left before examining one final element: the striking resemblance between the concept of Bible-centered law in British-Israelism and Christian Identity, on the one hand, and its counterpart among some contemporary evangelicals, on the other. These so-called "Reconstructionists" are part of the dominion theology movement that urges the reconstruction of society on Christian lines prior to the Second Coming. The Reconstructionists, including such figures as Rousas John Rushdoony, David Chilton, and Gary DeMar, consider biblical law binding and wish to see American law recast in biblical terms. There is, however, no evidence of any connection between the small but influential Reconstructionist movement and the British-Israel or Identity groups considered here. Indeed, there is no evidence that either is even aware of the other.² Where British-Israelism drew legal inferences from its claim of Israelite ancestry, Reconstructionism reflects a quite different Calvinist tradition transmitted through Dutch Reformed scholars and institutions. Nonetheless, should Reconstructionism expand beyond its currently small coterie, it may create a climate of opinion from which similar Christian Identity doctrines will inadvertently benefit. Since Reconstructionist leaders are trained intellectuals (something Identity figures are certainly not), the rigor of their approach may confer a halo of respectability on all ideas of Bible-centered law, including Identity's, despite the latter's completely separate origins.³

I take this warning very seriously. All traces of racist blood covenantalism in Christian Reconstruction must be forthrightly rejected on the basis of confessional covenantalism. This is my goal in this essay.

B. What Is a Hybrid?

In 1967, Rushdoony wrote: "In view of the complexity of the problem of defining species, the problem of hybrids is correspondingly difficult. The phenomenon is real, but what is it? . . . Does the present state

2. This is incorrect. Rushdoony and I have relied on the work of a British Israelite, Curtis C. Ewing, with respect to the structure of the sabbath week of Mosaic Israel. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 134, 511, 830n. Ewing would occasionally attend conferences where Rushdoony or I would speak. He, like Rushdoony, kept the dietary laws. Rushdoony repeatedly cited the work of Howard B. Rand, *Digest of the Divine Law* (Merrimac, Massachusetts: Destiny Publishers, 1943). See *Institutes*, pp. 57, 106, 228, 528n.

3. Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 208–9.

of knowledge permit the extensive theorizing so prevalent on every side of the issue?"⁴ He made a good point. The whole question of hybrids and species was scientifically unresolved. He quoted an evolutionist, Irving W. Kornbloch, in what he described as "a very careful and conscientious survey of what is called 'The Role of Hybridization in Evolution' but is actually a survey of hybridization as such. . . ." Kornbloch had written: "If hybridization plays only a minor role in evolution, as some maintain, it is very strange indeed that there are so many vigorous, fertile hybrids in existence today, and more being found each year by those who earnestly search for them." Rushdoony's reply was narrowly focused: "To 'prove' hybrids is one thing, to 'prove' evolution is another." His point was well-taken: the two are not obviously the same.

Then Rushdoony went on to say something that he did not attempt to prove: an attempted neutralization of Kornbloch's assertion of beneficial hybrids. "Kornbloch has only demonstrated, in terms of a particular approach, that hybrids exist. More than that, he has not shown."⁵ Perhaps; I have not read Kornbloch's book. But Rushdoony's final retort was simply rhetorical agnosticism: "Does the present state of knowledge permit the extensive theorizing so prevalent on every side of the issue?"

Six years later, all of his previous agnosticism regarding hybrids had departed, although there had been no significant breakthrough in scientific evidence regarding the evils of most hybrids, as far as Rushdoony ever suggested in print. He elevated hybridization in society to the status of covenantal evil, making its eradication a foundational principle in his social theory. In doing so, he moved from covenantalism to racism, as we shall see.

C. Leviticus 19:19: Case Law of Separation

In Chapter 17, I provided an explanation of the case law against the interbreeding of cattle, mixing seeds in the same field, and not wearing clothing made of a linen-wool mixture (Lev. 19:19). I identified the underlying principle: *temporary separation*. I explained the first two prohibitions in terms of the mandatory separation of the tribes in Israel, and the third prohibition in terms of separating priestly

4. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1967] 2001), p. 154. (<http://bit.ly/rjrtmos>)

5. *Idem*.

status from non-priestly status. There had to be a policy of active separation of cattle breeds because of the normal tendency for cattle to interbreed. This means that the law had nothing to do with eliminating hybrids. The offspring of two breeds of cattle are not sterile. This was the reason why they had to be separated.

Rushdoony explained Leviticus 19:19 in terms of a biblical principle that there must be no hybrids in society. He discussed this verse in a section he titled "Hybridization and Law."⁶ He concluded the section with this assertion: "*Third, hybridization and unequal yoking involve a fundamental disrespect for God's handiwork which leads to futile experimentation, such as organ transplants, which represent sterile and limited gains in some areas, and a basic loss of moral perspective in every area.*"⁷ Given the fact that Greg Bahnsen was given at least an extra decade and a half of life and productivity because of a pig's valve that was sown into his heart, this conclusion by Rushdoony certainly needs exegetical evidence.⁸

With respect to mixed fabrics, Rushdoony said, "To bring diverse things together in an unnatural union is to despise the order of God's creation."⁹ This principle of interpretation—unnatural union—does not stem from Leviticus 19:19, nor is applicable to the passage. Such an interpretation reverses the meaning of the prohibition against the mixing of the seeds. *What is normal within a local species is genetic mixing.* Genetic separation within a species is abnormal: the result of environmental separation. In the case of the prohibition against mixing breeds of cattle or mixing crops in a field, the primary issue in Leviticus 19:19 was symbolic of the mandatory but unnatural preservation of the separate tribes of Israel until Shiloh came, the promised Seed. This is why this temporary prohibition ended when the promised Seed came, overcoming the judicial separation among Israel's tribes, and also between Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female (Gal. 3:28). Within the confessional covenant of Trinitarianism, such separation is no longer mandated by God.

To the extent that Rushdoony's comment applies only to the pro-

6. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 253–62.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

8. Bahnsen's physician told him that the same sort of congenital heart defect that afflicted him had been invariably fatal a decade before Bahnsen received his first heart operation. There had been no known treatment. Bahnsen died the year after the first edition of *Boundaries and Dominion* (1994) was published.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

hibition regarding mixed fibers, we need to remember that clothing itself is unnatural. Clothing does not grow on trees or sheep. It is manufactured. The judicial issue of the third prohibition of Leviticus 19:19 was never the “unnatural” mixing of fabrics; all fabrics are unnatural. The issue was exclusively symbolic and ritualistic. The prohibition against wearing mixed wool-linen clothing had to do with priestly sacrifices and priestly clothing in a nation of priests. Wool makes people retain sweat on their bodies; linen does not. Thus, *ritually speaking*, the two fibers were at cross purposes. They are no longer at cross purposes because the New Covenant has abolished animal sacrifices. Priests today are not told by God what kind of fabric to wear. Sweat is no longer a matter of ritual importance. The new priesthood is clothed in Christ as a result of baptism (Gal. 3:27).

D. The Question of Sterility

Rushdoony’s entire subsection is titled, “Hybridization and Law.”¹⁰ In commenting on Leviticus 19:19, he reproduced a lengthy extract from Ellicott’s commentary, most of which was devoted to a consideration of genetic mixing. Only one sentence refers to mixing wool and linen. Rushdoony said that the hybrid comes at great costs—sterility—“and thereby violates God’s creation ordinance.”¹¹ He identified the prohibition against genetic mixing within a species as a *creation ordinance* rather than a temporary ordinance governing national Israel. Then he added that “the commandments clearly require a respect for God’s creation.”¹²

There never was any such creation ordinance, as Jacob’s experiment in miraculous breeding indicates. Jacob’s agreement with Laban allowed Jacob to obtain ownership of those sheep and goats that were born in his herds (Gen. 30:33). He used rods to separate his animals from Laban’s, and those conceived before the rods were stronger animals, although they were multi-colored and visibly less desirable. Laban wound up with feeble animals; Jacob with stronger (Gen. 30:42). There is no question that Jacob established a system of genetic manipulation. He allowed God to do the work, but he actively intervened in order to let God do the work: “And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all

10. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

12. *Idem.*

the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle" (Gen. 30:40). The Hebrew word translated *cattle* here can be translated as flock, herd, stock, or possession. It was not limited to bovines.

Rushdoony was arguing that *within a species*, sexual mixing is unnatural and is therefore prohibited by biblical law. His argument makes no sense. *first*, what did he mean, "unnatural"? What is natural is interbreeding within a species. What is unnatural is separation. *Second*, if "hybridization" normally produces sterility, then it surely is a case of theological overkill to present the prohibition of hybridization as a fundamental principle of biblical law. Why would biblical law place the supposed principle of anti-hybridization into a position of importance if most hybrids are impotent? Hybrids are hardly a threat to social order. They cannot maintain their own uniqueness down through the generations. Their heirs lose any original unique characteristics as they interbreed. If anything, most hybrids become weaker over time: less able to compete in a natural environment. Their fruits are usually consumer goods, not long-term capital goods. *Third*, the scientific definition of a species is that cross-breeding is possible and normal among its members if they reside in the same environment. Rushdoony's assumption of the normality of genetic separation in nature is incorrect. The opposite is true. Genetic separation in nature, meaning the development of new breeds within a species, is produced by the interplay of reproduction and local environmental changes.¹³ Species do not evolve, but local variants of a species can change in response to environmental changes. One such environmental change is technology: men's development of specialized breeding techniques.¹⁴

Hybrids themselves were of no concern to the Mosaic law. What was of concern was the active *scientific process of interbreeding* inside the boundaries of Israel. The prohibition against interbreeding was a prohibition against the production of *newer, more productive breeds* within the boundaries of Israel. The Israelites could lawfully import new breeds, but then they had to keep them separate from the existing ones in the land. Interbreeding was lawful outside of Israel's boundaries. There was never any creation ordinance against interbreeding.

13. The ability of insects to adapt to pesticides is an example. A plant species' ability to develop resistance to blight is another.

14. Walter E. Lammerts, a pioneer in the Scientific Creation movement, was a highly successful breeder of roses. His roses won numerous international prizes. Lammerts, "The Scientific Creationist Movement in the United States: A Personal Account," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I (Summer 1974).

Here is one additional piece of evidence that is worth noting: the mule. This is the classic animal hybrid: the normally sterile product of horse and donkey. It is a very strong work animal. It was used as a military animal in ancient Israel (I Chron. 12:40).¹⁵ Its presence in the household of the kings (II Sam. 13:29; I Kings 10:25) and the presence of 245 mules among those who returned to Jerusalem from Medo-Persia (Ezr. 2:66) indicate that there was never any creation ordinance against hybrids. If there had been, Ezra and Nehemiah would have kept such beasts out of the land when they returned to rebuild. Mules could be imported, even though it was not legal to breed horses and donkeys to produce them. *The deliberate mixing of seeds was illegal, not the offspring as such.* The judicial issue was representational, not biological: tribal separation in Mosaic Israel until the promised Seed came. Confessional unity in Mosaic Israel was subordinated to tribal unity only until this messianic prophecy was fulfilled. Considered from the point of the confessionalism of pre-Mosaic and post-Mosaic law, the law against the mixing of seeds was abnormal, i.e., not representative.

E. The Lure of Racism

Rushdoony's mistake regarding the importance of a law against "hybridization" was not some minor exegetical slip, nor is the application he makes with it. His identification of Leviticus 19:19 as a law prohibiting genetic intermixtures can produce serious theological and judicial consequences. It can lead directly to racism. Rushdoony's analysis and subsequent applications of Leviticus 19:19 are sufficient proof.

When applied to humanity, Rushdoony's argument is the once-familiar segregationist argument against racial mixing—"the mongrelization of the white race," as it is sometimes described.¹⁶ Rushdoony did not resort to such crass language, but his interpretation of Leviticus 19:19 insists that genetic separateness within a species is both normal in nature and universally required by biblical law. The man-imposed exceptions to this supposedly normal *and normative* process of sexual separation have been outlawed by God, he insisted. Man supposedly must not attempt to produce hybrids—a creation ordinance that is permanent in history.

15. It was still being used during the American Civil War (1861–65): an important beast of burden for military transport.

16. Such language is now confined to neo-Nazi cults, racist cults, and some of the more aggressive branches of British Israelism.

1. Inter-Racial Marriage

Rushdoony did not hesitate to apply this exclusionary principle to inter-racial marriages. first, he wrote that "St. Paul referred to the broader meaning of these laws against hybridization, and against yoking an ox and an ass to a plow (Deut. 22:10), in II Corinthians 6: 14."¹⁷ Broader meaning of the seed laws, yes; judicial specifics, no. Paul wrote: "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" The issue here is faith. Christian faith overcomes all other divisions, including the Mosaic seed laws. (Note: Deuteronomy 22:10 immediately precedes a parallel verse to Leviticus 19:19c—no mixing of wool and linen—indicating that Leviticus 19:19c refers to *covenantal-confessional* separation, not tribal separation.) Second, Rushdoony wrote: "But Deuteronomy 22:10 not only forbids unequal religious yoking by inference, and as a case law, but also unequal yoking generally. . . . The burden of the law is thus against inter-religious, inter-racial, and inter-cultural marriages, in that they normally go against the very community which marriage is designed to establish."¹⁸ Note his asserted equivalents: inter-religious marriages and inter-racial or inter-cultural marriages. He was not speaking here merely of civil law; he was speaking of biblical law in general.

The shift in his argument is both subtle and significant. He was not arguing that inter-racial marriages do not produce children. Such unions are not biologically sterile. Then are inter-cultural marriages genetically sterile? He did not argue that they are. So what has "hybridization" got to do with either type of marriage? Genetically speaking, not a thing. *Rushdoony shifted his argument from genetics to race and culture.* He moved from a case law of the Bible regarding cattle, planting, and clothing to a racial-cultural application. He invented a legal category of "hybridization" in order to apply it to inter-racial and inter-cultural marriages. What he was saying is that such marriages are *covenantally* sterile. The problem is, this is a denial of the New Testament doctrine of the gospel's power to break down the wall separating Jew from Greek, bond from free. His theology of sterility mixed a false interpretation of a case law with traditional hostility to "inferior races."

The standard of *unequal covenantal yoking* unquestionably applies to marriage. Rushdoony was correct on this point: Paul makes this

17. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 256.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 256–57.

clear in II Corinthians 6:14. This Pauline prohibition is universally believed by orthodox Bible commentators to apply to marriage covenant. Almost all commentators believe that it also applies to the church government, although expositors in the Erastian, state church tradition may choose to downplay this. Christian Reconstruction teaches that this biblical principle of covenantal separation must also apply to civil government: not in Christians' dropping out of political life, which is pietism's recommended solution to the "unequally yoked" dilemma in civil government, but in the eventual exclusion of non-Christians from the franchise and from all public offices, after a nation is overwhelmingly Christian in its public confession. (Late in his career, Rushdoony began to deny in public the obvious civil application of the "no unequal yoking" covenantal principle, preferring instead to defend traditional political pluralism's anti-Trinitarian U.S. Constitutional settlement.)¹⁹

The judicial standard involved in the biblical concept of "yoking" is exclusively covenantal: public confession of Trinitarian faith, local church membership, the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper, and public obedience to God's law. For a Christian to deny salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is apostasy. To refuse to join the local church is an assertion of one's judicial autonomy. To refuse to celebrate the Lord's Supper is self-excommunication. To deny the law of God is antinomian. A Christian should not marry anyone who is remiss in any of these four areas. To be remiss in any of them is to break covenant with God. But marrying a Christian from another race or another culture is not covenant-breaking.

This principle of covenantal discrimination applies to each of the three institutional covenants: church, state, and family. "Equal yoking" means a public commitment of all covenantal participants to the Athanasian creed or some other Trinitarian creedal statement, as well as church membership. *The judicial issue is faithfulness to the covenantal oath.* "Equal yoking" is strictly a judicial concept. "Unequal yoking" is therefore also strictly a judicial concept; as such, it has nothing to do with race or culture: in family, church, or state.²⁰ It has nothing to do

19. See his explicit denial of theocratic politics in the transcript of his nationally televised interview with Bill Moyers, "God and Politics: On Earth as it Is in Heaven," Public Affairs Television (Dec. 23, 1987). MOYERS: "Is that the kind of society, where Christianity is the official religion, like it was in Armenia?" RUSHDOONY: "No." (Transcript, p. 7.)

20. Obviously, if two people cannot speak the same language, they may have future marital problems. This is not a valid covenantal objection to their marriage. The pre-

with community standards except to the extent that these derivative standards are confessionally Trinitarian—a product of the covenant.

2. *The Marriage Covenant*

Marriage is a covenant; it is governed by God's law. Rushdoony accepted this view of Christian marriage and used it to develop a theological defense of divorce based on the Mosaic law.²¹ The view of marriage as a lawful covenant established by oath between two individuals under God's authority leads to a significant conclusion: unless we abandon the Bible's identification of marriage as a covenant, we cannot legitimately say that "normally" marriages are this or that in a judicial sense. Marriages are either legal or illegal; there is no criterion of "normality" in a covenant bond except whatever is mandated by God's law. In the case of marriage, the law is indeed a creation ordinance (Gen. 1:26–28). To the extent that man's laws interfere with this biblical covenantal principle, the marriage covenant becomes inescapably antinomian and perhaps even pagan. Rushdoony fully understood this, which is why he attributed "creation ordinance" status to the principle of genetic separation in Leviticus 19:19, and then moved to cultural and racial applications. He sought to transform *community opinions* regarding race into a *judicially binding* category.

Marriage is a covenant under God. A covenant is inescapably judicial.²² Marriage is established by a binding oath.²³ Therefore, by applying any judicial criterion, including a supposed creation ordinance, to the question of the lawfulness of a marriage necessarily elevates this criterion to covenantal status. Rushdoony made it clear what this supposedly biblical criterion is: anything that goes "against the very community which [marriage, citizenship, or church membership] is designed to establish." Once this *confessionally empty* judicial criterion—*community preference*—is applied to one covenantal institution, we

sumption is, one or both will learn the other's language. This is also true of churches. Members of churches cannot lawfully be excluded from the Lord's Supper because of a language barrier. Should a person be excluded from citizenship because of a language barrier? No. But he will have trouble being elected to public office. He can be barred from voting on the basis of functional illiteracy in the language on the ballot, but states that require secret ballots—only one person per booth at a time—can and should provide translations on the ballot for major linguistic groups.

21. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, pp. 401–15.

22. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987]1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

cannot easily restrict it to that institution. Community preference, once elevated to a fundamental judicial ideal, breaks all covenantal boundaries. Thus, if Rushdoony were consistent in his discussion of marriage as the basis of community and the community's preferences as judicially sovereign, he would have to apply this principle of "what the community wants" to the covenants of church and the state. His overall covenantal theology rejects the lawfulness of such community intervention. This indicates that his view of hybrids and race was anti-covenantal.

F. Compulsory Segregation vs. Biblical Law

He began writing *Institutes of Biblical Law* in the late 1960s, when the civil rights movement in the United States was in its radical phase. The word "integration" at that time had a very specific frame of reference: racial. Federal courts and troops had been forcing the racially segregated South to integrate its public institutions from the late 1950s through the 1960s. Rushdoony broadly defined "enforced integration" as any attempt by a higher judicial agency to overrule local community preferences. He wrote: "Unequal yoking means more than marriage. In society at large it means the enforced integration of various elements which are not congenial."²⁴ To say that southern white segregationists and black integrationists were uncongenial in the 1960s is putting it mildly.

1. Lynching

Lynching²⁵ of blacks by white mobs of varying sizes and motivations had been a familiar practice in the South for over a century: imposing the negative sanction of death apart from a civil trial. Prior to the Civil War, abolitionists had been lynched, sometimes in Northern states. In New York City's week of anti-draft riots (July 13–17, 1863), at least eleven blacks were murdered out of at least 105 people who died.²⁶ After the Civil War, lynchings took place in the Midwest and West, though rarely in the Northeast; over 80% of the victims were

24. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 257.

25. Named after Virginia judge Charles Lynch, who convicted and hanged Loyalists during the American Revolution. Walter F. White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer, [1929] 1969).

26. Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 282 (blacks murdered), p. 5 (total deaths of 105).

white.²⁷ The largest percentage of lynchings took place in the South; by 1900, the phenomenon was confined to the South. Far more black males were lynched in the South than before the Civil War. Before the war, most blacks were owned and came under legal protection. Lynching became a socially acceptable community practice in the post-Civil War South. One estimate places the number of lynchings in the South, 1880–1930, at almost 4,000: over 700 whites and over 3,200 blacks.²⁸ In 1880, 32% of the victims were white; in 1930, only 9% were.²⁹ Sometimes accompanying lynchings were acts of torture, burning, and even dismemberment, especially when mobs were large.³⁰ Lynchings were rituals.³¹ Judicially, there were few risks to these murderers. Trials for people accused of lynching blacks were rare in the South; convictions were virtually nonexistent. While the "strange fruit"³² of black men hanging on trees steadily disappeared after the 1930s and was almost gone by the 1950s, the lynching mentality still existed among the die-hard white segregationists.

The fact is, on racial matters (as on slavery matters prior to 1865), the South's community standards for civil justice for blacks were radically unbiblical: (1) denying the legal basis of slave marriages; (2) denying legal protection for the slave; and (3) no system of guaranteed redemption.³³ Thus, Rushdoony's critical comment on slavery in general applies to Southern slavery: "Modern man seeks to avoid the yokes of community life in Christ, and he falls under the heavy yoke of the state."³⁴ In this case, the state in question was local; neither state governments nor the national government had the means of enforcing justice in the American South prior to 1930. Local police forces and sheriffs enforced the law.³⁵ The local institutions of civil government in the South were sometimes tyrannical toward freed blacks after 1865.

27. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 8.

28. Monroe Work (ed.), *The Negro Yearbook: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1931–1932* (Tuskegee, Alabama: Negro Year Book Publishing, 1931), p. 293; cited in *idem*.

29. *Idem*.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

31. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

32. The title of a 1939 song made famous in the North and infamous in the South by black blues singer Billie Holiday.

33. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 232–44. (<http://bit.ly/gntools>)

34. R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, vol. 2 of *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1982), p. 69.

35. Brundage, *Lynching*, p. 161.

The most blatant judicial forms of this local tyranny were abolished by the U. S. Supreme Court and Federal marshals and Federal troops, 1954–70. When Southern blacks once again got the right to vote,³⁶ local politicians in the South “felt the heat,” and therefore “saw the light.” They changed. When Southern blacks imposed the sanction of the vote, they were not trying to make Southern politicians better people; they were merely making them more responsive to a significant new political pressure group. The underlying covenantal issue was political sanctions, not political salvation, although the rhetoric of salvation was commonly employed by civil rights reformers.

2. *Judicial Neutrality*

Rushdoony attempted to skirt the covenantal issue by an appeal to judicial neutrality: neither a pro-segregation nor a pro-integration judicial standard. This line of argument is an implicit denial of his fundamental philosophical premise, namely, that there can be no neutrality. But in racial matters, he insisted, there can be such neutrality judicially. In 1971, he wrote:

Let us consider one aspect of that [class] conflict, the racial situation. The attempts to force integration and to force segregation by law are very old. With Assyria, forcible integration was a policy of state. All these attempts failed when the social conditions militated against them. If two peoples were relatively equal and religiously congenial, integration quickly followed, despite all legal obstacles. Where the differences were marked, neither opportunity nor law was able to bridge the gap. Neither legalized integration nor segregation accomplish anything more than to aggravate a situation. To introduce the state into an area of personal, religious, and moral decision is to abdicate the harmony of classes for a statist imposition. If a person or if a people are inferior, nothing can compel their rise; if they have a potential, why prevent their development? Where there are religious and social reasons against mixed marriages, nothing can further such marriages as long as the faith and the society are strong. If these factors are invalid or disappear through disbelief, nothing can prevent integration in the short or long run.³⁷

This line of reasoning is basically the same as the one Gamaliel took with respect to the civil suppression of the Jerusalem church by

36. They possessed this right during Reconstruction, 1865–1877.

37. *Chalcedon Report* #68 (April 1971). Reprinted in Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1991), p. 746.

the Jerusalem rabbinical council. If the church is of God, he said, it will flourish despite persecution; if it is not, then it will fail (Acts 5: 34–39). It was an argument for *toleration based on judicial inaction*. But this argument departed from the Mosaic law's mandatory civil sanctions against a call to false public worship (Deut. 13). Gamaliel, in his call for civil neutrality, necessarily called the Jewish authorities to abandon Moses, for he did not call them to accept Jesus' testimony in the name of Moses, which Jesus had done (John 5:45–46). His call for religious toleration was not merely a call based on a theory of religious neutrality; it was a call to abandon the Mosaic law. We should not interpret either argument for state inaction—Rushdoony's or Gamaliel's—as judicially neutral. They are not neutral; they are accommodationist.

3. Rushdoony's Two Choices

In Rushdoony's case, he had only two choices: (1) come out against Federal laws against state laws that enforced segregation, or (2) come out in favor of Federal laws—and Federal troops—enforcing laws that abolished state laws that enforced integration. There was no third choice. Either state laws enforcing segregation would be enforced or they would not be. By denying the legality of state laws enforcing segregation, the Federal government's position was not inherently integrationist; rather, it was for social voluntarism—what Rushdoony said he believed in. People in the South would be allowed to marry whomever they pleased without state laws prohibiting this on the basis of race. But Rushdoony did not call for support of such Federal legislation and Supreme Court interpretations. He opposed the civil rights movement, as his writings from the era reveal. In 1966, he quoted favorably the words of Lyndon Johnson in 1948: "The civil rights program, about which you have heard so much, is a farce and a sham . . . an effort to set up a police state in the guise of liberty. I am opposed to that program. I fought it in the Congress. It is the province of the state to run its own elections."³⁸ Johnson was substituting state judicial sovereignty for Federal judicial sovereignty, i.e., the sovereignty of segregationist states in the South. He was promoting the view that negative political sanctions imposed by black voters would not be brought against white segregationist politicians like himself. When his political base changed—from U.S. Senator from Texas to President of the United States (1964–1969)—his view of sovereignty changed. He be-

38. *Chalcedon Report* No. 5 (Feb. 1, 1966), in *Roots of Reconstruction*, p. 551.

came an advocate of civil rights. Rushdoony criticized the later Johnson by quoting the earlier Johnson. But in doing so, he necessarily came down against Federal laws abolishing segregation.

What if a local civil government has previously introduced a restrictive marital standard? What if it has made illegal all inter-racial marriages? What should a higher civil court do? Nothing? Then it accepts the local court's compulsory segregationist standard. It has not acted in a judicially neutral manner, for there is no judicially neutral manner. Should the higher court declare the law unconstitutional? Then it necessarily interferes with regional community standards. There is no escape from some judicial standard. There is no judicial neutrality.

Let us get this point clear: *civil government-enforced racial segregation is biblically illegitimate*. The state should not dictate to anyone that he must not marry someone, except in cases of incest or a previous marriage. A higher court must declare as invalid any local law that forbids marriages on the basis of race. This is a biblically mandatory restriction on any local community's authority to legislate laws governing the racial aspects of marriage. This is not a civil vote for or against inter-racial marriages; it is a civil vote of "no confidence" with respect to the state's authority to compel decisions in this area of life.

4. A Covenantal Issue

The issue here is covenantal. Rushdoony knew this, and this fact led him to modify his doctrine of community preferences to this extent: "The effects of integration have too often been studied only by proponents and opponents of integration. Unfortunately, both believe that enforced integration is possible. From the days of the Assyrians, who moved nations and peoples about to homogenize their empire, to the 20th century, such attempts have been failures. People do not inter-marry unless a common faith, culture, and standard brings them together. Then, they cannot be kept apart."³⁹ But if this is true of marriage, then there can be no valid civil or ecclesiastical law against inter-racial marriages if the partners share the same confession of faith, no matter what local community standards happen to be—the opposite of what he argues in the *Institutes of Biblical Law*.

There is a fundamental schizophrenia in Rushdoony's doctrine of the marriage covenant specifically and covenantalism generally. This

39. *Chalcedon Report* #74 (October 1971); *Roots*, p. 769.

schizophrenia stemmed in part from an incorrect interpretation of the Mosaic laws prohibiting genetic mixing. This led him to elevate community racial standards over biblical law in the name of a creation ordinance that never was.

G. Standards for Exclusion

What criteria determine which group is excluded from what covenantal organization? Rushdoony had already made his view plain: *community standards*. Let me quote him again: "The burden of the law is thus against inter-religious, inter-racial, and inter-cultural marriages, in that they normally go against the very community which marriage is designed to establish."⁴⁰ But there are also church communities and political communities. Are they also autonomous from biblical law? Can they lawfully ignore a creation ordinance? Racism spreads. The concern of Rushdoony's analysis here is not with a specific biblical limit on state authority. His analysis rests on an all-inclusive principle: *a creation ordinance*. He announced the existence of a creation ordinance in order to justify a view of marriage based on community standards of order and propriety. Rushdoony's assertion of the existence of a creation ordinance of genetic separation led him to embrace in principle the humanistic theory of society that he elsewhere opposes so eloquently: John Dewey's view of community standards and community authority.⁴¹

In Christ, the only valid standards for judicial exclusion in a formally covenanted church, state, or family are: (1) denying the Trinitarian faith (or oath) and (2) repeatedly breaking God's law as a way of life. Race is not a valid standard for covenantal exclusion, and wherever race becomes such a means of exclusion within any organization that is bound by a common confession of faith, it works against the ideal of the biblical covenant. There is no earthly court-enforceable biblical law against personal separation from others outside of church, but there can be no valid judicial exclusion of any race from the rights and obligations of the ecclesiastical covenant. Any program of enforced racial segregation within a covenantal institution is judicially evil. Annuling such a program by higher law within that covenantal hierarchy is not itself a program of enforced racial integration. Rather, it is

40. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 257.

41. On Dewey, see R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963), ch. 15.

merely prohibiting a judicial evil: state-enforced racial segregation.⁴²

It is true the national government in the United States has abolished state laws prohibiting inter-racial marriages. This is not the same as forcing racially different individuals to marry. To confuse the two is a monumental confusion. It is a confusion based on racism.

H. Judicial Review

The biblical judicial issue of race in the United States in the 1960s was not enforced integration, whatever the humanistic judicial issue was. The biblical issue was this: *illegally enforced racial exclusion from the voting booth, i.e., access to civil covenant sanctions*. Blacks were being kept from exercising their legitimate civil right of imposing civil covenant sanctions on civil rulers. They were being excluded by state and local laws from participating in a republican civil rite of covenantal renewal. *The civil rights movement was judicially a civil rites movement*. Senator Lyndon Johnson understood this in 1948. He affirmed his commitment to keep blacks away from this rite of covenant renewal—the imposition of civil sanctions.

The state has neither the authority nor the power to make men into better people. It cannot lawfully or successfully force people to have warm feelings toward their neighbors. But the state does have the God-given authority to impose sanctions against certain evil acts. For example, if a lower branch of civil government is excluding people from the civil franchise or from access to civil institutions on the basis of anything except their lack of a covenantal profession of allegiance or their legal status as criminals in prison, a higher civil court has the obligation to annul that exclusion. Such a judicial annulment is not inherently an example of forced integration, although it can be and has been an aspect of a larger program of forced integration. Rather, it is the judicial annulment of a covenantally illegal law that forcibly excludes people from the legitimate office of citizen—those who impose sanctions in the voting booth. The American South enforced such illegitimate laws for almost a century, 1877–1970. The national govern-

42. This should not be understood as a legitimization of laws requiring businesses to serve people or hire employees irrespective of race. Economic discrimination is not a covenantal act. If a business decides to hire or not to hire people of a certain race, the state should remain silent. Civil laws prohibiting economic discrimination inevitably become laws mandating quotas. Bureaucrats, if they are to be restrained in their quest for power, must be provided with written numerical ratios as guidelines to determine whether or not racial (or other) discrimination is taking place. This means quotas.

ment, for political reasons, went along with this illegal covenantal exclusion. This cooperation between national and local civil governments ended in the decade of the 1960s.

The national government's application of new civil sanctions did change millions of white people's minds in the South, 1957–1970, unlike the application of far more rigorous military sanctions during Reconstruction, 1865–77. No one in the South today publicly laments the annulment of the various "Jim Crow" segregation laws; the climate of opinion has changed.⁴³ Jim Crow laws have gone the way of chattel slavery, but these laws were no less enthusiastically affirmed by white Christians in the South, 1890–1960. But the overall climate of moral and political opinion among the non-Christian, university-educated elite of the South regarding the locus of political sovereignty—Federal rather than state—had steadily changed during the twentieth century. Thus, the specific climate of opinion regarding segregation shifted rapidly, 1957–1970, when Federal sanctions were imposed. What the North's military governments of the Reconstruction era had not accomplished, 1865–76, humanistic public education, nationally marketed textbooks, college education, theological liberalism, and President Johnson's Civil Rights Act of 1964 did accomplish.

Rushdoony's misidentification of the judicial annulment of illegal racial segregation in public institutions as necessarily a product of "enforced integration" is a variation of a similar error on his part: identifying the Supreme Court's covenantal obligation to strike down bad or unconstitutional laws as an illegitimate attempt to make men good. That is, he rejected a court's decision to refuse to enforce a morally bad law or unconstitutional law because this would mean that the court is attempting to make men good. He wrote: "*Second*, we must remember that the Constitution can make no man nor nation good; it is not a moral code."⁴⁴ He confused the biblically legitimate concept of judicial review—annulling bad laws—with biblically illegitimate messianic acts of state healing: salvation by law. A messianic view of civil law

43. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900–1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965). Cf. Charles S. Mangum, Jr., *The Legal Status of the Negro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940).

44. R. J. Rushdoony, "The United States Constitution," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, XII (1988), p. 22. For a discussion of Rushdoony's confusion on this distinction, see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 687–91.

is at odds with the fundamental legal position of the Bible, which presents the state as God's monopolistic agency for the coercive suppression of public evil.⁴⁵ But if we reject the principle of judicial review in the name of anti-messianism, we are left without any means of judicial appeal (Ex. 18). If the mere annulment of a bad law is discussed as if it were inherently a case of imposing positive civil sanctions (which biblical law rejects), then there cannot be lawful judicial review. This would go far in destroying the judiciary.⁴⁶

The same principle of judicial review applies to hierarchical church courts. Any local church that excludes people from membership on the basis of race must be disciplined by its denomination or association. The local church must be excluded from the larger fellowship for its practice of unjustly excluding people from the local fellowship. It does not matter what the local church's "community" thinks. The issue is quite simple: What are the judicial terms of God's covenant? They are never racial in the New Covenant. They were never racial in the Old Covenant, either. For example, the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites from citizenship for 10 generations (Deut. 23:3) was judicially based on the origin of both those nations in Lot's drunken incest with his daughters (Gen. 19:31-38). The descendants of bastards were also excluded for 10 generations (Deut. 23:2). The covenantal issue here was not race; it was covenantal rebellion. Biblical laws of exclusion are confessional and moral.

I. Sovereignty: From the Bible to the Community

Leviticus 19:19 commanded the Israelites to keep their breeds of cattle separated. This meant that they could not lawfully breed their cattle systematically. The law also required them to keep the seeds of different crops separate from each other in any given field. finally, they could not wear cloth of a linen-wool mixture.

These first two laws spoke of separation: separating the confessionally identical and culturally similar tribes of Israel. The third law required them to avoid clothing that symbolically testified to equality between priest and non-priest. None of this had anything to do with a

45. Chapter 16.

46. This does not mean that decisions by the courts should not be appealed to a combined review of the executive and legislative branches. See North, *Political Polytheism*, pp. 502–13. There should be no single institution that possesses final jurisdiction in history. Every doctrine of divine right challenges God as the only final court of appeal.

prohibition of hybrids. None of this had anything to do with the separation of races and cultures. This had to do, first, with separating similar tribes until Christ, the promised Seed, came in history. Second, it had to do with the separation of God's priestly nation from non-priestly nations.

Rushdoony invented a supposed creation ordinance of hybridization. Then he applied this mythological judicial principle to inter-racial marriages—marriages between partners who may share the same covenantal confession. He identified local community standards of order as the standards that must govern marriages. *This transfers sovereignty over the marriage covenant from God's law to the local community.* This new sovereignty, which Rushdoony offered in the name of biblical law, cannot easily be restricted to the marriage covenant: unless there is some higher biblical principle to stop it, the doctrine of community sovereignty moves into church and state. We have seen where this leads: to humanism, both right-wing (Scottish Enlightenment Whiggery) and left-wing (totalitarianism).

Rushdoony invoked a creation ordinance. What higher principle is there than a creation ordinance? It is more fundamental than Mosaic law. Only a New Testament law possesses greater authority. There is such a law—no separation between Jew and Greek, free and bond—but Rushdoony ignored it. He wanted to keep superior races and inferior races separate until such time as local community standards approve of covenantal bonding, i.e., marriage under the authority of the local community's judicially autonomous covenant. Any appeal beyond this authority—whether to biblical covenant theology or the U.S. Supreme Court—Rushdoony rejected as marks of integrationism in the 1960s and 1970s. He never publicly abandoned this position.

Rushdoony concluded his discussion with these words: "Hybridization is an attempt to deny the validity of law. Its penalty is an enforced sterility. In every area, where man seeks potentiality by a denial of God's law, the penalty remains the same, limited gains and long-range sterility."⁴⁷ He moved from a biological phenomenon to a social metaphor. He took this metaphor very seriously—judicially seriously. His defense of biblical law therefore suffers.

Conclusion

Rushdoony's defense of a non-existent creation ordinance is a clas-

47. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 262.

sic example of what Van Til identified as circular reasoning. Rushdoony's discussion of hybridization begins with a presupposition: genetic sterility is morally evil and therefore biblically prohibited. Yet the Bible says nothing about this sterility aspect of animal or plant breeding. It prohibits the mixing of seeds in one field, but it does not identify sterility as the reason for the prohibition. To make his case, Rushdoony had to ignore the fact that Israel brought mules—genetically sterile—into the land after the exile (Ezr. 2:66).

Then he moved from genetic sterility, which he called hybridization, to social sterility. His argument implicitly assumes that certain practices he disapproved of are socially "sterile." These practices included inter-racial marriages between "inferior" and "superior" races, as defined by local community standards. He also rejected all organ transplants.⁴⁸ To make this case, he invented a creation ordinance that never existed—a law against hybridization—and then he transplanted this theological construct to practices he did not personally approve of. He was implying that the supposed creational prohibition against biological mixtures is the symbol of a prohibition against certain kinds of inter-racial marriages, among other practices. Such marriages must await community approval before they can become covenantally valid. He thereby subordinated the marriage covenant to community opinion. *This is humanism, pure and simple.* It is John Dewey disguised as John Calvin: community over confession. If taken seriously, it could all too easily become Martin Bormann disguised as Martin Luther: race over reformation.

This kind of biblical exposition is, as Rushdoony derisively called it elsewhere, *eisegesis*: reading into the text of Scripture things which the expositor dearly wants the text to say, despite the fact that the text says nothing of the kind. It is surely not *exegesis*: deriving from the text the message God wishes to communicate. That there are racial differences among men is obvious, an aspect of the worldwide division of labor (Gen. 11; I Cor. 12). But there is only one difference that matters covenantally in church, family, or state: theological confession. Here is the great dividing line. Rushdoony's discussions of biological hybrids and race relations have obscured this covenantal line of demarcation.

There was never a creation ordinance against hybrids. There was a temporary Mosaic seed law that symbolized the prohibition against marriages that crossed tribal boundaries inside Mosaic Israel. This law

48. There is a lingering suspicion in my mind that he began with certain views on race and went looking for a biblical reason to justify them.

ended forever with the coming of the New Covenant and the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There was no tribal inheritance to be preserved in Israel once the promised Seed had come. There was no tribal system in Israel after A.D. 70.

Appendix G

MALTHUSIANISM VS. COVENANTALISM

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:28).

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies (Gen. 22:17).

And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude (Gen. 32:12).

The message is clear: the primary blessing in history is an expanding population of covenant-keepers. Man's dominion assignment from God mandates population growth. God's covenantal promise to Abraham involved a multiplication of his heirs. World dominion and population growth are linked.¹

This fact is no longer taken seriously by most Protestant Christians. It is, however, taken very seriously by the zero population growth movement, which sees man as the cancer of the world. Man's dominion over nature is seen as the ultimate threat to nature. Bill McKibben has stated this theology well: "We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence *is* its meaning; without it there is nothing but us."² Nothing but man: this is blasphemy in the minds of modern pantheists and nature-worshippers.

Nature's meaning, like all meaning, is provided by God and His de-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1985] 2012), ch. 1.

2. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 58.

cree. Man is to represent God in history. Through covenant-keeping men, nature receives its God-given meaning. This is why population growth of covenant-keeping men is so important. Man is to fill nature, thereby subduing it: for God's glory, in His name, and by His law. Such a view of man and nature is horrifying to modern, covenant-breaking man.

There is another factor to consider: the fixed number of demons. Satan's demonic followers constitute a numerically fixed host: no reproduction. Angels do not reproduce (Matt. 22:30). Therefore, as human covenant-keepers grow in numbers, the ratio of demons to covenant-keepers falls. The ability of Satan's host to influence events also falls. Like jugglers who try to juggle an ever-increasing number of oranges, so is Satan's host. The same is true of his earthly imitators, who adopt centralized economic planning as their means of prosperity and control—above all, control. As British philosopher and radical Bertrand Russell openly admitted in 1923, "Socialism, especially international socialism, is only possible as a stable system if the population is stationary or nearly so. A slow increase might be coped with by improvements in agricultural methods, but a rapid increase must in the end reduce the whole population to penury, and would be almost certain to cause wars."³

A. The Legacy of Malthus

The legacy of Malthus—or at least the Malthus of 1798—is still with us. He altered his thesis decisively after 1798, abandoning his scientifically unsupported rhetoric of a geometrically increasing human population bounded by arithmetical increases in food. His disciples, however, still cling to the myths of the original edition of his *Essay on Population*.⁴

Rev. Malthus was not committed to the Bible's message of the blessings of large families (Psalm 127) and the goal of population growth for covenant-keeping societies (Gen. 15:5). He was an opponent of what would be called the economics of growth. He contrasted Adam Smith's wealth of nations with what he called the happiness of nations, especially the laboring classes.⁵ He was concerned with im-

3. Bertrand Russell, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, [1923] 1959), p. 273.

4. Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (New York: Penguin Books, [1798] 1982).

5. *Ibid.*, ch. XVI.

proving what today is called the quality of life, which he, like his disciples, contrasted with “mere” economic growth. He defined economic growth in terms of an increase in the supply of things. Had he defined economic growth as “an increase in the number of choices at the same price as earlier,” he would have had to modify his suggested contrast between the quality of life and economic growth.

Malthus worried greatly about population growth, not for what it supposedly will do to disrupt the environment, but because of the famines and wars that a growing population supposedly must produce in a finite world. He worried about the fate of man, not the fate of nature. While he would have agreed with the title of the 1972 book by Campbell and Wade, *Society and Environment: The Coming Collision*, his concern was with the environment’s effects on society, not society’s effects on the environment.

The Green movement, the ecology movement, and the zero-population growth movement are united in their commitment to the Malthusian mythology regarding the necessity for population control. But, unlike Malthus, they want the state to impose these restraints, including abortion.

The fundamental dividing issue between the biblical view of growth and the anti-growth movement’s view of growth is eschatological. The Bible predicts the end of the world. Time is inescapably bounded. The Bible affirms the moral legitimacy of growth in history, but it also affirms that history is bounded. Those who reject the biblical doctrine of the final judgment at the end of time offer a rival scenario: unbounded time and bounded growth. They understand that we cannot have unbounded time and unbounded growth in a finite world. They prefer a worldview based on unbounded time. They are not committed to overcoming the environmental limits to growth. They are committed to overcoming the eschatological limits to time. Given the biblical doctrine of the post-judgment lake of fire (Rev. 20: 9–10), this is understandable.

Christians who do not recognize the existence of this underlying eschatological dispute have been swept into the anti-growth movement by the power of its promoters’ rhetoric, not by the logic of their arguments. It is time to consider not only the arguments of the anti-growth movement, but also its hidden agenda: elitist, coercive power over the decisions of the vast majority of producers, better known as consumers.

B. The First Edition's Slogan

Malthus' concern over man's growing population began in the generation when the growth of England's population became visible to social analysts. One of the most famous phrases in the history of economics is the statement in the first edition of Rev. Thomas Robert⁶ Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798): "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio."⁷ On the basis of these two supposed laws of nature, he concluded: "By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal. This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. This difficulty must fall somewhere and must necessarily be severely felt by a large portion of mankind."⁸ What is not generally known by those who cite Malthus' famous statement about comparative rates of growth, mankind vs. food supplies, is that he removed this scientific-sounding statement from later editions of his essay. He later recognized that it could not be supported by the evidence, and in fact was refuted by the evidence.

Like Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Malthus' most famous work was initially published anonymously.⁹ Malthus wrote it as a reaction to some of the more optimistic speculations of several Enlightenment and utopian thinkers. In the lengthy original title of his essay, he specifically identified the Marquis de Condorcet and the egalitarian William Godwin, the poet Shelly's father-in-law. His father, Daniel Malthus, was enamored of Godwin's thesis; Malthus wrote his essay to show why he renounced both egalitarianism and the doctrine of inevitable historical progress.¹⁰

Malthus was born in 1766 and died in 1834, the year that Cyrus McCormick perfected his mechanical reaper, which led to the huge increase of grain production in the American Midwest. In 1798, the year of the *Essay*, Jenner introduced vaccination against smallpox.¹¹ So, we

6. He was not called Thomas; he called himself Thomas Robert or T. Robert: William Petersen, *Malthus* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 21.

7. Malthus, *Population*, p. 71.

8. *Idem*.

9. Antony Flew, "Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 9.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

11. Petersen, *Malthus*, p. 2.

see in Malthus' day the foundations of both an increase of life expectancy and an increase in food production. Both processes have continued unabated.

C. Overpopulation?

Condorcet had raised the specter of overpopulation in his book, the *Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind [Spirit]* (1795), written in 1794 while he was in hiding from Robespierre's Terror, and published the year after the deaths of both Condorcet and Robespierre.¹² He believed in inevitable progress, but he recognized that there are limits to growth. There would come a time "when the increase in the number of men [surpasses] that of their means," with the result that there will be a "decrease in prosperity and population."¹³ What was his solution? The increase of progress in science and the arts. Mankind will learn that "if they have obligations towards beings who are yet to come into the world, they do not consist in giving them existence only, but happiness; . . ." There are limits on population, but these can be reached without that "premature destruction, so contrary to nature, and to social prosperity, of a portion of the beings who have received life."¹⁴ This, as Nisbet points out, is fairly close to the conclusion that Malthus was to reach in later editions of his essay.¹⁵

Godwin was a true utopian. He, too, recognized the problem of overpopulation. His solution, stated in *Political Justice* (1793), was to speculate that, in the future, mankind as a species will eventually attain immortality in this world, after which men will cease to procreate.¹⁶ That is, men will become like the angels. Christianity has always taught this regarding man's post-resurrection condition, but the theologians' expositions did not invoke either evolution or the idea of the perfectibility of man in history. Despite being the target of Malthus' essay, Godwin wrote him a glowing letter that congratulated Malthus, but he reasserted his faith that men would use their reason to supply a moral check on population growth. In subsequent editions of the *Es-*

12. Condorcet died a suicide. He poisoned himself with jimson weed the night he was arrested and put into prison. This was the account provided by his friend André Morellet, *Mémoires inédits de l'Abbé Morellet de l'Académie Française*, 10th ed. (Paris: Ladvocat, 1822), ch. 24; cited in Petersen, *Malthus*, p. 41.

13. Cited by Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 212.

14. *Idem.*

15. *Idem.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

say, Malthus gave full recognition to these moral checks.¹⁷ In subsequent editions, he moved from biological pessimism to a kind of moral optimism. Nisbet wrote: "We find Malthus the pessimist succeeded by Malthus the social democrat and believer in the forthcoming improvement in the human condition."¹⁸ But it is this Malthus of 1798 who is remembered. It is that Malthus who is revered by the zero population growth cultists.

Concern over the expansion of human population was common among writers in the two decades that preceded the publication of Malthus' essay. In 1781, the Abbé Theodore Augustin Mann read a memoir to the academicians of Brussels. He raised the question of population stability. He concluded that there can be no famine-free stable equilibrium between human population and the food supply because environmental limits will eventually thwart good morals. "This equilibrium is evidently impossible among a people with good morals, because population naturally increases in an indefinite progression, while the means of subsistence are necessarily limited by the soil."¹⁹ The limits of the physical environment are greater than the expansionary power of population growth, which he saw as the outcome of good morals. The Venetian monk Giammaria Ortes wrote a major study on population, *Riflessione sulla Popolazione delle Nazioni per rapporto all'Economia Nazionale* (1790). He, too, argued that human numbers seem to expand geometrically, while the goods necessary to sustain life expand more slowly. There is a conflict between man and nature.²⁰

Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection rests on Malthus' observation on the growth of species. Independently of each other, Alfred Russel Wallace and Charles Darwin had accepted Malthus' thesis about population growth, namely, that a species will grow in number until its members run into an environmental barrier. They both concluded that a species survives when its members possess special characteristics that enable more of them to survive. The more progeny is issued by a particular pair in a species, the greater the likelihood that one of these progeny will possess the specific characteristics required for survival. It was Malthus' thesis that led them both to invent their

17. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

19. Cited by Charles Emil Stangeland, *Pre-Malthusian Doctrines of Population: A Study in the History of Economic Theory* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, [1904] 1966), p. 323.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

mutually announced theory of evolution through natural selection.²¹ Wallace made the connection in 1858 while he was suffering a fever.²² Darwin claimed later to have read Malthus' original 1798 essay in 1838. He, too, said that it led to his discovery of evolution through natural selection.²³

One of the oddities of intellectual history is that Marx rejected Malthus,²⁴ yet enthusiastically accepted Darwin.²⁵ Marx saw Malthus as too pessimistic regarding the future of mankind. He was not alone in his assessment. The debate between demographic optimists (anti-Malthus) and pessimists (neo-Malthusians) raged throughout the nineteenth century.²⁶ It escalated rapidly after the mid-1960s. People ask: Can society escape the "Malthusian" disaster of famine?

D. The Debate Continues

Concern over population growth escalated in the 1960s, especially after the counter-culture movement appeared around 1965. A major news magazine in the United States announced in 1965: "The World's Biggest Problem." It asked: "How can the world feed all its people, at the rate the population is growing?"²⁷ This article had been preceded by "World Choice: Limit Population or Face Famine."²⁸ Even *National Review*, then the most influential conservative intellectual magazine in

21. They co-authored an essay, "On the Tendency of Species to form Varieties. . . ." *Linnean Society Papers* (1858); reprinted in *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Philip Appleman (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 83–97. Darwin cited Malthus: p. 83. On the Darwin-Wallace discovery, see Arnold C. Brackman, *A Delicate Arrangement: The Strange Case of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace* (New York: Times Books, 1980).

22. Alfred Russel Wallace, *My Life*, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905), I, pp. 361–62.

23. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, [1959] 1967), p. 66.

24. Ronald L. Meek (ed.), *Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb*, rev. ed. (Palo Alto, California: Ramparts, 1971).

25. Marx to Engels: Dec. 19, 1860; Marx to Lasalle: Jan. 16, 1861. Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 41 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), pp. 232, 246–247. In 1866, Marx switched his allegiance to a crackpot ethnologist and racist, Pierre Trémaux. Marx to Engels: Aug. 7, 1866. Engels dismissed Trémaux. Engels to Marx: Oct. 2, 1866. Cited in Nathaniel Weyl, *Karl Marx: Racist* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1979), p. 72.

26. E. P. Hutchinson, *The Population Debate: The Development of Conflicting Theories up to 1900* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1967).

27. *U.S. News and World Report* (Oct. 4, 1965).

28. *Ibid.* (June 14, 1965).

the United States, got on the bandwagon in 1965.²⁹

1. Paul Ehrlich

In 1968, Dr. Paul Ehrlich's best-selling book, *The Population Bomb*, was published. In it, Ehrlich, a Stanford University professor of biology, warned: "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines—hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate. . . ." ³⁰ A far better estimate of the threat of worldwide famine was made in 1969 by Harvard University nutritionist Jean Meyer, who predicted that "food may at some time (20 or 30 years from now) be removed altogether as a limiting factor in population." ³¹ Meyer's viewpoint received very little publicity, although it was to prove correct within a decade.

The predicted famines did not occur in the 1970s or the 1980s. What did occur was a surplus of food. The apocalyptic critics in 1965 should have paid more attention to the statistics of food production. After 1950, worldwide grain production increased steadily. From 1950 through 1975, this increase was in the range of 25% to 40% per capita. ³² In the less developed countries (excluding Communist China), the increase was in the 13% range. Between 1950 and 1980, the world's supply of arable land grew by more than 20%, and it grew even faster in the less developed countries. From 1967 to 1977, the world's irrigated acreage grew by more than 25%. ³³ The price of seed, fertilizer, pesticides, and farm equipment also dropped in this period, in some cases by as much as half. ³⁴ In the 1980s, grain farmers all over the world suffered economic losses as a result of overproduction. While these trends may not be permanent, they did create a tremendous public relations problem for the heralded famine-predictors of the counter-culture era (1965–70).

29. "The Population Explosion," Special Article Section (July 27, 1965).

30. Paul Ehrlich, "Prologue," *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, [1968] 1970).

31. Jean Meyer, "Toward a Non-Malthusian Population Policy," *Columbia Forum* (Summer 1969), p. 5. This is published by Columbia University.

32. The United States Department of Agriculture estimated 40%; the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimated less than 30%.

33. All of these figures are found in Nick Eberstadt, "Hunger and Ideology," *Commentary* (July 1981), p. 43.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

What also occurred was a dramatic fall of birth rates in undeveloped nations: a contraceptive revolution.³⁵ In 1979, Ehrlich referred back to his book and others like it that had prophesied rising birth rates in the 1970s: "But we were all dead wrong."³⁶ He still held that a crisis was coming: perhaps famine, or a pandemic, or nuclear war.³⁷ In 1980, he made a \$1,000 bet with University of Maryland economist Julian Simon over the future price of five metals—a bet on the limits to growth. Simon predicted that prices would be lower. He proved correct; Ehrlich paid off the bet in 1990. He could easily afford to pay off; in that same year, he was granted a \$345,000 MacArthur Foundation Prize and half of the \$240,000 Craford Prize, the ecologists' version of the Nobel Prize.³⁸ Simon was unknown to the general public.³⁹ The media were overwhelmingly supportive of the apocalypics. Rival viewpoints on the population question, despite the overwhelming evidence, received little attention from the major opinion-makers. The opinion-makers were strongly opposed to population growth because they were strongly pro-abortion. The apocalypics seemed to provide scientific evidence for a looming catastrophe. This reinforced the legalization of abortion in 1973 (*Roe v. Wade*).

In 1942, Warren Thompson warned of the *decline* in the birth rate in Western Europe and its colonies, 1890–1940. "It is the most important demographic change of our time."⁴⁰ This decline in birth rates in the West has generally continued, although in the early 1990s, it was reversed in the United States.⁴¹ By the late 1980s, there was no Western European nation except Ireland⁴² with a birth rate anywhere near

35. Steven W. Sinding and Sheldon J. Segal, "Birth-Rate News," *New York Times* (Dec. 19, 1991).

36. Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich, "What Happened to the Population Bomb?" *Human Behavior* (Jan. 1979), p. 88.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

38. John Tierney, "Betting the Planet," *New York Times Magazine* (Dec. 2, 1990), pp. 52–53. Gold was in the \$350/oz range.

39. Their debate went back to the original Earth Day in 1970, when, at a faculty party, Simon tossed a drink in Ehrlich's face. He called Ehrlich the author of work that lacked substance or scholarship. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

40. Warren S. Thompson, *Population Problems*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1942), p. 188.

41. By 1992, the U.S. birth rate had climbed to 2.05 children per family, up from 1.8 in 1987, much to the surprise of population forecasters. Lucinda Harper, "Census Bureau Lifts Population Forecast, Citing Fertility, Immigration, Longevity," *Wall Street Journal* (Dec. 4, 1992).

42. Ireland in this period experienced a rising population: 1.5% per year. "Irish Economy Dips After Big Decade," *New York Times* (Dec. 25, 1981). It is the one West

2.1 children per family—the family replacement rate.⁴³ Had Islamic birth rates been excluded, the birth rate figures would have been much lower in several nations. West Germany's birth rate had fallen so low by the late 1970s that the German population will die out in the year 2500 if the same birth rate is maintained.⁴⁴ (There will be plenty of Muslims, especially Turks, to replace them.) By the late 1980s, a new warning was being sounded: European life spans were lengthening, birth rates were dropping, and government retirement programs were facing a looming crisis: too many recipients, too few taxpaying workers.⁴⁵ Yet the apocalypticists continue to warn of an impending explosion, a population bomb.

2. *Global 2000*

In 1980, a Presidential Commission reported to the President of the United States on the impending crises. Unlike most reports from Presidential commissions, this three-volume report received worldwide publicity. It was titled, *Global 2000 Report to the President*, but became known simply as *Global 2000*. It was a deeply political document. It was also a classic Malthusian document, meaning the 1798 Malthus, not the more mature Malthus. It warned on page 1:

If present trends continue, the world in 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable ecologically, and more vulnerable to disruption than the world we live in now. Serious stresses involving population, resources, and environment are clearly visible ahead. Despite greater material output, the world's people will be poorer in many ways than they are today.

For hundreds of millions of the desperately poor, the outlook for food and other necessities of life will be no better. For many it will be worse. Barring revolutionary advances in technology, life for most people on earth will be more precarious in 2000 than it is now—unless the nations of the world act decisively to alter current trends.

Nothing like this happened. Two comments are relevant here. First, there has been no revolutionary technological development, for

European nation with young people visible.

43. This includes both southern and northern Europe: "The Missing Children," *The Economist* (Aug. 3, 1991).

44. John Vinocur, "West Germans, Birth Down, Ponder Future, or Lack of It," *New York Times* (April 28, 1978).

45. "Grapppling With the Graying of Europe," *Business Week* (March 13, 1989).

example, along the lines of nanotechnology, where molecule-sized mechanical assemblers put together atoms and molecules in order to produce organic as well as inorganic substances in almost limitless quantities. This development, if it comes, will at last force a drastic revision of the legacy of Malthus. It looks technologically feasible sometime before the year 2070, but it has not happened yet.⁴⁶ Second, “the nations of the world”—read: national governments—poured tens of billions of dollars worth of aid into the third world in the 1980s, but in the handful of isolated socialist economies of Africa, things nevertheless grew worse.⁴⁷ Outside of these tiny socialist economies, which were also suffering from civil war, the predicted food crises did not take place.

This absence of crises was predicted by a group of scholars in a book published in 1984: *The Resourceful Earth*.⁴⁸ This book received very little attention from the press. Its editors offered another scenario: “If present trends continue, the world in 2000 will be *less crowded* (though more populated), *less polluted, more stable ecologically*, and *less vulnerable to resource-supply disruption* than the world we live in now. Stresses involving population, resources, and environment *will be less in the future than now . . .* The world’s people will be *richer* in most ways than they are today . . . The outlook for food and other necessities of life will be *better . . .* life for most people on earth will be *less precarious* economically than it is now.”⁴⁹ This prediction came true for all but North Korea and Cuba.

The Malthusian apocalypitics in 1980 dismissed as irrelevant two centuries of economic and technological progress: 1780–1980. They also ignored earlier periods of population growth in European history. Economic historian Karl Helleiner wrote:

The opinion, still widely held, that before the eighteenth century, Europe’s population, though subject to violent short-run fluctuations, remained stationary over long periods, or was growing only imperceptibly, is, I believe, no longer tenable. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that those oscillations were superimposed on clearly recognizable “long waves.” At least two periods of secular increase

46. Erik K. Drexler, *Engines of Creation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1986); K. Eric Drexler and Chris Peterson, *Unbounding the Future: The Nanotechnology Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1991).

47. See below, “Foreign Aid: Government to Government.”

48. Julian L. Simon and Herman Kahn (eds.), *The Resourceful Earth: A Response to Global 2000* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

49. Simon and Kahn, “Introduction,” *ibid.*, pp. 1–2. Ellipses are in the original.

can be tolerably well identified in the demographic history of medieval and early modern Europe, the first extending from about the middle of the eleventh to the end of the thirteenth, the second from the middle of the fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth, century. . . . *In this sense the demographic development of the eighteenth century was not unique.* What was unprecedented about it was the fact that the secular upward movement started from a higher level, and that it was able to maintain, and for some time even increase, its momentum. Population growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, unlike that of previous epochs, was not terminated or reversed by catastrophe.⁵⁰

Something changed after 1750. The world experienced what Adam Smith taught in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776): economic freedom produces rapid, long-term growth.

Economic freedom is necessary but not sufficient to produce long-term population growth. A religious worldview favorable to large families must accompany economic liberty. Men must believe what David wrote so long ago: "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Ps. 127:4–5). The issue here is world dominion under God. This faith has faded rapidly in the humanist West. With falling birth rates among the populations of the industrialized world, rates of population growth are headed lower.⁵¹ When third-world nations industrialize, they almost certainly—a very dangerous phrase in demographics—will experience the same thing. (We must always add: unless people change their minds and then change their behavior.)

The Malthusians always talk about the burden of more mouths to feed. They never talk about the economic benefits of more hands to work and more minds to think creatively beginning two decades later.⁵² They ignore the long-term capital returns from a 15-year or 20-year capital investment in morality and education. That is, *they are present-oriented and therefore lower-class social theorists.*⁵³ Sadly, vocal

50. K. F. Helleiner, "The Vital Revolution Reconsidered," in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History* (London: Arnold, 1965), p. 86.

51. An "echo effect" can persist for several generations: despite birth rates below the family replacement rate of 2.1 births per family, total population continues to grow because of high birth rates in the past. A rising number of marriages produces a rising population even though family size decreases.

52. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

53. Class position is best understood in terms of time perspective, not money. See

Christian intellectuals in the late twentieth century joined the camp of the Malthusians.

3. *The Specter of Hunger Is Himself Very Thin*

Are many people facing famine today? If so, what is the proper solution? If not, why are so many Western intellectuals convinced that famine is imminent? How could a supposedly serious pair of scholars have written a book in 1967 titled, *Famine—1975?*⁵⁴ The famine never appeared. Instead, food prices fell. Per capita consumption of food rose. Yet the myth of looming food shortages continues to be believed. From 1798 until the present, Malthus' predictions have been refuted by the facts, decade after decade. The West has experienced a growing population with increasing per capita consumption of food. Yet the myth still flourishes in the West. That starvation is possible in a major war is quite possible. The question is: If we avoid such a major war, is a famine inevitable? The apocalyptic's answer: *yes*. This answer has been proven incorrect for over two centuries, but generation after generation of apocalyptic's learn nothing from the evidence. Theirs is a religious worldview, impervious to the historical record. It is also an anti-biblical worldview, opposed to the dominion covenant.

E. An Age of Hunger?

Consider the anti-free market book written by a politically left-wing evangelical historian, Ronald J. Sider: *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977).⁵⁵ This book was very popular among college-age Protestant evangelicals and neo-evangelical college professors for several years until the Institute for Christian Economics hired David Chilton to write *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981). After that, Sider's name and influence faded rapidly.⁵⁶ The collapse of

Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), ch. 3.

54. William and Paul Paddock, *Famine—1975! America's Decision: Who Will Survive?* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

55. Co-published by the neo-evangelical Protestant Inter-Varsity Press and the liberal Roman Catholic Paulist Press.

56. A second edition of *Rich Christians* was published by Inter-Varsity in 1984, one which promised on the cover to respond to Sider's critics. Inside, there was no reference to David Chilton's refutation, or to a dozen other published critics. Sider simply stonewalled; his influence began to disappear almost immediately. He rapidly fell out of favor with his left-wing evangelical supporters when he came out publicly against both abortion and homosexuality in the mid-1980s. The third edition of *Rich Christians* (Waco: Word, 1990) also made no reference to Chilton. Neither did the

Communism in the late 1980s buried what little remained of his reputation as a social theorist—a fate shared by many of his humanist peers. It was not that most of them changed their minds after 1989. Rather, the public started laughing at them. This drove them into a snit of silence. Finally, in 1997, the fourth edition appeared. In it, Sider reversed many of his old opinions, adopted some of Chilton's conclusions, toned down his rhetoric, but still refused to mention Chilton or his book.⁵⁷ By then it was two decades too late. His original errors had become conventional thinking for a generation of academic neo-evangelicals.

Let us begin with Sider's initial assumption: our present age of hunger. The fact is, no era in man's history has been described more inaccurately as an age of hunger than the era in which Sider wrote his book. The near-universal conquest of hunger for most of the world's population, except those people caught in civil wars in backward African nations,⁵⁸ had been achieved by 1977. The 1980s accelerated this conquest. Like so many other academic jeremiads of the twentieth century, Sider's came after the supposed crisis had very nearly been solved⁵⁹—solved by free-market, profit-driven agriculture.

The extraordinary productivity of modern capitalist agriculture stands as a testimony to the possibilities for urbanization and suburbanization. Men prefer to live in cities and towns when they can afford to leave the farm. The division of labor—social, economic, intellectual, cultural—that urban life promotes makes almost inevitable net out-migration from exclusively rural areas. This is exactly what the jubilee land laws promoted. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen this development as never before in man's post-Babel history.

What about the supposedly near-starvation conditions of the politically designated third world?⁶⁰ The poorest nations on earth in

fourth edition in 1997.

57. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Appendix F: "The Re-Education of Ronald J. Sider."

58. And, in the 1990s, in civil-war torn regions of former Communist domination in Europe and Asia.

59. "The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk."—Hegel.

60. The concept of the "third world" is uniquely political. It refers to those nations that seek government-to-government foreign aid. P. T. Bauer wrote: "The Third World is the creation of foreign aid: without foreign aid there is no Third World. The concept of an underdeveloped world eventually to become the Third World was invented after the Second World War. It did not exist before then. From its inception, the unifying characteristic has been that the Third World is in practice the aggregate

1983, the economies of sub-Saharan Africa, were producing on average 90% of the calories they needed. The three poorest nations on earth—Mali, Ghana, and Chad—produced two-thirds of the needed calories.⁶¹ The common characteristic of these African nations is that their governments have placed controls on farmers: heavy taxation, controls against private exporting of crops, price controls on agricultural products, and government monopoly purchases at prices well below world market prices. This observation was made by English economist Peter T. Bauer two decades before Sider's book appeared.⁶² Bauer was one of the foremost economic theorists in the area of economic development; he was elevated to the House of Lords for his work in the field. (He died in 2002.) A century before Sider's book appeared, Cornelius Walford had identified the same causes of famine in history that Bauer identified: (1) the prevention of cultivation and the willful destruction of crops; (2) defective agriculture caused by the communistic control of land; (3) governmental interference by regulation or taxation; (4) currency restrictions, including debasing of coins.⁶³

Sider ignored all this or else was unaware of it in 1977. By 1984, he was no longer unaware of it, for Chilton had presented Bauer's evidence and supporting academic evidence.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Sider's second edition in 1984 refused to respond to Chilton's line-by-line critique, despite the fact that the new edition's cover promised that he would respond to his critics. He never mentioned a word about Chilton, Bauer, or Walford. This was not scholarship; this was naive

of countries whose governments demand and receive Western aid. In all other ways the unity or uniformity is pure fiction." Bauer, *Equality, the Third World and Economic Delusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 87.

61. The World Bank, *World Development Report 1986* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 234–35, Table 28; cited in E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1990), p. 127.

62. P. T. Bauer, *Economic Analysis and Policy in Under-Developed Countries* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Commonwealth-Studies Center, published by Duke University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 83–84. Bauer published a detailed study of these government marketing boards as early as 1954: *West African Trade: A Study of Competition, Oligopoly and Monopoly in a Changing Economy* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, [1954] 1963), Part 5.

63. Cited in E. Parmalee Prentice, *Hunger and History: The Influence of Hunger on Human History* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1939), p. 4.

64. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982), pp. 127–31, 134–35, and especially 139, where he cited Walford's four causes of famine. (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>)

socialist propaganda disguised as caring Christian scholarship.

In an important 1981 article, economist Nick Eberstadt noted that four myths contribute to our failure to deal with the intellectual problem of hunger, the myths of (1) widespread and growing hunger; (2) growing and inevitable agricultural scarcity; (3) ominous food deficits; (4) the superiority of socialist agriculture. He then went on to provide statistics to refute each of these four myths.⁶⁵ Sider promoted the first three myths and implicitly promoted the fourth by his attack on profit-seeking agriculture.

The worst famine in modern history, the Chinese famine of 1959–62, was caused by Mao's Great Leap Forward policies: a vast scheme of government-directed production. As many as 30 million people died as a result of this program. "Even as their policies were causing millions of their citizens to starve," Eberstadt wrote, "China's leaders denied that there was a crisis, refused all offers of international aid, and exported food."⁶⁶ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a million ethnic Ibos died in a Nigerian famine. This was government policy: the Islamic Nigerians were trying to eliminate the rebellious Ibos. Similar government policies led to famines in Ethiopia, East Timor, and Cambodia.⁶⁷ Hunger is not the product of population growth, the West's meat consumption, or the failure of modern agriculture. The problem is socialist economics. Sider and his intellectual peers are making this problem worse. The problem is not rich Christians in an age of hunger. The problem is isolated socialist economies in an age of capitalist prosperity.

F. Foreign Aid: Government to Government

Did the West do nothing while third-world residents starved? Hardly. In 1982, the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated that the West sent about \$18 billion to third-world countries. In addition, multilateral development agencies (government operated) provided an additional \$8 billion. To that was added government and private investment and lending. The total, according to the OECD, was in the \$80 billion range.⁶⁸ In one year! These

65. Nick Eberstadt, "Hunger and Ideology," *Commentary* (July 1981). Eberstadt was at the time a visiting fellow at Harvard University's Center for Population Studies.

66. Eberstadt, "Famine, Development, & Foreign Aid," *Commentary* (March 1985), p. 26.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

68. The nominal dollars today (2012) would be more than double.

capital flows began in the early 1950s. From 1956 to 1982, the West sent \$670 billion in aid (OECD estimate). In 1985 prices, this was over \$1.5 trillion. Three-quarters of this money came from governments. Add to this the money sent from 1982 to 1985 plus the money sent in the first half of the 1950s, and the total is \$2 trillion. How much wealth did this represent? *The combined value of all farms in the United States and all stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1985.*⁶⁹ But this enormous transfer of wealth was insufficient to stop the famines in sub-Saharan Africa, and so it was equally insufficient to stop the critics of capitalism, who called for more compulsory aid and more sacrifices by Western taxpayers. This points to a conclusion that Bauer had made decades earlier, but which is unacceptable to modern statist: the primary shortage of capital in backward societies is moral capital, meaning people's attitudes and beliefs.⁷⁰ This crucial form of capital cannot be provided by government handouts.⁷¹

Did the recipient governments use this money to strengthen agriculture? Not often. Politicians and bureaucrats wanted to bypass agriculture in order to become leaders of industrial nations. Industrial nations have more prestige and more modern weaponry. Third-world economic planning programs deliberately starved the agricultural sector. In Peru and Mexico, less than 10% of gross national product was produced by farming in 1980, half of Germany's rate in the 1930s. Ecuador's percentage in 1984 was smaller than Holland's in 1950. Bolivia's rate was less than Greece's in 1984, yet Greece is considered a developed nation. Senegal, in the midst of the continuing Sahel famine, in 1984 produced at the same level of Japan in 1950.⁷² The problem is not lack of foreign aid. The problem is the misuse of this aid by recipient politicians and bureaucrats.

G. Other Ignored Factors

One of the familiar arguments of the semi-vegetarian social critics of capitalist agriculture is that Westerners eat too much meat. If we just ate more vegetables, the freed-up food resources could feed the

69. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

70. P. T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 78–79.

71. Gary North, "Free Market Capitalism," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth & Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), pp. 27–65. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWap>)

72. Eberstadt, "Famine, Development & Foreign Aid," p. 29.

starving masses of the world. That is to say, if we ate less meat, our governments could tax the money we saved by eating soybeans and then send surplus soybeans to Africa (or wherever). I call this outlook soybean socialism.

1. Soybean Socialism

Sider's comments are typical. Notice his use of the pronouns *we* and *our*. "Undoubtedly the most striking measure of the gap between rich and poor is food consumption. . . . U.S. citizens consume almost five times as much grain per person as do the people in the developing countries. The major reason for this glaring difference is that we eat most of our grain indirectly—via grain-fed livestock and fowl."⁷³ What these guilt-manipulating critics always fail to mention is that the recipient nations suffer from a far worse situation: their animals eat huge quantities of grain, yet they escape a similar fate at the hands of man.

The sad fact is this: animals in under-developed countries consume vast quantities of poorly stored food, especially grains. I have covered this in *Moses and Pharaoh*,⁷⁴ but some of the facts are worth repeating. The "sacred cows" of India eat a lot of grain, but nobody eats them. Estimates of the number of such cows in India range between 175 million to over 200 million. They eat enough grain to feed 1.2 billion people. Robert Sassone wrote in 1972: "This means that India produced enough food, so that if you moved the cows out, you could move everybody in from the continents of Antarctica, Australia, Africa and Europe. You could also move in everybody from most of the other nations in the world. Then all those people could eat better than the people of India eat today."⁷⁵ India's rats also eat. In the early 1970's, rats and cows together consumed half of India's agricultural output.⁷⁶ It would have taken a train 3,000 miles long to haul all the grain eaten by rats in India each year.⁷⁷ Rats in other nations are also big eaters. In one year, rats in the Philippines consumed over half the corn and 90% of the rice crop.⁷⁸ Is this the fault of the "monopolistic" West?

73. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 42.

74. North, *Moses and Pharaoh*, pp. 341–42.

75. Robert L. Sassone, *Handbook on Population*, 2nd ed. (Author, 1972), p. 53.

76. Robert M. Bleiberg, "Down a Rathole," *Barron's* (Aug. 11, 1975), p. 7.

77. The estimate of Dr. Max Milner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Over 40% of the World's Food Is Lost to Pests," *Washington Post* (March 6, 1977).

78. *Idem*.

2. *The Green Revolution*

Then there is the “green revolution” that transformed Asian agriculture in the 1960s. That revolution is continuing. Norman Borlaug, who won the Nobel Prize in 1970 for his high-yield dwarf wheat that rescued Asia from famine, in 1992 announced a program to save Africa from famine. With a grant provided by a private Japanese philanthropist, Borlaug’s program was tried on 150,000 African farms. The results were spectacular: yield increases of 2.5 to one, 1986–1992. Even after civil war ended his work in the Sudan, the Sudanese still harvested 800,000 tons of wheat, up from 160,000 in 1986. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, himself a farmer, told the World Bank in 1992: “Dr. Borlaug’s system works. I’ve been on the farms. I’ve seen it work.”⁷⁹ Yet Sider in 1977 dismissed the green revolution as a temporary phenomenon because “fantastic population growth almost matched increased agricultural productivity. When droughts and floods struck in 1971 and 1972, hunger returned.”⁸⁰

A major problem with Sider’s book is that he regarded short-term statistics produced by ideologically motivated pleaders as a convenient substitute for both economic theory and detailed historical research. In the second edition, he refused to respond to the first edition’s many errors pointed out in Chilton’s *Productive Christians*. The third edition (1990) failed to respond to Chilton’s third edition, which refuted Sider’s second edition line by line. There is no mass starvation in the world, but there is a vast market for guilt among intellectuals. Finally, in 1997, he gave up on the entire 20-year project. He accepted much of what Chilton had said. But he never mentioned Chilton once in any of the last four editions, including the 2005 edition.

H. Capitalist Guilt or Liberal Guilt?

Who is to blame for all this alleged starvation? Rich people in the West, said Sider in 1977. “Tragically, rising affluence in North America, Europe, Russia [!!!] and Japan had also tripled the cost of grain for export in the same short period.”⁸¹ What is Sider’s solution to the “problem” of the North American “monopoly” over food? “A new food policy *now* is one way to avoid such a dangerous situation. The con-

79. Richard Critchfield, “Bring the Green Revolution to Africa,” *New York Times* (Sept. 14, 1992).

80. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 17.

81. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 17.

stantly growing demand for food must stop—or at least slow down dramatically. That means reduced affluence in the rich nations and population control everywhere.”⁸²

Sider’s analysis rests implicitly on what Mises called the Montaigne dogma: an increase in one person’s wealth always comes from a decrease in another person’s wealth.⁸³ Such a view is opposed to the biblical idea that God rewards covenant-keeping societies, in part so that other societies will praise God and adopt God’s laws (Deut. 4:5–8), thereby spreading wealth across the globe. Sider wants the West to feed the world’s starving poor. But when he said “the West,” he means Western governments. He means *charity by compulsion*—the destruction of charity.

Western governments have done enough damage already. The series of famines that began in the Sahel region of Africa in the 1970s were caused by ill-advised government foreign aid projects from the West. The Sahel region comprises about a fifth of the land area of Africa, stretching east to west, just south of the Sahara: from Mauritania on the west coast through Mali, Niger, Chad, the Sudan, and parts of Ethiopia and Somalia. The West’s project managers sank deep water wells in order to increase the water supply for agriculture. The nomads of the region then abandoned centuries-old wandering routes and settled close to the wells. The result should have been predicted but wasn’t: the nomads’ animals overgrazed the areas near the wells, multiplied rapidly, thus bringing regional famine. Meanwhile, the world development organizations continued to sink more wells, spreading the famine.⁸⁴

The majority of the cases of starvation today are in sub-Saharan Africa, north of South Africa. Very few people live there—fewer than a hundred million, with the AIDS plague rapidly spreading across the lower part of the that incontinent continent. How could the rest of the world be fed by the food supposedly forfeited by these people? Civil war is a major cause—perhaps *the* major cause—of starvation in Africa. The opposing military forces steal most of the food sent to civilians by foreign charities and civil governments. In December, 1992, the United States government sent 30,000 of its military troops into

82. *Ibid.*, p. 214. This statement is missing in the 1984 edition.

83. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 660. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

84. Claire Sterling, “The Making of the Sub-Saharan Wasteland,” *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1974).

Somalia, under the authority of a United Nations task force, in order to stop the civil war from curtailing civilian food supplies sent by the West. The U.S. government implicitly acknowledged the source of the famine in Somalia: civil war, not the Montaigne dogma.

The West's consumption of food has had nothing to do with the agricultural crisis of sub-Sahara Africa. Poorly designed Western government foreign aid programs and domestic civil wars are the primary causes. Socialist agriculture, demonism, and God's curses are also relevant. What socialist critics refuse to consider is that socialism always produces low agricultural output. What humanists refuse to consider is that God brings terrible negative sanctions on those who worship demons. What Christian intellectuals refuse to consider is that they should avoid becoming apologists for propaganda from socialists and humanists.

There is no evidence that population growth today threatens per capita food consumption. Whether or not famine occurs will be decided by economic policy and the ability of civil governments to provide conditions of peace, where trade can take place without threat of violence. The world is not facing famine. The growth of free market institutions around the world has lowered the price of food, and has therefore lowered the percentage of people's incomes spent on food. What creates famine are such factors as government-imposed price ceilings on food, government controls over agricultural production, government restrictions on food distribution, and civil war. Where the free market flourishes, people do not starve. Rather, the market for weight-loss programs expands.

I. The New Tower of Babel

From at least the time when the late eighteenth-century French pornographer and communist propagandist Restif de la Breton wrote *The Year 2000*, the year 2000 has been the focus of humanism's eschatological concern.⁸⁵ The goal of the socialists and humanists has been to engineer a new world order, a rival of the new world order established by Jesus Christ.

One of the means of gaining public acceptance for the humanists' political new world order has been an appeal to the need to protect the environment, which is by nature international: moving fluids (air and water). These moving fluids can easily be used as "free" dump sites by

85. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 and All That," *Commentary* (June 1968).

those seeking to transfer private costs to others. (The other major appeal has been to disarmament.)

In 1970, a wave of excitement swept academia: Earth Day. This celebration was organized politically. Rallies were held across the United States and the world. This took place within weeks of the visible end of the counter-culture movement, which had begun between 1964 and 1965. This had been an era of cultural rebellion, intellectual transformation, sexual license, occultism, drugs, anti-war riots, and an economic boom which ended only with the recession of 1969–1970.⁸⁶ For six years, waves of protest swept the United States and the world. They ended one month after Earth Day: at Kent State University in Ohio, where a National Guard unit shot and killed several students during a protest. Within weeks, the public manifestations of the counter-culture's revolutionary phase ended. But the world was no longer the same; much of the counter-culture had been permanently institutionalized and commercialized.

One American author more than any other gave an account of this movement: Theodore Roszak. In 1969, his book appeared, *The Making of a Counter Culture*.⁸⁷ It pictured a movement based on a philosophical rejection of the boundaries of Western rationality, morals, and behavior: beyond technocracy. Three years later, he wrote *Where the Wasteland Ends*.⁸⁸ The title of the second book is significant. The wasteland motif is significant. He returned once again to the contrast between two deeply religious symbols: the garden and the wasteland. The wasteland, he wrote, is what technology produces. It is the civilization of the machine.

1. *The Establishment's New World Order*

In between the publication of these two books, another author wrote an essay. He wrote it for the most influential journal in the world, *Foreign Affairs*, the official publication of the Council on Foreign Relations.⁸⁹ He wrote it for the April 1970 issue: Earth Day. The

86. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), pp. 6–11. (<http://bit.ly/gnocultism>)

87. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969).

88. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972).

89. On the influence of the C.F.R. and its parallel organizations throughout the Anglo-American world, see Carroll Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 950–55.

author was George Kennan, one of the six "wise men" who shaped U.S. foreign policy from the Great Depression of the 1930s through the 1980s.⁹⁰ Kennan was the author of another article for *Foreign Affairs*, a 1946 anonymous essay that set forth the policy of containment: containing the Soviet Union geographically, a boundary strategy. This was the most influential and famous article on U.S. foreign policy written in the twentieth century. He died in 2005 at age 101.

Kennan's 1970 article was titled, "To Prevent a World Wasteland: A Proposal." This essay represented the assimilation of the counter culture's environmental vision by the masters of the technocratic Establishment. The Establishment's intellectuals had been ready and willing from the beginning to harness the pent-up forces of the revolt against the Establishment. They sought to re-channel these protests into rent-seeking, bureaucracy-expanding efforts to reduce human freedom. The state would be the beneficiary; those who controlled access to the most powerful positions within the state would benefit. The ultimate state is international.

Kennan began his observations with a quotation from the Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization, U Thant: "For the first time in the history of mankind, there is arising a crisis of world-wide proportions involving developed and developing countries alike—the crisis of human environment. . . . It is becoming apparent that if current trends continue, the future of life on earth could be endangered."⁹¹ Kennan observed that environmental problems normally become a concern first "within national boundaries. . . ." He immediately shifted his discussion to the international questions: polluted air, contaminated coastal waters, and wildlife.⁹² These phenomena are not respecters of national boundaries. As it is in the Book of Leviticus, so is it in *Foreign Affairs*: a question of boundaries. Kennan wanted these boundaries extended beyond nations.

Kennan called for the creation of "a body fortified by extensive scientific expertise" which will be able to measure the adequacy of "a considerable body of international arrangements" that deal with the environment. So far, he insisted, "it is evident that present activities have not halted or reversed environmental deterioration." There is no reas-

90. They were Dean Acheson, Charles Bohlen, Averill Harriman, George Kennan, Robert Lovett, and John J. McCloy. Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).

91. George Kennan, "To Prevent a World Wasteland: A Proposal," *Foreign Affairs*, XLVIII (April 1970), p. 401.

92. *Idem*.

on to suppose that they will stop.⁹³ He described the features that this new co-ordinating body must have: (1) facilities for the collection and dissemination of information (i.e., tools of control and propaganda); (2) co-ordination of “research and operational activities”; (3) the establishment of international standards in environmental matters, purely advisory; (4) international action governing the high seas, outer space, the Arctic and Antarctic, and the stratosphere.⁹⁴ This fourth requirement “consists simply of the establishment and enforcement of suitable rules for all human activities conducted in these media.”⁹⁵ In short, if a man breathes the air, swims in the sea, flies into outer space, or dwells on the ice caps, he is to be governed in all his activities by suitable rules. Kennan’s proposal is messianic.

Messianic programs require messianic enforcers. Kennan’s program is no exception. “Someone, after all, must decide at some point what is tolerable and permissible here and what is not; and since this is an area in which no sovereign government can make these determinations, some international authority must ultimately do so.”⁹⁶ There must be an international treaty or convention. “But for this there will have to be some suitable center of initiation, not to mention the instrument of enforcement which at a later point will have to come into the picture.”⁹⁷

Kennan called for a non-governmental agency of experts that can impose negative sanctions with civil authority. It must be a government beyond civil government and the boundaries of civil government. “This entity, while naturally requiring the initiative of governments for its inception and their continued interest for its support, would have to be one in which the substantive decisions would be taken not on the basis of compromise among governmental representatives but on the basis of collaboration among scholars, scientists, experts, and perhaps also something in the nature of environmental statesmen and diplomats—but true international servants, bound by no national or political mandate, by nothing, in fact, other than dedication to the work at hand.”⁹⁸

93. *Ibid.*, p. 402.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 404–5.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 405.

96. *Idem.*

97. *Ibid.*, p. 406.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 409–10.

2. *Russian Socialism*

In January, 1994, a nationally circulated newspaper insert magazine, *Parade*, ran a three-page interview with Mikhail Gorbachev, the deposed ruler of the Soviet Union (1991), who immediately became the head of an environmentalist organization called the Green Cross. This worn-out Communist war horse was proclaiming the Kennanist line in preference to the Leninist line. Collectivist that he was, his enemy was still the same: the American consumer, who has too much wealth.

If we're going to protect the planet's ecology, we're going to need to find alternatives to the consumerist dream that is attracting the world. Otherwise, how will we conserve our resources, and how will we avoid setting people against each other when resources are depleted? . . .

America must be an example to the world. America should do what we have done—that is, to abandon any attempt to impose a certain model on other peoples. If we just say, “Xerox the American way and standard of living,” then we must answer the question, “What do we do about the fact that 260 million people in America use 40% of the world's energy resources, and the 5 billion people in the rest of the world use what's left?” America must be the teacher of democracy to the world, but not the advertiser of the consumer society. It is unrealistic for the rest of the world to reach the American living standard. The world can't support that. Even now, only one third of the world's population is provided for adequately. We should, therefore develop other models.⁹⁹⁰

He called for “a new consciousness based on environmental justice.”¹⁰⁰ There is no blueprint, but there must be action. A new evolution is upon us. “There is no clear answer, except that the old ideologies in our civilization must give way to the new challenges of our civilization. The growing environmental movement must be a vehicle for that.”¹⁰¹

What is worth noting is that only a few weeks before, on November 28, 1993, the *New York Times* “Op Ed” page published an essay by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in which he proclaimed an almost identical thesis. The article was titled, “To Tame Savage Capitalism.” If any per-

990. Colin Greer, “The Well-Being of the World Is at Stake,” *Parade Magazine* (Jan. 23, 1994), pp. 5, 6.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

101. *Idem.*

son was responsible for destroying the reputation of Soviet Communism in the West, it was he. His three-volume study, *The Gulag Archipelago*, chronicled the terrorism of Soviet Communism from Lenin to the 1960s, and he was generally believed by Western intellectuals, who had rejected similar reports for over half a century. He was exiled from the USSR in 1974. The critic of the Soviet Union has also been the critic of Western capitalism. He now joins hands—or at least propaganda efforts—with Mr. Gorbachev, the protégé of Mr. Andropov, the former head of the KGB, the Soviet secret police that Solzhenitsyn despised.

In his essay, Solzhenitsyn decried the spiritual vacuum in the former Soviet Union, a vacuum that capitalism cannot fill. This has been a continuing theme in his writings: the failure of secularism, East and West.¹⁰² The West is now in trouble. It now faces “environmental ruin” and “the global population explosion.” The third world constitutes four-fifths of mankind, and will soon constitute five-sixths. It is “drowning in poverty and misery,” and it will soon “step forward with an ever-growing list of demands to the advanced nations.” He, too, rejected the growth model of Western capitalism. “The time is urgently upon us to limit our wants.” He attacked the United States without naming it for having resisted the demands of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. He did not mention what these demands were: to reduce industrial carbon dioxide emissions by government edicts in order to reduce global warming.

There are four major problems here. First, there is no clear-cut scientific evidence of global warming. When the temperature changes of the world’s oceans are included in the analysis, there is no evidence of directional change, 1890 to 1990. The evidence that temperatures have increased comes from temperature measurements taken at sites in or near cities, where temperatures have increased. In any case, the increase in carbon dioxide emissions accelerated after World War II, but temperatures have not risen since then.¹⁰³ Second, the major sources of carbon dioxide emissions are natural, most notably from termites, which contribute some 14 billion tons of carbon dioxide per year, compared to mankind’s supposed output of five billion tons—in an at-

102. A. Solzhenitsyn, “The World Split Apart,” his 1978 lecture to the graduating class of Harvard University, in *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), c. 3.

103. Wilfred Beckerman and Jesse Malkin, “How much does global warming matter?” *The Public Interest* (Winter 1994), p. 4.

mosphere of five quadrillion tons. Mankind's contribution is less than one millionth of the total atmosphere.¹⁰⁴ Third, there is no evidence that global warming is a bad thing. Plant life grows much faster in a high carbon dioxide environment.¹⁰⁵ (Scientific creationists have argued since 1961 that such environmental conditions probably existed under the pre-Flood canopy, when men's life spans were far longer.)¹⁰⁶ Fourth, it would be bad economics to invest heavily in anti-global warming technologies today when far cheaper technical solutions are likely to appear long before the supposed problem gets worse.¹⁰⁷ (As for atmospheric ozone, there was no increase or decrease, 1978 to 1991.)¹⁰⁸

In 1977, Ballantine Books, a popular paperback book company in the U.S., published *The Weather Conspiracy: The Coming of the New Ice Age*. The book began with this warning: "There is growing consensus among leading climatologists that the world is undergoing a cooling trend" (p. 5). But there was no temperature evidence for this frightening scenario, either.

Like Gorbachev, Solzhenitsyn repeated the oft-quoted statistic that the U.S. is a huge consumer of the world's resources. Gorbachev used the 40% figure; Solzhenitsyn used 50%. Neither figure is accurate. The U.S. share of world output/consumption has fallen slowly but steadily as other nations have increased their output and hence their consumption of resources. In 1989, the U.S. share of world output was in the range of 26%.¹⁰⁹ This information was available to the authors in 1993.

Solzhenitsyn complained: "When a conference of the alarmed

104. Peter Sawyer, *Green Hoax Effect* (Wodonga, Victoria, Australia: Group-acumen, 1990), p. 20.

105. Research findings on this subject are available from Dr. Arthur Robinson, Oregon Institute of Science & Medicine, P. O. Box 1429, Cave Junction, Oregon.

106. Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), pp. 404–405.

107. Beckerman and Malkin, pp. 13–16.

108. Chart, *Access to Energy*, 21 (Nov. 1993), [p. 4]. See also Rogelio A. Maduro and Ralf Schauerhammer, *The Holes in the Ozone Scare* (Washington, D.C.: 21st Century Science Associates, 1992).

109. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1993* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Government Printing Office, 1993), Table 1388: Gross National Product in Current and Constant (1989) Dollars. Some 60 nations are compared with the U.S. There are other, smaller nations not listed in the table whose output would add to the total. This would reduce the U.S. share. Exchange rate correlations are complex; it may be that the actual share of U.S. productivity is underestimated, thereby making the U.S. share of world production higher.

peoples of the earth convenes in the face of unquestioned and imminent threat to the planet's environment, a mighty power, one consuming not much less than half the earth's currently available resources and emitting half its pollution, insists, because of its own present-day interests, on lowering the demands of a sensible international agreement, as though it did not itself live on the same earth. Then other leading countries shirk from fulfilling even these reduced demands. Thus, in the economic race, we are poisoning ourselves." We must therefore "learn to limit firmly our desires and demands, to subordinate our interests to moral criteria," or else "humankind" will "simply be torn apart, as the worst aspects of human nature bare their teeth."

He recommended no economic blueprint. Solzhenitsyn has resisted offering an economic blueprint—which he sees as Western and hence unspiritual—throughout his career. But he is opposed to capitalism.¹¹⁰ He has long opposed industrial growth and the ideal of economic progress.¹¹¹ He has cried out against the supposed depletion of economic resources.¹¹² He warned years ago against imminent Malthusian disaster: ". . . *in all cases the population will be overtaken by mass destruction in the first decades of the twenty-first century. . . .*"¹¹³ He did predict in 1974 that the creative West would eventually "set about the necessary reconstruction."¹¹⁴ But he offered no blueprint for this reconstruction, any more than Gorbachev did two decades later. Both men perceive capitalism as morally bankrupt despite—or perhaps because of—its enormous economic success. They damn it as immoral, but they propose nothing to replace it. This opens the door to the creation of a socialistic New World Order in the name of third world poverty, environmental ethics, and overcoming the population explosion. This means a larger, more powerful state with the international authority to bring sanctions against those nations and individuals who violate the new ethical order. The mild socialist (Solzhenitsyn) and the mild Communist (Gorbachev) are strongly opposed to the free market. In this, they are not alone.

110. On Solzhenitsyn's anti-capitalist economic views, see Mark W. Hendrickson, *The Titan and the Marketplace: The Economic Thought of Alexander Solzhenitsyn* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, International College, 1981), written under Hans Senholz.

111. Solzhenitsyn, *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 22.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

113. *Idem.*

114. *Idem.*

3. *The Escalating War Against Christian Society*

Shortly before he died, Professor Arthur Selwyn Miller of George Washington University completed the manuscript of a book, *The Secret Constitution and the Need for Constitutional Change*. It had been financed by the Rockefeller Foundation.¹¹⁵ He argued that the United States is governed by two constitutions, one formal and the other secret.¹¹⁶ The U.S. has always had an elite form of government, he said; “tiny minorities” make the basic decisions.¹¹⁷ This constitutional dualism is now leading to a constitutional crisis, he said. We must now restructure the U.S. Constitution in order to gain consistency between the two systems, he insisted. But how can this be done? “Extraordinary conditions demand extraordinary, even unique, remedies.”¹¹⁸ These remedies include the following: enforced stabilization of population;¹¹⁹ the restructuring of the economy;¹²⁰ the elimination of the threat of nuclear war;¹²¹ the redefining of national security as protection against “environmental degradation throughout the world”;¹²² the equitable distribution of material resources.¹²³ All of this will require the abandonment of Christianity:

The Biblical admonition that mankind should have dominion over everything that moves upon the earth (as well as matter that does not move, such as plants and minerals) must be replaced with a view that humanity has an inescapable “oneness” with *nature* and the natural world, and must act accordingly. Dominion under the tenets of Judeo-Christian theology has long been employed as a justification for relentless exploitation of the riches of the planet. This will have to be supplanted by an instruction, divine or otherwise, that humans must protect all of nature’s creatures, large and small.

The finite nature of the planet Earth and its *natural* resources must be recognized. There are limits to growth. Anyone who thinks that

115. Arthur S. Miller, *The Secret Constitution and the Need for Constitutional Change* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1989), p. ix.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 3. The most detailed treatment of this minority control is found in Philip H. Burch, Jr., *Elites in American History*, 3 vols. (New York: Holmes & Meyer, 1981). Miller relied on this study: p. 3.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

122. *Idem.*

123. *Idem.*

economic growth can continue indefinitely, says Professor Kenneth Boulding, is either a madman or an economist.¹²⁴

Miller called for a Planetary Constitutional Convention.¹²⁵ (This was not a new idea; a similar call was made for similar official reasons in 1974.)¹²⁶ “The world is spinning out of control. Chaos masquerades as order. There is a demonstrable destructive logic to human systems. Already the terrible reactions to crises, near and far, are appearing.” He listed crime, racism, famines, terrorism, and religious wars.¹²⁷ “Population cannot be brought under control, peace cannot be assured, pollution is not controlled, and poverty is everywhere. These situations signify a societal nervous breakdown.”¹²⁸

The rhetoric continued to escalate. In 1991, the year before Earth Summit in Rio, the Trilateral Commission, headed by David Rockefeller, published a book through Oxford University Press: *Beyond Interdependence: The Meshing of the World's Economy and the Earth's Ecology*.¹²⁹ The authors end their book with this rhetorical warning: “The Earth Summit will likely be the last chance for the world, in this century at least, to seriously address and arrest the accelerating environmental threats to economic development, national security, and human survival. It will certainly be the last major chance for the present generation of leaders and decision-makers to fulfill their basic obligations to their peers, today's youth, and future generations” (p. 128). This is the covenantal language of inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model.¹³⁰

The question is this: Does this rhetoric reflect the magnitude of the crisis? In the past, it has not. What about today?

124. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

126. Alfred L. Webre and Philip H. Liss, *The Age of Cataclysm* (New York: Capricorn Books, G. P. Putnam's Sons, [1974] 1975). This book was based on New Age religion: Edgar Cayce's predictions. Part II, ch. 3. The book included sections on Survival and Regeneration (Part III) and The Future World Society (Part IV). This section included the following chapters: Chaos, Millennium, The Federalist Party, A New Constitution, and Global Society.

127. Miller, *Secret Constitution*, p. 72.

128. *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

129. By Jim MacNeill, Pieter Winsemius, and Taizo Yakushiji, who obviously represented the three blocs of the Trilateral Commission: North America, Europe, and Asia.

130. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

J. Rhetoric and Reality

Kennan, Gorbachev, and Miller used the rhetoric of crisis to further their elitist political design. The humanists' apocalyptic rhetoric of inescapable crisis begins with the idea of absolute limits to growth. There is no doubt that there are limits to growth; the fundamental limit is God's final judgment. There are historical limits, too.¹³¹ This is why there are prices. But to say that there are *determinate limits to growth* is very different from saying that any committee knows what and where these limits are, when they will call a halt to growth, and how society should operate after such limits are reached.

All talk about "spaceship earth" is specious and politically motivated.¹³² It invokes a military-bureaucratic metaphor—a spaceship—to describe the decentralized decision-making of men and the unplanned operations of nature.¹³³ Echoing Barbara Ward, Gorbachev used the now-commonplace imagery: Planet Earth and its crew.¹³⁴ But the symbol of a spaceship necessarily invokes the image of a captain. Denying the biblical doctrine of a sovereign, transcendent God—the ultimate captain—the socialist must identify other candidates for captainship. One thing is sure: those officers in the control room must be limited in number. They constitute an elite. All rule is hierarchical: either top-down (Ex. 1) or bottom-up (Ex. 18). But without a captain, the more that power is centralized, the greater the rewards for gaining absolute personal control, and the greater the risks of personal failure to do so. The worst will get on top.¹³⁵

In a world in which many prices fall¹³⁶—a world of expanding productivity, especially in agriculture—the economist must discuss relative prices, not absolute limits to growth. There are limits *at the margin*: I must give up *this* in order to obtain *that*. But most of these limits are temporary.¹³⁷ At some price, they can be overcome. The question

131. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970); reprinted in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

132. Barbara Ward, *Spaceship Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Garrett Hardin, *Exploring New Ethics of Survival: The Voyage of the Spaceship Beagle* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1973).

133. Gary North, "The Mythology of Spaceship Earth," *The Freeman* (Nov. 1969); reprinted in North, *Introduction to Christian Economics*, ch. 23.

134. *Parade* (Jan. 23, 1994), p. 5.

135. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), ch. 10: "Why the Worst Get on Top."

136. Assumption: a fixed money supply.

137. The main exception is energy: specifically, the supply of oil. Kenneth Deffeyes,

is: At what price? The other question is: Who pays it? Economist Jacqueline Kasun wrote, "The doomsday literature of limits is shot through with the conceit of absolute capacity, which is alien to economics. . . . In the lifeboat, human beings are pure burdens, straining the capacity of the boat."¹³⁸

The world is almost empty. Fly across any of it and look down. The population apocalypitics of today are like those late Renaissance-era Roman Catholic scientists who refused to look into Galileo's telescope. Sitting next to us on a cross-country flight, the population apocalypitics offer us the same challenge that Groucho Marx offered when caught in the act in a famous scene: "Are you going to believe me or your own eyes?" They will see it when they believe it. As yet, they do not believe it. But hardly anyone believes them any more.

The propaganda of "spaceship earth" escalated in the 1960s. An early example was *The Population Explosion and Christian Responsibility*, published in 1960.¹³⁹ From 1965 on, book titles heralded an age of limits—not the traditional limits but absolute limits: *Our Depleted Society*,¹⁴⁰ *Too Many Americans*,¹⁴¹ *Famine—1975! America's Decision: Who Will Survive?*¹⁴² *The Costs of Economic Growth*,¹⁴³ *The Biological Time Bomb*,¹⁴⁴ *The Limits to Growth* (a best-seller),¹⁴⁵ *The No-Growth Society*,¹⁴⁶ *The Overdeveloped Nations*.¹⁴⁷ In 1972, a Presidential commission headed by John D. Rockefeller III, a long-time promoter of zero population growth,¹⁴⁸ was issued: *Population and the American Future*.¹⁴⁹

What was going on during the same period? By 1980, only about

Hubbert's Peak: The Impending World Oil Shortage (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002). Hubbert's peak is the prediction by a Shell Oil geologist in the 1950s, M. King Hubbert, regarding the peak output of oil: before 2010.

138. Jacqueline Kasun, *The War Against Population: The Economics and Ideology of Population Control* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), p. 32.

139. By Richard M. Fagley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

140. By Seymour Melman (Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

141. By Lincoln H. Day and Alice Taylor Day (New York: Delta, 1965).

142. By William and Paul Paddock (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

143. By Ezra J. Mishan (New York: Praeger, 1967).

144. By Gordon Rattray Taylor (New York: New American Library, 1968).

145. By Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

146. Edited by Mancur Olson and Hans H. Landsberg (New York: Norton, 1973).

147. By Leopold Kohr (New York: Schocken, 1977).

148. John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson, *The Rockefeller Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), ch. 23.

149. New York: New American Library, 1972.

2% of the world's population was threatened with dangerous hunger.¹⁵⁰ What about the incursion of the cities on agricultural land? Mythical. From 1950 to 1960, there was an increase of 9% in total arable land in the 87 countries studied, nations constituting 73% of the world's total land area. There was an additional 6% rise in permanent, arable cropland worldwide, 1963 to 1977, a United Nations study concluded. By 1980 in the United States, under 4% of the nation's total land area was used for urban purposes.¹⁵¹ In short, the rhetoric of imminent crisis was contradicted by the reality of per capita economic growth.

Consider the year 1971. The U.S. had increased crop production by 13% over 1970. Canada had harvested over 50% more wheat. India's output was so great that it had a surplus of eight million tons of grain. India gave Bangladesh 10% of its surplus and averted a famine there.¹⁵² India's food production outstripped its population growth after 1948. Even so, if they had slaughtered all of their non-productive sacred cows in 1971, India's farmers could feed at least 1.2 billion extra people.¹⁵³

Overcrowding? In 1970, all the people on earth and their homes and local parks could have fit on 15% of the land area of the United States. If these four billion people had been willing to live in the same density of population that they accepted in New York City, the entire world's population would have fit in the state of Montana.¹⁵⁴ (But they would not have enjoyed the winters.) It would have been possible to fit everyone on earth inside the U.S. with the same density of population that prevailed in the state of New Jersey: 1,000 persons per square mile.¹⁵⁵ It is worth noting that the politicians of New Jersey have named it the Garden State.

K. Ethics and Life Style

The twentieth-century West exported the means of increasing poor people's lives. The food problem has been overcome repeatedly since the late eighteenth century. In many backward regions, birth rates remained high, death rates fell, and populations increased. But

150. Eberstadt, "Hunger and Ideology," *Commentary* (July 1981), p. 43.

151. Julian Simon, "Worldwide, Land for Agriculture Is Increasing, Actually," *New York Times* (Oct. 7, 1980); cited by Kasun, *War Against Population*, p. 37.

152. Sassone, *Handbook on Population*, pp. 51, 52.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 53. In the 1970s, India tripled its food production by adopting free markets in agriculture. *Science* (Aug. 3, 1984), p. 463.

154. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

155. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

birth rates fall as wealth increases, people move to the cities, and families' net economic costs of rearing young children rise. *Human behavior changes*. This was a universal demographic experience in the twentieth century.

Those environmental determinists who have recognized that people do change their reproductive behavior have shifted the argument from population growth to style of life. The slowdown is insufficient. More is needed—more of less. Less is more. “Small is beautiful,” announced Buddhist, non-theistic social theorist E. F. Schumacher,¹⁵⁶ and humanists responded enthusiastically. Arnold Nash wrote: “The initial issue is the *kind* of life that we want to live on this earth as distinct from the *number* of people who are to live this life.”¹⁵⁷ He warned about an overcrowded earth which will bring “overwhelming chaos through the entire world in our social life. . . .” We were told that overcrowding in cities produces rising crime. The whole world may well be headed in the direction of Calcutta, “where more than half a million people eat, sleep, live, and die with no home other than the streets. . . .”¹⁵⁸ The critics never ask this question: Is what happens in a Hindu society representative of what must happen in a Christian, pro-growth society?

The problem with the city is not overcrowding as such; it is the widespread loss of faith that takes place in cities. The impersonality of the modern city raises the cost of policing crime; self-discipline becomes more important. The loss of faith produces evil consequences faster, since the costs of detection and policing are higher. But the problem is the loss of faith. It is the loss of faith and those communities that grow out of faith.¹⁵⁹ The medieval city was a covenantal association, based on common participation in the Lord's Supper.¹⁶⁰ The

156. E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper Colophon, [1973] 1975).

157. Arnold S. Nash, “Food, Population and Man's Environment,” in Ronald H. Preston (ed.), *Technology and Social Justice* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1971), p. 326.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

159. Jane Jacobs' criticisms of modern city planning are on target: the devastation of urban planning that destroys older neighborhoods. See especially her *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1971). On the economic viability of cities, see Jacobs, *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Random House, 1969); *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984).

160. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 1247. This was part of Weber's incomplete *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, written shortly be-

modern city is not.

The problem is not, as Nash and many other commentators have insisted, man's growing control over nature. Nash brings this covenant lawsuit against dominion man: "What man has been doing in upsetting so violently the world's natural ecology is simply a prolongation of what he has been doing from the very dawn of his history. He has been trying to change the world of nature."¹⁶¹ Man is polluting the world. He is poisoning the atmosphere.¹⁶² "Mineral shortages will soon emerge."¹⁶³ And so on. *Society and Environment: The Coming Collision* announced the title of a 1972 collection of essays.¹⁶⁴ *The End of Nature* warned Bill McKibben's book title in 1989. Man the destroyer is destroying the natural world.

Step by step, the theology of the critics of economic growth has become more clear: radical humanism in an alliance with a new pantheism-animism. We are, in the words of Berit Kjos, *Under the Spell of Mother Earth*.¹⁶⁵ The literature of eco-animism is large and growing.¹⁶⁶ In June, 1992, the largest gathering of world leaders and media representatives since the founding of the United Nations Organization in 1945 met in Rio de Janeiro for the Earth Summit. Everything is moving toward a new Tower of Babel, all in the name of a common cause: to save the earth from man's productivity.

But where has this productivity come from? The ethical cause-and-effect relationship announced by God in His law is the answer. The growth of mankind's per capita productivity has come as a blessing from God in response to a growing willingness on the part of various societies to conform outwardly to His laws of private property and personal responsibility. Understand, this has not been merely a growth in productivity matching the increased numbers of men; it has been a system of increasing wealth per individual. The positive economic sanctions listed in Deuteronomy 28:1–14 have been experienced by the West for over two centuries. The power of our own hands has not pro-

fore his death in 1920.

161. Nash, "Food," p. 327.

162. *Ibid.*, pp. 327–28.

163. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

164. Edited by Rex R. Campbell and Jerry L. Wade (Boston: Allyn and Bacon).

165. Victor Books, 1992.

166. Norman Myers (ed.), *Gaia: An Atlas of Planet Management* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1984); Frank Barnaby (ed.), *The Gaia Peace Atlas* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); Judith Plant (ed.), *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* (Philadelphia: New Society Pubs., 1989); Anuradha Vittachi, *Earth Conference One: Sharing a Vision for Our Planet* (Boston: New Science Library of Shambala, 1989).

duced this wealth (Deut. 8:17).¹⁶⁷

Conclusion

The ultimate resource in history is not man; on this point, Simon is wrong.¹⁶⁸ It is also not the good earth, as the eco-animists argue. *The ultimate resource is the God of the covenant.* But it takes God's grace, both special and common, to make this ultimate resource available to covenant-breakers. This gift of grace involves mankind's ethical transformation: the willingness and ability of large numbers of people to obey God. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10).

Society today suffers not from overpopulation but from overregulation. We suffer not from a growing scarcity of resources but from a growing scarcity of freedom. Freedom does not come at zero price. In this sense, it is not natural. It is the product of accurate economic thinking and moral self-restraint. When Malthus wrote of moral self-restraint he had in mind was sexual activity. The moral self-restraint we need today is political restraint.

The lure of Malthus' incomparably inaccurate prediction regarding the overexpansion of human population in relation to food has blinded generations of pessimists and economic planners to the truth. What is the truth? This: *economic liberty, when coupled with future-orientation of the part of many members of society, can and does lead to less hunger, less poverty, and more choices.* Maximum economic growth is achieved when large numbers of people in a society voluntarily adopt the following worldview:

1. Faith that this world is not random, that it is governed by permanent moral principles (i.e., a non-Confucian, non-pragmatic ethic).
2. Commitment to serving consumers as the highest authority (i.e., few government regulations passed in order to favor producers: anti-mercantilism).
3. A political commitment to uphold predictable civil laws that defend private ownership ("Thou shalt not steal").

167. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

168. Simon, *Ultimate Resource*.

4. A readiness to compete with all comers, i.e., open entry into the marketplace (anti-licensure, anti-bureaucracy).
5. Future orientation: optimistic people who are ready to invest (deferred consumption).

It is not the state's job to create widespread future-orientation; it is also not the state's job to subsidize the activities of others. The state's job is to bring negative sanctions against those who commit public evil. It is to defend the rights of owners over their property—owners' rights, not "property rights."

The problem for underdeveloped nations is not that they have received too little economic aid from Western governments but far too much. They have adopted the false ideas of three or more generations of Western intellectuals who do not believe that individuals can and should regulate their own affairs, bear their own burdens, and reap their own rewards. Instead, the critics of freedom regard the state as a sovereign agent that possesses sufficient knowledge and sufficient creativity to produce wealth for all. What the state has done is to impoverish those who have few economic reserves to make up for the disastrous decisions of government economic planners.

The world does not need fewer people; it needs fewer bureaucrats.

Appendix H

CONSPIRACY, FORGERY, AND HIGHER CRITICISM

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables. . . . (II Peter 1:16a).

I make an assumption when I come to the text of any biblical passage: it is consistent with all the other passages. I agree with Jesus: Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35b). This distinguishes my approach from the higher criticism of the Bible, which assumes that there is no unity in the Bible, that every text will be found to contradict at least one other text, and that even within chapters, an astute critic can find lots of inconsistencies. Having identified these supposed inconsistencies, the traditional higher critic then attributes them to the supposed fact that different authors wrote the book, with long periods of time separating them. He makes this assumption regarding the Bible: “Different human authors = irreconcilable statements.” He transfers a methodological assumption from the world of literary criticism to the word of God, where it does not apply. He does this because he assumes that the Bible is just another book.¹ He assumes this, in turn, because *he does not want to hear the consistent testimony of the God who brings final judgment against covenant-breakers*. To stop his ears from hearing God’s testimony, he fills them with noise: academic incoherence.

What marks the arguments of traditional higher critics is an incoherence born of extraordinary precision. The higher critics of the Bible have sharpened their intellectual tools so precisely that the tools are useful only for splitting academic hairs.

As with any other discipline, higher critics are marked by differences in skill. There are varying degrees of precision and complexity in

1. Gary North, *The Hoax of Higher Criticism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnhohc>)

their arguments. Few scholars in the Anglo-American tradition can match the precision and complexity of the average German scholar. The average German higher critic could identify at least two authors in the words, "Mary had a little lamb; its fleece was white as snow." If given tenure in a major state-supported university, teaching no more than three graduate students in a single four-hour seminar each week, he could, over 10 or 15 years, write an entire volume on "Deutero Mary." Then at least five other German scholars would write a minimum of one book each refuting the first scholar, showing that more than two Marys were involved. The average Anglo-American critic cannot do this. He is not up to the challenge. To identify Deutero Mary, he would need an additional text: "And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go."

Traditional higher critics base their case on the supposed incoherence—theological, judicial, and moral—of the Bible's texts. When we read the convoluted, unsubstantiated, jargon-filled, verbally constipated essays and books by higher critics, we get the impression that higher critics assume that the biblical texts are as incoherent as previous higher critics were—that is to say, monumentally incoherent. Higher critics spend at least as much time refuting previous higher critics as they do in explaining how and why the Bible's texts are supposedly jumbled. Traditional higher criticism is composed of layer upon layer of jumbled arguments, not reaching to heaven, like the Tower of Babel, but rather like layers found in an archeological dig: each level has been razed almost completely (but not quite) in order to provide a new foundation for the next critic's reputation. For a critique of the whole procedure, and also the paganism of the university system that has fostered it, see the marvelous book by a former higher critic, Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (1990).

A. Professor Hartley's Insight

The conservative Bible scholar is expected by his academic peers to genuflect whenever he visits the ever-expanding mausoleum known as the temple of higher criticism. He is expected to visit it whenever he writes an introduction to a Bible commentary, even if he only passes through briefly. A good example of this obligatory respect for the spiritually dead is found in John Hartley's 1992 commentary on Leviticus. Hartley's bibliography gives the impression that he has read everything

ever written on Leviticus, even in Italian.

In the book's Introduction, he includes a seven-page section in small print on "Author and Origin." Guess what? "Views about the authorship and the origin of the Book of Leviticus vary widely." No kidding! He attributes this situation to two factors: (1) the "sparsity of materials available for reconstructing a history of Israelite worship and the priesthood," and (2) "divergent methodologies for interpreting ancient texts."² This is a scholarly, respectful way of saying: "There simply aren't enough documented facts to arrive at an unambiguous conclusion, so every covenant-breaking professor of Old Testament 'literature' who can read Hebrew, German, and English (let alone Italian) can safely propose any goofy theory he can dream up in his attempt to advance his academic career. If published—and in the arid field of Old Testament studies, it probably will be—the theory will have an academic half-life of about five years."

After surveying dozens of speculative, factually inconclusive, and mutually contradictory theories about who wrote Leviticus and when, Professor Hartley gives us his conclusion. Brace yourself. He said that the authors and revisers of Leviticus, whoever they may have been, and whenever they may have lived, surely influenced the Israelite community. But, he hastens to add, we need to recognize that the Israelite community surely influenced the authors and revisers. Specifically, he said that the text of Leviticus had an important role in "forming the ancient Israelite community." Nevertheless, higher criticism has provided us with "great benefits" by revealing to us "the significant role that the community had in shaping and interpreting the text. . . ."³

What does all this mean? It means that Professor Hartley, in order to cover his backside from carping academic critics, is still relying on his fading notes from a lecture on "Circular Social Causality in a Linear World" that he scribbled down long ago in some introductory sociology course. (I could be wrong, of course. I suffer from, as he puts it, "a sparsity of materials.")

B. How Did the Forgers Do It?

Hartley's positive view of the legacy of higher criticism is misplaced. The higher critics' theory of mutual interaction between text

2. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4 of *Word Bible Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1992), p. xxxv.

3. *Ibid.*, p. xliii.

and community makes no sense. It assumes that many (if not all) specific texts were repeatedly revised in terms of later community standards. We need to think critically about such an assumption. First, everyone acknowledges that the Old Testament contains the only surviving written documents that record the history of Israel in detail from the exodus through the prophets. These texts survived only because the Jews were religious in their intense desire to preserve the texts from error. Copyists have long been governed by elaborate rules to preserve faithful copies. Even in our own day, the Orthodox Jewish community supports such work, despite the existence of photocopies, CD-ROM drives, and “write once-read many” magnetic memories. Working six hours a day, five days a week, a professional scribe takes a year and a half to copy 248 parchment sheets of the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy): almost two thousand hours. A newly certified scribe works hard to complete five lines an hour.⁴

Second, the higher critics expect us to believe that later scribes successfully tampered with these texts—not just once, but many times—over many centuries. Third, they want us to believe that nobody outside the continuing conspiracy ever caught on. This is a conspiracy view of history that dwarfs all other examples of the genre. Somehow, all those painstakingly transcribed scrolls that were in the Israelite community disappeared, leaving only the fake one, only to be superseded by later fakes. Like the evolutionist’s theory of a mutant gene that somehow makes one member of a complex species uniquely fit to survive—in the face of the huge odds against positive mutation—so is the higher critics’ theory of the corrupted text: generation after generation, text after text, the forgeries survived and prospered for a time, re-shaping Israelite culture, only to be completely replaced by other forgeries.

Princeton Seminary’s Robert Dick Wilson was one of the most skilled scholars of the Old Testament in his day. He had a reading knowledge of some 45 languages. Despite his academic reputation, he occasionally indulged in sarcasm, even in his professional writing. (Too bad this practice is out of style in today’s Bible-believing academic circles; it would liven up things considerably.) Wilson wrote of the Mosaic law:

... the critics have undertaken the difficult task of proving that these

4. Betsy Thatcher, “Special project: Scribe writing Torah Scroll,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* (Dec. 26, 1990).

laws constitute a series of forgeries, extending over a period of about 500 years, committed by more than seventeen different persons, all reformers of the highest ethical standards and all devoted to the service of Jehovah, the God of truth. Besides *mirable dictu*, the forgeries were all successful in that prophets, priests, Levites, kings, and people, were all alike induced to receive them as genuine and to adopt them as obligatory, as soon as they were made known to them. The Jews and the Samaritans, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Rabbis, Aristaeas, Josephus, Philo, Christ and the Apostles, all accepted the combined works as of real Mosaic authorship. But no amount of camouflage could deceive the critical eyes of the German professors and their scholars (all of whom agree with them; hence the phrase, "All scholars are agreed"). To them the imperfections of the codes and their disagreements, yes, even the particular half century in which each law was promulgated, are as clear as the spots on the sun, if only you will look through their glasses, and are not blinded by prejudice occasioned by faith in Jehovah, or Christ, or by the rules of evidence.⁵

Wilson indulged in ridicule. And why not? As Augustine wrote in *The City of God* (XVIII:40), ridicule is an appropriate response when dealing with ridiculous ideas. He was referring to the pagan theory that the world is much older than 6,000 years—a theory that most seminary professors and Christian college professors today take so seriously that they refuse to discuss the six-day creation, either in class or in print. This has been true for over a century. Even though the Westminster Confession of Faith specifies that the world was created in six days (IV:1), both Charles Hodge and his son A. A. Hodge rejected this doctrine despite their affirmation of the Confession, an untenable position that received considerable attention from the Presbyterian Church's theological liberals and biblical higher critics.⁶ Hodge, Sr., wrote: "The Church has been forced more than once to alter her interpretation of the Bible to accommodate the discoveries of science. But this has been done without any violence to the Scriptures or in any degree impairing their authority."⁷ He stated that the geological time scale is "unquestionable," revealing "a process of divinely regulated de-

5. Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, [1926] 1959), pp. 39–40.

6. On Charles Hodge's age-day theory, see his *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1871]), I, p. 570. On A. A. Hodge's open rejection of the Confession in the name of uniformitarian geology, see his book, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1869] 1992), pp. 82–83.

7. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I, p. 573.

velopment consuming vast periods of time.”⁸ While the Bible’s account “is infallibly true,” we must recognize that “it was not designed either to prevent or take the place of a scientific interpretation of all existing phenomena, and of all traces of the past history of the world which God allows men to discover.”⁹

C. In Search of the Missing Original Texts

To prove that later scribes (i.e., forgers) (1) inserted new material into copies of the received judicial texts, and (2) this new material was consistent with the respective dominant worldview of each scribe’s era, the higher critic needs information about the judicial and theological content of these successive worldviews. The problem is, such detailed information is available today only in the Old Testament’s historical passages. But these texts, too, are thought to have been corrupted by later copyists. So, where is the fixed standard—the “autograph,” as it were—by which a higher critic can evaluate which corruption came during which era? If a judicial text was corrupted by a scribe, but the historical record of the scribe’s era was itself subsequently corrupted, how can the higher critic prove that a particular law was inserted by a particular scribe-forger at a particular point in Israel’s history? In other words, how can the critic prove that the text influenced the community, while the community influenced the text? Where is the untampered-with evidence? Where is the *fixed textual standard* that is necessary in order to identify which revision was made during which era?

No fixed textual standard exists today. If it did, it would be the long-denied “autograph”—the original biblical text to which defenders of biblical inerrancy have appealed for over a century. Denying the theory of a flawless autograph written down by a God-inspired scribe, each higher critic has been free to promote this or that law as the product of this or that much later scribe. But the critics do not agree on which laws were inserted when. Conclusion: without a fixed textual standard for the Pentateuch, and without uncorrupted historical texts, higher critics cannot identify which worldview assuredly belongs to which era, and therefore which era’s worldview led to the forging of which specific legal text. But they pretend that they can. Anyone who openly challenges this pretension in public will probably not be al-

8. *Ibid.*, I, p. 82.

9. *Ibid.*, I, p. 83.

lowed to graduate from the prestige institutions of the academic world, all of which are controlled by the pretenders. Then the absence of such graduates will be presented by the pretenders as evidence that all serious (degree-holding) scholars agree with the pretension. They employ *circular certification* to validate their theory of *circular causation*: text and community.

1. Copyists' Known Errors Were Deliberately Preserved

Let me state unequivocally: there *are* errors in the surviving biblical texts. That is to say, the texts that have survived are not so perfect as the autographs were. Put another way, *the transcribers were not guided by God in the same way and to the same degree that the original authors were*. Let me state the obvious: those scholars who defend the infallibility of the original texts of the Bible do not defend the infallibility of the subsequent copyists.¹⁰ If they were to defend such a position, they would be denying the uniqueness of the originally infallible Bible. This would defeat their purpose, i.e., to defend the unique revelation of God in the Bible: *one scribe per revelation*.

The existence of obvious errors in the Bible testifies to the extraordinary faithfulness of the transcribers. Consider one exceedingly obvious contradiction: "Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem" (II Ki. 24:8). "Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD" (II Chron. 36:9). Eight years old or eighteen? What copyist could ignore this discrepancy? But his job was not to correct the text, presumably by changing eight to eighteen in II Chronicles 36:9. He let the error in Second Chronicles stand, visible to all.

The defense of the inerrancy of the original written revelation should not also be a defense of the God-sustained perfection of every succeeding copyist. The miracle took place once per text, and only once. Mistakes then followed. That an early mistake would be re-

10. On this point, the Westminster Confession is misleading: "The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known among the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, *kept pure in all ages*, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them." WCF, I:8 (emphasis added).

tained, given the fanatical dedication of the Jewish scribes, is hardly surprising. What ought to be very surprising is the conclusion of the critics, namely, that later copies could have been successfully re-worked, except at one point in Israel's history: the discovery of a single copy of the law during Josiah's reign (II Ki. 22). A secondary opportunity existed at the return to Jerusalem under Nehemiah (Neh. 8), but this would not have solved the problem of the many texts left behind in Babylon, where a majority of Israelites remained.

2. *The Mysterious Disappearance of All Previous Copies*

The higher critics, had they not overplayed their hand very early, might have retained the illusion of credibility if they had confined their theory of scribal re-writing to Josiah's era. But once the theory of successive forgeries is invoked, the old question raises its head: *Where did all the previous copies go after a successful forger plied his trade?* The higher critics deride inerrancy's theory of the missing autographs. Far more preposterous is the higher critics' theory of the instantly disappearing rival texts whenever a forgery was perpetrated by some editor or team of editors. In the higher critics' social evolutionary theory of the "textual survival of the fittest," the forgeries somehow gained dominance, while the older copies all "died out as a species." As with Darwin's missing links between species, *the textual "missing links" remain missing*. We are expected to believe that all of the older copies in many synagogues and households somehow perished, but the single forgery and its copies survived, just as we are expected to believe that a single prehistoric reptile triumphed over all of its scaly competitors within the particular species because it had a partially developed feather—not sufficiently developed to make it airborne, however—instead of a claw.¹¹ ("Take this," cried the mutant lizard as he smashed his opponent with his feather in their life-and-death battle for access to a female. "And that!")

The defender of the inerrant original texts admits that the perfect original copies disappeared very early. Then how did the common Masoretic Hebrew text become dominant? Why are the number of its internal discrepancies so limited? More important, why aren't there hundreds of competing versions with competing errors? Why did one version of imperfect copies survive, and almost all other flawed ver-

11. Vic Lockman, *Link Lizard Defeats Evolution*, a children's cartoon tract that has yet to be answered by tenured university evolutionists.

sions disappear? The only reasonable answer is this: *the major errors must have occurred very early in the copying history of any given text.* After that, competing new copies that failed to correspond with existing copies were burned or otherwise destroyed, as traditional Judaism's rules of copying require. That a copyist's error could occur shortly after the original appeared is conceivable. That a single late forgery could have replaced all the earlier versions is far less believable. The longer that an existing common text had been available, with its familiar errors, the less likely that any recently modified version could have triumphed so completely that all the older versions disappeared. The larger the number of successive forgeries required by the theory, and the longer the time period in which these totally successful forgeries took place, the less believable the theory is, except to men who prefer noise to God's judicial word in history.

D. Relativism Eats Its Own Children

I ask: Of what possible intellectual benefit is any theory of mutually reinforcing historical causation—text and revision—that is based on the shifting sands of higher criticism? The higher critics have no agreed-upon methodology—no hermeneutic—to resolve their own endless disputes. This is one reason why Professor Reventlow was correct in 1980 when he wrote: “Any attentive observer will note a considerable decline in the significance of biblical study within the general framework of Protestant theology as it is practised in universities and church colleges and as it affects the work of local church communities. . . . [H]istorical criticism and exegesis have come to take very much a back place.” The “vanishing role of biblical study in the wider context of theology is a failure of exegetes to reflect adequately on their methodology and the presuppositions, shaped by their view of the world, which they bring to their work.”¹² Meanwhile, the unity of theology has collapsed; its inner center has disappeared.¹³ And no wonder: relying on the presumption of textual disunity promoted by higher criticism, liberal theology could not maintain its own unity.

This is why there has been a shift of opinion occurring within theological liberalism since about 1960: a growing readiness to accept instances of thematic unity in the Bible's texts. Today's more innovat-

12. Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, [1980] 1984), p. 1.

13. *Idem.*

ive liberals search for literary unity in biblical texts, even though they do not regard literary unity as evidence of divine authorship. The critics still deny the Bible's theological unity, for theological unity points to an unchanging and judgmental God. Literary unity is becoming acceptable, for it supposedly points to anonymous authors with a taste for great literature, which is all that the critics want the Bible to be. The literary criticism of the Bible, which originally launched the literary criticism of secular texts, has now come full circle: modern critics of secular literature have brought to the Bible their practice of discovering common themes in literature. *The emphasis today is increasingly on unity rather than diversity.* The newer critics are still moral relativists, but at least they perceive some coherence in the world of literature. They have seen where absolute textual relativism was headed—into literary chaos—and some of them have turned back. (The literary “deconstructionists” have not.)¹⁴

American church historian Edwin Scott Gaustad has well described the relativistic worldview that undergirded the higher critics early in the twentieth century: “Everything had a history, even dogma, as the German Protestant Adolph Harnack had shown. Very little, if anything, was ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever.’ Very little, if anything, had been believed ‘by all men, always, everywhere.’ Very little, if anything, escaped the captivity of its own culture, the relativity of its own terminology, the perceptual limitations of its own advocates.”¹⁵ This relativism almost completely eroded the few remaining traces of methodological unity and coherence in the academic discipline of higher criticism. This is what has caused the reaction in recent years. About all that remained of traditional higher criticism by 1960 was the practitioners’ faith in the possibility of gaining academic tenure with their arcane skills. Frankly, they all sounded incoherent. But academic reputations are made by developing new approaches. So, to distinguish themselves from their incoherent competitors, some of the newer generation of critics came to a radical conclusion: the Bible’s texts do show traces of coherence!

In 1957, Old Testament scholar Edward J. Young pointed to the epistemological problem of his generation of higher critics: “Further-

14. Harold Bloom, *et al.*, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979); Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1986).

15. Edwin Scott Gaustad, “Did the Fundamentalists Win?” in Mary Douglas and Steven Tipton (eds.), *Religion and America: Spiritual Life in a Secular Age* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), p. 171.

more, if fallible human writers have given us a Bible that is fallible, how are we ourselves, who most certainly are fallible, to detect in the Bible what is error and what is not? . . . How shall we evaluate the God of Scripture? How do we know whether we can separate the wheat from the chaff in the Biblical teaching about God? The answer is that we simply cannot do so. . . . How then can we judge the Scripture? Judge the Scripture we cannot; we are left in a hopeless scepticism.”¹⁶ This has become true of the higher critics: they have been left without hope by their own skepticism. All that the best of them have today is a sense of satisfaction for having discovered continuity in a literary theme or two.

The discipline of biblical higher criticism is smoke and mirrors with footnotes. This has been visible to any intelligent observer for over a century. Yet still we find a smoke-inhaling commentator who is stumbling around in higher criticism’s hall of mirrors. Professor Hartley doffs his cap to “the great benefits” of the work of higher critics. He genuflects at the mausoleum of dead theories of multiple Pentateuchal authorship. He sings a brief hymn of praise to the circular sociology of knowledge: texts influencing culture, culture influencing texts. The spirit of higher criticism has him by the throat, yet he tries to sing its praises. We need a generation of Bible expositors who are not fooled by this nonsense.

E. One God, One Author, Once

I have worked with the texts from Genesis through Deuteronomy from 1973 to 2006. I have found exactly what I assumed from the beginning: *the texts are part of a coherent whole*. This unity exists because a coherent God revealed these texts to one inspired man, Moses. What has impressed me as I have worked through the Pentateuch is how the economic laws of God are part of an integrated judicial and theological system. The economics of the Pentateuch, Genesis through Deuteronomy, makes sense as a unit. This judicial unity enables the reader to make sense of the individual texts. The evidence continues to build: the law of God is not a patchwork of texts that were added and later modified by many anonymous authors over the centuries in a vain attempt to provide unity to an otherwise incoherent collection of mutually contradictory principles. In other words, *the Bible was not*

16. Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth: Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 76.

written by successive teams of higher critics. This is difficult for higher critics to believe.

What has impressed me is the judicial unity of the Pentateuch's structure. I regard the religion of traditional higher criticism as a theology too fantastic for a careful reader to believe without a gigantic leap of nonrational faith. How could such unity have been achieved by a series of authors, each with a different outlook, each with a different agenda, each in a different historical era, over many centuries? How did they produce, retroactively, a document which is supposed to have been written by one man anywhere from five centuries to a millennium earlier, depending on which text was written by which anonymous author, and when? Here is E, the Elohist, rewriting J, the Jehovist (or was it the other way around?), only to be followed by D, the Deuteronomist, who adds his two shekels' worth. Finally P, the priestly redactor, shows up, who in the 1920s had been regarded by critical scholars as the first Elohist, but by 1943 was believed to have served as the Pentateuch's final copy editor.¹⁷

How did these four forgers do it? How did they hide their identities? How did all the other minor rewrite specialists hide their identities? How was the judicial unity of the variant texts preserved? More to the point, *why did generations of Israelites fail to spot the jumbled nature of the Pentateuch's original legal order*—the disunity that later rewriters somehow overcame? What I have found in the five books of Moses is economic unity. How did it get there? Equally worth asking, why do today's higher critics—academic layer 19? 27? 33?—refuse to acknowledge this remarkable economic unity? They are so busy identifying the supposed linguistic variations of the layers of texts that they cannot see *the structural unity of the judicial order*—not just a literary theme or two—presented in these texts.

Conclusion

Higher critics of the Bible have proposed a theory of biblical textual disunity. Their motivation has always been judicial: to escape the biblical doctrine of final judgment and the correlative doctrine of each individual's personal responsibility before God in terms of God's special revelation. From the beginning, they have opposed the biblical concept of fixed ethical standards.

17. Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1943] 1949), Introduction.

Their strategy of denial has always rested on the techniques and premises of literary criticism. This tradition began in the mid-seventeenth century, as Reventlow's detailed study of the early history of English higher criticism indicates. It accelerated during the first half of the nineteenth century, even in conservative Calvinistic circles in the United States.¹⁸ The acceptance of higher criticism was made far easier after 1859 as a result of Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection: the survival of the fittest (texts). After 1875, the spread of higher criticism was unstoppable, despite a "guilty" verdict in 1893 in the most famous heresy trial of the nineteenth century, the Briggs case.¹⁹ Evolutionism is modern man's most widely shared alternative to fixed law: in social theory, legal theory, biology, geology, and ultimately cosmology. But cosmology really is primary: covenant-breaking man's denial of God's final judgment.

Evolutionary process when applied to the Bible mandates a theory of progressive rewrites of the texts of Scripture. This theory mandates a conspiracy theory of monumental proportions. The details of the operations of this conspiracy are rarely discussed in public. The theory is never called a conspiracy theory, for conspiracy theories are almost always officially out of favor in academic circles, but it is a conspiracy theory.

This multi-stage conspiracy theory proclaims the successive re-writing of the holy texts by numerous anonymous forgers. Successful forgers were not caught or even perceived. Unsuccessful ones, if any, have also left no traces. Each successful forger suppressed all traces of every previously forged copy of the holy texts. Each forger had a specific goal in mind: to rewrite the past in terms of the his goals for his social order and legal order. Without a convenient Orwellian memory hole, these forgers were somehow able periodically to re-centralize Israel's civil and priestly orders, suppress all rival judicial positions and all earlier texts, publish their new texts, get them accepted as supernaturally binding by the entire social order, and then de-centralize the social order once again, as required by the law's tribal order. Improbable? At least.

This improbability has not fazed the higher critics. Furthermore,

18. Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), ch. 6.

19. Mark Stephen Massa, S.J., *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990).

this conspiracy theory is academically untouchable: no fundamental criticism of its presuppositions, methodology, or conclusions is tolerated. There are no prominent dissenters within the academic community. The scholarly world has swallowed this conspiracy theory to the same degree, and for the same reasons, that it has swallowed evolutionism. But while Darwinism's missing biological links perished completely through natural causes, leaving no traces, higher criticism's missing textual links were actually ferreted out and suppressed by an unknown number of conspirators. The successful operations of these Israelite conspirators are as improbable as the theory is universally accepted.

Biblical higher criticism is never identified as a conspiracy theory. What more could anyone ask of a conspiracy theory? Paraphrasing Saddam Hussein's late 1990 pre-war rhetoric, higher criticism of the Bible is the mother of all conspiracy theories. It began in Eden: "Hath God said?"

Appendix I

CRITICS OF THE FIVE-POINT COVENANT MODEL

*In analyzing now the nature of Biblical law, it is important to note **first** that, for the Bible, law is revelation. . . . The law is the revelation of God and His righteousness. . . . The **second** characteristic of Biblical law is that it is a treaty or covenant. Kline has shown that the form of the giving of the law, the language of the text, the historical prologue, the requirement of exclusive commitment to the suzerain, God, the pronouncement of imprecations and benedictions, and much more, all point to the fact that the law is a treaty established by God with His people. . . . The **third** characteristic of the Biblical law or covenant is that it constitutes a plan for **dominion under God**.*

R. J. Rushdoony (1973)¹

Rushdoony began *The Institutes of Biblical Law* by explaining biblical law in terms of a preliminary but undeveloped model of the biblical covenant: the first three of the five points. He cited as authoritative Meredith G. Kline's discussion of the parallels between the Mosaic law and the pagan suzerainty treaties of the second millennium B.C. But, having introduced a preliminary covenant model into this, his most authoritative and comprehensive work, he failed to pursue this insight. Ray Sutton did. In *That You May Prosper* (1987), he extended Kline's insights to demonstrate the Bible's comprehensive theonomic foundation. Kline does not approve of this theonomic application—or any other theonomic application—and has remained silent for two decades regarding Sutton's book. This is not surprising. Kline's premier opponent in the theonomy movement, Greg Bahnsen, did not appreciate works built on Kline's insights, and he remained unconvinced

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 6, 7, 8.

by Sutton's application. This is also not surprising. Because the development of the five-point model came out of Tyler, and because it places so much emphasis on the institutional church, Rushdoony remained silent. This, too, was not surprising. This has left me as the main promoter of Sutton's thesis.

A. The Necessity for Systematic Theology

Charles Hodge's re-write of Francis Turretin's seventeenth-century theology² in the early 1870s will no longer suffice, assuming that it ever did. His system was a Protestant version of Roman Catholic Scholastic categories. It included theology proper (God), anthropology (man), hamartiology (sin), Christ (Christology), soteriology (redemption), ecclesiology (church), and eschatology (last things). There is nothing innately incorrect about these categories, but they were derived from Scholastic philosophy, not the texts of Scripture. Francis Landley Patton, who served as president of Princeton Seminary, 1902 to 1914, was not exaggerating when he referred to Turretin as the Thomas Aquinas of Protestantism.³ That was the problem: with Turretin and Old Princeton.

The Protestant church needs a systematic theology. It does not have one today. Such a systematic theology must incorporate the insights of biblical theology, i.e., the study of the uses and development of biblical symbolism (rhetoric) from Genesis to Revelation. In other words, systematic theology must incorporate the work of Geerhardus Vos and his disciples.⁴ At the same time, the speculations of Vos' disciples must be brought under the discipline of the judicial theology of the Bible. Those who follow Vos have been what economist F. A. Hayek has called "puzzlers" and "muddlers."⁵ There is more to theology than solving curious puzzles. Ecologists insist that we cannot change just one thing. The pieces of the biblical puzzle are part of a systematic whole. You cannot restructure just one piece.

2. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 4 vols. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992–97).

3. Cited by Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 281.

4. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology—Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1948] 1992). Vos taught at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1892 to 1932.

5. F. A. Hayek, "Two Types of Mind" (1975), in Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), ch. 4.

Theology demands structure. *There can be no theology without theological structure.* It may be a hidden or implicit structure, but there will always be a structure. A Bible-affirming theology must proclaim a biblically derived structure. In contrast, modern critics of orthodox theology deny the existence of any consistent structure. For example, liberal higher criticism denies the theological unity of the Bible.⁶ The rise of dialectical theology, especially Barthianism,⁷ in the twentieth century has made it all the more imperative that Christians proclaim a Bible-based theological system. Barthians deny that the Bible provides us with propositional truth; the Bible is supposedly is a “witness to God’s word,” not God’s word itself. Rushdoony has put it well: “There can be no systematic theology if the God of Scripture is not a coherent unity, and if His word is not a coherent whole.”⁸ Christians must respond to allegations of the Bible’s disunity or incompleteness by affirming what the Bible says of itself: it is the authoritative source of propositional truth, suitable for doctrine, reproof, and correction, for it is inspired by God (II Tim. 3:16). It is not sufficient to defend the faith with some muddle-headed variant of “No creed but Christ, no law but love.”

What should be the structural principle undergirding systematic theology? It is my contention that a biblical systematic theology must be based on the covenant: that which binds God and man. Covenant theology reveals who God is: the transcendent yet immanent Creator. It reveals who man is: made in the image of God; under God and over nature, and now ethically fallen. It speaks of God’s law, God’s judgments, and the future. It is a comprehensive framework under which the fundamental doctrines of the faith are subsumed. It is, above all, a judicial framework.

Such a systematic theology has yet to be written, for traditional covenant theologians have yet to present a systematic biblical covenant model. Without a covenant structure or model, there is no covenant theology. There can of course be a theology that for tradition’s sake is called “covenant theology,” but it will just be Calvinism’s five

6. Appendix H.

7. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1947); Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962). Presbyterian & Reformed is now located in Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

8. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1994), I, p. 67. He wrote this chapter in 1979. The entire manuscript was completed in 1984.

points accompanied by the endless droning of the equivalent of a New Age mantra: “Covenant theology, covenant theology, covenant theology. . . .” What traditional covenant theologians need is a demonstrable, biblically derived definition of “covenant.” They need to answer these questions: What is a covenant? How do we recognize it? Where is it found in the texts of Scripture? What are its categories that are found in *every* occurrence of a covenant in the Bible? Covenant theologians have remained mute or incoherent regarding answers to these obvious questions for well over three centuries.⁹

Calvinists, while publicly affirming covenant theology, have for over three centuries substituted other conceptual frameworks for systematic theology. Their six loci represent one attempt to define and explain the Calvinist faith. Another: the five points of Calvinism.

B. The Five Points of Calvinism

Calvinists accept the 1619 Synod of Dort’s five points of Calvinism. They would reject any assertion that these five points do not, in fact, define their position. No anti-Calvinist critic would be foolish enough to make such an assertion, since everyone loves a good whipping boy, which the five points appear to be in the eyes of Arminians and humanists. Some good Calvinist may ask, as Leonard Coppes asked, “Are five points enough?”¹⁰ but no one pays much attention. The better informed within Calvinist circles will even point out that all five points were developed in the early seventeenth century in response to the five points of Arminianism, Jacobus Arminius’ Trojan Horse gift to Protestant theology: the five points of Arminianism. What are Calvinism’s five points? In English, these:

1. Total depravity of man
2. Unconditional election by God
3. Limited atonement (particular redemption)
4. Irresistible grace
5. Perseverance of the saints

9. For an example of this lack of definition, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1949] 1963), p. 213. For my analysis, see “Publisher’s Preface (1992),” in Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), pp. xiv–xv.

10. Leonard J. Coppes, *Are Five Points Enough? The Ten Points of Calvinism* (Manassas, Virginia: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1980).

The acronym in English is TULIP, a Dutch-associated flower.

Calvinists are quite content to proclaim these points. The TULIP acronym helps them remember exactly what they believe that distinguishes them from their rivals. But then along comes Sutton, with his five-point model. “No, no,” the Calvinist critics cry. “His structure is imposed on the Bible!” So, let us consider Sutton’s five points, but in a different order:

1. Total depravity/*Ethics* (man’s)
2. Unconditional election/*Oath* (God’s)
3. Limited atonement/*Hierarchy* (representation)
4. Irresistible grace/*Judicial imputation*
5. Perseverance of the saints/*Succession*

To which the Calvinist critics reply (if at all): “Oh. A structure. A model. Five points. Hmmmm. Interesting. Yes, I see your point. In fact, I see five points. But. . . . But this proves nothing. *Nothing!*” The fact that Sutton’s model precisely fits all five points of Calvinism is dismissed as irrelevant. More than this: it is dismissed as proof that Sutton’s model is just too simple, just too universal, just too easy, just too good to be true. It therefore cannot be true. The Calvinist critics casually dismiss the huge theological benefit to them of the existence of a rigorously tight fit between the two five-point models. What benefit? If Sutton’s model is based on the exegesis of specific biblical texts, then *the structure of the five points of Calvinism can be shown to be covenantal*. This makes the five points of Calvinism *structurally* biblical, not just abstracts of five structurally disjointed theological conclusions.

There is no single text anywhere in the Bible that teaches the five points of Calvinism. Calvinists know that their beloved five points were derived from a number of different Bible texts, none connected structurally to the others (they suppose), none exhibiting a self-contained structure in itself (they suppose). The five points of Calvinism are regarded by their defenders as a system—not one derived structurally from the texts, however, but *deduced* from many texts *and then imposed on theology as a whole*. This theological imposition—this theological “Procrustean bed”—is regarded as legitimate by Calvinists. Why? *Because they readily admit that their five-point system is not derived from any biblical text*. This obvious apologetic weakness is regarded by them as Calvinism’s pre-eminent strength!

Then I came along using Sutton's discovery¹¹ and announced in effect: "Look, brethren, here it is at long last: an exegetical defense of our beloved five points. The structure of Calvinism's five-point model really *is* derived from the structure of God's word after all. Before Sutton, we had no proof of this wonderful fact, but now we do." Are they happy? Of course not. They much prefer to admit that Calvinism's five points are not found in any particular text. Then they insist that this fact makes their five points more reliable than Sutton's five points, which are found in many, many texts. It is a very strange business, this movement called Calvinism.

Traditional covenant theologians defend a deduced theological system that they claim is biblical, yet they are without a precise covenant model. They deeply resent and resist Sutton's fusing of Calvinism and the biblical covenant. Why? Two reasons. First, Sutton's model proclaims not only predestination (point one), but ecclesiastical hierarchy (point two), theonomy (point three), the Lord's Supper as an act of covenant renewal (point four), and postmillennialism (point five). One or more of the final four doctrines will bring howls of protest from almost any Calvinist defender of predestination, i.e., point one, God's absolute sovereignty. Second, Sutton discovered it first, and he was outside of academia at the time he discovered it. "Not discovered here" is the academician's reason for automatically rejecting any new idea or discovery.

C. The Four Points of Christian Reconstruction

Within the world of Calvinism has arisen an even more precise, even more theologically rigorous subset: Christian Reconstruction. The Reconstructionists also have a model that distinguishes them from everyone else. They are proud of it. It has four points:

1. Predestination¹²
2. Theonomic ethics
3. Presuppositional apologetics (Van Til)
4. Postmillennialism¹³

11. North, "Publisher's Preface (1992)," *That You May Prosper*, 1992 edition, p. xvi.

12. Rejected by would-be Arminian Reconstructionists.

13. Rejected by premillennial and amillennial theonomists, who sharply distinguish Christian Reconstruction from theonomy. There are very few of these people, and none has offered a theological defense of his system. See, for example, Peter Burden-Teh, "Theonomic and Historic Premillennialism," *Calvinism Today* (Jan.

The two rival camps—Tyler and Vallecito—were agreed on all four. But there is one additional point: the doctrine of the covenant itself, i.e., the five-point model. Where does it fit? It is point two in a revised Reconstructionist outline.

1. Predestination/transcendence
2. Covenant/hierarchies: church,¹⁴ state, family
3. Theonomy/ethics
4. Presuppositionalism/judgment
5. Postmillennialism/inheritance

The offensive point is point two: hierarchy. Among some Christian Reconstructionists, a rejection of the doctrine of the church's authority is common. Some theonomists want independent churches. Some want none, i.e., none with any judicial authority to excommunicate. They see clearly where Sutton's five points lead: toward a hierarchical church authority that brings lawful judgments in history, just as John Calvin insisted¹⁵ (point two: hierarchy/representation). This also implies that churches should offer frequent (weekly) communion, just as John Calvin insisted¹⁶ (point four: oath/sanctions). It means employing young child communion, retarded member communion, and Alzheimer's victims communion as a means of covenant renewal (point four).¹⁷ This view of the Lord's Supper is not acceptable to most Presbyterian Reconstructionists. They are quite content to accept the five points of Calvinism plus four points of Christian Reconstruction.

1994), and my response, "Eschatology and Social Theory," *Christianity and Society* (April 1994). Address: P. O. Box 1, Whitby, North Yorkshire, England.

14. With the church as primary or central, not the family: the major point of conflict between Tyler and Vallecito. See Appendix B: "Rushdoony on the Tithe: A Critique."

15. Calvin did not like the word "hierarchy." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), IV:iv:4. But his doctrine of infant baptism rested on a doctrine of judicial representation by parents. *Ibid.*, IV:xvi:7, 17–20. He believed in a similar judicial representation in church government. He defended the office of bishop if the bishop is under the judicial authority of the assembly. That is, he defended episcopacy while rejecting prelacy (rule by sovereign bishops). *Ibid.*, IV:XI:6.

16. *Ibid.*, IV:xvii:44.

17. If young children are not allowed to take communion because they do not understand its theological ramifications, what about retarded adults and people suffering from Alzheimer's disease? But if the latter may lawfully take communion, on what basis are young children excluded? Age? But what non-Baptist Calvinist church identifies age as such as the legal boundary between participation and exclusion?

They have not rushed to embrace Sutton's thesis. They are willing to adopt theological models, but only so long as these models are not presented as biblically authoritative.

D. A Biblical Structure for Biblical Theology

One of the problems I face in promoting the five-point covenant model is this: its theologically conservative critics do not like the thought that there is an authoritative model for theology that was discovered this late in church history. There is an innate suspicion among Reformed theologians that theological innovations are generally dangerous. I respect this attitude, but only as an initial presupposition. I agree: major theological innovations should be considered guilty until proven innocent. Even small innovations are suspect. The camel of heresy has repeatedly pushed its way into the tent of orthodoxy with small innovations. Nevertheless, each suggested innovation must be examined in terms of the Bible. The church does discover new biblical facts. There has been progress in church history. There has been progress in the development of the confessions and creeds of the church. The church does not still rely exclusively on the Apostles' Creed.

I have stated the case for the five-point model very strongly. I have argued that it is a major integrating theme in the Bible. The five-point model, I have argued, is *the* integrating model for understanding covenantal law and covenantal relationships. Therefore, to the extent that the biblical theme of covenantalism is essential to some passage, the *judicial aspects* of one's interpretation of this passage must be explored initially in terms of the five-point model. Not every passage in Scripture is visibly covenantal, but a lot more are covenantal than is admitted by non-covenant theologians.

The fact that non-covenant theologians should reject my sweeping use of the five-point model is understandable. They refuse to accept the idea that the covenant is a major theme in Scripture. What bothers me is that so many professed defenders of covenant theology reject the applicability of the five-point model beyond the Book of Deuteronomy. Meredith G. Kline, an early promoter of the Deuteronomy model in his book, *Treaty of the Great King* (1963), ignores it with respect to the New Covenant, the Decalogue, and a great deal more. Not only do covenant theologians reject the five-point model, they refuse to consider the evidence of its wide applicability in those texts of Scripture that Sutton examined in his monthly newsletter, *Covenant Renewal*,

1987–1993. The critics are either unfamiliar with this newsletter or pretend that it never existed.

That the five points fit Deuteronomy was not a revolutionary observation late in the twentieth century. What was rejected, and rejected strongly, was any suggestion that the structure of Deuteronomy is relevant for anything beyond Deuteronomy. I am showing, commentary by commentary, that the same five-point model that structures Deuteronomy also structures the Pentateuch itself. The five books of Moses, in their very arrangement, reflect the five points of the covenant. When I say *reflect*, I mean *governed by*. This is another way of saying that *the Pentateuchal model is the archetype*. Deuteronomy's structure is a subordinate application of this archetype. The same is true of the structure of Leviticus and Exodus.

It is not wrong to look for governing structures in the texts of the Bible. It is not automatically heretical or ill-informed to announce the discovery of a theme or structure in numerous texts. To discover and expound such patterns is one of the tasks of the discipline known as biblical theology. It is true that I cannot go to a verse in Scripture that says: "Lo, thou findeth the five-point model of Deuteronomy also in the structure of the five books of Moses." Writing biblical theology is not that easy. Try reading the works of Geerhardus Vos if you doubt me. But Vos was a master of the Scriptures, and it is a serious mistake to dismiss his methodology.¹⁸ Had the other Princeton theologians understood what Vos was doing, and had they used his insights to restructure their late-nineteenth-century version of Turretin's seventeenth-century Protestant Scholasticism,¹⁹ they might better have resisted the forces of theological liberalism that captured Princeton Seminary in 1929. Presbyterian liberals after 1875 used an imported version of biblical theology—higher criticism—to undermine men's confidence in traditional Calvinist orthodoxy.²⁰

18. A good introduction is *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, edited by Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

19. Hodge's *Systematic Theology* (1871–73) was adopted by Princeton because by that time, American students could no longer read Latin well enough to read Turretin.

20. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), pp. 160–63. (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

E. Then Came Fisher

Critics of the broad use of the five-point model now have a major problem: Milton Fisher's Foreword to the 1992 edition of *That You May Prosper*. Dr. Fisher at the time was without doubt the most thoroughly credentialed Bible-believing Old Testament scholar in the United States, and probably anywhere. He received his Ph.D. in Mediterranean studies from Brandeis University, written under the legendary Cyrus H. Gordon, and an M.A. from Johns Hopkins in oriental studies, completed under the equally legendary W. F. Albright. Dr. Fisher wrote the following:

The book you now hold in your hand is doubtless the clearest exposition of Bible-as-covenant (that is, Bible as meant to be understood) that you've ever read. That's because the author has spelled out in no uncertain terms the implications of historic reformational covenant theology in the light of current scholarship. . . . Its commanding logic demands your interaction with the flow of reasoning and its often surprisingly fresh suggestions will prove a stimulus and assistance to your formation of judgments of your own. . . . Fresh insights into God's Word are sure to be gained, to say the least, through Sutton's work. I found it to be so, after nearly half a century of serious study and teaching of the Bible. Thinking through this book will enable you to focus upon and relate by covenantal principles certain details which you have either overlooked or found puzzling. . . . So, a revived interest and excitement in Bible study is an assured byproduct of reading this book.

When you read criticisms raised by "Deuteronomy only!" critics, keep this question in the back of your mind: "How did poor old Milton Fisher get taken in so completely by such a misleading, overstated book as Sutton's?" Then ask yourself this question: "Or it is possible—indeed, highly probable—that the critic, in this case at least, does not know what he's talking about?"

F. *Sola Scriptura*

Anyone who believes that the acids of modernity have not seeped into the temple, let alone the gates of the city, need only consider the implicit relativism of many who today present themselves as the defenders of *Sola Scriptura*. They do exactly what the modernists did in their capture of the mainline denominations in the early twentieth century. The modernists also dismissed all creeds, confessions, and

biblically derived models as convenient theories without binding theological, judicial, or ecclesiastical authority. The modernists sought to escape three things: the judicial authority of the churches, the theological boundaries of orthodoxy, and negative church sanctions. They were successful in this attempt. They inherited the conservatives' theological and financial legacies, denomination by denomination. (They did not, however, escape the sovereignty of God, His authority, His theological standards, and His eternal sanctions. As each modernist has crossed the biological boundary of death, he has been disinherited.)

Consider the Calvinist. If Calvinism's five points are just one more convenient but non-binding classification scheme among many, in what way are they *theologically* binding? Merely on the basis of personal taste? To most people, all five of Calvinism's points taste rotten. If theology is symphonic,²¹ what if someone wants to hum a new tune? What if the tune is really catchy? This is the question of theological standards (point three).

If Calvinism's five points are not textually derived, and if their "mere" theological status—their status as a theological model—makes them institutionally non-binding, how can anyone logically justify the establishment of a Calvinist church in terms of the five points? The question, "Are there more than five points?" can far more easily become: "Are there fewer than five points?"

What Calvinists need is a textually binding and theologically binding structure. And now we have it. But Calvinists do not want it.

There is inescapable evidence in Deuteronomy of a five-point structure.²² This is my starting point for any discussion of Sutton's five points. I ask, not altogether rhetorically: "Well, Mr. Calvinist Critic, which biblical book is structured in terms of the five points of Calvinism? Also, Mr. Theonomist Critic, which biblical text reveals the four points of Christian Reconstructionism?" The answer to both questions is *none*. Worse, the defenders of the "many theological models, but none with any binding authority" thesis like it this way. It somehow comforts them to know that what they believe with all their hearts is actually only a mental construct: *a convenient but judicially disposable*

21. Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987).

22. Deuteronomy 1:1–5; 1:6–4:49; 5–26; 27–30; 31–34. Cf. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

theory, without a single book or text in the Bible that reveals its outline. Conclusion: if Sutton had only the Book of Deuteronomy, he would still be one book ahead of all of his critics except Meredith G. Kline, who has remained prudently mute on the thesis of *That You May Prosper*, despite its appendix on his theology.²³

G. Countering the Critics

In 1986, a year prior to the publication of *That You May Prosper*, I decided to undermine the legitimacy of what I knew would become the standard criticism of Sutton's thesis: "Deuteronomy only!" I hired Sutton to write a monthly newsletter, *Covenant Renewal*. Each issue discussed a specific biblical passage or text that is structured in terms of the five-point model. Each newsletter was the equivalent of 18 double-spaced typed pages. The first issue appeared in January, 1987. Only in the spring of 1993 did he cease writing it on a regular basis because of his duties as president of Philadelphia Theological Seminary, the seminary of the Reformed Episcopal Church.²⁴ There were over seventy issues of Sutton's newsletter, more than 1,200 double-spaced typed pages of evidence. This effort cost ICE a great deal of money: tens of thousands of dollars. Why did ICE go to this expense? Answer: to remove forever the legitimacy of the "Deuteronomy only!" argument.

The existence of *Covenant Renewal* has not silenced Sutton's many "Deuteronomy only" critics, nor did I expect it to. But these critics have systematically failed to mention the existence of *Covenant Renewal*. This deliberate silence has fooled most of their victimized followers, but it has also condemned these critics before God (ninth commandment: bearing false witness). This surely was worth ICE's money.

My publishing strategy has now led to another kind of criticism. It goes as follows: "Yes, Sutton's model fits all kinds of passages. This proves that it cannot possibly be biblical. It is just too convenient. It is just too good to be true. It is therefore an invention of man. The more passages it fits, the more clearly it has to be a counterfeit." I call this the "one size can't fit all, unless it is stretched out of shape" criticism, also called the "too good to be true" criticism. But it represents a major retreat from the "Deuteronomy only" criticism.

23. Sutton, Appendix 7: "Meredith G. Kline: Yes and No."

24. Sutton will tell anyone that the academic approval of *That You May Prosper* is what led to his presidency. He was awarded the Th.D. from the Central School of Religion in England in 1988, and this led to his new job.

These critics have a strategy, one described by Van Til in a fine analogy. They stand in front of what they regard as a bottomless pit. Each one holds a large shovel. "Throw any fact you like at us!" So we do. One critic after another takes his shovel and tosses the most recent fact over his shoulder into the pit. "Now throw us another. We dare you! We double-dog dare you!" This can go on for years, as I hope to prove. It is expensive to keep tossing the facts at them, but as the defenders age, those shovels will become increasingly heavy for them. They will also find that their brighter disciples are decreasingly impressed with this unproductive defensive strategy. The fact is, there are no bottomless pits in life. Even if there were, there is more to the defense of a position than shoveling facts into a pit. Those who adopt this strategy never move forward. Their disciples eventually conclude there is more to theology than bottomless pits, and more to eschatology than stationary shoveling. There is, in the final analysis, the Great Commission.²⁵

These critics never respond to specific presentations with specific refutations; they just shovel each new fact over their collective shoulders. This is regarded as first-rate scholarship by today's seminary faculties. This is why Christianity can be so easily dismissed by its critics as the faith of old women of both sexes. *Christians are not taken seriously because most of them do not take ideas seriously.* Calvinists always had one thing going for them within the Church International: they were Protestantism's scholars. No longer. The academic neo-evangelicals have replaced them. But these neo-evangelicals are defenders of theological mush—heavily footnoted mush. This leaves modern evangelical Protestantism as intellectually paralyzed as Israel's army was before Goliath. But when Sutton, like David, arrived from the pastoral hinterlands bearing his five stones, the army's officers were deeply resentful. They still are.

It is not sufficient to be a defender if a battle goes on indefinitely. The offense eventually wins. The longer the battle continues, the truer the old slogan: "The best defense is a good offense." It does little good for a critic to reject Sutton's thesis unless he has a better one to put in its place. All the critics—the "Deuteronomy only!" critics and the "One size can't fit all!" critics—are united in this confession: "All theories are equal, but one is more equal than others: our rejection of Sutton's five

25. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

points.”

The assumption of the critics is that God has no integrated covenantal structure in His mind; at least, His revelation does not reveal such a structure. God’s mind supposedly operates without an identifiable pattern with respect to covenant theology: so the covenant theologians insist. When Sutton presents many passages in the Bible that conform to the five-point model, the critics automatically dismiss his discoveries as man-made “eisegesis”: reading a structure into the text. They are insistent: “Covenant theology has no biblically authoritative structure!” This, it should be pointed out, is exactly what myriads of critics of covenant theology have maintained for about three centuries.

H. Biblical Analogical Reasoning

The theoretical question is this: If man’s mind is analogous to God’s, thinking God’s thoughts after Him, then if man does not receive these patterns from God’s mind, how can man be said to be made in God’s image? If we cannot find intellectually and judicially binding patterns in the Bible, how can we render judgment in terms of God’s priorities? Are we stuck with Barth’s dialectical god: wholly concealed yet wholly revealed? Or has God revealed Himself *clearly* to creatures who are morally and judicially bound to speak His word in a creaturely but covenantally faithful manner?

In 1978, Rushdoony wrote: “The canon or rule of life and faith is either from God or from man. It is either the canon of covenant law, or it is the canon of man’s word as law.”²⁶ A year later, he published an essay denying the existence of any underlying master (humanist) principle. He insisted: “The quest for a master principle is in essence anti-Biblical and is destructive of Christianity.”²⁷ It is worth noting that he used a five-point argument in his attempt to prove this. Each of his five points conforms to one of the biblical covenant model’s five points, a fact Sutton noted in 1987.²⁸ Sutton’s critics face the dilemma of every covenant theologian who denies that God’s covenant has a fixed structure: *without a structure, there can be no covenant.*

If you do not have a *theological model*, you do not have a *principle*

26. R. J. Rushdoony, *Infallibility: An Inescapable Concept* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1978), p. 26; *Systematic Theology*, p. 23.

27. Rushdoony, *Necessity for Systematic Theology*, p. 62; *Systematic Theology*, p. 108.

28. Ray R. Sutton, “The Inescapability of a Master Principle,” *Covenant Renewal*, 1 (June 1987). Rushdoony’s essay is titled, “The Search for a Master Principle,” ch. 16.

of biblical interpretation: a hermeneutic. Christians need a hermeneutic. The question is: What should it be? Theological liberals have one: "The Old Testament, but, above all, the Book of Leviticus, is judicially irrelevant." The problem is, most evangelicals share this opinion of the Old Testament, and especially of Leviticus.

I. The Substitution of Rhetoric for Evidence

My arguments and evidence regarding the broad applicability of the five-point Pentateuchal model are rarely commented on by critics except indirectly. I would put it even more strongly: the specifics of what I have written are never commented on; the blackout strategy is in force. Those few critics who seem to understand what I have written are universally unwilling to go into print with the specifics of their case against my arguments, as well as Sutton's text-by-text evidence. Instead, they resort to rhetoric, and misleading rhetoric at that.

1. Sandlin's Attack

Let us consider a representative case of this rhetorical strategy. Rev. Andrew Sandlin, at the time a Christian Reconstructionist, wrote of my broad application of the Pentateuchal-covenantal model:

What is objectionable about this insistence is that, like scholastic dispensationalism, five-point covenantalism when applied as a textual and theological construct is not exegetically derived. To extrapolate from Deuteronomy's patent covenantal structure to the view that Sutton's version thereof 'must serve as the necessary classification scheme for all orthodox Christian theology' is unwarrantable inasmuch as it is an implicit denial of the reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura*. To the Reformers Scripture itself is the ultimate authority; and when useful biblical models we develop begin to supersede the Scriptures themselves 'as the necessary classification scheme for all orthodox Christian theology,' we come dangerously close to a crypto-Catholicism in which the word of man competes with and dominates the word of God.²⁹

I was the target of his rhetoric. He called my exposition on the covenant an example of "overrefinement" and "confusion."³⁰ When a biblical scholar's exposition is not exegetically derived, is overrefined,

29. Andrew Sandlin, "Reservations on Tyler Reconstructionism," *Calvinism Today*, II (April 1992), p. 23.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

and is confused, it must be deeply flawed. The accuser presumably has considerable evidence to support his charges. Unfortunately, in the case of the most vociferous of my critics, they never do. They insist; they do not attempt to prove. They employ rhetoric; they do not offer evidence.

Sandlin also said that “North’s insistence introduces sectarianism into reconstruction.”³¹ He then compared me with militant fundamentalist Bob Jones II—which I find amusing, but Bob Jones III would not. (BJIII and I had a lengthy exchange of hostile letters in the late 1970s regarding the definition of fundamentalism). Nevertheless, his accusation regarding my concern about sectarianism was not off the mark. I am indeed doing my best to make the five points of the biblical covenant model a defining feature of Christian Reconstruction: specifically, point two of the five points (not just four) of Christian Reconstruction. Once again, these five points are: (1) the absolute sovereignty of the Trinitarian Creator God (Calvinism-Augustinianism); (2) the covenant itself, which is governed by the five points; (3) biblical law (theonomy); (4) Van Til’s presuppositional apologetic method; and (5) postmillennialism. The earlier version—points 1, 3, 4, and 5—was what Rushdoony and I pioneered from 1973 on.³² I have broken with Rushdoony on his refusal to add point two: the covenant. My explanation for his refusal to adopt it is this: he rejects it because it points directly to binding church hierarchy—the kind of authority that Calvin defended in Book IV of *The Institutes*.³³ Sandlin at the time was in Rushdoony’s camp. He recognized what I am trying to do, but he misinterpreted my intent. I am not trying to sectarianize Christian Reconstruction. I am trying to show that Rushdoony’s version of the position—anti-church to the core and therefore anti-covenantal—was deeply sectarian. I adhere to the traditional doctrine of the church and the sacraments; he has forthrightly rejected both. I am therefore distancing myself from Rushdoony’s sectarianism. Sandlin was unwilling to acknowledge Rushdoony’s sectarianism, and he responded by tarring

31. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

32. I exclude Bahnsen here because Bahnsen has always argued that theonomy (biblical law) is not connected theologically with postmillennialism. Rushdoony and I have argued that the two are linked theologically. Since 1986, I have argued that point four of the covenant model—sanctions—supplies this link: covenant-breakers will get weaker as God’s kingdom unfolds, while covenant-keepers will become more influential. Bahnsen called himself a theonomist; he rarely if ever described himself as a Christian Reconstructionist.

33. See Appendix B.

me with that brush.

The fact is, if the church at large never adopts either of our versions of Christian Reconstruction, or some development thereof, both camps will remain sectarian. Because I am a churchman, I can freely admit this. Because Rushdoony wasn't, he could not. Sandlin announced: "Reconstruction does not rest upon—and never has rested on—ecclesiastical polity."³⁴ This is indeed true of Rushdoony's version, which is why it is sectarian. But if by *polity* Sandlin means *participating in the Lord's Supper as a local church member under the authority of elders*, then Reconstructionism does indeed rest on ecclesiastical polity. Rushdoony stopped taking the Lord's Supper for over two decades; he refused to join a local church for the same period.³⁵ This is what separates my version of Christian Reconstruction from his.

2. *Rhetorical Flourishes*

Sandlin used very strong language to dismiss my position on the covenant, although I think "crypto-Catholicism" is choice, however off-target. We right-wing Americans of the 1950s era used to use "crypto-Communist" for similar rhetorical purposes. (The liberals never used "crypto-fascist." They just shouted "You fascist!" and let it go at that. They had no subtlety, no class.) But to say that a large portion of a Christian expositor's life's work—not to mention his enormous publishing expenses—is not exegetically grounded is a direct challenge either to his moral integrity or his intellectual capability. He is either a knave or an incompetent. While it is legitimate to make such a challenge on occasion, since the academic evangelical world today is filled almost to overflowing with theological knaves and incompetents, the accusation should always be supported by detailed, textually based evidence. I recommend David Chilton's book, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*, as a representative model of how such a challenge should be presented. But this is what my published critics never offer. This is what annoys me. It leads me to do things that are considered unchristian in my day (though not Luther's and Calvin's day, and surely not in Cromwell's day), such as calling attention to the critics' naked backsides. It is now Sandlin's turn.

Sandlin was temporarily a theonomist of the Vallecito variety. I

34. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

35. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

single him out, not because I have anything against him personally, but because he was the first writer I have come across who has been willing to take me on in print regarding my broad use of the five-point covenant model.³⁶ Also, here was someone who employed rhetoric—which I sincerely do appreciate—though unfortunately at the expense of both logic and evidence. In a single passage, readers are terrorized with two traditional bogeymen: dispensationalism (which uses a model) and Catholicism (which also uses a model). Let me suggest another traditional model: the five points of Calvinism. That model, surely, is a lot closer in structure to the five-point covenant model. More to the point, the five points of Calvinism are in fact an application in the area of “theology proper” of the much broader five points of covenantalism. Whatever objections Sandlin had against my broad use of the five points of covenantalism should also be applied to the five points of Calvinism.

While no Calvinist dares to say that the five points of Calvinism are superior to Scripture, all of them say these five points are superior to the five points of Arminianism, which is where they came from in the first place. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) offered them in response to Arminius’ five points. The Calvinist says to the Arminian, “My five points are better than your five points.” I am indeed saying to the world, “Sutton’s five points of the covenant are better—more exegetically derived—than Calvinism’s five points.” The Pentateuch is not structured in terms of the five points of Calvinism. Neither is Deuteronomy. Neither is Leviticus. Neither is Exodus.

Had Sandlin challenged me to defend my assertion regarding the superiority of Sutton’s five points to the five points of Calvinism—which are a subset of the covenant’s five points—I would have no objection. That is what theological debate is all about. I would then engage him in a printed debate. I launched this debate when I decided to begin publishing *Covenant Renewal* months before *That You May Prosper* appeared. The ICE spent a lot of money publishing Sutton’s *Covenant Renewal*. My objection to Sandlin is that he used excessive rhetoric in order to imply that I have advocated heretical nonsense, i.e., his suggestion that my recommended theological model supersedes Scripture in the same way that dispensationalism’s model is assumed by its adherents to do, or Catholicism’s models. If I believed

36. My critics tend to avoid interacting with me in print. Perhaps they recognize the old, pre-Internet rule: “Don’t get into a public confrontation with someone who orders ink by the barrel.”

such a thing about theological models, I would indeed be a Roman Catholic in my hermeneutic. In short, he was not content to challenge me regarding my detailed defense of the covenant's five points against rival classification schemes regarding structure of the biblical covenant and its applications in covenantal matters. He made it sound as though I am opposed to *Sola Scriptura*. For rhetorical purposes, the man deliberately misrepresented me.

At the most, his article was read by only a few hundred people. I respond here only because his rhetorical flourishes are representative of a broader class of contemporary would-be theological debate: verbal assault without theological interaction.

Before I reply in detail, I raise the following pair of not-quite rhetorical questions. First, are the creeds of the Christian church judicially binding as confessional models for church membership, i.e., membership in a covenantal institution? Second, are confessional statements of specific denominations judicially binding as confessional models for ordination to the ministries of the church? If Sandlin said yes to both questions, thereby placing himself within the orthodox tradition of the Christian church, his rhetorical assault on my broad use of Sutton's five-point backfires on him. He has now acknowledged that there can be *judicially binding* statements of faith—theological models, to use another word—that are under the authority of the Bible and over the church. That is to say, *these theological models are covenantally binding*. On the other hand, if he says no, he thereby places himself in the antinomian camp, with its constant claim: "No creed but the Bible, no law but love!" The logic of his own critique escaped Sandlin. This is always the risk of adopting strong rhetoric.

I presume that he affirms that the creeds and confessions are covenantally binding as ecclesiastical statements. But this is only the beginning. A creed is a brief statement of personal faith. It begins with *credo*, "I believe." But are there examples in the Bible of theologically binding structures of belief that are more than accurate summaries of certain theological conclusions? Put differently: Does the Bible itself present structured summaries of correct belief—summaries whose very structures govern the revelation of God in the Scriptures? Put differently still: Are the very structures of certain biblical passages themselves binding as representative systems of belief? Finally, are theological constructs sometimes actual biblical constructs?

3. *Models: An Inescapable Concept*

Sandlin implied that some systems of doctrine are autonomous creations of error-filled men who have sought to make these theological constructs superior to Scripture. This, he said, violates the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura*. On this point, he was quite correct. To which I reply: "So what? What has this traditional Protestant observation got to do with me?" The only answer supported by his article's evidence is this: not a thing. But his rhetorical implication was that this criticism of theological systems has everything to do with me. What he implied, but refused to prove from my writings or my use of evidence, is that I have elevated the five-point covenant model above the Bible. He wrote: "To the Reformers Scripture itself is the ultimate authority; and when useful biblical models we develop begin to supersede the Scriptures themselves as 'the necessary classification scheme for all orthodox Christian theology'"—the quoted phrase is mine—"we come dangerously close to a crypto-Catholicism in which the word of man competes with and dominates the word of God."³⁷ He said "we come dangerously close"; what he means is "*North* comes dangerously close."

He accepted the use of "useful biblical models." He rejected the use of models that "supersede the Scriptures themselves." I ask two questions. First, can there be useful biblical models that are not mandated by the Scripture? I see no *judicially binding* usefulness in any theological model that is not mandated by the Scriptures. Some literary model may be interesting or curious in a Vos-like sense, but in discussing the covenant, we must limit ourselves to judicially binding models. Second, are there theological models that go beyond the realm of pragmatism—mere usefulness—to become judicially binding on men's consciences? I have in mind the doctrines of the Trinity and the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on Calvary. If so, then we should describe these biblical models—not merely "useful biblical models"—as being inherent in the very revelation of the Bible. To describe them in this way is not the same as saying that they "supersede the Scriptures themselves." Their authority is *equal to* the Scriptures because they are *inseparable from* the Scriptures. Or are the Jews correct in their insistence that the Trinity is a New Testament addition—a theological construct of men, one not grounded in God's authoritative self-revelation?

I am arguing that *inherent in the very structuring of God's self-rev-*

37. Sandlin, "Reservations," *Calvinism Today*, p. 23.

elation in the texts of Scripture there are models. It is simply not true that every model or structure that a theologian (or anyone else) brings to the study of the Bible must always and inevitably be an autonomously derived construct that he seeks to impose on the Bible. There are constructs that were from the beginning *imposed by God on the texts of Scripture*. This is because it is impossible for men to think apart from models. We cannot know everything exhaustively—a major theme in Van Til’s system. We cannot relate every fact in the universe to every other fact. We therefore require accurate models in order to integrate the limited knowledge we have. These models must “do justice”—point four of the covenant model—to the facts. But where should we obtain such theologically authoritative models? The answer ought to be obvious: in the Bible.

It is our task to think God’s thought after Him as creatures. God communicates to us as creatures; His revelation is structured in terms of models that we can understand and employ in rendering theological judgments. For instance, God announced ten commandments, not eleven or nine. Accurate theological models are themselves biblically structured revelations from God. These models can be grammatical, theological, or symbolic. We cannot think apart from such structures. Our minds were created to think this way. The universe is also structured to match the structures of our minds. If this were not so, there could not be modern science. The astounding structure we call mathematics would not coincide with the regularities of the external world.³⁸

There is a kind of conservative theological relativism that says, or at least implicitly assumes, that all theological structures are the creations of men’s minds; none is imbedded in the texts or the structure of the Bible. This assumption is fatal to orthodoxy. *It assumes man’s legitimate autonomy.* It says, in good Kantian fashion, that there is no inherent order in the “thing-in-itself” (in this case, the Bible), and even if there were, man could not know this order directly. Thus, all of our knowledge of the Bible is properly ordered by man’s categorical structure of thought. We bring order to the Bible. We bring different orders. What we have here is symphonic theology. All tunes are equal (but some are more equal than others).

This assumption of the non-ordered nature of both the Bible and

38. Eugene P. Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>). Wigner won the Nobel Prize in physics.

creation is wrong. Man *can* know the revelation of God *covenantally*, and God holds each man eternally responsible for the proper though subordinate understanding of it. This revelation is both general (the universe) and special (the Bible). The Bible's revelation has precedence over general revelation. We are required to structure our understanding of general revelation in terms of the structure of biblical revelation. This is the meaning of Van Til's presuppositionalism. This is why it is rejected: it places our knowledge of reality under the authority of the Bible. But if Van Til is correct, then we cannot avoid this conclusion: the Bible provides integrating structures for human thought. Put differently, it offers *blueprints*. These blueprints govern theology. This means that our theological models must be derived from the inherent structure—models—of the Bible itself. The only theological symphony we are allowed to play is the one provided by the Bible itself. We are not to bring theological models to the Bible from outside the Bible. But this means that *we must go to the Bible in search of authoritative models*. Models are an inescapable concept. It is never a question of models vs. no models. It is always a question of which models. This should be obvious to any follower of Van Til.

With respect to the five-point covenant model, I say without any reservation that this model—this structure—is far more visible in the texts of the Bible than the Trinity is. This is not to say that it is more important because it is more visible. Belief in the five-point model is not on the same level as belief in the Trinity in terms of eternal consequences. The structure of God's covenantal relationships to man is not of the same consequence as God's eternal relationship with Himself: the aseity of God. We need God; He does not need us. But I *am* saying that in God's decision to reveal Himself to fallen man by means of written revelation, God has seen fit to reveal the structure of His covenantal relationship to man in the actual structure of numerous texts of Scripture. He has not done this with equal clarity when revealing His Trinitarian nature. I have seen attempts to find the Trinity in the structure of Scripture. I have not been impressed, and neither have most theologians through the ages.

I have not read this five-point structure into Scripture. God put into Scripture, and I am merely reading Scripture. In contrast, Sandlin has read it *out* of Scripture. It is there, but he refuses to admit this. Seeing, he will not see.

J. The Question of Exegesis

Sandlin misused his rhetorical gifts to suggest that my broad use of the five-point covenant model is illegitimate because it is not exegetically derived. He did not say that my exegesis is erroneous. That would have required direct citations from my writings and specific discussions of my errors. That would also have meant interacting with me and with the Bible. His language can be interpreted as implying that I have not attempted to derive my conclusions from the Bible. He was also very careful to avoid any mention of the (then) more than five years of specific applications of this model presented in Sutton's newsletter. He did not refer to my Preface to *The Sinai Strategy: The Economics of the Ten Commandments*, which shows that the Ten Commandments are structured into two parallel sets of the five points: one priestly, the other kingly. He did not refer to my commentaries to show that the Pentateuch is structured this way. I have been arguing this since 1987, beginning with my General Introduction in the revised edition of *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*. He told his readers that my thesis is not exegetically derived, and then he remained silent about my lengthy exegetical defenses of my thesis.

I should be used to this sort of rhetoric by now. I should be, but I am not. I cannot seem to get used to it. I am a scholar and a Christian, and this sort of thing is considered a breach of integrity in both worlds. There is also the question of the Ninth Commandment. We are not to bear false witness. If you say that a Christian scholar has not rested his case on the Bible, when he has said repeatedly that his system *does* rest on the Bible, you have a moral obligation to present some evidence. If you do not have room to prove your case in one place, you (or someone reliable) should already have presented the case elsewhere. But Sandlin refused to do this. He authoritatively dismissed my work on the structure of the covenant as non-exegetical, and then went on to another topic: an attack on James Jordan. I have previously called this approach to theological debate **hit-and-run** scholarship: you drive over the targeted victim from behind and then speed away into the night.

He announced, without offering any evidence, that the five-point covenant model, if applied beyond Deuteronomy, is the theological equivalent of dispensationalism and Catholicism because it is not exegetically based. Therefore, he implied rhetorically, defenders of the covenant model implicitly assume that this model is superior to the

Bible. But such an assumption is a denial of *Sola Scriptura*. Sandlin's argument rests completely on an assumption: that my broad use of the model is not exegetically based. His "proof" of this statement is his refusal to acknowledge the existence of *Covenant Renewal* and everything I have published on the five-point model.

My point from 1986 on—my blatantly obvious point—is *not* that Sutton's classification scheme is above Scripture. I am arguing two very different things. First, and most important, Sutton's proposed model is in fact derived from the structure that was built into the Bible by God—not above the Bible, but *in* the Bible. Deuteronomy reflects it, not because only Deuteronomy reflects it, but because Deuteronomy reflects the Pentateuch, which is structured by the five-point model. Second, and far less important, I have argued that the five-point covenant model is a whole lot better, and a whole lot more exegetical, than traditional Scholastic Calvinism's (i.e., Turretin's) loci.

If Sandlin is incapable of challenging me theologically on these two points, he should keep his rhetorical flourishes to himself. Rhetoric is not a valid substitute for theological disquisition and detailed, comprehensive exegesis. Not to put too fine a point to it: one half of a single brief essay is not a valid substitute for a major text in theology (*That You May Prosper*), six years of newsletters, and a growing shelf of Bible commentaries.

K. Sandlin vs. Biblical Theology

Having said all this, let me make one last observation about the professed concern of Sandlin regarding the supposed lack of exegetical support for my broad application of the five-point model. What I have argued, and what Sutton also argued, is that theology must be both systematic and biblical, i.e., dogmatic and exegetical. Orthodox theology must acknowledge the historical development of God's revelation, Genesis to Revelation, as well as affirm the *doctrinal constancy* in God's progressive revelation, which undergirded and shaped this revelation. Why must both be affirmed? Because man is an historical creature. Mankind develops in wisdom and knowledge, and this will continue in eternity. God is infinite; man is not. Therefore, our knowledge of God will grow for all eternity. Because I simultaneously defend the idea of fixed, unchangeable truth in the mind of God and the idea of the finitude of man, I defend both systematic theology (fixed theological categories) and biblical theology (progressive revelation in the

Bible). There is equal ultimacy here: fixed truth in the mind of God and God's progressive revelation to mankind. Once the canon of Scripture was closed, man's systematic theology could not remain absolutely fixed because man's knowledge of God cannot remain constant. Finite man cannot comprehend—encompass—an infinite God. There has been progress theologically in history precisely because the church has moved forward to maturity.

Sandlin clearly distrusts biblical theology as a separate academic discipline. He is far more enamored with Turretin's Scholastic theological system than he is with modern biblical theology, which is more closely tied to the exposition and exegesis of specific texts than post-Turretin systematic theology has ever been. He defends Turretin and attacks biblical theology: "The shift from a dogmatic and confessional theology of Turretin's sort to a purely exegetical and biblical theology, however, tends to result in heterodoxy. . . ." ³⁹ What did he mean, "purely exegetical"? He did not say. Is there something suspicious about exegetical theology? Isn't his formal criticism of my use of the five points the fact that my theology is not exegetical? Could it be that his real objection to my use of the five-point Pentateuchal-covenantal model has more to do with my rejection of Turretin's system as a judicially binding model than with my supposed lack of exegetical evidence?

Surely exegetical and biblical theology did not shift to heterodoxy in the hands of Geerhardus Vos. Furthermore, historically speaking, the Princetonians' defense of their only slightly modified Turretinian theology collapsed under the weight of Kant, Darwin, and modernism early in the twentieth century, if not before. Van Til was correct: the Princetonians' attempt to tie Calvinism to rationalism—in Princeton's case, Scottish common sense rationalism—was doomed to failure, as are all attempts to unite Jerusalem and Athens. The categories (loci) of Turretin's covenant theology were established in response the categories of Roman Catholic Scholasticism, not in terms of the Bible's actual covenant structure. They could not survive the collapse of Catholic Scholasticism. In fact, they collapsed first. ⁴⁰ By "collapsed," I do not mean that they became incorrect. I mean that they became irrelevant

39. Andrew Sandlin, "Review of *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, by Francis Turretin," *Christianity and Society*, IV (April 1994), p. 30. This is the re-named *Calvinism Today*.

40. I would date the beginning of the collapse of Rome's Scholasticism with Pope John XXIII (1958–1963); the demolition was completed by his successor, Paul VI.

to the culture around them, including the American Presbyterian Church itself. This is the fate of every theological construct grounded in man's logical categories rather than in explicitly biblical categories.

What Sutton and I have argued is that biblical theology should be governed by biblically revealed theological categories. Only the Bible is simultaneously unchanging and relevant to history. Therefore, only the Bible's categories are reliable as fixed theological standards to govern the exegetical insights derived from biblical theology. *Biblical theology should always be structured by biblical categories.* The five-point covenant model is by far the most comprehensive biblical structure, for it is simultaneously creational, judicial, and eschatological. It, not Protestant Scholasticism's seven loci, should govern the presentation of the Trinity, the atonement, and other explicitly revelational concepts. In the task of providing a judicial framework to biblical theology, the five points of the covenant have far greater Scriptural authority than Scholastic Calvinism's seven loci. The five points are actually found in the texts of Scripture. The Scholastic loci are found only in the minds of theologians. This does not make the loci incorrect, but it does make them less reliable, long term, than the covenant's five points, in developing a covenant theology. The seven loci are mental constructs that are derived from passages in Scripture, but they are never found as a unit in Scripture. The seven loci are the imposition of a logically contrived structure over the texts of Scripture, not a structure present in the texts themselves.

What I perceived in 1994, after I had read Sandlin's 1994 defense of Turretin, is that his 1992 public criticism regarding my supposed lack of exegesis may have been more rhetorically motivated than I had suspected. I am calling for the adoption of a Bible-revealed structure to govern biblical theology. Sandlin did not really want biblical theology at all. He did not trust it. He wanted good, old fashioned, rationalistic, seventeenth-century Calvinism. To which I respond: "We've been down that road already. It leads to a dead end."

Without both biblical theology and systematic theology, we will not recover lost ground. Both must be developed in terms of the Bible. Biblical theology must always be governed by the terms of systematic theology in order to keep biblical theologians from flying into the "wild blue yonder" through unrestrained interpretive maximalism. But the governing categories of systematic theology should not be the categories of seventeenth-century Protestant Scholasticism. The categories of systematic theology must be explicitly biblical, including the actual

structure of the texts. There is circularity here, but of a biblical kind.⁴¹

L. Sandlin Departs

In any case, the Sandlin of 1992 is no more. A year after he went off the payroll of Chalcedon, in December, 2002, he publicly cast off the restrictive shackles of the Christian Reconstruction movement (CRM). He wrote a farewell piece for the Razormouth site: "Saying goodbye to Christian Reconstructionism." He wrote: "So, I say farewell to the CRM, and my spirit is not 'Good riddance,' but rather, 'Thanks for the memories.'"⁴² But this was not enough to satisfy him. One year later, on December 16, 2003, he posted an essay on Razormouth. He criticized John MacArthur's statement that the central doctrine of the gospel is salvation by faith alone. No, no, no, said Sandlin. "The main issue of the New Testament is not justification by faith alone (vital though it is) but rather, as Oscar Cullmann demonstrates, the Lordship of the risen, ruling Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. MacArthur's view, under the sincere attempt to preserve a gracious soteriology, truncates the Biblical picture of the work of Christ."⁴³ Oscar Cullmann? **Oscar Cullmann? Oscar Cullmann????** Oscar Cullmann was the German Lutheran theologian who spent his career in the ecumenical movement. The World Council of Churches issued this obituary in 1999:

Everything marked Cullmann out for ecumenical commitment; he came from Strasbourg, the city of the Reformation figure Martin Bucer, he was bilingual and he was passionate about the "essence" of the Christian faith. He became involved in interconfessional talks as early as the 1920s. Without repudiating his Lutheran background, he taught for many years at the Reformed Faculty in Basle. After the Second World War his teaching activities extended to Paris and Rome. The time spent at the Waldensian Faculty in Rome gave him the opportunity to make many Roman Catholic contacts. His uncomplicated, salvation history-oriented theology was also well-received in Rome. His book "Peter—Disciple, Apostle, Martyr" (1952) paved the way for an objective discussion on a sensitive subject in re-

41. On biblical circular reasoning, see Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, volume II of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Den Dulk Foundation, 1969), p. 12.

42. P. Andrew Sandlin, "Saying Goodbye to Christian Reconstructionism," Razormouth (Dec. 10, 2002). The site is now a how to make money site. The original article is now posted here: <http://www.garynorth.com/SandlinFarewell.pdf>.

43. Sandlin, "The Biblical Perspective on Paul." This appeared on Sandlin's site: The document is gone as of 2011.

lations between the confessions. At a time when contacts at the highest level were unusual, he was received by the Popes Pius XII, John XXIII, and above all, Paul VI. Karl Barth used to say teasingly, "Oscar, on your gravestone it will say 'Here lies the adviser to three Popes'". Tease he might, but years later, when times had changed, Barth himself made a high-profile visit to Rome. Cullmann was personally invited as an observer to the Second Vatican Council and his voice was heeded by many. His conversations with Paul VI gave rise to the plan for an ecumenical institute in Jerusalem.⁴⁴

He was the twentieth-century neo-orthodox theologian (1902–1999) of whom Cornelius Van Til warned in 1970:

If evangelical Christians take a second look at Cullmann, they will see that he works in the line of Bultmann and of Barth rather than in the line of Luther and Calvin. Cullmann has in common with both Bultmann and Barth, the assumption of human autonomy as it has found its modern expression in Kant. This assumption of human autonomy results in an absolute dualism between the world of science as the world of abstract impersonal law, and the world of faith as the world of wholly unknown and wholly non-rational forces. This second world is called the world of the noumenal by Kant and the world of person-to-person confrontation by his theological followers. By the powers of sheer postulation and assertion the second world is then placed above the first. *The meeting point of the two worlds is called the Christ*. Somehow this Christ is supposed to be more intelligible than the Christ of Chalcedon!⁴⁵ . . .

A recently written article on *The Relevance of Redemptive History* gives some evangelical Christians occasion to remark that Cullmann is now, more obviously than before, on the side of the Evangelicals in the Great Debate Today. However, the framework of Cullmann's thinking remains the same throughout his writings. It is because of his essentially post-Kantian framework of thought that Cullmann finds it possible to be as "ecumenical" as he is. His sympathy with Roman Catholic thinking springs from the fact that in it, as well as in his own post-Kantian views, the ideas of human autonomy, of abstract logic, and of brute contingent factuality, have a controlling place.⁴⁶

To add insult to injury, in Sandlin's December 22 posting, "Biblio-

44. World Council of Churches, Office of Communications, Press Release (21 January 1999), "Oscar Cullman (1902–1999)." (<http://bit.ly/CollmanWCC>)

45. Cornelius Van Til, *The Great Debate Today* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), pp. 39–40.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

phile's Year-End Top Ten Favorite Books Read in 2003," we find this at the top of the (alphabetical) list: "Barth, Karl. *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*." I ask: What in the name of orthodoxy has anything written by Karl Barth contributed to Sandlin's thinking? Has he not read and understood Van Til's *The New Modernism* (1947) or *Christianity and Barthianism* (1962)? This book recommendation came from a man who had written one year earlier, "I've been identified by some on the left and even some on the right as R. J. Rushdoony's intellectual (if not institutional) heir, but I neither deserve nor desire that mantle."⁴⁷ Not quite: the left-right sources that he linked to did not mention his intellectual heirship. They noted—inaccurately—that he was the head of Chalcedon. He was not. Still, just like Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play, he refused the crown, even though (unlike Caesar) only he offered it. Given where he has headed since then, I think this was wise.

Conclusion

The Book of Deuteronomy is structured in terms of a five-point model. Meridith Kline's *Treaty of the Great King* (1963) makes this clear. But this same five-point biblical structure is visible in far more passages in the Book of Leviticus than in Deuteronomy. Not only is Leviticus structured in terms of the covenant model, the five-point structure appears again and again in its subsections.⁴⁸ So, those critics who say "Deuteronomy only!" have another large problem to add to their Exodus problem: the Leviticus problem. This will not faze them, of course. They will still carry on about the non-existence of this five-point pattern except in Deuteronomy. But anyone who has read this commentary, plus *Tools of Dominion* and *The Sinai Strategy*, will expect more proof than the repeated assurances of critics who steadfastly refuse to comment on anything that Sutton and I have written since 1987, or on what Gary DeMar⁴⁹ and George Grant⁵⁰ wrote in the Biblical Blueprints series, or on what Ken Gentry wrote in 1990 in *The Greatness of the Great Commission*, which is structured by the five-point model.

47. Sandlin, "Saying goodbye to Christian Reconstructionism."

48. James Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

49. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), which is structured by the five-point model. (<http://bit.ly/gdmruler>)

50. George Grant, *The Changing of the Guard* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), which is structured by the five-point model. (<http://bit.ly/GrantGuard>)

Rhetoric is not a legitimate substitute for textual analysis, and the “Deuteronomy only!” critics have offered nothing so far except rhetoric. They do not respond to the evidence. Their pit is filling up. I conclude that it is now up to the “it’s too good to be true, because we seem to find it everywhere” critics to defend the camp of traditional covenant theology against a covenant theology with a textually derived structure. If there is one thing that traditional covenant theologians cannot tolerate it is a textually derived theological structure.

I have said it before, and I shall say it again: the vocal critics of Christian Reconstruction have a moral obligation to produce detailed Bible commentaries that show why mine are incorrect. These commentaries must also demonstrate what is correct, both theologically and in terms of applying the Bible to the modern world. The critics no doubt prefer to confine their efforts to a an occasional negative book review in some small-circulation magazine, but such protests are not substitutes for the hard and expensive work of producing commentaries and comprehensive treatises built on commentaries. A three-page negative review is little more than a wail: “I just don’t like this, and neither should anybody else!” Wailing against God’s law in the face of an encroaching humanist civilization is an exercise in futility. Without an explicitly biblical alternative to God’s law, such wailing constitutes a surrender to humanism.

What I say here about the critics of Christian Reconstruction applies equally well to those Reconstructionists who deny the five-point covenant model. The four points of Christian Reconstruction are not found in any passage in Scripture. The five points are. Repeatedly.

End of Volume 4

SANCTIONS AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON NUMBERS

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An Economic Commentary on the Bible, 31 vols. (1982–2012)

Marx's Religion of Revolution (1968, 1989)

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Successful Investing in an Age of Envy (1981)

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SANCTIONS AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON NUMBERS

GARY NORTH

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PREFACE

I began writing my economic commentary on Genesis in the spring of 1973. I wrote one chapter per month for the *Chalcedon Report*, beginning in May, 1973. I accelerated the process in August of 1977: ten hours a week, 50 weeks a year. Even so, it took me until 1982 to publish *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*. I immediately began working on Exodus. That project occupied eight years and three volumes of commentary, plus four books that served as appendixes to the third volume.¹ *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion* took three years (1982–85); *The Sinai Strategy: The Economics of the Ten Commandments* took a year (1985–86); and *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* took four years (1986–90). *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary*, a short version (about 800 pages) of *Boundaries and Dominion*, took almost five years (1990–94). Yet when I began Leviticus, I had thought that I might do Leviticus and Numbers in one volume.

It took me about six months to write the first draft of this book. I began in January of 1995. I completed the first draft in late June. It took another six months to revise, correct, typeset, and proofread it. By that time, I had finished Chapter 29 of my commentary on Deuteronomy, which went through Deuteronomy 12. The Deuteronomy manuscript was already longer than the entire commentary on Numbers. I had not expected much trouble in writing *Sanctions and Dominion*, but I had not expected it to be as easy as it turned out to be, not counting the appendix, which was a challenge.

A. The Five-Point Covenant Model

Deuteronomy completes book five of the Pentateuch, which in turn follows the five-point structure of the biblical covenant model.²

1. *Dominion and Common Grace* (1987), *Is the World Running Down?* (1988), *Political Polytheism* (1989), *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

When I began writing this economic commentary on the Bible, I was unaware of this structure's all-pervasive importance for understanding the Pentateuch. I had read Meredith G. Kline's *Treaty of the Great King* (1963) years earlier, but I had forgotten its thesis regarding the precise number of points in the covenant. I did not recognize its implications for this project until late 1985, when Ray Sutton first presented his version of the model, based on the earlier research by Kline. Sutton's version was more precise—exactly five points, not five or six—and it was more explicitly judicial. Most important, he brought the covenant model into the New Testament era, unlike Kline, who had relegated it to the Mosaic economy only. Kline's goal was to seal off the Mosaic law from the New Testament era. Sutton's goal was to demonstrate the continuity of the covenant's structure in both testaments.

First, I saw that the Ten Commandments are structured in terms of two parallel sets of five points each, priestly (1–5) and kingly (6–10).³ This verifies the Protestant version of the numbering of the Decalogue, in contrast to the Roman Catholic and Lutheran⁴ arrangement. It also lays to rest Calvin's peculiar 4–6 structuring of what he regarded as the two tables of the law: 1–4 (piety) and 5–10 (justice).⁵ The traditional 5–5 structuring had been suggested as early as Josephus' first-century history of the Jews.⁶ That structuring is correct, although Josephus' thesis that the two tablets had five commandments written on each of them probably is not.⁷ Second, I realized that the Pentateuch itself is structured in terms of the same five points: Genesis (God's transcendence/presence), Exodus (God's authority and Israel's deliverance), Leviticus (God's law), Numbers (God's historical sanctions), and Deuteronomy (Israel's inheritance). On these points, I have gone into greater detail in the General Introduction in *Sovereignty and Domin-*

3. Preface, Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), vol. 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986).

4. Conservative Lutherans do not like to be referred to as "Protestants," which they equate with the Swiss Calvinistic Reformers. Their version of the Decalogue reinforces this preference. Their view of justification by faith does not.

5. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1563] 1979), III, p. 6.

6. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, III:V:5.

7. *Ibid.*, III:V:8. I accept Kline's thesis: there were two complete sets of ten commandments each that were placed inside the Ark of the Covenant as testimonies: one was God's receipt; the other was Israel's. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), Part II, ch. 1.

ion and in the Preface to *Boundaries and Dominion*, my commentary on Leviticus. There is no need to repeat myself here.

The Book of Numbers extends the Bible's covenant model through a consideration of Israel's post-exodus, pre-conquest wilderness history. As the fourth book in the Pentateuch, its overarching theme is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant model.⁸ God brought negative sanctions on the exodus generation because that generation had refused to bring negative sanctions against Canaan immediately after the return of the spies. When the next generation brought negative sanctions against cities on the wilderness side of the Jordan River, its members proved that they were covenantally ready to escape from the wilderness. The historical events of the wilderness era were, above all, a manifestation of God's corporate covenantal sanctions in history: negative against Israel.

B. New Heavens and New Earth: Prophesied Sanctions

We come now to the passage of the Bible that amillennialists resist commenting on, the passage that categorically and forever testifies against amillennialism. The crucial issue is sanctions: specifically, the historical sanction of extremely long life. Isaiah wrote of God's work in his day:

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed (Isa. 65:17–20).

Consider these highly specific words: "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." These words are clear; they are

8. Milgrom refers to "the difficulties of finding the book's inner cohesion." Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. xiii. This inner cohesion becomes obvious when it is seen as book four in the Pentateuch, with the Pentateuch structured by the covenant model.

also prophetically binding. They tell us that in this sin-cursed world, where death still reigns, the reign of death will someday be challenged by a revolutionary increase of life expectancy. This has not happened yet; it must be in the future. This prophecy cannot possibly apply to the post-resurrection world of eternity, for death will still exist, the text says. This passage is literal and eschatological. The promised blessings are both literal and future. These blessings are the kinds of blessings that postmillennialists and premillennialists⁹ expect during a literal, future era of millennial blessings. These historical blessings cannot be allegorized away without compromising the text, yet allegorizing is the only exegetical option for an amillennialist. This passage unquestionably destroys the case for amillennialism. No wonder amillennial Bible commentators and theologians grow hyperbolic and allegorical on those exceedingly rare occasions when they deign to offer comments on this, their position's exegetical Achilles' heel.¹⁰ The positive sanction of long life is just too positive for their would-be future realm of Satanic persecution of the church. Sinners who die at age one hundred will be accounted as children: early death. Covenant-keepers will live much longer than this. But these demographic conditions reverse the prophesied amillennial future, where evil always increases in strength and receives external blessings, while righteousness is increasingly confined to the persecuted ghettos of life.

The historical sanctions of God during the final phase of the New Heaven and New Earth, as described by Isaiah, conform to the post-millennial system: righteousness is rewarded with greater wealth and power in the long run, while evil becomes increasingly impotent. Such a view of the future, we are assured by amillennialists, is heretical. It is obvious who ought to be the chief heretic in the canon of amillennialism: the prophet Isaiah.¹¹

9. What destroys the premillennial system is Matthew 13, the chapter on historical continuity between the first advent of Christ and His second advent.

10. Amillennialist Archibald Hughes, in a book titled *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958), refused to comment directly on this passage, despite the fact that the phrase "New Heaven and New Earth" first appears here. He mentioned the passage only in passing, along with other verses, saying that it refers to eternal life, despite the fact that it discusses long life, not eternal life (pp. 138–39). There is no other comment anywhere in his book on this, the key problem passage in the Bible for amillennialists. This sort of evasive scholarship reveals a deep-seated weakness of the amillennial position.

11. For a detailed study of the eschatological and social implications of Isaiah 65:17–20, see Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

My main point here is that God's historical sanctions are indissolubly connected to the process of corporate inheritance and disinheritance in history. That is, eschatology and historical sanctions are indissoluble covenantally. To discuss either without reference to the other is to commit a major exegetical error.

C. Covenantal Sanctions and the Protestant Reformation

The issue of oath-bound sanctions served as the great dividing issue theologically in the Western church from the Protestant Reformation until the late nineteenth century, when eschatology replaced sanctions as the primary dividing issue within the Protestant community.¹² Martin Luther broke with Rome over the practical question of the sale of indulgences. He asked: Does the Papacy possess the authority to annul God's eternal sanctions in exchange for cash? The underlying theological issue here was salvation from hell's negative sanctions: By faith or by works? But the theoretical issue of the judicial basis of salvation came as a spin-off of the practical question of the sale of indulgences. It was Tetzel's sales program that led to Luther's 95 theses.

There were two other covenantally related issues that came to the forefront in the Reformation, neither of which has ever been settled: vows and sacraments. The Roman Church accused Luther and his allies of being vow-breakers, which indeed they were. This accusation was reasserted eloquently as recently as 1993 by E. Michael Jones in his study of the sexual debauchery of modern art, *Degenerate Moderns*.¹³ He traced the degeneracy of modern art to the sexual debauchery of the artists. Then, without warning in the final chapter, and without offering any historical evidence for subsequent connections, he identified the origin of modern sexual debauchery in Western art and culture as Luther's undermining of priestly and monastic vows. Jones ar-

12. In the early church, the initial divisive issue was sovereignty: the doctrine of God. This was settled by the great Trinitarian creeds of the early church councils. It was the only issue that ever was settled. Then the debate moved to authority: church vs. state. The Eastern Church placed the state at the top of the hierarchy in history. The Western Church proclaimed the equal ultimacy of church and state under God. That issue came to the forefront in the West in 1076: the Papal Revolution. The next dividing issue in the West began immediately: the doctrine of law. The Scholastics attempted to fuse Roman law and canon law into one theoretical system. They failed; the two legal orders separated: rational law (state) vs. spiritual law (church). The modern world has inherited this ethical dualism.

13. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

gued that Luther wanted sex; the priests and nuns wanted sex; they broke their vows to get sex; and that led to Picasso. This line of reasoning may seem a bit tenuous to Protestants, but so ingrained is the centrality of the vow of celibacy in the thinking of traditionalist Roman Catholics that the emptying of Northern European nunneries and monasteries, 1520 to 1540, constitutes for some of them the crucial turning point in Western civilization. Everything evil in Western male-female relations stems from that event. They believe that it did more than merely undermine the church's ministry; it destroyed Christendom. The monstrous evil that Renaissance humanism's Papacy had become by 1517 is somehow beside the point; better the Borgias than Luther, we are still implicitly (though never explicitly) assured. The Borgias bribed people, poisoned people, and led totally debauched lives, but Luther broke his vow of celibacy. The latter act is seen as the essence of the great rebellion, not the former.

The other issue, the sacraments, was also the issue of covenantal sanctions. Luther asked: How many sacraments are there? Who has the authority to admit laymen to these sacraments? Who has the right to excommunicate whom? All of these sacramental issues were tied to the overriding issue of oath-bound ecclesiastical sanctions. A series of excommunications and counter-excommunications began in Northern Europe in the 1520s; they led to civil wars over the next century.

Because the West was Christian, the entire social order was oath-bound in 1517: church, state, and family. Only the Jews lived outside rule of law established by covenantal Trinitarian oaths, and they lived in separate ghettos with their own legal order. In the West, these ghettos were literally sealed off at night. In Poland, Jews lived in enclaves in the cities owned by the nobility, exempt from many gentile urban economic laws. This ghetto system benefitted the rabbis, for it transferred civil power to them over other Jews.¹⁴ But Jews were the great exception; everyone else was under Trinitarian covenantal oaths. Thus, the Reformation's schism over the legitimacy of existing oaths led in the sixteenth century to dynastic persecutions, burnings at the stake, and wars in Northern Europe, followed by a series of civil wars in the seventeenth century. The devastating Thirty Years War in Germany (1618–48), the English-Scottish war (1638–41), the English Civil War (1642–49), Cromwell's Lord Protectorship (1652–58), and the restoration of Charles II in 1660, were all struggles over the content of the

14. Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (London: Pluto, 1994), pp. 54, 60–63.

civil oath.

The theoretical reconciliation of this covenantal issue in civil affairs after 1700 marks the triumph of Enlightenment political pluralism over a pietistic Protestantism. Newtonian natural law theory replaced the Bible and Scholastic natural law theory as the new basis of social ethics and civil law. Protestants abandoned civil institutions to what they believed was a legitimate common-ground morality. Today, almost all Protestant theologians defend this dualism between revealed religion and civil authority. According to Enlightenment political theory, civil authority is not governed by Trinitarian oaths; it is governed by common-ground confessions of loyalty to a religiously neutral state. This confession of faith is accepted by Protestant theology, though with increasing doubts regarding the underlying myth of neutrality. As the myth of neutrality fades, so does the theoretical foundation of modern political pluralism.

D. The Renunciation of God's Historical Sanctions

To maintain the legitimacy of civil oaths without Trinitarian content, pluralism's Christian defenders have had to renounce the concept of predictable supernatural sanctions in history, i.e., sanctions invoked by corporate covenantal oath. This denial of the presence in the New Testament era of God's predictable covenantal sanctions has left Protestantism without any means of defending the ideal of Christendom. Lutheranism was always dualistic, but Calvinism was originally cultural-civilizational. Unofficially after 1700, and formally after 1787, American Calvinism adopted Lutheranism's dualistic view of society.¹⁵

Without the concept of covenantal sanctions in history, original Calvinism's comprehensive world-and-life view has been truncated to encompass little or nothing outside church and family. Attempts to revive Calvinism's once confident worldview, but on a pluralistic basis, most notably Abraham Kuyper's attempt in the late nineteenth century Netherlands, and more recently Francis Schaeffer's in the United States, have all failed, and for the same three reasons. First, without an appeal to a uniquely biblical law-order that encompasses politics, there is no way to distinguish Christendom from common-ethics Enlightenment humanism. Second, without the threat of God's predictable dir-

15. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America ("Covenanters") long resisted this, but how much of the older view is shared today in this tiny denomination is questionable. Much depends on the theological commitment of the faculty of its denominational college, Geneva College.

ect sanctions in history—sanctions lawfully invoked by covenantal oath—Christians cannot provide a biblically grounded defense of the right of the state to enforce the Bible-mandated sanctions attached to biblical law. The state imposes its sanctions as God’s minister (Rom. 13:4). If God does not bring sanctions in history in terms of His covenant law, neither should the state. Civil law then becomes humanistic law. Third, without a predictable historical separation of cultural inheritance and disinheritance in terms of God’s law and biblical sanctions, the meek cannot inherit the earth. Covenant-breakers will. Modern pluralistic Calvinism denies all three.¹⁶ Thus, it cannot suggest a uniquely Calvinist or even vaguely Trinitarian social theory. It merely baptizes the reigning humanist pluralist worldview and then rushes to embrace some crackpot liberal economic reform scheme that the liberals abandoned as hopelessly out of date ten years earlier.

The Lutherans have always been ethical dualists. Luther defended a theory of two completely separate legal orders, one for Christians and the other for the inherently non-Christian state.¹⁷ For Luther, there was no possibility of Christendom.¹⁸ The Anabaptists have also remained consistent: they renounced the ideal of Christendom and its mandated Trinitarian civil oaths in the aftermath of the failed Munster communist rebellion in 1535. In both views, Christian passive resistance to state tyranny is all that is allowed by God. This quietism was not Northern American Presbyterianism’s view until after the defrocking of J. Gresham Machen in 1936 and his death six months later, when Presbyterianism finally succumbed to eschatologies analogous to Lutheranism’s amillennialism¹⁹ and Anabaptism’s premillennialism.²⁰ Quietism was not Southern Presbyterianism’s view until after the Civil War, when the denomination went pietistic-fundamentalist on the few social issues it formally discussed: gambling, liquor, and prostitution, but not tobacco.²¹ American Presbyterianism in the twentieth century

16. Gary Scott Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870–1915* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian University Press, 1985). This publishing house is a subsidiary of William B. Eerdmans.

17. Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed” (1523), in *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), vol. XLV.

18. Charles Trinkaus, “The Religious Foundations of Luther’s Social Views,” in John H. Mundy, *et al.*, *Essays in Medieval Life* (Cheshire, Connecticut: Biblo & Tannen, 1955), pp. 71–87.

19. Westminster Seminary was dominated by Dutch theologians after 1936.

20. Carl McIntire’s Faith Seminary after 1936 and the Bible Presbyterian Church after 1938.

21. The Virginia and Carolina economies were closely tied to tobacco.

has abandoned its Scottish roots, thereby becoming either Lutheran-amillennial or pietist-premillennial in its social outlook. Pessimillennialism, when coupled with the ethical dualism of modern political pluralism, has transformed Calvinism into something barely distinguishable from its old Protestant rivals: Lutheranism and Anabaptism.

E. Sanctions and Eschatology: Calvin vs. Kline

John Calvin believed that God enforces His law in history through the imposition of predictable sanctions. This was basic to his worldview. Without this faith in historical sanctions, Calvinism would have become another version of Lutheran dualism or Anabaptist quietism. Calvin's comments on the fifth commandment's promise of long life and blessings to those who obey their parents is indicative of his outlook. He knew, as David knew (Ps. 73), that bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. But this does not negate the law of God and its attached sanctions, Calvin insisted. There are times "where God works variously and unequally," Calvin said, but this does not make His promises void. There are always compensating rewards in heaven. More important for our understanding of his outlook, however, is what he adds: "Truly experience in all ages has shown that God has not in vain promised long life to all who have faithfully discharged the duties of true piety towards their parents. Still, from the principle already stated, it is to be understood that this Commandment extends further than the words imply; and this we infer from the following sound argument, viz., that otherwise God's Law would be imperfect, and would not instruct us in the perfect rule of a just and holy life."²² In other words, the sanctions of the fifth commandment are still in force. God's visible sanctions in history in general are not random; they reflect His commitment to defend and extend His law in history.

Calvin's comments on the fifth commandment were put into final form by the author in 1563, the year before his death, and therefore represent the culmination of his thinking. A century later, in the aftermath of the Restoration of Charles II, his spiritual heirs began to abandon this outlook. They began to lose faith in the covenantal predictability of God's sanctions in history, especially positive sanctions for covenant-keepers.²³ In our day, Meredith Kline devoted his academic ca-

22. Calvin, *Harmonies*, III, p. 11.

23. The turning point in New England was marked by the publication in 1662 of

reer to persuading Calvinists to abandon Calvin on this point. If Calvin was correct here, then Kline's denial of the continuing New Covenant authority of the Mosaic law-covenant²⁴ would represent the abandonment of Calvinism in the name of Lutheranism, which I contend is exactly what Kline's theology represents.²⁵

Both European Calvinist traditions—Dutch and Scottish—produced their formative documents in an era in which civil sanctions were assumed mandatory in the protection of church doctrine and liturgy. Two centuries later, Anglo-American Calvinism officially renounced the ideal of Christendom in the revision of the Westminster Confession of 1787–88. It adopted the Enlightenment's ideal of political pluralism. The Synod was timed to match the Constitutional Convention of May, 1787. The two meetings overlapped briefly in Philadelphia; the Synod was ending on a Monday as the Convention was beginning.²⁶ Meanwhile, Continental Calvinism had almost no influence outside of Holland after 1700. After 1800, right-wing Enlightenment social theory was substituted by the theologians for the older theocratic ideal. Calvinist social theory after 1800 has been indistinguishable from conservative humanism's social theory. It has been some variant of Whig political theory.

Kline offered a dualistic theology in the name of Calvin. Kline's theology rests openly on his denial of the presence of humanly predictable covenantal sanctions in New Testament times. According to Kline, ethical cause and effect in history are, humanly speaking, essentially random. In this, he challenged Calvin at the very core of Calvin's ethical theory. He wrote: "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually con-

Michael Wigglesworth's two poems, *The Day of Doom* and *God's Controversie With New England*. In England, the imposition of the Act of Uniformity (1662) and the expulsion of some two thousand Calvinist pastors from their pulpits were equally devastating to older Calvinism's faith in the future and in God's positive sanctions in history.

24. Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, Part 2, ch. 3: "The Intrusion and the Decalogue."

25. Kline's former student and full-time disciple Michael Horton is far more open regarding this quest for a Lutheran-Calvinist reconciliation. The judicial basis of such a reconciliation is Calvinism's acceptance of Lutheranism's ethical dualism, which Horton seems to accept. In a letter to *Christian News* (Nov. 13, 1995), a conservative Lutheran publication, he wrote of his organization, CURE, that "we are building a co-operative effort between the Reformed and Lutheran Christians in an effort to restore a Reformation witness." Horton left the Reformed Episcopal Church and joined the Christian Reformed Church in 1995.

26. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 543–48. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

ditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.”²⁷ Calvin, in stark contrast, dismissed such a view of historical causation as pagan to the core. Yes, he said, following David, good things sometimes happen to bad people and bad things to good people, but this is merely Satanic deception. “When such is the state of matters, where shall we find the person who is not sometimes tempted and importuned by the unholy suggestion, that the affairs of the world roll on at random, and as we say, are governed by chance?”²⁸ With respect to his theory of visible cause and effect in history, Kline succumbed to the temptation.

The theological contrast between Kline and Calvin could not be sharper. In the name of Calvin, Kline has abandoned Calvinism and has substituted an ethical dualism consistent with Lutheranism, Anabaptism, and, for that matter, Enlightenment humanism. His theory boils down to this: in this world, God does not defend or extend His law by means of humanly predictable corporate sanctions. On this point, covenant-breakers are in full agreement with Kline. (So, from what I can see, are most of his colleagues at Westminster Seminary.)²⁹

27. Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

28. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1557] 1979), III, p. 122.

29. Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>)

F. The Christian Ghetto: Living Under Humanism's Sanctions

Couple Kline's view of God's unpredictable corporate sanctions in history with the amillennialism of sixteenth-century Calvinism, and the result is ghetto Christianity: the mentality of a defensive community of besieged and culturally doomed Christians—"cannon fodder for Christ." Its unofficial slogan is: "Of the ghetto, by the ghetto, for the ghetto!" With respect to Christian civilization, these ghetto theologians deeply believe, "Once lost, always lost." Christianity must remain a strictly defensive operation culturally. Although Christians created Western civilization, once the humanists conquered it in the eighteenth century, this supposedly set in historical concrete humanism's position as the reigning covenant-breaking social order. Any attempt to re-conquer culture for Christ is heretical, we are assured.

It is true that sixteenth-century Calvinists were hostile to the idea that the gospel would eventually convert most of mankind. On this point, they adhered strictly to the dominant tradition of Roman Catholic eschatology. Calvin himself was ambivalent on the issue; there were elements of what would later become postmillennialism in his thinking.³⁰ The others were outright hostile. (So were the Lutherans.) But Calvinists also believed that Protestant Christians, although a permanent minority group worldwide, had the right and moral obligation to defend their local majority positions in sections of Northern Europe by means of the sword. They were all theocrats in the traditional meaning of the word. They believed in the imposition of civil sanctions in the name of Jesus Christ and His earthly kingdom.

Not so today. Their spiritual heirs, as Enlightenment pluralists, have abandoned sixteenth-century Calvinism's theocratic ideal, but not its amillennialism. Today, Christians are in the minority everywhere. So it must stay forever, announce the theologians of the Protestant ghetto. So it was always intended to be. Writes Protestant Reformed Church theologian-editor, David J. Engelsma: "The ungodly always dominate. The world's rulers always condemn the cause of the true church. The wicked always oppress the saints. The only hope of the church in the world, and their full deliverance, is the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment. This is Reformed doctrine."³¹ On

30. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, Appendix D: "Calvin's Millennial Confession." Cf. Gary North, "The Economic Thought of Luther and Calvin," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975), pp. 104–106.

31. Editorial, "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism. 3. Apostasy and Persecu-

the contrary, this is merely ghetto theology's doctrine.

The sixteenth-century Reformers believed no such thing regarding the perpetual subordination of Christians to covenant-breakers, which was why Calvin consented to the execution of Servetus. Christians, the Calvinist Reformers universally believed, are not to accept as final any temporary triumph of their enemies in the social order. This is why the Calvinist Reformers all invoked the sword as a means of preserving the hegemony of Protestant Christianity in the West. Every Calvinist theologian agreed on this, right down to the days of Oliver Cromwell. Nor did Calvin teach that Protestant rule in all parts of Northern Europe was necessarily doomed eschatologically. Yet his spiritual heirs have substituted the political doctrines of the Enlightenment's common-ground humanism for Calvin's theocratic worldview. They defend cultural surrender and ghetto living as Calvinism in action, i.e., *inaction*. They have interpreted Calvin's doubts concerning a future, universal, worldwide rule of Christianity in every society as if Calvin had in some way affirmed the universal, worldwide rule of covenant-breakers over covenant-keepers in every society. Let me put it as clearly as I can: *modern Calvinists have adopted Servetus' view of the political order, and they have done so in the name of Calvin*. This ought to be regarded as the greatest irony in the history of applied Calvinism. Meanwhile, Calvinist defenders of the permanent cultural ghetto are ready, figuratively speaking, to burn at the academic stake any postmillennial Calvinist who calls attention to this remarkable irony.

Permit me to invoke a familiar phrase: it is never a question of civil sanctions vs. no civil sanctions. It is always a question of whose civil sanctions. It is a question of who imposes sanctions against which public evils. It is a question of whose laws define the public evils for which civil sanctions are legitimately imposed. In short, there is no neutrality.

Second, let me restate the obvious: the history of man is a war between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Marx was wrong: history is not the history of the class struggle. It is the history of the covenantal struggle. Thus, there are two possible choices for building a civilization: Christendom or anti-Christendom. We now get to the famous bottom line: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). There are

tion," *The Standard Bearer* (May 1, 1995), p. 365.

Christians who want to limit this two-fold distinction to individual souls, families, and churches. They categorically deny that this division applies to the civil covenant. They do so because they are opposed to the ideal of Christian civilization. Officially, they affirm the existence of a freedom-enhancing, creedally neutral civil law. Unofficially, they either prefer to live under anti-Christian civil laws rather than biblical law, or else they seek a peace treaty with humanism because they are convinced that the only alternative to this is the open persecution of the church and the nearly total destruction of all traces of Christian culture. They believe that their unofficial peace treaty with covenant-breakers can gain Christians limited zones of neutral freedom under “mild” anti-Christian civil sanctions. They prefer life in a Christian cultural and emotional ghetto to the comprehensive responsibilities associated with the Great Commission.³² To put it in historical terms, their theory of civil government borders on the Amish view. In this sense, Protestant political theory has become Anabaptist, beginning with Roger Williams and continuing in Westminster Seminary’s faculty.³³ It relies on some combination of natural law, natural revelation, natural rights theory, and common grace to protect Christians from tyranny.

The issue is sanctions. Anti-Christendom Christians believe that anti-Christians will not impose harsh civil sanctions on Christians if Christians agree publicly not to impose any civil sanctions on anti-Christians. They have adopted as a New Testament theological doctrine Sam Rayburn’s political dictum: “You’ve got to go along to get along.”³⁴ More to the point, they have adopted the strategy of preemptive surrender. They think they can settle for Finlandization: a degree of independence from a powerful neighbor. They forget that Finland achieved Finlandization in 1940 only by fighting Stalin’s forces and inflicting so much havoc on his troops that it paid Stalin to settle with them. The Finns did not start out with a policy of Finlandization; otherwise, they would have wound up like Latvia, Estonia, and Lithu-

32. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

33. North, *Westminster’s Confession*. See also North, “‘I’ve Been Framed!’ A Study in Academic Positioning” (Dec. 1995). (<http://bit.ly/gnframed>)

34. Rayburn was Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives longer than anyone in history, 17 years, 1940 to 1961, excepting only 1948–49 and 1953–55, when the Republicans were in power. He was America’s second most powerful politician after the President. He was a House member from 1912 to his death in 1961, also a record.

ania.

But it is even worse than this. Christian defenders of neutral politics, neutral civil law, and the pre-emptive surrender of Christians, as Christians, in the political order do not believe that Stalin, Mao, Hitler, Khomeini, and Saddam Hussein are representative of consistent covenant-breaking in operation. They think loveable old Ben Franklin is.

G. Engelsma vs. the Mosaic Sanctions

As I argue in this book and argue in greater detail in my commentary on Deuteronomy, the issue of covenantal sanctions cannot be separated theologically from the issue of eschatology. Positive and negative sanctions in eternity—heaven vs. hell, the New Heavens and New Earth vs. the lake of fire—are reflected in history: kingdom of God vs. kingdom of Satan. What divides most conservative Christian expositors today is their assessment of which kingdom visibly reflects God's positive corporate sanctions in history: God's or Satan's. The vast majority of those who call themselves Christians today believe that the answer is clearly "Satan's." God's positive corporate sanctions in history are showered on covenant-breakers, we are told. God's negative corporate sanctions in history are progressively imposed on the church, we are also told. Only one view of eschatology denies this with respect to the New Covenant church age: postmillennialism. This view is dismissed as heretical by premillennialists and amillennialists.

1. Engelsma vs. *Chrstendom*

Consider the inflammatory rhetoric of amillennialist Engelsma. He dismissed "the carnal kingdom of postmillennialism" as "injurious, if not disastrous." Postmillennialism raises "practical nightmares." He invoked a code word of the pietist-Anabaptist tradition: "worldly." He went on: "Reformed men and churches make strange, forbidden, wicked alliances in order, by hook or by crook, to build the earthly kingdom of Christ."³⁵ Christian Reconstruction introduces the "fundamental heresy of Judaizing" by calling for "a vast array of Old Testament laws. . . ."³⁶ As for J. Marcellus Kik's book, *An Eschatology of Victory* (1971), it is heretical, as is Christian Reconstructionism. "By heresy, I mean not only a serious departure from the teaching of the Scriptures

35. David J. Engelsma, "Jewish Dreams," *The Standard Bearer* (Jan. 15, 1995), pp. 173–74.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

but a grievous corruption of the gospel. The error is that the spiritual kingdom revealed and realized by the gospel is changed into a carnal kingdom, and the spiritual triumph of the exalted Christ in history is changed into an earthly triumph.”³⁷ This is very strong judicial language. Is he correct?

Here, I offer the reader an explanation. I devote the remainder of this Preface to answering Rev. Engelsma. Yet he is not a well-known critic of Christian Reconstruction. He is a leader in a small Dutch-American denomination, the Protestant Reformed Church.³⁸ Then why single him out? First, because he keeps singling me out in his denominational magazine, calling me one of America’s most dangerous heretics. But this accusation does not mean too much. To identify me as a heretic requires only that you get at the tail end of a long line. Hal Lindsey, Dave Hunt, and Constance Cumbey (the *Hidden Dangers of the Raindow* lady) are up at the front; Rev. Engelsma is a comparative late-comer with a very limited readership.

Second is the fact that Rev. Engelsma and his colleague Rev. Hanko³⁹ are among the very few remaining Dutch-American Calvinist defenders of traditional amillennialism who are willing to go into print on the topic. I have previously referred to their eschatology (and to premillennialism) as ghetto eschatology.⁴⁰ Rev. Engelsma admitted that there are not many defenders of the Dutch amillennial tradition: “De-Mar may well be right when he says that the number of Reformed and Presbyterian amillennialists ‘is steadily declining.’ The reason, in part, is the great apostasy now fulfilling the apostle’s prophecy in II Thessa-

37. *Ibid.* (March 15, 1995), p. 295.

38. It was founded in 1923 in reaction to the Christian Reformed Church’s position on common grace, namely, that God shows some degree of favor and love to all men. The PRC has denied the very existence of God’s common grace, thereby abandoning Calvin and the entire history of Reformed theology. Their theologians cannot easily explain I Timothy 4:10: “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.” What did Paul mean, specially, if special grace does not contrast with common grace? Salvation in this general context of God’s universal salvation means healing, not eternal life. See Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), p. 57. (<http://bi.ly/gndcg>)

39. For an intellectually devastating refutation of Rev. Hanko’s writings on eschatology, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), Appendix B. (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

40. Gary North, “Ghetto Eschatologies,” *Biblical Economics Today*, XIV (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

lonians 2:3. This falling away is due, in part, to the failure of Presbyterian and Reformed churches, ministers, theologians, and editors of religious periodicals”—he is a minister, theologian, and editor of a religious periodical—“vigorously to defend amillennialism and equally vigorously to expose and condemn postmillennialism.”⁴¹ He and Rev. Hanko believe that the church is now in the end times, a belief which they share with most dispensational premillennialists.

In recent years, a growing number of Calvinistic amillennialists have preferred to identify themselves as “optimistic amillennialists.” I think this repositioning has had something to do with the Reconstructionists’ success in identifying amillennialism as a philosophy of self-conscious historical retreat and psychological paralysis: a permanent remnant psychology.⁴² No one likes to be tarred and feathered with this kind of imagery, even if it happens to fit. The amillennialist, like the premillennialist, seeks a cultural stalemate today, since he sees the only eschatological alternative as persecution for the church.⁴³ For an amillennialist or a premillennialist, a cultural stalemate would constitute a major victory, however temporary for the church. In earlier versions of amillennialism, its defenders were perfectly content to accept cultural defeat and persecution, in order to assure the imminent return of Jesus Christ in final judgment. “The worse things get, the better we feel: our deliverance draweth nigh!” No one so far has set forth an exegetical case for optimistic amillennialism, i.e., an eschatology of permanently stalemated forces, good vs. evil. But so few theologians today are ready to defend with real conviction and enthusiasm the original amillennial pessimism, that Rev. Engelsma and Rev. Hanko have staked out a kind of operational monopoly: the last really enthusiastic defenders of the older Dutch amillennial tradition. I think they correctly perceive that they face declining public interest in their message of inevitable defeat and persecution for God’s church: no victory and no secret rapture. This is not what most people would call an inspiring message.

As we shall see, one thing that bothers Rev. Engelsma is the inescapable reality of the Old Testament’s mandated civil sanctions against adultery and homosexuality. *The issue is sanctions.* He argued that

41. Engelsma, “Another Letter and Response on Jewish Dreams,” *The Standard Bearer* (March 15, 1995), p. 296.

42. R. J. Rushdoony, *Van Til* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960), p. 13.

43. Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), ch. 11: “The Stalemate Mentality.” (<http://bit.ly/gnsoldiers>)

there is supposed to be no trace of the Old Testament's legal order in New Testament era civil law. "The New Testament reality of the nation of Israel, the real kingdom of God in the world, does not legislate and execute the civil laws of the Old Testament. It has no use for the civil laws of the shadow-nation."⁴⁴ This means one of two things: (1) the real New Testament kingdom of God has no civil aspect, and hence does not legislate, or (2) the real New Testament kingdom does have a civil aspect, but some other source of civil law has been substituted by God. What other source, he refused to say.

Reconstructionists ask: "Where should Christians seek accurate definitions of law and crime?" Engelsma prudently remained silent on this point, except to say where we should not search: the Old Testament. He and Rev. Hanko have remained silent on this matter for 25 years in their intermittent attacks on Christian Reconstruction. In this respect, they share a great deal with all of Reconstructionism's critics. Reconstructionists have offered a comprehensive ethical system in the name of Christ; meanwhile, our critics resort to rhetoric. They yell, "Heretics!" This is not a legitimate substitute for detailed biblical exegesis: criticism based on biblical texts. This is why I devoted 26 years to writing detailed commentaries on the economics of the Pentateuch. Our critics have yet to respond with an equally detailed series of commentaries on any aspect of the Pentateuch. As time goes on, the disparity between our commentaries and our critics' rhetoric will become more pronounced.

2. *Kingdom Sanctions*

Notice that Rev. Engelsma spoke of "the real kingdom of God in the world." He did not say exactly what this phrase means. I need to make two additional observations. *First*, if he was defining this "real kingdom" strictly and solely as the institutional church, he had abandoned a fundamental tenet of the Protestant Reformation, which denied that the institutional church constitutes the whole of the kingdom of God in history. The New Testament kingdom encompasses the institutional church, but it is far more. On this issue, I appeal to Geerhardus Vos, a respected theologian in the Dutch Reformed tradition, who also held a faculty position for over four decades at Princeton Theological Seminary. He wrote of the kingdom of God: "There is a sphere of science, a sphere of art, a sphere of the family and the state, a

44. Engelsma, "Jewish Dreams," *op. cit.*, pp. 174–75.

sphere of commerce and industry. Whenever one of these spheres comes under the controlling influence of the principle of the divine supremacy and glory, and this outwardly reveals itself, there we can truly say that the kingdom of God has become manifest. . . . On the one hand, his [Christ's] doctrine of the kingdom was founded on such a profound and broad conviction of the absolute supremacy of God in all things, that he could not but look upon every normal and legitimate province of human life as intended to form part of God's kingdom. On the other hand, it was not his intention that this result should be reached by making human life in all its spheres subject to the visible church."⁴⁵ *The institutional church is narrower than God's kingdom.* This has always been the Reconstructionists' view of the kingdom.⁴⁶ It is quite conventional in Reformed circles, contrary to Rev. Engelsma's suggestion.

Second, if Rev. Engelsma was not defining the kingdom as the institutional church alone, then he needed to offer reasons why the Mosaic civil laws governing adultery and homosexuality are no longer valid. It is not enough for him merely to say that they are not valid; he must show us why. He refuses to do this, however. He immediately moved from the question of civil law to the church, calling on the church to exercise only the power of excommunication. This is an illegitimate line of argument. The two systems of covenantal sanctions are judicially separate: state vs. church. Any discussion of church sanctions as if these in some way constitute the whole of the kingdom's earthly sanctions is in error. If the kingdom is more than the institutional church, which it is, then a covenant theologian must discuss civil sanctions in terms of covenantal law. But Rev. Engelsma, whose theology becomes pietistic at this point, preferred to discuss only church sanctions. He wanted his readers to imagine that only church sanctions possess the legitimate designation of kingdom sanctions in history. He wrote: "For the church is a spiritual realm. She does not, e.g., put adulterers and homosexuals to death. Where there is public, impenitent practice of these sins, the church exercises discipline, which is a spiritual key of the kingdom of heaven. Her purpose is the repentance of the sinner, so that she may again receive him into her fellowship."⁴⁷

45. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teachings of Jesus Concerning The Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 88.

46. See R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 69–70, for a discussion of this point which relies on Vos.

47. Engelsma, "Jewish Dreams," *op. cit.*, p. 175.

This logically irrelevant comment deflects the reader's attention from the crucial judicial issue: *the function of civil sanctions in a Christian commonwealth*.⁴⁸ No author in the Reconstructionist camp has suggested or implied that the institutional church has the authority to impose civil sanctions.⁴⁹ *The issue of criminal sanctions is a state matter*. It is here that Christians, as Christians, are required by God to suggest explicitly biblical definitions of crime. But Rev. Engelsma had already ruled out any appeal to the Mosaic law as a possible standard for definitions of crime. Why? He offered no exegetical or hermeneutical reasons; he just did not like the Mosaic law.

Notice: if we substitute the words "sexual molestation of children" or "murder" or any other crime for "adultery" and "homosexuality," Rev. Engelsma's subtle shift from a discussion of Mosaic civil sanctions (supposedly annulled in our era) to ecclesiastical excommunication (always open to removal upon repentance) would strip Christians of the biblical authority to call for biblically defined state sanctions against crime. The twin issues here are *definition* and *sanctions*. Definitions of criminal behavior and the appropriate legal sanctions are found in the Mosaic law. But Rev. Engelsma rejected the Mosaic law. His theological position leads, step by step, to the necessary acceptance by Christians of humanist definitions of crime. His open and defiant rejection of the Mosaic law and its civil sanctions in principle delivers Christians into the tender mercies of covenant-breaking man, which is exactly where Rev. Engelsma says Calvinism teaches that we must be until Christ comes again. For those of us who think that we are not morally obligated or eschatologically condemned to such a state of affairs, Rev. Engelsma has a description: "heretics."

What is the kingdom of God? In this book and throughout my writings, I offer this simple definition: *the civilization of God*, i.e., **Christendom**. God's kingdom comprises redeemed hearts and redeemed institutions. It is neither exclusively spiritual nor exclusively material-social, neither exclusively eternal nor exclusively temporal. The kingdom of God is paralleled by the kingdom of Satan. What are the former's boundaries? Wherever sin presently operates, there Christians should seek to extend the boundaries of the kingdom of God. Its definitive boundaries are the whole creation. "And Jesus came

48. Kenneth L. Gentry, "Civil Sanctions in the New Testament," in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

49. Gentry, "Church Sanctions in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *ibid.*, ch. 7.

and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). Its operational boundaries are being extended through time, but not in a straight line. Territory is gained; then it gets surrendered. The question is: Can the whole world be subdued to God's glory? Not perfectly, but progressively, the postmillennialist says. Not in history, the amillennialist says. Only after Jesus comes with His angels to rule the earth in person, the premillennialist says.

The pessimillennialist, whether premillennial or amillennial, resists my definition of the kingdom, for it extends long-abandoned and long-denied areas of responsibility to Christians. It announces the need for comprehensive evangelism as part of God's mandated program of comprehensive redemption.⁵⁰ Pessimillennialists seek to escape these added kingdom responsibilities. It is all that the pietistic theologian can do to maintain biblical relevance inside the narrow confines of the Christian ghetto. Defending the Bible's relevance in the frightening world outside this ghetto is more than he chooses to bear.

3. *Orwellian Newspeak*

Rev. Engelsma's eschatology denies the transforming power of the gospel in history. It does not present Christianity a world-transforming, evangelizing, spiritual leaven (Matt. 13:33). It implies that the presence of the Holy Spirit will not transform our world. He saw Satan's earthly kingdom as possessing the only comprehensive, world-changing program in history. His implicitly humanistic social theory and his defeatist eschatology justify life in a defensive Christian ghetto. For Rev. Engelsma and theologians who share his views, the doctrine of Christ's bodily ascension in history to the right hand of God remains an irrelevant doctrine for social theory. In fact, these men deny the very possibility of Christian social theory, precisely because of their ghetto eschatology. They spend their careers rewriting the plain meaning of the Great Commission: the discipling of all nations.⁵¹ The Great Commission cannot mean this, Rev. Engelsma's theology implicitly insists; therefore, it must mean gathering the elect out of these nations, not placing them over these nations through successful evangelism. The promised victory of Christ is re-defined as Satan's permanent defeat of the Great Commission in history.

50. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action." (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

51. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission*.

Rev. Engelsma understood that Christians resist being labeled pessimists and retreatists, especially when they really are pessimists and retreatists. He therefore adopted the language of postmillennial optimism to describe the amillennial defeat of Christ's Great Commission in history. In this sense, he is a faithful practitioner of what George Orwell called "newspeak" in his novel, *1984*. "Freedom is tyranny Peace is war." For Rev. Engelsma, defeat is victory. Christ supposedly has predestined that His church must fail in fulfilling the terms of the Great Commission. This failure must be regarded by Christians as a great victory, he believed, since the church has and will continue to participate in its cultural suicide mission.

Amillennialism believes that the gospel is now, will be, and always has been "successful" (we prefer to say, "victorious") on earth. Its triumph on earth is its accomplishment of the purposes of the risen Christ with the gospel. These purposes are the gathering of the elect out of all nations and thus the saving of the nations in them; the preservation of the elect in faith and holiness; the empowering of the elect believers and their children to live obedient lives to the Lord Christ in all spheres of earthly life; the building of the church; and the hardening of the reprobate. This victory is worldwide.⁵²

So, he said, Christ empowers His people "to live obedient lives to the Lord Christ in all spheres of earthly life." I ask: "What constitutes Christian obedience to Christ in the realm of politics?" Political reform? He answered emphatically, no; rather, we must retreat more deeply into our Christian ghetto, self-consciously and openly abandoning the entire social and political world to the devil. This is God's plan for the ages, he said. "But Satan *does* have 'complete control over the nations of the world.' Of course, he is not the almighty sovereign. The triune God is sovereign. But Satan controls the nations of the world as to their spiritual condition."⁵³ This is not merely a temporary condition that Christians must work to reverse. On the contrary, we must learn to live with it. "Until the personal return of Christ, the nations under the government of the kings of the earth make war against Him as He is present in His church by His Word."⁵⁴ The old phrase that

52. Engelsma, "An Open Letter to Gary North (Part One)," *The Standard Bearer* (March 1, 1996), p. 246.

53. Engelsma, "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism. 3. Apostasy and Persecution," *ibid.* (May 1, 1995), p. 343.

54. Engelsma, "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism. 2. Revelation 20," *ibid.* (April 15, 1995), p. 366. April 15 is tax-filing day in the United States: appropriate for

Ben Franklin recommended as America's national slogan—"Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God!"—has been in effect reworked by Rev. Engelsma: "Resistance to tyrants is disobedience to God!" Our goal is to be let alone by the humanists in our little ghettos. Otherwise, our task is to serve as martyrs. There is no legitimate hope in Christian social transformation. We are little more than sheep for the slaughter. He calls this theology "victorious." Indeed, it is . . . for Satan.

Conclusion

The seventeenth century brought the beginnings of postmillennial optimism to Protestantism, and accompanying this postmillennialism, for the first time in man's history, came the ideal of long-term economic growth, compounded. This economic growth ideal eventually transformed England; it was in England that the Industrial Revolution began in the late eighteenth century. What was first believed to be possible in the seventeenth century began to take place a century later: long-term growth without permanent reversal.

Anglo-Scottish-American Presbyterianism was postmillennial until the late nineteenth century. Only with the spread of liberalism and pietism in the Northern Church and pietism in the Southern Church after 1900 did conservative American Presbyterianism move into pre-millennialism and amillennialism, when Scofield in the South and Westminster Seminary's mostly Dutch faculty in the North after 1936 replaced the postmillennial tradition of the Hodges, Warfield, Thornwell, Dabney, and Machen. But all of them, on the question of sanctions, agreed with the Anabaptists: God does not bring predictable corporate sanctions in history in terms of societies' adherence to or defiance of His Bible-revealed law. They were right-wing Enlightenment Whig humanists on the question of civil oaths.⁵⁵

To maintain such a Whig worldview, you must abandon the Book of Numbers. The Book of Numbers is the Pentateuch's book of sanctions. The refusal of the Israelites of the exodus generation to impose negative military sanctions against Canaan brought God's negative sanctions against them: death in the wilderness. This indicates that sanctions are an inescapable concept. It is never a question of sanctions vs. no sanctions. It is always a question of whose sanctions. As

Dr. Engelsma's tirade against all Christian political reform.

55. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996). (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

Lenin so graphically put it, “Who, whom?” There is no escape from this question in eternity; there is also no escape from it in history, as the exodus generation learned to their great discomfort.

INTRODUCTION

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD (Jer. 31:31–32).

Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest (Ps. 95:8–11).

The Psalmist offers as a warning the Israelites' wilderness experience, which is the central focus of the Book of Numbers. The wilderness experience was a curse: a negative sanction. This curse was announced in God's wrathful oath that the exodus generation would not inherit the Promised Land. They would die in the wilderness. Thus, what might have been a temporary transition period in the lives of the exodus generation became their lifetime experience. The Promised Land was associated with rest from their labors. Israel would not gain this rest during their lifetimes. "So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest."

This passage offers important information for a correct assessment of the primary theme of the Book of Numbers: oath/sanctions. This theme is point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ The Book of Numbers is the Pentateuch's book of sanctions. Had the exodus generation been faithful to God, this book would have been the book of conquest: the victory of Israel (positive sanctions) over Canaan (negative sanctions). Instead, it is the book which chronicles Israel's rebellion against

1. Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

God through rebellion against Moses, and of God's negative sanctions imposed in response to their rebellion.

Actually, this is an overstatement. Numbers does not chronicle most of the wilderness period. It chronicles about four years: two at the beginning of the wandering and two at the end.² It provides historical information on the reasons for God's imposition of corporate negative sanctions on the exodus generation (1–17); then it provides more historical information regarding the removal of these sanctions from their children, (21–36). Two chapters are devoted to certain priestly laws (18, 19). The central passage is chapter 20, which records the death of Miriam, the sin of Moses in striking the rock, God's judgment against Moses—he shall not enter the land—and Aaron's death. This marks a transition: from wrath to grace for Israel.

Numbers reveals the covenantal basis of historical progress: positive sanctions for covenant-keeping and negative sanctions for covenant-breaking. This covenantal cause-and-effect relationship serves as the foundation of the theory of economic growth. Profits (positive sanctions for accurate forecasting),³ wages, and interest-rent⁴ can be invested. If these investments are based on accurate forecasts of the future, and if they are implemented on a cost-effective basis, they produce an expansion of capital, which is a tool of dominion. With greater capital, more of the earth can be brought under mankind's dominion. The positive feedback of compound growth, if extended over time, becomes the basis of economic transformation and the conquest of nature, or as economic historian John U. Nef put it, the conquest of the material world.⁵ We conclude that one of the foundations of mankind's fulfillment of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28) is long-term economic growth. Without the possibility of reinvested earnings and the growth of capital—above all, accurate information and the social means of implementing it—there would be no way for mankind to extend God's kingdom across the face of the earth, transforming

2. R. K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1992), p. 431.

3. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: HoughtonMifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

4. Rent is another word for interest. It arises from the same phenomenon: the discount which all men apply always in the present to the value of expected future income. See Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

5. John U. Nef, *The Conquest of the Material World: Essays on the Coming of Industrialism* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian, [1964] 1967).

nature to reflect the covenantal, hierarchical rule of God in history through His ordained agent, man.

The idea of an “unspoiled nature” that has not been influenced by man and reshaped by man in terms of man’s desires and needs is an anti-biblical concept. God made it plain to Israel: better the rule of covenant-breaking Canaanites than the rule of nature. “And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land” (Ex. 23:28–30). In other words, God’s negative sanctions against Canaan were to be delayed so that the land would not fall under the negative sanctions of the animals. The reappearance of autonomous nature was regarded by God as being a more fearful negative sanction against the land than continuing dominion by covenant-breaking mankind.

The modern environmental movement denies this view of nature by elevating the supposed needs of impersonal, autonomous nature over the goals of man.⁶ Such a view of nature is pagan to the core. Increasingly, environmentalism has become pantheistic and even occult: earth as “Gaia”—a living spirit.⁷

A. The Covenantal Structure of the Exodus-Wilderness Books

The Book of Exodus presents the story of God’s deliverance of the Israelites. The true king delivered them out of their former bondage to a false king. God intervened in history to demonstrate His power in history. “For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I

6. A manifesto of such a view of autonomous nature is Bill McKibben’s book, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989).

7. Even when cloaked in scientific terminology, any attempt to revive the name of the Greek goddess Gaia in relation to “mother nature” is indicative of an anti-biblical religious impulse. See *Gaia: An Atlas of Planet Management*, ed. Norman Myers (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1984); *The Gaia Peace Atlas: Survival into the Third Millennium*, ed. Frank Barnaby (New York: Doubleday, 1988). For a detailed critique of the politics and religion of environmentalism, see Michael S. Coffman, *Saviors of the Earth?* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994).

raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:14–16). This is point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy.⁸ The evidence of God's power was His ability to impose negative sanctions on Pharaoh and those whom he represented. The deliverance of Israel began with sanctions that led to a transfer of inheritance. "And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians" (Ex. 12:36). This structure of redemption in history was to serve as a model for the exodus generation and all succeeding generations. Inheritance and disinheritance are linked by sanctions: positive for the inheritors, negative for the disinherited.

From Exodus we move to Leviticus: the book of holiness, where the laws of holiness appear. This is point three of the biblical covenant model: ethics.⁹ The goal of God's deliverance is the restoration of covenantal obedience on the part of those delivered. This message was to become part of the Passover's ritual, an opportunity to teach respect for God's law to each successive generation. "Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought US out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us" (Deut. 6:21–25).

The Book of Numbers is clearly concerned with point four of the covenant model: sanctions. The Israelites repeatedly rebelled against Moses in the wilderness. Moses was God's representative. God therefore repeatedly brought corporate negative sanctions against the generation of the exodus. Their rebellion ultimately cost them their inheritance. Godly inheritance—point five¹⁰—is based on faithfulness to the stipulations of the covenant. The sons of the rebellious generation lawfully claimed the inheritance. The Epistle to the Hebrews extends the theme of the Psalmist by describing this inheritance in terms of rest.

8. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

“But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:17–19). The transfer of the right of inheritance was based on sanctions: negative against the generation of the exodus, positive for the generation of the conquest. The actual transfer was also based on sanctions: positive for the Israelites, negative against the Canaanites. The preliminary phase of this transfer began in Numbers 21: the disinheritation of King Arad.

B. From Point Four to Point Five

The Book of Numbers has relatively little to say about the details of economics, at least when compared to the other four books of the Pentateuch. Numbers is concerned with sanctions, but always in terms of the promised inheritance. The main sanctions the book discusses are military and liturgical. The book begins with a numbering of the people, which was in fact a mustering of God’s holy army. Excluded from this initial mustering was the tribe of Levi. This tribe was the priestly tribe, i.e., the tribe that was in charge of the sacrificial system. The sacrificial system was a system of sanctions.

The economic issues dealt with in the Book of Numbers mainly have to do with the distribution of the spoils of war. Military spoils were an important topic because Israel was preparing for the conquest of Canaan. The military victory of Israel would constitute the disinheritation of Canaan’s nations. That is, the disinheritation of Canaan by Israel was to be the basis of Israel’s inheritance. The sanctions were simultaneously positive and negative. This God-mandated disinheritation would be an extension of what Israel had already experienced in Egypt. God’s disinheritation of Egypt’s firstborn sons had been the historical basis of Israel’s initial inheritance: “Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold” (Ex. 11:2). The Egyptians were ready to surrender what would have been the inheritance of the firstborn because of the trauma of the final plague.

The promise of military spoils was designed to motivate the Israelites to greater fervor (Num. 32:17–18; Josh. 17:13–18). The promise of victory¹¹ was insufficient to motivate the exodus generation. The Book

11. “By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be in-

of Numbers provides a grim history of that generation. The book's Hebrew title is *bemidbar*, "in the wilderness": the fourth word in the first verse.¹² Israel's wilderness experience was the product of Israel's refusal to believe God, obey God, and become the sanctions-bringing agent of God. The long-promised inheritance began only when all the members of the exodus generation except Moses had died (Num. 20). At that point, the conquest generation began the process of *disinheritance through conquest* on the wilderness side of the Jordan River (Num. 21).

C. The Promised Land

The promise given to Abraham was that in the fourth generation after the descent into Egypt, Israel would conquer the inhabitants of Canaan (Gen. 15:16). This promise was conditional: the Israelites had to remain a people. The visible covenantal mark of this unity was circumcision. The failure of the Israelites of the exodus generation to circumcise their sons required the mass circumcision of Israel at Gilgal after they had crossed the Jordan (Josh. 5:5). Israel had to experience the negative sanction of shed blood before the nation could lawfully shed the blood of the Canaanites who occupied the Promised Land. The negative sanction of circumcision preceded the negative sanction of disinheriting Canaan militarily. Military disinheritance, in turn, had to precede the positive sanction of national inheritance: "But we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance" (Num. 32:17–18).

This should alert us to the two-fold nature of covenantal sanctions: positive and negative. It should also alert us to the two-fold nature of covenantal inheritance: inheritance through disinheritance.

The exodus generation wanted their inheritance without the obligation of disinheriting others. They wanted the benefits of the covenant without the costs: circumcision, obedience, and risk. They died in the wilderness because they refused to accept the risk of negative sanctions. Because they feared death more than they desired the inherit-

creased, and inherit the land" (Ex. 23:30).

12. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 1.

ance on God's terms, God gave them death without the inheritance. They sought God's positive sanctions apart from the threat of negative sanctions. This had been Adam's desire, too: to be as God without the threat of death. The result in both cases was death.

D. Military Sanctions

The Book of Numbers has less to say about economics, because it is concerned with military sanctions. In war, the winners gain victory at the expense of the losers. The winners gain spoils at the expense of the losers. This is what economists call a *zero-sum game*. There is no increase in total wealth; the gains of the winners are paid for by the losers. The free market allows mutual benefits through voluntary exchange. Each party to a transaction seeks to better himself by exchanging one set of circumstances for another. Market exchange is not based on the military principle of "beggar thy neighbor." It is based on the principle of mutual benefit.¹³ Because Canaan was to be placed under God's total ban—*hormah*—Israel's inheritance had to be based on violence: specifically, military conquest. The mandated process of inheritance could not be a market process. There had to be a forcible disinheritance. Canaanites were not to gain by Israel's presence in the land. They were not to be allowed to enter into a mutually profitable economic relationship with Israel. This is why the Book of Numbers is not much concerned with economics. Its focus is military sanctions: a system of "winner take all." Israel was not to expand its borders through conquest after the Canaanites had been expropriated. The boundaries of the Promised Land were fixed by the original distribution of land. The sacrificial system prevented any extensive growth in

13. An exception is a futures contract, in which two parties agree with each other either to buy or sell a specified quantity of goods in the future at a fixed price. Whatever profit one party gains is supplied by the other party. The benefit to each party is the freedom of each to affirm his assessment of the economic future by means of an investment tied to that assessment. There are also benefits for the society in general: the best assessments of participants with capital are brought to bear on pricing scarce resources. The presence of the various futures markets brings valuable information into play in the economy. Prices respond faster to the expected conditions of supply and demand. That is, the most accurate information is assimilated faster into the economy by means of the price system. This information transfer costs nothing to the vast majority of the participants in the economy. These costs are born by the participants in the futures markets. What is a zero sum game for the two parties to the contract has positive benefits for the economy as a social system. The futures market when considered in the context of society's quest for better information at low prices, is not a zero sum game.

Israel's geography, since the men of Israel who dwelt in the land had to walk to a central location three times a year, minimum, in order to participate in the national feasts and sacrifices. Violence was not to become the basis of wealth creation in Israel. The military conquest of Canaan was to be a one-time event.

E. A Fool in His Folly

Martin Noth, who died as he was completing his commentary on Numbers, was (and remains) one of the most respected academic commentators on the Old Testament. Yet any normal person who picks up his Numbers commentary and reads two pages will think to himself: "This book is utterly incoherent. No one in his right mind would waste his life writing something as useless as this. Noth must have been a German." Indeed, he was. He was a German's German: enormously learned, enormously liberal, and enormously unreadable. His commentary on Numbers does not bother with the mundane task of explaining what any passage means. Instead, it goes on and on about which traditions or late-date authors' interpolations found expression in Numbers, producing a definitively chaotic book. The Book of Numbers is a jumble without any integrating theme, Noth argued, because of these later insertions. Noth wrote:

From the point of view of its contents, the book lacks unity, and it is difficult to see any pattern in its construction.¹⁴

There can be no question of the unity of the book of Numbers, nor of its originating from the hand of a single author. This is already clear from the confusion and lack of order in its contents.¹⁵

Numbers participates only marginally in the great themes of the Pentateuchal tradition.¹⁶

Martin Noth was a liberal higher critic who denied that the Pentateuch is the inspired, authoritative, morally binding word of God. Put more biblically, Martin Noth was a fool. "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall" (Prov. 10:8). "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered" (Prov. 28:26). He adopted and applied the hermeneutic

14. Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 1.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

of higher criticism, namely, that many people wrote the Pentateuch a millennium after it says it was written. He invoked the evidence offered by higher criticism: the alleged chaos of the Pentateuchal texts. Then he assured his readers that Numbers is incoherent and without unity. But his conclusion had nothing to do with Numbers; it had everything to do with Noth's blindness. Noth and his academic peers are blind.

And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness (Isa. 29:18).

His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber (Isa. 56:10).

Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:14).

Contrary to Noth, the Book of Numbers is integral to the Pentateuch, and its overriding theme reflects this: sanctions. The book is placed exactly where it should be: book four, which corresponds to point four of the biblical covenant model. Had Noth understood the covenant, respected it, and paid attention to it, he might not have concluded that Numbers possesses no unity and "participates only marginally in the great themes of the Pentateuchal tradition." But Noth was a fool who did not heed Solomon's counsel: "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding" (Prov. 17:28) He went into print to be hailed around the academic world by less notable fools who have shared his hermeneutic.

What is disheartening is to read a supposedly conservative commentator—a Dutchman who, like so many Dutch theologians, feels compelled to imitate German scholarship—who spouts the same Party Line: "... Numbers is not a literary unit but acquired its present form over a period of time."¹⁷ Or Timothy Ashley, who did his best to avoid the most blatant theses of the higher critics, especially the incoherent-text theory, who wrote: "Moses may be seen as having a key role in the origin of some of the material in Numbers, though we have no way of knowing how much of it goes back to him."¹⁸ I suggest this percentage of the Book of Numbers that was written by Moses: one hundred.

17. A. Noordtjij, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1983), p. 13.

18. Ashley, *Numbers*, p. 7.

“And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these are their journeys according to their goings out” (Num. 33:2).

Conclusion

The Book of Numbers, book four in the Pentateuch, conforms to point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions. The message of the book is clear: when covenant-keepers rebel against God in history, the blessings—positive sanctions—associated judicially with covenantal faithfulness will be removed; God’s negative corporate sanctions will be imposed. This does not mean that the heirs of covenant-keepers are permanently disinherited. On the contrary, their heirs will surely inherit. The negative corporate sanctions are not permanent down through the generations. The promise will be fulfilled. The structure of the covenant cannot be broken. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:9–11).

The New Covenant in no way reverses this structure of inheritance. On the contrary the New Covenant reaffirms it. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The New Covenant was marked by a transfer of inheritance from Israel to the church. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21 : 43). This transfer was visibly imposed by God through Rome’s destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.¹⁹

The Book of Numbers has stood as a warning down through the ages: the basis of covenantal inheritance is corporate covenant-keeping. Numbers calls on men and nations to repent, to turn back to God in search of the standards of righteousness. If God was willing to disinherit the exodus generation because of their constant complaining and their lack of courage, how much more should the spiritual heirs of the Canaanites take heed!

19. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

1

MUSTERING THE ARMY OF GOD

And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies. And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers (Num. 1:1–4).

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. God told Moses to number the fighting men of Israel. This message came to Moses in the wilderness. “In the wilderness” (*bemidbar*) was the original Hebrew title of the fourth book of the Pentateuch. The title of this book in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (275 to 100 B.C.), was *Arithmoi*,¹ from which we get the English word, arithmetic. The English title, Numbers, is related to *arithmoi*. The book begins with God’s command to number the people. This was a military numbering, i.e. a mustering of troops.² Every man above age 19 was mustered, even though some were physically unfit for duty, e.g., the aged. The principle here was that the army of Israel was a holy army of all the men of the nation. Those who could not fight were represented by those who could. This was analogous to the distinction between front-line troops and those on duty far from the battlefield. All were in the army, but some did the fighting. All were “in uniform,” but not all carried weapons. All were under the chain of command.

What may seem astounding in today’s world of bureaucratic delays, Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation, and the desig-

1. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. xi.

2. Milgrom, Excursus 2, “The Census and Its Totals,” *ibid.*, p. 336.

nated tribal leaders then mustered the entire nation, on the same day that God ordered the mustering: the first day of the second month. "And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls" (Num. 1:18).³ That was a remarkable chain of command.

The Israelites had departed from Egypt a little over a year earlier: on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after Passover (Ex. 12:18). Exactly one month later, they arrived in the wilderness at Sin (Ex. 16:1). In the third month, they came to Sinai (Ex. 19:1).⁴ There they ratified their national covenant with God. God recounted verbally what He had done for them in delivering them from Egypt; then He demanded an oath of obedience.

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD (Ex. 19:4–8).

God had imposed negative corporate sanctions on Egypt. This was the basis of the Israelites' deliverance. There was a message here: negative corporate sanctions are the concomitant of positive corporate sanctions in the struggle for covenantal supremacy in history. In this sense, the struggle is analogous to a military struggle, not a free market transaction in which both parties benefit. God's grace preceded His law. Now He called the nation to obedience. He set forth a conditional promise: if they obeyed Him, He would make them a kingdom of

3. Milgrom cited Numbers 10:11 in his attempt to prove that it took 20 days. "And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony." I see no connection between this event and the mustering. *Ibid.*, p. 337,

4. Jewish tradition says that this was 50 days after the Passover, i.e., on the very first day of Pentecost, which was formalized ritually in Mosaic Israel as the firstfruits feast. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services As They Were in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1874] 1983), p. 261.

priests. Moses informed the elders and the people of what God had said, and they swore allegiance to Him. The Book of Numbers is a history of how they repeatedly broke their agreement, and the consequences thereof.

A. The Exodus Numbering

Approximately nine months after this corporate act of national covenant renewal, Israel had completed the construction of the tabernacle: “And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up” (Ex. 40:17).⁵ We are not told how long it took them to construct the tabernacle, although it could not have been much more than three months. Construction did not begin until after Moses returned with the second writing of the tables of the law (Ex. 34:29). He had been on Mt. Sinai the first time for 40 days (Ex. 24:18) and 40 days the second time (Ex. 34:28). In between was another 40-day period in which he fasted without water. This fast took place after he cast down the original tablets of the law (Deut. 9:18).⁶ We are not told how much time separated his second return from Sinai and the beginning of construction, but it seems to have been brief. The nation’s voluntary offering for the construction of the tabernacle followed his second return (Ex. 35). Then construction began (Ex. 36). Subtracting 120 days (40 X 3 = 6 months) from nine months leaves three months for the construction of the tabernacle.

1. Atonement

To build the tabernacle, the people had donated gold and silver that they had taken from the Egyptians (Ex. 33:4–6; 38:24–25). This voluntary mass donation was accompanied by a mustering of Israel: “A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for everyone that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men” (Ex. 38:26).

Mustering was an aspect of priestly atonement (Ex. 30:15). The na-

5. In 1611, “reared” referred to buildings, while “raised” referred to children (Gen. 38:8; Ex. 9:16; Josh 5:7). By 1900, American grammar had reversed the usage. Hardly anyone except English teachers in the United States says “reared” these days.

6. Moses went without food and water for a total of 120 days, or four months: on Sinai the first time (Deut. 9:9), after the golden calf incident (Deut. 9:18), and on Sinai the second time (Ex. 34:28).

tion was supposed to be numbered—literally: *mustered*—prior to holy warfare. There is an element of negative sanctions associated with the Hebrew word for numbering used here: *paqad*. It does not mean mere counting.⁷ “When thou takest the sum [count] of the children of Israel after their number [*paqad*] , then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest [*paqad*] them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them” (Ex. 30:12). The same word is sometimes translated as *visit*. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex. 20:5). This visitation implies negative sanctions: “Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit [*paqad*] their sins” (Isa. 14:10). The word can mean *punish*. “And I will punish [*paqad*] the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible” (Isa. 13:11).

The nation faced no military enemy at the time of the Exodus mustering. No one is said to have ordered this mustering, yet the nation voluntarily consented to it: “And the silver of them that were mustered of the congregation was an hundred talents, and a thousand seven hundred and threescore and fifteen shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary: A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for everyone that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men” (Ex. 38:25–26). This corresponded to the required payment of half a shekel of silver per man (Ex. 30:14–15). This was in addition to their voluntary offerings of gold and brass, which they brought in such abundance that God ordered Moses to tell them to stop (Ex. 36:5–7).⁸ While the final accounting appears in Exodus 38, it was recorded here after the construction of the tabernacle had begun. The donations had come at the time of the mass presentation (Ex. 35:20–29). The same tally lists the gold (Ex. 38:24), yet this gold would not have been donated after God had told them to

7. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21–23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 227. (<http://bit.ly/jjlaw>)

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 56.

stop. So, the donations must have come in prior to the prohibition.

These numbers reinforce the text's estimates of the size of the Israelite population. The Babylonian system of monetary units roughly paralleled the Israelite system. The Babylonians used a hexadecimal system: 60 shekels to a mina, 60 minas to a talent. The Israelite system was based on 50 shekels to the mina, 60 minas to the talent.⁹ The same system was still in force in the Israel of Christ's day.¹⁰ The scholars' estimate of the Israelite shekel as one-3,000th of a talent is derived from Exodus 38. Thus, to avoid relying heavily on circular logic, I argue only that this account provides a rough confirmation of size of the Israelite population. What can be said with confidence is that the monetary units of Israel and Babylon were similar, so the account of the money collected reinforces the picture of a large Israelite population. At 50 shekels per mina, there were 3000 shekels to the talent. The 100 talents of silver totalled 300,000 shekels, plus 1,775 additional shekels, or 301,775 shekels. Multiplied by two, this totals 603,550, the number of those mustered. Conceivably, these estimates could have been inserted by a later forger, but there is internal consistency of the account. Had there been an inconsistency, the higher critics would have pounced on it centuries ago.

God had told Moses: "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass" (Ex. 25:2–3). He did not tell Moses to muster them. The tally in Exodus 38 specifies that they gave silver in terms of the mustering requirements. So, with respect to silver, they donated in terms of the mustering requirement; with respect to gold and brass, there were no required amounts. The gold and brass constituted their voluntary excessive giving.

As we learn from the Book of Numbers, every adult fighting man of Israel must have participated in this first mustering, since exactly the same number of men were mustered at this time as were mustered about four months later: 603,550 (Num. 1:46).¹¹ So, no eligible male re-

9. "Money," *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, 5 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), vol. III, p. 419; "Weights and Measures," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1929] 1943), vol. V, p. 3080.

10. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV:vii:1, III:viii:10; cited in "Money," *idem*.

11. If the Exodus mustering took place immediately before the beginning of the tabernacle's construction, then it took no more than three months for the tabernacle to be completed. The tabernacle was completed on the first day of the first month of

fused to participate. This identical number indicates that Israel was in a condition of zero population growth: as many men had entered the ranks of those eligible to be mustered as those who had died.

Joshua and Caleb soon served as spies who entered Canaan (Num. 13:6, 8). This means that they had been mustered, since they were part of a military reconnaissance unit. Caleb was 40 years old at the time (Josh. 14:7). Toward the end of the conquest, he spoke of being 85 yet physically strong (Josh. 14:10–11). This strength was some sort of special miracle—an aspect of God’s promise to him (Num. 14:24)—or so he seemed to indicate. But he was not Moses’ age, who was 120 at the time of his death just before the conquest (Deut. 34:7), when Caleb was almost 80. He must have been in the generation that followed Moses. Surely Joshua was, for Joshua died an old man “a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies” (Josh. 23:1). So, God’s promise to Caleb and Joshua should not be interpreted as having singled them out as unique survivors among Moses’ generation, but as survivors of the wilderness experience in general.

2. *Why the Exodus Mustering*

The mustering in Exodus was judicially unique: Israel faced no imminent military confrontation, and no judicial compulsion is mentioned in the text. The tabernacle was not uniquely associated with warfare, i.e., Israel in its judicial capacity as God’s holy army. Each man presented a half shekel of silver (Ex. 38:26). This silver had been required for making the implements of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:19, 25, 32; 27:17), and was so used (Ex. 38:27–31). Some of the offerings were voluntary (Ex. 25:2), but with respect to silver, the offerings were tied to the mustering. Why was the nation numbered?

Perhaps this first mustering had nothing to do with atonement. In such a case, they did not plan to bring exactly the amount of silver per person that God required whenever they made atonement at a mustering. This possibility seems farfetched. Why didn’t they bring more silver than what was required to make atonement? They brought so much wealth that God told Moses to tell them to stop. But with respect to silver, they brought exactly the amount required to make atone-

the second year (Ex. 40:17). The second mustering (the first Numbers mustering) took place a month later: the first day of the second month of the second year (Num. 1:1,18).

ment.

For what action were they making atonement? This mass donation of money took place after the golden calf incident (Ex. 32). Perhaps the people were making retroactive atonement payments for themselves. They had gone to war with God. They had lost. The Levites had become the enforcing army of the Lord, killing 3,000 men (Ex. 32:28). This was what had changed Levi's judicial status from a family under a curse (Gen. 49:5-7)¹² to God's firstborn, priestly family (Num. 3:12); no other judicially relevant act on their part is mentioned. The text does not say that the golden calf incident was the cause of the mustering; the context only suggests that this was the case. All we know for sure is this: the half shekel paid at a mustering was atonement money. Atonement was a ransom or a judicial covering for some infraction. The most obvious infraction even remotely associated with war's bloodshed was the golden calf incident.

The number of men slain was not a large percentage of the total male population, if the Israelites numbered 600,000 fighting-age males: about one-half of one percent. But if the number of Israelites was a fraction of 600,000, the death toll was more significant. This point becomes important in the Appendix, where I discuss the possibility that the bulk of those mustered in Exodus 38 were adoptees out of the mixed multitude that had fled with Israel. If they were adopted after the sanctions were applied because of the golden calf incident, then the 3,000 deaths constituted a significant fraction of the Israelite nation. As I show in the Appendix, this conceivably may have been close to 10 percent of the adult male population.

B. Numbers' Two Musterings

God required Moses to muster the men of Israel twice in the wilderness: once at the beginning of the wilderness period and once at the end (Num. 26). There were three musterings: these two and the prior one in Exodus.¹³ The problem here is to discover a judicial link among the three events. I think it is associated with the shedding of man's blood.

The mandatory mustering in Numbers 1 took place just before the nation was ready to begin its march toward Canaan. Had they not

12. The cause was the illegitimate negative sanction of war that Levi and Simeon had imposed on the Shechemites after they had been circumcised (Gen. 34:25–30).

13. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), pp. 57, 59.

sinned subsequently by refusing to listen to Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14), they would have begun the war of conquest in Canaan. Thus, the mustering in Numbers 1 was preparatory for war.

Mustering required the payment of atonement money (Ex. 30:15–16). No reason for the need for atonement is stated. Jordan believed that it was God's presence that mandated the payment.¹⁴ I would add that it was God's presence in His covenantal capacity as sanctions-bringer. When God is present in His office as sanctions-bringer, the unholy man is profane: a boundary violator.¹⁵ Prior to holy warfare, God approached the nation of Israel as the sanctions-bringer: positive and negative. "For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee" (Deut. 23:14). God would then bring sanctions against whichever army was not holy. The payment of atonement money judicially set apart God's assembled army as the holy army. This is why the Israelites of Joshua's day had to be circumcised before they could begin the conquest (Josh. 5:5). They could not be covenantally holy inside the boundaries of the holy land apart from circumcision. God's presence in their midst in his capacity as sanctions-bringer would destroy them, just as the angel of the Lord had almost destroyed Moses' uncircumcised son Gershom when Moses brought him across the border into Egypt (Ex. 4:24–26).¹⁶

The second mustering came after a series of successful wars outside of Canaan (Num. 21). Why didn't God muster the nation prior to these wars? Because they were defensive wars. The Canaanites had initiated them. After the treachery of the Midianites, however, God told Moses to vex them (Num. 25:17). Then the mustering took place. The conquest of Midian and then Canaan were offensive wars for Israel. They were holy wars in God's name. They involved violating the national boundaries of societies that had been set apart by God for judgment.

14. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, pp. 228–29.

15. On the distinction between common and profane, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

16. On the angel's attack on Gershom rather than Moses, see Gary North, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1984), p. 220. See also George Bush, *Notes on Exodus* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: James & Klock, [1852] 1976), I, p. 67.

C. No Population Growth

One month after the tabernacle's completion, the size of Israel's militarily eligible male population was exactly the same as it had been approximately four months earlier at the Exodus mustering: 603,550 men (Ex. 38:26; Num. 1:46). This indicates that Israel's population had reached zero growth. Thirty-nine years later, God ordered another mustering. The population was essentially unchanged at this second compulsory mustering: 601,730 (Num. 26:51); so was the number of Levites (Num. 3:39:22,000; Num. 26:62:23,000). Israel suffered from zero population growth in the wilderness.

The approximately 600,000 fighting-age males in the first two musterings comprised two generations: Moses' and Joshua's. The conquest generation and their adult-age sons replaced the 600,000 men who had been over age 19 at the time of the first mustering. If the top two generations were 300,000 each (population replacement-rate mode), then a family of Joshua's generation produced on average one son and grandson age 20 or older by the time of the second Numbers mustering. But should we assume a stagnant population prior to the exodus? The textual evidence is against this: families with more than two children. If population was growing, then Joshua's generation was larger than Moses'. This growth process was reversed in the wilderness, where most Israelites had even smaller families than two children. The nation moved from grace to curse. Why?

The early chapters of the Book of Numbers record a series of complaints and rebellions on the part of the Israelites. They afflicted Moses with their murmuring. The exodus generation was continually looking backward longingly at Egypt, despite the fact that they had been in bondage there. They were a present-oriented people who looked to the past with nostalgia. They had short memories.

God had delivered them, not to dwell in the wilderness, but to dwell in Canaan. He expected them to be future-oriented. But these ex-slaves could not shake off their mental chains. They looked backward to their lives of bondage and saw only prosperity and security. They resented freedom because they resented responsibility. They were not an operational army; they were a psychologically dependent assembly.

God had to raise up a new army. He had to wait for the children of Joshua's generation and their children to mature. Joshua's generation had to learn patience. They would grow up in a wilderness, not an em-

pire. They would have no illusions regarding the wonders of life in the wilderness. They would not look backward to Egypt, where they had lived only as children or not at all. They would look forward to Canaan.

The ex-slaves did not multiply in the wilderness. They stagnated. One by one, they died; one by one, they were replaced. The army of the Lord was not short on numbers; it was short on leadership, courage, and faith. Its failure was not based on its lack of size. God did not honor them by expanding the army's size, which would have retroactively affirmed the legitimacy of their fears in refusing to invade Canaan. The next generation would conquer the land with the same size army.

Population stagnation is a curse in the Bible, though not so great a curse as population reduction. There was a slight reduction in the wilderness era. The nation was under a curse. We could say that He placed the nation "on hold." The exodus generation would have to content themselves with being nomads rather than pilgrims. Pilgrims have a destination; nomads simply wander in circles. Only to the extent that members of the exodus generation could look forward covenantally to victory through their children could they become pilgrims. They had been told that they would die in the wilderness. To the extent that they were mentally bound to a time horizon no longer than their own lifetimes, they became nomads.

These nomads were not ready to fight a war with the Canaanites. Their pilgrim children would be. The pilgrim wants rest in the place of his dreams. His life's walk is linear even though he may wander in circles for a time. He has a goal, so the fact of his circular wandering is not a disaster. He knows that he will eventually break out of his familiar pattern.

The stagnation of Israel's population matched the stagnation of vision of the exodus generation. Present-oriented people discount the future at a higher interest rate than future-oriented people do. The present value of a future achievement is lower for a present-oriented person than for a future-oriented person. The estimated payoff for thrift and sacrifice in the present is lower. The present-oriented person wants immediate gratification. The conquest generation had no choice but to defer their gratification. They were under the authority of present-oriented people. Their deliverance was still in the future; their parents' deliverance had been in the past. In the interim, the nation stagnated.

For those members of the conquest generation who longed for de-

liverance from the stagnation of the wilderness, God's curse was real. But it offered hope. In the fourth generation, they would gain their promised inheritance. In the meantime, the governing principle of their existence was the army's rule: "Hurry up and wait."

Conclusion

The three musterings of Israel were military actions. They were aspects of holy warfare. The mustered Israelites had to pay the priests atonement money in preparation for the shedding of blood. This bloodshed was covenantal: an aspect of God's negative sanctions against covenant-breaking nations. The Exodus mustering probably was a retroactive payment for the Levites' sanctions in God's name and the nation's name against 3,000 representative Israelites for the golden calf. The first Numbers mustering was in preparation for the conquest of Canaan, which was postponed because of Israel's rebellion (Num. 14). The second Numbers mustering took place just before the holy war against Midian.

The conquest generation had to learn patience for 39 years. They had to learn about deferred gratification. They would conquer Canaan, but only after their parents and grandparents had died in the wilderness. Their inheritance would have to wait. This was the result of the present-oriented, fear-driven rebellion of the exodus generation. The army of the Lord was a defeated army psychologically. Until this changed through generational attrition and replacement, the holy army wandered in the wilderness.

2

MILITARY PLANNING VS. CENTRAL PLANNING

Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies (Num. 1:2–3).

This commandment was theocentric. God was the military head of Israel. He gave them victories as well as defeats, as they would learn after their rejection of the testimony of Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:45). He was in no need of a military census. Why did He require one? The first reason was that He delegates authority to creatures who are not omniscient. They must find substitutes for omniscience. Number is one of the most useful substitutes for comprehensive knowledge—an extraordinary tool.¹ Second, there was the matter of an atonement payment. This also required a census.

A. Church and State in Wartime

Man is not God. No numerical census will ever equal God's omniscience. No substitute for omniscience will ever approach God's omniscience as a statistical limit. No expenditure of economic resources in data-gathering will ever replace reliance on God's covenantal sanctions in history. The creature will remain a creature. The quest for omniscience is therefore an unholy quest. Omniscience is an illegitimate goal. This is one reason why God placed strict limits on mustering. It was not a normal event. It was done only prior to holy warfare, except for the instance of the mustering in Exodus 38, which may have been a

1. Eugene Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>). Wigner was a Nobel Prize-winning physicist.

retroactive atonement for the golden calf.

God told Moses and Aaron to muster the entire adult male population, family by family. Aaron's presence was mandatory. Mustering in Mosaic Israel was an act preparatory to holy war. No holy war could be called without the consent of the high priest, for the Aaronic priests had to blow the silver trumpets that assembled the nation (Num. 10:2, 8). Blowing only one trumpet gathered the princes (v. 4). Both trumpets had to be blown to assemble the whole nation at the tabernacle (v. 3). This twin trumpet signal sounded the alarm. A second blowing of both trumpets by the priests launched the army on its march (vv. 5–6). Without the participation of the priests, no holy war could lawfully be launched. *This gave the priesthood a veto over national military action.* No military mustering was legal without their participation.

Moses was present in his capacity as a civil ruler. He was the representative of the nation in its judicial capacity. So, in the case of holy warfare, the supreme civil commander functioned in a priestly capacity, even though he was not a priest. We might call this quasi-priestly authority: legitimate power over life and death. The entire nation is at risk. In wartime, the senior military commander lawfully possesses such quasi-priestly authority. He does not possess it in peacetime, except in preparation for war.

The armies were tribal affairs, and under them, family affairs. This meant that warfare was intensely personal. If a section of the army was overrun, whole families would die, whole communities would be emptied of men. This happened in the American Civil War (1861–65), where the fighting-age male population of entire towns sometimes disappeared. Town regiments signed up as units and were kept as units throughout the war. This built a closeness of spirit, but it involved great risk to the community. Enlistment policies were changed in subsequent wars to prevent this. In World War II, brothers were allowed to enlist together, but when all five Sullivan brothers died on a sinking ship, the rule was changed. A modern army is far less personal, with senior officers required to rotate regularly through various commands. The bureaucratic impulse has replaced the personal impulse as warfare has become more rationalized. Such was not the case in Mosaic Israel. The localism of Mosaic Israel was reflected in their military formations.

The army was a federation. Each tribe supplied warriors. In mustering the armed forces, a tribe might refuse to participate, as was the case when Deborah called the army together to fight Sisera: several

tribes refused to send anyone (Judg. 5:16–17).

B. Mustering and Atonement

There was an exemption in this tribal mustering: Levi. This was the priestly tribe. The rules governing tribal mustering seem to be in conflict. At first, God forbade Moses to number the Levites. “For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying, Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel” (Num. 1:48–49). “But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses” (Num. 2:33). God later told Moses to number them (Num. 3:15). “All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand” (Num. 3:39). Children were numbered. Why were the Levites numbered differently from the other tribes?

God gave this as His explanation for not mustering them: “But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it; they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle” (Num. 1:50). They possessed a unique geographical responsibility; it was a capital crime for non-Levites² to approach the tabernacle while the Levites assembled and disassembled it whenever the nation moved (v. 51).

Furthermore, when the fighting men paid their half shekel at the time of their mustering, they paid it as atonement money (Ex. 30:15). This was an ecclesiastical payment. “And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial

2. The Hebrew word is transliterated *zoor*. The same root is translated “strange” in the case of the strange fire offered by Nadab and Abihu (Num. 3:4). A stranger (*zoor*) was any person who could not lawfully cross an ecclesiastical boundary. “There shall no stranger [*zoor*] eat of the holy thing; a sojourner of the priest, or an hired servant, shall not eat of the holy thing” (Lev. 22:10). A hired servant could be an Israelite, yet he was kept away. The boundary around the priest’s table included even his married daughter, though not if she was no longer married and without a child. “But if the priest’s daughter be a widow, or divorced, and have no child, and is returned unto her father’s house, as in her youth, she shall eat of her father’s meat: but there shall no stranger [*zoor*] eat thereof” (Lev. 22:13). Her child made her part of her husband’s family, even though he was no longer her husband.

unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls” (Ex. 30:16). This money must have been paid to the tribe of Levi, for they alone served in the tabernacle. They did not pay atonement money; they received it. Thus, when they counted the money, they did not declare a shortfall when money from the tribe of Levi did not appear in the total. The mustering process referred to in Numbers 1 was related to the Levites’ collection of the atonement money: a half shekel per warrior. But the Levites were not to be mustered in this way; they did not owe the atonement money.

1. Banners and Battles

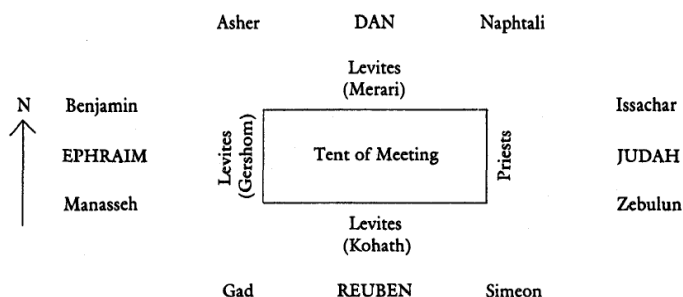
Each of the other tribes had a standard, meaning a military identification banner. The other tribes were required to pitch their tents around their respective banners (Num. 1:52). The Levites had no such standard around which to pitch their tents. “But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony” (v. 53).

The Hebrew word for standard is translated “banner” only once in the King James Version—oddly enough, in the Song of Solomon: “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love” (Song 2:4). This was meant to be hyperbolic: not a battle flag but a love flag. The banners are mentioned in Numbers 2 and 10, both cases when the Israelites marched. “On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim according to their armies: and the captain of the sons of Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud” (Num. 2:18). “In the first place went the standard of the camp of the children of Judah according to their armies: and over his host was Nahshon the son of Amminadab” (Num. 10:14). These identifying flags are common in infantry maneuvers. A general in the field can see from a high emplacement where his armies are located on the battlefield.

The Levites had no battle flag. They were not to be placed in the field as a separate tribe. Their job was to guard the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant.³ Their battle marker was the Ark of the Coven-

3. Milgrom wrote: “The most important function of the Levites, one that invests their entire adult life, is to guard the sanctuary against encroachers. In fact, they are identified by this function—‘guardians of the tabernacle of the Lord’ (31:30, 47).” Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. xl. Cf. Milgrom, p. 341.

ant. When the nation moved, it moved in military formation. The Levites carried the portable tabernacle and the Ark. They were guarded on all four sides by the other tribes. Military commanders knew exactly where the Levites were during battle: in the middle of the formation. James Jordan provided a diagram in *Through New Eyes*.⁴ This diagram is found in Wenham's commentary.⁵ It is reprinted exactly in Milgrom's commentary right down to its typography: which tribal names to place in capital letters.



(Jordan has revamped this; he now believes that the corners were symbolically the most important. He places the lead tribes there rather than the center.)

The Ark of the Covenant had to be separated from the other tribes by 2,000 cubits in Joshua's day (Josh. 3:4), or about 1,000 yards (914 meters). Numbers 2 describes the peacetime formation. Judah led it in wartime (Num. 10:14). The priests were protected by the other tribes; they in turn defended the tabernacle from enemies, including invaders from the other tribes. In other words, at the very center of the formation was the Ark of the Covenant, the dwelling place of God. This had to be protected by the nation, at the cost of their lives. The last defensive barrier was the tribe of Levi.

This meant that the Levites did not put themselves at risk as a tribe in the initial confrontation with the enemy. Only if the enemy broke through the lines did the Levites go into battle. From the point of view of military risk, the Levites were protected by the structure of

4. James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), p. 205. (<http://bit.ly/jjneweyes>)

5. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity, 1981), p. 67.

6. Milgram, *Numbers*, p. 340.

the army's formation.

2. Defending the Tabernacle

Because members of the other tribes could not approach the tabernacle when it was being moved by the Levites (Num. 1:51), they probably would have hesitated to pursue invaders who had broken through the lines and who were approaching the tabernacle. It is not said that God held non-Levites responsible for approaching the tabernacle as its would-be defenders, but this silence would have produced psychological hesitancy—often fatal to military defenders. In all likelihood, they were not allowed to approach the tabernacle in wartime, even for the sake of defending the Ark. The later example of Uzzah, who reached out to steady the Ark as it was being moved, indicates that this was the case: when he touched it, he was killed by God on the spot (II Sam. 6:6–7). So, once the outer lines were breached by the enemy, the Levites would have fought alone. This made them even more dependent on the other tribes. The Levites were warriors, but their task was different: to defend the tabernacle, not to defend the land.

A military commander has the obligation to estimate what his forces are. Mustering was a pre-war event. Because they were warriors with a defensive assignment, to protect the tabernacle, it was lawful for the Levites' commander to number them. The list of mustered tribes does not include the Levites in either instance in Numbers; this population figure is always given separately. "But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them" (Num. 1:47). Moses and Aaron later numbered them (Num. 3:39). As the senior representative of the tribe, Aaron had the right to know the number of warriors under his command.

This does not mean that Israel's senior military commander possessed this authority over Levites. The Levites were not part of his forces. They could not be called into military service for the defense of the land. They were called into ecclesiastical service by the high priest to defend the tabernacle. They lawfully bore the sword, not as civil agents but as ecclesiastical agents. They were the anointed defenders of God's house.

The Levites were not the first line of military defense. They were at lower risk in battle. They did not pay atonement money. They seemed to have all the advantages. So, God imposed a disadvantage: they had no inheritance in the land. "At that time the LORD separated the tribe

of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him" (Deut. 10:8–9). This disadvantage would have had the effect of reducing any murmuring against the Levites by those who were at greater risk, since the potential critics would inherit rural land.

3. *Landed Inheritance*

There was a relationship between ministering to God and landed inheritance. The Levites had no rural landed inheritance. Their immediate commitment was not to land but to God. They did not guard the land; they guarded the dwelling place of God. They were not to spend the bulk of their time improving the land. This is why they were entitled to the tithes of the other Israelites. "The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance" (Deut. 18:1). The other tribes were guardians of the land; hence, they had a landed inheritance.

The Levites were numbered in the sense of merely counting them. They were not numbered in the sense of collecting atonement money from them. They were numbered as defenders of the tabernacle. They were not numbered as defenders of the land. They had no battle flag. They had no landed inheritance as a tribe. Grammatically, the numbering process was the same: mustering. Covenantally, there were two separate numbering processes: one for those who possessed a landed inheritance and who owed atonement money prior to national battle; the other for those who did not have a landed inheritance and did not owe atonement money.

If the payment of Exodus 30 had been a civil head tax, then there is no reason why the Levites should not have paid it, since it would have gone to the State. But it did not go to the State for civil purposes; it went to the Levites for the service of the tabernacle.⁷ The obligatory payment or non-payment of this money was central to the numbering

7. My target here is Rushdoony, who argues that the atonement money of Exodus 30 was in fact the only civil tax in Mosaic Israel. He argues specifically that the temple collection was a civil tax. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 281–82. For my previous rebuttal, see North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

(counting) and yet non-numbering (civil mustering) of Levi.

Levites were citizens. They paid civil taxes, whatever these taxes were and however they were collected. Levites did not pay atonement money. They were not to inflict offensive military sanctions against Israel's enemies; rather, they were to inflict defensive ecclesiastical sanctions against invaders who might break through the lines of the other tribes. Their task was to keep boundary violators from profaning the sacred space of the tabernacle, whether Israelites or non-Israelites.

C. Citizenship and Military Service

Citizenship in Mosaic Israel was tribal. Each of the 12 non-priestly tribes was required to supply a representative to monitor the numbering process. The Levites were represented by Aaron. Each of the dozen representatives had to be the head of his father's household, i.e., the senior patriarch or most respected officer. "These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel" (v. 16). For example, the representative of Judah was Nashon (v. 7). His son Salmon would marry Rahab; his descendants included Boaz and David (Ruth 4:20).

Citizenship was by a dual oath: civil and ecclesiastical. The judicial issue was two-fold: hierarchy (point two of the covenant) and sanctions (point four).⁸ There was a hierarchy of civil appeals courts (Ex. 18). A person who was not bound by oath under covenantal sanctions could not lawfully impose these sanctions on others. A citizen was a civil judge. A judge could impose civil sanctions as a lawful agent of the state. Every citizen was under the stipulations of two of God's covenants: civil and ecclesiastical. Apart from being bound by a pair of self-maledictory oaths under these two covenantal institutions, a person did not possess lawful authority to impose civil sanctions in Mosaic Israel.

Mosaic civil sanctions were exclusively negative. They were defensive: discouraging evil acts. The results were positive—a reduction in public evil—but the sanctions were negative. The model for civil sanctions was military defense: imposing physical sanctions against invaders. Those who were outside the national covenant and also outside the holy land were to be kept from invading, which would have been a

8. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 2, 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

boundary violation: a profane act. God's holy army was supposed to keep a rival army from transgressing the nation's geographical boundaries, i.e, profaning the land. The mandatory mark of citizenship was eligibility for service in God's holy army.⁹ Keeping out unauthorized, non-sanctioned invaders from outside the land and from outside the national covenant was central to citizenship.

Does this mean that the Levites were not citizens? An expositor could argue this way, since they were not numbered as civil warriors. Their assignment was ecclesiastical: defending the tabernacle at the center of the military formation. I argue that they were members of their tribe, and they had judicial authority within their tribe. They did not have civil judicial authority in their place of residence if they were not living in a Levitical city. In a Levitical city, they possessed permanent legal claims on family-owned real estate that was part of the jubilee (Lev. 25:32–33), so they must have had civil authority there. They were the only permanent residents. I see the Levites as citizens who were not numbered for military service as warriors. They were the exception to the rule governing citizenship because of their special legal situation: defenders of the tabernacle rather than defenders of the land.

1. Citizen Warriors

What about an old man who was no longer capable of fighting? Did his physical incapacity disqualify him as a judge? The Mosaic law did not mandate this. There were old men who served as judges. Barzillai, who was 80 years old, pleaded that he could no longer discern good from evil, and therefore should not accompany David on his triumphal journey back to Jerusalem (II Sam. 19:34–35). Yet he had fed the king and his men when they fled from Jerusalem during Absalom's revolt (II Sam. 17:27). While in Barzillai's house, David had numbered those fighting men still with him. Barzillai was not numbered by David (II Sam. 18:1). Yet David later regarded him as fit to travel at his side in a place of honor. Barzillai had pleaded age, not with respect to his fighting ability, which was obviously nil, but with respect to his powers of judicial discernment. David granted him his request; he stayed behind. That he had been a loyal citizen was obvious. He had aided David

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30, section on "Holy War, Citizenship, and Liberty." Deborah was a judge; she also led God's holy army.

in the latter's capacity as supreme civil judge. Yet he was no longer fit for military service. This in no way restrained David from asking him to accompany him after the defeat of Absalom. The issue was Barzillai's powers of judgment.

Similarly, Joshua in his old age called the judges of Israel to hear his final words. He instructed them as Moses had instructed him before the conquest, invoking a similar message. Moses had said: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee" (Deut. 31:23). Joshua told the judges: "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left" (Josh. 23:6). Both invoked military imagery with respect to the law of God. Yet Moses was no longer fit to serve in the military, and neither was Joshua. Both were judges when they delivered their final addresses.

I conclude that citizenship for all but Levites was based on eligibility for service in the military at some point in life, but not in old age. Moses and Joshua had served in the military, yet were still judges in their old age. Barzillai had once been eligible for the military, and his decision to aid David at the risk of his life was clearly a military act. Only his self-declared mental incapacity kept him from serving as an honored judge at David's side.

D. Military Sanctions

Mustering was an act preparatory to the imposition of God's legitimate covenantal sanctions in history. It was an act under priestly sanctions. Those who were not under priestly sanction in Mosaic Israel were not allowed to impose holy sanctions. They could not become members of the army. The biblical principle of covenant membership is this: those who impose sanctions must be under them. This is the principle of the rule of law. These holy military sanctions were positive for the winners and negative for the losers. The primary historical sanction of war is death. To begin preparing for a war is to begin preparing for someone's death, possibly one's own. Death stalks every battlefield.

Mustering was part of military planning. It was mandatory prior to a war. More than this: *the military census is the biblical model for all other forms of planning.*

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first,

and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply [it happen], after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace (Luke 14:28–32).

There is more to military planning than numbering the army. There is also the question of the army's willingness to fight: mental preparedness. This applied both to the army and the civilian population. Moses sent spies into the land and awaited their reports (Num. 13–14). God did not order this (Num. 13:2) in order to evaluate the strength of the enemy; He did this in order to test the spies' willingness to evaluate the land's blessings and military strength in terms of the Israelites' willingness to fight. A fearful man was not to fight, for his fear might spread to those around him (Deut. 20:8). Gideon dismissed 22,000 people who admitted that they were afraid to fight (Judg. 7:3).

In Mosaic Israel prior to the Babylonian captivity, the male civilian population above the age of 19 was the army (Num. 1:20). The Book of Numbers records the history of the wilderness period in terms of a central theme: military preparedness, i.e., the ability of God's covenant people to impose military sanctions. God brought the holy nation/army under a series' of sanctions in the wilderness, including military sanctions, in order to enable Moses to evaluate the military preparedness of the nation prior to the conquest of Canaan.

Moses began with a rag-tag army of civilians. In every sense of the word, this was an army of conscripts. They had been thrown out of Egypt by the Egyptians (Ex. 12:33). Moses had not taken them out by way of Philistia for fear that they would turn back toward Egypt in the face of war (Ex. 13:17). They had never fought a battle prior to the war with Amalek, and Moses had to stand with his arms above his head for them to win (Ex. 17:8–13). They had been placed in bondage by the Pharaoh of the oppression because he was fearful that they might someday fight a battle alongside Egypt's invading enemies (Ex. 1:10). They had been bullied for a generation by Egyptian taskmasters, as well as taught submissiveness by their own civil representatives. In Egypt, they had been fearful of any confrontation with authority (Ex. 5:20–21), let alone a war. This Egyptian training had been remarkably

successful. Except for Moses' slaying of the taskmaster, during the entire era only the Hebrew midwives had been courageous enough to resist. Their non-violent actions of self-conscious deception of the civil authorities had saved the nation (Ex. 1:19–20). They lied to a false god (Pharaoh) in the name of the true God, and God blessed them for this, dwelling specially with them (Ex. 1:20a). Israel had been delivered by women. This had taken place 80 years before the exodus—a distant memory testifying to the long-term submission of Israel's males to pagan military power.

E. A Strictly Civil Census

God required Moses to muster the people shortly after the exodus, before the nation had sinned by bringing negative sanctions against Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14). God had not yet forbade this generation from entering the Promised Land. The second mustering took place just prior to the next generation's invasion of the land. Mustering was related to the payment of blood money to the priests (Ex. 30:13); both were religiously holy acts. The ritual payment of atonement money ceased with the demise of the Mosaic priesthood. Mustering was associated strictly with that priesthood. Abram had not been required to make such a payment to Melchizedek prior to his battle with Chedorlaomer (Gen. 14).

1. David's Sin

Such mustering was not lawful apart from the threat of war and a payment to the Levites. When God was angry with the people of Israel, He caused David to muster the nation, so that He could bring judgment against them. "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah" (II Sam. 24:1). This mustering was illegal, as Joab understood:

For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people. And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing? Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the

captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel (II Sam. 24:2–4).

God did this to David, and through his representative covenantal leadership, to Israel, by way of Satan, who acts as an intermediary in such matters.

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it. And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 21:1–4).¹⁰

I have reproduced both passages in full so there can be no doubt: they describe the same incident.

Joab falsified his report by refusing to number the tribes of Benjamin and Levi (I Chron. 21:5–6). No military agent of the nation was ever allowed to number Levi (Num. 1:49). By refusing to muster Benjamin, Saul's tribe, the smallest tribe in Israel (I Sam. 9:21), Joab made certain that the mustering was not of the entire nation. By not mustering all of the non-priestly tribes, Joab silently declared that this was not a holy war, for the priesthood had not authorized it by blowing the twin trumpets, nor had the entire nation been mustered.

Immediately upon receiving Joab's report, David knew he had

10. May we legitimately say that Satan and his followers sometimes do God's work of deception? The Bible repeatedly affirms that this is the case. "And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the LORD said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee" (II Chron. 18:19–22). "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thess. 2:11–12). Nevertheless, we must not blame God for what God uses Satan to do. This is illogical by the standards of autonomous man (meaning also the standards of Gordon Clark), but it is required that we hold both positions—God's absolute sovereignty and Satan's full responsibility—in order to avoid making God the author of sin. On this point, see Romans 9:14–23.

done a sinful thing. “And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly” (I Chron. 21:8). God then gave David three terrible choices (v. 12). David told God to decide (v. 13); so, God brought a plague against the people, killing 70,000 of them (v. 14). This was consistent with the law of mustering. When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them” (Ex. 30:12). Plague came because David mustered the people without collecting the mandatory atonement money for the priests. This mustering invited God into their midst as the sanctions-bringer, but they made no payment. They thereby became profane.

Why did Joab know that the mustering was wrong? Because no priest had consented to it. No blood money had been paid to the priesthood. The act was dearly sacrilegious: a profane act because it violated a sacred boundary. But what could that boundary have been? It had something to do with the nonpayment of blood money. It had something to do with the priesthood. Mustering was to precede a holy war. David was not facing a holy war, yet he mustered Israel’s fighting men. This was an assertion of a priestly authority that he possessed only as the national military leader in a time of war. David was the senior military commander, the one under whom blood would be shed. He was the senior priest of the military, under the authority of the high priest. He did not possess this mustering authority as senior civil magistrate. This authority was priestly, not kingly. Thus, it was illegal for the civil government to conduct this census. It was an assertion of priestly authority that was legitimate only prior to a holy war.

Joab told the king: “Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it.” It would be a blessing for God to multiply the military might of the nation, he said, so that David could see this. Spoken like a true soldier. The cost of supporting an army a hundred times larger, however, would have to be borne by someone. In a war, a large army is a clear blessing; in peacetime, it isn’t. Joab’s point was that David should not be counting the nation on his own authority. To experience an increase in the army large enough for its commander to see is a fine goal in, wartime, but to muster the nation apart from a looming battle was wrong.

2. *The New Covenant*

The issue was ecclesiastical: atonement money and the shedding of blood. Under the New Covenant, the Mosaic priesthood is gone forever, as the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches. Numbering prior to a war is no longer mandatory. The question is this: Is such numbering (counting) legitimate?

Taking a careful accounting of one's assets is legitimate for an individual, and was compared by Jesus with taking a military census. Should the state be prohibited from doing what an individual should do and the senior military commander had to do under Mosaic law prior to a war? Can it lawfully number its fighting forces even though no war is imminent? I see no reason not to allow this. Maintaining defensive forces is designed to prevent war, i.e., prevent the shedding of blood. This is a valid goal of the state, which has a legal monopoly on imposing physical negative sanctions.

But what about other forms of census-taking? Has God given the state lawful authority over planning except with respect to planning for a war, i.e., the legitimate imposition of God's physical sanctions against covenant-breakers who have violated the law? There is no biblical warrant for such indiscriminate data collection. The state may lawfully count the policemen under its authority, since the state is God's designated covenantal agent in a war against crime. But the state is not given the authority to conduct prying investigations into the lives of law-abiding private citizens.

Wherever the state asserts authority which is not warranted by the Bible, it imitates David's illegal mustering. It asserts for itself power that God has not delegated to it. Such an unlawful arrogation of power is the mark of a Pharaonic state. It claims ownership—legal control—over the allocation of assets not lawfully under its sphere of legitimate authority. One of the marks of state control is its census-taking activity. Whenever the state numbers things not lawfully under its legitimate authority, it becomes Pharaonic.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Joseph had travelled there to be enrolled in a census conducted by Augustus Caesar (Luke 2:1–5). This was not a tax, as the King James Version misleadingly says; it was a census. Augustus was following the lead of Julius Caesar, who had compiled a detailed statistical record of the empire, the *descriptio orbis*. Augustus had sent 20 trained agents throughout the empire to compile a similar work, which he wrote in his own hand, *Breviarium*

totius imperii.¹¹ To manage a centrally planned empire, the emperor needed statistical data.

F. Statistics and Government Planning

One of the great evils of an income tax is that it mandates reporting to the state of a family's income, capital, and financial dealings. The state assembles huge, detailed dossiers on individuals, families, and businesses, which only tax officials are allowed to inspect for accuracy.¹² The income tax has been the great engine of statistics-gathering by the modern state. The census is the other. Both are compulsory in the United States. A resident can be fined for refusing to cooperate with the census-taker. Statistics pour into the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Department of Labor, the Internal Revenue Service, and many other agencies: federal, state, and local.

Some of these statistics are sold to the public in data banks or in printed government reports. But only rarely are they used by businesses for strategic planning, especially small businesses. They are rarely delivered in a useful form. They do not tell most businesses what business managers need to know. In any case, they are old; they are at best snapshots of past behavior. Nonexistent is the firm that goes bankrupt or sustains a major loss because of its heavy reliance on faulty government statistics. This is because no business management team would be so foolish as to rely on government statistics for making major decisions. They hire specialized market testing organizations that seek out and analyze the highly specific and narrow information needed by business managers.

Each year in the United States, the government releases a 1000-page book, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. It is jointly produced by the Department of Commerce, the Bureau of the Census, and the Economics and Statistics Administration. It is a convenient government subsidy to such professional groups as historians, economists looking for factual support for almost any theory, editorial writers, and students writing term papers. Politicians' assistants use it to ghostwrite speeches and reports.

Statistics are records of the past that have been summarized in the

11. Frederick Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, [1887]), I, pp. 120–21.

12. "IRS to expand secret data base on people's lives," *Dallas Morning News* (Jan. 20, 1995), p. 1. This data base is closed to the general public. It was set up in order to facilitate more efficient tax collection.

form of numbers. Economist Ludwig von Mises wrote: "Statistics provides numerical information about historical facts, that is, about events that happened at a definite period of time to definite people in a definite era. It deals with the past and not with the future. Like any other past experience, it can occasionally render important services in planning for the future, but it does not say anything directly valid about the future."¹³ Furthermore, "what the statistics of human action really show is not regularity but irregularity. The number of crimes, suicides, and acts of forgetfulness . . . varies from year to year."¹⁴ The biologist, wrote sociologist-historian Robert Nisbet, can predict future changes in some environmentally controlled population, but "It is very different with studies of change in human society. Here the Random Event, the Maniac, the Prophet, and the Genius have to be reckoned with. We have absolutely no way of escaping them. The future-predicters don't suggest that we can avoid or escape them—or ever be able to predict or forecast them. What the future-predicters, the change-analysts, and trend-tenders say in effect is that with the aid of institute resources, computers, linear programming, etc. they will deal with the kinds of change that are *not* the consequence of the Random Event, the Genius, the Maniac, and the Prophet. To which I can only say: there really aren't any; not any worth looking at anyhow."¹⁵

Government statistics are used by economic planners, including the central bank, to regulate the national economy. Not that these statistics are accurate or even useful. Older data are constantly being revised. But they create the illusion that government planners are capable of making effective representative decisions for consumers on the basis of an overall economic plan. The planners supposedly are capable of devising comprehensive, scientific, economic input-output grids, inserting the latest data, and presto: an accurate picture of the economy emerges. This picture then supposedly enables them to forecast the future effects of their official decisions. This is a politically convenient myth. Academic studies of government forecasting repeatedly conclude that flipping a coin would be as accurate (perhaps more accurate) as the forecasts of government economists; so would

13. Ludwig von Mises, *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1962), p. 56. (<http://bit.ly/MisesUFES>)

14. Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 84–85. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTAH>)

15. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 and All That," *Commentary* (June 1968), p. 66.

making the simple assumption that this year will be pretty much the same as last year.

Faith in the power of statistics to convey relevant economic information to government planners is visible in a statement by Eugene Rostow. He assumed that it is an altruistic civil government, not the profit-seeking decisions of consumers and producers in a free market, which is truly rational. Government planners alone can see the big picture and rationally guide the overall economy for the benefit of others, or so we are told. “The policy of maintaining high levels of employment therefore implies a policy of seeking to make the current output of the economy a maximum—that is, to obtain as valuable a yield as possible from the intelligent current use of the nation’s capital resources, and its inheritance of capital, organization, skill, and habit. This goal is the first economic problem of any responsible government.”¹⁶ This faith lodges initiatory and final economic sovereignty in the state, and in those who are ordained by the state to conduct its planning activities.

In contrast to the god of socialism, this god of the mixed economy is not an earthly version of Calvin’s predestinating God, but it is surely an immanent Arminian kind of god. It does not predestinate, but it makes incentives available to those who conform to its laws. It nudges history along its orderly path. But a blind god is not much of a god (Deut. 4:28), so this immanent god must be said to be able to see clearly. He must be given eyes. Samuel Ruggles, the American delegate to the International Statistical Congress of 1863, was an early prophet of the statistical millennium: “Statistics are the very eyes of the statesman, enabling him to survey and scan with clear and comprehensive vision the whole structure and economy of the body politic.”¹⁷ Such confident rhetoric is not so evident today, but the underlying faith is still widespread. Rostow asserts that “the development of the statistical series which provide rough tools of accounting for the current economic performance of the economy has improved our opportunities for studying the behavior of the economy, and for making both private and public policy decisions more rational and effective.”¹⁸ He was a

16. Eugene V. Rostow, *Planning for Freedom: The Public Law of American Capitalism* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 69.

17. Cited in Murray N. Rothbard, “Fact-finding is a proper function of government,” *Clichés of Politics*, ed. Mark Spangler (Irvington, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1994), p. 93n. The essay was first published in *The Freeman* in June, 1961: “Statistics: Achilles’ Heel of Government.” (<http://bit.ly/RothbadStats>)

18. Rostow, *Planning for Freedom*, p. 69.

professor of law, not an economist, but his faith in the planned economy was very great. Freedom through state compulsion: here was the twentieth-century liberal's number-one official economic goal. (His number-one goal, unofficially, is the quest for power: a very ancient goal.)

Apart from coercively collected, tax-funded statistics, the government planning priesthood and their academic allies could not easily maintain the myth of their ability to predict the economic future and then create incentives through tax policy and monetary policy to overcome the supposed inefficiency of voluntary economic exchange, i.e., the free market social order. Rothbard was correct: "If the government received no railroad statistics, for example, how in the world could it even start to regulate railroad rates, finances, and other affairs? How could the government impose price controls if it didn't even know *what* goods have been sold on the market, and what prices were prevailing? Statistics, to repeat, are the eyes and ears of the interventionists; of the intellectual reformer, the politician, and the government bureaucrat. Cut off those eyes and ears, destroy those crucial guidelines to knowledge, and the whole threat of government intervention is almost completely eliminated."¹⁹

In a 1960 article, Rothbard surveyed the history of economists' opinions on the collection of government statistics since the mid-nineteenth century. In case after case, the economists who praised such statistical work had as a motive the creation of a planned economy. The Fabian socialists in England in the late nineteenth century are the models.²⁰ Richard T. Ely, one of the founders of the American Economic Association, and Lester Frank Ward—sociologist, government bureaucrat, and the first major apologist for central planning in the U.S.—both defended the collection of such data.²¹ Wesley C. Mitchell, one of the pioneers in statistical inquiry in economics in the early twentieth century, said that "the type of social invention most needed today is one that offers definite techniques through which the social system can be controlled and operated to the optimum advantage of its members."²² His wife wrote of his work at mid-century that "he envisaged the great contribution that government could make to the un-

19. Rothbard, "Fact-finding," p. 92.

20. Murray N. Rothbard, "The Politics of Political Economists: Comment," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 74 (Nov. 1960), p. 660.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 660–61.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 662.

derstanding of economic and social problems if the statistical data gathered independently by various Federal agencies were systematized and planned so that the interrelationships among them could be studied. The idea of developing social statistics, not merely as a record but as a basis for planning, emerged early in his own work.”²³ The Bureau of the Budget in 1954 announced: “National growth and prosperity demanded an enlightened conduct of public affairs with the aid of factual information. The ultimate responsibility of the Federal Government for underwriting the health of the national economy has always been implicit in the American system. . . .”²⁴ The accelerating growth of U.S. government data collection came, the Bureau said, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, as a means for the government to combat the Great Depression.²⁵

It is not just that statistics require constant tinkering, both theoretically²⁶ and in terms of their proper collection.²⁷ It is also that they establish the indispensable theoretical foundation for coercive government intervention into the economy. The Bible is unalterably opposed to such coercive intervention. It is therefore opposed to the collection of statistics that are not part of its war-making authority, including the war against crime.

Rothbard noted in 1960 that the collection of statistics by the government leads to greater intervention: “. . . the growth of statistics, often developed originally for its own sake, ends by multiplying the aven-

23. Lucy Sprague Mitchell, *Two Lives* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953), p. 363. Cited in *idem*.

24. *Economic Statistics*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Economic Statistics of the Joint Economic Committee on the Economic Report, 83rd Congress, July 12, 1954 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. 10; *ibid.*, p. 663.

25. *Idem*.

26. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 19, section on “Intuition and Measurement.” Cf. Oskar Morgenstern, *On the Accuracy of Economic Observations*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963). Morgenstern wrote a book on game theory with John von Neumann, one of the most gifted mathematicians of the twentieth century. Morgenstern was aware of the limits of mathematics as a tool of economic analysis. A more recent treatment of the problem is Andrew M. Kamarck’s *Economics and the Real World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). See also Thomas Mayer, *Truth versus Precision in Economics* (Hampshire, England: Elgar, 1993).

27. Examples taken from my files in 1989—a small sample of two decades of my files on the topic: “America Counts on Its Numbers,” *Insight on the News* (May 22, 1989); Richard Lipkin, “Painting policy by the numbers: Imprecise art?” *Washington Times* (May 23, 1989); “Getting Physical,” *The Economist* (Aug. 26, 1989); Jonathan Fuerbringer, “Rusty Statistical Compass for U.S. Policy Makers,” *New York Times* (Oct. 30, 1989).

ues of government intervention and planning.”²⁸ Furthermore, when pragmatic social reformers go looking for problems to solve by government action, they use statistics. “The pragmatist looks for areas where the economy and society fall short of the Garden of Eden, and these, of course, abound.”²⁹

Conclusion

The Book of Numbers begins with the mandated mustering of the fighting men of Israel. This was an aspect of Israel as the holy army of the Lord. It was an aspect of negative civil and ecclesiastical sanctions—specifically, the military conquest of Canaan. It was a priestly activity. The priesthood had to sanction every holy war that involved the whole nation.

God is omniscient. Man is not. God allows men to pay for data-gathering in order to make better private decisions, but mankind cannot become omniscient. The state, as the most powerful covenantal agency, is not allowed by God to pursue data-gathering in an unholy quest of God-like omniscience or omnipotence.

When David mustered the people when no war was being contemplated, God judged him by killing 70,000 Israelite males by a plague. This indicates that legitimate mustering by the civil government was regarded by God as a unique event, something associated with authorized combat and the threat of death in battle: the shedding of blood.

Those who were eligible for mustering, and hence for battle, were citizens in Mosaic Israel. Prior to the Babylonian captivity, their eligibility to serve in the army of the Lord was their primary proof of citizenship.

The rise of the modern planning state was associated with the rise of government statistics. The two developments were intimately and necessarily associated. Governments began collecting statistics before the ideology of central planning was widespread. Once begun, however, coercive data gathering became part of the larger process of extending state authority over the decision-making of all those under its authority. The quest for ever more detailed, accurate, and recent statistical data is an aspect of man’s attempt to become God. The messianic state, if it is to bring its promised healing, must imitate God. It must pursue omniscience, which in turn becomes the supposed basis of its

28. Rothbard, “Comment,” p. 663.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 664.

representative (statistically significant) omnipresence and, ultimately, its omnipotence. Because Mosaic Israel was founded on a public repudiation of Egypt's messianic state, its legal order made impossible the civil government's collecting of statistics that were unrelated to the defense of the nation against covenant-breakers. There is nothing in the New Covenant that altered the Old Covenant's view of the messianic state. Thus, there is no reason to believe that government data-gathering is legitimate except in the specified areas of national defense and crime prevention. It can lawfully collect taxes, but taxes that mandate the collection of information on private citizens are inherently suspect. Such data must not be used for manipulating the economy; they are to be used only for legal purposes, to prove that someone has or has not paid his taxes.

3

THE HIERARCHY OF SERVICE/SANCTIONS

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel. And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death (Num. 3:5–10).

The English word “hierarchy” comes from the Greek word for priest (*hierus*). We think of a hierarchy of command in terms of an image: a vertical chain. This hierarchy may be judicial; it may be merely functional. It is associated with point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy or representation.¹

This law, as with all the other Mosaic laws, was theocentric. In this case, however, the theocentric character of the law was manifested geographically. This law governed the Aaronic priesthood. The central—literal and figurative—service of the Aaronic priesthood was associated with the holy of holies. The holy of holies marked the central focus of Israel: the earthly dwelling place of God, the place of His name. The holy of holies was the geographical link between heaven and earth. In it rested the Ark of the Covenant.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

A. Guardians

The Mosaic priesthood guarded the boundaries associated with the holy of holies. The priests in the narrow sense were those who officiated in the sacrifices: the sons of Aaron. In a broader sense, the priesthood was the tribe of Levi. In the broadest sense, Israel was a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). They all were to guard the tabernacle by imposing physical sanctions on those who violated a series of concentric boundary markers: from the holy of holies to the nation's boundaries.

Priests were the assigned agents of bloodshed inside the sacrosanct boundaries associated with the holy of holies. The narrowly defined priests shed the blood of animals to placate God. The more broadly defined priesthood defended the tabernacle from profane invaders who had no lawful access. The most broadly defined priesthood was the army of the Lord, a holy army, which defended the nation because the nation was God's sanctified dwelling place.

The legal basis of the Levitical priesthood of pre-exilic Mosaic Israel had begun in the wilderness with the golden calf incident (Ex. 32). First, there was an act of corporate rebellion in which the high priest, Aaron, had participated. Aaron's act of rebellion had been a re-capitulation of the original sin of Adam, who ate a forbidden covenantal meal as mankind's representative high priest. This corporate act of rebellion involved the whole nation. God required a bloody sacrifice to atone for it. There is no atonement apart from the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22).

Second, the Levites gained their tribal office as the Mosaic priesthood because they had atoned for their sin by wielding the sword without mercy (Ex. 32:26–29). This atonement extended retroactively to their earlier sin, which had been a merciless wielding of the sword: the slaying of the Shechemites and the looting of their assets (Gen. 34:25–27), an act cursed by Jacob (Gen. 49:5). Imposing mortal sanctions on their biological brothers brought their sanctification, thereby offsetting their curse for having imposed the same sanctions against the Shechemites, their newly adopted brothers. *The covenant is far more important than brotherhood.* Levi had violated this principle with Shechem; his heirs honored it in the wilderness.

The golden calf incident was a prelude to the next act of priestly rebellion, the strange fire incident (Lev. 10:1–2). The first incident led to the elevation of the Levites to priestly office when they joined Moses and executed 3,000 Israelites. The second incident led to the substitu-

tion of a new pair of priests due to the deaths of the two original officers. *Bloodshed marked the Mosaic priesthood from the beginning.*

The priestly office was sacrificial before God, meaning that it involved the imposition of the negative sanction of death. The threat of sanctions was hierarchical: on the animals as representatives, on those whom they represented if the nation continued in their rebellion, and directly on those who acted as the mediatorial agents of sacrifice.

Because the priests performed the ritual acts of substitutionary atonement—judicially representative deaths—they were under the threat of more immediate and more direct negative sanctions than the people were. They stood on holy ground. The closer that men came to the most comprehensive act of representative sacrifice—the yearly sprinkling of blood inside the holy of holies—the more dangerous was the ground. *Holy ground was bloody ground, judicially speaking.* It was the place of negative sanctions.

B. Hierarchy and Inner Circles

The old rule governing the organization of a workshop applied to priestly service: “a place for everything, and everything in its place.”

1. *The Ark of the Covenant*

At the center of Israel were the contents of the Ark of the Covenant: two tables of the law, a golden pot of manna, and Aaron’s rod (Heb. 9:4). The manifestation of God’s law and the implements of His sanctions were linked spatially: the tablets (law), the manna (bread), and the rod (sanctions). Man needs law and bread in order to live. “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Deut. 8:3). The rod served as a warning: violate the boundaries of the Ark, and negative sanctions will be applied, just as they were applied on Pharaoh by means of this rod.² These three items were en-

2. Exodus 7:9–10, 19; 8:5, 16. There has been a long debate among the Jewish commentators as to whether this rod was Moses’ or Aaron’s. The twentieth-century editor and Chief Rabbi of the British Empire J. H. Hertz includes a gloss by David Levi and Isaac Delgado, late eighteenth-century commentators: “. . . the rod of Moses used by Aaron at the bidding of Moses.” Hertz (ed.), *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (2nd ed.; London: Soncino, [1937] 1987), p. 236. The mid-nineteenth-century Orthodox Jewish commentator Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote: “There is absolutely no necessity to be-

cased inside the Ark and were never supposed to be viewed by any person in history.³ This was the ultimate inner sanctum of Israel: “For God’s eyes only.” It was closed to man, just as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been closed to man. A boundary protected this inner sanctum: the walls of the Ark.

A series of concentric circles of holiness encased the Ark. The Ark was placed behind a curtain, creating the holy of holies, into which only the high priest came once a year to offer sacrifice (Lev. 16:14–15). The high priest had this job; no one else did (v. 17). “Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people” (Heb. 9:6–7). This annual event conformed to the five-point biblical covenant model. The requirement mandating judicial representation (point two) in the offering of one representative annual sacrifice of blood (point four) overcame the otherwise absolute sanctity (point three) of the holy of holies, the dwelling place of God (point one), thereby enabling the Israelites to survive as a nation (point five).

Like the garden of Eden, where only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was declared off-limits to man, so was Mosaic Israel. Only the interior of the Ark was declared completely off-limits. But Adam had proven that man does not honor God’s verbal boundaries, so God placed a series of “No Trespassing” signs in front of men as they approached the Ark’s sacred space. He placed swords – not flaming—into the hands of the Levites to guard the last few hundred feet (Num. 1 :51). The basis of this authority was their previous willingness to use the sword against their brothers (Ex. 32:27).

The closer to the inner circle of holiness in Mosaic Israel—the implements inside the Ark of the Covenant—the higher the level of ecclesiastical authority. The greater the danger was of violating a sacred boundary, the higher the ecclesiastical authority. With respect to the sacred, *inner* meant *higher*. This relationship was unique to the church

lieve that this was Moses’ staff and not Aaron’s. (Some of the commentators put themselves to considerable effort to try and prove it must have been Moses’ staff). It is much more reasonable to take it, as the verse clearly says, as Aaron’s staff.” Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, 5 vols. (Gateshead, London: Judaica, 1989), II, p. 78. I believe that the same rod was used by both men, even as Aaron spoke for Moses.

3. I am assuming here that the mercy seat which sat above the Ark was a lid (Ex. 25:21). The Hebrew word used for “mercy seat,” *kapporeth*, comes from *kaphar*, meaning “covering.”

covenant. It did not apply to the civil hierarchy. There was no other place that was geographically sacrosanct outside of the areas associated with the throne room of God. The holy of holies housed the highest of highs, associated with God's mountain.⁴ Like Mt. Sinai, where God gave the law to Moses, so was the tabernacle. Jordan wrote: "The boundary around the mountain correlates to the boundary inside the courtyard that kept the people from approaching the altar. In this way, then, the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) were models of the ladder to heaven, of the holy mountain. . . . The Tabernacle was God's portable mountain."⁵

2. *Circles of Authority*

The association of the inner circles of the tabernacle with hierarchy, secrecy, and authority was to make the sacred space of the tabernacle foreboding to outsiders. The sense of power was inescapable. The circles of authority grew more diffuse as they moved away from the tabernacle. Hierarchy meant access to power; centralization meant access to power. To be a part of the inner circle meant access to power.

God closed access to these inner circles to those not part of specific families: Aaron, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. Apart from adoption into one of these families, which involved the surrender of a man's inheritance in the land, and also involved the payment of an entry fee,⁶ access to these inner circles was closed. There could be no competition for such access between excluded families.

The Levites lived in a camp separated from the other tribes by 2,000 cubits⁷ (Josh. 3:4). Non-priestly Israelites were to be kept away from the inner courts of the tabernacle by the Levites, who were to kill intruders. The Mosaic law dearly separated land ownership from sacred space. During wartime, it kept political authority at arm's length—at least 1,000 yards—from the sanctuary of the highest ecclesiastical hierarchy. After all of the copies of the Mosaic law had disappeared for generations, a copy was found in the temple (II Kings 22:8). The op-

4. James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), pp. 85, 155–163, 212–13. (<http://bit.ly/jjneweyes>)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 36.

7. About 1,000 yards (914 meters).

pression of covenant-breaking kings had not stripped the land of every copy. The temple's inner sanctuary had provided a safe hiding place for the lost copy. The symbolic point was this: *God's law is beyond the authority of kings to re-write*. The hierarchy that declared the law was not under the king, nor did the king have lawful access to the inner sanctum where the law rested. God's law was higher than the king. The tablets representing God's law were housed in the inner sanctum of the tabernacle, not in the king's household. There should be no mistake about this: *the church was the central institution in pre-exilic Mo-saic Israel because the Ark of God was guarded by the church*.⁸ The swords of the Levites took precedence over the sword of the king.

C. Hierarchy and the Division of Labor

There was a Levitical division of labor established by family membership. This division of labor was associated with tasks that were performed separately in a series of concentric circles with the Ark at their center.

Aaron was the high priest of Israel. On his shoulders rested the responsibility of performing those rituals that only the high priest was allowed to perform as a judicial representative of the nation. His yearly entrance into the holy of holies was the primary ritual (Ex. 30:10). The high priest was closest to the inner circle.

To perform his duties successfully, he needed assistance. Under him were his two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, who had replaced the two older sons, Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:12; Num. 3:4), who had been burned by fire from the altar when they offered strange fire (Lev. 10:1–2; Num. 3:4). “And to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that therein is, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof” (Num. 4:16). The sons of Aaron had access to areas that were off-limits to the other Kohathites: “But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die” (Num. 4:20).

The Kohathites were required to tend to the implements that were inside the boundaries of these outer coverings but outside the inner coverings of the structure, i.e., outside of the holy of holies (Num.

8. After the exile, despite the absence of the Ark, the church no longer had any serious competition from the state with respect to its social centrality. The state in Israel was part of a foreign hierarchy: Medo-Persian, Hellenic, or Roman.

3:31). They were allowed to minister closer to the inner circle than the Gershonites were. The Gershonites were required to tend to the hanging coverings of the tabernacle (Num. 3:25–26). These were the *implements of separation*: boundary markers inside the structure. The sons of Merari were required to tend to the outer structure itself (Num. 3:36–37). All the Levites were under Eleazar’s supervision whenever they performed ritual activities inside the sanctuary (Num. 3:32). Otherwise, they were under Ithamar’s authority (Num. 4:28, 33; 7:8).

The next set of differentiating tasks was associated with moving the tabernacle. The corporate job of Aaron’s sons in times of travel was to cover the Ark of the Covenant (or Testimony) with the veil of the tabernacle (Num. 4:5), and then cover the other holy implements (Num. 4:6–14). This was the task of separation: *preserving the boundaries of holiness associated with the sacrifices*.

Once these vessels were covered, the Kohathites came to assist the sons of Aaron by moving the covered vessels (Num. 4:15). The coverings preserved the visual sanctification of the objects. The Kohathites were warned not to touch any holy object (v. 15b). The objects were carried on poles (“staves”)⁹ inserted through rings¹⁰ or carried on top of bars (vv. 10, 12). God also warned the sons of Aaron not to do this task. “And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites: But thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them everyone to his service and to his burden: But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die” (Num. 4:17–20). Kohathites were to be kept away from these objects until the sons of Aaron took down the hanging walls of separation, so that there was no longer any “in” to go into.

The Gershonites were prohibited from doing the work of the Kohathites. Their assignments related to the next circle outward: bearing the curtains of the tabernacle. They disassembled and reassembled the tabernacle’s coverings and the associated furnishings (Num. 4:22–28). They were under the jurisdiction of Ithamar (v. 28).

Similarly, the sons of Merari had their tasks associated with the next outward circle: bearing the boards and pillars (Num. 4:29–33).

9. Numbers 4:6, 8, 11.

10. “And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it” (Ex. 25:14–15).

They were required to do the same with the outer support structure of the tabernacle (Num. 4:29–33). Each item was assigned to one man by name (v. 32). They, too, were under the jurisdiction of Ithamar (v. 33). The Hebrew word, *massaw*, indicates carrying or portering. They used oxcarts to transport the various materials (Num. 7:7).

The Levites transported the Ark on a cart in David's day, which was clearly in violation of the law. They were supposed to carry the Ark on poles. This infraction led to the death of Uzzah, who reached out and touched the Ark in order to steady it, and God killed him (II Sam. 6).

If we were to draw a map of authority within the tribe of Levi, it would look like this: the high priest at the center; Eleazar as his servant, in charge of ritual; Ithamar in charge of supervising the other families in non-ritual affairs; followed by Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. Because the Merari family guarded the outer boundaries of the temple, its members bore the sword against intruders. With respect to hierarchy, we can understand this through the analogy of a military chain of command: commanding officer, chaplains, general staff, field grade officers, officers, and enlisted men. All would be in uniform, and only they could lawfully wear these uniforms.

These tasks did not require all of the family members of each of the three Levitical families to serve at the central place of worship all of the time. Presumably, the Aaronic families of Eleazar and Ithamar did remain at the tabernacle full time. Those Levites who were not employed full-time at the tabernacle dwelt in the Levitical cities and in other cities. During war-time, all of the Levites would have returned to the tabernacle to guard it as the last line of defense against foreign invaders.

The Mosaic law did not assign special tasks to those Levites who lived away from the tabernacle. In other words, when outside the sacred boundaries of the tabernacle, the Levites could do whatever they wanted to do. They might teach, provide legal counsel for elders in the gates, farm, engage in trade, or whatever else they had the skills to do. They were not permitted to buy rural farmland, but they could lease it.

D. The Hierarchical Flow of Funds and Service

The language of the texts indicates the subordination of service. The high priest ruled. The sons of Aaron were to serve the high priest; the Kohathites were to serve the sons of Aaron; the Gershonites served

the Kohathites; and the sons of Merari were the Levites who served the other families by protecting the perimeter. They bore the sword. The imagery is that of an upward flow of service.

This upward flow of service was paralleled by an upward flow of funds. The Levites collected the tithes of the people; the priests collected the tithes of the Levites. The separation of the family of Levi from any normal inheritance in the land established its moral claim on income from those who enjoyed landed inheritance (Num. 18:20–30). Levi became Israel's substitute for the firstborn son, and therefore he was entitled to the double portion (Deut. 21:17): automatic income. But this double portion eliminated their inheritance in the land.

Authority flowed outward from the throne room in which the tables of the law were housed to the borders of the nation and beyond (Jonah). Funds flowed inward toward that inner circle. The judicial declaration of the law and the ritual purification of the nation had to be paid for. Priestly service was ultimately representative service to God. God dwelt in the inner circles of Israel. He was the highest authority.

1. Tithe of the Tithe

The law established that Levites paid a tithe to Aaron. This referred to the high priest. I find it difficult to believe that one percent of the nation's net increase went each year to one man to cover his basic living expenses. Did this money go only to the sons of Aaron, namely, the priests who offered the sacrifices? The text does not say.

To find the answer, we must ask ourselves: Is the laborer worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7)? If he is, then those Levites who were in full-time service at the tabernacle must have been paid by the high priest. We do not get something for nothing; there are no free lunches. The Mosaic law does not indicate that these servants were self-funded or funded as some sort of family obligation. This is indicated by the text in Nehemiah: "And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God" (Neh. 10:38–39). Again, we read: "And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the por-

tions of the singers and the porters, every day his portion: and they sanctified holy things unto the Levites; and the Levites sanctified them unto the children of Aaron" (Neh. 12:47).

Who were the priests who received the tithe of the Levites in pre-exilic times?¹¹ Answer: those who were serving God full-time in sacramental activities at the tabernacle. This included those Levites who were serving their tour of duty at the tabernacle. In the tribal division of labor, they could not spend time working at other jobs.

2. Tithe-Exempt

The Levites' tithe to Aaron is specified as a tithe of everything they collected from the other tribes. "Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe. And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress" (Num. 18:26–27). The phrase, "as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor," indicates that those Levites who made incomes from non-sacramental services paid a tithe on this increase to the priests.

Those at the top of the hierarchy did not pay a tithe. They paid in full-time service to God and to the other tribes. They were judicial intermediaries. Because they devoted all of their time to the service of God and the other tribes, they were not required to pay a tithe to themselves. This indicates that they were not to spend time in commercial ventures, agriculture, and other income-generating activities. Full-time service was defined as sacramental service that was associated with sacrifices and cleansing. It was tied geographically to the tabernacle and/or the holy of holies (when the Ark of the Covenant was not inside the tabernacle, as it was not in the era after Eli and before David brought it back to Jerusalem, the city of David).¹² Such service

11. This changed in post-exilic times because so few Levites returned and so many priests did. Accompanying Zerubbabel were 4,289 priests (Ezra 2:36–39) and 341 Levites (Ezra 2:40–42). Extra-biblical evidence, mainly from Josephus, indicates that the tithe was divided so that the priests were supported more directly by the fruits of the people. See *Life of Flavius Josephus*, 15; *Antiquities of the Jews*, XI:V:8; XX:VIII:8; ix:2. *Against Apion* 1:22; cited in "Tithe," in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, eds. John M'Clintock and James Strong, 12 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros, 1894), X, p. 436.

12. Jerusalem was known as the city of David (II Sam. 5:6–7). David brought the Ark back to his city (II Sam. 6:12).

was closed to those who were not ordained to it. It was explicitly ecclesiastical service. The mark of full-time service was personal exemption from the tithe. It was therefore a mark of total dependence on the tithes of others. *The greater the degree of service, the greater the degree of economic dependence.* The most authoritative ruler in Israel—the high priest—was the most dependent servant: dependent on God’s grace with respect to the correct performance of his duties and the duties of those priests under his jurisdiction,¹³ and dependent on the people to pay their tithes.

This principle has not changed. Ministers of independent churches do not owe a tithe to the church on their income gained from the church. There is no need for an accounting game of “pay the minister’s tithe,” with the church paying him a larger salary so that he has enough money to live on after the tithe, which goes back to the church. Those working in what is euphemistically called full-time Christian service owe a tithe to the local church unless they are employed by the church. Salaries received from the church in exchange for services to the church are not to be tithed. This, of course, does not apply to profit-seeking businesses that sell goods or services to the church. This rule applies to individuals who are paid by a local church to perform services associated with that church’s official tasks, if they are also members of this church. If they are members of another local church, then their tithe goes to the other church.

This exemption from the tithe applies only to employment by the church, which possesses a lawful sacerdotal monopoly. It does not apply to employment by parachurch organizations. For example, a person who is employed by a parachurch organization who then tithes his income back to this organization is doing more than playing economically meaningless accounting games; he is rebelling against God. He owes the tithe to his local church.

E. Holiness and the Division of Labor

The priesthood was hierarchical. Different branches within Levi performed different tasks. This separated authority hierarchically within the tribe of Levi, and it separated Levitical authority to declare the law hierarchically to the other tribes.

Korah was a member of the family of Kohath. He was Moses’ cousin: the son of Moses’ uncle, Izhar (Ex. 6:18–21). He led a democratic

13. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

revolt against Moses. “Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” (Num. 16:1–3). Korah’s revolt rested judicially on the basis of the supposed equality of authority within Israel. God disposed of them appropriately: by causing the earth to open up beneath them (Num. 16:31–33). They had lifted themselves up; God would pull them down. But not immediately.

For Korah to make such a democratic claim, he had to enlist the cooperation of members of at least one other tribe. His claim would have made no sense had he limited his recruiting to the tribe of Levi. To have done so would have pointed to the existence of hierarchy in Israel: Levi over all the others. This would have undermined his claim. Therefore, Korah had to approach the sacred center of Israel accompanied by non-Levites. He also had to participate in a profane act: the transgressing of a sacred boundary.

Moses’ prophetic test of equality was both geographical and liturgical: to have all claimants to priestly authority light fires. Those who did not possess lawful hierarchical authority to perform such a liturgical act would be placed under God’s direct negative sanctions. Their fire would be declared strange fire. Moses proposed a test based on sacrilege, which in turn was based on the division of labor. “And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi” (Num. 16:5–7). The holiness of separation would soon prove to be total.

Moses criticized Korah for the latter’s refusal to be content with the high degree of authority that God had given to the Levites: “And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: Seemeth it

but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?" (Num. 16:8–10). But Korah wanted even more authority.

Moses declared himself to be a prophet in terms of God's immediate application of negative sanctions: "And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD" (Num. 16:28–30). The Old Covenant prophet was a prophet because God's negative sanctions predictably followed the prophet's declaration of a covenant lawsuit. This is why the office no longer exists under the New Covenant, and also why the negative civil sanction of capital punishment for false prophecy (Deut. 18:20–21) no longer applies. The Old Covenant's rigorous temporal predictability no longer exists.

God's visible judgment against Korah made it clear that the Mosaic Covenant's hierarchy of priestly authority was a *hierarchy of power*. This is because it was a *hierarchy of sacramental holiness*. This hierarchy of holiness was the basis of a division of labor in the service of God. Not everyone had the authority to approach God's inner sanctum by passing through the concentric circles of holiness that surrounded it. Korah had proclaimed the doctrine of equal holiness. God pronounced visible judgment against this doctrine by destroying him and those allied with him. The division of labor in Israel would be retained.

These concentric circles ended definitively at the crucifixion, when the veil of the temple was rent, top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). That this tearing began at the top of the veil indicated that God had initiated it. Nevertheless, what was definitive judicially took a generation to fulfill. The high priest still possessed a sacrosanct position, which Paul acknowledged when he apologized for having berated him, not knowing that he was the high priest (Acts 23:4–5). Not until the fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple by the Romans did the Mosaic law's degrees of priestly holiness finally cease. The fires of the altar ended

forever when God burned the temple. The altar's fire had become strange fire through Old Covenant Israel's rebellion. The priesthood ended, thereby ending the influence of the Sadducee party. The Pharisees—defenders of the oral law, unlike the Sadducees¹⁴—replaced them as the leaders of the new religion of Judaism.¹⁵

F. Monopoly Services and Economic Dependence

The Levites provided teaching services and judgment to the nation. They also carried the tabernacle from place to place. Both forms of service involved holiness. The Levites had been set aside by God for these purposes. These services were tribal monopolies. As monopolies, they could have become opportunities for economic oppression. God placed economic limits on the Levites in order to limit their economic return from the possession of these monopolies: a limit of ten percent of any increase in wealth by the people and the Levites' requirement to provide free freight hauling services. Those who were involved in transporting the tabernacle became priests for the duration of the journey: full-time priestly servants of God. The free market's pricing principle—high bid wins—did not apply to the ecclesiastical services performed by the Levites. The tithe did.

The Mosaic Covenant clearly established the principle of tribal interdependence. In Mosaic Israel, the tribes other than Levi were covenantally incapable of serving God sacramentally by themselves. They became covenantally dependent on members of the tribe of Levi to serve as intermediaries between them and God. The inter-tribal link among the other dozen tribes was the tribe of Levi, which served all the others and collected tithes from them.

The Levites were heavily (though not exclusively) dependent economically on the other tribes for their income. They were more dependent in the early stages of Mosaic Israel's history than God intended them to be as time went on. God made them economically dependent initially by way of the laws of landed inheritance: they did not participate in the original distribution, nor could they buy up rural land or inherit it.¹⁶ As the nation grew in numbers and wealth, how-

14. Herbert Danby, "Introduction," *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), pp. xviii–xix.

15. The key figure in this transition was Johanan ben Zakkei. *Ibid.*, pp. xxx–xx. On Judaism as a post-A.D. 70 religion, see Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), Preface.

16. With this exception: "And if he will not redeem the field, or if he have sold the

ever, this economic dependence would have been reduced by the increasing value of urban property in relation to rural land. Mosaic law was biased against capital in rural land, for the law favored population growth: fewer miscarriages (Ex. 23:26) and longer life spans (Ex. 20:12) for covenantal obedience. Population growth in the context of a fixed supply of rural land, with all male heirs inheriting, leads to ever-smaller family allotments.¹⁷ Under such conditions of covenantal blessing, the Levites, who could own inheritable real estate in the cities, would have seen their income sources less dependent on tithes based on the agricultural productivity of the other tribes.

Levites were not prohibited from owning urban businesses, so their economic dependence on the other tribes would have been reduced over time, at least when the nation was covenantally faithful to God. This was an economic incentive for the Levites to teach and enforce God's law. God's positive corporate sanction to Israel—urban growth—would have served as a subsidy to the Levites, who would have been more likely to buy urban real estate prior to this demographic shift. They were more likely to be early residents of cities, since they could not lawfully inherit rural land.

There could have been another factor in the decreasing economic dependence of Levi: the growing size of the tribe in comparison to the numbers involved in full-time priestly service. When the need to transport the tabernacle ended with the completion of the temple, this reduced an important aspect of priestly service. This Levitical service was replaced by singing (I Chron. 15:15–16). Also, it is possible that the number of priests required for the sacrifices would not have grown proportionately to the tribe of Levi. That would have depended on the demand for sacrifices by the general population. It is possible that the growth in demand for sacrifices would have required many more priests. We do not know. We do know that far more priests returned from the exile than Levites (Ezra 2:36–42).

There was a dual monopoly in Mosaic Israel: control over sacrifice by the Levites and control over rural land by the other tribes. Members of the other tribes had no hope of obtaining the guaranteed income of the tithe unless they were adopted into a Levite family (Lev. 27:2–8). The Levites had no hope in agricultural inheritance. The dozen other

field to another man, it shall not be redeemed any more. But the field, when it goeth out in the jubile, shall be holy unto the LORD, as a field devoted; the possession thereof shall be the priest's" (Lev. 27:20–21). See North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 37.

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 34.

tribes had to be fed spiritually by the Levites. The Levites were to be fed literally by the other tribes. Each of the monopolists knew that what he possessed was incomplete, that he would have to supply services to others in order to prosper.

G. Mobility at Some Price

As men approached the holy of holies, there was increasingly limited lawful geographical mobility. This limited mobility was based on the presence of sacred boundaries. Transgression of these boundaries was not a violation of etiquette; it was a violation of sacred space: profanity.

Israelite society was not characterized by a fixed hierarchy, especially a hierarchy of inheritance. The sacred hierarchy was confined to a single tribe. This opened the possibility of social mobility for those outside the tribe of Levi. There were no economic guarantees outside of Levi, but there were also no significant restraints on what a free man could earn or do with his capital, including time. There was the jubilee law (Lev. 25), but this law was to be applied infrequently; Economically speaking, its effects would have become decreasingly significant over time in a covenantally faithful society, as a result of the decreasing economic relevance of agricultural landed property.

The sacred boundaries for Israelites were limited to the area close to the tabernacle. Beyond this geographical limit, men could go where they would. They could rise as high as their talents would allow when God's law was enforced. There was no caste system that specified that a man, family, or tribe had to perform this or that service. Service was contractual. With the exception of those services identified by God's law as inherently immoral, each person could offer his services for sale without restriction. Because Israelite society was not sacred, service was not fixed. *Sacred boundaries applied only to the sacramental realm of the sacrifices.* Had Mosaic society been universally sacred, these sacred boundaries would have encased men and their talents within tight legal and geographical boundaries.

Beyond the sacred space of the tabernacle, and outside of any sacred services performed by local Levites, men were free to move. So, they were free to choose. They could offer to buy their way into whatever position was for sale, whether they used their labor or their money as the appropriate currency of access. Every hierarchy other than the hierarchy of ecclesiastical service, which included the king's

office as military priest in times of holy warfare, was temporary. Because men possessed the legal right of mobility, upward and downward, the hierarchies that existed at any point in time were mobile.

The covenantal hierarchy of the priesthood was sacred: a matter of life and death. The covenantal hierarchy in the army was quasi-priestly: control over life and death. The respective chains of command were necessary for the performance of oath-bound service. The hierarchical structure of both of these hierarchies could lawfully be defended by the threat of violence. Outsiders could not gain lawful access apart from adoption and/or oath. The same is true in a family, another oath-bound institution. But there is no fourth institution lawfully established by means of a covenantal oath.

With the annulment of the Mosaic priesthood, neither birth nor family adoption is necessary to gain access to the mediatorial ecclesiastical office of minister. Only a wife¹⁸ and a ministerial oath is mandated. Even in the case of the military services, access to the top positions has generally been open to men of lower classes during wartime. The man who repeatedly wins battles “buys” his way into senior military positions normally closed in times of peace. The currency of upward mobility during wartime is victory. This is why, in Tocqueville’s opinion, the non-commissioned officer in a democratic army favors war.¹⁹ Exemplary service in battle, coupled with the high death rate of officers, are his ways of gaining permanent promotion.

This stands as a warning: in a non-covenantal hierarchy, those who seek to use violence against others in order to maintain their places against those who wish to compete lawfully for office, income, or position have violated God’s law. If they invoke the state as their agent of coercion, they have sinned. The free market principle of “high bid wins” must be honored. *The right to bid for place is fundamental to biblical liberty.* Others must be allowed to buy their way into any non-covenantal hierarchy if access is for sale—and access is almost always for sale, although the terms may be unofficial and concealed.

In modern democracy, political incumbents establish new layers of bureaucracy and reinforce old layers in order to seal off outsiders from access to civil authority. The Italian theorist Robert Michels called this

18. “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:1–2).

19. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Meyer, 2 vols. (Garden City, New York: Anchor, [1966] 1969), II (1840), ch. 23, p. 654.

the iron law of oligarchy.²⁰ This sociological law may be iron-like, but any use of force to preserve the benefits of an oligarchy is biblically illegitimate. A society that allows such acts to become widespread and then endemic will eventually come under God's judgment in history. The nearly bloodless collapse of Communism's bureaucracies in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its satellites, 1989 to 1991, is the most graphic display in modern history of the reality of this cause-and-effect relationship. Communism literally went bankrupt.²¹ This economic bankruptcy after seven decades had caught up with Communism's theoretical bankruptcy,²² which in turn had created moral bankruptcy.²³ The Soviet hierarchy, established by force,²⁴ collapsed. Or better put, its members found new ways of imposing force and surviving, but without the ideology of international Communism to justify the use of force.

H. The Inevitability of Hierarchy

Hierarchy is an inescapable concept, built into the creation through the dominion covenant: man's exercise of dominion over the creation. God acts through intermediaries. The husband exercises headship over his wife and children, for whom he is responsible. The general exercises authority over his troops, for whom he is responsible. Hierarchy is an outworking of representative responsibility: God holds leaders more responsible than followers for the outcome of events, even though followers, corporately, are the intermediate source of a leader's authority. Authority is distributed by God from the top down and from the bottom up simultaneously.²⁵ Nevertheless, God holds leaders more responsible than followers: with greater authority comes greater responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).

Hierarchy in Mosaic Israel was based on the sacrosanct yet limited

20. Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, [1908] 1949).

21. Judy Shelton, *The Coming Soviet Crash: Gorbachev's Desperate Pursuit of Credit in Western Financial Markets* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

22. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnmrror>)

23. Konstantin Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society: The Secret World of Soviet Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

24. Michael Voslensky, *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984); Davis K. Willis, *KLASS: How Russians Really Live* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985).

25. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

extent of the sacred. The sacred did not encompass everything in Israel; on the contrary, it encompassed very little, and the narrow boundaries of sacred space were evidence of this. While ethical transgression was common, necessitating sacred sacrifices, profaning sacred boundaries was rare, for profanation was frequently fatal. It was rarely repeated by the same person. Fear of sacred space was widespread.

The fixed hierarchical boundaries of the Levites were tied to the fixed concentric structure of sacred boundaries. When these boundaries were annulled by the New Covenant, the old tribal hierarchy was annulled with it. The torn veil of the temple pointed to the torn condition of tribal boundaries. The Mosaic priesthood ended, and with it, the tribal separations.

What the Bible denies is the legitimacy of judicially fixed hierarchies in non-covenantal institutions. The Bible does not promote equality. There is no equality in heaven (I Cor. 3:14), nor is there equality in hell (Luke 12:47–48). There is a bedrock individualism in biblical sociology because there is an inescapable individualism in final judgment. No person can transfer responsibility to another person and thereby escape the consequences of his actions (Gen. 3:12–13). Yet there is also a bedrock corporate element in biblical sociology: final judgment is announced to two great collectives: sheep and goats, saved and lost (Matt. 25).

I mention this because, as a late twentieth-century social theorist, I am well aware of the conflict between liberalism and conservatism, a conflict that cannot be mediated by radicalism. Conservative sociologist Robert Nisbet has described it well: "If the central ethos of liberalism is individual emancipation, and that of radicalism the expansion of political power in the service of social and moral zeal, the ethos of conservatism is tradition, essentially medieval tradition. From conservatism's defense of social tradition sprang its emphasis on the values of community, kinship, hierarchy, authority, and religion, and also its premonitions of social chaos surmounted by absolute power once individuals had become wrenched from the contexts of these values by the forces of liberalism and radicalism."²⁶ The twentieth century saw the fruition of conservatism's fears: two world wars, Communism, Nazism, and the alienation and despair produced by individual moral debauchery. Yet we should not ignore an insight of the mischievous libertarian humorist, P. J. O'Rourke. If you think the good old days

26. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 11.

were good, think of one word: dentistry.

In opposition to the individualism of liberalism, the collectivism of radicalism, and the traditionalism of conservatism, I offer biblical covenantalism: a sovereign God whose decree governs history, who has been revealed in history by the Bible and Jesus Christ, both called the word of God, who have announced God's unchanging standards. I proclaim God's predictable visible corporate sanctions in history, leading to the progressive triumph of His elect representatives in history. Covenantal social theory has a place for the conservative ideals of community (church), kinship (family), hierarchy, and authority. But it also has a place for the liberal ideals of individualism, progress, science, peaceful political change (democracy), and economic growth. What is needed today, and will be needed in a thousand years, is a theoretically coherent and practical integration of these ideals which preserves personal liberty without sacrificing the bonds of community, and also preserves sufficient political power to repel military invaders and suppress domestic disturbers of the peace. Without sanctions, there is no hierarchy; there is only opinion. Point four and point two of the biblical covenant model are intimately linked.

Conclusion

The hierarchy of sacred service in Mosaic Israel involved a hierarchy of authority. The high priest was at the pinnacle of this hierarchy. He had far greater responsibility than those under him. Below him came the sons of Aaron. Then came the other Levites: Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. Below them came the other tribes. The closer that a man's service came to the Ark of the Covenant, the more dangerous it was. This system of geographical holiness kept each man in his place. As a man approached Israel's central holy place, he in effect approached God's holy mountain, and like Mt. Sinai, where God met with Moses to establish the covenant and deliver the law, it was a capital offense for insufficiently holy Israelites to cross its boundary (Ex. 19:12–13).

Participants in Israel's holy commonwealth knew that they could not operate alone. They knew also that services had to be paid for. There were no free lunches in Israel, although the presence of the manna in the Ark at the very center of the nation testified that there had been partially subsidized lunches in the wilderness. The curse of the ground had been removed for a season.

There was no possibility of equality in Israel; the society was hierarchical. The closer to the Ark that a man operated lawfully, the greater his sacerdotal authority and responsibility, and also the greater his economic dependance on the economic success of others and their obedience to the law. While the high priest in Israel would probably never go hungry, he risked God's sanctions every time he performed a mandated ritual. The fiery testimony of Nadab and Abihu was sufficient warning. No one could lawfully trade places with him, and no one who wanted to live would have tried.

Priestly service was governed by the workshop rule: a place for everything, and everything in its place. But the farther away from the holy of holies, the less that Israel was governed by this narrowly circumscribed law. The office of high priest was unique. There could only be one high priest at a time. The farther away from the Ark, the less that any man had a specific mandated service or required place. Put differently, priestly service is judicially more specific than non-priestly service.

Let us consider the most successful of all the non-biblical systems of sacred hierarchy in man's history: Hinduism. The Hindu system of permanent religious castes is the product of a religious worldview that extends the principle of priestly service to all of life. A man born into one caste cannot advance himself or his family if such advancement is dependent upon his performing services that are monopolies of another caste. Social stagnation in Hindu society is correlative to its vision of the proper maintenance of religious tradition, even to the point of denying the cosmic reality of linear change.

Life is religious. It is also judicially protected by God. There is a right to life under God's law, but this is not a sacred right, for life is not a sacred rite. To argue otherwise is to move in the direction of Hinduism's caste society.

By confining sacred service within narrow geographical and tribal boundaries, God opened Mosaic society to the possibility of upward social mobility and progress. Sacred hierarchy there was, but it was tightly bounded, both for its own protection and the protection of the society around it.

4

THE FIRSTBORN AND NEGATIVE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD (Num. 3:11–13).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's ownership. This passage announced God's unique proprietary claim on the Levites because of their position as the sacrificial substitutes for the firstborn sons of Israel. As Creator, God owns everything, but He established here a special claim on the firstborn, including animals. This special claim had its origin in God's execution of the firstborn sons of Egypt.

God hallowed (*kawdash*) the firstborn. The Hebrew word *kawdash* means holy or sanctified. The word is also used with respect to the sabbath. "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified [*kawdash*] it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen. 2:3). "Remember the sabbath day, to keep [*kawdash*] it holy [*kawdash*]" (Ex. 20:8). "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed [*kawdash*] it" (Ex. 20:11). The word means set apart. God is the Lord of each day of the week (general claim), yet He has set apart one day as His special holy day (special claim). There are six common days and one holy day. This distinction between common and holy applied to the Levites' position among the tribes of Mosaic Israel. The law of the firstborn's redemption appears immediately prior to the law of the sabbath (Ex. 34:20–21).

A. Firstborn Sons

Did *firstborn* refer only to a son? Both text and context indicate that it did. First, in relationship to covenantal inheritance, God designated the nation of Israel as His firstborn son. God told Moses: “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (Ex. 4:22–23).

Second, the subsequent system of sacrifice mandated sacrifices for firstborn sons, not daughters. “But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy *sons* thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty” (Ex. 34:20; emphasis added). The interpretation of biblical passages that are less specific should be governed by passages that are more specific. This one is less specific: “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine” (Ex. 13:2). This one is more specific: the Israelite father’s words to his inquiring son. “And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, *being males*; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem” (Ex. 13:15; emphasis added). The father acts as God did: slaying firstborn male animals (reflecting Egypt’s loss) and redeeming his firstborn son (reflecting Israel’s gain).

Third, when requiring the substitution of Levites for firstborn Israelites, God specified firstborn sons: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names” (Num. 3:40). When the sex of the firstborn child is not specified, the Bible assumes the child is masculine: “And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his *brother* which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel” (Deut. 25:6; emphasis added). This is how the Book of Nehemiah interpreted firstborn: “Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God” (Neh. 10:36).

Fourth, when the judgment came on Egypt, it was a judgment

against the nation's strength: "He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength" (Ps. 105:36). This corresponds to Jacob's identification of firstborn Reuben as his might, strength, and power (Gen. 49:3). This was what made David's position unique: the eighth son of Jesse was the heir who became the strong man and king (1 Sam. 17:12, 14).

Fifth, prior to the substitution of the Levites for the firstborn sons of the other tribes, the nature of the redemption system was unstated. "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors [vintage]: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me" (Ex. 22:29). This involved some sort of formal dedication, but God did not say what this dedication was. This law pointed to the nation's need of a system of redemption, but it did not offer specifics. Israelites were to look forward to the establishment of a redemption system; until then, they were mentally to set apart their firstborn sons. Having set apart (made holy) their firstborn sons, the parents had to wait upon God to tell them what to do next, just as Abraham had to wait upon God for further details in the sacrifice of Isaac. They were to set apart their firstborn; then they were to wait for God to tell them what to do next. But they were not willing to wait on God; instead, they "rose up to play" (Ex. 32:6). In response, God had Levi impose the negative sanction of death on their representatives (Ex. 32:28).

Sixth, only firstborn sons were entitled to a double inheritance (Deut. 21:15–17). There was no similar provision for firstborn daughters when all of the children were girls. Daughters in such a household had a right of landed inheritance in Israel, so long as they did not marry outside their tribe (Num. 36). But the absence of any reference to double inheritance indicates that the double portion was related to the extension of a man's name and strength in Israel. Not being entitled to the unique covenantal blessing, the firstborn daughter was not under the unique covenantal burden.

B. Passover, Sanctions, and Succession

God said, "for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD" (v. 13). Something had happened on the first Passover night to change the previous legal relationship between God and the firstborn. The question is: What?

The firstborn prior to the first Passover had been exclusively a pos-

itive sanction from God. The firstborn was entitled to a special blessing from his father, which is why Jacob deceived Isaac regarding his identity: he wanted the blessing that would have gone to Esau (Gen. 27:19), had God not revealed to Rebekah that Jacob was the chosen son (Gen. 25:23), and had not Esau sold his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25:33). The firstborn was the extension of the father's might, dignity, and power. The firstborn was God's sign that through succession, the father's name and rule would extend into the future. After the Passover, however, there was a negative sanction associated with the firstborn, both of sons and male animals. "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine" (Ex. 13:1-2). Why was there the imposition of a negative economic sanction?

This had something to do with the judicially representative character of the firstborn. The firstborn represented the future: a family's future and, corporately, a nation's future. God placed a unique claim on this inheritance after the death of the firstborn of Egypt. He called the firstborn *His*. He did not limit this to humans; it included the animals, too. To enforce His claim of ownership after the first Passover, God imposed a system of negative sanctions. As we shall see, clean animals had to be slain, unclean animals redeemed with a money payment, and sons redeemed with a money payment.

No Egyptian family escaped the negative sanction of the death of the firstborn (Ex. 12:29-30). When Israel departed, the Israelites took with them much of the wealth of Egypt (Ex. 12:35).¹ All the firstborn sons of Egypt were dead. Israel, God's firstborn son, therefore inherited what would have been the inheritance of the firstborn Egyptians. This transfer of inheritance, family by family, was the result of God's negative sanctions against the original heirs. The spoils of Egypt repaid Israel for decades of slavery—the kidnapping of God's firstborn—but in a unique form: wealth gained as a direct result of the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt. What is important here is the link between negative sanctions—the death of Egypt's firstborn—and disinheritance. God's provision of an inheritance for Israel (positive) was based on His disinheritance of Egypt (negative). The historical means of Egypt's disinheritance was the death of Egypt's firstborn. In short, the sanction of death was the historic basis of the subsequent disinheri-

1. This wealth was sufficient to enable 600,000 men to pay the half shekel of silver three times in the wilderness.

ance-inheritance. This covenantal process of sanctions/inheritance-disinheritance was to be repeated in the conquest of Canaan a generation later.

The Mosaic penalty for kidnapping was death: “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:16). God found His son in the hands of the representative agent of the kidnappers: Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s accomplices were given an opportunity to renounce the crime and escape bloodguilt by placing the blood of a lamb on their doorposts, but no Egyptian family complied. This led to the comprehensive disinheritance of Egypt: “And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle” (Ex. 12:29).

The Passover was required of the Israelites to remind them of the night in which God’s wrath passed over the families of Israel. The shedding of a lamb’s blood had protected each family. But Israel was not to forget the negative sanction imposed on Egypt: “That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped” (Ex. 12:27). The positive sanction of national deliverance was accomplished through the negative sanction of corporate execution. The shedding of blood preceded this deliverance: the shedding of the lambs’ blood. Either a lamb’s blood was shed or else the firstborn son perished in the households of Israel and Egypt.²

At the first Passover, firstborn sons became uniquely representative of the future: the future of Egypt and the future of Israel. So representative was the firstborn son at the first Passover that he died unless he had a blood covering: firstborn animals and firstborn sons. The Passover brought a negative sanction: death. The outcome of this sanction determined succession and inheritance in Egypt: the Egyptians’ second-born sons (if any) were disinherited by the departing Israelites. This indicates that point four of the biblical covenant model—sanctions—is judicially bound up with point five: succession.

2. I do not think lambs’ blood was necessarily mandatory for the non-Egyptian, non-Israelite slaves. See Appendix I.

C. Firstborn Rites

Immediately following the recapitulation of the law of the Passover (Ex. 13:3–10), we read:

And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD'S. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt (Ex. 13:11–16).

As in the case of the Passover, they were to do this as a means of instructing each generation in the story of their deliverance from Egypt. Firstborn animals were either to be slain or redeemed with money. Leviticus 27 specified that the firstborn of clean animals had to be sacrificed: “. . . no man shall sanctify it; whether it be ox, or sheep: it is the LORD'S” (v. 26b). That meant that it had to die. The firstborn of an unclean animal had to be redeemed by paying their market value plus one-fifth (v. 27).

The one exception was the donkey: it had to be slain by breaking its neck, or else it could be redeemed by the sacrifice of a lamb. We shall consider the reason for this exception later in this chapter. The donkey and the horse were unclean animals. They had hooves, but these hooves were not cloven. To be a clean beast with hooves, it had to have cloven hooves and also chew the cud (Lev. 11:3–7). Horses were comparatively rare in Israel; the donkey was the commonly used beast of transport for man.

As in the case of the Passover feast (Ex. 12:26–27), sons were expected to ask what the meaning of this practice was. The meaning here was the same as the meaning of Passover: (1) the family's deliverance

(positive sanction) through the shedding of a lamb's blood (negative sanction); (2) collecting the inheritance of Egypt (positive sanction) through the death of Egypt's firstborn (negative sanction).

As already mentioned, unclean animals were not to be killed; they were instead redeemed by a payment. "Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem" (Num. 18:15). A money payment had to be substituted for Israelite firstborn males and unclean animals. Was the link here based on Israelite firstborn as judicially unclean? No, but they, like unclean beasts, were not eligible to serve as literal sacrifices. So, a substitute payment was mandatory. After the rebellion of the golden calf incident, the required sacrifice was specified by God as economic. It had not been specified prior to this incident.

The firstborn son, who before the revolt was the son who extended the father's strength, became an economic liability compared to his brothers. The rejoicing of fathers was reduced by the expense of this sacrifice. God had delivered His firstborn son on the night of the first Passover. After the rebellion at Sinai, something associated retroactively with the deliverance from Egypt led to God's imposition of a cost associated with the firstborn.³ The close association of this law with the Passover regulations (Ex. 13:2–3) pointed to the Passover as the definitive event.

D. The Levites as Substitutes

When Israel in the wilderness abandoned the God of their deliverance and pressured Aaron to construct a golden calf, the nation allied itself spiritually with a false god. The Levites subsequently came to the defense of God's name by joining Moses in imposing the sanction of blood. They executed 3,000 men (Ex. 32:28). This became the basis of their blessing from God: "For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day" (Ex. 32:29). Their deliverance from the curse of Jacob (Gen. 49:7) was made possible by

3. This points to a fundamental biblical principle: God must sacrifice something when He delivers His people. He sacrifices what Abraham was asked to sacrifice: His son. Abraham was offered a substitute to save his son: a ram (Gen. 22:13). Israel on Passover night was offered a substitute to save a firstborn son: a lamb. These substitutions were possible only because God did not substitute a lesser sacrifice for His son.

their participation in the shedding of blood. The 3,000 executions were representative sacrifices that placated God's wrath against the nation. The Levites became the nation's priestly tribe because of their willingness to participate in what was in part an atoning sacrifice and in part a defense of God's name.

They gained a unique inheritance because of this. They would henceforth receive redemption money from the other tribes. This substitute payment benefitted the other tribes, who were released from an obligation that would otherwise have bound firstborn sons. The theological debate is over what that obligation was, as we shall see. What is clear is that the Levites did not pay this redemption money to themselves or to the priests, since they had been chosen by God to serve Him as representatives of the nation. They did not make a substitute payment, for they had become the substitute payment.

The Levites became the priestly tribe after the golden calf incident. They also became substitutes for the firstborn sons. The question is: Why did the firstborn sons need substitutes? The traditional Jewish answer is that firstborn sons would have had to become priests if the Levites had not replaced them. Rashi,⁴ the eleventh-century commentator, argued along these lines.⁵ Samson Raphael Hirsch, the intellectual founder of what in his day came to be called Orthodox Judaism, wrote in the nineteenth century: "By the transference of the service of the Sanctuary from the firstborn to the Levites, the consecration of the firstborn is not removed. They remain, unaffected by the transference, consecrated to God."⁶

The problem with this argument is that the context does not indicate sacrifice in the sense of personal service to God. The context indicates sacrifice in the sense of execution. The firstborn animals were not given to the priests for their use; on the contrary, they were either killed or redeemed. Unclean animals had to be redeemed with money. Why? Because they could not serve as sacrificial substitutes.

There is nothing in the texts governing the firstborn to indicate that the firstborn son had some unique claim on priestly service. The Bible never says that a firstborn son under the Old Covenant would automatically have become a family priest in the household of his fath-

4. Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo) Yizchaki.

5. Rashi, *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, trans. A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, [1934] 1985 [Jewish year: 5745]), IV, p. 11 (Num. 3:12–15).

6. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, 5 vols. (Gateshead, London: Judaica Press, [1875?] 1989), IV, *Numbers*, p. 29 (Num. 3:13).

er. Both Cain and Abel offered priestly sacrifices, not just Cain (Gen. 4:3–4). By the time a man reached 30 years old, the age of Mosaic priestly service (Num. 4:47), he would probably have been the head of his own family.

Someone had to serve as a priest, but this office was not said to be a monopoly of firstborn sons. Prior to the golden calf incident, Moses used young men of Israel as assistants: “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD” (Ex. 24:4–5). Non-Levites originally had duties associated with offering sacrifices.

The rabbis are correct about one thing: the firstborn sons were indeed consecrated by God. They were consecrated in the same way that firstborn sons in Egypt had been consecrated: as *covenantal representatives of the nation's future*. The mark of their unique status was their inheritance of a double portion. Their judicially consecrated status became an enormous threat to them at the golden calf incident. Because of the rebellion of their parents, the firstborn sons of Israel became the judicial equivalent of the firstborn sons of Egypt: under a curse. These sons were in need of another blood atonement: the judicial equivalent of Passover lambs.

God substituted others in order to save the firstborn sons: 3,000 of their fathers. The Levites served as the priests in this atoning sacrifice. *They slew 3,000 men, who became the judicial equivalent of Passover lambs*. The Levites became executioners because the men had become idolaters, just as the Egyptians had been. Had the Levites not acted to execute 3,000 representatives of Israel, God would have slain the firstborn sons. The firstborn sons of Israel, apart from the bloody service of the Levites, were as deserving of death as the firstborn sons of Egypt had been. God substituted the Levites and the redemption payment system, not for the sake of some hypothetical, God-consecrated priestly role for Israel's firstborn, but for the sake of *the firstborn sons' judicial status as condemned representatives of the nation's future*: point four of the biblical covenant—sanctions—in relation to point five, succession.

As in the case of Egypt, Israel's inheritance would have been cut off had God imposed this negative sanction. If the Israelites on the pre-adoption Passover night were in replacement-rate mode, then the fu-

ture of the nation would have been completely cut short apart from a program of adoption. Only daughters would have remained. They would have had to marry adopted sons of the mixed multitude. But more to the point covenantally, the destruction of firstborn sons would have left the Ark of the Covenant undefended in the next generation.

E. Bloodless Execution

A redemption payment was mandatory for the firstborn sons. It was also mandatory for unclean animals. The exceptional case was the donkey. Here, the owner had a choice: *break its neck or redeem it with a slain lamb*. This is repeated twice in Exodus. “And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem” (Ex. 13:13). “But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty” (Ex. 34:20). What was the reason for the link between a redemption payment for donkeys and men?

First, consider the fact that the donkey had to be killed in a special way: a broken neck. No other sacrifice in the Mosaic Covenant was by broken neck. What was the relevance of a broken neck? *It was execution without bloodshed*. Every other animal sacrifice involved the knife. The sacrificed animal’s blood was used in the ceremony as a sign of atonement. But this animal sacrifice was unique: no blood. It was therefore not a means of atonement. It was a sacrifice strictly in the sense of an economic loss.

Second, this law was given prior to the Mosaic dietary laws. But there was an earlier dietary law in force. If an animal remained in a bloodless condition, its carcass became valueless; its flesh could not be eaten. *No animal could be eaten lawfully with its blood still in it*. The context of this dietary law was God’s covenant with Noah—specifically, the provision dealing with the killing of men. “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:4–6). So, the sacrifice of the firstborn donkey was exclusively a negat-

ive economic sanction. Neither the owner nor the priest could eat it or use its carcass if it remained in an uncut state. The implication was that it could not be skinned after its death, for it was to be killed with its blood intact.

Third, the substitute for the firstborn donkey was a lamb. *This is the only case in the Mosaic law of an animal's substituting for the first-born.* Clean animals had to be slain; firstborn sons had to be redeemed by a payment of five shekels; unclean animals had to be redeemed by a money payment of its market value plus one-fifth—the payment associated with the Levitical redemption payments.⁷ But the donkey was unique: its redemption required the sacrifice of a lamb.

Fourth, the sacrifice of the donkey was *symbolic of the Passover* in two ways. First, the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt was bloodless. God executed them directly without the use of any implement. This was not a ritual execution in the normal sacrificial sense, for there had been no knife. It was also not warfare in the traditional sense, for there had been no weapons. It was uniquely the intervention of God. Second, without the covering of a lamb's blood on the doorposts, the firstborn of Egypt perished. But so would the firstborn of Israel. The life of the firstborn sons of Israel on the Passover night in Egypt was spared only by shedding a lamb's blood.

Fifth, *the slain lamb could be eaten by the priest.* This substitution converted an unmitigated economic loss (slain donkey) into a benefit for the priest (slain lamb).

All this leads me to a conclusion. *Any firstborn son who was not redeemed by a money payment was considered to be the judicial equivalent of a donkey with a broken neck.* But the firstborn Egyptians had also been the judicial equivalent of donkeys with broken necks: bloodless victims of God's wrath. This symbolism pointed to an unredeemed firstborn son as the judicial equivalent of a firstborn Egyptian: under God's wrath. He would therefore not have been entitled to be circumcised. He would have become a *disinherited son*. If his father circumcised him anyway, the son would thereby have been placed under the negative sanctions of the covenant. He would then have had his ecclesiastical membership taken away: excommunication. This would have left him without citizenship.⁸ He would not have been allowed to inherit his share of his father's land—the double portion (Deut. 21:17).

7. Leviticus 5:16; 6:5; 27:9–15, 19, 27, 31.

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 54:F.

F. The Firstborn Sons of Levi

The firstborn son received a special inheritance (Deut. 21:17). The presence of such an inheritance is what identified the recipient as a firstborn son. Because of their firstborn legal status, the Levites were entitled to payments from the other tribes for every firstborn son (Num. 3:47). Because of their firstborn legal status as God's firstborn (Ex. 4:22), the Israelites were entitled to restitution payments for their forced servitude in Egypt, which they collected from inheritances that would otherwise have gone to the dead firstborn sons of Egypt (Ex. 12:35–36). It is in this context that we should interpret Numbers 5:5–8:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed. But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him.

This law was an extension of the law of restitution found in Leviticus 6:5. It was a law that penalized sin by requiring a restitution payment of 20 percent. But it also rewarded voluntary confession, since the penalty for theft was normally double restitution (Ex. 22:4), and could be four-fold (dead or sold sheep) or five-fold (dead or sold ox) (Ex. 22:1).⁹

This extension of the law specified the priest as the final claimant to both the replacement and restitution payments. If the victim could not be located or was dead, then his relative would receive the payment. If the relative could not be located, then the priest received it. There was no escape from the trespasser's liability. By identifying the priest as a person with a final claim on the property, the Mosaic law made clear the legal status of the priests: God's firstborn sons among the Levites. *Their responsibility before God was greater than that of any other judicially representative group in Israel.*¹⁰

There is no New Covenant principle that would remove this first-

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 4, section on "The Priestly Office."

born legal status of the institutional church. As the guardian of the civil oath, the institutional church still performs a judicial function of the Mosaic priesthood. It is this function that entitles the church to payments from convicted criminals.¹¹

G. Monetary Policy

In Numbers, God specified the firstborn son's redemption price: five shekels of the sanctuary (Num. 3:47). Five shekels of silver were also the entry price for a male child adopted into the tribe of Levi (Lev. 27:6).¹² Because the judicial intent in both cases was related to Levitical inheritance, the shekels must have been of the same value.

A currency unit could be called a shekel, but the priestly shekel was mandatory for making payments to God's ecclesiastical agents. In times of widespread monetary debasement (Isa. 1:22), God could not be lawfully cheated by those who would have offered a shekel of lower value, even if both currency units were called "shekel." It would have been a profane act to offer such a debased payment to the Levites.¹³ Every time the shekel of the sanctuary is mentioned, the text says that it weighs 20 gerahs.¹⁴ This informed the nation what the sanctuary's shekel weighed. People could then compare the market's shekel with the sanctuary shekel. This would keep the moneychangers more honest. The priesthood also would have greater difficulty debasing their shekel. If this judicial connection is correct, then the priestly shekel was originally intended by God to become the standard for the weight and fineness of silver for the other currency units specified as shekels.

Conclusion

God's slaying of Egypt's firstborn identified Him as the nation's blood avenger—the kinsman-redeemer—on their behalf. Only a slain lamb would have protected the Egyptians. God executed the firstborn of Egypt in a bloodless manner, just as Israelites were subsequently required to kill every firstborn donkey that they chose not to redeem with a slain lamb. The firstborn male donkey was symbolic of the first-born sons in Egypt, whether Egyptian or Israelite. Only the shed blood of a lamb could save them.

The Israelites owed the Levites payment because the Levites had

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

12. On the entry price system, see *ibid.*, ch. 36.

13. This would explain the presence of money-changers in the temple area (John 2:14–15).

14. Exodus 30:13; Leviticus 27:25; Numbers 3:47; 18:16; Ezekiel 45:12.

shed blood on their behalf. The Levites had saved Israel from the judgment of God (Ex. 32). God separated them from the other tribes because they were His agents of wrath as well as His agents of sacrificial substitution: blood avengers and kinsman-redeemers. They were the agents of sacrifice, both as recipients of the sacrificial funds and as guardians of the place of sacrifice. They were holy.

God brought sanctions on Passover night: positive for Israel and negative for Egypt. This changed the judicial status of firstborn sons in Israel. Before the first Passover night, the birth of the firstborn son was exclusively a positive event: the extension of a man's strength. After the first Passover night, the firstborn sons of Israel were set apart by God. They were His. They were His, not in the sense of priestly servants, but in the sense of being destined for execution, yet unfit as altar sacrifices. This was the symbolic negative sanction hanging over the head of every family: the threat of disinheritance by execution. To save the firstborn son's double inheritance after the golden calf incident, each family had to redeem the firstborn son with a payment of five shekels to the Levites. Without this, the firstborn son forfeited his inheritance in Israel: a mark of God's curse on the family. This law was imposed only after the construction of the tabernacle. This sanctified the Levites as permanent substitutes for the firstborn sons.

The specification of five shekels of silver paid to the Levites as the Levitical adoption entry price, as well as the redemption price for firstborn sons, indicates that the shekel of the sanctuary was to serve as a standard for Israel's money payment system. The five shekels referred to silver. Any debasing of the currency would be detected. The shekel of the sanctuary was to remain a monetary standard that was free from political control. This unit of exchange was not to be tampered with by the priests; thus, it would condemn any other currency that was called a shekel but which did not contain 20 gerahs of silver.

The New Covenant has substituted baptism for circumcision. There is no longer any difference between sons and daughters with respect to their required subjection to a covenant sign. The annulment of Passover and the transfer of covenantal sanctions to the Lord's Supper ended the judicial discontinuity in Israel's history that Passover imposed on Israel. This law was unique to Mosaic Israel. The unique covenantal threat to firstborn sons no longer exists.

5

BLESSING AND NAMING

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise [in this way] ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them (Num. 6:22–27).

The theocentric focus of this law is obvious: God is the source of predictable covenantal blessings in history, i.e., positive sanctions. The Israelites were required to accept God's name as marking their family status among the nations: God's firstborn son (Ex. 4:22–23). Aaron and his sons publicly placed (invoked: NASB) God's name on the people of Israel. This invocation of the blessing was linked to their authority to invoke God's name on the sons of Israel. If the people remained faithful to God's covenant law, they would receive the positive sanctions that God promised to bring upon them (Lev. 26:3–12). Naming them placed them formally under the sanctions.

The sanctions listed here were positive. The specific one was peace (v. 26). This was the exodus generation's number-one goal. They did not want to fight. They wanted peace. God told them how to attain it: not by avoiding the conquest of Canaan but by avoiding evil. They viewed peace as the absence of negative sanctions. This was wrong. *Peace is the extension of God's kingdom in history.* "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The

zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:6–7). Peace therefore necessarily involves *the imposition of negative sanctions on evil*: Satan's kingdom of man.

Peace with God comes through covenantal faithfulness. By explicitly invoking positive sanctions, the priests were implicitly also invoking negative sanctions. Presumably, the main one was war: the absence of peace for God's enemies. There is no escape from the two-fold nature of God's covenantal sanctions. To place yourself under His blessings, you must also place yourself under His cursings. Both blessing and cursing come in terms of His law (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

The sanction of peace was visible. It was important for this sanction to be universally respected and sought after, for it was to serve as a testimony to pagan nations. The Psalmist wrote: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah" (Ps. 67:1–4). The positive covenantal sanction—"saving health" or "salvation" (*yeshuw'ah*)—was to remind men of the reality of God's covenantal stipulations: "thy way." God judges the nations of the earth; they are all bound by the cross-boundary stipulations¹ of His covenant; He brings predictable corporate sanctions in terms of these stipulations.

Who was under God's special covenantal sanctions, as distinguished from His common-grace, cross-boundary sanctions (e.g., Nineveh in Jonah's day)? That person who was under oath-bound covenantal authority and who therefore bore God's name. Who invoked the name of God and the name of the person? The sons of Aaron and those with priestly authority who were operating under their jurisdiction. Had their invocation of God's blessings not been followed by covenantal blessings, this would have called into question their authority to name the people. This is why one sign of forfeited authority by the priesthood was the failure of the blessings to appear. This surely was what the drought in Elijah's day was all about: the failure of the gods invoked by the priests of Ahab's Israel to bring corporate blessings.

Why did these blessings have to be invoked publicly by the sons of Aaron? First, because Aaron's sons were the guardians of the four cov-

1. On cross-boundary laws, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion:C4.

enantal oaths of society: marital (Num. 5), personal (Num. 6), civil,² and ecclesiastical. Second, they were God's highest judicial representatives between God and man, which is why they conducted the altar's sacrifices, and why their family representative, the high priest, alone had lawful access to the inner sanctum of the tabernacle: the holy of holies (Ex. 30:10). As such, they interpreted God's word authoritatively. The ordained representatives of a society serve as the interpreters of the law. They possess lawful authority to enforce the law. Enforcement involves the imposition of sanctions. Without sanctions, their interpretations are mere opinion.

A. Sanctions and Law

The sons of Aaron could lawfully invoke God's positive covenantal sanctions in history because they possessed priestly authority. The biblical state lawfully imposes only negative sanctions. It bears the sword, but it is not a God-designated agency of healing.³ The church, however, is an agency of positive sanctions. It does not possess the sword; it cannot lawfully impose punishment on all those living within specified geographical boundaries. It cannot lawfully impose physical punishment. It imposes its judgments judicially and verbally: speaking in God's name as His agent.

Here is a fundamental judicial principle: *no sanctions—no law*. If the state cannot lawfully impose sanctions on those who have violated a civil law, then this law is nothing more than one opinion among many. It is not a civil law.

He who speaks officially in the name of the law must be able either to impose or invoke predictable sanctions in terms of this law. If he cannot do this, then his authority is compromised. If there are no sanctions attached to his interpretation of the law, then his authority is specious. He is not to be taken seriously as a representative; at best he is an insightful commentator.

Invocation is verbal. The invocation calls forth God's sanctions, either in history or eternity. If God has not authorized this invocation, then the invoker is either a charlatan or very confused about his au-

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 6: "Guardian of the Civil Oath."

3. A state that claims the right to impose positive sanctions has become messianic. Its healing comes from its exercise of monopolistic power: the sword and wealth collected by means of the sword. The messiah's healing power does not come from confiscated wealth. This is why the messianic state is a pretender. It exercises power in the name of healing through coercion.

thority in this instance. We can see this most clearly in the two Mosaic laws governing prophets.

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee (Deut. 13:1–5).

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:20–22).

The false prophet was marked by either of two ways: (1) he prophesied an event, it came to pass, and then he told people to worship another god; (2) he foretold the future in God's name, but the event did not come to pass. A false prophet had to be executed. This is why the false priests on Mt. Carmel were executed by Elijah (I Kings 18:40): they had prophesied the falling of fire on the sacrifice, but nothing happened; they had also called people to worship false gods. The agent of the sanction of execution, Elijah, had prophesied that the fire would fall on the sacrifice when he invoked God's name; it did. He had called on the people to decide: worship God or Baal (I Kings 18:21).

The reason why these two Mosaic laws no longer apply under the New Covenant is that the special office of prophet no longer exists. Men can lawfully speak prophetically in God's name of sanctions in general following sins in general, but they are not given accurate insights into the future. We see the future as through a glass darkly

today (I Cor. 13:12). Because no one can legitimately claim the lawful prophetic authority to direct the imposition of negative civil sanctions under the New Covenant, which was not the case in Elijah's day, the Mosaic Covenant's negative civil sanctions against false prophets no longer apply. Because the Old Covenant office of prophet has been annulled with the completed text of the Bible, the civil laws governing false prophecy have also been annulled. Excommunication by the church has replaced execution by the state in the matter of false prophecy. If there were still prophets among us, then we would still need the negative sanction of capital punishment to protect society from false prophecy.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, God's sanctions visibly followed the spoken word of a true prophet. This was the basis of his authority to demand the imposition of civil sanctions: to deflect God's corporate negative sanctions. (The same justification undergirds civil sanctions everywhere, in every era.) A false prophet was under the threat of execution: his invoked heavenly sanctions might not come to pass. He who claimed the authority to invoke heavenly sanctions also could invoke civil sanctions; he was therefore under these sanctions. As a false prophet, he was also a false witness. The penalty for being a false prophetic witness in God's name was death, for such testimony invoked God's name in an evil cause: a violation of the third commandment (Ex. 20:7).⁴ If there had been no covenantal correlation between sanctions invoked and sanctions perceived, the Mosaic civil law governing the false prophet (Deut. 18:20–22) would not have been enforceable. Guilt or innocence was determined by the presence of cause and effect: verbal cause followed by visible effect. This is no longer the case in the New Covenant because the New Covenant has not retained the covenantal connection between heavenly sanctions invoked and heavenly sanctions imposed. This is because covenantally authoritative revelation ceased with the closing of the canon of Scripture.⁵

Numbers 5 established the law of the accused wife. Her husband accused her of sexual immorality; under oath she denied it. She took a loyalty oath before her husband, the priest, and God. The priest then subjected her to a rite. If she was guilty, there would be visible mani-

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 2, *Decalogue and Dominion*, ch. 23.

5. Revelation from God in the sense of unique personal insights still exists because the Holy Spirit guides individual men into truth, but such revelation is not covenantally authoritative.

festations in her body. If she was innocent, nothing would happen. The visible results testified to her guilt or innocence. She and her husband had to accept these results as judicially binding. This jealousy testing had meaning only within the context of a covenantally predictable cause-and-effect relationship binding the oath, rite, and visible sanctions.

B. Natural Law, Random Events, and Dialecticism

There are three ways of denying the covenantal relationship that unites God's Bible-revealed law, man's formal oath, and God's predictable historical sanctions. One is to appeal to an unbreakable natural law which admits no deviations and therefore no miracles. Second, appeal to a realm of chance in which every event is infused with an element of randomness. Third, appeal to law and chance simultaneously. The twentieth century manifested all three approaches, with the third becoming more popular since the discovery of quantum physics in the late 1920s. But the theoretical conflict between impersonal fate and impersonal chance has always been with mankind. So have attempts to put the two together in a dialectical relationship.

Throughout history, men have asked themselves at key points in history: Is this God's special intervention or merely causes familiar to man? Under the Old Covenant, men devised tests that would tell them whether God was specially involved. The most famous incident in the Bible was Gideon's testing of the fleece: wet fleece, dry ground; dry fleece, wet ground (Jud. 6:37–40). But there were others. Moses' challenge to Korah and Dathan was one. "And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD" (Num. 16:28–30).

There were times when God's intervention in history was understood even by covenant-breakers. When the inhabitants of each successive Philistine city in which the stolen Ark of the Covenant resided came down with boils, the civil rulers recognized their problem. They came to the priests for counsel. The priests recommended a test: "Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there

hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring. their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us” (I Sam. 6:7–9). It was not chance; it was God.⁶ The oxen walked into Israel (v. 12).

In the depths of philosophical despair, the author of Ecclesiastes wrote: “All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Eccl. 9:2–3).⁷ This way lies madness, as he understood. He returned to law and sanctions at the end: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁸

C. The Place of God’s Name

To name a thing is to assert authority over it. Adam named the animals; he also named Eve. The sons of Aaron placed God’s name on the Israelites: “And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them” (Num. 6:27). *They were asserting their authority over the people.* As priests who were lawfully invested by God with this authority, they could lawfully invoke God’s blessings in history on those under their authority, which meant under God’s authority.

The sons of Aaron could lawfully draw close to the dwelling place of God. This was their special authority. The dwelling place of God was the dwelling place of God’s holy name. “Then there shall be a

6. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 33.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 45.

8. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD" (Deut. 12:11). King Darius also recognized this: "And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed" (Ezra 6:12).

Proximity to the heavenly throne of God is proximity to His sanctions, both heavenly and earthly (Job 2; Rev. 6:10). Proximity to His earthly dwelling place means proximity to His earthly sanctions. The sons of Aaron were in closest proximity to God's earthly throne: the Ark of the Covenant. Thus, they were closest to His earthly sanctions. They could lawfully invoke His positive sanctions because they lived in proper fear of His negative sanctions. They knew what had happened to Nadab and Abihu: strange fire had brought consuming fire (Lev. 10:1–2). Those who submitted themselves to the authority of the sons of Aaron submitted themselves to God's name. This was the judicial basis of their participation in the predictable corporate blessings of God under the Mosaic Covenant. What was this name? With respect to His general authority over history, His is the self-existent name: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Ex. 3:13–14). With respect to His special manifestations within Israel's history, He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was, judicially speaking, the God of the covenant. This covenant extends across time. At the close of his life, Moses told the generation of the conquest:

That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day (Deut. 29:12–

15). . . . Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven (Deut. 29:18–20).

When a person under the oath-bound covenant has God's name removed from him, his name is blotted out in history. The curses will come on him if he fails to repent and take up God's name again. This is the structure of biblical law. But who formally removed God's name from a person under the Mosaic Covenant? The final earthly authority to do this was the priesthood, with the sons of Aaron comprising the high court prior to the exile.

When the sons of Aaron departed into apostasy under Eli, the nation lost the war with the Philistines. The Ark was lawfully removed from the tabernacle in times of war. But in Eli's day, it was captured on the battlefield by the Philistines (I Sam. 4). After the Philistines sent the Ark back by cart, it was not immediately returned to the tabernacle. The sons of Aaron no longer offered sacrifices in the presence of the Ark. Only under David's kingship was the Ark returned to Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:17).

D. Good News from False Prophets

For the priests to have blessed Israel when Israel was in rebellion would itself have been an act of rebellion. This would have been a public manifestation of the nation's covenantal rebellion. To call down God's blessings on rebellious people is to break covenant with God. The mark of a false priesthood was the invocation of God's blessing of peace on a nation in ethical rebellion. Even Ahab, the consummate evil king of Israel, understood this. He knew the difference between a prophet who told him what he wanted to hear and a prophet who told him the truth. He just refused to listen to the truth.

And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand. And

the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak. So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD? And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? (1 Kings 22:12–18).

Micaiah then went on to warn the king regarding the supernatural source of the good news announced by the king's official prophets:

And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee (1 Kings 22:19–23).⁹

9. North, *Disobedience and Defeat*, ch. 23. That this spirit was evil is clear from the context. Prior to Christ's ministry, Satan had access to the court of heaven (Job 2). After the crucifixion, he no longer had such access. "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12:7–12).

The true prophet announced that God had sent a lying spirit to deceive both the false prophets and the king. God did this to false prophets under the Mosaic Covenant, in order to destroy them publicly as testimonies to the nation. “And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel” (Ezek. 14:9). Not every false prophet was a lying prophet; some reported accurately the messages of lying spirits. They were deceived prophets. Micaiah graciously revealed the true source of the false prophecy to the king. One of the prophets struck him (I Kings 22:24). Micaiah pronounced a curse on him (v. 25). Then the king brought the negative sanction of imprisonment against Micaiah (vv. 26–27). The truth of the matter would be revealed in terms of whose negative sanctions prevailed.

There had been sufficient covenantal awareness on the part of the king to know that he needed another opinion. He had also recognized that Micaiah had been lying to him by giving him the initial good news. Micaiah had deliberately uttered false words to him, just as God had lied to Ahab’s new set of priests—the first set had perished on Mt. Carmel (I Kings 18:40)—through the lying spirit. Micaiah at first told him what he wanted to hear. But the king knew better. He recognized false words when he heard them in the mouth of a prophet of God. This was no court prophet hired by the king and his wife. Ahab knew what Micaiah’s God was planning for him; he had been warned by Elijah: “And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine” (I Kings 21:19). He was determined to prove Elijah and Micaiah wrong.

Ahab commanded his guards to imprison Micaiah. Micaiah then offered another word of prophecy, also connected to God’s visible sanctions in history: “And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Harken, O people, everyone of you” (I Kings 22:28). The positive sanction of peace would be the public test. If peace came to Israel, Micaiah was the false prophet and therefore had to be executed (Deut. 18:20–22). If peace did not come, then the court prophets were deserving of execution.

Ahab took the prophet’s words seriously enough to disguise himself before going into battle (I Kings 22:30). This did him no good. He did not return alive. “And a certain man drew a bow at a venture [in

his simplicity], and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded" (v. 34). There was nothing random about this event, despite the bowman's lack of knowledge regarding the identity of his target. Ahab died. "And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake" (1 Kings 22:38). Three prophecies had come to Ahab regarding his end; two were true and one was official. He knew the difference. He sought to kill the first unofficial prophet (Elijah) and imprisoned the second (Micaiah). But he knew the difference. He sought to bring negative sanctions against those true prophets who invoked God's name and His curses. He listened—i.e., decided his course of action—to false prophets who invoked God's name and His blessings. God then brought negative sanctions against him, as prophesied.

Conclusion

Aaron and his sons invoked God's name and God's positive sanctions on the nation. They could do this lawfully only because they were the highest anointed ecclesiastical representatives between God and Israel. This invocation of God's name publicly placed Israel under the terms of God's covenant: His law. This was an act of corporate covenant renewal, for Israel as a nation had already covenanted with God in Exodus 19. God's name was already on them. They were supposed to understand that when the blessing of peace came, this was not an impersonal event, either random or by the nation's military power. It was God's gift to the nation, either in response to their covenantal faithfulness or as a prelude to His negative sanctions against their pretended autonomy: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).¹⁰

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

6

THE ALTAR OFFERING

And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them; That the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered: And they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle (Num. 7:1–3).

The theocentric issue here is lawful sacrifice. The builders completed the tabernacle on the first day of the first month (Ex. 40:17). Moses then finished the interior (Ex. 40:18–30). Numbers 7 begins with the completion of the tabernacle. There can be no doubt: this is the same event.¹ So, Numbers 7 backtracks 30 days, for the events of Numbers 1 took place on the first day of the second month (Num. 1:18).

The princes or chieftains of Israel delivered the offering to Moses. God instructed Moses to distribute the carts and oxen to the families of Gershon and Merari, but not to Kohath, which was Moses' family. Kohath was closest to the Ark of the Covenant. This created a special holiness burden. "But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because

1. Milgrom saw a major problem here. If the text is taken at face value, the donations began on the day the tabernacle was completed. This was the first day of the first month (Ex. 40:17). Passover began on the 14th day (Ex. 12:18). This means that if the offerings brought by the chieftains were actually sacrificed on the day they were presented to the priests, the priests had to do the work. But they had not yet been consecrated. Thus, he concludes, the phrase "in the day" is mistranslated. It should be merely "when"—an indeterminate timing. The sacrifices were made after Passover. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), pp. 362–64. A simpler way to solve this problem is to say that the offerings were not immediately sacrificed when presented. They were kept by the priests for subsequent sacrifice.

the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders" (Num. 7:9). The closer to the inner circle, the greater the ritual responsibility, the greater the danger of profanity, and the greater the holiness of those serving. In contrast, the closer a Levite was to the non-Levitical tribes, the larger the required physical burden of sacrifice on behalf of these tribes.

Levite families that were closer to the outer rings of holiness bore the brunt of the physical burdens: transporting the implements of the tabernacle and defending the Ark from the first wave of any attack on the holy of holies. The two families in the outer rings of holiness were given the primary burden of transporting the implements of sacrifice, for they lawfully bore the implement of defense: the sword. They were the sanctions-bringers against invaders: Merari first and then Gershon. Twice as many wagons filled with offerings went to Merari as to Gershon (Num. 7:7–8) because Merari had to transport twice as much. Merari served in the outer ring of the three concentric circles of authority.² The last line of defense was Kohath. More of the Kohathites would survive an unsuccessful attack than the Gershonites; more of Gershon would survive than Merari. Conversely, God would kill more of the Kohathites than the Gershonites for profane acts, while Gershon was more at risk than Merari.

A. Equal Tribal Assessments

This offering was the offering for the altar. The earlier offering had been for the construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 36:3). Numbers 7 recounts in detail the same story a dozen times: one day per tribe. It lists what each of the tribal princes placed in the wagons. Each prince represented one tribe; each offering was the same.

And his offering was one silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering: One spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense: One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering: One kid of the goats for a sin offering: And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year (Num. 7:13–17a).

There was no distinction sacrificially among the 12 tribes in terms of their wealth or population. They all owed four of the five sacrifices:

2. Chapter 3:B:2.

whole burnt offering (point one), meal (tribute, allegiance)³ offering (point two), peace offering (point three), and sin (purification) offering (point four). They did not owe a guilt (reparation) offering (point five), which has no corporate aspect.⁴ The Israelites had not sinned against men; they had sinned against God.

The offering was delivered to the tabernacle by princes, i.e., men who served as civil officers. The text does not say how they had apportioned the required offering among the families. We know only that they brought an equal offering for each tribe. This means that larger tribes paid less per capita⁵ than smaller tribes did. Poorer tribes per capita paid as much as wealthy tribes. The principle of proportional taxation did not apply in this instance, i.e., the principle of the tithe. In this case, the assessment was tribal, not personal. It was not a tax; it was an offering. It had to do with the body of the nation as a called-out body of believers. They were represented by princes, probably not in the latter's legal capacity as civil officers but in their capacity as warrior-priests. The nation had been numbered already, before the building of the tabernacle (Ex. 38:25–26). The holy army was now in service.

In the case of atonement offerings, each fighting man was numbered, and each paid a half shekel of silver (Ex. 38:26). In the case of the altar offering, each tribe paid the assessment owed by every other tribe. In the language of modern economics, these assessments were regressive: they weighed more heavily on the poor than the rich.⁶ This was also true of the individual assessments at each national mustering. Of course, because the wealth of the Israelites at this time had been ex-

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 2:A.

4. Sacrificial offerings had to be male; personal offerings could be female. The purification offering had to be female (Lev. 4:28, 32). Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 363. Milgrom neglected to mention that the ruler's reparation offering had to be male (Lev. 4:23). It was the common person's offering that had to be female. Masculinity under the Mosaic covenant was associated in the civil covenant with rulership, femininity with subordination. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, p. 93.

5 Technically, per caput: singular.

6. This analysis assumes that we can make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, which we cannot do scientifically; we can only do this as ethicists, which is what economists officially want to avoid at all costs, or at least very high marginal costs. Unofficially, the only way they can make any practical recommendations is to assume that they can make such comparisons. See Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5:B; North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix H (1990): "The Epistemological Problem of Social Cost."

tracted from the Egyptians as their lawful restitution for having been made slaves, we do not know what the original distribution of wealth was. Perhaps it was close to equality. It is extremely important to point out that, because these offerings were not civil taxes, they throw no light on proper civil tax policy.⁷

B. Cleansing Before Service Begins

After the gifts were delivered to Moses, he spoke to God. God told him to light the lamps, which Aaron did (Num. 8:1–3). Then came the next step: “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean” (vv. 5–7). Once they were cleansed, it was time for a meat (meal) offering (v. 8a), the offering associated with priestly authority,⁸ and a sin or purification offering (v. 8b). This was to take place in front of the assembly (v. 9), who were the representatives of the congregation.⁹ First, however, the transfer of representative authority had to pass from the assembly to the Levites by laying on of hands. “And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites” (v. 10). This is a very important principle: *biblical authority flows downward from God and upward from the people*. The Levites represented the people before God and represented God before the people. Their authority was mediatorial. God’s acceptance of their sacrifices judicially sealed the first; the laying on of hands judicially sealed the second.

Aaron offered the Levites as a tribute offering to God: “And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD” (v. 11). To confirm this sacrificial offering of an entire tribe—the representative firstborn—the Levites transferred their offenses symbolically to the two bullocks: one for the whole burnt offering (their judicially dead

7. Rushdoony’s arguments to the contrary have colored the theonomist movement for four decades. He designated as a civil poll tax what was a priestly atonement assessment on all members of God’s holy army. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 281–82. Cf. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 58.

8. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 2.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 4:F.

legal status),¹⁰ the other for their sin offering. “And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites. And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the LORD” (vv. 12–13). Once cleansed ritually, the Levites were ready to be offered to God:

Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine. And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering. For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me. For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself. And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary (vv. 14–19).

First, they washed their clothes (v. 21a); second, Aaron made an atonement offering for them (v. 21b). Only then did they go into full-time service (v. 22).

The Levites had to serve Aaron and his sons for a period of 20 years: from age 30 to age 50.¹¹ After age 50, they still served as assistants, presumably doing lighter physical labor and guard duty.¹² “This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more: But shall minis-

10. James Jordan wrote: “What the sacrifice removes is not sin but death, the judgment for sin. Death having been removed, it is now possible to live a righteous life.” Cited in *ibid.*, ch. 1:A.

11. Numbers 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47. The reading 25 years appears only in Numbers 8:24. There is no textual reconciliation of this problem; commentators from the rabbis to the present have suggested no convincing answer.

12. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 97.

ter with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge” (vv. 24–26).

The Levites would have served under the priests during the three major feasts, when there was need for many servants. In other times, they probably served on a rotating basis. The Levitical cities had Levites as residents; they were not all permanent dwellers living close to the Ark of the Covenant.

All of this took place before the second numbering, for the next section states: “And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season.” (Num. 9:1–2). The Passover was celebrated that month (v. 5), before the second numbering a month later.

The dedication of the gifts took 12 days. Then came the cleansing and dedication of the Levites. It is not clear whether this took place on day 12 or day 13. It did not take place on day 14, since that was the start of Passover: the 14th day of the first month (Num. 9:5).

C. The Secondary Passover

It was at this time that the question was raised concerning ritual cleanliness and distant journeys. Certain men came to Moses and asked him regarding their contact with a dead body. They had not been allowed to make an offering associated with the Passover—presumably, the sacrificial lamb. They were ritually defiled. Moses enquired of God.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it. But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin (Num. 9:9–13).

This indicates that the Passover was the only mandatory annual

feast. In the case of the firstfruits (Pentecost) and tabernacles/booths, a man could stay away if he was on a journey or had been in contact with a dead body. In the case of Passover, however, he was expected to attend. This would have kept journeys from extending too far or too long. It placed commerce under temporal boundaries. Under such strict limits, the only possible justification for a journey that kept a man away from both Passovers would have been a distant missionary journey.¹³

The existence of such a provision in the original law code of Israel indicates that profitable foreign trade was a very real possibility. This in turn points to the existence of foreign trade as a separate occupation, especially for those tribes that had cities on the Mediterranean eastern coast. One modern academic interpretation of the Egyptian, Hittite, and Mesopotamian empires is that these inland empires in the second millennium B.C. did not engage directly in foreign trade, but worked through neutral intermediaries along the Mediterranean's eastern coast.¹⁴ If this interpretation is correct, then this dynastic practice placed Israel in a geographically strategic position, along with the Phoenicians to the south and the trading cities north of Tyre and Sidon, such as Ugarit, which served as a conduit between Greece and the Near Eastern cultures.¹⁵ (Professor Gordon believed that the alphabet went from Ugarit to the Hebrews and Phoenicians to the Greeks.)¹⁶ The costs of land transportation were too high to be profitable except for jewels and other high value commodities, i.e., money assets. This was as true in the ancient world as it was until the invention of the railroad. Not having access to any river that led into the great inland empires, Israel's coastal tribes would have to become

13. To argue that Passover was more important than foreign missions is to misconstrue the importance of ritual in Old Covenant Israel. Righteousness was always more important in God's eyes than ritual when honoring a ritual would have interfered with righteousness. "For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon everyone that prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (II Chron. 30:18–20).

1414. Robert B. Revere, "No Man's Coast': Ports of Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, eds. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Peterson (Chicago: Regnery, [1957] 1971), ch. 4.

15. Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: Norton, 1965), ch. 5.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

world traders in order to prosper. This appears to be what they did.¹⁷

Conclusion

Sinful men cannot make acceptable offerings to God apart from mediation. In this case, a whole system of intermediaries was in operation. The families gave gifts to the tribal leaders; the tribal leaders delivered them to Moses; Moses delivered them to the Levites; the Levites delivered them to Aaron; Aaron delivered them to God as sacrifices for the Levites. The animals and meal were used by Aaron to make an offering in the name of the Levites. The Levites had to be cleansed through washing and sacrificial offerings in order for them to serve as mediatorial substitutes for the nation.

The family of Kohath received none of the altar offerings from the tribal princes. The family of Gershon received half of what the family of Merari received (Num. 7:7–8). Merari had greater responsibilities for transporting the tabernacle's instruments than Gershon had. Merari also had greater responsibility in defending the holy of holies from attackers. Merari was the first line of military defense within the confines of the tabernacle area. Merari was less holy than Gershon; Gershon was less holy than Kohath. The tribe that was most holy received none of the altar offering.

Because the sacrificed animals that were not whole burnt offerings could be eaten by the priests, Gershon and Merari had to share their food offerings with Kohath. The princes had brought no sacrifices for the Kohathites to offer and therefore to participate in a meal. Those who were less holy owed an offering to those who were more holy: from the 12 tribes upward to the Kohathites. The Kohathites were the most holy; so, the other tribes owed sacrifices to them.

17. See North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Introduction:K.

PROGRESSIVE WHINING AND FINAL ACCOUNTING

And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them (Num. 11:1–3).

The theocentric reference of this passage is God's impatience with Israel's pattern of behavior. They were without faith in Him as the deliverer. They had substituted complaining for faith. They had found that by complaining to Moses about their external conditions, they could get what they wanted. They did not pray; they complained. They did not exercise patience; they whined. Because of God's grace, they had gotten what they asked for. This time, they got more than they asked for.

The Israelites were not satisfied with what they possessed in the wilderness.¹ But their problem was not the wilderness. Their problem was their fear of responsibility. They feared freedom. This fear had become visible when Moses and Aaron first challenged Pharaoh to allow the people to go. Pharaoh ceased delivering straw to them for brick-making. "And the officers of the children of Israel did see that they were in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not [di]minish ought from your bricks of your daily task. And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh: And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our

1. The Rolling Stones' 1965 song, *Satisfaction*, made them world-famous. It began with and returned to this ungrammatical complaint: "I can't get no satisfaction." They spoke for the quail-feasting twentieth-century West.

savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Ex. 5:19–21).

A. A List of Priorities

This was only the beginning. When fleeing from Pharaoh's army on Egypt's side of the Red Sea, they complained again. "And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14:10–12). God delivered them by the miracle of the divided waters.

Then they faced a food crisis: "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no" (Ex. 16:2–4). God gave them manna.

This pattern pleased them: whining to Moses followed by gifts from God. So, they repeated it. "And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me" (Ex. 17:1–4). God gave them water out of the rock (v. 6).

They were in a situation in which they were totally dependent on God: the wilderness. It should have been clear to them that God was sustaining them. The natural environment surely wasn't. Yet they still complained. They thought they deserved more blessings. They insisted that the blessings in Egypt had been greater than the blessings in the wilderness. But they had been slaves in Egypt. This fact they ignored. They placed liberty low on their personal scale of values; their memory of leeks and onions was high on the list. So, the absence of the leeks and onions loomed large in their consciousness. Their liberty under Moses required God's sustaining grace, best manifested in the manna. They deeply resented this mark of their dependence.

Their problem was not the absence of leeks and onions. Their problem was their list of priorities. Each person makes decisions in terms of his list of priorities. A man exchanges a bit of this for more of that. God had provided them with water from rocks and manna from the ground, and this had cost them nothing: free grace. They should have responded with thanksgiving. But they could not swallow the manna contentedly because they could not enjoy the blessings of liberty under God contentedly. They placed liberty at the bottom of their list of priorities; they placed food at the top. Paul wrote of this mentality: "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:19).

1. Values and Choice

Modern free market economic theory is individualistic. It begins with the individual's goals, his list of priorities. In theory, there is no way for an economist to speak of a collective list of priorities, because there is no scientific way to make comparisons of different people's value scales.² Nevertheless, such value scales do exist because men act corporately to achieve corporate goals. This is what social policy is all about.

The covenantalist begins with God's covenant, not with the individual or the collective. God's law provides the value scale. His ethical standards for individual behavior tell us what to place where on our personal scale of values. His ethical standards for corporate behavior tell us what to place where on society's scale of values. The story of the

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5. This summarizes the debate in the 1930s between Lionel Robbins (an individualist) and Roy Harrod (a Keynesian).

exodus and the wilderness stands as a warning beacon to men through the ages: *the blessing of liberty under God is ethically preferable to the promise of security under man*. The promise of security under man is a trap leading into slavery: an illusion.

We make choices in terms of four things: what we value (a scale of preferences), what we have (capital), how much time we think we have, and what we know about the relationships among them (a plan). This decision-making procedure operates under God's sovereignty. He, too, has a scale of preferences,³ capital (including mankind),⁴ a time scale (history),⁵ and a plan (decree).⁶ Men choose analogous to God, as creatures. Men act re-creatively, not creatively.

B. Negative Sanctions Applied

Numbers 11 begins with another complaint. We are not told what it was. We are told that God had finally had enough. He began a series

3. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Mic. 6:7-8). "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Cf. Matthew 23:23.

4. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).

5. "And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished" (Dan. 12:7). "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matt. 24:35-36).

6. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:9-11). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, vvho hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:3-5). "For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3).

of lessons that never made any lasting impression on the exodus generation. He responded to their complaint with supernatural fire. This sanction matched His emotion: “His anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them” (v. 1) The people cried out to Moses for relief. Moses prayed to God, and the fire stopped.

The next verse indicates how little they had learned: “And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (4–6). God had answered their request for food a year earlier. They had grown bored with this miracle. They wanted more. Moses wanted out:

Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased. And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight. . . (vv. 10–15a).

God was angry with the people; Moses had a right to be weary. God was patient with Moses. God had Moses bring 70 elders near. “And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone” (v. 17). God promised to give the people flesh to eat the next day (v. 18). But this promise of blessing was to be delivered by Moses in the language of cursing: “Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?” (vv. 19–20).

This time, Moses showed the lack of faith that was later to cost

him entrance into the Promised Land. He asked God rhetorically where all this flesh would come from. His language was reminiscent of Abraham's response to God's promise of a child at age 99. "Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them? (v. 22).⁷ God's response was short and to the point: "Is the LORD's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not" (v. 23). So, God responded to Moses with a challenge: "See if my word comes true." He thereby announced His own prophetic status. "See if my positive sanctions match my promise."

God brought birds in droves, and more than droves. This was an extension of the nation's experience when the manna first appeared: "And it came to pass, that at even[ing] the quails, came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host [camp, NASB]" (Ex. 16:13). Before, they had seen the birds. This time, they would feast on them. Briefly. "And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp" (vv. 31–32).⁸ They began to eat. They had enough food for a month; they would not enjoy it for an hour. "And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague" (v.

7. The phrasing of this seemingly rhetorical question is another piece of evidence that Israel numbered about 2.4 million people. Moses would not have used the rhetoric of all the fish in the sea to describe the requirements of feeding a few thousand people.

8. The Hebrew words "cubits face earth" were translated as "two cubits high upon the face of the earth." This translation cannot be correct. A pile of dead quail three feet high in an area in the range of 713 miles would constitute billions of quail. If it was a day's journey across the camp—say, 30 miles—then the radius was 15 miles. The formula $\pi \times r^2$ gives 731 miles. The phrase "cubits face earth" should be translated as "cubits above the face of the earth," i.e., the height at which the quail flew into the camp: about three feet, where they could be hit with any heavy implement. This was the interpretation of Rashi: "*This means that they were flying at a height of two cubits from the ground so that they reached just up to a man's breast. . . .*" Rashi, *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum, translators, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, [1934] 1985 [Jewish year: 5745]), IV, p. 58 (Num. 11:31).

33). They got more than they had bargained for.

C. Aaron and Miriam

Moses' brother and sister were not satisfied with their authority. "And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it" (Num. 12:2). God brought the three of them into the cloud at the door of the tabernacle. Then He identified Moses as far more than a prophet: "And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently [openly, NASB], and not in dark speeches; and the similitude [likeness] of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (vv. 6–8).

God removed the cloud. Miriam was now leprous. Biblical leprosy was a disease of God's judgment.⁹ God did not strike Aaron, who was a man and had a high office. Miriam was a woman and had no office. Her sin was greater than Aaron's: less justification for demanding authority. Aaron immediately repented before God in both of their names (v. 12). Moses cried to God to heal her, which He did, but not without an additional negative sanction: "And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again" (v. 14). There is no doubt that the people knew all about this; the camp did not move until her week was over (v. 15).

D. Send in the Spies

The time had come to test the nation's readiness for the conquest of Canaan. "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, everyone a ruler among them" (Num. 13:1–2). Men with leadership ability would make the decision about the wisdom of invading Canaan. They would make their decision only after first-hand reconnaissance. They would see with their own eyes the land and its inhabitants. They would

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

calculate with their own minds the risk-reward ratio. Then they would decide. "And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes" (vv. 17–20). They searched the land for 40 days (v. 25).

Their report was delivered in the familiar form: "We've got good news and bad news." First, the good news: "And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou-sendest us, and surely it Howeth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it" (v. 27). Then the bad news: "Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there" (v. 28).

Then came Caleb, who proclaimed, in effect, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." "And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (v. 30).

E. Faith, Facts, and Actions

At this point, the spies' story changed. The bad news was all true; worse, even. "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). Meanwhile, the good news disappeared. The land was nothing; worse, even. "And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature" (v. 32).

Caleb and Joshua believed Israel could win; the others believed they could not. When it looked as though Caleb's report might place them in jeopardy militarily, they revised their report. The potential reward was just not worth the risk. Better to wander; better to eat manna; best of all, to have died. "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the chil-

dren of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!" (Num. 14:1–2). Life was their burden; they feared to lose it in battle. Better to return to slavery: "And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (vv. 3–4).

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the representative assembly (v. 5). Joshua and Caleb remained on their feet and spoke out. The land is good; God will give it to us if He favors us; do not rebel against God or fear the Canaanites (vv. 7–9). Their words were negative sanctions against the people and the other ten spies. The people were ready to respond with more direct sanctions: "But all the congregation bade stone them with stones" (v. 10a).

At that point, God appeared. He was ready to impose comprehensive negative sanctions: "And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they" (vv. 11–12). Moses intervened and offered the most effective prayer there is: an appeal to God's reputation. "And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness" (13–16). Be merciful, therefore; pardon their iniquity (vv. 18–19).

So, God did just that (v. 20). Then He announced another negative sanction: "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it" (vv. 22–23). He also an-

nounced a positive sanction: "But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (v. 24). Then He returned to graphic language: "Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me" (v. 29). But Joshua and Caleb will enter the land (v. 30).

The rebels' children would be placed under a great burden. "And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness" (v. 33). The adults would die off during these years, matching their 40 unproductive days in the wilderness (vv. 34). To verify His words, God slew the ten cowardly spies who had slandered the land, thereby slandering God's promise regarding the land: "And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD" (vv. 36–37).

Always before, when the people repented, the negative sanctions had stopped: Once again, they made a brief repentance (vv. 39–40). Moses understood their chicanery: they planned to show God wrong, again. They would defeat their enemies on their terms. "And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you" (vv. 41–43). They refused to listen. They attacked Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in the area. They were soundly defeated (vv. 43–45).

Israel believed the reports it wanted to hear. When the people heard of the good land filled with big people, they discounted the message of the good land. The spies then revised their initial report: bad land, big people. When God told them they were not able to win a relatively minor battle, they refused to believe Him. They trusted in themselves. They did not trust themselves enough to defeat Canaan. They did trust themselves enough to defeat Amalek. Had they listened to Joshua and Caleb, they would not have had to bother with Amalek; they would have marched straight into Canaan. They lost a minor

battle, yet they could have won a major battle. The issue was their faith in God's word, not comparative size of armies. Faith in God's word is what they lacked.

Conclusion

Evaluation is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions/judgment. The people were supposed to evaluate their situation in terms of God's word, as confirmed by His acts of deliverance in recent history. They refused to believe God's word; therefore, they evaluated their situation incorrectly. They interpreted the historical facts in terms of covenant-breaking standards. They did not use God's word as their standard of evaluation. God brought corporate judgments against them because of this open disbelief.

The Israelites had fallen into a bad habit: whining to Moses to get what they wanted from God. By God's grace, this whining initially resulted in positive sanctions. The problem was, they did not recognize that it was God's grace, not their whining, that had gained them the objects of their desires. Their whining was a public testimony of their lack of faith in God's promises. They focused on the negative side of their journey, ignoring or denying the positive. This was reflected in the spies' revised report: bad land, big people.

The land was good; the land was theirs for the taking. It was not theirs for the asking. They had to take risks on the battlefield. God was going to bring negative sanctions against Canaan; this was an inescapable aspect of His original promise: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). God would bring His judgment when the iniquity of the Amorites was full. The Israelites wanted the positive sanction of the land without the negative sanctions associated with battle. The land was not available on these terms. So, Israel rebelled. They wanted the land on their terms; failing that, they did not want the land at all. So, they did not inherit.

Manna was not good enough; they wanted quail. So, they cried out that manna was bad. The land was not good enough; they wanted it empty of resistance. So, they cried out that the land was bad. What was good they evaluated as bad. They brought formal public judgment against manna and the land. God then brought a covenant lawsuit against them.

They were willing to return to Egypt, thereby disinheriting their

children. In reply, God disinherited them, skipping a generation. It was the parents who were disinherited by God, not the children.

God did not intend that they dwell in the wilderness forever. He wanted them in the Promised Land. But to gain their promised inheritance, they had to have faith in God and then bear the risks of warfare. This is why God begins the Book of Numbers (*bemidbar*: “in the wilderness”) with a military numbering. It pointed to their present condition (wilderness) and the way to a better condition (warfare). Not willing to bear the burden of the risks of warfare, they forfeited their inheritance. They refused to honor the covenantal principle that underlies godly inheritance: “no pain, no gain.” They wanted gain without pain, inheritance without negative sanctions. Anything less than this was not good enough for Israel. They forgot the obvious, which the sacrificial system announced clearly: apart from the means of grace, Israel was not good enough for God.

8

DEFERRED GRATIFICATION

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you, And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto the LORD, of the herd, or of the flock. Then shall he that offereth his offering unto the LORD bring a meat offering of a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of oil. And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt offering or sacrifice, for one lamb (Num. 15:2–5).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's ownership of the Promised Land. When making an offering, the Israelite would have to offer oil, bread, and wine to God. This representative or token offering pointed to God's ownership of the source of bread and wine: the land. This law would come into force only after the inheritance had been delivered. The law did not apply in the wilderness.

Who is the giver of gifts? God. He reasserted His claim on Israel by reminding them of the inevitability of the Promised Land. He promised again to give the land to them. It would be the land of their habitation. This means that it would be the land of God's habitation. Obviously, the wilderness was not to be their place of habitation. It was merely a transitional residence for the younger generation. For the exodus generation, it was a permanent residence. They would die and be buried in the wilderness they hated.

This law was therefore aimed at the generation of the conquest. It was given to the exodus generation early in the wilderness experience, yet it did not relate to them. They knew this in Numbers 15. This is why this section of Numbers 15 is a problem passage. It did not relate to the lives of those who were old enough to obey it.

A. Additional Sacrifices

In Wenham's words, this section of Numbers 15 "baffles commentators."¹ It deals with offerings: burnt offerings, peace offerings, and sin (purification) offerings. God required that meal, oil, and wine accompany these offerings. This requirement did not appear in Leviticus 1–7. Why were these requirements added in Numbers 15?

A fairly simple explanation for this change is the fact that the land would offer benefits that the wilderness did not. There was no way for the Israelites to enjoy wine in the wilderness except by trade with nations that were in nearby lands. There is no record of such trade. Oil was also a problem: no olive trees. The oil offerings in the wilderness were limited. Not so in the Promised Land. There they were required with other sacrifices.

The general principle here is that man sins in the face of an environment that testifies to God. The greater the testimony of God's benefits to man, the greater is man's sin. From that person to whom much has been given, much is expected (Luke 12:48).

The Promised Land was flowing with milk and honey; the wilderness was not. God would be entitled to a share of the fruit of the land when the people entered the land. This applied not just to tithes and voluntary offerings but also to mandatory offerings to cover sin.

This is additional testimony to the fact that God does not call upon man to make huge sacrifices. He warns men that they must not attempt to buy their way out of God's judgment by means of enormous sacrifices. Man does not possess sufficient assets to placate God. To act as though he does is itself sinful.² What God does call man to do is to acknowledge that with greater blessings from God there is greater responsibility to God. Their entrance into the land will be a blessing, God announces in Numbers 15. The people should know that the land will bring blessings because there will be additional requirements for the mandated sacrifices, as well as for the voluntary peace offering (Num. 15:9–10).

The parents had just rebelled against God and had been locked out of the Promised Land. What were they going to miss? A lot, God announced. The new requirements for the various offerings testified to the fact that life would be filled with blessings in the land: meal, wine,

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 126.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 1.

and oil. The people had rebelled against God by complaining about the insufficiency of manna. In the Promised Land, there will be far more than manna, God was reminding them here.

There will be a new aspect of the offering. “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you, Then it shall be, that, when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall offer up an heave offering unto the LORD” (Num. 15:18–19). The heave offering will be of the threshingfloor (v. 20). Previously, the heave offering by the people was animal: “And the right shoulder shall ye give unto the priest for an heave offering of the sacrifices of your peace offerings” (Lev. 7:32; cf. Lev. 10:15). When they have land, they will have farms. A small portion of agricultural output must go to the heave offering. But not yet—not until they arrive in the land.

B. Willing to Wait

The promise of land was sanctioned by the requirement of additional offerings. The generation of the conquest had been told from the early days of the wilderness wandering that the land would come to them. Their parents did not sacrifice as their children would eventually sacrifice. Their parents were under lesser requirements because their parents were recipients of reduced blessings. The present and future distinction between the required sacrifices testified to the present and future condition of Israel. God would ask for more in the Promised Land. This was proof that God would fulfill His promise. He would become the beneficiary of His own gift of land: greater sacrifices, more pleasing aromas drifting up to heaven. Why wouldn't the younger generation expect the fulfillment of the promise of land? The God of Israel would be a beneficiary.

Their parents were not patient. The sanction against impatience was appropriate: the imposition of the necessity of deferred gratification. God would teach the younger generation a lesson. He would remain patient, not demanding greater sacrifices in the present; so should members of the younger generation remain patient.

This would pressure them to adopt the mentality of upper-class people. Lower-class people are not patient. They resist any suggestion of deferred gratification in life. In contrast, upper-class people are willing to wait to be gratified.³ This is why upper-class people are more

3. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), ch. 3.

thrifty, make long-range plans, and remain in school longer than lower-class people. The generation of the exodus was a lower-class generation. Their children were not to imitate them. The very structure of the sacrifices reminded them that God was willing to wait for His lawful rewards. They were, too.

C. Planning Ahead

The law of the sabbath was specific: no work was to be done on the sabbath. "Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 31:14–15; cf. 35:2). The law was specific, but what constituted lawful labor? A case-law application was needed here. Israel soon got one:

And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses (Num. 15:32–36).

The stick-gatherer was working on the sabbath. Perhaps he was planning to start a fire. This was illegal on the sabbath. "Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day" (Ex. 35:3). Perhaps he had run low on fuel. This also was no excuse. In fact, running low on fuel was Jesus' model of the well-intentioned soul who does not plan ahead regarding the final judgment: the parable of the ten virgins, half of whom forgot to store up oil for the time when the bridegroom would return (Matt. 25:1–13). Perhaps he was doing this to re-sell the sticks later. In this case, he was working commercially. One thing was sure: the stick-gatherer was working. The judges were not sure if the sabbath death penalty extended to this seemingly minimal daily task. It did.

The stick-gatherer could have gathered sticks on the previous six days. He did not gather a sufficient number. A penalty had to be paid:

either a lack of sticks or an excess of stones. He refused to regard as legally binding on him either of these negative sanctions against stick-gathering on the sabbath. God, however, did regard the law as binding on him.

1. Sabbath and Fuel

The gathering of sticks is a fine example of Hebrew case law as applied in the light of a general requirement of the Decalogue. It shows, perhaps, better than any other instance, the implications of the fourth commandment for the Hebrew nation. Consider the economic implications. What was involved in the gathering of sticks? Sticks could be used for at least four purposes:

1. *Heating* the home
2. *Lighting* the home
3. *Cooking* the meals
4. *Selling* for uses 1–3

As far as actual use was concerned, the case in Numbers 15 applied more to the daily life of Hebrew women than it did to the men of the family. It is more often the man and his work which are the focus of modern sabbatarian concern, but this was not necessarily the case in a rural, pre-industrial community. The gathering of sticks was more likely to be the task of children; women were to use them for household tasks, once gathered. Men were to reap the benefits of both the gathering and actual use of the sticks, but in general they would not have much to do with the actual handling of sticks. There could be a few exceptions, of course, but one exception seems to be far more likely, namely, that of the professional stick-gatherer. His work would be most in demand on the sabbath, precisely the day on which the prohibition against work was enforced. A woman who failed to gather sticks earlier in the week could buy some from a professional.

We are not told that the man in Numbers 15 was such a professional, but the severity of the punishment clearly would have made it far more dangerous for such a class of professionals to have come into existence. There was a need for a harsh penalty, men and women being what they are. There is always a delight in violating God's commandments if one is a sinner; if that violation also brings with it certain superficial benefits above and beyond the mere pleasure of defiance, so much the better. Sabbath prohibitions involved heavy costs

for the obedient; enforcement of the sabbath required stiff penalties, thus burdening violators with high costs in the form of high risk.

What were the costs of the sabbath? For the man, it was the forfeiture of all income—monetary (less likely in a pre-modern rural society), psychological, or in physical property—for that day. But women also paid. They had to gather all sticks earlier in the week. It meant more work during the week, either in longer days or by increasing the intensity of the working day—or both. Had the working day not been lengthened or intensified, then other tasks which it was desirable to accomplish would have to have been foregone, and that, as any wife knows, also involves costs (especially if a husband or a mother-in-law notices the failure in question). There would always be a temptation to forego the gathering of sticks during the week, especially if a professional would come by with a load of wood on the sabbath for a reasonably cheap price. If his price was less than the woman's estimation of the costs involved in gathering the wood earlier in the week, a bargain was to be expected. By imposing a rigorous and permanent form of punishment on the violator, the community was able to force up the price of the sticks; risks would be so high that few professionals could survive. How many women could or would pay the costs? It would be cheaper to buy them or gather them earlier in the week. Stick gathering was made an unlikely source of profitable employment on the sabbath. Since the market for sticks on the sabbath was restricted because of the high prices for the sticks (due to the risks involved), the opportunities for temptation were thereby reduced to a minimum. It did not pay anyone to violate the sabbath, and it was too expensive to hire someone to violate it.

Conclusion

The present-oriented person is less willing to plan ahead than the future-oriented person. The stick-gatherer was obviously present-oriented. He did not plan ahead during the previous week. He acted on the spur of the moment on the sabbath. Short of sticks, he sought more. On the sabbath, he retroactively evaluated the previous week's work and found it lacking. He decided that he could make up for lost time. He was wrong. He lost all remaining time. Time ran out for him.

Time runs out for everyone. That is time's curse in a world under God's negative sanction of final judgment. The goal, then, is to make good use of our allotted time while it is available. The sabbath reminds

us of this requirement. To honor it means that we must plan ahead. We must work harder during the week to avoid having to work on the sabbath.

Time orientation is important for distinguishing societies. The biblical concept of history is linear: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. It has a beginning and an end. Men are told to pay attention to the end of time. While this emphasis is minimal in the Old Testament, the last three verses of Daniel being the main exception, the emphasis on the shortness of man's days is continual. Men are to look ahead to their old age, death, and future generations.

The wilderness experience was designed to teach the younger generation patience, daily trust in God (manna), and faith in the good land to come. They were to acknowledge that all good things come on schedule. So do all bad things. That future era would bring good things to Israel and bad things to Canaanites, whose iniquity would at last be filled (Gen. 15:16). They were to imitate God, who was willing to wait for his extra sacrifices until they entered the Promised Land.

The man who gathered sticks on the sabbath failed to honor the deferred gratification principle of the Old Covenant sabbath: rest at the end of the week. He chose to disparage that future rest by failing to plan ahead. He was present-oriented, and this cost him dearly on the day of rest.

9

EVALUATION AND SANCTIONS

And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up: Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up (Num. 16:12–14).

I have already commented on the confrontation between Moses on one hand and Korah and Dathan on the other.¹ Korah, a member of the family of Kohath, was Moses' cousin (Ex. 6:18–21). He was joined by Dathan and Abiram, members of the tribe of Reuben (Num. 16:1). They complained that Moses had arrogated too much authority to himself. There was no distinction among Israelites, they said. All were equally holy (v. 3). Moses called for a test of these democratic claims: a test of fire (v. 18).

The rebels had this complaint: Moses was a false prophet. He had told them that God would lead the nation into a land of milk and honey. But where were they? In the wilderness (*bemidbar*). Everyone could see this: wilderness, wilderness all around them. No milk, no honey. We are not blind, they said. "Wilt thou put out the eyes of these men?"

But the accusers went beyond this. Not only were they not in a land of milk and honey, Moses had led them out of a land of milk and honey. Moses had promised them something better than what they had enjoyed in Egypt. He had lured them out of a good land with the promise of a better land. But now they found themselves in a worse land.

This had been the constant theme of the exodus generation since

1. Chapters 3 and 5.

before the parting of the Red Sea: the positive blessings of Egypt. The nation believed in the message of Korah and Dathan. They had voiced it themselves repeatedly. The people's complaint had not been political, however. It had been economic: Where is our water? Where is our meat? This time, the complaint was more political and ecclesiastical: Where is our authority? But the complaint was supported by an appeal to economic conditions. They were saying to Moses: "Your interpretation of God's plan was incorrect. There is no reason for you to elevate yourself above us."

A. In Hope of Plenty

Moses had come before Pharaoh with a demand: let the Israelites go three days' journey into the wilderness. Pharaoh rejected this demand. Then came a series of confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh. In none of these was the question of Israel's permanent emigration ever raised. God had told Moses that this was His intention (Ex. 3:8, 17), but not until after the Passover did Moses inform the people about this (Ex. 13:5). They knew they were leaving Egypt, for they spoiled the Egyptians, but they did not know where they were going unless they remembered God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:16).

When Moses raised the hope of plenty, it caught their imagination. The early confrontations in the wilderness centered around the disparity between the wilderness and the promise, and between the past and the promise. They wanted to be effortlessly delivered by God into the Promised Land. By the time of the rebellion of Korah, the generation of the exodus knew that they would not enter the Promised Land. Having been denied the fulfillment of their promise, they reinterpreted Egypt as the retroactive Promised Land. They had no sense of inheritance. Egypt, the land of bondage, where their children had been condemned to perpetual servitude to foreigners, became the Promised Land. Since that generation would not inherit the real Promised Land, it was obviously not worth inheriting.

This was their present-orientation in action. They were revisionist historians who, less than two years after the exodus, were re-writing the history of their recent experience in Egypt: not bondage but a golden age. They had short memories in public.

Had these political rebels really forgotten about their lives in Egypt? This seems highly unlikely. Their appeal to revisionist history was rhetorical. It was an appeal to the people regarding the unpleas-

antness of the present wilderness condition. "Just give us a reformed administration, and the wilderness will become more bearable. We suffer in a wilderness as subordinates; let us suffer the wilderness as equals. Egyptian slavery involved subordination; the wilderness involves subordination; let us put an end to subordination!"

This appeal invoked the hope of plenty. This hope had been thwarted by Israel's sin and their fear of confrontation with Canaan. But Korah made no mention of the true causes for the delay of milk and honey. He only mentioned Moses' original promise. He failed to mention that this promise had been conditional on their obedience. He also failed to mention that their children would inherit. They wanted instant fulfillment of the promise of milk and honey.

Milk and honey: this is a familiar political promise by the politician who seeks authority in the name of equality. Wealth is a valid goal: God gave this goal to Moses; Moses gave it to the people. Milk and honey are aspects of kingdom blessings: *positive sanctions for covenantal faithfulness*. The model is the New Heaven and the New Earth (Isa. 65:17–20). The politician and power-seeker who plans to replace the incumbent finds that an appeal to more milk and more honey is a powerful appeal. "The incumbent has promised to deliver the goods; he has failed to deliver; so, elect me."

Korah could not offer the promised plenty of Canaan. God had been very clear about this. That generation would not inherit. What were the obvious options? First, they could return to Egypt, that other land filled with milk and honey. But Egypt had been wiped out: its firstborn sons were dead. It was probably in chaos—or under the rule of invaders. Second, they could stay in the wilderness under Moses' rule. Third, they could stay in the wilderness under a new system of political and ecclesiastical rulers, but in the name of equality. The rebels recommended the third option. But their appeal was to economics: the absence of milk and honey under Moses' rule. "If we can't get what we had been promised under the old regime, let us establish a new regime."

The judgment of God against the rebels was total. This included their wealth. "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods" (Num. 16:32). All of their goods disappeared into the pit. Their assets became as cursed as Jericho's would be in the next generation: total (*hormah*). "And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch

nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins” (Num. 16:26).

B. Poor Evaluation, Large Losses

Did Israel learn its lesson? No. “But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD” (Num. 16:41). They had seen the fire from heaven consume the 250 who had offered sacrifice (v. 35). This did not make an impression on them. The Israelites interpreted all of this in terms of their desire for equality with Moses and Aaron. Their representatives, who had acted to elevate the people, had been destroyed. It was not God who had done this; it was Moses and Aaron. God’s immediate response to this accusation was to send a plague on them (v. 47). Only the active intervention of Aaron saved the nation, but 14,700 of them died (v. 49).

Chapter 17 is really an extension of chapter 16. God established one more test and one more evaluation. He had Moses instruct the tribes to bring one rod per tribe. The name of the prince of the tribe was to be written on the tribe’s rod. These men were political representatives, not priests. Then He had Moses write Aaron’s name on Levi’s rod. When these rods were placed before God in the tabernacle and left overnight, Aaron’s rod blossomed (v. 8). The other rods did not. Moses brought each man’s rod back to him (v. 9). “And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron’s rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not” (v. 10). “And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?” (vv. 12–13). This ended the rebellion of the people in seeking to become priests or to send their agents to become priests.

C. The Basis of Evaluation

The people did not suffer from physical blindness; they suffered from moral blindness. They refused to interpret what they saw by means of what God told them through Moses. They were in revolt against God. They were in revolt against Moses. Moses’ words were automatically rejected by them. Thus, his evaluation of reality was also rejected by them. They were consistent. They rejected God, Moses, and the reality imposed by God and explained by Moses.

Reality was what Moses said it was. God's visible sanctions came predictably in terms of Moses' evaluation. The people could ignore their own eyes and ears, and did. After the destruction of the rebels, the people blamed Moses. The true god had been represented by the rebels; Moses must have represented a false God. So, God gave them another dose of reality.

Still, God knew this was not enough. He imposed the test of the blossoming rod. This finally persuaded them. They were now afraid to approach the tabernacle. But it had taken negative sanction after negative sanction to persuade them. Seeing, they would not see. This willful blindness brought a series of negative sanctions on them, just as it had with Pharaoh. They were not myopic; they were Pharaonic.

They could have avoided the negative sanctions at every step, had they listened to Moses: prior to the golden calf incident, prior to the spies' return, prior to the quail, prior to Korah's rebellion, prior to their attribution of righteousness to the late Rev. Korah. Had they listened to Moses, they would have seen reality. Refusing to listen to Moses, they refused to see reality. This was reaffirmed by Jesus in the parable of Lazarus and Dives: "Then he [Dives] said, I pray thee therefore, father [Abraham], that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:27–31). Hell is preliminary to the ultimate negative sanction, the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15) yet not even the testimony of one resurrected from the dead can persuade Moses-rejecting men of hell's reality or of the way of escape. The way of escape from the negative sanctions, Abraham said, was a willingness to listen and conform to Moses and the prophets prior to the imposition of the sanctions. This, the generation of the wilderness steadfastly refused to do. And so the negative sanctions kept coming.

Conclusion

The people had looked at their wilderness condition, had compared it with the promise of milk and honey, and had sanctioned the rebels retroactively. Korah had asked rhetorically, "Wilt thou put out

the eyes of these men?" But these men could not see. They were judicially blind. Seeing, they would not see.

The nation saw what they wanted to see. They saw Moses and Aaron as tyrants, despite the fact that it had been, and soon would be again, the active intervention of Moses and Aaron that allowed them to survive. They saw the wilderness, but did not see liberty. They saw their children, but did not see the inheritance, which is why they refused to circumcise their sons (Josh. 5:5). They had seen Egypt's tyranny, but viewed it as a land of plenty.

Evaluation is associated with judgment. To evaluate something is to judge it. The test of what an evaluator says is how closely his words match what God has decreed. As Moses said before God's judgment between Moses and Korah, "Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD" (vv. 28–30). But the people did not understand this; they chose not to understand. So, the negative sanctions came on them.

Reality imposes sanctions. Evaluation must match reality in order to be successful. Those who evaluate reality accurately reap rewards. Those whose evaluations fail to match reality suffer losses. This is the great law of entrepreneurship: those who forecast the future accurately and act accordingly prosper; those who do not forecast accurately and act accordingly lose. Assets move from those who evaluate properly to those who evaluate improperly.

10

TITHE AND SANCTIONS

And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die. And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you (Num. 18:1–4).

The theocentric principle here is God's holiness and man's God is set apart from man: holiness.¹ This required the creation of a series of concentric circles of holiness around the Ark of the Covenant, where God dwelt with Israel. Someone had to take personal responsibility for guarding² these zones of holiness from trespassers whose very presence would profane the sacred space. So, God transferred to the sons of Aaron the responsibility of guarding the sanctuary. Because of man's sin, any iniquity within the sanctuary's boundaries had to be dealt with ritually. This was the task assigned to Aaron and his sons by God: to guard the sanctuary and cleanse it. They bore the responsibility for any violations of the holiness of the sanctuary's sacred boundaries.

God's goal was the elimination of the effects of sin in Israel. He desired to remove the nation from the judgment of sin. By creating a system of ritual acts of cleansing, God made possible life apart from the imposition of His negative sanctions: "And ye shall keep the charge of

1. Point three: ethics.

2. Point four: sanctions.

the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel” (v. 5).

Boundaries had to be respected in Israel. But boundaries, like law, to which sanctions are not attached are merely opinion. The boundaries of the Ark of the Covenant were not mere opinion. God’s sanctions enforced the boundaries associated with His dwelling place. Because it is better to fall into the hands of angry men than an angry God,³ He appointed defenders. They would impose preliminary sanctions to guard the sacred space associated with the Ark. “And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest’s office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest’s office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death” (vv. 6–7).

A. A Meat-Eating Priesthood

The sons of Aaron could lawfully claim certain offerings as food: “This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat [meal] offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee and for thy sons. In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee” (vv. 9–10). These sacrifices were not regarded as the care and feeding of God—a common belief among pagan societies.⁴ Rather, they served as legal coverings for the donors and as food for the priests. The priests received the heave offerings (v. 11). They received the best, not the dregs: “All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee” (v. 12). But to receive these offerings, the priest had to be clean before God: “And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine; everyone that is clean in thine house shall eat of it” (v. 13). The primary goal was holiness; the secondary goal was the support of

3. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

4. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 59. Cf. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia; Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), p. 35.

priests.

“Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine” (v. 14). A devoted item was the most holy of all. It could not be repurchased by the donor, unlike the dedicated object. The dedicated item could be repurchased by an additional payment of 20 percent (Lev. 27:15); not so the devoted item (Lev. 27:28–29).⁵

Second, the priest received a payment for the firstborn male in every family, as well as firstborn males of unclean beasts (v. 15). The payment was five shekels of the sanctuary (v. 16). The firstborn males of cows, sheep, and goats could not be redeemed; they had to be offered to the priests, who then sacrificed them.

This raises the question of transport. These animals had to be taken to Jerusalem to be sacrificed. They were not the property of the Levites; they belonged to the sons of Aaron. “And the flesh of them shall be thine, as the wave breast and as the right shoulder are thine. All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee” (vv. 18–19). The costs of transportation were high. Presumably, the animals did not have to be delivered immediately. As they fattened up, they became more valuable as food. The priests would become the owners of more valuable animals. A man with a large herd would have driven the designated animals to Jerusalem at one of the mandatory festivals. This would have made the trip more difficult. It also would have filled the roads with droppings, which presumably would have been collected by farmers whose properties were close to the roads.

Four of the five primary sacrifices (v. 9) had to be eaten in the holy place (v. 10). The first primary offering, the whole burnt offering (Lev. 1), was exclusively God’s; the priest retained only the hide (Lev. 7:8). Verse 10 specifies “every oblation” (*corban*), which means every sacrifice. This is comprehensive language: “every oblation” was substituted for the whole burnt offering. This means that the priests alone had access to all of these holy offerings. The question arises: What about the heave offerings (v. 8)? Could they be shared with the other Levites? The language of the texts indicates that the offerings placed on the altar were the exclusive responsibility of the priests and therefore the exclusive property of the priests. These offerings could not be shared, for

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

they had to be consumed in the holy place.

Every firstborn male born of a clean animal had to be brought to Jerusalem. The priests had to eat this meat in the holy place. The other families of Levi therefore could not partake, for they had no access to the innermost part of the tabernacle. Even their wives could not participate: “every male shall eat of it” (v. 10). There must have been a lot of unconsumed meat; the greater Israel’s prosperity, the greater the waste. The excess had to be disposed of, presumably outside the camp, as was required of the sin offering for the priesthood (Lev. 4:12; 8:17; 9:11).

1. God’s Law vs. Vegetarian Virtue

This law makes it clear that the priests of Israel were meat eaters. Eating meat on a regular basis was a mark of their holiness in a society in which meat was a comparative luxury. They represented God, and God is described in the Bible as one who delights in the odor of burning flesh (Ex. 29:18; Lev. 1:9). The tabernacle-temple was a place of mouth-watering odors, where a barbecue was in progress day and night. Those who approached the holy place could not have avoided this smell. It reminded them of God’s judgment: either a substitute goes on God’s altar or else the person does.

The unconsumed meat was a form of holy waste. God shared the roasted flesh of animals only with the sons of Aaron. They ate their meals in the presence of God. Representatively, they feasted well in the presence of God, just as sin-free man is to feast well in the presence of God. The exclusive nature of this feast pointed to the grace of God in bringing sinful men into His presence.

It is one of the marks of God’s blessing in the modern world that an ever-increasing percentage of men are able to afford to eat meat on a regular basis. This fact of free market capitalism is deeply resented by those who can legitimately be described as soybean socialists. They cry out against the sinfulness of the West, and especially the United States, for consuming so much meat. They bring their version of a covenant lawsuit against Americans who enjoy eating beef. Ronald J. Sider’s book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), is a representative example. This book became a best-seller among neo-evangelical Christians in the late 1970s until I hired David Chilton to write *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981), after which Sider’s

book faded into oblivion, as politically liberal fads generally do.⁶

Sider blamed Third World poverty on the meat-eating West. Residents in the United States consume five times more grain per capita than those living in developing nations, he observed. This blessing he regarded as a moral infraction. It is impoverishing the Third World. "The major reason for this glaring difference is that we eat most of our grain indirectly—via grain-fed livestock and fowl. . . . Why is that important? Because it takes many pounds of grain to produce just one pound of beef. . . . Beef is the cadillac of meat products. . . . It is because of this high level of meat consumption that the rich minority of the world devours such an unfair share of the world's available food."⁷ He repeated this accusation, almost word for word, in the ignored and now nearly forgotten third edition of his book.⁸ His language of guilt manipulation is evident: "devours," "unfair share." We can almost hear Korah and Dathan railing against Aaron: "You and your sons are eating an unfair share of our beef. You are devouring our fields by your lust for meat, especially beef. You are no more holy than we are. Let us all publicly demonstrate our commitment to equality by eating nothing but grains from now on."

Not only did the priesthood feast on beef and other clean meats, they were required to throw away every ounce that they did not eat. This was holy wastefulness, and it was commanded by God. Any complaining about this procedure on the part of the non-priestly families of Levi, let alone any other tribe, was an assault on the integrity of the sacrificial system. Sinners were to bring their special offerings to God, and the priests alone benefitted directly. It unquestionably paid to be a priest.

The fat was to go to God: "And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour: all the fat is the LORD'S. It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood" (Lev. 3:16–17).⁹ This was a mark of God's sovereignty; it also was a form of dietary protection for the priests. If they did not honor this legal claim by God, and they ate the fat, then there would be negative consequences in their arteries. But the idea that eating meat in large

6. It was co-published by Inter-Varsity Press and the Paulist Press.

7. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), pp. 42–44.

8. Waco, Texas: Word, 1990, pp. 22–23.

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 3.

quantities should be universally avoided, irrespective of individual metabolisms and budgets, flies in the face of God's sacrificial system. Was it a curse to be a priest? Did God bring His loyal priesthood under the negative sanction of poor diet and bad health? Did He provide a daily miracle in cleaning the arteries of the priesthood? The texts reveal nothing like this. What they do reveal is a national sacrificial system that mandated an overflow of meat into the tabernacle.

We are no longer under the rules of this system. We can lawfully eat meat or chicken or even tofu burgers, as we see fit. Whether we should eat lots of beef depends on our incomes and our metabolisms. The issue is not to be decided by an appeal to morals; it is a personal matter of taste, cost, and health. Just as the righteous priests' constant feasting on meat was a mark of their position of great responsibility, authority, and blessing, so is the West's abundance of meat.¹⁰

B. Implications of This Inheritance

The Levites had no landed inheritance outside of Levitical cities: "And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num. 18:20–21). This law had important implications for both the social order and the political order of Israel.

1. Social Implications

There is always the problem of envy and jealousy in a society. The jealous person thinks: "You have something I want. I will take it from you." This was the sin of Korah and Dathan. The envious person thinks: "You have something I want. I cannot get it from you. I will destroy it so that neither of us can enjoy it." This had been the sin of the Philistines in regard to Abraham: "For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. And

10. The fact that McDonald's hamburger restaurants have become in our day the most visible sign of America's cultural presence in foreign nations is altogether appropriate. The company's universally recognized corporate representative, Ronald McDonald, is a clown with a smiling face. Theologically speaking, soybean socialists are clowns with angry faces. I prefer the smiling Ronald to the nagging Ronald.

Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them" (Gen. 26:15–18). The Philistines were envious: better to fill up these wells with dirt rather than retrieve water from them today but risk having Abraham or his heirs claim them later and benefit from them.¹¹

The system of Levitical inheritance kept jealousy and envy at a minimum. The Israelites were required to pay tithes to the Levites, but the Levites could not inherit rural land. Only later, if Israel became a predominantly urban society, would this restriction on rural land ownership fade as a major restraint on the wealth of Levi. The Levites had to be supported by the nation, but only in proportion to the prosperity of the nation.

There is no doubt that God deliberately established offsetting inheritances: tithes vs. land. "But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance" (Num. 18:24). If the Israelites grumbled about the arrangement, this grumbling would be completely illegitimate. The Levites bore the sins of the nation if they did not guard the tabernacle from defilement: "But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance" (v. 23). The Levites were compensated for the risk they bore. The closer that men drew to the tabernacle, the greater their risk.

2. Political Implications

The Levites had no inheritance in the land. They lived in 48 designated Levitical cities which were distributed throughout the land (Num. 35:7). This meant that they could serve as legal counsellors and literate specialists. No other tribe had a monopoly claim on these services. The Levites were unlikely to become operational agents of any single tribe, since their sources of prosperity and the locus of their

11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 27.

influence were distributed across the nation. If the tribe of the king sought an alliance with the Levites of Jerusalem, there were Levites living inside the boundaries of the other tribes whose interests were local. These Levites of the cities provided counter-weights to Levites living near the king's palace. There might be court priests in Israel, but there would be country Levites to offset their influence.

At the same time, the Levites could not amass landed wealth for their families. This meant that tribal leaders did not have to worry about a political consolidation resulting from economic consolidation for as long as Israel remained predominantly agricultural. Local leaders could seek alliances with the Levites against the central government without feeling threatened. This acted as a restraint on political centralization.

The Levites received their income from local residents. This made them dependent on the prosperity of local populations. If residents in one region had wanted to establish restrictions on the export or import of goods, the local Levites might have approved. But there were Levites in other regions who had different interests. The priests would decide the limits of ecclesiastical interpretation, but there would have been a tendency for the national priesthood to balance the interests of all in order to keep peace in the tribe. This would have tended to favor the development of a national body of legal precedents that did not benefit one region at the expense of another. This would have consolidated legal opinion in ecclesiastical matters, but not on the basis of one regionally dominant tribe's interests. This consolidated body of precedents would have reflected the opinions of all the regions, since Levites resided in each region. The regionalism of the tribes was offset by the nationalism of Levi. At the same time, the potential regionalism of the priesthood in Jerusalem was offset by its economic interests. The priesthood maximized its income and its political independence by maximizing the income of the whole nation, since the priesthood was paid a tithe of the tithes received by the Levites (vv. 26–28).

C. Fee for Sacred Services Rendered

The Levites were forbidden to cheat the priesthood by sending the dregs of their produce. They had to send the best: "Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the LORD, of all the best thereof, even the hallowed part thereof out of it" (v. 29). The priests were to be well-paid. They were the senior representatives of the nation before

God. To cheat them was to cheat God. If the nation did this, God would bring negative sanctions against them: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation” (Mal. 3:8–9).

The tithe was the designated system of payment. It was priestly. The tithe burdened every member of society the same. The rich paid 10% of their net income from rural land; so did the poor. There were no exempted classes except the priests themselves. No one was too poor or too rich to escape paying. Had the payment been a fixed quantity of goods or money, the poor would have been burdened excessively, and the rich would have paid a token. The tithe meant that each income group would be equally burdened.

The tithe governed giving to the Lord’s priestly representatives. The tithe was a matter of life and death—eternal life and death. In matters of eternal life and death, the tithe principle governs payments. No one is able to buy his salvation; at the same time, no one is able to escape his lawful acknowledgment of his need for an intermediary institution that represents God: a priesthood. Man can be saved apart from such a priesthood, but no saved man is supposed to abandon his biblically mandatory economic support of God’s priesthood, i.e., those who possess a lawful monopoly over the administration of the sacraments: God’s sanctions in history. Those who guard the sacraments are entitled to a tithe on each covenant-keeper’s net income.¹²

The principle of the tithe is not the free market’s auction principle of “high bid wins.” Salvation is not in fixed supply, to be allocated by a central distributor on the basis of competitive bidding. Salvation is not part of the curse; it is the overcoming of the curse. Salvation is not governed by the law of economic scarcity, i.e., “at zero price, there is greater demand than supply.” But the supply of priestly guardians is not infinite. Their services must be paid for. So, the tither is not buying his salvation; he is supporting the representatives whose task it is to declare the way of salvation and to allocate access to the sacraments. Tithing is therefore a sacramental function; it is a payment for sacred services rendered. This does not mean that tithing is mandatory in order to receive the sacraments. The sacraments are not for sale for money. They are allocated, however. Those who do not profess faith in the God of the Bible are not allowed access to the sacraments. Also,

12. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

those who have been excommunicated because of their flagrant sinning do not have lawful access. In Israel, access to Passover was limited to circumcised males and their families. The phrase “cut off from his people” appears regularly in the Mosaic law. This was a judicial cutting off. A judicially consecrated representative of the church must decide who has lawful access to the sacraments. His services must be paid for. The tithe is the mode of payment mandated by God. Those who pay less fall short of God’s requirements (Mal. 3:8–9).

D. The Politics of Plunder

God did not designate this system of equal percentage giving as unfair. Twentieth-first-century man does. First, his designated sovereign agency is the state, not the church. To cheat the taxman is to cheat the state: the highest relevant court of appeal in history. Second, modern man points to an equal percentage payment system and calls it *regressive*: an excessive burden on the poor. The tithe principle is in fact *proportionate*, but modern man dismisses proportionate taxation as regressive, thereby condemning it in the name of a supposedly higher morality: one opposed to oppressing the poor. Modern man calls for *progressive* taxation, i.e., graduated tax brackets. The rich should pay a greater percentage of their income, we are told. Modern man does not identify what percentage of income taxation constitutes a boundary beyond which the state cannot lawfully go. Establishing such boundaries is understood as wholly arbitrary: a matter of political power. Those who pay a lower percentage of their income, because they constitute a majority, establish the upper limits of taxation.

Modern taxation is justified in terms of a messianic view of the state: the state as healer. The state requires support from the people in order to accomplish its tasks. These tasks are said to be inherently unbounded: as extensive as man’s pain and vulnerability. They are defined through political power. One of these tasks is the redistribution of wealth, officially from rich to the poor; in fact from the wealthy and upper middle classes to the middle classes in the name of the poor. The middle classes, like the Mosaic priests, staff the bureaucratic posts that administer the funds and enforce the regulations. They are understood as the agents of healing. They represent the middle class in the name of all the people, and they distribute the funds officially on behalf of the poor. Yet almost every study of government legislation and its tax burdens reveals that the middle class receives the lion’s

share of the State's benefits.¹³ They exercise a majority, and their political representatives do not openly thwart their interests.

In 1945, Beardsley Ruml gave a speech to the American Bar Association (ABA). Ruml was never a well-known man, and he is long forgotten today, even among professional historians, but his influence in the United States for a generation was enormous. In 1922, he was hired to run the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Fund. He had previously been employed as an assistant to the president of the Carnegie Corporation. He was 26 years old.¹⁴ He later served as dean of the Social Sciences Division of the University of Chicago. From 1923 on, he ran the Rockefeller-funded Social Science Research Council, assisted by his older academic colleague, University of Chicago political scientist Charles E. Merriam.¹⁵ Through this organization after 1928, Ruml funded large segments of the American social science community to promote the ideology of the government-regulated economy. As Donald Fisher wrote: "A bargain was struck between social scientists, Rockefeller philanthropy, and the State that has since become an accepted part of the way we organize social life."¹⁶ In 1954, the Reece Committee investigations on tax-exempt foundations concluded: "The Social Science Research Council is now probably the greatest power in the social science research field."¹⁷ He drafted part of the Social Security Act in 1935, and he was the driving force in 1942 behind the introduction of Federal income tax withholding, which began in 1943.¹⁸ This dramatically increased the collection of individual income taxes: from \$3.2 billion in 1942 to \$19.7 billion in 1944.¹⁹ Ruml was on the board of

13. George J. Stigler, "Director's Law of Public Income Redistribution," *Journal of Law and Economics*, 13 (April 1970). Aaron Director was Milton Friedman's brother-in-law.

14. Don Fisher, *Fundamental Development of the Social Sciences: Rockefeller Philanthropy and the United States Social Science Research Council* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 32.

15. Barry D. Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 182.

16. Fisher, Preface.

17. *Tax-Exempt Foundations*, Report, House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, 2nd session, Report 2681, Dec. 16, 1954 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), p. 47. Cf. pages 47–51.

18. Patrick D. Reagan, "The Withholding Tax, Beardsley Ruml, and Modern American Public Policy," *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives*, 24 (Spring 1992), p. 23. Cf. Randolph E. Paul, *Taxation in the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), pp. 328–36.

19. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975), p. 1122.

the New York Federal Reserve Bank from 1937 to 1947; he served as chairman during the final six years. This is the dominant Federal Reserve Bank among the dozen regional branches of America's central bank. No one reaches this post who is not fully trusted by the highest levels of banking and government.

He announced to the ABA that, with the creation of a U.S. central bank (1913) and the suspension of domestic gold payments in exchange for dollars (1933), the United States no longer needed to levy taxes for revenue purposes. With the power to create money, he said, the ultimate revenue source is the nation's central bank. Taxes have become means of redistributing wealth among groups and to express public policy "in subsidizing or in penalizing various industries and groups."²⁰ "The second principal purpose of federal taxes is to attain more equality of wealth and of income than would result from economic forces working alone. The taxes which are effective for this purpose are the progressive individual income tax, the progressive estate tax, and the gift tax. What these taxes should be depends on public policy with respect to the distribution of wealth and of income."²¹ The mechanism of taxation had become an important means of pursuing national policy objectives, not a means of providing the state with revenue. Put differently, the inflation tax of fiat money creation by the central bank had become the revenue source; other forms of state taxation were means of wealth redistribution. His opinion has not been shared by many officials, but in theory, the distinction could be applied. In practice, the central bank's inflation tax and other forms of state taxation are used as both revenue sources and as social policy tools.

Such a view of the state transforms politics. Politics becomes the politics of plunder rather than the defense of individual liberty, the defense of property rights, and protection against violence. The civil government moves from being an agency that imposes negative sanctions against criminals on behalf of their victims²² to an agency that provides positive economic sanctions to favored members of the community²³ at the expense of negative economic sanctions imposed on others in the community. Control over taxation and economic regulation has in

20. Beardsley Ruml, "Taxes for Revenue Are Obsolete," *American Affairs*, 8 (Jan. 1946), p. 36. (<http://bit.ly/RumlTaxes>)

21. *Idem*.

22. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

23. Or outside the community, e.g., State-to-State foreign aid.

the twentieth century become a three-fold matter: the exercise of presumed messianic power, the suppression of one's class enemies, and economic self-defense. Jack Douglas put it well: "... the welfare states in the most Christian Western states have strongly emphasized their supposed enactments of the Christian virtues—compassion, charity, forgiveness, kindness, and so on, even when they have simultaneously been rabidly pursuing the seven deadly sins."²⁴ In fallen man, power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely—Lord Acton's famous dictum.²⁵ This applies to taxation, for the power to tax involves the power to destroy—Chief Justice John Marshall's equally famous dictum.²⁶

Israel's priesthood was not to become a battlefield of wealth redistribution among classes. God placed explicit limits on what the Levites could lawfully request in God's name: the tithe. The Levites were under God's law. Men might pay them less than a tithe, but this would bring God's negative sanctions in history. Individuals might pay more, but this extra giving was not called a tithe; it was a voluntary offering.

The Levites were restricted by a boundary, the tithe. The tithe was not a means of income redistribution among classes. The tithe was the inheritance of the Levites. It was owed to them by the tribes. This was not a matter of choice among those who were under the covenant.

Conclusion

The tithe is grounded legally in the sovereignty of ordained officials over the administration of the sacraments. It is the biblically mandated payment for sacramental services rendered. In Mosaic Israel, these services involved animal and other sacrifices. They also involved Passover and the two other mandatory national feasts. The Levites were guardians of the tabernacle area, while the Aaronic priests were the guardians of the Ark of the Covenant. This guardianship had to be paid for. The Levites received a tithe of the net income of the Israelites; the priests received a tithe of the income of the Levites. Income

24. Jack D. Douglas, *The Myth of the Welfare State* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1991), p. 11.

25. Letter to Mandell Creighton (April 5, 1887); reprinted in *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1986), II, p. 383. The context of this remark was his rejection of the authority of the Papacy to use the state to impose physical torture and execution against heretics. Acton was a Roman Catholic.

26. *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819); reprinted in John Marshall's *Defense of McCulloch v. Maryland* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 46.

flowed up the chain of ecclesiastical command.²⁷

By giving the Levites a tithe rather than rural land as the tribe's inheritance, God balanced both the social order and the political structure of Mosaic Israel. Levites served as legal advisors in every region. They had local allegiances economically, but they also had a national allegiance judicially: the priesthood. Neither the king nor local tribal leaders could exercise primary influence over the Levites as a tribe. Levites owed their allegiance to a different chain of command, ecclesiastical rather than political.

The Israelites were not buying their salvation with their tithes. They were paying for human services associated with the operation of the sacrificial system. The tithe was not a market price, i.e., high bid wins. Rather, it was a priestly price: proportional giving. The poor man and the rich man paid the same proportion. This made sure that the day-to-day administration of the sacrificial system involved an equal economic sacrifice for all. This form of equality was the equality of the percentage of forfeited income, not the equality of price. The equality of price—one price for all men—would have burdened the poor more than the rich. It would also have created the illusion that salvation was for sale on a competitive market. This would have implied a scarcity of salvation. Unlike a scarce resource, salvation is available to all at zero price. What is scarce is not salvation but rather the guardians of the sacraments.

Priestly pricing is proportional pricing. The closer we get to life-and-death services, the closer we approach priestly pricing. The free market pricing principle of high bid wins does not apply equally to every occupation and service. It specifically does not apply to the guardians of the sacraments.

The law of the sacrifices mandated a flow of meat to the sons of Aaron. There was no vegetarianism in Israel. Most of the sacrifices were clearly meat-based. The sweet savor of soybean cakes and tofu may have impressed Cain, but Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God. Abel's blood-based sacrifice continued as the standard in Mosaic Israel.

27. Chapter 3:D.

11

THE LURE OF MAGIC

And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them (Num. 20:10–12).

The theocentric issue here is covenantal cause and effect. The chapter begins with the death of Miriam (v. 1). It closes with the death of Aaron (v. 28). Aaron died at age 123 (Num. 33:39). This was in the fortieth year after the exodus (Num. 33:38). Moses died at age 120 (Deut. 34:7). He died just before Israel's entry into the land; so, he was 80 years old at the time of the exodus.

The events of this chapter were important for the nation because they mark the late stages of the transfer of inheritance. The generation of the exodus had been told by God that they would not enter the land; they would die in the wilderness (Num. 14:32). Miriam had just died. Moses and Aaron were old men. Time was visibly running out on the few remaining members of the exodus generation. But their legacy of rebellion still survived. The Israelites once again complained to Moses regarding the faithlessness of God.

And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is

there any water to drink (Num. 20:2–5).

Moses and Aaron once again went to God for a solution. “And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them” (Num. 20:6). This time, God promised another deliverance. He would provide water out of a rock a second time. The first time, shortly after the exodus, God had commanded Moses to strike a rock with his rod. “Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel” (Ex. 17:6). This time, however, He commanded Moses only to speak to the rock in public: “Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink” (Num. 20:8).

A. Moses Rebels Against God

Moses took the rod (v. 9), gathered the assembly before the rock (v. 10), spoke a word of condemnation to them (v. 10), and struck it twice (v. 11). The water gushed forth, but so did God’s voice. God told Moses that Moses had not believed Him. His act did not sanctify God before the people (v. 12).

God’s prophecy regarding the future of their generation as a result of the false reports of the ten spies had been clear: only Joshua and Caleb would enter the Promised Land as conquerors. Moses and Aaron were not singled out as survivors. But they had not participated in the false reporting. God dealt with Moses subsequently as if he had not been guilty of any terminal infraction. The spies had brought the condemnation on their generation, but apparently not on Moses and Aaron. Nevertheless, Moses and Aaron had not been listed by God as survivors. It should have been clear that something they would do later would keep them out of the Promised Land, because they were neither exempted by God’s condemnation nor were they responsible for the false reports. They should have understood this. They should have been better prepared for this final testing of their faith. They should have known that God’s prophecies of negative sanctions are both ethical and conditional: “unless you turn from your evil ways and obey

me.” A prophecy that something negative must happen in history is a warning that the recipient of the bad news must turn from his evil. It is never a prophecy that something must happen irrespective of God’s sovereign, initiating grace of redemption and man’s subordinate repentance. Jonah learned this after his ministry to Nineveh had been successful. God did not destroy Nineveh.

B. A Matter of Causation

Moses was familiar with rocks that produce water. God had previously told him to take the rod and strike a rock. He had done as he was told, and this act of obedience was followed by the flow of water. The people had seen this miracle (Ex. 17:6). Nevertheless, this had not changed their hearts. Neither had the subsequent miracles and the plagues. God’s negative sanctions had not registered on their ethical consciousness. They were still complainers. They still came before Moses with this complaint: “What has God done for us lately?” They wanted further positive sanctions despite their rebellion.

Moses, deep down inside, remained a man of his generation. He did not fully believe God’s prophetic word. He had doubts—not so grave as the people’s doubts, but serious enough so that he hesitated to rely on God’s word alone. Moses had spoken with God. He had seen God do mighty things through him. What he should have learned from all this was that God’s word is true. Men can rely on it. God spoke the world into existence (Gen. 1). When God says that something will come to pass, it will come to pass unless man’s repentance intervenes—always an aspect of His negative prophetic word. When God instructed an Old Covenant prophet to speak a positive prophetic word before the people, the prophet could rest assured that whatever God told him to say would come to pass. A negative prophecy was always qualified—“unless you repent”—but a positive word was sure. The people were given the benefit of the doubt. The bad prophetic news was qualified; the good news was not. There is no case of a positive prophetic word’s being overturned by man’s rebellion.

The Israelites refused to accept this. They kept complaining to Moses that God had promised them an inheritance of milk and honey. They deliberately refused to count: four generations to the conquest (Gen. 15:16); Moses’ generation was generation three. But their rebellion in the incident of the spies had been the secondary cause of their disinheritance. The fourth generation had a positive word from God,

and it would surely be fulfilled. This prophetic structure should be understood as a promise to the recipients of the promise of landed inheritance that they would not rebel, that God's grace would surely sustain them. A negative prophecy could be overcome by God's grace of redemption, while a positive prophecy could not be overcome by man's rebellion, although it might be postponed, since God would in this case overcome man's natural proclivity to rebel. This structure of prophecy is an aspect of God's grace. Grace tends toward blessings in history.¹

Moses should have believed God's positive promise unconditionally, but he did not. He did not believe that his mere speaking to the rock would result in a flow of water. God did not tell him to tap the rock. God told him only to take the rod, assemble the people, and speak before the rock. There was a required plan, but it did not involve striking the rock. There was visible cause and effect, but it did not involve striking the rock. The system of cause and effect was supernatural. Speaking to a rock in public was surely not the normal way to provide large quantities of water in a wilderness. To speak water out of a rock is surely a miracle worth recording. But Moses did not believe God to this degree. He wanted two intermediate steps: striking the rock twice.

In Genesis 1, God spoke the world into existence. There was no intermediary causation. God spoke; events consistent with His word immediately took place. The time interval in each step was less than one day. There was no uniformitarian continuity of time, with events taking place slowly in a cosmic process of evolutionary development. God spoke the world into existence. His word was sufficient.

Men do not normally possess such a word of authority. They speak, but only those who hear and understand can bring to pass what is spoken. The tower of Babel is the consummate example. When a breakdown occurred in corporate communication, men ceased to build. Without the cause and effect of the continuity of speech, men cannot work together. The division of labor breaks down.

When a man who possesses authority speaks, his words initiate a process of cause and effect. But man's words have no effect directly on inanimate objects. Mind over matter is God's prerogative, not man's; so is word over matter. We do not think and grow rich merely by thinking. We do not gain it when we "name it and claim it" merely by

1. This is an argument against both amillennialism and premillennialism. This argument rests on the covenantal connection between sanctions and inheritance.

speaking. There must be intermediary causation: possibly supernatural, probably natural, but never automatic.

To speak an event into existence apart from human, animal, or electrical-mechanical intermediation is to rely on supernatural causation. A supernatural being who hears and understands what a man has spoken then transforms that realm which is external to both the speaker and the hearer. The speaker's words initiated the transformation; they did not cause it.

Moses recognized the supernatural nature of the event. There was no question that only God could bring it to pass. The question facing Moses was this: On what basis would God bring it to pass? By a publicly spoken word alone? Or by an additional causative step or steps? What was binding: God's word or a ritual act? What were the means of grace: words and taps or merely words?

Moses relied on ritual. He would speak and tap the water out of the rock. The ritual was of his design: not just one tap, as had been the case at Horeb, but two. Why two? The text does not say. But two it had to be, Moses decided. One tap would not do. A spoken word alone would not do.

This reliance on ritual is a familiar pattern in history. Men find that ritual enhances the authority of words. The ritual makes the words more likely to be obeyed. The ritual in fact is thought to invest the words with power. The words are thought to be impotent without an accompanying ritual. The ritual distinguishes authoritative words from non-authoritative words.

In what way does ritual invest words with power? There are three answers, each corresponding to one of the three rival views of causation in history: magical (realism), traditional (nominalism), and judicial (covenantalism). The realist believes that ritual infuses words with power. There is a separate realm of power that can be tapped into by man through a mixture of words and ritual. Ritual is what connects words to power. The nominalist believes that rituals persuade men that words have greater authority. Men are more likely to believe in the words because of the presence of ritual. The judicialist believes that ritual invokes or calls down power when the words are lawfully spoken. It is the judicial legitimacy of the words in the context of historical circumstances that invests the words with power.

C. Adam's Transgression²

The best way biblically to answer this debate over the nature of causation is to consider Adam's transgression. When God announced a judicial boundary around the forbidden tree, did He invest the tree and its fruit with special properties that would automatically produce certain results if touched or eaten? Or was the tree merely symbolic, having no express judicial relationship with God, but only giving Adam an opportunity to prove himself faithful or not? Or was the tree set apart as a unique place of communion, a place declared by God as off-limits to Adam? We need to consider the three views of causation and their respective analyses. The first two answers conform to the philosophical categories of realism and nominalism. Both are incorrect. The third position conforms to the biblical category, covenantalism.

1 Metaphysical Boundary

We know that their eyes were immediately opened after they ate. They recognized their own nakedness and guilt. Was the fruit itself the source of their discontinuous change of perception? Was the tree a gateway to cosmic forces of illumination, a "cosmic tree," to use the language of pagan mythology?³ Did it mark "the center of the world," the supreme sacred space?⁴ Could Adam and Eve somehow manipulate these cosmic forces to gain further knowledge or power? Was the forbidden tree a microcosm that offered man power over the macrocosm, analogous to the voodoo doll's supposed power to produce analogous effects in the thing represented by the doll? Could Adam and

2. This section appeared originally in Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

3. The cosmic tree was related to the idea of the cosmic mountain: the *axis mundi* or axis of the world—the line drawn through the earth which points to the pole star. It was the link between heaven and earth. See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), p. Ill; cf. 266–67, 271, 273–74. On the *axis mundi*, see the extraordinary, complex, and cryptic book on ancient mathematics, myth, and cosmology, *Hamlet's Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time*, by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend (Boston: Gambit, 1969). It should be obvious what the source of these cosmic tree and cosmic mountain myths was: the garden of Eden, itself located on a mountain or raised area, for the river flowing through it became four rivers (Gen. 2:10).

4. Eliade writes: "The tree came to express the cosmos fully in itself, by embodying, in apparently static form, its 'force', its life and its quality of periodic regeneration." *Patterns*, p. 271.

Eve achieve “unity of being” with the universe through subsequent forbidden feasts? Could they achieve self-transcendence? In short, could they become mini-gods, as the serpent had promised Eve (Gen. 3:5)?

The Genesis account of their transgression informs us that immediately after their eyes were opened, the forbidden tree was no longer the focus of their interest. They did not seek additional fruit. They did not invoke cosmic forces to protect them or do their bidding. They paid no further attention to the tree. They did not act as though they believed the tree possessed any special properties other than its fruit, which was admittedly good to view and good to eat. Even the serpent said nothing further to them. There was no need for him to say anything. His words and work were over. Adam and Eve had performed the profane act. It was an act of judicial transgression: a trespass.

It is clear that their new-found self-awareness was the product of *self-judgment*: they had evaluated their act of rebellion in the light of their new interpretation of God’s word.⁵ They did not rush to discover a chemical formula for an antidote to poison fruit. They also did not rush to discover a magical formula to protect themselves from the cosmic forces that the fruit had unleashed. They correctly understood that the fruit was not their problem; God’s promised judgment was. The tree had meaning to them only in terms of God’s legal boundary around it, which they had transgressed. The fruit was of no further interest or use to them. They referred to it again only under God’s subsequent cross-examination.

2. *Symbolic Boundary*

What about the tree’s unique symbolic status? Was the response of Adam and Eve merely the product of an increase in their self-awareness, a perception induced solely by their act of transgression? In other words, was the tree merely a symbolic agency in the transformation of their own self-awareness, something like an ethical mirror? Was the transformational power of the tree merely psychological? In short, had the transformational power of the tree merely been imputed to it by Adam and Eve?

If the tree served solely as a symbol of man’s ethical condition, then on what basis did the radical and discontinuous increase of their mutual self-awareness take place? What was it about eating forbidden

5. That it was a new interpretation is seen in their response: sewing fig leaf aprons rather than confessing their sin in prayer and seeking God’s forgiveness.

fruit that produced their perception of nakedness? Their immediate concern was not that they feared that God would bring judgment against them sometime in the future; it was that they were immediately discomforted by their own nakedness. It was not that the now-partially denuded tree pointed symbolically to their completely denuded judicial condition in the eyes of God; it was that they experienced shame in their own eyes as judges. God had assigned a necessarily judicial task to them when He told Adam to guard the garden.⁶ Adam's task was to announce preliminary judgment against Satan, for Satan had testified falsely regarding the character of God. "Hath God said?", the serpent had asked. But Adam and Eve had served instead as false judges, rendering judgment implicitly against God and explicitly against God's word.⁷ Immediately, they recognized that they were wearing no "robes"—the mark of lawful judicial authority. They were *judicially uncovered* before each other. Their perceived dilemma had nothing further to do with the tree. Now the primary symbol of their spiritual condition was their own naked flesh. They sought to cover this revelation with fig leaves.

God was not judicially present in the garden immediately after their sin. He did not shout a warning to them: "I said not to touch that!" He gave them time to respond, either as covenant-breakers or covenant-keepers. They responded as covenant-breakers. They knew that His negative sanctions were coming, but their immediate concern was not their nakedness in His eyes; it was nakedness in their own eyes. Later, they hid themselves from God when they heard Him coming; in the meantime, they felt a compulsive need to hide their flesh from each other.

They reacted as though the psychological effects of eating from a merely symbolic tree—their sense of shame regarding their own personal nakedness—could be successfully covered by the leaves of another fruit-bearing tree. A representative of the plant kingdom had been a crucial aspect of this crisis of perception, so they covered themselves with leaves. They did not slay the serpent or some other animal in their quest for a covering. *They dealt with their sin symbolically*: the tree had become to them a symbol of their transgression, and so their required coverings should be of a similar kind. (Their son Cain was to

6. "And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep [*shawmar*: guard] it" (Gen. 2:15).

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix E (1987): "Witnesses and Judges."

make a similar evaluation of his judicially uncovered condition when he brought a sacrifice of the ground rather than an animal sacrifice [Gen. 4:3].)

They were wrong. Their problem was judicial, not symbolic. They had not transgressed a mere symbol; they had transgressed the boundary surrounding God's restricted property. They had been involved in a *boundary violation*. It is not that some sacred object serves merely as man's ethical mirror; it is Instead God's law that serves as the mirror.⁸

3. *Judicial Boundary*

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7a). The use of the passive voice here is significant. *By whom* were their eyes opened? Either by God directly or by their own consciences as God's image-bearers. We are not told which. What we are told is that prior to their act of transgression, their eyes were not open; afterwards, they were. This must mean that "open eyes" in this sense was *judicial*. They *saw* what they had done. They *evaluated* their new condition in the light of God's warning. They *understood* at least some of the consequences. But, being in sin, they misjudged what would be required to cover the effects of their sin. They twisted their own self-judgment. They made it seem less important than it was, as if it were a sin suitable for self-atonement.

The tree served as a symbol only to the degree that it was *set apart* (sanctified) by God as His exclusive property. The tree did not reflect man or man's psyche; it represented God as sovereign owner of the cosmos. Its status as a visible symbol (i.e., *judicial evidence*) of man's covenant status was relevant only in terms of its own designated status as a sanctified object. It had been judicially and verbally set apart by God. The tree was therefore *sacred*. It was not to be touched or eaten by man until God removed the restriction. To violate this sacred object was to *profane* it. To eat from it meant death, not in the sense of a poison apple, nor in the sense of a prohibited metaphysical doorway to overwhelming cosmic forces, nor in the sense of a means of man's self-realization of his own inherent evil, but in the sense of inevitable historical and eternal sanctions imposed by an absolute personal God.

8. "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [mirror]: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:23–25).

Eating from the tree changed man's judicial status. This was a profane act. Adam became profane: entering the judicial status of God's declaration, "Guilty as charged." He became *sacrilegious*.

As we shall see, so did Moses.

D. Moses, the Would-Be Magician

Moses was acting as a realist, i.e., as a magician. His ritual act of tapping the rock was a magical act: a power-infusing component of a supernatural pattern of causation. His words supposedly would not stand alone; they required an infusion of supernatural power, which only ritual could supply. Following tradition was surely not the deciding issue here, i.e., nominalism. Speaking to a rock in a traditional manner would not bring forth the water. There was no traditionalist cause-and-effect pattern associated with speaking to a rock. Furthermore, if Moses had been acting as a judicialist, he would not have tapped the rock. The tapping ritual added nothing of substance to his words, and it subtracted from the authority of his words, for God had commanded him only to speak publicly to the rock, not tap it.

Pagan magical religion sees the priest as an intermediary between a realm of supernatural power and the realm of man's daily affairs. This supernatural realm may be personal or impersonal, but selected men access it through defined rituals. The boundary between supernatural power and natural causation is controlled by the priest because he is the master of ritual. Even his spoken words can take on the character of ritual. They become formulas of power rather than prayers of supplication.

In tapping the rock, Moses acted as a pagan priest. When he relied on the rod as the means of bringing water from the rock, he adopted the mentality of the magician. This rod had served him as an implement of sanctions, both negative (the Nile's cursed water) and positive (Horeb's blessed water).⁹ Moses had become psychologically dependent on this rod. In his mind, it became a tool of supernatural power rather than a symbol of supernaturally delegated judicial authority. He did not regard God's word as authoritative; rather, it was God's word plus: the rod. As a prophet, Moses was to speak events into existence by repeating God's word. It was God's word that was the basis of

9. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go" (Ex. 17:5).

Moses' authority, not the visible implement of authority. But because Moses had repeatedly used this visible indicator of his prophetic authority as a means of invoking the predictable historical sanctions associated with the Old Covenant's prophetic office, he adopted the mentality of a pagan priest. He moved from biblical covenantalism to pagan realism. He moved from judicial invocation to magical manipulation.

This move was not absolute. Moses still brought a judicial invocation against Israel: "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (v. 10b). He identified them as rebels who relied on public displays of God's power rather than His promises. But in saying this, he condemned himself, for he, too, relied on public displays of God's power rather than His promises. That was why he tapped the rock. God had promised Moses to bring water in response to Moses' public verbal invocation. Moses and Aaron did not believe Him, which God stated explicitly: "... because ye believed me not" (v. 12a).

E. Negative Sanction: Disinheritance

God announced that Moses and Aaron would not lead the nation into Canaan. This had also been His negative sanction against the generation whose tribal representatives had sought to stone Caleb and Joshua. God had not specifically announced that Moses and Aaron would die in the wilderness, but it had been implied by the fact that he singled out only Caleb and Joshua. God's sanctions are judicially associated with inheritance and disinheritance. *The ultimate negative sanction is eternal disinheritance.* When God told Moses and Aaron that they would not live to lead the next generation into Canaan, He was bringing a major negative sanction against them.

God in His grace provided water out of the rock. The people in their rebellion would have water to drink. Nevertheless, that generation was doomed to die in the wilderness. God in His grace also allowed Moses and Aaron to live long enough to lead the nation through the wilderness. But their fate would be the same as their sister Miriam's (v. 1): they would die in the wilderness. They would not share in the inheritance.

Moses and the people shared too many presuppositions. This is why they shared the same curse: disinheritance. First, Moses trusted in ritual over God's spoken word. He acted as a magician rather than as a prophet. Similarly, the people expected God's blessings irrespective of

His verbal judgments against them. They expected the promised inheritance (v. 5) apart from their covenantal faithfulness to His revealed word.

The Old Covenant prophet's word was ethically conditional. Jonah is the archetype. Jonah announced publicly that Nineveh would perish in 40 days (Jonah 3:4). The nation immediately repented. God spared them for this repentance. The prophecy was conditional: destruction unless you repent. Jonah had not announced the conditional clause, but it was implicit in Jonah's message. It is even possible that Jonah had not understood the conditionality of his message, for he sulked when God did not destroy Nineveh 40 days later (Jonah 4).

The Israelites kept reminding Moses that God's promise to them had not come true. This was the heart of their rebellion. They had not paid attention to the details of His promise to Abraham: the fourth generation would inherit. While some of them would have participated in the inheritance had they not rebelled, their sons would lead the army. When Moses promised to lead them into a land of milk and honey, he meant covenantally: their sons would receive what Abraham had promised. The parents would inherit through the actions of their sons. They forfeited their co-participation through their rebellion in Numbers 14. They had attempted to stone the representatives of the generation of the conquest, Caleb and Joshua.

They viewed the prophetic office as a pagan priesthood: infusing words with power through ritual irrespective of the judicial content of the words. They wanted signs and wonders; Moses provided this for them. By succumbing to the temptation of tapping the rock, he acted as Aaron had in the golden calf incident: pandering to the people. They wanted a magical religion of ritual without ethics, rewards without obedience. God disinherited them for acting consistently with this pagan worldview. God told Moses to remove Aaron's robes of authority and place them on Eleazar, which Moses did (vv. 26–28). Aaron immediately died (v. 28). Chapter 20 begins with Miriam's death; it ends with Aaron's death and the month of national mourning. The sanction of disinheritance had been applied by God in full public view.

Conclusion

When Moses tapped the rock twice in order to coax water out of it, he publicly proclaimed a magical religion. He added a ritual of his own to the word of God. Without this ritual, he decided, either God

would not honor His word or the people would not be moved to faith in the God who speaks events into existence. Moses and Aaron displayed a lack of faith in such a God. They therefore suffered the same negative sanction that burdened their generation: disinheritance.

Cause and effect in history are covenantal. God decrees whatever comes to pass. History is governed by God in terms of God's will, both hidden (Deut. 29:29) and revealed. God told Moses to speak His words to the people. God did not tell Moses to add any ritual in order to verify God's words or to infuse power into the supernatural nature of the event that followed: water out of a rock. God's word was sufficient. But Moses did not believe this. His actions publicly testified to his disbelief.

Magic is a religion that substitutes ritual for ethics. It invokes power through ritual acts. Even its words take on the character of ritual: formulas. Magic is a religion of manipulation: ritual acts that supposedly produce predictable changes in the world outside the sacred priestly realm. This is not biblical religion. Biblical religion has rituals, but these rituals are judicial, not magical. They do not enable the priest to tap into a realm of power irrespective of the ethical content of men's acts. Biblical ritual is judicial, bringing men under the terms of God's law and the sanctions attached to it. The sanctions are real, i.e., historical, but they are the outcome of a cause-and-effect system that rests on ethics rather than ritual. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:7-8).

12

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VICTORY

Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon (Num. 21:14).

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. The book of the wars of the Lord is one of several missing books that are referred to in the Bible. These include the book of Jasher (Josh. 10:13; II Sam. 1:18), the book of the acts of Solomon (I Kings 11:41), the books of Samuel the seer, Nathan the prophet, and Gad the seer (I Chron. 29:29), the prophecies of Ahijah the Shilonite and Iddo the seer (II Chron. 9:29), the book of Shemaiah the prophet (II Chron. 12:15), and the chronicles of the kings of the Medes and Persians (Esth. 10:2). This is the first biblical reference to a now-missing book.

The text informs us that these wilderness wars began at the border of the wilderness, the Red Sea, where God destroyed the army of Pharaoh. The missing chronicles continued at least until the war listed in this chapter: the war at Arnon, the border of Sihon's kingdom. The victories associated with the defeat of Sihon became part of Israel's folk heritage: proverbs of destruction. "Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared: For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of the high places of Arnon" (Num. 21:27–28).

The question arises: When did this final series of wars begin? Did the generation of the exodus initiate them? Or was it the generation of the conquest? It was the latter. Miriam and Aaron were dead by the time the battles began. They died in the fortieth year after the exodus (Num. 33:38). By this time, all of the older generation had died off except Moses. They had died during the 38 years from the exodus to Israel's arrival at Kadesh-barnea (Deut. 2:14). This took place prior to the journey to Mt. Hor (Num. 33:36–37), where Aaron died.

Moses was old. It was he who would announce the terms of the inheritance to the next generation: the Book of Deuteronomy is a record of these terms. This second giving of the law (*deutero, nomos*) was preparatory to national covenant renewal: the circumcision of the conquest generation (Josh. 5:7). God's prophecy to Abraham regarding the inheritance of the fourth generation (Gen. 15:16) was about to be fulfilled. What we see in this chapter is the manifestation of a new psychology of victory in Israel. There was one final rebellion. After this, open rebellion ended until after the conquest.

A. Hormah

Hormah was the city where the Israelites had suffered a major military defeat. They had attempted to prove Moses wrong regarding their inability to prosper militarily after their attempted stoning of Joshua and Caleb. "Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah" (Num. 14:45). That legacy of defeat would now be reversed.

Chapter 21 is an account of several wilderness wars. The first was the war with king Arad the Canaanite. He lived in the south, outside the borders of Canaan (Josh. 12:6–7, 14). He started a war with Israel, and he took some of them prisoner (Num. 21:1). "And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah" (vv. 2–3).

Israel's counter-attack was preceded by a vow. A biblical vow is a promise sworn to God that if God performs a specific act in history, the vow-taker will perform another act or series of acts. This is a lawful oath before God. Such an oath is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions. The vow implies that God will impose negative sanctions on anyone who takes such a vow and subsequently fails to perform his side of the bargain. "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth" (Num. 30:2). "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt

forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee" (Deut. 23:21–22). The vow is therefore a self-maledictory oath: calling down God's negative sanctions in history for failing to abide by the terms of the oath.

Israel promised to destroy utterly the cities under Arad's authority. This they did. The area of devastation Israel called Hormah. The word *hormah* is derived from the Hebrew word for "devoted." A thing devoted by a vow to the Lord could not be bought back (Lev. 27:28–29).¹ The *hormah* was the ban.² It was the judicial equivalent of a whole burnt offering. All of it belonged to God. It was fit for burning, under a curse, like Jericho: "And the city shall be *accursed*, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent" (Josh. 6:17; emphasis added). The Hebrew root word is the same in both cases: devoted or accursed.

B. The Serpent as Negative Sanction

After the defeat of Arad and prior to the next phase of the wilderness wars, Israel rebelled one last time. Their complaint was the same old complaint: God had failed to live up to His promise. This had been the complaint of the exodus generation: God supposedly had broken His vow to Israel. As always, that generation failed to acknowledge that the prophecy had been to Joshua's generation. The exodus generation had rebelled against God by rejecting the testimony of Joshua and Caleb, representatives of the fourth generation, and by seeking to impose the sanction of death on them: stoning (Num. 14). The next generation now repeated their complaint. "And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread" (Num 21:4–5). Early in the wilderness period, God had brought positive sanctions on the nation when they had offered this complaint: manna (Ex. 16) and water from the rock (Ex. 17). But later on, He had brought negative sanctions against them for their complaining: fire (Num. 11:1–2) and plague (Num. 11:33). It should have been clear to

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 36:A; ch. 36:B:1–2.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 622–23.

them that if they persisted in this complaint—comparing Egypt's bondage conditions favorably with life in the wilderness—He would impose further negative sanctions. They had not learned this lesson, yet they had been wandering for several decades. Like children who repeatedly commit the same infraction, despite previous punishments, so was Israel. They needed another lesson. "And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6). The people then repented: "Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people" (v. 7).

1. *The Brass Serpent*

At this point, an event took place that raises difficult questions regarding symbolism in the ancient Near East, as we shall see. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (vv. 8–9). This took place sometime in the second half of the fifteenth century before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The brass serpent was attached to a pole. This image still marks the guild of physicians: a serpent entwined around a pole. A similar symbol, two serpents entwined around a pole, goes back to Sumeria. The Sumerian god Ninazu was the god of healing. The son of this god, Ningishzida, was represented by the two snakes and pole.³ This is known today as the caduceus: in Greek mythology, the wand of Hermes. The symbol of a snake on a pole is also associated with Asklepius, the Greek god of healing. This god was the Greek deity most frequently represented in snake form.⁴ The Phoenecians' healing god, Eshmun, was represented by a snake.⁵ The snake-pole symbol was part of the crest of the Surgeon General of the United States until 1871.

3. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1930?] 1961), pp. 488–89.

4. John Cuthbert Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1910] 1964), pp. 274–75.

5. Jacob Milgram, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 459.

The caduceus replaced it in 1871.⁶

Did God select a symbol familiar as a sign of healing in the pagan Near East in Moses' day? Or was this event the origin of this Near Eastern symbol of healing? The conventional academic dating systems place the events of the exodus late in the second millennium, B.C. The earliest clay tablets containing Sumerian literary history are dated as having been written late in the third millennium. Large numbers of these clay tablets are dated as having been written in the first half of the second millennium.⁷ By revising the conventional academic chronologies of the ancient Near East, which insert a mythical Dark Age era, 1200 BC to 700 BC,⁸ we may be able to identify the caduceus symbol as contemporary with Israel's wilderness era. To determine which came first, the wilderness event or the Sumerians' caduceus snake-pole symbol, we must first determine the date of the earliest appearance of the symbol. This task still lies ahead of us. "Clearly, a colossal amount of work lies ahead in building new detailed chronologies for individual areas," wrote revisionist Peter James.⁹

The sanction facing the bitten Israelite was death. To escape it, the victim had to take a ritual step: to look at the elevated symbol of deliverance. This symbol became the archetype of the sinner's access to spiritual healing: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

6. "Caduceus," *Grolier Encyclopedia* (1990).

7. Samuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, [1956] 1959), p. xix.

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix A (1985): "The Reconstruction of Egypt's Chronology." My book appeared in the same year that the authors of *Centuries of Darkness* first met at the London Institute of Archeology. They found that they had all become skeptical regarding chronologies of the ancient Near East, i.e., that "the 'centuries of darkness' inserted into the histories of so many areas between 1200 and 700 BC were largely illusory." Peter James, *Centuries of Darkness: A challenge to the conventional chronology of Old World Archeology* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. xviii. The authors believe that the general inflation is more like 250 years than 500 (p. xxi). The modern source of this call for a revised Near Eastern chronology was Immanuel Velikovsky, whose reconstruction proved to be, writes James, "disastrously extreme" (p. xxi). An attempt to revise ancient chronologies was pursued for three decades by Isaac Newton. His book, published without his permission, was *The Chronology of the Ancient Kingdoms Amended* (1725). Cf. Frank Manuel, *Isaac Newton, Historian* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963). The most detailed revisionist study I have read on the topic of Egypt's chronology in relation to Israel's is an unpublished, 89-page, singlespaced personal letter sent to me by Brad Sparks in 1986. It should be updated and published, but I no longer know where Sparks is.

9. James, *Centuries of Darkness*, p. xxii.

even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14–15). These words precede the widely quoted verse, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The ultimate negative sanction, the second death (Rev. 20:14), is removed through a man's willingness to acknowledge the reality of the eternal effects of the serpent's sting in his life, and to subordinate himself to God by acceding to the means of grace. The serpent, as the original earthly agent of man's evil and rebellion, symbolizes man's broken covenant with God. What was placed on both the pole and the cross, symbolically and judicially speaking, was sin: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). The pole and the cross represent the sanction of death: God's permanent negative sanction against the serpent and its effects. By lifting up an image of the serpent, Moses identified the agency of the negative sanction against man: sin. The man who failed to acknowledge this means of deliverance was doomed.

This healing by the elevated serpent was the positive sanction that transformed Israel from a nation of psychologically defeated nomads into a nation of pilgrims on the march. This time, Israel at long last learned its lesson. Never again did Israel bring the accusation against Moses that God had brought them into the wilderness to die, and that Egypt had been a better place to live. The only instance even remotely similar to the old complaint was Joshua's prayer to God after Israel's defeat at Ai. He complained that it would have been better to have remained on the far side of the Jordan. But his complaint was not that Israel was better off outside the land. He appealed to the holiness of God's name: "For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Josh. 7:9). Israel's defeat would reflect badly on His name. God then told him of the infraction that had polluted Israel: the theft of something from Jericho, which had been placed under the total ban of *hormah*.

C. Sanctions and Inheritance

Israel's wanderings continued (Num. 21:10–13). They came to Beer. Here the leaders of the nation were instructed by Moses to dig a well. "And from thence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the

LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves" (vv. 16–18a). This took place shortly before Israel's initial occupation of the land outside Canaan. When the nation's leaders dug the well, they were visibly serving the needs of those whom they represented judicially. They personally expended scarce resources on behalf of the nation as a whole. The idea of *political leadership as public service* became part of Israel's folklore, encapsulated in the song of the well.

Then Israel journeyed to the border area between the Amorites and Moab. Moab had been born through the incestuous union of Lot and his daughter (Gen. 19:37). Moab and his brother Ammon had always displayed the mark of Sodom: sinful rebellion. It took ten generations of circumcision and profession of faith for a Moabite or an Ammonite to gain citizenship in Israel (Deut. 23:3), compared to three generations for an Edomite or an Egyptian (Deut. 23:8). The Amorites had conquered Moab and had appropriated much of Moab's land (Num. 21:26). There was a proverb regarding this defeat: "Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites" (v. 29). The defeat of the Moabite god Chemosh was revealed in his surrender of the Moabites to the Amorites. This was the meaning of a military defeat in pagan antiquity: the surrender of the gods of the defeated army.¹⁰ It was only Israel that renounced this theology of local gods, for God promised to allow their enemies to defeat them if they disobeyed Him (Lev. 26:17, 25, 33). He would remain with them spiritually in any captivity. Israel asked Sihon, king of the Amorites, to allow Israel to pass through his territory on the king's highway. Sihon not only refused, he assembled his army against Israel. This was an unnecessary act of war. Israel had asked Edom the same thing, and had gone another way when Edom refused (Num. 20:14–21). Edom had assembled an army, but this was a defensive operation (Num. 20:20). Sihon attacked Israel without provocation (Num. 21:23). This led to his complete destruction in battle (v. 24). Israel took possession of all of the Amorite cities (v. 25). "Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites" (v. 31). This land became the inheritance of two

10. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Bk. III, Ch. XV.

and a half tribes. "And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about" (Num. 32:33).

Moses had been told by God that by making the request to pass through the cities under Sihon's jurisdiction, he would provoke the king to imitate the Pharaoh and launch a suicidal confrontation. Deuteronomy 2 records in greater detail God's strategy of conquest. "Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle. This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee" (Deut. 2:24-25). The war was preceded by Moses' attempt to initiate peace: "And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace. . ." (v. 26). God dealt with Sihon as He had dealt with Pharaoh: He hardened Sihon's heart. "But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day" (v. 30). This was the beginning of Israel's inheritance: "And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land" (v. 31). Israel also gained the inheritance of Moab by conquering Sihon. In Numbers 22 through 25, we read of Moab's attempts to reclaim this forfeited inheritance: first by a military alliance with Midian and by prophetic cursing by Balaam, then by physical and spiritual seduction.

Moses used this initial conquest to extend Israel's power: "And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there" (Num. 21:32). The first group of spies sent out by Moses had returned from Canaan with negative reports (Num. 14). This time, their reports furthered the conquest of Canaan. This was the preliminary series of conquests designed to teach the generation of the conquest that God was faithful, that Israel could win in battle. City by city, the inheritance was built up. Israel began to move from a people on a pilgrimage to a people with roots in the land. The next confrontation was with Og, king of Bashan. He, too, was utterly defeated (v. 35). Thus did Og join Sihon in the folklore of

Israel's conquests.¹¹

Conclusion

Numbers 21 records a series of corporate capital sanctions: against Arad the Canaanite, against the people of Israel, against Sihon the Amorite, against the cities of Jaazer, and against Og of Bashan. Negative sanctions against Moab had already been applied by God through Sihon. Arad and his cities did not become part of Israel's inheritance. They became *hormah*: a whole burnt offering to God. This pattern of conquest was repeated by the next generation: Jericho became *hormah*. In neither case was Israel allowed to appropriate the land or property of these cities.

Israel was ethically transformed by the serpent experience. The nation ceased complaining about the wilderness as a promise unfulfilled by God. Shortly thereafter, God began to deliver into their hands parts of the land outside the boundaries of the Jordan. At first, this was the result of an offensive attack by Sihon, but after possessing Sihon's inheritance, Moses began an offensive campaign modeled after the failed campaign of Numbers 13–14. He sent spies out; then Israel conquered a city, Jaazer. Then Og launched a war against them, which he lost. Israel's mentality changed as a result of these initial battles. Israel began to occupy defeated nations' land. Israel's psychology of defeat began to change to a psychology of victory. The tribes began to secure an inheritance for themselves and their heirs through a series of military victories. The positive sanction of victory became the basis of Israel's inheritance.

What had produced this change? We can blame the serpents' sanctions, but this is only a minor part of the story. Their complaint was a recapitulation of the sin of the generation of the exodus. This was the same old complaint. The beginning of inheritance began soon after the serpents did their covenantal work. Israel had not occupied king Arad's land, for it was under the ban, as Jericho would be. But the next military victories allowed Israel to cease wandering. These victories changed the psychology of the nation. The old complaint that God had not fulfilled His promise to Israel regarding the Promised Land received a death blow: down payments on the victory to come.

11. Numbers 32:33; Deuteronomy 1:4; 29:7; 31:4; Joshua 2:10; 9:10; Nehemiah 9:22; Psalm 135:11.

13

THE OFFICE OF COURT PROPHET

And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies; and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour. And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak? (Num. 24:10–13).

The theocentric issue is God as the sanctions-bringer. Men must conform their judgments to God's judgment. At this stage of his career as a prophet, Balaam was still serving as God's representative. He understood what God had promised. He was still refusing to curse Israel. He also understood that Israel was no longer under the curse of God that had made nomads out of the exodus generation, wandering in circles. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them" (Num. 23:21). Israel was immune to divination, incantations, and other paraphernalia of magic: "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (Num. 23:23).

A. "Every Man Has His Price!"

Balak, king of Moab (Num. 22:4), realized that he had a monumental problem on his hands. He had seen the Israelites defeat Sihon and thereby gain the inheritance of Moab that Sihon had collected from Moab (Num. 21:26). The Israelites had then gone on to defeat

the city of Jaazer and Og of Bashan. They were no longer the defeated people who had been routed by the Amalekites and Canaanites (Num. 14:45). Their numbers were vast. They were a company, Balak informed the Midianites (Num. 22:4), as in multitude (Gen. 28:3).

Balak had formed an alliance with Midian. Moab was the heir of Lot. Midian was the heir of Abraham through Keturah (Gen. 25:1–2). Moses had fled from Egypt to Midian (Ex. 2:15). He had been given an inheritance in Midian through his wife and his children. Now, a generation later, Midian had allied itself with Moab against Moses. Soon, Midian would participate in a joint action with Moab to undermine Israel's faith by worshipping the gods of Moab (Num. 25:1–2, 6). Midian came under negative sanctions because of this (Num. 25:17).

1. Court Prophets

What Balak needed, he decided, was a court prophet who would curse Israel in the name of God. Prophets could be purchased, Balak believed. "He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (Num. 22:5–6).

Balak believed in the power of verbal curses when delivered by an official representative of God. Negative sanctions in history could be successfully invoked by means of a curse. This required a prophet, whose word was authoritative because what he said would surely take place. A prophet prophesied. For a price, Balak believed, Balaam would prophesy evil against a king's enemies. His curses were for sale. The positive sanction of money could purchase the negative sanction of God's curse in history. Such were the religious convictions of Balak.

"And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak" (Num. 22:7). Balaam inquired of God, and God told him not to go with them, for Israel is blessed (v. 12). At first, Balaam refused to appear before the king (v. 13). Balak sent another group, this one even more honorable than the first (v. 15).

This indicates that Balak was trying to negotiate a low price; he had not sent his most prestigious representatives the first time. He was persuaded that “every man has his price,” but also that it is not shrewd to offer your top price early in the negotiations. Having failed in his first attempt to lure Balaam into his court, he raised his price: “For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people” (v. 17). But Balaam refused again: “And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more” (v. 18). He inquired again of God, and this time God told him to go with them.

2. Balaam's Price

This raises a difficult question: Why did God tell him to go this time? God did not want him to go. Balaam went with them. “And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him” (v. 22a). God had already told Balaam that Israel was sacrosanct: beyond negative sanctions. He had also told him not to go with the first group of emissaries (v. 12). For a prophet of God, this revelation should have been sufficient. But Balak knew his man. Balaam had a price. That price was determined in stages. This is why Balaam came to God again (v. 19). Maybe this time God's answer would be different. And so it was: “And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do” (v. 20). Balaam was like a moth flitting around an open flame. When Balak's price rose, so did Balaam's interest. Perhaps God would give him a new word of knowledge. At some price, maybe God would change His mind.

Balak and Balaam shared the same view of prophecy; they disagreed only regarding the price. Balak believed that the prophet could be bought off. The words of the prophet supposedly had power within themselves; God was either an afterthought or a tool of the prophet. Balak did not want the prophet to serve as an intermediary, speaking God's word as God's representative (point two of the biblical covenant model). What Balak wanted was an invocation of negative sanctions against Israel. God was unwilling to impose these sanctions. He told Balaam to tell this to Balak, which Balaam did: “How shall I curse,

whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:8–9). But Balak's response was to recommend a change of perspective: "And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence" (Num. 23:13).

Balak was a manipulator. He believed that man, not God, is sovereign. He believed that the prophet's power stemmed from himself or from some impersonal cosmic repository of power. If he could persuade the prophet to declare a word of power, then the cosmos would respond and impose that curse. God had nothing to do with the curse; Balaam was sovereign, not God. And Balaam had a price. The answer Balak wanted to know was what this price was. If he could ascertain Balaam's price and pay it, he would become sovereign over Israel on the battlefield. He might even regain Moab's lost inheritance, which Israel occupied.

Balaam insisted that he was not in a position to deliver what the king wanted. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (Num. 23:19–20). Israel was going to win: "Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain" (v. 24).

This concerned Balak. He had asked for a prophetic word; he did not like what he heard: a blessing for Israel. He wanted to return to the status quo ante: "And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all" (v. 25). But he was too late: the prophetic word had been spoken. "But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?" (v. 26). So, Balak suggested another change of perspective: "And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon" (vv. 27–28).

This is the classic sign of a manipulator: "Just keep your options open until you see things my way." He wants a particular outcome. If he cannot get what he wants by approaching the evidence from one

perspective, he approaches it from another. He is not involved in a search for truth. He is buying a preconceived outcome. Balaam cooperated again. "And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar" (v. 30). It was obvious that he was caught between two opposing forces, and he wanted to escape the pressure. He wanted temporal rewards from Balak, but he did not want punishment from God. He kept the process open-ended for as long as he could. He sought God in the wilderness through a trance (Num. 24:1, 4). The revelation was the same, only more so: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn [wild bull]: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows" (vv. 5–8). Then came God's promise of sanctions for Balaam: "He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee" (v. 9).

At this unpleasant news, Balak rejected Balaam and sent him home. He rebuked Balaam for having failed to deliver the curse he wanted (v. 10). It was all God's fault. "Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour" (v. 11). Before, Balak had expected Balaam to perform as requested, on Balaam's own authority. Now, however, Balak ridiculed Balaam by pointing out that God had decided to keep Balaam from receiving the honors which the king had planned to bestow on him. God was obviously being vindictive against Balaam; this had nothing to do with Israel's protected covenantal status.

3. At What Price?

The economist shares Balak's view of pricing. He may not argue that every man has his price, but he argues that at the decision-making margin, every man will evaluate a price. The decision-maker will count the cost of saying no to the offer. His cost of saying no is whatever he might have gained by saying yes, minus whatever it would cost him to say yes and fulfill his contract.

If a future-oriented individual believes that God will impose negative sanctions on a scale beyond calculation, he will refuse to say yes to an offer that endangers his future. Jesus asked: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). By this He meant that the cost-benefit ratio of a soul-threatening decision is overwhelmingly on the side of righteousness. The cost of doing evil is too high. The magnitude of the discrepancy is so great that gaining the whole world would be a bad bargain. This understanding had governed His own response to Satan's temptation: "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:8–10).

What this means is that for some decision-makers, the net cost of saying no to evil is so minuscule as not to be a factor. The person's fear of God is so great that the price offered does not register on his scale of values. At what price will a mother murder her infant son? For some mothers, no such price exists. For others, it does—a prophetic mark of covenant-breaking.¹

If no price is sufficiently high to register on her scale of values, then the price can be said to be economically irrelevant. It is not an economic factor for her. There is no choice to be made. A clever economist can then define the problem out of existence: "Since there can be no choice, there is no trade-off; without a trade-off, there is no economically relevant marginal price." A morally wise economist, however, will say that some people do not have a price.

Sin being what it is, and present-orientation being what it is, in most decisions most men will have a price. The covenant-breaker believes that this area of decision-making is wider than it really is, for there are people who believe that the price of disobedience to God is

1. "Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat" (Lev. 26:28-29). "And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh" (II Kings 6:28-30).

too high. The economist, rarely being a covenant-keeper, and also a methodological atheist—though usually a self-declared morally neutral agnostic—finds it difficult to believe that there are people who act irrespective of price. He may re-define the array of prices to include men's beliefs in the hereafter, but in practice, the typical economist presumes what Balak presumed: every man has his price. The humanistic economist rejects or ignores the ultimate law of sociology: "Some do; some don't."

B. Donkey, Prophet, and King

The story of Balaam's journey to meet the king is better known than the circumstances of the event. Balaam was initially told by God not to accompany the two kings' representatives (Num. 22:12). Balaam did not want to take no for an answer.

God knew this. Balaam told the representatives that he would not come with them, but he left a way of escape. This is the classic answer of the bureaucrat: announce a negative at the first request, but leave a way of escape. The bureaucrat who retreats from yes to no alienates some politician's constituent. A bureaucrat who retreats from no to yes placates the constituent.

Next, God allowed him to go with the representatives, but God did not want him to go. He knew Balaam's heart, which was evil. On the journey, the angel of the Lord appeared to Balaam's donkey, but Balaam did not see it. Three times the donkey refused to go forward. Three times, Balaam struck the donkey for disobedience. Finally, the angel revealed himself to Balaam, informing him that "I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me" (Num. 22:32b). Balaam then offered to turn back (v. 34). "And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak" (v. 35).

The best-informed participant was the donkey, who saw the angel from the beginning. Less informed was Balaam, who saw the angel only after the donkey did, and only after he had beaten the donkey three times (v. 32). Least informed was Balak, who refused three times to accept God's word through Balaam that God had a special relationship with Israel. "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them

these three times” (Num. 24:10). Balaam three times had tried to persuade the donkey to do things his way; he used negative sanctions, but these failed. Balak three times had tried to persuade Balaam to do things his way; he used positive sanctions, but these failed. The donkey was a better servant of God than Balaam was; Balaam was a better servant of God than Balak was. The donkey defied Balaam in order to protect Balaam from the angel; Balaam defied Balak in order to protect himself from God. The donkey was not self-interested; Balaam was. This incident reveals that covenant-breakers in their rebellion do not have the common sense of a donkey. A donkey serves its master better than a covenant-breaker serves God (Isa. 1:3). The words of Balaam to the donkey should warn covenant-breakers of the wrath to come: “I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee” (Num. 22:29b). If Balaam was ready to kill his faithful donkey out of personal pride, what is God ready to do with covenant-breakers who resist Him out of this same pride?

C. Balaam’s Motivation

Balaam did not want Balak to have the last word in this matter. He revealed another prophecy that he had been given in the vision (Num. 24:16). He presented the king with a messianic prophecy: “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city” (vv. 17–19). He prophesied the extinction of the Amalekites and the Kenites (vv. 20–22). Then he departed (v. 25). But as we learn in Numbers 31, Balaam’s last word was an incomplete word. He remained the king’s agent rather than God’s.

The account of Balaam’s prophecy indicates that he was weak, hoping that he might profit from his position as a court prophet, but strong enough to resist Balak’s request that he utter a curse against Israel in God’s name. He refused to say no each time that Balak asked him to reconsider or to look at the matter from a new geographical perspective. He played with fire, but he initially avoided getting burned. The problem was, he could not stop playing with fire. His seeming immunity led to his eventual destruction. He refused to utter a false

prophecy against Israel, but he then devised the plan by which the Midianite allies of Moab seduced the Israelites. "Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD" (Num. 31:16). For this, Moses ordered him executed, after the military defeat of Midian (v. 8).

Balaam's plan involved the use of Moabite and Midianite women as temptresses. "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods" (Num. 25:1-2). This was the first time that Israel is said to have openly worshipped foreign gods; it would not be the last. This false worship angered God (v. 3). There is no doubt that this had been Balaam's plan. He believed that God supported Israel because of Israel's righteous behavior. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them" (Num. 23:21). What he had misunderstood was that God did not see iniquity in Israel because of its absence in Israel. He failed to see it judicially. God looked at the judicial coverings that He had provided Israel: the sacrifices, the system of cleansing, and the other boundaries that separated Israel from the other nations. He had chosen Israel despite Israel's sins. He was building up Israel as His people. Thus, any attempt to undermine Israel's commitment to God would not result in the defeat of Israel but the defeat of the perpetrators. Balaam had prophesied: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23:10b). His words subsequently condemned him. He died the death of the unrighteous.

There is no indication that Balaam was paid for having suggested this strategy of subversion. Paid or not, Balaam wanted to be part of the establishment. He wanted to be an insider, part of the inner ring. As C. S. Lewis remarked before a group of university students: "Of all passions the passion for the Inner Ring is most skillful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things."² The king of Moab had sent representatives of Moab and Midian to recruit him (Num. 22:7). This was proof of his importance to the leaders of the alliance. Access to power is a strong lure. Balaam would not sell a false prophecy to Balak, though he refused to turn down the king's request

2. C. S. Lewis, "The Inner Ring" (1944), in Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), p. 103. (<http://bit.ly/LewisRing>)

definitively at the very beginning of the negotiations. Balak believed that every man has his price. Balaam did have a price, but that price seems not to have been money. The price was access to power, to importance within the inner ring. He thought of himself as a master strategist. He believed that he could undermine the basis of Israel's support by God. This way, he would be able to announce a true prophecy that was favorable to Balak's cause.

Balaam was formally a true prophet. He refused to utter a false prophecy, i.e., a judicially binding curse in God's name. "And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more" (Num. 22:18). Ethically, however, he was a false prophet. He used his knowledge of God's covenantal relationship with Israel—a covenant grounded in ethical stipulations—to lure Israel into adultery in the broadest sense. Balaam had a surface understanding of biblical covenantalism. He understood that God's corporate sanctions in history enforce His covenant's stipulations. Balaam believed that if he could lure Israel into the judicial status of a covenant-breaking nation, God would impose negative corporate sanctions on Israel. These, he believed, would weaken Israel, allowing the alliance to defeat Israel. He could then invoke a curse against Israel. He would thereby establish himself as both a true prophet and a court prophet.

God did impose sanctions on Israel: 24,000 died in a plague (Num. 25:9). More would have died had it not been for the representative judicial action of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar (v. 7), who executed an Israelite man and Midianite woman in their act of debauchery (v. 8). But Israel's sin did not break the covenant permanently. God's grace covered the transgression. God then called Israel to battle Midian (v. 17). It was Midian that lost the war, not Israel (Num. 31).

Conclusion

Balaam was the classic court prophet. The court prophet in Israel served the king, not God. The king paid him to speak the word of the king in the name of God. Whether he declared the future accurately was irrelevant to his status as a court prophet.

Covenant law is intended to lead sinners to repentance. Balaam did not call Balak to repentance before God. Instead, he sought a way to lure Israel into sin. He misused his knowledge of God's covenant.

He sought a perverse end by means of the law itself. In this sense, he adopted Satan's strategy with Eve in the garden and Jesus in the wilderness: partial citations of the law in order to undermine the intent of the law, i.e., covenantal faithfulness to God. Balaam announced God's commitment to Israel because of Israel's righteousness, and then he devised a strategy to make Israel unrighteous. For this, God placed him under the negative sanction of execution.

14

DIVIDING THE INHERITANCE

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him. Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few (Num. 26:52–56).

The theocentric focus of this law is the familiar theme of ownership: God was the owner of the Promised Land. He delegated to Israelite tribes and then to families inter-generational stewardship over certain plots of land. He served as the original agent of distribution by means of the casting of lots. Tribes were to serve as the secondary agents of distribution: allocating ownership in terms of family size. The question to be resolved was ethical: To what extent was the allocation of land based on considerations of equity—family size and need—and to what extent on the question of equality of family inheritance? That is, was the allocation based more on family size or tribal inheritance rights? This problem has baffled rabbinic commentators for almost two thousand years.

This command to allocate portions of the land followed the second wilderness numbering of Israel (Num. 26:1–2). The nation had already been involved in a series of defensive wars against Canaanites who dwelt outside the boundaries of the Jordan. Israel did not initiate them. (The conquest of Jazeer may have been an exception.) Israel was victorious over these nations and had begun to occupy large tracts of real estate, but only because the previous holders had attacked Israel rather than allowing Israel access through their lands. This was the down payment on Israel's inheritance, prophesied by Abraham: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the

Amorites is not yet fun" (Gen. 15:16). Now, the iniquity of the Amorites had become full. The Amorite tribes outside of the boundaries of Canaan had launched a pair of offensive campaigns against Israel (Num. 21 :23, 33), which they lost. This marked the beginning of the conquest.

A. By Lot or by Need?

The nation numbered 601,730 men of fighting age (v. 51), which was very close to what it had been a generation earlier. Once this was ascertained, God laid down the law of spoils. First, it was by family size. "To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to everyone shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him" (v. 54). Second, it was by lot. "Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit" (v. 55). Taken at face value, these two rules are inconsistent. If distribution is strictly by lot, then there is no way to allocate property in terms of "larger families—more land." A plot of land will go to the family selected by lot.

Pre-modern rabbinical commentators were not agreed on a way to resolve this. Some, following Rashi, argued that the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Hakodesh*) allocated unequal portions to the families. "Although the portions were not of equal *area* because, *as we have now said*, in all cases they assigned the portions according to the numerousness of the tribe, yet they did so only by aid of the lot, but the lot fell by the utterance of the Holy Spirit, as is explained in Baba Bathra (122a)."¹ The problem here was the text's indication that Israel's leaders had to consider the size of the tribes. If God was in solely in charge of this, why did Moses mention this problem in the rules governing allocation? It seems as though the rules placed this responsibility on the rulers.

Nachmanides rejected this interpretation: ". . . it is explicitly stated in the Gemara [Baba Bathra 11 7b] that the meaning of [this section] according to the Sages was not to distinguish in any way between [the portion given to] each particular tribe [since they each received an equal portion]. . . . [T]he Rabbis expressly came to the conclusion that the Land was *not* divided according to the heads of men, [i.e., accord-

1. Rashi, *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum, trans., 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, [1934] 1985 [Jewish year: 5745]), IV, p. 129 (comment on verse 53).

ing to the overall population], but it was divided among [all] the tribes [equally]. Thus they divided it into twelve equal parts, and each tribe took that part which was assigned to it by lot”² The rabbis debated about whether the inheritance went to the sons at the time of the second wilderness numbering as individual warriors or whether they inherited their shares in terms of what God had allocated at the exodus to their fathers.³

Isaac ben Judah Abravanel (1437–1508), an Iberian rabbinic commentator, offered a third possibility. The lots for the tribes identified the region of the nation in which a tribe would ultimately dwell, but the size of these tribal plots was based on tribal population. Some tribes might receive less fertile land, so they would be granted larger territories within the general region. The modern commentator, Jacob Milgrom, thinks that this is the correct approach, with this modification: the families, too, would receive their plots in terms of their size, not by lot.⁴ But is he correct?

If allocation was strictly by lot to each family, then the presumption is that the plots allocated were all the same size. But the allocation was not strictly by lot. There was also a consideration of family size. The question is: Which family? Was a family determined on a “one numbered warrior, one family plot” basis? Or was it based on the family name within each tribe? Or was it some sort of mixture?

B. Individual Plot or Tribal Plot?

In the second Numbers mustering, each tribe’s census was broken down into families, and each family was named. In the first Numbers mustering, only Levi’s report was broken down by family names (Num. 3:17). The other tribal families were not named. After each tribal name, this phrase occurs: “. . . after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war.” The distinguishing mark of this earlier numbering is this phrase: “according to the number of the names.” In the numbering described in Numbers 26, this phrase does not occur. Instead, the name of each family appears. This

2. Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, 5 vols. (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1975), III, p. 313.

3. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, 5 vols. (Gateshead, London: Judaica Press, [1875?] 1989), IV, *Numbers*, pp. 446–48.

4. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 481.

points to the importance of family name in the second wilderness numbering. Each family knew that it would be a part of a victorious military campaign. Each knew what the terms of the inheritance were. Each had its name recorded in anticipation of the victory.

By identifying family names, meaning the names of the sons of the twelve patriarchs (Joseph's two sons initially counting as one family), the elders of each tribe knew that larger family units would have to be allocated more land. The question was: More land out of what sized tribal portion?

1. *Plot Size*

If this command from God was to be honored, there had to be a fixed reference point. The problem facing the commentator is to identify this fixed reference point. Was it the size of the *family plot*, with the same sized plot distributed by lot to each warrior? Was the *tribal plot* size fixed, with the allocation of plots within this fixed unit determined by the size and number of the families belonging to the tribe? Or was the constant factor the *general geographical location* of the land rather than the size of the allocation? If so, was this confined to the tribes' allocation, or were family plots also governed by the "general location" principle?

First, if each family plot was the same size, with allocation based on the number of holy warriors within each tribe, then the tribes' inheritances would not have been equal in size. Larger tribes would have received larger allocations. This was Rashi's opinion. Second, if each tribal allocation was the same size, then the individual warriors' inheritances would have varied in terms of the number of families in the tribe: members of larger tribes received smaller family inheritance on average. The families would then have been granted larger or smaller plots in terms of their size. This was Nachmanides' opinion, and he cited rabbinical tradition. This would have meant that members of small tribes with few families would have been granted larger plots, on average, than members of populous tribes.

There is a problem with Nachmanides' interpretation: a subsequent clarification of the law. "And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit" (Num. 33:54). It

appears as though the casting of lots was also used to divide up tribal real estate among each tribe's families: "every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth." It also sounds as though larger families received larger portions: "And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance." What did these phrases mean? Did "allocation by lot" apply both to the tribes and families? Did the "allocation by population" also apply to both? If so, how? How did God's allocation by lot integrate with the rulers' allocation in terms of population and presumed economic need?

2. Dual Allocations

The language of Numbers 33:54 indicates that both systems of allocation governed the initial allocation, first to tribes and then to families. How might this have worked? Let us consider Abravanel's suggestion. The land was divided up into eleven regions, but initially there were no fixed boundaries assigned to these large plots. Then lots were cast to determine which tribe would live in which region. Variations in the land's productivity would not become matters of inter-tribal conflict except in the tribes' border areas. The falling of the lot would govern the distribution. Then the question of tribal size became an issue. Here the rulers would have to decide. The Levites would probably have played an important role here because they were not given any rural land. Levites would live in cities in all regions. They had no self-interest in favoring one tribe over another. By using the lot method to allocate land regionally, and by using population to establish boundaries, the system reduced tribal conflict over the regional assignments, yet it honored considerations of equity: not favoring the members of small tribes by granting them family plots that were larger on average than the plots inherited by populous tribes.

If this dual allocation system was established as a way to reduce the number of inter-tribal conflicts regarding general location, yet to preserve equity based on family plot size, then the same dual allocation system would have worked in the same way to reduce the number of intra-tribal conflicts. The casting of lots determined each family's legal claim to a piece of property in a region within the tribe's inheritance, but the boundaries of the plots were determined by considerations of family size in relation to the land's expected productivity.

The decision facing the rulers was comparable to the decision facing the parents of several children. They have inherited a piece of property which, for some reason, they cannot legally sell. It is time to build a home. Should they tell the architect to build all of the rooms the same size? If they do, then the older children will complain, "But I need more room. The younger children have rooms as large as ours. It's not fair!" If they build different-sized rooms, the complaint from the younger children will be: "But the older one's rooms are bigger. You're not treating us the same. It's not fair!" What should the parents tell the architect to design? Then there is the additional question of where the rooms are to be placed, given the design of the house. Will one room look out on a lovely back yard, while another room face the blank side of the next door neighbor's house?

The language of Numbers 33:54 governing the distribution of both tribal land and family plots seems to indicate that both principles of allocation had to be honored. If the two systems of allocation were in force, we can better understand how this system worked by using the analogy of the home. Casting lots will determine which part of the home each child will live in: facing the back yard, front yard, or the next door neighbor's house; close to the kitchen or close to the joint bathroom; etc. "Don't complain to us; the lots decided your location." Once this general placement of the children's rooms is decided, the size of the rooms are designed in terms of the needs of older children vs. younger children.

The analogy breaks down in one crucial respect: older children grow up and move out. This leaves their rooms available for younger children who have also grown. In Israel, once a family was assigned its plot of ground, it could not permanently move out or buy more, except to move inside a walled city, where the jubilee land law did not apply.

C. Joshua's Allocations

Subsequent revelation provides us with additional evidence regarding the actual allocation of tribal land. "And the lot of the children of Joseph fell from Jordan by Jericho, unto the water of Jericho on the east, to the wilderness that goeth up from Jericho throughout mount Bethel, And goeth out from Bethel to Luz, and passeth along unto the borders of Archi to Ataroth, And goeth down westward to the coast of Japhleti, unto the coast of Beth-horon the nether, and to Gezer: and the goings out thereof are at the sea. So the children of Joseph, Manas-

seh and Ephraim, took their inheritance” (Josh. 16:1–4). The first thing to consider is the highly specific territory described here. The borders of this inheritance were already fixed. This seems to call into question Abravanel’s interpretation. But maybe not, as we shall see.

The second point is the singular word: lot. One lot fell to the children of Joseph. There had been an existing unit of land. The lot associated with this unit of land fell to the two tribes of Joseph. This means that the lot was associated with one patriarch. This led to a complaint:

Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out. And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto? And Joshua answered them, If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee. And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both they who are of Beth-shean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel. And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot only: But the mountain shall be thine; for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down: and the outgoings of i shall be thine: for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong (Josh. 17:13–18).

The heirs of the two sons of Joseph believed that they had been short-changed by the lot allocation system. They appealed to their might, i.e., their greater numerical strength, over the other tribal units. They deserved more land because they were in fact two family units, not one. In other words, the two tribes were calling for a revision based on population size. This seems consistent with Abravanel’s view: lot first, then reallocation based on population. But the two tribes were also raising a judicial point: they were two tribes. They had obviously been allocated only one tribal unit.⁵

5. These two tribes received their inheritance from Jacob one generation later than the other sons did, for they were grandsons of Jacob. So, their population expansion began later, biologically speaking. This would have made a considerable difference in their size at the time of the conquest. They would have been much smaller than the other tribes. Where, then, did they get their extra numbers? From adoptions. The sons of Joseph in the early years would have attracted more volunteers, since Joseph was

Joshua's response was both clever and critical of their claim. He understood their request as a judicial claim rather than a population claim: "one lot only." They wanted another lot. There were twelve non-Levitical tribes, not eleven. He told them, "You may have more land," he said. "Just go do your job and conquer the Canaanites whom you have allowed to occupy the land. You may claim another tribe's share of the inheritance by finishing what neither your tribe nor the other tribe has been able to complete: the conquest." In other words, he said: "All right, you self-proclaimed mighty men of war, you tough guys: go out and exterminate some really tough guys who are armed with iron chariots. Mighty is as mighty does. Put your muscle where your mouths are." Did they have a legitimate legal claim? Let them prove their claim on the battlefield.

The heirs of Joseph had a plausible legal case: they were in fact two families. They had been counted as two families in the musterings. Joshua took this into consideration. But he did not grant them their request irrespective of what they would do to enforce their claim. Combined, they were larger than other tribes. But numbers are as numbers do. They had to prove their case by evicting Canaanites. That is, they had to do something extra in order to validate their claim. They could keep any extra ground they conquered. This answer was Joshua's way to head off criticism from the other tribes. The other tribes might come back and complain: "Joseph was entitled to one share, just like the rest of us. He could not lawfully bequest what was not his to give. Let the heirs of his two sons accept this without trying to get their hands on our land." Joshua would have an answer: "They did not take away your land; they took away Canaanites' land. They earned their extra portion on the battlefield. It is only fair that they should share in a larger inheritance."

This was a special case: legal rather than demographic. The next seven casts were not special.

And there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you? Give out from among you three men for each tribe: and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the inheritance of them; and they shall come again to me. And they shall di-

the Pharaoh's agent. I am indebted to David McCalman for this insight. This is additional evidence for the presence of the adoption process early in Israel's stay in Egypt.

vide it into seven parts: Judah shall abide in their coast on the south, and the house of Joseph shall abide in their coasts on the north. Ye shall therefore describe the land into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God (Josh. 18:2–6).

This indicates that these seven tribes already had received their inheritances. Joshua announced the regions that Judah, Ephraim, and half the tribe of Manasseh would occupy.⁶ We know from the previous chapter that Joseph had received his land by lot. This indicates that the tribal lots for all of the tribes had already been cast. Each tribe knew approximately where its land would be. Each tribe would send out surveyors. So far, this is consistent with all three approaches to the allocation problem: Rashi's, Nachmanides', and Abravanel's.

The men were sent out in teams of three with instructions to survey the land. This indicates that the wars of conquest were over. The surveyors were not told to do an extensive survey in terms of the actual numbers of families in their tribes. Upon their return, they were to place before Joshua the descriptions of the boundaries of each of the seven tribal units.⁷ The text does not indicate that the seven plots were equal.

He had told them to bring back their descriptions "that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God" (v. 6). So, there was still a further allocation of land remaining. This indicates clearly that two separate castings of lots had to take place. The first was tribal. The second applied to clans or smaller family units. We are not told how the surveyors knew precisely which land belonged to which tribe, nor are we told if there had been, or would be, a demographics-based reallocation after the tribal lots were cast (Abravanel). We are not told whether a postsurvey reallocation took place. What we are told is that there had been a previous casting of lots, as indicated by the complaint by the heirs of Joseph, as well as by the fact that the surveyors knew generally where their tribes' inheritances were. We also know that another casting of lots lay ahead.

Rashi argued that God would have decided where the lots fell, with

6. This indicates that Ephraim and half the tribe of Manasseh had been successful in removing the Canaanites. The text says "their coasts" not "his coast" with respect to the tribe of Joseph.

7. This indicates that the Israelites had learned in Egypt how to survey. The highly sophisticated skills of the Egyptians in this regard are rarely noted in textbooks. See the appendix by Livio Stecchini in Peter Tompkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

large tribes receiving large inheritances. His view is theologically conceivable, though not very plausible. (Why had Moses brought up the family size issue if God would decide all this?) Nachmanides argued that the tribal plots were equal. Abravanel argued that only the tribal regions were determined by lot.

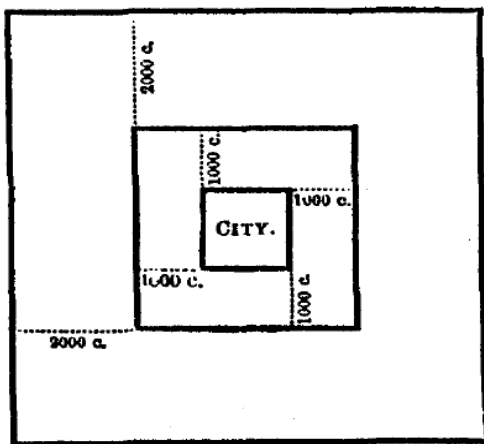
Nachmanides' position has to be rejected, at least with respect to family plots. His approach assumed tribal plots of equal size and allocated by lot, with family plots that varied in size in terms of family size. But why would there have to be an additional round of lot-casting? If the clan or family allocations were based strictly on need, what role did lot-casting play? With respect to family plots, we are left with some variation of Abravanel's approach: lot-casting to determine general location, plus a subsequent reallocation in terms of family size.

This still does not answer the question: Were the tribal allocations equal in size? Ethically speaking, if it was proper to reallocate land for families after the lots had been cast, then there seems nothing wrong with applying this principle to tribes. This does not mean that this was done.

We are not told whether tribal territorial units were equal in area. We are told that family units were unequal. Joshua's comment indicates that lot-casting in some way applied to the secondary, intra-tribal allocations. What, then, is meant by Numbers 33:54? "And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit." The principle seems to be that demographic considerations apply to families. A general allocation principle governed family inheritance: "to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance." I conclude that this principle applied to the tribal territories, too. I side with Abravanel, though with this modification: the dual lot-demographics allocation system applied to tribes and families alike, not just to tribes.

How could this allocation system have applied to the Levites? Levi received a portion of the land: 48 walled cities (Num. 35:7), plus suburbs around them for their cattle (Num. 35:4). The height of each of these suburbs was fixed: 2,000 cubits (3,000 feet). "And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits and the city shall be

in the midst: this shall be to them the suburbs of the cities” (Num. 35:5). The diagram suggests one way that this might have been laid out.⁸



The size of each city would have been different. The area of a plot with a 2,000-foot side of a city wall would have been larger than a plot with a 1,500-foot side. Thus, the size of the Levites' combined plots would have been different, city by city.

We are not told how each Levitical family was assigned residence in a particular city, but lot-casting would have been an obvious means. The cities, like the tribal plots (if either Rashi or Abravanel was correct, and Nachmanides was wrong), varied in size. Once assigned to a city, a family would have received its plot by lot, but the principle of family size would probably have governed the final allocation.

Conclusion

The second Numbers mustering of Israel was preliminary to the conquest of Canaan. Tribal families were named because they would soon become the recipients of the post-conquest distribution of land. The tribes may have received equal portions of land, but probably there were post-lot reallocations based on the land's productivity and

8. C. J. Ellicott, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1961 reprint), p. 214.

the size of the tribes. This surely was the system governing families.

The tribes had to fight the Canaanites before receiving their land. Even Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, who had received their inheritance on the far side of the Jordan (Num. 34:14), would not inherit until they and the other tribes had conquered Canaan (Num. 32). Ephraim and half the tribe of Manasseh had to fight in order to claim a two-plot inheritance. There could be no final allocation of the spoils until all the land was conquered. God would reward each tribe according to His good pleasure.

Joshua administered the casting of lots that governed family allocations (Josh. 18:6). He probably left to tribal leaders the final reallocation based on family size and need. There was an equity consideration here: the number of mouths to feed. There was also a military input consideration: the number of warriors provided by each tribal family. It seems unreasonable that a tribe that had contributed large numbers of warriors received an equal share of the spoils. This would have penalized the warriors of the larger tribes: smaller plots, on average. A large family in a small tribe might have received more land than a large family in a large tribe if all tribal territories were equal. This would have constituted an economic penalty on large tribes. Joshua's answer to the heirs of Joseph indicates that the more that a tribe contributed to the victory, the more land it deserved in the post-conquest allocation.

The distribution of family plots was by lot and by post-lot reallocation on the basis of family size. It seems likely that this same system governed the allocation of tribal territory. The lot determined the general region of one's inheritance: tribal territory and family plots. The question of need in relation to population governed the family allocation procedure and probably governed the tribal.

15

BLOODLINE INHERITANCE

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren. And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses (Num. 27:6–11).

The theocentric focus of this law is ownership: God was the primary owner of the Promised Land. He would soon delegate to Israelite families the inter-generational secondary ownership of certain plots of land. These families were to serve as stewards in the administration of God's land.

Stewardship is a hierarchical function: point two of the biblical covenant model. The steward is a legal representative of the owner. The steward must apply the owner's principles of administration (point three) to the assets entrusted to him. Stewardship also involves sanctions: profit and loss. If he fails, he will be placed under negative sanctions by the owner. Jesus' parable of the talents is the New Testament summary of this arrangement (Matt. 25:14–30).

Milgrom argues that the case of the daughters of Zelophehad marks off a separate section of the Book of Numbers. The first encounter opens the new section (Num. 27); the second encounter closes it (Num. 36). The chapters that follow the second Numbers mustering (Num. 26) differ sharply with the preceding ones. The earlier chapters display the murmurings of the exodus generation; the second section

displays the faithfulness of the conquest generation.¹

Five daughters of Zelophehad came to Moses with a problem. They had no brothers. Their father had died. They asked a question: "Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father" (v. 4). The judicial issue here was a man's name. The economic issue was inheritance. A righteous man's name was supposed to be preserved in Israel. His inheritance in the land was proof of his righteous status. The daughters were careful to identify their father as having been in the company of the saints: "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons" (v. 3).

Korah's name had become tainted. His family had forfeited his goods: "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods" (Num. 16:32). But his sons must have broken with the sin of their father, for they survived the judgment: "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign. Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not" (Num. 26:10–11). They remained active priests. "And Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his brethren, of the house of his father, the Korahites, were over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle: and their fathers, being over the host of the LORD, were keepers of the entry" (I Chron. 9:19). Zelophehad's daughters seemed to be arguing that if Korah's evil name had not passed to his sons, who retained a priestly inheritance, how much more should five daughters of a righteous man have an inheritance in the land.

1. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. xiii.

A. Preservation of the Seed

This inheritance law was an aspect of the seed laws of Israel. The messianic promise set forth by Jacob was that Judah would bear the sword in Israel until Shiloh came (Gen. 49:10). The tribes had to be kept separate until the fulfillment of this prophecy. The seed laws and inheritance laws were an aspect of this separation. I wrote in the Conclusion of Leviticus:

Land laws and seed laws were laws associated with God's covenantal promises to Abraham regarding his offspring (Gen. 15–17). There was a chronological boundary subsequently placed on the seed laws: Jacob's prophecy and promise. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). After Shiloh came, Jacob said, the scepter would depart from Judah. The unified concept of scepter and lawgiver pointed to the civil covenant: physical sanctions and law. Jacob prophesied that the lawful enforcement of the civil covenant would eventually pass to another ruler: Shiloh, the Messiah.

The Levitical land laws were tied covenantally to the Abrahamic promise regarding a place of residence for the Israelites (Gen. 15:13–16). These land laws were also tied to the Abrahamic promise of the seed. "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). The mark of those included under the boundaries of these seed laws was the covenantal sign of circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14). Circumcision established a personal covenantal boundary. There were also family and tribal boundaries tied to the laws of inheritance. The ultimate inheritance law was above all a land law: the jubilee law (Lev. 25).²

In Numbers 36, the case of the daughters of Zelophehad reappeared. Given two facts—the jubilee law and the judicial status of a wife as an adoptee into her husband's family and tribe—the daughters' land would pass into the tribes of their husbands if they inherited land and then married men who were outside their tribe (Num. 36:3). This would have created a parcel of one tribe's land within the boundaries of another tribe. Moses then announced a modification of the jubilee law: "This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), pp. 637–38.

best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry. So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for everyone of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (vv. 6–7). The landed inheritance was tied more to the tribe than to the family. Upon marrying into another tribe, a daughter surrendered her inheritance to her sisters. Each tribe had a legal claim to the land within its borders. This claim was exercised through judicial representatives: families. Each family was under the jurisdiction of its tribe. It gained its lawful authority over its land through the tribe.

This modification of the jubilee land inheritance law was designed to keep the tribes geographically separated. This prevented any tribe from becoming dominant outside its own sphere of geographical authority. Loyalty would be to the tribe, region by region. This tribal decentralization would restrain the development of nationalism except as an aspect of Israel's priesthood. Even a king would be restricted from amassing rural land and houses for his heirs. For all the evil that Ahab did, it was his theft of Naboth's vineyard that brought God's final sanction against him. God told Elijah: "And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (I Ki. 21:19).³

The land inheritance law elevated family name over economic productivity, love, or power. The land owner could not disinherit his family by selling his rural inheritance to the highest bidder. The tribal name was elevated over family name. To preserve each family's name in a specific tribe, and to preserve the numerical strength of each tribe, God established a land inheritance system for rural property that subsidized the heirs of the conquest generation.

B. Old Covenant Inheritance-Disinheritance

There was covenantal disinheritance in Israel: civil, ecclesiastical, or familial. A father was not allowed unilaterally to disinherit just one son. A father had to follow strict rules of inheritance. "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him

3. This was fulfilled in 1 Kings 22:38. For Jezebel, who had planned the evil act (I Ki. 21:5–9), it would be worse: the dogs would actually eat her. "And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezebel" (I Kings 21:23). This was fulfilled in II Kings 9:35.

children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut. 21:15–17).⁴

The eldest son received a double portion. The question is: Why? There are two reasons: judicial and economic. Judicially, the eldest son was the first son to bear his father's name. He was a testimony from God to the man that God had decided to bless the man's name in Israel. The son would have a place in the national covenant in the next generation. He would rule over his brothers until they departed from the family's land. Isaac blessed Jacob, thinking that Jacob was Esau, his firstborn: "Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be everyone that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (Gen. 27:29). This was a matter of judicial authority. The firstborn normally replaced his father's rule over the family. Second, economic: with greater blessings come greater responsibilities. This is a basic biblical principle of personal responsibility. The eldest son presumably had to bear the primary responsibility in supporting his feeble parents in their old age. The Bible does not say this explicitly; it is a conclusion based on the fact of the double portion. This conclusion is consistent with the principle announced by Christ: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48b).

The only way that a man could unilaterally disinherit a son was to disinherit all of his children: to cut off his family's name in the tribe. He could do this by pledging his land to a priest and then breaking the pledge by remaining in control of the land and its income. At the jubilee, the land went to the priest if the man failed to redeem the land from the priest (Lev. 27:19–21).⁵ This was the only way that a priest could become a land owner in rural Israel. It was also the only time that a tribe forfeited its legal claim over rural land, and then only to a member of the one tribe that was scattered throughout the nation and had no tribal landed inheritance. This tribe's authority was not de-

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

5. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, pp. 608–11.

pendent on its possession of rural land, nor would its sporadic inheritance of scattered plots provide it with a means of extending its influence. Its national influence was tied to its very inability to extend power through the accumulation of land. So was its financing: the tithe.

Geographically, disinherited sons were cut off from their tribe. They could reside in a city or rent land in the country, but the family's name ceased to be a permanent legacy in the tribe except by adoption into a city. The elders of a city could reverse any son's loss of tribal connection, but they could not reclaim his forfeited land. That had passed permanently to a priest.

How could just one evil son be disinherited under the Mosaic Covenant? First, by civil execution. "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deut. 21:18–21). Second, by ecclesiastical excommunication. If a priest excommunicated a man, he could not inherit from his father.⁶ He was "cut off from his people." In both cases, the father could not unilaterally disinherit just one son. Either the elders or a priest would have to take formal action to validate the disinheritance.

C. New Covenant Inheritance-Disinheritance

With the transfer of the kingdom from Israel to the church (Matt. 21:43), the laws of inheritance were transformed. With a new priesthood came a new legal order. This biblical principle of judicial transformation was announced by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 54:E:1.

after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 7:12–17). The Mosaic land inheritance laws ceased with the advent of the new priesthood. There was no longer any need to keep the tribes geographically separate. The church recognized this, of course, but so did the Jews. After the fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple, Judaism replaced the Old Covenant religion. Judaism is not the religion of Old Covenant Israel, a fact that Jews who are familiar with their tradition readily admit.⁷

In Mosaic Israel, a father could not unilaterally disinherit his son; under New Covenant law, he is allowed to. This transfers economic authority to the father. The threat of economic disinheritance is a hammer that he holds over wayward children. He is not compelled by New Covenant law to subsidize evil. He was not compelled by law to subsidize evil under the Mosaic law, but his authority to make this assessment was shared with civil or ecclesiastical authorities.

The law of the double inheritance of the eldest son no longer binds anyone biblically. Younger sons no longer are expected to reside on the land of their fathers under the authority of the eldest brother. This is why the law of the levirate marriage no longer applies: an unmarried brother who lives on his father's land with his brother is no longer required to marry his dead brother's widow if he died without children (Deut. 25:5–6). Neither land ownership nor family name confers covenantal status in the New Covenant. There are no tribes, so inheritance has nothing to do with tribal boundaries. A family's name in Israel is no longer judicially relevant. When Shiloh came, any prophetic function of a family's name ceased. Through adoption into God's family, His name alone remains covenantally relevant (John 1:12; Eph. 1:5). Daughters receive the covenant sign of baptism as a binding judicial mark of this adoption; they can lawfully inherit with sons.

A father is allowed to establish other systems of hierarchical authority over the family's inheritance: trustees, general partners, and so forth. He is allowed to choose the best person for the job of administering the family's assets. Ethics and competence count for more than family name. Any attempt to elevate family name above Christian confession is cultic. Biblical familism was relevant only with respect to the prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. Biblical familism under the

7. Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), Preface.

Mosaic law was tied to the tribes. When tribal authority disappeared with the fall of Jerusalem, so did biblical familism. Any attempt to revive familism in the name of Old Covenant law is therefore cultic. This is seen most clearly in the British Israelite movement, which self-consciously ties familism to tribalism. Familism is a traditional alternative to covenantalism, especially in politically conservative circles.⁸ Jesus warned against familism in no uncertain terms: “For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:35–37). He never said anything so harsh as this against the state.

New Covenant biblical inheritance and disinheritance rest on formal confession and ethics. The true son is the son who confesses and then obeys God the Father by conforming himself to God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He is entitled to a double portion or more if his brothers and sisters are less faithful than he is. The New Covenant goal is to build up the kingdom of God in history by multiplying the inheritance over time. “And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:29).⁹ Entry into the family of God is established by confession, as manifested in baptism: a self-maledictory oath taken under God, which incorporates a person into God’s family. Family membership is maintained by outward obedience to God’s moral law and by regular covenant renewal, as manifested in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The New Covenant’s extension of family inheritance in history has visibly shifted from tribalism to confessionalism. Shiloh has come.

Conclusion

Bloodline inheritance had a political function in pre-exilic Mosaic Israel: the separation of families within the tribes and also of tribes within the nation. This was to insure that no family or tribe was able to centralize power or wealth by means of land purchases. The jubilee law returned a family’s rural land to the heirs of the conquest genera-

8. Gary North, *Baptized Patriarchalism: The Cult of the Family* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gnbap>)

9. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 39.

tion. Tribal decentralization preserved liberty in Mosaic Israel prior to the exile. After the exile, those who returned to Israel were a handful compared to the numbers that inherited at the time of the conquest. Israel became a captive nation. National preservation, not decentralization, became the primary political goal. This became a priestly function rather than a tribal function.

After the exile, the land inheritance law changed. Inheritance was still governed by the jubilee, but this was to include pagans who resided in the land at the time of Israel's return. "Thus saith the Lord GOD; This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another: concerning the which I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers: and this land shall fall unto you for inheritance" (Ezek. 47:13–14). "So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 47:21–23).¹⁰ If the jubilee was actually honored, which we do not know, it was to be honored in a new way. Gentiles were to be given access to the land. Genocide was no longer part of the Old Covenant order. This post-exilic law was to serve as a herald of a New Covenant order to come, where Jews and gentiles would inherit the kingdom together in terms of confession and ethics, not blood.

10. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 20120, ch. 22.

16

OATH AND SANCTIONS

If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth (Num. 30:2).

The theocentric focus is the covenant oath. The oath constitutes point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions.¹ Oath and sanctions are linked judicially. A covenantal oath is a *self-maledictory* oath. It formally invokes God's negative sanctions in advance, should the oath-taker not perform the details of his oath. Without the threat of God's negative sanctions, there is no valid covenantal oath. Putting this another way, where it is not valid to invoke such sanctions, a biblical oath is not valid. Putting it even more specifically, a self-maledictory oath is valid only when sworn under the judicial authority of an institution that has been authorized by God to impose or accept such an oath. There are three such institutions: church, family, and state. This is the reason why secret societies misuse the power of the oath when they impose initiatory oaths of secrecy that invoke negative sanctions. Such oaths are not valid, nor are the unsanctioned institutions that require such oaths of their members. Those who have bound themselves by such an oath are formally part of a covenantal order that seeks to replace God's kingdom.

A biblical oath is made to God. It may be made to God directly, such as a promise to obey Him, or through the authority of others who have been designated by God as His covenantal agents. The oath is secured by taking it officially under the authority and sanctions of God. This authority must not be invoked haphazardly. God's name is not to be misused. It is not some sort of universal judicial seal for every conceivable personal promise. It is limited to those uses and those institu-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

tions that God has authorized. "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7).²

A. Laws Governing Biblical Oaths

The Mosaic laws governing vows to God were rigorous. The man who made a personal vow to God could do so in private. The vow's details were between him and God. In contrast, the person who made a vow to a covenantal institution did so in some public ceremony. His oath was a matter of public record. God noted it; other men noted it. This oath was enforceable by the institution administering it. It was a vow which proceeded out of a person's mouth. A mute person presumably wrote down the details of his oath if he could write. If he could not write, he must have made some other visible response to specific questions.

1. A Woman's Vow

Most of chapter 30 deals with vows made by women. The Mosaic law allowed women to make vows, but with the exception of the widow or the unmarried daughter of a deceased man, her vows did not become valid if vetoed by the head of her household: either her husband or her father. A woman was under masculine authority, and this authority had the right to annul her vow. God did not recognize as judicially binding the unilateral vow of a woman who was under masculine authority.

If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth; And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her. And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul; And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 23.

But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her. But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her. And if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath; And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her, and disallowed her not: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband hath utterly made them void on the day he heard them; then whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand: her husband hath made them void; and the LORD shall forgive her. Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void. But if her husband altogether hold his peace at her from day to day; then he establisheth all her vows, or all her bonds, which are upon her: he confirmeth them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard them. But if he shall any ways make them void after that he hath heard them; then he shall bear her iniquity. These are the statutes, which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, between the father and his daughter, being yet in her youth in her father's house (Num. 30:3–16).

The head of the household had to be informed of the woman's vow in order for it to become operational. The vow did not become binding until one day after he heard it and allowed it to stand. The head of household exercised veto power. As a legal intermediary between God and a woman, the male head of the household bore the responsibility of authorizing her vow. This was the judicial issue. The economic issue was that the resources required for her to fulfill her vow would come out of the family's resource base. For every minute that it cost her to fulfill her vow, that minute could not be allocated to assisting her husband, which was her assigned task as a wife or daughter. The head of the household would have to estimate in advance whether this additional cost was too high.

The fact that a widow's vow required no further authorization indicates that a vow was an act of the head of a household. The widow did not have an intermediary. With her marriage, she had substituted a new head of household for her father. With the death of her husband, she was elevated to his office as household head. This office possessed God-given authority independent of the gender of the holder. Her vow before God required no intermediary to confirm it. Judicially, her word

was binding; economically, she had to make the authoritative estimate regarding the family cost of fulfilling it.

Except for a widow, a woman was represented judicially by a man. The representative had to validate the oath of the person represented. Presumably, such an arrangement also extended to male children under age 20. A young man could take an oath, but it had to be confirmed. The hierarchical nature of covenantal representation governed the invocation of oaths.

2. New Testament Alterations

Has this masculine-dominant hierarchical structure changed in the New Testament? Regarding the ecclesiastical oath, there has been a fundamental change. Baptism is a covenant oath-sign.³ Females are baptized. They are allowed to take an oath of allegiance to God through membership in His church without asking permission from their husbands or fathers. In fact, they are required to make such a covenant in defiance of this authority. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:34–37).

Has a woman’s access to baptism changed anything in family authority? The New Testament does not indicate any major change in the family, other than the elimination of the Mosaic law’s easy divorce (Deut. 24:1; Matt. 5:31–32⁴). The husband is still the head of his household (I Tim. 3). Yet the story of Jael indicates that a wife could lawfully break the vow of her husband when his vow was illegitimate. Her husband had sworn peace with Sisera (Judg. 4:17). She killed Sisera anyway. She did this under the general authority of Deborah, who was a national judge in Israel and under whose leadership the Israelite army was bringing sanctions against Sisera. Jael did not violate her husband’s oath on her own authority; she did so under a superior covenantal civil authority. She respected the civil hierarchy by disobeying a subordinate hierarchy. Her rebellion against her husband was part of

3. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968), ch. 5.

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix A:D.

Israel's rebellion against Sisera, and is so celebrated in Deborah's song. She was promoted in honor among women. "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (Judg. 5:24).

3. *The Civil Oath*

In the area of civil government, women are not under any biblical restrictions regarding oath-taking. They may lawfully become citizens; they may swear and then testify in a court of law. They may also vote: the imposition of judicial sanctions, a form of covenant renewal. What was an historically unique case with Deborah became common in the twentieth century: female judgeship. In no area of life has there been a more fundamental break with classical civilization, where women had no role to play in civil government because they had no role to play in the rites of the city, which were the legal basis of citizenship. The legacy of Greece and Rome was one of exclusion of women from all things civil. Kitto wrote of Athens: "Women were not enfranchised: that is, they could not attend the Assembly, still less hold office. They could not own property: they could not conduct legal business: every female, from the day of her birth to the day of her death, had to be the ward, so to speak, of her nearest male relative or her husband, and only through him did she enjoy any legal protection."⁵ Women in the late Roman Republic were far more emancipated socially than their Athenian predecessors had been,⁶ but they could not vote.⁷ They could not appear in court as witnesses.⁸ They were not even answerable to the state; their families alone had the right to judge them.⁹ "Among the ancients," writes Fustel, "and especially at Rome, the idea of law was inseparably connected with certain sacramental words. . . . [W]hat placed a man under obligation in the ancient law was not conscience, or the sentiment of justice; it was the sacred formula."¹⁰ Women, not having access to the religious rites of the city, could not lawfully invoke this formula.

5. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1951), p. 221.

6. F. R. Crowell, *Cicero and the Roman Republic* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, [1948] 1964), pp. 280–82.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

8. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Bk. II, Ch. VIII, p. 92.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

10. *Ibid.*, III:XI, p. 191.

It took over three millennia for the Bible's principle of the oath-bound female judge to be honored on a widespread basis in society. Women in the West received the civil franchise in the years following the First World War (1914–18), the war that also ended kingship in the West. Kingship was allowed by the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 17),¹¹ but it was a less preferred judicial order than rule by judges (I Sam. 8).¹² A female judge was in general preferable to a king under the Mosaic system, but it took the enormous social disruption of World War I for the West to acknowledge this politically by driving out its kings and giving women the vote. Bible-believing churches resisted this political development. Pagan suffragettes—freethinkers and Spiritualists¹³—and their masculine, liberal, and radical political allies first promoted it on a national level in England and the United States. The women's suffrage movement in the United States was secular.¹⁴ In the United States in the late nineteenth century, there was an alliance in the North and West between anti-liquor temperance societies, dominated by women and including Protestant evangelicals, and the women's suffrage movement, but the national leaders of the evangelical churches did not support women's right to vote. In the American South, the suggestion was resisted strongly.¹⁵

When the church and Christians refuse to extend God's kingdom principles in history, covenant-breakers may decide to do so. When they do, they will gain authority over the Christians for a time. God brings positive sanctions to those who uphold His law, even at the expense of His covenant people's authority. While covenant-breakers cannot indefinitely uphold God's law, since it testifies against them, during the period when they do uphold it, they gain external blessings.¹⁶

11. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press: [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

12. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

13. Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 32. He cited Anne Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon, 1989).

14. Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975).

15. Robert Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 2nd ed. (w York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 80–81.

16. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gngrace>)

4. Paying Off a Vow

The payment of a vow could not be made out of a person's second-best capital, unlike a voluntary offering to which no promise was attached. "And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein. Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen, or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall not offer these unto the LORD, nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar unto the LORD. Either a bullock or a lamb that hath any thing superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted" (Lev. 22:21–23). A person could lawfully give a priest an animal that was not suitable for the altar, but when it came to an animal to be sacrificed on the altar, its blemish-free condition was required.

This rule governed all vow payments. It extended back to the economic source of the asset: "Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God" (Deut. 23:18). This is why prostitutes were not citizens of Israel. They had the legal status of uncircumcised strangers. They could not bring their tithes and offerings to God, so they could not be members of the church. This separated them from citizenship in the holy commonwealth. They could not serve as judges, as Deborah did. But they were not threatened with civil sanctions so long as they did not consort with married men, and so long as they were not daughters of a priest.¹⁷ Polluting a priest's household brought pollution into God's presence. This was a sacred boundary violation: profaning the temple. This violation of household authority was a capital crime. "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21 :9). Her harlotry put the nation at risk of God's negative sanctions.

B. Voluntary but Irrevocable

"When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and

17. A non-virgin who married a man without informing him of her status risked stoning as a whore (Deut. 22:21).

perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth" (Deut. 23:21–23). A personal vow is not required by God, although in order to gain lawful access to judicial authority in church, family, and state, a vow is required. When a person swears a vow to God, or to other men who are allowed by God to accept such a vow, he must fulfill the terms of his vow. God does not hold him guiltless who breaks his vow. God also does not relegate to second-class status a person who does not swear a vow.

A publicly sworn vow had to be paid publicly. "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people" (Ps. 116:14). So vowed David. This is especially true for men who hold public office. They must set a judicial example, as David understood. He repeated this vow four verses later. His son Solomon also understood the importance of adhering to the vow's stipulations: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?" (Eccl. 5:4–6).¹⁸

Why take a vow? One reason is to ask for positive sanctions from God. "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (Gen. 28:18–22).¹⁹ This act of dedication invoked God's name, and God later identified Himself to Jacob by referring back to this event: "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred" (Gen. 31:13).

18. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 16.

19. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 29.

The vow could be corporate as well as personal: “And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah” (Num. 21:1–3).

A vow that called down God’s positive sanctions in exchange for the payment of a future vow is easy to understand. God was expected to pay in advance. If He did not deliver what the vow-taker had asked for, the oath was not inaugurated. But the vow-taker could show thanks to God, and devotion to God, by taking a vow after a deliverance by God. The crew of the boat on which Jonah was travelling made such a post-deliverance vow: “Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows” (Jonah 1:14–16). These vows were made by men who were not formally covenanted to God—a biblical example of common grace in operation.

The stranger could lawfully invoke a vow. The priests were required to participate in the fulfillment of a vow that involved priestly activities. “Speak unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them, Whatsoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, that will offer his oblation for all his vows, and for all his freewill offerings, which they will offer unto the LORD for a burnt offering” (Lev. 22:18).

C. New Testament Oaths

Hierarchy is still part of every covenantal institution. Oaths are still valid. No covenant can be ratified apart from the invocation of the member’s oath. The oath is the required means for a person to establish a lawful judicial claim on the benefits—positive sanctions—of membership in the covenant institution. There has to be formal subordination to the covenant in order for the sanctions to become operat-

ive. There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates that an oath to join a church, establish a new family through marriage, or receive citizenship from a civil government are invalid. On the contrary, there can be no binding covenantal membership apart from such a oath. It is the oath that seals the covenant judicially. For example, the difference between fornication and marital sexual union is not physical; it is judicial. The presence of a judicially binding public oath differentiates the latter from the former.

The New Testament sometimes seems to be hostile to oaths, but the context of these passages indicates that public oaths of covenant ratification and renewal were not an issue. Oaths invoked in noncovenantal relationships were the issue. Jesus said:

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Matt. 5:33–37).

Jesus referred here to a traditional practice of publicly promising to perform some act and covering his promise with the veneer of additional authority invoking supernatural authority. This practice was never valid. There are lawful public oaths taken to covenantal institutions; there are lawful private oaths to God; but there are never private oaths to other men that are lawfully invoked by an appeal to God or the supernatural. A person who seeks to establish a unique degree of authority for his promise to another person by invoking supernatural hierarchy and supernatural negative sanctions is misusing the oath. He is covering his personal testimony with the aura of covenantal authority. This is a violation of the commandment not to take God's name in vain. It is a boundary violation: profanation.²⁰ The New Testament Greek word for oath is *horkos*: fence.²¹

There was an example of such an oath in the persecution of Paul by a group of Jewish fanatics. "Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that

20. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

21. The third commandment relates to boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant model. It parallels the eighth commandment, which prohibits theft.

thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee" (Acts 23:19–21). The Greek word for "oath" in this case meant anathematizing, i.e., self-maledictory. It was an invalid oath, and those who took it either broke it or starved themselves to death. They did not kill Paul.

The Christian's word is so bounded by authority that his words should be trusted apart from any invocation of supernatural hierarchy. The Pharisees did this on a regular basis. They also adopted peculiar rules regarding what words constituted a valid invocation.

Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon (Matt. 23:16–22).

Jesus challenged all such man-made rules. The word of a covenant-keeper should be simple and direct. There must be no verbal tricks, no counterfeit oaths subsequently declared null and void because of an imprecise formula. James repeated this warning: "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (James 5:12).

A covenant oath does not invoke surrogate phrases for heaven. It invokes God's name. This oath is a direct verbal appeal to God because it is taken under a unique institution that has been authorized by God to impose sanctions in His name: church, family, or state. This authority to impose God's sanctions in history is what identifies the institution as covenantal.

D. Social Contract Theory

Four biblical covenants—personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil—have served as models for other relationships and institutions. The corporate covenants linking God, man, and other men have been imitated by atheistic contracts. A contract is analogous to a covenant, but with God's name removed from the formal agreement. It does not invoke God's name or His sanctions in enforcing the agreement's stipulations.

1. From Covenant to Contract

The civil covenant under God has become a civil contract among men. There is no historical evidence that such an act of contracting ever took place. This historical event is completely hypothetical. This was well understood by Rousseau, whose *Social Contract* (1762) was preceded by his earlier study of the subject, his dissertation on inequality. In that essay, he wrote of the state of nature, the hypothetical pre-contractual judicial condition: "Let us begin then by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question."²² Enlightenment political theory, both right wing (Whig) and left wing (Rousseau) operated on the assumption that this hypothetical social contract is the judicial foundation of civil government's assertion of a right to inflict violence in defense of civil law. The state created by this contract then becomes the enforcer of its implicit stipulations: natural law. There is no appeal beyond the state. Covenantalism under God becomes contractualism: a man-created, man-based social order.

The family covenant under God then becomes the marriage contract under the state. The justification of divorce becomes social: what is good for society as interpreted by the state. So does the justification for disciplining children. The family then comes under the jurisdiction of the state because God is no longer taken seriously as one of the participants in the arrangement. The state replaces God as the supreme sanctioning agent.

Economic contracts are also analogous to the covenant. The state becomes the ultimate guarantor of a contract's stipulations. The contract's participants agree to perform certain duties in exchange for money or other assets. The mutuality of the contract brings benefits to

22. Rousseau, "A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind" (1754), in Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, Everyman's Library (New York: Dutton, [1913] 1966), p. 161.

both signers. The state threatens negative sanctions for a violation of the contract, thereby increasing the likelihood of performance. Contractualism had been an aspect of Western political theory since the late Middle Ages.²³ The Scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas was the major source.²⁴ Contractualism was developed as a comprehensive social philosophy—not just for civil government but for society—by Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century. The Scottish Enlightenment was decentralist, emphasizing the bonds of society before and more comprehensive than the state. The European Enlightenment tended to reverse this; its focus was statist, with the state as the organizing principle of society. The Scottish Enlightenment's outlook became the social philosophy of English Whiggism. Scottish Enlightenment political thought was a deistic version of seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism's covenant theology: government as an appeals court system that intervenes when all other human governments and associations fail to settle a dispute. Continental Enlightenment political thought was a deistic version of the Jesuit order's hierarchy: civil government as centrally directed, highly disciplined social order. "Citizen" became for the French Revolutionaries what "brother" was for the Jesuits. (Among Communists a century later, "comrade" replaced "citizen.")

Nineteenth-century English liberalism abandoned even the weak deistic elements of Whiggism.²⁵ Nothing substantive remained except the stipulations of the two contracts: private and civil. The sanctions upholding the stipulations of the contract were said to be exclusively secular. Nineteenth-century Continental liberalism also abandoned the doctrine of God. Anti clericalism became a new religion.²⁶

2. *Darwinism and the State*

Darwinism had a transforming impact on both Anglo-American and Continental social thought. In the two decades after the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859), Darwinism was used by the disciples of Herbert Spencer to bolster the free market by asserting the legitimacy of unguided economic competition as the means of the sur-

23. Sir Ernest Barker, "Introduction," in Barker (ed.), *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. vii.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. viii–ix.

25. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), ch. 2.

26. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

vival of the fittest individuals and businesses. Over the next two decades, intellectual opinion shifted dramatically: Darwinism was increasingly used to support statism, in which state economic planning was invoked by Darwinists to defend the survival of the fittest society through scientific planning. Rather than viewing society as analogous to nature—red in tooth and claw—the new social Darwinism viewed society as analogous to a plant breeder’s greenhouse, with the scientific elite serving as the breeder. The directionless, anti-teleological free market was dismissed as anachronistic, even as a directionless, anti-teleological nature was also dismissed. Both were understood as having been superseded by planning, teleological man, meaning a scientific elite acting in the name of mankind. The primary theorist who announced this new social Darwinism was Lester Frank Ward.²⁷

Darwinism undermined Whiggism by undermining Newtonianism. Whiggism had been undergirded by a Newtonian view of the universe: mathematical and mechanical. Newton’s Unitarian god supposedly created it and sustained it. By 1850, such a god was no longer regarded as necessary to social theory, but the social fruits of that god’s authority still lingered: faith in the coherence of a social system established through a myriad of voluntary contracts. Society was believed to be the result of human action but not of human design—Scottish Enlightenment theorist Adam Ferguson’s worldview a century earlier.²⁸

The Newtonian worldview was essentially mechanical. In Newtonianism, mathematics rules the cosmos. To the extent that physics became the ideal model for men’s social theories, the quest for social order became the quest for the mathematically fixed laws of society.²⁹ Natural law was understood as governing historical processes, bringing order to these processes. This worldview collapsed under the weight of a reforming social Darwinism, which relied increasingly on the state as an agent of social change, scientific planning, and ethical action. In Europe, this new social outlook was called social democracy. In the United States, it was called Progressivism.

No better statement of the transformation can be found than liberal Presbyterian elder Woodrow Wilson’s 1908 book, *Constitutional*

27. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix A:N.

28. F. A. Hayek, “The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design,” in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), ch.6.

29. Louis I. Bredvold, *Brave New World of the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), ch. 2.

Government of the United States. In 1907, Wilson openly moved from laissez-faire Jeffersonianism to Progressivism. He was the president of Princeton University at the time. He wrote *Constitutional Government* as a thinly disguised fat campaign tract for the Democratic Party's 1908 nomination for the Presidency. The book was published in the year of the Presidential election. Fundamentalist Presbyterian elder and radical political populist William Jennings Bryan received the nomination for the third time; Wilson had to wait four more years to attain his goal. He was elected President in 1912 and again in 1916.

His book praised the Presidency as the central political office: head of the party. This was a self-conscious break from the U.S. Constitution's view of the office. The Constitution does not mention political parties, and the Framers had hated political factions in 1787. They also hated big government (Hamilton excepted). They inserted checks and balances into the Constitution in order to prevent the growth of a large central government. Wilson, having switched to Progressivism, had to undermine this older political faith. He turned to Darwin for the solution. The Framers had been Whigs because they had been Newtonians, he correctly argued. This Newtonian Whig worldview is incorrect, he insisted, and so is the Constitutional order that assumes it. "The government of the United States was constructed upon the Whig theory of political dynamics, which was a sort of unconscious copy of the Newtonian theory of the universe. In our own day, whenever we discuss the structure or development of anything, whether in nature or in society, we consciously or unconsciously follow Mr. Darwin; but before Mr. Darwin, they followed Newton. Some single law, like the law of gravitation, swung each system of thought and gave it its principle of unity."³⁰ This shift in outlook from Newtonianism to Darwinism in social theory was basic to the American Progressivism. It justified the creation of a planned economy.

The checks and balances built into the federal government by the Constitution had become a hindrance to effective political action, he said. This language of balances reflects mechanism. We need to overcome this mechanical way of thinking, Wilson insisted:

The trouble with the theory is that government is not a machine, but a living thing. It falls, not under the theory of the universe, but under the theory of organic life. It is accountable to Darwin, not to Newton.

30. Woodrow Wilson, *The Constitutional Government of the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, [1908] 1961), pp. 54–55. (<http://bit.ly/WilsonCG>)

It is modified by its environment, necessitated by its tasks, shaped to its functions by the sheer pressure of life. No living thing can have its organs offset against each other as checks, and live. On the contrary, its life is dependent upon their quick cooperation, their ready response to the commands of instinct or intelligence, their amicable community of purpose. Government is not a body of blind forces; it is a body of men, with highly differentiated functions, no doubt, in our modern day of specialization, but with a common task and purpose. Their cooperation is indispensable, their warfare fatal. There can be no successful government without leadership or without the intimate, almost instinctive, coordination of the organs of life and action. This is not theory, but fact, and displays its force as fact, whatever theories may be thrown across its track. Living political constitutions must be Darwinian in structure and in practice.³¹

This was the Progressives' worldview: the state as a centralized agency of reform in which sufficient political power is concentrated to overcome the economic power of large corporations. The state becomes society's coordinator, analogous to the central nervous system-brain connection: organic.

3. *Three Choices*

The biblical view of society is neither mechanistic nor organic. It is covenantal. It is based on the binding nature of covenants established by oaths under God—oaths that invoke sanctions in history. Covenant theology is *personalistic*, for God created the universe and sustains it by His sovereign power. Covenant theology is also *judicial*. It insists on broad historical predictability in terms of Bible-revealed covenantal laws to which are attached corporate sanctions. It is the predictability of these corporate sanctions that make possible a distinctly Christian social theory. *Without predictable corporate sanctions, there cannot be social theory.* When Christians deny the predictability of God's corporate historical sanctions in terms of covenant law, they necessarily place themselves under the rule of humanist law and a humanist social order. They must then choose between (1) the individualistic contractualism of a social order sustained by faith in Darwinian competition or (2) the statist contractualism of a social order sustained by faith in Darwinian central planning.

The statist offers these criticisms of contractualism. First, there is no comprehensive ethical basis for contractualism other than indi-

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

vidual self-interest, which can be radically anti-ethical. Second, the predictable, socially beneficial results of the free market's sanctions—profit and loss—are suspect. Market profitability at best reflects the producer's performance in meeting the temporary desires of economically successful buyers, not the economic system's performance in meeting the true needs of the broad mass of citizens. Third, the contractalist social system evolves over time without rational direction or predictability. Who is to say that it will not evolve into socialism? So, why wait? Adopt socialism now.

The contractualist offers these criticisms of statism. First, the ethics of power-seeking politicians and bureaucrats are highly suspect. In any case, these ethics will evolve over time; Darwinism offers no permanent ethics. Any appeal to social ethics as superior to individual ethics is a smoke screen for the self-interested plans of power-seekers. Second, the predictable results of unchecked, monopolistic political power over other men's decisions are evil. "All power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Third, the economic system behaves irrationally under central planning because central planners have no rational success indicators in a socialistic economy: prices that reflect the true state of supply and demand.

From the late seventeenth century until the present, Christian social theorists have chosen between these two broad social theories: statist and individualist. They have not offered an outspokenly biblical alternative. They have baptized one or another of humanism's theories. The suggestion that Christianity offers a separate social theory superior to humanistic theories is inherently theocratic, and Protestantism since 1700 has been anti-theocratic.

With each revolution in Western epistemology—from Platonism to Aristotelianism to Cartesianism to Newtonianism to Darwinism—there has been a corresponding revision of operational Christian social theory. The church has played catch-up, following a generation or two later, dutifully repeating its formula: "Yes, the Bible is consistent with this prevailing theory of civil government. Forget what Christians said back then."

Conclusion

Taking a vow is a serious matter. It is always sworn to God. It may be sworn directly, but it also may be sworn to a covenantal agency lawfully representing God. Because it necessarily invokes God's negative

sanctions for failure to perform its stipulations, a covenant oath is called self-maledictory. Because the invocation of negative sanctions brings a special judicial authority to the oath, the use of it is restricted by God. His name may not lawfully be invoked to authenticate a personal oath in public unless there is a covenantal agency empowered by God to bring negative sanctions against the oath-taker: church, family, or state. A personal oath to God apart from a sanctioning agency must not be sworn in public. It must be sworn in private.

Under the Mosaic covenant, a wife or daughter had to have her oath confirmed by her husband or father in order for it to be binding, unless she governed her own household. The widow was the representative independent woman: head of her own household. In New Covenant times, because of baptism's lawful application to both sexes, adult daughters are legally independent; so, they possess this covenantal authority. When a judicially independent woman pays for the fulfillment of her oath, she can lawfully take a vow. God will hold her to it.

A promise that does not invoke God's name or sanctions is a contract. *The presence of a self-maledictory oath under God's sovereign authority distinguishes a covenant from a contract.* A contract does not possess the sanctified status of a covenant. Breaking a contract that results in harm to another person is a sin, but it is not of the same magnitude as breaking an oath-invoked covenant. Contracts are not to be elevated to the status of covenants. Covenants are not to be debased to the level of contracts. *Covenantalism is the biblical basis of contractualism, not the other way around.* Whig political theory since Adam Smith has failed to understand this crucial aspect of causality: from covenant to contract. Whig social theory places contractualism at the center.

The civil government is a covenantal institution. While contractualism is valid for explaining economic relationships—the quest for mutual self-interest by means of the division of labor—it is not valid as a form of political theory, despite the presence of personal self-interest and the division of labor in political affairs. Civil government has the God-given monopolistic authority to impose physical sanctions on evil-doers: the sword. The free market does not legitimately authorize any agency to impose physical sanctions. Its sanctions are not lawfully invoked by covenant oath.

The focus of political theory should be the proper imposition of negative sanctions: suppressing evil, not increasing net economic pro-

ductivity. The biblical goal of civil government is the suppression of evil. Any increase in economic productivity is a positive effect of suppressing evil.

WAR BRIDES

And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword. And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles [fortresses], with fire. And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts (Num. 31:7–11).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the sanctions-bringer. Midian had tempted Israel by sending women to marry them and then lure them into the worship of false gods. “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites, and smite them: For they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor’s sake” (Num. 25:16–18). Yet in this passage, Moses allowed the Israelites to marry Midianite women. Why the apparent discrepancy?

Marriage is a covenantal institution. It is governed by laws of the covenant. The Mosaic law established laws for marrying foreign women. These laws were explicit. The only foreign women who could lawfully be married by an Israelite were survivors of a military conflict in which Israel annihilated a foreign city outside the Promised Land (Deut. 20:14),¹ or converts to the faith (e.g., Rahab, Ruth).

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48.

A. The Destruction of Midian

The destruction of Midian was now covenantally complete. The cities were burned. All the males were slain. But this was not *hormah*. The unmarried young women and girls were lawfully taken captive as spoils; so were animals and precious metals. "And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves" (Num. 31:15–18).

This sanction of mass execution was in accord with the law of foreign warfare that God subsequently revealed to Israel. "And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations" (Deut. 20:12–15).²

The women were legal as spoils; the Israelites were allowed to marry them. But first the women had to go through a rite of covenantal transition, of purification.

When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her (Deut. 21:10–14).

2. *Idem*.

The Israelite could not marry a foreign woman until she had shaved her head. This was a visible mark of her new covenantal subordination. She had been under another culture's authority before; now she was under a new authority. The removal of the mark of her subordination, her hair,³ and its re-growth in a new household testified to her new legal condition. She was also to bewail her father and mother for a month. This was a ritual break with the old conditions of her existence: the authority of her parents' household. Clearly, this woman had not been anyone's wife. She would not be a woman seeking revenge against her new husband for having killed her first husband. She would not bring the children of another man into her new household.

This is another reason why Israel was required to kill the sons, including infant sons, of the defeated nation. There would be no warriors or sons of warriors of a defeated culture inside the gates of Israel. The survival of the young women was a positive sanction—grace—for the defeated culture. The negative sanction of annihilation was normative. Moses made it clear that there was to be mercy shown to some and none to others: "Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves" (Num. 31:17–18).

B. The Defeat of Paganism's Gods

These women were pagans by profession of faith and lifestyle, yet they were eligible to become wives. How could the purity of marriage be maintained? Because these women were captives who were no longer under the covenantal authority of pagan gods. The gods of the pagan world were local gods, gods of the city-state. When a city was defeated, so were its gods. When a city was utterly wiped out, so were its gods. These captive women now had no ritual connection with the gods of their city.⁴ Those gods had been wiped off the face of the earth. Israel was instructed to destroy foreign cities and every male inside its walls. This was the proof of the defeat of the city's local gods.

3. "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered" (I Cor. 11:5–6).

4. They may not have had any connection before, except through their fathers. This was the case in Greece and Rome. Women did not participate in the rites of the city, only in household rites.

When the gods of a pagan city outside of Canaan fell to Israel, Israel was to have no fear of them again. In contrast, the gods of Canaan were a continuing threat, since they were tied to the land itself. To spare anyone in those cities in which Israel intended to dwell was not allowed. "But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God" (Deut. 20:16–18).

The virgin who had been taken from her city, which was then burned to the ground, had been stripped of her covenant. This did not make her a covenant-keeper, but it placed her under the covenantal jurisdiction of an Israelite. Mosaic law did not recognize the necessity of a captive wife to confess faith in Israel's God. There was no rite of covenantal access for women. Circumcision was for males only. For that matter, males who were purchased from abroad had to be circumcised and then given access to Passover, even if they made no confession of faith. "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:13). The judicial issue was not their confession; rather, it was the confession of the head of the household that was determinative.

The judicial issue was sanctions. The head of the household imposed family sanctions. Those under his authority were counted as covenant-keepers because they were under the authority of a covenant-keeper. These subordinates could not lawfully recruit household members into idolatry. To do so was a capital crime.

If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand

of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you (Deut. 13:6–11).

The threat of this civil sanction was regarded by the Mosaic law as sufficient to warrant marriage to a female survivor of an annihilated foreign culture.

C. Two Forms of Liberating Subordination

Forcible covenantal subordination of foreigners was possible in two ways: by purchase (slavery) and by captive marriage. The covenantal goal in both cases was the servant's separation from bondage to pagan gods. Slavery was a form of evangelism: when successful, far better than eternity spent in hell. The captive woman who entered a household by marriage was not to be treated as a slave. She could not be sold by her husband. She had been humbled once by the shaving of her head, the paring of her nails, and her physical status as a wife. She could not lawfully be humbled a second time by the same man. She had made the transition out of paganism through marriage; she therefore could not be made a slave by the man who had brought her out of paganism. This indicates that the covenantal purpose of both the permanent servitude of, and marriage to, captive women was liberation out of paganism. A pagan could be liberated in either way, but not both. Liberation was a one-time act.

This means that an ex-pagan wife could not become a permanent slave in Israel unless she was divorced by her husband and later married a permanent slave or a pagan who then became a permanent slave through crime or debt. Her status as a free woman had been guaranteed by her first husband. She could give up this status through marriage to a man who did not possess it, but it could not be removed from her by law without her consent unless she was excommunicated for cause and then committed a crime whose restitution payment required her sale into slavery. Even this limit to her status is implied; it is nowhere stated. It is implied because being cut off from the covenant was a judicial sanction against an Israelite male who broke a major law, including a public denial of God. *Biblical law does not subsidize evil.* It does not create a class of criminals beyond the law's negative sanctions. But for a rejected captive wife to be subjected to the threat of

permanent servitude, she either had to commit a crime as an excommunicant or else subordinate herself to a pagan, who was, or who later became, a permanent slave.

D. Land Laws and Civil Jurisdiction

The law governing the marriage of captive women was a land law. We know this because the parallel law governing warfare within the boundaries of Canaan was different: every human resident of Canaan was to be killed.

The Mosaic covenant was a geographical covenant. It established judicial differences between Jew and Greek, as well as between male and female. Circumcision was the physical mark of the difference between Jew and Greek, as well as between men and women.

The threat to Israel came from the gods of Canaan. Because the gods of paganism were geographically based, and because God's dwelling place was inside the boundaries of Israel, the threat of distant foreign gods was reduced. This is why God established in His law the negative sanction of national captivity for Israel (Deut. 28:41). Captivity to gods outside of the Promised Land would not destroy Israel because Israel would seek to escape this bondage and return to the Promised Land. After their return from the exile, Israel did not again worship the gods of Canaan. But Israel also did not again go out to conquer foreign cities. Israel remained under political bondage to foreign empires.

The Mosaic laws of conquest no longer apply today in the area of religion. We are not told to execute every male inside the gates of another city. The universality of the gospel transcends political groupings. It crosses borders. This was true in the post-exilic era, too. Jews spread throughout the empires of the Near East, residing under the civil rule of many gods. The Mosaic laws of warfare ended with the end of Israel as a separate civil jurisdiction. *The total annihilation of Canaan was a one-time genocidal requirement.* The Mosaic laws of near-annihilation also ended when the boundaries of Israel no longer served to identify the monopolistic civil jurisdiction of God within the confines of a single nation.

Conclusion

The destruction of Midian involved the capture of virgin girls. These women were marriageable. Their eligibility for marriage was what authorized Israel to spare their lives. They were no longer seen as

a threat to Israel's covenant. The gods of their cities were covenantally dead. The captives recognized this. They had no covenantally significant religion to invoke against Israel.

18

THE SPOILS OF HOLY WARFARE

Take the sum of the prey [booty: v. 32] that was taken, both of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief fathers of the congregation: And divide the prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation (Num. 31:26–27).

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. The 12,000 warriors (v. 5) who battled Midian were at greater risk, statistically speaking, than those who had not been selected to fight. Actually, the combatants were at zero risk: every one of them survived, a miraculous result (v. 49). But they did not know this outcome prior to the war. The post-war division of the spoils reflected the fact that the warriors had placed themselves at greater risk. They kept half of the booty.

From their half was taken a small payment: one out of 500 of the living captives, women and animals (v. 28). This portion was given to Eleazar the priest as a representative of the Aaronic priesthood (v. 29). This was booty for all of the priesthood. Eleazar had no need for 32 new wives (v. 40). From the half of the proceeds given to the congregation, one out of 50 of the living captives was given to the Levites (v. 30).

The Israelites who did not participate in the war were required to pay ten times the quantity of goods paid by the warriors who did fight: one out of 50 vs. one out of 500. This means that those who had not been at risk had to pay ten times the tribute of those who had been at risk. This payment was only 20 percent of a tithe: one in 50 vs. one in 10. It was more like a firstfruits offering than a tithe: a token payment. The tithe would have been owed after the distribution of the booty, when each recipient knew exactly what he had received. But because the required tithe on living animals was paid only on the net increase in the herd, with the tenth animal owed to God when it passed under

the rod (Lev. 27:32),¹ it was possible that God would not receive a tithe on the booty. The net increase of each herd might not have been ten beasts that year. If nine or fewer animals had been added to a herd during the year, the herd's owner owed nothing. This was a likely situation in the wilderness. So, God's priestly tribe did get paid something "off the top" prior to receiving tithes from individuals.

A. Taxes vs. Spoils

The fact that those who were at risk paid one-tenth of the tribute owed by those who were not at risk seems to indicate that *the modern principle of graduated taxation is anti-biblical*. Those who receive more income, i.e., entrepreneurs who are at greater risk of losing their wealth, are today required to pay to the state a higher percentage of their income than those who earn less income. In the case of the spoils of Midian, those at risk paid only ten percent of what was required from those who were not at risk. Those who had been at risk forfeited half of the spoils to those who had not been at risk. This was not a tax. It was not paid to the state.

Tribal warriors had been chosen as covenantal representatives of Israel to wage holy war against a national foe. The war's outcome was predetermined. God would surely destroy Midian. This war had been initiated by God, not by Israel (v. 3). Military spoils were therefore part of the nation's judicial-covenantal system. This was not a case where a man was working on behalf of his family, seeking a private return on his labor. On such an increase, he would have owed first fruits plus a tithe—nothing more. He would not have been required to share half of his income with other Israelites. In contrast, a man chosen to fight Midian was working as a national covenantal agent. He was bringing destruction to a military enemy. He was wielding the sword on behalf of God: a bringer of God's negative corporate sanctions. This was a priestly act and also a military act. It was holy warfare. The laws governing the allocation of military booty were different from the laws governing the tithe.

B. A Voluntary Offering

This had been a miraculous victory. "And they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 38.

our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us" (v. 49). Their enemies had been completely wiped out, yet not one warrior had died. This, concluded the captains, required a special payment to God. "We have therefore brought an oblation for the LORD, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the LORD" (v. 50).

Each of the warriors had taken booty on his own behalf (v. 53). This was legitimate. They violated no law. They had divided the living goods with the other Israelites, but they were not required to share their inanimate booty. Nevertheless, the captains decided to give all of the inanimate booty to God. This was an act of devotion: economically meaningful thanks for having been protected as an army. It was also a kind of life insurance premium. If they publicly acknowledged by such sacrificial giving that they had received miraculous protection from God, they might receive similar protection in the upcoming battles in Canaan. This battle was a kind of military exercise in preparation for the conquest. If word spread to Canaan that not one Israelite had perished in the victory over a large, rich nation like Midian, fear would also spread in Canaan. Fear was already spreading there, as Rahab testified later to the spies. "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2:10–11). This was surely to the advantage of Israelite warriors.

Normally, this atonement money would have been paid prior to the battle at the time of the numbering (Ex. 30:13). This had not been required because the nation had already been numbered in preparation for the conquest of Canaan (Num. 26:2–51). Immediately after this, God revealed a system for allocating the land (vv. 52–56). Because the battle over Midian was preparatory for the conquest, God did not require them to be numbered again. They did not pay the half shekel of silver to the Levites. But when it became clear in retrospect that they had not really been at risk during the battle, they decided to forfeit any personal economic gains they had made as individuals. They concluded: "No pain, no gain."

Their payment of atonement money was voluntary. It was a public admission that this had not been a normal military encounter. They

paid the atonement money, not as a judicial covering for having killed Midianites, but as an acknowledgment that they had been physically covered by God during the battle. They did not keep the booty as a personal reward for having put their own lives at risk when their lives had not been at risk.

Moses and Eleazar accepted this payment on behalf of God. “And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of the congregation, for a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD” (v. 54). This memorial would remain as a testimony to the protecting hand of God in battle, but also as a public acknowledgment that the men who had received God’s special protection had acknowledged this by a voluntary gift.

Conclusion

The military spoils of Midian were unique. The whole nation had not been directly involved in the battle. Only a small, covenantally representative force had been chosen to fight. This would not be the case in Canaan. This was a preliminary campaign designed to prove to Israel that God was with them in a special, miraculous way. Not one Israelite died in battle.

The representative character of this force was manifested in the requirement that the participating warriors forfeit half of their animate spoils to the nation. The nation made a small tribute payment to the Levites; the warriors paid a tenth of this tribute to the Aaronic priests through Eleazar. Those who had entered the battle at greater risk statistically paid less than those who remained behind.

The miraculous outcome of the battle—no Israelite deaths—so impressed the warriors that they voluntarily gave their inanimate booty to Moses and Eleazar. They had not in fact been at risk, so they decided not to keep the booty that was normally the reward of any soldier who could take it in battle. The riskreward ratio of normal combat had been overcome in this battle by God’s intervention. The statistical improbability of the campaign testified to God’s special presence among them. The combatants publicly acknowledged that there had been no risk by surrendering their personal rewards to the covenantal representatives of the God who had removed the risk.

19

LAND TO MATCH MEN'S SKILLS

Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle (Num. 32:1).

The theocentric issue here was inheritance. The inheritance would be based on military conquest: sanctions. Where did the Reubenites and the Gadites get their cattle? Israel had been wandering in the wilderness for almost four decades. What kind of wilderness was it? Was it a place where cattle multiplied? Or were these cattle the spoils of war? Or were they the fruit of trade?

Some of these cattle could have come from Egypt, for the Israelites took cattle out of Egypt (Ex. 12:38). This raises the question: Where did the Egyptians get these cattle? Hadn't their flocks been depleted by the hail and then by the death of the firstborn (Ex. 12:29)? It seems clear that before the hail, many Egyptians feared Moses' words: "Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die. He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: And he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field" (Ex. 9:19–21). Obviously, a lot of people brought in their cattle and stayed inside themselves. Second, the Israelites, though slaves, did own cattle in Egypt. "Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither" (Ex. 10:26). Conclusion: there must have been grass in the wilderness.

Some of these cattle came from the victory over Bashan. "But all the cattle, and the spoil of the cities, we took for a prey to ourselves"

(Deut. 3:7). Previously, the Israelites had destroyed the cities of King Arad. These cities were called *hormah* (Num. 21:3), which implies total destruction. There is no indication that the Israelites took spoils from Arad's cities. This military victory was more like a whole burnt offering comparable to the subsequent total destruction of Jericho. So, the cattle did not come from Arad. We know that Israel confiscated Sihon's cattle (Deut. 2:35). The Israelites collected considerable cattle from Midian (Num. 31 :33, 44). Some of the cattle may have come from the another Amorite nation: Jaazer (Num. 21 :32).

All of the tribes also participated in the spoils. These two tribes may have traded their inanimate wealth to members of the other tribes in exchange for cattle. These two tribes must have had special interest in cattle and special skills related to herding. They viewed the ownership of cattle as of greater value to them than the ownership of other forms of wealth that they possessed. A profitable exchange was possible if the cattle owners in the other eleven tribes wanted what the two tribes possessed.

A. Capitalizing One's Productivity

The leaders of the two tribes approached Moses and Eleazar with a proposition: an exchange. They were willing to give up any legal claim on the land inside Canaan's borders in exchange for the land that Israel had already conquered beyond the Jordan. "Even the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle" (Num. 32:4). They sought a match between the land and their preferred form of capital: cattle. They believed that they would possess greater wealth if this specialized land became theirs rather than the agricultural land of Canaan.

This was an economic decision which acknowledged the reality of the division of labor. The output of land varies. The output of people varies. If land and labor match, the result is greater wealth for those who own the land. That is, those people who have skills associated with a certain type of productivity can capitalize the value of these skills by owning the land through which these skills can maximize economic output. As the value of their output rises, in part as a result of their control over land with special characteristics, the value of the land also rises. But ownership and control are different. A man may rent land and thereby control it, but any increased value that his actions impart to the land may later be claimed by the land's owner. So,

if a person possesses the specialized skills and knowledge to make a certain plot of land rise in value, he would be wise to purchase this land before the land's existing owner recognizes the producer's ability to raise the value of the land's output, and therefore before the owner can respond to this information by raising the land's price. In other words, by purchasing the land, the producer appropriates the value of his future productivity. He capitalizes his productivity by owning the land that appreciates because of this productivity.

Probably the best examples of this capitalization process in the second half of the twentieth century are Disneyland and Disney World, the world-famous amusement parks. In the early 1950s, when Walt Disney's company built Disneyland, he bought up enough land to build the park in what was then a less sparsely populated area in Southern California: before the regional freeway system was completed. Neither he nor anyone else knew if this venture would be successful. No one had ever built a family theme park before. The result was successful beyond anyone's wildest imagination. The tourists streamed into the city of Anaheim. The price of land located close to Disneyland skyrocketed. Others bought it, built hotels and other businesses on it, and reaped the reward. Disneyland made them rich.

Disney did not make the same mistake twice. Disney World is located on a huge tract of land near Orlando, Florida: 27,000 acres,¹ or 42 square miles. The Disney organization has drained the swamps and built hotels on the property as well as two other theme parks: Epcot Center and the MGM movie theme park. The company's goal is to get tourists to come there for a week and spend every penny within the confines of the Disney theme park system. Nevertheless, successful rival theme parks have been built in Orlando. But the lion's share of the increase in land value located close to Disney World has gone to the Disney organization, which capitalized its knowledge and its name by buying up the surrounding land before it became expensive. Disney locked in ownership of land needed for future expansion. He bought it at a pre-Disney World price. He bought it more cheaply per acre because he bought so much land at one time. The Disney company received a discount for volume. Disney believed that the total return on this investment would be greater than the forfeited interest return on the money the company tied up in buying and holding the land.

The two tribes saw an opportunity. They were cattlemen. If they

1. This is 10,800 hectares.

could gain ownership of recently conquered land that was more suitable for cattle ranching than farming, they would reap an entrepreneurial reward. Because they knew that members of the tribes legally would not be allowed to buy or sell land to non-members—the jubilee land law (Lev. 25)—they understood that capitalization in their case would go from the land to their cattle ranching skills. Land ownership in Israel would be less mobile than cattle ownership. To maximize the value of their skills in cattle ranching, they needed ownership of specialized land. They would not be allowed to buy comparably specialized land after the conquest. This land's highest valued use, they believed, was for cattle ranching. Anyway, for their purposes, this was its highest valued use. They could best capitalize their cattle raising skills by owning this land rather than tracts of land across the Jordan. So, they made their offer to Moses.

The subsequent land distribution indicates that the two tribes represented half the tribe of Manasseh. "And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about" (Num. 32:33). Thus, we should conclude that half of Manasseh also had reasons for preferring Gilead. They may have been cattle specialists. They may have had another reason. In any case, they preferred to join their brethren on the wilderness side of the Jordan.

B. Covenant Before Contract

Moses had a ready reply. It was the reply of a military commander. "And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?" (vv. 6–7). He understood that the cost of conquest was the shedding of blood. God had given the Israelites their assignment: to impose the maximum sanction in history, i.e., genocide. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee" (Deut. 7:16). He knew that there would be negative effects on the morale of the other tribes if these two tribes were given the land before the conquest. The whole nation had defeated the tribes beyond the

Jordan. Why should just two tribes reap the entire nation's present spoils without putting themselves at further risk?

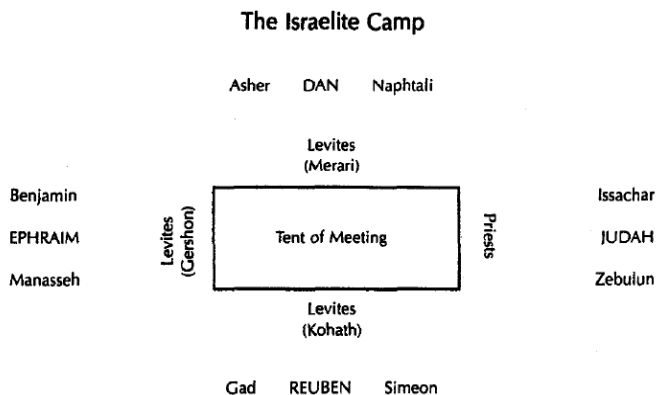
The tribal leaders had a reasonable solution to Moses' concern: "We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones: But we ourselves will go ready armed before² the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward" (Num. 32:16b–19). In other words, they would more than place themselves at risk alongside of the other tribes; they would serve as the advance guard. The negative sanctions of death and injury would place them at risk. They would receive no economic reward until the risks of warfare were behind them.

Moses agreed to these terms: "And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war, And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, And the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD" (Num. 32:20–22). He made no mention of their offer to serve as an advance guard, which had been their original offer, which demonstrated that fear of combat was not the issue. He reduced their required level of commitment. If they broke the terms of this less rigorous covenant, Moses said, there would be negative sanctions: "But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out" (v. 23). We know this agreement was a covenant rather than a contract because of the threat of God's negative sanctions.

Was their offer sincere? The layout of the nation's military formation indicates that it was. Reuben and Gad marched side by side. Manasseh was on the right flank.³

2. Hebrew word: *paniym*. It can be translated many ways, but among these are "face," "forefront."

3. James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), p. 205. (<http://bit.ly/jjneweyes>)



If the nation subsequently marched into battle with the "south" quadrant leading the attack, Gad and Reuben would take the brunt of the initial resistance. Simeon would also be exposed. Manasseh would be on the right flank. If half the tribe of Manasseh joined Simeon's ranks, Simeon would receive additional support, thereby compensating for its increased risk.

To accept this offer, Moses would have had to sacrifice Judah's role as the "point man" of the nation, the primary sword-bearer in battle, a position consistent with Jacob's prophecy: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Judah had led the nation during the wilderness wanderings. "In the first place went the standard of the camp of the children of Judah according to their armies: and over his host was Nahshon the son of Aminadab" (Num. 10:14). Milgrom calls the army's eastern flank the choicest position, since Moses and Aaron camped at the entrance of the tabernacle.⁴ So, in this sense, the offer was an offer by the eldest brother (Reuben) to replace Judah in the conquest. This was in fact the way the tribes marched into Canaan. Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed the Jordan before their brethren (Josh. 4:12).

4. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 340. He cited Numbers 3:38: "But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." He says that the southern flank (Reuben, Gad, Simeon) was the next most important position when the army was marching east, since the rotation was to the right. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

The curse of Jacob against Reuben was that he was unstable. “Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father’s bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch” (Gen. 49:3–4). By becoming one of the point tribes in the conquest, Reuben removed this curse, even as Levi had removed his curse by bearing the sword against the tribes after the golden calf incident. In Joshua 22, the last section of the book, we read of the suspected idolatry of the trans-Jordan tribes, which turned out not to be idolatry but an affirmation of the covenant. In Judges, we read of Reuben’s presence with Deborah and Barak in the war against Sisera, when other tribes were absent (Judg. 5:15–16). Reubenites obviously had become stable in their ways.

C. Structuring a Persuasive Offer

Moses then assembled representatives of the other tribes to announce the terms of this covenant (v. 28). He told them the options. He structured the options in such a way that the other tribes could hardly refuse. “And Moses said unto them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over Jordan, every man armed to battle, before the LORD, and the land shall be subdued before you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession: But if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan” (vv. 29–30). If the two tribes fought alongside the other ten non-Levitical tribes, they would surrender their share of the Promised Land to the other ten tribes. This was clearly a benefit to the other tribes. The other tribes would trade any future claims on the land of Gilead to the two tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh (v. 33). On the other hand, if the two tribes refused to fight, they would still inherit their share of the land of Canaan.

Was this fair? Why should these two and a half tribes receive part of the spoils of war if they refused to fight? Because of the promise to Abraham: his seed would inherit the land. This promise was qualified in only one way: circumcision. Without this covenantal mark, this seed and land prophecy would not come to pass. This is why the sons of Israel had to be circumcised after they crossed the Jordan but before they conquered Jericho (Josh. 5:7). The two and a half tribes could not be kept out of the land if they agreed to fight. In fact, it seemed impossible to keep them out even if they refused to fight. They were en-

titled to their share of the land.

So, the offer was structured in such a way that the positive sanctions of the two and a half tribes' participation favored the other tribes: their forfeiting of any claims to land inside the Jordan River's boundaries. Reinforcing this offer was the fact that a negative sanction would be imposed on the other tribes if the two and a half tribes refused to cross over: sharing equal portions in the division of the lands. Every tribe would receive 26% more land if the two and half tribes fought. The other tribes would give up this benefit if they refused to agree to the arrangement, and the two and a half tribes then sat on their hands in Gilead. There was no legal way to keep the nonparticipants out of the spoils.

Moses knew he had a problem. The two and a half tribes were strongly committed to the idea that they should inherit Gilead. If he rejected their offer, they might refuse to cross over the Jordan out of spite. Because of their cattle, they had a special desire to possess Gilead—a desire not shared equally by the other tribes. If they refused to cross over, this might start a mass defection among the other tribes. In any case, some tribes might experience defections. Militarily, it was Moses' task to keep the tribes together. They had marched out of Egypt in military array (Ex. 13:18: NASB).⁵ They were supposed to march into Canaan the same way. So, Moses structured the sanctions in such a way that the other tribes were unlikely to reject the offer.

1. Free Riders

There was a risk accompanying this offer. It resulted from what economists call the free-rider problem. If the nature of a goal is inherently collective—a successful military campaign is such a goal—but not all participants are required to provide working capital in order to receive the benefits, then it pays some people to sit on the sidelines. They ride free of charge alongside paying customers. This creates a shortage of the scarce service, i.e., a shortage at a price that most people would be willing to pay if everyone were required to pay the same price. If no one is going to be penalized for not paying his fair share—whatever other participants regard as fair⁶—why should any-

5. Literally, five in a rank. James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), p. 215. The root word is derived from the Hebrew word for five (II Sam. 2:23; 3:27; 4:6; 20:10). (<http://bit.ly/jjchurch>)

6. In a collective effort, there is no scientific way of determining a fair share. This is

one participate? If no one participates, the collective goal cannot be achieved.

This is the logical justification for the imposition of civil compulsion in certain collective efforts. This free rider argument lies behind the creation of an analytic economic category called public goods. Edwin Dolan described public goods as “goods or services having the properties that (1) they cannot be provided to one citizen without being supplied also to that citizen’s neighbors, and (2) once provided for one citizen, the cost of providing them to others is zero. Perhaps the best example of a public good is national defense.”⁷ A missile-defense system protects everyone in the region whether or not one person pays. But if anyone so protected can legally escape paying, then the missile-defense system will probably not be built.

The free market offers a solution in most areas of resource allocation: no participation in the end result for those who refused to participate in the effort—“no pain, no gain.” A legal boundary is placed around the end product, i.e., a property right is established. The legal system authorizes property owners to exclude free riders. But exclusion from God’s covenant with Israel was not allowed merely for failure to participate in military service. Deborah could not legally force Barak to lead the army against Sisera (Judg. 4:8). Similarly, she could not force the tribes to participate. This is why she included ridicule against some non-participating tribes in her song of victory (Judg. 5:16–17, 23). She used the negative sanction of retroactive ridicule because she had no civil negative sanction at her disposal. Moses also refused to establish an extra-biblical legal basis of exclusion from the covenant of Israel.

If other tribes demanded some sort of additional reward for their participation in the conquest, they might defect if Moses refused to grant it. The army of Israel might be depleted. So, Moses took a risk. Announcing a negative sanction against the other tribes—sharing their inheritance in Canaan with these non-combatants if they refused to accept the two tribes’ offer might backfire on him. He had two counter positions: one stated, the other implied. First, he offered a pos-

another application of a central dilemma for theoretical economics: the impossibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. See Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982 2012], ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix H (1990).

7. Edwin G. Dolan, *Basic Economics*, 2nd ed. (Hillsdale, Illinois: Dryden, 1980), p. 56.

itive sanction: a 26% increase in post-war land allocation for the other nine and a half tribes. They would receive a larger percentage of land that was more suitable for farming than Gilead, which was presumably what the other tribes preferred. They were not cattlemen. Second, he implied a negative sanction. He would call off the invasion. He did not say this, but if there were mass defections—too many free riders sitting on the sidelines—this was the implication. This would have meant dividing up Gilead among all twelve tribes: a major reduction in tribal spoils.

The representatives of the other tribes assessed the offer and decided to accept it. The rewards outweighed the costs. By consenting to the offer, they would gain the military cooperation of the two and a half tribes. They would also gain a significant increase in the post-war land distribution inside Canaan by forfeiting land outside Canaan that was more beneficial to cattlemen than to other agricultural producers. This land would probably be even less valuable after the conquest, for it would be more distant from whatever city God would choose inside Canaan as the city of the tabernacle. This would mean longer and more expensive journeys to attend the three annual feasts. It is not surprising that they agreed to the offer.

It is also not surprising that the Israelites had trouble displacing all of the Canaanites. The inability of Joshua to transfer any of the inheritance of one tribe to another because of the former's military non-participation or its failure to overcome the Canaanites probably hampered his overall military campaign. It took six years for Israel to conquer the land of Canaan,⁸ and the task was never fully completed (Josh. 15:63; 17:12–13). There was one period in which the inheritance was delayed for seven tribes: "And there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you?" (Josh. 18:2–3). He may have had a free rider problem.

Conclusion

Reuben and Gad possessed lots of cattle. The land of Gilead out-

8. Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness (Josh. 5:6). The first numbering in Numbers took place in the second year after the exodus (Num. 1:1). Moses sent in the spies shortly after this numbering. Caleb was age 40 at the time Moses sent in the spies; he was 85 when he began his final campaign in Canaan (Josh. 14:6–7, 10). Thus, Caleb was victorious in year six of the conquest, 46 years after the exodus.

side of Canaan was better suited to cattle raising than Canaan. These tribes realized that Gilead was better suited to their occupations than anything they might conquer in Canaan. They wanted to capitalize the value that they would bring to the land as cattlemen. They approached Moses with an offer: an inheritance in Gilead in exchange for an inheritance in Canaan. This was a contract.

Moses made sure that the covenant came first: the inheritance of Israel as promised to Abraham by God. They would have to put their lives on the line in the national war effort inside Canaan before they could inherit outside Canaan. They had to stake their claim to Canaan before they could stake their claim to Gilead. Moses also invoked God's negative sanctions against the two tribes if they failed to participate. They apparently took this covenantal threat seriously (v. 23). Once everyone had inherited his property in Canaan, they would be allowed to return to their land in Gilead. They agreed.

Moses made a persuasive offer to the other ten tribes: inherit the land of two and a half tribes in exchange for land outside the Promised Land that the nine and a half tribes did not really want, plus gain the military support of these tribes, or else (unstated) forfeit this additional land in Canaan and maybe not get aid from the two and a half tribes. This offer was strong enough to keep defectors from refusing to invade Canaan, even though a person, family, or tribe could not be excluded from inheritance inside Canaan for non-participation in the conquest.

20

SANCTIONS AND INHERITANCE

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it (Num. 33:51–53).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance through the application of negative sanctions at God's command. God instructed Moses to repeat the command given to the generation of the exodus: exterminate the Canaanites. This work of extermination was to mark them as a covenant people.

And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee. Observe thou that which I command thee this day: behold, I drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hittite, and the Jebusite. Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods (Ex. 34:10–16).

The exodus generation did not honor God's command. They pre-

ferred to wander in the wilderness, hoping against hope to be allowed to return to Egypt. They believed that God would not impose the same kinds of negative sanctions on Canaan that He had imposed on Egypt. They did not want to become the military agents who would impose His negative sanctions, any more than they had wanted Moses to impose negative sanctions against Pharaoh (Ex. 5:20–23).

The next generation of Israelites was ready to play the role of sanctions-bringer. They had recently imposed negative sanctions on Arad, Og, Sihon, and Midian. God had upheld them miraculously in the war on Midian: not one life lost (Num. 31 :49). They had wielded the sword effectively. They had experienced the taste of victory. They liked it. They wanted more.

A. The Spoils of War

Moses offered them positive sanctions: land. “And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall giv(e the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man’s inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit” (Num. 33:54). Their tribes’ general location would be established by lot, i.e., not by politicians or priests. God would give each tribe its due. The actual boundaries were probably decided in terms of tribal size, as with family allocations. But the rulers would allocate the actual parcels in terms of the size of the families.¹ This way, those who had better fulfilled the dominion covenant mandating large families (Gen. 1:28) would not be initially penalized by less land per family member.²

God also cautioned them regarding negative sanctions if they refused to impose total annihilation against the Canaanites. “But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them” (Num. 33:55–56). The Israelites were not immune from God’s negative sanctions in history. To the degree that they adopted the religion of Canaan, they would be treated

1. Chapter 14.

2. Over time, large families would mean smaller plots of land. This is why the jubilee land law tended toward urbanization, where the jubilee inheritance law did not apply. See Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24:G.

analogously. The judicial issue was therefore not bloodline but confession of faith and obedience to the terms of the covenant. The sanctions were covenantal.

B. First War, Then Peace

The pattern of victory over Canaan was Old Covenant sabbatical: first work, then rest. The sabbath commandment is the fourth commandment.³ It has to do with the negative sanction of work and the positive sanction of rest. Israel had to wage war for six years before gaining its rest.⁴

Israel was not told in advance that the removal of the Canaanites would take six years. God did tell them that it would not be an overnight process, since the animals of Canaan were not to be allowed to escape from the domination of mankind. “I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land” (Ex. 23:29–30).

Moses began his public presentation to the conquest generation by listing the places where Israel had rested along the way. They had wandered, rested, and wandered again. They had found no permanent rest. They had moved 33 times from the time of the exodus to the death of Aaron on Mt. Hor (Num. 33:5–38). Aaron’s death occurred in the fortieth year after the exodus (v. 38). Then they began a final series of wanderings: eight resting places in less than one year (vv. 41–49).

These final wanderings were different: Israel defeated major enemies. This time, they were not driven out; rather, they drove out others. They were able to build up both their confidence and their land holdings through force of arms. They had been attacked repeatedly; they had won repeatedly. This began a psychological transformation of the nation: from a defensive to an offensive mentality. They had not initiated these wars, but they had won them. This was in preparation for their crossing of the Jordan River: the move to total offense.

The exodus generation had maintained the peace by fleeing whenever challenged. Their solution to an external challenge was a retreat. They had been told by Moses that God was not going to give them a

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 4.

4. Chapter 19, footnote 8.

definitive victory in their lifetimes. This made them defensive. They did not want trouble. Their inheritance was cut off. They had no intention of placing their lives at risk for the sake of the inheritance of their children. They demonstrated this one-generation time perspective by refusing to circumcise their children (Josh. 5:7). The mark of a legal claim on the inheritance that had been promised to Abraham was circumcision. The exodus generation refused to impose the mark of the covenant on their heirs. They were saying, in effect, "If we cannot inherit, then why should our sons inherit?"

The generation of the conquest had lived as wanderers because of their parents' rebellion and cowardice. They had seen the consequences of rebellion and cowardice. They had lived all of their adult lives under negative sanctions. They had grown tired of this pattern of behavior. They wanted their inheritance, and they were willing to pay for it on God's terms: military conquest. This was risky, but it was better than living as wanderers.

God warned them that if they refused to drive out the Canaanites, they would fall under the same negative sanctions that Canaan was about to experience. The threat of negative historical sanctions is inherent in the biblical covenant. Canaan was about to learn this firsthand. So was Israel. But Israel had gained positive sanctions—land—by becoming God's agency of negative sanctions: a holy army.

This army was being taught a lesson: the trustworthiness of God's promises. This was an important lesson for the nation prior to the conquest. The victors' positive sanctions in warfare were gained through the losers' negative sanctions. Positive and negative sanctions are military corollaries. Warfare is a zero-sum activity: losers supply the winnings of the winners. This makes warfare different from the free market, where both trading partners expect to gain through a voluntary exchange.

Conclusion

Moses made it clear to the conquest generation that the terms of success in history are judicial. The Israelites were required to maintain their commitment to God's law. This included the one-time law of annihilation. The gods of Canaan were local gods who exercised their authority within the geographical boundaries of the promised inheritance. This is why the nations of Canaan had to be destroyed. Military conquest alone would destroy the authority and jurisdiction of the

gods of Canaan. The defeat of those gods would mark the victory of God. The historical issue was sanctions.

God announced: "I have given you the land to possess it" (Num. 33:53). But to collect what He had already given, they had to dispossess the Canaanites and their gods. Israel's inheritance was not delivered on a silver platter. They had to earn it. Yet it had been promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:16). There was a promise; there were also conditions. One of these conditions was circumcision. The other was military conquest. There was promise; there was also deliverance. To collect on the promise, Israel had to impose negative sanctions against Canaan. The iniquity of the Amorites was at long last full (Gen. 15:16). Their day of reckoning had come. Israel was God's designated agent for this imposition of God's judgment in history.

God's promise to Abraham looked forward to the day of judgment on Canaan. This promise was eschatological with respect to Canaan: last things. The victory of Israel involved the imposition of negative sanctions on Canaan. These sanctions were necessary conditions for the fulfillment of the promise. Moses told the leaders of Reuben and Gad that they had to participate in the war in order to receive their inheritance on the wilderness side of the Jordan: no warfare-no inheritance. They had already benefited from the victories of the holy army of Israel; they would have to contribute to the victory within Canaan's boundaries.

With respect to the eschatology of Canaan and the inheritance of Israel, sanctions were a necessary part of the fulfillment of God's prophecy: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). It was not possible for Israel to separate sanctions from the inheritance. Similarly, it was not possible for Israel to separate sanctions from eschatology, i.e., Canaan's eschatology. The victory of Israel over Canaan involved the imposition of negative sanctions. Israel's victory was Canaan's defeat. More to the point, the visible victory of Israel's God was the visible defeat of Canaan's gods. The covenantal victory of God was the necessary corollary of the covenantal defeat of Canaan's gods. It is not covenantally legitimate to discuss eschatology apart from sanctions, any more than it is to discuss God's law apart from the law's specified sanctions. They are a covenantal unit: law, sanctions, and eschatology. Modern Christian theology denies this unbreakable covenantal unity. So did the exodus generation.

21

CITIES OF REFUGE

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at un-awares. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment. And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge (Num. 35:9–13).

This law rested on the theocentric principle of God as the provider of sanctuaries in history for innocent people who are suspected of wrongdoing. The parallel principle is that the accused person who chooses to dwell outside of these safe havens is totally at risk in a world of imperfect knowledge and imperfect justice.

God gave Levi an inheritance: 48 cities (Num. 35:7). Of these 48 cities, six were designated as cities of refuge (v. 6). God told Israel that three of these cities were to be located inside the boundaries of Canaan; the other three were to be across the Jordan in the lands allocated to Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh (v. 14). After the conquest, “they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh” (Josh. 20:7-8).

A. Murder or Accidental Death

These cities of refuge were unique. They offered protection to anyone who innocently caused the death of another.

Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land,

which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither. And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past; As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live: Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past (Deut. 19:3–6).

This grant of protection to the suspect did not relieve judges from the responsibility of trying him. Murder was a capital crime. The elders in the city of refuge did not subsidize murder. They offered a cooling-off period. The congregation in the suspect's community retained primary jurisdiction. "But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait, Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm: Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments" (Num. 35:22–24). The question was: Where should the suspect remain in protective custody before the trial? Israel had no prison system. The city of refuge served as a kind of prison for the man: it kept him in, but it kept the blood avenger out. The city did not enforce his functional incarceration; the blood avenger did.

The civil court in the suspect's jurisdiction had primary authority after the suspect had fled to the city of refuge. It could seek his extradition into its protective custody. The elders of his home community would send someone to escort him home. These escorts would protect him from the blood avenger until after the trial. If the local court then declared him innocent, it would send him back to the city of refuge. "Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments: And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil" (Num. 35:24–25). This congregation must have been located in his home town, for the text required the congregation to restore him to his city of refuge. Obviously, he was

not in his city of refuge during the trial. If declared innocent, he would not live among the relatives of the victim until after the death of the high priest. Again, this served as a cooling-off measure.

The local congregation might declare him guilty. It would then turn him over to the blood avenger. "But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities: Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee" (Deut. 19:11–13). The blood avenger would execute the sentence.

B. Degrees of Protection

The city of refuge tried the person initially. The judges listened to his story. If they believed it, he could remain inside the city until his home court demanded his extradition and arranged protective custody for him. Until his community demanded his extradition, he was allowed to remain in the city of refuge, safe from the blood avenger.

That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled (Josh. 20:3–6).

The civil court in a city of refuge had jurisdiction only within the boundaries of its city. The city was comparable to a modern embassy. Inside its four walls, no other nation exercises jurisdiction. Outside, the laws governing the foreign nation or city are sovereign. Inside the city of refuge, a man was legally immune from attack by the blood avenger. Outside, he was not immune.

It was a matter of jurisdiction. The civil court in a city of refuge

possessed a geographically limited jurisdiction in the case of accidental manslaughter. The blood avenger had the primary jurisdiction outside of the city's walls prior to the suspect's trial back home. The suspect's local civil court had jurisdiction, but it had to demand extradition in order to enforce it. When it did so, jurisdiction shifted from both the city of refuge and the blood avenger.

Today, a civil court decides finally who is to blame. In Mosaic Israel, the local court assessed guilt or innocence. But to try the person, the local community had to wait until the city of refuge took him. The avenger of blood—the *go'el* or *ga'al*—had the authority to execute the suspect on sight prior to his arrival in a city of refuge.

C. Blood Avenger, Kinsman Redeemer

Mosaic law devotes considerable space to this family office. The kinsman-redeemer was the closest relative. Boaz was Naomi's kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 2:20). God is spoken of as Israel's kinsman-redeemer. "Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships" (Isa. 43:14). David spoke of God as his kinsman-redeemer: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14). Job viewed God as the final judge: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job 19:25).

Yet this redeemer, this deliverer, was also the judge who had the authority to execute a man who had killed the redeemer's nearest of kin. Until the man arrived in a city of refuge, the blood avenger served as jury, judge, and executioner. In Israel, where a death was involved, there was swift justice. This sanction was permanent.

1. Sanctions and Incentives

The death penalty is the limit of any civil sanction. The state is to be neither bloodthirsty, imposing torture or mass executions, nor soft-hearted, imposing a lesser sanction. The incentive either to exceed or avoid imposing God's law is always very great. The Mosaic law had two major methods of assigning the responsibility for executing the capital sanction: shared responsibility and unitary responsibility. Shared responsibility removed the full responsibility from the citizen. The method of execution, stoning, made it impossible for any parti-

cipant to know if his blow had killed the criminal. Unitary responsibility fell to the blood avenger. The blood avenger knew that his act would kill the suspect. He was the nearest of kin, and he had the incentive to execute judgment. But there was only one blood avenger. Everyone else in the community had to restrain himself. *There were to be neither mobs nor clan feuds in Israel.* Both shared responsibility and unitary responsibility were under God's law and his restraints. The restraint in this case was geographical: a city of refuge.

The office of blood avenger was designed to reduce the threat of clan or family feuds. One person was designated as a lawful agent of the state. His lethal action kept the violence from spreading. When a family member was killed, the family as a unit did not seek vengeance. One member did. In fact, the other members of the family were not allowed to restrain the suspect from fleeing to a city of refuge. No family could assign the task of hunting down the suspect to the fastest runner in the family. The office was held strictly on a next-of-kin basis.

The tribes could more easily restrict bloodshed from spreading by keeping the roads open. To give the suspect a better opportunity to reach a court, the tribes made sure that easy access was possible. The Mosaic law also allowed travellers to eat a handful of food free of charge (Deut. 23:24–25; Matt. 12:1). The man who was killed by a blood avenger had been given an opportunity to escape. His family had less incentive to retaliate against a member of another family, since the same legal protection was available to all. To exact vengeance against the blood avenger in such a case, let alone against other family members of the deceased victim, was to remove the protection that the city of refuge offered to everyone.

Open roads were therefore a life-and-death issue. Everyone had an incentive to support the maintenance of open roads leading to one or more cities of refuge. The Bible does not establish who has jurisdiction over roads, but the system of refuge cities indicates that for roads connecting to, or feeding into, these cities of refuge, the state had an obligation to build and maintain them as part of the judicial system. There would have been no toll roads into these cities. To have established tolls would have been to sell access to justice. The Bible does not authorize such a system of justice.

D. The Presumption of Guilt and Innocence

The man who accidentally killed his neighbor was automatically

presumed guilty by the blood avenger. This means that the slain victim, who could not speak on his own behalf, was automatically presumed innocent. The suspect was not allowed to defend himself physically against the blood avenger; to have done so would have been assault or murder. In the latter case, the state would have imposed the death penalty. The innocent man would have forfeited his innocence by killing his lawful pursuer. The courts recognized the right of the blood avenger to execute the suspect. Had they not done so, powerful suspects could have disposed of speedy but ineffective avengers.

With respect to everyone else in Israel, the suspect was not considered guilty. He had the right of protection if he reached a city of refuge. He could not be killed by the blood avenger within the walls of that city. At the death of the high priest, he returned home in safety: innocent for life.

This reduced the cost of murder trials in Israel. The suspect bore the cost of fleeing to a city of refuge. He would have started running as soon as he recognized that his victim was dead. This surely would have increased the likelihood that he would have done his best to save the victim's life if he appeared as though he could be saved. But once the victim was dead, there was no time to waste.

The blood avenger, who was probably biased in favor of the victim, would bear the cost of pursuing the suspect. No one else would. The judges in a city of refuge, presumably with no bias against the suspect, would conduct the preliminary hearing. If the suspect wanted to bring witnesses on his behalf, he or the witnesses would have borne the expense of travel. The city of refuge supplied only the judges. This would have taken place only when the suspect managed to make it to the city. This means that the bulk of the cost of prosecuting murder suspects would have been borne by the blood avenger. The defense cost would have been borne mostly by the suspect. This system allocated the costs of murder to those with the greatest incentive to gain a settlement.

The system also forced a suspect to identify himself publicly. Running away did not imply his guilt. He headed for a city of refuge where he could publicly protest his innocence. The blood avenger knew where to find him. The cost of tracing the suspect was low. If he was innocent, the refuge city's judges might protect him. If he was guilty, the blood avenger knew where to plead his case. There would be fewer unsolved murders in Israel because of this system. An unsolved murder was a major problem in Israel because of bloodguilt. This is why there was a formal system of public expiation for unsolved deaths

(Deut. 21:1–9). “So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD” (Deut. 21:9).

The dead man could not speak on his own behalf. This is why the suspect was presumed guilty by the victim’s family, but only one person could lawfully apply the appropriate sanction apart from a trial: the kinsman redeemer, who acted judicially on behalf of the victim. The refuge city system increased the incentive for a suspect to prove his case in a civil court. He had to identify himself as a suspect to the authorities.

E. Personal Boundaries and Defensive Jurisdiction

Not every death was under the jurisdiction of the blood avenger. The blood avenger gained jurisdiction over suspects who had been involved in what appeared to be an unrelated activity, such as work, where what could have been an accident caused a death. There were certain situations in which circumstances indicated that the victim had initiated the violence. In this case, a blood avenger had no jurisdiction.

A deceased intruder was retroactively presumed guilty. When a householder killed an unknown thief or intruder inside the boundaries of his house when it was obvious that the intruder had no legitimate reason to be inside, there was no question of the householder’s liability (Ex. 22:2–4). He was innocent. An intruder who came into the house at night had no legal rights. The blood avenger had no jurisdiction. The house’s boundaries testified against the intruder.

If a man attacked another man in front of witnesses, and the defender killed him, the blood avenger had no jurisdiction. The slayer’s boundaries had been violated. He was presumed innocent; only a local court could declare him guilty.

The case laws indicate that the victim had not initiated violence against the slayer. The slayer’s rock or axe head had caused the fatal injury. The victim had done nothing to bring on the response of the slayer. He had violated no boundaries. The witnesses, if any, could not speak definitively on behalf of the slayer or the slain. In such a case, the victim was presumed innocent. The blood avenger then had lawful jurisdiction until the suspect could place himself inside the walls of a city of refuge.

The refuge city system was designed to overcome two crucial features of Israelite society: the limits of knowledge and the tendency of

clan societies to develop blood feuds. The limits of knowledge are universal; clan societies are not. Israel was a tribal society. A tribal society is a usually clan-based society, for families, including extended families, possess their civil jurisdiction through a tribal council or court. The legal hierarchy is tribal. The civil sanctions are imposed tribally: in Israel's case, corporate stoning. Thus, families within a tribal society are tempted to seek analogous authority to impose final sanctions, since the judicial system appears to be based on bloodlines. This is the sociological basis of clan feuds.

Israel established limits on such a development. The Levites were one limit: counsel from outside the tribe's regional authority. The cities of refuge, which were all Levitical cities, were another limitation. The blood avenger seems to be a clannish office, but it operated to limit the spread of clan feuds. In fact, the blood avenger was an agent of the state who received his office through the family. His authority to impose lawful sanctions was limited by the civil congregation of his own city and by the mortality of the high priest.

F. The Death of the High Priest

We are not told why the high priest had to die in order for the innocent man to be released. The high priest's death had preeminence over the civil government of the innocent man's local community as well as over the blood avenger. The "blood feud," i.e., the family or clan feud, had to be eliminated. There had to be a healing judicial act which would overcome the blood lust of the avenger. It was not enough for a local court to declare the suspect innocent. There had to be a death. The death of the high priest was a substitutionary atonement. The dead man had been presumed the victim of foul play by his family. The local court had overturned this judgment on the basis of incomplete evidence, but the case was not settled permanently until the high priest died. The suspect then had his name cleared in history. No further act of violence against him was legal. The blood avenger had no further jurisdiction.

There has to be a way to bring disputes to a peaceful end. The costs of perpetual warfare are too high. Such conflicts undermine peace. Too many resources must otherwise be expended to reduce violence. The death of the high priest ended all defense costs for the suspect. The high priest's death called into session the court of highest earthly appeal, which automatically handed down a verdict of "inno-

cent.” The authority of the court of the city of refuge was thereby extended beyond the jurisdiction of the city.

This law is no longer in force. It cannot be; there is no earthly high priest. Without a mortal high priest, there would be no way for an innocent man ever to return to his home. There would be no prospect of full liberty for the innocent man. This law was operationally annulled with the exile, when Israel lost jurisdiction over civil justice inside its boundaries. It was definitively annulled with the death of the true high priest, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The cities of refuge were designed to reduce conflict, especially family feuds. The initial burden of proof was on the suspect. If he was fleet of foot, he might escape judgment by the blood avenger. If he could plead his case to the judges of the city of refuge, he could live. If he subsequently persuaded his local court, he would have been returned to the city of refuge that had sheltered him. If he outlived the high priest, he could lawfully return to his community.

Blood had been shed, and it had to be atoned for. The judicial issue here was expiation: cleansing bloodguilt for the land and for the victim’s family. The refuge city system reduced the number of unsolved cases of murder. This protected the land. The death of the high priest provided the final expiation for the original bloody act. This protected the local community from the heavy costs of family feuds.

To protect themselves, communities had to keep the roads open. Roads in Israel were both judicial and sacramental: judicial with respect to the cities of refuge; sacramental with respect to the festivals and required sacrifices at the central city. There is no biblical evidence that state highway construction was justified on the basis of its positive economic effects, although the roads surely had positive economic effects. What the roads were intended to provide was access to justice and access to expiation. Both justice and expiation were geographically based. “Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the

LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (Isa. 40:2–5).

Having to dwell inside the boundaries of a city of refuge until the high priest died was a negative sanction. The person so condemned probably would have had to change occupations. He would have had to learn to compete in a completely different environment. This no doubt was an incentive for those working in jobs that involved imposing risk on others to take care of their equipment.

The odd thing is that the Mosaic law was silent about what family sanctions there were against accidental manslaughter inside a city of refuge. Presumably, the kinsman-redeemer did not possess the power of enforcement against anyone who lived inside a city of refuge. If so, then the city of refuge would have been a more risky place to work: less care regarding the repair of the tools of one's trade. The threat of living inside the confines of a city of refuge would have weighed less heavily on someone who already lived in one.

The fact that the victim's family received nothing from the person who had caused the death but escaped to a city of refuge indicates that Mosaic civil law did not rest on the doctrine of strict liability. Strict liability requires the person who inflicts an injury to compensate the victim, no matter what the circumstances. Mosaic law rested on a much less rigorous concept of liability. If a damage-producer could not reasonably have foreseen it, the state allowed him a way to avoid making full compensation on an eye-for-eye basis. Men are not omniscient; biblical law acknowledges this fact in its concept of liability.

22

TRIBAL INHERITANCE

This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry. So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers. Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance (Num. 36:6–9).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance, which was a matter of upholding the family's name, just as God upholds His (Ex. 20:7).¹ The tribe of Manasseh was divided. Half of the tribe lived in Gilead, that section of Israel which lay beyond the Jordan. The chief rulers of this part of the tribe approached Moses with a question: What about the jubilee year?

And they said, The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters. And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the jubilee of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fath-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 23.

ers (vv. 2–4).

The five daughters of Zelophehad had previously come to Moses with a question: What about their inheritance? More to the point, what about the survival of their father's name in Israel? "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father" (Num 27:3–4). The law was silent on this matter. The daughters did not want to lose their land, but the Mosaic law weighed heavily on the side of masculine authority. They sought a clear-cut ruling from God: Did God place the preservation of masculine authority above feminine authority to the extent of removing a man's inheritance from his exclusively female progeny? "And Moses brought their cause before the LORD. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter" (Num. 27:5–8).

Household authority rather than gender was primary in Israel. Like the widow who became the head of her household, and who thereby gained the right to declare a vow independently of a man (Num. 30:9), so were the daughters of a man who died without sons. His name was to be preserved in Israel through his offspring. Daughters rather than brothers were the means of preserving his name.

A. Adoption Through Marriage

A problem still remained: What about marriage? When a man married, his wife brought a dowry into the marriage. The dowry was what distinguished a wife from a concubine. The dowry was generally provided by the bridegroom: a bride price. This is why Saul established the terms of his daughter's dowry for David: the foreskins of a hundred Philistines (I Sam. 18:25). Because the bridegroom provided the bride price, a daughter was not an economic burden on her brothers. Her dowry did not cost them part of their inheritance. A sister was not a

source of negative economic sanctions in the family.² In contrast, a son inherited a portion of his father's land. This capitalized his branch of the family. This is how a man's name was normally preserved in Israel.

Then what about marriage? If the daughter inherited a portion of her father's land, and her husband was outside the tribe, would the tribe's inheritance be reduced? The jubilee law as written indicated that this was the case. The issue was judicial: adoption. The bride was adopted into her husband's family. We know this because of the response of the tribal leaders. If the wife had not become a member of her husband's family, which could take place only through adoption, then the problem the leaders brought before Moses would never have arisen. But the husband was under the authority of another tribe. Through his authority over his wife, based on her adoption into his household, his tribe would gain authority over the legacy of the man who died without sons.

The judicial solution was tribal. If a daughter married a man who was a member of her tribe, she inherited her father's land. If he was outside her tribe, she forfeited her inheritance. This inheritance was part of her tribe's inheritance. It was located within the legal boundaries established by lot (Num. 36:2). The tribe's judicial authority extended to its borders. The enforcement of God's civil law was tribal. Each tribe would apply God's law locally as it saw fit. *This judicial decentralization was a major source of liberty in pre-exilic Israel.* The central civil government could not impose its will over the tribes apart from an appeals system (Ex. 18).

The creation of geographical zones exempt from local tribal law would have undermined this decentralized system of rule. If one tribe could extend its authority by means of marriage, this would have subsidized a form of inter-tribal imperialism. The power of one tribe could have been extended through a program of seeking out brotherless virgins in another tribe. These women, already vulnerable, would have become pawns in a game of inter-tribal politics. To protect them, and to protect the regional authority of each tribe, God revealed a solution: the forfeiture of landed inheritance by a woman adopted into the family of a rival tribe. Landed inheritance was not strictly individualistic. "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he

2. *Ibid.*, Pt. 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 47.

maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut. 21:15–17).³ It was also not strictly familistic, as the case law of Zelophehad's daughters indicates. It was partially tribal. "Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but everyone of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance" (Num. 36:9). The preservation of a man's name mandated the preservation of his tribe's name. The preservation of a man's inheritance mandated the preservation of his tribe's authority over his land. Only with the defeat of Israel by Assyria and the defeat of Judah by Babylon did this system of tribal authority end. It ended because the hierarchy of civil authority was transferred by God from Israel to a series of pagan empires.

B. Progressive Revelation and Eschatology

Perhaps more than any other incident in Scripture, the story of Zelophehad's daughters reveals the progressive nature of God's revelation in biblical history. The jubilee land law was incomplete. It did not answer the question: What if an Israelite dies without sons? This question was raised by the five daughters in Numbers 27. Moses asked God; God replied: daughters should inherit, not the man's brothers or his uncles. But this answer raised another question: What if a daughter marries a man from outside her tribe? This was a problem because of a judicial issue that is never directly raised in the Mosaic law but which is the most fundamental of all judicial issues: adoption. Ultimately, this is the issue of redemption: the transition from wrath to grace. While the Mosaic law does not discuss it, this issue underlies the entire system: adoption into a tribe through a family or a city (citizenship); adoption into a family through marriage (inheritance); adoption of one family's inter-generational slave into another Israelite family (liberation).

God did not reveal the details of all this at one point in time. He revealed it over time. The jubilee law did not answer all of the problems of inheritance. Neither did God's initial revelation to Moses re-

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

garding the daughters of Zelophehad. He waited for the appearance of the moral discipline that used to be called casuistry—the systematic application of God’s law to specific cases—to reveal new problems. Then He revealed the answers through Moses.

With the closing of the canon of Scripture, progressive revelation ceased. No new revelation comes to man that has authority equal to that of the Bible. A claim of judicial equality is in fact a claim of judicial superiority, for that which lawfully interprets past judgments is judicially superior to the past. God’s revelation in Numbers 36 was superior to what He revealed in Numbers 27. That which He revealed in Numbers 27 was superior to what He had revealed in Leviticus 25.

Casuistry did not cease with the closing of the canon of Scripture. Casuistry is basic to every legal system. In the West, casuistry ceased to be practiced by Protestants around the year 1700.⁴ The demise of Protestant casuistry was part of a larger social transformation: the replacement of Puritanism’s theocratic ideal by Newtonian rationalism, Enlightenment speculation, and political secularism. The kingdom of God was progressively restricted to heart, hearth, and church. This was a denial of the comprehensive claims of God on man and his institutions.⁵ The revelation of the Bible was assumed to be irrelevant to civil affairs. The revealed law of God was assumed to be subordinate to both natural law and common law because natural law is supposedly more universal than biblical law, and common law is second in authority after natural law. The categories of space and time were invoked against biblical law. They still are, although the category of time is generally given precedence: the doctrine of evolution. Cultural relativism has generally replaced natural law theory in academic circles.

This raises the issue of eschatology. If God’s law can never extend to the four corners of the earth through mass evangelism and conversion, then the common-ground categories of space and time will continue to supersede the category of biblical law in the thinking of the vast majority of Christians. That is, if progressive sanctification is eschatologically impossible outside the boundaries of heart, hearth, and church, the kingdom of God must remain confined in history to cultural ghettos. The revealed law of God loses its operational author-

4. Kenneth E. Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry*, new ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1948), pp. 206–207.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

ity because it supposedly was circumscribed spatially and temporally. This ignores the existence of God's specially revealed cross-boundary laws.⁶ Their existence was manifested in the ministry of Jonah, who prophesied God's corporate negative sanctions against Nineveh. Cross-boundary laws are geographically universal. They are also temporally binding.

Only with a restoration of biblical casuistry can the kingdom of God be consummated in history.⁷ But until there is widespread belief in the triumph of the gospel in history, casuistry will remain, at best, the hobby of a handful of Christian academics with a lot of time on their hands.

Conclusion

The case law application of the jubilee law which we find in Numbers 36 ends the Book of Numbers. There is no question what the issue was: inheritance. This is the issue of continuity in history. In the context of Mosaic Israel, this issue was the preservation of a man's name. But it also involved his tribe's name. It had to do with the messianic prophecy of Jacob regarding the coming of Shiloh. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). This was a seed law. It was also a land law: the preservation of the judicial authority of the tribes in a decentralized holy commonwealth. This judicial commonwealth ceased in the realm of civil government with the exile. So did the land laws in their original form.

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion, C:4.

7. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix Q.

CONCLUSION

Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest (Ps. 95:8–11).

The Book of Numbers is the Pentateuch's book of sanctions: the fourth book in the Pentateuch. Oath/sanctions is point four of the five-point biblical covenant model.¹ The Book of Numbers is an integral part of the five books of Moses. Its theme—sanctions—is integral to the five-point biblical covenant model.

The book begins with the mustering of the holy army of God. This was the second mustering. The first had taken place about seven months earlier (Ex. 38:26). The third and final mustering took place just before the conquest of Canaan (Num. 26). A numbering required the payment of atonement money for the blood to be shed in the subsequent battles of the army (Ex. 30:12, 15).²

A. The Slave's Mentality

The Israelites had spent their lives as slaves. Through their leaders, they had resisted Moses and Aaron after the two had confronted Pharaoh (Ex. 5:20–21). In refusing to heed this request by Israel's elders, Moses and Aaron replaced them as national leaders by the time of the exodus. Each of God's ten negative sanctions against the Egyptians followed a confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. These sanctions publicly ratified God's sovereignty over Pharaoh.³ They also ratified the transfer of civil and ecclesiastical authority from the existing

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 50.

3. *Ibid.*, Pt. 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

rulers of Israel to Moses and Aaron. The exodus, which culminated in Israel's crossing of the Red Sea (positive sanction) and the drowning of Pharaoh and his charioteers (negative sanction), was the final ratification of this transfer of authority. But as the Book of Numbers reveals, these foundational sanctions in the history of Israel did not completely persuade the ex-slaves. They repeatedly lost faith in Moses' leadership, which meant that they repeatedly lost faith in the God whom Moses represented, and who consistently brought visible sanctions in response to Moses' words. Moses' ability to forecast God's immediate sanctions identified him as a prophet, yet the people resisted Moses' words and God's ratification of them. In this sense, they were like their former master, Pharaoh. They would promise to obey, but then they refused.

Slaves depend on masters. The master first makes plans; he then works to carry them out. He gathers resources, which includes slaves. He owns both the raw materials and the slaves. The model for the office of master is God the Creator, who created raw materials and then created Adam. God owned all of these resources because He created them. He delegated responsibility to Adam to administer His resources in terms of a goal: Adam's judicially representative dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26).⁴ To one degree or other, the master delegates responsibility to his slaves; if he did not, he would have to do the work himself. Of what economic use would such unemployed slaves be? They would be little more than adornments for the master: consumer goods.

1. Representation

A good slave must learn to think his master's thoughts representatively. He should think to himself, "How would my master want me to do this?" This is why Christ warned: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).⁵ A good slave will not do things the way his evil master would. He therefore becomes unfaithful to his master, even if his acts increase his master's wealth. He becomes a representative of another, higher master, the heavenly master who lays down the law in

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 39.

history and enforces it in history. This is why bad masters lose control over good slaves in history. The good master eventually delivers good slaves from their intermediary bad masters. He does this in history. The nineteenth century is proof.

The Israelites had lived in Egypt under two masters: God and the supposedly divine Pharaoh. As time went on, and as deliverance seemed to be delayed, they took on the moral characteristics of their earthly master, Pharaoh. We see this in the first confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh: Moses' slaying of the cruel taskmaster. The Israelites were envious of him. They preferred to see him torn down from his position of authority rather than have him rule over them. "And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known" (Ex. 2:13–14). That phrase, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" was to become the constant refrain of the Israelites in the wilderness. The answer was obvious: God had. In rejecting the leadership of Moses, they were rejecting the authority of God. This was God's testimony to Samuel half a millennium later: "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee" (I Sam. 8:7–8). They wanted a leader like the other nations had, which meant that they wanted gods like the other nations had. They preferred Pharaoh to Moses. They preferred the golden calf to God.

2. Time Preference

The Israelites were marked by impatience. In their years in Egypt, they had grown impatient with God. They looked to Pharaoh as the ultimate sanctions-bringer in history. Yet God operated on a very strict timetable. "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:41).⁶ This impa-

6. The actual time they spent inside Egypt's national borders was 215 years; the

tience is a familiar theme in the Book of Numbers. The golden calf incident was typical of Israel's entire wilderness experience: with Moses absent, the people played with idols.

This short time frame is common to lower-class people, who are present-oriented.⁷ They are slaves to the present. The Bible says that we must be slaves to the future.⁸ God rules the future as absolutely as He rules the present and the past. An important mark of His people's faithfulness is their confidence in the future, for it is governed by God's eternal decree. This is seen through faith, since we cannot see the future. But God's reliability has been revealed in the Bible through the prophets' accurate predictions of future events.⁹ The mark of the true prophet was two-fold: accurate predictions regarding the future (Deut. 18:22) and faithful theological testimony regarding the one true God (Deut. 13:1–5).

A person who is future-oriented is upper class, no matter what his present income is. His thinking is characterized by long-range planning, thrift, and a willingness to defer gratification. Mises calls this phenomenon low time-preference. The future-oriented person is willing to lend at comparatively low rates of interest. He is unwilling to borrow at high rates of interest in order to fund present consumption.¹⁰

The generation of the exodus could not plan for the future successfully. They were trapped by their own present-orientation. They could not see beyond the present. They were therefore blind to the reality of the past. They kept crying out to Moses to take them back to Egypt. They remembered the past in terms of the low-risk immobility of slavery. The past deliverances of God did not persuade them to accept His promise of future protection because they had no confidence

time they spent under Egypt's kingdom authority, which extended to Canaan, was 430 years. See North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1:A.

7. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 47–48, 53–54.

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 16:B.

9. This is why higher critics of the Old Testament invariably conclude that prophetic passages that demonstrably came true, most notably those in Daniel forecasting three future empires, were written after the fact. The suggestion that some men can know the future in detail is an implicit affirmation of teleology: a future that is fixed, i.e., not open-ended in terms of the present. It affirms predestination. Only man is allowed by humanists to seek to predestine the future, and even he is not acknowledged as being capable of achieving this goal.

10. On time-preference and the rate of interest, see Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

in history. They did not believe that the events of the exodus testified to the reliability of God's covenant with them. They did not believe Moses when he prophesied the positive sanction of future victory. They demanded constant reassurance. "What have you done for us lately?" was their constant rhetorical question to Moses, and therefore to God.

In this sense, they were radical empiricists: spiritual forefathers of David Hume and modern existentialists. For the radical empiricist, there is no continuity of law in history. Patterns of cause and effect that individuals believe they have observed in the past do not prove the continuing existence of the same fixed patterns in their observations, let alone in the world beyond their observations, whether in the present or the future. The fact that a radical empiricist remembers that when he stuck his finger into boiling water, it hurt, does not prove to him that it will hurt the next time he does this. The mother's warning to her small child who is about to touch a hot stove—"Hot! Hot!"—may persuade the small child not to touch it after a few painful experiences, or even after one, but this does not persuade the radical empiricist to change his theory of causation and perception.¹¹ The small child possesses greater epistemological clarity and more common sense than the radical empiricist. Similarly, the children of the exodus generation had more sense than their parents. They, unlike their parents, learned from experience.

B. Sanctions and Inheritance

The Israelites departed from Egypt bearing spoils. The sons of Israel survived the corporate negative sanction of the death of the firstborn. All of Egypt's firstborn sons perished on the night of the Passover. Their inheritance went to the departing Israelites. The positive sanction of inheritance was based on the negative sanction of disinheritance. There was a biblical principle at work here: "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). The Book of Proverbs extends this principle: "The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just" (3:33). "The memory

11. I think this has something to do with Jesus' warning about hell: "Hot! Hot!" Rebellious children do not listen. They prefer to remain radical empiricists rather than become Christians. "Show me!" they cry. Jesus rose from the dead to ratify the reliability of His warning. The radical empiricist then cries: "Show me again!" He refuses to accept God's testimony (Luke 16:30–31).

of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot" (10:7).

The status of the Levites as the tribe in charge of the sacrifices also reveals this relationship between sanctions and inheritance. The sacrificial system was a system of negative sanctions applied to judicial representatives (animals) by judicial representatives (priests). The priesthood represented the firstborn sons of Israel. They had achieved this lofty status because they had shed the blood of 3,000 Israelites after the golden calf incident.¹² But the status of the firstborn was ultimately not lofty, for the firstborn son was under a curse: a representative of Adam, God's firstborn. Only because God accepted an animal substitute did the firstborn sons of Israel survive Passover night. Had there not been a sacrifice, the firstborn sons of Israel would have perished as surely as the firstborn sons of Egypt did. Because the Passover lambs were disinherited, the firstborn sons of Israel inherited. Because the 3,000 sons of Israel were disinherited by the Levites, the Levites inherited the unique judicial status of the nation's priestly tribe. But this judicial status involved great risk: life lived within the sacred boundaries of the tabernacle-temple. Violations of sacred space and sacred ritual could bring death (Lev. 10:1–2). The inheritance of Eleazar and Ithamar was based on the disinheritance of Nadab and Abihu (v. 6).

Canaan was supposed to be disinherited by Israel. This disinheritance would be the basis of Israel's inheritance. This transfer of wealth was based on ethics, not power. God had told Abraham: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). Corporate, national iniquity was the covenantal basis of the disinheritance of the Amorites. The progressive rebellion of the Amorites was cumulative. It moved toward eschatological fulfillment.

C. Sanctions and Eschatology

Israel had been given an eschatology: *guaranteed inheritance through military conquest*. The exodus generation had not believed this eschatology. Or, more to the point, that generation refused to believe that the eschatological fulfillment of the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey was in any way associated with Israel's prophetic role as a sanctions-bringer in Canaan. Israel rejected the specified terms of the inheritance: military conquest. So, the next generation would inherit. This meant that each of Israel's holy warriors would

12. Chapter 4.

have to accept both the obligation and threat of personal military sanctions in battle. Israel's national inheritance was tied to the presence of these sanctions.

This leads us to a theological conclusion. Point four of the biblical covenant model is sanctions. It is as tied judicially to point five, inheritance, as it is to point three: law. God imposes historical sanctions, positive and negative, in terms of His covenant law. These sanctions result in inheritance by His covenant people and the disinheritance of covenant-breakers. This is why theonomy is inescapably and indissolubly tied to eschatology. Theonomy is inherently postmillennial because theonomy is biblical law, and biblical law is indissolubly linked to God's covenant sanctions in history. Law without sanctions is mere opinion. Theonomy without predictable historical sanctions is mere opinion—one not widely shared. Theonomy without postmillennialism is God's law without predictable sanctions—sanctions that lead to the victory of God's kingdom, in time and on earth.

The New Covenant has not annulled the covenantal structure of inheritance. On the contrary, the New Covenant reaffirms it. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). The New Covenant was marked by a transfer of inheritance from Israel to the church. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This transfer was visibly imposed by God through Rome's destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.¹³

Like the generation of the exodus, the vast majority of today's Christians steadfastly maintain that the covenantal structure of inheritance no longer applies in history. Amillennialism and premillennialism march arm in arm on this point. Amillennialists insist that God will progressively impose corporate negative sanctions against the church. Christendom as a civilization will be suppressed, if it has not already been consigned by God to the ash can of history. Not only that, antinomian amillennialists insist, the very idea of Christendom is a perverse legacy of Old Covenant Israel. They dismiss the ideal of Christendom as "Constantinian."

Meanwhile, premillennialists are divided. Historic premillennialists, whose ranks are thin, agree with the amillennialists: until Christ returns to set up His earthly kingdom, things will get worse for God's people. The dispensationalists insist that things would get worse were

13. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

it not for the rapture. The church will be delivered out of history. Both of these eschatologies agree: the covenantal structure of history has been reversed by God. Covenant-keepers will be progressively disinherited, which covenant-breakers will inherit the earth. Only the cessation of history—by either the final judgment or the rapture—can bring back the covenantal structure of history as it existed under the Old Covenant. The New Covenant is, to this extent, a burden of cosmic proportions for God's people compared to the Old Covenant. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in history brought a harsh legacy into history, we are assured by pessimillennialists: the reversal of the covenant's basis of inheritance. Their eschatologies are consistent with their view of sanctions, i.e., that covenant-breakers will progressively impose historical sanctions on covenant-keepers. Pessimillennialists have a consistent theology of historical sanctions and inheritance: covenant-breakers will inevitably inherit in history because God has predestinated them to impose historical sanctions on the church. This was the operational eschatology of all those who sought to stone Caleb and Joshua.

The suggestion that all three eschatological views can coexist indefinitely inside the same ecclesiastical organization is necessarily a suggestion that neither covenant theology nor eschatology matters decisively in the life of the church. Both doctrines are to this extent *adiaphora*: things indifferent to the Christian faith. Ultimately, this suggestion of eschatological pluralism is highly partisan. It favors the worldview and anti-Christendom agendas of both amillennialism and premillennialism, for these outlooks are united in their opposition to the covenantal structure of inheritance and disinheritance in the New Testament era. In the name of eschatological neutrality, amillennialists and premillennialists come to postmillennialists and ask them to agree that covenantal postmillennialism's view of the past and the future is, historically speaking, a moot point. Moot points are mute points. This is an ancient lure: the myth of neutrality. It is offered in the name of peace and growth. It is the myth that undergirds all forms of confessional pluralism.

This is why a consistent theonomist must reject eschatological pluralism as an ideal for the creeds and confessions of the churches. There is no eschatological neutrality in the Bible. Premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism cannot all be true. If they are said to be judicially equal, then eschatology is necessarily reduced to the status of *adiaphora*. A church that is not postmillennial is like the

generation of the exodus: fearful of judicial and cultural victory, committed to wilderness wandering as a way of cultural life, and hostile to those who, like Caleb and Joshua, predict inevitable victory in history.

To discuss eschatology apart from a consideration of God's law and historical sanctions is to ignore the covenant's structure. The covenant is a unified system. It cannot be broken analytically and still retain its authority. Any consideration of inheritance, either in eternity or in history, has to include the doctrines of sanctions, law, authority, and the sovereignty of God. A discussion of eschatology apart from historical sanctions is as misleading as a discussion of prophecy apart from the sovereignty of God. To say that something must happen in the future while asserting that man is totally free to choose a different future is covenantally absurd. It is equally absurd covenantally to discuss eschatology without discussing sanctions: covenantal cause and effect. It is also covenantally absurd to discuss God's historical sanctions without discussing God's law. The covenant is a unit. It cannot be broken.

Postmillennialists can afford to be patient. They understand that the future will bring victory for Christ's church in history. Christendom will be established in history. So, they can afford to do the work of dominion inside the boundaries of eschatologically pluralist churches. They know that, when victory becomes visible over time, the defenders of pessimillennialism will face a much smaller audience. Most people prefer success to failure, dominion to martyrdom. They understand and believe the economist's dictum: "It is better to be rich and healthy than it is to be poor and sick (other things being equal)." Pessimillennialism is popular when things are going badly for the church and kingdom. It offers deliverance out of history: rapture or second coming. But when things start going better, and keep going better, Christians will at long last understand that the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth and in history is what is mandated by the Great Commission.¹⁴ Then will be the time to revise the eschatological portions of various ecclesiastical confessions of faith.

Conclusion

The Book of Numbers is the Pentateuch's book of sanctions. It

14. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

ends with the story of Zelophehad's daughters. The leaders of the tribe of Manasseh wanted to know about a specific application of the jubilee's laws of inheritance. Would a tribe's land pass to another tribe if an inheriting daughter married a man from the other tribe? The answer was *no*. This is a fitting conclusion to the book of sanctions. It leads to the fifth book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy: the book of inheritance.

APPENDIX

HOW LARGE WAS ISRAEL'S POPULATION?

So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty (Num. 1:45–46).

And all the firstborn males by the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those that were numbered of them, were twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen (Num. 3:43).

Commentators have argued for over a century about the size of Israel's population. Liberals and those influenced by them want to downsize it. Conservatives are at a loss explaining how it got as large as the biblical texts say that it did. There are a whole series of problems in assessing the demographics of Mosaic Israel.

Conservative Bible commentator Gordon Wenham provided several arguments as to why the texts' population figures are wrong—perhaps by as much as a factor of 100 to one. His arguments reveal the extent to which modern evangelical Bible commentators have mimicked higher critics in their ready acceptance of the hypothesis of extensive textual corruption. Jacob Milgrom's solution is even worse. He suggested that the original author of Numbers lied: “. . . the tendency of ancient epics to inflate numbers is well attested.”¹ Despite the fact that multiple texts assert the same demographic picture, thereby reinforcing each other, commentators are ready to substitute their own speculations when these texts do not describe events that conform to present-day scientific or historical theories. This raises the issue of

1. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 339.

biblical interpretation.

A. Liberals and the Bible

There are many examples of this methodology in the literature of academic biblical studies. A common example is this one: higher critics of the Bible have sought to re-define the Red Sea. It has become in retrospect the Sea of Reeds, through which the Israelites safely walked across dry land (Ex. 14:21).² Just imagine: people actually walked across relatively dried-up marshes! The very thought of this stupendous event paralyzed the Canaanites with fear: "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red [Reed] sea for you" (Josh. 2:10a). This escape across the marshes was followed by an unprecedented miracle: Pharaoh's army, hot in pursuit, drowned in this sea of reeds. (The word for "reed" can also be translated "papyrus." Perhaps the Israelites used the reeds to create papyrus to create environmental impact statement forms, and drowned the Egyptians in them. Just a suggestion.) All that is missing from this Red Sea revision is a comparable creek to substitute for the Jordan River: "For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over" (Josh. 4:23). Perhaps the Jordan was running seasonally low at the time of Israel's crossing.

Another miracle was the manna, which has retroactively become insect dung. And what a miracle it was! Two different species of insects provided it: same color, same texture, same naturally sweet, honey-like flavor—"No preservatives added!" (Ex. 16:31). One insect species was located in the mountains, the other in the lowlands.³ But the miracle had only just begun: both varieties of insects excreted double loads on the day before the sabbath but nothing on the sabbath (Ex. 16:22, 26–27)—truly strict sabbatarian insects! So, the Israelites feasted on insect dung daily for 39 years. Yet they were also required by God to break a jar if a dead insect was found inside it (Lev. 11:32–33). We

2. James King West, *Introduction to the Old Testament: "Hear, O Israel"* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 133. The word "red" (*supf*) can be translated reed or weed, as in: "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head" (Jonah 2:5). The presence of weeds did not mandate the presence of marshes.

3. F. S. Bodenheimer, "The Manna of Sinai," *The Biblical Archeologist Reader*, X (Feb. 1947); reprinted in G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman, eds., *The Biblical Archeologist Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1961), p. 79.

might ask rhetorically: Who are we, or who was Moses, or who was God, to blame the murmurers for having preferred eating quail to insect dung (Num. 11:6)?

My conclusion: theological liberalism does a strange thing to people. It turns their brains into manna (lowland variety).

B. "The Numbers in Numbers Don't Add Up!"

Wenham argued that the wilderness could not have supported such a large population, even with manna, i.e., the heavenly kind. After all, "The bedouin population of modern Sinai amounts to only a few thousand; . . ."⁴ Noordtzi agreed: Sinai could not have fed all those people; it was a wilderness. But the whole point of the manna was to sustain the Israelites miraculously in the wilderness. The manna was a miracle, as was their clothing that did not wear out. Moses described both of these as related miracles (Deut. 8:3–4).

Furthermore, Wenham says, archeological evidence points to much smaller population centers: a few thousand people per Canaanite city.⁵ God said that it would take years for the invading Israelites to overcome the existing population in Canaan (Ex. 23:29). If the Israelite population was large, there could have been only brief resistance by tiny Canaanite villages.⁶ This indicates that the number of Israelites was small. Wenham does not mention another possibility, namely, that today's archeological evidence is incomplete and has been misinterpreted by extrapolating from a handful of discoveries. The same criticism can be leveled at modern chronologies of the ancient Near East prior to the eighth century B.C. Archaeologists therefore date the strata incorrectly. Wenham's failure to mention the possibility that modern archeological scholarship has made crucial errors is also representative of the higher critic's mind-set. When the latest scientific evidence, which he can be confident will eventually be superseded and made obsolete, tells him that the Bible's account is false, he accepts the new evidence and rejects the Bible's account.

Wenham cited a 1906 book by Flinders Petrie,⁷ an archeologist, who argued that the word translated thousand (*'eleph*) could mean either "thousand" or "family." Recording the population of Reuben, the

4. Gordon J. Wenham, *Number: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 61.

5. Wenham, *Numbers*, p. 62.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

7. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London: Murray, 1906).

text says 46,500 men (Num. 1:21). Not so, said Petrie: the tribe of Reuben really consisted of 46 families ('*eleph*') plus 500 men. Wenham cites his own father's study, which allowed 45 Reubenite leaders and 1,500 men.⁸ Noordtzij insisted that '*eleph*' means "clan."⁹ Other estimates of Israel's total population range from 140,000 to as few as 20,000. Petrie allowed no more than 5,600.¹⁰ He was being generous; G. Ernest Wright allowed no more than 5,000; the Israelites may have been as few as 3,000.¹¹ This is a reduction from about 2.4 million (men, women, and children). The Bible's account, we are informed, may be off by 800 to one. Not too reliable! But this isn't the half of it. Harrison said that one estimate places the number as low as 100 people.¹²

Ashley simply capitulates: "In short, we lack the materials in the text to solve this problem," i.e., the problem of large numbers.¹³ He was exaggerating. We have enough materials in the text to begin to solve the problem. We must use these materials to guide us in our search for the answer.

C. Whose Numbers Should We Accept?

That the number of Israelites was huge can be seen from the despair of Balak the Moabite in seeking an alliance with the Midianites. "And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company¹⁴ lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou

8. Wenham, *Numbers*, p. 63.

9. Noordtzij, *Numbers*, pp. 24–25.

10. Wenham, *Numbers*, p. 64.

11. G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 66.

12. R. K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1992), p. 436.

13. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 66.

14. "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a **multitude** of people" (Gen. 28:3).

blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (Num. 22:4–6). I find it difficult to believe that fewer than 5,000 people covered the face of the earth. That about 1,000 warriors terrified Balak seems even less probable. Balaam's prayer is even more revealing: "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23:10). But the scholars think Balak and Balaam were grossly exaggerating, that they were terrified of a handful of ex-slaves who somehow had recently conquered King Sihon, the city of Jaazer, and King Og (Num. 21:24–35).

We have a tally of the booty taken from Midian by 12,000 Israelite warriors in the period immediately prior to the invasion of Canaan:

And the booty, being the rest of the prey which the men of war had caught, was six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand sheep, And threescore and twelve thousand beeves, And threescore and one thousand asses, And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of women that had not known man by lying with him. And the half, which was the portion of them that went out to war, was in number three hundred thousand and seven and. thirty thousand and five hundred sheep: And the LORD's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and threescore and fifteen. And the beeves were thirty and six thousand; of which the LORD's tribute was threescore and twelve. And the asses were thirty thousand and five hundred; of which the LORD's tribute was threescore and one. And the persons were sixteen thousand; of which the LORD's tribute was thirty and two persons (Num. 31:32–40).

The Bible testifies clearly to the size of at least one city-state in the wilderness. Thirty-two thousand young women and girls were taken captive. This was no village. This was a separate culture that possessed a great deal of wealth.

The degree of honesty of Petrie's argument is more readily assessed when we read the account in Numbers of the size of the families of Levi: Gershon, seven '*eleph*, five hundred (Num. 3:22); Kohath, eight '*eleph*, six hundred (v. 28); Merari, six '*eleph*, two hundred (v. 34). Total number of Levites if '*eleph* means *thousand*: 22,300. This corresponds closely with the summary total of 22,000: "All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand ['*eleph*']"

(Num. 3:39).¹⁵

Petrie knew he had a problem.¹⁶ In Numbers 3, there can be no confusion over the meaning of 'eleph. Levi had three family groups; each family had a specific number of males above one month old. This number corresponded closely to the number of Israel's firstborn: "And all the firstborn males by the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those that were numbered of them, were twenty and two thousand ['eleph] two hundred and threescore and thirteen" (Num. 3:43). So, the number of Levite males in Numbers 3—judicial surrogates for Israel's firstborn (Num. 3:12–13)—matched almost perfectly the number of Israel's firstborn males, counted in thousands. We cannot escape the grammar of the numerical account in Numbers 3.

But Petrie sought to evade the plain language of the texts. He argued that the Levites' numbers in Numbers 3 were inserted into the text in a later period. What later period in Israel's history would have imagined that there were 22,000 Levites? Only a period in which there were a lot of Levites. Where did all these Levites come from? If there were only 5,600 adult male Israelites at the time of the numbering, how many adult male Levites were there? Four hundred, perhaps? How, and how fast, did this Levite population grow from 400 to so many that 22,000 seemed reasonable to the forger (sorry: "redactor")? Was the redactor so confused that he inserted numbers for the tribe of Levi that totaled four times larger than the number of all the other 12 tribes combined (using Petrie's estimate of 5,600)? Translating 'eleph in Numbers 1 as "family" rather than "thousand" leads to a dead end. It was an obvious dead end on the day it was proposed in 1906.

Counting the firstborn was required because there had to be a substitute for them: the Levites. The Levites as a tribe would substitute for the firstborn on a one-to-one basis. If there were more firstborn sons than Levite males, someone would have to pay the Levites five shekels per extra firstborn. The Bible does not say who would have to pay. The allocational question was this: Which families had born the "excess" 273 children? If all of the families were counted, and the comparison was made, on what basis would a particular tribe or family be assessed the five shekels? Would it be those families whose firstborn were born later than the others, i.e., families of those firstborn who constituted

15. Here there could have been an error in copying: the Hebrew word for 6—the Kohathites' 8,600—is similar to the word for 3. If the figure was 8,300, the total was 22,000. Wenham, *Numbers*, p. 71.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

the excess? This would seem to be fair, but we are not told.

The ratio of firstborn sons to adult males constitutes a long-recognized problem. There were 603,550 adult males (Num. 1:46). There were 22,273 firstborn (Num. 3:43). Wenham wrote: "This means that out of 27 men in Israel only 1 was the first-born son in his family. In other words, an average family consisted of 27 sons, and presumably an equal number of daughters."¹⁷ Milgrom also cited this ratio.¹⁸ The firstborn were not adults—age one month and older. The ratio is clearly impossible demographically. Because this dilemma is based on biblical texts, it requires a solution consistent with the texts. Wenham saw none. I see three possible explanations. But before considering them, we must understand the demographics of Israel in Egypt.

D. Population Growth: Jacob to Moses

There were only four generations from the generation born after the descent into Egypt until the conquest (Gen. 15:16). The time Israel spent in Egypt was 215 years. I discussed in *Authority and Dominion* why the 215-year figure is correct, and why the 430 years included the time that Abraham and Isaac spent in Canaan, which was formally under Egyptian sovereignty.¹⁹ Paul was clear on this point: it was 430 years from the promise given to Abraham until the giving of the law to Moses at Mt. Sinai. "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (Gal. 3:17). We also know that this stay in Egypt took four generations: the text regarding Jochebed (Num.26:59).

If a woman bore a child every two years, and if she lived to 120 years old, and if her menopause came at, say, age 80 (Sarah was beyond menopause at age 90), then theoretically she could have borne 30 children in a 60-year reproductive period: age 20 to 80. (A figure of 54 children per family is impossible. This would have required almost one child per year from every woman for her six decades of fertility.)

Let us assume that each of the 70 wives produced 30 children, and

17. Wenham, *Numbers*, p. 61.

18. Milgram, *Numbers*, p. 339.

19. On 215 years rather than 430, see North, Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Pt. 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1986), ch. 1:A:1–2. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II, Chapter XV; Section 2, in *Josephus: Complete Works*, William Whiston, trans. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1960), p. 62.

all of her children survived, married, and repeated the process. Half of these children would have been sons. The average number of children in Jochebed's generation would have been $30 \times 70 = 2,100$. Of these, 1,050 were sons. Repeating this performance, Moses' generation would have totaled 15,750 men ($15 \times 1,050$). Assuming no retarding effects demographically from the persecution of the Pharaoh, Moses' generation would have produced 236,250 sons ($15 \times 15,750$). If all of Moses' generation had been alive at the time of the first numbering, and all of Joshua's generation, the total would have been 252,000 men. But there were over 600,000 men. Even with the preposterous assumption of 30 children per family, the numbers do not add up.

Relating to the second mustering in the Book of Numbers, we read: "And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister" (Num. 26:59). It appears that Israelite mothers had far fewer than 30 children unless Jochebed missed the mark by a factor of ten to one. Israel's descent into Egypt took place when Jacob was an old man: age 130 (Gen. 47:9). Jochebed's birth occurred after Levi had come down with his father into Egypt. There were no other intervening generations. Moses' generation was the second after the descent. This left only two until the conquest of Canaan (Gen. 15:16).²⁰

1. Adopted Household Servants

Seventy male family members arrived in Egypt: "All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six; And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten" (Gen. 46:26–27). Jacob plus the 66 sons and grandsons plus Joseph plus his two sons equalled 70. They could have brought several thousand servants into Egypt with them: *servants adopted into their families*. Recall that Abraham had 318 household servants (Gen. 14:14).

Only by adopting their servants or other residents of Egypt could the Israelites have reached large numbers by the time of the exodus. If there were 1,500 men who came down with Levi's generation, and

20. The children of Joshua's generation did have children, and presumably some of them were over age 20 at the second Numbers mustering. But the leaders were the sons of Joshua's generation, and so are regarded as heirs of God's promise to Abram.

each had seven sons, in Jochebed's generation there were 10,500; Moses' generation had 73,500; Joshua's had 514,500. Together, this totalled 588,000 men, which was close to 600,000. So, this would have been biologically possible, but highly unlikely: 14 children per family, all of whom survived and repeated the process.

Then there is the problem of the effect of high birth rates. If Joshua's generation continued to reproduce at these rates, the 600,000 men would have had something like six million children at the exodus, at least 90% of whom died in the wilderness. An even higher percentage of them died if any of them had children, since the nation was in zero growth mode in the wilderness. Covenantally, this is an unacceptable scenario: God's judgment against the fourth generation rather than the third. To avoid it, we must conclude that the overwhelming majority of Joshua's generation had two children: replacement rate. From 14 children per family to two children in a single generation: this is simply unheard of in history. Living in slavery did not stop Aaron from having four sons. So, this 14-children-per-family scenario is totally implausible.

It takes such a series of demographic assumptions that are not directly revealed in the texts to solve the problem of the 600,000 adult males, beginning with the assumption of 1,500 (or more) men who were counted as Israelites. We can play with the numbers by assuming that even more servants came down, or that they had lower reproduction rates, or that more residents of Egypt were adopted in Joseph's era, but this does not avoid the adoption issue. There had to be adoptions at some point: either early in the process or at the very end, and possibly all along the way. The larger the number of adoptees early in the process, the smaller the families could be in order to reach 600,000, assuming that most of these 600,000 were not themselves very late adoptees (post-exodus).

The nation experienced zero population growth in the wilderness. The number of adult males at the beginning was the same as the number of adult males at the end. The nation supposedly grew to a huge size during the years of servitude; then, in freedom, its population growth ended. This is not easy to explain. A fast-growing population is characterized by large numbers of children, not the small families that appeared in the wilderness. A fast-growing population rarely reaches zero growth in one generation unless there is a catastrophe, either biological or political, that produces less-than-replacement-rate births or else wipes out children before they reach maturity. Normally, there is a

population “echo” of the children who have already been born, even if these children reproduce only at the replacement rate. So many of them are marrying and having children that the population keeps growing even though this generation is only producing two children (replacement rate) per family. The smaller the families were before the exodus, the less of an echo effect in the wilderness. There was no echo in Israel’s wilderness experience. The nation reached population stagnation in one generation. There has to be a reason. The death of the bulk of the fourth generation in the wilderness is not a covenantally likely solution: they were the heirs of God’s promise to Abraham. Also unlikely is the possibility that they failed to reproduce at all during the wilderness era. Then what happened? This lengthy chapter is my attempt to suggest a plausible explanation. As far as I am aware, no previous commentator has even raised the question.

I see no exegetical escape from the presupposition of adoption: adoption into the original 70 families of Jacob’s era and/or after they settled in Egypt, and (as I shall suggest) again before the numbering mentioned in Exodus 38.²¹ Adoption came early because the 70 males who came down to Egypt, including sons and grandsons (Kohath’s generation),²² would not have multiplied fast enough to have constituted a numerical challenge to Pharaoh: “And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. . . . And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we” (Ex. 1:7, 9). There had to be adoptions by Jacob and his sons in order for the population to have multiplied this much by the time of Moses’ infancy. The base of 70 families was not large enough to have provided such a threat in a single generation.

2. What Seems Reasonable?

Moses had a brother and a sister (Num. 26:59). Was his family abnormally small? Small, but not abnormally small. Aaron had four sons (Num. 26:60). He may have had daughters, but the text does not say so.

21. If someone were to ask me if I think I have ever made an exegetical breakthrough of real significance, one never before suggested by any commentator, this would be my choice. See *Moses and Pharaoh*, ch. 1.

22. Kohath and Jochebed were brother and sister (Num. 26:59). She married her nephew Arnam (Ex. 6:20). Presumably, she was born much later than Kohath: the Numbers text says she was born in Egypt. Her birth in Egypt established her as part of the first of the four generations prophesied in Genesis 15:16.

There were few families with 16 children. This means that there must have been many families for the population to have reached 600,000 men, unless there was a last-minute mass adoption of gentiles just prior to the Exodus mustering. These families must have been the families of the adoptees in Egypt.

The case for adoption is exegetically inescapable. The texts demand it. The only question is: When did the bulk of these adoptions take place? We know that Israel's population was large and growing in the days of Moses' infancy. This indicates that a significant number of adoptions had already taken place, either before they came down into Egypt or shortly thereafter in the days of Joseph's rulership. There was insufficient time for biological reproduction to have produced such a military threat from the loins of 69 men (Jacob was beyond fatherhood).

The problem is this: Did the adoptees of the early years reach 600,000 adult men at the time of the exodus? We can only speculate; the texts do not tell us authoritatively.

E. The Meaning of *Firstborn* at Passover

Because of the problem of the 27-to-one ratio, Bible-believing commentators who understand the nature of the demographic problem have frequently dealt with it by altering the definition of *firstborn* in Numbers 3. They employ a different definition for the Passover. We shall see why this is the case in the sections on the proposed solutions.

Numbers 3:40 reads: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names." This is the same language that is used in the previous verse: "All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand." *All* of the male Levites were numbered. The parallel language for the firstborn seems to exclude the possibility that *firstborn* was limited to those sons under age 20.²³ But is this conclusion correct?

On the other hand, is it possible that *firstborn* only referred to males under age 20? Consider the survival of the Egyptian army. The death of the firstborn in Egypt did not seem to afflict adults. "And it came to pass, that, at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the

23. Or under age five, if James Jordan is correct. See below, Section F.

land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Ex. 12:29–30).

Pharaoh survived; so did the captive in prison. The phrase, "the captive," is a representative term: a head of household. So, the adult head of household survived *if he had a firstborn son living at home*. Egypt's firstborn male offspring, at least minors living at home, did not survive. All of Pharaoh's servants arose. All of the Egyptians arose. What can this mean? It means that the adults under Pharaoh's command survived, but their firstborn sons did not. One male was dead in a family, but not two, i.e., both father (if he was a firstborn son) and son.

Pharaoh still commanded an army. Were the survivors all younger sons? This seems unreasonable. The whole command structure would have been destroyed if firstborn officers all died. Furthermore, unless Pharaoh was a second-born son whose older brother had died, he would have perished if death had taken every firstborn son irrespective of his age or his status as household head. If this was true in Egypt, then it may have been true—probably was true—of Israel. After all, the threat of death had been given to both the Egyptians and Israelites. Only the Passover lambs saved Israel from the same negative sanction that afflicted Egypt.

If the sanction of death struck every firstborn son in Egypt, fathers and sons, which I think is unlikely, then the Pharaoh of the Passover was either a second-born son (his older brother had previously died without leaving a son to inherit the throne) or else he was replaced by his younger brother after the Passover, who then pursued Israel. Moses must have been dealing with a Pharaoh who was a surviving brother if *firstborn* for Egyptians meant all firstborn adult males. On the other hand, if *firstborn* meant the *firstborn dwelling* in a household, then Pharaoh could have been biologically a firstborn. His resident son died in his place.

Some Egyptian households would have seen their firstborn sons depart years before. Yet every household had a death. If my view is correct, then those firstborn fathers whose firstborn sons had left home came under the sanction of death. I conclude this because: (1) every household had a death; (2) there were still many adult males left alive in Egypt. This indicates that not every firstborn son died. Those

who still lived in their fathers' households did die. For a firstborn son who had left home, and who had a son of his own who died, there also was a death back home: the firstborn head the household, i.e., his firstborn father. There was a death in every household.²⁴ Only two things could save a firstborn father: the death of his resident firstborn son or the death of a lamb.

Was the threat against Israel the same? Was every male at risk, or were only their sons at risk? The text seems to indicate that the same threat applied to the Israelites that applied to the Egyptians. I conclude that the definition of the term *firstborn* applied equally to both nations: the firstborn son in a household.

We now return to the problem of the 27-to-one ratio between adult males and firstborn sons.

F. First Proposed Solution: Firstborn as Young Minors

James Jordan asks us to assume that firstborn sons were young minors in a household, i.e., that only minors under the age of five were counted as firstborn sons.²⁵ Why should we assume this? Why should we assume that they could have had older brothers? Textually, the one reason is the size of money payment required by God. The payment to the Levites was five sanctuary shekels per firstborn (Num. 3:47). This was also the size of the payment to the Levites which was required for buying entry through adoption into the family of Levi of a male child, age one month to five years (Lev. 27:6).²⁶ The second reason is practical: to reduce the number of firstborn in Numbers 3 compared to the number at the Passover. If judicially we can reduce this number, then the biological anomaly disappears.

This approach requires a redefinition of *firstborn*. Jordan at first did not think it does. He wrote that "the original Passover was designed to save, directly, the firstborn sons between the ages of one month and five years; indirectly, everyone else." But in speaking to him about this problem, I learned that he now says that the Numbers 3

24. No younger brothers headed households in which their firstborn sons had departed. If every household was headed by a firstborn son, then Egypt was in replacement-rate mode: zero population growth.

25. James Jordan: "Who Were the Firstborn Sons?" *Biblical Horizons*, No. 73 (May 1995), p. 4.

26. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 36.

definition serves to reduce the number of biological firstborn.

There is a problem with this solution: the echo effect. If *firstborn* means any son under age five, irrespective of older brothers, then his older brothers become a covenantal sanctions problem. If he has, say, three older brothers—one in each five-year age bracket—then Joshua's generation had very large families: at least eight children per family. To avoid the conclusion that large numbers of the fourth generation died in the wilderness, we must assume that the 400,000 fathers produced only one son. This means that the typical firstborn son was also the last-born son. If the 22,273 firstborn sons had older brothers who had been counted at the Passover by means of an earlier definition, then the echo problem appears: 400,000 fathers times eight children, or 3.2 million children. Some 2.8 million died in the wilderness, hopefully before they had their own children, most of whom would also have died.

Joshua's generation was at the end of its peak childbearing years: on average, probably about age 35 or 40. All but two of them were dead 39 years later. If the 22,273 sons had been born over the preceding four years, then the average number of male births was about 5,600 a year. But the replacement rate for 400,000 men was closer to 20,000 a year for two decades. This raises the obvious question: Where did the 600,000 men in Numbers 26 come from? Were most of the other 380,000 sons bunched together demographically from age five up? Were they born over a 16-year period at a rate of 23,000 a year, followed by a sharp drop in the birth rate? (If we were to adopt the definition for *firstborn* as "under age five," applying both to Passover and Numbers 3, then not many firstborn sons were actually at risk at Passover: maybe 25,000 out of 375,000. This may be why Jordan adopts his definition only for Numbers 3.) The demographics of this scenario are uncomfortable to a Bible-believing expositor. It may be possible to put all of the seemingly conflicting pieces together, but it is not an easy task.

Jordan's definition of *firstborn* reduces the number of sons in Numbers 3 compared with the Passover. A century ago, C. F. Keil adopted a similar strategy, but with a different way of shrinking the number of numbered firstborn. His solution has the benefit of minimizing the echo problem.

G. Second Proposed Solution: Births Since Passover

According to this scenario, firstborn sons who were alive at the first Passover had already been atoned for by the blood on the doorposts. Thus, no further payment was necessary. The law governing the money payment to the priests for the firstborn was given in the wilderness, after the first Numbers mustering. It did not apply retroactively to those children whose lives had been spared during the Passover, who were not in need of further substitutes; the Passover lambs had served that function. The money payments were due only for those sons who had been born in the wilderness during the 12 months from the Passover in Egypt to a month before the first Numbers mustering.²⁷ This amounted to 22,273 sons. So, the 27-to-one ratio cannot be taken as applying to all the firstborn in Israel. It applied only to those born in the 12-month interim period.²⁸

The demographic question is this: Could 600,000 families have produced 22,273 firstborn sons and approximately the same number of firstborn daughters in 12 months? Conception took place beginning nine months prior to Passover and continuing for another three months. Moses' generation was beyond the normal childbearing years; certainly firstborn children for any of them would have been abnormal. We know that Israel was about to experience a drastic reduction of lifespans, from around age 120 for Moses and Aaron to about 70 to 80 for Joshua's generation (Ps. 90:10). Joshua's generation died of old age in the wilderness; therefore, very few of them were above age 40 at the early musterings.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that there were 400,000 mustered men in Joshua's generation, ages 20 to about 70. Ages 20 to 40 are the prime reproduction years. Could, say, 175,000 families have produced 22,273 firstborn sons? Theoretically, yes, especially if the parents were recently married as a result of the exodus liberation, which perhaps a third of them were. But did this really happen? How

27. This eliminated all but the prematurely born sons who were born as a result of the debauchery of the golden calf incident, which took place as Moses was returning from Mt. Sinai. Israel arrived at Sinai in the third month, probably toward the end of the month (if the Jews are correct about dating the arrival at firstfruits/Pentecost). Moses was with God for 40 days. This placed the rebellion at less than nine months prior to the Numbers numbering.

28. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [English translation, 1872–84], n.d.), III, pp. 11–13.

many of these 175,000 families had never produced a son? Most of them had, which is why Keil adopted his narrowly circumscribed definition of *firstborn* as a solution to the 27-to-one problem. There is no solid reason to say that his scenario was biologically impossible. To reproduce themselves, Joshua's generation required 400,000 sons. (Their grandsons could supply the 200,000 replacements for Moses' generation.) The 400,000 sons meant replacement-rate mode: one son per household. So, about 22,000 sons born in one year seems reasonable. If this birth rate had continued for two decades (ages 20 to 40), this would have produced a little over 400,000 sons.

Yet even if all this did happen, it does not solve the more fundamental problem: Where did the 400,000 men of Joshua's generation come from?

In every plausible scenario, the expositor has to rely on the adoption argument to make sense of the numbers. Bible-believing expositors have generally avoided dealing with this demographic problem. Jordan accepts this with respect to the original families, but Keil did not mention it. Biological reproduction rates do not allow the kind of population growth required to get from the 70 males who came down to Egypt in the famine to the 600,000 who were numbered. The texts indicate that Joshua's was the third generation: Kohath, Moses, Joshua. Conclusion: servants must have been adopted into the original families. Israel then spread out through the land of Goshen.

Could Keil's thesis be modified to include prior adoptions? Yes. This would not change his basic point regarding the meaning of *firstborn* in Numbers 3. But to adopt this solution, we must assume a drastic reduction of births, i.e., a drastic reversal of the previous experience of growing families. There was no population echo in the wilderness. This means that Joshua's generation either suffered drastically lower birth rates than their parents or else more of their children died before reaching maturity. A decreased birth rate could have been the effect of the persecution.

The main problem with Keil's thesis is the language that God used to explain His substitution of the Levites for the firstborn: "And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD" (Num. 3:12–13). It sounds as though

God was setting apart (hallowing) the Levites because of the previous hallowing of the firstborn. He placed His claim on them. All of this is in the context of the payment of five shekels per firstborn.

The problem with the solutions offered by Jordan and Keil is that they both define *firstborn* in a way that the plain reading of the text seems to deny: *firstborn* as under age five or as a son who was born after Passover. Is there any solution that preserves the normal meaning of the word: a firstborn son of Israel? Yes, but it invokes a scenario that is surely not intuitive, just as the early adoption scenario is not intuitive, though mandatory.

While I devote considerable space to a third scenario, my instincts tell me that Keil's approach creates the fewest problems. But for those who are suspicious about tampering with the plain meaning of words, I offer a thesis that adheres to the definition of *firstborn* as the firstborn son of a household. It also solves the 27-to-one problem and the zero growth problem. It may do this, however, at too high a speculative price. What the reader must understand is that the texts do not offer solutions to these problems in a straightforward manner. You must decide how much "creative explaining" you can tolerate.

H. Third Proposed Solution: Mass Adoption

If adoption early in Israel's stay in Egypt is the only way to solve the problem of the source of the 600,000, why not follow through on this approach? What about the possibility of later adoptions? What about a mass adoption after the exodus?

I present the following scenario in order to consider the possibility that there is a legitimate alternative to Keil's definition of *firstborn*, which is the heart of his solution to the 27-to-one problem.

Before we study the problem in greater detail, I must present a new definition for Numbers 3: *a firstborn son who was not old enough to be mustered*. He was under age 20. At the Passover, the deciding factor had been the presence of the firstborn son in the household. This changed in Numbers 3. Jordan has one explanation; Keil had another. I tentatively suggest a third: *mustering removed him judicially from his father's household*. With the addition of a new institution, God's holy army, which was assembled through mustering and which required an atonement payment, the definition of a firstborn son changed. Judicially, a soldier in God's holy army was no longer under the same degree of family jurisdiction as he had been prior to his milit-

ary eligibility. Judicially speaking, he had moved out of his father's household. So, at the time of the Exodus mustering, the criterion of *firstborn* shifted: from a household resident in Egypt to a man under 20 years old.

Recall that I am dealing with three problems: (1) how the 27-to-one ratio could have existed; (2) how a relatively small population of sons became the 600,000 fighting males that invaded Canaan; (3) how Israel grew to 600,000 adult males in three generations: Kohath's, Amram's, and Moses'. If *firstborn* means something significantly different in Numbers 3 from what it means in Exodus 12, there ought to be a reason for the change. I think the reason may have been judicial: the presence of the army of the Lord. The following presentation is structured by this definition of *firstborn*. If neither Jordan's nor Keil's definition seems legitimate, then consider the implications of a third.

At the exodus, the Israelites were joined by others who were fleeing the tyranny of Egypt. What if most of them subsequently covenanted with the Israelites? When word spread that the Israelites were about to depart, not to mention the spoils they were carrying with them, others in Egypt saw their opportunity and took it. They had two options: they could go out of Egypt into the wilderness or into Philistia on their own, or they could link up to the nation whose God had just smashed the Egyptian social order. Add to this the miracle of the manna: nearly free food²⁹ until the conquest (Ex. 16).

A lot of them could have chosen the latter option: to stay with the Israelites. This explains the presence of the mixed multitude with the Israelites (Ex. 12:38). It is possible that some of these people were adopted into the families of Israel as full members. For the sake of argument, let us consider the possibility that the bulk of the mustered Israelites were recent adoptees, and the firstborn sons were biological sons, not adoptees. If true, this would solve the 27-to-one demographic problem.

1. *Biological Sons vs. Adopted Sons*

The firstborn sons were biological sons of Israel (Num. 3:12). They were the minor sons of Joshua's generation. Let us assume that this strictly biological definition of *firstborn* governed the mustering process. Those who were subsequently ingrafted into the nation through adoption were not counted as firstborn sons retroactively back to Pas-

29. There had to be grinding and cooking.

sover, nor were their children, who had not been born under the covenant. These pre-mustering adoptees added to the number of fighting-age males, but they and their children were not counted as firstborn. *Firstborn* was biological, not judicial: “opens the matrix” (Ex. 13:15).

After the completion of the tabernacle, the Levites were set apart by God as a separate tribal offering in place of biological firstborn sons, as we have seen (Num. 3:12–13). This revelation came after the other tribes were mustered and just before Levi was numbered. This judicial substitution of Levites for firstborn minor sons was a one-time event that took place four months after the mustering in Exodus.

We might assume that the foreign adoptees were grafted into Israel covenantally through circumcision, but this may not have been the case. Those who came out of Egypt were circumcised (Josh. 5:5), but this presumably refers only to Israelites at the time of the crossing of the Red Sea. This great miracle allowed everyone accompanying them to escape, including the mixed multitude. There is no reason to believe that the passage in Joshua refers to the mixed multitude, who would not have been circumcised. This miracle of dry passage must have persuaded the mixed multitude, just as it persuaded the Canaanites, that God was with Israel. At this point—after the Red Sea exodus—some would have asked to be adopted into Israel. Perhaps Israel circumcised these newcomers, but perhaps not. Israel did not circumcise those sons who were born in the wilderness. If adoption did take place without circumcision, a lot more of the mixed multitude males would have consented to be adopted.

Why would Israel have agreed to this mass adoption? Because of their graciousness? Perhaps, but the thought of adding a huge number of potential fighting men to the army would surely have been a major motivation. This decision would soon cost the Israelites a lot of money: the payment of silver at the first mustering and presumably also at the second and third. The adopters had to fund the adoptees' payments. The mixed multitudes had not received the inheritance of the Egyptians.³⁰ Perhaps they had some silver, but if they were escaping slaves, this is doubtful. The immense number of adoptees in comparison with the number of biological Israelites meant that this adoption into the army of the Lord must have been extremely expensive for each Israelite family. Each family would have had to fund the atonement payment of its adoptees. Expanding the army of the Lord was a

30. Chapter 4:B.

costly venture for each original Israelite family. It made economic sense only if they actually planned to invade Canaan. The only way for the economics of adoption to have paid off for the exodus generation was for the nation to have invaded Canaan immediately, thereby receiving its inheritance. The cost of two atonement payments could have been recovered only through military conquest. But after two numberings, the nation suffered a failure of nerve. The inheritance was delayed for another generation.

What if the mixed multitude had been adopted on the day after the death of Egypt's firstborn? They were not part of the original Passover, but perhaps they participated in the spoiling of the Egyptians.³¹ This is difficult to imagine: a mass adoption of foreigners followed that very day by a shared inheritance.

This would have meant that the adoptees paid their own atonement money, and also that the per capita wealth extracted by the spoiling was vastly smaller. But this does not change the economics of the mustering process. The adoptees were supplied with the atonement money they needed to pay the Levites. Either the Egyptians gave it to them directly or the Israelites did. In either case, the original Israelite families, other than the Levites, wound up with far less wealth than if there had been no adoption.

The mandated payment enforced a huge transfer of wealth from the 12 tribes to the priests and the tabernacle. This also indicates that the Israelites had stripped Egypt of an immense treasure: large enough to fund the payment of three wilderness numberings of mostly adopted foreigners, plus the voluntary offering prior to the building of the tabernacle.

Because of the number of Israelites slain by the Levites after the golden calf incident, I believe that the mass adoption may have come after this event. The 3,000 slain men were a significant percentage of the original Israelite population of about 35,000 men.³² The magnitude of the loss of population was consistent with the magnitude of the crime against God. The loss of one-half of one percent of 600,000 adult males does not seem sufficiently burdensome. But to take this position, I must assume that the mixed multitude had no part in the rebellion,

31. We say "the Egyptians," but we mean something more circumscribed: those Egyptians living close to the Pharaoh's court. These were the leaders of the nation. It was they who supplied the enormous quantity of gold and silver used later by Israel to build a golden calf, build the tabernacle, and pay for three musterings. To say that these Egyptians had been rich is not putting it strongly enough.

32. See below, Section H:2.

nor would they have participated in the covenant oath at Sinai. This may be too much to assume. If they were adopted earlier, then God was being very lenient with the nation.

In the third numbering (Num. 26), the text is silent with respect to firstborn sons. This is because there was no longer any need to number them as a group. The ratio of biological firstborn sons to the total number of Levite males was established after the initial numbering of the tribes; so, this ratio was no longer judicially relevant except for individual families. From the day of the one-time numbering of the Levites (Num. 3), each non-Levitical family had to pay money to the Aaronic priesthood for each firstborn male under its authority, whether of man or beast (Num. 18:15–16). Numbering the firstborn corporately was no longer necessary.

2. *The Number of Levites*

The number of Levites almost perfectly matched the number of biological firstborn minor sons of the other 12 tribes. This was God's doing, not man's. The adoptions took place before Exodus 38:25. Moses did not yet know about the substitution of Levites for firstborn sons. It does not appear that Moses deliberately assigned to Levi a number of adoptees that closely matched the number of firstborn. Presumably, each tribe was assigned a proportional share of new members. As the other tribes' total number of adopted members grew, though not the total number of biologically firstborn sons, the Levites' number of adopted sons also grew. Moses numbered all of the males of Levi above one month old, not just firstborn sons (Num. 3:39).

Given the mass adoption theory, a relatively small Israelite population existed on Passover night. We know that there were about 22,000 biologically firstborn males one year after the exodus. This was every firstborn male above one month old (Num. 3:40). If the definition of *firstborn* was common to both Israel and Egypt on Passover night, which I think was the case, and only household-resident firstborn Egyptian sons died, which I also think was the case, then the firstborn Israelites were unmarried sons living in their fathers' households. For reasons already offered, I argue that *firstborn* in Numbers meant firstborn males under age 20. I use the 22,000 figure as a marker. There would also have been somewhere in the range of 22,000 firstborn females. But bear in mind that what constituted a firstborn son in Numbers was not exactly the same as at Passover. The definition had

changed: males under age 20.

If Israel's population prior to the exodus had been at the replacement rate level, there would have been a one-to-one ratio between firstborn and the total population of each gender: every person a first-born. This would mean that the number of children of Joshua's generation was about 45,000. There were 45,000 parents and possibly even 45,000 grandparents. Israel's population would have been somewhere in the range of 135,000 people. Again, this assumes zero population growth. But if Aaron's family size was typical—four sons—then there was actually considerable population growth. This means that there were fewer grandparents (Moses' generation) than parents (Joshua's generation).

If Aaron's family and Zelophehad's wilderness family of five daughters (Num. 26:33) were typical, then the Israelites were multiplying above the replacement rate by a factor of two.³³ We know that the nation had been growing rapidly prior to the Pharaoh of the persecution (Ex. 1:7). Because of the relatively small size of the families in Aaron's day, I believe that the bulk of the adoptions took place prior to the persecution, probably under Jacob. We do not know what happened to the birth rate in Moses' generation, although the examples we have indicate that there may have been growth. If the persecution and slavery that were specifically designed by the Pharaoh to slow the Israelites' rate of growth actually worked, then Moses' generation suffered a reduced rate of increase compared to the previous one. We do not know that this was the case. Aaron had a brother and a sister (Num. 26:59), but he had four sons. There is no way that 70 biological Israelites could have multiplied to 22,000 firstborn sons in three generations without adoptions.

Let us assume that population was doubling every generation. Something in the range of 22,000 firstborn sons were residing in their fathers' households. Let us assume that each of them had a brother, although this is probably too high an estimate for the Passover. Eventually there would have been two brothers per household: doubling. So, there were about 22,000 fathers in Joshua's generation, and 11,000 grandfathers, if all were still alive. So, the adult males of Israel probably totalled fewer than 40,000, perhaps as low as 33,000.

33. Zelophehad's family was not typical in the wilderness. It was abnormally large. Replacement-rate demographics were dominant. Perhaps he kept trying for a son. Perhaps he was an Israelite rather than an adoptee. He may have been operating in terms of an earlier dominion outlook. Or maybe God just blessed him with a lot of children.

How did this small group reach 600,000 adult males one year after the Passover? The solution has to be mass adoption, sometime after the Passover, or after the exodus, or after the golden calf incident. This influx also provided the males that brought Levi's numbers up to 22,000 males—not firstborn³⁴—at the time of the Numbers 3 numbering.

The other tribes were mustered first (Num. 1). The Levites were not numbered at this point, by God's command (Num. 1:49). God then announced that the Levites would serve as judicial substitutes for the total number of firstborn males in the other tribes (Num. 3:12-13). As it turned out, the number of biologically firstborn Israelite males was close to the number of Levite males as augmented by the recently adopted recruits. This does not seem to have been the result of planning by the Israelites. This information regarding the substitution had not been known prior to Numbers 3.

Leviticus 27:2-8 referred to an entry price for entering the tribe of Levi. This was a very large amount of money per family, which is why the system served as a barrier to entry³⁵. This law was given in Leviticus, which was revealed to Moses after the completion of the tabernacle (Lev. 1:1). But the mass adoption took place prior to the Exodus numbering, i.e., prior to the construction of the tabernacle. The law requiring an entry payment to the Levites had not yet been revealed to Moses. Thus, the other tribes did not have to fund the adoption of thousands of gentiles by the tribe of Levi. The barrier to entry came only after Book of Leviticus was revealed.

If I am incorrect about the Leviticus prices being entry prices into the tribe of Levi, then some other explanation of what those prices were is necessary. I do not see a reasonable alternative. So, I conclude: 1) the bulk of those Israelites who were counted in the Exodus numbering were Israelites by post-Passover adoption; 2) the prices in Leviticus 27:2-8 were priestly adoption prices paid by those who wanted to be adopted into the tribe; 3) the entry fee was not imposed on future adoptees until after the mass adoption had taken place.

After the numbering of the 12 tribes was finished, God told Moses to number the Levites (Num. 3:15). After this counting was completed (v. 34), God ordered a precise counting of the firstborn of the other

34. Because the number of Levite firstborn sons was judicially irrelevant in the substitution process, they were not numbered separately.

35. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36.

tribes (vv. 44–45). There were an additional 273 biologically firstborn sons in the overall population, for whom ransom money was paid to Aaron (Num. 3:46–51).

3. Adoption into a Tribe

I am assuming here that adoption was by family or tribe, not by the nation as a whole. Israelites had membership in the congregation through their families, clans and tribes. Thus, when the mass adoption took place, each family, clan, and tribe received its share of the newcomers. In any case, each tribe did. The newcomers were not citizens in general; they were citizens of tribes. Levi would not have been left out of this initial distribution of new members.

Amram's small family, like Aaron's, indicates that at the time of the exodus, Israel's nuclear families were not large. The question is: How many families were there in each clan? If families were small, there would have had to be many families for Israel's adult male population to have been 600,000 by the Exodus numbering. That is, prior adoptions would have had to multiply the number of nuclear families.

Is the mass adoption of the mixed multitude the likely scenario, with stable population in the wilderness based on a less-than-replacement-rate stagnation, but without a population catastrophe? If so, then the firstborn sons had been born of Israelite mothers; the adoptees were the mixed multitude.

If Israelite fathers adopted gentile sons, then the bulk of these adoptees were probably younger men who were of fighting age. They would have been adopted by Moses' generation. Thus, the bulk of the population was in Joshua's generation. These adults were replaced by the conquest generation. The sons of Joshua came from the loins of Joshua's brothers by adoption. Replacing Moses' generation was statistically incidental; it had not been large compared to the 600,000. Thus, the population moved into replacement-rate mode during the wilderness. Joshua's generation was much larger than Moses' through adoption. Their sons and grandsons did not quite replace the adult males of Moses' generation and Joshua's combined.

So, most of the 600,000 males were probably members of Joshua's generation. If so, then each family bore fewer than two children who reached maturity, for the 600,000 men a generation later included grandsons of Joshua's generation. My conclusion is that their birth rates were low or else the mortality rate for children was high. The

first possibility seems more likely. God brought them under a curse in the wilderness: very low birth rates. But He did not kill off large numbers of the fourth generation.

The 22,273 non-Levite, biological (matrix-issued), firstborn sons of Israel, from one month old to age 19, constituted four percent of the fighting-age male population of 603,550. To be in replacement-rate mode, there had to be approximately 22,000 fathers. Some fathers might have been childless; others might have two sons; but nationally, the 22,273 firstborn testified to an upper limit on the number of men in Joshua's generation. Again, to maintain the replacement rate, there could have been no more than about the same number of men in Moses' generation. If there was growth, however, then the number of Moses' generation was less: fathers producing more than one son. If the growth rate was doubling, as Aaron's four children testified to, there were 22,000 fathers and 11,000 grandfathers. This indicates how thoroughly gentile, genetically speaking, Israel's army was at the time of the first mustering, and how important covenantal adoption was in Israel's founding as a nation. Most of the 603,550 were ex-gentiles. This is why they were numbered separately from the biological first-born. This was serious covenantal evangelism.

There is a weak link in this scenario. I regard it as the major weak link. If the maximum number of men in the third generation was in the range of 22,000—no higher than 30,000—then there probably were not this many men at the beginning of the oppression, two generations earlier. For growth to have taken place, there would have been fewer than 22,000 men when the oppression began. The faster the growth, the fewer the men. I believe there was growth: the blessing of God. This was the testimony of the Israelite midwives. What threat would fewer than 22,000 men have posed to the Pharaoh of the oppression? Perhaps he was looking ahead at what might be if he refused to restrict their growth, but in a society that had enough slaves to construct the pyramids, there would not have been a great threat from 10,000 men, let alone 5,000.

My theory of mass adoption and a subsequent tribal membership re-distribution to the Levites is textually speculative. The texts say nothing about either event. But something like this is consistent with the tribal population numbers recorded so exactly and repeatedly in the texts. The adoption scenario may seem far-fetched. But adoption into Israel had been going on from the time of the descent into Egypt, and maybe earlier.

I. The Mixed Multitude at Passover

There is another important question: Did the firstborn sons of the mixed multitude die on Passover night? Not necessarily. The confrontation was between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt, who were represented judicially by Pharaoh. Gentile slaves and other residents of Egypt are not mentioned prior to the exodus itself (Ex. 12:38). God had not brought a covenant lawsuit against them.

Let us consider three possible scenarios. *First*, it may be that God spared their sons without blood on their doorposts. The Bible does not say that the homes of the mixed multitude were visited with death; only the homes of the Egyptians: “. . . It is ‘the sacrifice of the LORD’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. . . .’” (Ex. 12:27). The comprehensive language of Exodus 12:29–30 may indicate otherwise, but Exodus 12:27 may be the dominant theme: Israel vs. Egypt. *Second*, it is possible that they believed the Israelites and put blood on their doorposts. To this extent, they covenanted with God: a common-grace, non-adoptive covenanting. Problem: Where did this many of them get the lambs? Or did they use some other form of blood, e.g., the blood of human fathers? Did God accept a substitute form of blood in an emergency? He might have. He wants obedience, not the blood of animals. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17). *Third*, it is possible that their firstborn died. This possibility seems unlikely, for the adoption scenario rests on the assumption of the presence of a large population of non-Israelite males. If their firstborn sons did die, who subsequently married all of their firstborn daughters? How did demographic stability occur in the wilderness era, i.e., one wife, one husband, one son, and one daughter?

I think the second possibility is most likely. I reject the first scenario—grace without bloodshed—because of the comprehensive nature of the death of the firstborn in Numbers 8:17: “For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself.” The firstborn sons and animals of the mixed multitude survived because the parents smeared blood on their doorposts. They believed the God of Israel with respect to the coming sanction. They had seen the other nine plagues. In smearing their doorposts with blood, they did

not covenant with God in a special grace sense but in a common grace³⁶ sense: a visible acknowledgment that He is sovereign and the source of visible covenantal sanctions in history. They broke covenant with the gods of Egypt, but they did not formally covenant with the God of Israel. They only acknowledged that in order to avoid the negative sanction of death, they had to obey God and place blood on their doorposts. If they could not locate a lamb, they substituted some other form of blood. They were not held to so strict an honoring of the Passover rites as the Israelites were because they were breaking covenant with Egypt, not establishing a covenant with God. They did not eat a Passover meal, but they did avoid the death of their firstborn. When it came time to leave, they left alongside of Israel because they had broken covenant with Egypt. This did not make them part of Israel; it did separate them from Egypt. Only adoption could make them part of Israel. But their firstborn sons did survive Passover night. These sons provided the next generation of God's holy army.

1. Not All Were Adopted

Later in Numbers, we read about the mixed multitude. "And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?" (Num. 11:4). Where did these people come from? There are two possible answers. First, not all the mixed multitude had covenanted with Israel. Second, these new converts were still regarded as a separate group culturally. They were not yet assimilated into Israel's covenantal life. I think the first answer is the correct one. There were many among the escaping masses who did not want to suffer circumcision (assuming they were to be circumcised) and subordination to the God of the Bible, but they saw the advantages of remaining with the Israelites. For a time, manna had seemed to them to be one of these blessings. They had not been asked to depart from the camp of the faithful.

The mixed multitude served as contrasts to covenant-keepers, and they also served as sources of temptation, as was the case in Numbers 11. They still had an independent voice. The Israelites listened to their complaints against God and then voiced these complaints themselves. Judgment came swiftly: the positive sanction of quail and the negative sanction of plague (Num. 11:31–33).

36. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gngrace>)

2. Objections

There are several plausible objections to my scenario. The main one is that no revelation of such a mass adoption appears in the Bible. But neither does the suggestion of prior adoptions, yet these are necessary to make sense of Israel's demographics.

Second, why would a small nation adopt a lot of questionable pagans? Wouldn't the newcomers swamp the adopters? One reason is that the pagans asked to be adopted, even as the Gibeonites later were willing to become servants (Josh. 9). How could Israel reject such a request and still adhere to God's covenant? If a small local church is approached by 500 local college students who ask to join, what is the church to do? Tell them to go elsewhere? But there was no "elsewhere" in the Old Covenant. Another reason is military. Cowards like large numbers, hoping to reinforce their weak position. Here was a nation that feared marching into Canaan with an army of 600,000 men (even though not all of them could serve). How brave would they have been if there were, say, only 35,000 of them, with a third of these being old men?

Third, what language would have been used to communicate? Probably whatever language the Egyptians used to command these people. Then how was Hebrew ever to become the nation's common language? Perhaps through the same means that Hebrew has become the common language of the modern state of Israel: by conducting worship, civil law, education, and business in Hebrew.

Fourth, one which I have already mentioned: the small size of the population in Kohath's day. In my opinion, this is the strongest objection. It calls into question the reason for the oppression, which ultimately decided Israel's fate in Egypt.

Conclusion

Here are the three problems that are raised by this passage: 1) how the 27-to-one ratio between adult males and firstborn sons could have existed biologically; 2) how a relatively small population of sons became the 600,000 fighting males that invaded Canaan; 3) how Israel grew to 600,000 adult males in three generations.

The third problem can be answered in only one way: through adoption into the nation of Israel. Because the theme of adoption is so central to the issue of God's kingdom in history, I used this theological model to approach the other two problems. I asked: Could the 27-to-

one ratio have had something to do with the relationship between biologically firstborn sons and newly adopted adults? Second, could the disparity between the birth rates of the Passover's Israelites and the newly adopted gentiles explain the seemingly overnight appearance of zero population growth during the wilderness era?

Something took place in Israel's wilderness experience which reversed the high population growth rates that had prevailed since their descent into Egypt. I suggest the following: God's imposition of low birth rates on rebels. My solution to the echo problem does not require the death of fourth generation members who were born prior to the exodus. It also allows high birth rates for Joshua's generation: more than firstborn sons.

Jordan's solution, that the firstborn sons were under age five, suffers from the problem of redefining the meaning of *firstborn*. The evidence for five years or younger comes from the adoption price of Leviticus 27:6. It is indirect, at best. This solution creates problems regarding the birth rates of Joshua's generation in Egypt: either below the replacement rate or skewed very strangely during the last four years in Egypt.

Keil's thesis of the numbered firstborn as only those born after the exodus, if coupled with some variant of the early adoption scenario, is plausible, but only at the expense of radically redefining *firstborn* so as to eliminate the Passover's sons from the numbering.

For the person who resists a major redefinition, mine is technically possible though speculative: mass adoption. The enormous number of adult male Israelites at the time of the first numbering, if compared to the small number of firstborn sons, indicates that the Israelites had adopted huge numbers of fleeing gentiles into the nation sometime during the year following the exodus.

This places adoption at the very center of Israel's history as a nation. There must have been prior adoptions: surely of the household servants who came into Israel; probably of residents of Egypt in the years prior to the oppression. But the ratio of adult males to firstborn sons—27 to one—can be explained in terms of a mass adoption out of the mixed multitude, either at the time of the exodus or in the months that followed, but before the Exodus numbering.

One thing is certain: *Israel was a nation of recruits*. From God's recruiting of Noah, then Abram, then Jacob's servants, and perhaps at the exodus, Israel had been a nation of adopted recruits. This was Ezekiel's clear testimony to the nation: "And saith the Lord

GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great" (Ezek. 16:3–7a).

What I have deduced from the texts is based on the data in the texts. This means that the Jews of Jesus' day should have known about the many adoptions of gentiles in Egypt. But the teachers of Israel did not teach this. Even the Jews who believed Jesus (John 8:31) were unaware of it. "They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (John 8:33). They were incorrect on both counts. First, they were obviously in civil bondage to Rome, and had been in bondage to pagan empires ever since the exile. Second, they were heirs of the adopted sons of Abraham's heirs.

Any hope in a blood covenant through Abraham was a false hope. The Abrahamic covenant had itself been adoptive. Jesus on another occasion warned the Pharisees and Sadducees: "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9). The context of that challenge was John's baptism. Jesus employed rhetorical language—stones into sons—to proclaim the message of adoption. The vast majority of those who called themselves Abraham's sons were heirs of adoptees. If they believed otherwise, they had not paid close attention to Moses' accounts of the population explosion in his youth and the post-exodus adult to firstborn ratio.

If Jordan's thesis is correct, namely, that the firstborn sons in Numbers 3 were under age five, then my suggestion regarding Israel's having adopted large segments of the mixed multitude is incorrect, or at least not necessary to make sense of the texts. We could legitimately conclude that adoptions of gentiles into Israel took place earlier in Israel's history, but not necessarily after the exodus Passover.

My objection to his interpretation is based on my view of what a

firstborn son was judicially in Egypt: any firstborn son, no matter how old, who had no firstborn son in his own household who would bear the sanction of death. There was no age limit on this judicial status. *The deciding covenantal issue was household residence.* This was why blood had to be smeared on the doorposts, and everyone had to remain inside his house.

This definition changed in the musterings. The firstborn son in Numbers 3 was any firstborn son who was not eligible for mustering because he was under age 20. judicially speaking, a mustered son had left his father's household. The deciding covenantal issue of household status moved from physical residence to military status: a new hierarchy. But if my thesis concerning late adoptions is wrong, then so is my definition of *firstborn*.

Like Jordan, Keil wants the number of firstborn sons in Numbers 3 to be smaller than the number at Passover, so as to reduce the 27-to-one ratio. He accomplishes this by limiting the time horizon of what constituted a firstborn son in Numbers 3. There were far more firstborn sons, biologically speaking, than those recorded in Numbers 3. How many, we cannot know, but as many as we need to make the ratio believable! This is one way to handle the problem. It does require the addition of the assumption of prior adoptions. By extending the number of births that persisted from the exodus to the Numbers numbering, we discover that Joshua's generation was close to replacement-rate mode. This implies extensive adoptions very early in Israel's sojourn in Egypt: slower growth late in the process; therefore, a minimal echo effect.

In contrast, my thesis of late adoptions allows approximately the same number of firstborn in Numbers 3 as at the Passover. It solves the 27-to-one problem by dramatically increasing the number of biologically unrelated adults numbered. This makes the ratio acceptable by removing it from the realm of biology.

I prefer Keil's thesis to Jordan's. It gives a theological reason for the shift in definition: the atonement of the Passover's firstborn by the lambs. But is Keil's solution superior to my thesis of a post-exodus mass adoption? His explanation is surely less complicated. It raises fewer questions about the problems of assimilating a huge number of foreigners. But to make it plausible, we must make the assumption of extensive early adoptions, probably in Joseph's era, in order to avoid the implications of a monumental demographic echo effect: either a dramatic reduction in the birth rate of Joshua's generation or the

deaths of most of the fourth generation in the wilderness.

I have suggested a third possibility: the mass adoption of the mixed multitude. It is the only way I can imagine that the 27-to-one problem can be solved without radically redefining *firstborn* in Numbers 3. Yet I have redefined it slightly: defining the son's departure from his father's household as judicial rather than strictly physical. To answer the 27-to-one problem, there must be two different definitions.

Having made the strongest case I can for the mass adoption thesis, I think it is weaker than Keil's. Yet it is the only substitute for Keil's that I think comes close to solving the three problems. It raises so many questions, however, that it is safer to go with Keil's definition of the firstborn: a firstborn son who was born after the Passover but no less than one month before the second numbering. But in either scenario, there is no escape from the conclusion that Israel was a nation of adoptees.

End of Book

INHERITANCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY

VOLUME 1

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INHERITANCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY

VOLUME 1

GARY NORTH

**Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on
Deuteronomy**
Volume 1

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Printed in the United States of America.

This book is dedicated to my wife

Sharon North

who gave me the original idea for this commentary in 1973

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FOREWORD

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:12–14).

This book is a narrowly focused Bible commentary: the laws of Deuteronomy that relate to economic life. You have somehow discovered this book. Why should you read it? One reason is *to get Christian guilt-manipulators off your back*.¹ There are a lot of them out there. If you are tired of being harassed to give more money to God, even though you already tithe, this book will help. On the other hand, if you do not tithe, then this book can also help you: *to get God off your back*.²

Another reason: *to learn more about the biblical basis of riches*. This will help you understand why the West got rich before the rest of the world copied the West. *The West obeyed God's Deuteronomic laws governing ownership*. It also adopted the biblical concept of linear time. The West has reaped an unprecedented reward: compound economic growth that has lasted for over two centuries.

A third reason: *this book constitutes a challenge to Christian anti-nomians and legalists (often the same people), who are committed to the ideal of the cultural defeat for Christianity in history*. If you are tired of sitting in the back of humanism's bus, or if you think that you may wind up sitting on the back hump of Islam's camel, this book offers hope.

1. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1985). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>); Joel McDurmon, *God Versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

2. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision 2011).

Why is this book so long: a foreword, a preface, an introduction, 76 chapters, a conclusion, plus 10 appendixes? Two reasons. First, because there is a great deal of material on economics in Deuteronomy. Second, because I am going to die before this commentary has much effect on anyone except me.

When an author of innovative or controversial educational books concludes that his influence will not come in his lifetime, he should write in great detail. He should seek to make his work stand the test of time, capable of answering a myriad of questions after he is dead and buried. The author covers more material in greater detail because he will not be around to answer questions. He is appalled by the thought of what happened to Karl Marx: generations of books on what Marx *really* meant. (Note to future commentators on my commentaries: you are certainly entitled to write a book on what North should have meant, but clearly did not.)

Christian philosopher Greg Bahnsen said that doing philosophy is like swimming underwater. So is reading this commentary. It should be read a chapter or two at a time. Then put it aside and think about what you have just read. This book will be read in its entirety by very few people. It is far too long. But it can be read chapter by chapter by people who want insight on a particular passage. Each chapter was written to stand alone. I wrote this book with the assumption that many readers will read only one chapter. Search engines on the World Wide Web will bring people to individual chapters. Perhaps a few people will then read the entire book. I salute you!

A. A Neglected Book

The Book of Deuteronomy is obscure for most Christians. It is an unknown book among Christians in the pews. In the late stages of the first draft of the first edition (1999) of this book, I heard a sermon on the ninth commandment. The pastor cited Deuteronomy 19, the section dealing with the penalty against bearing false witness. The woman next to me whispered to me, "Where is Deuteronomy?" She was a dedicated Christian lady and a teacher in an adult Sunday School. She had just completed a summer school course at a well-known fundamentalist seminary in Texas. For her, Deuteronomy was a closed book, a lost book. She is not alone.

Deuteronomy is not read today. Why not? Because Deuteronomy lays down the law. So does the Book of Exodus, but Exodus contains a

lot of historical information in it. Pastors can preach from it without touching on biblical law. Leviticus has a lot of law in it, but there is so much material on the sacrifices and the ceremonies that pastors can preach on Leviticus' many "types" of this or that New Testament theme. They can avoid the law. Like Exodus, Numbers has historical information in it.

Not so with Deuteronomy. From its opening section to the end, Deuteronomy lays down the law. This is why pastors avoid this book like the plague of biblical leprosy. On every page, it proclaims, "trust and obey, for there's no other way." Protestants sing these words, but they do not believe them. They proclaim: "We're under grace, not law!" They are wrong. They are under humanist civil courts and humanist lawyers. They will remain in this condition of bondage until they discover an explicitly biblical answer to this question: "If not biblical law, then what?"

B. A Resented Book When Understood

Resented? Is this too strong a word? No. This deep-seated resentment is deliberately concealed for reasons of public positioning, but it is there. There is a sense of foreboding about this book, which is followed by resentment. Men resent being called by God to greater service, greater sacrifice, and greater responsibility. This is what Deuteronomy does, for it offers covenant-keepers the possibility of long-term cultural success, including economic success. Christians know the truth: *with greater blessings come greater responsibility*. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).³ They resent Deuteronomy because it offers a pathway to personal success and therefore greater personal responsibility, and even worse, from their point of view, a pathway to corporate success and therefore greater corporate responsibility.

I have encountered two rival approaches to the economics of Deuteronomy. The first is resentment by those Christians who believe that

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

the civil government should exercise a significant welfare function in society, meaning the coercive redistribution of wealth through regulation and taxation. This position is well represented by Ronald J. Sider's best-selling first edition of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (1977).⁴ Deuteronomy teaches nothing like this. It teaches that private charity should prevail. The second position is resentment regarding the level of economic success that is promised to covenant-keeping societies, for economic success raises inescapable accompanying issues of wealth-creation by covenant-keepers and the degree of leadership in society that their wealth offers them. This position is well represented by Gene A. Getz's book, *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (1990).

1. Diehl vs. Deuteronomy

A classic statement of resentment against Deuteronomy is found in William Diehl's response to my position paper in *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views* (1984), edited by Robert Clouse, published (and almost immediately suppressed)⁵ by InterVarsity Press.⁶ Diehl is Keynesian, i.e., a disciple of the homosexual British economist, John Maynard Keynes, who in 1936 attacked the free market as an inefficient institution that is in need of a large centralized civil government in order to provide a system of coercive wealth redistribution to maintain full employment. There is no such scheme of civil government found anywhere in the Bible, and Deuteronomy is expressly hostile to such a concept of civil government. Diehl responded as follows to my brief theonomic defense of the free market:

That the author is strong on "biblical law" is apparent. The essay provides us with thirty-nine Old Testament citations, of which twenty-three are from the book of Deuteronomy. Alongside these imposing Old Testament references the reader is given only nine New Testament citations, of which only four come from the mouth of Jesus. Notwithstanding one of North's concluding statements that

4. See Appendix F.

5. Within a year of publication, with the book selling well enough to provide the four authors and the editor with several hundred dollars each in the first round of royalties, the publisher pulled the book off its list and offered to sell all copies in bulk for 25 cents each. I bought all of them: several thousand copies. I like to think that it was my spirited and heavily exegetical defense of the free market, and my equally spirited critique of the other three authors' less exegetical presentations, that forced the publisher to gag.

6. My paper is reprinted as Appendix E.

we need “faith in Jesus Christ,” this essay might more properly be entitled “Poverty and Wealth according to Deuteronomy.” The teachings and parables of Jesus are rich with references to wealth, poverty and justice. Why has the author chosen to ignore these? Can it be that the words of the Master are an embarrassment to the advocates of a free-market system?⁷

The teachings and parables of Jesus are indeed rich with references to wealth, poverty, and justice, but they are not rich with suggestions that the civil government can legitimately tax people at a rate four to nine times greater than the tithe, which is what all modern Western governments have done, beginning with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. (It should also be pointed out that I Samuel 8:10, 14 identify such levels of taxation as tyranny.)

Diehl and men like him have a problem with biblical interpretation. *The words of Jesus are also the words of Moses.* To imply otherwise is to imply that Marcion’s second-century defense of a two-gods authorship of the Bible is somehow orthodox. Marcion’s position was unorthodox then, and it still is. Was Deuteronomy revealed by some other god than the God of the Bible? No. Is Jesus divine? Yes. So, Mr. Diehl was indulging in a form of rhetoric that was devoid of any clarifying hermeneutic: a reconciliation of Moses and Jesus based on the words of Jesus. *When rhetoric undermines orthodoxy, it should be sacrificed for the sake of orthodoxy.* This is especially true in the case of Mr. Diehl, who, in his attempt to escape the clear teaching of Scripture in favor of private ownership and the free market economy, was reduced to arguing that the Bible really says nothing authoritative regarding economics. “The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way.”⁸ What way? As he insisted, a way without judicially binding biblical law. In this, he is joined by about a billion other Christians, who are equally hostile to the suggestion that the Bible provides authoritative judicial limits to their dreams and schemes for building the kingdom of man in the name of the kingdom of God.

7. William E. Diehl, “A Guided-Market Response,” in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 66. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

8. Diehl, “The Guided-Market System,” *ibid.*, p. 87.

I ask: What is wrong with Deuteronomy's discussion of the causes of wealth and poverty? There is no other book in the Bible that discusses these related issues in greater detail. God should not be placed in the dock just because Deuteronomy does not conform to the incoherent speculations in Mr. Keynes' *General Theory*.⁹

Sider in 1977 through 1990 was even more committed than Diehl to the ideal of the coercive state as the proper biblical agency of wealth-redistribution. But, in his 1997 edition, he retracted much of his early work and became openly hesitant regarding what, exactly, the Bible has to say about economics.¹⁰

2. Getz on Material Possessions

Gene Getz is a dispensationalist. He therefore believes in a radical separation of the Old Testament from the New Testament. His theology distinguishes sharply between the church in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament. He taught at Dallas Theological Seminary in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when that school was still defending the founder's version of dispensationalism. This was a decade and a half before "progressive dispensationalism" replaced the older version at Dallas. (In 1988, Dallas stopped publishing the founder's 8-volume *Systematic Theology*.) He had previously taught for two decades at Moody Bible Institute, the premier undergraduate dispensational academic institution of higher learning. In 1972, Rev. Getz founded the Fellowship Bible Church. It was there that he wrote his book, *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions*.¹¹ This book was the culmination of a career of teaching.

He confined his study mainly to the New Testament. He therefore quietly assumed away most of the Bible. I would not call his book "*Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark," as the traditional barb puts it. I would rather call it "*Julius Caesar* without the Roman Empire." Specifically, it is Jesus without Moses.

His is a common error. Indeed, it is the most common error in Christendom. It is, in fact, an important aspect of Protestantism's denial of Christendom. This began with Martin Luther in 1517. Luther

9. For a coherent critique of one of Mr. Keynes' disciples, a Calvinist, see Ian Hodge, *Baptized Inflation: A Critique of "Christian" Keynesianism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/HodgeBI>). This is a critique of Douglas Vickers, *Economics and Man* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1976).

10. See Appendix F.

11. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press.

was not content to deny Roman Catholicism's claim to represent Christendom. He went much further: to deny Christendom as a concept. He was an ethical dualist.¹² He promoted the idea of Bible-free natural law for non-Christian political systems and an inner spiritual release from the law for the redeemed.¹³ As for Christendom, it was for Luther a myth, for the only way to build a Bible-based society by rejecting natural law theory and using only the Bible would be to invoke Old Testament law. He denied that this methodology is valid. He therefore denied the legitimacy of the ideal of Christendom. Most Protestants have followed his lead.

Rev. Getz is in this tradition. But there is a difference: he is not explicitly an ethical dualist. He is an ethical dualist by default when it comes to civil government, for he never discussed its God-imposed limits. This dualism is implicit and not readily observable to readers who share it, which is most of them.

He spent over 400 pages in discussing New Testament passages that deal with wealth and poverty, or as he called them, material possessions. His Scripture index reveals his hermeneutic: two pages from the Old Testament and 11 pages from the New Testament. Yet he called his book *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions*. This is false advertising. It should have been called *A New Testament Biblical Theology of Material Possessions*. Seminaries that teach biblical theology offer an OTBT course and an NTBT course. Instructors and students understand the difference in scope. Rev. Getz's readers do not. He wrote his book knowing full well that he nowhere solved the hermeneutical problem of reconciling and integrating the two fields of academic biblical theology. But, in this deliberate, self-conscious neglect, he is not unique. Entire seminary and Christian college faculties suffer from the same refusal to deal with this crucial hermeneutical issue: the reconciliation of the testaments.

Getz's book is over 400 pages long. It presents 126 "supracultural principles" of stewardship or ownership.¹⁴ All of them are taken from the New Testament. As a group, they deal with these themes: the spiritual danger of wealth, the necessity of Christians' giving charity, and the insecurity of wealth. Not one of these principles affirms the mor-

12. Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundations of Luther's Social Views," in John H. Mundy, *et al.*, *Essays in Medieval Life* (Cheshire, Connecticut: Biblo & Tannen, 1955), pp. 71–87.

13. Chapters 8 and 17.

14. Gene A. Getz, *Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), ch. 39.

ally binding law of tithing, which he specifically said is no longer binding in the New Covenant era.¹⁵ He left everything to the individual conscience. “Every Christian is ultimately responsible to give to God on the basis of his own heart decision.”¹⁶ If this is true, then pastors are reduced, as Getz was reduced, to arguing that God wants individuals to give more than they are presently giving. These pastors must spend their entire careers begging for money, as I have argued elsewhere.¹⁷ The become beggars for Jesus.

The New Testament does not identify widespread blessings, including wealth, as the products of national obedience to God’s law: the teaching of Deuteronomy 28:1–14. This explicitly covenantal view of economic prosperity and poverty is found in the Old Testament, but not in the New Testament. This means one of three things: (1) the New Covenant authors assumed the continuation of the Old Covenant’s judicial foundation of wealth and poverty (the theonomists’ view); (2) the New Covenant has no official explanation for wealth and poverty, and is generally hostile to personal riches (pietism’s view); or (3) the New Covenant has broken with the Old Covenant, and is unquestionably hostile to wealth (Sider’s published view before 1997).

Getz is a pietist. He pressed Christians to make personal economic decisions, not on the basis of biblical law, but rather on the basis of their feelings. He had nothing to say about the state’s role in establishing justice as one foundation of economic growth. All he said about the state was this: (1) Christians have an obligation to pay their taxes;¹⁸ (2) it is a fortunate thing that the state’s welfare programs have reduced the burden on churches for supporting the poor.¹⁹

Getz said explicitly that Deuteronomy 28’s view of wealth and poverty is the Old Testament’s teaching.²⁰ Then he did his best to distance himself from the Old Testament’s specifics. He threw out Deuteronomy 28, justifying this jettisoning of biblical revelation on the basis of cultural differences. He cited someone named Willingale in

15. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

17. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

18. Getz, *Material Possessions*, pp. 255–56.

19. “First, the church should make sure there are no other sources of support—including assistance from various governmental agencies. If people in need have access to welfare systems, they should use those resources to the full. This was not possible for widows in the first-century world, but fortunately, it is possible in many countries today.” *Ibid.*, p. 317.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

the *New Bible Dictionary* (Eerdmans, 1962).

Willingale reminds us that this unique economic setting in Israel “changes in the New Testament.” Israel now existed in a totally different situation culturally and economically. The Jews had to adapt their laws to a commercial economy.²¹

Why I am supposed to take seriously Willingale’s observation is beyond me. Willingale’s view rests on preposterous assumption: that the Jews in the era of the Mosaic law did not participate in a commercial economy until after the Monarchy. Speaking of the conquest generation, Getz wrote: “Because of God’s material provisions for the children of Israel, there was no need to establish businesses based upon a free enterprise system. Rather, they were able to make a living from the land they had received free from indebtedness.”²² This statement boggles the imagination. First, he implicitly defined business as exclusively urban. He had no conception of agriculture as a business, or other rural occupations as businesses. Second, he conveniently ignored the 48 Levitical cities (Num. 35:7). Third, Israel was located on one of the most important trade routes of the ancient world: the road between Egypt and Babylon, with ports on the Mediterranean. The Old Testament is filled with laws governing commerce. But, having created a true straw man—Old Covenant business as urban—Getz made his break with Deuteronomic law.

Interpretation and Application Today. The challenge twentieth-century Christians face is to interpret these Old Testament teachings without transplanting Old Testament law into another cultural setting in a legalistic, literal fashion.²³

This is the standard pietistic line: the Mosaic law as *legalistic* when applied *literally* to the New Covenant era. Somehow, it must be applied spiritually, meaning non-literally. But on what basis can anyone draw such a conclusion regarding a specific Mosaic law? Using what hermeneutic (principle of interpretation)? The pietists never say. However, in order to evade the accusation of being what they obviously are—antinomians—they hasten to add statements such as these: “At the same time, we must not bypass the spirit of these laws. Though designed for Israel, they yield timeless principles that are supracultural,

21. *Idem.*

22. *Idem.*

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 265–66.

for, as we will see, they are affirmed by New Testament teaching.”²⁴ This is *pietistic gush* unless it is accompanied by a principle of interpretation that enables us to discover the timeless principle in a now-annulled Mosaic law. Getz offered no such principle.

Getz did not again refer to Deuteronomy’s covenantal laws governing economic growth, nor did he show that any principle in the New Testament relates covenant-keeping to wealth. This law of wealth does not appear in his list of 126 supracultural principles. He never offered one word of encouragement regarding the covenantal legitimacy of great wealth as a blessing of God. His entire book is one long call for people to give more money to the local church, although he refused to specify what percentage. Having abandoned the tithe as a judicial principle, he substituted guilt-manipulation.

Getz is to Christian financial guilt-manipulation on behalf of the local church what Sider was for Christian financial guilt-manipulation on behalf of the state and the United Nations. I define Christian guilt-manipulation as preaching that makes Christians feel guilty for not having given enough to the poor, despite the fact that the preacher chooses not to point to any biblical law that the victims have broken, such as the law of the tithe. Getz denied the law of the tithe. Sider called for something called a “graduated tithe” extracted by compulsion by the state.²⁵ This is *open-ended guilt* that no specific act of sacrifice can overcome. The guilt is open-ended because its institutional context is antinomianism.²⁶

Getz, like Sider, did not accept the explicitly biblical basis of legitimate riches: covenant-keeping. He discussed the reduction of poverty only in terms of charitable giving by Christians and hard work by recipients, never in terms of job-creating investments by Christians and other profit-seeking capitalists. His footnotes and his bibliography reveal no awareness of David Chilton’s *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981) or E. Calvin Beisner’s *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate Use of Resources in a World of Scarcity* (1988).²⁷ But, far more important than this, he ignored the Old Testament’s revelation that undergirds these two books. For him, the Mosaic law is irrelevant except as some sort of handy-dandy, non-binding

24. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

25. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity, 1977), pp. 175ff.

26. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 56.

27. Both published by Crossway Books.

grab-bag of examples for some vague process called “the spirit of these laws.”

Of what practical, institutional use is a concept of “the spirit of these laws” without either the laws or their mandated sanctions? For example, what would Rev. Getz say if he caught one of his parishioners having sex with a pig? Maybe this: “Joe, you really aren’t entering into the true spirit of God’s law.” What could he say to this response? “If there is no New Testament law against it, then I’ll pick my partners as I choose. It’s just a matter of taste, after all. This is how my spirit leads me. The New Testament era is different from the culture of Mosaic Israel. After all, Reverend, you wrote it yourself: ‘This Old Testament law and others like it must be interpreted in its cultural setting.’²⁸ Well, the law against bestiality I interpret as ‘others like it.’ Who is to say I’m wrong? Put up or shut up, Reverend.”

In defending a hermeneutic of the Mosaic law’s authority as culture-based and therefore mutable, Getz is not alone. This is why I have used the same case-law example of deviant animal husbandry in response to a faculty member of Westminster Seminary.²⁹ Getz’s antinomian hermeneutic is not unique to dispensationalism, which at least has an explanation, however weak exegetically, for the total judicial discontinuity between the Testaments: the absolute separation of Mosaic law from the so-called Church Age or “Great Parenthesis.” All schools of theology except theonomy presume the general principle of judicial discontinuity. This is why theologians, one and all, resent Deuteronomy. This is why they also resent theonomy and its implication, Christian reconstruction. In this hostility, they are joined by theological liberals and humanists.

3. Pietism vs. Responsibility

There are pietistic Bible commentators who argue that the dominion covenant made with Adam was pre-Fall and therefore does not apply to history. An example is the then-tiny and now even tinier premillennial fundamentalist denomination, the Bible Presbyterian Church, which declared in 1970 that the cultural mandate (the Dutch Reformed version of the dominion covenant) has no authority in history,

28. Getz, *Material Possessions*, p. 266.

29. Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 211–14. (<http://bit.ly/gnwc>)

but is exclusively pre-Fall and post-final judgment. Genesis 1: 26–28³⁰ and Genesis 9 have nothing to do with culture, they insisted. The passages apply only to biological reproduction. Genesis 9 does not use the words “and subdue it,” and therefore the passage has nothing to do with culture in history. The idea of the cultural mandate “cuts the nerve of true missionary work and of evangelism.”³¹

For pietists, true missionary work and evangelism apply only to individual souls, denominational reform (i.e., separatism’s endless church splits), and the establishment of Christian families. Culture in general is in principle handed over to the devil and his earthly agents. The dominion covenant is said to remain right where it was immediately after Adam’s Fall: under Satan’s authority. This means that the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in history have had no effect on Adam’s rebellious transfer of allegiance to Satan in history. Culture is seen as outside of Christ’s redemption. So, the Great Commission has to do with souls, not culture. The Great Commission is really not so great. It is highly limited.³²

Why do Christians defend such a truncated view of the gospel? *Because they want to restrict their personal responsibility for engaging in comprehensive social reform.* The idea of the dominion covenant appalls them, for it makes them responsible for politics, culture, and everything else. They want to go through life as minor figures without responsibility in a world legitimately dominated by covenant-breakers. They prefer not to think about the possibility that God has called His people to subdue the earth for His glory, and has provided biblical laws to enable His people to obey Him. They prefer to adopt natural law theory on the assumption that covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers can agree on fundamental cultural and civil law and, once agreed, that covenant-breakers can run things. All the pietist wants is immunity from covenant-breakers. But covenant-breakers do not offer them immunity. They want control. They take seriously the dominion covenant. They just don’t take God’s law seriously. They share the same hostility to God’s law with the pietists.

Pietists pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is

30. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

31. For the complete document and its refutation, see R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 723–30.

32. For a refutation, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

in heaven,” with one of two mental escape clauses: (1) to be fulfilled after the second coming, during the millennial reign of Christ, bodily, over a top-down international bureaucracy (premillennialism); (2) to be fulfilled after the final judgment, when sinners are permanently separated from saints (amillennialism). In both cases, the implication is the same: “not my responsibility.”

C. Higher Critics and Their Baptized Agents

Higher critics of the Bible argue that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. These five books were supposedly written centuries later by ecclesiastical officials inside the land. That is to say, higher critics implicitly argue that the Book of Deuteronomy is a pack of lies that was written and rewritten over the centuries by a series of highly dedicated and highly skilled forgers. But, being mild-mannered academics as well as wolves in sheep’s clothing, the critics do not use such words as “lies,” “forgers,” and “deception.” They prefer such sophisticated terms as “myths,” “redactors,” and “*weltanschauung*.”³³

One argument against the higher critics is the integration of the five books of Moses. The Pentateuch is a remarkable structure. How did hordes of redactors re-write the Pentateuch, line by line, without undermining the integration of the five books? How was it that this structure, which generations of higher critics failed to perceive, was understood by each of the redactors? How was it that generations of tiny revisions maintained this covenant structure, which was invisible to academic specialists—even Germans!—until the work of George Mendenhall in the mid-1950s?³⁴

The Pentateuch is structured in terms of a covenant. The five books of Moses parallel the five-point biblical covenant model.³⁵ This model defines covenant theology.³⁶ The five-point structure is clearest within the Book of Deuteronomy: transcendence (1:1–5); hierarchy (1:6–4:49); ethics (5–26); sanctions (27–30); and continuity (31–34).³⁷

33. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix H: “Conspiracy, Forgery, and Higher Criticism.”

34. George Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

35. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, General Introduction.

36. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010).

37. This is Sutton’s version of Meredith Kline’s proposed structure. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and*

The book's five-point structure is widely acknowledged by scholars specializing in the Old Testament. James Jordan divides the book into five parts: (1) steward as vice-gerent, (2) new cosmos,³⁸ (3) Moses' sermon on the Ten Commandments, (4) implementation, and (5) succession.³⁹ This five-point model also governs the structure of Exodus⁴⁰ and Leviticus,⁴¹ as well as the Ten Commandments⁴² and the five sacrifices of Leviticus.⁴³

This covenantal structure was common to Hittite treaties in the second millennium, B.C. This was Mendenhall's point and Kline's. If the Book of Deuteronomy was put into its final form in, say, the seventh century B.C., how was it that it was structured in terms of a treaty structure in wide use almost a thousand years earlier?

Despite this obvious problem, professedly conservative Bible commentaries still promote some version of higher criticism. The *New Bible Dictionary*, co-published by InterVarsity Press in England and Tyndale House in the United States, asserts: "But none of these statements permits the conclusion that Deuteronomy as we have it today came completely, or even in large measure, from Moses himself. One has to allow for editorial activity and adaptations of original Mosaic material to a later age."⁴⁴ Let me translate this into non-Ph.D. English: "One has to allow for post-Mosaic forgeries by non-inspired charlatans who adapted the original Mosaic material according to the interests, information, and perspectives of their age, fooling the likes of you, my academically uncertified Christian reader, generation after generation." The author says as much: "However, it became necessary in new situations to represent the words of Moses and to show their relevance for a new day."⁴⁵ Then he escalated his rhetoric: "While there seems little reason to deny that a substantial part [which part?] of Deutero-

Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 48–49; Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), pp. 21, 41, 59, 77, 96. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

38. Two sets of five points each (1:6–46; 2:1–4:40).

39. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

40. Sovereign God (1–17), judicial appeals courts (18), laws (21–23:13), oath (23–24), and inheritance (25–40). North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix S:C:1.

41. Sacrifices (1–7), priestly cleansing (8–16), laws of separation (17–22), covenant-renewal festivals and covenant-breaking acts (23–24), and inheritance (25–27). North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Introduction to Part I, Section B:1.

42. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion*.

43. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Preface, Section B.

44. "Deuteronomy, Book of," *New Bible Commentary*, p. 283.

45. *Idem*.

nomy was in existence some centuries [how many?] before the seventh century BC, it is not possible [for humanist-certified Christian scholars] to say how much of it comprises the *ipsissima verba* of Moses himself.”⁴⁶ How impressive: *ipsissima verba*. I would call his language *struttissima verba*. “Hey, all you untrained bumpkins out there who still believe in the inspired word of God, who still believe in the words of Jesus, which identified the author of the law as Moses. You don’t have a Ph.D. issued by some secular university. You poor, pathetic people are struggling to earn a living, while we Christian academics live off of your tithes, your offerings, or maybe even your taxes through a tax-funded university faculty. Personally, I live off of public tax money. See what we can do! We can undermine your faith at your expense. We can toss around Latin phrases. I guess that shows you what we are.” Yes, it does. And also what they believe: “Hath God said?”

Those thoughtful people who, in a century or a millennium from now, may reflect on why the twentieth century was almost devoid of Bible commentaries that were confident in the cultural relevance of the Bible, or in principles drawn from the Bible, or in the probable success of the gospel in transforming culture, need only consider the emasculating effects of such prevarications as we find in *The New Bible Commentary*, written for educated laymen by humanist-trained and humanist-certified academic evangelicals. Cautious Christian authors refused to use words that reflect what they were really saying. Forgers in retrospect become “editors.” Revisions made centuries later by these clever and unscrupulous forgers become “relevance for a new day.” The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible becomes a mish-mash of “fragments.” The Bible as delivered to the saints becomes a grab-bag of updates, revisions, and improvements on the revealed word of God. The timeless authority of the Bible is jettisoned for the timely authority of academic relevance. The word of man triumphs in history, revision by revision, leaving saints in every age without an inspired anchor linking heaven and earth, eternity and time. Man is thereby unchained covenantally, which is what covenant-breaking man since Adam has wanted to be. Twentieth-century evangelical churches were deeply compromised with modernism’s pagan culture, rarely more visibly or more dangerously than in the Christian college and seminary classroom. So far, the twenty-first century has not changed this situation. But it is just beginning.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

D. The Economics of the Pentateuch

I began writing my economic commentary on the Bible in the spring of 1973. In August of 1977, I went into high gear: 10 hours a week, 50 weeks a year. I have invested over 16,000 hours in this writing project since 1977. With the completion of the Pentateuch, I reached the end of phase one of this project in 1999.

No one before me had bothered to write an economic commentary of the Pentateuch. A major reason for this neglect was that there has never been any demand for such a Bible-based study. Academic economists are methodological atheists, which includes Christian economists. Both groups search for social truths through supposedly value-neutral reason. Economists are not willing to re-think their academic specialties in terms of the assumption of the final authority of the Bible. They do not re-structure the received wisdom of their academic disciplines in terms of biblical revelation.

I wrote this commentary, above all, because I was curious about what God's law says about economics. I had to do the exegetical work to find out, since no one else ever had. I learn best by research and writing. It has taken a large investment of time for me to find out.

Why do I think an economic commentary on the Bible is important? Six reasons. First, it is important for God's people to understand what the Bible has to say in every area of life. The church cannot bring an effective covenant lawsuit against society if its members do not know what the Bible says is wrong, legally and morally, with every area of society. Sin reigns wherever God's law doesn't. To reduce sin, we must extend the rule of God's law by means of God's grace. God's law is as comprehensive as sin. So is God's redemption.⁴⁷ When empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians can use the law to overcome progressively the rule of sin in every nook and cranny in which it reigns. God's Bible-revealed law is Christendom's unique tool of dominion.

There I go again, using a naughty word: *Christendom*. Most Protestants for over a century have not used it in public except as a pejorative. Christendom implies that the city of God can have visible manifestations in history—in the church (“well, of course”), the family (“OK, we can accept that”), and the state (“Wait a minute—that

47. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: “Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action.” (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

sounds like theocracy to us!”).

I could ask the typical Bible-affirming Christian: Is there sin in personal life, the area of self-government? His answer: “Yes.” Then what is the solution? Answer: “God’s grace and God’s . . . uh, hmmm; oh, yes, God’s *principles!*” (This sounds a lot safer theologically than God’s *law*.) I am not exaggerating. Rev. Getz refused to use the phrase “biblical law.” He substituted the academic mouthful, “supracultural principle.” I suggest that nobody uses a word like “supracultural” who does not have a hidden agenda. Rev. Getz’s hidden agenda was to keep his readers from accepting the concept of an authoritative biblical law-order that is set forth in both the Old Testament and the New Testament and is therefore still binding in the New Testament era, including the “Church Age” or “Great Parenthesis,” as dispensationalists call it.

What about sin in the church, the area of church government? What is the solution? “God’s grace and God’s principles!” What about sin in the family, the area of family government? Solution? “God’s grace and God’s principles!” What about the state, the area of civil government? “Democracy and natural law!” This is pietism’s confession: fundamentalist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian.

A second reason why this commentary is important is that there is a positive relationship between corporate obedience to God’s law and corporate success in history (Deut. 28:1–14). This positive relationship is denied by anti-theonomists, most notably Meredith G. Kline. My goal is to persuade Christians to begin obeying God’s Bible-revealed law in preparation for preaching it, enforcing it, and benefiting from it.

Third, I want this economic commentary to serve as a model for other practical and theoretical Bible commentaries in the various social sciences.

Fourth, I am tired of hearing the Christian scholar’s familiar slogan, “The Bible isn’t a textbook in [my academic discipline],” the discipline in which he was formally certified by humanists in some institution of higher learning, and for which he is a mouthpiece for a baptized version of humanism’s conclusions. The Bible is indeed not a textbook. But it does provide the governing interpretation and many facts necessary for writing accurate textbooks.

Fifth, I want to write a textbook someday on Christian economics as a first step in restructuring the Christian curriculum. To do thus, I first must know what the Bible says about economics. The Pentateuch was the place to start: the law.

E. Time for a Change

There is a sixth reason. I am convinced that P. A. Sorokin was correct two generations ago: the West is facing a monumental breakdown.⁴⁸ We live in a culture which rests on the humanistic presupposition that anything that cannot be touched, measured, or manipulated by scientific techniques is not socially relevant. Sorokin called the product of this outlook “sensate culture.” No society can survive indefinitely that holds such a view of cause and effect, he said.

The world’s division of labor will collapse if there is a breakdown in the means of payment: bank credit money. If this happens, there will be a worldwide economic disaster. In the aftermath of such a disaster, not to mention during it, Christians will be among the local competitors for social and political influence.

There are others threats: a plague that cannot be suppressed by antibiotics, biological warfare, nuclear war, and warfare against the electronic infrastructure, such as EMP (electromagnetic pulsation). All of these threaten the international division of labor. All of them threaten the debt system. This means that the banks are threatened from outside the financial system as well as from inside.

If we avoid all this, we will still face the bankruptcy of tax-funded social welfare programs for the aged. Charities will have to pick up the slack Christians are not ready for this huge increase of responsibility, but it is coming anyway.

During the crisis period, I expect theonomy to receive a wider hearing among Christians, who will be facing that ancient political problem: “You can’t beat something with nothing.”

I now possess a monopoly: an economic commentary on the Bible. Maybe I can at long last generate some demand at something above zero price.

Here is the looming social problem, in the words of real estate master investor Jack Miller: “Voters will call for a man on a white horse, and there are a lot of guys out there with brown horses and whitewash.” To distinguish accurately between white horses and whitewashed horses, we need to have a model for white horses (Rev. 19:14). The Bible provides this model: biblical law. The problem is, this model is found mainly in the Old Testament. Christians today prefer leaders on whitewashed brown horses to the Old Testament.

48. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age* (Oxford, England: Oneworld, [1941] 1992).

Conclusion

I think sections of my multi-volume commentary will still be read in a hundred years, though not read by many. Its temporal longevity is easy to secure, because there is one advantage that commentaries possess over other books: they help pastors interpret difficult Bible passages. The Pentateuch has many difficult passages. This, plus the World Wide Web, will keep this commentary “in print.”

This book is long because it is a Bible commentary relating to a specialized area. A standard Bible commentary comments—or should—on every passage. It cannot include much information about any one passage. This commentary is different. It is designed to convey extensive knowledge about a few verses that relate to the topic at hand: economics. The reader is seeking more information per passage than a standard commentary can provide. This book can be read cover to cover, even if it has no covers, but it is designed to be read one chapter at a time. I assume that a pastor who is preaching on one passage wants information on this passage and no other, for today. The same is true of a reader who reads a passage and wants to see if it has any economic implications. This is the reason why the book is repetitive. I assume that most people will not read it straight through, and even if they do, they will forget what I say about a specific passage. They will come back to this book, if at all, for clarification regarding one passage. A Bible commentary should meet the needs of readers who are seeking clarification, one passage at a time.

I also offer a warning: those Christians who continue to chant the academic mantra, “There’s no such thing as Christian economics,” have their work cut out for them. They have a lot of reading to do. So far, they have done very little reading. To all of them, I say, using an analogy from basketball, “The ball is in your end of the court.” The fact is, it has been for a couple of decades.

Until you see evidence that at least one of my critics has done his homework in the exposition of biblical texts and economic theory, whose Bible citations and footnotes reflect this, and who has offered a coherent refutation of what I have written, with footnotes to my economic commentary on the Bible, you would be wise not to take their mantra seriously. *There really is such a thing as Christian economics.* It is part of the church’s inheritance.

With every inheritance comes responsibility. The church today prefers to forfeit its lawful inheritance for the sake of avoiding any ad-

ditional responsibility. This is true in almost every area of life and especially every area of academic specialization. Result: the church is a convenient public doormat for humanists, who laugh at it in derision yet also fear it. The church is growing worldwide. Humanism is in retreat everywhere, especially the nation-state. If the church ever claims its full inheritance and begins to apply it, the cultural tide will shift: in science, politics, economics, and education. This, the humanists fear. Sadly, so do most Christians.

PREFACE

And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers, Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the LORD. Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither. But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it (Deut. 1:34–39).

The language of inheritance appears early in the Book of Deuteronomy. Inheritance is the integrating theme of the entire book, as I shall argue in this commentary. Inheritance is the transfer of lawful ownership at the death or departure¹ of the testator. I contend that *economic theory is primarily the social science of ownership*. I define economics as follows:

Economics is *the science of covenantal stewardship*: the administration of resources that have been assigned by God, the cosmic Owner, to a person or group, which then leads to an increase, a decrease, or no change in the resources' value in God's estimation and also in the estimation of other stewards.

I begin with God. *Christian economics is theocentric*. The archetypical passage on economics in the Bible is Jesus' parable of the tal-

1. "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country" (Gen. 25:5–6).

ents (Matt. 25:14–30;² Luke 19:12–15³).

A. The Covenantal Structure of the Pentateuch

Inheritance and Dominion is the culmination of my two-fold, multi-volume assertion that (1) the biblical covenant model has five points, and (2) the Pentateuch is structured in terms of the biblical covenant model. I did not recognize this when I began writing this series of economic commentaries in 1973. I recognized it only in late 1985, when Ray Sutton first presented his study of the covenant model in a series of Wednesday evening Bible studies. I argued for this five-point structure of the Pentateuch in my “General Introduction to *The Dominion Covenant* (1987),” published in the second edition of *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*.⁴ The biblical covenant model has five parts: the transcendence/presence of God; man’s hierarchy/authority under God; ethics/law as the basis of covenant-keeping man’s dominion in history, i.e., the visible extension of the boundaries of God’s kingdom; oath/sanctions as the basis of cause and effect in history; and succession in history through corporate covenant renewal.⁵ The acronym for this structure is THEOS. If this argument is correct, then the fifth book of the Pentateuch should match the fifth point of the covenant: inheritance/disinheritance, a two-fold process in history which mirrors the dual covenantal sanctions of blessing and cursing.

Let us survey briefly the primary integrating theme of each of the Pentateuch’s five books. Genesis reveals the absolute sovereignty of God in creating the world out of nothing and sustaining it in history. Exodus reveals the deliverance of national Israel in history by this sovereign God, who requires His people to covenant with Him as His lawful subjects (Ex. 19). Leviticus reveals the laws of God for Mosaic Israel: the stipulations of Israel’s national existence as a covenantal unit. Numbers reveals God’s corporate sanctions in history: against Israel in the wilderness because of unbelief, and against the Amorites a generation later, outside the borders of Canaan, in the months preceding the

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 46.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), General; Introduction, Section F.

5. On the five points, see Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

invasion of Canaan. Deuteronomy is the book of inheritance through covenant renewal, revealing the imminent fulfillment of the promised Abrahamic inheritance, which involved the disinheritance of the Canaanites.

The reader is hereby warned: if, after reading this commentary, you find that you agree with my thesis that the primary theme of Deuteronomy is inheritance, then you should be more willing to accept my thesis that the Pentateuch is structured in terms of the five-point biblical covenant model.

This commentary series is called *An Economic Commentary on the Bible*. My general thesis for all of these volumes is that both economic theory and practice are inherently covenantal. I titled the first volume, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*. I argued there that God's covenant with Adam (Gen. 1:26–28) defines mankind. This thesis has led me to argue that the fundamental economic issue is not scarcity, contrary to virtually all economics textbooks. *The fundamental economic issue is ownership*. The issue of ownership is always covenantal. The legal question, "Who owns this?" is more fundamental than the economists' initial question: "Why do I have to pay something to obtain this?"

To answer the question, "Who owns this?" we must first answer the question: "Who possesses original sovereignty?"

B. Original Sovereignty

Economists should begin the study of economics with a question: Who is originally sovereign? The Bible's answer is clear: God. He created the world. He therefore possesses *original jurisdiction*. Through the rebellious actions of the serpent, Eve, and Adam, Satan gained subordinate control over the earth. Adam, as God's supreme covenantal agent, had the authority to decide which sovereign he would serve. By disobeying God, he transferred allegiance to Satan. This was an act of covenant-breaking. It was also a judicially representative act: he did this in the name of his heirs. Those heirs of Adam who remain outside of God's covenant of redemption necessarily deny the ownership claims of God.

It is covenant-keeping man's God-given assignment to extend the kingdom of God in history, reclaiming territory that was lost by Adam's transfer of covenantal allegiance. This reclaiming of the earth is a two-fold activity: fulfilling the original dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28) and reclaiming the lost inheritance from covenant-breakers.

We redeem this property—buy it back—just as Christ redeemed us from the wrath of God. We redeem this world as delegated stewards under Christ’s general ownership, as both the Creator of the world (Col. 1:16) and as its Redeemer. But, because of His comprehensive redemption, we now operate not merely as stewards, but as adopted sons (Gal. 4:5–8). Our stewardship is our means of establishing our post-final-judgment inheritance, as the parable of the talents says. There is continuity between history and eternity.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:11–15).⁶

Ultimately, Satan will be disinherited in history. To argue otherwise is to argue that Adam’s transfer to Satan of Adam’s God-given stewardship over the kingdom of God is a permanent condition in history. The eschatological assumption of Satan’s triumphant reign in history also necessarily assumes that Jesus Christ’s Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20)⁷—reclaiming the world by means of the Holy Spirit-empowered gospel of redemption (buying-back)—will produce only a series of sporadic Christian oases in the historically permanent desert of Satanism. It is to argue that biblical eschatology teaches that Adam’s inheritance in history was permanently transferred to Satan, irrespective of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in history and for history. This outlook transfers almost all of the covenant-keepers’ lawful inheritance to the world beyond the grave. It makes men’s cultural inheritance an *either/or* proposition: either history or eternity. It denies what the Bible teaches: inheritance is a *both/and* proposition. It is inheritance in both history and eternity for covenant-keepers, and disinheritance in both history and eternity for covenant-breakers.⁸

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

7. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>) North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

8. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

C. Eschatology and Inheritance

This theme of inheritance/disinheritance is basic to covenantal progression in history: the growth of the kingdom of God at the expense of the kingdom of Satan. In this sense, covenantal conflict is what economists call a *zero-sum game*: the winner's gains come at the expense of the loser. Because of God's common grace,⁹ this is not always true in cultural matters. Through the division of labor, covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers can simultaneously expand their respective spheres of influence. There can be win-win arrangements in history between both camps. The obvious example is population growth. But in the supernatural battle for an individual soul, covenantal conflict is a pure zero-sum conflict. One kingdom expands at the expense of the other.

This covenantal fact of life and death raises the issue of eschatology. The theological doctrine known as *eschatology*—the doctrine of the last things—is point five of the biblical covenant model. It cannot be separated from a theory of history, because eschatology is also the doctrine of *whatever precedes* the last things. It is, in this sense, the doctrine of the next-to-last things. Because there are three rival theories of biblical eschatology—amillennialism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism—each has a different conception of the next-to-last things. Each theory has its own conception of social theory, i.e., social cause and effect.¹⁰

Biblical eschatology is the story of the replacement of Satan's stolen kingdom by God's kingdom. The eschatological question that divides theologians is this: To what extent is this process of kingdom replacement revealed in history? Is history an earnest—a down payment—on the eternity to come? Is there considerable or minimal continuity between history and eternity? Does the wheat or do the tares progressively dominate as history unfolds? *Amillennialism* insists that history is a reverse foretaste of eternity: the righteous get weaker, and the unrighteous get stronger. *Premillennialism* teaches the same with regard to the era prior to Christ's bodily return and His imposition of a comprehensive international bureaucracy, staffed by Christians, for a thousand years. *Postmillennialism* insists that covenantal history is the story of the lawful transfer of inheritance, secured by the death of the

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

10. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

lawful Heir, who thereby has become the Testator (Heb. 9:16–17). For postmillennialism, history is also the story of disinheritance in history: covenant-keepers' reclaiming of the stolen legacy from covenant-breakers. Righteousness will replace unrighteousness as the next-to-the-last things unfold.

D. Social Theory and Eschatology

The fifth point of the biblical covenant model is succession.¹¹ The fifth point is judicially connected to the fourth: sanctions.¹² Corporate sanctions are applied by God in history in terms of point three: law.¹³ Any discussion of biblical law that ignores corporate sanctions and succession is incomplete. Any discussion that self-consciously separates sanctions and succession is incorrect.

Succession is an aspect of eschatology. The eschatological question regarding history is this: *Who shall inherit the earth?* The Bible is clear: covenant-keepers.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).¹⁴

This eschatological outlook is denied by premillennialists and amillennialists. This is why they have a major problem with the Book of Deuteronomy, the premier book of inheritance in the Old Testament. To deal with this book, they have to argue that the corrosive effects of sin always lead men to break the covenant and lose the inheritance. This is why covenant-keepers supposedly will not inherit the earth. The problem with this argument is two-fold: (1) it necessarily makes covenant-breakers the inheritors, thereby denying the plain

11. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 5.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

14. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 4.

teaching of Scripture; (2) it relegates the New Testament doctrines of the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ to the realm of eschatological *adiaphora*—things indifferent to the faith.

E. Methodological Starting Point: Scarcity or Ownership?

In my 1987 book, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics*, I began with the first point of the covenant: God's transcendence, yet also His presence. In economic theory, this principle is manifested in the concept of God's original ownership. Point two, hierarchy-representation, is applied in economics by the concept of God's delegated but restricted ownership of property to individuals and organizations: stewardship. Point three, boundaries, is applied in economics by the concept of landmarks or fences. Point four, profit or loss, is the basis for evaluating success or failure. Finally, point five, inheritance, is the economic issue of economic growth.

1. Adam Smith on Private Property

Humanistic free market economists traditionally begin their analyses with the issue of scarcity. This has been true ever since Adam Smith wrote *Wealth of Nations* (1776). They begin here for an unstated but powerful reason: their quest for epistemological neutrality. They begin with what appears to be a common-ground observation about the external world, an observation that is universally acknowledged and therefore presumably neutral epistemologically. They seek to avoid any appeal to theology or other obviously value-laden presuppositions. The issue of scarcity is not epistemologically neutral. It is heavily value-laden, but it is far easier to conceal this fact than to conceal the more obviously value-laden doctrine of original ownership.

After I read Tom Bethell's 1998 book, *The Noblest Triumph*, I recognized how inappropriate Smith's starting point was. Bethell made the neglected point that Smith generally ignored the concept of private property in *Wealth of Nations*. Bethell wrote, "there is very little that is directly about property in *The Wealth of Nations*. The few paragraphs on the subject are extraneous to Smith's argument."¹⁵ Smith's oversight enabled socialists, beginning with William Godwin in his book, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), to focus on ownership as

15. Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity through the Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), p. 97.

the central issue: the failure of private ownership and the goal of state ownership. There was no full-scale intellectual defense of private property as the linchpin of rational economic analysis until Ludwig von Mises wrote his path-breaking essay, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920). Mises extended his analysis in his 1922 book, *Socialism*, presenting it in final form in *Human Action* (1949). Thus, almost two centuries passed between Smith's neglect of private property until Mises' comprehensive theoretical defense of economic theory as grounded in private ownership. It was not until the political and economic collapse of the bankrupt Soviet Union in 1991 that socialist economists quietly retired from the field of intellectual battle.

When would-be autonomous man begins his discussion of economics apart from any consideration of the twin doctrines of creation and providence, he has assumed as incontrovertible what he needs first to prove, namely, that the creation is an autonomous "given," and that man is also an autonomous "given." Far from being neutral, this presupposition of the creation's autonomy is an intellectual act of theft. It is an application of the serpent's rhetorical question: "Hath God said?" (Gen. 3:1). That question led immediately to the transgression of a boundary: theft. So does the assumption of scarcity as the methodological starting point of economics.

2. Locke's Theory of God's Original Ownership

When a methodological individualist eventually gets around to considering the question of personal sovereignty, he begins with the presupposition of each man's ownership of his own person. This was John Locke's argument in 1690, but only after he had invoked God's sovereign ownership of creation. He wrote: "Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a 'property' in his own 'person.' This nobody has any right to but himself."¹⁶ Libertarian economist and ethicist Murray Rothbard began with self-ownership apart from any consideration of God.¹⁷ If followed to its logical conclusion, Rothbard's presupposition legalizes suicide. Christians should therefore sense the presence of a fundamental ethical problem associated with methodological individualism.

16. John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (1690), V:26.

17. Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, [1982] 1998), pp. 45–46, 59. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardEOL>); Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), p. 92. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

The right-wing Enlightenment's presupposition of each person's self-ownership does not solve the moral and judicial problems regarding the limits (boundaries) of that which adult children owe to their parents, whose time and effort allowed their children to survive. Methodological individualism begins with the individual as if there were no legal bonds of the family, which is a corporate institution sanctioned by God and possessing legal claims on the individual. Are these family claims morally and legally valid? Methodological individualism begins with assumption that these claims are not valid. Methodological individualists assume this; they do not prove it by an appeal to economics, which is not autonomous. Economic analysis assumes, but does not prove, certain doctrines of property.

At best, the presupposition of self-ownership does not solve the problem of ownership of anything other than one's own person. But men are dependent on external nature for their survival. How is ownership lawfully established over anything in nature? The libertarians, who are methodological individualists, offer two answers. First, ownership is established by a person's verbal declaration.¹⁸ If true, then we must ask: What happens when one person's declaration extends across a boundary that some other person lays claim to? This is the issue of *lawful boundaries*, which is point three of the biblical covenant.¹⁹ Who possesses lawful authority to decide which declaration is superior? (Point two.) By what standard? (Point three.) By which sanctions? (Point four.)

The second answer insists that ownership is established, as John Locke argued in 1690, by mixing one's labor with the soil. Locke wrote:

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a "property" in his own "person." This nobody has any right to but himself. The "labour" of his body and the "work" of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this "labour" being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for oth-

18. This was the position of libertarian anarchist Robert LeFevre.

19. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3.

ers.²⁰

This also does not answer the question of boundaries. How wide a range does the original owner lawfully roam as he picks the fruits of nature, removing them from the unclaimed state of nature? Locke said that a man in a state of nature has a legal claim only to that which he removes from the environment for his consumption. But then a man walks away in search of other fruits of nature. On what legal basis can he establish lawful permanent ownership of the land that he leaves behind? That which he is unwilling to defend by his continuing presence cannot be said to belong to him—not on the basis of anything in Locke’s theory, anyway. Covenantally speaking, God retains and defends His primary ownership by His omnipresence. Man does not possess this attribute. When he leaves the scene, his claim of ownership departs with him, or so Locke’s analysis implies.

Locke’s theory is mostly hyperbole. We must ask: What kind of labor is mixed with the soil? Extractive labor only? This is what Locke said.²¹ Then what of planting and guarding, as in the garden of Eden? In short, what about fences? What are the lawful limits of man’s original fences? Locke’s answer: “As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labour fix a property in. Whatever is beyond this is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy.”²² The moment the economic theorist raises the divisive judicial issue, “more than his share,” he has raised the issue of boundaries. How can today’s land user know how much land he will use tomorrow or next week? What new information will he discover? Can he pick one berry in the far country, and by this act of extraction, lawfully establish title to everything in between? Can he plant one acorn in a far country and thereby lay claim to everything in between? The soil in Locke’s theory is symbolic soil, not literal soil. There are no identifiable boundaries in Locke’s theory, yet *the establishment of boundaries is the central issue of the definition of lawful title to property*, from the garden of Eden until final judgment.

Locke’s theory of individual ownership assumes the prior existence of some sort of overarching moral and legal order. Locke admitted this in the opening words of his chapter on property.

20. Locke, *Second Treatise*, V:26. Rothbard took this position. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, p. 92.

21. Locke, *Second Treatise*, V:27.

22. *Ibid.*, V:30.

Whether we consider natural reason, which tells us that men, being once born, have a right to their preservation, and consequently to meat and drink and such other things as Nature affords for their subsistence, or “revelation,” which gives us an account of those grants God made of the world to Adam, and to Noah and his sons, it is very clear that God, as King David says (Psalm 115. 16), “has given the earth to the children of men,” given it to mankind in common.²³

Immediately, he hit a conceptual brick wall. How can we logically get from God’s delegation of ownership to one man, Adam or Noah, to the concept of individual ownership by many men? Locke had no answer, as he admitted, so he offered speculation regarding “how men might come to have a property in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common.” “Might” is surely a highly speculative word, and a weak foundation on which to build an entire social, political, and economic worldview. Locke wrote a long, convoluted sentence.

But, this being supposed, it seems to some a very great difficulty how any one should ever come to have a property in anything, I will not content myself to answer, that, if it be difficult to make out “property” upon a supposition that God gave the world to Adam and his posterity in common, it is impossible that any man but one universal monarch should have any “property” upon a supposition that God gave the world to Adam and his heirs in succession, exclusive of all the rest of his posterity; but I shall endeavour to show how men might come to have a property in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common, and that without any express compact of all the commoners.

Locke began with God as the sovereign original owner, who then delegated ownership to the sole representative agent of mankind, Adam. This expressly biblical starting point was the context of Locke’s theory of self-ownership and his theory of ownership through a man’s labor mixed with soil. None of this provides epistemological support for a libertarian theorist. The methodological individualist begins with the autonomous individual. He cannot legitimately invoke God, Adam, or covenant theology, nor would he want to. Yet Rothbard invoked Locke when he theorized regarding the ethical starting point for private property. He presented Locke’s soil and labor argument as if it in some way solved the issue of boundaries. He devoted only a few paragraphs to this most crucial of all economic questions: original ownership.

23. *Ibid.*, V:24.

3. Collective Sanctions and Society

In contrast to Locke's methodological individualism, the methodological collectivist assumes that society's claims of ownership are prior to and superior to the individual's claims. But this raises a series of questions that humanists have been unable to answer to each other's satisfaction. What is society? What are its boundaries (point three)? The local community? The nation-state? The whole world—the so-called family of man? Who represents this society (point two)? Are we speaking of the state, i.e., civil government, when we say the word “society”? Which state? Exactly what is it that establishes the prior or superior jurisdiction of this or that agency called the state? What if there are competing jurisdictions of various states? Whose jurisdiction is superior? By what standard? Who lawfully imposes the sanctions? From what or from whom are sanctions lawfully derived by those who claim to represent society? Wars are fought between nations and within nations regarding the issue of the authority to establish boundaries and then impose sanctions against boundary violators in the name of society.

The methodological collectivist asserts a prior sovereignty or a superior sovereignty over the individual. But this also does not answer the question of the delegated authority to guard the garden. A representative guardian is required, but in whose name? By whose standard? Hitler wanted national socialism, but he kept expanding the Reich's boundaries. Stalin wanted international socialism, but productivity inside the national boundaries of the Soviet Union's satellite nations always seemed to benefit the Soviet Union's hierarchy. It took the Second World War (1939–45) to establish new national boundaries in Europe, and then the Cold War (1946–91) began: a dispute over boundaries. To say that society is sovereign raises the question: Which society? Represented by whom? By what standard? By which sanctions? With what goals? These are crucial questions, yet there has been no agreement on them or their answers throughout the history of social theory.

These methodological issues extend into the field of economic theory. There is a long tradition of methodological collectivism in economics: from Greek speculation to medieval guild socialism to modern socialism, Marxism, and modern ecology-based economics.

There are very few examples of exclusively individualistic or exclusively collectivist theoretical economic systems. There have been

none in practice. Men cling intellectually to one or another version of the mixed economy. Keynesianism has been the dominant version of a theory of the mixed economy since the late 1930s.

In opposition to both methodological individualism and methodological collectivism, I offer methodological covenantalism.²⁴

Conclusion

Deuteronomy is the Pentateuch's book of inheritance and disinheritance. Its theme is three-fold: predestination, adopted sonship, and inheritance. The fourth generation after the descent into Egypt would surely inherit Canaan (Gen. 15:16).²⁵ This had been predestined by God. This inheritance was nonetheless ethically conditional: primarily dependent on Jesus Christ's representative perfect work and secondarily dependent on Joshua's decision to circumcise the nation at Gilgal (Josh. 5:3). To maintain this inheritance—the kingdom grant—Israel would have to obey God's law. Disobedience would produce disinheritance, which Jesus announced to the religious leaders of Israel: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The adopted Israelite heirs were finally replaced in A.D. 70 by gentile adopted heirs. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

Deuteronomy offers the basics of biblical economics. The economics that Deuteronomy teaches is free market economics. This is why Christian economists of the socialist or Keynesian persuasion do not spend a lot of time commenting on the specific details of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is an affront to their economics. They therefore reject Deuteronomy, *a priori*. The problem is, they refuse to offer an exegetical basis for their rejection. They assume what they need to prove. They regard the Old Testament as "God's word, emeritus." They offer no hermeneutical defense of this position. They merely assume it. Then they wander off into the epistemological wilderness of academic humanism in search of formulas by which the state, through compulsion, deficits, and fiat money, can turn stones into bread.²⁶

24. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

25. Kohath, Amram, Moses, Gershom.

26. Appendix A.

INTRODUCTION

These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab (Deut. 1:1).

The Hebrew words that begin this book of the Bible, *‘eleh dabarim* or *devarim*, mean simply “these words.” But this phrase is not the familiar name of the book that has come down through time to Jews and gentiles. Deuteronomy is the book’s commonly accepted title. The word “deuteronomy” is an Anglicized derivative from the Greek: second (*deutero*) law (*nomos*). It comes from the Septuagint’s¹ rendering into Greek of the words *mishneh torah*,² or **copy of the law**. “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites” (Deut. 17:18).³ It is worth noting that this verse occurs in a passage in which any future king in Israel is told to read the Mosaic law and obey it.

What were the words of Moses? They were a recapitulation of God’s law. This is why the laws of Deuteronomy repeat so many of the laws of Leviticus, e.g., Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. This recapitulation of the law was preparatory to the national covenant renewal at Gilgal (Josh. 5). The generation that had been born in the wilderness had not visibly covenanted with God: no circumcision. Most—probably all—of the members of the exodus generation except Moses were dead by now.⁴ Aaron died (Num. 20:28) just prior to the wars against

1. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek: second century B.C.

2. The title of Maimonides’ twelfth-century commentary on the Mosaic law, written from 1177 to 1187. It fills 14 volumes in the Yale University Press edition, *The Code of Maimonides*. The 14 volumes, I am informed by Rabbi Daniel Lapin, represent the 14 bones of the human hand.

3. *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1982), p. 280.

4. Exceptions: Joshua and Caleb.

King Arad, King Og, and King Sihon (Num. 21). It was now time for national covenant renewal (point four of the biblical covenant model), which had to precede national covenantal inheritance (point five). Deuteronomy presents both the judicial basis and the promise of this inheritance.

According to the King James Version, this presentation of the law was made “on this side of Jordan in the wilderness.” This is an inaccurate translation. The Hebrew word translated as “this side” should be translated “opposite side,” i.e., east of the Jordan, meaning across the Jordan. The King James translators sometimes translated *ayber* as “other side.”⁵

Moses died on the wilderness side of the Jordan. Yet the context of this passage indicates that the word should be translated “other side.” Because Moses wrote these words, he must have been writing from the perspective of the nation after it had crossed the Jordan. He was on the other side of Jordan when he wrote of the other side as the other side. That is, he wrote Deuteronomy *as if he were writing to people settled in Canaan*. He was writing in the prophetic confidence that Israel would be successful in the conquest of the land. He was writing to those who had already inherited. The future-orientation of the Book of Deuteronomy begins in its first sentence.

A. Sanctions and Inheritance/Disinheritance

Deuteronomy begins after the promised negative sanction against the generation of the exodus had been imposed by God: they would not enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:23). This exclusion was a secondary form of disinheritance. The primary form was genocide. This is what God had initially threatened. “I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they” (Num. 14:12). Moses had countered this threat by means of the ultimate prayer: an appeal to God’s reputation.

And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it,

5. “And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which is **beyond** Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days” (Gen. 50:10). “From thence they removed, and pitched on the **other** side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites” (Num. 21:13). Yet in one case the word is translated both ways in one verse: “For we will not inherit with them on **yonder** side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on **this** side Jordan eastward” (Num. 32:19).

(for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness (Num. 14:13–16).

Inheritance can be secured in one of two ways: disinheritance or adoption. Either God displaces the present owners and transfers ownership to His people, or else He incorporates the present owners into His people through adoption, which then secures the inheritance. *There is no third way.* Inheritance and disinheritance are two sides of the same coin, or the two sides of the same covenant. They are an aspect of God's sanctions, positive and negative, in eternity but also in history. *This means that inheritance and disinheritance are both ultimately eschatological.* The historical conflict of kingdom's, God's vs. Satan's, is ultimately a battle over inheritance and disinheritance.

Sihon's resistance to Israel was part of this preliminary process of inheritance/disinheritance.

But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land. Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Jahaz. And the LORD our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain: Only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took (Deut. 2:30–35).

This had been a manifestation of a system of national dispossession. The gods and the laws of Canaan were to be dispossessed by force.

And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier

than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever (Deut. 4:37–40).

This dispossession was supposed to be comprehensive: “But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee” (Deut. 20:16–17).

The Book of Deuteronomy is the Pentateuch’s book of inheritance. It follows the Pentateuch’s book of sanctions, Numbers.⁶ The account of the preliminary dispossession on the wilderness side of the Jordan is found in Numbers 21. The significance of this initial warfare was announced by Moses to the generation of the conquest. Moses framed his discussion of the events of Numbers 21 in terms of God’s program of inheritance/disinheritance.

B. The Fourth Generation

The key verse governing the inheritance of the land of Canaan by Israel is Genesis 15:16: “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.” The four generations that dwelt in Egypt were the heirs of Levi: Kohath, Amram, Moses, Gershom.⁷ It was under Joshua’s leadership that his generation and their children invaded Canaan. Joshua was the representative leader.

A theological question arises: Was God’s promise to Abraham conditional or unconditional? Was it dependent on what Abraham and his heirs would do (conditional), or was it a prophecy that could not be thwarted by anything that man would do (unconditional)? For that matter, is it legitimate even to distinguish between the two?

The traditional theological answer to this question is that the Abrahamic promise was unconditional. This answer invokes Paul’s argu-

6. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012).

7. Gershom was born outside of Egypt, but he was part of the fourth generation.

ments in Galatians 3. “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:17–19). Paul here was speaking of the Mosaic law, but theologians have extended his line of argumentation to the context of the Abrahamic promise regarding Canaan.

To argue that a promise is unconditional is to argue for God’s predestination. The theologian announces: “God’s promise to Abraham was a prophecy.” Yet this statement begs the question. Is biblical prophecy at least sometimes conditional? For example, Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days, yet Nineveh escaped this curse through repentance. Was God’s promise to Abraham that sort of prophecy, i.e., conditional on the ethical response of those who heard it? Specifically, could the third generation have inherited Canaan, had the word of God been mixed with faith? “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb. 4:2).

C. The Doctrine of Predestination

God’s absolute predestination is central to the doctrine of the unconditional promise. God promised Abraham that the fourth generation would inherit. This can mean only one thing: they were *predestined* to inherit. It was not merely statistically likely that they would inherit; they would surely inherit. Yet the males born in the wilderness were not circumcised. They were circumcised in a mass ritual procedure at Gilgal after they had crossed the Jordan and were inside Canaan’s boundaries (Josh. 5:4). To inherit, they had to be lawful heirs. The mark of Abrahamic heirship was circumcision. “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you” (Gen. 17:11). Circumcision was the covenant sign. So, in order to fulfill the Abrahamic promise, the Israelites had to perform a mandatory work. This means that the Abrahamic promise was conditional on works, yet at the same time, it could not be thwarted, for the inheritance by the fourth generation was predestined.

tined. This is the age-old issue of promise vs. works, unconditional promise vs. conditional promise.

1. Conditional or Unconditional

Ephesians 2:8–10 solves this theological dilemma: not only are covenant-keepers predestined to eternal life, they are predestined to temporal good works. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” A covenantal promise is therefore *ethically conditional*—the mandatory performance of good works—yet it is also *operationally unconditional*, for these good works are part of the predestined inheritance itself. Protestant fundamentalists quote Ephesians 2:8–9: grace. Roman Catholics are more likely to quote Ephesians 2:10: works. Theonomists quote the entire passage, which includes the phrase, “which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them,” i.e., predestination.

The Epistle to the Hebrews ties the doctrine of predestined good works to the ethically conditional nature of the Abrahamic promise. Hebrews 3 and 4 discuss the sabbatical rest which God gives to His people. The Israelites of Moses’ generation did not enter into the rest—Canaan—which God had offered to them. The author cited Psalm 95: “Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest” (Ps. 95:8–11; cf. Heb. 3:8–11). This means that God made a legitimate offer to the third generation: immediate inheritance. Moses made this plain in his recapitulation of the events immediately following the exodus.

And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do. And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us. Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and

possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged. . . . Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God: And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there. Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God, Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day. And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers, Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the LORD (Deut. 1:18–21; 26–36).

How can we solve this seeming theological anomaly? God's promise was given to the fourth generation, yet He commanded the third generation to begin the invasion of Canaan, promising to go before them, leading them to victory, just as He had done in Egypt and the Red Sea. This indicates that *the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise by the fourth generation was historically conditional*, i.e., dependent on the faithlessness of the third generation, which would refuse to conquer.

The beginning of the solution to this theological dilemma is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3). These words are quite clear: "although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." This language—"before the foundation of the world"—is also found in the biblical passage which, more than any other, teaches the doctrine of predestination, the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the church at Ephesus. Paul wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath

blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. . . . In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:3–6, 11–14).

2. *The Three-Fold Theme of Grace*

Predestination, adoption, and inheritance: here is the three-fold theme of God's special grace to His people in history. This is not a two-fold theme—adoption and inheritance—contrary to Arminians and other defenders of the doctrine of man's free will. Adoption in Christ is the only judicially valid basis of any man's claim to his share of the inheritance of God's kingdom, both in history and eternity. Paul teaches that every redeemed person's adoption by God in history has been predestined before the foundation of the world.

The three-fold theme of *predestination*, *adoption* (*judicial sonship*), and *inheritance* is the theme of the Book of Deuteronomy. God, in His absolute sovereignty, predestined the fourth generation after Abraham to inherit the Promised Land. Moses spoke the words recorded in Deuteronomy to the representatives of the fourth generation, just prior to Israel's inheritance of the land under Joshua. Similarly, God has predestined individual Christians to eternal salvation, which is their lawful inheritance through judicial adoption into God's redeemed family. Paul's words are clear: we have obtained in history a down payment or "earnest" of this eternal inheritance. "Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (v. 13b). The Greek word translated here as "purchased possession" is elsewhere translated as "saving," as in "the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39).

The Greek word that Paul used for "inheritance" (Gal. 3:18) is the

same one that Stephen used to identify God's promise of Canaan to Abraham: "And he gave him none **inheritance** in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child" (Acts 7:5). Paul used this language of the *seed*, which alone lawfully *inherits*, in order to identify those who are *adopted* by God the Father through Christ's sacrificial work of redemption: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

Paul insisted in his letter to the Ephesians that this eternal and historical inheritance of the kingdom of God is an inheritance of righteousness only for those who are themselves righteous. "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5). *This kingdom inheritance comes exclusively through God's grace.* Nevertheless, Paul insisted on another equally important doctrine: *the earthly good works that are mandatory in the life of the true heir are as predestined as the adoption itself.*

D. Imputation

Imputation is associated with point four of the biblical covenant model: sanctions. He who imposes sanctions necessarily extends judgment. He evaluates. God is the sovereign imputer of judgment. He is the sanctions-bringer.

The basis of the theological reconciliation of grace vs. good works, or unconditional election vs. conditional inheritance, is the doctrine of imputation. Participation in both of the two kingdoms in history, Satan's and Christ's, is representational as well as individual. The sin of Adam is imputed to covenant-breaking man. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come" (Rom. 5:12–14). There was a law that condemned all men to death: God's command to Adam not to eat of the forbidden tree. Adam's heirs did not commit this sin individually, but they all committed it representatively through their father, Adam. So, death reigned from Adam to Moses. The fact that Adam's heirs did not (and

could not—no tree) commit Adam's specific sin made no difference in the question of life and death. They all committed it. Adam's representative act condemned all of his heirs. The proof of this, Paul argued, is that they all died. The law was still in force—not the Mosaic law, but the Edenic law. The sanction of death still ruled.

This judicial imputation of Adam's sin is the historical starting point of biblical covenant theology. To escape God's declaration of "Guilty!" to Adam, and thereby to Adam's heirs, a person must come under God's declaration of "Not guilty!" to Jesus Christ and His heirs. Adam's sin is the judicial basis of the imputation of disinherited sonship to Adam's heirs. Jesus Christ's perfect humanity (though not His divinity) is the judicial basis of the imputation of adopted sonship to Christ's heirs. "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:16–17).

Let us consider this theological doctrine from another angle: the imputation of Christ's good works. As surely as Christ met the comprehensive demands of God's law, so also do all those people to whom His perfection is imputed by God. *Christ's imputed perfection is definitive*. At the moment of their regeneration, people receive Christ's perfection judicially through grace. Then they are required to strive in this life to meet Jesus' standard of moral perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). This condition of perfection is achieved by covenant-keepers only in the world beyond history. But the goal of perfection is still our mandatory standard, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Both conditions are true of covenant-keeping men in history: perfection and imperfection. First, imperfection: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:8–10). This condition relates to progressive sanctification in history. Second, perfection: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the

devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (I John 3:7–9). In the day of final judgment, God looks at Christ's perfection in history, not Christians' sins in history. The redeemed person's moral condition, definitively and finally, is representatively perfect: sin-free. This is because of the representative imputation of Christ's perfection. But the redeemed person's life in history is a progressive overcoming of sin, which is always present.

The doctrine of imputation is the theological basis of reconciling God's conditional and unconditional promises. An unconditional promise rests on the predestinating work of God in history to bring the recipients of the promise to that degree of moral perfection and judicial righteousness required to obtain the promise. *No promise by God is devoid of stipulations.* The covenantal question is this: Who lawfully performs these stipulations on behalf of the heirs? Paul provided the answer in Galatians 3. His message in Galatians 3 is that the promise is more fundamental than the law. Yet the promise was not in opposition to the law, nor was the law absent from the conditional terms of the promise.

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law (Gal. 3:17–21).

Did the Israelites have to be circumcised in order to inherit the land? Yes. To become an heir of God's promise to Abraham's seed, you had to be circumcised. Yet the promise to Abraham was nonetheless unconditional. How could it be both? *Because of Christ's work as the judicial representative of all redeemed men.* God's promise to Abraham—and through him, to his heirs—was always conditional on Jesus Christ's fulfilling of God's law in history. This is why Paul invoked an otherwise peculiar grammatical argument: "Now to Abraham and his

seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). *God's promise to Abraham was unconditional for the fourth generation only because this promise was conditional on the historical work of Jesus Christ as redeemed mankind's judicial representative.* Had Jesus' perfectly obedient life not been predestined by God before the foundation of the world, there would have been no judicial basis of redemption, and therefore no unconditional promises in history. The only promise that would have been fulfilled in history would have been God's promise to Adam: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

Death was a major sanction. So was the curse of the ground. Sanctions are fourth on the list of the Bible's five-point covenant model. These are: transcendence/presence, hierarchy/representation, ethics/boundaries, oath/sanctions, and succession/inheritance. As applied to economic theory, these five points are: primary ownership, delegated ownership, property rights, scarcity, and inheritance. Scarcity in the modern economic definition—"at zero price, there is greater demand than supply"—is the result of God's curse of the earth in response to Adam's rebellion (Gen. 3:17–19).⁸

If this is the case, then Christians should conclude that a reduction of scarcity, i.e., economic growth, is the result of God's positive sanctions in history. On what legal basis does man receive these positive sanctions? For the answer, the Christian must look to the work of Christ: His legal status as God's covenantally representative agent and also His work of redemption through God's imposition of negative sanctions at Calvary. The negative sanctions of Calvary were soon overcome in history by Christ's bodily resurrection and His bodily ascension. These two divine positive sanctions in history have enabled man's overcoming of the curse of the earth through economic growth. *The negative sanctions that were imposed by God on Adam have been **definitively** overcome through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. These Adamic sanctions must now be **progressively** overcome in history through dominion by Christ's covenantal agents.* The dominion covenant is still binding on mankind. We are to obey God's law. God will bless the society that does this. This is the message of Deuteronomy 28:1–14. The society that disobeys will suffer losses. This is the

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 11.

message of Deuteronomy 28:15–68. The question of economic growth raises the issue of law.

E. The Hatred of God's Law

By linking covenant-keeping with God's blessings in history, and covenant-breaking with God's curses in history, the theonomist challenges just about everybody. Not only does he challenge all other religions, including humanism, he also challenges premillennialists and amillennialists. There can be no escape from this confrontation. The doctrine of eschatology (point five) raises the issue of historical sanctions (point four). These, in turn, raise the issue of biblical law (point three). The consistent theonomist insists that biblical law, God's predictable historical sanctions, and eschatology are "a package deal," to use modern American slang. They are unbreakably interlocked. Defenders of non-theonomic views of eschatology are not always consistent in their rejection of this package. A few of them may not openly reject theonomy's insistence on the covenantal continuity of biblical law and God's visible, predictable, corporate historical sanctions, although most of them do. Their rejection of postmillennialism eventually leads most of them to reject theonomy's view of law and sanctions.

Modern Christians are generally opposed to biblical law. This is one reason why they are opposed to postmillennialism. Instead of rejecting biblical law on the basis of their anti-postmillennialism, many of them are anti-postmillennial because of their rejection of the continuing authority of biblical law and its mandated civil sanctions. For these critics, the Book of Deuteronomy is an offense. When pushed to state their views, they come out against Deuteronomy. The size of this commentary indicates why they are so hostile to Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy contains the most comprehensive presentation of God's law.

Is there evidence that God's commandments in Deuteronomy were annulled by the New Covenant? Some commandments have been annulled, such as the law of genocidal annihilation. That was a one-time event. It is the job of the expositor to examine which Mosaic laws have carried over into the New Covenant and which have not. But for a critic of the free market order, or any other aspect or social product of Deuteronomy, blithely to dismiss Deuteronomy's authority over him and his academic speculations without showing what has been annulled and why, is to play with fire.

Modern man arrogates to himself the right to pick and choose

from God's revelation, a practice which Rushdoony called the smorgasbord approach to the Bible. Modern academic evangelicals come in the name of the latest humanist fad, indulging in the rhetoric of contempt for God's law. Joseph Sobran, a Roman Catholic columnist with a gift for the English language, once wrote that he would rather belong to a church that is 5,000 years behind the times than one that is huffing and puffing to keep with the spirit of the age. Put another way, better Eastern Orthodoxy than the World Council of Churches. Better the Athanasian Creed than the Social Gospel.

God's law provides the legal framework for a free market social order; it undermines the theory of socialism. Until at least one critic of the free market produces a comparably detailed commentary on the economics of the Pentateuch, readers of my multi-volume series should withhold judgment regarding the standard replies by Christian defenders of socialism and the mixed economy: (1) the Bible does not offer a blueprint for economics; and/or (2) the Bible is opposed to the free market. Assertions without proof are merely rhetoric. To my critics, I will say it one more time: *You can't beat something with nothing.*

Conclusion

Deuteronomy recapitulated God's law in preparation for Israel's national covenant renewal through circumcision (Josh. 5). Moses looked forward to Israel's conquest of Canaan. The law would provide the judicial basis for Israel's maintaining the kingdom grant.

The Pentateuch is structured in terms of the five points of the covenant. This fact testifies against higher critics who would deny the Mosaic authorship. The Pentateuch's structure compares with the treaties of kings of the second millennium B.C. It was written in that era.

The fifth point of the covenant is inheritance/disinheritance. This is the primary theme of Deuteronomy. The book is inherently postmillennial. Dispensationalism denies this, of course. But, by acknowledging that Jews after A.D. 70 have been under the covenant's negative sanctions,⁹ the editors of the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967) thereby acknowledged covenantal continuity, Old Testament to New Testament. Nevertheless, by ignoring the continuity of the covenant with respect to the church as the lawful heir of the Old Covenant's promises, they placed Christians under the rule of covenant-breakers.

9. *New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 251, note 2, Deut. 30:5.

If both positions are true—continuity (negative) for Jews and discontinuity for the church—then neither the Jews nor the Christians are the recipients of corporate covenant blessings this side of the millennium. The cultural pessimism of dispensationalism is inescapable. It offers no cultural hope for the Church Age; so, it places no value on the development of biblical social theory.

In contrast, theonomic postmillennialism offers both hope for the church and incentives for those Christians who would develop an explicitly biblical social theory. Deuteronomy, more than any other book in the Bible, offers the judicial content of such a reconstruction.

The two most common Christian eschatologies, premillennialism (fundamentalist churches) and amillennialism (European liturgical churches), have correctly relegated the conquest of Canaan to the Old Covenant. They have also relegated inheritance in history to the Old Covenant. But these are separate issues. After the exile, the laws of landed inheritance changed. The gentiles occupying the land were to be incorporated into the jubilee's inheritance system (Ezek. 47:21–23).¹⁰ This pointed to the New Covenant's incorporation of the gentiles into the covenant. *It was not the conquest of Canaan that was fundamental to Israel; it was the preservation of the messianic seed line that was fundamental.* The crucial eschatological issue was the Promised Seed, not the Promised Land.

This does not mean that the issue of inheritance in history was an exclusively Old Covenant issue. On the contrary, the issue of inheritance is far more a New Covenant issue. The Old Covenant inheritance centered around the Promised Seed (Gen. 3:15). Only much later did the issue of the Promised Land become intermixed with the Promised Seed (Abraham's covenant). This was a temporary mixing of categories of inheritance that ended with the coming of the Messiah, i.e., Shiloh (Gen. 49:10), and His rejection by Israel.

The universalism of the Genesis inheritance (Gen. 3:15) has now been mixed with the universalism of the kingdom of God in history (Matt. 21:43). This is the meaning of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

10. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

Amen” (Matt. 28:18–20).¹¹ So, far from being relegated to the Old Covenant, *inheritance has become the fundamental eschatological issue of the New Covenant.*

11. See Appendix I.

Part I: Transcendence/Presence (1:1–5)

1

THE GOD WHO BRINGS JUDGMENT IN HISTORY

These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab. (There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea.) And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them; After he had slain Sihon the king of the Amorites, which dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, which dwelt at Astaroth in Edrei: On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law. . . (Deut. 1:1–5).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the sovereignty of God. He is present with His people. He brought judgment against the Amorites. He would now declare His law once again, as He had four decades earlier. He would declare Himself through Moses, just as He had four decades earlier.

By the time of the opening words of the Book of Deuteronomy, all of the fighting men of the generation of the exodus were dead, except for Joshua and Caleb. In his recapitulation of the story of the wilderness, Moses said: "So it came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people. . ." (Deut. 2:16). Then Moses re-told the story of the defeat of Sihon (Deut. 2:26–35). This event had taken place before Deuteronomy's narrative began (Num. 21:21–26).

The exodus generation was the third after Israel's descent into

Egypt: Kohath, Amram, Moses. The conquest of Canaan was therefore imminent, according to God's prophecy to Abraham. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). The death of the exodus generation had prepared the nation of Israel for the long-promised inheritance. Deuteronomy is the Pentateuch's book of inheritance. Inheritance is associated with succession, which is point five of the biblical covenant model.¹

Meredith Kline identified this introductory passage in Deuteronomy as the preamble of the covenant or treaty between God and Israel. "Ancient suzerainty treaties began with a preamble in which the speaker, the one who was declaring his lordship and demanding the vassal's allegiance, identified himself." Deuteronomy's opening words, "these are the words," were common in extra-biblical treaties.² Who, then, was the sovereign? Was it Moses himself, as James Jordan argued?³ Or was it God?

It was God. Moses was the mediator.

A. Moses the Mediator

The opening words reveal that Moses spoke them. The question is this: In what capacity? It had to be as a *delegated agent*. "Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them; After he had slain Sihon the king of the Amorites. . ." (vv. 3b–4a).

Who had achieved the victory over Sihon? Not Moses. God had given them victory—the same God who had sustained them in the wilderness for four decades. The implication was that God is sovereign over all earthly kings, even as Moses was sovereign over Israel's civil rulers (Deut. 1:13–18). God was also present with the Israelites, delivering their enemies into their hands—as present as Moses had been in rendering civil judgment (Ex. 18). That is, God is *above* mankind, yet He is *especially present* with His chosen people.

This makes God different from both the god of deism and the god of pantheism. The god of deism is too distant from his creation to

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

2. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 50.

3. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 58. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

influence it. *His lack of immanence destroys his sovereignty.* His personalism is limited; it applies only to his own being. The world is impersonal. English Deists may never have argued this way, since they were heavily influenced by Christianity, but this is the theoretical meaning of deism. The god that made the cosmic clock no longer interferes with it. At most, he tinkers at the edges of creation. In contrast, the god of pantheism is a part of the creation and is therefore unable to influence it as a sovereign master. He is immersed in it. He cannot remove himself from it in order to command it. *His lack of transcendence destroys his sovereignty.* His personalism is limited; he shares it with the world he did not make.

The God of the Bible is *sovereign over* the world because He made it out of nothing. He is *present with* the world because He providentially sustains it. The God of origins is the God of history. The Bible teaches cosmic personalism.⁴ The world is personal because God is personal. It does not share in God's being, but it reflects His being. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). In contrast to the Bible's concept of cosmic personalism, most modern philosophies teach cosmic impersonalism. God has been shaved out of the cosmos by Occam's razor.

This passage resembles part two of the biblical covenant model, which Kline called historical prologue.⁵ Yet Kline listed it as part one: "Preamble: Covenant Mediator."⁶ A mediator implies a hierarchy; hierarchy is also point two of the biblical covenant model.⁷ Why, then, did both Kline and Sutton designate this brief section as part one? Why do I? If this designation is merely for the sake of argument, to make the Book of Deuteronomy fit the five-point covenant model, then the power of their argument is weakened.

This is ultimately a question regarding the Person who is represented by the mediator. God revealed Himself to Old Covenant people through prophets. Moses was the greatest of these prophets (Deut. 34:10).⁸ The words of Moses His servant could be trusted. These words had to be obeyed because God is above men, and He brings judgments

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1.

5. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, p. 52.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

7. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

8. John the Baptist was his equal (Matt. 11:11).

in history in terms of His Bible-revealed law. The *law-giver* is God, who is also the *sanctions-bringer*. He is transcendent over the world as the law-giver, yet He is present with the world as the sanctions-bringer. Sihon and Og learned the hard way that God is totally sovereign. To present Himself to the generation of the conquest, God announced through Moses His law and sanctions.

The announcement of God's law and God's historical sanctions points back to the giving of the law after the exodus. The Book of Exodus is the second book of the Pentateuch. It corresponds to the second point of the covenant, as Kline and Sutton argue. Moses reviews in Deuteronomy the story of God's dealings with Israel for 40 years in the wilderness (1:6–4:49). God is the God of history because He is ruler over history: hierarchy. He brings His word to pass.

In the Book of Genesis, God revealed Himself as the Creator. In Genesis, Moses presented an account in the first chapter in terms of what God repeatedly said: "Let there be," and the immediate results of His words in history. When God presented Himself in the Old Covenant, He did so, not by announcing a theological proposition, but by declaring what He has done in history. He identified Himself through written words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Then He gave a detailed account of His acts. Similarly, we read in the opening passage in Deuteronomy, "Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them" (v. 3b). Who is the Lord? He is the Person who only recently had destroyed Sihon and Og (v. 4), the Person whose law Moses was about to review.

B. Four Decades

The Book of Deuteronomy begins six months after Aaron died (Deut. 1:3). Aaron died at age 123 (Num. 33:39) in the fortieth year after the exodus: "And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the LORD, and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the first day of the fifth month" (Num. 33:38). Deuteronomy's phrase, "the first day of the fifth month," also refers to Aaron's death. Miriam had died before Aaron, in the first month (Num. 20:1). Aaron's death marked the end of the wilderness period.

Deuteronomy ("second law") announces the terms of the covenant. It is the second reading of the law. Why a second reading? Because

this was preparatory to an act of national covenant renewal. The fourth generation after the nation's initial subordination to Egypt (Gen. 15:16) was about to experience corporate covenant renewal. This took place inside the Promised Land at Gilgal: mass circumcision (Josh. 5:5). Before they were told by Joshua to participate in this act of covenant renewal, the generation of the conquest was required to hear the law read in public.

It was not just that they had to hear the law. They also had to be reminded of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (Deut. 4:20, 34, 37), as well as God's miraculous preservation of Israel in the wilderness (Deut. 8:3–4). The law of God and the nation's deliverance by God were linked: "These are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt" (Deut. 4:45). Because the deliverance and preservation of Israel in the wilderness were clearly miraculous events, the God who performed these miracles is above history: transcendent. But because He spoke through Moses, God was also present with His people. His transcendence in no way undermines His immanence—immanence in the sense of presence. He is not part of the creation, but He is present with His people.⁹

Conclusion

The opening passage in Deuteronomy identifies Moses as the spokesman for the God who had delivered Israel out of Egypt and had also defeated two great Canaanite kings, Sihon and Og. Then begins a presentation of this sovereign King's law. But before this law was announced by God's prophet, the Israelites had to be reminded of the power of God in history. God's law is not some sort of natural law order that is part of the cosmos and therefore indistinguishable from the cosmos. God's law is not a system of impersonal law. It is the law of the God who is sovereign over history. The evidence of His sovereignty was His deliverance of Israel.

To persuade the Israelites that He could deliver the long-expected inheritance into their hands, God spoke through Moses. Moses spoke of God's demonstrated power over two Canaanitic kings. Moses spoke also of God's law. As sovereign over history, God is the sanctions-

9. Jesus Christ was God incarnate in history. This is the ultimate manifestation of both presence and immanence. God was in the world but not of it. In His capacity as perfect man, He was of the world. In His capacity as God, He was not.

bringer in history. He delivers His promised inheritance in history. He announced His law through Moses after He had slain Sihon and Og. First had come the display of His power; then came the revelation of His law. He possesses the authority to impose His law because He is sovereign over history.

Part II: Hierarchy/Representation (1:6–4:49)

2

A DELAYED INHERITANCE

The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them (Deut. 1:6–8).

The theocentric focus of this command is stewardship-ownership. Stewardship is the representative control over an asset on someone else's behalf. It implies hierarchical authority: owner > steward > asset.

A. Israel's Refusal to Fight

This transfer of ownership of the Promised Land was legally grounded in God's oath to Abraham, which He had renewed with Isaac and Jacob. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). The exodus generation was the third generation. Its members had feared a confrontation with the Canaanites (Num. 14). This led to their wilderness wanderings.

Moses begins Deuteronomy with a summary of the rebellion of the exodus generation in refusing to listen to Joshua and Caleb (1:22–38). It was at that time that God had reaffirmed the promise that the fourth generation would inherit. "Moreover your little ones, which ye said

should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it" (v. 39). With this as the historical background, Moses begins the second reading of God's law (v. 5). This reading of the law was a covenantal act (point three) preparatory to the covenant renewal ritual of national circumcision (Josh. 5:5) (point four). Circumcision was the mandatory rite preparatory to the conquest: inheritance (point five).

For a younger generation that knew these stories, Moses' words suggested what lay ahead: warfare. Joshua would be leading the nation into battle, his reward from God because of his courageous recommendation to invade Canaan a generation earlier. Their parents had been told by God at the time of that earlier battle with Amalek that it was time to conquer Canaan. Their parents had not accepted this assignment. Three miracles—the manna (Ex. 16), water out of a rock (Ex. 17:1–7), and military victory through Moses' raised hands (Ex. 17:8–13)—had not persuaded them that Moses' leadership could be relied on, that he had a unique position as God's spokesman. They did not believe Moses because they did not believe God.

Moses then reminded the conquest generation of God's repetition of the command to conquer the land. This had taken place at another mountain, the mountain of the Amorites (Deut. 1:19). "And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us. Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged" (vv. 20–21). Moses was speaking to the generation of the conquest; the fighting men of the exodus era, were all dead (v. 16). Nevertheless, he spoke of his having spoken to "you." He reminded them of their parents' decision not to accept the words of Joshua and Caleb (vv. 22–25). He applied the parents' rebellion to their children because it had been a *covenantally representative act*. "Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God: And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us" (vv. 26–27). *Their parents had refused to listen to Moses*. "Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD

thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God, Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day” (vv. 29–33).

It was at that point that God had disinherited the exodus generation: “And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers” (vv. 34–35). Had the sins of the fathers condemned the sons? Moses would later reveal this law: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16). Yet the sons had wandered with their fathers for 40 years. Their inheritance had been delayed. The effects of their fathers’ sin had been borne in part by the sons. *There is covenantal representation in history. There is hierarchy.* Their parents had lawfully been in authority over them. They had made a bad decision that affected their children. The children had participated in the sins of their fathers in the same way that they had participated in the sin of Adam. *Covenantal continuity* in history is based on *covenantal representation*. Sons inherit from fathers; they also participate in the sins of their fathers, which can be seen in the size and timing of the inheritance.

Moses reminded them of the two exceptions to the curse: Caleb (v. 36) and Joshua. “But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it” (v. 38). For four decades, Moses had encouraged Joshua. Now the time had arrived; Joshua’s time had come. It would soon be his assignment to lead Israel in the conquest of the Promised Land. The children of the exodus generation would gain what their parents had forfeited. The day of inheritance was imminent.

Their parents had rebelled against God’s announcement of the 40-year delay. They had immediately attacked the Amorites. As Moses had predicted (Num. 14:41–42), Israel lost that battle (vv. 41–44). From that point until the recent victories over Arad, Sihon, Og, and Moab-Midian, Israel was not allowed by God to fight. Israel was not entitled to the lands of Edom and Moab (Deut. 2:5, 9). Israelites had to buy whatever they wanted: “Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink” (v. 6). They had forfeited their inheritance; so, God refused to

allow them to engage in military conquest. Israel was not entitled to any nation's land, other than that owned by the Canaanites.

B. The Conquest of Canaan

The conquest of Canaan was a unique event. The land had been assigned to Israel in Abraham's day. But there was a time limit on the fulfillment of this promise: four generations (Gen. 15:16).

This raises a theological problem. God punished the exodus generation for their refusal to follow the advice given by Joshua and Caleb: begin the conquest. Yet He had prophesied to Abraham that the fourth generation would conquer. Why did God punish the exodus generation for not doing what He had told Abraham would not be done?

The third generation was called upon by God to conquer the Canaanites immediately after the exodus. "And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us. Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged" (Deut. 1:20–21). Yet the fourth generation was the promised heir (Gen. 15:16). How could God require the third generation to conquer Canaan?

This military conquest could have been achieved by the third generation's transfer of title to the inheritance to the fourth generation immediately following the exodus. This could have been achieved judicially by a transfer of military authority to the fourth generation, which was represented by Joshua and Caleb. These two men spoke for the fourth generation and its interests: immediate invasion. The other 10 spies spoke for the third generation. Had the third generation's representatives accepted the testimony of Joshua and Caleb, and had they been willing to transfer military leadership to Joshua and Caleb, Israel would have entered Canaan as the conqueror a generation early.

The judicial issue, and therefore the prophetic issue, was representation. Which generation's representatives would represent all of Israel in the imposition of corporate sanctions? The answer of the third generation: "Ours." This decision, publicly manifested by the congregation's attempt to stone Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:10), sealed their doom. They would all die in the wilderness (Num. 14:33).

The exodus generation's sin in rejecting God's command had condemned them to a life of wandering. The Amorites, i.e., the residents

of Canaan and the immediate surrounding areas—Arad, Sihon, and Og—were given extra time by God to work out the implications of their respective faiths. They were allowed to develop their rule. They had an important purpose in covenant history. They became negative examples for Israel: how not to worship and live. This leads me to a conclusion: *sin compounds over time*. It gets worse. It feeds on itself, building to a crescendo. The Amorites were filling up their cup of iniquity. In this sense, there is a kind of *progressive de-sanctification* that parallels progressive sanctification. Evil grows to the point where God will tolerate it no longer. Then He cuts it short.

The Amorites were building up an *economic inheritance* for the fourth generation of Israelites. “And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full. . .” (Deut. 6:10–11). Nevertheless, Canaan’s *spiritual inheritance* was an abomination. Israel would inherit the former but was forbidden to claim the latter. But how could this be? If Canaan’s spiritual inheritance was abominable, why not also the economic results of that inheritance? If the spiritual roots were perverse, why not also the fruits? How could an evil tree produce good fruit? “For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Luke 6:43).¹ This is the question of common grace.

C. Common Grace and Inheritance

Because man is made in the image of God, he cannot avoid certain common beliefs and evaluations. “Drop dead!” is a universally recognized negative phrase, just as “O, king, live forever” was a common term of respect in many ancient kingdoms, even though obviously impossible to fulfill in history.² Certain features of life are almost universally accepted as being desirable. Wealth is one of them, though not necessarily great wealth, which most men and societies acknowledge brings with it unpleasant consequences. Good health is another.

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

2. I Kings 1:31; Nehemiah 2:3; Daniel 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6, 21.

Nowhere is there anyone who would deny the truth of North's universally preferable trade-off: "It is better to be rich and healthy than it is to be poor and sick." (Of course, this must be qualified by the economist's *ceteris paribus*: other things remaining equal.)

There are common features of life that everyone acknowledges as preferable. Men share commonly agreed-upon goals: wealth in general, health in general. People seek to attain these preferred conditions of life. *This shared outlook is an aspect of common grace.* It makes economic cooperation possible among men of all religious and philosophical views.³ This is why the efforts of Canaanites in building up their farms and vineyards produced an inheritance for Israel. Men agree on the desirability of certain results. This does not validate their logic or other culturally derived methods of coming to conclusions. It does not validate their worship of idols in seeking God's favor. But it does mean that there must be a common acceptance of certain principles of action in order for individuals to prosper.

One of these principles is thrift. Men through hard experience are taught to "save something for a rainy day." They are told: "waste not, want not." They learn that "a penny saved is a penny earned."⁴ They learn not to eat their seed corn. Another principle is hard work. Men labor to subdue the earth in order that the earth might bring forth its fruits. The earth blooms because men work hard over long periods of time to convert the ground into something desirable.

D. Covenantal Limits to Growth

The life spans of men are shorter in the post-Flood world than they were before. Moses wrote: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Ps. 90:10). There are limits to the growth of capital under the authority of any individual. For the compounding process in the broadest sense to continue, he must find associates who share his vision and skills, so that he may make them heirs by leaving his capital to them.

By shortening men's life spans, God made the inheritance/disinheritance factor predominant in the building of His kingdom. If men

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

4. Assuming a rate of zero income taxation. In high income tax brackets, a penny saved is 1.4 pennies earned.

lived as long as Methuselah (Gen. 5:27), the compounding process of evil would not have been undermined nearly so effectively as it has been through the multiplication of inter-generational transfers of wealth. There has been a much greater dispersion of the wealth of covenant-breakers because of shorter lifespans. The godly corporate inheritance compounds through the generations through the dominion work of the church. It cannot compound long term through either the family or the state. The family inheritance is too easily dissipated through bad marriages, broken covenants, or unmotivated heirs, while the state is not creative. No institution matches the church for long-term compounding: succession. *By shortening all men's lives, God has subsidized covenant-keepers' corporate advantage in society until such time as Christians are in a majority.*

1. Progressive Inheritance Through Disinheritance

The Bible's system of covenant sanctions is clear: covenant-keepers inherit; covenant-breakers do not. Covenant-breakers are eventually disinherited by covenant-keepers. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).⁵ This transfer of inheritance was by war in the case of the Canaanites. But after this, Israel was to extend its process of progressive inheritance through disinheritance by economic means. One of the means of extending their dominion was extending credit. "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6).⁶ Their possession of wealth would multiply at the expense of covenant-breakers.

And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 41.

6. Chapter 37.

command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them (Deut. 28:11–14).⁷

Nevertheless, covenant-breakers were not to be pressured by covenant-keepers to borrow. Then how was it that their progressive disinheritance by Israel would be accomplished voluntarily? Why would they go into debt to Israel? For the same reason and in the same way that Esau was willing to sell his inheritance to Jacob (Gen. 25:30–33). Esau was more *present-oriented* than Jacob was. He valued present gratification more highly than Jacob did. Jacob was willing to give red pottage to Esau in exchange for Esau's present legal title to his future inheritance. A voluntary exchange became possible because the two men had different time perspectives. Jacob was upper class; Esau was lower class.⁸

So, there are limits to growth for the covenant-breaker. The ultimate limit is eschatological: the final judgment. God will bring to a close the conflict between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. But, prior to this eschatologically representative event, God disinherits those who hate Him. He allows covenant-breaking societies to compound their sin and their wealth for a few generations, but He allows covenant-keepers to multiply their righteousness and wealth for many generations. "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:5–6). This does not mean thousands of people; it means *thousands of generations*. The literalism of "thousands of generations" would mean at least 80,000 years (40 x 2 x 1000). I believe this language is symbolic; it means until the end of time.⁹

7. Chapter 69.

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 26:D.

9. Here is one reason why I believe this. Our memories are limited. We cannot recall more than a tiny fraction of our own lives. In studying the records of history, we can discover and then summarize only a few representative fragments. We remember far less than we read. So, if mankind survives for tens of millennia, men in the future will find it impossible to master the covenantal past, even when they live long lives (Isa. 65:17–20). The longer the race survives, the less we can understand of man's history. We become overwhelmed by its complexity and diversity.

A lengthy passage later in Moses' monologue makes this time perspective clearer. First comes God's covenant promise. Next comes God's fulfillment of the promise by giving victory to His people. This should produce in them ever-greater covenantal obedience, which in turn will produce ever-greater blessings. This is the compounding process, and it is tied to corporate obedience. The compounding process is covenantal.

But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;¹⁰ And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them. Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee. And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee. If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them: but shalt well remember what the LORD thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt (Deut. 7:8–18).

A covenant-breaking society can experience long-term growth. But the period of economic growth for a covenant-breaking society is vastly shorter than the long-term growth open to a covenant-keeping society. The compounding process in any area of life produces accel-

10. Here, only a thousand generations are mentioned, not thousands. The language of thousands of generations is symbolic.

ating growth. When you re-invest the earnings, and these investments also participate in the compounding process, the numbers get astronomically large very fast. The higher the rate of growth, the faster the things being compounded reach high numbers.

God was telling Israel that covenantal obedience produces growth. Growth produces victory. No matter how low the rate of growth, if the compounding process goes on long enough, it will engulf the world. It will reach environmental limits of growth. The world is not infinite.¹¹ *This is God's way of pointing to the end of time.* There are environmental limits to growth. There is just so much "stuff" to inherit. There is also a temporal limit to growth: the final judgment. The existence of compound growth for covenant-keepers points to the final victory in time of God's kingdom. It also points to the disinheritance of Satan's kingdom in history.

2. Cutting Off Growth

The key to compounding is continual reinvestment. It does not matter how low the rate of growth is; if this growth continues through time long enough, it will eventually swallow up everything in the environment that feeds it. This is the message of Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare. The hare achieves a rapid conquest over space, but he does not sustain it. The tortoise can achieve only a slow conquest of space, but he never quits moving forward. The tortoise eventually overtakes the sleeping hare. "Slowly but surely" is a familiar folk phrase that illustrates this principle of comparative growth. So is "little by little." Isaiah wrote: "But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (Isa. 28:13).

God cuts off the growth of covenant-breaking societies. They grow only until their iniquity becomes full. Then they either fall or are converted to faith in God. Their growth ceases if they continue to reject God. They experience setbacks. Meanwhile, the compounding process goes on for covenant-keeping societies. Even if it is reversed temporarily, it returns.

The church is the heir of God's covenantal promise of growth. It

11. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970) (<http://bit.ly/TheologyCurve>); reprinted in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

survives all setbacks. Its growth may slow down for a time. Covenant-breaking organizations and even whole societies may outrun the church for a time. But the church is never stopped. It is like the tortoise in the fable.

Biblical principles of limited civil government, free trade, thrift, and freedom of contract produce compound economic growth. As the West has applied these principles, it has grown rich.¹² Another major factor was confidence in the possibility of long-term economic growth. This was an implication of postmillennialism, which was rediscovered in Holland and Scotland in the seventeenth century. Then there was the issue of the legitimacy of profit-seeking. That, too, was acknowledged by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. The idea spread to the British Isles in the eighteenth century.¹³

All other social orders fell behind the West in this regard. The lure of wealth is universal. The West's principles of economics are now being adopted by societies in Asia. The economic results of this adoption have been spectacular since the end of World War II in 1945. But these principles of economic development have been secularized by their expositors. These principles have been explained as contract-based, not covenant-based. No sovereign, personal God is said to sustain the growth process. In fact, economists have been more ready than any other academic group to dismiss God as irrelevant to theory. They were the first academic profession to secularize their discussions: in the late seventeenth century.¹⁴

The growth of economic output has led to the growth of population. All over the non-industrial world, populations are growing as never before in man's history. In the wealthy West, however, reproduction rates are falling. Were it not for immigration, these rates would be much lower. After two centuries of compound economic growth, Europe has lost its faith in the God of the Bible and its faith in the future. No European nation is reproducing itself biologically; all are below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman.¹⁵ Most of these nations are inviting Muslims to come and live, to do the low-paying jobs that the domestic populations refuse to do at the wages

12. Nathan Rosenberg and L. E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

13. This is the thesis of Deirdre McCloskey in a proposed six-volume set titled *The Bourgeois Era*. Two volumes have been published as of 2011.

14. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1963), ch. 6.

15. Pat Buchanan, *The Death of the West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

offered. Muslims have large families, although this is beginning to change in Western Europe, and has dramatically changed in Iran. They are steadily replacing the indigenous populations. The same attitude regarding family size has appeared in the United States. In 1957, the average American family produced almost four children. By 1971, this had fallen to two children, where it remains. Immigrant families, especially from Latin America, were the main exceptions. The West's inheritance is steadily being transferred to residents and citizens whose cultural roots are in the southern latitudes.

Today, we see the covenantal realm of Satan expanding. The West has generally abandoned Christianity, and the Third World has yet to adopt it, although there are revivals going on in sub-Sahara Africa, Latin America, and China.¹⁶ But the growth in the number of covenant-breakers is dwarfing the growth of covenant-keepers. This has put the church on the defensive.

If widespread revival does not come before the end of time, and if compound economic growth nevertheless continues, then the covenantal social theory implied by the Book of Deuteronomy can be said to have been annulled at some time prior to the twentieth century, presumably by the New Covenant. If Mosaic social theory is no longer in effect, then there can be no social theory that is explicitly based on the Bible. *If there is no predictability between corporate covenant-breaking and God's corporate negative sanctions, then biblical social theory is not possible.* This would place Christians permanently at the mercy of covenant-breaking social philosophers. The wisdom of covenant-breaking man would triumph: one or another of the competing, irreconcilable systems of social cause and effect would triumph. Christians would be asked to baptize the reigning social theories of their nation. No doubt they would do so. They have done so ever since the days of the early church, when Christian apologists adopted Greek categories of philosophy in the name of Christ.¹⁷ They have done so in the name of epistemological neutrality and, in modern times, political pluralism.¹⁸ But this would not solve the problem of discovering what God has spoken authoritatively in New Covenant history.

16. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

17. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), Part IV: "The Church Fathers."

18. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise." See also Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

Conclusion

When God's people refuse to seek His wisdom and obey His word, they forfeit many opportunities. This was true in the wilderness era. It is equally true in the modern world. When God's law is not honored by God's people, they always find themselves progressively enslaved by covenant-keepers: psychologically, philosophically, culturally, economically, and politically. God prophesied this, too (Deut. 28:15–20). This corporate cursing cuts off the growth process. If corporate blessing were never restored, covenant-breakers would be given equal footing with God's people. But this cutting off of God's people is always temporary (Deut. 4:25–31).¹⁹

Even though one generation may forfeit great opportunities, a subsequent generation can make up for lost time. *Succession covers a multitude of losses*. The goal, then, is to train up the next generation, provide it with capital, and keep the compounding process alive. As the capital base of money, talent, wisdom, and experience continues to grow, society can live off the “interest.” That is, subsequent generations are not required to save as religiously. As time goes on, the investment begins to sustain more and more projects. Dominion is extended because of the covenant community's access to a huge capital base. It can afford to make some mistakes. It need not guard its wealth so closely. But it must not live exclusively on accumulated capital. Each generation must leave its legacy to the next. Each generation should leave God's covenant society a little richer. *Biblical society is value-added society*. This is the primary theme of Deuteronomy: adding value through inheritance.

The exodus generation had refused to honor the compounding process. They had forfeited its opportunity to inherit through Joshua's leadership. They had held on tightly to power and authority by refusing to surrender the inheritance to the fourth generation after the spies' return from the Promised Land. The third generation could have inherited through the military leadership of Joshua, but they refused. Thus, they broke the compounding process. They wandered in the wilderness until all of them died except Joshua and Caleb. Then the compounding process could begin again with an enlarged capital base: the wealth of Canaan.

19. Chapter 10.

3

DELEGATED AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL ORDER

And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone: The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude. (The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!) How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife? Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you (Deut. 1:9–13).

The theocentric focus of this law is God’s delegation of judicial authority to men. Authority is an aspect of point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. The Division of Labor

Unlike God, no man is omniscient. Men must create alternatives to omniscient judgment. Moses had been burdened with the task of rendering judgment to all the people prior to Exodus 18. But he could not govern as the patriarchs had governed. There were too many Israelites. Israel needed a judicial hierarchy.²

While this law resembled a seed law in the sense that it derived from the fulfilled promise of seed to Abraham, it in fact was a cross-boundary law that applies to every commonwealth larger than an extended family. The problem of the division of judicial labor is to be solved by the creation of a hierarchical appeals court.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion by Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 2 (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

Here Moses reminded the conquest generation of the nation's first major crisis of authority. Exodus 18 records the event in detail. A long line of disputants formed outside Moses' tent every day. "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening" (Ex. 18:13). His father-in-law warned him that the magnitude of this burden as a judge would overwhelm Moses as well as the people. "Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone" (v. 18). He counselled Moses to establish a hierarchical chain of command. There would be judges of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands (v. 21): 60,000, 12,000, 6,000, and 600, or 78,600 judges.³

These judges were untrained and untried. They could provide only imperfect justice, but they could do this on a systematic basis, day in and day out. This was better for Israel than the perfect justice provided by Moses, because in order to gain access to this justice, men would spend their days waiting in line. The value of their time was greater than the cost of imperfect justice.⁴

Moses agreed to accept Jethro's suggestion. He must have recognized the truth of Jethro's warning. There was not enough time and not enough Moses to provide justice to the entire nation. The burden of delayed justice would oppress the people. Meanwhile, Moses would waste away. And after he was dead, where would the people receive justice? Who would then render perfect justice? Better to train up a generation of judges in preparation for the transition. Better to establish a tradition of imperfect judges rendering imperfect justice on a widespread basis. Swift imperfect justice is preferable to delayed perfect justice.

B. The Decision to Delegate

One of the most precious of scarce economic resources is managerial talent. It commands a high price in a competitive, growing economy. No one knows how to mass produce it. There are so many competing management training systems available that no one knows which one is most effective. In different kinds of businesses, different

3. This was Rashi's eleventh-century estimate: Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo) Yitzhaki, known as Rashi, *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum, translators, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, [1934] 1985 [Jewish year: 5745]), II, p. 95.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 19.

management skills are required. Because the supply of effective managers is limited, they command a high price. Societies seek substitutes for managerial talent, such as compensation by commission (self-motivation) and computerized information.

The creative person usually finds it difficult to delegate all but the simplest tasks. He does not trust his subordinates' efforts. He may be willing to delegate to those who have special information in areas he is unfamiliar with, but the more talented he is in several areas, the less willing he is to delegate.

The division of labor is hampered by those who refuse to delegate. The English economist David Ricardo offered an example of two producers, one of whom is more productive than his trading partner in producing a particular product. Because his skill is even greater in producing some other product, which commands a higher price, which his trading partner wants to buy, he should allow the trading partner to produce the first product and then trade for it. Similarly, a soldier who can shoot straight when under fire, but who also types fast, should concentrate on his unique advantage: shooting. There are more skilled typists than skilled shooters. Their value to an army is less than the value of straight-shooting, front-line soldiers. Even if the typist is a less-skilled typist than the straight-shooter is, the army could be overrun if the men on the front lines cannot shoot straight. That semi-skilled typist should be recruited from a pool of men who cannot shoot straight under fire.

The general who staffs his headquarters with near-sighted men who are skilled managers would be wise to delegate management to them. His job is to design better battle plans than the enemy general does. Only if the task of the senior commander is to hold together skilled generals who are in competition with each other should he be known for his management skills.⁵

In effect, the delegator is asking his subordinates to trade with him. They will provide certain forms of output within the company; he will provide other forms. His job is to put together a team whose combined output is greater than the sum of the individual parts of that team would have been, had he not organized it. If he is successful, he multiplies his efforts. He gains the output of others in a combined effort.

5. Dwight D. Eisenhower is a classic example of a manager-general. His job, 1942 to 1945, was to keep British, American, and Commonwealth commanding generals from undermining each other.

C. Multiplication and Authority

Moses offered a prayer of blessing in the middle of his exposition on the hierarchy of civil authority. The King James translators placed this prayer in parentheses. “(The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!)” (v. 11). He had just told them that God had already multiplied their numbers. They had witnessed this growth. Now, he prayed for more.

This is the dominion impulse. It involves the multiplication of all assets, including population.⁶ He immediately asked the proper question: How could he bear the burden placed on him as the supreme civil judge? He saw clearly that as the number of people multiplied, the number of disputes would multiply. It is likely that the number of disputes would rise even faster than the number of people. Without imposing new rules of behavior, doubling the number of people in a room will more than double the noise, as people talk louder to overcome the noise of additional people talking. The same is true of lawsuits in a litigious society.

Moses had understood that the blessing of additional people would soon become a curse if the judicial order were not restructured. Jethro offered the solution: a series of appeals courts. Any growing organization faces a similar problem. As the number of details increases, there must be institutional alterations to keep the details from overwhelming the system. A well-designed system must either find ways of standardizing ways of dealing with these details or else find ways of resisting growth. For example, a company that pursues growth must avoid the temptation to tinker with the structure of the firm in order to deal with lots of unique problems in unique ways. It must devise standard ways to deal with unique problems. If it tries to deal with too many unique problems, its ability to grow will be thwarted. It will become bogged down in details. It must treat unique problems as parts of larger aggregates to which familiar rules apply. It must smooth over the small distinctions. This is especially true of a price-competitive firm that seeks growth through cost-cutting and mass production.

Similarly, a civil government must resist the temptation to solve every social problem, review every case, and establish case law precedents by creating solutions to difficult and non-standard disputes. “Hard cases make bad law” is an ancient saying in the common law

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1.

tradition.

There must be an increase in authority as complexity increases. The question is this: Where should this increase take place? At the top of the social system or the bottom? The traditional socialist argument is that increasing social complexity requires more centralization and more planning at the top.⁷ Government must assert its authority, central government especially. This argument was challenged by F. A. Hayek in the late 1930s and 1940s. As societies grow more complex, he argued, they should decentralize. Central planners do not possess sufficient knowledge to micro-manage an advanced and growing economy. Social complexity is too great. The only source of knowledge that is sufficient to manage this growing complexity is the free market, with its price system, its sanctions (profit and loss), its specialization of knowledge, and its decentralized power structure.⁸

Because God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, complexity is not a threat to Him. He can decentralize authority to man without any fear of losing His sovereignty. The same pattern is mandated for man: the willingness to decentralize, to delegate authority. By delegating authority, men reap the benefits of the division of labor. Others are given opportunities to serve in a leadership capacity. The talents of more men are called forth by a system of rules that allows those with skills to rise in the hierarchy.

Second, there are multiple hierarchies in a biblical society. There is no unitary system of authority which grants all the favors and receives all the acclaim. There are many areas of service and many chains of command. The civil hierarchy is severely limited by biblical law in what it can lawfully do. It can suppress public evil through the imposition of negative sanctions. But this leaves open many other areas of productivity, power, and honor within a biblical society.

Thus, by limiting the power of civil government as well as its jurisdiction, biblical law creates the judicial basis of a society that can grow in complexity without mandating the concentration of power to preserve social order. In fact, an increase in social order should accom-

7. The classic statement of this position is Chapter 3 of Frederick Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1882). This chapter first appeared in Engels' *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (1878), Part III, Chapter II. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), vol. 25, pp. 254–71.

8. F. A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (1945); reprinted in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>)

pany the multiplication of wealth, numbers, and knowledge. What creates social disorder is sin and its outward manifestations, not complexity as such. If the increasing complexity of society is the result of voluntary human action under God's law—self-government under God—then it is not a threat to the social order. On the contrary, this complexity is a blessing for the social order. When each man can find his unique area of maximum service—to God and man—a social order flourishes. The extension of the division of labor allows men to match their highly specialized productive talents with customer demand. The multiplication of producers extends each man's authority by narrowing his area of service. This increase in an individual's authority is the outcome of his increased productivity. He has access to additional capital because investors shift their investments from less productive employers of workers to more productive workers. It is not necessary for the state to centralize its authority in a doomed quest for greater social order. If it does, there will be a decrease in social order.

When men complain that “things are getting too complicated these days,” they mean that they are having trouble keeping up with social change. Their surroundings are changing fast. Yet every man loves to discover an opportunity to better himself that had not existed before. *But every new opportunity adds to the complexity of society.* With every new opportunity comes the potential for a better world. The fact is, a member of some primitive tribe can learn to operate an electric light switch as effortlessly and as absent-mindedly as any modern man does. Within a few months, he will want his own motorbike. Social complexity comes in enticingly simple steps.

If some people want simplicity, they can buy it. The Amish live simple lives, but most people think the price is too high: eighth-grade educations, no automobiles, no computers, no electricity (except in the barn), and no buttons or zippers. The visible mark of the true “plain person” is hook and loop clothing. The visible mark of heresy is the button and eye. A zipper indicates full-scale apostasy. And so it should, for the zipper is one of modern man's most amazing little technologies, so simple by most men's standards that they pay no attention to it. Yet who can explain it? Like a sewing machine's stitch, the zipper is incomprehensible to most people. Dedicated resistance to zippers necessarily marks the anti-complexity worldview of the Amish: the temptation of the seemingly simple and cheap device that opens the door to complexity on a scale that no previous civilization could have imagined. To the Amish, a zipper is as welcome as it would have been

to the high priest of Israel, had one been installed on the veil of the temple.

When sin multiplies, however, an increase in state authority may be called for. This extension of authority should not be centralized. The threat to liberty of central authority is too great. Even with God's agent Moses as the supreme civil judge, Jethro warned that Israel would suffer. Moses possessed too much authority. Better to decentralize state authority to untrained judges than to concentrate authority in one man. Such centralized authority will undermine freedom, reduce complexity, reduce the division of labor, and cut short the multiplication of wealth. Men will stand in long lines seeking justice rather than getting on with living.

Conclusion

Moses had to delegate authority in order to save himself and the nation from exhaustion. The complexity of a large society overwhelms the best efforts of the best men at the top to deal with the inevitable disputes that arise among men. The solution is judicial decentralization and the delegation of judicial authority. This brings forth new knowledge that would not have manifested itself in a system of concentrated political power.

But how are disputes to be handled? By a fixed law, a predictable legal order, and self-government. Biblical social order begins with grace. The civil manifestation of this grace is God's revealed law. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). To deal with the multiplication of disputes, society requires the multiplication of judges, not all of whom are civil magistrates. A society that seeks multiplication as well as the concentration of political power will find that these goals are unattainable, long term. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 provided the most graphic proof of this principle in modern times, and perhaps in all history: an enormous empire, based on the concentration of power, simply collapsed in a period of a few weeks, at the cost of only three lives. The Soviet Union had strangled itself in bureaucracy and misinformation, and had lost the will to resist, let alone expand. The top-down hierarchy of the centrally planned economy becomes unproductive and socially brittle.

A biblically structured social order reveals a multiplicity of hier-

archies, each with its own jurisdiction, none with final earthly jurisdiction, all governed by God's Bible-revealed law. There must be ordained judges in a series of appeals courts, both civil and ecclesiastical. Voters in both church and state must retain the authority to revoke the ordination of these judges. Where the voters' authority is absent, in either church or state, the institutional supreme court inevitably becomes a legislative body. It asserts some form of divine right theory: the denial of any earthly appeal beyond the court's authority.⁹

9. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

4

THE FACE OF MAN

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as judge. Sanctions are associated with point four of the biblical covenant model, yet chapters 1:6–4:49 are categorized as belonging to point two: hierarchy. Two observations are relevant here: (1) sanctions are always associated with authority, i.e., the legal right to impose sanctions; (2) sanctions—positive and negative—are the means of inheritance/disinheritance. The God of the Bible was calling the fourth generation (Gen. 15:16) to impose negative sanctions on Canaan on His behalf. Warfare was to be the means of their inheritance. They should not be afraid of the Canaanites. Once in control of the Promised Land, they should also not be afraid of evil-doers. A hierarchical appeals court must settle these judicial issues.

A. Judicial Fear: An Inescapable Concept

Men are to fear God more than they fear men. Moses warned judges not to fear any man to the point of rendering false judgment in God's name. He who is ordained by law to speak as God's judicial representative must speak an honest word. This is the basis of the overriding principle of biblical law: the rule of law. "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (Ex. 12:49).¹ The corollary to the rule of law is the principle found in this verse: there must be no respect of persons. This law is repeated

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

throughout Scripture.²

There is a theocentric framework for this law: God as supreme judge. “For there is no respect of persons with God” (Rom. 2:11). “And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him” (Eph. 6:9). “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (I Peter 1:17). The warning is clear: “But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (James 2:9). Judges must render impartial judgment in God’s name, on His authority. This was not a seed law or a land law. It was a cross-boundary law—perhaps *the* cross-boundary law: the rule of God’s law.³

The governing principle of biblical civil justice is victim’s rights.⁴ To achieve the rule of law in specific case law applications, the judge must protect the victim. The judge must declare his judgment in terms of God’s law and the evidence in front of the court. Nothing must interfere with his declaration: not bribes, not favoritism, and not fear of repercussions. “Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s.”

The civil judge hands down judgment in God’s name. He acts as a representative of God, declaring God’s judgment in history. This is what makes a civil judge a minister of God. Men are to fear him because of his office as God’s judicial representative. “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13: 4).⁵

Men must fear God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The Old Testament declares this repeatedly. “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:2).⁶ Men will either fear God or fear some aspect of the creation. They will either begin with God’s wisdom or man’s wisdom, but *the beginning of wisdom is fear*. The man who fears noth-

2. Deuteronomy 16:19; II Chronicles 19:7; Proverbs 24:23; 28:21.

3. On these categories of the Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

4. Gary North, *Victim’s Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

6. Job 28:28, Psalms 111:10, Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33.

ing is a fool. He has not understood the threat of God's eternal negative sanctions. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

The judge is cautioned not to fear the face of man. This language is obviously symbolic. No one fears another person's face. Men fear the vengeful impulses which lie behind grim faces. "But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (Gen. 4:5). Cain's face foretold trouble to come for Abel. No judge is to fear such a face. He is to fear God and hell, not those standing before the bar of justice.

Unrighteous men are to fear a righteous judge. In a perverse society under the rule of evil men, a righteous judge must live under the threat of negative sanctions. Thus, *judicial fear is an inescapable* concept. Either covenant-breakers fear judges who uphold God's law, or else covenant-keepers fear judges who uphold a rival legal order—or should fear them. But political pluralists prefer it this way.

B. Time Perspective and Sanctions

Basic to all human action is the concept of time preference. We act in the present. We are responsible in the present. We consider the future when we are making our decisions in the present, but we value the present more than we do the future. We apply a discount to the future. Economists call this discount the rate of interest.⁷

People vary with respect to their assessment of the importance of the future. Some people are more future-oriented than others. They understand that success in the future is heavily dependent on actions taken in the present. They are willing to sacrifice present enjoyment for the sake of future enjoyment. They save money at a much lower rate of interest compared to the rate which must be offered to a present-oriented person in order to persuade him to save.

Edward Banfield has defined class position in terms of time perspective. An upper-class person is more future-oriented than a middle-class person, who is in turn more future-oriented than a lower-class person.⁸ An upper-class person may not have more money early in life than a middle-class person—a medical student, for example—

7. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

8. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), ch. 3.

but over time his devotion to thrift and hard work will normally produce personal wealth.

This insight regarding time perspective has implications for law enforcement, especially sanctions. If a person is extremely present-oriented, he cares little about the distant consequences of his actions. He discounts future pain so heavily that present enjoyment looms far larger in his decision-making. Even if he thinks he may be caught, tried, convicted, and sentenced, he dismisses the end result as relatively meaningless. He dramatically subordinates *then* to *now*.

Because God's law is supposed to be implemented without respect to persons, both the present-oriented person and the future-oriented person face the same civil sanctions. The existence of time preference tells us that a greater number of present-oriented people will commit crimes than future-oriented people. They fear the future less. The threatened civil sanctions do not appear equally threatening. Economic theory tells us that when the price of anything is lowered, more of it will be demanded. The price of criminal behavior is perceived to be lower by a present-oriented person than by a future-oriented person.

C. Capital Punishment

To deal with extreme present-orientation, God's law establishes the sanction of execution. The magnitude and permanence of this negative sanction impresses even the present-oriented criminal. Discounting death to zero price takes a unique degree of commitment to the present. A hero may do this for the sake of a greater cause. Most criminals are not this present-oriented.

The biblical case for capital punishment rests on the principle that some crimes are an especial affront to God. He demands that the convicted criminal be delivered immediately into His court. In the case of murder, the victim cannot announce a lesser penalty. Unlike Jesus on the cross, who asked God to forgive those who persecuted Him, the murder victim is silent. So, God requires the criminal's execution.

A positive side effect of capital punishment is the inability of the criminal to gain revenge against those who condemned him. Those who commit crimes so heinous that the state may not legally punish them with anything less than execution are unable to threaten judges and jurors. When the state substitutes other penalties, the criminal can later seek revenge.⁹ In the name of leniency to criminals, the state

9. The classic American western *High Noon* (1952) is built on this theme.

places at risk those law-abiding citizens who announced judgment in God's name.

In the United States, the abandonment of capital punishment was accompanied by an unprecedented increase in crime, 1960 to 1975.¹⁰ It was an era in which traditional conservative humanism was visibly replaced by various forms of liberal humanism. The state substituted new sanctions for old. It sought to heal evil men rather than condemn them. It sought to rehabilitate criminals rather than punish them. The healing state became the lenient state—lenient on criminals, but harsh on their victims and those who lived in fear of criminals. This was consistent with left-wing humanism's concept of the state as an agency of healing, of positive sanctions.

The previous decade had launched an era of judicial activism,¹¹ but in 1960 there were still signs culturally that an older conservative humanism prevailed in the thinking of the general public. Yet within one decade, 1960 to 1970, this older attitude was abandoned by policymakers and judicial theorists. For decades, liberal elitists and academics had called into question the legitimacy of traditional negative sanctions against crime. The 1950s marked the last decade of the common man's dam of resolve. As Irving Kristol wrote, "Prior to the victory of modern liberal dogmas in the early 1950s, the police and the courts could cope with common street crime, as well as burglaries or robberies, without having to defer to a catalog of criminals' constitutional rights, most of which, at the time, were still undiscovered. It may have made for less perfect justice, but it did deter wanton criminality among the young and ensured a more trusting, less fearful society."¹² A new judicial activism silenced conservative critics. The book title chosen by Karl Menninger, one of the reformers, said it all: *The Crime of Punishment*.¹³ The liberal elite succeeded in persuading voters to abandon "wild west" justice: the justice of predictable negative sanctions. The result was an unprecedented increase in crime.

10. James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), ch. 1; U.S. Senator James L. Buckley, "Foreword," Frank Carrington, *The Victims* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975).

11. The symbolic figure here was U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, beginning with his appointment to the Court in 1953. The "Warren Court" was decidedly liberal.

12. Irving Kristol, "The Way We Were," *Wall Street Journal* (July 14, 1995).

13. Karl Menninger, M.D., *The Crime of Punishment* (New York: Viking, 1968).

D. Liberty and Justice

Liberty requires the rule of law. The rule of law means predictable law. Men must believe that evil-doers will be punished if the evidence testifies against them. Their victims will be economically rewarded by criminals, even if this means selling the criminals into slavery until their victims are repaid.

The predictability of the law increases the likelihood that negative civil sanctions will be imposed. The criminal already discounts the personal cost of negative future sanctions. High time preference—a steep discounting of the future—is one aspect of criminal behavior generally.¹⁴ If the criminal understands that most crimes go unsolved and that most solved crimes go unpunished, his heavy discounting of the future drives his present costs of crime almost to zero. This increases the amount of crime in society: as the cost of something falls, more of it is demanded. By increasing the predictability of negative sanctions, the legal system decreases the amount of crime by raising its cost to criminals.

There is another aspect of discounting: the victim's. The victim estimates the likelihood of negative sanctions' being imposed on the criminal. If the likelihood is low, why go to the trouble of seeking justice? Why take the risk? Also, will the victim be rewarded if the criminal is convicted? Is there the possibility of positive sanctions? The more likely the positive sanctions, the more likely the victim will co-operate with law-enforcement officials in solving the crime.

The first stage in the retreat of a society from the rule of biblical law is the substitution of an ideal of social revenge for the biblical ideal of victim's rights. The ideal of victim's rights is always abandoned by the humanist state, which regards all crime as crime against the state. The humanist state imposes negative sanctions, but always at taxpayers' expense. The symbol of this legal order is the prison. The negative sanction of prison brings no positive sanctions to victims except in the sense of revenge. The biblical judicial ideal of victim's rights fades; it is replaced either by a theory of social revenge or by a theory of criminal rehabilitation. These rival theories can trade places back and forth in the public's estimation, as each is tried and found wanting.

In both cases, the citizenry fears the criminal. In the first case, the

14. Edward Banfield, "Present-Orientedness and Crime," in Randy E. Barnett and John Hegel III (eds.), *Assessing the Criminal: Restitution, Retribution, and the Legal Process* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1977), pp. 140–41.

criminal is locked up for years. He is removed from the presence of law-abiding people. He associates with a caste of professional criminals in prison. He is prohibited from making economic restitution to his victims. Citizens deny the criminal's social redemption through personal restitution. They have no trust in biblical law as a means of restoration. They trust only in the state's vengeance. "Lock him up and throw away the key!" In the second case, he is paroled early and released back into society before he makes restitution to his victims. Citizens receive into their midst hardened criminals. They learn to fear these men, who in turn fear neither God nor law-abiding men.

When the fear of evil men undermines a community's fear of God, that community is eventually going to experience tyranny. The worst men will claw their way to the top through the imposition of fear. A subculture based on rule by fear has an enormous competitive advantage in a society that fears men more than it fears God. When this subculture becomes dominant, the rule of law becomes rule by criminals.

The mark of a community's commitment to liberty is its commitment to biblical law. God's law must be enforced. The countenances of the citizenry must be set against the countenances of criminals. The citizenry represents God. Their ordained civil agents represent them before the face of God and represent God before the faces of criminals. Civil authority flows from God to citizens to the civil magistrate.¹⁵ They are judges insofar as they bring sanctions, positive or negative, against their ordained representatives. They are told not to fear the face of man.

Conclusion

The rule of law requires the honoring of the principle of no respect for persons. God's law is unified, for it reflects His moral unity. It is universally binding, for He is universally sovereign. Judgment should not be made unpredictable through the imposition of unpredictable sanctions. "Different strokes for different folks" is not a biblical principle of justice.

When the sense of justice departs from a society, that society becomes vulnerable to appeals by criminals, guilt-manipulating politicians, revolutionaries, tyrants, and others who offer to get even with the present order: the politics of revenge. When statist revenge is sub-

15. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

stituted for personal restitution, a society searches in vain for a judge who will bring stability, peace, and justice. When statist rehabilitation is substituted for personal restitution, a society also searches in vain for stability, peace, and justice. In both cases, liberty is at risk. The predictability of just laws becomes either the predictability of unjust laws or the unpredictability of any law.

The issue here is hierarchy. Civil law is enforced by legal representatives who serve as God's agents and also as the community's delegated agents. The judge must not fear law-breakers, for he declares God's law. He must fear God, not men. Criminals must fear civil judges, who speak in the name of God, and who mandate God's civil sanctions. One mark of a disintegrating social order is the criminals' loss of fear of the civil law. When judges in turn fear law-breakers, this fear spreads to the entire society.

Courage is as basic to law-enforcement as it is to military service. There is supposed to be a covenantal hierarchy of fear: judges must fear both God and the voters; criminals must fear God and the judges. The society of Satan is based on a perverse hierarchy: criminals fear other criminals; judges and citizens fear criminals. They fear the faces of evil men.

5

BUREAUCRATIC COUNSEL

Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged. And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe (Deut. 1:21–23).

The theocentric principle of this law is God in His office as supreme military commander. He gives orders. These orders are to be obeyed. In His capacity as supreme commander, He possesses omniscience, an incommunicable attribute. Men are not omniscient. They require means of increasing the supply of accurate information.

A. God's Spies

In this case, Israel needed spies. The spies would enter the land of Canaan, evaluate its vulnerability to invasion, and return to speak accurately on God's behalf. They were to think God's thoughts after Him, as faithful representatives. Thinking God's thoughts after Him is part of the hierarchy of covenantal dominion.

Moses here recounts the story of the exodus generation's rebellion against God's command that they immediately conquer Canaan. God gave the command, and the people did not initially reject it. Instead, they added a suggestion, namely, that they be allowed to gather information regarding the best route into Canaan for military purposes. Moses approved of this request. He selected a representative from each of the tribes to conduct the reconnaissance operation.

What appeared to be a sensible pre-war tactic turned out to be the first in a series of retreats. The nation did not want to challenge the residents of Canaan, but their leaders did not admit this in the early

stages of the operation. Moses went on to recount the story of their rebellion, how the exodus generation and those men old enough in the next generation to have participated in the conquest had been prohibited from entering the land. Only Caleb and Joshua were excepted (Deut. 1:36, 38). They had shown resolve regarding the conquest; for this, they were spared the ignominy of having their personal inheritance in the land revoked by God. The next generation would inherit: “Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it” (v. 39).

God’s negative sanction of disinheritance matched the nation’s negative strategy of non-confrontation. He wanted Israel to disinherit the Canaanites; this negative sanction would have been a positive sanction for Israel. This was what economists call a zero-sum game: the gains of the winners are offset by the losses of the losers. Warfare has this characteristic. Israel wanted to avoid war; so, the spies recommended non-confrontation. This would have permanently disinherited Israel and permanently confirmed the continuity of inheritance in Canaan. *Disinheritance is an inescapable concept*. Either Israel would be disinherited or the Canaanites would be. By escaping the sanction of war, Israel wanted to escape war’s negative sanctions. But this granted immunity to Canaanites. It also constituted a negative sanction against Israel’s heirs. Ultimately, it constituted a negative sanction against God, who had promised Abraham that the fourth generation would inherit (Gen. 15:16). Had Israel’s strategy of non-confrontation been allowed to stand, God would have been exposed before His enemies as one who did not fulfill His promises.

B. A Matter of Strategy

God had a strategy: the conquest of Canaan. This strategy was announced three times: to Abraham once and to Moses twice, at the beginning and end of the wilderness period. first, He had told Abraham that his heirs would conquer Canaan in the fourth generation after their descent into Egypt. This was Joshua’s generation. Second, He had told the exodus generation to begin the offensive campaign (Deut. 1:21). This was their responsibility, God said, yet anyone who knew of the promise to Abraham would have known that this generation would not conquer. The only way for the third generation to partici-

ate in the conquest of Canaan was to surrender leadership to the fourth generation. Third, at the end of the wilderness period, God told Moses and Joshua that the conquest must begin soon. This was carried out under Joshua.

The conquest of Canaan was ethically and prophetically mandatory. The question was: Which generation would carry it out? Those to whom the command to march into Canaan was first given soon rebelled against this strategy. They rebelled, not by citing the specific details of the Abrahamic promise—fourth generation, not third—but by announcing that the Promised Land was not worth the military effort to inherit. “And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature” (Num. 13:32). In short, they tampered with the visible evidence. They said that this place could not possibly be the Promised Land of milk and honey. The land ate up its normal inhabitants; you had to be a giant to prosper.

The recalcitrant captains should have gone to Moses with this request. “Tell God that we are not ready to lead this campaign. He told our father Abraham that the fourth generation would conquer Canaan. We are not that appointed generation. We respect the details of His prophecy. We do not want to get ahead of God’s prophetic timetable. We also do not want to fall behind. We are ready to transfer leadership of the army of the Lord to our older sons, under Joshua’s command.” Had they put their request in terms of God’s promise to Abraham, they would have demonstrated their commitment to His word. Instead, they tried to thwart His word by declaring the land unfit to conquer.

God’s strategy for Canaan was military conquest: the imposition of final negative historical sanctions. The details of this operation were left to Moses and the captains of God’s holy army. God did not tell them the best route into Canaan. He did not do their tactical work for them. He announced to Moses the timing of the conquest, but He left to Moses and his advisors the responsibility for implementing the general strategy. That is, God delegated responsibility to His designated representatives.

Moses accepted the offer of the captains to allow spies to go into the land for reconnaissance purposes. This seemed to be a tactical matter. What he did not understand until after their return was that

this request was not tactical; it was strategic. The generation of the exodus had no intention of risking their lives to conquer Canaan. God had spoken, but perhaps they could buy more time. The request regarding the tactical reconnaissance operation was their means of delaying the implementation of the mandated strategy.

C. Rule by Committee

God announced the strategy. The task of the supreme commander is to design a military strategy. Military strategy is focused on a narrow goal: victory or stalemate, never defeat. This is why warfare lends itself to the establishment of a supreme commander. A society agrees on the fundamental goal: the avoidance of defeat. Because there is this unanimity of opinion and a narrowly defined performance standard, it is possible for a central planner to design a strategy. A military strategy lends itself to unitary decision-making. A senior representative of the nation must implement a wartime military strategy. The nation's other representatives may approve or disapprove of the strategy; they may or may not be able to veto it if they do not approve. Lower-level representatives also affect strategy through approving or disapproving something that the senior representative has submitted for consideration. A committee cannot effectively design a strategy. The committee's division of labor is valid for counsel, but not for innovation.

1. A Multitude of Counsellors

The Bible recommends a multitude of counsellors:

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety (Prov. 11:14).

Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established (Prov. 15:22).

For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety (Prov. 24:6).

The larger the multitude of counsellors, the less likely that they will be able to devise an alternate strategy. *The larger the group is, the less likely the agreement.* A strong ruler knows that he is far less threatened by a large group of advisors than a small group. It costs too much for the members of a large group to combine against him. There are many competing strategic details to resolve, many competing egos

to assuage. The Bible recommends a multitude of counsellors; it does not recommend a multitude of strategists. This system of multiple counsellors is designed to *increase the wisdom* of the decision-maker and at the same time *strengthen his authority*.

This process of *centralized strategic planning through diversified counsel* is mandatory in military matters, and this is also true of economic organizations. But counsel is not the same as strategic decision-making. Devising a corporate strategy is the responsibility of one person who has been delegated the authority by the owners to represent the corporation. He is held responsible by owners or whoever is legally represented by this supreme commander. This is not true of counsellors. When asked, counselors raise objections, comment on risks, suggest alternatives, and generally enable the commander to count the costs of his strategy. They do not design a strategy.

Jesus used the analogy of military strategy to describe personal decision-making. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply [it happen], after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage [ambassador], and desireth conditions of peace" (Luke 14:28–32).¹ We are supposed to count the costs before we begin the action. Counsellors help us to estimate costs more accurately.

Committees can veto plans; they are rarely able to establish plans. The voices of the members are not unified. The division of intellectual labor produces cacophony in a committee. The unitary design needed for a successful strategy does not come from a committee. Folk wisdom understands this: "A camel is a horse designed by a committee." The division of intellectual labor does not produce a unified design, because none of the committee's members is willing to take final responsibility for a strategy created by all the other members.

The supreme commander trusts his own judgment more than he trusts the judgment of a committee. He relies on a committee to suggest several alternatives; he does not rely on it to produce a strategy.

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

He refuses to be held responsible for a strategy designed by competing men who will not take personal responsibility for the committee's collective decision, if any. He understands that committees can sometimes veto a strategy. Committees can select someone to design a new strategy, but they cannot devise an effective strategy.

2. To Veto God

Israel's spies attempted to veto God's announced strategy, but they proposed no agreed-upon alternative. God had announced the overall strategy and the timing. Any attempt on the part of the captains or the spies to thwart that strategic plan was a form of rebellion. God did not ask the Israelites to accept or reject His strategy. He allowed them only to seek out information which would have enabled Moses to design tactics to implement God's overall strategy.

The committee of spies returned to give an account of Canaan that was at odds with everything God had told them. Only Caleb and Joshua publicly defended the basis of God's strategy, namely, the vulnerability of the Canaanites to immediate invasion. "If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey" (Num. 14:8). For his public defense of God's strategy, Joshua was appointed by God to succeed Moses and to direct Israel's inheritance: "But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it" (Deut. 1:38). He and Caleb could have led the army to victory four decades earlier than they eventually did.

Had the spies been allowed to speak authoritatively for Israel, God would have executed the entire nation (Num. 14:11–12). Canaan would have remained occupied by the Amorites indefinitely. That is, the Amorites would have inherited the inheritance which God had promised to Abraham's seed. It was this possibility that Moses raised in his debate with God: God's vow to destroy the Amorites would not be fulfilled; so, His enemies would mock Him (vv. 13–16). God heeded this warning (v. 20). God then applied negative sanctions. The spies had sought to veto God's strategy, but God vetoed them. He executed them on the spot with a plague (v. 37).

As is so often the case, 10 of the spies had a hidden agenda. It reflected the nation's hidden agenda, which became clear only in retrospect: to avoid military conflict with Canaan. To conceal this

agenda, they recommended the reconnaissance. God knew their agenda, yet He did not tell Moses to call a halt to the reconnaissance. He allowed Moses to approve the spies' tactic. Moses would learn soon enough what the spies' hidden agenda was. The spies' report discouraged the nation. "And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there" (Deut. 1:27–28).

The committee's report had undermined the Lord's recently announced strategy: to invade Canaan immediately (v. 21). Moses could not persuade them to believe God (v. 32). The authority of the committee's majority report was overpowering when combined with the fears of that generation, fears which the people had repeatedly expressed to Moses. The spies had corroborated what the nation had feared: the Promised Land was filled with giants. Despite the fact that God cut down all of the nay-sayers on the committee, the people did not change their minds regarding God's strategy. The majority report had truly spoken for them judicially. Only Moses' intercessory prayer had saved them from God's wrath.

D. Sovereign Counsellors

The people who are represented by a decision-maker are sovereign over him. They have the authority to thwart their economic and political representatives. God holds them responsible for what their leaders do.² This is why biblical law places centralized military decision-making authority into the hands of one man. The people can see who is responsible for making plans. This is much less true when committees make the plans. Members of committees seek to hide from the derivatively sovereign people. They seek to avoid the limelight. They seek to transfer personal responsibility by spreading it among many others. When things go wrong, a committee is like a circle of men, each pointing to the man next to him. "He did it. Blame him." The supreme example in the Bible is Adam blaming Eve, and by implication, God, who gave him Eve.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

1. Legal Sovereignty

Does this biblical structure of authority imply central planning? In military matters, yes. In military affairs, the decisions of the strategist have the characteristic of being all or nothing. A mistake can lead to national defeat. So, societies have adopted a single chain of military command.³ What about economic planning? Is it also to be centralized? Within one firm, yes. The owner or senior manager has to be held accountable. Accountable to whom? first to the lenders, then to the holders, but finally to the customers. The share owners are legally sovereign; the customers are economically authoritative.⁴ There has to be a central officer who announces the company's general strategy. In a profit-seeking enterprise, the primary strategy is to make a profit. The company's general rules and compensation schemes set the boundaries of profit-making efforts. These are announced and enforced by central management. Senior managers allow lower-echelon managers and salesmen to apply the general rules to specific cases, where central management does not have immediate access to local information.⁵

For the owners of a corporate enterprise to exercise legal sovereignty, managers must be under the control of the owners. Owners must be allowed to replace managers. In the case of public corporations, the owners are the shareholders. This is why it is important for business law to allow proxy fights and corporate take-overs. If the diversified owners of shares of the company are not allowed by existing management or the civil government to throw out the existing management, then their authority as owners is thwarted. Government regulations that prohibit "predatory corporate raiders" inevitably subsidize the existing managers, increasing their immunity from profit-seeking shareholders who would prefer to sell their shares at a profit to raiders, who in turn see ways of increasing the market value of the company's assets and shares.⁶

3. Even here, the Mosaic law divided national authority. Both a civil representative and then two priests had to blow the pair of trumpets: first the civil ruler, then the priests (Num. 10:2–9).

4. On the distinction between legal sovereignty and economic authority, see North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 25:B:1. Owners tell managers what to do; customers tell owners and managers if what was done was profitable.

5. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944), pp. 31–36. (<http://bit.ly/MisesBUR>)

6. Henry G. Manne, *Insider Trading and the Stock Market* (New York: Free Press, 1966), ch. 11.

2. Customer Authority

In a free market economy, the ultimate institutional sovereign is collective: customers. Their individual decisions to buy or sell produce a collective result: *an objective array of prices*. Their decisions also produce profits or losses for specific sellers. So, final sovereignty in a free market is diffuse. The free market allows buyers and sellers to come together and make individual exchanges voluntarily. *Because ownership is diffuse, sovereignty is diffuse*. Because accurate knowledge is diffuse, ownership is diffuse, for people specialize in those productive services that they understand best and therefore possess a comparative advantage. The free market rewards the pooling of accurate knowledge through the price system. The competitive bidding of *buyers against buyers* and *sellers against sellers* produces an array of publicly available prices. These prices convey information to other buyers and sellers. They also convey motivation for sellers to meet the demands of customers on a cost-effective basis.

In a free market, the goals of asset owners are complex and shifting. The operations of a free market are not like a military campaign. In a military campaign, the goals of citizens are highly focused: the avoidance of defeat, preferably through victory. The narrow focus of this common goal mandates central planning by a supreme military commander. Military victory through the concentration of specific military forces is very different from economic victory, which comes mainly through the pooling of highly diffused knowledge—the most expensive economic resource—through a system of rewards and punishments, i.e., profit and loss.

In a free market, the customers are a multitude of counsellors. Sellers must meet customer demand profitably, or else they will go out of business. The counsellors possess legal authority: the legal right to buy or refrain from buying. They also possess economic authority: they own an asset (money) that they can use to buy other assets. The opinions of these counsellors can be ignored by sellers, but always at a price: reduced sales, reduced income. Thus, senior decision-makers in profit-seeking firms must take seriously the opinions of customers, whose counsel has money attached to it.

The Bible exhorts decision-makers to seek a multitude of counsellors. In economic affairs, this means that they must seek out representatives whose opinions reflect the opinions of the customers. This is why statistical sampling techniques are widely used by businesses. This

is also why such techniques are used by politicians seeking election in a democracy.

In a free society, the counsellors are sovereign, either as customers or voters. They bring sanctions, both positive and negative, through money or votes. Decision-makers must pay attention to counsellors when the counsellors are armed with such sanctions. The counsellors possess lawful authority. In the free market, as in a representative democracy, the biblical principle of a multitude of counsellors is greatly honored through appropriate systems of sanctions.

In an unfree society, central planners strip customers and voters of any meaningful authority. The result is always the same: reduced wealth. This is why socialism always impoverishes all but the senior politicians and their favored counsellors. After the fall of Communism in the late 1980s in Eastern Europe and in the USSR in 1991, citizens of the formerly Marxist tyrannies learned just how far behind the capitalist West they had been. Their richest leaders were poor by comparison to the West's middle class, a fact that the leaders had learned at the 1980 Olympics, which were held in Moscow. Visitors from the West were visibly far richer than the Soviet tyrants. This huge disparity of wealth could no longer be easily ignored in the USSR. The Communist leaders' wealth was a joke; they were being laughed at by the West. The West's political conservatives could dismiss the USSR as nothing more than "Bangladesh with missiles."⁷ This condescension by the West broke the tyrants' confidence in the benefits the Communist system had produced for them. Within a decade, European Communism was abandoned in a series of bloodless coups. European Communist parties changed their names.

Western college professors were the last to learn. As late as 1989, the world's most popular college-level economics textbook still asserted: "The Soviet economy is proof that, contrary to what many skeptics had earlier believed, a socialist command economy can function and even thrive."⁸ Within two years, the Soviet Union no longer existed. It visibly collapsed economically in 1989 and politically in December of 1991.

7. Richard Grenier's phrase.

8. Paul A. Samuelson and William D. Nordhaus, *Economics*, 13th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), p. 837. Cited in Mark Skousen, *Economics on Trial* (Homewood, Illinois: Business One Irwin, 1991), p. 214.

Conclusion

God was Israel's strategist. Moses was His mouthpiece, His chief of staff. When the spies attempted to replace God's strategy with their own, they became rebellious. They attempted to usurp a degree of authority that did not belong to them. Rather than remaining content with gathering information useful in the implementation of God's strategy, they tried to replace that strategy. He brought judgment against them individually and against the nation that consented to their report. The 10 spies died immediately; the generation died off, one by one, over the next four decades.

Devising a strategy is not a project for a committee. A committee articulates long-term goals and rules. It then delegates authority to hired senior managers, the strategists. A strategist is wise to consult committees and people with expert knowledge, but the vision and integration required for a successful strategy are not provided by committees. Those who make up a committee are not individually responsible for the outcome of a strategy to the degree that a supreme commander is. To match personal responsibility with strategy, a society or an organization must place one person in charge. Two captains of equal rank cannot successfully command a military unit. Two admirals cannot direct a ship. *The centralization of strategic authority is inevitable.* Committees can veto strategies; they cannot design them. Hierarchy is visible and legal in a military chain of command.

In a free society, wise rulers seek out counsellors who reflect the opinions of citizens and customers, who exercise control through the authority to impose sanctions: votes or money. This is what public opinion polls and market research are all about: seeking out *representative counsellors* who can serve as surrogates for the society's final counsellors, the people. In an unfree society, rulers strip the people of the authority to impose meaningful sanctions. God brings such societies under judgment. He strips economic planners of the ability to gain accurate information.⁹ The citizens of such societies withhold accurate information and their productive efforts from the rulers. The familiar phrase of workers in Soviet Russia is representative: "The government pretends to pay us, and we pretend to work."

9. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920), in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Socialist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963), ch. 3. This is posted on-line: <http://www.mises.org/econcalc.asp>.

6

THE SKILLS OF FOREIGN TRADE

And command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a footbreadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession. Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink (Deut. 2:4–6).

The theocentric principle of this law is God as the sovereign Owner who allocates national lands as He sees fit.

A. Honoring Boundaries

Boundaries are associated with point three of the biblical covenant model.¹ The eighth commandment—third in the list of five kingly commandments (6–10)²—prohibits theft.³ Why is this law governing trade placed in the section of Deuteronomy associated with point two: hierarchy? The answer is the doctrine of representation. Covenantal boundaries are an aspect of delegated authority. The steward is under God's authority. Ownership is an aspect of stewardship. The prohibition against theft is an aspect of the hierarchical nature of ownership.

Stealing from man is representative of stealing from God. This law has to do with fear: the fear of brotherly nations. This fear could become the basis of tyranny: theft.

What God commands in this passage is not hierarchy but trade.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), Preface.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

Trade is a relationship between *legal equals*: each party possesses legal authority over his property. Trade is a relationship between *economic equals*: each participant possesses what the other desires.

This land law⁴ regarding Israel's wilderness wandering was based on a broader principle of justice: the prohibition against theft. Israel was told not to seek another inheritance besides the land of Canaan. Esau's land was listed as off-limits; so was Moab's (v. 9). Israel had no legal claim to any other nation's inheritance besides Canaan's. To have set their eyes on any land but Canaan would have been a violation of the tenth commandment, the command against covetousness.

God told them to buy meat and drink with money. They had been given money by the Egyptians. Israel had gained the inheritance of many of Egypt's firstborn sons, who had all perished on Passover night. Israel had been capitalized by the Egyptians, who had illegally held them in bondage. Even after the capital losses imposed by Moses after the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:20), Israelites still had money.

Money has been defined as the most marketable commodity.⁵ It has the widest market of all commodities. Wherever men go, there are other men who want to exchange more specialized goods and services for money, the least specialized good. Money is the most liquid asset. This means that it can be exchanged for other valuable assets rapidly without advertising costs and with no discount.

Money is an ideal form of wealth for men on the move. It is readily transportable, easily divisible, and has a high value in relation to its volume and weight. Money was what Israel needed for a 40-year march through the wilderness. Had there been no other nations to trade with, money would have done the Israelites far less good, since men cannot eat money. But men can surely eat the things that money can buy, and there were many cultures along Israel's journey with one thing in common: a desire for more money.

B. Voluntary Trade

Because the Israelites had money, they had the option of trading with those foreigners along the way who had meat and drink for sale. In the wilderness, meat and drink were in short supply. The Israelites possessed money, but they could not eat their money. On the other

4. On land laws, see Appendix J.

5. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 32. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>) The first German edition was published in 1912.

hand, the nations they passed by had meat and drink. Pre-exodus Egypt had been the richest kingdom in the region around Sinai. Now the Israelites possessed much of the transportable wealth of Egypt. A series of mutually profitable exchanges became possible. The nations had what Israelites wanted, and vice versa.

The Israelites possessed an advantage: the nations were afraid of them (Deut. 2:4). Israel had just defeated Egypt. They had crossed the Red Sea miraculously. This was a demonstration of supernatural power that threw fear into the hearts of the Edomites. But God warned Israel not to use force to extract wealth from Edom. He told them to be peaceable people, for other nations lawfully possessed their own inheritances. There were legal boundaries around their possessions.

This made trade a major source of increased wealth for the Israelites. Israelites would give up money, which was of low value to them, in exchange for meat and drink, which were of high value to them. Giving up money for consumer goods meant the de-capitalization of Israel's distant future. But men live in the present; they must eat and drink in the present. God allowed them to make the decision: money as part of the inheritance for the next generation vs. meat and drink in the present.

Israelites were not to place their hope in money. They were also not to place their hope in military conquest, other than in or around the land of Canaan. So, with respect to portable wealth, those who gave up money for meat and drink were more present-oriented than those Israelites who refused to trade. They became spenders rather than savers. They valued the pleasures of meat and drink more than they valued their money. They knew that the next generation would conquer Canaan. At that future point, the spoils of Egypt would be rendered relatively less valuable. It was productive real estate that would then be valuable, for it would produce wealth for the whole nation.

The spoils of Egypt became the means of immediate gratification for some Israelites. The value to them of meat and drink in the present far outweighed the discounted future value of money. Money could not be invested at high rates of return by a nation wandering in the wilderness. It would not compound for entrepreneurs. The Israelites of the exodus generation knew they would not be allowed to conduct exchange with Canaanites inside the Promised Land. They were to replace the Canaanites, not enter into economic arrangements with them. What good was money to them in the wilderness? It was either a

means of buying pleasure in the present or a means of transferring an inheritance to their children. But their children had been guaranteed an inheritance in Canaan. So, why not spend money?

This raises an important issue for economic theory. Is mankind consumption-driven or production-driven? Should consumption or production be the central issue of economic theory? Virtually all humanistic schools of economic opinion say that the goal of production is consumption, either immediate consumption or consumption in the distant future. This is the doctrine of *customers' authority*.

It is my contention that *biblical economics places production, not consumption, at the center of covenant-keeping motivation*. This is because *biblical society is value-added society*. To add economic value requires thrift, entrepreneurship, and improved technology. The biblical goal of production is mandatory for the extension of the kingdom of God in history. Consumption is legitimate. So is celebration. The tithe of celebration was required in Mosaic Israel (Deut. 14:22–29).⁶ Nevertheless, increased production is to be the primary motivation of the covenant-keeper. *Biblical economics is supply-side economics in the broadest sense*. Thrift is therefore a moral obligation.

The Israelites who understood this would have restricted their consumption for the sake of adding to their children's inheritance: gold and silver. Long-term conquest requires an intergenerational transfer of wealth. Compound interest makes itself felt as time goes on. The longer the period of growth, the less dependent on the rate of growth is the investor. The covenant-keeping investor is told to think generationally. He is to provide capital in the broadest sense for his children. This capital includes future-orientation, meaning low time preference. Low time preference means a low rate of discount applied to streams of expected future income. It means low interest rates.⁷

Money was less valuable than meat and water in the value scales of some members of the exodus generation. Meat and water were less valuable to some Edomites than money. Because each participant in an exchange values what the other has more than what he has, both of them can increase their satisfaction by a voluntary exchange. God told Moses to instruct the nation that from now on, and for the next four decades, voluntary exchange would be the only lawful avenue of their wealth-generating activities with other societies. They had to learn to

6. Chapter 34.

7. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

prosper through peaceful exchange. Violence should not become a means of increasing the nation's wealth.

This set a pattern for post-conquest relations with the nations around Israel. Israel restrained itself when it possessed what appeared to be a military advantage. Israel would not have retained an advantage, had they violated the boundaries that God had placed around the nations, but the nations did not know this. Israel had to rely on trade to get what people wanted. This must have made an impression on the nations in the region. If anyone wanted access to the wealth of Israel, he could gain it by offering an Israelite an advantage. The Israelites were ready to trade. They were not in the empire-building business. They were in the “let's make a deal” business.

This pressured all wealth-seeking Israelites to become skilled bargainers. They could not rely on military force to gain what they wanted. They had to learn self-restraint. Weak nations must do this of necessity. Strong nations are wise to do this. The example of Switzerland is over five centuries old. That nation displays a ferocious determination to defend its territory from military invasion, yet it displays complete neutrality outside its borders. It is an armed camp internally and a disarmed sales force externally. A banker defends his bank's vault. He also makes visitors welcome when they come to deposit money or borrow at rates profitable to the bank. Switzerland has become the banker for the world's central banks.⁸

C. A Matter of Positioning

Israel gained a reputation in the wilderness for trading rather than fighting. This was probably what lured Arad, Sihon, and Og into suicidal attacks on Israel just prior to the conquest of Canaan. Those powerful kings assumed that trade-seeking Israel could not defend herself. They were wrong. Israel was about to become the most battle-hardened military force in the region. But for almost four decades, Israel had positioned herself as a non-violent trading nation, a wandering people without a home base. Trading nations that gain the reputation of being unwilling to fight become vulnerable to aggressive nations that prefer conquest to trade.⁹ This was not Israel's condition, but it appeared to be Israel's condition immediately prior to the first

8. The Bank for International Settlements is headquartered in Basle, Switzerland. This is the central banks' clearing house.

9. This is why Switzerland has had to maintain itself as an armed camp to defend its autonomy and neutrality. The Swiss avoid a reputation for softness.

battles of the conquest.

After the conquest, Israel allowed foreigners to live inside her borders. The rule of law did not discriminate against foreigners who lived inside non-Levitical walled cities. They could buy and sell homes and leave an inheritance to their children (Lev. 25:29–30). Furthermore, one law governed all traders (Ex. 12:49).¹⁰ This was unheard of in the ancient Near East. In all other societies, the cities' gods were local. If you did not have legal access to the religious rites of these local gods, you had no legal standing. These rites excluded foreigners and women.¹¹ But Israel's God was a cosmic God. His transcendent authority was not dependent on geography. So, Israel became a place where all people could seek freedom from arbitrary civil government and legal protection for their property.

This positioned Israel as a trading nation. Israel welcomed traders as no other Near Eastern nation did. But this positioning had begun prior to the conquest. When Israel had no homeland, she sought no nation's wealth through conquest. Similarly, when Israel gained a homeland, she was commanded by God to seek no foreign national's wealth through oppression. In both instances, Israel gained wealth through trade. Israel extended the division of labor by abandoning force. She tempted the best and the brightest wealth-seekers from other societies to share their skills and information voluntarily through trade.

Israel for centuries was a nation located on important trade routes. With access to the Mediterranean, Israel was one of a handful of neutral trading nations that operated outside of the jurisdiction of the great land-based empires: Egyptian, Hittite, and Babylonian.¹² But a successful trade route is more than a matter of geography. It is also a matter of legal protection. From its days in the wilderness, Israel began building its reputation as a nation conducive to foreign trade. Revere writes of the coastal trade city:

Its main function was to guarantee neutrality. Continuity of the supply of goods was essential, since it could not be expected that traders

10. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

11. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book II, Chapter VIII.

12. Robert B. Revere, "'No Man's Coast': Ports of Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, eds. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Peterson (Chicago: Regnery, [1957] 1971), ch. 4.

—under the difficult conditions of archaic long distance travel—would come to an outlying place unless they knew for certain that a safe exchange of goods was possible. The presence of a strong military power on the spot would unfailingly frighten them away. Political neutrality, guarantee of supplies, protection of the lives and property of strangers had to be assured before trade could start. A prior understanding between the corporate parties was therefore needed, usually based on regular treaties. Such an understanding, no doubt, would include facilities for disembarking, lading, portage, storage, grading of goods and the fixing of equivalencies backed by the coastal authority. Without this mechanism of the port of trade, there could be no regular trading.¹³

God's prohibition against the multiplication of horses by the king was unquestionably part of this arrangement (Deut. 17:16). The presence of a large offensive army—an army with chariots or cavalry—would send mixed signals to the land-based empires that used the coastal port cities as foreign trade centers. A safe, innocuous coastal nation was not bothered by the great empires until well into the eighth century B.C., when Assyria began its conquests.¹⁴ The empires avoided establishing cities in the coastal areas, possibly because trading cities might have opened these closed societies to new ideas and an uncontrolled wealth. Foreigners were kept at a distance through the use of neutral coastal ports and state-authorized caravans to and from those ports.

Positioning is important in establishing a market. When men think of a particular good or service, they think of the product, company, or nation that supplies the best known (best positioned) item. Israel's positioning under God's law was as a nation where trade brought wealth to all market participants, including foreigners. Wealth flows into those nations in which property is protected and contracts are enforced impartially. God established "no trespassing" boundaries around other nations' assets as well as neighbors' assets. When it came to protecting private property, with the exceptions of rural land and the homes of Levites in Levitical cities (Lev. 25:32–33), "otherhood" in Israel was not different judicially than "brotherhood." This judicial condition is the mark of a trading nation.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 52. Mosaic law was adamant about the evil of false weights and measures (Lev. 19:35–36; Deut. 25:13; 25:15; Prov. 11:1; Prov. 20:23).

14. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Conclusion

From the beginning of their wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites knew that they were not allowed to take land from the non-Amorite cities in the region. Those cities were the lawful possession of others. God honored the property rights of other nations that worshipped false gods. Even though these nations were afraid of Israel, they were not to be exploited. Israel was not to take advantage of them. Instead, the Israelites were told to trade for whatever they wanted from those nations. Voluntarism rather than military strength was to be the basis of gaining ownership of other nations' goods.

This was supposed to set the pattern for Israel's future economic dealings with foreign nations. Without the threat of violence facing them, other nations would come to regard Israel as a place to do business. If they wanted to benefit from Israel's productivity, they could bargain with Israelites. Without fear of confiscation, they could bring something valuable into Israel in search of a trading partner. Their property would be protected by Israelite law and custom. *This safe haven for private property irrespective of national origin would make Israel a cross-roads for profit-seeking foreign traders.* Egyptians could seek out Israelites or Babylonians or Hittites to do business. Israel could become one of the neutral, independent, coastal nations that served the great empires as common centers of trade.

God would soon give Israel the geographical location that could make the nation a foreign trade center. But first, He imposed a law that favored foreign nations: the protection of their property. By honoring this law prior to the conquest of Canaan, Israel would mark itself as a nation where private property was safe. *Israel would become known as a trading nation rather than an aggressor nation.* This reputation would position Israel as a regional trade center, bringing income from foreign traders seeking opportunities. This was part of God's program of foreign missions through law: "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:6–8).¹⁵

15. Chapter 8.

TRANSFERRING THE INHERITANCE

Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see (Deut. 3:27–28).

God was about to ordain a new leader over Israel. As Lord of the cosmos, God possesses the authority to select His representatives. Representation is point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy/authority/representation.¹

A. Sanctions and Inheritance

God told Moses to be a mentor to Joshua in these last days of wilderness wandering. The older man would prepare the younger to take authority over the nation. This transfer of personal authority represented the coming transfer of the inheritance to Israel. Joshua would command Israel after Moses died. Only then would the actual transfer of land take place. God was about to remove the authority of Canaan over the land. Israel's task was to enforce this transfer of ownership. This was clearly a land law. More than this: it was a one-time land law in Israel's history.²

Moses asked God if God would allow him to go into the Promised Land (v. 25). God told him not to ask for this again (v. 26). Moses had been forbidden to cross over because he had struck the rock twice with

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. On land laws, see Appendix J.

the rod in order to call forth water, after God had told him to speak to the rock but not strike it (Num. 20:8, 11–12).³ This negative sanction against Moses was a prohibition against his participation in the inheritance. Moses had identified himself as a spiritual member of the exodus generation, a man who trusted more in signs and wonders than in the promises of God.

God's sanctions are the means of inheritance. Positive sanctions are inheritance sanctions; negative sanctions are disinheritance sanctions. The focus of sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant model, is point five: inheritance and disinheritance. Positive sanctions are given to covenant-breakers ultimately to increase the inheritance of covenant keepers. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁴ The **New Heaven and New Earth** are the eternal inheritance of the righteous (Rev. 21:1). *The historical model for this final transfer of inheritance is the conquest of Canaan.* The wealth created by covenant-breakers became the inheritance of covenant-keepers. “And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deut. 6:10–12).

Joshua inherited Moses’ mantle of authority. He replaced Moses in the civil hierarchy. This transfer of authority was the judicial basis of the fourth generation’s inheritance of Canaan.

B. Heirs and Inheritance

Covenant-breaking man is short of time. He has to earn a very high rate of return in order to accumulate vast wealth in one lifetime. He has to compound this wealth at rates that are abnormally high. This means that he must bear greater risks. He may lose all of his capital in a bad transaction. The second commandment states specifically that covenant-breakers exercise only a few generations of rule, while

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 11.

4. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 41.

covenant-keepers extend and compound their rule for thousands of generations, i.e., permanently. “Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments” (Deut. 5:8–10).

The covenant-keeper can rest content with ordinary rates of growth, for he believes that his heirs will continue the process. The goal of the covenant-keeper is steady expansion, year by year, generation by generation. *The continuity provided by the covenant releases covenant-keepers from a frantic search for abnormally high rates of return.* If each generation is faithful in building up the inheritance, and if each generation trains up a faithful generation, the compounding process brings success. It is more important to raise up a faithful, competent, future-oriented generation than to make high rates of return for one generation, only to see the next generation renounce the faith, inherit, and squander the legacy. This breaks the covenant and dissipates the inheritance.

Compound growth becomes negative because of covenantal rebellion (Deut. 28:38–40). This thwarts the compounding process. It sets the next generation back one or more generations. The threat of covenantal forgetfulness is always before us: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁵ So is the threat of negative returns: “And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God” (Deut. 8:19–20).⁶

God told the exodus generation that they would not inherit. This prophecy pressured that faithless generation to consider the future of their children. Only through their children would they participate in the inheritance. They could have participated in the conquest by transferring military leadership to their sons at the time they sent in the

5. Chapter 21.

6. Chapter 22.

spies.⁷ This was not what that generation wanted. Even Moses wanted to escape this negative sanction. He wanted to walk into the Promised Land as the national leader. God did not allow it. His word was unbreakable. No member of that generation would inherit personally. The inheritance of the nation of Israel would be attained through the disinheritance of the exodus generation. Because the exodus generation refused to disinherit the Canaanites, God disinherited the exodus generation. The Canaanites enjoyed an extra generation of dominion over the land.

God told Moses to encourage Joshua. Joshua would lead the nation into Canaan. He would therefore replace Moses as the nation's prophetic leader. He would command God's holy army. He needed training, even at this late date. He needed a word of blessing. Moses, as the supreme commander, was uniquely able to provide this blessing. It was like the blessing of a patriarch to his son. This time, however, the inheritance would not be a bloodline inheritance, as had been true of patriarchy. It was a judicial inheritance based on personal confession: Joshua's confession before the council of spies. Joshua, not Moses' son, was the heir of the office of national prophet.

As Moses' successor, Joshua would have to lead as Moses had. He would have to exercise courage. He was the representative agent in the conquest. He had been such a representative at the council; now he would be the senior officer. He had demonstrated courage then; he would have to demonstrate it again. Moses had recently testified to God's omnipotence, at the very end of his career. "O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?" (v. 24). It was this confession that Joshua needed to accept intellectually and internalize emotionally in his role as national leader. Through Joshua, the entire nation was duty-bound to accept it and act in terms of it. This testimony, if acted upon, would be the basis of their inheritance.

C. Courage Through Obedience

Shortly prior to his death, Moses gave this advice to Joshua: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it" (Deut. 31:7b). God repeated

7. Chapter 1.

this to Joshua immediately prior to the crossing of the Jordan River:

Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. **Be strong and of a good courage:** for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, **that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law,** which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. **This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein:** for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:1–9).

This more detailed version of Moses' instructions made it clear that the basis of Joshua's courage would be his commitment to the law of God. As the national leader, it was his task to read the law daily and meditate on it. The law was not to depart out of his mouth; that is, his words of judgment (point four) were always to be grounded in the law (point three). The basis of the inheritance (point five) would be their adherence to the law. If they ever departed from the law, they would forfeit their inheritance.

Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail

with longing for them all the day long; and there shall be no might in thine hand. The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed away (Deut. 28:30–33).

Courage is a product of covenantal faithfulness. Without covenantal faithfulness, courage will depart: “In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see” (Deut. 28:67). Courage increases, or should increase, when men experience victories. That is, when they gain positive sanctions or, in wartime, inflict negative sanctions, they grow more confident. But if they refuse to trust God as the source of their victories, two unpleasant things can result: (1) cowardice because they do not trust God to deliver their enemies into their hands as He has in the past, and (2) defeat through overconfidence in their own power. Israel in the wilderness suffered from both afflictions: cowardice after the spies’ report and overconfidence immediately thereafter, when they attacked Amalek against God’s express command (Num. 13).

When God instructed Moses to build up Joshua’s courage, He was telling Moses to relate the whole law to Joshua and the nation. The Book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ response to God’s command. The recapitulation of the law ends with Moses’ final words to Joshua (Deut. 31:23). The law would serve Israel as the basis of the inheritance. Through the Mosaic law, Israel would maintain the kingdom grant from God.⁸ Grace precedes the law. The promise to Abraham preceded the kingdom grant. “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Gal. 3:18). But Israel could not retain this grant if she violated God’s law. “Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:1–2).

8. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Introduction, Section E.

Conclusion

The exodus generation had never been promised the inheritance. They were all disinherited at the time of the council of spies. This negative sanction transferred the inheritance to their children. The parents would not enjoy the fruits of military victory. They preferred fruits without risk. They lost their inheritance.

God required courage from the next generation. They could not be risk-avoiders and also heirs. Under Joshua, they were courageous, though not enough to drive all of the Canaanites out of the land. “As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day” (Josh. 15:63; cf. 17:12–13). As a result, God ceased to support them militarily. Just before his death, Joshua announced: “Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you” (Josh. 23:13). This was an announcement of disinheritance, in contrast to Moses’ prophecy of inheritance at the time of his death. Joshua’s prophecy was fulfilled partially at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. It was fulfilled completely in A.D. 70.

What the nation learned at the captivity was that courage and obedience are linked. *They could not maintain their courage apart from obedience.* Without courage, they would eventually surrender the inheritance. Without obedience, they would lose their courage.

8

EVANGELISM THROUGH LAW

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is God as the Law-giver. He declares His law through representatives: God > Moses > Israel > nations.

A. Unique Among the Nations

Why is this law in the section of Deuteronomy that is related to point two? What has hierarchy got to do with this? Answer: Israel was God's representative nation among all other nations. Israel was supposed to become the model nation.

Moses, as the representative of God before Israel and Israel's representation before God, here announced a principle of dominion: the power of biblical law in reducing foreigners' resistance to Israel. Israel's reputation would be elevated above that of other nations to the extent that other nations acknowledged the legitimacy of God's law, which they would do, Moses said. Israel, as the nation that was governed by biblical law, would become pre-eminent among the nations—not politically, but in terms of its moral influence. Israel's reputation would accompany individual Israelites. This reputation would confer an advantage on the nation's foreign representatives. They would be

seen as agents of the most just God. In this sense, Israel's authority was moral. It was based on God's law. Israel's authority was to be based on a hierarchy of righteousness. *Israel would represent God to the nations.*

This was a land law insofar as Israel had to obey it. It was a cross-boundary law insofar as foreign nations were required by God to acknowledge the wisdom of biblical law. Clearly, it was primarily a cross-boundary law.¹ It had to do with the universal wisdom of biblical law.

God expected foreign nations to hear of His law. How could this take place? Why should foreigners care anything about the laws governing a small nation like Israel? Normally, foreigners had little incentive to learn about the laws of a foreign nation. But two groups would pay attention: foreign traders and political representatives of foreign nations. Traders especially would pay attention, since their capital was at risk while inside the boundaries of a foreign nation. Foreigners normally had no legal standing in any nation of the ancient world, for they could not participate in the rites of the city's local gods. But in Israel, a cosmic God had announced that every foreigner had legal standing in the search for justice: "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (Ex. 12:49).² A foreigner who had been cheated by an Israelite could bring the cheater before a civil court.

Israel would become a center of trade to the extent that judges enforced God's law. This would bring foreigners into Israel, either as short-term opportunity-seekers [*nokree*] or as permanent residents [*geyr*]. The story would have spread rapidly: how property was safe in Israel, how courts treated all men the same, and how oppression of foreigners was a violation of the civil law. Such a legal order was unheard of in the ancient world.

B. Justice Is a Universal Goal

There are many definitions of justice, but rare is the nation that formally denies the legitimacy of justice. Men seek justice, often with greater fervor than they seek money. They regard justice as one of society's major goals. They want to live under a civil government that offers justice.

God revealed that the nations would respect His law. They would

1. On these Mosaic legal categories, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012) Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

recognize that the Mosaic law was a great legal order that reflected a great God. Israel, as God's unique national representative, would bask in the sunlight of God's justice. But how could this be if all men have fundamentally different concepts of justice? The very possibility of other nations' honoring God by acknowledging the justice of Israel's legal order points to the existence of common elements of justice that cross borders and eras. God places in the heart (conscience) of every man the work of the law—not the law itself (Heb. 8:10), but the work of the law (Rom. 2:14–15).³ This knowledge is suppressed by covenant-breaking men in the final stages of their rebellion (Rom. 1:18–22), but it is part of every person's legacy as a human.⁴ The work of the law is in every person's heart. But covenant-breakers' active suppression of this revelation is why every appeal to the authority of a universal logic or ethic is doomed. The work of the law is innate to man, but no logical system that presupposes the sovereignty of man's mind can logically come to a belief in the sovereignty of God. Thus, every attempt to invoke natural law theory as the basis of long-term social order is biblically spurious. A covenant-breaking man's knowledge of the work of the law is held innately, not logically. It is suppressed actively, not passively. His knowledge condemns him eternally, and at best allows him to prosper for a time prior to his rebellion against the truth. The positive sanctions covenantally connected to men's external conformity to the work of the law eventually undermine the ethical rebel's sense of autonomy, which in turn leads him into external rebellion, just as God's blessings on Sodom and Canaan did. Conformity to "natural law"—the work of the law in men's hearts—will bless covenant-breaking men temporarily, but in blessing them, it eventually condemns them or their heirs in history. It cannot bring them to a knowledge of the truth. We are not saved by law. Neither are societies.

Most Protestant theologians have insisted that this is the case with respect to individuals, but they have denied that this insight applies to society. Lutherans have been most forthright in this inconsistency. Luther's two-kingdoms theory rested on his theory of two radically distinct forms of law: spiritual law governing Christians and natural law governing societies.⁵ He had no theory of Christian law for Christi-

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [2000] 2012), ch. 4. Cf. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), I, pp. 74–76.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

5. Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundations of Luther's Social Views," in John H. Mundy, *et al.*, *Essays in Medieval Life* (Cheshire, Connecticut: Biblo & Tannen,

an societies, for his amillennial eschatology denied the possibility of a Christian society in history.

To the extent that Christians have shared Luther's eschatology and his social theory, they have adopted his ethical dualism. Every Christian theologian or social theorist who invokes natural law theory is an ethical dualist. Some are quite forthright about this; others are not. But we should recognize the covenantal confession of the ethical dualist whenever we come across it: a denial that the law-order revealed in the Mosaic law is in any way binding on societies and civil governments today. The more adamant dualists argue that Christians can live under any legal order without compromising their faith, with only one exception: biblical civil law. Every legal order is permitted except the only one which God ever commanded: biblical civil law. In the social theory of the hard-core Christian ethical dualist, all civil legal orders are equal, but one is less equal than others: biblical civil law.

Covenant-keeping men can and do depart from the proclamation of, and adherence to, biblical law. This is why Israel was warned: "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deut. 4:9). Covenant-breakers cannot completely suppress their knowledge of what God expects from them. It means that they refuse to obey the things that they know to be true. Their consciences become seared (I Tim. 4:2).

The power of Israel's testimony to the nations would be the fact that Israel's civil courts would not misuse their power to impose unjust decisions on foreigners. As in the case of Israel's time in the wilderness, when God restrained them from confiscating the inheritances of other nations (Deut. 2:4–6),⁶ so would God's restraint of unjust judges provide a unique testimony. Foreigners who lived in fear of injustice in other nations would be able to live in peace in Israel. The power of Israel's judicial testimony would be great because it was granted freely to the weak. In Israel, the three representative groups that were singled out as deserving of special judicial scrutiny, lest oppression raise its head, were widows, orphans, and strangers. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deut. 27:19; cf. Deut. 14:29; 24:17, 19–20).

1955), pp. 71–87.

6. Chapter 6.

C. Increased Trade, Increased Evangelism

When a minority group without power is protected by law, members of that group spread the word. Such were strangers in Israel. When Israelite traders came into a foreign nation whose agents traded regularly in Israel, they would probably have received special consideration from the local sellers, despite the fact that the local courts granted no special consideration to foreigners. There is a tendency for good deeds to be repaid by those who seek a continuing profitable relationship. In this sense, Israel was in a position to set the judicial agenda outside of its own borders. Its testimony to the otherwise oppressed would have strengthened God's hand, and the hand of God's agents, in nations whose representatives had been treated well in Israel.

The great empires of the first millennium B.C. did not establish jurisdiction over port cities on the coasts. They allowed these cities to operate under local jurisdictions.⁷ This indicates that the rulers understood the power of foreign ideas. The major clearing center for new ideas was a port city. Here men gathered from many nations, selling many wares, and telling stories of many gods. But one God, above all others, was a threat to the sovereignty of a host nation's gods: Israel's. This God claimed a universal reign irrespective of geography. To make this claim believable, Israel was required to enforce God's law fairly and without discrimination against foreigners. All men are the same under God. His rule extends to all men.

The question arises: How important was world trade in the ancient world? The modern historian assumes cultural evolution. He assumes that modern ships alone have made world trade possible. Prior to medieval times, he assumes, trade was limited to the Mediterranean Sea, expensive and infrequent land journeys, and coastal shipping. This assumption is incorrect. World trade has brought contacts between distant cultures for millennia. Only in the second half of the twentieth century has the extent of this trade become visible to a handful of specialists. The academic world dismisses the evidence because the evidence calls into question the long-held assumptions about the technological accomplishments of pre-modern societies.⁸

7. Robert B. Revere, "No Man's Coast': Ports of Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, eds. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Peterson (Chicago: Regnery, [1957] 1971), ch. 4.

8. I survey this generally suppressed historical evidence in *Boundaries and Domin-*

Conclusion

The Mosaic law was to serve Israel as a means of worldwide evangelism. Someone carved the Ten Commandments into a boulder in New Mexico in the days of Jesus or earlier. Some Israelite understood the truth of Deuteronomy's assertion that the law of God is a powerful tool of evangelism. Oppressed men respond well to civil justice.

The civil law of God was simple enough for traders and resident aliens to learn. They would know their rights before God. Their chief civil right in Israel was equality before the law. This was a unique right in the ancient world, where civil rights were tied to civil rites. Foreigners had no civil rites in the ancient city-states, so they had no civil rights. This was not so in Mosaic Israel.

One of the self-inflicted wounds of modern Christianity is Christians' denial of the continuing validity of biblical law in New Testament times. They have stripped the church of one of its premier tools of evangelism: the proclamation of universal justice. God has given them their request—a world not under God's Bible-revealed covenantal law—and has thereby brought them under the rule of covenant-breakers.

9

HEAR, FEAR, AND TESTIFY

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children (Deut. 4:9–10).

The theocentric basis of this law is the fear of God, who brings sanctions. This is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10).

A. A Family Inheritance

As covenantal agents of God, fathers were required to teach their sons and grandsons the law of God. The family's hierarchy was to extend Israel's national covenant into the future. This was not a seed law in the sense of a tribal law.¹ It was an affirmation of the covenant in the life of Israel. It is a universal law that is to govern covenant-keeping fathers throughout history. Only when God is no longer to be feared does this law cease in history, "that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth."

Moses spoke these words to people who could remember the giving of the law. Through their parents' oath of allegiance to God, they had participated in the sealing of the covenant at Sinai-Horeb (Ex. 19), immediately prior to God's giving of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). Moses warned them not to forget, and to tell what they had seen to their children and grandchildren.

The threat to Israel was a break in this verbal inheritance. There was a risk that their memories of this covenantal event might depart

1. On seed laws, see Appendix J.

from Israel. But how? Through a failure to tell this story. The focus of this warning was not primarily individual; it was corporate. Old people remember the events of their youth even when they forget their own names. The memory spoken of here was corporate memory, i.e., the transmission of the story. If this story should ever depart out of the nation's corporate heart, it would no longer define Israel. It would no longer motivate them to fear God and obey Him.

The transmission of Israel's inheritance rested on the telling of this story. Here, Passover was not the focus; the giving of the law was. Passover was to remind them of the great deliverance from Egypt, which Moses called the iron furnace (Deut. 4:20). But the story of the giving of the law was equally important. It was not just that God had delivered them out of bondage; it was that He had also delivered to them His law. The events surrounding the covenantal meeting between God and Israel at Mt. Horeb had to be repeated to the next generation. They had heard God (v. 12). They were not eyewitnesses to God; they were earwitnesses to God. They were required to pass on this story just as they had received it: verbally.

B. Hearing Is Believing

Modern man has a phrase, "Seeing is believing." The technology of photography launched a new era. Men could at last record faithful images of what they had seen. This elevated the eye to a position of authority that it had enjoyed only in trials, where witnesses had to confirm the event. The photograph replaced one of the witnesses. But this legal authority as a witness is about to depart unless modern computer technology is reversed. The technology of digital imaging is going to make possible the altering of photographic images to such an extent that seeing will no longer be believing.²

The rise of modern science is generally explained in terms of the rise of experimentation. Only that which can be measured is said to be scientifically valid. The repeatability of an experiment is the source of its validity: other scientists can see the same results. But the description of these experiments is always conveyed verbally. Words must accompany the images and mathematical formulas in order for others to understand the procedures and repeat them. Never has seeing been

2. The immensely popular 1994 movie, *Forrest Gump*, brought to the screen mixed images of old newsreels and a modern actor. Several of these mixed images looked real. Similar image mixing had already been used by television advertisers.

believing except for the individual who saw. To transmit a description of what he saw to others requires more than images. It requires words. *The images confirm the words.* Images do not speak for themselves. Facts do not stand alone. Facts are never brute facts; they are always interpreted facts.³

This does not mean that seeing is irrelevant. I think of the scene in a Marx brothers skit where Groucho is discovered in the arms of some young woman. "What are you going to believe," he asks the intruder, "me or your own eyes?" Eyes are a valid source of information, but there is always an interaction between sight and interpretation. The persuasive power of belief and habit is usually greater than the power of sight. The Israelites saw the Red Sea open before them; then they crossed over dry land; then they saw the water close over the Pharaoh's army. Still, they soon ceased to believe that this unified event was in any way relevant for their new trials. Seeing was believing, but what Israel believed was highly restricted through their lack of faith. Seeing lasts only for a moment; then memory takes over—memory filtered by faith.

Hearing is repetitive. For those who did not see, as well as for those who saw but never learned the lesson, hearing is the dominant mode of communication.⁴

There is a strong ethical element in the Hebrew verb "to hear." The word for "hear" in Hebrew is the same as the word for "obey": *shawmah*. "As soon as they **hear** of me, they shall **obey** me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me" (Ps. 18:44). "Now therefore, if ye will **obey** my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Ex. 19:5). "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be **obedient**" (Ex. 24:7).⁵ When God speaks, men should obey. When those in authority speak for God, the listeners should obey. This is why telling the story of the giving of the law was mandatory in Israel. The story was intended to persuade men to fear God, hear God's law, and obey what they heard.

Stories possess great authority when told by those in authority and

3. This is a constant theme in Van Til's writings. See Cornelius Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, vol. 6 of *In Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1978), Introduction.

4. Reading involves sight, but prior to the advent of photography, reading was mainly hearing through the eyes.

5. See also Genesis 22:18; 26:5; 27:8, 13, 43; 28:7; Exodus 15:26; 18:24.

confirmed by others in authority. The command to tell the story of the giving of the law was directed to parents and grandparents: people in authority. Children look up to their elders—literally when children are young. The awe associated with tall parents is analogous to the awe associated with God. The Israelites repeatedly expressed fear of the giants in the land; it was this that kept the exodus generation from the inheritance. They feared the children of Anak: “And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (Num. 13:33; cf. Num. 14:28). They saw other “men of great stature” (Num. 14:32).

Israel’s spies had seen giants. But seeing was not to be believing. Hearing was to be believing. Joshua said: “Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven, A people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak!” (Deut. 9:1–2). Not only were the Israelites to hear; they were to obey. It was time to claim the inheritance. But to do this, they had to trust what they heard, not what they saw.

C. Obedience and Inheritance

The basis of maintaining the covenant’s kingdom grant is obedience to the terms of the covenant. An inheritance can always be dissipated. It can shrink to a shadow of its former self when the faithful become a remnant. The captivity brought home this point. Israel forfeited the original inheritance during the exile. Most Israelites remained behind, content with life in Assyria-Babylon-Persia. Only a remnant returned to the land on a permanent basis. The others came only at Passover.

The problem with maintaining the compound growth of an original grant of capital is that growth can turn negative. This delays the conquest. The kingdom’s era of expansion is replaced by an era of contraction. The problem is, when you lose half of your capital, you must double it to get even. Large losses are difficult to overcome. Growth seems almost automatic during the high-growth phase of a stock market boom. It is taken for granted. Yet a 20% per annum increase becomes exponential in just a few years. Such rates of growth cannot be sustained. The expanding capital base runs up against the limits to growth. Those who pursue wealth-building as if such rates can be sus-

tained for part of the economy without comparable rates of growth throughout the whole economy eventually reach environmental limits. The investor runs out of investments that enable him to reinvest his profits at 20%. The compounding process slows. To sustain such high rates of growth, men often adopt techniques of debt: leverage. The threat to debt is two-fold: (1) mass inflation, which destroys the currency unit; (2) economic contraction, which bankrupts the debtors.

Moses told them generation. They were also to teach their grandchildren. This would either constitute a double witness—parents and grandparents combined—or else it would overcome the defection of the children. The grandparent factor becomes a kind of covenantal insurance policy against a breakdown in the inheritance process.

This is why bastardy is such a threat to a society. When fathers are absent, mothers must sustain the legacy. They do not enjoy the benefits of the division of labor. This places heavy burdens on mothers and children. Mothers must earn money to support their children. They must also allocate time to teach them. The covenantal legacy is threatened by a break in continuity. Grandmothers may intervene at this point, caring for the children while mothers are at work. If the grandmothers fail in their task of transmitting the story of the covenant, the third generation is cut loose from the covenant. This is when the breakdown of inheritance begins. This also implies the breakdown of society. The inheritance is ethical and cultural. When it fades, so does social order.

This process of cultural and social disinheritance has taken place in the United States among the black population. In the early 1960s, the rate of black illegitimacy was about 25%: high. By the 1990s, it had reached the two-thirds level.⁶ In the inner cities, it was above 80%.⁷ The social breakdown in the black community that was predicted by Harvard professor Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965 has taken place. Crime has escalated; welfare dependency is becoming universal among unmarried mothers.

There has been a one-generation cultural echo: black to white. The rate of illegitimacy among whites was 22% in the early 1990s—only slightly under the rate of black illegitimacy in the early 1960s.⁸ By

6. Jason DeParle, "Census Reports a Sharp Increase Among Never-Married Mothers," *New York Times* (July 14, 1993).

7. Charles Murray, "The Coming White Underclass," *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 29, 1993).

8. *Ibid.*

1990, one-quarter of children in the United States were growing up without fathers. Writes Nicholas Davidson: "This is the greatest social catastrophe facing our country. It is the root of the epidemics of crime and drugs, it is deeply implicated in the decline in educational attainment, and it is largely responsible for the persistence of widespread poverty despite generous government support for the needy."⁹ Some 70% of all the juveniles in United States correctional facilities grew up without fathers in the household.¹⁰ There is no indication that this demographic process is decelerating; on the contrary, it is accelerating. Between 1983 and 1993, the birthrate for unwed mothers in the United States rose by 70%.¹¹

When the covenantal legacy is lost by three successive generations, it takes a religious revival to restore it. In my day, this will have to come from outside the secular entertainment media—music, television, and movies—and the secular schools, which combined absorb almost all of the daylight hours of every child. The government-funded school systems that are universal in the West in the twentieth century divorced learning from the Bible. This replaced the Christian covenantal inheritance for the vast majority of residents in the West.

D. Restoring the Testimony

When Christian parents send their children to secular schools, they are inevitably telling their children that knowledge—useful knowledge—has nothing to do with the Bible. Yet the words of Moses convey the opposite viewpoint: *the knowledge of God's revelation in the Bible is the foundation of all useful knowledge*. The parents then have a major problem: to persuade their children regarding the moral consistency of the parents' outlook, which is pro-secular education and pro-Bible. They do this by appealing to the traditional argument of the two hermetically sealed compartments of revelation: biblical and natural. Somehow, the two are consistent, yet they are separate. But because of *the hierarchical structure of all knowledge*—from God to man—this argument cannot be sustained. Either secular presuppositions regarding cause and effect in history replace the Bible's providential view of cause and effect, or else the Bible's cosmic personalism is sub-

9. Nicholas Davidson, "Life Without Father," *Policy Review* (Winter 1990), p. 40.

10. Philip F. Lawler, "The New Counterculture," *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 13, 1993).

11. Stephen A. Holmes, "Birthrate for Unwed Mothers Up 70% Since '83, Study Shows," *New York Times* (July 20, 1994).

stituted for the cosmically impersonal universe of humanism. We cannot begin our reasoning process from the presupposition of the autonomy of nature and human thought and then logically reach the conclusion that God is totally sovereign in history. We cannot reason consistently from the god of humanism—evolving nature as interpreted by autonomous man—and end with the God of the Bible.

1. *Philosophical Dualism*

Philosophical dualism asserts two forms of knowledge, each based on a separate foundation, with both leading to the same truth. This presupposition has led Christian philosophy into compromises with humanism from the days of the early defenders of the faith.¹² It has culminated with the widespread support by Christians of the compulsory, tax-supported school. Christians send young children into an educational hierarchy in which the God of the Bible is either ignored or ridiculed. *This has broken the covenant of the modern evangelical church.* This substitution of covenants begins in kindergarten. It accelerates through graduate school. The American graduate school has been secular from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century.¹³ The opinions of a majority of college-educated Protestant evangelicals are not significantly different from the opinions of college-educated non-Christians.¹⁴ This is not surprising, since the colleges require all of their faculty members to have earned graduate degrees from secular universities. The professorial drift on campus into liberal humanism is disguised by a cloak of verbiage about Christian relevance in a pluralistic world. Such relevance usually is said to be available by baptizing some discarded humanistic fad.

At the end of the twentieth century, wrote David Wells, "It is only where assumptions in culture directly and obviously contradict articles of faith that most evangelicals become aroused and rise up to battle 'secular humanism'; aside from these specific matters, they tend to view culture as neutral and harmless. More than that, they often view culture as a partner amenable to being coopted in the cause of celeb-

12. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), ch. 4.

13. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 9.

14. James D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chaps. 3, 5.

rating Christian truth.”¹⁵ But it has not been secular humanism that has been co-opted; it has been modern evangelicalism. “Evangelicals now stand among those who are on easiest terms with the modern world, for they have lost their capacity for dissent. The recovery of dissent is what is most needed, and the path to its recovery is the reformation of the church.”¹⁶

Wells was speaking of upper-middle-class, well-educated men and women who are beneficiaries of humanist culture. He subsumed under his label all the pietist-fundamentalist-charismatic church growth proponents who dismiss theology as irrelevant.¹⁷ But this categorization is misleading without extensive qualifications. Pietistic fundamentalists have generally resisted the inroads of modernism, and the six-day creationists still do in academic areas related to origins. Fundamentalists have defended Scofield’s rejection of the Enlightenment ideal of inevitable progress, while rejecting both Darwinian liberalism and post-World War II evangelicalism. Bob Jones University surely has had no alliance with modernism. “We’re reactionaries and proud of it!” has been the cry of millions of fundamentalists, especially prior to 1976, when some of them began to take tentative steps back into American political life, from which they had been absent as an identifiable voting bloc since 1925, the year of the Scopes “monkey” trial. Wells was also not speaking of the Christian home school movement. These people are dissenters, which is why evangelicals do not find them respectable. When parents take their children out of the public schools, they join the ranks of the dissenters, for the public schools have long served as America’s only established church.¹⁸

There has been an implicit, unspoken alliance between Christians and right-wing Enlightenment culture since at least 1700. In the name of Sir Isaac Newton, right-wing humanists have presented their case for universal principles of knowledge, law, and culture. But this implicit alliance was not self-consciously adopted in the name of an alliance; it was believed by the Christians to be inherently Christian.¹⁹ The fact that Newton hid his Unitarianism from his superiors at Cambridge in

15. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 11.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

18. Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 68.

19. Cotton Mather, *The Christian Philosopher* (1721).

order to retain his teaching position only added to the confusion.²⁰ After Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) destroyed the foundations of this Newtonian-Christian synthesis, American fundamentalists began to distance themselves from modernism. This self-conscious distancing escalated rapidly after the Scopes anti-evolution trial in 1925,²¹ and escalated again after the publication of *The Genesis Flood* in 1961. Newtonian mechanism still has its adherents in Christian scientific circles, for it is regarded as the only alternative to both evolutionary Darwinian organicism and Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty. Nevertheless, there has been a major break with modernism in the realm of creationism. This break has dismayed the neo-evangelicals, who strive to make peace with modern science at the expense of the Bible. What Wells said about evangelicals applies to the American Scientific Affiliation, a group of Trinitarian scientists who reject the six-day creation.²² It does not apply well to the Creation Science movement.

2. State Accreditation

The restoration of Christian culture can come only from outside the existing educational system. The churches must abandon the lust for certification through secular college education, beginning with the removal of all requirements for candidates for the ministry to attend state-accredited colleges and humanist-accredited seminaries. Parent-funded Christian education, beginning at the lowest level, must steadily replace the tax-funded system of state-accredited secular education. The graduate schools will be the last to fall. This means that curriculum materials must be written which are systematically in opposition to the presuppositions of modern secularism. The Bible must be placed above conventional curriculum materials.

This keeps non-certified people from entering the professions. Academic accreditation has been the humanists' means of centralizing the curriculum of all schools, not just tax-funded schools. This system was designed by a liberal Baptist minister, Frederick Gates, and sold to his employer, oil tycoon and liberal Baptist John D. Rockefeller, Sr.,

20. Gale E. Christenson, *In the Presence of the Creator: Isaac Newton and His Times* (New York: Free Press, 1984), ch. 10: "Heretic: Sotto Voce."

21. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), ch. 21.

22. Henry M. Morris, *A History of Modern Creationism* (San Diego, California: Master, 1984), pp. 130–44.

who in turn persuaded the United States Congress to authorize the incorporation of the General Education Board in 1903. "It would be difficult to overstate the value of the work the GEB did in the ensuing half century. Ironically, it seems largely forgotten today. . . . To understand the GEB, one must see it as an agency of change, one of such remarkable accomplishments that it is scarcely an exaggeration to refer to it as revolutionary."²³ One of its major accomplishments was "reforming college administration and developing professional standards for graduate education throughout the United States. . . ."²⁴ Furthermore, "the work was done very quietly, with great circumspection and skill, for the good reason that, like any agent of change, the GEB was up against some form of established opposition in each of its successive missions. . . ."²⁵ By the time it was voluntarily shut down in 1960, the year John D., Jr. died, it had expended \$324 million on its many projects.²⁶ Some \$208 million had gone into higher education.²⁷ (The purchasing power of the dollar in 1903 was at least 20 times greater than in 2010; it was six times greater in 1960.) But setting standards for lower-level schools was also part of the plan. The GEB was the main factor behind the creation of the public school system in the American South, through the funding of one professorship in education in every major state university in the South, and through lobbying in every state capital. From a few hundred schools in 1900, the South's public school system grew to thousands in the 1920s.²⁸

3. Christian Schools

For the non-parochial school, non-immigrant-group Protestants in the United States to break with this entrenched monopoly would have seemed impossible in 1960, but since that time, the Christian school movement has grown rapidly. The deterioration of the public schools has paralleled and accelerated the exodus of Christians. These are self-reinforcing phenomena. Christian-fundamentalist curriculum materials are still highly influenced by traditional secular outlines, and none

23. John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson, *The Rockefeller Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), p. 70.

24. *Idem*.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 79. The two main figures in distributing the funds in the early years were Jerome Greene and Abraham Flexner. *Idem*.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

of them is at a truly high level academically, but independent Christian schools represent an advance over what existed a generation earlier. A minority of Christian parents has begun to take seriously Moses' words regarding the necessity of teaching their children the stories of the Bible. These stories, when coupled with the law of God, provide God's people with the means of conquest: the cultural compounding process. But so much covenantal capital was dissipated by Christians in the twentieth century that it will take centuries to reclaim lost ground unless a revival—very high compound growth—should begin and be sustained. In the past, revivals have not been sustained.²⁹

The church must tell the Bible's story and show people how to apply it in New Covenant times. Parents must tell the story to their children. But the presumed judicial discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant has created a problem. Of what relevance to the kingdom inheritance is the giving of the law at Horeb, if there is no continuity between the Ten Commandments, the case laws of Exodus, and New Covenant historical sanctions? If there is no visible kingdom of God in history that is tied covenantally to biblical law,³⁰ and if there is no predictability between corporate faith and corporate sanctions,³¹ then the Bible's story becomes little more than a testimony to personal moralism, if that. It loses its character as inheritance-preserving. This is the situation in the post-Puritan West. The assumption of judicial discontinuity has undermined the relevance of what had been a mandatory story.

Conclusion

Moses warned his listeners not to skip a generation. Parents were told to tell their children about the meeting between God and Israel at Mt. Horeb. God delivered the law to them at that time. Respect for the law was given added support by the testimony of parents and grandparents who had heard God speak in history.

This covenantal legacy was to be handed down verbally, generation by generation. This legacy would in turn undergird the legacy of land, which followed the giving of the law and the wilderness experi-

29. See my site, www.SustainedRevival.com.

30. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

31. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

ence. Moses understood the threat of a break in Israel's covenantal inheritance, which above all was *an inheritance of law*. The authority of God's law was to be attested to by the testimony of the parents, who could trace back their unbroken testimony to the revelation of God at Mt. Horeb. When the children heard about God from their household elders, they were to fear and obey God. Their obedience to God was to lead to the expansion of the inheritance.

10

REMOVING THE INHERITANCE

When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell (Deut. 4:25–28).

This was a warning. Its theocentric basis is the second commandment: God as a jealous God.¹ He alone is to be worshipped. Moses warned of corporate sanctions to come, sanctions based on the second commandment. Moses prophesied that the people would build another golden calf to serve as their god. A calf would again serve as the nation's representative to the world of spirits and power. There is no exclusively future tense in Hebrew, but it is clear from the structure of the passage that Moses' comments were directed at a distant generation. That generation would be carried into captivity, where they would be told by their captors to worship lifeless foreign gods. The nation's punishment would fit the crime.

A. The Prophet's Job

An Old Covenant prophet, as God's voice of authority (point two of the biblical covenant model), set forth the law of the covenant: point

1. The second commandment was the second in the list of five priestly laws in the Decalogue. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), Preface.

three (law). Then he warned what the penalties would be if the people broke the law: point four (sanctions). Biblical negative prophecy was always ethically conditional. Sometimes these conditions were explicit. If the listeners would turn away from their covenant-breaking ways, the prophesied sanctions would not arrive. We see this in Jeremiah's warning:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer. 18:1–10).

Sometimes, the ethical conditions were implicit. For example, God told Abraham that his heirs would conquer Canaan in the fourth generation (Gen. 15:16). Yet God told the third generation to invade the land. He knew that they would disobey Him, which is why He could be specific with Abraham. The prophecy was ethically conditional; God knew that the prophecy's conditions would not be met by the third generation. God also knew that the Canaanites would not repent. Thus, the promise to Abraham was historically reliable. God had predestined the fourth-generation Israelites to covenantal victory and the Canaanites to covenantal defeat. God had ordained the Canaanites to condemnation.² The Canaanites deserved to be annihilated. This in no way denies the fact that the prophecy regarding their defeat was conditional.

Moses spoke here of successive generations. The King James translators properly inserted "ye," although the Hebrew text does not in-

2. "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old **ordained to this condemnation**, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

clude the plural pronoun. His warning was directed at the conquest generation, but it is clear that God's sanctions would come much later, to future generations that would rebel: "ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger" (v. 25). Moses spoke to those future generations through their covenantal representatives: the generation of the conquest. He could do this because he knew that his words would persevere. He had already warned this generation to tell their children and grandchildren the story of the giving of the law (vv. 9–10).³ In order to preserve the landed inheritance, he said here, all successive generations would have to obey the terms of the covenant. That is to say, *the maintenance of the kingdom grant was conditional*. It always is. This raises the enduring theological question of the relationship between prophecy, promise, and conditions.

B. Prophecy, Promise, and Conditions

This issue of covenantal conditionality has been a favorite debating topic for hundreds of years among technically precise Calvinists, who regard themselves as covenant theologians. This debate never gets settled. Paul's words are the point of contention: his contrast between law and promise. "For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3:18). Covenant theologians have argued that there are unconditional promises in the Bible; otherwise, there can be no true promises and therefore no true grace in history.

Paul's contrast between law and promise seems absolute, but it really isn't. There was an unstated condition in God's promise to Abraham that neither Paul nor the theologians mention: sexual union. Putting the matter in biological terms, Paul's allegorical contrast between Sarah and Hagar was not based on the differences between the normal conception method and the virgin birth. "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise" (Gal. 4:22–23). The promise to Abraham regarding Isaac was conditional. It was biologically conditioned, and it was also ethically conditioned. He was not to imagine that Sarah would become the judicial equivalent of the mother of the Messiah.

3. Chapter 9.

God's promise to Abraham was not on a par covenantally with the messianic promise of the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14), although it was analogous to it. Isaac was not Jesus. Had Abraham misinterpreted God's promise in terms of the virgin birth, he would have been ethically out of line. He would not have gone into Sarah's tent. The prophecy would not have been fulfilled. The prophecy was fulfilled because Abraham took biologically effective action at age one hundred.

Conclusion: *we must not attempt to separate historical conditions from the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.* Historical conditions are an inescapable aspect of every human action. No Calvinist argues that God sovereignly predestinates occasional events in an otherwise chance-governed world. That argument is the Arminian's intellectual burden. The Calvinist argues that God predestinates everything. The Calvinist speaks of the decree of God as providentially undergirding all that comes to pass. In short, as I have said from time to time, *God does not predestinate in a vacuum.* The fulfillment of a specific prophecy is not some imposed event that God inserts into an otherwise autonomous flow of historical events. The Arminian thinks it is, but the Arminian is wrong.

Human action is therefore inescapable in the fulfillment of every covenantal promise. Human action is always ethically conditional, for everything that men say, think, or do is under the authority and jurisdiction God's comprehensive law (Matt. 15:10–20). To argue otherwise is to adopt antinomianism: a theology of neutral, impersonal gaps in the law of God.

The antinomian's view of prophecy parallels his view of ethics. He sees the fulfillment of biblical prophecy as a *discontinuous intrusion by God* into the autonomous processes of history,⁴ in much the same way that he sees the jurisdiction of God's law as sporadic and under tight boundaries. In his view, history is mostly autonomous and chance-conditioned. History is not predestined and decree-conditioned. History is not seen by the Arminian as covenantal in the sense of being the providential outcome of human action within the context of God's sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and inheritance. But for a covenant theologian to defend the total separation of promise from ethical conditionality is necessarily to adopt some form of Arminianism-anti-

4. The term "intrusion" is Meredith G. Kline's, which he applies to the Mosaic Covenant. Kline, "Intrusion and Decalogue," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XVI (1953/54); Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 154–71.

nomianism: the God of the Bible as the God of the intrusion, whether historical or judicial.

C. Invoking Covenantal Witnesses

Moses invoked heaven and earth to witness against the nation that day (Deut. 4:26). This is covenantal language. Moses was not invoking living organisms. He was not a believer in Gaia, the earth-goddess. *He was invoking a double witness.* He was putting the nation on alert: these two cosmic witnesses would stand guard, day and night, to testify against them. A double witness was required to convict someone of a capital crime. "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death" (Deut. 17:6). Heaven and earth are the limits of history; there is no place for men to commit sin that is outside of the boundaries of heaven and earth. David asked rhetorically: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Ps. 139:7–8). There is no escape from God and His word. "Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire" (Deut. 4:36).

God had said to Cain, "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). Blood has no vocal chords. But Abel's blood was in the ground, and God saw this evidence of murder. The existence of historical evidence in the presence of an omniscient God constitutes a valid witness against lawless men. What Moses was saying was that God would see their acts of rebellion, their worship of rival gods. This evidence could not be covered up in God's cosmic court. The evidence would cry out against them. This would constitute a covenantal witness against them.

The proof of God's covenantal sovereignty is the inheritance. When Israel successfully claims this legacy on Canaan's battlefields, Moses announced, Israelites will know that God can and will enforce the terms of His covenant. The positive sanction of gaining the inheritance will testify to the reality of the negative sanction of its future revocation. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. First, He gives.

And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of

Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever (Deut 4:37–40).

Then He takes away.

When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell (Deut. 4:25–28).

Israel will break the covenant, Moses announced. This was a prophecy. He knew this was coming unless Israel avoided rebellion. Moses did not mention the possibility that Israel might not rebel, i.e., the conditional nature of the prophecy. The condition of covenantal faithfulness would not be met. Moses spoke generations in advance to those in the midst of rebellion. God in His mercy will not kill them all for their false worship. Instead, He will strip them of their inheritance, but only for a time. He will hear their cries for deliverance, even as He had heard their cries when they were in Egypt. He will remain faithful to His covenant with Abraham even though the nation will wander into prohibited worship. But there will be a price to pay. There will be corporate negative sanctions. The covenant would remain in force.

By *invoking heaven and earth*, Moses was making this issue a matter of *covenantal sanctions*. Covenant sanctions are predictable in the ethically conditional sense of “if . . . then.” A prophet's task was to persuade his listeners of the predictability of these sanctions. That which identified an Old Covenant prophet was the specific nature of the predicted sanctions. With the closing of the canon of Scripture, this office

was annulled. No man's word today is lawfully elevated to the authority of the Bible. Moses, however, was the nation's premier prophet. His words became part of Scripture, which is why his warning had judicial authority down through history. In Jesus' parable of the rich man and the poor man, He has Abraham invoke Moses and the prophets. "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:29–31).

It is clear that Moses did not believe that Israel would listen to his words. He knew they would eventually rebel. This passage was designed to comfort them in a time of captivity. God would deliver them out of captivity as surely as He had prophesied through Moses that He would deliver them into captivity. The promise of deliverance *out of* was as certain as the promise of deliverance *into*. Sin being what it is, bad situations are easier to get into than out of. But foretelling the future is a mark of supernatural authority, and God was telling them in advance what would take place. Israel could trust His word.

D. Removing the Inheritors

Land is not mobile; people are. The threat to Israel's landed inheritance was two-fold: (1) invasion by other nations; (2) Israel's removal from the land. Under the judges, invasion was the problem. Centuries later, removal was the threat. The greater of these threats was removal, which is the focus of this prophecy. God threatened to remove the inheritance from Israel by removing Israel from the inheritance.

Under the judges, Israel faced domination by nearby nations that forced Israel to pay tribute. These nations sought tribute, not permanent slaves. They did not seek to carry the people out of the land. Later, under Assyria and Babylon, which were building great empires, Israel was led into captivity. This was the focus of Moses' warning, almost a millennium before Babylon carried off Judah. The prophetic time perspective was long.

The greatest threat to their liberty would be their forced subordination to foreign gods. "And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell" (v. 28). To be forced to serve dead idols was a terrible prospect. But Moses knew where rebellious men's hearts are: in their earthly posses-

sions. So, he prefaced this ultimate curse with a this-worldly curse: captivity. They will lose their property. They will lose their military strength. This will culminate in their subordination to dead idols.

The basis of military success, David told Israel generations later, is not weaponry. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Ps. 20:7). He was merely rephrasing Moses’ warning to Israel’s kings not to multiply horses (Deut. 17:16).⁵ Moses made it clear that their covenantal faithfulness alone would preserve their independence as a nation. This independence would someday be withdrawn.

Moses offered hope to the scattered captives. “But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them” (vv. 29–31). Nevertheless, the full Mosaic covenant would never be restored to Israel. The civil covenant would be broken forever. After the remnant of Israel returned from captivity, the nation did not enjoy sustained political independence. The age of the empires had arrived. Control over Israel’s politics passed from the Medo-Perians to Alexander the Great and his successors, and from them to Rome. This loss of civil authority protected the nation from idolatry. Israel never again worshipped the gods of Canaan. Those gods had been defeated twice: by Israel under Joshua (partial) and by Assyria and Babylon (total), who replaced the Israelites with imported foreigners who did not worship the local gods of Canaan. Power would no longer come from Canaan’s gods under the captivity. Without power, the gods of the ancient world had no claim on men’s allegiance. The gods of the ruling empire would dominate while Israel was absent from the land.

When the remnant of Israel returned, pagan gods were seen as enemies, the gods of their conquerors. Israel’s leaders could not worship these alien gods and still retain the allegiance of the nation. Israel did not again turn to idols. Israel’s post-exilic temptations were legalism, Greek philosophy, and Hellenic culture, not dead idols. The captivity cured them of their older bad habits.

5. Chapter 42.

It was one thing for foreigners to reside in Israel as conquerors before the exile. It was quite another for them to remove Israelites from the land. This was the conclusion of pre-exilic idolatrous religions. Idolatrous worship in the pre-empire phase was local worship. The sovereignty of a god was manifested in his ability to extend visible rule to his people. Ancient civil theology was power religion.⁶ The success of a god was tied to the success of his people militarily. This is why an invading army was less of a threat to Israel than captivity, and less of a covenantal sanction. Israel's continuing presence in the land seemingly testified to the nation's continuing covenant with God. Israel's defeat was not total. So, to break them of this idolatrous way of thinking, God told them that His covenant with them was valid irrespective of their geography. They would be carried off, yet this would not break God's authority over them or His ability to deliver them. On the contrary, their military defeat would confirm the terms of His covenant. Unlike all the other religions of their day, Moses announced, Israel's military defeat and geographical scattering would confirm them as God's people.

E. Counting the Cost of Rebellion

Moses presented a real-world problem before them. Like every prophet who invoked covenant sanctions, he challenged them with a cost-benefit analysis. What was the cost of rebellion? Captivity. What was the cost of captivity? Loss of land, loss of authority, and loss of the temple.

The prophet had a difficult task of persuasion. He came before people who were confident that the sanctions would not come, either because "we're really not all that bad," or because "God's sanctions are symbolic, not historic" or because "God will not see us," or because "God is merciful," or because "we have the temple." People want to commit sin with abandon. They want cost-free sinning. They refuse to acknowledge that sin has significant costs attached.

Then there is future-orientation. Present-oriented people steeply discount the future. They apply a high discount to future costs and future benefits. They are the grasshopper in Aesop's fable of the ant and the grasshopper, a story resembling a biblical injunction: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

gathereth her food in the harvest” (Prov. 6:6–8). Present-oriented people regard the pleasures of sin as immediate, and therefore highly valuable, whereas future costs are distant, and therefore not a significant factor in decision-making today. Such an outlook is the antithesis of Moses’ time perspective, for Moses was highly future-oriented. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:24–27).

The Israelites prior to the exile returned to idolatry, generation after generation. No matter what negative corporate sanctions God imposed, Israel returned to idolatry. Moses had warned a future generation of the wrath to come, but no rebellious generation read his warning with this mental reservation: “This might mean us.” Like the men in Noah’s day, who married and gave in marriage, and were carried away in the Flood (Matt. 24:38–39), so is every generation entrapped by sin. “I’ll think about it tomorrow” is the appropriate tombstone inscription for generations of covenant-breakers.

In the Old Testament, there is only one example of national repentance prior to the imposition of negative covenant sanctions: Nineveh (Jonah 3). A king in Israel might occasionally repent representatively and thereby defer the corporate sanctions (e.g., Josiah and Hezekiah), but Jonah alone was able to see national repentance from the bottom up. The king of Nineveh repented last, not first (Jonah 3:6). It was this repentance which gained Assyria the positive corporate sanctions that transformed her into an empire, which then brought the long-prophesied negative sanction of captivity to Israel. Moses’ prophecy was fulfilled because Nineveh repented long enough to build up its strength as an empire.

Moses warned the generation of the conquest about the cost of idolatry. That generation was soon to compromise with idolatry by allowing idolatrous Canaanites to remain in the land (Josh. 15:63; 17:12–13). The Book of Judges shows how God delivered Israel into the hands of idolatrous foreign nations because of Israel’s idolatry. Moses’ warning was not taken seriously enough to change men’s behavior. Each generation imagined that the covenant’s negative sanctions would be delayed indefinitely. Each generation failed to count the cost.

The debt to God kept growing, compounding so as to become unpayable. The debt finally came due at the time of the exile:

And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, **till there was no remedy**. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years (II Chron. 36:15–21).

Present-oriented people count temporally distant costs differently than future-oriented people do. Future-oriented people discount those costs at a far lower rate than present-oriented people do. The burden of those future costs looms greater in the mind of a future-oriented person. He pays closer attention to them. This is equally true of future blessings. The future looms larger in the thinking of a future-oriented person than in the thinking of a present-oriented person.

Israel did not respond to the threat of negative sanctions in the distant future. But it is the mark of spiritual maturity that a nation does pay attention to the distant future in making its decisions. Nineveh responded, but Jonah had prophesied a relatively short time period: 40 days (Jonah 3:4). Total judgment in 40 days caught their attention. An unspecified time period did not motivate Israel.

Conclusion

Deuteronomy 1:6–4:49 made clear to the conquest generation that God is above all other gods and all other kings: hierarchy. He has the power to deliver His people both out of bondage and into bondage. No

one can stay His hand. Moses presented a detailed account of how God had delivered their fathers out of Egypt and through the wilderness. In recent days, God had delivered Sihon and Og into their hands, destroying them completely. The preliminary phase of the conquest was now completed.

Moses concluded his historical account with a warning of covenantal judgment to come. This prophesied judgment was specific: their removal from the land to a foreign nation. The moral cause would be idolatry: worship of the gods of Canaan. The resulting sanction would be their cultural subordination to foreign idols. The penalty would fit the crime. But Moses did not put a time limit on the fulfillment of this prophecy. It was open-ended. This did not reduce its threat to Israel. There were no cases of open-ended covenant lawsuits against Israel in the Bible that were not eventually prosecuted by God. The final one came in A.D. 70.

The nation did not respond in a way which indicated that they took Moses' warning seriously. The Israelites became idolatrous again and again. They did not learn their lesson under the judges. But God gave them time to change their ways. He gave them so much time that they discounted the future costs of rebellion to something approaching zero. In the face of mercy, sinners continued to sin. But eventually the bills came due.

Part III: Ethics/Law/Boundaries (5–26)

11

JUDICIAL CONTINUITY

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire (Deut. 5:1–5).

This passage begins the third and longest section of Deuteronomy: the law. The theocentric focus of this law is God as the Lawgiver in His capacity as the covenant-maker. The covenant's authority extends through time, generation after generation. "The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." God had appeared to Israel at Horeb almost four decades earlier, where He appeared to the nation in fire and smoke (Ex. 19:18). Sinai and Horeb are interchangeable names in this case, since it was at Horeb that the Israelites worshipped the golden calf in Moses' absence (Ps. 106:19).

A. Face to Face

Moses spoke here of the covenant that God made with them. He said that this covenant was not the covenant that God made with their fathers. God made this covenant with those still alive: face to face. Some of the listeners had been young men or children at the time of that initial covenant act (Ex. 19). But what about those who were now under age 40? Those alive at the time of Moses' second presentation of

the law had not all been alive at the first presentation of the law. What did Moses mean when he said, “The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day” (v. 3)? This sentence cannot be taken literally, nor was it so understood in Moses’ day. How should it be taken?

To make sense of the passage, we should consider in detail another literal phrase that cannot be taken literally: *face to face*. “The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire” (v. 4). We know this cannot be taken literally because of what God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai:

And he [Moses] said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen (Ex. 33:18–23).

So, we know that Moses did not speak to God face to face. Yet a few verses before this passage, we read: “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle” (Ex. 33:11). The key phrase here is this: *as a man speaks to his friend*. God spoke to Moses as someone bonded to Him through shared experiences and shared goals.

Not only did the Israelites not speak to God literally face to face, they avoided speaking to Moses face to face after his return from the mountain. “And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face” (Ex. 34:30–33). The glory of Moses was more than they could stand, let alone the glory of God.

Yet in the confrontation between God and Moses regarding the 10

spies' false testimony regarding Canaan, and because of the people's willingness to stone Joshua and Caleb, Moses reminded God that He had called Israel out of bondage and had promised to deliver Canaan into their hands. Moses asked: What if God destroys the nation first? This will lead God's enemies to mock Him. "And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day-time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night" (Num. 14:14). But God was not seen face to face. What the Israelites saw was the glory cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. In this, God manifested Himself to them. This was the literal application of "face-to-face." Israel was in God's presence, as in the presence of a friend, when they were led by the glory cloud.

The reference is partially symbolic—the glory cloud—and partially ethical: the relationship between friends. Thus, whenever this ethical bond is broken by Israel through rebellion, Israel will no longer enjoy its face-to-face relationship with God. "Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day. Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods" (Deut. 31:17–18). "And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith" (Deut. 32:20).

B. "Not With Our Fathers"

This phrase seems to refer to the patriarchs. Moses spoke to the nation about God's new covenant, a covenant not made with their fathers. Moses was the father of the exodus. His generation had fled Egypt. Yet he spoke here of the fathers. Such a reference points back to the generations that preceded his.

What covenant was Moses speaking about? The covenant whose stipulations are the Ten Commandments. This had been a new covenant for Israel, one which provided the general principles of law by which the nation would judge and be judged. God had made this new covenant with those alive that very day. Moses was preparing his

listeners for a second reading of the Decalogue (vv. 6–21).

But what of those who had not been alive at Sinai-Horeb? They were listening now. They would soon hear the law read to them again, though modified slightly: the justification for the sabbath, i.e., their deliverance out of Egypt (v. 15). The important factor here was *the continuity provided by the Mosaic law*. The covenant was the same because the law was the same. The covenant had been made with them at Horeb because the law had not changed. *The constancy of the Mosaic law was the judicial foundation of the continuity of the Mosaic covenant*. The act of covenant renewal which would transfer the inheritance to the next generation would be grounded in the same commandments that had grounded that original covenant at Sinai-Horeb.

The covenant had been made between God and all of the listeners because the covenant establishes continuity: God's sovereignty, His authority, His law, His oath-bound historical sanctions, and His system of inheritance. Point five—inheritance—is possible only because the covenant can be renewed through the generations. This covenant renewal system is what links the generations. The link is the covenant, not biology. The biblical covenant is not a racial covenant; it is a confessional covenant. It is established by oath and oath-sign, not genetics. By birth, men are automatically consigned to Adam's covenant of death. They enter God's redemptive covenant only by oath and oath-sign.

Were the patriarchs participants in God's redemptive covenant? Of course. Then why did Moses exclude them from this covenant? Because this covenant had been, and would continue to be, the historical manifestation of God's redemptive covenant for a new era. There was a new priesthood: Aaron's. There was therefore a new covenant with a new set of stipulations. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). There was absolute continuity of redemption; there was only partial continuity of administration. Circumcision remained; Passover was new.

God had made this new covenant with Israel. This covenant, as with the redemptive covenant in every era, included *an administrative means of succession*. The covenantal mark was still circumcision, but this mark was not sufficient. There also had to be annual covenant renewal: Passover.

The question arises: Did they actually celebrate Passover in the wilderness? The biblical texts do not say. The Book of Numbers does not provide information of events beyond the first two years until two

years before the conquest.¹ Passover is not mentioned in the interim period. They celebrated it in the first year (Num. 9:5), prior to their rebellion against Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14). The next reference to Passover is at the end of the wilderness era, when Moses told the conquest generation the proper date for celebrating it (Num. 28:16). It appears as though they had not celebrated it in the interim.

Here is the theological problem: grace and law. The Passover was a means of grace, but it was closed to those who were not circumcised (Ex. 12:48). The conquest generation was not circumcised in the wilderness. This took place only after they had crossed into Canaan (Josh. 5:5). They immediately celebrated Passover (Josh. 5:10–12). God timed their entrance into Canaan in terms of the Passover. If Passover had been celebrated in the wilderness, either these people had been excluded or else admitted apart from the mark of the covenant. Exclusion seems unlikely. What about participation? The Old Testament is silent.

Nevertheless, we must decide, despite the absence of evidence: either there was no formal covenant renewal in the wilderness (no Passover) or there was grace shown to the conquest generation, i.e., access to Passover apart from circumcision. What do we know for sure? The parents refused to circumcise their children; they were in rebellion. It would have been consistent with this rebellion to have refused to celebrate the feasts. They had cut themselves off from the future by refusing to: (1) conquer the land themselves or (2) turn power over to their adult sons to lead them into the Promised Land.² They had also been unwilling to participate representatively in the conquest through faith in their sons' future victory. The mark of this unwillingness was their refusal to circumcise their sons. My conclusion: they did not celebrate Passover.

C. To Maintain the Grant

Moses introduced this third section of the Book of Deuteronomy with a call to Israel to learn, keep (guard),³ and do the statutes. He re-

1. R. K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1992), p. 431.

2. Chapter 1.

3. "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to **keep** the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24); "And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's **keeper**?" (Gen. 4:9).

minded them that God had made His covenant with them. They participated in the original covenant just as if they had been there at Sinai when God appeared in the fiery cloud and gave them the commandments. *Judicially, God had made the covenant with them through their legal representatives, their parents.* The covenant at Sinai was their covenant, for God would deal with them as friends, face to face. He had broken off relations with their fathers after the rebellion of the spies. Only God's promise to Abraham to deliver Canaan into Israel's hands had preserved them. Moses had pleaded on this basis in order to save the entire nation (Num. 14:13–17). On the basis of that promise, to be fulfilled soon by the fourth generation (Gen. 15:16), the face-to-face relationship with Israel had been maintained. Thus, the covenant was far more their covenant than it had been for their fathers at Sinai, who had broken it repeatedly. The very uncircumcised condition of the fourth generation testified to the degree that their fathers had broken the covenant.

To maintain the covenant, Moses announced, they would have to obey God. *The continuity of God's law had not been broken.* This was what linked them to their fathers. It was also what would link their descendants to them. The inheritance was grounded in God's promise to Abraham; maintaining it would be grounded in their obedience to God.⁴

The focus of Moses' immediate concern was the conquest. He was about to recapitulate the law because a new generation had succeeded the old. *To them the Abrahamic promise applied.* The covenant was their covenant far more than it had been their fathers' covenant, for they were the heirs of the promise. They had to understand the judicial relationship between God, covenant, law, sanctions, and inheritance. To maintain the grant, they had to obey.

God granted them the inheritance, not on the basis of what they had done, but because of what He had promised. *As heirs of the promise, they were heirs of grace.* They had not earned the inheritance. It was theirs because God had promised Abraham that the fourth generation would inherit. They would have to fight to win it, but the promise was their motivation. As recipients of God's grant, they could fight in great confidence. They had already learned this in the war against Midian, in which not one Israelite warrior had died (Num. 31:49).

The land flowing with milk and honey would soon be theirs. This

4. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 9. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

was grace. They would receive an infusion of capital to replace whatever they had spent of Egypt's spoils. This capital would not just be money; it would be land. To this grant of land they would add their creativity and labor. This would in turn produce great wealth, if they continued to obey.

This means that *Israel's greatest visible capital asset was the law of God*. The law would serve them as their tool of dominion.⁵ But without God's grace, God's law is incapable of delivering the goods long term. The law always condemns those who seek to use it for their own purposes. Adherence to the law produces wealth, but this wealth then becomes a snare for its owners (Deut. 8:17–18).⁶ Men sin. *Without grace, men cannot fulfill the stipulations of the covenant*. Habakkuk announced this principle clearly: "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). Faith in God's redemptive grace, not faith in man's creative power, is the basis of covenant blessings. Through faith, men obey; through obedience, they maintain the covenant grant.

Conclusion

God spoke through Moses to the generation of the conquest. He told them that He had made a covenant with them. God was dealing with them just as if they had been the first to make this covenant with them. *This was a new covenant which the patriarchs had not known*. It was a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. Moses told them that God had spoken to them out of the fire at Mt. Sinai, even though many who were listening to Moses had not been born at that time. He told them that God had spoken face to face with them, even though no man had seen God's face. God had established a covenant at Sinai, and they were part of this covenant. They were about to inherit the land, fulfilling the Abrahamic promise. The continuity of both promise and law placed them inside the covenant.

To re-confirm this covenant, Moses would now read the Ten Commandments to them. First, he referred to the covenant-making event of Exodus 19: the face-to-face meeting between Israel and God at Mt. Sinai. This event was followed by Exodus 20: the giving of the Decalogue. Second, they were now going to hear the law again. This

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

6. Chapter 21.

was evidence that God was still dealing with Israel on a face-to-face basis. God had not changed, and neither had the terms of His covenant, with one exception: the reason given for the sabbath. If Israel remained faithful to the terms of this covenant, the nation would maintain the kingdom grant that was embodied in the land.

12

SABBATH AND LIBERATION

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day (Deut. 5:14–15).

In the Exodus version of the fourth commandment, the theocentric focus is clearer: God made the earth in six days and rested the seventh. God as the Creator is its primary message. This version is different. It has to do with justice: masters and servants. Egypt had been unjust; therefore, God had delivered His people out of Egyptian bondage. The Exodus version is clearly a cross-boundary law. This version, however, is clearly a land law.¹ It has to do with the history of Israel. Unlike the other nine commandments, this one creates problems of interpretation based on land law vs. cross-boundary law.

A. A Nation of Former Servants

The Ten Commandments listed in Deuteronomy 5 are ethically the same that appear in Exodus 20. There is only one major variation: the reason given for the sabbath. In Exodus 20, the reason given is creational: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (v. 11). This reason rests on something that God did. The reason given in Deuteronomy 5 rests on something that the Israelites had been. The focus of Deuteronomy

1. On land laws and cross-boundary laws, see Appendix J.

5:15 is on the Israelites' experience in Egypt. What had been their condition? They had been servants. Egyptians had ruled over them. The implication is that the Egyptians had not allowed them to rest. Deuteronomy 5:15 contrasts with Exodus 20:11, but the contrast is implicit, not explicit. Exodus 20:11 tells us what God did. Deuteronomy 5:15 implies that the Egyptians did something else.

1. A Slave's Life

The exodus generation was a generation of slaves. They had grown up under bondage. Their thinking was shaped by their lifelong condition as subordinates. They had not been allowed to make important decisions for themselves. They had been told what to do under threat of physical sanctions. When Moses had challenged Pharaoh, Pharaoh's response was to add new work requirements: to find a substitute for straw in their brick-making. That is, their punishment was additional work. Moses had asked Pharaoh to allow the people time off for worship. Pharaoh's answer was to make them work even harder, despite the fact that their production would be less efficient, economically speaking. Work had been a negative sanction in Egypt's slave society.²

The first case law in Exodus 21 has to do with slave marriages (vv. 2–6).³ The second case law governs the sale of daughters as servants (vv. 8–11).⁴ God caught their attention by announcing laws that were intimately connected with what their previous condition had been. They had been slaves; here were rules that protected slaves.

2. Why the Change?

The question arises: Why did God not offer in Exodus 21:11 the justification for the sabbath given in Deuteronomy 5:15? Second, why didn't He give the creational justification for the sabbath to the conquest generation? Wasn't the conquest generation more like God in His capacity as builder? Weren't they about to build a new civilization? But this is not what we find.

Moses in the first section of Deuteronomy 5 made the connection

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 7.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 32.

between the establishment of the national covenant at Sinai-Horeb and this generation. He spoke of God as having made the covenant with them personally. Here, Moses repeated the connection. Who had been servants in Egypt? Those listening to him. Yet, chronologically speaking, this was incorrect. The generation of former slaves had died off. Their slave mentality had condemned them to wander in the wilderness for four decades. Their fear of confrontation had led them into sin (Num. 14). They had not been willing to accept God's assignment of military conquest. But Moses spoke as if all of his listeners had just come out of Egypt. "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm."

The continuity of the Mosaic covenant, as manifested above all in Passover, linked all successive generations of Israelites with the exodus generation. *Passover was a rite of passage: passage out of bondage*. Israel had no rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Judaism's bar mitzvah is a modern rite. The Mosaic Covenant had only two rites of passage: from the family of Adam into the family of Abraham (circumcision)—clearly a matter of adoption—and from the slave's life to the liberated man's life (Passover). Both rites were manifestations of God's grace. The first rite was a one-time event; the second was an annual event. The first rite placed a man definitively under the terms of God's covenant; the second was an act of covenant renewal. The Passover celebrated what God did immediately after the first Passover meal was eaten. The meal reminded Israelites of their slave condition. This is why they were required to eat bitter herbs (Ex. 12:8).

3. *The Conquest Generation*

The conquest generation did not ritually enter the family of Abraham until Gilgal, on the far side of the Jordan (Josh. 5:5). Yet they had already begun to inherit in terms of God's promise to Abraham (Num. 21).⁵ Their willingness to fight was proof of their membership in Abraham's line of descent. Israel had been a family. Abraham's name had meant "father of multitudes." Israel had become a multitude in Egypt (Ex. 1:7).⁶ But Israel in Egypt was not yet a nation because she was a slave. Not until Israel swore covenantal allegiance to God at Sinai and

5. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 12.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1.

received the law did Israel become a nation. Prior to this corporate covenantal event, Israel had been an extended family.

Now, for the second time, Israel received the Mosaic law. The people did not have to swear allegiance. This had been done representatively once and for all by their parents in Exodus 19. Moses had already pointed back to the events of Exodus 19, in preparation for the reading of the law. He would do so again upon the completion of his reading of the law (vv. 22–33). With the reading of the law, Moses renewed the national covenant. This public event was to be repeated every seventh year after they came into the land (Deut. 31:9–13).⁷

B. The Day of Liberation

Deuteronomy 5:14 speaks of strangers in the gates. The language refers to the existence of gates. Israel in the wilderness had no gates. The gate was a judicial boundary. As with any boundary, the gate separated insiders from outsiders. Those inside the boundary were under the rule of law that governed the jurisdiction. Inside this boundary, God said, all men must be treated the same. “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49).⁸

The sabbath law governed everyone inside the national boundaries of Israel. This included strangers, manservants, and maidservants. It also included animals. One year in seven, it even included the land, which was to receive a year of rest (Lev. 25:4–5).⁹

By giving a new reason for the sabbath, Moses established a sympathetic link among the listeners, their deceased parents, and all the servants whom the listeners might employ in the future. The sabbath became a day of liberation for all Israel, but especially those in bondage. *The sabbath pointed to a future day of liberation.* God had worked six days and had rested on the seventh. This pointed to Israel’s day of liberation at the end of her week. The bondservant was not to be required to work on the sabbath (Deut. 5:14). The conclusion is incapable: a day of liberation would come for Israel’s bond servants.

Egypt had refused to honor the sabbath with respect to servants, which was the crucial test of sabbath-keeping. The Israelites had been forced to work without a day of rest. They had also not been allowed

7. Chapter 75.

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

to worship God. Moses' challenge to Pharaoh was that the people be allowed to have time off from work in order to worship God. Pharaoh understood what this meant: a direct challenge to his status as a divinity in Egypt. If he granted this time of relief from work, he would have ritually acknowledged his subordination to the God of Israel. He refused to allow this. Israel did not get her rest period until the day after Passover. *Israel's day of rest was her day of liberation.*

Egypt was condemned in God's eyes by the fact that the Egyptians did not allow their servants a day of rest. What He allowed Himself at the end of the creation week, Egypt did not allow for the slaves: a day of rest. The Egyptians had assumed that they owned all of the output of their servants. They had assumed that God owned none of this output. In short, they had assumed their autonomy from the Creator God. They had placed themselves under the bureaucratic rule of a supposed divine monarch, the Pharaoh, while extending his rule over their slaves. The legal condition of the slaves reflected the Egyptians' own legal condition: servants of Pharaoh. Their servants were their judicial representatives. This is why the sabbath law singled out servants. How men treat their servants is how their super iors will treat them. *Their servants become their representatives.* This hierarchical principle of *subord inate representation* governs one's placement among the sheep or the goats at the final judg ment (Matt. 25:31–46).

The sabbath law in Deuteronomy 5 warned Israel: to ignore the sabbath law is to become like the Egyptians. The evidence of how well Israelites obeyed the sabbath law would be seen in how they treated their servants. So it had been for Egypt; so it would be for Israel. *The sabbath was Israel's representative principle of liberation.* If Israel refused to honor it, the nation would again come under the negative sanction of slavery. This was why Judah went into captivity to the Babylo nians. The nation had not allowed the land its sabbath rest periods (Jer. 50:34).

C. Literal Texts for Less Literal Purposes

There are discrepancies between the Exodus 20 account and the Deuteronomy 5 account. A minor one is the difference between the two versions of the law against covetousness. In the Exodus 20 account, the prohibition begins with the neighbor's property and moves to the neighbor's wife (v. 17). The reverse is the case in Deuteronomy 5:21. Similarly, the blessing attached to the fifth command ment in Ex-

odus 20:12 was long life in the land. In Deuteronomy 5:16, the promise is more general: “that it may go well with thee, in the land. . . .” But the discrepancy between the two justifications for the sabbath is not minor. The two accounts are totally different.

How, then, are we to interpret Moses’ words? “These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me” (Deut. 5:22). If God added no more words than the words which Moses had just repeated, then what of Exodus 20:11? These surely were words in addition to Deuteronomy 5:15. If some archaeologist in Israel should ever discover the fragment of the broken tablet on which the sabbath law appeared, what would it say? Would it repeat both justifications or just one? If only one should appear, then one of the written accounts of the giving of the Decalogue is incomplete. If one of the accounts is incomplete, then the words, “he added no more,” cannot be taken literally.

This discrepancy cannot be a function of Moses’ flagging memory. “And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deut. 34:7). He was in the final stages of writing down the Pentateuch (Deut. 31:9). He would die within a few weeks, and possibly within a few days. The suggestion that he would not have remembered what God announced at the sealing of the national covenant, or what God wrote on the tables of the law for 40 days (Ex. 24:12, 18; Deut. 9:9), or what Moses subsequently wrote on the tables of the law for 40 days (Ex. 34:28), would be ludicrous.

Higher critics like to think that different editors revised the two passages. But what forger would have been sufficiently stupid to revise part of the Ten Commandments? The Decalogue was the heart of Israel’s religion. Of all the passages in the Pentateuch to tamper with, the Decalogue would have been the last choice of a clever forger. Every torah scroll in the nation would have been different from his revision. Only at the time of the rediscovery of the law under Josiah would such a forgery have been possible (II Kings 22). But what would have been the forger’s motivation? Why not just re-write the seemingly deviant passage in the rediscovered scroll to make it conform to your scribal agenda? Why change one without changing the other? Why create a visible discrepancy? The higher critic must attribute a degree of stupidity to the forger that calls into question the intelligence necessary

to become a successful forger. A forger this stupid would not have possessed the intellectual skills necessary to become a “redactor,” according to the canons of higher criticism: a master of the existing biblical texts and a master of deceit.¹⁰

E. A Question of Covenantal Purpose

My assumption is that God did verbally announce both reasons for the sabbath at the original sealing of the national covenant, but the words on the tablets¹¹ included only the more general justification: the creation account. The number-one question in the Book of Exodus is this: Who is Moses’ God? Answer: the God of the patriarchs (Ex. 3:15). This was what God told Moses to tell the rulers of Israel (Ex. 3:16). This answer looked back to the stories found in the first book of the Pentateuch, the book of origins. This God was the God of creation, which Moses asserted in the opening words of Genesis.

At the time of the sealing of the national covenant, the Israelites had just passed through the Red Sea. This event would have been at the forefront of concern for any nearby pagan nation that might hear of this deliverance. Who are the Israelites? Who knows? Who cares? But a God who can part the waters of the Red Sea is a God to be reckoned with. *What He did at the Red Sea pointed to His sovereignty as Creator.* The God of creation rules over nature. *A creation-based justification of the sabbath would have been understood by all nations.* The Exodus justification of the sabbath is consistent with the purpose of the book: to announce the authority of God. This authority is absolute because He is the Creator.

The Deuteronomy version applies specifically to Israel’s history. Moses in Deuteronomy was announcing a link between the generation of the exodus and the generation of the conquest. This link was covenantal-judicial: the Decalogue. It was also historical. Moses in Deuteronomy was making it clear to that generation that they were the heirs of all that had taken place in Egypt, before most of them had been born. The justification for the sabbath in Deuteronomy is *historical-participatory*. This fits the covenantal goal of Deuteronomy better than Exodus’ creational justification does, namely, to affirm point five of the

10. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix P: “The Hoax of Higher Criticism.” See also North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Appendix H: “Conspiracy, Forgery, and Higher Criticism.”

11. On two sets of identical tablets, see Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), Part 2, ch. 1.

covenant: inheritance. This is the primary theme of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 5:22 reads: “These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.” The degree of literalism in Moses’ words here must be judged by two things: the context of his monologue on the Decalogue and the written record in Exodus. The context here was *national covenant renewal and inheritance*. The written record in Exodus was more universal: the authority of God as Creator. Conclusion: God and Moses wrote on the tablets what we read in Exodus 20:11, not what we read in Deuteronomy 5:15.

Conclusion

The sabbath law explicitly governed the treatment of subordinates. The test of how a man honored the sabbath was how he treated his subordinates. This is true in both versions of the law.

The justification for the sabbath law in Deuteronomy 5 is different from the justification in Exodus 20. In the earlier version, *God’s creation week* is used to justify the sabbath: a cross-boundary law. In the second version, *Israel’s time of bondage in Egypt* is given as the reason. In the first version, God set the *positive pattern* for all superiors in history. In the second, Egyptians set the *negative pattern*. God gives men a weekly day of rest out of mercy. Israelites had to do the same for their subordinates. In both versions of the sabbath law, subordinates are the focus of concern. *How men treat subordinates reflects their obedience to God*. From God to the lowest subordinate, each ruler in the hierarchy must honor the sabbath principle of rest.

The *day of rest* is by implication the *day of liberation*. The day of rest is the model of the final liberation from bondage to sin. We labor today to enter into rest later, just as God did. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:9–11). There have been periods of liberation throughout covenant history. Israel did not remain a slave to Egypt indefinitely. This implied that no nation or people will be in servitude to any other indefinitely. This also implied that servitude will eventually end. The definitive abolitionist act occurred in Christ’s min-

istry, when He fulfilled the jubilee laws (Luke 4:18–21).¹² With the abolition of the jubilee laws also went Israel's permanent slave laws (Lev. 25:44–46).¹³

The Hebrew sabbath was intended to relieve men from the bondage of labor once a week. By honoring the sabbath, they acknowledged publicly that they were not in bondage to the futile quest for more. The quest for more is a hard task-master. It knows no limits. The Hebrew sabbath announced: "Enough for now!" Until men are willing to believe this and act in terms of it, they remain slaves to one of two idols, either nature or history.¹⁴ Regarding a land ruled by either of these idols, it can accurately be said, as the fearful spies said of Canaan, "The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof" (Num. 13:32b).

The New Testament's covenantal deliverance of God's people out of the Old Covenant was presented by the author of the Hebrews as an aspect of the sabbath (Heb. 4). This deliverance was achieved by Christ in His earthly work, whose efforts serve as a model for our earthly labors: "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (v. 10). Covenant-keepers enter God's rest definitively through faith in Christ: "For we which have believed do enter into rest" (v. 3a). They must strive toward this rest historically: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (v. 11). They achieve rest at the final judgment. This is in the future: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (v. 9).

Christ's entrance into the heavenly places as the high priest took place in the past. Our rest has been attained definitively and representatively through Christ. We look back in faith to His attainment of definitive rest on our behalf, even though we also look to the end of time for its final consummation. The first day of the week—the eighth day¹⁵—is our day of rest because of our testimony that, judicially speaking, we have already entered into our promised rest through Christ's representation.

12. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

13. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 30.

14. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

15. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [1982] 2012), ch. 6:D.

13

LAW AND SANCTIONS

Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess (Deut. 5:32–33).

God as the Lawgiver is the theocentric focus of this law.

A. A Cross-Boundary Law

This case law was a cross-boundary law.¹ It was not a tribal law. It was a law of national inheritance in Canaan, since it referred to the land. The question is: Was it exclusively a land law?² I argue that it extended beyond the boundaries of Israel, for the Mosaic law was inherently expansionist and evangelical.

Moses informed the conquest generation that God had spoken these words to him immediately after the giving of the law in Exodus 20. The phrase, “ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left,” occurs repeatedly in the Pentateuch and in Joshua. The model was the march through the Red Sea: “But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left” (Ex. 14:29). They were safe on dry land in between two mountains of water. This judicial principle also underlay the decisions of Israel’s civil judges (Deut. 17:8–11) and the king: “That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel” (Deut. 17:20). This principle was to

1. On cross-boundary laws, see Appendix J.

2. On land laws, see Appendix J.

become the basis of Israel's extension of dominion over other nations: "And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them" (Deut. 28:13–14).

The phrase also appears in the Book of Joshua, at the beginning of the conquest and at the end of his rule, when he transferred authority to the judges. The people told him: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:7). Decades later, he told the rulers: "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left" (Josh. 23:6). Solomon echoed this: "Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil" (Prov. 4:27).

B. Ethical Cause and Effect

The basis of long-term success in history is adherence to the laws of God. This is stated clearly in the text. Moses exhorted the nation to obey God in order to prolong their lives in the land. This was a national extension of the Decalogue's familial rule: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12). Paul pointed out that this was the first commandment to which a promise was attached (Eph. 6:2). This is a very important observation.

A promise in the Bible is always conditional. This is because a promise is always covenantal, and covenants are always ethically conditional. Calvinists speak of unconditional election, but this phrase is technically incorrect. Election from the beginning was always conditional on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in history. God imputes—unilaterally declares judicially—the perfect righteousness of Christ to individual sinners, but this perfect righteousness was not unconditional. It was conditional down to the last jot and tittle of the law. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). *All theological discussions of unconditional*

vs. conditional promises should begin with the life of Christ. Anyone who argues that election is unconditional should be specific: unconditional with respect to the recipient of God's special grace, but neither historically nor judicially unconditional with respect to the life of Christ. This qualification seems obvious, but it is rarely mentioned in such arguments.

God's promise to Abraham regarding the inheritance was not made in terms of the Mosaic law. Paul wrote: "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3:17–18). Yet there was a law *implicitly attached* to the Abrahamic covenant promise: the law of circumcision. The conquest generation had to be circumcised before the conquest could begin within the Jordan's boundaries (Josh. 5:5). There were conditions attached to the promise.

Paul said that the commandment's positive sanction of long life for those who honor parents was a promise. This was obviously a conditional promise. This conditional promise was explicitly part of the Mosaic law. God extended this same promise from the family to the nation when He broadened the stipulations of the covenant to the whole of the Mosaic law.

Covenant law has sanctions attached. *These sanctions are positive and negative.* These sanctions are the means of inheritance. The negative sanctions are the means of disinheritance, while the positive sanctions are the means of inheritance. Point three of the biblical covenant model—ethics³—is inextricably connected with point four: sanctions.⁴ Point five—inheritance⁵—is the result of point four. *They are a consistent, judicially unbreakable unity.* Thus, God's promise of inheritance to Abraham's heirs was inextricably bound to the stipulation of the Abrahamic covenant: circumcision. Similarly, God's promise to the Israelites regarding the maintenance of the kingdom grant was inextricably bound to the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. The Mosaic covenant's stipulations were far more comprehensive than the

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North, *ibid.*, ch. 4.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, *ibid.*, ch. 5.

Abrahamic covenant's had been. "Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess" (Deut. 5:33).

The Israelites were told to obey God in order to receive specific benefits. The presentation of the law was in terms of results: benefits for obedience, set-backs for disobedience. God did not present the covenant as a system of rules that was in no way connected with outcomes. On the contrary, God presented His law in terms of the wisdom of pursuing righteousness because of the benefits. "Doing well by doing good" is the very essence of biblical ethics. More specifically, doing well *in history* by doing good is biblical. Anyone who suggests that God has created an ethical system that promises only "pie in the sky bye and bye" has either not understood the biblical covenant model or else he has denied that this Old Covenant ethical system extends into the New Covenant. In the second case, he needs proof based on the New Covenant. It is not sufficient to assert such a conclusion without exegetical proof.⁶ Solomon said: "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccl. 11:1). Jesus said: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19:29).⁷

C. Straight and Narrow, Deep and Wide

The road to success for Adam prior to the Fall was broad. He could do anything he wanted to without fear of loss, with one exception. For Abraham, this road was narrower. He had to circumcise the males of his household. For Moses, the road was narrower still. More things were placed off-limits. In some areas, the New Covenant is even narrower. Consider adultery. Christ moved the law from deed to thought. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27–28). On the other hand, the minutia of the dietary laws have been annulled completely (Acts 10; I Cor. 8). So, certain ethical limits have been tightened; ritual limits have been

6. Ever since 1973, theologians have been waiting for this proof.

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

loosened. Mosaic land laws, seed laws, and priestly laws have been annulled.⁸ But the requirements for extending the kingdom have been made far more rigorous, especially geographically.⁹

Predictable, historical, visible corporate sanctions are unbreakably attached to God's law. This is covenant theology's explanation of God's promise of the church's visible victory in history. This promise is what amillennialists and premillennialists deny; they preach the visible cultural defeat of the church in history. This is why premillennialists and amillennialists either deny covenant theology or else define it in such a way that the law's sanctions are removed. We are told that there is no possible widespread cultural victory for the church in history because of the following reasons: (1) the Mosaic law has been completely annulled; (2) the covenant's historical sanctions are no longer predictable; or (3) the promise of the church's defeat in history has replaced the promise of Israel's victory in history, at least in this dispensation. None of these theological arguments is correct.¹⁰

Because God's covenant is a unified system, God's law, His historical sanctions, and our inheritance are an unbreakable unity. *The inescapable reality of God's predictable sanctions in history is why it is theologically mandatory to link theonomy with postmillennialism.* Non-theonomic postmillennialism can exist without theonomy, but theonomy cannot exist without postmillennialism, assuming that we define theonomy in terms of the five points of the biblical covenant. Of course, it is quite possible to discuss all five points independently, and many Calvinists do: God's sovereignty without God's law, God's sanctions without church hierarchy, and so forth. This is the way that Reformed Baptists adhere to Calvinism: without the covenant. It is also the way that most Presbyterians adhere to Calvinism. Protestants have been doing this for centuries. But if we speak of biblical covenant theology, we must speak of an integrated system: all five points. Deuteronomy is clearly structured in terms of these five points. So is Levitic-

8. Appendix J.

9. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

10. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

us.¹¹ So is the Pentateuch.¹²

Covenant theology identifies the straight and narrow path. It argues that because God is absolutely sovereign, every fact of history operates under His authority. God has given to covenant-keepers the hierarchical authority to extend His kingdom in history. They are to do this in terms of His Bible-revealed law, the tool of dominion.¹³ Covenant-keepers who possess lawful, ordained authority are required to bring predictable individual sanctions in terms of God's law: specific cases. God also brings corporate sanctions in terms of His law. This is why covenant-keepers inherit progressively over time, while covenant-breakers are progressively disinherited. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).¹⁴

The ethically straight and narrow path leads to widespread dominion in history. Those who remain on this path inherit the earth.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).¹⁵

D. Deuteronomy and Inheritance

The word "deuteronomy" is an English transliteration of the Greek words for *second* and *law*. Deuteronomy is the second presentation of the law. Moses read the Decalogue to the people in Deuteronomy a second time. Why? Because this was part of an act of national covenant renewal. The long-promised Abrahamic inheritance was about to be claimed by the fourth generation. Yet this generation had not been

11. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary and Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Introduction, Section B.

12. *Ibid.*, Preface, Section A.

13. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

14. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 41.

15. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

circumcised. Legally, they were outside Abraham's family covenant.

Moses' second reading of the law was a recapitulation of the events of Exodus 19 and 20, which is why Moses told that story and read that law. Because the Aaronic priesthood remained the same, this was not a new covenant with a new law. It was covenant renewal. Only through national covenant renewal, which involved circumcision, could this generation inherit. They were still technically outside the full covenant, Abraham's covenant of the promised inheritance. They had to go through a separate act of covenant renewal because of the rebellion of their parents in not circumcising them. Their parents had clearly broken the Abrahamic covenant. They had, judicially speaking, placed their children outside the inheritance. It was as if they said to themselves, "Since we cannot inherit, our children must not inherit, either." These were present-oriented people without a sense of dominion, without a commitment to kingdom-building.

By reading the law to the uncircumcised generation, Moses turned their minds back to the first event in *national* covenant-making: the covenant established at Sinai-Horeb (Ex. 19, 20). This reading was an act of covenantal subordination (point two).¹⁶ This followed the first covenantal step in the conquest: the total destruction of Arad's kingdom (Num. 21:1–3), a whole burnt offering (point one).¹⁷ Moses was preparing them for the next covenantal step: crossing the Jordan, a boundary violation signifying the conquest of Canaan (point three). Then would come the next covenantal step: circumcision, an oath sign (point four). Then would come the next covenantal step: the total destruction of Jericho, another whole burnt offering on Canaan's side of the Jordan (point one). Only then would come the full conquest: inheritance (point five).

Conclusion

The law of the covenant was Israel's tool of dominion. Israel was about to inherit, according to God's promise to Abraham. But inheriting is not the same as maintaining. To maintain the kingdom grant, Israel would have to obey God.

This passage offers a conditional promise: long life in the land as a positive sanction for obedience. God's promises are reliable. This means that His corporate historical sanctions are predictable. Predict-

16. Exodus is the book of the covenant (Ex. 24:7).

17. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 1.

able in terms of what standard? His Bible-revealed law. Biblical law begins with the Ten Commandments, which Moses has just read to them. It also includes case laws or application laws, which he will read to them later. The important point is that the law of the covenant and the maintenance of the Israel's kingdom grant in history were linked by the presence of God's predictable corporate sanctions.

Paul's citation of the fifth commandment and its positive sanction of long life affirmed the continuing validity of a crucial aspect of the Mosaic covenant. He universalized this promise: from long life in the land of Canaan to long life on earth. This was not an act of covenantal annulment. It was the antithesis of covenantal annulment. This fact constitutes a major exegetical dilemma for those who oppose theology.

14

THE WEALTH OF NATIONS

Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey (Deut. 6:1–3).

The theocentric issue here is the law of God: point three of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Intergenerational Covenant-Keeping

Moses was repeating himself. The same principles of interpretation apply here as in Deuteronomy 5:32–33. Moses had just given a similar message: obey the law, enjoy long years, and have things go well for you: “Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess” (Deut. 5:33).² He added three extra themes here: intergenerational covenant-keeping, population growth, and inherited wealth.

“Thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son”: this phrase reminded Moses’ listeners that their ethical responsibilities did not end with themselves; they extended down to those who would eventually inherit. “Keep all his statutes and his commandments,” Moses told them. To

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Chapter 13.

preserve the inheritance intact through the generations, each generation would have to bear the responsibilities associated with training up the next two generations.

This law places grandparents into the chain of family command. The grandparents have responsibilities to preserve whatever capital they have accumulated. But this capital base is more than marketable wealth. *The crucial capital asset is ethics.* Without this, marketable wealth will inevitably be dissipated. This is the message of Deuteronomy 28:15–68.

Obviously, parents have greater covenantal authority over children than grandparents do. Parents are God's mediators between God and their children. The question is: Will the grandchildren mimic their parents or their grandparents? Which representative model will be dominant? There is always the possibility that grandchildren will model themselves after their grandparents. Folk wisdom has a saying: "We make our grandparents' mistakes." Each generation sees more clearly the mistakes of the parents, and so seeks to avoid them. This leads to a kind of generation-skipping.

We see this in the twentieth-century United States. The 1920s were years of ethical rebellion: the "roaring twenties." This was a time of economic growth, sexual experimentation, artistic creativity and degeneracy, and present-orientation. In the United States, it was a time of illegal drugs: alcohol. The 1930s followed: the Great Depression. The children of the "flappers" of the 1920s grew up in the depression years and World War II. They grew up in hard times, marched off to war, saw death on a massive scale, came home, started families, worked hard, saved their money, and enjoyed a growing prosperity without social rebellion. These children of the Great Depression bore the "flower children" who came of age in the late 1960s, a time of economic growth, sexual experimentation, artistic creativity and degeneracy, and present-orientation. The marijuana-smoking flower children had far more in common with their hip-flask grandparents than with their parents. The 1970s brought a reaction somewhat like the 1930s: economic recessions, stagnation of per capita economic growth, a glum reaction against deviant behavior, and a growing conservatism. The children of the flower children became far more like their grandparents. The nostalgia among the young for the socially conservative 1950s began in the late 1970s and escalated in the 1980s.

The point is, *there is no automatic straight-line social development.* Societies are linear only in the broadest sense. They can experience

culture-shattering crises that break the covenant. When this happens, people may react the way their grandparents did when facing similar crises. There is a kind of *cultural echo effect*: grandparents to grandchildren.

There is also an *economic echo effect*. De Tocqueville observed in the 1830s that there was a rags-to-riches-to-rags phenomenon in the United States: “. . . I do not know a country where the love of money holds a larger place in the heart of man and where they profess a more profound scorn for the theory of the permanent equality of goods. But fortune turns there with incredible rapidity and experience teaches that it is rare to see two generations collect its favors.”³

The responsibility of the grandparents is even greater if they live in the households of their children and have responsibilities of supervising their grandchildren. This is the case in many black⁴ households in the United States today, where grandmothers raise the grandchildren while their unmarried daughters earn salaries outside the home. The breakdown of the black family since the 1940s has led to a situation where two-thirds of the children today are born illegitimate—over 80% in inner-city areas.⁵ This has put enormous economic pressure on unmarried mothers and has added heavy social responsibilities on grandmothers, who are also frequently unmarried. Third-generation illegitimate children are becoming common. This has led to what appears to be irreversible poverty—irreversible without a moral transformation or an economic collapse. The liberalization and feminization of black churches and the rise of the welfare state have left black families with few moral resources, such as fathers. White illegitimacy is now in the 22% range. There appears to be a one-generation echo effect racially: from blacks to whites. In the early 1960s, black illegitim-

3. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., eds. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1835] 2000), I:3, p. 50.

4. When Negroes were called Negroes by Negro leaders, it made things easier for whites. But the old word was abandoned when representatives of the American black power movement of the late 1960s learned how to manipulate the white media's representatives through calculated guilt manipulation and violent rhetoric, which was exactly what TV newscasters and journalists needed to get air time—the holy grail for TV newscasters and journalists. These Marxist and secular interlopers had to come up with a new word to describe their race as part of their systematic program to replace the older generation of Christian Negro leaders, who had preached—literally—nonviolence. The black power movement was a flash in the pan, but their re-naming of Negroes has stuck. I defer to convention here.

5. Charles Murray, “The Coming White Underclass,” *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 29, 1993).

acy was about 25%, while white illegitimacy was about 5%.

Clearly, there has been a breakdown in social values. The retreat of Christian orthodoxy in the United States, especially in non-rural areas outside the South, which began around 1890, has broken the covenant. Within a century, there were signs of breakdown everywhere: legalized pornography (late 1950s), rising crime rates (1960–80), the drug culture (late 1960s), legalized abortion (1973), a rising divorce rate (at least half of all marriages fail), rising welfare dependency, and collapsing academic standards in the government schools—all compounded in the black inner cities. From the generation that grew up in the 1890s—the “gay nineties,” in which secularism made its first major cultural gains in the United States—to the children who came of age and voted in the 1990s, it took only four generations: from my grandparents to my children. It did not take long. The broken social covenant of the “gay nineties” has produced a culture in which almost nothing remains of the ideal of Christendom.

The covenantal question is this: How long can long-term economic growth be sustained by a society that is growing ethically perverse? Is economic growth self-sustaining irrespective of moral vision? Not if the American inner city is a valid example. Economic growth is the product of certain attitudes toward the future: future-orientation, peaceful exchange, honest dealing, legitimate private ownership, minimal civil government, predictable civil government, and so on. These attitudes are becoming less common in the inner-city ghetto. These are not the attitudes of men with no fathers, no wives, poor educations, and no jobs. They are surely not the attitudes of drug addicts.

B. Population Growth

The next covenantal promise containing a positive sanction is this one: “that ye may increase mightily.” This increase is numerical. Biological expansion is the product of two things: high birth rates and low death rates. A high birth rate is a covenantal promise: “There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil” (Ex. 23:26). So is a low death rate: “Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 5:16).

The compound growth process is governed by what has become known as *the law of 72*. The annual rate of growth divided into the

number 72 gives the period of time it takes for the population to double. A 7.2% per annum growth rate will produce a doubling in 10 years. A 10% growth rate will produce a doubling in 7.2 years. This means that a 3% per annum increase will produce a doubling in a little over 24 years. This will increase a population by a factor of 16 in a century. This is serious multiplication. Anything that multiplies by a factor of 16 in a century gets very, very large in a millennium.

Israel began with about 2.4 million people. In just two centuries, with a 3% growth rate, the population would have been 614 million people. Twenty-four years after that, it would have been over 1.2 billion—the estimated population of China today. This would have been two centuries before the Davidic kingdom. This obviously was not going to happen—not within the geographical confines of tiny Israel. But there is no doubt that once compound growth produces an upward-pointing curve, the population approaches its environmental limits very fast. With a low growth rate, it takes a long time to reach the point when the population curve turns upward, but once it does, it reaches its limit fast.

There are two limits to growth, each corresponding to one of man's two idols: physical environment and time. The corresponding idols are nature and history.⁶ If any population compounds, it will usually run out of space before it runs out of time. In a world in which time is considered functionally unlimited, growth's limits are said to be environmental. Why is time considered functionally unlimited? Because any rate of growth, no matter how low, reaches its environmental limits within the confines of historical time. Cosmic evolutionary time therefore is not an environmental limit in such a world. The only question is the rate of growth in comparison to the perceived environmental limits.

With the coming of quantum physics in the late 1920s—the physics of the subatomic world—and the invention of the silicon computer chip in the 1950s, a handful of creative writers have begun to speculate about a realm that has no physical limits, a realm in which there is no law of diminishing returns.⁷ Raymond Kurzweil actually preaches the

6. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

7. Most notably George Gilder: *Microcosm: The Quantum Revolution in Economics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989); *Telecosm: How Infinite Bandwidth Will Revolutionize Our World* (New York: Free Press, 2000). This book was published at the top of the tech stock bubble, which fell by 80% over the next year, taking Gilder's newsletter publishing empire with it.

law of accelerating returns.⁸ As proof, they point to the fact that the capacity of the computer chip has doubled every 18 to 24 months since the 1960s: “Moore’s Law.”⁹ The doubling period is now down to one year. This is the highest decades-long growth rate of anything known in man’s history.¹⁰ Chip capacity increases so rapidly that by the time a buyer receives delivery of the fastest microcomputer on the market—delivery generally takes up to three weeks—it is likely that an equally fast microcomputer will be advertised at a lower price. But while limits to growth may not actually exist in the subatomic world—which I doubt—they surely exist in the capital markets. It costs billions of dollars to construct a new computer chip factory.¹¹ Until these costs cease to rise, there will still be an economic limit to the rising speed of the chips, although what that limit is, no one on earth knows.

What may apply to subatomic physics does not apply to reproduction rates. There are biological limits to growth. These limits are either environmental or chronological. Either the population runs out of space or the world runs out of time. When the population in question is man, analysts assume that mankind must run out of space or the things necessary for man’s survival that are produced in space. Put another way, modern man assumes that time is functionally limitless. There will be no final judgment in historical time. There will only be the slow erosion of the universe as it moves over billions of years toward its own heat death: the triumph of physical entropy over life.¹² The heat death of the universe is the only temporal limit acknowledged by modern man: time runs out because there is nothing left by which time can be measured. Time’s arrow freezes solid, ceasing to fly.

This leads modern man to a conclusion: mankind must reach environmental limits soon. Man’s population has already turned the corner; it is on the upward slope of the exponential curve. At present

8. Ray Kurzweil, “The Law of Accelerating Returns” (March 7, 2001). This is published on his website, www.kurzweilai.net.

9. First observed by Gordon Moore, co-inventor of the computer chip in the 1960s.

10. Kurzweil’s article points out that computation speed per dollar for information technology doubled every three years from 1910 to about 1950. Then the doubling rate went to every two years. The doubling period keeps getting shorter.

11. Interview with Gordon Moore: Peter Leyden, “Moore’s Law Repealed, Sort Of,” *Wired* (May 1997). I did not discover this article until 2001. Gary North, “Moore’s Law, Pareto’s Law, and Greenspan’s Dilemma,” *Gary North’s Reality Check* (Dec. 24, 2001). This is posted here: <http://bit.ly/MoorePareto>.

12. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

population growth rates, men will approach infinity as a limit within a few centuries. So, demographers and social commentators assume that there must be a reversal of man's growth within half a century or so: war, plague, famine, or population control—either state-imposed or self-imposed.

The covenantal question is this: How long can any population grow in the face of widespread paganism and apostasy? (Atheism is a little-shared view.) Israel did not grow. After the exile, only a handful of Israelites returned to the land. Israel from that time on was under the domination of a series of empires until Rome expelled all of them from Palestine in A.D. 135, after Bar Kochba's rebellion. It was a small, isolated nation. Nothing like the promise of Deuteronomy 6:3 took place.

The promise was conditional. It rested on ethics. Israel rebelled continually. But inherent in that promise was a covenantal possibility: the filling of the earth. That had been true since the days of Adam and Noah, both of whom were told by God to multiply. It was a little over two centuries from Noah's Flood to the birth of Abraham's father (Gen. 11:10–27). It was 430 years from God's promise to Abraham to the exodus (Gal. 3:16–17). Yet in this brief time period, the Israelites and their adopted heirs in Egypt grew to 2.4 million. There were also the other nations of the earth. If we take Genesis 11 literally, there is no question that there was enormous population growth after the Flood.¹³ So, with respect to Israel in Canaan, covenant-keeping men would have run out of time before they ran out of space.

The command to multiply, coupled with the economic means of multiplication, points to the end of time. Modern man does not want to acknowledge the end of time. Thus, he is trapped in a dilemma: he must accept the limits to growth. He wants to affirm the compound growth of knowledge and wealth, yet this is impossible in a world of cosmic time. We run out of space, if nothing else. So, a few men are willing to listen to another scenario: war, plague, famine, and population control. Nature has always kept mankind in check, but ever since 1800, it hasn't. History is supposedly unbounded; so, it cannot replace nature as the imposer of limits: no final judgment. This leaves it to warring man or scientific man or sovereign nature, which will produce some man-killing bacterium or virus, to impose the inevitable negative corporate sanctions. A series of best-selling books in the mid-1990s on

13. Of course, there must have been many other children in each family besides those named. The text requires this because it is specific with respect to chronology.

the potential for killer plagues testified to modern man's wondering about limits. He sees the effects of compound growth, and he knows this growth cannot go on for centuries. The question is: What will stop it?

C. Milk and Honey

Moses spoke of "the land that floweth with milk and honey."¹⁴ This language was covenantal. It was not to be taken literally. What this covenantal language meant was that the new land would be a good place to raise cattle and bees, as well as all the other good things of rural living. Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh took this language so seriously that they gave up their claims on land across the Jordan because they found that land outside the boundaries of Israel was good for cattle. Moses granted them their request (Num. 32:33).

The language of flowing milk and honey testified to a land that would provide covenant-keeping people with the comforts of middle-class living, however defined. Solomon prayed: "Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:7–9).¹⁵

The covenantal imagery of milk and honey meant that no matter how fast Israel's population grew, there would be wealth for all. This meant that the economic limits to growth inside Israel would expand with the population. But this promise obviously had limits. Space is in fixed supply. There are always spatial limits to growth. We do not live in the quantum. What this promise clearly pointed to was *emigration out of Israel*: the extension of Israel's holy commonwealth ideal beyond the geographical confines of Palestine. This expansion would force major adjustments in such geography-based rituals as festivals held in a central city. *The very promise of population growth pointed to a new covenant with new legal requirements.*

This law promised covenant-keepers that their growth in numbers would never be threatened by the limits of their environment if they obeyed God's law. Their numbers and their wealth would grow togeth-

14. American parents used to sing to their children of the big rock candy mountain, where lemonade rivers flowed.

15. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 85.

er. There would be milk and honey for all. This promise is anti-Malthusian to the core. Malthus' suggestion in his then-anonymous *Essay on Population* (1798) that human numbers expand geometrically, while food expands only arithmetically, makes no sense biologically. Humans eat things that multiply. Why edible things cannot be cultivated to multiply faster than we do, he never said. One seed of corn produces an ear; one ear produces hundreds of seeds. Corn multiplies a lot faster than men do. Malthus dropped the phrase in later (acknowledged) editions. Nevertheless, it is that phrase from the first edition which is most closely associated with his name: the Malthusian thesis. It is far more powerful rhetorically than it ever was logically or has been empirically since then. It was the most significant erroneous forecast in the history of eighteenth-century social science. Only Marx's prediction of proletarian revolution rivaled it half a century later.

Modern man, beginning in the eighteenth century, has found ways of multiplying food faster than men. The price of food as a percentage of family income has been dropping steadily for over two centuries. This development is what has fuelled the increase in man's population. Economic growth—milk and honey—has more than kept pace with man's population. The poor in any industrial nation, and in most non-industrial nations, eat better today than their ancestors did two centuries ago. Even the things that we should not eat in large quantities, and which our ancestors could not afford to eat in large quantities, such as sugar, we eat because we want to and can afford to. Our ancestors had to content themselves with honey. Americans consume over a hundred pounds of sugar a year. Sugar beets, not honey bees, have made it possible for dentists to make a good, upper middle-class living. (Speaking of dentistry, what advocate of "simpler living" and a "return to nature" is prepared to go back to the pre-anesthetic dentistry of 1840?)

England's adoption of the rhetoric and ethics of free market capitalism in the eighteenth century¹⁶ ratified the trustworthiness of Moses' covenantal promise. We live in a land flowing with milk and honey, but with very few urban flies and hardly any bee stings. Should we conclude that Israel could not have made a similar discovery? Israel failed

16. Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). McCloskey's forthcoming third volume in this projected six-volume series will have to prove this point; it is merely asserted in the second volume.

to experience long-term per capita economic growth, not because Israel lived way back then, but because Israel was covenantally unfaithful.

D. The Wealth Formula

Moses set forth a conditional promise: population growth and per capita economic growth in exchange for corporate covenantal obedience. Had Israelites conformed to the terms of the covenant, Israel would have experienced the same kind of compound growth that the West has enjoyed since the mid-eighteenth century.

Wealth is so widespread today that we fail to recognize the magnitude of what the West has experienced over the last two centuries. The economic condition of the average Englishman in 1750 was far closer to the economic condition of the average Israelite in Joshua's day than it was to the average Westerner today. Travel was just about as slow. The cost of travel was just about as high. Metallurgy was superior, but medicine probably was not. The physical pain of life's disasters was no different. A fire could wipe out a family's wealth just as completely in 1750 A.D. as in 1400 B.C. Mortality rates for children were high in England. We do not know what they were in Israel. Communications were much better in England because of the printing press. For the wealthy and well educated, life was substantially advanced beyond Joshua's day—more sophisticated toys—but for the average farmer, it was not much different. For the average English coal miner, it was worse. On the whole, the typical Israelite would have recognized the life style of England in 1750 as being marginally more productive than Israel's, but probably not worth suffering the English climate (and surely not English cooking).

Had he visited any modern industrial nation, he would have recognized this world as beyond the dreams of kings. Ours is a radically different world economically from 1750. The difference is not in raw materials. Those have not changed. The "limits to growth" doom-sayers might even argue there are fewer resources today. The difference is in science, technology, and rates of capital formation. But how did these changes come about? Through changes in economic organization. The chief difference is in the power of the institutions of capitalism to draw forth productive ideas from millions of people and then supply entrepreneurs with the capital required to transform a small

percentage of these ideas into customer-satisfying output.¹⁷ The difference, in short, is in the division of labor, just as Adam Smith wrote in 1776. The structure of production of the pin factory in chapter 1 of *Wealth of Nations* has been imitated around the world, and its output had multiplied 500-fold by the final decade of the twentieth century. But how could this have been accomplished? By improving industrial output on average by a little under three percent per annum since 1776.¹⁸ From about 1870 until the 1990s, the annual economic growth rate in the United States was 3.25%.¹⁹ What is a barely measurable improvement in one factory's production on an annual basis becomes a world-transforming miracle in a little over two centuries, i.e., the amount of time from the death of Moses to the beginning of Gideon's judgeship. Putting it differently, this would have been from Moses' death to the birth of David's grandfather's grandfather's father. The West, beginning with Great Britain, found a way to sustain compound economic growth of somewhat under three percent per annum despite wars and revolutions. This discovery has changed the world.

Who is to say that a society that honored the Mosaic law could not have done the same? Who is to say that compound economic growth could not have begun fourteen centuries before the death of Jesus Christ rather than seventeen centuries after? The Mosaic law makes it plain that such economic growth was not only possible, it was morally mandatory.

Conclusion

Moses delivered to Israel the judicial foundation of long-term economic growth. Through God's grace, the nation could adhere to the Mosaic law. This would have produced the growth in population and per capita wealth promised by Moses. But God, in His sovereignty, did not predestine Israel to obey. The growth opportunity was lost. But

17. John Jewkes, David Sawyers, and Richard Stillerman, *The Sources of Invention*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1969).

18. Walt W. Rostow estimated the average annual increase of world industrial production as 2.84% per year. Rostow, *The World Economy: History & Prospect* (Austin: University of Texas, 1978), p. 48. Such a precise figure is spurious. The incomplete documentary evidence and the difficulty of comparing rates of growth in different periods and nations make such statistics little more than informed guesses. But "less than three percent" seems like a reasonable guess until someone can prove that this guess is extremely high or extremely low.

19. Milton Friedman, "Getting Back to Real Growth," *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 1, 1995).

this does not mean that the potential for enormous long-term growth was not available to Israel.

Had Israel continued to grow as fast as the world's population has grown since 1776, the filling of the earth would have been completed millennia ago. But it was not God's time. The rate of population growth will vary until such time as God has determined that time must end. We will run out of time before we run out of raw materials, space, and productive new ideas. *Time, not nature, is the crucial limit to growth.*

Modern man in his heart fears the idol of history more than he fears the idol of nature, so he has invented a mythology—uniformitarianism—which comforts him by assuring him that mankind has all the time in the world. “There’s plenty more where that came from!” Billions of years have passed, we are assured, so billions must lie ahead. “No final judgment anytime soon!” Modern man then pretends to fear nature: the resource limits to growth. He invents whole philosophies to deal with nature and nature’s limits.²⁰ He whistles past the cosmic graveyard, telling himself that mankind will run out of resources before we run out of time. He forgets Moses’ words: *fear God, not nature*. It is the fixed supply of time, not the far less fixed supply of raw materials, which threatens every covenant-breaking man and covenant-breaking mankind as a whole. Time is the only irreplaceable resource, and it is in short supply. Nothing points this out to man more effectively than the multiplication of man. God’s dominion command (Gen. 1:28; 9:1), when obeyed, forces men to hear the ticking of the prophetic clock. Either we must lower the rate of population growth to zero or less,²¹ or face judgment: at the hand of God or the hand of the idol of nature. Covenant-breaking man prefers to deal with the idol of nature, with whom he believes he can work out a peace treaty on terms satisfying to man.

20. North, *Is the World Running Down?*

21. This will begin in the second half of the twenty-first century, if current demographic trends continue: Ben. J. Wattenberg, *Fewer: How the New Demography of Depopulation Will Shape Our Future* (Chicago: Dee, 2004); Philip Longman, *The Empty Cradle* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

15

LAW AND INHERITANCE

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut. 6:4–9).

The theocentric principle here is God as the Lawgiver.

A. Obedience and Inheritance

This passage begins with what have become the most famous words of Judaism, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD,” called the *shawmah Israel*, or “hear, Israel.” In Hebrew, the word for “hear” is the word for “obey”: *shawmah*. The passage then adds what became some of the most famous words of Jesus: “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (v. 5).¹ Moses then told the nation that these words must become central to the nation, with each father teaching them to his son from morning to night (v. 7). The theocentric focus of this law is obvious: God as the one and only God.

The phrase “morning to night” indicates the comprehensive authority of biblical law. All day long, the law of God applies to the affairs of men. Fathers were to spend time with their sons, either in the fields or in the family business. Sons were to receive knowledge of the law in

1. “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30).

the context of profitable labor. The familiar phrase, “learning by doing,” was applicable. It was a system of instruction we might call “learning while doing.” The law was not some abstract legal code. It was an integrated system of rules that was supposed to be taught in the context of daily living. God’s Bible-revealed law was not to become peripheral in the lives of God’s covenant people. It was to be central. It was to govern men’s activities throughout the day. It was to be memorized, discussed, and acted upon by young and old. Fathers were not to tell their sons, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Their lives were to become consistent with their words. The sons would hear God’s law and see their fathers carrying it out. This law mandated a mastery of the details of biblical law to all those who were covenanted to Him.

All of this has been lost to modern man. Today, formal education is not Bible-based, family-based, occupation-based, or personal. It is humanism-based, state-based, abstract, and bureaucratic. It is also intensely feminine in the early years.

B. The Biblical Covenant Model

The entire passage, Deuteronomy 6:4–15, constitutes a single covenantal command. The structure of this passage parallels the biblical covenant model: all five points.² Point one, transcendence/ presence, is summarized by the opening: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.” This God is the Creator God of the patriarchs. He is not some local deity. He speaks with a unified voice. He speaks to men clearly in the midst of history.

Point two, hierarchy/authority, is seen in the command to love Him, and not just love Him, but love Him with everything man has at his disposal: heart, soul, and strength. Men must place their lives at God’s disposal, doing in love whatever He commands.

Point three, ethics/boundaries, is found in the command to place God’s words or commandments at the center of our lives. Men must teach these laws to their children down through the generations. Biblical law is to become the framework of interpretation of every person’s life, governing what he does and says from morning to night. Even the boundaries of a man’s house were supposed to be marked by the presence of the written law.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010).

Point four, oath/sanctions, appears in the next section of the passage. God promises to deliver the wealth of the Canaanites into the hands of the Israelites. For the Canaanites, this will constitute negative sanctions. For Israel, it will constitute positive sanctions.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (vv. 10–12).

The Israelites were told to fear God because of this, and to swear their oaths by His name: “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name” (v. 13).

Point five, succession/inheritance, is found in the covenantal threat of disinheritance: “Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth” (vv. 14–15).

This passage later became the legal basis for the covenant lawsuits brought by the prophets against Israel. Here, in one brief passage, we find the outline of God’s covenantal dealings with Israel until the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. As a geographically based nation, Israel was removed twice from the land: at the captivity and at the diaspora under Rome. They were scattered across the face of the earth. But, as a people, they were not destroyed from the face of the earth. After their return from the exile, Jews did not again pursue the gods around them. After the diaspora under Rome, they remained an identifiable people.

A problem today is the growing sophistication of covenant-breakers. The gods of Canaan did not reappear in history. Other gods did. They have offered power and influence—positive sanctions—to those who are willing to worship them. Such worship has become progressively more intellectual and moral than liturgical, more a matter of replacing biblical laws with other laws. Rather than teaching sons the law of God, men have turned over their sons to be trained by certified educators who are more far familiar with rhetoric than law.

C. Teaching the Next Generation

The passage following this one instructs covenant-keepers to instruct their children in the law of God. Parents are warned that children will ask questions about the meaning of God's law. "And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?" (Deut. 6:20). We might expect the required answer to be related to the person of God, holiness of God, or some other lofty speculation. Not so. The answer is to be tied to the corporate blessings of God in history.

Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us (vv. 21–25).

God had delivered them from bondage. He had imposed negative sanctions on Pharaoh and his household. He had brought them into the Promised Land. This was the fulfillment of a promise to the patriarchs. God commanded Israel to obey Him, "for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day." That is, God has established a cause-and-effect relationship in history between covenant-keeping and corporate blessings. The basis of Israel's preservation of its inheritance in the land was covenantal obedience to the specific terms of God's revealed law. The children of Israelites were to be instructed in two things: the history of Israel and the law of God. They were to be told that these two courses of study are covenantally related. The basis of the relationship between history and law is point four of the biblical covenant model: sanctions.

A mark of rebellion against God's covenant is the denial of this fixed relationship. *To study history apart from God's law is to lay the foundation for national disinheritance.* If the events of history have nothing predictable to do with God's law, then history becomes the product of forces other than God and His covenant. God's law then

becomes, at best, a guide for personal ethics, a guide that cannot definitively be shown to advance the careers of those who adhere to it.

It is basic to modern Christian theology to deny that such a corporate cause-and-effect relationship exists in New Testament times. If it did exist, then Christians would be compelled to preach, teach, and obey biblical law if they want to prosper. This thought is anathema to modern theologians, so they deny that success in history has anything to do with God's law as revealed in the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Calvinist Meredith G. Kline writes that ethical cause and effect in history are, humanly speaking, random. "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."³

If most Christians had ever heard about Kline's argument, which they haven't, they would regard it as too radical. You have to be trained for years in seminary in order to believe anything as ethically antinomian and as culturally futile as Kline's position. Christians find it difficult to teach their children that obedience to God produces random results in history, whether corporately or personally. So, they search for common-ground ethical principles of individual action, hopefully shared by all honest men, that will reintroduce ethics into the discussion of historical cause and effect, but without any invocation of the Bible and God's predictable sanctions, which would reintroduce the embarrassing issue of biblical law. They are apt to cite Benjamin Franklin's famous eighteenth-century motto in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, "Honesty is the best policy." This is a statement of personal faith rather than a developed social theory. This declaration is devoid of biblical covenantal content because: (1) the definition of honesty is not tied to the Bible; (2) the definition of "best" is not tied to the Bible. It was Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* that first introduced a comprehensive common-ground theory to justify the link that Franklin's aphorism set forth. Smith argued that honesty will generate income on a free market, which was what Franklin was arguing. Smith developed the idea in detail.

There is a practical problem with Franklin's motto. With no explicit biblical laws to adhere to, no God-invoked historical sanctions to

3. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

undergird it, and no common definition of “best policy,” this common-ground humanist faith can lead to a morally questionable career, such as Franklin’s. He hired men to serve under him who he knew were British spies, most notably Edward Bancroft, during his term of service as an ambassador to France during the American Revolution. He refused to tighten security in the Paris office, despite continual warnings to do so. He met secretly with Paul Wentworth, the head of Britain’s agents in France. He was known to the British secret service as “72” and “our leading man.” Franklin’s biographer Cecil Currey concluded: “Benjamin Franklin wanted to win the American Revolution. No matter who lost—the United States, France, England—Benjamin Franklin wanted to win. In some ways he did. His honor remained intact. He gained new renown. He was rewarded by a grateful nation with additional positions of public responsibility. His secrets generally remained hidden.”⁴ In Franklin’s case, dishonesty was the best policy during his career in France. If America lost, he would survive as a covert friend of Britain; if America won, nobody would believe his duplicity other than his political enemy John Adams and his fellow ambassador in Paris, Arthur Lee, both of whom suspected him. He got away with it. (Two professional historians have written on Franklin’s status as a possible double agent and ally of British spies. One did so anonymously and did not go into teaching;⁵ the other saw his book consigned to what he later called “historical limbo.”⁶)

The problem is, those who say they are God’s chosen people have been hesitant to teach their children that God commands obedience and imposes sanctions in history in terms of this obedience. They have tried to find alternatives to such a revelationally grounded concept of historical cause and effect. They have sought broader ethical principles that have been sanctioned by covenant-breakers. In short, they have substituted new laws for old and new sanctions for old, which ultimately implies new gods for old.

4. Cecil Currey, “The Franklin Legend,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976), p. 143.

5. The anonymous author of 1789, distributed by the John Birch Society. He later worked on the staff of a famous conservative United States Senator.

6. Currey, “Franklin Legend,” p. 150. See also Currey, *Code Number 72: Ben Franklin: Patriot or Spy?* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972). His previous book on Franklin was *Road to Revolution: Benjamin Franklin in England, 1765–1775* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1968). The earlier book was favorably received by historians. It was not controversial. It was not memorable. It was safe.

D. New Gods for Old

Consider post-exilic Israel. The experience of the exile broke Israel's habit of worshipping the idols of the land of Canaan. But the people continued to substitute new gods for old. In the name of the God of the Bible, they worshipped more subtle gods than those represented by physical idols. Greek philosophy and literature became a snare for a minority of well-connected Jews during the three centuries before the birth of Jesus. This was Judaic Hellenism. But the Jews' commitment to cosmopolitan Hellenism did not overcome their commitment to a proto-Talmudic law.⁷

The idols of ancient paganism were deaf, dumb, and blind (II Kings 19:17–18; Dan. 5:23). They judicially represented demonic forces whose offer of power and wealth was limited to geographical regions. They were not universal gods. To sustain an empire, a ruler had to destroy the authority of local gods by destroying their temples and their cities' walls or by removing the people from their walled city-states. The smashing of a city's walls represented the destruction of its gods, as the fall of Jericho indicated. Jericho was Israel's model: total destruction. But this was a one-time event. For the inheritance to survive, Israel could not repeat this act of total devastation. Instead, Israel was commanded to commit genocide or remove from the nation all of the inhabitants of Canaan's cities. This was why God allowed Israel to leave the cities' walls intact: the removal of the former residents was sufficient. But this complete removal was also covenantally necessary: should any of them remain in the land, they would lead the Israelites into false worship (Deut. 7:1–5).

After the exile, the Jews faced a new problem: *syncretism*. The religion of the empires was a religion of cooperating gods. The heart of this religion was politics. The political order replaced the priestly order. The various priesthoods became functionaries of the state. Their task was to secure the favor of all of the gods of the conquered cities. Today, we call this religion *pluralism*.⁸ While the modern world's version of syncretism is not openly idolatrous, the result is the same: the substitution of political salvation in history for the rule of local gods.⁹

7. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, [1974] 1981), I, p. 313.

8. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

9. See Appendix C: "Syncretism, Pluralism, and Empire."

E. Covenant-Keeping and Worldly Success

Deuteronomy 4 identifies covenantal faithfulness as the basis of continued dominion in the Promised Land. The sanction of removal from the land is clearly a negative sanction, a divine punishment. The implication is that covenantal faithfulness brings positive sanctions: economic success. We read in Deuteronomy 8 that compound economic growth is a public testimony to the cause-and-effect relationship between man's covenantal faithfulness and God's positive sanctions in history. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).¹⁰

The problem is that the positive sanctions can lead to covenantal rebellion: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17). The blessing of God can become the basis of covenant-breaking man's belief in the autonomy of man. The blessing becomes a snare.

The gods of modernism are the gods of man's pretended autonomy. They are the product of mankind's success. The gods of modernism are secularized versions of covenantal truths. Does number really rule the world? No, but God in His wisdom created a world in which some of the numerical inter-relationships discoverable through man's mind are found to govern some of the operations of nature, thereby making science possible. Is compound economic growth really possible? Yes, for a time, when men honor God's law, especially God's laws restricting the claims of the state on the wealth of men (I Sam. 8:15, 17).¹¹ But time will run out—something that compound growth in a finite world points to. Is science a tool of dominion? Yes, but not when scientists adopt theories of origin and providence that place impersonal randomness and unbreakable law on the dialectical throne of an autonomous universe.

The legitimate goal of success in history is to be attained by the means of grace. The covenantal faithfulness of God's people leads to success. Success can be sustained, however, only by continuing covenantal faithfulness. When men believe they have discovered the secret of compound growth apart from the law of God, they have said in their heart that the power of man's mind in guiding his hand is the source of

10. Chapter 22.

11. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

our wealth. This confession of faith is the essence of modernism. It is the mark of apostasy. A world built in terms of such a confession cannot be sustained long term.

F. The Feminization of Young Child Education

One of the monumental and as yet unsolved problems of modern society is that women teach boys: either mothers or female school teachers. The context of teaching today is the classroom or home, not the work place. This means that education for males has moved away from the father-son apprenticeship model, which was clearly the Mosaic norm, to the classroom, where education is bureaucratic, impersonal, and abstract—separated from a father's discipline and his occupation. This is also generally true of home schooling. Education in the modern world is almost completely feminized until the high school level.

The feminization of modern culture begins in the grammar school classroom. Socially, it is regarded as “women's work” to teach young children. There is a social stigma attached to men who teach young children.¹² Thus, the success indicators of American education through age 11 or 12 are female standards: sitting quietly at a desk, good penmanship, neatness, and unquestioned subordination to authority. Boys who meet these criteria tend to be regarded by other boys as sissies, i.e., imitation girls: non-athletic, non-confrontational, and bookish. There is a stigma attached to “book learning” for little boys. Mark Twain's character Huckleberry Finn is representative. Huck is an outdoorsman, someone who cannot stand Aunt Polly's feminine world. His friend Tom Sawyer is somewhere in between, but it is Huck, not Tom, who incarnates the masculine image of mid-nineteenth-century American youth.

This process began with the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century. In the 1700s, books on how to be a good parent were written for fathers. By the middle of the 1800s, they were written for mothers. In his excellent book, *Fatherless America*, David Blackenhorn made this observation: “Within the home, the father retained his formal status as chief executive, or head of the family, but had largely ceded to his wife the role of chief child raiser, manager, and decision

12. This is why a day care center can be such a profitable family-run business: most men refuse to do it. On the supply side, this reduces competition. Meanwhile, on the demand side, unmarried women seek out male role models for their young children.

maker. . . . Paternal authority declined as the fatherhood script came to be anchored in, and restricted to, two paternal tasks: head of the family and breadwinner."¹³ Fathers leave home in the morning and come home in the evening. They do not take their sons to work.

1. The Division of Labor

There were economic factors for this social change. The main one was the division of labor. It is less expensive in cities than in rural areas to match the specialized production skills of individuals with the demands of employers. There are more workers available in an urban geographical area. Population density is higher. Transportation costs per distance covered are less. Also, as capital invested per worker increases, production becomes more specialized. *Output per unit of resource input increases*. Therefore, wages increase. All of this leads to increased pay for urban workers. This is offset mainly by rising real estate costs, as demand for urban space increases.

Specialization accompanies capitalization. Fathers today are employees, not owners. They are not given time by their employers to teach their sons on the job. The extreme division of labor made possible by modern capitalism makes it unlikely that a son will follow his father in a family business. There is no family business, and the son's skills are different from his father's. A father rarely teaches his sons their lifetime trade.

Men change occupations several times in a career. The restructuring of modern corporations due to international competition is now threatening the lifetime employment practices of earlier generations, even in patriarchal Japan. So, education has to be performed in a specialized classroom setting, as it has always been for the very rich and well-placed elite corps of students who have been trained to staff the bureaucracies in man's history. But what has worked well for an educated and privileged elite has not worked equally well for the mass of students. Beyond basic literacy, the training appropriate for an elite bureaucracy is different from the training appropriate for students who do not fit into a book-oriented bureaucratic setting. Meanwhile, the impersonalism of a classroom has replaced the personalism of apprenticeship all over the world.

Women can be employed less expensively than men. Their income is normally supplemental to their husbands' income, or else they are

13. David Blackenhorn, *Fatherless America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 15.

single and can share the expenses of an apartment with other women. They can afford to work for less than a man can, especially a married man. The “school marm” has been a fixture of American education since at least the mid-nineteenth century. When knowledge of Latin ceased to be the criterion for all teaching positions, women began to replace men as teachers below the college level. College education was closed to all but a tiny minority, mainly masculine, throughout the world until the late nineteenth century. In the United States, the creation of state-funded land-grant universities, beginning with Federal legislation that set aside Federal land for state-funded agricultural schools (1862), changed this by opening up college to both sexes. The elective system, which scrapped compulsory Latin and classical education, as well as compulsory chapel attendance, began at Harvard University in the 1880s and spread rapidly.¹⁴ This moved higher education from theology—Latin had for centuries been the international language of theologians¹⁵—to science and the liberal arts. This was a worldwide shift in higher education. It replaced knowledge of Latin with the college diploma as the basis of access to teaching and ministerial positions. But college attendance was still highly restricted until after World War I. The great expansion of state-funded college education came after World War II. Women gained equal access to higher education, both economically and legally. Nevertheless, more than any other college major except possibly home economics, elementary education has been the choice of women, which is why it has the lowest prestige of any field except home economics.

For a century, the Boy Scouts offered an extra-curricular alternative to the feminized classroom, but scouting came midway in a boy's life. The Cub Scouts, a later development than the Boy Scouts, is run by mothers. Male scoutmasters run the Boy Scouts; boys are eligible when they turn age 10½. Scouting faded in popularity in the late twentieth century, reducing boys' personal contact with masculine authority except in the principal's office. Positive sanctions and most negative sanctions are imposed by women until children reach high school. In the final two years of high school, boys' academic achievement shoots ahead of girls' achievement in math and science, but this comes at age

14. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 187–89.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

15 or 16, late in the maturity process.¹⁶

In the final decades of twentieth-century, the gang replaced the family for hundreds of thousands of teenage ghetto youths, whose fathers were either absent or ineffectual. The gang is exclusively male, although there are female gangs that are extensions of male gangs. The gang is bound by a self-maledictory blood oath and some form of initiatory rite of passage. It becomes the educator for rebellious young men who have rejected the public school. It is far closer to the apprenticeship ideal. It offers an apprenticeship in crime.

2. *The Decline of Apprenticeship*

The move from the personalism of apprenticeship to the impersonalism of the classroom is economics-driven: a group of parents shares the cost of a tutor. There is a loss of personalism. There is a move from practical wisdom to instruction in abstract material and rote memorization. This is a continuing problem for modern education, as it has always been in bureaucratic or priestly education. The medical profession in the twentieth century adopted internship as a way to imitate apprenticeship: on-the-job training after graduation from medical school.¹⁷

The decline of apprenticeship has paralleled the rise of secular education: formal/bureaucratic rather than practical/profitable. The

16. Reasons offered for this change have been both social and genetic. Social arguments include these. First, there are more male teachers at the high school level, who regard spirited intellectual competition as manly. They reward boys' behavior: more aggressive, questioning. Second, girls who are equally competitive with boys tend to be regarded as masculine and perhaps a threat to male egos. Girls who want to be popular with boys tend to be quiet, refuse to ask questions, and play the feminine role: submissive. They fall behind academically, especially in math and science. Girls test at 50 points below boys on the Scholastic Achievement Test in math: 450 vs. 500 out of 800 maximum. Jane Gross, "To Help Girls Keep Up, Girls-Only Math Classes," *New York Times* (Nov. 20, 1993). Problem: the girls do not test lower than boys in the language arts. Are they more aggressive in language arts classes? This seems doubtful. Another explanation is genetic: girls think more abstractly than boys until puberty, when boys begin to catch up and then excel. There have been only two female grandmaster chess players: Jewish sisters. There are no females at the very top of the profession among physicists and mathematicians. There have been no major female composers of Western classical music, and few in popular music.

17. Internship is also a way to reward hospitals for cooperating in the restriction of the supply of physicians which state medical licensure necessarily entails. Hospitals receive the low-cost services of newly graduated physicians for several years. Reuben A. Kessel, "Price Discrimination in Medicine," *Journal of Law and Economics*, I (1958), pp. 29-32.

sellers of educational services have always sought access to a wider market of potential buyers by establishing common-ground, religiously neutral education. This has been going on since the earliest days of university education in the twelfth century: the rise of scholasticism and also the revival of Roman law at the University of Bologna.¹⁸ Specialized instruction in technological fields also lends itself to the myth of neutrality. Graduate school education in the United States, except for theological seminaries, has been secular from its origins in the final quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁹

The advent of Unitarian, state-funded education in nineteenth-century America separated religious confession from education. Progressive education has always been messianic: the substitution of the government school for God as the agent of redemption.²⁰ It has been at war with the educational criteria of Deuteronomy 6.

Ironically, it was training for the gospel ministry that first adopted the bureaucratic education model, beginning with the creation of the university in Western Europe in the twelfth century. The theological seminary appeared in 1808: Andover Seminary in Massachusetts. It was invented by Rev. Jedediah Morse because of the appointment of a Unitarian in 1805 to the chair of moral philosophy at Harvard College.

3. Solutions

Parents have the legal option of delegating authority to other teachers. The classic biblical example of this is God's delegation of authority over His son to earthly parents: the incarnation. The Old Covenant example is Hannah's vow to delegate Samuel's upbringing to Eli the priest (I Sam. 1). The parent must be sure that the teacher will be equally faithful in teaching God's Bible-revealed law to the child. A parent can send his child to live with a man who will apprentice the child. Also, a parent can hire a tutor, which is a traditional exception to direct parent-child instruction. This is an expensive solution. Both approaches retain the personalism of parent-child instruction.

There are Christians today who reject the biblical right of parents to delegate the teaching function, but all such objections end about the time that the critic's child is eligible for college. When a child reaches

18. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 123–31.

19. Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, ch. 9.

20. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963).

age 18, the critics of earlier delegated education insist that the parents now possess this right of delegation. Legally in the United States, this is true. The child legally becomes an adult, except for the right to buy alcohol. The child is said by the critics of Christian day schools to have become accountable, and the parents therefore become free from the teaching obligation when the child graduates from high school. Yet the parents still usually pay the child's education bills. In the Mosaic covenant, reaching age 20 authorized a man to join God's holy army (Ex. 30:14).

Parents are required by God's law to educate their children, morning to evening. But because of the division of labor, some parents are better teachers than others. As specialization increases, the teaching skills of some parents become more evident. Parents will trade off: one parent comes in and teaches a group of students mathematics and science; another teaches music; another teaches a foreign language. To deny the legitimacy of joint teaching is to assert the ridiculous: the equal ability of all people in every field.²¹ The assertion that a mother may not lawfully teach any children but her own is an assertion that: (1) all mothers are equally gifted teachers; or (2) any differences in teaching skills are irrelevant or insignificant in the outcome of education; or (3) children should be deprived of the specialized skills of several teachers until after high school. All three arguments are doomed. Parental concern for their children's education, as well as widespread parental exhaustion and defeat in the face of chemistry, physics, and calculus, will eventually overcome the arguments of the "parents-only" purists. Only if some impersonal high school curriculum appears in which the children teach themselves, either by computer or by private study, can the parents-only argument become remotely plausible. But even in such a case, the parent must delegate instructional responsibilities to the author of the software or the books. We are back to square one: parents are commanded to teach their children by means of bib-

21. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (I Cor. 12:4–11). Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians* 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

lical law. Either this responsibility may be delegated or else all programmed education from outside the family must cease.

Parental sovereignty over education must be restored. The fundamental starting point in the reconstruction of education is therefore the removal of all state funding and regulations. This includes tax-funded educational vouchers.²² Economic sovereignty must match legal sovereignty. He who pays the piper should call the tune.

Conclusion

The command to worship God by obeying His law was tied to sanctions: positive (inheritance) and negative (disinheritance). The ultimate threat to the Israelites was that God would remove them from the land if they worshipped the gods of Canaan. This was a land-based command. The gods of Canaan were land-based gods. If the Israelites did not have the moral strength to separate themselves spiritually and ritually from the gods of the land, God would separate them from both the land and its gods.

The sanctions related specifically to the inheritance and disinheritance of the land of promise. This threat was fulfilled twice: at the exile and after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The question arises: Were the sanctions more general than this? That is, was the command to worship God a cross-boundary law and therefore valid in the New Covenant? Yes, because the God of Old Covenant Israel is a universal God: the one and only true God. No other god may safely be worshipped.

When God ordered Israel to hear, He simultaneously ordered Israel to obey. The Christian community has ceased to hear or obey, except highly selectively. The churches' self-conscious rejection of God's Bible-revealed law, its mandated sanctions, and Christians' kingdom inheritance in history has undermined their assertion of God's absolute sovereignty (partial, says the Arminian) over history and the church's authority in history. A God who is not completely sovereign over history is not the Creator God of the Bible who providentially ordains everything that comes to pass. He does not issue announcements to pagan rulers as God did to King Cyrus:

22. Gary North, "Educational Vouchers: The Double Tax," *The Freeman* (May 1976). (<http://bit.ly/NorthVouchers1976>); North, "Vouchers: Politically Correct Money," *ibid.* (June 1995). (<http://bit.ly/NorthVouchers1995>); "Friedman and North on Vouchers," *ibid.* (July, 1993). (<http://bit.ly/NorthFriedmanVouchers>)

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things (Isa. 45:1–7).

A partially sovereign god cannot legitimately assert his authority in history. No wonder, then, that modern Christians are convinced that their partially sovereign God has not issued unique laws as tools of dominion, nor has He offered a world-conquering vision to His followers. A God who does not impose predictable corporate sanctions in history is in no position to guarantee his followers a visible kingdom in history as a reward for obeying His laws.

GENOCIDE AND INHERITANCE

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire (Deut. 7:1–5).

The theocentric focus of this law is the final judgment, when God will cut off for all eternity all those who oppose Him. This eschatological focus was not clear to Israelites, for Israel had no concept of the final judgment, which is a New Testament doctrine. The final judgment is the ultimate example of inheritance and disinheritance. The bodily resurrection to eternal life and the bodily resurrection to eternal death (Rev. 20:14–15) are the models of earthly inheritance and disinheritance.

Chapters 6–26 are associated with point three of the biblical covenant model: ethics/law/dominion.¹ This passage deals with sanctions: Israel vs. the Canaanites. But these sanctions were part of a one-time program of national dominion. This passage is immediately preceded

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

by a call to obey God's law. "And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us" (Deut. 6:24–25). The verse that immediately follows this passage invokes holiness, which is another aspect of point three: boundaries. The word "holiness" means "set aside." We read: "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth (Deut. 7:6). We see that the context of this passage is point three of the covenant.

A. Genocide

This law mandated genocide. Theologically, it reflected the final judgment: God's eternal disinheritance of covenant-breakers. What God told Israel to do to the Canaanites is representative of what He will do in eternity to those who refuse to covenant with Him in history. There will be no post-resurrection covenants. Destruction will be total: worse than annihilation—eternal damnation. Adam's broken covenant will remain broken for all eternity. This was the theological foundation of genocide under the Old Covenant.

Israel's inheritance of Canaan was to be complete. Therefore, so was the Canaanites' disinheritance. The existing inhabitants of the land were to be driven out of the land or annihilated, preferably the latter. The Israelites were warned by God not to make a covenant of any kind with them. This included the marriage covenant, but it also included ecclesiastical and civil covenants. The separation of God from the idols of Canaan was to be total. This separation was to be enforced by the sword.

God forbade them to show any mercy to the inhabitants. Genocide had to include infants and children. We know this because of God's requirements regarding Israel's subsequent dealings with the Amalekites. "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (I Sam. 15:3). This was repayment for an event that had taken place four and a half centuries earlier: the refusal of Amalek to allow Israel to pass through their land at the time of the exodus. This established a condition of permanent warfare between Israel and Amalek. "For he said, Because the LORD hath

sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Ex. 17:16). This was reaffirmed just before the conquest: “Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it” (Deut. 25:17–19). Samuel reminded Saul just before the final battle, over four centuries later: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt” (I Sam. 15:2). Saul lost his kingship for his refusal to destroy the animals and the king of the Amalekites (I Sam. 15:27–28). God has a long memory when it comes to imposing negative sanctions.

Total warfare against a city had already taken place outside of Canaan: at Hormah, where the Israelites destroyed Arad’s kingdom (Num. 21:3). It would happen one time inside the land: at Jericho. It was also to have taken place under Saul. In all three cases, there were to be no spoils of war; everything was to be destroyed. But with respect to capital rather than people, Canaan was not to be totally destroyed. Israel would lawfully claim the wealth of Canaan as an inheritance.

B. Cause and Effect in Ancient Cosmology

Modern scholarship assumes that men’s faith in God is based on deep-rooted psychological needs (which modern scholars have failed to overcome through the techniques of modern rationalism), tradition (which has been uprooted by modern society), and fear of the unknown (which has been superseded by fear of the known), rather than on the actual existence of a supernatural realm that affects cause and effect in history. The god of modern man is the noumenal god of Kant: dwelling impersonally beyond history in a realm of mystery that is related to history only through the autonomous ethical consciousness of individual men.² Scholars assume that primitive men, past and present, have been unable to recognize the random character of many seemingly coordinated yet improbable events in history. Primitives have at-

2. Richard Kroner, *Kant’s Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956).

tributed these improbable events to a supernatural being's active intervention in history.

The scholars have misunderstood both the events and the primitives. The ancients understood full well the distinction between a random, improbable series of events and supernatural intervention into nature. For example, after each of the cities of Philistia was struck by a plague whenever the Ark of the Covenant was brought inside its boundaries, the priests advised the rulers to perform an empirical test. "Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us" (I Sam. 6:7–9). It had not been chance, they soon learned: the oxen took the cart and the Ark back to Israel.³

So, too, did Solomon understand the difference between a world governed by a combination of impersonal chance and impersonal fate vs. a world governed by a sovereign God. Solomon in his pain of recognition admitted what modern man prefers to suppress: belief in a world governed entirely by impersonal chance or impersonal fate or an impersonal mixture of the two leads to the madness of meaninglessness.

The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity (Eccl. 2:14–15).

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity (Eccl. 3:19).

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is

3. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead (Eccl. 9:2–3).

Solomon, speculating as a philosopher, looked at death and saw it as the great leveling agent. He argued that if temporal life is all there is, then nothing has meaning, for one life cannot be distinguished from another, one species from another. To divinize the temporal by denying the supernatural is to surrender all meaning to death: the death of meaning.

C. Invoking Idols

The ancients were far wiser than modern man, for they tried to structure their lives in terms of a ritually responsive supernatural realm rather than an inherently incomprehensible impersonal realm.⁴ They believed that local gods governed their lives rather than distant butterflies.⁵ They did not deny what their eyes occasionally showed them, namely, that the supernatural can directly influence the course of history. They understood that priestly magic was not always trickery.

This understanding was the basis of their worship of local deities. Idols served as links in history between demons and men. The Bible speaks of idols as blind and deaf, but it does not speak this way of demons. It makes the point that an idol is not a god. The idol merely represents sources of supernatural power that men invoke by covenant oath and correct ritual procedure. Israel was warned not to establish

4. Kant's noumenal realm is incomprehensible to the mind of man, yet it is held in dialectical tension with the partially knowable phenomenal realm. Man's mind supposedly holds the two realms together.

5. The "butterfly effect" is modern science's latest phrase to describe the effects of unknown. A butterfly's fluttering wings can supposedly set up wind patterns that produce a hurricane a continent away. Men probably do not believe this about literal butterflies and literal hurricanes, but they do believe that unnoticed, seemingly random, and incalculably undetectable causes produce measurable results. The first kind of event is too obscure for man to control; the second may be much too large to control. Man is trapped in a cosmic maelstrom not of his own or anyone else's making. The phrase "butterfly effect" was popularized in James Gleik's best-selling book, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987). For a cogent rebuttal, see Stanley L. Jaki, *The Only Chaos and Other Essays* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990). Jaki was a Roman Catholic priest, physicist, and historian of science. Gleik was a *New York Times* reporter. Gleik was far better known than Jaki.

covenants with the Canaanites, for the Canaanites invoked demons through their idols. God told Israel to destroy the idols of Canaan, not because idols can see and hear, but because they represent covenantal links between men and the occult realm of the demonic.

Because there are demons who act in history, they persuade men to believe that by invoking this or that deity, men can manipulate the cosmos. "As above, so below" is magic's statement of faith. The faith of someone who believes in magic is this: procedurally precise rituals performed here below can invoke power from on high to affect things here below. This faith is correct only insofar as Satan is the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). In fact, magic invokes power from below.⁶ Men can manipulate local things, such as a voodoo doll, in order to produce specific effects at a distance. This is neither mind over matter ("telekenesis") nor words over matter. It is the invocation of demonic beings that have been given limited powers in history, such as the effects produced by Satan in his testing of Job.

The ancients knew that these powers can be invoked and manipulated by men for the ends of men. Idols of the ancient city represented demons who participated in the covenantal life of the family, clan, and city. This is why Paul warned that to participate in cultic feasts is to participate in devil worship: "What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (I Cor. 10:19–21). This clear warning regarding pagan covenantal meals is in the chapter preceding his description of the church's covenantal meal.

Modern rationalists interpret the Bible so as to remove all traces of supernaturalism. They view the realm of the demonic as nonexistent, as impotent in history as carved idols or as impotent as God. They view the demonic as a self-serving invention of priestly magicians. Even a few Christians assume this: specifically, certain sleight-of-hand artists known today as magicians. They are not magicians; they are illusionists. Magic uses ritual to link supernatural forces to history: "as above, so below." But modern magicians view the supernatural as an il-

6. R. J. Rushdoony, "Power from Below," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, 1 (Winter 1974).

lusion and their illusions as real.⁷ I exchanged a long series of detailed letters with one such Christian illusionist, who insisted that Satan and his demons have never had any supernatural power in history. This man denied that the magicians of Egypt possessed supernatural powers, denied that the sticks they threw down actually turned into snakes, despite the clear statement of the text of the Bible that this took place (Ex. 7:12). No, he insisted, they merely used trickery to make it look as though they had conjured up snakes. On this point, he insisted, the Bible cannot possibly mean what it specifically says. I pointed out to him that this is the humanist's hermeneutics: interpreting the Bible in terms of modern man's anti-supernatural presuppositions, dismissing the God of the Bible along with the priests of Egypt. He did not change his mind. He viewed the priests of Egypt simply as skilled tricksters, as he is. That is, he chooses to believe that he and his humanist peers are every bit as clever as they were.

Modern man wants it both ways: to be as clever as the ancients, but far wiser. Modern man may be as clever; he is surely less wise. The priests of Egypt and Phoenicia could distinguish among chance, demons, and God. They could devise accurate tests to evaluate which was the dominant factor in particular situations: "Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said" (Ex. 8:19). Modern man is more like Pharaoh than his magicians. As Jaki said, that which parades as modern scientific cosmology does not include the fear of God, which is the beginning of all wisdom.⁸

D. Localism or Cosmos

What holds the world together? The New Testament makes it clear: He who was born of God and woman does, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:14–17). *The unity of the cosmos is secured by the sovereignty of God.* Behind the seemingly

7. The most prominent illusionist denier of the supernatural is known professionally as the Amazing Randi.

8. Jaki, *The Only Chaos*, p. 7.

infinite and therefore humanly immeasurable particulars of history and nature is cosmic personalism: the Creator-Sustainer God who has counted the hairs of every head (Matt. 10:30), or as modern man would put it, the subatomic particles of every galaxy. Butterflies and hurricanes are all part of God's decree.

Ancient religion did not emphasize the coherence of the cosmos, for the primary categories of ancient religion were pantheistic and animistic. The gods of Canaan were regarded by the inhabitants as local gods. They were cultic gods in the sense of familistic, clan-based, and civic. This was the common theological outlook of the ancient world, including Greece and Rome.⁹ The boundaries of a city marked the limits of a local god's sovereignty. Beyond those boundaries, he could extend his reign only through military triumphs by members of his cult. When Ben-hadad's advisors explained the defeat of Syria by Israel, they invoked the localism of Israel's God (I Kings 20:28). This public theological assessment led to the destruction of Syria's army by Ahab's troops. Evil as Ahab was, God gave him the victory rather than to allow Ben-hadad imagine that the God of Israel was some local Near Eastern deity whose sovereignty was threatened by the military forces of Syria. God controlled events outside the geographical boundaries of Israel. The kings of the earth were required to acknowledge this. Adam had known and was required to acknowledge this verbally and ritually; so are the rest of us.

The idols of Canaan were representational. They mediated oath-bound covenants. This was why Israel was required to destroy the idols, groves, and other representations of demonic authority. The nations of Canaan were in covenantal subjection to covenant-breaking supernatural beings represented by idols. These beings promised power to men and delivered on the promise enough of the time to keep the power-seekers in covenantal bondage. God did not require the death of every man, woman, and child in Canaan merely because a handful of professional illusionists had used their skills to establish local priesthoods. Had the cults of Canaan been, cosmically speaking, nothing more than income-producing enterprises of prestidigitators who today would be entertaining crowds in Las Vegas gambling casinos, God would not have mandated genocide.

God promised to give Israel victory over the inhabitants of the land. This meant that every human covenantal agent of demonic

9. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955).

forces had to die, so that there would be no further invocation of local demons. The demons of the ancient city operated inside geographical boundaries imposed by God. No demon could exercise its powers at will across the face of the earth. Thus, when a city fell to an invader, the participants on both sides recognized that the gods of the victorious city had participated in the defeat of the gods of the defeated city. Jesus made it clear that civil war is characteristic of Satan's kingdom.

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you (Matt. 12:22–28).

E. Annihilation: Sanctions Applied

Israel's defeat of the cities of Canaan was supposed to reflect God's defeat of the demons that were worshipped in those cities. To this extent, the magical formula, "as above, so below," was correct.¹⁰ What men would see on earth would reflect the warfare in heavenly places. This is why God required total annihilation. There would henceforth be no reasonable doubt: the God of Israel is sovereign. But Israel always doubted. This is why Israel failed to drive out or destroy all of the inhabitants. Israel's doubt regarding the trustworthiness of God's promise of total victory, which was to be manifested by Israel's comprehensive negative military sanctions in Canaan, laid the foundation of Israel's subsequent bouts with idolatry.

The military sanctions were comprehensive, but they were not total. The army of Israel drove out most of the land's inhabitants, but it did not drive out all of them (Josh. 15:63; cf. 17:12–13). This failure gave a foothold to the few remaining Canaanites to lure the Israelites

10. The request in the Lord's Prayer, "in earth, as it is in heaven," is a call for ethical correspondence, not metaphysical correspondence. It is preceded by "thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10).

into idol worship. The idols of Canaan represented demons whose power had not been totally extinguished by God because Israel had failed to destroy every trace of their places of covenant renewal and the people who were under these pre-invasion covenants. Just before his death, Joshua announced: "Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you" (Josh. 23:13). Thorns in your eyes: here was a powerful image to warn men of the effects of idolatry.

The Israelites were required by God to move from word to deed. God's word specified total annihilation. This was the mandatory deed. By removing the idols and the inhabitants, Israel would inherit everything of Canaan's that was worth inheriting.

F. Human Capital and Technology

The division of labor is basic to wealth. To increase the division of labor, men save—restrict their present consumption—in order to produce capital goods that they expect to produce consumer goods and services in the future. Thrift finances the increase of goods and services.

In recent decades, it has become more clear to economists that human capital is a very valuable resource.¹¹ Genocide is the antithesis of the division of labor: the systematic destruction of highly developed human capital. While Israel was promised the vineyards and houses of their enemies, there was no doubt that the skills used to produce such wealth would perish with the destruction of the inhabitants. Nevertheless, God required annihilation. This would reduce the division of labor compared to what it could have been through local trade.

Why did God require this? What cost-benefit analysis informed God that it was better for Israel to reduce the division of labor by destroying the inhabitants of the land? We can only guess, but our guesses can be informed guesses.

The essence of magic is the principle of something for nothing, or at least something costly for something seemingly inexpensive. Light a few candles, recite some incantations, paint a design on some convenient surface, and presto: you get what you want. There is no require-

11. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

ment that the participants plan and save for the future, or select the proper mix of land, labor, and capital. There is no doubt that the Canaanites had understood conventional economic planning, which is why they left a legacy to Israel. But undergirding their concept of economic cause and effect was their reliance on supernatural forces that promised something for practically nothing. The demons required covenantal subordination. Their covenants elevated magical formulas and rituals above rational planning and prayer. The productivity of economic planning was assumed by Canaanites to require rituals such as human sacrifice and temple prostitution. Power from below was understood as necessary for power in history. It was this invocation of magical power through debauchery and murder that God would not tolerate.

There was rational planning in Canaan. The physical capital left behind by the former inhabitants proved this. But technology is not neutral. *Technology is applied cosmology*. It is governed by assumptions regarding cosmology: cause and effect. These assumptions govern the development and application of technology. The assumptions governing Canaanite technology were so demonic that God wanted Israel to destroy all traces of that cosmology by destroying all those who professed it. The ultimate resource is not the human mind, contrary to modern economists. *The ultimate resource is a confession of faith which acknowledges the God of the Bible as the master of the universe and the source of man's abundance* (Deut. 8:18).¹² The *theological content* of the Christian confession of faith and the *scientific worldview* that it produces are the source of long-term economic growth.

Modern technology is the outworking of what the world called *technology* before the seventeenth century: *grammar*.¹³ Modern technology rests on the grammar of science. So did late medieval technology, which was highly sophisticated both in theory and application.¹⁴ Modern man invokes the repeatable wonders of science through written formulas that are governed by a series of assumptions regarding cause and effect. The grammar of mathematics underlies modern technology, but this grammar is not autonomous; it rests in turn on a host of presuppositions regarding the coherence of man's reasoning processes and the relation of this coherence to the external world.¹⁵

12. Chapter 21.

13. Jaki, *The Only Chaos*, p. 124.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

15. Vern S. Poythress, "A Biblical View of Mathematics," in Gary North (ed.),

To what extent is the grammar of science and number dependent on the grammar of faith? Canaan's buildings did not fall down. Canaanites planted fields continued to produce food, despite the Canaanites' denial of God's sovereignty. Their accumulated capital was transferrable. How was this possible? Because man is made in the image of God. This common humanity brings with it common knowledge by means of common grace.¹⁶ Such knowledge, like the knowledge of cooking, is affected by time and place; it produces recognizable variations, but like recipes, it is repeatable and therefore transferrable. Accurate scientific formulas are universally valid, according to the theory of modern science. Their accuracy is not dependent on a personal confession of correct theology. But scientific formulas are not invoked outside of the processes of history, which are *always* covenantal. Scientific formulas and their applications are influenced by covenantal cause and effect in history. Some societies inherit; others are disinherited. The point is, because scientific formulas and the knowledge that underlies them are transferrable—universal, in other words—they and their products can be inherited. This is why the wealth of the sinner can be laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22).¹⁷

G. Economic Growth Through Imported Knowledge

Economic growth is a process of compounding.¹⁸ The division of labor is extended over time, not just across borders. The extension of per capita wealth through the extension of the division of labor is dependent on the maintenance of social order. It is not just free trade across borders that makes men rich. There must be saving, wise investing, and scientific discovery.¹⁹ There must be social development, which includes a *progressive commitment to the moral boundaries imposed by biblical law*. What the conquest of Canaan teaches us is that

Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), ch. 9; cf. Eugene Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>)

16. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

17. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 41.

18. Chapter 14.

19. John Jewkes, David Sawyers, and Richard Stillerman, *The Sources of Invention*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1969).

God calls to a temporal halt the path of economic development of certain social orders. This is not a random cessation of development. Inheritance and disinheritance are linked covenantally. Jeremiah announced:

Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land. And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people. But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD" (Jer. 12:14–17).

Canaan's division of labor was soon to be cut off. It was about to be replaced by Israel's division of labor. Canaan's approach to science and technology had to end. A new social order would use Canaan's physical capital to extend God's dominion. *The genocidal disinheritance of Canaan would provide the physical inheritance of Israel.* This inheritance was not to include knowledge that was in any way dependent on the invocation of Canaan's gods. "And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place" (Deut. 12:3). Israel failed in this exercise of religious intolerance, which is why Joshua warned against invoking the names of regional gods. "That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the names of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them" (Josh. 23:7).

God is the Creator, the source of all accurate knowledge. His universalism gives His people an enormous advantage. They are in a position to make productive use of the discoveries of other nations and other religions. But the use of such information is limited by biblical law. To the extent that such information is dependent on the invocation of the name of any other god, it may not lawfully be used by His people.

This means that occult knowledge is forbidden. Knowledge that is available only to the initiate into a cult or secret society is not valid, although this knowledge may be true within limits. But if such know-

ledge can be separated from the name of the god invoked by the cult, it is eligible to become part of the covenant-keeper's inheritance. An example would be the mathematical knowledge developed within the confines of the Pythagorean cult. Initiation into that oath-bound cult would have been forbidden to covenant-keeping Israelites, but both studying and applying the Pythagorean theorem regarding right triangles would have been legitimate activities. The truth of the theorem is not dependent on the ritual practices of the cult. The theorem became part of the inheritance of the West, which for a millennium meant Christendom.

The key issue is the oath: *to swear by*. The oath places man covenantally under the god invoked by the oath. Wealth, including knowledge, that is obtainable only through such oath-taking is not part of a legitimate inheritance. If the secrets of the cult pass into the public domain, as Pythagorean mathematics did, then covenant-keepers may lawfully put them to good use. Using Euclidian geometry is valid because there is no oath involved. But to seek membership in the cult in order to gain inside knowledge of its economically advantageous secrets, even to make them public, would be valid only as part of a government-directed spying operation in a war effort, such as was used in the conquest of Canaan: the spies (Josh. 2). It would then be a matter of military conquest, not economic gain. It would be a matter of the sword, not the purse. Industrial spying is therefore invalid, even if done by governments, as it surely is in the modern world. So is joining a secret order that promises business or political success. C. S. Lewis called this the desire for membership in the inner ring, and he warned against it.²⁰

H. Universal God, Regional Capital

God is not threatened by other gods. Over time, His people become less threatened by other religions. The Israelites were forbidden to speak the names of other gods. "And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth" (Ex. 23:13). Is this law still in force? If it is in force, is it to be taken literally? Or is it an injunction against invocation? The prophets mentioned the names of other gods. So did Stephen at his stoning (Acts 7:43). This was an as-

20. C. S. Lewis, "The Inner Ring" (1944), in Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 93–105. (<http://bit.ly/LewisRing>)

pect of the study of comparative religions: announcing the superiority of God to His rivals. The prohibition against speaking the names of other gods must have been an injunction against another kind of speaking, namely, covenantal or magical invocation.

After their return from the Babylonian captivity, the Jews did not again go after other gods. Their susceptibility to idolatry had ended. Hellenism and legalism became problems, but idolatry did not. The threat today is the threat of syncretism, also known as pluralism: the acceptance of anti-theistic presuppositions by the covenant-keeping community.²¹

The universality of God and His covenants makes it possible for covenant-keepers to accept the non-oath-bound findings of rival religious worldviews. God's church is not regional, nor was it ever intended to be. It crosses the boundaries of geography and time. The church in the broadest sense is the means of absorbing new information and making such information even more productive. It is to disseminate information and vision. Christendom's productivity is supposed to undermine all covenant-breaking social orders, bringing them face to face with the sanctions of God in history: positive and negative. This offensive conquest is not by the sword but by faith and productivity.

Discoveries always cross borders. Useful knowledge cannot be monopolized for long. The question is: Will covenant-keepers gain and retain the dominant influence in the interpretation and applications of these discoveries, or will their covenantal enemies gain control over them by means of these discoveries? In other words, *whose inheritance is it?* There can be no neutrality. One side or the other will inherit. The idea that these discoveries are covenantally neutral is incorrect. *Truth comes only from God, and this includes the interpretation of theories and facts.* Meanwhile, truths that are accepted by covenant-breakers are always misinterpreted because they deny God as the origin of all truth. As time goes on, this misinterpretation becomes more consistent, i.e., more consistently wrong. Truths are not regarded by covenant-breakers as testimonies to the God of the Bible (Rom. 1:20–25).²² Such truths are always held down through unrighteousness, which brings God's judgment in history: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

21. Chapter 15:D. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

22. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). The visible sign of such judgment is open homosexuality (Rom. 1:26–27). Legalized homosexuality in any society is a curse of God for corporate unbelief. It is a prelude to corporate destruction.

So, the benefits of science and technology are always dependent on the proper use of knowledge. If covenant-keepers are unable or unwilling to set the terms of discourse for new discoveries and the application of old ones, then the wealth generated by these discoveries will eventually undermine faith: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).²³ This will eventually result in negative sanctions: “And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God” (Deut. 8:19–20).²⁴

I. Open Borders

The Israelites were not going to be welcomed by the Canaanites. Even if they had come peacefully, they would not have been welcomed. They represented a threat to the Canaanite social order. They were people who were covenanted to another God. Religious pluralism was impossible. One side or the other would win.

Israel later welcomed strangers from other lands. Why weren’t those immigrants a threat to Israel, just as Israel had been to Canaan? First, because immigrants entered Israel on Israel’s terms: open obedience to God’s civil law was required. Proselyting for a rival god was a capital crime (Deut. 13:6–10). Second, because the gods of such immigrants would not be local gods. These immigrants had left the domain of their regional gods. Idols of non-universal gods were not a major threat to Israel. As for gods that made universal claims, there were none in the pre-captivity, pre-empire Old Covenant era. All rival gods were local. After the Babylonian captivity, the gods of a series of empires shared their pantheon with conquered deities of conquered nations. These were not universal gods in the sense that Israel’s God was: a God who shared no pantheon space with rivals. The gods of Greece

23. Chapter 21.

24. Chapter 22.

were local civic gods,²⁵ or animistic gods,²⁶ or else the contrived Olympian gods, the joint products of Homeric poetry and the pan-Hellenic games. In contrast, Greek philosophy made universal claims, and Hellenism did become a major problem for Jews and Christians. But Hellenism was not tied to idols.

Israel allowed open borders because God did not allow public proselyting or public observance of rival religions. The civil order was established by a covenantal oath to God. He, and He alone, was the acknowledged sovereign of Israel. In Elijah's day, this law was being violated by priests of Baal. His confrontation on Mt. Carmel was designed to end this practice. "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there" (I Kings 18:38–40).

1. Immigration

The main threat of immigration is covenantal, not economic. The increase in the national division of labor that takes place when immigrants arrive is a net benefit. The judicial problem arises because of the rival gods and rival philosophies that immigrants bring with them. The religious pluralism of modern Western politics relegates non-political covenants to *adiaphora*: things indifferent to political religion, so long as they do not infringe upon the realm of political religion. But we have found that political pluralism is as theocratic as any other religion. It will not tolerate challenges to its final authority from any realm outside of politics. Decade by decade, political religion extends its claims over all the other areas of life.

The modern immigrant brings with him gods that are as universal in their claims as the God of the Bible is. The local gods of ancient paganism are barely remembered, let alone understood. How can a society survive the claims to authority of the representatives of rival uni-

25. Fustel, *Ancient City*, III:VI, pp. 146–55.

26. Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1922] 1991); *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912); *Epilogomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1921), both available in online editions.

versal gods? How can these universal claims be harmonized with the universal claims of modern political religion? Harmonizing these claims has been the long-term national experiment of the Enlightenment era, beginning around 1700.

A businessman likes to have a growing supply of laborers who compete against each other to sell him their labor time. Immigration is a blessing for the employer. It increases the supply of labor, thereby lowering labor costs. But what if, after five years, these immigrants could vote themselves a share of his business? Then he would be more careful about who gains access to the nation. Naturalization makes the immigrant a participant in the modern welfare state: a citizen. He can lawfully exercise the civil sanction of voting. He can therefore gain legal entitlements to other people's wealth. So, modern political pluralism, when combined with the welfare state, creates a state of affairs in which those who already have the vote and capital resist the arrival of immigrants who bring rival philosophies regarding what constitutes the good society and the legitimate means of obtaining it.

The economist reduces everything to economics: cost-benefit analyses. Economics is as relentless in its extension of its reductionism as any other academic worldview. That which is significant politically for an economist is whatever he can reduce to fit economic concepts.²⁷ The economist is unwilling to acknowledge that politics is covenantal even though politics is based on a binding oath of allegiance under a monopolistic legal order, which in turn has its origin in God's common grace civil covenant. Marriage and the church are also covenantal and so do not readily lend themselves to economic reductionism.²⁸ This is why the economist sounds unbelievable when he discusses immigration as if it were little more than international job-seeking. The immigrant no longer brings idols with him. Instead, he brings a world-

27. See, for example, James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962). Over two decades later, Buchanan won the Nobel Prize in economics, presumably for this work more than his subsequent studies. (Tullock, a lawyer with no formal economic training, was not mentioned publicly by the Nobel Committee.)

28. One of the unresolved problems in economics is the economic analysis of prostitution. While the economist argues that "everything has a price," no unmarried economist acknowledges publicly that he much prefers sex from a prostitute to sex in marriage because of prostitution's tremendous cost savings. "Don't buy: rent!" Few men say that renting sexual favors from strangers is a better deal for them than bearing the burden of supporting a wife. Sex that is available for hire makes it inherently less valuable in most would-be buyers' eyes than marital sex.

view tied to another religious order. This worldview has legitimacy equal with all others in a pluralistic political order. Idols in Mosaic Israel did not. When he becomes a naturalized citizen, the modern ex-immigrant can work to impose this worldview by voting.

2. *Madison and Rousseau*

American Constitutional political theory relies on some version of Madison's theory of factions in *Federalist 51* to save republican democracy from Balkanization. Madison argued that political factions would cancel each other out, leaving commitment to the common civil order as the binding national confession. This implicitly assumed that there is a widely agreed-upon common source of justice, although Madison, like the United States Constitution, did not mention natural law. His argument was very close to Rousseau's argument for the absolute sovereignty of the General Will, expressed only through politics, over all other voluntary contracts and institutions. Madison's theory privatizes non-political relations, removing them from issues of state; Rousseau's absorbs all other relations into politics. I call Madison's view political Unitarianism.²⁹ The end result is the same: the common bond of politics.

Because covenantal consensus breaks down when the census reveals diversity, modern pluralistic society faces a crisis: cacophony. As Cornell University professor W. Pearce Williams put it in a 1983 letter to the *New York Times*, "we live in a consensual society in which we often have to do things we don't want to do, or even think are wrong, because we have agreed to abide by majority rule. Destroy that argument, and the result is not freedom but anarchy—a condition which the United States seems rapidly approaching."³⁰

Immigration is from two sources: foreign countries and mothers' wombs. The abortion movement is an anti-immigration movement of unique commitment. The abortionists resent the welfare implications of motherhood, but they also resent it with respect to the state. They see babies as welfare cases. Margaret Sanger was the founder of Planned Parenthood, still the best organized pro-abortion organization in the United States. In her book, *The Pivot of Civilization* (1922), she criticized the inherent cruelty of all welfare states. She insisted that or-

29. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 450–52. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

30. Cited in Jaki, *The Only Chaos*, p. 43.

ganized efforts to help the poor are the “surest sign that our civilization has bred, is breeding, and is perpetuating constantly increasing numbers of defectives, delinquents, and dependents.”³¹ Such charity must be stopped, she insisted. The fertility of the working class must be regulated in order to reduce the production of “benign imbeciles, who encourage the defective and diseased elements of humanity in their reckless and irresponsible swarming and spawning.”³² Swarming (like insects), spawning (like fish): here was marvelous zoological rhetoric from the lionized founder of Planned Parenthood. “If we must have welfare, give it to the rich, not the poor,” she concluded.³³ “More children from the fit, less from the unfit: that is the chief issue of birth control.”³⁴ For abortionists, the womb is an open border. They seek to kill all those who would cross it without authorization.

What is the biblical solution? Respect for covenantal oaths. The marriage oath creates a claim on open entry for the biological fruit of marriage. This legal claim must be defended by the civil government when some mothers seek to revoke it. Second, the civil oath grants authority to impose God’s sanctions. Those who are not under the terms of the civil oath should not be allowed to impose its terms on others. Thus, immigration is economically legitimate. What is not legitimate as a Christian ideal is a civil oath that does not bind men to allegiance to the God of the Bible. God brings negative sanctions against all rival civil oaths, and open immigration leads to two such sanctions: the breakdown of society (anarchy) or the substitution of a theocratic oath to a rival god. Roger Williams’ experiment in tiny Rhode Island—a civil order without an oath to God—became the first operational model of the Enlightenment’s much larger experiment in religious pluralism. We can safely predict concerning how this professedly neutral civil covenant will end: broken.

Conclusion

God told Israel to conquer Canaan by force. The Israelites were prohibited from making any sort of covenant with them. The best way

31. Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York: Brentano’s, 1922), p. 108; cited in George Grant, *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood*, 2nd ed. (Franklin, Tennessee: Adroit, 1992), p. 27.

32. Sanger, *ibid.*, p. 115; cited in Grant, *ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 96; cited in Grant, *ibid.*, p. 28.

34. Sanger, “Birth Control,” *Birth Control Review* (May 1919); cited in Grant, *ibid.*, p. 27.

to prevent this was to destroy every last one of them, so that the nation would not be in a position to make additional covenants.

This reduction in the available division of labor obviously was a threat to the transfer of local knowledge: either saving knowledge to the Canaanites or destructive knowledge from the Canaanites. The benefits of whatever technical knowledge possessed by the Canaanites would not offset the liabilities of the covenantal worldview which accompanied their technical knowledge. Israel was more vulnerable to the knowledge possessed by Canaan than Canaan was to the knowledge possessed by Israel. This would not always be true, but it took the captivity and the occupation of the land by outsiders—later called Samaritans—to reduce this vulnerability. Any surviving post-conquest local gods of Canaan had by then been visibly defeated by the gods of Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia. In terms of the theology of the ancient Near East, this defeat had removed them permanently as historical forces to contend with or contend for. No society invoked the gods of Canaan after the rise of the empires.

BY LAW OR BY PROMISE?

All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers (Deut. 8:1).

The theocentric framework of this law is the dominion covenant: the command to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:27–28).¹ It is an aspect of point three: ethics/law/boundaries. Obedience to God's law produces dominion.

A. Economic Growth

Deuteronomy 8 is by far the most important passage in the Bible dealing with the topic of Adam Smith's classic 1776 book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. It announced the covenantal pattern for economic growth: grace, subordination, law, sanctions, and inheritance. It listed the unmerited gifts that God gave to Israel, from Israel's deliverance out of bondage to the raw materials of the Promised Land. This is all grace. Twice Moses called upon the Israelites to remember God's grace (vv. 2, 18). This was a call to subordination. Four times he reminded them to keep God's commandments (vv. 1, 2, 6, 11). He spoke of the positive sanction of economic growth (v. 13) and the negative sanction of expulsion from the land (vv. 19, 20). Yet the entire chapter deals with the inheritance: the land of Israel. To maintain this inheritance, the Israelites had to obey biblical law. In other words, their maintenance of the inheritance was ethically conditional.

The passage begins with a call to obedience. Moses warned the generation of the conquest to obey all of God's commandments. The

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 4.

theme of *covenantal faithfulness through national obedience* is continual in Deuteronomy, for only through corporate covenantal obedience to the Mosaic law could the conquest generation maintain its inheritance. The language of the text is clear: collecting the promised inheritance was conditional. “**All the commandments** which I command thee this day shall ye **observe to do**, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and **possess the land** which **the LORD swore unto your fathers.**”

This verse raises a theological problem regarding the terms of inheritance. God had sworn to the patriarchs that He would give the land to Israel. He had promised Abraham that the fourth generation would inherit (Gen. 15:16). The theological question is this: Was Israel’s inheritance legally secured by God’s promise or by their obedience to the law?

B. Circumcision and Inheritance

In the context of God’s promise to Abraham that his seed would inherit, Paul wrote: “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Gal. 3:18). Paul was speaking of Jesus Christ, not the Israelites, as the inheriting Seed. He was speaking of the kingdom of God, not the land of Canaan. Nevertheless, the judicial question was the same in both cases: *By law or by promise?* Paul argued clearly: by promise. On this passage, Protestantism rests much of its case for salvation by grace rather than works: “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (v. 14).

Yet there is no doubt that one legal condition for Israel’s inheritance was circumcision. Abraham was required to circumcise his household’s males (Gen. 17:12–13). The Israelites, in turn, were required to circumcise their household males. The generation of the exodus had failed to do this, so Joshua had the conquest generation circumcised as soon as they crossed the boundary of the Jordan River (Josh. 5:7). The promise to Abraham remained valid, but to qualify judicially as the generation of the conquest, all of the males had to be circumcised. Wasn’t circumcision a work of the law? Yes. So, if inheritance was by circumcision, how could it be by promise?

To make sense of this seeming anomaly, we should seek a solution by considering *the judicial nature of the Abrahamic promise*. The

fourth generation would inherit, God had promised (Gen. 15:16). He had immediately sealed that promise with a covenantal oath-sign: passing a fire between pieces of a dismembered animal (Gen. 15:17). This was a sanctions-bound self-maledictory oath. It meant this: "So let it be done unto Me if I do not bring to pass what I have promised to Abraham." But what constituted a generation? Judicially, this had to mean *circumcised sons*. A man was not an Israelite by birth; he was an Israelite by covenant. "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant" (Gen. 17:14).

The external mark of this covenant was circumcision. The same was true corporately of the inheriting generation. They would not become that promised generation by birth; they would become that generation by covenant. The promise was secure; nevertheless, conformity to the definitional terms of the promise mandated the work of circumcision: no circumcision—no generation; no generation—no fulfillment of the promise. So, the judicial basis of the fourth generation's inheritance was obedience to God's specially revealed law: circumcision. Yet the judicial basis of the *possibility* of inheritance was promise.

This two-fold conclusion is inescapable: (1) *promise* as the judicial basis of God's *granting* of the inheritance to Israel through Abraham; (2) Israel's *obedience* as the judicial basis of His *transferring* it to them as promised. The special form of obedience was the oath. Circumcision was an oath sign.²

Protestant commentators have gone out of their way to avoid discussing the fourth generation's circumcision as the judicial requirement for collecting the inheritance. It is clear why they have done this: the Pauline doctrine of inheritance by promise. While James did not write about the judicial basis of Christ's inheritance, we can be fairly sure what he would have written: *inheritance by Christ's obedience*. To mark Himself as the heir—the *lawful* heir—of the promise, Christ had to obey the law. The situation facing the fourth generation was analogous: to mark themselves as the lawful heirs of the promise, they had to obey the law.

Paul wrote of Abraham, "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect"

2. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968), ch. 3.

(Rom. 4:13–14). But on what is saving faith grounded judicially? Answer: on the substitutionary atonement of Christ. This atonement was grounded judicially in the perfection of Christ, who obeyed the whole of the law of God. He was a perfect sacrifice; no other would have sufficed to placate God's wrath. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8–9). *Christ's legal sonship was marked by His perfect obedience to God's law, even unto death.* Analogously, the fourth generation's heirship was marked by their circumcision, even unto risking death, i.e., their temporary military incapacity while inside the boundaries of the Promised Land. They were military invaders, yet they deliberately incapacitated themselves as a nation. They placed their faith in God's promise to Abraham, not in their own military might.

Protestants speak of unmerited grace. With respect to the *recipients* of grace, grace is indeed unmerited. Men do not merit God's favor on their own account. But with respect to the *judicial basis* of grace, it is completely merited by the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Unmerited grace is grounded in Christ's merit through obedience. This merit is a *legal claim*, and as heirs to grace through their adoption by God through Christ, this legal claim passes to the elect. Salvation is legally claimed by the elect, not on the basis of their obedience, but on the basis of Christ's obedience. *Grace is grounded in biblical law, which includes the Abrahamic law of circumcision, through one man's perfect fulfilling of biblical law's stipulations.*

So, to discuss Israel's inheritance in terms of promise only or law only is to discuss half of the legal transaction. The inheritance was established by grace through God's promise, but there was supposed to be obedience on the part of the fourth generation. Joshua understood the legal conditions of this inheritance. Israel might, by God's grace, inherit without obedience, but they were supposed to obey. This was Moses' message to them, too: *maintenance of the kingdom grant was conditional.* As the author of the Hebrews put it, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

C. Maintaining the Kingdom Grant

"All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the

land which the LORD swore unto your fathers" (Deut. 8:1). This was not the announcement of the judicial definition of what constituted the fourth generation, namely, circumcision. This was an announcement of a covenantal link between obedience and inheritance. How can we make theological sense of Moses' words? He invoked the promise while mandating obedience.

First, we must ask: Did Moses expect the blessings listed in Deuteronomy 8 to unfold sequentially? Did he mean to say that the fourth generation had to obey the commandments in order for God to multiply them, to be followed by their conquest of the land? Obviously not, since he was preparing them for the conquest, not for a long period of population growth as the means of military conquest. Their multiplication would come after they had secured the land. Yet the text places multiplication prior to the securing of the land. If we take his words as *sequentially* meaningful, his call to obedience would make no chronological sense. The conquest would be delayed for another generation. But the fourth generation had to inherit.

Second, we must ask: What was Moses getting at? Answer: the requirement that Israel obey God in order to possess the land, maintain the land, and multiply in the land. Israel obeyed God first by submitting to circumcision. This act of obedience preceded the conquest. While the people might have relied on God's grace to enable them to conquer the land without being circumcised, instead they relied on God's grace to enable them to escape military defeat during their time of physical incapacity.³ In both scenarios, they had to rely on grace: the promise, which Moses cited. They could be sure of the promise. The question was: How best to claim their grace-based inheritance. By refusing to be circumcised or by risking a military set-back? They chose the latter.

Grace precedes law in both God's covenant of creation and His covenant of redemption. He gave the law to Adam (Gen. 2:16) after He had given Adam life and land (Gen. 2:7–14). This is the covenantal pattern: *grace precedes law*. James Jordan wrote: "God's Word is always promise before it is command. . . . God always bestows the Kingdom as a gift before presenting us with our duties in it."⁴ The kingdom had been bestowed on Abraham as a gift. That is, the land had long ago

3. They knew the story of Shechem: how Simeon and Levi had slaughtered them while the Shechemites were recovering from circumcision (Gen. 34:25–26).

4. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 7. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

been assigned to Abraham's heirs. God had transferred the land to Israel by grace and promise, but He had not yet transferred legal title to the new owners. That would come through military conquest. They had received the law at Sinai four decades earlier, not two centuries earlier. They had been tested in the wilderness in terms of the Mosaic law, and the fourth generation had passed these tests. After the conquest, they would have to remain judicially faithful in order to retain possession.

Grace always precedes law in God's dealings with His subordinates. *We are in debt to God even before He speaks to us.* The land grant was based on the original promise given to Abraham. That promise came prior to the giving of the Mosaic law.⁵ This is why Jordan said that the laws of Leviticus are more than legislation; the focus of the laws is not simply obedience to God, but rather on maintaining the grant.⁶ Israel's basis of maintaining the grant was ethics, not the sacrifices. Man cannot maintain the kingdom in sin.⁷

Moses continued: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (v. 2). This would seem to violate the principle of grace preceding redemption. God had humbled them in order to see whether or not they would obey Him. The giving of the law at Sinai was followed by the negative sanction of national humiliation. Only four decades later was the prospect of inheritance before them. This seems to point to another pattern: law-humiliation-grace.

To whom was Moses speaking? To the heirs of a formerly enslaved nation. The giving of the law did not take place in an historical vacuum. It took place after a series of miraculous deliverances. The giving of the Mosaic law was the culminating act of national deliverance. Grace precedes law, but it does not annul law. *Law confirms grace.* It ratifies a prior gift of God.

D. Covenantal Predictability and Social Theory

Is the historical fulfillment of God's promises separate from the law? Not according to Moses. Is this fulfillment separate from the re-

5. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

cipients' fulfillment of the law? Only partially. Grace may bring fulfillment despite a period of rebellion. Nevertheless, there is a covenantal pattern announced in the law, but especially in Deuteronomy: obedience brings blessings; disobedience brings cursings. Inheritance and disinheritance are not random; they are predictable covenantally. They are not predictable perfectly in all cases because *grace is greater than sin*. Negative sanctions are sometimes delayed despite sin (e.g., the Amorites in Canaan, Abraham to Moses—an example of common grace). But our affirmation of grace must not become an affirmation of historical indeterminism regarding corporate blessings and cursings. A person who invokes grace in order to deny the consequences of law becomes an ally of covenant-breakers. *He has denied the covenant*. He has denied the historical relevance of God's law in history. But history does not take place in a judicial vacuum. Other law-orders will be imposed in order to govern men, including Christians. We must decide: God's law or chaos? God's law or tyranny?

Whenever the covenantal predictability of corporate inheritance and disinheritance is denied, a uniquely biblical social theory becomes impossible. This is why Lutheranism has always been incapable of producing independent social theory. Luther was adamant about the irrelevance of Christianity for legal theory. To rulers, Luther wrote: "Certainly it is true of Christians, so far as they themselves are concerned, are subject neither to law [n]or sword, and have need of neither. But take heed and fill the world with real Christians before you attempt to rule in a Christian and evangelical manner."⁸ As for true Christians, "these people need no temporal law or sword. If all the world were composed of real Christians, that is, true believers, there would be no need for or benefits from prince, king, sword, or law."⁹ Luther was an ethical dualist.¹⁰ Because Lutheranism denies any relevance to biblical law in the arrival of corporate blessings, it must invoke ethical dualism: natural law or pagan law for the civil sphere, personal morality for the individual Christian, and silence regarding the church. But what is true of Lutheranism is equally true of any form of Christianity which uses the doctrine of grace to annul the covenantal predictability of corpor-

8. Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed" (1523), *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), XLV, p. 91.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

10. Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundations of Luther's Social Views," in John H. Mundy, *et al.*, *Essays in Medieval Life* (Cheshire, Connecticut: Biblo & Tannen, 1955), pp. 71–87. Cf. David J. Lose, "The Ambidextrous God: Luther on Faith and Politics," *Word & World*, XIX (Summer 1999), pp. 260–67.

ate sanctions. *When Calvinism abandons faith in covenantal predictability in history, it ceases to be Calvinism; it becomes Lutheran.*¹¹

Protestant social theology has almost always been Lutheran in content, if not form: an unstable mixture of personal Christian morality combined with humanistic, common-ground natural law theory. Personal morality is regarded as having had no meaningful implications for the development of social theory. This delivers social theory into the hands of covenant-breakers and their intellectual allies within the church, who share the covenant-breakers' assumptions regarding the possibility of both ethical neutrality and epistemological neutrality, as well as the irrelevance or even harmful effects of Old Testament law on society. When theologians challenge this unofficial but long-term alliance, they are challenged with some variation of the following: "The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Ex. 5:21). Dispensational author David Allen Lewis offered this reason for rejecting Christian Reconstruction: it may upset humanists, who will inevitably become more powerful. "[A]s the secular, humanistic, demonically-dominated world system becomes more and more aware that the Dominionists and Reconstructionists are a real political threat, they will sponsor more and more concerted efforts to destroy the Evangelical church. Unnecessary persecution could be stirred up."¹²

Conclusion

Moses told the conquest generation to obey God's law. Yet he also cited the promise. He said that the long-term success of the conquest was dependent on their continued covenantal faithfulness. Yet the promise God made to Abraham was secure: sealed by an oath-sign.

11. This is what Meredith G. Kline's denial of God's predictable sanctions in history represents. See Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184. Kline's former student and full-time disciple Michael Horton has been far more open regarding this quest for a Lutheran-Calvinist reconciliation. The judicial basis of such a reconciliation must be Calvinism's acceptance of Lutheranism's ethical dualism, which Horton's two-kingdoms theology promotes. (<http://bit.ly/HortonKingdoms>) In a letter to *Christian News* (Nov. 13, 1995), a conservative Lutheran publication, he wrote of his organization, CURE, that "we are building a cooperative effort between the Reformed and Lutheran Christians in an effort to restore a Reformation witness." Horton left the Reformed Episcopal Church and joined the Christian Reformed Church in 1995. In 1998, he joined the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California, in historical theology.

12. Lewis, *Prophecy 2000* (Green Forest, Arkansas: New Leaf Press, 1990), p. 277.

Their conquest of the land was guaranteed. Yet they were told to obey God's laws. *There can be no doubt that Moses invoked both the law and the promise.* This is what troubles Protestant commentators.

The solution to the problem is to recognize the judicial basis of the promise, which was a form of grace. All grace is grounded judicially on the perfect fulfillment of the whole of God's law. There must be perfect obedience. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). There can be no separation of law and promise, for *promise is grounded in law*. The question is: Whose obedience? The answer is inescapable: *Jesus Christ's obedience*. So, the fulfillment of any promise rests judicially on Christ's fulfillment of the demands of the law. Grace is present because of the judicially representative character of Christ's fulfillment, just as the curse is present because of the judicially representative character of Adam's Fall. Imputation by God is fundamental: the imputation of Christ's perfection or the imputation of Adam's sin. God looks on each person and imputes—declares judicially—one or the other moral condition. Then He pronounces sentence: "Guilty" or "Not guilty."

The Israelites would soon mark themselves, both literally and symbolically, as lawful heirs to the promise through circumcision. This they did under Joshua. In the wilderness, it had not mattered so much that they were not circumcised, but after they crossed the boundary of the land, they would have remained profane—sacred boundary violators—had they not become circumcised.¹³ To avoid remaining profane, they submitted to circumcision. Then they proceeded to remove the truly profane nations from the land.

Moses was also warning them in this passage about the ethical basis of maintaining the kingdom grant. A nation of covenant-breakers could not indefinitely occupy the Promised Land. God would remove them (Deut. 8:19–20).¹⁴

13. On the biblical concept of the profane, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

14. Chapter 22.

MIRACLES, ENTROPY, AND SOCIAL THEORY

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years (Deut. 8:2–4).

The theocentric focus of this law is the absolute sovereignty of God over the creation, including man. The test of the nation's commitment to God—"what was in thine heart"—was ethics: "whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no."

A. Continuous Miracles

God broke the laws of nature in order to sustain His people in the wilderness. This should persuade all men to obey God. God had fed Israel miraculously with manna. In the midst of their national humiliation, there had been life-giving grace. But that was not all: "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years" (v. 4). Their clothes had not worn out. Their feet had not become swollen. Moses made it clear that God's grace had not been a one-time event. It had been a continuous process for four decades. He reminded them of this because a miracle sustained for decades ceases to be regarded as a miracle. It becomes a familiar aspect of daily life. It seems to be an inherent part of the environment, but it isn't. Men expect benefits in this life. When these benefits are continual, men regard them as normal.

This law was not a land law. It related to Israel's wandering, but its intent was man's universal obedience: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live." Jesus cited this law to Satan in the famous stones-into-bread temptation (Matt. 4:4).¹ It is clearly a cross-boundary law, which means that it is still binding under the New Covenant.²

A miracle is abnormal. It is a supernatural act of deliverance or blessing which disrupts the normal pattern of events. But the normal pattern of events is itself a manifestation of grace, beginning with life itself. This grace need not imply God's favor; it is nevertheless *an unmerited gift* to men and angels, both fallen and unfallen.³ Both historical continuity and discontinuity are acts of God's grace. The former is so continuous—a series of life-sustaining acts strung together infinitesimally close—that its gracious character is perceived only through faith, which in turn is an initially discontinuous event that through self-discipline is supposed to become continuous.

The miracles of the wilderness era were so continuous that they took on the appearance of common grace. Moses reminded Israel of the special position which the nation had in God's eyes, as proven by their patch-free clothing. God had actively intervened in history to sustain them in preparation for the promised day of judgment. The day of judgment is a day of sanctions, positive and negative, depending on one's covenantal status. The day of negative sanctions was about to arrive inside the boundaries of Canaan. For the Israelites, this would bring the promised inheritance. For the Canaanites, this would bring the promised disinheritance; their cup of iniquity was at long last full (Gen. 15:16).

B. The Second Law of Thermodynamics

I have written a book on the apologetic uses and misuses—mostly misuses—of the second law of thermodynamics.⁴ I wrote it for two

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

2. On cross-boundary laws, see Appendix J.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

4. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview*

reasons: (1) to refute a socialist propagandist who had presented a defense of state economic planning in terms of the need to reduce entropy; (2) to refute modern Creation Science insofar as the second law has been invoked to thwart the construction of an explicitly creationist social theory. In both cases, the theorists have misused the second law of thermodynamics.

The first law of thermodynamics is called the law of the conservation of energy. It states that the total energy of the universe—a supposedly closed system—does not change. Potential energy may become kinetic (changing) energy, but total energy does not change. Modern physics is built on this law. The condition described by the first law of thermodynamics is one reason why there can never be a perpetual motion machine. It would have to produce more usable energy (work) than it began with. It would have to do its work and then re-supply itself with an amount of potential energy equal to or greater than it expended in doing the work. This is sometimes called a perpetual motion machine of the first kind.

The second law of thermodynamics states that in a closed system, potential energy can become kinetic energy, but kinetic energy—energy transformed—cannot become potential energy. Therefore, the energy available for usable work declines over time (classical thermodynamics). As an example, temperature moves from hot to cold, but it does not move from cold to hot unless external heat is applied. Another example: a brick may fall from a wall to the ground, but it will not rise from the ground to the wall unless additional energy is added to the process from outside the system, such as someone who lifts it. Put chronologically, time does not move backward. Contemporary humanism teaches that from the moment just after the Big Bang until that frozen waste called the heat death of the universe, energy is dissipated.⁵ Sir Arthur Eddington named this one-way process of energy dissipation through time: *time's arrow*.

The idea of time's arrow creates a serious cosmological problem for evolutionists. Time's arrow proceeds from order to disorder, whereas evolution's arrow supposedly moves from less order to greater order: from the simple to the complex. These two processes have yet to be reconciled by means of an appeal to the thermodynamic laws governing the universe as a closed system.

(Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

5. But will electrons quit moving? Will atoms still be there? Does the second law apply to subatomic realm?

In any physical process—potential energy to kinetic energy—there will always be heat loss or heat dispersion, also described as an increase in randomness, within a closed system (statistical thermodynamics). This loss of coherence is sometimes called *entropy*. Entropy is a measure of the increase in randomness. The work performed by a machine is a one-time event. The energy has been dissipated, some of it into heat loss. In a machine without oil or some other lubricant, the grinding of metal is audible to all: heat is being produced and then dissipated. There is no lubricant in nature that can overcome all of this heat loss. This is entropy's law. This is a second reason why there can be no perpetual motion machine: heat loss. The machine cannot regain all of the energy expended in work because some of that kinetic energy is lost through heat dispersion.

Perpetual clothing is the equivalent of a perpetual motion machine. This passage proves that, in principle, a perpetual motion machine is possible, but it takes supernatural resource inputs to make it run. The system—nature—is not closed all of the time. Whenever it is closed, however, clothing always wears out through friction. Everything wears out. Feet swell and then wear out. People attached to feet wear out. This is the second law of thermodynamics at work. Where work is performed in a closed system—no new infusions of energy or anything else from outside—the second law guarantees that there is a permanent loss of potential energy, so that some day, potential energy will dissipate—become random—and cease to perform any work. The universe eventually will go into permanent retirement, sometimes called the heat death of the universe. This is inevitable, unless . . . unless the second law of thermodynamics is violated by what is known in Christian circles as the final judgment, or unless the second law of thermodynamics is violated by miracles, or unless the second law of thermodynamics is not actually a law but merely a familiar process regionally and temporally that is not in fact universal. Most physicists regard it as universal,⁶ which is why most physicists: (1) deny any final judgment other than the impersonal heat death of the universe; (2) deny the existence of miracles.

Once you admit the existence of miracles that are generated and sustained from outside the system of the universe, you thereby deny the universality of the second law of thermodynamics. If the universe is an open system, then the second law need not always apply. Unless

6. They are not equally sure regarding the subatomic realm.

you see God as a kind of energy pipeline operator who siphons off useful energy from other parts of the universe in order to overcome the negative effects of entropy in this region of the universe, you must regard miracles as a violation of the second law. To define miracles as consistent with the second law, you would have to explain the patch-free clothing of the Israelites as having caused a loss of potential energy somewhere else in the immense closed system called the universe. “Entropy still ruled in the wilderness, but its effects on Israelite clothing were offset by God, who drained off potential energy from some other region.” Ultimately, this strictly physical approach to miracles would force Christians to explain the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ in terms of permanently lost potential energy. Then they must search for the existence of a heat sink into which wasted energy was dispersed.

C. In the Garden of Eden⁷

Adam had a nose. He had a sense of smell. But what was there to smell? The fragrance of flowers is a product of the second law of thermodynamics: the move from order to disorder. The millions of tiny particles that activate our sense of smell are distributed randomly, which is why we smell them rather than step in them. They do not pile up.

Consider another example. What if Adam had wanted to build an internal combustion engine? Without a carburetor, the liquid known as gasoline would not power an automobile except in one fiery propulsion event. The carburetor breaks up the liquid into tiny droplets and distributes them randomly in a heat chamber where these particles can be ignited safely by an electric spark. Were it not for the second law of thermodynamics, there would be only one explosion, not thousands per minute.

What if Adam had wanted to play a friendly game of solitaire? He would have pulled out a deck of cards and shuffled them. No cheating here! Shuffling a deck of cards makes the order of the cards unpredictable. Why? Because their order has moved toward randomness. Why? Because of the second law of thermodynamics.

This means that the second law of thermodynamics operated before the Fall of man. This was admitted once by Henry M. Morris, who

7. This section is based on “Entropy in the Garden of Eden,” *Is the World Running Down?*, pp. 124–26.

elsewhere has built his apologetic for creationism on the second law. In an essay addressed primarily to scientists rather than the general Christian public, he made this statement regarding the operation of the second law in Eden: “The formal announcement of the second law in its post-Fall form is found in Genesis 3:17–20. . . . Thus, as best we can understand both Scripture and science, we must date the establishment of the second law of thermodynamics, in its present form at least, from the tragic day on which Adam sinned. . . .”⁸ To speak of the “second law in its post-Fall form” and “in its present form at least” is an unobjectionable way to discuss the second law. It suggests that we must distinguish the pre-Fall and post-Fall operations of the second law. This implies that we should distinguish a cursed from an uncursed operation of that law. *We live in a cursed-entropy world, not an entropy-cursed world.* But, as far as I am aware, nowhere else in his writings did Morris discuss the implications of this distinction, nor do his colleagues in the Creation Science movement. This is a major weakness in that movement. A discussion of entropy prior to Adam’s Fall is long overdue in Creation Science—so overdue that I suspect that a full discussion would raise objections to the ways in which the movement has used the second law in the past, as well as the ways in which the members of the movement have refused to use it.

The correct use of the second law of thermodynamics in Christian apologetics mandates tight constraints. To argue that the world is running down because of entropy is incorrect. Prior to Adam’s rebellion, the second law of thermodynamics operated in a world that was in no way running down. The second law today operates differently from the way it did in Eden. That is, the *physical effects* of the second law of thermodynamics were in some fundamental way changed by God after the Fall of man. These effects have been *cursed*.

Entropy is a fact of life, like death and taxes. Prior to the Fall of man, it was equally a fact of life, before death and taxes had appeared. Despite entropy’s cursed effects, we can and should work to achieve longer life spans and lower taxes. The Bible prophesies a future era of longer life spans (Isa. 65:20).⁹ Why not lower taxes to match? Why not reductions in entropy? Entropy is a cost. We can find ways of lowering

8. Henry M. Morris, “Thermodynamics and Biblical Theology,” in Emmett L. Williams (ed.), *Thermodynamics and the Development of Order* (Norcross, Georgia: Creation Research Books, 1981), pp. 129–30.

9. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15.

costs. Motor oil reduces metallic friction and therefore reduces entropy. With respect to entropy's economic costs, they have been steadily reduced since the Industrial Revolution. That entropy exists, there can be no doubt, although if it operates in the subatomic realm, it has not yet manifested itself. That entropy, as a cost of production, can have significant effects on a particular social order is also not doubted. But that a serious social theory can be constructed in terms of entropy as an ever-growing social cost is highly doubtful, as socialist Jeremy Rifkin's failed attempt indicates. He ceased writing about entropy within few years after he announced it as a major intellectual breakthrough, substituting time-management as the culprit of capitalism.¹⁰

D. Continuity and Discontinuity

The Christian's case against Darwinian evolution can be based on the second law of thermodynamics only on the unstated assumption that today's universe is not governed by the physical laws of the pre-Fall universe. The Christian must be very careful how he uses the second law. He cannot accurately say that entropy did not exist in Eden, because it did operate there. Pollen's move from an ordered to a disordered (random) state—entropy—was what activated Adam's sense of smell. What was missing in Eden was hay fever, not entropy. Entropy was not cursed before the Fall; today it is. But this is not how modern defenders of Creation Science usually state their case. They state it incorrectly, as if the second law of thermodynamics did not operate prior to the Fall. They do not distinguish between the uncursed and cursed *effects* of the second law; instead, they distinguish between a world before the second law was imposed by God and today's fallen world under its despotic rule. They argue that the second law came into existence as a result of God's curse. Morris writes: "This law states that all systems, if left to themselves, tend to become degraded or disordered. . . . This, then, is the true origin of the strange law of disorder and decay, universally applicable, all-important second law of thermodynamics. Herein is the secret of all that's wrong with the world. Man is a sinner and has brought God's curse on the earth."¹¹ In 1982, he wrote: "It is well to be reminded that the two greatest laws of science—the universal principles of conservation and decay—are merely the sci-

10. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, Appendix F: "Time for a Change: Rifkin's 'New, Improved' Worldview."

11. Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (San Diego, California: Creation-Life, 1976), p. 127.

entific formulations of, first, God's completed and conserved work of creation, and second, His curse on the creation because of sin."¹² It is as if he had forgotten his properly qualified statement in 1981: "The formal announcement of the second law *in its post-Fall form* is found in Genesis 3:17–20. . . . Thus, as best we can understand both Scripture and science, we must date the establishment of the second law of thermodynamics, *in its present form at least*, from the tragic day on which Adam sinned. . . ."¹³ Morris' inaccurate formulation of the second law is widely cited in creationist circles, where it is invoked repeatedly in the apologetic against Darwinism. Hardly anyone knows about his correct formulation, which would force creationists to qualify this apologetic and thereby weaken it rhetorically, though strengthen it logically.

Invoking the second law of thermodynamics is a strictly negative apologetic tactic, and, as we shall see, it falls on deaf humanist ears. The Christian uses this argument to refute a Darwinist's assertion that ours is the only world there has ever been or will ever be. The Christian says: "If this really is the only world there has ever been, then the second law of thermodynamics tells us that things could not have evolved from less order to more order. Entropy denies Darwinism." To which the faithful Darwinian replies: "But the second law applies only to closed systems, and the earth is not a closed system." The proper Christian response is: "Then how did the universe itself evolve from disorder to order?" To which the no longer faithful Darwinian responds: "In the nanosecond of the Big Bang, when the second law did not apply."

The Darwinist must invoke *cosmic discontinuity*—the evolutionist's equivalent of the Bible's doctrine of creation out of nothing—in order to secure the present continuity of nature's evolutionary processes. Many leading Darwinists have now capitulated to discontinuity: *punctuated equilibrium*, physically unexplainable, extremely rapid, comprehensive biological transformations of entire species.¹⁴ But this does not shake their faith in the naturalism of the laws of evolution, any more than the existence of miracles shakes the Christian's faith in the universality of the laws of thermodynamics. Each side explains the existence of exceptions to the not-quite universal laws of thermody-

12. Henry M. Morris, *Evolution in Turmoil* (San Diego, California: Creation-Life, 1982), p. 174.

13. Morris, "Thermodynamics and Biblical Theology" (1981), *op. cit.*, pp. 129–30. Emphasis added.

14. The main proponent in the United States was Harvard University paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, who died in 2002.

namics in terms of its respective presuppositions regarding the origins of the universe. Neither side is willing to admit that the universe has been governed by the second law of thermodynamics throughout history: from either the garden of Eden or the Big Bang.

The Christian's legitimate apologetic use of the second law of thermodynamics is therefore extremely limited in scope: to force the Darwinist to abandon uniformitarianism, i.e., the original Darwinian doctrine that the processes of nature that we observe today have always been operational. This doctrine is what provided the pre-Darwinian geologists with their evolutionary time scale, which was crucial to their denial of the accuracy of Genesis 1. This discovery of what John McPhee has called "deep time" led to the next intellectual revolution: Darwinism.¹⁵ Darwin adopted Hutton's and Lyell's uniformitarian geology before he restructured biology.¹⁶ But rare is the contemporary Darwinist who is silenced by the uniformitarian argument for cosmic continuity. He is willing to invoke cosmic discontinuities whenever convenient, now that he and his peers have agreed that Darwin's continuity-based arguments have permanently shoved the Bible's God out of the universe and out of men's thinking. Having made such effective epistemological and cultural use of Darwinian continuity, evolutionists today feel secure in invoking discontinuity whenever convenient, in much the same way that the creationists invoke miracles. Punctuated equilibrium—unexplainably huge discontinuities in macro-evolution—is modern Darwinism's equivalent of the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea.

Darwinists want their cosmic miracles to be impersonal, so as to avoid considering God's final judgment. They want final judgment to be the impersonal eternal heat death of the universe long after they and everything else has died, not the highly personal eternal flames of the lake of fire. In contrast, Christians want their historical miracles to be personal, long before everything has died, in order to invoke God's final judgment. They want to escape the meaninglessness of the impersonal heat death of the universe in order to believe in the meaningfulness of God's highly personal judicial declaration, "Not guilty!"

15. McPhee is quoted by Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow/Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 2.

16. Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 182–84.

E. Is the Social World Running Down?¹⁷

Those who invoke the second law as an argument against Darwinism are almost always premillennialists. Most of the others are amillennialists. As pessimillennialists, they also are highly tempted to argue that the social order is analogous to the physical order. It, too, is visibly running down. Nothing can restore it except: (1) the premillennial return of Jesus Christ to set up an earthly millennial kingdom (where the second law will be annulled or else overcome by regular miracles); (2) the amillennial return of Christ at the final judgment (after which the second law will be annulled).

Not many pessimillennialists will actually go into print on this point. In a flyer produced by the Bible-Science Association and the Genesis Institute (same address), we read the following: "The creationist realizes that the world is growing old around him. He understands that things tend to run down, to age, to die. The creationist does not look for the world to improve, but to crumble slowly—as in erosion, decay, and aging."¹⁸ This is a philosophy of self-conscious defeat, a cry of cultural despair. It is also not the kind of philosophy that anyone would normally choose to challenge socialists or other humanists.

1. Social Entropy

The whole idea of social entropy as an aspect of physical entropy is wrong-headed. First, the entropic process of cosmic physical decay takes place in humanistic time scales of billions of years. Such a time scale is irrelevant for social theory, whether Christian or pagan. Societies do not survive for billions of years—not so far, anyway.

Second, what does it mean to say "the world will [or will not] improve"? What world? The geophysical world? What does an ethical or aesthetic term such as "improve" have to do with the physical world? Scientific evolutionists have been careful to avoid such value-laden adjectives with respect to historical geology or biology, at least with respect to the world prior to mankind's appearance. Without a moral evaluator, says the Darwinist, there can be no meaning for the word "improve."

Christians should be equally careful in their use of language. The Christian should argue that *God evaluates* any improvement or degen-

17. This section is based on *Is the World Running Down?*, ch. 3: "Entropy and Social Theory."

18. *What's the Difference? Creation/Evolution?* (no date), p. 2.

eration in the external world, and therefore men, acting as God's subordinates, also make such evaluations. But there is no autonomous *im-personal* standard of "world improvement," as any evolutionist readily admits. So, the flyer apparently had as its point of reference not the geophysical world but rather *man's social world*.

The flyer says that things tend to run down. "Evolution demands that things 'wind up' even as we see them run down. Therefore the evolutionist looks for things to improve." This implies that Christians should not look for things to improve. Again, what do we mean by "improve"? If things only *tend* to run down, this implies that *sometimes* things *don't* run down. If so, then there must be decay-offsetting progressive forces in operation. What might these be? The main one is the gospel of salvation. Regeneration restores ethical wholeness to men. Another offsetting factor is obedience to the law of God. God's law enables men to rebuild a cursed world. In other words, *ethics is fundamental; entropy isn't*. This is why entropy, to the extent that any such phenomenon applies to the affairs of men, is only a tendency.

The reason why I keep citing this short document (tract) is because it is the one creationist document I have seen that even mentions social theory, and even then only vaguely. I would have been happy to consider other documents from Creation Scientists that deal with entropy in relation to social theory, but I have been unable to find any. In 1988, I searched the complete set of the *Creation Social Sciences and Humanities Quarterly* and found nothing on the topic. There is zero interest in this topic in modern evangelicalism. There is almost as little interest in the relationship between creationism and the social sciences. By 1895, 36 years after the publication of *Origin of Species*, Darwinism had captured virtually every academic field. By 1994, 33 years after the publication of Morris and Whitcomb's *Genesis Flood*, this thin quarterly magazine ceased publication. It had been published for 16 years. It never had more than 600 subscribers. It never reviewed *Is the World Running Down?*, despite the fact that its main author, Ellen Myers, was for years on ICE's mailing list. It occasionally would reprint something I had written, but not on the topic of entropy. (Its partial archives are on the Web.)¹⁹ My book was never reviewed in any Creation Science publication that I ever saw. It went down the memory hole. The book was a self-conscious frontal assault on the movement's use of the second law, yet the movement's leaders

19. <http://www.creationism.org/csshs>.

pretended that it did not exist. Pretense that a major criticism has never been offered is a convenient institutional strategy, but it does not answer the criticism. It merely keeps one's followers in the dark. This is a high-risk strategy for any movement that presents itself to the world and to its followers as both academic and intellectually valid.

Why this silence on social theory? It may be that the entropy paradigm is so powerful that six-day creationists have become pessimistic about the possibility of constructing the foundations of a self-consciously biblical social science. Perhaps they have been baffled by some variation of this question: "If entropy is the dominant factor in life, how can there be progress in social institutions, including the family and the institutional church?" The answer that I offer is simple enough: both the resurrection and bodily ascension of Jesus Christ have made possible the historical overcoming of many of the *cursed* aspects of entropy in the physical universe, and to whatever extent that entropy-related curses affect social institutions, these effects can be offset even more rapidly than in the physical realm. Why? Because the three main institutions of society—family, church, and state—are covenantal. Point four of the biblical covenant model—sanctions²⁰—offers legitimate hope in comprehensive healing in history. This healing is both personal and institutional.²¹ The closer we get to man, who is made in God's image, the more the covenant's sanctions of blessings and cursings become visible.

2. *Pessimillennialism and Entropy*

I suspect that there is a better explanation for pessimillennialists' silence on social theory. It is not that pessimillennialists became paralyzed in their development of social theory by the power of the concept of entropy. Rather, it is the other way around: *their pessimillennialism has governed their use of the concept of entropy*. Their inherently pessimistic social theory has led to a particular application of the entropy concept: the denial of entropy in the pre-Fall world. They see physical entropy much as they see the social world: inherently debilitating rather than cursed in its effects. They see entropy as the dominant factor in a physical world governed by physical decay; they see disorder as the dominant factor in a social world governed by mor-

20. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

21. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

al decay. They see isolated islands of physical order in a world of escalating physical disorder; they see isolated islands of social order in a world of escalating social and moral decay. They view the physical universe as declining into oblivion apart from occasional miracles; they see history as declining into oblivion apart from rare events of individual salvation. The physical world must march toward physical chaos until God calls the process to a halt at the final judgment. The social world must also march toward social chaos until God calls the process to a halt at the final judgment. In neither case does the New Testament doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God play any theoretical role. In both cases, the Old Testament's curses are left unaffected by the New Testament's blessings. In both cases, the Old Testament's tale of rebellion and destruction is dominant. In neither case does New Testament biblical theology play any role. The New Testament's message of comprehensive redemption—the Great Commission²²—is denied in the name of the Old Covenant's pre-ascension setbacks.

When I published *Is the World Running Down?* I did not expect Creation Scientists to respond to it in print. I was correct; almost no one did. More to the point, no one in the movement has ever written a book on entropy and social theory. Mine remains the only Christian book that deals with the subject, which minimizes the connections between physical entropy and social entropy. I admit freely that physical entropy imposes costs on production processes, but the key question is social: Which social order best encourages the discovery and implementation of technological reductions in these costs? Creation Scientists do not bother to ask this question. The Creation Science movement has not produced a single social theorist since *The Genesis Flood* appeared in 1961. This is ominous for the Creation Science movement. It means that the movement's attempt to reconstruct modern natural science has not only failed to persuade the vast majority of natural scientists, it has persuaded no social scientists. Why is this ominous? Because the success of Darwinism can be measured by its penetration of all other academic fields within a single generation.

As I said earlier, three decades after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the worldwide intellectual community had become overwhelmingly Darwinian. In almost every academic discipline in the

22. Kenneth Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

social sciences and the humanities, Darwinists had laid totally new intellectual foundations; each field had been totally reconstructed to conform to Darwinism. By 1890, the Progressive Movement in the United States was ready to restructure civil government and social theory, including theology, in terms of the Darwinian ideal of scientific central planning.²³ So were Progressivism's cousins in Europe, the Social Democrats. The absence of any similar effort, let alone success, among Creation Science's adherents outside of the natural sciences, indicates that there is either something missing in or radically wrong with the movement's entropy apologetic. This was one of my main themes in *Is the World Running Down?»: the incompatibility of Creation Science's entropy apologetic with biblical social theory. Our physical world is not a closed system; neither is our social world. God intervenes in nature and history. He intervened in the corporate life of Israel during the wilderness period, overcoming entropy in the area of apparel.*

3. Pessimillennialism and Social Theory

I argue that the Creation Science movement has a hidden but widely shared eschatological agenda: pessimillennialism. Dispensational premillennialists and amillennialists want to believe that the social world must continue to deteriorate alongside the physical world, and a whole lot faster. They accept what might be called "the uniformitarianism of social deterioration." Evil is always compounding in such a view. This steady increase in evil is fast approaching that point on the social graph when the curve will turn sharply upward and begin to approach infinity as a limit: the exponential curve. In other words, pessimillennialists believe that things will soon get so bad socially that Jesus will just have to come again in person to straighten everything out by force. This time of exponential social evil is almost upon us; therefore, they conclude, the Second Coming is just around the corner. They believe that there is not enough time remaining to reverse this process of deterioration. Furthermore, there is no possibility of doing so: social entropy is as universal as physical entropy is. No long-term reversal of social entropy is compatible with the entropy apologetic. The institutional church is seen as socially impotent; the gospel is seen as exclus-

23. Sidney Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General-Welfare State: A Study of Conflict in American Thought, 1865–1901* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956), Part 2.

ively personal; and fulfilling the Great Commission is seen as an impossible dream.

Until Creation Science begins to have an impact on social thought, it will be unable to counteract Darwinism, which long ago reconstructed social theory in its own image. The presuppositions underlying modern biological evolution appeared first in the social theories of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, not in the natural sciences.²⁴ Then, after 1880, the free market social theory of pre-Darwinian evolutionism was abandoned; replacing it was reform Social Darwinism: state planning. Evolutionistic social theory laid the foundations of biological Darwinism, just as pessimillennialism laid the foundations of Creation Science's entropy apologetic. Until the eschatological agenda of Creation Science is openly discussed, Creation Science will continue to be irrelevant outside of the natural sciences. Until pessimillennialism is abandoned by Creation Science, Creation Science will continue to be irrelevant in the area of social theory. Pessimillennialism makes impossible the development of a specifically biblical social theory.²⁵

Premillennialists presumably believe in "universal social entropy." But there is neither a formula governing social entropy nor any way scientifically to identify or measure this supposed phenomenon, unlike physical entropy. Premillennialists implicitly assume that this universal social entropy will be reversed or offset during the future millennium. They do not say this explicitly, however. Premillennialists refuse to discuss the topic of entropy's operations during the coming millennium. Perhaps they choose not to think about such matters; in any case, they refuse to write about them. Henry M. Morris ignored the topic in his commentary on the Book of Revelation. He said that entropy will be repealed after the final judgment,²⁶ but he was conveniently silent with respect to entropy during the millennial kingdom.

Most premillennialists believe that things will no longer decline morally and socially during the millennium.²⁷ Presumably, premillen-

24. F. A. Hayek, "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design" (1967), in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), ch. 6; S. S. Schweber, "The Origin of the Origin Revisited," *Journal of the History of Biology*, X (1977), pp. 229–316.

25. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

26. Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1983), p. 441.

27. An exception is accountant-turned-theologian Dave Hunt. See Hunt, *Beyond*

nialists also believe that the effects of physical entropy will somehow be offset during the millennium. They never discuss this, and so I cannot know for sure what they believe on this point. I doubt that they do, either. On the one hand, if entropy's effects will be offset cosmically, then the millennium will constitute one gigantic miracle. On the other hand, if entropy's effects will be offset *at a price* by normal scientific and technological progress, then we can in theory do the same thing now without the bodily return of Jesus to rule from Jerusalem or Colorado Springs or wherever He will set up headquarters. In either case, entropy is not a permanently debilitating factor in social organizations. Either a series of miracles will offset it, as took place in the wilderness era, or mankind's efforts in reducing costs will offset it.

Amillennialists see no permanent future reversal of social decline in history; a better day is not coming on this side of the Second Coming. In this sense, amillennialists are what Rushdoony once said they are: premillennialists without earthly hope.

Neither of these pessimillennial creationist groups sees any advantage in devoting time and money to a study of biblical social theory. Why bother? Isn't everything is going to hell in an entropic handbasket? Isn't everything doomed? Wouldn't any investment of time and money in developing a creationist social theory constitute a waste of scarce economic resources, like polishing brass on a sinking ship?

Moses had an answer for such rhetorical questions: *no!*

Conclusion

A very clever professor of engineering once stated a specific form of the second law of thermodynamics: "Confusion (entropy) is always increasing in society. Only if someone or something works extremely hard can this confusion be reduced to order in a limited region. Nevertheless, this effort will still result in an increase in the total confusion of society at large."²⁸ If knowledge were the product of physical creation—or if life were—then his theorem would be correct in this sin-cursed (but not entropy-cursed) world. But Moses' account of the wilderness indicates that life is not strictly physical. Other laws apply. It is worth noting that the famous physicist, Erwin Schrödinger, insisted that life is governed by laws different from those established by mod-

Seduction: A Return to Biblical Christianity (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1987), p. 250. For a critique, see *Is the World Running Down?*, pp. 257–63.

28. W. L. Everitt, Dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Illinois. Cited in Paul Dickenson, *The Official Rules* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978), p. 48.

ern physical theory. In his book, *What Is Life?*, he wrote: “What I wish to make clear in this last chapter is, in short, that from all we have learnt about the structure of living matter, we must be prepared to find it working in a manner that cannot be reduced to the ordinary laws of physics.”²⁹

To persuade Israel that promise precedes law, and therefore that grace precedes law, Moses reminded them of their experience in the wilderness. God had overcome the laws of nature by feeding them with manna and by keeping their clothing from wearing out. In modern terminology, God had suspended the second law of thermodynamics. Entropy in these areas had been reduced to zero. There had been neither wear nor tear on their clothing.

This was miraculous. Moses expected Israel to understand this. God’s active intervention into the processes of nature had been continuous for four decades. He had overturned the laws of nature in order to humble the Israelites without killing them. To keep them both humble and alive in the wilderness as a test of their covenantal commitment, He had performed a series of miracles that constituted one long miracle. They had passed the test. Now, Moses was telling them, God would secure the long-promised kingdom grant for them through military conquest. But their continued covenantal corporate obedience would be required by God in order for the nation to maintain this kingdom grant.

This Mosaic world-and-life view offers hope for society. Whenever men remain covenantally faithful through obedience to God’s Bible-revealed laws, social progress is not only possible, it is assured. God’s kingdom grant was given to the church by Jesus after His resurrection: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28: 18b–20).³⁰ This kingdom grant was sealed by His ascension in history. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I

29. Erwin Schrödinger, *What Is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell* (Cambridge University Press, [1944] 1967), p. 81.

30. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:12–14).

The Great Commission will be fulfilled prior to the final judgment: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:24–28).³¹ The termination of entropy's curse will coincide with the termination of death: the last enemy to be subdued. No more worn out clothes and no more swollen feet: what was in the wilderness evermore shall be, world without end, amen.

31. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

19

CHASTENING AND INHERITANCE

Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills (Deut. 8:5–7).

The theocentric focus of this passage is stated in the passage: God as the chastener of His son, Israel. He brings sanctions in terms of biblical law. “Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.”

A. Israel as God’s Son

Israel’s judicial position as God’s adopted son was the basis of both types of corporate sanctions: positive (Promised Land) and negative (chastening). The proof of God’s negative sanctions would be Israel’s imminent inheritance of the Promised Land: the disinheritance of the Canaanites.

This was not a seed law.¹ Its intent was universal: “Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him” (v. 6).

Deuteronomy follows Numbers, the book of sanctions.² Moses here told Israel that they must obey God’s commandments in order to escape His chastening, but also because God was about to lead them into the Promised Land. The covenantal link between historical sanctions and earthly inheritance is as unbreakable as the link between God’s revealed law (“commandments”) and sanctions (“chastening”).

1. On seed laws, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012).

Put another way, the covenantal link between historical sanctions and eschatology is as fixed as the covenantal link between law and historical sanctions. Put a third way, historical sanctions are the covenantal link between law and eschatology. Put comprehensively, theonomy is not simply a matter of God's law; it is a matter of the covenant: God's absolute sovereignty, man's subordinate authority, Bible-revealed law's continuity, historical sanctions' predictability, and postmillennialism. Put as a slogan, *theonomy is a package deal*.

"Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee." This warning affirmed the legal status of Israel as the son of God. More than this: Israel was God's firstborn son. "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Ex. 4:22–23). As the firstborn son, Israel was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:15–17).³ This reflected the greater responsibility of the firstborn son in representing the father and the covenant line. The firstborn was supposed to declare his father's word to the younger sons. The younger sons would grow up under the authority of the firstborn son. His authority was psychologically derived from his age, but it was judicially derived from his status as heir. The heir spoke his father's word authoritatively.

This placed an added responsibility on Israel's shoulders to declare God's commandments to the gentiles. Judicially speaking, the gentiles were the younger sons.⁴ They were not to speak authoritatively to Israel; the opposite was true. This was why God raised up Jonah as a prophet to bring God's covenant lawsuit against Nineveh.

The Promised Land was Israel's double portion. Deuteronomy 8 devotes considerable space to a detailed description of the manifold blessings of the Promised Land (vv. 7–13). There was to be no question in their minds that this constituted a double portion. This was the preferred land. It was not then the barren, parched land that it is today. It was still a land where a ram could get its horns caught in the branches of a thicket on top of a mountain (Gen. 22:13). Today, the mountains of Palestine are barren.⁵

3. Chapter 49.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37:D.

5. This created a major cinematic problem for the movie *Abraham*, filmed in Israel

Israel was required to obey God's commandments as a representative son. Israel was under the covenant. In order to declare the covenant authoritatively, a person must be under the terms of the covenant. To remind them that they were under these terms, Moses warned them of God's chastening. There had been negative sanctions imposed on national Israel for her disobedience. These sanctions testified to Israel's status as a son. Chastening was a negative sanction intended to restore the father-son personal relationship. It was not a sanction designed to beat down and destroy. It was not the permanent negative historical sanction that God demanded that Israel impose on the inhabitants of Canaan.

Israel's status as a firstborn son reveals why God told Israel to destroy Canaan. The Canaanites were second-born sons of God: disinherited sons. They were occupying the inheritance of the firstborn son. But why did this give Israel the right to kill them? In the Mosaic law, there was only one case where a family member was authorized to take part in the execution of another family member: when the convicted member had tried to lure the sanctions-bringing member to worship a false God (Deut. 13:6–10).

Canaanites were a threat to Israel because they would eventually lure Israel into false worship. This was the reason that God gave Israel for destroying the Canaanites. The presence of Canaanites in the land would be a constant source of temptation (Ex. 34:11–16). If allowed to remain in the Promised Land, the Canaanites would eventually become bonded to Israel through marriage (Ex. 34:16). As the second-born sons in the household, they would lead Israel into rebellion against the Father. God knew this; so, He announced that He had judged the Canaanites in advance and had found them guilty. Israel had to serve as God's executioner. The firstborn sons and the second-born sons could not occupy the same landed inheritance.

This theme of the inheritance of the firstborn and second-born sons is found repeatedly in Genesis. Again and again, *the firstborn son proved to be the disinherited son*. It began with Adam's rebellion; the inheritance was transferred to God's chronologically second-born son, Jesus Christ.⁶ The second-born Son became the firstborn judicially.

and starring Richard Harris. The mountain top scene where Isaac was to be sacrificed had no way to introduce the ram. The ram just happened to show up and was conveniently captured off-camera by Abraham.

6. Paul established the distinction between the first Adam and the second or last Adam, Jesus Christ: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

This theme of the rebellion of the firstborn continued with Cain's slaying of Abel. Esau was also the firstborn, but God told Rebekah that the younger would rule the elder (Gen. 25:23). This repeated reversal of the legal pattern of inheritance was based on God's grace in re-inheriting the younger brother through adoption, while condemning the disinherited older brother. The Canaanites as elder brothers had gained possession of the land, but as disinherited sons, their claim was invalid. Israel, by God's grace, had become the firstborn son with lawful title.

B. Suffering and Imposing Negative Sanctions

Moses had already reminded them that God had humbled them in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2).⁷ This suffering was a form of chastening. Their suffering was to remind them that they were under the terms of God's covenant as a son. God had already called them to impose His permanent negative historical sanctions on the wilderness side of the Jordan. This had led to the expansion of Israel's inheritance. Reuben (Israel's firstborn), Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh inherited this land (Num. 32:33). This served as a down payment on the national inheritance. God had shown that He would deliver their inheritance to them through military conquest. They were not to fear their enemies.

The four decades of negative sanctions (wandering) were not intended to destroy them but rather to confirm them in the covenant. They were sons, not bastards. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. 12:6–8). The legal bastards—disinherited sons—were about to be publicly disinherited.

Sonship is by oath consigned. There must be a physical representation of this covenant oath in order for it to become the legal basis of inheritance. The Israelites had not yet been circumcised, which is why they had to be circumcised before they could begin the war to inherit Canaan (Josh. 5:8). Outside of Canaan, they had already begun the conquest, but the actual inheritance of the trans-Jordan lands was delayed until after the defeat of Canaan (Deut. 3:20). The tribes dwelling on the wilderness side of the Jordan also had to be circumcised before lawful title to the inheritance could be legally transferred by God

7. Chapter 18.

to His firstborn son. Israel's physical suffering at Gilgal was preparatory to the far worse physical suffering of the Canaanites. Israelites had to experience the negative physical sanction of circumcision before they could lawfully impose the negative physical sanction of death inside the boundaries of the Promised Land.

Those who were formally under the God's covenant sanctions were the only people authorized by God to impose negative civil sanctions in Israel. Citizenship is established by oath. Those who seek to impose negative civil sanctions and participate in the political sacrament of voting must first place themselves formally under the terms of the God's two covenants, church and state.⁸

Conclusion

Moses announced the requirement that Israel, as the son of God, was required to keep God's commandments. God had been humbling them for four decades. Now, He was about to bring them into a bountiful land which would be their inheritance. The sequence was as follows: negative sanctions as a means of maturity through chastening, obedience to God's law as an ethical requirement, and inheritance in history. The chastening, while a negative sanction, was in fact confirmation of their legal position as inheriting sons. So, this negative sanction was a form of grace. Once again, we are reminded that grace precedes law. But this passage also indicates that law precedes the transfer of the inheritance in history.⁹

The second-born gentile sons of Canaan had been disinherited by God in Abraham's day: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). This verbally imputed disinheritance—what we might call *definitive* or judicial disinheritance—was to be achieved *progressively*: "I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become

8. This principle of civil law remains covenantally authoritative. It is dishonored in New Testament times by every system of civil government that bases citizenship on anything other than public Trinitarian confession and communing membership in the institutional church.

9. This was true even in Eden. Adam in Eden was supposed to gain experience in obeying God's law before moving outside the garden's boundaries into the world.

desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Ex. 23:27–30). This disinheritance was to be *finally* achieved in history: "When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deut. 7:1–2).

The covenant's development in history reflects the structure of the covenant: sovereign grace, hierarchical sonship, law, sanctions, and inheritance. The conquest of Canaan, from God's definitive promise to Abraham regarding the inheritance of Abraham's sons to the final defeat and disinheritance of the Canaanites, is representative of all of man's history. While this covenant sequence was always broken by Old Covenant Israel, as represented by the survival of a remnant of Canaanites in the land, the New Covenant sequence moves toward historical fulfillment of this sequence. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9).

OVERCOMING POVERTY

A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass (Deut. 8:9).

This description of the Promised Land appears in a passage devoted to dominion. It related to Israel's inheritance of the land, but its ethical intention was universal: "Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him" (Deut. 8:6).

A. Biblical Scarceness vs. Economic Scarcity

This was not a seed law or land law.¹ It was universal. This description of *a land without scarcity* seems consistent with the sabbatical year of release from debt: "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it" (Deut. 15:1–4).² But it seems inconsistent with Deuteronomy 15:11: "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." God's affirmation that they would eat *bread without scarceness*—the abolition of poverty—did not negate the sabbatical year law, which implied that this law would cease when there was no more poverty in the land. But

1. On seed laws and land laws, see Appendix J.

2. Chapter 35.

He also promised that there would always be poverty in the land. How can all this be sorted out biblically?

The word translated here as “scarceness” occurs only once in the Old Testament. It is derived from a Hebrew word, *miskenuth*, meaning poverty, which is found only in Ecclesiastes. “Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished” (Eccl. 4:13).³ “Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard” (Eccl. 9:15–16).⁴ *Miskenuth* in turn derives from the Hebrew word translated as “folly”: *siklooth*. This word is also confined exclusively to verses in Ecclesiastes, such as in Ecclesiastes 2:13: “Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.” *Siklooth* is derived from *sawkal*: silliness. “And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever” (I Sam. 13:13).

By tracing the origins of these words, we see a connection: scarceness, poverty, folly, silliness. The essence of silliness is that men refuse to keep God’s commandments, as Samuel told Saul. *Obedience brings wealth*. This is the core meaning of Moses’ description of the Promised Land. The land contains a sufficient supply of scarce economic resources to enable a covenant-keeper to eat bread.

This concept is different from the economist’s concept of scarcity. The economist defines scarcity in terms of price. At zero price, the demand for a scarce economic resource will be greater than its supply. This was surely not what Moses had in mind: “. . . a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass” (Deut. 8:9b). Any expenditure of labor is a payment. The copper of Israel was not obtainable apart from labor.⁵

The Promised Land was not outside of history and its cursed scarcity. It was a place with sufficient resources that a folly-avoiding person who obeyed God’s commandments would not suffer poverty. David observed: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not

3. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

5. The King James translators always translated the Hebrew word for copper as brass, an alloy of copper and zinc.

seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). *Poverty in Israel would be abnormal for covenant-keepers if Israel remained faithful to God.* This wealth principle was not confined to Mosaic Israel. It is universal.

If the wealth principle is universal, then the question facing all mankind is this: What is the most valuable economic resource? This resource is what all men should seek. The Bible tells us what this resource is. Few men listen. Even fewer seek it.

B. The Ultimate Resource

The ultimate resource is not human creativity, contrary to Julian Simon's book.⁶ Rather, it is God's covenant. Not creativity as such but adherence to God's law is what brings forth the positive human creativity that sustains long-term economic growth. Human creativity can sometimes be perverse, and it then brings forth poverty. Warfare is usually a counter-productive endeavor (James 4:1).

Covenant-keeping is the key to wealth. Covenant-keeping is the *wealth formula*. A society does not need physical resources to prosper. It needs personal liberty, a private property order, future-orientation (low time preference), a willingness to work hard and wisely in terms of God's moral standards, a widespread acceptance of the moral legitimacy of commerce and profits, and some way to transport products to and from the world outside. The tiny community of Hong Kong since 1945 has become a formidable economic competitor in several fields, most notably in textiles and financial services. The United States government has long been pressured by American textile and clothing manufacturers to legislate import quotas against clothing exported by this geographically tiny (a little over 400 square miles) society of seven million hard-working people,⁷ so competitive are Hong Kong's manufacturers. Hong Kong has almost no natural resources. It has to import at least 90% of everything it consumes. Only one-seventh of its land is arable.⁸ Its only natural resource of any consequence is its harbor. Meanwhile, other parts of the world are awash in natural resources, but they are also awash in envy, crime, government regulations on the

6. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981). The phrase is Drucker's: Peter Drucker, *Landmarks of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), p. 180.

7. In 1945, about 600,000 lived there. Alvin Rabushka, *Hong Kong: A Study in Economic Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 11.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

economy, and present-oriented people who choose not to save. These societies are marked by their poverty.

The land of Israel had many natural resources. It also had access to the Mediterranean Sea. It was “A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey” (Deut. 8:8). The threat to Israel’s prosperity was not the threat of natural resource depletion. God did not warn them to use civil government coercion to conserve resources. He warned them against forgetting where they had received these resources:

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 8:11–14).⁹

Covenantal forgetfulness would eventually produce *covenantal faithlessness*. This would lead to God’s corporate negative sanctions against them (vv. 19–20). If they enjoyed the gifts without remembering and worshipping the Giver, then their prosperity would not survive. It was God’s covenantal administration that would enable them to prosper in the Promised Land.

C. Land and Labor

The list of resources emphasized agriculture, herding, and mining. These were traditional occupations in the ancient world, along with seafaring, trade, and textiles. The Promised Land’s geography offered all of these industries. The economist generally refers to these resources as land.¹⁰ The Promised Land was filled with resources. The Israelites could therefore look forward to prosperity. They were not expected by God to believe in Hong Kong economics: compounding creativity that makes land valuable mainly as a consumer good rather than land that supplies raw materials. Even today, Hong Kong’s eco-

9. Chapter 21.

10. In this technical sense, the sea is land. Because of its liquid status, the sea and rivers present problems for assigning ownership. That which flows is difficult to isolate; that which cannot be isolated is difficult to own and disown. It is this problem which leads to pollution, both liquid and air-borne: using water and air as free resources to reduce production costs.

conomic success is almost beyond the willingness of university-educated people to understand, accept, or believe. This was especially true prior to 1980. As Rabushka wrote in 1979, “One can, I think, count the number of American economists who study Hong Kong’s political economy on the fingers of one hand, or at most two.”¹¹

1. Faith in Land

The idea that widespread prosperity can be attained without the natural resource of land is not readily believed. This was especially true before Bill Gates became the richest man in the world at age 30 by owning and improving software code. To go from an investment of \$50,000 in 1980¹² to about \$500 billion in 1999¹³ by means of magnetic ones and zeros embedded on pieces of plastic—plus the ability to persuade millions of buyers that these inexpensive pieces of plastic are useful—would have appeared impossible in 1981. Today, however, creating this kind of personal wealth seems possible *only* by doing highly creative things with magnetic ones and zeros.

Nevertheless, a great deal has changed in people’s thinking since 1980. This change accelerated rapidly among the West’s intellectual elite after the highly popular (in the Western media, but not in the USSR) Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev publicly admitted the collapse of the Soviet economy in 1989, which in fact had not collapsed at all, since it had never been sufficiently productive to have collapsed. The Soviet Union had always been little more than a Third World country, i.e., dependent on government aid and loans from Western banks. It had an insane economic system, a fact made hilariously clear in Leopold Tyrmand’s 1972 book, *The Rosa Luxemburg Contraceptive Cooperative*. Communist nations’ poverty had been visible to anyone who visited them with open eyes and no socialist presuppositions, i.e., people other than Western intellectuals.¹⁴ What collapsed in 1989 was

11. Rabushka, *Hong Kong*, p. 2.

12. The price that Microsoft paid to buy the rights to QDOS from Seattle Computer Products, which Microsoft then sold to IBM for the not-yet-invented IBM-PC. Microsoft retained the rights to license MS-DOS.

13. The imputed value of all Microsoft shares in November, 1999: its market capitalization. By November, 2011, the value was down to \$225 billion, with the dollar’s purchasing power reduced by 35%. Of course, if existing share holders all tried to sell their shares to get access to cash, the value of the shares would fall dramatically. But Bill Gates for years has been selling off shares constantly, becoming a true multi-billionaire and philanthropist.

14. Sylvia R. Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treat-*

Western intellectuals' faith in the productivity of the state's direct ownership of the means of production. This collapse was seen within a few months in America's book stores: \$24.95 books written by Marxist college professors were being sold in discount bins for a dollar or two. After the official suicide of the USSR on December 31, 1991, such books became very difficult to find except for a few titles in university book stores, where tenured Marxist professors who pretend that their worldview hasn't become a joke, even among their liberal academic colleagues, still assign them.

2. *The Wealth Formula*

What God told Israel was this: the maintenance of the kingdom grant was conditional. They had to keep God's commandments. He did not tell them that He would miraculously add new supplies of iron and copper if they proved to be obedient. He would multiply them and their flocks. He would multiply their vines. They would get wealthier, step by step. The heart of this system of economic growth was the covenant: law, positive corporate sanctions, and compound economic growth. God gave them the wealth formula. They did not adopt it. This had to wait until the late eighteenth century. When men at long last accepted it, they entered into the world of compound economic growth, where growth in output of two percent per year for two centuries brings personal wealth beyond the dreams of kings in 1800. Computer technology has converted silicon—sand—into wealth beyond anything ever dreamed by the ancient and medieval magicians and alchemists. But the modern world has reversed the covenantal imagery of blessing. "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen. 22:17). God views sand as cheap and children as valuable. The modern world sees children as a liability and sand as an asset.¹⁵ This is

ment of Foreigners, 1924–1937 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

15. The United States Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973. Two years later, beachfront property in southern California began to soar in value even faster than other southern California real estate did. Sand was now seen as being both scarce and desirable. A beach bum's lifestyle—clinging, irritating sand and blinding sun, with its cancer-causing, wrinkle-producing, "skin like leather by age 35" tanning—became the lifestyle of choice for present-oriented rich people. They became willing to pay extreme price premiums for truly mediocre housing to gain easy access to this unpro-

why the modern world is headed for judgment. A good, old fashioned plague would change modern man's imputation of economic value. So would the bankruptcy of government-funded pension plans.

D. What the Land Might Lack

Trade is the voluntary, non-coercive means by which a person who has more of some item than he wants, compared to how much he wants what someone else has, is able legally to get ownership of the other person's goods. Each person enters into an exchange believing that he will be better off after the exchange.

This is as true statistically of nations as of individuals. Residents of a nation that lacks some resource can buy it from residents in another nation. For example, in the late 1970s, Hong Kong imported 85% of its food and exported 90% of its manufactures.¹⁶ Meanwhile, some nation grew the food that it sold to Hong Kong. Hong Kong residents wanted food more than extra clothing; the other nation's residents wanted clothing more than extra food. Hong Kong was in effect manufacturing food; its trading partner was in effect growing clothing. The same sort of arrangement categorizes trade between the United States and Japan.¹⁷

It was not necessary that God fill the Promised Land with every conceivable natural resource. It was only necessary that He give them His law and the grace to obey it, which allows men's creativity to flourish. *Creativity is the basis of economic growth*. Raw materials have always been available. What makes them valuable is men's knowledge of productive, customer-satisfying things to do with them. What makes them worth searching for and digging up is the income potential provided by other men with other things to exchange. He who has the productive skills that produce the finished products that customers desire to buy will not lack anything in whatever land God places him, but only for as long as there is freedom.

ductive, responsibility-avoiding lifestyle. I grew up in that once middle-income environment, 1953–59, Manhattan Beach, and was happy to leave. In 2011, Manhattan Beach was the most sought-after real estate by the rich in the United States: "Where the Rich Are Moving," CNBC.com. <http://bit.ly/MBrich>. My family had moved away in 1962, selling their two houses for little money.

16. Rabushka, *Hong Kong*, pp. 2–3.

17. See Gary North, "Growing Toyotas, Manufacturing Soybeans," *The Freeman* (Jan. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/GrowingToyotas>)

Conclusion

The Promised Land was not a land literally flowing with milk and honey. It was a land that possessed great advantages, not the least of which was its location on a widely used trade route. It had minerals. It had room for sheep. It had a climate fit for agricultural production. It had not yet been stripped of its fertility by millennia of ecological exploitation and neglect.

The key to prosperity in the land of Israel was covenantal faithfulness, not government-planned resource conservation. To continue to eat bread without scarceness, Israel would have to avoid the folly of covenant-breaking. The land was bountiful, which was appropriate for an inheritance. But the land was to be understood as a manifestation of God's grace. Subordination follows grace; law follows subordination; sanctions follow law; and an inheritance either multiplies, stagnates, or contracts in terms of men's sanctions and God's. For those who kept the covenant, the land would lack nothing, even as Hong Kong lacks nothing. When a nation is productive, it can buy whatever it does not have. When God said "thou shalt not lack any thing in it," He did not mean that the land contained everything they needed. It would contain the people of the covenant. Covenantal faithfulness, not minerals and climate as such, would enable them to escape the burden of poverty.

21

THE ASSERTION OF AUTONOMY

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth (Deut. 8:10–17).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the gracious Provider. It has to do with maintaining the kingdom grant: “Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.” The issue is law: point three of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Continually Thanking God

God demands thankfulness on the part of the recipients of His grace. The message here is clear: covenant-keepers can become spiritually forgetful as a direct result of the visible blessings of God. As a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

result of the gift, they forget the Giver. That covenant-breakers forget the God who gave them their blessings should come as no shock, but this warning was directed at covenant-keepers.

Because the sin of covenantal forgetfulness is universal, this law was not a land law or a seed law.² Theologians who argue that this law was exclusively a land law want to escape from its implication: God brings sanctions in history against those who forget Him. When they argue that this was a land law that was unique to Mosaic Israel, they strip the covenant of its predictability and therefore also its authority in history. Those who forget God are supposedly in no worse shape in history, and perhaps far better shape, than those who remember Him.³

Forgetfulness is an aspect of point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy. The covenantally forgetful man forgets something quite specific: his complete dependence on the grace of God. Moses here listed the external blessings that God had given them in the wilderness, a hostile place that would not sustain a large population. They had received water out of the rock and a daily supply of food. In the wilderness, the generation of the conquest had been kept humble and subordinate by their reliance on God's miracles.⁴ God would soon give them blessings after they conquered the Promised Land. The transfer of inheritance from Canaan to Israel would be an aspect of God's comprehensive deliverance of the nation out of bondage and into freedom. Their freedom would initially be accompanied by a discontinuous increase in their external wealth: military victory. Then this wealth would multiply.

B. Miracles as Welfare

The move from Egypt to Canaan is a model of the move from slavery to freedom. The model of a free society is not Israel's miraculous wilderness experience, where God gave them manna and removed many burdens of entropy.⁵ The predictable miracles of the wilderness era were designed to humble them, not raise them up. The wilderness experience was not marked by economic growth but by economic stagnation and total dependence. They were not allowed to save extra

2. On land laws and seed laws, see Appendix J

3. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3: "Halfway Covenant Ethics." (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

4. Chapter 18.

5. Chapter 18

portions of manna, which rotted (Ex. 16:20). On the move continually, they could not dig wells, plant crops, or build houses. At best, they may have been able to increase their herds, as nomads do (Num. 3:45; 20:4; 32:1). The wilderness experience was a means of teaching them that God acts in history to sustain His people. The wilderness economy with its regular miracles was not to become an ideal toward which covenant-keepers should strive. Israel longed for escape from the wilderness. It was God's curse on the exodus generation that they would die in the wilderness.

The wilderness economy was a welfare economy. The Israelites were supplied with basic necessities, even though the people did not work. But they lacked variety. People without the ability to feed themselves were fed by God: same old diet. People without the ability to clothe themselves were clothed by God: same old fashions. Israel wandered aimlessly because the exodus generation had refused to march into war (Num. 14). They were not fit to lead; so, they had to follow. They were welfare clients; they had no authority over the conditions of their existence. They took what was handed out to them. And, like welfare clients generally, they constantly complained that their life style just wasn't good enough (Num. 11).⁶ They had been unwilling to pay the price of freedom: conquest. God therefore cursed them to endure four decades of welfare economics. The only good thing about the wilderness welfare program was that it did not use the state as the agency of positive blessings. No one was coerced into paying for anyone else's life style. God used a series of miracles to sustain them all. There was no coercive program of wealth redistribution. Israel was a welfare society, not a welfare state.

The lure of the welfare state remains with responsibility-avoiding men in every era. It was this lure which attracted the crowds to Jesus. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:26). They wanted a king who would feed them. They viewed Jesus as a potential candidate for king because He could multiply bread. They associated free food with political authority. He knew this, so He departed from them (John 6:11–15).

Men in their rebellion against God want to believe in a state that can heal them. They believe in salvation by law. They prefer to live under the authority of a messianic state, meaning a healer state, rather

6. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 7.

than under freedom. They want to escape the burdens of personal and family responsibility in this world of cursed scarcity. They want to live as children live, as recipients of bounty without a price tag. They are willing to sacrifice their liberty and the liberty of others in order to attain this goal.

One mark of spiritual immaturity is the quest for economic miracles: stones into bread. The price of this alchemical wealth is always the same: the worship of Satan. "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:3–4).⁷ Modern welfare economics teaches that the state can provide such miracles through positive economic policy, i.e., by taking wealth from some and transferring it to others, either directly or through monetary inflation. This belief is the presupposition of the Keynesian revolution, which dominated twentieth-century economic thought, 1936–1990. John Maynard Keynes actually described credit expansion—the heart of his system—as the “miracle . . . of turning a stone into bread.”⁸

When Israel crossed into the Promised Land, the identifying marks of their wilderness subordination were removed by God: the manna and their permanent clothing. This annulment of the welfare economy was necessary for their spiritual maturation and their liberation. The marks of their subordination to God would henceforth be primarily confessional and ethical. The only food miracle that would remain in Israel would be the triple crop two years prior to a jubilee (Lev. 25:21).⁹ God promised to substitute a new means of Israel’s preservation: economic growth. No longer would they be confined to manna and the same old clothing. Now they would be able to multiply their wealth. The zero-growth world of the welfare society would be replaced by the pro-growth world of covenantal remembrance. But then they would forget the source of their economic success.

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

8. Keynes (anonymous), *Paper of the British Experts* (April 8, 1943), cited in Ludwig von Mises, “Stones into Bread, the Keynesian Miracle,” *Plain Talk* (1948), reprinted in Henry Hazlitt (ed.), *The Critics of Keynesian Economics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1960), p. 306. (<http://bit.ly/HazlittCKE>)

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 27.

Conclusion

Moses warned the generation of the conquest that their success in the future will be based on the same crucial factor that had sustained the generation of the exodus: the God of the covenant. God was the source of deliverance. He is the source of the inheritance. He is the source of any continuity of success over time.

Covenant-breaking people do not believe this. Thus, they will be tempted to acknowledge the gift, but forget the giver. They will not attribute their success to random forces. They will attribute it to the might of their own hand, i.e., their autonomy. They will see themselves as the be-all and end-all in history: alpha and omega.

Moses did not warn them here that Israel will worship other gods. That went without saying. Moses repeatedly warned them against idolatry. Here, the issue was different: the source of their wealth. They would someday claim to be the source, not some local deity. They would seek to substitute themselves as the god of covenant sanctions. They would seek to establish a new hierarchy of covenantal authority.

This had been Adam's sin. He would decide who was correct about the results of eating the forbidden fruit: either God or the serpent. The agent with the power of determining the final truth of God's word is either God or a pretender. Moses warned that Adam's act of rebellion would be played out again in the Promised Land. He did not mention Adam, but the sin was the same: claiming to be the source of covenant sanctions. Adam acted as though he thought he would not die. The Israelites would act as though they had produced their wealth autonomously. If there is a central sin of all modern economic thought, this is it: attributing to man and his works the wealth of nations. Free market economists praise individuals, while collectivists praise committees. To man be the glory, Amen.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AS COVENANTAL CONFIRMATION

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant with you which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deut. 8:18).

The theocentric issue here is the covenant, which is associated with point two of the biblical covenant model.¹ Exodus is the second book in the Pentateuch. It is the book of the commandments, which are collectively called the book of the covenant (Ex. 24:7).

Moses prefaced this passage with a prophecy (vv. 1–17). God was about to give them a land of milk and honey. Moses warned them that, as a covenanted nation, they will be tempted to rebel after years of living in the Promised Land. They will be afflicted with covenantal forgetfulness.² They will not attribute to God their deliverance from Egypt and their miraculous survival in the wilderness. They will be tempted to assert their autonomy from God by claiming that the might of their hands gave them this wealth (v. 17). This is rebellion: the substitution of a new hierarchy for the original one. It is comparable to Adam's rebellion.

Moses then reminded them of the source of their wealth: God. Their wealth in the Promised Land will be part of a system of covenantal sanctions. They must view their wealth in terms of God's covenant, not the might of their own hands, i.e., autonomy.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Chapter 21.

A. The Power to Get Wealth

This passage is a command: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (v. 18). This verse is one of the most important verses in the Bible regarding wealth. *Covenantally speaking, this is the Bible’s most important verse on the nature and purpose of wealth.* It states that wealth is a means of God’s establishment of His covenant.

The covenant is established by grace. God brings covenant-breakers under His covenant through adoption. Israel’s adoption by God is the biblical model (Ezek. 16:6–13). Adoption takes place by God’s declarative judicial act: God announces His lawful claim on His children. God told Moses: “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (Ex. 4:22–23). God’s claim superseded Pharaoh’s false claim of ownership. God’s deliverance of Israel out of Egypt’s bondage was His declaration of a superior claim of jurisdiction. Liberty under God was the alternative to servitude under Pharaoh.

God delivered Israel progressively out of bondage: out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into Canaan. So, the judicial reality of *Israel’s definitive liberation* by God was established visibly through *Israel’s miraculous deliverance from the burdens of Adam’s curse*. Israel survived in the wilderness through a series of miracles: the overcoming of scarcity (manna and water), the overcoming of entropy’s curse (wear and tear).³

Why the need for progressive deliverance? Why not instant liberation? Moses gave them the answer: their need for humility. God had humbled them in order to prove them (vv. 2, 16). They had not been morally fit to inherit Canaan immediately after their deliverance from Egypt. The first generation was still a nation of slaves. They had the slave’s mentality. They could not forget the onions of Egypt (Num. 11:5). They remembered onions and forgot God. This element of covenantal forgetfulness would remain Israel’s great temptation until their return from the exile. They kept forgetting that God was the source of their blessings. They kept returning to idolatry.

Their power to get wealth in the Promised Land was analogous to

3. Chapter 18.

their experience of miracles in the wilderness. The wilderness miracles were designed to strengthen their faith in a God who delivers His people in history and who fulfills His promises to His people in history. The problem was this: the continuity of these miracles became a part of Israel's predictable environment. Israel began to take them for granted. Moses twice repeated the fact that God had humbled them in the wilderness (vv. 2, 16). Moses wanted them to understand that the threat of being humbled is always present with the promise of covenantal blessings in history. The wilderness miracles had been designed by God to remind Israel that God was their deliverer. Moses then extended this principle: wealth was to remind them that God is their deliverer.

God delivers men visibly through covenantal blessings. These blessings can be measured: "And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied. . ." (v. 13). What is visible to all testifies to the existence of a covenantal realm of bondage and deliverance that is invisible. This is a manifestation of the covenantal principle of representation (point two): *the visible testifies to the existence of the invisible*. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20a).⁴ Jesus' miracles of healing were examples of this principle of representation. They authenticated His messianic office under God (Matt. 9:2–7).

The visible blessings of God in history are to remind men of the blessings of God in eternity. The visible curses of God in history are to remind men of the curses of God in eternity. But in Old Covenant Israel, there were no clear distinctions between eternal negative sanctions and eternal positive sanctions. Not until the last section of the Book of Daniel was the doctrine of the bodily resurrection clearly enunciated (Dan. 12:2–3). The grave seemed to cover all men equally. The distinction between paradise and hell is a New Testament doctrine. So, the focus of Old Covenant's covenantal sanctions was historical.

B. Compound Economic Growth

Moses enunciated here for the first time in recorded history the

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

doctrine of permanent economic growth. In all other ancient societies, history was seen as cyclical. Men viewed history much as they viewed nature. The fruitfulness of spring and summer would inevitably be overcome in the fall and winter. The idea of linear history—temporal beginning and end—was not believed, because the covenant-breaking world rejected the *cosmic judicial* basis of linear history: creation, Fall, redemption, and temporal consummation. The twin idols of nature and history were cyclical in covenant-breaking religion. Only the new idol of autonomous philosophy offered some possibility of linear development: the growth of knowledge. But this came late in ancient man's history. Philosophy appeared in Greece at about the time that Israel was sent into exile and ceased worshipping the carved idols of Canaan.

In Israel, the doctrine of compound economic growth (Deut. 8) preceded by nine centuries the doctrine of the bodily resurrection (Dan. 12:2). Moses taught Israel that compound economic growth is possible through covenantal faithfulness. If Israel remembered God as the source of their wealth—an act of covenantal subordination—and continued to obey His law as a nation, then God would shower the nation with even more wealth. *This wealth was designed to confirm the covenant.* God's covenantal blessings and cursings had been visible in the wilderness, Moses reminded them. The curses were designed to humble them, he said. Then what of the prophesied blessings? Moses was equally clear: they were designed to confirm the covenant. God would continue to deal with Israel covenantally, which meant that they could expect visible blessings and visible cursings in terms of their own ethical response to these blessings. Do not forget who provides these blessings when blessings multiply, Moses warned. These external blessings would not be covenantally neutral. They would be signs of the continuing covenantal bond between God and Israel.

Economic growth was an aspect of the Mosaic covenant. There is no biblical indication that this was changed in the New Covenant. *The existence of God's covenant should be recognized in the compounding of wealth.* If visible blessings confirm the covenant over time—a progressive fulfillment—then economic growth is in principle as open-ended as the covenant. The covenant is perpetual; so is the possibility of long-term economic growth. Moses told them that economic growth would not automatically cease because nature is cyclical. History is not cyclical. Economic growth can compound through the seasons because the covenant transcends the seasons.

Sanctification is progressive. The blessings of God are supposed to compound because the visible confirmation of God's covenant in history is designed to reconfirm the terms of the covenant to each succeeding generation. Each generation is to experience positive feedback: blessings, remembering, obedience, blessings. This process of economic growth is what makes possible an ever-increasing inheritance. God's gracious kingdom grant is progressively appropriated by the heirs through the progressive confirmation of the covenant. The goal is the conquest of the whole earth through conversion and confirmation. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).⁵

C. The Idea of Progress and Inheritance

The ideal of economic growth parallels the idea of progress in history. Moses made it clear that the covenantal faithfulness of Israel was not a static ideal. *History is progressive because corporate sanctification is progressive*. It is not simply that history is linear; it is also progressive. This section of Deuteronomy is important because it sets forth the ideal of progress. God had delivered Israel from bondage. He had led them through the wilderness. Now, in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, He was about to lead them into the Promised Land. In the Promised Land, they could legitimately expect the multiplication of both their numbers and their wealth. "And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied" (v. 13). This multiplication process is basic to the fulfillment of the dominion covenant given to Adam and Noah. But this process is at bottom covenantal, not autonomous. It is an aspect of God's positive historical sanctions in response to corporate covenantal faithfulness.

1. Linear History and Corporate Sanctification

To sustain corporate progress, two ideas must be widespread in a

5. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

culture: the idea of *linear history* and the idea of *progressive corporate sanctification*. When the idea of linear history is absent, men do not sustain hope in the future of corporate progress, for progress must inevitably be swallowed up in the retrogressive phase of the next historical cycle. The *Great Reversal* will overcome the hopes and dreams of all men. It will cut short every program of social improvement. The discontinuity of reversal will always overcome the continuity of progress.⁶ *In short, if history is not linear, the visible inheritance will eventually be destroyed.* The visible distinctions between covenant-breaking societies and covenant-keeping societies will disappear or be made operationally irrelevant by the magnitude of the Great Reversal. Such an outlook requires the following re-writing of the second commandment: “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and doing the same unto them that love me, and keep my commandments.”

When the idea of progressive corporate sanctification is absent, men do not sustain hope in either the supposed mechanism or the supposed organicism of progress. Progress is, at best, limited to an elite core of individuals: a matter of inner discipline, secret knowledge, capital accumulation (e.g., money-lending), or mystical retreat from history. When a society loses faith in corporate progress, its citizens lose a major incentive to forego consumption in the present for the sake of greater future income. Men become more present-oriented than people in societies that retain faith in corporate progress. They apply a higher rate of discount (interest) to future income. The rate of economic growth slows as the rate of saving drops. If there is no possibility of sustained covenantal progress based on a distinction between the earthly fate of the wicked vs. the earthly fate of the righteous, then the present consumption of capital is the obvious policy. Solomon summarized this view: “There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth

6. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), chaps. 4, 7, 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

him under the sun" (Eccl. 8:14–15).⁷ In short, *if there is no visible corporate sanctification, then the visible corporate inheritance will be dissipated.*

2. Cyclical History

The pagan ancient world did not have a doctrine of compound economic growth, because it had no doctrine of sustainable corporate progress. J. B. Bury wrote in 1920 that the idea of progress requires faith in the inevitability of mankind's autonomous advancement. This advancement must not be the result of any outside intervention; it must be man's gift to man.⁸ It is not sufficient for the development of the idea of progress that men recognize the existence of advancement in the past. The question is this: Must there be inevitable long-term advancement in the future?⁹ Belief in progress is an act of faith.¹⁰ Classical Greece did not possess this faith.¹¹ "But, if some relative progress might be admitted, the general view of Greek philosophers was that they were living in a period of inevitable degeneration and decay—in-avoidable because it was prescribed by the nature of the universe."¹² As Bury noted, Greek science "did little or nothing to transform the conditions of life or to open any vista into the future."¹³ What was true of Greek thought was equally true of every ancient society except Israel.

Science was stillborn in every society in which belief in cyclical history was dominant.¹⁴ Physicist and historian Stanley Jaki presented a series of masterful expositions of the relationship between the Greeks' view of cyclical history and their failure to extend the science they discovered. The Christian ideal of progress made possible the advancement of Western science; it was not Renaissance science that launched the modern idea of progress. Contrary to Ludwig Edelstein,¹⁵ the

7. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), , ch. 31.

8. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Growth and Origin*, rev. ed. (New York: Dover, [1932] 1955), p. 5.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

11. *Idem.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

14. Stanley L. Jaki, *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986). Cf. Jaki, *The Savior of Science* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1988), ch. 1; *The Only Chaos and Other Essays* (Lanham, Maryland: Academic Press of America, 1990), ch. 5.

15. Ludwig Edelstein, *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity* (Baltimore, Mary-

Greeks did not take seriously the idea of progress, for they believed, among other anti-progress ideas, in the Great Year of the cosmos: the 26,000-year rotation of the heavens, an idea that was denounced by several church fathers from Origen to Augustine.¹⁶ Belief in this Great Year was common in many ancient societies. It was important in Platonic thought.¹⁷ Priests and astrologers noticed the precession of the equinoxes.¹⁸ Ancient astronomers knew that every few thousand years, the pole star changes. We know today that the wobbling of the earth's axis is the cause; the earth whirls like a spinning top with an inclined axis. Ancient societies explained this odd movement in terms of the unbalanced rotation of the heavens. The heavens were seen as rotating around the earth as if the stars were part of a system analogous to a broken mill.¹⁹ Paralleling this, classical thought developed the cyclical idea of an original golden age which was followed by degeneration,²⁰ and which will be followed by a new golden age.

Edelstein saw the documentary evidence of classical optimism as being "widely dispersed"²¹—another phrase for "scattered and unsystematic." He saw the idea as "popular in antiquity," but his presentation of the scattered and fragmentary evidence is insufficient to prove his case. Edelstein, as is the case with the vast majority of modern historians, saw in Renaissance science the recovery of the lost classical scientific heritage.²² Yet the primary origin of the details of Renaissance science was the deliberately unacknowledged science of the late middle ages, a fact demonstrated by physicist Pierre Duhem in 10 detailed volumes. The demonstrated fact of the medieval origins of modern science has been ignored or actively suppressed by the humanist academic world. The first five volumes of Duhem's *Le Système du Monde* were in print in 1917; the second five volumes appeared only in 1954–59. In between, the French academic community and publishing world suppressed their publication because they undermined one of the most cherished myths of the Enlightenment, namely, that medieval

land: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967).

16. Jaki, *The Only Chaos*, pp. 74–75.

17. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols., *The Spell of Plato*, 4th ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), I, p. 19, and the footnotes: pp. 208–19.

18. See any standard encyclopedia under "precession."

19. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An essay on myth and the future of time* (Boston: Godine, [1969] 1977), ch. 9.

20. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 109–201.

21. Edelstein, *Idea of Progress*, p. xxxii.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

science was “medieval.” The story of this exercise in humanist academic censorship has been written by Jaki.²³ Duhem is still unknown to most historians. An exception is Robert Nisbet, who offered two brief, favorable sentences in his *History of the Idea of Progress* (1980).²⁴ Yet Nisbet repeatedly relied on Edelstein’s book to defend his own view that the classical world accepted the idea of progress.²⁵

It was Christianity, with its doctrine of creation, Fall, redemption, and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), that brought together the Old Covenant idea of God’s positive corporate sanctions and the New Covenant idea of world transformation. The twin doctrines of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and His ascension to the right hand of God made possible the overcoming of the more cyclical Old Covenant pattern of man’s ethical Fall, his ethical redemption by God, and a subsequent fall. Christ’s resurrection and ascension were definitive historical acts of victory over the familiar cycle of fall-redemption-fall. “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (I Cor. 15:17–20).²⁶ Christ’s bodily resurrection set forth the personal model; His bodily ascension set forth the civilizational model. The ascension proved His post-resurrection claim of total power over history (Matt. 28:18–20).

D. Finitude: Things and Time

Twice, God told mankind to multiply: Adam (Gen. 1:28) and Noah (Gen. 9:1). This command was a call to fill the earth. This is the dominion covenant. But it was also necessarily a call for man to acknowledge the limits of time. At some point in the future, the dominion covenant will be fulfilled. That day will mark the end of history. “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies

23. Stanley L. Jaki, “Science and Censorship: Hélène Duhem and the Publication of the ‘Système du Monde,’” *Intercollegiate Review* (Winter 1985–86), pp. 41–49. Cf. Jaki, *Uneasy Genius: The Life and Work of Pierre Duhem* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984).

24. Robert A. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 78, 101.

25. *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

26. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

under his feet" (I Cor. 15:24–25). At that point, a new covenantal order will come into existence: an eternal order.

There is no possibility of permanent long-term growth in a finite universe. Nothing compounds indefinitely. At some point, the population reaches the limits of growth. At any positive rate of growth, wealth approaches infinity as a limit when the curve turns upward and becomes what we call an exponential curve.²⁷

1. *The Realm of the Quantum*

The only thing in recent history—or any history—that does seem to grow without meaningful limits is the capacity of computer chips, which doubles every 18 months, possibly every year.²⁸ At this rate of growth, the computer chip will equal man's brain capacity sometime in the first third of the twenty-first century. Then, a year later, it will be twice as large. A year after that, four times as large, and so on. If this growth of chip capacity really is a law—Moore's law rather than Moore's observation—then men will face in the mid-twenty-first century the implications of a continuing theme in modern philosophy and, more graphically, science fiction: the replacement of man the decision-maker by one of man's tools. The data storage capacity of the microchip will equal man's brain in, say, 2030. Then, a year later, this chip capacity will double. And so on, ad infinitum. If knowledge is power, then impersonal computer systems will gain power to the extent that their computational ability is equated with knowledge.

The cost of building a single chip production plant is running into the billions of dollars. At some point, the cost of pursuing Moore's law should reach the limits of capital available to build the production facilities.²⁹ The big questions are these: Will the chips ever be used to

27. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970); reprinted in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

28. This is known as Moore's law. This "law" was articulated in 1965 by Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel Corp., the creator of the modern microcomputer chip. Ray Kurzweil says that chip capacity is now doubling every year. Kurzweil, "The Law of Accelerating Returns" (March 7, 2001). This is published on his website, www.kurzweilai.net. A similar law to Moore's is Metcalfe's law: the cost-effectiveness of computer networks increases by the square of the number of terminals. George Gilder in 1997 added a third "law" governing telecommunications bandwidth. He forecasted that the supply of bandwidth will triple every year for the next 25 years. *Gilder Technology Report* (Feb. 1997), p. 1.

29. Interview with Gordon Moore: Peter Leyden, "Moore's Law Repealed, Sort Of," *Wired* (May 1997).

create less expensive chip production facilities? Will microchips be used to design microfactories? Will the capacity of the chips overcome the cost of capital? Will the "intelligence" of the chips lower the cost of their production? If so, then we will have arrived at a state of affairs in which the law of decreasing returns is overcome in one area of life, and the most important area economically: the cost of obtaining usable information (though not necessarily wisdom).

Raymond Kurzweil, a developer of computerized machines that convert written text into voice patterns, thereby allowing the blind to read, stated that most of the cost of a computer comes from the chips, and all but about 2% of the cost of the chips derives from the cost of the information embodied on them.³⁰ George Gilder concluded: "Driving the technology in the quantum era will not be Goliath fabs [fabrication factories] that can produce millions of units of one design but flexible design and manufacturing systems that can produce a relatively few units of thousands of designs."³¹

The linear increase in the speed of the chips seems to violate a fundamental economic law: the law of diminishing returns.³² But even if exponential linearity is possible in the quantum realm of the microcosm, as Gilder asserted, men so far can gain access to this microcosmic realm only through physical production of the gateways into the microcosm: the chips themselves. The non-quantum realm of chip manufacturing is still governed by the law of diminishing returns, as enormous capital losses in chip manufacturing testify from time to time. Yet even if this ever ceases to be true, there is still no reason to accept Gilder's moral vision: "Overthrowing matter, humanity also escapes from the traps and compulsions of pleasure into a higher morality of spirit."³³ Gilder has confused the realm of the quantum with the human spirit, a mistake going back to Kant's theory of the noumenal realm. The antinomies separating the realm of the quantum from the realm of molecular reality are analogous to those separating Kant's noumenal from his phenomenal. The impersonal quantum realm has no ethics; neither does the impersonal phenomenal realm of cause-and-effect science. This is the problem with Kant's nature/ freedom or

30. Cited in George Gilder, *Microcosm: The Quantum Revolution in Economics and Technology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 328.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

32. I wrote this in 1997. In 2001, Kurzweil proposed the law of accelerating returns.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

science/personality dualism.³⁴ The God of the Bible is shoved out of both realms. So is His law. So are His sanctions.

2. Population Growth Consumes Space

We live in the space-time continuum, however much we can make use of quantum physics. We are not subatomic creatures. The impossibility of indefinite compound growth of both humanity and man's wealth points to the limit of time. There will come a time when the physical room for mankind's multiplication will no longer allow any extension of the covenantal process of dominion. At that point, the Genesis command to multiply must end. A new cosmic order will be imposed by God, i.e., a new covenantal order (II Peter 3:10). Progressive sanctification in history will have fulfilled the terms of the dominion covenant.

Our world is generally governed by the laws of thermodynamics, even though there are exceptions, e.g., miracles.³⁵ The first law of thermodynamics establishes the fixity of matter-energy: the finitude of the creation. This law is as important covenantally as the second law, which establishes a one-way move from potential energy to used-up energy that can no longer do any work. *Both laws point to finitude.* Both laws establish theoretical *limits to growth*. Sections of the universe can be rearranged by man, but to do this, man must reduce the available energy or matter of the universe. This matter-energy is finite. Because of the cursed nature of the second law, so is time. Time's arrow moves in only one direction.

At today's rates of change, the second law seems to establish a cosmic limit of eons of time. How much time, no one can say for certain, but the estimates tossed out by cosmologists are never less than tens of billions of years. In stark contrast, human population growth accelerates the coming of the end of eschatological time, for it approaches infinity as a limit at an accelerating rate after the growth curve becomes exponential. The tens of billions of years supposedly remaining until either the heat death of the universe or the collapse back to the omega point of another Big Bang—though smaller than the first one, says the second law—are covenantally little more than conceptual side shows. *Astronomical time becomes irrelevant eschatologically in the*

34. Richard Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956).

35. Chapter 18.

face of mankind's compounding population growth. What is significant eschatologically is population growth: the biological ability of man's population to reach the environmental limits of growth within a few centuries, or a few millennia if life outside the earth is environmentally sustainable. At 2% growth per annum, it will not take tens of billions of years for mankind to fill up the cosmos. Six billion people growing at 2% per year become 327 billion people in two centuries, 2.4 trillion in three centuries, or (I think improbably) 52 quadrillion, 600 trillion in eight centuries.³⁶

Of course, there can be catastrophes. Population growth can be reversed. So can economic growth. But the West's attainment of sustained positive economic growth rates in the range of over two percent per year since the late eighteenth century has placed before mankind a believable vision of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. When it comes to compound growth, a little goes a long way remarkably fast.

E. The Zero-Growth Movement

The ideology underlying the zero-growth movement—both population growth and economic growth—rests on a recognition that mankind will reach its environmental limits to growth relatively soon unless the compounding process ceases (which I think it will). There is a legitimate sense of foreboding associated with this temporal limit, a realization that man's definition of himself and his meaning in history will change radically when mankind's population reaches its environmental limits, which will not take two centuries if present growth rates continue. This sense of foreboding is the sense of impending doom, either eschatological or cultural—the transformation of the Enlightenment's commitment to growth. The defenders of the zero growth school of thought call for coercive state action to begin to impose judicial limits to growth now, before mankind's population reaches its environmental limits. They want men to begin to come to grips emotionally with the limits of growth. They correctly sense that there is some eschatological connection between nature's limits and man's temporal limits. There is a connection: the fulfillment of the dominion covenant and therefore its temporal annulment, either through a new revelation from God, which the New Testament does not allow (Rev. 22: 18), or else the end of time.

Biblically speaking, long-term compound growth of both men and

36. A two percent rate has a doubling date of about 36 years: $73/2$.

per capita wealth is the result of covenantal faithfulness. The judicial condition for maintaining such growth is freedom. *The zero-growth movement therefore challenges freedom in the name of saving the environment.* It is quite open in its call to place political restraints on economic freedom. Mankind's ability to multiply both men and things over time is seen as the great threat to the survival of "the good life," as defined by academics and intellectuals who have already attained historically great wealth, especially leisure. If the price of extending such freedom and therefore such wealth to the masses of humanity is the continuation of economic growth, and if humanity keeps multiplying because of its increasing wealth, therefore making mandatory even greater economic growth, then the zero-growth movement is ready to establish a new international world order that will use coercion to end the growth process.

The zero-growth movement is a movement of "haves" who are determined to keep most of what they have and deny an opportunity to the "have nots." The multiplication of scarce *positional goods*—goods that reflect social status and which lose their utility as status goods when lots of people can buy them³⁷—threatens the present social order in which the rich and their well-paid spokesmen are visibly on top. By calling a halt to aggregate economic growth, the zero-growth movement seeks to stabilize today's production of positional goods and the wealth to buy them.

The zero-growth movement is to positional goods in general what California's Coastal Land Commission is to socially prime waterfront area property. Such property would lose its status as socially prime if agents of the middle class could buy up valuable land and build time share apartments and condominiums for re-sale. Thus, the land's present owners have used the state to prohibit such purchases. In the name of preserving the natural environment, the present owners of this highly unnatural environment—expensive homes, electricity lines, phone lines, etc.—keep out the riff-raff. They have made it illegal for their money-seeking neighbors to sell property to your agents and mine: real estate developers. The phrase "real estate developers" is a hated phrase in socially prime circles, for it means "the middle class."³⁸

37. Fred Hirsch, *The Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 11.

38. Thomas Sowell, *Pink and Brown People and Other Controversial Essays* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), p. 104. This essay appeared originally in the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* (March 23, 1979): "Those Phony Environmentalists."

Meanwhile, the middle class does the same thing to the lower middle class through zoning commissions. Zoning commissions keep apartments and mobile home parks out of middle-class neighborhoods. The freedom of buying and selling threatens today's distribution of socially positional real estate. Existing owners of such real estate cannot afford to buy all of these goods, so they use the state to restrict such purchases by newcomers. This raises the social value of existing property by lowering its market value. This is a state subsidy to those present owners of real estate who seek maximum status income rather than maximum money income.

F. Idolatry, Autonomy, and Power

Moses warned Israel of the major temptation that lay ahead: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (v. 17). The wealth that would inevitably come from God as a way to confirm their keeping of the covenant would lead them into temptation. The covenant's ethically governed cause-and-effect sanctions in history would not sustain their faith in God. Israel would forget the sovereign Giver. They would attribute their wealth to another sovereign: themselves.

1. Idolatry

We know that Israel constantly worshipped idols until the era of the exile. These idols were fertility gods. Yet Moses' warning did not identify idolatry as the great threat to Israel, but rather self-worship. Moses did not warn them that they would attribute to idols the source of their wealth, yet this is what they did do for the next eight centuries. Israelites did not sacrifice their children by requiring them to pass through secular universities; they required them to pass through fire (II Kings 17:17; Ezek. 23:37). How can we reconcile this seeming discrepancy between idolatry and self-worship?

The pre-exilic idol was a *representational link* between man and the supernatural. By making their requests known to the idol, men sought their own ends. But the idol was not regarded as autonomous; it was part of the *continuum* between man and cosmic sources of power. The idol had to be constructed by man. This creative act transferred to man partial authority over the process of environmental manipulation. The god represented by the idol required man to become part of this creative process. Without man and the work of his hands,

the god represented by the idol would lack something important: man's piety and fear. The god would also not be fed. For paganism, unlike Old Covenant religion, sacrifices and oblations were the care and feeding of gods.³⁹

Pagan religion is a system of mutually beneficial transactions. Man gets what he wants by placating a god who wants something from man. Man and god are part of a larger cosmic process in which each of them achieves his goals through a division of labor. Both man and his god confront impersonal fate, impersonal chance, or both, depending on the situation, and each requires the services of the other in order better to attain his own goals. Neither can claim absolute autonomy, for each is entwined in impersonal cosmic forces, and each works most effectively in cooperation with the other.

2. Shared Authority

Then in what sense could the covenant-breaking Israelite say to himself that the power of his hands had brought him his wealth? Only in the sense of his *shared authority* in the process of wealth-getting. He would beg before an idol, and the god represented by this idol would then include him in the process of wealth-creation. It was man's request and man's ritual obeisance that made possible the creation of wealth. An idolatrous man would subordinate himself to an idol in some proscribed sense—some set of formal ritual boundaries—but not in the way that a covenant-keeper subordinates himself to a God who is completely autonomous and above the creation's processes. In idolatrous religion, there is *no complete autonomy*, but there is also *no complete subordination*. Both pagan man and his god were involved in a cosmic battle against impersonal forces and boundaries. Sometimes they joined forces; sometimes they did not. Pagan man saw his gods as only relatively more powerful than he was. It was a matter of degree. Thus, by linking himself to an idol, man could increase his likelihood of getting his own way by conforming ritually to a relatively more powerful being. But classical paganism saw man and god as co-laborers in the fields of fate or luck/chance.⁴⁰

39. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 148.

40. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957), pp. 157–59. (<http://bit.ly/cnccacc>). Reprinted by the Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, Indiana.

By placating a god through idolatrous worship, pagan man believed that he could in some way manipulate this god into doing man's will. Man's cleverness in getting a good deal determined the degree of his success as a bargainer. Man knew that he could not get something for nothing out of the deity, but he sought transactions that were weighted heavily in man's favor: something for practically nothing. The closer he came to this favorable exchange rate, the better he could claim, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth." By getting a god to do man's will on man's terms, pagan religion sought greater autonomy. What pagan man did not want was a god who drove a hard bargain. But the God of the Bible drives a very hard bargain: unconditional surrender (as I titled my 1981 book). Pagan man remained pagan because he rejected this God.

3. Autonomy as Power Over Nature

Man's quest for autonomy is a quest for power: self-made law. In the West, what is called autonomy is power over nature. To gain such power, mankind requires knowledge of nature's processes and sufficient capital to exploit this knowledge. Law is generally regarded as natural, i.e., outside of man, yet discoverable by man. In the most consistent forms of humanism, however, law is seen as man-made, i.e., an order imposed on the "raw stuff" of nature by man's creative mind. This suggestion seems crazy to most "common sense" rationalists, but it is inherent in Kant's revision of philosophical categories. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant concluded: "Thus the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances, had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there."⁴¹ So, the judicial debate in the West has been between the advocates of judge-discovered law (e.g., English common law) and legislator-made law (e.g., European civil law).⁴² Neither side accepts the legitimacy of God-revealed law. Such a view would undermine man's claim to autonomy.

In contrast to Western rationalism, Eastern mysticism seeks an escape from law and nature by immersion in the cosmic unity, which is impersonal and non-judgmental. Buddhist D. T. Suzuki announced: "Buddhism does not condemn this life and universe for their wicked-

41. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), A 125. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 147.

42. Cf. N. Stephen Kinsella, "Legislation and the Discovery of Law in a Free Society," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, XI (Summer 1995), pp. 134–81.

ness as was done by some religious teachers and philosophers. The so-called wickedness is not radical in nature and life. It is merely superficial.⁴³ The Eastern mystic sees both nature and law as illusions, as fetters on true understanding. But the nirvana of selflessness involves a surrender of personal autonomy in order to gain autonomy from nature and law: incorporation into the monistic one.⁴⁴ There is also pantheism, which completely denies man's autonomy and seeks immersion in monistic nature. But Eastern mystical man is as adamant as Western rational man regarding the illegitimacy of God-revealed law in the sense of publicly declared universal standards. *Revealed law points to an autonomous God who dictates to an eternally subordinate man.* Eastern man is willing to forfeit his autonomy for the sake of ontological wholeness, but only to impersonal, monistic, non-judgmental forces.

Autonomy is a unique characteristic of God. God alone establishes the law. Man is a creature; he must conform himself to nature's laws or else seek to escape from nature, which also means escaping from meaning and sensibility. So, what Western man means by autonomy is a knowledge of impersonal law which gives him the ability to gain control over nature for his own ends. *Knowledge is power.* While man does not make the law, as the discoverer of law he can use it to manipulate nature. He seeks a profitable bargain from nature. It is not that he created the law; he merely exploits it for his own purposes. This is also the goal of idolatrous pagan man: not autonomy from his deity, but a cost-effective manipulation of nature through his deity. Modern man subordinates himself to an impersonal law-order with limited jurisdiction him in order to gain a lever over nature. Similarly, pagan man subordinates himself to a personal deity of limited jurisdiction in order to gain a lever over nature. Modern man acknowledges his subordination to law in general in order to exercise control over things in particular. Pagan man acknowledges his subordination to a local deity in order to exercise control over things in particular. Modern man hopes to use the law to beat the law. Pagan man hopes to use the deity to beat the deity. Both seek power.

43. D. T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, [1907] 1963), p. 128. Schocken Books is a Jewish publishing house.

44. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix C:B.

G. The Curse on the Quest for Autonomy

Moses foretold blessings if Israel obeyed God: an extension of the nation's wealth beyond the inheritance from Canaan. But if they rebelled, they could expect an analogous disinheritance: "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (vv. 19–20).⁴⁵

Here Moses raised the issue of *false worship*, which is always enmeshed in *man's quest for autonomy*. While they would claim that the might of their hands had created their wealth, in fact they would worship false gods. They would claim autonomy, but they would practice idolatry. They would claim to be in control, but in fact they would find themselves in moral bondage. God would then apply his corporate sanctions in history. Israel would be expelled from Canaan as surely as the Canaanites had been. Not all of the Canaanites were expelled by Israel (Josh. 15:63; cf. 17:12–13). Similarly, not all of the Israelites were taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar; he left the poorest people behind (II Kings 24:14).

God promised to visit the same kinds of sins with the same negative sanctions. Inside the boundaries of Israel, false worship would no longer be tolerated. The Promised Land was under the covenant. The nation would visibly come under negative sanctions if they worshipped other gods.

So, long-term economic growth cannot be sustained by any society unless its members honor the terms of biblical law. This does not mean that only confessing nations can experience economic growth. It does mean that when prosperous nations grow lax about enforcing the biblical principles of civil law, they will find that their wealth dissipates. The blessings of external covenant-keeping will fade when men cease to honor the civil principles of biblical law: private property, freedom of exchange, restitution, honest weights and measures, and so on. But will men honor these principles even though they do not honor the God who established them? This question has not been resolved.

45. Chapter 23.

H. The Transformation of 1800

We come to the most important unanswered historical question in man's history. It is this:

How did it happen that, beginning approximately in 1880 in the United Kingdom compound economic growth of between 2% and 3% per annum began and has not been reversed?

In 1800, world population was about one billion people. Today, it is approaching seven billion. This is expected to go to nine billion by 2050.

In 1798, an anonymous book by Rev. T. Robert Malthus, a self-taught economist, appeared: *An Essay on Population*. It predicted that there would be no long-term increase in per capita wealth, due to the rise of population. This prediction was conventional to a fault. Never before had rising per capita wealth not been overcome by rising population. The prediction was wrong. A similar prediction was made by Paul Ehrlich in his 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*. It became a best-seller. In its opening paragraph, it predicted the following: "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate. . . ." The prediction was wrong. The world's population doubled over the next four decades, and per capita income rose.

Some economic historians date the Industrial Revolution around 1780. Others believe that sustained growth came in 1820. By selecting 1800, I am not too far out of line.

There are two aspects of the question. First, what changed in 1800 that could not have changed in 1800 B.C.? Second, why did this change take place in the tiny Island in Northwest Europe and not somewhere else?

Economic history as an academic profession has been operating since the early decades of the twentieth century. Some very intelligent practitioners have devoted their careers to answering this question. No one has come close to persuading his peers, let alone persuade non-economic historians. I studied economic history with two of them: Herbert Heaton, who was one of the founders of the profession, and Hugh Aitken, who edited *The Journal of Economic History* in the 1970s. They had no answer.

It is not just academic historians who have asked it. An islander in New Guinea asked a visiting physiologist and ornithologist, Jared Diamond, how it was that Westerners have so much cargo. Cargo was the islanders' designation to wealth as a result of their initial contacts with American troops that built airfields during World War II. The flying machines brought in so many goods. Diamond thought long and hard about the answer. He wrote a best-selling book, which became a three-par television documentary: *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997). He wound up as a professor of geography, a third academic field. He is widely respected. But his answers do not provide a solution to the question: Why Great Britain?

On the magnitude of what has taken place since 1800, two studies stand out: Gregory Clark's Darwinian explanation, *A Farewell to Alms* (2007) and Dierdre McCloskey's first two volumes of a proposed six-volume set, *Bourgeois Virtues* (2006) and *Bourgeois Dignity* (2010). McCloskey's book, *Bourgeois Dignity*, provides evidence on what could not have caused this transformation: thrift,⁴⁶ capital equipment,⁴⁷ the rise of greed,⁴⁸ the Protestant ethic (as formulated by Max Weber),⁴⁹ capital accumulation,⁵⁰ expropriation of poor workers,⁵¹ accumulation of human capital (e.g., education),⁵² transportation breakthroughs,⁵³ natural resources,⁵⁴ coal,⁵⁵ foreign trade,⁵⁶ the slave trade,⁵⁷ expropriating foreign tribes,⁵⁸ commerce,⁵⁹ changes in property rights,⁶⁰ and science.⁶¹ McKloskey's question has not been answered. "If the spinning jenny was such a swell idea in 1764 CE [academic lingo for A.D., imported from Judaism], why was it not in 1264, or 264, or for that matter 1264 BCE. If factories extracted surplus value in 1848, why not in

46. Dierdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Cbiucago Press, 2010), ch. 14.

47. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

48. *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

49. *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

50. *Ibid.*, ch. 17.

51. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

52. *Ibid.*, ch. 19.

53. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

54. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

55. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

56. *Ibid.*, chaps. 23–25.

57. *Ibid.*, ch. 26.

58. *Ibid.*, ch. 27.

59. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

60. *Ibid.*, chaps. 33–36.

61. *Ibid.*, ch. 38.

1148? Thus the economic puzzle of the Industrial Revolution.”⁶² These are not trick questions. McCloskey has served as the president of the Economic History Association.

McCloskey has offered a thesis whose proof must wait until the third volume. The change had to do with rhetoric: the acceptance in Holland around 1600 of the legitimacy of commerce and innovation. This new outlook spread to Great Britain in the eighteenth century, and from there to the United States and Europe. This new outlook favorable to entrepreneurship made the difference. So, a change in belief regarding ethics and status was the basis of the great transformation.

I am favorable to the thesis. I want to believe it. It is consistent with my lifetime of study of just this question. But, to prove it, McCloskey must show that a major change that took place in Dutch theology and then ethics, a change that spread to the British Isles. Which ideas changed that were completely different?

I offer this suggestion: a completely new view of progress. This transformation did take place: a shift from amillennialism to postmillennialism. There were postmillennial Dutch theologians, according to the former South African Calvinist theologian, F. N. Lee. In a letter to me dated May 1, 2011, he listed these: De Bres, Gellus, the *Dordt Dutch Bible*, Maresius, Voetius, Leusden, Huernius, Cocceius, Calovius, d’Outre n, Van der Kamp, Witsius, the two Vitringas, Hoornbeek, Essenius, Groenewegen, Koelman, Lampe, Hoekendijk, Brakel, and á Marck. Postmillennialism for the first time in man’s history offered a theological defense of linear, progressive wealth: meaning progress in the earthly kingdom of God that need not be reversed. I can think of no other significant explanation for a change in opinion regarding the relationship between ethics and the future.

Conclusion

Deuteronomy 8 sets forth the covenantal basis of compound economic growth. It ties sustained economic growth to corporate covenant-keeping. In doing so, it establishes eschatological limits to growth. In a finite world, nothing grows forever. Therefore, long-term economic growth as a predictable reward for corporate covenant-keeping becomes a testimony to the potential brevity of history. This brevity can be overcome through corporate covenant-breaking—the quest for autonomy—and God’s predictable negative historical sanctions. *Deu-*

62. *Ibid.*, p. 377.

teronomy 8 moved the discussion of time from the cosmos to the covenant. It moved from cosmically imposed cyclical history⁶³ to God-imposed linear history. In doing so, this passage broke with ancient cosmology. Modern evolutionism's cosmology is equally incompatible with it.

Covenantal history is not subsumed under vast quantities of cosmic time; on the contrary, it is determinative of cosmic time. Covenant sanctions, not the second law of thermodynamics, determine the limits of history. Deuteronomy 8 establishes not merely the *covenantal possibility* of compound economic growth but also the *covenantal requirement* of such growth. A failure of a society to achieve this is a sign of its covenant-breaking status, whether permanent or temporary.

This brings me to a conclusion: the zero-growth movement is a covenant-breaking movement with a covenant-denying eschatology. Humanism's "limits to growth" philosophy is misconstrued. It focuses on physical limits to growth—inescapable in a finite world—in order to call men to impose anti-growth policies through political coercion. The biblical goal is to call on mankind to extend existing environmental limits to growth through production, including especially the production of additional human beings. Our awareness of the existence of final limits to growth should inspire us to pursue growth through personal capital accumulation and the de-capitalization of the state. The environmental limit of time is our great enemy, not the environmental limit of raw materials, including living space. By extending man's dominion to the final limits of the environment's ability to sustain human life, man reaches the eschatological limit of time. It is our God-assigned task to fill the earth, not to impose political limits on growth. The biblical concept of "fill the earth" *does* mean there are final limits.

The traditional plea of the foreign missions fund-raiser is woefully incomplete: "When that last sinner is brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ, Christ will return in glory!"⁶⁴ On the contrary, Christ will return in glory when mankind has fulfilled the dominion covenant, which includes the Great Commission.⁶⁵ That last sinner, whoever he or she may be, will complete the Great Commission, but only after mankind has completed the dominion covenant. The ideal of growth

63. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959).

64. I heard just such a plea sometime around 1965. I heard it again in early 1997 at a church-sponsored missions conference. Eschatology affects missions.

65. Gentry, *Greatness of the Great Commission*.

will never end in history. It is an eschatological corollary of history. Our task as covenant-keepers is to bring on the end of history by working to reach mankind's limits to growth.

DISINHERITING THE HEIRS

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).

The theocentric principle undergirding this warning is the doctrine of God as the sanctions-bringer in history. The chapter deals with maintaining the kingdom grant through obedience to God's law. "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him" (Deut. 8:5–6). They would lose the land grant if they worshipped other gods. The mark of this false worship would be disobedience: "ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God."

A. To Perish

The language of negative sanctions here is absolute. These sanctions were historical. This law was not a seed law. It did not apply exclusively to tribal relationships. It was a land law because it applied to Israel's survival inside Canaan's boundaries. But was it exclusively a land law? That is, does the same negative sanction of national removal from the land threaten every covenanted nation? This seems unlikely. Invasion, perhaps, but not actual removal. Mass conversion to a rival faith, yes, as in North Africa, 632–732, and Constantinople, 1453, but not actual removal. What Israel did to Canaan was a one-time event: genocide. Similarly, what Assyria did to the Northern Kingdom, and Babylon did to Judah were unique events, analogous to what Israel had done to Canaan: kidnapping.

We can also ask: Do nations lawfully covenant with God in New Testament times? This text does not say, but the context of this text was a universal aspect of the covenant: covenantal forgetfulness and God's desire that all nations obey Him. "Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him" (v. 6). Thus, if forgetfulness is a permanent covenantal problem, then it must still apply to nations, for the nation is the context of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).¹

The Hebrew word translated as "perish" is elsewhere translated as "destroy." In this context, the word seems to mean total destruction: the same degree of destruction that God was asking them to bring against the Canaanites. God had used Israel to destroy Arad completely, whose newly ownerless land Israel had then inherited, as promised. "And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah" (Num. 21:2–3). The destruction of Canaan was to be comparable:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it. And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit. But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them (Num. 33:51–56).

This was a command in the form of a prophecy. God warned the Israelites that if they did not bring total destruction to the Canaanites,

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

the Canaanites would remain in the land to vex them spiritually. If Israel then worshipped the gods of Canaan, God would impose the negative sanction that He had instructed Israel to bring against Canaan. Nevertheless, this language of total destruction was conditional. There was always to be the possibility of forgiveness on God's terms when He dealt with Israel. This meant that there would not be total destruction. Moses warned them; then he comforted them:

Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee. For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God. When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them (Deut. 4:23–31).²

So, on the one hand, there would be what God described as total destruction. On the other hand, captivity abroad would be substituted for total destruction. "And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up" (Lev. 26:38). Israel would perish as captives perish, not as the families of Korah and Dathan had perished: "They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation" (Num. 16:33).³

2. Chapter 10.

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 7.

B. The Prophesied Seed

There was one promise that was not conditional: Jacob's. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). This was a messianic prophecy, not a covenantal prophecy. *Old Covenant messianic prophecies were not ethically conditional.* Nothing that man could do to rebel against God would in any way hinder the scheduled advent in history of the Messiah.

This being the case, the corporate negative historical sanction of destruction could not be total. *The language of total destruction had to be interpreted in terms of the messianic prophecies.* The destruction of Israel would be analogous to the destruction of Canaan: not total, as God had required, but partial, as Israel had actually imposed. A remnant of Canaan remained in the land; so would a remnant of Israel also remain during the Babylonian captivity. "And he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land" (II Kings 24:14). A remnant of captives also would return.

God did not intend that the language of total destruction be interpreted literally, for He had already given Israel a pair of promises that made total destruction impossible. First, there would be an inheriting seed of Judah. Second, there would be an opportunity to repent in a foreign land. The symbolism (rhetoric) of Deuteronomy 8:19–20 was not to be understood by Israel as negating the eschatology of the messianic promises and the ethically conditional status of pre-Messiah covenantal lawsuits against Israel. *Judicial theology always governs biblical symbolism*; the latter is in service to the former.⁴

The promised messianic inheritance assured Israel of some minimal degree of continuity. The inheritance would not be completely removed from the nation at least until Shiloh appeared. Israel would not be removed from the face of the earth, although Israel might be removed from the face of the land. This physical removal was the covenantal threat set before them in Deuteronomy 8:19–20. Part of the landed inheritance would be removed from them and transferred to others. Upon their return, the old laws of landed inheritance would be modified to include strangers. Israel would no longer have a monopoly

4. This is a basic principle of the hermeneutics of Christian Reconstruction and the Calvinist tradition generally.

of ownership in the Promised Land. "And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 47:22–23).

Israel could not lay claim to Canaan unconditionally. Israel would gain legal title through conquest, but this legal title was no better than their corporate maintenance of the terms of ownership. These terms of ownership were covenantal. They involved biblical law. God reserved the right to evict Israel from the land if the terms of His contract were not honored.

Bodily eviction was the primary threatened sanction here. God would use another nation to sweep them out of the land, just as He would soon use them to sweep out the Canaanites. God is jealous; He would not tolerate false worship by His people. *The negative sanction of disinheritance would remind them of their conditional status as inheriting sons.* The Babylonian captivity would remind them of this conditional inheritance. Upon the remnant's return from captivity, the new terms of landed inheritance would remind them that landed inheritance would no longer rest legally on the original conquest under Joshua. It would rest on a family's mere presence in the land at the time of the captives' return, even a gentile family (Ezek. 47:21–23). The judicial threat of Deuteronomy 8:19–20 was this: if Israel did not preserve the monopoly of God's public worship in the land of Israel, God would not preserve Israel's monopoly of landed inheritance.

This post-exilic inclusion of strangers in the inheritance pointed to a broadening of the covenant to include the gentiles. With the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies, the gentiles became co-heirs of the entire covenantal inheritance. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27–29). This lay in the distant future in Moses' day.

C. Predictable Corporate Sanctions

Deuteronomy 8:19–20 established specific negative sanctions. The law of the covenant did not stand alone. To this law were attached sanctions. In this instance, the negative sanction of national eviction was built into the Mosaic law. To discuss God's covenant law-order apart from God's predictable corporate sanctions in history is at best a theological mistake and at worst a mark of self-conscious antinomian rebellion. It is comparable to discussing history apart from eternity and its two-fold sanctions. To say that heaven and hell are not predictable is to deny Christian orthodoxy. In fact, *the open denial of a literal hell and a literal lake of fire is the premier mark of heresy in the modern world*. This denial of predictable sanctions has also been moved from eternity to history. It is widely believed among Protestant scholars today that there are no predictable divine sanctions in history.

This denial of predictable historical sanctions, if true, would make impossible the creation of a uniquely biblical social theory. If God does not bring predictable corporate sanctions in history in terms of His Bible-revealed law, then Christians and Jews must adopt some version of natural law theory or democratic theory or some other humanist system of man-imposed sanctions in their search for social predictability. Sanctions are an inescapable concept in social theory. It is never a question of sanctions vs. no sanctions. It is always a question of which sanctions imposed by whom in terms of which law-order. There is no escape from this limit on man's thinking. *If there were no predictable relationship between biblical law and sanctions, there could be no biblical social theory*. Without biblical social theory, there can be no accurate social theory. Social theory is either biblical or else incorrect, as is equally true of all human thought.⁵

1. Political Theory

Political theory is a subset of social theory. This is because politics is a subset of a more comprehensive system of sanctions: a higher law and therefore higher sanctions. In modern humanist political theory, political representatives are believed to represent larger social forces. As such, representatives impose civil sanctions as agents or legal representatives of these forces. These forces may be seen as personal or impersonal, but they are always believed to be partially predictable by

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1998), pp. 496–529.

man.

The justification for civil sanctions always rests on a formal appeal to a specific theory of justice. Justice is always defined as a coherent system of law and sanctions. In all widely held theories of politics, justice can be legitimately sought in the realm of politics only because *justice is understood as being broader than politics*. Men believe that they must submit to negative institutional sanctions because they believe that these sanctions in some way will prevent or forestall the imposition of even more threatening negative sanctions by something more powerful and more menacing than man and his sanctions.

Consider a simple example. Residents of urban areas located close to earthquake faults elect political representatives who pass laws establishing building codes that reduce the threat of collapse during an earthquake. The impersonal seismic forces that produce earthquakes are understood as governed by the laws of geology. These laws can be studied and catalogued. While individual earthquakes may not be predictable very far in advance, the statistically predictable occurrence of earthquakes in general is widely believed. This predictability is what justifies the building codes. Negative civil sanctions for violating these building codes are regarded as legitimate because of the statistical predictability of earthquakes. The lesser threat of civil sanctions is justified in terms of the larger threat of collapsing buildings.

The laws of geology do not autonomously justify such building codes. There must be an added element of moral law. An earthquake is a disrupter of the peace—an invader from below. The state is seen as the preserver of the peace. Building codes therefore help to preserve the peace, just as fire codes do. Other arguments could also be introduced: the state as insurer, protector, or healer. These additional elements are used today to justify civil building codes in seismically vulnerable regions. Conclusion: a knowledge of physical laws is necessary but not sufficient to justify negative civil sanctions. Social theorists should also consider the effects on society of physical laws.

On what basis are laws against certain immoral public acts justified? What if there were no overarching system of moral law with predictable sanctions attached? That is, if God did not threaten to bring coercive sanctions against society in general for tolerating certain immoral acts, would there be a legitimate reason for the state to bring coercive sanctions against those who commit such acts? This is the issue of what is commonly designated as a *victimless crime*. Economist and legal theorist F. A. Hayek wrote: "At least where it is not believed that

the whole group may be punished by a supernatural power for the sins of individuals, there can arise no such rules from the limitation of conduct towards others, and therefore from the settlements of disputes.”⁶ In short, “no God—no victim.”

The judicial case against the sale of addictive drugs might be made in terms of addiction as a potential source of crime. Question: On what judicial or moral basis can negative civil sanctions be imposed on *potential* causes of future crimes? Wouldn't this open the door to civil sanctions against all sorts of not-yet-crimes and might-become-crimes? Could the state then be restrained from becoming tyrannical? The state would then replace God as the perceived victim of victimless crimes. Its majesty would be seen as threatened by such activities, and many are the actions that might challenge this majesty. If drug addiction is uniquely threatening to social peace, those who defend the imposition of civil sanctions against addictive drug sales must make their case based on the statistical relationship between widespread addiction and crime. This is because the case for negative civil sanctions against the sale of addictive drugs cannot be made directly from biblical law. There is no biblical civil law against drunkenness except in the case of the rebellious son. But gluttony is also specified in the text as a mark of his rebellion (Deut. 21:20).⁷ No one suggests negative civil sanctions against the sale of fattening foods—or at least no one had at the time that I wrote this sentence.⁸

Governments have passed many laws against the sale of drugs in response to the steady increase in middle-class addiction, which has accompanied the breakdown of biblical faith. The nineteenth century, which had few such laws, was not cursed by an addicted population. Humanist society has failed. Laws against drug sales cannot restore the lost faith in God and meaning. They merely raise the price of rebellion, but at the cost of a great loss of honest people's liberties.

6. F. A. Hayek, *Rules of Order*, vol. 1 of *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 101.

7. Chapter 50.

8. On July 23, 2002, a class-action lawsuit in the United States was filed against four fast-food companies. The companies are accused of selling dangerous products that make people fat. This is tort law, but if the plaintiffs' case is successful, this could lead to civil laws regulating the fat content of food, or at least laws requiring some kind of disclaimer by the sellers.

2. *Sanctions and Social Theory*

Modern social theory has abandoned the idea that God brings predictable sanctions in history in terms of His law. This includes most Christian social theory, such as it is. Theonomy is the main exception to this rule. For humanist social theory, the idea of God's sanctions in history is relegated to *adiaphora*: things indifferent to the humanist faith. Mirroring this humanistic outlook is modern Christian theology, which relegates civil law to *adiaphora*. For humanists, God's law and His sanctions in history are irrelevant to their worldview; for most Christians, God's law and sanctions in history are equally irrelevant to their worldview. On this shared testimony, the humanist-pietist alliance has rested for three centuries.⁹ Political pluralists have always declared this confession of faith, from Roger Williams (1630s) to the Christian Coalition (1990s).¹⁰ To the extent that Christians are begin-

9. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

10. As I wrote in this book's Foreword, the Christian Coalition is a political action organization. It was created in 1989 by the satellite/cable television multimillionaire entrepreneur Pat Robertson, who had resigned from the Southern Baptist ministry in 1988 before he made an unsuccessful run in 1988 for the Republican Party's nomination for President. In its 1995 political testament, *Contract With the American Family*, the organization announced the standard pluralist-Unitarian worldview that has governed the United States since the late nineteenth century. Ralph Reed, Jr., then its Executive Director, proclaimed: "We believe in an America where all citizens are judged on the content of their character, and not on their gender, race, religion, or ethnic background" (pp. ix-x). This is the standard pluralist-humanist litany, "without respect to race, color, creed, or national origin." It places character above theological confession (creed). It defines the content of character apart from the Bible. The document correctly invokes Roger Williams as the originator of the American doctrine of the separation of church and state (p. 5) It rewrites colonial history, just as third-rate humanist high school history textbooks have done for a century, by claiming that the Puritans had fled from "the European system of officially sanctioned 'state religions'" which "benefited neither the state nor the religion involved" (p. 5). In fact, Massachusetts and Connecticut maintained state-established Congregational churches well into the 1800s: Connecticut, 1818; Massachusetts, 1833. The document calls for tax-funded education that maintains "traditional values" (p. 13), which was exactly what Unitarian Horace Mann called for when he promoted the public school movement in Massachusetts in the 1830s: traditional values stripped of all theological content. *Contract With the American Family* (Nashville, Tennessee: Moorings, a division of Random House, 1995) is subtitled: *A bold plan by Christian Coalition to strengthen the family and restore common-sense values*. This is an appeal to something resembling eighteenth-century Scottish common-sense rationalism, which did not survive Darwinism and modern existentialist philosophy. The last major institution to defend Scottish rationalism was Princeton Theological Seminary, which went liberal in 1929. See Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

ning to consider the possibility that God brings predictable corporate sanctions in history, to that extent they have moved away from political pluralism and toward theonomic covenantalism.¹¹

The dividing issue here is the question of the source of our knowledge of these laws and also their divinely imposed sanctions. If the source is believed to be shared by all rational men irrespective of their belief in the Bible as the unique, revealed word of God, then natural law theory undergirds social theory, either as some variant of medieval scholasticism or right-wing Enlightenment humanism. In both cases, Protestants find themselves under the domination of humanism, either by way of Greece or Scotland, Aristotle or the two Adams: Ferguson and Smith. On the other hand, if the source of this knowledge is not shared, but is found exclusively in the Bible, then theonomic covenantalism undergirds social theory.

D. Sanctions and Sovereignty

Rushdoony wrote that the source of a society's law is its god.¹² His friend T. Robert Ingram had written the same thing a decade earlier. "Clearly the law giver in any case is the highest authority for any people. The origin of its law is its god."¹³ This is an accurate observation, but it is incomplete as stated. The source of a society's sanctions is also its god. I will go further: *if a society distinguishes sharply between the source of its law and the source of its sanctions, the latter is the god of that society.* In general, however, societies regard the source of law and sanctions as the same.

There is always some degree of schizophrenia regarding a society's god because there are multiple sources of sanctions in history. In the twentieth century, Protestants gave lip service to God as sovereign over history, yet they also denied that God's law has any place in civil law codes. But if God is over history, yet without predictable sanctions in history, He becomes analogous to the god of deism. Christian social theory then becomes something analogous to Scottish Enlightenment moral philosophy. Protestant Christians for three centuries have gone a long way down this road in the direction of operational deism. They

11. See Appendix C, section on "Pietism and Politics." See also Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

12. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 5.

13. T. Robert Ingram, *The World Under God's Law: Criminal Aspects of the Welfare State* (Houston, Texas: St. Thomas Press, 1962), p. 3.

affirm that God brings sanctions against societies, but not in terms of biblical law. *God supposedly brings sanctions in terms of natural law.* He is said to have revealed Himself equally clearly to all rational men regarding His universal but theologically neutral moral law, i.e., natural law. This universal revelation is said to supersede biblical law, which was supposedly annulled by the New Testament. This removes fundamental law from the Bible and transfers it to logic, custom, or power. It therefore establishes *the political sovereignty of man*, who no longer must confess faith in the God of the Bible in order to rule legitimately in civil society.

To the degree that a system of cosmic or social sanctions is regarded as unpredictable in history, to the same degree are sanctions-bringing representative agents freed from observing the details of cosmic or social law. They can substitute other laws that are in no clear way governed by cosmic or social law. The sovereignty of God progressively becomes the sovereignty of man, which in turn elevates the sovereignty of the state, which is seen increasingly as the ultimate sanctions-bringer in history. The hierarchy of politics then supersedes all others.

Conclusion

The covenantal threat listed here was disinheritance. Moses was preparing the conquest generation for a military campaign. The military spoils would be the long-deferred inheritance: Canaan. The threat of disinheritance was a powerful threat for such a group. Israel had waited 470 years for the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Now, at the very time of fulfillment, Moses warned them that if they broke covenant with God by worshipping other gods, God would remove them from the land. The first step toward apostasy, Moses warned, was their vain imagining that they, rather than God, were the source of their wealth (v. 17).¹⁴

The threat was their removal from the land. God would remove them as surely as He would soon remove the present inhabitants. This promise of disinheritance was no less reliable than the promise of inheritance to Abraham. Inheritance was about to take place; they could rest assured that disinheritance would also take place. If they worshipped the gods of Canaan, God would remove them from those regions in which local deities were believed to exercise their sovereignty.

14. Chapter 21.

If Israelites attributed to themselves and their adopted local gods the wealth they would enjoy in Canaan, God would deal with them in the same way. This warning established a fundamental principle of covenant theology: *similar corporate sins bring similar negative corporate sanctions in history*.

Whenever those who call themselves by God's name refuse to believe this judicial principle, even going so far as to deny its continuing authority, they find themselves on the defensive. Those who worship other gods and obey other laws promise positive sanctions in history. If those who are chosen by God to worship Him and obey His laws refuse to acknowledge the threat of God's negative corporate sanctions in history, they become "we, too" social theorists. "Our way is just as good as your way." This eventually becomes, "Our way is pretty much the same as your way, since God is the author of universal truth. Your way obviously works—positive sanctions abound—so we will restructure our way to mimic your way." As dispensational publicist Tommy Ice put it, "Premillennialists have always been involved in the present world. And basically, they have picked up on the ethical positions of their contemporaries."¹⁵ In this, they have not been alone. Christian social theorists have been doing this from the beginnings of systematic Christian social theory in the medieval West. They have followed the lead of the early church's apologists, who imported the wisdom of Greece in the name of common-ground truth. They have attempted to combine Jerusalem and Athens. The result has been a compromised intellectual defense of the Christian faith.¹⁶ There comes a time when Christian theologians should abandon traditions that have compromised their critiques of their religious and epistemological enemies. So should Christian social theorists.

15. Tommy Ice, response in a 1988 debate: Ice and Dave Hunt vs. Gary North and Gary DeMar. Cited in Gary DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction* (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1988), p. 185. (<http://bit.ly/gdmdebate>)

16. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), ch. 4; cf. Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict* (Syllabus, Westminster Seminary, 1962).

OVERCOMING THE VISIBLE ODDS

Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven, A people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak! Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee. Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people (Deut. 9:1–6).

Moses here presented a prophecy. This prophecy, as with most biblical prophecies, had an ethical component. God always deals with men covenantally, and the covenant rests on God's law.¹ This prophecy announced the near-term fulfillment of God's original promise to Abraham. That promise had linked Israel's victory to Canaan's immorality: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). The iniquity of the Amorites was now full. The day of the Lord was at hand.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

The Israelites were commanded to begin the conquest. This command rested on God as sovereign over history. His prophecy regarding the fourth-generation's conquest of Canaan was about to come true. The theocentric nature of this prophecy is obvious. God's decree is sovereign.

This was a land law.² It related to the conquest. But it had implications far beyond the conquest. It related corporate disobedience to defeat in history as a general principle.

A. The Day of the Lord

"Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day." This announcement was not supposed to be taken literally. The Israelites did not cross the Jordan that day. Moses still had a great deal more to tell them, as the length of the remainder of this commentary indicates. Moses did not die that day. After he died, the nation mourned 30 days (Deut. 33:8). Then they crossed the Jordan. So, what did Moses mean by "this day"?

The "day" referred to here was the day of the Lord. This phrase refers in Scripture to *a period of divine judgment that constitutes a turning point in a society's history*. The phrase, "the day of the Lord," does not occur in the Bible until the prophets; it occurs most often in the Book of Isaiah. Generally, it refers to a period of negative corporate sanctions.³ "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty" (Isa. 13:6). Occasionally, the phrase "that day" is used to describe a time of national restoration: positive corporate sanctions. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isa. 11:11–12). *The day of the Lord was a period of national sanctions: inheritance and disinheritance*. Usually, it meant dis-

2. On land laws, see Appendix J.

3. "For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Isa. 2:12). "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa. 2:17). "Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day" (Isa. 9:14).

inheritance for rebellious Israel and inheritance for some invader. In this context, however, it meant Israel's inheritance and Canaan's disinheritance.

The Bible uses the language of heavenly transformation to describe covenantal-political transformations. This is clear in Isaiah's prophecy regarding the defeat of Babylon by Medo-Persian kingdom (Isa. 13:1).

Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger" (Isa. 13:9–13).⁴

This same cosmic language was invoked prophetically by Jesus to describe the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matt. 24:29).⁵ *The Bible uses the language of cosmic transformation to describe national disinheritance: the end of an old world order.* An old world order is then replaced by a newer world order. The final new world order in history is Jesus Christ's. No other will ever replace it. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

The time period of judgment normally lasts for longer than a day, but the final consummation comes on one day, the day of final judgment being the archetype. It is marked by either the total destruction of the unrighteous or their unconditional surrender.⁶ The siege of Jerusalem, which ended the Old Covenant order, took far more than a

4. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985), pp. 98–99. (<http://bit.ly/dcpardise>)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

6. North, *Unconditional Surrender*.

day, but it was consummated with a day of destruction: the burning of the temple—not by official command—by a pair of Roman soldiers. The Jewish defector Josephus, who became a court historian for the Roman emperor, referred to this as “that fatal day.”⁷ This fiery event marked the demise of the Mosaic priesthood in Israel. It also marked the origin of Rabbinic Judaism, or as Neusner called it, “the Judaism of the two Torahs,” i.e., the Old Testament and the Mishnah/Talmud.⁸ The teachers of the oral law had followed the Pharisees rather than the Sadducees; their ideas triumphed among the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem.⁹ From that time on, those who proclaimed themselves as the legitimate heirs of Moses added their respective authoritative commentaries on the Old Testament: the New Testament for Christians and Mishnah/Talmud for Jews.¹⁰ In both cases, the respective interpretive commentaries were assumed by their adherents to take precedence operationally over the Old Testament, although neither group challenged the authority of the Old Testament.¹¹ Both sides acknowledged the radical covenantal discontinuity that had taken place with the burning of the temple. The Old Order was gone forever. It cannot possibly replace the New World Order of Jesus Christ, for no order ever will.

This is why dispensational theology is utterly wrong about: (1) the removal of the church from history by the Rapture; (2) the absence of every trace of the New Testament order during the interim period of seven years until Christ returns bodily to set up His millennial kingdom; and (3) the substitution of a Jewish theocratic-bureaucratic order during the millennium, where temple sacrifices of bulls and sheep and goats will be restored. Although dispensational theologians refuse to say this in print, these animal sacrifices would have to replace the

7. Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of The Jews*, VI:IV:5.

8. Jacob Neusner, *An Introduction to Judaism: A Textbook and Reader* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 157. Neusner is the most prolific scholarly author in modern history. His bibliography runs over 950 books: a book every two weeks for 40 years. (<http://bit.ly/Neusner950>). For a partial list, see <http://bit.ly/NeusnerBooks>.

9. Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

10. An exception is the Karaite sect of Judaism, which acknowledges the authority only of the Pentateuch. They organized themselves as a separate sect in the eighth century, A.D. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 169.

11. Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xi.

Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is said by dispensationalists to memorialize the death of Christ. What will the "memorials" (Scofield's term)¹² of the animal sacrifices symbolize? There is no equality possible; one sacrificial "memorial" or the other must be authoritative.

There will be no revival of a Jewish theocratic order,¹³ because Jesus Christ is not a bigamist with two brides and a different sacramental system for each of them. The gentile church is not Leah, with the Jewish church serving as Rachel, or vice versa. There is only one bride for the Bridegroom. There is also only one final world order: Jesus Christ's. It will never be broken by an eschatological discontinuity: the Rapture, followed by a Great Tribulation period. We learn this from Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares. "He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. 13: 28–30). Jesus explained: "The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world" (vv. 39–40). There will be no uprooting of either wheat or tares, the church or the rebels, until the end of time.¹⁴

Moses told Israel that a day of covenantal discontinuity had now arrived. There would soon be a covenantal displacement in the land of Canaan. The Levitical laws governing landed inheritance (Lev. 25) and all the other Mosaic land laws would soon have a meaningful geo-

12. See the comments on Ezekiel 43:19 in the original *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 890, and suggestion number one in the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford, 1967), p. 888n. Suggestion number one is that these animal sacrifices will be memorials, just as Scofield wrote. Suggestion number two simply scraps the whole temple-sacrifice scheme by allegorizing the passage—a familiar approach of dispensational "hermeneutical literalists" whenever their professed hermeneutics leads them into some embarrassing exegetical dead end. The authors were too timid to say which suggestion they preferred.

13. If, as the dispensationalists argue, "Israel always means Israel and not the church," then the millennial age must be Jewish. Dispensationalists appeal to the Psalms to describe the restored kingdom. As postmillennialist O. T. Allis wrote in 1945, "According to Dispensationalists the Psalms have as their central theme, Christ and the Jewish remnant in the millennial age." Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1945), p. 244.

14. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

graphical context. *A new world order was about to replace the Canaanites' old world order.* The magnitude of this covenantal discontinuity would be visible to all. Everyone would know in retrospect that God alone had been behind this transformation because of the disparity in physical size between the winners and the losers. The multitude of Israelite ants would consume the Anakim elephants.

B. The Bigger They Are

The Anakim were large people, probably Goliath-sized. Goliath was a little over nine feet tall (I Sam. 17:4). Spies sent by Moses to survey Canaan had reported: "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). The region around Canaan had been the home of several groups of these giant peoples. "The Emims dwelt therein in times past, a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; Which also were accounted giants, as the Anakims; but the Moabites call them Emims" (Deut. 2: 10–11). The Hebrew word translated "giant" is *rawfaw*.

Og of Bashan was a giant. He was described by Moses as the last of them. "For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon? nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man" (Deut. 3:11). A man who sleeps in a bed that is over 13 feet long and six feet wide is either a giant or else worries a lot about falling out of bed. Og's size did him no good militarily. "And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, being the kingdom of Og, gave I unto the half tribe of Manasseh; all the region of Argob, with all Bashan, which was called the land of giants" (Deut. 3:13). The military success of Israel over Og of Bashan was a trans-Jordan preliminary testament: Israel would inherit Canaan despite the presence of giants.

Which giants? Wasn't Og the last of them? In what sense was Og the last of the remnant of giants, when Anakim still dwelt in Canaan? Moses said: "For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants." What did Moses mean by this? Was Og even larger than the others? The size of his bed indicates that he was. A man the size of Goliath does not need a bed over 13 feet long. Og was the largest giant of all, the last of the original race mentioned in Genesis 6:4.¹⁵ Canaan's

15. The legend of these giants can be found in Hesiod's *Theogony*, lines 53–54.

Anakim were *accounted* as giants (Deut. 2:11, 20). When God enabled Israel to conquer Og, He showed Israel that the “not quite giants” would not be a large problem.

Other tribes of peoples accounted as giants had been conquered by Israel’s relatives, Esau and Ammon. “That also was accounted a land of giants: giants dwelt therein in old time; and the Ammonites call them Zamzummims; A people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; but the LORD destroyed them before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead: As he did to the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, when he destroyed the Horims from before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead even unto this day” (Deut. 2:20–22). If the heirs of evil Esau and the even more evil Ammon had inherited the lands of the giants, then Israel should not fear the Anakim. The issue was ethics, not size, as the text indicates.

Israel in David’s time faced Philistine heirs of the giants. In each case, the giants lost their battles with individual challengers from Israel (II Sam. 21:16–22). The old phrase, “the bigger they are, the harder they fall,” is well illustrated by the fate of the giants.

C. Counting the Costs

Moses had sent out spies to survey the land and report back (Num. 13). The sight of the giants had terrified some of the spies (v. 33). What they had personally seen made a greater impression on them than what they had heard from God through Moses. Then Joshua and Caleb reminded them of what they had heard. “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel” (Num. 14:8–10). This did not persuade the skeptics; in fact, it outraged the other spies. When men’s hearts are rebellious, what they see means more to them than what God has told them. That was the 10 spies’ problem. Each of them substituted “I saw with my own eyes” for “Hear, O Israel.”

This is probably an eighth-century work contemporary with the ministry of Isaiah. See also Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1927] 1962), pp. 452–53.

We are told to count the cost of our actions. Jesus warned His listeners regarding the cost of discipleship. He used analogy of military planning. “Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:31–33).¹⁶ This requirement to count the cost led to Moses’ decision to send out the spies. But what 10 of the dozen spies forgot was this: *facts are to be interpreted in terms of God’s word*. Facts are not autonomous; there are no “brute facts.” Facts are always interpreted facts. They are interpreted correctly by God because they have been created by God. They are what God says they are because He created them that way. Van Til has put it this way: “The non-Christian assumes that man is ultimate, that is, that he is not created. Christianity assumes that man is created. The non-Christian assumes that the facts of man’s environment are not created; the Christian assumes that these facts are created.”¹⁷ The spies were supposed to interpret what they saw by what God had told them. Accurate interpretation begins and ends with hearing and believing the word of God.

Israel was facing what appeared to be enormous odds against the nation. The spies’ own eyes seemed to tell them this. But men’s eyes tell them nothing apart from men’s faith. Our eyes may confirm our faith, fail to confirm it, or confuse us, but they do not operate autonomously. The information that eyes provide must then be interpreted. The Israelites were told to estimate the odds in terms of God’s promise to Abraham regarding the sins of Canaan: “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16).

D. Judicial Blindness and Deafness

Soon after Moses announced the crossing of the Jordan, he revealed to Israel the rules of warfare. The first rule: “When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God

16. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

17. Cornelius Van Til, *The Christian Theory of Knowledge* (n.p.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), p. 14.

is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (Deut. 20:1). God subsequently warned them in the midst of the conquest of Canaan: “Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough [ham-string] their horses, and burn their chariots with fire” (Josh. 11:6b). Israel defeated the initial wave of charioteers, just as God had promised (Josh. 11:9). But the Israelites refused to believe their own eyes, just as they had refused to believe their own eyes at the Red Sea. “And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both they who are of Beth-shean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel” (Josh. 17:16). “And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron” (Jud. 1:19).

Israel’s theological inheritance to each succeeding generation was reduced by the power of sight over hearing. They would not listen to God’s written word and His prophets. The Bible speaks of hearing and seeing as ethical. *What is foundational is not the physical acuity of man’s sight and hearing, but a man’s covenantal framework of interpretation.* Isaiah wrote:

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land” (Isa. 6:8–12).

God inflicted judicial blindness on the nation. Israelites would see and hear, yet they would not perceive the covenantal meaning of what they saw and heard. This biblical principle of *judicial blindness* was basic to Jesus’ use of parables:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to

them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear (Matt. 13: 10–16).¹⁸

Paul also quoted Isaiah's words in his final recorded lecture to the Jews: "Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Acts 28:26–27). The hearing that should govern men's decision-making is covenantal hearing.

E. Comparative Degrees of Moral Rebellion

The text says that God would soon give the victory to the Israelites despite their unrighteousness. "Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (v. 5). Three ideas are present here: (1) Israel is not righteous; (2) the Canaanites are more unrighteous than Israel; (3) God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled.

The original promise had included a prophecy regarding the sins of the Amorites: they would be filled, i.e., their national boundaries of tolerable rebellion would be breached. The *promise* of land for Abraham's heirs was not devoid of a specific *prophecy* regarding the ethical condition of the Canaanites. The fulfillment of the promise was therefore as secure as the fulfillment of the prophecy. The element of ethical conditionality had been present in the original terms of the promise.¹⁹

18. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 27.

19. Chapter 17.

The promise not only did not annul the ethical stipulations of God's covenant with Abraham, its fulfillment would soon confirm that covenant, Moses said. But the Israelites were not to regard the fulfillment of the original promise as a confirmation of their righteousness. They were only to regard the fulfillment as confirming the Canaanites' even greater unrighteousness. The filling up of the Canaanites' iniquity had placed a chronological boundary around Canaan: the day of the Lord. The Canaanites would not extend their dominion over the land beyond this chronological boundary, which was both an ethical-covenantal boundary and a prophetic boundary. God had announced to Abraham, "Thus far and no further" regarding Canaan's sins and its time remaining. Now He would fulfill His promise.

1. Canaanites Were Worse

Esau had defeated giants; so had Ammon (Deut. 2:20–22). Yet Esau and Ammon were not paragons of national virtue. Ammonites were so evil that it took 10 generations of covenant membership to enable an Ammonite to become a citizen of Israel (Deut. 23:3). Yet God had delivered the giants into their hands. This victory was not evidence of the righteousness of either Esau or Ammon. Compared to the giants, however, they were better.

Moses warned Israel not to misinterpret the victory that lay ahead. "Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee" (Deut. 9:4). The Israelites could not legitimately regard themselves as morally deserving of the victory. Israel deserved nothing special, but the Canaanites deserved worse. Their evil had multiplied over time. Their debts to God had compounded. Their day of reckoning had almost arrived. The Israelites were to serve as agents of God's judgment. Morally speaking, the Israelites were in much the same condition as the deceased reprobate at whose funeral the best that the eulogizer could say about him was this: "His brother was worse." Israel, as God's adopted son, was better than the Canaanites, the disinherited sons of Adam.

Autonomous man has no legal claim on God. The temptation of Israel was to regard the impending military victory as a sign of their superior ethical standing before God. The lure, once again, was autonomy. "For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess

this land” was the ethical equivalent of “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).²⁰ Both assertions rested on a belief in Israel’s autonomy. Moses warned them: “Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people” (Deut. 9:6). Then he recounted their experience in the wilderness: “Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the LORD thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the LORD. Also in Horeb ye provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry with you to have destroyed you” (vv. 9–10). The cause, Moses reminded them, was the golden calf incident (vv. 12–14). Part of the inheritance from the exodus generation to the conquest generation was a tendency to rebellion.

The threat then had been national destruction. It still was (Deut. 8:19–20).²¹ When God had threatened to destroy them after the golden calf incident, Moses had interceded with God, appealing to His name and reputation. “Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (Ex. 32:12–14). It would have been futile for Moses to have invoked Israel’s righteousness as the basis of God’s extension of mercy. This was still true for the generation of the conquest.

2. The Adamic Covenant

Canaanite civilization was unrighteous. More than this: it was progressively unrighteous. It kept getting worse. It had therefore reached its temporal limits. It had reached its boundaries of dominion. Canaan was about to forfeit its inheritance.

If the unrighteousness of Canaan had progressed to such a degree that God was willing to impose total negative sanctions, then there

20. Chapter 21.

21. Chapter 23.

must have been a standard of righteousness governing Canaan. Negative sanctions without law is tyranny. God is no arbitrary tyrant. Then on what lawful basis does God impose negative sanctions? Paul wrote that the negative sanction of death rules in history because the law of God condemns all of Adam's heirs. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come" (Rom. 5:12-14). In short, *no negative sanctions –no law*. The converse is also true: *if negative sanctions, then law*.

Canaan was under covenantal stipulations. This was the judicial basis of God's prophecy against Canaan. Canaan had violated God's law long enough. The day of reckoning had arrived. This implies that Canaanites were under law. Which law? Answer: *covenantal law to which historical sanctions were attached*.

This raises a crucial question: Which covenant? Canaan had not formally covenanted with God as Abram had (Gen. 15:18). Canaanites were not under the law of the covenant in the way that Abraham's heirs were. The transfer of inheritance was nevertheless about to take place based on Canaan's violation of God's law. How could this be?

The answer is found in the Adamic covenant. *There is a universal covenant between God and Adam's heirs*. It operates in history. Societies progress in terms of their conformity to the law of this covenant. Societies also are cut short in history in terms of this law: the second commandment. Moses had just reiterated the second commandment: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Deut. 5:9). This warning was not limited to Israel, since it spoke of God-haters, i.e., covenant-breakers. The second commandment was the judicial basis of the negative sanctions that Israel was about to impose on Canaan: the Canaanites' sincere worship of false gods.

The Adamic covenant has corporate sanctions. It is not just a law governing individuals. Not only do individuals die, civilizations also die. Not only does God kill individuals, He also kills civilizations. God would soon prove this to Canaan and Israel. Deuteronomy, as the book of the inheritance, is both a testament and a testimony to the fact that

God kills societies. He executes judgment in history in terms of the Adamic covenant's stipulations. *Adam ate from the forbidden tree; so, Adam's heirs can distinguish good from evil, just as the serpent promised.* They cannot legitimately plead ignorance of the law. That they actively suppress God's truth in unrighteousness, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:18–22), testifies to their covenantal knowledge of the truth, not their lack of knowledge.²²

Any suggestion that God does not hold all mankind responsible for obeying His law must come to grips with the destruction of Canaan. Why did God speak to Abraham of the growing iniquity of the Amorites if there was no ethical standard governing Amorite civilization? Because God brought judgment on Canaan, we must ask: By what standard?

Moses had warned Israel in the passage immediately preceding this one that if Israel worshipped other gods, God would bring the same judgment against Israel that He was about to bring against Canaan (Deut. 8:19–20).²³ By worshipping other gods, men honor the laws of other covenants. Covenants have stipulations. To adopt other laws besides God's law constitutes rebellion.

How can God legitimately hold covenant-breakers in the Adamic sense responsible for breaking a corporate law-order that they have never publicly affirmed? Answer: because they are covenant-breakers in Adam, and they are also covenant-breakers on their own account. Adam and his heirs are under *corporate covenant law* as surely as they are under individual covenant law. Whole societies perish as surely as individuals die. The question then is: How do Adam's heirs know about the law-order under which they operate and for which God holds them corporately responsible? Paul provided the answer: the *work* of the law is written in every person's heart. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean [intervening] while accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:14–15).²⁴

22. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

23. Chapter 23.

24. On the distinction between the work of the law written in an unregenerate person's heart and the law written in the regenerate person's heart, see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), I, pp. 74–76. Cf. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 4.

3. *Natural Law and Common Grace*

In the history of Western political theory, this judicial knowledge has been referred to as natural law. In one sense, such knowledge is in-born and therefore natural. It is built into the hearts of all rational men. In another sense, it is supernatural: as an image of God, each man reflects God. Such knowledge is not sufficient to bring all men to saving faith, but it is sufficient to condemn them before God. Such knowledge is sufficient to enable them to perceive the external requirements of the common law. The question is: Will they obey what they know to be true? The biblical answer is simple: "Only if God gives them the grace to obey." Grace in this sense is an unearned gift from God, i.e., a gift earned by Jesus Christ on the cross, but not earned by the recipients on their own account. Calvinist theologians often call this unearned gift *common grace*. Calvin called it general grace.²⁵ Common grace enables men to obey at least some of the works of the common law in their hearts. But when this common grace is removed from them in history, societies march into the valley of the shadow of death.

Moses announced that Canaan was nearing the end of its long march to destruction. Those Christians who deny the existence of common grace in history have a major exegetical problem with Israel's conquest of Canaan. Why was Canaan condemned by God? By what standard was Canaan condemned? How had Canaan filled up its cup of iniquity by Joshua's day? What should Christians call those historical means by which God had earlier prevented them from following the dictates of their rebellious hearts? If the cup of iniquity was full in Joshua's day, what had retarded the level of iniquity in Abraham's day? Without the concept of common grace, and specifically *corporate common grace*, these questions are unanswerable covenantally.²⁶

Sects that refuse to acknowledge the existence of common grace are unable to develop an explicitly biblical social theory or political theory. They must therefore sit under the academic and judicial tables of covenant-breakers, praying to God that a few scraps will fall from the tables occasionally to feed them (Matt. 15:22–27).²⁷ They necessarily must view the history of the church as one long march into the

25. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), II:II:17. Ford Lewis Battles translation, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I:276. See Battles' footnotes on the same page.

26. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

27. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 34.

shadow of death. They necessarily must adopt a view of Christians as perpetual crumb-eaters in history. In other words, they necessarily must adopt pessimillennialism, either premillennialism or amillennialism.²⁸ They must reject an eschatology that insists that Christianity will triumph in history, for such a triumph would mean that the positive sanctions of saving faith are in some way related judicially to the negative sanctions that disinherit covenant-breakers in history. This triumphant scenario raises the issue of corporate common grace and its removal from covenant-breaking societies in history. In short, they cannot explain the covenantal relationship between Israel and Canaan, between Christ and Caesar. So, they simply ignore it.

There is no neutrality. To deny common grace is to affirm a universal common law-order other than God's covenant law. Some law-order must rule society; sanctions must be applied in terms of some system of law. *By denying common grace in history, sectarian Christians necessarily affirm the sovereignty of natural law over God's revealed law.* They affirm the legitimacy of Adamic law over Bible-revealed law. They affirm covenant-breaking man's superior authority to interpret Adamic law apart from God's special grace of biblical revelation. If predictable sanctions in history are not imposed by God in terms of the stipulations of His Bible-revealed law, which has precedence over natural (Adamic) law, then predictable sanctions in history must be governed by Adamic common law. One set of sanctions must become dominant in society: either those that are attached to biblical law or those that are understood by covenant-breaking men to be attached to what they regard as uncursed natural law. *There is no equality pos-*

28. The Protestant Reformed Church openly denies common grace and affirms amillennialism. For a scholarly critique of the anti-postmillennial presentations of the Protestant Reformed Church's senior theologian, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), Appendix A: "Cultural Antinomianism." (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>) That theologian's belated response was a book that did not refer to Gentry's critique, but instead offered a series of brief, unfootnoted chapters that had been editorials in the denomination's magazine. He referred to postmillennialists other than Gentry, and to books other than Gentry's. His book was published nine years after Gentry's original critique in the first edition. David J. Engelsma, *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, California: Reformed Witness, 2001). The book offered neither a bibliography nor an index. In response to Gary DeMar's criticism that Engelsma never offered footnotes, he insisted that footnotes are not necessary, since the magazine "is written for believers, not for scholars and theologians" (p. 42). This is not the best way to phrase the matter. Are we to conclude that scholars and theologians are not believers? On Engelsma's theology, see Appendix I, subsection on "Amillennialism."

sible here: one law-order must dominate the others. The predictability of corporate historical sanctions will be assessed by men in terms of biblical law or natural law or man-made law.

The triumph of Israel over Canaan tells us which law-order is dominant—biblical law—but those who deny common grace do not get the message. They are forced to explain the victory of Israel over Canaan as some sort of anomaly in history. *So also must they explain the victory of Christ over Caesar*, i.e., the replacement of pagan Rome by Christianity. As far as cultural dominance in history is concerned, critics of common grace think that God is on the side of covenant-breakers. Their worldview is straightforward: evil must get more powerful over time, while Christianity must get weaker.²⁹

The question then arises: Why should Christians attempt to develop biblical social theory? Isn't this in effect wasted effort eschatologically, an exercise in intellectual futility? By their actions, pessimillennialists and the critics of common grace theology have demonstrated that this is exactly what they believe. They have counted the costs of dominion, which include the personal costs of developing an explicitly biblical social theory. They have compared these estimated costs with the estimated benefits of success. They have weighed in the balance biblical social theory and biblical social action, and they have found both wanting. Why? Because their risk-reward estimates have been affected by their pessimillennialism. They have echoed the 10 spies: "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). They have made it clear that they believe that in New Covenant history, God is on the side of covenant-breaking societies.

F. Which Side Is God On?

The most important question in estimating the costs of any risky action is this: *Will God be pleased with what I am about to undertake?* To estimate the height of the Anakim was not difficult. The difference in physical stature between the Anakim and the Israelites was obvious. Their eyes told them: seek peace, avoid confrontation. But what they saw was not the heart of the cost-benefit analysis. The heart of the matter was their heart before God. Were they going to believe His

29. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

promise or their own eyes?

Their problem was this: *rebellious hearts make bad estimates*. After God had told the exodus generation that their representatives' treatment of Joshua and Caleb had doomed them to death in the wilderness, they decided that it was time to march into battle.

And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned. And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah" (Num. 14:40–45).

Not until the next generation came to maturity did Israel have a victory at Hormah (Num. 21:3).³⁰

The Israelites were not supposed to go into battle unless the war had been authorized by the priesthood. The tribes were to march into battle only after the priests had blown the trumpets. "And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations" (Num. 10:8). Bloodshed had to be preceded by the payment of atonement money to the priests (Ex. 30:12–13).³¹ Under the Mosaic covenant, the priesthood had the exclusive authority to decide whether God was on the side of Israel. Their declaration alone sanctioned the war in God's eyes; without this sanction, a war should not have been sanctioned in the nation's eyes.

The West has always placed the authority to declare war exclusively in the hands of the national civil government. The churches historically have had no interest in challenging this state of affairs. At most, the medieval church claimed the right to impose a few of the rules of warfare, such as truce days. Today, secular agencies do this,

30. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 12.

31. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

most notably the International Red Cross. Once a war is declared by the government, the churches immediately become vocal supporters of the war effort.³² There is no further discussion about the legitimacy of the war. Whatever discussion takes place must take place before the war breaks out. Those who favor peace lose the debate completely on the day that war is declared. All debate ends. One mark of a society that has lost faith in its moral foundations is the existence of such debate after a war begins. For example, in the American Civil War (1861–65), by late 1864, after the fall of the city of Atlanta, when the Confederacy was beginning to be seen by its supporters as a lost cause militarily, a few Southern preachers began to voice doubts about both the moral legitimacy of slavery and the justness of the Confederacy's cause. After the war ended in defeat, almost no Southerner publicly lamented the demise of slavery.³³ The shock of military defeat had changed their minds. Moral legitimacy had been determined on the battlefield; the South's preachers merely reflected the military results.³⁴

Conclusion

Moses told the Israelites that the day of the Lord had arrived. It was a day of historical sanctions: positive for Israel and negative for Canaan. While its completion would take place only under Joshua—a six-year day of vengeance—the day had already begun.

The day of the Lord is always a day of sanctions. Moses warned Israel: the fact that God was going to use Israel to bring negative corpor-

32. American clerics who opposed America's entry into World War I in 1917 sometimes suffered civil sanctions: arrest and imprisonment. A Church of the Brethren pastor was sent to prison for having recommended to his congregation that they refuse to buy war bonds. He was tried after the armistice in 1918 and sentenced to prison for 10 years, later commuted to a year and a day. H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, [1957] 1968), pp. 118–19. As the authors pointed out, clerical opponents of the war were usually from smaller, poorer churches. *Ibid.*, p. 117. For publishing an anti-war book on prophecy, *The Finished Mystery*, in July, 1917, eight leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses, including Joseph Rutherford, were sentenced to 20 years in prison in June, 1918, after World War I had ended. A Federal appeals court overturned this decision in 1919. James J. Martin, *An American Adventure in Bookburning In The Style of 1918* (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Press, 1989), pp. 16–17. Martin's account is more accurate than Peterson and Fite's (pp. 119–20).

33. One who did was the Presbyterian theologian Robert Dabney. See his book, *A Defence of Virginia [And Through Her, of the South]* (New York: Negro University Press, [1867] 1969).

34. Richard E. Beringer, *et al.*, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), ch. 14: "God, Guilt, and the Confederacy in Collapse."

ate sanctions against Canaanites should not lead them to conclude that they had any legal claim on God based on their own righteousness. They would replace Canaan as God's agents in the land, but their legal claim to the land was based on two things only: God's promise to Abraham and the two-fold boundary that God had placed on Canaan's iniquity, ethical and temporal. God's announcement of "no further dominion" for Canaan was not to be regarded as an announcement of unconditional dominion for Israel. *Dominion is by covenant, and God's covenant is always ethically conditional.* The covenant has stipulations to which predictable historical sanctions are attached. These sanctions are the basis of extending the inheritance. Canaan had forfeited its inheritance by breaking the Adamic covenant's corporate stipulations. These stipulations were common-grace stipulations.

The Canaanites looked invincible. They were in fact highly vulnerable. They were guaranteed losers in history, according to the Abrahamic promise, which was in fact an integral aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. This promise was a prophecy regarding the temporal limits of corporate rebellion. Canaan's transgression of the Adamic covenant's boundaries would bring predictable negative sanctions in history. The prediction was the Abrahamic promise: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16).

SONSHIP, SERVITUDE, AND INHERITANCE

I prayed therefore unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin: Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness. Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm (Deut. 9:26–29).

The theocentric reference point here is God's legal status as Israel's owner. Israel was God's inheritance, i.e., His property. To the extent that Israel extended its national inheritance, God would extend His. This relationship was representative. Israel was required to act as God's agent, even as Adam was required to act as God's agent. The issue here was ethics. Moses had begged God not to judge Israel in terms of the ethical rebellion of Israel: "the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin." Moses had reminded God that the *legal* basis of sonship is God's *promise* of sonship. "Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The *ethical* basis of sonship is *obedience*, which was why Israel had been in such great trouble.¹

1. The ethical basis of sonship is why God's ethically flawless son had to die as the legal representative for all of God's adopted sons. This is presumed by the entire history of the covenant, but it is not stated here.

A. Moses as the Replacement Patriarch

Moses summarized here the results of his verbal exchange with God in Exodus 32, when God had offered to establish Moses as the patriarch of a new nation. That exchange had involved God's offer of sonship to Moses, in effect making him a new Abraham.

And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people (Ex. 32:9–14).

Moses had immediately interceded with God by appealing to God's reputation. If God slew Israel, the Egyptians would say that He could not deliver on His promises. This would tarnish God's reputation, Moses implied. Moses appealed to the integrity of God's name, not to the non-existent integrity of Israel. God honored this appeal to His own honor. He spared Israel.

God had promised Moses an inheritance: a new nation. As the patriarch of such a nation, Moses would be acclaimed and honored. In response, Moses reminded God that it was God's honor that was primary. As the patriarch of a new nation, Moses would gain the authority to direct their future, to lead them in the paths that he would choose. In effect, this new nation would become Moses' servant, his inheritance. His name would be on them. Moses would in fact replace Abraham as the founding patriarch, for the promise to Abraham would be broken by the destruction of Israel. Either Israel would not conquer in the fourth generation, contrary to God's promise (Gen. 15:16), or else Abraham's name would be extended in history only by Moses' adopting a new nation. But that would have violated Jacob's promise regarding Judah's bearing of the sword until Shiloh came

(Gen. 49:10).

Moses countered God's offer by invoking the names of the patriarchs with whom God had made His covenant. That is, he appealed to God's word. Finally, in the speech to the conquest generation, he said that he had told God that Israel was God's inheritance (Deut. 9:26, 29). To have given Moses a completely new inheritance, God would have had to *disinherit Israel* completely. That would have been the same as *disinheriting His own word*, Moses implied. This argument saved Israel, which remained God's inheritance.

B. God's Name Was on Israel

God had placed His name on the Israelites through His covenant with Abraham. He had changed Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17:5). Similarly, he had changed Jacob's name to Israel (Gen. 32:28). The authority to name someone is a mark of foundational authority. Adam named the animals (Gen. 2:19); then he named Eve (Gen. 2:23). In both cases, God had brought to Adam the living objects to be named. Adam was the father of the human race. God had created Adam, marking God as mankind's father. God's authority was higher than Adam's, for He had created Adam and had named Adam. In this judicial sense, *God's name was on Adam*.

Because God had delegated to Adam authority over the creation (Gen. 1:26),² He had Adam name the living creatures under his immediate authority. So, God's name was on the creation directly, for He had created it, yet it was also on the creation indirectly, because Adam had named the animals, and His name was on Adam. The world is therefore God's lawful inheritance, both directly and indirectly. God's authority is both direct (providential) and indirect (covenantal). That is to say, His authority is simultaneously unmediated and mediated. This is why the Bible affirms God's absolute predestination and man's full responsibility for his own actions. "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22).

God had disinherited Adam by cursing his body and the ground for his transgression (Gen. 3:17–19)³ and casting him out of the garden (Gen. 3:24). But before issuing His curse, God had promised the ser-

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

pent that Eve would have an heir who would bring negative sanctions against the serpent's seed (Gen. 3:15). God did not execute Adam on the day of Adam's transgression, for to have done so would have cut off Adam's seed. This would have made impossible the promised seed's ability to bring sanctions against the seed of the serpent. God extended common grace—a gift unmerited by the recipients—in the form of extended life and dominion in history to the serpent, to Eve, and to Adam. He did this for the sake of the promised seed.⁴ This seed was Jesus Christ, who would inherit through Abraham. Paul wrote: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

God's name is on God's Son. His Son was incarnate in history in the person of Jesus Christ. God's name was therefore also on Abraham, for through Abraham would God's incarnate Son come in history. There was no escape from this judicial naming. As surely as the promised seed would come in history to crush the head of the serpent, so was God's name on Abraham and his descendants. As surely as Adam was God's servant, so were Abraham and his descendants God's servants. This office of *servantship* was in fact *sonship*. God told Moses: "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Ex. 4:22). But how had Israel been restored to sonship after God's disinheritance of Adam? Through covenantal adoption.

Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live (Ezek. 16:1–6).

Israel was God's inheritance because His name was on Israel

4. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), pp. 57–59. (<http://bit.ly/gndcgg>)

through adoption. God had named Jacob Israel, which reflected His position as Israel's adopter. God's inheritance was His possession. The entire nation was spoken of by Moses as being God's inheritance. It was this *judicial claim* by God on national Israel which alone had saved Israel from God's wrath. By invoking the legal language of inheritance, Moses had stayed the hand of God at the time of the golden calf. Now Moses reminded his listeners of their position as God's inheritance. But this inheritance was reciprocal. God became Israel's inheritance. Moses stated this explicitly with respect to the Levites, who had no landed inheritance in Mosaic Israel. "Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him" (Deut. 10:9). What was true of Levi as the priesthood of Israel in relation to the other tribes was also true of Israel as the priesthood of humanity in relation to the other nations.

C. From Servitude to Sonship

This judicial position of being God's inheritance is a position of blessedness. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD: and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Ps. 33:12). Nevertheless, to be part of another person's inheritance is to be his slave. Possessing such an inheritance down through the generations was lawful in Israel under the jubilee code, but this inter-generational slavery was limited to heathen slaves who had begun their term of bondage when they were outside of the national covenant. "Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour" (Lev. 25:44–46).⁵

This Mosaic law revealed a covenantal principle: better to be a slave in the household of faith than to be a free man outside the covenant. This principle did not end with Jesus' fulfillment of the jubilee law

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus* 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

(Luke 4:18–21).⁶ Its administration did, however. Under the New Covenant, the highest ideal is liberty: “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather” (I Cor. 7:21).⁷ This liberty is possible because the covenant of redemption is no longer tied exclusively or uniquely to membership in any geographically and historically bounded nation. The mediatory status of national Israel in the Mosaic covenant of redemption is forever annulled. Old Covenant Israel is no longer God’s son. Old Covenant Israel was *definitively* disinherited at the crucifixion: the veil of the temple separating the holy of holies from the common area was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:52). Old Covenant Israel was *progressively* disinherited through its persecution of the New Testament church, and *finally* disinherited at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. After that, Old Covenant Israel ceased to exist.⁸ Its successor, Rabbinic Judaism, possesses neither a temple nor an animal sacrifice system. The covenantally valid sacrificial fires of the temple were extinguished forever when the unauthorized fire lit by a pair of Roman soldiers burned the temple to the ground after the siege of Jerusalem ended.⁹ The Mosaic covenant has been forever annulled.

Under the Mosaic covenant, servanthood was a blessing because it was a form of preliminary sonship. The possibility of redemption from bondage was always present through adoption by another Israelite.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the servant was under the household covenant of the master. This brought blessings that were not available outside the household of faith.

The Mosaic covenant was itself a form of sonship that involved servanthship. The transfer of the inheritance from *father to son* was marked by a change in practical status from *servant to son*. We see this illustrated in the New Covenant’s replacement of the Old Covenant. Because the New Covenant has replaced the Old Covenant, covenant-keeping gentiles can become sons.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

8. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

10. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 30:K.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ (Gal. 3:26–4:7).

With the advent of the Son of God in history, Israel was offered its long-awaited opportunity to move from inheritance-servitude to inheritance-sonship. The price of this transition was two-fold: (1) Israel's public acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah; (2) Israel's public consent to the extension of adoptive sonship status to the prodigal sons, i.e., the gentiles. But Old Covenant Israel, like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:28), was hard-hearted. The older brother in the parable complained to his father that the father had never slain a fatted calf for him. Where was his reward as the firstborn son?¹¹ This was Israel's constant complaint to God. "Where is our reward? We have been faithful. Where is our fatted calf?" Moses warned them in this passage: with the golden calf in Israel's background, they should all be content with the fact that God had not slain the nation at the foot of the altar.

A recurring theme in the Old Covenant is the rebelliousness of the older brother, whose inheritance ordinarily was the double portion (Deut. 21:17).¹² Instead, the younger son inherited because of the older brother's rebellion, e.g., Seth over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, Ephraim over Manasseh, David over Eliab, and ultimately Jesus over Adam. *The rebellious firstborn resents the faithful second-born*. "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the

11. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 37.

12. Chapter 49.

battle” (I Sam. 17:28). Then the younger brother inherits through his covenantal faithfulness.

The Jews should have remembered all this when Jesus told His parable of the prodigal younger brother who repented and the stiff-necked older brother who complained. The older brother refused to rejoice with his father at the return of the younger brother in humility. His father’s joy meant nothing to him; he cared only about the honor shown to his prodigal brother. His brother’s humility had regained his access to the household and its rewards. What was the public mark of his brother’s humility? His willingness to enter his father’s household as a servant, not as a son (Luke 15:21). He understood that servanthship is preferable to life outside the household of faith. This realization is the only basis of a return to sonship for prodigal sons. The sons of Adam are all prodigal sons.

Conclusion

Moses designated Israel as God’s inheritance. The Israelites’ status as God’s inheritance placed them in the judicial position of servants, yet also as lawful sons. They owed God service, for the inheritance is lawfully at the disposal of the heir. They were also subordinate to God as the lawful heir. This is why Jesus’ parable of the servants who kill the heir of the master so outraged the Jews (Matt. 21:38–46).¹³

The inheritance does not exercise authority over its owner. Moses made it clear to them that their status as God’s inheritance placed them in a special judicial position: subordinate. What he did not say, but which was implied by biblical theology, is this: *legitimate sonship always begins with servanthship* (Gal. 4:1–7). Even sin-free Adam was not allowed to touch all of God’s inheritance. *Servanthship is the training required of all lawful sons*. As the inheritance of God, Israel could prove its legal status as the son of God. Israel would then inherit the kingdom of God. The implied warning was clear: should Israel rebel against its judicial status as God’s inheritance—as bondservants in the household of faith—God would disinherit Israel, just as He had threatened to do after the golden calf incident. Next time, there might not be a Moses to plead with God for mercy.

13. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

SONSHIP, OBEDIENCE, AND IMMIGRATION

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked (Deut. 10:12–16).

The fear of God is the theocentric focus of this passage. The decisive issue here is obedience. “And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways.”

A. The Covenantal Function of Fear

Covenantal faithfulness begins with fear (Prov. 9:10). Fear, obedience, and love were united in this passage. Israel was told to obey God. The basis of this fear was legally grounded in God's status as Creator: “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is.” The passage's logic is sharp: *from man's obedience to God's ownership*. Man's absolute obedience is required by God because God is the absolute owner of the universe. This ownership included Israel, which owed a special debt to God as God's chosen nation. “Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day” (v. 15). God's cosmic ownership identifies this

law as a universal law. It was not a seed law or a land law.¹

The fourth generation would soon be circumcised at Gilgal (Josh. 5:7). The circumcision of their flesh would visibly bond them with Abraham, but this circumcision of their flesh would not be sufficient to maintain the kingdom grant. They would have to obey God's law. Moses referred to this as the circumcision of the heart.

Paul made extensive use of this metaphor in his development of the New Covenant's extension of the Old Covenant's promises and inheritance to the gentiles. The central issue is ethics, Paul insisted, not circumcision. "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:25–29). This is exactly what Moses told them in this passage. It is not who you are but *what you do* that determines how God deals with you. God does not regard persons in declaring His formal judgments. "For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward" (Deut. 10:17).

B. Sonship and Inheritance

Moses was making a crucial covenantal observation. It was in fact the most important aspect of the Mosaic Covenant: *the mark of true sonship is the circumcised heart*.² Ethics is more important than ritual. The true son is the son who obeys his father. It was this message that the Israelites forgot or denied by their actions, generation after genera-

1. On land laws and seed laws, see Appendix J.

2. In defense of my estimation of the centrality of this passage, I cite Paul. "Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:26–29).

tion, culminating in the nation's consummate rebellion: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus drove home Moses' message in his parable of the two sons: "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:28–32). The true Son of God, the true heir of Abraham, was murdered by the would-be heirs. Jesus' next parable revealed that He knew exactly what they would do to Him: the parable of the husbandmen who killed the heir (Matt. 21:33–46).

Circumcision was the physical mark of subordination to the Mosaic covenant. Circumcision was the Old Covenant's oath-sign.³ Every biblical covenant must be ratified by an oath, and this oath invokes negative sanctions on the covenant-breaker.⁴ The negative sanction of the cutting of the flesh was the judicial equivalent of invoking negative sanctions on the oath-taker for disobeying God's law. The covenant's oath-sign invokes positive and negative historical sanctions in terms of the covenant's stipulations. Circumcision did not guarantee Israel's inheritance; it merely invoked positive sanctions for obedience, which in turn would ensure the inheritance.

Moses was warning his listeners: *obedience to God was a more important sign of sonship than circumcision was*. Circumcision invoked God's sanctions, but these sanctions were applied in terms of God's law. Point four of the biblical covenant model—oath/sanctions—refers the oath-taker back to point three: ethics. The physical mark of the Old Covenant was circumcision. But the other visible mark was of much greater importance: obedience to the law. *Circumcision without obedience brings God's negative sanctions*. Jesus warned: "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he

3. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968), ch. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–43.

that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:19–21).⁵ Circumcision without obedience was a curse, not a blessing.

Moses’ words in this passage reflect the biblical covenant model. God, as the sovereign owner of heaven and earth (point one), established His covenant with representatives (point two): the patriarchs of Israel. He has placed Israel under His law (point three), to which are attached sanctions (point four). These sanctions are invoked by circumcision; they are applied by God in terms of obedience or disobedience. Corporate inheritance is the ultimate positive sanction in history: the kingdom of God on earth.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).⁶

While Israel’s inheritance is not specifically mentioned in this passage, this is the central theme of the Deuteronomy. Moses did identify that generation as part of Abraham’s promised seed, “even you above all people, as it is this day” (v. 15).

Israel could not rely on circumcision as the judicial basis of its national inheritance. Maintaining the kingdom grant is always an ethical task.⁷ Israel’s rituals were symbols of cleansing and restoration, but they were useless if they were not accompanied by a change of heart and behavior. Circumcision would condemn Israel if the nation committed the sins of Canaan. Circumcision would bring the Mosaic covenant’s negative corporate sanctions. Deuteronomy is the second reading of the law because *the Mosaic law was the written testament that specified the terms of the national inheritance*.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 18.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

7. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 9. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

C. Sons and Strangers

Sons inherit; strangers in the household do not. This had been Abram's dilemma. "And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" (Gen. 15:2). The judicial question is this: Who is the true son with a lawful claim on the inheritance?

The true sons of God are those who obey Him. This fact raised a major question for Israel, one which they never answered correctly: Can a stranger become a son? The answer was covenantally obvious, but it was repulsive to Israel: yes. The stranger, if he acts as a son should act, is entitled to become the lawful heir. The son, if he acts as a stranger to the covenant, is to be disinherited (Matt. 21:28–32).

Adopted sons replace biological sons as the lawful heirs. *This is the message of the New Covenant.* The gentiles could become sons on the same basis that the Jews could: obedience to God's covenant, i.e., adoption. This obedience is imputed by God to adopted sons on the judicial basis of Christ's perfect ethical fulfillment of the criteria of sonship. Both Jews and gentiles need adoption, Paul wrote to the Galatians: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:4–6). Adoption had always been open to gentiles in Israel, but it took up to 10 generations for the heirs of some strangers to achieve this (Deut. 23: 3). Under the New Covenant, adoption required a new oath-sign, baptism, and a new Passover, the Lord's Supper. As had been the case with the Mosaic Covenant's rituals, these new oath-bound rituals were not to be regarded as substitutes for obedience.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (I John 2:3–4).

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us (I John 3:24).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments (I John 5:2).

The true son does the will of his father. By identifying a man's works, others can identify his covenantal father. This covenantal concept of sonship was why the circumcised stranger was a threat to the self-esteem of covenant-breaking Israelites. The visible obedience of covenant-keeping strangers testified against the sonship of covenant-breaking Israelites.

Those who were the biological heirs of the conquest generation had an inheritance in the land. Immigrant strangers could not inherit rural land except through their adoption into a family line of the conquest generation. But they could buy houses in the cities (Lev. 25: 29–30), and they could become full citizens in the cities after several consecutive generations of circumcised heads of households. They could become full sons of the covenant even though they could not inherit rural land. This eventually placed a heavy social and psychological premium on the possession of a claim to rural land. Land rather than ethics became the chief differentiating factor in the minds of covenant-breaking heirs of the conquest generation.

D. Sacrosanct Land

The land became sacrosanct in the thinking of those Israelites who placed formal title to land above obedience as the true mark of sonship. "The land, the land" became their cry. The supreme mark of their disinheritance would be their removal from the land. Recognizing this sinful outlook in advance, Moses warned: "And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind" (Deut. 28:63–65).

Assyria removed Israelites from the land in the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. In 586 B.C., Babylon removed most of those living in the

Southern Kingdom.⁸ A comparative handful returned from the Babylonian captivity in 538; the vast majority remained behind in Babylon. Moses saw this, too. "And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God" (Deut. 28:62). Only a remnant returned to Israel, as Jeremiah had foretold: "And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase" (Jer. 23:3). Rome removed most of them permanently from the land in 135 A.D. after Simon bar Kochba's abortive rebellion (132–35).⁹ The diaspora had begun.

Without the laying on of hands (*semikah*), which could be done lawfully only inside the boundaries of the land of Israel, a Jewish court under Phariseism had no authority to impose the punishments mandated in the Bible. The development of an alternative system of sanctions became a major task of Judaism after the failure of Bar Kochba's rebellion and the forced dispersion of the Jews by the Roman authorities.¹⁰ The problem of rule outside the land had appeared earlier, however, with the destruction of the temple. The holiness of Israel could no longer be based on the presence of the temple in the land. *The Jews became in their own eyes the holiness of God, replacing the temple*. This meant that all Jews everywhere participated in this holiness. To attest to this separate judicial condition of holiness, they needed to be judged by Jewish law, and this law could invoke sanctions that were valid only inside the boundaries of Israel.

The holiness of the Jews had been a major doctrine of the Pharisees even before A.D. 70. This placed the Pharisees in a dominant position within Judaism after A.D. 70.¹¹ The Romans placed Gamaliel at the head of the Jews' local system of patriarchal rule.¹² From the fall of Jerusalem until Bar Kochba's rebellion, the Jewish leaders began the

8. Not all, however: "But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left certain of the poor of the land for vinedressers and for husbandmen" (Jer. 52:16).

9. Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz reported that Bar Kochba persecuted no one except Jewish Christians, who refused to take up arms against Rome. Heinrich Graetz, *A History of the Jews*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1893), II, p. 412.

10. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co., [1953] 1973), p. 93.

11. Jacob Neusner, *An Introduction to Judaism: A Textbook and Reader* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 160–61.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 159. This Gamaliel was the son of Paul's teacher: Paul Johnson, *A History of The Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 150.

work of codifying the Pharisees' oral law, but it remained oral.¹³ The greatest early codifier was Rabbi Akiba, born around A.D. 50, who as an old man died at the hands of the Romans after the failure of Bar Kochba's rebellion, which Akiba had supported.¹⁴ He had publicly identified Bar Kochba as the Messiah.¹⁵ Late in the second century A.D., Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi ("the Prince" or "the Patriarch") completed the codification of the Pharisees' oral tradition. This was the Mishnah.¹⁶ The Talmud, a detailed and seemingly unstructured series of comments on the Mishnah, was completed in Babylon around A.D. 500.¹⁷

These developments, which sealed off Judaism from the surrounding Roman culture, moved in a direction opposite from developments in the early church. The New Testament's inclusion of gentiles into the kingdom's inheritance was an extension of Moses' original principle of sonship through obedience. Baptism merely speeded up the process of inclusion: from several generations (Deut. 23:3–8) to immediate covenantal membership. Inclusion became definitive at the time of baptism; the Mosaic law's multi-generation progressive inclusion process for immigrants was annulled along with the jubilee law.

E. Visible Economic Evidence of Civil Justice

Moses went from a warning regarding stiffnecked rebellion to a discussion of God as the judge: "For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward" (Deut. 10:17). Here is a God to be feared. He cannot be bought off. An attempted bribe brings no benefits in God's court.

The proof of God's imperviousness to any attempt to deflect His judgment is His treatment of those who are in no position to offer a bribe. God executes righteous judgment for the afflicted: orphans, widows, and strangers. "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment" (v. 18). These three groups were the Mosaic law's symbols—its representatives—of the judicially defenseless in Israel. Members of these

13. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

14. Ernest R. Trattner, *Understanding the Talmud* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1955), pp. 101–102.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 137. The source for this is the Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'an 4:7, 68d.

16. Graetz, *History of the Jews*, II, pp. 460–61.

17. Trattner, *Understanding the Talmud*, p. 55.

groups could not execute judgment in Israel. Who, then, would represent them in a court of law? God would, Moses warned. And since He would, His earthly judges had better do the same. "Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (v. 19). By reminding them of their stay in Egypt, Moses recalled the penalty of injustice: national destruction. He also reminded them of the positive historical sanctions shown by God to covenant-keepers who are unrighteously afflicted by covenant-breakers: "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude" (v. 22).

This was a clear prophecy of what would happen to Israel if the nation's leaders handed down corrupt judgments that respected persons or bribes. *Israel's experience would recapitulate Egypt's experience.* If Israel's judges did not honor the rule of law in its courts, treating strangers the same as Israelites, then Israel would be brought low.

Israel had been a stranger in Egypt. At first, Egypt had treated Israel well. This had been manifested by Pharaoh's elevation of Joseph as second in command. Egypt had survived the famine because the Pharaoh had honored Joseph's advice. Egypt received a blessing through the stranger in her midst. Had Pharaoh returned Joseph to prison, where he had been brought under negative judicial sanctions unrighteously by Potiphar, Egypt would have suffered a disaster. Egypt's treatment of this stranger within her gates would determine Egypt's fate.

In a later generation, a new Pharaoh brought the Israelites under bondage. This arrangement seemed to be profitable for a time. The Pharaoh gained the benefit of cheap slave labor for at least a generation. But this could not become a permanent relationship under the law of God. The debt relationship for this evil—the negative sanctions—compounded over time. The debts came due at the exodus. Egypt was destroyed.

When had Israel's population growth taken place? During the good times, the days of liberty in Egypt. The multiplication of Israel was what had frightened the Pharaoh of the oppression (Ex. 1:9). That is, strangers flourished in Egypt. This is an important mark of a righteous society: *strangers flourish*. The rule of law, if the law is just, provides the judicial framework for economic growth. Immigrants are notoriously thrifty and hard working compared to those who stayed behind in the old country. What we call the Puritan work ethic, which includes future-orientation and thrift, enables the immigrants to prosper. A society that oppresses strangers is unjust. The blessings of

justice can be seen in communities of immigrants who prosper and eventually grow wealthy enough to move out of their cultural ghettos in a generation or two. This has been the experience of the United States.¹⁸ It has made the United States unique in modern history, especially prior to 1924, when the immigration laws were drastically tightened.¹⁹

Moses warned Israel to deal justly with orphans, widows, and strangers. Yet if Israel did this, resident aliens would flourish economically according to their talents and their work ethic. If Israelites resented their success, as Egyptians had resented Israel's success, and began dishonoring God's law by perverting justice to strangers, then the days of vengeance would come. On the other hand, Israel's covenantal success would be manifested by the economic success of resident aliens. The Mosaic law even provided for the sale of poor Israelites into household servitude to resident aliens (Lev. 25:47–52). *The sign of God's blessing would be rich strangers in the land.* To attempt to tear them down through judicial discrimination would call forth God's judgment against the nation.

The essence of envy is the desire to tear down someone else merely because he is superior. Envy was the motivation of the Philistines in filling in Isaac's wells with dirt (Gen. 26:15).²⁰ They did not confiscate these wells for their own use; instead, they destroyed his inheritance from his father. They were not made richer, but Isaac was made poorer. This is the heart, mind, and soul of envy. When a society compromises the rule of law in order to tear down economically successful people, it kills the judicial goose that lays the golden eggs. When a society knows this and does it anyway, it has become consumed with envy. Its earthly reward will be an increase in judicial arbitrariness, bureaucracy, and poverty, as well as class resentment. It will grow worse, for the sin of envy cannot be placated. There is always

18. Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

19. America's problem, unlike Mosaic Israel's, is that the civil oath does not pledge citizens to obedience to God and God's revealed law. Thus, the immigrant can gain citizenship while maintaining the religious oath which he brought with him. Because Western nations impose only secular oaths on their citizens, immigrants who retain their alien religious oaths undermine the remnants of the Christian social order that created the West. They are allowed to impose political sanctions in terms of religious worldviews hostile to Christianity. The experiment in secular civil government is not yet completed. It will end badly.

20. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Bible* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 27.

someone who is superior in some respect.²¹

F. The Open Invitation

The uncircumcised alien could prosper in Israel when God's law was enforced. This was another indication to Israel that physical circumcision was not the heart of the matter; ethical circumcision was. *The covenantal issue was obedience to God's law.* If a resident alien producer served Israelite customers efficiently, he would prosper. The Mosaic law invited aliens to come to Israel and serve those living in Israel by producing on a free market. The Mosaic law's promise of equal justice would recruit productive people to Israel—clearly a benefit to customers in Israel. Political envy and jealousy were held at bay by the Mosaic law. *The stranger's wealth would not be extracted from him by coercive, arbitrary civil laws.* Private property would be secure when the Mosaic law was enforced.

This open invitation to immigrate to Israel was a means of increasing Israel's wealth. Attracting productive people is even better than discovering valuable raw materials. Human creativity is more valuable in the long run than raw materials are, whose prices tend to fall in relationship to the price of labor in a growing economy.²² Again and again in history, societies that find themselves in possession of valuable raw materials have fallen behind economically within a century or less because governments extract the mineral wealth. The state grows larger, strangling the productivity of its citizens. The monarchy of Spain after 1500 is the classic example. It controlled access in and out of its American empire. It controlled the choke points of commerce. This way, the king made sure that he received his 20% share of the precious metals mined in his American colonies.²³ Spain's government and monopoly controlled all aspects of commerce.²⁴ Spain's monarchs misjudged the source of Spain's continuing wealth. The goose that would lay the most golden eggs in the Americas was not Spain's mining monopoly; rather, it was the system of economic liberty that prevailed above the

21. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1966] 1969), pp. 251, 336. The novel by L. P. Hartley, *Facial Justice*, is a classic statement of the insatiable nature of envy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960).

22. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

23. Curtis P. Nettels, *The Roots of American Civilization*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 43.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Rio Grande River. Curtis Nettels, a specialist in American colonial history, concluded regarding South America: “In the end the stifling effects of regulation contributed a major cause of the successful revolt of the colonies during the Napoleonic wars.”²⁵

Spain enjoyed the wealth of the South American and Mexican gold mines for almost two centuries, but by the end of the seventeenth century, Spain’s economy had visibly begun to fall behind England’s and even the Netherlands’, whose national income rested on trade rather than mining. The absence of gold mining above the Rio Grande in early North America made its economic triumph far more likely in the long run. Men seeking liberty and individual economic opportunity came by the tens of millions to the United States. Liberty made the difference economically, not gold. A nation’s gold mines eventually run out; liberty need not run out. Whether it does or doesn’t depends on a society’s ethics.

G. Immigration and Membership Oaths

The possibility of immigration raised the issue of economic inheritance. Strangers in Israel could become legal heirs through adoption by Israelite families. Blood-line inheritance was not the basis of the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was not a blood-line covenant. It was an ethical-judicial covenant. Men were by oath consigned, not by blood consigned. Israelites could not lawfully pass laws or make judicial decisions that discriminated against strangers. They could not lawfully place discriminatory judicial penalties on strangers. Legislated envy was illegal in Israel. The gentile had a protected position in Israel’s legal code. He could buy a lawful inheritance inside Israel’s walled cities (Lev. 25:29–30). Ultimately, he had a possibility of becoming a co-heir through adoption.

One mark of a free society is that strangers can flourish economically. The encouragement of immigration is part of biblical law. The problem comes when the national civil covenant establishes citizenship apart from a confession of faith, i.e., a covenantal oath of allegiance to the God of the Bible and His law. When inheritance is by mere physical presence, or by a pledge of allegiance to a secular state, immigration becomes a covenantal threat to those who are already dwelling in the land. When the state is used as a means of coercive wealth distribution—e.g., the modern welfare state—then the immigrant be-

25. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

comes an economic threat to taxpaying citizens: a potential drain on their wealth. Initially, he receives resources from the state because he is poor. Later, his children can become citizens and vote for additional support from the state.

The ultimate form of immigration is birth. The abortion movement in the United States was founded on class hatred by dedicated racists and eugenicists such as Margaret Sanger, who cried out against the foreign-born working class because its members were “benign imbeciles, who encourage the defective and diseased elements of humanity in their reckless and irresponsible swarming.”²⁶ “More children from the fit, less from the unfit” she declared; “that is the chief issue of birth control.”²⁷ Sanger and her ideological associates wanted to reduce the flow of immigrants, who were crossing borders and crossing birth canals. The first step in their legislative agenda was achieved through the legalization of birth control devices: the elimination of a negative judicial sanction on voluntary exchange. The second was the 1924 United States immigration law: the imposition of new negative sanctions against immigrants. The third was the legalization of abortion by the United States Supreme Court in 1973: the removal of negative sanctions against abortionists and the imposition of permanent negative sanctions against infants.

H. Adoption in Family, Church, and State

Biblical inheritance is by sonship. Sonship is attained by means of covenant oath and obedience. Biblically speaking, sonship is legally open to anyone who is willing to affirm the covenantal oath: in family, church, and state. The biblical model for sonship is adoption.

In family affairs, the head of the household initiates the adoption offer at his discretion. Adopted sonship is not automatically granted to everyone who seeks it. The family is a private institution grounded in biology (Gen. 2:24) as well as by a covenant oath of mutual intimacy and sexual exclusivity. With respect to the Adamic family’s civil status, the terms of its confession are private even though the state lawfully regulates certain aspects of membership, such as its biological heterosexuality, and also enforces inheritance. No child is a bastard under biblical civil law on the basis of his married parents’ refusal to confess

26. Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York: Brentano’s, 1922), p. 125; cited in George Grant, *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood* (Franklin, Tennessee: Adroit Press, 1992), p. 27. Sanger’s book is on the Web.

27. Sanger, “Birth Control,” *Birth Control Review* (May 1919); cited in *idem*.

the faith established by God's law for the two other public covenantal institutions, church and state. Neither is a child who was not born into a family entitled to membership merely because he confesses a married couple's confession. Family covenant membership is automatic through birth.²⁸ There must not be legal discrimination against the *Adamic covenant family* based on the issue of confessional content other than the promise of exclusive mutual bonding. This is not true of church and state.

In church and state, an open membership offer—the offer of adoption—is automatically extended to the general public with the original incorporation of either of these covenantal organizations. Church and state are public monopolies: the monopoly of the sacraments and the monopoly of life-threatening violence. God has established rules governing both of these monopolistic institutions. Those people who have gained early access to the benefits of membership are not allowed by God to close these benefits to newcomers. Membership in both covenantal organizations is open to all comers on the original terms of the covenant. In neither church nor state are officers allowed by God to discriminate against anyone who seeks membership by means of a covenant oath. Trinitarian Protestant churches have violated God's law in the past, for local congregations for generations screened members by race. So has an anti-immigration Trinitarian state. So has anyone who seeks to substitute a covenantal oath in either institution that denies the theology of the Athanasian creed. Public sonship is by public Trinitarian oath. To substitute a new oath is to substitute a new covenant.²⁹

This does not mean that Christians' opposition to immigration is illegitimate when the state has adopted a non-Trinitarian confession. Christians may legitimately seek to substitute a Trinitarian covenant, which will require votes. If they see that certain immigrants who confess a rival and highly aggressive religion are becoming eligible for citizenship, then as a defensive political strategy for the sake of the extension of the kingdom of God, they may legitimately seek to work politically to cut off such immigration as part of their goal of establishing a Trinitarian confession for the nation. But for those Christians who

28. What distinguishes the Christian family from the Adamic family is infant baptism. Children are supposed to be baptized as infants, thereby transferring to the institutional church covenantal authority over the children through the parents. Baptists and non-Christians deny the validity of this legal arrangement.

29. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

deny the legitimacy of a Christian nation—the vast majority of Protestant Christians today—any opposition to immigration is made in terms of non-confessional considerations. This constitutes discrimination based on economic, racial, or other considerations. The Bible condemns all such judicial discrimination except against citizens of enemy nations during a declared war, which would in effect constitute an invasion, or against immigrants afflicted with contagious deadly diseases, which would also constitute an invasion.

Conclusion

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is also the beginning of wealth. The circumcision of the heart—obedience to God—is the basis of maintaining God’s inheritance and expanding it. *The circumcised heart is the mark of legitimate sonship.*

This opened the possibility of inheritance to strangers in Mosaic Israel. The immigrant, if he consented to circumcision, could look forward to urban citizenship for his heirs. Even if he remained uncircumcised, he was entitled to civil justice in terms of the Mosaic law. The rule of law mandated by God: “One law shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49).³⁰ The Mosaic law’s protection of private property was universal.

This was a major incentive for productive strangers to immigrate to Israel. They could enjoy the fruits of their labor despite their alien legal status. There is no question that this aspect of the Mosaic law was an aspect of Israel’s evangelism to the world (Deut. 4:5–8).³¹

30. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

31. Chapter 8.

OATH, SANCTIONS, AND INHERITANCE

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. Thy fathers went down into Egypt with three-score and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude (Deut. 10:20–22).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the fear of God, the God who does terrible (fearful)¹ things. The overall context of this passage is obedience. “And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deut. 10:12). The verse following this passage reinforces this ethical theme. “Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway” (Deut. 11:1).

A. Fulfilled Promises

God is sovereign over history, as Israel’s history had demonstrated. Such fear should lead to *covenantal swearing*, Moses said: “to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.” Because of the presence of a covenantal oath, this law is a universal law. It was not a seed law or land law, although it had to do with the inheritance of Canaan. It has to do with inheritance in general because the passage assumes the presence of a covenantal oath.

Israel’s oath-bound covenantal subordination had resulted in the fulfillment of two of God’s three promises to Abraham. First, the promise of numerous descendants: “And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to

1. The Hebrew word for fear (v. 20) and terrible (v. 21) is the same.

number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen. 15:5). The second promise had also been fulfilled: collecting the inheritances of Egypt's firstborn. "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (vv. 13–14). The third prophetic promise had not yet been fulfilled when Moses spoke to the elders of Israel, but it soon would be: the inheritance of Canaan. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (v. 16).

The fulfillment of the first two promises was supposed to produce confidence in the fulfillment of the third: national inheritance. The fulfillment of all three promises was supposed to motivate the nation to even greater covenantal faithfulness. "Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway" (Deut. 11:1). Joshua and the older members of his generation as children had seen God's historical sanctions on Egypt; the younger members and their children had not. "And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, And his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land" (vv. 2–3). God had destroyed Egypt's army by burying them all in the Red Sea (v. 4); He destroyed Dathan and Abiram by having the earth swallow them (v. 6). The older members had seen all this with their own eyes (v. 7). This was supposed to make the conquest generation obedient. "Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it" (v. 8). The sight of God's sanctions in history is to become a means of covenantal reinforcement.

B. Eschatological Inheritance

The exodus generation would have to inherit, as Abraham had inherited, through their heirs. They had been told this a generation earlier. "But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised" (Num. 14:31). The exodus generation had to content itself with inheriting

eschatologically. Their victorious heirs would represent them. They would achieve their victory through their heirs, just as God had promised mankind in His curse on the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

Eschatological inheritance is worth very little for men without saving faith, especially present-oriented men without faith in the future. Israel was about to become a nation of immigrants. The immigrant's future-oriented ideal of making a better life for his children and his grandchildren makes him a thrifty, hard-working, uncomplaining servant in society. Rarely do his grandchildren sustain either his eschatological vision or his savings rate. They assume that what they possess is normal and almost cost-free rather than the unique inheritance of two generations of thrift and hard work. They become historically forgetful. They become forgetful regarding the way to wealth: a high savings rate and service to the customer. Covenantal forgetfulness was the crucial economic threat to Israel, which was about to become a nation of newly arrived immigrants. Beware, Moses warned, that "thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).²

The older generation's weakness had been present-orientation: a refusal to be content with eschatological inheritance. As soon as Moses told them that they would not be allowed to conquer Canaan, they rushed into a forbidden war with Amalek (Num. 14:44–45). They immediately became overconfident when they should have been humble before pagan covenant-breakers for a generation. Previously, they had lacked confidence when they should have been humble before God and therefore confident regarding their imminent victory over covenant-breakers. In both cases, they did not have confidence in the predictability of God's historical sanctions: (1) negative corporate sanctions on Canaanites through Israel inside the land; (2) negative corporate sanctions on Israel through Amalekites outside the land.

These decisive events had been uniquely covenantal. First, the Israelites had not believed in the historical relevance of point one of the biblical covenant model: (1) the sovereignty of God over the events of history; (2) His unique judicial presence with them as a nation. Second, they had not accepted their national office as God's representative agent in bringing negative corporate sanctions against Canaan. Third, they had not believed God's revelation to them: imminent victory over Canaan, said Joshua and Caleb; imminent defeat by Amalek, said

2. Chapter 21.

Moses. Fourth, they had initially sought to avoid imposing God's sanctions and then had sought to impose sanctions on their own. Fifth, they had no patience with the doctrine of eschatological inheritance. They were present-oriented.

C. Promise and Continuity

Moses pointed to the growth of Israel's population. They had arrived in Egypt as a handful; now they were a multitude. He cited the words of God to Abram: the stars of heaven. God's promise to childless Abram had been fulfilled. The change in name to Abraham—father of nations or multitudes—had been fulfilled.

God's revelation to Abram 470 years earlier had been reliable. The Israelites could see with their own eyes that God's promise had been fulfilled. But this had been equally true of the preceding generation. They had not believed their own eyes. They had not acknowledged that they were living proof of the reliability of the covenantal promise to Abram.³ They had not understood that God's oath in history had come true in history. They had not looked to their own history, including their immediate history, with the eyes of faith. The fulfillment of God's oath to Abram had been ignored by the exodus generation. It had made no impact on their thinking, their words, or their actions.

The Israelites of the exodus generation did not acknowledge the importance of continuity in history. *The judicial basis of Israel's continuity was God's oath to Abram.* That which followed this oath had confirmed the terms of the oath. The oath had not been mere words; it had been a prophecy. This prophecy had come true in their generation. But the fathers of the conquest generation had refused to acknowledge that the fulfillment of God's oath in history had transferred to them a heavy degree of responsibility. They no doubt understood that this was the case, but they refused to acknowledge it. They were determined not to enter the Promised Land. They had no desire to transfer leadership to their sons under Joshua, even though Joshua's generation had been identified prophetically by God as the inheriting generation (Gen. 15:16). They preferred not to inherit. They clung to their authority in the wilderness rather than transfer it to their sons and march into Canaan. They preferred to allow death to transfer this authority four decades later. They preferred wandering in the wilderness to seeing the fulfillment of God's covenant oath to Abram in their

3. He had not yet been re-named in Genesis 15.

lifetimes.

God's oath to Abram was the basis of their covenantal inheritance as sons of Abraham. Their very self-definition was tied to God's oath. This meant that it was tied to everything that had happened since then, for the events since the days of Abraham had confirmed the oath. It was a true oath because it had been fulfilled as promised. Moses reminded the conquest generation: the handful had become a multitude, as promised. The God of Israel could foresee the future because He decreed the future. The decree of God is sovereign over history. Faith in this principle would enable the conquest generation to fulfill the promise regarding the fourth generation. The inheritance was assured, Moses told them.

Why was he so sure? Because he understood the history of Israel from the days of Abram. He understood that *continuity in history is covenantal*. The continuity of history rests on God's covenant oath and His sanctions in history. These historical sanctions confirm the original oath and bring it to pass in history. This means that *inheritance in history is covenantal*. It rests on God's oath. But God's oath is tied to God's law. This is why men are required to obey God. The fear of God produces obedience to God's law. Obedience brings God's positive sanctions. Positive sanctions bring the inheritance.

D. Continuity and Conquest

Point five of the biblical covenant model is continuity. But this implies succession in history. The Book of Deuteronomy makes it plain that *covenantal continuity involves inheritance*. It is not merely that Israel persevered as a nation. Israel inherited the Promised Land. Israel's perseverance was not supposed to be merely biological; it was to be cultural and economic. Israel was to take possession of wells that others had dug and vineyards that others had planted. Israel was not to wander in circles in the wilderness. God's promise to Abram had been more than mere national survival; it had involved the promise of inheritance.

The promise had been numerical: from no sons at all to sons like the stars of heaven. That is, the fulfillment of the promise could be visibly measured in history. Obviously, that promise had been figurative. Moses knew from the numbering exactly how many people constituted Israel. The symbolic language of the measureless stars of heaven had pointed to a future census. The language of immeasurability had

pointed to measurability, i.e., confirmation. The impossible would come true. Abraham's new name would in fact be confirmed in history. He was not merely to be the father of a handful; he was to become the father of nations. God asked him to believe this, which he did. Then it came true.

Covenantal continuity is the continuity of growth. It is not the continuity of mere survival; it is the continuity of *conquest*. It is not the continuity of life in the historical shadows; it is the continuity of *dominion*. It is not the continuity of mere confession; it is the continuity of *kingdom extension*. Whenever God's people refuse to acknowledge that the continuity promised to God's people in history is a continuity of conquest, dominion, and kingdom extension, they begin to act like the exodus generation. Their lack of faith produces timidity. Timidity produces half-hearted measures. The lack of success of half-hearted measures reinforces their lack of faith. They dwell in the wilderness and call it the Promised Land in history. They spiritualize the language of victory. They call a stalemate in the wilderness a triumph of the kingdom.

Moses was preparing them for conquest. He did this by telling them again and again to fear God. Why should they? Because God is the God of the oath. He is the God of oath-bound sanctions in history. *These historical sanctions confirm His oath by bringing expansion and victory to His people.* Moses was rallying the troops of the fourth generation by calling to their attention the history of God's dealings with earlier generations. He was calling them to military conquest in history; so, he reminded them of their demographic expansion in the past.

Moses told them to swear by God's name. This was a call to covenant renewal. They were to swear their oath to the God who had sworn an oath to Abram. The promises attached to that oath had been fulfilled. This oath-bound God "hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen." What they had seen was preliminary to what they would soon see: the defeat of Canaan. The defeat of Canaan had been part of the original oath (Gen. 15:16). There was no legitimate reason to hold back any longer. The inheritance was at hand.

Conclusion

Moses told them to fear God and swear allegiance to Him. He

offered as evidence the fulfillment of the seemingly impossible promise to Abraham: the multiplication of his heirs. Israel had grown from seventy people to a multitude. Moses appealed to a positive corporate sanction—multiplication—as a justification of the requirement to fear God and swear allegiance to Him. Moses could also have mentioned the prophesied capitalization of Israel through the disinheritance of Egypt's firstborn, which was God's second promise to Abraham.

The third promise to Abraham, as yet unfulfilled, was Israel's inheritance of the land. This had been an eschatological inheritance for the exodus generation, just as Abraham's inheritance had been eschatological: multiplication of his heirs, their spoiling of the Egyptians, and the conquest of Canaan. The fulfillment of this third aspect of the inheritance was as sure as the first two had been. What had seemed impossible to Abram had already come true. Now the third stage of the inheritance was about to come true. Moses was arguing from the oath-bound covenant to the inheritance by way of historically fulfilled prophecy. The Abrahamic covenant's oath had invoked positive sanctions in history. These were sanctions of inheritance: heirs, capital, and land. Although Moses here mentioned only the multiplication of Abraham's seed, the other two sanctions were part of the original promise. The Israelites were therefore required to obey God's law (Deut. 11:1). Moses made it clear that all three aspects of the covenant are linked judicially: obedience to God's law, predictable oath-bound corporate sanctions in history, and corporate inheritance in history.

RAIN AND INHERITANCE

For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil (Deut. 11:10–14).

The theocentric focus of this prophecy is God as the Caretaker of the land who is sovereign over the weather. The prophecy's goal was to encourage obedience: "And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day. . . ."

A. Egypt vs. Canaan

While God's general administration over the earth is still a feature of His sovereignty, this prophecy was specific: specific boundaries, specific topography, and specific weather. This prophecy was not universal. It was tied to the land of Canaan. As we shall see, the New Covenant established a different principle for weather. It is no longer predictable in terms of national ethics.

The fulfillment of this prophecy would take place within the boundaries of the Promised Land: "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land

yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you" (Deut. 11:16–17).

1. Rain vs. Nile

Canaan, Moses promised, would be very different from Egypt. One visible difference would be the source of water. The comparison was between watering with one's foot and watering from on high. What did it mean, "waterest with thy foot"? This probably referred to Egyptian irrigation. The Nile was the only source of water in Egypt. A series of man-made canals directed the water to various regions. Farmers tapped into the water supplied by these canals. A farm's irrigation system may have employed a series of small, foot-activated water wheels to direct the flow. This was W. M. Thompson's suggestion in 1880. He had seen nineteenth-century Egyptian peasants use such devices. Or the verse may have referred to the farmer's moving of dirt with his foot to plug one furrow in order to direct the water into another furrow.¹ In either case, irrigating by foot was a time-consuming, labor-intensive process. Much of the farmer's labor would have been devoted to directing the precious water into the seeded soil.

This would not be a farmer's main burden in the Promised Land. In Canaan, God would bring water from the sky. From the beginning of the year to the end, God's eyes would be upon this land (v. 12). This was a clear benefit compared with Egypt, where the survival of the nation depended on the brief period each year in which the Nile flooded. This was the only source of Egypt's water and therefore its prosperity. Not so in Canaan. Under God's direct authority, the rain and the sun would nourish the land to enable it to produce its wealth.

There was another important aspect of this blessing: the reduction of administrative bureaucracy. We know that whenever ancient societies depended heavily on national irrigation systems and sophisticated technologies of flood control, they became centralized bureaucracies that were controlled by those with the astronomical and technical information necessary to plan agriculture.² Wittfogel calls these centralized civilizations *hydraulic economies*. "Time keeping and calendar making are essential for the success of all hydraulic economies. . . ."³

1. W. M. Thompson, *The Land and the Book*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1880), I, p. 22.

2. Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

He classified Egypt as a hydraulic economy.

2. *Calendars and Control*

We know that ancient Egypt possessed a sophisticated astronomical calendar that charted the stars.⁴ One specialist in the ancient world's systems of measurement has reported that the Egyptians as early as the first dynasty had measured the geography of the Nile down to minutes of both longitude and latitude, from the equator to the Mediterranean Sea. This could not have been done, he argues, without highly advanced astronomical knowledge.⁵ Egypt was the classic model of an imperial bureaucracy.⁶ It is not far-fetched to connect Egypt's bureaucracy to Egypt's dependence on a single source of water.

The land of Canaan was a very different environment from Egypt. Its source of water was the heavens. There could be no centralized control of the water supply. There was no way to gain a special advantage through knowledge of the calendar combined with knowledge of the rise and fall of a single river. The knowledge of the seasons was available to any observant farmer. Knowledge of the timing of the rain would not become the monopoly of any priestly caste. This necessarily decentralized power in Israel.

As for the calendar, the priests had to share this knowledge with the people. The three annual journeys to Jerusalem had to be timed perfectly (Ex. 23:14–17). So did the day of atonement (Lev. 16:29–30). The nation had to be told in advance when these times were so that people could plan their journeys. *The times of the year were to remain common knowledge in Israel.* The firstfruits offering had to be made at Pentecost, 50 days after Passover (Ex. 34:22; Lev. 23: 15–17). The feast of Booths or Tabernacles was linked to the harvest (Lev. 23:39–43). The Israelites understood the agricultural calendar.

The specialized knowledge of the calendar was also a major factor in priestly control over the ancient classical world.⁷ Each city had a

4. Henri Frankfort, *et al.*, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1946] 1977), p. 81.

5. Livio C. Stecchini, "Astronomical Theory and Historical Data," in *The Velikovsky Affair: The Warfare of Science and Scientism*, ed. Alfred de Grazia (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966), p. 167.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 2.

7. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Insti-*

different calendar because it had different gods and different festivals.⁸ In Greece, the Olympic games were a common festival, but different cities had different calendars.⁹ Not so in Israel. The festivals were not tribal. They were confined to one location, which later became Jerusalem. The tribes journeyed to that city. There was one God, one calendar, one series of national festivals.¹⁰

The sabbatical year of release (Deut. 15),¹¹ in which the reading of the law to the assembled nation would occur (Deut. 31:10–13),¹² had to be known to all men in Israel, including strangers. This would in turn provide knowledge of the timing of the jubilee year (Lev. 25). None of this was secret information. Knowledge of God's law and knowledge of the calendar were linked.

The tribes had possession of information regarding their boundaries. This decentralized another form of knowledge in Israel: geography. The four types of specialized knowledge by which Egyptian bureaucrats controlled the nation—astronomy, the calendar, flood cycles, and geography—were either possessed by all Israelites or were irrelevant to agriculture in Israel.

God controlled the water supply, Moses said. For as long as Israelites believed this, the priesthood could not plausibly assert power over the affairs of the nation based on their special meteorological knowledge. In fact, the opposite was true: the false religion of the priests of Ahab's reign was the cause of God's withholding of rain (I Kings 17:1). A prophet who opposed the official priesthood to the point of commanding their collective execution (I Kings 18:40) was the mediatorial source of water in Israel: an anti-bureaucratic figure if there ever was one.

B. Linear Time, Eschatological Time

Time for Israel was not cyclical; it was linear. It was linear because it was eschatological. Dozens of prophecies were tied to Israel's future. Jacob-Israel's prophecy regarding the coming of Shiloh was the main one: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from

tutions of Greece and Rome (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), III:VII:2, pp. 158–60.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

9. *Idem.*

10. Chapter 31.

11. Chapter 36.

12. Chapter 75.

between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10).

Astronomy in the ancient world produced a cyclical worldview. The priests' knowledge of the specific positioning of the heavens throughout the year was extremely sophisticated—far beyond that possessed by most educated people in modern times. The ancients knew about the wobbling of the earth's axis, although they explained this in terms of the wobbling of the heavens.¹³ They knew about the 26,000-year cycle of the pole stars. This "great year" led to a cyclical view of history.¹⁴

They did not know about the hydrologic cycle: bodies of water-evaporation-condensation-rain. They had a more direct view of rain-fall: the intervention of some deity. Moses called it "the rain of heaven." God views the land from heaven. He cares for the land. He sends the rain. The absence of rain should be seen as a covenantal curse: "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you" (Deut. 11:16–17). This warning was fulfilled under Ahab (I Kings 17).

Thus, the cycle of rain was not to be understood as a cycle in the sense of providing a model for time. Israel's agricultural cycle would be cyclical: rain, sun, harvest, and planting, but always within the framework of the three annual feasts and festivals. *These festivals were eschatological, always looking ahead toward the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom.* The rain cycle was therefore covenantal. It would be governed by the nation's obedience or disobedience to God's law.

Here was a crucial distinction between Israel and all other ancient nations: *nature was not seen as normative.* Its processes were seen as dependent on the nation's covenantal faithfulness. The operations of nature in Israel were different from its operations outside the borders of the land. The Mosaic Covenant's land laws and seed laws were unique to Israel, for they were tied to the messianic prophecies, especially the prophecy regarding Shiloh.¹⁵ Inside Israel's borders, nature

13. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An essay on myth and the future of time* (Boston: Godine, [1969] 1977).

14. Chapter 21:E

15. North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 33.

was an aspect of the special grace of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 11:13–15). Outside these borders, the common grace of the Adamic covenant applied: “. . . for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45b).¹⁶

Jacob had gone down into Egypt because the common curse of nature had impoverished him. God’s special grace had been shown to Egypt through Joseph’s ability to interpret Pharaoh’s dream. Egypt had grain for sale during the famine; Palestine did not. God did not spare Egypt from nature’s curse by interfering with nature’s processes. He spared Egypt by a special revelation in advance. God had a plan for the sons of Jacob. This plan was larger than the plans of the decision-makers. As Joseph said to his brothers, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

Egypt’s salvation in a time of famine had been based on the Pharaoh’s power to tax one-fifth of the crops of Egypt (Gen. 41:34). He had the power to place Joseph in charge of the entire operation: “And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:43). This power was derived from two sources: Egypt’s faith in the Pharaoh as a god and the priesthood’s knowledge of the cycles of the Nile. Joseph exempted the priesthood from his famine-driven purchase of the land of Egypt in the name of Pharaoh (Gen. 47:22). This indicates that the priests had been the allies of Pharaoh in maintaining Pharaoh’s power over the nation. The Mosaic law prohibited the exercise of such power by any king in Israel (Deut. 17:16–17).¹⁷ Israel’s covenant-governed hydrologic cycle reinforced this prohibition.

C. The Biblical Doctrine of Economic Growth

Because the Mosaic Covenant was eschatological, Israelites could legitimately expect long-term per capita economic growth in response to their faithfulness. The cyclical pattern of rain-sun-harvest would not become a restriction on Israel’s development. On the contrary, the covenantal basis of this cycle guaranteed compound growth in re-

16. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

17. Chapter 41.

sponse to national covenantal faithfulness. The agricultural cycle was not dominant inside Israel's borders; covenant law, its sanctions, and linear time were.

The Mosaic Covenant's positive sanction of growth—population and productivity—meant that the Israelites were not prisoners of nature. Nature is subordinate to God, and God ruled Israel by a covenant. *The Israelites could gain control over nature through national obedience.* In Egypt, the priests and perhaps other initiated specialists controlled the output of agriculture through their guild's knowledge of the calendar and the Nile's flood pattern. Salvation was by knowledge and power, not national obedience. In Israel, none of this was the case. The wealth of national Israel would be the product of ethics: the special grace of the Mosaic Covenant. Its positive economic sanctions were population growth and increased wealth per capita. The biblical model for economic growth was based on the existence of visible economic blessings as the means of covenantal confirmation. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).¹⁸

A cyclical worldview denies the long-run possibility of such positive economic sanctions. So does the modern world's zero economic growth model.¹⁹ The ancients believed that a cycle of growth would always be undermined by a cycle of decay. The cosmic age of gold was followed by ages of debased metals.²⁰ This pattern of decay was dominant in the thinking of cyclical cosmologists. The great year would repeat its cycle, and social cycles must reflect this cosmic cycle.²¹

Moses denied the existence of any cosmic cycle when he told the people that rain would come in terms of the covenant. *The Mosaic Covenant was eschatological.* Its sanctions had to be interpreted in terms of linear eschatology, not the great year. There would be only one Messiah, not an endless series of them.

The Bible's primary theme is this: *the transition from wrath to grace.* There would not be another Adam to repeat the transgression of the first Adam. On the contrary, the Messiah would be a superior Adam, a second Adam whose fulfillment of the terms of the covenant

18. Chapter 21.

19. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 55. The economist most closely associated with this worldview is E. J. Mishan.

20. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 105–200.

21. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959).

would forever replace the Adamic covenant and its tests and sanctions. The New Heavens and the New Earth would replace the present cosmic order. Yet there must be eschatological continuity between history's New Heavens and the New Earth and eternity's.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed (Isa. 65:17–20).²²

This prophesied era cannot refer to eternity, for sinners will still be dwelling among the righteous. Death will still be present among the saints, which is not a feature of the redeemed and resurrected world of eternity. So, the prophesied millennial blessing of extended life expectancy is historical. No verse in Scripture more clearly refutes the amillennial system of interpretation.²³ This is why the amillennialist theologian Archibald Hughes, in his book, *A New Heaven and New Earth* (1958),²⁴ refuses comment on this passage. He writes as though this passage did not exist, despite the fact that his book invokes its language. He commented exclusively on the New Testament's passages where this phrase occurs. He knew exactly what he was doing. He refused to discuss the historical aspects of kingdom inheritance in a book devoted to the eternal inheritance. This is the heart of amillennialism: it asserts a radical discontinuity between New Covenant history and eternity.²⁵

The Mosaic Covenant's optimistic eschatological worldview made

22. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15.

23. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 98–106, 213–14. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>) That this passage represents a crucial exegetical problem to amillennialism is recognized by David J. Engelsma, theologian of the Dutch-American Protestant Reformed Church. Engelsma, *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, California: Reformed Witness, chaps. 15–17. He is responding to my challenge in *Millennialism and Social Theory*. On Engelsma's eschatology, see Appendix I, Section C:1.

24. Archibald Hughes, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: An Introductory Study of the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Eternal Inheritance* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958).

25. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, p. 123.

possible the hope of sustained positive sanctions: *a permanent inheritance*. The Bible affirms that this covenantal inheritance cannot be dispersed or destroyed in eternity. It will begin to manifest itself in history. Over and over, the Old Testament affirms this fact:

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

This inheritance is the kingdom of God. It is a kingdom visibly manifested by its dominion in history. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar:

Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:34–35).

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure (Dan. 2:44–45).

Sustained economic growth is not only possible; it is normative. It remains an ethical obligation for every covenant-keeping society. This economic implication of the eschatology of the Mosaic Covenant was not annulled by the New Covenant. The fact that Shiloh came to fulfill the terms of the Mosaic Covenant did not annul its eschatology. On the contrary, Jesus Christ announced that His definitive fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant in history must be progressively implemented in history by His followers (Matt. 28:18–20).²⁶ We call this the Great

26. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

Commission. *Commission* is the correct word: this world-transforming task has been commissioned to us, and we are paid a very high commission: 90%. God contents Himself with a mere 10%: the tithe.²⁷ As any salesman will tell you, a 90% commission structure is a very great commission.

Conclusion

Moses told the Israelites that their inheritance in the Promised Land would be something unique: an agricultural cycle marked by covenantal sanctions, positive and negative. Their covenantal faithfulness would determine which category of sanctions they would experience. The covenant, not miracles, would soon become normative inside Israel's national boundaries.

The Mosaic Covenant's eschatological foundation would therefore govern the Mosaic economy in the broadest sense, Moses told them. Negative corporate sanctions would not become permanent; positive corporate sanctions could become permanent. Paganism's cyclical pessimism has no covenantal foundation, Moses implicitly was telling them. Covenant-keepers will inevitably inherit the earth in history. The kingdom of God is the universal kingdom in history because it is the universal kingdom in eternity. While the Old Covenant did not speak about eternity, it spoke very clearly about history. It taught that history is covenantal, not cyclical. Moses said that this fact would be seen by all Israel in the rain of heaven.

27. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

LAW, SANCTIONS, AND INHERITANCE

Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth (Deut. 11:18–21).

The theocentric focus of this law is the authority of the specially revealed law of God. The words are the law. This usage conforms to the use of the Hebrew word *dabar* (“word”) as “commandment” in Exodus 34:28: “And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.” The association of the number “ten” with “commandments” occurs only with the word *dabar*.¹

A. Mastery of the Law

The laying up of God’s words in one’s heart and soul is described here as if the words were to be written on one’s hand or written down on pieces of paper and pasted to one’s forehead. The language here is allegorical. God’s words are not literally stored up in the blood-pumping organ we call the heart. They are, however, stored away in the obedient covenant-keeper’s soul. They are to guide his actions. These words must be reinforced throughout the day by personal obedience and by teaching the next generation by word and deed.

The context of this passage is God’s law (v. 20). Obeying the laws

1. See also Deuteronomy 4:13, 10:4.

of God is to become a way of life for all men. The covenant-keeper is supposed to talk about the law from morning to night as he works beside his children. The law governs every aspect of our lives, and so we are to talk about it throughout the day. Our very conversations are to remind us of the comprehensive nature of God's law. Because God's law is comprehensive, our discussion of the law is to be comprehensive. *Every covenant-keeper is to become an expert in the law of God.* He is to think about it, discuss it, and explore its implications every day. Men are to discuss God's law daily because they are to honor it daily through obedience. Men are to use their own words to build ethical hedges around their lives. Their own words should serve as constant ethical reminders: guideposts. To argue that this law was exclusively a land law is to deny the previous sentences in this paragraph.

Yet there was a sense in which this command was a land law. The Ten Commandments were to be written down on the doorposts of every home. This was a literal requirement under the Mosaic economy. In the United States in the 1950s, families often placed a rubber doormat in front of the door that said, "welcome." Those who came in were first supposed to wipe off the dirt from the soles of their shoes by standing on the doormat and rubbing their shoes on it. Symbolically, the Israelites were to wipe off their evil behavior from their souls when they entered a home.

In modern times, Orthodox Jews seek to obey this law in a literal fashion. They place a tiny scroll of the Ten Commandments inside a small storage device called a mezuzah, which is then affixed to the front door of the home or business. The problem with their interpretation of this law is that the scroll inside a mezuzah can't be seen. The device can easily become a kind of talisman. I have seen a Jew kiss his fingers and then touch the mezuzah on leaving his business. This is thought to be a way to show respect, but the problem is that the stipulations of the law itself are not visible. This makes the mezuzah analogous to the Ark of the Covenant, where the tables of the law were stored. The idea of having the Decalogue written on the doorposts was that it could be read by all literate people who passed through the door. The same was true of all gateways. This included the gates of the city, where the judges met to decide cases. This law required that the Ten Commandments be written on the equivalent of the wall of a civil court.

Is this law still in force? The New Covenant indicates that there has been a definitive shift from external writing to internal writing. The Epistle to the Hebrews twice asserts that the New Covenant has

fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah 33:31–33: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Heb. 8:10). “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them” (Heb. 10:16). I regard this as analogous to the circumcision of the heart, which is the fulfillment of the requirement of the circumcision of the flesh. “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:29). The circumcision of the heart annulled the Old Covenant’s requirement of the circumcision of the flesh. Similarly, embedding the law of God into the heart in the New Covenant annulled the law requiring the Israelites to write the Ten Commandments on their doorposts and gates. It is not that the Israelites were not also required to place the law in their hearts. They were, as this Deuteronomic passage indicates. But this external requirement is no longer judicially binding on covenant-keepers under the New Covenant. The replacement of circumcision with baptism is the reason. *Covenantal circumcision is now exclusively inward and judicial*. So is the requirement of covenantal law-posting.

B. Enjoying the Inheritance

There is a positive sanction attached to the law governing judicial instruction: “That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth” (Deut. 11:21). Long life in the land is a universally desirable gift from God. Nobody appeared a second time before any king in the ancient world with the greeting: “O, King, live briefly.” He said, “O, King, live forever.”²

The promise of long life connects law and sanctions judicially. In this case, the connection is stated positively: teach your children God’s law, and both you and they will enjoy long life. This is an extension of the fifth commandment: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Ex. 20:12).³ Paul wrote: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for

2. I Kings 1:31; Nehemiah 2:3; Daniel 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6, 21.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1–3). There should be no question that Paul regarded the judicial link between obedience to parents and long life on earth as a New Covenant phenomenon. This means that the fifth commandment was not a land law whose visible corporate sanction was tied exclusively to the Mosaic economy in Israel. The positive sanction of long life for obedience to parents has not been annulled by the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. This implies that the positive sanction of long life for teaching one's children about God's law has also not been annulled. What has been annulled is the circumscribed geographical focus of the public reign of the original laws: the land of Israel. Covenant-keepers are no longer promised that they will live long in the land of Israel in peace and prosperity, handing down the inheritance. Paul made it clear: the promise now applies to the whole earth. The New Covenant rests on the Great Commission. The predictable sanctions of God's law now apply everywhere that the gospel is preached and the covenant is affirmed corporately. *This is what it means to disciple the nations*. They are brought under the discipline—the sanctions—of God's covenant.

This is extremely significant for the development of Christian social theory. *The covenantal link between God's Bible-revealed law and His predictable corporate sanctions in history has not been broken by the advent of the New Covenant*. In the case of Deuteronomy 11:21, the connection was rigorously covenantal: (1) God has given His people the land (transcendence); (2) parents teach children (hierarchy); (3) God's law is put into the heart (ethics); (4) Israelites can live long in the land sworn by God to the fathers (oath); (5) their children can also live long in the land (succession).

C. Inheritance and Disinheritance

The land would be someone's inheritance, either Israel's or the Canaanites'. The alternative was for the land to return to the beasts, which God would not allow (Ex. 23:29). Mankind, not the beasts, is to exercise dominion over nature (Gen. 1:26;⁴ 9:1–3⁵). The conservationist rhetoric about the sacred wilderness rests on bad theology. For Is-

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

rael to inherit, the Canaanites would have to be disinherited. This is the model for eschatology: *the expansion of God's kingdom in history must come at the expense of Satan's kingdom*. To argue otherwise is to argue that Satan's visible kingdom must expand at the expense of God's, which is exactly what amillennialists argue, and dispensational premillennialists also argue regarding the "Church Age."

1. Confidence and Fear

At the final judgment, Satan and his covenantal subordinates will be totally disinherited (Rev. 20:10). Covenant-keepers will then openly inherit the whole earth, and both it and they will be relieved of the burden of sin and its curses (Rev. 21).⁶ The conquest of Canaan was a type of the final judgment. What would be the basis of Israel's inheritance? Judicially, it would be obedience: the covenantally representative obedience of the coming Messiah (Isa. 53). But obedience was not the whole story; it never is. Sanctions are attached to God's law. The sanctions in this case would be confidence (positive) and fear (negative).

For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you (Deut. 11:22–25).

The Israelites were supposed to have confidence in God as totally sovereign over history. Next, they were supposed to trust Moses' words as representing God. Third, they were supposed to trust God's law. Fourth, they were supposed to trust God's prophecy of the fear which He would place in the hearts of the Canaanites. Obedience to God's law was the key. Their obedience would prove their faith in God and Moses' words in God's name. If they obeyed God's law, they would

6. This final conquest over sin is denied by the heretical position known by its defenders as "full preterism." This is the preterism presented in the obscure nineteenth-century book, *The Parousia*, by J. Stuart Russell. For my critique of Russell, see Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012). Appendix.

inevitably inherit the Promised Land.

2. Ethics

The crucial theological point here is that *inheritance is fundamentally ethical*. Obedience to God's law is the inescapable component of inheritance. Faith in God is important, but faith without works is dead faith (James 2:17–20). It does not count. It is analogous to someone who believes that the stock market will rise, but who then refuses to invest his money in terms of what he believes. He refuses to "put his money where his mouth is." He does not participate in the rise. His accurate forecast haunts him after it turns out to be true. This, too, is a model for eschatology. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19–21).⁷ The person who views the inheritance as ultimately eschatological must see to it that he structures his life in terms of the covenantal stipulations governing this inheritance. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26).⁸

The Israelites would not be allowed to claim this victory without risk, nor would they possess it overnight. "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Ex. 23:29–30). (There is nothing sacred about wilderness areas. They are merely as-yet undomesticated regions, like the garden of Eden prior to Adam.) The promise to Abraham regarding the fourth generation's inheritance of the land was God's *definitive* eschatological announcement regarding the conquest (Gen. 15:16). The military conquest of Canaan would be the *progressive* fulfillment of this prophecy. The eventual displacement of the Canaanites would be the *final* aspect of this prophecy. To achieve this, the Israelites had to trust God's promises.

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

3. *Eschatology*

This is the model for biblical eschatology. The inheritance of the earth in history by God's covenant people is *definitive*, for Jesus Christ is the only lawful heir. Jesus has transferred this inheritance to His church (Matt. 28:18).⁹ This was the fulfillment of what He had told the Jews: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The process of inheritance in history is *ethical*: ever-increasing obedience to God's law, which is followed by ever-increasing positive economic sanctions that confirm the covenant. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).¹⁰ Covenant-keepers are required to *redeem* the world for God, i.e., buy it back. They are not to use military conquest or force; that was a one-time event for Israel. They must buy it back by preaching the gospel, obeying God's law, and faithfully employing the wealth that God pours down on them because of their obedience. Covenant-keepers will inherit the earth *progressively* through their obedience to God's law, their confidence in the transforming power of the gospel, their ability to meet customer demand efficiently, their biological multiplication, their tithing to the church, and their charitable service. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).¹¹

If there were no predictable corporate sanctions attached to God's Bible-revealed law, we could have no legitimate confidence in the future success of the kingdom of God in history. Our eschatological hopes would be exclusively post-mortem. But the Bible teaches that whatever takes place on earth is a down payment—an earnest—for what will take place beyond the final judgment. History points to eternity; earth points to heaven. Jesus warned Nicodemus: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" (John 3:12). At the final judgment, covenant-keepers will inherit the earth; covenant-breakers will be completely disin-

9. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

10. Chapter 21.

11. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

herited (Matt. 25:31–46). But final judgment is preceded by progressive judgment in history. *What takes place in history mirrors the final inheritance and disinheritance, so as to provide a covenantal warning in history.* There must be sufficient continuity between history and eternity to provide covenant-keepers with legitimate confidence and to provide covenant-breakers with legitimate fear. The mandated conquest of Canaan is the model for history, which in turn is the model for eternity. The failure of the Israelites to complete the conquest is not the model, for Christ's resurrection and ascension have taken place in history: the empowerment of His people.

D. Teaching One's Children

The proper method of writing the law on the heart is by instruction. Parents are to instruct their children in the details of God's Bible-revealed law throughout the day. This is good for the children and better for the parent. The parent cannot in good faith utter that famous disclaimer, "Do as I say, not as I do."¹² The law of God requires obedience. There is no legitimate escape from the stipulations of biblical law. We are to keep the whole of biblical law in our mandated quest for perfection.¹³ The child should be able to see consistency between what the parent says and does.

The children are to internalize biblical law—write it in their hearts—through hearing it and seeing their parents applying it daily by obeying it. They are to mimic their parents, and in doing so, they reinforce the law of God, which is already written on their hearts through the grace of conversion. *They are to achieve progressively what regeneration has already done for them definitively.* The progressive transition from wrath to grace involves God's preparation of the heart for the law. At the time of redemption, God creates a special place in a covenant-keeping man's conscience that is designed to house God's law. Then the covenant-keeper is supposed to work all of his life to fill up this designated area of his conscience with practical knowledge of the

12. "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1).

13. "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). "Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God" (Deut. 18:13). "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). "Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day (I Kings 8:61). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

law. As he increases his understanding of how the laws are to be applied in specific cases, he becomes a mature Christian.

Successful teachers tell us that the very process of teaching increases the teacher's understanding of the material taught. The process reinforces what the teacher knows, imbedding it in his mind. If he does not teach it, the material fades from his thinking. Like notes taken in college and never reviewed or taught, yet never thrown away, the note-taker's memory of them fades. James wrote: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [mirror]: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:22–25). Moses warned Israel not to permit the forgetfulness born of inaction. The mental notes taken in childhood must be reviewed and renewed throughout life. The very act of imparting this knowledge to children throughout the normal events of the day is a means of retaining the law and writing it in one's heart.

The Calvinist philosopher Cornelius Van Til described his early years growing up on a Dutch farm in the late nineteenth century:

Ours was not in any sense a pietistic family. There were not any great emotional outbursts on any occasion that I recall. There was much ado about making hay in the summer and about caring for the cows and sheep in the winter, but round about it all there was a deep conditioning atmosphere. Though there were no tropical showers of revivals, the relative humidity was always very high. At every meal the whole family was present. There was a closing as well as an opening prayer, and a chapter of the Bible was read each time. The Bible was read through from Genesis to Revelation. At breakfast or at dinner, as the case might be, we would hear of the New Testament, or of 'the children of Gad after their families, of Zephon and Haggi and Shuni and Ozni, of Eri and Areli.' I do not claim that I always fully understood the meaning of it all. Yet of the total effect there can be no doubt. The Bible became for me, in all its parts, in every syllable, the very Word of God. I learned that I must believe the Scripture story, and that 'faith' was a gift of God. What had happened in the past, and particularly what had happened in the past in Palestine, was of the greatest moment to me.¹⁴

14. Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (Philadelphia: Committee on Christi-

His parents understood the need of presenting the Bible to their children day by day. The children learned that the Bible was very important to their parents. It therefore became important for the children. Years later, Van Til would tell his students at Westminster Seminary that his father used to teach him and his brother as the three of them worked in the fields on their hands and knees. His brother's son Henry later followed in his uncle's footsteps to become a professor and author.¹⁵ Henry's son also became a professor and an author.¹⁶ This inheritance began in the fields, with a father teaching his sons the Bible and the catechism. The father was planting more than physical seeds as they worked.

E. The Christian School

The day came when Van Til's parents sent him to a Christian school. He remembered his vaccination decades later. "I can still feel it."¹⁷ The school was itself a form of vaccination: a vaccination against covenant-breaking. The school was an extension of his family. His parents had vowed at his baptism to instruct him in God's ways. "It was in pursuance of this vow that they sent me to a Christian grade school."¹⁸ The school taught a curriculum from the point of view of his Dutch Calvinist parents. "In short, the whole wide world that gradually opened up for me through my schooling was regarded as operating in its every aspect under the direction of the all-powerful God whose child I was through Christ. I was to learn to think God's thoughts after him in every field of endeavor."¹⁹

Sending children to a Christian school was common to conservative Dutch households in his day, and remains so. The Christian school has kept the Dutch community together in the United States, and it has kept Dutch Calvinists together in the secular, covenant-breaking Netherlands. The Christian school provides specialized education that parents are not always capable of providing. The school is based on the biblical principle of the division of labor: "Now ye are the body of

an Education, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, n.d.), pp. 5–6.

15. Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1959).

16. L. John Van Til, *Liberty of Conscience: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1972).

17. Van Til, *Why I Believe in God*, p. 6.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

19. *Idem.*

Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (I Cor. 12:27–28).²⁰

The school provides specialized instruction. This instruction replaces the father's time in the fields or wherever he works. With the vast increase in the division of labor since the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century, a father is less and less able to pass his skills to his sons. He works away from home, and his skills rarely match his sons' abilities or interests. They learn their morality from him, but not their occupations.

In the eighteenth century and earlier, wealthy families hired tutors for their own children. The wealthy in England have for two centuries sent their sons to boarding schools in order to separate them from their families. This is also done by the wealthiest old families in the United States.²¹ *Separating young sons from their families is a rite of passage into the elite of both societies.* This transfers influence to the elite prep schools and then a handful of elite universities. The less wealthy have had to settle for a classroom setting: more students per instructor and therefore a lower cost per family.

Education today is overwhelmingly formalized. From age five through graduate school (age 30?), the student is educated in the classroom. Formal education is tied to the printed word. Apprenticeship one-on-one with a master craftsman has been replaced by classroom bureaucracy and written examinations. People who are skilled at taking written examinations, but unskilled in making a living in a competitive market, teach children about how to make a living in a competitive market or, more likely, how to be successful in bureaucratic careers. The teachers in both systems reproduce themselves: craftsmen (few) or bureaucrats (many).

The modern state seeks to steal the legacy of the faithful: the hearts and minds of their children. The educational bureaucrats today have imposed a massive system of *ideological kidnapping* on the voters. This is the inherent nature of all compulsory education, regulated education, and tax-funded education. Education is not neutral. The bureaucrats have built a gigantic system of humanist indoctrina-

20. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians* 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

21. Nelson Aldrich, Jr., *Old Money: The Mythology of America's Upper Class* (New York: Knopf, 1988), pp. 144–58.

tion with funds extracted from all local residents in the name of a hypothetical, religiously common-ground education. This justification has always been a covenant-breaking lie, from Unitarian Horace Mann's public schools in Massachusetts in the 1830s until today.²² From the late nineteenth century until today, leading American educators have been forthright in their public pronouncements of their agenda. This agenda is deeply religious. John Dewey, the "father" of progressive education, dedicated humanist, and philosopher stated his position plainly: "Our schools, in bringing together those of different nationalities, languages, traditions, and creeds, in assimilating them together upon the basis of what is common and public in endeavor and achievement, are performing an infinitely significant religious work."²³ More than this: "In such a dim, blind, but effective way the American people is conscious that its schools serve best the cause of religion in serving the cause of social unification. . . ."²⁴

Conclusion

Moses gave Israel a command and a promise: law and sanctions. He told them to mark their dwelling places by the law of God. He told them to teach their children the law. In doing this, they would hide the law in their hearts (Ps. 119:11). If they did this, Moses said, they would be visibly blessed with large families. They would enjoy "the days of heaven upon the earth" (Deut. 11:21).

The covenantal link between obedience and visible sanctions was basic to this passage. The inheritance was defined in terms of heirs and their possession of land. Paul wrote that the same link still operates under the New Covenant (Eph. 6:1–3). There is no way covenantally to break the link uniting law-keeping, positive sanctions, and inheritance, any more than there is a way to break the link uniting law-breaking, disobedience, and disinheritance. These links make possible the development of biblical social theory. Being possible, the development of an explicitly biblical social theory is a covenantal mandate, part of the

22. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963).

23. John Dewey, "Religion and Our Schools," *Hibbert Journal* (July 1908); reprinted in *Education Today*, edited by Joseph Ratner (New York: Putnam's, 1940), p. 80. This document is reprinted photographically in David Noebel, *et al.*, *Clergy in the Classroom: The Religion of Secular Humanism* (Manitou Springs, Colorado: Summit Press, 1995), p. 19. Many other statements like Dewey's appear in this highly revealing book.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81; in Noebel, *ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

dominion covenant itself.

Because Christian theologians for nineteen centuries have ignored or even denied the existence of these judicial links in the New Covenant era, the church has not been able to develop an explicitly biblical social theory. The result is today's Babylonian captivity of the church. Like the Hebrews during the original Babylonian captivity, most Christians prefer ghetto life outside the Promised Land to the rigors of a life of rebuilding the nation's broken wall and the crumbling homes of their forefathers. Only a remnant has decided to return. This remnant has yet to build up the high walls of Jerusalem. Its members are laying the marker stones, however. This work is necessary before the serious work of reconstruction begins.

One of the reasons why the idea of the God-mandated task of Christian reconstruction suffered a three-century hiatus, from the late seventeenth century to the late twentieth century, was the almost universal hostility of the church to the suggestion that the Bible-revealed laws of God are part of an integrated system that is still binding on society. Christians generally give lip service to the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20), yet they ignore the Decalogue's unity with the case laws that followed (Ex. 21–23).²⁵ Few modern Christian scholars have understood that the case laws of Exodus were applications of the judicial principles set forth in the Decalogue. Rushdoony did, and his *Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973) marked the awakening from the slumber that had overtaken Christian moral theorists since 1673: the publication of Richard Baxter's *A Christian Directory*. The demise of Protestant casuistry by 1700 left Protestants without revelational guidelines for civic morality. The case-law specifics that illustrate the Ten Commandments faded from most Protestants' memories.

The rise of biblical higher criticism in mid-seventeenth England came as a response to the Puritans' affirmation of biblical law as a guide for society, including civil government. Critics of the authority of the Old Testament argued that the Old Testament is a literary work, not a valid source of universally binding judicial standards.²⁶ This intellectual development paralleled and encouraged the rise of the Enlightenment, which sought to sever both natural science and social theory from biblical judicial standards.

25. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

26. Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, [1980] 1984; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

The attitude of the higher critics toward the Mosaic law had been in the church from the early centuries. In this sense, Anglo-American Puritanism represented a break with church history. The higher critics provided a new justification for the long hostility of Christians toward the Mosaic law: the unreliability of the texts of the Old Testament rather than the annulment of the Mosaic law by the New Testament. This explanation was not welcomed by Anglo-American mainline churches until after 1874, when Old Testament higher criticism was imported from Germany and promoted by university scholars. Yet the critics' hostile attitude toward biblical law had prevailed in Anglo-American churches for almost two centuries by 1875. The Enlightenment's humanists had made common cause with the church's moral theologians in affirming natural law and natural reason as the sources of valid standards for science and social theory. This informal operational alliance still exists, despite the almost universal collapse of faith in natural law theory among humanists as a result of Darwinism's attack on any concept of permanently binding laws in a world of changing environments and evolving species.²⁷

Critics of biblical law have recognized that biblical law is an integrated system. *First*, biblical law relies on the presupposition that God rules over the universe: theocracy ("God rules"). *Second*, there are parallel hierarchical systems of law-enforcement in church, state, and family. Christians generally accept the principle of theonomy with respect to churches and families, but they reject it with respect to civil government. This rejection has been basic to the humanist-pietist alliance, which is now breaking down because humanists are systematically using the state to encroach on the Christian family and the church in the name of common-ground principles of morality and law that have precedence over biblical family law and biblical church law. *Third*, biblical law is revelational, which implies that non-biblical law-orders are invalid in God's eyes. This challenges natural law theory and all forms of political pluralism. This is an affront to the Enlightenment, whose principles most Christians have adopted with respect to civil government. *Fourth*, biblical law and biblical sanctions are a unity. This means that there really is hell, which is the Enlightenment's most hated concept. The unbreakable unity of God's law and God's sanctions also implies that civil governments should impose the Bible's mandated civil sanctions. This suggestion is an affront to all human-

27. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix A.

ists. Such a view of civil law points to the final judgment and therefore God's sovereignty over man: a down payment (earnest) in history of eternity. Biblical civil sanctions are therefore rejected by all humanists and most Christians, who have adopted Enlightenment social and political theories in the name of a socially responsible Christianity. *Fifth*, God's sanctions in history produce predictable winners (covenant-keepers) and losers (covenant-breakers) in history. This in turn points to the triumph of Christendom in history. In short, such a system of sanctions-based social and cultural inheritance is inherently postmillennial. Eschatologically, this suggestion is unacceptable to pessimillennial Christians, whose name is legion.

The result is the Babylonian captivity of the church. Unlike the original Babylonian captivity, captives today rejoice in their chains. They call this system of officially neutral political pluralism *freedom*. They seem genuinely surprised when their humanistic captors continually shorten the chains and tighten the bands.

End of Volume 1

INHERITANCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY

VOLUME 2

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INHERITANCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY

VOLUME 2

GARY NORTH

**Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on
Deuteronomy**
Volume 2

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COMMON GRACE AND LEGITIMATE INHERITANCE

These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall over throw their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place (Deut. 12:1–3).

The theocentric focus of this law is the illegitimacy of all other forms of worship. The passage is preceded by a call to obedience: “And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day” (Deut. 11:32).

A. Illegitimate Gods

In the case of the gods of Canaan, illegitimacy meant illegality. To destroy the name of every god of Canaan was a morally mandatory act on the part of the Israelites. There was no neutrality possible. There also was no possibility of a nameless God in Israel. Either God’s name would be destroyed inside the boundaries of Israel or else the Canaanite gods’ names would be destroyed. God made it clear: their idols had to be smashed. As with their idols, so with their names: total elimination. “. . . make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth” (Ex. 23:13b). This was a land law.¹ It is no longer in force. It had to do with the destruction of Canaanite civilization and the theology of the ancient world: Canaan’s gods as local deities tied to the land.

1. On land laws, see Appendix J.

God refused to accept equality with other deities. This is as true under the New Covenant as it was in the Old. “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:22–23). The Athenians had added an unidentified god to their pantheon of deities just to make sure some unacknowledged god would not bring negative sanctions against them because they had ignored him. The God of the Bible was being treated by Athens as if He were one of these nameless gods. But the God of the Bible cannot be placated with an altar to no god in particular, or with any altar at all. Paul announced: “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24–25). An occasional public sacrifice does not impress Him. He is the Creator God. What God demands is the sacrifice of every person’s life, in every area of his life. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). God calls all men to devote the whole of their lives.² This has to include civil affairs. But the modern church rejects this conclusion.

B. Smashing Idols

The conquest of Canaan was a military action. The Canaanites were to be completely destroyed (Deut. 7:1–5).³ After the destruction of Canaan, only the Amalekites deserved total destruction, because of the evil they had shown to Israel during Israel’s wilderness wandering. God had established a covenant of total destruction with Israel against Amalek: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 9.

3. Chapter 16.

generation to generation” (Ex. 17:14–16). Samuel reminded Saul of this covenant: “Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (I Sam. 15:1–3). Saul lost his kingship for showing mercy to Amalek’s king and also for allowing the Israelites to keep Amalek’s domesticated animals as spoils.⁴ Samuel hacked Agag to pieces in order to demonstrate God’s covenant of total destruction (I Sam. 15:33). This was an extension of a pre-conquest covenant of destruction. After Canaan was captured, no new war of annihilation was valid (Deut. 20:10–18).⁵

That the annihilation of Canaan was to be a one-time event is seen in the jubilee inheritance law. Every half century, ownership of every piece of rural land reverted back to the heirs of the families of the conquest generation (Lev. 25:13).⁶ But after Israel’s return from the exile, the jubilee law was to be altered. “And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 47:21–23).⁷ Non-Israelites were not to be driven out, nor were they to be disinherited. Why not? Because the gods of Canaan by then had been annihilated in the hearts of men.

4. “But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly. Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments” (I Sam. 15:9–10).

5. Chapter 47.

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

7. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

C. God, Stars, and History

The ancient world believed that to defeat a city was to defeat that city's god or gods. To the degree that a conquering army spared the lives of the citizens of a defeated city, to that extent was mercy granted by the conquerors' god to the losers' god. To build an empire, a conquering nation either had to remove the citizens of a defeated city and replace them with people who worshipped the empire's gods, or else the empire had to incorporate the defeated city's gods into the pantheon of the empire. Where no provision for such incorporation existed theologically in the culture of the victor, the victor had to annihilate or completely dispossess the losers. This meant destroying all traces of their gods.

It was assumed that the gods of the two armies battled each other. In other words, what took place on the battlefield was matched by a conflict in heaven.⁸ If there was conflict on the battlefield, there had to be conflict in heaven. There was no cosmic unity in paganism's nature; there was no absolute God who controlled what comes to pass in history. "On first looking upon the external world, man pictured it to himself as a sort of confused republic, where rival forces made war upon each other."⁹ Two ways to conceive of unity in the cosmos, through impersonal forces, are by fate and astrology. The belief that the heavens above are related to events on the earth below is the theoretical basis of astrology, a common belief in the ancient world and even today.

The ancient world believed that the heavens were related to earthly history. Immanuel Velikovsky went so far as to argue that the Greek myth that Athena was born out of Zeus' forehead had its origin in the fact that the planet Venus was born in historical times: a spin-off (literally) of the planet Jupiter. Venus was originally a comet, he said, and it caused the events of the exodus.¹⁰ While I do not think he was correct—God did not use Venus to bring the plagues of the exodus on Egypt—there is no doubt that the heavens and the gods were closely associated in ancient thought. This includes biblical thought. "The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the

8. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book III, Chapter XV, pp. 205–6.

9. *Ibid.*, III:II, p. 121.

10. Immanuel Velikovsky, *Worlds in Collision* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1950), p. 172.

waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera" (Jud. 5:19–20). This is not to be interpreted literally; these words appear in Deborah's song. Songs are exercises in symbolism.

There is a biblical analogy between stars and earthly affairs. The king of Babylon was described with an angelic-heavenly analogy: a star-angel who sought to surpass God's other star-angels. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:12–14). (Lucifer was the morning star in the ancient world, i.e., Venus, but only when it preceded the appearance of the sun. It was called Hesperos when it followed the sun.) The host of heaven is described as stars.

And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them (Dan. 8:9–10).

And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13).

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born (Rev. 12:3–4).

Literal stars did not fall on earth, nor will they, contrary to dispensationalism's proclaimed hermeneutics of prophetic literalism.¹¹ God defeated Satan's angelic host in history because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in history. Satan and his host were cast out of heaven in the days of John's Apocalypse. In fact, the full transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant was marked by the casting down of Satan to earth. Preliminary phases of this casting down began during

11. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), pp. 45–46. Cf. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 40.

Christ's ministry. "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:17-18). The final act of Satan's heavenly disinheritance was post-crucifixion.

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. **And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony;** and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child (Rev. 12:7-13).

My point here is that the ancient world viewed reality as a supernatural realm. Men, local gods, and the heavenly orbs interacted in history. For example, the appearance of the star of Bethlehem was noted by non-Jewish star-gazers. They also understood what it meant: the birth of a long-prophesied king. They asked Herod: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matt. 2:2). With the end of the Old Covenant, these cosmic relationships ceased. The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 completed the prophecies regarding stars falling from heaven: the end of the Old Covenant order and with it, the Mosaic order, with its temple sacrifices. Prior to A.D. 70, there were good reasons to believe in connections between the heavens and the earth. These reasons were covenantal, not astrological or astronomical. Men were to acknowledge that God governs both heaven and earth. *The world is governed in terms of ethics, for God created the world.* The prophet Amos said: "Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day

dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name: That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly” (Amos 5:7–10).

D. Genocide as Deicide

The destruction of Canaan would necessarily involve the destruction of Canaan’s gods, Moses announced. A defeated army meant the defeat of that army’s gods. This was the theology of Canaan and the nations around Canaan.

This was not biblical theology. A defeat of Israel on the battlefield would be a sanction against the nation for its unrighteousness. The Israelites would be subjected militarily or carried into captivity as God’s predictable sanction against national rebellion, Moses repeatedly warned. This would not testify to God’s weakness, but to His sovereignty. The victors who thought otherwise would be punished. “For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me” (Zech. 2:8–9). Only with the transfer of the kingdom’s inheritance to a new nation, the church of Jesus Christ, would final destruction come to Old Covenant Israel. Jesus warned Israel’s leaders: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). This was an implied threat: the destruction of Israel except insofar as Israel united covenantally with this new nation in terms of the New Covenant (Rom. 11).¹²

Canaanite culture was so evil in God’s sight that it had to be destroyed. Israel would soon serve as God’s sanctions-bringer in history. There was to be no mercy shown, because the evil of Canaanite culture was too great. To show mercy to the Canaanites would be the equivalent of accepting the evils which they had practiced. It would be a grant of mercy to their gods. This is why Moses demanded the total annihilation of both men and idols. By publicly removing the Canaanites from history, God would demonstrate His wrath against evil. He had already partially done this with Egypt. This partial destruction had terrified the

12. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 8.

Canaanites, according to Rahab (Josh. 2:9–11). God had already done it completely with the Canaanite cultures beyond the Jordan: Arad and Bashan.

The gods of the land of Canaan would become a snare to Israel. The very survival of these gods would testify either to Israel's military weakness (the biblical view) or God's inability to bring to pass what He had promised to Abraham: full inheritance (Canaan's view). Such military weakness would be interpreted by Israel in terms of Canaanite theology: the partially successful defense of Canaan's old order against the new order of Israel. That is, the gods of Canaan would be seen as possessing partial sovereignty in history. The absolute sovereignty of God would be understood by covenant-breaking Israelites as a myth because of the very survival of Canaan's gods and Canaan's original residents. In short, neither mercy nor military weakness was allowed to Israel by God during this one-time conquest.

The gods of the ancient world were local gods: gods of the city or family. These gods were said to rule within certain geographical boundaries. Their power was tied to geography and to the rites practiced by their followers. Fustel wrote of classical religion, "There was nothing more sacred within the city than this altar, on which the sacred fire was always maintained."¹³ In Roman religion, a break in the fire's continuity was considered catastrophic. Any Vestal virgin who allowed Rome's sacred fire to go out in the was buried alive as a sanction.¹⁴

The perpetual fire on God's altar became central liturgically to Mosaic Israel (Lev. 6:13), but this had not been true in pre-Mosaic covenantal religion, nor would it be true during Israel's future captivity. Israel as a nation could continue to exist and even prosper without this altar, as the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity later indicated, but God did demand sacrifice inside the land, and the altar's fire was basic to this requirement. The fiery altar represented purification, as it did in all ancient religions, but *this purification was judicially representative, not magical*. It did not cleanse anything based on its heat or its transformation of the cosmos. It judicially represented God's sanction on sin. It applied to dead animals' flesh and the fruits of the field the punishment that man deserved. It did not feed God. Israel's religion was judicial religion, not magical religion.

Israel was told to break down Canaan's altars. There could be no rival sacred fire in Israel—not in the home, the city, or anywhere else.

13. Fustel, *Ancient City*, III:VI, p. 146.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

“Burn their groves with fire,” Moses said. These destructive fires were not sacred fires. They were merely military acts. It did not require a Mosaic priest to officiate at the destruction of a sacred Canaanite altar. So it would be for Israel in A.D. 70, when Roman soldiers burned the temple. No priest officiated. This fire ended the sacred character of fire in Israel.¹⁵ Judaism, a replacement religion of Old Covenant Israel,¹⁶ has no sacred fire and no burnt offerings.

E. The Spoils of War and Common Grace

The destruction of Canaan’s altars served as a representative destruction of Canaan’s culture. With the exception of Jericho, which had to be completely destroyed, the economic inheritance of Canaan became part of Israel’s inheritance. If the Israelites killed the Canaanites and smashed their implements of worship, they were entitled to the spoils of war.

This means that the products of a culture are not inherently tainted by the ethics of that culture. This fact legitimizes trade. It is neither ritually polluting nor immoral to exchange goods and services with someone who practices a rival religion. The fact that a Canaanite had created something of value as a testament to his own faith or religious premises did not pollute the item he created unless it was actually used in some cultic rite. Canaan’s sacred implements were targeted for destruction, but the common implements of life that testified to the Canaanites’ false view of the sacred became legitimate spoils of war.

This points to a theological distinction between common grace and special rebellion. The sacred groves of Canaan were in fact unholy groves, i.e., profane groves in which covenant-breakers transgressed God’s standards of righteous worship. The lawful boundaries of God’s sacred worship had been violated repeatedly in Canaan, which is why their groves were profane. That which is profane is sacred space that has been violated by a transgression.¹⁷ Special rebellion had polluted these groves so thoroughly that Israel had to smash them. But the other aspects of Canaan’s culture—orchards, houses, fields, etc.—were part of the realm of the common. They were neither sacred nor pro-

15. Jacob Neusner, *An Introduction to Judaism: A Textbook and Reader* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 157.

16. Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xi.

17. On sacred, profane, and common, see North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 6D, H.

fane. The realm of the common is analogous to the trees of Eden, except for the forbidden tree and tree of life after the Fall: open to all men without covenantal restriction. Thus, the capital of Canaan, like the capital of Egypt, could lawfully become part of Israel's inheritance.

Common grace is defined as God's unmerited gifts to men irrespective of their covenantal confessions.¹⁸ Men do not earn these gifts, nor is God required to provide these gifts by anything other than His autonomous choice. But, by His healing common grace, God enables men of many religious confessions to become productive. This productivity benefits mankind. In the final analysis, God does this for the sake of His people, who will progressively inherit the earth in history.

If the saints will not inherit in history, then the productivity and wealth of covenant-breakers are supplied by God primarily for the purpose of condemning them in eternity, as the rich man in the parable was condemned (Luke 16:19–25).¹⁹ Their very productivity will condemn them: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48b).²⁰ There would therefore be no continuity between the process of inheritance and disinheritance in history and God's declaration of final inheritance and disinheritance in eternity. The process of corporate covenantal sanctions in history would then have nothing predictable to do with the corporate sanctions in eternity: saved vs. lost.²¹ In short, the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ in history—God's positive sanctions for Christ's perfect covenant-keeping—would have nothing predictable to do with the outcome of the Great Commission in history (Matt. 28:18–20).²² This, few Christian theologians are willing to affirm explicitly, yet most of them hold such a viewpoint.

The complete disinheritance of Canaan was God's means of destroying the works of unrighteous men. But, rather than destroying their capital assets, God through Israel destroyed them and their ritual implements for worshipping their gods. Even in the unique case of

18. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

19. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

20. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

21. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

22. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

Jericho's assets, the precious metals were to go to the temple (Josh. 6:19). The special grace of God would thereby overcome the special rebellion of Jericho.

Because of the extent of the rebellion of the Canaanites, Israel could not lawfully enslave them. Canaanites were not allowed to remain inside the boundaries of the land. To have allowed this would have meant allowing the continuing presence of agents of Canaan's local deities. They would become evangelists for a false religion. Because pagan religion was expressly a religion of the land, the mere presence of Canaanites would testify falsely to the partial sovereignty of Canaan's gods. Any assertion of the partial sovereignty of any god except the Bible's God is inescapably a denial of the religion of the Bible. Thus, the presence of Canaanites inside Israel's boundaries posed too great a threat for Israel to bear safely. The Israelites would eventually interpret the mere presence of Canaanites as a partial victory of Canaan's gods over Moses' God, rather than blaming their own fears and their disobedience to God. Such a false view of God would lead to Israel's rebellion and false worship: idolatry.

The trickery of the Gibeonites overcame this rule, but they became slaves to the temple (Josh. 9:27). Individual Israelites could not profit from the trickery of Gibeon; the Levites alone did. The special grace of God overcame His declaration of genocide against Gibeon, but the priestly tribe alone profited. The Gibeonites and their labor did not become part of the common grace inheritance of individual families outside of Levi. Only Levi's burdens would be reduced.

F. Genocide and Economic Inheritance

The annihilation of Canaan's population and the destruction of Canaan's implements of worship were mandated by God in order to demonstrate His absolute sovereignty. The Canaanites had rebelled long enough. Their evil had compounded too far for God to tolerate it any longer. Their cup of iniquity was full (Gen. 15:16). In terms of the pagan theology of the ancient world, the continuing toleration of Canaan would have constituted God's incomplete victory over His rival gods, i.e., His limited sovereignty. In terms of Moses' warning, Israel's toleration of Canaanites would have meant that His people were playing the harlot, or would soon do so, with the gods of Canaan. Showing mercy to Canaanites would represent an ethical failure on Israel's part.

Genocide was required inside the boundaries of the Promised Land because the Israelites were spiritually weak. If the Canaanites remained in the land, the Israelites would be lured into the power religions of Canaan, just as they had been lured into the worship of the golden calf. Inside the land's boundaries, the Canaanites had claimed sovereignty for their local gods. This claim had to be visibly refuted by Israel's annihilation of the Canaanites. For Israel to inherit the Promised Land, the Canaanites had to be disinherited. So did the gods of Canaan and the theology of Canaan. Dominion religion had to overcome power religion by military action this one time. The spiritual vulnerability of Israel had to be offset by a complete military victory.

But such was not to be. They were too weak spiritually to impose God's negative sanctions completely. They did not totally annihilate the Canaanites. As Moses prophesied, Israel then fell into sin and idolatry. The incomplete military victory of the Book of Joshua was followed by the repeated military defeats of the Book of Judges. The Israelites imposed incomplete military sanctions against Canaan; their enemies outside the land subsequently imposed far more complete military sanctions against the Israelites. From this bondage the judges repeatedly delivered them.

This requirement of annihilation did not apply to the economic assets of Canaan, which could be claimed by the Israelites as part of their inheritance: the spoils of war. Canaan's capital was the product of false local religions, but it was also part of the general dominion covenant: mankind's mandatory subduing of the earth (Gen. 1:26).²³ The more general dominion covenant took precedence over the special rebellion of Canaan. Only those highly specialized capital goods that were expressly designed for false worship came under the ban. With the exception of the precious metals of Jericho, which were set aside for the tabernacle (Josh. 7:24), even the gold and silver implements of Canaan's worship could be claimed by the conquering Israelites, though obviously not in the form of idols. Melted down—transformed from specific to general economic uses—the precious metals of Canaanite religion could become the lawful inheritance of the Israelites. Here was another reason to burn the groves of Canaan: Israelites could lawfully confiscate any gold and silver. The common grace of God, as seen in the lawful use of Canaan's precious metals, added an incentive for the special judgment of God against the special rebellion of Canaan.

23. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

G. The Rejection of Christendom

“And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God” (vv. 3–4). The principle here is obvious: mandated negative sanctions were imposed against Canaan’s gods; none was imposed against God. To leave Canaan’s idols intact was illegal; to impose negative sanctions on God’s ritual implements was also illegal. There could be no judicial equality between God and Canaan’s deities. There was no judicial neutrality possible. *To assert the equality of Canaan’s gods with the God of the Bible was to assert a world without the jealous God of the Bible.*

1. Pluralism and Atheism

The modern West is theologically pluralistic. It has been marked by a functional atheism unknown in any previous social order. Most people say that they believe in a god of some kind. Only in the formerly Communist, former East Germany is admitted atheism as high as 60% of the population.²⁴ Operationally, however, the public institutions of the West are atheistic. The state is officially neutral religiously in the United States, and the state demands sacrifice of 40% or more of the citizenry’s income. In Western European nations, what passes for tax-funded Christianity is theological liberalism, which is humanism in clerical robes. God’s name has been publicly disenfranchised. The ideal of Christian civilization—Christendom—is ridiculed by Christians and humanists alike as theocratic oppression, “medievalism,” and “triumphalism.” Professed religious neutrality is the civil order of the day. Civil neutrality has been a myth highly useful to humanists in the early stages of their infiltration and transformation of Christian society.

The only alternative to Christian triumphalism is Christian defeatism, but “defeatism” is word avoided like the plague by the eschatological defeatists who publicly ridicule triumphalism. Conservative theological seminaries universally reject postmillennialism’s triumphalism. In this, they are joined by the humanists, who govern the present “neutral” social order. It is as if the leaders of Mosaic Israel had joined

24. Reported by Andrew Greeley, “Religion Around the World,” a joint report of the International Social Survey Program and the National Opinion Research Center. *National & International Religion Report* (May 31, 1993), p. 2.

political forces with the leaders of Canaanite society in order to create a common pluralist civil order. *This pluralist-syncretist impulse was exactly what Moses warned against.* It always means the defeat of God's people and their political subservience to His enemies.

There is no legitimate confessional neutrality. There is no permanent common confession in history between Christ and antichrist. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). *There is no middle ground between Christian social defeatism and Christian social triumphalism.* There is therefore no permanent eschatological neutrality. Eschatology cannot legitimately be dismissed as an aspect of *adiaphora*: things indifferent to the faith. But this is not believed by the vast majority of those who call themselves evangelical Christians today. In the name of both amillennialism and premillennialism, the ancient ideal of Christendom is dismissed as impossible in history and therefore illegitimate as a goal.

2. *The Kingdom of God, Sort Of*

Pessimillennialist pietists assert such incoherent judicial statements as this one: "But the Kingdom of God is a rule, not a realm." What does this mean? *It means that there is no biblically revealed civil law of God worth enforcing by the state solely on the basis of its status as biblically revealed.* The kingdom of God supposedly has neither a uniquely biblical civil law nor appropriate civil sanctions. This means that God is on permanent leave as king in history. A king with no realm is not a king; he is merely: (1) an abdicated monarch; (2) a publicly rejected monarch who used to have a realm; or (3) a would-be monarch without enough dedicated followers to enforce his claim. This means that "Thus saith the Lord!" is judicially irrelevant unless it is accompanied by "Thus saith religiously neutral common-ground logic." The god of such a confessionally neutral civil realm is self-proclaimed autonomous man. Anyone who asserts that "religious neutrality is a myth" without concluding that "political pluralism is therefore equally a myth" is suffering from self-delusion and confusion on an intellectually crippling scale.

Pessimillennialists assert a two-stage kingdom of God: today's exclusively internal, spiritual manifestation of God's kingdom—"for Christians only"—and an exclusively future comprehensive kingdom, when Jesus will come back to rule over His presently nonexistent realm. They write such things as this: "Jesus spoke about a Kingdom

that had come and a Kingdom that was still to come—one Kingdom in two stages. . . . The second stage, which will take place when Christ returns, will assert God’s rule over all the universe; His kingdom will be visible without imperfection.”²⁵ The authors are telling us in no uncertain terms that *there is no judicial, confessional, and civilizational continuity in history between the first stage and the second stage of God’s kingdom.*

In the first stage, God supposedly has no realm. His people must therefore content themselves throughout history with life in the confessional equivalent of pre-Mosaic Canaan. They live today in what is fast becoming a new Sodom, yet they seek to persuade each other that all we need to do today is to restore the social order of Ur of the Chaldees. If this blindness continues, they will eventually find themselves, as Lot found himself, crying out to Sodomites: “Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof” (Gen. 19:8). Like Lot, they naively believe their homes somehow possess a widely acknowledged immunity from social evil in today’s common-confession civil order. They think that a common-confession state will protect their rights as confessional Christians in the family and the church. But the humanist state is at war with the Christian family and the Christian church. The humanist state demands subservience by the family and the church. This was also true in the Roman Empire, which is why the war between Christianity and pagan Rome was absolute: a war to the death.

Christians today believe in the possibility of a permanent common civil confession between Christianity and humanism. In more insightful moments, modern evangelicalism prophesies a coming revival of Roman Empire-like tyranny. This was Francis Schaeffer’s point in *How Should We Then Live?* (1976). In fact, he thought that the coming “imposed order” might be worse than Rome’s. As an alternative, he called for a return to the Bible, not as a utilitarian solution to cultural problems, but as a moral requirement. “It means the acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord, and it means living under God’s revelation.” But, as a consistent premillennialist, he had never accepted the theocratic

25. Charles Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), pp. 84, 85. Colson went to jail in the late 1970s after several years of serving as President Richard Nixon’s senior political hatchet man. He wrote a book about his conversion: *Born Again*. He founded Prison Fellowship.

ideal of Christendom for the era prior to the millennium. The best that Christians can legitimately hope for, he said, is minority status. “*Such Christians do not need to be a majority in order for this influence on society to occur.*”²⁶

This made no sense, given his premillennial eschatology. His book and his film series of the same name surveyed the systematic growth of religious self-consciousness on the part of non-Christians in the West: their dedication to removing every trace of Christian influence. The film series began with a section on the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. There is no doubt as to what he privately thought must come: something far worse for the church, namely, the Great Tribulation. He was post-tribulational. But he was not willing to admit forthrightly to his film audience and to his readers that this was the underlying eschatological presupposition of his life’s work. This was why his book was not a call to explicitly Christian social action, but rather *a survey of what the church has given up*; not an explicitly biblical blueprint for social and cultural reconstruction, but rather *a cataloguing of Christendom’s surrender and hand-wringing disguised as an intellectual’s cultural critique*; not a call for the progressive establishment of God’s kingdom on earth in history, but rather *a program of religious common-ground anti-abortion politics*—yet somehow in the name of a non-utilitarian Christianity. He forthrightly denied the legitimacy of a confessional Christian nation.

In the Old Testament there was a theocracy commanded by God. In the New Testament, with the church being made up of Jews and Gen tiles, and spreading all over the known world from India to Spain in one generation, the church was its own entity. There is no New Testament basis for a linking of church and state until Christ, the King returns. The whole “Constantine mentality” from the fourth century up to our day was a mistake. Constantine, as the Roman Emperor, in 313 ended the persecution of Christians. Unfortunately, the support he gave to the church led by 381 to the enforcing of Christianity, by Theodosius I, as the official state religion. Making Christianity the official state religion opened the way for confusion up till our own day. There have been times of very good government when this interrelationship of church and state has been present. But through the centuries it has caused great confusion between loyalty to the state and loyalty to Christ, between patriotism and being a Christian.

26. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1976), p. 252.

We must not confuse the Kingdom of God with our country. To say it another way: “We should not wrap Christianity in our national flag.”²⁷

What he really meant is that *we should not wrap our nation in Christianity’s flag*. But every nation must be wrapped in some religious flag. There is no religious or ethical neutrality, after all. So, we must ask ourselves, what flag did Francis Schaeffer prefer that we wrap our nation in? He never said, but since there is no neutrality, there will always be a flag (i.e., a public symbol of political sovereignty). It flies high today in the name of neutrality, flapping over the public school system. It flies high every time a nation defaults from an explicit religion. That flag is the flag of secular humanism.

Jesus was described by Colson as a “King Without a Country.”²⁸ Yet this is hardly what Jesus announced: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). Jesus has a country: His church. This universal country is supposed to permeate every country on earth, bringing them all under covenantal subordination to Jesus Christ: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19).²⁹ One piece of evidence of such national subordination is the Trinitarian confession of the nation’s civil covenant. Because Christians have ceased to believe this, they first allowed and then promoted the substitution of other oaths and other covenants, but always in the name of a purer, higher, and more mature Christianity.

3. Kingdom Oath

The ideal of Christendom is out of favor today. Christendom is the cultural manifestation of the Trinitarian kingdom of God, a social order founded on a confession of faith in the Trinitarian God of the Bible. The rejection of the legitimacy of the visible kingdom of God—and, by implication, of the Great Commission which underlies it—is universal, even inside the churches. The universal commitment today is to political pluralism and the ideal of a religiously oath-less civil or-

27. Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1981), p. 121.

28. Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, ch. 6.

29. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

der.³⁰ But there are always oaths; the question is: To which god? The God of the Bible or some rival god?

The most popular rival god today is the state. Men must swear allegiance to the state and its constitution, not to God and His Bible, when they seek or confirm their citizenship in today's "neutral" societies. Christian evangelicals accept this arrangement as both normal and normative. Yet there has never been a single treatise written by any Bible-affirming Protestant Christian apologist for pluralism that shows how the Bible's required sanctions against false worship are consistent with political pluralism, i.e., a common civil oath. Christians speak today in defense of pluralism as if such a general treatise had been written three centuries ago, with dozens of monographs and textbooks following it through the centuries. They act as though the civil religion of political pluralism is consistent with—an extension of—the Bible. It never occurs to them that political pluralism is a form of polytheism: equal time for all religions in civil affairs, equal time for all law-orders, equal time for covenant-breakers and the gods they represent. The god of the state then is elevated to the throne of civil power. This god banishes all gods whose spokesmen do not acknowledge its sovereignty in history. Christian political pluralists' insistence on "equal time for Jesus" eventually is replaced by humanism's "no time for Jesus." The Christians' anguished cries of "Unfair!" accomplish nothing significant. Having surrendered political sovereignty to a supposedly neutral civil order, Christians find that this order is not neutral. Even so, most Christians still acquiesce in principle to the false claims of this civil order.

There is no neutrality. There can be no mutually acceptable covenant between Christ and Satan. Each insists on sovereignty. But Christ's spokesmen have, for well over three centuries, insisted that there is such a covenant in the civil realm. The result has been exactly what Moses said it would be: *the cultural displacement of biblical religion by its enemies*. First, the Trinitarians surrendered the civil confession to the unitarians. Then both groups surrendered the civil confession to the secularists. Christians now find themselves in the absurd position calling for a restoration of the long-defunct common-ground unitarian confession in the name of traditional civil liberty. The humanists laugh in derision, having long since absorbed the unitarians into their ranks. The supposedly naked public square is in fact fully clothed in the cler-

30. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

ical robes of humanism.

Conclusion

The annihilation of Canaan was to be a one-time event. Other rules of war applied to nations outside the boundaries of Canaan (Deut. 20).³¹ God did not require that the names of gods outside the land not be mentioned. The focus of God's concern was Canaan and its gods. After the exile, the inheritance pattern of the jubilee year was to be extended to gentiles living in the land at the time of Israel's return (Ezek. 47:21–23).³² The law was altered because the conditions had altered. Never again would Israel be tempted to worship the gods of Canaan, for the authority represented by those gods had been totally vanquished by the invading empires. Never again did Israel worship the gods of Canaan.

The New Testament does not authorize either genocide or a prohibition against any mention of the names of other gods. The civil issue in the New Testament is political sanctions, not military sanctions. The legitimate possession of the civil authority to declare and enforce God's Bible-revealed civil law is both necessary and sufficient for covenant-keepers: *sanctions by Trinitarian oath*. The names of other gods may be spoken. The relevant covenantal question is: Whose name do citizens invoke in the civil oath? In other words, *by whose name are civil sanctions invoked?* Here, no neutrality is possible. The quest for such neutrality is the quest for political polytheism.

31. Chapters 48, 49.

32. North, *Restoration and Dominion*, ch. 22.

31

COMMUNAL MEALS AND NATIONAL INCORPORATION

But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the first lings of your herds and of your flocks: And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee. Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; . . . (Deut. 12:5–10).

This passage has to do with boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant.¹ “But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come.” God’s name was to be placed publicly on Israelite society. He had marked out the land with His name. The basis of their maintenance of this land grant was obedience. “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.”

Here is the theocentric focus of this law: *God as the owner of Israel*. God was to become central to the life of the nation. This shared confession would unify the nation. The unity of Israel was grounded in the unity of God (Deut. 6:4). At the same time, the plurality of Israel was

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

grounded in the plural nature of God (Gen. 1:26; 11:7). This plurality was to serve as the basis of Israel's system of tribal localism and political decentralization. Israel's primary unity was confessional, ecclesiastical, and priestly. Israel, like God, was to be both one and many.

A. An Anti-Polytheistic Priestly Law

Canaan was a polytheistic culture. Israel was monotheistic, though not unitarian. God is plural in His unity. "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26a). "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language" (Gen. 11:7a). This language is dismissed by unitarians as a so-called "plural of majesty," meaning unitarian majesty. On the contrary, such language announced early and emphatically that God is plural, which is why He is majestic. The persons of the Trinity operate as the ultimate team.

The equal ultimacy of unity and plurality in the Godhead is the ontological foundation of mankind's various covenantal incorporations: the coming together of many in a display of unity. Canaanitic culture was pluralistic because it was polytheistic. There was no single place of sacrifice and ritual celebration in Canaan. The cities worshipped different gods. Canaan was not incorporated as a unitary social order. City by city, society by society, Israel captured the land. Altar by altar, the gods of Canaan fell. Canaanite society possessed no sacrificial unity. Divided, it fell.

Moses warned Israel that a new order would soon be incorporated in Canaan: unified nation, unified confession, unified celebrations. Israelites would henceforth be required to journey to a central location to eat their sacrificial meals. These common meals would mark the end of Israel's pilgrimage in the wilderness. The three feasts would be celebrated familistically and nationally, not tribally. *The dozen land-holding tribes had no covenantal function during the national feasts.* The Levites would officiate at the celebrations; the other tribes would have no role. The tribes could not become what the cities of Canaan were: separate centers of formal worship, each with its own god. This pointed clearly to *the centrality of worship* rather than the centrality of politics as the basis of national incorporation.

The great sin of Jeroboam was not his political secession from national Israel, which God imposed as a punishment on King Rehoboam for his ruthless increase in taxation (I Kings 12:14–15). Jeroboam's great sin was his creation of a new priesthood and new places of wor-

ship, which constituted idolatry (vv. 15–33). His motive was political. He interpreted Israel's unity in terms of politics. "If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah" (v. 27). This was a politician's assessment of covenantal unity. He reimposed the multiple worship centers that had prevailed in pre-Mosaic Canaan: "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan" (vv. 28–29). It was this which God had expressly prohibited: "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee" (Deut. 12:13–14). *Jeroboam abolished the Hebrews' centralized worship because he regarded politics as above worship*, whether in Jerusalem or in his newly established Northern Kingdom. His idolatry was political. This is covenant-breaking man's perpetual temptation: *to elevate politics over worship*, man's kingdom over God's kingdom.

God withered Jeroboam's hand when the new king attempted to bring sanctions against a prophet who condemned the new worship (I Kings 13:4). The king then begged the prophet to restore his hand, which he did. Then the king invited him to share a meal with him. "And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest" (vv. 8–9). *Jeroboam understood the covenantal function of a shared meal*. So did the prophet, who refused to eat what was obviously a political meal in the presence of the king. He refused to sanctify Jeroboam's political idolatry.²

2. In the United States, politicians occasionally meet with religious leaders of all faiths at "prayer breakfasts." These events are held mainly for the benefit of the politicians, who thereby deflect public criticism by those religious leaders in attendance and also by others who naively interpret these events as in some way holy. These are common grace events that solidify support for political polytheism.

B. Lawful Administrators

There would be blessings in the Promised Land, Moses said. The main blessing would be land; the secondary blessing would be peace; the tertiary blessing would be wealth. These positive sanctions were to be accompanied by sacrifice at a central place of worship. “But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD” (Deut. 12:10–11).

The required national sacrifice included a shared meal or series of shared meals. “And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maid-servants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you” (v. 12). The focus of the national celebration was familial, but the Levite, as a member of the ecclesiastical tribe, was to be invited into these family festivals. His tribe was in charge of the covenantal sacrifices; he was therefore entitled to share in the familial celebration.

We see here three blessings: land, peace, and bread.³ The land was administered by families; peace was administered by civil government; bread was administered ecclesiastically. I use the word *administered* here covenantally: an oath-bound minister of God who allocates the assets under his lawful jurisdiction. He acts as God’s steward or trustee. What is significant here is this: *bread is covenantally ecclesiastical, not familial*. Families owned the land that produced the grain that made bread-making possible, but the priestly tribe had primary claim on the bread. They were lawfully entitled to a tenth of the land’s net output (Num. 18:21).⁴ This is because they administered the sacrifices.

3. The phrase, “peace, land, bread,” is attributed by historians to Lenin in the days immediately preceding the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. I have been unable to find any document written by Lenin that indicates that he ever said it. The story was given a worldwide audience by the literary critic, Edmund Wilson, in his summary, not based on a primary source by Lenin, of Lenin’s supposed speech when he arrived at the Finland station in 1917. Wilson, *To the Finland Station* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1940] 1953), p. 470.

4. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

So, the Levites were the administrators—the representative agents—over the bread of the nation.⁵ Their God-given legal claim on a token payment marked them as the source of bread in the land. They represented God when they collected the families' tithes. They acted in God's name and on His behalf. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD" (Lev. 27:30). The land was administered by families, but the church had the fundamental legal claim over the output of the land: bread. The Levites therefore had to be invited in by families to share in the familial meals during the communal sacrifices. The Levites had first claim on these meals.

It is imperative that we understand that the Levites' legal claim to a tenth of every family's bread was not based on the social services which they provided.⁶ It was based on their lawful administration of the sacrifices. As evidence, consider the fact that they did not have to be invited in to share a family meal back home. Their lawful claim to participation in the families' meals existed only during the national festivals, which centered around the sacrificial and sacramental flame of the altar.

C. Local and National Incorporation

The Levites were spread across the nation. They lived in cities inside every tribe's jurisdiction. Israel's families were told to share their meals with "the Levite that is within your gates" (v. 12). This indicates that a local Levite journeyed to the central location alongside residents of his region. The local Levite joined with local families to share meals in a distant city. The tribal bond no longer functioned in the place of sacrifice. The national geographical bond did.

The tribes maintained a separate legal existence. They had influ-

5. Joseph served as Egypt's priest when he allocated grain and bread in Egypt. He was Egypt's administrator over bread. Joseph in effect had replaced Egypt's chief baker, who had been executed two years earlier, as Joseph had prophesied in prison (Gen. 40:22).

6. On this point, Rushdoony was dangerously wrong. He saw their claim as based on their role as providers of social services. He insisted that families administered the tithe by allocating it to the representatives they deemed God's best servants. He wrote in 1979, "What we must do is, *first*, to tithe, and, *second*, to allocate our tithe to godly agencies. Godly agencies means far more than the church." R. J. Rushdoony and Edward A. Powell, *Tithing and Dominion* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1979), p. 9. For a detailed critique of Rushdoony's ecclesiology, which centers on his view of the allocation of the tithe, see Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), Part 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnttithing>)

ence over families through the laws of landed inheritance (Lev. 25). They had influence over geography because of the same laws of inheritance. They defended their own land. This meant that civil jurisdiction—bearing the sword—was in the hands of tribal captains. In this sense, Israelite tribal law mirrored the Canaanite system. What distinguished Israel from Canaan institutionally was its common theological confession, including the mark of circumcision, and common national celebrations. First, confession: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut. 6:4). Second, there were common national celebrations, which are the focus of this passage. Common theological confession bound Israel to one God by oath. Common celebrations bound Israel to one God by eating. The celebrations imposed an economic loss: costs of making the journey and any offerings. They also involved economic gains to those who were normally not included in family celebrations: the local Levites.

The overwhelming majority of the costs associated with national incorporation were ecclesiastically imposed. The costs of the journey, the sacrificial offerings, and the shared meals were all imposed by laws regulating ecclesiastical sacrifices. Families were bound to the nation by means of theological confession and common sacrifice, which involved a journey to a common location. At the center of Israel covenantally were an implied ecclesiastical oath (circumcision), an altar, and the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tables of the law (Deut. 31:26). None of these centralizing features of Israelite society was uniquely tribal.

The incorporation of the one and the many in Israel was both confessional and ecclesiastical. Mosaic civil law was enforced primarily by tribal units of government, but neither the civil law nor its required negative sanctions had its origin in tribal civil governments. Because civil law enforcement was administered primarily by tribal governments in Mosaic Israel, this means that *the unifying forces of Mosaic Israel were not primarily civil*. The tribes were subordinate to the nation, but the nation was constituted by *theological confession* and maintained by *ecclesiastical sacrifice*. The authority of these two foundations of incorporation was affirmed economically: losses imposed by the costs of centralized worship. The tithe was paid locally to local agents of the cross-boundary national tribe: Levi. The mandated national celebrations required the participation of local Levites as guests at the family meals.

This law applied to all other holy offerings and sacrifices, which

could not be lawfully offered in the local community (Deut. 12:17–18). The Levites would always possess legal access to the family's communion meals in the city of sacrifice. "Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth" (v. 19). To refuse the Levite was to invite excommunication, and with it, the loss of citizenship.

D. Intermediary Authorities

One of the fundamental themes in Western political theory and also social theory has been the debate over the legitimacy of intermediary institutions. Conservative political theory ever since Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) has invoked local units of civil government as possessing lawful authority. At least in theory, local units of civil government are supposed to be the most important units except during a war. Radical political theory has affirmed the opposite ever since Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762). The bond that unites men is said to be their political participation in a unitary national state, which incorporates the General Will of the people. In between the national state and the individual there is no legitimate realm of independent civil authority.⁷

This debate over political theory has been paralleled in social theory. A consistent follower of Rousseau denies the legitimacy of any claim to independent authority made by non-civil, intermediary institutions generally, not just local or regional civil governments. In contrast, a consistent follower of Burke affirms superior authority of local non-civil institutions—family, church, voluntary association—over the claims of the state, especially the national state, outside of narrowly circumscribed areas of civil authority. Independent, decentralized social institutions are viewed as a necessary restraint on illegitimate state power.⁸

What no longer appears in Western thought is any suggestion that intermediary authorities possess superior authority to the individual. We can find intellectual defenses of one institution as possessing superior authority to another institution, but not superior authority to the individual, unless the institution is the state. The individual is said to possess ultimate authority in relation to all intermediary institu-

7. Robert A. Nisbet, "Rousseau and the Political Community," in Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1968), ch. 1.

8. Robert A. Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, [1986] 2002), pp. 50–66.

tions, which exist to serve individuals, not the other way around. This outlook was not true of medieval social theory, and surely not of ancient political theory, which asserted the omnipotence of the state, which men (not women) participated in through the family or other collective unit.⁹ Antiquity had no concept of the rights of the individual.¹⁰ For the Greeks, the *polis* or city-state was supreme.¹¹

It took over two centuries for the debate between Burke and Rousseau to be concluded in the West. With the unexpected, overnight, non-violent collapse of the Soviet Union in December of 1991, the ideological victors were the secular conservatives and secular nineteenth-century liberals, whose economic theories of decentralized private ownership have paralleled Burke's defense of political and social decentralization.¹² The manifest failure of the Soviet Union's central economic planning at long last persuaded the West's intellectuals of the worthlessness of Communism, both as an economic system and a political system. Nevertheless, seven decades of Communist terrorism had not persuaded most of them of the utter illegitimacy of Communism as an ideology. As long as Western intellectuals believed that Communism was making sufficient economic progress to maintain its machinery of terror, most of them refused to voice more than occasional token objections to Soviet Communism's barbarism.¹³ Many of them respected the power that such barbarism conferred on Communism's rulers. Western intellectuals believe in state power as the primary means of transforming society. This is why they abandoned respect for Communism without a blink after 1991. Stripped of their power, the Communists were stripped of their legitimacy in the humanistic West. The Western intellectuals' much-beloved Premier Gorbachev disappeared overnight, only to surface two years later as

9. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), III:XVII, pp. 219–23.

10. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, ed. Oswyn Murray (New York: St. Martins, [1872] 1999), p. 53.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–58.

12. Adam Smith and Edmund Burke respected each other's opinions. Burke had read and adopted Smith's economics, while Smith is said to have commented: "Burke is the only man I ever knew who thinks on economic subjects exactly as I do without any previous communication having passed between us." Cited in Isaac Kramnick (ed.), *Edmund Burke* (Englewood-Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 100. The same quotation appears in Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: from Burke to Santayana*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Regnery, 1954), p. 19.

13. Jean-Francois Revel, *The Flight from Truth: The Reign of Deceit in the Age of Information* (New York: Random House, [1988] 1991).

the head of a heavily endowed non-profit foundation promoting world government for the sake of ecology. This Red premier had turned into just another Green.¹⁴ He had become a Western intellectual, devoid of personal power.¹⁵ So, nobody in authority has paid much attention to him. Conservatives dismissed him as a red turned green . . . for the sake of green (dollars).

There was a reason for the intellectuals' overnight dismissal of Communism. For two centuries, all but a few of them have worshipped at the altar of pragmatic economic growth. Communism was "the god that failed" for only a handful of Western intellectuals.¹⁶ It was never a god for most of them. Economic pragmatism remains their god. This god is now seen as having brought negative corporate sanctions against the god of Communism. Western intellectuals today blandly dismiss Communism as merely a failed scientific experiment that happened to cost 100 million lives¹⁷—a noble experiment, a few of them might say in private,¹⁸ but now passé. Their pragmatic god is still on his throne in their hearts, dispensing blessings and cursings.

The Mosaic law had elements of both Burke and Rousseau. There

14. He was the political leader who had long ignored warnings from Russian engineers regarding the unsafe status of Chernobyl-type nuclear reactors, and who was in charge when the 1986 Chernobyl disaster took place. This has all been politely ignored by the Western intellectuals.

15. When he ran for president in Russia in 1996, he received so few votes that his candidacy was not statistically visible. Boris Yeltsin, his old antagonist, was elected over a Communist who no longer called himself a Communist. The ex-Communists had no further use for a loser like Gorbachev in 1996, just five years after his removal from office.

16. The phrase comes from a 1949 collection of essays by ex-Communist liberals and socialists: *The God That Failed*, edited by Richard H. Crossman. This was the only variety of anti-Communism that was taught on college campuses until the 1980s.

17. Stéphane Courtois, et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 4. This assumes that the total was 20 million deaths in the Soviet Union, which is a low estimate. It may have been 60 million.

18. Felix Somary recorded in his autobiography a discussion he had with the economist Joseph Schumpeter and the sociologist Max Weber in 1918. Schumpeter expressed happiness regarding the Russian Revolution. The USSR would be a test case for socialism. Weber warned that this would cause untold misery. Schumpeter replied: "That may well be, but it would be a good laboratory." Weber replied: "A laboratory heaped with human corpses!" Schumpeter retorted: "Every anatomy classroom is the same thing." Felix Somary, *The Raven of Zurich* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), p. 121. I am indebted to Mark Skousen for this reference. The USSR became what Schumpeter predicted, an anatomy classroom filled with corpses, but with this variation: unlike medical classrooms, the USSR killed people to gain its huge supply of corpses. So did Red China. So did Marxist Cambodia.

is no question that intermediary institutions played a major role in Mosaic civil law, for the tribal civil governments were the primary agencies of law enforcement. This was Burkean. So was the Mosaic law's devaluation of civil government when compared to family and ecclesiastical governments. The Mosaic law's system of national sacrifices and festivals was a unique mixture of familism and centralized ecclesiastical representation. Intermediary civil institutions (tribes) had no covenantal role to play in the Mosaic law's reconciliation of the one and the many through national incorporation. People participated at the national festivals either as family members or as priests. The priests had a lawful claim on the families' culinary rites of celebration: meals. Indeed, the common meal was the rite of reconciliation: between man and God, between family and priesthood. The state had no covenantal role to play here; neither did the tribe.

Conclusion

The reconciliation of the one and the many is the Trinity. This reconciliation was reflected in the communal rites of Mosaic Israel. The meals were mandated national celebrations that involved economic sacrifice. Families journeyed to a common location marked off from the rest of Israel by the presence of the altar and the Ark. Participation in the rites of celebration was secured by theological confession, which in turn was marked by circumcision. *A common theological confession* unified the nation under the Mosaic law's covenantal sanctions: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4).¹⁹ *Common meals in a common place* also unified the nation under the Mosaic law's covenantal sanctions.

The nation secured its incorporation through confession and communal eating. The church does the same. The centrality of confession and communion in Mosaic Israel should be obvious. *It was not only a civil oath that bound the nation (Ex. 19), but also an ecclesiastical oath.* The Mosaic law mandated national festivals after Israel inherited the land of Canaan. The inheritance was secured by means of negative military sanctions, but it was to be maintained by non-military sanctions. It was secured by civil action, but was to be maintained by ecclesiastical action. Israel fought in tribal units, but the nation celebrated nationally as family units that were made holy by two things: a journey to the place of the altar and the presence of Levites at family meals.

19. Chapter 15.

The national celebration imposed economic losses on families.

Enlightenment political theory has substituted civil confession for theological confession as the basis of establishing national incorporation. It has substituted voting for eating as the basis of maintaining national incorporation. From Machiavelli to Hobbes, from Locke to Madison, the message was the same: national incorporation is by civil oath alone.

What is astounding is that this Enlightenment confession is today regarded by Protestants and most Catholics as a statement of Christian principles. The enemies of Christianity have triumphed over Christianity in the civil realm because they have persuaded Christians of the illegitimacy of Trinitarian confession as the basis of national incorporation. The result has been the substitution of massive taxation for the tithe, bread and circuses for bread and wine. This is empire's familiar pattern of development, from the Roman Empire to all the other evil empires that seek to revive it. They will all perish, to be replaced in history by a common kingdom that is established by Trinitarian confession and maintained by communion meals eaten in the presence of ecclesiastical authorities. This thought is distressing news for Enlightenment political theorists and their spokesmen inside the churches and Christian college classrooms.

THE MURDEROUS GODS OF CANAAN

Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God. When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it (Deut. 12:28–31).

The theocentric focus of this law was obedience to God's Bible-revealed law. "Observe and hear all these words which I command thee." God offered a practical reason for this obedience: "that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God." Law is linked to sanctions.

Sanctions, in turn, are linked to inheritance. There is a war for the inheritance in history. Disinherited sons claim the inheritance. This war is covenantal. It involves all five points of the covenant.¹ It is a war over sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and inheritance. As such, it is at bottom ethical. The gods that men worship are reflected in the laws that men obey. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010).

Those who affirm and obey God's Bible-revealed law are identified here as the true heirs. Those who deny the authority of God's Bible-revealed law and disobey it are the false heirs.

A. Sacrificing the Future

This passage begins with a prophecy: "When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land" (v. 29). Title to their land will surely be transferred to Israel. The question facing Israel was the question of how to maintain the kingdom grant. I wrote in *Boundaries and Dominion*:

Leviticus presents the rules governing this kingdom grant from God. This land grant preceded the giving of these rules. *Grace precedes law in God's dealings with His subordinates*. We are in debt to God even before He speaks to us. The land grant was based on the original promise given to Abraham. That promise came prior to the giving of the Mosaic law.² This is why James Jordan said that the laws of Leviticus are more than legislation; the focus of the laws is not simply obedience to God, but rather on *maintaining the grant*.³ The basis of maintaining the grant was ethics, not the sacrifices. Man cannot maintain the kingdom in sin.⁴ The fundamental issue was sin, not sacrifice; ethics, not ritual.⁵

God warned them against dallying with the rituals of Canaan's gods. He warned them, "enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise" (v. 30). But the primary issue was not liturgy; it was ethics. It was the prohibition against murder. "Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods" (v. 31). The great evil of Canaan's rituals was the willful destruction of their own children in formal sacrifice: ethics (point three) encapsulated in ritual (point four).

Human sacrifice is the greatest ritual evil in history, and it was widespread prior to the spread of the Christian gospel. Classical

2. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 8. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), p. 9.

Greece and Rome both practiced human sacrifice,⁶ although history textbooks do not mention this, and even specialized historical monographs ignore it or mention it only in passing. This historical blackout is an aspect of the successful re-writing of history by humanists who rely, generation after generation, on their peers' glowing accounts of a supposedly secular classical world, an academically satisfying world in which formal religion was socially peripheral and mostly for political show. The fact that a vestal virgin was buried alive as a sanction against either her unchastity or allowing the ritual fire to go out⁷ is an historiographical inconvenience, and so it is rarely mentioned. Vesta was the sacred fire of Rome, a goddess. She was the incarnation of moral order, both in Greece and Rome.⁸ Vesta's ritual requirements had the sanction of execution attached to the virgin priestesses. *Where we find the imposition of the death penalty, we do not find a socially peripheral issue.* Centuries later, the sacrificial bloodshed of Mexico's Aztecs in the late fifteenth century reached the limits of this ritual abomination.⁹ The remarkable speed of that perverse civilization's disinheritance by the Spanish and their Indian allies, from 1519 to 1521, should give pause to the academic world, which does not take seriously covenantal cause and effect. (Modern legalized abortion more than matches the efficiency of the Aztecs' slaughter, but not as a ritual practice.)

A visible manifestation of the essence of covenant-breaking man's religion is his willful cutting off of his own legacy. This is a variation of the crime of attempted suicide—the suicide of the entire race. “But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death” (Prov. 8:36). In the name of confiscating the lawful inheritance from covenant-keepers, the covenant-breaker destroys it. He is driven by envy. In the name of securing an inheritance for his heirs, he kills his heirs. Here is a biblical example:

And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son

6. Lord Acton, “Human Sacrifice” (1863), in *Essays in Religion, Politics, and Morality*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1988), III, ch. 19.

7. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), III:VI, p. 147.

8. *Ibid.*, I:III, pp. 30–32.

9. Serge Gruzinski, *The Aztecs: Rise and Fall of an Empire* (New York: Abrams, [1987] 1992), pp. 49–56.

shall he set up the gates of it (Josh. 6:26).

In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun (I Kings 16:34).

B. Comparative Religion

God forbade the Israelites to name the names of the gods of Canaan. "And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth" (Ex. 23:13). Was this a ban against historical scholarship? Was this prohibition to be taken literally?

The language here is covenantal. Naming the name of a god was in this context an act of invocation. It was an act of worship. Calling upon a god is an act of religious subordination. To invoke the name of a god is to acknowledge formally that he brings sanctions in history. The context of Deuteronomy 12:30 was historical study for the sake of covenantal subordination: ". . . enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise." The prohibition of false worship took the form of a universal prohibition against mentioning the names of the gods of Canaan. To ignore the area of comparative religion is to ignore the possibility that *false worship can be introduced in the name of progressive reform as well as the restoration of ancient practices*. To be able to recognize a proposed progressive innovation as the restoration of an ancient abomination is an advantage. Without a knowledge of the past, it becomes more difficult for guardians of orthodoxy to defend its boundaries.

There is no doubt that the rulers of Israel spoke the names of foreign gods. "Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites" (Num. 21:29). "Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess" (Jud. 11:24). But Chemosh was not a god of Canaan. Its geographical area of sovereignty was outside the boundaries of Israel. Foreign gods did not pose the same degree of covenantal threat to Israel that the gods of Canaan did, for they were not perceived as exercising sovereignty inside the boundaries of the Promised Land. To invoke the names of foreign gods was a violation of the first command-

ment (Ex. 20:3), but for false worship to become socially significant, there had to be some basis for people to believe that cause and effect in history were influenced by the god invoked. This god had to be able to impose sanctions on behalf of those who invoked his name. Because the ancient world outside of pre-exilic Israel did not invoke the name of any finally sovereign god, the social threat to Israel came from the pre-conquest local gods of Canaan.

What about local gods? Could Israelites lawfully speak their names? I believe they could, although I am not sure that this was the case. I argue that invocation is not the same as classification. The prophet Jeremiah spoke Baal's name as part of his covenant lawsuit (Jer. 7:9; 11:13). But Baal was a god of Moab (Num. 22:41). It may be that the word, meaning "master" or "owner," was widely applied in Israel to rival gods. But as for the specific names of the gods of pre-conquest Canaan, the Bible is silent.

After the exile, there seems to have been no application of this law. The sovereignty of the pre-conquest gods of Canaan was finally destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians. The new world of empires was openly polytheistic. Many gods resided in the pantheon of each empire. The cultural threat of exclusively local gods ended forever in Israel. The threat of polytheism and syncretism still existed, but Israel's defensive position as a nation under foreign domination restricted the spread of polytheism. A polytheist in post-exilic Israel was a traitor to the nation, a collaborator with the enemy. He would have been ostracized. The threats to orthodoxy in post-exilic Israel were legalism and pagan philosophy. It was the lure of Greek philosophy and culture, with its common-confession universalism and its aestheticism, that pulled cosmopolitan Jews away from Moses.¹⁰ Meanwhile, legalists planted thickets of ritual hedges around the Mosaic law. The kernel of orthodoxy was either ground into flour and leavened with Hellenistic universalism or else smothered by the legalism of the Pharisees.

In modern times, the academic study of comparative religion has again become a threat to theological orthodoxy, not because the advocates of academic comparative religion invoke the sanctions of rival gods, but because they deny the supernatural existence of all gods. Academic comparative religion is a form of cultural relativism—in-

10. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, [1974] 1981), I, p. 313.

deed, the supreme form. It insists that the details of both theology and ritual change through time and across borders. This superficial academic polytheism is converted into implicit atheism by its universalism. Here is the supposedly universal aspect of all religion: the common man's faith in supernatural beings and forces that do not exist. The universalism of religion is the *universalism of error* in the face of either as-yet unsolved questions or as-yet rejected answers. Religion's sanctions are said to be exclusively personal and social; all of the gods invoked by their disciples are equally without power. Men, not gods, impose sanctions in history, say the advocates of academic comparative religion. All of the gods have been disinherited by rational men, we are told, save one: the god of humanity. To inherit in history—the only inheritance that supposedly matters—men must invoke the god of humanity. It is this god alone that brings predictable positive sanctions to those who invoke its name and who subordinate themselves to its representative agents: customers (economic sanctions) and voters (political sanctions). All the other natural and social forces in history are understood by humanists as impersonal.

Comparative religion in post-conquest, pre-exilic Israel posed the threat of the elevation of local gods above the God of the Bible. Comparative religion in the modern world poses the threat of the de-throning of the God of the Bible and His banishment to the common pantheon of all other gods, save one: the god of humanity. This pantheon of gods no longer occupies the acropolis on the highest hill of the city. More likely, a local television transmission tower does.

The threat of comparative religion is the threat of idolatry. Idolatry invokes gods other than the God of the Bible, gods who are believed to be the most powerful sanctions-bringers in history. Ancient comparative religion invoked local gods; modern comparative religion invokes a universal god: mankind. The issue of sanctions in history necessarily raises the issue of inheritance in history. To inherit, men must ally themselves to the god who really does bring sanctions in history.

Conclusion

God told Moses that He would disinherit the gods of Canaan. He would do so by enabling the Israelites to disinherit the Canaanites. But He warned them not to worship the gods of defeated Canaan.

While the ancient world believed that the gods of a city that had lost a war were defeated along with the city's army, the fact is that the

Israelites were sorely tempted to worship the gods of Canaan, despite Israel's victory over Canaanite cities. Moses warned that the presence of a remnant of surviving Canaanites would be interpreted by Israel as though the gods of Canaan had overcome the God of the Bible, despite the fact that Israel had overthrown the idols of Canaan. Despite the fact that the losers had lost, the Israelites were tempted to worship the losers' gods. The losers became the winners in Mosaic Israel. Foreign agents had to destroy the remnants of Canaan's gods: Assyria and Babylon. These conquerors served as God's rod of discipline. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation" (Isa. 10:5).

Israel's military defeat of Canaan should have meant the defeat of Canaan's gods. Only because Israel was ethically rebellious did traces of Canaan's old culture and old theology survive. These remnants of evil then served as evil leaven, just as Moses had warned. Only after the second defeat of Canaan's gods, as a result of the defeat of Israel by Assyria and Babylon, were the gods of Canaan finally disinherited. Israel had to be temporarily disinherited in order for Canaan's gods to be permanently disinherited.

THE LURE OF MAGIC: SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee (Deut. 13:1–5).

The theocentric framework of this law is the love of God. The test of covenant-keepers' love of God is their willingness to obey God's law. "Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice." The test is ethics.

A. The Mosaic Prophet's Judicial Role

Proper worship necessitates obedience to God's revealed law, Moses said. Worship, like wisdom, begins with the fear of God. Once again, Moses warned Israel to obey God's commandments. This is the continuing ethical theme of the Book of Deuteronomy, which constituted the second giving of the law. The point of this obedience, given the position of Deuteronomy as book five of the Pentateuch, is inheritance. *Covenant-keeping was the basis for maintaining the national inheritance.* It still is, but to affirm this is to break with modernism in its

broadest interpretation.

This was a civil law because it mandated a penalty that could only be lawfully enforced by the civil government: execution. God tested Israel's love of Him by seeing whether the civil authorities would execute any prophet who came publicly in the name of another god. If they did execute him, the nation proved its love for God. If they refused, the nation did not love God. This was a cut-and-dried test.

This passage dealt with those people who claimed to be prophets. A prophet had a specific judicial function in Mosaic Israel: to declare to a God-designated audience God's direct revelation regarding the future. God would test their corporate faith by evaluating their behavior in response to the prophet's challenge. The biblical prophet delivered a *covenant lawsuit* against someone or against some group. If the listeners did not repent, the prophet warned, God would bring negative corporate sanctions against them. Sometimes the prophet's message was repentance.¹ Jonah's covenant-lawsuit against Nineveh is a representative example: "Repent or else be destroyed within forty days." Publicly, Jonah prophesied destruction only, but the possibility of their corporate repentance, and therefore their avoidance of negative corporate sanctions, had been implicit from the beginning (Jonah 4:2). Sometimes, however, the prophet's role was limited to provoking a confrontation prior to God's imposition of negative corporate sanctions. Elijah's confrontation with Ahab prior to the drought is representative (I Kings 17:1–5).

The prophet was usually outside the priestly hierarchy. He was rarely a member of the priestly tribe of Levi. Samuel, for example, was an Ephraimite (I Sam. 1:1).² Samuel anointed Saul, and he later announced God's sanction against Saul (I Sam. 15:28). The prophet at times announced that the nation was not obeying the law of God. He demanded in God's name that the existing legal order and the nation's dominant social practices be abandoned. This implied that his God-given authority was superior to that of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. In the name of God's law, the prophet demanded the scrapping of the existing legal and social order.

The listeners' obvious response was: "Who are you to say?" When a man came before the nation in the name of the true God and His Bible-revealed law, he was inescapably a revolutionary in the eyes of a

1. Not always, however: Moses' prophetic role was not intended to gain Pharaoh's repentance. See below: section C, "Something for Nothing."

2. If Eli adopted him, which is possible, then Samuel was a member of Levi.

covenant-breaking Establishment. The covenantal question then arose: "In God's eyes, who is the *authorized representative* of the nation's God-sanctioned Establishment?" A related question arose: "What *evidence* does this man present which testifies to his office as a prophet?" This was what the fiery competition on Mt. Carmel between Elijah and the court prophets was all about (1 Kings 18). This was a case of competing claims by competing prophets: 850 (v. 19) to one. Which prophet possessed the final authority to command the execution of the rival? Elijah issued this challenge. "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). He demanded that the representatives of the nation decide. He ignored King Ahab altogether because the king possessed no authority to decide. He appealed directly to representatives of the tribes.

When the king's prophets lost the competition, thereby identifying their judicial status as false prophets, Elijah commanded the civil representatives of the nation kill them all, which they did (1 Kings 18:40). This was in accord with Deuteronomy 13:1–4. Yet Elijah was not a civil magistrate. No civil court had convicted these men. Nevertheless, under the Mosaic law, he possessed the lawful authority to command this public execution by representatives of the nation.

A prophet may have been able perform signs and wonders. He may even have predicted the future accurately. His possession of supernatural abilities—outside the normal space-time continuum—testified in part to his special legal status. This was partial evidence of his special relationship with God, but it was not sufficient to prove his claim of God-given authority. *Far more important than signs and wonders was his theological orthodoxy.* A true prophet had to come in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It did not matter what signs and wonders he performed if he came in the name of another god. His signs and wonders might be deceptions, or they might even be authentically supernatural, but his message was itself a deception. No god other than the Bible's God could be lawfully worshipped publicly inside the borders of Israel. The prophet's ability to perform signs and wonders—below-cost shortcuts in the normal space-time continuum—had to be accompanied by orthodox theological confession. *The differentiating mark between magic and prophecy was theological confession.*

The law governing prophets was valid for as long as the office of

prophet existed and as long as Israel possessed civil authority in the land. The office of prophet no longer exists. Neither does Mosaic Israel. The office ended with the Old Covenant in A.D. 70. So did Mosaic Israel. No one today possesses the God-given authority to announce to ordained church officers and civil officers that the judgment of God will fall on society or his audience if they do not obey his words. No private citizen can lawfully command the execution of 850 other men. A prophet who does not in principle possess the God-given authority to command the public execution of rebellious men is no prophet. Such authority was basic to the office of Mosaic prophet.

Some charismatics and Pentecostals assert that the office of prophet still exists. I have yet to read any theological defense by them of their position, which would have to prove the following: (1) the prophet offers a covenant lawsuit against men, including civil magistrates; (2) if the authorities disobey the prophet, God will impose specific negative sanctions against them and all those under their authority, and these sanctions are announced in advance by the prophet; (3) the capital civil sanction against false prophecy, which itself enforced Old Covenant prophecy, is still in force.

B. Boundaries and Prophecy

Men are creatures before God. They are under His authority. They are also under the constraints of the creation. They are not originally creative. They are re-creative as subordinates who are made in God's image.

1. Making Improvements

It is legitimate for men to re-work the creation by means of their knowledge of the laws governing the creation. Adam was told by God to dress the garden (Gen. 2:15). This means that God told Adam to re-work the creation. Adam was told to improve his environment. The world was originally created good, but Adam possessed the power and the lawful authority to make it better. He also had the responsibility to make it better. But he could lawfully exercise this authority only as a creature who acknowledged his limitations. He was required by God to acknowledge by his actions his belief in his own creaturehood and his subordination to God. He was not allowed to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He understood this, and he told Eve. She represented Adam, who in turn represented God. She spoke a proph-

etic word to the serpent: "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen. 3:3). She added a new element, a kind of hedge: not touching the fruit. God had told Adam only not to eat it. Then she violated her own prophetic word. So did Adam. God then brought a covenant lawsuit against the serpent, Eve, and Adam, in the order of their rebellion, *from lower to higher*, in terms of His original prophetic word to Adam.

Prophecy concerned ethical boundaries: violate them, God warned, and predictable negative sanctions will come. Some of these sanctions will come predictably in history; all will come predictably in eternity. The prophet's job was to warn his audience of the adverse consequences of breaking God's covenant. The boundaries were enforced by God. Violate His ethical boundaries, and you will experience unpleasant consequences, the prophet warned. These ethical boundaries were testified to by the prophet's ability to overcome creational boundaries, some times called laws of nature. The Old Covenant prophet was empowered by God to escape these conventional limits because this ability testified to his authority in announcing both the ethical boundaries and the predictability of their attached sanctions. Violating the laws of nature was the prophet's means of calling a halt to the nation's violation of the laws of God.

2. Boundaries and Magic

To acknowledge the lawful boundaries that God has placed around man is to worship God by obeying Him. We are not to pursue our goals by means of magic. What is magic? It is any attempt to invoke any supernatural authority other than the God of the Bible, asking this force to alter man's environment by means of causation that is beyond temporal cause and effect. Magic is a method of calling on supernatural personal forces to alter the normal processes of either nature or history. Without supernatural intervention, man's ritual manipulations and invocations are powerless. A voodoo doll is a powerless implement of magical incantation apart from demonic intervention.

The element of repeatability is missing in magic because the supernatural cause is sometimes absent or powerless or obstinate. The supernatural cause of the sought-for outcome is not predictably present in the way that the ordinary means of temporal causation are predictably present. The personal "catalyst" that makes possible the

magical series of events is invoked, not employed. It is a conscious servant or accomplice, not an unconscious tool.

A prophet might seek to affirm his judicial office by altering nature at a distance or by forecasting events. If Israelites who were skilled craftsmen in this particular manipulation of nature or skilled forecasters of historical trends could not replicate his performance in a statistically significant number of cases, the self-proclaimed prophet did not thereby validate his office. He may have been a prophet, or he may have been a clever trickster, or he may have been a magician. The judicially compulsory evidence of his office as prophet was his verbal orthodoxy. The crucial test of his office was not his performance of signs and wonders; it was his confession of faith.

Modern science officially rejects the possibility of causation at a distance in the absence of some physical connection, with one gigantic exception—gravity³—and many very tiny ones: subatomic physics (the quantum). Science rejects the suggestion that demons and angels intervene in history. It also rejects the ability of God to do this. It denies that any such God exists. It asserts the autonomy of the cosmos. Modern scientific man is therefore a fool (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).

3. *Idolatry*

Herbert Schlossberg argued that there are two pagan idols: nature and history.⁴ The quest for signs and wonders is a mark of these two idols. Schlossberg said that all social idols are idols of history. This would seem to include philosophy.⁵ Historically, after the Israelites returned from the captivity, they ceased to worship the idols of Canaan. Simultaneously, philosophy arose in Greece and spread across the Mediterranean world. Hellenism became the preferred idol of choice among socially cultured Israelites until the fall of Jerusalem. Pharisaic legalism, which also arose in the post-exilic era, was a domestic theological error.⁶ Legalism was defended in the name of Israel's God. Hellenism was defended in terms of a universal wisdom that transcended

3. The theory of interplanetary ether was nineteenth-century science's attempt to escape the concept of mass attracting at a distance in a vacuum.

4. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

5. There is a sense in which autonomous man regards philosophy as the mediating factor between nature and history.

6. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, [1974] 1981), I, p. 313.

divisive supernatural revelation.

The primary covenantal issue of idolatry is transcendence. Something or someone is proclaimed as superior to God. In operation, this issue becomes ethical. An idol is any representative manifestation in history (point two) of a law-order that substitutes for God's (point three). Moses made it plain in Deuteronomy, over and over, that *obedience to God's commandments is the visible test of one's confessional orthodoxy*. A man who would subsequently call on Israelites to disobey these commandments, Moses said, was to be regarded as a fool. If he also named the name of another god, he was to be executed. "And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee" (Deut. 13:5).

C. Something for Nothing

For a man to escape the limits of temporal creation means that he can gain something for what appears to be nothing. By subordinating himself to supernatural powers that are forbidden by God, a man can sometimes escape the limits of temporal cause and effect. This ability to go beyond commonly repeatable causation offers to some initiates of occultism the possibility of gaining wealth, power, and influence over others. This lure is powerful. Men are impressed with magic, which seems to offer them access to a below-cost realm of human action, a realm that is in some unstated way connected to the realm of conventional causation.

The text indicates that signs and wonders were possible in the Old Covenant world. Moses himself had been in a battle of signs and wonders when he and Aaron challenged the priests of Egypt. The test was the test of the snakes. Moses' snakes ate the Egyptians' snakes. But the test decided nothing, for Pharaoh's heart was hardened. The visible test of the comparative signs and wonders did not persuade him (Ex. 7:10–14).

The message of the Bible is that while power is persuasive, orthodox confession is inherently more powerful. Moses' confession of faith through Aaron (Ex. 7:2) was more powerful than Pharaoh's confession of faith, and this was demonstrated by the victory of Aaron's serpents

(Ex. 7:12).⁷ Moses' confession did not change Pharaoh's mind, because the power of God in hardening Pharaoh's heart was more powerful than the persuasive power of the signs and wonders. God deliberately kept Pharaoh from changing his mind and therefore from changing his confession—an explanation that is rejected by all Arminians. But Arminians cannot escape Paul's words: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:14–18). The absolute sovereignty of God with respect to salvation is manifested in history by His absolute sovereignty over every man's confession. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whitherso ever he will" (Prov. 21:1).

Moses, in his office as a prophet (Deut. 34:10), was not sent by God in order to change Pharaoh's mind. He was sent to provide God with an occasion to demonstrate God's power in history: predictable sanctions. The end result inside the boundaries of Egypt was the transfer of the inheritance of Egypt's recently deceased firstborn sons to Israel (Ex. 12:35–36). The Egyptians had long believed that they could get something for nothing out of Israel: slave labor and the inheritance. At the time of the exodus, this generations-long miscalculation was exposed for all to see. The Egyptians had believed that the state's coercion of Israel would remain profitable: an efficient allocation of scarce resources. They were called to account by God at the time of the exodus. The tyranny of Egyptian socialism's commitment to a world of something for nothing led to a national economic disaster, as it always does. The historical model of all socialism is Pharaoh's Egypt: bureaucratic, tyrannical, and ultimately disastrous for those in charge.⁸ The events of 1989–91 in Eastern Europe and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics were merely recapitulations of the Egyptian model. These systems broke down economically, politically, and socially in a com-

7. If the serpents of Pharaoh's prophets were mere trickery, then Moses' theological confession meant nothing. Aaron was merely a superior trickster.

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

prehensile collapse—remarkably, without much bloodshed.⁹

The magician seeks to gain his ends by escaping from some of the limits of his own creaturehood. The creation places limits on him that he deeply resents, just as Adam resented the boundary around the forbidden tree. The magician seeks to escape the requirement that, in order to gain a new set of circumstances, he must give up something of value. He wishes to increase his wealth—to improve his circumstances—by holding onto his wealth and augmenting it in ways that do not threaten his wealth. He wants personal economic growth—an increase in the options available to him—without a threat to his net worth. He does not care who provides this for him. He also does not care if others in the economy suffer losses in order to provide his gains. He cares only about his own advancement and the advancement of those working with him. He is convinced that magic will provide these gains. He may even believe that his risk-free gains come at no one's expense. But whatever his belief regarding the source of his gains, he believes that he does not have to offer something of greater value in the estimation of a trading partner than what ever he expects to receive in exchange.

Yet even he suspects that there is never something for nothing. He is at risk. He knows that if he performs his invocation incorrectly, he could lose everything. He knows that the supernatural power invoked has the power to provide benefits from outside the space-time continuum. The threat of loss is inescapable: such a power can also impose costs from outside the space-time continuum. This is the reason for the extreme concern of the magician regarding the details of incantations, formulas, and rituals. Because of the risk of dealing with supernatural forces that are personal, jealous, and quite possibly malevolent, the experienced magician is extremely cautious. The details of supernatural rituals become as important to him as the details of scientific procedure are for scientists when dealing with explosives or viruses. The malevolent whims of the supernatural force invoked by the incantation or formula are more of a threat to the magician than the outcomes of most of nature's formulas are for the scientist or the craftsman. Tools do not seek revenge against their users. Demons do.

The magician seeks to obtain something for nothing. It is not that

9. Marxist politicians, having re-named their parties, returned to favor politically within a few years in some of these Eastern European nations. Eastern Europeans had not been prepared for freedom and responsibility in 1990. The moral erosion and escape from personal responsibility fostered by socialism had done its work. The lure of something for nothing is still very strong.

he seeks personal gain at minimal expenditure. We all do this. What he seeks is access to wealth or power outside the realm of ethical law and scientific law. He substitutes ritual for ethics. Ritual seems cheaper than ethics. In doing so, he risks something very important for the sake of something far less important. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).¹⁰

D. The Annulment of the Mosaic Office of Prophet

The two-fold test of the prophetic office was this: accurate predictions of the immediate future and adherence to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The death penalty was mandatory for any prophet whose predictions failed to come true—signs and wonders (Deut. 13:1–5) or any other event (Deut. 18:22)—or who announced the sovereignty of any other god (Deut. 18:20). There was a very high risk for anyone claiming to be a prophet whose words had not been put into his mouth by God. Or so it seemed. But in times of widespread apostasy, there was little risk for a false prophet for speaking a false word. In times of apostasy, the word of God is not honored. The false prophet is honored; the true prophet is not. So, negative civil sanctions would be imposed on the true prophet, which was the case in Israel again and again. Then God’s corporate negative sanctions would come with a vengeance.

1. Jesus as a Prophet

Jesus Christ’s ministry was the fulfillment of the prophetic office, which He annulled when He came in judgment in the final act of corporate negative sanctions against Old Covenant Israel: the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.¹¹ He knew what was in store for Him and what would then be in store for Israel. He warned the religious rulers that this would be the case, for it had always been the fate of prophets to be put under negative sanctions by the rulers of Israel, leaving the nation exposed to God’s wrath.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build

10. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

11. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto your selves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Matt. 23:29–38).

2. The Bible's Prophetic Monopoly

The completion of the New Testament era of revelation with the destruction of Jerusalem completed the judicially binding revelation of God. All of the New Testament's manuscripts were written before the final revocation of the Old Covenant in A.D. 70. This includes the Book of Revelation.¹² This means that the Bible has supplanted the covenantal authority of any man to announce formally, on threat of historically unique supernatural sanctions, the annulment of any biblical law that came prior to his ministry. Similarly, he cannot lawfully announce new universally binding laws in God's name. The office of prophet no longer exists; the Bible is God's only final word in history.

The Mosaic law's prophet could lawfully tell kings to change the nation's laws on threat of immediate national punishment. A true prophet's ability to perform signs and wonders verified two things: (1) his ability to invoke supernatural sanctions to enforce his covenant lawsuit; (2) his ability to see that God would defend the prophet's lawsuit by imposing specific sanctions. Such authority belongs to no man today. No man today speaks with the same authority as the completed Bible. No man can lawfully invoke publicly God's specific historical sanctions in a specific time frame. He can only invoke the general cov-

12. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/klgbjf>)

enantal sanctions that apply to the kind of sin under consideration. He can speak prophetically only in the sense of warning men of the sanctions to come; he cannot lawfully invoke sanctions in the way that an Old Covenant prophet could: guaranteed in the immediate future in the name of God. “And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty” (II Kings 1:10). This power is no longer granted by God to anyone who speaks in His name. The very possession of power analogous to this is evidence of false prophecy; it is demonic. Such power was necessary to validate a prophet’s word, which was given to him by God only because God’s judicially authoritative revelation had not yet been completed. The prophet was authoritatively inspired. In the world after the final replacement of the Old Covenant in A.D. 70, no one is authoritatively inspired. If he were, his words would possess formal equality with the Bible, and because of the immediate nature of his inspiration, superior operational authority.

This does not mean that an evangelist on the foreign mission field cannot lawfully counteract curses that are invoked by some shaman or witch doctor. He can and should. The test of supernatural power is at stake. But the evangelist is not imposing negative supernatural sanctions. He is short-circuiting negative supernatural sanctions. Any evangelist who seeks conversions by publicly invoking supernatural negative sanctions, imposed physically and at a specific time, is imitating Satan. Praying an imprecatory psalm¹³ against public law breakers is legitimate for a lawfully ordained officer. Calling down literal fire from heaven is not.

3. Civil Law

The question arises: What is the lawful role of civil government in suppressing false prophecy? Is this law still in force? “And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee” (Deut. 13:5).

If the office of true prophet no longer exists, then what is the cov-

13. Imprecatory psalms include Psalm 83:9–18; 68:1–2; 79:6, 10–12.

enantal, judicial threat to society of a false prophet? There is none. The threat of God's corporate negative sanctions no longer exists with respect to false prophecy, since the promise of God's corporate positive sanctions no longer exists with respect to true prophecy, having been annulled by the New Covenant. Then on what basis can a civil government lawfully impose negative sanctions against a false prophecy that does not come true? There seems to be none. *The office has been annulled. So have the related sanctions.*

A false prophet under the Mosaic law was judicially analogous to a private citizen today who makes a policeman's uniform, dons it, and then tells people what to do in the name of the law. This is illegal: the assertion of civil authority not ordained by a lawful government. The false prophet in Israel made a similar assertion. The sanction against this illegitimate assertion was public execution. If there were no office of policeman today, there would be no need of civil laws against imitating one. If every police uniform were regarded as merely a funny costume, there would be no justification for imposing civil sanctions against someone who wears such a costume and then announces his authority in the name of the law. If a costume does not imply sanctions-bearing authority, it is judicially harmless. If it is judicially harmless, it is beyond civil sanctions.¹⁴

The Bible is now complete. It serves as prophet. It tells people what is required of them. The voice of God is in print. No other voice can claim equal authority. Thus, there is no judicial role for a prophet in the post-A.D. 70 New Covenant era. *There have been no false prophets since A.D. 70 because there have been no true prophets.* Today, there are only misguided or corrupt people who claim to be prophets. Their claim should be dismissed, not by civil law, but by ecclesiastical law. Church members who make such claims, and who demand that Christians do what they say rather than obey lawfully constituted church authorities, are to be placed under negative church sanctions. If they persist in their claims, they may have to be excommunicated. They are not to be executed.

Conclusion

There is no way to gain something for nothing apart from the grace of God. Even here, the covenantal limits of creation are still in

14. A trademarked costume is protected by civil law, but only as a matter of torts: private party vs. private party. The threatened sanctions are a matter of restitution.

force. God extends grace to individuals and societies because He revoked deserved blessings from His Son, Jesus Christ, in the latter's sacrifice on Calvary. The payment was made by Jesus Christ. By grace, Christ's representative victory over sin and death is extended by God to men. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Peter 3:18). That which is a below-cost benefit for the recipients of God's grace has been paid for. Some men gain something valuable for nothing because Jesus Christ suffered something terrible for righteousness. Thus, the Bible testifies to the covenantal illegitimacy of the economic quest for something for nothing.

The magician can perform signs and wonders. What distinguished him from the prophet under the Old Covenant was confession. The prophet warned men that they should not expect something for nothing. They should not expect to keep the fruits of righteousness apart from the continual investment required to sustain it: covenantal faithfulness. The prophet warned men that they should not expect something (fruits) for nothing (sin). If men persisted in the pursuit of something for nothing, they would reap judgment. The day of reckoning would come. This was the prophet's message. It was a covenantal lawsuit based on an orthodox confession of faith. That a true prophet might perform signs and wonders—what appeared to be something for nothing—was in fact a confirmation of the fact that there is never something for nothing. When men gain something for nothing, they do so only because they are recipients of grace, which rests judicially on supernatural payment by a representative. The pursuit of something for nothing eventually brings God's judgment: negative sanctions.

The magician also was beyond conventional historical limits, but his message was different. He performed his miracles in terms of a different confession. He promised more of the same—power on demand—for those who conformed to another god. Such a god could not bring permanent below-cost benefits, Moses warned. God would bring negative corporate sanctions on Israel if the nation believed such a prophet. More than this: God would bring negative sanctions on Israel if Israel's civil government failed to execute false prophets. This covenantal connection between widespread law-breaking and predictable corporate negative sanctions was the justification of civil sanctions: the threat of God's corporate negative sanctions if a public evil

was not brought under the threat of civil sanctions. The magistrate acted as a surrogate for God, imposing Bible-mandated negative sanctions on specific covenant-breakers as a way to head off God's corporate negative sanctions. This is equally true in New Covenant times.

The reason why this Mosaic civil sanction is no longer mandated is because the office of prophet has ceased. The Bible has replaced the prophet under the New Covenant. No man speaks with authority equal to, and therefore superior to, the Bible. The threat of false prophecy is no longer civil. No private party lawfully commands civil rulers in the name of God on threat of God's immediate negative sanctions. The office of Mosaic prophet has no judicial authority today. Neither does the office of false prophet. The state therefore does not need a penalty in order to defend the true prophet's authority from false prophets.

COMMERCE AND COVENANT

Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself; thou shalt give it unto the stranger [geyr] that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien [nokree]: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk (Deut. 14:21).

There is no explicit reason given in the Bible for either of these prohibitions. This makes it difficult to identify the theocentric focus of either prohibition. They are clearly holiness laws. Holiness is an aspect of point three of the biblical covenant: boundaries.

The first law is clearly a land law. The dietary laws were laws that applied to covenanted residents of the Promised Land, or those men who had an inheritance in Israel through circumcision. This law dealt with unclean meat.¹ The land laws ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Peter in a vision was told by God to eat unclean animals (Acts 10). Paul wrote: "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one" (I Cor. 8:4).

The first law governed ritually clean animals that died naturally. The second law governed a specific case: seething a kid in its mother's milk. The second law has no specific economic application that I can see. The first law does. Theologically, these are separate verses.

A. Holiness Laws

The first prohibition cannot have had anything to do with health, since the law specified that strangers in the land were allowed to eat such meat. God would not deliberately have threatened the health of a resident alien. To call biologically contaminated meat a gift would

1. On land laws, Appendix J.

have been a terrible misuse of language. The Hebrew word for “gift” here is found throughout the Old Testament. God’s gifts to mankind and to Israel were in no way polluted or threatening; neither was this gift. So, this law was based on something other than health issues.

The Mosaic law prohibited the eating of animals that had died naturally. The sanctions attached to this prohibition were mild. “And every soul that eateth that which died of itself, or that which was torn with beasts, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even: then shall he be clean” (Lev. 17:15). Because this law applied to the resident alien, it was not exclusively ecclesiastical, since the uncircumcised stranger or “protected stranger”² [*geyr*] did not belong to the congregation. But there were no civil penalties mentioned. So, with respect to the stranger, the law against eating such meat was merely a suggestion. The matter of ritual cleanliness did not affect him. If he ever did approach the tabernacle, which was the only place where ritual uncleanness was a threat to him or to the nation, it would have been to offer sacrifice (Num. 15:29). In this case, he was under the purity restrictions. Otherwise, he was not holy to the degree that an Israelite was, so the threat of uncleanness was of no importance to him, just so long as he did not attempt to approach the tabernacle, thereby committing a boundary violation.

He was holy in the sense of being set apart—holy—as a resident in Israel, a person living under Mosaic civil law. He was set apart to this degree: he was a beneficiary of the common grace of God that overflowed within the land’s boundaries because of the special grace shown to Israel. He was set apart by God in a way that a resident of another land was not. He could eat such meat, but it was not legal to sell it to him. It had to be a gift. One presumption of this law was that a stranger in economic need was threatened by poverty more than Israel was threatened by a stranger who ate such meat. It was lawful for an Israelite to make a gift of prohibited meat to him. For the inconvenience of a ritual washing, the Israelite could remove any ritual pollution that might extend beyond evening. If the resident alien had qualms about eating such meat, he could sell it to a non-resident alien [*nokree*], just as an Israelite could.

2. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 398.

B. Degrees of Holiness

I have covered the topics of sacred, profane, and common at some length in chapter 6 of *Boundaries and Dominion*. I discussed why the sacred can be profaned by a boundary violation, but the common cannot be. The sacred character of something creates the possibility of a ritual boundary violation. *We cannot profane something that is common.*

The closer a person came to the holy of holies, the more dangerous he became: to himself and to Israel. God did not tolerate anyone except the high priest to enter the holy of holies, and then only once a year (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:34). A boundary violation in this case threatened the nation. God might depart from the holy land of Israel.

A holy object must be protected from violation. What was the holy object in question in this verse? The Israelite? The meat? The land? The covenant? The tabernacle? Another Mosaic law points to the status of the Israelite as holy: the law governing the clean animal slain in the field by wild beasts. “And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs” (Ex. 22:31). The meat of an animal that had died of sickness, old age, or an accident was not holy. It was not to be set aside to God for His exclusive use. On the contrary, it was to be consumed inside the holy land only by two classes of foreigners: resident aliens [*geyr*] and foreign visitors [*nokree*].

The Israelite could not lawfully eat it, but he could touch it in order to transport it. If he touched it, he became unclean (Lev. 11:39), but this was not much of a burden. To cleanse himself ritually, he merely had to wash himself and his clothes. “But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you. And for these ye shall be unclean: whosoever toucheth the carcass of them shall be unclean until the even. And whosoever beareth ought of the carcass of them shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even” (Lev. 11:23–25). “And he that beareth the carcass of them shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: they are unclean unto you” (Lev. 11:28). If an Israelite was not planning to approach the tabernacle, his unclean status did not matter.

The Israelite could pick up the dead animal and transport it to a commercial center. He could then lawfully sell it to a visiting foreigner. He could also give it to a resident alien who was willing to live under God’s civil laws. This alien was the equivalent of a refugee. He was not

a citizen, nor was he a member of the congregation, but he was a lawful member of the community.

This indicates two degrees of holiness: the Israelite and the resident alien. It also indicates non-holy status: the non-resident alien. The resident alien was entitled to special consideration in the Mosaic law. For example, he could not lawfully be charged interest when he sought an emergency loan (Lev. 25:35).³ However, it was legal to charge interest to a *nokree* (Deut. 23:20).⁴ In this case, the resident alien could be given an asset that was illegal for an Israelite to use for himself. The non-resident alien could be charged a price.

If an Israelite wanted to profit from his dead animal, he could sell it to a non-resident alien. He could not lawfully profit from a resident alien. He could not lawfully enter into commerce in this instance with a resident alien. This would have tended to direct the prohibited meat into commerce. Most people prefer profit to charity most of the time. The meat of animals that had died of natural causes would have tended to wind up on the tables of travelers and foreign businessmen.

The living animal had been ritually clean, no matter who owned it, but it was prohibited to Israelites because of the way it had died. So, the difference in holiness had to be in *the judicial status of its original owner*. The Israelite was a priest to the nations. He was under God's national covenant. The resident alien was voluntarily under the laws of the land on a permanent basis, but he had not sworn a covenantal oath to God. The visiting stranger was under the law only temporarily. *The relationship between the person and the land* seems to have been the distinguishing issue here. The Israelite was tied to the land covenantally. The resident alien was tied to the land residentially. The stranger was tied to the land commercially. The commercial tie was seen as having no judicially permanent status. There was no oath-bound bonding in commerce. This is a general principle of biblical economics: *the transitory character of commerce*. It possesses no covenantal aspect; it is contractual, not covenantal.

The holiness of the land of Mosaic Israel was presumed by this law. The degree of holiness of people was tied to the permanence of their connection to the land. The land was holy, so the meat could not law-

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28.

4. Chapter 57. Cf. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49:C.

fully be consumed by those who had an oath-bound connection to the land. In the mouths of the permanent residents of God's holy land, the meat became profane. In the mouths of the less permanent resident aliens, it became profane if it had been purchased. In the mouths of non-residents, it was not profane at all. The most pure individual could not eat the meat because of his permanent connection to the land. The less pure individual could not buy the meat because of his voluntary connection to the land. The impure individual could buy the meat because of his commercial connection to the land.

With the coming of the New Covenant, the land of Israel began to lose its covenantal status. With the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it lost its covenantal status completely. There is no longer any holy land except in a travel brochure—a distinctly commercial artifact. The non-holy status of the land was not changed by the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, contrary to Zionists and dispensationalists. God dwells equally with all of His chosen Trinitarian people today; they approach Him judicially only in oaths and sacraments.⁵ Land ownership in the New Covenant has moved from the legal status of holy to that of commerce. While land ownership may possess special characteristics because of the commitment that men some times have to a family residence, their constant movement from place to place has undermined this traditional commitment. In the United States, where one-fifth of the population moves each year, land ownership is no longer widely regarded as fundamentally different from the ownership of other forms of wealth. The mobility of people has undermined any lingering sense of the holiness of land. Men move geographically today in terms of the free market's demand for their labor or their land. This has led to the *psychological de-sacralization* of land.⁶ This psychological de-

5. God has a special protecting relationship with the Jews as self-professed covenantal heirs of Old Covenant Israel insofar as He preserves their separate identity in history. He does this in order to fulfill Paul's prophecy regarding Old Covenant Israel, the branch which God has cut off: "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Rom. 11:23–24). But these disinherited heirs of Moses can reclaim their share of the inheritance only by becoming Christians and joining Christ's church. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

6. It has also led to a loosening of the bond between the owner and the physical object owned. Schumpeter wrote in 1942: "Dematerialized, defunctionalized and absentee ownership does not impress and call forth moral allegiance as the vital form of property did." Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York:

sacralization process is less advanced in Europe and parts of Asia, but as the free market extends its influence, mobility replaces permanence in every area of life. The free market erodes the sense of geographical community. Neither the local community nor the land retains men's permanent allegiance. Consumer demand extends its sovereignty as men seek to maximize their incomes. Consumer demand is constantly changing; so are men's residences.⁷

C. Commerce and Purity

The biological purity of meat was not a judicial question. Neither was the ritual purity of the meat. The ritual purity of the eater was.

Because the eater's degree of holiness was based on his degree of permanence in the holy land, the meat was available for limited commerce. The market value of the meat would be determined by the market demand for it. The Israelite owner could act as the economic agent of two kinds of aliens: resident and non-resident. The seller could not legally accept an economic bid by a resident alien. The Israelite decided which alien would receive the carcass of the animal. Charity would govern the transfer of ownership to the resident alien; commerce would govern the transfer to the non-resident alien.

The purity of the land became an economic advantage to the non-resident alien: subsidized meat. He would be the only legal bidder in the auction for this kind of meat. This is another way of saying that *it paid foreigners to do business inside the boundaries of Israel*. The non-resident alien had an advantage over the residents of the land: oligopolistic⁸ access to the free market for this form of meat.

The purity of the land therefore served as an economic barrier to entry against a foreigner's resident alien status. A non-resident alien would forfeit his legal access to this segment of the meat market if he decided to take up permanent residence. He might occasionally be given free meat, but he could no longer bid commercially for this form of meat. This was a cost of becoming a resident. Yet the imposition of this cost was unique: the loss of an indirect subsidy. A nation that offered an indirect subsidy to non-resident foreigners was unique in

Harper, [1942] 1947), p. 142.

7. Part of this mobility is a product of government-guaranteed long-term loans in which part of the risk of default by the debtor is borne by taxpayers rather than lenders. This coercive arrangement has subsidized mobility and has undermined community. So have government-funded highway systems.

8. Technically speaking, oligopsonistic: one class of lawful buyers.

the ancient world.

God did not waste this form of meat, yet He did impose tight holiness restrictions on His people. The animal would not be totally worthless just because it had died of natural causes. There would be a market for its meat. This saved the Israelite from a total loss. But this law did impose some loss on the Israelites: a restricted market. There were economic costs of holiness.

Concerns about holiness did not eliminate the market in this case. Did they eliminate the market in other cases? What about unclean animals? Were they under similar restrictions: total for Israelites, partial for resident aliens, and non-existent for non-residents? Could an Israelite lawfully sell pork to non-resident aliens?

The purity laws were designed for the sake of the land. The degree of one's legal connection to the land marked the degree of restriction in the case of the animal that had died naturally. Such deaths would occur from time to time. The economic question was this: How to minimize this loss without compromising the purity of the land? The law allowing meat sales to non-resident aliens reduced the risk to Israelites of raising ritually clean animals. There would at least be some local demand for such dead beasts. But had this specific limitation on unavoidable losses been applied generally, it would have led to the commercialization of unclean foods. For example, had it been legal for Israelites to sell pork to non-resident aliens, some Israelites would have begun commercial ventures for this purpose. The land would have become filled with unclean beasts, thereby increasing the likelihood of prohibited contacts by Israelites with such beasts. So, in order to reduce the economic loss imposed by the unforeseen death of a clean animal, the Mosaic law made two exceptions to the rule against eating ritually clean animals that died naturally. This reduced economic risk in the clean-animal industry. But the Mosaic law did not encourage the production of unclean animals by opening up a local market for them. Commerce was not supposed to increase the number of ritually impure animals; it was merely to decrease the economic risk of an unforeseen loss of a clean animal.

This law must have increased the slaughter of sick but ritually clean animals. The owner's risk of losing access to the broader commercial market increased as a clean animal aged or grew sick. He knew that if it died, the market for its remains would shrink dramatically. To avoid the requirement of providing non-resident aliens with an economic subsidy—reduced competition for such meat on the demand

side—the Israelite had to kill the animal before it died of natural causes. Also, a weak animal would become easy prey of wild beasts. If they got to the animal first, only the dogs would benefit. It should be clear that the economics of the Mosaic law encouraged the slaying of clean animals. *The holiness of the land led to the slaying of ritually clean animals. Blood would be shed for the benefit of the righteous.* The blood of animals would be poured into the land. “Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water” (Deut. 12:16).⁹

D. The Annulment of the Mosaic Land Laws

The fact that meat which was prohibited to an Israelite could lawfully be sold to a non-resident alien indicates that this law was a land law. He who had no legal attachment to the land had legal access to a commercial market for such meat. The purity of the land was not threatened by the consumption of such meat by aliens. The holiness of the land was not threatened in this case by the eating habits of those with no covenantal connection to the land.

This is another piece of evidence that the Mosaic food laws were land laws, not health laws or laws of moral purity. I have developed this thesis in my commentary on Leviticus.¹⁰ The food laws protected the land’s holy status as God’s place of residence. These laws tended to keep foreigners out of the nation who might otherwise settle there. *Food laws were barriers to entry.* People had to change their diets or their budgets when they entered Israel. People do not like to change their diets or their budgets. It takes a strong-willed person to make a break with his nation’s culinary tradition. If this break must become permanent, it takes considerable will. The cost of maintaining an imported diet was high. It was legal, but the availability of prohibited meat¹¹ would have been reduced below what it would otherwise have been, had there been no dietary laws. Those who were not covenanted with the God of Israel would have had either an emotionally difficult time adjusting their diets or a costly time inside the land for not adjusting.

The holy status of the land of Israel ended with the advent of the church. Jesus had predicted this to the Jews: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation

9. See also Leviticus 7:26–27; 17:10–14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:23; 15:23.

10. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 21:C.

11. It would have been salted or smoked; there was no refrigeration.

bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This prophecy was definitively fulfilled with His death and resurrection: the giving of the Great Commission to the church (Matt. 28:18–20).¹² It was extended progressively after the sending of the Holy Spirit to the church (Acts 2). It was finally fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem, when the temple sacrifices ended forever.

E. The Annulment of the Mosaic Food Laws

The Mosaic food laws had no connection with health considerations. God had not subjected Noah and Abraham to increased health risks by allowing them to eat whatever they wanted. God's covenant with Abraham looked forward to the conquest of the land, but it did not impose either land laws or food laws. *The food laws were holiness laws established to reinforce the holiness of the land.* This is why they were announced by Moses, not by Abraham or Noah. After the fall of Jerusalem, these laws were finally annulled. But Jesus had already announced their definitive demise. "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matt. 15:11). Peter had received a revelation from God regarding the definitive annulment of the food laws.

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven (Acts 10:9–16).

Peter understood what this revelation meant. As he announced to Cornelius, the centurion: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common

12. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

or unclean” (Acts 10:28). This was an announcement by God to the world that the land of Israel had *definitively* lost its separate judicial status. Peter forgot. Paul later called it to his attention.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled like wise with him; in-somuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal. 2:11–14).

Calvin was adamant about the abolition of the Mosaic food laws. In his commentary on Acts 15, he ridiculed those who would revive any aspect of the food laws. Calvin was a master of invective, and we see it here:

As touching meats, after the abrogating of the law, God pronounceth that they are all pure and clean. If, on the other side, there start up a mortal man, making a new difference, forbidding certain, he taketh unto himself the authority and power of God by sacrilegious boldness. Of this stamp were the old heretics, Montanus, Priscillianus, the Donatists, the Tatians, and all the Encratites. Afterwards the Pope, to the end he might bind all those sects in a bundle, made a law concerning meats. And there is no cause why the patrons of this impiety should babble that they do not imagine any uncleanness in meats, but that men are forbidden to eat flesh upon certain days, to tame the flesh. For seeing they eat such meats as are most fit, both for delicacy and also for riot, why do they abstain from eating bacon, as from some great offence, save only because they imagine that that is unclean and polluted which is forbidden by the law of their idol? With like pride doth the tyranny of the Pope rage in all parts of life; for there is nothing wherein he layeth not snares to entangle the miserable consciences of men. But let us trust to the heavenly oracle, and freely despise all his inhibitions. We must always ask the mouth of the Lord, that we may thereby be assured what we may lawfully do; forasmuch as it was not lawful even for Peter to make that profane which was lawful by the Word of God.¹³

Anti-bacon babblers: Calvin had no toleration for such as these!

13. John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1560] 1979), I, pp. 422–23.

Any attempt to revive the Mosaic food laws for any reason is a move leading out of the church. The only biblical food laws today apply exclusively to the Lord's Supper, a mandatory meal for Christians that is legally barred to non-Christians and non-members of Christian churches. Lawful access to the Lord's Supper is by formal ecclesiastical oath and oath-sign: baptism.

Ever since Vatican II (1963–65), Roman Catholics have been allowed to eat meat on Fridays. The prohibition had been based on abstinence for Good Friday's sake, not the Mosaic food laws' sake. Paul criticized this attitude as marking those who have departed from the faith (I Tim. 4:1): "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (I Tim. 4:3).¹⁴ Today, the prohibition against meat on Fridays does not exist. Catholics have finally adopted the Protestants' position. It took a long time. There has been no admission by the hierarchy that the Protestants were right after all. That is not how bureaucracies operate. The truth is, theological modernists have infiltrated the Roman Catholic Church. This would be an even more embarrassing official admission. An embarrassed silence covers the decision to abolish meatless Fridays. So, Catholics can now eat meat, but the Church, despite official proclamations by the Pope, welcomes homosexuals into its seminaries. A 2002 article in *Newsweek* reported that at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California, 30% to 70% of its students are either homosexuals or bisexuals. The school's rector admits that the figure may be as high as 50%. He also said, "I think we do a good job recruiting solid candidates, and welcome the opportunity to do better."¹⁵ Meanwhile, heterosexual men are avoiding the priesthood in droves.¹⁶ The Church was better off with meatless Fridays and fewer liberals. But those days are dead and gone.

Conclusion

The law allowing the sale of certain meats to non-resident aliens reduced the burden of an unforeseen loss due to the unexpected death

14. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 5.

15. David France, "Gays and the Seminary," *Newsweek* (May 20, 2002). (<http://bit.ly/SeminaryGays>)

16. Michael S. Rose, *Goodbye, Good Men: How Liberals Brought Corruption into the Catholic Church* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2002).

of a clean animal. This law also preserved the holiness of the land by placing restrictions on Israelites and resident aliens. The non-resident alien received an indirect economic subsidy because of this law. He could buy what Israelites and resident aliens could not.

The resident alien who bought such meat from an Israelite committed no civil crime. The Israelite who sold it to him did commit an ecclesiastical infraction. With respect to the locus of law enforcement, the food laws were to be enforced by priests, Levites, and family members; they were not civil laws. They had civil implications—citizenship through church membership—but not civil sanctions. If a non-resident alien sold such meat to a resident alien, neither of them committed an infraction, for neither was under the ecclesiastical covenant. This law was ecclesiastical, not civil. No civil penalties were specified. If an alien ate pork, the holiness of the land was not threatened. But ecclesiastical law did restrict what covenant-keeping Israelites could do with meat. This in turn affected market prices, which would have made unclean meat more expensive by reducing its production in Israel.

Prices were affected in Israel by the dietary laws, but there is no indication that these laws applied to resident aliens, other than the general prohibition of eating blood (Lev. 17:13), which was a Noachic law (Gen. 9:4) that is still in force (Acts 15:20, 29). This would explain why there were herds of pigs in Jesus' time (Matt. 8:30–32). Israelites could not lawfully produce unclean meat commercially, but resident aliens could. Resident aliens had faced a major problem when the jubilee law was enforced (which may have been never) in pre-exilic times: they could not buy permanent ownership of rural land. When enforced, this law would have tended to eliminate the permanent commercialization of unclean animals. The jubilee law surely would have made the development of permanent herds of such beasts unlikely, for the resident alien could not have counted on access to rural land after the jubilee. Only in the post-exilic era, when resident aliens at the time of Israel's return gained lawful permanent access to the land (Ezek. 47:21–23),¹⁷ would such herds have become more likely.

17. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

TITHES OF CELEBRATION

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (be cause he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest (Deut. 14:22–29).

The theocentric focus of this law is stated in the text: “that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always” (v. 23). The context of this chapter is holiness. “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut. 14:2). This separated aspect of Israel was an aspect of boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant.¹

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

I have quoted the entire passage because there could be confusion if it is not seen as a unit. There is already sufficient confusion when it *is* seen as a unit. Sorting out the implications of Israel's system of tithes is a difficult process, as we shall see.

A. National and Local Festivals

Men fear nature, especially in agricultural societies. They seek ways to reduce this fear. "Save for a rainy day," men are told. They trust in our own devices. God told Israel that under His covenant, there would be plenty of sunny days ahead for covenant-keepers. He would provide the capital necessary to fund their celebrations. *The discipline of tithing was designed to acknowledge their fear of God and reduce their fear of nature and history.* The tithes of celebration were especially useful in this regard. They were a form of holy wastefulness. This wastefulness included the consumption of intoxicating liquors.² It was "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we live."

The initial tithe mentioned in this text was to be consumed by families and Levites at a central location (vv. 22–23). *The central feasts were not tribal affairs.* They were familistic, ecclesiastical, and national. Was this feast to be funded by a second tithe in addition to what was owed yearly to the Levites? The text indicates that it was. This tithe was used to fund the family's expenses at one of the three annual festivals, presumably Booths ("Tabernacles"), the post-harvest feast.

There was a second tithe of celebration: a third-year tithe (v. 28). This festival took place locally. Levites were invited, but so were strangers, widows, and orphans (v. 29). The presence of strangers indicates that this was not an ecclesiastical festival. Was it civil? Or was it something else entirely? Until we know what agency enforced it—which the text does not say—we cannot be sure.

These tithes were imposed by God. If the nation obeyed Him and paid them, He promised to bless them (v. 29). The question is: Were these civil taxes? God did not threaten to impose negative corporate sanctions on Israel if the state refused to impose penalties for any one's failure to tithe and participate in the festivals. Who, then, was the victim of a crime? For this to have been a matter of civil government, the invited attendees would have had to possess a lawful civil claim on other people's wealth. Not to have brought one's tithe to the festival would have been a matter of theft. There would have been some sys-

2. See Appendix G: "Strong Drink."

tem of state-imposed restitution available to the victims. But the primary victims were the families that owed God the money. The lion's share of these expenditures was to be consumed by the actual wealth producers. The judicial problem here is to identify the earthly victims who could lawfully bring a lawsuit against the non-tithers. If these victims were widows, strangers, and orphans in general, how could they prove damages in particular? If this was impossible, then on what judicial basis could the state have acted on their behalf to collect from non-tithers in general in order to allocate to specific claimants?

This law stated that a tithe on the land was to be eaten in a central city (v. 24). All land-owning and land-leasing Israelites were required to journey to Jerusalem, presumably at the post-harvest feast of Booths. "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD" (Lev. 23:34). They were to celebrate together. They had to bring a tithe of their crops, which they would consume at the festival. To avoid carrying heavy crops to a distant city, and also to allow them to eat other crops brought in from other regions, they were allowed to sell their crops in their home city and buy whatever they wanted in Jerusalem.

This celebration was to serve as a reminder that their wealth did not depend on their efforts alone. This additional tithe might otherwise have been invested, but it had to be consumed. Men were asked to place their faith in God more than in thrift. The celebration declared: "There's a lot more where this came from!"

This was a tithe on the increase of rural land, as were all of the tithes in Israel. The annual tithe went to the Levites to compensate them for not being allowed to own rural land. It was their inheritance (Num. 18:21). The tithe was not left in the hands of the people who had produced it. I call the annual Levitical tithe the first tithe, following rabbinic tradition. It was Levi's inheritance.

In contrast was the second tithe: the tithe of national celebration. While the Levite had to be invited by land-owning families to celebrate (v. 27), he was not entitled to all of it or even the bulk of it. This was not the case in the first tithe. Rabbis have concluded that this was a second tithe.³ I agree with this assessment.

The first tithe was uniquely the possession of the Levites. It was

3. Herbert Danby, note to Maaser Sheni ("Second Tithe"), which is a section of the First Division, *Zera'im* ("Seeds"), *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. 73n.

therefore a matter of property rights. It was enforceable by civil courts.

B. The First Tithe

This was the tithe owed to the Levites as the tribe without an inheritance in land. “But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance” (Num. 18:24). It was owed to them because they had no landed inheritance in rural areas. Their legal claim on the income of others was based on their lack of any original claim on the land. All net income in the land, except for the income of priests and Levites when they serving the Lord in ecclesiastical callings, was subjected to the first tithe.⁴

The seventh year was a year of simultaneous debt release throughout the land (Deut. 15).⁵ In that year, the land was to lie fallow (Lev. 25:4–5).⁶ A tithe was owed on whatever grew of its own accord and was harvested. It was owed on new animals born during the year. It was owed by those who derived income from sources other than agriculture.

Any attempt to explain the tithes of celebration as substitutes for the first tithe is an argument in favor of the expropriation of the Levites’ lawful inheritance. They had no inheritance in land, but they had a substitute inheritance: the tithe. To argue that these other tithes were substitutes is to argue that the Levites were disinherited by this law. They would have had to forfeit their income in order to make celebrations possible for land owners. Clearly, a tithe of celebration was an additional tithe. The questions are: Who had to pay it? Who enforced it?

C. The Second Tithe

The second tithe was a tithe solely on agricultural output. The text is clear on this. “Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first-

4. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

5. Chapter 36.

6. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 23.

lings of thy herds and of thy flocks. . .” (vv. 22–23). Those who lived in cities did not pay it. All income not derived from agriculture was exempt. Agricultural land owners paid the second tithe in six out of seven years.

The second tithe had to be consumed in the central city of worship. This is why the prohibition in Deuteronomy 12:17–18 against eating the tithe in one’s own gates has to refer to the national tithe of celebration: “Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand: But thou must eat them before the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.”

If the central city was too far away for a family to carry the tithed goods, the family could sell the goods locally for money. This money had to be spent on food and drink at the celebration (v. 25). The rabbis concluded that these agricultural goods could be redeemed lawfully only by an added payment of one-fifth to the Levites.⁷ This rule is not found in this text. The rabbis appealed to what appear to be similar texts, such as this one: “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’S: it is holy unto the LORD. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof” (Lev. 27:30–31). The rabbis were incorrect. The law in Leviticus governed an item owed to God, such as an animal, that the family wanted to keep. For the privilege of buying back what was God’s, the family paid a 20% premium to the Levite. This was money paid in lieu of the Levites’ receiving the designated commodity. This was not the situation with the second tithe. There was no element of redemption in this tithe. This tithe was under the authority of the family, not the Levite. The family was not redeeming something that belonged to God. It was merely changing the form in which the tithe would be carried to Jerusalem.

The Levites had a claim to part of the second tithe: participation in meals. Strangers, widows, and orphans did not.

When widely obeyed, this law would have led to an increase in the

7. Danby, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

demand for money locally at the time of the national festival. The demand for money would have increased at a higher rate in regions farther away from the central city, because of the higher transportation costs. The price of agricultural goods would have been lower than in Jerusalem in these distant areas, which is another way of saying that there was an increased demand for money locally. At the same time, demand for agricultural goods would have increased in the central city because travelers brought their money into the city to buy the food consumed during the celebration: "More money chasing fewer goods."

The fall in the price of agricultural goods in the outlying regions and the parallel rise in the money price of such goods in the central city would have produced profit opportunities for specialists in agricultural transportation. They would have been able to buy goods in the distant regions in order to move them to the central city and sell them to the attendees. They would have "bought low and sold high." Moving goods from places where they are in low demand to a place where they are in high demand is an important market service. It would have been performed by specialists. Families would have estimated which was more profitable to them: carrying the bulky goods to Jerusalem vs. paying higher prices for them there.

D. The Third Tithe

This tithe was long ago called the third tithe. Tobit, written in the third century before Christ, referred to it.

But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the feasts, as it is ordained for all Israel by an everlasting decree. Taking the first fruits and the tithes of my produce and the first shearings, I would give these to the priests, the sons of Aaron, at the altar. Of all my produce I would give a tenth to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem; a second tenth I would sell, and I would go and spend the proceeds each year at Jerusalem; the third tenth I would give to those to whom it was my duty, as Deborah my father's mother had commanded me, for I was left an orphan by my father (Tobit 1:6–8; New Revised Standard Version).

Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, written late in the first century A.D., wrote this:

Besides those two tithes, which I have already said you are to pay every year, the one for the Levites, the other for the festivals, you are to bring every third year a third tithe to be distributed to those that

want; to women also that are widows, and to children that are orphans. But as to the ripe fruits, let them carry that which is ripe first of all into the temple; and when they have blessed God for that land which bare them, and which he had given them for a possession, when they have also offered those sacrifices which the law has commanded them to bring, let them give the first-fruits to the priests (IV:VIII:22–23; Whiston translation).

Nevertheless, Jewish commentators have regarded the second and third tithes as one.⁸ Their interpretation is incorrect. There was a third tithe. It was different in at least two ways from the second tithe. First, the celebration was held locally. Second, non-citizens in the community were invited in to celebrate, in addition to Levites. “At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest” (vv. 28–29). This was a tithe of celebration, but it was communal rather than national. *It was a tithe for the sake of the judicially dispossessed.*

There may have been a third distinction having to do with the tax base: a tithe on any increase, not just agricultural. This depends on the meaning of this verse: “At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates” (v. 28). If we interpret these words as governed by the context of the second tithe, then this was a substitute for the second tithe. But the substitution clearly was not strict. The festival was held locally. Local residents other than Levites were invited. Town residents were likely to be members of the same tribe as the rural land owners who lived in the surrounding area. I regard this celebration as tribal. It was not national. The question arises: Did the third tithe apply to all income? If we see this tithe as primarily tribal, and if we also see the cities as part of the tribes’ inheritance, then the third tithe may have been required on all forms of net income. On the other hand, if this is interpreted within the context of the introductory verses, it applied only to

8. John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 4 vols. (London: Collingridge, [1763] 1852), I, p. 745. Gill had greater knowledge of the primary sources of early Judaism than any other Christian Bible commentator. His contemporary, John Lightfoot, came close. Alfred Edersheim, a convert from Judaism, knew the sources well, but he not a Bible commentator.

agriculture.

This may seem like a small matter, but it is central to understanding welfare economics from the biblical perspective. If the tithes of celebration were tithes exclusively on the land, imposed because the land was not part of the Levites' original inheritance and from which they were excluded by the jubilee law, then the state had a legitimate role in enforcing these tithes. It was a matter of defending the original agreed-upon terms of the allocation of private property at the time of the conquest. But the celebration tithes were consumed mainly by the producers. The Levites had a claim only on a small portion of this wealth. Also, the third tithe went in part to subsidize attendance by non-Levites. On what legal basis did they possess a claim on the income of anyone else? What legal principle undergirded this law, assuming that this law mandated state wealth-redistribution? If the state was authorized to enforce the third tithe on land owners, then the Mosaic law did authorize a form of coercive wealth-redistribution, although extremely small, in this instance.

In the third year, this special tithe of celebration was shared with those residents who were not eligible, apart from adoption, to become citizens in the local tribe. This tithe is generally referred to as the poor tithe, but a prosperous stranger or widow was also to be invited. The rabbinic assumption was that members of these four categories—widows, orphans, strangers, and Levites—would have been poor, but there is no reason to assume that Levites were poor.

The correct classification of these attendees is judicial, not economic. The stranger and the orphan (a minor) were not eligible to serve in the Lord's army. They could therefore not be citizens. The Levite had no inheritance in the land. He could not be a citizen in the tribe in which his city was located unless it was a Levitical city. He served in a separate military unit, one which defended the Ark of the Covenant.⁹ The widow, though the head of a household, was not eligible to serve in the army. She was an heir only through her husband and her children when they reached adulthood. She could not hold civil office because she was not under the family authority of a man who was himself eligible to serve in the army and therefore as a judge.¹⁰ While any of these guests at the festival may have been poor, the criterion for being invited to the festival was not their poverty.

9. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 2:B–C.

10. I conclude that Deborah served as a judge because she was married and not a widow.

Rather, it was their lack of judicial standing as citizens. They were not eligible to hold civil office in the local tribe. Thus, to call this third-year tithe a poor tithe is incorrect, although Jewish tradition so labels it. It had to do with the beneficiaries' judicial status, not their economic status.

E. The Levites' Lawful Inheritance

The Levites had no rural landed inheritance in Israel. The other tribes did. The tithe on the land was the Levites' inheritance. This leads me to a conclusion: *anything that undermined the tithe on the land undermined Levi's inheritance*. If the interpretation of any Mosaic law led to the legalization of an exemption from the first tithe, this interpretation had the economic effect of disinheriting Levi.

If those who enjoyed the fruit of the land could gain a competitive advantage over other land owners by legally refusing to pay the first tithe, then the Levites would be steadily disinherited. If a leaseholder or land owner could legally have retained an extra 10% per year, six years out of seven, using this money to invest in tools, seeds, or whatever, stewardship over the land would have been exercised increasingly by non-tithers. This would have been true in the case of covenant-breaking Israelites as well as covenant-breaking resident aliens.

This leads to a very important conclusion, one which I had not seen before I began interpreting the laws governing the tithes of celebration. There was an implicit clause built into God's original grant of land: *the primary tithe of the land belonged to Levi*. This was Levi's inheritance. This clause guaranteed that *Levi could not be disinherited by covenant-breakers who refused to pay the first tithe*. Because the other tribes inherited rural land, Levi inherited the first tithe.

The state enforces contracts. Under the Mosaic covenant prior to the exile, the appropriate civil sanction for refusing to pay tithes on the land must have been the disinheritance of the tithe-protester. This sanction was applied on the basis of Levi's lawful inheritance. It was not a civil enforcement of an ecclesiastical obligation. It was a civil enforcement of Levi's tribal inheritance. *The judicial issue was Levi's inheritance, not the theological commitment of the land's steward*. My conclusion is that the resident alien could lease rural land, but he had to pay the first tithe to the Levites. The original owner could not alienate—literally—Levi's inheritance by leasing his land to an alien. *Levi*

had an enforceable legal claim on a portion of the output of the nation's rural land. This means that the civil government enforced the payment of the first tithe. This was not a matter of the state subsidizing the church. It was a matter of lawful inheritance: the enforcement of legal title. *As surely as a family's title to rural land was enforceable by the state, so was the Levites' title to the first tithe.* The Mosaic tithe was therefore different from the New Testament's tithe. The church has no legal claim on the public's income, or even on its members' income. This solves the judicial problem of the first tithe, but not the many problems of the second and third tithes.

Were the tithes of celebration part of Levi's inheritance? Part of these tithes was. The Levites had to be invited to the festivals. The legal question is this: Could the economic portion of this obligation have been met without the participation of the land's steward in the festival? That is, could he have paid the Levites a portion of these tithes, thereby fulfilling his obligation? The law does not say. We must guess. It is not an easy guess.

The Levites had a right to attend the celebrations, i.e., *participation in the life of the nation*, which included celebrations. Did this mean that the Levites had a right to celebrate in the presence of those who served as the land's stewards? Was there more to their claims beyond money for food? If we answer yes, then the non-Israelite leaseholder or excommunicated Israelite had to attend the celebrations on threat of civil sanctions. What sanctions? The law does not say. Perhaps it was the forcible removal of the leaseholder from the property. If so, this would have been a very costly penalty, at least during Israel's agricultural phase.

Who was authorized to enforce the claims of the Levites? If this law was strictly ecclesiastical, then the Levites had this power: excommunication. This certainly would have been a self-interested enforcement system. The judges would have been the stated beneficiaries of the law. Did they possess this authority to judge in first-tithe cases? They shared this authority. The tithe was owed to them because they were the priestly tribe, and also because they had a legal claim based on their lack of landed inheritance. Both church and state were authorized by God to enforce the first tithe.

Then why not also the second and third tithes, at least with respect to participation by the Levites? There seems to be no good reason not to assume that this was the case. The problem comes with respect to institutionally enforceable claims by the other participants: widows,

orphans and strangers. This raises the issue of Israel as a welfare state. Did the Mosaic civil law force one group of residents to finance annual festivals for others? It is not easy to make such a case based on the textual evidence here.

These were feasts to honor God: “that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always.” They were feasts to which Levites had to be invited. Were the feasts somehow exclusively civil and therefore compulsory? Only to the extent that the Levites possessed a civil legal claim on being invited to attend. At most, the civil character of these festivals, if any, would have authorized the state to enforce a claim on some food and drink—hardly a major expense. The suggestion that the state had the authority to compel attendance at a religious festival is foreign to everything else we know of the Mosaic law. But if the state did possess this authority, we have problems: the resident alien and the excommunicated Israelite. These people were legally able to lease rural land, even though they could not purchase it in pre-exilic Israel. This raises some important judicial issues, which are never discussed by the commentators.

F. Alien Leaseholders

It is clear from the text that the second tithe was a tithe on the produce of the land. This raises the question of the leaseholder. It was legal for an owner to lease his land to another person for up to 49 years—until the jubilee (Lev. 25:10).¹¹ The question arises: Could this leaseholder have been a resident alien? The Bible does not say. It was legal to lease out the land to another person (Lev. 25:25–28). It was also legal to sell oneself to a resident alien (Lev. 25:47–54).¹² We must discover the answer by means of other principles of biblical law, as well as by their implications. What is said here of a resident alien is also true of an excommunicated Israelite.

Next, was a resident alien or an excommunicant required to pay any tithe of celebration? The text does not say. It would make the expositor’s task much easier if it did.

The tithe of celebration was a tithe on the land’s produce, year by year. Did the alien or excommunicant have to attend these festivals and spend his tithe? That is, did the state have the right to compel anyone to attend a festival? Clearly, the Levites did not possess ecclesiast-

11. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

ical authority when dealing with an alien or an excommunicant. I can see nothing in the Mosaic law to indicate that the state possessed such authority.

Did the state or the church lawfully enforce these tithes? If it was only the church, then the church's threat of excommunication and, as a result, loss of citizenship held no terrors for an uncircumcised resident alien. He was not a citizen. Then what was the meaningful sanction against him if he refused to pay this tithe? Could the state have forced the resident alien to leave the leased land? If so, was he entitled to a refund from the Israelite land owner whom he had paid? That would have placed a heavy burden on the land owner, who had put his money to other uses. Removal from the land was a heavy economic burden on a family that refused to attend a festival. It would have amounted to confiscation of property on a huge scale. On whose behalf? To what victim had the alien owed the tithe? To God by way of Himself, mainly. It does not seem biblical to argue that the state had any jurisdiction over the resident alien in this matter, with the possible exception of paying for a Levite's food and drink, who was owed support based on the original land distribution. Yet even this was unlikely. The Levites' claim was on the first tithe. A man who refused to attend a festival owed nothing to someone else.

My conclusion is that no covenantal agency possessed the authority to enforce attendance or support by a resident alien or excommunicant. This conclusion, however, leads to an unexpected conclusion. If it was lawful for a resident alien or an excommunicant to avoid paying all tithes of celebration, he could operate with a much lower overhead than a covenant-keeping Israelite could. He could spend the money locally or else reinvest it. He would have been able to purchase capital by avoiding the celebrations. Over time, this would have given him a major advantage, as his extra returns compounded. The non-participating resident alien would have had an advantage over Israelites in bidding for control over the land. This would have tended to transfer stewardship over land to those who were not heirs of the conquest. They could have leased the land from Israelites, paid a token amount to finance food once a year for a local Levite, and invested the difference. Other things being equal, they would eventually have displaced the Israelites from agriculture. The Israelite land owners would have done well by leasing their land to aliens and excommunicants, so they would not have remained on the land.

Therefore, if the tithe law was not enforced by the state, the celeb-

ration tithes would have tended to push (lure) tithe-paying Israelites off their land and into the cities, leaving non-tithing resident aliens and excommunicated Israelites in control of the land. Such people did take control of the land during Israel's exile, but this was understood a curse on Israel. Did the Mosaic law subsidize a result which was similar to the result of the captivity? Was land stewardship distributed in favor of covenant-breakers? This, surely, is an unexpected application of the Mosaic law.

Under such an interpretation, this tithing law was self-defeating. It was a tithe on agriculture only. Urban Israelites escaped it, and so could resident aliens who leased rural land for farming. Who, then, would pay it? A strange law, indeed!

An alternative to this interpretation is to deny that the resident alien or excommunicant had the right to lease land in Mosaic Israel, precisely because he could not be effectively pressured ecclesiastically to celebrate in Jerusalem. If any such a prohibition on land ownership had been enforced, there would have been costs imposed on Israel's economy. Owners would have received lower bids for leasing their land, since aliens and excommunicated Israelites would not have been allowed to bid. The land would not have been used by the most efficient producers. Of course, the tithes of celebration were not imposed for short-term efficiency's sake.

The problem here is that a covenant-keeping resident alien would have been discriminated against by such a prohibition. Why shouldn't he have been allowed to act as a steward of the land? On what legal grounds could he have been excluded? Wasn't one law in Israel to govern all men (Ex. 12:49)?¹³ What was the covenantal basis of such an exception? Where was the justice of such an exclusion? The fact that some resident aliens might not pay the tithes of celebration was not much of a reason to exclude aliens from leasing agricultural land.

G. Who Enforced the Third-Year Tithe?

The third tithe confuses things even more. Others besides Levites were to be invited in. Did the land owner owe them a place at his table, on threat of civil sanctions? Was the civil government the enforcing agent? If it was, then we have here an example of the welfare state in

13. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

action. Unlike the Levites, these guests had no legal claim based on the original inheritance. If the state lawfully forced a recalcitrant land owner to invite them in, then they were not guests. They were welfare state clients. They were beneficiaries of state coercion. Did God mandate such a system in His law?

Then there is the question of who was required to pay. Was it every local Israelite or just local land users? On what legal basis would landless people in a town have owed the guests anything? Not by a distinction between original landed inheritance and the absence thereof. Urban land had not been part of the original inheritance that was excluded from the Levites. Levites lived in towns and could buy property. Were landless urban dwellers required to subsidize other landless urbanites, who had no civil claim on the output of non-rural property? Was this an incipient form of state-funded "bread and circuses" in the Mosaic law?

Well, which is it? How was this law enforced? Here are the four choices. *First*, the state compelled land owners and leaseholders to attend religious festivals on threat of losing their land or some other civil sanction. *Second*, the state compelled land owners and leaseholders to provide free meals for an indeterminate number of strangers during third-year festivals, with double restitution to these unidentified victims if they refused to pay. *Third*, because the state could not legally compel payment of celebration tithes, it prohibited non-tithing resident aliens and excommunicants from leasing rural land, in order to avoid indirectly subsidizing non-tithers. *Fourth*, the state had no authority in this area; instead, the Levites lawfully enforced the celebration tithe laws. But because the Levites had this exclusively ecclesiastical authority, they had no way of enforcing these laws on resident aliens and excommunicants, i.e., they had no meaningful sanctions to impose. Therefore, because no covenantal institution possessed effective negative sanctions in this area, non-paying resident aliens and excommunicants would have gained a competitive advantage in agriculture and would have steadily displaced paying Israelites from the land. Because non-tithers would progressively dominate the land, and urban Israelites were not required to pay, this law had to become a dead letter. It was inherently unenforceable. If so, then why did God announce it?

Let us review the options in greater detail. Did the state impose negative sanctions for non-attendance? If so, this law violated the bib-

lical legal principle of victim's rights.¹⁴ Who was the victim of a refusal to attend? To whom did the criminal owe restitution? To himself? This makes no sense.

Did the state compel wealth-redistribution? The feasts were by invitation only. In this sense, this law was like the gleaning law (Deut. 24:19–22).¹⁵ Those with assets—land owners—were required by God to invite others to share their wealth. But this was not a civil law. No bureaucrats provided the land owners with lists of those who had to be invited. Then who were the identifiable victims? Which uninvited strangers had a legal claim on which land owner's hospitality? Which widows? Which orphans? How did the judges allocate the percentage owed by land users to specific uninvited victims? How would such assessments have been determined without creating an arbitrary judicial system? This view of state power is so far removed from the Mosaic law that it, too, makes no sense.

Did the state prohibit resident aliens and excommunicants from leasing land—not just nonpaying ones, but all of them? To allow only paying ones to lease land would have meant that the state had the power to compel attendance by removing nonpaying ones from the land. We are back to the first choice: state compulsion. So, did biblical law discriminate, on the basis of ecclesiastical membership, against would-be farmers? If so, Israel was not merely a theocracy; it was an ecclesiocracy. But the Mosaic law indicates that Israel was not an ecclesiocracy. Is this law an exception? This is possible, but I am unwilling to take this huge exegetical step. Surely such a view of this law's implications violates the principle of the rule of law.

This leaves one final choice: this law was institutionally unenforceable. We must therefore accept its economic implication: *non-tithers would have possessed a competitive advantage in farming*. This would have moved non-tithers onto the land and tithers into the cities, where they would no longer have been required to pay celebration tithes.

H. Old Wineskins

Built into the Mosaic land laws were at least two self-destruct clauses. This law was one of them. The other one was the jubilee land law. The jubilee law mandated that rural land be returned to the heirs

14. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

15. Chapter 62.

of the conquest every half century. A growing population—one of God's promises to Israel for obeying His law—meant ever-smaller parcels of land. This in turn meant a declining share of family income derived from agricultural output. This tithe law was a parallel law. *Over time, the covenantal faithfulness of Israel would have reduced the value of any tithe on income from land.* As time went by, no family could count on much from its landed inheritance. Meanwhile, the costs of celebrating would have gone up. The larger the population, the more expensive festival rent rates in Jerusalem would be.

This law pointed ahead to a day when the old wineskins of the Mosaic land laws would be broken by the new wine of population growth. *The Mosaic land laws were inherently anti-rural. They subsidized urbanization.* This is not surprising. Biblical eschatology points to a city: Zion, the city of God (Zech. 8; Rev. 21; 22). *Israel's land laws were designed to push Israelites off the land and into the cities. Eventually, these laws would have pushed them out of the Promised Land.* When enforced, the jubilee inheritance law would have promoted emigration out of Israel. It would have pushed men into occupations that were connected to foreign trade rather than domestic agriculture. The rural land inheritance law therefore promoted contact with foreigners. This was an aspect of the dominion covenant. It was to serve as a means of evangelism. The story of Israel, her laws, and her God was to spread abroad (Deut. 4:5–8).

The landed inheritance of Canaan was temporary. Men who paid careful attention to the Mosaic law would have seen that Israel was like Eden: a temporary training camp for worldwide dominion. *The land of Israel was both a boot camp and headquarters.* The diaspora was an inescapable concept for Israel. Either the nation would rebel against God, avoid population growth, and be carried into captivity, or else it would obey God, grow, and extend God's kingdom across the face of the earth. In either case, they could not remain bottled up inside Israel's geographical boundaries. Israel chose the first approach, twice: pre-exilic and post-crucifixion.

In between the conquest and the Babylonian captivity, what about the implicit subsidy to nonpaying resident aliens and excommunicants? Other things being equal, they would have inherited rural land—not as owners but as actual users. But the per capita value of this landed inheritance would have fallen steadily in times of national obedience: ever-smaller plots. Besides, other things are not equal. This law was given “that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work

of thine hand which thou doest.” Obedience to God would have brought national blessings. Even with growing festival nonparticipation in the countryside, the urban faithful would have continued to celebrate voluntarily with their growing nonagricultural incomes, leaving the nonparticipants to fall behind economically in the country side. *The push of God’s kingdom in history is toward urban life.*

I. New Testament Annulment and Restoration

The three temple-related annual festivals were aspects of Israel’s land laws and seed laws.¹⁶ The national festivals maintained geographical and ritual unity among the geographically dispersed tribes. These mandated journeys to a central location reminded the tribes of the centrality of the temple-altar, the Ark of the Covenant, the tablets of the law, and the geographically dispersed tribe of Levites. These celebrations were times of common confession.

There is no New Testament indication that any comparable national ceremony is to bind New Testament churches or residents of any covenanted Christian nation. The national feasts were tied explicitly to Jerusalem and the tabernacle; nothing like this geographical centrality exists under the New Covenant. The New Covenant substitutes the sacraments and decentralized worship for the temple festivals.

The third-year tithe of local celebration was not associated with the temple. It was a tribal affair. It involved a voluntary tax on the land and, if the inclusive language is taken literally, also on town residents. Those who were the contractual stewards of the land were required by God to pay both of these tithes, but no agency enforced this. One cost of leasing the land was participation in the festivals. But no one was forced by threat of formal sanctions to bear this cost.

Judicially, the second and third tithes were Mosaic land laws. The third tithe was also a seed law, having to do with the tribes. It required a communal celebration in local cities. These tithe laws were tied judicially to the conquest of Canaan. They were annulled when Israel’s unique status as owner of the Promised Land ceased in A.D. 70. Israel’s kingdom inheritance was transferred to the church, as Jesus had predicted (Matt. 21:43). Therefore, like the other land laws and seed laws, these two tithes did not extend into the New Covenant. Nevertheless, as examples of communal celebration, they serve us well. Christmas is

16. On land laws and seed laws, see Appendix J.

a common time of communal celebration in the West. The American tradition of feeding the homeless a turkey dinner at Christmas bears a faint trace of the old Mosaic practice. But these common meals, while funded by the higher classes, have rarely been attended by them. There is no social mixing today of property owners, widows, orphans, and strangers. Something socially healing has been lost with the annulment of the older festival pattern.

Medieval Catholicism annually celebrated over one hundred holy days (holidays).¹⁷ Spain had 150 saints days and festival days as late as 1620.¹⁸ Beginning with Luther's recommendation, Protestants drastically reduced the number of such holidays.¹⁹ This led to an increased number of work days in Protestant nations. It also led to a sabbatarian rest pattern of one day in seven. This development has very nearly destroyed the idea of a church calendar. Liturgical churches that are closer to the medieval pattern are more likely to pay attention to the church calendar; the Presbyterian and Anabaptist traditions do not. In Puritan Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century, it was illegal to celebrate Christmas. The government assessed a fine for any violation.²⁰ Religious celebrations are suspect in the Puritan tradition. In some instances today, Christmas and Easter are not celebrated by strict Presbyterians, although this is rare.

With the rise of the trade union movement, the number of paid holidays increased. The number of religious holidays in Protestant nations is still small, usually consisting of Christmas eve and day, and Easter weekend. Christian celebrations today are generally confined to families and local churches. There is no equivalent of Mosaic Israel's compulsory national feast of celebration.

If the second and third tithes were annulled because of the replacement of Israel's covenant by the church, what of the Levitical tithe? It was a tribal entitlement. It was given to Levi in place of rural land. On what legal basis does it survive in the New Testament, since the other dozen tribes lost their landed inheritance? There are no priests who offer lawful sacrifices in the New Covenant.

17. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1967), p. 146.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 149–51.

20. May 11, 1659: Nathaniel B. Shurtleff (ed.), *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 5 vols. (Boston: William White, Commonwealth Printer, 1853), V, p. 366.

J. Melchidezek

The tithe that constituted the first tithe is the most theocentric of all the economic laws of the Bible. It places God at the center of creation, i.e., the sovereign agent over creation. From at least the days of Abram to today, this primary tithe has been mandatory. The first mention of the tithe appears in Genesis 14, after Abram had returned from his victorious battle over Chedorlaomer. This took place before God established His covenant with Abram. This was a pre-circumcision practice. “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all” (Gen. 14:18–20). Only after Abram paid his tithe to a priest did God establish His covenant with him (Gen. 15).

Melchizedek’s announcement was theocentric: “. . . the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.” To pay a tithe to God’s priest was therefore Abram’s legal obligation. This was his acknowledgment that God is who Melchizedek said He is. Abram affirmed Melchizedek’s confession of faith by paying his tithe to Melchizedek. Abram subordinated himself to God confessionally by subordinating himself economically to the priest who represented God. He confessed a believable confession by affirming the truth of Melchizedek’s representative, mediatorial confession in Abram’s name and in God’s name. His public economic subordination to God’s priest validated his personal confession. He put his money where his mouth was. Only after he did this did God establish His covenant with him. In short, *the historical basis of the Abrahamic covenant was Abram’s prior confession through economic subordination to God’s ordained priest.* The meaning of Abram’s payment should be clear: *confessing man’s tithe is owed to the church.*²¹ This has never been clear to the church. Because of its confusion on this matter, the church of Jesus Christ has taken what amounts to a vow of poverty, thereby becoming a mendicant order: begging for Jesus.²²

There can be no question that such ecclesiastical positioning calls

21. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011). Cf. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

22. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 4.

into question the believability of the church's confession regarding the sovereignty of God in history. It may mimic Melchizedek's words, but it does not mimic Melchizedek's authority. Yet the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirmed that Jesus is the heir of Melchizedek, whose office is greater than any Levitical priest's:

For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better (Heb. 7:1–7).

The very office of Jesus as high priest comes from His inheritance of Melchizedek's office, who was superior to Abraham. This argument places the church as the legitimate successor and heir of Mosaic Israel, for the church traces its covenantal claim on the inheritance to Melchizedek, who was superior to Abraham. Yet the modern church ignores all this, for it refuses to lay judicial claim to a tenth of the income of its members. *In refusing to assert its rightful claim to the tithe, the church publicly denies its authority as heir of Melchizedek through Jesus Christ.* It compromises its confession of Melchizedek's confession: "Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand." The modern church refuses to affirm this confession, with its declaration that God brings predictable sanctions in history. It therefore refuses to impose a negative sanction on those members who refuse to tithe to the church: the revocation of *voting* membership.²³ *Communicant members who refuse to place themselves under ecclesiastical authority should not be entitled to impose ecclesiastical authority over other members.* Or, in the familiar slogan, "he who pays the piper calls the tune." Non-tithing members should not

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

call the judicial tunes, including the election of those officers in charge of allocating church funds. But modern churches have ignored this principle, leading to their capture by theological liberals, who love to call the tunes with other people's money, an outlook they have in common with political liberals, who use tax funds rather than church funds to call the tunes.

Conclusion

Land owners were told by God to voluntarily set aside an extra 10% of their net agricultural income in six years out of seven in order to fund the national tithes of celebration. In the sabbatical year, land owners still had to attend feasts in Jerusalem, but they did not have to invite in strangers, widows, and Levites. Participation in these national feasts was to be financed by a special tithe on all rural land. Given the expenses and burdens of travel, it is likely that the feast of Booths served as the national tithe-feast. In the third year, however, rural land-owning families were required to allocate an additional tithe for a local celebration, inviting widows, orphans, strangers, and Levites to attend.

At these feasts, the head of a rural family was not to conserve funds. The family and its guests were required to consume the entire tithe. Nothing was to be held back. This was God's celebration. This freedom from economic restraints was manifested by the authorization of intoxicating drink as part of the national celebrations. This law countered excessive future-orientation. The future is in God's hands, just as the present is. The present has its lawful rewards. To "save for a rainy day" was legitimate in Mosaic Israel; on the other hand, never to celebrate God's sunny days was illegitimate. As an ethical model, the Mosaic tithes of celebration are valid in the New Covenant. They are not ecclesiastically mandatory, however.

The first tithe was Levi's inheritance in lieu of rural land. It was imposed on all rural land-generated income in Israel. This inheritance was enforceable in a civil court. It was a tribal inheritance, not an ecclesiastical inheritance as such.²⁴ The civil sanction was not specified. Loss of citizenship was one possibility. Actual confiscation is another. The tithe today is not connected to the conquest generation's distribu-

24. The New Covenant tithe is a Melchizedekan tithe, not a Levitical tithe (Heb. 7). This is why the state cannot legitimately enforce it. It is the church's moral claim on God's covenant people, not a legal claim enforceable in a civil court.

tion of land. It is therefore no longer a civil matter.

What of the second and third tithes on the land? They were neither civil nor ecclesiastically enforced, with the possible exception of payment for Levites' festival meals.

Because of the economic burden of these laws, nonpaying resident aliens and excommunicants would have gained control over rural agricultural land, other things being equal. God's grace, however, does not make things equal. He promised to bless the nation if they obeyed. If rural renters had refused to pay but urban dwellers did pay, God would have honored the urban faithful. This is why there are limits to humanistic economic analysis. The economists do not see the covenantal structure of economics, including growth theory.

The value of the land's output in a family's budget would have fallen over time in a growing population. This meant that there would come a day when these festival laws would be annulled by God in order to meet the new environment: urban life, emigration, and falling income from small-scale agriculture. The celebration tithe laws were old wineskins: designed by God to be broken, either by apostate rural non-tithers or by successful covenant-keepers who went abroad and did not return to the annual festivals except on rare occasions.

The first tithe extends into the New Covenant by way of Melchizedek. Jesus Christ is the high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Tithes are paid to Him by means of payments to His institutional church.

36

THE CHARITABLE LOAN

At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it. Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day (Deut. 15:1–5).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's sabbath: point four of the biblical covenant. Its context is law in general: "to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day." This is ethics: point three.

A. Debt Relief

There had to be scheduled periods of rest in the Promised Land: for the land itself, for agricultural workers, for domesticated farm animals, and for at least one form of debt: the morally mandatory, non-interest-bearing charitable loan. God had rested on the seventh day; Israel was to rest in the seventh year. The law of the sabbath was announced in the fourth commandment. This placed it under point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions.¹

The release from work was a positive sanction. So was the release from debt. "Forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12) remains a valid prayer.²

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

This release from debt was called the Lord's release. The Hebrew word here translated as "release," *shawmat*, means "rest" or "throw down." The mandatory *resting of the land* in the seventh year is related grammatically to the *release from debt*: "But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard" (Ex. 23:11).³

God's blessings are once again said to be tied to national obedience. *Israel's inheritance of the land was conditional*. Law, positive sanctions, and inheritance were a covenantal unit. This means that law, negative sanctions, and disinheritance were equally a covenantal unit. The positive sanction of rest was explicitly tied to the maintenance of the national inheritance. This rest included rest from debt. This was a land law: "for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it" (v. 4b). It was tied to Israel's system of covenantal release.

B. Loans to the Poor

There was an annulment provision in this law of debt release. It would not apply when there were no longer poor people in the land (v. 4a). This should be regarded as hyperbolic language. "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land" (v. 11). But the fact remains that in some unique way, this law was connected judicially to the presence of poor people in the land. This exclusionary clause should alert us to the possibility that this law was not universal in scope or application. It was tied in some way to both the poor and the land.

Moses explained the application of this law. It was explicitly related to poor people. "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (Deut. 15:7–8). There was a strong element of moral obligation here.⁴

What did the word mean, "wanteth"? The same Hebrew word,

3. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 53.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, *Ibid.*, ch. 49.

khawsare, is used to describe God's care for them in the wilderness. They lacked nothing. "Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they **lacked nothing**; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not" (Neh. 9:21). Yet the exodus generation had complained continually that they lacked everything good which they had possessed in Egypt. In response, God kept them wandering in the wilderness. He disinherited that generation. So, the idea of "want" in this context is serious poverty, where one's work or life is in danger. Such a lack of basic necessities is not common to covenant-keepers: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1).

There were sanctions attached to this law because it was a subset of a larger category of biblical laws: charity. "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse" (Prov. 28:27). These promised negative sanctions were individual. God imposed them directly on individuals, apart from any intermediary covenantal authorities. *He did not threaten the community with negative corporate sanctions. Thus, these were not laws governing covenantal institutions.* These laws were neither civil nor ecclesiastical. There is no suggestion that any covenantal institution had the either the right or the obligation to threaten formal negative sanctions against individuals who disobeyed this law. The Bible is clear about the presence of these individual sanctions in history. Charity laws were not a subset of the land laws.

The mandated discipline here was self-discipline. The man with money to lend was to consider the plight of the poor man. He was to evaluate the causes of the poor man's poverty. Having determined that the person was not poor because of bad habits, the man with money was to lend generously. If he did, he would be rewarded: a positive sanction. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto" (vv. 9–10). Again, it was God, not the state, who would reward the generous lender. This is why this law had nothing to do with civil sanctions. Biblical civil sanctions are exclusively negative. The Bible does not author-

ize compulsory wealth redistribution.⁵

C. The Israelite Bondservant

After the discussion of morally obligatory lending, the text introduces what appears to be a wholly unrelated topic: the Israelite bondservant. This bondservant was to be released in the seventh year.

And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that where with the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bond man in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day (vv. 12–15).

There is something missing here: an explanation of the difference between this kind of Israelite bondservant and the Israelite bondservant described in Leviticus 25:

And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God. (Lev. 25:39–43).⁶

Here is an Israelite bondservant who was purchased by another Israelite. He remained a bondservant until the jubilee. This could be as long as 49 years. Yet the text in Deuteronomy 15 insists that the Israelite bondservant be released in the seventh year. How can these two laws be reconciled?

5. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1982] 1996). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>)

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Five Point Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 29.

1. A Question of Collateral

The person described in Leviticus 25 was a person with no land to return to. What redeemed him from bondage was the return of his land at the jubilee (Lev. 25:13).⁷ Because he had no land in the interim, he could find himself without the means to repay a commercial loan. He defaulted on his loan, and he was then sold into bondage to repay it. The presumption here is that he no longer held title to any land. He was landless until the jubilee. He had no collateral for the loan other than his own labor. So, when he defaulted, he lost his freedom.

The collateral for a loan could be either goods or services. Goods could easily be pledged and transferred at the time of default. Labor services could be transferred, too, but they involved the loss of freedom for a specified period of time. If goods were pledged, their transfer redeemed the loan. But what was the value of a person's labor services? To assess this, there had to be a labor market. There was a market for long-term labor services. We would call it a slave market. An Israelite's enslavement was legally limited; it could not exceed 49 years. This limitation did not apply to foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46).⁸ Why not? Because an Israelite's redemption out of bondage was by rural land ownership: part of the original inheritance attained by the conquest generation.⁹ When the Israelite bondservant's land was returned to him, he could return to his land. He thereby gained redemption from bondage.

There was another distinguishing factor: the circumstances of a loan. The Israelite who had no land to pledge for a loan was considered a poor risk. He had lost control over his land for some reason. Perhaps he had lost it by having to repay a previous loan. So, the lender wanted security for his loan. He wanted long-term labor services that would command a market price high enough to guarantee his repayment.

2. An Interest-Free Loan

What of the poor man in Deuteronomy 15:12? He was morally entitled to a loan. More than this: he was entitled to an interest-free loan.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 24.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

9. A Levite's judicial basis of citizenship was his legal claim on the tithe. He may have owned a home in a city, but this was not the legal basis for his liberation at the jubilee.

"If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury" (Ex. 22:25).¹⁰ "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger [*geyr*], or a sojourner [*to shawb*]; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase" (Lev. 25:35–37).¹¹ A poor man had a superior claim on a righteous man's loanable funds. This was not a commercial loan. Commercial loans were legitimate. The non-resident alien [*nokree*] had no claim to an interest-free loan. "Unto a stranger [*nokree*] thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury" (Deut. 23:20a).¹² But an interest-free loan was morally compulsory in Mosaic Israel in a way that a commercial loan was not.

The poor man who sought an interest-free loan could be asked to pledge his cloak, but it had to be returned to him by evening (Ex. 22:26).¹³ This kept him from pledging an asset that was already pledged, but it meant that only a nearby neighbor would lend to him—a person who would know his character and the reasons for his present poverty.

The interest-free loan proved that the borrower was at risk of bondage only until the sabbatical year of release. He was not at risk until the jubilee. The presence of interest proved that he was at risk for a longer period: until the jubilee. The zero-interest loan was morally obligatory on the lender. The interest-bearing loan was not. *The person seeking an interest-bearing commercial loan had no moral claim on the prospective lender.* He was at greater risk in case he defaulted.

In the year of release, the lender was to provide the borrower with capital: "Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him" (Deut. 15:14). "It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest" (v. 18). There was no such obligation on the lender when a long-term

10. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 29.

12. Chapter 57.

13. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

Israelite bondservant departed in the jubilee year. He would return to his land empty-handed. But the poor man who defaulted on a charitable loan apparently had land to return to.

I wrote the following in my extended commentary on Leviticus, *Boundaries and Dominion*, chapter 29.

* * * * *

A man's willingness to bear the risk of up to six years of bond service for his failure to repay a loan established the loan as a morally compulsory, zero-interest, charitable loan. Unless the poor borrower was willing to take this risk, he had no moral claim on the lender. Yet it is clear from the text that Israelites could lawfully be sold into servitude until the next jubilee year. This bondage was a means of debt repayment. So, if servitude of up to 49 years was possible, why did the threat of no more than six years of bondservice judicially identify a morally compulsory charitable loan?

The answer is found in the issue of legal access to the inheritance. A man who was so poor that he was willing to risk bondservice until the next sabbatical year, but who was unwilling to put up his land as collateral, had a moral claim on a zero-interest charitable loan. He had a property to return to. He was poor, but he was obviously not so present-oriented or risk-oriented that he would use his inheritance as collateral. His poverty was temporary. He had an inheritance to return to in the sabbatical year after a period of bondservice. His post-crisis goal was liberty and dominion: self-government. So, he used his own potential servitude as collateral to secure the charitable loan.

The borrower who was willing to use his inheritance as collateral in a business loan, or someone who had already leased out his land until the next jubilee year, was not equally protected by the Mosaic law. He had no moral claim on a zero-interest charitable loan. Either this was a business loan, in which the element of moral obligation was not involved, or else the person was economically incompetent: he had already leased his inheritance, yet he still wanted a loan. For this person, the time limits on bondservice that were offered by the sabbatical year of release were inoperative. He could be placed into bondservice until the next jubilee year.

Access to the inheritance served as the debtor's sanctuary. If he had not leased out his land, or if he had not lost it because he had used it as collateral to secure a non-charity loan that later went bad, he

could not be placed in bondservice for longer than six years. God reminded the debtor that retaining possession of his inheritance was very important in God's eyes. Debtors who were willing to place their inheritance at risk to secure a business loan, or who had already leased out their land, were regarded by the Mosaic law as second-class debtors. They had no moral claim on a zero-interest loan; they also did not possess a sanctuary from bondage: they could serve beyond six years, i.e., until the next jubilee trumpet sounded.¹⁴

* * * * *

What if the man released in the sabbatical year did not want to face the trials of life? In that case, he could choose to remain with the lender. The subsequent passage sets forth the ritual terms of permanent bondservice: the pierced ear (Deut. 15:16–17). This covenantal mark of bondage obligated only him, not his adult heirs. If he came into bondage as a poor man by way of a default on an interest-free charity loan, his adult heirs could not be obligated to stay with him. He took the oath of allegiance in his own name only.

D. Commercial Loans

A failure to recognize the character of this loan as a charitable loan leads to a second error: a failure to recognize the presence of commercial loans in ancient Israel. Combined, these two errors produce a serious historical and analytical error: the perception of Mosaic Israel as a noncommercial society in which the universal phenomenon of interest-producing loans did not exist because of the Mosaic law.

Whenever we see such a line of reasoning, we can be sure that the author has an assumption disguised as a conclusion, namely, that the Mosaic law is inapplicable in today's world. The Mosaic law is thought to be suitable only for an older era, an agricultural era, an era in which such modern economic categories as interest were not operational. This assumption leads to either of two additional errors: (1) the concept of interest is not universal, but is merely an artifact of modern capitalism; or (2) the category of interest is universal, so the Mosaic law is anti-capitalistic.

14. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 29:A.

1. Willingale's View

In a remarkably inaccurate interpretation of the Mosaic economy, A. E. Willingale argued in 1962 that there was no commercial lending in ancient Israel prior to the monarchy. Willingale wrote:

Loans in Israel were not commercial but charitable, granted not to enable a trader to set up or expand a business but to tide a peasant farmer over a period of poverty. Since the economy remained predominantly agricultural up to the end of the Monarchy, there developed no counterpart to the commercial loan system already existing in Babylonia in 2000 B.C. Hence the legislation contains not mercantile regulations but exhortations to neighborliness.¹⁵

Willingale was wrong. There were commercial loans in Israel. He did not recognize that the jubilee year's debt law that governed the indentured servitude of a Hebrew brother (Lev. 25:39–41) had to refer to a commercial loan or a profit-seeking consumer loan that had not been the product of a crisis in the debtor's life. Had it been an interest-free charitable loan, he would have gone free in the sabbatical year. He would not have had to wait for the jubilee year to regain his freedom and return to his family's farm.

Willingale in 1962 faced the problem that faces every Bible-believing theologian today who attempts to comment on biblical issues for which he has no training in the academic discipline involved—in this case, economic theory. There is no body of academic materials available to him that has been written by Bible-believing scholars who have reconstructed their academic disciplines in terms of biblical revelation. This is why Christian reconstruction is necessary, and also why it is hated by those Christian scholars who are unwilling to reconsider their academic specialties and careers in terms of the authority of the Bible.

Willingale was quoted on this matter as an expert by dispensational theologian and pastor Gene A. Getz.¹⁶ Getz then used Willingale's error to prove to his satisfaction—though not mine—that Deuteronomy's economic laws are no longer valid in the New Testament era because the Mosaic Israel was designed for a rural, non-commercial economy. Getz ignored the obvious: Willingale's analysis does not solve the problem of analyzing Israel's economy after the monarchy,

15. "Debt," *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1982), pp. 275–76.

16. Gene A. Getz, *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), p. 264.

which, according to Willingale, was urban and commercial.

Getz wanted to find a New Testament loophole for Deuteronomy 28: the link between national covenantal faithfulness and wealth, and national covenantal rebellion and poverty.¹⁷ “Willingale reminded us that this unique economic setting in Israel ‘changes in the New Testament.’ Israel now existed in a totally different situation culturally and economically. The Jews had to adapt their laws to a commercial economy.”¹⁸ Getz affirmed a discontinuity between the Mosaic economy and the New Testament economy. Even in terms of his own argument, Getz placed this discontinuity a millennium too late. According to Willingale, the Jews would have had to adapt their laws a millennium before Christ. Getz did not mention this problem for his thesis regarding the New Covenant inapplicability of Deuteronomy 28.

2. *Spiritualizing Away God’s Law*

Getz was a pietist. The theological tradition known as pietism asserts a radical discontinuity between the judicial requirements of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The pietist views Christianity as a religion of the heart, not a religion of the marketplace, whether economic or political.¹⁹ Getz sought to undermine the continuing judicial authority of the Mosaic law in both church and state. He spiritualized away its meaning. First, he rejected the Mosaic law’s binding authority. Then he invoked a vague and undefined spirit in order to avoid the accusation of being an antinomian. “At the same time, we must not bypass the spirit of these laws.”²⁰ I ask: What spirit? With what negative sanctions for violating the spirit? Getz wanted deliverance from the Mosaic law, yet he also invoked an undefined, toothless version of the law. He spiritualized away the law, yet he also sought to retain biblical ethics. All dispensational theologians produce this sort of exegesis regarding biblical law, as do most non-dispensational theologians. This methodology of *judicial spiritualizing* is a standing testimony against dispensationalism’s self-proclaimed hermeneutical principle of exegetical literalism.²¹ Yet the dispensationalist does not honor this principle

17. Chapter 68.

18. Getz, *Material Possessions*, p. 265.

19. See Appendix I.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

21. Perhaps the leading dispensational theologian after the death of Lewis Sperry Chafer was Dallas Seminary’s Charles C. Ryrie. In 1965, he wrote: “Therefore, the second aspect of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism is the matter of plain hermeneutics. The word *literal* is perhaps not so good as either the word *normal* or *plain*, but

of interpretation. He honors another: “literal whenever convenient.” He picks and chooses the passages which he interprets literally, just as all other Bible-believing interpreters do.

The dispensational theologian is a literalist regarding unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Jews or the temple—prophecies that the church for almost two millennia has maintained were fulfilled by the church before A.D. 70 (preterism) or are in the process of being fulfilled by the church. He insists that these prophecies must be fulfilled after the Rapture (pre-tribulationism) or after the Great Tribulation but before the Second Coming (post-tribulationism). Yet he is equally ready to find hidden meanings in the dimensions of the temple, or allegories about Jesus in its stones. He is also ready to spiritualize out of church history the New Testament’s application of almost every law in the Old Testament—and, in principle, all of them, including the Ten Commandments.²² Getz wrote: “Heretofore, we have noted that most of God’s promises for being faithful with material possessions relate to eternity and not to this earth.”²³ Getz knew exactly what Deuteronomy 28 teaches, and he sought to escape its clear teaching.²⁴ Here we have one more poorly executed attempt to escape from the Mosaic law and its corporate sanctions in history. In doing so, Getz attempted to strip riches of all covenantal significance—in America, the richest society in history. He also removed from Christi-

in any case it is an interpretation that does not spiritualize or allegorize as nondispensational interpretation does. The spiritualizing may be practiced to a lesser or greater degree, but its presence in a system of interpretation is indicative of a nondispensational approach.” Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), pp. 45–46. In his 1995 revision, he backed off. He added these qualifications: “To be sure, literal/historical/grammatical interpretation is not the sole possession or practice of dispensationalists, but the consistent use of it in all areas of biblical interpretation is. This does not preclude or exclude correct understanding of types, illustrations, apocalypses, and other genres within the basic framework of literal interpretation.” Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 40. This transformed his previous unsupported but uncompromising definition of literalism into a muddled, unsupported statement.

22. Former Dallas Seminary professor S. Lewis Johnson publicly rejected the Ten Commandments as the heart of legalism. Legalism for him meant the Ten Commandments. He approvingly quoted fundamentalist Presbyterian pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse, who argued that “It was a tragic hour when the Reformation wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds and catechisms and sought to bring Gentile believers into bondage to Jewish law, which was never intended either for the Gentile nations or for the church.” S. Lewis Johnson, “The Paralysis of Legalism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (April/June 1963), p. 109.

23. Getz, *Material Possessions*, p. 233.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 265–66.

ans who follow his interpretation any possibility of developing an explicitly biblical economic theory.

He did not tell his readers what his hermeneutical principles were. He did not explain, let alone justify, why he devoted almost his entire book to New Testament passages on property, almost completely ignoring the Old Testament's teachings. I have written thousands of pages of books on the economics of the Pentateuch. By 1990, I had published three volumes: one on Genesis and two on Exodus 1–20. Chilton's *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* appeared in 1981 and was in its third edition in 1990. Yet not one reference to these books appears in Getz's footnotes or his bibliography. When it came to biblical theology, Getz avoided three-quarters of the Bible.

Getz ignored completely the economics of the Old Covenant, except to dismiss Deuteronomy 28. Yet he called his book biblical theology. He seemed unaware of the massive deception involved in both his hermeneutics and his title. Dispensationalists are incapable of thinking covenantally or judicially, for there are neither laws nor historical sanctions in their doctrine of the New Covenant during the so-called Church Age. For them, everything significant socially is found in relationships, feelings, and either legalism (the laymen) or a rejection of legalism in the name of an undefined spirit of interpretation (the scholars). They are antinomians regarding biblical law. They seek to improve on biblical law, either by replacing it with men's laws (legalism) or by undefined spiritual feelings (antinomianism). This is why the dispensational movement has yet to produce its first book on New Testament social theory or social ethics. It has no explicitly biblical theory of social causation. It shares this weakness with Lutheranism.

E. New Testament Applications

The New Testament Christian faces an even more rigorous requirement than the Old Covenant saint did: "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35).²⁵ Even a poor non-resident alien is now to become the beneficiary. The man with assets is to lend to this person without hope of repayment. A charity loan is still

25. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

governed by the Old Covenant rule: no interest.

Does this mean that every potential borrower's request must be granted? No; the charity loan is still limited by the rule that evil is not to be subsidized. The moral character and habits of the borrower must be known to the lender. The lender must make an evaluation: Is this a truly poor man whose economic troubles are not of his own making? There is no obligation on anyone's part to subsidize incompetence born of immoral or present-oriented behavior.

The person with assets to lend may choose to have a representative agency make this evaluation for him. He may decide to loan money to the agent or organization, allowing someone else to decide who deserves an interest-free loan. Such loans are to be made on the same basis as the Mosaic charitable loan: no interest. We are not to loan money at interest to charitable organizations. The idea of interest-paying church bonds is abominable.²⁶ If churches or non-profit Christian organizations choose to raise money, let the members and supporters donate extra money (best), or borrow the money in the commercial loan market and give it to the church (second-best), or lend this money at zero interest (third-best). If Christian organizations must borrow money at interest, let them borrow from unbelievers or commercial banks. But this is a third-best decision, for it places the church in a subordinate position to covenant-breakers: the servanthood of the debtor. It is a dark day when God's church is in debt to unbelievers through commercial banks. It may have to be done, but it is a dark day when it is done.

In modern times, there is no provision for collateralized labor, i.e., a period of legally enforceable debt servitude. For charitable loans, this is a good rule; for commercial loans, it is not. Today, there is also no national year of release. This is legitimate; Israel's national sabbatical year was an aspect of the Mosaic land laws: the inheritance. Furthermore, the jubilee was an aspect of the original conquest. It no longer has any judicial or covenantal purpose.

The New Testament rule governing charity loans has broadened the Mosaic limits. Christians are to lend at zero interest to the righteous poor without hope of any repayment. The absence today of an enforceable period of debt servitude does not affect this obligation. If anything, it reinforces it. The very absence of such a period of ser-

26. Gary North, "Stewardship, Investment, and Usury: Financing the Kingdom of God," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), Appendix 3.

vitute points to the New Testament's rule: *lend without hope of repayment*.

Would it be illegitimate for a society to legislate such a requirement, though not a period longer than the six-year limit of Deuteronomy 15? We must ask: On what basis? If the sabbatical year was a land law, which it appears to have been, then the annulment of Mosaic Israel's special covenantal position removes that as a justification. What covenantal legal principle might legitimately be substituted? Not the sabbath law. Paul was clear: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).²⁷ The enforcement of the sabbath is not to become an aspect of judicial sanctions. The locus of enforcement has shifted to the individual.²⁸

There was never any moral obligation to make commercial loans under the Mosaic covenant. This is still the case. There remains a moral obligation to loan at zero interest to the brother in the faith or a righteous resident alien. This law had nothing to do with seed or land. This is why the uncircumcised resident alien was morally entitled to a zero-interest emergency charity loan. It was a law governing personal relations among people who agreed to live under the legal terms of God's civil covenant. It was a land law, but not a Promised Land law. It was a covenantal land law: a cross-boundary law that would apply to any nation formally covenanted under God.

Today, Western nations are only rarely formally covenanted under God, and none acknowledges the Bible to be the supreme law of the land. There is therefore no equal moral obligation to lend to resident aliens. This biblical obligation depends on the society's view of debt and the moral outlook of the poor neighbor. If the poor man is an honest man who is in a crisis through no fault of his own, then he is morally entitled to a zero-interest charity loan from a true believer in the God of the Bible. But, like the poor man in Exodus 22:26, he can legitimately be asked to surrender his cloak as collateral. This is a means of seeing to it that he does not indebt himself to many lenders simultaneously. This is an institutional restraint on debt servitude which should be honored today. To lend, hoping for nothing in return is one thing; to devise a system which encourages poor people to run up large debts on the basis of no collateral or multiple loans on the same piece

27. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

28. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 2, ch. 24.

of collateral is something else. Honest, hard-working, otherwise future-oriented people should not be encouraged to become servants to debt. Extending credit to present-oriented people who are willing to pay high rates of interest on commercial or consumer loans is legitimate (Deut. 15:6).²⁹ It is not legitimate to encourage future-oriented people who are trapped by circumstances beyond their control to go ever-deeper into charitable debt. They should also be encouraged to repay all debts to avoid a life of servitude. A sign of spiritual maturity is debt-free spending. A sign of even greater spiritual maturity is interest-free charitable lending.

There is no longer a six-year debt limit on this moral obligation to repay. The New Testament extends greater mercy, but it imposes greater moral maturity in paying off debts and avoiding them in the first place. Paul wrote: “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (II Thess. 3:7–10).

Conclusion

The interest-free loan was a charitable loan. It was morally obligatory, though not legally obligatory, for an Israelite with surplus assets to loan to a poor Israelite brother or a poor resident alien on an interest-free basis. Such a loan involved the threat of a six-year maximum period of bondservice in case of a default. Liberation day was the national sabbatical year, which was also the year of release for all charitable loans. This was a very different kind of loan from an interest-bearing commercial loan that was collateralized by an Israelite’s land or labor until the next jubilee. In the case of a non-Israelite, a default on a large commercial loan could lead to inter-generational slavery (Lev. 25:44–46).³⁰

The early church and the medieval church misinterpreted the Mosaic laws governing charitable debt. A series of church councils and

29. Chapter 37.

30. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 30.

decrees placed extensive prohibitions on interest-bearing loans.³¹ This hampered the growth of industry for over a thousand years. It also placed Christians into debt to Jews, who had no restrictions on lending at interest to gentiles. This created great hostility on the part of gentiles, and it led to repeated violence and defaults on loans, especially by gentile governments.

The sabbatical year is no longer required, for this law applied only to Canaan, when the date of Israel's entry into the land could be accurately determined. The sabbatical year was tied to the calendar of the feasts. With the New Testament, the locus of sabbath enforcement has been transferred to the individual conscience.³² There is no longer a nationally applicable, legally enforceable sabbatical year.

31. J. Gilchrist, *The Church and Economic Development in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martins, 1969), Documents. Gilchrist provides translations of numerous texts, from Nicea (325) on, that dealt with usury. The premier study of the late medieval church's position is John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957). For a summary, see Noonan, "The Amendment of Papal Teaching by Theologians," in Charles E. Curran (ed.), *Contraception: Authority and Dissent* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), pp. 41–75.

32. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 24.

LENDING AND DOMINION

For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee (Deut. 15:6).

The theocentric aspect of this law is dominion: the extension of God's kingdom in history through the voluntary subordination of covenant-breaking nations. Dominion is an aspect of point three of the biblical covenant. The blessing was a positive sanction—grace precedes law—but the correct response was money-lending.

A. International Money-Lending

The public's hostility to money-lending is universal—as universal as the practice is widespread. There are passages in the Old Testament that indicate such hostility.¹ There has been a long ecclesiastical tradition that has restricted or prohibited lending at interest.² Then why does this law appear in the middle of a passage that restricts interest-bearing loans? Why should lending at interest be regarded as Israel's proper response to God's blessing?

This law had nothing to do with lending to the poor, yet it appears in the middle of a passage dealing with loans to the poor. It stands in contrast to the remainder of the passage. The contrast between loans

1. Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36–37; Deuteronomy 23:19; Nehemiah 5:7, 10; Psalms 15:5; Proverbs 28:8; Isaiah 24:2; Jeremiah 15:10; Ezekiel 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12.

2. J. Gilchrist, *The Church and Economic Development in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martins, 1969), Documents. Gilchrist provides translations of numerous texts, from Nicea (325) on, that dealt with usury. The premier study of the late medieval church's position is John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957). For a summary, see Noonan, "The Amendment of Papal Teaching by Theologians," in Charles E. Curran (ed.), *Contraception: Authority and Dissent* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), pp. 41–75.

to the poor and loans to foreign nations is obvious. The Hebrew capitalist was to extend both kinds of loans. They were not the same kind of loan. The underlying motivation was also not the same. The loan to the poor brother or permanent resident alien (Lev. 25:35–37) was a charitable loan. The loan to the foreigner was not.

There was no prohibition against taking interest from a loan to a foreigner. What applied to the foreigner temporarily living in the land also applied to foreigners living abroad.

Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger [*nokree*] thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it (Deut. 23:19–20).³

How does a person lawfully accumulate capital needed to lend? By spending less than he receives. That is, he accumulates capital by becoming *a net exporter of goods and services*. He takes in more money than he spends on consumer goods and services.

What is true of an individual is equally true of a nation. I do not necessarily mean merely a nation-state; I mean a nation: a covenantally oath-bound society. To become an international money-lending society, a nation must be filled with people who are net exporters of goods and services. They can *lend abroad* only because they *sell abroad*. Even if they sell newly mined gold or silver, they are nevertheless exporters. If they are not involved in mining, then they have money to lend abroad because they have earned money from abroad, which they subsequently lend to people in those societies that have run trade deficits with them. We call an *excess of income in money* a *trade surplus*. Yet, technically, there has to be equality: value for value. Nobody in commerce gives away free money. Money must be earned. So, in the broadest sense, trade creates a *balance* (equality) of payments *surplus* (inequality). But how can there be a surplus if there is balance? Because there is a balance of assets: goods and services (assets) exported = goods and services (assets) imported + money loaned out (future income: asset). This equation applies also to an individual who is accumulating capital.

The motivation for the initial contact between a foreign borrower and an Israelite lender was probably international trade. The language

3. Chapter 57.

barrier was overcome because of the motivation of making a profit.

Why would a foreigner want a loan from an Israelite? Why would he want this dependence on a foreigner? The most obvious reason was to finance additional trade. The foreigner planned to bring additional goods to sell to the Israelite. To finance more goods to bring into Israel, the foreigner requested a loan. He could take gold or silver back to his country, purchase goods, and bring them to Israel. If the profit margin on the sale of the goods was high enough, he was ready to pay a rate of interest to the Israelite.

The Israelite was ready to lend because he wanted a rate of return on his money. The foreigner was willing to pay more interest than a competing Israelite because of the import operation's profit opportunity. Because the lender probably had an on-going business relationship with the foreigner, he was willing to trust him. If the borrower defaulted, he would lose access to an outlet for his goods.

This explains why an individual Israelite importer would serve as a money-lender to a foreign exporter of foreign goods. But, at some point, the Israelites would run out of money to buy foreign goods. The importer would run out of money to lend to the foreign exporter. Therefore, for Israelites to serve as national money lenders, they would have to export more goods than they imported. They would have to run what is usually called a favorable balance of trade. Why favorable? Because the exporting nation takes in more money than it spends abroad on imported goods. But all trade must balance. Why, then, can an exchange be favorable? Because it allows the exporting nation to buy *production goods* in the nation it exports to. Instead of buying consumer goods and services in exchange for exported goods and services, individuals in the exporting nation buy foreign capital, i.e., production goods. Or they make loans to foreign purchasers of the exported goods.

Assume that the foreigner wanted to buy an item from an Israelite seller. Instead of paying cash, he borrowed the money from the Israelite exporter or from a lender in Israel. Or he may have agreed to pay a rate of interest for the value of the goods received from the Israelite exporter. In this case, no money changed hands. The foreigner paid for the item by means of a promise to pay. Over time, Israel's citizens built up capital abroad. They were paid a return on these investments. More money or goods or services flowed back into Israel as time went on. The process could continue for as long as Israel could find foreign buyers for its goods and borrowers for its loans. Capital owned by Is-

raelites would increasingly be located abroad.

For a nation to become an *international money-lender*, it must become an *international exporter*. It must enjoy a competitive advantage in international trade in order to gain an international advantage in money-lending. In fact, there can be no trade surplus without either money-lending abroad or purchases of foreign capital. To make the investments abroad, the exporting nation must be more efficient in selling its goods and services abroad than the importing nations are in selling theirs in return.

God told Israel to become an exporting nation. He did not say this explicitly. He said it implicitly when He told Israel to become a money-lending nation. He called Israel into the world trade markets. He told the Israelites to become more efficient producers than foreign nationals.

God called on Israelites to establish business contacts abroad. This would require their gaining mastery of foreign languages, as well as an understanding of foreign laws, currencies, and business practices. Israel was not to isolate itself from the rest of the world.

B. Extending the Covenant

Not only did God call Israelites to become familiar with foreign economic practices, He called them to demonstrate to foreigners the productivity of God's covenant. God's law was to become a means of evangelism (Deut. 4:5–8).⁴ One proof of success for God's law would be Israel's greater productivity. Members of an importing nation who borrow from an exporting nation recognize the efficiency of the exporters. The presence of Israelite goods imported from abroad would testify to the efficiency of the exporters. As time went on, successful businessmen in foreign nations would learn the Israelites' secrets of economic success. They would have to imitate these practices in order to compete. After all, if they had nothing worth buying, Israel would cease trading with them.

Exporting is a means of cultural conquest. This form of conquest is not based on war. It is based on voluntary cooperation. But to export more goods than it imports, a nation must become a net exporter of capital. One form of capital exporting is money-lending.

For citizens of a foreign nation to have maintained the advantage of access to desirable goods imported from Israel, its economic repres-

4. Chapter 8.

entatives would have had to deal honestly with Israelite exporters and money-lenders. If its agents cheated Israel by defaulting on loans, and if the nation's courts upheld this, then the residents would suffer a reduction in the flow of goods and services.

Here is a legitimate reason to seek wealth: to become an international money-lender. There is a reason to become a money-lender: to increase the influence of your covenant-keeping society. The lender is the master over the borrower (Prov. 22:7).⁵ To seek such mastery over other nations is legitimate. To be in a financial position to lend to citizens of covenant-breaking nations is a blessing of God. His kingdom is advanced by such lending. Conversely, it is a curse to be in debt to citizens of other nations.

The text here is not talking about what is today called foreign aid, which is in fact state-to-state aid: using tax money extracted from the residents of one nation to fund state-funded projects in another nation.⁶ The text is talking about the aggregate debt or credit positions of a covenant-keeping society: the net effects of voluntary, individual decisions to lend to or borrow from foreigners.

C. Future-Orientation and Hierarchy

Everyone values the present more than the future, for responsibility is in the present. So is enjoyment and opportunity. But future-orientation is vital for planning. Without it, men would not save in the present for the sake of the future. The value of money would collapse. Who would hold money in the present if he did not plan to spend it in the future?⁷

We discount the present value of future income. This rate of discount is called the rate of interest. A complete discounting of the future would produce an infinite rate of interest. No one would sacrifice any present consumption for the sake of future consumption. Paul expressed this idea in terms of the Christians' faith in the bodily resurrection. "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die" (I Cor. 15:32).

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 67.

6. P. T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development: Studies and debates in development economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 95–135.

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1990] 2012), Appendix J.

When people are highly future-oriented, they are willing to lend money or goods at lower rates of interest than less future-oriented people are willing to lend. They have what Mises called low time-preference. When people are present-oriented, they are willing to pay high rates of interest.⁸ Edward Banfield called these two groups upper class (future-oriented) and lower class (present-oriented).⁹ There is a profitable voluntary transaction possible between members of both groups: a future-oriented person can profitably lend to present-oriented person. This transaction is profitable on both sides. Both actors get what they want. But there is a superior and inferior in the relationship. “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7). While a present-oriented person gains access to the money or goods that he wants immediately, in exchange for a promise to repay the lender in the future, he does not gain this advantage at zero cost. He becomes a servant. But this is his choice. It is not a matter of compulsion.

The Bible makes it very clear that there are legitimate hierarchies in this life. One of these hierarchies is economic: lender over debtor. Another is social: master over servant. These hierarchies are individual. They are also social. They are also international.

This verse clearly recommends becoming an international lender. It very clearly discourages becoming an international debtor. This is another way of saying that it is an advantage to be future-oriented and a disadvantage to be present-oriented. *The covenant-keeper is supposed to be future-oriented.* He is supposed to be thrifty. Accumulating capital for the purpose of becoming a lender is a good thing for covenant-keepers.

Entire societies are characterized by a specific time orientation. Israel was to become a future-oriented society. When this happened, Israel would become a net lender of money. Surrounding nations would achieve their goals—present gratification—in exchange for future repayment. Israel would achieve its national goal—the extension of foreign trade and money-lending—by providing what the surrounding nations wanted: present gratification. Those on each side of the transaction would achieve their goals, but the result would be a hierarchy, with Israel on top.

8. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 6:3.

9. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 48–54.

It is a mistake to consider both positions—higher and lower, master and servant—as equal. Such a view reflects a false ethical neutrality. Freedom is better than servitude. This is why Paul told Christians slaves, “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather” (I Cor. 7:21).¹⁰ The Mosaic law indicates that it is better to be on top than on the bottom, a money-lender rather than a money-borrower. Jesus reinforced this view in his parable of the fearful steward who buried his coin. The owner reproved the steward: “Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury” (Matt. 25:27).¹¹

As is true of every individual, not every nation can be a net exporter of goods and capital. Not every nation can be equal in productivity all of the time. There cannot be an exact balance of trade at all times. Each side gets what its members want, but the side that wants dominion rather than subordination has chosen the better goal. The question then becomes one of means. The Bible teaches that the correct means is the export of goods, services, and loans, not the export of armies.

Conclusion

This verse makes it clear that the nation of Israel was to become a money-lending nation by means of international trade. It was to become a trade surplus nation, i.e., a net exporter of goods, services, and money. The money exported (lent) out had to come from the surplus of exports over imports. Goods flowed out; money and goods flowed in. The lower the amount of present goods that flowed in, the larger the amount of future goods that would flow in later.

This is the model followed in the post-World War II era by the Asian “tigers”: first Japan; then Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. Today, China is following their lead. Their domestic economies have been export-driven. Their export businesses have learned how to compete in international markets. Their citizens in the aggregate have run net trade surpluses by becoming international lenders. This process is a unit: two sides of the same coin. Then the coin is lent at interest.

10. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

11. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

CONSUMING CAPITAL IN GOOD FAITH

All the firstling males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the firstling of thy sheep. Thou shalt eat it before the LORD thy God year by year in the place which the LORD shall choose, thou and thy household. And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt eat it within thy gates: the unclean and the clean person shall eat it alike, as the roebuck, and as the hart (Deut. 15:19–22).

The theocentric principle here is simple: *God should get paid first*. He was entitled to the unblemished firstborn males. The requirement of unblemished animals was an aspect of God's holiness: *boundaries*. God set aside certain animals for Himself. He owned them in a unique way, analogous to His special ownership of the forbidden tree in the garden.

A secondary theological principle, which governed the blemished firstborn, was this: the covenant's positive sanctions are predictable for covenant-keepers. God required covenant-keeping Israelites to consume their capital publicly as a way to testify to their confidence in the truth of this covenantal principle.

A. Sacrificing the Firstborn

This law was a land law.¹ It was a Passover law.

And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD'S. And every firstling of an ass thou

1. On land laws, see Appendix J.

shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem (Ex. 13:11–15).

The negative sanction of the slain animal was to testify against covenant-breakers. Pharaoh was the archetype of every covenant-breaker. Egyptians under his covenantal authority saw their firstborn sons die: the ultimate negative sanction in Old Covenant history, and in most other cultures as well. The slaying of the firstborn animal represented God's negative sanction against sinners: death. It represented Adam: the firstborn son who rebelled against God, which called forth negative sanctions.

These laws of sacrifice were ecclesiastical. Biblical civil law does not threaten negative sanctions for men's refusal to extend positive sanctions to others. Biblical civil law threatens negative sanctions against those who impose negative sanctions on others.

This does not mean that these laws had no civil implications. They did. The violator could be excommunicated, and an excommunicated man lost his citizenship. He moved from the legal status of Israelite to the legal status of stranger. He therefore could not serve as a judge. No longer being under the negative sanctions of the church, he could no longer remain eligible to impose negative civil sanctions on others. Israel was a theocracy. Dual confessions, ecclesiastical and civil, were required from those who possessed lawful civil authority.

B. Sacrifices Mandated an Immediate Loss

God owned the firstborn. When the firstborn males of clean animals arrived, they had to be eaten before the Lord in Jerusalem. The firstborn were signs of God's blessing. This law required men to consume the tokens of their economic future. These animals were not allowed to be trained to do any work. They were not to become capital assets. The people of Israel were required to squander a portion of their assets to the glory of God: *holy wastefulness*.

Clean, unblemished firstborn animals were set apart as holy sacri-

fices. Clean, blemished firstborn animals were set apart for a meal of celebration locally. As with the tithes of celebration,² this was an aspect of holy wastefulness. Israelites were to rejoice in complete confidence: “There’s lots more where that came from!”

The donkey was set apart for execution, although it could be redeemed with a lamb (Ex. 13:13; 34:20). The donkey was not a sacrificial animal, nor could it be lawfully eaten, since it was unclean. It was a work animal, a beast of burden. It could be ridden or hooked up to a cart.

What of unclean animals other than donkeys? They had to be redeemed by a money payment, just as a firstborn son was. “Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD” (Num. 18:15–17). The point was, there had to be either death or redemption.

Regarding an unblemished clean animal: “Thou shalt eat it before the LORD thy God year by year in the place which the LORD shall choose, thou and thy household” (v. 22). This applied to the unblemished firstborn. These animals belonged to God. They were an economic liability: they had to be transported to the central city of sacrifice. It was likely that this would be done during one of the three annual festivals. In the meantime, these firstborn animals had to be cared for. They would absorb capital.

An unclean beast could not be lawfully consumed or offered. For these, the Israelite had to pay the market price plus 20% to the priest. “And if it be any unclean beast, of which they do not offer a sacrifice unto the LORD, then he shall present the beast before the priest: And the priest shall value it, whether it be good or bad: as thou valuest it, who art the priest, so shall it be. But if he will at all redeem it, then he shall add a fifth part thereof unto thy estimation” (Lev. 27:11–13).³

2. Chapter 35.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 36:B.

The clean beast without a blemish was eaten by its owner, but only after it had been taken to the central city. The clean beast that had a blemish was eaten by its owner in the gates of the nearby city. A donkey either had to be redeemed by a money payment or a lamb had to be sacrificed in its place. These were consumption goods, not visible testimonies of the future. They could not become capital goods except in the case of the donkey, for which the owner sacrificed a lamb. *Such acts of consumption acknowledged publicly that God is in control of history.* He deserves a sacrifice. He will also bring additional wealth into the households of faithful Israelites. The economic loss involved in the sacrifice testified to a man's faith in this system of covenantal cause and effect, a system of covenantal causation that operates predictably in history.

With respect to blemished animals, the law was less burdensome: "Thou shalt eat it within thy gates." This saved transportation costs. These animals were not sacrifices in the sense of burnt offerings. They were communal meals: "the unclean and the clean person shall eat it alike" (v. 22). The word "unclean" applied to those who ate the meal. It could not have applied to the food eaten. Israelites could not lawfully eat unclean foods. But they could lawfully eat with strangers in certain ritually required meals. More than this: *they were required to eat with strangers.* They even had to pay for the meal. The foreigner was more likely to dwell in a walled city, where he could buy, sell, and inherit real estate. He was to be invited to share in the festivities. He was to be made welcome. He was to be made aware of the fact that Israelites regarded themselves as under the protective covenant of God. *The positive sanctions associated with the productivity of the firstborn could be safely squandered in a festival meal.* Here was a nation that had such confidence in the reliability of God's covenant sanctions that people were willing to consume their firstborn animals at a party in which covenant-breakers were invited. This was clearly a form of evangelism.

C. A Statement of Faith

When God required the Israelites to eat the firstborn male animals, He was requiring them to make a statement of faith: *they had confidence in the future.* God would enable the female animal to bring additional offspring into the world. Even miscarriages could be overcome through national covenantal faithfulness. "There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I

will fulfil" (Ex. 23:26).⁴ God was with Israel in a special, redemptive way. Israelites were required to acknowledge this ritually and economically. A way to acknowledge their confidence of the future was to consume capital in partying.

A shared meal was an important tool of evangelism. First, it pointed to the gentile as a co-laborer under the dominion covenant. He, too, had a legitimate role in the subduing of the earth (Gen. 1:26).⁵ His work is acceptable to God.⁶ Although the uncircumcised stranger was not a recipient of special grace, he was a recipient of common grace.⁷ The shared meal of the blemished animal was a means of common grace. The animal could not be used on God's altar, but it had to be used to benefit the uncircumcised resident. His judicial status as a covenant-breaker was his lawful claim to access to the meal. As to which covenant-breakers would be invited, this was up to the Israelite, but someone from among the class of unclean men had to be invited.

Second, the shared meal pointed to the need of the Israelite to maintain contacts with uncircumcised residents within the gates of the city. If a man eats a meal with another man, there is a degree of fellowship present. Those who eat together normally talk together. The obvious question from the covenant-breaker would have been: "Why did you invite me? I'm not an Israelite." This would have served as a means of testimony regarding God's deliverance of Israel in history, just as the children's question did at the family's Passover meal (Ex. 12:26–27).

Clearly, the blessings of God were to pass down to covenant-breakers who lived in Israel. The blessings in this case were paid for by the sacrifice of a capital asset. This was another example of Israel's uniqueness in the ancient world. The stranger was to participate ritually in the life of the nation. This did not entitle him to citizenship; only circumcision and inter-generational covenantal faithfulness could do that (Deut. 23:2–8). He could not participate in the Passover meal apart from circumcision (Ex. 12:48). But people of his judicial status

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 55.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

6. This means that his work is acceptable to covenant-keepers. The wealth supplied by his productivity can lawfully be purchased by covenant-keepers, thereby increasing their wealth.

7. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

were entitled to participate in ritually required meals. I am aware of no other nation in the ancient world whose code of law offered the foreigner equal access to the civil courts (Ex. 12:49),⁸ real estate ownership (Lev. 25:29–30), ecclesiastical membership (Ex. 12:48), and fellowship. The law of God served as a means of evangelism (Deut. 4:5–8).⁹

D. The Future-Orientation of Biblical Covenantalism

The sacrifice of the firstborn was an act governed by a worldview that was future-oriented. The Israelite was told to suffer a present loss for the sake of the covenant. The covenant imposed economic costs in the present, but it promised positive sanctions in the future. Participation in ritual sacrifices and meals was an external requirement that was to encourage covenant-keepers to think in terms of costs and benefits over time. This particular sacrifice—the firstborn male—was uniquely geared to imparting this message. The primary Old Covenant sign of God’s blessing in history—the firstborn son¹⁰—had to be redeemed, and the firstborn animal had to be sacrificed, paid for, or, in the case of the donkey, redeemed by the slaying of a lamb.

The sacrificial system, like the tithe, was a means of manifesting God’s future-orientation. He is sovereign over history. He brings His decree to pass. Israel was supposed to look to the future for the culmination of the inheritance. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:9–11). This is the theme of Psalm 37.¹¹ The present is important, for it is the locus of decision-making and responsibility, but the future is important as the locus of fulfillment. The righteous man will sacrifice a portion of the wealth of the present for the sake of fulfillment in the future. The sacrificial system was designed to compel the public honoring of this

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

9. Chapter 8.

10. “Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power” (Gen. 49:3). “He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength” (Ps. 105:36).

11. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

principle by individual covenant-keepers. Participation in public rituals was supposed to reinforce men's faith in this principle. *External observance was supposed to reinforce internal acceptance; internal acceptance was supposed to reinforce external observance.*

This *system of circular reinforcement* between external and internal law-keeping is a fundamental principle of all law-making. Laws do not make men good. Man is not saved by law in a special grace sense, but good laws reinforce good ideals. Laws that most people accept as moral and legitimate create habitual patterns of behavior. Habits make certain behavioral patterns less costly to individuals, more automatic, and therefore more predictable by others. *By increasing men's predictability, good habits extend the division of labor.* Other men trust their fellows to perform in predictable ways. This lowers risk. It lowers costs. Economics teaches that when the price of something is lowered, more of it will be demanded. Social cooperation increases when men's good habits become ingrained. This increases the division of labor and therefore increases total output per unit of resource input. Wealth increases.

A future-oriented person is an upper-class person.¹² He makes decisions in terms of a lower rate of interest than a present-oriented person. He discounts the present value of future goods by a lower rate.¹³ A future-oriented person is willing to forfeit present consumption (i.e., save) for the sake of future income at a rate of interest that does not lead a present-oriented person to save. A society filled with future-oriented people will have a faster rate of growth, other things being equal, than a society of present-oriented people.

Israel was supposed to be future-oriented. God's assignment to the Israelites was for them to extend the kingdom of God on earth. This is every person's assignment (Gen. 1:27–28; 9:1–17), but Israel was to honor it. Nevertheless, future-orientation was not sufficient to enable them to achieve this goal. They had to put God first. They had to acknowledge ritually that God was the source of their blessings. It was not their future-orientation alone that provided their blessings; it was God.

12. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 48–50.

13. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute [1962] 2009), ch. 6:3.

Conclusion

The sacrifice of the firstborn animal imposed an economic loss on every Israelite family. This loss had to be borne without complaint for the sake of the future. The sacrifice of the animal was to serve as a testimony regarding God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It therefore was a testimony to *God's sovereignty over history*. God would continue to deliver Israel if Israel remained faithful. The covenant's negative sanctions had to be imposed on the firstborn so that the covenant's positive sanctions would continue to be showered on Israel. For the sake of present testimony to sons and strangers, as well as for the sake of future blessings, the present loss of the firstborn or its redemption price had to be borne, preferably enthusiastically. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7).¹⁴

14. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 9.

INDIVIDUAL BLESSING AND NATIONAL FEASTING

And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice. Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee (Deut. 16:14–17).

The theocentric principle governing these three festival laws is the national covenant, which included foreigners. The festivals were to be held at a central location. This was a matter of geographical boundaries (point three).¹ The festivals were tied to blessings. This was a matter of sanctions (point four).²

A. Citizenship and Feasting

This chapter in Deuteronomy recapitulates the laws governing the three mandatory national feasts. These were holy periods or holy days. From such celebrations we derive the word “holidays.” Holidays are days that are set apart by law for special activities. Holiness is an aspect of point three of the biblical covenant model: boundaries.

These were clearly ecclesiastical laws. They had to do with priestly

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

activities.³ All three feasts had to be celebrated by the adult males of the nation at a central location. The negative sanction attached to the law of the feasts was excommunication. The text does not state this explicitly, but the requirement of the festival laws was a journey to the central city where the priestly sacrifices were to be performed.

This does not mean that there was complete separation between the civil and ecclesiastical covenants. At the feast of Booths (Tabernacles), one year in seven, the entire law had to be read publicly to the assembled nation (Deut. 31:10–13).⁴ This included civil law. This event took place in the sabbatical year, the year of debt release (v. 10). Strangers had to attend (v. 12). While strangers were not citizens in the sense of judges, they were beneficiaries of the Mosaic civil law. The implication is that attendance at the reading of the law, which included civil law, was required. Then what would have been the appropriate civil sanction against strangers who failed to attend? The law is silent. It was not loss of citizenship; they were not citizens. It was not expulsion from the land; they could have been property owners in the cities. Property rights were defended in Israel; this is basic to the rule of law. There does not appear to have been a civil sanction for non-attendance. Presumably, the sanction was ecclesiastical: exclusion from the right to participate at the national feasts, where the poor and strangers were to be welcomed into the family feasts. The civil covenant was not the focus of concern in the festival laws, except one year in seven. The ecclesiastical covenant, which extended to strangers who wanted to participate, was the concern.

Nevertheless, there was one civil implication of the stranger's refusal to participate in the feasts. A circumcised stranger was on the road to full citizenship. Israel allowed outsiders to apply for citizenship, i.e., membership in the congregation. Depending on which nation he came from, this took either three generations or 10 (Deut. 23:3–8). Any refusal on his part to participate in the national feasts would have led to his excommunication. He would no longer have had lawful access to the Passover, which circumcised strangers possessed (Ex. 12:48). His excommunication would have revoked the covenantal validity of his circumcision. This would have delayed his heirs' inheritance of citizenship for an extra generation. Once again, we see the unbreakable relationship governing biblical law, oath-sanctions, and lawful inheritance.

3. On priestly laws, see Appendix J.

4. Chapter 75.

B. Covenantal Participation

The five representatives listed in this law were identified repeatedly in the Mosaic law as representatives of the oppressed. The manservant and maidservant were under the jurisdiction of the family. The fatherless and the widow were not part of the family, but they were to be invited by other families to participate in the prosperity of the community (Deut. 14:28–29).⁵ Finally the stranger or resident alien (*geyr*) who had placed himself under God's law was to be invited.

Verse 12 provides the reason: "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes." Israel's experience in Egypt was representative of injustice and oppression. What had happened to them in Egypt should not happen to the politically and economically weak in Israel. *Those who were under the law were to be treated well. The issue was the covenant.* Those who were under the civil covenant were bound by oath to obey the civil law. The rule of law was mandatory in Israel. Israel's righteousness before God, like every judge's righteousness, was manifested in the courts.

One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you (Ex. 12:49).⁶

One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you (Num. 15:16).

Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them (Num. 15:29).

Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:19).

These were civil commandments. They had to do with civil courts: the place where negative sanctions were imposed. But the requirement went beyond negative civil sanctions; it involved God's positive sanctions: "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:18–

5. Chapter 35.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

19). The laws governing the three annual ecclesiastical feasts were part of this general obligation to love the stranger. The positive sanctions of participation were ecclesiastical. Mosaic civil law did not invoke positive sanctions, because positive civil sanctions can only be funded by the imposition of negative sanctions on others.

C. Expensive Celebrations

In my commentary on Leviticus, I devoted space to the economics of the three centralized feasts. I concluded that the economic burden must have been in the range of at least 15% of gross income, not counting travel and lodging costs, and not counting forfeited income. Adding these costs, the total burden may have been closer to 25%, the estimate of Rabbinic tradition.⁷ This was a very heavy burden. It had to be borne in faith. But the increased wealth of the nation would have pointed to the reliability of God's covenantal promises. The law specifically stated that the testimony of personal economic prosperity was to be considered by each celebrant in estimating what he could afford to spend at the festivals. In faith, men were to open their wallets in a common celebration three times a year.

The costs of the festivals had another important function. They kept money away from the civil government. This kept the state from expanding. This is never mentioned in the commentaries.

The Israelites were told that God would reward them, and that they had to celebrate this bounty. The blessings of God were guaranteed: "Be cause the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice" (v. 15b). This promise was corporate. Yet there was also the assumption of individual blessings: "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee" (v. 17). The individual blessings would vary; hence, the individual was required to give of his increase in celebration. He was not to hold back in his rejoicing, for God had not held back His blessings.

Moses was telling them that God's deliverance of the nation out of Egyptian bondage and wilderness wandering was the down payment on the promised inheritance. Blessings in the land would verify the presence of God among His people. So, *economic growth was basic to the covenant's system of sanctions*. The people would be able to afford

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Introduction, section H.

the three national celebrations. These celebrations would be very expensive, but they would be affordable to the poorest man in Israel. Every man could risk walking away from his labors for up to seven weeks a year (depending on his distance from Jerusalem).

The blessings would fund the celebrations. This was God's promise of great economic blessings because the costs of celebration would be high. He was promising His covenantal blessings. *These blessings would confirm His covenant.* They would verify His presence among them, not just in a spiritual sense but in an economic sense. The covenant's blessings would be visible in history. Israel's mandatory response was to take a large portion of their blessings and reinvest this in national celebrations. They would come together in the presence of God because God had blessed them nationally and individually, as promised in the Mosaic law itself. God was with them individually in their local communities, as seen in their economic prosperity. Their mandatory response was to take a substantial portion of their wealth and squander it in celebration. In this sense, the celebrations were to serve as exercises in faith. God called on them to pour their profits back into the nation. The nation was not to be regarded as a political entity. On the contrary, the lion's share went into celebrations. The state could not lay claim to a large portion of the nation's wealth because this otherwise discretionary income was not legally discretionary. One important effect of this law was the binding of both the state and the priesthood.

D. Fighting Condition

Not only were church and state to be kept trim by this law, so were the people. *The mandated festivals can be considered as a national military fitness program.* God's holy army would be in training. Every man had to walk to the nation's central place of worship three times a year. Only those who were on a journey could skip two of the three feasts: Firstfruits and Booths.⁸

Had the celebrations been legal in their home towns, the Israelites would have been tempted to consume their capital in calories. This would have been a form of gluttony. This was prohibited by the Mosaic law. *Gluttony was a mark of rebellion.* Parents were required to act as prosecuting agents in a covenant lawsuit against gluttonous sons:

8. I presume this because of the law governing Passover, which allowed a late celebration because of journeys (Num. 9:10).

“And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard” (Deut. 21:20).⁹ “For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Prov. 23:21).¹⁰ Thus, Solomon warned: “When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat” (Prov. 23:1–3).

There was no prohibition against eating meat. In fact, the opposite was true. The people were to enjoy the fat of the meat they brought to be sacrificed. In Moses’ parting account of God’s dealings with Israel, past and future, he focused on fat. Israelites were allowed to eat the fat of the land, including animals. But the people were not to become bloated. A nation of obese people would testify to the nation’s subordination to false gods. Moses adopted the imagery of obesity to describe the nation’s rebellious spiritual condition.

For the LORD’S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not (Deut. 32:9–17).

The Mosaic law encouraged the consumption of fat, but it also mandated exercise. God’s gifts were not to be misused. Men were not to shovel their net income into their mouths. They were not to eat their own futures. In an agricultural society, wealth is understood as

9. Chapter 31.

10. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 74.

having to do with excess food. Being fat in such a society would have been an aspect of what today is called “conspicuous consumption.” Fat was allowed by the Mosaic law. The language of fatness was invoked by Moses to symbolize God’s blessings. But fat was not to compromise anyone’s physical mobility. A man’s extra weight had to be paid for on journeys to Jerusalem three times a year. There was a strong incentive for the obese person to reduce his intake of food. The kind of obesity that is the result of lust for food was equated with the lust to distort one’s senses with alcohol to the point of irresponsibility.¹¹ Fat was allowed—indeed, it was mandated at the feasts. Alcohol was also allowed (Deut. 14:26).¹² But gluttony and drunkenness were prohibited.

Conclusion

God promised covenantal blessings for Israel’s covenantal faithfulness. The national festivals were part of this system. They were expensive events that required the men of Israel to gather in one place at the same time. These festivals were God’s way of establishing a sense of national community under His law. Israel would be more than tribes and cities. Israel was a holy nation.

11. The judicial issue of drunkenness is responsibility before God. Any substance or practice (e.g., a discipline that produces a demonic trance) that distorts one’s senses so that one becomes unable to judge his surroundings responsibly must be avoided. An exception is where the individual places himself legally and physically under the authority of others, as is the case in the administration of anesthetics.

12. See Appendix G.

CASUISTRY AND INHERITANCE

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Deut. 16:18–20).

The theocentric focus of this law was the impartial judgment of God. This has to do with a faithful application of God’s law to specific judicial cases. The issue is justice, which is an aspect of dominion. While the central issue is obedience, the specific application is judgment: point four of the biblical covenant. More than any passage that I have considered before in this commentary, this one seems to be out of place: in the section of Deuteronomy relating to point three: law.

A. Rendering True Judgment

This was not a land law. It was a cross-boundary law.¹ Men are to render honest judgments in history because God does. “Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (II Chron. 19:7). Men’s covenantal judgments in history are to conform judicially to God’s covenantal judgments in history and eternity.

In rendering covenantal judgment, men are required to think God’s thoughts after Him as creatures. They can do this because they are made in God’s image. *The essence of man’s status as God’s image-bearer is his ability to render judgment.*² This is why Satan tempted

1. On land laws and cross-boundary (universal) laws, see Appendix J.

2. You might want to commit this sentence to memory. It is important.

mankind through the serpent by telling Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were supposed to render judgment against the serpent in terms of God's revealed word.³ The covenantal hierarchy⁴ of God > man > creation was to be preserved by man's representative act of rendering God's judgment against Satan's representative agent, the serpent. Adam and Eve were to render judgment against Satan by refusing to follow the serpent's advice, i.e., his false rendering of judgment against God's revealed word. The essence of the temptation in the garden was the rendering of judgment for or against God's revealed word, for or against the serpent's word. Adam and Eve were to render a joint verdict of "guilty" against the serpent. His crime was having testified falsely against God's word. They were to impose the appropriate sanction by crushing his head. They could not judge Satan directly, but they could kill his covenantal representative. Because they refused to do this, God prophesied that a son of Adam who would do this (Gen. 3:15).

To this law were attached positive sanctions: life and property. "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (v. 20). The state was in no position to provide the sanction of life. That was God's prerogative. These sanctions were not civil sanctions, for they were positive sanctions. They would come in response to honest judgment. God would give Israel life and inheritance if Israel's judges rendered honest judgment.

This law governed the establishment of local civil courts. These courts could not have been ecclesiastical, for this law made no reference to priests or Levites. The ecclesiastical covenant was not here invoked by Moses. This means that the civil covenant was the focus of this law. Officers and judges were civil magistrates.

B. Stoning and Hierarchy

This raises the judicial issue of stoning. Here are two reasons why stoning was required by the Mosaic law as the proper means of public execution. First, stoning conforms to the imagery of the crushed head.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), Appendix E: "Witnesses and Judges."

4. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

A stone is most likely to be fatal when it crushes the head. Second, stoning allows joint participation in the judicial act of enforcing civil sanctions. Both Adam and Eve would have participated in the execution of the serpent, not just Adam.

Men imposed this sanction before God revealed His law to Moses. The practice of stoning was understood by both the Egyptians and the Israelites: “And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land. And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, as he shall command us” (Ex. 8:25–27). In the wilderness era, Moses despaired: “And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me” (Ex. 17:4). The penalty against coming close to Mt. Sinai when God revealed His presence to the nation was stoning, both of man and beast (Ex. 19:13). For an animal to gore a man calls forth stoning (Ex. 21:28–29, 32). Goring a human is a breach of the covenant’s hierarchical order: man over animal. Only after these events and case laws did the Mosaic law mandate stoning against those who testified falsely about God. False prophets were to be stoned (Deut. 13:1–5). So were members of an Israelite household who tempted other members to worship a false god (Deut. 17:2–6). Finally, an unmarried woman who had sex with another man before marriage, and who did not tell her betrothed husband about this in advance, could be accused of this crime by her newly wedded husband.⁵ The penalty was stoning (Deut. 22:21).

What did these crimes have in common? A violation of the covenantal hierarchy: a goring beast over a human being, a false prophet over the community, a rebellious family member over the others, a false wife over her husband. Whenever a major violation of point two of the biblical covenant took place, the appropriate sanction was stoning: crushing the head.⁶

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 47:C.

6. That such a suggestion appalls modern Christians indicates the extent to which pluralism has undermined Christian social thought. The crime of treason against God no longer is regarded as a crime by modern man; hence, the appropriate Mosaic sanction is considered barbaric. In a society in which blasphemy is a trifle, stoning is an offense.

C. Hierarchy, Casuistry, and Economic Growth

The Mosaic legal system, like all legal systems, was hierarchical: point two of the biblical covenant model. The issue here was authority, namely, the voice of authority. Someone must speak God's word authoritatively and representatively in history. Rendering covenantal judgment is a representative act. This is why point two of the covenant—hierarchy, representation, authority—is always connected with point four: rendering judgment, imposing sanctions. In declaring God's word in history, God was above Moses, Moses was above the civil judges, and the civil judges were above the people. God revealed His law to Moses, who taught God's law to civil magistrates, who then served as judges.

1. Judge-Declared Law

The judges were required by God to render judgment in specific cases. This meant that they were required by God to apply the Mosaic law to disputes that would arise between men. The judges were therefore required by God become experts in the art of *casuistry*: the application of general legal principles and specific case law precedents to new situations. The general legal principles were the Ten Commandments. The case laws were specific biblical laws that extended the Ten Commandments to recognizable historical situations.⁷ By means of casuistry, the judges were supposed to bring justice to Israel. Over time, a body of judicial opinion and precedents would be accumulated which would serve as judicial wisdom. Judicial precedents would then extend the rule of law. Men would begin to think covenantally, judging their own actions in advance. This would not be judge-made law; it would be *judge-declared law*. God makes the law; His judges are to apply it in history and even in eternity. Jesus announced to His disciples at the Passover meal: "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29–30). Paul announced to the church at Corinth: "Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (I Cor. 6:3).⁸

The original revelation of the Mosaic law was top-down: from God

7. North, *Tools of Dominion*, *ibid*.

8. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of I Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

to Moses to the judges. This top-down hierarchical element was to be re-confirmed in Israel once every seven years, when the entire nation was to be assembled at a common location, and the entire law was to be read to them publicly (Deut. 31:10–13).⁹ But this event was comparatively rare. The teaching of God's revealed law would normally have been conducted locally: by the Levites, who were judicial specialists, and by the civil judges in actual cases. The Levites were agents of God who declared God's revelation and who served as judges in ecclesiastical disputes. The civil magistrates were officers ordained through the civil covenant who possessed the power of the sword: the monopoly of physical coercion. They declared the civil law publicly and applied it to men's bodies (whipping¹⁰ and capital punishment¹¹) and their property (fines¹² and restitution¹³).

2. Legal Predictability

When both parties are fairly certain that the law's sanctions will be imposed on the disputant who loses the case, the person with the weaker case has an incentive to settle out of court. This reduces the number of cases that are brought to trial. A successful legal system is one in which the high predictability of the law leads to increased self-government and a reduction in the number of cases brought to trial.¹⁴ A vast increase in the number of court cases is evidence of the break down in the rule of law: the clogging of the courts.¹⁵

The greater the predictability of the courts, the greater the incentive for men to cooperate with each other. Why? Because the greater predictability of the judge's application of the law's sanctions reduces the cost of predicting the results of human action. As with any other scarce resource, as the price is lowered, more is demanded. *The price of the division of labor is reduced by predictable law.* The division of

9. Chapter 75.

10. "Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed: lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee" (Deut. 25:3).

11. For a list of cases, see *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix M, Addendum.

12. Fines must be used to compensate victims of unsolved crimes, not as revenue sources for the state. *Ibid.*, chaps. 37:D:3; 41:C.

13. Exodus 22:1–13.

14. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 208.

15. This has been the situation in the United States since the 1960s: Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

labor is increased by an increase in the rule of law: more people take advantage of the opportunities offered by increased social cooperation. This increased division of labor raises the output of cooperating individuals. The decentralized decisions of individuals become more predictable. This reduces the cost of obtaining that most precious of all scarce economic resources, accurate knowledge of the future. We can predict more accurately what other people will do when we and they abide by the rules. F. A. Hayek, the free market economist and legal theorist, argued that individual creativity and flexibility are secured by fixed rules. "The maximal certainty of expectations which can be achieved in a society in which individuals are allowed to use their knowledge of constantly changing circumstances for their own equally changing purposes is secured by rules which tell everyone which of these circumstances must not be altered by others and which he himself must not alter."¹⁶ As I wrote in *Authority and Dominion*:

F. A. Hayek made a point, which must be taken seriously by those who seek to explain the relationship between Christianity and the advent of free enterprise capitalism in the West. "There is probably no single factor which has contributed more to the prosperity of the West than the relative certainty of the law which has prevailed here."¹⁷ Economist Thomas Sowell's comments are especially graphic: "Someone who is going to work for many years to have his own home wants some fairly rigid assurance that the house will in fact belong to him—that he cannot be dispossessed by someone who is physically stronger, better armed, or more ruthless, or who is deemed more 'worthy' by political authorities. Rigid assurances are needed that changing fashions, mores, and power relationships will not suddenly deprive him of his property, his children, or his life."¹⁸

Hayek quite properly denied the validity of the quest for perfect certainty, since "complete certainty of the law is an ideal which we must try to approach but which we can never perfectly attain."¹⁹ His anti-perfectionism regarding the rule of the law is also in accord with the anti-perfectionism of Christian social thought in the West.²⁰ Christianity brought with it a conception of social order which made

16. F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 1, *Rules and Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 108–109.

17. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 208.

18. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 32.

19. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, p. 208.

20. Benjamin Warfield, *Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958). This is an abridged version of his two-volume study, published posthumously by Oxford University Press in 1931 and reprinted by Baker Book House in 1981.

possible the economic development of the West.²¹

What always threatens the rule of God's law in history is the judge who departs from the Bible-revealed law of God. The judge who substitutes his own wisdom for biblical law or the body of legal opinion derived from it is a threat to biblical civil justice. So is the judge who seeks bribes for rendering judgment that deviates from God's fundamental law and constitutional laws. Bribes pervert justice. It is the court's task to extend justice. Civil justice in turn makes possible capitalism's increase of a society's wealth. The positive sanction of wealth is the outcome of civil justice.

In the period immediately preceding the conquest, Moses revealed this case law, which recapitulates Leviticus 19:15: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." It recapitulates Deuteronomy 1:17: "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it." Its theocentric focus was God's judgment. God is not a respecter of persons when He judges any man. God does not look at the person's class position, money, good looks, or any other distinguishing feature. He does not accept bribes to corrupt His judgment. He looks at His law and the person's thoughts, words, and actions, and He judges the degree to which the person before Him has conformed to or deviated from His law. In other words, God applies His law to historical circumstances. He interprets it and makes assessments in terms of it. *God practices the judicial art of casuistry.* He does not wait until the end of time to render judgment. He renders preliminary judgments in history. As creatures made in His image, men are required by God to do the same: thinking God's thoughts after Him, declaring His law, and applying sanctions in terms of His law. Men are to render righteous judgment. They do this through biblical casuistry.

In our day, biblical casuistry is a lost skill. Worse; it is a skill widely derided as theocratic and therefore illegitimate. This is not merely the opinion of covenant-breakers; it is announced with equal fervor and confidence by Christians: social theorists (few in number since 1700 precisely because of this hostility to biblical casuistry), church leaders, civil leaders, and people in the pews. But there is no escape from the

21. North, *Authority and Dominion*, p. 1340.

requirements of casuistry. If men do not render judgment in terms of God's fundamental law—the Ten Commandments—and God's biblically revealed constitutional laws, which have extended the Ten Commandments to real-world cases,²² then they must render judgment in terms of some other law-order. Judges dare not remain silent if social order is to be maintained. Disputes will be settled: in covenantal courts or by clan feuds or on battlefields. Sanctions must be imposed in order to settle disputes. The judicial question is this one: *By what standard?* It was no accident that Rushdoony chose this as the title of his 1959 study of the philosophy of Cornelius Van Til. Van Til had attacked the idea of a common-ground, autonomous, religiously neutral, universal natural law, but he suggested nothing to take its place. Rushdoony concluded that the only biblically valid alternative to natural law theory is theonomy. He did not begin working out the theonomic answers to social, legal, and economic questions until the second half of the 1960s.

D. Sanctions and Inheritance

Verse 20 reads: "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." There can be no question about the unbreakable covenantal connection between the law's sanctions and inheritance. The art of rendering biblical judgment is the art of deciding guilt or innocence in terms of biblical law. But this must involve judicial sanctions. To the law are attached sanctions. *The imposed sanctions must fit the violation.* This is the biblical principle of the *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye.²³

The original context of this principle of justice was abortion: "If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:22–25). It is indicative of the contemporary crisis in Protestant thought that legalized abortion did not become the target of widespread Protestant political opposition until several years after the United States Supreme

22. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973).

23. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 38.

Court handed down *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. But after 1980, a growing minority of evangelicals began to organize against legalized abortion. It was this public issue that dragged Francis Schaeffer into political activism.²⁴

Because there can be no neutral zone in the abortionist's office between a dead baby and a live one, the myth of neutrality is definitively denied in matters of abortion. This inescapable fact of abortion persuaded Schaeffer's son to write *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality*.²⁵ Whenever the myth of neutrality fades, the conflict between rival religious world views escalates. The always mythical zones of neutrality between Christianity and humanism are recognized increasingly as being mythical. This pressures Christians and humanists to go their respective ways to develop their respective views of what constitutes a legitimate earthly kingdom. Both sides then seek to use their vision of the kingdom to shape society.

Theocracy is therefore an inescapable concept. It is never a question of theocracy vs. no theocracy. It is a question of which theocracy. The issue of legalized abortion has dragged evangelical Protestants into the political arena, forcing them to abandon their previous pietism-quietism, forcing them to come up with theologically precise answers to the crucial judicial and ethical question: *By what standard?* The moment a Christian raises this question, he must confront the issue of theocracy vs. pluralism, not just in the church and family, but in civil government.²⁶ This is why the issue of legalized abortion has led Christians to issue manifestos that sound theocratic. They *are* theocratic. They undermine Enlightenment pluralism, which has served as the judicial basis of modern Western society ever since the late eighteenth century. But because modern Christians have embraced Enlightenment pluralism in the name of Christ, there is an inevitable schizophrenia in their manifestoes.²⁷

By what standard? Anglo-American Protestants have resisted dealing with this crucial question from an explicitly biblical point of view ever since the end of Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate with his death in

24. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race* (1976); reprinted in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 5 vols. (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1982), V, *A Christian View of the West*, pp. 281–410.

25. Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1982.

26. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

27. On the unresolved schizophrenia of Francis A. Schaeffer's book, *A Christian Manifesto* (1981), see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 180–85. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

1658, but legalized abortion is now forcing their hand. Peter's injunction is before them: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (I Peter 3:15). This hope is more than faith in the world beyond the grave. It is hope that someday, infants will not be deliberately sent to their graves, which include trash bin "dumpsters" located behind the offices of abortionists.

The covenantal issue of sanctions cannot legitimately be separated from the covenantal issue of inheritance. This is obvious in the case of abortion. "Who will inherit?" is the fundamental issue of the death penalty: the earthly one as well as the eternal one. Abortion imposes the death penalty on those who have done neither good nor evil (Rom. 9:11). When abortion is legalized by the civil government, abortionists become agents of the state, for only the state has the right to impose the death penalty. In the name of personal privacy for women, the United States Supreme Court necessarily swore in an army of executioners: mothers, physicians, nurses, and their support staffs. A civil oath—a swearing in—is unofficial and implicit in the authorization of abortion, but it is nonetheless binding. This is why an entire social order is at risk from the judgment of God when it allows its civil representatives to delegate such powers of execution to private citizens. Biblically, these executioners are no longer private citizens; they are agents of the state, which is in turn an agent of the corporate society. As with a citizens' posse that is sworn in by a sheriff, so are the executioners sworn in by the state. Members of a sworn-in posse have a delegated though circumscribed right to kill those who resist their authority. So do abortionists and their assistants in a nation that has legalized abortion. Today, abortionists possess greater judicial immunity from civil action than a posse does.

E. Justice and Positive Sanctions

We return to the issue of positive sanctions: "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (v. 20). The positive sanctions of extended life and land were extensions of the Mosaic seed laws and land laws. These laws were the result of Jacob's messianic prophecy regarding Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws and land laws

were laws confined to Israel. They were not cross-boundary laws.²⁸ The question arises: Were the promises of verse 20 more than extensions of the seed laws and land laws? This raises a subsidiary question: Does this connection between civil justice and personal possessions extend into the New Covenant? That is, was this law a cross-boundary law that applied beyond the borders of Mosaic Israel? Or was it confined historically and geographically to Israel?

This hermeneutical question raises the issue of covenantal continuity. Meredith G. Kline's dictum regarding the mystery of God's New Covenant historical sanctions comes into play: "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."²⁹ If correct, this would negate the possibility of an explicitly biblical social theory. Christians would have to look either to autonomous nature or autonomous man to provide the predictable sanctions that make possible both social cohesion and social theory. The existence of cross-boundary laws that were binding outside of Mosaic Israel, and are still binding today, is what makes possible Christian social theory.

Is there a principle of continuity between this Mosaic principle and New Covenant law? There is no doubt that the general judicial principle of not respecting persons in judgment is a cross-boundary law. Peter cited this principle in his confession to Cornelius after Peter's vision of the clean and unclean beasts: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts. 10:34). This is a fundamental New Covenant principle.

For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:11).

But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons (Col. 3:25).

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons (James 2:1).

28. On the categories of Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

29. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *The Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear (I Peter 1:17).

The question, then, relates to the covenantal connection between rendering civil justice and God's external blessings. Did life and land serve as representative blessings for a broader class of blessings? Or were they narrowly circumscribed extensions of Mosaic Israel's seed laws and land laws?

The exegetical problem facing us here is to identify the covenantal basis of the extension of both long life and property ownership into the New Testament economy. I argue that the non-theonomist has the burden of proof to prove discontinuity. But the non-theonomist insists that it is the theonomist's burden to prove continuity. So, for the sake of argument (since I know I can win it in this instance), I shall willingly bear this burden.

The solution is found in Paul's citation of the fifth commandment. "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12).³⁰ Paul wrote: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1–3). The Greek word for *earth* applies to specific geographical locations. Examples: "And thou Bethlehem, in **the land** of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matt. 2:6). "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into **the land** of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life" (Matt. 2:20). The Greek word for land can also refer to the whole earth: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5)."³¹ The continuity between both the command and specific sanctions of the Mosaic law and New Testament inheritance should be obvious.

Paul's letter to Ephesus was not intended to persuade gentiles that in order to receive long life, church members would have to move to Israel. Yet this would have to be the argument of anyone who denies the covenantal continuity between the promise of long life on the land in the fifth commandment and Paul's citation of this law to strengthen his case regarding the child's obligation to obey his parents.

30. North, *Authority and Dominion*, 25.

31. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

The most general law governing the case law application of Deuteronomy 16:18–20 was not Jacob's promise that Judah would bear the sword in Israel until Shiloh came (Gen. 49:10). Rather, it was the fifth commandment. Because the fifth commandment and its sanctions extend into the New Covenant era,³² Deuteronomy 16:18–20 has to be interpreted as a cross-boundary law, not a land law or a seed law. Obviously, it was not a priestly law. This is why we can be legitimately confident that when judges render civil justice in terms of God's revealed law without respect to persons, this will produce the blessing of long life. The enforcement of biblical civil law will also protect private property. The word *land* in this passage represents inherited property in general. In fact, it asserts the right of inheritance.

F. Health and Wealth

Deuteronomy 16:18–20 informs us that *there is a positive economic correlation between honest judgment and life*. First, civil judges who refuse to take bribes or pervert justice thereby secure men's inheritances. Secure inheritances represent a defense of private property, including contracts. Second, judicial respect for private property is the legal basis of free market capitalism. Third, free market capitalism consistently increases per capita wealth. Fourth, increased per capita wealth increases average life expectancy. Long life is a visible blessing which is positively correlated with increased per capita wealth. As a nation's per capita wealth increases, so does the average life expectancy of its residents. So does their general health.³³

The measurable blessing of increased life expectancy is revealed statistically in decreasing rates for life insurance premiums. Those theologians, such as Kline, who deny any measurable correlation between corporate obedience to God's covenantal law and corporate

32. The non-theonomist is in a bind exegetically. The original law is part of the Mosaic covenant: the Ten Commandments. He must argue that the sanctions attached to the fifth commandment, while valid today, do not imply covenantal continuity. But this is refuted by Paul's citation of the entire commandment, including the positive sanctions for obedience. Paul singled out this law as the first law with a promise. He did not call into question the promise, i.e., this law's sanctions. On the contrary, he affirmed the promise.

33. Aaron Wildavsky, *Searching for Safety* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1988), pp. 58–75; John D. Graham, Bei-Hung Chang, and John S. Evans, "Poorer Is Riskier," *Risk Analysis*, XII, No. 3 (1992). John C. Shanahan and Adam D. Thierer, "How to Talk About Risk: How Well-Intentioned Regulations Can Kill," *Heritage Talking Points*, No. 13 (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1966), p. 14. (<http://bit.ly/RiskTalk>)

blessings must demonstrate that decreasing term insurance rates are not correlated to corporate covenantal faithfulness, i.e., external obedience to God's law. They must first deny that the West's increased life expectancy came as a result of widespread adherence to the stipulations to God's law, most notably laws protecting private property (Ex. 20:15), including contract law. Then, second, they must prove it.

The Mosaic law informs us, and the history of the West confirms, that the civil government's enforcement of God's Bible-revealed civil law increases national wealth in the long term. The continuing trustworthiness of verse 20's covenantally linked promises—private property, honest judgment, and life—has been verified by the history of the West, especially since the late eighteenth century, when the rule of civil law produced the Industrial Revolution in England, which spread within one generation to the European Continent and the United States. The rule of law was emphasized by Protestantism's concept of individual conscience, self-government, limited civil government, and eschatological future-orientation.³⁴ Wealth increased steadily as never before in history in response to Protestantism's worldview in the field of economics.

Conclusion

The same covenantal connections linking life, property ownership, and faithful civil judgment are found in the sanction attached to honoring one's parents. Long life (a measurable blessing) in the land (secure inheritance) for honoring parents (a legal stipulation) is affirmed in Exodus 20:14. He who would in any way deny the covenantal link between the stipulations of biblical law and visible, positive, corporate sanctions must deny the continuing validity of the fifth commandment. He must also explain how Paul's citation of the fifth commandment and its sanctions in Ephesians 6:2 does not re-confirm Exodus 20:14. In short, he must apply an antinomian hermeneutic to the New Testament. He must argue for a radical judicial discontinuity between the two covenants, despite the fact that the author of Hebrews twice

34. Postmillennialism first appeared in a comprehensive, developed form in the Protestant West in early seventeenth-century Holland, Scotland, and England. See *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer 1979), Symposium on Puritanism and Progress. The belief in the possibility of long-term compound economic growth for society did not exist prior to seventeenth-century Puritanism. This positive eschatology was secularized by the Enlightenment in the next century. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 And All That," *Commentary* (June 1968).

cited as fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy that the law will be written in the hearts of men as being fulfilled in the New Covenant (Heb. 8:10–11; 10:16).

Antinomianism is the denial of biblical law and its sanctions in New Testament times. It threatens the judicial inheritance of the West. This, in turn, threatens the economic inheritance of the West: the increasing per capita wealth made possible by free market capitalism. Whether this antinomianism is the scholastic variety, the Lutheran variety, the Reformed variety, or the dispensational variety, the result is the same: the undermining of covenant-keeping men's faith in the positive corporate results of corporate covenantal faithfulness. This loss of faith then undermines the development of an explicitly biblical social theory, including economics.

ISRAEL'S SUPREME COURT

If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously (Deut. 17:8–13).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's office as a judge. God is the final Judge.¹ As in the case of the previous chapter, this one seems to relate more to sanctions: point four.² As we shall see, however, the passage deals with a particular judicial issue: *jurisdiction*.

This is the issue of boundaries: point three.³

1. The final negative sanction is eternal death (Rev. 20:14–15).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

A. Church and State

The settlement of disputes between men is supposed to reflect the final settlement of disputes between God and man. In God's court, there will be a final settlement. Every case will be brought to a conclusion. There will be either reconciliation or permanent separation between the Judge and the judged.

The office of priest—he who offers sacrifices as man's representative—ended in A.D. 70.⁴ The question is: Has the ecclesiastical minister replaced the priest? Does the church still possess authority in supplying representatives who hand down civil judgments? This is the crucial covenantal question that this chapter must answer. If the answer is yes, then the absolute judicial separation of church and state is a false Enlightenment myth.

God's authority on the throne of judgment is unitary in the sense of His unified being (Deut. 6:4). Yet this authority is also plural: "let us" (Gen. 1:26; 11:7). God's court reflects God's being: both one and many. A human court is not God's heavenly court, yet it must reflect the one and the many of God's heavenly court. The equal ultimacy of the one and the many cannot be achieved through ontology: unified being. It must therefore be achieved subordinately, i.e., representatively. This is why, in Israel's supreme court, both church and state were represented. Israel's voice of civil authority at the highest level was not legitimate if it was restricted to civil magistrates.

B. A Question of Jurisdiction

No social order can survive without civil sanctions. Under the biblical civil covenant, these sanctions are exclusively negative. The state is not a supplier of positive sanctions except in its capacity as the judge of those who have committed crimes whose proper sanction is restitution. The state then transfers wealth from the criminal to the victim. But the state is not the source of the positive sanctions showered on the victim; it is only the arbitrator. It compels the law-breaker to return to the victim that which lawfully belongs to the victim, including compensation for his suffering and the statistical risk he bore of not discovering who had committed the crime.⁵ Normally, this requires double restitution (Ex. 22:4). In short, the state is the lawful enforcer.

4. This, of course, is a Protestant interpretation of the office.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43:C.

It possesses a God-given, covenantal monopoly of violence in order to enforce justice (Rom. 13:1–7).⁶

In Deuteronomy 17:8–13, Moses presented a case law application of the general principle of the hierarchy of covenantal judgment. In Exodus 18, he set up a system of appeals courts.⁷ Here he made an application of the general law of appeals. Two men have come into a local court. They are equals in influence. This makes the case too difficult for a local court to judge. “If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose” (v. 8). The case was to be transferred to a higher court in which the judges were not part of the local community. In modern law, this is called a *change of venue*. The Mosaic law acknowledged that in difficult cases between prominent persons, each with his own supporters, each with a strong case, local judges may not be qualified to render judgment. The cases are too hard. This is the language of Exodus 18: “And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves” (v. 26).

The mandated solution was to assemble a group of judges, civil and ecclesiastical, to consider the case. There is no question that Moses was here describing a civil dispute. The mandatory sanction for disobedience to the supreme court was execution. The church in Israel did not possess the power of the sword except in defending against trespassers of the boundaries around the tabernacle (Num. 18:3, 22). All of Deuteronomy 17 deals with civil law, but ecclesiastical judges played a role in the legal process.

This court’s decision was final. It had to be obeyed. Nevertheless, there is no indication that the case in question had been a matter of capital sanctions prior to the court’s final judgment. But once this court had declared final judgment, both participants had to obey. The person who was declared guilty had to follow the directive of the court. He was not executed, which means that this was not a capital infraction. But contumacy—presumptive resistance to the supreme court—was a capital offense.

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

7. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

This indicates that the supreme court's word was judicially representative of God's word. Its word was final in history. But this word was not exclusively civil or ecclesiastical. It was both. The judge, as a representative of the civil covenant, declared his judgment only in association with the priests. There had to be a united declaration. This kept the state from becoming judicially autonomous. Similarly with the church: the priests had no lawful way to enforce their judgment physically without the cooperation of the civil magistrate. *Autonomy was not a legitimate option at the highest judicial level.*

This joint declaration of judgment was analogous to a joint declaration of war. The two silver trumpets had to be blown by the Aaronic priests before the princes could lead the nation into battle. One trumpet was blown initially to assemble the princes. Not until both were blown by the priests was the princes' decision to go into battle ratified (Num. 10:1–9).⁸ Church and state had to agree to the war.

Any party in the civil dispute who rebelled against the terms of the joint declaration faced death. What had been a matter to be solved by economic restitution now moved to a new level of criminality. It moved from *restitution through money* to *restitution through execution*. The resisting party was to be delivered into God's heavenly court for final sentencing. Certain acts demand that the convicted criminal be transferred to God's court. One of these acts was resistance to a final determination by Israel's supreme court.

The cost of law enforcement in this case was borne by the civil government. The civil government had a cost-effective means of reducing resistance to its official decisions: the threat of execution. The resisting party had considerable incentive to count the cost of his non-compliance. This cost was very high: his permanent removal from the jurisdiction of any man's court.

The formal declaration by the supreme court moved the dispute from man's word to God's word. The person who resisted coming to terms with his opponent prior to the supreme court's declaration could say to himself: "I'm not going to comply. I don't have to comply." But the word to which he had not had to comply was the word of another individual. There had not yet been a covenantal declaration. But after the court made its final judgment, the threat of the most permanent civil sanction was inserted into the actor's cost-benefit analysis. He was no longer facing man's word; he was facing God's. He was there-

8. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [1997] 2012), ch. 2:A.

fore no longer facing an individual's sanctions, such as the other party's refusal to trade with him in the future. The negative sanction had moved from economics to life itself.

C. An Increase in Predictability

Whenever this sanction was consistently imposed within the boundaries of Israel, the Israelites would have found that their lives had become more predictable. The law would have been taken seriously by everyone. An execution or two every few years would have sent a very clear message to all Israel regarding the costs of resistance to the law. This was the intent of this law: "And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously" (v. 13).

When large numbers of people fear the civil law, their actions become more predictable whenever the courts are predictable. The law becomes more predictable when the courts become more predictable. An increase in the predictability of the law reduces the costs of decision-making. People know generally what the law requires. They also know that the judges will impose the specified sanctions attached to the law. The last remaining element of uncertainty is the reaction of the guilty party. Will he comply with the court's declaration? This case law made it clear: God expected the guilty party to comply. God expected the state to see to it that the guilty party complied. The person who refused to comply with the court's declaration would not get another opportunity to break any law.

Israel's solution to the settlement of private disputes was very different from Athens' solution. In private disputes, the Athenian court did not enforce its judgments unless there was a matter of state concern involved. The matter was turned over to the victorious party for enforcement.⁹ Justice was available, but only to families strong enough to enforce the court's decision.

With greater legal predictability, society reduces its costs of production. When men know what the law requires, and when they know that convicted law-breakers in the society have a great incentive to comply, they can more easily predict the actions of others. This increases the predictability of other decision-makers in society. This in turn decreases the cost of cooperation. One of the most familiar laws of economics is this: *when the cost of production of something is re-*

9. G. Glotz, *The Greek City and its Institutions* (New York: Barnes & Noble, [1929] 1969), p. 249.

duced, more of it will be supplied. Producers see an opportunity to make a profit: by increasing production, they can take advantage of the newly discovered difference between production costs and consumer prices. By reducing the cost of predicting other people's actions, this law, including its specified capital sanction, would have tended to increase the output of labor in Israelite society. This would have increased the wealth of those living under the Mosaic law's jurisdiction. By reducing the likelihood that others would refuse to comply with the law, this law increased the likelihood that men would honor their promises. This would also have increased the value of contracts. A contract is an agreement that increases the predictability of other people's actions in the future. The greater the expected value of a contract, the more people who will seek out others to deal with.

This leads to a very important principle of Christian economics: predictable covenantal law and covenantal sanctions undergird the humanly unplanned development of a contractual society. The *covenantal basis of contract law* is manifested in this case law. The threat of execution for non-compliance with the state's interpretation of what a contract requires will increase the likelihood that men will take care in drafting their contracts and complying with their terms.

There is nothing in the New Covenant that annuls this principle of civil court authority. There is no New Covenant principle that authorizes reduced civil sanctions for non-compliance with the supreme court's decision. There is nothing that changes the specified sanction. In fact, the severity of the specified sanction is what demonstrates the supreme authority of the court. *To reduce the sanction is to undermine the authority of the supreme court.* Any argument on the part of non-theonomists that the New Covenant has nothing to say about such matters is implicitly an undermining of civil authority and therefore a subsidy to criminals. In any case, if the New Covenant really has nothing to say about such judicial matters, then the consistent New Covenant theologian should excuse himself from the discussion. He has nothing to say, for the New Covenant supposedly has nothing to say. On the whole, Christians in the West have willingly excused themselves from such discussions since about 1700, which is why social theory, criminal law, and politics have become battlegrounds between left-wing Enlightenment humanists and right-wing Enlightenment humanists.

Why this silence by Christians? Perhaps because they have recognized the underlying theocratic nature of this law and all civil law. This

Mosaic law had an important qualification: Israel's supreme civil court was neither wholly civil nor wholly ecclesiastical. The supreme court's authority to enforce its word was legitimate only because this decision of the civil judges came only after consultation with, and the support of, the priests.

D. The Priests the Levites

The phrase in verse 9, "the priests the Levites," first appears in the Bible in this verse. If we are to understand the scope of this law, we must understand the meaning of this phrase. In Deuteronomy 18, we are given a clearer picture of who these priests-Levites were. They were those Levites who served as tabernacle-temple priests. They had to reside in the city where the tabernacle was located. They were not Levites who lived in local communities. The priests officiated at the sacrifices (Deut. 18:1–8). This means that these priests held sacramental offices. They were ordained to special ministerial office, which required them to be present at the altar. In some cases, they actually sold their real estate in their home cities: "They shall have like portions to eat, beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony" (Deut. 18:8).

The presence of priests on the nation's supreme civil court gave veto power to the church. *The supreme representative function of the supreme court could not lawfully be exclusively civil.* The civil oath did not authorize exclusive judicial authority at the highest level, i.e., the final court of appeal. This balance of authority served as a check on the state. The state's agents could not unilaterally declare God's law in the most difficult cases that divided men.

E. Separation and Inheritance

The permanent separation of covenant-breakers from God at the final judgment leads to a transfer of inheritance: from the guilty parties to the innocent victims. The New Heaven and New Earth in its post-final judgment, consummated form will be inhabited solely by covenant-keepers (Rev. 21:1–4; 7–8). This model of final inheritance/disinheritance is the judicial basis of the prophecy that the righteous will inherit the earth in history. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and

shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:9–11). *History will reflect the outcome in eternity.*

The postmillennial implications of these passages are obvious. Amillennialism’s theory of history as a permanent stalemate between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers, with the church in permanent remnant status, or the church as progressively under oppression,¹⁰ is contradicted by Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the historical manifestation of the New Heaven and New Earth, in which, unlike the scene in Revelation 21:4, death will still exist. Isaiah 65:17–23 presents a promise of permanent inheritance, in which righteousness is the basis of inheritance, and therefore disinheritance by covenant-breakers is no longer a threat.¹¹

The progressive transfer of inheritance in history will resemble Egypt’s transfer of wealth to the Israelites at the exodus. The inheritance of the Egyptians’ firstborn sons was transferred to God’s firstborn son, Israel. This is normative for history. So far, it has not been normal because of the repeated apostasy of the church, but that which has been normal in the past is not that which is normative. It is also not a permanent condition.

There were a few cases under the Old Covenant in which there was no inheritance by Israel, where disinheritance was absolute. God imposed total destruction on a few cities. Sodom and Gomorrah are the archetypes. Lot did not inherit the wealth of Sodom. Arad’s cities were totally destroyed by Israel (Num. 21:3). Jericho was totally destroyed (Josh. 6:24). Saul lost his kingship because he refused to destroy Amalek totally (I Sam. 15:35; 16:1). But in the vast majority of cases in the conquest of Canaan, Israel inherited the capital assets of the defeated nations. This was part of God’s original plan of inheritance: it was to be achieved through the disinheritance of covenant-breakers. “And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full. . .” (Deut. 6:10–11). Solomon later summarized this process: “A good man leaveth an

10. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 76–94. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

11. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15.

inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).¹²

F. New Testament Applications

The New Testament equivalent of the priest-Levite is the ordained church officer who has the right to administer the sacraments and to restrict unauthorized people's access to the sacraments. This officer holds the keys to the kingdom (Matt. 16:19). He has the authority to declare people excommunicate. That is, he lawfully can exercise judgment with respect to a man's eternal inheritance. To the extent that inheritance in history is correlative to inheritance in eternity, he possesses the right indirectly to determine inheritance in history.

1. *Inheritance in History*

The biblical covenant makes it clear that the righteous will inherit in history. This historical outcome is denied by pessimillennialists. This is another reason why point five—eschatology—influences point four: sanctions. It also influences point two: hierarchy. This is why the modern Christian is not really neutral regarding the continuing authority of Mosaic law. He does not really believe that the New Testament has nothing to say about this, despite his initial assurances to the contrary. He insists that the New Testament has abolished all traces of the Mosaic civil law, or at least all those traces that call into question the Enlightenment's theory of religiously neutral civil law and political pluralism, which he devoutly accepts.¹³ He rejects point five of the biblical covenant, and therefore he rejects points two and four: the suggestion that a minister of the sacraments has any lawful advisory and veto function in a civil court. He sides with the humanists in a joint effort to deny that the church has any legitimate official authority in civil judgments. Prior to 1650, such a joint declaration would have been considered unthinkable in the West outside of the tiny New England commonwealth of Rhode Island.

The most important church council in history was the Council of Nicea, held in 325. It settled for all time the question of the divinity of Jesus Christ. To deny Christ's equality with God is to deny the Christian faith. The church has accepted this declaration ever since. Yet this

12. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

13. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

international ecclesiastical assembly was called to serve by the Emperor Constantine, who wanted this issue settled. It got settled theologically at the Council of Nicea, although it was not settled militarily and socially for several centuries.¹⁴

The Westminster Assembly first met on July 1, 1643. The British Parliament, in its rebellion against King Charles I, had called for the Assembly in the previous November. Parliament, not the Anglican Church, which opposed Parliament, chose the Assembly's representatives. *The Westminster "divines" were in fact political appointees.* The Assembly was advisory to the Parliament. The members were paid by Parliament to attend.¹⁵ The Westminster Assembly ratified Parliament's authority by putting the following declaration into the Confession: the civil magistrate "hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God."¹⁶ This passage was removed by the American Presbyterian Church in the revision of 1787–88, at the same time that the United States Constitution was being ratified. The Whig view of the separation of church and state was ratified in both constitutional documents: by the removal of a section in the ecclesiastical covenant, and by the inclusion in the civil covenant of a prohibition against religious test oaths for Federal office-holding.¹⁷

2. The Protestant Solution: Abdication

The modern Protestant is a child of the Enlightenment in his political outlook. The political religious pluralism which was regarded as heretical by the church, East and West, for 1700 years is today universally accepted by Protestants as somehow innately Christian and, in the words of unitarian skeptic Thomas Jefferson, "self-evident." The modern secular state has issued its declaration of independence from God, and American Protestants have not only agreed, they have hailed this as the very work of God in history, their source of liberation. No one has put it any more starkly than former Presidential aide and con-

14. The invading Ostrogoths were Arians.

15. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

16. Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), XXII:3.

17. Article VI, Section III. See Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 385–91. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

victed felon (pre-conversion) Charles Colson: "Thus two typically mortal enemies, the Enlightenment and the Christian faith, found a patch of common ground on American soil."¹⁸ He regarded this as a great breakthrough in civic freedom. As one of modern American evangelicalism's most respected figures, Colson's opinion is representative.

In the best-selling popular history of colonial America, *The Light and the Glory*, two Protestant authors wrote of "the divine origin of its [the Constitution's] inspiration. . . ."¹⁹ Furthermore, "it is nothing less than the institutional guardian of the Covenant Way of life for the nation as a whole!"²⁰ Yet they recognized that it is "a secularizing of the spiritual reality of the covenant. It can thus never be the substitute for a covenant life totally given to the Lord Jesus Christ."²¹ This should be obvious to any Christian. But their statement is also covenantally incomplete. The crucial question is this: What is the New Covenant basis of the *civil* covenant in "a covenant life totally given to Jesus Christ"? The two authors did not raise this question, for the question no longer occurs to modern American Christians, even among those few who adopt the word "covenant." Yet the father of one of the authors served as Chaplain of the United States Senate, and later became the posthumous subject of a best-selling book and a Hollywood movie.²² The "covenant life totally given to Jesus Christ" is arbitrarily confined to three spheres: personal, ecclesiastical, and familial. Without any supporting exegesis of the Bible, American Protestants for over two centuries have assumed that the civil covenant has no legal connection to Christ, and should not.

Meanwhile, the United States Supreme Court has outlawed public prayer in tax-funded schools (1963), as well as the teaching of creation in these schools (1991). It has legalized abortion on demand in the name of a woman's right to privacy (1973). Christian political activists who oppose all three decisions seem to think that these decisions were in no way connected to the United States Constitution's declaration of

18. Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (1987), p. 119. This book was jointly published by William Morrow, a secular publishing firm, and Zondervan Publishing House, a fundamentalist publishing firm.

19. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1977), pp. 343–44.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 348.

21. *Idem.*

22. Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter: The Story of Peter Marshall* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951).

covenantal independence from God and the church in 1788. The secularization of the Supreme Court, they believe, has nothing to do with the actual wording of the Constitution. Christian activists today suffer from near-terminal naiveté.

Protestantism has accepted of the Enlightenment's doctrine of pluralism. Roman Catholicism laid the foundations for this capitulation by its acceptance of Stoic natural law theory by way of Aristotle. Scholasticism's acceptance of Aristotelian logic set the precedent. The Reformers offered no substitute, and by the mid-seventeenth century, late-medieval scholastic categories of politics were imported into the Presbyterian tradition. The footnotes in Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex* (1644) are filled with references to members of the Dominicans' school of Salamanca. These men were brilliant jurists, as well as economists who pioneered concepts of free pricing, monetary theory, and interest as a time-based phenomenon that were in some ways superior to Adam Smith's theories over two centuries later.²³ Their epistemology was rationalist, as Scholasticism always was.

In the same year that *Lex, Rex* was published, Roger Williams' *Bloudy Tenant of Persecution* appeared. His defense of religiously neutral civil government so appalled Parliament that they ordered all copies burned. It was based on natural law theory. But before the book appeared, Williams had secured a Parliamentary charter for Rhode Island that allowed him to conduct an experiment in his theory of neutral civil government.²⁴ That "lively experiment" in polity a century and a half later conquered the colonial American mind.

Without a state church, early modern era Protestants saw no way to secure a voice in civil affairs that Christian political theory had demanded for seventeen centuries. The rise of Oliver Cromwell in 1644 as the military master led to the extension of liberty of worship to all Protestant sects. The Independents would not tolerate an intolerant state church. Scottish Presbyterianism's attempt to secure such a monopoly²⁵ was anathema to them. Cromwell's victory made impossible the Presbyterians' demand for a state church. The restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660 did not reverse this toleration, although the King imposed the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which led to

23. Murray N. Rothbard, *Economic Thought before Adam Smith: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought* (Brookfield, Vermont: Elgar, 1985), ch. 4.

24. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 85.

25. See Jane Lane, *The Reign of King Covenant* (London: Robert Hale, 1956).

the departure of 2,000 Puritan ministers from their pulpits.

Who should represent the church in the civil courts? This question has had no answer in Protestant nations since the late seventeenth century. Which ministers should be eligible to serve? Which groups calling themselves churches should be eligible to serve? This was no problem for Mosaic Israel, which had only one lawful priesthood.

The correct answer—"ministers of churches that affirm an historic Trinitarian creed"—was too narrow for Enlightenment humanists and Protestant Independents, and too broad for the Presbyterians. Protestants have been deadlocked since the seventeenth century. The result has been the progressive secularization of the United States' civil order: from Scholastic natural law theory to Newtonian natural law theory to Madison's grand experiment, a Constitution stripped of any theory of law. In the opinion of the Framers, the preservation of liberty is a matter of technique rather than ethics: designing proper institutional checks and balances in the allocation of political power. But these checks and balances have steadily fallen prey to the sovereignty of the Supreme Court, which the Constitution's authors regarded as the least powerful branch of the Federal government, but which has become the most powerful. The Supreme Court renders final judgment—point four—on the legality of what the other two branches do. The Court therefore has become the voice of authority: point two.²⁶

In Mosaic Israel, the supreme court could not represent one covenant; it had to represent two: church and state. This is the system of checks and balance announced by God through Moses, but modern man, both Christian and non-Christian, regards the Mosaic judicial settlement as a source of tyranny. Judicial checks and balances are seen today exclusively as intra-civil government matters—national, state, and local—but never as matters of inter-government relations, i.e., civil and ecclesiastical.

3. A Royal Priesthood

The New Covenant, like the Old Covenant, rests on an oath of loyalty: allegiance to God. There are four areas where this covenant oath seals a legal bond: personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil. The modern Christian generally acknowledges the legitimacy of the first three covenantal Trinitarian oaths, but as a loyal son of the Enlightenment, he denies the fourth.

26. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 10.

If the fourth covenant were honored, this principle would become a judicial reality: he who is not sealed by covenant oath (point four) may not lawfully exercise covenantal authority (point two) to interpret the law (point three) invoking and applying covenant sanctions (point four). To declare covenant sanctions is to affect the inheritance (point five) in God's name (point one). Only those who are under the covenant through an oath possess this authority. The political questions become: Whose covenant? Whose oath?

To gain the eternal blessings of God, a person must swear a personal covenant oath to the God of the Bible, whose Son and Messiah is Jesus Christ. To gain the blessings of the sacraments, a person must come under the authority of the institutional church. To gain the blessings of a Christian marriage, a person must have sworn oaths one and two. So also with biblical citizenship. But this is denied by most Christians today. They are sons of the Enlightenment.

Biblical citizenship, above all, is the *authority to become a judge*, either through membership in the military or as a judge. A judge includes the office of voter and the office of juror. He who is not a citizen may not vote or serve on a jury. If he has not sworn a loyalty oath to the state, he is not a citizen. If he has not also sworn the first two oaths—personal and ecclesiastical—he is not to become a citizen in a biblical commonwealth.²⁷

The connection between the Mosaic covenant's theory of priestly participation in the supreme court and a modern nation's supreme court is this: there must be representatives of Trinitarian churches on the nation's supreme civil court. But what about Israel's local courts? The priests served there, too (Deut. 19:17).²⁸ This indicates that priests were sent by the temple-officiating priesthood to serve in local communities as co-judges.

The officiating Mosaic priests were centrally located. The place of sacrifice became their temporary home. This is no longer the case. There is no central place of sacrifice. But there is a central place where the supreme civil court meets. This is in part a matter of tradition, at

27. The Enlightenment attacked this doctrine of oath-bound Christian citizenship. Humanists sought the legal authority to impose civil sanctions on Christians in the name of another God: autonomous man. They did not wish to live inside the boundaries of God's Bible-revealed law. So, they created a theory of political citizenship which invokes a loyalty oath only to the state—a state devoid of any Trinitarian demarcation. Their theory of citizenship is today universally accepted by Protestantism and American Catholicism.

28. Chapter 45:E.

least for now, but it is also a matter of personalism. There is more to courts than the formal gatherings of court's judges.

The New Testament's covenant oath is priestly. The promise of Exodus 19:6 has been fulfilled:

And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation (Ex. 19:6a).

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (I Peter 2:9–10).

Peter's language is important for political theory. The New Covenant's priestly status is royal, i.e., kingly. The Protestant Reformation's doctrine of "every man a priest," i.e., every *redeemed* person a priest, is an extension of part of Peter's declaration. But the Reformation did not affirm the parallel doctrine: every redeemed person a king. This was a major theological and social omission. This political principle implies universal civil suffrage among adult church members. Tentative beginnings of this doctrine arose only in the next century, particularly during the English Civil War (1642–49). The sect known as the Levellers wanted to extend the vote to all male rate-payers in church or state.²⁹

The covenantal basis of both doctrines was announced by Peter: *every redeemed, covenantally bound person is both a priest and a king*. This does not deny the fact that there are still ordained officers in church and state who exercise greater authority than those whom they represent. Hierarchy is an inescapable aspect of the covenant. So is ordination. But the concept of the priestly-kingly believer in Christ leads to the concept of *covenant ratification* in both spheres: church and state. Members of churches and citizens of states lawfully possess the veto. On regular occasions, a majority of them must be allowed to extend positive sanctions to a representative, thereby imposing negative sanctions on his rivals. The bottom-up authority of the covenant matches its top-down authority. *Without the imposition of covenant*

29 62. William Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 325. "Leveling" did not refer to property ownership. It referred to right to vote. The Diggers and the Fifth Monarchy men were the communists of the English Civil War era.

sanctions, there can be no covenantal representation. Ordained representatives must truly represent both parties to the covenant: God and man. Both God and man must authorize an office-holders' continuing possession of authority. Officers of both church and state must be held responsible by those whom they represent. Leviticus 4 set forth a sacrificial structure that established this judicial principle: *God holds a nation's citizens corporately responsible for the sins of their representatives, both ecclesiastical and civil.*³⁰ How, then, are the people to sanction civil representation? Democratic politics is a consistent application of Peter's announcement. The political question then becomes: Who has lawful access to the exercise of the vote? The New Covenant's answer is this: "Those who are under oath-bound covenantal sanctions to the Trinitarian God of the Bible in both church and state."

The priesthood of all believers secures the priestly status of every jury and every court whose members are all members in good standing of Trinitarian churches. Then why doesn't this principle of the universal priesthood solve the judicial problem of church-state relations at the level of the supreme court? Why is there still a necessity of a mixed court containing judges and sacramental officers? Because of the principle of checks and balances. *There must be a division of authority.* In every supreme court that lawfully imposes physical sanctions, there must be representation of the church. Someone who has the right to declare a person excommunicate must have a veto power on every supreme civil court. The civil authority must not assert its own exclusive counsel at the highest level. The checks and balances necessary to restrict civil government from becoming tyrannical must include a veto in the possession of sacramental officers. This is the message of Deuteronomy 17:8–12.

Conclusion

Israel's supreme civil court was to include representatives of two covenants: civil and ecclesiastical. This law authorized the priests to veto the decision of a judge. The law speaks of a joint declaration: "According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do." This law brought the power of the civil government in support of contracts. The threat of execution for one's refusal to adhere to the court's de-

30. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

claration placed the rebel under severe pressure to conform. This would have increased the predictability of the marketplace. Disputes over the interpretation of contracts would have ended with the supreme court's judgment.

This law brought contract law under the authority of the civil courts, which had jurisdiction over contracts. *Contract law was not an extension of the state, but it was under the authority of the state.* Yet, in the Hebrew commonwealth, the state had no final jurisdiction. The joint declaration of representatives of church and state kept the institution from attaining final authority in civil law. *No aspect of biblical law is more hostile to Enlightenment political philosophy than Deuteronomy 17:8–13.* The doctrine of the separation of church and state was from the beginning an attempt to create a monopoly of violence for the civil government by revoking the church's veto of the civil magistrate at the highest judicial level. Marxian Communism was one product of Enlightenment political philosophy: left-wing Enlightenment humanism.³¹ The extension of the United States Constitution's secular roots by the United States Supreme Court after 1960 was another: right-wing Enlightenment humanism.³²

31. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnmrro>)

32. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 10.

BOUNDARIES ON KINGSHIP

When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me. . . (Deut. 17:14).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's office as King of kings.

A. God's Sovereignty and Israel's King

This was a land law.¹ It governed the office of king, an optional office in Old Covenant Israel. This biblically authorized office has not existed since the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In fact, it has not existed in history since the exile. Men have called themselves kings, and they have acted as kings, but they have not been legitimate, in the same sense that neither priest nor prophet has been legitimate. All three Old Covenant offices were completed by Christ and annulled.

Moses' assumption here was that Israel would conquer the land of Canaan. There was a strong element of prophecy: predictions accompanied by ethical commands. The laws governing kingship in Israel assumed that Israel had already conquered the land. This is another instance in the Bible where *grace precedes law*, which is a fundamental principle of God's covenantal dealings with men. God would give them a military victory comparable to their deliverance out of Egypt. This victory would then serve as the historical basis of kingship. *Without prior grace, there would be no earthly king over Israel.* The very presence of an earthly king in Israel was supposed to remind them of the visible grace of God in history. Only because God is the sovereign master over history and the deliverer of His people in history could the Israelites ever set a king over themselves. The Israelites' mandatory pre-

1. On land laws, see Appendix J.

supposition of earthly kingship was supposed to be the absolute sovereignty of God over history. The Mosaic doctrine of kingship rested on this doctrine: *Israel's true king was God*. This was the theocentric focus of the kingship laws.

The Mosaic law provided for the establishment of kings in Israel. This is not to say that God required kingship in Israel. He did not. Israel broke these kingship laws when the people demanded a king four centuries later. Their motivation was not theocentric; it was humanistic. Samuel reminded them of the theocentric focus of Israel's kingship: God's gracious deliverance. "And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands" (I Sam. 10:19). God had revealed to Samuel that the Israelites were substituting a new covenant. This new covenant necessarily involved the rejection of the God of the Mosaic covenant: "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7).

God told Samuel to do what they asked. God gave them enough rope to hang themselves. He told His prophet to go along with them, anointing the new king in God's name. There would be four kings over Israel's united kingdom, but early in the reign of the fourth king, Rehoboam, there was a revolt which divided Israel into two kingdoms (I Kings 12).² This, too, was part of God's covenantal order: He visits the iniquity of the fathers unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him (Ex. 20:5).³ The glory of the Davidic kingdom and the wealth of Solomon's kingdom were aspects of God's covenantal curse on Israel: magnificent rope for a national hanging. "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:19–20).⁴ *When they demanded a king, they began a journey into covenantal disobedience that led*

2. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

4. Chapter 23.

to Babylon. When they returned from the exile, they never again had an Israelite as a king. Final civil authority was imposed on them from headquarters outside the land: Medo-Persia, regional Hellenism, and Rome.

The Mosaic law mandated restraints on Israel's kings. It placed specific boundaries on the king. One of these was that the king not multiply wives for himself. David and Solomon self-consciously defied this law. The pinnacle of Israel's glory came during the reigns of two kings who defied the Mosaic laws of kingship. David multiplied wives. Solomon multiplied wives and gold. Visible rebellion was accompanied by visible blessings: rope. The bills eventually came due. Rehoboam demanded the taxes necessary, he believed, to finance the kingdom that his father had consolidated. The visible splendor of earthly power and glory does not come cheaply. Rehoboam's demand for higher taxes led to a successful tax revolt that divided kingship in Israel. The centralized kingdom was decentralized by political revolution. This is the inevitable fate of every kingdom in history. God the king will not tolerate indefinitely the claims of rival kings and kingdoms.

B. Decentralized Civil Government

Kingship in the ancient pagan world was associated with divinity. The king was frequently regarded as a divine-human link. This was not merely a judicial link; it was an ontological link. The king or emperor was believed to participate in the being of God.⁵ Even today, the emperor of Japan is officially said to be a descendent of the gods.⁶

This belief has historical roots, according to the Bible. There was such a divine-human king in Old Covenant history: Melchizedek, king of Salem. The Epistle to the Hebrews describes him: "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (Heb. 7:3). The language of this epistle indicates that Melchizedek was a theophany, in the same way that the burning bush was. He held two offices: priest and king. This was not permitted to an Israelite king. The two offices had to be kept separate. Kings could not lawfully offer priestly sacrifices (I Sam. 13:9–14; II Chron. 26:19).

The separation of church and state was fundamental in the Mosaic

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

6. "Emperor Jimmu," Wikipedia.

law. There were two national judicial chains of command in Israel, civil and ecclesiastical. The high priest's office was separate from kingship. The priesthood unilaterally exercised the sword only in a defensive perimeter around the tabernacle. The Mosaic law was divided structurally between ecclesiastical law and civil law. The centralization of power that was implied by kingship could not lawfully centralize ecclesiastical power under the state. There could be no Melchizedekan king-priest in Israel.

To call for an earthly king was Israel's public admission of political defeat. There is no question of the biblical legitimacy of kingship, for the Mosaic law established provisions governing the office. There is also no question that it was a second-best arrangement. The people of Israel abdicated when they had Samuel ordain a king. For four centuries (I Kings 6:1), they had possessed the authority to follow or reject their judges. They also held a veto. Although Deborah's song retroactively ridiculed those tribes that had not heeded her call to do battle against Sisera (Jud. 5:16–17), there was no question that she had not possessed lawful authority over them to compel their participation. Furthermore, without a joint declaration of war by the princes and the priests (Num. 10), Israel could not lawfully go to war. Israel was to be ruled by princes and judges, who were to consult with the Levites. Political leadership was decentralized in Israel because their king was God. There had to be a high priest in Israel; there did not have to be a king. *Visible sovereignty was supposed to be ecclesiastical far more than civil.* The final voice of civil authority was to be a corporate body: judges and priests who would declare God's judgments in specific cases (Deut. 17:9).⁷ The presence of priests on this supreme civil court was designed to keep civil authority from becoming autonomous.

To maintain such a decentralized civil government, the Israelites would have to retain their confidence that God was truly in their midst and that He revealed Himself through His ordained representatives, both ecclesiastical and civil. The inauguration of a king was a public declaration that *the nation no longer wanted its legal status as a thoroughly decentralized kingdom of priests.* God recognized this, and He instructed Samuel to tell them this. The king would centralize tax collection and extract a tithe from them (I Sam. 8:15, 17).⁸ They did not heed Samuel's warning. Either they did not believe Samuel or they did not care. Either they believed that they could place limits on the king's

7. Chapter 41.

8. North, *Disobedience and Defeat*, ch. 14.

taxing power or else they believed that the trade-off was worth it. They wanted to be like the nations around them. God granted them this request.

In Moses' day, God knew they would eventually inaugurate a king. This is why He graciously had Moses announce tight boundaries on the king's legitimate authority. He gave the Israelites guidelines—a blueprint—that would enable them to identify when their king was moving toward apostasy, rebellion, and tyranny. Saul, a terrible king, did not openly violate them. David and Solomon did. Rehoboam, surely a third-rate king, imposed new taxes at the beginning of his reign. For this, the Northern Kingdom seceded. God kept Israel decentralized by authorizing a divided kingdom under Jeroboam and therefore two kingly lines.

C. Covenantal Boundaries

Deuteronomy's first kingly law established that only an Israelite could occupy the office: "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother" (Deut. 17:15). This law governed the nation's civil and ecclesiastical representatives. In Israel, a joint ordination was mandatory for establishing kingship: church and state. Samuel anointed Saul, but he first went before the civil representatives of the nation to warn them not to raise up a king: a political creation of the congregation. Later, when Solomon's authority to reign as king was challenged by a rebellion by his brother Adonijah, the priests and the people decided in his favor. "And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon" (I Kings 1:39). This *joint ordination procedure* was even clearer in the case of young Joash, who replaced murderous Queen Athaliah.

And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the LORD. And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, Treason. But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges: and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the

house of the LORD. And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain. And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people that they should be the LORD'S people; between the king also and the people. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD. And he took the rulers over hundreds, and the captains, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of the LORD, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings (II Kings 11:13–19).

Deuteronomy 17:15 told the people what they could not lawfully do: ordain a stranger as king. The king had to be eligible to be a judge, i.e., a citizen. Citizenship was covenantal. This citizenship principle established that only a circumcised male who was a member of the congregation, or the daughter or wife of a citizen (e.g., Deborah),⁹ could lawfully be ordained to impose civil sanctions. He had to be under covenantal sanctions, marked in his flesh, in order to be eligible for kingship in Israel. This meant that in order for a man lawfully to impose civil covenantal sanctions, he had to be under ecclesiastical covenantal sanctions. A king's flesh had to reveal his implicit self-maledictory oath before God, which had been taken on his behalf by his circumcising parent, who had acted as a household priest.

Circumcision was a physical manifestation of what was to be an inward ethical condition. Moses had already warned Israel: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked" (Deut. 10:16). The stiffnecked person was someone who would not heed God's word. He was a rebel. The circumcised man might not be circumcised in heart, which was why Moses here revealed other marks of the circumcised heart in a man possessing supreme civil authority: one wife, no horses, and not much money.

After Israel returned from the Assyrian-Babylonian exile, its supreme civil rulers would no longer be circumcised. The people had no

9. She was a judge. She commanded the army, but only as a United States President does: as a civilian. She could not legally be drafted into the army. Only men were mustered (numbered) in God's holy army. I conclude that her civil authority as a judge stemmed either from her husband or father, although the text in Judges does not say this. The judicial issue is circumcision: the mark of being under the covenant's negative sanctions.

further say over who would rule over them. The final authority in civil government did not reside in a court in Jerusalem; it resided in some foreign capital. The history of Israel was a transition from judgeship to domestic kingship to foreign empire. Under foreign rulers, both at home and abroad, Israel was to learn the true meaning of kingship. Israel got its wish: to live as the other nations did—as a subordinate nation in a foreign king’s international empire.

D. Military Boundaries

The horse was an offensive weapon. Horses were the basis of both the cavalry and chariots. There were to be few horses in the king’s stable: “But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way” (v. 16). The horse was a tool of empire. Israel’s kings could not lawfully multiply them.

The kingdom of God vs. the empire of man: here was the choice before Israel. Israel’s civil order was to be decentralized. *Decentralized societies cannot become empires without abandoning their political decentralization.* Republican Rome is the most famous example in history: when Rome became an empire, she ceased being a republic. *Decentralized societies lack what every empire requires: an offensive military force.* A king or his functional equivalent is the commander of every empire. There must be a chain of command with one person serving as the final voice of authority in an empire. The military model requires one-man rule.¹⁰ One-man rule is required in wartime, for the same reason that there can be only one captain on a ship: someone must be held personally accountable for making life-and-death decisions. When a decentralized society suffers a defensive war, this one-man rulership is temporary. A decentralized nation is difficult to lure into an offensive war: there is no king to promote such a war for his glory, and many powerful local leaders who oppose it, knowing that their power will be transferred upward when war begins. When Israel

10. In England’s nineteenth-century naval empire, the Prime Minister served in place of the king. Today’s largest empire, the United States, does not rule directly over other nations, but rules as first among equals in an international world order. As with England a century ago, the United States’ main international concern is commerce. The largest private United States banks have more long-term authority in the maintenance of this commercial empire than the politicians do, which was also the case in England’s empire.

anointed a king, the nation took the first step toward empire. The next step after this was a stable of horses.

Egypt had been an empire based on chariots. There were limits on what chariots could accomplish. Chariots had failed to keep Israel inside Egypt's boundaries. No Israelite king was to send Israelites down to Egypt to buy horses or to learn the arts of horse-based warfare. *Horses were forbidden to Israel's kings because empire was forbidden.* Israel would be defended by God, just as she had been at the Red Sea. Israelites were not to put their trust in horses.

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God (Ps. 20:7).

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! (Isa. 31:1).

An Israelite army without horses was at the mercy of God, not the mercy of Egypt. To preserve the inheritance of Israel, the king had to conform to God's Bible-revealed laws, for he was the nation's supreme civil representative. A stable full of horses would serve as a symbol of the king's trust in military might rather than God's preserving hand. *An arms race in offensive weaponry in Israel would testify to a national loss of faith.* Men of valor seated on slow-moving donkeys or on foot would be sufficient to defend the borders of Israel and preserve the inheritance. There were other chariots on call: "And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (II Kings 6:17). Chariots of fire, not chariots of horses, were to constitute Israel's strategic defense initiative.

E. Marital Boundaries

"Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (17a). Saul had only one wife (I Sam. 14:50). Ahab had only one wife, probably out of fear of upsetting her. Ahab's kingship proves that monogamy was no guarantee of righteousness. David had an unknown number of wives and concubines (II Sam. 5:13), in addition to his eight listed wives.¹¹ Solomon, of course, was the world record-holder: 700

11. Michal (I Sam. 18:27–28), Abigail (I Sam. 25:39), Ahinoam (II Sam. 2:2), Bath-

wives and 300 concubines, i.e., wives without dowries (I Kings 11:3). The problem was, as is said of Solomon, “his wives turned away his heart” (I Kings 11:3).

The prohibition on polygamy applied in the Old Covenant only to kings. The most likely reason why the king was singled out in this regard was his access to foreign wives. These marital alliances were not merely biological; they were covenantal. They were therefore political. These wives would likely be part of military alliances with foreign kings. David’s wife Maacah was the daughter of a king (II Sam. 3:3). The multiplication of foreign wives was a lure into polytheism, for with foreign wives might come foreign gods. A king’s polygamy could easily lead to polytheism. Polytheism was the obvious way for a king to reconcile in his competitive household the imported gods of his wives and their sons. Foreign wives could accept this solution, for the gods of the ancient Near East were polytheistic. This is what happened to Solomon.

From the viewpoint of a foreign king seeking to undermine Israel, an alliance through his daughter’s marriage to an Israelite king was ideal. This was a low-cost strategy of subversion. The Israelite king’s polytheistic example could undermine Israel in all four covenants: personal, ecclesiastical, civil and familial. *The family was therefore the weak link in the religion of Israel.* So concerned was God to preserve the monotheism of the Israelite family that He demanded the death penalty for any family member who tempted another member to worship a false God (Deut. 13:6–10). The prosecuting family members were to cast the first stones after the errant member’s conviction (v. 9). This was because witnesses were required to cast the first stones under Mosaic law (Deut. 17:7).¹²

F. Treasury Boundaries

The text continues: “. . . neither shall he greatly multiply to himself

sheba (II Sam. 11:27), Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah (II Sam. 3:3–5).

12. Jesus understood the implications of this civil law: “And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death” (Matt. 10:21). “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:34–37).

silver and gold" (17b). These precious metals could be used to build monuments to kingly power: public works projects. These public works projects honor the king or the state. They must then be permanently maintained through permanent taxation, unless the state is willing to admit defeat and transfer their ownership to private organizations.¹³ Precious metals could be used to build up an offensive army: the way of empire.¹⁴ They could be used in profligate moral dissipation by the king and his court.¹⁵ It was a violation of God's law for a king to use his authority to extract so much wealth from the population that the excess revenue could be hoarded in the form of money.

G. Judicial Boundaries

The king was told to become familiar with the Mosaic law. "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall

13. The national highway system built by the United States Federal government in the late 1950s and 1960s is now becoming a major financial drain on state and local finances as these roads and bridges steadily wear out. Governments did not set aside gasoline tax revenues to pay for the roads' replacement. The consumption of capital took place over several decades. Now the budgets of these governments are constrained by massive debt and by political promises regarding welfare: the support of the poor. Even worse in this respect is the century-old underground water systems of older United States cities, especially in the Northeast.

14. Such hoards of precious metals do not last long in wartime; the costs of warfare are too high. But the presence of a hoard of precious metals in reserve might lure a short-sighted king into starting a war that would outlast his hoard. The problem with a war paid for by the king's precious metals is that his army must gain a string of victories over wealthy opponents in order to replenish his dwindling supply of gold. The offensive military campaign becomes self-reinforcing. To maintain the conquests, wealth must be extracted from the conquered peoples, who resent the imposition. The Roman Republic did not extricate itself from its military victories. The government used the wealth extracted from the provinces to maintain local control over them. Little of this wealth flowed back into Rome's treasury except immediately after an initial military victory. Private Roman citizens kept most of the booty. Bribery and extortion became common with local governors and Rome's senators. A. H. M. Jones, *The Roman Economy: Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1974), pp. 115–21. The republic became an empire. Eventually, the cost of maintaining it led to bankruptcy and mass inflation. *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

15. Isaiah warned: "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant" (Isa. 56:10–12). The court at Versailles under Louis XIV and Louis XV left a mountain of royal debt and oligarchical moral debauchery for Louis XVI to deal with. He and the old order did not survive the ordeal (1789–94).

write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel” (Deut. 17:18–20).

First, at the time of his accession to the throne, he was to copy the law in his own hand. *He had to be literate*. A king in Israel could not lawfully claim that he had not read the law. He had not only read it; he had written it down. To maintain this kingly inheritance, his son would have to be able to read. This writing down of the law was a joint brain-hand exercise: suitable for memorization. Also, by writing down the law, he was submitting to the treaty of the great king. i.e., God Himself, whose laws and sanctions are in the text.

Second, the priests kept the original copy. This meant that the priests were the law-keepers in Israel. They were the ones with exclusive access to the original source document of Moses’ judicials. The king could not tamper with this document. He could not retroactively write new copies of the law in order to mislead the judges of the nation. He was not to become a forger who might later be identified as such by some higher critic of the Bible. He was not sovereign over the law. He was under its authority, as preserved in written form by the priests. *Priestly authority was superior to kingly authority in the area of law*, and this was to be acknowledged by the king by his act of copying the law from the priests’ version.

Third, he was required to read the law continually. He was to learn to fear God and to keep God’s law. The sign of his fear of God would be his obedience to God’s revealed law. This would keep him in his place: “That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left” (v. 20a).

Fourth, there was a positive sanction attached to this law: “. . . to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel” (v. 20b). This was an extension of the fifth commandment’s promise: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Ex. 20:12). By honoring God by obeying His law, the king could bring the blessings of long life and extended authority to himself and his

heirs. The law specifically identified the land as “his kingdom.” To preserve his family’s kingly line, he had to obey.

H. Taxes and Control

Centralization means a transfer of authority away from the individual. Taxes imposed by a central government are transmitted to an agency of government more distant from the taxpayer than local governments. The taxpayer has less influence over the spending of this money. This means that the spending preferences of the individual are usually compromised by the collecting agency. His preferences are drowned out by the preferences of other taxpayers and special-interest political pressure groups. The central collecting agency can play off one competing group against another. This allows the civil government’s decision-makers to substitute their spending preferences for those of the taxpayers. Meanwhile, organized opposition to specific taxes will be sporadic and diffused.¹⁶

The king in Israel faced competing demands for the money he collected. There is always heavy demand for free money. Those desiring access to the king’s money might even be located outside the country. The king, as the official representative of all the people, had more claims on the use of his funds than any local government faced. The spending decisions made by a king were therefore more complex. Meanwhile, the taxpayer found it difficult to gain the king’s support for the taxpayer’s preferred project. His preferences were drowned in the noise of competition.

This noise transferred greater power to the king and his agents. The more complex the problems facing the king, and the more noise there was in the competition for access to the funds, the greater the flexibility of the king in spending the taxpayers’ money. This means greater arbitrariness and less of a restraining effect by the law. The more money collected by the king, the more detailed the law book had to be to govern the allocation of the revenue. A rule of bureaucracy is this: *the thicker the law book, the more arbitrary the decisions*. If the law book is too thick to make it easy for anyone to coordinate the details of the law, the bureaucrat has fewer restraints on his decision-making. This is another reason why the Bible’s law book is comparatively thin—thin enough to be read to the assembled population once

16. Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 292–94.

every seven years (Deut. 31:10–12).¹⁷

The Mosaic law established a political order in which civil power was decentralized. There could be a king, but for four centuries, there wasn't. Civil government's decision-making was kept at the local level. So was tax revenue. This decentralization made it possible for local taxpayers to have a greater voice in the distribution of their funds. It also allowed them to place pressure on the government when taxes got too high. It was far more difficult to restrict a distant king's power over the purse. It took a political revolution under Jeroboam to reduce the burden of Rehoboam's taxes (I Kings 12). Revolution is an expensive, risky, and infrequent occurrence in the affairs of nations.

I. Tax Tyranny

When the Israelites first proposed a king to Samuel, the prophet warned them of the dire consequences that would surely follow. The king would tax them equal to the tithe (I Sam. 8:15, 17). This threat of looming tax tyranny did not deter them, any more than dire warnings against the establishment of a national income tax deterred voters in the early twentieth century. The people wanted a king in Israel; similarly, the people have wanted a savior state in the twentieth century, with the high tax rates necessary to fund such a would-be savior state. The twentieth century produced tax rates far above the tithe. To get back to a mere tithe, which Samuel warned was tyranny, most of the civil governments of the modern world would have to cut taxes by three quarters. To get back to the tax level of tyrannical Egypt under Joseph (Gen. 47:26)—God's curse on Pharaoh-worshipping Egypt through Joseph—modern welfare states would have to cut taxes by at least half.¹⁸

This fact is evidence that the modern world has adopted political tyranny in the name of freedom and economic justice. The modern secular world has strayed so far from belief in the God of the Bible that it regards tax tyranny as liberty. Tax reformers who call for a 20% national flat tax—leaving intact all state and local taxes—are dismissed by the vast majority of intellectuals and elected politicians as crackpot defenders of a near-libertarian state. Meanwhile, the modern church refuses to call for massive tax cuts in the name of the Bible. The oper-

17. Chapter 75.

18. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 35.

ating alliance between secular humanists and the Old Testament-rejecting pietists has led to the establishment of the would-be savior state, which promises healing to all mankind. This is modern man's version of salvation by law. Christians affirm its legitimacy in the name of their rejection of Old Testament law. They argue that the acceptance of Old Testament civil law is a form of legalism.

This has led Christians, step by step, into a political alliance with modernists, whose version of salvation by humanistic civil law has become a universal faith in the once-Christian West. In the same way that the Israelites demanded a king because the pagan nations around them had kings, so have Bible-affirming Christians voted for politicians who have imposed tax tyranny in the name of the savior state, i.e., the welfare state. They have not understood that there is a relation between biblical law and freedom. Neither did the Israelites.

The modern welfare state was the creation of Otto von Bismarck, who advocated state-funded pensions and health insurance in the 1880s in order to undermine the Social Democrats (socialists) and the liberals (*laissez-faire*) who were challenging his authority to rule over Germany's government.¹⁹ Germany, which had by then become the center of state-funded education and biblical higher criticism, became the West's model for the welfare state after 1890.²⁰ Bismarck called his program "applied Christianity," but it was actually applied force for the purpose of increasing state power. He told his biographer in 1881, "Anybody who has before him the prospect of a pension, be it ever so small, in old age or infirmity is much happier and more content with his lot, and much more tractable and easy to manage, than he whose future is uncertain."²¹ He also told him, "The State must take the matter into its own hands, not as alms-giving, but as the right that men have to be taken care of when, with the best will imaginable, they be-

19. He could not persuade the German parliament in 1881 to vote for government funding of health insurance, but it did vote for state-mandated health insurance (1883) and accident insurance (1884), to be co-funded by workers and employers. But, economically speaking, workers funded the employers' share, too. The employers would have been willing to pay the workers the same money in salaries. The payment was simply a cost of doing business. It went to insurance rather than wages.

20. A. J. P. Taylor, England's prolific socialistic historian, wrote: "German social insurance was the first in the world, and has served as a model for every other civilized country. The great conservative became the greatest of innovators." Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman* (New York: Knopf, 1955), p. 203.

21. Moritz Busch, *Our Chancellor (Bismarck): Sketches for a Historical Picture*, trans. William Beatty-Kingston, 2 vols. (New York: Books for Libraries, [1884] 1970), II, p. 217.

come unfit for work. . . . This thing will make its own way; it has a future. When I die, possibly our policy will come to grief. But State Socialism will have its day; and he who shall take it up again will assuredly be the man at the wheel."²² In 1889, shortly after his forced retirement, Bismarck's tax-funded pension plan was voted into law.

Christians want to live in a society like the pagan nations around them. This is especially true of Christians in college classrooms who have earned advanced academic degrees from state-funded universities and state-accredited private secular universities, which today serve as the institutional equivalent of Nebuchadnezzar's school for the sons of conquered nations (Dan. 1). This lust of covenant-keepers to conform to the latest manifestations of covenant-breaking society has undermined the covenants from the day that the nation of Israel ratified the national covenant in Exodus 19. The unwillingness of covenant-keepers to filter and then restructure imported ideas, institutions, and practices by means of God's Bible-revealed law places them at the mercy of the ethical standards of their enemies.

Conclusion

The king, as the final voice of civil authority, was not to replace the supreme court, which had to include priests (Deut. 17:8–13). The priests could exercise a judicial veto.²³ Yet because the king possessed an army and personal authority, he would inevitably become a major source of judicial interpretation. He would threaten the system of co-judgeship in which the priests served as counsellors to civil judges. The authority to declare the law in God's name and then to enforce it is the foundation of covenantal authority. The state has the power to enforce the law physically. In a covenantally rebellious society, the fear of the state is greater than the fear of excommunication. The state becomes the most feared interpreter of the law.

This is why Absalom used the promise of wise judicial declaration as his primary weapon in his subversion of his father's throne.

And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but

22. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 321–22.

23. Chapter 41.

there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (II Sam. 15:2–6).

Absalom promised to do what Moses could not do: render perfect justice to all-comers. His offer would not have been believable had the king not already undermined the supreme court's function by arrogating judicial authority to himself, and through his own person, to the autonomous state.

Foreign kings repeatedly made trouble for Israel, from the day that Chedorlaomer kidnapped Lot (Gen. 14) to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Pharaoh of the oppression was the archetype of what a king could become if left unchecked by law and God's historical sanctions. There had been only one exception: Melchizedek. Abram had gone to meet him, bringing tithes to him and receiving bread and wine from him. But Melchizedek was different from the other kings: he was also the priest of Salem. He lawfully possessed both offices: king and priest (Gen. 14:8). He was a royal priest. He, too, was an archetype—not for individual kingship, but for corporate kingship. Israel as a nation of priests was to imitate Melchizedek.

Israel was set apart by God at Sinai. The nation took an oath there to obey God's law (Ex. 19). God then gave them His law (Ex. 20–23). At Sinai, God had prophesied that they would become a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). They were not yet such a kingdom, He implied, but someday they would be. It was the fulfillment of this prophecy by the church that Peter announced: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peter 2:9).

Implicit in Peter's doctrine of the institutional church as a holy nation is the call for a return to the decentralized Israel of the judges era, though without a high priest. Decentralization is to be both civil and ecclesiastical, for Jesus Christ is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:10) and therefore a king (Heb. 7:1–2). He reigns exclusively from heaven, not from an earthly holy of holies. But it took until 1918 for the Christian West to come to grips with the civil im-

plications of the doctrine of the bodily ascension of Christ. By the end of World War I, when the kings at last departed, Christendom had also departed. It was not Christianity that finally abolished kings; it was the Enlightenment, both left wing and right wing.

LEVITICAL INHERITANCE THROUGH SEPARATION

The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance. Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them (Deut. 18:1–2).

The theocentric focus of this priestly law is God's identification of Himself as the Levites' inheritance. This law governed the separation of the tribes: boundaries.

A. Landless Levites

This was a land law.¹ It had to do with landed inheritance inside the boundaries of Israel. Inheritance through separation was basic to the Mosaic covenant.² God separated Israel from the nations. He also separated the tribes. He separated the Levites from the other 12 tribes. The Levites would inherit an office that allowed them geographic proximity to God's dwelling place in the tabernacle. The cost of this inheritance was their forfeiture of any inheritance in rural Israel. God separated them for service to Him. He therefore separated them judicially from their brethren. The economic marks of this judicial separation were two-fold: their lack of jubilee-guaranteed rural landed inheritance and their lawful claim on the tithe (Num. 18:26).³

Levites could not normally inherit rural land, according to the jubilee laws. Instead, they were entitled to a tithe from their rural brethren.

1. On land laws, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 21.

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

ren. There was a reason for this: the other tribes did not have lawful access to tabernacle service. *The separation of Levi from rural land was an aspect of God's separation of the other tribes from His presence.* God identified Himself as the Levites' inheritance. The Levites' inheritance of God was accompanied by their legal claim on the tithe.

And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance (Num. 18:20–24).

The connection between the tithe and liturgical service is obvious in this text. *The Levites alone had control over the sacrifices; therefore, they alone had a legal claim on the tithe.* There was nothing voluntary about this claim on the productivity of others. As surely as an Israelite had to worship God according to the ritual requirements of the tabernacle, so did he have to pay his tithe to the Levites. His payment was for services rendered: atoning services rendered to God in the name of the people. The tithe had nothing to do with non-liturgical services to the community, such as teaching, music, or anything else. The Israelite had no independent authority to send his tithe to agents who met his social needs or anyone else's.⁴ *The tithe went to God through His church.* No other agency had a legal claim on the tithe. This has not changed in New Testament times.

What has changed is the tribal aspect of the tithe. The Levites' inheritance was part of the tribe's lack of inheritance in rural land. This made the tithe a matter of civil law, just as the enforcement of the jubilee year was the be civil. The Levites possessed an enforceable claim on the tithe. The church does not.

4. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

B. The Geography of Mosaic Inheritance

The Levites could not inherit rural land except in a very special situation, when a priest inherited land because of an owner's broken vow of land pledged to God (Lev. 27:20–21).⁵ As an heir of God, a priest could inherit this land under the provisions of the jubilee. Under no other circumstances could a non-priestly Levite inherit rural land. He could only lease it until the next jubilee.

By separating Levites from rural land, the Mosaic law prevented the centralization of landed wealth by the one tribe that had no geographical boundaries: Levi. The Levites would have to content themselves with tithe money, voluntary offerings, and urban real estate, which was not under the jubilee's provisions in non-Levitical walled cities. Within their own cities, the jubilee year did apply to Levites (Lev. 25:33). This kept Levites tied geographically to cities, which were located inside the boundaries of specific tribal allotments. Their regional influence would come through their urban wealth and their social position as counsellors who were experts in God's law. It would not come through their amassing of rural land: pockets of civil influence inside other tribal communities. Citizenship was possible inside cities, for covenant-keeping men had access to membership in God's holy army, but their citizenship was by adoption into a tribe. If this was the tribe of Levi, its influence was mainly indirect: not through votes inside another tribe's council but rather through non-voting theological and judicial influence.

The other tribes were required to keep their distance from the inner courts of the tabernacle. It meant death for them to approach the holy of holies, where the Ark of the Covenant rested: death by armed Levites or death by God (Num. 3:5–10). The concentric boundaries of the holy of holies were protected by the armed representatives of the three Levitical families: Merari (outermost ring), Gershon, and Kohath (innermost ring).⁶ After Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity, there was no further mention of the Ark. The holy of holies still remained holy in Israel, but there was no longer a pair of the original covenantal documents inside the Ark.

The Bible does not say whether the tithes were collected locally, then sent to a central warehouse, and then redistributed nationally to every Levite on some pro-rated share. The high expense of transport-

5. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36.

6. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 3.

ing goods implies that Levites were paid from local storehouses. This meant that the prosperity of a local Levite was dependent on the prosperity of residents in his region. *The Levite was economically dependent on the local community's success.*

A Levite could volunteer for service at the tabernacle (Deut. 18:6). This service was sacramental (v. 7). Sacramental service mandated equal income for services rendered, but the Levite could also receive income from the long-term leasing out of his inheritance (v. 8). Income from sacramental service was tithe-free; income from the sale-lease of his property or other investments had to be tithed.⁷ If he had owned a house in a Levitical city, he could lease it out to someone else. He had the right to return and buy back his property at any time (Lev. 25:32). His house would automatically be returned to him or his heirs in the jubilee (Lev. 25:33).

The unique geographical presence of God with members of one tribe established this tribe's legal claim on a tenth of the net income of their brethren. The text speaks of God as the Levites' inheritance (v. 1). This inheritance was geographical, occupational, and revelational.

The Levites had to defend the Ark of the Covenant. This responsibility was in part liturgical and in part covenantal: an aspect of the oath. They lawfully possessed the authority of the sword inside the boundaries of the tabernacle area (II Chron. 23:7). Because of the holiness of the Ark, the Levites had a unique geographical calling before God and men. The Levites' roots in Israel were tied to the Ark of the Covenant and the sacrifices and defense associated with it.

The Levites served God inside the geographical boundaries surrounding the Ark of the Covenant: a radius of 2,000 cubits. Joshua told the invading tribes regarding the invaders' formation: "Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Josh. 3:4). This was the same distance of ownership of land surrounding the Levitical cities. "And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about. And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits and the city shall be in the midst: this shall be to them

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 3:D:2.

the suburbs of the cities" (Num. 35:4–5).

Land was basic to the Mosaic law's system of inheritance. Land was part of the seed laws, which also dealt with inheritance.⁸ The Levites were God's inheritance in Israel. God set them apart for special service to Him. He did not let them place their financial hopes on rural land, which was the inheritance of the other tribes. This was a major advantage to the Levites, for there could be no legitimate economic hope in rural land if Israel kept God's covenant law. The multiplication of the Israelite population—long life (Ex. 20:12) coupled with no miscarriages (Ex. 3:26)—would have shrunk the size of each inheriting generation's family plot. We might even call this God's plot against family plots. The Levites would have been owners of urban real estate, which would rise in value as Israelites moved from the farms and aliens moved to Israel. God placed them in the geographical centers of future economic growth, assuming that the nation kept God's covenant. Teaching the nation to do this was a major task of the Levites. God attached a positive economic sanction to the success of the Levites' calling. They would do well by doing good. The value of their inheritance would grow.

The Levites would speak for God throughout the land. Their separation from tribal land made them a dispersed tribe. Their separation from the other tribes locally was an aspect of their separation from the other tribes liturgically.

C. The Levites' Occupational Separation

No other tribe could offer burnt offerings to God. Levites were the designated intermediaries in between God and members of other tribes. In payment for the services associated with sacrifices, the Levites were to receive tithes and offerings. The priests of the sanctuary—the holy, set-apart area—who were selected from the family of Aaron (Num. 18:1), were to receive a tithe of this tithe (Num. 18:26).

This specialized and judicially restricted liturgical service had to be funded. Because liturgical service was mandatory for the renewal of both the ecclesiastical and civil covenants,⁹ it was funded by a mandat-

8. On seed laws, see Appendix J.

9. Families also participated in the national feasts, but they did so as members of the ecclesiastical community. The feasts were not means of family covenant renewal, for there are no means of family covenant renewal. The family covenant of the marriage partners is broken only by death, either biological or covenantal. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas:

ory tithe. This was not a voluntary payment, for attendance was not voluntary. This payment moved upward from individuals to Levites because of God's appointment of the Levites as His covenantal spokesmen in the national hierarchy. There was a top-down flow of ecclesiastical authority from God to the people, and the Levites were at the top of this earthly hierarchy. They possessed a monopoly because of their proximity to the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the two stone tablets of the law, the founding covenantal documents.¹⁰ That Levites were the nation's senior spokesmen is indicated by the fact that they, not the state, had a specified claim on the net rural income of the nation, and that any attempt on the part of a king to collect an equally large percentage of income was tyrannical (I Sam. 8:15, 17). The church, not the state or the family, was the central institution in Israel.¹¹

The Levites' lawful claim on covenant-keeping men's income was based on their God-ordained monopoly of liturgical service. Their occupation was closed to members of other tribes. To become a Levite, a man had to be adopted into the tribe, and this required the payment of an expensive entry fee by the adoptee on behalf of himself and every member of his family (Lev. 27:2–8).¹²

D. The Levites' Revelational Separation

The high priest had access to God's word directly. He possessed the urim and thummim. "And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually" (Ex. 28:30). "And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come

Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>) It is lawfully broken when children leave their parents' household to marry (Gen. 2:24). A failure to participate in a mandatory feast did not break the legal requirements of a family, such as staying married or honoring parents. An individual Israelite was required to attend, whether or not he was a member of a family. A circumcised stranger could also attend, although to gain this privilege, any male in his household also had to be circumcised (Ex. 12:48).

10. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), Part 2, ch. 1.

11. This is equally true today. The church extends into eternity (Rev. 21, 22). The family and the state do not.

12. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 35.

in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation" (Num. 27:21). This access was not granted to Levites and other priests.

The priests had access to the written Mosaic law and the written revelation of the Bible, beginning with the Pentateuch. At some point, probably early in Israel's history, these scrolls were copied down for use locally by the other Levites. The decentralized system of synagogues in Jesus' day used scrolls of the Bible (Luke 4:17). Access to written revelation made the Levites specialists in rendering judgment, both civil and ecclesiastical. But this occupational specialization was not uniquely the possession of the Levites. Judges had equal civil authority (Deut. 17:8–13).¹³

The priesthood shared this declarative authority with prophets. The prophet had superior authority. The prophet's authority was greater than the king's (II Sam. 12) and the priesthood's. Moses' authority as a prophet (Deut. 34:10) was greater than Aaron's authority as a priest. But the office was a temporary one, and any misuse of it was a capital crime.

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:18–22).

With greater authority comes greater responsibility (Luke 12:42–48).¹⁴ *False prophecy was a capital crime in Israel because the prophet was the supreme judicial authority.* The proof of his authority was his ability to invoke successfully God's direct sanctions. But he was not to rule on a throne or offer sacrifices in the temple. His was not a permanent office. He was called by God to render supreme judgment in

13. Chapter 41.

14. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

times of national apostasy when civil judges and Levites were not speaking God's word, and who were therefore speaking the word of another god. *His authority was based on God's direct revelation to him and God's imposition of sanctions invoked by him.* He was the designated agent, called directly by God, who brought a formal covenant lawsuit against the nation, which included the nation's ordained leaders.

Because the prophet did not possess a permanent office, he had no lawful claim on anyone's income. Such a claim is possessed only by someone who is ordained by God through a formal process of ordination. Ordination is both institutional and covenantal. It is invoked by covenantal oath. The prophet's calling was not necessarily so invoked.

The prophet was not necessarily a member of a Levitical family that possessed a lawful covenantal claim on another family's money. This issue has nothing to do with contractual claims, which are not established by covenantal oath. Here I am speaking of covenantal claims that can be transferred by oath to a successor. A king normally transferred to his son his legal claim on a portion of the income of the people. The son's right of kingly inheritance had to be confirmed by ecclesiastical anointing, as Solomon's was (I Kings 1:39).¹⁵ A Levite could pass to his sons his legal claim to tithes and offerings. A prophet did not possess any such claim; his son could not inherit it.

The Levites possessed no claim of immediate revelation from God except through the high priest. Their expertise in the law was occupational. That is, their claim to knowledge of revelation was not a monopoly. It was shared by civil judges. The Levites had a claim on men's income. So did civil judges. The prophet did not. *God's direct revelation to and direct calling of the prophet were not accompanied by a legal claim on someone else's money.* The office of Levite and judge, which did involve such a legal claim, did not imply access to direct revelation. The prophet's authority rested solely on his possession of direct revelation from God, yet he had no lawful economic claim in his capacity as a prophet. Any assertion by a prophet of a covenantally authorized claim on someone else's money would have constituted *prima facie* evidence of the illegitimacy of his call by God. Court prophets hired by the king or appointed under his authority were sure to be false prophets. Judah's King Jehoshaphat suspected as much when he heard Ahab's 400 assure the two kings that they would be victorious over the

15. Jehoiada the priest rallied the Levites to defend the kingship of Joash. The Levites defended the young king by means of swords (II Chron. 23:1–8).

Syrians. He asked for a second opinion. He wanted to hear from a prophet who was not on Ahab's payroll (I Kings 23:7).

The Levites were separated by God to study His law and pronounce judgments. This separation was an aspect of the division of labor. Not only was it a generational phenomenon, unlike the prophet's office, it was not monopolistic. It was shared by civil judges. Their knowledge was therefore based on specialized study rather than uniquely supernatural intervention by God. Their inheritance was based on *liturgical separation*, not revelational separation. Revelational separation, which the prophet possessed, was not accompanied by legal claims on other people's income. This made the prophetic office not only highly risky judgmentally—imprisonment or death if you prophesied accurately to unrighteous leaders, execution if you prophesied falsely to righteous men—but risky economically. Prophesying was a calling,¹⁶ not an occupation.

Conclusion

The Levites possessed no guaranteed inheritance in rural land. They did possess a jubilee-guaranteed inheritance inside Levitical cities (Lev. 25:33). As a substitute for landed inheritance, God gave them as their inheritance a claim to a tithe on other men's net income. This made them dependent on the productivity of other men.

Their ecclesiastical claim on other men's income was based on the liturgical monopoly which they possessed. This monopoly had a geographical aspect. Only Levites could lawfully approach the innermost sanctum of the tabernacle, and only the high priest could enter it. The Ark of the Covenant was the holiest object in Israel. It had to be defended. The Levites possessed this occupational assignment. They retained it after their return from Babylon, although the Ark seems to have disappeared. This assignment ended when the Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70.

Their civil claim on other men's income was based on their lawful inheritance of the tithe in lieu of rural land. This civil claim ended in A.D. 70.

16. I define a calling as the most important work a person can do in which he would be most difficult to replace. Only rarely is a person's calling his occupation.

LANDMARKS AND SOCIAL COOPERATION

Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it (Deut. 19:14).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's ownership: the judicial issue of boundaries.

A. Ownership as Exclusion

God owned the land of Canaan. As the original owner, it was His right to determine who would manage it for Him. He could lawfully exclude anyone from occupying a piece of land, in the same way that He excluded Adam and Eve from the forbidden tree. *Ownership, above all, means the legal right to exclude.*¹ So does stewardship, as a form of delegated ownership. God was about to transfer stewardship over this land from the Canaanites to the Israelites. That is, he was about to use Israel to exclude Canaanites from the land they were occupying. More to the point, for Israel to inherit the land, which God had promised to Abraham, Canaanites would have to be disinherited. *Inheritance/disinheritance is the fundamental theme of Deuteronomy.*

Because God planned to take up residence in Israel in a special way (Num. 35:34), His ownership of the land of Israel was special. He owned the whole world in general, but He owned the land of Canaan specially. "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). Also, He owned all nations generally, but He owned Israel specially. "But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy

1. The model is God's exclusion of the forbidden tree.

name; thou art mine" (Isa. 43:1). He established laws governing rural land ownership inside the nation's boundaries (Lev. 25)² that had not applied before, and which would no longer apply in the same way after the exile, when gentiles living in the land would be included under the jubilee laws (Ezek. 47:21–23).³ These laws finally ended when God ceased to dwell with Israel as a nation after A.D. 70. The disinheritance of Israel was marked by the annulment of the jubilee laws. These laws had never applied outside of the land of Israel. They had not been cross-boundary laws. They were land laws.⁴

B. Permanent External Boundaries

The original allocation of land to the families of the conquest generation in the days of Joshua was supposed to remain unchanged. Down through the generations, there would be subdivisions of the original properties within each family, but the external boundaries were to remain unchanged. These boundaries marked the inheritances of the original families. Moses told Israel that God would distribute each family's inheritance through surveyors, judges, and lot-casters (Num. 26:52–56).⁵ God was sovereign over this casting of lots.

Every Israelite family was required to honor God's original allocation. Only after Israel's return from the exile did God allow new boundaries for those families that had lost track of their original boundaries, or whose claims had been replaced by foreigners brought into the land by the conquering Assyrians and Babylonians. Prior to the exile, any tampering with the evidence of this original allocation was a form of theft of God's property. God's agents had *subdivided the land*, and in so doing, they had allocated the *responsibilities of stewardship*. The jubilee law placed limits on the permanent transfer of these responsibilities. These responsibilities (liabilities) were inseparable from the land (asset). No family could lawfully sell these assets-responsibilities or forfeit them to repay a debt.⁶

The jubilee land law was important for what it silently implied: *in*

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

3. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

4. On land laws and cross-boundary laws, see Appendix J.

5. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 14.

6. The one exception was the refusal to pay a vow to a priest (Lev. 27:20–21). See North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36:E–F.

the absence of such a law, it was lawful to transfer such stewardship responsibilities. It was lawful to delegate these assets-responsibilities until the next jubilee year. Any suggestion that economic liability cannot legally be delegated or transferred is incorrect—as incorrect as the suggestion that economic assets cannot legally be delegated or transferred. The jubilee law testifies to the fact that *economic liability and responsibility can lawfully be delegated*, and, in the absence of such a law, can be *permanently transferred*. The whole point of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26)⁷ is that God delegated a great deal of responsibility to Adam, who in turn delegated some of it to Eve, and would have delegated it to his children. It was the very legality of this transfer that gave Satan his opportunity to steal the inheritance by deceiving Eve and corrupting Adam. “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (I Tim. 2:14).

This law was repeated in Deuteronomy 27:17: “Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen.” There had to be a public affirmation—an amen—on the part of the people. The fundamental issue here was inheritance. The jubilee land laws were supposed to provide continuity between the original allocation and the future. There could not be any legal long-term alienation of rural land. There was an eschatological reason for this restriction on the sale of land. The Mosaic land laws were aspects of the seed laws, and the seed laws were messianic, having to do with Jacob’s prophecy regarding Shiloh (Gen. 49:10). The tribes had to be kept separate in order for Jacob’s prophecy to come true. The land laws were a means of keeping the tribes separate.⁸

To move a neighbor’s landmark was an act of theft. It was not an easily achieved deception in open terrain. The more accurate the measuring devices, the more difficult the deception. The ancient world had extraordinarily accurate measuring devices, as the dimensions of the Cheops pyramid indicate.⁹

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

8. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 17.

9. Peter Tompkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). See especially the appendix by Livio Stecchini. See also Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet’s Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time* (Boston: Gambit, 1969).

C. The Civil Sanction

Moving a landmark was an act of theft. The penalty for theft was double restitution: “If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double” (Ex. 22:4).¹⁰ This must have been a monetary payment. The civil sanction could not have been the forfeiture of rural property. This was not any man’s right to transfer. A convicted criminal could not alienate his family’s land. Double restitution must have been made by the transfer of some other form of property besides land.

A successful theft constituted the disinheritance of one’s neighbor. What was the value of this disinheritance? There was no market for the sale of rural land in Mosaic Israel. That was because it was illegal to disinherit one’s heirs. There was a long-term leasehold market. The maximum term of the lease was 49 years: until the next jubilee (Lev. 25:27). The technical problem was for judges to estimate a market price for the stolen asset, despite the fact that there was no market for permanent transfers of land under the jubilee law. They could not simply double the prevailing lease price, which would expire at the next jubilee. The next jubilee might be in a year, so the lease price would have been low. The theft, however, was intended to be permanent. A more accurate assessment of the market value of the stolen land would have been its lease price, with payment in advance, at the beginning of the most recent jubilee cycle. They could double this price to establish the restitution price. Of course, 49 years is not the same as the permanent transfer of ownership. But the price of any income stream that is purchased on a 49-year lease basis, with payment in advance, is close to the price for a much longer lease period. Also, the higher the rate of interest on long-term loans, the closer that the upfront cash payment will be for both lease periods. The discounted present market value of income received in year 49 is close to the discounted present market value of income received in year 99.

D. Graves and Boundaries

There was a major difference between Israel and the other nations, including Greece and Rome: the lack of sacred land. There was no sacred land in Israel. There was sacred space: the place where the Ark of the Covenant was housed. The most sacred space in Israel was inside

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia; Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

the Ark. After the return of the Ark from Philistia on the cart drawn by the oxen, it arrived at Bethshemesh. God's judgment came against the residents in the early days of the Ark's arrival. "And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter" (I Sam. 6:19). This many deaths indicates that the whole city was involved. A generation of men died, leaving their wives without husbands. This would have drastically speeded up the inheritance process in the region. Not surprisingly, the survivors invited the people of Kirjath-jearim to take away the Ark. They did, and it remained with them for about a century before David brought it back to Jerusalem.¹¹

Sacred space had to do with God's unique judicial place of residence. The idea of *God's judicially restricted presence* differentiated Israel from the other nations. Animism was rampant in the ancient world. Demons were believed to reside in the neighborhood. Their presence led to the development of a common theological outlook. Men believed that particular plots of land served as the residences of local gods and also the spirits of deceased male heads of household. Land was inalienable in ancient Greece, for the local god of a family had nothing to do with the god of another family. The domestic god conferred on the family its right to the soil. The family's hearth, like the family's tomb, could not lawfully be moved. Neither could either be occupied by others. Fustel wrote: "By the stationary hearth and the permanent burial-place, the family took possession of the soil; the earth was in some sort imbued and penetrated by the religion of the hearth and of ancestors." This, he said, was the origin of the idea of private property.¹² He was incorrect. Private property originated when God delegated to Adam authority over the earth, but then retained ownership of the forbidden tree. It was God's "no trespassing" declaration that established the principle of private property. God's right to exclude man was a boundary that man had to honor, on threat of death. God delegated no authority over that tree. Then He departed. His declaration of man's exclusion established private property.

11. James Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), p. 224. (<http://bit.ly/jjneweyes>)

12. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book I, Chapter VI, p. 67.

Israel's religion was founded on the public rejection of all other religions, including animism. Animism is a religion of local gods. The God of Israel was the God of the whole earth. He could dwell with Israel outside the land. Thus, He could threaten the Israelites with temporary exile without threatening their existence as a holy nation. "And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind" (Deut. 28:63–65). Because God is the universal God, their exile would in no way break their covenant with Him. On the contrary, their exile would confirm the covenant: predictable corporate negative sanctions in history. The Old Covenant was primarily judicial, not geographical. It had been renewed through verbal ratification by the nation at Mt. Sinai, which was located outside the land (Ex. 19).¹³ He would still be their God in a foreign land. The fact that an invading nation—Assyria—would remove most of the population and substitute foreigners as permanent residents of the land in no way polluted the land. It was Israel's sin that had polluted the land, not these foreigners (later known as Samaritans). In fact, Ezekiel told Israel that resident aliens would be under the jubilee land laws after the Israelites returned to the land (Ezek. 47:21–23).¹⁴

This geographical sequence of events would have been inconceivable in ancient Greece. The boundaries of each family's land were guarded by large stones called Termini. These stones were regarded as gods. "The Terminus once established according to the required rites there was no power on earth that could displace it. It was to remain in the same place throughout all ages."¹⁵ It was the same in ancient Rome. "To encroach upon the field of a family, it was necessary to overturn or displace a boundary mark, and this boundary mark was a god. The sacrilege was horrible, and the chastisement severe. According to the old

13 Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 20.

14. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

15. Fustel, *Ancient City*, II:VI, pp. 68–69.

Roman law, the man and the oxen who touched a Terminus were devoted—that is to say, both men and oxen were immolated in expiation.”¹⁶

The Old Testament rarely mentions tombs, graves, and burial. This indicates that such matters were not considered important ritually, let alone theologically. Burial was a family matter, as when Jacob buried Rachel (Gen. 35:20). There was no officiating priest. Moses’ body was not marked by any pillar, and its location was immediately forgotten (Deut. 36:4). The only reference to burial in the Mosaic law governs the death of sinners hanged on a tree: “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance” (Deut. 21:22–23). Touching a grave was a minor infraction: “And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days” (Num. 19:16). All that was required was ritual sprinkling (v. 18).

The land of Israel was important as God’s dwelling place. It was not important as the burial place for Israelites. *The crucial covenantal issue was ethics, not ritual-based piety.* If the nation broke the covenant, God threatened to depart from the land. He would no longer defend them Israel invasion. Where a man was buried had significance only if he was outside the land. Joseph had asked that his bones be taken out of Egypt at the exodus. This had to do with God’s promise of land to Joseph’s forefathers (Gen. 50:24). It was a covenantal issue, not a ritual issue. It had to do with the fulfillment in history of a covenantal promise. The fact that very few Jews returned to Israel after the exile did not make gentiles of those who remained behind in Medo-Persia. Their dispersion beyond the boundaries of Israel was implied from the beginning: the promise of zero miscarriages (Ex. 23:26)¹⁷ and long life (Ex. 20:12)¹⁸ were promises guaranteeing a population explosion to covenant-keeping Israel. Israel’s geographical boundaries were not supposed to incarcerate the Israelites.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

17. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 55.

18. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

D. Social Peace and Cooperation

The law of landmarks upheld private property. As such, it was an application of the eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal” (Ex. 20:15).¹⁹ Moving a marker was a way to steal the future value of an asset. But this asset—land—had another function: marking the boundaries of the original land distribution. A theft of land was a theft of God’s property. He had allocated the land in Joshua’s generation. This allocation was designed to separate tribes from each other, thereby honoring Jacob’s messianic prophecy regarding Shiloh.

This law governed neighbors and close relatives. It acknowledged that theft is a great temptation for those who are one’s closest covenantal associates. The threat to landed property in Mosaic Israel was either one’s immediate neighbors or an invading foreigner. This law implied that God would be the enforcer, since slight adjustments of markers are not easily detectable. But this also implied that men were willing to risk the wrath of God for the sake of relatively minor shifts in ownership. A major alteration of a boundary would have been obvious. Either the boundary-mover was a thief for the sake of theft, since not much property was involved, or else he planned a long-run confiscation, a little bit at a time. In either case, this was serious criminal behavior.

The nature of this crime would have led to family conspiracies. There can be little doubt that families on both sides of a landmark would have been well aware of its location. Generations of inherited property were at stake. Members of families would have known what would eventually be their inheritance. This is why family members would have had to conspire together to get away with such a theft. Anyone who attempted such a theft on his own who did not conspire with his family would have risked facing a family member in court serving as a witness for the victim. The sanctions against the false witness appear in the next section (vv. 15–21).²⁰

For one family to tamper with the boundary markers of its neighbor meant that intra-tribal conflicts would increase. This was obviously a crime that threatened social cooperation in the community. When neighbors cannot trust neighbors not to steal, it is difficult for a community to enjoy the division of labor. There is too much hostility and distrust.

19. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

20. Chapter 45.

But the threat was more than inter-family conflicts; it was equally intra-family conflicts. Within the boundaries of the original land grant there would have been new landmarks, generation by generation. If the jubilee was actually enforced, then there would have been additional markers, generation by generation. Each male heir of each original conquering family was entitled to a portion of the original land. The parcels of land would have grown smaller over time in the face of a growing population. As the plots grew smaller, as testified to by the boundary markers, the nation would have been reminded that they could place no faith in rural land as a long-term source of income. They would have to move off the land eventually. The dominion covenant could not be fulfilled inside the boundaries of Israel. Neither could it be fulfilled inside the boundaries of a family's rural inheritance. The heirs would have to be separated from their original inheritance in the land if they were to prosper economically. The markers were to testify to this covenantal reality, generation by generation.

Conclusion

The defense of private property is necessary for the extension of social cooperation and the division of labor. This law, because it dealt with contiguous property that was marked off by visible boundaries, dealt with neighbors. The preservation of social peace in a community is a high priority. It was an even higher priority in Mosaic Israel, where enforcement of the jubilee made it highly unlikely new neighbors could become permanent residents. Disputes over property could result in long-term conflicts or even feuds. Because family conspiracies would have had to underlie any plan to move a marker, this crime threatened social cooperation even more than other kinds of theft.

"Good fences make good neighbours," wrote the American poet Robert Frost. He made a good point. Moving a fence is a lot more difficult than moving a single boundary marker. But building a fence is more expensive than sticking a marker in the ground. Unless the fence lies entirely on one person's property, thereby reducing his available land by a greater percentage than his neighbor's land, neighbors must come to an agreement regarding the width of the fence, the construction materials, etc. A good fence that separates property equally along the line of the fence implies prior good relations between neighbors. The fence helps to maintain this cooperation. A fence is a manifestation of the private property order. By allowing men to exclude others,

it encourages cooperation. When the fruits of this cooperation can readily be distributed in terms of the value which each party has put into the joint effort, there is an incentive for joint efforts. Boundaries around property acknowledge the owner's right to exclude. When these boundaries are enforced by law and social custom, the individual can more safely open the gate to others. When you have the legal right to remove visitors, you can more safely invite them for a visit. Good fences, in the broadest sense, make good neighbors, in the broadest sense.

THE PENALTY FOR PERJURY

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you (Deut. 19:15–19).

The theocentric principle here is that God is a true witness. He does not lie. God, as the supreme Judge, does not respect persons.¹ The context of this passage is disobedience. It begins with the problem of sin, and it ends with the problem of evil. Both are aspects of ethics: point three.² But judgment is associated with point four: sanctions.

A. Witnesses

The law of God is to be applied impartially, meaning without respect to persons. The civil magistrate's evaluation also must not be in terms of the class (wealth) or status (social position) of either the victim or the accused.³ Showing respect of persons in the exercise of

1. Deuteronomy 1:17; 16:19; II Chronicles 19:7; Proverbs 24:23; 28:21; Lamentations 4:16; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; James 2:1, 9; I Peter 1:17.

2 2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

3. On the modern sociological distinction between class and status, see Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), ch. 5.

judgment is one of the major sins of mankind, in both church⁴ and state. This was not a land law.⁵

Deuteronomy 19:15–19 presents the civil standard governing false witnesses. The standard is *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye. “And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deut. 19:21). That which the false witness had hoped to achieve—having the court impose a specific negative civil sanction against his intended victim—he himself would bear. The cost of offering false testimony was commensurate with the cost of being a victim of false testimony. It was risky to become a false witness in Mosaic Israel. The more flagrant the false testimony, the riskier it became.

The biblical texts do not identify the witness specifically as a witness for the prosecution. This does not necessarily mean that the defense’s witnesses had to participate in the stoning. If a witness had confirmed the testimony of the accused, it would seem to be excessively stringent for the law to require him to participate in the execution. On the other hand, the witness serves as a defender of the court’s authority. The court has declared the accused guilty. Why shouldn’t he participate in the execution? On this basis: his unwillingness to participate actively in what he regards as an unjust decision. Participation would violate his conscience. He is not to rebel against the court, but he need not become an active executioner.

Consider a witness for the prosecution in a criminal trial. The court is God’s court. The state may be acting as the prosecutor on God’s behalf. This was always the case in murder trials, where the victim could not bring charges. The witness for the prosecution is always an agent of this court. He is also an agent for the person bringing the accusation. God delegates to the state the authority and requirement to execute people convicted of capital crimes. The historically permanent civil sanction of death removes the convicted person from the local jurisdiction of the earthly court and transfers him into God’s heavenly

4. “For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?” (James 2:2–6).

5. On land laws, see Appendix J.

court. The witness is therefore acting as God's designated judicial agent through the court.

What about a witness for the defense? Witnesses for the defense were also under court sanctions. They were not allowed to lie under oath. What if they did? Were they under the threat of the court's sanctions? Yes. False witnessing was not allowed. Then what was the appropriate sanction? We return to the *lex talionis*: eye for eye. If they deliberately testified falsely, thereby persuading the court to release a guilty person back into society, they came under the sanctions that should have been applied to him. The court cannot lawfully prosecute the defendant a second time if he has been declared innocent by a jury,⁶ but it can prosecute the perjurer. This is not double jeopardy. *The perjurer judicially represents the criminal whose testimony the perjurer has set free.* The criminal has been set free; the perjurer takes his place. Judgment is upheld. The appropriate civil sanction is applied. The victim is not left with a sense of injustice. The person who inflicted the damage has not paid for his crime, but his substitute has. This is an application of the biblical principle of *substitutionary atonement*. If someone who is in a lawful position to pay the victim does so on behalf of the criminal, the victim is not to pursue the matter any further. The false witness is in a legal position to make this substitutionary payment, and the court is supposed to insist that he make it. The text does not say this specifically with respect to a witness for the defense, but the principle of the substitutionary atonement makes it clear that such a substitute is legitimate. When the sanction is imposed on the false witness, the judicial matter is settled. Peace may then be restored to society. This is a major goal of biblical law. The accused should be placated when the court imposes on the conspirators the penalty that would have been imposed on him.

6. This assumes that the common law's prohibition against double jeopardy is enforced. I regard this principle as biblical. When God declares a man not guilty, he is forever not guilty (Rom. 8:39). The state in this sense is to imitate God. When double jeopardy is prohibited by civil law, this restrains the state from becoming tyrannical, bankrupting innocent people by endless trials. The principle does not restrict the enforcement of ecclesiastical law. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), pp. 831–32. (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

B. Common Grace, Common Oath, and Common Sanctions

What about witnesses who were not circumcised? Were they permitted to testify? Here I must make deductions based on what is required of witnesses for the prosecution. But this raises questions regarding the basis of judicial decision-making.

The problem here is the theory of knowledge. Knowledge is not neutral. If this is the case, then the Christian philosopher should ask: What is the epistemological common ground between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers? The Calvinist philosopher-theologian Cornelius Van Til said it is the common knowledge of God in every person—the sense of deity.⁷ It is also the common ground of creation, both Adamic and general.⁸ The covenant-breaker suppresses this knowledge (Rom. 1:18–20).⁹

How can a covenant-breaker's testimony be regarded as equal in judicial value to a covenant-keeper's testimony? The answer is in the existence of court sanctions. A convicted perjurer will suffer the same sanctions that would have been imposed by the court on his victim, had his perjury been successful. In other words, because all witnesses are under the same negative sanctions, their oaths before the court are considered equally valid. These confessions are not eternally equal, but they are historically equal.

God's common grace¹⁰ allows covenant-breakers to interpret the world sufficiently accurately to enable them to live productive lives. One aspect of this productivity is their ability to perceive and interpret events sufficiently accurately as to make their words reliable in business affairs. This same principle applies to their oath-bound court testimony.

The Mosaic civil sanction against perjury by a witness is clear: the perjurer must suffer the same penalty that would have been applied to his potential victim. He has sought to impose civil sanctions; now those sanctions are imposed on him.

7. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963), ch. 8.

8. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1998), pp. 418–20.

9. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

10. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

The biblical principle of an eye for an eye—the *lex talionis*—is imposed on a convicted false witness. If he testified falsely against the accused, and this is discovered by the judges, then he becomes subject to the penalty that would have been imposed on the victim. This threat brings civil sanctions into the picture. The witness comes under civil sanctions, which means that he comes under the laws of the civil covenant. But must he confess faith in the God of the civil covenant in order to come under its sanctions?

The witness for the prosecution was required by law to cast the first stone. Did this make him a judge? Wasn't he imposing judgment in the name of God? Yes, but only at the instruction of the court. He did not declare judgment; he merely contributed information to those who would declare judgment. As an agent of the court, he did cast the first stone. He did not do this on his own authority.

Because he was not a citizen, he did not evaluate the evidence, i.e., he did not serve as a judge. He did act on behalf of the court in casting the first stone. This sanction would have been imposed on him had he been convicted of perjury. He was under oath-bound negative civil sanctions. He was therefore bound by an oath of obedience, irrespective of the absence of his personal confession of faith in the God of the covenant. A civil oath invoked covenant sanctions: the stones of justice. If the court convicted the accused, the prosecution's witness would participate in the execution as one who was formally under the court's civil sanctions. But he was already under these civil sanctions as a resident of Israel.

Only the citizen was eligible to declare God's judgment as a judge, an office closer to a modern juror than a robed judge. The non-citizen did not possess this authority. A person did not have to be a citizen in order to testify. The casting of stones was not a mark of citizenship; it was a mark of subordination to the Mosaic civil covenant, including its sanctions. What was invoked by the non-citizen witness was not God's direct sanctions, either on Israel or on him; rather, it was God's indirect sanctions through the court. He who would be required by law to cast the first stone would also have the first stone cast at him if he was convicted of perjury in a capital trial. The sanction was valid for all those who came under the Mosaic civil covenant and who then committed capital crimes. This included strangers in the land. But if they subordinated themselves to these sanctions, they also had the authority to impose them, as agents of the court, though not as citizens. They served as agents of the court when they served as witnesses for the

prosecution.

C. The Cost of Obtaining Accurate Information

The punishment should fit the crime. This is the biblical principle of justice that undergirds the *lex talionis*. Similarly, the court's cost of obtaining accurate information should be proportional to the crime. A society that spends as much money in court to convict a bicycle thief as it does to convict a murder is indirectly subsidizing murderers. Resources are not unlimited. Court costs are positive. If the court is spending as much to prosecute bicycle thieves as murderers, the society will experience fewer stolen bicycles and more murders. The court should not require the same thoroughness of investigation in a minor case as it does where a person's life is on the line. A society that cannot allocate court expenses in terms of the severity of the criminal acts under examination will find itself burdened with injustice. This is the condition of modern Western jurisprudence. Perhaps the best example is a case that was settled in November, 1996, a libel trial that had become the longest trial in English history: over 292 days. The lawsuit had been brought by the McDonald's Corporation against a pair of unemployed people who had accused the company of having promoted poor nutrition, exploited children, encouraged litter, mistreated animals, and destroyed rain forests. The couple eventually lost the case, but they had no money to pay the plaintiff's huge legal fees, as English law requires.¹¹

The biblical law of perjury helps to balance the court's cost of obtaining information. The court does not threaten a witness with the risk of subsequently being brought to trial and convicted of a capital crime for having lied regarding a minor crime. If the threat is too great, witnesses will not readily volunteer. On the other hand, witnesses in a capital crime will be hesitant to participate in a conspiracy to bring false information before the court. The court's benefit (i.e., reduced cost) of screening out false information by means of a threat of perjury sanctions is partially offset by its cost of not obtaining accurate information because of witnesses who fear testifying.

Because false testimony is easier for one person to commit than many, this law mandates multiple witnesses for the prosecution. "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin,

11. Sarah Lyall, "Britain's Big 'McLibel Trial' (It's McEndless, Too)," *New York Times* (Nov. 29, 1996).

in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established” (v. 15). The testimony of one false witness is insufficient to convict the accused unless supporting impersonal evidence is very strong. But false witnesses involved in a conspiracy face a problem: all of them know that they are lying. They know that for their lie to be successful, the defense must not be able to prove collusion among the witnesses. But more than one person is involved in the deception. If one participant’s conscience gets the better of him, he may reveal the existence of a conspiracy.

One way for the defense to persuade a conspirator to admit the truth is to offer him future immunity for his true testimony and an accusation against the others. The principle of victim’s rights allows the victim to offer forgiveness to anyone who has victimized him. He can be selective in this judgment. If the criminal has offered to confess his sin, the victim is in a legal position to forego the application of the biblically mandated sanctions.¹² The state must honor the victim’s assessment.¹³ In modern law, the criminal who testifies for the state is said to offer state’s evidence. In a case of false witness, a perjurer offers either victim’s evidence or defendant’s evidence.

Because of this possibility, the larger the conspiracy, the greater the likelihood that the conspiracy will be revealed by one of the participants. Betrayal does not require either a stricken conscience or an offer of immunity from the victim. The very nature of the motivation of secrecy can lead to a betrayal. The sense of power that knowing a secret conveys to the participants can itself lead to betrayal. Georg Simmel wrote in 1908: “The secret contains a tension that is dissolved in the moment of revelation. This moment constitutes the acme in the development of the secret; all of its charms are once more gathered in it and brought to a climax. . . . The secret, too, is full of the consciousness that it *can* be betrayed; that one holds the power of surprises, turns of fate, joy, destruction—if only, perhaps, of self-destruction. For this reason, the secret is surrounded by the possibility and temptation of betrayal. . . .”¹⁴ The betrayer becomes a big shot—even bigger, perhaps, than what he would have been had he remained a cooperating participant in the conspiracy.

12. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 33:F.

13. *Idem*.

14. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans., ed. Kurt H. Wolf (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 333–34.

A prosecuting attorney is not allowed knowingly to bring in a false witness. Neither is a defense attorney. They are agents of the court, bound by the court's rules of procedure. A conspiracy to mislead the court brings the court's penalty on any attorney who knowingly uses a false witness to testify. The goal of the court is to obtain accurate information. A conspiracy to mislead the court is a serious infraction. It is an assault on the court and an assault on the accused.

By requiring multiple witnesses for the prosecution (accusation), the state makes possible cross-examination of more than one person. Their stories can be compared and evaluated for consistency. Lies can be detected more easily. The prosecution has to prove its case. The defense has an easier time of it. The Bible does not teach explicitly that the accused must be assumed to be innocent, but the person who is making the accusation has a greater burden of proof. In this sense, the accused is presumed to be innocent. The conflicting stories are not assumed to be of equal weight judicially. This would lead to a stalemate. In the case of a stalemate, the accused would not be convicted by the court. The accused has the advantage.

D. Perjury Sanctions Threaten Both Parties

If a man brings an accusation against another, and the accused says that the other man is not telling the truth, this is not necessarily the same as saying that the accuser is lying. The accuser may be misinformed. But if the accused says that the accuser is a false witness who is deliberately telling a lie, then the accused is putting the accuser at risk. The accused must not commit perjury. He must not accuse the other person of telling a lie if the accuser is telling the truth.

What if the accused person resorts to perjury? What are the consequences? The *lex talionis* principle applies. First, if he stole something, he owes double restitution to his victim (Ex. 22:4).¹⁵ But if in addition he has lied about the accuser, saying that the accuser has committed perjury, he has not merely stolen; he has attempted to place his accuser under penalties. The lying criminal will then have to pay double restitution on these penalties, as well as the original restitution payment. When the criminal compounds the sin, he compounds his obligation.

Consider the alternative interpretation: the convicted person does not owe double restitution for his false accusation against the accuser.

15. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 43.

If his ineffective lie on the witness stand goes unpunished, he owes double restitution for the original crime, which he would have owed anyway. Lying to the court would then be a rational decision: the criminal is no worse off by his false accusation against the victim, and he may reduce the likelihood of being convicted for the theft. This would subsidize lying on the witness stand. But biblical law's goal is to reduce criminal behavior and protect the victim. Thus, the implication of this law is that lying to the court increases the liar's risk. Double restitution on the original infraction is insufficient. It repays the victim for the original infraction; it does not repay him for the second.

E. Priests and Judges

The conflicting parties "shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition" (vv. 17b–18a) First, the joint assembly of priests and judges constituted a representative assembly. This assembly represented God. To stand before this assembly was to stand before the Lord. The priests and judges would hand down judgments in the name of the Lord: ecclesiastical and civil. They served as spokesmen for God in history. In civil affairs, a court speaks for God. Under the Mosaic covenant, the priests had to be present in this civil assembly. Just as the priesthood's representative agents had to blow the two trumpets in order for Israel's holy army to be lawfully assembled and sent into battle (Num. 10:5–8), so did priests have to be present at this court. The priests had a civil function in Mosaic Israel: to offer counsel regarding the written law. They also were in a position to excommunicate a false witness. They gathered information by being present in civil court. This did not restrict them from conducting a separate trial in a church court, but they were there to hear the evidence in civil court.

The judges conducted the inquiry, according to this text. The priests were there to provide counsel and legitimacy, but the civil representatives conducted the investigation. The court might hand down negative sanctions. The investigatory work of the court was therefore conducted by civil officers.

Today's courts are strictly civil. In the United States, a witness for decades was sworn in by having him repeat an oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him God, with his left hand on a Bible, Old and New Testaments, and his right hand

pointed skyward. This was a Christian oath because of the presence of a Christian Bible. In the late twentieth century, this practice was modified. Atheists affirmed that they would tell the truth. They did not need to invoke God's name or place a hand on the Bible. They came under the sanctions of the earthly court. They did not imply through affirmation their belief in a heavenly court. Their testimony was accepted as equal in authority to any other witness's testimony. This procedure is legitimate biblically. The witness is under the court's sanctions, just as a stranger was in Mosaic Israel.

The question arises: What about the presence of a priest on the court? Covenantally, there are no priests today, for the sons of Aaron are gone, and there is no altar of sacrifice. The office is as defunct as the office of prophet.¹⁶ Does this fact invalidate the Mosaic law governing civil courts? Or is there an implied continuity of office from Old Covenant to New Covenant? Is the Trinitarian ecclesiastical minister the covenantal heir of the Mosaic priest? Should an ecclesiastical minister or ministers be present on the court to provide counsel and legitimacy? A civil magistrate is a minister (Rom. 13:4).¹⁷ He speaks in God's name. Must a civil court also include ecclesiastical ministers? To answer all this, we must first consider the structure on Mosaic civil government.

F. Federalism: Mosaic vs. Enlightenment

The Mosaic law provided a system of federalism between church and state. The church was part of Israel's federal judicial order. The civil government could not unilaterally speak in God's name when handing down formal decisions in which sanctions were involved. It could not unilaterally start a war nor decide between witnesses. In both cases, a representative of the church had to be present. This was true of Israel's supreme court (Deut. 17:8–13).¹⁸

1. State Jurisdiction

Modern federalism seeks a balance of power and authority within the divisions of civil government: executive, legislative, and judicial; national, state, and local. But modern federalism is exclusively civil. It assumes that the church has neither a legitimate claim nor any legit-

16. Chapter 33.

17. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 11.

18. Chapter 41.

imating function in civil government. The biblical doctrine of the separation of church and state has become a doctrine of exclusively secular authority: the separation of supernatural religion and state. Humanism proclaims that those ministers known as civil magistrates possess exclusive authority to speak in the name of God in civil cases. The state is said to have exclusive jurisdiction—law-speaking—in applying physical and monetary negative sanctions. The theocracy of modern federalism is an exclusively civil theocracy. *The autonomous people rather than God are said to legitimize civil government.* This corporate sovereign, whether Rousseau's General Will or Madison's "We, the People," must be represented by a voice of authority which speaks in the name of the sovereign and him only. This sovereign is seen as exclusively natural, not supernatural. Therefore, no ecclesiastical representative is said to possess lawful authority in civil matters except insofar as he may be a citizen, like any other citizen.¹⁹ The church has no representation in the state. While there are exceptions to this general rule, such as bishops who sit in England's House of Lords, which does not initiate legislation, the West has moved toward the elimination of church authority in civil government since the late eighteenth century.

The doctrine of separation is justified by modern, post-Enlightenment Christians in the name of protecting the church from secular influence. But this argument cuts two ways. It is used by secularists to protect the state from Christian influence. The idea is that there is some neutral common law that derives its authority from something broader than the Bible or Christianity. This broader judicial authority is considered superior to biblical authority in the realm of politics, which today encompasses just about everything.

The kingdom of politics is as comprehensive in its claims as is the kingdom of God. Christians today have accepted the majority of these claims, reserving only small zones of supposed autonomy from the kingdom of politics. These claims of immunity are constantly being challenged by the state. To accommodate the claims of the state, Christians have all but abandoned the ideal of the kingdom of God in history as a realm as comprehensive as Adam's kingdom. The suggestion that the Great Commission extends as far as Adam's Fall did is rejected by most Christians, for such a suggestion raises the issue of

19. In the United States Constitution (1788), the outlawing of religious test oaths for U.S. government office-holders was the means of asserting this autonomy (Article VI, Section III). Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 385–85, 389–92. (<http://bit.ly/polpol>)

theocracy: the rule of God's law. The Great Commission has been re-defined to include the Christian family, the Christian church, the humanist-accredited college and theological seminary, and the Christian school—usually state-certified—but not the civil government.²⁰

2. *Biblical Federalism*

This passage proves that in the Mosaic civil order, the priesthood had a role to play in civil government. To deny that this role has been transferred to the ecclesiastical ministry under the New Covenant is to argue for a covenantal discontinuity. The New Covenant's abolition of the Mosaic priesthood is the obvious way to make such a claim. But if the abolition of the priesthood becomes the basis of the discontinuity, then some aspect of the Mosaic priesthood that was connected to animal sacrifices has to be associated with civil justice. With the abolition of the sacrifices, the ecclesiastical ministry has supposedly lost its role in civil justice. If, however, the basis of the priest's participation in a civil court was the priest's expertise in biblical law and the political need to create *a federalism of covenantal authority in civil justice*, then there is no civil discontinuity between the Mosaic priesthood and the New Covenant's ecclesiastical eldership. In this case, modern humanistic civil justice is illegitimate biblically and must be reformed. The monopoly of the secular state over civil justice then cannot find justification in the Bible.

The doctrine of the complete separation of church and state has been a convenient way for Christians to escape any responsibility for dealing with questions of civil government and political theory from an explicitly biblical viewpoint. They have preferred to defer to today's ideological heirs of the Enlightenment Whigs²¹ or Enlightenment social democrats²² on such matters. To justify this deferral, they have adopted some version of secular natural law theory, long after Darwinism had completely undermined the philosophical basis of secular natural law theory.²³ In fact, Christian social theorists are among the last re-

20. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

21. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

22. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1996). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>)

23. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1969] 2000), p. 7. (<http://bit.ly/rjrbph>)

maintaining defenders of natural law theory. The predecessors of the humanists with whom they seek an accommodation had abandoned the theory by 1900. From the early days of the church, natural law theory has been the basis of the surrender by Christian theologians and moralists to humanists. The habit seems unbreakable, even when the humanists have abandoned natural law theory.

Conclusion

The text says that the judges had the responsibility of investigating and evaluating the conflicting testimonies of rival parties. They had to decide if one person was deliberately lying. If he was, then he was to be placed under a civil sanction. The sanction was clear: whatever penalty the state would have imposed on the victim had the testimony of the false witness been believed. Equity in this instance was based on *lex talionis*: eye for eye. The justification was the elimination of a public evil: “so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.”

Then why were the priests there? The text does not say. I think there are three reasons. First, to provide counsel regarding God’s written law. Second, to gather information in order to declare a false witness excommunicate. There would be a double witness against false witness. Third, to provide legitimacy to the court.

There had to be civil sanctions if there was civil law. The sanction was to be commensurate with the infraction. Because the sanction was the same in both cases, the rule of law was affirmed. There could be no favoritism on the part of the court. The fear of offering false witness was to be comparable to the fear of being convicted by false witness. The false witness had to consider the consequences of his testimony. He had to count the cost (Luke 14:28–30).²⁴ He had to consider the damage that his testimony would cause another person. To assist him in his process of cost accounting, the Mosaic law specified that if he was shown to be a false witness, he would suffer the same penalty that he had sought to inflict on his victim.

There is no indication that this aspect of the Mosaic law has been annulled by the New Covenant. On the contrary, the New Covenant affirms the principle. More than this: the New Covenant order was sealed forever by God’s final judgment against Israel’s false testimony. The false testimony given against Jesus Christ—that He was not who

24. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

and what He said He was—led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, thereby ending forever the Old Covenant order.²⁵ The Sanhedrin had sentenced Christ to death, knowing that their procedures were illegal, even in terms of their own law.²⁶ God sentenced Old Covenant Israel to death, a sentence carried out in A.D. 70.

Is there continuity of the other aspect of this law, i.e., the presence of priests in a civil court's procedure? The presence of representatives of both church and state made the covenantal implications clear. *The state must not hand down judgments irrespective of the church's interpretation of what constitutes righteous judgment.* The priest was a counsellor and a legitimizer. He did not conduct the actual investigation, but he could respond to questions regarding equity.²⁷ His main assignments in this case were to serve as a source of legitimacy for the court and to protect the citizenry from a monopolistic civil government that would refuse to acknowledge any authority but its own in rendering civil judgment. There was to be no absolute separation of church and state in Mosaic Israel. This constituted a system of federalism. It refuted the idea of civil autonomy/monopoly.

The would-be false witness was warned to count the cost of his action. This cost was the same as the cost borne by the victim of his false testimony. There was an equality of sanctions. This is why Adam's rebellion was attempted regicide and parricide.²⁸ This is why there was a death penalty attached to the eating of the tree's fruit. Adam had in principle had agreed to act as the serpent's agent in bringing a covenant lawsuit against God by publicly challenging God's supposedly false claim of absolute authority. By violating the tree's boundary, he handed down judgment against God in the name of the serpent. The

25. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdays>)

26. Under the Pharisees' interpretation of Judaic law, if the court paid a witness, this invalidated his testimony. *Bekhoroth* 4:6, in *The Mishnah*, ed. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. 534. The court had paid Judas 30 pieces of silver to identify Jesus, i.e., to provide witness that this was the man they planned to accuse. "Then Judas, which had betrayeth him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that" (Matt. 27:3–4). Then the execution of Jesus took place. Judas repented of his act before the sentence was carried out. The Jews did not. Judas paid with his life (v. 5). So did Old Covenant Israel.

27. This indicates that God's examination of Adam and Eve was done in His judicial capacity as king rather than priest.

28. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), Appendix E.

proof that his accusation was false was his own death. He had failed to count the cost accurately.

God, on the day of judgment, will serve as a witness. If He has granted salvation by grace through faith, He will serve as a witness for the defense.

A HIERARCHY OF COMMITMENTS

And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her (Deut. 20:5–7).

These laws related to participation in God's holy army. They therefore related to citizenship in Israel. These laws were aspects of point three of the biblical covenant: the ethical and judicial separation of God's people. These were holiness laws. Holiness is an aspect of part three of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. The Economics of the Firstfruits Offering

The first two laws of military exemption had something to do with the right to enjoy the fruits of one's labor. Death on the battlefield was not to separate a man from these fruits. Yet the exemptions were not permanent. In the case of a newly married man, the exemption lasted one year (Deut. 24:5). The fourth exemption, fear, I cover in the next chapter.

The first two laws of military non-participation were land laws: new house, new vineyard.² They had to do with sacrifices: priestly. These sacrifices no longer exist. Neither does the priesthood. The

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. On land laws, see Appendix J.

third exemption was a seed law: newlywed.³

In what way did a man's right to enjoy a preliminary return on a long-term capital investment reflect a property right of God? I offer three plausible answers: the tithe, the firstfruits offering, or both.

The problem with designating the tithe alone as God's property right rather than the firstfruits offering (or both) is that the tithe is God's permanent right of return. The two exemptions were not permanent. In contrast, the firstfruits offering was a preliminary offering in addition to the tithe. The firstfruits offering was a kind of down payment to God for God's down payment on the harvest. Firstfruits were offered three times on the day after Passover (Lev. 23:1–12), at the feast of Firstfruits (Pentecost) (Ex. 34:22), and at the feast of Booths (Tabernacles) (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:39–40). In the case of Booths, when the harvest was complete, others in the community were to be invited in to share the wealth.

Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice (Deut. 16:13–15).⁴

To understand what was involved in this law of military exemption, we must begin with a fundamental biblical economic principle: *the individual serves as the economic agent (steward) of God*. God had delegated to individual Israelites the task of building up the capital base necessary to increase His firstfruits. This is why a producer's right to collect the firstfruits of a newly finished capital asset—house or vineyard—could not lawfully be challenged by the state in Mosaic Israel, even in wartime. *The producer's initial claim on the fruits of his newly completed stream of income was superior to the state's claims on his life*. This, in turn, reflected God's prior claim of firstfruits on agricultural output. The firstfruits offering of the vineyard would be paid to the priesthood, who in turn held a veto on the war (Num. 10:8; Deut. 20:2).

3. On seed laws, see Appendix J.

4. Chapter 35.

But why did a newly built home offer an exemption? There was no firstfruits offering required for dedicating a new home. Answer: *an Israelite's home was analogous to God's home, which was the tabernacle-temple*. Although no law required it, Solomon dedicated the newly constructed house of God by sacrificing 22,000 oxen and 20,000 sheep (1 Kings 8:63). Thus, a sacrifice of dedication, while not legally required, was appropriate when a man finished building his home. He could enjoy the fruits of his labor, just as God, in His capacity as a cosmic house-builder,⁵ enjoyed the blessings of dwelling in a new home.

The firstfruits were token payments to God: a kind of down payment on the future tithe. They were a man's statement of faith in God's long-term future bounty, as well as thanks for God's preliminary manifestation of blessing.

B. Inheritance and Battle

Chapter 20 deals with military affairs. Israel's inheritance of Canaan would be the result of military action. The physical disinheritance of the Canaanites through their execution on the battlefield was to be the operational means of claiming the inheritance. *Military sanctions were to be the means of this long-prophesied inheritance/disinheritance*. That is, point four of the biblical covenant model, sanctions, was the prerequisite of point five.

The laws in this passage applied to a settled population: settlement in the post-conquest world. This generation as yet had no houses, no vineyards. They had not become dwellers in the Promised Land. They were still outsiders. So, this passage presumed a forthcoming victory. These laws would go into effect in Israel's history only after the conquest. In this sense, this passage was prophetic. It assumed the transfer of the inheritance. More than this: these laws had to do with the maintenance of the individual's inheritance, i.e., enjoying the firstfruits of house, vineyard, or wife. *The focus of these laws was on preserving an inheritance*. One man sows; another man is therefore not to reap. This was to be the case in Israel for righteous men. *He who sows is supposed to reap*. Not even the needs of the military were to supersede this principle. Only unrighteousness is to break the legal pattern of sowing and reaping. Canaan was soon to become an example of such unrighteousness.

5. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1980), pp. 17–18, 20–21, 35–42.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you (Deut. 6:10–14).

There is a *fundamental principle of individualism* in the Deuteronomy 20 passage. The defense of the individual's legal right to enjoy the firstfruits of his labor was superior to the military defense of the nation.

God had not instructed Moses to convey these rules of post-conquest warfare to the exodus generation. There was no need. First, they were not the fourth generation that was scheduled to inherit (Gen. 15:16). Second, He knew that they were an army of slaves: fearful of everything. They were in no spiritual condition to conquer Canaan.

C. No Conscription

The tribes were supposed to respond to a call to military action. Yet it is clear from Deborah's song that some tribes had not responded (Jud. 5:16–17). This indicates that the Mosaic law offered no formal negative sanctions to the central government that would enable it pressure the tribes to assemble. The Levite whose concubine had been raped to death by the Benjaminites cut her corpse into pieces and sent them to the other tribes (Jud. 19:29). This was a form of moral suasion. There was no legal compulsion available to him.

Could a tribe compel each adult male to assemble in military formation? There was no law that mandated this. The exemption laws of Deuteronomy 20 mandated that the officers permit any member who qualified under the law to return home. Anyone could claim fear and thereby be exempted. Perhaps not many men would have done this, for fear of shaming themselves, but the other three exemptions were easy ways out. All three involved building toward the future, i.e., future-oriented activities. There was no shame involved in claiming one of these exemptions. What is important to understand here is the principle that a man's demonstrated but unfulfilled *future-orientation*—

the figurative harvest sown but not reaped—was more important to Israel than his participation in the army. The building of familistic capital was more important than participation in war. The creation of streams of personal income was more important for the nation than adding numbers to the army.

If a man could be exempted immediately preceding the battle, was there compulsion in assembling? That is, with exemptions so easy, what would have pressured men to assemble and then march off to war? If there were no external, civil pressures available to the state, why would there have been these exemptions? One reason occurs: ecclesiastical pressure. Citizenship in Mosaic Israel was based on two things: circumcision and eligibility for service in God's holy army. If a man refused to answer the call to muster the troops, would he have lost his citizenship? Was mere military eligibility sufficient to maintain citizenship? Or was actual attendance at the mustering required?

Deborah did not declare that members of the tribes of Reuben, Asher, and Dan had lost their citizenship (Jud. 5:16–17). They suffered the negative sanction of being written into her song of victory in an unfavorable light. They would have had the option of going home on the basis of fear, but they never even showed up. They were not willing to admit in public at the time of battle that they were too afraid to fight. This is why Deborah criticized them: not for their fear but for their unwillingness to show up and admit in public as tribes that they were too afraid to fight.

The Mosaic law had no specified negative sanctions against non-appearance. *Thus, there was no lawful military conscription under the Old Covenant.* There was neither a written law nor specified sanctions that compelled anyone to answer the trumpets' call. The state had to rely on men's sense of duty to motivate them to answer the call. Even after responding, there was another opportunity to return home.

D. An Army of Holy Warriors

The goal of these exemption laws was two-fold. First, no fighting man should suffer second thoughts about having completed a long-term project that he did not have time to enjoy. Second, the army had to rely on God more than its numbers. I discuss the second concern in the next chapter.

The first concern had to do with a warrior's sense of commitment. Any warrior who had valid reasons to hold back in the heat of battle,

especially offensive battle, was told to go home. These reasons had to do with the future. He had created a capital asset that was to provide him with a stream of income: home or vineyard. He had not enjoyed any benefits from that capital asset. He had not paid the priesthood its lawful firstfruits offering. A similar logic governed the third exemption: a wife back home. In the case of a new wife, the exemption was even more specific: a year's mandatory exemption. His wife's interests were also at stake. The presumption was that the man would have time to impregnate his wife in a year. The issue of biological heirs was a major one in Mosaic Israel. This had to do with the seed laws. The levirate's marriage provisions were associated with these laws: "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut. 25:5–6).⁶

Any civil leader who began making long-range plans for indulging himself in a war faced a potential veto by his army: prior capital formation. A man who expected to be called into battle could start building a house, planting a vineyard, or courting a woman if he wanted to avoid serving in the army. If he got the house built, the vineyard planted, or the girl married him before the silver trumpets were blown, he could come home after the mustering but before the battle. Preparations for unpopular wars would have increased capital formation in Israel, at least in the three areas of housing, wine, and families. While some men fought, others would be enjoying the fruits of their labors. *This was a military anti-recruiting system designed to keep rulers from indulging in the sin of empire.* Sitting at home by the fire, a glass of wine in hand, with your new wife on your lap surely beats slogging through the mud in a foreign war of empire. "Make love, not war" was a law governing Israelite marriage. Any call to the holiness of a cause would have to be believed by the holy warriors in order for the leaders to recruit an army. Mercenaries would not guarantee victory.

A wise king of Israel would have understood this threat to his plans. "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else,

6. Chapter 64.

while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace" (Luke 14:31–32).⁷ The military service exemption laws, when enforced, would have kept the kings honest. It would have kept them from high-risk international displays of their own power.

Conclusion

First, citizenship in Israel was based on eligibility for service in God's holy army.⁸ Second, the state did not possess final authority over priests and citizens. Warfare was made holy by acclamation by the priesthood. Without their support, the war was illegal. There could be no numbering and no atonement money, which had to be paid to the priests (Ex. 30:12).⁹ Third, mandatory military conscription was illegal. This was a major restriction on the expansion of state power, which increases dramatically in wartime and is rarely reversed after the war.¹⁰ The hierarchy of military authority in Mosaic Israel reflected the hierarchy of mandatory payments: priesthood, head of household, state.

Israel as a *holy army* was a *judicially restricted army*. The army had to be called into action by priests. There were two opportunities for the priesthood to veto a war: prior to assembling the army and immediately prior to the war (Num. 10:2–8). Individuals also had a right to return home. This placed the civil rulers at a disadvantage in any schemes for building an empire.

There were superior claims on every warrior's commitment. These were in part economic and in part covenantal. He did not owe a sacrifice for a newly dedicated house, but such sacrifice was appropriate for God's house, so presumably it was appropriate for a man's house. He did owe a firstfruits offering for his newly planted vineyard. Until that debt was paid at the next national feast, he was to depart from the battlefield. He was also to return to his new bride, for her sake (Deut. 24:5) and for his (Deut. 20:7). These commitments took precedence over the state's right to call citizens into battle.

These legitimate commitments, as well as the personal benefits as-

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

8. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 2:C

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2011), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

10. Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

sociated with reaping the fruits of one's labor, did not threaten the cohesiveness of God's "leaner, meaner" holy army. The army's greater cohesion would have been the result of these exemptions. Holy warriors were supposed to be committed to victory. But some commitments could not be relegated to secondary status, either judicially or psychologically. These commitments became the legal basis of exemption from military duty.

The firstfruits offering was a priestly law. Priestly laws are no longer binding. The law of the new vineyard was a land law. Land laws are no longer binding. The care of a new wife was a seed law. Seed laws are no longer binding. The underlying principle of each was that a man is to enjoy a token payment on his productivity before his life is placed at risk militarily.

No civil sanctions are ever legitimate against men who refuse to serve in the military, for whatever reason. The state does not possess the right to draft anyone into military service, on threat of civil sanctions, in peacetime or war.

A FEW GOOD MEN

And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart (Deut. 20:8).

Deuteronomy 20 deals with military affairs. The laws in this section governed God's holy army. These are holiness laws: aspects of point three of the biblical covenant.¹

A. God's Holy Army

Moses announced this law to the generation of the conquest, but before this generation had marched into battle. He reminded them of the theocentric framework of their assignment. They were soldiers of a living God who is sovereign over history.

The section begins with a call to courage based on God's sovereignty: "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (v. 1). This law was not a land law or a seed law. It was not grounded in the Mosaic sacrifices or the tribal system: a priestly law. It was therefore a cross-boundary law: universal.² This law governed God's holy army, but the general principle upholding it—the removal of fearful men from the ranks—is a universal principle of covenantal warfare.

This holy army would fight under a dual chain of command:

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. On the four categories of the Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

officers and priests. The priests were not merely spiritual cheerleaders whose main task was to supply extra courage to men marching into battle. That is, they were not modern military chaplains. They actually held a veto over the war. When the army approached the battlefield, a priest was to approach the assembled warriors and announce: "Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (vv. 3–4). A holy army was to be motivated by the words of a holy priesthood. If the priesthood failed to support this military action, refusing to encourage the army by invoking covenantally the name of God, the army could not lawfully obey any order to go into battle. This meant that the priesthood three times had a veto over the entire campaign: before the army marched off to war (Num. 10:8); when the mustered men were to pay their atonement money (Ex. 30:12), which the priests could refuse to accept; and again immediately prior to the engagement.

There has been a debate in the West for a millenium over what constitutes righteous warfare. There is no doubt biblically how to answer this in theory. A holy war is a war fought by a nation whose Christian ministers exercise a lawful veto on the war and who nonetheless have promoted it. If the state imprisons Christian ministers for speaking out against a war, as the United States government sometimes did during World War I,³ then this war is not just.

B. Thinning the Ranks in Advance

The goal of this law was to thin the ranks of God's holy army. This is not the normal goal of any military planner. He always wants more men and equipment than he has.⁴ But Israel was told to trust in God, not in military strength. David, a warrior, wrote: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Ps. 20:7). Isaiah wrote: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!" (Isa. 31:1). This outlook reflected Israel's theory of holy warfare. God told the na-

3. H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, [1957] 1968), ch. 11: "Disciplining the Clergy."

4. This is the fundamental law of scarcity: "At zero price, there will be greater demand than supply."

tion that He would be with them in righteous military undertakings. Their faith would be tested by their willingness to thin the ranks by means of exemptions. The very smallness of the army was to increase the nation's faith in the coming victory. What would normally be regarded as a negative sanction was in fact a positive sanction.

This Israelite practice rested on a psychological premise: a fearful man is not much of a warrior. Also, an Israelite who did not trust God's promise to be with His people in holy warfare was surely not very holy. He would not see the army as uniquely protected by God and set apart for victory. No warrior wants to fight alongside of a fearful man. He wants to know that his flanks are covered in the line. A fearful man who holds back thereby exposes those on either side of him to added risk. Furthermore, a fearful man has not internalized the opening words of this passage: "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (v. 1). His doubts call into question the army's corporate commitment to these words. God made provision for such a fear-burdened man to excuse himself and return home before the battle began.

There is always fear in battle: fear of the enemy, fear of senior officers, and fear of being labeled a coward. Different men respond differently to these fears. God told Israel not to fear the enemy. If a man feared the enemy, he was asked by an officer to go home.

The authority of the Israelite warrior to walk away from a war meant that the rulers had to be very careful in deciding what was worth fighting for. The priests held a veto on the decision of a civil ruler to take the nation into war. The individual warrior could not veto the war, but he could veto his participation in it. He could "vote with his feet." This placed a very serious limitation on political rulers. The rulers were to confine their military affairs to defensive wars and holy wars. The holy status of a war would be determined by the priesthood, not by the state. Any war begun by the ruler apart from the priests would not have the Ark of the Covenant present on the battlefield. The senior civil ruler could not demand that every holy warrior accompany him on his march into battle. Otherwise, it would be the leader's war, not the army of the Lord's war. He might persuade others to go into battle for the sake of spoils, but that would make his army a mercenary army. The motivation of mercenaries is personal gain. Mercenary armies are notoriously less successful than citizen armies defending

their homelands. These restrictions on civil rulers meant that *Israel could not become an empire while obeying God's law*. Its rulers could not easily extend their military power beyond the original boundaries of the nation.

Just prior to the battle, there was to be a deliberate thinning of the ranks. The officers were to offer their men a way of escape. There were four ways out of the ranks: two were explicitly economic; one was marital; one was psychological. If a man had built a new home, planted a new vineyard, married a new wife, or was afraid, he could return home (Deut. 20:5–8).⁵ The classic biblical case of deliberately thinning the ranks was Gideon's series of screening devices (Jud. 7:3–8). The first screening device was fear. This was the most effective device; 22,000 Israelites voluntarily departed (v. 3). They swallowed their shame and went home. They probably knew that to fight while afraid was contrary to the Mosaic law. Fearful men were not allowed to serve. Fear, not small numbers, threatened the success of the military venture. They chose not to violate His law. It was better to acknowledge their fear publicly and go home than to break God's law and fight in fear.

The commander of Israel's army was not to rely on numbers. The army had to be numbered prior to a war because each man owed blood money—an atonement payment—to the priests (Ex. 30:12).⁶ This numbering was not to be used as a way for the commander to assess the likelihood of success in a military venture. Success on the battlefield, this passage informs us, was entirely dependent on God. This formal procedure of thinning the ranks was the way of affirming meaningful faith in God's presence with the nation in holy warfare.

C. Rational Calculation and Cowardice

This law made Israel's army different from any army in history. In all other armies, senior military commanders have had to devise ways to keep their troops in line.⁷ They have used the negative sanctions of shame, fear of superior officers, harsh discipline, and ultimately the threat of the firing squad or its equivalent to keep the ranks from breaking and running under fire. These sanctions are designed to offset the self-interested soldier's rational desire to run.

5. Chapter 46.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

7. Even the phrase "in line" suggests a military image: a line of troops that will not break and run under fire.

1. *A Soldier Under Fire*

Consider the decision-making process of a soldier under fire. He makes a cost-benefit analysis based on how his decision will affect him. The question here is the degree to which individual self-interest either supports or undermines a military formation. Here is a fundamental fact of infantry tactics: there is greater risk of being killed from behind while fleeing in open terrain than of being killed while standing and fighting, since the attacking troops are afraid of dying. Active resistance makes attackers less offensive-minded, less committed to destroying all those who resist them. Opponents who flee reduce the risk to their attackers, i.e., lower the cost of attacking. (This was especially true when infantry faced chariots.) With any scarce economic resource, the lower the cost, the more will be demanded. The lower the cost of attacking your enemy, the more you will be willing to do it, other things being equal. Nevertheless, defensive resistance is not the least dangerous personal decision. The least dangerous decision, apart from negative sanctions imposed by your own forces, is to run away early while your comrades are still fighting. They keep the enemy at bay; meanwhile, you distance yourself from danger.

Here are a soldier's options. *First*, if the line breaks and runs, he will be left standing nearly alone—a standing duck, so to speak. This is the most dangerous option. We can call this the Uriah option. "And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die" (I Sam. 11:14–15). The more courageous the soldier, the more likely that he will die if his comrades flee. A brave man with cowards on his flanks will soon be a dead man. *Second*, if he runs early, he reduces his risk of dying during this encounter, whether or not his comrades run away later. The sooner he runs, the better for him: those who stay in the ranks longer before running are more likely to be cut down by the initial wave of charging troops. The attackers will be busy slaughtering those close at hand. Defense takes time; meanwhile, he keeps running. *Third*, he stands his ground until he sees his comrades running; then he tries to run faster than they do.

The least dangerous decision is to run early. The next-safe decision is to stand and fight, but only if all of your colleagues are standing and fighting. Your safety depends on the decisions of others in the line, just as theirs depends on you. Your survival therefore depends on

your ability to time your flight so that you run away just slightly ahead of your colleagues. In a line that is about to break, your survival depends on your speed: deciding when to run and how fast you can run compared to your comrades. The next most dangerous decision is to run late and slow. The most dangerous decision is to stand and fight after your comrades have run. The cowardly early runner is least at risk. The brave man who stands his ground alone is most at risk. The others are in between. This is why it is so important to remove cowards from the line. Their decision to run jeopardizes everyone in the line.

The safety of the soldier depends on the willingness of his colleagues to stand and fight, or to march forward and fight, with him or without him. Some members of his unit predictably will die, whether it wins or loses. Immediate self-interest motivates each man to run away fast and early.⁸ The more fearful his comrades, the sooner he had better start running.⁹ The slower he runs, the earlier that he must begin running.

There is no question about it: *in an offensive war, where your nation is not being invaded, the safest thing to do is go home*. This is “running early,” before the line forms. This is why the Mosaic law screened out those who were the most likely troops to run when attacked. Fear is like a forest fire. One way to contain forest fires before they begin is to cut down and remove highly inflammable trees that might catch fire and serve as conduits for the flames.

2. Cowardice

Cowardice is a military evil second only to treason—worse even than disobeying a lawful order. Cowardice threatens every military tactic. Senior commanders employ tactics that persuade most troops to stand and fight most of the time. Military training instills the fear of suffering shame by imposing negative sanctions based on shame: the first man to run is branded as an unjustifiable coward. Military forma-

8. David Friedman, *Hidden Order: The Economics of Everyday Life* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1996), p. 7.

9. This is why *esprit de corps* is so important for an army. Men in arms must learn to trust their colleagues, and their colleagues must be worthy of this trust. The braver your comrades are, the safer you are. This is why an army must strive to eliminate the presence of cowards and to reduce the level of cowardice in all the other members. This is why armies award medals and activate firing squads.

tions have been designed to keep men from running.¹⁰ If everyone runs, the collective guilt is spread around. So, initial flight must be stopped, and the means of stopping it is to threaten negative sanctions. The smaller the number of those who run, the greater is the individual responsibility and individual punishment on those who run. "They won't court martial us all if we run as a unit," thinks the soldier, "but they may court martial me if I run and the others hold the line."

The more fearful the individual is, the more likely he will run. The more fearful that he knows his comrades to be, the sooner he will run. The sight of a man running away can set off a chain reaction along the line. So, the most effective way to keep men from running is to increase their courage rather than threaten them with shame. That was why God required Israel's commanders to let fearful men go home early. They "ran" before the war began.

D. Israel's Motivation

Israel's army was to operate in terms of the expectation of the positive sanction of victory rather than the negative sanction of defeat. Negative formal sanctions to overcome fear were less necessary in Israel's holy army because those who were afraid were asked to leave before the war began. Tactically, this meant a smaller but a more determined army. A commander knew the operational size of his battlefield forces before he went into battle. His forces expected victory, so they were less willing to run. Those who walked into battle expected to walk home victorious. The familiar negative sanctions to reduce the likelihood of flight under fire were less necessary.

An opposing commander was probably unaware of this aspect of Israel's tactics. A frontal assault on the line normally reduces most units' will to resist. But Israel's front lines would be different. Any foreign commander launching an assault on Israel's holy army in the expectation that normal defensive fear would work to his advantage would receive a lesson in defensive resistance. Israel's troops would be far less likely to break and run. The offensive army would suffer higher casualties than normal.

By fielding a smaller army of more determined troops, God would gain the glory. This is why he told Gideon to thin the ranks (Jud. 7:2). A smaller army was a better fighting force, man for man, than any rival army because of the Mosaic policy of allowing fearful men to go home

10. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

before the battle began. The Israelite commander could better calculate the responses of his troops because the fear-ridden troops had gone home. This meant that the traditional problem for military tactics—how to keep non-rugged individualism from undermining the formation—was far less of a problem for Israel.

Conclusion

The text makes it clear that the goal of sending the fearful man home was to keep fear from spreading in the ranks: “Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart” (v. 8). By removing the faint-hearted from the ranks before the battle began, the officers were able to minimize the spread of fear on the battlefield. They thereby increased the confidence of those under their authority. This increased the likelihood of victory . . . for a few good men and the God they represented. In a defensive war, it is far easier for the military to gain volunteers. Men know that their lives, their families, and their property are at stake. They are more likely to preserve their circumstances by joining the military than by fighting alone when the invaders arrive in force. In defensive wars, conscription is not necessary. In offensive wars, it is not legal.

LIMITS AGAINST EMPIRE

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God (Deut. 20:10–18).

The theocentric framework of these laws of military conquest is God's disinheritation of His enemies. This means God's dominion.

A. Disinheritance

This was a land law.¹ These rules of warfare no longer apply, because God's exclusive residence in one holy nation no longer applies. The temple is no more. Neither are captives to be brought back into the land as permanent slaves. The annulment of the jubilee land laws by the ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:17–21)² has annulled the permanent

1. On land laws, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

slaves law (Lev. 25:44–46).³

This passage is about disinheritance. First, the disinheritance of God's enemies could be by *military action*. It could involve their annihilation, as it was supposed to in Canaan, but that was a one-time event, as this passage also indicates. Those cities outside Canaan which made war against Israel would be dealt with differently from those cities inside Canaan which Israel made war against.

Second, disinheritance could be by *subordination*: a system of tribute, which can be monetary but can also be cultural. We see this in the modern West: a culture which once was confessionally Christian is now becoming increasingly pagan, yet it still sustains itself by drawing upon the ethical and cultural capital of Christianity. (The phrase “drawing down” might be more appropriate, as in drawing down a bank account.) The West pays covenantal tribute to God through its outward conformity to some of the laws of God. But as time goes on, it pays less and less tribute as it substitutes man's word for God's word. The problem it faces today is the same problem that faced a tributary in the ancient Near East: the vassal city that broke treaty with the regional monarch risked war, captivity, or annihilation. When the king's negative sanctions were finally imposed, they could be devastating.

Third, covenantal disinheritance could be by *regeneration*: bringing assets formerly devoted to other gods under the administration of a covenant-keeper. Ownership of the property does not change, but the legal status of the owner before God changes: from a disinherited son in Adam to an adopted son in Christ. *This is the primary means of disinheritance in the New Testament era*. It is the covenantal disinheritance of the old Adam and simultaneously the covenantal inheritance of the second Adam, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:45). It is the reclaiming of the world through the covenantal reclamation of the world's lawful owners. Whatever is under the legal authority of a regenerated individual is thereby brought under the hierarchical administration of Jesus Christ. This comprehensive reclamation project is what has been assigned to Christians by the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).⁴

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

B. The Whole Burnt Offering and Disinheritance

The Israelites were told to show no mercy to the nations inside Canaan's boundaries (Deut. 7:16). These nations had practiced such great evil that they had become abominations in the sight of God. "For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee" (Deut. 18:12). The language of Deuteronomy 20:10–18 indicates that every domesticated animal inside the boundaries of Canaan was to be killed: "thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth." With respect to the first city to fall, Jericho, this law applied literally (Josh. 6:15–21). It did not apply literally to the other cities of Canaan. After the destruction of Jericho, the first city inside Canaan to be defeated, cattle became lawful spoils for the Israelites. "And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it" (Josh. 8:2). The word "breatheth" did not apply to Canaan's cattle; it applied to the human population. "And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe" (Josh. 11:14).

Jericho was the representative example of God's total wrath against covenant-breakers who follow their religious presuppositions to their ultimate conclusion: death.⁵ Jericho came under God's total ban: *hormah*.⁶ This was the equivalent of a whole burnt offering: almost all of it had to be consumed by fire. In the whole burnt offering, all of the beast was consumed on the altar (Lev. 1:9, 13) except for the skin, which went to the officiating priest (Lev. 7:8). Similarly, all of Jericho was burnt except for the precious metals, which went to the tabernacle as firstfruits (Josh. 6:24).⁷ Nevertheless, because God want-

5. King Solomon observed: "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36).

6. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), pp. 10–11. (<http://bit.ly/jjjudges>)

7. Achan had secretly appropriated some precious goods in Jericho. For this, he and his family was executed. This was also the equivalent of a whole burnt offering. Everything under his jurisdiction was burned at God's command (Josh. 7:15). This included even the precious metals that would otherwise have gone to the tabernacle (v. 24). The men were killed by stoning; then their remains were burned (v. 25). This points to the execution as a whole burnt offering: the animal had to be slain before it was placed on the altar. The remains of Jericho were a whole burnt offering; Achan

ed His people to reap the inheritance of the Canaanites, He allowed them to confiscate the cattle and precious goods of the other conquered Canaanite cities. This illustrated another important biblical principle of inheritance: “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁸ Canaan’s capital, except in Jericho, was part of Israel’s lawful inheritance. The Canaanites had accumulated wealth; the Israelites were to inherit all of it. This comprehensive inheritance was to become a model of God’s total victory at the end of history. Their failure to exterminate the Canaanites, placing some of them under tribute instead (Josh. 16:10; 17:13), eventually led to the apostasy of Israel and the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, just as Moses prophesied in this passage (vv. 17–18; cf. 7:1–5; 12:30–31).

The annihilation of every living soul in Canaan was mandatory. “And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee” (Deut. 7:16). This was a model of God’s final judgment. But it was a model in the same way that Jericho was a model: a one-time event. Jericho was to be totally destroyed, including the animals; this was not true of the other cities of Canaan. Similarly, the Canaanites were to be totally annihilated; this was not true of residents of cities outside Canaan. In this sense, Jericho was to Canaan what Canaan was to cities outside the land: a down payment (“earnest”) on God’s final judgment—final disinheritance—at the end of time. This earnest payment in history on the final disinheritance is matched by the earnest payment in history on the final inheritance. This is surely the case in spiritual affairs.⁹ Debates over eschatology are debates over the extent to which these earn-

had covenanted with Jericho by preserving the remnants of Jericho’s capital. On the execution of Achan, see North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Appendix A: “Sacrilege and Sanctions.”

8. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007]2012), ch. 41.

9. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an **inheritance**, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the **earnest** of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:10–14).

est payments in history are also cultural and civilizational, and whether they image the final judgment, i.e., to what extent history is an earnest on eternity.¹⁰

C. Mosaic Law vs. Theocratic Empire

Those living outside the land were under different Mosaic rules of warfare. Their judgment in history would not have to be final. The Israelites had to offer a peace treaty to any foreign city prior to laying siege to it (v. 10). The theocentric principle here was that *God offers a peace treaty to all men who are not yet formally under His authority*. If men refuse to submit while this grace period is in force, they are doomed. This period of grace is history. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

Once Israel began its siege, history had run out for that city. It would no longer be able to extend the dominion of its gods. The gods of that city were placed under preliminary judgment by the siege. After the defeat, the gods of that city were buried. Some of the women and children would survive, but the city, its gods, and its culture would not. Once the siege began, God’s handwriting was figuratively on the city’s walls: it had been weighed in the balance and found wanting (Dan. 5:27). *If Israel won, the city died*. Once the siege began, it was not to be called off until the city was defeated. There might be temporary cease-fire agreements because of Israel’s temporary weakness, but once the treaty of tribute was rejected by a city, that city was doomed, according to God’s rules of warfare. Once the siege began, there could be no partial surrender, i.e., survival through paying tribute.¹¹

10. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

11. Biblically, God began His final siege of Satan’s city of man at Calvary. The church now lays siege to the city of man in history, for the latter represents the gates of hell. “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). The imagery of hell is that of a city under siege whose walls cannot indefinitely hold off the attackers. Because of the failure of the church constantly to maintain this siege, the city of man is occasionally offered temporary cease-fires. But once begun, Christianity’s siege against the city of man can never be called off. If it is incompletely sustained because of the Christians’ sin and weakness, it will later be strengthened. There is now no tributary peace treaty possible for the city of man, which refused to surrender while Christ walked the earth. The city of man will never be offered another opportunity to surrender and survive through paying tribute. Only one thing can bring relief: surrender through conversion, which is another way to destroy the city of man. The city’s final annihilation takes place after the final judgment (Rev. 20:14–15). Sin retards the ability of the church to complete the operation in history. Nevertheless, the city of man will

1. Tributary Surrender

Conditional mercy was initially offered to all those inside the walls if they surrendered before the siege began. The men could avoid a death sentence by surrendering, but there was a condition: tribute (v. 11). This is analogous to the restitution penalty owed by a thief. A lying thief who confesses before the trial begins pays a 20% penalty to the victim (Lev. 6:5);¹² if he waits until after it begins, he pays double (Ex. 22:4).¹³ Prior confession lowers the costs of civil justice; similarly, prior surrender lowers the cost of conflict on both sides of the city's walls, especially for the losing army.

This surrender by the men would bring all those under their authority under the same covenant of surrender. The tributary peace treaty would henceforth apply to all those inside the gates of the city. This treaty secured the survival of the foreign city's culture, for residents were not required to confess faith in God as a condition of the treaty. The Old Covenant principle of circumcision was that every male under the covenantal, household authority of an Israelite had to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12–13). Under the tributary treaty, foreign males did not have to be circumcised; this indicates that their defeat as a city-state did not place them under Abrahamic covenantal authority. They would merely pay tribute to Israel's civil government,¹⁴ as historically defeated sons of Adam, but they would not pay a tithe to Israel's priests.

There is no evidence from Scripture that such foreign military campaigns were recommended by the prophets. They were legal when governed by Mosaic law, but they were not to become high-priority activities in the life of Israel. The most famous case of a tributary nation to Israel was Moab, which revolted against Israel after Ahab died. But Ahab had been more of a foreign king than an Israelite king, with his priests of rival gods. His son Jehoram was evil, although he destroyed his father's image of Baal (II Kings 3:2). When Moab revolted against him, Jehoram called the king of Judah to help him subdue Moab. When the king of Judah asked Elisha to bless the campaign, Elisha said it was only for Judah's sake that he would do so (v. 14). The

be visibly subdued in the final days, only to launch one final counter-attack (Rev. 20:7–9). Like Germany's Battle of the Bulge in late 1944, this counter-attack will fail.

12. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 7.

13. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion*, ch. 45:E:2.

14. Solomon collected tribute as tax money (I Kings 4:6; 5:13–15).

campaign was initially successful, but when the king of Moab sacrificed his oldest son as a burnt offering on the wall of the city, this created indignation against Israel within the ranks of the alliance. The invading army broke up and went home (v. 27).

2. Survival Through Circumcision

This raises a major question regarding the siege: Could the men of a besieged city escape the final sanction of death by affirming the covenant and becoming circumcised? If they could, this raises the question regarding the creation of a theocratic empire through military expansion. I argue that a foreign city, once placed under siege, could surrender covenantally and thereby escape annihilation. The Mosaic law does not say this explicitly, but it does not authorize the destruction of an Israelite city unless that city had begun to worship foreign gods (Deut. 13:12–15). How could Israel lawfully annihilate a city of circumcised men who had thereby publicly affirmed their covenantal allegiance to God? By mass circumcision, the city would have been incorporated into God's covenant. On what legal basis could the siege be continued? Thus, I see no alternative but to conclude that Israel could have increased its borders through military action, or at least through defensive military action: chasing an invading army all the way home and then laying siege to its cities. There was a way of escape for a besieged city: surrender to the God of Israel through circumcision. Tithes and offerings to God's temple would then be substituted for the original offer of peace: tribute to Israel's civil government. But the city would not be what it had been. The old city, like the old Adam, would have been destroyed. Covenantal absorption into Israel was another way of destroying a foreign city's gods and culture.

Yet God did not tell Israel to extend His covenantal reign by means of war across boundaries, once Canaan had been conquered. The possibility existed that some cities might surrender through conversion, but the Mosaic law did not encourage this. In fact, it discouraged this. Israel faced three major barriers to the creation of a theocratic empire. The first was judicial: a foreign city could stop the creation of such an empire merely by surrendering before the siege began. The second was cultural: if it failed to surrender on these terms, after its defeat it would no longer survive as a city. The women and children who survived the siege were then brought under the authority of Israel's households (v. 14). In both cases, the city avoided becoming part

of a theocratic empire. The third barrier was economic: to engage in a siege, Israelites had accepted the economic burden of the future victory: supporting large numbers of captive women and children. Furthermore, their wives would have to be willing to go along with this: new wives, new adopted children, new concubines, all of whom would dilute the inheritance of their own children. Israel was polygamous; a foreign war bride, conspicuous for her beauty (Deut. 21:11), would not have been welcomed with open arms by the wife back home. Built into Israel's social system was an unofficial veto of foreign wars. Furthermore, the economies and social systems of the ancient Near East did not support widespread slavery.¹⁵ Without Israel's permanent occupation of foreign cities, where the real estate could be used to fund the women and children taken captive, Israel could not afford to engage in foreign military conquests. The requirement that adult Israelite males attend all three annual feasts placed geographical limits on the extent of the conquest. The farther away a conquered city was from Jerusalem, the more expensive the trips to the annual feasts would be for its Israelite residents.

The issue of geography posed a major problem for the Mosaic law. The festival laws would have to be reworked if the theocratic kingdom expanded; otherwise, theocratic expansion would have been impossible. How could Jews residing in a distant city have attended the festivals every year? They couldn't. The larger the theocratic empire grew, the more impossible it would have been for all of the faithful to have walked to Jerusalem, let alone to have lodged there for a week. It seems likely that sometime after the Babylonian captivity, from which comparatively few Jews returned to Israel, the synagogue system replaced annual attendance at Passover. The Mosaic law's festival requirements no longer were enforced rigorously on faithful men as a condition of covenantal faithfulness. There was no longer a holy army in Israel; the nation was under the administration of foreign pluralistic empires.

I have argued in my commentary on Numbers that missionary activity always superseded the requirement that every Israelite male appear at Passover annually, let alone the other two annual feasts. Righteousness was more important than ritual precision in Mosaic Israel (I Chron. 30:18–20).¹⁶ Consider Paul's absence from the feasts. He

15. Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery In the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 119.

16. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*,

stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching in the synagogue (Acts 18:8–11). The author of Acts records that “we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days” (Acts 20:6). They had not been in Jerusalem for the Passover. They did not make it back to Jerusalem in time for the second Passover celebration for those who had been on journeys (Num. 9:11). Paul did try to get back to Jerusalem by Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Nevertheless, in front of the Jewish assembly, Paul announced: “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). No one called his assertion a lie on the basis of his failure to attend Passover.

3. Public Theology

Israel’s theology was public as no other ancient religion’s theology ever was. Foreign residents living inside Israel were invited to go to a central city every seventh year and hear the reading of the law (Deut. 31:10–12).¹⁷ Foreigners would have been in contact with their home cities, especially if they were involved in trade inside Israel. There would have been widespread international dissemination of knowledge regarding Israel’s legal order. Any foreign city that was unwise enough to goad Israel into an attack would have known in advance about Israel’s rules of siege warfare. Foreign rulers would have known two things: (1) it was suicide not to surrender before a siege began; (2) it was very expensive for Israel to lay a siege, both for time lost and the costs of assimilating the captives.

This system of constrained warfare would have created incentives for foreign rulers to find ways other than military invasion to get what they wanted out of Israel’s rulers. Israel would be unlikely to attack a foreign city without extreme provocation, such as an invasion of Israel’s territory. This fact would have tended to place a protective barrier around Israel’s borders in times of its military strength, yet at the same time, Israel’s military strength would not have become a major threat to foreign nations. Israel was under restrictions—military, marital, economic, and geographical-ritual—that would keep it a defensive power only. This meant that Israel’s military strength would have promoted foreign trade rather than foreign wars. Israel would have been too dangerous to invade militarily, yet too restricted by the Mosaic law

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), p. 122.

17. Chapter 75.

to invade on its own initiative. Israel was the original incarnation of President Theodore Roosevelt's famous rule of American foreign policy: "Speak softly and carry a big stick."¹⁸

This meant that in times when Israel was mighty, these laws reduced the likelihood that Israel would engage in a systematic program of territorial conquest. It was too difficult for Israel to retain captured territory. Israelites were required to keep separate from gentiles. Their food laws and other laws of ritual cleanliness forced this separation. Foreign cities were not places where Israelites who kept the Mosaic law would normally want to dwell. They might retain their separate identity as a captive people who were allowed to live under their own rules and leaders in ghettos, which most of them did from the Babylonian captivity until the nineteenth century, but they could not easily rule in foreign cities without breaking the Mosaic holiness laws, let alone the far more rigorous rabbinic holiness laws. Interaction with local gentiles was too restricted. So, their empire, if any, would have to be based on a system of tribute, not local law enforcement by resident Israelites. It would have been an empire of trade and taxes. Such far-flung empires are difficult to maintain without a strong military presence, or the threat of military reprisals, in the captive lands.¹⁹ This kind of foreign military presence was made difficult by the festival laws. It took their captivity outside the land to restructure the laws of the festivals. It took life in a foreign ghetto and submission to the civil laws of other gods. This restructuring was not the product of an Israelite empire; it was the product of non-Israelite empires.

A city in the ancient Near East, with its local gods, could become an empire only through the pluralism of idols. Israel alone could survive as a nation apart from a homeland without succumbing to pluralism, for Israel's God claimed universality and exclusivity. Such a claim negated the possibility of a common pantheon (all gods) of idols. But Israel could not become an empire because of the Mosaic laws of ritual separation; it could at most survive as a ghetto subculture in foreign lands. Only in nineteenth-century Europe (and always in the United States) did Jews escape life in the ghetto, entering into a world of Protestant religious pluralism, two centuries after Protestantism had faded

18. His aggressive foreign policy belied his words: America spoke loudly under his administration (1901–1909).

19. The British Empire was the greatest exception to this rule in the history of man. But if every British official had been forced to return to London every year to attend the equivalent of Passover, it is highly unlikely that the British Empire would have survived long.

as a theocratic ideal. In this world, few men spoke authoritatively in civil affairs in the name of a supernatural god, and those few who did, such as Holland's Abraham Kuyper, asked only for equal access for confessional Christians to state subsidies and privileges, such as tuition-free, state-certified education.²⁰ The gods of modernism have reigned nearly supreme in this culture, and Judaism went liberal and humanistic with unprecedented speed. By the mid-twentieth century, Reform Judaism could accurately be described as "Unitarianism, but with better business connections."

D. Women and Children

The siege law required that women and children be spared after the fall of the foreign city. All of the men were to be killed. There could be no mercy for male heads of household. Their execution would have automatically placed the surviving women and children under the Mosaic covenant. There was no way for widows and orphans to build a society. The children needed protection. Their mothers were in no position to provide this.²¹ The law did not allow defenseless survivors to be left behind by the Israelite army, to fend for themselves or die.

The text says that all the males were to be slain. Did this mean only the adults? Or were male children slain, too? Consider Israel's defeat of the Midianites, which took place outside Canaan. "And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves" (Num. 31:15–18). The text here does not say. My assumption is that the text would require this if God demanded it.

The outcome of the siege had disinherited that society. Without any surviving male leadership, there could be no transfer of covenantal civil authority to the next generation. The war had destroyed generational continuity. Thus, all of the captives had to be integrated into Israel. This meant either adoption, including marriage, or enslavement

20. Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, [1960] 1978), ch. 20.

21. This is why widows, orphans, and strangers were the three groups repeatedly identified in the Mosaic law as deserving of legal protection and special consideration.

on a massive scale. Deuteronomy 21:10–14 sets forth the laws of marital adoption for foreign military widows. Those who became permanent slaves (Lev. 25:44–46) and those who became wives were brought under the household authority of their new husbands. In lieu of being circumcised, the prospective wives first had to shave their heads (Deut. 21:12). This was a sign of their *enforced transfer of authority* from their old households to new ones. It marked a covenantal transformation. This transformation was not necessarily confessional; it was geographical and institutional. The woman was removed from her surroundings and taken back to Israel (v. 12), where she was to mourn her father (dead) and mother (dead or taken captive)—but not her late husband—for a month (v. 13). Her former gods had perished in the total defeat of her city and the death of her husband and father. These gods had no jurisdiction apart from the city that had been built in their name.

By carrying women and children back to Israel, the warriors either enslaved or adopted the survivors. In both instances, the survivors came under the jurisdiction of an Israelite household. The survivors would henceforth live under a hierarchy that confessed the God of Moses. There was no religious pluralism allowed in any Israelite household (Deut. 13:6–11). *Thus, warfare was a form of evangelism through household subordination.* The victorious warriors had no choice in this matter. They were not allowed to kill defenseless women and children. To leave them behind to starve in a city without husbands would have been a form of impersonal execution. Such a deserted city would have become a target for invasion, rape, and enslavement to other cities' gods. This was not allowed. If women and children were to be enslaved, the God of the Bible would be the master of their new households. *Counting the costs of warfare meant counting the costs of victory.*

E. Immigration and Assimilation

The gods of the fallen city had been definitively disinherited, but traces of their cultural influence would survive in the captives' outlook and practices. War brides and older children would bring memories and habits formed under the covenantal administration of idols. Many aspects of this covenantal legacy would have to be modified or completely overcome. This would not be an overnight transformation.

The primary means of breaking these habits was language. Immigrants had to learn a new tongue. Cultures are maintained and de-

veloped through language. The final death of a culture occurs only when no one is left who speaks its language and confesses its doctrines. *The immigrant must think in new patterns and categories.* He must learn a new grammar and vocabulary. A subtle transformation of a person's thought takes place through language. An immigrant speaks with an accent; young children raised in a new society do not. The mark of assimilation is their lack of an accent. Accents are more than inflections of the tongue; they are ways of thinking and acting. The goal was to remove every trace of foreign accents in the cultural-confessional sense. In this sense, *assimilation meant conversion.*

Discipline was the second major area of transformation. This would have manifested itself most continually in work. The immigrant's daily schedules would have changed, although in an agricultural economy with a low division of labor, most of life's basic tasks would have been familiar across national borders. There would be different ways of getting things done, but the same sorts of things would have to get done as had to get done in the old country. *By working differently, people adapt to new environments.* The cause-and-effect pattern of work—planting and reaping—is a major form of discipline, to which are added the institutional carrot and stick.

The third area of transformation was dietary. The newcomers would be forced to change the eating habits of a lifetime. This is a discontinuity so great that few people can ever achieve it voluntarily, as evidenced by myriads of diet plans that produce only handfuls of permanently thin people in the West. The newcomers' diets would remind them daily that they were in a new land and living a new way of life. The clean-unclean distinctions in Israel would have forced the newcomers to regard some of their familiar delicacies as abominations—abominations that testified to theological and moral abominations in the world they had left behind. Their former way of life could not be manifested at mealtime. Most of their former foods would have been present in Israel, but not the meat-based specialties. The taste of food is governed by preparation. *Men express their cultures through taste.* Things would never taste the same again. Like the sense of smell, we cannot remember what things taste like until we actually place them in our mouths. New tastes, especially for children, would daily block out old memories.

Celebration and liturgy were also important. Play and formal worship are not full-time endeavors. They are scheduled for certain special

times. They mark a society.²² But in an agricultural society, the law and its sanctions are more readily assimilated through work than through play or liturgy.

The subtle nuances of a culture reflect an identifiable outlook. Work, eating, celebration, and formal worship are the primary activities of life, especially in an economy with a low division of labor. The newcomers would have to learn a new language, learn to enjoy new foods, learn new songs, and learn new confessions and laws. Language and work—word and deed—would have encompassed most of the daily life of the immigrant. It was here that the assimilation process would have been most comprehensive and rapid.

F. Evangelism After the Captivity

The development of a theocratic empire was virtually impossible for Israel under the Mosaic law. The annual festivals would have limited the geographical scope of the empire. *The festivals made impossible the full-time occupation of distant foreign cities.* Only after the return from Babylon, when Israel no longer was an armed holy army, could dispersion of the Israelite population take place. Evangelism by word and deed was to replace evangelism by post-war enslavement.

The fact that attendance at the annual festivals was no longer enforced by excommunication after the return from Babylon is *prima facie* evidence that the required festivals had something to do with Israel as a holy army. Annual attendance was no longer enforced because it was no longer required. This indicates that *the mandatory nature of the festivals was God's deliberate restraint on the creation of an empire.* When that threat disappeared in history, so did the requirement of attendance at each of the festivals. Israel could then evangelize by word and deed. Evangelism was clearly more important than the original Mosaic requirement of annual attendance. *Until Israel sheathed its sword, it could not evangelize the world.* This judicial alteration has been formalized by the New Covenant: "And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt.

22. Modern Western society is so heavily entertainment-oriented and so minimally liturgical that entertainment has virtually replaced liturgy in the lives of millions of people. Not without cause is the television set referred to as the one-eyed god.

26:51–52).

The laws mandating the annual festivals were suspended during the Babylonian captivity and then permanently modified after the partial return of the remnant of Israel to the land. We do not know what the new laws of the festivals were, but we know that the rigorous Mosaic festival laws were no longer enforced. This lack of enforcement made possible evangelism through the Jews' resettlement. *The religious pluralism of the pagan empires made possible Israel's evangelization of gentiles*, for it opened the gates of every city to citizens of every other city. To take advantage of this opportunity, God silently accepted the priesthood's revocation of mandatory attendance at each annual feast. He did not bring negative sanctions against either the priests or the nation for non-attendance at some festivals.

After the return from Babylon, Israel's evangelism—proselytizing—involved the establishment of local synagogues throughout the cities of the successive empires. There was no longer any holy army in Israel; therefore, its troops would no longer march to Jerusalem three times a year. With no army, there was no way for Jews to besiege a city. Therefore, the laws of the siege treaty were silently annulled. Instead, Jews invaded foreign cities through trade, relocation, and synagogue-building. They penetrated enemy strongholds by means of the new pluralism of the empires: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman. *Cities would henceforth be penetrated by walking through open gates*. The saving message of the God of Abraham could be preached openly. With economic footholds inside foreign cities, there was no longer any need to threaten annihilation of a foreign city's army should the city not surrender in advance of the siege by agreeing to pay tribute. Israel no longer had either the military power or the ecclesiastical need to issue such a threat. Evangelism by trade, preaching, and synagogue-building replaced evangelism by siege, enslavement, and war-bride adoption. The New Testament church inherited these post-Babylonian techniques of evangelism. The Mosaic laws authorizing the siege treaty had long since been annulled by the Babylonian captivity and its aftermath. The old laws were not formally annulled. But accepted practices in Jesus' day indicate the extent of the changes.²³

Conclusion

A foreign war was to be a rare occurrence in the life of Mosaic Is-

23. A major one: the absence of family members at the Last Supper.

rael. The costs of such warfare, which included the costs of victory, were high. The benefits, apart from tribute, were low. Warfare could be Israel's means of evangelizing the survivors of a siege, but this would not have included males. It was only partial evangelism. The foreign war was a form of inheritance/disinheritance. The city itself would have to be destroyed unless left intact for other nations to inherit, since the festival laws made occupation by Israel unlikely. The wives and children of the disinherited city would become part of the inheritance of Israel. But this living inheritance had to be capitalized to make it productive: by providing training, food, shelter, and even adoption through marriage. There were high costs for warrior families in the assimilation process. Slavery was not a widespread institution in the ancient Near East, unlike classical Greece and Rome.

The creation of pluralistic pagan empires made possible the peaceful extension of God's kingdom in history. Their pluralism gave equal access to all submissive religions. In these covenantal conflicts among competing religions, biblical religion triumphed. The cacophony of competing religious and philosophical claims, coupled with the breakdown of classical ethics and philosophy, eventually undermined the moral confession of the Roman empire, and in so doing, undermined the civil authority of Rome.²⁴ Christian civilization, with its non-pluralistic confession, replaced Rome's pluralism²⁵ in the West. This new civilization came into existence in the fourth century and lasted for over a thousand years until the Renaissance's revival of classical religion's occultism²⁶ and its art and literature,²⁷ followed by the Enlightenment's revival of religious pluralism.

This revival of paganism's religious pluralism represents a revival of the civil religion of the Near Eastern and European empires: "all nations under god"—the god of the centralized bureaucratic state. Its promised new world order challenges Christ's new world order. It cannot succeed: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom

24. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957). (<http://bit.ly/cnccacc>)

25. Appendix C.

26. Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1964); Stephen McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: LSU Press, 1989).

27. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Penguin, [1860] 1990), Part 3.

shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Dan. 2:44–45).

If a besieged city visibly converted to God through circumcision, would its inhabitants then have been required to march to the festivals? Only if its adult males became citizens of Israel, meaning that they became eligible to join Israel's holy army. They could not become eligible to serve as judges if they did not make these annual marches. If proselytes who lived outside the land were not part of Israel's holy army, then they were not required to attend the annual feasts. This was the case of Jews living outside the land during and after the captivity. This meant that Israel could not create an empire through military action. Cities outside the land that converted to faith in the God of Abraham did not thereby become a part of Israel's army or of Israel's civil structure. They could not subsequently march against other cities and thereby pull national Israel into a conflict far from its original borders. These proselyte cities would pay their tithes to the Levites, but they could not legally extend Israel's authority beyond the boundaries of the land which God had promised Abraham. They could extend God's authority, but not national Israel's. The distance from the official festival city made empire impossible.

FRUIT TREES AS COVENANTAL TESTIMONIES

When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege: Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued (Deut. 20:19–20).

This was a law governing holy warfare. The theocentric issue here is related to the forbidden tree in the garden: boundaries. Boundaries are an aspect of point three of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Trees and the Dominion Covenant

This law applied to the people of Israel when they were operating as an army outside the boundaries of the Promised Land. This creates a problem of interpretation. Was this law bounded by the Mosaic covenant? Yes. Does it still apply today? Not strategically. This makes it a land law.² Armies today are not required by God to maintain a siege until the enemy surrenders. Under the Mosaic covenant, they were. “And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword” (Deut. 20:12–13).³ Also, this law no longer applies tactically. Enemy nations no longer can hide inside walled cities. There

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

2. On land laws, see Appendix J.

3. Chapter 48.

are no more walled cities. Gunpowder removed them centuries ago.

But there is one aspect of this law that does still hold: the role of fruit-bearing trees in the dominion covenant.

There is a hierarchy in the dominion covenant: God > man > nature. In this hierarchy, man serves God, while nature serves man. God is not dependent on either man or nature. Man is dependent on both God and nature. Man reflects God as a unique creature who is made in God's image. He rules over nature because he is different from nature: made in God's image. But he is also a creature. He is part of an interdependent creation. He is required by God to acknowledge his two-way dependence and his two-way responsibility: upward and downward.

This law of warfare reminded man that fruit-bearing trees sustain man's life. For this reason, they must not be used to impose man's death. Man relies on fruit-bearing trees to sustain his life and make his life more pleasant; they, in turn, are heavily dependent on man for their cultivation. They can exist apart from man in some environments, but man's care makes them flourish. There is mutual interdependence between man and fruit-bearing trees.

This law makes it clear that holy warfare is not just a means of inflicting death and destruction. It is a means of extending life. *Holy warfare is not destruction for destruction's sake. It is destruction for God's sake.* There is an element of disinheritance in war, but it is always to be offset by an element of inheritance.

B. Laying Siege

Once begun, the siege of a foreign city was supposed to be completed. "Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued" (v. 20). When a city refused to covenant with God by surrendering to Israel's holy army, it was doomed unless it covenanted with God by surrendering to Israel's holy priesthood. Unless the men surrendered to God through mass circumcision, all of them would be executed after their defense ended (Deut. 20:13).⁴ Once they had been placed under the formal negative sanctions of God, the men of a besieged city were not to be allowed to escape this judgment apart from their complete covenantal surrender. Partial surrender was no longer an option.

4. Chapter 48:C:2.

This meant that the Israelite army had no choice: it had to maintain the siege until the city fell. This placed a great deal of pressure on the army's commander to find techniques to break through the city's defenses. He might be tempted to cut down all of the trees in the region to use as siege implements. They could be used as siege implements in five ways: as battering rams, as siege towers, as scraping implements to undermine the walls from tunnels dug beneath the walls, as tunnel supports, and to build ladders to scale the walls. Military historian Horst de la Croix wrote that "the basic siege methods—battering, sapping, mining, scaling—. . . will remain the same throughout the ages."⁵ Trees could be used as firewood. The longer that the siege went on, the more depleted the countryside would become. Fruit-bearing trees would become more valuable.

The language of the text is clear: the reason why the fruit-bearing trees were protected was that man's life is maintained by these trees. These trees would provide food for Israel's troops. This pointed to the possibility that the siege might last for several seasons. The commander was to acknowledge that he and his men might be there a long time. They were allowed to eat from these trees. A commander who was conducting a winter campaign knew that his army might still be there in spring and summer. *Israel's army was to acknowledge that the extension of God's kingdom sometimes takes longer than covenant-keepers would prefer.* The siege might take years. The fruit trees would provide a blessing in the time of the harvest. It would be short-sighted to cut them down. It would contribute to a short-run mentality: "If we can't starve these people out in one season or less, it will be time to go home." God was telling the army that they had to stay there and wait until that city surrendered.

The fruit trees would sometimes have been visible from the walls of the city. The defenders watching on the walls could report back to their officers that the Israelites still had not cut down the fruit trees. This information would have undermined confidence in the leaders of the city. The Israelites were not intending to go home soon. They were prepared to sit and wait for as long as it took to defeat the city. This meant that the Israelites were determined to win. They were willing to invest whatever amount of time it would take to starve out the city. Meanwhile, they would feast on the fruit of the field.

5. Horst de la Croix, *Military Considerations in City Planning: Fortifications* (New York: George Braziller, 1972), p. 18.

C. The Imagery of the Siege

The trees were outside the boundaries of the city's wall. This wall kept the residents of the city from feasting on the trees that provided life. In relation to the trees, the city's wall was a defensive boundary for the Israelite army. Israel used swords to keep the defiant residents of the city away from the fruit trees that had once sustained them and delighted them. Because the city had not surrendered to Israel when the peace treaty was offered, the men of that city would never again taste the fruit of those trees. The symbolism is obvious: this was analogous to the fiery sword that kept men away from the tree of life in the garden.

Yet the tree of life will again grow in the midst of a garden: the city-garden of the new heaven and new earth. "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:3). The barrier between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers will become absolute. "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Luke 16:26). The question facing covenant-breaking man is this: Can he somehow cross the barrier to gain access to the tree of life? That was the question facing the men of the besieged city. The answer was *yes*, but only through covenantal conformity to God through circumcision. They could bring the city under God's protection. They could become Israelites: adopted sons. There was no other way that they would ever again feast on the fruit of the trees that lay outside the walls if Israel obeyed God's laws of warfare.

The imagery here was not of a circumscribed garden separated from the world by a wall. On the contrary, the imagery was a walled enclosure in which death was sure, surrounded by a world in which fruit was sweet. The kingdom of God lay outside the walls of the city; it was defended by the army of God. The kingdom of covenant-breaking man was surrounded. It was under siege. It was strictly defensive. Life lay beyond the walls of the city. The men enclosed by those walls could not gain access to life. The walls that temporarily sustained them from death by the sword also kept them away from the trees of life. Their enemies would feast on the fruit while they, determined not to surrender on terms acceptable to God, would not again taste such fruit.

Their enemies would inherit.

D. Hope in the Future

Trees that were visible from the walls testified to those inside the walls that there was hope available, but not on their covenantal terms. There was one way of surrender. The men could circumcise themselves and their sons. They would then throw open the gates of the city to the holy army. They would plead immunity through self-inflicted covenantal wounds. There was risk, of course. The Shechemites had done this, and they had been slaughtered by two sons of Israel (Gen. 34:25). But this had been a great evil for which Jacob was greatly upset. “And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house” (v. 30).

Could those people inside the boundary provided by the wall trust the Israelites not to take advantage of them? Would Israel obey God’s law? There was a visible test of Israel’s commitment to God’s law: fruit trees. *If the fruit trees were still standing, then Israel was still honoring God’s law.* This meant two things: (1) the army of God was dug in for the long haul; (2) there was still hope for the city. Mass circumcision could still gain mercy from the invaders. But the men of the city would have to undergo pain. They would also have to surrender: open gates. They could no longer safely put their trust in walls and gates.

On the other hand, if the fruit trees had been cut down, there was hope of survival in terms of the city’s old covenant. This Israelite army was visibly a short-term army. It had not honored God’s law. It was willing to consume the trees that would feed it in due season. Here was a reason for those inside the walls to continue their resistance. Why surrender to an army that was there only for the short haul? Resistance offered hope. Surrendering to such an army would be foolish. Such an army was ruthless with life-giving trees; it would probably be ruthless with defenders. Every man inside the city would die. Better to resist to the last man. Better to threaten unacceptable losses for an army that was not there for the long haul, one that was not committed to victory in terms of God’s law.

Which would it be: surrender to God or continued resistance? Which was the wiser course of action? Circumcision might bring per-

manent peace or it might bring a slaughter. Resistance might bring a military slaughter or it might bring terms of surrender for tribute's sake, the way that some of the Canaanites survived Israel's program of genocide (Josh. 16:10; 17:13). Fruit-bearing trees provided evidence. If they were still standing, this army was serious about God's law. If they had been cut down, this army was not serious about obeying God. It would then be too risky to surrender by mass circumcision. It might be safer to resist longer, hoping for terms of peace based on tribute.

E. Inheritance and Foreign Policy

By allowing the fruit-bearing trees to survive, the army was maintaining the value of the land. For land located close to Israel's borders, this decision would have capitalized Israel's inheritance. It left intact an agricultural inheritance. But for land located far from Israel, the income stream provided by the trees could not be capitalized by Israel. The trees were too far from Jerusalem. The journey to the festivals would be too long. The army dared not annex the city.

The adult male residents of the besieged city had to be executed, apart from conversion through circumcision. The women and children had to be brought back to Israel. Who would then take care of the trees? After all, the trees were wealth. If left undefended, such wealth would serve as a beacon: "Come and get it!" A neighboring nation would not leave such wealth to rot. It would invade the empty region. The trees would provide capital for the invaders. This meant that another nation with other gods would inherit what Israel had temporarily conquered. This would bring the invading nation closer to Israel's borders. Therefore, *a major foreign policy consideration in deciding whether to place a city under siege was who its neighbors were.* If the city bordered a strong nation that could pose a threat to Israel, it would be unwise for Israel to lay siege to it. Why waste Israel's resources in a military operation that might expose the nation to greater danger later on? A short-term military success might be followed by a long-term military disaster. Why strengthen your enemies? Solution: call off the siege before beginning it.

Such a foreign policy would have reduced the risks to short-term raiders who could raid the fringes of Israel's borders without the threat of a siege of their cities, but it would also have reduced the likelihood of full-scale invasion. Weaker cities would have bordered Israel. They might constitute an annoyance to those tribes whose land was on the

borders, but these invaders would not have constituted a major threat to the nation.

The preservation of the besieged city's fruit-bearing trees forced foreign policy considerations on Israel. It forced Israel's leaders to count the long-term costs of war. The farther away the city, the less economic incentive there was to conquer it. The more powerful the city's neighbors, the less economic incentive for Israel to lay siege to it. Only if the city submitted to God through circumcision would beginning a siege make sense, and then only in retrospect. This was a high-risk military decision: once the siege began, the decision-making authority to determine who would inherit the fruit trees would move from Israel to the besieged city. Even if Israel won, knocked down the walls, and burned the city, those trees would still be standing: a standing testimony to the fruitfulness of a now-empty land. The land would not stay empty for long.

F. Ecology and Inheritance

This law had ecological implications. The presence of fruit-bearing trees had implications for birds and other fruit-eating beasts of the field. The ecology of the land was to be honored by the invading Israelite army; they were not to become destroyers.

As far as the adult male residents of the besieged city were concerned, the ecological care shown by the Israelites constituted a guaranteed death sentence on the city. The Israelites' care for God's land meant annihilation for the men of the city. The Israelites were caring for God's land, which meant that they would obey God's law. God's law told them not to pull back from the siege: "Thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued" (v. 20b). By extending life to the fruit-bearing trees, Israel's army was extending a death sentence on the city's adult males.

The general ecological principle announced by this text, namely, that "the tree of the field is man's life," becomes narrowly applied in the context of a siege. The tree of the field is not covenant-breaking man's life. Covenant-breaking man is now locked inside the walls of his city. He may be able to see life from the walls of the city, but he cannot gain access to it. The trees of the field would become life for the covenant-keeping army that was laying siege. The trees would sustain life for the city's executioners. The life-sustaining properties of the fruit would increase the likelihood of the death of the trees' former

owners. That which had sustained life would now indirectly threaten life. This was a matter of inheritance. *The Israelite army had inherited the means of life.* The forthcoming disinheritance of the men inside the city's walls would now be made even more likely.

A preservationist ecology in the context of God's covenant lawsuit against evil offers life to covenant-keepers and death to covenant-breakers. The benefits of a preservationist ecology must therefore be discussed within the covenantal framework of history. This raises the issue of eschatology. If history brings progressive defeat to covenant-keepers and victory to covenant-breakers, then a preservationist ecology leaves God's enemies as the inheritors. By sustaining the productivity of the earth, the covenant-keeper provides an inheritance to future generations. But if these future generations maintain the ethics of the pre-Flood world or pre-conquest Canaan, then God, through ecological preservation and capitalization by covenant-keepers, will someday offer to His enemies "houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full" (Deut. 6:11). The displacement of covenant-keepers can happen, of course, but only as God's covenantal curse on His people: "Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them" (Deut. 28:39). But is such a curse permanent in history? Does it characterize covenantal inheritance and disinheritance in history? No.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and **he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.** And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. **And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine en-**

emies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And **thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD**, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. **And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand**, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul (Deut. 30:1–10).⁶

G. New Testament Applications

Unlike all other Mosaic laws, this law was applicable *only* outside the boundaries of the land. Inside, there could be no mercy shown. This law was not a cross-boundary law;⁷ it was a law governing Israel's relations with gentiles in their land. The general principle of this law holds true in every era: "The tree of the field is man's life." Because the general principle is true, this law continues to be in force. What is no longer in force, however, is siege warfare. New technologies have replaced it. Men no longer lay siege to walled cities. The West's importation of Chinese gunpowder ended that ancient military strategy in the fifteenth century: artillery ended the military benefits of city walls. Walled communities have become popular inside crime-ridden cities, but no organized enemy lays continuous siege to them. Also, military units may build defensive barriers, but these units are not cities.

This law is not a law governing the use of explosives. Fruit trees may be destroyed by an artillery barrage or a bombing raid, but this is not the same as using the trees as weapons of war. Also, this is not a law against using chemical defoliants that open up terrain so that enemies cannot hide. The context of the Mosaic law of the siege was an immobile city facing a dug-in army.

In the medieval era, this law would have applied to a siege. There were walled cities and castles. Armies did come and lay siege to them. They did cut down trees to use as weapons of war. These invading armies should have honored the Mosaic law of the fruit trees.

6. If taken literally, this implies that the Islam's conquest of North Africa in the seventh century will not be maintained indefinitely. I take it literally.

7. On cross-boundary laws, see Appendix J.

Conclusion

The invading Israelite army was to honor God's law of ecology. This was not for the benefit of the covenant-breakers who were trapped inside their own defensive walls, nor was it for their heirs, who would be carried back to Israel. This was for the benefit of the army itself during the siege and also for those foreign invaders who would occupy the land after the Israelites returned home. These inheritors would be one of three groups, if the Israelite army obeyed God's law: (1) the Israelites themselves, but only if the city was close to Israel's border; (2) the city's existing inhabitants, but only if they submitted to circumcision, becoming Israelites through adoption; (3) the invading army that would march into the unoccupied land after Israel's army had departed. Which outcome was best for Israel? The covenantal surrender of the city was best. The residents would henceforth pay a tithe to the Levites. Better that men worship God than that they die in their sins. Better that they surrender unconditionally to God while His siege is still in progress than that they die in the post-siege mass execution. God told Ezekiel: "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" (Ezek. 18:21–23).

This Mosaic law of the siege is still in force. The invading army is not to cut down productive trees or, by extension, burn the crops. Warriors are supposed to battle warriors. The idea that warriors are deliberately to wage war on undefended civilians as a way to weaken the opposing army is a perverse strategy. It is also a basic strategy of modern warfare, beginning with the American Civil War: General Sherman's march to the sea in 1864–65 and General Sheridan's burning of crops in the Shenandoah Valley. These were evil precedents that led to the horrors of World War II's bombing of civilian populations.

DOUBLE PORTION, DOUBLE BURDEN

If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his (Deut. 21:15–17).

The theocentric focus of this law is inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant. It also has to do with boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Legitimate Disinheritance: Full or Partial

How much property should specific heirs inherit? What can one heir lawfully lay claim to? What can he exclude from the other heir's possession? The judicial issue here is boundaries. The eldest son inherited a double portion. Why? If we can discover the underlying moral principle here, we can better understand inheritance.

The degree of service owed by someone to another person or group is always proportional to the amount of capital provided for him by the person or group to whom the service is owed. Jesus warned: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia, [1994] 2012).

much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).²

1. Inheritance and Responsibility

The fact that more was given to the firstborn son meant that more would be required from him. Capital was promised to him by his father; thus, I conclude that he would owe his father and mother services proportional to the promised inheritance. No biblical text says this specifically, but it can be inferred from the principle of mutual obligation.

How did this inheritance system work? Rushdoony described it: "The general rule of inheritance was limited primogeniture, i.e., the oldest son, who had the duty of providing for the entire family in case of need, or of governing the clan, receiving a double portion. If there were two sons, the estate was divided into three portions, the younger son receiving one-third."³

The immediate context of this law was the law governing war brides, although the principle of inheritance that is stated here applied beyond the war bride. It applied to Israel as a society that allowed polygamy. It was a land law.⁴

An Israelite warrior was allowed to bring home a woman from a defeated foreign city. In fact, these women had to be brought home. They would not be able to defend themselves if they stayed behind. The question was: Would they become permanent slaves or wives? That is, would they be adopted through marriage? If the captive woman consented to marry an Israelite by paring her fingernails, shaving her head, and mourning for her parents for a month (Deut. 21:12–13), it was legal for him to marry her.⁵ Immediately following these laws is the law of the double portion.

The eldest son had to receive the double portion under Mosaic law. This implied that he was to bear a double portion of responsibility in caring for his aged parents. But a father could lawfully disinherit a rebellious son if he had the backing of a covenantal authority. This disinheritance could be accomplished through the civil imposition of physical death, as the very next section of Deuteronomy indicates

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 180.

4. On land laws, see Appendix J.

5. Chapter 48:C.

(21:18–23).⁶ It could also be accomplished through the ecclesiastical imposition of covenantal death. Excommunication under the Mosaic law removed a man's eligibility to serve in God's holy army. This, in turn, removed his citizenship and his inheritance in the land. Strangers could not inherit rural land, and an excommunicated man was a stranger, i.e., cut off from God's people.

2. Disinherited Firstborn Sons

The eldest son was to inherit a double portion. Nevertheless, the history of the patriarchs reveals something very different in practice: either full disinheritance or a single-portion inheritance of the first-born son. This began with Adam, who rebelled against God, his father. Adam covenanted with Satan through the serpent by sharing a forbidden covenantal meal with his wife. He violated the boundary of death that God had placed around the forbidden tree. This covenantal act cost him his life. Through grace, however, God granted Adam and Eve time on earth to work out the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).⁷

Adam had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain was the firstborn (Gen. 4:1). He was evil. His sacrifice was not acceptable to God (v. 5). He then slew his younger brother. Through grace, God extended Cain's life (v. 15), but He removed Cain from the covenant line. A third son, Seth, youngest of all, replaced Cain as the heir through which the promised seed (Gen. 3:15) would come (Luke 3:38).

Noah had three sons. The eldest was Shem (Gen. 6:10). Shem's line was the covenant line. This indicates that he had been a righteous man who did not warrant disinheritance. But Shem's first two sons did not extend the covenant line; Arphaxad, the third son, did (Gen. 10:24).

Abraham had two sons. The elder, Ishmael, was disinherited by Abraham because he mocked Isaac (Gen. 21:9), who was the true heir of God's promise (Gen. 17:16). Isaac was the second-born son.

Isaac had two sons. The elder, Esau, sold his inheritance to his brother, Jacob, for a mess of pottage (Gen. 25:33).⁸ God had already promised Rebekah that the heirs of the elder son would serve the heirs of the younger (v. 23). That is, the covenant line would be through Jacob, not Esau.⁹ Jacob gained his deserved inheritance-blessing from

6. Chapter 51.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 2, 3.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 26.

9. This prophecy extended down to the days of Christ. Herod was an Edomite, an

Isaac (Gen. 27:28–29). Isaac later blessed Esau through a prophesy of Esau's greatness, but he had nothing left of substance to give Esau (vv. 37, 39). He had given Jacob the full inheritance, leaving nothing for Esau. By giving Jacob the full inheritance, believing that Jacob was Esau, Isaac had necessarily disinherited Esau, thinking that he was disinheriting Jacob. Esau was the ethically rebellious son. He had married Canaanite wives, against his parents' wishes (Gen. 26:34–35). After he lost his blessing, his father told him not to marry other Canaanite wives (28:9). His obedience was partial: he married a daughter of Ishmael (28:9), the disinherited son of Abraham. Esau's pattern of rebellion was continual in the key area of covenantal inheritance: marriage. Isaac had sought to escape his responsibility to disinherit his rebellious son by disinheriting Jacob instead. This tactic backfired on Isaac. It led to Esau's complete disinheritance.

The inheritance law helps us to answer the ethical and judicial question: Was it wrong for Rebekah and Jacob to deceive Isaac? The answer is *no*, it was not wrong. Isaac's physical blindness reflected his moral judgment. Jacob and Rebekah took advantage of his physical weakness in order to overcome his moral weakness. They were facing a morally blind old man who would not acknowledge the legitimacy of God's prophecy to Rebekah concerning the two sons and their respective covenant lines, nor would he honor Esau's sale of his birthright to Jacob. Isaac was willing to defy God for the sake of his delight in the taste of venison stew (Gen. 27:3–4). In this, Isaac was as short-sighted as Esau had been when he sold his birthright for a pot of stew. Rebekah was morally and legally justified in undermining her husband's evil plan to disinherit Jacob, and, through this act of rebellion, disinherit God's promised covenant seed.¹⁰ God had specified to her which son should inherit. Isaac was in rebellion.

Jacob's first four sons were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. All were born of Leah, the unloved wife (Gen. 29:32–35). One aspect of the double portion was rulership. Jacob gave permanent civil rulership to Judah (Gen. 49:10). He had legitimate covenantal reasons for skipping Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Reuben had defiled his father's bed by having sex with Jacob's concubine, Billah (Gen. 35:22). Simeon and Levi had slain the Shechemites after the Shechemites had submitted to

heir of Esau: Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV:I:3. He sought to destroy the promised seed. He failed. Joseph and Mary had removed themselves and their son from Herod's jurisdiction (Matt. 2:13–15). They returned when Herod had died (v. 19).

10. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 27.

circumcision (Gen. 34:25). This ruthless act of revenge had brought reproach on their father (v. 30). These sons inherited single portions. This left Judah as the primary heir, which involved exercising rulership. The promised seed's covenant line would come through Judah (Luke 3:33).¹¹

The case of Judah's sons is the most convoluted of all. His first son, Er, was wicked. God killed him before he conceived a son of his own through Tamar (Gen. 38:7). That is, God cut off Er's covenant line. To restore it biblically, Onan his brother had to marry her.¹² But Onan was also wicked; he married her, but then refused to bear a child with her in his brother's name (v. 9). God killed him, too. The third son was too young to marry. It is clear that Tamar was the victim of her two husbands' evil ways. She was being denied legitimate seed. Tamar then tricked Judah into fathering twin sons with her after the death of Judah's wife. Her son Zarah was the second-born, yet he had very nearly become the firstborn (vv. 28–30). In this case, the promised seed came through the firstborn son, Pharez (Luke 3:33). Yet Pharez was not legally the firstborn son. Shelah, the third son of Judah's first wife, should have been the heir through Judah. But the evil of his two older brothers, coupled with his young age, as well as the evil of his father in lying with Tamar before marriage, thinking she was a prostitute, transferred the covenant line to the surviving second-born son, Pharez. This was done by God for Tamar's sake, who had twice been cheated by evil husbands. Through her the promised seed would come.

11. It is not clear from the text that Judah received a double portion. It is also not clear from the allocation of land listed in the Book of Joshua. Rushdoony argued that Jacob awarded a double portion to Joseph, for he gave a blessing to Joseph's two sons. The reason for this, he said, is that Jacob was under Joseph's care in Egypt. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 180. The problem with this argument is that Joshua did not recognize this claim to a double portion in allocating land in Canaan. When the two tribes came to him claiming a right to the double portion—a right based on their numerical strength, not a promised double portion—Joshua told them that they would have to prove their claim on the battlefield by defeating Canaanites who were armed with iron chariots (Josh. 17:13–18). That is, they would have to disinherit the Canaanites, not their brethren, to gain their double portion. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 14:C.

12. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut. 25:5–6). See Chapter 63.

In the case of Joseph, the firstborn son of Jacob's beloved wife, Jacob transferred Joseph's single-unit inheritance to Joseph's two sons. Jacob did this prior to his final accounting with his other sons. Manasseh was the firstborn, but Jacob gave the blessing to Ephraim. Joseph tried to correct this, but without success. "And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations" (Gen. 48:19). Jacob offered no reason for this. The second-born son would receive the double portion of Jacob's blessing: authority and population. But this did not necessarily imply that Ephraim would receive a double portion of Joseph's inheritance. In the land distribution under Joshua, the two sons received separate portions based on their military prowess. There is no indication in the text that Ephraim's inheritance was double the size of Manasseh's.

Mosaic law was not formally in force prior to Moses. The patriarchs did not go to priests and civil rulers to legitimize their decisions regarding their sons' inheritance. They made these decisions on their own authority as household priests and rulers. After Moses, the law mandated a system of confirmation for the father's disinheritance of a particular son, which the next section of Deuteronomy reveals. The parents had to bring their rebellious son before the civil magistrate.

The New Testament provides a reason for the persistence of this pattern of inheritance among the patriarchs. Paul referred to Jesus as the last Adam. "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45). The first Adam had forfeited his lawful claim on the inheritance from his father, God. Adam was disinherited. But God then showed grace to Adam. On what legal basis? Because of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. On this basis, God gives common grace to all mankind and special grace to His chosen people: a common salvation (healing) and a special salvation. "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).¹³ Adam and his heirs have received the gift of life on the basis of the work of the second Adam. Yet even here, the true pattern exists: the firstborn son inherits. Jesus

13. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6; Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gndcog>)

Christ is the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity. He is the only begotten son of God. “But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61–62).

B. Sons and Daughters

Mosaic covenant fathers had the responsibility of assessing the moral character of their sons. Their allocation of the inheritance had to conform to the law of the double portion. They could not, on their own authority, depart from this law. But the law gave no autonomous claim to rebellious sons. God’s law does not subsidize evil. Either of the other two covenantal authorities could confirm a father’s decision to disinherit a rebellious son. The civil government could enforce such a claim through execution of other, lesser, penalties for lesser infractions; the ecclesiastical government could enforce it through excommunication.

1. Adoption

This law said nothing about daughters. It assumed that daughters would not inherit if a son was still alive at their father’s death. Why? To find the answer, we must understand the principle of economic support. Daughters married into another family. Their office as helpers of their husbands meant that their efforts would go to provide support for their husbands’ parents. Wives were adopted into their husbands’ families.

A father provided a dowry for his daughter in marriage. If he failed to do this, she was a concubine, not a free wife. But a son-in-law provided a bride price to the family of the bride. This kept the dowry from depleting the inheritance of her brothers. This payment exempted the bride from any obligation to support her aged parents. This obligation was her brothers’ obligation. By forfeiting any claim on an inheritance, the daughter escaped any future economic burden for supporting her parents.¹⁴ There was a balance to the Mosaic inheritance system.

The traditional description of wives as “barefoot and pregnant”

14. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 32:B:1.

implicitly justifies a system of inheritance that passes all of the parents' assets to sons and their wives. Daughters for millennia did not receive dowries in the form of formal education. But on the day that a family hired a tutor to teach a daughter to read, that family began to alter the economics of inheritance. As soon as the ability to read meant access to income-producing occupations, an investment in a girl's education began to undermine the traditional system of inheritance. Those traditionalists who long ago opposed formal education for daughters may have sensed the revolutionary social and economic implications of what it meant to have literate women in a society. But that resistance is long gone. From the Reformation until the late nineteenth century, the ability to read in the West meant the ability to read the Bible. The Protestant religion's individualism and its biblicism, coupled with the mass production of printed materials, made literacy cost-effective for the masses. This change in the investment-return ratio for basic education inevitably undermined the traditional system of sons-only inheritance. The daughters received a dowry through education. They were thereby brought under the biblical obligations for supplying a proportional share of parental support if their husbands failed to supply a bride price comparable to the cost of their wives' educations.

2. Modern Times

Prior to the nineteenth century, women had few options to work for money outside the home. Labor was more clearly allocated in terms of physical strength, with the resulting division of labor within the household and within society. This has changed dramatically with the extension of the division of labor and the substitution of mechanical and especially electrical power for human and animal power.¹⁵ When a woman can flip a switch as easily as a man can, the ability to use electrical tools to perform specialized labor then becomes more a matter of skill and temperament than physical strength. Also, there is not much evidence, if any, that indicates that women as a class cannot perform such highly skilled tasks as eye surgery as readily as men can.

Women have entered the work force by the hundreds of millions in the West since World War II. This has been a matter of social convention. This social transformation has been going at least on since the

15. To this should be added the advent of popular contraception techniques. With fewer children, women have reduced their household management burdens. While they fill up their days with activities, no doubt, they bear fewer children because they believe they could not bear the added household burdens.

early nineteenth century, when unmarried women were brought into the textile industry as seamstresses. They had been involved in this industry as wool spinners from ancient times. The division of labor provided by mechanized sewing equipment moved the location of their work. This was part of a social revolution, no doubt, but it was not a revolution in basic skills. It was a revolution in capital formation.

As women have become a source of family monetary income, their ability to support aged parents financially has raised the question of inheritance. Should all of their income go into their husband's family? This raises the question of education. Who paid for their educations? Mass education has enabled women to enter occupations that had been closed to them. More to the point, mass education has created new occupations that did not exist a century ago. If parents pay for a daughter's education, they provide a dowry. If the son-in-law provides no bride price comparable in value to this investment in the bride's education, compounded at a market rate of interest as if it had been a student loan, then her parents have a moral claim on a portion of her wealth and time. To argue otherwise is to argue for the disinheritance of her brothers. If she gets equal funding in her education, but they are alone legally and morally responsible for the support of their aged parents, then the biblical principle of proportional responsibility is violated. Brothers have been decapitalized by sisters.

The tax authorities recognize this relationship between capital invested and payments owed. The state pays for the education of daughters. It therefore taxes daughters when they enter the work force. The state collects taxes to support existing retirees. The system of proportional responsibility is honored to some degree by this system. But, as taxes for retirement systems and state health care rise, the wives become, in effect, the supporters of the aged parents—and not so aged parents—of other families. The share of national income going to pay taxes today is close to the share of income earned by women in the work force. To fund the faceless aged, husbands have sent their wives out to work. This is not the way that husbands and wives think of this financial arrangement, but the numbers reveal that this is essentially the nature of the bargain. The state has paid for the education of women—the wife's dowry—so it collects money from women for the support of the aged. We can call this process the statist bureaucratization of the dowry.

C. New Testament Applications

Is the allocation of a man's inheritance still governed by Deuteronomy 21:15–17? To answer this question, we consider the fact that there have been judicial alterations. First and foremost, there is no longer polygamy under the New Covenant.¹⁶ The church has rejected the idea that polygamy is a valid form of marriage except under highly unusual circumstances.¹⁷ Second, the Mosaic seed laws and land laws have been annulled by the coming of Jesus Christ. Land no longer has a covenantal-prophetic role to play in the history of salvation. Third, the state no longer enforces the laws against rebellious children. Whether it should or not is an issue I deal with in the next chapter. But the fact that the mandated civil sanction of execution no longer threatens a rebellious son has had effects on the administration of this law. Fourth, as we have seen, daughters now inherit.

Daughters have a new legal status under the New Covenant. Females are baptized in the church. The formal mark of covenant blessings and covenant cursings is placed on both sexes. This means that, covenantally speaking, the benefits of inheritance and the threat of disinheritance are presented formally to both sexes. Covenant sanctions ultimately are sanctions of inheritance and disinheritance: in eternity, but also in history.

Then what remains of Deuteronomy's inheritance law? Only the principle of proportionality. Of those assets bequeathed to the children, there should be a double portion for the heir who accepts primary responsibility for the care of the aged parents. If all of them accept equal responsibility, then all should inherit equal portions. Similarly, the son or daughter who abandons every aspect of this family obligation thereby abandons any moral claim on a share of the inheritance. In a biblical commonwealth, this would also mean abandoning a legal claim.

Parents need to make this principle clear to their children. Before the parents are infirm, they should know which children have agreed to accept which burden. This is analogous to an insurance policy. The

16. By extending the right of unilateral divorce to wives (Mark 10:2–12), Jesus annulled the right of polygamy to husbands. The negative sanction—no right of remarriage—must apply equally to men and women. North, *Hierarchy and Dominion*, Appendix A.

17. When a man is converted to Christ in a polygamous culture, if he renounces his marriages to all but the first wife, these abandoned wives would become pariahs in the society. They would have nowhere to go. I know of no denomination or missionary group which requires that a new convert do this to his wives.

death benefits paid to the survivors are proportional to the premiums paid. The common Western practice of parents who refuse to talk about the size of the inheritance, the details of the will and the obligations of the children is biblically perverse. God has set forth this rule of inheritance: *rewards are determined by performance*. This rule applies to each man's eternal inheritance, too. "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (I Cor. 3:12–14).¹⁸ "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7–8).¹⁹

D. Disinheritance by the State

In my discussion of the fifth commandment, "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Ex. 20:12a), I pointed out that the modern messianic state has substituted its claims on men's inheritance for the claims of the true sons. The state has become a pseudo-family, educating children according to its standards and presuppositions, funding health care, paying for men's retirement, and so forth. To do this, the state must decapitalize the family through taxation. The state, unlike a biblically defined family, does not create wealth. It consumes wealth as it redistributes it from one group to another.²⁰

The state is an interloper in the lawful system of inheritance. It had presented a false claim, and beginning early in the twentieth century, men have believed this claim. Through graduated taxation schemes (called "progressive"), the state places an ever-greater economic burden on the more productive members of society. The principle of the tithe is denied. The principle of *theft by majority vote* is substituted. The state demands the double portion or more, in the name of its compulsory programs of healing.

This process of disinheritance rests on the covenantal principle

18. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

19. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

20. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 25.

that the state is the true son. This disinheritance honors fathers and mothers in the name of the state. It releases children from the burdens of supporting aged and sick parents. But, having been persuaded of the legitimacy of this new hierarchy of responsibility, voters cannot morally resist the claim of inheritance. Who is the son who deserves the double portion? The one who provides the double portion of support for the aged parents. This means the state. The greater the percentage of support provided by the state, the greater the proportion of the nation's inheritance that is demanded by the state. Why should men expect anything different? The principle of the double portion sets forth the relationship between support and inheritance.

For a son to argue that he is completely responsible for his aged parents is to assert a legal and moral claim on the parents' inheritance. The younger brothers who accept the oldest brother's offer have thereby acquiesced to the implication: a forfeited inheritance. Voters do not recognize the cause-and-effect relationship between the state's offer of support for the aged. They do not recognize the implicit legal claim which the state is making: reducing the ability of economically successful men to pass on wealth to their heirs. As voters transfer more and more responsibility to the state for the care of the aged, the state steadily becomes the substitute heir.

Conclusion

The Mosaic law of inheritance specified that the allocation of the inheritance was by legal right, not by parental discretion. The firstborn son inherited the double portion. This did not mean that a rebellious firstborn son would inherit a double portion or any portion at all. Both the church and the state had the authority to alter an inheritance through covenantal sanctions: excommunication and execution, respectively. This law restricted the right of a father, on his own authority, to alter the inheritance to his sons.

The biblical principle of proportional rewards and the biblical principle of proportional obligations were combined in this law. There were reciprocal obligations between fathers and sons. The promise of a double portion of the inheritance imposed the obligation of a double burden of responsibility to care for aged parents.

The general principle that the firstborn son should inherit a double portion was honored in the breach from Adam to Jacob's twelve sons. Firstborn sons did not inherit in many instances. This in-

dicates that there was covenantal rebellion among the oldest sons, generation after generation. This pattern of the rebellious older son who had to be disinherited was continual in Old Covenant history. It culminated with the Jews of Jesus' day, who resented the heart-felt welcome and celebration given by the Father for the rebellious but repentant younger brother (Luke 15:29–30). The younger brother in the parable represented the gentiles.²¹ The result of this hard-hearted rebellion was the disinheritance of the eldest son. As God's covenant-keeping firstborn son, Jesus prophetically announced the coming disinheritance of the covenant-breaking firstborn son, Old Covenant Israel: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The gentiles would soon inherit the kingdom. The church as the gathering of the saints would soon replace Old Covenant Israel as the true son of the covenant.

In our day, the state has begun to replace the family as the provider of welfare, from womb to tomb. The state asserts its right to educate the children according to its covenant-breaking religious presuppositions. It has gained this authority by offering parents free education, i.e., taxpayer-funded education, for their children. The state offers food for the poor, medical care for the young and the aged, and pensions for all. To fund this comprehensive messianic program of social healing, the state has taxed its subjects vastly beyond the limits of the tithe (I Sam. 8:15, 17).²² Men pay the state a quadruple tithe or more, while Christians pay the church far less than a tithe.

One result of the rise of messianic politics has been the disinheritance of covenant-keeping children, as the state has de-capitalized the covenantal family. Another result since the 1940s has been the wife who works outside the home: forced into the labor market in order to pay these taxes. Without the taxes provided by these working wives, state-run pension systems would already have collapsed in bankruptcy. These retirement programs will be revised by the politicians, but then they will collapse later, when the economy itself breaks down, or when working wives retire and demand to collect their pensions. These working women have borne few children—below the demographic replacement rate of 2.1 children per family—so a shrinking work force

21. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 38.

22. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary of the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

will be called upon to support these long-lived pensioners.²³ The overburdened taxpaying heirs will eventually rebel politically. This system of messianic politics has led to the emasculation of the church, which has turned into a beggar.²⁴

23. Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America—and the World* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

24. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

51

EXECUTING A REBELLIOUS ADULT SON

If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear (Deut. 21:18–21).

The theocentric basis of this law is God's threat of execution against Adam for rebelling against Him. The passage has to do with sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ But all Mosaic capital sanctions had to do with putting evil out of the land: exclusion.² This law also relates to inheritance: exclusion. In these two ways, this law is an aspect of point three.³

A. Adam's Rebellion

Adam was under God's authority because God was his Creator, his Father. Adam was an adult. He was living on his Father's property. The mark of his Father's ownership of both Adam and the world in which Adam dwelled was the forbidden tree. God declared this tree off-limits for Adam. It was not Adam's property, even though Adam was God's heir.

Adam knew that this world belongs to God. As a resident of this

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7; 21:21; 22:21; 22:24.

3. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 3.

world, Adam was required to acknowledge God's total ownership and universal authority, but Adam rebelled against this arrangement. He would not acknowledge God's sovereign ownership.

Consider the way in which his rebellion took place. He rebelled by eating the forbidden fruit. Consumption in this case was a sin for Adam. The modern free market doctrine known as *consumers' sovereignty*, first articulated in the mid-1930s by W. H. Hutt,⁴ in this instance applied to God, not Adam. God, as the tree's owner, was a consumer: He had separated the tree and its output for Himself. This form of consumer demand is sometimes called *reservation demand*: demand by the present owner.⁵ Whatever income the tree might produce in the future belonged exclusively to God. God was absolutely sovereign over this tree. He was absolutely sovereign over all of the trees, of course, but by placing a verbal "no trespassing" sign around one representative tree, God announced His absolute ownership of the earth and its fruits. By authorizing Adam to eat from all other trees, herbs, and animals (Gen. 2:29–30), He announced His sovereign ownership: His right to share His property with others. God's right to include Adam as a minority shareholder in the creation was publicly revealed by His exclusion of Adam from access to the tree. Adam did not accept his position as a minority shareholder. He wanted exclusive control.⁶

The tree was forbidden to Adam; so, eating from it was Adam's way of expressing his rejection of God's self-asserted authority over Adam and the creation. God tried Adam in a court of civil law, convicted him, and pronounced the death sentence. Nevertheless, God then showed mercy to him by allowing him time to repent, time to bear sons of his own, and time to train them. *Time had not yet run out for Adam*. But this was all a matter of grace: gifts of God that Adam did not deserve. As the injured party, God had the right to extend mercy to Adam: the biblical judicial principle of victim's rights.⁷

4. W. H. Hutt, "The Nature of Aggressive Selling" (1935), in *Individual Freedom: Selected Works of William H. Hutt*, eds. Svetozar Pejovich and David Klingaman (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1975), p. 185.

5. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), pp. 247–48, 253.

6. He could not gain majority control. Man serves one of two masters, God or Mammon, i.e., God or Satan. Adam elected as his representative the representative of Satan, i.e., the serpent. Even when covenant-breaking man believes that he is the President of the corporation, he is in fact operating under a would-be chairman of the board: Satan.

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1990] 2012), Appendix M; cf. North, *Victim's*

B. A Matter of Disinheritance

Deuteronomy 21:18–21 reveals many of the same characteristics as the account of Adam’s rebellion. There is a hierarchy of parental authority, and a son breaks it. His ethical rebellion is visible in his gluttony: *rebellion through undisciplined eating*. Adam ate without self-discipline. God tolerated Adam’s rebellion for a while; so do the parents in this passage. Judgment finally came on Adam: he died, just as God had promised. So does this rebellious son. Most important for a clear understanding of this passage, Adam was an adult. So is the son in this passage.

This law was not a seed law, relating to the preservation of the tribal system, nor was it a land law. It has to do with universal principles of civil justice and crime prevention. Yet some aspects of it were based on its land law status.⁸

This law was a law of disinheritance. Because a father in Mosaic Israel could not legally disinherit a son on his own authority as the head of the household (Deut. 21:15–17), the family had no autonomous means of disinheritance.⁹ This was because of the jubilee land law regarding inheritance. One or both of the other two covenantal institutions had to validate the decision of a parent or parents to disinherit a son: church or state. There had to be a joint institutional declaration against him. No single person or institution possessed the exclusive voice of authority in God’s name. There was a balance of authority in Mosaic Israel regarding disinheritance.

First, there is *reversible disinheritance*: ecclesiastical excommunication. The excommunicated son lost his citizenship in Israel. He no longer had legal access to service as a warrior in God’s holy army. He therefore could not be a judge, bringing negative covenantal sanctions in God’s name. In this sense, the excommunicated man had become a *covenantal stranger*. A stranger could not inherit rural land in Mosaic Israel prior to the return from the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 47:21–23).¹⁰ This is why excommunication was a form of disinheritance. Because excommunication extends into eternity, this was the most threatening form of disinheritance. Death would seal the priest-

Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

8. On the categories of the Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

9. Chapter 50.

10. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

hood's eternal death sentence. But excommunication is reversible through the excommunicant's public repentance.

Second, there is *irreversible disinheritance*: civil execution. This is the most threatening form of disinheritance in history, but it has no eternal implications. Israelite parents and the state could not speak authoritatively regarding a man's eternal judicial status; only the Levites could do this. Two-fold disinheritance was eternally permanent: excommunication pronounced judicial sentence historically and eternally, but with the possibility of repentance and the restoration of the forfeited inheritance; execution removes the common grace of time that could lead to the special grace of repentance.¹¹ The sentence of execution reduces the time available for repentance: from the judges' announcement of the death sentence until its enforcement. For the rebellious son who was brought before the civil authorities by his parents, *time had just about run out*. There would be no further common grace extended to him by God through his parents.

C. What Was the Son's Crime?

A crime is a matter of civil sanctions. Sin may not be. The negative sanction in this case was death: the supreme civil sanction. What, then, was the son's crime? He was a sinner, surely, but were these sins crimes? If they were crimes, why did the parents have to file charges against him? Why hadn't the civil authorities taken independent action against him?

To find the answers, let us go through the steps in this case. The father and mother took their rebellious son before the civil authorities. They informed the authorities of the nature of his infractions: gluttony,¹² drunkenness, and disobedience to parents. Hearing this formal covenant lawsuit against the son, the authorities were required by this law to decide in favor of the parents. While they retained the right of

11. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

12. In the most popular Bible in the English-speaking fundamentalist world, the trademarked *Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1909), there is no reference in its concordance to gluttony. There are three categories for alcohol abuse: drunk, drunkard, and drunkenness. This reveals a great deal about fundamentalism's priorities of evil-doing. A 1997 report on the health of Southern Baptist ministers and leaders reported that of some 1,000 attendees at the 1997 Southern Baptist Convention national meeting, 60% of them were at least 20% overweight, compared with 26% of the general public. This was not a random sample, but it was large enough to reveal the presence of a problem. *Dallas Morning News* (Sept. 6, 1997), p. 6 G.

cross-examination to verify the facts, the presumption of this law was that the parents had not testified falsely against their son. Parents may be expected to testify falsely on a son's behalf, but they rarely bring false charges against him, especially when the penalty is death. This law assumed that parental love was operating as a disincentive to a false accusation. The accusers therefore had been driven to this extreme remedy by the behavior of their son.

1. An Adult Son

The son was an adult. We know this because of the nature of his sins. He was a drunkard and a glutton. Drunkenness is an adult's sin. In no society that I am aware of has the state ever legalized continual drunkenness for minors. It is clear from the text that the state had no authority to keep him from drinking excessively or eating excessively apart from this formal complaint by his parents—a complaint that necessarily invoked the death penalty. This means that the son was an adult. He would not control himself, and his parents could no longer control him.

His refusal to obey them indicates that their threats no longer scared him. It also indicates that they had run out of threats. Physical punishment by his parents was no longer possible because he was an adult. Disinheritance was not much of a threat, as I shall argue, because he had already been disinherited. Another meaningful threat was for them to throw him out of the house, and I shall argue that they were unwilling to do this for a socially valid reason: their fear that he was unsafe to be in society as an autonomous agent. This leaves only the threat of execution. This, too, had failed. Judgment day had come.

This son was not a criminal. If he had been, the state could have acted independently of the parents. He had not behaved violently against his parents. Had he done so, he would already have been executed. The case laws of Exodus set forth the laws of battery and verbal assault against parents: "And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death" (Ex. 21:15). "And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death" (Ex 21:17).¹³ So, his rebellion involved a dissolute life style and disobedience to parents. This behavior had become criminal behavior, but only within the context of the family. It was the covenant lawsuit brought by his parents that transformed his sins into crimes.

13. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33.

2. *Criminal Acts*

The actions of the son were judicially criminal, for they called forth the death penalty. Yet drunkenness and gluttony are “victimless crimes.” They do not inflict physical damage on contemporaries. But they do inflict damage on the covenant line: the dissipation of the inheritance. Gluttony and drunkenness are assaults on the family’s economic future because they involve the squandering of present resources. These sins of excess transfer wealth from the family that has accumulated it to families that sell food and drink to the wastrel. The son’s addiction to wine and food threatens the continuity of family capital. His parents seek a way to put a stop to this.

Why was this transfer of capital a criminal matter? This son was an embarrassment to his parents, but why were his actions matters for the civil court? Why did the court have to execute him? Disobedience to parents is a negative response to positive commands. There had been no parental victim of a verbal assault. He had not stolen from them, beaten them, or in any way threatened him. He had merely ignored their instructions. He was an adult. Was he still required to obey them? On what legal basis could the state execute him? There is a two-fold general principle of biblical civil law: (1) there must be a victim; (2) the state is to prohibit public evil, not seek to make men good. In what way were these parents victims of positive evil? In what way were the sins of drunkenness and gluttony deserving of public execution?

The deciding legal issue here was *continual disobedience to parents*. There is no indication that drunkenness as such was a capital crime in the Mosaic covenant, nor is it a capital crime today. In fact, there is no indication that it is a crime at all. The state has no jurisdiction over drunks who are not threatening other people with bodily injury.¹⁴ The same is true of gluttony. It was not illegal to eat too much, nor is it today. Yet this son was to be executed by stoning, the sign of God’s judgment against evil men.

If we eliminate drunkenness and gluttony as the joint basis of his conviction, we are left with disobedience to parents. They could not control him. He was a threat to their authority in the household. He was therefore deserving of death. His gluttony and drunkenness were evidence of his disobedience, not the judicial basis of his execution. *The issue here was disinheritance: irreversible disinheritance.* The parents were so convinced that he was beyond redemption that they were

14. In today’s world, a drunk driver does threaten others.

willing to bring him before the civil court for execution. While there is no text that required them first to seek and gain ecclesiastical excommunication, it is likely that they had already done so. This sanction had failed to gain his obedience to them. They were now bringing him to the final court of appeal in history in order to transport him into God's final court of appeal in eternity. In short, they were acting on behalf of God as lawful covenantal authorities. They were bringing a covenant lawsuit against their son.

2. Covenantal Authorities

A parent is required by God to inflict pain on rebellious young children. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov. 13:24). "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18). The parent's authority to inflict pain on a disobedient child is basic to the family covenant.¹⁵ The parent possesses the legal right to impose physical sanctions. That is, he is not to be threatened with civil or ecclesiastical sanctions for beating his child, so long as the degree of punishment fits the infraction. This is a fundamental principle of biblical law: the punishment must fit the infraction.

The family covenant does not authorize the imposition of capital punishment by a parent.¹⁶ This is why the Mosaic law required parents to take their rebellious adult son to the officers in the gate, i.e., the civil judges. Under the Mosaic covenant, the state clearly had the right to impose the sanction of execution on a son who was brought before it by the parents. More than this: it had an obligation to do so. Yet the son had not committed any physical violence against his parents. If he had, he would have been subject to execution independent of his parents' formal accusations (Ex. 21:15, 17). Cursing a parent or striking a parent is considered an attack on God and His authority. For the son to escape judgment, his victimized parent would have had to publicly forgive the son for this action. But the son would have been marked as

15. This is why modern statist law places legal sanctions on parents who physically beat their children. The messianic state seeks to reserve this monopoly for itself, as the would-be parent of all mankind.

16. Roman law did authorize a father to kill his children. In this sense, legalized abortion is more Roman than Christian. The practice of exposing infants was made illegal in Rome only after a Christian emperor came to the throne, in 374 A.D. The practice nevertheless continued. Alan Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 17.

a rebel. Repeated violations would have classified him as a habitual criminal. As we shall see, *this passage implies that habitual criminals in Israel were executed*. So, the mandatory execution of Deuteronomy 21 was not for a positive assault by the rebellious son. It was for his disobedience to his parents, as revealed publicly by his drunkenness and his gluttony.

His crime was contumacy: a refusal to obey lawful authority. The parents had lost control over their son, as they admitted publicly: “he will not obey our voice.” *In some fundamental way, this man threatened the social order*. If the primary agents of discipline had failed, and were willing publicly to acknowledge this, then the state had to intervene. But was execution mandatory? The text indicates that it was. There seems to be no room for mercy. I have argued that this was not a means of disinheriting him economically. The Levites could have cut him off from his people. In fact, it seems probable that this would already have been done prior to bringing him before the civil government. The church would have cut him off from access to service in God’s holy army. This would have effectively removed his citizenship. He would have had no further rights of economic inheritance. *This was a matter of the inheritance of the family name*.

Then why bring him before the judges? Wasn’t execution a form of judicial overkill? No; *it was a means of making permanent his judicial disinheritance in history*. It was a means of persuading him to come to grips with the *judicial* meaning of his prior excommunication: the threat of eternal disinheritance. He had run out of time. He could no longer delay the day of reckoning. By bringing him before the civil court, his parents were telling him: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2b).

Note: this law did not apply to daughters. Daughters were not carriers of the family name. This was a family matter that involved the judicial issue of inheritance: the continuity of the family name.

D. Family Name

Both parents had to bring charges against him. This was a capital charge. “At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death” (Deut. 17:6). In ecclesiastical proceedings for excommunication, the father had the right to bring the son to the Levites for judgment. The preceding passage deals with the

eldest son of the first wife, the unloved wife. Reuben, the rebellious son of Leah, was the model.¹⁷ Mosaic law was concerned about inheritance. There had to be a valid reason for any disinheritance. The reason was covenant-breaking. A father did not possess the independent authority to make this determination with respect to the family covenant. Excommunication had to be pronounced by an authorized ecclesiastical officer.

Under such circumstances, the mother of the accused son might have opposed her husband's judgment. She might not have been willing to bring formal charges against her son. The father still had the right to bring such charges for the sake of preserving the inheritance, but it was not for him unilaterally to decide judicially whether his son would inherit family wealth under the Mosaic law.

In contrast to the laws governing excommunication, it took a double witness to invoke the capital sanction. This was a matter of the right of inheritance: irreversible disinheritance. The parents had decided to cut off further mercy. The principle of victim's rights identifies them as the ones who had the right to be merciful. They decided to be merciful to future victims of their son's dissipation.

This son was still under their household jurisdiction. Presumably, he had already been excommunicated. He was no longer a citizen of Israel. He was judicially a stranger in the land. But his parents still allowed him to live in their household. In other words, *they were showing mercy to him, just as God had continued to show mercy to his disinherited son, Adam*. The son could no longer inherit, but he might repent. The parents had not thrown him out of their household. This was a prodigal son who had not gone into another nation to spend his inheritance, for he possessed no inheritance. He was nonetheless a prodigal. Whatever assets he gained through working he spent on strong drink and food.

This son was not merely a slow learner; he was a non-learner. He was not merely a son of Adam; he was a son of Cain. This was a threat to the parents: *because their son was a resident in their household, they would have been liable for his actions outside the home*. Household authority in a patriarchy was very great under the Old Covenant. The father was considered the head of his household. Thus, those who lived under his lawful authority placed him at economic risk. Their law-breaking might result in legal claims against him. *The son's drunk-*

17. Jacob made this determination on his own authority as both father and household priest, since this was before there was a separate tribe of priests (Gen. 49).

en behavior might threaten the non-landed inheritance of the other children. The parents of an excommunicated son had two ways of reducing their legal liability: send him out of their household or have him removed through execution. Presumably, sending him away was the easiest way. This granted him time for his possible repentance. It would also have severed the legal tie to him which his continued presence in their household created.

In this instance, however, the parents decided that he was too rebellious to be sent into society. It was therefore not just a matter of their legal liability for his actions, which could be removed by sending him away. Something more crucial than economic liability was involved. He was a potential threat to society. *He was a disgrace to the family name.* To preserve the integrity of the family's name, they could take him before the judges, present their case against him, and have him executed.

The parents made a joint decision: this son deserved to die. His rebellion against them had become a way of life. His rebelliousness was a pattern of behavior. He was a habitual rebel. His drinking and eating habits testified to this. He was in bondage to sin. He was not fit to be sent into society. As his parents, they had the joint authority to make this determination. *The civil magistrates were required to enforce this decision.* The civil magistrates had to accept the testimony of the parents when supported by independent evidence: the son's eating and drinking habits. They had to acknowledge the authority of the parents to protect society and the family name by removing their rebellious son from any further mercy. If parents believed that their son was both incorrigible and a threat to society, their assessment had to be honored by the state.

E. Supporting Family Authority

Heads of household in Israel were not allowed to impose the covenantal sanctions of excommunication or execution. These covenant sanctions were outside of their lawful sphere of authority. Because the ultimate physical sanction of execution was prohibited to them, they lacked a powerful negative sanction. They also could not impose the maximum sanction of excommunication. Presumably, the Levites had already done this. Nevertheless, their son was still a rebel. They still could not control him. If the three sanctions of excommunication, revocation of citizenship, and reversible disinheritance had not thrown

the fear of God into him, what would? The fear of execution: irreversible disinheritance. Without this, he could not be controlled.

The parents could not impose this sanction on their own authority. But without this threat, they could not maintain control in their own household. They had to be backed up by the civil government, which possessed the authority to impose this sanction. So, in this case, the state became the supporting agency of parental authority. The parents were restrained by law from imposing the ultimate remaining sanction. But somebody had to.

The parents had decided that this son was not fit to be released into society without being under family jurisdiction, and they were no longer willing to accept this responsibility. He was too great a liability. They could no longer control him, and they also could no longer risk keeping them under their legal authority. The church could not control him. Who could? The state. The state had to be called in to support the judgment of his parents: he was not fit to stay alive. If parents were willing to say this in public, their judgment had to be honored. The state had to execute him. This was a two-fold matter of preserving family authority and preserving public safety.

What was his crime? Contumacy. He had rebelled so continually against family authority that this constituted a threat to society. His family possessed the authority to tell him to quit practicing evils that fell short of public actions that were subject to civil sanctions. The state could do nothing on its own authority to stop him from excessive drinking and eating apart from this formal accusation by his parents. To keep state authority on a tight chain, the Mosaic law did not authorize the state to execute people for drunkenness and gluttony. Therefore, in order to reinforce family authority, the Mosaic law granted to parents the right to invoke the permanent civil sanction against their son. Neither covenantal institution could impose this sanction on its own authority. This kept both forms of authority in check. It took joint action on the part of both covenantal authorities to remove a rebellious son.

Because of the nature of authority in Mosaic Israel, the church presumably had already imposed its ultimate sanction: excommunication. The text does not reveal this, but we can safely presume that the parents would not have resorted to this final declaration of their inability to control their son unless the church had also failed in its attempt to support family authority.

The heads of a household had an enormous responsibility in Mo-

saic Israel. They were asked to subordinate the traditional and nearly universal bonds of parental affection to the larger purpose of defending God's law. One aspect of this defense was the preservation of family capital. A wastrel son was dissipating family capital and, by implication, the family line. The parents were called on by God to put an end to this destruction of the family line.¹⁸ They were to call on the state to destroy the destroyer.

This meant that there had to be another heir through whom family capital could be extended. This family was in a situation analogous to Adam and Eve after Cain killed Abel. While God protected Cain from execution, He also removed him from his parents' presence. A new son, Seth, became the heir of his parents. Through Seth came the covenant line (Luke 3:38). A similar problem faced the parents of a rebellious son. If they had no other son, then they would either have to pray for one or else adopt one. *The point is, it took faith in God's plan for parents to bring a rebellious son before the civil rulers. It took faith in God's provision of a replacement heir.* Parents would have to place obedience to God's law over bloodline inheritance in the extension of the family's legacy through time.

F. Family, Society, and State

This degree of religious faith is rarely present in any family. Families are normally highly protective of their members. They place members inside a shield of toleration and protection from outside criticism. They resist the intrusion of outsiders who would bring a covenant lawsuit against a member. But God's law requires parents not only to avoid such defensive arrangements but actually initiate the covenant lawsuit against a wastrel son. *This act of covenantal judgment visibly places the family under God's law.* The state has no independent authority to initiate this covenant lawsuit. It must wait on the parents to do their duty. The magistrates must order the execution of the son on the word of the parents. The authority of the two witnesses must be respected. The witnesses act as agents of the court.

Parents in Israel who refused to do their duty faced a choice: (1) continue to protect the wastrel, thereby placing family capital at risk, either through his dissipating ways or through lawsuits brought against them as responsible agents over him when he commits a crime;

18. The heirs of such a man would likely become covenant-breakers. They would die in their sins.

or (2) send him out into society on his own, thereby placing others at risk. Parents may have decided that the former decision was too risky for family capital, but the second choice shifted the risk to outsiders. The law was clear: parents were not to do this. *They were to protect society by delivering their son up for execution.* They were to subordinate family ties to the glory of God and the needs of law-abiding society.

Apart from a radical transformation of men's allegiance and understanding, it is unlikely that most family heads will ever do their duty in this regard. Rather, they will subordinate society to family ties. But when they do this, they transfer power to the state. They defer to the state the responsibility of bringing a covenant lawsuit against a known wastrel. But before the state can lawfully bring a covenant lawsuit against him, there must be a victim. He must harm someone. *Thus, the unwillingness of families to subordinate their interests to God's law leads to an increase of crime and social disorder.* Those who know that a wastrel is dangerous to society have nonetheless sent him out into society. They have washed their hands of him by sending a potential wolf among sheep. In doing so, they have raised the risk of harm to others. *Parents are a godly society's first line of defense against evil.* This law makes it clear just how important parental responsibility is, and just how burdensome. Parents must subordinate their love for their son to the law of God and the needs of society. They must place God's interest above family interests. Jesus said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). This law indicates that Jesus was drawing upon an Old Covenant principle when he announced His judgment against the cult of the family.¹⁹

G. Rushdoony's Interpretation: Juvenile Delinquency

Rushdoony discussed this passage in several places in *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. He says that this passage refers to "incorrigible juvenile delinquents."²⁰ He repeats this in a section dealing with the Fifth Commandment: "The Economics of the Family."²¹ He discusses

19. Cf. Gary North, *Baptized Patriarchalism: The Cult of the Family* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), pp. 1–3. (<http://bit.ly/gnbap>)

20. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 77.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

this law at length in the section on "The Family and Delinquency."²² He cited it when discussing family authority and law enforcement.

The family very clearly has a serious role in law enforcement. The family is a law-order and disciplines its members. The nature and extent of the family's punishing power can be seen by looking again at a text previously considered, Deuteronomy 21:18–21, the death penalty for juvenile delinquents. There are certain very important aspects to this law. *First*, the parents are to be complaining witnesses against their criminal son. The loyalty of the parents must thus be to God's law-order, not to ties of blood. If the parents do not assist in the prosecution of a criminal child, they are then accessories to the crime. *Second*, contrary to the usual custom, whereby witnesses led in the execution, in this case, "the men of the city" did. Thus, where the death penalty was involved, the family was excluded from the execution of the law.²³

But this law went beyond mere family authority, he said. It extended to society at large: the prevention of the creation of a criminal class. He wrote:

Third, as we have seen, incorrigible juvenile delinquents were to be executed (Deut. 21:18–21), and also all habitual criminals. Such persons were thus blotted out of the commonwealth. When and if this law is observed, ungodly families who are given to lawlessness are denied a place in the nation. The law thus clearly works to eliminate all but the godly families.²⁴

Clearly, then, the intent of this law is that all incorrigible and habitual criminals be executed. If a criminal son is to be executed, how much more so a neighbor or fellow Hebrew who has become an incorrigible criminal? If the family must align itself with the execution of an incorrigibly delinquent son, will it not demand the death penalty of an habitual criminal in the community? . . . The purpose of this law is to eliminate entirely a criminal element from the nation, a professional criminal class. . . . Biblical law does not recognize a professional criminal element: the potentially habitual criminal must be executed as soon as he gives plain evidence of this fact.²⁵

The breakdown of family authority in the inner cities in the United States has led to a replacement institution: the gang. The gang pro-

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 185–99.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 359–60.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 380.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 187–88.

vides community, authority, commitment, and income. It is bound by a self-maledictory covenant oath. The gang has become the primary agency of physical sanctions in the predominantly non-white inner cities. Gangs of teenage boys have become the single major source of crime. These gangs are masters of the illegal drug trade. They are spreading across the nation, replacing the Mafia and other traditional criminal syndicates. They are well organized and difficult for law enforcement authorities to penetrate.

These developments were implied in Rushdoony's analysis of this passage, which he offered a decade prior to the public's recognition of the plague of gang life. Yet his actual exposition is ignored by ignorant or willfully perverse Christian critics of theonomy who imagine that they are more humane than God, let alone Rushdoony. "Theonomists would execute little children!" they cry in horror, never bothering to read Rushdoony's clear statements regarding this law, never considering the threat of juvenile delinquency to residents of inner cities. In the white middle-class safety of the suburbs,²⁶ critics issue smug dismissals of theonomy in the name of tender little children. (When they are mugged in a parking lot, however, they call on the state to imprison these teenage thugs and throw away the key.) They impugn God by impugning Rushdoony. They ridicule God's law by ridiculing their version of what they think Rushdoony said. They do not attempt to exegete Deuteronomy 21:18–21; they just continue to cry out, "The theonomists would execute little children." The ancient heresy of Marcionism is with us still: the belief that an evil God gave us the Old Covenant, but a loving God gave us the New Testament. The critics of theonomy never put things quite this bluntly, but what they write and say about the capital crimes and sanctions of the Mosaic law indicates that they believe it.

H. Adult Contumacy

My interpretation is different from Rushdoony's. I do not think the son was a juvenile delinquent. He was a delinquent, but he was no juvenile. In today's usage, "juvenile delinquent" means "a convicted criminal who is not old enough to be dealt with by civil law as an adult, and who is therefore under milder civil sanctions." This was not the legal status of the son in this passage. He was not yet an identifiable criminal. He had not broken any civil laws. He had not been convicted

26. Possibly a temporary condition of safety.

of any crime. Here was his legal status: he was under his parents' legal authority; he was a glutton and a drunkard; he would not obey his parents; and they could not control him by means of family sanctions. Presumably, he was also an excommunicant. He was on the road to perdition, and he was a disgrace to the family name. His parents believed that he was too dangerous to be sent into society as a disinherited stranger. Before he committed any crime, his parents brought him to the civil authorities to have him executed.

This means that merely by his continual refusal to obey them, coupled with the marks of uncontrollable behavior—gluttony and drunkenness—he had committed a capital crime. This in turn means that open, wilful, publicly visible rebellion against joint parental authority was a crime equal to murder, for the civil sanction was the same. It was not gluttony and drunkenness that constituted his crime; it was his long-term rebellion against family authority while living under that authority. This was Adam's crime, too: eating what his Father had prohibited. He died for this sin. So will you, apart from God's adoption. Man's mortality is the result of original sin.

This was an adult who was still living in his parents' household. Rushdoony was correct: *this law, when enforced, restricts the formation of a criminal class*. This law and its capital sanction serves as a model of the biblically mandatory hostility that a godly society must have against habitual criminal behavior. If parents are not to tolerate continual rebellion against family authority, to the point of demanding that their son be executed by stoning, then how much less toleration should a society show toward incorrigible breakers of the civil law! If parents must be willing to bring a capital covenant lawsuit against their own flesh and blood, how much more ready must citizens be to rid society of habitual criminals! If it is a capital crime for a man to drink too much and eat too much and disobey his parents in the privacy of their home, then it surely is a capital crime to be convicted of a third or fourth felony. *The civil government should not lock up incorrigible felons and throw away the keys. It should execute them.* As the Bible says about the rebellious son, "And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deut. 21:21). If all Israel was to fear becoming a rebellious son, surely every Israelite was to fear becoming a habitual felon.

I. Illegal Drugs and the Messianic State

Today, men and women around the world call upon the state to deal with drug dealers. They do so in the name of their children. They cry out to the state: “We cannot control our children. They are addicted. They steal from us. They lie to us. They rebel against our authority continually. Therefore, we must arrest drug dealers, convict them, imprison them, and throw away the key!” What they do not say is this: “This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice. He is a drug addict. Stone him to death. So shall other people’s sons learn to fear.”

The state responds to political pressure by passing innumerable laws against addictive drugs. Nevertheless, the addiction spreads. The state takes away more and more civil liberties, especially privacy, in the name of the war on drugs. Nevertheless, this war is visibly being lost. The public believes that the sale of addictive drugs should be made illegal. What the public does not believe is that their own sons and daughters are making self-conscious decisions to spend money on substances that will addict them, knowing full well that these drugs are dangerously addictive. They see their children as ill-informed. But it is the parents who are ill-informed; their children know a great deal about drugs. This is not an information problem. It is a moral problem. It is also an incentive problem: lack of fear of the legal consequences.

Children in the West have wealth at their disposal greater than what the rebellious Israelite son possessed. Sons and daughters in today’s world of unprecedented wealth have great purchasing power. They are nevertheless wilfully destroying themselves, squandering their inheritance, not in some far country, as the prodigal son did, but in the bedrooms of their parents’ homes. They are perfect examples of the rebellious son of Deuteronomy 21.

Here is why the drug trade flourishes: parents have given their children enormous wealth without guidance or restrictions and have sent them into the government’s tax-funded schools, which have become the primary marketplace for drugs, especially in the early stages of addiction. *The modern public school is a state-funded illegal drug emporium.* Students have accepted the religion of humanism that the public schools proclaim: the Darwinian story of man as the heir of beasts and meaningless cosmic chance. They have learned their school lessons well. They celebrate the religion of humanism with the high-

efficiency tools of the “cool” drunkard: mind-altering drugs.

Instead of cutting off their children’s funds, pulling them out of the public schools, and monitoring their daily activities from morning to night, parents call for more government spending on drug rehabilitation programs, more government money for drug education programs in the public schools, and more government money for drug enforcement programs. In short, they call for more of the same: more humanism, more statism, and more prisons. The parents believe in the religious precept of classical Greece, which is taught in the public schools, namely, that man’s problem is educational rather than moral, that man can be saved through law and legislation. The parents worship at the altar of the messianic state and then wonder why their children are tempted by drugs.

The key issue here is not the question of the legalization of drugs. The question here is the primary locus of enforcement. *The biblical locus of primary law enforcement is the family.* The Bible acknowledges that the institution with the lowest cost of obtaining accurate information should be the initial law enforcing agent. This is obviously the family in cases of gluttony, drunkenness, and drug addiction. Any attempt by parents to shift the locus of primary responsibility to either school or state is illegitimate.

Similarly, if we differentiate between the teenage child and the adult child, calling for reduced penalties for the child because of the child’s lack of maturity—as we do with tobacco sales—then the penalty could be less than stoning. It might be public whipping; more lashes for students who had sold drugs to finance their habits than for final users. The point is, there has to be a severe public sanction against such rebellious behavior as drug addiction. If parents are unwilling to bring their rebellious children before the magistrates in the name of God, the family’s name, and the protection of society, then we can expect the drug plague to continue and the steady disappearance of our freedoms.

This passage in Deuteronomy offers a solution: execution of rebellious heirs. But modern man is too humane for this. Too human. Too humanistic. He prefers living under the messianic state to living under biblical law. He prefers statism to family responsibility. He prefers a growing international criminal class built on drug profits to bringing a capital covenant lawsuit against his own rebellious child. He is ready to send all drug dealers to prison for decades until the day he is told that his child supported his or her habit by luring other men’s children into

the heartless addiction; then he cries out for a tax-financed drug rehabilitation program rather than prison for his supposedly victimized child. He prefers a massive and costly prison system that clearly is not working to low-budget whipping or stoning that would work very well. In the final analysis, he would rather see his adult child stoned on drugs than stoned by citizens. He ignores the Bible's warnings: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Conclusion

The law governing the rebellious adult son was a law supporting family authority. The magnitude of the civil sanction indicates the severity of the crime and the importance of preserving family authority. But this law had social implications as well. *It was a law that offered protection to society from an organized criminal class.*

This law was a step beyond the negative sanction of excommunication, which governed citizenship and therefore inheritance. Inheritance in Mosaic Israel was an aspect of the seed laws and the land laws. It also had to do with eligibility to serve in God's holy army. This law seems to have been a law governing an excommunicated, disinherited son, although no text explicitly says this. The parents had run out of negative sanctions other than sending him away from the household, which they regarded as too risky for society. They had to appeal to the state to impose the maximum negative sanction that remained to be imposed on rebels. This law had to do with three things: family authority, disinheritance, and the protection of the general public. The parents, who were legally able to remove him both geographically and legally from the economic benefits of their household, refused to do this. They must have believed that it was not safe to remove him from their judicial authority as a member of their household. They feared that he would become a threat to society. Thus, to preserve the integrity of the family name and to protect society from a lawless rebel who had not yet become a habitual criminal, but who probably would if he was out from under their authority, they brought charges against him in a civil court. The court had to impose the death penalty, given the testimony of the parents and the evidence of both his gluttony and drunkenness.

There is no indication that this law has been annulled by the New Covenant. It was neither a seed law (tribal) nor a land law. There was a

need for his execution in order to preserve the family's good name and to protect society. Without the willingness of a few parents to take this extreme measure, rebellious adult sons would learn not to fear their parents. These dedicated parents, who placed God's law, family authority, family reputation, covenantal inheritance, and social safety above their own emotional commitment to their son's biological survival, would serve as representatives for the whole society. The actual execution of a rebellious son would reinforce parental authority in many families. These goals have not changed with the coming of the New Covenant. In today's world, the son might be a drug addict rather than a drunken glutton. The point is, he must be visibly out of control. But there must be a two-fold witness against his rebellion. It is not sufficient that he be out of control, though not a law-breaker, for the state to execute him. It is also not sufficient for the parents to bring charges against him. There must be a two-fold witness against him: (1) two parents testifying to his rebellion and (2) publicly verifiable evidence of either his unwillingness or inability to control his own actions.

There has been one major alteration in the application of this law, however. The New Covenant has increased the responsibility of daughters. Daughters are baptized. They are placed under the covenant's dual sanctions: blessing and cursing. Daughters can inherit if they agree to bear the responsibility of caring for aged parents.²⁷ To limit the application of this law to sons is illegitimate today. If daughters are rebellious, financially able to become drunkards and gluttons or crack-cocaine addicts, and are still living under their parents' household jurisdiction, then there is no judicial reason for them not to come under this law.

Ever since the publication of Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, critics of biblical law have repeatedly focused on this law as the sign that theonomy is perverse. In private conversations, I have heard this biblical passage invoked more often than any other as evidence that theonomy is heartless and cruel. Yet the critics never cite Rushdoony's argument that this was a law against the formation of a criminal class. Instead, they cite—and condemn—only the law itself. The critics' theological problem is this: their belief that the Old Covenant God must have been heartless and cruel. They hold the Marcionite dogma. Again and again, we hear the refrain: "Theonomists would execute little children!"²⁸ It is time for this misinterpretation to end. But

27. Chapter 50:B.

28. I once received a letter from a Westminster Seminary graduate who had not

it won't. It is too convenient a rhetorical device for modern-day Marcionites to resist.

been offered a job. He wanted me to hire him. He also wanted Bahnsen to hire him. He misspelled Rushdoony's name in his affirmation that he was familiar with theonomy, although not yet willing to subscribe to theonomy. I mentioned the possibility that I might be willing to hire him and his wife to run a day care facility. He wrote back that his wife found it odd that anyone who believed in stoning children was ready to start a day care. Needless to say, I did not hire him. His verbally clever but theologically ill-informed wife cost them an opportunity to begin a potentially lucrative and satisfying career with my money. His wife was simply repeating what has become a common misrepresentation of the theonomic interpretation of this passage.

LOST AND FOUND

Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost things of thy brother's, which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again (Deut. 22:1–4).

The theocentric issue here is God's primary ownership. He places boundaries around what is His, beginning with the forbidden tree. Boundaries are an aspect of point three of the biblical covenant.¹ God delegates temporary control over His property. This relates to point two: hierarchy.²

A. Delegated Ownership

These laws governing lost property were extensions of Exodus 23:4–5: “If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.” Extending what I wrote in chapter 51 of *Authority and Dominion* regarding the Exodus passage, these laws,

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: The Economics of Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

since they deal with property, were governed by the theocentric principle of God as the cosmic Owner. He has delegated ownership of selected portions of His property to individuals and organizations, so that they might work out their salvation or damnation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Because God has delegated responsibility for the care and use of His property to specific individuals or organizations, who are held responsible for its management, non-owners are required by God to honor this distribution of ownership and its associated responsibilities.³ This includes even the return of lost property to its owner.

These were neither seed laws nor land laws. They were cross-boundary laws.⁴ These laws mandate the public's recognition that all ownership is delegated and therefore representative. Ownership means lawful delegated control over the use of a scarce economic resource. The stranger who finds a lost item becomes a delegated owner working on behalf of the property's two owners: God and the delegated owner. There is a new hierarchy of ownership: God > legally responsible title holder > discoverer. The discoverer is under the greatest legal constraints governing the use of the property because he does not hold title, yet he now possesses physical control over the property. The fundamental principle of all biblical government is this: *with power comes responsibility*. The discoverer cannot legally escape responsibility before God, for God has transferred to the discoverer a temporary, though highly restrictive, administrative legal title. This is why the law does not identify the discoverer as a thief.

Because these laws are so similar to the Exodus laws, I reproduce here much of chapter 51 of *Authority and Dominion*. Some readers may not own a copy of my earlier book. It may be inconvenient for them to locate a copy. It is easy for me to reprint what I wrote there, but with a few modifications. The Exodus case laws single out enemies. These do not. The Exodus law regarding the lost animal is the stronger law because it deals with an animal owned by an enemy. The Deuteronomy version is more general: the finder may not know who owns the wandering beast. Because of his lack of information, he is required to expend resources to care for the animal until the owner claims them. The finder's lack of information leads to expenses associated with caretaking. In this regard, this case law is also an extension of the care-

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 51.

4. On the categories of the Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

taking law.⁵

I focus here on the law regarding the lost animal, although the same principles of responsible administration govern all forms of lost property. Consider the law of the fallen animal (Ex. 23:5). This is a simple case law: help the animal. It does not matter who its owner is. This assistance is a charitable subsidy to both the animal and its owner. It creates good feelings. A good deed done on behalf of the fallen animal should be seen by the owner as a sign of the helper's righteousness. It testifies to the helper's commitment to God's law. Because the law of the fallen animal is an uncomplicated law, I do not devote much space to discussing it.

Let us consider more carefully the law governing the lost animal. There are several beneficial results of this moral law whenever it is widely obeyed. First, it upholds the sanctity of the legal rights of property owners. Second, it reasserts man's legitimate control over the animal creation. Third, it increases the bonds of friendship among men with a common confession of faith. Fourth, the passage of time makes it easier to identify thieves. Fifth, it provides an incentive to develop marks of private ownership, such as brands on animals.

This law is not a civil law. Biblical civil law invokes only negative sanctions against public evil. This is because the state is not an agent of salvation. It cannot lawfully seek to make men good. It is limited to imposing negative sanctions that will make men's evil acts more expensive, thereby reducing the number of evil acts. When the state mandates charity, civil law becomes a source of positive sanctions. But these laws, like the laws of Exodus 23:4–5, are positive, charitable injunctions.

B. The Owner's Right to Exclude

There is a rhyme that English-speaking children chant: "Finders, keepers; losers, weepers." When one child finds a toy or possession of another, he torments the owner with this chant. Yet his very chanting testifies to the fact that the tormenter really does not believe in his own ethical position. If he really wanted to keep the object, he would not admit to the victim that he had found it. He would forego the joys of tormenting the victim for the pleasure of keeping the object. The tormented owner can always appeal to his own parents, who will then go to the parents of the tormenter. In Western society, most parents

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 46.

know that the discovered object is owned by the loser.

From time to time, someone discovers a very valuable lost object, such as a sack of paper money that dropped out of an armored car. When he returns it to the owner, the newspapers record the story. Invariably, the doer of the good deed receives a series of telephone calls and letters from anonymous people who inform him that he was a fool, that he should have kept the money. Again, this is evidence of the West's dominant ethical position: the critics prefer to remain anonymous.

From a legal standpoint, the reason why the law requires the finder to return the lost item to the owner is that the owner owns the rights of use and disposal of the property. What is owned is the right to exclude other people from using the property. This "bundle of rights" is the essence of ownership. The capitalist system is not based on "property rights"; it is based on some person's legal right to control the use and disposal of property. Nothing inheres in the property that gives these rights.

There is another familiar phrase, "possession is nine-tenths of the law." This is incorrectly stated, if by "possession" we mean physical control over some object. The possession which is nine-tenths of the law is the possession of *the legal right to exclude*, not possession of the physical object itself. The object does not carry this legal right with it when it wanders off or is lost by the owner.

We can see this easily when we consider the case of a lost child. The fact that someone discovers a lost child obviously transfers no legal right to keep the child. The child is to be returned to the parents or to the civil authorities, who act as legal agents of the parents. Possession is clearly not nine-tenths of the law. If anything, possession of a long-lost child subjects a person to the threat of being charged with kidnapping. Because God is the ultimate owner of mankind, He has delegated the legal right to control children to parents, except in cases of physical abuse by parents which threatens the life of the child. In short, parental sovereignty is nine-tenths of the law, not merely possession of physical control over a particular child.

When someone who discovers another person's property is required by God to return it to its owner, there can be no doubt concerning the Bible's commitment to the private ownership of the means of production. *Biblical moral law, when obeyed, produces a capitalist economic order. Socialism is anti-biblical.* Where biblical moral law is self-enforced, and biblical civil law is publicly enforced, capitalism

must develop. One reason why so many modern Christian college professors in the social sciences are vocal in their opposition to biblical law is that they are deeply influenced by socialist economic thought. They recognize clearly that their socialist conclusions are incompatible with biblical law, so they have abandoned biblical law.⁶

C. Dominion Through Judgment

This case law extends man's dominion over nature: domesticated animals are not to "run wild." They are under man's care and protection. This reasserts man's place under God but above the animals: point two of the biblical covenant model, hierarchy.

A lost animal can damage other people's property (Ex. 22:5).⁷ It can wander into a pit and get hurt or killed (Ex. 21:33–34).⁸ It can injure men or other animals (Ex. 21:35–36).⁹ To have a domesticated lost animal wandering without any form of supervision testifies against the dominion covenant. It is a sign that God's required moral and hierarchical order has broken down. It is an aspect of God's curse when beasts inherit the land (Ex. 23:29). In short, animals that are capable of being domesticated require supervision by man.

No man's knowledge is perfect. Men can lose control over their domestic work animals. When they do, it becomes a moral responsibility for other men to intervene and restore hierarchical order. This is done for the sake of biblical social order: (1) for the individual who has lost control over his animal and who is legally responsible for any damage that it might perform, and (2) for the sake of the animal.

A domesticated animal such as an ox is a capital asset, a tool of production. Mankind's development of tools of production is the basis of economic growth. The loss of a trained work animal reduces its owner's ability to subdue his portion of the earth. This sets back the fulfillment of God's dominion covenant with mankind. This loss of production reduces the per capita economic growth of the whole community, even though this corporate loss may not be large enough to be perceived by men. The person who finds a lost animal is required to

6. A good example of such antinomian socialist reasoning is John Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), ch. 4. See also my response, *ibid.*, pp. 198–203. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

7. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 44.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 41.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 42.

restore it to the owner, even though this involves economic sacrifice on his part. In the long run, this implicit sanctioning of privately owned capital will produce increased wealth for all.

The biblical imagery of the lost sheep of Israel is indicative of the central concern of the Bible: *the restoration of moral and legal order, the overcoming of sin and its effects*. Lost sheep in history need a shepherd. They are wandering toward destruction. God intervenes and brings them home. The New Testament imagery of Jesus as the *good shepherd* points to the theme of *restoration*.

Even if biblical civil law mandated private charity—negative sanctions on one person for the sake of positive sanctions to another—it would be close to impossible to gain a court’s conviction against anyone who ignored this law and let the animal continue to wander. There would have to be at least two witnesses. The accused person could claim that he had never noticed the animal or any other lost object. It is also difficult to imagine what civil penalties might be attached to this law. We therefore should conclude that the enforcement of this law is based on *self-government under God’s law*. The person who returns a lost object to its owner is demonstrating that he has acted out of concern for God’s law, not out of concern for civil sanctions. He is a person who exercises self-government under God’s law. Again, it becomes more difficult to entertain suspicions about his overall ulterior motives.

Let us assume that the discoverer has found the animal in his garden or his fields. He wants to get it away from his crops. He is not allowed by law to kill it. It is not responsible for its actions. To get it away from his crops, he must either take it down to the edge of his property and shoo it away, or else he must place it in a pen or other restrictive area. To keep from losing wealth because of its unrestricted access to his crops, he must go to the trouble of placing it under restraints. If he wants to be reimbursed for the crops it consumed or any damage it caused, he must locate its owner. The economics of a wandering beast in a biblical commonwealth provides incentives, both positive and negative, for the righteous man to become a caretaker of the lost animal.

The person who steals an animal and is immediately arrested could offer this excuse: “I found this animal wandering in the area, and I was simply returning it to its owner. I did not know who owned it, so I was taking it home until I could make further inquiries.” This excuse might work once or twice. It would not be a suitable excuse three or

four times. A person who lives in a society that has developed an information reporting system, in order to avoid suspicion, must report the whereabouts of lost articles to the civil authorities if he does not know who the owner is. Thus, as time passes, the “excuse of the wandering animal” fades. The owner who discovers his animal in another’s possession has a far stronger legal case than if this case law were not in God’s law-order. A lost animal is not supposed to remain indefinitely in another person’s possession, especially after the person who lost it announces its absence publicly. “Thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it.”

D. Marks of Ownership and Reduced Search Costs

This case law makes it far more likely that lost property will be immediately returned to a known owner. Thus, obeying this law increases the economic return from marking property. This is an economic incentive to extend the principle of owner’s rights. A person’s legal claim to property is secured at a lower cost through a mark of ownership. When anything can be obtained at a lower price, more of it will be demanded than before. This is why marks of ownership are important factors in extending the free market social order. When more people own property and thereby secure the stream of income that assets provide, they will find it in their self-interest to defend the principle of owner’s rights.

By marking property, the owner reduces future search costs, both his search for the animal and the finder’s search for the owner. The mark also reduces search costs for a neighbor whose crops have been eaten or ruined by a wandering beast. He can then gain restitution from the owner (Ex. 22:5).¹⁰ Branding also reduces search costs for the civil authorities if the animal should be stolen. By burning an identifying mark into an animal’s flesh, or by attaching a tag to its ear or other flesh, the owner increases risks for a thief. This also decreases risks for those who might buy from the thief. The buyer is able to verify whether the seller possesses title to the mark and therefore title to the beast.

God’s use of circumcision in the Old Testament era is an obvious parallel to the brand. So was the hole punched in the ear of a voluntary lifetime servant (Ex. 21:6). These were both marks of ownership. The New Testament practice of baptism leaves no visible mark, but it leaves a legal description in the records of a continuing third-party in-

10. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 44.

stitution, the church. Baptism is also a mark of God's primary ownership. The same is true of property registration generally. Titles, deeds, and other marks of legal ownership have developed over the centuries, thereby extending the dominion of mankind through the development of the institution of private property. *By identifying legal owners, a society increases the level of personal responsibility.* This, too, is a fundamental biblical goal.

E. Not a Case of State-Enforced Charity

The discoverer must sacrifice time and effort to see to it that the property is returned to its owner. This might be seen as a form of judicially mandated charity, one of the few examples of compulsory charity in the Bible. Compulsory charity, however, is a contradiction. Charity must always be legally voluntary. It is governed by the legal principle that the recipient has no judicially enforceable earthly entitlement to the gift. This is why the modern welfare state is careful to label its compulsory wealth-redistribution programs as *entitlements*. The creators of these programs want to avoid any suggestion of voluntarism, which implies that the donor has the right to refuse to make the gift. Thus, this case law is not related to charity. The owner has a legal claim on the property. He has an entitlement. The person who finds the lost property is expected to honor this legal claim, even though it costs him money or time to do so.

This law requires a form of wealth-redistribution. The person who discovers lost property owes it to the owner to return it or care for it. This is a positive injunction. Yet biblical civil law, as I have argued repeatedly, does not issue positive injunctions. It does not compel anyone to do good; it merely prohibits people from doing public evil. Thus, I conclude that *this law is not a civil law, but is rather a moral injunction*. There is no civil sanction attached to it, nor is there any general judicial principle of restitution that would enable the judges to determine a proper sanction. The civil government therefore has no role to play in the enforcement of this law.

The civil government can become involved if the person who owns the property discovers it in someone else's possession. The suspicion of theft immediately arises. This risk is an incentive for the discoverer to return it to its owner, in order to avoid future criminal prosecution for theft. But this is a separate issue. The case law in question should be seen as a moral responsibility placed on the individual directly by

God, not as a civil statute.

In all likelihood, however, the individual who finds a wandering animal owned by no known person will report this to some authority. He does not want to be found in possession of another man's beast. To insure himself from a future lawsuit, he tells someone in authority, or at least local witnesses, that he has found a wandering animal. This shared information serves as a means of lowering the costs of finding lost animals. Because of the laws governing theft, this caretaker law increases the likelihood that the finder will expend extra effort to inform the authorities of his discovery. The local civil magistrate or Levite would then serve as a lost-and-found agency. Someone whose animal had wandered off would go to someone in authority and enquire regarding any report of lost animal of a particular description.

We can presume that the animal would not be too far from home. Even though this law of mandatory caretaking was not enforceable by a civil court, it was enforceable in God's court. God's court involves sanctions, positive and negative, in history. The covenant-keeper who found a lost animal would have felt moral pressure to take it to his home. He would then have had to take care of it. This was an expense that he might not have wanted. He would therefore have had another incentive to inform the authorities or in other ways get word into the community about the stray beast.

What about the output of the animal? The finder was entitled to shear the sheep if he cared for it. He could sell the wool or use it. There is no indication in this text or any other that his expense in caring for a lost animal could not be recovered by the productivity of the animal. If it ate his grass, if he had to hire extra help in caring for it, if he put it in a barn to shelter it, and no man claimed it, then he was entitled to use it. If anything happened to it while he was working it, he would have been responsible. It was not his property. It was, in this sense, on loan to him. He could not misuse it, but he could use it.

Whenever this law was honored in Israel, an animal could not have strayed far from its owner. Sooner rather than later, an Israelite would have done his duty and taken it home. The more faithful to God's law Israel was as a nation, the sooner that someone would have taken responsibility for this lost, wandering beast. The more righteous the society was, the less distance the animal could have wandered. Widespread personal righteousness in this case meant lower search costs for the owner. This was another example of the great respect for private property in the Mosaic law.

F. Treasure Hidden in a Field

This law seems to be contradictory to Jesus' parable of the kingdom of heaven: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matt. 13:44). Why isn't Jesus' example a case of lost property? Why isn't the finder required to report it to the presumed owner, i.e., the owner of the field? Because the treasure had been deliberately hidden. The finder had the right to play along with the deception.¹¹

Jesus was challenging Old Covenant Israel to cease hiding the treasure of salvation from the gentiles.¹² The kingdom of heaven is not supposed to be hidden; it is to be shared with all the world. But someone had taken the treasure and had hidden it, He said. This was similar to the action taken by the responsibility-averse wicked servant who refused to multiply his master's resources that had been entrusted to him. This was another kingdom parable.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:24–30).¹³

The person who discovers a hidden treasure is not under any ob-

11. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 31.

12. Paul wrote: "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: **Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved**, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:14–16).

13. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

ligation to inform the owner of the field of its existence (Matt. 13:44).¹⁴ Someone had taken steps to hide the asset. The original owner had decided to invest the treasure by hiding it. This is not the best way to increase wealth except in times of warfare or widespread theft. It is better to put the asset to work. The hidden asset is not being used productively.

The finder takes a great risk by selling everything he owns to make a bid on the field. The field's owner, if he knows about the treasure, may dig it up and then sell the field—now far overpriced—to the finder. But if the field's owner does not know about the hidden treasure, the buyer is not under any moral obligation to tell him about it. The field's buyer is reclaiming the asset from the heirs of the original treasure-hider, who know nothing about the whereabouts of the treasure and who did not hide it. They have no legal claims on this property. They are not like the owner of lost property, who does have a legal claim. The treasure in the field is not marked. It is not the responsibility of the discoverer to seek out the heirs, who may be scattered across the face of the earth, depending on how long the treasure has been hidden. The person most likely to put the hidden treasure to productive use is the treasure-finder who is willing to sell all that he has to buy the field.

The Jews had hidden God's kingdom in Jesus' era. They were hoarding it. They were not taking it in its pure form to the gentiles. They had encrusted it with layers of man-made law, thereby hiding it. This was hampering the growth of the kingdom. This is why Jesus also said: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Jesus was telling His listeners that they had found the hidden treasure: the kingdom of heaven. It was time for them to commit everything they owned to the spread of the good news of redemption: to gentiles as well as to Jews. The Jews refused to admit that what they had done by way of legalism and nationalism had concealed the kingdom from gentiles. Thus, the kingdom was rightfully the property of the church, which stripped the message of redemption of its legalism and then shared it with the world. It was not that the kingdom had been lost; it had been deliberately hidden and kept out of plain sight. Thus, the law of lost property did not apply in the parable.

The economic principle governing hidden treasure is what W. H.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

Hutt called the theory of idle resources. Hidden treasure is not idle if it is the object of human decision-making. It is invested in a particular way. When resources are deliberately not being used to produce goods and services, this may be because of the owners' lack of information about how to maximize the value of the unused asset, i.e., to make it worth more in production than it is sitting idle.¹⁵ When an idle resource is idle because no one recognizes it as valuable, or because the owner has forgotten where it is hidden, then the least costly way to get it back into production is to allow a finder to buy it. This is an application of the Austrian school's theory of entrepreneurship: profit as the result of the decision of an entrepreneur who bears the economic uncertainty associated with production.¹⁶ The entrepreneur believes that he possesses better knowledge regarding future consumer demand than his competitors do. He buys a productive good at a price that is lower than it would be if all producers recognized its highest-value future use. If his forecast is correct, and if he puts the underpriced asset to consumer-satisfying use, then he gains his reward: an above-average rate of return on his investment. If his forecast is incorrect, or if he misallocates the resource, then he reaps losses.

To maximize the spread of accurate information and the consumer benefits associated with this information, the free market social order allows entrepreneurs to buy fields containing "hidden treasure." These fields are in the form of scarce resources that are not priced as high as they would be if other entrepreneurs knew the truth: hidden treasures are buried here, i.e., there are benefits that consumers will be willing to pay for. These treasures are not lost resources; rather, they are forgotten or ignored resources that are not being put to their maximum consumer-satisfying uses. In short, accurate information regarding the future is not the equivalent of a lost sheep that has wandered off and will be missed by the owner. It is the equivalent of a treasure buried and therefore taken out of production by a previous owner, and then forgotten. There is no moral reason why someone who finds a way to serve the public better through putting this treasure back into production should be required to broadcast this information to anyone. But he must not steal it; he must buy the field in which it is hid-

15. W. H. Hutt, *The Theory of Idle Resources: A Study in Definition*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1977).

16. Israel M. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973; Kirzner, *Perception, Opportunity, and Profit: Studies in the Theory of Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

den. He must bear the costs of gaining ownership.

Conclusion

The lost domesticated animal is a valuable asset. To preserve the principle of private ownership, God's law assigns responsibility to the person who finds lost property. He is required by God to care for it until its owner arrives to claim it. Because of the laws against theft, it is likely that the finder will report his discovery to someone in authority. This increases the spread of knowledge. It also tends to create a lost-and-found office in society. The person who lost his property in Israel had two likely sources of information regarding his lost property: the elders in the gate and the local Levite.

This law was neither a seed law nor a land law. There is no more reason to assume that it no longer applies in the New Covenant than it would be to assume that the same principle of caretaking does not apply to lost children. The person who finds a lost beast is no more entitled to become its owner than he is entitled to become the lawful guardian of a lost child. In the case of a lost child, the judicial incentive to report the existence of the lost child is greater. Kidnapping is a capital crime (Ex. 21:16).¹⁷ But the same interpretive principle holds true: *the finder is not allowed to become a keeper*. The finder has an obligation to care for the lost beast as he would to care for a lost child. He has an analogous obligation to report his discovery, though not an equally intense obligation, given the disparity of the civil penalties for theft vs. kidnapping.

This law created incentives for owners to brand their beasts. By marking them, the owner made it more likely that the beast would be returned to him by the finder. The brand made it less likely that a finder would be able to claim that the animal was his rather than the owner's. In other words, the brand reduced the likelihood of either a permanently lost animal or a stolen animal. With the owner's mark on the animal, the owner could claim his right of ownership.¹⁸ This was why circumcision marked Israel. God's legal claim was on the male Israelite. The fact is, the image of God in man is God's universal claim of ownership, but the covenant mark in the Mosaic law made this ownership visible to the person so marked. God's unique claim of ownership

17. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 34.

18. For a child today, hand prints on a birth certificate provide even stronger evidence of original authority over the child.

was on an Israelite. This was the meaning of circumcision; it is also the meaning of baptism. No matter how far a “branded” covenant-keeper strays from both the protection and restraint of the institutional church, God’s mark of baptism identifies him as owned by God.

NATURE'S ROOTS AND FRUITS

If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young; But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days (Deut. 22:6–7).

The theocentric aspect of this law is the creation. God rules over nature because He created the universe. He establishes the human rules that are to govern man's governing of nature. He places boundaries around His property.

A. Preserving Nature's Organic Productivity

This is not a seed law or a land law. It is a cross-boundary law.¹ It applies to nature in general, not just to Canaan. God gave to mankind the responsibility of ruling over the creation (Gen. 1:26).² God recapitulated this covenant with Noah and his sons (Gen. 9:1–3).³

Because this is a covenant under God, there is hierarchy. The hierarchy of the dominion covenant is this: God > man > woman > minor children > nature. Because it is a covenant, there are sanctions attached. This law announces a personal blessing for obedience: long life. The blessing itself points to point five of the biblical covenant model: continuity, i.e., greater time on earth in order to extend one's dominion over nature. The positive sanction, long life, is an aspect of inheritance: building up a capital base to leaves to one's children.

Man's dominion over nature extends God's grace to the creation.

1. On the categories of the Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

The implementation of this grace is governed by God's law. The principle undergirding this Mosaic case law is that *the productivity of nature must be preserved by man*. The individual who finds a mother bird is allowed to claim her offspring as his lawful possession, but he must set free the mother. The mother is an instrument of productivity. She has reached adulthood. She has survived nature's challenges to youth. Animals that were further up the food chain did not catch her. Also, she did not starve. Because this animal is a skilled survivor, she is worth more as a productive asset than the newborns are. Man can do what he wishes with the newborns, but he must let the adult go free to reproduce again. In this, we can see a pattern for man-directed ecology in general. Adult mothers of wild species that are valuable to man are to be allowed to continue to reproduce.

The setting of this case law is not organized agriculture. A man comes across a bird's nest. The bird has built it where it decided, not where man decided. The Hebrew word translated "by chance" refers to an encounter. It is frequently translated "befall." A man has come upon the nest. This discovery was unplanned by the man. The bird was operating under the laws of humanly unplanned nature. This was not a chicken farm.

This law secures life for the mother because of the presence of the offspring. A man may lawfully claim an isolated female bird for his own. If it is not immediately caring for its young, it is "fair game." But what about mammals? The principle of this law is that a female with offspring under her immediate care, and therefore dependent for survival on her care, must be set free. Modern hunting laws that protect female deer are extensions of the principle that mothers caring for their young are off-limits to hunters. Young mammals are different from young birds. They can wander off. So, the fact that a female is visibly alone is not proof that she has no young under her authority. She is therefore protected from hunters. But the hunting laws also protect the young; so, these laws are in violation of this case law. Biblically, the offspring are fair game.⁴

This law protects a productive female while she is caring for her young. Her productivity in bringing offspring into the world and caring for them must be honored. This case law protects her life. It does not do so for the sake of the existing offspring, which may be law-

4. It is considered "unsporting" to shoot immature deer. The problem here is that civil laws should not be enacted which go beyond the meaning and intent of biblical law. The boundaries protecting young animals in the wild should not be civil.

fully harvested by the discoverer. My conclusion is that it protects the mother for the sake of future offspring. A demonstrably productive asset in nature must be allowed to continue its productivity. This interpretation is consistent with the law of fruit-bearing trees during a siege: the invading army may eat the fruit of nearby trees, but not cut them down (Deut. 20:19).⁵ Orchards planted by the enemy were treated as if they had grown on their own. They had not been planted by the invading Israelites; they were therefore to be left standing.

B. The Tragedy of the Commons

This law governs animals found in the wild. There is no comparable law governing domesticated animals. The owner of a farm is in charge of breeding his animals. He feeds them, shelters them, and cares for them directly. They are not survivors in the wild; they are survivors in a sheltered environment. In this setting, the owner is not under any restriction regarding mothers and offspring. He may lawfully kill the mother and eat her eggs. But will he? Probably not. After all, the mother is his property. She may not lay golden eggs, but she does lay consumable, marketable eggs. She is a capital asset that produces a stream of income. She is a proven producer. The owner probably will not kill her in her years of productivity.

Nevertheless, this female may be growing less fertile. The owner may decide that she is now fit for eating. After he collects her eggs, he is entitled to wring her neck. This is not an animal that survives in the competitive environment of nature. It is an owned resource. The owner has authority over it.

The differentiating characteristic is ownership. Animals found in the wild are unowned. In such cases, these animals may become victims of annihilation by non-owners who see them as free resources. *When men are in control of free resources, they tend to overconsume them.* They do not bear the costs of ownership, yet they can reap the benefits of ownership. The high benefit-cost ratio encourages them to consume the resource. After all, they are not able to collect an income stream from an animal which they encounter in a field. It is a “now or never” situation. They can now gain the benefits of owning the asset. If they wait, they will be unlikely to appropriate this particular fruit of nature. Thus, there is an economic incentive to “overharvest” the resource. They will kill the mother and take the eggs.

5. Chapter 49.

This result is sometimes called the tragedy of the commons.⁶ No one owns the wild. No one owns this particular family of animals. The costs of production are almost nonexistent to the harvester; the benefits of harvesting are high. So, he takes all of the resource. This leads to overuse of the asset: overgrazing, overpolluting, or over-whatever. *Ownership provides an economic disincentive against immediate consumption.* But ownership of a long-term capital asset does not exist in nature. Thus, unowned, ungoverned nature must be protected by civil law. Men, in their legal capacity as God's corporate agents over nature, must place legal restraints on the misuse of temporarily unowned nature.⁷ This is for the benefit of nature and also for the benefit of men in the future, who will be able to harvest nature's bounty. Those animals that are under mankind's covenantal authority are to be protected against the otherwise rational economic decision by a non-owning individual to overconsume nature's resources.

Because this law authorizes the discoverer to harvest the offspring, it clearly recognizes man's legal authority over nature. The fruits of nature—in this case, the offspring—are fair game for man. Man is not to be kept completely out of unowned nature for the sake of nature. *Unowned nature is a challenge to man's mandated dominion over nature.* It testifies to the incomplete dominion of man in history.⁸ Nature under the autonomous dominion of beasts is so repulsive to God that He allowed Canaanites to remain in the land until the Israelites could either exterminate them or drive them out. "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee" (Ex. 23:29). This is why the idea that a jungle is to be preserved for the jungle's sake is an anti-

6. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* (Dec. 13, 1968); reprinted in Garrett de Bell (ed.), *The Environmental Handbook* (New York: Ballentine, 1970). For a critique, see C. R. Batten, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *The Freeman* (Oct. 1970). (<http://bit.ly/BatCom>) Cf. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 31:B.

7. Nature is not to remain unowned. Nature should not be owned by the state. The biblical case for state ownership must be made in terms of the principle of hierarchical responsibility. The defender of state ownership must show from the Bible either that the state has been authorized by God to serve as His dominion agent or that inherent in the arrangement are conditions that mandate bureaucratic administration. The judicial issue is God's hierarchy of ownership, not some theory of nature's rights. Nature has no rights. The idea that nature has rights independent of man as God's dominion agent is pagan to the core. Nature has no rights, in the same sense that property has no rights. It is ironic that environmentalists who decry property rights also cry for nature's rights.

8. This includes the oceans. The problem with oceans is that they are unowned. They are part of the commons. The result is an overharvesting of some species.

biblical idea. The man-killing insects of a jungle are to be treated by man with no more leniency than a plague-carrying mosquito is, unless there is some clear ecological benefit to mankind by sparing the killer.⁹

This law places restraints on the tragedy of the commons. Nature's independent productivity is to be preserved by civil law until such time as man can domesticate nature. Man subdues nature through private ownership. When land is privately owned, when animals are penned in, and when man provides a protective environment for the animals under his authority, then this law ceases to have any relevance. When the commons—commonly owned land or unowned land—disappears, so does the related tragedy of overconsumption. While it is incorrect to argue that “the only good rain forest is a dead rain forest,” it is biblically correct to say that the best rain forest is a privately owned rain forest. (By the way, “rain forest” is a term that usually refers to a jungle, a far less compelling word rhetorically in public policy debates.) While a privately owned rain forest can become the victim of inappropriate ecological management, this is also true of a politically owned rain forest. But there is this difference: private owners have greater personal economic incentives to preserve the productivity of an asset, as determined by consumers' use of the asset, than a government's salaried managers have. Also, by decentralizing ownership, the free market social order increases the likelihood that an ecological mistake will not be imposed on all of nature at the same time, which is not the case when a centralized civil government exercises direct control over the property. In short, fewer commons mean fewer and less wasteful tragedies.

Conclusion

The fruits of nature belong to man. This biblical principle undergirds this case law: the offspring can lawfully be harvested by the finder. But the roots of presently unowned nature belong to God. His delegated intermediary is nature itself until men establish direct ownership over tracts of nature and begin to manage them. Until then,

9. If burning down a forest or a jungle creates an environment in which mosquitoes multiply, and if society is unwilling or too poor to allow the use of chemicals such as DDT, then leaving the forest or jungle standing may be the best ecological policy. The mosquito historically has been man's greatest enemy in nature. Man's seeming victory over malaria-carrying mosquitoes by the mid-1960s has been rolled back by laws against DDT. Gordon Harrison, *Mosquitoes, Malaria and Man: A History of the Hostilities Since 1880* (New York: Dutton, 1978).

God exercises His control over the mother hen through the operations of nature. God demonstrates His ownership by placing legal restrictions on the use of nature's capital assets. This is why the mother hen must be set free to breed another day. Man is not to overharvest un-owned, unmanaged nature. Because man is not providing the scarce means of sustaining life for nature's wild animals, he is not to be given free reign over both the roots and fruits of nature. Unless he extends a full-time system of management over nature, including the care and feeding of mother hens and their species equivalents, he is not allowed to take both the mother and her offspring in the same harvesting operation. God has placed another "no trespassing" sign around His property.

It is obvious why the state cannot easily enforce this law of the unplanned encounter: bureaucrats possess insufficient information regarding any infractions. The state's negative sanctions cannot easily be applied to those who break this law. Thus, God has attached a positive sanction to this law, one which applies to the individual. He who honors this law will receive long life. The individual reaps this reward because he is the primary locus of sovereignty for this law's enforcement. He has exclusive information regarding his encounter; he therefore is the recipient of the blessing of obedience.

This is neither a seed law nor a land law. It is a cross-boundary law. In fact, it is precisely because nature has no internal ownership boundaries that this law must be enforced: primarily by the individual; secondarily by state anti-poaching laws.

THE ROOFTOP RAILING LAW

When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence (Deut. 22:8).

The theocentric reference point of this law is man as God's image: the doctrine of representation, which is point two of the biblical covenant.¹ Why representation? Because the language of blood appears in the text. Man's blood must not be deliberately shed, because man is made in God's image. When a person does something which significantly threatens the lives of others, he is to be held legally liable (Ex. 21:18–19),² except in wartime or crime prevention by an officer of the law. By extension, if he builds a structure which significantly threatens the life of another person in the normal course of affairs, he is to be held legally liable for any injury suffered as a consequence. In this case, the text is concerned with the death of the victim. The language of blood points back to the law prohibiting murder in Genesis 9. "And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:5–6).

A. New Homes

The language of blood places this case law under the general cat-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/tymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 35.

egory of murder. Thus, this law is not strictly a land law, yet is it also not strictly a cross-boundary law, as we shall see.³ It is unique.

This law has to do with a boundary around a home's roof. This boundary protects human life. A death caused by the absence of a railing around a roof is not accidental manslaughter, as it would have been under the law of the cities of refuge (Num. 35:9–29).⁴ It was murder. The civil penalty was the execution of the head of the household: eye for eye. The mere absence of a restraining device would automatically have condemned the householder judicially. There was no legally valid excuse. The risk of building a new house without a roof railing was high.

1. The Inheritance Principle

The context of the law was new construction. This law did not apply to existing houses. This law governed homes that were built in Israel after the conquest. The inheritance associated with the conquest of Canaan was not under this law. The original inheritor and his heirs were not burdened by the costs of constructing a railing on a roof. The person who bought a home that had been built by a Canaanite was not required to build a protective railing. *The principle of inheritance from Canaan was more important than the principle of safe housing.* When the Israelites took Canaan, the Canaanites left their houses standing. Their houses became part of Israel's lawful inheritance. An Israelite who was too poor to afford to build a railing on his roof was not to be prohibited from claiming ownership of a house with an unprotected roof. Those who ventured onto the roof of such a house did so at their own risk. The owner was not to be forced to sell the house just because he could not afford to build a railing on the roof. *This law balances safety with economics.* If a man has the wealth to pay for building a new home, then he is not a poor man. He has capital. He is exchanging one form of capital for another. In such cases, this law announces, the builder must go to the extra expense of building a railing on his roof. The additional cost—the marginal cost—of building a railing is small in comparison to the total cost of building the house. For a little more money, the owner secures an added measure of safety for his family and guests. As a man of means, he owes this to them. It is not a great

3. On land laws and cross-boundary laws, see Appendix J.

4. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 21.

added expense.

What about a buyer of an existing home that has no roof railing? He can afford to build a new home or buy an existing home. He chooses to buy an existing home. The text applies to a newly built house. But why shouldn't the law apply to him? One reason might be that the added marginal expense of adding a railing reduces the profit from selling the house. The law would force the seller to pay for it, thereby reducing the profit from the sale, or else force the buyer to pay,⁵ thereby reducing the market for used homes. In the case of the conquest of Canaan, the inheriting owner or his heirs would have faced reduced demand—lower value—for the sale of an asset which they inherited when the first owner participated in the conquest of Canaan. That is, such a legal requirement would have reduced the net worth of the original Israelite owner or his heirs. Mosaic law did not impose such a confiscation of inherited wealth on the owner or his heirs. This law indicates how highly the principle of inheritance was regarded by the Mosaic law.

This law does impose costs on new home construction. A new home was not part of the original inheritance of Canaan. It was part of the fruits of life in the land. For the sake of protecting the life of man, this law mandated that new-home builders pay attention to the risk of a cultural phenomenon: social gatherings on roofs. The law warned the man paying to have a home built: if you do not go to the added expense of building a protective railing around the roof, and someone falls from the roof and dies, this law designates the head of the household as a murderer. The risk of having such an event take place in one's home would have to be borne by the home owner. This added cost could be avoided by putting up a railing. The new-home owner had to make his decision in terms of costs either way.

What if the home's builder decides to sell the house immediately upon its completion? This raises the question of the transfer of legal liability. If the next buyer can escape the liability because he did not personally build the house, this would subsidize the construction of homes by professional home builders who have no intention of ever occupying them. This would place a competitive disadvantage on the individual who builds his own home or who pays to have it built. The professional contractor who builds a house before he has a contract from a buyer could build it less expensively. The buyer would be buy-

5. This applies in cases where the supply is inelastic, i.e., not price sensitive.

ing a home that he neither had built himself nor had agreed to have built for him. This would subsidize the building of less expensive, more risky homes. This would increase the likelihood of accidents. So, the buyer of a newly constructed house would become legally liable. He would have to pay to install a railing in order to remove this liability.

2. A Flat Roof

The flat roof of the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean was a place where people gathered for celebrations. It was not the tapered roof of Northern Europe, which focuses the weight of snow in such a way that it slides off the roof rather than breaking through the roof. The tapered roof has the same effect on people as it has on snow: it increases the likelihood that people will slide off the roof. People do not gather together on a tapered roof to hold parties. Climbing up a tapered roof is not part of the average person's normal daily activities. Anyone who goes onto a tapered roof does so at his own risk. He may fall off the roof accidentally, in the sense that he does not plan to fall off the roof, but knows that he may fall if he fails to take normal precautions, such as wearing shoes with non-slip soles. He may fall even with such precautions. He knows that he is doing something abnormal. He does not fall off a tapered roof accidentally in the sense of a careless act that takes place in the normal course of events.

A house designer who puts a safety railing around a tapered roof is adding to the risk of dwelling inside. Snow would be retained by such a barrier. Instead of sliding off the roof, snow may crash through it, endangering those inside the building. Thus, this safety law governing Near Eastern roofs would be a dangerous law to enforce in, say, Scandinavia. A literal application of this law in Scandinavia would not decrease risk; it would increase risk. The biblical goal of this law is to increase personal safety. If this law were applied literally without respect for geography, it would sometimes produce the opposite result: a decrease in safety.

This leads us to a principle of interpretation: *we must search for the intent of a law*. It is not sufficient merely to obey it. To obey a law unquestioningly is to risk misapplying it. A biblical law must be obeyed until such time as skilled interpreters find a biblical reason to apply it in some other way for the sake of the law's intent. *The spirit of the law must govern the letter of the law*. This case law illustrates this hermen-

eutical principle better than most.

B. Self-Government Under Biblical Law

This law does not mandate the creation of a civil government bureaucracy that enforces home safety laws. It announces that the person who builds a new home must go to the expense of building a protective railing around the roof. Any owner of a newly constructed house who fails to do this faces the ultimate penalty: execution. If someone falls from a roof and is killed, the dwelling's owner must die. *This enforcement of this law rests on self-government, not bureaucratic government.* It relies on the self-interested decisions of home builders and new home buyers to defend themselves against the negative civil sanctions associated with harm. There is no indication from this law that the state is authorized to create a regulatory agency that writes safety codes that apply to home builders before they can legally offer their homes for sale. On the contrary, this law places decision-making authority in the hands of the home builder or new home buyer. It is his decision as to how much legal risk he is willing to bear. If he wishes to avoid legal risk but also avoid the expense of building a railing, he will have to keep people off his roof. He will lose the square footage available for entertaining. He decides.

There is a role for civil government: the enforcement of penalties after the event takes place. There is another role: announcing in advance that this penalty will be imposed. A court must convict; then the state must apply sanctions after the witnesses have testified and the court has reached a decision. The state legitimately declares in advance safety standards and the penalty for violating them, but it does not compel anyone to abide by them. We are dealing here with a discrete event: one roof, one victim of a fall. We are not dealing with a phenomenon such as pollution, in which each polluter contributes a nearly immeasurable quantity of pollution, but polluters as a group create an unpleasant or dangerous environment.

The modern world is bureaucratic as no previous society ever has been, with the possible exception of ancient Egypt.⁶ The government regulatory agency is a ubiquitous feature of modern political and economic life. Administrative law has steadily replaced legislative law.

6. "Max Weber on Bureaucratization" (1909), in J. P. Meyer, *Max Weber and German Politics: A Study in Political Sociology* (London: Faber & Faber, [1943] 1956), p. 127.

This constitutes a legal revolution that is undermining the Western legal tradition.⁷ If this trend is not reversed, probably by some disaster that bankrupts most civil governments, it will put an end to freedom. The top-down bureaucratic social order—Satan’s model, given his lack of omniscience and his need for tight control over rebellious subordinates—will replace the bottom-up appeals court system of biblical law (Ex. 18).⁸ The centralization of economic life will continue.

If God still brings negative sanctions in history against rebellious societies, then we can expect a great reversal, either through a religious transformation that steadily produces decentralization, or else through an unexpected cataclysmic social breakdown. The state will see its regulatory powers removed or drastically shrunk. The centralizing tendencies of political power will eventually be thwarted by the market or by the voters, though more probably the market.

C. The Price of Perfect Safety

A modern application of this law would impose personal liability on someone who places an abandoned refrigerator with a lock-latch in the alley behind his home without first removing the door or the latch. A child might play hide and seek by climbing into the refrigerator and shutting the door. He would suffocate to death. Such stories were familiar throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Courts did not always impose harsh penalties on the owners.

Had the authorities wanted to reduce the number of accidental deaths by suffocation of small children, they would have passed a law that mandated the execution of the owner of any discarded refrigerator that still had pins in its hinges. A discarded refrigerator with its hinge pins still installed would have been the judicial equivalent of an uncovered pit (Ex. 21:22–25).⁹ But politicians would not have voted for anything so drastic as execution for death-producing liability. This would have been too risky politically. Instead, they passed laws against the manufacture of lock-latch refrigerators. The sale of lock-latch refrigerators was banned in 1958 in the United States. Doors that can be pushed open from the inside were made mandatory for producers of refrigerators.

Such laws are passed primarily because judges have refused to

7. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 34–41.

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 19.

9. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 38.

honor the principle of holding owners personally responsible for “roofs without railings” or “uncovered pits.” In contrast, the Mosaic law did not require the civil government to impose fines on people who dug pits and then failed to cover them, nor did it mandate roof inspectors. It did not create an army of administrative law enforcers. Instead, it assigned individual responsibility to owners of dangerous property. The civil government let men’s *fear of their legal liability* serve as their incentive to make their property safer.

1. Economic Effects of Legislation

There are economic effects of any legislation that assesses economic penalties before an accident occurs. These effects are seldom taken seriously by legislators or by the special-interest groups that lobby for such legislation. In the case of lock-latch refrigerators, the original product had definite advantages. When the door was closed, it audibly snapped shut. The new no-lock doors sometimes fail to close tightly, but users are not always alerted when this happens because of the absence of the old snap sound. These doors are less efficient than older doors in this respect. Unlatched doors are more easily left open by children, who find them more difficult to close than doors of the older design, which snapped shut easily. As a result, food rots from time to time, or at least cold air escapes, and these costs are borne by the owner.

It seems certain that a few lives are saved each year by this legislation, but there never were hundreds of cases of smothered children in any year. A case was a newspaper-worthy occasional event. Millions of refrigerator owners are today subjected to the statistical risk of occasionally leaving a door open and rotting a week’s food. Predictably, this cost is more difficult to bear for lower-income families, since expenses for food account for a higher proportion of their household budgets.

It may seem callous to compare the cost of spoiled food, no matter how much food gets spoiled, with the lives of children, no matter how few die of suffocation, but there are always inescapable costs with every desirable benefit. *Legislation creates benefits; therefore, in a cursed, scarcity-bound world, it necessarily imposes costs.* “Who benefits? How much? Who pays? How much?” These questions should always be asked before any piece of legislation is voted on. Guido Calabresi summarizes the range of decisions available to voters, legislators, and judges in deciding who should be made financially responsible

for accidents: "The question of who should bear the costs of a particular accident, or of all accidents, is to be decided on the basis of the goals we wish accident law to accomplish." In short, the decision is politically open-ended.

Thus it is a policy question whether costs should be (1) borne by particular victims; (2) paid on a one-to-one basis by those who injure a particular victim; (3) borne by those broad categories of people who are likely to be victims; (4) paid by those broad categories of people who are likely to be injurers; (5) paid by those who in some way violate our moral codes (in some sense are at fault) according to the degree of their wrongdoing, whether or not they are involved in accidents; (6) paid by those who are in some actuarial sense most likely to violate our moral codes; (7) paid from the general coffers of the state by particular industry groups in accordance with criteria (such as wealth) that may be totally unrelated to accident involvement; (8) paid by some combination of these methods.¹⁰

Humanism offers no simple moral, legal, or economic rule book which governs the state's decision to impose legal liability: "... in considering the bases of accident law, there are virtually no limits on how we can allocate or divide the costs of accidents."¹¹

2. Utopian Legislation

When society adopts a utopian legal code which proclaims "better millions of extra dollars spent by consumers on a safer product design than just one child dead from an accident," it thereby places an impossibly expensive burden on society—the expense of seeking an impossible goal, *risk-free existence*.¹² Besides, legislators honor the principle of "better millions of dollars than just one . . ." only when it is cost-effective for them as politicians, that is, only when adversely affected voters will not be numerous enough, or not sufficiently well organized, to threaten them at the next election. For example, far more children are killed yearly in home fires than ever died in abandoned refrigerators. Many lives could be saved by legislating *and continually enforcing* the installation of smoke detectors in every home.

10. Guido Calabresi, *The Costs of Accidents: A Legal and Economic Analysis* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 22.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

12. Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

Legislators could also require fire escape drills twice a year, with penalties on parents for violating this law. Voters today refuse to accept the level of interference in their lives by the state that the enforcement of such a fire safety law would require. So, legislators in this case ignore the principle of "better millions of dollars than just one . . ." They honor it only when comparatively few lives are threatened (e.g., asphyxiated children in abandoned refrigerators), and only a few companies need be monitored (e.g., appliance manufacturers).

A similar analysis can be made of speed limits on highways. There is no doubt that highway deaths could be reduced drastically if legislators would pass a maximum speed law of 25 miles (40 kilometers) per hour and then allocate large sums of money each year to enforce the law. The same could also be said if they would establish the death penalty for any drunk driver who kills another person in an auto accident. But the public seems unwilling to tolerate such legislation.

Conclusion

The law of the roof railing applied only to houses constructed after the conquest. The law of original inheritance was superior in Mosaic Israel to the safety law of the roof. The inheritor of a home built by a Canaanite was not under the civil sanctions of this law. He who went onto a flat roof built by a Canaanite did so at his own risk. If there was no railing, he had to be extra careful. This transferred legal liability to the guests. This was a consequence of the Mosaic law's defense of original inheritance. The conquest of Canaan was Israel's original inheritance, and it was defended by law.

The railing law transferred legal liability to the owners of post-Canaanite homes. The original owner of such a home had to consider the risk of hosting a party on his roof. If he failed to build a railing, he would lose his life in the case of a fatal fall by another person. This law therefore provided an incentive to owners to have documentation regarding original ownership. If the owner could not prove that his home had been built before the conquest, he became legally liable. A detailed record-keeping system was not mandated by this law, but it was surely encouraged.

This law was not intended to create an administrative bureaucracy of building inspectors. It was not a system of government licensing. It transferred legal liability to owners. In this sense, it reinforced the authority of the court system at the expense of the regulatory adminis-

trative law system. This indicates the presence in Mosaic legal order of an impulse hostile to administrative law.

This law may make no sense in a different environment, such as tapered roofs or thatched roofs. It applies only to a society that has flat roofs. This law teaches us that we must consider the judicial and moral principles undergirding a particular law. In this case, the primary principle was the inviolability of Israel's original inheritance; the secondary principle was cost-effective safety in a high-risk environment. The primary principle disappeared with the disappearance of the original housing. The secondary principle remains.

This was a unique law: partially a land law—original inheritance—and partially a cross-boundary law. Once the original housing wore out, it remained a cross-boundary law, but of a peculiar kind: one which could not be applied literally in every weather environment and still maintain its goal, i.e., personal safety.

LAWS PROHIBITING MIXTURES

Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together (Deut. 22:9–11).

The theocentric principle here is God's holiness: ethical boundaries.¹ God separates Himself from evil.

A. Boundaries and Holiness

The land of Israel was holy, i.e., sanctified. This is a typical explanation for laws of separation.²

The first prohibition was a law governing ritual pollution: defilement. What was the basis of this defilement? The text does not say. There is no doubt that the theological issue is holiness: boundaries.

The law of the plowing team and the law of mixed clothing seem to be in some way related to the first law. They are laws of separation: boundaries. Separation had something to do with ritual pollution, but what? Why was a field of mixed seeds evil? What did this symbolize? Israel's separation from Canaan? Israel's separation from the nations around her? Or one tribe's separation from another?

I have already analyzed the parallel verse in Leviticus: "Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed; neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee" (Lev. 19:19). I have decided to reprint portions of that chapter in this volume, since

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

2. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, 5 vols. (Gateshead, London: Judaica, 1989), V, p. 438.

some readers will not have a copy of my Leviticus commentary.³

The theocentric meaning of this passage is the meaning of the entire Book of Leviticus: *God's boundaries must be respected*. This case law established three boundaries, each referring to a specific economic activity: *animal husbandry, agriculture, and textiles*. Except for the products of mining and metalworking, these were the primary categories of economic goods in the ancient world. Leviticus 19:19 established rules for all three industries.

That world is long gone. Beginning no later than the fifteenth century, A.D., and accelerating rapidly in the late eighteenth century, a series of improvements in all three industries transformed the traditional economy of Europe. The modern capitalist system, with its emphasis on private ownership, the specialization of production, and the division of labor, steadily replaced the older medieval world of the common fields. This comprehensive economic transformation was accompanied by the violation of at least the first two of the statutes of Leviticus 19:19, and seemingly all three.

The question I need to answer is this: Was this law annulled by the New Covenant, or was the Agricultural/Industrial Revolution illegitimate biblically? I argue that the law was annulled.⁴

This raises the question of biblical interpretation: hermeneutics. I cover this in the next section.

B. Hermeneutics

A hermeneutic⁵ is the principle of interpretation. My theonomic hermeneutic enables me to do three things that every system of biblical hermeneutics should do: (1) identify the primary function of an Old Covenant law, (2) discover whether it is universal in a redemptive (healing) sense, or whether (3) it was conditioned by its redemptive-historical context (i.e., annulled by the New Covenant). In short: What did the law mean, how did it apply inside and outside Mosaic Israel, and how should it apply today? This exegetical task is not always easy, but it is mandatory. It is a task that has been ignored or denied by the vast majority of Christian theologians for almost two millennia.

The question here is the hermeneutical problem of identifying

3. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 17.

4. An earlier version of this chapter appears in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

5. The singular can also be “hermeneutics.”

covenantal continuity and covenantal discontinuity. First, in questions of covenantal continuity, we need to ask: What is the underlying ethical principle? God does not change ethically. The moral law is still binding, but its application may not be. Second, this raises the question of covenantal discontinuity. What has changed as a result of the New Testament era's fulfillment of Old Covenant prophecy and the inauguration of the New Covenant? A continuity—prophetic-judicial fulfillment—has in some cases produced a judicial discontinuity: the annulment of a case law's application.

I begin any investigation of any suspected judicial discontinuity with the following questions. First, is the case law related to the priesthood, which has changed (Heb. 7:11–12)? Second, is it related to the sacraments, which have changed? Third, is it related to the jubilee land laws (e.g., inheritance), which Christ announced that He had fulfilled (Luke 4:18–21)?⁶ Fourth, is it related to the tribes (e.g., the seed laws),⁷ which Christ fulfilled in His office as Shiloh, the promised Seed (Gal. 3:16)? Fifth, is it related to the “middle wall of partition” between Jew and gentile, which Jesus Christ's gospel has broken down (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14–20)?⁸ These five principles prove fruitful in analyzing Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:9–11.⁹

Let us consider another question: Has a change in the New Covenant's priesthood (Heb. 7) also been accompanied by a change in the laws governing the family covenant? I can think of one. The church from the beginning has denied the legality of polygamy, even though there is no explicit rejection of polygamy in the New Testament except for church officers: husbands of one wife (I Tim. 3:2, 12).¹⁰ The church

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

7. On seed laws, see Appendix J.

8. This application is especially important in dealing with Rushdoony's theory of “hybridization.” See North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Appendix F: “Rushdoony on ‘Hybridization’: From Genetic Separation to Racial Separation.”

9. There are several other hermeneutical questions that we can ask that relate to covenantal discontinuity. Sixth, is it an aspect of the weakness of the Israelites, which Christ's ministry has overcome, thereby intensifying the rigors of an Old Covenant law (Matt. 5:21–48)? Seventh, is it an aspect of the Old Covenant's cursed six day-one day work week rather than the one day-six day pattern of the New Covenant's now-redeemed week (Heb. 4:1–11)? Eighth, is it part of legal order of the once ritually polluted earth, which has now been cleansed by Christ (Acts 10; I Cor. 8)?

10. There is a valid theological reason for the rejection of polygamy, but it is rarely discussed: Jesus' extension of the right of unilateral divorce to wives (Mark 10:2–12). Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3, Appendix A.

has never been clear on the exegetical reason for abandoning polygamy. Christians are hard-pressed to defend the change biblically. They invoke common sense or church tradition. There is a biblical reason for the change, but it is indirect, and I may be the only person who has discovered it. The reason for the change is Christ's change in the divorce law. A woman today can lawfully divorce her husband for reasons other than adultery (Mark 10:12). In the Mosaic law, only the husband could lawfully do this (Deut. 24:1). In the New Covenant, neither the divorcing wife nor the divorcing husband may remarry after a no-fault divorce. To marry such a person is to commit adultery (Mark 10:12). Because of the New Testament's principle of gender equality under ecclesiastical law—an equality based on baptism of males and females—a husband may not lawfully have more than one wife. If he did, this would make no-fault divorce far less of a sexual burden for a husband.¹¹

Did other changes in the family accompany the New Covenant's change in the priesthood? Specifically, have changes in inheritance taken place? Have these changes resulted in the annulment of the jubilee land laws of the Mosaic economy?¹² Finally, has an annulment of the jubilee land laws annulled the laws of tribal administration?

C. Case Laws and Underlying Principles

Laws governing agriculture, plowing, and textile production had to be taken very seriously under the Mosaic covenant. The expositor's initial presumption should be that these three laws constitute a judicial unit. If they are a unit, there has to be some underlying judicial principle common to all three. All three prohibitions deal with mixing. The first question we need to ask is the crucial one: What was the covenantal meaning of these laws? The second question is: What was their economic effect?

I argue here that the fundamental judicial principle undergirding the passage is the requirement of separation. Two kinds of separation were involved: tribal and covenantal. The first two clauses were agricultural applications of the mandatory *segregation of the tribes* inside Israel until a unique prophesied *Seed* would appear in history: the Messiah. We know who the Seed is: Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "Now unto Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not,

11. North, *Hierarchy and Dominion*, Appendix A.

12. On land laws, see Appendix J.

And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). The context of Paul's discussion is *inheritance*. Inheritance is by promise, he said. The Mosaic law applied "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:18). Two-thirds of Leviticus 19:19 relates to the inheritance laws of national Israel, as we shall see. When the Levitical land inheritance laws (Lev. 25) ended with the establishment of a new priesthood, so did the authority of Leviticus 19:19.

The final clause of both Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11 deals with prohibited clothing. This prohibition related not to separation among the tribes of Israel—separation within a covenant—but rather the separation of national Israel from other nations. The principle undergirding second form of separation—clothing—is more familiar to us: *covenantal separation*.

D. Boundary of Blood: Seed and Land

The preservation of Israel's unique covenantal status was required by the Mosaic law. The physical manifestation of this separation was circumcision. A boundary of blood was imposed on the male organ of reproduction. It was a sign that covenantal life is not obtained by either physical birth or through one's male heirs. Rushdoony wrote about the meaning of circumcision as a denial of faith in man's ability to reproduce himself bilogically. "Circumcision witnesses to the fact that man's hope is not in generation but in regeneration. . . ." ¹³ To escape Adam's legal status as a covenant-breaker, a man must re-covenant with God, a human response made possible by God's absolutely sovereign act of regeneration. The mark of this covenant in ancient Israel was circumcision. Ultimately, this separation was *confessional*. It involved an affirmation of the sovereignty of Israel's God. This was a different kind of boundary from those that divided the tribes, for the tribes were united confessionally: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:4–5). ¹⁴ The nation of Israel was separated from non-covenanted nations by geographical boundaries, but most of all, by covenantal boundaries.

Tribal and family units separated the covenant people within Is-

13. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 43.

14. Chapter 15.

rael. This separation was always to be geographical, usually familial,¹⁵ but never confessional. Again, every tribe confessed the same confession (Deut. 6:4). They were divided tribally because they would have *different heirs*. Only one tribe would bring forth the promised Seed. Tribal separation was therefore based on differences in prophetic inheritance.

Israel's tribal divisions had political implications. They guaranteed localism. This *localism of tribal inheritance* was the judicial complement of the *unity of national covenantal confession*. Tribal boundaries were part of an overall structure of covenantal unity.

Family membership and rural land ownership in Israel were tied together by the laws of inheritance. A rural Israelite—and most Israelites were rural¹⁶—was the heir of a specific plot of ground because of his family membership. There was no rural landed inheritance apart from family membership. Unlike the laws of ancient Greece, Mosaic law allowed a daughter to inherit the family's land if there was no son. But there was a condition: she had to marry within the tribal unit (Num. 36:8). The landed inheritance could not lawfully move from one tribe to another (Num. 36:9).¹⁷ A man's primary inheritance in Israel was his legal status (freemanship). He had the right to serve in God's holy army. He also inherited rural land (Lev. 25:10) or, if he was a Levite, land in Levitical cities (Lev. 25:32–33). The Promised Land was tied to name. The land of Israel was God's; His name was on it. The family's land was tied to the family's name.¹⁸ Jacob had promised Judah that his blood line would rule until the promised heir (Shiloh) should come (Gen. 49:10). Thus, the integrity of each of the seed lines in Israel—family by family, tribe by tribe—was maintained by the Mosaic law until this promise was fulfilled. The mandatory separation among the tribes was symbolized by the prohibition against mixing seeds. The prohibition applied to the mixing of seeds in one field (Lev. 19:19). The field did not represent the whole world under the Mosaic covenant; *the field represented the Promised Land*. The husbandman or farmer had to create boundaries between his specialized breeds and between

15. There could be inter-tribal marriages. Daughters received dowries rather than landed inheritance. Dowries could cross tribal boundaries.

16. This is not to say that God intended them to remain rural. On the contrary, the covenantal blessing of God in the form of population growth was to move most Israelites into the cities as time went on. See *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24:F.

17. The exception was when rural land that had been pledged to a priest went to him in the jubilee year if the pledge was violated (Lev. 27:20–21). *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

18. *Ibid.*, ch. 17:G:2.

his crops.

So closely were seed and land connected in the Mosaic law that the foreign eunuch, having no possibility of seed, was not allowed to become a citizen in Israel (Deut. 23:1). (The New Testament's system of adoption has annulled this law: Acts 8:26–38.)

Leviticus 19:19 is part of the Mosaic covenant's laws governing the preservation of the family's seed (name) during a particular period of history. It was an aspect of inheritance: the necessary preservation of genetic Israel. The preservation of the separate seeds of Israel's families was basic to the preservation of the nation's legal status as a set-apart, separated, *holy* covenantal entity. This principle of separation applied to domesticated animals, crops, and clothing.

E. Covenantal Separation

Let us now consider the law prohibiting the linking an ox and a donkey in plowing (Deut. 22:10). In Leviticus 19:19, the prohibition was against the mixing of breeds in order to develop specialized breeds. This was a seed law: there was a possibility of interbreeding. Such was not the case in the law against joint plowing.

The ox and the donkey work differently. They are not beasts with the same strengths and habits. To use them in a joint plowing effort is to reduce the productivity of both. Neither can achieve its proper calling before God if they are linked by a yoke in the same work effort. The yoke makes each of them a poorer servant. This prohibition was not a seed law; it was a covenantal law. Paul wrote: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:14–18). The law against joint plowing is a law against putting covenanted people with noncovenanted people in the same covenantal institution. The issue here is theological confession. *A common theological confession is the biblical yoke.* Those who refuse to take a covenantal

oath are not to be joined in a common covenantal task with those who take it. There are three institutions to which this principle applies: church, family, and state.

This law was symbolic of all three covenantal relationships in society: church, family, and state. Israel was not to join with other nations in a covenantal bond; neither were Israelites to marry foreigners. The church was to be kept pure. Modern humanistic political theory denies that this principle of separation applies to the civil covenant, but clearly it applied in Mosaic Israel. Where Israelites exercised lawful civil authority, they were not voluntarily to share political power with covenant-breakers. Those Christians who invoke Paul's authority to prohibit marriages between Christians and non-Christians are necessarily invoking Deuteronomy 22:10. No one should assume that Paul annulled the principle of unequal yoking in the civil covenant while affirming it in the church and family covenants. The case for Paul's supposed annulment of the civil covenant's yoke must be proven exegetically. It must not merely be assumed. Israel was under civil bondage during the captivity and after, so this law could not be applied in civil government, but this is not proof that this law has been partially annulled. Christian political pluralists assume that the law of unequal yoking has been partially annulled, but they do not offer an exegetical defense.¹⁹

F. Clothing

Mixed clothing made of linen and wool was under a different kind of prohibition. It was illegal to wear clothing produced by mixing these two fibers. There was no law against producing mixed cloth for export, however. Why was wearing it wrong but exporting it allowed?²⁰

No other form of mixed-fiber clothing was prohibited by the Mosaic law. Did this case law by implication or extension prohibit all mixed fibers? This seems doubtful. It would have been easy to specify the more general prohibition rather than single out these two fibers. Then what was the nature of the offense? Answer: to wear clothing of this mixture was to proclaim symbolically *the equality of Israel with all other nations*. This could not be done lawfully by Israelites. It could be done by non-Israelites outside Israel, for there, no such opinion had

19. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

20. In biblical law, if something is not prohibited, it is allowed.

any covenantal authority.

Linen was the priestly cloth. The priests were required to wear linen on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:30–34). Linen was to be worn by the priest in the sacrifice of the burnt offering (Lev. 6:10). During and after the Babylonian captivity, because of their rebellion in Israel, the Levites and priests were placed under a new requirement that kept them separate from the people: they had to wear linen whenever they served before the table of the Lord. They had to put on linen garments when they entered God's presence in the inner court, and remove them when they returned to the outer court. No wool was to come upon them (Ezek. 44:15–19). The text says, "they shall not sanctify the people with their garments" (Ezek. 44:19). Priestly holiness was associated with linen.

Inside a priestly nation, such a mixture was a threat to the holiness of the priests when they brought sacrifices before God. As between a priestly nation and a non-priestly nation, this section of Leviticus 19:19 symbolized the national separation of believers from unbelievers. Deuteronomy 22:11 is the parallel passage: "Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts: [as] of wool and linen together."

Inside the boundaries of Israel, this law symbolized sacrificial separation: the tribe of Levi was set apart as a legal representative before God. In this *intra-national* sense, this law did have a role to play in the separation of the tribes. This is why it was connected to the two seed laws in Leviticus 19:19.

It is still prohibited to mix covenantal (confessional) opposites in a single covenant: in church, state, and family. But is the wearing of this mixture of these two fabrics still prohibited? No. Why not? Because of the change in the priesthood (Gal. 3). Our new covering is Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27–29). Here it is again: *inheritance is by God's promise to Abraham*. The sign of this inheritance is no longer circumcision; it is baptism. This is our new clothing. The old prohibition against mixing wool and linen in our clothing is annulled. The new priesthood is under a new covering: Jesus Christ.

G. The Question of Jurisdiction

Was this a civil law or an ecclesiastical law? To identify it as a civil law, we should be able to specify appropriate civil sanctions. The text mentions none. The civil magistrate might have confiscated the progeny of the interbreeding activities, but then what? Sell the animals? Export them? Kill them and sell the meat? These were possible sanctions, but the text is silent. What about mingled seed? Was the entire crop to be confiscated by the state? Could it lawfully be sold? Was it unclean? The text is silent. This silence establishes a *prima facie* case for the law as ecclesiastical.

The mixed clothing law refers to a fact of covenantal separation: a nation of priests. The Israelites were not to wear clothing made of linen and wool. Mixing testified symbolically to the legitimacy of mixing a nation of priests and a common nation. This is why wearing such mixed cloth was prohibited. This aspect of the case law's meaning was primarily priestly. Again, the *prima facie* case is that this was an ecclesiastical law and therefore to be enforced by the priesthood.

The maximum ecclesiastical sanction was excommunication. This would have marked the law-breaker as being outside the civil covenant. He faced the loss of his citizenship as well as the disinheritance of his sons unless they broke with him publicly. Instead of a mere economic loss, he faced a far greater penalty. This penalty was consistent with the status of this law as a seed law. The prohibition of mixed seeds was an affirmation of tribal separation until Shiloh came. An attack on tribal separation was an attack on Jacob's messianic prophecy. The appropriate penalty was ecclesiastical: removal from both inheritance and citizenship within the tribe.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to answer three questions: What did these verses mean? How were they applied? How should they be applied today? This is the three-part challenge of biblical hermeneutics.

The prohibition against the mixing of seeds—animals and crops—was symbolic of the mandatory separation of the tribes. This separation was eschatologically based: till Shiloh came (Gen. 49:10). The prohibition against wearing a mixed cloth of linen and wool was a priestly prohibition: separation of the tribe of Levi within Israel and symbolic of the separation of the priestly nation of Israel from other nations, i.e.,

a confessional separation.

The law prohibiting mixed seeds was temporary because it was tribal. It ended with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, or, at the latest, at Pentecost. *Spiritual adoption has overcome tribalism as the basis of inheritance in the kingdom of God.* The gift of the Spirit, not physical reproduction, is the basis of Christians' inheritance. National Israel was disinherited in A.D. 70.²¹ The kingdom of God was taken from national Israel and given to a new nation, the church (Matt. 21:43). The jubilee land laws (Lev. 25) have ended forever. So have the prohibitions against genetic mixing and mixed crops. When people are baptized into Christ through the Spirit, this new priesthood puts on Christ. The older requirements or prohibitions regarding certain types of garments have ended forever. What remains is the judicial boundary between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers. This separation is eternal (Rev. 20:14–15).

The biblical principle of not mixing seeds, whether of animals or crops, in a single field applies to us only indirectly. The basic judicial application is that we must be faithful to Jesus Christ, the promised Seed, who has come in history. In Him alone is true inheritance. But there is no application with respect to tribal boundaries. The tribes of Israel are gone forever. Thus, there is no application of this verse genetically. We are allowed to breed animals and plant various crops in the same field at the same time.

The other applications of the principle of separation prohibited (1) plowing with both an ox and a donkey, (2) the wearing of mixed fiber garments: linen and wool. The prohibition against plowing with different species reflects the biblical principle of covenantal relationships: the prohibition against unequal yoking. Israel was to have no covenantal relationships with the nations around her. That law is still in force.

The prohibition against mixed clothing applies to us today through baptism, for by baptism we have received our new clothing in Christ. This principle of separation still holds nationally, for it is covenantal, not tribal. It refers to the distinctions between priests and non-priests, between priestly nations (confessionally Christian) and non-priestly nations. It refers to the distinction between Christendom and every other world system. But it has nothing to do with fabrics any longer.

21. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW

Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him (Deut. 23:15–16).

The theocentric principle that undergirded this law is the principle of God’s sanctuary. The meaning of “sanctuary,” as with “sanctification,” is related to holiness. A sanctuary is a place formally marked by boundaries for the worship of God. This does not mean that everyone who enters a sanctuary is there to worship God. It does mean that everyone inside its boundaries has unique access to God.

A. Slaves from Abroad

This law seems to be contrary to the Mosaic law’s defense of private property in slaves. Foreign slaves in Israel were the permanent possession of their Israelite owners, generation after generation (Lev. 25:44–46).¹ Furthermore, Israelite bondservants were not free to come and go as they pleased. A debtor who had forfeited payment on a zero-interest charitable loan had to serve his creditor until the next year of release—up to six years (Ex. 21:2).² If an Israelite had been sold into bondage to another Israelite in order to repay a non-charitable loan, he had to serve until the next jubilee—up to 49 years (Lev. 25:39–40).³ If an Israelite sold himself into bondservitude to a resident alien, he had to serve until the next jubilee or until one of his relatives bought him out of servitude (Lev. 25:47–52).⁴ In short, the Mosaic law upheld the right

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 31.

3. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 29.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

of a foreigner to retain ownership of an Israelite. This was a strong defense of private property. Contrary to Rushdoony, there was nothing even remotely voluntary about remaining in temporary bondservice, let alone permanent slavery.⁵ This is why it took an act of extreme violence by a master to authorize a civil court to award a slave his freedom, e.g., poking out an eye or knocking out a tooth (Ex. 21:26–27).⁶

This was not a land law.⁷ If the jubilee land law authorizing foreign servitude could not be invoked by a foreign slave owner to get back his slave, surely a foreigner cannot invoke it today, after Christ has annulled the jubilee law (Luke 4:17–21),⁸ including the law authorizing inter-generational slavery.

1. *An Immigrant*

The key words that unlock the meaning of this passage are *among* and *gates*. The escaped slave described in this passage had come to dwell among them. The words “with thee” were added by the translators. The Hebrew word for *among* immediately follows *dwell*. The Hebrew word could also be translated *within*, meaning within a jurisdiction. The escaped slave also had the right to choose where he would live. He could choose one gate from many gates, meaning any city.

To understand this law better, we must first consider the fact that Mosaic civil law did not compel anyone to offer positive sanctions.⁹ Rather, it imposed negative sanctions for evil acts. It should be the ideal for every system of civil law to remove all positive sanctions by the state and impose only those negative sanctions authorized by, or implied by, biblical law. The state is to impose negative sanctions only: punishing public evil. It is not a wealth-creator; it is a wealth-redistributor. It is not safe to entrust to the state the power of making one man rich at the expense of another. It is also not moral. A welfare state is a covenant-breaking state.

5. He wrote: “Thus, the only kind of slavery permitted is voluntary slavery, as Deuteronomy 23:15, 16 makes very clear.” R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 286.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 39.

7. On land laws, see Appendix J.

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

9. Restitution payments by the convicted criminal are the restoration of what is owed to the victim. The state coercively redistributes wealth back to the lawful owner. The legal owner was the victim of a crime. Under biblical law, no one has a legal claim on another person’s wealth merely because the other person is richer.

Second, we should recognize that slaves do not “dwell among” an individual. The language indicates that this law was addressed to a corporate group, the nation. It was a civil law. It did not compel any Israelite to grant a positive sanction to the escaped slave. What it did was to prohibit Israel’s civil authorities from imposing a specific negative sanction on him, namely, returning him to his owner or forbidding him the right to take up residence in a city. The locus of jurisdiction was the nation, from which the slave could choose any city as his place of residence. *This indicates that he had not previously been a resident of Israel.* He was an escapee from servitude in a foreign household in a foreign nation.

2. Idolatry

The key covenantal issue here is hierarchy. This former slave had been in bondage to a foreign master, who in turn was in bondage to a foreign god. The slave had sought deliverance from his former master. He had decided to come to Israel because it was the nation in which former slaves could be free men. *Men were free in Israel because they were not in bondage to idols.* This is the heart of the Bible’s message: *deliverance from evil.* This deliverance begins with deliverance from idolatry. In the Old Covenant, idolatry was almost universal outside of Israel.¹⁰ There was little likelihood that this slave would bring along an idol from the household of his former master. Such an idol would have been the mark of his former servitude. In any case, household or civic idols in the ancient Near East were exclusively local gods. The fugitive slave’s presence inside the boundaries of Israel testified to their limited jurisdiction.

My interpretation of this law as applying to foreign slaves has ancient precedents. The Talmud declared this fugitive to be a non-Jewish slave of a Jewish master living outside the land (Gittin 45a). There is no exegetical evidence for identifying the owner as a Hebrew, but the rabbis did identify the fugitive as having immigrated into Israel. Nachmanides argued that this slave had been in bondage to a foreigner. The key issue was idolatry, he said. “The reason for this commandment is that with us he will worship God and it is not proper that we return him to his master to worship idols.”¹¹ This statement is incor-

10. The one major exception was Greek rationalism, a millennium after this law was declared. But Greek rationalism was the religion of very few classical Greeks, as Socrates’ execution indicates.

11. Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, 5 vols. (New York: Shiloh, [1267?])

rect with respect to worshipping God, for worship was not required of any foreigner residing in Israel. He was required only to obey God's civil laws, which did not include formal worship. But it is true that the slave had been delivered from the idolatrous rituals of his former household, in which a slave would probably have been compelled to participate.

Nachmanides also argued that the slave probably had fled into the camp of the Israelites during an offensive military campaign by Israel against a foreign city.¹² The previous section of Deuteronomy sets forth laws governing foreign campaigns (vv. 9–14). This is a plausible argument. A foreign slave would have had a much greater opportunity to flee from a foreign master during a defensive war against Israel. But this law stands on its own, irrespective of war. Any slave who could get to Israel—the Promised Land—could escape bondage. This fact would have become well known among slaves in the ancient Near East, as word of this sanctuary spread from slave to slave. Israel would have attracted other men's slaves.

3. *Private Property*

Israel honored private property. Property is an extension of the kingdom of God in history. Private property is an owner's legal immunity from fraud and violence, both private and public, which is granted by God and is supposed to be enforced by the state. God's authority to grant such a legal immunity is based on His original ownership of the creation and His delegation of stewardship tasks to individuals. Every individual is responsible to God for the management of whatever it is that God has put under his authority, as Jesus' parable of the three stewards indicates (Matt. 25:14–30)¹³—the parable that immediately precedes His description of the final judgment: sheep and goats. In short, *private property is legally grounded in the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty*.

The foreign slave master did not acknowledge God's authority. Therefore, his rights of property were inferior to the fugitive slave's right to asylum in Israel. The Promised Land was to be a place of refuge, a sanctuary—a set-apart place, i.e., a holy place. Immigrant fugitive slaves were not compelled to worship God, but they did have to

1976), V, p. 288.

12. *Idem*.

13. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

obey God's civil laws. They had to honor God to this extent. Foreign gods could no longer claim jurisdiction over these ex-slaves. The power of foreign gods was broken to this extent.

The former slave master was disinherited by this law. His living inheritance had fled to a sanctuary. The legal defense of his inheritance under the authority of an idol was sacrificed to the principle of defending Israel's boundaries and its sanctuary status. The biblical covenantal principles of God's sovereignty, His hierarchical authority, and Israel's boundaries were superior to pagan covenantal principles: local god or gods, an alternative hierarchy, and local jurisdiction.

In effect, the Mosaic law acknowledged the right of a foreign slave master to proclaim his local god's local authority. If he chose to live under such tyranny, he was entitled to do so. But this idolatrous tyranny would not extend its authority across Israel's borders. This case law mandated that Israel's civil government not return immigrant slaves to their foreign masters. It announced to foreign masters: "You want to worship a local god? Very well, have your own way. Your god's jurisdiction does not extend across Israel's boundaries. Your property rights in people's lives do not extend across these boundaries."

This means that a foreign slave who had been purchased by an Israelite in a foreign nation would henceforth live inside a sanctuary established by God: a covenant-keeping household in a covenant-keeping nation. He could hear God's word there. He would be circumcised (Gen. 17:2). He would attend Passover with the family. Through lawful purchase, he had been separated from the idolatry of his nation. Legally, the head of his new household had become his kinsman redeemer. *This practice pointed forward to Jesus Christ's purchase of the gentiles through His death on Calvary.* Covenanted gentiles now live in His household, not merely as servants but as adopted sons. Christ has become their kinsman redeemer.

Whether a slave's new household was located in a foreign nation or in Israel, he was the property of his owner. Prior to the annulment of the law of permanent slavery by Jesus Christ's fulfillment of the jubilee law, the principle of the covenant-keeping household as a foreign slave's sanctuary superseded the principle of the Israelite city as the foreign slave's sanctuary.¹⁴

14. In the New Covenant, the principle of the covenanted Trinitarian nation as a sanctuary for oppressed foreign slaves is still in effect. This includes the escaped slaves of messianic states.

B. Oppression

The Mosaic law repeatedly mentions three classes of people who deserved special consideration as deserving of justice: widows, orphans, and strangers. The immigrant fugitive slave was in a vulnerable position—indeed, the most vulnerable position in Israel. He could not return home without becoming enslaved again. Worse; he was a man who had run away. He would be subject to harsh penalties. Masters would have made him an example to other would-be fugitive slaves. The fugitive slave in Israel had no local family, no access to landed inheritance, no citizenship, and no place to return. He had been at the bottom of the social ladder in his home country. Except for the foreign slave permanently owned by an Israelite family, he was at the bottom of the social scale in Israel. But, economically speaking, he was potentially in worse shape than the permanent slave, who was part of an Israelite household. He had no economic safety net.

What did it mean to oppress a person? Oppression as defined by the Bible is a judicial act. It involves using civil law to steal from or otherwise restrict an honest person. Oppression is a misuse of the civil law. There is no economic definition available to civil judges to identify oppression. There is only a judicial standard.¹⁵ The biblical principle of civil justice is expressed in Exodus 12:49: “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.” The rule of law is at the heart of civil justice.¹⁶ To use the civil law to shape the outcome of another person’s economic output is a form of oppression. When the state shapes economic results by applying the law to one group in a way not applied to all men, someone is being oppressed.

The judicial defenselessness of the immigrant ex-slave was not supposed to become an opportunity for oppression. He was not to be targeted as a likely candidate for theft through judicial manipulation. His property rights were to be upheld in Israel, unlike his former master’s property rights. His former master had gained authority over him by means of another god’s laws. The God of Israel had become his liberator. Liberation in Israel was a symbol of liberation by God. It meant liberation from corrupt civil laws. The rule of God’s law gave him his liberty. It also warned him regarding the final judgment: all men are under the same law and sanctions. All men need the mercy of God as

15. North, *Authority and Dominion*, chaps. 48:C, 52.

16. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

the judicial basis of their liberation from sin and its eternal consequences: negative sanctions.

Conclusion

Economics is subordinate to biblically revealed religion. So is everything else. Private property is not an absolute principle. Neither is any other principle. No arrangement or institution is absolute in history. Only the written word of God possesses unchangeable, comprehensive authority in history.¹⁷ No institution can legitimately claim total allegiance. Any institution that does so will fail. The more secular it is, the sooner it will fail. This is why the Communist Party failed, despite its extraordinary international expansion under Lenin and Stalin. It claimed total allegiance.¹⁸ It could not enforce this. One by one, the most eloquent of Communism's disaffected former disciples recognized it as the god that had failed, decades before it visibly failed.¹⁹

Is this case law still in force? Yes. Christian societies should be sanctuary societies, where liberty is available to all residents: liberty under biblical law. The sanctuary is bounded; these boundaries must be defended by the sword. This means that Christian societies must be defended by confessionally Christian civil governments. In short, *biblical sanctuary means Trinitarian theocracy*. There can be no permanent sanctuary state in history apart from Christian theocracy,²⁰ just as there is no sanctuary in eternity apart from subordination to the King of kings.

No magistrate in a Christian nation should ever send an immigrant fugitive slave back to his master. His master may be the state. Modern nations do not admit to being slave societies, even when they are. The reality of slavery, whatever it is called, should be acknowledged by the civil authorities in free societies. Immigration laws should offer sanctuary to all those who are suffering from the judicial

17. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

18. Benjamin Gitlow, *The Whole of Their Lives* (New York: Scribner's, 1948).

19. Richard Crossman (ed.), *The God That Failed* (New York: Harper, 1949).

20. The United States was the most open sanctuary society in history. It was also socially Protestant throughout most of its history. California began to erect immigration barriers against the Chinese toward the end of the nineteenth century, when the Darwinian Progressive movement was beginning to gain political strength. The 1924 national immigration law was passed in the middle of the humanistic Roaring Twenties.

equivalent of slavery.²¹

The covenantal problem here is that open borders into a confessionally pluralistic nation offer ripe fruit to dedicated disciples of non-pluralistic foreign religions. They bring their gods with them. These gods are not local gods; they make universal claims, just as the God of the Bible does. Their disciples want to extend the authority of their non-pluralistic religions. Islam is the obvious example. When citizenship is not grounded in a public confession of faith in the God of the Bible, immigrants can work to change the pluralistic confession of the nation after they become naturalized citizens. The religion of pluralism offers most of these immigrants equal access to the public square, once they become citizens. The result is the weakening of Christian faith in the public square and the undermining of the remnants of Christian civilization. In secular democratic nations, the war for the national confession will be fought in the nation's bedrooms. Apart from a massive revival, comparative birth rates will determine the future national confession. In Western Europe, Islam is winning this demographic war.²²

This is not to deny the legitimacy of open borders. Open borders were basic to Mosaic Israel. If fugitive slaves were welcomed in Israel, how much more were free men welcomed! If people who were lowest on the social scale outside the land had legal access to residency inside the land, how much more did capital-owning immigrants have access! This case law offers additional evidence that Israel had an open doors immigration policy. People who were willing to submit to the civil laws of Israel's God were offered freedom inside the holy nation's boundaries. Israel was a true sanctuary.²³

21. Gary North, "The Sanctuary Society and Its Enemies," *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, XII (Summer 1998), pp. 205–19. (<http://bit.ly/SanctuarySociety>)

22. Pat Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Threaten the West* (New York: St. Martin's, 2001).

23. In 1850, the government of the United States passed a fugitive slave law. This law mandated that officers of the United States government extradite fleeing slaves to southern states. These officers were empowered to appoint local commissioners to assist them. These commissioners in turn were empowered to compel private citizens to join a *posse comitatus* to chase down fugitive slaves. No jury trials on the alleged slave's judicial status were allowed in North; none was authorized in the South, either. The accused was not allowed to present testimony in the North regarding his free status. A fine of \$1,000—a huge sum in 1850—was imposed on anyone who aided a slave in escaping. "The Compromise of 1850," in *The Annals of America*, 18 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968), VIII, pp. 55–57. In short, the government of the United States compelled residents in the North to cooperate with slave owners in the South whose forefathers had purchased kidnapped Africans from slave traders (mainly

The deciding civil issue was confession of faith. Citizenship was open only to circumcised men and their wives who confessed faith in the God of Israel and who participated in Passover. Israel was not pluralistic. Long-term residence did not mean the right to vote. It meant only the right to participate without discrimination in Israel's economy. It meant justice; it did not mean judgeship.

Northerners) prior to 1808, when the import of slaves was outlawed inside the United States. After 1808, Southern slave owners bred them for sale, cutting the North out of the lucrative industry. The fugitive slave law of 1850 forced Northern moralists to break the law and help those slaves who broke it. The enforcement of this law over the next decade steadily separated the United States into two nations: a sanctuary nation and a slave nation. The politicians found no way to reconcile these two nations. This law created the mentality of "two nations in one," which in turn led to the Civil War (1861–65). After the South's states seceded in late 1860 and early 1861, the newly inaugurated President, Abraham Lincoln, decided to force them back into the Union militarily.

USURY: YES AND NO

Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals [food], usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it (Deut. 23:19–20).

The theocentric principle here is that God protects His people as a shepherd protects his flock. He places boundaries around them.

A. Subordination and Debt

The text specified that the covenant-keeping lender was to imitate God by not lending at interest to a brother in the faith, i.e., a person who publicly confesses faith in the God of the Bible and who had subordinated himself to the covenanted ecclesiastical community by means of an oath-sign.¹ Those who were outside of the covenanted ecclesiastical community could be lawfully treated as a shepherd would treat sheep outside his flock. These sheep did not recognize his voice. These sheep were not under his authority; therefore, they were not under his protection.

What is judicially crucial here is the biblical concept of becoming a brother's protector. The shepherd-sheep relationship implies *subordination by the sheep*. "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7).² The Mosaic law recognized that a sheep enters the debt relationship as a subordinate. As we shall see, the cause of this subordination was to be a factor in the lender's

1. Under the Old Covenant, circumcision; under the New Covenant, baptism. See Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), pp. 86–89. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 67.

decision as to which kind of loan is involved: charitable or business. The poor brother who had fallen on hard times through no moral fault of his own was morally entitled to a zero-interest charitable loan (Deut. 15:1–7).³ This subordination aspect of a loan is universal. This law was therefore not a land law.⁴ It had implications for the Israelites' maintenance of the kingdom grant, but its legitimacy was not based on this grant.

This law indicates that God protects covenant-keepers in a way that He does not protect covenant-breakers. He regards the former as deserving of special consideration. This is a matter of inheritance.

The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever (Ps. 37:21–29).

There was a positive sanction attached to this law: "that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it." Moses promised that God would provide visible blessings in the land. The land was not the positive sanction attached to this law, for it would soon be their inheritance. But comprehensive blessings inside the land's boundaries would be the result of honoring this law. There can be no doubt about this law's importance. This law was highly specific, but the blessings attached to it were so comprehensive that they were unspecified.

B. Two Kinds of Loans

In the other case laws dealing with zero-interest loans, it was the poor brother who was to be benefited. "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer,

3. Chapter 35.

4. On land laws, see Appendix J.

neither shalt thou lay upon him usury" (Ex. 22:25).⁵ This protection extended to the resident alien. "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger [*geyr*], or a sojourner [*toshawb*]; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase" (Lev. 25:35–37).⁶ There were two deciding factors in making a zero-interest loan: the would-be borrower's poverty and his status as legally protected.

One biblical principle of interpretation is this: the more narrowly specified text is considered authoritative over the more broadly specified text. That which is narrowly defined is clearer. It provides more data on how the text is to be understood. We should move from the clear to the less clear, from the specific to the general.

In the interpretation of this case law, we conclude that if God had prohibited covenant-keepers from charging interest to everyone, He would not have excluded the stranger from the prohibition. Similarly, if He had prohibited covenant-keepers from charging interest to other covenant-keepers, He would not have specified poor brethren as coming under the prohibition. There would have been no need for God to identify a smaller group among the brethren as deserving of special treatment if all brethren were equally deserving of such treatment.

Not only was the economic status of the circumcised brother a criterion, so was the kind of loan. A charitable loan was morally compulsory. "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (Deut. 15:7–8).⁷ To this type of loan was attached a negative civil sanction for a debtor's failure to repay: a period of bondage that lasted until the next

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28.

7. Moral compulsion is not legal compulsion. The state was not to impose negative sanctions on anyone who refused to lend. God would provide positive sanctions on those with open wallets: "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto" (Deut. 15:10).

national year of release (Deut. 15:12). This could be up to six years of bondage. Yet it was also possible for a debtor to be enslaved for a much longer period for a failure to repay a debt: until the next jubilee year (Lev. 25:39–41).⁸ This could be up to 49 years of bondage. This raises a major question: What criteria distinguished sabbatical-year debt servitude from jubilee-year debt servitude?

The first criterion was the presence of an interest rate. If a poor man sought a morally compulsory zero-interest loan from his brother in the faith, he placed himself at risk for up to six years. At the end of that time, either the loan was automatically cancelled by law or else he, having previously forfeited repayment, was released from bondage and sent out with food and drink by his creditor (Deut. 15:13–14). A second criterion was that a charitable loan did not require a man's landed inheritance as collateral. Collateral was either goods or else his willingness to become a bondservant for defaulting. The text does not indicate that he was required to pledge his family's landed inheritance in order to collateralize a charitable loan.

If a man who possessed a rural inheritance that he could use as collateral decided to seek a non-charitable loan, he had no moral claim on the lender, nor could he reasonably expect to receive an interest rate of zero. This loan would have been either a business loan or a consumer loan. This would-be debtor was not truly poor unless his land holdings were too small to support him. The presence of jubilee-bondage loans in addition to sabbatical year-bondage loans indicates that there were commercial loans in Israel. If the interest-bearing commercial debt contract placed him at risk of bondage, then by forfeiting payment on the loan, the debtor placed himself in a much longer term of bondage. This is evidence that commercial loans were much larger than charitable loans. Such loans could be made for longer periods of time than six years. The collateral was the income stream of the land and even the individual for up to forty-nine years. In short, a commercial loan could place at risk the fruit of a man's inheritance until the next jubilee.

C. Two Kinds of Aliens

The alien or stranger [*nokree*] was eligible for an interest-bearing loan at any time. Loans to him were permanent; the year of release did not benefit him. "And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor

8. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 29.

that lendeth ought unto his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner [*nokree*] thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release" (Deut. 15:2–3). The foreigner here was an alien who either was not a property-owning resident in Israel or was not circumcised. He was not a permanent resident who had settled in a city, i.e., a sojourner.

The Mosaic law distinguished between the two kinds of aliens in other ways. In the law governing unclean meat, we read: "Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger [*geyr*] that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien [*nokree*]: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God" (Deut. 14:21a). The permanent resident could receive the unclean meat as a gift, but it could not be sold to him, i.e., it offered no profit for the Israelite. In contrast, it was lawful to sell ritually unclean meat to a foreigner [*nokree*].⁹

The permanent resident [*geyr*] was to be treated as a brother: he was not to be charged interest on a charitable loan, as we have seen (Lev. 25:35–37).¹⁰ He was a kind of honorary Israelite. Not being a citizen of Israel—a member of the congregation—he could not serve as a judge. If he was not circumcised, he could not enter the temple or eat a Passover meal. But as a man voluntarily living permanently under biblical civil law, he was entitled to the civil law's protection, including the prohibition against interest-bearing charitable loans. Permanently residing voluntarily under the law's authority, he was under its protection.

Lending at interest was one of God's means of bringing foreigners under the authority of Israel. "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6).¹¹ This was an aspect of *dominion through hierarchy*: "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7).¹² The foreigner was fair game for a program of profitable money-lending. This included loans to poor foreigners. When a foreigner was desperate for money, an Israel-

9. Chapter 34.

10. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 28.

11. Chapter 37.

12. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 67.

ite was allowed to take advantage of the situation and lend to him at interest. In contrast, the resident alien was legally protected; he was to be treated as a brother. He was already voluntarily under God's civil law and some of the ritual laws, such as ritual washing after eating meat that had died of natural causes (Lev. 17:15). There was no need to bring him under dominion through debt. He had already acknowledged his debt to God.

D. Which Jurisdiction?

The negative sanction for forfeiture was a period of bondage. This placed the Mosaic debt laws under the civil government. But there were no stated penalties for a lender's refusal to lend, despite the moral compulsion aspect of the charitable loan. God promised to bring negative sanctions against the individual who refused to honor this aspect of the law (Deut. 15:9) and positive sanctions for the man who honored it (v. 10). The state is not a legitimate agency for bringing positive sanctions. The state lawfully imposes only negative sanctions. It enforced bondage on those debtors who defaulted, but it did not compel lenders to make loans.

This means that the lender was under God's sanctions directly, while the debtor was under God's sanctions indirectly. The lender might give him the positive sanction of a charitable loan, and the state would enforce the penalty for non-repayment. The debtor's obligations were specific: pay back so much money by a specific date or suffer the consequences. The lender's obligations were not specific: lend a reasonable amount of money and subsequently receive unspecified blessings from God. There was no earthly institution that could lawfully enforce specific penalties on such unspecific transactions.

Biblical civil law prohibits specific acts. The state lawfully enforces contracts, but these contracts are narrowly specified in advance by the parties. The state enforces justice, which includes imposing negative sanctions on those who violate contracts. But it is not the state's responsibility to mandate that potential lenders provide loans of a specific size and duration to borrowers.

E. Not Restricted to Money Loans

"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals [food], usury of any thing that is lent upon usury" (v. 19). This clause in the law makes it plain that usury, meaning a posit-

ive interest rate, applies across the board to all items lent. The phenomenon of interest is not limited to money loans. It is a universal aspect of lending, which is why the law specifies that the prohibition applies to loans in general, not merely money loans.

1. *Interest and Rent*

There is an ancient and widespread error going back at least to Aristotle that interest on money loans is unproductive because money, unlike animals, does not reproduce itself. In other words, money is sterile. Therefore, Aristotle concluded, "of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural."¹³ Yet the critics of usury have generally viewed rent on land as legitimate.¹⁴ If I loan someone 20 ounces of gold and charge him one ounce per year in interest, I am viewed as a usurer and somehow morally questionable. If, on the other hand, I let the same person use my farm land, which is worth 20 ounces of gold, and I charge him one ounce of gold per year as rent, I come under no criticism. Why this difference in opinion? In both cases, I give up something valuable for a period of time. I can either spend the gold or invest it in a business venture. Similarly, I can either sell the farm or plow it, plant it, and reap a crop. In both cases, I allow someone else to use my asset for a year, with which he can then pursue his own goals. I charge him for this privilege of gaining temporary control over a valuable asset. I charge either interest or rent because I do not choose to give away the income which my asset could generate during the period in which the other person controls it.

To expect me to loan someone my 20 ounces of gold at no interest is the same, economically speaking, as to expect me to loan him the use of my farm on a rent-free basis. In fact, the thing which people conventionally call *rental income* is analytically *interest income*. Because a payment for the use of land is seen as morally neutral, men describe the interest income generated by land by means of a morally neutral term: rent. Because a payment for the use of money is seen as morally reprehensible, men describe the interest income generated by money loans by means of a morally loaded term: usury. But the transactions are analytically identical. *Interest income and rental income are the same thing: payment for the use of a marketable asset over time.*

13. Aristotle, *Politics*, I:X, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, [1946] 1958), p. 29.

14. This would be an extension of Aristotle's argument: "acquisition of fruits and animals." *Ibid.*, p. 28.

There is a tendency to see interest as something exploitative and rent as something legitimate. Interest income is not seen as productive; rental income *is* seen as productive. Why the difference? Probably because people think that the creation of value is limited to the creation of goods and services. This outlook is incorrect, and the best example is the discovery of a new idea. It is not physical. We can see this analytical error at work in a series of examples.

2. The Deciding Factor Is Not Material

Example number one. I sell a one-year lease to my abandoned gold mine, which no longer produces any gold. I charge one ounce of gold for this opportunity, payable at the end of one year. The lease-holder discovers a new deposit, digs out two hundred ounces of gold in one year, and pays me one ounce of gold. Nobody thinks this arrangement is exploitative on my part. He gets rich, and I get my agreed-upon ounce of gold. Even if he fails to find any gold, most people would regard my net income of one ounce of gold as legitimate. After all, I let him use my abandoned gold mine for a year. He made a mistake, but he might have struck it rich.

Example number two. An inventor comes to me. He thinks that he has discovered a way to increase the output of gold mines—say, a chemical method of extracting more gold out of the ore. He does not have the money to complete his final experiment and file for a patent. I lend him 20 ounces of gold for a year at one ounce of gold interest. During this year, he completes the testing, files the patent, and sells the patent for a fortune. He returns my 20 ounces plus one ounce of gold. Have I exploited him? No. But what if his final test proves that the process does not work? Or what if he files the patent incorrectly and someone steals his idea, leaving him without anything to show for his effort? Am I an exploiter because I demand the return of my 20 ounces plus one? I was not a co-investor in the process. I would not have shared in his wealth had everything gone well. His use of my gold did allow him to follow his dream to its conclusion, whether profitable to him or not.

Example number three. What if he borrows my 20 ounces of gold to complete tests on another invention that is unrelated to gold mining? Has the economic analysis changed? No. The borrower seeks his own ends by means of the 20 ounces of gold. Meanwhile, the lender seeks his ends: an interest payment. Each party to the transaction pur-

sues his own individual goals. Each believes that he can benefit from the transaction.

Conclusion: the physical nature of the asset lent for a fixed payment over time has nothing to do with the analytical basis of the transaction, but it has a lot to do with people's confusion about interest. The heart of the matter¹⁵ is not material; it is temporal. The lender gives up something of value for a period of time, and he will not do this voluntarily without compensation unless he believes that his refusal to make a zero-interest loan to a poor brother will result in negative sanctions from God, which it did in Mosaic Israel. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee" (Deut. 15:9).

Deuteronomy 23:19–20 acknowledges the identical nature of these lending transactions irrespective of the physical composition of the items lent: money, food, or anything else. An interest payment was not to be charged on the kind of loan described here: a charitable loan to a brother in the faith. The *charitable aspect* of the loan was the *interest income foregone* by the lender. He could have used the asset to generate income for himself; instead, he lent freely and asked only that what he has lent be returned to him. He was charitable because he forfeited the income which his asset would have generated for him in the business loan market. He gave away this income to the borrower, who paid nothing for it.

F. Compensation for Risk

It is not simply that the lender forfeits income that others would otherwise pay him to use his asset for a year. The lender also bears risk. First, he bears the risk that the loan will not be repaid. The text governing charitable loans makes this clear: "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee" (Deut. 15:9). Charitable debts became unenforceable in Israel in the seventh year. All those who were in debt bondage for

15. We call a mental concept "matter" when we really mean "issue" or "question." We refer "central importance" as "heart." The language of the material invades the mental.

having failed to repay a charitable loan went free (Deut. 15:12), so the loan's collateral in the form of the borrower's future work would not be available to the lender as compensation for a default.

Second, the lender today bears the risk that, if he lends money, the government or the central bank may inflate the nation's domestic money supply, thereby lowering the value of the money which he receives at the end of the loan period. To compensate him for this risk, the lender adds an inflation premium to the interest rate. The threat of price inflation due to monetary inflation is one reason why self-interested lenders should organize politically to pressure the government: (1) not to increase the money supply; (2) to prohibit the central bank from doing so.¹⁶

The lender must be compensated for known risk; otherwise, he will not make the loan. In commercial loans, borrowers compensate the lender for this risk. The risk of one borrower's default is paid for by a *risk premium factor* in the interest rate which is charged to all borrowers within the same risk classification. In the case of the charitable loan to the poor brother, God becomes the risk-bearer. He offers the lender the same shepherd-like protection in hard times that the lender offers the poor brother in hard times. The lender's faith in God's protecting hand is revealed by his willingness to lend at no interest to a righteous poor brother. Also, he thereby acknowledges that God has given him his wealth: "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6).¹⁷

G. Uncertainty vs. Risk

The free market economist offers a distinction between uncertainty and risk. Risk is a statistically calculable negative event. Certain classes of events can be forecasted accurately, i.e., within statistical limits. The discovery of this social fact made possible the modern eco-

16. If the money is gold or silver, and there is no fractional reserve banking, there will be a slow decline in prices over time in a productive economy, since increasing economic output (supply of goods and services) will lower prices in the face of the relatively fixed money supply. The price of goods approaches zero as a limit: the reversal of God's curse in Eden. In such a world, the lender of money reaps a small return: the money returned to him will buy slightly more than it would have bought when he lent it. In such a monetary environment, the borrower would be better off to borrow consumer goods rather than money.

17. Chapter 37.

conomic world.¹⁸ In contrast, uncertainty cannot be measured in advance. Some kinds of events cannot be forecasted by means of statistical techniques, e.g., inventions or the discovery of a gem or a gem of an idea. Risk is different from uncertainty.¹⁹

While we all are to some degree both risk-bearers and uncertainty-bearers, there are only a few people who are professional uncertainty-bearers. We call them *entrepreneurs*. These people forecast the economic future and then buy and sell goods and services in terms of their forecasts in order to profit from their hoped-for accurate knowledge. When successful, they reap profits. When unsuccessful, they reap losses. Because the kinds of events they deal with have not yet been successfully converted into risk events, the market does not enable investors to deal with these events in a scientific, analytical manner. We call such events high-risk events, but this is incorrect analytically. They are uncertain events.

Lenders who seek a legally predictable rate of return lend money at interest. In contrast, investors who are willing to put their money “at risk”—really, *at uncertainty*—in order to share in any profits must also share in any losses. The gains and losses of entrepreneurial ventures are not predictable, or at least not predictable by most people.²⁰ People who are uncertainty-averse but not equally risk-averse lend to people who are willing to bear uncertainty, but who prefer to gain the capital necessary to develop a venture by promising lenders a legally enforceable fixed rate of return. The distribution of risk and uncertainty to those who are willing to bear each of these is made possible through the market for loans. Those entrepreneurs who make statistically unpredictable breakthroughs that benefit society can be funded in their ventures by others who are unwilling to bear uncertainty but who are willing to bear some degree of risk. Without such a social institution, only two kinds of entrepreneurs could fund their ventures: (1) those with capital of their own to invest; (2) those who are willing

18. Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

19. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>); Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

20. An entrepreneur who has discovered a way to deal with formerly uncertain events by means of proprietary or as yet not widely recognized statistical techniques is in a position to make a great deal of money until others discover or steal these techniques.

to share their profits with co-owners of any discovery, and who also have the ability to persuade these investor-owners to put their money into the venture.

Conclusion

The more general language of this case law—*brothers in the faith*—has misled commentators for two millennia. This law must be interpreted in terms of the more narrowly focused reference point of the other laws governing interest: *poor* brothers in the faith, as well as poor resident aliens, who have fallen on hard times through no moral fault of their own. This case law applied to charitable loans made to brothers in the faith and resident aliens who lived voluntarily under God's civil laws. It did not prohibit interest-bearing commercial loans. It did not apply to charitable loans to foreigners [*nokree*].

By failing to understand the context of the Mosaic laws against interest-taking, the medieval church placed prohibitions on all interest-bearing loans.²¹ This drastically restricted the market for loans. It restricted the legal ability of people who were averse to entrepreneurial uncertainty from making loans at interest. It thereby restricted the ability of entrepreneurs to obtain capital for their ventures. The result was lower economic growth for the entire society.

A New Testament principle broadens the restriction to all borrowers who are in trouble through no fault of their own. We must loan to those who may not be able to repay. "And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:34–36).²² The context is the merciful charitable loan, not the legitimate business loan. This is another example that explodes the myth of the Old Covenant as more rigorous than the New. In this case,

21 20. J. Gilchrist, *The Church and Economic Development Activity in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martins, 1969), Documents. Gilchrist provided translations of numerous texts, from Nicea (325) on, that dealt with usury. The premier study of the late medieval church's position is John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957). For a summary, see Noonan, "The Amendment of Papal Teaching by Theologians," in Charles E. Curran (ed.), *Contraception: Authority and Dissent* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), pp. 41–75.

22. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

the New Testament is far more rigorous than the Old.

Because of the broadening of this law to include covenantal enemies of God, the New Covenant lender must see to it that the borrower is truly in need. At zero interest, there is greater demand for loans than supply of them. At zero repayment, the demand is nearly infinite. So, the lender must exercise good ethical judgment in allocating charitable loans. The goal is to assist desperate people in their hour of need, not gain the money back. Even if a borrower may not be able to repay, he is still entitled to consideration. But the lender must not lend money to subsidize evil. He must lend to those in desperate need. Otherwise, he will be out of loanable funds by the end of the day.

VOWS, CONTRACTS, AND PRODUCTIVITY

When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth (Deut. 23:21–23).

The theocentric principle illustrated here is the predictability of God's sworn promises. A vow is an oath. This law is therefore governed by an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model. But, as I hope to show, to the extent that this law relates to contracts, it is not governed by point four, but by point three: boundaries. It sets forth stipulations of what is agreed to among equals.¹ A contract is not the same as a vow. It is not invoked by an oath before God.

A. God's Predictable Word

God announced in Isaiah 45, a passage devoted to His sovereignty: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (Isa. 45:22–23). The New American Standard Version adds "allegiance" to the final sentence. There is no escape from God's sworn word. The reliability of God's word is absolute. He swears by His own authority. There is no higher authority.

Isaiah compared the predictability of God's word with both the

1. Legal equals: the right of contract between people with legal control over property, including labor. Economic equals: each wants what the other has to offer.

predictability and productivity of the seasons. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:10–11). The element of productivity in God's reliable word should not be ignored. Nor should the hierarchical aspect of His word, which can be seen in the words that introduce this section: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (v. 9).

A sovereign God speaks an authoritative, hierarchical word, and this word accomplishes all that God proposes. God's spoken words are productive in history. More than this: they are the basis of progress in history. Cause and effect in history are grounded in God's covenants with men. Historical sanctions are applied by God in history in terms of men's responses to His authoritative word. Dominion is by covenant.² Covenants are established by judicial oath. The binding oath becomes the model for legally binding contracts. Contracts are also tools of dominion, but they are not established by an oath between God and men.

B. Productive Words

This was not a land law. It is a universal law, i.e., a cross-boundary law.³ The law of the vow is still binding. God speaks, and the world responds. He spoke the universe into existence (Gen. 1). It is not enough to affirm that His word is absolutely sovereign from the creation to the final judgment and beyond.⁴ We must also affirm that His word is productive. There was more to this world at the end of the creation week

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

3. On the categories of the Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

4. It is surely not enough to affirm that His word is relatively sovereign, i.e., sovereign except for substantial gaps of historical indeterminacy commonly known as man's free will. Pharaoh had no free will in opposing Moses: "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:17–18). Judas had no free will in betraying Christ: "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22).

than there had been at the beginning. There is progress in history because of His sovereign word, which He speaks prior to the events of history and above the processes of history. What God says He will do, He brings to pass. What He brings to pass is progress. History moves toward the final judgment, not randomly but according to God's sovereign decree. Nothing happens that is outside His decree.

In their public prayer to God, the disciples cited Psalm 2's description of the hopeless rebellion of the kings of the earth against God, and then applied this text to the crucifixion: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27–28). Even in evil events there is progress in history. "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4). *Progress in history rests on God's absolutely sovereign, absolutely comprehensive decree.* The kingdom of God advances in terms of His prior spoken word and His present sustaining providence, which corresponds in all details to His original word.

Man is made in God's image. He speaks as God speaks, but in a creaturely, representative way. The covenantal question is this: In the name of which god does he speak? Just as he is required to think God's thoughts after Him, so is he required to speak God's words after Him. After a man speaks, his subsequent actions are supposed to confirm his words, for God's actions invariably confirm His words. A man's actions are to testify to the reliability of his words. The more reliably he speaks, the greater his productivity because of his greater value to others. Other men can make plans confidently in terms of his words. Greater predictability makes cooperation less expensive. Where the price of something drops, more of it will be demanded. *The social division of labor increases as a result of the predictability of men's words.* Individual output per unit of input increases. Men grow wealthier. Greater wealth makes the tools of dominion more affordable.

The vow serves as the model of a contract. The words in a vow have greater authority than the words in a promise. The vow is made before God by means of an oath which implicitly or explicitly invokes the sanctions of God in history. The individual takes the vow on his own authority. There is no intermediary institution in between God and the vow-taker. It is not like a church vow, a civil vow, or a marital vow. A covenantal relationship between God and man is confirmed by the presence of a vow to God. The oath's sanctions serve as the link

between heaven's throne and history. This is why the person who vows before God must be sure that he fulfills the stipulations of his vow. God is the direct enforcer of negative sanctions against the vow-taker who defaults.

C. The Judicially Binding Authority of the Oath

"For the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee": this is an assertion of a threatened negative sanction. This threatening language identifies a promise to God as a vow. A vow is taken to God and then is enforced by God. The vow has covenantal authority. It is not the judicial equivalent of a contract made between men. It is a hierarchical, oath-bound contract between God and a person. He brings sanctions directly, for the oath invokes God's sanctions. The oath is *self-maledictory* ("bad-speaking"), calling down God's negative sanctions on the oath-taker should he fail to abide by the covenant's stipulations.⁵ Thus, the vow has greater authority than a contract does, which invokes the state as the contract's sanctions-bringer. A contract is not lawfully sealed with a self-maledictory oath before God.

This case law is an extension of an earlier case law: "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth" (Num. 30:2).⁶ The word for "bind" is the same one used to describe what the Philistines did to Samson. The word is also used to describe harnessing a horse to a chariot. It is as if one's soul—the breath of life—could be tied down to a physical implement. Word and deed are bound together judicially. *This bond is two-fold: verbal and historical.* What a man says must correspond to the promised external deeds which he is subsequently required by God to perform. *These deeds invoke God's deeds:* sanctions, either positive and negative.

Cause and effect relationships in history are covenantal. This is why the structure of the covenant is the basis of biblical social theory. *Biblical social theory is inescapably judicial.* Having spent four decades in the wilderness under the negative sanctions that God had applied to their fathers, the Israelites of Joshua's generation should have begun to understand this. (Three thousand five hundred years later, so should Christian intellectuals, but they rarely do.)

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

6. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

A promise made to God is more binding legally than a promise made to man. It is sometimes lawful to break a promise to a man, for there is no absolute authority in a relationship of a man to another man, unless that promise is a covenantal vow, as in marriage. A good example of breaking a promise was Solomon's promise to his mother:

Bath-sheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand. Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; I pray thee, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay. And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother to wife. And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. Then king Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life" (1 Kings 2:19–23).

Solomon realized that Adonijah was claiming the political inheritance for himself, for he was seeking marriage with the woman who had slept by King David to warm him. Adonijah was claiming continuity. He was attempting a political rebellion. Not only did Solomon break his word to his mother, he executed his older half-brother for this insurrection against his throne.

Solomon recognized this misuse of his civil authority by Adonijah. He humiliated his misused mother by breaking his promise to her, and then he executed his conniving half-brother. Adonijah had misused Bathsheba and intended to misuse the Shunamite girl. He was imitating Satan, who had used the serpent to deceive the woman in order to undermine her husband's lawful authority. Solomon recognized this tactic for what it was, and therefore had his brother executed.

Other kings were not equally wise—pagan kings. Darius, king of Medo-Persia, was tricked into promising to execute any man who prayed openly to God within a 30-day period. His advisors had devised this tactic in order to trap Daniel, who was immediately arrested and brought before the king. "Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king,

Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed" (Dan. 6:14–15). Centuries later, Herod followed in this pagan tradition with respect to his stepdaughter: "But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her" (Matt. 14:6–9). Both men should have broken their promises. They had been misused by those under their jurisdiction. They became vulnerable to manipulators.

A king's word was not God's word. Only when God was invoked to confirm a lawful vow did the vow of a king take on the character of an unbreakable covenantal oath. What was true of a king was true for a lesser man. After the Israelites had made a covenant with the Gibeonites, who had tricked them, they upheld their words. First the vow: "And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them" (Josh. 9:15). Then the fulfillment: "And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. But all the princes said unto all the congregation, **We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel:** now therefore we may not touch them. This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them. And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them" (Josh. 9:18–21).

God did not bring sanctions against Israel for having allowed a Canaanitic tribe to survive. On the contrary, He allowed the Gibeonites to serve the priests in the work of the temple. "And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose" (9:27). When an alliance of Canaanite nations attacked Gibeon, presumably to make them an example for having surrendered to Israel, Gibeon called on Israel to defend them. Israel came to Gibeon's defense and routed the Canaanites (Josh. 10). God had told the Israelites not to spare any nation in the land. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall de-

liver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee” (Deut. 7:16). Yet Israel was oath-bound to spare Gibeon and even come to Gibeon’s defense. This was the power of the covenantal oath under the Mosaic law. This was the authority of God’s name, lawfully invoked.

D. Invoking God’s Name

A covenantal oath has great authority because God’s name has great authority. This was what the rulers of Israel told the murmuring congregation. “We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel.” That was supposed to settle the matter. The matter was supposed to remain settled. Saul broke this oath with Gibeon some four centuries later. The Israelites living under David paid the consequences.

Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites. And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.) Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD? And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you. And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them. But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD’S oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholahite: And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest (II Sam. 21:1–9).

God had not forgotten the oath made by Joshua and the rulers of Israel. Saul either forgot or believed that God would no longer hold him responsible for honoring it. God did not forget what Saul did. Negative sanctions—three years of famine—came on Israel many years after Saul was dead. This was consistent with God's law: "The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed" (Deut. 28:24). Atonement was required. David offered blood atonement: the execution of the seven heirs of Saul by means of hanging or crucifixion.⁷ There were two sons (of Rizpah) and five grandsons (born to Merab—not Michal, who died childless: II Sam. 6:23).⁸ He spared Saul's grandson because of David's prior oath to the man's father (II Sam. 21:7). The Gibeonites counted the matter closed with the execution of Saul's heirs. The blood of their father was on the sons' heads, for their father was dead and beyond historical sanctions.

Then what about this Mosaic case law? "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16). Bahnsen dismissed it as not relevant here.⁹ But how could it not be relevant? What circumstance rendered it inapplicable? Bahnsen appealed to the precedent of Achan: the sons died for the sin of their father. I agree with this line of reasoning. Bahnsen argues that the issue was the defilement of the land. I have taken a different approach. The judicial issue was sacrilege.¹⁰ In Achan's case, the required sanction applied to the entire family. Why? Because none of them had broken publicly with their father. They were accomplices. The same applied to Saul's sons. They had not publicly disavowed their forefather, Saul, which would have required them to forfeit their non-landed inheritance. By renouncing their economic inheritance, they would have also renounced their guilt.

There is no biblical indication that the Mosaic laws of the vow have been annulled by the New Covenant. The New Testament strengthens the authority of the vow: the Son of God has confirmed the vow. "Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that

7. Greg L. Bahnsen, "Law and Atonement in the Execution of Saul's Seven Sons," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter 1975–76), p. 105.

8. *Idem*.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

10. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix A.

denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8–9). To *deny* Christ is to *disavow* Him. Paul warns: “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (II Tim. 2:11–13). The promised eternal sanctions—positive and negative—are grounded judicially on Christ’s inability to deny Himself, His words, and His authority.

E. A Contract

A contract does not have the same degree of authority that a lawful covenantal oath possesses. A lawful covenantal oath invokes God as the sanctions-bringer. A contract invokes the state as the sanctions-bringer. The state does not possess the same degree of authority that God does. To elevate a contract to the status of a covenant is to elevate the authority of the state over God. Any assertion of *equality* here is a hidden assertion of *superiority*.¹¹ There cannot be equality with God; there is therefore no equality of a contract with a lawful covenant. Jesus warned about invoking God or the sacred implements of God to sanction a non-covenantal affirmation: “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matt. 5:34–37).

The West’s social contract theory since the late seventeenth century has placed the state at the pinnacle of power. Some versions invoke God; others do not. In none of them does the Bible gain authority over the terms of the social contract. This places some version of neutral civil law in authority, which in turn rests on a theory of mankind’s rational corporate mind and also on a theory of the existence of universally acknowledged and binding moral standards, irrespective of the content of rival religious confessions. It also makes the state the sovereign interpreter and enforcer of the social contract’s stipulations.

In Rousseau’s contractual theory, this statism is more pronounced than in Locke’s version.¹² In Locke’s contractualism, there can be a

11. Consider bigamy. The second wife asserts equality with the first wife. The first wife knows better. She is the loser. She has become “used goods.” She is Leah; the new wife is Rachel.

12. Robert A. Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays*

theoretical appeal to God, or to a higher law, or to the sovereign people. But there is a theoretical question here: Who lawfully represents God or the higher law? The doctrine of *contractual representation* is necessarily a doctrine of *historical representation*. This is the question of the voice of authority. If the king does not hear a grievance from the people, Locke wrote, "the appeal then lies nowhere but to heaven . . . and in that state the injured party must judge for himself when he will think fit to make use of that appeal and put himself into it."¹³ This does not settle the issue of conflicting voices in history. It merely defers it. Locke's god in the *Second Treatise* is not part of a covenantal relationship which is established in terms of revealed law and predictable corporate sanctions. How, then, does the aggrieved party know if he is in the right or if God will defend his cause?

By invoking the state, the aggrieved party to a voluntary private contract seeks to reduce the costs of enforcing the stipulations of the contract, but only in a society in which the civil authorities predictably uphold private contracts. The state enforces contracts as a way to reduce violence. It limits vendettas and families or clans in their quest for autonomous justice.

The state's enforcement of contracts has a side positive effect: a reduction in the costs of cooperation. This reduction in the costs of cooperation increases the likelihood of on-going cooperation among the parties to the contract. By lowering the parties' costs of enforcing compliance, the state encourages cooperation. It increases the predictability of men's outcomes. It thereby reduces personal risk (statistically predictable loss) in society by lowering the costs for men to pool risk and reduce risk's burden on any single participant to the contract. The insurance contract is the obvious example, but the same process of *dispersing risk* applies to contracts in general.

When the costs of gaining predictable law enforcement increase to such an extent that invoking the state's sanctions is more expensive than the value of the expected income stream offered by the contract, cooperation breaks down. *This is why self-government is crucial for sustaining a contractual society.* If the participants must resort to the state continually to gain mutual compliance, the legal costs and delays will increase so much that their cooperative venture fails. If any society relies exclusively on lawyers to interpret the law, the lawyers' guild will make full use of this monopoly. The society will fail to obtain predict-

(New York: Knopf, 1968), ch. 1.

13. John Locke, *Of Civil Government: Second Treatise* (1690), section 242.

able justice. It will fall.

Conclusion

Covenant-keepers are under the confessional vow of subordination as members of the church covenant. They are under an implicit vow to the state. In cases regarding courts and judgeship, they may be under an explicit vow. Beyond this, they are not asked by God to take personal vows of service. They may lawfully do this, but they are not required to. Once a person takes a personal vow to God, he is bound by it. He must fulfill its terms. "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth. If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth" (Num. 30:2–3). "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:4–5). This is what Jesus told the Pharisees, pointing to Israel's rebellion and the Jews' looming loss of God's kingdom.¹⁴ As with a covenantal oath, the vow is legally binding. God brings negative sanctions to those who do not comply with its terms.

A contract has less authority than a vow, but it has similar aspects: a sovereign enforcer (the state), a hierarchy of enforcement (representatives), stipulations, sanctions, and continuity. This means that a contract's terms are supposed to be honored by the participants. This theological aspect adds an element of authority to private contracts. *A biblical covenantal society will eventually develop into a contractual society.* Late medieval Christianity developed the legal institutions that established and have maintained the Western legal tradition.¹⁵ This should come as no surprise.

Oath-bound covenantal vows before God make possible social cooperation by establishing the church, state, and family. A contract is

14. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:28–31; cf. 21:43).

15. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

analogous to a covenant. It has analogous effects. A contract increases the likelihood of social cooperation among men by lowering the costs of cooperating. It increases the precision of the agreed-upon deeds which men promise to perform. It makes it legal for the state to impose negative sanctions against those parties to the contract who fail to fulfill the terms of the contract. *Contracts lower the costs of cooperation, thereby increasing the amount of cooperation demanded.* Increased social cooperation increases the division of labor and therefore increases men's individual productivity and income.

FREE FOR THE PICKING

When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn (Deut. 23:24–25).

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is that God, as the owner of the creation, has the exclusive right to specify the terms of the leases that He offers to his stewards. He establishes boundaries.

A. Rural Leaseholds in Israel

This law announced certain terms of God's rural leasehold. It announced to the land owner: "You do not possess absolute sovereignty over this land. Your neighbor has the right to pick a handful of grain or grapes from this field. Your right to exclude others by law or force is limited." In this sense, God delegated to a farmer's neighbors the right to enforce God's claim of exclusive control over a *symbolic portion* of every field. The land owner could not lawfully exclude God's delegated representatives from access to his crops. The fact that he could not lawfully exclude them testified to his lack of absolute sovereignty over his property.

In the garden of Eden, God placed a judicial boundary around one tree. A symbolic portion of the garden was reserved by God. This boundary was there to remind Adam that he could not legitimately assert control over the entire garden. Over most of it, Adam did exercise full authority. But over one small part, he did not. It was off-limits to him. Adam's acceptance of this limitation on his authority was basic to his continued residence in the garden. More than this: it was basic to his life.

God interacted with man on a face-to-face basis in the garden. He

no longer deals with man in this way. Instead, God has established a system of representative authority that substitutes for a verbal “no trespassing” sign around a designated tree. The neighbor is God’s agent who comes into another man’s field and announces, in effect: “This field does not belong exclusively to you. As the original owner, God has a valid legal claim on it. So do I, as God’s agent.”

In this text, God forbade land owners from excluding visitors from their fields. A visitor had the right to pick something to eat during the harvest season. He lawfully reaped the fruits of another person’s land, labor, and capital. The legal boundaries that delineated the ownership of a field did not restrict access by the visitor. The visitor had a legal claim on a small portion of the harvest. He had to appear in person to collect this portion. Put a different way, *outsiders were co-owners of a portion of every field’s pickable crop.*

One question that I deal with later in this chapter is whether this law was a cross-boundary law rather than a seed law or land law.¹ If it was a cross-boundary law, then God was making this law universal in its jurisdiction. He was announcing this system of land tenure in His capacity as the owner of the whole earth, not just as the owner of the Promised Land.

B. Exclusion by Conquest

The Israelites were about to inherit the Promised Land through military conquest. Their forthcoming inheritance would be based on the disinheritance of the Canaanites. The specified means of this transfer of ownership was genocide. It was not merely that the Canaanites were to be excluded from the land; they were to be excluded from history. More to the point, theologically speaking, their gods were to be excluded from history (Josh. 23:5–7).

The Israelites would soon enjoy a military victory after a generation of miraculous wandering in the wilderness (Deut. 8:4). There could be no legitimate doubt in the future that God had arranged this transfer of the inheritance. He was therefore the land’s original owner. They would henceforth hold their land as sharecroppers: 10% percent of the net increase in the crop was to go to God through the Levitical priesthood. This was Levi’s inheritance (Num. 18:21).²

1. On the difference, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

Before the conquest began, God placed certain restrictions on the use of His holy land: *the formal terms of the lease*. As the owner of both the land and the people who occupied it, God's restrictions were designed to protect the long-term productivity of His assets. Yet He imposed these laws for their sakes, too. Land-owning Israelites had to rest the land every seventh year (Lev. 25:4).³ They had to allow poverty-stricken gleaners to come onto their land and pick up the leftovers of the crops (Lev. 19:9–10;⁴ 23:22;⁵ Deut. 24:21).

This passage further erased the legal boundary between the land's owners and non-owners. Whatever a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands was his to take prior to the harvest. He had legal title to this share of his neighbor's crop. This portion did not belong to the land owner. Ownership of land, seeds, and prior labor did not entitle him to that portion of the crop which a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands. That is, *his prior investment was not the legal basis of his ownership*.

God's promise to Abraham and the nation's military conquest of Canaan were the joint legal basis of Israel's rural land ownership. Legal title in Israel had nothing to do with some hypothetical original owner who had gained legal title because he had mixed his labor with un-owned land—John Locke's theory of original ownership.⁶ There had once been Canaanites in the land, whose legal title was visibly overturned by the conquest. The Canaanites were to be disinherited, Moses announced. They would not be allowed to inherit, because they could not lawfully be neighbors. The conquest's dispossession of the gods of Canaan definitively overturned any theory of private ownership that rested on a story of man's original ownership based on his own labor. The kingdom grant preceded any man's work. The promise preceded the inheritance. In short, *grace preceded law*.

The neighbor in Mosaic Israel was a legal co-participant in the kingdom grant. He lived under the authority of God. His presence in the land helped to extend the kingdom in history. The land was being subdued by men who were willing to work under God's law. The exclusion of the Canaanites had been followed by the inclusion of the Israelites and even resident aliens. Canaan was more than Canaanites. It

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

6. John Locke, *On Civil Government: Second Treatise* (1690), section 27.

was also the land. The conquest of Canaan was more than a military victory; it was a process of kingdom extension. The fruits of the land belonged to all residents in the land. The bulk of these fruits belonged to land owners, but not all of the fruits.

In this sense, the resident who owned no land, but who had legal access to the land, was analogous to the beast that was employed to plow the land. “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn” (Deut. 25:4).⁷ Although the neighbor was not employed by the land owner, he was part of the overall dominion process inside Israel. The fact that God had included him inside Canaan made it more difficult for those who served other gods to occupy the land. A man’s access to the civil courts and to the fruits of the field gave him a stake in the land, something worth defending. Israel was no pluralistic democracy. It was a theocracy. No law but God’s could lawfully be enforced by the state. Only God’s name could be lawfully invoked publicly inside Israel’s boundaries (Ex. 23:13). By remaining inside the land, a resident was publicly acknowledging his allegiance to Israel’s God rather than to another god. He was acknowledging God’s legal claim on him. God in turn gave him a legal claim on a small portion of the output of the land.

C. Jesus and the Corn

Verse 25 is the partial background for one of Jesus’ more perplexing confrontations with the Pharisees.

And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Luke 6:1–5).⁸

The Pharisees did not accuse the disciples of theft; rather, they ac-

7. Chapter 63.

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

cused the disciples of not keeping the sabbath. Had the disciples been guilty of theft, their critics would have taken advantage of this opportunity to embarrass Jesus through His disciples' actions, which the disciples had done right in front of Him. The reason why they did not accuse the disciples of theft was that in terms of the Mosaic law, the disciples had not committed theft. Their infraction, according to the Pharisees, was picking grain on the sabbath. Picking grain was a form of work.

1. David and the Showbread

Jesus' response was to cite an obscure Old Testament incident: David's confiscation of the showbread. The circumstances surrounding that incident are even more perplexing to the commentators than Jesus' walk through the field. David was fleeing from Saul. David lied to a priest and confiscated the showbread, which was always to be on the table of the Lord (Ex. 25:30).⁹

Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away (I Sam. 21:1–6).

Jesus was implying that David had not done anything wrong in this incident, either by lying to a priest about his mission or by taking what

9. There was not enough bread to save their lives from starvation. These loaves were not, in and of themselves, crucial for David's survival. But as one meal among many, the bread was part of a program of survival. These loaves might not be the last ones confiscated by David.

belonged to God. David invoked the status of his men as holy warriors on the king's official business, which was why the priest raised the issue of their contact with women. David's answer—they had had no contact with women for three days—pointed back to the three days of abstinence prior to the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 19:15). David, as God's anointed heir of the throne of Israel (I Sam. 16), possessed kingly authority. Jonathan, Saul's formally lawful heir, had just re-confirmed his *inheritance-transferring oath* with David (I Sam. 20:42).¹⁰ Because of this oath, David had the authority to lie to a priest and to take the showbread for himself and his men, even though Saul was still on the throne. David acted lawfully. David acted as Jacob had acted when he tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing which was lawfully his by revelation and voluntary transfer by Esau (Gen. 27).

The priest said that there was no common bread available. This indicates that this was a sabbath day: no cooking. There was no fresh bread or hot bread, which was why the showbread was still there: it had not been replaced by hot bread. So, David asked for holy bread on a sabbath. There was no question about it: he was asking for holy bread on a holy day in the name of the king. The priest gave it to him. On what legal basis? The text does not say, but David's invoking of Saul's authority indicates that a man on a king's mission possessed lawful authority to receive bread set aside for God if there was no other bread available. God had said, "thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway" (Ex. 25:30). But this situation was an exception which the priest acknowledged as valid. The desire of the king's men superseded this ritual requirement.

Down through the centuries, Protestant Bible commentators have struggled with the story of David and the showbread. They have accused David of being a sinful liar. Puritan commentator Matthew Poole called David's lie to the priest a "plain lie."¹¹ John Gill, a Calvinistic Baptist and master of rabbinic literature, referred to David's lie as a "downright lie, and was aggravated by its being told only for the sake of getting a little food; and especially to a high priest, and at the tabernacle of God. . . . This shows the weakness of the best men, when left to themselves. . . ."¹² Neither commentator criticized David for taking

10. The original covenant had been marked by Jonathan's gift of his robe to David, symbolizing the robe of authority, as well as his sword (I Sam. 18:3–4).

11. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1683] 1962), I, p. 565.

12. John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 4 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, [1764] 1853), II, pp. 196–97.

the showbread on the sabbath, which was the judicial heart of the matter. Christ sanctioned this action retroactively, which puts Christian commentators in a bind. So, they focus instead on David's lie, just as commentators focus on Rahab's lie, while refusing to raise their voices in protest against the significant ethical issue: her treason. This is a common blindness among pietistic commentators: straining at ethical gnats and swallowing what appear to be ethical camels.¹³

The Pharisees did not criticize David's actions. Jesus cited this incident in defense of His actions. *His answer indicates that He was declaring His own kingly authority.* As surely as David's anointing by Samuel on God's behalf had authorized him to deceive a priest and take the showbread on the sabbath, so had the Holy Spirit's anointing of Jesus authorized Him to have His disciples pick grain on the sabbath. As surely as the king's men were authorized to eat the showbread on the sabbath, so were Christ's disciples authorized to eat raw grain on the sabbath.

2. Lord of the Sabbath

Jesus then took the matter a step further: He announced that He was Lord of the Mosaic sabbath. This meant that He was announcing more than kingly authority. *He was declaring His messianic heirship at this point: the son of man, Lord of the Mosaic sabbath.* If David, as the prophetically anointed but not-yet publicly sanctioned king of Israel, possessed temporary authority over a priest for the sake of his lawful inheritance of the throne, far more did Jesus Christ, as messianic heir of the kingdom of God, possess authority over the sabbath in Israel.

One thing is certain: the judicial issue was not grain-stealing.

D. A Foretaste of Bread and Wine

A visitor eats grapes in the vineyard, but he cannot lawfully carry them off his neighbor's property. He cannot make wine with what he eats. Neither can two hands full of grain make a loaf of bread. This case law does not open a neighbor's field to all those who seek a finished meal. A free sample of the raw materials of such a meal is offered to visitors, but not the feast itself. *This is not a harvest in preparation for a feast; it is merely a symbol of a feast to come.* To prepare a feast, productive and successful people must bring to the kitchen sufficient

13. Cf. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), especially pp. 838–42.

fruits of the field. The full blessings of God are displayed at a feast. This case law does not offer a feast to the visitor. It offers a full stomach to a person walking in a field, but not a feast in a home or communion hall. It offers sufficient food to a hungry man to quiet the rumblings of his stomach, but it does not provide the means of celebration. It offers a token of a future feast. It is symbolic of blessings to come, a down payment or earnest of a future feast.

Grapes and grain point to the sacramental nature of the coming feast: a communion meal. The two crops singled out in this law are corn (grain) and grapes. The disciples picked corn, not wheat. Corn can be eaten raw; wheat cannot. The fact that these two crops are the raw materials for bread and wine is not some random aspect of this case law. *This law pointed forward to the communion feast of the New Covenant.* The Mosaic covenant was, in effect, the grain and grapes that pointed forward to the New Covenant's bread and wine. The New Covenant's bread and wine in turn point forward to the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9). The communion table of God brings together people of a common confession and a common community who look forward to the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God in history at the end of time. So it was also in Mosaic Israel. The eschatological aspect of Deuteronomy, as the Pentateuch's book of the inheritance, provides a framework for interpreting this case law.

God gives to every man in history a foretaste of a holy meal to come: common grace. Not every man accepts God's invitation. Not every man is given access to God's table, either in history or eternity. The fellowship of God is closed to outsiders by means of a common confession that restricts strangers from lawful access to the table. But a free foretaste of the bounty of God's table at the consummate marriage supper of the Lamb is given to all those who walk in the open field and pick a handful of grain. A handful of this bounty is the common blessing of all mankind. This is the doctrine of common grace.¹⁴

The visitor is not allowed to bring a vessel to gather up the bounty of his neighbor's field. Neither is the covenant-breaker allowed access to the Lord's Supper. The visitor is allowed access to the makings of bread and wine. Similarly, the covenant-breaker is allowed into the church to hear the message of redemption. He may gain great benefits from his presence in the congregation, or he may leave spiritually unfed. So it is with the visitor in the field. "I take no man's charity," says

14. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

one visitor to a field. “Religion is a crutch,” says a visitor to a church.¹⁵ Such a willful rejection of either blessing indicates a spirit of autonomy, a lack of community spirit, and a lack of a shared environment.

E. Neighborhood and Neighborliness

Grapes and grain remain ripe enough to eat in the field only for relatively short periods of time. Either they are not yet ripe or they have just been harvested. The neighbor in Israel was not allowed to bring a vessel to carry away the produce. The presumption was that the neighbor was visiting, became hungry, and ate his fill right there in the field. This is what Jesus’ disciples did. The neighbor, unless very hungry, did not walk over to the neighbor’s house three times a day to get a quick meal. He had his own crop to harvest. If he was landless, he might come into a field and eat. He could even bring his family. The landless person would have gained access to free food, but only briefly, during the harvest season.

The two crops explicitly eligible for picking were above-ground crops. This law did not authorize someone to dig a root crop out of the ground. The eligible food was there, as we say in English, “for the picking.” Were these two crops symbolic for all picked crops, or did the law authorize only grapes and grain? I think the two crops were symbols of every crop that can be picked in a field. The neighbor was like an ox that treaded out corn; he could not lawfully be muzzled (Deut. 25:4).¹⁶ This meant that the hungry neighbor had a limited range of crops at his disposal. If he was also a local farmer, then his own crop was similarly exposed. His concerted effort to harm a neighbor by a misuse of this law would have exposed him to a tit-for-tat response. If he used this law as a weapon, it could be used against him.

Who was the neighbor? The Hebrew word, *rayah*, is most commonly used to describe a close friend or someone in the neighborhood. “Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour’s wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour’s house, his field, or his manservant, or his maid-servant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Deut. 5:21). It can be translated as friend. “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us

15. A good reason for not passing a collection plate in church is that visitors may believe that a token payment will pay for “services rendered.” So, for that matter, may non-tithing members.

16. Chapter 63.

go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers" (Deut. 13:6). It was a next-door neighbor: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it" (Deut. 19:14).¹⁷

But did it always mean this? In Jesus' answer to this question by the clever lawyer, He used the story of the Samaritan on a journey through Israel who helped a beaten man, in contrast to the priest and the Levite who ignored him (Luke 10). Jesus was arguing that *ethics*, not friendship, confession, or place of residence, defines the true neighbor. The Samaritan was the injured man's true neighbor because he helped him in his time of need.¹⁸ The lawyer did not disagree with Jesus' assessment. He understood that this interpretation was consistent with the intent of the Mosaic law. This means that a law-abiding man on the road in Mosaic Israel was a neighbor. The crop owner had to treat a man on a journey as if he were a local resident. This included even a foreigner.

The Greek word used to translate *rayah* in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament is *pleision*, which means "near, close by."¹⁹ This indicates that the Jewish translators regarded the neighbor as a local resident. The neighbor was statistically most likely to be a fellow member of the tribe. Rural land could not be sold permanently. It could not be alienated: sold to an alien. The jubilee law regulated the inheritance of rural land (Lev. 25). This means that the neighbor in Mosaic Israel was statistically most likely a permanent resident of the community.

Nevertheless, this law opened the fields to people on a journey, just as the Samaritan was on a journey. As surely as the Samaritan was the injured man's neighbor, so was the land owner the hungry traveler's neighbor. This law was a reminder to the Israelites that God had been neighborly to them in their time of need. After the exile, such permanent geographical boundaries were maintained only if the occupying foreign army so decided. Jesus walked through the field under Rome's civil authority, not Israel's.

Why would God have designated these two above-ground crops as

17. Chapter 44.

18. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 21.

19. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 678.

open to neighborly picking? This law made neighbors co-owners of the fruits of a man's land, labor, time, and capital. The land owner was legally unable to protect his wealth from the grasping hands of non-owners. He was left without legal recourse. Why? What judicial principle undergirded this case law? What benefit to the community did this law bring which offset the negative effects of a limitation of the protection of private property? To answer this accurately, we must first determine whether this case law was a temporary law governing only Mosaic Israel or a permanent legal statute for all Trinitarian covenantal societies.

F. Seed Laws and Land Laws

Seed laws and land laws were temporary statutes that applied only to Mosaic Israel.²⁰ I have argued previously that the seed laws of the Mosaic covenant were tied to Jacob's messianic prophecy regarding Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws and land laws served as means of separating the tribes, thereby maintaining the continuity of each tribe until the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy, which rested on tribal separation.²¹ The jubilee inheritance laws were land laws that were designed by God to accomplish this task.

One aspect of tribal separation was the creation of a sense of unity and participation in a larger family unit. Members of each tribe were linked together as descendants of one of Jacob's sons. There was an aspect of brotherliness within a tribe that was not shared across the tribe's boundaries. There is a social distinction between brotherhood and otherhood. Boundaries mark this distinction. The main boundary for Israel was circumcision, but tribal boundaries also had their nationally separating and locally unifying effects.

By allowing the neighbor to pick mature fruit, the Mosaic law encouraged a sense of mutual solidarity. The local resident was entitled to reap the rewards of land and labor. The land belonged ultimately to God. It was a holy land, set apart by God for his historical purposes. To dwell in the land involved benefits and costs. One of the benefits was access to food, however temporary. The staff of life in effect was free. In harvest season, men in Israel would not die of starvation. But their

20. Appendix J.

21. Appendix J.

source of sustenance was local: their neighbor's field. Would this have created animosity? Sometimes. Everything in a fallen world is capable of creating animosity. But what about the owner's sense of justice? It was his land, his effort, his time, and his seeds that had made this wealth possible. Why should another man have lawful access to the fruits of his labor?

One possible answer ties this law to the Promised Land. Israel was a holy land that had been set aside by God through a program of partial genocide. (God had specified total genocide, but the Israelites had failed.) The land was exclusively God's. It was His dwelling place. He fed His people on His land. God, not their own efforts, was the source of their wealth (Deut. 8:17).²² Israel's holy status was still true in Jesus' day because of the temple and its sacrifices. But there is a problem with this explanation: strangers in Jesus' day dwelled in the land, and in fact ruled over the land. Furthermore, Jesus identified the Good Samaritan as a neighbor. The Samaritan therefore would have qualified as a man with lawful access to an Israelite's field. The Promised Land fails as the basis of this case law.

A second possible explanation is this: the tribes existed in order to complete God's plan for Israel. Local solidarity was important for maintaining the continuity of the tribes. Problem: this law was still in force in Jesus' day, yet the tribes no longer occupied the land as separate tribal units. The seed laws have nothing to do with this law.

Third, it could be argued that Israel was a holy army. An army does not operate in terms of the free market's principle of "high bid wins." In every military conflict in which a city is besieged, martial law replaces market contracts as the basis of feeding the population. The free market's principle of high bid wins is replaced by food rationing. Solidarity during wartime must not be undermined by a loss of morale. A nation's defenders are not all rich. *The closer we get to the priestly function of ensuring life, the less applicable market pricing becomes.* Problem: Israel was not a holy army after the exile. It was an occupied nation. Yet this case law was still in force. There was no discontinuity in this case between the Mosaic covenant and the post-exilic covenant.

If a Mosaic law was not a land law, a seed law, or a priestly law, then it was a cross-boundary law. This means that it remains in force in the New Covenant era. The problem is to identify in what ways this law can be applied in a relevant way in the New Covenant era.

22. Chapter 21.

G. The Farmer and the Grocer

The Mosaic law authorized a neighbor to pick grapes or grain from another man's field. It did not authorize a man to pick up a free piece of fruit from a grocer's table. What is the difference? What underlying moral or organizational principle enables us to distinguish between the two acts? In both cases, the "picker" wanted to eat a piece of fruit for free. He was not allowed to do this in the second case.

Let us consider the economic aspects of this law. Both the farmer and the grocer sought a positive return on their investments. The farmer planted seeds in the ground, nurtured the seedlings, and sold the crop to someone, possibly the grocer or his economic agent. The grocer made his money by purchasing a crop in bulk from the farmer or his economic agent, transporting it to a central location, and displaying it in a way pleasing to buyers. What was the differentiating factor? Time? Soil? Location? Money?

The difference seems to have been this: *control over rural land*. The farmer in Mosaic Israel worked the land. He cared for it directly. The grocer did not. The farmer profited directly from the output of this land. The grocer profited indirectly. The farmer had a unique dependence on the land. The grocer did so only indirectly, insofar as food that was imported from abroad was much more expensive for him to buy, except in Mediterranean coastal areas and regions close to the borders of the nation. The distinction between grocers and land owners may also have had something to do with the jubilee land laws.²³ Rural land was governed by the jubilee law. Urban real estate was not. Unlike urban land, prior to the exile, rural land was the exclusive property of the heirs of the conquest, though not after the return (Ezek. 47:21–23).

Those who lived on the land and profited from it as farmers were required to share a portion of the land's productivity with others, as we have seen. To this extent, the fruit of the land was the inheritance of those who dwelled close by. This law would have strengthened the sense of community in a society that was bound by a national covenant that was tied to land. The local poor would have had something to eat in the harvest—a sense of participation in the blessings of God. A brief safety net was in place. To gain access to a full safety net—a lawful bag in which to put the picked produce—the poor had to work as gleaners

23. As I shall argue below, I do not think this was covenantally relevant: "Has This Law Been Annulled?"

(Deut. 24:19–22).²⁴ While the state was not authorized to send crop collectors into the fields to collect food to redistribute to the poor, the Mosaic civil law did not enforce sanctions against those who came into a field to eat a handful of food. *It was not legal for land owners to impose physical sanctions against neighbors who took advantage of this law.* The civil law did not compel wealth redistribution in Mosaic Israel, but it defined the land owner's property rights in such a way that the state was prohibited from bringing negative sanctions against those who entered the field to pick a handful of the crop.

H. A Shared Environment

Let us consider a difficult application of this case law. Did this law open every man's fields to wandering hordes during a famine? Times of famine have been times of great disruption of the social order. Wandering bands of hungry people fan out across the countryside. Whole populations move from region to region in search of food. This happened repeatedly in Europe from the late medieval era until the late seventeenth century, and well into the twentieth century in Russia.²⁵ Similar famines have occurred in China in modern times.²⁶ Before the advent of modern capitalism, famines were a regular occurrence. Even within capitalist society, Ireland suffered a nearly decade-long famine in the 1840s. The absentee landlords in England did not foresee the threat to the potato crop posed by the blight at its first appearance in 1841. Over the next decade, these landlords paid for their lack of foresight with huge capital losses; a million Irish paid with their lives.²⁷

Are wandering strangers in search of food the judicial equivalent of a neighbor? Is a desperate family on the road in search of food entitled fill their stomachs with a farmer's corn or apples? If enough of these people were to show up at harvest time, their economic effect would be comparable to a swarm of locusts. Locusts in the Bible are seen as the judgment of God (Ex. 10:4–6; Deut. 28:38). The land owner planted a crop and cared for it in the expectation that his family would eat for another season. Was he now required to sit idly by and watch strangers consume his family's future? Was the state prohibited by this

24. Chapter 62.

25. For a list of dozens of these famines, see Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity* (New York: Dutton, 1942), p. 132.

26. Pearl S. Buck's novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), tells this story.

27. A good summary of the story is Christine Kinealy, *The Great Hunger in Ireland* (Chicago: Pluto, 1997).

case law from defending his interests? If so, then what would be his incentive to go to the expense of planting and nurturing his next crop? Would he even survive to plant again? Was Israel's society benefited by opening the fields to all comers in every economic situation? Was the nation's future agricultural output threatened by a definition of "neighbor" that includes an open-ended number of strangers in search of free food?

The goal of this law was the preservation of community. Its context was *a local neighborhood in which families shared the same environment*. A crop failure for one family was probably accompanied by a crop failure for all. Mutual aid and comfort in times of adversity were likely in a community in which every person has a symbolic stake in the community's success. These people shared a common destiny. This law was an aspect of that common destiny.

As for the Samaritan in the parable, he was not on the road for the purpose of stripping fields along the way. The Samaritan assisted the beaten man; he did not eat the last grape on the man's vine. The Samaritan found another man on the same road. They were both on a journey. They shared a similar environment. They were both subject to the risks of travel. The threat of robbery threatened all men walking down that road. What had befallen the victim might have befallen the Samaritan. It might yet befall him. Perhaps the same band of robbers was still in the "neighborhood": the road to Jericho.

Men who share a common environment also share common risks. When men who share common risks are voluntarily bound by a shared ethical system to help each other in bad times, a kind of social insurance policy goes into effect. Risks are pooled. The costs that would otherwise befall a victim are reduced by men's willingness to defray part of each other's burdens. But, unlike an insurance policy, there is no formal agreement, nor does the victim have any legal claim on the non-victim. The beaten man had no legal claim on the Samaritan, the Levite, or the priest. Two of the three ignored him. They broke no civil law, but their act of deliberately passing by on the other side of the road revealed their lack of commitment to the principle of community: shared burdens and blessings.

The ethics of neighborliness is mutual sharing when the resources are available. The ethics of neighborliness did not mandate that the state remain inactive when hordes of men whose only goal is obtaining food sweep down on a rural community. The harvest was shared locally because men have struggled with the same obstacles to produce it.

The original struggle was the conquest of Canaan, which was a tribal effort in each region. This law assumed a context of mutual obligations, not the asymmetric conditions in a famine, when the producers face an invasion from outside the community by those who did not share in the productive effort.

I. Community and Economy

One of the favorite contrasts of sociologists is community vs. economy. The most famous example of this in sociological literature is Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), which he wrote at age 32. In this pioneering work, the author contrasted the small, medieval-type village with the modern city. He argued that the demise of the personal relationships of village life has led to the impersonal rationalism and calculation of the modern city.²⁸ He used the now-familiar analogies of organic life and mechanical structure to describe these two forms of human association.²⁹ He viewed the family as the model or ideal type of *Gemeinschaft*.³⁰ The business firm, which is a voluntary association established for a limited, rational purpose (profit), would seem to serve well as a model for *Gesellschaft*.³¹

In American history, there have been few defenders of *Gemeinschaft*. Thomas Jefferson heralded the independent yeoman farmer, but Jefferson was no advocate of village life. A group of intellectuals and poets known as the Nashville agrarians in 1930 wrote a brief defense of southern agrarian life in contrast to modern urbanism, but they have long been regarded at best as regional utopians, even in the South.³² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were contemptuous of "the idiocy of rural life,"³³ and most commentators have agreed with them. Most

28. He did not argue, as Marx and other sociologists and economists have argued, that it was the rise of capitalism that undermined the village life. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 78.

29. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*) (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1887] 1957), pp. 33–37.

30. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, p. 75.

31. His theme—the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from communalism to rationalism—became an integrating theme in the works of the great German sociologist, Max Weber. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

32. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, [1930] 1977). Cf. Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

33. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 6, p. 488.

commentators have been urban.

The movement of vast populations from the farms to cities has been a continuing phenomenon worldwide, beginning no later than the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century. The advancing division of labor was made possible by close contact in urban areas, the transportation revolution, the mechanization of agriculture, the revolution in electrical power, and government-funded road systems. This has concentrated populations in vast urban complexes.

The Bible promotes both cultures. The farms of Israel were held together as a civilization by the Ark of the Covenant, which was housed in a city. The New Heaven and New Earth is described as a city in which the tree of life grows (Rev. 22:2).³⁴ In the Old Covenant, the city was supported by the farms. In the New Covenant's imagery of the final state, the image is different: the city contains the tree. The tree feeds the inhabitants. The symbolism seems to be *from farm to city*. This was also the thrust of the jubilee legislation: ever-smaller farms for an ever-growing population.³⁵ Yet, covenantally, an heir of the conquest always had his historical roots in the land. The land was his inheritance. His name was associated with the land.

This judicial link to the soil ended with the New Covenant. The land ceased to be a holy place after the fall of Jerusalem. But the imagery of the tree of life, like the imagery of bread and wine, ties members of the New Covenant community to the soil. The preference of suburban Americans for carefully mowed lawns, of Englishmen and Japanese for gardens, of the Swiss and Austrians for flowers growing in window gardens and for vegetable gardens all testify to man's desire to retain his links to the soil from which he came.

There is a story told about the German free market economist Wilhelm Röpke. He was living in Geneva at the time. He invited another free market economist (said by some to be Ludwig von Mises) to his home near Geneva. He kept a vegetable garden plot near his home. The visitor remarked that this was an inefficient way to produce food. He countered that it was an efficient way to produce happiness.³⁶

34. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 21. (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

35. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

36. Russell Kirk said that Röpke said that it was Mises. In 1975, I heard the same story from another economist, Röpke's translator, Patrick Boorman. I do not recall that Mises was the target of the remark, but he may have been. See Kirk's 1992 Foreword to Wilhelm Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, [1942] 1992), p. ix.

The division of labor is a powerful social arrangement. Specialization increases our economic output as individuals. We can earn more money per hour by specializing than by performing low division of labor tasks. But we also increase our dependence on the social institutions that have promoted the division of labor. Above all, we increase our reliance on banks, transportation systems, and other arrangements run by computers. We have delivered our lives into the hands and minds of computer programmers. The payments system is governed by fractional reserve banking. This is risky. There is an economic case for investing in a lower division of labor lifestyle with a portion of our assets and our time.

There is more to community than efficiency. Community is more than property rights. Community in Mosaic Israel was based on a series of covenants. The right of private property was defended by the commandment not to steal, but the definition of theft did not include eating from a neighbor's unharvested crop. This exception was unique to the land. It applied to a form of property that was not part of the free market system of buying and selling (Lev. 25). God was the owner of the land in Mosaic Israel. He set unique requirements for ownership of Mosaic Israel's rural land. These rules were designed to provide a brief safety net in an area of the economy in which it was illegal to transfer family ownership down through the generations.

In the final analysis, this law was far more symbolic than economic, for the harvest time would not have lasted very long. The sense of community had to be preserved in a system that restricted buying and selling. Those who did not own the best land or even any land at all had a stake in the success of local land owners, despite the law's restrictions of the permanent sale of inherited property. This symbol of participation in the fruits of the land was important for a society whose members celebrated the fulfillment of God's prophecy regarding the inheritance of a Promised Land.

J. Has This Law Been Annulled?

Is there any Mosaic covenantal principle whose annulment also annulled this law? We know that a similar law is still in force. Paul cited the law prohibiting the muzzling of the working ox, applying it to the payment of ministers. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that

treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (I Tim. 5:17–18).³⁷ But this case law applied more generally to the Christian walk. “For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope” (I Cor. 9:9–10).³⁸ There is a down payment in history—an earnest—of the covenant-keeper’s kingdom victory in eternity. This down payment is an aspect of the inheritance (Eph. 1:10–14).

The tribal system was annulled in A.D. 70. Was this law exclusively tribal? The same kinds of psychological benefits seem to apply outside the tribal context: commitment to the community, a sense of participation in the blessings of this community, a willingness to defend it against invaders. What is missing today is Mosaic Israel’s public exclusion of the names of other gods. A man’s presence in the land does not, in and of itself, testify publicly to his willingness to serve under the law of God. The mobility of rival gods is like the mobility of the God of the Bible in the Old Covenant. The universality of their claims makes them different from the gods of the ancient Near East in Moses’ day. To this extent, the situation has changed. But religions that claimed allegiance to universal gods appeared in the Near East and Far East at about the time of the Babylonian exile. Nevertheless, people in Israel in Jesus’ day were still allowed to pick grain in their neighbors’ fields.

This law seems to be a cross-boundary law. The neighbor, defined biblically, has a legal claim to a handful of any crop that he can pick. The biblical hermeneutical principle is that any Old Covenant law not annulled explicitly or implicitly by a New Covenant law is still valid. There seems to be no principle of judicial discontinuity that would annul this law.³⁹

37. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

38. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

39. Because I see no judicial discontinuity between the covenants regarding this law, I conclude that the distinction between the grocer and the farmer was not based on the jubilee law, which has been annulled (Luke 4:18–22). North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

Conclusion

This law applies to rural land during the harvest season, but before the harvest takes place. The goal of this law was to increase the sense of community. Residents are supposed to know that they have a small stake—a symbolic stake—in the prosperity of the land.

There seems to be no discontinuity between the two covenants with regard to this law. It was a theocratic law, but whenever a nation covenants with the Trinitarian God of the Bible, this Mosaic law is still binding. Its principles of ownership are morally binding.

The modern world is politically polytheistic. It denies legitimacy to the principle of civil theocracy. It also passes legislation that excludes neighbors from any man's field. It then extends the principle of exclusion to the nation itself. It creates "no trespassing" boundaries around the nation. Access to a man's field is analogous to access to the nation; the modern state is consistent in this regard. Immigration legislation excludes outsiders because they may become a threat to a national covenant that is not confessional. Immigrants may gain the vote and use the state to redistribute wealth. The same kind of exclusivism operates in laws legalizing abortion, which is another barrier to entry into the land.

This law testifies against geographical exclusivism because *this law is part of a system of covenantal order that is confessionally exclusivist*. Open borders are the rule for biblical theocracy: access to the visible kingdom of God in history. Here is the logic of "open borders openly arrived at." You may freely walk into a local church; therefore, you may also freely walk into the nation in which that church operates. Any Christian who promotes closed national borders is saying, in effect, "Until some church sends a missionary to your nation, or until your entire population has access to the Internet, you must content yourself with going to hell. Sorry about that."

The message of this law is clear: access to God's promised land is to be accompanied by access to the fields of the promised land at harvest time. This gives non-owners and non-citizens a stake in the maintenance of a biblically theocratic society. This law makes it clear that private property is not an absolute value in human society. Private property is an absolute right for God, as the boundary placed around the forbidden tree in Eden reveals; it is not, however, an absolute right for man. *Nothing is an absolute right for man, for man is not absolute*. This case law breaches the boundaries of rural land. Owners are not

allowed to use force to exclude a neighbor from picking a handful of the crop to eat in the field. The state may not defend owners' legal title to this token portion of the crop. This means that they have no legal title to all of it. This is clearly a violation of libertarian definitions of private ownership.

Like the tree in the midst of the garden, this limitation on exclusive ownership is minimal. It does not amount to much, economically speaking. God originally opened the entire world to Adam. He restricted only one tiny area of the creation as His own exclusive property. Adam may have concluded regarding this restriction on his authority, "It's not the money; it's the principle of the thing." Surely, this is how his fallen heirs think. They do not want God to interfere in their economic lives, except to give them more wealth, even at the expense of their neighbors.

There is no question: it is the principle of the matter that counts. The principle is this: *God is sovereign; man is not*. God has the final legal right to exclude access to His property; man does not. By means of this law, God tells owners of rural property that He, not they, has the final say regarding who has legal access to their land. The neighbor is *God's representative agent* in this declaration of sovereignty. He has the right to walk onto a neighbor's property and pick a handful of corn during the harvest season. The value of this corn is minimal. The judicial principle is fundamental. In this sense, this law is a recapitulation of the law governing the forbidden tree in Eden.

There are dedicated Christian defenders of some version of socialism or Keynesian interventionism who are always in search of a passage that restricts private ownership. They have yet to latch onto this passage. To them, I say: "Beware. This is a very hot potato." This law does not authorize open access for every occupation. It is limited to rural property. The principle of ownership here is not that the community at large has lawful title to a portion of every resident's output. The principle of ownership is that God is the cosmic Owner. Because He does not intervene visibly in history, unlike in Eden, He singles out representative agents who act in His name on behalf of the fundamental principle of ownership: God owns all things. To demonstrate His cosmic ownership, God restricts a landowner's right of exclusion. In doing this, He demonstrates His own right of exclusion. He excludes rural land owners' absolute right of exclusion. A neighbor's lawful access to a handful of corn judicially represents God's right to set the terms of exclusion, i.e., ownership.

What is significant judicially is this law's insignificance economically. There is nothing of great economic value involved, any more than the fruit of the forbidden tree was economically valuable in comparison to the wealth available to Adam in Eden. It really is the principle involved. It did not take much of value in Eden to sort out the judicial issue involved: God's absolute right of ownership. Similarly, neither does it take much of value in the law of the open field to sort out the same judicial principle.

A Christian socialist may lawfully pick a handful of ideological corn from this law, but this will not sustain him for very long. At best, it is a snack. If his point is that there is no absolute right of private ownership in a godly society, he is correct. If his point is that a handful of neighborly corn is a valid representative case justifying the state's ownership of society's means of production, or taxation at a rate that would have made the Pharaoh of the oppression feel guilty, then our straws-grasping scholar is guilty of bringing in a mechanical reaper and stripping the field clean. He has moved from being a neighbor to being a thief. In this sense, he reflects the modern state.

End of Volume 2

INHERITANCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY

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VOLUME 3

GARY NORTH

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COLLATERAL, SERVITUDE, AND DIGNITY

No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge. . . . When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God. . . . Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing (Deut. 24:6, 10–13, 17–18).

The theocentric focus of this pledge law is the existence of legal boundaries. God, as the redeemer (point four), establishes legal boundaries (point three) around property delegated to men (point two).

A. The Pledge

At the very heart of the debt relationship is the pledge. The pledge serves as collateral: the debtor's economic motivation to repay. If he fails to repay, he loses ownership of the pledge. Until he fails to repay, he retains possession of it. He can exclude others from access to it. But his failure to keep his promises (stipulations) leads to the transfer of control to the creditor, who defends his right to exclude the debtor by means of the stipulations of the loan contract.

The theocentric model of the pledge is God's promise. By means of a pledge, He places His reputation on the line. If He fails to fulfill His pledge, He loses His reputation. He therefore loses His judicial status as God. This, of course, cannot be; this is why God fulfills His verbal pledges. He has too much at stake not to. Moses reminded God of this

fact when God threatened to destroy Israel and make Moses the patriarch of a new nation (Ex. 32:11–13).

The first pledge recorded in the Bible is God's promise to Adam that in the day that Adam ate of the forbidden tree, he would die (Gen. 2:17). This promise was fulfilled: Adam did die that day, judicially speaking. He died definitively. The curse of death came on him and his heirs. Adam was a dead man walking. Death and damnation, as with life and salvation, are definitive, progressive, and final. The final death is the second death of the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). Had it not been for God's willingness to sacrifice His son on behalf of Adam and Adam's heirs (Heb. 2:17), man's temporal existence from that time on would have been a working out of this definitive judicial status of death. God announced the grace of this future substitutionary atonement in His pledge to Adam regarding the coming of an heir who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). This grace is both common and special. That Adam still walked was proof of God's common grace. That his son Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice to God was proof of God's special grace.

Man's pledge, unless in the form of a vow before God, does not partake in the character of an oath.¹ It has stipulations, but it does not invoke God's direct sanctions in order to validate the promise. It therefore has more to do with law and boundaries than with either oath or hierarchy. It has to do with contract rather than covenant.

A pledge is a tool of dominion. It enhances its owner's ability to extend his dominion. A tool lowers the cost of achieving one's goals. The pledge or collateral may sometimes be so closely associated with the individual that to remove it from him completely can undermine his definition of himself. As a dominion law, it was not a seed law or a land law. It was a cross-boundary law.²

Man's word is not God's word. Man's promise is not God's promise. Man does not lawfully defend his words and his promises with the same degree of commitment with which God defends His. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: **If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself**" (II Tim. 2:11–13). In short, *man is a greater risk than God*. Believing in man's word is far more risky than believing in God's word. Therefore, a wise creditor asks for collateral, or else he imposes a high-

1. Chapter 58.

2. On these legal categories, see Appendix J.

er rate of interest on a loan before he extends it. A man's promise to repay may be merely verbal or contractual, such as with a "signature loan" or a credit card loan. Such uncollateralized loans command higher interest rates than collateralized loans because they are more risky. Borrowers are statistically more likely to default on such loans. This is why they must offer to pay lenders a higher rate of interest in order to obtain loans. All borrowers in this statistical classification of borrowers pay a higher rate because a higher percentage of borrowers in this class will default. The lender must be compensated for this additional risk.

A collateralized loan adds security to the loan, i.e., it increases the statistical likelihood that the borrower will repay the debt. The pledge is a valuable item—at least to the borrower—that the borrower agrees to transfer to the lender, should he default on the loan. The pledge could be a tool of production. This case law specifies that if this tool is basic to the borrower's life or productivity, it must remain with him. His means of escaping debt bondage must not be taken from him by the creditor.

These pledge laws are extensions of the laws governing collateral: "If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious" (Ex. 22:26–27). A poor brother's life is not to be endangered by having to surrender his coat as a pledge against debt.

This law does not protect the covenant-breaker. It is not a general equity law. The covenant-keeper is to be subdued economically for the glory of God. "The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them" (Deut. 28:12–13).³

B. Tools of Dominion

The millstone is a miller's source of livelihood, but it is not his source of biological life. He can make a living doing something else,

3. Chapter 70.

but he believes that cannot make as good a living. A man is versatile. He can do many kinds of work. But a man is also limited. Each man performs certain tasks with greater skill than he performs others. Because some men are more skilled than their fellows in particular areas of production, they can perform these services less expensively than their competitors. This set of circumstances makes possible the social division of labor.

1. The Social Division of Labor

The range of skills across the human race is stupendous. A man who has one set of skills can learn different skills. A man is not a machine. A machine can perform one task well. The more complex the machine, the fewer uses to which it can be put profitably. A machine that makes one item falls to scrap value if demand for that one item falls to zero and is expected to stay there by all entrepreneurs. This condition is not true of a man. He can learn new skills if the demand for his present specialized abilities should fall.

Because of the highly diverse and unspecific nature of human labor, men can gain income by exchanging their specialized labor services for other specialized services or goods. Because of the highly specific abilities which some men possess, they can gain a higher price than their competitors for their labor services. But selling these specialized labor services is risky. If demand for a specific labor service declines, the seller will lose income faster than another man whose more general skills rarely face an equally large decline in demand. An across-the-boards decline in demand is far less likely statistically than a decline in demand for a specialized service or product.

In times of economic growth through capital investment, income rises faster for those who supply specialized labor. Why? Because their unique abilities have been made more productive by specialized tools of production. This income advantage persuades additional people to specialize. *The social division of labor increases when capital investment increases.*⁴ Conversely, in times of economic decline, when the division of labor shrinks because of a shortening of the structure of production,⁵ the specialist producer may find that his income falls rapidly. He must then abandon his specialty. The man who uses a special-

4. Friedrich A. Hayek, *Prices and Production*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1960), ch. 2. Cf. Mark Skousen, *The Structure of Production* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), ch. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. Skousen, *ibid.*, ch. 9.

ized tool of production to gain his income is therefore more vulnerable to shifts in demand than his less capitalized neighbor. He gains his income by producing a specialized service or product. He builds his way of life—his pattern of expenditures—in terms of the income generated by his tool. If he demand falls for his output, or if he loses access to this tool, his way of life will be disrupted.

2. No Tools, Low Output

The miller has invested capital and time in mastering the tools of his trade, which in this case are a pair of millstones. He then seeks a loan. The lender demands one of the millstones as a pledge. Without his complementary tools of production, his output falls rapidly. He must revert to selling less specialized forms of labor. These services bring a lower return because there are more competitors who can underbid him in this new field than there had been in his old field. He has lost his competitive advantage. His ability to repay the loan falls. His self-definition as a participant in society is undermined by the loss of his tool of production. Both his self-image and his productive role in society are threatened by the loss of his tool.

This case law prohibits the lender from taking a millstone as a pledge. He is restricted in two ways. First, the lender may not legally collect this pledge in advance of repayment, which would increase the likelihood that the loan will not be repaid, thereby forcing the miller into servitude. Second, the language indicates that he must not accept the millstone as a default pledge, i.e., a transfer of ownership to the lender should the borrower default. God says: “Hands off!” To reduce the risk of the debtor’s default in the absence of the millstone as a pledge, the lender must therefore either ask for a higher rate of interest (if this is a profit-seeking loan) or else content himself with some other form of pledge, including the man’s willingness to be sold into indentured servitude.

Wouldn’t the debtor’s self-image be threatened by indentured servitude? Yes. I conclude that this prohibition against taking a millstone as a pledge must have more to do with his life as a producer than his life as a free man. Under the Mosaic economy, a lender was allowed to sell the debtor into servitude or force him or his children (II Kings 4:1–7) to come and work for him until the debt was paid off. But the lender was not allowed to take away the man’s tools of production. Without these, the debtor could not readily buy his way out of servitude. Fur-

thermore, society would lose his output as a tool-endowed, specialized producer. To enhance the debtor's ability to pay off the loan and, if necessary, buy his way out of debt servitude, this law allowed him to retain ownership of his tools of production. As a secondary benefit to society, this law kept the producer in the work force as a specialist.

To put this law into a modern setting, there is no doubt that taking an automobile tire as collateral can be a high motivational technique to get repayment from a man with only one car with only four tires (no spare). He cannot drive into town without it on Saturday night. But he also cannot drive to work or do odd jobs that would earn him extra money. Without the use of his car, he falls under the threat of permanent debt, meaning permanent bondage. This case law rejects as illegitimate the use of such collateral during working hours. The required collateral is not to be part of a man's tool kit of dominion. If a debtor owns a sports car that is his pride and joy, as well as an old car for pulling loads of hay, it would be legitimate to take one or more tires of the sports car. The sports car testifies to his misplaced sense of priorities. Humbling his pride is different from breaking his spirit by bankrupting him.

C. The Good Life

A specialized producer can shift to a less specialized occupation and still put food on his family's table. The man without a pair of millstones is not facing starvation. Yet the language of this text indicates that the millstone was the man's life. I conclude that the language must be referring to something other than biological life. What does this text mean? While the Hebrew word here is often used in the sense of biological life, it has other meanings. It often means *a man's chief desire*. "And Hamor communed with them, saying, The **soul** of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife" (Gen. 34:8). "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my **lust** shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them" (Ex. 15:9). "Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the **heart** of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). "But now our **soul** is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Num. 11:6). The use of the word in the passage that preserves open fields, is close to the meaning in this text: "When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own **pleasure**; but

thou shalt not put any in thy vessel” (Deut. 23:24).⁶ A man’s heart and *soul* define his life in his own eyes. “But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy **soul**” (Deut. 4:29). “Chief desire” seems to be the meaning in this text.

A millstone is a tool of bread-making, but owning one is not a matter of life and death. It is possible to eat grain without grinding it into bread. Corn can be eaten on the cob. Wheat can be sprouted or cooked as cereal. A man need not starve because he does not own a pair of millstones to grind his grain.

Bread is more than nutrition; it is symbolic of the full life. “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11)⁷ refers to a comfortable way of life, a good life. As such, bread is one of the sacraments.⁸ Where there is no millstone, there will be something important lacking: bread, which provides a sense of personal and social fulfillment. This condition of dearth is a mark of God’s judgment: “Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle” (Jer. 25:10). A society in which millstones are not grinding is a society under God’s wrath.

This case law forbade a creditor from taking away one of the means of the good life. This law was not restricted to millers. It was more comprehensive than that. A poverty-stricken family enjoys its daily bread. It should not have this enjoyment cut off by a creditor. A covenant-keeper is not deliberately to reduce another covenant-keeper to beggary. “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).⁹

D. Household Authority

The independent head of the household should not have his authority undermined. The very term “breadwinner” indicates the im-

6. Chapter 58.

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2003] 2012), ch. 12.

8. This is why fermented wine is also one of the sacraments. It is part of the full life, the good life. Being without it is a curse of God for sin. “Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them” (Amos 5:11).

9. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

portance of bread. It is a mark of authority, of productivity, to provide bread. A breadwinner who is reduced by another man's deliberate actions to eating wheat sprouts and cereal has been stripped of his authority. The covenant-keeper is not to strip his fellow covenant member of his dignity. This is why the lender does not have lawful access to the debtor's house. He must stand outside the boundaries of the debtor's house and wait for the debtor to bring out the pledge.

Basic to dominion is confidence in oneself and one's future. *Anything that degrades a man is a threat to his ability to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant.* This applies even to corporal punishment: "Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed: lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee" (Deut. 25:3). A man must not be deliberately humiliated. The prohibition against taking a man's millstone is related to this concern. A man who has been stripped of the marks of authority in his own household is not in a strong position to recover his lost productivity. He is less likely to "bounce back" from adversity. The lender is to refrain from actions that would needlessly inhibit the recovery of the covenant-keeping debtor. The extension of God's kingdom through the corporate efforts of the covenant-keeping community must not be needlessly inhibited.

The creditor knows that the debtor will be motivated to repay the debt if the creditor owns something of value. But there is a difference between owning something of economic value and something of psychological value. The debtor wants to have his pledge returned, so he works to replay the loan. But an item that is vital psychologically for a normal man's ability to repay, such as a millstone used to put bread on his own table, is not to be taken as collateral. His loss of collateral is not to threaten his ability to repay. The goal is *repayment through liberty*, not perpetual subordination.

E. Sanctions

What is the state's role in enforcing this law? First, it must refuse to enforce the terms of a contract if the contract uses the crucial tools of a man's trade as his pledge. But should the state bring negative sanctions against a lender who actually collects such a pledge? That is, should the state require the lender to pay double restitution to the victim of the prohibited contract? In this case, should the lender be required to return to the debtor his upper millstone, plus an additional

one?

One of the goals of biblical law is to protect people from the rise of an arbitrary state. If the lender who has collected his collateral from a defaulting borrower cannot predict with a high degree of accuracy whether a judge or jury will regard this collateral as an indispensable tool of the borrower's trade, then the greater the potential penalty that can be assessed by the court, the less likely the creditor will make the loan in the first place. If he may be retroactively required to return the pledge, he will consider this possibility when counting the cost of making the loan. The threat of double restitution increases this cost. The very unpredictability of the court reduces the size of the credit market. The court's decision regarding the crucial nature of the pledge is inherently difficult to predict. If the lender might be compelled to pay double restitution as a criminal penalty, he may choose not to make the loan.

On the other hand, if the state is not allowed to enforce this law, this law loses its status as a civil law. Society's wealth will be threatened by the possibility that millers will lose their upper millstones—and not merely millers.

How can the two goals be reconciled, so that would-be debtors can obtain loans, and society will also retain the services of skilled craftsmen?

One way is for magistrates to refuse to enforce the terms of a biblically prohibited debt contract. Surely, a magistrate should not enforce a murder contract. This situation is analogous. A magistrate would require the lender to return the tool-based collateral to the borrower. But no criminal sanctions are imposed because no criminal intent can be proven. Perhaps the lender did not understand that this tool was truly crucial to the borrower's productivity. Besides, the borrower must not be thought of as without information about his own occupation. If he failed to inform the lender about this, he must bear some of the responsibility. So, this is not a criminal matter.

Society needs protection from an arbitrary state far more than it needs protection from grasping creditors who drive hard bargains. An arbitrary state is dangerous to men's freedom and society's wealth. It is not only lenders who must be placed on a tight leash; it is also state bureaucrats. To allow the state to impose criminal sanctions against a creditor who has taken a tool of production as collateral from a borrower is to foster the expansion of state power. God provides a positive sanction: "it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy

God" (v. 13). That is, God has made a pledge. Men can count on this. God has given His word.

F. The Boundaries of a Man's Home

The lender must not violate the boundaries of a debtor's home. When the debtor brings out his pledge, either before the loan is made or after he has defaulted, the lender must wait outside the doors of the household. This makes it clear to all parties that the obligation has been met by the payment of the pledge. The lender exercises authority over the pledge. He does not exercise authority over the debtor. *The hierarchy of the contract extends from the lender to the pledge.* It does not extend to the debtor.

This means that the *debt relationship*, when collateralized by a marketable asset, is *limited in scope*. It is, in this restricted legal sense, an impersonal relationship. The lender must content himself with collecting the pledge. He is not given authority to transgress the boundaries of the debtor's house.

The *dignity of the debtor* is preserved by this law. He is not to be humiliated. For a lender to march across the door of the debtor's home is to humiliate the debtor. This is not lawful. There is a limit on the debtor's obligation. One limit is the door of his household. This is a judicial boundary.

This does not mean that the state is similarly restricted. If the debtor refuses to transfer the contract's pledged item to the lender, then the lender has the authority to appeal his case to the state. The boundaries of the home protect the borrower from an invasion by the lender. They do not protect against the invasion of the state in defense of a lawful contract. The state, in its capacity as God's delegated agent, possesses the authority to enforce lawful contracts. The lender has become the victim. The state must defend the victim's rights.¹⁰

G. Burdensome Collateral

The text continues: "And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God." This is a recapitulation of the earlier law of collateral: "If thou at

10. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious" (Ex. 22:26–27).¹¹ The law in Exodus pledges a negative sanction: "I will hear," meaning judgment in history.¹² This pledge by God must be acknowledged by men and honored in word and deed.

The lender must return life-preserving collateral every evening. This form of collateral is not a tool of production. Demanding a tool of production as a pledge is altogether prohibited. This collateral is an asset that is necessary to sustain life for part of the day. If it is cold outside, day and night, then such collateral is prohibited by the language of verse 6, "for he taketh a man's life to pledge." So, this asset must be life-preserving in the sense of not humiliating a man by making him shiver through the night, i.e., removing from him the good life. Shivering through the night is the functional equivalent of not eating bread. Returning the collateral every night is a major burden on him. It is bothersome. The lower the market value of the loan and its collateral, the less willing a lender will be to demand this item as collateral. The time wasted is worth more to the lender than the loan is worth to him. He has the option of not collecting the collateral daily. But he also has the option on any morning of claiming it. This right of the lender lowers the possibility of a form of fraud on the part of the borrower which I call multiple indebtedness.

H. The Restriction on Multiple Indebtedness

I have covered this aspect of the laws governing collateral in another place.¹³ Here I expand on my earlier analysis. If his cloak is his collateral, then he can lawfully pledge it for only one loan. He can use the collateral to keep warm at night, but he must not use it to secure another loan. He cannot lawfully offer a pledge of his cloak to half a dozen lenders, none of whom is aware that the cloak has been pledged to five other lenders. *Multiple pledges secured against the same collateral are fraudulent.* Each of the lenders believes that his loan is secured

11. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

12. "If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless" (Ex. 22:23–24).

13. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49:J.

by an item that is important to the borrower, an item that the borrower does not want to lose. But if it is being used to secure six loans, the debtor at some point may decide: "I can't earn enough money to pay off all of my creditors. I am too far in debt. Why should I bother to repay any of these people?" The magnitude of his debt becomes a motivation to stop repaying. The debtor gives up. This defrauds the lenders, who believed that the pledge was an incentive for him to repay. Instead, because of multiple pledges, it became an incentive for him to go so far into debt that the loans could not be repaid. This is a misuse of the concept of collateral. *Multiple indebtedness is a lure into greater debt and greater risk.*

By allowing the creditor to take possession of the pledge during the day, this law discourages the practice of multiple indebtedness. The pledge is still useful to the debtor, but it is also useful to the lender, not as an income-producing asset but as a chain that limits the debtor's opportunity to go too deeply into debt.

1. Fractional Reserve Banking

The modern banking system is a fractional reserve system.¹⁴ Depositors (lenders) are encouraged by bankers (debtors) to deposit funds in banks. The bank offers a rate of interest to its depositors. The banker then lends out all but a small fraction of the money deposited. He makes an interest rate return on the money lent out. He pays a lower rate to depositors. The bank earns income through the spread between these two rates. The small percentage of the deposits kept in reserve can be used to pay to depositors who come in and withdraw their money. The banker assumes (correctly) that on most days, the amount of money deposited will be close to the amount of money withdrawn. The bank keeps a small reserve to make up any excess of withdrawals over deposits.

The system rests on a lie. The bank offers all of the depositors a guarantee: you may withdraw your money on demand. Yet it then lends the deposits to debtors who by contract need not repay for months or years. The bank is, in the investment world's phrase, "borrowed short and lent long." The bank cannot make good its promise of "withdrawal on demand" if too many depositors come in and demand their money on the same day.

14. Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1986), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>)

If depositors believe that a bank is in trouble—suffering from either excessive withdrawals or risky loans—fear spreads. A bank run begins. When this happens, a line of would-be withdrawers forms in front of a bank. Lines spread to many banks. Even if one bank can be bailed out by other banks, or the nation's central bank, a large number of banks cannot be bailed out at once, except by printing money to hand out to depositors.

The banks' guarantee is then exposed for what it was from the beginning: no better than the banking system's ability to fool depositors about the inherent risk in a payments system that rests on a statistical impossibility. The banking system as a whole cannot fulfill its guarantee of sufficient funds for depositors to withdraw at any time. The banking system can fulfill it only when most depositors believe that the banking system can fulfill it. When an inherently unpredictable number of depositors simultaneously reach the conclusion that the guarantee is not only impossible to fulfill (logic should have told them this), but is about to be defaulted on, the bank run begins.

When an inherently unpredictable number of banks cannot meet their obligations, the domino effect begins. The payments system begins to collapse. An economy rests heavily on promises to buy or sell, to pay and deliver. This highly complex system of mutually interrelated obligations rests on the central promise of the banks regarding money: "You can get your money out of this institution on demand." If the banks default on this promise, all of the other promises in the economy are at risk. When the banks cease making payments to their depositors and to each other, almost every economic promise is called into question. It is not just the banks that have made promises; *everyone has made promises*. Employers have made promises to employees. Suppliers have made promises to deliver goods and services. Producers have invested resources in making available goods and services that cannot be sold under the new conditions. They stop making any further investments. They fire employees.

The social division of labor rests on a reliable means of payment. But the fractional reserve banking system is inherently unreliable. It rests on a known lie that is called into question by depositors periodically. When this happens, the payments system breaks down. As a result, the social division of labor shrinks rapidly. This destroys the market for specialized production. *The greater the degree of his specialization, the more vulnerable the seller is to falling demand.* Unemployment increases. Fear spreads. The downward spiral accelerates.

2. *The Payments System*

The breakdown in the payments system has an effect very much like the effect caused by a creditor who takes the debtor's upper millstone. In a breakdown in the payments system, the miller still owns the upper and lower millstone, but he cannot sell the output of these stones at the previous high price. There is insufficient demand at the previous price, or perhaps at any price. Yet he has built his way of life—his pattern of expenditures—on the expectation of a particular stream of income. The breakdown in the payments system dries up his stream of income. He must now seek other forms of income. This usually means producing less specialized goods or services. Yet he enters this less specialized market at a time when large numbers of other specialized producers are abandoning their occupations in an attempt to replace their dried-up income streams. We call this event an economic depression. It can come in one of three forms: (1) a collapse of the banking system and a reduction in the supply of credit (deflation); (2) a vast increase in the money supply through the printing press (inflation); or (3) inflation with legislated price ceilings (shortages and rationing).

The breakdown in the payments system destroys the accuracy of the array of prices that had been established under the older payment conditions. It is as if all the information in a computer became erroneous. The crucial information previously generated by the price system is undermined by the breakdown in payments. The intricate web of supply and demand is shredded. Forecasts made in terms of the previous array of prices are exposed as wasteful. Capital projects are exposed as loss-generating. Promises made to employees threaten the survival of their companies. Everyone's life style is threatened by the breakdown in promises caused by the breakdown in the payments system. *This is the inevitable effect of the fractional reserve banking system.* The banking system's lie is universally exposed as a lie. Statistically, this time of exposure—this day of reckoning—has to happen eventually.¹⁵ Yet most men are surprised when it does.

Because the credit money system applies to all participants in the market, its breakdown endangers everyone. It is not a case of one debtor's default. Such a default may temporarily undermine the payments system of those to whom he previously bought and sold, but

15. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 20. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

this disruption is temporary and local. But when the banking system collapses, the effects are widespread. There is no fall-back position for the vast majority of the producers in the economy, i.e., no reserves. The reserves were in the banks. They are long gone. Only those people who enjoyed a debt-free way of life based on a low division of labor can go through the payments adjustment period without experiencing a potentially devastating psychological crisis. The Amish and especially the Hutterites may go through the payments crisis unscathed, assuming that their gun-owning neighbors and a well-armed local police force protect them from thieves. Residents in the deepest bayous of Louisiana may not experience a large change in their life style. Almost everyone one else will.

I. The Dominion Covenant and Social Hierarchy

The doctrine of the covenant itself is point two of the biblical covenant model. We can see this in the very structure of the Pentateuch. The Book of Exodus is the book of the covenant.¹⁶ It is also the second book of the Pentateuch. The second point of the biblical covenant model is hierarchy.¹⁷ A covenant is necessarily hierarchical. God initiates it, and man responds, either as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. A covenant is not a contract between or among equals.¹⁸ There is always a superior involved: God.

In the dominion covenant, God is the archetype; man is made in His image. From this we draw a conclusion: because God is not a servant of Satan, covenant-keeping man should not become a servant to covenant-breaking man. On the contrary, the opposite is the biblical ideal: covenant-breaking man is to become a servant of covenant-keeping man. Covenant-keeping steadily puts covenant-keepers at the top in history. This process is built into the creation itself. It is recapitulated in God's law.

Sometimes covenant-keepers fall into dire straits through no fault

16. "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7).

17. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

18. The great evil of social contract theory, whether Lockean or Rousseauvian, is that it is seen as a judicial bond among equals. These equals contract together to create a superior entity, the state. There is a hierarchy, but it is strictly a natural hierarchy. It is said to be governed by natural law, not supernatural law.

of their own and must become servants of other covenant-keepers. There were rules in the Mosaic law governing such servitude (Lev. 25:14–17).¹⁹ It was to be mild. The superior in the relationship was not to oppress the subordinate.

Poverty and debt produce a form of servitude. “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7).²⁰ It is best to be financially independent and out of debt. It goes against the biblical model of liberation when a covenant-keeper seeks to enslave fellow believers. The widow, the orphan, and the stranger were to be protected. This passage extended the Exodus passage: “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child” (Ex. 22:21–22).²¹ These three figures served in the Mosaic law as the chief examples of vulnerability. Their legitimate interests were to be upheld in civil courts and in economic transactions. The way that these groups were treated testified to the moral condition of society. The reference in both passages to Egypt pointed back to the era in which God’s people were unfairly oppressed. The exodus generation and the conquest generation were reminded: as sons of God, they had deserved liberation, and God had delivered them by destroying their evil oppressors. The lesson should have been plain enough: they should expect similar negative sanctions for similar transgressions.

Conclusion

The law prohibiting a creditor from taking a man’s tools of production as a pledge against the loan supports a higher social division of labor.²² By enabling the producer to stay in his chosen line of work, this law encourages him to supply the demand of customers more efficiently. The debtor does not forfeit his way of life, just so long as he repays his loan on time, as he promised. He retains the ability to repay his debt. A debt incurred on the basis of his previous level of income is more easily repaid when he keeps his tools of production.

The problem comes when everyone has made pledges, i.e., con-

19. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 25.

20. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 67.

21. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 48.

22. In the United States, a man who declares bankruptcy must turn over his assets to the court, which sells them to repay his creditors. But there is an exemption: the tools of his trade.

tracts. They have promised to buy or sell in the future at a specific price. They have become dependent on the promises of others to buy or sell at specific prices. Their way of life is based on the maintenance of an expected array of prices. The breakdown in the payments system destroys these expectations. It forces men to break their promises. The fractional reserve banking system cannot indefinitely fulfill its pledge to allow depositors to withdraw their funds at any time. At some point, the banking system's pledge will be broken: depositors will not be able to withdraw their money. Everyone's income falls because of the rapid and widespread shrinking of the division of labor.

When men move from a high level of income based on a high social division of labor to a low level of income based on a reduced social division of labor, they experience a loss of dignity. *The economy's collective economic depression produces individual psychological depression.* This is why fractional reserve banking is a threat to society. By violating the Mosaic law's restriction on multiple indebtedness, fractional reserve banking places society at great risk. At some point, the statistical risk of a breakdown in the payments system produces the event. Very few people are ever prepared for it. Personal self-esteem suffers a devastating attack. Men's dreams are wiped out. Some men work harder. Most men become fearful of risk. Dominion suffers.

The law prohibiting a lender from entering the home of a debtor to take possession of the debtor's pledge preserves the dignity of the debtor. It protects the boundaries of his home, which means the boundaries of his covenantal authority as the head of his household. Until he defaults on the loan, he maintains at least some degree of dignity. This is important for a man's productivity. It is therefore important for maintaining society's wealth. Men who have lost their self-confidence do not make effective entrepreneurs and workers.

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WAGES AND OPPRESSION

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee (Deut. 24:14–15).

The theocentric focus of this passage is two-fold. First, God pays us what He has agreed to pay us, and He pays us on time. His words are reliable—laws, in fact. Second, God is a protector of those who cannot protect themselves. He places protective boundaries around the defenseless. Both of these principles are aspects of point three of the biblical covenant model: boundaries.¹

A. Withholding Wages

This was not a seed law or a land law. It was a cross-boundary law.² This was an extension of Leviticus 19:13: “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.”³ There, the practice of withholding wages overnight is described as robbery. Here, the sin is identified as oppression.

The previous section of Leviticus 19 deals with theft through fraud: the deliberately deceptive use of words (vv. 11–12).⁴ The first half of verse 13 repeats this warning. The second half adds another form of fraudulent wealth transfer: the withholding of a worker’s wages overnight. This act is specified as fraud, and it is also specified as

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

2. On the difference, see Appendix J.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

robbery. The question is: Why? If the worker agrees in advance to wait longer than a day for his pay, why should the law of God prohibit the arrangement? Or does it? (Here, I reproduce the relevant sections of chapter 13 of *Boundaries and Dominion*.)

It is always helpful in understanding a case law if we can first identify the theocentric principle that undergirds it. Verse 13 deals with paying a debt. *The employer-employee relationship reflects God's relationship to man*. God provides us with an arena: life and capital. Similarly, the employer supplies an employee with capital that makes the employee more productive. Man is dependent on God. Similarly, the laborer has worked for a full day. The employer is required to pay to him at the end of the work day. The context is clear: *rapid payment for services received*. God employs us as His stewards. He gives us the tools that we need to serve Him and thereby serve ourselves. He always pays us on time. So should the employer.

The employer who withholds wages from his employees is making a symbolic statement about God's relationship to man: God supposedly delays paying man what is rightfully owed to him. This symbolism is incorrect. It testifies falsely about God's character. This case law makes it plain that the employer owes payment before the sun goes down, a reference back to the creation: the division of day and night (Gen. 1:16–18; cf. Matt. 20:8).

God delays settling all accounts with mankind until the end of man's week in history, the final Day of the Lord.⁵ Man is *definitively* in debt to God, for God did not slay Adam on the day of transgression. Man is *progressively* in debt to God, for God has given to man far more than man has given God. God's refusal to settle accounts with men in this life is testimony of His grace to each man—an undeserved extension of credit—and also of a final judgment to come. Man is *finally* in debt to God.

God graciously gives gifts to all men until the day of judgment: common grace to all and special grace to His elect.⁶ So, by implication, it is legitimate for an employer to pay his workers in advance, for this testifies to the true debt relationship of man to God. Man, the employee, owes much to God, the employer, who has advanced wages to man so that man may work out his salvation or damnation in fear and trem-

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

6. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

bling. Understand: *this grace on God's part places mankind increasingly in God's debt*—a debt that is growing ever larger as time extends and God's common grace compounds. If men do not repent, there will be hell to pay, i.e., there will be God to pay in the ultimate debtor's prison (Matt. 18:23–35).⁷

B. A Position of Weakness

The wage earner is assumed by God to be in a weaker economic position than the individual who is paying his wages. This employer-employee relationship reflects God's supremacy as the sovereign employer and man's subordination as a dependent employee.

If the wage earner is not paid immediately, then he is being asked by the employer to extend credit to the employer. The employer gains a benefit—the value of the labor services performed—without having to pay for this benefit at the end of the work day. The Bible allows this extension of such credit during daylight hours, but not overnight.⁸ This law teaches that the weaker party should not be forced as part of his terms of employment to extend credit to the stronger party. God acknowledges that there are differences in bargaining power and bargaining skills, and He intervenes here to protect the weaker party. This is one of the rare cases in Scripture where God does prohibit a voluntary economic contract.

What if the worker says that he is willing to wait for his pay if he is given an extra payment at the end of the period to compensate him for the time value of his money (i.e., interest)? This would be an unusual transaction. The extra money earned from two weeks of interest would be minimal in comparison to the amount of the wage. In any case, to abide by the terms of this law, such a voluntary agreement would have to be *a legal transaction publicly separate from wage earning as such*. There would have to be a public record of its conditions. It would constitute an investment by the worker. But the worker would have to pay his tithe and taxes on this money before he could legally lend it to the employer. There is no biblical law that prohibits a poor man from earning interest on his money. Usury is defined as the taking of interest from a poor man who has requested a zero-interest charitable

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

8. By implication, the night laborer is under the same protection: he must be paid before the sun rises. The idea is that he must be paid by the end of the work day.

loan.⁹ Usury is not the same as an interest-paying loan to a rich man from a poor man who wants to make some extra money.

The law here specifies that an employer who hires an individual to work for a period of time has to have the money available to pay that individual on a daily basis at the end of each work day. This is the employer's standard requirement. There would be no confusion about this in a Christian covenanted society.

There is no doubt that in the modern world, such an arrangement is not economically efficient. Checks must be written, checks must be delivered to individuals, account books must be kept, and so forth. If this had to be done daily, it would add to the expense of running a firm.¹⁰ The larger the firm, the more difficult such an arrangement would be. Nevertheless, the employer is required by God to abide by this law. The question is: Can he lawfully substitute a more convenient payment scheme and still meet the requirements of this law?

C. Debt and Credit: Inescapable Concepts

If the employer decides that it is too much trouble to pay each worker at the end of each work day, he must advance the funds for the period of employment prior to the next payday. Thus, if the average period of employment between paydays is two weeks, the employer must bear the risk of paying an individual for work not yet received. The employer must extend credit to the worker. *The worker must assume a debt obligation*: two weeks of agreed-upon labor services.

Payments for a stream of services are not simultaneous, although this limitation will change when the use of electronic cash becomes widespread. Therefore, one of the two parties in this transaction must go into debt in this system, while the other must extend credit. *There is no escape from debt and credit without the digital technology of continuous payments*. What this law authorizes is an extension of credit by the worker to the employer for a maximum of one work day. At the end of the work day, the account must be settled. Credit is no longer

9. Chapter 35. Cf. North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

10. In the final stages of the German inflation in 1923, workers were sometimes paid cash in the morning. Wives would accompany them to work, take the cash, and rush to spend it on anything tangible before it depreciated during the day. This inflation devastated workers and employers alike. On the daily payment of wages in the second half of 1923, see Adam Ferguson, *When Money Dies: The Nightmare of the Weimar Collapse* (London: William Kimber, 1975), pp. 149, 191.

extended by the worker, so he receives his day's wage.

What if the transaction is different? What if the worker is paid in advance for a week or two of labor? He then necessarily becomes a debtor to the employer. He is required to deliver the work that he has been paid to perform. This places the worker in a debt position, but it is not a long-term debt. It is not considered a form of slavery, but there is no doubt that the worker has voluntarily accepted payment in advance, and this creates an obligation on his part. This debt position is limited, however. The law's presumption is that the employer is not going to pay a person in advance for months of work except in very rare circumstances.¹¹

It is clear that debt and credit are inevitable in an economy that is based on the division of labor. One party must extend credit to the other for some period of time. The other party therefore must become a debtor. The period of the debt in a labor contract may be brief, but it does exist. The inescapable questions are: (1) who will be the creditor, (2) who will be the debtor, and (3) for how long a period of time? *The idea of a debt-free economy is utterly utopian.* It is not economically possible to establish such an economy unless payments are simultaneous, moment by moment.¹² Such a payment system is too expensive for any organization to establish today. It would destroy the labor market if it were required by law.

The Bible teaches that we are not to become indebted to others: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8).¹³ This must not be interpreted in an absolutist fashion. We know this because every person is in debt to God, and also to the perfect man, Jesus Christ, as a result of Christ's atoning work at Calvary.¹⁴ This rule of debt-free living should be interpreted in a non-utopian sense. It means that *we are to avoid*

11. One of these circumstances is found in the book publishing industry. An individual is sometimes paid in advance to write a book manuscript. This is one of the highest-risk transactions in the business world. The best way to keep an author from finishing a manuscript is to pay him in advance. As a publisher, I learned this lesson after much experience.

12. I am reminded of the scene in the film *America, America* (1963), where the suspicious Greek buys passage on a ship to the United States. He holds out his money to the ticket salesman behind the counter, but he refuses to release his grip until the salesman places the ticket in his other hand. They let go simultaneously.

13. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2002] 2022), ch. 12.

14. This debt always involves common grace; sometimes it also involves special grace. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, op. cit.

debt contracts that threaten our continuing legal status as free men. It does not mean that we are to become hermits who separate ourselves from a division-of-labor economy. It surely does not mean that we are required to become household slaves. A Christian perfectionist, as a result of reading tracts against fractional reserve banking, once offered me the opportunity to hire him as a permanent indentured servant if I would agree to feed, clothe, and house him on a zero-cash basis. He recognized that Federal Reserve Notes and checking accounts are both money and debt instruments, and he wanted to be totally separated from any contact with either cash or checks. He felt too guilty to continue as a free man. He was willing to become a household slave to someone who was not equally concerned morally about using Federal Reserve Notes or checking accounts, and who would pay him in kind (i.e., goods). In short, he was willing to subordinate himself for life to someone whom he perceived as not being equally moral, so that he himself could live in technical moral purity. He wanted a protective boundary around him, and he was willing to give up his freedom to attain this. But this brought him into conflict with Paul's injunction to indentured servants to take freedom whenever it is offered (I Cor. 7:21). Problem: Who would want to employ such a guilt-ridden perfectionist? What productive services could he perform? Could anyone trust his promises? What would be his next paralysis-inducing interpretation?

Free men in Mosaic Israel were those who had not been sold into slavery to repay a debt. Free men had an inheritance in the land. This means that large debts today should be collateralized, e.g., a mortgage. A man can lose his home if he defaults on the mortgage, but he does not lose his freedom. The creditor reclaims the collateral rather than placing the debtor in bondage or selling him into bondage.

The restraining factor against the extension of too much credit by the stronger party is the employer's fear that the worker will either quit before his term of service ends or else not produce competent work. It is too expensive for the employer to sue the average worker for damages; court expenses plus his own time in court exceed the money owed. The economic judgment of the employer is the restraining factor. He suspects that he will not be repaid if he extends too much credit. Nevertheless, there is no biblical law that says that the employer must not extend credit in the form of wages paid in advance. He has to make the decision whether it is worth the risk to do this, given the organizational difficulties of making payments at the end of

every work day.

This text specifies that the *worker* must not be asked to work for a week or two in order to receive his wage. There is always a risk of default by a debtor, whether he is the employer or the worker. This law specifies that the risk of default for this form of debt beyond one work day must be born by the employer, not by the worker.

The employer must not become a thief by withholding anyone's wages. By forcing the employer to make restitution to his employed workers who had seen their wages withheld, the law reduces the amount of oppression of those unseen by the judges: future workers who are too weak even to compete for the delayed-payment job.

D. Worker vs. Worker

There are some workers who might be willing to work for a period longer than a day before receiving their pay. In a modern capitalist economy, this procedure is accepted by all concerned, since it is the policy of employers to offer severance pay to dismissed workers.¹⁵ The worker who plans to quit usually informs his employer of the fact that he will soon be leaving. The employer knows that the worker may become somewhat distracted in the final days of employment. The employer may decide to allow the worker to take his paid vacation at the end of his term of employment. So, the modern worker is paid by the employer for services not rendered when he leaves the job, not at the beginning of the term of employment. At the beginning of the contractual relationship, the modern worker renders services to the employer for which he is not paid at the end of the work day. This practice is what the Bible prohibits.

In a poor nation, which the whole world was until the nineteenth century, an offer to accept delayed payment would have given these capital-owning workers a big competitive advantage over destitute workers who needed payment immediately. This law establishes that competition among workers must not involve the employer's acceptance of such an offer by any worker. The biblical standard of payment is specified: payment at the end of the day. There may be payment in

15. There are also state-run compulsory programs of workers' compensation; any worker who is fired can receive payments from the state. Employers are required to pay taxes into these insurance funds. This is a morally corrupt system that penalizes employers who want to fire inefficient workers in order to improve customer service and/or increase profits that can be used to reward its investors. It also subsidizes unemployed workers to stay out of work until the benefits run out.

advance but not delayed payment.

Where this law is enforced, destitute workers in the community are not replaced in the labor force by less destitute workers who can afford to forego immediate payment. All workers are to be allowed to compete for jobs, irrespective of any worker's possession of reserves sufficient to tide him over until the next payday. So, one idea behind this law is to make job opportunities available to the destitute workers in the community. Everyone who is physically able to work is to be allowed to compete for a job on a basis independent of his asset reserves. *The destitute man's poverty is not to become the basis of his exclusion from the labor market.* His competitors are not allowed to use their ability to extend credit to an employer as a way to offset his only assets: his willingness and ability to work.

It should be clear that this law is far more applicable to a poor society than to a modern capitalist one. Very few people in a modern capitalist society are so poor that they cannot wait for a paycheck in two weeks. But the principle should still be honored. It is unfair for an employer to force workers to extend him credit as the price of getting that first job assignment. To do so is to offer the oppressing robber's option: "Your money or the job!" This law prohibits robbery and oppression: by the employer and also by the employer's implicit accomplice, i.e., the worker who can afford to accept a delayed-payment contract, thereby excluding the poorest workers from the labor market.

E. A Case of Theft and Non-Criminal Oppression

Whenever we analyze a voluntary contract from the point of view of the ethical question of "oppressor and oppressed," we need to ask the economic question: *Who wins and who loses?* Few moral analysts have had training in economic analysis. This is why they often miss the point. They incorrectly identify the oppressors and the oppressed.

This law prohibits two parties from profiting from delayed payment: the employer and the worker who possesses sufficient assets to survive a delay in payment. Why does the employer delay payment? One reason is that he is trying to avoid risk. He wants to be able to fire the worker without losing the value of the labor that the worker still owes him because of the money that he paid the worker in advance. God grants the employer the legal right to avoid this risk of default, but only if he pays wages daily. The employer may lawfully assess the worker's net productivity, work day by work day. If the worker is pro-

ducing unacceptably low output, the employer does not have to hire him the next day. The worker's contract is good for only one day or less, depending on what he agreed to in advance. The employer goes into debt to the worker: a day's wages. But whenever the employer seeks to retain the worker for a longer period than one work day, he must either pay the worker at the end of each work day or else extend payment in advance. The worker then goes into debt to the employer: a labor obligation.

1. The Weaker Party

The worker needs protection. An employer might hire him for a period and then dismiss him without pay. Jacob's complaint against Laban was that Laban had changed his wages repeatedly, meaning retroactively (Gen. 31:7). To protect the worker from this sort of oppression, God requires the employer to bear the risk of longer-term default. The employer bears the risk that the worker may turn out to be inefficient and will have to be fired before he has fulfilled his contract. The worker might even cheat the employer by walking off the job before his term of employment is over. That is the employer's problem. He can minimize this risk by paying workers at the end of each day. In doing so, he does not allow them to become indebted to him. If he chooses to have more infrequent pay periods, then he must bear the risk of paying people in advance who turn out to be poor workers.

There are workers who are willing and able to bear the risk that they will be cheated by an employer. They will accept delayed wage payments. If there were not such workers, this law would not be necessary. The employer could not rationally expect to be able to pass on this risk of hiring people to the people being hired unless he believed that there were workers who were willing to accept a delayed payment work contract. We know that such workers exist by the millions today. They have always existed.

This case law prohibits such an arrangement, whether initiated by an employer or a worker. The law specifies in advance exactly what each worker should expect: payment at the end of the work day. *This law discriminates against all those workers who are willing and able to compete against other workers by accepting delayed wages.* It is not simply a law against the oppression of destitute workers by employers; it is also a law against the indirect, non-criminal oppression of destitute workers by other workers.

2. *The Weakest Party*

It is not immediately apparent that this law deals with the oppression of the poor by the somewhat less poor. This law seems to have only the employer in mind as the agent of theft. But the employer cannot act alone in this act of theft. He needs accomplices, even if they are unaware of their economic status as accomplices. An employer who wants to discriminate against destitute workers in this way cannot do so without the voluntary cooperation of other workers. He cannot hire people to work without daily wage payments unless some workers are willing to work on these terms. The text identifies this practice as illegal, but it is not merely the oppression of those workers who voluntarily agree to accept the terms of the contract; it is also the oppression of those workers who cannot afford to offer their labor services on these terms. It is above all the oppression of those who are *excluded* from the employer's work force, not those who are included. But it requires some knowledge of basic economics to discover this fact. This law's protection of the destitute worker's ability to bid for jobs is implicit in the text, not explicit.

On what legal basis does this law apply to the free market? Why should a voluntary contract—delayed payment—be prohibited by civil law? What makes the practice of delaying payment judicially unique, and therefore legitimately subject to interference by the civil government?

3. *The Priestly Factor*

It is the vulnerability of the weakest seller of labor that makes this law necessary. God imposes this law because of what I call the priestly factor in free market pricing. This factor is seldom if ever discussed by free market economists. When human life is at stake—beyond the modern economic principle of marginalism—unrestricted free market competition is in some instances not morally valid. All real-world societies recognize this fact, but free market economists rarely do, since they are committed to a supposedly value-free (ethically neutral) analysis.

Here is an example of priestly pricing: a physician who bargains sharply with a seriously injured man at the scene of an accident. He cannot lawfully charge "all the traffic will bear"¹⁶ under such condi-

16. The phrase is from Frank Norris' anti-capitalistic novel, *The Octopus* (1901). The phrase was uttered by the book's villain, railroad agent S. Behrman.

tions. He is not allowed to charge significantly more than what is customary for treating that kind of injury in cases where the patient can be taken to any of several emergency treatment facilities. If he does drastically overcharge the victim, a civil court will not enforce the contract. The medical profession has ethical rules against such uninhibited pricing practices. Most people, unlike trained economists, have at least a vague understanding that human life, like eternal salvation, is not to be sold to a dying man on the basis of the free market's familiar auction principle of "high bid wins" unless there is sufficient time for the injured person to seek a second opinion and negotiate a second price quote.¹⁷

The law against delaying the payment of wages is an application of the ethics of priestly pricing. A destitute worker is not to be excluded from any labor market by an employer's policy of delaying payment. Delayed payment is a policy of excluding workers.

Why would an employer want to exclude workers from bidding for a job, i.e., lowering his labor costs? Normally, he would not want to exclude them, but it takes considerable familiarity with economics to understand why this policy discriminates against destitute workers. This law prohibits such a practice. God expects men to obey His law even when they do not understand all of its ramifications. Obedience is primary, not intellectual understanding. Men are to show good faith to God by obeying God's law as best they can, so that He will reward them. One of these rewards is greater understanding, thereby enabling men to obey God even better.

F. Competition: Discrimination = Exclusion

This law does not prohibit other forms of competition among wor-

17. Priestly pricing is based on ability to pay, e.g., the tithe. Economists call this practice price discrimination: one monetary price charged to members of one group; another price charged to members of a different group. The economist's standard explanation for this phenomenon is that there are government-imposed barriers to entry, e.g., licensing. The classic presentation of this view is Reuben A. Kessel, "Price Discrimination in Medicine," *Journal of Law and Economics*, I (Oct. 1958). I wrote to Kessel in the mid-1970s and suggested the priestly role of physicians as another factor in price discrimination. He wrote back politely and said this had never occurred to him. He did not say that he thought I had discovered anything significant. A legitimate question is this one: Why do civil governments create such barriers to entry? The political self-interest of the legislators is not the only possible explanation. Legislators and judges seem to recognize the priestly role of physicians. They understand that some kinds of voluntary but life-and-death contracts are not enforceable in the courts, and should not be.

kers. It prohibits only this one, which reflects the character of God in his gracious dealings with men in history. There is no law in the Bible against one worker's willingness and ability to offer to work for less per day or less per hour than another worker presently does. Any offer to serve another person on terms that are better for him than the terms presently being offered is an offer to *discriminate*, which is an act of *exclusion*. The offer discriminates against the person who has previously benefitted from the arrangement under the existing terms. The legal right¹⁸ to make a better offer is inherent in the biblical requirement that we become more profitable servants.

1. *The Economics of Persuasion*

We never know all of the available alternatives in life. We learn about better ways of achieving our goals through better offers that are made to us. We frequently need to be persuaded to do the wise thing. Wisdom is not automatic. Neither is accurate knowledge automatically acted upon.¹⁹ This is an epistemological application of Paul's ethical principle that knowing the good is not the same as doing it: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). This is why advertising must be persuasive; in fact, persuasiveness is more important for successful advertising than conveying technically accurate information.²⁰

There is market competition for accurate information and also for effective persuasion (i.e., motivation). Neither information nor persuasion is a free good. Both parties to a voluntary transaction are buyers of both information and persuasion. While we do not normally think of persuasion as something that buyers purchase, it must be purchased. We reward those specialists in motivational advertising who provide the techniques of persuasion by buying whatever it is they are selling. Professional advertisers pay for specialized courses on how to become more persuasive. Customers take specific action when they are persuaded to buy. Advertisers therefore respond accordingly. They adopt techniques of persuasion—what scholars have for millennia called *rhetoric*. Persuasion is not a free good. Customers voluntarily pay for it. They want persuasion. They will not buy without it. If the

18. By "right," I mean "immunity from legal challenge."

19. Israel M. Kirzner, *Perception, Opportunity, and Profit: Studies in the Theory of Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), ch. 9.

20. Israel M. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 159–80.

would buy without it, advertisers would cease providing it.

The structure of competition for both information and persuasion is no different from any other form of market competition: *buyers vs. buyers* and *sellers vs. sellers*. A person who thinks that he can sell me an alternative approach to solving my problem comes to me and says, in effect: "Include me in your production process. Exclude someone else. I have discovered a better way." *The offer to include him is inevitably an offer to exclude his competitors.* There can be no possibility of inclusion inside a boundary without the possibility of exclusion; otherwise, there would be no boundary.

3. Competition Without Oppression

This should alert us to a biblical fact of economic life: *economic oppression* is in fact a form of *discrimination*. Economic oppression can also be used as a means of *competition*. Most forms of discrimination are morally valid and legal. Therefore, so are most forms of competition. This case is an exception. Why does God prohibit this form of competition among workers? I think it must be the *all-or-nothing* aspect of this form of competition. An excluded worker may be too destitute to survive as a free man without pay. He is at the bottom of the barrel financially. He might be able to work for a bit less money per day, but he cannot afford to work for nothing for several days or weeks. He is in a desperate situation, so God intervenes and gives him what he needs to compete: *time*. His skills are not to be removed permanently from the marketplace just because he is too destitute to accept a job that delays payment for work completed beyond one work day.

The Bible correctly assumes that the employer is in a stronger bargaining position than the destitute employee in the community. God's law therefore places limits on the time that the employer can withhold the wages of the employee. It says specifically that withholding wages beyond the end of the work day constitutes oppression. God establishes this formal standard, and Christians should acknowledge its existence and obey it. *There are biblical judicial limits on voluntarism.*²¹ No employment contract contrary to this law is legal in God's eyes. The civil laws of every nation should prohibit such delays in the pay-

21. This fact does not constitute a legitimizing of an open-ended socialism, including some modernized version of medieval guild socialism. Biblical law, not socialist slogans, is the source of our knowledge of such limits on voluntary exchange.

ment of wages.

G. Bargainers: Strong, Weak, and Weakest

Because so few people are trained to think economically, they do not perceive the “things hidden”: in this case, the identification of the primary victim and the primary beneficiary of this prohibited labor contract. We need to think through the effects of such a contract by means of “Levitical” reasoning, eaning *boundary* reasoning: inclusion and exclusion. The traditional pair of questions posed by economists —“Who wins?” and “Who loses?”—becomes: “Who is included?” and “Who is excluded?”

In the absence of this law, there is an implied threat to the potential worker who is unwilling or unable to extend this credit. If he refuses to extend credit to the employer, he will not get the job. This is a major threat. By contrast, the employer suffers very little by paying wages in advance. He loses a small interest return on his money. This interest *presumably* is not worth a great deal to him, especially if he is a small-scale employer, which most employers in history are.

Why only *presumably*? Because of an inescapable epistemological limit on economic science. Technically, the economist cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, so he cannot say scientifically that the employer’s gain is psychologically smaller than the worker’s loss. The psychological loss or gain of the two individuals cannot be computed. There is no scientific way to measure the psychological loss to the worker of forfeiting the interest by extending credit, nor is there a way to compute the psychological loss to the employer if he is required by law to forfeit the interest by extending credit.²² It is not necessary for us to make such a numerical computation; we can still identify the primary victim and the primary beneficiary whenever this law is violated.

We need to consider three parties in our economic analysis: the employer, the employed worker, and the excluded worker. The text does not speak of the excluded worker, nor is the average Bible commentator likely to consider him, but he is crucial to the analysis. A less destitute worker may decide to accept the terms of employment:

22. On the question of interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, see Appendix A, section on “Value Theory at an Epistemological Impasse.” See also Appendix B. See also North, *Dominion Covenant*, ch. 4. Cf. Gary North, *The Coase Theorem: A Study in Epistemology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gncoase>)

delayed payment. A destitute worker cannot afford to accept it. The excluded worker becomes the primary victim of a delayed-wages contract. He cannot afford to take the job. The less destitute worker takes the job. He would of course rather be paid early, but his willingness to accept delayed payment is a form of competition on his part that gives him an advantage over very poor people in the community. The Bible calls this form of competition *oppression*.

The primary economic beneficiary of this form of oppression is not the employer, for whom the interest gained by delaying payment is minimal, but rather the worker who can afford to have his wages delayed, and who therefore gets the job. He excludes his competition through oppression. *The employer here acts as the economic agent of the employed worker.* This representational relationship is not readily understood. No one without economic training will blame the employed worker for the unemployment of the destitute worker. If anyone is blamed, it will be the employer. The employer *is* to blame, judicially speaking: he imposes the illegal terms of employment: robbery, a form of oppression. God's law designates the employer as the initiator of an evil contract, and hence *judicially liable*, as we shall see. The fact remains, however, that the worker who takes the job on these terms becomes the agent of economic oppression, while the excluded worker is the primary economic victim.²³ The person who appears to be the victim—the worker who takes the job—is in fact the primary economic beneficiary of this labor contract. He obtains what both of the competing workers needed: the job.

H. What Did the Employer Steal?

The appropriate civil sanction is not specified, as is also the case in other laws governing oppression. But in most other cases, the absence of any civil sanction points to the absence of civil jurisdiction because of excessive limits on the judges' knowledge. Not so in this instance. Restitution in this case is technically possible to compute. If victims prosecute and the courts convict, the practice will disappear from public view.

The primary judicial question is: How much does the convicted employer owe the victim? Answer: the victim's costs of prosecution

23. One more time: the employer gains a small interest return and a small risk-avoidance return. The worker gains the promise of a wage, bears some risk of not being paid, and forfeits a small interest payment. The excluded worker, too poor to accept the contract, gains nothing.

plus the restitution penalty.²⁴ There are two approaches to establishing what restitution payment is owed by the employer: (1) by considering the forfeited interest; (2) by considering the forfeited daily wage. I believe the second approach is valid. We must examine the first approach in detail in order to see why it is not valid. The key question that we need to answer is this: What constitutes the thing stolen? Is it the interest or the wage?

1. Interest

A withheld wage requires a worker to extend credit to his employer. For a week or two, or perhaps even a month, the worker has extended credit, day by day, to the person employing him. The employee has therefore forfeited the interest that he might have earned day by day, had he been able to put this money in the bank rather than spending it on necessities. It is obvious that the interest payments foregone would not be very much money; nevertheless, it is possible to compute what double restitution of that forfeited interest would be. However, only a very skilled person could have made this computation prior to the widespread knowledge of mathematics. For example, consider how difficult this would be apart from the use of the zero (a decimal point followed by a zero is needed to compute percentages under 10%), which came to the medieval West only through contact with Islam. The Arabs in turn learned of it in India. There is no evidence that the zero was known to any culture prior to the ninth century, A.D.—the West's era of Charlemagne. (The Mayans and the Indians discovered it independently or else were in contact with each other). The average employer could not have computed this payment easily in Moses' time, let alone the average employee.

The cost to the worker of this forfeited interest would be higher to him than the cost to the employer. I am speaking here of the actual rate of interest, not subjective cost. The worker has to forfeit goods that the wages would have bought in the interim. There is no doubt that a modern worker can borrow the money to buy these goods, repaying the loan at the end of the working period. (Prior to World War I, small consumer loans from banks were unavailable to workers.) The difficulty is, a worker is not in a position to borrow money at the same low rate of interest that the employer can obtain. The poverty-stricken

24. If the victim's court costs are not paid by the convicted criminal, very few victims will be able to sue, so the practice of discrimination will not be reduced.

worker is a high-risk borrower. He can easily be trapped in a cycle of debt. When this law is honored, an employer has greater difficulty in forcing the employee into debt servitude.

Computing the forfeited interest would be difficult even today. In Moses' day, it would have been very difficult. How many judges would have been able to establish this implied forfeited payment? Not many. So, we must look for a better solution. We must turn from the concept of forfeited interest to the concept of forfeited wages.

2. *Wages*

It is not implied in the text that double restitution of the forfeited interest should be paid, since this is not what is specified as the thing stolen. In fact, the text does not specify the thing stolen. What *is* identified in the text as an act of theft is the refusal of the employer to pay the agreed-upon wages in a timely manner. We conclude that *the withheld wage is the thing stolen*. Thus, a civil judge can rightfully impose a much higher penalty on the employer than double the employer's forfeited interest. The thief would not simply pay double restitution on the forfeited interest; he would pay double restitution on any wages unpaid at the end of each work day.

Why so high a penalty? After all, the worker forfeited only the interest that his money might have earned. Why impose double restitution based on the entire daily wage multiplied by the number of days of delayed payment? Because God's law defines the act as *theft*.

The act is also a form of oppression, but the oppressor here is the worker who accepts the contract. He is not identified as a thief. He is not subject to criminal charges by the invisible excluded workers who cannot afford to wait to be paid.

We need to examine the employer's motivation. If his primary goal is not to earn a little extra interest by delaying wages, then what is it? Most employers adopt a policy of delaying wages today because their rivals do. This policy is almost universal in modern advanced economies. Employers give little or no thought to the practice. For that matter, neither do most employees. But what if employers did give thought to it? What would their primary motivation likely be?

I. The Limits of Economic Knowledge

A Marxist—an endangered species these days—would probably argue that the employer's goal is to place local workers in a totally de-

pendent position. The poorer these workers are, the more desperate their economic condition is likely to be. The more desperate their economic condition, the cheaper they will be willing to work. If the employer can maintain what Karl Marx once called the industrial reserve army,²⁵ i.e., the unemployed, he can force down local wages. His theft is therefore deliberate. One problem with this line of reasoning is that it assumes that the employer understands a complex chain of economic reasoning. He probably doesn't. Another problem is that employers like to have lots of qualified workers competing against each other.

The key word here is *qualified*. As a former employer, I believe that the typical employer is trying to minimize his risk when he hires competent workers rather than substandard workers. He delays payment because he wants to see each new worker prove himself before getting paid. This delay in payment pressures workers with little capital to quit early or never even apply for the job. *The practice of delaying wages is therefore primarily a screening device.* It favors workers who have capital in reserve. These capital reserves serve the employer as a substitute for other screening techniques. The employer's economic problem is the his lack of knowledge about the competence of the new worker. *The employer uses a delayed payment scheme in order to minimize his search costs in estimating the competence of new workers.* Accurate knowledge is not a zero-price resource. Employers try to obtain such knowledge as cheaply as possible. They use the new worker's willingness to accept delayed payments as a cost-effective substitute for more detailed information regarding the worker's abilities and his willingness to work.

J. The Limits of Judicial Knowledge

Here we have a situation where the law seems unjust. I have argued that the primary economic beneficiary of delayed payments is the worker who can afford to extend the credit and therefore gets the job. I have identified the primary economic victim as the excluded destitute worker. Yet the law identifies the employer as the oppressor-robber, and the only way for a judge to impose negative sanctions is for him to require the employer to pay the employee. In other words, the *judicial* victim is not the primary *economic* victim.

Why does God give the employee a lawful claim against the em-

25. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867), XXV:3 (New York: Modern Library, [1906] n.d.), pp. 689–703.

ployer? Because this worker is the only *judicially visible victim*. He is a weak bargainer when compared to the employer. He is stronger than the destitute excluded workers, but he is still weak compared to the employer. This law is meant to protect the weak from the strong. It protects the weakest party only indirectly: by threatening the employer with penalties for robbing the weaker. Judges are not omniscient; they cannot identify the weakest workers, i.e., those who never even bothered to apply for the job because of their lack of capital. Judges provide protection to the weakest workers only indirectly.

The judicial problem is this: How can the judges identify the actual victims of this form of discrimination? The primary economic victim of a delayed-wage contract was the excluded worker who could not afford to take the job. He has been oppressed by the worker who took the job on the illegal terms. Exactly which workers were the excluded ones? That is to say, which workers would have gained employment had the delayed-payment system not been in force? This is virtually impossible for civil judges to determine. Knowing the harsh terms of employment, some destitute workers may not have bothered to apply. Any seemingly destitute worker might later complain to the civil authorities that he had never bothered to apply for the job because of the delayed payment feature.

So, by what means can such a law be enforced while still maintaining justice? How can legitimate, predictable sanctions be imposed? What, if anything, should be done to indemnify the primary victim? This is why economic oppression is rarely a crime. The civil magistrate cannot specify the illegal criteria, the victims, or the appropriate restitution.

There is another issue. How can a restitution payment to the employed worker help a destitute worker who was too poor to accept the terms of employment in the first place? The judge does not restore anything to him. Nevertheless, the penalty does help the excluded worker: not as a payment to compensate him for *past* oppression, but as a threat against *future* oppression.

This law reduces future injustice to the weakest members of the work force by forcing the oppressing employer to pay the visible victim—the worker whose wages were withheld—instead of paying the invisible victims whose claims cannot be precisely identified or resolved judicially. The agent of oppression, namely, the worker who took the job, is rewarded by the court, not for being an oppressor (which he was) but because he was the victim of a criminal act.

K. Protecting the Weakest Party

First, there is no active assault. There is only a refusal to pay. Second, the weakest worker is the unemployed person who cannot afford to live without wages. He is being oppressed by both the employer and his employee. Judicially, it is not possible for a court to identify the specific worker who would have taken the job had the employer paid in advance. Therefore, in order to remove this form of indirect oppression from society, God grants to the weaker worker—the employed worker, who himself is an oppressor (though probably unknowingly)—the authority to press a covenant lawsuit in the courts on his own behalf.

A small portion of the wealth of the weak worker had been transferred to the employer. This wealth transfer can be calculated for purposes of judicial restitution. Because the defrauded worker presses charges, the weakest worker is indirectly protected. The weaker worker, acting on his own behalf judicially and economically, acts as an economic agent for the weakest workers. He probably does not perceive that he is in fact acting as the economic agent of his competition. A more economically sophisticated worker would probably not press charges against his employer, since the delayed payment system excludes his competition, but there are never very many economically sophisticated workers (or anyone else, for that matter). Some workers will press charges, so the oppressive practice will be reduced.

The courts can take action only when someone brings a lawsuit against a perceived law-breaker. This could be a rival employer. The weakest victims cannot act on their own behalf in these two types of cases. The excluded worker cannot prove that he was a victim. Similarly, the victimized blind or deaf person cannot prove that the crime took place. A biblical court system requires an agent to bring a lawsuit against the law-breaker. These case laws provide the necessary incentives for agents to bring these lawsuits.

There is another way for workers with capital to compete. They can offer to work for free for a period as apprentices. Then, when they have proven themselves reliable, the employer can begin to pay them. This is a legitimate strategy. Their donated time remains donated. They bear the risk of not getting hired. They do not place the employer in their debt. But employers cannot legally make compulsory such free service as a condition of employment. The offer is at the discretion of the worker. There must be an element of apprenticeship risk in

order to legitimize this offer. The employer is under no obligation to hire the worker.

Conclusion

This case law deals with theft from economically weak workers and also indirect economic oppression of the most impoverished workers in the community. The most impoverished workers are those who cannot afford to extend credit to their employer. They need to be paid at the end of the work day. The employer is required to do this or else pay them in advance for a longer term of service.

This law proves that Mosaic Israel was not a debt-free society. There were creditors and debtors. A legitimate biblical goal is to reduce long-term debt, but God's civil law does not mandate absolutely debt-free living. Debt is basic to society, for society implies a division of labor. Debt will exist in a division of labor economy until such time as an economically efficient means of making moment-by-moment wage payments becomes universal.

The employer who delays payment to his workers is defrauding them. But to do this, he is inescapably providing an opportunity for some workers to oppress their competitors. The worker who can afford to work without pay for a period is given an opportunity by the employer to steal a job away from a worker so poverty-stricken that he cannot survive without payment at the end of the day. This form of competition is illegitimate, this passage says ("fraud, robbery"). It is unfair competition. God's civil law makes it illegal for an employer to act as the economic agent of any employee against a destitute competitor. There are very few cases of unfair competition specified in the Bible, but this is one of them.

This passage is not a biblical injunction for the state to become a welfare agent: a dispenser of positive sanctions. The delay of payment overnight is described in Leviticus 19:13 as robbery: a crime. A judge can impose a restitution penalty on the perpetrator. There is also a hidden element of oppression: the excluded workers.

To become subject to civil law, oppression must be identifiable as a criminal offense. There must be definable criteria that make the act a crime. The indirectly oppressed, excluded worker is not the victim of a crime. Ironically, the one who has oppressed him, the employed worker, is the victim of a crime: delayed payment. Even more ironically, if the oppressor brings a lawsuit against his assailant, the employer, he

thereby makes it less likely that he and his employer will be able to oppress the weakest party: the excluded worker. This is why I think the excluded worker or the state acting on his behalf can bring a lawsuit against the employer to have the practice stopped. But he must not be awarded restitution. He cannot prove he was uniquely harmed, thereby excluding all other potential claimants.

The oppressive character of the contract should be recognized by the judges, and no legislation should ever be passed that imitates the “delayed payment” contract, with its exclusionary side effects.

GLEANNING: CHARITABLE INEFFICIENCY

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing (Deut. 24:19–22).

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is this: God shows grace by allowing mankind access to the fruit of God's field, i.e., His creation. God allows mankind inside the boundaries of His field. A fallen man is in the same judicial position as a poverty-stricken, landless Israelite or stranger was under the Mosaic economy. God does not exclude eternally cursed men from access to the means of life in history. Neither were land owners in post-conquest Mosaic Israel to exclude the economically poor and judicially excluded residents of the land. A fallen man is always a gleaner.¹ He comes into God's field as a petitioner. He is never the original owner. Ownership is therefore a form of stewardship. It is *vertical*: God > man > nature. It is also *horizontal*: owners representing other men (customers).

A. Ownership and Stewardship

God is the original land owner who sought to make the Promised Land's blessings available to every able-bodied worker who was willing to go into the fields at the time of the harvest. This was an aspect of

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 11:M.

the dominion covenant: man as God's steward who participates in the subduing of the earth (Gen. 1:26–28). Those people who were without either land or tools in Mosaic Israel nevertheless had an obligation to work. Because the Mosaic law assigned rural land to families that were heirs of the conquest generation, this case law opened up otherwise closed fields. The gleaners could not inherit these fields,² but they had a moral claim on a portion of the leftovers. This was both a land law and a seed law.³

This passage expands on the gleaning laws of Leviticus: "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:9–10).⁴ "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:22).⁵ It identifies the three classes of vulnerable residents: widows, orphans, and strangers. It refers to Israel's years as a slave in Egypt. It offers positive sanction: "that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands." The negative sanction of bondage is contrasted with the positive sanction of God's blessings.

1. *Gleaning as a Model*

I have already covered gleaning in chapter 11 of *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary*. I am not reproducing that chapter here. Deuteronomy 24:19–22 identifies society's poor more specifically: stranger, orphan, and widow. It also adds a reason: Israel's time of bondage in Egypt. God had delivered Israel from this bondage. Israelite land owners were to offer similar deliverance to the poor.

Gleaning was a form of morally compulsory charity. It remains the primary *moral* model for biblical charity, but, as I hope to show, it is not a *literal* model for modern charity. *In a non-agricultural society, gleaning cannot become a literal model for charity.* Morally, however,

2. Conceivably, some poor gleaner might be the long-term heir of the property who had temporarily lost possession of his field.

3. On land laws and seed laws, see Appendix J.

4. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

gleaning is to be our guideline for charity: those in the community who have been called in the West “the deserving poor” (charity-deserving) to be allowed to do hard work in order to support themselves and improve their condition. God expects the more successful members of a community to provide economic opportunities for such willing laborers—opportunities for service.

As with every biblical law, this law was ultimately theocentric. The beneficiaries of this law were God’s representatives in history, just as victims of crimes are representatives of God. Crime is primarily an assault on God by means of a crime against man, who is made in God’s image. Crime is man’s attempt to bring unlawful negative sanctions against God by bringing them against one of His representatives. Charity is analogous to crime in this respect, but with this difference: the sanctions are both lawful and positive. What a person does to the poor is counted as if he did it to Jesus (Matt. 25:32–40).

2. *Inefficiency: Yes and No*

The stated goal of modern economic science is to explain men’s actions in terms of the principle of income maximization, i.e., sanctions: profit and loss. For a given expenditure of scarce economic resources, how can a person maximize his personal return, however he defines “return”? Put another way, how can he avoid wasting valuable resources? How can he exchange his present circumstances for better circumstances in the future without surrendering ownership of benefits that need not be surrendered?

The farmer was warned by Moses not to seek to maximize his total return on his agricultural investment. He was not to go back to pick up the forgotten sheaf, or go through his olive orchard, beating the trees a second time, or glean the vineyard a second time. The three examples in the text apply to the raw materials for producing *bread, wine, and oil*. These were the vegetable sacrifices required by God (Lev. 2:4; 23:13). They were the best produce of a man’s field. *They served here as representatives of all agricultural production*. Moses told owners of these crops that they should leave behind some small percentage, so that gleaners could harvest them. This meant that the Mosaic law transferred *partial ownership* of these unharvested crops to those who did not own the land and had not made the investments necessary to produce them.

By the standards of modern economics, God was commanding

land owners to be wasteful. He commanded them to leave behind for others a small portion of the fruits of their investment. He was saying clearly that members of three defenseless groups—strangers, widows, and orphans—had a moral claim on a small portion of the output of the land.⁶ They did not have a legal claim, but they had a moral claim. Here, the Bible's supreme example is Ruth, who was both a stranger and a widow. Boaz let her glean in his fields (Ruth 2).

This was an inefficient way to harvest crops. God was saying that it was an efficient way to *harvest souls*. Poverty-stricken people who gained access to the post-harvest fields would recognize in the land owner a willingness to forfeit a portion of his income for the sake of God's law, which recognized the plight of the righteous poor. Word would get out among the poor: here was a man to be imitated. Down the ladder of wealth, from the richest to the poorest, the goal was to provide a boost out of poverty to the people on the rung below. But in the case of the land owner, he was required by God to reach down two rungs and provide a poor person with a way to climb out of poverty. Sometimes poverty is well deserved. Some times it isn't. The goal of this Mosaic law was to pressure the land owner to identify the righteous poor in his community and provide both income and work experience for them.

An efficient man plans for the future. He counts the future costs of his present actions. A poor man is rarely an efficient man. He is too worried about his next meal to plan ahead very far. He is present-oriented. This law announced to the poor man: "If you are willing to work hard, you will not have to worry about where your next meal is coming from. You will then be able to plan ahead more easily." A man who was present-oriented because of an ethical failure would probably remain poor. In contrast, a future-oriented man whose time horizons had been shortened because of his poverty was given a way to rise in his class position. Class position is based more on time-perspective than money. The present-oriented man is lower class.⁷

6. In chapter 35, on the tithes of celebration, I identified these three groups as judicially undefended. This was because a fourth group, the Levites, were included in the list. The Levites were not necessarily poor. In this law, however, the Levites are not mentioned. Thus, I regard the classification here as economic rather than judicial.

7. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 53–59.

B. Sanctions

The motivation for obedience rested on a cause-and-effect system of sanctions. In this case, the motivating sanction was supernaturally based, historically manifested, and positive: “that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands” (v. 19). There was also an implied negative sanction: “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing” (v. 22). *The oppression of Israel in Egypt was the Mosaic model for oppression.* The unstated implication of this passage is that Israel’s deliverance from Egypt is the model of God’s corporate judgment in history. As God’s firstborn son (Ex. 4:22), Israel had gained the inheritance of the Egypt’s disinherited firstborn sons, who had died at Passover. The message: *the oppressed will eventually inherit in history.* To maintain the inheritance, a person or a nation must not become an oppressor.

This is a continuing theme in Deuteronomy: *the ethically conditional nature of the inheritance.* Without righteousness, Israel’s inheritance could not be permanently maintained. *This is one of the crucial themes of the Bible.* It undergirds inheritance by the New Covenant church: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). The church inherited the kingdom because Israel did not remain obedient. The context of Jesus’ announcement of Israel’s coming disinheritance was His parable of the unjust stewards who refused to pay what they owed the land owner. He lured the chief priests and the elders into condemning themselves in public for disobeying God: “They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons” (Matt. 21:41).⁸

Despite Jesus’ confirmation of the Mosaic covenant’s system of sanctions, *Christians have ignored or downplayed this theme of historical inheritance and disinheritance.* This is evidence of widespread antinomianism: hostility to biblical law and its mandated civil sanctions. Christians have asserted that the Mosaic law and its sanctions, both civil and historical, have been completely annulled by the New Covenant. This has led them to a dismal conclusion: there will be no unique cultural inheritance by Christians in church history; consequently,

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

there will be no disinheritance of God's enemies. The meek will not inherit the earth. Jesus really did not teach Christians to expect such an inheritance, we are told. With respect to a future world wide cultural inheritance by covenant-keepers, perhaps He was speaking about the millennial "Jewish church" (dispensationalism's view). Or maybe He was speaking allegorically about eternity (amillennialism's view). But He could not possibly have meant that the covenantal heirs of those who are meek before God will exercise dominion in history. Such a "triumphalist" outlook rests on faith in a system of predictable, corporate, historical, *covenantal* cause and effect, which in turn rests on a revelational moral and legal order. In short, *such an outlook rests on theonomy*. This outlook is not acceptable to modern Christianity.

C. A Lawful Claim: Moral or Legal?

God announced that the poor people and resident aliens in Israel were to be invited in by the land owner so that they could harvest the corners of the field and the fallen grain. This meant that, as a class, they had a moral claim on the "droppings" of production. This also meant that they had no legal claim on the primary sources of income of an agricultural community. They were *invited* in. There was no state-financed welfare in Israel.

It would have been difficult for a judge or a jury to identify which individuals in the community had a legal right, as victims of his refusal to honor the gleaning laws, to bring charges against the land owner. The text specifies no negative institutional sanction that had to be imposed on a land owner who refused to honor the gleaning laws. God is indirectly revealed as the agent who would bring negative sanctions against an individual land owner who refused to honor the gleaning laws. The state was therefore not authorized by the text to bring these sanctions against individuals on behalf of God. The sanctions were individual rather than corporate. *Without the threat of God's negative sanctions against the entire covenanted community, there was no justification for civil sanctions*. Civil sanctions were imposed in Israel in order to substitute the state's subordinate wrath for God's more direct wrath against the community. Furthermore, in case of a violation of the gleaning law, there would have been no easy way to determine legitimate restitution. *Where there are no civil sanctions, there is no crime*. To violate this law was a sin, not a crime. God would curse the owner directly, but the society was not at risk. Thus, civil sanctions

were inappropriate.⁹

This law applied only to agriculture: field and vineyard. Field and vineyard are the sources of bread and wine: Melchizedek's meal for Abram (Gen. 14:18) and also the Lord's Supper.¹⁰

D. Who Paid, Who Benefitted?

What was the economics of the gleaning law? In a sense, the requirement that the land owner and professional harvesters leave behind a small portion of the crop for the gleaners made this portion analogous to the manna that God had supplied to the Israelites during the wilderness wandering. This miraculous though predictable food was a pure gift of God. Similarly, both the produce of the land and God's grace in establishing the requirement that the land owners and harvesters share with the gleaners were signs of God's continuing grace to the poor. The gleaners were visibly dependent on God's grace for their survival. This had also been the case for the nation in the wilderness. This law was mandatory to economic hierarchy.

Gleaning laws were exclusively agricultural laws. God commanded the harvesters of the field and the vineyard to be wasteful—wasteful in terms of their personal goals, but efficient in terms of God's goals. They were to leave behind part of the produce of both the vineyard and the grain field for gathering by the poor.

This law indicates that *the leftovers of the Promised Land belonged to God*. God transferred the ownership of these high harvesting cost assets from the land owner and the harvester to the poor and the stranger. The owner in one sense did benefit, at least those owners who paid their field hands wages rather than by the supply harvested, i.e., piece-rate payment. The obedient owner did not pay salaried harvesters to collect marginal pickings. This lowered his labor cost per harvested unit of crop. But the net income loss as a result of gleaning did lower his total return from his land and planting expenses. There is no doubt that this economic loss of net revenue constituted a form of compulsory charity. It was a *mandated positive sanction*. This should alert us to the fact that this law was *not* a civil law. It was rather a church-enforced law. The church, not the state, is to bring positive sanctions in history. The church, not the state, offers Holy Communion. This distinction is representative of the differing functions of the

9. See my discussion in *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11:B.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 11:C.

two institutions.

The gleaning law was also to some extent an advantage to the piece-rate harvester. He was able to achieve greater output per unit of time invested. He was not expected to spend time gathering the marginal left overs of the crop. *Marginal* returns on his labor invested were higher than they would have been had it not been for this law. Nevertheless, both the owner of the land and the piece-rate harvesters did suffer a reduction of *total* income because of this law. The harvesters saved time but gathered less. They did suffer a reduction of income compared to what they would have earned apart from this law.

How did piece-rate harvesters suffer a reduction of total income? Because they could not lawfully gather the total crop of the field or the vineyard. Each worker had to leave some produce behind, which means that his income suffered. This also means that the poor of the community were in part funded by the *slightly less poor*: the piece-rate harvesters. The harvesters were reminded of the burdens of poverty. This in effect became an *unemployment insurance* program for the harvesters. They knew that if they later fell into poverty, they would probably be allowed to participate as gleaners. They forfeited some income in the present, but they did so in the knowledge that in a future crisis, they would be able to gain income from gleaning. Both the land owner and the piece-rate worker financed a portion of this morally compulsory insurance program.

The law placed a burden on the land owner. Yet this burden was in fact a form of liberation *if* he acknowledged the covenantal nature of the expenditure. It was analogous to the tithe. By honoring it, he was acknowledging God's sovereign ownership of his land. This act of sharing placed him visibly in the service of the great King. That King was his protector, for he was a vassal. As with rest on the sabbath, the owner could rest confidently in the knowledge that the King would defend his interests as a vassal if he abided by the terms of the King's treaty.

There was another benefit to the faithful owner, according to Aaron Wildavsky, an expert on the history of taxation.¹¹ He was also a careful student of the Mosaic law. He wrote of the gleaning law that "Compulsiveness easily converts to fanaticism. The farmer who harvests not 99 percent of his crop but every last little bit becomes consumed by his compulsion. Soon enough excess—getting it all—be-

11. Carolyn Webber and Aaron Wildavsky, *A History of Taxation and Expenditure in the Western World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).

comes an overwhelming passion.”¹² He identified fanaticism as idolatry.¹³ *The gleaning law restrained the idolatry of greed.* It reminded rich men that they did not need to keep everything that they managed as God’s stewards in order to remain successful. It restrained them from the passion of autonomous man: defining themselves in terms of their wealth rather than their obedience to God.

E. Hard Work

The gleaner had to work harder than the average worker did in order to harvest the same quantity of crops. The “easy pickings” were gone by the time the gleaner was allowed into the fields. This means that he had high marginal labor costs. That is, he had to invest more labor per unit of crop harvested than the piece-rate harvester did. Assuming that the harvester’s goal was a high return on labor invested, it was preferable to be a piece-rate worker than to be a gleaner. To be a gleaner was to be in a nearly desperate condition.

In the case of both piece-rate work and gleaning, *most of the labor costs of harvesting were borne by the poor.* A rich man did not work in the fields. In modern terminology, this might be called a *workfare* program instead of a welfare program. The gleaner was not a passive recipient of someone else’s money. He had to work. Furthermore, marketing costs may actually have been borne by the poor. It would have been legal for the poor individual to take whatever pickings he gained from the field and go to a store owner or other purchaser of the crop. The owner of the land did not have the right to compel the gleaner to sell the gleanings to him. *This means that the gleaner was enabled to obtain a competitive market price for the output of his labor.* Of course, this would have been extra work and risk for the gleaner, and it involved specialized knowledge of markets. Nevertheless, it was a right before God that the gleaner possessed.

There was another great advantage to this form of morally enforced charity: it brings hard-working, efficient poor people to the attention of potential employers. In effect, employers in Mosaic Israel could “glean” future workers from society’s economic “leftovers.”

This system produced more food for the community than would have been produced apart from the law, although costs were higher

12. Aaron Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), p. 30.

13. *Idem.*

than otherwise.¹⁴

F. Subsidizing Tribalism and Localism

Is becoming a low-paid field hand God's universally required on-the-job training system? No. God no longer expects poor people to learn how to become field laborers. In Old Covenant Israel, however, it was important that men learn to serve Him locally. God wanted to preserve localism and tribalism. The tribal system was important for the preservation of freedom in Israel. Tribalism and localism undermined attempts to centralize the nation politically. Thus, the gleaning law was part of the social order associated with Old Covenant Israel. It reinforced the tribal system. It also reinforced rural life at the expense of urban life—one of the few Mosaic laws to do so. *The land owner was required by God to subsidize the rural way of life.* Local poor people were offered subsidized employment on the farms. Had it not been for the gleaning system, the only rural alternatives would have been starvation or beggary. Hungry people would have moved to the cities, just as hungry people do all over the world today.

The jubilee land inheritance laws kept rural land within the Israelite family. If a daughter inherited land because there was no brother, she could not marry outside her tribe if she wanted to keep the land. "Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance" (Num. 36:9).¹⁵ While a rich man might move permanently to a city, the poor person was encouraged by the gleaning law to stay closer to home.

Cities would inevitably have become the primary dwelling places for most Israelites if they had obeyed God as a nation. Population growth would have forced most people into the cities. The size of family plots would have shrunk as each generation inherited its portion of the land. But until Israel's corporate covenantal faithfulness led to population growth and increased per capita wealth, each tribe's poor members were to be subsidized by the gleaning law to remain close to the tribe's food supplies. *This law was a means of retarding the growth of an unemployed urban proletariat.* The countryside was to be the place where the poor man received his daily bread. He would have to

14. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11:F.

15. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

do simple agricultural labor to receive his food. This law also promoted localism rather than a distant bureaucracy.¹⁶

Another important reason for localism was the concern of God that His resources not be used for evil purposes. Either the provider of this agricultural charity had to reside locally or else his specified agent had to. Local residents in rural Mosaic Israel were more likely to be well known to the land owners. Presumably, the cause of their poverty was also well known to the land owners, or at least this could be discovered without much difficulty. *The gleaning system reduced the subsidy of evil.* The poor person who was poor as a result of his own bad habits did not have to be subsidized by the land owner and the professional harvesters who worked his fields. The land owner had the right to exclude some poor people from access to his fields. Gleaning was therefore a highly personal form of charity, since the person who was required to give this charity was also the person who screened access to the fruit of the land.

This means that the gleaning law was a form of *conditional* charity in each individual recipient's case, although the loss was compulsory from the point of view of the land owner. *Biblical charity is always conditional.*¹⁷ Charity is not to subsidize evil, for it is an act of grace. *Unconditional charity is antinomian.* In a fallen world, unconditional charity will eventually subsidize evil. This is even more true of legal entitlements to other people's wealth. Such wealth transfers are not a form of charity. They are legislated theft. They represent a perverse modification of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The local member of the land owner's tribe was the primary recipient of charity, but he was not the only one. The other recipient of the grace of gleaning was the stranger. These strangers were presumably resident aliens who had fallen on hard times. Some of them may have been hired servants who could not find employment. They were people who did not want to go back to their home country. They were therefore people who wanted to live under the civil law of God in the Promised Land. These people were morally entitled to the same consideration that the poor Israelite was morally entitled to. It is clear that this arrangement would have increased the emotional commitment of

16. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11: G:1:(a).

17. Ray Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

the resident alien to the welfare of the community. He was treated justly. This law was agricultural only. It did not apply to urban businesses.¹⁸

G. Conditional Charity: Moral Boundaries

The owner of a farm had to acknowledge the sovereignty of God by obeying the gleaning laws. These laws were a reminder to him that *biblical authority always has costs attached to it*. The owner of rural land had been given capital that other people lacked. He therefore had an obligation to the local poor as God's agent, for the land itself was pictured as God's agent. His obligation was to supply the land's left overs to the poor.

In making this demand, the gleaning law placed decisive limits (boundaries) on both the poor rural resident and the state. It limited the moral demands that the poor could make on economically successful people in the community. The poor had no comparable moral claim against the successful non-agricultural businessman. This law also limited the demands that the state could make on the community in the name of the poor. Biblical law specified that the man with landed wealth should share his wealth with the deserving poor, not the poor in general. The deserving poor were those who were willing to work hard, but who could not find work in the normal labor markets. In short, *the gleaning law had conditions attached to it*. The idea of morally compulsory, non-conditional charity was foreign to the laws of the Mosaic covenant.¹⁹

The gleaner had to work very hard, for he reaped only the left-overs. This means that his income was lower than would have been the

18. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11:H.

19. It is equally foreign to the law of the New Covenant. This assertion appalls Timothy Keller: "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections," in William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (eds.), *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 273–79. He called initially for unconditional charity to all poor people. He argued that anyone in need anywhere on earth is my neighbor, thereby universalizing the moral claims of all poor people on the wealth of anyone who is slightly less poor. He wrote: "*Anyone* in need is my neighbor—that is the teaching of the Good Samaritan parable." *Ibid.*, p. 275. He rejects the traditional Christian concept of the deserving poor (pp. 276–77). He concluded: "I am proposing that the reconstructionist approach to biblical charity is too conditional and restrictive." *Ibid.*, p. 278. For my response, see North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 271–73. (<http://bit.ly/gnwestcon>) See also Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" in North (ed.), *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ch. 9.

case if he had been a professional harvester. Gleaning provides a lesson to the poor: *there are no free lunches in life*. Someone always has to pay. The economic terms of the gleaning system established that only destitute members of the community would have become gleaners. If there had been any other source of income besides begging, they would have taken it. The hard work and low pay of gleaning was an incentive for the individual to get out of poverty.

The gleaning laws operated within the framework of the jubilee land laws. The poorest Israelite in the community at some point would inherit a portion of the original family inheritance. The size of that portion of land depended on the number of male heirs. Its value depended on the economic productivity of local residents who could legally bid to lease it.²⁰ The more productive the heir, the more likely that he would be able to retain control over it.²¹ Gleaning gave the poor Israelite an opportunity to gain management skills and other skills as a land owner prior to the time that he or his children would be given back the original family land grant through the jubilee land law. The gleaning law provided training that could in the future be converted into family capital. The gleaning law was designed to keep poor people in the local agricultural community.

The gleaning law did not apply to non-agricultural businesses or professions. It originated from the fact that God declared Himself as the owner of the Promised Land. He did not verbally claim an equally special ownership of businesses. The land, not business, was identified as God's covenant agent that brought God's covenant lawsuits in Old Covenant Israel.²² Any attempt to derive a modern system of charity, public or private, from the gleaning law faces this crucial limitation. The gleaning law was not intended to apply out side a farm.

The modern welfare state is a perverse mirror image of the gleaning law. Everything is reversed. The modern welfare state is overwhelmingly urban. It disregards the moral criteria for charity and substitutes bureaucratic-numerical criteria. This has greatly expanded both the political boundaries of charity and the extent of poverty. People get paid by the state for being poor; the free market responds: more poor people. The welfare state now faces bankruptcy: the destruction of

20. The economist looks for a price to establish value. The highest market value is determined by the highest market bid by a potential buyer or long-term leaser.

21. This legal right to inherit the family's land did not extend to the stranger until after the exile (Ezek. 47:22–23). Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

22. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 32.

those dependent on its support.²³

There are few modern applications of the gleaning law, which was a land law. Modern society is not agricultural.²⁴ But there is a theological principle that undergirds gleaning: *fallen man is always a gleaner*. But redeemed men will progressively escape their dependence on other men's charity as society advances through God's grace.

Conclusion

The gleaning law was part of an overall system of political economy. Many of the details of this political economy were tied to the Promised Land and the sacrificial system of that land. Localism and tribalism were both basic to the application of the gleaning law in Mosaic Israel. Consider localism. The authority of the local land owner to chose who would glean and who would not from among various candidates—the boundary principle of inclusion and exclusion—transferred great responsibility and authority into his hand. This kind of *personalized charity* is no longer taken seriously by those who legislate politically grounded welfare state policies in the modern world. Such a personalized system of charity transfers too much authority to property owners, in the eyes of the politicians, and not enough to the state and its functionaries.

It is not the principle of localism that changes in the New Testament era; it is only the landed tribalism that changes. When the kingdom of God was transferred to a new nation (Matt. 21:43), meaning the church, the Levitical land laws were abolished. Gleaning therefore no longer applies in the New Covenant era. The jubilee land law was annulled by Jesus through: (1) His ministry's fulfillment of the law (Luke 4:16–27);²⁵ (2) the transfer of the kingdom to the church at Pentecost (Matt. 21:43; Acts 2); and (3) the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.²⁶ Can we learn anything from the gleaning law? I think we can, but these lessons are essentially negative. They show us what should not be done, not what must be done, to avoid God's negative sanctions on us as individuals.

The lessons from gleaning are these: (1) all charity is based legally

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 11:J.

24. *Ibid.*, ch. 11:K.

25. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

26. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

on the fundamental principle that God owns the earth (Ps. 24:1); (2) a third party has no legal civil claim on any asset that he does not own; (3) charity should not create permanent dependence on the part of the recipient; (4) charity should not subsidize evil; (5) charity should involve hard work except in cases where the recipient is physically incapacitated; (6) charity should not provide living standards that are higher than the poorest workers in society are able to earn.

The fundamental principle learned from the gleaning laws is this: *charity in a biblical social order must not be based on the idea that the state is a legitimate institution of salvation.* The state is not a biblically legitimate agency of social healing. It is an agency of public vengeance (Rom. 13:1–7).²⁷ It possesses a lawful monopoly of violence. *It therefore cannot be entrusted with the authority to take the wealth of successful people in order to reward the poor.* If it is allowed to do this, its agents become the primary beneficiaries of the confiscated wealth. Its political and bureaucratic agents will gain power over both the poor and the economically successful. These agents will become permanent spokesmen for the official beneficiaries of the wealth, namely, the poor. They will have no incentive to elevate poor people as a class permanently out of poverty. A system of legal entitlements for the poor becomes a system of legal entitlements to full-time jobs for those who administer the system. This is the antithesis of the gleaning system of the Mosaic covenant. In that system, participants had an economic incentive to get the poor back to work: the land owners, the piece-rate harvesters, and the poor themselves.

It is clear what God expects from all property owners: a willingness to forego maximum personal returns. They are to “leave something on the table” for the other party in any transaction between righteous people. Non-owners—the righteous poor—have a moral claim, though not a legal claim, on the output of the owners. Property owners serve as stewards of God, the original Owner. God provides the raw materials and the social order which provide wealth. In this sense, every owner is a “free rider” in the economic system, i.e., a person who has not paid for all of the services rendered to him. *Grace precedes law. Man is always in debt to God. Every creature is a free rider in the creation.* The owner who seeks to maximize output for himself and his family thereby announces his own autonomy: “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17b). In a world sustained

27. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2003] 2012), ch. 11.

by God's grace, this is a graceless attitude. It is an efficient way to become disinherited.

UNMUZZLING THE WORKING OX

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn (Deut. 25:4).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as man's employer. God pays man whatever He has promised. The image relates to boundaries: boundaries around the ox's mouth and around the field.

A. Judicial Hermeneutics

This was not a land law or a seed law. Paul's citation of this law indicates that it was a cross-boundary law.¹ That which this verse reveals regarding God's requirements for employing an ox, it also reveals about God's relationship with man in man's covenantal office as an agent of dominion. A man works for God. Paul informs us that God allows a man to enjoy the fruits of his labor as he exercises dominion on behalf of God, whether or not he acknowledges the existence of, or the assignment by, his heavenly employer. What God allows to man, man should allow to his subordinates. This includes his animal subordinates.

1. *Protecting an Ox*

How a man treats his ox reflects how he treats workers in general. The ox is a symbol of dominion.² It serves man as a working agent. It therefore is entitled to special protection. This is why the penalty for stealing and then either selling or destroying an ox is five-fold restitution (Ex. 22:1).³ For other forms of theft (except sheep), as well as for

1. On the differences among these laws, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43:F.

3. *Idem*.

an ox or sheep found in the thief's possession, it is double restitution (Ex. 22:4).⁴

Man is not a beast. He possesses future-orientation. The ox is not future-oriented. He eats as he works. The farmer who expects an ox to work all day without eating is expecting too much. Even in the case of a hired man, biblical law does not expect him to wait beyond sunset to receive his wages (Deut. 24:15).⁵

Rushdoony adopts this verse as an explanatory model for biblical interpretation.⁶ He does so because Paul cited this passage in two epistles. In each case, Paul extended the narrow focus of this case law to a much broader concern: the payment of Christian workers who were laboring as teachers. In the first example, Paul reminded the Corinthians that He was an apostle. He was in authority over them. He was therefore entitled to financial support.

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope (I Cor. 9:1–10).

The field to be plowed in this case was the world. Paul was harvesting men. The Corinthians were part of his work of harvesting. Why were they resisting paying him? As surely as an ox was entitled to eat while he worked for another, so was Paul entitled to be paid as he worked on behalf of the Corinthians.⁷

4. *Idem.*

5. Chapter 61.

6. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 11, 506.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

In the second example, Paul defended the right of church rulers to a double portion. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Tim. 5:17–18). Double honor in this context meant double payment, i.e., payment higher than what a comparably skilled workman would receive. The elder who devotes all of his time to serving the church should be well-compensated by the members.⁸

What was the biblical origin of the concept of double payment? It has to be the firstborn son's double inheritance (Deut. 21:15–17).⁹ A church elder is to be treated as a firstborn son. He performs double service; he should receive double honor and double payment.

2. From Minimal to Maximal Application

The law governing oxen is a Mosaic case law. These case laws are stated in a narrow context, but they are to be applied more broadly, as Paul's examples indicate. Rushdoony describes this case-law's hermeneutic: "These specific cases are often illustrations of the extent of the application of the law; that is, by citing a minimal type of case, the necessary jurisdictions are revealed. To prevent us from having any excuse for failing to understand and utilize this concept [of case law], the Bible gives us its own interpretation of such a law, and this illustration, being given by St. Paul, makes clear the New Testament undergirding of the law."¹⁰ Rushdoony uses Paul's application of this case law as a hermeneutical model which has been validated in the New Covenant.

Rushdoony classified the ox law as an application of the commandment against theft. "If it is a sin to defraud an ox of his livelihood, then it is also a sin to defraud a man of his wages; it is *theft* in both cases. If theft is God's classification of an offense against an animal, how much more so an offense against God's apostle and minister?"¹¹ Rushdoony used to say, "Americans want their religion, but they want it cheap." He regarded such an attitude as a violation of this case law.

The case laws apply the Ten Commandments in real-world situations. "Without case law, God's law would soon be reduced to an ex-

8. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

9. Chapter 50.

10. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 11.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

tremely limited area of meaning. This, of course, is precisely what has happened. Those who deny the present validity of the law apart from the Ten Commandments have as a consequence a very limited definition of theft. Their definition usually follows the civil law of their own country, is humanistic, and is not radically different from the definitions given by Moslems, Buddhists, and humanists.”¹²

3. From Minimal Application to Zero Application

The hermeneutic that is typically used by Christian Bible commentators and expositors is this: “If a Mosaic law is not reaffirmed in the New Covenant, it is no longer binding.” In other words, *a Mosaic law is guilty until proven innocent*. This judicial presupposition raises the problem of bestiality, which is prohibited by the Mosaic law but is not mentioned in the New Covenant. If the person committing the act is not married, the “New Testament only” Christian faces a very difficult problem: On what judicial basis should the act be prohibited by the state? It was prohibited under the Mosaic covenant. Why not today? Furthermore, what is the appropriate civil penalty? It was execution under the Mosaic law (Lev. 20:15–16). Modern commentators handle this judicial problem by not considering it.¹³

An example of this hostility toward the Mosaic case laws is Dan G. McCartney’s essay in the Westminster Theological Seminary symposium, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (1990). He is a professor at the Gordon-Conwell Divinity School. He forthrightly rejects all of the Mosaic case laws, thereby removing the covenantal status of civil government. “Therefore, the New Testament’s approach to the Old Testament is not an attempt to readapt or contemporize case law, in the way the Rabbis did. The law, or rather the Old Testament as an entirety, is focused on Christ, and *through him* it becomes applicable to believers. Thus case law is not *directly* applicable, even to believers; it is applicable only as a working out of God’s moral principles, an expression of God’s character revealed in Christ.”¹⁴ That is to say—and

12. Idem.

13. I have raised this issue before. Gary North, *75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won’t Ask* (Tyler, Texas: Spurgeon Press, 1984), Q. 26. (<http://bit.ly/gn75bible>) Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 211–14. (<http://bit.ly/gnwestcon>) I have yet to see any critic of theonomy deal in print with this problem.

14. McCartney, “The New Testament Use of the Pentateuch: Implications for the Theonomic Movement,” in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and Robert W. Godfrey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 146.

he says it—there is no binding authority of either the Mosaic case laws or their mandated civil sanctions. “Where legal questions arise, he [Jesus] is concerned with the law’s internal application, not its external enforcement.”¹⁵ “As we have noted, the New Testament gives no indication of the law’s sanctions as applicable to any except Christ and, through him, his people. . . . There may indeed be punishment for people *within the church* (2Co 10:6), but this does not involve civil authority or those outside the church (1Co 5:12), and its only form is various degrees of removal from fellowship (being ‘cut off’ from the people).”¹⁶ This is the theology of pietism: removing all biblical sanctions from the civil law.¹⁷ This in principle leaves Christians at the mercy of the non-Christians who write the civil laws and enforce them. The pietist prefers man’s civil law to God’s civil law. So does the covenant-breaker. *This agreement has become the basis of an implicit operating civil alliance between Christian pietists and covenant-breakers.*¹⁸ Only as the covenant-breakers extend the civil law’s jurisdiction to encompass, control, and then immobilize the church do the pietists protest. “That’s not fair! You guys promised to be neutral.”¹⁹ To which the covenant-breaker responds: “We are completely neutral in the area of religion. Our interpretation of neutrality says that the God of the Bible has no public authority in society. You are saying that God is relevant to some aspects of society, such as the church, or the family, or education, and that you have the right to impose economic or other sanctions in these areas. You discriminate against others who say that the God of the Bible may not lawfully be invoked as the basis of public decision-making. Understand, in our view, everything is public. Nothing is outside the realm of civil law.”²⁰ So, you are not being neutral as we define it. You are trying to legislate morality when you create zones of exclusivism in which your economic or membership sanctions apply. We will no longer allow you to be unneutral.”

Step by step, Christians surrender the doctrine of God’s authority in history. Step by step, their enemies push them into Christian ghettos. But ghettos are never permanent. Eventually, like the Jewish ghettos of northern Europe and Soviet Asia, the residents will be removed from these ghettos and sent into different ghettos: concentration

15. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

17. See Appendix I.

18. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1:A.

19. See Appendix H: “Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise.”

20. Secular humanists do insist on one safety zone: sexual activity.

camps. They may not be called concentration camps. They may be called re-education camps. They may be called government schools.²¹ But life in the ghetto is always at the discretion of those who make the laws and enforce them. There is no neutrality. There is no immunity. Two kingdoms are at war. They cannot both be triumphant in history. Any alliance between the two kingdoms is temporary. One will eventually gain power over the other.

B. Wiser Than God

The vast majority of Christians have always believed that they can improve on the Mosaic law. On their own authority, they revise God's law by coming to conclusions in the name of God that deny the specific teachings of God's revealed law. Then they proclaim their annulment-through-interpretation as being in conformity with "the true spirit of God's law" or "the underlying principles of God's law." As part of this improvement, they reject the binding authority of God's law. In doing so, they necessarily become advocates of some system of law proposed by one or another group of covenant-breakers. They refuse to ask themselves the obvious question: "If not God's law, then what?" In short, "By what *other* standard?"²²

As an example, consider the assertion of Rev. John Gladwin, a defender of central planning, who later became a bishop in the Anglican Church and one of its leading social theologians. He became a member of the House of Lords in 1999.²³ In a chapter in a book devoted to Christian economics, he rejected the concept of the Bible as a source of authoritative economic guidelines or blueprints. In fact, he assured us, it is unbiblical to search for biblical guidelines for economics. "It is unhelpful as well as unbiblical to look to the Bible to give us a blueprint of economic theory or structure which we then apply to our contemporary life. We must rather work in a theological way, looking to the Bible to give us experience and insight into the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This then helps us discover values and methods of interpretation which we can use in understanding our present social experience."²⁴ Furthermore, "There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal

21. William F. Rickenbacker (ed.), *The Twelve-Year Sentence: Radical Views of Compulsory Schooling* (San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, [1974] 1998).

22. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

23. <http://bit.ly/GladwinWiki>

24. John Gladwin, "A Centralist Response," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and*

state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy."²⁵ He contrasted biblical law unfavorably with theology. He then goes on to praise the welfare state as an application of theological, rather than legal, insights.²⁶ Theology informs us that "there is no escape from the need for large-scale state activity if our society is to move into a more equitable future at social and economic levels."²⁷ Clearly, neither the Mosaic law nor the New Testament teaches this concept of economics, but theology supposedly does. Whose theology? Reinhold Niebuhr's, in his post-Marxist phase.²⁸

So, we are assured, there are no authoritative economic guidelines or economic blueprints in the Bible. On the other hand, there are numerous vague and non-specific ethical principles which just about any Christian social theorist can invoke when promoting his recommended reconstruction of society. All it requires to baptize socialism is a series of nice-sounding pat phrases taken from the book of theological liberalism, which Gladwin offers in profusion: "the bounds of Christian principles of human concern," "the righteousness revealed to us in God himself," "the good," "structural frame work of law and social values," "gross and deepening disparities in social experience," "spontaneity of love," "the light of the gospel," and "the most humane principles of social order."²⁹

Let's you imagine that Gladwin was an aberration, consider the fact that the two other anti-free market essayists in the book adopted the same anti-blueprint hermeneutic. William Diehl, a defender of academic Keynesianism's state-guided economy, confidently affirmed: "The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to

Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 124. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

25. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid.*, p. 183.

26. Gladwin, "Centralist Response," *ibid.*, pp. 125–26

27. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid.*, p. 193.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 197. He cites *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). It is an odd book to cite. It was written by the author in reaction against his youthful fling with Marxism, a book in which he proclaimed that Jesus "did not dwell upon the social consequences of these moral actions, because he viewed them from an inner and a transcendent perspective." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner's, [1932] 1960), p. 264.

29. See my critique in *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 200.

examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way.”³⁰ Art Gish, a defender of small communities of Christians who hold property in common, informed us that “Since koinonia includes the participation of every one involved, there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers.”³¹

The fact that these statements appear in a book on Christian economics should come as no surprise. These comments are typical of the opinions of humanist-educated Christian intellectuals. Christians who have spent their lives in humanist educational institutions, and who then have fed their minds on a diet of humanist publications, in most cases have adopted the worldview of one or another variety of humanism. They have felt emotionally compelled to baptize their adopted worldview with a few religious-sounding phrases. But just because someone keeps repeating “koinonia, koinonia” as a Christian mantra does not in any way prove that his recommended policies of common ownership will actually produce koinonia. What produces peace, harmony, and increasing per capita output is widespread faithfulness to God’s law.

Understand, I am not suggesting that voluntary common ownership is anti-Christian, any more than I am saying that voluntary celibacy is anti-Christian. Paul recommended celibacy (I Cor. 7:32–33). He did so, he said, because of “the present distress” (v. 26).³² Similarly, the Jerusalem church held property in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Shortly thereafter, a great persecution of the church began. The entire church fled the city, except for the apostles (Acts 8:1). This exodus created the first foreign missions program in church history: “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). The fact that they had sold their property enabled them to leave the city without looking back, as Lot’s wife had looked back. So, for temporary purposes in times of great trial, voluntary celibacy and voluntary common ownership are legitimate, even wise. But to make either practice a recommended institutional model for all times and places is a misuse of historical events. The one institution where common ownership has been productive for longer than one generation is the monastery. However, it takes celibacy to make this system work for

30. William Diehl, “The Guided-Market System,” *ibid.*, p. 87.

31. Art Gish, “Decentralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 154.

32. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 9.

longer than a few years. As soon as there is a wife saying, "He's earning as much as you are, but you're far more productive," koinonia ends. In the modern state of Israel, the kibbutz collective farms faded rapidly as important sources of national production.

It is unwise to attempt to become wiser than God. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Cor. 1:25).³³ This is why it is our job to become familiar with God's Bible-revealed law. It, not the latest academic fad, is to be our guide, generation after generation. David made this clear in Psalm 119.

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD (v. 1).

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law (v. 18).

So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever (v. 44).

Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight (v. 77).

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day (v. 97).

My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law (v. 109).

I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love (v. 113).

It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law (v. 126).

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them (v. 165).

I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight (v. 174).

Despite generations of Christians who have said that they believe in the Bible, word for word, they have not believed in the 119th psalm, the longest chapter in the Bible. This is David's praise of God's Bible-revealed law. They have spent their lives avoiding its plain teaching. *The 119th psalm is a witness against the church.* Nowhere is this clearer than in the academic field of economics, the original social science, which was self-consciously structured by its founders in terms of theo-

33. *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

logical agnosticism.³⁴

C. Still in Force

The law against muzzling an ox is repeated twice in the New Testament, in the context of paying church officers. The person who defends a view of God's law that mandates a New Covenant recapitulation in order for a Mosaic law to be valid can hardly dismiss this case law. What he does dismiss as unproven is Rushdoony's insistence that this case law is a model for the others, i.e., that *the Mosaic case laws have continuing validity in the New Covenant era unless annulled by the New Testament*.

1. Hermeneutics (Interpretation)

Paul's application of this law provides commentators with an example of biblical casuistry: applying a biblical law to specific cases. The pietist prefers to operate on the assumption that unless a New Testament author applies a case law, the case law is no longer valid in the New Covenant. But Jesus' language does not validate this assumption: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17–18). *The continuity of God's law is Jesus' hermeneutical presupposition*. It is therefore the responsibility of the commentator to provide reasons for the annulment of a particular case law. He may not legitimately assume away judicial continuity. Yet commentators write as though it is somehow the burden of the defender of the case laws to prove each case law's continuing authority.

Beginning with *Tools of Dominion*, I have begun the discussion of each case law with a consideration of its theocentric focus. If we begin with God and His relationships with mankind, we are on more solid ground exegetically than if we begin with man, his desires, and needs. The Bible begins with "In the beginning God. . . ." not "In the beginning man. . . ." While it is possible to misconceive the theocentric focus of a law, it is also possible to misconceive the anthropocentric focus of a law. It is safer to begin with God, in whose image man is made, than to begin with man, who is continually tempted to see God as

34. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1963).

made in man's image.³⁵

Because of the debate over hermeneutics, the debate over this case law raises several issues. First, must this law be applied literally? If the farmer feeds the animal a diet designed by scientists, should he still obey this law? Maybe the ox likes to eat corn on the cob, plus the cob, but isn't a scientifically designed diet better for him nutritionally? Second, to what extent is Paul's invocation of this law a model for all other Mosaic case laws? Is Paul's wider application of this case law to the affairs of men a model for other case laws? How can we know when we have extended the application of a law too broadly?

2. *Literalism*

In modern industrial nations, only Amish and Hutterite farmers use animals to do their plowing. The legal issue of muzzling the ox never arises in the context of mechanized agriculture. But Christian missionaries work with farmers who still use oxen. What should they tell these farmers? Should the farmers muzzle their oxen or not?

The ox should be paid as he works in the field as surely as the pastor should be paid for his labor. If the farmer wants to feed his animal before taking it into the field, that is legitimate. Perhaps then the animal will not eat so much in the field. What is not legitimate is forcing it to work while wearing a muzzle. The animal is used to eating throughout the day. The farmer is not to force new eating habits on a work animal. If he can train the animal without using compulsion to eat at scheduled times, this is not a violation of this law. What is convenient for the farmer may become convenient for the animal. This is for the animal to decide. In any case, the animal should not be muzzled while it is working in the field.

3. *How Much More!*

If this case law applies to oxen, then how much more does it apply to men! Another case law tells us that employers should pay their workers at the end of the day (Deut. 24:15).³⁶ This enables us to begin to apply this law in human affairs. But this is only the beginning. Paul

35. Ludwig Feuerbach is a classic example of this form of theological anthropocentrism. See his book, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). Cf. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), pp. 28–30. (<http://bit.ly/gnmrror>)

36. Chapter 61.

said that the muzzled ox law also governs the payments that churches owe to ministers. In other words, if it applies to day laborers, how much more to laborers in the word of God!

How do we know when we have extended a case law application too far? First, when we find another case law that places limits on us. Men are to be paid daily, by the end of the working day. So, they need not be paid hourly. Also, this law implies a lunch break. Men work with their hands, unlike an ox. They use their hands to feed themselves. So, they may not be able to work and eat at the same time. But if a man has food in his pocket and munches as he works, this is legitimate unless eating raises risks for others or himself. This law implies that he can lawfully eat a handful of uncooked corn from the stalks of the field. This is affirmed by another case law (Deut. 23:24–25).³⁷ These two laws also imply that he may eat the fruit of the tree or vine as he works.

The Bible comments on the Bible. The commentator must search the case laws to see if one modifies another. Searching the Bible for authoritative insights into the interpretation of any passage is the commentator's task in every area of exegesis, not just the case laws. The *a fortiori* (how much more) argument is used by New Testament writers to deal with subjects other than the Mosaic law.³⁸

D. God's Law: Formally Universalized by Christ

Paul cited this law in two letters: one to Timothy and the other to the church at Corinth. The recipients were gentiles. Questions:

Why did Paul think his audience would recognize this obscure Deuteronomic law?

If this Mosaic case law is not to apply to the New Covenant, why did Paul cite it?

What authority does this law have over gentiles?

If it was a land law, then why does it apply outside the Promised Land?

37. Chapter 59.

38. See, for example, Paul's discussion of the casting off of Israel and the resulting blessings to the gentiles, which he contrasts with the blessings the gentiles can expect when Israel is grafted back into the olive tree of faith (Rom. 11:12–15). John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), II, pp. 77–84; cf. North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2003] 2012), ch. 8.

If a Mosaic case law is not to be broadened to apply to human relationships, then why did Paul apply it to pastoral financial support?

Antinomian critics of the Mosaic law have always had major problems with Paul's invocation of this law. They can hardly argue that this law possesses no authority today, but they also cannot readily explain why Paul cited it—at least not without calling into question their antinomian hermeneutic. Paul cited this law as judicially authoritative. He did not justify the law against muzzling oxen by invoking a previously unknown New Testament law to support pastors. On the contrary, he justified the New Testament's requirement for laymen to support pastors by invoking this Mosaic law.

Paul did not suggest that this law was a temporary historical intrusion in the development of salvation history. On the contrary, he explained the New Testament's requirement of pastoral support as an extension of this Mosaic law. Far from being a temporary intrusion³⁹ or judicial discontinuity in God's redemptive covenantal history, the law of the unmuzzled ox was an aspect of *the continuity of God's Bible-revealed law in God's redemptive covenantal history*: a covenantal stepping stone in the extension of this law's formal jurisdiction over the whole world. Today, unlike in Moses' day, the ascension of Jesus Christ has taken place, and God has sent the Holy Spirit. The law regarding muzzled oxen has been formally universalized by Paul, and men are now Spiritually empowered to obey it.

This law is a cross-boundary law. It has crossed the borders of Old Covenant Israel—a geographical border (e.g., Corinth) and the covenantal border (New Covenant). What repels antinomian commentators is the theonomists' suggestion that there are many cross-boundary laws in the Mosaic law. They resist admitting the existence of even one such Mosaic case law. But this law will not go away.

This law has always applied to gentiles, even before Moses. They should never have muzzled their oxen. They should not have refused to pay a laborer his wages. Paul asked the Corinthians: "Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes?" (I Cor. 9:9b–10b). He answered his own question: "For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (10b). This was

39. The term is Meredith G. Kline's, which he applied to the entire Mosaic covenant. Kline, "Intrusion and Decalogue," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XVI (1953/54); Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 154–71.

equally true under the Old Covenant, even before Moses.

Through Christ's New Covenant, the cross-boundary laws of the Mosaic covenant have been extended officially to the gentile world. As surely as Jonah brought a covenant lawsuit against Nineveh, so did the early church bring one against Old Covenant Israel and Rome. The church invokes God's law. Every covenant lawsuit rests on a system of law. The church is not supposed to invoke natural law, meaning a law-order common to all men., i.e., the work of the law written on all men's hearts (Rom. 2:14–15).⁴⁰ If it lawfully invoked only natural law, which rests the authority of fallen man's reason, then there would be nothing uniquely biblical about the church's covenant lawsuit. The lawsuit would merely be one more humanist appeal to covenant-breaking man to change his evil ways. In contrast, God's covenant lawsuit must always invoke God's Bible-revealed law—not the Mosaic land laws, seed laws, and priestly laws, but its cross-boundary laws. A church that had to adhere to natural law only would be like a Mosaic Israel that adhered only to natural law. But God required that the entire revelationally revealed law be read to the assembled nation once every seven years (Deut. 31:10–12).⁴¹

Conclusion

This case law governs men's treatment of their working oxen. It also governs churches' treatment of their ministers. In between these two applications of this law lies the general area of employers' relations with their employees. The governing hermeneutical principle here is this: "If this law governs men's relationships with subordinate animals, how much more does it govern their relationships with subordinate men." There is nothing in this case law to indicate that it had something to do with either a Mosaic seed law or a land law. Paul's extension of this law to the payment of full-time church workers indicates that it was a cross-boundary law. It applied outside the land of Israel in Moses' day, and it still applies today.

40. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 4.

41. Chapter 75.

LEVIRATE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY NAME

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel (Deut. 25:5–6).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's protection of His own name. This aspect of this law is closely associated with the third commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7).¹ God places a boundary around His name.

A. Major Problems for Bible Commentators

This law was a seed law.² The preservation of a man's name is clearly stated here to be the reason for this law. So, the theocentric focus of this law is inheritance. But how? The preservation of God's name in history is not dependent on His biological issue. God is beyond the creation and history. Yet we know that every Old Covenant law had something to do with God's relationship to man.

What was the relationship in this case? It could not have anything to do with God's desire for biological heirs. God is not Zeus. This fact should warn us: this law had to do with *covenantal inheritance*, not biological inheritance. The dead brother had not produced an heir.

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012). Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 23.

2. On seed laws, see Appendix J.

This meant that his name would be put out of Israel unless his brother intervened biologically. Why was this necessary? As we shall see later in this chapter, this law had to do with *adoption and the transfer of inheritance*. This was its theocentric focus. This law had a great deal to do with the family, but the family considered as a covenantal institution rather than biological.

The Latin legal term, *levir*, refers to the brother of a husband. This Latin word has long been applied to the relationship described in this text. A brother was required to bond sexually with his sister-in-law under two limiting conditions: the two brothers had lived together, and a married brother had died without leaving an heir. The first limiting condition has not always been recognized by expositors. If the brothers did not dwell together, this case law was not applicable.

Commentators have trouble with this law, so different is it from today's practices. They rarely have disciplined themselves to think covenantally, so they have trouble identifying the central focus of a law that seems so different culturally. The author of the section on "Levirate" in the M'Clintock & Strong encyclopedia, a conservative late-nineteenth-century work, insisted that "A wise and just legislator could scarcely have been inclined to patronize any such law. . . ." ³ In writing this, the author revealed his own patronizing attitude toward God's law—an attitude common to most Christian expositors.

Many things that we would like to know about the application of this unique Mosaic office are not available in the text. We must surmise a great deal. For example, the text does not say that the levir had to be unmarried in order to marry the widow. Polygamy existed lawfully under the Old Covenant. On the one hand, this law was a positive ethical command; no exception based on polygamy appears in the text. On the other hand, if there was no exception based on the levir's status as a married man, then this law mandated polygamy in a unique situation. Is this likely?

We know that this law superseded the law forbidding a man to marry his deceased brother's wife (Lev. 18:6, 16). The penalty for such a union was childlessness (Lev. 20:21), implying God's personal intervention, but this law was given specifically so that there might be a child. There can be no doubt that this law superseded the law prohibiting a brother from marrying his dead brother's wife. It is possible that this law mandated polygamy in a unique situation. Yet this seems con-

3. John M'Clintock and James Strong (eds.), *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), V, p. 389.

trary to our understanding of God's standards for marriage. Because the text does not mention polygamy, the commentator must look for hints in the passage that may offer clues to an answer—hints that are not apparent on the first or second reading.⁴

B. Seed and Name

Let us begin with God. Israel was God's son (Ex. 4:22). This meant that Israel bore God's name. The preservation of *a man's name in Israel* had something to do with the preservation of *God's name in history*. But what? God was not dependent on Israel to preserve His name, yet Israel's survival was important for God's reputation. After the exodus generation's attempt to stone Joshua and Caleb for having told them that God would give them victory over the Canaanites, God threatened to destroy Israel and raise up a new nation for Moses to lead. Moses reminded Him that His reputation was at stake: His promises to Israel. The issue was disinheritance: "I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they" (Num. 14:12). Moses appealed to God's reputation, not Israel's legal claim: "Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness" (vv. 15–16). God heeded Moses' argument. The decisive issue was God's reputation, not Israel's biological survival as a nation or son.

In contrast, Israel, not being God, was dependent on seed. The future of Israel was tied to God's promise to Abraham to preserve his seed. Paul wrote: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Again, it was *God's promise to Israel* that was crucial to Israel, not God's dependence on Israel. To fulfill this promise, God had to provide inter-generational continuity, i.e., an inheritance down through the generations of Israel. So, to this extent, God's reputation was dependent on Israel's survival.

This raises the old theological problem of conditional vs. unconditional promises. If the promise was unconditional, then God had to see to it that Israel survived. If it was conditional, then He had the option of cutting off the nation if it rebelled. The resolution of this seeming

4. See below: section F.

antinomy is found in the doctrines of predestination and imputation. First, predestination: God made a promise to Abraham. To this promise were attached conditions, such as circumcision. Ultimately, all conditions were met by Christ. God predestined their complete fulfillment. Second, imputation: God imputed Christ's future righteousness to Israel by grace. The future advent of the promised Seed in history was therefore the basis of Israel's survival.⁵

This places the promised Seed at the center of the life of Israel. This Seed would come through Judah (Gen. 49:10). *Thus, the separation of the tribes and their continuity through time was basic to God's covenant with Israel.* It was in this context that the levirate marriage law operated. It had to do with the preservation of a man's name. The deceased brother was part of a family. This family was part of a tribe. Tribal life in Old Covenant Israel was basic to the survival of the nation, not because of some inherent benefit of tribalism, but because of God's promise to Abraham regarding the coming Seed. This same promise of seed had been made to Adam (Gen. 3:15), but there was no element of nationalism or tribalism in this promise. There was a fundamental element of nationalism in God's promise to Abraham. There was a fundamental element of tribalism in Jacob's promise regarding Shiloh—an extension of the Abrahamic promise. So, the seed laws applied inside the boundaries of Israel, but not beyond. The Adamic promise of seed applied to the world outside Israel's borders. The same Seed—Jesus Christ—was the focus of all three promises (Gal. 3), but their fulfillment was achieved differently.

C. The Kinsman Redeemer

The Mosaic seed laws were inheritance laws. The levirate marriage law also regulated inheritance. The firstborn son⁶ would inherit the dead man's name. Why did this inheritance of a name matter so much in Israelite society? Because the *preservation of a man's name* meant that he had an *inheritance in Israel's future*. He was heir to the promises that God had given to Abraham and Moses. The preservation of a man's name was in this sense eschatological. It had to do with Jacob's promise to Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). *An Israelite male was sup-*

5. Chapter 13:B.

6. Or daughter, if he had no son.

posed to look forward to this messianic day of the Lord. Through his firstborn, he participated in Israel's eschatology. The Israelites' family name system was future-oriented. The firstborn seed was basic to a family's future, just as the promised messianic Seed was basic to Israel's future. Both forms of covenantal seed were linked eschatologically by Jacob's prophecy regarding Shiloh.

The brother who had enjoyed the use of the family's landed inheritance had a legal obligation: to marry his dead brother's wife and bring the brother's heir into the world. This law is clear: *the two brothers had to have been living in close proximity.* Their lives in this sense had to be intertwined. This close geographical proximity had made each brother the kinsman redeemer/blood avenger (*go'el*) of the other. If one of them had been killed by another man where there was no witness, the survivor had the responsibility of pursuing the perpetrator (Num. 35:19, 27).⁷ The nearest of kin *judicially* was the nearest of kin *geographically*. He would have been the person who had the greatest likelihood of overtaking the suspect on the highway as the latter raced toward a city of refuge. A brother who resided elsewhere was not the blood avenger.

The masculine relative who was the nearest of kin geographically was the kinsman redeemer. One of the responsibilities of the kinsman redeemer was to serve as the levir. He was required by the Mosaic law to *redeem the name* of his childless dead brother. This is what Onan refused to do for his dead brother, Er (Gen 38:9). God killed him for this sin (v. 10). Onan had enjoyed the fruits of his inheritance, which included citizenship and a name, but he was unwilling to accept the obligation associated with this inheritance, which was associated with the seed, i.e., the family's future.⁸ One branch of the family had been cut off biologically. This threatened the name of the whole family. No branch was to be cut off in this way when two brothers lived together.

D. A Matter of Inheritance

The laws governing inheritance were generally patriarchal, though

7. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 21.

8. The traditional interpretation of this verse by Roman Catholics insists that Onan's sin was not his refusal to consummate the marriage as such, but rather his enjoyment of sex without coitus. *Onanism* is the Church's euphemism for either masturbation or coitus interruptus. This interpretation of the passage is incorrect. God slew him because he had gone into Tamar and ritually defiled her, her husband's name, and his levirate obligation.

not exclusively. “And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father’s brethren. And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses” (Num. 27:8–11). A man’s land went to his male heirs at his death.⁹ If he had no male heirs, it went to his daughters (Num. 27:8).¹⁰ If he had no son or daughter, it went to his closest male relatives (Num. 27:9).

This information helps us to identify who the kinsman redeemer/blood avenger was in Mosaic Israel. There is no law that expressly says that the geographically closest adult male (though not a father) to the inheritance was a man’s kinsman redeemer, but the structure of biblical authority implies that this was the case. Biblically, the link between judicial responsibility and economic benefits is strong.¹¹ I conclude that the geographically adjacent relative who would inherit a childless man’s legacy was the first eligible man to marry his childless widow. He was the kinsman redeemer.

The Book of Ruth is the story of the levirate marriage in action. In the case of Ruth, no surviving brother had lived alongside her late husband. So, she had no levirate claim on her husband’s kinsman redeemer, who would have been a cousin back in Israel. When Naomi returned to Israel, she had legal standing as the widow of an Israelite. Boaz voluntarily agreed to marry Ruth if the nearest of kin to Elimelech refused.

The Bible’s account is important for our understanding of the Mosaic economics of inheritance. The negotiation between Boaz and Naomi’s kinsman redeemer began with a discussion of land, not marriage. Because Naomi had no surviving heirs, her husband’s nearest kinsman

9. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 15.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

11. “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:47–48). Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

was eligible to inherit her land. But since she was still alive, he would have to pay her for the use of the land until her death. He would pay a lease until her death, and then it would be his. He understood this. What he did not know was that there was a further requirement: marriage to Ruth, who could yet raise up seed in the name of Naomi's dead husband, Elimelech.

Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, **I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance:** redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.

Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: **And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah,** of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman (Ruth 4:1–12).¹²

12. The text mentions Tamar, who had been cheated by Onan of her right to raise up seed in the name of her husband (Gen. 38:9). This is a clear reference to this land

The kinsman wanted to buy Naomi's land; he did not want marriage to her daughter-in-law. He did not have to marry Ruth, however. He had not lived close to Ruth's husband on the family's land. Elimelech's son Mahlon had resided in Moab, far from Israel. Neither Ruth nor Naomi had the right to spit in the man's face. He had the right not to marry Ruth in order to raise up seed in the name of his nephew.

Consider the reason offered by the kinsman for not marrying Ruth. It had to do with his own inheritance. "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it." He had hoped to inherit the land of his heirless deceased brother.¹³ His sister-in-law was too old to bear children. He was therefore willing to buy it from Naomi before she died. This would have given her money to live on. The land would have come to him eventually. But Boaz was proposing something else. If Boaz married Ruth, and if Ruth gave birth, then Elimelech's land would pass to the child of Ruth, who would become the family's firstborn son. This land would be part of the legacy of Ruth's dead husband.

Because of Boaz's willingness to become Ruth's husband, the existing kinsman could gain control over Naomi's land only by marrying Ruth. But if she bore him an heir, he could not pass this land to his own children. The land would pass to Ruth's firstborn. Assuming that he was single, and assuming that he married Ruth, the land owned by Elimelech could not become his namesake's land; it would become Elimelech's namesake's land: Ruth's firstborn. His own flesh and blood would inherit this land, but *this biological heir would not be his judicial namesake*. So powerful was the concept of family name in Israel that the man turned down an opportunity to purchase land that his biological heir would eventually inherit.

For the existing kinsman to lose the inheritance from Elimelech through Naomi, another kinsman had to marry Ruth. Ruth could never possess an inheritance in Israel to leave to her firstborn except through the decision of a kinsman of her late husband to adopt her as a wife. Without Ruth's marriage to a kinsman of Elimelech, the land would automatically pass at Naomi's death to Elimelech's nearest of kin, i.e., Elimelech's kinsman redeemer.

The existing kinsman redeemer had to approve of this transfer, which was why Boaz assembled elders as witnesses. The existing kinsman redeemer could retain his claim on the inheritance only by mar-

transaction as an aspect of the levirate marriage law.

13. The brother had fathered two sons, but both had died without children.

rying Ruth and then having Ruth remain barren, as she had been in Moab. If she bore a child who lived long enough to bear children to inherit, the existing kinsman redeemer and his heirs could not inherit this land. He decided that this marriage was not worth the added economic risk. If he married Ruth, and she bore him a child, all of the capital that he would invest into the land would become part of another man's covenant line. It would be his biological child's family line, but not his family name's line. This is evidence that blood lines in Israel were regarded as less important than covenant lines. *Family name was more important in Israel than biological generation.*

E. Name Above Biology

This is an extremely important theological point. Rahab the former harlot and Ruth the Moabite were adopted into their husband's covenant lines. This adoption was by oath: a marriage oath. Through them came David the king and Jesus, who was a greater king than David. Through two foreign women, the covenant line was extended. More to the point, through these women the supreme covenant line in Israel was extended: Judah's. Most to the point, through them the promised Seed was born (Matt. 1:5, 16). The crucial covenant line was preserved through marriage, and, in Ruth's case, levirate marriage to the biological heir of Rahab: Boaz (Matt. 1:5).

Boaz became the kinsman redeemer of Elimelech's line. He did this by marrying Ruth, a gentile. Only through his marriage to Ruth could he serve as the kinsman redeemer of Elimelech's line. That is, Boaz, as an heir in the line of Judah and, as it turned out, progenitor of Jesus the redeemer, exercised this office by marrying a Moabite. Moabite males took 10 generations to become citizens (Deut. 23:3). As heirs of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his firstborn daughter (Gen. 19:37), Moabites were regarded as far more perverse covenantally than Egyptians, who could become citizens in three generations (Deut. 23:7–8). But because of Boaz's judicial role as kinsman redeemer through marriage, Ruth was adopted into the covenant line in just one generation. Of all legal relationships biblically, adoption is the most authoritative. Through adoption, the disinherited children of Adam re-enter the family of God. *Adoption is the judicial basis of inheritance.* Adoption is by *covenant oath*, not biology.

Ruth, a gentile, was adopted into Israel's supreme covenant line by the willingness of a man to become a kinsman redeemer to her late

husband. “Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day” (Ruth 4:10). By lowering himself socially by marrying a Moabite, and by being willing to raise up seed for his kinsman Elimelech by way of Elimelech’s dead son, Boaz was granted an extraordinary blessing. He became the biological forefather of David and Jesus. Legally, these heirs were not part of his personal covenant line. Only through Elimelech’s name could he participate in the crucial covenant line. Only by being willing to raise up seed on behalf of another did he unknowingly place himself as the key figure in the extension of the key covenant line in Israel and, for that matter, in all of history. Boaz became the biggest covenantal somebody in his generation only because he was willing to become a covenantal nobody in the extension of Elimelech’s line. The land that he presumably bought from Naomi became the family inheritance in another man’s line. Any improvements that he made in this land became another family line’s property. By abandoning his own name covenantally, he thereby became the greatest name of his generation, a name that is listed in both of the messianic genealogies in the New Testament (Matt. 1:5; Luke 3:32).

This case law was a seed law. As a law governing inheritance, it was also a land law. The firstborn of a levirate marital union inherited the deceased father’s name. The text implies that later-born children would not inherit the deceased man’s name.¹⁴ The inheritance was above all covenantal: part of God’s promise to Abraham. The deceased man’s name was imputed to the heir by God and by law, even though he was born of the levir. *The imputation of a man’s name was the essence of his inheritance*: from his fathers and to his children. God had revealed this to Abraham: “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2–3).

What the levirate law tells us is that the imputation of a man’s name was more fundamental than either genetic inheritance or family discipline. In the context of the continuing academic debate between “nature” (genetics) and “nurture” (social environment), neither was

14. The brother would extend his name by means of the other children. If the first-born son died, then his office as name-carrier would have passed to the oldest surviving son.

fundamental in Israel. What was fundamental was *judicial imputation*. The levir performed a redemptive act on behalf of his brother's covenant line. This act was far more judicial than biological or social. He provided biological seed and family discipline, but the decisive factor was judicial-covenantal-eschatological, not biological or social. It was so decisive that the law prohibiting a brother from marrying his sister-in-law was suspended.

Because of Boaz's grace to Naomi through Ruth, a unique and judicially unconventional thing took place: Boaz replaced Elimelech in Israelite history as part of the covenant line of David (I Chron. 2:11–12). In terms of the law of the levir, the family line through Ruth was Elimelech's, but Elimelech is never mentioned in relation to David. It was Boaz's marriage to Ruth in the name of Elimelech that secured Boaz's place in history. As the heir of Rahab, his act of mercy grafted Rahab into the kingly line retroactively. Judicially, Boaz's family line is irrelevant to the coming of David. Yet because of his grace shown to a gentile woman, his family name entered the most important family line in man's history. Boaz established his name and his family line's name in history by a merciful covenantal act which, in terms of the Mosaic law, submerged his name to Elimelech's. Boaz, who had not even been the closest of kin to Elimelech's son, and who had in no way been required to serve as levir, replaced Elimelech in Israel's family lists.

Jesus would imitate Boaz's judicial precedent, not by marrying, but by refusing to marry. By refusing to marry, He thereby transferred His inheritance to His kinsmen. He died on their behalf, so that they could be legally adopted into His covenant line.¹⁵ His death and resurrection have offered to the gentiles God's covenantal inheritance by means of adoption, just as Boaz's willingness to marry Ruth offered her covenantal inheritance through adoption. As the heir of Jacob's promise (Gen. 49:10), Jesus was the true heir in Israel, the son of David the king. But Jesus was not Joseph's biological heir. Here we see another act of mercy: Joseph's refusal to put Mary away for fornication with another man. Joseph adopted Jesus as his firstborn son, and in doing so, gained shame for himself: the birth of his firstborn son in fewer

15. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:3–5).

than nine months after marriage.

As David's namesake and heir, Jesus transferred His kingdom to the church (Matt. 21:43). He extended His kingdom grant, not by holding onto it in history but by relinquishing it. Like Boaz, by relinquishing His covenantal claim in Old Covenant Israel—His name—Jesus secured the inheritance for his kinsmen, thereby also securing His name in history. What Boaz had done on a small scale, Jesus did on a large scale. The judicial heart of what both of them did involved *a transfer of inheritance by surrendering the family name*. In doing this, Jesus, like Boaz, secured His name in history.

F. The Mosaic Family as a Tribal Unit

The seed laws and land laws existed because of Jacob's granting of blessings in Genesis 49, and specifically, his prophecy regarding the coming ruler, Shiloh.¹⁶ They were tribal laws, not laws governing the family unit as such. Had they been laws governing the family unit as such, they would have been cross-boundary laws, universal in scope then and now. The law of the levirate marriage would still be in force. This law is no longer in force because Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Covenantal adoption has completely replaced the law of the levirate marriage in the New Covenant. Jesus established the model. His death, which ensured His lack of biological heirs, was inherent in His plan of adoption and the transfer of kingdom inheritance. *Confession of faith has replaced tribal name as the basis of biblical inheritance*. Confession of faith involves adopting a new family name. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26b). A man's legal claim to a portion of God's kingdom inheritance is based on his possession of Christ's name as an adopted son. The New Covenant's preservation of Christ's name through *adoption by conversion* has replaced the Old Covenant's preservation of family name through *adop-*

16. The practice of levirate marriage existed earlier than Genesis 49. Onan's rebellion indicates that the practice did exist, and it was a law, for God's negative sanction came on him. Without law, there is no legitimate sanction. This was not, however, a written law. Its application was tied to the tribal units of Jacob's family. Lot's daughters had used a perverse application of the levirate marriage. They had deceived their father when he was drunk. Tamar similarly deceived the widower Judah, her father-in-law, but Judah had not been drunk, and she did this only after Judah had demanded that she wait for the surviving youngest brother to grow up and fulfill his then-unwritten duty as a levir. She should have been released by Judah from any obligation to serve as the mother of Er's covenantal heir.

*tion by reproduction.*¹⁷ What has changed, above all, is the tribal basis of inheritance. Covenantally mandated tribes no longer exist. This is why the seed laws and land laws have been replaced by the laws governing confession of faith and church membership. The church is the new nation that has inherited God's kingdom (Matt. 21:43). It has no tribes.

G. What About Polygamy?

I have already said that the text says nothing about the possibility that the levir was a married man at the time of his brother's death. If he was married, was he required by law to obey this law?

Let us look for hints. Here is one. The law specified that the firstborn son would inherit the deceased brother's name. The language implies that the firstborn son inherited all of the deceased brother's land. Land and name were linked. Under normal circumstances, all of the sons bore their father's name. All had a claim on part of the inheritance, with the eldest brother gaining a double portion (Deut. 21:15–17).¹⁸ But in this case, the firstborn alone inherited the dead man's name.

That there was a firstborn implies that there could have been subsequent children. The marital union was an on-going union. Why were these later children cut out of the dead brother's inheritance? I conclude that *the sons born later would have been part of the covenant line of the biological father*. They would have divided up the inheritance which he had received from his father. They were not allowed to participate in the inheritance of the firstborn because this was his inheritance through his mother's dead husband.

If I am correct, this means that the levir retained his own covenant line despite marriage to his sister-in-law. He was not asked by God to forfeit his own covenant line for the sake of his brother. He was asked only to forfeit his firstborn son through his brother's wife for the sake of his brother. If he had been unmarried, his biologically firstborn son would not be his covenantally firstborn son. His biologically firstborn son through his wife would bear another man's name. Any additional biologically sons through her would become his covenantal sons. His second-born son would become his heir, a name sake for him.¹⁹

17. The mark of adoption in the Old Covenant was circumcision.

18. Chapter 50.

19. The theme of the second-born son who inherits is repeated in the Old Covenant. It points to the distinction between Adam and Jesus as the true heir of God. In

If he was already married, the incorporation into his household of additional sons through the brother's wife would have reduced the size of the plots inherited by the sons of his first wife. There is no doubt that this dilution of her sons' inheritance would have been resisted by the first wife. This dilution would have constituted their partial economic disinheritance, though not covenantal disinheritance. The children of the first wife would not have lost their family names, only a portion of their father's land. His would have constituted a *double disinheritance*. If the husband refused to marry his sister-in-law, then at her death or at her remarriage to a non-kinsman, her late husband's land would have passed to his brethren. Perhaps the levir was the only brother. From an economic standpoint, performing the duty of the levir imposed a double economic burden on the children of the first wife: first, the dilution of their legacy, which they would then share with the new wife's later-born children; second, the future forfeiture of the levir's portion of his deceased brother's land. If polygamy was mandated by this law, then a wise wife would have recommended a move away from the jointly operated family farm until such time as a newly married brother produced his first child.

Because of the potential disinheritance aspect of the arrangement under polygamy, I conclude that this law did *not* apply to a brother who was already married. The biological sons of the levir would have had to forfeit too much. The firstborn son would have gained all of the dead man's legacy, while his older half brothers and younger brothers would have had to divide up the legacy of their biological father. Such a division of property would have been too heavily weighted to the economic advantage of one son.

The firstborn of a non-polygamous levirate marriage received his legacy from the dead man's estate—biologically, his uncle; covenantally, his father. His younger brothers, if any, divided up the levir's estate. Under such an arrangement, the second-born son would inherit the double portion of the biological father's estate. That was clearly an advantage for him. This estate would be larger than it would have been had there been no legacy from the dead man. The biologically firstborn son did not share in his father's landed legacy. This was an advantage for all of the brothers. Their *judicial half brother* received a large legacy, but this legacy would not have been in the family, had the first husband not died, so this legacy did not cost the other brothers any-

this case, however, the distinction had nothing to do with sin and rebellion by the firstborn.

thing that they might otherwise have inherited.

The economics of the levirate marriage points to potential *economic disinheritance in a polygamous arrangement*. This is not proof that a married levir was not mandated to marry his sister-in-law, for covenantal concerns in Israel were to be respected over economic concerns when the two were in conflict. But in the absence of specific language dealing with the question of polygamy, we can legitimately look for potential injustice that would have resulted from polygamy. Economic disinheritance was surely a negative factor.

Because a wise wife would have had an economic incentive to recommend departure from the family farm upon the marriage of a brother, the levirate law governed unmarried levirs. The economics of the arrangement under polygamy would have undermined the enforcement of the law. This would have reduced the number of levirate marriages. It seems unreasonable to suppose that God would have mandated polygamy, only to leave an obvious escape hatch for first wives to recommend: moving the family off the family's land for a year or two until the brother had an heir. If this law's covenantal effects were so important that it mandated polygamy, there would have been no loophole. But there was a loophole: moving away. I conclude that this law was not intended to apply to married levirs.

We must consider briefly the refusal of Elimelech's relative to marry Ruth. He could have justified his refusal by invoking the fact that his kinsman had died outside the land. Clearly, the two had not been living close to each other. Instead, he invoked the economic implications of inheritance: "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance." If he was not married, then in what way would marrying Ruth have been a threat to his inheritance? One answer: he was a widower with sons. Any sons born to Ruth beyond the first would have diluted his sons' inheritance. Another possible answer: he would have had to spend time and money in building up the land that his biologically firstborn son would inherit. So, this passage cannot be used to prove that he was married. Nevertheless, this passage also cannot be used to disprove the possibility that he was already married or was a widower with sons. It does not provide sufficient information.

Conclusion

The levirate marriage law was a Mosaic seed law that increased the likelihood of the eschatological survival of all family lines within a

tribe. It placed family name above immediate bloodline relationships. The firstborn of a levirate union would inherit both name and land from the deceased covenantal father, not from the biological father. The levir, as a kinsman redeemer, acted to establish his dead brother's covenant line.

In the post-A.D. 70 era, there are no covenantally relevant tribal lines, for Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, in the post-ascension New Covenant era, Jesus Christ serves as the kinsman redeemer/blood avenger. This office exists nowhere else. There are no longer any cities of refuge. There is no longer an earthly high priest whose death liberates a man who is seeking refuge from the blood avenger. Both in its capacity as a seed law and as a law regulating the office of kinsman redeemer, this law has been annulled by the New Covenant.

JUST WEIGHTS AND JUSTICE

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God (Deut. 25:13–16).

The theocentric focus of this law is the fixity of God's law. Man may not lawfully change it.

A. Reference Points

Diverse weights are the equivalent of arbitrary law and injustice. They are a form of theft. This was not a land law or a seed law. It was a cross-boundary law.¹

To serve as a weight or measure, a physical object must not be subject to extensive change. There will be some change, imperceptible over short or even fairly long periods, because man and his world decay. Physical objects are subject to the processes of decline. They are under the burden of cursed nature: entropy.² But a weight or a measure is noted for its comparative permanence in a world of flux. This permanence is what gives the weight or measure its unique capability of serving as a means of comparison over time. Men can compare different things over time because these things can be compared to a third thing, which serves as a reference point.³ Without reference points, history would be nothing but flux. *God and His covenant law*

1. On the categories of the Mosaic law, see Appendix J.

2. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

3. For example, modern man is told by scientists that space is curved. The correct reply is: "Compared to what?"

are man's reference points. Weights and measures are analogies to God's covenant.

By comparing the man who uses unjust weights to an abomination, this law points to the worst transgressions of the Egyptians and Canaanites.⁴ But why is this form of theft so repulsive to God? Because it is a representative act: to identify God as a liar and false gods as truth-tellers. *Using a dishonest weight is not merely theft; it is a major moral crime, analogous to idolatry*—a deception that was representative of Satan's deception of man kind: calling man to worship a false god.

I have commented on the judicial meaning of weights and measures in *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*.⁵ I reprint that section here.

* * * * *

B. Just Measures and a Just Society

The familiar Western symbol of justice is the blindfolded woman holding a balance scale. The blindfold symbolizes the court's unwillingness to recognize persons. The scale symbolizes fixed standards of justice: a fixed law applied to the facts of the case. Justice is symbolically linked to weights.

1. Quantification

Justice cannot be quantified,⁶ yet symbolically it is represented by the ultimate determinant of quantity: a scale. An honest scale registers very tiny changes in the weight of the things being weighed. A scale can be balanced only by adding or removing a quantity of the thing being measured until the weights on each side are equal, meaning as

4. "And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?" (Ex. 8:26). "And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;)" (Lev. 18:25–27). "The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God" (Deut. 7:25).

5. Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012.

6. See below, section on "Intuition and Measurement."

close to equal as the scale can register.⁷ Even here, the establishment of a precise balance may take several attempts. An average of the attempts then becomes the acceptable measure.

The ability of men to make comparisons is best exemplified in the implements of physical measurement. Men adopt the language of physical measurement when they speak of making historical or judicial comparisons. For example, the customer *balances* his check book. This does not mean that he places it on a scale. Or he *weighs* the expected advantages and disadvantages of some decision.

The economist constructs what is known as an index number in order to compare the price *level*—meaning prices of specific goods and services—in one period of time with those in another period. He assigns *weights* to certain factors in the mathematical construct known as an index number. He says, for example, that a change in the price of automobiles—Hondas rather than Rolls-Royces, of course—is more important to the average customer than a change in the price of tea. This was not true, however, in Boston in 1773. So, the economist-as-historian has to keep re-examining his “basket of relevant (representative) goods” from time to time. He must ask himself: “Which goods and services are more important to the average person’s economic well-being?” But there is no literal real-world basket of goods; there is no literal real-world average customer; there is no means of literally weighing the *importance* of anything. Yet we can barely think about making economic comparisons without importing the symbolism of weights and measures.

The language of politics also cannot avoid the metaphor of measurement. The political scientist speaks of *checks and balances* in the constitutional order of a federalist system. These are supposed to reduce the likelihood of the centralization of power into the hands of a clique or one man. That is, there are checks and balances on the exercise of power. These are institutional, not literal.

The language of measurement is inescapable. This is an implication of point three of the biblical covenant model: standards.⁸ As surely as societies create bureaus that establish standards of measurement, so God has established permanent judicial standards. Both kinds of stan-

7. There are physical limits on the accuracy of scales. God’s civil law calls for equal justice, not perfect justice. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19: “Perfect Justice.”

8. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstympl>)

dards must be observed by law-abiding people.

2. The Representative Case

The preservation of just weights and measures in the Mosaic covenant was important for symbolic reasons as well as economic reasons. As case law, it represented a wider class of crimes. It was important in itself: prohibiting theft through fraud. But there was something unique about a case law governing weights and measures: *it was representative of injustice in general*. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard [length], in weight, or in measure” (Lev. 19:35).⁹ The language of unrighteousness and judgment has a wider application than merely economic transactions. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15).¹⁰ This is the fundamental principle of all biblical justice.

To understand why weights and measures are representative of civil justice in general, we need to understand what was involved in the specific violation. The seller can better afford the specialized weighing equipment of his trade than the individual buyer can. He is therefore in a position to cheat the buyer by rigging the equipment. *But the narrowly defined crime of using rigged measures is representative of the whole character of the civil order: a violation of justice at the most fundamental level*. Analogous to the businessman, the judge is not to use his specialized skills or his authority to rig any case against one of the disputants. The legal structure is regarded as a specialized piece of equipment, analogous to a scale. No one in charge of its operations is allowed to tamper with this system in order to benefit any individual or class of individuals. To do so would constitute theft. *Injustice is seen in the Bible as a form of theft*.

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, be hold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and gray-headed; and, be hold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded?

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

10. *Ibid.*, chaps. 14, 15.

whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness (I Sam. 12:1–5).

Injustice is also linked to false weights and measures. Isaiah made all these connections clear in his initial accusation against the rulers of Israel: “Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them” (Isa. 1:22–23). False measures in silver and wine; princes in rebellion against God but companions of thieves; universal bribe-seeking; oppression of widows and orphans: all are linked in God’s covenant lawsuit brought by the prophet. In Isaiah’s day, it was all part of *a great spiritual apostasy*—an apostasy that would be reversed by the direct intervention of God: “Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isa. 1:24–26). When the rulers of Israel’s northern kingdom remained unwilling to enforce God’s law, generation after generation, God raised up Assyria to bring corporate negative sanctions for Him (Isa. 10:5–6).

Because weights and measures are representative of the moral condition of society in general, the prophets used the metaphor of weights and measures in bringing their covenant lawsuits. The Psalmist had set the example: “Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity” (Ps. 62:9). Micah castigated the whole society, warning of judgment to come, for they honored “the statutes of Omri” and did the works of his son Ahab (Mic. 6:16).

The LORD’S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it. Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the **scant measure** that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the **wicked balances**, and with the bag of **deceitful weights**? For the rich

men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth (Mic. 6:9–12).

The essence of their rebellion, Micah said, was *the injustice of the civil magistrates*: “The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up” (Mic. 7:2–3).

Daniel’s announcement to the rulers of Babylon regarding the meaning of the message of the handwriting on the wall is perhaps the most famous use in Scripture of the imagery of the balance. “And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan. 5:25–28).

Corrupt measures are a token—*representative*—of moral corruption. To be out of balance judicially is to be out of covenantal favor. *The most representative civil transgression in society is the adoption of false weights and measures.*

C. Intuition and Measurement

“Add a pinch of salt.” How many cooks through the centuries have recommended this unspecific quantity? There are cooks who cannot cook with a recipe book, but who are master chefs without one. Their skills are intuitive, not numerical. This is true in every field.

1. Analogical Reasoning

There are limits to measurement because there are limits to our perception. There are also limits on our ability to verbalize and quantify those measurements that we perceive well enough to act upon. Oskar Morgenstern addressed this problem in the early paragraphs of his classic book, *On the Accuracy of Economic Observations*.¹¹ Our eco-

11. Oskar Morgenstern, *On the Accuracy of Economic Observations*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963). Morgenstern wrote a book on game theory with John von Neumann, one of the most gifted mathematicians of the twentieth century. Morgenstern was aware of the limits of mathematics as a tool of

conomic knowledge is inescapably a mixture of objective and subjective knowledge.¹² We think as persons; we are not computers. We do not think digitally. We think analogically, as persons made in God's image. We are required to think God's thoughts after Him. To do this, we need *standards provided by God* that are *perceptible to man*. God has given us such standards (point three of the biblical covenant model). We also need to exercise judgment in understanding and applying them (point four). This judgment is not digital; it is analogical: thinking God's thoughts after Him. We are required by God to assess the performance of others in terms of God's fixed ethical and judicial standards.

In order to achieve a "fit" between God's standards and the behavior of others, we must interpret God's objective law (a subjective task), assemble the relevant objective facts (a subjective task), discard the irrelevant objective facts (a subjective task), and apply this law to those facts (a subjective task). The result is a *judicially objective* decision. At every stage of the decision-making or judgment-rendering process, there is an inescapably *personal* element, for which we are held personally responsible by God.¹³

When we speak of objective facts, we often invoke the language of

economic analysis. A more recent treatment of the problem is Andrew M. Kamarck's *Economics and the Real World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). See also Thomas Mayer, *Truth versus Precision in Economics* (Hampshire, England: Elgar, 1993).

12. Morgenstern wrote: "All economic decisions, whether private or business, as well as those involving economic policy, have the characteristic that quantitative and non-quantitative information must be combined into one act of decision. It would be desirable to understand how these two classes of information can best be combined. Obviously, there must exist a point at which it is no longer meaningful to sharpen the numerically available information when the other, wholly qualitative, part is important, though a notion of its 'accuracy' or 'reliability' has not been developed. . . . There are many reasons why one should be deeply concerned with the 'accuracy' of quantitative economic data and observations. Clearly, anyone making use of *measurements* and *data* wishes them to be accurate and significant in a sense still to be defined specifically. For that reason a level of accuracy has to be established. It will depend first of all on the particular purpose for which the measurement is made. . . . The very notion of accuracy and the acceptability of a measurement, observation, description, count—whatever the concrete case might be—is inseparably tied to the use to which it is to be put. In other words, there is always a theory or model, however roughly formulated it may be, a purpose or use to which the statistic has to refer, in order to talk meaningfully about accuracy. In this manner the topic soon stops being primitive; on the contrary, very deep-lying problems are encountered, some of which have only recently been recognized." Morgenstern, *Accuracy*, pp. 3–4.

13. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Appendix G, "The Covenantal Structure of Judgment."

physical measurement. This is because we think analogically. Making subjective judgments is analogous to measuring things objectively. Yet we never measure things objectively, meaning *exclusively* objectively. It is men who do the measuring, and men are not machines—and even machines have limits of perception. We ask: “Is the balance even?” “Is the bubble in the level equidistant between two points?” At some point, we say: “It’s a judgment call.” Discovering the answer is a judgment call: an evaluation based on one’s observation of something that is beyond the limits of one’s ability to perceive distinctions. For example, consider the task of an umpire or referee in any sport. He makes judgment calls. In modern philosophy, we find that the major schools of thought are analogous to the umpire’s standard explanations of his decision. In baseball, the umpire “calls a strike.” He announces that the pitched baseball passed within the strike zone of the batter’s body (a variable in terms of his height) and above home plate. The batter protests. It was a “ball,” he insists: either outside his strike zone or not above home plate. The umpire offers one of three answers. These three answers are expressions of the three dominant views of Western epistemology.

“I call ’em as they are.” (Newton)

“I call ’em as I see ’em.” (Hume)

“They are what I call ’em.” (Kant)¹⁴

To make a biblically valid judgment regarding the public record of the event under scrutiny, judges must perceive the limits of the law and the limits of the records. The public record of the event must reveal (represent) an act that took place within the “strike zone” of God’s law. The actor must clearly have violated that zone—that boundary—of God’s law. In the language of the common law courts, it must have violated that boundary “beyond reasonable doubt.” *The language of the law is imprecise here because the act of rendering judgment is imprecise.* Yet juries decide, judges hand down punishments, and society goes on.

2. Intuition and Creation

Intuition cannot be verbalized, catalogued, or quantified, for by

14. There is a fourth possible reply: “Shut up. You’re only a figment of my imagination.” (Berkeley)

definition intuition possesses no rational structure, yet it exists nevertheless. Every philosophical system ultimately must appeal to intuition to bridge the chasm between mind and events.¹⁵ Without such a bridge, according to humanists, human choice and therefore personal responsibility disappear into one of three kinds of universe: a chaotic cosmos, a deterministic cosmos of mechanical-mathematical cause and effect, or a dialectical cosmos—mechanism infused by randomness, and vice versa.¹⁶ (All three are said to be governed by the second law of thermodynamics and are headed for the heat death of the universe.)¹⁷

There is a fourth possibility: a covenantal, providential, created cosmos. Here is the biblical solution to the problem of human knowledge: *the doctrine of creation*. The world was created by God in such a way that men, made in God's image, may exercise dominion over it. This theory of knowledge also relies on intuition: biblically informed intuition. Intuition is an inescapable concept. It is never a case of "intuition vs. no intuition." It is always a case of *whose* intuition according to *whose* standards.

Spiritual maturity is the ability to make biblically well-informed judgments. Christians must presume that intuitive judgments that come after years of studying God's Bible-revealed laws and making decisions in terms of them will be more reliable—i.e., more pleasing to God—than intuitive judgments that come from other traditions or that are the products of unsystematic approaches. There is no way to test the accuracy of this presumption except by observing God's sanctions in history on those groups that are under the authority of specifically covenanted judges.¹⁸

15. For case studies of this assertion in the field of economics, see Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), ch. 5.

16. James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987).

17. North, *Is the World Running Down*, ch. 2.

18. If God's sanctions in history are random in the New Covenant era, as Meredith Kline insists that they are, then there is no way to test this presumption. Intuition-based decisions would become as random in their effects as God's historical sanctions supposedly are. For an assertion of such randomness, see Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

D. Objective Standards

God decrees everything. History happens exactly as He has decreed it. God evaluates history, moment by moment, in terms of His permanent standards. This judgment is *objective* because God makes it, and it is also *subjective* because God makes it.

Man is responsible for thinking God's thoughts after Him. Man must obey God by conforming his thoughts and actions to God's law. Men do not have the ability to read God's mind (Deut. 29:29), but they do have the ability to obey. Men do not issue valid autonomous decrees, nor does history follow such decrees. God proposes, and then God disposes.¹⁹

1. *Weights and Measures*

The same is true of weights and measures. There are objective standards, and these are known perfectly by God. This perfect knowledge is a mark of His sovereignty. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" (Isa. 40:12). Man must seek to conform his actions and judgments to these objective standards. He does so by discovering and adopting fixed standards. Physical standards are the most readily enforced. The archetypical standards are weight and measure. Even the passage of time is assessed by means of a measure. In earlier centuries, these measures were frequently governed by weight, such as water clocks or hourglasses filled with sand.²⁰ Measures have been perfected over time, including measurements of time itself.²¹

19. The humanism of Marx's partner Frederick Engels can be seen in his statement that "when therefore man no longer merely proposes, but also disposes—only then will the last alien force which is still reflected in religion vanish; and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect." Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (Anti-Dühring), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, [1878] 1987), 25, p. 302.

20. The sun dial was an exception, but it could not be used at night or on cloudy days.

21. David Landes persuasively argued that improvements in the measurement of time in the late medieval and early modern eras were the most important physical advances in the history of Western Civilization, without which few of the other advances would have been likely. David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1983).

Occult man sees *ritual* as a means of gaining supernatural *power* for himself. Christian man sees ritual as a means of worshipping God and gaining *dominion* over himself and his environment, to the glory of God. Occult man sees measurement as a means of obtaining supernatural power. Christian man sees *measurement as a tool of dominion*, beginning with self-dominion. The West is the product of such a view of measurement. A man wearing a wristwatch is someone under the influence of the Christian view of time. In the ancient pagan world, priests were the monopolists of calendars. This information was a major factor in maintaining their power over the general population, which possessed no reliable measurements.²² In the West, very few educated people understand the details of the astronomical basis of calculating time, let alone modern cesium atom clocks, but virtually every one has ready access to a calendar and a clock with an alarm. No longer does an elite priesthood exercise power through its monopolistic knowledge of the astronomical calendar. The advent of cheap calendars transferred enormous power to the individual. *Cheap calendars and clocks have decentralized power*. But in doing so, they have made individuals more responsible for the use of time, which is man's only truly irreplaceable resource.

The universality of the wristwatch²³ makes it impossible for employers or sellers to cheat large numbers of people regarding time. Because access to this information is cheap, time-cheating becomes more difficult. In fact, the employee is far more able to cheat the employer. The employee is the seller of services. If he is paid by the hour, he is tempted to find ways to collect his pay without delivering the work expected from him. The salaried employee cheats more easily on his time account; the commissioned salesman cheats more easily on his expense account.

2. Specialized Knowledge and Responsibility

The biblical law of weights and measures teaches that *God identifies the seller—the receiver of money—as legally responsible*. This re-

22. This was especially true of ancient agricultural dynasties that were dependent on rivers. Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1957] 1964), pp. 29–30. For an extraordinary examination of ancient man's priestly mastery of both astronomy and time, see Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time* (Boston: Gambit, [1969] 1977).

23. This is beginning to fade. Younger people do not wear them. They carry cell phones, which have clocks. The wristwatch is dismissed as a single-function device.

quires an explanation. The buyer (customer) has legal control over the distribution of the most marketable commodity: money. Because he possesses the most marketable commodity, he possesses greater flexibility and therefore greater economic authority in the over all economy. We speak of *consumer's sovereignty* in a free market.²⁴ (Because man's sovereignty is never final but always delegated by God, it is better to speak of *customer's authority*.) Then why is the seller singled out by biblical law as the potential violator? Doesn't greater responsibility accompany greater authority (Luke 12:47–48)?²⁵

The legal question must be decided in terms of *comparative authority in specific transactions*, not comparative authority in the economy generally. A seller of goods and services possesses highly specialized knowledge regarding his market. Cheating by a seller of goods and services is therefore more likely than cheating by a buyer because *the seller has an advantage in information*. This is why biblical law singles out weights and measures as the representative implements of justice. Physical implements of measurement can be created more easily than other kinds of evaluation devices. The existence of a precise (though never absolute) physical standard makes it relatively easy to create close approximations for commercial use.²⁶ The availability of devices and techniques to specialists employed as agents of the civil government, in the name of the buyers, allows the operation of checks and balances on the checks and balances. The state has greater ability to police the sellers in this area than in most other areas.

On what biblical basis do magistrates enforce weights and measures? Answer: to defend the unsuspecting victim. The problem here is analogous to the problem of measuring pollution or noise. The victims are not easy to identify, for they may not know that they have been

24. See below, "Competition and the Margins of Cheating."

25. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

26. The United States National Bureau of Standards (founded in 1901, but in principle authorized by the United States Constitution of 1787) establishes key lengths by using a platinum-iridium bar stored at a specific temperature. This, in turn, is based on a not quite identical bar stored by the International Bureau of Weights and Measurements in Sèvres, France. These bars do not match. Also, when cleaned, a few molecules are shaved away. Scientists now prefer to measure distance in terms of time and the speed of light. A meter is defined today as the distance a light particle travels in one 299,792,458th of a second. Time is measured in terms of the number of microwave-excited vibrations of a cesium atom particle when excited by a hydrogen maser. One second is defined as the time that passes during 9,192,631,770 cesium atomic vibrations. Malcolm W. Browne, "Yardsticks Almost Vanish As Science Seeks Precision," *New York Times* (Aug. 23, 1993).

cheated. The extent of the cheating cannot easily be ascertained by the victims in retrospect. The cost of gathering this information is too high. As a cost-saving measure (the language of measurement is incapable) for past victims and potential future victims, the state imposes public standards, and sellers are required to conform. As in the case of protecting potential future victims of speeding automobiles, the state establishes boundaries in advance. The police impose negative sanctions for violations of speed limits, even though the victims have not publicly complained against this particular speeder. The driver did increase the statistical risk of having an accident, so there were unidentified victims.²⁷ They are represented by the judicial system: the police officer who catches the speeder and the court that convicts him.

E. Competition and the Margins of Cheating

The International Bureau of Standards was established by the General Conference on Weights and Measures in 1875. National governments covenanted with each other by the Treaty of the Meter. The member nations' governments pledged to honor the standards agreed upon. These standards did not originate in 1875, however, nor did they originate with civil government. It does not require a treaty to establish such standards. There can be official standards, but unofficial standards are far more widespread. The free market can and does establish such standards. In fact, the more technologically innovative a society is, the less likely that a civil government will be the primary creator or enforcer of the bulk of the prevailing standards. When it comes to establishing standards, the state's salaried bureaucrats are usually playing catch-up with profit-seeking innovators.

Standards have boundary ranges. Market standards are likely to be less precise technically than the language found in civil statutes, for participants in markets understand that the development, selection, and enforcement of standards are not cost-free. The degree of variance from any standard depends on the costs and benefits of enforcement. It also depends on the locus of sovereignty of such enforcement: the customers.

27. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 41:C.

1. Buyers and Sellers

In a free market, the buyer of goods and services (i.e., the seller of money) is economically sovereign, not the seller of goods and not the state. This means that the buyer possesses final authority to buy or not buy. *The customer has greater economic flexibility than the entrepreneur does.* He can take his money elsewhere. This is another way of saying that the cost to him of seeking and obtaining an alternative offer for what he wants to sell (money) is normally far lower than the cost to the seller of specialized goods or services to seek and obtain an alternative offer. The seller of money has maximum liquidity. Money is properly defined as the most marketable commodity;²⁸ hence, the customer, as the seller of money, is economically sovereign (meaning authoritative).

The seller uses implements to make measurements. No seller can do without such implements, even if he is selling services. At the very least, he will use a clock. The seller is warned by God to make sure that he uses these implements consistently as he goes about his business. Yet this is not quite true. The seller is not to supply less than the standard determines; he may lawfully give more. If he gives any buyer less than he has said he is giving, he steals from him. If he gives a buyer more than he says, he is not stealing. He is offering charity, or giving a gift, or being extra careful, or building good will to increase repeat sales. So, the business owner is allowed to give more than he has indicated to the buyer that the buyer will receive; he is not allowed to give less. The seller need not tell the buyer that he is giving an extra amount, but he is required to tell him if he is giving less.²⁹ The boundary, therefore, is a seller's *floor* rather than a ceiling.

Sellers compete against sellers; buyers compete against buyers. This is the fundamental principle of free market competition, one which is not widely understood. The buyer is playing off one seller against another when he bargains, even if the second seller is a phantom;³⁰ the seller is playing off buyer against buyer. Buyers compete directly against sellers only when all parties have imperfect information regarding the alternatives. No one knowingly pays one ounce of silver

28. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1912] 1953), pp. 32–33. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>)

29. A non-owning manager or employee must be precise: to give more on his own authority is to steal from the owner; to give less is to steal from the buyer.

30. The phantom buyer may walk in this afternoon. The seller is not sure. Neither is the buyer.

for something that is selling next door for half an ounce. The seller will not sell something to a buyer at a low price if he knows that another buyer is waiting in line to buy at a higher price. Neither will a buyer buy at a high price if he knows that another seller waits across the hallway to sell the same item at a lower price.

This being the case, it should be obvious why sellers who use false scales find themselves pressured by market forces to re-set their scales closer to the prevailing market standard. Their competitors provide a greater quantity of goods and services for the same price. It may take time for word to spread, but it does spread. Buyers like to brag about the bargains they have bought. Even though their tales of bargains increase the number of competing buyers at bargain shops, and therefore could lead to higher prices in the future, they do like to brag. This bragging gets the word out.³¹ A seller who consistently sets his scales below the prevailing competitive standard risks losing customers. This pressure does not mean that all or even most scales will be set identically, but it does lead to a market standard of cheating: competitive boundaries. *The better the information available to buyers, the narrower the range of cheating.* None of this assumes the existence of a standard enforced by civil government.

2. *The Scales of Justice*

Much the same is true of the scales of civil justice. Word spreads about the availability of righteous civil justice. If there is open immigration, as there was to be in Mosaic Israel, it is possible for those suffering injustice to seek justice elsewhere. (This is a major advantage of federalism: those living in one state can move to another if they disapprove of the prevailing local situation. This allows the testing of ideas regarding the proper role of civil government.) The Bible assumes that word about national justice does spread:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom

31. There are limits to this. If the buyer has found an exceptionally inexpensive seller, especially a small, local seller who may be ill-informed about market demand, and if he expects to return to make additional purchases, he may not say anything to potential competitors. He does not want to let the seller know that there are many buyers available who are willing to pay more. There is a "bragging range." That is, there are boundaries on the spread of accurate information. Accurate information is not a free good.

and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).³²

The existence of a righteous nation in a fallen world of nations can lead to a competitive uplifting of civil justice in those nations that experience a net migration out. *Emigration pressures unjust nations to revise their judicial standards.* This is why totalitarian regimes place barriers at their borders. The threat of the loss of “the best and the brightest,” also known as the brain drain, is too great. The barbed wire goes up to place a boundary around the “ideological paradises.”

The tearing down of the Berlin Wall in late 1989 was a symbolic event that shook Europe. It was the visible beginning of the rapid end of the legacy of the French Revolution of 1789: left-wing Enlightenment humanism.³³ It was a sign that the economically devastating effects of Marxist socialism were the inevitable product of injustice.³⁴

32. Chapter 8.

33. We can date the end of that tradition in the West: August 21, 1991, when the Soviet Communist *coup* begun on August 19 failed. Boris Yeltsin and his associates sat in the Russian Parliament building for three days, telephoning leaders in the West, sending and receiving FAX messages, sending and receiving short wave radio messages, and ordering deliveries of Pizza Hut pizza. So died the French Revolutionary tradition. Sliced pizza replaced the guillotine’s sliced necks.

34. This was the message of F. A. Hayek in his 1944 book, *The Road to Serfdom*, which became an international best-seller. Western intellectuals scoffed at its thesis for over four decades, though in diminished tones after 1974, when he won the Nobel Prize in economics. The scoffing stopped in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union’s economy. A few months before he died in 1992, Hayek was awarded the United States medal of freedom. He had outlived the Soviet Union. He also had outlived most of the original scoffers. As he told me and Mark Skousen in an interview in 1985, he had never believed that he would live to see the acclaim that came to him after 1974. Few men who move against the intellectual currents of their eras live long enough to see such vindication. He died in March, 1992, at the age of 92, receiving international acclaim: “In praise of Hayek,” *The Economist* (March 28, 1992); John Gray, “The Road From Serfdom,” *National Review* (April 27, 1992). As *The Economist* noted, “In the 1960s and 1970s he was a hate-figure for the left, derided by many as wicked, loony, or both.” By 1992, no one remembered such scurrilous attacks as Herman Finer’s *The Road to Reaction* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945). Milton Friedman, who was on the same University of Chicago faculty as Hayek and Finer, wrote that Hayek “unquestionably became the most important intellectual leader of the movement that has produced a major change in the climate of opinion.” *National Review*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

People in Marxist paradises wanted to escape. Given the opportunity, they would “vote with their feet.” With the Berlin Wall down, there was an immediate mass exodus from East Germany. Simultaneously, Western justice began to be imported by East Germany. This leavening effect was positive. East and West Germany were legally reunited.

For this emigration process to serve as a national leaven of righteousness, there must be *sanctuaries of righteousness*. There must be just societies that open their borders to victims of injustice, including economic oppression.³⁵ This is what Mosaic Israel offered the whole ancient world: sanctuary. This was God’s means of pressuring unrighteous nations to become more just. He imposed a cost on evil empires: the loss of productive people to Israel.

On the other hand, widespread immigration can pressure a just society to become less just if the newcomers gain political authority. If they are allowed to vote, they will seek to change some aspects of the sanctuary nation’s legal structure. For example, they may seek to legislate compulsory welfare payments: politically coerced subsidies paid to immigrants by the original residents. It is not God’s intention to pay for a rising standard of justice in evil empires by means of falling standards of justice in covenanted sanctuary nations. His goal is to raise standards of justice everywhere. So, political pluralism is prohibited by God’s law. Suffrage (the vote) is by covenantal affirmation and church membership, not mere geographical residence. *This is why the biblical concept of sanctuary requires a biblical judicial boundary: covenantal citizenship.*³⁶

If justice produced indeterminate economic effects, and if injustice produced indeterminate economic effects, there would be no economic pressure on totalitarian regimes to tear down the boundary barriers. But justice does not produce indeterminate economic effects. Similarly, if the social world were what Meredith G. Kline insists that it is—a world in which God’s visible sanctions in history are indeterminate for both covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking³⁷—then there could be no historical resolution of the competition between civil righteousness and civil perversity. A quasi-Manichean denial of such a resolution is the implicit and sometimes explicit assumption of amillennial-

35. Gary North, “The Sanctuary Society and Its Enemies,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, XIII (Summer 1998), pp. 205–19. (<http://bit.ly/NorthSanctuary>)

36. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

37. Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

ism.³⁸ The leaven of justice in such a world would have no advantage over the leaven of injustice. But there is no neutrality in life. Therefore, in a world of totally depraved people, such cultural neutrality could not be maintained for long. The leaven of evil would triumph. Yet it does not triumph, long term. Pharaonic tyrannies have all collapsed or become culturally impotent throughout history. This fact testifies to fallen mankind that God's sanctions in history are not indeterminate. Honesty really is the best policy, as Ben Franklin long ago insisted. In the competition between good and evil, the leaven of righteousness spreads as time goes on. Its visible results are so much better (Lev. 26:1–13;³⁹ Deut. 28:1–14⁴⁰).

3. The Forces of Competition

The pressure of international economic competition cannot be withstood for long. It brought down Soviet Communism. Marxist tyrannies could not gain the economic fruits of righteousness without the moral roots.⁴¹ They could not permit a modern economy based on computers, data bases, FAX machines, and rationally allocated capital in their rigged, corrupt, fantasy world of central economic planning and credit money.⁴² The reality of the Russian workers' saying could not be suppressed forever: "We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us." This inescapable reality led to a falling standard of living and the eventual collapse of European Communism.

The international free market has no universally enforceable standards of weights and measures, yet it operates more successfully than any other economic system in history. Private arbitration some times is invoked. Usually, national standards are closely observed by market participants. There are great and continuing debates over which standards should be adopted internationally, especially as international trade increases. But even without formal political resolutions to these debates, the international market continues to flourish. In the medieval world, there was an internationally recognized "law merchant," and

38. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 76–92; ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

39. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, chaps. 32–34.

40. Chapter 69.

41. Konstantin Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society: The Secret World of Soviet Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

42. On the truly fantastic nature of the Soviet economy, see Leopold Tyrmand, *The Rosa Luxemburg Contraceptives Cooperative: A Primer on Communist Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

it has been revived in modern times.⁴³

But what about Gresham's Law? "Bad money drives out good."⁴⁴ This is the pessimillennial view of history as applied to monetary theory. But Gresham's Law is misleading. It has an implied condition, but only people who understand economics recognize the unique nature of this condition. The law only applies when a civil government establishes and enforces a price control between two kinds of money. Then the artificially overvalued money remains in circulation, while the artificially undervalued money goes into hoards, into the black market, or is exported. Bad money drives out good money only when governments pass laws that attempt to override the free market's assessment of relative monetary values. This is not to say that there should not be civil laws against counterfeiting, but it does mean that counterfeiters must be very skilled to compete in a free market order. Laws against counterfeiting raise the cost of being a counterfeiter, thereby lowering the supply of counterfeit money.

Counterfeiting applies to religion. Christians must contend with cults, but cults are imitations of Christianity. Today, we see no fertility cults that self-consciously imitate the older Canaanite religions. Bacchanalia festivals are no longer with us, at least not in a self-consciously cultic form.⁴⁵ New Age advocates may seem numerous, especially in Hollywood and New York City, but there are very few openly New Age congregations of the faithful. Religious counterfeits take on the characteristic features of Christianity in order to extend their influence beyond traditional borders. The rites of Christianity have many imitations around the globe, but the rites of Santeria do not.⁴⁶

A wise counterfeiter will not try to pass a bill that has a picture of Karl Marx on it, let alone Groucho Marx. Successful counterfeits in a competitive market must resemble the original. This is why there is,

43. Benson, *Enterprise of Law*, pp. 30–35, 62, 224–27. See also Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), ch. 11. The Jews who dominate the international diamond trade make bargains without public contracts, and they never appeal to the state to settle disputes. These merchants have their own courts that settle disputes. It seems likely that they do not pay income taxes on every profitable trade.

44. "Bad money drives out good money," the law really states. Yet in a very real sense, the familiar formulation is correct: bad money does drive out good. It creates black markets, cheating, and many other evils.

45. Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Carnival in the Caribbean are such festivals.

46. Bill Strube, "Possessed with Old Fervor: Santeria in Cuba," *The World & I* (Sept. 1993). This African-Cuban voodoo cult is closely associated with homosexuality. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

over time, a tendency for covenant-breakers to conform themselves to the external requirements of God's law until they cannot stand the contradiction in their lives any longer.⁴⁷ Then they rebel, and God imposes negative sanctions, either through His ordained covenant representatives or through the creation.⁴⁸

F. A Final Sovereign

The Bible identifies judges as covenantal agents of God. Unlike the free market, where customers are sovereign, the state requires a voice of final earthly authority. This does not mean that one person or one institution has final authority. Biblically, no institution or person possesses such authority in history; only the Bible does. But there must be someone who officially announces "guilty" or "not guilty." *Someone must impose the required sanctions.* Civil sanctions are imposed by the state.

This means that legal standards must not fluctuate so widely that men cannot make reasonable predictions about the outcome of trials. If there is no predictability of the outcome, then there will be endless trials. Conflicting parties will not settle their disputes before they enter the courtroom. A society should encourage predictable outcomes; otherwise, individuals cannot be confident about receiving what the law says they deserve.⁴⁹ It is because the outcomes of trials are reasonably predictable that conflicts are settled before they come to trial.

1. Legal Predictability

Hayek's comments in this regard are very relevant. He announced a conclusion, one based on decades of study of both economic theory and legal history: "There is probably no single factor which has contributed more to the prosperity of the West than the relative certainty of the law which has prevailed here. This is not altered by the fact that complete certainty of the law is an ideal which we must try to approach but which we can never perfectly attain." He then went on to make this observation, one which relies on the concept of the thing not seen: "But the degree of the certainty of the law must be judged by

47. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

48. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

49. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison" (Matt. 5:25).

the disputes which do not lead to litigation because the outcome is practically certain as soon as the legal position is examined. It is the cases that never come before the courts, not those that do, that are the measure of the certainty of the law.”⁵⁰ In other words, self-government is basic to all government, but predictable law, predictable enforcement, and predictable sanctions must reinforce self-government if a society is to remain productive. The clogged courts of the United States in the final third of the twentieth century testified to the breakdown of the certainty of civil law, as well as to the effects of tax-financed law schools that have produced over 700,000 lawyers.⁵¹

There is little doubt that the proliferation of lawyers in the United States in the latter years of the twentieth century was a sign of a major breakdown of its moral and legal order. The United States in 1990 had some 730,000 lawyers—70% of the world’s total. In 1990, Japan had 11 lawyers per 100,000 in population; the United Kingdom, 82; Germany, 111; the United States, 281. Japan had 115 scientists and engineers per lawyer; United Kingdom, 14.5; Germany, 9.1; United States, 4.8.⁵² The idea that the state can provide perfect justice is a costly myth.⁵³

Civil government today has become what Frédéric Bastiat predicted in 1850: an instrument of legalized plunder.⁵⁴ After 1870, throughout the West, the view of the state as an agency of compulsory social salvation spread. It escalated rapidly after 1900, when Social Darwinism moved from its “dog-eat-dog” phase to its state-planned evolution phase.⁵⁵ This vision faded in the early 1970s, according to Peter Drucker, one of the modern world’s most astute observers.⁵⁶ Wheat on College economics professor P. J. Hill has described the earlier process: the decline of predictable law and the rise of the transfer society. “The idea of the transfer society is a society where property rights are up for grabs.”⁵⁷ The problem with such a society is that so many people start

50. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 208.

51. In the case of lawyers, Say’s famous law holds true: production creates its own demand. The old story is illustrative: when only one lawyer lives in town, he has little work. When another lawyer arrives, they both have lots of work from then on.

52. “Punitive Damages,” *National Review* (Nov. 4, 1991).

53. Macklin Fleming, *The Price of Perfect Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

54. Frédéric Bastiat, *The Law* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 2007), pp. 13–18, 21. (<http://mises.org/books/thelaw.pdf>)

55. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

56. Peter Drucker, *The New Realities* (New York: Harper, 1989), ch. 2.

57. “The Transfer Society: An Interview with P. J. Hill,” *Religion and Liberty*, I

grabbing rather than producing. The rule of law is collapsing.

We've become a society in which the rules are in flux, thereby prodding people to spend a large amount of their time and resources trying to change the rules to their benefit. Our book⁵⁸ argues that in the beginning the Constitution was a set of rules for a few areas that pretty much encouraged the entrepreneurial type of person to go out and make better mousetraps, to create wealth. Somewhere around the 1870's the constitutional climate started changing dramatically, not by amendment but by interpretation. The Constitution became interpreted in a more casual way. There was a rise in what we call "reasonable regulations;" the Supreme Court said the state legislatures could pass any sort of regulations they wanted about economic affairs so long as they were "reasonable."

That meant, of course, that people spent a lot of time trying to get regulations written to their advantage or to the disadvantage of their competitors, because there was no clear-cut standard. And today almost nothing in the economic arena is unconstitutional. . . .

Today, much of the economic game is in the political arena. It is played by getting rules on your side, or making sure that somebody else doesn't get the rules on their side against you. The action is in Washington, D.C.

It's interesting to look at the statistics of many large companies and see how much of their time goes into lobbying, where their business headquarters are, who the big players are, etc. It turns out that it's just as important to try to make sure that the rules favor you as it is to produce better products. Any society in which the rules are not clearly defined, whatever they are, is at risk. You need a society of stable, legitimate and just rules in order to have people productively engaged.

I would put it this way: Theft is expensive. In a society where theft is prevalent people will put a lot of their efforts into protecting themselves—into locks and police guards, etc.

Government can prevent theft, but can also be an agency of theft. If this is the case, then people will look to government to use its coercive arm to take from other citizens. In such a world of "legal theft" people will devote resources to protecting themselves and to

(Nov./ Dec. 1991), p. 1. This is a publication of the Acton Institute.

58. Peter J. Hill and Terry Anderson, *The Birth of a Transfer Society* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1989).

getting government on their side.⁵⁹

2. *Open Entry vs. Open Access*

Open entry to economic competitors in a free market is not the same thing as open access to political competitors in a civil government. The free market is not a covenantal institution that possesses a lawful monopoly as an ordained representative of God. Civil government is. Allowing open access for office-seekers within a single governmental structure is not the same as allowing rival governmental structures within the same sphere of political authority. There has to be a hierarchy of authority, meaning a chain of command, in all three covenantal governments: church, family, and state. There is no such hierarchy in a free market. The customer's decision is economically sovereign on a free market: to buy or not to buy. He is not comparably sovereign in a covenantal institution: to obey or not to obey apart from the threat of lawful sanctions.⁶⁰ He is under external authority.

Civil government must enforce certain physical standards of measurement, if only for purposes of tax collection. The idea that a free market can provide profit-seeking courts as a complete substitute for the final earthly sovereignty of a civil court is a myth of libertarianism. The essence of a free market system is that it does not and cannot make final declarations. Why not? Because the essence of the free market is that anyone can step in at any time and announce a higher bid. The market, if it is truly free, cannot legally keep out those who offer higher bids. Therefore, there can be no final, *covenantally binding* bid in a free market, since the market system allows no appeal to a superior, covenantally binding institution. If voluntary agreements are subsequently broken, there must be an agent economically outside of the market and judicially above the market who can sovereignly enforce the terms of the agreement. The free market is *open-ended* because it offers *open entry*. The resolution of disputes requires the presence of a *representative covenantal agent* who can dispense justice in God's name. Disputes are usually resolved before they reach this final declaration, but only because of the presence of this ultimately joint agency of final declaration.⁶¹ This final court of appeal must be able to appeal to a higher court: God's.

59. Hill, "The Transfer Society," pp. 1–2. Cf. Gary North, "The Politics of the Fair Share," *The Freeman* (Nov. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/NorthFairShare>)

60. Chapter 51.

61. Chapter 41.

G. Victim's Rights and Restitution

The fundamental principle of biblical civil jurisprudence is victim's rights. The state is to act as the agent of injured parties. If the injured party is unwilling to prosecute, the state is not to prosecute.⁶² The state may not prosecute the seller who is discovered cheating by means of false weights and measures.

There are criminal cases in which there is no identifiable victim. The classic example is the case of a driver who exceeds the speed limit and does not injure anyone. He has imposed risk on other drivers and pedestrians. The state in this case is allowed to impose fines on the convicted speeder. The money should be used to provide restitution for those who are injured by a hit-and-run driver who cannot subsequently be located or convicted.

What about the seller who uses rigged scales? The state cannot prove when this practice began; it can only prove when the practice was discovered. It probably cannot identify who was defrauded. This means that many of the victims cannot sue for damages. Should the seller not suffer negative sanctions?

One possible way to resolve this dilemma is for the state to require the seller to provide discounts for a period of time to all of his past customers. The discount would be determined by the degree of scale-tampering: double restitution. If the scales were 10% off, then he must offer 20% discounts. To make sure he does not simply raise his retail prices before he starts offering the discounts, the state would fix his retail prices as of the day the infraction was discovered. A sales receipt would entitle a customer to the discounts.

Because of modern packaging and mass production, not many stores would come under this threat. The butcher in the meat section of a supermarket would be one seller whose scales would be basic to the business. But, on the whole, modern technology transfers responsibility back to the companies that sell the packaged products to retail outlets. How, then, could the law be enforced on them? To require them to offer a discount to a retailer does not benefit the customer; it provides a profit to the retailer. One way would be for those who have receipts for a product to be able to buy that firm's products for a period of time at a discount. The firm would then be forced to reimburse the retailer for the difference. This is a sales technique used by manufacturers in gaining market share in supermarkets: discount coupons.

62. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33.

It could be imposed by the state as a penalty. This would reward those customers who save their receipts. If this procedure is too complicated for the victims to be fairly compensated, because of the nature of the product—a “small-ticket item”—then the firm could be required to offer discounts across the board to all future buyers of that specific product for a period of time. The firm would also be required to identify on the packaging of that product an admission of guilt, so that the discounts would not be regarded as an advertising strategy. Finally, the discount reimbursements to retailers would not be tax-deductible as a business expense to the seller.

H. Evangelical Antinomianism

For a scale to operate, it must have fixed standards. If it is a balance scale like the one the famous lady of justice holds, it must have fixed weights in one of its two trays. There is no escape from the covenantal concept of judicial weights. This is the issue of ethical and judicial standards: point three of the biblical covenant model. Mosaic law stated that within the boundaries of Israel, honest (predictable) weights were mandatory. It did not matter whether the buyer was rich or poor, circumcised or not circumcised: the same weights had to be used by the seller. Israel was to become a sanctuary for strangers seeking justice. The symbol of this justice was the honest scale.

Which judicial standards were mandatory? The Bible is clear: God’s revealed law. National Israel was not some neutral sanctuary in which rationally perceived natural law categories were enforced. That unique sanctuary was where biblical law was enforced. Those seeking sanctuary in Israel had to conform to biblical civil law. The metaphorical weights in the tray of civil justice’s scale were the Mosaic statutes and case laws.

Because the modern Christian evangelical world is self-consciously and defiantly antinomian—“We’re under grace, not law!”—Christians emphatically deny the New Covenant legitimacy of the concept of biblically revealed laws. They assume that men can develop universal, religiously non-specific moral standards in the same way that the world has developed universal physical weights and measurements. They prefer to ignore what the Bible reveals about covenant-breakers: those who hate God love death (Prov. 8:36b). The closer that covenant-breakers get to the doctrine of God, the more perverse they are in rejecting the testimony of the Bible. They interpret God, man, law, sanc-

tions, and time differently from what the Bible specifies as the standard. They affirm rival covenantal standards.

A holy commonwealth would establish the law of God as the civil standard, but modern evangelical Christians hate the revealed law of God above every other system of law. First, they affirm as the binding standard the myth of neutrality: religiously neutral natural law. Second, they affirm their willingness to submit themselves to any system of law except biblical law. They announce: “A Christian can live peacefully under any legal or political system,” with only one exception: biblical law. Modern Christians see themselves as perpetual strangers in the perpetual unholy commonwealths of covenant-breaking man. They deny that liberty can be attained under God’s revealed law. God’s revealed law, they insist, is the essence of tyranny. They seek liberty through religious neutrality: the rule of anti-Christian civil law. They seek, at most, “equal time for Jesus” in the satanic kingdoms of this world. They forget: the “equal time” doctrine is the lie that Satan’s servants use while dwelling in holy commonwealths. When Satan’s disciples gain civil power, they adopt a new rule: “As little time for Jesus as the state can impose through force.”

I. Geisler’s Norm

Norman Geisler, a fundamentalist philosopher with a Ph.D. issued by a Roman Catholic university, and a devout follower of Thomas Aquinas,⁶³ has insisted that all civil law must be religiously neutral. We must legislate morality, he says, but not religion. This means that civil morality can be religiously neutral. “The cry to return to our Christian roots is seriously misguided if it means that government should favor Christian teachings. . . . First, to establish such a Bible-based civil government would be a violation of the First Amendment. Even mandating the Ten Commandments would favor certain religions. . . . Furthermore, the reinstitution of the Old Testament legal system is contrary to New Testament teaching. Paul says clearly that Christians ‘are not under the law, but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14). . . . The Bible may be

63. Aquinas, he said in 1988, “was the most brilliant, most comprehensive, and most systematic of all Christian thinkers and perhaps all thinkers of all time.” Angela Elwell Hunt, “Norm Geisler: The World Is His Classroom,” *Fundamentalist Journal* (Sept. 1988), p. 21. This magazine was published by Rev. Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University. Geisler was at the time a professor there. The magazine has ceased publication. Geisler resigned from the school in 1991.

informative, but it is not normative for civil law.”⁶⁴ The suggestion by those whom he calls “the biblionomists” [*biblionomy*: Bible law] that God’s law still applies today is, in Geisler’s words, a “chilling legalism.”⁶⁵

We need legal reform “What kind of laws should be used to accomplish this: Christian laws or Humanistic laws? Neither. Rather, they should simply be just laws. Laws should not be either Christian or anti-Christian; they should be merely fair ones.”⁶⁶ There is supposedly a realm of neutral civil law in between God and humanism: the realm of “fairness.” This means that *Mosaic civil law was never fair*. Those who believe that the Mosaic civil law was unfair refuse to say that this is what they believe. It sounds ethically rebellious against the unchanging God of the Bible, which it in fact is. Nevertheless, this rebellious outlook was universal within Protestantism in the twentieth century; it has been since at least the late seventeenth century.

This theory of neutral civil law denies Christ’s words concerning the impossibility of neutrality: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).⁶⁷ “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30). Yet Geisler wrote: “God ordained Divine Law for the church, but He gave Natural Law for civil government.”⁶⁸ For this assertion, they rarely offer any biblical exegesis. They insist, as Geisler insists, that true civil justice can be obtained only by removing all visible traces of Christianity from civil government. Neutrality!

But there is no neutrality. There has never been a neutral kingdom of civil law, and there never will be. Facing the reality of this historical fact, this question inevitably arises: “Which is worse, secular humanism or God’s law?” When push comes to shove, Geisler identifies the greater evil: God’s law. “Thoughtful reflection reveals that this ‘cure’ of reconstructionism is worse than the disease of secularism.”⁶⁹ Christi-

64. Norman L. Geisler, “Should We Legislate Morality?” *ibid.* (July/Aug. 1988), p. 17.

65. *Idem.*

66. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

67. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

68. Geisler, “Should We Legislate Morality?” p. 17.

69. Norman L. Geisler, “Human Life,” in William Bentley Ball (ed.), *In Search of a National Morality* (Baker Book House [conservative Protestant] and Ignatius Press

ans must content themselves with living as strangers in a strange land until Jesus personally returns in power.⁷⁰

The Christian antinomians' view of civil law has implications for their doctrine of eschatology. This is why virtually all amillennialists and premillennialists defend natural law theory and political pluralism, while attacking theonomy.⁷¹ They see God's people as cultural losers in history.⁷² The most they hope for is a cultural stalemate.⁷³ They prefer to live meekly and impotently inside cultural ghettos rather than fight a cultural war in the name of Christ.⁷⁴ They do not believe they can win; therefore, they deny the basis of fighting in such a war, namely, a uniquely biblical judicial alternative to humanistic law. They deny the legitimacy of Bible-revealed judicial standards that would make possible an explicitly Christian social order during the era of the church. Their antinomian social ethics is a corollary to their pessimistic view of the church's future. God has granted them their desire: they live at the mercy of their enemies who control the various social orders of our day. But the walls of their ghettos have huge holes in them: public schools, television, movies, rock music, and all the rest of humanism's lures.

Unlike the Israelites in Egypt, who cried out to God for deliverance (Ex. 3:7), today's Christians have generally preferred their life in Egypt to life in the Promised Land. God cursed the exodus generation: death in the wilderness. But He did not allow them to return to Egyptian bondage. Today's Christians may grumble about certain peripheral aspects of their bondage, but they do not yet seek deliverance from their primary bonds, most notably their enthusiastic acceptance of religious and political pluralism, natural law theory, and the first-stage humanist promise of "equal time for the ethics of Jesus." They hate the very

[conservative Roman Catholic], 1992), p. 115.

70. A question for premillennialists: "Will Jesus enforce the Mosaic law or a system of neutral natural law during His premillennial kingdom?" Premillennial defenders of natural law theory refuse to address this question in print. If they answer "Mosaic law," they have admitted that it is intrinsically morally superior to natural law. If they answer "natural law," they sever the God who declared the Mosaic law from that law. They prefer to remain silent.

71. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

72. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, chaps. 7–9.

73. Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1984] 1988), ch. 11. (<http://bit.ly/gnback>)

74. Gary North, "Ghetto Eschatologies," *Biblical Economics Today*, XIV (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

thought of their responsibility before God to establish covenanted Trinitarian national sanctuaries.

* * * * *

J. Fractional Reserve Banking

Modern banking is based on the use of false weights and measures. Fractional reserve banking rests on fraud.⁷⁵ It replaces a voluntary currency system that is based on a particular weight and fineness of a precious metal or some other commodity. The origin of fractional reserve banking was the issuing of a warehouse receipt for an asset—a money metal—that was not actually held in reserve. The banker issued a promise to pay gold or silver when he could not redeem all of the signed promises. The false warehouse receipt circulated as money as if it had been the actual commodity promised. This enabled the issuer to charge interest on loaned funds: something (for him) for nothing (in his warehouse). The losers were those who attempted to redeem their receipts during a bank panic. The bank went bankrupt (bank + rupture), leaving late-arriving depositors with nothing. Prior to the bank run, there were other losers: people who had to pay higher prices for goods and services because of the inflationary effects of unbacked warehouse receipts that circulated as if they were money. These receipts were used by buyers to bid up prices. Those people without access to these newly printed false receipts consumed fewer goods and services because of increased prices.

The modern banking system has fraud at its heart.⁷⁶ Because of this, everyone today is at risk of a collapse of this house of—false receipts. When the system of monetary payments breaks down, as it will when this fraud becomes widely perceived as a threat to men's wealth, and the bank runs begin, all those who have planned their futures in terms of a predictable, continuous supply of credit money issued by commercial banks will find their plans destroyed. The modern world's unprecedented division of labor, which has been made possible by a system of payments based on commercial bank's promises to pay, will collapse. Unemployment will soar when workers find that their labor

75. Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1986). (<http://bit.ly/gnmoney>)

76. Murray N. Rothbard, *The Mystery of Banking* (New York: Richardson & Snyder, 1983). This book has been posted in PDF format on-line by the Ludwig von Mises Institute. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardBanking>)

services are too narrowly focused to be purchased at the prices that prevailed before the banks went bankrupt. We call this event a depression. It occurs when there is an unforeseen contraction in the division of labor. This takes place whenever the fractional reserve banking payments system breaks down, as it did during the economic depression of the 1930's.

There are negative sanctions in history for breaking God's law. An economic depression is the economy's built-in negative sanction against banking fraud.⁷⁷ If the state refuses to enforce God's law governing weights and measures as it applies to money and banking, then the economic system will refute it. The justification for having the state enforce a law mandating 100% reserve banking⁷⁸ is God's threat to bring corporate negative sanctions against any society that disobeys His law.

In the modern world, central banking lies at the heart of a massive, centuries-long deception by the politicians and the bankers. Here is the essence of the arrangement. The nation-state issues a monopoly of credit creation to a privately owned bank. In exchange, the central bank guarantees to buy the state's debt. This quid pro quo has operated continually in England ever since the founding of the Bank of England in 1694.⁷⁹ It became the world's model for banking in the twentieth century. The world's central bankers want to create a single central bank that issues a single currency. This implies the existence of a common fiscal (taxing and spending) policy for the nations that are inside the international central banking system, i.e., the abolition of national sovereignty. The bankers and the politicians want the benefits of a gold standard without its restraints. They are unwilling to allow a common currency based on a commodity, most likely gold, for this

77. Murray N. Rothbard, *America's Great Depression* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1963] 2000). (<http://bit.ly/RothbardAGD>)

78. Murray N. Rothbard, "The Case for a 100 Percent Gold Dollar," in Leland B. Yeager (ed.), *In Search of a Monetary Constitution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), ch. 4. This essay has been reprinted as a booklet, *The Case for a 100 Percent Gold Dollar* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/RothbardGD>)

79. In the years immediately following World War II, the government nationalized the Bank of England, but management has remained the exclusive prerogative of commercial bankers. Non-bankers are not allowed inside the bank, as I found out by accident in 1985, when Mark Skousen and I walked into it, thinking it was Lloyd's Bank. A man dressed in the traditional beekeeper uniform politely asked us to leave. Feigning the ignorance common to American tourists, I asked: "You mean I can't open an account?" I was assured that I could not.

would restrain the issuing of credit money and the issuing of government debt. They want the pleasant effects of gold—a predictable means of payment—without the restraints imposed by geology: the high cost of extracting this metal. They want to be sovereign over money, so that they can get something for nothing. The politicians want the state to pay below-market interest rates on its debt, and the bankers want interest payments for credit issued out of nothing, with the state's debt certificates as the central banks' legal reserves—the privilege of a state-created monopoly in a nation that does not enforce God's laws of weights and measures.

Perhaps someday the corporate negative sanction known as economic depression will be widely recognized by political leaders and articulate voters as the inevitable result of monetary inflation, especially fractional reserve banking.⁸⁰ If they fail to recognize this, then the world will continue to suffer from periodic depressions.

Conclusion

“Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity” (Job 31:6). The imagery of the balance scale is basic to understanding each person's relation to God, either as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. Weights and measures are also representative biblically of the degree of civil justice available in a society. If those who own the measuring instruments of commerce tamper with them in order to defraud customers, either specific groups of customers—especially resident aliens—or customers in general, they have sinned against God. They have stolen. If the civil government does not prosecute such thieves, then the society is corrupt. The continued existence of false weights and measures testifies against a society.

There are limits to our perception and the accuracy of scales. This applies both to physical measurement and civil justice. Society cannot attain perfect justice. There must always be an appeal to the judge's intuition in judicial conflicts where contested public acts were not clearly inside or outside the law. This does not mean that there are limits to God's perception and God's justice. Thus, there will be a day of perfect reckoning. Over time, covenantally faithful individuals and institutions approach as a limit, but never reach, the perfect justice of that final judgment. This brings God's positive sanctions to covenant-keeping

80. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 20. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

individuals and institutions, making them more responsible by making them more powerful. Progressive sanctification, both personal and corporate, necessarily involves an increase in God's blessings and therefore also an increase in personal responsibility.

The state is required by God to enforce His standards. The free market social order—a development that has its origins in the twin doctrines of personal responsibility and self-government—requires civil government as a legitimate court of appeal. But the bulk of law enforcement has to be individual: “Every man his own policeman.” No other concept of law enforcement will suffice if a society is not to become a society of informants and secret police. Second, law enforcement must be associative: market competition. Buyers and sellers determine the degree of acceptable fluctuation around agreed-upon standards. Only in the third stage is law enforcement to become civil. Here, the standards are to be much more precise, much more rigid, and much more predictable. Representative cases are to become guidelines for self-government and voluntary associative government.

THE FIRSTFRUITS OFFERING: A TOKEN PAYMENT

And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us (Deut. 26:1–3).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's establishment of a holy commonwealth, a place set aside by God for His holy people. This relates both to boundaries and ethics.

A Liturgy of Thanksgiving

God was about to deliver the land of Canaan into their hands. They had not conquered it yet. To identify himself as a lawful resident, the Israelite or circumcised resident alien would be required to say to the priest, "I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us" (v. 3). Then he was to say, "And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God" (v. 10). This was cause of celebration: "And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you" (v. 11). God had sworn that He would deliver Canaan into their hand (v. 3). Because He had fulfilled this promise of inheritance, each Israelite owed Him a firstfruits offering.

This offering had to be brought to Jerusalem once each year (Ex.

23:16). This was the feast of Weeks or Pentecost (Deut. 16:9–10). The men of Israel owed God a trip to the central city and a token payment of the forthcoming harvest. The cost of the trip was far more than the market value of the token payment. Clearly, this law was a land law.¹ It had to do with the conquest of Canaan.

The Israelites had to suffer economic losses in order to demonstrate their thankfulness toward God. This passage makes it clear that this thankfulness looked back to the exodus and the conquest. In some sense, a token payment looked forward to the full harvest, but the text indicates that this was thankfulness for God's positive corporate sanctions in the past. The Passover had to do with God's deliverance. So did Firstfruits (Weeks/Pentecost), but this deliverance was the deliverance of Canaan into their hands. At Passover, the children were to ask what the ritual meal meant, and the father was to tell them about God's overnight deliverance of the nation (Ex. 12:26–27). At Firstfruits, the male head of household was to declare before a priest what the meaning of this ritual was. The man bringing the offering was required to make this historical confession:

And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian [Aramean—NASB] ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God (Deut. 26:5–10).

This offering was used to support the priests, but its economic value was minimal compared with the cost of making the journey to Jerusalem. Had this offering been strictly economic, the priests would have done far better financially had men been allowed to pay them the money equivalent of the journey. This indicates that *what was important was the public confession, not the offering itself*. It was the cost associated with the journey that demonstrated each man's commitment

1. On land laws, see Appendix J.

to God. This cost was the main burden.

At the same time, there was a benefit: *corporate worship*. “And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you” (v. 11). Here the thanksgiving is said to be personal. This celebration was supposed to be more important than the money value of the offering. By requiring the men of Israel to come to Jerusalem to confess their thanks giving for God’s prior deliverance of Israel, both corporately and individually, God created in His people a sense of corporate membership.

The feast of Firstfruits/Weeks/Pentecost was to be a celebration of God’s supernatural intervention in history on behalf of His people. Included in this corporate celebration was the stranger (*geyr*). This was a resident alien who had consented to live under God’s civil law. Israel’s inheritance was corporate. It was also familistic. The feast of Firstfruits celebrated both forms of inheritance. The required feast was God’s reminder to them that He, not the power of their own hands (Deut. 8:17),² had gained this inheritance for them. The message was clear: to continue to maintain this inheritance, the men of Israel had to acknowledge their dependence on God. This honoring involved corporate worship and the expenses thereof.

B. Token Payments for Blessings Received

The main sacrifice at Pentecost was not the handful of grain which the participant brought; it was the time and expense of travelling. This sacrifice testified to the covenantal faithfulness of the participant. There were costs associated with this benefit: forfeited time, energy, and a handful of grain. God was extracting a great deal of productivity from his people. This was another reminder to them that their wealth did not depend on a conventional allocation of time, seed, and labor. It depended entirely on their covenantal faithfulness.

God does not need our gifts in order to extend His kingdom. He grants to His people the honor of bringing offerings to Him so that they can demonstrate the seriousness of their commitment to Him and their dependence on Him. The Israelites’ public commitment was one means of securing the continuing blessings of God. It was also a way to secure each man’s commitment to the stipulations of the covenant. If a man verbally confessed that God had delivered the nation

2. Chapter 21.

and had secured their inheritance, and then took days to walk to and from the place of confession, he had put his money where his mouth was.

When someone forfeits the ownership of capital for the sake of another person, we say that he is either buying something or being charitable. But what do we call such an expenditure when the recipient does not use the asset? There was no suggestion in Old Covenant religion that God ate the sacrifices brought to Him. This made biblical religion different from ancient religions generally.³ But if the Israelite was sacrificing something of value, what did he expect in return? God's favor. Then was he buying God's favor? Was the arrangement a true *quid pro quo*? Could he expect to receive a stream of income if he provided a trickle of sacrifice?

1. Job's Dilemma

This, basically, was the assumption of three of Job's four questioners. They assumed that he had done something wrong to warrant God's wrath. They were wrong; it was his righteousness that had gained him such adversity, by way of Satan. But Job did not understand why the afflictions had come upon him. He had sacrificed on behalf of his children (Job 1:5), yet they had all been killed at a feast (Job 1:19). Where was the justice of God? That was Job's question. God's answer in chapters 38–41 was a series of rhetorical questions that boiled down to this: "I'm God, and you're not."

The sacrifices were the Israelite's public acknowledgment that whatever he possessed had come from God. Job asked his rebellious wife: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10b). God is sovereign over all. But in chapter 3, Job abandoned this testimony. The Book of Job is the account of how he regained his original confession.

The theological problem here is the predictability of God's historical sanctions. If God's curses come as unpredictably as His blessings in response to covenantal faithfulness, the world takes on the appearance of ethical randomness. This is the world of Meredith G. Kline: "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being ex-

³ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 59.

perienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.”⁴

The conclusion of the Book of Job indicates that the predictability of God’s covenant sanctions is a reliable assumption. “So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses” (Job 42:12). This passage indicates that God’s objective sanctions in history are not always immediately revealed, but they are nevertheless predictable. They are not random.

2. A Token Payment

God required the beneficiaries of His blessings to acknowledge the source of these blessings. The means of acknowledgment was their assembling at a formal place of worship. Their sacrifice was their formal admission that God was the source of their blessings. This implied that there would be further blessings. This was an aspect of the covenant’s system of sanctions. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁵ The positive sanction of wealth affirmed the covenant. That is, God demonstrated His commitment to the covenant by creating a predictable stream of blessings for them. By acknowledging retroactively that God had shown grace to Israel, the Israelites were securing future blessings. Grace is to be followed by a token payment. God’s grace to Israel was greater than the payment required. The token payment nevertheless was adequate to secure another round of grace. Then were they buying God’s grace? Not in the sense of full payment for services rendered. *It was a token payment to God for services already rendered.* This testified to their awareness that grace was the basis of their blessings. Grace is not paid for by its recipients.

Token payments are important in maintaining covenantal faithfulness. Paul wrote that man’s token payment involves everything he owns: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).⁶ Everything that man

4. Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

5. Chapter 22.

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

can bring before God in payment for services rendered is a token payment. “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).⁷ So, in effect, the firstfruits offering was a token payment of a token payment.

Conclusion

The firstfruits offering was a token payment for blessings already received: corporate blessings and personal blessings. Israelites sacrificed more wealth to get to Jerusalem than they did in surrendering ownership of a handful of grain. They acknowledged that God was the source of their blessings. They acknowledged also that their token payments were not sufficient to repay God.

Their covenantal faithfulness in participating in a liturgy of thanks giving secured for themselves a continuing stream of blessings. The historical predictability of God’s visible corporate sanctions for covenantal faithfulness was at the heart of this ritual feast. It reminded them that God could be trusted to deliver them in the future, just as He had delivered them in the past. *Past sanctions testified to future sanctions*. Two festivals of Israel, Passover and Firstfruits, looked back in history to God’s deliverance of the nation, but they also looked forward to the maintenance of the kingdom inheritance. The past was prologue.

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 41.

POSITIVE CONFESSION AND CORPORATE SANCTIONS

When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them: I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me. Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey (Deut. 26:12–15).

The theocentric focus of this law is God's oath-bound status as the sanctions-bringer in Israel. To prove loyalty to God, the covenant-keeper had to make a public declaration: "I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them." The oath was an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant model. But the content of the oath had to do with law: point three.¹

A. Confession and Sanctions

In this passage, we see the intimate relation among points two,

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

three, and four of the biblical covenant model. The passage begins with tithing: one's economic acknowledgment of subordination to God and His church. This relates to point two.² It also affirms obedience to God's law: point three. It then calls for God to bring positive corporate sanctions: point four.

The supplicant called on God to enforce His covenant through sanctions: "Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey" (v. 15). He called for God to bless His people today, just as He had blessed their fathers. This law was revealed before God had given Canaan into Israel's hands. God would soon demonstrate the covenantal basis of this law, namely, Israel's victory over Canaan. The victory over Canaan would ratify this law. This was a land law, i.e., having to do with tribal celebrations.

The laws governing the second and third tithes appear in Deuteronomy 14:22–23.³ This law was different. It mandated a public oath after the presentation of the third tithe, meaning the local third-year tithe of celebration. This oath went beyond the presentation of the tithe. This oath was a means of covenant renewal. It belonged in point four of the biblical covenant model.

The person had just brought his tithe into the town. He then was required to declare this tithe as representative of all the other commandments. As surely as he had not cheated God and the recipients of this holy (hallowed) tithe, so he had not broken any of God's commandments. "Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them: I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me" (vv. 10–13). This was comprehensive self-testimony. It covered everything.

For a man to make such a claim, he would have had to be perfect. Such perfection included making atonement and restitution for his

2. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

3. Chapter 35.

sins. In this sense, he was to be as perfect as Job: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. . . . And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually" (Job 1:1, 5).

To make an affirmation as comprehensive as the one mandated by this passage meant that the individual making it was renewing his covenant with God. This oath must have been taken in front of a Levite, for the sins in question were not merely civil crimes. He then called down God's positive sanctions on the nation based on his affirmation of his own atoned-for legal status. "Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey" (v.15). He was adding his public testimony to the nation's covenantal request for God's positive corporate sanctions. This of course assumed that others in Israel also were making this affirmation. On the basis of their *individual* confessions of purity, they called *corporately* on God to bring positive sanctions.

Was the excommunicated Israelite required to take this oath? Was the resident alien? I cannot imagine why. A man outside the ecclesiastical covenant could hardly have been required to renew it. Although he was required to pay his tithe as the land's steward, because the tithe was the Levites' lawful inheritance (Num. 18:1–4),⁴ he was not required to take an oath that would have been inherently false. As a non-citizen, he was in no position to call formally on God to impose positive sanctions. He was not under oath-bound ecclesiastical sanctions.

B. Historical Sanctions

This oath was a positive confession personally and a positive confession corporately. It did not call down God's blessings on the individual except insofar as he was under God's corporate sanctions. The positive personal confession had to do with his obedience in the past. The positive corporate confession invoked God's past sanctions on Israel's behalf at the conquest as the precedent for His future sanctions.

4. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

By testifying to their continuing obedience to God's law in the past, they affirmed their confidence in His covenantal sanctions in the future.

A loss of faith in God's past sanctions would have been fatal for this oath. Such a loss of faith would have undermined the confession. Their faith in those sanctions also would have persuaded them to avoid confessing their own individual perfection. If they lied, they could expect no positive sanctions. They could also expect negative sanctions. To the degree that they believed in God's past sanctions against Canaan, they should have believed in God's future sanctions against themselves for disobedience. "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:19–20).⁵

Once in each seven-year cycle, they were required to get right publicly with God. The outward evidence of getting right with God was their presentation of the third tithe. The third tithe was celebrated locally (Deut. 14:28).⁶ People would have known each other. This would have kept sinners more humble. Their positive confession regarding their sin-free judicial condition invoked God's corporate sanctions: negative if they were lying; positive if they were telling the truth. The nation could not reasonably expect continued blessings if most of the confessors were either lying or ignorant of their own sins.

This act of covenant renewal was preparatory for national blessings. A little over three years prior to the beginning of the sabbatical year, they called on God to provide national blessings. If their prayer was answered, they would have excess crops. This would be a source of the reserves required to store up food for the sabbatical year. A negative response from God would make these preparations much more expensive. Then they repeated the rite in year six.

C. God's Sanctions and Pagan Confession

What God did in the past, He is willing to do in the future. There is continuity in history. The next passage affirms that God's goal for Israel was international acclaim:

5. Chapter 23.

6. Chapter 35.

This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched [said] the LORD this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken (vv. 16–19).

The basis of historical continuity is obedience to God's revealed law. Without obedience, there will be a negative discontinuity (Deut. 8:19–20).⁷ *The twin sanctions of cursing and blessing determine discontinuity and continuity.*

Obedience would gain Israel a great international reputation. This means that the pagan nations would honor Israel as a great nation. They would confess the truth about Israel and God's law (Deut. 4:4–8). There would be consistency among God's *imputed righteousness* to Israel, Israel's *actual performance* in history, and pagan nations' *subjective acknowledgment* of Israel's objective righteousness. Two of God's blessings in history are corporate righteousness and corporate confession, even by covenant-breakers. Although members of covenant-breaking nations had a different view of God, man, law, sanctions, and time, they would nonetheless confess that Israel's visible success, based on the Bible's view of God, man, law, sanctions, and time, was superior to their own. Their public confession would conform to God's confession. They would acknowledge God's blessings as blessings. In this sense, they would disavow their own ethical standards and affirm God's standards. This is why covenant law is a form of evangelism.⁸ Because *biblical law is attached to positive corporate sanctions and continuity*—long-term development—its visible results are so manifest that covenant-breakers are compelled by the evidence to confess its superiority.

The pagan's ability to recognize and confess the truth is an aspect of common grace. The objectivity of God's corporate blessings in history overcomes the hostile confession and false perception of God and His kingdom by covenant-breakers. Isaiah prophesied this eschatolo-

7. Chapter 23.

8. Chapter 8.

gical condition:

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right. But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand (Isa. 32:1–8).

This does not mean that covenant-breakers are converted to soul-saving faith by the testimony of their own eyes. Conversion is by God's special grace. Those who are not converted will, in the final rebellion, join with Satan in an attack on what is good and successful. The objective testimony of God's blessings on a covenant-keeping social order will enrage covenant-breakers and goad them into a final act of destruction. This will end history. "And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:9–10). When they rebel, they will rebel against a universal, triumphant civilization that is objectively so successful that it calls forth the religion of revolution.⁹

Conclusion

The Israelites had to bring their third-year tithes. A failure to do so would have undermined this confession. But this confession used the tithe as a model of covenantal obedience in general. They had to declare publicly, one by one, that they had obeyed all of God's laws in the previous seven-year period. This was a covenant renewal ceremony. It called down God's positive sanctions, but this necessarily involved the

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

risk of negative sanctions for false oath-taking.

How could they dare to make such a perfectionist affirmation? Only on the judicial basis of the covering provided by personal repentance, restitution, and public sacrifices. Covenantally, this oath was valid only because of the ultimate covering: Jesus Christ's future sacrifice on the cross. The same oath is assumed to have been taken privately by every adult Christian prior to participating in the Lord's Supper.

This corporate event sealed Israel's legal condition until the sabbatical year of release, as either a covenant-keeping nation or a covenant-breaking nation. If God withheld His blessings, they would be tempted to plant crops during the year of release. This would have brought down even greater negative sanctions.

This corporate oath ceremony ceased to be required when the third-year tithe ceased to be required. The third tithe was a land law primarily and a seed law secondarily. This tithe was a communal tithe that united the members of each tribe in the tribe's towns. It was a tribal law. With the cessation of Israel's tribes in A.D. 70, this law was annulled.

Part IV: Oath/Sanctions (27–30)

68

LANDMARK AND CURSE

Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:17).

The transition to the fourth section of Deuteronomy is marked by the formal declaration by the Levites of God's curses and blessings. The people were to respond with "Amen," which was a formal corporate ratification by oath (vv. 14–26): point four of the biblical covenant model. This liturgy was covenant renewal: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ This liturgy was to be preceded by the establishment of a monument of stones inside the boundaries of the land. On these stones were to be written the law (vv. 2–8). The theocentric focus of the landmark law is God's office as the sanctions-bringer. Sanctions are associated with point four.

A. Disinheritance by Theft

This chapter begins with a command to set up stones on Canaan's side of the Jordan (v. 2). These stones would have the law of God written on them (v. 3). They would be made into an altar on which burnt offerings (negative) and peace offerings (positive) would be offered by the people (v. 6). The Levites would then pronounce a series of curses on specific acts (vv. 14–26). This chapter marks a shift from law to sanctions in the Book of Deuteronomy. It begins Part 4.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

This law required public confession was a recapitulation of the law governing landmarks: "This law thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it" (Deut. 19:14).² The focus was inheritance: each family's inheritance of land and also the nation's inheritance of the land of Canaan.

The sin of removing a neighbor's landmark in order to enlarge one's own inheritance involves disinheriting one's neighbor. It is an act of theft. It violates the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15). This was not a land law. It is universal.³

Moses told the people the following: after the nation had crossed the Jordan and had entered the land, they were to assemble at the dual mountains of the dual sanctions, Gerizim (blessing) and Ebal (cursing) (Deut. 27:12–13). The Levites were then to declare specific acts that would bring cursing to the violators. After each declaration, the assembled nation would respond, "Amen." That is, *the assembled nation would ratify each law and its declared curse*. This would constitute an act of national covenant renewal. The new generation would renew formally what their parents had ratified at Mt. Sinai a generation earlier (Ex. 19). This ratification was to be corporate; all the people would participate.

The law of the landmark is the only one in the list (vv. 15–26) that was explicitly economic. None of them was a land law or a seed law. Two other laws may have had economic aspects, but they had to do with the perversion of justice: "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen" (v. 19). "Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen" (v. 25). The presumption in these two instances is that the civil law would be misused for someone's benefit. The sought-for benefit would turn into a curse.

The list of curses ended with the requirement that the entire list be ratified: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen" (v. 26). That is, partial ratification would lead to a curse, and the nation was to invoke this curse. *He who refused to invoke the whole of the law and its curses thereby placed himself under the covenant's curse*. This fact was publicly to be declared by all the other participants. The nation would

2. Chapter 44.

3. On land laws and cross-boundary laws (universal), see Appendix J.

soon exercise the democratic right of sealing the national covenant on behalf of every member of this covenant, present and future.

The people could not exercise what might be called a pick-and-choose veto over God. They could not pick and choose from among a large list of provisions. They were confronted with a comprehensive list of provisions. God established the covenant. They could ratify all of its stipulations and thereby escape the curses.

B. Boundaries and Sanctions

The landmark is a physical boundary, but it is also an ethical boundary. This corporate confession appears in a list of boundaries. The nation was required to confess that there were curses attached to violations of these ethical boundaries.

If God chose to remove Israel from the land because of Israel's sin, the families' geographical boundaries would lose their binding moral character. Almost a thousand years later, the prophet Ezekiel announced a change in the land law: after the nation's return from the exile, non-covenanted people living in the land would gain the right to purchase rural land (Ezek. 47:22–23).⁴

1. Classical Religion

This law was in stark contrast to the boundary laws of classical Greece and Rome, whose boundaries were marked by markers called *termini*. A *terminus* was a god. Once established as a boundary marker, this god could not lawfully be moved. This practice was found even before Rome among the Sabines and the Etruscans.⁵ In Greece, each family had its own gods—dead ancestors—and its own sacrificial hearth. The worship of these household gods was tied to the soil. Fustel de Coulanges described the theology of family ownership of land. Ownership of land was tied to each household's sacred fire.

The sacred fire, which was so intimately associated with the worship of the dead, belonged, in its essential character, properly to each family. It represented the ancestors; it was the providence of a family, and had nothing in common with the fire of a neighboring family,

4. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

5. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), II:VI, p. 68.

which was another providence. Every fire protected its own and repulsed the stranger. The whole of this religion was enclosed within the walls of each house. The worship was not public. All the ceremonies, on the contrary, were kept strictly secret. Performed in the midst of the family alone, they were concealed from every stranger. The hearth was never placed either outside the house or even near the outer door, where it would have been too easy to see. The Greeks always placed it in an enclosure, which protected it from the contact, or even the gaze, of the profane. The Romans concealed it in the interior of the house. All these gods, the sacred fire, the Lares, and the Manes, were called the consecrated gods, or gods of the interior. To all the acts of this religion secrecy was necessary.⁶

This was polytheism. It divided family from family, family from stranger. "Each family was most completely independent."⁷ Classical religion defended property in land as a sacred right which rested on sacred rites. It also rested on sacred space. Fustel's description reveals how very different classical religion was from biblical religion, which placed the God of creation on top. The following lengthy extract from *The Ancient City* indicates the centrality of a family's religious rites in classical religion.

Religion, and not laws, first guaranteed the right of property. Every domain was under the eyes of household divinities, who watched over it. Every field had to be surrounded, as we have seen for the house, by an enclosure, which separated it completely from the domains of other families. This enclosure was not a wall of stone; it was a band of soil, a few feet wide, which remained uncultivated, and which the plough could never touch. This space was sacred; the Roman law declared it indefeasible; it belonged to the religion. On certain appointed days of each month and year, the father of the family went round his field, following this line; he drove victims before him, sang hymns, and offered sacrifices. By this ceremony he believed he had awakened the benevolence of his gods towards his field and his house; above all, he had marked his right of property by proceeding round his field with his domestic worship. The path which the victims and prayers had followed was the inviolable limit of the domain. On this line, at certain points, the men placed large stones or trunks of trees, which they called *Termini*. We can form a good idea as to what these bounds were, and what ideas were connected with them, by the manner in which the piety of men established them. "This," says Seculus flaccus, "was the manner in which our ancestors pro-

6. *Ibid.*, I:IV, p. 37.

7. *Idem*.

ceeded: They commenced by digging a small hole, and placing the Terminus upright near it; next they crowned the Terminus with garlands of grasses and flowers; then they offered a sacrifice. The victim being immolated, they made the blood flow into the hole, they threw in live coals (kindled, probably, at the sacred fire of the hearth), grain, cakes, fruits, a little wine, and some honey. When all this was consumed in the hole, they thrust down the stone or piece of wood upon the ashes while they were still warm." It is easy to see that the object of the ceremony was to make of this Terminus a sort of sacred representation of the domestic worship. To continue this character for it, they renewed the sacred act every year, by pouring out libations and reciting prayers. The Terminus, once placed in the earth became in some sort the domestic religion implanted in the soil, to indicate that this soil was forever the property of the family. Later, poetry lending its aid, the Terminus was considered as a distinct god. . . .

The Terminus once established according to the required rites, there was no power on earth that could displace it. It was to remain in the same place through all ages. This religious principle was expressed at Rome by a legend: Jupiter, having wished to prepare himself a site on the Capitoline hill for a temple, could not displace the god Terminus. This old tradition shows how sacred property had become; for the immovable Terminus signified nothing less than inviolable property.

In fact, the Terminus guarded the limit of the field, and watched over it. A neighbor dared not approach too near it: "For then," says Ovid, "the god, who felt himself struck by the ploughshare, or mattock, cried, 'Stop: this is my field; there is yours.'" To encroach upon the field of a family, it was necessary to overturn or displace a boundary mark, and this boundary mark was a god. The sacrilege was horrible, and the chastisement severe. According to the old Roman law, the man and the oxen who touched a Terminus were devoted—that is to say, both man and oxen were immolated in expiation. The Etruscan law, speaking in the name of religion, says, "He who shall have touched or displaced a bound shall be condemned by the gods; his house shall disappear; his race shall be extinguished; his land shall no longer produce fruits; hail, rust, and the fires of the dog-star shall destroy his harvests; the limbs of the guilty one shall become covered with ulcers, and shall waste away." We do not possess the text of the Athenian law on this subject; there remain of it only three words, which signify, "Do not pass the boundaries." But Plato appears to complete the thought of the legislator when he says, "Our first law ought to be this: Let no person touch the bounds which separate his field from that of his neighbor, for this ought to remain immovable....

Let no one attempt to disturb the small stone which separates friendship from enmity, and which the land-owners have bound themselves by an oath to leave in its place.”⁸

The soil was sacred in classical religion because the soil was unbreakably associated with local gods of the family. This was not true of biblical religion, where God was seen as the owner. In biblical religion, private property is not sacred and liturgical; rather, it is judicial and moral. In classical religion, the gods had to be fed. They needed a system of inviolable sacred inheritance, so that they could be fed. But the God of the Bible is in no way dependent on rites performed by men. The ownership of land is therefore not inviolable. Under the Mosaic law, land was bounded by laws of inheritance that were established so that men could extend God’s kingdom. The landmarks could not lawfully be moved, but this was an aspect of family inheritance and dominion, not the maintenance of exclusive family hearths.

The Mosaic law promised the sanction of no miscarriages for obedience. “There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil” (Ex. 23:26).⁹ It also promised large families as a positive sanction for obedience. So, the land would not support people as families grew. This was an impulse for Israelites to spread across the earth, bringing the religion of God along with them in foreign nations.¹⁰

This was not true of classical religion, which was polytheistic. For classical religion, the only unity outside the family had to be at bottom political. The system was based on primogeniture: the eldest son inherited all of the family’s land.¹¹ A city could establish colonies through military conquest. This led eventually to a quest for empire. Conquest had to be military. It was not evangelical. Militarism mandated the defeat of local gods: either their elimination or their subordination. Alliances could be established only by formally equating the gods of each city and creating joint rites.¹² The Roman pantheon was political: the equality of all gods under the unity of imperial politics. Religion became subordinate to politics because only through politics

8. *Ibid.*, II:VI, pp. 67–69.

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012) Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 55.

10. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24:G.

11. Fustel, *Ancient City*, II:VII:6, pp. 83–85.

12. *Ibid.*, III:XV, p. 209.

could the cacophony of polytheism-familism be overcome in classical religion. As in every society, unity had to be established through confession and ritual, but Roman religion required a political confession. It involved an affirmation of the genius of the emperor and, later, his divinity. This was unacceptable to Christians. A bloody war for confessional supremacy took three centuries. Rome imposed bloodshed, but Christian confession triumphed in the end.

2. Curses

Those Christians who deny that the Mosaic law carries into the New Covenant should review this list of curses. Which of them is no longer operable?

Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:15–26).

If all of these seem to be still in force, then what about the concluding confession? "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen" (v. 26). In other words, if all of these laws carry into the New Covenant, then what about God's negative sanctions against those who violate them? What kinds of negative sanctions can the violators reasonably expect? If a man is cursed who violates these laws, then what about the Mosaic law's civil sanctions against such acts? On what judicial basis can these sanctions be said to have been annulled? Are these sins today less

heinous in God's eyes than they were in Moses' day? Are they not still crimes? Has the coming of the New Covenant made men less responsible before God than before Christ's revelation? Is it a biblical principle that less is expected from those to whom more has been given? Or is it rather the reverse (Luke 12:48)?¹³

Conclusion

This prohibition against moving the landmark appears in a passage that specified the judicial content of the corporate act of national covenant renewal by the conquest generation. It pronounced a curse against the person who moves his neighbor's landmark, thereby disinheriting his neighbor and his heirs.

The invocation of a curse marks each of these boundaries as covenantal. The Bible-affirming commentator who denies that the Mosaic law applies in the New Covenant has a major problem with this passage: *there is no explicit covenantal principle of discontinuity that annuls any of these prohibitions*. There is also no explicit covenantal principle that revokes their curses. Then on what judicial basis have the civil sanctions attached to these sins been annulled? This raises the issue of hermeneutics: the biblical principle of biblical interpretation.

13. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

OBJECTIVE WEALTH AND HISTORICAL PROGRESS

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. . . . The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. . . . And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee (Deut. 28:4–5, 8, 11).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the sanctions-bringer. The entire chapter of Deuteronomy 28 is a chapter on sanctions.

A. Visible Testimony Under the Mosaic Covenant

God here promises to bring blessings on the nation in response to Israel's covenantal obedience (Deut. 28:1–2). These blessings include wealth. Deuteronomy 28 is a recapitulation of Leviticus 26. It announces dual sanctions: blessing and cursing. The chapter begins with blessing; it ends with cursing. The section on cursing is much longer than the section on blessing.

This was not a land law. The entire passage is not a land law.¹ Modern commentators who reject theonomy regard this passage as a land law, although they may use some other term to describe it. They do not acknowledge that these threatened corporate sanctions carry into the New Covenant. They are incorrect. These sanctions are historical. They are predictable. Covenantal rebellion by a society will

1. On land laws, see Appendix J.

lead to God's imposition of these sanctions. This is why this passage and Leviticus 26 are among the most important in the Bible—I believe *the* most important—for an explicitly biblical social theory.

These promises related to measurable quantities—"increase," "plenteous"—of specific goods: cattle, kine (domesticated oxen), and sheep. "Increase" here referred to storage implements: basket, store houses. The *numerical objectivity* of these reference points is crucial for this passage. These were not inward blessings. The fulfillment of these covenantal promises, Moses told the nation, will be visible to the Israelites and their enemies. They will serve as evidence of God's sovereignty over history through the predictability of His covenant relationships. The blessings and cursings of God under the Mosaic covenant were sure. They were not disconnected from God's law. There was a bedrock objectivity that united covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. That which God regarded as a blessing, He told Israel, all men would regard as a blessing; the same was true of cursing. The lists of blessings and cursings in Deuteronomy 28 were premised on an agreement among subjective evaluators. *There is a shared universe of discourse and evaluation.* This objectivity is not undermined by subjective evaluations by individuals or groups. *The subjectivism of individual perception would not overcome the objectivity of the corporate sanctions.* Israel would enjoy more blessings than the surrounding nations did if the people obeyed God's law. They would be visibly, objectively cursed if they disobeyed.

The idea of national blessings and cursings rests on the existence of objective measures. For men to make such evaluations, numerical measures must apply to the external world. To own a larger number of desirable goods is superior to owning fewer of them. However clever or arcane the methodological subjectivist² may become, there is no escape from Deuteronomy 28. The objective superiority of *more* is assumed by God. Other things being equal, it is better to be rich and healthy than it is to be poor and sick.

This passage ratifies the legitimacy of individual comparisons of national wealth. An individual may lawfully seek out evidence of superior performance of any society. At the same time, this passage does

2. On methodological subjectivism, see Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1990] 2012), Appendix H; North, "Economics: From Reason To Intuition," in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), ch. 5.

not ratify the legitimacy of government-funded comparisons of national wealth. The collection of economic or other performance data by the government, except for military-related purposes or other aspects of law enforcement, is illegitimate. To use state coercion to fund data-gathering is a form of illicit numbering. The Mosaic law made it clear that numbering was lawful only in preparation for holy warfare. It was not to be a common activity of the state. Defenders of the central planning state can justify its efficiency only on the basis of its possession of more accurate and more relevant information than the private sector possesses. Statistics becomes a necessary justification for socialism and interventionism. Strip the state of its access to pretended knowledge, and you strip away its aura of omniscience.³

The point of Deuteronomy 28 is not that there are objective measures of economic performance that are available to state economic planners. On the contrary, the point of this passage is this: the way to wealth, both individual and corporate, is through systematic adherence to biblical law. Employees of the state are not supposed to search the records of historical data for tax policies or other forms of coercion that lead, statistically speaking, to a greater likelihood of an increase in per capita wealth. Instead, they are to content themselves with the enforcement of God's law in a quest for civil justice. When they are successful in this venture, per capita wealth will increase. *Justice produces wealth*. Any attempt to discover economic laws of wealth based on a detailed search of detailed economic statistics reverses the Bible's concept of moral cause and economic effect. It places economic causation above moral causation in the wealth of nations.

Adam Smith understood this; his disciples rarely have. Before he wrote *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), he wrote *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). His moderate Deism was a desiccated version of the covenantal Presbyterianism of his Scottish forbears. His contractualism was a man-centered version of their covenantalism. His orderly world of economic causation rested on moral cause and effect in history. The seeming autonomy of his economic theory from morality, and of his morality from theology, is an illusion. Smith's epistemology moved in the direction of autonomy, no doubt, but his economic theory was not an exercise in value-free methodology. He recognized that an economy is grounded in moral causation, for society rests on justice. "Society may subsist, though not

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 2.

in the most comfortable state, without beneficence; but the prevalence of injustice must utterly destroy it.”⁴ Social order is not the product of immoral behavior, however profitable vice may be in the short run. “Vice is always capricious—virtue only is regular and orderly.”⁵ Self-interest that is devoid of love of the neighbor cannot build a civilization. “As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature that we love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or, what amounts to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us.”⁶ Smith did not pursue this theme in *The Wealth of Nations*. The doctrine of ethics is not part of its methodological framework. His disciples have ignored his instruction on justice as systematically as Newton’s disciples have ignored his God, creation, and providence.⁷

B. Capital and Covenant

Evaluating God’s favor to a society by an appeal to numerical measures is valid. But this evaluation must always be governed by the economist’s qualification: “other things being equal.” The “other things” in this case are ethical. *Ethics comes first*. For most people, it is better for them to be middle class than wealthy. Why? Because of the ethical temptations associated with great wealth. “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).⁸ If a person’s ethical status could be ensured irrespective of wealth, then more would always be better than less. But it is inherent in the covenantal structure of a fallen world that wealth and ethics are intertwined. Adam Smith understood this: “The virtue of frugality lies in a middle between avarice and profusion, of which the one consists in an excess, the other in a defect, of the proper attention to the objects of self-interest.”⁹ He lauded frugality in the name of capital formation, but not frugality to the point of greed. He praised spending by the wealthy as a source of benefit for workers, but not to

4. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Classics, 1976), p. 167.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 368.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

7. Isaac Newton, *Principia* (1687), “General Scholium,” Section 4.

8. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 438.

the point of wasting one's inheritance.

Here is where biblical covenantalism gets tricky. On the one hand, wealth is designed to confirm the national covenant. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).¹⁰ But it can just as easily undermine the covenant: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).¹¹ The same numerical sanction—wealth—can become a means of grace or a means of wrath. One's covenantal status determines which effect wealth has. The trouble is, we are not always sure about what our covenantal status is, nor are we sure what it will become under different economic conditions. This is why the author of the Proverbs prayed for middling wealth. It is safer.

In genetics, this tendency is called "regression to the mean." It was discovered by Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin.¹² One scholar of the history of statistics says that this tendency has applied to every system we have discovered.¹³ He exaggerates. There are many systems in which another phenomenon operates: Pareto's 80-20 law.

1. Pareto's Law and Regression to the Mean

There is a pattern that is found in every nation that economists study, irrespective of its politics, religion, or the people's educational attainment. About 80% of a nation's capital is owned by 20% of its population. The shape of either a nation's wealth distribution curve or its income distribution curve does not resemble the shape of its population curve. The population curve in a Western nation bulges with the middle class. In an economically undeveloped nation, it bulges with the poor. In contrast, both the income distribution curve and the wealth distribution curve bulge with the rich, generation after generation. This does not mean that the same families remain rich. It does mean that the richest 20% of the population owns most of the nation's wealth and gains most of the income generated by this capital at any given time. The shape of the income distribution curve resists alteration.

10. Chapter 22.

11. Chapter 21.

12. Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Odds: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996), p. 167.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

Italian sociologist-economist Vilfredo Pareto in the late nineteenth century made detailed investigations of the distribution of income in European nations. He discovered an amazing fact: the slope of the income curve, from the richest to the poorest members of society, was similar in every nation that he studied. The richest members received most of a nation's income. This statistical relationship, first published in 1897,¹⁴ has not changed significantly over the last century, irrespective of the economic policies of individual industrial nations. Later studies by other economic historians indicated that in 1835–40, 1883, and 1919 in Great Britain, the richest 10% received 50% of the nation's income.¹⁵ This statistical relationship has come to be known as the Pareto law or the Pareto rule or the 20-80 rule. A 20-80 distribution has been found to apply in social institution after institution, as well as in their diverse operations.¹⁶ No one seems to know why. An economist wrote in 1965: "For a very long time, the Pareto law has lumbered the economic scene like an erratic block on the landscape; an empirical law which nobody can explain."¹⁷

I would like to say that I have an answer to this seemingly irreconcilable question regarding 80-20. The phenomenon exists. Why does it exist? Why doesn't regression to the mean eliminate it? I do not have an explanation. I have searched the World Wide Web for anything that discusses the contradiction between these two statistical outcomes I have found nothing, and very few documents that even contain the phrases. I had not recognized the conflict when I published the first edition of this commentary in 1999.

Pareto offered a famous sociological theory: circulating elites. He argued that the same families or social groups will not be found in the top 20%, generation after generation. Over long periods of time, this appears to be true, but it is not easy to prove. Statistics do not prove it in the way that they validate wealth distribution. The theory is consistent with the hierarchical aspect of the biblical covenant model. The question is: Why does the distribution of income remain skewed, des-

14. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d'Economie Politique*, vol. 2 (1897), pp. 370–72. The book has still not been translated into English, although it remains famous.

15. D. H. Macgregor, "Pareto's Law," *Economic Journal* (March 1936), pp. 81, 86. Reprinted in Mark Blaug (ed.), *Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)* (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 21, 26.

16. Richard Koch, *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret of Achieving More With Less* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1998).

17. Josef Steindl, *Random Processes and the Growth of Firms: A Study of the Pareto Law* (London: Charles Griffin, 1965), p. 18. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 3.

pite either government intervention or free market competition? We do not know.

2. Covenantal Blessings

Here is what Christians do know: God is sovereign over the poor. He raises them up—not all of them, but some of them. “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and he hath set the world upon them” (I Sam. 2:7–8). God can intervene in history to break the cycle of poverty as surely as He breaks the cycle of wealth. The question is: Is there a cycle of poverty? Is there a cycle of wealth? Do the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, “other things being equal”?

This is another way of asking: Is God capricious? Does He raise up some and cast down others for no particular reason? Deuteronomy 28 denies this. God has established a structure of economic order. First, there are not many extremely poor men in a covenant-keeping society. “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25). Second, there are not many rich men. Capital is hard to earn and harder to retain unless the state intervenes to protect existing holders of capital from new sources of competition. If a state does this, then its national economy eventually falls behind free market societies that refuse to grant such coercive protection to special-interest groups.

If a society is getting richer than its rivals, the poor inside this society may become richer than the middle class in another. Can this lead be maintained indefinitely? To answer this question, I begin with a statistical observation: the effects of long-term economic growth are cumulative. A small rate of growth, if compounded, creates huge effects over centuries. A slightly higher rate of growth, if maintained, creates huge disparities of wealth between nations over centuries. But huge disparities of anything within a system are what call forth the counter-effects: either regression to the mean (which does not seem to govern wealth distribution) or the circulation of elites (which does seem to operate in income distribution). If a nation has a competitive lead, other nations will be tempted to imitate it, assuming that the sources of its advantage become known. There is a great personal eco-

conomic incentive for outsiders to discover and appropriate these secrets.

Can God's covenantal blessings be maintained indefinitely? To answer this question, we must not appeal to the Old Covenant's category of original sin. The familiar Genesis pattern of creation, Fall, and redemption appeared continually in the Old covenant, but the New Covenant has broken that pattern through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The possibility of *sustained confession* and *sustained economic growth* does exist as a theoretical ideal. The history of the West after 1750 has demonstrated this possibility with respect to the economy. Men have found the secrets of widespread wealth: individual freedom, enforceable contracts, future-orientation, capital accumulation, and technology. England discovered these secrets first. The United States replaced England as an engine of growth early in the twentieth century. Asia has begun to replace the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first.

A nation is subject to the lure of autonomy: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth." It can lose its position of leadership. Historically, every leading nation has. But the New Covenant has overcome original sin in a fundamental way. It has made possible the Mosaic law's ideal of long-term compound growth. It has given man a new eschatology, one which is no longer trapped by the cyclicalism of the pagan world. Linear history—creation, Fall, redemption, final judgment—can be applied to nations and societies. Society is not organic. It does not parallel biology: birth, growth, decline, death. Society is covenantal: confession, obedience/disobedience, sanctions, inheritance/disinheritance.

Contrary to what I wrote in the 1999 version of this book, there is no bell-shaped distribution of wealth within a society. A minority of about 20% of the population owns about 80% of the capital. But there is change in who occupies the top positions, although this may take generations.

The Bible says that at one end of the income distribution curve, the rich man is tempted to forget God. If he succumbs, he loses his wealth. Or his heirs forget to honor the moral basis of wealth-creation. They dissipate their inheritance. The process of inheritance rewards the righteousness. At the other end of the curve, the poor man who steals is eventually caught and sold into bondage under a successful person. His victim receives payment; he receives training; his buyer receives a stream of labor services. If the servant is successful and buys

his way out of bondage, he re-enters society as a disciplined man, and presumably a self-disciplined man. He accumulates wealth.

Can a family maintain its advantage? No more than a society can. Then what about society? It is possible for a covenantally faithful society to retain its advanced position until such time as: (1) it succumbs to the temptation of autonomy; (2) other nations imitate it and become even more faithful. On the one hand, sin can undermine a society. It can pull it back into comparative poverty. On the other hand, the gospel can spread, bringing other nations into the growth mode. The deciding factor here is grace, not statistics.

Nations rise and fall, or else get overtaken, but none can maintain a permanent lead apart from its continued lead in the area of ethical sanctification. Wealth has followed the gospel: westward.

C. Visible Testimony Under the New Covenant

The visible outcome of covenant-keeping is external blessing. This theme is basic to the Pentateuch. I argue that it is basic to the entire Bible. My argument is not taken seriously by Christian commentators and Christian social theorists. They argue that there has been a great discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This discontinuity supposedly has broken the predictability of God's visible responses in history to man's obedience or disobedience. But if there has been a great discontinuity, then what of the evangelism aspect of God's Bible-revealed law (Deut. 4:5–8)?¹⁸ Has ethical cause and effect been annulled by God? Are the differences between covenant-keeping nations and covenant-breaking nations no longer visible to covenant-breakers? Has God annulled this tool of evangelism in the New Covenant, an era which is generally regarded by Christians as the great era of evangelism, i.e., the Great Commission? The critics of biblical law assume that this is the case, but they rarely say so publicly. This implication of their hostility to biblical law is just to embarrassing.

Under the Mosaic covenant, covenant-breakers could see that the outcome of covenant-keeping was superior to other outcomes. This realization was designed by God to call forth the above confession. But Christians today assume that under the New Covenant, this older relationship between national obedience and national wealth is gone. The objective testimony that God gave to covenant-breakers through Israel under the Old Covenant supposedly no longer exists. The arrival of the

18. Chapter 8.

New Covenant has supposedly left modern man with less excuse. Under the Old Covenant, foreigners could see that Israel's law-order was superior. Under the New Covenant, they supposedly cannot see this because no nation possesses or can possess any such covenantal law order. No such law-order exists, we are told. Under the Mosaic law, in short, covenant-breakers supposedly possessed greater clarity regarding the blessings of the covenant, and therefore had greater responsibility for rejecting the covenant than they have today. This strange theory of covenantal responsibility is implicitly held by the vast majority of Christians today. We are asked to believe that the New Covenant has left covenant-breaking men with more excuse for their rebellion, for the clearer covenantal categories of the Old Covenant have been superseded by a less clear covenantal order.

The antinomian critic seeks to evade this implication by arguing that the Holy Spirit's presence in the New Covenant has more than offset the loss of clarity regarding ethical cause and effect. The theological temptation here—one that is widely succumbed to—is that some form of antinomian mysticism will replace judicial theology. An antinomian doctrine of the Holy Spirit replaces the objective testimony taught by Deuteronomy 28.

I argue that a theory of the regressive covenants—more personal responsibility for covenant-breakers despite reduced objective testimony—is incorrect. Antinomian mysticism is also incorrect. There is progress in covenantal history. *Theological contrasts get clearer over time, not more muddled*.¹⁹ The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in history have made the Great Commission possible (Matt. 28:18–20).²⁰ The sending of the Holy Spirit has granted to God's people greater understanding than Old Covenant saints possessed. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (John 16:13). With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility (Luke 12:48).²¹ With the spread of the gospel across national borders has come a spread of knowledge. There remain differences between the

19. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy Tale for Grown-ups* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), p. 283.

20. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

21. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

national blessings of God and national cursings. Modern Christian academics assure us that these distinctions no longer exist. This is Meredith G. Kline's position, as we shall see. It is the position of every Christian social theorist who denies the New Covenant applicability of Deuteronomy 28, which means all except the theonomists. I contend the opposite: it is not covenant-breakers who are blind to these differences but rather Christian academic social theorists.

D. Social Theory

Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, more than any other passages in the Bible, serve as the basis for the development of a uniquely Christian social theory. If this system of predictable covenantal blessings and cursings was applicable only to the Mosaic era, then there is no possibility of a uniquely Christian social theory. Christians would have to pick and choose among various humanistic theories of social causation. This in fact is what they have been doing since about 1700. Even before then, most Christian social theorists went to the Greeks and Romans before they went to the Mosaic law. After 1700, they all did. There was no distinctly Christian social theory from the demise of casuistry, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, after 1700.²² Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973) revived the lost art of casuistry. He had begun preaching the weekly sermons that became the *Institutes* in the late 1960s, exactly paralleling the advent of the situation ethics movement in liberal churches.

Meredith G. Kline attacked Christian Reconstruction in the name of covenantal randomness: "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."²³ But his criticism went beyond the Christian Reconstruction movement. His broader target was the New Covenant ideal of Christendom. He denied that such an ideal has its roots in the New Covenant. He was not alone in this viewpoint. It is shared by

22. Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952). On the decline of Roman Catholic casuistry in 1700, see Albert J. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 269.

23. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

virtually all of modern Protestant Christianity. The debate among Christian social theorists centers on which baptized humanist ideal should be substituted for the ideal of Christendom.

In the Protestant West, academically certified evangelicals tend to baptize left-wing Enlightenment social theory, while fundamentalists baptize right-wing Enlightenment social theory. Both groups dismiss as theocratic any judicial system that invokes the Mosaic law as a binding standard for social policy. It is generally considered legitimate to invoke the Ten Commandments, but even here, there is deep suspicion. The first three commandments are considered off limits for civil law; the fourth is considered problematical for civil law; and five through ten are regarded as valid aspects of the civil order only to the extent that they are enforced only as universal statements of a common-ground moral law. Both groups prefer to live under humanism's theocracy rather than the Bible's theocracy. Both groups proclaim, "we're under grace, not law," meaning that both groups baptize the rule of humanistic lawyers. Both proclaim that God rules in history, but only through the tender mercies of covenant-breakers.

Because Kline's theology is opposed to the ideal of Christendom, it is opposed to the ideal of Christian social theory. He offered no social theory. The same is true of his disciples. They have no theory of history. Because they regard the Mosaic law and the civil sanctions that God imposed to defend it as an "intrusion" in the history of the covenant,²⁴ Kline and his followers can offer no theory of history either before or after the Mosaic era. History is inscrutable for them, and they insist that this is history's fault rather than theirs.

E. The Covenantal Structure of History

The biblical covenant is an integrated system. It cannot be accurately discussed apart from all five points. Sanctions link law and eschatology. God's sovereignty enforces this link through hierarchy. He is over the creation, yet He acts through the creation. He is different from the creation, yet He is manifested by the creation. The judicial basis of His wrath on covenant-breakers and their works is two-fold: (1) original sin; (2) the fact that the creation reflects God's moral character to all men. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against

24. The term "intrusion" is Kline's, which he applies to the entire Mosaic covenant. Kline, "Intrusion and Decalogue," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XVI (1953/54); Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 154-71.

all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18–20).²⁵

The system of historical sanctions described in Deuteronomy 28 is the basis of men's understanding of God's eternal character. This system is representational. *What happens in history is analogous to what happens in eternity: the extension of God's kingdom.* This extension is, first of all, visible in history. Second, it is based on the predictable outcome of covenantal sanctions. The kingdom of God rests on the moral authority of God's law.

To argue that the kingdom's extension in history is not predictably connected to men's corporate responses to God's law is to argue for the processes of history as either indeterminate (Kline) or perverse (Van Til). Van Til wrote that the future will bring persecution for Christians at the hands of ever more powerful covenant-breakers.

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for "the day of grace," the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.²⁶

Van Til's position is clear: as history develops, the persecution of Christians by the reprobates increases. The good get better, while the bad get worse. Good people therefore become less influential, while bad people become increasingly dominant. But everyone becomes more self-conscious ethically. Spiritual darkness spreads as this self-awareness spreads. Christians should therefore be thankful that they live today rather than later. Christians are tolerated today, he says; then, they will be persecuted. Only the discontinuous end of history

25. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

26. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), reprinted in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85.

will bring relief to Christians. This is the traditional amillennial view of the future. The good news of the gospel for a Christian theory of history supposedly is that history will end before things so bad that the gospel is completely overcome culturally.

In such a view, the final state beyond the grave represents a radical discontinuity from history. It is not simply that corruption does not inherit incorruption. All Christians agree on this principle.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . . Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 15:42–44, 50–54).

The divisive issue is whether history points *clearly and objectively* to God's objective victory in eternity. Paul's emphasis on discontinuity in I Corinthians 15 appears in the context of continuity: the rule of Christ in history. Specifically, Paul wrote of the first resurrection as a testimony to the final resurrection. In between these two supernatural events, "he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." This "he" is not Satan.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all

in all (I Cor. 15:21–28).²⁷

There are two passages in the Bible that amillennialists cannot deal with in a straight forward manner: Isaiah 65:17–23²⁸ and this one. These are the two great stumbling blocks for amillennialists. When these passages appear, amillennialists announce: “Let the mumbling begin.” In short, “when you stumble, mumble.”

What is significant for social theory in Van Til’s view of the coming eschatological discontinuity is the radical nature of the discontinuity in the inheritance/disinheritance process, time vs. eternity. At the end of time, history’s supposedly progressive disinheritance of covenant-keepers by covenant-breakers becomes the complete inheritance by covenant-keepers. For covenant-keepers, eternal victory is snatched out of the jaws of historical defeat. For covenant-breakers, the reverse is true. *In Van Til’s version of amillennialism, eternity is not an extension of covenantal history; on the contrary, it is the **great reversal** of covenantal history.* For Van Til, the New Covenant history’s system of cultural sanctions is exactly the opposite of what is described in Deuteronomy 28. This is why I call his theory of common grace ethically perverse.²⁹ My standard is Deuteronomy 28.

F. Epistemological Self-Consciousness

Van Til argued that history will reveal an increase in epistemological self-consciousness. I have argued that he really meant ethical self-consciousness.³⁰ Van Til’s theory of common grace raises an interesting question. If the covenant-breaker becomes more consistent with his God-denying presuppositions over time, then he must depart further and further from the truth. As an amillennialist, he argued that this would increase the covenant-breaker’s power. As a postmillennialist, I argue that this would decrease his power. But a more interesting question is this: To what extent is the truth-denying covenant-breaker ready and willing to abandon consistency for the sake of pragmatism? If Deuteronomy 28 is still in force in the New Covenant, then the consistent covenant-breaker is headed for comparative poverty. The cov-

27. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on first Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

28. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15.

29. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

30. *Idem*.

enant-keeper will excel him in productivity.

Look at the history of the Soviet Union if you want an example of covenant-breaking consistency run amok. Look at Red China's "Great Leap Forward," 1959–62: as many as 30 million people may have starved—the records are not clear.³¹ In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union collapsed in bankruptcy. Red China under Deng in the 1980s abandoned socialism for the sake of economic growth. This experiment worked. China has experienced historically unprecedented economic growth, 1979–2005. Men's desire for wealth has undermined socialism as an ideal, for they now recognize that socialism produces poverty. Socialism as a theory finally crashed and broke apart on the rocks of economic reality, 1988–1991. The world is no longer in the grip of the idea of socialism.³² When socialism faded as an ideal, it faded incredibly fast. Pragmatism overcame it almost overnight. The world looked at Gorbachev's Russia and concluded: "Loser." Nobody wants to be a loser. The Marxist promise of world domination foundered: in the financial markets, in Afghanistan, and in the Persian Gulf.³³ Communism's eschatology of victory has become a joke. Stripped of faith in Communism's positive, confident eschatology,³⁴ Communists were doomed to defeat. The movement's total failure was reflected almost overnight in the discount book bins of the West: books on Marxism became unsalable at retail prices. Publishers immediately ceased publishing them. Except in university book stores, where tenured radicals are still employed, we no longer find Marxist books offered for sale. That twentieth-century ideological war is over. Marxism died with a whimper, not a bang.

Left-wing Western humanist intellectuals have replaced their once-confident defenses of socialism with half-hearted affirmations of the concept of private ownership (with extensive qualifications).³⁵ They have grudgingly adopted more of the Bible's truth in the name of

31. The most detailed account in English is Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

32 32. Clarence B. Carson, *The World in the Grip of an Idea* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1979).

33. Iraq was a client state of the Soviet Union. Its defeat in early 1991 by the U.S. military broke the spell of the Soviet Union as a military powerhouse. In 1996, the Russian army was defeated by the army of the breakaway state of Chechenya. The Russian army has become a rag-tag force of unpaid beggars in the streets. Michael Specter, "In Triage, a Wasted Russia Sacrifices Veterans," *New York Times* (Jan. 19, 1997).

34. F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1974).

35. So have left-wing Christian intellectuals. See Appendix F: "The Economic Re-Education of Ronald J. Sider."

practical reality. *Pragmatism has overcome ideology*. The desire for the good life has overcome the desire for full-scale state control over the economy among the West's left-wing intelligentsia. Full-scale socialism—state ownership of the tools of production—became politically incorrect in the late 1980s, despite all of the opprobrium heaped by the political and academic establishments on England's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and America's President Ronald Reagan. Socialism has become a god that has visibly failed. No one today wants to be known as someone who worships in socialism's shrine. Socialism committed the ultimate sin for modern intellectuals: it became passé.

At the end of history, there will be a great satanic rebellion. "And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:9–10). This rebellion will be a rebellion against success, not failure. It will be a rebellion against an established Christian civilization, not against some marginalized ghetto culture. The whole point of Satan's rebellion is to rebel. To describe this rebellion as if it will be a huge majority movement against a tiny handful of poverty-stricken, politically impotent Christians makes no sense.³⁶

Covenant-breakers become less intellectually consistent over time, not more consistent. They become more pragmatic, more willing to subordinate themselves to a culture that delivers the goods—in the long run, Christian culture. Whenever they become more consistent, they produce the bad society, one that fails to deliver the goods. *They want the fruits of covenant-keeping more than they want the fruits of covenant-breaking*. This is why there can be social progress in history. Covenant-breakers will progressively recognize in the New Covenant what they recognized in the Old Covenant: "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what na-

36. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 525–28. (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

tion is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?)” (Deut. 4:5–8).³⁷

At the end, they will rebel. That is why it will be the end.³⁸ But to imagine that the good get weaker and the bad get stronger over time is to imagine a vain thing: the reversal—not merely the annulment—of Deuteronomy 28.

Conclusion

Deuteronomy 28 sets forth blessings and cursings. These sanctions are national covenant sanctions. They have not been annulled by the New Covenant. Deuteronomy 28 sets forth the hope of progress in history: obedience brings inheritance; disobedience brings disinheritance. Covenant-keepers will inherit in history if they obey. The decisive issue here is not power; it is obedience.

The objectivity of the blessings in history points to the power of common grace in history. Men who do not worship God nevertheless perceive the benefits of obeying God’s law. Men see with their eyes and acknowledge with their tongues that covenant-keeping brings more of the good things in life than covenant-breaking does. *The objectivity of God’s historical sanctions testifies to the reality of the objectivity of God’s eternal sanctions.* This is as it should be. It brings covenant-breakers under greater condemnation in history and eternity than if there were no predictability and objectivity to God’s covenant sanctions in history.

There are two ways of denying the continuing authority of God’s system of covenant sanctions in history. First, by denying that the New Covenant’s corporate sanctions are continuous with the Old. This denial needs to be proven exegetically, not assumed automatically. Second, by denying that covenant-breaking men will subjectively see and acknowledge the admittedly objective structure of covenantal sanctions in history. But this attributes to covenant-breaking men a degree of continuous commitment to holding down the truth in unrighteousness far greater than their desire for the good life, which can be obtained by conforming to the external requirements of God’s law. What we have seen throughout history is that covenant-breakers are repeatedly willing to conform to God’s external laws for the sake of gaining the covenant’s objective blessings. Admittedly, they would be-

37. Chapter 8.

38. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

come steadily more consistent with their own atheistic presuppositions if they could do so at zero price. But such consistency has a high price tag: economic stagnation and other unpleasant cursings. Men refuse to pay this price for too long, once they have seen that freedom works, elevating their rivals. When, at the Moscow Olympics in 1980, the Soviet elite saw what Western tourists owned, compared to the shoddy, pathetic goods the Soviet elite enjoyed, Communism's doom was sealed. Eleven years later, after an entombed nuclear reactor, a bankrupt economy, and a failed war in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union fell. It took only three days: August 19 to 21, 1991.

Deuteronomy 28 provides the basis of a self-consciously biblical social theory. But Deuteronomy 28 is rejected by modern Christian social theorists. This is why they refuse to provide anything explicitly biblical in the way of social theory. They baptize this or that humanist system. They reject the Pentateuch as a source of either the judicial content or the formal structure of social theory. "The Bible does not offer economic blueprints," they insist, which is why they are little more than cheerleaders for humanism rather than designers of a new civilization. "We're under grace, not law," they proclaim, which is why they are under humanist politicians, bureaucrats, and lawyers.

Christian social theory must accept the New Testament continuity of the corporate sanctions of Deuteronomy 8 and 28. Yet Christians who regard themselves as laying the intellectual foundations of an academic Christian worldview have rejected the Book of Deuteronomy. They have come to readers in the name of Christ, yet they have invariably proclaimed some sort of common-ground philosophy with humanism: natural law, political pluralism, Enlightenment social philosophy, God as Creator but not Savior, common grace. Every suggested common-ground system has led to the transfer of legal sovereignty and political power to humanists, who gladly accept the gift and then tighten the screws on Christians and the institutional church. Christian social theorists then return to the drawing board, vainly searching for yet another common-ground alternative to Deuteronomy 28, vainly expecting those who hate God to share with God's people the delegated sovereignty of power. Moses is not good enough for Christian social theorists, so they have instead invoked Aquinas, Grotius, Locke, Rousseau, Smith, Madison, Burke, Marx, Mill, and other assorted defenders of the social ideal of human autonomy. They have placed God in the dock by way of Moses. Then they wonder why neither the humanists nor the theonomists take them seriously.

CREDIT AS A TOOL OF DOMINION

The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).

The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail (Deut. 28:43–44).

The theocentric issue here is God as the source of both positive and negative economic sanctions. These sanctions lead either to the corporate inheritance or disinheritance of nations. The nations will become Israel's inheritance if Israel obeys God. Israel will become the owner of the other nations' capital. This will in turn elevate Israel's political power over them. In short, "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7).¹

All of this seems hard to believe. How could a tiny nation in Palestine become rich and powerful to this degree? The answer involves the theological doctrine of God's sovereignty over history, coupled with the corporate sanctions of Bible-revealed covenant law. Modern humanist man believes in neither doctrine. Neither does modern Christian man: Arminian, antinomian, and eschatologically escapist.²

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 67.

2. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

A. Trade, Credit, and Debt

When a person sells an item to another person, there is either an immediate exchange of present assets or the establishment of a debt-credit relationship. In the first case, one participant receives goods, services, or money from the other. The other party to the transaction receives the reciprocal. In the second case, one participant receives present assets in exchange for a promise to pay future assets.

Credit and debt are simultaneous and reciprocal. One person surrenders ownership of goods, or legal claims on future goods, or else he supplies present services. For this, he receives the other person's promise to pay future goods or services, or ownership of a third party's promise to provide goods or services in the future.

There is present value received on both sides of the transaction. *Promises to pay often possess present value.* The more trustworthy the promisor is, the greater the economic value of the promise, i.e., the lower the risk of default.

Because promises to pay possess present value, there is value for value exchanged. Neither party in the exchange is asked to surrender something for nothing. Neither party is expected to gain something for nothing. Each party exchanges in order to receive something of greater value to him than what he surrenders. But there is not an exchange of presently consumable wealth. One (or more) party in the transaction promises to pay future consumable wealth.

In most exchanges in a modern economy, there is an element of delayed payment. *Most exchanges have an element of debt and therefore credit.*³ Most exchanges are by check or credit card. Only a comparative handful of exchanges involve currency, which in fact means current payment. Very few exchanges are pure barter. Barter is characteristic of a low division of labor society, i.e., a backward society. Therefore, *the greater the division of labor, the greater the level of debt-credit.* The greater the division of labor, the greater the specialization of both production and consumption, i.e., the greater the number of choices. The greater the number of choices, the greater the wealth of the society. If credit produces wealth through thrift, then so does debt. Credit and debt are two sides of the same legal relationship. We can accurately say, then, that *debt produces wealth.* There is no way around this fact until such time as all electronic payments are cleared instantaneously.

3. Chapter 61.

The high per capita output of modern society rests on an extensive division of labor and therefore extensive debt-credit. Without debt/credit, most of the world's population would die within a few weeks.

There is a tendency for traditional critics of modern life to disparage debt. They may quote Paul: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8).⁴ But the debt discussed here, which Paul rejected, is not the debt of 30-day deferred payments (credit cards) or the period needed for checks to clear the banks. The debt in question is long-term debt. As to how long a debt period must be before critics begin to challenge its legitimacy, there is no way to say in advance.

Debt establishes a legal bond between creditor and debtor. A person who writes a check to buy something has established a legal relationship with the seller. This relationship lasts until the check clears and the seller's bank account is credited with the money. Then the legal relationship ends, unless there was some sort of guarantee with respect to the good or service.

A guarantee is another form of debt. When an automobile manufacturer sells a vehicle with a six-year or 100,000-mile (or kilometer) guarantee, the manufacturer becomes a debtor to the buyer. This is not usually called a debt by the common person, but surely the sales contract establishes a debt. There are people who claim to be opponents of debt who would accept the legitimacy of a performance guarantee of some kind. This indicates that they have not thought through the meaning of debt.

B. Debt and Subordination

We do not think of an automobile manufacturer as being subservient to the product buyers, but surely it is subservient. It has issued legal guarantees. From time to time, we read of vehicle recalls by an automobile company. The company offers to make a free repair of a faulty part. It costs millions of dollars just to inform the buyers of the recall, let alone make the repairs.

The buyers may be subservient to the automobile manufacturer. Buyers usually buy on credit. The credit may be issued by a bank, but it also may be issued by the manufacturer, who has set up a division for making loans. The extension of debt by the seller of goods is part of

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

the overall sales campaign. There may be more profit in the debt contract than in the sale of the product. A manufacturer may be using the product as a means of persuading buyers to accept debts.

So, for buyers and sellers, mutual promises over time may extend for years. Each party is subservient to the other in some way. Each has extended credit and accepted debt in order to facilitate the original transaction.

Then why does the text say that the nation that has extended credit is the master, and the nation that has accepted a debt is the servant? What have nations got to do with anything, analytically speaking? The transactions are all individual. In what way are national entities involved?

1. Corporate Blessings and Curses

God says clearly in these passages that the extension of credit is a means of dominion. There are winners and losers. These individual winners and losers belong to specific covenantal associations, called nations. Gains and losses, when added up, establish criteria for winning nations and losing nations, or rival groups within a nation. “The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low” (v. 43).

Who was the stranger in Mosaic Israel? The Hebrew word here is *geyr*. This was not a *nokree*, a part-time foreign visitor. This was a resident alien who was under the Mosaic law, including even some of the sacrificial restrictions.

Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood (Lev. 17:12).

And every soul that eateth that which died of itself, or that which was torn with beasts, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even: then shall he be clean (Lev. 17:15).

But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:34).

Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death:

the people of the land shall stone him with stones (Lev. 20:2).

And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death (Lev. 24:16).

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou (Deut. 5:14).

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates (Deut. 24:14).

Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge (Deut. 24:17).

Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:19).

Despite the protection offered to the stranger by the Mosaic law, Moses says here that it is a curse on Israel if strangers collectively are net lenders to the Israelites collectively. Strangers were to be treated well, but they were also to remain subservient to the Israelites. One means of establishing their subservience within Israel was by the Israelites' extension of credit to them. This was certainly the means of dominion with respect to geographically foreign nations: "Thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow" (v. 12).

2. Debt and Class Membership

There can be no question of God's assessment of credit and debt. First, it is better to lend than to borrow. "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7). Second, this is as true of nations as of individuals. Third, the extension of credit is a tool of dominion. If you wish to rule, become rich. If you wish to rule, extend credit.

What is not said here, but is surely implied, is that one means of becoming rich is to extend credit. The creditor gains present legal title to future goods by surrendering present title to present goods. He val-

ues the future goods promised by the debtor more than he values the present goods that he surrenders to the debtor in order to establish the creditor/debtor relationship. He presumably is more future-oriented than the debtor. He is therefore in a higher class.⁵

High present-orientation is not true of a debtor who is using the debt to build a business or gain an education or in some other way become more productive. He has adopted an economic position described by the Bible as subservient, but he does this temporarily for a purpose: to become a ruler later. This pathway from servant to ruler is basic to the entire Bible story, from Adam, who was required to obey God in the garden before becoming a ruler over the earth, to Joseph, who served Potiphar and the prison master, to Moses, God's servant, to Christ, as the archetype of servant become master.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11).

This is why debt for productive purposes is legitimate for a dominion-oriented covenant-keeper. Nevertheless, the debt-burdened covenant-keeper should acknowledge the reality of his subordinate condition during the period of the debt. He is paying for his future authority to rule by spending a period in bondage. This is not a cost-free arrangement.

Israel was a servant of Egypt, but at the exodus, Israel collected what was owed (Ex. 12:35–36). There are periods of subordination for a nation, and then there may be periods of dominance. During the nineteenth century, England was the world's money-lender and investor. The United States was a debtor nation to England. But the debt was productive debt. It was used to build canals, railroads, and other capital projects. After World War I bankrupted the nations of Europe,

5. On future-orientation as the basis of class position, see Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), ch. 3.

the United States became a creditor nation.

The same legal relationship—creditor/debtor—changes character when the debt is used for consumption. When an individual borrows money to purchase goods that depreciate, he consumes his capital. What capital? First, it is his ability to borrow, which is a capital asset. He uses it for present consumption rather than future production. Second, he consumes his future income, which is now owed to the creditor. This income could have been used to lend out or create a business, but it belongs to the creditor until the debt is repaid.

3. Capital and Choice

Long-term capital consumption is the road to poverty and servitude. This process reduces a person's future options, i.e., his choices. This is the meaning of poverty: few choices. Capital consumption reduces a person's ability to become more productive. If done in old age, it reduces one's economic legacy. We must consume in order to live. Some luxury spending is part of God's rewards in history: post-production, not pre-production. Charity is also positive. But only in emergency conditions should a person use borrowed money to provide charity, which is usually consumed rapidly. Charity creates long-term dependence on the donor by the recipient, unless it is designed to avoid this effect. Charity that establishes dependence is like credit that establishes dependence. It is a tool of dominion. Charity that is financed with borrowed money creates a hierarchy of dependence: from the creditor to the borrower to the recipient.

A nation whose members are expanding their credit through their thrift is extending its dominion. Properly put, a nation whose residents have extended credit, net, to residents of other nations have extended the dominion of their nation or society. As individuals acting in their own self-interest, they have extended their nation's corporate dominion. This market-produced fusion of personal dominion and corporate dominion was not widely understood prior to the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Conversely, Deuteronomy 28:43–44 indicates that a nation that is a net borrower may be under a long-term curse, or it may be involved in a capital-formation program. It depends on what the debt is being used for: consumption or capitalization.

This assessment of a corporate condition implies that the reason for individual indebtedness is influenced by a shared corporate world-

view and a shared corporate rate of time-preference. Individuals with in a group view dominion in much the same way: it is either worth sacrificing present consumption in order to attain or else not worth it. This means that corporate groups are more than the individuals who compose them. It also means that *methodological individualism is not biblical*. Three of the four covenants of God are corporate: familial, ecclesiastical, and civil. Confessions can also be national. “And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD” (Ex. 19:7–8). Covenant sanctions are corporate.

C. Clustering and Commerce

If the means of establishing a credit/debt relationship between individuals is trade, then so is the means of establishing a credit/debt relationship among groups, including nations.

Trade across borders is conducted between individuals: across national borders, across state borders, across city borders, and across the street. Despite the fact that trade is between individuals, trade has corporate effects within borders. A familiar proverb says, “Birds of a feather flock together.” So do people. People with a shared worldview tend to adopt similar spending and saving habits. These habits create corporate patterns of thrift.

In the late twentieth century, market researchers discovered the existence of a series of comprehensive, statistically significant correlations among people who live in the same zip code, i.e., a postal delivery neighborhood. These correlations are lifestyle correlations. Over 60 separate postal code lifestyle classifications were known to exist in the United States in the 1990s. These correlations are geographical. Marketers make accurate decisions in terms of these geographical correlations. This phenomenon has been called *clustering*.⁶ To limit a discussion of trade to pairs of individuals would lead the analyst to overlook clustering. This clustering can be intensely local. It can also be international.

Most of the time, the extent of clustering is not perceived by residents. While most people can recognize differences of neighborhood in-

6. Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustered World: How We Live, What We Buy, and What it all Means About Who We Are* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000).

come and such neighborhood phenomena as mowed lawns, painted homes, and other aesthetic identification markers, the techniques of scientific surveying reveal subtle differences that residents do not consciously recognize, such as favored brands of products or favored forms of recreation.

Because such detailed and objective local distinctions can be identified scientifically and verified by the results of test marketing by profit-seeking companies, local characteristics can accurately be said to exist. There are also well-known characteristics of nations that residents inside and outside readily acknowledge. The old joke about purgatory being a world in which Germans are the policemen, the French run the bureaucracies, Italians own the banks, India runs the transportation system, and the English are the chefs, is amusing because national characteristics are widely recognized. As time goes on, the Americans will replace Germans as the policemen in the joke. The Japanese will provide the humor.

Racial and national characteristics provide the most familiar distinguishing marks of "them vs. us." People identify themselves as members of a group that provides them with meaning, security, and a sense of belonging to an inter-generational group that offers personal significance. Less meaningful in industrial societies are tribal distinctions that once were matters of life and death. Clan membership used to be significant for survival in Scotland, but no longer. And, because of the effects of humanism, theological confession has been relegated to official insignificance in the civil realm. Yet humanism proclaims an intensely theological confession regarding the nature of God, man, law, causation, and time.

Trade between individuals can and does result in corporate assessments regarding corporate winning and losing, kingdom-building and kingdom-surrendering. The assessments in Deuteronomy 28 regarding the comparative success of Israel among the nations points to the possibility of corporate progress over time. Trade by individuals is rarely discussed in the Mosaic law, other than in the context of oppression or sabbath-breaking. The personal benefits of trade are rarely mentioned. Yet the national effects of debt are discussed here in terms of covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. The Bible's main passages that discuss economic results—Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28—begin with collectives, not individuals.

The text makes it clear that it is better to extend credit than to amass debt. Yet to extend credit is to indebt the recipient. The context

of these passages is the exercise of lawful rule. The passage discusses international politics, not wealth-creation. It discusses the results of a series of voluntary exchanges between sellers and buyers. The corporate results are national debt, meaning national subordination, and national credit, meaning national domination. Out of millions of politically unplanned, mutually agreed-upon voluntary exchanges comes national servitude or dominion. Out of many, two.

How can this be? How can a series of unplanned individual exchanges produce long-term corporate results are described here as covenantal curses and blessings? Because of causation in history. *Social causation is covenantal*. It has to do with confession and life style, with word and deed. The confession and lifestyle that God mandates in Deuteronomy rests on His national covenant. Those who had covenanted with God—Israelites—were distinguished from resident aliens and residents in other lands. The individual covenant is structured so as to produce dominion for God’s corporate kingdom. So are the familial and ecclesiastical covenants. They are of one piece. They are a “package deal.” All work together to extend God’s kingdom in history. (I deliberately use the present tense.) If a society abandons one of the pieces, it has compromised its status as covenantal under God.

This means that *God’s covenants capitalize the kingdom of God*. They create a lifestyle that is favorable to economic growth. This means that the laws of the covenants promote personal thrift, hard work, careful planning, honest money, private property, and entrepreneurship. Yet the actual words of the four covenants do not require the oath-taker to pursue allegiance to most of these economic means to the larger end, namely, the extension of God’s kingdom in history. The eighth commandment does require the oath-taker to forego theft.⁷ This is an affirmation of private property. The tenth commandment against covetousness reinforces this affirmation. While adherence to these two commandments by covenant-keepers does extend God’s kingdom in history, there is no mention of this goal in the decalogue.

D. New Testament Teaching

The New Testament’s clearest statement with respect to lending is found in Jesus’ parable of the talents.

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012) Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 28.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:24-30).

The parable is about the stewardship of a man's God-given resources in history. The man who buried his talents, returning nothing extra, had misunderstood the biblical principle of *value-added living*. He was criticized harshly by the owner, who told him that he should have lent the money at usury.

This passage legitimizes banking and interest. The money returned to the owner should have been more than the money delivered because interest was available to the risk-averse steward. By forfeiting any interest return, the steward cheated the owner of a legitimate return on the use of his money.⁸

Conclusion

God tells His people to become creditors to covenant-breakers. The alternative is for covenant-breakers to become creditors to covenant-keepers. This is evidence that debt and credit are inescapable concepts. It is never a question of avoiding credit/debt. It is a question of who extends credit to whom.

As a people, covenant-keepers are to run balance of payments surpluses, i.e., sell more to covenant-breakers than covenant-breakers buy from them. Covenant-keepers are to lend money to covenant-breakers. How can this take place? Because covenant-breakers spend more of their money on goods and services sold by covenant-keepers than they spend on goods and services sold by covenant-breakers. The difference in the total is lent by covenant-keepers to covenant-breakers.

8. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

Isn't this a way to enable covenant-breakers to enjoy additional income without present production? Yes. The idea behind this arrangement is that covenant-breakers are more present-oriented than covenant-keepers are. They buy consumption goods now. Covenant-keepers thereby become owners of foreign capital, reaping a future return by lending in the present. *By extending credit, they purchase the future productivity of covenant-breakers.* This is another way by which God extends His rule over the earth in history. He allows His people to act as His stewards, purchasing the future output of covenant-breakers. Covenant-keepers buy back the capital of covenant-breakers. They establish a legal claim to an ever-growing proportion of the world's output.

This passage, as with all of Deuteronomy 28, establishes the principle of methodological covenantalism.⁹ There are economic issues that are not dealt with accurately on the assumption that we must begin our economic analysis with either the autonomous individual or the corporate state.

9. Chapter 68.

THE COVENANT OF PROSPERITY

Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do. Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day (Deut. 29:9–15).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the king of the covenant. God called His people to come before Him to ratify His covenant. This has to do with point four of the covenant: oath.¹ There is no doubt that He initiated this public ratification meeting. They were to respond to His call. They did not call Him; He called them.

A. God's Call to Prosperity

The positive sanction of prosperity is assured on the basis of covenant-keeping. This was an inter-generational covenant: “Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day.” Those who would later in-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

herit from this generation would be bound by the same covenantal stipulations. That is, *the stipulations remained with the inheritance*. The property could not be alienated from the legal conditions that had established the original right of inheritance. This was not a seed law or a land law.² It was the law of the covenant: past, present, and future. This includes the church and every nation in covenant with God through the church. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43).

“Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.” These words constituted a call to prosperity. This was a call to dominion. It was a call to added responsibility. God expects more from those to whom He has given more than from those who have received less (Luke 12:48).³

Because we live in a culture that attributes enormous importance to prosperity, we may find it difficult to believe that men need to be called to prosperity. Nevertheless, there are cultures in which envy is dominant. To own too much is to invite reprisals. The very idea of seeking prosperity is anathema in such cultures. To set oneself apart through wealth is regarded as a transgression of fundamental cultural values. This is especially true in primitive cultures.⁴ This is what keeps them primitive.

A similar mentality has been pervasive in American fundamentalist circles for over a century. Economic success is considered this-worldly. To pursue it is to risk being identified as a person whose reference points are temporal rather than eternal. The same kind of hostility to wealth can be found in liberal and neo-evangelical academic circles. History professor Ronald Sider’s best-selling book of the 1970s, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), was a tract for its time. Two decades later, however, the allure of such tracts had diminished considerably. I can understand why Sider re-wrote his.⁵ The lure of a well-funded retirement portfolio is much greater today. A retirement portfolio of half a million dollars is considered too small by professors who were undergraduate cheerleaders for Sider in 1977.

This passage makes it plain that prosperity is a valid goal. This is

2. See Appendix J.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

4. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, [1966] 1970), pp. 41, 295, 304, 305, 330.

5. See Appendix F: “The Economic Re-Education of Ronald J. Sider.”

why God has attached positive economic sanctions to His law. Obey Him, and you will tend to become wealthy. This tendency may be offset by uncharacteristic adversity, such as chronic sickness, or by a calling⁶ that gains little monetary income, such as foreign missions. But, on the whole, God's people are supposed to be *abnormally prosperous* because they are to be *abnormally obedient*. God rewards obedience. This means that covenant-keepers are to exercise dominion in history.

Wealth is a tool of dominion. As such, it is a legitimate goal. As surely as a tradesman seeks to own the tools that will increase his productivity, so should Christians seek to obey God's revealed laws. God's positive sanctions will pour down on those societies that obey Him. Men thus rewarded will find it easier to extend their influence into new areas or deeper into their own areas of service. Their wealth will enable them to extend the kingdom of God in history. Wide spread poverty is a social curse, not a blessing. It will be the disciples of Satan, not the disciples of God, who will be impoverished as history unfolds.

B. Future-Orientation

The text prophesies of future generations that will come under the covenant of prosperity. God was making a covenant with them, too. They might not ratify it nationally in the same way that this generation was being asked to ratify it. God would call them together to renew it every seven years (Deut. 31:10–12).⁷ He might not call them to proclaim verbally their allegiance to Him. They would not have to. Their possession of the inheritance would be proof enough that the terms of the covenant still were binding. The formal ratification by the conquest generation would judicially represent the heirs.

If prosperity was to come to the conquest generation, why not also to each subsequent inheriting generation, as long as each would continue to uphold the terms of the covenant? The oath was binding across the generations. The covenant possessed continuity over time. Its authority would be demonstrated continually by the presence of visible sanctions. The inheritance itself was one of these sanctions.

It should have been obvious to everyone that, over time, Israel's population would increase in response to their covenantal obedience. A fixed supply of land in the face of a growing population would guar-

6. Calling: the most important work you can do in which you would be most difficult to replace.

7. Chapter 75.

antee smaller plots for each succeeding generation.⁸ So, the inheritance was more than rural land. The economic inheritance was mainly the ability of covenant-keeping families to generate increased income. *What was being guaranteed was not land but prosperity.* God had delivered into the hands of Israel the secrets of amassing wealth. Would they keep the law and extend the kingdom grant? Or would they rebel?

God was setting before them a unique gift: the ability to create wealth. This process of wealth-creation could extend down through the ages. God was telling Israel that wealth was *supposed* to extend through the generations. This was their inheritance. It was intended to ratify the covenant: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁹

God was also setting before them *a theory of history that was both linear and progressive.* They could extend the covenant over centuries. This kingdom grant was theirs. It would provide their heirs with blessings. These blessings would testify to the continuing presence of God and to the continuity of His covenant. Israel’s future would not be cyclical. They would not inevitably lose whatever God had given them. In fact, they could not permanently lose it, just so long as they did not break the covenant through lack of faith and lack of obedience. God was giving them a crucial tool of dominion: *long-term future orientation.* He was giving them the psychological basis of an upper-class mentality: *faith in the future.* It is this mentality that provides men with a way out of poverty.¹⁰

Neither linear time nor the concept of compound growth was common in any other ancient society. The concept of cyclical time was all-pervasive in the ancient world. What God was telling Israel was that *continuity through time is provided by the covenant itself.* A man’s efforts today can lead to ever-greater wealth for his heirs. But these efforts must not be limited to thrift and technological experimentation. They must also be ethical. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words,

8. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24:G.

9. Chapter 22.

10. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 48–54.

which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:4–9).¹¹

Conclusion

God called Israel to prosperity. He told them that their covenant ratification would extend to other people who were not present on that day. The covenant would carry down through the generations. The inheritance would constitute proof of the continuing validity of the covenant.

This was a new mental outlook for the ancient world: linear history and progressive history. History would be affected by what Israel would do that day. History would be shaped by the covenant. From Abraham before them to unnamed multitudes after them, the covenant would bind together the generations of Israel. This covenant would include growing wealth. God was not offering them per capita economic stagnation. He was offering them per capita economic growth. Prosperity means expansion: of wealth, of population, of dominion, of the kingdom grant.

11. Chapter 15.

CAPTIVITY AND RESTORATION

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:1–5).

The theocentric focus of this prophecy is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the covenant.¹ He promised to preserve the inheritance of Israel, despite the sanction of captivity. This is part of the inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.²

A. A Prophecy of Captivity

Moses made it clear to the generation of the conquest that there would eventually be a time of captivity and scattering in Israel's future. This was an aspect of God's negative historical sanctions. This would not constitute a break in the covenant. On the contrary, it would visibly confirm the covenant. The covenant's authority, like God's, exten-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2010), ch. 3.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

ded beyond the geographical boundaries of Canaan.

Immediately prior to Moses' death, God reconfirmed His prophecy regarding the future defection of Israel: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day. Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods" (Deut. 31:16–18).³ Without the promise of restoration, this passage would have constituted a prophecy of the cutting off of Israel. Moses warned them: "For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands" (Deut. 31:29). Nevertheless, there remained hope: "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people" (Deut. 32:43).

This was a land law.⁴ It applied to Israel as a holy nation in the land where God dwelled. It was a testimony against the theology of the ancient world: local gods that dwelt in regions. This was an affirmation of the universality of God's rule. This universality would be demonstrated by the captivity of an entire nation and its subsequent return to the Promised Land.

B. Outside the Land

The inheritance included the land, but it was not limited to the land. This was why God could threaten Israel with removal from the land. He would demonstrate His authority over them by removing them from the geographical confines of Israel.

This was a unique outlook in the ancient world, where local gods were tied to the soil of the family or city. The land was the place of res-

3. Chapter 76.

4. On land laws, see Appendix J.

idence of the gods. The mark of their defeat was the military defeat of the city and its destruction or captivity.⁵ There could be no continuity as a people apart from the religious rites, especially rites of fire, associated with the worship of family and city gods.⁶ Israel, however, was told that at some point, the nation would be sent into captivity outside the land. The people would nevertheless retain their unique status as God's people. They would maintain a separate existence abroad. They would eventually return to the land.

The restoration of the land would be a mark of their inheritance. This promise tied them to the land because it acknowledged that *God's covenant involved more than land*. Because it was more extensive than the land, their removal from land became a proof of the covenant's authority, just so long as there would be restoration. This is what God promised.

The mark of a broken covenant would be the dispersion of the Jews without restoration. If God ever extinguished the fires of the temple and refused to rekindle them, this would mean the permanent disinheritation of Israel. If captivity was not followed by a return to the land, then the continuity provided by the covenant no longer was in force. This *promise of restoration* implied a *means of disinheritation*, should Israel and the temple not be restored to the land. This is why Jesus' prophecy of the transfer of the kingdom to a new nation (Matt. 21:43) constituted an assault on the temple and the nation. He was saying that the Jews would be forcibly removed from the land and not allowed to return. This took place on a preliminary basis in A.D. 70 and finally in A.D. 135, after Bar Kochba's rebellion.

The creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 has been seen by dispensationalists as a partial ratification of the Old Covenant's promises in the New Covenant era. "In the twentieth century," write the editors of the *New Scofield Bible*, "initial steps toward a restoration of the exiled people to their homeland have been seen."⁷ What has not yet been seen is the restoration of temple sacrifices. This makes it difficult for dispensationalists definitively to connect the modern state of Israel with this passage in Deuteronomy. The hope for restored temple sacrifices is an important motivation for popular dispensational authors to

5. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book III, Chapter XV, p. 207.

6. *Ibid.*, I:III, pp. 25–33.

7. *The New Scofield Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 251n.

predict—and even finance—the rebuilding of the temple, despite the fact that the thirty-five acre site of the old temple is now occupied by a Muslim mosque.⁸ They fully understand that by promoting this, they are risking war between Muslims and Jews—all the better to create the conditions for Armageddon, three and a half years after the not-so-secret Rapture. They also know that they are promoting the restoration of the temple's sacrifices. I suppose that the thought of Christians' contributing money for the restoration of temple sacrifices is no more appalling—and no less—than the idea that the future kingdom era of millennial blessings will be Jewish, with temple sacrifices throughout. “. . . [T]his interpretation is in keeping with God's prophetic program for the millennium. The Church is not in view here, but rather it is a prophecy for the consummation of Israel's history on earth.”⁹ The implication is obvious: temple sacrifices, as “memorials,”¹⁰ will replace the cross of Jesus Christ as the Christian memorial. Then on what basis will Passover not replace the Lord's Supper? Christian tradition perhaps, or maybe the high cost of hotel space in Jerusalem, but surely not theology. The Book of Hebrews is unlikely to play any major role in the future millennial kingdom, except possibly in memorial services for the Church Age.

C. Cursing and Blessing

The promised restoration of Israel would not only involve blessings on the people of Israel; it would also involve cursings on Israel's enemy. Both sanctions would still be in operation. Payday would come for those gentile nations that served as God's rods of iron by placing Israel under the yoke. “And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as

8. Don Stewart and Chuck Missler, *The Coming Temple: Center Stage for the Final Countdown* (Orange, California: Dart, 1991); Thomas Ice and Randall Price, *Ready to Rebuild: The Imminent Plan to Rebuild the Last Days Temple* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1992).

9. *New Scofield Bible*, p. 884n.

10. C. I. Scofield called these offerings “memorials.” *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 890n.

he rejoiced over thy fathers” (Deut. 30:7–9).

Consider the implications of these verses. Because of Israel’s rebellion, God would raise up pagan nations that would bring negative corporate sanctions against Israel. Isaiah announced this in advance: “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings?” (Isa. 10:5–8). God would raise up Assyria, a nation that would boast in its own power. But in that boast, Assyria would seal its doom.

Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood. Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire (Isa. 10:12–16).

God’s love of Israel was the basis of His corporate negative sanctions against Israel. “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (Ps. 89:30–32). This was a mark of Israel’s sonship. “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee” (Deut. 8:5). What God would do with Israel, the Israelites were to do to their own sons. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Prov. 13:24). But this was not to give comfort to the rod. The implement is never greater than the user.

The issue, then, was obedience. The restoration of Israel would come, but only on condition of obedience. "If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (Deut. 30:10). If not, then not. Without obedience, Israel would be transformed into a rod that God would use against His newly adopted sons, the gentiles. *This reversal of covenantal roles took place definitively at the crucifixion of Christ.* Then came the stoning of Stephen. Then came the persecution of the Jerusalem church. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). Finally came the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The marked the final cutting off of Old Covenant Israel.¹¹ With the extinguishing of the temple's fire, the Old Covenant ceased forever. The fire was applied to the temple; Roman soldiers burned it. The covenantal roles were reversed, gentile vs. Jew. The prophecy of Isaiah regarding Israel's kindling of Assyria was reversed in A.D. 70; the rod would itself be consumed: "Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day; And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth" (Isa. 10:16–18). The light of the New Israel has served as a flame. The church is now the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). The church inherited Old Covenant Israel's status as God's son, both to suffer early chastisement by the jealous older brother, who was now disinherited, and to serve as God's fire in history.

Conclusion

This prophecy continued the theme of sanctions: section four of Deuteronomy. The negative sanction of dispersal and captivity would be overcome by Israel's return to the land. The positive sanction of regathering would offset the negative sanction of removal from the land. There would be covenantal continuity for Israel outside the land. This

11. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

continuity would be demonstrated for all to see by God's restoration of Israel to her inheritance inside the land. Israel would maintain her national identity by means of the covenant and through hope of restoration. The discontinuity of dispersion would be healed by the greater continuity of restoration. The continuity of the covenant would overcome the discontinuity of dispersion. If it ever failed in this regard, the Old Covenant would come to an end.

LIFE AND DOMINION

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:19–20).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the cosmic judge of life and death. This is an aspect of sanctions: point four of the covenant.¹ But the promise is to the seed: inheritance. This is point five.²

A. Long Life in the Promised Land

God here invoked the language of a covenant lawsuit. For any capital crime, there must be two witnesses (Deut. 19:15). He called heaven and earth to testify as His witnesses. In this covenant lawsuit, God's witnesses for either the prosecution or the defense were heaven and earth: the creation. He is the creator of heaven and earth. God is sovereign in His court. This was not a seed law.³ The New Testament's invocation of the promise of long life on earth as an application of the promised Mosaic positive sanction of long life in the land (Eph. 6:3) makes clear that this was not a land law.

These words conclude the fourth section of the Book of Deuteronomy, which is the section dealing with sanctions. Section five begins

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2010), ch. 3.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

3. On seed laws, see Appendix J.

with Deuteronomy 31.⁴ What is important in this regard is the nature of the judicial sanctions: life and death. *Death is the ultimate form of disinheritance.* He who is not alive cannot inherit. Life is the starting point of inheritance. We have here evidence of the unbreakable link between point four of the biblical covenant model and point five. *Sanctions are inseparably linked covenantally to inheritance and disinheritance.* To separate the discussion of point four from point five, and vice versa, inevitably produces a partial covenant theology.

Verse 20 contains these words regarding God: “he is thy life, and the length of thy days.” He is the source of long life, which is a universally honored positive sanction. But for Israel, long life was not sufficient. The goal was life in the land. The promise of long life had a goal, “that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.” The good life was life in the land.

Here again, we see the connection between point four and point five. Long life is a positive sanction. It is the basis of the inheritance. Dead men do not inherit. But is long life sufficient? The text specifies that the additional years given to God’s covenantally faithful servants were to be used to extend Israel’s dominion over the land. Dominion was the goal. The land was the arena. Long life was the means. But what was their tool of dominion? God’s law. God called them to obedience (v. 20).

In the passage immediately preceding this one, God set forth the threat of negative sanctions. “But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it” (Deut. 30:17–18). To worship false gods is to commit suicide, both personal and corporate. God threatened Israel with the sanction of removal from the land. Israel’s arena of dominion would be removed. To escape this negative sanction, God called on them to choose life.

This was a this-worldly frame of reference. It was also immediate. This was not pie in the sky, bye and bye. “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?”

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, p. 96.

Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (vv. 11–14). Because the law was close to them—imbedded in their thoughts—the covenant's earthly blessings were also close to them. God announced this to a generation that was about to inherit the land.

B. Compound Economic Growth

The theme of compound economic growth is basic to the Book of Deuteronomy. As the fifth book in the Pentateuch, its theme is succession or inheritance. That is, its theme is the future. *God promised Israel that the nation would persevere and prosper if it remained faithful to God's law.* This perseverance was not merely a matter of linear succession; it was a matter of dominion. Dominion requires population growth. It requires personal wealth. It therefore requires compound economic growth. This is what God promised: "And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers" (v. 9). But the basis of this process is obedience, both internal and external: "If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (v. 10). To maintain the kingdom grant, Israel had to obey.

Here God promised Israel expanding wealth. In verse 16, He promised biological reproduction. God therefore promised to match population growth with economic growth. Population growth was not a threat to them. It would not produce increasing misery as the number of mouths increased without a comparable increase in the food to feed them. Nowhere in the Bible can we find a warning of increasing numbers of covenant-keeping people who are suffering hunger as a result of their increased numbers. Hunger, yes, but always in the context of an external imposition of various sanctions of death.

Men are called to choose life. The more who survive, the longer they can reproduce. The more they reproduce, the faster the growth of population. By choosing life in the context of God's covenant, men thereby choose growth. They choose dominion. They also choose re-

sponsibility, for with blessings and power come responsibility (Luke 12:48–49).⁵ The extension of covenant-keeping man's dominion is the goal of the God's system of sanctions.

The modern intellectuals' hatred of both population growth and economic growth is indicative of a radical hatred of life, man, and God. That the legalization of abortion has accompanied the various zero-growth movements is not surprising. The humanist world is a *culture of death* because it is a culture built on a lie: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).⁶ *This invocation of man's autonomy is suicidal.* "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36). Two centuries of unprecedented economic growth and population growth have disturbed many God-haters who fear hell. They fear God's final judgment, as well they should. They see that compound growth in a finite universe points to one of two things: the end of growth or the end of time. Seeking to avoid dealing with the latter, they deny the legitimacy of the former. *The war on growth is a war on God. It is a war on man's dominion.*

It is the sign of a terrible compromise with evil that we now find Christians—generally academics who have spent their lives in humanist institutions—echoing this anti-growth propaganda. Christians today are bombarded by alien messages from morning to night when they participate in the world around them. They pick up the clichés of humanists who dominate culture today. Christians have not been taught to think biblically, meaning covenantally, meaning judicially. They cannot sort out the wheat of common grace from the chaff of ethical rebellion. They pick up slogans from God-haters who are at war with the dominion covenant. They internalize bits and pieces of an alien worldview that is at war with the biblical doctrines of God, man, law, sanctions, and time. They do not recognize that they have joined the enemies of God. They have not self-consciously switched sides. Some have, of course: wolves in sheep's clothing.⁷ But the typical Christian layman is stumbling through life in a kind of intellectual fog. He does not recognize his immediate surroundings: the bog of humanism.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

6. Chapter 21.

7. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996). (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

Conclusion

God calls on men to choose life. This passage makes it clear that at least four things are involved in choosing life: longer life spans, a greater number of heirs, greater wealth, and an arena of service to God. Also implied are greater authority, dominion, and responsibility. This is the meaning of biblical inheritance: an increase in the tools of dominion both individually and corporately and a commensurate increase in both personal and corporate responsibility for exercising dominion.

The positive sanction of life is contrasted with the negative sanction of death. But death in this context—the conquest of Canaan—meant removal from the Promised Land. Death meant life outside the land. It meant life under another nation’s gods and governments. Death meant the tyranny of pagan idolatry because idolatry produces death. “But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it” (vv. 17–18). Idolatry is the way of spiritual death. Spiritual death leads to historical disinheritance.

Modern Christians, especially academic theologians, do not believe this. They insist that this historical cause-and-effect relationship ended with advent of the New Covenant. They are persuaded that historical cause and effect is either random or perverse. Either there is no relationship between idolatry and wealth or else the relationship is perverse: evil prospers and righteousness starves. Both views are antithetical to the concept of dominion by covenant, or at least dominion by God’s covenant. Both views proclaim that dominion is by man’s covenant. Because covenant-breaking man is dominant culturally today, the defender of random cause and effect proclaims the long-term victory of evil-doers by default.⁸ In partial contrast is the defender of perverse cause and effect in history. He insists that covenant-breaking man extends dominion because covenant-breaking man possesses the wealth formula: power religion.⁹

In stark contrast to both views is dominion religion, which proclaims dominion by God’s covenant. It rests on faith in the continuing

8. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 4; cf. North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

applicability of God's law. Specifically, it rests on the Book of Deuteronomy, which sets forth God's law, God's sanctions, and the visible triumph of God's people in history. Deuteronomy tells men to choose life. This does not mean life lived in the shadows of history or life lived in a pietistic ghetto, meaning life lived in fear of the enemies of God, who supposedly hold the keys to the ghetto's door. It means a life of progressive dominion over the creation.

Part V: Succession/Inheritance (31–33)

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COURAGE AND DOMINION

And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed. And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you. Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed (Deut. 31:4–8).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the sanctions-bringer in history. As such, we would expect this passage to be part of the fourth section of the book. Yet those commentators who have seen a five-part pattern in Deuteronomy identify chapter 31 as the beginning of the fifth section.¹ Kline treated this section as Moses' last testament. The passage begins with Moses' announcement of his great age: "And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me,

1. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 135–49; Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Pros per: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 5.

Thou shalt not go over this Jordan” (v. 2). In this transition passage, Moses spoke first to the nation, but then he spoke to Joshua. He was in the process of transferring his mantle of leadership to Joshua. The mark of this leadership was courage.

A. “Forward . . . March!”

This was a land law.² It invoked the immediately concluded wars against the kings on the wilderness side of the Jordan River. It referred to the immediate conquest. The assurance of specific victory over Canaan was tied to God’s promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:16).

Deuteronomy is the book of covenantal inheritance. The Book of Joshua marks a new covenant: the book of the conquest. First, God gave title to the Promised Land to Israel. Joshua would soon lead the people to impose the transfer. What Moses told Joshua in his last testament, the representatives of the nation repeated to Joshua after Moses’ death. I cite the whole passage in order to prove my point. The language of courage is the language of conquest.

Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with

2. On land laws, see Appendix J.

thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:1–9).

Notice the judicial frame of reference: “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (v. 7).

The imagery here is based on a battlefield formation. The leader marches at the head of his troops. He is out in front. He is the point man, fully visible to the enemy and the target of the archers. Normally, this would be suicidal. The senior military commander stays at the rear, protected by his troops. But this image is different. *The leader is visible as the point man*. At his side there is no one. His officers and troops are behind him. This leader has his flanks unprotected. He can be blindsided if his troops fail to rush forward to protect him. Yet this passage indicates that the warrior who marches at the head of the army is not to look to the right or the left around him—at his undefended flanks, in other words. He is not to worry about his flanks. He is to keep his eyes on the enemy who is in front of him. He is also not to look to the right or the left as a way to escape. He is to march forward, into the valley of the shadow of death. He should fear no evil.

On what basis was Joshua expected to take this forward position? Only because God was serving as his senior commander. If Joshua and Israel pleased God, they would not have to worry about their flanks. They could march forward in safety and therefore great confidence. How could they please God? By obedience. God had promised to impose the negative sanctions of the law on their enemies. “And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you” (Deut. 31:5). This is why the people repeated Moses’ words to Joshua: he was to stay within the narrow boundaries of God’s law. His flanks and the army’s flanks would be undefended apart from his obedience to the law.

The military strategy appropriate to such a formation is called a frontal assault. It assumes that the army can penetrate the enemy’s defenses by overpowering them. Such a strategy assumes overwhelming offensive superiority. It is not an appropriate tactic for a smaller army, let alone a guerilla band. Only if a smaller army has either some remarkable superiority in weaponry or the advantage of surprise should it attempt a frontal assault. Yet the language of Joshua 1 points to a

frontal assault.

Contrary to higher critics of the Bible, Israel had a very large army: 600,000 men. In addition, God was on their side. A frontal assault was the appropriate formation. It would strike terror into the hearts of their enemies. Here was a leader who did not fear the arrow, the stone, the javelin, or the chariot.

B. Narrow Is the Way

The covenant's sanctions are positive and negative. In a war, the positive sanctions for one army are negative sanctions for its rival. God had already promised them victory over future enemies that had temporarily conquered them. "And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee" (Deut. 30:7). Therefore, how much more would He impose negative sanctions on the Canaanites, whose prophetic time had come (Gen. 15:16)!

The success of Israel's military strategy depended on ethics. Achan's secret theft of Jericho's banned goods led to the defeat of Israel at Ai (Josh. 7). The stoning of Achan, his family, and his animals led to the victory over Ai (Josh. 8). Yet even in this case, the strategy was not based on a frontal assault. It was based on deception, whose success in turn rested on Israel's previous defeat. Achan's sin had altered the army's strategy.

The path to victory was a path of righteousness. City by city, Israel was to conquer Canaan. The nation was told to obey the law—all of the law—in order to achieve military victory. The path that mattered most was the ethical path. The law hedged them in. They were not to stray outside the boundaries of the law: either to the right or the left.

In a sense, this is also a matter of military strategy: the massed formation. The offensive army overpowers its enemy because it applies massive force to one section of the enemy's defensive line. The offensive army seeks a breakthrough in the enemy's line, which will split the enemy force into two uncoordinated and fearful smaller armies. This is the strategy of divide and conquer. The enemy commander keeps reserves for just this purpose: to send them into a breach in the line. To keep his army from breaking apart, he risks the lives of his reserves.

The massed formation of God's army is also a tightly knit formation. The wedge of the leader and his troops smashes into the enemy's defensive line, hopefully at its weakest point. The ethical imagery of

the *straight and narrow path* is tied to the imagery of a *military formation*. The offensive army does not dissipate its force by spreading across the battlefield. It concentrates its force like a battering ram. This is the imagery of the narrow path. When covenant-keepers wander off this path into sins of all kinds, the army of the Lord is weakened and scattered across the battlefield. *It is men's adherence to God's law that keeps them in a tight formation*. Jesus warned: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13–14).³

C. Optimism and Victory

The language of this passage is military language. This was appropriate: Moses was passing leadership to Joshua, who would soon lead the nation into battle. Joshua was to be above all a military leader. Almost all of the Book of Joshua deals with the conquest and the subsequent partitioning of the inheritance in Canaan. Moses did his best to impart to the next generation the confidence which his own generation had lacked. It was their excessive fear of their enemies' sanctions and their insufficient of fear of God's sanctions that had kept them wandering for four decades in the wilderness. Moses had spent the final third of his life herding fearful sheep who kept wandering off ethically.

The context of this passage is the coming invasion of Canaan. The Israelites' confidence was to rest on two things: (1) their adherence to God's commandments (v. 5) and (2) His promise to previous generations (v. 7). Man's obedience and God's promises are linked covenantally.⁴ But if this is true of the life-and-death matter of warfare, how much more is it true of the other areas of life!

This passage sets forth a fundamental principle of entrepreneurship: *knowledge is not sufficient; there must also be action*. A person who has accurate knowledge of the future must act in terms of this knowledge if his knowledge is to give him an advantage over those who do not know. In fact, knowledge without action can place the person in a worse position. He is paralyzed with fear of the future, which is why

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 17.

4. Chapter 10.

he cannot act. The person who is unaware of the future but who makes decisions that will produce profits in the future is better off than the person who knew, but who feared to act. *Ignorance is bliss compared to knowledge accompanied by fear-induced paralysis.*

Shakespeare places into Julius Caesar's mouth the phrase, "Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once." The man who fears the future is at a disadvantage with a man who sees it and does not fear it. He may even be at a disadvantage with a man who does not see it and does not fear it. *The fear of failure hampers the righteous man.* This fear of risk and failure is part of the West's folk wisdom. We are told, "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush." Perhaps it is, but is it worth three? At some expected ratio, a bird in hand should be let loose so as to make possible a two-hand capture of a bushel full of birds. There are counter-insights in Western folk wisdom, such as "Nothing ventured, nothing gained" and "He who hesitates is lost."

The man who knows the future, but who then fails to act on his knowledge, is like a race track tout who knows which horse will win but neither bets nor convinces anyone else to bet on that horse. His knowledge will not affect the pre-race betting odds, nor will it make him any money. Or he is like a military commander who knows where his enemy's forces are, but fails to deploy his forces to take advantage of this knowledge.

Similarly, a definition of entrepreneurship that rests on knowledge of the future alone, without capital invested in terms of this knowledge, is a useless definition. It is not enough to know the ratio of present prices to future prices. The entrepreneur must have capital available to him that will enable him to buy present goods or sell future goods in order to take advantage between the actual ratio in the future and today's ratio, which reflects investors' inaccurate knowledge of the future. He must also have the courage of his convictions. He must put his money where his mind is. (Not where his mouth is, however. A wise entrepreneur will keep his mouth shut, since by opening it, he gives away valuable information that may affect the market's present/future price ratio, which he plans to take advantage of.)

The presence of optimism is not sufficient. There must also be accurate knowledge. Paul writes of the Jews' condemnation by God as having been the product of zeal without knowledge (Rom. 9:31–10:4). The zeal engendered by courage can lead to destruction as readily as knowledge without zeal. In military affairs, there has to be a willing-

ness to engage the enemy. In entrepreneurial affairs, there has to be a willingness to engage a future different from what one's competitors imagine it will be.

Conclusion

Moses gave to Joshua a command: be courageous. This meant that Joshua must move forward, not being deflected by concerns about what was going on at his right or his left. The same is true of our adherence to God's law. If we stick to God's revealed pathway, veering neither to the right nor the left, we shall be victorious. God will stand with us for His own glory, delivering His enemies into our hands.

Moses made it plain that action was required. Risks had to be taken. By whom? By Joshua, above all. His courage under fire would set the pattern for his men. It was a good sign that the Israelites commanded Joshua to be courageous after Moses' death. It indicated that they were ready to receive the long-promised inheritance. Title to the land had been transferred to them by Moses by the second reading of the law. Now it was time to collect.

LAW AND LIBERTY

And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (Deut. 31:9–13).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the giver of the kingdom grant: the national inheritance. This is point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Year of Release

To maintain the kingdom grant, Israel's priests would have to read the Mosaic law publicly to the entire nation at the feast of Tabernacles (Booths). This was the annual week-long feast in Jerusalem that followed by five days the day of local celebration: the day of atonement (Lev. 23:27, 34). The priests and elders were responsible for the reading of the Mosaic law to the people, presumably Exodus 20–23. They may also have read the case laws of the other four books. This case law does not say.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 5.

We might have expected that the law would have been read at Pas-over. Instead, it was read at Booths. Why? Because Booths was closely associated with the day of atonement. The day of atonement was the day of liberation for Israel. This law illustrates a fundamental principle of theology: *grace precedes law*. The day of atonement and day of release preceded the reading of the law. This was both a land law and a priestly law.² It no longer applies nationally. But the judicial principle that undergirds it—the need for covenant-keepers to hear biblical law—is still in force.

The year of release was the sabbatical year (Deut. 15). In this year, during the feast of Booths, all zero-interest charity loans to fellow Israelites and to resident aliens [*geyr*] were to be cancelled (Deut. 15:2). Any Israelite or resident alien who had been required to serve as a bondservant because he had defaulted on a charitable loan had to be released. He was to be given capital—food, wine, and herd animals—when he left (vv. 13–14).³

Consider the timing of the reading of the Mosaic law. Once every seven years, the entire nation was to assemble at Jerusalem. Five days earlier, poor people who still owned rural land had been released from charitable debts or any related debt bondage. As debt-free men, they came to Jerusalem to celebrate. There, they heard the law.

For a newly released bondservant, the reading of the law would have reminded him of the importance of obedience. He had fallen into debt through no moral fault of his own, at least in the opinion of his creditor. The way to avoid future debt bondage was to remain obedient to God's law, for the law promised external blessings for obedience. The Mosaic law was read to a nation of free men. It provided the guidelines for remaining free.

The year of release was associated with the jubilee year. In the year following the seventh sabbatical year—the sabbatical year of sabbatical years—the jubilee year was to take place. All rural land was to revert to the heirs of the conquest generation. This reversion was to take place on the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9). This means that Israel's other class of debtors also regained their freedom on that day. Those debtors who had defaulted on commercial loans had those debts cancelled and had their share of the ancestral land returned to them. Except for criminals sold into slavery to pay off debts to their victims,⁴ and except

2. On land laws and priestly laws, see Appendix J.

3. Chapter 35.

4. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Insti-

for foreign slaves (Lev. 25:44–46),⁵ the year of jubilee was to be Israel's universal year of release. Charitable debts had been cancelled the previous year. The nation had heard the reading of the law. Then came the jubilee.

B. One Nation Under God

Israel was truly one nation under God. This law made it clear that the entire nation was to hear the priests and elders read the law. These laws were civil laws, yet priests and elders read them. More than any other passage in the Bible, this one makes it clear: *there can be no absolute separation of church and state*. The two institutions can be differentiated, analogous to the ways in which the three persons of the Trinity are differentiated, but there can be no absolute separation. When it came to God's law, the priests and elders were required by God to read it publicly. Everybody residing inside the land, including strangers [*geyr*], was required to come to hear the law. God was the source of justice in Israel. The priests were the agents delegated by God to interpret His law. Interpretation was not a monopoly.

The nation was under God. One proof of this was the fact that all permanent residents were under God's revealed law. This included strangers. They were required to hear the law read in public once every seven years, and not merely listen, but also pay for a journey to the central city. *They were all to participate in a national celebration of covenant renewal*. This was not limited to ecclesiastical covenant renewal, for strangers were required to attend.

It was at Booths that the 70 bulls were offered annually as sacrifices (Num. 29:13–32), presumably for the 70 nations that represented the gentiles (Jud. 1:7), and one additional bull (Num. 29:36), presumably for Israel. The day of atonement, celebrated locally, was immediately followed by Booths, which was celebrated nationally. Localism was followed by nationalism. The Levites were the tribe that represented the nation. They were a source of national unity.

C. The Rule of Specially Revealed Law

Moses commanded the priests and elders to gather the people together. By what authority did he tell them this? Not as high priest,

tute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 134–35. (<http://bit.ly/gntools>)

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

which he was not, but as the nation's prophet. He was God's delegated intermediary between God and Israel. As such, he laid down the law.

Civil law is common to all men who reside in a geographical area. The Bible teaches this. Those inside the boundaries of Israel were required to obey God's law. The Mosaic covenant mandated that God's law must apply to all men equally, thereby upholding the principle that the rule of law is to be upheld (Ex. 12:49). Civil law in Mosaic Israel was revelational. Civil law in Israel was not the autonomous discovery of rational men searching the logic of their minds and the raw material of the creation.

Was attendance required by civil law? That is, were civil sanctions applied to those who refused to attend? No negative sanction is listed in the text. There would have been an ecclesiastical sanction: excommunication. This would have threatened a stranger who participated in Passover (Ex. 12:48). It would not have threatened a resident alien who did not attend Passover. It would have threatened an Israelite, for citizenship was based on membership in God's holy army. This membership was a priestly office, which is why members paid atonement money to the priests (Ex. 30:12–16).⁶

Access to the office of judge was based on participation in the national reading of the Mosaic law. What does this fact reveal about the authority of natural law in Israel? This: *what was judicially common to residents of Israel was not confession of faith but God's specially revealed law*. Those who were not eligible to serve as judges nevertheless had to obey the law. They were invited to attend Booths once every seven years in order to participate in a priestly ritual that served as national covenant renewal. Yet the stranger had not necessarily affirmed the national covenant by consenting to circumcision. He was supposed to attend, although no civil sanction threatened him for refusing to attend. His voice had no covenantal authority in renewing the covenant, for he did not possess the legal authority to impose civil sanctions. Yet he was supposed to attend.

Why should he have attended? First, to learn what the law expected of him. Second, to learn what the state was authorized to do to him if he broke the law. *This national day of legal education was a means of placing restrictions on both the church and the state*. The public reading of the Mosaic law gave to the listeners the means of defending themselves from evil-doers, including officers of church and state. Res-

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

idents were to be protected from each other by the law. They were strongly encouraged to attend the festival to hear the formal reading of the law. In a society in which there was no printing press and literacy was not common, this was an important way to place the authorities on a judicial chain. Men would understand their rights—their *legal immunities from the state*—because they had heard the law. The state could not lawfully prohibit the public reading of the law. It was the church that had been given the joint authority to read the law. The priests would have a part in making access to the law easier in Israel.

This limitation on civil power meant that *an independent legal hierarchy was present in Israel that would serve as a check on the state*. Any attempt by the state to restrict the priests from exercising their God-given authority to read the law before the nation would incur the resistance of the priests and the wrath of God.

D. Natural Law vs. Theocracy

Natural law theory rests on the assumption that there is a source of common ethics and common wisdom irrespective of theological confession. This common system of ethics is said to serve as the only legitimate basis of a common judicial system. This common legal order is supposedly accessible to all rational men, however men define rational. *This presumed commonality is the basis of the civil law's legitimacy*. Natural law is said to be grounded in the nature of man as a rational being, whether or not he was created by God. Because natural law supposedly possesses authority irrespective of theological confession, it is said to be the basis of civil government, for civil government has authority over all men who reside in a geographical area irrespective of their confession of faith. So runs the familiar intellectual defense of natural law theory.

The traditional Christian version of natural law theory adds that it is man in his office as God's image-bearer that establishes the possibility of natural law. It is God in His office as universal Father (Acts 17:26) rather than as the redemptive, adopting Father, who establishes civil government. The natural law theorist distinguishes between God the Creator and God the Redeemer in discussing natural law. God as Creator is universal; God as Redeemer is particular. It is God as universal who lays down the civil laws that all men must obey.

The Christian defender of natural law theory usually argues that God placed Israel under the rule of a civil order that was particular. In

God's redemptive-historical plan, Israel's narrow parochialism—grounded in God as *redeeming Father*—temporarily superseded the universal. Why, we are not told. It just did. The New Covenant, we are told, is the triumph of the universal. The New Covenant delivers us into the hands of civil rulers whose authority does not rest on their confession of God as Father, either universal or particular. Their civil confession of faith need be implicit only: *a confession of self-professed autonomous man as the universal*. Man is the law-giver because humanity is common to man.

The humanism of natural law theory is obvious. Prior to Darwin's implicit destruction of all natural law theory, natural law theory was Western humanism's primary judicial alternative to Christian law. Darwin destroyed men's faith in a common legal order grounded in man's reason. Why? Because men are individuals caught in a purposeless evolutionary process that has no fixed ethical standards.⁷ Nevertheless, a few Christian social theorists still cling to a doctrine of humanistic law that has to be defended today by an appeal to biblical revelation: the doctrine of special creation. Only by invoking special creation can they save natural law theory from Darwinism. But the rationality of unredeemed mankind opposes the Bible's doctrine of special creation. So, Christian defenders of natural law theory wind up in the peculiar position of having to affirm the authority of biblical revelation in order to defend a theory of civil law that denies any independent civil authority of biblical revelation. They affirm that which common reason rejects as irrational or irrelevant. They do so in order to defend a system of humanistic civil law which rests on the assumption of the authority of common reason and common ethics. God as Redeemer is replaced by God as Creator. God as Creator is then said to legitimize the civil order of autonomous man. In this way, the city of man replaces the city of God in the political theory of fundamentalists, who hate the idea of biblical theocracy far more than they hate the reality of humanist theocracy. They turn over the right of civil rulership to humanists, and they believe they are doing God and society a favor in this pre-emptive surrender.

If men of all confessions can successfully govern themselves, as though they were covenant-keepers, by means of a civil law order that is in no way grounded on God's Bible-revealed law, then why did God require the Israelites to hear the reading of the Mosaic law? Why was

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

national covenant renewal grounded in a public reading of the Mosaic law? If covenant-keepers in the New Testament era are not supposed to invoke the authority of biblical law as the justification of their efforts to establish a God-honoring civil government, then why was this insight not given to God's covenant people prior to the advent of Roman Stoicism? Why did God's people have to wait for Roman Stoics to discover the theory of natural law, by which they explained why Rome had the authority to create an empire out of the ruins of the Greek city-states? The Stoics in the era of the Roman empire provided a philosophical justification for that empire. A defense of empire had not been provided by the polytheism of classical religion, which had undergirded the autonomous city-states of Greece.⁸ Yet Christians are expected to believe that God waited until the advent of the tyrannical Roman Empire in order to inform His covenant people of the sole authority of man's universal reason in establishing civil law. God supposedly raised up Stoic philosophers rather than prophets to bring this message to the church. Furthermore, it was not until tiny Rhode Island's Roger Williams in the early 1640's discovered pluralism's principle of religiously neutral civil commonwealth that God's church was presented with this theory in the name of Christianity.⁹ This implicit theory of the origins of civil freedom seems an odd one for Christian intellectuals to hold, but they do. They refuse to state it this baldly, but they do believe it. Their theory of natural law demands it.¹⁰

This text forces us to consider the obvious fact that in order to preserve liberty in Mosaic Israel, the nation corporately had to hear the law once every seven years. The basis of judicial liberty was not the interior speculations of everyman. *The basis of judicial liberty in Israel was obedience to God's specially revealed law.* What the modern Christian political pluralist must maintain is that judicial liberty comes from the common-ground logic and/or experience of covenant-breaking man. It is not the Bible, he insists, that presents the basis of liberty; rather, God's enemies do. There simply has to be some common-ground moral vision which unites covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers, and this vision must serve all mankind as the basis of liberty. Adam's Fall has therefore not seriously blinded men to moral truth.

8. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), pp. 77–82.

9. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 249–50. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

10. See Appendix H: "Week Reed: The Politics of Compromise."

Covenant-keeping rational man holds back or suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), yet somehow this process of self-imposed blindness does not undermine the outcome of his moral reason, a moral reason shared by all rational men. Covenant-breaking man's moral and judicial speculations are said to possess greater authority than the Mosaic law does, or than the Bible as a whole does, or so we are assured by modern defenders of natural law theory, whether Christian or pagan.

E. Biblical Economics

Biblical economists should take a stand against the rationalist's claim that only that which is common to all men's reason is epistemologically valid. This is the modern economist's defense of *wertfrei*: value-neutral logic. He defends this nineteenth-century epistemological doctrine with greater enthusiasm and confidence than representatives of the other social sciences do. Biblical economics does not rest on faith in any theory of epistemological neutrality. It recognizes that any claim of epistemological neutrality evaporates as a result of a key doctrine of modern economics: the scientific impossibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.¹¹ There is no common objective scale of subjective values; there is no measuring device. Thus, according to the epistemological assumptions of methodological individualism, there can be no such thing as applied economics.¹² Between the theoretical speculations of the economist and the world of economic advice and policy-making there can be no connection made without destroying the doctrine of exclusively subjective value. This, no non-Marxist economist wants to admit.

The correct solution to this epistemological dilemma is an appeal to the Bible: the covenantal doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty, man as made in God's image, the world under God's law (including Bible-revealed law), God as the sovereign evaluator/imputer, and judicial continuity. It is in through twin doctrines of God's creation and providence that we can discover ways of reconciling subjective value and objective value. It is in the doctrine of the Trinity that we can discover ways of reconciling the personal imputation of subjective value

11. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

12. See Appendix A, section on "Value Theory at an Epistemological Impasse." See also Appendix B.

with the corporate imputation of objective value.¹³

Conclusion

The nation of Israel was told by God to assemble at a central city once every seven years, in order to hear the public reading of God's revealed law. God did not call them into university classrooms to cogitate on the inherent wisdom of the common man. He did not call them to devise systems of law that would be acceptable to covenant-breaking strangers in the land. Instead, He called them to corporate covenant renewal through hearing the priests read the Mosaic law. *No passage in the Bible more clearly reveals the illegitimacy of political pluralism and its corollary, natural law theory.*

By undermining natural law theory, this passage also undermines the case for value-free economics. A correct understanding of the law of God rests on a theory of Bible-revealed law. So does a correct understanding of the laws of economics.

Law and liberty are linked by biblical law. This includes political liberty and economic liberty. While the natural man can, through common grace, understand a great deal about the creation, his presupposition regarding the availability of true knowledge apart from the written revelation of the God of the Bible is incorrect. Liberty begins with God's grace and is sustained by God's grace, which includes the grace of biblical law.

13. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

A COVENANTAL SONG OF NEAR-DISINHERITANCE

And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods (Deut. 31:16–18).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the maintainer of the kingdom grant. The grant was the inheritance: point five of the covenant.¹

This was not a law. It was a prophecy. God told Moses that Israel would surely rebel against Him after they entered the Promised Land. The very prosperity of that land would lead them astray. “For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant” (v. 20).

God instructed Moses to write a song. This song would provide an account of God’s deliverance of Israel—not out of Egypt, but rather out of the wilderness. It would begin with the fourth generation’s inheritance of the land. “And it shall come to pass, when many evils and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 5.

troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear" (v. 21).

The song begins with a statement of God's sovereignty: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). This is point one of the biblical covenant model.

Point two describes Israel's rebellion against God's hierarchy: "They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?" (vv. 5–6)

Point three describes God's establishment of the boundaries of the nations and of Israel (v. 8). He led them inside the boundaries of the wilderness (vv. 10–12).

Point four describes God's positive sanctions: food in abundance (vv. 13–14). This led to Israel's fatness and her subsequent loss of faith: sacrificing to false gods (vv. 15–16), i.e., a new oath and new covenant. This produced negative sanctions (vv. 20–22). "I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them" (v. 23).

Point five, disinheritance, would not come, not for Israel's sake but for the honor of God's name. "I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the LORD hath not done all this" (vv. 26–27). But Israel would not recognize this as God's motivation during her rebellion. "For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" (vv. 28–29).

The arrogance of the enemy nations would bring them down. "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left" (vv. 35–36). This meant that the disinheritance that would rightfully come upon Israel would instead be replaced by a new inheritance. This would produce the disinheritance of those nations that would serve as God's rods of iron

against Israel. "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people" (v. 43). This ended the song of Moses (v. 44).

Moses then called on the nation to obey the law: "And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law" (v. 46). Obedience is the basis of life: "For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it" (v. 47). Once again, obedience is here identified as the basis of maintaining the kingdom grant.

Moses was then instructed by God to climb Mt. Nebo, so that he could see the land into which he would not be allowed to march (v. 49). Disobedience had kept him outside the land (vv. 51–52). What was true of Moses would surely be true for Israel: disobedience would undermine the inheritance.

Conclusion

The chief inheritance of Israel was the law itself. "Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4). The law was their tool of dominion, the standard of their continuing economic inheritance.

Moses then blessed each of the tribes as his last will and testament, just as Jacob had done with his twelve sons in Egypt. The expulsion of the Canaanites was imminent:

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places (vv. 27–29).

Moses then did as he had been told: he went up Mt. Nebo to see the Promised Land. Then he died. But before he died, he transferred leadership to Joshua by the laying on of hands (v. 9). This represented the transfer of inheritance to Israel.

CONCLUSION

Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob (Deut. 33:4).

The Book of Deuteronomy is the Pentateuch's book of inheritance. The fifth and final section of Deuteronomy has to do with inheritance in the broadest sense. The primary inheritance of Israel was God's specially revealed law. This was Israel's tool of dominion.¹ Obedience to the law was Israel's basis of maintaining the inheritance and extending it in history. But it was not sufficient for Israel to maintain the inheritance; Israel had to extend it. There is a war in history between God's kingdom and Satan's. There is no permanent peace treaty between these two kingdoms. There is no neutrality. There can be no stalemate. Israel forgot this, which is why the kingdom was removed from her (Matt. 21:43). Modern Christians also tend to forget this.²

Moses consummated his writing of the book of the inheritance with a series of blessings, tribe by tribe (Deut. 33:6–25), just as Jacob had, almost two and a half centuries earlier (Gen. 49).³ As for the nation, Moses said, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places" (Deut. 33:29). Then he went off to Mt. Nebo to die. But before he did, he laid hands on Joshua. "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9). This completed the transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua.

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

2. Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1984] 1988), ch. 11. (<http://bit.ly/gnback>)

3. Israel's sojourn inside the boundaries of Egypt was 215 years. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 1:A.

This was Joshua's long-awaited inheritance.

Deuteronomy presents a recapitulation of the Mosaic law. The inheriting generation was required to affirm their commitment to this law. In this sense, Deuteronomy is a book of covenant renewal. This would seem to place the book under point four of the covenant: oath. But the book also involves the transfer of the judicial inheritance to the generation of the conquest. In this sense, Deuteronomy is an aspect of point five: succession. This is another reason why I believe that points four and five of the biblical covenant model are so intimately related. In fact, the full consummation of Deuteronomy did not take place until the Israelites had crossed over Canaan's boundary (point three) and were circumcised (point four) at Gilgal (Josh. 5:3). Israel had to be circumcised before the historical transfer of title to Canaan could take place. The covenant oath that was implied by circumcision was mandatory prior to Israel's receiving the inheritance of Canaan. We can say that the inheritance of the law and the re-affirmation of the promise came with the Book of Deuteronomy. The historical inheritance of Canaan by Israel is described in the Book of Joshua. *Circumcision confirmed confession*. More than this: *circumcision constituted confession*. It was an oath-sign.⁴

Deuteronomy sets forth the legal basis of Israel's inheritance of Canaan. It presents God's law and refers to the sanctions attached to this law-order. Israel's acceptance of this covenant document was to serve as the judicial basis of the oath-sign to be imposed across the Jordan. *The transfer of the law was the covenantal basis of the transfer of the inheritance*. In this sense, the law was Israel's primary inheritance: received first. The Promised Land was the secondary inheritance: received second.

A. Promise and Conditions

There could be no legitimate doubt that this generation would inherit. It was the fourth generation after Jacob's descent into Egypt. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). Nevertheless, the fulfillment of this promise was conditional. First, Israel formally had to subordinate the nation to God (point two) by affirming God's law (point three) and its historical sanctions (point four). The proof of

4. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968), ch. 3.

their acceptance of the law's historical sanctions was their willingness to submit to the oath-sign of circumcision. Without such ritual submission, they could not become true sons of Abraham and therefore heirs of the promise to Abraham. There should be no doubt here: *the Abrahamic promise was conditional*. Had the Israelites rejected God by rejecting His law, as manifested by their refusal to be circumcised, they would not have inherited. They could *inherit the law* without circumcision, and they did (Deuteronomy), but they could not *inherit the land* without circumcision (Joshua).

This conditionality of the Abrahamic covenant creates a minor theological problem that is easy to solve. Unfortunately, it has long been dealt with by theologians as if it were a major problem that is very difficult to solve. Here is the problem: How can a promise made by God and then sealed by His oath be conditional? If the fulfillment of an oath-bound covenantal promise is conditional, then its fulfillment in history seems to depend on man rather than God. Sovereignty is thereby transferred to man. How can this be?

The correct and relatively simple answer is theological: *the fulfillment of God's promises is secured by God's sovereign decree*. God does not predestinate in a vacuum. He does not predestinate single events within a contingent historical framework. When He announces a promise or a prophecy, His sovereign decree secures the comprehensive historical conditions necessary for its fulfillment. God's sovereignty over history at no point is transferred to man. God retains it absolutely. The complete fulfillment of the covenant's conditions is as secure as the complete fulfillment of the promise.

It is one of those oddities of ecclesiastical history that Calvinist theologians who call themselves covenant theologians have debated the fine points of conditional versus unconditional promises. I do not understand why. Of all theologians who should not bother to debate this topic in an either/or framework, Calvinists ought to be first in line. It is only in Calvinism's twin doctrines of predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God that we find a solution to this theological problem. It is time to say it loud and clear: *there is no such thing as an unconditional covenantal promise*. To imagine that there is such a thing is to imagine that the covenants of God were not secured by the perfect life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. *Everything in history after God's cross-examination of Adam and Eve has been conditional on the work of Jesus Christ in history*. Was there any possibility that Jesus would not fulfill these conditions? Not a chance:

"And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). This means, ultimately, that *there is no such thing as chance*. God promised Adam and Eve the following: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Was this promise conditional on Christ's advent and perfect work in history? Of course. Was there any chance that the covenant's conditions would not be fulfilled by Christ? None. *This promise was conditional on Christ's work, yet there was no possibility that these conditions would not be met perfectly by Christ's work.*

Obviously, some promises are more openly ethical and conditional than others, in the sense that the outcome of the promise can be different from what was predicted. This is the case with some covenant lawsuits. The best representative example is Jonah's warning to Nineveh: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4b). Nineveh believed this and repented (turned around). "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (v. 9). They repented; God also repented. But other covenant lawsuits have been predestined to come out just as God had promised: badly for the accused. "Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness. And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the LORD: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them" (Jer. 13:13–14). And so He did. Jeremiah was not to pray otherwise.

And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee (Jer. 7:13–16).

Because the office of prophet ceased after A.D. 70,⁵ all covenant

5. Chapter 33.

lawsuits today are of the Jonah variety: repentance must always be assumed to be an option for the hearers. No one lawfully brings a New Covenant lawsuit that does not offer the option of repentance. God no longer reveals in advance the specific outcome of a particular covenant lawsuit: blessing or cursing. In this sense, all New Covenant lawsuits are *pecially* conditional, i.e., their outcome is unknown to man because the response of the accused is unknown to man. We must also affirm that, judicially speaking, all covenant lawsuits, promises, and prophecies are *generally* conditional: there is no escape from God's sanctions in history. What the future response of men would be was not always clear to those who heard these lawsuits, promises, and prophecies in the Old Covenant. But sometimes it was clear. For example, God did not offer Nineveh's option of repentance to the Amorites of Canaan. The Amorites' iniquity would surely be filled, not emptied by their repentance. Yet even in this case, the Gibeonites cleverly subordinated themselves to God through subordination to Israel, and they escaped the promised destruction (Josh. 9).

B. Compound Growth and National Covenant Renewal

Deuteronomy presents a covenant theology that allows for compound growth, both of population and the economy. More than this: *growth is presented as morally mandatory*. Put another way, the absence of growth is seen as a sign of God's curse. This growth-oriented outlook distinguished biblical religion from all other ancient religions. The key elements of Deuteronomy's covenant theology are found in Deuteronomy 8.⁶

First, there was a promise of population growth. This promise was conditional on Israel's obedience. "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deut. 8:1–2).

Second, there was a warning attached to the promised blessing of economic growth. This is because economic growth leads to a temptation: the temptation of autonomy. "And when thy herds and thy flocks

6. Chapters 17–23.

multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:13–17).

Third, there was a declaration of the inescapability of blessings. These blessings were built into the Mosaic law. *Here, in one verse, is the most important single statement in ancient literature regarding the possibility of long-term economic growth.* "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (v. 18). The unique blessing of the power to get wealth serves as a means of confirming God's covenant in history. I say *serves*, not *served*. This covenant is still in force. He who denies this also implicitly denies the possibility of Christian economic theory.⁷

Consider the implications of cause-and-effect relationships among external covenant-keeping, visible wealth, and covenantal confirmation. The visible blessings that result from covenant-keeping are designed to increase men's faith in God and His covenant. The covenant's confirmation by corporate economic growth becomes a motivation for corporate covenant renewal. Greater corporate faith is supposed to produce greater spiritual maturity, which in turn is to produce greater corporate blessings. Economists call such a process *positive feedback*. Here we have a vision of that most wonderful of all social

7. Sometimes this rejection of biblical economic theory is explicit. See the comments of William Diehl, cited in my Preface, under "The Hatred of God's Law." He displayed near contempt for my heavy reliance on Deuteronomy in my biblical defense of the free market. Then he went on to deny the legitimacy of biblical economic theory: "The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way." William E. Diehl, "A Guided-Market Response," in Robert Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 87. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>). He was reacting to my article defending free market capitalism. That article is reprinted as Appendix E.

wonders: *compound economic growth*. Deuteronomy 8 tells us that it is possible for a society to sustain corporate economic growth by means of corporate covenantal obedience. This means that limits to growth can be overcome progressively. More than this: they must be steadily overcome. *Compound corporate economic growth is an ethical imperative because corporate obedience to God is an ethical imperative*. Economic growth is a social imperative, not an option.

The compounding process eventually produces an exponential curve: a number approaching infinity as a limit. But in a finite world, nothing grows forever.⁸ In a finite world, an exponential curve reaches environmental limits very fast. Population growth is the most obvious example. Yet we are told in Deuteronomy 8 that wealth can compound indefinitely. By this, God means *finitely*. The ultimate environmental limit to growth is time. If growth continues over time in a world of economic scarcity, including living space, time must run out. It will run out before covenant-keeping men reach society's physical limits to growth. This covenantal fact points clearly to the near-term consummation of history if men remain faithful to God by obeying His law. Time runs out when God's people obey Him and reap their appropriate reward: approaching the objective limits to growth.

Prior to the end of history, that which will bring economic growth to a halt is not any environmental limit to growth, but rather corporate sin. "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (vv. 19–20).⁹ Or, as John described it in the Book of Revelation, "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and

8. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970; reprinted in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

9. Chapter 23.

shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:7–10). In short, bad guys finish last.

C. Pessimillennialism vs. Inheritance

Moses' argument regarding the forthcoming conquest of Canaan rested on the presence of predictable corporate sanctions: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known" (Deut. 11:26–28). If there had been no judicial connection between God's law and His predictable corporate sanctions in history, then Israel's fulfillment of God's definitive promise to Abraham regarding the inheritance would have had no value as a confirmation of God's covenant. But God had already told them that their wealth would come as a confirmation of the covenant (Deut. 8:18). *To separate law, sanctions, and inheritance is to deny the biblical covenant.* They are part of an integrated whole. To ignore either the one (integration) or the many (each part) is a mistake.

The suggestion that God's covenant laws and sanctions still apply in New Covenant history is an affront to most schools of theological opinion, Christian and non-Christian. By linking Bible-revealed law and corporate historical sanctions, the covenant theologian makes a statement regarding the growth of the kingdom of God in history. He argues that the kingdom of God will progressively extend its authority across borders. God enables His people to redeem—buy back—all rival covenant-breaking social orders. God supplies them with the tools necessary for this redemption, beginning with His law.¹⁰ "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer" is a biblical concept that has been stolen and re-branded by covenant-breakers. When the rich get richer by covenantal faithfulness through serving customers, the poor who break God's law are supposed to get poorer in relation to covenant-keepers.¹¹ This process of compound economic and demographic growth for covenant-keepers and compound losses for covenant-

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion*.

11. I am not arguing that they get absolutely poorer. The free market social order makes almost all people richer over time: the collective effect of slow but steady compound economic growth. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 27.

breakers is the covenant's framework. This process transfers the inheritance to covenant-keepers over several generations. This is God's plan for the ages.

Pessimillennialists¹² and humanists deny this. A growth-oriented outlook calls into question the premillennialist's assertion that the church must fail in its attempt to fulfill the Great Commission until Jesus returns in person to set up a world-wide bureaucracy, probably with headquarters in Jerusalem. (The dispensationalist insists that this is where head quarters must be; the historic premillennialist is silent on this topic.) Until Jesus returns, says the premillennialist, the church will experience successes and failures, but it will not experience the continuity of growth and cultural victory. The amillennialist agrees with the premillennialist's view of church history. He adds, however, that there will be no era of millennial blessings in history under a Christ returned to earth. The amillennialist, in Rushdoony's words, is a premillennialist without earthly hope.

It is not surprising that premillennialists and amillennialists agree that biblical law is no longer valid in New Covenant times. If valid, biblical law's predictable corporate sanctions would lead to the inheritance of the earth by covenant-keepers and the disinheritance of covenant-breakers. That is, if biblical law and its mandatory sanctions are still in force, there is a covenantal basis for predicting that God's plain prophecies will be fulfilled in history. Let us review:

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

This inheritance is the kingdom of God. It is a kingdom visibly manifested by growth in history. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar:

Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was

12. The term is F. N. Lee's.

found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:34–35).

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure (Dan. 2:44–45).

I keep repeating these kingdom-inheritance verses because they are not believed by modern Christians. Christians read them and then immediately deny them. Premillennialists remove the fulfillment of these prophecies from church history and place their fulfillment in the millennial age, when Jesus will rule in person. Premillennialists insist on a radical discontinuity between the work of today's Christians and the work of those who will rule with Christ during the millennial kingdom. Premillennialists affirm the legitimacy of a literal interpretation of these prophecies of victory, but they deny the legitimacy of institutional continuity between the church's work today and the era of fulfillment. *They deny the legitimacy of Christians' hope in their own efforts to leave behind a comprehensive covenantal inheritance in history.* Nothing of lasting value survives the seven-year Great Tribulation, according to dispensationalism. The church's legacy will be lost.¹³

In contrast, amillennialists deny that these prophecies are to be taken literally. They affirm continuity between the church's work today and the future, but then they categorically deny that there will ever be a cultural victory for Christianity. They "spiritualize" away Christians' victory and earthly inheritance. They convert the Bible's clear language regarding an earthly inheritance into an unearthly inheritance. They convert the visible historical triumph of Christian culture—Christendom—into an invisible mental triumph of isolated, besieged Christians who find themselves in the midst of a triumphant covenant-breaking culture.¹⁴

13. The dispensational movement's theologians refuse to discuss publicly this aspect of their eschatology, but the conclusion is implied by the system and acted on by the movement's lay followers. They care nothing about building anything that will be left behind after the Rapture.

14. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*,

The postmillennialists, few in number today, alone assert both the literal fulfillment of these prophecies and the covenantal continuity between the past and future. In other words, they assert a progressive *continuity of victory*. Postmillennialists insist that each generation of Christians inherits a legacy from earlier generations, and each generation has a moral obligation to increase this legacy and then transfer it to those who follow. Postmillennialists insist on the *continuity of growth*: the compounding process.

For this reason, pessimillennialists stand arm in arm rejecting postmillennialism.¹⁵ Premillennialists despise postmillennialism's assertion of historical continuity, while amillennialists despise postmillennialism's assertion of Christianity's literal cultural victory in history. Both sides agree to oppose the common enemy. Both sides wallow in the visible failure of today's eschatologically disarmed Christianity, which they themselves have disarmed. Both sides proclaim today's setbacks for Christianity as the wave of the future until Jesus comes again in person. Both sides, in the final (eschatological) analysis, believe that the work of the Holy Spirit is to oversee the near-total defeat of His kingdom in history. Premillennialists and amillennialists agree: there is no corporate earthly hope for Christians until Jesus replaces the Holy Spirit in history by returning bodily in power and judgment, either millennial judgment (premillennialism) or final judgment (amillennialism). The mere presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the church (John 16:5–10) is insufficient to enable Christians to replace covenant-breakers as the creators and arbiters of civilization. When these people think "civilization," they think "humanism." They are theologically incapable of regarding Christian civilization as either a possibility or a desirable cultural option. Their eschatology shapes their thinking in every area of theology and most areas of life.

Their outlook is best expressed by the senior theologian of the Protestant Reformed Church, a Dutch-American denomination that split from the Dutch-American Christian Reformed Church in 1923 over the question of common grace, which the PRC denies.¹⁶ In an attempt to refute the obvious and inescapable literalism of Isaiah 65:17–

2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), Appendix A. (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

15. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

16. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), Introduction. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

21, he cries out against the very idea of Christian culture. Why? Because sin has ruined everything, and will throughout history.

There will be sin in the postmillennial kingdom. Every day we will know our misery of guilt and shame, the worst misery of all. Every day anew we will have to battle indwelling sin, which wrenches from us the groan, "O, wretched man that I am." What difference does it make that Gary North sits on the throne of the world and that Kenneth Gentry, Jr., is in charge of radio, television, movies, and the internet worldwide? . . .

There will be no vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ in this kingdom of postmillennialism. Still only in a glass darkly.

For these reasons alone, we Reformed amillennialists would not be enthusiastic over Christian Reconstructionism's kingdom. Indeed, we would be groaning, as we do today, waiting for the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). We would be crying night and day for divine vengeance on Christ's and our enemies (Luke 18:1-8). We would be praying fervently, "Lord, put an end to this postmillennial business as soon as possible, and come quickly."¹⁷

This is forthright, self-conscious, proud cultural despair. It is a despair born of a worldview that proclaims that anything short of perfection in heaven is so utterly tainted with sin that Christianity can make no difference culturally. But neutrality is never an option for a pessimillennialist. He really prefers the culture of humanism, Islam, or anything other than Christianity. Paraphrasing Orwell's pig, "All cultures are evil, but some (Satan's) are more equal than others." When men adopt a dead-end eschatology, they are driven by the logic of their position to accept a dead-end culture, which they then proclaim as the best that Christians can hope for: anti-Christianity. The Holy Spirit becomes the defender of the hard-pressed faithful rather than the implementer of a strategy of kingdom conquest: the cultural replacement of evil with good. Pessimillennialism strips them of all earthly hope. They abandon the church's God-given inheritance. This is not for them: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Neither is this: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much,

17. David J. Engelsma, "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism." (<http://bit.ly/AmilDefense>)

of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47b).¹⁸ Seeking to avoid responsibility, they not only hand back the inheritance to God, they announce to their followers that it is in fact Satan's gift to his disciples—tainted beyond redemption. Defeat is their rallying cry. "Let's go out and lose this culture for Christ!"

D. Eschatology

Deuteronomy's covenantal worldview is rejected by humanists and most Christians. *Covenant theology is impossible without eschatology*. Because humanists and Christians reject Deuteronomy's eschatology, they also reject the Pentateuch's doctrine of covenantal inheritance: "Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 16:19–20).¹⁹ They offer other eschatologies and therefore other covenants.

Humanists reject biblical covenantalism because they reject the doctrine of final judgment. There will be no final judgment by God, they insist. There will be either the heat death of the universe²⁰ or a cyclical recapitulation of the Big Bang of creation: contraction, bang, expansion, ad infinitum.²¹ Both of these cosmic possibilities are impersonal. The humanists' hypothetical universe is a universe devoid of cosmic personalism, for their universe was not created by God.

The humanists' rejection of final judgment has implications for economic theory. There are two rival views: pro-growth and anti-growth. First, the typical economist insists that the limits to growth are always marginal. At the margin, there are no fixed limits to growth. There are only marginal limits to resources. Any ultimate objective limit to growth may be ignored for now—in fact, *must* be ignored, now and forevermore. *At some price*, there is always room for one more, no matter what it is we are talking about: such is the confession of the

18. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

19. Chapter 40.

20. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

21. The Big Bang that follows each cosmic contraction somehow will overcome the second law of thermodynamics: entropy. The heat death of the universe will be avoided.

economist. The marginalism of modern subjective economic theory lends itself to a concept of growth that has no objective limits. Growth cannot go on forever, the economist may admit if pressured for an answer, but it can surely go on for another year. Maybe two. The mainstream economist trains himself not to think about ultimate objective limits; he thinks only about marginal limits. Eschatology—the doctrine of the last things—is anathema to him. There are no last things, only marginal decisions.

Second, the anti-growth humanist asserts that mankind has become a destroyer, that nature's limits must be honored by rapacious man, and therefore the state must impose restrictions on the use of private property because of capitalism's insatiable quest for more. This outlook insists that there are objective limits to growth in nature, and therefore the state must restrict private individuals from pressing against these limits. Anti-growth legislation is necessary in order to avoid an inevitable collective catastrophe—there are numerous humanistic doomsday scenarios—that must occur when mankind reaches the environmental limits to growth. This eschatology is an eschatology of historical disaster. Anti-growth humanists are not concerned with the cosmic end of the world, i.e., the heat death of the universe. They do not predict the end of the world. Rather, they predict either the end of autonomous man's attempts to subdue nature or else the end of autonomous nature. They prefer the former.²²

Contemporary pessimillennial Christians, in contrast to humanists, are more deeply concerned about eschatology than history. They assume that eschatology is discontinuous with culture, i.e., a breaking into time that will overthrow man's works rather than heal and extend them. In effect, they deny to the creation what Christ's resurrected body was for history: continuous with history (recognizable), yet transcendent beyond history, as the ascension subsequently revealed to the disciples. They do not see the end of time as the death and resurrection of cursed history. They oppose biblical covenantalism because it places the end of history within the context of Christendom's extension of the limits to growth. They reject any suggestion that mankind will reach objective limits to growth as a result of the spread of the gospel, the conversion of billions of people, the division of labor, and men's widespread obedience to biblical law, for this scenario suggests a postmillennial eschatology that modern pessimillennialism rejects.

22. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989).

This is why pessimillennial Christians have no explicitly biblical economic theory. Without the Bible's doctrine of the covenant, they cannot reason both biblically and economically.

Once a person accepts the continuing validity and authority of the covenantal message of Deuteronomy, it is only by arguing that the triumph of covenant-breaking society is inevitable in history that he can escape the postmillennial implications of Deuteronomy. Theologians do this, of course, but in doing so, they must appeal to the failure of Old Covenant Israel as a binding model for all history. This leads them to dismiss or at least ignore the doctrine of *Christ's bodily ascension in history*, an event that confirmed the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Only by denying the possibility of progressively fulfilling the Great Commission in history can anyone who accepts the covenantal authority of Deuteronomy legitimately deny postmillennialism.²³ Such a denial inescapably rests on this presupposition, which is never publicly admitted by those who deeply believe it: *Christ's bodily ascension plays no significant role in empowering the church to fulfill the Great Commission through the post-ascension advent of the Holy Spirit*. Such a view of history also denies any significance for the doctrine of the ascension in the development of either eschatology or Christian social theory. In the final analysis, pessimillennialism substitutes the experience of Old Covenant Israel for the doctrine of empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

If the biblical doctrine of the covenant includes corporate compound economic growth as a confirmation of the covenant (Deut. 8:17),²⁴ then biblical covenantalism has eschatological implications. Here is the big one: *the meek shall inherit the earth*. Covenant-keepers who are meek before God, as evidenced by their confession of faith and their way of life—obedience to God's Bible-revealed law—are empowered by the Holy Spirit in history to extend the kingdom of God in history. That is, they are empowered in history by the Holy Spirit to fulfill progressively, though never perfectly, the terms of the dominion covenant.

23. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

24. Chapter 21.

E. The Structure of Theonomy²⁵

Theonomy is covenantal. The covenant is marked by five points: God's transcendence/presence; man's representative, hierarchical authority over creation and under God; God's Bible-revealed law; God's historical sanctions, positive and negative; and covenant-keepers' inheritance or succession, in time and eternity. In chapter 19, I wrote that theonomy is not simply a matter of God's law; rather, it is a matter of the covenant: God's absolute sovereignty, man's subordinate authority, Bible-revealed law's continuity, historical sanctions' predictability, and postmillennialism. Put as a slogan, *theonomy is a package deal*.

On this point, I break with Greg Bahnsen, who argues in *By This Standard*: "What these studies present is a position in Christian (normative) *ethics*. They do *not* logically commit those who agree with them to any particular school of *eschatological* interpretation."²⁶ Logically, perhaps not; I defer here to Bahnsen's abilities as a logician. Theologically, God's biblically revealed law cannot be separated covenantally from sanctions and eschatology.

I can appreciate Dr. Bahnsen's dilemma. First, he believes that the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches theonomy.²⁷ Second, the ordination standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which ordained him, are explicitly committed to what is known as "eschatological liberty," or better put, "eschatological opinions as Confessional *adiaphora*," i.e., things indifferent to the Confession's statement of faith. Presbyterianism formally asserts the proposition that an ordained officer can lawfully affirm, or refuse to affirm, any one of at least three totally incompatible theories of eschatology, at least two of which have to be biblically incorrect and therefore heretical. In order to escape the burden of endless heresy trials and shattered churches, Reformed churches relegate eschatology to the realm of *adiaphora*.²⁸

Bahnsen does not want to fight a three-front war: law vs. antinomianism; postmillennialism vs. amillennialism; postmillennialism vs. premillennialism. He formally separates his discussion of theonomy,

25. Written prior to the death of Greg Bahnsen.

26. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Tex as: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), p. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

27. Greg L. Bahnsen, "M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics: An Evaluation of His Reply," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Winter, 1979–80), pp. 200–202.

28. In this sense, Lutherans are correct when they insist that they are not Reformed. They are creedally committed to amillennialism.

which he believes is both the biblically mandated position and also consistent with the Westminster Confession and its two catechisms, from postmillennialism, which he believes is the biblically mandated position and therefore inconsistent, if postmillennialism really is biblically mandated, with the formal Presbyterian ideal of eschatology as a moot point theologically. The five-point covenant model, if true, pulls eschatology into ethics and vice versa by way of historical sanctions. This may be another reason for Bahnsen's lack of enthusiasm for Ray Sutton's and Meredith Kline's five-point covenant model, especially Sutton's, who does not relegate the covenant and its five points to the legal status of the Mosaic "intrusion," to use Kline's terminology.²⁹ I, on the other hand, am committed not only to the five-point structure of the covenant, but also to the five-point structure of the Pentateuch, as well as Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and the Book of Revelation.³⁰

Conclusion

I have come to the conclusion of the Conclusion to the book that concludes the Pentateuch.

The Pentateuch is structured in terms of the Bible's five-point covenant model. So is Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is a future-oriented book. It deals with inheritance. It looks forward to the events chronicled in Joshua. It lays down the law a second time. The law was Israel's tool of dominion. Now that the nation was about to inherit the long-promised land of Canaan, the law was vital. *By obeying the Mosaic law, Israel could maintain the kingdom grant until the era of the gentiles arrived.* If Israel rebelled, God would remove the grant and transfer it to another nation. Jesus prophesied: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This finally took place in A.D. 70.

Deuteronomy, in Kline's words, is the treaty of the Great King.³¹ The question is: Was this treaty abrogated forever by Jesus, or were its

29. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), Appendix 7: "Meredith G. Kline: Yes and No." (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

30. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

31. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963).

stipulations merely modified? The answer to this question divides theonomists from their critics, whose name is legion.³² Theonomists insist that this treaty is still in force. God still brings a covenant lawsuit against His enemies in terms of this covenant's laws. Theonomy's critics deny this. But the critics have a problem with Deuteronomy 5: the recapitulation of the Ten Commandments. The section ends with this warning: "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess" (Deut. 5:32–33).³³ If this promise of blessing ended with Jesus' ministry, why did Paul cite the fifth commandment and reaffirm its life-extending promise? "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1–3). He extended the scope of the positive sanction's applicability from the geographical confines of Canaan to the whole earth. This is not what I would call judicial annulment.

When covenant-breakers abandon the treaty of the Great King, we should not be surprised. The very concept of the Great King of the covenant offends them. But we also find that covenant-keepers insist, generation after generation, that they agree with covenant-breakers about the non-binding character of Deuteronomy's laws and sanctions. They are allied with covenant-breakers against those who argue that the treaty is still in force, and that God's corporate judgments in history are imposed in terms of its stipulations. Covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers seek a different treaty, with different laws and different sanctions. While they rarely agree on what this treaty might be, the terms of discourse are today set by covenant-breakers. Both groups insist that the presuppositions regarding what constitutes justice and

32. In May, 1997, a committee of the tiny Free Kirk of Scotland declared theonomy heretical. In doing so, the committee broke with the Westminster Confession. See Martin A. Foulner (ed.), *Theonomy and the Westminster Confession: an annotated sourcebook* (Edinburgh: Marpet Press, 1997). What remains of this once-great ecclesiastical body is an operational alliance between theological liberals, who hate the law of God, and pietists who fear institutional squabbling and who are unfamiliar with historical scholarship, especially the history of seventeenth-century Scottish theology. We have seen all this before, in the American Presbyterian Church. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996). (<http://bit.ly/gncrossed>)

33. Chapter 13.

how we can both ascertain it and impose its laws must be a neutral, common-ground endeavor. Lo and behold, the conclusions reached by the two groups are presented to the public in terms of autonomous man and his moral and intellectual standards.

There is no neutrality. Protestant American Christians today are willing to say this in public far more often than they were when I began writing my economic commentary on Genesis in April of 1973. This confessional reversal constitutes the beginning of a revolution in religious thought. When Christians at long last decide to follow this statement regarding neutrality to its logical conclusion—the denial of political pluralism³⁴—they will have begun a major journey toward theonomy. To speed up this process of self-awareness, I ask, one more time: If not God’s law, then whose? If not God’s law, then what? I suggest three choices. God’s law or chaos. God’s law or tyranny. God’s law or chaos followed by tyranny.

“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” (I Kings 18:21). Then came the negative sanction: “Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God” (vv. 38–39). God’s people learn slowly, but they do eventually learn. The trouble is, this learning process generally requires them to suffer extensive negative sanctions.

End of Volume 3

34. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

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INHERITANCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY

VOLUME 4

GARY NORTH

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Appendix A

MODERN ECONOMICS AS A FORM OF MAGIC¹

Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink (Num. 20:8).

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also (Num. 20:11).

In a previous situation, God had told Moses to strike a rock with his rod, and water would flow out of it (Ex. 17:6). This procedure had worked exactly as promised. Now, God's command was different: speak to a rock. In both cases, the Israelites would get what they wanted for no effort or payment on their part. Moses would pay the price—a below-market price by anyone's standards. His words would bring them God's supernatural blessing.

This time, Moses struck the rock twice. He made up a ritual of his own to substitute for God's explicit command to him. He hit the rock twice. The water flowed, just as it had at Marah, but this act of autonomy, lack of faith in God, and outright defiance against God's command cost Moses entrance into the Promised Land. "And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not

1. I wrote this essay in 1998. It was published in the *Bulletin of the Association of Christian Economists* (1998). This essay is a frontal assault against modern economics. Nothing like this had been written before. It was a call for Christian economists to abandon the methodology of humanistic economics. I received no written responses. Christian economists are uninterested in epistemology, as are most humanistic economists.

bring this congregation into the land which I have given them" (Num. 20: 12). In what did Moses' lack of faith consist? *He had substituted ritual magic for covenantal obedience.* He had imagined that a ritual—a formula of some kind—would enable Israel to gain supernatural blessings from God.² Israel would get something for nothing. This plan worked for Israel, but Moses paid a heavy price.

God wanted to teach Israel a lesson, namely, that obedience to God's revealed word produces blessings in history, no matter how low the statistical probabilities of success appear to be. Moses substituted a different lesson: adherence to precise formulas is what produces blessings in history. This is the magician's worldview.

A. The Economist's Worldview

Economics is a highly rationalistic social science, if not *the* rationalistic social science. Economists do not recommend invoking supernatural forces as a means of explaining anything or changing anything. Economics is an entirely man-centered discipline. How, then, can it be considered magical? Because economists propose a worldview that insists that wealth-creation can take place, and does take place, by means of techniques and institutional arrangements that supposedly have no necessary connection to God's word. Economic theory substitutes formulas for biblical ethics in its explanation of how the world works.

The economist proposes the magician's quest: discovering the proper techniques for gaining external blessings apart from external conformity to the stipulations of God's specially revealed cross-boundary laws.³ If wealth-creation is governed by social laws and techniques that are independent of ethics, then man can gain something valuable apart from the costs of obedience to God. This is also the magician's worldview. The magician seeks an arcane formula or procedure to invoke, or some other source of power over nature that he can manipulate to gain his ends, that does not ask him to change his commitment to his own self-centered ends. Modern economics is the academic incarnation of this outlook, an entire worldview that interprets most of society's operations in terms of men's individual solutions to one simple question: "What's in it for me?"

Post-Scholastic economics has generally asserted that wealth-cre-

2. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 11.

3. On cross-boundary laws, see Appendix J.

ation is not a matter of ethics except insofar as a man's willingness to conform to certain behavior patterns increases the statistical probability of his gaining voluntary cooperation from others. Wealth-creation is seen as a matter of the efficient application of ethically neutral knowledge to the problems of scarcity. For the economist, the phrase, "honesty is the best policy," is epistemologically meaningful only if honesty can be shown statistically to earn a rate of return above the rate of interest obtainable by investing in "risk-free" short-term government debt.

Ever since the late seventeenth century, economics has rested self-consciously on the methodological assumption of agnosticism regarding God. It has sought to avoid any invocation of the authority of religion. Operationally, this agnosticism is atheism. This confessionally atheistic worldview was first extended into scholarship by the economists. William Letwin's book, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (1963), remains the most detailed study of this development. He wrote: "Nevertheless there can be no doubt that economic theory owes its present development to the fact that some men, in thinking of economic phenomena, forcefully suspended all judgments of theology, morality, and justice, were willing to consider the economy as nothing more than an intricate mechanism, refraining for the while from asking whether the mechanism worked for good or evil. That separation was made during the seventeenth century. . . . The economist's view of the world, which the public cannot yet comfortably stomach, was introduced by a remarkable *tour de force*, an intellectual revolution brought off in the seventeenth century."⁴ He went on to assert that "the making of economics was the greatest scientific achievement of the seventeenth century."⁵ While the development of Newtonian physics would seem to deserve that honor, there should be no question that scientific economics was the greatest atheistic intellectual achievement of the seventeenth century, retaining this title until Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871). Newton the physicist at least tipped his academic hat to a deistic unitarian god who sustained sufficient order in the cosmos to make applicable men's knowledge of mathematics. The economists, then as now, tipped their academic hats to no god at all.

Adam Smith seems to be an exception. He was a deist of some sort. This is clear from scattered passages in his book, *The Theory of*

4. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, [1963] 1965), pp. 158–59. This book was published first by M.I.T. Press.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

Moral Sentiments (1759). The book is barely known, rarely read, and never discussed in the textbooks as a contribution to economic thought. Smith made no analytical use of its vague theology in the *Wealth of Nations* (1776).⁶ His famous “invisible hand”⁷ was a mental construct, not a god. “The hand’s going to get you” was not what he had in mind.

Economists ever since the late nineteenth century have proclaimed the ideal of value-free economics: economic science devoid of ethical content. They have to this extent become magicians. The magician seeks something for nothing by means of ritual formulas. The economist seeks ways for society to attain “more for less”⁸ by means of insights generated by means of arcane mathematical formulas.

B. Equilibrium as Conceptual Magic

Modern economics assures us that a society can create wealth if it implements production techniques within a framework accurately described by a series of simultaneous equations. Léon Walras, a French economist living in Switzerland, in the 1870s described the market order in this way. Oskar Lange in the 1930s argued that socialist central planning could match the efficiency of the free market by adhering to such mathematical equations in a trial-and-error process.⁹ These equations presume the economist’s concept of equilibrium: a condition in which no further economic change is beneficial because all of the society’s production opportunities have been maximized. It is a world without profit or loss, a world without mistakes.¹⁰

For this to take place at any point in history, all of the participants in a free market, or the central planners in a socialist economy, would have to possess perfect knowledge, including perfect knowledge of the future. *They must be omniscient*. Economists do not use such decidedly theological terminology when describing equilibrium. If they

6. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

7. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Cannan edition, p. 423. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1976), pp. 304–5.

8. More precisely, he seeks to obtain more value from a given cost of resource inputs, or a given value from less costly resource inputs.

9. See Oskar Lange and Fred M. Taylor, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1938] 1956), pp. 72–83. This essay first appeared in the *Review of Economic Studies* in 1937.

10. Israel M. Kirzner, *Market Theory and the Price System* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1963), pp. 246–49. (<http://bit.ly/KirznerMTPS>)

were more forthright about the presumptions of equilibrium theory, they would not be taken seriously by anyone outside of their profession. Roger Leroy Miller wrote in his textbook: "Equilibrium in any market is defined as a situation in which the plans of buyers and the plans of sellers exactly mesh, causing the quantity supplied to equal the quantity demanded."¹¹ Gwartney and Stroup agreed: "When a market is in equilibrium, there is a balance of forces such that the actions of buyers and suppliers are consistent with one another. In addition, when long-run equilibrium is present, the conditions will persist into the future."¹² How can such a meshing of plans occur? Through perfect forecasting: "In summary, an output rate can be sustained into the future only when the prior choices of decision-makers were based on a correct anticipation of the current price level."¹³ The phrase "correct anticipation" has to be interpreted as "perfect foreknowledge," but the authors are too scientific to say this. Their peers know what they really mean—*equilibrium is an impossible condition to fulfill*—and the average student is not too inquisitive about the relationship between a theory based on human omniscience and details in the real world.

Edwin Dolan summarizes the professional economist's definition of the condition of economic equilibrium: "The separately formulated plans of all market participants may turn out to mesh exactly when tested in the marketplace, and no one will have frustrated expectations or be forced to modify plans. When this happens, the market is said to be in equilibrium."¹⁴ E. H. Phelps writes in *The New Palgrave* (1987), the English-speaking economics profession's dominant dictionary: "Economic equilibrium, at least as the term has traditionally been used, has always implied an outcome, typically from the application of some inputs, that conforms to the expectations of the participants in the economy."¹⁵ There seems to be perfect agreement here: a kind of theoretical equilibrium among economists. The definitions mesh.

So does their blandness. This textbook definition of equilibrium

11. Roger Leroy Miller, *Economics Today*, 5th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 49.

12. James D. Gwartney and Richard L. Stroup, *Economics: Public and Private Choice*, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 186.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

14. Edwin G. Dolan, *Basic Economics*, 2nd ed. (Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden, 1980), pp. 44–45.

15. Edmund S. Phelps, "equilibrium: an expectational concept," in *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, eds. John Eatwell, Murray Milgate, and Peter Newman, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan 1987), II, p. 177.

seems so subdued and uncontroversial, perhaps even plausible. The economists' language certainly gives the impression that equilibrium applies to a real-world phenomenon: "a situation in which the plans of buyers and the plans of sellers exactly mesh," "when a market is in equilibrium," and "the separately formulated plans of all market participants may turn out to mesh exactly when tested in the marketplace." We can almost visualize a dedicated student writing down the definition of equilibrium on an index card, to be filed away in a card box or electronic filing software until the night before the final exam, when the note will be retrieved and the definition filed for 24 hours in a much less reliable storage device.

Now, for the sake of argument, let me provide a somewhat more controversial though more complete definition of equilibrium:

Equilibrium is the condition of the world economy which occurs whenever all three billion market participants on earth (not counting their non-participating children) have perfectly forecasted the supply-and-demand effects of all of the economic decisions of all of the other three billion economic decision-makers, so that their plans mesh perfectly without error. This is why there is no incentive for plan-revision. No one has anything more to sell at the existing prices, and everyone has purchased all that he wants at the existing prices, so prices will not change as a result of anyone's changing his mind. Equilibrium requires that every market participant forecast perfectly the economic future, which has therefore ceased to be uncertain. In short, equilibrium occurs whenever everyone on earth has previously attained what Christian theologians refer to as one of God's incommunicable attributes: *omniscience*.

This note card might generate a second reading, even the night before the final exam. Perhaps an A-level student might think to himself, "This economic condition does not seem altogether plausible." I would go so far as to suggest that even a few of the B-level students might wonder, at least briefly, whether this definition applies to the real world. The C-level students will surely do their best to commit the definition to memory, though without success. The others do not bother to use note cards.

Equilibrium as a concept applies only to a never-never land where men possess one of the attributes of God. This never-never land is the realm of simultaneous equations and the calculus, not people. Yet time and time again, we find economists seriously discussing a theoretical problem in economics as if this never-never land could conceivably

occur in the real world. So, to put it as bluntly as I can, almost the entire academic economics profession has been involved in a self-conscious deception of new students and the general public. The economists have fooled lots of people, especially themselves.

B. Lange vs. Mises

Let us consider a real-world example of “applied equilibrium” thinking by economists, one which had considerable impact on the history of economic thought for half a century. This example comes from one of the most important debates in the history of economic thought. Ludwig von Mises argued in a 1920 essay that socialist economic calculation is impossible because of the absence of market prices; therefore, socialist planning is inherently irrational.¹⁶ Oskar Lange responded in 1937: “Let us see how economic equilibrium is established by trial-and-error in a competitive market.”¹⁷ He asserted the ability of socialist central planners, in the absence of private ownership and private capital markets, to coordinate the economy by means of trial-and-error pricing.

1. A Communist’s Theory

So confident was Lange in the real-world applicability of his solution that he began his book with a rhetorical dismissal of Mises that became far more familiar than the details of Lange’s arguments. Socialists are beholden to Mises, he said, because Mises articulated the irrational calculation argument better than anyone else. “Both as an expression of recognition for the great service rendered by him and as a memento of the prime importance of sound economic accounting, a statue of Professor Mises might occupy an honorable place in the great hall of the Ministry of Socialization or of the Central Planning Board of the socialist state.”¹⁸ Less familiar is his Marxian follow-up: “[E]ven the sta[u]nchest of bourgeois economists unwittingly serve the proletarian cause.”¹⁹

Lange was no vague socialist. He was a Communist. This made him unique on the University of Chicago economics faculty, 1938–45,

16. Ludwig von Mises, “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth” (1920); reprinted in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963), ch. 3. (<http://www.mises.org/econcalc.asp>)

17. Lange, *Socialism*, p. 65.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

which was generally free market-oriented. During World War II, he broke with the Polish government-in-exile in London, openly switching his allegiance to the Lublin Committee, sponsored by the Soviet Union. In 1944, he served as a diplomatic go-between for Roosevelt and Stalin in matters regarding post-war Polish borders and its government.²⁰ He renounced his United States citizenship in 1945 to become the Polish ambassador to the United States. In 1947, he returned to Poland to serve as an economist. In 1957, he was appointed chairman of the Polish Economic Council. Here is the kicker: he did not suggest the implementation of his 1937 solution to Mises' challenge. Instead, he appealed to the new god—the computer—to solve the problem of coordinating scarce resources. He died in 1965.²¹ His abandonment in practice of his own suggested solution did not penetrate the thinking of the myriad of Mises' critics in the Western world, who continued to cite his 1937 essay as if it were gospel truth. In short, "Better to accept a defunct theory by a Communist planner in a poverty-stricken backward nation than to accept the legitimacy of a comprehensive theoretical criticism of socialism in general." Ironically, it was Poland that first broke loose from Soviet Communism's tyranny. The Solidarity labor movement understood that Communism cannot work—yes, even before certain best-selling Western economists did. The Poles began their high-risk protest against the USSR in 1981. Yet as late as 1989, Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Samuelson wrote in his best-selling economics textbook: "The Soviet economy is proof that, contrary to what many skeptics had earlier believed, a socialist command economy can function and even thrive."²² That same year, the Soviet Union went bankrupt in full public view, and the Berlin Wall came down. In 1991, senior Soviet Communists folded up shop, looted ("privatized") the Party's funds, and publicly abandoned Communism.

2. *Theory and Reality*

The theoretical problem with Lange's appeal to trial-and-error as a means leading to equilibrium is that for equilibrium to occur, there

20. "Oskar Ryszard Lange, 1904–1965," *History of Economic Thought Website*, New School of Social Research. (<http://bit.ly/LangeBio>)

21. Dolan, *Basic Economics*, p. 686.

22. Paul A. Samuelson and William D. Nordhaus, *Economics*, 13th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), p. 837, cited in Mark Skousen, *Economics on Trial: Lies, Myths, and Realities* (Homewood, Illinois: Business One Irwin, 1991), p. 208.

must first be omniscience by the person or persons in charge of resource allocation. There is no need for trials because there is no possibility of errors by those who possess omniscience. Equilibrium is the negation of trial and error. Now, to be fair to Lange, he must have had in mind the argument that trial and error by socialist planners is as efficient—no, more efficient—in reaching equilibrium than the profit-seeking decisions of resource owners. More equitable, too. Or, to paraphrase Orwell, “All equilibrium conditions are equal, but some are more equal than others.” All we need to assume, as good socialists, is “freedom of choice in consumption and freedom of choice in occupation,”²³ and the central planners can bring equilibrium into existence as well as entrepreneurs can. In fact, better. “Once the parametric function of prices is adopted as an accounting rule, the price structure is established by the objective equilibrium conditions.”²⁴ In short, what Mises and the Austrian school of economists always insisted is impossible in history—equilibrium conditions—Lange appealed to as the solution to the problem of socialist economic calculation.

For over half a century, this argument was accepted by most economists as a theoretically valid dismissal of Mises, i.e., Mises’ theory of entrepreneurship in a world of economic uncertainty and subjectively imputed prices. Lange’s argument was also, by implication, a dismissal of Frank H. Knight’s 1921 classic, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, which rested on the same theory of entrepreneurship that Mises offered.²⁵ Lange’s proposed practical solution, which was never adopted by any socialist planning agency, was regarded by his academic peers as having solved the real-world problems raised by Mises. As socialist economist Robert Heilbroner admitted in 1990, the year after the Berlin Wall came down, and the year before the Soviet Union collapsed: “Fifty years ago, it was felt that Lange had decisively won the argument for socialist planning.” It has turned out, Heilbroner belatedly admitted, that Lange was wrong, and “Mises was right.”²⁶ Fifty years of criticism from a handful of free market economists that Lange’s solution, based on equilibrium conditions, was no solution at all, in no way affected the thinking of the majority of academic economists.²⁷ This is

23. Lange, *Socialism*, p. 72.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

25. Knight also taught at the University of Chicago.

26. Robert Heilbroner, “After Communism,” *The New Yorker* (Sept. 10, 1990), p. 92.

27. Peter G. Klein, “Introduction,” *The Fortunes of Liberalism: Essays on Austrian Economics and the Ideal of Freedom*, ed. Peter G. Klein, vol. IV of *The Collected Works*

not surprising. Academic economists were equally committed to equilibrium as a legitimate model with which to critique free market capitalism,²⁸ and so they refused to pay any attention to Lange's critics.²⁹ What finally persuaded them was not Mises' arguments but socialism's visible irrationality: the bankruptcy of the Soviet-bloc nations.

Israel Kirzner argued that what is lacking in the neoclassical economics of Walras, Marshall, and their disciples is some means of explaining how equilibrium can occur, thereby giving life to the advanced textbook world of simultaneous equations. "However, when price is described as being above or below equilibrium, it is understood that a single price prevails in the market. The uncomfortable question, then, is whether we may assume that a single price emerges before equilibrium is attained. Surely a single price can be postulated only as the result of the process of equilibrium itself. . . . The procedure also assumes too much. It takes for granted that the market already knows when the demand price of the quantity now available exceeds the supply price. But disequilibrium occurs precisely because market participants do not know what the market-clearing price is."³⁰ This applies even more forcefully to Lange's socialist planning board. This line of argumentation, which is Mises' Austrian argument, undercuts Walras as well as Lange. The economics profession has not given this idea careful consideration in its journals and textbooks. Walras was the original spinner of invisible clothing for the emperors of economics. Emperors who wear invisible clothes prefer to keep clear-eyed critics away from their parades.

Invoking equilibrium when discussing economic policy-making is an exercise in conceptual magic. *Equilibrium rests on the assumption of the possibility of mankind's simultaneous omniscience.* Yet neoclassical economics, including Keynesianism, invokes the equilibrium

of F. A. Hayek (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 10.

28. For example, the once-popular "perfect competition" model was used to show why capitalism fails in practice. But in the perfect competition model, there is no competition, since everyone is omniscient regarding the uses of scarce resources. See Israel Kirzner's criticisms of E. H. Chamberlin in Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), chaps. 3, 4.

29. The most widely known response was by Hayek in *Economica* (1940); reprinted in F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIEO>) The most detailed criticism was by the little-known economist, T. J. B. Hoff, *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Society* (London: William Hodge & Co., 1949). (<http://bit.ly/HoffCalc>)

30. Israel M. Kirzner, *Perception, Opportunity, and Profit: Studies in the Theory of Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 4–5.

concept continually.³¹

D. Economic Theory vs. Ethical Value

Ethical value is publicly stripped of all authority in modern economic theory.³² Those few economists who have argued that value-free economic analysis is mythical have had almost no influence on the profession. If they have had any influence, this topic was not the area in which they established their reputations.³³ The one well-respected American economist who argued forcefully for the reintroduction of values into economic theory, Kenneth Boulding, was regarded as somewhat eccentric for promoting the idea that ethics should be incorporated into the tools of analysis.

Meanwhile, the use of high-level mathematics as a tool of theoretical analysis, especially since the days of Walras, reveals just how committed the economics profession is to arcane formulas. There is even an element of priestly ritual about this procedure. Liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who spurned mathematics, formulas, and graphs throughout his career, once revealed a little-known side of the profession. The editors of the professional journals, which are the avenues of career advancement, play a game regarding the use of mathematics. "The layman may take comfort from the fact that the most esoteric of this material is not read by other economists or even by the editors who publish it. In the economics profession the editorship of a learned journal not specialized to econometrics or mathematical stat-

31. The Austrians invoke it occasionally, but only as a mental construct. Mises called it the evenly rotating economy (E.R.E.). He used it only to prove that the interest rate is a universal phenomenon. One exception to this refusal to invoke equilibrium is Kirzner's 1963 discussion of perfect competition, which he said is impossible to attain. This appeared in his out-of-print upper division economics textbook, *Market Theory and the Price System*, pp. 108–109. He never revised this book to incorporate his later studies of entrepreneurship. For a critique of the E.R.E., see Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), p. 449.

32. Walter A. Weisskopf, *Alienation and Economics* (New York: Dutton, 1971), ch. 4.

33. Robert Heilbroner is a good example. His popular book on the history of economic thought, *The Worldly Philosophers*, is a standard text in both history and economics departments. It was assigned by the millions. But his essay on the impossibility of value-free economics was not published in an economics journal. Robert L. Heilbroner, "Economics as a 'Value-free' Science," *Social Research*, XL (1973), pp. 129–43; reprinted in William L. Marr and Baldev Raj (eds.), *How Economists Explain: A Reader in Methodology* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1982). The publisher did not bother to typeset this volume. It was written on a typewriter.

istics is a position of only moderate prestige. It is accepted, moreover, that the editor must have a certain measure of practical judgment. This means that he is usually unable to read the most prestigious contributions which, nonetheless, he must publish. So it is the practice of the editor to associate with himself a mathematical curate who passes on this part of the work and whose word he takes. A certain embarrassed silence covers the arrangement."³⁴ Outsiders are unaware of the massive deception that is now endemic within the academic economics profession.

E. Value Theory at an Epistemological Impasse

The attempt to create an economic science as devoid of value judgments or ethics as physics has led to a theoretical impasse. This impasse was first discussed in detail in the 1930s, but it is almost never mentioned today because it cannot be solved, given the presuppositions of modern economics. Economists in the 1870s³⁵ began to abandon classical economics' concept of objective economic value. They substituted individual value preferences for objective value. All economic value is imputed by individuals, modern economics insists.

If this is true, then in order to make any kind of policy recommendation, the economist must assume that the value preferences or value scales of individuals can be compared with each other. To say that a policy benefits a lot of people assumes that the economist can compare the value scales of all of these people, or at least a statistically valid sample of them (but how can we be sure it is valid?), as well as the value scales of those who are not benefitted by the policy. He must be able to total up benefits and costs. He must be able to aggregate individual value preferences. But this is impossible to do. *There can be no scientifically valid interpersonal comparison of subjective value.* This was Lionel Robbins' conclusion in 1932,³⁶ and while he partially recanted in 1938, he did not explain why he had been incorrect in 1932.³⁷

34. John Kenneth Galbraith, *Economics Peace and Laughter* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 41n.

35. William Jevons, Carl Menger, and Léon Walras. Cf. Karl Pribram, *A History of Economic Reasoning* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), Part VI.

36. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1932), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

37. On his debate with Sir Roy Harrod in 1938, see North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5:C:1. Cf. Mark A. Lutz and Kenneth Lux, *The Challenge of Humanistic Eco-*

There is no common scale of values in human action, economic or otherwise. There is no value *scale*. Scales are physical devices used by physicists and chemists. An idea of a “scale of values” is at best a useful teaching device. It is not only mythical, it is misleading if it is associated with actual measurement. It makes economics sound like a physical science. Individual value preferences can be ranked; they cannot be measured.³⁸ As for social value, it has no role to play in a science that denies that it is possible to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. The problem, however, is that the concept of social value plays an enormous role in economics. Indeed, *economics as a social science is inconceivable apart from the concept of social value*. Economics without a concept of social value would be like physics without a concept of mass.

The quest for a value-free economic science is ultimately the quest for man’s autonomy from God and His law. It is a quest for meaning apart from “thou shalt not.” The socialist economist is less likely to indulge in this quest than the free market economist is, since he invokes the benefits and legitimacy of social justice despite all socialist economies’ declining economic output. There are “higher values” than “mere statistical output,” he insists. The state must redistribute resources in order to benefit the oppressed or whichever the favored group is. Theoretically speaking, a strictly value-free free market economist cannot respond to the socialist by appealing to the free market’s *measurable efficiency* and growth without violating the principle of *individually imputed value*. There can be no scientifically valid measure of aggregate economic value, so there is no way to measure economic efficiency.³⁹

This admission would undermine all discussions by economists of government economic policy. Neither the socialist economists nor the free market economists want to see this happen. To have lots of people understand that economists as scientists must remain mute in all gov-

nomics (Menlo Park, California: Benjamin/Cummings, 1979), pp. 83–87. These two authors were as little known as their publisher.

38. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), p. 258. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

39. Murray N. Rothbard, “Comment: The Myth of Efficiency,” in Mario Rizzo (ed.), *Time, Uncertainty, and Disequilibrium* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1979), p. 90. Cf. Gary North, *The Coase Theorem: A Study in Economic Epistemology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gncoase>)

ernment policy matters is not in the economists' personal self-interest. They might lose their jobs.

The economist pretends to pull a rabbit (a policy recommendation) out of an empty hat (value-free economics). But he put the rabbit in the hat before he went on stage. He has definite value preferences. His economic analysis will reflect this fact. He will defend or attack this or that government policy in terms of his preferences. He cannot do this as a scientist, given the impossibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. He does so as a self-interested propagandist who pretends to be a neutral scientist for the sake of being taken seriously by policy makers and voters. This kind of magic is prestidigitation. It is based on manipulation and illusion. Sometimes I think the primary victims of this illusion are the economists themselves, most of whom seem blissfully unaware of the epistemological subterfuge they are promoting.

F. The Trinity and Imputation of Value

Without the presupposition of an omniscient God who imputes value subjectively in terms of a scale of values, a God who can measure value scales and make interpersonal comparisons of men's subjective utility, there can be no economic science. Modern economic science rests unofficially on the assumption of collective value scales and preferences, and also their measurability, even though officially economists deny their existence. Economists must assume what they officially deny.

There must be socially objective value and a socially objective value scale if there is a legitimate economic evaluation of social policy. There must be a value scale undergirding every evaluation; that is what "evaluate" means. God's judgments are objective in the sense of being both eternal and historical. He brings visible judgments in terms of His law. These judgments are both objectively grounded and subjectively grounded in the fixed moral character of God: "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).⁴⁰ God knows objectively whatever He knows subjectively, and vice versa. In Him, both subjective value and objective value reside. They reside there personally, for God is personal.

40. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

A corollary to the doctrine of God as an imputing agent is this: if individual men were not made in God's image, imputing value in a creaturely fashion, there could be no economic science. Men can impute value only because God has already done so. An individual can make useful estimates of social costs and benefits only because God makes precise calculations of social costs and benefits.

Finally, there is this corollary: if men were not able to impute value corporately, even as the Triune God of the Bible imputes value corporately, there could be no social theory, including economic theory. There could be no epistemological basis for policy formation. Societies can make judgments corporately because God does. The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of social theory.

This is all denied by the modern economist. Economics has adopted the confession of the magician, not in the sense of invoking the supernatural, but in the sense of attributing wealth-creation to value-free techniques governed by formulas. The socialist invokes state planning; the free market economist invokes private property. Both deny that wealth is the product of obedience to God's laws. >From economics, the original social science,⁴¹ has come the confessional model of all the others: "There is no necessary and sufficient god but man, either individual or collective."

The right-wing Enlightenment began with the English Whigs' political protests against a state-established church, but the concept of an evolving autonomous social order was first articulated by the Scottish common-sense rationalists in the mid-eighteenth century. They described society as the result of human action but not of human design.⁴² This model later served Erasmus Darwin and his grandson Charles as the model of biological evolution.⁴³

The Scots' social model was a kind of secularized Presbyterianism: a bottom-up appeals court system. It was paralleled by Continental left-wing Enlightenment social theory, whose model was secularized Jesuitism: a top-down authoritarian order. Scottish moral philosophy replaced theology (eighteenth century). Then political economy replaced moral philosophy (nineteenth century). Finally, economics re-

41. Political philosophy, as distinguished from political science, began its march into atheism with Machiavelli. But Machiavelli had no explicitly scientific pretensions.

42. F. A. Hayek, "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design" (1967), in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), ch. 6.

43. The influence here was David Hume. Hayek, "The Legal and Political Philosophy of David Hume" (1963), *ibid.*, p. 119n.

placed political economy (twentieth century). With each step, economics has moved further away from any concept of a divinely sanctioned moral order.

Conclusion

Man lives in a world of imputed meaning, for he is a creature under God. God imputes original meaning and value to the creation. Man is God's subordinate, required by God to think his own thoughts after Him, in a law-abiding, creaturely manner. But this is both too much and too little for covenant-breaking man. He wants to be less than the image of God and more than the agent of God. If he is God's image, he is responsible to God. He wants autonomy from God; so, he subordinates himself to nature instead. Rejecting God's law as a guide to human action, he finds himself entrapped by impersonal forces, which are in turn governed by (or are they merely revealed by?) impersonal formulas. Covenant-breaking man seeks out formulas as the pathways to wealth and power. Some people prefer astrological formulas; others prefer statistical averages. Fate or chance or an impersonal mixture of the two: Which will it be? "Get your bets down, gentlemen. The window is about to close."

But why do any of these formulas work? Consider mathematics, the most popular source of power-granting formulas in our day. Men master the discipline of mathematics in order to understand and control their world, rarely pausing to contemplate the utter unreasonableness of the fact that a mental construct that is governed exclusively by its own rules of logic nevertheless applies in so many powerful ways to the operations of the external world.⁴⁴

Economics allows the use of higher mathematics as a tool of theoretical analysis only where equilibrium conditions exist, i.e., where one or more men are presumed to be omniscient. "Ye shall be as gods" is the applicable phrase here. Every other use of mathematics in economics is either a simplified hypothetical example of price ratios for the sake of teaching or else statistics applied to historical data. Yet modern economics is overwhelmingly mathematical in its formal presentations, as a survey of any three professional journals will prove (within a statistically acceptable range or error, of course) to skeptical readers.

44. Eugene Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, 13 (1960), pp. 1–14. Wigner won the Nobel Prize in physics. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>)

Modern economics, the original strictly humanistic social science, cannot avoid these humanist antinomies. For example, in seeking autonomy from God, modern economists propose a world in which only individuals impute value to the creation. But then they find that these autonomous imputations cannot be aggregated: no common measure exists. It is impossible to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. So, policy-making on a scientific basis must logically be abandoned. But the economist does not want to abandon either science or policy-making, especially government policy-making, where the power is, or seems to be. So, he refuses to think about the logic of his position.

The economics profession is becoming ever more self-conscious in its quest for analytical tools that abandon any trace of ethics. Some economists are even bothered by the traditional concept of choice.⁴⁵ They may adopt indifference curves as a way to avoid the more psychological, and therefore more scientifically suspect, concept of utility. But if acting man is truly indifferent between two possible outcomes, how can he choose? Will he stand motionless, like Buridan's ass, until the threat of deprivation pressures him to take action, at which point he abandons his indifference?⁴⁶

Economists adopt cost curves, supply curves, all kinds of curves. But a curve is made up of infinitesimal points. Prices and quantities are described by curves as changing in infinitesimally small moves. Infinitesimal changes are not aspects of decision-making. But curves are subject to the calculus, which for the modern economist is surely a more important explanatory tool than human action is.

Economists rest their case for economics as a science on theoretical constructs that assume that man is omniscient. But there is no human choice in a world in which man knows outcomes; there are only responses.⁴⁷ Economists invoke complex mathematical formulas in their quest for knowledge and influence, while abandoning the idea of rational human choice. Armen Alchian, a free market economist of the

45. Most notable is Armen Alchian: "Uncertainty, Evolution, and Economic Theory" (1950), in *The Collected Works of Armen Alchian*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 2006), I, pp. 3–17.

46. Murray N. Rothbard, "Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics," in *On Freedom and Free Enterprise: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises*, ed. Mary Sennholz (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 238. (<http://bit.ly/On-Freedom>)

47. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 249. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

Chicago School, writes: "The essential point is that individual motivation and foresight, while sufficient, are not necessary" for economic theory to be true.⁴⁸

Step by step, humanistic economics is abandoning man. Economics substitutes a behaviorist concept of man for the decision-maker who inhabits the real world. Man disappears in the world of simultaneous equations. God is not mocked . . . not at zero price, anyway.

48. Alchian, "Uncertainty, Evolution and Economic Theory," in Alchian, *Economic Forces at Work*, p. 27.

Appendix B

INDIVIDUALISM, HOLISM, AND COVENANTALISM

And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied. . . (Deut. 8:13).

The language of mathematics infuses Moses' discussion of Israel's blessings. This language points to objective wealth: the multiplication of valuable things. This raises a problem for economic theory. How is value measured? How is wealth measured? If value is objective, it can be measured, but modern economic theory officially places the individual's subjective valuation—economic imputation—at the heart of its theory of value. Subjective evaluations cannot be measured, even by those who make these evaluations. There is no objective value scale, either personally or interpersonally. Yet modern economists have been obsessed with the intellectual challenge of establishing reliable indexes of national wealth, prices, and corporate social utility. They have persuaded governments around the world to spend billions of dollars to collect economic data from private citizens and firms. In fact, this data collection has justified the establishment of government economic planning. Without statistics, government planners could not claim the ability to plan the economy.¹

Humanist economic theory has been unable to resolve the dichotomy between subjective value and objective value.² If value is imputed

1. Murray N. Rothbard, "The Politics of Political Economists: Comment," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 74 (Nov. 1960). Rothbard, "Fact-finding is a proper function of government," *Clichés of Politics*, ed. Mark Spangler (Irvington, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1994). The essay was first published in *The Freeman* in June, 1961: "Statistics: Achilles' Heel of Government." Cf. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 2, section on "Statistics and Government Planning."

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch.5. Cf. North, *Authority and Domin-*

subjectively by an individual, it is impossible for another individual to measure objectively this value. In fact, it is impossible for the first individual to impute cardinal numbers to his own valuation. He can only establish an ordinal ranking of values: first, second, third, etc. As Rothbard wrote,

It is important to realize that there is never any possibility of *measuring* increases or decreases in happiness or satisfaction. Not only is it impossible to measure or compare changes in the satisfaction of different people; it is not possible to measure changes in the happiness of any given person. In order for any measurement to be possible, there must be an eternally fixed objectively given unit with which other units may be compared. There is no such objective unit in the field of human valuation. The individual must determine subjectively for himself whether he is better or worse off as a result of any change. His preference can only be expressed in terms of simple choice, or *rank*. . . . There is no possible unit of happiness that can be used for purposes of comparison, and hence of addition or multiplication. Thus, values cannot be measured; values or utilities cannot be added, subtracted, or multiplied. They can only be ranked as better or worse.³

If this is true, then it is scientifically impossible to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. This was Lionel Robbins' assertion in 1932.⁴ But if he was correct, then it is impossible for economists as scientists to make policy recommendations based on the superiority of one outcome to another. Roy Harrod pointed this out in a 1938 essay.⁵ Robbins then capitulated, announcing that he did accept the legitimacy of idea of economic policy-making.⁶ He never reconciled his two positions.⁷ So far, neither has anyone else.

This is the problem of epistemological subjectivism and policy-making. It applies to every social science, not just economics. It is more obvious in economics, however. The economics profession sys-

ion: *An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1990] 2012), pp. 1093–1100. ??? (App. D:e)

3. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), pp. 18–19.

4. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (New York: St. Martins, 1932), p. 140. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

5. R. F. Harrod, "Scope and Method of Economics," *Economic Journal*, XLVIII (1938), pp. 396–97.

6. Lionel Robbins, "Interpersonal Comparisons of Utility: A Comment," *ibid.* (1938), p. 637–39.

7. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5:C:1.

tematically avoids discussing it. Economists dearly love their role as policy experts. They do not want to admit to their students, let alone to the general public, that the foundations of modern economics make such a role scientifically fraudulent.

B. Welfare Economics, Ethics, and Subjectivism

Whether we use the language of multiplication or the language of social utility, we are dealing with collectives. If we use such terminology to assert an increase in social wealth, we are aggregating individual utilities. But this procedure is illegitimate if economic value is exclusively subjective. Thus, we cannot move scientifically from the individual to the group on the basis of economic analysis. Conclusion: there is no such thing as scientific welfare economics.

1. Rothbard on Welfare Economics

Rothbard attempted to make this move in a 1956 essay. First, he denied the existence of total utility. "We must conclude then that *there is no such thing as total utility*; all utilities are marginal."⁸ Second, he announced: "The problem of 'welfare economics' has always been to find some way to circumvent this restriction on economics, and to make ethical, and particularly *political*, statements directly."⁹ Third, he stated that all ethical issues are imported from outside the discipline of economics.¹⁰ Fourth, he asserted that all economic advising denies the ethical neutrality dictum.¹¹ Then how can an economist make any statement regarding social welfare? Only on one basis: if any change increases at least one person's utility and has not reduced any other person's utility. This is Pareto's unanimity rule.

There is one overwhelming objection to this rule: *the existence of envy*. If one person is made richer by some change in the economy, and another person resents this outcome, the benefit to the first person may be offset by the negative feelings of the second. Rothbard in 1956 acknowledged this as a theoretical problem, but then he dismissed it. Envy is strictly internal; it does not lead to action, and only action counts. "How do we *know* that this hypothetical envious one

8. Murray N. Rothbard, "Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics," in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 234.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

loses in utility because of the exchanges of others? Consulting his verbal opinions does not suffice, for his proclaimed envy might be a joke or a literary game or a deliberate lie.”¹² Conclusion: “We are led inexorably, then, to the conclusion that the processes of the free market always lead to a gain in social utility. And we can say this with absolute validity as economists, without engaging in ethical judgments.”¹³ So, there is an aggregate called social utility after all. We can postulate an increase in social utility whenever we can identify a voluntary exchange: two people are better off, and no one else is worse off, *just so long as there is no such thing as envy*. Rothbard imported an aggregate into his analysis, as all welfare economists must, and with welfare economics comes ethics—the end of value-free economics.

Unfortunately for the acceptability of this thesis, Rothbard later wrote a classic essay in 1971 on the importance of envy in society, especially as the basis of socialism.¹⁴ By moving envy out of the realm of the merely hypothetical into the realm of the politically significant, Rothbard undermined his reconstruction of welfare economics. Envy *does* exist after all in the world of demonstrated preferences; it is a major foundation of socialism. Therefore, the economist who uses some version of Pareto’s analysis—at least two market participants are better off, while no one is worse off—in order to prove an increase in social utility yet without invoking ethics, is deluding himself. He has imported ethics into economic analysis the moment the issue of envy is introduced. He has assumed that envy is ethically illegitimate and therefore cannot legitimately be used to criticize that libertarian version of welfare economics which supposedly enables an economist to assert an increase of social utility based on the existence of voluntary exchanges. Ethics, in short, becomes determinative in “value-free” economic science. This hostility to envy as a legitimate aspect of economic analysis rests on an ethical foundation.

2. Kirzner on Welfare Economics

Three decades later, Israel Kirzner—a disciple of Mises and also a

12. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

13. *Idem.*

14. Rothbard, “Freedom, Inequality and the Division of Labor,” *Modern Age* (Summer 1971); reprinted in Kenneth Templeton (ed.), *The Politicalization of Society* (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyPress, 1978), pp. 83–126. The essay was also reprinted as a monograph by the Mises Institute, Auburn, Alabama. (<http://www.mises.org/fipan-dol.asp>)

rabbi of Orthodox Judaism¹⁵—profusely praised Rothbard’s 1956 essay for its rejection of aggregates. “To attempt to aggregate utility is not merely to violate the tenets of methodological individualism and subjectivism (by treating the sensations of different individuals as being able to be added up); it is also to engage in an entirely meaningless exercise: economic analysis has nothing to say about sensations, it deals strictly with choices and their interpersonal implications.”¹⁶

Kirzner rejected the idea of “Pareto optimality” because “a Pareto optimal move is considered to advance the well-being of *society*—considered as a whole.”¹⁷ He was correct; this is exactly what Pareto optimality implies. But Rothbard’s essay rested on Pareto optimality: two people being better off and no one else (except the envious, who were dismissed by definition) worse off. Kirzner completely missed the fundamental point—a highly non-individualistic point—of Rothbard’s essay: social utility *is* an aggregate, and this aggregate can be said to increase only because of Pareto optimality. In the essay following Kirzner’s, I set forth these challenges to Rothbard:

If the economist cannot make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility . . . as Rothbard insists, then how can he be certain that “the free market maximizes social utility”?¹⁸ What is “social utility” in an epistemological world devoid of interpersonal aggregates?

If “*in human action there are no quantitative constants*,”¹⁹ and therefore no index number is legitimate,²⁰ then how can we say that monetary inflation produces price inflation? What is price inflation without an index number? What is an index number without interpersonal aggregation?

If we cannot define “social utility,” or price inflation, then how can we know that “money, in contrast to all other useful commodit-

15. Economist Aaron Levine has referred to Kirzner as “Rabbi Dr. Israel Kirzner, Talmudist extraordinaire. . . .” Levine, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law: Aspects of Jewish Business Ethics* (New York: KTAV, 1980), p. xi.

16. Israel M. Kirzner, “Welfare Economics: A Modern Austrian Perspective,” in Walter Block and Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr. (eds.), *Man, Economy, and Liberty: Essays in Honor of Murray N. Rothbard* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 1988), p. 79. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMEL>)

17. *Idem*.

18. Rothbard, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy* (Menlo Park, California: Institute for Humane Studies, 1970), p. 13. Reprinted in Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, p. 1065.

19. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, p. 845.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 845–46.

ies employed in production or consumption, does not confer a social benefit when its supply increases"?²¹ How can we legitimately say anything about the aggregate entity, "social benefit"?²²

Kirzner understood that these aggregates are illegitimate from the point of view of methodological subjectivism, and he refrained from arguing publicly as an economist for any social policy throughout his career. He saw that, in terms of pure subjectivism in economics, to discuss the concept of social choice is "to engage in a metaphor."²³ "To choose, *presupposes* an integrated framework of ends and means; without such a presumed framework allocative choice is hardly a coherent notion at all."²⁴

Such a statement identifies Kirzner as a very precise follower of Mises and a less precise follower of Moses. Without the concept of *aggregate, corporate social curses and blessings*, there can be no national covenant between God and His people. Without the idea of a series of corporate covenants there could be neither Judaism nor Christianity. The covenants of Israel were *judicially objective*. To demonstrate this objectivity, God provided *objective economic blessings* that were visible to anyone who looked at the evidence.

And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else (Deut. 4:37–39).

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full (Deut. 6:10–11).

21. Rothbard, "The Case for a 100% Gold Dollar," in Leland B. Yeager (ed.), *In Search of a Monetary Constitution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 121.

22. Gary North, "Why Murray Rothbard Will Never Win the Nobel Prize!" in *Man, Economy, and Liberty*, p. 105.

23. Kirzner, "Welfare Economics," p. 80.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow (Deut. 28:9–12).

The consistent methodological subjectivist refuses to see with his own eyes. He does not acknowledge the scientific relevance of either corporate blessings or corporate cursings. This was Israel's problem in Isaiah's day.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land (Isa. 6:8–12).

Such blindness is *judicial blindness*. God blinds men so that they cannot see with their own eyes. Judicial blindness is a mark of His covenantal curse. Men interpret what they see in terms of what they believe, and what covenant-breakers believe is that God does not bring corporate, objective, measurable, covenantal sanctions in history.

Kirzner rejected classical economics in the name of subjectivism. He therefore rejected biblical economics in the name of subjectivism. For methodological subjectivism, there is no such thing as national wealth, economically speaking, for there is no collective. If nation A is devastated by a plague, leaving behind only one alcoholic survivor who now owns the contents of every liquor store in the nation, while nation B has not suffered such a plague, there is no way for a subjectivist economist to say which nation is now better off. The alcoholic is clearly a happy man. Who is to say scientifically that the collective joy of nation

B, which avoided the plague, is greater than the collective joy of nation A, i.e., the drunk who is feeling no pain? There is no such thing as collective joy, says the methodological subjectivist. In Kirzner's words, "economic analysis has nothing to say about sensations." Contrast this with Moses' economic analysis: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).²⁵ Moses spoke this to the assembled nation, not to a private individual.

Moses was raising the question that fascinated Adam Smith: the origin of the wealth of nations. Kirzner dismissed this whole question as epistemologically misguided.

During the period of classical economics it was, of course, taken for granted that a society was economically successful strictly insofar as it succeeded in achieving increased wealth. Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* expressed this approach to the economics of welfare simply and typically. It was taken for granted that a given percentage increase in a nation's physical wealth (with wealth often seen as consisting of bushels of 'corn') meant a similar percentage increase in the nation's well-being. From this perspective a physical measure of a nation's wealth provides an index of that nation's economic success, regardless of its distribution. A bushel of wheat is a bushel of wheat. Clearly this notion of welfare offends the principles of methodological individualism and subjectivism; it was swept away by the marginalist (subjectivist) revolution of the late nineteenth century.²⁶

But Smith's perception of objective national wealth was closer to the covenantal wisdom of the Bible than radical subjectivism is.²⁷

25. Chapter 21.

26. Kirzner, "Welfare Economics," p. 78.

27. The phrase "radical subjectivism" is Ludwig Lachmann's. He claimed in 1982 that radical subjectivism "inspired the Austrian revival of the 1970s. . . ." Ludwig M. Lachmann, "Ludwig von Mises and the Extension of Subjectivism," in Israel M. Kirzner (ed.), *Method, Process, and Austrian Economics: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1982), p. 37. Lachmann was being simultaneously overly modest and overly arrogant. It was his lectures in defense of radical subjectivism at the 1974 South Royalton, Vermont, conference (which I attended) that split the Austrian movement into the Rothbardian and Lachmanian camps. Radical subjectivism was surely an aspect of the revival of Austrian economics, for it split the movement into two irreconcilable factions. Radical subjectivism was hardly basis of Austrianism's revival. Lachmann also invoked the economics of "Shackle, the master subjectivist" (p. 38). But Shackle was never an Austrian School economist. Lachmann pretended otherwise. See Lachmann, "From Mises to Shackle: An Essay on Austrian Economics and the Kaleidic Society," *Journal of Economic Literature*, XIV

By stripping all traces of objective value theory out of economics, radical subjectivism produces an intellectual world of sustained incoherence. A handful of academic economists have trained themselves to dismiss the visibly obvious as epistemologically irrelevant.²⁸ Their academic peers do not go along with them, but they also do not offer refutations of this epistemological nihilism that are based on epistemological subjectivism/individualism.

B. Dualism: Objective vs. Subjective Economics

I am not speaking here of Kant's dualism between the realm of man's mind and the realm of physical causation.²⁹ Mises, as a good Kantian, acknowledged the legitimacy of this dualism.³⁰ I am speaking here of the dualism between aggregative, objective value theory and individualistic, subjective value theory.

The epistemological problem with all forms of welfare economics and all forms of economic policy-making is the problem of reconciling *aggregative values or preferences*, whose existence is denied by extreme economic individualists, yet also invoked by them at some point, and *subjective values*, which are dismissed as morally peripheral by methodological holists, but which are also invoked by them at some point. This topic is avoided like the plague within the economics profession, since there has never been a widely agreed-upon humanistic solution to this dualism.

1. Indeterminacy

The methodological individualist moves epistemologically toward complete *indeterminacy*. There is no explainable continuity between the external world and the world of subjective evaluation. The momentary subjective states of the individual are said to lose contact with the external world and even with his own previous subjective states.³¹

(March 1976). In the history of economic thought, G. L. S. Shackle is the most consistent defender of Kant's noumenalism as an economic methodology. I regard Kirzner's theory of entrepreneurship as Lachmanian.

28. In short, says the economist, "Your facts cannot be sustained by economic theory."

29. Richard Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956).

30. Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 1.(<http://bit.ly/MisesTAH>)

31 31. Lachmann wrote: "The human mind can, it is true, transcend the present

This epistemological indeterminacy was named by the radical subjectivist economist, Ludwig Lachmann: *kaleidic perceptualism*. He self-consciously invoked as his image of society the child's toy, the kaleidoscope.³² A kaleidoscope is a tube that uses mirrors to produce ever-changing, unrepeatable, visually fascinating, and *conceptually meaningless* patterns out of shifting, colored pieces of glass.

For Lachmann, and also for Kirzner, it is illegitimate to speak of national economic growth or per capita economic growth.³³ Yet Mises argued to the contrary: "Saving, capital accumulation, is the agency that has transformed step by step the awkward search for food on the part of savage cave dwellers into modern ways of industry."³⁴ For the radical subjectivist, it is illogical to argue that an increase in per capita capital leads to greater per capita wealth. Per capita capital is "a wholly artificial construct," wrote Kirzner.³⁵ Yet Mises argued: "There is but one means available to improve the material conditions of mankind: to accelerate the growth of capital accumulated as against the growth in population. The greater the amount of capital invested per head of the worker, the more and the better goods can be produced and consumed."³⁶ Mises' original radical subjectivism has run aground on the shoals of a far more radical subjectivism. The result of pure subjectivism is the end of meaning, not just for economics but for human thought in general. It destroys continuity: through time and between individuals.

2. Central Planning

In contrast, the methodological holist moves toward central planning in imagination and memory, but the moment-in-being remains nevertheless always *self-contained* and *solitary*. . . . It follows that it is impossible to compare human actions undertaken at different moments in time." Ludwig M. Lachmann, *Capital, Expectations, and the Market Process* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977), p. 83.

32. Ludwig Lachmann, "An Austrian Stocktaking: Unsettled Questions and Tentative Answers," in Louis Spadaro (ed.), *New Directions in Austrian Economics* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1978), p. 7. This book might well have been titled *Kaleidic Developments in Austrian Economics*, or perhaps *The Epistemological Breakdown of Austrian Economics*.

33. Ludwig Lachmann, *Capital and Its Structure* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977), p. 37.

34. Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 39. (<http://bit.ly/MisesAnti>)

35. Israel M. Kirzner, *An Essay on Capital* (New York: Augustus Kelly, 1966), p. 120.

36. Mises, *Anti-Capitalist Mentality*, p. 5.

ning. The concept of social goods and social evils implies a single planning mind and a single standard of good and evil. This is what alienates the individualists. They want to preserve human freedom; the holist wants to improve the human condition systematically, meaning through central planning and coercion. The individualist does not trust the state; the holist does not trust the free market. The individualist rejects state compulsion; the holist rejects social and even personal indeterminacy, which radical subjectivists such as Lachmann preach with fervor. The individualist wants the consumer to be sovereign; the holist wants the voter or bureaucrat to be sovereign. The individualist defends the sovereignty of individual plans; the holist defends the sovereignty of the state's plan.

The individualist proclaims faith in the rationality of the market and its ability to improve the human condition. He then denies the epistemological legitimacy of any objective unit of measurement that would allow an outside observer to assess such improvement. In contrast, the holist proclaims faith in the rationality of the state and its ability to improve the human condition. He then denies the appropriateness of any unit of measurement that points to the failure of central planning to deliver the goods. Denying the relevance of socialism's objective failure, he proclaims his faith in intangible socialist goods that provide dignity and meaning in socialism's world of stagnant or declining economic output. Both the individualist and the holist seek justification in a hypothetical realm of the spirit—Kant's noumenal realm—which lies outside the domain of objective measurement, i.e., Kant's phenomenal realm. In search of meaning, members of both schools of economic thought flee to the zone of man's indeterminate subjective freedom: Kant's noumenal realm. The holist seeks justification for his views in terms of the collective "quality of life," which cannot be scientifically measured. The individualist seeks justification for his views in terms of the individually perceived productivity of the entrepreneurial flash of insight, which cannot be measured, taught, or even described scientifically.³⁷

37. Kirzner's entrepreneurial "ah, ha," alertness, or hunch is the premier example of this flight to the noumenal in search of explanations. He called entrepreneurial alertness "the *instant* of an entrepreneurial leap of faith. . . ." Kirzner, *Perception, Opportunity, and Profit: Studies in the Theory of Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 163. This moment of discovery is beyond the constraints of logical cause and effect. "Once the entrepreneurial element in human action is perceived, one can no longer interpret the decision as merely calculative—capable in principle of being yielded by mechanical manipulation of the 'data' or already *com-*

C. Resolution: Methodological Covenantalism

The methodological covenantalist finds the solution to these inherent and permanent dualisms in the concept of a sovereign, omniscient God. God has a plan. He matches ends and means. He issues a decree for history, and this decree will be fulfilled. "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4: 35). The presupposition of a sovereign God replaces the presupposition of sovereign man.

To the extent that men think God's thought after Him, they adopt God's standards—His *hierarchy of legitimate ends*—with respect to their lives. God enables people to coordinate their plans through human action because His decree and plan are above theirs. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov. 16: 9). "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). In Joseph's words to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20). God's law-order provides the framework of productive coordination, in economics as in other areas of life. His sanctions in history provide both the incentives and disincentives that confirm His covenant law.

The methodological individualist does not begin with the methodological covenantalist's presupposition of an omniscient God. Such a God would thwart the individualist's autonomy. Neither does the methodological holist begin with God; he begins with some substitute source of planning and accurate information, most commonly the state. The idea of cosmic personalism is foreign to humanistic economics.³⁸ Economics since the late seventeenth century has been self-consciously agnostic,³⁹ i.e., militantly atheistic with a thin veneer of humility for academic propriety's sake. The result is epistemological chaos, which is concealed from public view, even from the occasionally

pletely implied in these data." Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 35. He spoke of the entrepreneur's "propensity to sense what prices are realistically available to him" (p. 40). The essence of this sense is that it is beyond calculation, i.e., beyond Kant's phenomenal realm.

38. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1.

39. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1963).

inquisitive eyes of graduate students, by a kind of embarrassed silence. Should anyone enquire about this epistemological dualism, he will be assured that such matters are irrelevant to what economists do. And what do economists do? Economics. Then what is economics? Whatever economists do. (These definitions were offered, respectively, by Jacob Viner and Frank Knight.)

Conclusion

The Bible's objective language of national wealth undermines methodological individualism. But rarely do methodological individualists pursue their position to its logical conclusion. The language of statistical averages and price indexes is common to most methodological individualists.

Because biblical cosmic personalism is true, there can be a resolution to the philosophical problem of the seeming contradiction between subjective and objective knowledge. In economics, this contradiction is seen most clearly in the debates over objective and subjective value. The Bible's objective value theory is grounded in the objective Person of God—His declarations, standards, and evaluations. God's subjective declaration of value to His objective creation—"it is good"—and His objective declarations of blessings and cursings in history indicate that subjectivism and objectivism are correlative. They are grounded in the objective character of God's subjective declarations. The mind of man is capable of making objective evaluations of external conditions because his mind reflects God's mind. He is made in God's image. His evaluations become progressively accurate as they approach God's evaluations as a limit. He thinks God's thought after Him.

There is corporate wealth. Men can subjectively perceive objective differences between rich and poor nations, rich and poor corporations, and rich and poor governments. I can remember being challenged verbally by Mises in the fall of 1971 to defend my statement that we can make objectively meaningful comparisons between subjectively perceived human conditions. I said, "It is better to be rich and healthy than it is to be poor and sick." He said, "Yes, that's so." This was not a great philosophical exchange, but it got to the point. That point was not noumenal.

Appendix C

SYNCRETISM, PLURALISM, AND EMPIRE

And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure (Dan. 2:40–45).

Daniel's prophecy to Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar foretold the rise of a series of empires. The last worldwide political empire would be Rome's. It would break apart. It would be replaced by a new empire, a new world order: the church, the stone cut from the mountain made without hands. There is no political empire capable of replacing the church as the basis of an integrated world order. Every self-proclaimed new world order will fail.

In our day, we have seen two rival claimants to the throne of empire, each claiming to be a builder of a New World Order: international Communism and Western humanism. Soviet Communism visibly collapsed in 1991. Today, Western humanists believe that they are capable of putting together an international order based on free trade,

central banking, currency manipulation, and international bureaucratic agencies with the power to control the legal framework of international production. This ideal, like the ideal of Communism, will smash on the rocks of economic efficiency. This ideal is built on faith in political controls, which today means faith in central banking, taxation, and computers.¹

A. A Common Pantheon

The strategy of the ancient empires was syncretism: the fusion of competing religious faiths. It still is, but today it is called pluralism. The idols of the conquered cities could be brought into the pantheon of the empire's gods. This was Rome's strategy. Local idols lost their exclusivity when they entered the empire's pantheon. Rome sought to maintain the regional authority of the gods of the classical city-state by incorporating them into the Roman pantheon. By honoring the geographical significance of local deities, Rome sought to subordinate them all to the pantheon itself, i.e., to the empire. The Roman pantheon ("all gods"), manifested politically by the genius and later the divinity of the emperor, universalized the implied divinity of the classical city-state.

It was the exclusivity and universalism of the God of the Bible that identified Jews and Christians as politically untrustworthy and even revolutionary subjects. They refused to worship either the genius or the divinity of the Roman emperor. They would not acknowledge the authority of the Roman empire's pantheon of gods. They would not acknowledge the God of the Bible as just one more regional god among many. The God of the Bible, they insisted, was above the creation and outside it. This confession was revolutionary in ancient Rome. Rushdoony explained why:

The essence of the ancient city-state, polis, and empire was that it constituted the continuous unity of the gods and men, of the divine and the human, and the unity of all being. There was thus no possible independence in society for any constituent aspect. Every element of society was a part of the all-absorbing one. Against this, Christianity asserted the absolute division of the human and the divine. Even in the incarnation of Christ, the human and the divine were in union without confusion, as Chalcedon [451 A.D.] so powerfully defined it. Thus, divinity was withdrawn from human society and returned to

1. The international financial crisis that began in late 2008 has yet to be resolved.

the heavens and to God. No human order or institution could claim divinity and thereby claim to represent total and final order. By divinizing the world, Christianity placed all created orders, including church and state, under God.²

The Roman Empire could not coexist with Christianity. The Roman authorities recognized this fact over two centuries before the Christians did. While Christians were honest, hard-working, peace-loving citizens, they were necessarily the enemies of pagan Rome. Their God would not submit; He ordered His people not to submit. The Christians sought peace through religious pluralism, but Rome sought dominion through syncretism: the absorption of all religions into the religion of empire. Syncretism is the enemy of orthodoxy. Political pluralism—the equal authority (little or none) in civil law of all supernatural gods—is a grand illusion. But Christian believers generally have not yet recognized in political pluralism the syncretism that underlies it and the humanistic empire which is pluralism's long-term goal.³

Christians under Roman rule called for religious toleration—the right not to worship the emperor as a condition of citizenship or even resident alien status—but Rome's authorities knew better. They recognized what early Christians refused to acknowledge, namely, that the God of the Bible recognizes no other gods, rejects syncretism, and therefore calls for the subordination of culture to Him and His Bible-revealed law. Rome recognized early that pluralism is a politically convenient short-term illusion and a long-run impossibility. There would either be a judicially impotent Christian establishment under the authority of a political priesthood or else covenant religion would govern the nation's political oath of allegiance. The result of this early recognition was Rome's intermittent persecution of Christians for almost three centuries, followed by the fall of Rome and the inheritance of Rome's infrastructure—roads, laws, and customs—by Christians in the fourth century. Rome's syncretism failed as surely as the Christians' early pluralism failed.

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), p. 131.

3. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

B. Tertullian's *Apology*

In the late second or early third century, Tertullian (145–220), the intellectual founder of Latin Christianity, wrote his famous *Apology*, a defense of Christianity as a pietistic religion of heart and hearth which should have been acceptable to Rome's power religion. It was addressed to "Rulers of the Roman Empire. . . ."⁴ It was a critique of Rome's demand that Christians must worship the divinity of the emperor for the sake of the prosperity of the empire.

He attributed to ignorance the rulers' hostility to Christianity. "So we maintain that they are both ignorant while they hate us, and hate us unrighteously while they continue in ignorance, the one thing being the result of the other either way of it."⁵ In Chapter 25, he pointed out that the complex pantheon of Rome in his day had not been the religion of the early Romans. "But how utterly foolish it is to attribute the greatness of the Roman name to religious merits, since it was after Rome became an empire, or call it still a kingdom, that the religion she professes made its chief progress! Is it the case now? Has its religion been the source of the prosperity of Rome?" On the contrary, he argued: "Indeed, how could religion make a people great who have owed their greatness to their irreligion? For, if I am not mistaken, kingdoms and empires are acquired by wars, and are extended by victories. More than that, you cannot have wars and victories without the taking, and often the destruction, of cities. That is a thing in which the gods have their share of calamity. Houses and temples suffer alike; there is indiscriminate slaughter of priests and citizens; the hand of rapine is laid equally upon sacred and on common treasure. Thus the sacrileges of the Romans are as numerous as their trophies."⁶ The sacredness of Rome's pantheon of gods is an illusion; the gods of Rome are idols. "But divinities unconscious are with impunity dishonored, just as in vain they are adored."⁷

If this was calculated to persuade Rome's rulers, it was an apologetic failure. Tertullian did not understand, or pretended not to understand, the inherently political nature of classical religion. The gods of Rome were thoroughly political in Tertullian's era. This is not surprising. In classical religion, the gods of allied cities, as well as allied famil-

4. Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. I, opening words. Reprinted in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1870] 1978), III, p. 17.

5. *Idem*.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

7. *Idem*.

ies and clans within a city, had always been political. They had always been creations for the sake of politics.⁸ Peace treaties between warring cities were treaties between their gods.⁹ While the ancients believed that the gods did bring sanctions, positive and negative, in history, they also believed that these sanctions were applied to members of oath-bound, custom-bound, and ritual-bound groups: families, clans, and city-states. The heart of Roman religion was its public piety.¹⁰ Jews and Christians remained aloof from these public ceremonies, not because the rituals were public, but because they formally invoked idols. On the other hand, they were persecuted, not because they refused to believe in the power of idols, but because they refused to participate in acts of public piety. *The judicial issue for Rome was the oath—formal invocation—not personal belief.* The public oath affirmed men's obedience to representatives of the gods of the pantheon—representatives who were, above all, political agents of the emperor.

In Chapter 28, Tertullian called for religious toleration generally, affirming strict voluntarism in worship. Christians cannot in good conscience "offer sacrifice to the well-being of the emperor." Yet for this refusal, he complained, they have been illegitimately condemned as treasonous. Roman religion was itself sacrilegious, he said, "for you do homage with a greater dread and an intense reverence to Caesar, than Olympian Jove himself."¹¹ Of course they did; the Olympian Jove was a political construct. Caesar was the earthly manifestation of Rome's political power, and classical religion was power religion. Tertullian sought to condemn Rome's rulers for "showing impiety to your gods, inasmuch as you show a greater reverence to a human sovereignty than you do to them."¹² His strategy was naive; the heart of all power religion, from Pharaoh to the latest political messiah, is the honoring of human sovereignty.¹³

In Chapter 29, he argued that the gods of Rome did not protect Caesar; rather, Caesar protected the gods. "This, then, is the ground on

8. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book III, ch. VI.

9. *Ibid.*, III:XV.

10. Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 64.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

12. *Idem.*

13. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

which we are charged with treason against the imperial majesty, to wit, that we do not put the emperors under their own possessions; that we do not offer a mere mock service on their behalf, as not believing their safety rests in leaden hands.”¹⁴ This was also a naive argument, yet one still revered by most Christian defenders of modern political pluralism. To pray publicly for Caesar in the name of the pantheon of Rome’s gods was to acknowledge that Caesar was the common reference point, the common spokesman, for the inherently political gods of classical culture.

The syncretism of Rome’s religion was the theological justification for the administration of Rome’s political empire: a hierarchy of sanctified power from Caesar to the lowest officials in the otherwise autonomous city-states that made up the empire. This hierarchy of power was sacred, a matter of formal ritual.

The source of law in society is its god.¹⁵ Caesar was the source of law in the name of the gods of the pantheon. There was no operational hierarchy above him; there was a political and military hierarchy below him. This much Tertullian understood. This was the heart of his argument against the seriousness of Roman religion. But to maintain widespread faith in the legitimacy of any social order, the authorities must foster faith in a sacred—though not necessarily supernatural—law-order, i.e., laws to which non-political and cosmic sanctions are attached. Civil authorities seek to instill the fear of the society’s gods in the hearts of the subjects of the sacred political order. This is why Tertullian was unquestionably treasonous, for he was undermining men’s faith in the higher order which the authorities insisted undergirded Rome’s legitimacy. Tertullian was challenging the civil covenant of Rome, an overwhelmingly political social order. He challenged Rome’s gods, the authority of Rome’s rulers to command allegiance to the primary representative of these gods, Rome’s law, Rome’s sanctions against treasonous Christians, and ultimately Rome’s succession in history. There was no more revolutionary act than this. Taking up weapons was a minor infraction compared to this.

In vain did Tertullian cry out for toleration, just as modern Christian defenders of political pluralism cry out vainly. “Why, then, are we not permitted an equal liberty and impunity for our doctrines as they

14. Tertullian, *Apology*, pp. 41–42.

15. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 5.

have, with whom, in respect of what we teach, we are compared?"¹⁶ The answer should have been obvious: they—the tolerated religions—publicly acknowledged the legitimacy of the covenant of Rome's power religion. Christianity could not acknowledge such legitimacy and remain faithful to God.

Tertullian had mystical tendencies, and he spent the end of his life as a member of a cult, the Montanists, which had been founded half a century earlier by a tongues-speaking, self-styled prophet, Montanus, and two women who were also said to be prophetesses. They taught the imminent bodily return of Christ.¹⁷ After Christ's bodily return, they taught, He would set up an earthly kingdom.¹⁸ Tertullian's *Apolo-gy* was governed by an outlook hostile to time, dominion, and political involvement. His political pluralism was an outworking of his theological pietism, a pietism which eventually led him into a premillennial cult that called for asceticism, suffering, and martyrdom prior to the imminent Second Coming.¹⁹ His political pluralism was consistent with his later theology: a call, not for the victory of Christianity in history, but merely for peace until such time as Christ returns to set up a millennial kingdom. For Tertullian, history offered little hope. Yet even so, his limited critique of Rome in the name of political pluralism and toleration went too far for Rome's hierarchs.

C. Julian the Apostate

The Roman authorities understood the implications of the rival religion which Tertullian preached. They were unimpressed with his arguments that Christians were the best citizens of Rome because they gave alms freely and paid their taxes.²⁰ The Christians were by far the most dangerous citizens of Rome, as the last pagan emperor Julian (361–63) fully understood. The victorious Christians designated him posthumously as "Julian the Apostate." This name has stuck, even in textbooks written by his spiritual heirs. A secret convert from Christianity to occult mysteries at age 20, Julian took steps to weaken the Christians immediately after he attained the office of Emperor. Julian

16. Tertullian, *Apolo-gy*, ch. XLVI, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, III, p. 50.

17. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), p. 128.

18. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 254.

19. W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1965] 1981), p. 292.

20. *Apolo-gy*, ch. XLII, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, III, p. 49.

was the first Renaissance ruler, a lover of Greek antiquity.²¹ He concealed his conversion to paganism throughout his adult life until he gained uncontested political power in 361. This is understandable, given the fact that his late cousin, the Arian Emperor Constantius, had ordered the murder of Julian's father and mother in the year Constantine died, 337, when Julian was five years old.²² There was great resentment in Julian.

One of his earliest acts as emperor was to establish pagan review boards governing the appointment of all teachers. Teachers henceforth would have to teach classical religion along with traditional rhetoric.²³ Christians, however, were forbidden by Julian to teach such texts. He understood the social authority of formal education. He dismissed the Christians in his work, *Against the Galileans*: "It seems to me that you yourselves must be aware of the very different effect of your writings on the intellect compared to ours, and that from studying yours no man could achieve excellence or even ordinary human goodness, whereas from studying ours every man can become better than before."²⁴ As is true today, the possession of a formal education was basic to social advancement.²⁵ Christians had long understood this, and those seeking social advancement had capitulated to the requirement of mastering rhetoric, but in a watered-down, minimal-paganism form. Wilken writes: "For two centuries Christian intellectuals had been forging a link between Christianity and the classical tradition, and with one swift stroke Julian sought to sever that link. . . . Christian parents, especially the wealthy, insisted that their sons receive the rhetorical education, and it now appeared as though Julian were limiting this to pagans."²⁶ The more things change, the more things stay the same.²⁷ What Julian attempted, the United States Department of Education has achieved.²⁸ So have other similar politically

21. Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, p. 171.

22. John Holland Smith, *The Death of Classical Paganism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 93.

23. Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, pp. 173–74.

24. Cited in Smith, *Death of Classical Paganism*, p. 109.

25. Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, p. 175.

26. *Idem*.

27. Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, op. cit.

28. Only in the summer of 1995 did the United States Department of Education allow a non-regional accrediting organization begin to offer accreditation to colleges. The regional associations are all secular. The new association is equally secular, but its recommended curriculum is more traditional, rather like late-nineteenth-century pagan college education.

appointed and coercive review boards throughout the world.

In a very real sense, Julian's edict launched a dilemma that has faced the Western church since the eleventh century. If the knowledge of pagan texts is the legitimate basis of a gentleman's education—an assumption acknowledged by the Christian West until the Darwinian educational reforms of late nineteenth century—then why should Christians seek to become gentlemen? Why should they not content themselves with the study of the Scriptures and commentaries on the Scriptures, just as Jewish scholars in the West contented themselves for eighteen centuries with the study of the Talmud? One answer: because Christians do not want to live in ghettos, having seen what ghetto living did to the Jews prior to about 1850. On the other hand, won't exposure to classical learning undermine Christians' commitment to the truths of Scripture, just as secular education has undermined modern Judaism? We see this continuing debate in Christians' rival commitment to two forms of higher education: (1) the Christian liberal arts college, which has unquestionably gone increasingly humanistic and liberal;²⁹ and (2) the fundamentalist Bible college, which does not seek academic accreditation from state-licensed, monopolistic, humanistic accreditation organizations, nor would receive it if sought. This is the dilemma of the hypothetical but non-existent Christian law school that would teach biblical law and which therefore could not receive academic accreditation from the humanistic American Bar Association (ABA), which is mandatory for a school's graduates to gain access to the state-licensed monopoly of pleading the law for money.³⁰ Darwinism has replaced classicism in the modern curriculum, and college graduates are not so much gentlemen as bureaucrats, but the dilemma is in principle the same.

The solution is the biblical covenant, which provides Christians with revelational standards of evaluation that are to govern both the form and the content of education, but Christians have never believed this strongly enough to establish biblical guidelines for education. The

29. James D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 171–78.

30. This was the dilemma of Regent University's law school, which received provisional accreditation by the ABA on the basis of its dean's public commitment to an as-yet undeveloped, updated version of James Madison's pre-Darwinian, eighteenth-century political pluralism, and which in 1993 fired the dean and promised to adopt a more mainstream curriculum. "Titus Breaks His Silence," *World* (Feb. 5, 1994). The dean was Herbert Titus, who wrote an appendix in R. J. Rushdoony's book, *Law and Society*, vol. 2 of *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1982).

answer, in short, is theocracy—"God rules through God's rules"—but this suggestion is as abhorrent to modern pietistic Christians as it was to Julian.

D. Modernism's Gods

Modernism's gods are the lineal descendants of the gods of the Hellenistic world, which were *influence, wealth, and sophistication*. They are gods of a systematically secular civilization: *politics, economics, and formal education*. Their confessional demands are not so clearly stated as the traditional gods of Canaan were. They offer so many benefits and seem to demand very few formal sacrifices. They offer the universally pursued fruits of the division of labor in every field. They invite into their company all those who are willing to endure intellectual separation from the communities in which they were born. They demand this separation, initially, only in those areas of life that produce wealth and social advantages. They rigidly segregate the realm of formal worship from the world of economic productivity and civil service. They relegate the confessional world of revealed religion to the fringes of culture. They condescendingly allow the regularly scheduled formal worship of these culturally banished gods, but these schedules are limited by custom, and sometimes are banned by law (e.g., tax-funded anything in the United States).

Modernism's gods are like the gods of classical humanism, for they are part of the creation. Modernism denies judicial significance to anything outside the space-time continuum. Modernism's gods are gods of man's professed autonomy. Unlike the gods of classical humanism, they are universal gods that honor no geographical boundaries. They are idols of the mind and spirit. They offer power, wealth, and prestige to those who are willing to submit to their impersonal laws. They serve as the foundations of empire: man's empire. They claim the allegiance of all who would be successful.

Because they are impersonal gods, their various priesthoods can comfort the worshippers of personal gods by assuring them that the honoring of modernism's gods in no way dishonors the religion of any traditional god. The priests of modernism thereby proclaim the universal reign of humanism's kingdom, a reign unaffected by the competing claims of the worshippers of traditional deities.

Behind the competing dogmas of the great religions is the agreed-upon god of *numerical relationships*. Also above competing claims by

the priests of the gods of revelation is the transfiguring promise of *compound economic growth*. The traditional priest takes your money and gives you assurances of eternal peace. The banker takes your money and gives you three to five percent, compounded. The many-colored robes of a hundred priestly orders cannot compete with the dazzling white smocks of the scientific priesthood. Or so it seems.

It takes a highly sophisticated skeptic to perceive that the relevance of numerical relationships cannot be explained logically,³¹ that compound economic growth cannot continue indefinitely in a finite world,³² and that science places man on a meaningless treadmill of discovery in which every truth will be superseded, in which there is no long-term security of belief.

The reality of the permanent conflict between God and the gods of modernism can be seen in the outcome of their respective historical sanctions. Jews, as the original covenant people, regard themselves as heirs of the covenant. If any people should be immune to the lure of false gods, Jews believe, they are that people. Yet the worship of the gods of modernism has made great inroads in the Jewish community. They have trusted the modern state, only to be repeatedly betrayed by it.³³ They have trusted the economy, only to be blamed as malefactors and conspirators because of their economic success.³⁴ They have trusted education, only to have lost their confessional identity. The phrase,

31. Eugene Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. Wigner won the Nobel Prize in physics. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>)

32. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970). Reprinted in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/NorthICE>)

33. Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

34. Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Albert Lee, *Henry Ford and the Jews* (New York: Stein & Day, 1980); Sheldon Marcus, *Father Caughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), pp. 146–79. Primary sources include Maj.-Gen. Count Cherep-Spiridovich, *The Secret World Government or "The Hidden Hand"* (New York: Anti-Bolshevist Pub. Assn., 1926); John Beaty, *The Iron Curtain Over America* (Dallas: Wilkenson, 1951); William Guy Carr, *Red Fog Over America*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: National Federation of Christian Laymen, 1957); Carr, *Pawns in the Game*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: St. George Press, 1962); Olivia Marie O'Grady, *The Beasts of the Apocalypse* (Benicia, California: O'Grady Publications, 1959); Wilmot Roberston, *The Dispossed Majority*, rev. ed. (Cape Canaveral, Florida: Howard Allen, 1972), ch. 15. Most of these anti-Semitic books are out of print. They were always little-known, privately published, and consigned to the far-right fringe of American conservatism.

"I'm a Jew," today masks an absence of any agreed-upon theological or judicial content.

Over time, one begins to perceive that Jews are over-represented in the ranks of mathematicians, bankers, scientists, Hollywood celebrities, and in other fields. Meanwhile, there do not seem to be many rabbis who still defend the infallibility of the five books of Moses. In fact, the relationship seems to be inverse: the fewer the number of Torah-affirming rabbis, the more Jews who are visible in leadership positions inside the priesthoods of modernism.

E. Pietism and Politics

"Fewer Torah-affirming rabbis, more successful Jews." Because of the visible success of the Jewish minority in the West, this observation is easy to make. But the same inverse relationship seems to operate in Christian fundamentalist circles, although in the opposite form: "More Bible-believing ministers, fewer successful Christians." There are reasons for this. Many fundamentalist Christians conclude that success in this world is a spiritual trap to be avoided, a goal to be shunned. "Politics is dirty. Riches are a trap. Too much education is a bad thing." Pre-millennial dispensationalism has called into question the time available to Christians to pursue projects that rely on long-term compounding for success. As Rev. J. Vernon McGee put it in the early 1950s, "You don't polish brass on a sinking ship." In recent years, this success-rejecting presupposition has been called into question in some charismatic circles.³⁵ They are a minority.

Meanwhile, as American fundamentalist Christians have become politically active since 1976, they have steadily abandoned their commitment to dispensationalism. This is especially true of fundamentalism's national leaders.³⁶ They rarely speak about eschatology any more, and when they do, what they say about the future is at odds with what their multi-million dollar organizations are doing. An eschatology that confidently preaches inevitable failure in history for Christians is inconsistent with Christian political mobilization. The goal of politics is to win, not lose. Also, the rise of the independent Christian education movement since 1965 has been accompanied by the idea that Christian education should be better than secular education, which places a

35. The "positive confession" movement is the most obvious example.

36. I predicted this in my essay, "The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right," *Christianity and Civilization*, 1 (1982), pp. 1-40. ???

new degree of responsibility on Christians to develop superior curriculum materials. While fundamentalists have proven incapable of doing this, especially for students above the age of 15, they at least have understood that the task is necessary. But after three centuries of having to choose between right-wing Enlightenment humanism and left-wing Enlightenment humanism, Protestant Christians are not in a position to offer a well-developed alternative. Fundamentalists have generally chosen right-wing humanism—Adam Smith, James Madison—but they have at best baptized it in the name of vague biblical principles. They have not shown exegetically how the Bible leads to right-wing humanism's policy conclusions.

Calvinists and Lutherans never adopted such a comprehensive world-rejecting outlook, where at least middle-class success has been assumed to be normative, but they have also been deeply compromised by humanist education, especially at the collegiate level. Calvinist and Lutheran leaders and churches have gone theologically liberal and then politically liberal with far greater regularity than fundamentalist leaders and churches have.

The gods of the modern world, being universal in their claims, imitate the universalism of the kingdom of God. They undergird the kingdom of man. Their proffered blessings are not uniquely tied to the land as the gods of the ancient world were. These gods are not placated by sacred offerings of the field. They are placated only by confession and conformity: the affirmation of their autonomous jurisdiction within an ever-expanding realm of law—civil, private, or both. Their priestly agents offer positive sanctions to those who conform covenantally: the traditional human goals of health, wealth, power, fame, and security, as well as the great lure of the twentieth century, low-cost entertainment. The last goal has become necessary to offset the side effect of the first five: boredom.

America's mainline Protestant denominations have suffered the same fate confessionally during the same period.³⁷ Catholicism resisted the trend until the mid-1960s, but this resistance collapsed almost overnight, 1965–75.³⁸ The evangelicals are also succumbing.³⁹ Only

37. William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976).

38. Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Church* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987). For a representative primary source, see *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967). It was re-released by the bishops of the Netherlands in 1966.

39. Hunter, *Evangelicalism*.

fundamentalists, charismatics, and a handful of Calvinists and Lutherans, especially those committed to Christian education through high school, are maintaining their resistance by proclaiming late eighteenth-century right-wing Enlightenment humanism as an ideal. Church growth is taking place in those American churches that are resisting the liberal humanist tide. This has been true ever since the mid-1920s,⁴⁰ the very period in which liberal Protestant church growth peaked in the United States.⁴¹

Conclusion

The ancient empires adopted syncretism as a way to hold together the political order. Just as the syncretistic gods of the families and clans in Greece and Rome entered into the common pantheon of the city-state, becoming political gods, so did the gods of conquered city-states enter into the pantheon of the Roman Empire. The welcoming of these gods into the Roman pantheon undermined the ritual-theological foundations of the Roman Republic. Empires in the ancient world required the subordination of local gods to the political order.

This is in principle no different in modern pluralism. What has changed is the local character of the participating gods. They have become universalistic, mimicking the God of the Bible. The modern pantheon is not filled with idols. Pluralism acknowledges all religions as equal, just as syncretism acknowledged all idols as equal. But in both cases, this equality was the equality of subordination to the god of politics. This god is the supreme god of every political empire.

The anti-Christian leaders of the modern world are now campaigning for the creation of a New World Order. This is another move in the direction of empire. It will not come to pass. Babel always falls.

40. Joel A. Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929–1942," *Church History*, 49 (1980), p. 65.

41. Robert Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925–1935," *ibid.*, 29 (1960), pp. 3–16.

Appendix D

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF AMERICAN JUDAISM: A STUDY IN DISINHERITANCE

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins (Rom. 11:25–27).

Jews worry a lot about their corporate future. The continuing recurrence of this fear has been unique to Jews. Members of no other ethnic group have gone into print so often to proclaim the possibility that they might disappear as a separate people.¹ As Otto Scott, of Irish descent, once remarked: “Can you imagine an Irishman worrying in public about this possibility?” Yet, eschatologically speaking, this Jewish fear is legitimate. Paul in Romans 11 taught that the Jews will eventually disappear as a separate covenantal confessional group and be welcomed into the church.² They will, alongside many other ethnic groups, retain their cultural accents and dialects, but the grammar of their confession will be Trinitarian. They will cease to be Jews. Never-

1. See, for example, Alan M. Dershowitz, *The Vanishing American Jew: In Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1997).

2. “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?” (Rom. 11:23–24). Cf. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1864] 1950), p. 365; Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Mac Dill Air Force Base, Florida: MacDonald Pub. Co., [1839] 1958), pp. 632–33; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), II, pp. 65–103. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 3rd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000], 2012), ch. 8.

theless, until this happens, Jews will successfully maintain their separate covenantal identity as a people. The question is: Which Jews? The answer is: Jews who both understand and apply the covenantal principle of inheritance and disinheritance.

Judaism, in the sense of adherence to the teachings of the Talmud, is a minority religion even in the State of Israel. A minority religion's greatest threat is not genocide. It is intermarriage. Genocide is not a comparable threat, as the early church learned in the Roman Empire. It is never complete because it is always geographically and temporally bounded: this group of adherents in this region persecuted by this State for this period of time. Genocide reinforces the sense of solidarity among the targeted victims, especially first-generation refugees. Genocide creates a reaction: among the victors, who eventually grow weary of the bloodshed and grow embarrassed by the world's reaction, and among the victims, who adopt social strategies of survival. Threats strengthen the will to resist. Seduction weakens it.

A. The Sociology of Seduction

Seduction is the Jews' problem—seduction in the broadest sense, but also in the narrowest. The seduction that threatens a confessional religion more than any other is marital seduction: the confessionally mixed marriage. God warned Israel about this: "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods" (Ex. 34:14–16). Moses did not warn the daughters not to marry Canaanite husbands; he warned the men not to marry Canaanite wives. Women were seen as the seducers of covenant religion.

Judaism had its origin in the triumph of the Pharisees after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple removed the Sadducees from power.³ Judaism has always viewed seduction as asymmetrical covenantally: wives have the upper hand in mixed marriages. Judaism has been structured to take advantage of this aspect of the mixed mar-

3. Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962); Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (New York: KTAV, [1973] 1978).

riage. It defines a Jew as someone born of a Jewish mother. The mother's love of her children, which is the most powerful and universal social force there is, is harnessed to the judicial definition of what constitutes a Jew. A Jewish woman may be seduced away from her parents' plans, but she is not automatically disinherited. She is held less responsible than her brothers in this area of life. She does not bear the mark of the Jewish covenant: circumcision. Her flesh does not testify against her marriage vow, as it does with a maritally seduced Jewish male. She abandons less than he does. Her status as a Jew is transmitted to her children, if they confess the faith. This gives her a great incentive to rear her children as Jews, if possible. Her husband, whose faith was sufficiently weak to permit him to marry someone outside his faith, is not in a strong position to oppose her.

This asymmetric condition is reflected in the statistics of religious training among the children of mixed marriages: Jews with others. In 1971, 86% of the children of Jewish mothers and gentile fathers were reared as Jews, while only 17% of the children of Jewish fathers and gentile mothers were reared as Jews.⁴ In the mutual seduction of a mixed marriage, American Jewish women have retained the upper hand.

This is why the negative sanction of disinheritance of sons has always been crucial for the survival of Judaism. Jewish daughters have seldom inherited, so the threat of disinheritance has not been equally great. The Mosaic law allowed daughters to inherit rural land only when there was no son (Num. 36).⁵ So, Judaism's threat of disinheritance has been aimed at keeping sons in line. Jewish daughters have always had less to lose and more to gain than their brothers when entering into mixed marriages. Because Jewish women did not inherit money, and because their children could inherit their mothers' judicial status, the gentiles' seduction of Jewish women has never been the same degree of threat to the survival of Judaism. It is the seduction of sons that has been the primary threat. To defend against this, Judaism imposed harsh sanctions. When it ceased to impose them, it began a march into self-annihilation through seduction.

But who is the chief seducer? Not Christianity or any other confes-

4. This was the finding of the National Jewish Population Study of 1970–71, reported by U. O. Schmelz and Sergio Dellapergola, "Basic Trends in American Jewish Demography," in Steven Bayme (ed.), *Facing the Future: Essays On Contemporary Jewish Life* (n.p.: KTAV Publishing House and American Jewish Committee, 1989), p. 92.

5. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

sional supernatural religion. Christianity cannot adopt mixed marriages as tools of evangelism; such marriages are forbidden. They break the covenant, which is necessarily confessional. For the humanist, however, marriage is not seen as a covenant based on a mutual oath before God. It is seen as a cultural institution based on a breakable oath before the state, and the state is seen as religiously neutral. The humanist therefore sees no confessional problem with mixed marriages, for marriage is not perceived as a covenant that is based on a shared confession of faith. He encourages confessionally mixed marriages as a means of undermining the testimony of both partners to their children. *This is why humanism is the supreme threat to modern Judaism.* Unlike supernatural-confessional religions that are also threatened by seduction and which oppose mixed marriages, humanism proclaims the equality of all supernatural religious confessions—an equality of cultural irrelevance. Humanism seeks to seduce the sons and daughters of every supernatural religion. Thus, humanism is an equal opportunity seducer: men and women of all faiths are equally its targets.

The ideal of the confessionally mixed marriage has led, step by step, to the ideal of the sexually mixed college dormitory. The humanist believes in the efficacy of seduction. He believes that, in the competition between lust and the covenant, lust will win in the 18–24 age group. He believes that the children of Israel, if given the opportunity, will rise up to play.

This is why humanism constitutes the greatest threat to Judaism in its history. A majority religion can survive the assaults of mixed marriage much longer than a minority religion can. There are more candidates for marriage for the members of a majority religion. A minority religion cannot afford the temporary luxury of tolerating mixed marriages. This is especially true of American Jews, who are experiencing birth rates well below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per family. “If Jews, who in most parts of the United States constitute a tiny minority, were to choose their spouses at random, hardly any endogamous Jewish couples would be formed at all.”⁶

Humanism calls on all partners to choose their marital partners on a confessionally random basis. To encourage this, humanism has created the most powerful marriage bureau in history: the tax-funded secular university. No group has responded with greater enthusiasm to

6. Schmelz and Dellapergola, “Basic Trends,” in Bayme, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

the siren call of the secular university than the Jews, a topic I shall discuss later in this essay.

B. The Ghetto and Cultural Identity

European Jews prior to the Napoleonic wars (1798–1815) were isolated inside their own autonomous communities: ghettos. Some of these ghettos were urban; others were in small towns. When religious discrimination began to be repealed by Napoleonic law in the first half of the nineteenth century, Jews began to venture out of the ghetto, both intellectually and geographically.⁷ The Jewish community's abandonment of traditional Judaism began at that time. A division appeared between reforming Jews and defenders of Talmudic knowledge. Historian Paul Johnson writes: "The pious Jew—and there could be no other—did not admit the existence of two kinds of knowledge, sacred and secular. There was only one. Moreover, there was only one legitimate purpose in acquiring it: to discover the exact will of God, in order to obey it."⁸ Reform Judaism rejected this outlook; it sought to bring Jews into the world around them. It appeared in the second decade of the nineteenth century.⁹ The term "Orthodox Judaism" did not appear until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The term was coined by Reform critics of traditional Judaism.¹⁰

In Germany, legal discrimination against Jews faded steadily after 1820 and was gone by 1880.¹¹ Legal equality brought legal integration into the gentile community. Secular law revoked the long-standing special legal situation of Jews, where rabbis and elders possessed the authority to impose civil sanctions on members of the Jewish community. This separate legal status went back to the late Roman Empire. Israel Shahak writes of European Jewry in general: "This was the most important social fact of Jewish existence before the advent of the modern state: observance of the religious laws of Judaism, as well as their inculcation through education, were enforced on Jews by physical co-

7. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), Part 5.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 332–33.

10. I. Grunfeld, "Samson Raphael Hirsch—The Man and His Mission," in *Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays from the Writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch*, 2 vols. (London: Soncino, 1956), I, p. xxiii. Grunfeld said that Hirsch accepted this term of opprobrium and, through his leadership, transformed it into an acceptable self-definition.

11. Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820–1880*, vol. 3 of *The Jewish People in America*, 5 vols. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 17.

ercion, from which one could escape by conversion to the religion of the majority, amounting in the circumstances to a total social break and for that reason very impracticable, except during a religious crisis.”¹² Paralleling this change in the Jews’ legal status was an increase in animosity against them, although they never constituted more than 1.3% of the German population.¹³ Social discrimination against Jews in Germany remained common, culminating with the systematic Nazi persecutions, 1933–45.

In contrast, there was almost no social discrimination against Jews in the United States prior to the Civil War (1861–65). Jews had lived in North America as a culturally assimilated people from the mid-seventeenth century. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, they had become part of American urban life: in clothing, hair styles, and architecture.¹⁴ In New York, Jews became eligible for citizenship as early as 1715, although this was unique in pre-Revolutionary America.¹⁵ They never received a separate grant of authority to impose civil sanctions on deviant members of the synagogue. As a result, Jews were far more integrated into American life than their counterparts were in Europe prior to the 1820s. Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal and Ashkenazic Jews from Germany and Poland lived together from the beginning in New Amsterdam. This continued when it became New York City in 1664. They worked out an agreement on common worship and rule, 1728–1825; elsewhere in America, separate synagogues were common.¹⁶

American Jews were a tiny percentage of the population throughout the nineteenth century. In 1820, there were about 2,700 Jews in America.¹⁷ The overall American population in 1820 was 9.6 million.¹⁸ There were so few Jews that there were no rabbis. Until 1840, there was no ordained, functioning rabbi in the United States, i.e., someone who had graduated from a recognized rabbinical school or who had been certified by a talmudic scholar of distinction who had been li-

12. Israel Shahak, “The Jewish religion and its attitude to non-Jews,” *Khamsin*, VIII (1981), p. 28. See also Diner, *Gathering*, p. 18.

13. Diner, *Gathering*, p. 9.

14. Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654–1820*, vol. 1 of *The Jewish People in America* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), ch. 4.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–1.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61, 125.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

18. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), I:8, Series A 1–5.

censed.¹⁹ By 1840, the number of Jews in the United States had risen to 6,000. In 1848, there were 50,000.²⁰ As a means of comparison, consider that in 1840, there were 17 million Americans; in 1850 there were 23 million.²¹

Then, in the 1850s, came the steamship.²² This changed both the volume and pattern of immigration: from northern Europe to eastern, central, and southern Europe. The great waves of immigration hit America from all over Europe, not just Protestant northern Europe. American demographics changed rapidly. Among the tens of millions of immigrants were millions of Jews. Total immigration of Jews to the United States was no more than 150,000 as of 1880.²³ From 1860 to 1880, more of these came from eastern Europe than from Germany.²⁴ There were about 240,000 Jews in America in 1880.²⁵ Of these, 200,000 were from Germany.²⁶ Over the next 45 years, some 2.5 million Jews arrived, with the vast majority from eastern Europe, especially Russia.²⁷ From 1880 to 1920, one-third of all the Jews in Eastern Europe emigrated, and over 80% of them came to the United States.²⁸ Diner argues—implausibly, in my view—that this new immigration was not fundamentally different from the old: same Judaism, same immigration motivation, i.e., economic opportunity.²⁹ This is the equivalent of saying that, culturally speaking, New York City's Episcopalians were not fundamentally different from the Baptists of the American frontier. Even this comparison understates the difference. Episcopalians were separated from the Baptists by the Allegheny mountains. The Sephardic Jews, assimilated into the German-Polish Jewish community from 1841 to 1920,³⁰ were separated from the Russian Jews in New York

19. Jacob Rader Marcus, "The Handsome Young Priest in the Black Gown: The Personal World of Gershom Seixas," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XL-XLI (1969–70), p. 411.

20. Diner, *Gathering*, p. 56.

21. *Historical Statistics*, loc. cit.

22. Diner, *Gathering*, p. 43.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

26. Gerold Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880–1920*, vol. 3 of *The Jewish People in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 2.

27. Dinar, *Gathering*, p. 233.

28. Sorin, *Building*, pp. xv, 1.

29. Diner, *Gathering*, pp. 232–33.

30. Jacob Rader Marcus, "The Periodization of American Jewish History," *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XLVII (Sept. 1957–June 1958), p. 129.

City by a horse carriage ride and the money to purchase it.³¹

The hostile reactions of the gentile community after 1870 marked a change in its opinion regarding the perceived differences of the new immigration, not merely the latter's increased volume but its social characteristics. In the 1870s, Jews began to be kept out of exclusive resorts and social clubs, and Jewish girls were excluded from certain eastern women's colleges, but this was the extent of the discrimination.³² (By the early twenty-first century, social club exclusion is all that remains, and only just barely.) After 1900, social discrimination against Jews increased.³³ After World War I, it increased dramatically.³⁴ This exclusion reflected social opinion within the Jewish community. Sorin comments: "The farther west in Europe one's origins, the higher one's status." He calls this "the geographical origins rule."³⁵

The great reversal came in 1945 in reaction to the defeat of the Nazis. Anti-Semitism became unfashionable within educated circles, which more and more circles became. Anti-semitism had never been consistent with the religious pluralism of American life, the "live and let live" attitude which has been characteristic of American culture—an application of nineteenth-century Americans' laissez faire outlook. The Nazi ideology had been defeated on the battlefield, and this re-

31. Stephen Birmingham, "Our Crowd": *The Great Jewish Families of New York* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Birmingham, *The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Birmingham titled Chapter 16, "The Jewish Episcopalians." There has been a reaction to this view among a few Jewish historians. Some of the authors and the general editor of *The Jewish People in America* (1992), which was funded by the American Jewish Historical Society, reject the familiar periodization of Jewish immigration to America: Sephardic, German-Polish (Ashkenazic), and eastern European. This periodization scheme, familiar to American Jewish historians by 1900, was defended by Marcus, "Periodization of American Jewish History," op. cit., pp. 125–33. With respect to the final wave of immigration, 1880 to 1920, I do not see how its overwhelming eastern European character can be denied. Marcus dated the beginning of the east European Jewish immigration: 1852 (p. 130). This correlates with the advent of the steamship. He dated the triumph of the Russian Jewish tradition: 1920 (p. 130). Simon Kuznets, one of the most respected statisticians in American history and a Nobel Prize winner in economics, remarked that from 1820 to 1870, fewer than 4,000 Jews immigrated from Russia and 4,000 from Poland. From 1881 to 1914, two million Jews immigrated, and over 1.5 million were from Russia: 75%. Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure," *Perspectives in American History*, IX (1975), p. 39. Only 15,000 Jews arrived from Russia in the decade, 1871–80. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

32. John Higham, "Social Discrimination Against Jews in America, 1830–1930," *Publication of the Jewish Historical Society*, XLVII (1958), p. 13.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–19.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–23.

35. Sorin, *Building*, p. 2.

duced the appeal of the old inconsistency. Discrimination was replaced by toleration, and toleration by acceptance, in one generation: 1945 to 1975. But this acceptance has a confessional premise: "My religion is as good as yours, and all religions should be limited to home and congregation." The day that this confession is widely believed by members of a minority religion is the day that it moves toward assimilation. A Baptist can afford to confess this in a Methodist culture, or visa versa, but for a Jew in a humanist culture, such a confession is demographically suicidal. It undermines the traditional answers to the question: "What is a Jew?" A new answer now comes back: "A Unitarian with better business connections."

C. Jews and the Gods of Modernism

Throughout the nineteenth century, Jews actively began to pursue the gods of the gentiles around them: gods of marketplace. They got rich in Germany in that century, moving from poverty in 1820 to middle-class affluence by 1880.³⁶ The same upward movement of Jews took place in America. There was even less discrimination here. The common goal of Americans was making money. De Tocqueville wrote in 1835, "I know no other country where love of money has such a grip on men's hearts. . . ."³⁷ Access to the free market was open to all people except slaves in the antebellum South. Jews, who had been small traders in Europe, fit in well. They flourished. Like the members of many other ethnic groups, Jews wrote home to relatives in Europe about America's economic opportunities and its lack of religious discrimination. The waves of immigration grew larger.

In the twentieth century, another group of cosmopolitan gods became a temptation for Jews: gods of the academy. For about 25 years, 1920 to 1945, the prestigious American private colleges, universities, and medical schools placed quotas on the number of Jews. (The University of Chicago was an exception.)³⁸ Yet even in this case, discrimination was fairly lax. At Columbia University in New York City, the Jewish student population had climbed to 40% by 1920.³⁹ The school's

36. Diner, *Gathering*, pp. 12–13.

37. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, edited by J. P. Meyer, 12th ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1848] 1969), p. 54.

38. Diner, *Gathering*, p. 22. This school has been described as a Baptist institution where atheist students study Thomas Aquinas taught by Jewish professors. My assessment is that their Jewish professors are also atheists.

39. Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945*, vol. 4 of *The Jewish People in America* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Univer-

move farther away from the Jewish parts of the city in 1910 failed to reduce the flood of Jewish students when a subway line down the West side was constructed shortly thereafter. Quotas imposed in 1921 reduced this percentage to 22% in 1922.⁴⁰ Harvard's Jewish population, enhanced by "tram" commuters from Boston, climbed to 20% in 1920. The school's president then announced a quota of 10%. This decision was formally repealed by a special committee in 1923, but Harvard's new policies of accepting more students from the Midwest pushed Jewish enrolment back to 10% by 1930.⁴¹

Jews had long possessed legal access to tax-supported American schools and universities that came into existence after the Civil War. At the City College of New York in 1920, between 80 and 90% of the students were Jewish. At the Washington Square campus of the private New York University, the figure was 93%.⁴² In the 1930's, Jews constituted 3.5% of the American population—the high point—and 10% of its college population. The same drive for education had been present in Europe for a century.⁴³

Jews have flourished in this academic environment. Statistically, the biological heirs of Ashkenazic Jews are the most intelligent ethnic group in the United States.⁴⁴ Herrnstein and Murray comment: "A fair estimate seems to be that Jews in America and Britain have an overall IQ mean somewhere between a half and a full standard deviation above the mean, with the source of the difference concentrated in the verbal component. . . . But it is at least worth noting that their mean IQ was .97 standard deviation above the mean of the rest of the population and .84 standard deviation above the mean of whites who identified themselves as Christian."⁴⁵ These are statistically significant differences. The result has been the exceptional success of Jews in higher education and in the professions, which are screened by means of academic performance and competitive examination systems. "My son, the doctor" and "my son, the lawyer" are not just quaint phrases of

sity Press, 1992), p. 15.

40. *Idem.*

41. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

44. M. D. Storfer, *Intelligence and Giftedness: The Contributions of Heredity and Early Environment* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), pp. 314–23; cited in Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 275.

45. *Idem.*

proud but formally uneducated Jewish mothers in the 1920s through the 1940s. They are representative summaries of the success of Jews in entering the state-licensed professions, an ethnic penetration way out of proportion to their percentage in the overall population.

But there has been a heavy price to pay: initially, the undermining of confessional Judaism; secondarily, the undermining of cultural Judaism. The West's universities have made the same Faustian bargain to all: come to be certified, but give up your claims in the classroom to academically relevant knowledge based on revelation.⁴⁶ The Jews, as a minority based on religious confession, and as a minority with a competitive edge based on intelligence, have had the most to gain economically from this bargain, and the most to lose confessionally. For any religious group self-consciously to adopt a dualism that proclaims "two paths of knowledge" is to risk losing its best and brightest to the world of autonomous humanism. The seeming universalism of humanism's ideology offers to its initiates the power and productivity of the division of intellectual labor. To become a participant in this intellectual division of labor, the initiate need only abandon those aspects of his religious worldview that are irreconcilable or not readily shared with the segregating ideals of rival faiths. Jews have responded to this offer with greater enthusiasm and success than any other religious group in the West.⁴⁷ Edward Shapiro commented on the effect of secular values on Jewish professors.

Most Jewish professors had only a slight relationship to Jewish culture and Judaism. Data collected by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in 1969 revealed that while 32 percent of professors with a Protestant background and 25 percent with a Catholic background were either indifferent or opposed to religion, 67 percent of Jewish professors were indifferent or opposed to religion. And while 16 percent of Protestant professors and 23 percent of Catholic professors considered themselves deeply religious, only 5 percent of Jewish professors defined themselves as such. In comparison to other Jews, Jewish academicians observed fewer Jewish rituals, were more hostile to religion, affiliated with Jewish communal institutions less frequently, and intermarried more often. . . .

46. An example of an Orthodox Jew who accepted the bargain is a Harvard Law School professor, Alan Dershowitz, whose study of the effects of secularization reveals the plight of American Jewry: at the present rate of intermarriage, there will be no trace of the Jews in a century. Dershowitz, *Vanishing American Jew*.

47. See Irving Greenberg, "Jewish Survival and the College Campus," *Judaism*, XVII (Summer 1968).

Just as its investment in formal education was greater, so American Jewry spent more time, energy, and money than any other American ethnic or religious group in cultivating and analyzing its intellectuals. There must be something seriously wrong with American Jewry, it was argued, if it could not retain the loyalty of its brightest and best-educated members. The alienation of the Jewish intellectual from the American Jewish community occasioned much wringing of hands. There was, however, little that could have been done to bring Jewish intellectuals back to the fold. The sermons of rabbis and the proclamations of Jewish organizations could hardly convince intellectuals and academicians to abandon their secular and universalist outlook.⁴⁸

So, by worshipping in the shrines of secular culture, Jews are disappearing as a separate religious force. They are a political force, but not a religious force. Their separate legal status, which was an aspect of the judicial discrimination against them in Christian civilization, had enabled them to preserve their separate religious status for almost two millennia. With the coming to power of the gods of secular humanism—politics, money, and education—Jews left the ghetto and entered the public square to worship with their votes, their taxes, and their children. Public schools have become the established churches of Western civilization. Like the gentiles around them, Jews have tithed their children to the state. Also, since at least the 1930s, a majority of American Jews has consistently voted to allow the state to extract an ever-greater percentage of their income.⁴⁹ The saying is, “American Jews have the income of Episcopalians and the voting record of Puerto Ricans.”⁵⁰ Non-observant Jews have favored the welfare state.⁵¹ As an Orthodox and politically conservative rabbi has put it, “many non-observant Jews desperately pursue liberalism as a way out of their covenant. This is the true purpose of liberalism and Jews are its chief champions because it alone offers an escape from having to accept Jewish law—the Torah.”⁵²

48. Edward S. Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II*, vol. 5 of *The Jewish People in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 112, 113.

49. Nathaniel Weyl, *The Jew in American Politics* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968), ch. 12.

50. Cf. Peter Steinfels, “American Jews Stand Firmly to the Left,” *New York Times* (Jan. 8, 1989).

51. Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 125ff.

52. Daniel Lapin, “Why Are So Many Jews Liberal?” *Crisis: A Journal of Lay Cath-*

One Jewish leader in the American financial community has said of the Jewish New York elite of the 1820–1920 era: “Our Crowd is deadlier than a doornail. Ninety percent have disappeared and few are Jewish anymore.”⁵³ This problem is not confined to the United States; European Jews are also disappearing through assimilation.⁵⁴

D. The Disappearance of Non-Observant Jews

The non-observant Jews in the United States are not reproducing. “In present trends continue,” wrote sociologist Ernest van den Haag in 1969, “in the year 2000 there will have never been more handsome, better-endowed synagogues in America, nor so many; nor so few Jews.”⁵⁵ He argued that the intermarriage problem threatens the survival of American Judaism.⁵⁶ By 1969, this problem had been challenging non-observant American Jews for several decades, yet it was not even mentioned in sociologist Marshall Sklare’s 1957 anthology, *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*. But in April, 1964, Sklare sounded a warning in the Jewish publication, *Commentary*, in an article titled, “Intermarriage and the Jewish Future.” He sounded the alarm even louder in a second *Commentary* article (March 1970): “Intermarriage and Jewish Survival.”⁵⁷ But alarms rarely change social patterns, especially convenient ones. People continue to do whatever they have been doing.

A 1971 study showed that the rate of intermarriage was over 30%.⁵⁸ In 1973, Reform Judaism, the largest and most liberal branch of American Judaism, made its last public pronouncement opposing such intermarriage. It has subsequently accepted the new reality and has tried to deal with it.⁵⁹ In these mixed marriages, only 20% of the spouses convert to Judaism. Three-quarters of the children in families in which the spouse fails to convert are not reared as Jews. Very few of these

olic Opinion (April 1993).

53. Alan Greenberg of Bear, Stearns & Co. Cited in Jean Bear, *The Self-Chosen: “Our Crowd” is Dead* (New York: Arbor House, 1982), p. 23.

54. Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe Since 1945* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996).

55. Ernest van den Haag, *The Jewish Mystique* (New York: Dell, [1969] 1971), p. 181.

56. *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

57. Shapiro, *Healing*, pp. 234–35.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 238–39.

children marry Jews.⁶⁰ One Jewish historian has called this process “the demographic hemorrhaging of American Jewry.”⁶¹ The birth rate for Jews is one quarter to one-third less than for gentiles. It is the lowest ethnic birthrate in America.⁶² Meanwhile, “Of the major American religious groups, the Jews consistently placed last in surveys of religious attendance and belief.”⁶³ As van den Haag predicted, synagogue attendance declined in the 1970s and 1980s. This was especially true in Conservative synagogues, the group positioned between the liberal Reform Jews and the Orthodox Jews.⁶⁴ Edward Shapiro ended his book, the fifth in a five-volume history, *The Jewish People in America*, with this forlorn hope: “Jews have survived one crisis after another, and perhaps they will also survive the freedom and prosperity of America.”⁶⁵ In 1996, the World Jewish Congress, held in Jerusalem, issued a demographic report, *State of World Jewry*. It reported that in the United States, over half of all Jews who married in the 1980s married a non-Jewish partner. About one-quarter of the children of such mixed marriages are reared as Jews.⁶⁶

As with all academic matters, this view is controversial and has critics within the Jewish academic community. The demographic data are not sufficiently comprehensive to be certain. But in a carefully reasoned, highly qualified essay, two Jewish scholars conclude that the pessimists have the trends on their side. American Jews are not reproducing at a rate high enough to replace themselves. Whites in general are in the same situation; Jews, however, reproduce at a rate lower than whites in general. They have the lowest rates of reproduction among whites in the United States. The replacement rate is 2.1 children per family. In the mid-1980's, Jews had a rate of under 1.5; whites in general, 1.7.⁶⁷

Mixed marriages by the mid-1980s were in the range of 30%. The authors comment that “the inferred U.S. rate of 30% for individuals means that 45 percent of all couples with at least one Jewish partner

60. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

66. Religious News Service, reported in *Christian News* (Feb. 12, 1996), p. 9.

67. Schmelz and Dellapergola, “Basic Trends,” *Facing the Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 75: Table 1.

are mixed.”⁶⁸ Few of the non-Jewish spouses convert to Judaism.⁶⁹ This leads to the disinheritance of Judaism. The authors report on a remarkable finding. “A study in Philadelphia covering three generations found that mixed marriages in one generation entailed greater percentages of mixed marriages and increasingly smaller percentages of Jewish children in the following generations. If both parents of the Jewish respondent whose marriage was mixed had been Jews, 37 percent of the grandchildren were Jews; if the grandparents had been a mixed couple, none of the grandchildren were found to be Jewish in this particular study.”⁷⁰

By the late 1990s, intermarriage was at the 50% rate. Charles Krauthammer wrote that more Jews marry Christians (he meant gentiles) than marry Jews: about 52%.⁷¹ With only one in four of the children of these mixed marriages being reared Jewish, the future is grim for the survival of Judaism in America. “A population in which the biological replacement rate is 70 percent and the cultural replacement rate is 70% is headed for extinction. By this calculation, every 100 Jews are raising 56 Jewish children. In just two generations, 7 out of 10 Jews will vanish.”⁷² He concluded that the future of Judaism is dependent on the survival of the State of Israel. The Jews have put most of their eggs—in both senses—in one basket.⁷³

We can begin to understand why Jews prior to the First World War excommunicated adult children who converted to another religion, mainly Christianity. They would hold burial services: symbols of covenantal death. They would cut these defecting children out of their lives. They would not see their grandchildren grow up. They suffered the terrible pain of disinheriting their children, especially their sons, for the sake of the preservation of the religion of Judaism. It was a matter of survival.

Today, the religion of Judaism has been progressively replaced by the culture of Judaism—a culture without a public confession that invokes a supernatural God. Today, most American Jews do not believe that the God of the Bible brings covenantal sanctions in history for or against Jews on the basis of the community’s use of sanctions against

68. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

71. Charles Krauthammer, “At Last, Zion: Israel and the Fate of the Jews,” *Weekly Standard* (May 11, 1998), p. 24.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

covenantal disinheritance. Tolerance has made mixed marriages acceptable. The defecting children are not cut off through the equivalent of excommunication. The grandchildren are not cut off. But the grandchildren are unlikely to bear children who will be reared as Jews. Under the conditions of mixed marriage, the great grandchildren of Jewish couples will not be Jews. Refusing to disinherit children who marry outside the faith, they disinherit Judaism instead. Covenantal tolerance within Jewish families produces heirs with a different confession of faith. This produces extinction of the original confession.

Judaism is a minority religion. Tolerance within the covenantal bond of marriage leads to absorption. If confession is not seen as more fundamental than sexual attraction, and therefore not a matter of corporate sanctions, the minority faith will disappear. *The contest between passion and confession, if left to youth to decide, will lead to the demise of confession.* If the surrounding population is larger than those doing the confessing, the aging minority confessors will not be replaced.

The rise of a far more self-conscious Orthodox Judaism, which recruits actively in the secularized Reform Jewish community, has gained considerable publicity. It is not clear yet that this activism has produced any statistically significant change in the religious commitment of most Jews. The high birth rates among Orthodox Jews may in time reverse the larger Jewish community's demographic decline, but in the early twenty-first century, American Judaism is slowly disappearing. Jews are a rapidly aging group: the oldest of all American ethnic groups.⁷⁴ This demographic fact is masked by the high visibility of Jewish political involvement and influence in national politics. The rise of Jewish national political influence since the end of World War II has paralleled the rise of influence of the farm bloc. The smaller the number of people actually represented by each bloc, the greater its highly concentrated and well-funded political influence. Both are down to about two percent of the population.⁷⁵

74. Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 95.

75. In 1991, Jews were two percent of the population. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1994 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), Table 85. In 1993, agriculture employed 2.5% of the work force. *Ibid.*, Table 641. The rise of the gay rights movement after 1970 is an even better example. Homosexuals are a tiny minority—under one percent of the population—yet they have enormous political influence in the United States. As AIDS has reduced the number of homosexual men since the early 1980s, their political influence has increased dramatically.

Alan Dershowitz refers to an article in the October 1996 issue of *Moment* magazine. The article reports that, given present birth rates, by the fourth generation, 200 secular Jews will have produced 10 great-grandchildren, while the same number of Orthodox Jews will have produced more than 5,000.⁷⁶ It is clear what will happen unless covenantal attitudes regarding the future are reversed. Non-observant Jews in the United States will simply disappear.

What we see here is a fulfillment, three and a half millennia later, of Moses' warning. "Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth" (Deut. 6:14–15). The eighteenth century saw the construction of modernism's political temple by the Enlightenment, right wing and left wing. The acceptance of the legitimacy of this temple by the churches began the erosion of the ideal of Christendom.⁷⁷ The entrance of Jews into this temple in the nineteenth century was the beginning of a great apostasy for Judaism. The leaders of both religions concluded that there could be a reconciliation of confessions through the adoption of a neutral, common-ground confession: humanism. This common confession—politics, money, and education—seemed to offer a new era of economic growth, which in fact occurred. But with Western society's unprecedented increase in economic output has come a rise in philosophical despair, war, crime, decadence, family dissolution, and suicide.

Conclusion

Jews who live outside of the State of Israel suffer from a major problem: they do not face organized opposition. Dershowitz titles chapter two of *The Vanishing American Jew*, "Will the End of Anti-Semitism Mean the End of the Jews?" Jews do not face an armed majority that seeks their destruction. In the State of Israel, a nation surrounded by enemies, they do.

Organized opposition has always been a major factor in the preservation of the Jews' identity as a separate people. Western society was

76. Dershowitz, *Vanishing American Jew*, p. 25.

77. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. ([Hhttp://bit.ly/gnpolpol](http://bit.ly/gnpolpol)) See Gary North, *Conspiracy in Philadelphia: Origins of the United States Constitution* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Dominion Educational Ministries, 2004). (<http://garynorth.com/philadelphia.pdf>)

confessional. Jews did not share this confession. The ghetto was the solution for both sides. (For the anti-Talmudic Karaites, a ghetto within the ghetto was the solution.)⁷⁸ With the demise of the ghetto and the rise of Reform Judaism, the old barriers began to disappear. So did the Jews' old opposition to gentile culture. Jews had built effective cultural defenses against the conversion of individual Jews to rival religions, especially Christianity. But few Jews in 1850 perceived that secular humanism is a rival religion; even fewer perceived this in 1950. Christianity and Islam had a place for Jews as Jews, but outside the corridors of power. Humanism has a place for Jews as humanists inside the corridors of power. "Come one, come all," cry the humanists, "but you must leave your revelational civil laws outside the common Temple of Understanding." Jews in unprecedented numbers have succumbed to the siren song of social participation and leadership on these confessional terms.

The cost has been high: escalating absorption. This has always been a threat to Jews. What is unique about humanism's theology of absorption is its theology of a common confession based either on natural law theory or evolutionary political participation. Judaism must now find ways to maintain itself apart from the *shawmah Israel*. The words of *shawmah Israel*—"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4)—are still intact, but they have been revised in spirit: "Hear, O Israel, we are not gentiles." But there are two simple, all-too-familiar phrases that have proven incredibly powerful in negating the effects of this revised *shawmah Israel*. First, "Grandma, I won a scholarship to college." Grandma is dutifully proud. This is followed a few years later by, "Grandma, I'd like you to meet my fiancé." Pride is then accompanied by a sense of loss and a sense of foreboding. Both the sense of loss and the sense of foreboding should have accompanied the first announcement.

Pluralism has a program of assimilation. First, it offers the ballot. Then it offers the full-tuition scholarship. Then it offers the co-ed dorm. Then there is the sound of wedding bells—if things go well.⁷⁹ Then there is the sound of the pitter-patter of little feet. That sound, delightful as it is, has steadily drowned out the sound of the *shawmaw*

78. This was the case in twelfth-century Constantinople, according to Benjamin of Tudela, whose *Book of Travels* is a major primary source document of the era. Some 2,500 Jews lived in a fenced-off quarter: 2,000 Talmudists and 500 Karaites. A fence separated the two groups. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 169.

79. The other possibility is the silent scream of the aborted child.

Israel.

Then how can the Jews be preserved until the time of the great eschatological conversion? Only by their abandonment of their toleration of mixed marriages and by their abandonment of small families. Jews do not evangelize the general population; hence, there are no workable survival strategies except population growth and the disinheritance of those within the community who abandon the *shawmaw Israel*. Jews cannot persevere as humanists. The demographics of Reform and Conservative Judaism will lead to their replacement by the Orthodox. Orthodox Jews rely on confessional prophylaxis, not biological. Liberal religion is having the same effect on American Protestantism's mainline denominations as it had a century ago on Europe's. Why should Reform and Conservative Jews think they are immune?

Meanwhile, Orthodox Jews, who frown on contraception, are biding their time while filling cribs.

Appendix E

FREE MARKET CAPITALISM

[This essay appeared in the 1984 book edited by Robert Clouse, *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views*, published by InterVarsity Press. It was the first essay. Within a year, InterVarsity Press pulled the book off the market. It sold 6,000 copies to my company, Dominion Press, at 25 cents each. Dr. Clouse wrote to me saying that he could not understand this; the book had been selling well. I like to think that it was my essay and my three rejoinders to the statist who wrote the other three essays. I like to think that I was a great embarrassment to them. The neo-evangelicals who ran IVP were politically liberal, as their publication of D. Gareth Jones' pro-abortion book, *Brave New People* (1984), indicated. IVP soon suppressed that book, too, because of a successful public relations campaign by anti-abortion Christians. The English branch of IVP kept it in print, which tells you something about the evangelical community in England. I have retained the format in which my essay was originally submitted, including IVP's footnoting style. I have added letters designating the subheads for easier reference. I include this essay in this book because it reveals the extent to which I relied on Deuteronomy, a fact noted at the time by one of the other essayists, William Diehl, a Keynesian, who contemptuously dismissed my essay because of this.]

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. (Lev. 19:15, KJV)¹

I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. (Ps 37:25)

The topic of wealth and poverty should not be discussed apart from a consideration of the law of God and its relationship to the covenants, for it is in God's law that we find the Bible's blueprint for economics. Biblical justice, biblical law, and economic growth are intim-

1. All of my citations of Scripture in this essay are from the King James Version.

ately linked. The crucial section of Scripture which explains this relationship is Deuteronomy 28. There are external blessings for those societies that conform externally to the laws of God (vv. 1–14), and there are external curses for those societies that fail to conform externally to these laws (vv. 15–68).

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. . . . The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee (Deut 28:1–5, 9–11).

Deuteronomy 28 is an extension and expansion of chapter 8, in which the relationship between law, blessings, and the covenant is outlined. God was about to bring his people into the Promised Land, as the fulfilment of the promise given to Abraham. The “iniquity of the Amorites” (Gen 15:16) was at last full. The Canaanites’ era of dominion over the land was about to end. On what terms would the Hebrews hold title to the land and its productivity? Deuteronomy 8 spells it out: *covenantal faithfulness*. This meant adherence to the laws of God.²

Deuteronomy 8 reveals to us the foundations of economic growth. First, God grants to his people the gift of *life*. This is an act of grace. He sustained them in the years of wandering in the wilderness, humbling them to prove their faith—their obedience to his commandments (v. 2)—and providing them with manna, so that they might learn that “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth men live” (v. 3b). A 40-year series of miracles sustained them constantly, for their clothing did not grow

2. On the question of Old Testament law in New Testament times, see Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1977).

old, and their feet did not swell (v. 4). He also provided them with chastening, so that they might learn to respect his commandments (vv. 5-6)—the way of life. Second, God provided them with *land*, namely, the land flowing with milk and honey (vv. 7-8): “A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass” (v. 9). This also was an act of grace.

Life and land: Here are the two fundamental assets in any economic system. Human labor, combined with natural resources over time, is the foundation of all productivity. The third familiar feature of economic analysis, *capital*, is actually the combination of land plus labor over time. (The time factor is important. From it stems the economic phenomenon of the rate of interest: the discount of future goods against the identical goods held in the present.³ (*Warning*: I use footnotes to add explanatory material, to keep from cluttering up the text too much.) The original sources of production are land and labor.⁴ If the Hebrews were willing to dig, the land would produce its fruits.

So much for the gifts. What about the conditions of tenure? They were not to forget their God. They were not to “accept the gift but forget the Giver,” to use a familiar expression.

The very fulness of the external, visible, measurable blessings would serve as a source of temptation for them:

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Regnery, 1966), chap. 18. Let me give an example of the “discount for time.” If I were to announce that you have just won a new Rolls-Royce, and that you have a choice of delivery date, today or one year from today, which delivery date would you select (other things being equal)? You would want immediate delivery. Why? Because present goods are worth more to you than the same goods in the future. You might accept the Rolls-Royce a year from now if I paid you a rate of interest, in addition to the car. In fact, at some rate of interest you would accept the later date, unless you have a terminal disease, or an unquenchable lust for a Rolls-Royce.

4. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, 2 vols. (1962; reprinted., New York: New York University Press, 1979), I, pp. 284–87, 410–24. See esp. chap. 6. [This book was republished in 1993 by the Mises Institute, Auburn, Alabama.]

LORD thy God. . . . (Deut 8:10–14a)

God provides gifts: life and land. He also provides a *law-order* which enables his people to expand their holdings of capital assets (the implements of production) and consumer goods. But these assets are not held by men apart from the ethical terms of God's covenant. The temptation before man is the same as the temptation before Adam: to forget God and to substitute himself as God (Gen 3:5). It is the assumption of all Satanic religion, the assumption of *humanism*, the sovereignty of man. God warned the Israelites against this sin—the sin of presuming their own *autonomy*:

And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deut 8:17–18).

These words lay the foundation of all sustained economic growth—and I stress the word *sustained*. While it is possible for a society to experience economic growth without honoring God's law, eventually men's ethical rebellion leads to external judgment and the termination of economic growth (Deut 28:15–68). It is this concept of God as the giver which underlay James's announcement: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (Jas 1:17)

If men whose society has been (and therefore is still) covenanted with God should fall into this temptation to forget God and to attribute their wealth to the might of their own hands, then God will judge them:

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God. (vv. 19–20).

God has given us an outline of the covenantal foundations of a holy commonwealth.⁵ This is as close as the Bible comes to a univer-

5. On the holy commonwealth ideal in early American history, see Rousas J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic* (1964 reprint ed., Fairfax, Va.: Thoburn Press,

sally valid “stage theory” of human history or economic development.⁶ Long-term economic growth is based on men’s honoring the explicit terms of God’s law. The stages are as follows:

1. God’s grace in providing life, land, and law
2. Society’s adherence to the external terms of God’s law
3. External blessings in response to this faithfulness
4. Temptation: the lure of autonomy
5. Response:
 - a. Capitulation that leads to external judgment; or
 - b. Resistance that leads to further economic growth

The covenant is supposed to be *self-reinforcing*, or as economists sometimes say, it offers a system of *positive feedback*. Verse 18 is the key: God gives his people external blessings in order “that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers. . . .” The promise would be visibly fulfilled by their entry into the Promised Land, thereby giving them confidence in the reliability of God’s word. God’s law-order is reliable, which means that men can rely on biblical law as a *tool of dominion*, which will enable them to fulfill (though imperfectly, as sinners) the terms of God’s dominion covenant: “And God blessed them [Adam and Eve], and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). This covenant was reaffirmed with Noah (Gen 9:1–7). It is still binding on Noah’s heirs.⁷

The paradox of Deuteronomy 8 is this: Blessings, while inescapable for a godly society, are a great temptation. Blessings are a sign of God’s favor, yet in the fifth stage—the society’s response to the temptation of autonomy—blessings can result in comprehensive, external, social

1978), esp. chap. 8.

6. Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the great image was *historically specific*: four human empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Macedonia, and Rome), followed by the fifth Empire, God’s (Dan 2:31–45). This was not an “ideal type,” to use Max Weber’s terminology, nor was it a developmental model. Hesiod’s seemingly similar construction (Greece, 8th century, B.C.)—from the Age of Gold to the Age of Iron—was, in contrast, an attempt at constructing a universal model of the process of decay in man’s history. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1959), lines 109–201. The Bible’s developmental model is based on *ethics*—conformity to or rebellion against God’s covenant—not *metaphysics*, meaning some sort of inescapable aspect of the creation.

7. Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982).

judgment. Thus, there is no way to determine simply from the existence of great external wealth and success of all kinds—the successes listed in Deuteronomy 28:1–14—that a society is facing either the prospect of continuing positive feedback or imminent negative feedback (namely, destruction). The ethical condition of the people, not their financial condition, is determinative.

Visible success is a paradox: It can testify to two radically different ethical conditions. Biblical ethical analysis, because it recognizes the binding nature of revealed biblical law, is therefore a fundamental aspect of all valid historiography, social commentary, and economic analysis. An index number of economic wealth is a necessary but insufficient tool of economic analysis. The numbers do not tell us all we need to know about the progress of a particular society or civilization. We also need God's law as an ethical guide, our foundation of ethical analysis.

A. Ethics and Economic Analysis

A great debate has raged for over a century within the camp of the economists: "Is capitalism morally valid?" Marxists and socialists ask this question and then answer it: *no*. "But capitalism is efficient," respond the defenders of the free market. A few of the defenders also try to muster ethical arguments based on the right of individuals to control the sale of their property, including their labor services, without interference from the civil government.⁸ They rest their moral case on the presumed autonomy of the individual.

This sort of ethical analysis has not convinced many critics of capitalism. They reject the operating presupposition of free market economic analysis: *methodological individualism*. As *methodological collectivists*, they deny the right of men to use their property against the "common good." Problem: Who defines the common good? (The Christian answers that the Bible defines the common good, and sets forth the institutional arrangements that will achieve it. The Bible teaches neither collectivism nor individualism; it proclaims *methodological covenantalism*.)⁹ Another problem: Even if the common good can be defined by humanistic social commentators, who has the right to enforce it? Finally, can the state, through its bureaucracy, enforce

8. Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1982).

9. Gary North, "Methodological Covenantalism," *Chalcedon Report* (Oct., 1977), published by the Chalcedon Foundation, Box 158, Vallecito, California, 95251.

the common good in a cost-effective manner? Will the results resemble the official ethical goals of the planners? What kinds of incentives can be built into a state-planned economy that will enable it to perform as efficiently as a profit-seeking free market economy?¹⁰

The fundamental issue is *ethical*. The question of efficiency is a subordinate one. Few Marxists or socialist scholars seriously argue any longer that the substitution of socialist ownership of the means of production will lead to an increase of per capita output beyond what private ownership would have produced. The debates today rage over what kinds of economic output are morally valid. Also, who should determine what “the people”—whoever they are—really need? The free market, with its system of private ownership and freely fluctuating prices? Or the civil government, with its system of political competition and lifetime bureaucratic functionaries?¹¹

The real debate is a debate over ethical issues, something that economists have tried to hide or deny since the seventeenth century.¹² Economist William Letwin, who is wholeheartedly enthusiastic about this supposed triumph of value-free economics, does admit that there are difficulties with this outlook: “It was exceedingly difficult to treat economics in a scientific fashion, since every economic act, being the action of a human being, is necessarily also a moral act. If the magnitude of difficulty rather than the extent of the achievement be the measure, then the making of economics was the greatest scientific ac-

10. One of the finest books ever written in economics covers these questions in detail: Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). Sowell is an ex-Marxist, so he knows the arguments well. See also Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (1922; reprint ed., Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Press, 1981). This was first published in the United States by Yale University Press in 1953.

11. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1973), chap. 20: “Statist Bureaucracy in the Modern Economy.”

12. “The distinction between moral and technical knowledge is elusive. . . . From the standpoint of any science the distinction is absolutely essential. A subject is not opened to scientific enquiry until its technical aspect has been sundered from its moral aspect. . . . [T]here can be no doubt that economic theory owes its present development to the fact that some men, in thinking of economic phenomena, forcefully suspended all judgments of theology, morality, and justice, were willing to consider the economy as nothing more than an intricate mechanism, refraining for the while from asking whether the mechanism worked for good or evil. That separation was made during the seventeenth century. . . . The economist’s view of the world, which the public cannot yet comfortably stomach, was introduced by a remarkable *tour de force*, an intellectual revolution brought off in the seventeenth century.” William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (1963; reprint ed., Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1965), pp. 158–59.

complishment of the seventeenth century.”¹³ Apparently even more important than Newton’s discoveries!¹⁴ This faith in analytic neutrality has been reaffirmed by the developers of the two most prominent schools of free market economic analysis, Milton Friedman¹⁵ and Ludwig von Mises.¹⁶

One reason why the critics have been so successful in their attack against the academic economists’ hypothetically neutral defense of the free market is this: *Hardly anyone in the secular world really believes any longer that moral or intellectual neutrality is possible.* This is why Christian economics offers a true intellectual alternative: it rests on a concept of *objective* revelation by a true *Person*, the Creator of all knowledge and the Lord of history. The Bible affirms that neutrality is a myth; either we stand with Christ or we scatter abroad (Matt 12:30).¹⁷ The works of the law—not the law, but the works of the law—are written on every human heart (Rom 2:14–15).¹⁸ No man can escape the testimony of his own being, and nature itself, to the existence if a Creator (Rom 1:18–23).

Socialists deny the possibility of neutral economic analysis, and

13. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

14. Letwin does not actually say this. Perhaps he forgot about Newton. Or perhaps he was referring solely to social science when he named economics as “the greatest scientific accomplishment of the seventeenth century.” Or possibly he really meant what he wrote, which boggles the mind.

15. Milton Friedman, in a classic essay on epistemology, writes: “Positive economics is in principle independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgment.” Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 4. For a critique of the hypothesis of neutrality in economics, see Gary North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” in North, ed., *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* (Vallecito, Calif.: Ross House Books, 1976).

16. Mises writes: “In considering changes in the nation’s legal system, in rewriting or repealing existing laws and writing new laws, the issue is not justice, but social expediency and social welfare. There is no such thing as an absolute notion of justice not referring to a definite system of social organization. It is not justice that determines the decision in favor of a definite social system. It is, on the contrary, the social system which determines what should be deemed right and what wrong. There is neither right nor wrong outside the social nexus. . . . It is nonsensical to justify or to reject interventionism from the point of view of fictitious and arbitrary absolute justice. It is vain to ponder over the just delimitation of the tasks of government from any preconceived standard of perennial values.” Mises, *Human Action*, p. 721.

17. On the impossibility of neutrality, see the writings of Cornelius Van Til, especially *The Defense of the Faith*, rev. ed.. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963).

18. For a discussion of the similarities and differences between “the law” and “the works of the law” written on human hearts, see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1959), I, pp. 74–76.

their criticism has become far more effective as humanistic scholarship has drifted from faith in objective knowledge into an ever-growing awareness that all human knowledge is relative. (Marxists still believe in objective knowledge for Marxists, but not for any other ideological group.)¹⁹ Since all intellectual analysis is tied to a man's operating presuppositions about the nature of reality, and since these presuppositions, being pre-theoretical, cannot be disproven by logic, the socialist critic's logic is also undergirded by his equally unprovable presuppositions.²⁰ (There is a problem for non-Christian subjectivist thought, however: the breakdown of objective science.)²¹ Even a few economists are slowly coming to face the implications of subjectivism with respect to objective, neutral analysis, but not many, and their books are not yet influential. These men tend to be associated with "new left" economics, and the "establishment" is not impressed.²²

As Christians we must always maintain that *ethics is basic to all social analysis*. We must make clear what most professional economists prefer to ignore: It is never a question of analysis apart from ethical evaluation; it is only a question of which ethical system, meaning *whose* law-order: God's or self-professed autonomous man's? Because

19. Marxists believe in objective truth—proletarian truth—but they hold that all other approaches are intellectual defenses of a particular class perspective. All philosophy is class philosophy—a weapon used by one class against its rivals. Since history is objectively on the side of the proletariat, there can be objective truth for Marxists only. See Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1968), pp. 61–71. [Reprinted in 1989 by the Institute for Christian Economics.] (<http://bit.ly/gnmrnr>)

20. Compare Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970). See also Imre Lakatos and Alan E. Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970). The works of Herman Dooyeweerd, the Dutch legal philosopher, deal extensively with the pre-theoretical presuppositions of all philosophy: *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Philipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960); *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 vols. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1954).

21. Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), chap. 15.

22. See, for example, Walter A. Weisskopf, *Alienation and Economics* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971); Mark A. Lutz and Kenneth Lux, *The Challenge of Humanistic Economics* (Menlo Park, California: Benjamin/Cummings, 1979). Lux is a clinical psychologist, not an economist, and Lutz taught at an obscure college. Benjamin/Cummings is not a familiar name in publishing. I am not berating these men, their publisher, or their employers, though I do not share their economic views. I am pointing to the difficulty of getting such views discussed within the normal channels of the economics profession. The economics profession has not adopted the forthright acceptance by these men of the obvious implications of subjectivism for the neutrality doctrine.

the Bible provides us with a comprehensive system of ethics, it thereby provides us with a blueprint for economics.²³

B. Biblical Law and Exploitation

The prophets came before Israel and called the people back to the law of God. The people did not respond; the result was captivity. The law of God, when enforced, prevents exploitation. The case-law applications of the law are therefore to be honored. Even the supposedly obscure case laws often have implications far beyond their immediate setting. For example, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn” (Deut 25:4). Paul tells us that this law gives us a principle: “The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Tim 5:18b). Christ also said that the laborer is worthy of his hire (Lk 10:7). In short, if we must allow our beasts of burden to enjoy the fruits of their labor, how much more should human laborers enjoy the fruits of their labor!

Problem: Who decides how much to pay laborers? The church? The state? The free market? The Bible is quite clear on this point: Laborers and employers should bargain together. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is based on the *moral validity of the right of contract*. The employer hired men throughout the day, paying each man an agreed-upon wage, a penny. Those hired early in the morning complained when others hired late in the day received the same wage. In other words, they accused their employer of “exploitation.” This was an “unfair labor practice.” His answer:

Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take [that which] thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last [laborer], even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? (Matt 20:13–15)

Wasn't he morally obligated—and shouldn't he have been *legally* obligated—to have paid more, retroactively, to those hired early in the day? No. When they were hired, he offered them the best deal they believed they had available to them. He was “meeting the market.” Had a better offer been available elsewhere, they would have accepted it. Alternatively, should he have paid less to the men hired later in the day? No. He owed them the wage he had agreed to pay. Those hired in the

23. David Chilton, “The Case of the Missing Blueprints,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer, 1981).

morning had not known that a job would be available later in the day at the same wage. They faced *economic uncertainty*. (Economic uncertainty about the future is an inescapable fact of human action in a world in which only God is omniscient. Any system of economics that in any way ignores or de-emphasizes the economic effects of uncertainty is innately, inescapably erroneous, for it relies on a false doctrine of man.) They took the best offer that any employer made. If they had been omniscient, they might have waited, lounged around for almost the whole day, and then accepted an eleventh-hour job offer. "A full day's pay for an hour's labor: what a deal!" (An analogous approach to salvation: refuse to accept the Gospel in your youth, so that you can "eat, drink, and be merry," and then accept Christ on your deathbed. "A full life's worth of salvation for a last-minute repentance: what a deal!") But men are not omniscient. So they act to benefit themselves with the best knowledge at their disposal.²⁴ The employer had done them no wrong. Their eye was evil.

Christ used this parable to illustrate a theological principle, the sovereignty of God in choosing men: "So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen" (v. 16). The employer had a job opportunity to offer men; God offers salvation in the same way. The employer paid a full day's wage to those coming late in the day. If this action of the employer was wrong, then God's analogous action in electing both young and old ("late comers" and "early comers") to the same salvation is even more wrong. But this is the argument of the ethical rebel; Paul dismisses it as totally illegitimate. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom 9:14–15).

One of the most important facts of economics is this: *Employers compete against employers*, while *workers compete against workers*. Employers do not want rival employers to buy any valuable economic factor of production at a discount. Those who hire laborers do so in order to use their services profitably. They have no incentive to pass along savings to their competitors. If a worker's labor is worth five shekels per hour to two different potential employers, and the worker is about to be hired by one of them for four shekels, the second employer has an incentive to offer him more. He will offer him enough to

24. Again, consult Sowell's book, *Knowledge and Decisions*, for a detailed analysis of this issue. Also, see the classic study by Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (1921; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, Pubs., n.d.).

lure him away from the competitor, but not so much that he expects to lose money on the transaction. The free market's competitive auction process therefore offers *economic* rewards to employers for doing the *morally correct* thing, namely, honoring the biblical principle that the laborer is worthy of his hire.

Similarly, workers compete against workers. They want jobs. If an employer is offering a job to one employee for more than another person willing to work for, the second person has an incentive to step in and utter those magic words: "I'll work for less!" He underbids the competition. (When I say "underbid," I mean underbid in terms of money; I could also say that he overbids his competitors in terms of the hours of labor that he offers the employer for a given wage payment.) The free market's auction process offers an incentive to workers to offer employers "an honest day's labor for an honest day's pay." In short, the free market offers economic rewards to laborers for doing the morally correct thing, just as it offers employers.

Very, very rarely do employers and workers in a modern industrialized economy compete head to head. These instances take place when neither the worker nor the employer has a good idea of his own competition, or when one of the two is ignorant. Laborers may not know the going wage rate. Employers may not know if other workers are available for the money they are willing to pay. So it becomes a question of *negotiation*, the same kind of negotiation that Esau and Jacob transacted for Esau's birthright (Gen 23:29–34).

There is nothing wrong with competitive bargaining, as I explain in chapter eighteen of my economic commentary on the Bible, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*. Normally, competing offers are well known to all parties; advertising has made information on pricing and services widely available. "Help wanted" signs and classified ads do more for the income of the majority of laborers than all the trade unions in the land—legalized monopolies established by one group of workers to deny the legal right of other workers to compete against them.²⁵ Nevertheless, where there are gaps in men's information, men must pay to improve their knowledge. *Information is not a zero-cost good*. Any system of economic analysis which ignores or de-emphasizes this economic fact of life is innately, inescapably erroneous.

When a society guarantees men that they will be allowed to keep the fruits of their labor, it promotes the spread of information. Men

25. Gary North, "A Christian View of Labor Unions," *Biblical Economics Today* (April/May 1978), published by the Institute for Christian Economics.

can afford to invest in the expensive process of improving their knowledge. They are able to capitalize their efforts. If they are successful in improving their knowledge about competing economic offers, either as employers or laborers, they reap the rewards. Members of society are the beneficiaries, since better knowledge means less waste—fewer scarce economic resources expended to achieve given economic ends. The ends are set by competing bidders in the “auction” for consumer goods and services.²⁶ It should be recognized from the beginning that a deeply felt *hostility toward the moral legitimacy of the auction process* undergirds the socialist movements of our era.

C. Predictable Law

The Bible instructs a nation’s rulers not to respect persons when administering justice (Deut 1:17). Both the rich man and the poor man, the homeborn and the stranger, are to be ruled by the same law (Ex 12:49). Biblical law is a form of God’s grace to mankind; it is to be dispensed to all without prejudice. This is the implication of Leviticus 19:15, which introduced this chapter. The predictability of the judicial system is what God requires of those in positions of authority.

Predictable (“inflexible”) law compels the state and the church to declare in advance just exactly what the law requires. This allows men to plan for the future more efficiently. “Flexible” law is another word for *arbitrary* law. When a man drives his automobile at 55 miles per hour in a 55 m.p.h. zone, he expects to be left alone by highway patrol officers. The predictability of the law makes it possible for highway rules to be effective. Men can make better judgments about the decisions of other drivers when speed limits are posted and highway patrol officers enforce them. The better we can plan for the future, the lower the costs of our decision-making. *Predictable law reduces waste.*²⁷

The Hebrews were required by God to assemble the nation—rich and poor, children and strangers—every seventh year to listen to the reading of the law (Deut 31:10–13). Ignorance of the law was no ex-

26. Gary North, “Exploitation and Knowledge,” *The Freeman* (January 1982), published by the Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington, New York, 10533.

27. Perhaps the most eloquent and scholarly work that argues for the connection between predictable law, human freedom, and economic productivity is the book by the Nobel Prize winner in economics, F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), esp. the first 15 chapters. See also his trilogy, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973–80).

cuse. At the same time, biblical law was comprehensible. It was not so complex that only lawyers in specialized areas could grasp its principles. The *case laws*, such as the prohibition on muzzling the ox as he treaded out the corn, brought the general principles down into concrete, familiar terminology. In this sense, biblical faith is essentially a democratic faith, as G. Ernest Wright argues, for

it can be laid hold of with power by the simplest and most humble. We are surrounded by mystery, and ultimate knowledge is beyond our grasp. Yet God has brought himself (Deut 4:7) and his word to us. We can have life by faith and by loyal obedience to his covenant, even though our knowledge is limited by our finitude. One need not wait to comprehend the universe in order to obtain the promised salvation. It is freely offered in the covenant now.²⁸

The law of God gives to men a tool of dominion over an otherwise essentially mysterious nature, including human nature—not dominion as exercised by a lawless tyrant, but dominion through *obedience to God* and *service to man*.²⁹

For example, consider the effects of the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” Men are made more secure in the ownership of property. This commandment gives men security. They can then make rational (cost-effective) judgments about the best uses of their property, including their skills. They make fewer mistakes. This lowers the costs of goods to consumers through competition.

Christian commentators have from earliest times understood that the prohibition of theft, like the prohibition against covetousness, serves as a defense of private property. *Theft is a self-conscious, willful act of coercive wealth redistribution, and therefore it is a denial of the legitimacy and reliability of God’s moral and economic law-order.*

The immediate economic effect of widespread theft in society is the creation of *insecurity*. This lowers the market value of goods, since people are less willing to bid high prices for items that are likely to be stolen. Uncertainty is increased, which requires that people invest a greater proportion of their assets in buying protection services or devices. Scarce economic resources are shifted from production and consumption to crime fighting. This clearly lowers per capita productivity and therefore per capita wealth, at least among law-abiding

28. G. Ernest Wright, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 2, p. 509; cited by R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, vol. 2, *Law and Liberty* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1982), p. 413.

29. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, pp. 403–6.

people. Theft leads to wasted resources.

The internal restraints on theft that are provided by godly preaching and upbringing help to reduce crime, thereby increasing per capita wealth within the society. *Godly preaching against theft* is therefore a form of *capital investment* for the society as a whole (what the economists call “social overhead capital”), for it releases scarce economic resources that would otherwise have been spent on the protection of private and public property. Such preaching also reduces the necessary size of the civil government, which is important in reducing the growth of unwarranted state power.

What is true about the reduction of theft is equally true concerning the strengthening of men’s commitment to private property in general. When *property rights* are carefully *defined* and *enforced*, the value of property increases. Allen and Alchian, in their standard economics textbook, have commented on this aspect of property rights:

For market prices to guide allocation of goods, there must be an incentive for people to express and to respond to offers. If it is costly to reveal bids and offers and to negotiate and make exchanges, the gains from exchange might be offset. If each person speaks a different language [as they did at the tower of Babel], if thievery is rampant, or if contracts are likely to be dishonored, then negotiation, transaction, and policing costs will be so high that fewer market exchanges will occur. If *property rights* in goods are weaker, ill-defined, or vague, their reallocation is likely to be guided by lower offers and bids. Who would offer as much for a coat likely to be stolen?³⁰

The authors believe that the higher market value attached to goods protected by strong ownership rights spurs individuals to seek laws that will strengthen private-property rights. Furthermore, to the extent that private-property rights exist, the power of the civil government to control the uses of goods is thereby decreased. This, unfortunately, has led politicians and jurists to resist the spread of secured private-property rights.³¹

There is no question that *a society which honors the terms of the commandment against theft will enjoy greater per capita wealth* than one which does not, other things being equal. Such a society rewards honest people with greater possessions. This is as it should be. A widespread hostility to theft, especially from the point of view of self-gov-

30. Armen A. Alchian and William R. Allen, *University Economics: Elements of Inquiry*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1972), p. 141. Italics in the original.

31. *Idem*.

ernment (self-restraint), allows men to make more accurate decisions concerning what they want to buy, and therefore what they need to produce in order to offer something of value in exchange for the items they want. Again, I cite Allen and Alchian:

The more expensive is protection against theft, the more common is thievery. Suppose that thievery of coats were relatively easy. People would be willing to pay only a lower price for coats. The lower market price of coats will understate the value of coats, for it will not include the value to the thief. If the thief were induced to rent or purchase a used coat, the price of coats would more correctly represent their value to society. It follows that the cheaper the policing costs, the greater the efficiency with which values of various uses or resources are revealed. The more likely something is to be stolen, the less of it that will be produced.³²

When communities set up “neighborhood watches” to keep an eye on each other’s homes, and to call the police when something suspicious is going on, the value of property in the community is increased, or at least the value of the property on the streets where the neighbors are helping each other.

We want sellers to respond to our offers for goods or services. At the same time, we as producers want to know what buyers are willing and able to pay for our goods and services. The better everyone’s knowledge of the markets we deal in, the fewer the resources necessary for advertising, negotiating, and guessing about the future. These resources can then be devoted to producing goods and services to satisfy wants that would otherwise have gone unsatisfied. The lower our transaction costs, in other words, the more wealth we can devote to the purchase and sale of the items involved in the transactions.

One transaction cost is the defense of property against theft. *God graciously steps in and offers us a “free good”: a heavenly system of punishment.* To the extent that criminals and potential criminals believe that God does punish criminal behavior, both on earth and in heaven, their costs of operation go up. When the price of something rises, other things being equal, less of it will be demanded. *God raises the risks (“price”) of theft to thieves.* Less criminal behavior is therefore a predictable result of a widespread belief in God’s judgments, both temporal and final. When the commandment against theft is preached, and when both the preachers and the hearers believe in the God who

32. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

has announced his warning against theft, then we can expect less crime and greater per capita wealth in that society. God's eternal criminal justice system is flawless, and it is also inescapable, so it truly is a free good—a gift from God which is a sign of his grace. This is one aspect of *the grace of law*.³³ It leads to increased wealth for those who respect God's laws.

D. Compulsory Wealth Redistribution

The Bible says, "Thou shalt not steal." It does *not* say, "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote." A society which begins to adopt taxation policies that exceed the tithe—10 per cent of income—thereby increases economic uncertainty, as do other types of theft, both public and private. This increase in uncertainty may be even more disrupting, statistically, than losses from burglary or robbery, because private insurance companies can insure against burglary and robbery. After all, *who can trust a civil government which claims the right to take more of a person's income than God requires for the support of his kingdom?* What kind of protection from injustice can we expect from such a civil government? The next wave of politically imposed wealth redistribution is always difficult to predict, and therefore difficult to prepare for, so the costs of production increase.

When Samuel came before the Hebrews to warn them about the evils of establishing a king in Israel, he thought he might dissuade them by telling them that the king would take a whopping 10 per cent of their production (1 Sam 8:15). They did not listen. (And, for the record, neither have Christians listened to warnings against the forty and fifty per cent taxation levels of the modern welfare state.) The Pharaoh of Joseph's day imposed a tax of 20 per cent (Gen 47: 24–26). Egypt was one of the great tyrannies of the ancient world.³⁴ It was probably the most massive bureaucracy in man's history until the twentieth century.³⁵ Yet every modern welfare state—meaning every Western industrial nation in the late twentieth century—would have to cut its total

33. Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (1963; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983).

34. See the study by Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1957).

35. Lewis Mumford, "The First Megamachine," *Daedalus* (1966); reprinted in Lewis Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922–1972* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973). See also Max Weber, "Max Weber on Bureaucratization" (1909), in J. P. Meyer, *Max Weber and German Politics: A Study in Political Sociology* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), p. 127.

tax burden by at least *half* in order to return to the twenty per cent level of Egypt in Joseph's day.³⁶

E. Foreign Aid: State to State

Foreign aid means an increase in taxes in one nation, so that money can go to other nations. State-to-state aid must go through official, bureaucratic channels. Only in major emergencies—famines, floods, earthquakes—do foreign governments allow Western nations to bring food and clothing directly to their citizens. They understand the obvious: The increasing dependence of citizens on goods from a foreign civil government increases their direct dependence on that foreign civil government. He who pays the piper is in a position to call the tune. Oddly enough, intellectual proponents of increased state welfare fail to recognize what leaders in Third World nations understand immediately, namely, "there ain't no such thing as a free lunch." With the benefits come controls and future political or diplomatic obligations.

When the United States sends food under Public Law 480 (passed in 1954), to India, the Indian government, not private businesses, allocates it—or whatever is left after the rats at the docks and in the storage facilities consume approximately half of it. (Rats and sacred cows in India consume half of that nation's agricultural output. It would take a train 3,000 miles long to haul the grain eaten by Indian rats in a single year.³⁷)

There is a great temptation for government officials of underdeveloped nations to use this food to free up state-controlled capital which is then used to increase investments in heavy industry—investments that produce visible results that are politically popular—projects that cynics refer to as *pyramids*. These large-scale industrial projects are in effect paid for by the food subsidies sent by the West. Without the free food sent by the West, these uneconomical, large-scale projects would be out of the question politically. Even worse, foreign aid enables governments to spend heavily on military equipment that will be used to suppress political opponents or other Third World

36. For a discussion of why Joseph's imposition of a twenty per cent tax in Egypt was not part of God's law for Israel, see Gary North, *Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, chap. 23.

37. The estimate of Dr. Max Milner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He says that in one recent year, rats in the Philippine Islands consumed over half the sugar and corn, and ninety per cent of the rice crop. "Over 40% of the World's Food Is Lost to Pests," *Washington Post*, 6 March 1977.

nations—themselves recipients of Western foreign aid.³⁸

What would happen if the West were to stop shipping food at below-market prices? Local farmers in the recipient nations have been hurt—or in some cases, driven into bankruptcy—by the West's below-production-cost food, so they have reduced investments in the agricultural system. These nations have become increasingly dependent on the West's free food. If the subsidies were to cease, the agricultural base might be insufficient to provide for the domestic population, for agricultural output has been reduced as a result of taxpayer-financed cut-throat competition from Western governments that gave away the food. At the same time, if the subsidies were to cease, heavy industry projects could also go bankrupt (or, more accurately, may lose even more tax money than they lose already, and therefore become political liabilities).

Let us not be naive about the political impetus for shipments of American farm products under Public Law 480. The farm bloc and the large multinational grain companies are major supporters of the compulsory "charity" of foreign food aid, just as farmers favor the food stamp program. Farmers can sell their crops to the U.S. government at above-market prices, and then the government can give the food away to people who would not have bought it anyway. Politicians like the program also because the U.S. government uses the promise of free food as a foreign policy lever.³⁹ Government subsidies to agriculture have become a way of life in the United States, as have government controls on agriculture.⁴⁰

We know that foreign governments are hostile to what they refer to as "Western control," when private foreign capital comes into their nations. Why this hostility? *Because pro-socialist political leaders in underdeveloped nations resent the shift of sovereignty from civil government to the private sector, both foreign and domestic.* Yet these same officials beg for more state-to-state aid from the West. Why? Because *they* control the allocation of this form of economic aid after it arrives. The question of foreign aid, like all other forms of compulsory economic redistribution, raises questions of sovereignty.

Should we recommend increased taxes in Western nations in or-

38. P. T. Bauer, *Equality, the Third World and Economic Delusion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), p. 94.

39. For background on the political support for Public Law 480 and the program's use as a tool of American foreign policy, see Dan Morgan, *Merchants of Grain* (New York: Viking, 1979), pp. 100–2, 122–28, 258–68.

40. William Peterson, *The Great Farm Problem* (Chicago: Regnery, 1959).

der to “feed the starving poor” in foreign nations? Is this what Christ meant by loving our neighbors? Are Western tax revenues really feeding the starving poor, or are they financing the bureaucratic institutions of political control that have been created by pro-socialist, Western-educated political leaders who dominate so many of the Third World’s one-party “democracies”? Are poor people in the West being taxed to provide political support to wealthy politicians in the Third World? Does the Bible teach that state-to-state wealth transfers are ethically valid? Or does the Bible require *personal* charity, or church-to-church charity—charity which is not administered by foreign politicians?

These are fundamental questions regarding sovereignty, authority, and power. In the construction of the kingdom of God on earth, should we promote the increased sovereignty of the political state? Samuel’s warning is clear: *no* (1 Sam 8). Any discussion of government “charity”—compulsory wealth redistribution—must deal with this issue of sovereignty. Other questions, closely related to the preceding ones, are these: Is the poverty of the Third World the fault of the West? Is the Third World hungry because people in Western industrial nations eat lots of food? Does the West, meaning Western civil governments, owe some form of reparations (restitution) to Third World civil governments?

F. “We Eat; They Starve”

Consider the words of theologian-historian Ronald Sider, whose best-selling book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, has become one of the most influential books on seminary and Christian college campuses all over the United States. His introduction to the book sets forth the problem:

The food crisis is only the visible tip of the iceberg. More fundamental problems lurk just below the surface. Most serious is the unjust division of the earth’s food and resources. Thirty per cent of the world’s population lives in the developed countries. But this minority of less than one-third eats three-quarters of the world’s protein each year. Less than 6 per cent of the world’s population lives in the United States, but we regularly demand about 33 per cent of most minerals and energy consumed every year. Americans use 191 times as much energy per person as the average Nigerian. Air conditioners alone in the United States use as much energy each year as does the entire country of China annually with its 830 million people. One-

third of the world's people have an annual per capita income of \$100 or less. In the United States it is now about \$5,600 per person. And this difference increases every year.⁴¹

I can remember reading textbooks written in the 1950s that affirmed the wonders of American capitalism, and that pointed with pride to the fact that 6 per cent of the world's population *produced* 40 per cent (or 33 per cent, or whatever) of the world's goods. But that argument grew embarrassing for those who proclaimed the supposed productivity of socialism. Socialist nations just never caught up. So, capitalism's critics now complain that 6 per cent of the world's population (Americans) annually *uses up* one-third of the world's annual production, as if this consumption were not simultaneously a process of production, as if production could take place apart from the using up of producer goods. This is *word magic*. It makes productivity appear evil.

It is true that Westerners eat a large proportion of the protein that the world produces each year. This has been used by vegetarian socialists to create a sense of guilt in Western meat-eating readers of socialist literature. You see, our cattle eat protein-rich grains. "Corn-fed beef" is legendary—or notorious, in the eyes of the critics. Because of this, argues Dr. Sider, the "feeding burden" of the United States is not a mere 210 million (the number of human mouths to feed), but 1.6 billion.⁴² "No wonder more and more people are beginning to ask whether the world can afford a United States or a Western Europe."⁴³ (Outside of college and seminary campuses, not many people seem to be asking this question, as far I can see. Certainly the Haitian boat people and Latin American refugees aren't asking it. Neither are Jews who are emigrating from the Soviet Union.)

The psalmist proclaimed a poetic truth about God's ownership of the world by identifying these words as God's: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps 50:10). But "liberation theologians" are not impressed. Dr. Sider informs us:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that when the total life

41. Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 18. This book was co-published by the liberal Roman Catholic publishing house, the Paulist Press. Unquestionably, it represents an ecumenical publishing venture. Presumably, it reflects the thinking of a broad base of Christian scholars.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

of the animal is considered, each pound of edible beef represents seven pounds of grain. That means that in addition to all the grass, hay and other food involved, it also took seven pounds of grain to produce a typical pound of beef purchased in the supermarket. Fortunately, the conversion rates for chicken and pork are lower: two or three to one for chicken and three or four to one for pork. Beef is the cadillac of meat products. Should we move to compacts?⁴⁴

Must we rewrite the words of the psalm (with the seven-to-one ration in operation): "For every chicken of the forest is mine, and the soybeans upon seven thousand hills"? Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that a 1982 study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicates that low-income Americans—the people who liberation theologians supposedly want to deliver from "oppressive institutions"—eat more meat per capita than high-income Americans do. Blacks consume more meat per capita than other racial groups do.⁴⁵ Thus, the "less meat" program would reduce one of the prime pleasures of the poor in America.

Unquestionably, Third World populations sometimes suffer protein deficiencies. But any program of "social salvation through protein exports" is going to encounter problems that the wealth-redistributionists seldom consider. *People's food is fundamental to their culture.* Trying to stay on a diet has confounded millions of Americans. Eating habits are very difficult to alter, even when the eater knows that he should change. An education program to get Third World peasants to change their diets is going to be incredibly expensive, and probably futile. "Rice-eating people would often rather starve than eat wheat or barley, which are unknown to them," writes biologist Richard Wagner.⁴⁶

This problem goes beyond mere habits. Sometimes we find that people's diets have conditioned their bodies so completely that the introduction of a new food may produce biological hazards for them. This is sometimes the case with protein. Wagner comments:

Another even more bizarre instance was seen in Colombia, where a population was found with a 40 percent infestation of *Entamoeba histolytica*, a protozoan that generally burrows into the intestinal wall, causing a serious condition called amoebiasis. However, despite

44. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

45. Associated Press story, *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, 18 December 1982.

46. Richard H. Wagner, *Environment and Man*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 523.

the high level of *Entamoeba* infestation, the incidence of amoebiasis was negligible. The answer to this puzzle was found in the high-starch diet of the people. Because of the low protein intake, production of starch-digesting enzymes was reduced, allowing a much higher level of starch to persist in the intestine. The protozoans were found to be feeding on this starch rather than attacking the intestinal wall. If this population had been given protein supplements without concurrent efforts to control *Entamoeba* infestation, the incidence of amoebiasis would probably have soared, causing more problems than the lack of protein.⁴⁷

G. Cultures Are “Package Deals”

When a foreign culture introduces a single aspect of its culture into the life of another, there will be complications. This single change serves as a sort of *cultural wedge*. As the historian Arnold Toynbee puts it, “In a cultural encounter, one thing inexorably goes on leading to another when once the smallest breach has been made in the assaulted society’s defenses.”⁴⁸ Changing people’s eating habits, apart from changing their understanding of medicine, costs of production, agricultural technology, risks of blight, marketing, and an indeterminate number of other contingent aspects of the recommended change, is risky when possible, and frequently impossible.

Third World peasants often recognize the implications of a particular “cultural wedge” perhaps better than the Western “missionary” does: It may have a far-reaching impact on the culture as a whole—an impact which traditional peasants may choose to avoid. Unless the opportunity offered by the innovator is seen by the recipient as being worth the risks of unforeseen “ripple effects,” the attempt to force a change in the recipient’s buying or eating habits may lead to a disaster. Or, more likely, it will probably lead to a wall of resistance. Missionaries, whether Christian or secular, whether sponsored by a church or the Peace Corps, had better understand one fundamental principle before they go to the mission field: *You cannot change only one thing.*

One of the classic horror stories that illustrates this principle is the Sub-Sahara Sahel famine of the 1970s. This arid and semiarid area is vast. It stretches across the African continent, and it includes the nations of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Ghana, Niger, Upper Volta, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and part of Kenya. For 15 years, from the

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 518–19.

48. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial and The World and the West* (New York: World, 1958), pp. 286–87.

early 1960s through the mid-1970s, the West's civil governments poured hundreds of millions of dollars into this region. Yet between the late 1960s and 1974, hundreds of thousands of people starved, along with twenty million head of livestock. They are still starving. Why? As with most agricultural tragedies, there was no single cause. The area gets little rain: perhaps twenty-five inches in its southernmost regions, tapering off to an inch per year closer to the Sahara. The nomads needed water for their herds, as they had from time immemorial. The West gave them the water. Here was a totally new factor in the region's ecology. It destroyed them. This was one major cause.

The other cause was the absence of enforceable property rights in land. The nomads did not assign specific plots to specific families. No one was made personally and economically responsible for the care of the land. "All trees, shrubs, and pasture are *common*-access resources, so no *individual* tribesman has an incentive to conserve them, or add to their stock. No individual can reap the returns of planting or sowing grass, which hold the soil together and prevent 'desertification.'"⁴⁹

Beneath the rock and clay and sand, there is water. A subterranean lake of half a million square miles underlies the eastern end of the Sahara. Drilling rigs can hit water at one thousand or two thousand feet down. These boreholes were drilled with Western foreign aid money at \$20,000 to \$200,000 apiece. About ten thousand head of cattle at a time can drink their fill. Therein lies the problem. Claire Sterling describes what happened:

The trouble is that wherever the Sahel has suddenly produced more than enough for the cattle to drink, they have ended up with nothing to eat. Few sights were more appalling, at the height of the drought last summer [1973], than the thousands upon thousands of dead and dying cows clustered around Sahelian boreholes. Indescribably emaciated, the dying would stagger away from the water with bloated bellies to struggle to fight free of the churned mud at the water's edge until they keeled over. As far as the horizon and beyond, the earth was as bare and bleak as a bad dream. Drought alone didn't do that: they did.

What 20 million or more cows, sheep, goats, donkeys, and camels have mostly died of since this grim drought set in is hunger, not thirst. Although many would have died anyway, the tragedy was compounded by a fierce struggle for too little food among Sahelian

49. John Burton, "Epilogue," in Steven Cheung, *The Myth of Social Cost* (San Francisco: Cato Institute, 1980), p. 66.

herds increased by then to vast numbers. Carried away by the promise of unlimited water, nomads forgot about the Sahel's all too limited forage. Timeless rules, apportioning just so many cattle to graze for just so many days within a cow's walking distance of just so much water in traditional wells, were brushed aside. Enormous herds, converging upon the new boreholes from hundreds of miles away, so ravaged the surrounding land by trampling and overgrazing that each borehole quickly became the center of its own little desert forty or fifty miles square.⁵⁰

In Senegal, soon after boreholing became popular (around 1960), the number of cows sheep and goats rose in two years from four million to five million. "In Mali, during the five years before 1960, the increase had been only 800,000. Over the next ten years the total shot up another 5 million to 16 million, more than three animals for every Malian man, woman, and child."⁵¹ It is not just Americans and West Europeans who raise and eat "protein on the hoof."

The traditional nomad way of life is dead. Western specialists know it; the nomads know it. They live in tent camps now, dependent on handouts from their governments, which in turn rely heavily on the West's foreign aid programs. The West and the nomads forgot to honor (and deal with) this principle: *You cannot change only one thing.*

H. Cultural Transformation

The goal of charitable organizations that deal in foreign aid should be to bring the culture of the West to the underdeveloped nations. By "the culture of the West," I mean the law-order of the Bible, not the humanist, secularized remains of what was once a flourishing Christian civilization. This means that these organizations cannot be run successfully by cultural and philosophical relativists. Missionaries should seek to impart a specifically Western way of looking at the world: future-oriented, thrift-oriented, education-oriented, and responsibility-oriented. This world-and-life view must not be cyclical. It must offer men hope in the power of human reason to understand the external world and to grasp the God-given laws of cause and effect that control it. It must offer hope for the future. It must be *future-oriented*. To try to bring seed corn to a present-oriented culture that will eat it is futile. With the seed corn must come a world-and-life view that will

50. Claire Sterling, "The Making of the Sub-Sahara Wasteland," *Atlantic* (May, 1974), p. 102.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

encourage people to grow corn for the future.

It does little good to give these cultures Western medicine and not Western attitudes toward personal hygiene and public health. It does little good to send them protein-rich foods if their internal parasites will eat out their intestines. The naive idea that we can simply send them money and they will “take off into self-sustained economic growth” cannot be taken seriously any longer.⁵² To attack the West because voters are increasingly unwilling to continue to honor the tenets of a naive faith in state-to-state aid—faith in the power of political confiscation, faith in the power of using Western tax revenues to prop up socialist regimes in Third World nations—is unfair.⁵³

P. T. Bauer of the London School of Economics made the study of economic development his life's work. He emphasized what all economists should have known, but what very few acknowledged until quite recently, namely, that in the long run, people's *attitudes* are more important for economic growth than money. His list of what ideas and attitudes *not* to subsidize with Western capital is comprehensive. No program of foreign aid, whether public or private, should be undertaken apart from an educational program to reduce men's faith in the following attitudes. These attitudes are favorable to the development of a society that will experience economic growth.

Examples of significant attitudes, beliefs and modes of conduct unfavourable to material progress include lack of interest in material advance, combined with resignation in the face of poverty; lack of initiative, self-reliance and a sense of personal responsibility for the economic future of oneself and one's family; high leisure preference, together with a lassitude found in tropical climates; relatively high prestige of passive or contemplative life compared to active life; the

52. W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1960). This was a best-seller on college campuses in the early 1960s. For a critique, see the essays by several economic historians in Rostow, ed., *The Economics of Take-Off into Sustained Growth* (New York: St. Martin's, 1963).

53. Examples of socialist (centrally planned) economies that have been propped up by U.S. government aid are Costa Rica, Uruguay, El Salvador, and Ghana. See Melvyn B. Krauss, *Development Without Aid: Growth, Poverty and Government* (New York: New Press, McGraw-Hill, 1983), pp. 24–32. Another example is Zaire (formerly the Belgian Congo). Consider also that government-guaranteed loans, as well as below-market loans through such agencies as the Export-Import Bank, constitute foreign aid, for banks loan investors' dollars to high-risk socialist nations that would otherwise not have been loaned. The Soviet Bloc has done exceedingly well in this regard for decades. On this point, see Antony Sutton, *Western Technology and Soviet Economic Development*, 3 vols. (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1968–73).

prestige of mysticism and of renunciation of the world compared to acquisition and achievement; acceptance of the idea of a preordained, unchanging and unchangeable universe; emphasis on performance of duties and acceptance of obligations, rather than on achievement of results, or assertion or even a recognition of personal rights; lack of sustained curiosity, experimentation and interest in change; belief in the efficacy of supernatural and occult forces and of their influence over one's destiny; insistence on the unity of the organic universe, and on the need to live with nature rather than conquer it or harness it to man's needs, an attitude of which reluctance to take animal life is a corollary; belief in perpetual reincarnation, which reduces the significance of effort in the course of the present life; recognized status of beggary, together with a lack of stigma in the acceptance of charity; opposition to women's work outside the home.⁵⁴

A long sentence, indeed. If the full-time promoters of Western guilt understood the implications of what Bauer is saying, there would be greater hope for both the West and the Third World. What he describes is essentially the very opposite of what has come to be known as "the Protestant Ethic."⁵⁵ What is remarkable is the extent to which *ideologically motivated guilt-manipulators have adopted so many of the very attitudes that Bauer says are responsible for the economic backwardness of the Third World.*

Yes, the West continues to eat. The Third World finds it difficult to grow sufficient food. But Christians in the West are supposedly complacent. They are well-fed, while their "global neighbors" go hungry.⁵⁶ It appears that the ancestors of "rich Christians" and rich Westerners in general were very smart: They all moved to those regions of the world where food is now abundant. The Plains Indians, before Europeans came on the scene, experienced frequent famines. There were under half a million of them at the time.⁵⁷ Yet, somehow, European immigrants to the Plains arrived just in time to see agricultural productivity flourish. They now consume more than their "fair share" of the food, and their only excuse is that they produce it. This, it

54. P. T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 78–79.

55. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958). This book appeared originally as a series of scholarly journal articles in 1904–5. See also S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

56. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 30.

57. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Myth of Over-Population* (1969; reprint ed., Fairfax, Va.: Thoburn Press, 1978), pp. 1–3.

seems, is not a good enough answer—certainly not a morally valid answer. The West needs to come up with a cure for the hungry masses of the world, but *not* the one that worked in the West, namely, *the private ownership of the means of production*.

Ronald Sider has a cure—if not for the world's hungry masses, then at least for the now-guilty consciences of his readers, not to mention the not-yet-guilt-burdened consciences of the American electorate. "We ought to move toward a personal lifestyle that could be sustained for a long period of time if it were shared by everyone in the world. In its controversial *Limits to Growth*, the Club of Rome suggested the figure of \$1,800 per year per person. In spite of the many weaknesses of that study, the Club of Rome's estimate may be the best available."⁵⁸ And which agencies should be responsible for collecting the funds and sending them to the poor in foreign lands? United Nations channels.⁵⁹ Private charity is acceptable—indeed, it is better than the United States government, which sends food and supplies to "repressive dictatorships"⁶⁰—but not preferable. We need state-enforced "institutional change," not reliance on private charity, because "institutional change is often morally better. Personal charity and philanthropy still permit the rich donor to feel superior. And it makes the recipient feel inferior and dependent. Institutional changes, on the other hand, give the oppressed rights and power."⁶¹

But if the United States government is not really a reliable state to impose such institutional change, what compulsory agency is reliable? He neglects to say. The one agency he mentions favorably in this context is the United Nations—the organization which has formally indicted Israel as a "racist" nation, and which welcomed the Palestine Liberation Organization's Yassir Arafat, pistol on his hip, to speak before the membership.⁶²

It is interesting that the Club of Rome drastically revised its no-

58. Ronald J. Sider, "Living More Simply for Evangelism and Justice," the Keynote Address to the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle, England (17–20 March 1980), mimeographed paper, p. 17.

59. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 216.

60. *Idem*.

61. Sider, "Ambulance Drivers or Tunnel Builders" (Philadelphia: Evangelicals for Social Action, n.d.), p. 4.

62. For a critical analysis of Sider's views, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald Sider*, rev. ed. (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982). The book is now in the third edition, reprinted in 1996.

growth position in 1976,⁶³ and in 1977, the year *Rich Christians* was published, the Club of Rome published a pro-growth, pro-technology study.⁶⁴ As William Tucker observes, “When you’re leading the parade, it’s always fun to make sudden changes in direction just to try to keep everyone on their toes.”⁶⁵ Of course, it was favorable to vast state-to-state foreign aid programs.

I. A Zero-Sum Economy?

A zero-sum game is a game in which the winners’ earnings come exclusively from the losers. But what applies to a game of chance does not apply to an economy based on voluntary exchange. Unfortunately, many critics of the free market society still cling to this ancient dogma. They assume that if one person profits from a transaction, the other person loses proportionately. Mises objects:

... the gain of one man is the damage of another; no man profits but by the loss of others. This dogma was already advanced by some ancient authors. Among modern writers Montaigne was the first to restate it; we may fairly call it the *Montaigne dogma*. It was the quintessence of the doctrines of Mercantilism, old and new. It is at the bottom of all modern doctrines teaching that there prevailed, within the frame of the market economy, an irreconcilable conflict among the interests of various social classes within a nation and furthermore between the interests of any nation and those of all other nations. . . .

What produces a man’s profit in the course of affairs within an unhampered market society is not his fellow citizen’s plight and distress, but the fact that he alleviates or entirely removes what causes his fellow citizen’s feeling of uneasiness. What hurts the sick is the plague, not the physician who treats the disease. The doctor’s gain is not an outcome of the epidemics, but of the aid he gives to those affected. The ultimate source of profits is always the foresight of future conditions. Those who succeeded better than others in anticipating future events and in adjusting their activities to the future state of the market, reap profits because they are in a position to satisfy the most urgent needs of the public. The profits of those who have produced goods and services for which the buyers scramble are not the source of losses of those who have brought to the market commodit-

63. *Time*, 26 April 1976.

64. Jan Tinbergen (coordinator), *RIO—Reshaping the International Order: A Report to the Club of Rome* (New York: New American Library, Signet Books, 1977).

65. William Tucker, *Progress and Privilege: America in the Age of Environmentalism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1982), p. 193.

ies in the purchase of which the public is not prepared to pay the full amount of production costs expended. These losses are caused by the lack of insight displayed in anticipating the future state of the market and the demand of the consumers.⁶⁶

The “Montaigne dogma” is still with us. The economic analysis presented by Ronald Sider assumes it. He can be regarded as a dogmatic theologian, but *his dogma is Montaigne’s*. Consider for a moment his statistics, such as the Club of Rome’s assertion that \$1,800 a year would just about equalize the living standards of the world. The Club of Rome assumes tremendous per capita wealth in the hands of the rich—so much wealth, that a program of compulsory wealth-redistribution could make the whole world middle class, or at least reasonably comfortable. But the capital of the West—roads, educational institutions, communications networks, legal systems, banking facilities, monetary systems, manufacturing capital, managerial skills, and attitudes toward life, wealth, and the future—cannot be divided up physically. Furthermore, there is little evidence that it would be sufficient to produce world-wide per capita wealth of this magnitude, even if it could be physically divided up and redistributed.⁶⁷

If we divided only the *shares of ownership* held by the rich—stocks, bonds, annuities, pension rights, cash-value life insurance policies, and so forth—we would see a market-imposed redistribution process begin to put the shares back into the hands of the most efficient producers. The *inequalities of ownership* would rapidly reappear.

The important issue, however, is the Montaigne dogma. It views the world as a zero-sum game, in which winnings exactly balance losses. Then how do societies advance? *If life is a zero-sum game, how can we account for economic growth?* A free market economy is not a zero-sum game. We exchange with each other because we expect to gain an advantage. Both parties expect to be better off after the exchange has taken place. Each party offers an opportunity to the other person. If each person did not expect to better himself, neither would make the exchange. *There is no fixed quantity of economic benefits. The free market economy is not a zero-sum game.*

We understand this far better in the field of education. For example, if I learn that two plus two equals four, I have not harmed anyone. In the area of knowledge, we all know that the only people who

66. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, pp. 664–65. Italics in original.

67. Gary North, “Trickle-Down Economics,” *The Freeman* (May 1982).

lose when someone gains new, accurate knowledge are those who have invested in terms of older, inaccurate knowledge. Could anyone seriously argue that the acquisition of knowledge is a zero-sum game (except, perhaps, in the case of a competitive examination)? Would anyone argue that we should suppress the spread of new, accurate knowledge in order to protect those who have made unfortunate investments in terms of old information?

What should we conclude? The Third World needs what all men need: *faith in Jesus Christ and his law-order*. The Third World needs the increased economic output that is the inevitable product of true conversion to Christ. It needs a new attitude toward the future (optimism). It needs a new attitude concerning the power of biblical law as a tool of dominion. It needs to abandon the bureaucratic state agricultural control systems that pay farmers only a fraction of what their agricultural output is worth, with the difference going into state treasuries. It is not uncommon for West African governments to pay producers as little as *fifty per cent* of the market value of their crops.⁶⁸

What the Third World needs is what we all need: less guilt, less civil government, lower taxes, more freedom, and churches that enforce the tithe through the threat of excommunication⁶⁹—not a “graduated tithe,” but a fixed, predictable ten per cent of income. (A “graduated tithe” means a graduated ten per cent, which is contradictory. It is a political slogan, not a theological concept. It certainly is not a standard for state taxation: 1 Sam 8.)

J. Land Reform

We are told endlessly that Latin American nations need land reform. The government is supposed to intervene, confiscate the landed wealth of the aristocracy, and give it to the poor. This is a variation of Lenin’s old World War I slogan, “peace, land, bread.” [Note: in 2003 I discovered on my own that Lenin seems never to have used this slogan.] Is such a program legitimate? Is it practical?

The Bible has a standard for land tenure: private ownership. First, how can we respect this principle and still expand the holdings of land by the peasants? Second, how can we keep agricultural output from collapsing when unskilled, poor peasants take over land tenure?

68. P. T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development*, pp. 401–3.

69. Note, 2005: I have changed my mind on this point. The threat should not be excommunication but rather revocation of voting rights in the congregation.

The answer to the first question is relatively simple in theory: We need to adopt the biblical principle of inheritance. All sons receive part of the inheritance, with the eldest son obtaining a double portion, since he has the primary responsibility for caring for aged parents. Rushdoony's comments are important:

The general rule of inheritance was limited primogeniture, i.e., the oldest son, who had the duty of providing for the entire family in case of need, or of governing the clan, receiving a double portion. If there were two sons, the estate was divided into three portions, the younger son receiving one third. . . . The father could not alienate a godly first-born son because of personal feelings, such as a dislike for the son's mother and a preference for a second wife (Deut 21: 15–17). Neither could he favor an ungodly son, an incorrigible delinquent, who deserved to die (Deut 21:18–21). Where there was no son, the inheritance went to the daughter or daughters (Num 27:1–11). . . . If there were neither sons nor daughters, the next of kin inherited (Num 27:9–11).⁷⁰

By instituting the biblical mode of inheritance, the great landed estates of the Latin American world would be broken up. The civil government would immediately gain the support of the younger sons of the aristocracy. Land holdings would get smaller. Those sons who choose not to farm can sell their land to productive peasants, or if the poor people have no capital initially, hire them as sharecroppers. (In a capital-poor society, such as the American South immediately after the Civil War, sharecropping proved to be an economically sound arrangement.)⁷¹ The sons can buy the necessary capital, assuming they do not inherit it.

With each death, the land holdings get smaller. Will this lead to the destruction of productive, large-scale agriculture? Not if it is really productive. The size of land holdings could be increased by purchase by productive farmers. Also, corporations could be set up that would issue shares of stock to owners. The holders would leave shares of stock to their heirs, not the actual land. Then heirs could sell these shares to other people, including members of the rising middle class. Without single-inheritor primogeniture, there could be a rising middle

70. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 180–81.

71. Blacks preferred sharecropping to working for wages on white-owned farms: Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 67–70.

class.

One of the preludes to the American Revolution, especially in southern colonies, was the abolition of the English version of eldest-son primogeniture.⁷² Puritan New England never did adhere to eldest-son primogeniture. Historian Kenneth Lockridge writes:

The leaders of the [Massachusetts Bay] colony reflected a general awareness of the unique abundance of the New World in the novel inheritance law they created. In England, the lands of a man who left no will would go to the eldest son under the law of primogeniture, whose aim was to prevent the fragmentation of holdings which would follow from a division among all the sons. The law arose from a mentality of scarcity. It left the landless younger sons to fend for themselves. In New England the law provided for the division of the whole estate among all the children of the deceased. Why turn younger sons out on the society without land or perhaps daughters without a decent dowry, why invite social disorder, when there was enough to provide for all?⁷³

There was never a landed aristocracy in the New England because of this policy. Primogeniture and entail (prohibiting the from selling the land) disappeared in all but two colonies prior to the American Revolution.

I offer this example of one possible social and economic reform to demonstrate how relevant biblical law is for all societies, and how a deviation from biblical law has led, over centuries, to the creation of a ticking time bomb in Latin American nations. Instead of broadly based private property in land, and the development of a responsible middle class, Latin American nations now face the likelihood of Marxist revolution, with the state, not the people, gaining control over the land. As Rushdoony remarks, "The state, moreover, is making itself progressively the main, and in some countries, the only heir. The state in effect is saying that it will receive the blessing above all others. It offers

72. Robert Nisbet, the conservative American sociologist, concludes that the abolition of primogeniture and entail (fixing land to the family line) was an important symbol of the American Revolution. He admits, however, that few of the colonies in 1775 were still enforcing these laws. Nisbet, "The Social Impact of the Revolution," in *America's Continuing Revolution: An Act of Conservation* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1975), p. 80. Nisbet cites Frederick Le Play and Alexis de Tocqueville as sources for his opinion on the importance of the abolition of primogeniture and entail, pp. 82–83.

73. Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town, The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 71–72.

to educate all children and to support all needy families as the great father of all. It offers support to the aged as the true son and heir who is entitled to collect all of the inheritance as his own. In both roles, however, it is the great corrupter and is at war with God's established order, the family."⁷⁴

Conclusion

God's law is clear enough: *The family is the primary agency of welfare*—in education, law enforcement (by teaching biblical law and self-government), care for the aged. The church, as the agency for collecting the tithe, also has social welfare obligations.⁷⁵ The civil government has almost none. Even in the case of the most pitiable people in Israel, the lepers, the state had only a negative function, namely, to quarantine them from other citizens. The state provided no medical care or other tax-supported aid (Lev 13 and 14).⁷⁶

The balance of earthly sovereignties between the *one* (the state or church) and the *many* (individuals, voluntary associations) is mandatory if we are to preserve both freedom and order. The Bible tells us that God is both one and many, one Being yet three Persons. His creation reflects this unity and diversity. Our social and political institutions are to reflect this. We are to seek neither total unity (statism) nor total diversity (anarchism).⁷⁷ Biblical law provides us with the guidelines by which we may achieve a balanced social order. We must take biblical law seriously.⁷⁸

The most effective social movements of the twentieth century's masses—Marxism, Darwinian science, and militant Islam—have held variations of the three doctrines that are crucial for any comprehensive program of social change: *providence*, *law*, and *optimism*. The Christian faith offers all three of these, not in a secular framework, but in a revelational framework. The failure of Christianity to capture the minds of the masses, not to mention the world's leaders, is in part due

74. *Ibid.*, p. 181. See also Gary North, "Familistic Capital," in the forthcoming book, *The Dominion Covenant: Exodus* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), forthcoming. [The book was eventually titled, *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion*, 1985.]

75. James B. Jordan, "Tithing: Financing Christian Reconstruction," in Gary North, ed., *Tactics of Christian Resistance* (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983).

76. Gary North, "Quarantines and Public Health," *Chalcedon Report* (April 1977).

77. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (1971; reprint ed., Fairfax, Va.: Thoburn Press, 1978).

78. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.

to the unwillingness of the representatives of Christian orthodoxy to preach all three with uncompromising clarity. *The world will stay poor for as long as men cling to any vision of God, man, and law that is in opposition to the biblical outline.*

We need faith in the meaning of the universe and the sovereignty of God. We need confidence that biblical law offers us a reliable tool of dominion. Finally, we need an historical dynamic: optimism. We need a positive future-orientation for our earthly efforts, in eternity of course, but also in time and on earth. People need to surrender unconditionally to God in order to exercise comprehensive dominion, under God and in terms of God's law, over the creation.⁷⁹ There is no other long-term solution to long-term poverty. God will not be mocked.

79. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983). See also Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (1954; reprint ed., Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982).

Appendix F

THE ECONOMIC RE-EDUCATION OF RONALD J. SIDER¹

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (Isa. 8:20).

I began this economic commentary project in the spring of 1973: monthly essays in the *Chalcedon Report*. I escalated it in August of 1977, when I moved to Durham, North Carolina. At that time, I began to devote 10 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, to this commentary project. I still do.

In that same year, 1977, another historian, Ronald J. Sider, had his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*, co-published by the Paulist Press (liberal Roman Catholic) and InterVarsity Press (neo-evangelical Protestant). The fate of these rival publishing projects throws light on contemporary Protestant evangelical theology.

In mid-1997, the fourth edition of Sider's book appeared. On the cover, it proclaims: "Over 350,000 copies in print." Most of these copies were the first edition. The original publishers surrendered control over it in 1990, when Word Books picked it up and issued the third edition. Publishers do not surrender books that are still selling well. The second edition was forced on Sider in 1984 by David Chilton's book, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981), which I hired Chilton to write and which the Institute for Christian Economics published. Sider prudently refused to mention Chilton in that second edition . . . also in the third edition/latest edition.

A. He Changed His Mind

In a *Christianity Today* interview, published in the same issue as an obituary for David Chilton (April 28, 1997), Sider made it clear that

1. Published first as an Institute for Christian Economics report in 1997.

he no longer was of the same opinion as he had been in 1977. "The times have changed, and so have I" (p. 68). Furthermore, "I admit, though, that I didn't know a great deal of economics when I wrote the first edition of *Rich Christians*" (pp. 68–69). Or, he could accurately have added, the second and third editions. It is clear who his nemesis has been since 1981, the unnamed David Chilton: "I had no interest in trying to psychologically manipulate people into some kind of false guilt" (p. 68). Chilton had recognized the appeal to guilt throughout Sider's book. Sider now said that this was not his intention.

What happened to change his mind? First, the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989; second, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Times had changed, and so had he. Like so many academics who switched in the 1990s, he no longer argues for socialism. It was not David Chilton's arguments that persuaded him; it was a shift in liberalism's climate of opinion, and therefore academic neo-evangelicalism's opinions.

Sider's popularity began to fade about the time ICE published Chilton's book. Chilton's writing style—he was a master of clarity as well as rhetoric—his mastery of the Bible,² and his mastery of free market economics turned Sider's book into a retroactive embarrassment. I heard the following on many occasions: "I don't believe everything in Sider's book, but don't you think Chilton went to extremes?" Obviously, I didn't. Strong rhetoric catches people's attention. This was true of Sider's first edition, too. He used very strong rhetoric—most of which disappeared from the 1997 edition. If strong rhetoric is backed up by proof, it will accomplish its task far more effectively than the verbal equivalent of lukewarm oatmeal. Chilton's book was designed to teach biblical free market principles by means of a public dissection of a popular anti-free market book. Chilton's book did its work well. It sold better than any book that ICE ever published. I thought at the time that it was an almost perfect book. I still do.³

Let me use an analogy. To stop a group of amateur sportsmen from going over a waterfall in a rented motor boat, you have to yell really loud and wave your arms at them. They may complain later about all the undignified shouting and waving, but they may pull over to the shore. Even Sider pulled over, although not because of Chilton's

2. I sat in an office next to his. I would yell, "David, where is that passage about. . . ?" He would yell back, "It's somewhere in the middle of chapter [] of the Book of []." It always was.

3. The fatter revised edition is longer and a bit harder to read, for it had to respond to Sider's second edition, the one that included "a response to my critics," except Chilton.

shouting or mine. His ideology's outboard motor just broke down—a familiar experience with socialist products. He has now publicly tossed this burnt-out motor overboard. He deserves credit for this.

Still, he really owed it to his readers to have written something like this at the beginning of the new edition: "David Chilton was basically correct in his criticisms of my economic views. I have adopted many of his proposals, including the following: . . ." But there is not a word about Chilton or his book. This is consistent with the second and third editions.

B. Sider Led an Ideological Exodus

We are all familiar with the student who goes off to college and comes home after the first year spouting liberal nonsense that he learned in the classroom. This phenomenon has been around since the days of classical Greece. Aristophanes wrote a comedy about such a youth: *Clouds*. A young man goes off to Socrates' academy and then comes home a know-it-all jerk. Students usually get over this phase by age 30 unless they go to graduate school. In graduate school, the damage to both common sense and moral sense can become permanent.

The Christian version of this tale is the youth who comes home spouting nonsense and quoting the Bible out of context to defend his views. Maybe he quotes Israel's jubilee law (Lev. 25) as a model of state-directed wealth-redistribution. No one told him that the jubilee's legal basis was genocide: the destruction of an entire civilization by the Israelites, i.e., wealth-distribution by military conquest. No one told him that the same jubilee law authorized the permanent enslavement of foreigners and their children (Lev. 25:44–46).

He insists that he is still a Christian, but he declares that a Christian can be a liberal: an in-your-face, in-your-wallet, tax collector's gun-in-your-belly kind of liberal. He announces, in so many words, "You'll have to pay; government gets to spend the money on the poor (after skimming off 50% for handling); and it's all in the name of Jesus. Jesus loves a cheerful taxpayer."

With the publication of *Rich Christians* in 1977, Ronald Sider became the Moses of the American Protestant evangelicals' version of this kind of home-from-college liberal. (By 1977, John R. Stott had long served this role in England.) The trouble was, Sider never came home from college: he was still there—teaching. He led the neo-evangelicals in a unique kind of exodus: out of the fundamentalist prayer

closets of their youth. They thought they were on the cutting edge of a new, caring kind of Christianity. They imagined that they were headed into the Promised Land of social relevance and political influence. They believed that their students would follow them. The students did, too, for about three years. Then they changed their minds, voted for Ronald Reagan, and went into real estate development or the brokerage business. (This, too, shall pass, but that is another story.)

The original version of *Rich Christians* was a tract for the times. They were rotten times, ideologically speaking. The economic debate, as far as Christian intellectuals knew, was between Keynesians and Marxists. Not today. Everything has changed. Marxism is dead. Keynesianism is in its terminal stages, taking tiny, halting steps like an octogenarian with a walker. Sider recognized this, and he turned back toward what he used to call Egypt. "No, no: the Promised Land lies in *this* direction!" Most of this army turned back in the 1980s, and they have bought up all the choice real estate.

Sider began his revised edition with this admission: "My thinking has changed. I've learned more about economics."⁴ So have his former readers. Socialist radicalism has fallen out of favor all over the world. The climate of opinion in the liberal media changed in 1991. Ron Sider changed right along with it. I think of Joe Sobran's warning: he would rather be in a church that has not changed its beliefs in 5,000 years than in one that spends its days huffing and puffing to catch up with the latest shift in media opinion.

The 20th edition is barely recognizable. It even has a new subtitle: *Moving from Affluence to Generosity*. The earlier editions had been subtitled, *A Biblical Study*. The new subtitle is less pretentious. It also sounds more private than statist, which reflects the book's perspective.

Here is an example of just how much the book has changed. You may remember Sider's call to statist action on behalf of the poor. His argument in 1977 was this: God is on the side of the poor. ". . . the God of the Bible is on the side of the poor just because he is *not* biased, for he is a God of impartial justice."⁵ What did he say in 1997? "Is God biased in favor of the poor? Is he on their side in a way that he is not on the side of the rich? Some theologians say yes. But until we clarify

4. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Dallas: Word, 1997), p. xiii.

5. Ronald L. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 84.

the meaning of the question, we cannot answer it correctly.”⁶ The next chapter backpeddles away from the first edition.

In his 1985 edition, Chilton summarized Sider’s policy recommendations, and he offered footnotes from *Rich Christians* for every point: national (state) food policy, (state to state) foreign aid, a guaranteed national income, international taxation, land reform, bureaucratically determined “just prices,” national health care, population control, and the right of developing nations to nationalize foreign holdings.⁷ In Sider’s 1997 edition, foreign aid is mentioned briefly (pp. 31–38). But even here, Sider cited reports on how recipient governments have misused this aid in the past. Sider used the same kind of bureaucratic examples that Chilton used against Sider’s early editions (pp. 258–59). As for the recycled oil money loaned to the Third World, “Too much of what was loaned was spent on armaments, ill-planned projects, or wasted because of official corruption” (p. 260). He still mentioned land reform, but only briefly (p. 260). He wanted lower tariffs against foreign products. He was adamant about this.⁸ This was Chilton’s suggestion.⁹

As he became more cautious—openly so—he dropped almost all traces of his previous toying with socialism and statist coercion. The new edition was not the same book. It was not even a first cousin of the first three editions. His new edition was basically a retraction of the earlier editions—a kind of belated apology to the 350,000 buyers of his book who bought intellectually damaged goods.

But he still refused to mention Chilton’s book, even in the bibliography. He reminds me of Winston Smith in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, who dutifully dropped inconvenient historical information into the “memory hole.” Nevertheless, the new bibliography contained some very good books by such fine free market scholars as P. T. Bauer—to whom Chilton dedicated the third edition, since Bauer was a big fan of *Productive Christians*¹⁰—George Gilder, Brian Griffiths,¹¹ Julian

6. Sider, *Rich Christians* (1997), p. 41.

7. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), p. 35. (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>)

8. Sider, *Rich Christians* (1997), pp. 147–50, 244–45.

9. Chilton, *Productive Christians*, pp. 101–103.

10. He called Chilton on the phone at least once to tell him how much he liked the book. Chilton had initially thought it was someone who was pulling a trick on him.

11. When I visited him in 1985—the day that Margaret Thatcher’s policy unit hired him as an advisor—Prof. Griffiths told me that he had not heard about Christian economics until he read my Introduction to *Christian Economics*.

Simon, and Calvin Beisner. Unfortunately, he did not actually quote from any of these authors in his 37 pages of endnotes, except to attack Bauer as an extremist.¹² He quoted mainly from UNICEF, other United Nations agencies, and the World Bank. He still avoided citing economists generally and free market economists specifically. But at least his bibliography gave the illusion that he had thought through the reasons why his first three editions were wrong.

How did this happen? I attribute it to a dramatic shift in the climate of public opinion. This climate of opinion was beginning to change in 1981, when Chilton's book appeared and when I debated Sider at Gordon-Conwell Divinity School. But it was not yet changing among Christian academics. They follow the lead of secular humanist opinion leaders, usually by about five to 10 years. I was not well received by the faculty of Gordon-Conwell (or at any other seminary, now that I think of it).

C. Harbinger and Fad

Sider's book was part harbinger, part fad. It was a harbinger of things to come because, in 1977, Protestant evangelicals were just barely coming back into American politics as an identifiable voting bloc. The 1976 Presidential candidacy of Southern Baptist and Trilateral Commission member Jimmy Carter had made acceptable the label "evangelical" in the political arena. A majority of white Southern Protestants actually voted against Carter, but hardly anyone recognized this in 1977 or even today. The pundits incorrectly attributed his victory to the unpredicted appearance of the evangelicals.¹³

From the era of the media-orchestrated humiliation of fundamentalist Christianity at the Scopes' "monkey" trial in 1925 until the election of 1976, American evangelicals had been conspicuous by their absence.¹⁴ They generally opposed politics, or at least identifiably Christi-

12. Sider, *Rich Christians* (1997), p. 307.

13. He won mainly because Gerald Ford had been a Vice President who came into office because of Richard Nixon's 1974 resignation under a cloud of scandal. Ford immediately pardoned Nixon for unnamed crimes that Nixon had not been tried for. Then the 1975 recession hit. Meanwhile, the newly created Trilateral Commission went looking for a political unknown who could be palmed off on the scandal-weary American voters as an outsider. This strategy worked, but only for one election.

14. See Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), chaps. 7, 9. Cf. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 184–86;

an participation in partisan politics. Roman Catholics did that sort of thing, it was widely believed, "and you know what we think about Catholicism!" For decades, political liberals who controlled the theologically liberal National Council of Churches had chided fundamentalists, calling on them to get out of their prayer closets and get active in politics. They got their wish answered in 1980: the election of Ronald Reagan, whose personal commitment to salvation through faith in Christ was never proclaimed by him in public, and by his defeat of Carter, whose public commitment to Christ was considered media-worthy, but whose personal commitment was to theologians such as Paul Tillich. The National Council crowd never knew what hit them. Reagan stood firm, at least rhetorically, against the NCC's version of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote." He was re-elected in 1984. The NCC has never recovered. Like some emphysemic middle-aged athlete still dreaming of his glory days, the NCC continues to issue study guides and newsletters. No one pays any attention.

1. Sider and Social Action

Immediately after my debate with Sider at Gordon-Conwell, a reporter privately asked me what I thought of Sider. I told him that I appreciated Sider for softening up the market for my work. I told him that Sider was preparing the way for evangelicals to get involved in social action and politics, but that my economic opinions, not Sider's, were representative of the broad mass of evangelical opinion. That statement had been verified the previous fall, with Reagan's defeat of Carter. Sider had been part of the minority of white evangelicals who were favorable to Carter's worldview and hostile to Reagan's. Sider's fame was based on the opinion of classroom professors and liberal arts editors, what I have referred to as the Wheaton College-*Christianity Today*-Calvin College axis. This cloistered non-profit community of liberal arts graduates is part of the modern chattering class, but it never has reflected the opinions of donors in the pews. The man in the pew always knew that socialism is simply Communism for people without the testosterone to man the barricades.

I have maintained for four decades that neo-evangelicals pick up fads that have been discarded by secular liberals. Sider's book is proof.

Ralph Reed, *After the Revolution: How the Christian Coalition is Impacting America* (Dallas: Word, 1996), p. 53. Note that Reed's publisher was also Sider's.

The tenured academic community of Christians was mildly socialistic when the American media were. Now they are mildly free market, just as the media are. What caused the change? The failure of the Soviet Union. Mr. Gorbachev admitted in the late 1980s that his nation was economically bankrupt. This stunned the West's academics. They had always insisted that the USSR had a growing economy. Only a handful of free market economists had questioned this. In 1991, Gorbachev was unceremoniously thrown out of power. So were the Communists. They had neither money nor power by August 21, 1991, the day the Communist coup against Boris Yeltsin failed. With neither money nor power, Communism fell out of favor in the West overnight. The secular humanist West worships money and power. Lose these, and you're instantly passé.

Overnight, discount book bins filled up with Marxist books written by and for the college market. Marxists in the Western academic community found that their peers were laughing at them. Never before had this happened. They had always been taken seriously. Why? Because the Communists had the power to terrorize people without threat of retaliation, and Western liberals have great respect for this degree of power. They had raged for decades selectively only against military dictatorships in small nations—dictatorships that might be overthrown. Now the “impersonal forces of history” had turned against the Communists. This was bad news for tenured professors who had publicly worshipped the forces of history, as reported by the *New York Times*. They rushed in panic to get on board the last train out of socialism's world of empty promises and emptier souls.

They have now become born-again democratic capitalists. What is a democratic capitalist? Someone who has modified the eight commandment as follows: “Thou shalt not steal quite so much as before, except by majority vote.”

2. The Echo Effect: Neo-evangelicalism

Sider's book was partly a fad because it promoted a kind of warmed-over political liberalism that suited the times. In 1977, Jimmy Carter had just been elected President of the United States. He was a political liberal, and he was a self-proclaimed evangelical, despite his commitment to neo-orthodox theologians. Two years later, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of Great Britain. In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States. Those two politicians

restructured political rhetoric in the West. They made political conservatism acceptable. More important, they made liberals look both weak and silly. They oversaw major shifts in public opinion, even among intellectuals. In the year of Reagan's retirement,¹⁵ the Berlin Wall was torn down, and the East German troops did nothing to stop it, as if in response to Reagan's words to Mikhail Gorbachev: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Gorbachev sat tight. Two years after that, he was thrown out of office, along with Communism.

Overnight, the liberation theology fad died. Marxism became passé—the ultimate humiliation in the modern intellectual world. This was the year after the third edition of Sider's book appeared, which sank without a trace. Ronald Reagan had destroyed the climate of opinion that had made Ronald Sider's book a best-seller among college-educated Christian evangelicals. Reagan had destroyed Sider's market as surely as David Chilton had destroyed Sider's arguments. Sider admitted as much: "Communism has collapsed. Expanding market economies and new technologies have reduced poverty. 'Democratic capitalism' has won the major economic/political debate of the twentieth century. Communism's state ownership and central planning have proven not to work; they are inefficient and totalitarian."¹⁶ This was what David Chilton had argued back in 1981. Sider wrote: "One of the last things we needed was another ghastly Marxist-Leninist experiment in the world."¹⁷ Yet in 1977, he offered this bold-faced, capitalized question: **IS GOD A MARXIST?**¹⁸ He never answered this question; instead, he wrote several pages on how God "wreaks horrendous havoc on the rich."¹⁹ In 1997, he answered his own question. This is progress. It took him only 20 years.

D. The New, Improved Version

Dr. Sider has admitted that he didn't understand much about economics in 1977. That was clear to Chilton and me when we finally got around to reading his book in 1980. In 1997, he changed his tune. In the 1997 edition, for example, he continued to call for a "graduated

15. Required by the United States Constitution; had he run again, he would almost certainly have been elected a third time.

16. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. xiii.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–83.

18. Sider, *Rich Christians* (1977), p. 72.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 77. See Chilton, *Productive Christians*, p. 267.

tithe.” But he said this is strictly personal; he did not mention the state.²⁰ He assured us: “Certainly it is not a biblical norm to be prescribed legalistically for others.”²¹ Throughout the book, he called for private Christian charity—exactly what Chilton had called for. He made a few gratuitous genuflections toward government intervention, but mainly in the most conventional areas, such as public health matters and education²²—activities that the typical Southern Baptist layman would agree with. Most revealing, he stripped his book of confrontational rhetoric against the free market or in favor of big government. His rare negative rhetorical flourishes were now directed against Marxism. This edition was marked by academic caution. It is an apology rather than an apologetic.

Chilton’s arguments did not change Sider’s mind. By the time Communism fell, making anti-capitalism passé, he had written two revisions without even mentioning Chilton or his other free market critics. Even in his third revised edition (1990), he provided not one reference to Chilton’s book, and not one reference to me or this commentary series. The climate of opinion has not changed *that* much! It was not logic or the Bible that changed Sider’s mind. It was the change in the climate of secular academic opinion. He was not prepared to swim upstream. Neo-evangelicals always swim downstream with the liberal current, for liberals can impose academic sanctions.

I have been swimming upstream ever since I was 14 years old, when I attended a lecture by the anti-Communist Fred Schwarz in 1956. Bit by bit, inch by inch, I have seen the intellectual tide of opinion turn—not 180 degrees, but at least 110. It reached university professors last, especially in the humanities departments. Schwarz was surprised at how just fast the tide turned after 1989.²³ He had been swimming upstream since the mid-1940s. Swimming upstream is the price of overcoming evil in an era in which evil is entrenched. It is the price of launching a paradigm shift.

Sider’s earlier editions were subtitled, *A Biblical Study*. In 1997, he moved away from that sort of unacceptable positioning. He wrote: “When the choice is communism or democratic capitalism, I support democratic government and market economics.” Not quite. When the

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 193–96.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

23 23. Frederick Schwarz, M.D., *Beating the Unbeatable Foe* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1996), ch. 38.

choice was between Communism and market economics, he was not ready to attack Marxism, and he attacked the free market with a vengeance. It was only after the academic world was laughing at Marxists that he switched.

He went on to say, "That does not mean, however, that the Bible prescribes either democracy or markets."²⁴ To argue, as I have and Chilton did, that decentralized constitutional democracy and the free market are exactly what the Bible prescribes, is just too theonomic for Dr. Sider.²⁵ In 1997, Ron Sider was closer to the biblical truth, but not on the basis of the Bible, and not on the basis of economic logic, which was as absent in his 1997 edition as it was in 1977.²⁶ He dismissed my defense of the free market²⁷ as little more than an extension of Adam Smith, whom he correctly identified as an Enlightenment thinker.²⁸ He refused to tell his readers about this economic commentary series or my public attack on right-wing Enlightenment political theory.²⁹ He did not mention theonomy's commitment to searching for judicially binding social blueprints in the Bible. He did not inform his readers that free market economics as a discipline began, not with the Enlightenment, but with the late-medieval scholastic school of Salamanca, a fact that I have tried to get people to understand ever since I published Murray Rothbard's article on the topic in 1975.³⁰ These scholastics used rationalism, not the Bible, to defend their case; so did the late-seventeenth-century mercantilists,³¹ so did Smith; so does the entire

24. Sider, *Rich Christians* (1997), p. 237.

25. My position on biblical law and economics is stated in Chapter 52: "Biblical moral law, when obeyed, produces a capitalist economic order. Socialism is anti-biblical. Where biblical moral law is self-enforced, and biblical civil law is publicly enforced, capitalism *must* develop. One reason why so many modern Christian college professors in the social sciences are vocal in their opposition to biblical law is that they are deeply influenced by socialist economic thought. They recognize clearly that their socialist conclusions are incompatible with biblical law, so they have abandoned biblical law."

26. There is nothing on the price mechanism as a means of coordination, nothing on the division of labor, nothing on entrepreneurship as the source of profits, etc.

27. Appendix E.

28. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 92, note 5.

29. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

30. Murray N. Rothbard, "Late Medieval Origins of Free Market Economic Thought," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975), pp. 62–75; Rothbard, *Economic Thought before Adam Smith: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought* (Brookfield, Vermont: Elgar, 1985), ch. 4.

31. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1963).

economics profession. So what? Did Sider think that his favorite economists in 1977—there were not many cited in his footnotes—and non-economists were not also heirs of the Enlightenment? As with his academic peers, and virtually the entire Christian world, he hated theonomy, yet he implied that the Enlightenment left an unreliable legacy. To which I ask, one more time: *If not biblical law, then what?*

Sider affirmed what his academic peers affirm: the Bible offers no judicially binding economic, political, and social blueprints. But at least in the 1997 edition, we find no traces of his original inflammatory, anti-free market rhetoric—the outlook and rhetoric that made his book a best-seller. There is also no hint at the existence of some as yet-unpublished plan that might make statism work. He knew by 1997 that statism will not work. He could not tell us theoretically why this should be true. He showed no familiarity with Mises' 1920 article on the economic irrationality of socialist planning.³² That article was always the most important theoretical critique of socialism, which socialist economist Robert Heilbroner finally admitted in 1990 was correct.³³

Anti-Communism is pragmatic if it is not based on economic theory, or biblical law, or some other moral ground. Sider now rejects Communism as evil. Why did he wait so long? I contend that it was because the climate of secular liberal opinion had not yet shifted. Until secular pragmatists saw that the Communists could no longer maintain their terrorist apparatus, they rejected all economic criticisms of Communism that were based on its inherently irrationality and/or its moral evil. Until that point, the West's liberal media rejected all uncompromisingly anti-Communist authors and opinions as biased and unscholarly.³⁴

How much civil government is appropriate? We just do not know, Sider said. "We need intensive study of how much and what kind of government activity promotes both political freedom and economic justice. Through painstaking analysis and careful experimentation, we must discover how much government can work within a basic market framework to empower the poor and restrain those aspects of today's

32. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920), in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Socialist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963), ch. 3. (<http://www.mises.org/econcalc.asp>)

33. Robert Heilbroner, "After Communism," *The New Yorker* (Sept. 10, 1990), p. 92.

34. Jean-François Revel, *The Flight from Truth: The Reign of Deceit in the Age of Information* (New York: Random House, [1988] 1991).

markets that are destructive.”³⁵ Notice what is the framework: free markets, not civil government.

Guilt for poverty must now be shared internationally, perhaps like foreign aid. “As we saw in chapter 7, North Americans and Europeans are not to blame for all the poverty in the world today. Sin is not just a White European phenomenon.”³⁶

What of the effects of multinational corporations? “For the purposes of this book, however, we do not have to know the answer to the question of their overall impact.”³⁷ Some of them do damage; others do not. (This is sociology’s only known law: “some do; some don’t.”) What of colonialism? “It would be simplistic, of course, to suggest that the impact of colonialism and subsequent economic and political relations with industrialized nations was entirely negative. Among other things, literacy rates rose and health care improved.”³⁸ This, from the man who wrote in the second edition, “It is now generally recognized by historians that the civilizations Europe discovered were not less developed or underdeveloped in any sense” (pp. 124–25). He went on: “It would be silly, of course, to depict colonialism as the sole cause of present poverty. Wrong personal choices, misguided cultural values, disasters and inadequate technology all play a part.”³⁹ They do, indeed—Chilton’s point in 1981. Well, then, is there enough food being produced in the Third World today? Is the Third World facing famine? Here, too, we just do not know. The World Bank says there is no threat. Lester Brown—whose pessimistic assessment was prominent in the 1977 edition—says there is a threat. “The final verdict? Non-specialists like you and me cannot be sure.”⁴⁰

Here is what we *can* be sure of: this is not the *Rich Christians* that sold 350,000 copies.

Sider offered reworked versions of his old “institutionalized evil” and jubilee year chapters, but his heart just was not in it. Reading the 1997 edition of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* is like going to your college class’s 20th reunion and running into the campus radical, who is there mainly to sing the old songs. He cannot remember half of the words, but he can still hum most of the tunes. A good time will be had by all—all 350,000.

35. Sider, *Rich Christians* (1997), p. 236.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

E. Who Is the Targeted Audience?

Every author should decide who his targeted audience is before he begins to write. He must also decide the time frame for this particular book's influence. Some books are tracts for the times. Others are written for the long haul. Some are aimed at large numbers of buyers. Others are aimed at opinion leaders.

I do not expect more than a handful of people to read all 30 volumes of this commentary, yet portions of it will be still be read by some opinion-makers in 500 years. I say this in complete confidence. Why? First, because the Internet will keep it available. Second, because search engines will find videos of my summaries, and from there, viewers will find the chapters. Third, because pastors are always looking for help in dealing with problem passages, and the Pentateuch is filled with problem passages. Commentaries survive, in contrast to best-selling Christian books on contemporary issues. Recall that prior to the late 1960s, there were almost no books on contemporary Christian issues written by and for fundamentalists, and very few for academic evangelicals. This, too, was an aspect of the climate of opinion.

One idea or slogan in a book may long outlast the sale of the book, but who can successfully predict this? Not an author, surely. Not his publisher, either. Think of Malthus' formulation in his anonymous first edition of *Essay on Population* (1798): humans increase geometrically, while food supplies increase arithmetically. The idea was silly, the evidence was nonexistent, and the author dropped the phrase in subsequent editions. Nevertheless, it is the one thing most people who remember Malthus remember about him.

In contrast, another suggestion by Malthus, rarely associated with his name, was that nature produces huge numbers of offspring that perish. This idea was picked up six decades later by an unknown naturalist, Alfred Wallace, and applied to a wholly new way: some of the survivors survive because of unique biological traits, and these traits are passed on to their offspring. This insight became the basis of Wallace's formulation of the concept of evolution through natural selection. He suggested this to Charles Darwin in a letter. Darwin instantly saw that Wallace was about to beat him to the punch. Darwin had seen the same passage in Malthus and had reached the same conclusion, but he had hesitated for two decades to publish his researches. Darwin then decided that joint credit was better than no credit at all. He convinced Wallace to publish a jointly signed article in 1858. It had no

influence at all. A year later, Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared. His publisher had not expected the book to sell well. His publisher was wrong. As it has turned out, Wallace received none of the credit and is long forgotten except among specialized historians. And all of this came as a result of Parson Malthus' observation about a factor in population dynamics. So it goes in the world of publishing.

How can a book survive the free market's competition?⁴¹ There is fierce competition today in the oceans of new book titles that get printed each year. The general rule is that a book that hits the best-seller list rarely retains influence. It is too much a product of its time, i.e., tied too closely to the prevailing climate of opinion. It becomes a best-seller because it is an expression of the prevailing views of the day. Even if it is in opposition, it is within the dominant culture's acceptable boundaries of public discourse.⁴² But any climate of opinion can and will change dramatically from time to time. That is why we call it a climate. The best-sellers of one era are seldom read in the next, except by historians who are trying to explain how such mediocre books could have prospered. The fable about the hare and the tortoise applies well to books whose authors hope will change people's opinions and keep them changed. This thought comforts authors whose books have not sold well.

The trick here is keeping your book(s) in print. Slow sales kill books, especially in an age in which inventory taxes place negative sanctions on marginally profitable titles. The back list that was once the bread and butter for publishers has been undermined by taxation policies. The advent of books that can be produced on demand, one copy at a time, and Internet Web sites that may some day prove profitable for downloaded books, should keep help to book titles alive until their day dawns (if ever). The bankruptcy and then collapse of the modern welfare state will also help.

41. The book market is a free market. While college textbooks are subsidized indirectly by state-funded tuition, rarely does anyone change a deeply felt opinion because of something he read in a textbook. Nobody goes back to read his college textbooks, as distinguished from intelligent monographs or classics assigned in upper division classes.

42. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and William Bennett's *Book of Virtues* are examples of such opposition books: the first, an eloquent defense of classical education written for conservatives who have never had to trudge through that barren humanist ordeal; the second, a compilation of rewritten children's stories for grandmothers to give as Christmas presents to public school children who would be bored stiff by them if they ever bothered to read the book, which is unlikely.

Conclusion

I am writing for future generations of Christians who at long last become fed up with the results of compromises with humanism, whether right wing or left-wing. I say to them: to the law and to the testimony; trust and obey, for there's no other way; you can't beat something with nothing. I say a lot of things. Given the length of this book, I have said too much already. But this much I feel morally compelled say: beginning around 1960, I have learned that it is far safer to trust in the Bible than in the climate of opinion, especially tenured Christian academic opinion. Better to write and then see one's first (and last) edition appear on a remaindered book discount list than to become a best-selling author, only to publish a disguised retraction two decades later with the belated admission, "Well, it sounded good at the time."

Appendix G

STRONG DRINK¹

And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee (Deut. 14:26–28).

This text, more than any other, refutes modern fundamentalism's moral and legal prohibition against the consumption of alcohol. There is no exegetical answer to this text, so it is usually ignored by fundamentalists.

The standard fundamentalist response to biblical references to wine-drinking by righteous people is that this must have been unfermented wine. But, prior to 1869, no one had ever heard of unfermented wine. In that year, a pietistic and disgruntled communion steward, Thomas B. Welch, began producing non-alcoholic, pasteurized “wine” explicitly for use in the Lord’s Supper. He called it “Dr. Welch’s Unfermented Wine.” The product caught on among Protestant pietists and then became a separate commercial product. His son re-named it Welch’s Grape Juice, which was the foundation of a multi-million dollar company.² Grape juice as a commercial product is possible only because of pasteurization. The ancients did not possess this technology. Nevertheless, modern Protestant pietists have created an oral history which says that Jesus turned water into grape juice.

When Jesus turned water into wine, the feast’s organizer remarked that Jesus’ wine tasted better. This was unheard of, he said; party or-

1. Written in 1997. Kenneth Gentry’s book, *God Gave Us Wine: What the Bible Says About Alcohol* (Lincoln, California: Oakdown, 2001) provides a detailed analysis of the theology and exegesis of the Christian critics of wine.

2. Theodore Morrison, *Chautauqua: A Center for Education, Religion, and the Arts in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 11.

ganizers always served their best wine first. "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10). Why did party organizers do this? Because after many hours of drinking wine, the drinkers were "feeling no pain." They did not notice or care that the later wine was of lower quality. Less expensive wine could serve the celebrational purpose. Conclusion: Jesus created wine, not grape juice. Pietism's oral history of the wedding feast of Cana makes no sense in terms of the actual text.

Jesus, in describing the growth of God's kingdom, compared it to fermenting wine. Both expand. "And no man putteth new wine into old bottles [skins]; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better" (Luke 5:37–39). First, Jesus predicted expansion. Old Covenant Israel would not be able to contain this new manifestation of the kingdom of God in history. The kingdom's Mosaic boundaries would soon be broken. This imagery was tied to the bubbling expansion of the fermentation process. No pasteurization here! Second, Jesus said that old wine tastes better to experienced drinkers. That is, the more fermented wine tastes better. Applying this imagery to the issue of the two Israels, Jesus was predicting that the defenders of Old Covenant Israel would be critical of New Covenant Israel. They would prefer the familiar taste of traditional wine.

The imagery adopted by Jesus to describe the expansion of the kingdom of God was tied to the fermentation process. But grape juice is anti-expansion. Pasteurization kills the living organisms that make fermentation possible. The Jews would prefer old wine, Jesus predicted: familiar taste, no further expansion. Modern pietists prefer grape juice. If we take Christ's imagery seriously, we can see a reason for pietism's commitment to grape juice in the Lord's Supper. *Premillennial pietism opposes the expansion of God's comprehensive kingdom in history*. It wants "souls only" evangelism, not Christendom.

A. Strong Drink and Intoxication

Pietism's mythology of unfermented wine does not escape the exegetical problem. The crucial bibulous phrase in Deuteronomy 14 is not "wine"; it is "strong drink." The absence of strong drink had been

one of God's curses on the people during their wilderness wandering, just as the absence of bread had been. Moses reminded them of this: "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God" (Deut. 29: 5–6). But good times were about to replace the bad times! During the good days in Egypt, when Joseph wanted to reward his brothers before he revealed his identity to them, he gave him strong drink: "And he took and sent messes [portions] unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs. And they drank, and were merry with him" (Gen. 43:34). The word "merry" is translated from the Hebrew root word meaning to become tipsy or intoxicated, the word from which the Hebrew word for "strong drink" is derived. Strong's *Concordance* defines the word as follows: "Shekar, shay-kaw'r'; from Heb 7937; an intoxicant, i.e. intensely alcoholic liquor:—strong drink, + drunkard, strong wine."

The tithe of national celebration allowed families to spend money on liquor—liquor that was stronger than table wine. This was God's money, yet it was legitimately used to become slightly intoxicated, i.e., to make merry. The priestly tribe was to join in the festivities.³ This was not grape juice. It was good, old-fashioned, buzz-producing booze, and God wanted His people to experience its pleasures. But fundamentalist pietists hate liquor so much they refuse to acknowledge the clear teaching of the Bible. Their all-consuming hatred of liquor clouds their understanding as surely as the all-consuming love of liquor clouds the understanding of alcoholics.

This obvious etymological usage has been denied by dispensational fundamentalist Robert Teachout in his Dallas Theological Seminary Th.D. dissertation, as well as in his 1983 book. He insists that *shaykar* can mean "drink deeply" rather than "become drunk." Context determines which way to translate it, he insists. The Hebrew lexicons are therefore wrong. "The idea of drunkenness so often associated with both the noun and the verb is dependent upon the context (and the beverage that is imbibed), then, and is not the innate meaning of the

3. In the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, every pastor ("Levite") must take an oath of total abstinence from alcohol. They call themselves "Covenanters," after the Scottish Covenanters, yet they serve grape juice at the Lord's Supper. So do most Calvinistic Presbyterian churches. Yet the Scottish Presbyterian tradition always accepted the non-liturgical consumption of intoxicating liquor, such as Scotch.

word, despite the simplistic rendering of Hebrew lexicons.” Therefore, Deuteronomy 14:26 means “satisfying grape juice.”⁴

While he is not so open as to admit what he really means—this reference is brief—here is what he means: when the Bible says not to drink strong drink (e.g., Proverbs 31:4: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink”), the word means alcohol. But when it says that strong drink may be consumed (e.g., Proverbs 31:6: “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts”), it means grape juice. Fundamentalists write as though they actually believe that grape juice creates a merry heart, which indicates the degree of experience fundamentalists have with merry hearts. (Try to imagine a party where a room full of fundamentalists are working on their third punch bowl of grape juice. “Whoopie! Yippee! Halleluia!”) In short, we are asked to believe that the standard Hebrew lexicons are wrong, Strong’s *Concordance* is wrong, but Teachout is correct: what Deuteronomy 14:26 authorized was the consumption of a beverage that was not technologically possible to transport over long distances without fermenting. Fundamentalists ask us to believe that unfermented grape juice was common in a society that had never heard of pasteurization. My conclusion: false theological presuppositions can distort one’s perception of reality as surely as excessive consumption of strong drink can.

B. Fundamentalism and Phariseeism

It is typical of modern fundamentalism that drunkenness is singled out as a sin, but gluttony is rarely mentioned. In the concordance to the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), there is no entry for “glutton.” There are three for drunkenness: “drunk,” “drunkard,” and “drunkenness.” Deuteronomy 21:20 and Proverbs 23:21 passage are both cited under “drunkard.” The fundamentalist insists that any consumption of alcohol is a sin.⁵ Yet he does not offer any comparable accusation against fattening foods. Modern sugar beet products, which became common only two generations prior to Dr. Welch’s “unfermented

4. Robert Teachout, *Wine: The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence* (Columbia, South Carolina: Richbarry, 1983), p. 66.

5. Typical of this outlook are these books: William Patton, D.D., *Bible Wines: Or, the Laws of Fermentation and the Wines of the Ancients* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Star Bible Publications, 1871); Dr. Jack Van Impe, *Alcohol: The Beloved Enemy* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1980); David Wilkerson, *Sipping Saints* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1978).

wine," are never equally the target of fundamentalist moral concern, if they are mentioned at all. The bloated stomachs and posteriors of fundamentalists are not causes for tongue-wagging; falling-down drunkenness is. Fundamentalists single out one sin and ignore the other. We are still waiting for a fundamentalist tract on the sin of gluttony. Tracts and books on the sin of liquor have been common since the 1870's. The thesis of such tracts regarding pasteurized wine was not believable prior to Dr. Welch.

The Women's Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU)—*temperance* being defined by its members as *total abstinence*—was begun in 1874 in Chautauqua, New York, not far from Dr. Welch's vineyard. It was an early feminist organization. Fundamentalists joined it in large numbers. It still exists. The *New York Times* described it in 1989 as follows: "The group's philosophy is simple: What you can't drink can't hurt you. It has an axiom, too. 'We build a fence at the top of the cliff, so you don't need an ambulance at the bottom.'"⁶ This analogy of the protective fence was adopted by the Pharisees two millennia ago to describe the purpose of the oral law, which had become the Babylonian Talmud by A.D. 500. Judaism's oral law was a system of supplementary laws which placed outer boundaries—man-made interpretations—around the Mosaic law. Writes George Horowitz: "Rabbinical enactments were prohibitions called *gezerot* (decrees) and regulations of a positive character called *takkanot* (ordinances). With respect to *gezerot* one of the maxims of the Men of the Great Assembly was: 'Make a fence for the Torah' (*Avot* 1,1) i.e.: Protect the laws by a hedge of prohibitions more stringent than the letter. A warrant for this was found in Lev. 18, 30 interpreted as 'Make an injunction additional to my injunction' (*Mo'ed Katon* 5a; *sifra*, *Ahare* f. 86d, ed. Weiss; II *Dor* 247. The explicit prohibition of Deut. 4,2: 'Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, nor shall ye take aught from it' was easily got over by reliance upon Deut. 17, 8–11, quoted above, where implicit confidence in the courts of each generation and obedience to them are prescribed. Thus, paradoxical as it may seem the Rabbis believed that it was their right and duty to make changes in the Biblical law if imperatively required, while maintaining, nevertheless, that the commands of the Torah were unchangeable and might not be added to or diminished."⁷ It was this post-exilic system of interpretation that Jesus chal-

6. Dirk Johnson, "Temperance Union Still Going," *New York Times* (Sept. 14, 1989).

7. Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Co., 1973), p. 94.

lenged with His phrase: "You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you. . ."⁸

Fundamentalist legalism is notorious. Rejecting the Mosaic law, sometimes even including the Ten Commandments,⁹ the fundamentalist hastens to construct non-biblical fences and hedges around other men's Bible-authorized pastimes. Fundamentalists act as though they regard themselves as holier than God. So did the Pharisees.

Conclusion

There is no general prohibition against the use of intoxicating drinks in the Bible, except for kings (Prov. 31:4). There are no more God-anointed kings today. That office ceased with the Old Covenant. (So did the offices of priest and prophet.)

The Mosaic law authorized the consumption of wine and even stronger drink at the national festivals. Critics of alcohol logically must argue that the New Testament has imposed a more rigorous standard on God's people. What was part of the national covenant's national festival in Mosaic Israel has somehow become a sin today: the consumption of alcohol. There are no longer any mandatory national feasts. This, the critics might argue—indeed, they must argue—has not only removed God's authorization of alcohol; it has substituted a prohibition. To argue this way is to argue that the resurrected Jesus has removed a blessing from His people, a blessing that He graciously shared with others at the wedding feast at Cana. The problem is, there is no textual support for such a theological position. There is even evidence to the contrary. Paul wrote: "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (I Tim. 5:23). I would add "legalism" to this list of infirmities.

This passage makes it clear that strong drink is a blessing when it is under God's authority and man's emotional control. There are legitimate times and places for the consumption of intoxicating beverages.

8. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Foundation, [1977] 2002), ch. 3.

9. Former Dallas Seminary professor S. Lewis Johnson publicly rejected the Ten Commandments as the heart of legalism. Legalism for him meant the Ten Commandments. He approvingly quoted fundamentalist Presbyterian pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse, who argued that "It was a tragic hour when the Reformation wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds and catechisms and sought to bring Gentile believers into bondage to Jewish law, which was never intended either for the Gentile nations or for the church." S. Lewis Johnson, "The Paralysis of Legalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (April/June 1963), p. 109.

Most important, wine in the Lord's Supper is required by God. Dr. Welch was wrong—morally and theologically—to call into question the use of wine in communion. So are his spiritual heirs.

Appendix H

WEAK REED: THE POLITICS OF COMPROMISE

And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh: And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us (Ex. 5:20–21).

Politically conservative American Christians prefer affluent bondage under free market humanism rather than searching for a Bible-based alternative, for they recognize where the answer will lead: either to their belated acceptance of Christian theocracy or their belated public acceptance of the legitimacy of some other form of theocracy. Christians want to believe that they can avoid theocracy. They can't. Theocracy (*theos* = God; *kratos* = rule) is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of theocracy vs. no theocracy. It is a question of whose god rules. That which a society believes is its source of law is its operational god.¹

Christians do not want to admit this fact of political life, either to the public or to themselves. It embarrasses them. Typical are the views of Dr. Ralph Reed, an articulate political technician who, beginning in his late twenties, built Pat Robertson's political training organization, the Christian Coalition. Robertson is the son of a United States Senator, a multimillionaire television personality, and a former ordained Baptist minister with Pentecostal leanings. He ran for the Republican Party's nomination for President of the United States in 1988. Naturally, he lost.² He devoted the next dozen years to building up a non-

1. T. Robert Ingram, *The World Under God's Law: Criminal Aspects of the Welfare State* (Houston, Texas: St. Thomas Press, 1962), p. 3. Cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 5.

2. Vice President George Bush, Sr., won the nomination and the election.

partisan, grass roots political training organization, which Reed ran it for him until 1997, when he resigned to become an independent political consultant and a highly paid part-time political consultant for the now-infamous and bankrupt Enron Corporation.³

For Reed, politics is a profession. For the sake of partisan Republican Party politics, he walked away from considerable influence in the national media, which he enjoyed solely because he ran a non-partisan national political organization that in 1994 had over a million people in its computerized data base, which generated donations of \$20 million a year⁴—in short, a major political force.

Before he decided that running individual political campaigns for a living was a far better use of his time than shaping and articulating the political agenda of millions of American evangelicals—a conclusion I wholeheartedly agree with, given his views of what constitutes legitimate political compromise—he wrote *Active Faith* (1996). It was published by the Free Press, a secular international book publisher owned by the huge Simon & Schuster publishing company. He received that book contract because at the time he possessed a great deal of national influence. A year after its publication, he possessed almost none. I bought the book in a used book store in September, 1997, for half price.

A. Clinton, Yes; Rushdoony, No

In that book, Reed specifically attacked Christian Reconstruction. He did so within the context of his defense of President Bill Clinton: “I oppose President Clinton’s policies. But I do not despise him. Nor do I despise Mrs. Clinton, who has come under a blizzard of attacks in recent times. If Bill Clinton is a sinner, then he is no worse or less than you or me.”⁵

In 1996, the media’s reporting on Clinton’s continuing sexual scandals had long since been suppressed by senior editors. The Monica Lewinsky scandal was two years away, a scandal that led to his impeachment by the House of Representatives, though not his conviction

3. Enron went bankrupt in January, 2002, which at the time was the largest bankruptcy in American history. A few months later, WorldCom’s bankruptcy dwarfed it. Reed was paid \$10,000 to \$20,000 a month from 1997 through 2001. Robert Scheer, “A Walk Through the Valley of Greed,” *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 29, 2002).

4. Ralph Reed, *After the Revolution: How the Christian Coalition is Impacting America* (Dallas: Word, 1996), p. 200. The median price of a home was \$130,000.

5. Ralph Reed, *Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 261.

by the Senate. Had any pastor in the Christian Right done to a young female aide what Clinton did to Miss Lewinsky, his career would have ended, and the liberal media would have had a feast on his remains. Clinton lied to the public about the affair, admitting the truth only when her semen-stained dress revealed that it was his semen. But the dominant liberal media treated Clinton's critics as naive and politically motivated defenders of a long-dead sexual morality which has no role to play in politics. The voting public generally agreed with the media on this issue, which was indicative of the moral debauchery of the late twentieth century. The public also ignored Clinton's bombing of a harmless aspirin factory in Sudan on August 20, 1998,⁶ the same day that Monica Lewinsky testified to the grand jury for the second time.

President Clinton's public sins were a great deal worse than those of Mr. Reed's targeted readership: politically conservative Christians, who were hostile to Clinton. Reed was self-consciously making a statement by his defense of Clinton. Reed's statement placed him in the camp of the loyal opposition. This is where a day-to-day political operative always has to be. He expects equal loyalty from his opponents if his candidate wins. Problem: for a Christian political leader to become a member of the loyal opposition in an era of moral crisis, when Christians have at long last begun to become politically active, is to betray the future on behalf of the present. He offers tinkering with peripheral issues at a time when shaping the future requires a principled break with the present order. Political operatives exchange influence in the future for influence in the present. They are paid to do this. Their creed is: "Business almost as usual." Dr. Reed did what he was paid to do: keep the deck chairs of the Titanic neatly arranged in a joint effort with Mr. Clinton's supporters.

Christian Reconstructionists are on the other side of this bet. Almost no one else is—surely not in the Christian community. We are on the other side because of our conviction that God will continue to extend His visible kingdom in history, which includes politics. God says of the power of every covenant-breaking social order, contrary to political operatives in every generation: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (Ezek 21:27). This idea appalls Dr. Reed.

Dr. Reed wrote in 1996: "Some of the harshest criticisms of Clin-

6. "Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory," Wikipedia (<http://bit.ly/SudanBombing>) "Lewinsky Completes Second Day of Testimony," CNN (Aug. 20, 1998). (<http://bit.ly/SudanLewinsky>)

ton have come from the 'Christian nation' or Reconstructionist community, which argues that the purpose of Christian political involvement should be to legislate biblical law. Some of the more unyielding elements even advocate legislating the ancient Jewish law laid out in the Old Testament: stoning adulterers, executing homosexuals, even mandating dietary laws."⁷ Unyielding elements? Unyielding to what? To President Clinton? Most of the Reconstructionist authors I know ignored both the man and his wife. We are not all that interested in politics. I have written far more in criticism of George Bush, Sr.'s New World Order rhetoric than I have written about Bill Clinton. Both Rushdoony and I publicly opposed Bush's invasion of Iraq in 1991. It is also worth noting that I do not remember seeing Mr. Reed take on Mr. Bush's New World Order rhetoric in print, although this may be because I have not spent much time reading things written by Mr. Reed. Life is too short.

I am aware of no Christian Reconstructionist who believes that the state should enforce the Mosaic dietary laws. Rushdoony personally adhered to the dietary laws, and he has written, possibly, up to a total of three whole pages on this topic, scattered among his thousands of pages of books and articles. He never called for the state to enforce them. Dr. Reed may or may not understand this. Either he misunderstood Rushdoony's position on the dietary laws, or else he was cynically misrepresenting it. In either case, he called his own would-be scholarship into question.

B. Faking It Academically

Next, he misinformed his readers about Reconstructionism's eschatology. He described it as premillennial. Here, he moved from merely misleading rhetoric to good, old fashioned ignorance of the position of those whom he criticized. He hasn't a clue that he is dealing with postmillennialists—something that, by this stage, I should imagine that everyone else who knows anything about Reconstructionism understands. "Led by R. J. Rushdoony, a theologian who serves as the intellectual fountainhead of the movement, they believe that the primary objective of Christian activism should be to perfect society so that it is ready when Christ returns for His millennial reign."⁸ On the contrary, we teach that the progressively righteous society is the mil-

7. Reed, *Active Faith*, p. 261.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 261–62.

lennial kingdom made visible in history. Christ reigns in history through His people, not in person. This is the traditional postmillennial argument—nothing unique here—but Dr. Reed was oblivious to it. Yet he wrote as if he were a master of Reconstruction’s literature.

By now, I suppose that I should be used to this treatment. Our critics are legion. In most cases, they are not scholars. They do not know how to debate in public. They do not have the training or the inclination to engage in scholarly debate. But Ralph Reed earned a Ph.D. in history at an academically rigorous institution, Emory University, one of the most liberal universities in the United States. Had he handed in an equally unsupported critique of some liberal figure or movement to one of his liberal professors, he would have received an F. “Don’t submit your right-wing fundamentalist tirades in my class, sir. This term paper is not scholarship; this is character assassination, and shoddy scholarship at that.” Obviously, Dr. Reed did not do this when his liberal professors were grading him. He survived. But once out from under their control, he has reverted to form. He is a political operative with footnotes—although not enough of them. His main professional concern is neither theology nor truth; it is politics.

The basic rule of scholarship is that you must understand your opponent’s position and be able to summarize it accurately before you attack it. The humanists are way ahead of most Christians in matters academic. Christians too often ignore the rules of honest criticism. This leaves them vulnerable to rebuttals such as this one. They wind up looking like dolts, with or without Ph.D.’s. While we Reconstructionists are often highly critical of other intellectual positions, no one has ever accused us of not providing the footnotes that prove that our targeted victims have written exactly what we say they have written. Dr. Reed abandoned both his humanist training and the ninth commandment here. He offered not a single footnote in his attack on Christian Reconstruction. He did not understand our position, yet he wrote authoritatively as though he had mastered it. He dismissed it without understanding it, except for its current political liabilities, which he does not mention. For sincere but uninformed Christians to follow a man who conducts himself in public in this manner would be a blot on the church. Christ deserves better.

C. “Moses Was a Tyrant”

Dr. Reed was shocked—shocked!—at Christian Reconstruction-

ism's hostile attitude toward taxpayer-funded education. "Many reject school choice and efforts to reform public education as short-sighted and self-defeating. Instead, they call for the eventual elimination of public schools."⁹ He had *that* right. Oppose the public schools? Oppose the idea that education can never be religiously neutral? Can such things be? Dr. Reed could see clearly where this is leading: to tyranny. Christian Reconstruction promotes the tyranny of parents' control over their own children's education through direct parental control over its funding. He might well have added that we also promote the same negative view of state-funded retirement programs and state-funded medicine. Dr. Reed understood exactly what this meant in the late 1990s: lost elections. And so, he wrote, "Reconstructionism is an authoritarian ideology that threatens the most basic civil liberties of a free society."¹⁰ Yes, it does: it threatens the civil liberty to steal from other citizens by means of the ballot box, which is modern politics' most cherished principle.

Let us be quite clear about his position. Dr. Reed was arguing that the God of the Old Testament laid down as mandatory an authoritarian system of civil laws which "threatens the most basic civil liberties of a free society." He was not saying that Christian Reconstructionists have misinterpreted Old Testament law. On the contrary, he was saying that we have promoted, as he so delicately put it, "the ancient Jewish law laid out in the Old Testament." Because of our deviant judicial practice in this regard, he insisted, the pro-family movement "must unequivocally dissociate itself from Reconstructionism and other efforts to use the government to impose biblical law through political action. It must firmly and openly exclude the triumphant and authoritarian elements from the new theology of Christian political involvement."¹¹

Triumphant politics. Imagine that! Christian Reconstructionists actually believe that the purpose of political action is—you won't believe this—*victory*! They believe that civil laws cannot be religiously neutral, and that—you won't believe this, either—*religious neutrality is a myth*. They believe, fantastic as it seems, that when Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30), He was including civil law and lawyers.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

10. *Idem.*

11. *Idem.*

Please do not imagine that I am contemptuous of Dr. Reed. That would be like being contemptuous of an unhousebroken St. Bernard puppy that has just relieved itself on the living room carpet. The puppy did not know what else to do when nature called. Nature called the puppy in the same way that natural law theory called Dr. Reed, and the results are analogous. Dr. Reed did not know any better: he had a Ph.D. from Emory University. The average carpet owner knows enough to clean up puppy's pile, but only after rubbing the puppy's nose in it, so that he will not do it again. That is what I am doing here with Dr. Reed.

Actually, Dr. Reed has done my educational work for me. He used Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition to persuade millions of American evangelicals to get involved in politics. He indirectly trained millions of them. His organization's Web site announces, "As executive director of the Christian Coalition in the 1990s, he built one of the most effective grassroots organizations in modern American politics. During his tenure, the organization's budget grew from \$200,000 to \$27 million, and its support base grew from two thousand to two million members and supporters in thousands of local chapters."¹² These troops or their spiritual heirs at some point will be ready for theologically principled action. The day will come when Dr. Reed's "loyal oppositionist" views will be abandoned as naive, deeply compromised, and no longer relevant. Christian activists will be compelled by the crisis to ask themselves: "If not biblical law, then what?" In the early 1990s, Dr. Reed softened up the evangelicals for Christian Reconstructionism, just as Dr. Ron Sider softened them up in the late 1970s.¹³

I have devoted this much space to Dr. Reed, not because his views of Christian Reconstruction ever amounted to anything important, but because his kind of "big tent" Christian political compromise cannot be sustained in a time of major crisis. Such compromise is appropriate as a temporary tactic—never as a permanent principle—only in times of Christian cultural impotence and early institution-building. But there are always Christian leaders like Dr. Reed in every era, men who seek to justify a temporary tactic as a desirable permanent condition. They are given access to the public arena by humanists, who control the media and who want Christians to remain contented with sitting in the back of humanism's bus, though paying full fare. This is why Dr.

12. <http://www.gagop.org/AboutReed.asp> This page is dead. The paragraph remains on the Web: <http://bit.ly/ReedBuilt>.

13. Appendix F.

Reed's website proclaimed: "He is the best-selling author and editor of three books, and his columns have appeared in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal."

Reed got a lot of bad publicity in the first half of the twenty-first century. He became a highly paid consultant for Enron, the corporate fraud that became the largest bankruptcy in American history at the time of its demise in 2001.¹⁴ Five years later, it was discovered that he had been involved in a lobbying scandal involving American Indian gambling casinos. His associate Jack Abramoff went to jail.

On June 22, 2006 the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs released its final report on the scandal. The report states that under the guidance of the Mississippi Choctaw tribe's planner, Nell Rogers, the tribe agreed to launder money because "Ralph Reed did not want to be paid directly by a tribe with gaming interests." It also states that Reed used non-profits, including Grover Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform, as pass-throughs to disguise the origin of the funds, and that "the structure was recommended by Jack Abramoff to accommodate Mr. Reed's political concerns."¹⁵

No doubt Dr. Reed still thinks that all it will take to please God in the political realm is a national Christian political campaign based on the slogan, "Back to religious neutrality: Equal time for Satan!" No more of that Old Testament stuff. God was all wrong back then. God used to be the promoter of "an authoritarian ideology that threatens the most basic civil liberties of a free society," but no longer. God has changed His mind. He has come to his senses. Dr. Reed and his political peers applaud God. God now has their full approval. This no doubt is a great comfort to God.

We have seen all this before. The religious authorities in Jerusalem were part of the loyal opposition. Jesus had been disloyal. The Establishment crucified Him for His disloyalty. He had told them plainly, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). But it took the Jerusalem church from the stoning of Stephen until Nero's persecutions in A.D. 64 to break with the Jewish political Establishment. The Christians finally left Jerusalem permanently shortly after Nero's death in A.D. 68, or so church tradition says. Then,

14. Robert Scheer, "A Walk Through the Valley of Greed," *The Nation* (Feb. 11, 2002). (<http://bit.ly/ReedGreed>)

15. "Jack Abramoff Indian lobbying scandal," Wikipedia (July 23, 2011) (<http://bit.ly/ReedAbramoff>)

in A.D. 70, the Jewish political Establishment fell to pagan Rome's Establishment. Rome's army destroyed Jerusalem. Never again would the church be in loyal opposition to the Jewish political Establishment. That Establishment was gone.

Conclusion

Christians are supposed to understand their times. We have limited resources. We cannot fight every battle. We must select our battles accordingly. To regard political tinkering and the working out of marginal political compromises as a legitimate substitute for prophetic confrontation at a turning point in history is a great mistake. This is the mistake of substituting the peripheral concerns of the fleeting present for the future of God's kingdom in history. I pray that you will not make this mistake.

If this be triumphalism, make the best of it.

Appendix I

ESCHATOLOGY, LAW, AND PIETISM

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).

A. The Great Commission

The Great Commission was comprehensive: all power, heaven and earth, all nations, all things. Nothing was left out.¹ There is no zone of neutrality in the world. Nothing is excluded from the redemptive power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am aware of no Bible-affirming Christian theologian who has gone into print to argue that the Great Commission excludes any area of life. It would be difficult to make such an argument. It would be even more difficult to defend it.

The debate over Christian eschatology is ultimately a debate over whether God has decreed that the Great Commission will be fulfilled in history. Premillennialists and amillennialists deny that it can be fulfilled by today's Christian church. This is why I call these people *pessimillennialists*.² Most premillennialists argue that it will be fulfilled by force after Christ returns bodily to set up His earthly kingdom. But they also insist that Christians cannot fulfill the Great Commission by using the gifts that God has provided to the church during the period of Christ's bodily absence. Postmillennialists alone affirm that the Great Commission will become a cultural reality in a world in which

1 . Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/kggreatcom>)

2. The term was coined by F. N. Lee.

Christ is absent bodily, yet ruling through His people and their covenantal institutions.³

If the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled, then this puts Christians in a grim position: as cultural outsiders forever looking in, as workers whose work will never come to the degree of fruition commanded by Christ, as men without the tools of dominion, as people frustrated by a God-given assignment that God Himself has decreed eschatologically cannot come to fruition. Yet the vast majority of Christians believe that the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled. The church, with only the exceptions of the Puritans, seventeenth-century Dutch Calvinists, and Scottish Calvinists, has always believed this.

Those Christians who insist that the Great Commission will never be fulfilled in history invariably have in mind *a preferred practical alternative* to an eschatologically impossible world in which the things that Christ has commanded are obeyed by the vast majority of mankind. They owe it to themselves and also to their followers to set forth plainly and in print their preferred practical alternative. They should then call their followers to support the establishment of this preferred alternative, while at the same time reminding them to work sacrificially and without compromise to proclaim and extend the Great Commission, which unfortunately can never come to fruition in history. They should forthrightly teach their followers to themselves this question: “If not ‘all those things’ that Christ has commanded, then what?” But they do not want to put it this way. This is because the question sounds very much like a moral compromise, a quest for second-best in a world in which Christ has commanded comprehensive obedience. It sounds too much like this question: “What other social system is a legitimate practical substitute for that which Christ has commanded?” The answer to this second question is obvious: none. They perceive this, so they do not ask this question in public. But the various answers to this privately asked question necessarily shape their thinking, which in turn shapes their social agendas—usually hidden agendas. *There is no neutrality.* “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30).⁴ Therefore, the question regarding a practical and acceptable substitute for the Christendom of the Great Commission cannot be legitimately

3. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

evaded. Neither can an answer.

There has been a continuing search by Christians for a long-term cultural compromise. Christian theologians implicitly and sometimes explicitly ask themselves the following questions: (1) If Christianity cannot be triumphant in history, then what should Christians settle for as being second-best to what God has commanded? (2) Which anti-Christian culture, law-order, and worldview can and should Christians learn to live with in their lifelong quest for survival in a world at war with the God of the Bible?

These are ultimately eschatologically driven questions. They are this question: "Is there some way, other than cultural victory for Christ's gospel, in which the following passage can be avoided in my lifetime?"

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake (Matt. 24:6–9).

The eschatological preterist argues that the fulfillment of this prophecy took place at the fall of Jerusalem to Rome in A.D. 70.⁵ He does not believe that this prophecy is hanging over the church. But non-preterist amillennialists worry about it, which means most amillennialists. So do post-tribulation premillennialists. Pre-tribulation premillennialists (dispensationalists) find solace only in their belief that Christ will rapture the church out of history before this horrendous event takes place. But dispensationalism's rapture fever⁶ produces a view of the church's role in history that is always one of culturally defensive compromise with the prevailing anti-Christian civilization. As dispensationalist theologian Thomas D. Ice has put it, "Premillennialists have always been involved in the present world. And, basically, they have picked up on the ethical positions of their contemporaries."⁷

5. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

6. Gary North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism Is Paralyzed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993). (<http://gnrapture>)

7. April 12, 1988; cited by Gary DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction*, p. 185. The debate was Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice vs. Gary North and Gary DeMar.

Theology is a package deal. The Christian who asks the rhetorical question, “Is eschatology so important that it must divide Christians?” has no understanding of the integrated nature of theology.

B. Theology and Eschatology

The most important theological issue is *theology proper*: the doctrine of God. He who gets this doctrine wrong will suffer eternal negative sanctions. The early church fought long and hard to establish orthodoxy in this area of theology. It is here, and only here, that the church has come to an agreement: Trinitarianism. Regarding the other four covenantal issues—hierarchy, law, sacraments, and eschatology—there has been constant disagreement.

Eschatology is the fifth point of Christian theology: (1) God, (2) man, (3) law, (4) sanctions, (5) eschatology.⁸ It is also chronologically the fifth great theological debate in the history of the Western church. The first was theology proper. This debate was settled in the fourth century.⁹ The solution was the doctrine of the Trinity. None of the rest of the five debates has been settled. The second debate was over hierarchy: church vs. church (the East-West split came in 1054) and church vs. state (the conflict between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV in 1076). The third debate was over law. This debate began in the Western church in the eleventh century: canon law vs. a revived secular Roman law.¹⁰ Scholasticism soon appeared: the philosophical attempt to reconcile these two legal and philosophical systems. The attempt failed. The Reformation was fought mainly over point four: sanctions. The Reformation was a culture-transforming and culture-splitting public debate over the role of Papal indulgences (the issue of the sanction of purgatory), the number and meaning of the sacraments (realism vs. nominalism),¹¹ the judicially binding character of vows of celibacy made by the clergy and nuns, and the judicially binding char-

8. On the five points of covenant theology, see Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rsthymp>)

9. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998), chaps. 2, 3.

10. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

11. Covenantalism is implied by Calvin's rejection of Roman Catholicism's realism (real presence) and also Anabaptism's nominalism (remembrance). But his invocation of "mystery" did not solve the problem.

acter of excommunication by the Roman Church. Finally, in the late 1800s, eschatology became the fifth major divisive issue in Protestantism. This debate began in earnest with the success in the United States of *Jesus Is Coming* (1878), written by W.E.B.,¹² and the advent of prophecy conferences.

Christian theology is theocentric. *Theology proper* is the foundation of the other four doctrines. Get theology proper wrong, and you will get the other four wrong by identifying the wrong god as sovereign. This is why the Book of Genesis is the most important book in the Pentateuch. Genesis describes the origin of the universe and presents the Creator-creature distinction. The debate over origins has been the fundamental debate between Christianity and paganism from the beginning. Evolutionism has been around a long time. So has the doctrine of the eternity of matter.¹³ In our day, the evolution-creation debate has dwarfed all others as the chief theological battlefield of the church. More intellectual ground has been surrendered faster by Christianity since the advent of Darwinism than ever before in the history of the church. Even Islam's invasion of the West and its complete conquest of North Africa, 622–711, was a minor affair compared to the surrender of the modern church to a peculiar hybrid of Darwinism and theism: *theistic evolution*. Darwinists regard theistic evolution as ludicrous, but the idea gives psychological comfort to Christians who have adopted an evolutionary time scale. The church has preferred to baptize evolutionism rather than resist it.

The debate over eschatology has become a major dividing line within the Protestant church ever since the 1870s, about the time of Darwinism's extension into all academic fields. The comprehensive and rapid triumph of Darwinism in both the academic world and the political world has been paralleled by the triumph of dispensationalism in the Arminian, pietistic Protestant world.¹⁴ Darwinism has conquered the thinking of humanists. At the same time, dispensationalism has provided fundamentalist Christians with both a theological explanation and a justification for their surrender of cultural territory to the Darwinists. That which Christianity has surrendered to the humanists has been identified by pietists in general and dispensationalists in particular as either beyond the redemptive power of the gospel during this dispensation or else inherently part of Satan's kingdom. The

12. William E. Blackstone.

13. Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII.

14. The one major exception: the Church of Christ (Campbellite).

typical American fundamentalist's pre-1976 assessment, "politics is dirty," is more of a description of politics in general than politics merely in this temporary dispensation. The same negative assessment applies to culture in general. We are confidently assured: "There is no such thing as Christian [politics, economics, psychology, etc.]" This is accompanied by a corollary: "The Bible isn't a blueprint for [politics, economics, psychology, etc.]" Judicially, "we're under grace, not law." Above all: "You don't polish brass on a sinking ship."¹⁵ This statement of faith is eschatological.

Nevertheless, we are also assured of the opposite. "The Bible has answers for every question." "There is no neutrality." "Jesus calls men to surrender to Him totally." "The redemptive power of the gospel heals all sin." That these assertions are in complete opposition to the previous ones is not recognized by most fundamentalists.

Eschatology is part of the covenant: point five. The church can get the last four points incorrect and still persevere in history, but it cannot inherit in history until it gets correct all five points and their applications. The progressive cultural disinheritance of the church, which has accelerated since the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), began long before Darwin. It began no later than 1700: the rise of the Newtonian Enlightenment.¹⁶ But modern evolutionism offers the most coherent theological system in the history of the war between belief and unbelief: from its doctrine of impersonal creation (the Big Bang) to its doctrine of the impersonal last judgment (the heat death of the universe).¹⁷

Rival theologies have always confronted Christianity. These rival theologies have always occupied territory within the church and its allied academic agencies. So have rival eschatologies. Communism surely offered a rival eschatology.¹⁸ Today, as in 622, so does Islam.

C. Pessimillennialism vs. Deliverance in History

Amillennialism and premillennialism deny that Christianity can create a culture in history. Amillennialists say this can never happen. Premillennialists say it will not happen until Jesus appears with His an-

15. This phrase was popularized in the 1950s by radio preacher J. Vernon McGee.

16. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 334–55. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

17. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

18. F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig, 1974).

gels to set up an international Christian bureaucracy.

1. *Amillennialism*

To relegate formal eschatology to the final judgment and the post-resurrection world, which amillennialism does, is a fundamental error that has culturally debilitating consequences. It means surrendering civilization to covenant-breakers as a consequence of eschatological, prophetic inevitability. No one has put it more clearly than amillennialist theologian David Engelsma. He is the senior theologian of the tiny Protestant Reformed Church, which split from the Christian Reformed Church in 1923 over the issue of common grace, which the PRC says does not exist.¹⁹ As you read this diatribe, think “carnal = fallen men; spiritual = persecuted Christians.” Engelsma writes:

Carnal dominion is earthly victory. It is victory according to the thinking of man. It consists of numbers—the conversion of a majority of humans; of physical force—a Christian police force and army; of control of culture—godly television, radio, and newspapers; of deliverance from worldly cares and natural miseries—the virtual eradication of poverty, sickness, and war; and of material prosperity—jobs, money, houses, and long life.

This is the dominion of Christ that is proclaimed by postmillennialism, especially by Christian Reconstruction. This is supposed to be the victory of Christ in history, the flourishing of the Messianic kingdom.

It is a carnal dominion.

The victory heralded by Reformed amillennialism is spiritual. It is real victory. It is real victory here and now. But it is victory according to the thinking of God. It is contrary to human standards of victory, including that of Christian Reconstructionism, foolishness. No one can see this victory, just as no eye can see the kingdom that is established by this victory. The victory and kingdom of Christ can be known only by faith.

The true victory of Christ in history is His saving of the elect church from sin. It is His empowering that church to confess His name. It is His preservation of the church in holiness unto life eternal. To this saving of the church belongs Christ’s institution of true churches that preach the gospel purely, administer the sacraments

19. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1.(<http://bit.ly/gndcgg>)

properly, and exercise Christian discipline rightly.²⁰

To put it as bluntly and as graphically as I can, amillennialism's archetypal victory in a progressively sinful civilization is the victory of a handful of Christians who are locked in their cells at night in a concentration camp, and who are worked like slaves during their waking hours. God's victory is demonstrated by never allowing all of the concentration camps to snuff out weekly worship services. God shows Christians victorious grace by persuading the camp's warden to let them meet once a week in the camp's latrine area, and to take the Lord's Supper once a month.

For the amillennialist, victory in history is manifested best by the existence of the **Barbed Wire Reformed Church**. For the amillennialist, the enduring authoritative example of God's victory in history is Israel in Egypt, after the Pharaoh of the persecution but before Moses arrived to put the nation into conflict with the Pharaoh of the exodus. None of that deliverance stuff! All talk of deliverance only gets good people into trouble with the lawful authorities. Such talk is carnal. This was the message of the shackled rulers of Israel to Moses and Aaron.

And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh: And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us (Ex. 5:20–21).

If you doubt me, consider Engelsma's warning. "To mock this spiritual victory of Christ is unbelief. To be dissatisfied with it is ingratitude."²¹ Like the elders of Israel in Egypt, Engelsma calls to account anyone who dared to call attention to the obvious fact that slavery is not liberty and servitude is not victory.

Engelsma was a consistent amillennialist. He was also a consistent pietist. The pietist adamantly rejects any suggestion of the legitimacy and desirability of Christianity's cultural dominance in history. This is a form of neoplatonism. The pessimillennialist adds to this a sigh of relief: God has predestined this lack of influence. Failure is guaranteed eschatologically. The less cultural influence, the better spiritually, says the pietist.

Engelsma was forthright: earthly success, he defines as carnal, i.e.,

20. David J. Engelsma, *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, California: Reformed Witness, 2001), p. 123.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

either evil or at least spiritually immature. But there is an exegetical dilemma facing Engelsma, one which he conveniently ignores. Paul uses “carnal” pejoratively with respect to sin. He uses “spiritual” positively with respect to God’s law. “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). Moses taught explicitly that corporate obedience to Bible-revealed law guarantees the external dominion in history by God’s covenant people. It is not the law and its promises regarding history that are carnal, Paul taught; rather, it is the sinful condition of men who do not obey God’s law. Engelsma tried his rhetorical best to tar and feather biblical law and its cultural promises with Paul’s language of carnality. But Paul argued the other way: *the spirituality of God’s law*. Such is the fate of amillennialists who are also pietists. They do not think covenantally.

Engelsma’s theology bordered on neoplatonism, as all pietism does: *a contemptuous dismissal of matter as manifested in culture*. Rushdoony defined neoplatonism as follows:

For Greek thought, two substances existed; on the one hand are ideas, mind, or spirit, the world of forms, and on the other hand is the world of matter, of particulars against universals, of the many as against the one. Since each was an independent substance, there was no effective and necessary link between the world of mind and the world of matter, and, as a result, the two tended to fall apart as philosophy pursued the logic of each starting point.

Neoplatonism developed in Alexandria and spread throughout the ancient world. Basic to neoplatonism was the emphasis on mind or ideas as the true or more important substance, so that the superior man, discerning the irrelevance and/or illusory nature of the material world, concentrated on the things of the mind or spirit.²²

The pietist dismisses as material both cultural creativity and cultural dominion, for both are confined to history, which is ultimately irrelevant except as the brief period of time available for each person’s regeneration. The ideal of cultural dominion is said to be carnal. The Christian neoplatonist dismisses any claim that Christianity can or should create its own defining culture, even though he readily admits that every other religion creates its own defining culture. Therefore, he views the war between Christianity and all rival religions as a war in which Christians will at best be allowed by God to live in one or another

22. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Flight from Humanity: A Study of the Effect of Neoplatonism on Christianity* (Vallecito, California: Chalcedon, [1973] 2008), p. 6. ????

er pagan culture. God supposedly has predestined this outcome. Christianity will not transform culture. It will barely be able to preserve a defensive ghetto culture in the Gulag. The culture war is therefore not worth fighting. "Pull up the drawbridge!"

The main differences between amillennialism and postmillennialism center around the degree to which history will visibly manifest the judicial inheritance which Jesus Christ obtained through His death and resurrection, and which He announced to His disciples in Matthew 28:18. Will His legal title to all things, which was granted to Him by God the Father after the resurrection, progressively manifest itself culturally in the work of Christians in building up the kingdom of God on earth and in history?

Because of confusion on this point, let me clarify: the New Covenant kingdom of God was established *definitively* in history by Jesus prior to His death and resurrection. "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). Title to the earth was transferred to Him by God after the resurrection. Jesus transferred title to the church, His bride, no later than Pentecost (Acts 2). Thus, the New Covenant kingdom of God began before title was transferred. The church lawfully invokes its legal title, but this title is reclaimed from Satan *progressively*, through Christian reconstruction, i.e., working out our faith with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), in every area of life—matching Christ's transferred title to everything—through service to others: "But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42–45). The dominion covenant is progressively achieved by Christians in history on a culture-wide basis by means of the church's division of labor (Rom. 12; I Cor. 12), which I have discussed in my commentaries on these two Pauline epistles: *Cooperation and Dominion* and *Judgment and Dominion*.

The postmillennialist argues as follows: *that which was judicially definitive in history at the resurrection will be extended progressively in history to the entire culture*. This process is analogous to Jesus' sin-free final and perfect sanctification, which is judicially transferred to believ-

ers definitively at the time of their redemption,²³ but which they must work out in history.²⁴ God gave Abraham legal title to the Promised Land, but actual possession had to wait four generations (Gen. 15:16).²⁵ What Abraham received definitively by promise was achieved by his circumcised heirs, although they subsequently surrendered geographically for a time (the exile) and then covenantally in Christ's day (Matt. 21:43). Eschatologically, Old Covenant Israel moved steadily toward apostasy and defeat in history, beginning with the incomplete conquest of Canaan.

The amillennialist argues the opposite: *that which was judicially definitive in history at the resurrection will not be extended progressively in history to the entire culture*. Not only is there is no positive correlation between (1) Christ's definitive title to ownership of the world and (2) the church's extension of the kingdom of God in history to culture, there is a negative correlation. Satan's theft of culture through Adam will never be overcome in history. That which was definitive in Christ's resurrection from the dead and His lawful reclaiming of the inheritance will never have a widespread effect in history. There must be a growing historical gap between Christ's definitive inheritance of the earth at the resurrection and His final inheritance of the earth at the final judgment. In between, Satan and his disciples retain control and even increase their control.

Is the church also moving progressively toward final defeat, though not complete apostasy? I ask: Why should the church be defeated in history? I know why Israel was defeated. *Israel was defeated because Israel apostatized completely*. No conservative Trinitarian theologian argues that the entire church will apostatize completely, yet most Christian theologians believe that the church will be defeated culturally. The cultural history of the church will supposedly be found on that last day to have recapitulated the cultural history of Old Covenant Israel. So teach amillennialism and premillennialism.

23. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Rom. 4:5–7). See John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1955).

24. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

25. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

2. Premillennialism

There is another variation of the same pietistic error: dispensational premillennialism. This view of eschatology consigns the fulfillment of Old Testament's prophecies of universal victory for the kingdom of God to the post-Church Age era. Only after Christ bodily returns victoriously, along with his angels (and, in some popular versions, with resurrected saints),²⁶ which dispensationalism asserts, will it be possible to establish Christian culture. Premillennialists refuse to describe this future culture.

Dispensationalism is as pietistic and therefore as neoplatonic as amillennialism is. It has equally culturally debilitating consequences. Dispensationalism teaches explicitly that no Old Testament prophecy has been literally fulfilled or can be literally fulfilled by the Church in this, the so-called Church Age (the "Great Parenthesis").²⁷ For now, the church must resign itself to minority status and cultural impotence. Dispensational author David Allen Lewis offered this reason for rejecting Christian Reconstruction: such views will upset the humanists, who will inevitably become more powerful. "... as the secular, humanistic, demonically-dominated world system becomes more and more aware that the Dominionists and Reconstructionists are a real political threat, they will sponsor more and more concerted efforts to destroy the Evangelical church. Unnecessary persecution could be stirred up."²⁸ This was the response of the Hebrew elders to Moses and Aaron (Ex. 5:2). Those Christians who live in fear of the Egyptians of this world proclaim cultural impotence as a way of life.

My assessment of dispensationalism as equally neoplatonic as amillennialism also applies to generic premillennialism's insistence on the church's inevitably declining cultural influence in the pre-millennial era, in which the church supposedly must experience prior to Christ's eschatologically discontinuous return with His angels to establish His new headquarters on earth, rather than remain seated at

26. Thomas D. Ice, "Preface," final paragraph, in H. Wayne House and Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1988). For a brief critique, see North, *Rapture Fever*, p. 136.

27. "If the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the promises of the future made to Abraham and David are to be literally fulfilled, then there must be a future period, the millennium, in which they can be fulfilled, for the Church is not now fulfilling them in any literal sense." Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 158. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 147.

28. Lewis, *Prophecy 2000* (Green Forest, Arkansas: New Leaf Press, 1990), p. 277.

the right hand of God in heaven. The church will fall into persecution in history unless it is raptured out of history.²⁹

Then how is the New Covenant church any better protected from evil than the Old Covenant church was? Israel fell away repeatedly. How is it that the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ leaves His church no better equipped for victory?

D. Christ's Ascension and Social Theory

This raises a very embarrassing question: Is the *post*-ascension church always in the same eschatological condition as *pre*-ascension Israel?

1. Amillennial Social Theory

The amillennialist seeks to evade this question, but when pressed, his answer is *yes*. He believes, but refuses to say in public, that the bodily ascension of Jesus Christ in history and the sending of the Holy Spirit in history are insufficient to empower the church in history to break out of its sad pathway to visible cultural defeat. Amillennialists have an implicit but unstated conclusion with regard to the doctrine of the bodily ascension of Christ: *the cultural power of sin is greater in history than the cultural power of redemption*. They relegate the prophesied victory of the church in history to the realm of personal victory over sin, while affirming the church's inevitable visible defeat. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ took place in history, but for all the good it does the church culturally, it might as well never have happened. The ascension's impact is internal and individual, not external and cultural, insists the amillennialist.

Theological liberals have been far more consistent in their view of the resurrection and ascension: they have relegated both historical events to the realm of the spirit. To them, the bodily ascension of Christ is a phrase testifying to the spiritual optimism of the early church, not a visible, verifiable historical event. Amillennialists believe the same thing regarding the promised victory of the church in history. When the Bible repeatedly predicts that covenant-keepers will inherit the earth in history, the amillennialist says, "Spiritual, not literal!"

Postmillennialists believe that Christ's bodily ascension to heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost empowered the church

29. North, *Rapture Fever*.

in history to recapture lost territory in every realm of life. Amillennialists believe that such reconquest cannot take place in history; the church will surrender territory, should it ever actually recapture it. The church's cultural inheritance supposedly will go the way of the Mosaic land inheritance. Christ's ascension plays no role in amillennial social theory. Here is what I wrote in the conclusion of Chapter 6 in *Leviticus*.

There is remarkably little discussion of the ascension of Christ in modern orthodox theology.³⁰ This topic inevitably raises fundamental historical, cosmological, and cultural implications that modern premillennial and especially amillennial theologians find difficult to accept, such as the progressive manifestation of Christ's rule in history through His representatives: Christians.³¹ In a world in which grace is believed to be progressively devoured by nature, there is little room for historical applications of the doctrine of the historical ascension. Covenantal postmillennialism alone can confidently discuss the doctrine of Christ's ascension, for postmillennialism does not seek to confine the effects of Christ's ascension to the realms of the internal and the trans-historical.³² That is to say, postmillennialism does not assert the existence of supposedly inevitable boundaries around the effects of grace in history. On the contrary, it asserts that all such boundaries will be progressively overcome in history, until on judgment day the very gates (boundaries) of hell will not be able to stand against the church (Matt. 16:18).³³

Both amillennialism and premillennialism teach the inevitable disinheritance of the church in history and the illegitimacy of the ideal of Christendom as applying to civilization prior to the bodily return of

30. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 227–29. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

31. No theological or eschatological school denies that there can be prolonged setbacks in this manifestation of Christ's rule. Conversely, none would totally deny progress. I know of no one who would argue, for example, that the creeds of the church prior to the fourth century were more rigorous or more accurate theologically than those which came later.

32. This is why amillennialism drifts so easily into Barthianism: the history of mankind for the amillennialist has no visible connection with the ascension of Jesus Christ. Progressive sanctification in this view is limited to the personal and ecclesiastical; it is never cultural or civic. The ascension of Christ has no transforming implications for society in amillennial theology. The ascension was both historical and publicly visible; its implications supposedly are not. The Barthian is simply more consistent than the amillennialist: he denies the historicity of both Jesus' ascension and His subsequent grace to society. Christ's ascension, like His grace, is relegated to the trans-historical. See North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 111–13.

33. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, chaps. 12, 13.

Christ. Eschatology shapes social theory.

2. *Covenantal Social Theory*

Covenantal representation—point two of the biblical covenant model—is not merely contemporary; it is also historical and eschatological. For all mankind, it is historical representation in the past: Adam's Fall. For Old Covenant Israel, it was also eschatological representation in the future: Christ's bodily resurrection and bodily ascension to the right hand of God. New Covenant eschatological representation is based on the fact that there will inevitably be a cultural victory for the church in history because of Christ's bodily death, resurrection, and ascension, all of which were historical events. Christ's judicially representative victory *in history* is the covenantal foundation of the kingdom's triumph *in history*. Paul was adamant on this point: Christ's resurrection from the dead is the church's guarantee of victory in history.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. **For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.** The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:20–28).³⁴

Christ's bodily resurrection was the visible evidence of God's transfer of earthly power to Christ in history. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt.

34. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

28:18–20). Next, His bodily ascension was the visible evidence of His transfer of judicial authority to the church. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:8–9). The angels told the witnesses not to stand around gazing into heaven. “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The historicity of Christ's bodily ascension makes this event crucial for biblical social theory. Neither premillennialism nor amillennialism has a developed theology of the ascension. The amillennial system implicitly denies the relevance of this doctrine for social theory.³⁵ The premillennial system in practice concentrates on standing around and gazing upward in expectation of Christ's imminent return.³⁶ Both viewpoints reject the possibility of developing an explicitly biblical social theory—i.e., a social theory without any compromise with natural law—because both viewpoints ignore the implications of Christ's ascension for church history. Neither system acknowledges the five-point aspect of Christ's covenantal incarnation in history: (1) transcendence/immanence (both God and perfect man in one person with two natures); (2) hierarchy/representation (the divine office of Son in the economical Trinity and the human office of second Adam); (3) ethics/law (Christ's perfect fulfillment of the law); (4) oath/sanctions (death and bodily resurrection); (5) succession/inheritance (bodily ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit). Pessimillennial systems have substituted a doctrine of Satanic inheritance in church history for the doctrine of Christendom. This is a reversal of what Jesus taught: the meek will inherit the earth.

Covenant-keeping men's confidence in God's transforming work in history wanes when they no longer see evidence of God's predictable sanctions in history, an historical and psychological fact to which twentieth-century Christianity testified eloquently. This loss of perception is not a valid excuse for abandoning hope regarding the future, for God's word testifies to the victory of God's visible kingdom in his-

35. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 227–35.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 256–57.

tory.³⁷ Nevertheless, Christians lose confidence easily, including theologians; they cannot live indefinitely with contradictions between what they say they believe and what they see—"cognitive dissonance," as scholars call it. Theologians have re-written kingdom eschatology because they could no longer persuade themselves that what they and their peers see all around them testified to the predictability of God's corporate sanctions as described in the Old Testament. Premillennialism is an eschatology of predictable sanctions—both personal and corporate—that must be deferred until Jesus returns to earth in total power to impose them in person. Amillennialism is an eschatology of predictable, long-run, negative historical sanctions against God's people and His kingdom. So is premillennialism until such time as Christ returns in person to impose sanctions through a gigantic, international, top-down bureaucracy staffed by Christians.³⁸ But predictable, corporate, historical sanctions are an inescapable concept. It is never a question of "predictable, corporate, historical sanctions vs. no predictable, corporate, historical sanctions"; it is always a question of *what kind* of predictable, corporate, historical sanctions.³⁹ It is ultimately a question of *whose law-order* governs the imposition of such historical sanctions. It is a debate over who rules in history, Christ or antiChrist.

Almost from the beginning, the church substituted rival eschatologies that were based on an ethically perverse system of predictable, corporate, historical sanctions during the church age. These pessimilennial eschatologies teach that God will impose negative sanctions in history against covenant-keepers, and positive sanctions for covenant-breakers.⁴⁰ This is consistent with the church's opposition to biblical law and especially its sanctions.

Christian theologians have publicly rejected God's revealed law and its mandated civil sanctions, and they have also rejected the biblical doctrine of predictable historical blessings for men's corporate obedience and cursings for their disobedience. They have substituted other laws—"natural" laws—and other systems of predictable corporate sanctions, such as those imposed by a supposedly ethically neutral and culturally autonomous free market or those drawn up by a com-

37. Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1954).

38. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 4.

39. *Ibid.*, chaps. 7, 8.

40. *Ibid.*, chaps. 5, 11.

mittee of central planners. In short, they have abandoned biblical law, biblical sanctions, and biblical eschatology. They have vaguely understood that these three covenantal doctrines are a coherent, unbreakable unit—points three, four, and five of the biblical covenant model—and so they have consistently abandoned all three.⁴¹

3. Pietism's Social Theory

A representative example of pietism is Peter Toon's book, *The Ascension of Our Lord* (1984). The book was originally a series of lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary, the world's leading dispensational seminary. Books on the ascension are rare, so this one affords us an opportunity to see how the doctrine is understood in the evangelical Protestant community.

There is nothing in this book on the relationship between Christ's ascension and the extension of the kingdom of God as biblical civilization. There are chapters on Jesus the King, Jesus the Priest, and Jesus the Prophet. We might expect something on social theory in the chapter on Jesus the king. What we get is pure pietism: Jesus the suffering servant. Jesus does not reign so much as He suffers. This is because Jesus and His body, the church, are separated in history. They will remain separated until the end of the age.⁴²

Not only is Christ separated from His body, the church, and therefore must remain unfulfilled until the end of the age, says Toon, Christ actually suffers. His ascension has not overcome His suffering. Toon wrote:

Furthermore, there is a sense in which Christ, in relation to his body, is imperfect. Paul told the Colossian church: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church" (1:24). There were no deficiencies in the personal sufferings of Jesus Christ and there was no lack of worth in his sufferings. However, in and through his body, Christ still suffers, must suffer, and will suffer before the consummation of the work of God in this body (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). Yet, as he suffers in and through his body, he also brings succor to those who are suffering; we have a High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and tribulations (Heb. 4:15).⁴³

41. A good example is Cornelius Van Til. For a detailed analysis of Van Til's views on points three through five, see North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 3.

42. Peter Toon, *The Ascension of Our Lord* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), p. 45.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

To call this argument bizarre is saying too little. Hebrews 4:15 teaches that Jesus suffered in history. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Jesus suffered definitively in history, as Toon said. He suffered all there was to suffer in principle. But this does not deny the progressive suffering in history by His covenantal representatives. Jesus was also definitively perfect in history. This does not deny that His people work out Christ's judicially imputed moral perfection in history. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). This is progressive sanctification. Colossians 3 deals with progressive suffering. *Neither passage has anything to do with Christ's supposedly shared condition in heaven.*

How could Toon make such a blatant theological error, i.e., the idea of Christ's suffering in heaven along with His earthly church? Because his presentation in this book is completely colored by his pietism. Rather than discuss the Holy Spirit's empowering of Christians for kingdom-extending service, he called attention to the succoring of Christians by Christ. Christ's kingship is not manifested by Christianity's visible dominion in history, but rather by Christ's invisible succoring of besieged Christians in history. There is not one word in the book on either cultural dominion or the kingdom of God manifested in institutions other than the church. There is nothing on empowerment for cultural rule. Rather than empowering His covenant people to rule in His name, the ascended Christ is content to succor them in their permanent historical defeat. This is pure, 24-karat pietism. And, like 24-karat gold, it bends and can be flattened.

Toon cited the Westminster Larger Catechism (1647). He cited it selectively: Answer 45. He ignored Answer 54:

Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father, with all fulness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and doth gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them.

Note that this passage refers to history, i.e., the church militant: "furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them." Christ's subduing of His enemies therefore has

to take place in history, not only at the last judgment. Note also that there is no mention of suffering. On the contrary, the text proclaims “all fulness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth.”

Toon ignored this passage for good reason. He was engaged in a reinterpretation of the Larger Catechism to make it conform with pessimillennial pietism. This is not an easy task, for the document was produced by theocrats, many of whom were postmillennial, as Answer 191 indicates. Toon confined his discussion to the institutional church. He also confined his discussion to the psychology of individual Christians. He relegated all victory to the end of the world. Here is how he interprets Answer 45. (The italicized sentences are from the Larger Catechism. My responses are inside parentheses.) *He calls out a people to himself.* This means that Christ sends evangelists.⁴⁴ (So far, so good.) *He gives them officers, laws, and censures.* This refers exclusively to the institutional church.⁴⁵ (No problem yet.) *He bestows saving grace on the elect.* This refers exclusively to the institutional church.⁴⁶ *He rewards their obedience.* “This reward will be given in heaven, but its exact nature is not disclosed in the New Testament.”⁴⁷ *He corrects them for their sins.*⁴⁸ (No problem here.) *He preserves and supports them under all circumstances.* (Big problem here. Does this mean that He brings them external victory in history? No, said Toon. This support is strictly psychological.) “Yet Christ the King orders their circumstances and inwardly helps them by his Spirit so that they are able to stand firm in faith and joyfully confess his name in word and deed.”⁴⁹ *Christ restrains and overcomes all our enemies.* (But when? Only at the final judgment, said Toon.) “Before his return to earth, Jesus the Lord and King restrains the evil power of Satan and his hosts, so that what they can achieve is limited. When he appears in glory to judge the living and the dead he will overcome all his enemies and they will be judged and punished.”⁵⁰

Toon's pietism colored everything in the book. He said that Satan and his host possess limited authority. There is nothing unique about this observation. Every Christian admits this. But he neglected to say

44. *Idem.*

45. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

46. *Idem.*

47. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

48. *Idem.*

49. *Idem.*

50. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

explicitly what this admission means for a pietist. The pietist affirms that Satan presently rules the affairs of this world: culture, politics, education, etc. But, at the final judgment, Christ will overcome Satan by His divine, bodily intervention. This overcoming is supposedly not representative for Christ through His church in history. This overcoming is also not a process; rather, it comes only at the end of the process, i.e., at the end of history. In stark contrast to his view of Christ's non-dominion in history, the pietist believes that cultural dominion is judicially representative for Satan. Satan rules history through his covenant people. He does not rule from a throne in some earthly location. The pietist insists that neither Satan nor his host will be overcome by Christ's representatives in church history. Therefore, the pietist insists, what works for Satan until the end of time—*representative dominion through covenantal agents*—cannot work for Christ. Anyway, he would insist this if he had ever thought about this aspect of his theology, which he hasn't. But what did Jesus say about the church? This: the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

Toon did not refer to the future millennial kingdom, when Jesus supposedly will rule on earth in person. I have never read any premillennialist author who attempts to relate the theology of ascension, meaning Christ's cosmic rulership from on high, with the Great Commission's call for comprehensive redemption.⁵¹ We hear nothing about His rulership on earth and in history through His covenantal representatives. Yet pietism's theologians are quite willing to affirm that Satan's representatives in history do rule in his name, despite his physical absence. *These theologians refuse to consider this same representative arrangement with respect to Christians.* They openly affirm that Satan's representatives have achieved cultural dominion in history, despite their lord's physical absence, yet they categorically reject Christian cultural dominion as being impossible for Spirit-empowered Christians in the post-ascension era.

Then what has Christ's bodily ascension accomplished for the kingdom of God in history, according to pietists? Not dominion, surely. Not a comprehensive civilization. Not even a comprehensive theory of civilization. The pietist rejects the Middle Ages, when Christianity was culturally influential, as "triumphalism," theocratic, and tyrannical. He is happy that the church makes no such claims today. Better to

51. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action." (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

live under the rule of covenant-breakers. Better to suffer.

In an appendix, Toon wrote: "Third, the Ascension means that he is, and will be, the conqueror and judge of the enemies of God."⁵² This view of Christ's conquest incorporates two of the three traditional explanations of Christ's work of redemption ("buying back"): *definitive* and *final*. But something is missing: *progressive*. This is always missing in amillennialism, and it is always missing in premillennialism's view of the pre-millennial era of the church. Neither eschatological system has a doctrine of church history that relates Christ's definitive and final sanctification. That is, *there is no temporal connection between definitive sanctification and final sanctification*. There is also no corporate sanctification. Yet for the bride of Christ to be presented pure and undefiled to the Bridegroom at the end of history, there has to be progressive corporate sanctification in history. Amillennialists and premillennialists reject such a notion. So do pietists.

The chief theological problem with this omission is that Christ's resurrection and ascension were historical. The proof of Christ's definitive conquest over both sin and Satan were His resurrection (I Cor. 15) and His ascension (Eph. 4:8–10). Paul appealed to the doctrine of Christ's ascension to make his case for *the church's corporate progressive sanctification in history*. "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12–13). Amillennialism and premillennialism place in history Christ's definitive perfection and dominion. They place His final dominion at the end of history. Then what of Christ's progressive dominion? For pessimillennialism, there is none for the church, only for Satan's kingdom. Satan achieves this representatively through the disinherited sons of Adam. Christ does not achieve this representatively through His adopted sons.

This is why amillennialism and premillennialism are *asymmetric theologies*. Their theology of covenantal representation applies to Satan and his kingdom, but not to Christ and His kingdom. Both of these eschatologies affirm that Satan rules representatively, exercising dominion in history through his disciples, whereas Christ, having achieved definitive victory in history over Satan through His resurrection, suffers post-ascension historical defeat representatively through

52. Toon, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

his ever-besieged church. Christ can achieve cultural victory only by ruling in person, whereas Satan has achieved cultural victory without ruling in person. For the amillennialist and the premillennialist, cultural dominion in church history is a contest whose rules are rigged in favor of Satan: “Heads, Satan wins; tails, Christ loses.” What works for Satan fails for Christ: *representative rule*. Yet Jesus taught that the two kingdoms are so similar that the wheat and the tares must coexist side by side until the end of time (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43).⁵³

By restricting Christ’s kingship to the institutional church—Christ the Priest—and by involving Him in the suffering of his people—again, Christ the Priest—and by confining His rulership to the final judgment, *Toon stripped Jesus the King of His reign, His kingdom, and His cultural authority in history*. All pietists do this, but Toon was more self-conscious than most.

Toon was not ignorant. He was familiar with Anglo-American church history and historical theology. He knew that the many of the Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians were postmillennialists. Although he did not mention any of his books on Puritanism in the list of published books that appears in his book on the ascension, he was the author of *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel* (1970). It is a book on postmillennialism.

Toon self-consciously replaced the concept of the Great Commission, which governs everything under heaven, with pietism’s world of suffering redeemed sinners who cling to each other inside besieged local churches, and who pray for the return of Christ with His angels to overcome their culturally dominant and increasingly antagonistic covenantal enemies. Toon had no concept of Jesus as the king of culture because he rejects any concept of the kingdom of God as manifesting itself outside the institutional church (and perhaps the Christian family—he did not say). The implication of his theology of the ascension is that the ascension has produced a world in which Christianity possesses less cultural authority in history than Old Testament Israel lawfully possessed.

Toon has an eschatological agenda: to promote cultural retreat as God’s holy way of living. He ends his book by citing Colossians 3:1–5.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above,
where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on

53. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Toon says that this passage should govern our thoughts in the present world. Why this passage? Why not the Great Commission? Because Christianity is inevitably losing the cultural and intellectual war. "As the process of secularization continues, and as the success of modern science and technology condition us to be merely this-worldly in our thinking, we need to follow the advice which Paul have to the church of Colossae."⁵⁴ In short, secularism should not be resisted by the Christians' development of a comprehensive counter-culture based on the Bible. No, it is to be resisted only by righteous individual living. By citing this particular Pauline passage, he offers an agenda for dominion that boils down to this: just stop fornicating. This, for Toon, constituted the essence of the visible cultural manifestation of the kingdom of God in history, the most that we can legitimately expect in history from the Great Commission. This, or something like it, is the conclusion of all forms of pessimillennialism.

This is pietism's worldview. It leads to legalism. And then, in Christians' legitimate reaction to legalism, it can lead to an illegitimate licentiousness. Both positions are antinomian with respect to God's Bible-revealed law, Old and New Testaments.

The theological answer to pietism's permanent dualism of legalism and licentiousness is covenant theology, which has what pietism does not: a doctrine of the kingdom of God as a civilization, not just a list of prohibited individual sins.

E. The Location of Kingdom Headquarters

The eschatological issue of headquarters should not be ignored. God's headquarters are in heaven. "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:9–10). Man's headquarters are on earth.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Heaven does not come down to earth in history. Jesus did—once. After His ascension, His place of judgment is at the right hand of God, where He makes intercession on behalf of His people (Rom. 8: 34). The throne of grace is not on earth or in history. So, headquarters cannot be on earth or in history. This is equally true of Satan's kingdom, which premillennialists believe. Satan exercises dominion in history from beyond history. But Jesus doesn't, they teach.

The premillennialist associates Christ's dominion in history only with His bodily presence, not with His reign from on high. His reign from on high produces only cultural defeat in history for His representatives, both amillennialism and premillennialism teach. They do not relate Peter's words regarding Christ's location in heaven to His parallel dominion in history: "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (I Peter 3:22).

Paul described our battles in history as battles against these supernatural powers. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). These are the supernatural powers that Christ, through His bodily resurrection, definitively defeated. "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:13–15). Despite this, pessimillennialism teaches that these Satanic powers, which were definitively defeated by Christ in his resurrection, cannot be progressively defeated in history by Christ's pincer movement: power from His heavenly throne and power from His earthly church.

Eden was to serve Adam as his headquarters in the conquest of the world: the dominion covenant.⁵⁵ Adam was forcibly removed from headquarters after his rebellion. Headquarters for Noah was the ark, but only for a few months. After that, geography played no role until Abram was called out of Ur of the Chaldees. Ur could not serve as headquarters for Abraham; no place else could, either. Abraham wandered. After him, Israel wandered. Geographical headquarters was

55. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

re-established only with Israel's conquest of Canaan. But the same threat existed for Israel as had existed for Adam, as Deuteronomy constantly warns: *removal from headquarters*. This happened at the time of the first exile, and then culminated with the removal of geographical headquarters with the fall of Jerusalem.

Dispensational premillennialists assume that headquarters will be reestablished in Jerusalem by Jesus when He returns to set up His earthly kingdom.⁵⁶ Historic premillennialists remain silent regarding the place of earthly headquarters during the premillennial kingdom. Amillennialists and postmillennialists insist that kingdom headquarters in history has been transferred to heaven. Postmillennialists teach that this transfer will have visible cultural results in history: the progressive defeat of Satan's kingdom. Amillennialists also teach that this transfer will have visible cultural results in history: the progressive victory of Satan's kingdom.

With the transfer of God's kingdom to the replacement nation of the church (Matt. 21:43; 28:18–20), earthly headquarters no longer exist, even as an ideal. This has been a major transformation by the New Covenant. The church is decentralized. There are no biblically mandated international festivals. There are no international headquarters. While the Roman Catholic Church likes to think that it occupies international headquarters in the Vatican, as manifested by the Pope's authority, this faith was definitively shattered by its inability to enforce sanctions against the Eastern Church in 1054 and then against Luther after 1517. The Vatican after 1965 did not enforce effective discipline on the visible army of heretics who filled the church's seminaries, let alone the army of homosexuals who filled its pulpits. Its official proclamation of cultural authority may not be as devoid of visible evidence as Engelsma's standard of Christian cultural victory is, but it is close, and with respect to the sexual preferences of its ordained ministers, it is in even worse shape.

Conclusion

The law of God teaches that covenant-keeping will produce dominion in history for God's covenant people (Deut. 28:1–14). The issue of biblical law (point three) is tied to the issue of sanctions (point four) in history and therefore to eschatology (point five). This is why

56. While this is almost universally believed by dispensationalists, the movement's theologians have rarely mentioned it.

theonomy is necessarily postmillennial. This is a package deal. Biblical law's system of sanctions unbreakably connects point three and point five.

The attack on biblical law is an attack on point four: the law's sanctions, above all, civil sanctions. It is also an attack on point five: cultural dominion by covenant-keepers in history. This is why amillennialism and premillennialism are inherently pietistic. They denigrate Christianity's victory in history because they denigrate God's law. They denigrate God's law because they deny the law's historical sanctions, which produce cultural dominance for God's people. Denying this eschatological outcome, they must dismiss God's Bible-revealed law and its mandated civil sanctions as Old Testament intrusions into the history of the covenant. This dismissal delivers them into the hands of one or another system of anti-biblical law, which means anti-biblical ethics.

Appendix J

CATEGORIES OF THE MOSAIC LAW

This appendix appeared originally in the Conclusion to my book, *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary* (1994), pages 637–45. I have here retained the footnote references in that chapter. All of these laws are found in Leviticus, but they provide opportunities for Bible commentators and Christian ethicists to search for fundamental principles of interpretation for dealing with the Mosaic ordinances.

A. Land Laws and Seed Laws

Land laws and seed laws were laws associated with God's covenantal promises to Abraham regarding his offspring (Gen. 15–17). There was a chronological boundary subsequently placed on the seed laws: Jacob's prophecy and promise. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). After Shiloh came, Jacob said, the scepter would depart from Judah. The unified concept of *scepter and lawgiver* pointed to the civil covenant: physical sanctions and law. Jacob prophesied that the lawful enforcement of the civil covenant would eventually pass to another ruler: Shiloh, the Messiah.

The Levitical land laws were tied covenantally to the Abrahamic promise regarding a place of residence for the Israelites (Gen. 15:13–16). These land laws were also tied to the Abrahamic promise of the seed. "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). The mark of those included under the boundaries of these seed laws was the covenantal sign of circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14). Circumcision established a personal covenantal boundary. There were also family and tribal boundaries tied to the laws of inheritance. The ultimate inheritance law was

above all a land law: the jubilee law (Lev. 25).

The fall of Jerusalem and the abolition of the temple's sacrifices forever ended the Mosaic Passover. The five sacrifices of Leviticus 1–7 also ended forever. There can be no question about the annulment of the inheritance laws by A.D. 70. *But with this annulment of the inheritance laws also came the annulment of the seed laws.* Once the Messiah came, there was no further need to separate Judah from his brothers. Once the temple was destroyed, there was no further need to separate Levi from his brothers. There was also no further need to separate the sons of Aaron (priests) from the sons of Levi (Levites). Therefore, the most important Mosaic family distinction within a single tribe—the Aaronic priesthood—was annulled: the ultimate representative case. *The tribal and family boundaries of the Abrahamic covenant ceased to operate after A.D. 70.* This annulled the Mosaic law's applications of the Abrahamic covenant's land and seed laws. The land and seed laws were aspects of a single administration: the Mosaic Covenant. The New Covenant—based exclusively and forthrightly on the covenantal concept of adoption¹—replaced the Mosaic Covenant.

By dividing the Mosaic law into land laws, seed laws, priestly laws, and cross-boundary laws, we can assess which laws are still binding in the New Covenant, and which are not.

1. Land Laws

Biblical quarantine (Lev. 13:45–46). This law dealt with a unique disease that came upon men as a judgment. Only when a priest crossed the household boundary of a diseased house did everything within its walls become unclean. This quarantine law ended when this judicial disease ended when the Mosaic priesthood ended.²

Promised land as a covenantal agent (Lev. 18:24–29). The land no longer functions as a covenantal agent. That temporary office was operational only after the Israelites crossed into Canaan. That office was tied to the presence of the sanctuary³

1. Infant baptism is not a confirmation of covenantal inheritance through biological inclusion but rather its opposite: the confirmation of covenantal inheritance through adoption, i.e., adoption into the family of God, His church. The one who baptizes is an agent of the church, not an agent of the family. This was true under the Abrahamic covenant, too: the male head of the household circumcised the males born into that household, but as an agent of the priesthood.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1984] 2012), ch. 9.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

The laws of clean and unclean beasts (Lev. 20:22–26). This was a land law, for it was associated with the land's office as the agent of sanctions. These laws marked off Israel as a separate nation. This is true of the dietary laws generally, which is why God annulled them in a vision to Peter just before he was told to visit the house of Cornelius (Acts 10).⁴

The national sabbatical year of rest for the land (Lev. 25:1–7). This was an aspect of the jubilee year. The law was part of God's original grant of leaseholds at the time of the conquest. There is no agency of enforcement today. There has been no national grant of land.⁵

The jubilee law (Lev. 25:8–13). This law applied only to national Israel. It was a law uniquely associated with Israel's conquest of Canaan. It was in part a land law and in part a seed law: inheritance and citizenship. It was more judicial—citizenship—than economic. The annulment of the jubilee law was announced by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:17–19). This prophecy was fulfilled at the final jubilee year of national Israel.⁶ This probably took place in the year that Paul's ministry to the gentiles began, two years after the crucifixion.⁷

The jubilee law prohibiting oppression centered around the possibility that the priests and magistrates might not enforce the jubilee law (Lev. 25:14–17). Thus, those who trusted the courts when leasing land would be oppressed by those who knew the courts were corrupt.⁸

The jubilee year was to be preceded by a miraculous year bringing a triple crop (Lev. 25:18–22). This designates the jubilee year law as a land law with a blessing analogous to the manna. The manna had ceased when the nation crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan.⁹

The prohibition against the permanent sale of rural land (Lev. 25:23–24). This was a land law. It was an aspect of the conquest of Canaan: the original land grant. This law did not apply in walled cities that were not Levitical cities.¹⁰

The law promising rain, crops, peace in the land, and no wild beasts in response to corporate faithfulness (Lev. 26:3–6). This was a land law. Nature's predictable covenantal blessings were tied to the

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 24.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

7. James Jordan, "Jubilee (3)," *Biblical Chronology*, V (April 1993), [p. 2].

8. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 26.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 27.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

office of the holy land as the agency of sanctions.¹¹

2. Seed Laws

Gleaning (Lev. 19:9–10). The gleaning law applied only to national Israel, and only to farming. It was a means of establishing a major form of charity in tribe-dominated rural regions. This law promoted localism and decentralization in Mosaic Israel. The moral principle of gleaning extends into New Covenant times as a charity law, but not as a seed law. The principle is this: *recipients of charity who can work hard should*. This law is not supposed to be applied literally. There were no applications in civil law. This law was enforced by the priesthood, not by the state, for no corporate negative sanctions were threatened by God, nor would it have been possible for judges to identify precisely which poor people had been unlawfully excluded.¹² This principle of interpretation also applies to the re-statement of the gleaning law in Leviticus 23:22.¹³

The laws against allowing different breeds of cattle to interbreed (Lev. 19:19). This was a temporary seed law. It reflected the laws of tribal separation. So did the law against sowing a field with mixed seeds. Also annulled is the prohibition against wearing wool-linen garments.¹⁴

The law against harvesting the fruit of newly planted trees for three years and setting aside the fourth year's crop as holy (Lev. 19:23–25). This was a seed law. It was a curse on Israel because of the failure of the exodus generation to circumcise their sons during the wilderness wandering. It is no longer in force.¹⁵

The law governing the enslavement of fellow Israelites (Lev. 25:39–43). This was a seed law, although by being governed by the jubilee law, there was an aspect of land law associated with it. There is no longer any long-term indentured servitude bringing a family under the authority of another family for up to 49 years.¹⁶

The law governing the permanent enslavement of foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46). This must have been a seed law rather than a land law, for it opened the possibility of adoption, either by the family that owned the

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 33.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 17.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

16. *Ibid.*, ch. 30.

foreign slaves or by another Israelite family.¹⁷

The law governing the redemption of an Israelite out of a foreigner's household by the kinsman-redeemer (Lev. 25:47–55). This was a seed law.¹⁸

B. Priestly Laws

The laws of five sacrifices (Lev. 1–7). These were all priestly laws. They are no longer in force.¹⁹

The law prohibiting wine drinking by priests while inside the tabernacle or temple (Lev. 10:8–11). This law was exclusive to priests as mediatorial agents. The wine belonged to God; it had to be poured out before the altar. This law was tied to the holiness of the temple. It did not apply to Levites or priests outside of the temple's geographical boundaries.²⁰

The law establishing the official prices of people who take vows (Lev. 27:2–8). This was a law governing access to the priesthood. These vows governed those who were devoted—irrevocably adopted—to priestly service.²¹

The law establishing vows to priests and the inheritance of rural land (Lev. 27:9–15). This law was primarily priestly but secondarily a seed law: an aspect of inheritance. This law placed the negative sanction of disinheritance on those who vowed to support a priest through the productivity of a dedicated plot of land and then refused to honor the vow. The land went from being dedicated to devoted: beyond redemption.²²

C. Cross-Boundary Laws

Cross-boundary laws are still in force under the New Covenant. These are properly designated as Deuteronomy 4 laws: designed by God to bring men to repentance through the testimony of civil justice within a holy commonwealth.

Fraud and false dealing (Lev. 19:11–12). The laws against theft still prevail. They had no unique association with either the land or the

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

18. *Ibid.*, ch. 32.

19. *Ibid.*, chaps. 1–7.

20. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

21. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

22. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.

promised seed.²³

The law against robbing an employee by paying him later than the end of the working day (Lev. 19:13). This law protects the weakest parties from unfair competition: the ability to wait to be paid.

The law against tripping the blind man and cursing the deaf man (Lev. 19:14). The weaker parties are to be protected by civil law.²⁴

The prohibition against enforcing laws that discriminate in terms of wealth or power (Lev. 19:15). This law had no unique association with Israel's land or seed laws. Its theological presupposition is that God is not a respecter of persons: a theological principle upheld in both covenants.²⁵

The prohibition against personal vengeance (Lev. 19:18). This establishes the civil government as God's monopoly agency of violence.²⁶

The law prohibiting judicial discrimination against strangers in the land (non-citizens) (Lev. 19:33–36). This law an aspect of the just weights law. Laws governing justice were not land-based or seed-based.²⁷

The law against offering a child to Molech (Lev. 20:2–5). This was a law governed by the principle of false worship, although it appears to be a seed law (inheritance) or perhaps a land law (agricultural blessings). It had to do with identifying the source of *positive sanctions* in history: either God or a false god. God's name is holy: *sanctified*.²⁸ This will never change.

The jubilee law prohibiting taking interest from poor fellow believers or resident aliens (Lev. 25:35–38). This law was an extension of Exodus 22:25. It was included in the jubilee code, but it was not derived from that code. In non-covenanted, non-Trinitarian nations, however, Christians are the resident aliens. Thus, the resident alien aspect of the law is annulled until such time as nations formally covenant under God.²⁹

The law promising fruitfulness and multiplication of seed (Lev. 26:9–10). This law was covenantal, not tied to the holy land or the tribal structure of inheritance. It was a confessional law, but because of

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

24. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

25. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

26. *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

27. *Ibid.*, ch. 19.

28. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

29. *Ibid.*, ch. 29.

its universal promise, it was a common grace law.³⁰

Negative corporate sanctions (Lev. 26:13–17). These were promised to Israel, but they were not tied to either the holy land or the promised seed. The governing issue was the fear of God, which is still in force.³¹

The law of the tithe that applied to animals passing under a rod (Lev. 27:30–37). This law still applies, though it is no longer very important in a non-agricultural setting. God still prohibits individuals from structuring tithes in kind (goods) from pre-collection rearrangements that favor the tither.³²

D. The Traditional Categories

The traditional definition of the Mosaic laws as moral, ceremonial, and civil does not do justice to the judicial distinctions within the Moral law-order. This traditional classification system attempts to place a judicial barrier against any extension into the New Covenant of the Mosaic civil laws and ceremonial laws, while avoiding the pitfalls of antinomianism by affirming the continuing validity of the moral law. The problem with this traditional judicial hermeneutic is that the moral law, apart from specific Mosaic case laws *and their Bible-mandated required civil sanctions*, invariably has become intermixed with some version of paganism's natural law theory.

My approach has been, first, to identify the priestly laws that were annulled by Christ's ministry as the high priest, and the transformation of the priesthood from Levitical to Mechizedekal. The key New Testament document in this regard is the Epistle to the Hebrews. It sets forth this hermeneutical rule: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). Second, I have looked for evidence of a Mosaic law's inextricable relationship with the land, which had to do with the maintenance of tribal boundaries. Third, I have looked for evidence of a law's indissoluble connection with landed inheritance: seed laws. The seed laws and land laws often overlap.

The fourth category, cross-boundary laws, correspond to what is traditionally called the moral law. But the phrase "moral law" sometimes has the connotation of not being an aspect of justice, especially civil justice. Rarely if ever do defenders of the category of moral law

30. *Ibid.*, ch. 34.

31. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

32. *Ibid.*, ch. 38.

connect this moral law to the Mosaic law's mandated historical sanctions, especially civil sanctions. This view of the moral law transforms the moral law into exclusively self-disciplined law. This is the view of biblical law defended by pietists and secular humanists, who are united in their desire to restrict all biblical injunctions to the human conscience, where they possess no civil authority. This is the agenda, less and less hidden, of modern defenders of the category of biblical moral law. Those defenders who are not pietists are generally embarrassed by the severity of the Mosaic law's civil sanctions, especially in matters sexual.

There are also defenders of biblical moral law who have another agenda: to gain moral legitimacy for programs of state-mandated economic reform that were not mandated by the Mosaic law, and which may even be prohibited by the Mosaic law, all in the name of biblical justice. They invoke the moral law in the civil realm, but deliberately neglect or reject the specific context of a particular law. A familiar example of this political strategy is the invocation of the jubilee laws. The reformers insist that Christians must defend state programs of compulsory wealth redistribution in the name of these laws. Yet they refuse to acknowledge that the jubilee laws were aspects of genocide: Israel's mandated extermination of all of the residents of Canaan. They also refuse to acknowledge that these laws applied only to rural land and houses owned by Levites inside Levitical cities. They shout "liberation," but then mumble about not applying the jubilee laws literally. Here is an example of this strategy of deception. William Peltz, the Midwest regional coordinator of the Peoples Bicentennial Commission, at a meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, argued that conservative Christians can be turned into promoters of revolutionary politics if the revolutionaries can show them that the Bible teaches revolution. He then cited Leviticus 25, the chapter that contains the Jubilee land laws.³³ This tactic has subsequently become a popular theme of numerous radical Christians, including Ron Sider³⁴ and *Sojourners* magazine. The reformers have not bothered to tell their followers that if Leviticus 25 is still morally and legally binding, then lifetime slavery is

33. *The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial, The Peoples Bicentennial Commission, Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 94th Congress, Second Session (March 17 and 18, 1976), p. 36.*

34. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1985] 1996).

still morally and legally valid, for it is only in Leviticus 25 that the Hebrews were told that they could buy and enslave foreigners for life, and then enslave their heirs forever (Lev. 25:44–46).³⁵ I wrote my book, *Is the World Running Down?* (1988),³⁶ to challenge the misuse of Scripture in supporting various socialist schemes.

Conclusion

To understand a Mosaic law, you must first understand its context. Was it a land law, a seed law, a priestly law, or a cross-boundary law? If it was one of the first three, you must then determine whether the New Testament has in some way adopted and adapted it to fit the New Covenant order. An example would be gleaning. This was clearly a land law, yet it may possess underlying moral principles that can assist Christians in the kingdom work of transforming society. The gleaning laws set forth the relationship between charity and hard work. The task of application—casuistry—should begin only after a Mosaic law has been assigned to one of the four categories.

End of Volume 4

35. North, *Leviticus*, ch. 31.

36. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988).

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DISOBEDIENCE AND DEFEAT

*AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON
THE HISTORICAL BOOKS*

GARY NORTH

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INTRODUCTION

On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying, The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates (Deut. 1:5–7).

A. A Shared Kingdom, Not an Empire

The Euphrates River comes closest to the city of Jerusalem about 326 air miles (525 kilometers) north of Jerusalem, at Aleppo in Northern Syria, and then 75 miles (120 km) east on foot. The river was far beyond families' walking distance for the nation's three annual feasts. The three feasts (Ex. 23:14–19) established geographical limits on the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant. They kept Israel from ever becoming a regional empire (Deut. 20:10–18).¹ The most that the rulers of Israel could expect from conquest was to receive tribute from cities located on trade routes north of Israel to the Euphrates.

God promised Abraham that his heirs would be given land all the way to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18). This was a statement of initial conquest, but it was not a promise of long-term rule. God mandated the sacrificial system and the feasts, which negated the possibility of a kingdom of Israelites extending to the Euphrates. The northern territory might come under the rule of Israel by conversion or by tribute, but the Israelites could not possibly occupy the land all the way to the Euphrates.

1. *The Geography of the Promised Land*

Prior to the conquest, God repeated this command to conquer all

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48:C:2.

the land, from Lebanon to the Euphrates.

Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be (Deut. 11:24).

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Josh. 1:3–5).

Rarely are these passages discussed in Bible commentaries. There is problem in explaining why the promise to Abraham could not be fulfilled. Yet God commanded the conquest after He had given the laws of sacrifices to the nation through Moses.

According to a passage in Joshua,

Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you (Josh. 23:13–15).

He said, “not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.”

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy

them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them (Deut 7:1–2).

The Hittites were residents of the region around the Northwest Euphrates.²

2. *The Feasts*

Here is the problem. First, the Israelites could not occupy the land around the Euphrates and also obey God regarding the feasts. Second, genocide would have left animals in control over the land. But God never wanted this. This is why he drove out the nations slowly, so that the animals would not occupy the land (Ex. 23:29). Third, if fertile land was left empty, other tribes would migrate in. There would be new enemies on Israel's northern border. The warfare would be interminable to collect tribute. Fourth, Israel could surrender control over the land. But this would have negated God's promise. So, orthodox Bible commentators judiciously avoid discussing these issues.

We know that David fought to regain a city on the edge of the Euphrates (II Sam. 8:3). One proposed map of his kingdom places the far edge at the Euphrates.



This passage indicates that David's kingdom temporarily was restored to Joshua's territorial limits. But there can be no question of

2. *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. Yohannan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, eds. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), map 43.

this: *Israel never occupied the land all the way to these border cities.*

The Promised Land was incapable of being occupied exclusively by Israelites, given the travel requirements of the feasts. There was no way that a family could walk home to the Euphrates from the Passover (Lev. 23:5–8), held in Jerusalem, a distance of at least 400 miles (650 km), and then turn around and walk back for Pentecost, arriving 49 days after Passover ended (Lev. 23:15–16). Families at the Euphrates region would have had to rent housing in Jerusalem for two months a year. Their farms would have been left unattended. This was not economically feasible. Conclusion: either the three festivals were not required for all Israelites or else the Promised Land was suitable only for tribute.

It does no good to ignore this issue. This was a matter of ethics. Either the Israelites obeyed the laws of the feasts or else they failed to exterminate all the peoples to the edge of the Euphrates, for which God held them responsible. Genocide made sense only when followed by occupation. But it was impossible for Israel to occupy the Promised Land.

3. Replacement Tribes

There was no question that genocide was mandated. But this meant that the Israelites would have to bring in new tribes and place them under tribute, just as the Assyrians and Babylonians did with the Promised Land eight centuries after the conquest. The Promised Land would become an empire that would have to be defended militarily, unless the Israelites actively evangelized the new tribes. But they could not adopt them, for that would have placed them under the laws of the festivals. So, the converts would have to be gentiles. They could worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they would not be part of the covenant line biologically or through adoption into the tribes. To maintain legal title to the Promised Land, the Israelites would have to act as evangelists to gentiles, and also let the gentiles remain as covenant-keepers inside the land, but outside the festival laws. The kingdom of God would be extended confessionally, but not ritually.

The newcomers were to become as the Samaritans became eight centuries later, but without discrimination against them. The newcomers would be judicially suitable as residents of the land, yet not as Israelites. They would not be under the seed laws, the land laws, and

the priestly laws. They would be under the cross-boundary laws.³ They would swear loyalty to God, but they would not be members of the tribes. They would therefore not be required to make the journey to Jerusalem for the festivals.

The Israelites did not exterminate God's enemies, as required. They placed them under tribute. This converted Israel into an empire. God had not intended Israel to be an empire.

B. A Catalogue of Failures

The historical books on the Old Testament, Joshua to Esther, are a detailed catalogue of their failures. Theirs was a failure of ethics. It was also a failure of nerve. The brightest spot in this entire section of the Bible was Esther's courage in going before the king to ask him to throw a party for Haman (Esth. 5). Only later did she inform him about her own covenantal/genetic origins.

Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage (Esth. 7:3–4).

She saved the Jews from destruction, but it had taken her uncle's warning to force her hand.

Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esth. 4:13–14).

The story of the kingdom of priests, from Exodus 19 until the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, was a story of ethical rebellion. They had sworn allegiance to God at Sinai, on the basis of His promise to them nationally. "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children

3 3. On the four-fold categories of the Mosaic law, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion.

of Israel” (Ex. 19:6). This special status ended in A.D. 70.⁴

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:42–43).

Peter wrote to gentiles living outside the land of Israel (I Peter 1:1). He told them of their inheritance.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (I Peter 2:9).

Conclusion

It should have been clear to the Israelites at Joshua’s death that they were not going to receive God’s promised blessing with respect to territory—not without a change of heart. They did not obey God regarding genocide. They did not obey God regarding what was an inescapably aspect of the festivals: shared land, shared gospel, and shared kingdom. Rather than bring the replacement tribes under God, nearby nations would place them under tribute. They would come under God’s sanctions.

But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:17–20).

They did not choose life. They repeatedly chose death. The historical books record the details of these choices.

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

Israel did not obey God. The nation therefore suffered continual setbacks: military, economic, and political. The nation chose disobedience over growth, negative sanctions over positive sanctions. The story of Israel is the story of corporate covenant-breaking. It is therefore the story of corporate defeat.

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA

For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever (Josh. 4:23–24).

If I were to write a stand-alone commentary on Joshua, I would call it *Conquest and Dominion*. The conquest of Canaan produced *the central economic event of Mosaic covenant Israel: the initial distribution of the land*. The exodus was the central liturgical event, for it established the Passover. But it was not the central economic event.

A. Israel's Central Economic Event

The conquest was the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16).¹ That promise was given 470 years before the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River. From Abraham to the exodus was 430 years. “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal. 3:17). Then came 40 years of wandering. “For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD swore that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey” (Josh. 5:6).

How long did it take them to conquer Canaan? Seven years. We know this because of explicit chronology. “And the space in which we

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them" (Deut. 2:14). At Kadesh-barnea, Caleb and Joshua testified to the nation's readiness to conquer Canaan. The 10 other spies rejected this assessment. Caleb was 40 years old at that time.

Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal: and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea. Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart (Josh. 14:6–7).

And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old (Josh. 14:10).

By subtracting 38 years from 45 years, we get seven years. When Caleb came to Joshua to ask for specific territory (Josh. 14:12), this was seven years after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River. This was 475 years after God's promise to Abraham.

B. Inheritance and Disinheritance

God's promise to Abraham was a promise of inheritance. But, because the land was occupied and would remain occupied in the interim, it was also a promise of disinheritance. The Amorites would be dispossessed.

Joshua oversaw the distribution of the Promised Land. This distribution became the central economic event in Israel's history. The laws governing the inheritance of these plots of land are known collectively as the law of the jubilee (Lev. 25).² Rural land had to be returned to the heirs of the original owners every 49 years. This set a time limit on collateralized debt. The collateral had to be returned. It also set a time limit on Hebrew servitude, unless servitude was for payment of restitution by a criminal.

Jesus announced the beginning of His ministry by announcing His

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 23–31.

fulfillment of the jubilee. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19).³ By that time, the jubilee law was no longer enforced, assuming that it ever was. There is no biblical evidence that it was ever enforced. The Romans surely did not enforce it. The jubilees finally ended with the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman army in A.D. 70.

So, Israel’s system of inheritance began with a conquest and ended with a conquest. It began with the near-genocide of Israel’s enemies and ended with the destruction of the Israelite nation. The Romans dispersed the Jews throughout the empire after the second rebellion, Bar Kochba’s, in A.D. 133–35.

The Mosaic Covenant extended from the nation’s covenant with God at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19)⁴ until the fall of Jerusalem. Jesus had announced the transfer of Israel’s inheritance to the church. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43).

The legal foundation of Israel’s conquest of Canaan was the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15). This was renewed by the nation at Sinai. But this was more than covenant renewal. A new covenant sign had been added on the night before the exodus: Passover. God then gave a new legal order to Israel (Ex. 20–23). This established the Mosaic law. The nation was told by Moses and Joshua to conquer in the name of this law. “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8).

Then, after the rebellion of the golden calf, Israel was given a new priesthood: the Levites. “Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD’S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion,

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men” (Ex. 32:26–28). This confirmed the Mosaic Covenant. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12). To maintain the kingdom grant, the Israelites had to keep the Mosaic law.

Conclusion

The conquest established the starting date for the sabbath year (Lev. 25:1–7) and the jubilee year. Joshua led them militarily. After the conquest, Joshua distributed the spoils: land and cities. This inheritance mandated the disinheritance of the Amorites. It mandated genocide.

Genocide was the judicial, ethical, and historical foundation of the jubilee land laws. This is never mentioned by left-wing Christians who propose some sort of government-mandated wealth-redistribution scheme for the modern world. Nor is it mentioned by right-wing Christians who propose some sort of government-mandated debt-cancellation scheme. The jubilee law had its origin in the genocide of the conquest. It ceased to be a legal requirement with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

1

OBEY AND GROW RICH

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Josh. 1:6–8).

The theocentric principle here is the covenantal foundation of prosperity in the lives of covenant-keepers. God promises to bless those who obey His Bible-revealed law. He says that the book of the law must be the focus of Joshua's life, for he is the representative of the nation.

A. Moses' Last Testament

Moses had instructed the nation just prior to his reading of the Ten Commandments to the conquest generation.

Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess (Deut. 5:32–33).¹

Just prior to his death, Moses spoke one last time to the nation. He prophesied regarding what was about to begin on the far side of the

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 13.

Jordan River.

The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said. And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed. And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you. Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it (Deut. 31:3–7).²

B. The Need for Courage and Biblical Law

Courage is basic to covenantal success. So is biblical law. He who wishes to succeed must believe that God stands behind him and over him in his endeavors. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6).³ The covenantal foundation of this confident New Covenant faith is found in these Old Covenant passages.

Courage here was military courage. The nation was about to inherit the Promised Land. This had been God’s promise to Abram 470 years earlier.⁴ “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16).⁵ Joshua’s generation was the fourth generation.⁶

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 74.

3. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 30.

4. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Gal. 3:16–18).

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

6. “The son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel” (1 Chron. 6:38). Levi was in the first generation, Kohath was in the second, Moses was in the

There must also be a legal structure. This is basic to the biblical covenant: point three.⁷ The positive sanctions of longevity (Deut. 5:33), military victory (Deut. 31:3–5), and prosperity (Josh. 1:8) rested forthrightly on the nation's adherence to the mandated legal structure.

It takes courage to believe that these sanctions are predictable. The covenant-keeper in faith launches new projects. He believes that there is a positive relationship between obedience to God's law and positive outcomes in history. Moses told the nation to believe this. God told the nation and Joshua to believe this. *Courage is associated with obedience to God's book of the law.* Courage that does not rest on faith in this predictable relationship between obedience to biblical law and success in history is courage that rests on a weak reed.

And the LORD said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give unto them. And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? (Deut. 10:11–13).

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us (I John 4:18–19).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (I John 5:2–3).

Moses told the nation to have confidence in their imminent corporate inheritance of the Promised Land. After Moses' death, God reconfirmed this in His instructions to Joshua. All of this is covenantal. It conforms to the five points of the biblical covenant model. A sovereign God (point one)⁸ sets up Joshua as the national leader (point two).⁹ He tells the nation and Joshua to be confident in the reliability of biblical

third. Joshua received the mantle of leadership from Moses.

7. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

8. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 1.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

law (point three)¹⁰ and the positive sanctions that widespread obedience to this law-order produces.¹¹ This will lead to inheritance (point five).¹²

Conclusion

God told Joshua what Moses had previously told him. Joshua had to be courageous in the face of the Canaanites. This confidence had to be confidence in the sovereign God of the Bible, who rewards obedience to His Bible-revealed law. Confidence in anything else is a snare and a delusion. Again and again, the Israelites trusted idols. The Israelites were at times quite confident, but in the wrong source of reliable sanctions in history.

Covenantal success in history is conditional. It rests on Christ's successful fulfilment of the Mosaic law's requirements (Matt. 5:17–18).¹³ The Holy Spirit then empowers covenant-keepers to obey God's law. This results in prosperity. This is the Bible's prosperity gospel.

This gospel is denied by those who say that Christianity cannot triumph in history, not because Christians fail to obey God's law, but because God supposedly does not call Christians to exercise dominion in history by means of supernatural faith in Christ and also faith in God's supernatural ethical commandments. These skeptics include all humanists, all Muslims, and most Christians.

Addendum: The Prosperity Gospel

The phrase, "the prosperity gospel," is usually applied to a particular variety of Protestant charismatics. They teach that God wants all of His people to be economically successful. The secret of personal success is said to be the exercise of faith in the promises of God regarding one's guaranteed personal success in history. This gospel of success is not applied to Christian society in general. Rarely do its proponents accept the concept of a Christian society: Christendom. Most of them are dispensational premillennialists who reject the possibility of Christian society.

This teaching is not found anywhere in the Bible. God never tells

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North ch 4.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

13. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, [1977] 2002).

His people to have confidence in their future success, if this confidence is based on the intensity of their personal, individual confidence in the unconditional promises of God. *These promises are always ethically conditional.* God told Moses and Joshua that the basis of the nation's future military and economic success would be adherence to biblical law. They were to be intensely confident in biblical law and its historical sanctions, not the promise of prosperity irrespective of outward and inward conformity to biblical law.

The charismatic prosperity gospel relies too heavily on the concept of "think and grow rich."¹⁴ This was popularized in the mid-1950s in American liberal Protestant circles and the general public by Rev. Norman Vincent Peale's best-selling book, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), which sold tens of millions of copies. Peale was a pastor in a confessionally Calvinistic Dutch-American denomination, the Reformed Church of America, but neither his theology nor his book had anything in common with Christianity, let alone Calvinism.

The charismatic version of the Bible's prosperity gospel ("gospel" means "good news") is antinomian. It preaches confidence in the promises of God without reference to the ethical and judicial terms of God's covenant. God did not tell Joshua to have confidence in the inheritance apart God's Bible-revealed law. On the contrary, God told Moses, and Moses told the people, that they could not maintain this inheritance apart from widespread obedience to the book of the law (Deut. 28:15–68).

14. Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich* (1937). He was the author of *Law of Success* (1928), and *Success Through Positive Mental Attitude* (1959). He died in 1970.

2

ECONOMIC SAFETY NETS

And they did eat of the old corn [grain] of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the self-same day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year (Josh. 5:11–12).

The theocentric principle here is faith in God, who controls economic causation.

A. Covenantal Transition: Inheritance

Joshua 5 is a chapter on covenantal transition. Forty years earlier, the Israelites had crossed the boundary of the Red Sea. They had wandered for four decades (Ex. 16:35). Now they had crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. This was the fourth generation prophesied by God to Abram. “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16).¹ The *geographical transition* was therefore a *generational transition*. “And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt” (Josh. 5:4).

To mark this generational transition, Joshua had the males circumcised. This generation had not been circumcised (v. 5). The third generation had not obeyed the law of the Abrahamic covenant in Egypt or in the wilderness. They had not brought their sons under the formal sanctions of the covenant. This was Egypt’s lasting reproach to Israel. “And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day" (v. 9). Then they kept the Passover (v. 10).

The text then says that the manna ceased (v. 12). Manna had sustained the Israelites for four decades. "And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan" (Ex. 16:35). That which had sustained the nation in the wilderness never appeared again. They fed themselves off the produce of the land as an invading army.

This marked the end of a set of miracles. Moses had catalogued these miracles in his second reading of the law. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years" (Deut. 8:3–4).² God had suspended the second law of thermodynamics—entropy—for four decades. Now He reintroduced it into their lives.

B. A Safety Net for Ex-Slaves

I discussed the manna in detail in *Moses and Pharaoh* (1985).³ I argued that the manna served as a transition out of slavery. In Egypt, the state had provided Israelites with food and capital. They had served others. Up until the return of Moses to Egypt, the Egyptian state had provided straw to make bricks. That changed when Moses and Aaron challenged the Pharaoh. As a punishment, the Pharaoh required them to gather their own straw (Ex. 5:10–11).⁴

The predictability of their lives changed at that point. It changed even more when they crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness. There would be no provision by the state any longer. God substituted manna.

Manna had unique characteristics. It appeared every morning, no matter where the Israelites made camp. It burned off every afternoon. "And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating; and when the sun waxed hot, it melted" (Ex. 16:21). Every family

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 7.

had just enough for every member to eat. “And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating” (v. 18). It could not be stored overnight. “And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them” (vv. 19–20). A double portion appeared on the sixth day. “And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses” (v. 22). On the next day, the leftovers were edible. “And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none” (vv. 24–26).

The manna was miraculous, yet it was also utterly predictable. It was supernatural, yet common. It pointed to a God who sets aside the laws of nature for His own purposes. This is a God of predictability. This is a God of continuity in history. Yet this God of continuity delivered the nation out of Egypt by a series of discontinuous interventions into history. He is a God who is present in history, yet He is transcendent over history: point one of the biblical covenant.⁵ He delivers His people: point two.⁶ He is a God of law: point three.⁷ He is a God of sanctions in history: point four.⁸ He is the God of inheritance in history: point five.⁹ The manna demonstrated all of this.

The third generation Israelites had been slaves. They were not yet ready to exercise dominion. Their children would be, but only after four decades of daily miracles. That generation learned about the predictability of the God who rules over nature. They needed this experience, for they needed confidence that this God also rules over history. Nature and history are autonomous man’s two chief idols.¹⁰

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

10. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confronta-*

They were not the only people who had seen this God in action. The Canaanites had, too, and they feared greatly. That was what Rahab told the spies.

And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath (Josh. 2:9–11).

C. Removing the Safety Net

After the Israelites were circumcised, they celebrated Passover. That ended the manna. They had to learn new ways to feed themselves. They lived off the land. The land was theirs. It no longer belonged to the Canaanites. Thus began the transfer of inheritance from covenant-breakers to covenant-keepers. This transfer was by war and genocide. This was God's command. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee" (Deut. 7:16).

And the LORD thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the LORD thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them (Deut. 7:22–24).

This was a one-time only event. After they conquered the land, the rules of warfare changed (Deut. 20:10–15,¹¹ 19–20¹²). But, until the conquest was complete, they were to show no mercy. By "complete," God meant genocide.

tion with American Society (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 48.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 29.

But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God (Deut. 20:16–18).

The fourth generation had to take great risks on the battlefield. They were not to expect any further agricultural safety net. They would have to fight for their suppers. They would live off the land. They would take food out of the mouths of the previous owners, who had planted their crops.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth (Deut. 6:10–15).

If they wanted to eat, then they had to kill. If they were hungry, then their growling stomachs motivated them to conquer another city. God would no longer let them enjoy a welfare economy.

Conclusion

The Israelites had lived in a welfare economy for four decades—not a welfare state, but a welfare economy. They had been sustained by continual daily miracles. This was not God’s long-term plan for His people. He would give them capital in the Promised Land. “For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are

iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass” (Deut. 8:7–9).¹³

Then what of the safety net? That net would be His law. “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day” (Deut. 8:10–11).¹⁴ If they refused to obey, the safety net would collapse.

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut 8:18–20).¹⁵

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

3

SACRED WEALTH

And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD (Josh. 6:18–19).

The theocentric principle here is that God has placed some assets under a ban: cursed. To violate this ban was to become cursed.

This command referred to the spoils of Jericho. As the first city to be conquered inside the boundaries of the Promised Land, Jericho was under a ban. It was to be utterly destroyed. Only Rahab and those of her family members inside her house were to be spared. The city came under a curse. “And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent” (Josh. 6:17).

The gold and silver of the city would serve as God’s spoils. These metals were to be made into implements for the tabernacle. As the conqueror of the city, God would confiscate everything of value. The Israelites, as His agents, would keep nothing. This was symbolic of their subordination to God. The city was conquered by a miracle: the collapse of its defensive walls. This took place after a one-time-only liturgical procedure: six days of marching one time around this city, followed by a march of seven encirclements on day seven (Josh. 6:13–16).¹ The walls fell, and the army invaded. “And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword” (Josh. 6:21).

Jericho’s gold, silver, and vessels of brass and iron were off-limits to the Israelites. God set them aside for His purposes. That is, He put a

1. There was no sabbath that week.

“no trespassing” sign around them. He set them apart. This is the meaning of holiness: to be set apart. These metals were holy to the Lord. They could not lawfully be appropriated by anyone else.

This was unique to Jericho. It did not apply to the other cities. “And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it” (Josh. 8:2).

To violate a sacred boundary constitutes a profane act. This is the meaning of profanity: the crossing of a sacred boundary by a common person.² This is what Achen did. He became profane. He stole from God. He became cursed. That is, negative sanctions would soon be applied by God. The immediate result of his theft was the defeat of the army at Ai and the death of three dozen men (Josh. 7:5). Next, it led to the destruction of Achan’s household by the community of saints (Josh. 7:20–25). The loot was buried inside his tent. Everything inside that boundary was profane. It came under the ban: total destruction. It became a mini-Jericho. The curse of Jericho extended inside Achan’s tent.³

Wealth is normally common, not sacred. Jericho’s wealth was an exception. It had been set aside by God, just as the forbidden tree had been set aside by Him. *It represented God’s exclusive ownership of the land of Canaan.* It was His to do with as He pleased. His pleasure was in having His agents, including hornets (Josh. 24:12), destroy all of Canaan’s inhabitants. *The inhabitants would be disinherited.*⁴ Their possessions would be inherited by the Israelites. But, to secure their legal claim to this inheritance, the Israelites had to pass over the metals of Jericho.

Conclusion

The banned metals were representatives of both God’s ownership and Jericho’s position as cursed. That which was cursed by God became a blessing for God. To the victor go the spoils. The fall of Jericho represented God’s sovereignty over all of Canaan. It was the first city to fall. He had the right to destroy the city. He had a right to the prec-

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

3. Chapter 5.

4. This disinheritance was a down payment on eternity. What God does with covenant-breakers in eternity dwarfs what He did to the Canaanites.

ious metals within the city. He demanded that Israelites acknowledge this by refusing to confiscate the wealth of the city as their own.

The total destruction of Jericho sent fear into the hearts of the residents of the land. God's agents showed no mercy. They could not be bought off. They had turned over the city's precious metals to the priests. The destruction of Achan's household, as a mini-Jericho, sent the same message to the Israelites.

4

REPRESENTATIVE EVIL

Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff (Josh. 7:11).

The theocentric issue here is the doctrine of representation: point two of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Covenantal Representation

Adam sinned representatively on behalf of the human race. This is the heart of the doctrine of original sin. It is also the heart of the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (II Cor. 5:14–15).

Here, we learn of the cause of the defeat of Israel by Ai. How was it that one man’s sin was regarded by God as having represented the nation? The leaders did not know. They had ordered an attack on the city of Ai, and the Israelites were defeated. About 36 of them died (Josh. 7:5). This caught Joshua’s attention. Only then did God tell him what had happened. Then God led Joshua to the tribe, family, and household of the thief. The thief could no longer hide from the civil government.

And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it (Josh. 7:19–21).

This had been a great temptation for Achan. He did not resist. He violated the “no trespassing” sign hanging above the wealth of Jericho. This cost the lives of three dozen warriors. Then it cost the lives of every member of his family (vv. 24–25).² His sin was representative. The negative sanction of death was imposed by God on the warriors and by the court on Achan’s inheritance in the broadest sense.

B. Corporate Command

God had told the leaders of Israel what the rules were regarding Jericho. “And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD” (Josh. 6:18–19).³ He told them representatively. They conveyed this information to the holy army.

The judgment on the warriors at Ai was a visible indicator that something was wrong. This is why Joshua prayed to God. He prayed the way Moses had prayed, when God threatened to kill the Israelites and make Moses a leader of a new nation. Moses said not to do it; it would diminish God’s reputation in the eyes of covenant-breakers (Ex. 32:11–13).

And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do

2. Chapter 6. See also Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix A.

3. Chapter 3.

unto thy great name? (Joshua 7:7–9).

The negative sanctions had been visible and compelling. This was the price God imposed on Israel to persuade Joshua that there had been a serious infraction of His law. Someone had profaned the sacred boundary around Jericho's wealth. This would stand against the nation unless it was dealt with judicially.

This had been a corporate sin. This was because God had forbidden anyone in Israel to steal the assets. Because the command had been given to all, a single violation applied to all. The warriors outside the walls of Ai paid representatively because there had been a representative violation inside the boundaries of Jericho, whose walls had fallen.

The doctrine of covenantal representation can also work against negative corporate sanctions. Consider Abraham's bargaining with God regarding God's plan to destroy Sodom. Would God spare the city for the sake of 50 good men? Yes. How about 45? All right. What about 40? Agreed. And so on, all the way down to 10 (Gen. 18:26–32). This did Sodom no good. It did not have 10 righteous residents.

Joshua inquired of God, and God responded. God blamed the nation because of one man's sin. Joshua was able to deal with the problem because he had direct revelation from God regarding the violation. He also had indirect revelation in the process of narrowing down the suspects. A post-A.D. 70 society cannot gain access to such specific revelation. Civil magistrates must rely on conventional means of inquiry. But the principle of representation holds. There are still representative violations. This is why civil governments must bring negative sanctions against convicted violators. This keeps at bay God's direct negative sanctions against the corporate community. This action by civil magistrates testifies to the non-representative nature of the infraction. What is representative is covenant-keeping.

Conclusion

The defeat at Ai warned the leaders that something was wrong. It was not a random event. Negative covenantal sanctions on the battlefield testified to a prior violation inside the community. God blamed the nation for the sin of one man. This had to have been a representative sin. The sin was Cannanitic. It was the theft of God's spoils on behalf of a member of Israel. It imported forbidden spoils into the camp of the holy army. This was judicially comparable to leaven during Pas-

sover. It would corrupt the nation. It had to be expunged. “Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land” (Ex. 12:19). Achan was cut off.

5

ACHAN'S SACRILEGE

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day (Josh. 7:22–26).

A. An Act of Sacrilege¹

Achan appropriated forbidden objects in Jericho. These objects had been previously set aside by God for His temple. “But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD” (Josh. 6:19). This holy (set-apart) property is what Achan had appropriated. His was therefore an act of sacrilege. Sacrilege is a profane act, but a specific form of profanity: theft from a temple or a holy place.² Jericho was

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix A.

2. The Greek word for “sacrilege,” *hierarsuleo*, means “to rob a temple.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 374. New Testament examples: “Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit **sacrilege**?” (Rom. 2:22). “For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither **robbers of churches**, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess” (Acts 19:37).

to be offered as the firstfruits sacrifice to God on God's fiery altar. The entire city was to be burned. Its confiscated treasures were to be set aside for God's temple.

Because of Achan's act of sacrilege, God killed 36 Israelites in the first battle of Ai (Josh. 7:5). They were not responsible for his act of sacrilege, but God nonetheless imposed capital sanctions on them. This event was later used by Joshua in his strategy to take the city of Ai: "For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them" (Josh. 8:6). Nevertheless, the 36 dead men were dead because of a sin committed by a man in secret, a man who was not a representative civil ruler in Israel. Judicially, why did God kill them? Because of Achan's representative position as a priest (Greek: *hieros*) of God in the national hierarchy (Greek: *hierarch* = high priest).

B. Achan's Priestly Role in a Holy War

In his capacity as a warrior-priest, Achan had committed sacrilege. Jordan's assessment is correct: "All of Israel were [*sic*] a nation of priests, and it is the priests who prosecute holy war. God Himself had established a parallel between the war camp and the Tabernacle, both holy places. . . ." ³ As a member of God's holy army, Achan had been ordered to bring burning judgment against Jericho. His was not simply a run-of-the-mill capital crime of a father in his role as father; it was the sin of a man who had personally appropriated forbidden objects that were to be set apart for God, i.e., *holy* objects. His disobedience was a priestly act. The nation burned the remains of Achan and his family. God's direct sanction against false worship by a priest was fire (Lev. 10:2); it was also His punishment for a non-priest who offered incense illegally (Num. 16:35). ⁴

The crime of sacrilege under the Mosaic law carried with it a biblically unique degree of covenantal responsibility. The sanctions imposed by God and the state against this crime seem to have extended

3. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), p. 93.

4. Prostitution was not specified as a capital crime in Israel, except when committed by a priest's daughter. "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21:9). This indicates that a connection to the priesthood placed special restrictions on individuals, and violations brought a unique sanction: execution by fire.

to all those who were under the criminal's legal jurisdiction. This analysis in turn suggests that Adam's primary crime was also sacrilege.⁵ He had eaten a prohibited communion meal by appropriating fruit that had been explicitly set aside by God. *Sacrilege was the original crime that brought all of humanity under God's negative sanctions.* Adam's sons and daughters have received a death sentence because of the sins of their father. This sanction appears to be a unique judicial aspect of sacrilege, both in Adam's case and Achan's.⁶

The penalty imposed by Joshua and the court was the public execution of Achan, his family, and his entire inheritance. Even the stolen goods had become polluted through sacrilege, and therefore had to be burned with fire, along with the corpses (Josh. 7:25). God instructed the people of Israel to do with Achan what they had been instructed to do with Jericho. Worse; not even the silver and gold were to be salvaged for the tabernacle. The fire would be all-encompassing.

C. Fathers and Sons

There is no doubt that God sanctioned the execution of Achan and his household, for He immediately withdrew His anger and His negative sanctions (v. 26). Yet the targets of this public execution were Achan's family members. The crucial question is: *Did they partake in their father's sin?* If not, was this execution in violation of Deuteronomy 24:16? That text announces: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." Why were the sons and daughters executed for the sin of the father? The text in Joshua does not say that they knew of the crime, although they may have. It does speak of the burning of his tent. This indicates that the goods had been buried inside his tent. Those inside may have known what was going on. It is not stated specifically that some of the children were too young to know, nor does it state that some were old enough to be in their own tents. The point is, *inside the judicial*

5. Wrote Sir Henry Spelman in the seventeenth century: "Thus it appeareth that Sacrilege was the first sin, the master-sin, and the common sin at the beginning of the world, committed in earth by man in corruption, committed in paradise by man in perfection, committed in heaven itself by the angels in glory; . . ." Spelman, *The History and Fate of Sacrilege* (1698); Eades edition (London: John Hodges, 1888), p. 1; cited by R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, vol. 2 of *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1982), p. 33.

6. A fiery sword was placed by God at the entrance of the garden to keep out the sacrilegious priest and his heirs (Gen. 3:24). Achan's remains were burned (Josh. 7:25).

boundary of Achan's tent, everything had been polluted. The tent represented the judicial boundary of Achan's authority as a household priest. Everything inside that boundary had become profane as a result of his unauthorized and self-conscious trespass of holy objects. Everything inside was fit for destruction.

Surely the animals did not know. Why were even the animals under his administration executed? What had these animals done to deserve stoning? They had done nothing more than the animals had done in Adam's representative Fall, yet they, too, had suffered the consequences, as have their descendants. A cursed form of death entered the animal kingdom as a judgment from God. The subordinates suffered as a result of their master's act of defiance.

Because the text of Joshua 7 is not specific regarding the knowledge of Achan's sons and daughters regarding their father's act of sacrilege, we cannot be sure that they did not know and understand what their father was doing. The fact that the family's animals were stoned does indicate that a comprehensive ban—*hormah*—had been placed by God on his whole household, irrespective of their knowledge or consent. If Deuteronomy 24:16 is accepted as a universally binding standard for Israel's civil government, then we must conclude that they both knew and understood. If they did not know and understand, then we must conclude that Deuteronomy 24:16 did not apply in cases of sacrilege. The text of Joshua 7 does not definitively prove one interpretation over the other, but the execution of the animals does suggest that *sacrilege was a unique crime* and therefore outside the judicial boundary of Deuteronomy 24:16 regarding innocent sons and guilty fathers.

The issue at stake was the conquest's judicial character as a uniquely holy war. God had directed the Israelites to destroy all the families inside the boundaries of Canaan. "And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deut. 7:2; cf. 7:16). They were not allowed to show mercy, except to Rahab and her family, since she had covenanted with Israel before the holy army entered the land. Once the army had crossed over the boundary of the land, no other mercy was to be extended to the inhabitants within that boundary. The normal rules of holy warfare did not apply. Israel was not allowed to offer terms of surrender to any

Canaanite city, unlike wars outside the land (Deut. 20:10–11).⁷

Conclusion

By stealing holy objects in Jericho—goods that God had appropriated for Himself—Achan had not only stolen from God; he had also united himself and his family covenantally with Jericho. By stealing part of God’s required first-fruits offering, *Achan became a citizen of Jericho*. He also became profane: the violator of a sacred boundary placed by God around the city of Jericho. He was therefore required to suffer the judgment of every citizen in Jericho: death. *Achan’s covenantal citizenship extended down to his children and his property: the animals and the stolen goods*. Just as Rahab had become a citizen of Israel by hiding the spies and placing the red string publicly in her window, so did Achan become a citizen of Jericho by hiding the banned goods. Just as Rahab’s family had survived because of her covenant, so did Achan’s family perish because of his covenant. Achan and his family became Canaanites, and therefore the entire family came under the covenantal ban: *hormah*.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48.

6

THE UNCLAIMED INHERITANCE

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war (Josh. 11:23).

The theocentric issue here is God as the provider of Israel's inheritance.

A. The Euphrates

God had promised Canaan to Abraham 475 years earlier.¹ "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). He had reconfirmed this promise to Moses. "Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Deut. 1:7). "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be" (Deut. 11:24).

This promise had not yet been fulfilled. The Euphrates River (Baghdad) was about 600 miles east of Jerusalem. God's promise to Abram and Moses would never be fulfilled by the time that God's covenant with Israel ran out, when Roman legions conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 70.² Why not? Because God's promise had always been ethically conditional. It had always rested on obedience to God's commands, in-

1. See my Introduction to Joshua.

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

cluding His law. The Israelites had not obeyed.

B. Insufficient Obedience

Israel was an army of 600,000 fighting men when it invaded Canaan.

These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him (Num. 26:51–54).

It took 600,000 fighting men seven years to conquer Canaan. Even then, the conquest was incomplete. Numerous cities were never conquered. The Israelites let the Canaanites occupy their portion of the Promised Land. They taxed them instead of destroying them.³ They violated God's clear commandment.

And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth (Deut. 7:2–6).

God's command was clear: *genocide*. Nothing less would meet God's standards. The Israelites refused to obey. They substituted taxation for genocide. They concluded that having their civil government collect taxes was better than obeying God.

The ancient promise was not fulfilled. As it turned out, it would

3. "And they drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day, and serve under tribute" (Josh. 16:10). "Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out" (Josh. 17:13).

never be fulfilled. They would fall to conquerors from the Euphrates: Nebuchadnezzar. That defeat forever ended the political independence of Israel. The civil laws of Moses after that would never be enforced inside the nation of Israel.

They had been given the law by Moses immediately after their national covenant at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19).⁴ This was four decades before the conquest began. They had disinherited most of the Canaanites during the conquest. They inherited most of the Canaanites' land when the conquest ended. But they subsequently surrendered worship and then territory to their enemies. This set the pattern for Israel from then until the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They repeatedly were seduced by other gods and other nations. They were conquered by their enemies. They were repeatedly occupied by foreigners in the days of the judges. Then the northern kingdom (Israel) was carried off by Assyria. Over a century later, the southern kingdom (Judah) was carried off by Babylon in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Israelites were ruled by gentile kingdoms after a token number of them returned to the land of Israel from captivity: Medo-Persia, Macedonia, and Rome. They did not consistently obey God's law. Their courage ebbed and flowed. Their wealth ebbed and flowed.

C. The Division of the Land

The land of Canaan had to be allocated. "Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh" (Josh. 13:7).⁵ This raised the question: On what basis? "All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee" (Josh. 13:6). The initial distribution was by God's supernatural intervention: by lot. The exception was the tribe of Levi. "Only unto the tribe of Levi he gave none inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as he said unto them" (Josh. 13:14). Levites received tithes on the net out-

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

5. Two and a half tribes had received their inheritance on the far side of the Jordan River. "And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about" (Num. 32:33).

put of the other tribes' rural land rather than owning rural land themselves. "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num. 18:21). They would inherit 48 cities instead (Josh. 21:41). This allocation was made by the casting of lots (Josh. 21).

Tribe by tribe, the casting of lots distributed land. "By lot was their inheritance, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes, and for the half tribe" (Josh. 14:2).⁶ This was done under the authority of the civil head, the ecclesiastical head, and the tribal rulers. "And these are the countries which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed for inheritance to them" (Josh. 14:1). When the allocation was over, Joshua announced: "Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward" (Josh. 23:4).

What principle of land distribution governed the falling of the lots? The people did not ask. God did not say. The section in Joshua relating to the distribution of land and cities is the longest section in the Bible devoted to one corporate event. It extends from Joshua 13:6 through Joshua 22:8. The text is detailed in its description of which tribes received what. This record had to serve the nation for centuries, because family rural land was to remain in each family permanently: the jubilee year (Lev. 25).⁷ There was no system of longitude and latitude, no global positioning satellite system. This was as close as the Israelites could come to a precise description of tribal boundaries and captured cities. This became part of the Scriptural legacy, not just tablets stored in local archival collections. The records would persevere publicly down through the centuries.

There were local records of family plots. We know this because of the written arrangements that Jeremiah made with his cousin regarding the sale of family land.

And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver.
And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and

6. Joshua 15:1; 16:1; 17:1–2, 14, 17; 18:11; 19:1, 10, 17, 24; 32, 40.

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land (Jer. 32:9–15).

D. Inheritance Requires Disinheritance

The Israelites inherited the land of Canaan. This inheritance was theirs on a covenantal basis. God told Abraham:

And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites (Gen. 15:15–21).⁸

God gave them the lands of these peoples. The transfer of this inheritance was to be by military conquest and total genocide. The collective deaths of the existing owners would verify a legal claim that had been established by covenant 475 years earlier. The transfer in the inheritance was by covenant. This transfer was *judicially definitive*. It would be accomplished *progressively*. This process included a time of slavery in Egypt. That was part of the terms of the covenant. “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance”

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

(Gen. 15:13–14). The Israelites took the inheritance of the firstborn sons of Egypt, who died on the night of the first Passover. “And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians” (Ex. 12:35–36). *Finally*, Israel inherited. “And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat” (Josh. 24:13). The capital of rival cultures became Israel’s.

This inheritance was a one-time event. Israel was not to become an empire. Different rules of warfare were in force outside of Canaan (Deut. 20:10–15).⁹ Once the final disinheritance of the residents of Canaan was accomplished, Israel was to conquer by example, not by military power.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).¹⁰

This is disinheritance of covenant-breakers’ property. The means of disinheritance today are two-fold: economic competition and spiritual conversion.

Conclusion

This section of the Book of Joshua marked the culmination of almost five centuries of hope. A people that had owned no land now owned it. They had long looked forward to this day. The terms of God’s covenant with Abraham had not been completed. The nation would now demonstrate whether it would maintain its part.

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).¹¹

The nation was supposed to extend its conquest eastward to the Euphrates River. It never attempted this or even mentioned the possibility. The Israelites gave up. They remained content to occupy a small slice of the Promised Land, sharing the land with a remnant of the Canaanites. God fulfilled part of His promise when He arranged the nation's transport to the Euphrates under Nebuchadnezzar. Most of the Jews remained in Persia, close to the Euphrates, after Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Israel. That was where they codified their oral tradition in the Babylonian Talmud, beginning in the second century A.D. until the late fifth century. This Talmud became definitive for Judaism. The much shorter and fragmentary Jerusalem Talmud did not.

Covenantal inheritance is always by disinheritance. Covenantal inheritance is a zero-sum game. The model in the Old Testament is Jacob's inheritance from Esau. Isaac told Esau that he had no blessing for him. The blessing had been given to Jacob (Gen. 27:37). Esau persisted. Isaac gave him a blessing of leftovers (vv. 39–40). This is what covenant-breakers receive progressively in history. They lose even this in eternity.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

CONCLUSION TO JOSHUA

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast (Josh. 1:3–4).

The text is clear: Israel was to conquer land all the way to the Euphrates River, 600 miles from Jerusalem. Yet Israel never got close to the Euphrates River until Babylon carried the nation into captivity. Except for a handful of returnees in the days of Ezra, 9 centuries after the exodus, there Israel remained. In short, God's prophecy to Abram, to Moses, and to Joshua never came true. Why not? Because the promise had always been ethically conditional. It had always rested on obedience to God's commands, including His law.

When Joshua spoke to them in his old age, God's promise was visibly incomplete:

Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you. Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the names of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day (Josh. 23:4–8).

He reminded the nation of the inheritance that God had provided for them. He warned them, as Moses had warned him, that they must be courageous and obey God's law. This was how they would demon-

strate to God and men that they worshipped the God of the covenant. They knew that the promise had not been fulfilled: “the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward.” From the great sea eastward to the Euphrates, the conquest was not only incomplete, it had not even been attempted.

They were given the tool of dominion by Moses: biblical law. They were given land to serve as a covenant-testing place, even as Adam and Eve had a covenant-testing place in the garden. The remainder of the historical books are an account of their performance.

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES

Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not (Jud. 2:16–22).

The Book of Judges is the story of four centuries of failure. From the beginning to the end, the Israelites refused to follow God's law. They repeatedly chased after the gods of the land, the local gods of Canaan. God repeatedly brought them under judgment through defeat by foreign nations. They did not learn from this experience.

God still refused to drive out the Canaanites. He had already refused. The Israelites' army of 600,000 took seven years to exterminate most of the Canaanites, but even under Joshua, some Canaanite cities survived.

The Book of Judges is about false worship and political oppression. The Israelites preferred false gods to the God of the Bible. They therefore showed a preference for tyranny over liberty.¹ Moses had made it

1. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva

plain that false worship would bring military defeat and economic losses (Deut. 28:15–68). The Israelites did not believe this. They did not believe it after four centuries of law-confirming negative corporate sanctions, from the death of Joshua to the anointing of Saul. Then they entered a new phase of nonbelief, which lasted until the captivity.

The Book of Judges has almost nothing relevant to say about economics. The one exception is the account of Jephthah's daughter. This account is unexplainable biblically without reference to one of the most obscure laws in the Mosaic code, the law governing vows to a priest.

JEPHTHAH'S DISINHERITED DAUGHTER

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering (Jud. 11:29–31).

The theocentric principle here is that a vow to God must be kept (Num. 30). This is point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. A Unique Vow

First, the Spirit of God was on Jephthah. Second, he made a vow to God. Third, God gave him the victory he desired. If the vow was foolish, then why did the Spirit of God direct him to make it? If the vow was immoral, the same question applies. Also this question arises: Why did God give him the victory?

What did he expect would come out of the door of his house? A lamb? A bullock? He knew it would be his daughter.

1. *Burnt Offering, Votive Offering*

What was the meaning of the phrase, “burnt offering”? It meant placing a dead animal on the altar of God (Lev. 1).² Is there any case in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 1.

the Bible of such a lawful sacrifice of a human being? No. The Mosaic law said this: “And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD” (Lev. 18:21).

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch” (Deut. 18:10). God announced this through Jeremiah:

But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence (Jer. 32:34–36).

Then what did “burnt offering” mean in this context? It meant a permanent offering to God, a *votive offering*. A votive offering was associated with a vow to God. It was irreversible. The model was a burnt offering, which was irreversible.

To understand what was at stake, we need to consider one of the most obscure laws in the Mosaic law.

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation. And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels. And if it be from five years old even unto twenty years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male twenty shekels, and for the female ten shekels. And if it be from a month old even unto five years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male five shekels of silver, and for the female thy estimation shall be three shekels of silver. And if it be from sixty years old and above; if it be a male, then thy estimation shall be fifteen shekels, and for the female ten shekels. But if he be poorer than thy estimation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to his ability that vowed shall the priest value him (Lev. 27:2–8).

The rabbinical commentators do not do a better job than the

Christians in explaining this law, and the Christians are universally perplexed. It is obvious that vows were involved. Money payments were also involved. We need to answer two questions: What was the nature of the vow? What was the function of the money payment?

2. *What Is a Vow?*

To begin to sort out this pair of problems, we must answer this question: What is a vow? Biblically, a vow is a lawful invocation of God's covenantal sanctions, positive and negative. To escape God's corporate negative sanctions, there must be individual vows of repentance: covenant renewal. Covenant renewal involves a public reaffirmation of God's covenant: His sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and triumph (historical and eschatological). These are the five points of the biblical covenant model.³ A lawful public affirmation of God's covenant always comes in the form of a vow. In order to set oneself apart judicially before God, one takes a vow. Vows necessarily involve sanctions. They are self-maledictory oaths that invoke God's sanctions, positive and negative. Formal judicial separation is based on a vow; it always points to God's sanctions in history. This is why holiness (point three of the biblical covenant model) points to judgment (point four).

The vows in this instance were ecclesiastical. The Hebrew word that describes these vows, *pawlaw*, is translated here as "singular." The translation itself is singular: *pawlaw* is translated as "singular" in the King James Version only in this singular verse. It is elsewhere translated as "marvelous," "wondrous," or "separate." Lawful vows are always out of the ordinary, and these vows were very special vows among vows. They were marvelous vows. The question is: In what way?

Commentators argue about the possible reasons for the placement of this chapter at the end of Leviticus. Why should a section on vows appear at the end of a book on holiness? Gordon Wenham wrote: "It is a puzzle why ch. 27, which deals with vows, should appear in its present position, since ch. 26 with its blessings and curses would have made a fitting conclusion to the book."⁴ He offered two possible explanations, neither of them convincing.

I suggest the following explanation: the end of Leviticus marks a

3. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, chaps. 1–5.

4. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 336.

transition from a book that centers on point three of the biblical covenant—holiness, boundaries—to a book that centers on point four: oaths, sanctions. But what about part five of the book, inheritance? Here is the central theme of this passage: the loss of inheritance in one tribe in exchange for inheritance in another tribe.

The previous chapter, Leviticus 26, deals with God's positive and negative corporate sanctions in history. The move from an emphasis on point four of the biblical covenant—sanctions—in chapter 26 to point five—succession—in chapter 27 is appropriate.⁵ Negative sanctions in the context of chapter 26 have to do with disinheritance. Chapter 26 presents a catalogue of God's corporate covenantal sanctions. Chapter 27 begins with rules governing a particular type of personal vow. This in turn raises the issue of covenantal continuity. Jordan wrote: "Payment of vows relates to the fifth commandment, as we give to our Divine parent and thereby honor Him, and to the tenth commandment, since payment of vows and tithes is the opposite of covetousness. Thus, this final section of Leviticus has everything to do with continuity."⁶ The passage is where it belongs: in part five. The vow relates to inheritance: family continuity over time.

B. Devoted to Temple Service: Irreversible

The text does not tell us what stipulations governed this type of vow. The text also does not provide a context. This is why the commentators get so confused. The old line about "text without context is pretext" is applicable.

1. Addressed to Priests

The law was addressed to priests: "the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation." Whose estimation? The priests. Anything dedicated to the Lord is assumed by commentators to have been dedicated to or through the priesthood. The text is silent about the nature of the dedication; it speaks only of pricing. A gift of individuals was in some way involved, because specific prices are associated in the text with specific genders and ages.

Wenham discussed this law as symbolic of a man's willingness to pledge himself or those under his authority as temple slaves. The vow-

5. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 17. (<http://bit.ly/jjcovseq>)

6. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

taker could not really serve God in this way, Wenham argued. Access to the temple was reserved to Levites and priests.⁷ Once the vow was made, Wenham said, the person who had made it was required to redeem himself and any other people under the vow's authority by making an appropriate payment to the temple. These singular vows specifically invoked mandatory payments. "To free themselves from the vow, they had instead to pay to the sanctuary the price they would have commanded in the slave market."⁸ Once made, the vow had to be paid. He cited Psalm 116: "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people" (Ps. 116:14–18).⁹ This was David's affirmation of the law of vows, which stated: "But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth" (Deut. 23:22–23).¹⁰

We need to answer two questions. First, was Wenham correct about the exclusively symbolic nature of this type of vow? Second, was he correct about the payment as a substitute for literal temple service? Most commentators have agreed with Wenham on this point. I do not. I argue that the terms of the vow were not symbolic, and the payment was not a substitute.

2. *Devotion: Change in Legal Status*

In the case of heathen slaves, Israelites possessed lawful title to the slave and the slave's heirs (Lev. 25:44–45).¹¹ There is no reason to assume that an Israelite could not transfer ownership of his slave to an individual priest or to the temple. The tabernacle-temple already employed permanent pagan slaves: the Gibeonites. They were the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the assembly; hence, they were in-

7. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 338.

8. *Idem*.

9. *Idem*.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 58.

11. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 30.

volved in religious service. This *permanent temple slavery* had been specifically imposed on them by Joshua as a curse: “Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God” (Josh. 9:23). They were permanently set apart—devoted—for temple service. This was the result of their deception in gaining the vow of peace from Joshua (Josh. 9). The covenantal blessing—peace in the land—because of the Gibeonites’ deception became their covenantal curse: permanent slavery under the priests. They had escaped God’s covenantal ban of *hormah*—either their total destruction or their permanent expulsion from the land—but they could not escape His covenantal ban of temple servitude. *Hormah* (*chormah*) means “devoted.” Its frame of reference was God’s total destruction: “And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah” (Num. 21:3). A city devoted to total destruction was under *hormah*: a total ban. This destruction was a priestly act.¹²

I conclude that there is nothing in the Mosaic Covenant to indicate that pagan slaves could not be assigned to temple service even though they could not lawfully assist with the sacrifices. They were not allowed inside those temple boundaries that were lawfully accessible only to priests, but they still could work for the priests outside these boundaries. Thus, a symbolic transfer of ownership of a pagan slave to the priests is not the concern of this passage. The deciding issue contextually cannot be priestly ownership as such. The issue is also not the dedication or sanctification of household slaves. There was nothing special in Israel about the dedication of household slaves—nothing “singular.” It has to be something more fundamental: service within the normally sealed boundaries of the temple.

Then who were the vow-governed individuals of Leviticus 27:2–8? They were family members under the lawful authority of the vow-taker. The vow was a specific kind of vow, a vow of devotion. Devotion here was not an emotional state; it was a change in judicial status.

3. Devotion vs. Sanctification

At this point, I must introduce a crucial distinction of the Mosaic law: devotion vs. sanctification. A sanctified item was set apart for

12. On “*hormah*,” see James B. Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), pp. 10–12.

God's use, though not necessarily on a permanent basis. A devoted thing was set apart permanently for priestly service or sacrifice. This distinction is based on the law that appears later in Leviticus:

Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death (Lev. 27:28–29).

Death here was not necessarily physical death; it was, however, necessarily covenantal death. This meant that the devoted item was placed within the irreversible boundaries of God's ban. This form of *covenantal death* meant that the item was *beyond human redemption*. The devoted object came under God's absolute control. In many passages in Scripture, the Hebrew word for "devoted" (*khayrem*) is translated as "accursed" or "cursed." Such a cursed item could not be used for anything other than sacrifice to God. If it was subsequently misused—violated or profaned, in other words—the person who violated God's boundary himself came under the ban: beyond human redemption.

And the city [Jericho] shall be **accursed**, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves **accursed**, when ye take of the **accursed** thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it (Josh. 6:17–18).

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the **accursed** thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the **accursed** thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel (Josh. 7:1).¹³

But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been **utterly destroyed**, to sacrifice unto

13. Because Achan had violated the holy ban that God placed around Jericho's spoils, he placed his whole household under the ban. It was legally possible for a father to place his family under God's ban—disinheritance from the family's land and legal status—through covenantal adoption into the priesthood. But in this case, Achan placed his family under *hormah*: God's absolute ban of destruction. As the head of his household, he went through an adoption process: not into the tribe of Levi, but rather into covenantal Jericho. Thus, it was mandatory that the civil government execute his entire household, including the animals, and bury all his assets with them (Josh. 7:24).

the LORD thy God in Gilgal (I Sam. 15:21).

It is worth noting that this Hebrew word is the very last word that occurs in the Old Testament, in the passage that prophesies the coming of Elijah (John the Baptist), the man Jesus identified as the last man of the Old Covenant.¹⁴ “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5–6). This was God’s threatened negative sanction: covenantal disinheritance—fathers vs. sons—that involved God’s curse on Old Covenant Israel. As Jesus later warned: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household” (Matt. 10:34–36).

The devoted item could not be redeemed by the payment of a price. It had been *permanently transferred covenantally to God as a sacrificial offering*. This is the meaning of the singular vow. The singular vow was a vow whose stipulations were irrevocable. The devoted item was placed within the confines of an absolutely holy boundary: beyond human redemption. The vow was voluntary; the resulting transfer was irrevocable: a singular vow.

4. Devotion Through Adoption

Could an Israelite lawfully devote his child to priestly service? Yes; as we shall see, Jephthah’s daughter was pledged by her father. Once a person was adopted into the family of Aaron specifically or into the tribe of Levi, he could not re-enter another Israelite tribe by a subsequent act of adoption. He had been devoted to the temple: beyond redemption. So had his covenantal heirs. If I am correct about this, then in the context of marriage—another form of legal adoption¹⁵—there was no option for an Israelite father to buy back his daughter from her priestly husband by returning the bride price to his son-in-law.¹⁶ Similarly, there was no way for a man to buy back himself, his

14. “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16).

15. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 31:B.

16. The dowry remained with the wife in any case; it was her protection, her inheritance from her father.

wife, or his children from formally devoted service to God. In short, there was no redemption price for this kind of vow. This is why the vow was *pawlaw*: “singular.”

There is no indication that a man could place his adult male children into mandated priestly service. An adult son was not eligible for compulsory adoption. He was a lawful heir to the land and the legal status of his tribe and family. He could not be disinherited at his father’s prerogative. The crucial legal issue for identifying adulthood for men was military numbering. An adult male was eligible to be numbered at age 20 to fight in a holy war: “This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD” (Ex. 30:13). At age 20, a man came under the threat of God’s negative sanctions: going into battle without first having paid blood money to the temple.¹⁷ Once he became judicially eligible for numbering as a member of his tribe, he became judicially responsible for his own vows. He became, as we say, “his own man.” He became a member of God’s holy army. A father could no longer act in the son’s name.

C. A Disinherited Daughter

A daughter could not legally be numbered for service in God’s army. Thus, an unmarried daughter could be delivered into a priestly family, as we see in the peculiar case of Jephthah’s daughter.¹⁸ Jephthah’s vow to sacrifice the first thing to come out of his house could not legally be applied literally to a person. He could not lawfully burn a person, nor could the priests; therefore, any person who came under the terms of such a lawful vow had to be devoted to God in temple service.¹⁹ Jephthah had made a singular vow. It was irreversible. This means that his daughter had to be disinherited.²⁰ She was beyond redemption.

There was a distinction in Mosaic law between someone or something dedicated (sanctified) to the priesthood and someone or something devoted to the priesthood. The former could be redeemed by the payment of the market price plus a premium of one-fifth (Lev. 27:13,

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 58.

18. I accept the standard interpretation of this story: she was not literally executed by her father.

19. Jordan, *Judges*, pp. 204–13.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

15, 19).²¹ The latter could not be redeemed.

Disinheritance was permanent in Mosaic Israel. This could only be by covenant: specifically, by covenantal death. This is why disinheritance was a form of devoted giving. The head of the household publicly gave his heirs over to God. He²² publicly broke the family's covenant with such a person. There were only three means of lawful disinheritance in Old Covenant Israel: civil execution for a capital crime, expulsion from the congregation for an ecclesiastical crime, or adoption into another family or tribe. All three involved broken covenants: civil, ecclesiastical, and familial. In the third instance, the broken family covenant was simultaneously replaced by a new family or tribal covenant. A daughter was normally disinherited by her father in this way, and if she was to become a wife rather than a concubine, she was to receive a dowry from her father.²³

D. Virginity and Disinheritance

Jephthah's daughter was disinherited in a unique way: by legal transfer into a priestly family. She bewailed her virginity (Jud. 11:37) because this was the mark of her unmarried condition, and therefore of her eligibility for transfer into the tribe of Levi apart from her own will. The standard interpretation of the story of Jephthah's daughter rests on the assertion that as a temple servant, she would have had to remain a virgin.²⁴ I am aware of no evidence from the Book of Leviticus or any other biblical text regarding the mandatory and therefore permanent virginity of female temple servants. Then why did she bewail her virginity? Not because she was bewailing her supposed future virginity, but because she was bewailing her present virginity. It was her virginity that bound her to the terms of her father's vow; otherwise, her husband's authority would have negated the father's vow.

Jephthah's daughter was, as the phrase goes, "her daddy's girl": a dynasty-coveting power-seeker. When her virginity cost her the inheritance of her father's political dynasty, she bewailed her virginity. Her heart was not right with God. What was an enormous honor—adoption into the tribe of Levi, the spiritual counsellors of the nation—she

21. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36.

22. Or, in the case of a widow (Num. 30:9), she. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

23. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 32.

24. Jordan takes this approach: *Judges*, p. 210.

saw as a thing to bewail in the mountains for two months (Jud. 11:37).

Jordan raised this question: “Why didn’t Jephthah substitute a money payment for his vow? These monetary substitutes are set out in Leviticus 27:1–8.”²⁵ He said that commentators who have addressed this question have no easy explanation for it. He referred to Leviticus 27:28–29: “Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death.” Thus, he concluded, Jephthah’s daughter could not be redeemed. “Since Jephthah vowed to offer this person as a whole burnt sacrifice, we realize that he was ‘devoting’ him or her to the Lord, and thus no ransom was possible.”²⁶ This is the correct interpretation.²⁷ But this answer raises a more important question: If she could not legally be redeemed from this vow of temple service, how could anyone be redeemed from a vow of temple service? If the answer is that no person could be redeemed from such a singular vow under Mosaic law—and this is the correct answer—then what are we to make of Leviticus 27:2–8?²⁸ What was the meaning of all those prices?

E. Not a Redemption Price

In the section of Leviticus 27 that follows this one, we read of the redemption price of animals that are set apart (sanctified) to be offered as sacrifices (vv. 9–13). Then, in the section following that one, we read of the redemption price of a house sanctified to the priesthood (vv. 14–15). Finally, in the next section, the laws governing sanctified fields are listed (vv. 16–25). In the second and third cases, the term “sanctify” (*kawdash*, holy) is used.²⁹ In all three cases, the redemption price was

25. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 206–7.

27. Jordan pointed out to me that the only other use of *pawlaw*—“singular,” as in singular vow—in the hiphil voice is found in Numbers 6:2, which relates to a Nazirite vow: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk” (Num. 6:2–4).

28. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 35.

29. In the first case, sacrificial animals, the cognate term for “sanctify” is used: *kodesh*, holy (vv. 9, 10).

the market price at the time of the redemption plus 20% (vv. 13, 15, 19).

Then comes Leviticus 27:26: “Only the firstling of the beasts, which should be the LORD’S firstling, no man shall sanctify it; whether it be ox, or sheep: it is the LORD’S.” This law specifically denies the legitimacy of sanctifying the animal. This means that no redemption of the animal was legal. It was a devoted animal, not a sanctified animal. Sanctification in this context meant “set apart until redeemed.” This legal condition was less rigorous than devotion. Devotion meant that the legal boundary around the object was permanent. The same is true of the vow of Leviticus 27:2–8. In this passage, there is no mention of a supplemental payment of one-fifth. This is evidence that what is being considered in verses 2–8 is not a series of redemption prices. Then what does this section refer to?

The preliminary answer was given in 1846 by Andrew Bonar. He concluded that the list of prices in Leviticus 27:2–8 is not a list of redemption prices. “There seems to me a mistake generally fallen into here by commentators. They suppose that these shekels of money were paid in order to free the offerers from the obligation of devoting the person. Now, surely, the whole chapter is speaking of things truly devoted to God, and cases of exchange and substitution are referred to in ver. 10, 13, 15. As for persons devoted, there was no substitution allowed. The mistake has arisen from supposing that this amount of money was ransom-money; whereas it was an addition to the offering of the person, not a substitution.” He pointed to the case of Jephthah’s daughter as evidence.³⁰

Bonar explained the additional monetary payment in terms of the giver’s gratitude. A person who was really grateful to God, he said, would add money to the transfer. This misses the judicial point. What we have here is *an entry fee*: a payment analogous to a marriage dowry. A person who desired to transfer himself or a member of his family into the tribe of Levi had to provide a “dowry”—not to the family, but to the temple.³¹ Why a dowry? Because, theologically speaking, the bride of God is not a concubine. She is a free wife. The free wife in Israel had to be provided with a dowry. Judicially speaking, the Levites

30. Andrew Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1846] 1966), p. 497.

31. This does not mean that the money could never go to the adopting family. Officers of the temple might choose to transfer the funds to an adopting family for various reasons, such as the education of young children who had been adopted, or the care of older people.

were freemen in Israel. For anyone within another tribe to become a member of the tribe of Levi, the person's family—the head of the household—had to offer an additional payment. This payment was judicial. It established the person's legal status: a freeman (wife) rather than a slave (concubine).

Members of the tribe of Levi could not normally own rural land outside of 48 specified cities (Num. 35:7).³² Thus, any person who was delivered by a vow and payment into temple service lost his or her claim to his or her ancestral land. We see this in the case of Jephthah's daughter, in an incident that has confused Bible commentators for centuries. As his only child (Jud. 11:34), she was the lawful heir of his land and its accompanying legal status, but only so long as she did not marry outside his tribe (Num. 35:6–9).³³ By being adopted into the tribe of Levi, she could not thereafter marry outside of the tribe of Levi. Thus, she had to forfeit her inheritance from Jephthah. She could not extend her father's dynasty, a point Jordan made.³⁴ A father alienated his family's inheritance forever from his heirs if his male children were under age 20 or his daughters were unmarried at the time he made his vow. This did not mean that they lost their legal status as freemen; Levites possessed freeman status. But the heirs did lose their claim on the family's land.

Could the priest annul the vow? Yes. There was no compulsion that he adopt someone into his family. The vow was analogous to the vow of a daughter or married woman: it could be annulled within 24 hours by the male head of the household (Num. 30:3–8). The priests, acting in God's name, as the heads of God's ecclesiastical household, could lawfully annul someone's vow of adoption into the tribe. But if the vow was accepted by a priest in authority, the vow-taker and any other members of his family covered by his vow were then adopted into the tribe of Levi if they could pay the entry fee. Once adopted by the priest's family, there was no way back into non-Levitical freeman-ship in Israel. At the time of the adoption, the adopted family's original inheritance had been forfeited to the kinsman-redeemer, the closest relative in their original tribe (Num. 27:9–11).³⁵ They could retain their

32. There were two exceptions: (1) when a family dedicated a piece of land to the priesthood and then refused to redeem it before the next jubilee year; (2) when a family dedicated a piece of land to the priesthood but then leased the whole property to someone else (Lev. 27:16–21); North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36.

33. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 22.

34. Jordan, *Judges*, p. 205.

35. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 15.

status as freemen only as members of the tribe of Levi. Their family land was no longer part of their inheritance. But the males were still members of God's holy army. They were still citizens.

F. The Kinsman-Redeemer

Leviticus 27:2–8 is the passage governing the conditions of adoption into the tribe of Levi. There had to be a payment—the equivalent of a dowry—to the temple.³⁶ In the case of a slave, his owner had to provide the funds. If the adoptee was the head of a household, he had to make the payment on his own behalf, or else find someone to make it for him.

Who was the most likely person to make the payment for him if he could not afford to pay? Both judicially and economically, there is little doubt: the kinsman-redeemer. He would inherit title to the land left behind by a newly adopted family. The entry price was high; no one else was likely to have the same incentive to make so large a payment. This points to the work of Christ as the Kinsman-Redeemer of Israel and mankind. He has paid the fee for all those who are adopted into the New Covenant priesthood. No one else has either the incentive or the ability to pay this price. In His case, the incentive is not economic, for two reasons. First, Jesus Christ already is God the Father's lawful heir in history and eternity. He will inherit everything. Second, the entry price is too high—far beyond the very high price of 50 shekels in Old Covenant Israel. The price is the death of the Kinsman-Redeemer. His motivation was grace, not profit. Christians inherit as heirs of their Kinsmen-Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Everyone else is eternally disinherited.

Verse 8 reads: "But if he be poorer than thy estimation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to his ability that vowed shall the priest value him." The high priest, Jesus Christ, has paid the maximum price for each of His saints—those set apart by God judicially for priestly service. Entering

36. I do not think the price was paid to Levite families. Had the money gone to individual families, there would have been a strong motivation for Levites to recruit new members of the tribe. The entry fee was to serve as a barrier to entry, not a motivation to recruit new members. If the money went directly to the temple, local Levites would have had far less incentive to recruit non-Levites into the tribe. Aaronic priests would have possessed a veto over adoption: the men with the greatest authority in Israel. Adoption in this case was tribal, not familial, analogous to circumcised resident aliens who were adopted into tribal cities if they were accepted to serve in God's holy army.

with nothing of our own, we do not need to plead before a priest for a lower entry fee. The high priest has paid it all.

G. Annulled

If this analysis is correct, then it should be obvious that this law has been annulled with the New Covenant's change in the priesthood. The passage's variations in price—young vs. old, male vs. female—have nothing to do with economic productivity. They are irrelevant for the economic analysis of labor markets. They were equally irrelevant for such analytical purposes under the Mosaic Covenant.

The prices listed in Leviticus 27:2–8 were not redemption prices; they were *entry barrier prices*. They were not based on the expected economic productivity of people who were then immediately redeemed out of God's ecclesiastical service; they were based on the need to screen power-seekers and security-seekers from access to ecclesiastical service. *They were not market prices; they were judicial prices*. They were not barriers to escape from ecclesiastical service; they were barriers to entry into ecclesiastical service. Thus, rather than applying economic analysis to the productivity of the groups specified in Leviticus 27:2–8, we should apply economic analysis to the question of the judicial boundary separating the tribe of Levi from the other tribes.

Conclusion

This passage is not about human sacrifice. It is about adoption: Jephthah's daughter became a Levite. It is about a transfer of inheritance: from Jephthah's daughter to his nearest of kin, his kinsman-redeemer. It is about the disinheritance of his family line in Israel.

The story of Jephthah's daughter is the story of *disinheritance through adoption* into the tribe of the Levites. The Levites could not legally own rural land in Israel. By offering her as a burnt offering—irrevocable adoption by the Levites—Jephthah disinherited her.

CONCLUSION TO JUDGES

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Jud. 21:25).

God wanted a politically decentralized society. This is why He set up tribes. They controlled the land in their region. The local families could not lawfully be displaced from rural land for more than 49 years. This was the law of the jubilee year (Lev. 25).¹ It rested on the genocide of the conquest: the post-conquest distribution of rural land.

This was the way of God. God told Samuel to warn the Israelites about calling for a king. The king would oppress them (I Sam. 8:14–17).² The Israelites did not pay attention to Samuel's warning.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

2. Chapter 14.

INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust (Ruth 2:11–12).

The Book of Ruth presents the story of redemption. A Moabite woman was redeemed through covenantal adoption into a family of marginal covenant-keepers at best. Her mother-in-law was redeemed by the example of her daughter-in-law. An older man was elevated from obscurity to permanent fame by means of an act of grace that normally would have left him in obscurity.

It is a book about the importance of the family covenant in Mosaic Israel—an importance that exceeded both wealth and biological heirship. It is a book about an obscure Mosaic law that twice was central to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is a book about grace and self-sacrifice for the sake of the dead. It is a book about loyalty.

The Book of Ruth should remind us that it is better to make our decisions in terms of God's covenant than in terms of wealth. It is best to place our wealth at the service of the kingdom of God. We should place our poverty there, too.

8

LOST HOPE

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years (Ruth 1:1–4).

The theocentric principle here is God's covenant, which includes inheritance.¹

This family left Israel to journey to Moab. Moab was a covenantally perverse nation. It had its origin in the sin of incest. Moab was the son of the scheming firstborn daughter of Lot and her drunken father (Gen. 19:37). The daughters of Lot had lost hope in God's inheritance. They committed a grievous sin to gain inheritance on their terms.

Moabites had long been hostile to the Israelites. They had opposed the Israelites during the wilderness period (Num. 22–25). This led to a curse on them.

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever (Deut. 23:3–6).

To go to Moab for deliverance meant trusting in the gods of Moab. God told the Israelites not to seek the Moabites' peace and prosperity. Yet here was a family leaving Israel for residence in Moab in search of prosperity. This family had no faith in God.

The father died. The sons stayed for 10 years. They married Moabite women. Then they both died intestate. They never thought to return home. They looked to their future in Moab as the way to prosperity. Their inheritance would be in Moab. They were wrong.

When the sons died, their widowed mother decided to return home, but only because of good economic news from back home. "Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6). It was not God's covenant that lured her back; it was bread.

Her daughters-in-law went with her. She allowed this for part of the journey. Then she changed her mind.

And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people (Ruth 1:8–10).

She expected them to remarry. She did not comprehend that *they had subordinated themselves covenantally to the God of Israel through their marriages*. She regarded their covenants with God as broken with the death of her sons. One daughter protested, but then took her advice. The other, Ruth, refused to be sent back into the land of Moab's gods. "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16–17). Ruth understood the marriage covenant. She had been adopted by marriage into the household of a covenant-keeper. Her sister-in-law did not understand this. Her sister-in-law was as theologically ignorant as her mother-in-law was.

Naomi was a bitter woman. She saw the covenant only in terms of negative sanctions and biological inheritance.

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? (Ruth 1:19–21).

She had no faith in the future because she was too old to have children. She had told the two women, “Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband” (Ruth 1:12a). She failed to understand the central fact of the covenant after the Fall of man: *redemption by adoption*. Ruth had been redeemed by adoption—by God’s special grace and by her marriage vow. Her sister-in-law had not been redeemed, and so failed to honor the adoption. We are not told how Ruth learned this—surely not from her husband or mother-in-law.

Conclusion

The Book of Ruth is the great book in the Bible on redemption by adoption. A Moabite woman understood the doctrine. A family of Israelites did not. The contrast could not have been sharper.

Ruth and Boaz were the means by which Naomi was restored to faith. This restoration was grounded in a strange Mosaic law: the law we call the Levirate marriage. The word comes from “levir,” the Latin word for brother-in-law.

9

GLEANING

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter (Ruth 2:1–2).

Naomi and her sons did not return to Israel for a decade after the death of Elimilech (Ruth 1:4). Sometime between Naomi's departure from Israel and her return, Boaz became wealthy as a farmer. Elimilech's family remained outside of Bethlehem, yet they could have returned. The famine had subsided. They chose instead to remain in Moab. This showed a remarkable lack of faith in God.

A. The Gleaning Law

Ruth proposed that she go into the fields to serve as a gleaner. Naomi did not suggest this. This indicates the Ruth understood the implications of the law of gleaning better than Naomi did.

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:9–10).¹

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 11.

thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing (*Deut. 24:19–22*).²

The gleaning law was designed to protect the poor in rural locations. They had a moral claim on the leftovers of the land. The owners were not to strip a field bare of grain, or to strip the olive crop. The leftovers that fell to the ground would feed the very poor.

This system relied on the fact that gleaning produced a low return on invested time. A person so poor as to be reduced to gleaning had no higher output line of work available. Stooping in a field to pick up grain that the harvesters had missed was a low-productivity endeavor. Anyone who was dependent on food collected in this way had no better opportunity. This was a welfare program for the exceptionally poor.

The cost to the land owner was minimal. The extra time and work required to harvest fallen grain would not earn a high return. A man rich enough to hire harvesters was not poor. The economic return on the initial sweep across the fields was high. A second sweep would have been a low-return assignment. It was a better use of the harvesters' time to go on to the next section of the field, where the average return per investment of time and capital was high. The average return on the land itself was less. But the loss was minimal because of the low return on work expended. A harvester working on commission would not have wanted to spend time going through a field a second time. The gleaning law was advantageous to him. The owner would not assign the slim pickings to harvesters.

B. Ruth's Subordination

Ruth was in the right place at the right time. "And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap[penstance] was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech" (*Ruth 2:3*). Boaz showed up when she was in the field (v. 4). "Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?" (v. 5). The servant said that she was a woman of Moab who had returned with Naomi (v. 6). She then

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

asked permission of Boaz to glean in his field (v. 7). This indicates that the owner of the crop had the right to include some and exclude others. Boaz told her to glean only in his fields (v. 8). He also provided a social covering for her. "Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?" (v. 9b).

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore (Ruth 2:10–11).

Boaz understood that Ruth had covenanted with the God of Israel by returning to Israel when she was not required to. Her commitment to Naomi indicated that she had made a definitive break from the gods of Moab. He understood that Ruth was covenanted to God through Naomi. She had subordinated herself to God by subordinating herself to Naomi. Boaz made this clear to her. "The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12). He saw her as under the covenant and therefore a lawful recipient of God's positive sanctions. She was grateful. "Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens" (v. 13). Boaz then went above and beyond the call of duty.

And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not (Ruth 2:14–15).

He had begun the process of dealing with her as a kinsman-redeemer deals with a poor relative. He dealt with her as the widow of a near kinsman. He would have done the same for Naomi, but Naomi had not subordinated herself as a gleaner.

Ruth had not known that Boaz was a near kinsman. That became clear only when she took the grain back to Naomi.

And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen (vv. 19–20).

Naomi told her to stay in Boaz's fields (v. 21). Ruth took her advice (v. 21).

Conclusion

Gleaning was a good way for land owners to provide protection to very poor people in the local community. It was hard work. It was low productivity work. Anyone choosing to be a gleaner had no better opportunities. Gleaning would have been no one's first choice of occupations.

One of the advantages of gleaning was that a hard-working person would have been seen by harvesters and perhaps even the land owner. Owners are always on the lookout for efficient, honest employees. Gleaning provided the close contact required by an owner to identify exceptionally good workers. Boaz spotted Ruth from the beginning.

10

THE MATCHMAKER

Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do (Ruth 3:1–4).

A. The Family Name

The theocentric principle here was the preservation of the family's God-designated name. Under the Mosaic law, a man who died without a child would lose his name in Israel. His land would be inherited by his next of kin, who was also known as the kinsman-redeemer and the blood-avenger. The Mosaic law had a way to overcome this form of disinheritance.

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit

in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed (Deut. 25:5–10).¹

Naomi recognized that Boaz was a near kinsman of her dead son, Mahlon, who had died intestate. Ruth was the widow. Had Mahlon lived in close proximity to his brother in Israel, each would have been responsible to fulfill this requirement. But they did not live in Israel. They both died intestate. This excused the nearest male relative from having a child with Ruth. She lived in Moab.

Upon her return, this changed. The land that had belonged to Elimilech would go to the nearest male relative at Naomi's death. There were no grandsons to inherit. The land would not go to Orpah, who had returned to Moab. It would not go to Ruth, a Moabite woman who was not part of the covenant line. Only through marriage to the nearest of kin could Elimilech's name be preserved in Israel. Otherwise, his land and name would automatically become the possession of the kinsman-redeemer at her death. That would be his inheritance.

Naomi was at long last beginning to think covenantally. Had she decided in Moab to pursue this plan of action, she would not have tried to send back her sons' wives. Either of them could have secured her husband's name by marrying Elimilech's nearest of kin.

B. Naomi's Plan

Naomi saw a way out of this situation. If Boaz would marry Ruth, the name of Elimilech might be preserved in Israel. So might the name of Mahlon. Both men had died outside the land, but through the family's land, the family's name could still be preserved. This was only possible if the nearest of kin decided to marry Ruth. As it turned out, Boaz was not the nearest of kin. Naomi must have known this. She also must have known that the nearest of kin would have no incentive to marry Ruth. This was not required of him. Mahlon was not his brother, nor had they lived in close proximity. But if Boaz could be persuaded to marry her, assuming the kinsman-redeemer refused, Boaz could serve as the kinsman-redeemer.

Naomi's plan was straightforward. Ruth should go to Boaz after he had drunk enough wine to make him interested in a good-looking wo-

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

man. Naomi understood a fundamental rule of marriage. "You marry the person who is most available when you are most vulnerable." Ruth would make herself available.

Because this was Naomi's idea, Ruth would be regarded at worst as an accomplice of a scheming woman. But, because of the law of the brothers, Naomi would not be regarded as a woman who was after Boaz's property. On the contrary, she was after her late husband's property. If Boaz married Ruth and had a child with her, this child would become Elimilech's heir, not Boaz's heir. Elimilech's name, not Boaz's name, would be preserved. Boaz's name would be preserved through Ruth's second and subsequent children. This would have nothing to do judicially with Naomi.

This form of marriage was by adoption. The wife was adopted into her husband's family. Ruth had been adopted by Mahlon. She was therefore in the family of Elimilech. But, without a child, her late husband's name would not be attached to land in Israel.

Ruth followed Naomi's plan.

And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman. And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:6–11).

This exchange reveals an important fact: Boaz was an older man. Ruth could have married a younger man. She must have been good looking. She choose him. This was not because of his physical appeal. It might have been for a more comfortable life, but she could have found some man to support her.

Why did this make her virtuous? Because she was acting on behalf of her late husband. She was honoring his name. She was subordinating her sexual interest for the sake of her late husband's name in Israel. This was an act of sacrifice on behalf of a dead man. This was a coven-

antly sacrificial decision.

C. The Marriage Law

We know that Boaz fully understood the implications of Ruth's offer of marriage. She did not make her proposal on her own authority, but on Naomi's. Naomi was acting to secure her husband's name through Ruth.

Boaz knew he was not Mahlon's kinsman-redeemer. There was a closer relative. He told her:

And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning (Ruth 3:12–13).

He understood that she was not after him and his money but rather her husband's memory in Israel. He knew that she was willing to allow the other man to father her child. He did not ask her if she would do this. He knew that she would do this. That was what the Mosaic law required to secure Elimilech's inheritance.

He gave her grain to take home as a token of his commitment (v. 15). She took it to Naomi, who knew by this offering that Boaz was ready to take action. "Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day" (v. 18).

Conclusion

The story of the midnight encounter is not a story of seduction. It is a story of inheritance. Ruth acted on behalf of her father-in-law's name and her husband's name. This was a covenantal motivation. There were other men available, but they could not secure her husband's name. She presented herself to Boaz on behalf of her dead husband. Boaz was sufficiently impressed to take the next step: to secure that inheritance for her husband. He was willing to risk doing without her in order to fulfill the terms of the Mosaic law. He knew he would lose her if the kinsman-redeemer accepted the obligation.

11

THE NAMESAKE'S INHERITANCE

And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it (Ruth 4:3–4).

The theocentric principle here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹ Who would inherit the land? That would depend on the degree of covenantal commitment.

A. An Offer of Land

Boaz told the kinsman-redeemer the truth, but not the whole truth. He presented the proposition in terms of land. The land would eventually go to the kinsman-redeemer by lawful inheritance. Naomi was childless. No heir of Elimelech would inherit.

Boaz acted on behalf of Elimelech, but in the name of Naomi. He said that she wanted to sell land that was part of the inheritance. The kinsman-redeemer could get possession of this land by buying it from her while she was still alive. If he refused, Boaz would buy it. This would not secure the land for himself permanently. He could use it until the jubilee year. Then the land would revert to Naomi. If she had died, it would have gone to the kinsman-redeemer. This assumes that the courts enforced the jubilee year. There is no evidence that this was ever done in pre-exilic Israel. If it was not enforced, then the kinsman-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

redeemer would still inherit it at her death. Boaz was making an offer to buy the use of the land until it legally was transferred to the kinsman-redeemer.

The kinsman-redeemer decided to buy it. He wanted the use of it. He would become its owner before Naomi died.

At this point, Boaz provided additional information.

Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it (Ruth 4:5–6).

1. A Different Inheritance

The obligation to perform the levirate² marriage changed the economics of the arrangement. The kinsman-redeemer would not inherit the land. His child would. The child would legally be the child of Mahlon. Mahlon's name would persevere. The land would not become the kinsman-redeemer's. It would become his biological child's, who would not be his judicial child. Whatever money he paid Naomi for the land would become her possession. The land would become his biological child's possession, but Mahlon's name would attach to it. So committed to inheritance and name was the kinsman-redeemer that he turned down the offer. He could have had the use of the land until the jubilee year, or at least until he died. But name was more important than economics—for the kinsman-redeemer, for Naomi, for Ruth, and for Boaz.

Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day (Ruth 4:7–10).

2. "Levir": Latin for brother-in-law.

Consider the reason offered by the kinsman for not marrying Ruth. It had to do with his own inheritance. "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it."³ He had hoped to inherit the land of his heirless deceased brother.³ His sister-in-law was too old to bear children. He was therefore willing to buy it from Naomi before she died. This would have given her money to live on. The land would have come to him eventually. But Boaz was proposing something else. If Boaz married Ruth, and if Ruth gave birth, then Elimelech's land would pass to the child of Ruth, who would become the family's firstborn son. This land would be part of the legacy of Ruth's dead husband.

Because of Boaz's willingness to become Ruth's husband, the closer kinsman could gain control over Naomi's land only by marrying Ruth. But if she bore him an heir, he could not pass this land to any other children by an existing marriage. The land would pass to Ruth's firstborn child. Assuming that he was single, and assuming that he married Ruth, the land owned by Elimelech could not become his namesake's land; it would become Elimelech's namesake's land: Ruth's firstborn child. His own flesh and blood would inherit this land, but *this biological heir would not be his judicial namesake*. So powerful was the concept of family name in Israel that the man turned down an opportunity to purchase land that his biological heir would eventually inherit.

2. Marriage

For the existing kinsman to lose the inheritance from Elimelech through Naomi, another kinsman had to marry Ruth. Ruth could never possess an inheritance in Israel to leave to her firstborn except through the decision of a kinsman of her late husband to adopt her as a wife. Without Ruth's marriage to a kinsman of Elimelech, the land would automatically pass at Naomi's death to Elimelech's nearest of kin, i.e., Elimelech's kinsman-redeemer.

The existing kinsman-redeemer had to approve of this transfer, which was why Boaz assembled elders as witnesses. The existing kinsman-redeemer could retain his claim on the inheritance only by marrying Ruth and then having Ruth remain barren, as she had been in Moab. If she bore a child who lived long enough to bear children to inherit, the existing kinsman-redeemer and his heirs could not inherit

3. The brother had fathered two sons, but both had died without children.

this land. He decided that this marriage was not worth the added economic risk. If he married Ruth, and she bore him a child, all of the capital that he would invest into the land would become part of another man's covenant line. It would be his biological child's family line, but not his family name's line. This is evidence that blood lines in Israel were regarded as less important than covenant lines. *Family name was more important in Israel than biological generation.*

B. Name Above Biology

This is an extremely important theological point. Rahab the former harlot and Ruth the Moabite were adopted into their husbands' covenant lines. This adoption was by oath: a marriage oath. Through them came David the king and Jesus, who was a greater king than David. Through two foreign women, the covenant line was extended. More to the point, through these women the supreme covenant line in Israel was extended: Judah's. Most to the point, through them the promised Seed was born (Matt. 1:5, 16). The crucial covenant line was preserved through marriage, and, in Ruth's case, levirate marriage to the biological heir of Rahab: Boaz (Matt. 1:5).

1. The New Kinsman-Redeemer

Boaz became the kinsman-redeemer of Elimelech's line. He did this by marrying Ruth, a former gentile. Only through his marriage to Ruth could he serve as the kinsman-redeemer of Elimelech's line. That is, Boaz, as an heir in the line of Judah and, as it turned out, progenitor of Jesus the redeemer, exercised this office by marrying a Moabite. Moabite males took 10 generations to become citizens (Deut. 23:3). As heirs of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his firstborn daughter (Gen. 19:37), Moabites were regarded as far more perverse covenantally than Egyptians, who could become citizens in three generations (Deut. 23:7–8). But because of Boaz's judicial role as kinsman-redeemer through marriage, Ruth was adopted into the covenant line in just one generation. *Of all legal relationships biblically, adoption is the most authoritative.* Through adoption, the disinherited children of Adam re-enter the family of God. *Adoption is the judicial basis of inheritance.* Adoption is by *covenant oath*, not biology.

Ruth, a former gentile, was adopted into Israel's supreme covenant line by the willingness of a man to become a kinsman-redeemer to her late husband. "Moreover Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, have

I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day" (Ruth 4:10). By lowering himself socially by marrying a former Moabite, and by being willing to raise up seed for his kinsman Elimelech by way of Elimelech's dead son, Boaz was granted an extraordinary blessing. He became the biological forefather of David and Jesus. Legally, these heirs were not part of his personal covenant line. Only through Elimelech's name could he participate in the crucial covenant line. Only by being willing to raise up seed on behalf of another did he unknowingly place himself as the key figure in the extension of the key covenant line in Israel and, for that matter, in all of history. Boaz became the biggest covenantal somebody in his generation only because he was willing to become a covenantal nobody in the extension of Elimelech's line. The land that he presumably bought from Naomi became the family inheritance in another man's line. Any improvements that he made in this land became another family line's property. By abandoning his own name covenantally, he thereby became the greatest name of his generation, a name that is listed in both of the messianic genealogies in the New Testament (Matt. 1:5; Luke 3:32).

2. *The Imputation of a Man's Name*

This case law was a seed law. As a law governing inheritance, it was also a land law. The firstborn of a levirate marital union inherited the deceased father's name. The inheritance was above all covenantal: part of God's promise to Abraham. The deceased man's name was imputed to the heir by God and by law, even though he was born of the levir. *The imputation of a man's name was the essence of his inheritance*: from his fathers and to his children. God had revealed this to Abraham: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3).

What the levirate law tells us is that the imputation of a man's name was more fundamental than either genetic inheritance or family discipline. In the context of the continuing academic debate between "nature" (genetics) and "nurture" (social environment), neither was fundamental in Israel. What was fundamental was *judicial imputation*. The levir performed a redemptive act on behalf of his brother's coven-

ant line. This act was far more judicial than biological or social. He provided biological seed and family discipline, but the decisive factor was judicial-covenantal-eschatological, not biological or social. It was so decisive that the law prohibiting a brother from marrying his sister-in-law was suspended. That law had specifically stated that the negative sanction would be childlessness (Lev. 20:21). The levirate marriage was mandated by God specifically for producing an heir.

Because of Boaz's grace to Naomi through Ruth, a unique and judicially unconventional thing took place: Boaz replaced Elimelech in Israelite history as part of the covenant line of David (I Chron. 2:11–12). In terms of the law of the levir, the family line through Ruth was Elimelech's, but Elimelech is never mentioned in relation to David. It was Boaz's marriage to Ruth in the name of Elimelech that secured Boaz's place in history. As the heir of Rahab, his act of mercy grafted Rahab into the kingly line retroactively. Judicially, Boaz's family line was irrelevant to the coming of David. Yet because of his grace shown to a former gentile woman, his family name entered the most important family line in man's history. Boaz established his name and his family line's name in history by a merciful covenantal act which, in terms of the Mosaic law, submerged his name to Elimelech's. Boaz, who had not even been the closest of kin to Elimelech's son, and who had in no way been required to serve as levir, replaced Elimelech in Israel's family lists.

Jesus would imitate Boaz's judicial precedent, not by marrying, but by refusing to marry. By refusing to marry, He thereby transferred His inheritance to His kinsmen. He died on their behalf, so that they could be legally adopted into His covenant line.⁴ His death and resurrection have offered to the gentiles God's covenantal inheritance by means of adoption, just as Boaz's willingness to marry Ruth offered her covenantal inheritance through adoption. As the heir of Jacob's promise (Gen. 49:10), Jesus was the true heir in Israel, the son of David the king. But Jesus was not Joseph's biological heir. Here we see another act of mercy: Joseph's refusal to put Mary away for fornication with another man. Joseph adopted Jesus as his firstborn son, and in doing so, gained shame for himself: the birth of his firstborn son in fewer

4. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:3–5).

than nine months after marriage.

We do not know if Boaz had biological heirs through a former marriage. If he did, his property went to them. If he did not, then his second-born and later children inherited. Ruth was their mother, but they bore his name. In this case, Ruth became the agent for extending his name in history. The Bible is silent about this covenant line.

C. The Mosaic Family as a Tribal Unit

The seed laws and land laws existed because of Jacob's granting of blessings in Genesis 49, and specifically, his prophecy regarding the coming ruler, Shiloh.⁵ They were tribal laws, not laws governing the family unit as such. Had they been laws governing the family unit as such, they would have been cross-boundary laws, universal in scope then and now. The law of the levirate marriage would still be in force. This law is no longer in force because Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Covenantal adoption has completely replaced the law of the levirate marriage in the New Covenant. Jesus established the model. His death, which ensured His lack of biological heirs, was inherent in His plan of adoption and the transfer of kingdom inheritance. *Confession of faith has replaced tribal name as the basis of biblical inheritance.* Confession of faith involves adopting a new family name. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26b). A man's legal claim to a portion of God's kingdom inheritance is based on his possession of Christ's name through adoption. The New Covenant's preservation of Christ's name through *adoption by conversion* has replaced the Old Covenant's preservation of family name through *adoption by reproduction*.⁶ What has changed, above all, is the tribal basis of inheritance. Covenantally mandated tribes no longer exist. This is why the seed laws and land laws have been replaced by the laws governing confession of faith and church membership. The church is the new nation that has inherited God's kingdom (Matt. 21:43). It has no tribes.

5. The practice of levirate marriage existed earlier than Genesis 49. Onan's rebellion indicates that the practice did exist, and it was a law, for God's negative sanction came on him. Without law, there is no legitimate sanction. This was not, however, a written law. Its application was tied to the tribal units of Jacob's family. Lot's daughters had used a perverse application of the levirate marriage. They had deceived their father when he was drunk.

6. The mark of adoption in the Old Covenant was circumcision.

D. The Story of Tamar

The witnesses understood what was at stake judicially. “And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman” (Ruth 4:12).

Tamar had been cheated of her inheritance as a mother through the son of Judah, Onan. Her first husband had died, and Onan his brother refused to obey the law of the levir. This law was in force before Moses. Onan may have thought he would inherit his late brother's land. His younger brother was too young to marry Tamar. There would be no child within the family for Tamar. Onan's calculation backfired immediately.

And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also. Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house (Gen. 38:10–11).

Tamar waited. Shelah grew up. But Judah did not give him to be her husband. Then Judah's wife died. So, Tamar decided to achieve her goal by deception. She disguised herself as a prostitute and went to a city where she knew Judah was visiting. He went in to her. He gave her collateral until he would send her a lamb as payment. They both returned home separately. When she was found to be pregnant three months later, he was ready to have her executed. On what basis? Tradition? It was not a capital crime to be a prostitute under the Mosaic law, except for the daughter of a priest (Lev. 21:9). It was a capital crime for both parties when a man committed adultery with a married woman (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Judah was a widower. Tamar was not married. So, she had not committed adultery with him.

Judah had cheated her out of motherhood, and he had cheated his first son out of his name in Israel. He did not compel Shelah to marry her. Tamar decided to get what belonged to her and her late husband from the closest kinsman who was available. In response to Judah's verbal judgment against her, Tamar presented the collateral goods that he had given to her. “And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more” (Gen. 38:26). Israelites honored her for her successful deception. She had preserved her hus-

band's name. Her firstborn son was Pharez.

E. The Covenant Line

Boaz gained the right to marry Ruth as the nearest of kin. "So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son" (Ruth 4:13). Ruth fully understood the judicial implications of this birth. "And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel" (v. 14). Little did she know. Her son was Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David. This was to become the supreme family line in Israel. Out of David's line came Jesus.

And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse (Matt. 1:5).

Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson (Luke 3:32).

Yet, covenantally speaking, Obed was the son of Mahlon. Boaz and Ruth are the most unlikely names in the genealogies. Ruth was from Moab, the enemy of Israel. Boaz was not the covenantal father of Obed. Yet the story of Boaz and Ruth appears as a book on the Bible. Why? Because of her faithfulness in returning to Israel as Naomi's servant. This testified to her covenantal commitment to God. Similarly, the willingness of Boaz to subordinate his name to Mahlon's in Elimelech's covenant line testified to his willingness to sacrifice for his brother's name. He was not legally required to do this, because Mahlon had lived in Moab, not nearby. Ethics is central to God's covenants. These two were models of ethical righteousness.

F. Ten Generations to Freedom

The time restrictions placed on Hebrew servitude did not apply to non-Hebrew servants. They were the true slaves in Israel. Why were foreigners placed into slavery, generation after generation (Lev. 25:44–46)?⁷ The theological answer is clear: they were covenanted slaves to foreign gods. Their release from this covenantal bondage took 10 gen-

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

erations of faithful service to a family or institution under God's covenant.

The foreigner or foreign nation that rejected God's older covenant faced judgment in history. One of these judgments in the Old Testament was to become a slave in Israel. "Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God" ["no other God": New King James Version] (Isa. 45:14). This was to be Israel's blessing and the foreigner's curse.

Yet with every curse in history there is a measure of blessing. Biblical servitude in the Old Testament was always intended to lead men to ethical reformation and spiritual freedom. What about heathen slaves? Weren't they slaves "forever"? Leviticus 25:46 says, "they shall be your bondmen forever." Then in what way was heathen slavery a means of redemption in Israel? We know that in one crucial case, the word "forever" meant 10 generations. Deuteronomy 23:3 specifies that it was to take 10 generations for sojourners from Ammon and Moab, the "bastard" nations that were the sons of Lot's incestuous relationships with his daughters (Gen. 19:30–38), to enter the congregation, thereby becoming full citizens in Israel. But Nehemiah 13:1 reads: "On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of the LORD for ever." The Hebrews understood "forever" to mean 10 consecutive generations of covenant membership (circumcision).

Why 10 generations? This was the judicial curse imposed on bastards. There was also a 10-generation prohibition against a bastard's heirs' entering into the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2). Judah and Tamar produced a bastard son, Pharez. David was symbolically the tenth-generation son of this illicit union (Ruth 4:18–20). He then became the mightiest king in Israel's history. He "entered the congregation" as the supreme civil judge. As Rushdoony wrote, "There is no reason to doubt that eunuchs, bastards, Ammonites, and Moabites regularly became believers and were faithful worshippers of God. *Congregation* has reference to the whole nation in its governmental func-

tion as God's covenant people."⁸ Those who were the circumcised heirs of bastards had to wait patiently until their own heirs could regain legal access to the civil office of judge. Rushdoony continued: "The purpose of the commandment is here the protection of authority. Authority among God's people is *holy*; it does require a separateness. It does not belong to every man simply on the ground of his humanity."⁹

What about heathen slaves? Would they ever regain freedom? Yes: if they remained in the household for 10 generations, they became full congregation members. At that point, they came under the laws that regulated Hebrew bondservants. At age 20, a Hebrew male became a legal adult, subject to military numbering (Ex. 30:14). It would have been illegal to keep such an adult, tenth-generation heathen slave in slavery after he reached age 20. Thus, it took 10 generations of "circumcised service" to God and to the Hebrew household to escape slavery. But escape was legally possible for one's distant heirs. Better to serve as a slave in a Hebrew household than to be at ease in paganism outside of Zion. Pagans, then as now, went to hell if they died outside the household of faith. They then become eternal slaves under God, the Eternal Slave-Master. Thus, *enslavement in ancient Israel was a means of potential liberation for the heathen*.

Then what about the Gibeonites? The author of the Book of Joshua (possibly it was the prophet Samuel) says that they remained slaves, "even unto this day." The Gibeonites were still in bondage at least four centuries after they became slaves in the tabernacle, for Saul slew many of them, despite the fact they were under his covenantal protection as a separate people within the land (II Sam. 21:1–2). Four centuries seems to be longer than 10 generations, for the average lifespan of the Hebrews had shortened to 70 years by Moses' day (Ps. 90:10). This is comparable to today's lifespans, and one generation is classified as under 40 years—usually closer to 30 years.

G. The Incomplete Genealogy in Ruth 4

Could this 400-year time period of Gibeonite slavery have been less than 10 generations after Joshua's covenant with them, in fact, a mere five generations? I ask this seemingly preposterous biological question because David is listed as the tenth generation after Tamar

8. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), p. 65.

9. *Idem*.

and Judah (Ruth 4:18–22), yet only five generations after the era of Joshua. What are we to make of this evidence? Jephthah said that it had been 300 years from Joshua's conquest to his own day (Jud. 11:26). The only way to explain the genealogy of David—assuming that the genealogy of Ruth 4 is complete—is to assume that those born after Nahshon attained abnormally long lives, such as the 130 years of Jehoiada (II Chron. 24:15), and also to assume that they fathered the covenant-line sons remarkably late in life: close to age 100. These assumptions are highly improbable. It is therefore unlikely that this genealogy is complete. The listed line of Judah was Pharez, Hezron, Ram, Aminadab, and Nahshon. Nahshon was a contemporary of Moses (Num. 1:7). Thus, only four generations are listed in between Nahshon and David: Salmon, who married Rahab (Matt. 1:5), Boaz (who married Ruth), Obed, Jesse, and then David.

The Bible provides additional internal evidence that the genealogy is incomplete. First, Abraham was considered unique in having fathered a son at age 100, yet he lived centuries before the normal human lifespan had shortened to age 70 (Ps. 90:10). There is no mention of three consecutive abnormally long lifespans in the period of the judges (conquest to kingship). This silence is important evidence, though not conclusive, which testifies against the completeness of the genealogy of Ruth 4.

Second, the lifespans of those in the tribe of Judah had been comparatively short: five generations, Pharez to Nahshon, compared to four for the tribe of Levi: Levi to Moses (Ex. 6:16–26). Are we to believe that, without warning, every subsequent male in this family line fathered a child around age 100, while everyone else's lifespans had shortened to 70 years? This seems unlikely. If there had been such a return to pre-conquest lifespans in this single family line, why doesn't the Bible give us some reason for it? Caleb's strength at age 85 was a miracle, as he understood (Josh. 14:9–11): God's special sustaining of a faithful man because of God's promise to him 40 years earlier (Num. 14:30).

Third, Salmon was *at most* 59 when Jericho fell. The exodus generation perished in the wilderness. This meant that at the time of the exodus, Salmon was not old enough to have been numbered as an adult. Since numbering of adult males took place at age 20 (Ex. 30:14), Salmon at most was 19 years old at the exodus. Add to this 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and we get age 59. He married Rahab, who as a prostitute was probably at least 20 years old, and perhaps 30,

at the time of the fall of Jericho. Did she give birth to Boaz 40 years later (age 99 for Salmon)? How old was she if she did wait 40 years to bear Boaz? Sixty? Seventy? And if Salmon was under age 19 at the time of the exodus, and fathered Boaz around age 100, 50 or 60 years after the fall of Jericho, then Rahab would have been that much older. This seems extremely unlikely. It is therefore difficult to reject the conclusion that there were numerous unlisted generations in between Salmon and Boaz. It would be emotionally convenient to believe in the long lifespan view, Salmon to Jesse, and therefore to accept the genealogy of Ruth 4 at face value, but the internal evidence from Scripture makes it difficult to accept. The highly specific revelation concerning the chronology of the judges (Jud. 11:26) is God's means of pointing to the literary nature of the post-Salmon genealogy. It would be difficult to argue that Jephthah erred by several centuries, when we are also told that there were 480 years between the exodus and the beginning of the construction of the temple (I Kings 6:1), which began around 1012 B.C.¹⁰ Only by ignoring I Kings 6:1, and by dating the exodus centuries later than the early 1400s—which so many compromising Christian authors have done—could we shorten the period of the judges to such an extent that the lifespans of the final five generations of the Ruth 4 genealogy could be made to fit.

If the genealogy in Ruth 4 is incomplete, what explanation can we offer? I think it is because the author of Ruth wanted to emphasize the ethical basis of David's elevation to the throne: the liberating "tenth generation" after the covenantal mark of bastardy began. (This is additional indirect evidence for Samuel as the author of Ruth.) The shortened genealogy is a literary device pointing to a theological conclusion: *liberty and authority after 10 generations*. The genealogy's very incompleteness testifies to the importance of the tenth generation after the imposition of the covenantal curse. It points to the temporary nature of a curse in history that lasts "forever." It therefore points to God's grace to those who are patient in righteous living.

Conclusion

The law of the levir died with the death of the Old Covenant in A.D. 70. That law governed family name in a nation that was defined by family name: Israel. Jacob/Israel had pronounced this prophecy: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between

10. Chapter 17.

his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). The tribes had to be separated until Shiloh arrived. He arrived, and Israel crucified Him. Within one generation, Israel and the law of the levir ceased to exist.

In the era of Boaz and Ruth, the law of the levir was in force. Boaz was the nearest of kin who accepted his moral—but not legal—obligation to his deceased kinsman to preserve his kinsman's name. He promised to have children with Ruth. By this, as it turned out, his own name was preserved in Israel.

CONCLUSION TO RUTH

So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it (Ruth 4:13–16).

Ruth testified to the power of a kinsman-redeemer to restore life. She was not speaking of Boaz. She was speaking of Obed. The son born in a levirate marriage was Naomi's hope for the future.

This may seem strange to Western Christians. This is because they do not understand the Old Covenant's concept of inheritance. Obed was part of the family line of Judah. Jacob had prophesied to his sons, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). This was a messianic prophecy. Jesus was born in the covenant line of Boaz and Ruth. He fulfilled Jacob's prophecy.

The law of the levirate marriage twice sustained this covenant line: first, with Judah and Tamar; second, with Boaz and Ruth.

Ruth was a woman of great loyalty: to her husband's name, to her mother-in-law, and to God. "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). She has come down through the ages as an example of loyalty. But Boaz was no less loyal: loyal to his kinsman's name in Israel. He served as the kinsman-redeemer. Jesus did the same.

It would be a mistake to see Ruth as a gold-digger who was after Boaz's money. It was Naomi, not Ruth, who initiated the plan to gain Boaz as Ruth's husband. What was her motive? From Ruth's testimo-

nial to her, it appears that her motive was to gain an heir who would bear her husband's name. This was a legitimate goal under the Mosaic Covenant. Yet, in retrospect, Obed bore Boaz's name. Judicially, he was Mahlon's son, but in terms of the power of the story, he bore Boaz's name. Boaz's name appears in the genealogies of Jesus, not Elimlech's and not Mahlon's.

INTRODUCTION TO SAMUEL

And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD (I Sam. 3:20).

Samuel was a prophet. Samuel also served as a judge of Israel. He was the last of the judges. He anointed both Saul and David to be kings.

The two books of Samuel tell the story of the transition from judgeship to kingship, from political decentralization to centralization. It was an era of growing disbelief in God and increasing belief in the state. When the people came to Samuel requesting a king, Samuel saw what this meant.

But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king (I Sam. 8:6–10).

There is very little economic information in the two books. First Samuel tells of the decline of the priesthood under Eli's two sons (I Sam. 2:22–25) and the fall of the judgeship under Samuel's two sons (I Sam. 8:1–3).

It begins with the story of Samuel's miraculous birth. When his mother learned she was pregnant, she sang a song of great reversals in history. Winners lose, and losers win. Mary sang a similar song when she learned that she was pregnant (Luke 1:46–55).¹ God raises up

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd

some, and He pulls down others. Her message was clear: God is in charge; men are not.

The priests of Philistia believed that God might possibly be in charge. They had suffered plagues because they had brought the Ark of the Covenant inside their borders. Inside the cities, the Ark was followed by plagues. They wanted to believe in chance, but they were forced to believe in God. Causation is in His hands.

Finally, there is the story of kingship. Samuel warned the people not to centralize power in this way. They would pay for this rebellion with higher taxes. The people paid no attention. People down through history have refused to listen to this warning.

12

THE GREAT REVERSAL

They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them (1 Sam. 2:5–8).

The theocentric principle here is the absolute sovereignty of God in history.

A. The God of the Covenant

This is Hannah's song of rejoicing after she handed over her toddler son Samuel to Eli the priest. Samuel's birth had been an answer to her prayer, for she had been barren for many years. Shortly after his birth, she made a vow: "I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever" (1 Sam. 1:22b). She fulfilled her vow when he was a toddler. "Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there" (1 Sam. 1:28). God received a positive rate of return on that borrowed asset. In his office as judge, Samuel changed Israel forever.

Hannah viewed God as the source of blessings and cursings. In her song of praise, she spoke of both. She spoke of great reversals in history. Those on top fall. Those on the bottom rise. This is all due to God's absolute control over history. Hannah's song was clearly the model for Mary's *magnificat* a millennium later (Luke 1:46–55).¹ This

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd

fundamental issue is inheritance: “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.” She had just given up her recent inheritance by giving her son to the church.

This view of God’s control over history is based on the five-point biblical covenant. God is sovereign over history: point 1.² “The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” He places men in the economic hierarchy. “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up.” Hierarchy is point 2.³ He brings sanctions: point 4.⁴ He secures the inheritance of the righteous: point five.⁵ The only point that is not explicitly affirmed in her song is point 3: law.⁶ But, because the song praises God for reversing the positions of those up high and those down low, it implicitly assumes that the deciding issue is ethics. God does not randomly push people up or down on the hierarchies of life. Her son, a judge, would spend his career declaring God’s law and announcing God’s historical sanctions.

As the God of the covenant, God arranges the flow of history in terms of His plan. His plan conforms to the covenant and confirms it. Moses said: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁷ God is predictable. The affairs of the world are not random. They conform to His law and His decree.

There are times when good people are on the bottom. That had been her situation. Her husband’s other wife had borne children. She lorded it over Hannah. “And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat” (I Sam. 1:6–7). Her husband attempted to comfort her. “Then said Elkanah her hus-

ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

band to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (I Sam. 1:8). The answer was clearly "no, you are not." But Hannah held her peace. She prayed for years. Then Eli the priest told her that God would grant her request (v. 17). God did.

Hannah did not sing praises of a God who intervenes only to bring positive sanctions. She praised the God who brings negative sanctions. Making things right for the illegitimately downtrodden means bringing the trodders low.

B. Sacrifice for the Kingdom's Sake

Hannah was more interested in the kingdom of God than in her role as a mother. She saw her role as a mother as covenantal. She gave Samuel to God. In terms of the Mosaic law, she had to tell her husband. He had the right to veto it by the end of the day.

And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul; And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her (Num. 30:6–8).⁸

From what we learn of him here, Elkanah was a weak-willed man who was not in control of his household. He could not control one wife. He could not comfort the other. He went along with Hannah's vow. He surrendered his role as a father of Samuel. They had more children. "And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD" (I Sam. 2:20–21). We hear nothing of Elkanah again.

We do not know the names of her other children. They left no mark on Israel's historical record. The son she voluntarily surrendered into Eli's hands changed Israel and human history. He made David king, and through David came Jesus (Matt. 1:1).

8. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

Hannah surrendered Samuel through gratitude for the immediate past and faith in the long-term future. She believed that God would make better use of Samuel in the household of Eli than in her own household. What mattered most to her was what use God would make of him. She placed the kingdom first and herself second. She did not know what the positive sanctions would be for her. She did not know of five more children to come. But she knew of God's sanctions in history, which are not random. God had intervened on her behalf. She intervened on His behalf. She did not have to make her vow. She lawfully could have kept him at home. God could have raised him up to be a judge in her husband's household. But she did not know that he would become a judge. She saw only that he would be more likely to serve God well in the sanctuary of a priest's household than her husband's.

She visibly testified to the fact that she understood that parents are to serve as God's agents of instruction for their children. Their social function is covenantal. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). She provided a tutor for her son: Eli the priest. Instead of bringing the tutor into her household, she sent her son into his household. She did not cling to any notion that the best teacher is always a child's parents. Parents have a God-given responsibility to train their children, but this responsibility can lawfully be delegated to a specialist.

Conclusion

Hannah's song, like Mary's, speaks of great reversals. The poor get rich. The rich get poor. There is no security in history other than God and His covenant. God is completely in control. "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up." Impersonal social forces are not sovereign. Impersonal biological forces are not sovereign. Neither nature nor nurture is sovereign. God, and God alone, is sovereign. This is the message of Hannah's song. It serves as a crucial foundation for Christian economics, Christian political science, Christian sociology, and Christian theology. Any attempt to substitute another concept of historical causation is a fist waved in the face of God. We find its refutation in Psalm 2, a psalm written by the man Samuel anointed as king.

13

THEORIES OF CAUSATION

Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us (I Sam. 6:7–9).

The theocentric principle here is the covenantal structure of historical causation.

A. A Pattern of Negative Sanctions

The Philistines had a problem. They had defeated the Israelites. Their victory had come despite the presence of the Ark of the Covenant inside the Israelite army. As a token of their victory, they brought the captured Ark inside the boundaries of Philistia.

Every time the Ark was brought into a Philistine city, disasters followed. In Ashdod, the leaders put the Ark in the same temple in front of the image of the local deity, Dagon. This image was found the next day bowing before the Ark. The priests put it upright again. The next morning, it was found bowing to the Ark, with its hands and head broken off. Meanwhile, people in the city were struck with hemorrhoids (I Sam. 5:1–6). They drew the correct conclusion: “And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god” (v. 7). The leaders decided that Gath should have the honor of being the residence for the Ark. They sent the Ark to Gath.

The people of Gath were immediately struck with hemorrhoids (v.

9). “Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people” (v. 10). The Ekronites had figured out cause and effect here. “So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there” (v. 11).

We see here the speeding up of assessment and decision-making. In Ashdod, it took at least two days. In Gath, it took one day. The Ekronites knew what would happen even before the Ark entered the city. They all drew the same conclusion: the hand of God was on them, and the Ark was the reason. They all adopted the same policy: send the Ark somewhere else.

Ekron’s leaders knew enough to recommend sending the Ark back to Israel. But the decision-makers hesitated. That would be an admission of defeat. It would mean that the military victory they had enjoyed was due to God, not to the strength of the gods of Philistia. The token of that military victory was the Ark itself.

Inside the boundaries of Philistia, the Ark was dangerous. Gentiles were not to approach it. Inside Israel, it was defended by three layers of defenders: the three clans of Levi. Merari defended the outer circle (Num. 4:32–33); Gershon defended the second circle (Num. 4:26–28); Kohath defended the inner circle (Num. 4:15).

Any violation of the Ark’s sacred boundaries by an unauthorized person, meaning an unsanctified person, was an act of sacrilege: a profanation. By bringing the Ark inside the boundaries of Philistia, the Philistines committed sacrilege. They profaned the Ark. So, city by city, the scourges came. Still, the leaders refused to do what the leaders of Ekron knew should be done: send the Ark back inside the boundaries of Israel.

And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place (I Sam. 6:1–2).

The priests still refused to face the problem squarely. So, they hedged their bets. On the one hand, they recommended a trespass offering: five gold pieces fashioned in the shape of hemorrhoids, one

for each city (I Sam. 6:17). That would publicly announce to God that they knew who was behind their specific affliction. Also to be included were golden mice (v. 18). On the other hand, they proposed a test. The test was the cart and the undomesticated cattle. Take the cart and the cattle to the edge of the nation. Let it loose. See where the cattle take it. Normally, the cattle would go home. If they went into Israel, the Philistines could then logically conclude that God had been behind all of their afflictions.

B. Profaning the Ark

Inside the cities, the locals knew who was behind their afflictions. This is why they sent the Ark to the next city. But, outside the cities, the afflictions ceased. They dared to keep the Ark for seven months inside the land. The afflictions ceased or subsided because the Ark was being profaned less specifically. Why? Because each city had its own god. *The closer the Ark was to the gods of a city, the more threatening the afflictions.* This was the same in Israel. The closer to the Ark a person approached, the greater his risk of divine intervention against him. If he was allowed to pass across the various defensive barriers, the greater the threat to those doing the guarding.

The sons of Eli had been the examples. They had profaned the Ark. A prophet had warned Eli, their father.

Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever (I Sam. 2:31–35).

So outraged was God at the sinful performance of these sacrilegious men that God allowed the nation to be defeated on the field of battle.

And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when

they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God (I Sam. 4:2–4).

God was after the two sons. The nation had allowed them to continue as officiating priests. The nation was now paying for this refusal to defend the Ark. “And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain” (I Sam. 4:10–11).

Eli had known. He had warned them.

Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD’s people to transgress (I Sam. 2:20–24).

His warning did no good. “Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them” (25b). To slay them, God also slew thousands of Israelites. This, not the gods of Philistia, was why the Philistines had defeated Israel’s holy army. That army was not holy; it was profane. It had not defended the holiness of the Ark. It had violated it.

The Philistines became even more profane when they brought the Ark inside the nation’s boundaries and cities. They were suffering the consequences.

C. A Rigged Test

The leaders obeyed their priests.

And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the

images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh (I Sam. 6:10–12).

The rulers of the cities had already figured this out. For seven months, the leaders refused to do what the Ekronites knew had to be done: send the Ark back to Israel. They procrastinated. Why?

The priests still wanted to leave a theological escape hatch. If the Ark could be kept in the land safely, its presence would publicly testify to the victory of the gods of Philistia. The defeat of Israel would not be seen by the Philistines as God's judgment on Israel, with Philistia serving as His agent of wrath. That would identify Philistia as a kind of backdrop to the history of God's covenant with Israel.

That was what Philistia was. The priests suspected this, which is why they designed the test. But they wanted a way out of this public admission of second-place temporary status in history. This way out would be determined by cattle.

Modern science uses the science of statistics to identify causation. In subatomic physics, probability replaces causation. For atomic physics and everything else, there is an endless epistemological battle between those who regard deviations from randomness as the test of causation vs. those who affirm logic as the source of causation. This goes back to the rival schools of pre-Socratic philosophy: Heraclitus (randomness) vs. Parmenides (logic). This debate has never been resolved.

The priests of Philistia adopted a version of randomness: a pair of milk cows. Their calves were separated from them. Normally, the cows would follow their calves. If the cows, who had never before been yoked, headed back across the border into Israel, then causation was not chance-based. It was ordered.

The test was rigged. There was no chance involved. The cows would normally follow their calves. Unless their calves wandered into Israel, the cows would not wander into Israel. The test was rigged in favor of the gods of Philistia. The priests did not let the calves make the decision. Who knows? One might have stayed in Philistia, while the other went into Israel. That would be chance. Instead of flipping a coin—coins had not yet been invented—the priests could have let the calves decide the issue. The calves didn't.

Like loaded dice, like a rigged roulette wheel, or like marked cards,

the test was rigged. It was stacked against the God of Israel. The priests talked chance, but they did not really believe in it. They believed in self-interest: in this case, the self-interest of a pair of cows. The test was designed to favor the cows' self-interest. But, just in case God really was in charge this time, it would cost the nation some of its gold reserves. That was what happened.

Conclusion

Unsophisticated covenant-breakers believe in impersonal chance and impersonal fate. The two concepts are opposed. Covenant-breakers believe in randomness and unbreakable natural law. The two concepts are opposed. Scientific covenant-breakers believe that everything flows (Heraclitus), but everything is amenable to the fixed logical categories of the human mind (Parmenides). The two concepts are opposed. Philosophical covenant-breakers believe in an ever-shifting balance between these rival concepts (dialecticism). This balance cannot be proven logically or demonstrated statistically.

The priests of Philistia talked chance and believed in a rigged test. They saw the golden hemorrhoids as a just-in-case fall-back position: a kind of national insurance policy against the possible existence of the God of the Bible. They believed that a pair of heifers would serve as the means of determining the sovereignty of the rival gods.

The cart went to the city of Beth-shemesh. There, the people looked into the Ark. The Philistines had known better than to do this. God killed 50,070 men (v. 19). The Hebrew word is "males." That made almost as many widows. Men had greater responsibility. They paid a heavier price. This was not random. There is no known disease that kills only adult males. Like the Philistines, they also offered to send the Ark to a different city. Kirjath-jearim accepted. There the Ark remained for two decades (I Sam. 7:2).

Then Samuel began to serve as a judge (v. 3). He led Israel against the Philistines, and Israel won (v. 11).

So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life (vv. 13–15).

14

TYRANNICAL TAXATION

And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day (I Sam. 8:14–18).

The theocentric principle here is God as the king of Israelite society. He collected an ecclesiastical tithe of rural land's agricultural output for the support of the Levites. A replacement king would demand a tithe on everything.

A. The Desire for Centralization

The Israelites had grown tired of rule by independent judges. The text tells us nothing about Samuel's rule from the day he led the Israelites to victory against Philistia until his old age, when he appointed his sons to serve as judges (I Sam. 8:1–7). "And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (I Sam. 8:3–5).

The Israelites wanted to imitate the nations around them. They wanted a single representative civil ruler. They no longer wanted decentralized rule by judges. They wanted centralization. This was consistent with the history of the nation. They preferred a single voice of civil authority. "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give

us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee” (I Sam. 8:6–8).

God told Samuel to warn them of what would inevitably result from this centralization of civil power. “Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them” (I Sam. 8:9). Samuel then listed the evils that would come upon them. Among these were higher taxes.

B. A Tithe to the King

The king would raise taxes. The nation would pay him a tenth of their production (vv. 15, 17), along with forfeited capital: fields, vineyards, and olive orchards (v. 14). This would be in addition to whatever they were paying local civil magistrates. They did not care. The Israelites still wanted a king. Moses had prophesied this. “When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me. . . .” (Deut. 17:14).

The Israelites had suffered in Egypt from centralized political tyranny. The Pharaoh of Joseph’s era extracted an income tax of 20% (Gen. 47:24–26).¹ This had been God’s judgment on Egypt. They worshipped a Pharaoh who claimed to be divine. God raised up Joseph to give the Egyptians a taste of tyranny. They would learn what a supposedly divine monarch could collect in a centralized political order. Samuel warned the Israelites of something similar. They did not care. “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles” (I Sam. 8:19–20). They wanted a man to do battle in their name. God’s name was not enough. “And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city” (I Sam.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 35.

8:22).

The people were willing to pay a tenth of their income to a king. They were willing to pay one man far more than they paid the Levites. The Levites' tithe was a tenth of agricultural production. This compensated them for not possessing an inheritance in rural land. Members of the other tribes possessed more rural land than would have been the case had the Levites not been granted the tithe. In contrast, the king would take a tenth from everyone, city dwellers and country dwellers. He would take more than what an entire tribe received. The priesthood was supported by a tithe placed on only the Levites: one percent of Israel's rural output. The king would take a tenth. The kingship would be the most centralized institution in Israel.

What benefits would a king provide? Leadership in warfare, the people replied. What else? Nothing that the judges did not already provide. The judges provided civil justice. They provided this on a decentralized basis. People could move out of a judge's jurisdiction if he became corrupt, as Samuel's sons did. They could vote with their feet. They could not do this when a king took control of the court system and its enforcement.

A judge could not create international alliances based on marriage. The king could. Solomon later did. The women brought their foreign gods into the household of the king (I Kings 11). The Mosaic law prohibited this. "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deut. 17:17a).

A king could accumulate the weapons of war, including horses and chariots. The Mosaic law prohibited this. "But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way" (Deut. 17:16).²

The people did not have to follow a judge into war. At least three of the tribes had refused to come when Deborah called them to assemble (Jud. 5:16–17). The tribes could not easily avoid a national war initiated by a king.

Conclusion

There is an innate desire in men to go to war. James wrote: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence,

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1). The Israelites wanted a king like other nations. He would lead them into battle. They did not care about higher taxes. They did not care about kingly marital preferences. They wanted to be able to be proud about their nation's military prowess. For this, they needed a king. He needed taxes. They were ready to pay.

For the modern world to return to the taxation level of the Pharaoh in Joseph's day, governments would have to cut taxes and spending by at least 50% in the lower-tax industrial nations. They would have to cut by 75% to reach the tax level that Samuel warned against.

Voters may complain about high taxes, but they do not rebel. They do not replace high-tax politicians with low-tax politicians. They do not perceive that, after World War I began in 1914, the world moved into tax tyranny. The free nations are tax tyrannies by comparison with ancient Egypt or ancient anywhere. The voters do not perceive this, so conditioned are they by tax-funded education, which sings the praises of the modern welfare-warfare state.

Voters want centralization. They want to be proud of their chief national leader. God has assessed this preference and has found it wanting. "And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands" (I Sam. 10:19).

Switzerland has the longest tradition of political freedom of any large modern nation. It has no national leader. It has a rotating president who possesses no independent power and departs after one year. There is no head of state. There is a decentralized citizen militia. The nation stays neutral in foreign wars. It does not start wars. It is rarely invaded. The last period of non-neutrality was under Napoleon (1798–1815). Hitler decided not to invade: too high a price, no strategic payoff, and a decentralized militia to fight in the mountains, where all bridges and tunnels would have been blown up as a defensive strategy. The national government announced in advance that any post-invasion announcement of a surrender should be ignored.³ The nation has been a tax haven. It is rich. The only people who are afraid of Switzerland are tax collectors in other nations.

3. Stephen P. Halbrook, *Target Switzerland: Swiss Armed Neutrality in World War II* (Rockville Centre, New York: Sarpedon, 1998), p. 95. See also his speech to the University Club of New York City, July 21, 1998. (<http://bit.ly/SwissWW2>)

CONCLUSION TO SAMUEL

As the last judge in Israel's history, Samuel departed gracefully. He knew that his rebellious sons had provoked the people to demand a king (1 Sam. 8:1–4). He knew that Israel was about to enter a time of greatness under David. But he also knew that the people had rejected God when they rejected the system of local judges.

The economic message of Samuel is that God is in total control in history. He arranges things according to His pleasure. He has given mankind laws and courts. If people are faithful, they will triumph, just as his mother had triumphed over his potential stepmother, just as he had replaced Eli's evil sons as the true heir of Eli. To the extent that he wrote of economic affairs, he declared the sovereignty of God, not as capricious, but as the law-giver and sanctions-bringer. When the people chose a king, they chose higher taxes.

INTRODUCTION TO KINGS AND CHRONICLES

And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them (II Kings 18:11–12).

The books of Kings and Chronicles are mostly about God's historical sanctions, and these were mostly negative. The historical books from the kingship of Solomon to the two captivities are extensions of the books of Samuel. They manifested in history Samuel's warning to the Israelites against kings (I Sam. 8).¹ The Israelites never learned that what they believed and did would come back on them through their kings. When they rebelled, their kings rebelled. Late in Israel's pre-exilic history, on three occasions, they were given good kings. All three times, they continued to offer sacrifices in high places.² Because they committed liturgical evil in high places, rulers in high places did evil things to them. Finally, they were removed from Israelite kings. They were ruled by empires. It is worth noting that they never again returned to the worship of foreign gods. They never again worshipped in high places.

These historical books record the character of civil government under kings. They record the economic sanctions. Sometimes, there were positive economic sanctions. Most often, the sanctions were negative. Under Solomon, things went well. There was peace, prosperity,

1. Chapter 14.

2. "But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places" (II Kings 12:3). "Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places" (II Kings 15:4). "Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the LORD" (II Kings 15:35).

and extensive foreign trade. But the blessings of God hardened Solomon in his evil ways: polygamy and polytheism. He took the blessings for granted. His son was to take high taxes for granted. Then he lost the kingdom in a revolt initiated by even higher taxes.

There were positive sanctions for prophets and those around them. Elijah lived on miraculous food (I Kings 17).³ Elisha knew the future well enough to make accurate forecasts of commodity prices (II Kings 6).⁴

The two books tell us that rulers, both civil and ecclesiastical, have their own agendas. Rulers pursue these agendas in the name of God.

No matter how many times God provided blessings to kings, they turned against Him. Then came cursings. Sometimes the people repented. Occasionally, the rulers repented. But the nation always returned to evil, like a dog to its vomit. "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (Prov. 26:11).

First and Second Chronicles offer almost no economic information that does not appear in the books of Kings. The first 10 chapters of First Chronicles provide a detailed genealogy of the tribes. These genealogies served as the basis of inheritance.

3. Chapter 21.

4. Chapter 26.

15

WISDOM AND WEALTH

And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days (I Kings 3:11–13).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer in history.

A. Rendering Judgment

Solomon recognized that his supreme task as king of Israel was to render judgment in disputes. He had to apply the Mosaic law to specific circumstances. Rendering judgment is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

His bad judgment had already begun. He did not perceive this. “And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about” (I Kings 3:1). This practice of marital alliances with covenant-breakers would undermine his kingdom by the end of his life.

That was not the limit of his defective judgment. He allowed false worship. “Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days" (v. 2). The lack of a building was no excuse. It got worse. "And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places" (v. 3). Step by step, his life of covenantal compromise had begun.

God appeared to him in a dream. He asked Solomon what he wanted from God (v. 5). Solomon responded with an acknowledgment of God's role as the sanctions-bringer. "And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day" (v. 6). David was righteous; he received God's mercy. This mercy involved placing Solomon on the throne. This was a matter of inheritance: point five.² If continued, Solomon's name would be established down through the ages, until Shiloh arrived (Gen. 49:10).

He then professed humility. "And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in" (v. 7). Compared to the task of rendering judgment for a nation, his abilities were too limited. He had already shown such lack of judgment. God knew.

"And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing" (v. 10). God then rewarded him with good judgment. He also granted him visible riches. He had not asked for riches. Solomon would become legendary for his wisdom and his wealth. The nation also grew wealthy.

There is a system of predictable sanctions in history. Adherence to biblical law produces external blessings. Solomon understood this. God then promised him long life. "And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days" (v. 14).

Solomon responded with a liturgical act. "And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants" (v. 15). The text then tells the story of the two harlots and the living child. Solomon's threat to have the infant cut in half has come down through the ages as an example of his wisdom in rendering civil judgment. "And the king said, Bring me a sword. And

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other” (vv. 24–25).

Let us be clear about what he did. He lied to the women and his guards. He had no intention of killing the child. The lie worked. The two women believed he would do this. The mother responded to this threat. “O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it.” So did the other woman. “Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it” (v. 26). She was motivated by envy: the desire to destroy the other woman’s child, even though this would not benefit her. Solomon recognized whose story was true.

God had given him the ability to render good judgment. “And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment” (v. 28). This soon made his kingship unique in Israel’s history.

So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year (I Kings 10:23–25).

Conclusion

Solomon asked for wisdom. He needed it in two areas: marriage and liturgy. He never did escape these two flaws. The flaws grew much worse in his old age. He did not root them out while he still could. They undermined his kingdom.

He was a man of superb judgment regarding disputes between residents of Israel. It was self-judgment that was his weak link.

16

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF TRADE

Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people (I Kings 5:6–7).

The theocentric principle that undergirds this passage is God's absolute sovereignty in acts of creation. He is not dependent on the creation. He is the source of the creation. This is an incommunicable attribute. Mankind does not possess this degree of sovereignty. Thus, men must cooperate in order to increase their productivity. They are dependent on the creation, including each other.

A. Wisdom, Trade, and Peace

Solomon's goal was to build God's house. God had been specific. He wanted a house of cedar (II Sam. 7:7). Cedars grew in Lebanon, a region controlled by Sidon. Solomon therefore had to enlist the cooperation of the Sidonians. The Sidonians were the recognized experts in cedar-based construction. They had long specialized in working with cedar. Sidon had a competitive advantage internationally in the construction of cedar-based structures.

When Solomon sought a trade arrangement with Hiram, Hiram gave this response. "My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household" (v. 9). There was a potential trade arrange-

ment: cedars for food. Solomon accepted the offer (vv. 12–13).

1. Peace

The text provides crucially important information: “And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together” (v. 12). God gave Solomon wisdom. This wisdom led to a league of peace between the two men, which meant a league of peace between two nations.

Had the two nations been at war, there would not have been an open exchange of food for cedars. There might have been some surreptitious trade, but nothing that could be admitted publicly by either king.¹

It is often said that free trade reduces the likelihood of warfare between trading nations. This argument rests on a fundamental principle of economics: *when costs increase, output is reduced*. Free trade creates mutual dependence of residents in both nations. The cost of warfare rises when mutual dependence increases. Why? Because of losses sustained when the division of labor is reduced in both nations. Specialization declines. Therefore, output per unit of resource input declines. It is therefore cheaper for non-trading nations to go to war with each other than trading nations. Put differently, the price of war is higher for trading nations. As economics teaches, *when prices rise, less is demanded*. When the price of war increases, less war is demanded (other things being equal).

Solomon and Hiram made a league of peace. This was not a covenant. A covenant is established through a mutual oath under God. Israel was prohibited from making covenants with the city-states of Canaan (Ex. 23:31–33; 34:15; Deut. 7:2–4). Sidon was not inside Canaan, but it

1. During World War II, the central bankers of the warring nations met in neutral Switzerland at the Bank for International Settlements. They settled their accounts in gold, which was held in Switzerland. The leaders of all the warring nations knew about this, but these meetings were top secret. The public never found out until after the war ended. Even today, only a few people have ever heard this story. So crucial was the continuation of trade that both sides believed that monetary cooperation was vital for their respective war efforts. Anyway, their central bankers and commercial bankers believed this. Their opinion predominated. The BIS was in Basle, close to the German border. Axis influence was strong. Yet the president of the BIS was an American in the war years, despite the fact that the United States had not officially joined the BIS. It was a very strange arrangement. Gianni Toniolo and Piet Clement, *Central Bank Cooperation at the Bank for International Settlements, 1930–1973* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 7.

did not worship the same God. Therefore, no covenant between Hiram and Solomon was lawful biblically. On the other hand, there could be a peace treaty between the two kings. There could be economic exchange between the two nations. These arrangements could be abrogated lawfully by the two parties. Why? Because the league was not a covenant. It was not judicially comparable to a marriage.

2. Benefits

The story of Solomon and the king of Sidon is unique in the Old Testament. The senior representatives of two rival confessional kingdoms had respect for each other. Each was willing to please the other. Solomon paid for services rendered. Hiram delivered the goods for payment rendered. But the cooperation went beyond financial gain. Hiram knew that Solomon was building a house for a rival God. Solomon told him.

And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people (I Kings 5:5–7).

A foreign covenant-breaker understood the benefits of wisdom and civil justice. Moses had said this would happen.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this

day? (Deut. 4:5–8).²

The agreement between the two kings offered economic growth for both nations. Both kingdoms prospered economically. This raises a theological question: Does free trade and peace, both of which are biblical goals, mean that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man grow together? Do both benefit? In other words, does biblical law subsidize the kingdom of man? If so, in what way? Why?

B. Contractual Equality, Covenantal Hierarchy

Hiram was the subordinate in this relationship. Solomon was acting on behalf of the God of the Bible. The cedars of Lebanon would grace the temple. Hiram would receive payment, but the wealth of Hiram's nation would serve to extend the perception that God is sovereign. God's house would reflect this sovereignty aesthetically. The temple would last long after the payment to Hiram would be consumed. "And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year" (v. 11).

In terms of the economic relationship between the two men, meaning the two societies, there was *contractual equality*. Each surrendered ownership of something in order to gain something. The exchanges were voluntary. Each believed he was better off after the exchanges than before. Had this not been the case, there would have been no further exchanges. People do not exchange goods and services in order to become worse off.

Yet despite the contractual equality between Solomon and Hiram, there was *covenantal inequality*. This inequality had to do with point five of the biblical covenant: succession.³ The temple would bind the Israelites together until the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam. The temple would bind Judah and Benjamin together thereafter. After the return from Babylon, the rebuilt temple became the central reference point for the Jews. The memory of the original temple provided continuity, both confessional and historical. There was no comparable continuity for Sidon.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2010), ch. 5.

This raises a fundamental difference between humanistic free market economic theory and Christian economic theory. *Humanistic theory proposes no hierarchy of exchange*. Neither party has legal authority over the other. Each party benefits. Neither party can be said to benefit more. Why not? Because, according to subjective value theory, it is impossible to compare interpersonal subjective value. This was first argued by Lionel Robbins. He denied that there can be scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. This is because there is no objective measure of subjective utility.⁴

In contrast, Christian economics assesses exchange in terms of the extension of the two kingdoms. The benefits of God's kingdom compound over time when society's members adhere to God's law (Deut. 28:1–14).⁵ The benefits gained by covenant-breakers are eventually squandered (Deut. 28:15–68) or else inherited by covenant-keepers. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁶

Thus, there is *a hierarchy of authority in exchanges* between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. The covenant-keeper is in a stronger position. This is because of *inheritance and compounding*. The inheritance of the covenant-breaker is cut short. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex. 20:5). The inheritance of the covenant-keeper compounds. “And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:6).⁷ The word “thousands” refers here to generations, not population size. “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9).

Put a different way, humanistic economics examines exchange in terms of the plans of the participants. The analysis is future-oriented—teleological—with respect to expected *individual* benefits. Christian

4. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 40.

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

economics adds an element of *corporate teleology*: the kingdom of God. Voluntary exchange is teleological with respect to covenantal individual exchange and covenantal corporate exchange. In covenantal individual exchange, both parties expect to benefit. There is no hierarchy of authority. In covenantal corporate exchange, there is a hierarchy. Covenant-keeping societies extend the kingdom of God at the expense of the kingdom of Mammon. *Covenantal corporate exchange is ultimately a zero-sum activity*. God profits in history at the expense of Satan and his covenantal adherents.⁸ God profits in eternity in the same way. So do His disciples.

Humanistic economists assume a level judicial playing field: *equal protection of property, which includes the right of exchange*. So do Christian economics. Humanistic economists deny the epistemological relevance of corporate teleology. Christian economists affirm it. *The economic playing field is not level*. God's kingdom has an advantage: long-term economic growth. This is attained through obedience to God's Bible-revealed law-order.

C. Who Won? Who Lost?

Solomon and Hiram were judicial equals when it came to exchange. They were not equals with respect to the outcome of their exchanges. Solomon had the upper hand. He acted on behalf of the kingdom of God: point two of the biblical covenant model.⁹

Hiram had what Solomon wanted: cedars of Lebanon. Solomon had what Hiram wanted: food. Each of them wanted these things as representatives of the residents of their respective nations. Representation is point two of the biblical covenant model. The two kings came to a mutually beneficial arrangement: cedars for food.

To make this arrangement work, they established a league of peace between themselves and therefore between the residents of the two nations. This was not a covenant established by a self-maledictory oath under God: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹⁰ This was a contract that supplemented the trade agreement. The residents gained peace because the two leaders established peace. The leaders estab-

8. I am assuming here that postmillennialism is true. Amillennialism necessarily implies that Satan's kingdom (civilization) in history prospers at the expense of God's kingdom. Premillennialism necessarily implies that this is true until Jesus comes again to set up His earthly kingdom.

9. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

lished peace because they wanted a superior situation for those whom they represented.

Hiram prospered. His people prospered. Yet the kingdom of God was benefitted more. After almost five centuries, God got His house. The Sidonians received food. There was greater continuity for God's house. Both nations prospered, but the Israelites prospered more than the Sidonians. We know this, because God imputed greater value to His house than to the Sidonians' bellies.

Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? (II Sam. 7:5-7).

Conclusion

This analysis leads to a fundamental principle of Christian economics, one which is denied by humanistic economics: *voluntary exchange between the members of the two kingdoms extends God's kingdom more than it extends man's kingdom*. God's kingdom increases at the expense of man's kingdom. Trade is not a zero-sum economic activity for the participants. The exchanging parties benefit. But voluntary trade benefits the kingdom of God more than it benefits the kingdom of man, assuming only that the things traded are not morally corrupt. Although the kingdom of man expands its wealth, this is short-lived. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).¹¹

If premillennial and amillennial pastors were scrupulously honest with their congregations, they would preach the opposite view forthrightly and often, namely, that Satan will win in pre-Second Coming history because his representatives will win. This view leads to a conclusion: all economic exchanges with covenant-breakers contribute to the triumph of Satan's kingdom in history.

11. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

THE BIBLE'S CRUCIAL DATE MARKER

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD (I Kings 6:1).

This is an important date marker in the Bible. Without this reference and the parallel reference in First Chronicles, it would be much more difficult to establish biblical chronology. Biblical chronology is at war with the chronologies of the textbooks on ancient history. There is no escape from this war.¹

A. Nebuchadnezzar's Victory

To determine the year in which Solomon began building the temple, we must work backward from a date that we can narrow down to a two-year period: the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. A widely accepted date is 586 B.C. The two other dates are 587 and 588. Most scholars choose either 586 or 587.² I have decided to choose 586, in deference to a seeming majority of specialized scholars.³

Ezekiel informs us that it was 390 years from the division of the monarchy under Rehoboam to the fall of Jerusalem.

Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie

1. I agree with Floyd Nolen Jones: biblical chronology is one of the three major battlefields of modern biblical warfare. The other two are higher criticism of biblical texts and Darwinian evolution. Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, 15th ed. (Green Forest, Arkansas: Green Leaf Press, 2005), pp. 7–8. I have relied on his book for the presentation in this chapter.

2. Herman H. Hoeh, "When Did Nebuchadnezzar Conquer Jerusalem?" (1976), edited by Paul Finch (2005). (<http://bit.ly/HoehDating>)

3. Jones accepted this date: *op. cit.*, p. 23.

upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel (Ezek. 4:4–5).

Adding 390 to 586 gives us 976 B.C.⁴ That was the last year of Solomon's reign. Maybe we could argue 977 B.C. It does not matter for this chapter. We know from two passages that Solomon ruled 40 years.⁵ Adding 40 to 976, we get 1016 B.C. for the beginning of his reign. In the fourth year of his reign, he began to build the temple.

Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign (II Chron. 3:1–2).

Subtracting four years from 1016, we get 1012 B.C. This is the anchor date.

First Kings 6:1 is specific: the exodus took place 480 years before. Adding 480 years to 1012, we get 1492 B.C. as the date of the exodus, give or take a few years, depending on the date of the fall of Jerusalem and the dating by month of Solomon's coronation. Again, this variation matters little.

B. Abraham's Covenant

Paul wrote that it was 430 years from God's covenant with Abraham to the exodus. "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (Gal. 3:17). That identifies the date of the covenant: 1922 B.C.

Here is a problem. Which covenant was Paul referring to? There was the promise given to Abraham when God changed Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17). There was an earlier promise, when God told

4. Jones said it should be 975 B.C. Why? He said this: "inclusive numbering minus 1." *dem.* My view is that if an author does not precisely explain what he is talking about—"inclusive numbering minus 1"—the reader is entitled to conclude "case not proven." Chalk it up to the reader's ignorance. If an author is not clear, his reader is entitled to his ignorance. The text says 390. I stick with the text.

5. "And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years" (I Kings 11:42). "And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years" (II Chron. 9:30).

Abram that he would have heirs, and these heirs would return to conquer Canaan in the fourth generation (Gen. 15:16).⁶ The earlier promise came 14 years before God renewed His covenant with Abram. He was 99 years old at that time (Gen. 17:1). He was 86 when Hagar bore Ishmael (Gen. 16:16). He was therefore 85 when God made the first covenant with Abram.

I believe that Paul was referring to the initial covenant. Why? Because this was the initial reference involved the promise of seed. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). But Genesis 17 also mentions seed. Genesis 15 has promise of inheritance of land in the fourth generation. This was the exodus and conquest. But, more important theologically, is this crucial verse: "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 16:6). This is the passage Paul quotes. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). The context of Paul's remarks was the initial covenant, not the renewed covenant 14 years later.

The date of this covenant was 1922 B.C. How long had Abram been in Canaan when Ishmael was conceived? A decade. "And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife" (Gen. 16:3). So, the date of Abram's entry into Canaan was 1932 B.C.

Abram did not leave Haran until his father Terah died.

And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee (Gen. 11:32–12:1).

Abram obeyed. "So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran" (Gen. 12:4).

Terah was born 205 years before Abram went to Canaan: 1932 + 205 = 2137 B.C. From this point on, dating Noah's Flood is duck soup. The chronology of Genesis 11 is the most precise in the Bible.

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

C. Genesis 11

Because people usually ignore genealogies in the Bible, I reproduce it here.

These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood (v. 10).

And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 11).

And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah (v. 12).

And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 13).

And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber (v. 14).

And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 15).

And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg (v. 16).

And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 17).

And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu (v. 18).

And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 19).

And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug (v. 20).

And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 21).

And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor (v. 22).

And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 23).

And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah (v. 24).

This is the most detailed genealogy in the Bible. It is the only genealogy that provides the ages of fathers at the birth of the sons in Abraham's covenant line. This genealogy does not allow any wiggle room for those who want to discover long ages of gaps in the genealogy. There are no gaps. Adding the ages of each father, plus two years from

Arphaxad to the Flood, we get 222 years from the Flood to the birth of Terah. Then we add this to 2137 B.C. We get 2359 B.C. as the date of Noah's Flood. Wiggle room: the date of the fall of Jerusalem (two years), the date of Solomon's death (one year), the date he began the temple (part of one year), and the date of the relevant Abrahamic covenant (14 years).

D. The Inescapable War Over Chronology

Think through a few of the implications of this date. In every world history book, we are told of events that happened earlier than 2359 B.C. We are told of great civilizations that built cities. We are told of the bronze age and the stone age. We are told of cave paintings on walls drawn by people 30,000 years before Christ.

The Bible says all of these estimates are wrong.

There is very little chronological wiggle room for people who say that they believe that the Genesis account is accurate. If that account is accurate, then the three sons of Noah began the re-population of the earth no earlier than 2359 B.C. There was no other surviving family. We know this because of the renewed covenant between God and Noah. It recapitulated the covenant God made with Adam.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things (Gen. 9:1–3).⁷

This was God's covenant renewal with the biological and covenantal replacements of Adam and Eve: the sons of Noah and their wives. It was a representative covenant that still applies to all of Noah's heirs. The races of mankind came later, probably shortly after the tower of Babel, less than two centuries later. God altered the genetic inheritances of mankind. This was not some slow evolutionary process. This was done within a two-century period. The science of genetics is governed by a chronology. Which chronology? The Bible's or Darwinism's?

The cultures of the world are less than 5,000 years old.

7. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 18.

This means that Christians must do the research necessary to re-write history and archeology, with this goal in mind: to discover the overlapping accounts in what appear to be sequential genealogies of ancient kings. They must also find another way to categorize the sequence of civilizations (meaning overlaid mounds of broken pottery and rusted tools) besides stone, bronze, and iron.

The world history textbooks published by Christian fundamentalist textbook publishers do not alert their young readers to this problem. They tell readers about the Egyptians, who supposedly built pyramids in 5000 B.C. It is as if the authors had never read Genesis 11. They suffer from intellectual schizophrenia: a two-chronologies timeline.

Almost no one in Christian academia wants to begin train up generations of historians and archaeologists who understand the war over chronology and who are ready to get involved. History teachers remain silent. They do not suggest research paradigms to unravel the enigmas of non-biblical chronologies. They should point to retired chemistry professor Donovan Courville's self-published book, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications* (1971) as a model of what needs to be done. They are unaware of the book.

This game of let's pretend does Christianity no good.

Conclusion

Economic growth and population growth took place far more rapidly than the humanist chronologies suggest. Between the birth of Arphaxad sometime around 2357 B.C. and the exodus in approximately 1492 B.C., population grew so rapidly that the Israelites departed from Egypt with about 2.5 million people, leaving behind a larger Egyptian population that had enslaved this huge population.⁸

The Israelites moved into a region so densely populated that it took seven years for the Israelites to conquer Canaan partially.

And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day (Deut. 4:37–38).

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1.

Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them; That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty (Josh. 10:1–2).

This does not deal with China, India, Southeast Asia, Mesoamerica, and all the other people's of the earth in 1492 B.C.

There is lots of academic work to be done, or else lots of compromises to be made with the doctrine of biblical infallibility. The six-day creation movement has ignored this historiographical challenge. Its defenders have imagined that this battle over chronology is confined to biology, geology, paleontology, and astrophysics. They have steadfastly avoided asking chronological questions with respect to civilizations.

Immanuel Velikovsky recognized that astronomy and ancient chronology are intertwined. He sought a scientific answer to the origin of the solar system: *Worlds in Collision* (1950). He found it, he believed, in the chronology and descriptive account of the exodus: *Ages in Chaos* (1952). He attempted to reconstruct ancient chronology and astrophysics. He remained a fringe figure and outcast for all of his academic career.⁹ That is the necessary price. He is to be applauded for his attempt.

Choose this day which chronology you will serve.

9. Alfred de Grazia (ed.), *The Velikovsky Affair* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966). (<http://bit.ly/VelikovskyAffair>)

A PRAYER INVOKING GOD'S SANCTIONS

And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart (I Kings 8:22–23).

So begins Solomon's remarkable prayer. The temple had been completed (I Kings 7:51). The nation had been assembled in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:1). The Ark of the Covenant had been delivered to the temple (v. 4). God's glory had filled the temple (v. 10). Solomon reminded God of what he has done. "I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever" (v. 13). He has reminded the people that God raised up David, and God promised David that his son would build the temple (v. 20). God has brought this to pass (v. 21). Then he began his prayer. "And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven" (v. 22).

His prayer had these aspects: praise of God as unique; the God of the covenant and mercy (v. 23); the god of Israel (v. 24). This God dwells in heaven, which cannot contain Him (v. 27). Yet He will dwell in this house. "That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place" (v. 29). Solomon then offered himself as a representative of the people: "And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive" (v. 30). He then prayed to God to respect the prayers of the Israelites.

A. Final Court of Appeal

When rivals swore civil oaths in a court, judges could not decide who was telling the truth. God had to decide.

If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness (vv. 31–32).

There are limits on men's knowledge. There are none on God's knowledge. Men render imperfect judgment. God renders perfect judgment. Solomon invoked God as the supreme Judge. God had to intervene to separate the criminal from the victim. Solomon implored God to intervene in history and impose sanctions in terms of the truth.

This points to an appeals court that lies beyond the final earthly court. A court outside of history assesses history. It then imposes sanctions in history.

The existence of this court provides covenant-keeping man with hope in perfect judgment. He need not fret when covenant-breakers prosper in their wickedness. He can go about his business, knowing that God will sort out all claims perfectly.

Solomon did not call on God to restrict His judgment to eternity. He called on God to intervene in history. He believed that history is not autonomous. He saw a correspondence between evil and negative sanctions, between righteousness and positive sanctions. He saw the world as under God's law and God's predictable sanctions. He called on God to make these visible sanctions even more predictable.

B. Captivity and Return

When the nation sins and is carried off, Solomon prayed, do not leave it in a foreign land.

When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers (vv. 33–34).

Moses had warned them that God would deal with them as Canaanites if they followed the gods of Canaan.

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).¹

Moses had prophesied that there would come such a day.

That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:3–5).²

Solomon realized that this will come true, and He asked God to honor His word that Moses had given to the conquest generation.

C. Meteorological Sanctions

There are negative sanctions imposed by nature. Solomon recognized this and implored God to honor His covenant law.

When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance (vv. 35–36).

Moses had warned them about this. The Promised Land would remain a covenantal agent. God used hornets to drive out the Canaanites (Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12). He would use nature to plague the people if they committed similar abominations.

Take care, Moses said, “That the land spue not you out also, when

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 72.

ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you” (Lev. 18:28).³ “Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out” (Lev. 20:22).⁴ The land would become their enemy.

The goal of these negative sanctions was national repentance.

If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers (vv. 37–40).

D. The Stranger in the Gates

Solomon prayed on behalf of the covenantal stranger.

Moreover concerning a stranger [*nokree*], that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name (vv. 41–43).

The strangers would come and had come. The Mosaic law was a tool of evangelism.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 10.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).⁵

E. The God of Battle

There would be wars, Solomon knew. Israel's defender was God.

If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the LORD toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name: Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause (vv. 44–45).

This was a unique reference to the need of the God's holy army to *pray toward Jerusalem*. When they obey, Solomon implored God, answer their prayer. Give them victory. For the God of historical sanctions, this is easy. Solomon expected this. He believed that historical causation is based on covenantal law.

He repeated his invocation of protection if the nation is carried out of the land (vv. 46–47). “And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name” (v. 48). Why should God do this? “For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron” (v. 51). He is the God of the covenant. They are the people of this covenant. “For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD” (v. 53).

Conclusion

Solomon publicly prayed to God, invoking covenant sanctions. He affirmed his faith that the God of the covenant is reliable. The negative corporate sanctions to come would be in terms of His law and its sanctions. Similarly, the deliverance of Israel would be based on His law and its sanctions. These sanctions were grounded in His mercy. Prayer was required, Solomon implied, to gain the benefits of the covenant. So, he ended his prayers with a final supplication, one based on the

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

demonstrated reliability of God's promises.

And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.

And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day (vv. 55–61).

God heard his prayer. “And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually” (I Kings 9:3).

FEEDBACK LOOPS

And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem (I Kings 10:25–26).

The theocentric principle governing this passage is God as the defender of His covenant and its people.

A. Laws of Kingship

Moses in Deuteronomy 17 laid down laws governing kings of Israel. This was before there was a king in Israel, other than God. God regarded it as a rejection of His kingship when the people told Samuel to anoint a king. “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (I Sam. 8:7). Still, God provided guidelines for kings. The people could judge a king’s performance by how well he adhered to these laws.

When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself,

that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold (Deut. 17:14–17).¹

More than any other king in Israel's history, Solomon violated these laws. He was the richest king. He had the least trouble with foreign wars. Yet he assembled a huge fighting force. He trusted in chariots. This was sin. "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Deut. 20:1). Solomon did not believe this. "And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem" (*I Kings 10:26*).

There were actually cities devoted to chariots. "And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion" (*I Kings 9:19*). He had a business of importing and exporting chariots. "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means" (v. 29). The passage in Second Chronicles makes it clear that this was a business. "And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price. And they fetched up, and brought forth out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so brought they out horses for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, by their means" (*II Chron. 1:16–17*).

B. Wealth Accumulation

Solomon accumulated gold. He could not get enough gold.

And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon (*I Kings 9:27–28*).

And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon (I Kings 10:10).

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold (I Kings 10:14).

And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon (I Kings 10:21).

He was obsessed with gold. He could have lowered taxes. He could have given away the gold brought to him by other kings and the queen of Sheba. But he played the role of pagan king, and pagan kings were expected to own gold.

He knew God's law. There is no indication that he did not follow these Mosaic rules governing kings.

And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel (Deut. 17:18–20).²

His problem was that he did not apply what he read to his own circumstances.

C. Self-Government Under God

There was no higher civil authority than the king within the borders of Israel. Kings outside Israel did not want to fight Solomon. More likely, they wanted to meet him. Word of his wealth and wisdom had spread. Among kings, he was a celebrity.

This made it imperative that Solomon place himself under the law of God. He would have to judge his own actions by the terms of God's law. If he failed to do this, there was no civil agency higher than the king that could bring negative sanctions against him. This placed him outside the normal boundaries. A prophet could challenge him, but

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 14:G.

none did. The priesthood could challenge him, but it never did. God allowed him free rein to test him. At the end of his life, he failed the test. He did not subject himself to the Mosaic law's rules for kings.

D. Sanctions

The sanctions were seemingly positive: fame, fortune, and women. He was universally acclaimed. This placed him in a dangerous condition. Because the sanctions were positive, they served as a positive feedback loop. The more he received, the more he pursued evil. By accumulating forbidden wealth, he became enmeshed in a perverse feedback loop. The positive sanctions encouraged him to ever-greater violations of the law governing kings.

The Mosaic law did not forbid other men from accumulating gold and silver. They did not possess civil power. Their wealth was not a threat to the nation. A king's wealth was, for it persuaded him that he was doing all the right things. The Mosaic law established a unique, historically unprecedented set of restrictions on kings. The Mosaic law warned kings not to accumulate what in private life would not be prohibited. A citizen is surrounded by restraints. A king is not. A successful king accumulates wealth as a sign of his success. "If you've got it, flaunt it!"³ The centralization of power is a threat to the nation, both internally and internationally. Wealth attracts enemies, as Hezekiah's successors learned to their dismay.

At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD.

3. The phrase comes from the comedy film, *The Producers* (1967, 2005).

Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (II Kings 20:12–18).

He, too, accumulated gold and silver for himself. “And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasures for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels” (II Chron. 32:27). Great wealth was a snare to both Solomon and Hezekiah. God’s judgment on Hezekiah and the nation resulted in the destruction of the temple that Solomon had built. The accumulated gold was inherited by the Babylonian Empire. Yet this took place over a century after Hezekiah conducted his grand tour.

God did impose some negative sanctions. God raised up Hadad the Edomite to trouble Solomon (I Kings 11:14). He also raised up Rezon, who reigned over Syria. This man troubled Solomon all of Solomon’s life (I Kings 11:23–25). But these were minor annoyances, not a direct threat to his kingship.

Conclusion

Solomon’s visible success led to his downfall. This became clear to all through his son’s downfall, which permanently ended David’s kingly line in a united nation. Solomon suffered from an exclusively positive feedback loop. He was not wise enough or morally strong enough to follow the Mosaic laws that governed kings. He broke these laws, yet the positive sanctions kept increasing. They ensnared him. The older he got, the less self-governed he became. He became a tool of his multiple wives. He became a polytheist, following their gods as well as Israel’s God.

His son forfeited both the kingship and his father’s wealth.

The division of the kingdom weakened Judah militarily. “And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made” (I Kings 14:25–26). Second Chronicles adds this of the rulers of Judah: “Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may

know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries” (II Chron. 12:8). God would teach them a lesson—the same lesson that He had been teaching Israel from the days of the judges. They would find no tender mercies under foreign kings and foreign gods.

Solomon had accumulated gold as a steward of God. God transferred it to a covenant-breaking steward: Shishak. Better that a covenant-breaker should get positive feedback than a nation which had defied God through a king with too many wives, too many chariots, and too much gold. Only for David’s sake did Solomon get away with all this.

Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father’s sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen (I Kings 11:11–13).

Rehoboam was disinherited by God for his own bad judgment. But that bad judgment was the context of God’s judgment against his father. The Mosaic Covenant’s negative feedback loop reappeared with a vengeance.

20

TAX REVOLT

And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions (I Kings 12:14).

This theocentric focus of this passage is the sovereignty of God in bringing His word to pass.

Because Solomon had married 700 wives and kept 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3), he was led astray to worship other gods (v. 4). God had warned future kings of Israel about this. “Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (Deut. 17:17). God therefore told Solomon that his kingdom would not persevere.

Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father’s sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son (I Kings 11:11–12).

Rehoboam would surely lose the kingdom. God did not say how or why, only that it would inevitably take place. It took place because of high taxes.

A basic principle of economics is this: at a higher price, less is demanded. This includes civil government. If taxes go too high in relation to perceived benefits, people resist paying. They want less civil government.

Immediately after the people made Rehoboam king (I Kings 12:1), a delegation came to him (v. 3). They had a complaint and a promise. “Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon

us, lighter, and we will serve thee” (v. 4). This was a threat. If he did not make their yoke lighter, they would not serve him.

He said that he would seek counsel. This was wise. His father had written, “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14). First, he consulted the old men (v. 6). They gave him excellent advice: become a public servant. “And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever” (v. 7). He ignored this counsel. He then consulted younger men (v. 8). They gave him poor advice: to use power to compel obedience.

And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father’s loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions (vv. 10–11).

When the people returned, he conveyed this message (v. 14). Why was he so foolish? Because God had blinded him. “Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat” (v. 15). Ahijah had told Jeroboam that he would inherit the tribes (I Kings 11:29–31). In response to Rehoboam’s declaration, the people of the 10 tribes revolted against him (I Kings 12:16).

When Rehoboam assembled an army to suppress this revolt, God sent a messenger to him forbidding this. “Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD” (v. 24). This permanently divided the tribal lands. After the Israelites’ return from the exile, members of the same tribes did not live with each other in the same tribal region.

Conclusion

Rehoboam thought there was no political limit to taxes. He thought that the threat of intense negative civil sanctions—scorpions—would bring the protests to an end. But the people understood bet-

ter. Their consent was required for a king to collect taxes. A strong king could collect more taxes than a weak king. Solomon had been a strong king. The people of the 10 tribes recognized that Rehoboam was weaker than his father had been. He did not.

The kingship that the Israelites demanded from Samuel had, four kings down the road, resulted in tax tyranny. The 10 northern tribes revolted, but they did not abandon kings. They lived under a series of bad kings who were worse than Rehoboam.

Jeroboam immediately set up a system of corrupt worship as an imitation of the temple. "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth" (I Kings 13:33–34). God cut off individual kings; the people did not. Finally, God brought the Assyrians to carry them out of the land. Never again did they live under an Israelite king.

21

CONCEALED MIRACLES

And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days (I Kings 17:12–15).

The theocentric principle here is God’s miraculous intervention.

A. Miraculous Obscurity

This is the story of a long-term economic relationship. Elijah needed obscurity to evade King Ahab. The woman needed food. God provided a continuing miracle to provide them both with what they needed.

This relationship began with a revelation from God. “Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink” (vv. 9–10). Her response would re-shape her destiny. She was crucial to God’s plan for Israel.

King Ahab wanted to locate Elijah. Three and a half years later, the king’s servant Obadiah told Elijah, “As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee:

and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not" (I Kings 18:10).

How did he achieve concealment? By not interacting with any local residents. He did not look for a job. He did not beg. He did not perform miracles. He went into a house with a widow and her son. In that house there was food. God performed a daily miracle comparable to the manna in the wilderness. "And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah" (v. 16).

Elijah drew little attention. A few people may have noticed him. Some stranger lived, unmarried, with a widow. This was not the sort of arrangement anyone would suspect of a prophet of God from the nation of Israel. This was an ideal cover. It suggested an illicit arrangement.

B. How Poor Was She?

The woman claimed to be near death. This was hyperbolic language. She owned a house. She could have sold it for enough money to buy food. Her remark was intended to show that she was at the end of her rope. She would soon lose her residence. She could not find employment. She would soon be a beggar. Who was she to help a foreigner?

Elijah told her that she and her son would soon be the recipients of a long-term miracle. The little that she possessed would multiply. It would sustain all three of them. She believed him. But she was required to act in faith in order to confirm her trust in him. She had to give him something to eat. That would be the last of her reserves. The next step would be indebtedness, with her house as collateral, or else taking in a renter. Elijah was asking her to take him in. She demonstrated that she was ready to do this, for a price. The price was daily free food.

The miracle was not spectacular. It was not visible to the neighbors. No one would notice. The container of oil and the container of meal would not run out. The three could eat bread every day. This was a recapitulation of the manna. The fare would be boring, but it would keep the three of them alive.

For three and a half years—time, times, and half a time—the three of them would eat. She would have the basics covered. She could work for money if there was a job available. If there wasn't, they would eat.

Who would notice that she was not buying food on a daily basis? There are always competing grocers. One grocer would assume that she had bought from a rival. No one would notice how much food a widow bought, or failed to buy.

He would not be visible locally. He would remain out of sight, out of mind. He would be forgotten by anyone who might have noticed him, months or years earlier. There might be gossip, but for how long. Gossip fades if there is no reminder. The arrangement was ideal for avoiding reminders.

Life for him would be as boring as his meals. But, when you are avoiding capture, boredom is tolerable.

C. Working Capital

He told the woman that she would have free food until rain fell on Israel. She knew there was a time limit on the supply of welfare from God. She had time to develop an alternative stream of income. She could accumulate capital through thrift. She could save whatever her food would have cost. Her free food could serve as a source of capital. She might start a home business. She might get a regular job. When the rain came in Israel, she would have money or tools in reserve.

Elijah gave her another opportunity to make something of herself. She might take it. She might not. But God through Elijah was providing a way out. She had been on the ragged edge financially. She had almost run out of food. Then, without warning, Elijah had appeared. He was a man with a peculiar gift. He could provide free food.

Then he raised her child from the dead. Until that day, she regarded him as a miracle worker. But this was different. “And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth” (I Kings 17:24). This indicates that workers of miracles were not unheard of. They were exceptional, just as miracles are exceptional, but the mere possession of this rare ability did not guarantee that someone was sent by God. Performing a resurrection from the dead was proof.

If Elijah could do this, then there was nothing to fear. He would not be there as a household miracle-worker forever, but while he was there, the woman was invulnerable to circumstances. This must have given her hope. The world around her was not so great a threat any longer. She could take risks without fear of a disaster. Her outlook must have changed.

D. When Free Lunches End

Then the free lunches ended, just as the manna ended for Israel. “And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria” (I Kings 18:1–2). The text does not describe his departure. She is never mentioned again in the Old Testament. But she is mentioned in the New Testament. Jesus said:

And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow (Luke 4:24–26).

The context of these remarks was Jesus’ announcement of His fulfillment of a messianic prophecy. He had just read from a scroll of Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country (Luke 4:18–23).¹

This produced an Ahab-like reaction. “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong” (vv. 28–29).

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 6.

Israel was about to lose its special relationship with God. Jesus would later announce to the Jewish leaders, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). The unique protection that Israel had enjoyed ever since the last seven plagues on Egypt was about to be removed. The leaders of Israel did not want to hear this. Those who are dependent on miracles rarely do.

Conclusion

The widow could provide what Elijah needed: rental space and obscurity. Elijah could provide what she needed: food. She immediately saw the benefit of the transaction. It would last for several years. This arrangement thwarted Ahab’s attempt to locate Elijah. It provided a cover.

To enter into this arrangement, she had to take a chance that he was a fraud. “And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me.” His proposition began with “fear not.” Over the next three and a half years, she learned not to fear. Meanwhile, everyone in Israel was learning what fear is. They faced starvation. She had used the language of starvation rhetorically. Israelites faced starvation literally. God had removed Israel’s protection in order to weaken the authority of the king, his evil queen, and the court prophets of Baal. God provided literal protection for a foreign woman and her son. They played an important role in God’s confrontation with Israel. They were the beneficiaries of an arrangement that was not for their benefit, but rather for Israel’s—specifically, the remnant. God told Elijah after his return, “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him” (I Kings 19:18). By providing cover for Elijah, she and her son acted on their behalf. She never knew this, and neither did they.

A STOLEN INHERITANCE

And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee (I Kings 21:1–3).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance.

A. The Jubilee

The Mosaic law established the requirement that the original families of the conquest of Canaan not be allowed to sell rural land on a permanent basis. The laws of the 49th or national jubilee year included a law of landed inheritance (Lev. 25:8–13).¹

There was no absolute right of private property in rural land. There was only one legal way to transfer land to another family: an obscure law governing an unfulfilled vow to a priest (Lev. 27:20–21).² Naboth was not allowed to sell the land to Ahab on a permanent basis. He did have the right to lease it to Ahab until the jubilee year. There is no record that the jubilee law was ever honored in Israel. Ahab assumed that Naboth would sell the land to him at some price. He was mistaken. Naboth refused to sell. Without the jubilee law to protect his heirs' inheritance, the only way to secure his inheritance was to refuse to sell.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 29.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

B. Property Rights

Ahab was depressed by the fact that he could not persuade Naboth to sell his land.

And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard (I Kings 21:4–6).

His wife devised a scheme to enable her husband to obtain the land. She paid two men to bring false witness against him for blasphemy against God and the king. “And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died” (I Kings 21:13).

What was blasphemy? In almost every case in the Bible, the Hebrew word translated here as “blaspheme” is translated as “bless.” The exceptions are in this chapter and in the Book of Job. There, it is translated as “curse” (Job 1:5; 2:5, 9). This was a capital crime. “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death” (Lev. 24:16).

The congregation stoned Naboth for this act. “And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead” (I Kings 21:15). Why would he get the land? There was no valid reason. The witnesses had said that Naboth blasphemed the king, too. He was the injured party. He was entitled to restitution. Naboth’s death was that restitution. He was not entitled to the inheritance. That belonged to Naboth’s heirs.

C. Confrontation

His wife told him to go to the field and take possession of it. Simultaneously, God told Elijah to go to the field to confront the king.

Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine (I Kings 21:18–19).

Ahab and Elijah did what they were told. They met in the field. “And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD” (I Kings 21:20). Then Elijah cursed Ahab, as just Naboth was accused of having done to Ahab. The curse was the disinheritance of Ahab. “And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin” (I Kings 21:22). He also cursed his wife. “And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel” (v. 23).

The prophet had the authority to place these curses on the enemies of God. The penalty for false witness is the penalty that was imposed on the victim.

And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deut 19:18–21).³

God served as the judge of Ahab and his wife.

Conclusion

Ahab coveted another man’s inheritance. His wife arranged for

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

him to inherit it. This required funding a conspiracy to commit perjury. The penalty for this false testimony was death. Ahab had sought to inherit what would have belonged to Naboth's heirs. His penalty was death on the battlefield and the disinheritance of his heirs. Her penalty was a cursed death: to be eaten by dogs.

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LYING SPIRITS

And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee (I Kings 22:20–23).

The theocentric principle here is that when God wants to bring negative sanctions against a covenant-breaker, He will see to it that the person chooses a self-destructive course of action.

Ahab had been granted peace because he had humbled himself before God and Elijah regarding his theft of Naboth's land. God promised that He would not destroy Ahab. "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house" (I Kings 21:29). But this promise was conditional. We know this because in the next section, God lures Ahab into a suicidal war against Syria.

There is nothing in the text that indicates that Ahab returned the land to Naboth's heirs. He did not make restitution, as required by the Mosaic law: "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep" (Ex. 22:1).¹ The sheep was dead: Naboth. Ahab owed at least four times the value of the property to the heirs.

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

A. Prophecies: Lying and Truthful

God gave Ahab peace with Syria for three years (I Kings 22:1). Then the king of Judah paid a visit. Ahab asked him if he was willing to start a war with Syria to get back the city of Ramoth (v. 4). He spoke of this city as “ours,” but it was Ahab’s (v. 3). It was not in Judah. The king of Judah unwisely agreed (v. 4). But there was a condition. He wanted Ahab to consult his prophets (v. 5). These were court prophets, funded by Ahab. They assured Ahab that he would be victorious (v. 6). Jehosaphat was not convinced. He asked for a second opinion (v. 7). Ahab said that Micaiah was available, but that he always prophesied bad outcomes for Ahab (v. 8). That was the prophet who Jehosaphat wanted to consult (v. 8). So, Ahab sent for him (v. 9). Meanwhile, the court prophets reassured the two kings that victory over Syria was there for the taking (vv. 11–12).

Micaiah arrived. “So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king” (v. 15). Ahab recognized insincerity when he heard it. This was out of character for Micaiah. “And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?” (v. 17). He knew the difference between a paid court prophet and a real one. Micaiah then told him the truth. “I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace” (v. 17). This image was clear: Ahab would be killed in battle. “And the king of Israel said unto Jehosaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?” (v. 18). Then Micaiah told him what else he had seen. “Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left” (v. 19). Then he revealed the story of God’s desire to locate a lying spirit to deceive Ahab’s court prophets.

The enraged one of the court prophets. “But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?” (v. 24). Micaiah told him that in the day of Ahab’s death, Zedekiah would hide himself in the inner chamber (v. 25). At that point, Ahab ordered Micaiah imprisoned (vv. 26–27). Micaiah responded that if

Ahab returned in peace from the battle, God had not spoken through Micaiah (v. 28).

The kings then went into battle (v. 29). Ahab knew he was at risk. He told Jehosaphat to wear kingly robes. Ahab, on the other hand, would disguise himself (v. 30). At this point, Jehosaphat should have said, "Let's both wear robes." As it turned out, the disguise did Ahab no good, and the robes did Jehosaphat no harm.

But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him (vv. 31–33).

At that point, God intervened.

And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot (vv. 34–35).

The Hebrew word translated here as "at venture" means "simply." In the context, it means "at random." The man did not recognize that Ahab was the king. He just shot an arrow randomly. It reached its pre-ordained target. Micaiah's prophesy came true.

B. Untrustworthy Prophets

The court prophets thought they were providing accurate information. Zedekiah's reaction to Micaiah's description of what God had done to deceive the prophets indicates that he did not believe Micaiah's story.

King Jehosaphat did not fully trust the prophets. He wanted verification. Micaiah said that the court prophets had been deceived by a lying spirit. That spirit had been authorized by God to deceive the prophets. Why? To deceive Ahab. The covenant-breaker should not trust in prophets, Ezekiel warned.

For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 14:7–11).

There is covenantal cause and effect in history. He who breaks covenant with God should not expect guidance when he most needs it. He is vulnerable to deception by God and by those who claim to speak on behalf of God. This will continue until the end of time, Paul wrote.

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thes. 2:8–12).

Conclusion

King Ahab was a marked man—marked by God. He might have avoided death on the battlefield. He could have made restitution to Naboth's heirs. He refused. He could have let well enough alone with Syria. He refused. He could have listened to Micaiah. He refused. He thought he could reduce his risk on the battlefield by disguising himself. He was wrong. God lured him into a trap. Lying spirits lie. Covenant-breaking people believe. Power and signs and wonders are not guarantees of reliability.

LABOR AS DEBT COLLATERAL

Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen (II Kings 4:1).

The theocentric principle is hierarchy: service to God is preferable to service to creditors. “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7).¹

A. Collateralized Debt

The widow of a prophet’s son faced a crisis. He had gone into debt. He had died. The family still owed the debt. The creditor was coming to take the sons into service.

Why did the creditor have a legal claim on the labor of the sons? Because they were not yet of age to join God’s holy army: age 20 (Ex. 30:14).² They were subordinates in their father’s household. He could have benefited from their labor; hence, they were capital assets. The creditor had a legal claim on their labor services until they reached the age of maturity or until the sabbatical year released them because the debt was automatically canceled. “At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD’S release” (Deut. 15:1–2).³ But the year of release was associated with the sabbatical year of rest for the land. “Six years thou shalt sow

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 66.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard” (Lev. 25:3–4).⁴ The problem was, the courts did not enforce the land’s rest. Also, the people sold into servitude for debt repayment were not released, as required. This is why God sent Judah into captivity. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name: he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon” (Jer. 50:33–34). So, the sons would not go free until they reached age 20. The widow would not have their support.

B. Conventional Steps in a Miracle

First, Elisha conducted an inventory. He asked her what assets she owned. A pot of oil was all (v. 2). He then told her to go to people in the neighborhood and collect empty jars. Her good reputation was an asset. She had not considered this. He told her to close the doors and, in the presence of her sons, pour oil from her jar into the containers. She did. When she poured out the oil, it kept pouring until every container was filled. This was a miracle comparable to the one that fed the widow, her son, and Elijah in Zerephath.⁵ “Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest” (v. 7).

In assessing the economic aspects of this miracle, we must understand Elisha’s method of analysis. First, Elisha recognized that the debt had to be paid. Second, he assessed the nature of her assets: oil and a good reputation. Third, he recognized that there was a ready market for oil. She could obtain money to pay the creditor on short notice. There would be money left over for purchasing household necessities.

The miracle relied on the woman’s ability to borrow containers. There had to be some sense of neighborliness. Neighbors had to be willing to lend her capital assets for free. She had no spare cash. She could not rent containers. Had she not had a good reputation, she would not have been able to obtain that many containers on short no-

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

5. Chapter 21.

tice. The miracle's effectiveness therefore rested on ethics: hers and her neighbors'.

Conclusion

A godly man had gone into debt. This was probably not a commercial debt, although it may have been. It was probably an emergency debt. It was governed by the law of charitable loans (Deut. 15:1–7). The collateral was a man's labor. This included the labor of minor sons.

The year of release was not honored in Israel or Judah. So, the sons might be in bondage until they reached adulthood. Elisha recognized that these sons were their mother's comfort. He provided a miracle, which they performed in private. This solved their problem.

RECIPROCAL ACTS OF GRACE

And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither (II Kings 4:8–10).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer.

A. Grace vs. Reciprocity

This family could afford to add a room to their house in order to serve as an occasional guest room for Elisha. This would be wasted space most of the time. There would be no rental income from it. Because they never knew when he would pass by, they would have to leave it empty.

This was a gesture of support for Elisha. He responded by offering a far greater gesture of support. He asked his servant what the woman wanted in life. The servant said she had no child. Elisha had the servant call her, so that he could speak to her. This indicated that he was in a position to grant her this blessing. He did not ask her what she wanted. He announced that she would give birth (vv. 11–16). This was fulfilled the next year (v. 17). This was analogous to Abraham's visit from God, who granted Sarai the same gift, in response to Abraham's generosity in providing a free meal and lodging (Gen. 18:18).

This led to another miracle. The child later had a stroke and died. Elisha raised him from the dead, even as Elijah had raised the son of the widow (vv. 19–37). This was the supreme mark of a prophet. Jesus possessed the same ability. He raised Lazarus from the dead (John

11:44).

In two instances, Elisha demonstrated his ability to perform miracles. The opportunity had come because the woman had the idea of providing free lodging for Elisha and then followed through on it. She had asked for nothing in return. She just wanted to make his work less expensive.

Her generosity did not establish a *quid pro quo*. She had no economic claim on him. *He responded in grace to an act of grace*. This led to a pair of blessings that she could not have purchased with money.

The woman initiated the idea. Her husband went along with her. This looked as though it would be a net economic loss. They had enough wealth so that it was not a major financial burden. It was a little chamber. It led to a large blessing.

What the woman had done to Elisha was imitated by another faithful adherent. A man gave Elisha a lot of food for one man to eat. "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof" (II Kings 4:42). Elisha's response was to share this with people in the neighborhood. "And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD" (vv. 43–44). This was the historical background of Jesus' feeding of thousands of people on two occasions (Matt. 14:15–21; 15:30–38). The ability to multiply food was a mark of a prophet. Elisha was the type. Jesus was the archetype.

The text does not indicate that the man who gave Elisha the food was the recipient of any blessing from Elisha.

B. Blessings Are Not for Sale

Naaman was a great general for Syria. He contracted leprosy. In his household was a captive Israelite girl. The girl showed mercy to Naaman. "And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (II Kings 5:3). This became an opportunity to provide a witness for God to a pagan official.

The story got to Naaman. He, in turn, went to the king of Syria. He knew that he could not submit himself to a foreign prophet apart from

the blessing of his king. He did not violate authority. The king, in turn, dealt with the king of Israel. He did not violate what he regarded as Israel's hierarchy of authority. "And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (II Kings 5:5). Naaman was clearly a crucial asset for the king of Syria.

The king of Syria sent Naaman with the gold and a letter of introduction to the king of Israel. The king of Israel thought it was some sort of deception. "And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me" (II Kings 5:7). The letter must not have mentioned the prophet. The king of Syria regarded this power as inheriting in the person of Israel's king, as an agent of God.

Elisha knew of the king's rending of his clothes and came to him to inquire the reason. When told, he instructed the king to send Naaman to his house. "So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (II Kings 5:9–10). Elisha dealt with Naaman as a subordinate. He did not meet with him directly. He was testing Naaman's submission. Naaman failed the test.

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage (II Kings 5:11–12).

He would not have been healed, but for the intervention of his subordinates. "And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" (II Kings 5:13). So, Naaman humbled himself and bathed in the Jordan. He was instantly cured. "And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no

God in all earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused" (II Kings 5:15–16). Here, he humbled himself. This was appropriate. He offered to pay the prophet as a token of submission. Elisha refused. He was not in need of any gift. So, Naaman asked for another blessing.

And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing (II Kings 5:17–18).

Naaman wanted dirt from Israel as a mark of his subordination to Israel's God. As a commander, he was required to accompany his king into the worship place for the regional god. Naaman wanted to carry a token of Israel back to Syria as a covenantal mark of his subordination to the God who had healed him. He did not ask to be circumcised. He did ask for God's forgiveness for mandatory acts of piety to a god he no longer believed in. Elisha granted him this request. "And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way" (II Kings 5:19).

The king of Syria thought he could pay the king of Israel for healing. Naaman thought he could do some great thing to gain healing. Naaman's servants told him to do the small thing that the prophet had told him to do. They saw that what was required was subordination to something anyone could do, not proof of his own ability to meet the requirement.

God's grace is not for sale. Any performance required is not a purchase. It is a token of subordination.

C. A Servant's Error

Naaman's servants understood what needed to be done: ritual subordination, not a purchase. Elisha's servant did not understand this. He decided to take advantage of the situation. He pursued Naaman and asked for payment. "And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman

said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him” (II Kings 5:22–23). For Naaman, this was a minimal payment. He was glad to offer twice as much. It made him feel as though he was being of some use to Elisha’s ministry. That, Elisha had previously denied to him.

Elisha knew what had taken place as soon as he had returned.

And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow (II Kings 5:26–27).

This was a unique form of leprosy. It marked a man as having been under God’s curse, but it did not make him an outcast. Here was the law of leprosy. “Then the priest shall consider: and, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague: it is all turned white: he is clean” (Lev. 13:13). Gehazi could still remain a servant, but he would henceforth be a marked man. Leprosy was a judicial disease, not a communicable one.¹ A man was unclean judicially if he had leprosy, but not if he was entirely white. If he was entirely white, he had been under a curse, but he was not dangerous to the community.

Conclusion

There is no indication in the Bible that man can establish a positive balance sheet in history for himself by granting favors, large or small, to God. These acts of generosity are not acts of purchase. God does not offer His services for sale. Neither did the prophets. But God is always in a position to grant people their desires. These acts of grace need not be limited by the conventional operations of nature.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

PROFITING FROM INSIDE INFORMATION

And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver (II Kings 6:24–25).

The theocentric principle here is imputation: point four of the biblical covenant model.¹ Men impute economic value in terms of their scale of values within the context of a specific time period.

A. When Money Fails

Syria besieged Jerusalem. No one from outside the city could bring food to the city. The productivity of the city was economically depressed because of its lack of trade with the rural countryside.

People need to eat. If they do not eat, they die. Eating is high on every person's value scale. But, as they become full, they devote additional wealth to purchasing other items. The greater the supply of food, the lower its cost. This is because people demand other things, once they have accumulated enough food to last for a specific time period. The marginal value of an additional unit of food falls below the marginal value of something else.

The siege changed the context. Food could not be resupplied. It ran low. People were willing to spend their savings of silver to buy food. Their silver would do them no good if they died of starvation.

This had happened to Egypt during the seven-year famine. "And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth” (Gen. 47:15).²

This does not mean that prices rose. It means that the price of food rose. The prices of other items fell. No one wanted the goods that sold well in times of peace. They would have had to sell these goods at a loss in order to buy silver. If the price of silver in relation to an ass’s head fell, then the prices of other nonessentials also fell.

B. Cannibalism

The king of Israel faced a problem. A woman approached him. She asked for help. He told her that he could not help her. He had no food (v. 26). But that was not her problem. She had a contractual difficulty. She needed a government official to enforce it.

And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh (vv. 28–30).

This was the fulfillment of a prophecy given by God to Moses.

The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the LORD thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and to-

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 33.

ward the remnant of his children which he shall leave: So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates (Deut. 28:49–57).

What was the king's response? To blame Elisha. "Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day" (v. 31).

C. Prices as Indicators of Supply and Demand

Elisha was not concerned. He had inside information. God had revealed the future to him. "Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria" (II Kings 7:1). He did not say how this would come about. Instead, he focused on the array of prices. There would be a radical shift in favor of holding silver rather than food.

One ruler was skeptical. He voiced his skepticism. Elisha responded by predicting the man's death. "Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof" (v. 2).

Four lepers sat at the gate. They made a cost-benefit analysis: ". . . they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?" (v. 3b).

If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die (v. 4).

Then they took action in terms of their cost-benefit analysis. "And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there" (v. 5). God had scared away the army by

the sound of an approaching army. They had all fled, leaving their food and money behind (vv. 6–7). “And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it” (v. 8).

They satisfied their highest priorities first. They ate and drank. Next, they confiscated spoils: silver, gold, and clothing. They hid this booty. Then, having worked their way down their individual scales of values, conscience struck them. “Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household” (v. 9). They feared God, who brings negative sanctions. Their brethren were starving. “So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were” (v. 10).

This information was carried to the king (v. 11). He suspected a trap. The Syrians were hiding, waiting to attack any who came out of the city for food (v. 12). So, he sent out a few men on the five remaining horses to investigate. This testified to his own lawless heart. Moses had been clear about kings with horses and chariots. “But he shall not multiply horses to himself (Deut. 17:16a). Yet he had blamed Elisha for his troubles. The scouts found that the Syrians had fled.

The residents wanted to get to the food. “And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD” (v. 16). Elisha’s prediction had come true. But one man missed the feast: the skeptic. “And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him” (v. 17). The text repeats this as a double witness (vv. 19–20).

The prophet had possessed accurate information about the future. God had given it to him. Anyone who trusted him and who had food to sell would have sold it for silver immediately. This way, they would have sold assets that were about to fall in price. If his listeners had believed him, a move toward the array of prices that he predicted for the next day would have begun to appear soon after he made the forecast.

Those with food would have sold it, driving down the price of food. But they did not hear it, and those who did hear it did not believe it. One man was so skeptical that it cost him his life.

D. Famine Was Coming

The siege was over. A famine was coming, one comparable in length to the one that struck down Egypt in Joseph's day. "Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years" (II Kings 8:1). She believed him. She and her family moved to Philistia. There is no indication that he told anyone else. The entire nation did not move. The entire nation suffered the famine.

When the seven years were over, she and her family returned. She was ready to re-claim her land. But squatters had occupied it. So, she went to the king. At that very moment, Elisha's servant Gehazi was talking to the king. He was still leprous, but pure white. He was ritually clean. He could lawfully interact with anyone inside the gates of a city. The king had asked Gehazi about Elisha's works. This king was now a believer in Elisha's power. Gehazi told him of the restoration to life of her son. At that moment, the woman gained access to their presence. The king asked her what she wanted. She wanted back her land. The king then ordered his officer to restore her land and whatever had been taken from it over the past seven years (v. 6).

Conclusion

The residents of Israel's capital city did not believe Elisha in the time of the siege. He proved to be accurate. Prior to the next famine, a woman and her family did believe him. He again proved to be accurate. Those who had used her abandoned land to grow food during the famine had to repay her. She was far better off at the end of the famine than she would have been, had she stayed in Israel.

He had inside information. He knew what the prices of goods would be the next day. Those who listened to his predictions and took appropriate action prospered. Those who ignored him didn't.

PUBLIC INTEREST VS. SELF-INTEREST

And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the LORD, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the LORD, Let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance: and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house (II Kings 12:4–6).

The theocentric principle here is that the worship of God is more important than other uses of money donated to the church.

A. Bureaucratic Priests

The king was a righteous man. “And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him” (v. 2). Jehoiada was still in charge of the temple. Despite the fact that the dual structures of authority, church and state, were unified in their instructions, the priests did not follow orders.

The king grew tired of waiting for the priests to follow his orders and repair the temple. He decided to put on more pressure. He forbade any more collections by the priests until the temple was fixed. “Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house” (v. 17). The account in Second Chronicles has his words even more emphatic. “And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the

LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?" (II Chron. 24:6). There was a reason for the condition of the temple. "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim" (II Chron. 24:7).

The priests, being good bureaucrats, had fully understood this problem. But they had done nothing to solve it. "And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house" (v. 18). Now they were required to take action.

But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the LORD: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the LORD. And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the LORD (II Kings 12:9–10).

Chronicles adds this:

And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness. And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end (II Chron. 24:8–10).

This went on for some time.

Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance (II Chron. 24:11).

B. Delegation Without Monitoring

This was a joint operation. "And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the LORD, and also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the LORD"

(II Chron. 24:12; cf. II Kings 12:11–12).

These men did not do the more detailed work of the temple's implements. "Howbeit there were not made for the house of the LORD bowls of silver, snuffers, basons, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of the LORD: But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the LORD" (II Kings 12:13–14). The workmen returned the leftover money. This money was then used to hire specialists. "And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada" (II Chron. 24:14).

The craftsmen had done a good job. They did it under budget. The priests did not monitor them. "Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully" (II Kings 12:15).

The golden implements did not remain in the temple for long. "Then Hazael king of Syria went up, and fought against Gath, and took it: and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem" (v. 17). King Joash then used the sacred implements of the temple to bribe Hazael. "And Jehoash king of Judah took all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and in the king's house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem" (v. 18).

The author passed over the rest of the king's career. He referred to a missing book: "And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" (v. 19). We are told only how the king died. "And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and slew Joash in the house of Mollo, which goeth down to Silla" (v. 20).

C. God Imposes Negative Sanctions

Second Chronicles reveals why this assassination took place. Joash and the princes of Judah had rebelled against God.

Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves

and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.

And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.

And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings (II Chron. 24:17–25).

D. Sanctions and Bureaucracies

The decline into sin began with the priesthood. These men for years used money brought to the temple by the people to fund projects other than the repair of God's house. The king recognized that this was wrong. It placed the nation in jeopardy. God might bring negative sanctions against Judah. So, he ordered the priests to repair God's house. It had taken years for the king to recognize what was going on. This is indicative of how every bureaucracy works. If there are no negative sanctions threatening them, bureaucrats will continue to pursue their own agenda at the expense of the public.

Jehoiada had instigated the rebellion of the priests against the king. After his death at the ripe old age of 130 (II Chron. 24:15), the princes conspired against the priesthood by setting up rival places of worship. The king assented to this. When Jehoiada's son dared to criticize the princes, they killed him. The king did not bring negative sanctions against them. God therefore held him accountable. God brought neg-

ative sanctions against the nation. A small group of Syrians conquered a large army of Judah. Then the king's subordinates murdered him.

Step by step, the rulers of Judah—princes and priests—looked after their own interests. They did not look after God's interests. They had been raised up by God to serve as his ministers. Instead, they used their monopolistic positions to pursue their own interests at the expense of God's interests.

Conclusion

This passage does not tell us what the priests did with the money they held back from temple repairs. They deferred maintenance until the deterioration was visible to the king. They short-changed God. Then God short-changed them. He did so by bringing the Syrians against them. He allowed the king to strip the temple of its gold and silver. God cared about ethics more than gold and silver. He cared more about imposing negative sanctions on rebellious servants than he did about the adornment of His temple.

People pursue their own interests when they are granted monopolistic authority to pursue the public's interest. Beginning in the 1960s, a group of economists called public choice economists began to develop theories of how government employees work. People work for agencies that were set up to protect the public interest. The members nevertheless pursue their own economic self-interest, just as individuals do in non-governmental agencies. By assuming that employees pursue their own interests at the expense of the public's interest, in whose name they act, economists make better predictions about how government agencies operate than if they assume that the employees pursue the public's interest.

LOW-KEY LIVING

At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not (II Kings 20:12–13).

The theocentric principle here is to avoid tempting the enemies of God by making yourself a target. It places God's kingdom at risk.

A. Putting God's Possessions at Risk

Hezekiah unwisely displayed to foreign dignitaries the wealth in God's temple.

Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (II Kings 20:14–18).

This took place sometime around 703 B.C. We know this because he died in 687 B.C. Isaiah had just announced that the king would re-

ceive 15 additional years of life (v. 6). The Babylonians did not carry off the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to Babylon until approximately 586 B.C. So, this was a long-term prophecy. When Isaiah spoke of the king's sons, he meant distant heirs.

What had Hezekiah done wrong? Possibly nothing. Isaiah used the incident to introduce Hezekiah to a distant future. In Hezekiah's day, Assyria was the great empire (II Kings 19). Babylon was not yet the dominant kingdom. Yet Isaiah announced that Babylon would carry off Judah's population and the treasures of Jerusalem, including the temple's treasures. The news did not bother Hezekiah. "Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?" (v. 19). The announcement confirmed that none of this was likely to happen in his lifetime or the lifetimes of his near heirs. He had just received a 15-year stay of execution. This was stay of Judah's execution.

B. Tribute Money

Why did Isaiah approach the king immediately after this incident? He could have announced this when he announced that the king would live another 15 years. The warning was in fact a stay of execution for Judah. But he did not give it until after the visit from the representatives of Babylon.

The representatives saw the great wealth of the king and the temple. Yet twice in recent history, Judah's kings had stripped all of this wealth to pay tribute money to Assyria (II Kings 6:8; 18:14–15). The Babylonians would have known this. Advertising Assyria's successes in suppressing other cities was part of Assyria's system of regional control. Yet these two incidents were not the first time that the treasures of the king and the temple had been used to pay tribute. Syria had been a previous beneficiary (II Kings 12:18). So had the northern kingdom of Samaria (II Kings 14:14). This indicates that the productivity of the people of Judah was considerable. Their taxes and gifts to the temple had replaced what had been lost each time.

Any regional king would have known about the temple's wealth. Hezekiah made sure that the Babylonians knew. What was the point? Was it to proclaim the sovereignty of God? That sovereignty was not represented by the recently assembled gold in the temple. Temple gold had been used too often to pay tribute. If anything, this gold testified to the non-sovereignty of God. That was the opinion of the Assyrians.

The king's agent had sent this message to Hezekiah. "Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar?" (II Kings 19:11–12). That led the king into a trap. Hezekiah prayed to God, and God decided to uphold His honor.

Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead (II Kings 19:32–37).

God did not intervene in order to save the gold in the temple. He intervened because He did not tolerate being compared with the defeated gods of regional city-states. Any would-be empire-builder would have lusted after the gold of the temple. The reports brought back to the king of Babylon by his representatives would have whetted his appetite.

Conclusion

Hezekiah would have been wise to be polite to the representatives of Babylon, but not given them the grand tour. "Look at all this" was not the kind of welcome a wise king would ever give in that region of the world. Better would have been this: "It could be worse. Now, I want to show you my fig orchard."

And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon (I Kings 4:25).

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and

none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it (Micah 4:4).

In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree (Zech. 3:10).

RECEIPTS AND ACCOUNTING

Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house, Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully (II Kings 22:4–7).

The theocentric principle here is the fear of God. Where it is absent, men need receipts.

A. Independent Contractors

The young king, Josiah, ordered the high priest to begin repair work on the temple. This indicates a breakdown of responsibility within the priesthood. Why had the temple deteriorated to this extent, so that a teenage king could notice it? This is another example of the discrepancy between public goods and individual self-interest.¹

The high priest obeyed the king. He hired skilled craftsmen to perform the repair work. The high priest had been ordered to pay for this with money collected at the door of the temple. The high priest did not require the workmen to provide financial accounts of what they had spent. They did the work faithfully.

This indicates that the craftsmen were not part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They were independent contractors. The high priest did not require them to provide an accounting. It was not his responsibility to monitor how they ran their businesses. He hired the contractors to do

1. Chapter 27.

the work.

The text does not say that they competed by placing initial bids on the jobs, but the absence of receipts points to this. Why? Because the high priest needed to give an account to the king. He had been ordered to do something specific: repair the temple with money collected at the temple's door. He was under authority. He needed to prove that he had complied. He also needed to show that he was not favoring cronies or relatives with jobs paid for by temple funds. The only way to do this would have been to open the bidding process to the public.

He did not need to get an accounting from the craftsmen with respect to how they spent the money. He needed only to receive receipts for money received by them from the priesthood. The quality of their work would testify to their faithfulness. The text indicates that they met the required standards.

It is the job of the independent contractor to decide what price he will pay for the materials and labor required to perform a task. He evaluates supply and demand. He calculates a profit margin. He is a specialist in such matters. The person who hires him is not. The person hiring him defers authority with respect to where to buy and how much to pay. He only agrees to pay for services rendered. It is of no importance to him how much money the craftsman will make or lose in meeting the contract. This information is outside the buyer's zone of responsibility.

The independent contractor possesses specialized information about the markets for materials and labor. This is his business. He prospers or fails in terms of his ability to keep costs below revenues. He has a direct self-interest to forecast accurately what costs will be. With respect to this information, the buyer has no legitimate reason to know how he assessed the market and delivered the final product. The buyer has only three areas of responsibility: to sign the initial contract, to evaluate the work, and to pay whatever the contract specifies upon completion of the work.

In the case of the repair of the temple, we are told that the workers "dealt faithfully." This had to do with the finished work. They did what they said they would do. They did it on schedule. They did it for the prices agreed to.

B. Salaried Contractors

The other model is for the hiring firm to place the craftsmen on

the payroll. Here, the requirements change completely. The workers must not be evaluated merely in terms of the quality of work performed. They must do it on budget. They report to their superiors regarding what their work is costing. The employer is responsible for the cost of operations. Why? Because he did not open the production process to competitive bidding.

When an employer in-sources a job instead of outsourcing it, he has reasons. It is easier to monitor performance along the way. He does not need to hire a lawyer to sue for damages for work performed in a substandard way. He has hire and fire authority over the workers. There is tighter control. Part of this control is having access to receipts for materials and labor hired by the contractors. The costs of monitoring performance are higher. The hoped-for goal is lower cost. But this is more difficult to assess without extensive outsourcing. It is difficult to assess true cost, i.e., the price of this service in the open market. Without a free market for these services, employers are flying blind.

This is a variation of Ludwig von Mises' argument in 1920 that without private capital markets, central planners cannot evaluate economic cost rationally². Murray Rothbard extended this insight to apply to cartels. There will never be a single cartel, for it would not be able to assess costs of production without legally independent resource markets. It would be irrational.³

Conclusion

The high priest did not have to demand an accounting from the contract laborers, because they were independent contractors. They made the decisions regarding how to meet their contracts profitably. That was none of the high priest's business. All he had to do was to receive a receipt for payment upon completion of the work. He had to follow the money from the temple's door to the repairs. He did not have to follow any further.

2. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920). (<http://mises.org/econcalc.asp>)

3. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), pp. 659–61. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

HOLY DECORATION

Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal: The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD? Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, And gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy (1 Chron. 29:3–9).

The theocentric principle here is the legitimacy of sacrifice to honor God.

A. Celebrating God's Majesty

David here enumerates all the treasure that he had accumulated to build the temple. The wealth was enormous. Then the people added far more.

This indicates that God wanted something magnificent to honor him. The temple under Solomon was spectacular. It contained all of this, plus whatever he added.

One of the cries throughout history has been “God wants this

money for the poor.” It echoes Judas’ complaint.

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? (John 12:3–5).

Judas had an ulterior motive. “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (v. 6). The critics of cathedrals have not had ulterior motives. They have actually believed the slogan.

This text teaches that precious metals and precious stones are appropriate to celebrate God’s majesty. To celebrate it in this way, individuals must sacrifice great wealth. This sacrifice, like Mary’s, testifies to people’s respect for God and their appreciation of what He has done on their behalf.

The poor are always with us. There are always people in the bottom 20% of national income. If we were to refrain from celebrating God’s majesty until there are no poor, we would never celebrate God’s majesty.

Constructing the temple consumed enormous wealth. It took about 100,000 workers (I Kings 5:13–16) seven years (I Kings 6:38). When completed, Solomon offered sacrifices. “And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD” (I Kings 8:63). All this was expensive.

God had blessed Israel as a nation. The people gave a token payment back to Him. They announced: “We know there is more where that came from.” The magnificence of the temple was their testimony of confidence regarding the future.

B. To Give to the Poor

Giving to the poor was a requirement in the Old Covenant. It is required in the New Covenant. Yet there was no suggestion anywhere in Kings or Chronicles that God was displeased with the temple’s magnificence. Indeed, He had waited a long time for this public adoration.

For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Is-

rael unto this day; but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another. Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars? (I Chron. 17:5–6).

God was tired of waiting. Solomon built the temple to please God, not to cheat the poor. The poor did not deserve what David and Solomon and the people lavished on God through the construction of the temple.

The poor have no legal claim on the rich. They do have a moral claim on successful brethren in times of crisis. They are morally entitled to zero-interest charity loans, so long as they are willing to be put into servitude for up to six years, should they default on the loan (Deut. 15:1–7).¹

There were people in economic need in Solomon's day. They had no moral or legal claim on God. They had no moral or legal claim on the people who funded the temple.

Socialist governments spend money on huge government buildings. Keynesian governments spend money on anything they think will get consumers to spend more money, including compulsory wealth-redistribution programs. Every government in history has spent abnormal amounts of money on favored groups and government buildings. Men honor power. When they refuse to honor God, then they generally honor the state.

Conclusion

Not every synagogue was a temple. Not every church building is a cathedral. But to deny in the name of the poor the right of God's people to honor God by a few great representative displays of wealth is to short-change God.

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

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PREDICTABLE NATIONAL SANCTIONS

And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the LORD stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance (II Chron. 17:3–5).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer in history. These sanctions are distributed in terms of covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking.

A. Representative Obedience

This account of Jehoshaphat, the son of king Asa of Judah, reveals that the system of corporate sanctions described in Deuteronomy 28 was still in operation in Judah. The king was the representative of the kingdom. As such, his adherence to God's law was reckoned by God as applying to the entire nation. Jehoshaphat did what he could to extend the knowledge of biblical law.

Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people (vv. 7–9).

The result extended across the borders of Judah.

And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that

were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and tribute silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he goats (vv. 10–11).

This was peace. This led to the growth of prosperity inside the nation's borders. "And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of store. And he had much business in the cities of Judah: and the men of war, mighty men of valour, were in Jerusalem" (vv. 12–13).

B. A Wicked Alliance

The author records the same account that the author of First Kings did. Jehoshaphat joined with Ahab to attack Syria, on behalf of Ahab, who wanted to regain a city that Syria had captured. Ahab's court prophets prophesied success. Jehoshaphat wanted a second opinion. Ahab called Micaiah. He said that Micaiah had always prophesied negative things for him. This was no exception. But why had the court prophets prophesied success? Micaiah explained why.

Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the LORD said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee (II Chron. 18:18–22; cf. I Kings 22:20–23).

In the ensuing battle, Ahab was killed. Jehoshaphat was spared.

And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast

prepared thine heart to seek God (II Chron. 19:1–3).

C. Righteous Judgment

The king continued to reform the system of civil courts.

And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts. Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD, and for controversies, when they returned to Jerusalem. And he charged them, saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the LORD, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass (vv. 6–10).

After this, the Moabites came to attack Judah. Jehoshaphat went publicly before God in the temple. He affirmed the sovereignty of God.

And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? (II Chron. 20:6–7).

The king invoked the promise of the inheritance to bolster his case.

If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee (vv. 9–12).

The nation stood with the king. “And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children (v. 13). The king represented them.

A prophet came and told him not to fear, not even to attack the invaders. Just stand at a distance and watch.

And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever (vv. 20–21).

The invaders then went to war against themselves (v. 23). “And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much” (v. 25).

This brought more peace. “And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about” (vv. 29–30).

D. Another Bad Alliance

The king had not learned his lesson from the alliance with Ahab.

And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Ezion-gaber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish (vv. 35–37).

The negative sanctions were highly specific. The ships were lost. The alliance came to nothing. These negative sanctions warned the king. There is no indication in the text that he did this again. He died peacefully after a long reign. “Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Jehoram his

son reigned in his stead" (II Chron. 21:1).

Conclusion

King Jehoshaphat experienced highly specific sanctions, both positive and negative, in response to his actions. On one occasion, the sanction was positive despite evil. He was spared by the king of Syria in the battle that Ahab had lured him into. The positive sanction showed that God had honored him for his previous covenantal faithfulness. The prophet said, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD." What was the wrath? Military defeat. He did this once again, and the losses were specific: the failure of the joint venture with another king of Israel.

Generally, his actions were righteous. Judah experienced the blessings of peace and prosperity as a direct result.

A CORRUPT INHERITANCE

And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he was the firstborn. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel. Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD (II Chron. 21:2–6).

The theocentric principle here is inheritance by confession, not bloodline.

A. Inheritance and Disinheritance

The law of inheritance in Deuteronomy regarding the two wives specified that the firstborn son should inherit a double portion.

If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his (Deut. 21:15–17).

This was a double portion of the entire inheritance. If a man had a

total of five sons, the inheritance would be divided into six portions of equal value. The firstborn son would inherit two portions.¹

There was an associated law regarding lawless adult sons. They were to inherit nothing.

If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear (Deut. 21:18–21).

This law mandated execution. A father did not possess this authority. Civil magistrates did. Parents were to bring a public covenant lawsuit against a rebellious son, for the sake of preserving social peace and also the family's good name. Inheritance was not by blood. It was by confession and by conformity to biblical law. The Mosaic law did not allow a lawless son to inherit.²

B. Lawless Inheritance

With respect to the sons of Jehoshaphat, their father should have followed the laws of inheritance with his sons. It appears that he did allow his younger sons to inherit. But the supreme inheritance was the kingship. Here, Jehoshaphat honored the principle of the firstborn. This turned out to be a catastrophic mistake. Jehoram killed all of his brothers. Presumably, this was to cut off all possibility that a prophet or a priest would anoint one of them in place of him, just as Zadok had anointed Solomon in the presence of Nathan the prophet (I Kings 1:39).

Jehoram was in a marital covenant with the daughter of Ahab. If his father had paid attention to the actions of this son, he would not have allowed him to inherit the kingship. But the father honored a different principle: the principle of the firstborn son.

Abraham had not honored this principle. Ishmael was the first-

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 51.

born son, not Isaac. Isaac would have allowed Esau to inherit, but God had told Rebekah that Jacob would inherit. Jacob was the second-born. Judah in turn inherited the scepter of civil power from Jacob. “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). Yet Judah was the fourth-born son (Gen. 29:35). Reuben was first. Samuel picked David for the kingship, passing over David’s older brothers. David picked a younger son to succeed him: Solomon. Solomon was the firstborn of Bathsheba. His firstborn was Amnon (II Sam. 3:2). Amnon was a moral monster who raped his own half-sister and then cast her aside (II Sam. 13). The other sons were passed over, killed, or were rejected by David.

And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David’s wife. These were born to David in Hebron (II Sam 3:3–5).

There were other sons. “And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David” (II Sam. 5:13). Only later was Solomon born, and his mother had been an adulteress. Yet David selected Solomon to rule. Solomon was by far the best of David’s sons for the kingship.

Jehoshaphat ignored these precedents. He chose a covenantal rebel to be the king of Judah. This led to the murder of his other sons. Jehoram was covenantally a man of Israel, not Judah.

The author describes disaster after disaster that fell on Judah under Jehoram. Edom successfully revolted (vv. 8–10). Libnah revolted (v. 10). Elijah wrote to him and placed him under a series of curses. “Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day” (vv. 14–15).

Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians: And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king’s house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons (vv. 16–17).

He was disinherited by God. He died just as Elijah had prophesied (v. 19). "Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings" (v. 20). He died despised by the nation.

C. Youngest Sons, Oldest Sons

In reaction against Jehoram, the eldest son of Jehoshaphat, the nation of Judah chose Jehoram's youngest son, Ahaziah, to be king. His mother was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri and therefore the sister of Ahab. He was the youngest son, but the oldest surviving son.

And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction. He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead: and the Syrians smote Joram (II Chron. 22:1-5).

After he was killed in battle, his mother killed all but one of the surviving sons of Jehoram. "But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah" (v. 10). This included her own grandsons. One infant son of Ahaziah survived, but only because he was concealed by the wife of a priest: Jehoiada. She was a daughter of Ahab and the sister of King Ahaziah, but she was covenantally faithful to God (II Chron. 22:1). The murderous queen reigned until Jehoiada anointed Ahaziah's surviving son at age seven. He then had the usurping queen executed. "And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of musick, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason" (II Chron. 23:13). This was treason against her, but obedience to God. "Then all the people

went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars” (II Chron. 23:17). This was treason against Baal, but obedience to God. God rewarded Jehoiada by giving him a long lifespan: 130 years (II Chron. 24:15).

“Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name also was Zibiah of Beersheba. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest” (II Chron. 24:1–2). He had been the youngest son of Ahaziah, and the oldest surviving son.

Birth order did not matter. Covenantal commitment mattered.

Conclusion

Jehoshaphat unwisely used the principle of the firstborn son as his standard for judicial inheritance. He did honor the principle of the double portion with respect to economic inheritance. He did not cut off his younger sons. But Jehoram did. He used the power of the sword to defend his inheritance. God then brought negative sanctions against him that cut off his inheritance. God also undermined Judah’s empire by allowing the Edomites to escape from Judah’s rule.

The people had not complained when he allowed the high places of rebellious sacrifice to continue (v. 11). They shared in his guilt. They came under God’s negative sanctions.

33

SUNK COSTS AND FUTURE COSTS

Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, according to the houses of their fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin: and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield. He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver (II Chron. 25:5–6).

And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this. Then Amaziah separated them, to wit, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again: wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger (II Chron. 25:9–10).

The theocentric principle here is God as the source of blessings.

A. The Spoils of War

Amaziah, the son of Joash, was planning for a battle with the city state of Seir (II Chron. 25:11). He numbered the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Because this was in preparation for a holy war, it was legal. He also hired 100,000 troops from the northern kingdom's tribe of Ephraim. He paid them 100 talents of silver.

How much silver was a talent? The common estimation of scholars is 50 shekels to a talent.¹ Let us consider the economic implications of this. What was the military purchasing power of a shekel of silver? Not much. "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred

1. "Weights and Measures," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1375.

shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means” (I Kings 10:29).

Amaziah paid 100,000 warriors 5,000 shekels of silver. That is one-20th of a shekel per warrior. Each man accepted one-20th of a shekel to march off to war: pay for food, risk his life, and come home in one piece. This does not compute.

Here is another biblical example.

And when the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Syria-maachah, and out of Zobah. So they hired thirty and two thousand chariots, and the king of Maachah and his people; who came and pitched before Medeba. And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle (I Chron. 19:6–7).

The Ammonites rented a skilled charioteer, a chariot, and at least one horse for a little over one-and-a-half shekels per warrior ($1,000 \times 50 = 50,000/32,000$). A campaign could take weeks. Who fed these men? Who fed the horses? Who paid for repairs? This also does not compute.

What is missing from the story of Amaziah and the rented Ephraimites? The same thing that is missing from the story of the rented Mesopotamian chariots. This: *the promise of spoils*. To the victor belong the spoils. Warriors risked their lives for spoils. The Bible does not say that in these two cases, there was a promise of sharing in the booty, but the pricing tells us that this had to be the case. When men's lives are on the line, they demand payment.

Amaziah made a small down payment to the men of Ephraim. This was merely a token of his good faith. There was an assumption: they would share in the booty. The text makes no sense on any other assumption.

Then a man of God said not to use them. “But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the LORD is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help, and to cast down” (II Chron. 25:7–8). This led to Amaziah's question: “And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which

I have given to the army of Israel?" (v. 8). The man of God answered: "The LORD is able to give thee much more than this." Amaziah sent the 100,000 troops home with no further payment.

B. He Should Have Paid Them

This enraged the troops. They were being publicly humiliated as unworthy to participate. They were also being denied a share of the booty. They exacted vengeance. "But the soldiers of the army which Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah, from Samaria even unto Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil" (v. 13). This refers to 3,000 people. Beth-horon had been a city inside Ephraim (Josh. 16:5). It bordered on Benjamin. It had been a Levitical city, where the family of Kohath had lived (I Chron. 6:66–68). At some point, Benjamin had taken control of the city. It went into the southern kingdom, referred here collectively as Judah. The Ephraimites got revenge on what they regarded as stolen property.

C. Sunk Costs

Amaziah worried about that expenditure. That was silly. The money was gone. There was no way he could get it back from an army of 100,000 armed men. Yet he worried about it.

This is a common mistake in analysis. If the asset is permanently gone, it should play no role in anyone's calculations. Costs are opportunities foregone. Once the money is gone, it is no longer an opportunity. It is therefore no longer a cost. But people usually do not think of past costs as no longer relevant. They want to get even with their past mistakes. They want to be able to tell themselves, "I did not make a mistake. I did not lose that money." But they did, the moment it was legally transferred to new owners. Economists call such costs "sunk costs." They are not really costs. They are past expenditures.

The man of God said not to worry about the money already paid. God could provide another 100 talents of silver. Amaziah had not accurately calculated the cost of sending them home. He did not calculate his true costs, based on the risk of damage that an invading army could do to a defenseless population while Judah's army was fighting Seir. He was worried about a sunk cost. He was not worried about future costs.

The king had not consulted with any man of God before he hired

the Ephraimites. He had hired them rashly. When he was told by a man of God that he had made a mistake, he immediately made four more. First, he worried about a sunk cost, which was not in fact a cost. It was a past action that was irreversible. We cannot allocate lost assets. We can only allocate present assets. Second, he failed to consider the effects of his snub of their military honor. Third, he ignored the implicit assumption of the warriors that they would share in the booty. Fourth, he underestimated the risk of retaliatory action on the part of the armed Ephraimites.

Conclusion

Amaziah was foolish. He worried about something that he could not regain: money already paid. He also ignored the reality of the warriors' assumption of sharing in the booty. He ignored their sense of honor. Finally, he ignored a real cost: the threat from an angry army inside Judah's borders. He did not think he was breaking a contract. He did not explain that he was acting on orders from a man of God. The army imposed damages on civilians.

Warfare is a risky endeavor. When you hire mercenaries, you cannot be sure on whose side they will fight. When you bring an armed force inside your borders, you are creating an opportunity for plunder. Amaziah did not consider this when he agreed to hire the Ephraimites.

CONCLUSION TO KINGS AND CHRONICLES

Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand (II Chron. 36:14–17).

The theocentric principle here is God as sanctions-bringer.

Solomon built the temple. Almost four centuries later, Nebuchadnezzar sacked it (Ezek. 4:5). He killed men indiscriminately. This was the remedy. This was the final negative sanction that Moses had prophesied. “Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity” (Deut. 28:41).

Moses had also prophesied about a return from captivity.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and

multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:1–5).

This was fulfilled under Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up (II Chron. 36:22-23).

Isaiah had prophesied this almost two centuries earlier.

“That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (Isa. 44:28).

The books of Kings and Chronicles reveal that God did not gain the attention of the Israelites through the imposition of sanctions, either positive or negative. The positive sanctions reinforced them in their self-confidence, just as they reinforced Solomon in his.¹ The negative sanctions were only rarely attributed by the people to their own rebellion. They believed they deserved the positive sanctions, no matter what. They believed they did not deserve the negative sanctions, no matter what. God escalated the negative sanctions. This did no good. Then he brought Nebuchadnezzar to the gates of Jerusalem. No change. Then Nebuchadnezzar broke down the gates.

And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about (II Kings 25:8–10).

That got their attention. But it took 70 more years of reminders.

1. Chapter 19.

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA

In the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book. We know this because at the end of each book, the scribes provided a count of the verses. They also provided an identification of the middle verse of the book. This was so that future copyists would know how many verses there were. This practice reduced the possibility of error-filled copies. Copyists burned or cut up their copies if these copies did not conform to these notations. These notations are lacking at the end of Ezra. At the end of Nehemiah, these numbers refer for both books.¹ This fact is not widely known by Christians.

James Jordan says that Ezra was concerned with the holiness of the sanctuary, while Nehemiah was concerned with the holiness of society. Ezra focused on the temple. Nehemiah focused on the city and its wall.²

The books have the same outline. First, a foreign king authorizes the reestablishment of the God's kingdom (Ezra 1–3; Neh. 1:1–2:16). Second, there is local opposition. Third, the covenant-keepers are successful in completing the building project (Ezra 4:1–6:15; Neh. 2:17–6:19). Fourth, the completion is marked by an act of covenant renewal. Fifth, there is an immediate fall into sin: marriage with foreigners (Ezra 9–10; Neh. 13:4–31).³

Jordan makes the case that Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther deal with the same historical period. He argues that the presence of the name Mordecai in the list of returnees under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2) and again in the list in Nehemiah 7:7 indicates that the time period for these two books was within the lifetime of one man. It was not just Mordecai's name that appears in both lists. Three other names do, too. This was the Mordecai of Esther 10:3.⁴ Furthermore, the names of the priests and Levites who signed the covenant renewal document in Ne-

1. James B. Jordan, *Darius, Artaxerxes, and Ahasuerus in the Bible*, *Studies in Biblical Chronology* No. 5 (2001), p. 16.

2. *Idem*.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

hemiah's 20th year (Neh. 10:1–8) are similar to the list of names of those who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:1–7) in the first year of Cyrus' decree (Neh. 12:12–21).⁵

In Nehemiah, we read the following:

These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city (Neh. 7:6).

The comparative handful of returnees⁶ went back at first to Judah and Jerusalem: the southern kingdom. Those whose forebears had come from cities in the southern kingdom returned there. The others returned to their cities. "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities" (Ezra 2:70).

They did not occupy their families' rural plots. They could not. The Persian king had to deal with immigrants from other nations: Samaritans. They had been brought in by the Babylonians to occupy the nearly empty land. The original land distribution of the conquest generation was not restored. This changed the pattern of rural inheritance. The jubilee law had probably not been enforced. After the return, it could not be enforced. The Jews did not possess the legal authority to dispossess the strangers. Ezekiel had announced this at the time of the captivity.

So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 47:21–23).⁷

That was the legal requirement, according to the revised Mosaic

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–23.

6. "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women" (Ezra 2:64–65; cf. Neh. 7:66–67).

7. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

law. The returnees did not possess the authority to do this. Most probably dwelt in their home cities. In walled cities, the jubilee inheritance laws never applied.

And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile (Lev. 25:29–30).

The returnees would intermix geographically with Samaritans, who now lived where their forefathers had lived. They headed initially into cities.

TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4).

The theocentric principle here is the centrality of the temple in the life of Israel. It was the residence of God in history. This was understood by a Medo-Persian king.

A. Cyrus

Two centuries earlier, Isaiah had prophesied of Cyrus.

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be

built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid (Isa. 44:24–28).

This prophecy was about to come true. This prophecy, more than anything else, is why the higher critics of the Bible invented a theory of a second Isaiah, called Deutero-Isaiah, who supposedly wrote the second half of the book after the exile ended. Rationalists and humanists cannot accept the possibility that anyone can know the future with such precision. Such a possibility undermines their concept of cause (before) and effect (after). The central idea of prophecy is foreign to them, namely, that God controls the future.

B. The Funding of the Temple

Cyrus understood that the temple should become the center of worship for Israel. The Jews should pay for the rebuilding of the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had torn down. It was not the economic responsibility of other nations within the Medo-Persian empire, the empire that had replaced Babylon's.

He understood that he had a crucial role to play in this. He said that God "hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem." As God's designated and long-propheesied agent, he had the authority to identify who should fund the rebuilding: those who followed the God whose temple it had been and would be once again.

He recognized that not all Jews would return to Israel. "And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." The Jews who stayed behind had an obligation to fund those who would return and do the work of rebuilding. They all had the same confession of faith:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut. 6:4–9).

They also all relied on the same repretative sacrificial system, which required the temple.

Cyrus recognized that the Jews were different. They had been removed from their land, yet their God was still at the center of their lives. This was not a local god, unlike other gods of the ancient Near East. This God made claims on the lives of His people, even though most of them would not return to Israel. Those who remained behind were no less Jews. The sacrifices would be offered on their behalf.

This recognition was crucial to the future of the Jews. No matter where they resided, for as long as the temple was in Jerusalem, they would remain a separate nation. They were bound by covenant oath, covenant sign (circumcision), and covenant renewal (Passover). This solidarity survived the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D.

Cyrus restored the treasures that had been removed from the temple. “Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah” (Ezra 1:7–8). There had been an accounting under Nebuchadzezzar. These account books had been retained by Cyrus. The transition of empires involved the transition of accounting records.

C. The Returnees

The leader was Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2). A total of 42,360 members of the congregation—citizens of the nation—returned to Israel. In addition, there were 7,337 servants, plus 200 singers (vv. 64–65). This was a small group. Some of them were rich.

And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests’ garments (vv. 68–69).

This indicates that those who returned were not economic failures in Babylon. Some had been highly successful. They were willing to pioneer the return to a holy land whose population had been brought in from outside the region. They were not going back for business opportunities. They were going back for the temple’s sake.

Conclusion

Cyrus was God's representative civil agent in history. Through his actions, a representative group of Jews returned to Israel and constructed the temple. The temple would serve the dispersed Jews as their representative place of sacrifice. Most of them remained outside Israel.

Cyrus required the Jews to fund the building of the temple. This was not the responsibility of the Medo-Persian state. He returned the stolen treasures of the temple. That was the limit of the state's contribution to the project.

SYNCRETISM'S ENVY

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us (Ezra 4:1–4).

The theocentric principle here is the covenantal oath as the basis of membership in God's church.

A. Syncretism and Rebellion

Syncretism is the mixing of rival religious systems. As we shall see in this passage, syncretism is not acceptable to God.

Those residents of the land of Israel who were not bound by covenant oath to the God of Israel would not be allowed to fund the rebuilding of the temple. They would not share in the costs. They would gain the benefits associated with common grace: partial healing but without redemption.¹ They would not share in the benefits associated with special grace: redemption. It was not possible to obtain a portion of God's covenant special grace apart from covenantal subordination to God. This subordination was marked by an oath-sign: circumcision.

These residents were Samaritans. They had been brought into the Promised Land to replace the kidnapped Israelites. They had gained some knowledge of God from their time in the land. So, their repres-

1. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

entatives insisted, "We seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither."

Their offer to co-fund the temple's construction was rejected by the leaders of Israel. It was clear to the Israel's leaders that the commitment of these foreigners was not grounded in God's covenant with Abraham. They could become members of the nation through confession and circumcision. They were not requesting membership in the covenant. They were requesting co-participation apart from binding covenant oath. Their request was rejected forcefully.

B. Envy in Action

Envy is a highly destructive sin. The envious person seeks to tear down others, despite the fact that tearing down others does not benefit him. The envious person is obsessed with the idea that someone else possesses an advantage that he cannot attain. This difference is an affront to him. He refuses to accept it. He seeks to remove it—not by attaining something else of value for himself but by destroying the advantage possessed by the other person.²

1. *The Samaritans*

The Samaritans' leaders did not accept rejection by the leaders of Israel. They sought to remove the advantage that the Jews would possess through the temple. Even though the Samaritans did not have to finance any part of the temple, they wanted to prevent its construction.

Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia (vv. 4–5).

Cyrus sent the Jews to Israel in 538 B.C. The reign of Darius the Great began around 522 B.C., 16 years later. He ruled until 486 B.C. He was the king who invaded Greece. He lost the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.

2. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1966] 1970). Reprinted by the Liberty Fund, 1987.

2. Ahasuerus

“And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem” (v. 6). Who was Ahasuerus? The Apocryphal book, I Esdras, identifies him as Darius. It cites the parallel account of a great banquet (Esther 1:1–3), but instead of naming the king Ahasuerus, as the Book of Esther does, it identifies him as Darius (I Esdras 3:1–3). James Jordan presented a strong case that Ahasuerus was another name for Darius the Great.³ So did Floyd Nolen Jones.⁴ Jordan argued that the names were throne names that expressed the greatness of the king.⁵ Furthermore, the list of people who returned with Zerubbabel in Cyrus’ first year (Neh. 12:1–9) is similar to the list of covenanting Levites and priests who signed the covenant with Nehemiah after the building of the wall (Neh. 10:1–12). The list of names of the returnees under Ezra includes Mordecai (Ezra 2:2). So does the list in Nehemiah 7:7. Nehemiah’s list refers to the era after the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt (Neh. 7:1).⁶

In the early days of Ahasuerus, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached against the Jews for not finishing the construction of the temple (Ezra 5:1).

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built (Hag. 1:1–2).

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers (Zech. 1:1–2).

3. Rebuilding

The Jews began rebuilding both the temple (Ezra 4:2) and the

3. James B. Jordan, *Darius, Artaxerxes, and Ahasuerus in the Bible*, *Studies in Biblical Chronology* No. 5 (2001); “Esther: Historical & Chronological Comments (III), *Biblical Chronology Newsletter* (May 1996).

4. Floyd Nolen Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, 15th ed. (Green Forest, Arkansas: New Leaf Press, 2005), pp. 201–5.

5. Jordan, *Darius*, ch. 2.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

broken wall of the city (Neh. 4:6–11). The local governor then demanded to know who had authorized this.

At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? (Ezra 5:3–4).

This is the universal initial challenge by every official: “Where is your written authorization?” If there is no official piece of paper, there is no authorization. Here is the bureaucrat’s assumption: “That which has not been officially authorized is not permitted.” This is the opposite of the rule governing God’s kingdom, beginning in the garden of Eden: “That which has not been officially prohibited is authorized.”

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16–17).

Furthermore, the governor asked, who authorized this project locally? Who claimed such authority? He wanted names. This procedure usually terrifies the targeted victims. Not in this case. “But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter” (Ezra 5:5).

C. Letters from Lawyers

Local Samaritans then wrote Darius a letter. This letter is a fine example of the lawyer’s deliberately deceptive special pleading.

1. Making the Case

It raised questions of legality. It asked whether this construction project had been officially authorized. This would create doubt in the minds of senior officials under Darius. Doubt regarding authorization might pressure high officials to halt work on the project until the paperwork was in order.

Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. Be it

known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings (vv. 12–13).

This was guilt by association: the Jews were the heirs of the former residents of the land who had unsuccessfully resisted Nebuchadnezzar. Yet this letter was sent to officials of an empire that had overthrown Babylon. Why would they care if Jews had given trouble to Babylon? The Medo-Persian empire had given Babylon far more trouble. Nevertheless, bureaucrats have the same mentality everywhere and in all eras. They do not like resistance to official orders. They also do not like to see creativity that has not been officially approved.

The letter did not mention the temple. It mentioned only the city's wall. Walls were a mark of sovereignty: a technical means for local residents to increase the cost of law-enforcement by the empire. Walls are defensive. Who could the walls be designed to resist, if not the empire? The letter planted seeds of doubt.

Next, the letter asserted that the inquiry was motivated solely out of loyalty to the king. The Samaritans were loyal members of the imperial system: recipients of the king's money. There was no hidden agenda here. No, indeed; the king's well-being was all that mattered to them.

Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king; That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river (vv. 14–16).

They referred the recipient to old records: records of Israel's rebellion against an earlier empire. These are rebellious people, the letter said. The city's wall could have only one goal: resistance to lawful authority.

The strategy worked. Darius ordered his subordinates to examine the pre-exilic records of the Israelites. These written records had been transferred to the archives of the new empire. They showed that the accusation was accurate. These people had once been powerful, collecting tribute from other nations. They had resisted imperial author-

ity. Darius sent a letter back to the critics.

And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? (vv. 19–22).

That was what the Samaritans wanted to hear. The reconstruction of Jerusalem was halted, by order of the king. “Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (v. 24). This had been the goal of the Samaritans from the beginning. They were after a universal cessation of construction because this would stop work on the temple.

2. A Counter-Letter

The Jews also knew how to play the lawyer’s game. They gave an answer to the governor. The governor summarized their answer in his subsequent letter to Darius. The Jews got right to the point at hand: the issue was the construction of the temple, not the building of the wall. The local officials summarized the Jews’ argument in a letter to the king.

They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

The local governor assured the king that he and his colleagues had followed to the letter the king’s instructions in his letter. They had gone beyond the king’s instructions in their quest to enforce his letter—a common practice by bureaucrats down through the ages: going beyond what was mandated from on high. They had asked for the names of the leaders.

The Jewish leaders responded to this inquiry by admitting that

they had indeed been a rebellious people, thereby undermining to the Samaritans' tactic. The God of Israel had also been upset with the Jews, so He let them be carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. This shifted the terms of the dispute away from political rebellion to theology. That in turn brought the main topic to the forefront: the construction of the temple. The local officials summarized this verbal exchange.

We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon (7–12).

The Jewish leaders went beyond the distant history of Babylon, where the Samaritans wanted to confine it, to the more recent history of Medo-Persia. They responded in kind to the governor. "You want names. Have we got names!"

But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place. Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished (13–16).

The Jews had the biggest name of all: Cyrus. He had issued a decree regarding the construction of the temple. They had another name, the name of Cyrus's enforcer, Sheshbazzar. This man came 600 miles with the people to lay the foundation of the temple. *Laying the foundation was a covenantal act*. In this case, it was an act of state. As an agent of the king, this man had participated in the construction of the temple.

The Jews by now knew how to deal with bureaucrats. They hinted ever so obliquely to the problem now facing the local bureaucrats. The local bureaucrats had halted work on the temple. This was risky. This was thwarting the decree of Cyrus: “Even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished.” The bureaucrats took the hint.

D. Two Men Called Darius

1. *Darius the Mede (Cyrus)*

In Medo-Persia, thwarting a decree of the king was a dangerous thing to do. By this time in Darius the Great’s reign, the story of Daniel and the lions’ den would have been widely known by bureaucrats. The envious religious and political leaders of Medo-Persia had sought to entrap Daniel, who had been a Jew of authority in Babylon’s empire. They persuaded the earlier Darius, Darius the Mede (Cyrus),⁷ to decree that no one should petition his god for 30 days. “Establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree” (Dan. 6:8b-9). It was a stupid law, but Darius signed it anyway. Daniel had then refused to obey, as the officials knew he would. They brought evidence that he had worshipped the God of Israel. But they laid the verbal groundwork before they presented their evidence. “Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king’s decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not” (Dan. 6:12). They then brought charges against Daniel. The king was trapped.

Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed (Dan. 6:14–15).

When Daniel survived the ordeal in the lions’ den, Darius the Mede (Cyrus) placed the scheming officials and their families in the

7. James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall: A Commentary on The Book of Daniel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009), ch. 12.

lions' den. The officials had fully understood the law of the Medes and Persians, but they had not understood the risk.

2. Darius the Great

The local governors of Israel understood the risk. They also understood the way out of their dilemma. They asked the king to look it up. Check the records. Perhaps there is evidence to support the Jews' claim.

Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter. Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon (Ezra 5:17–6:1).

Lo and behold, there was an official record. And was it detailed!

And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expences be given out of the king's house: And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God (Ezra 6:2–5).

That ended the dispute. The Samaritans' legal strategy blew up in their faces. In the lawyers' game of looking it up, the Jews had compelling evidence. The king then compensated for his officials' not having looked things up more carefully. He instructed the local officials in no uncertain terms.

Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the

elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed (6–12).

The recipients of this letter had no doubt about their next steps. "Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily" (v. 13).

And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king (14–15).

D. Syncretism vs. Subordination

The Samaritans had asked to be a part of the building of the temple. They wanted co-participation covenantally. They claimed to worship the God of Israel. But they were uncircumcised. They were not willing to come under the Mosaic law. So, their offer was rejected.

In contrast, Cyrus and Darius recognized that the God of Israel possessed enormous power. They respected power. Darius knew that he had unwittingly hindered the building of the temple. He was making restitution. He wrote, "of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered." He wanted to speed up the construction process. He also formally brought sacrifices to the God of Israel: "young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven,

wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.” He was subordinating himself and his sons—his inheritance—under the God of Israel. He did not do so as a circumcised Israelite, but as a man who wanted the prayers of Israelites. He was not petitioning as a would-be equal, but as a humble servant of Israel’s God. The Jews had no objection.

Publicly, neither did the Samaritans.

Conclusion

This incident illustrates a fundamental biblical principle: the rejection of syncretism. *He who is not under the covenant’s laws by oath is not to become a joint participant.* He may kneel before God as a suppliant. He may not be kneeled to as a covenantal representative of God’s ecclesiastical covenant.

The Samaritan leaders said that “we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him.” They were like a person who is trying to get into a military base’s strategic planning center, but without either a uniform or papers. The person may insist that he is a big supporter of the military. The guard must not let him into the secured area. He is not under official authority, so he is not allowed to make official decisions. He is allowed to attend a parade. He is not entitled to plan one.

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FREEWILL OFFERINGS BY PERSIAN RULERS

Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God (Ezra 7:14–18).

The theocentric principle is subordination to God through voluntary sacrifice.

A. Religious Liberty

In the seventh year of his reign (v. 7), Darius/Artaxerxes sent Ezra the scribe, Levites, and priests to Jerusalem. They went of their own accord (v. 13). This was at least six years after the exchange of letters regarding the rebuilding of the temple. That dispute had begun in his first year (4:6).

Cyrus conquered Babylon around 538 B.C. He immediately authorized the Jews' return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1). He died in 530 B.C. Darius the Great came to power in 522. So, the dispute began about 16 years after Cyrus authorized the return to Jerusalem. Then it was at least another six years until Ezra returned to Jerusalem (7:7).

The king and his advisors sent silver and gold with Ezra. They

trusted him to use it for the purpose of sacrifice. The king and his counselors were submitting to the authority of Israel's God as non-members of the covenant. They were subordinating themselves to God, but not by means of a covenant oath. They were not placing themselves under the Mosaic law, but they were promoting that law-order for the Israelites. The king's decree identified Ezra as "a scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (v. 12). He even exempted them from taxation. "Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them" (v. 24).

He placed Ezra over the people as a civil ruler—an agent of the king. "And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not" (v. 25). That is, he authorized the Mosaic law as the civil law of this province. He placed civil sanctions in Ezra's hand. "And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment" (v. 26).

This was extraordinary. Persia allowed the Jews to govern themselves by means of God's law. Jews possessed religious liberty. In contrast, the Greeks at this time were divided into city-states, each with its own gods and its own laws. These cities were at war with each other constantly. There was no freedom of religion there for citizens as Greeks. Every citizen had to be a member of the city's religious cult. There was no religious pluralism in Greece: freedom of religion under a single legal order. There was no central government.

Western historians cheer the Greeks in the Persian wars (498–444 B.C.). The Persians are seen as the evil, tyrannical invaders. Yet it was the Persians, not the classical Greeks, who established religious freedom.

B. Covenant-Breakers' Donations

The rulers of Persia were covenant-breakers. They were outside the kingdom of God. They had no inheritance in this kingdom. But they possessed great power. The people of God were under their jurisdiction.

The rulers had three covenantal options: (1) formally covenant with the God of the Bible through circumcision and obedience to God's revealed laws; (2) remain outside the covenant, but publicly support the work of God's kingdom; (3) remain outside the covenant and persecute the people of God. Initially, Nebuchadnezzar did the third. Then he repented (Dan. 4). He did the first. Darius the Mede (Cyrus) and Darius the Great did the second. They made freewill offerings to the kingdom of God by supporting the building of the temple and offering animal sacrifices. The cost of building the temple was reduced because of this.

The question arises: Was there a hidden cost of these offerings? Did the kings exercise greater authority over the church/priesthood because of these gifts? The texts do not indicate that this was the case. The temple cost the Jews less to build than would otherwise have been the case. But the sacrifices were part of a system of sacrifice that did not benefit the nation directly. The priests had more meat to eat, but they also had more work to perform. There was an occasional advantage for the priests, but the only advantage for the public would have been if the priests sold this post-sacrificial meat to the general public. There was no authorization for this in the Mosaic law. "And that which is left of the meat offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire" (Lev. 2:10). "And all the meat offering that is baken in the oven, and all that is dressed in the fryingpan, and in the pan, shall be the priest's that offereth it" (Lev. 7:9).

Covenant-breakers could give to God through gifts to the temple or the priesthood. This gained them no permanent advantage institutionally. It did reveal publicly that the covenant-breakers did acknowledge some degree of sovereignty for God. God was at least entitled to be part of the pantheon of civic gods in the empire.

Conclusion

Darius and his top advisors donated gold and silver to the temple. They also provided animals to sacrifice on their behalf. This was not an attempt to gain civil power over the Jews. The king already possessed such power. The gifts were formal acts of personal subordination to God. This subordination was not covenantal. It was personal. They were not placing themselves under the laws of God. They were funding the ecclesiastical order that placed the Jews under the Mosaic

law.

Ezra rejoiced:

Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem: And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me (Ezra 7:27–28).

As it turned out, the Jews delayed rebuilding the city's wall for another 13 years (Neh. 2:1–5). It was the temple, not the wall, that had been foremost in their thinking.

CONCLUSION TO EZRA

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law (Ezra 10:2–3).

Separation of covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers was mandatory to avoid syncretism, defined as a mixture of confessions about God within a single oath-bound covenantal institution. The Jewish leaders had rejected the Samaritans' request that they be allowed to participate in the building of the temple. But what about the syncretism of their families? Could that lawfully continue?

This passage indicates that the men of Israel also ended their mixed marriages through permanent separation. This included the children of these marriages. They did this for the sake of God's covenant. They cast out these covenant-breakers from their midst, just as Abraham had cast out Hagar and Ishmael. The temple was now finished. They would not bring their covenant-breaking family members into the temple's grounds. This is the background for Jesus' warning: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). One implication of this declaration is the refutation of one of secular conservatism's most widely believed assertions, namely, that the family is the most important human institution. It is not. *The institutional church is the most important human institution.* The family will not extend into eternity.¹ The church will.

Ezra oversaw the construction of the temple. The animal sacrifices

1. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:29–30).

could now be restored. The separation between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers ecclesiastically now had a physical representation: the temple's walls. The Ark of the Covenant was gone, but the symbolic separation of the holy of holies still stood: the veil of the temple.² This representation then led to the separation of family members from heads of households. At this point, both church and family manifested the division established by covenant. What now needed to be separated representatively was the civil government. This separation could not be accomplished until the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt, including the gates. That was the next step in the restoration process. That is the subject of the Book of Nehemiah.

2. "And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mark 15:37–38).

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH

These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city (Neh. 7:6).

The comparative handful of returnees¹ went back at first to Judah and Jerusalem: the southern kingdom. Those whose forebears had come from cities in the southern kingdom returned there. The others returned to their cities. “So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities” (Ezra 2:70).

They did not occupy their families’ rural plots. They could not. The Persian king had to deal with immigrants from other nations: Samaritans. They had been brought in by the Babylonians to occupy the nearly empty land. The original land distribution of the conquest generation was not restored. This changed the pattern of rural inheritance. The jubilee law had probably not been enforced. After the return, it could not be enforced. The Jews did not possess the legal authority to dispossess the strangers. Ezekiel had announced this at the time of the captivity.

So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 47:21–23).²

1. “The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women” (Ezra 2:64–65; cf. Neh. 7:66–67).

2. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the*

That was the legal requirement, according to the revised Mosaic law. The returnees did not possess the authority to enforce this. Most probably dwelt in their home cities. In walled cities, the jubilee inheritance laws never applied.

And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile (Lev. 25:29–30).

The returnees would intermix geographically with Samaritans, who now lived where their forefathers had lived. They headed initially into cities.

Jerusalem was the central city because it was where the temple was. Nehemiah recognized that this city required a wall of separation between the temple and the covenant-breaking residents of the land. He devoted himself to seeing to it that the wall surrounding Jerusalem was rebuilt and maintained. This was 36 years after the Jews had returned to Jerusalem from the former Babylonian empire. They returned from the region of the Euphrates River.

The Book of Nehemiah is about rebuilding Jerusalem's wall.

A WALL OF COVENANTAL SEPARATION

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire (Neh. 1:3).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the residence of God in Israel. He resided inside the temple, which was His house. There were physical barriers around the sacrifices of the temple: the temple's walls. Another barrier was civil as well as ecclesiastical: the city's wall.

A. The Covenant's Sanctions

Nehemiah says that he was the cupbearer to the king (Neh. 1:11). His task was be sure that no one poisoned the king's drink. Generally, a cupbearer drank from the same source of wine that the king would be served. If it was poisoned, he would die. He then made sure that there was no intermediary between him and king. His was a life-and-death office. It mandated daily contact with the king.

When he learned that the wall was still in ruins, he prayed to God. He prayed as a representative of the people, confessing their sins on their behalf (Neh. 1:5–9). He reminded God of His covenant. "And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments" (v. 5). Nehemiah's prayer was representative.

Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned (v. 6).

He was not a Levite or a priest. He was not a prophet. He was an official in the king's service. The king was in authority over the Jews. He therefore was in a position to help the Jews who resided in Jerusalem. As an agent in a position to help, Nehemiah prayed on their behalf.

First, he reminded God that he knew that the Mosaic law had warned the people that they would be scattered if they refused to obey the law.

And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind (Deut. 28:63–65).

Nehemiah was aware that the people of Israel were still under covenantal sanctions. They were under judgment.

Second, He reminded God of His promise of deliverance. He cited Deuteronomy 30:1–3: “But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there” (Neh. 1:9).

Third, he prayed to God to be able to use his position to complete the work of reconciliation between Israel and God. “O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer” (v. 11). That work of reconciliation was incomplete because the wall of Jerusalem was incomplete.

His judicial position was analogous to what Esther's had been when the Jews were threatened by Haman. She could intercede on their behalf. That had taken place approximately eight years earlier, in the twelfth year of Darius' reign (Est. 3:7). It was now year 20 (Neh. 1:1; 2:1).

B. The Authority to Exclude

The king perceived that something troubled Nehemiah (Neh. 2:2). Nehemiah explained. “And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?” (v. 3). The king granted him authority to return to Jerusalem and repair the wall. Then Nehemiah asked for more.

Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me (Neh. 2:7–8).

When you are acting on behalf of God’s people, ask for more if you think you can get more.

The king possessed capital. Nehemiah asked for a portion of this capital. On what grounds? Because a city that had no wall in the ancient Near East was not a place of honor. It was an insecure place that could not defend itself.

Nehemiah was not asking for a wall so as to resist the king. Such resistance would have been suicidal. A king who could build up a wall could surely break down the wall. The wall was to secure the city against other enemies. Those enemies were also under the authority of the king.

Shortly after Nehemiah handed the king’s official papers to local officials, those enemies were alerted to the threat to their authority. “Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel” (Neh. 2:9–10). This was envy: the desire to tear down someone else. The same sin in the enemies of the Jews had hampered Zerubbabel in the construction of the temple 36 years earlier.¹

1. Cyrus conquered Babylon around 538 B.C. Jews returned to Jerusalem the next year. Local resistance began immediately (Ezra 4). Darius the Great became king in 522: 16 years after Cyrus conquered Babylon. Now it was 20 years after Darius became king.

Nehemiah inspected the wall at night (vv. 12–13). He found the wall in ruins (v. 13). He did not initially tell the local Jews of his plan to rebuild the wall (v. 16). Then he did tell them. He cited the king's words and commands. Word spread fast. "But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" (v. 19) They accused him of what they would have done, if they had possessed a secure wall: treason. Nehemiah understood what they feared losing: easy access into the city. "Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem" (v. 20). This was the same answer that Zerubbabel had given the non-Jews of his day. "But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us" (Ezra 4:3).² Nehemiah extended the boundary of covenantal exclusion from the temple to the city itself. Both boundaries were to be marked by walls in good repair.

The wall began to be repaired, family by family, section by section. It was a joint effort (Neh. 3).

Their enemies saw what this meant: exclusion. They resented this.

But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? (Neh. 4:1–2)

They began making preparations to take the city by force (v. 8). This, despite the fact that Nehemiah had been authorized by the king to re-build the wall. It was clear who was in rebellion to the king. They would rebel against him by destroying those whom the king had authorized to exclude them (v. 11). In response, Nehemiah told the Jews to arm themselves and be ready to fight. This meant that they would resist rebellion against the king. He did not appeal to the masses alone. He appealed to the rulers. "And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye

2. Chapter 35.

afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses” (Neh. 4:14). This was not revolution. It was counter-revolution. They became an armed camp. The men did not take off their clothes except to wash (v. 23).

Conclusion

Nehemiah understood the covenantal implications of a city without a wall. It could not defend itself from infiltration by covenant-breakers. In the ancient world, it took a wall to establish a city’s civil covenant. The wall could be defended.

The Book of Nehemiah is about the defense of the city. The defense was covenantal, not military. The city would be a place where God’s laws would be enforced. Those excluded from the city would be covenant-breakers residing in the land and unwilling to submit to the city’s laws.

The city’s wall would add an extra boundary around the temple. These Samaritans were inside the original national boundary. They would no longer have 24-hour access to the city where the temple resided, except on terms established by Jews.

DEBT SERVITUDE

Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards (Neh. 5:3–5).

The theocentric principle here is God's forgiveness. The sin here was usury.

And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer (Neh. 5:6–8).

A. The Charity Loan

The Hebrew word translated here as “usury” does not mean a high rate of interest. It means *any* rate of interest charged to a *poor Hebrew* seeking a *charity loan*. All three defining features had to be present in order for a loan to be usurious.

First, the person had to be poor. “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury” (Ex. 22:25).¹ Second, he had to

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*

be a covenant-keeper. That meant a fellow Hebrew. It was lawful to lend to a stranger. "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger [*nokree*]² thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deut. 23:19–20).³

The charity loan was under the law that governed the sabbatical year. "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release" (Deut. 15:1–2).⁴ This was specifically a zero-interest loan. This law did not apply to a foreigner. "Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it" (Deut. 15:3–4).

This law went beyond merely not charging interest. It was a moral obligation to make the loan.

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

2. An uncircumcised temporary resident.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 57.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day (Deut. 15:7–15).

This was a unique law in the ancient Near East. It was a morally mandatory form of charity. The man who had money to lend was morally required to lend it at zero interest for up to seven years. If a debtor could not repay, he could lawfully be enslaved by the creditor. That was why there were rules regarding the end of the term of service. The creditor also owed him capital to get started again.

What about collateral? The assumption was that he had little of value. “When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God” (Deut. 24:10–13).⁵

The lender had a right to this collateral, but not if it kept the person warm at night. “If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious” (Ex. 22:26–27). Then of what use was the collateral to the lender? It was a lot of extra trouble: delivering it back at night. This was a restriction on borrowing. The borrower got the use of the item when he needed it, but he could use it to secure only one loan. This prohibited multiple indebtedness.⁶

B. The Sin of the Nation

Nehemiah was angry because the rich in the land had used their wealth to oppress poor brethren. These were not people who had borrowed money for a business venture that had failed. Some had bor-

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 60.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

rowed because of a food shortage. "Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth" (Neh. 5:3). Others had borrowed to pay tribute to the king (v. 4). They had to offer their children's services as collateral. "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards" (v. 5). These were emergency loans. They were not modern consumer loans, which enable people to live in comfort beyond their means.

The rich had used their wealth to bring Hebrews under bondage. They did this through debt bondage. This had been prohibited by the Mosaic law. Why? Because it promoted the kind of bondage that the Egyptians had imposed on them. "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day" (Deut. 15:15). Nehemiah challenged the rich.

Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise (Neh. 5:11–13).

This repentance indicated that they had learned their lesson during the captivity. God had told Jeremiah that the city would be captured and burned by Nebuchadnezzar. But King Zedekiah would not have to die (Jer. 34:1–3). There was a way out. The king took it.

This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother.

Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name: But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.

The rulers then reversed themselves. They refused to suffer the loss of bondservants. This doomed them.

Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth (Jer. 34:8–20).⁷

The Jews of Nehemiah's day had repeated this sin. Upon hearing from him that it was a sin, they repented. They let their Hebrew ser-

7. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

vants go free. This marked a change of heart. They listened to a voice of authority. Nehemiah was that voice of authority—civil authority. He followed his own advice.

Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God (Neh. 5:14–15).

The text does not say how he financed this enormous expense. He must have been a rich man who owned productive assets. If this was not the case, then the king paid for his services out of his own funds. Nehemiah did not abuse his authority. He did not enslave his people during his dozen years in high office. “Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people” (v. 18). He did not add to their bondage.

Conclusion

Nehemiah governed by lawful delegated authority. He governed in terms of the Mosaic law. The people conformed to the Mosaic law because of his moral authority. He practiced what he preached.

Covenant-keepers are not to use their wealth as a means of enslaving their covenantal brethren. They are to have an open hand. They are not to subsidize sloth or riotous living, but they are to lend a helping hand to those in need. The people of Jerusalem had violated this law, as their forefathers had. But when called to account, they repented. They did not go back on their righteous action.

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THE FINAL STAGE OF A PROJECT

Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief (Neh. 6:1–2).

The theocentric principle here is the supreme importance of finishing a project. An uncompleted project testifies to a false task or a false God.

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).¹

Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope (I Cor. 9:10).²

A. Finishing the Wall

When he heard about the wall of Jerusalem being in ruins, Nehemiah decided that his task in life was to see to it that the wall was rebuilt. He forfeited his job as the king's cupbearer. He forfeited his position at court. He journeyed far to Jerusalem. He oversaw the project. He was determined not to be thwarted.

He had opponents. The heathen (*goyim*) were only part of this opposition, as he would soon learn. There were nobles who did not want the work completed. They were in league with the covenant-breakers.

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 20.

2. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

Putting up the gates was the final stage of the project. As soon as it became clear that the final stage of the project was imminent, the opponents redoubled their efforts to stop it. They offered to meet with Nehemiah in private. He refused. They repeated their offer four times (vv. 2–4). He refused all four times. Then they sent a messenger.

Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together (Neh. 6:5–7).

This was blackmail. They were warning him that they would go public with this accusatory letter if he did not cooperate. This was futile on their part. He had the trust of the king. But they were desperate. He replied that they were liars. “Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart” (Neh. 6:8).

The enemies of God wrote the open letter as if Nehemiah were plotting rebellion. This had been the strategy of the critics of the temple almost four decades earlier (Ezra 4:5–6).³ They had imputed evil political motives to those who wanted to establish physical boundaries around the sacrifices. Their spiritual heirs repeated the strategy.

The next step was a threat of violence. It was delivered by a seeming ally: a false prophet.

Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me (Neh. 6:10–13).

3. Chapter 34.

Nehemiah prayed to God. “My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear” (v. 14).

His opponents were escalating their resistance. Why? Because the closer the day of reckoning approached—the installation of the gates—the closer they were to a loss of influence.

The wall was a sieve without the gates. It could not serve as a way to lock out covenant-breakers. Freedom of entry was normal, but when the rulers inside the city decided to close the gates, they could control who entered and departed. The gates were the means of control. Without the gates, the rulers inside the city would have far less influence. The gates were the means of imposing negative sanctions: blocked entry. The wall was the means of judicial control. This was why the elders of a walled city sat at the gates. The gates were the symbol of judicial sanctions, because they really were the means of final control. The wall funneled traffic to the gates. The gates were the final step in the process of screening a city.

B. The Finished Work

“So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days” (Neh. 6:15). This was rapid work. By placing families in charge of specific sections of the wall, Nehemiah took advantage of the division of labor. He and his staff could assess the daily progress of each team. They could also compare their progress with that of other families.

The wall had been in ruins since the Jews’ return from Babylon under Cyrus 36 years earlier. After the people had begun work on the temple, they stopped. They had started again under Darius. They had not completed the second boundary: the wall. This boundary was not a physical boundary to protect the temple from physical attack. The Persian kings were the protectors of the temple. The wall provided a boundary of judicial protection. Covenant-breakers would not gain easy and automatic access to residents of the city who shared their commitment theologically and culturally. This included some of the rulers of the city.

Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of

Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear (Neh. 6:17–19).

The gates could now be closed. This would take place later, when Nehemiah saw that covenant-breaking merchants were buying and selling on the sabbath. He closed the gates. He threatened them with civil action if they continued this practice (Neh. 13:15–22).⁴

The wall of the city reinforced the enforcement of the Mosaic law inside the nation's central city. This increased the influence of the Mosaic law outside the city, but inside the national boundaries.

C. The Unequal Value of Parts of a Project

The completion of the wall of the city required the completion of the gates. This was the crucial final step. The project's goal would be incomplete if the gates were not completed.

This reveals an economic principle. As a project nears completion, the final step becomes more valuable. The previous costs of an incomplete project are of zero value, or close to it, if the project is not completed. For example, if the estimated payoff of a project is 2,000 ounces of gold, and the cost of the project is 1,000 ounces of gold, and 900 ounces have been spent, the value of the final step is 2,000 ounces of gold. What has already been spent is irrelevant as far as the final value is concerned. It is gone. This is called a *sunk cost*.

Consider the cost of building a highway between two cities. The contract to buy the land to build the highway must include all owners of land between the two cities. If the highway builders bought all of the land except one parcel, the owner of that parcel could continue to increase the price of his land as the highway neared completion. The economic value of that final parcel would approach the value cost of building a bypass.

Eminent domain is the legal power of a civil government to buy a piece of property, despite the owner's refusal to sell. The reason why civil governments assert the right of eminent domain is because of this phenomenon of the final parcel. By using compulsion, the planners can overcome the ability of one holdout to increase the value of his parcel, knowing that the value of his parcel approaches the value of the entire project, if all the others agree to sell. Because numerous parti-

4. Chapter 41.

cipants understand this, the costs of negotiating the sale of all parcels increases. They are not looking at the value of their properties today. Each of them is looking at his parcel in terms of what it would be worth if the project were close to completion. The cost of negotiation can get so high that the project cannot be arranged. The benefits that it might have provided are lost. The government lowers this cost by declaring the right of eminent domain. But this involves the surrender of ownership. There are costs associated with such a surrender. They are impossible to calculate.

So, the goal of reducing the more measurable costs of an immediate project tends to take precedence over the costs imposed by a loss of property rights. The cost that gains attention is more immediate and direct. The cost of the loss of ownership is distant in time, as well as a matter of economic theory rather than immediate practice. The value of the *thing unseen* does not register with most people.

If economic value is strictly individual and subjective, as modern economics teaches, then there is no economic value for unperceived benefits. If today's decision-makers ignore the cost of lost freedoms, then there are no costs of lost freedoms, if individual subjective value is all the value there is. People's present-orientation will generally triumph over long-term principles of economics.

To overcome this tendency, the Bible lays down basic laws of ownership. God is the supreme individual imputer of value. He has written His laws accordingly. In Mosaic Israel, the king could not lawfully confiscate the family property of a common man. This was basic to the inheritance laws. The family inheritance laws of the jubilee year did not apply inside walled cities.⁵ Nevertheless, David paid the owner of land in Jerusalem on which David planned to build an altar, even though the owner offered to give it away. "And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost" (I Chron. 21:24).

Conclusion

As the completion of the wall approached, the opponents in-

5. "And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubilee" (Lev. 25:29–30).

creased their efforts to sabotage the project. When the installation of the gates was all that remained, the opponents became frantic. They escalated their efforts in order to stop the final step.

There was economic logic to their opposition. The value of the wall was dependent on the gates. The value of establishing a covenantal defence of the city, meaning the enforcement of God's civil laws, was dependent on the gates. The opponents of the Mosaic law understood this. They resorted to tricks, then threats, then slander in order to stop the installation of the gates.

Gates in the West disappeared during the Renaissance because gunpowder made walls obsolete as military defenses. Cultural gates were partially overcome in the same era by the printing press and movable type. Finally, the Internet breached the last of the cultural gates. Individual self-government is the only defense today.

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

And some of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pounds of silver. And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pounds of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments (Neh. 7:71–72).

The theocentric principle here is economic inequality. Inequality is inherent in God's creation. This includes mankind. It also includes a society's distribution of wealth.

A. Rich Men's Donations

The richest men in Israel gave a large sum of money to pay for the work. The text does not identify this work. Presumably, it was related to the temple. The wall had already been rebuilt.

In Ezra, we read of the donations by wealthy Jews to the building of the temple. "And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments" (Ezra 2:68–69).

Nehemiah also records an offering. The amount of gold is different from the amount mentioned by Ezra. This had to be a different offering in Nehemiah's day. In this case, the donations of the common people as a whole were about equal to the donations by the wealthy few. The two groups of donations were very close: 200 pounds of silver less from the commoners, but offset by one hundred garments for priests. The numbers are too close to be random. I suspect that there was open bidding, or some sort of feedback through an intermediary. "Will you match this? You don't want them to donate more, do you?"

B. Pareto's Law

In 1897, the Italy-born Swiss professor of economics Vilfredo Pareto published his discovery that in every European nation he studied, about 20% of the population owned about 80% of the wealth.¹ This insight has subsequently been found to apply to a wide range of operations, even including earthquake damage. About 20% of a firm's customers provides 80% of the firm's profit. About 20% of the bugs in Microsoft's software produces 80% of the crashes and major failures.² About 20% of public-access facilities contribute about 80% of the crime.³ It could be said that 80% of the hand's functions are the result of 20% of the digits: the thumb.

There is no known cause of this phenomenon. So, there is no known cure, if a cure is needed. In every known society, irrespective of its economic structure or its operating legal principles, something close to a 20-80 wealth distribution occurs. No political reform or other reform has changed this distribution. This frustrates socialists, who believe that the state can and should equalize wealth. It also frustrates free market economists, who believe that market competition can and should equalize wealth. So, both groups refuse to discuss the Pareto law in detail. It is easier to ignore it.

This passage indicates that an inequality of wealth existed in Nehemiah's day. A small number of Jews provided half of the donations. We know that the 20-80 distribution occurs all the way up the pyramid of wealth. If we take 20% of 20%, we get 4%. If we take 80% of 80%, we get 64%. About 4% of the population owns 64% of the wealth. So, using a Pareto distribution, we can guess that the families that contributed half of the donations constituted approximately 3% of the population.

Conclusion

The richest members of the Israelite community donated half of the gold and silver used for this work, whatever the work was. It is likely that they constituted about 3% of the population. A fundamental inequality of wealth existed in post-exilic Israel some 36 years after

1. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d'economie politique* (1897), vol. 2.

2. Paula Rooney, "Microsoft's CEO: 80-20 Rule Applied to Bugs, Not Just Features," *Channel Web* (Oct. 3, 2002). (<http://bit.ly/ParetoBugs>)

3. Ronald V. Clarke and John E. Eck, *Understanding Risky Facilities* (Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, 2007), pp. 4–8. (<http://bit.ly/ParetoCrime>)

their return from Babylon.

The Bible nowhere indicates that there will ever be or should ever be equality of wealth in society. Paul used the word equality in his fund-raising letter to the Corinth church. “But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality” (II Cor. 8:14).⁴ But he used the same term in his advice to slave owners: “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” (Col. 4:1). He did not say to free the slaves. He told them to be just. A fundamental inequality would remain: master and servant. He was not talking about equal wealth or status. He was talking about justice: to render unto all according to their productivity and also their need in temporary hard times.

4. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

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A BUSINESS-FREE SABBATH

And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes; And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons: And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt (Neh. 10:28–31).

The theocentric principle here is the fourth commandment.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex 20:9–11).¹

This included the principle of the sabbatical year.

At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day (Deut 15:1–5).²

The nation took a corporate oath regarding the sabbath. This was an act of covenant renewal.

A. Profaning the Sabbath

The final section of the Book of Nehemiah provides an account of a violation of the sabbath and the response of Nehemiah, the governor.

In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath (Neh. 13:15–18).

Nehemiah, in his office as governor (*Tirshatha*), brought the first stage of a covenant lawsuit against the rulers of the nation. He did not go to the people. He did not go to the Samaritans. Yet these were the people who were violating the sabbath law: buyers and sellers. Instead, he went to the nobles, who represented the people.

Having brought this lawsuit against them, he took action.

And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath (Neh. 13:19–21).

He was the governor. This was a civil action against voluntary economic transactions. On what legal grounds did he do this? First, on the basis of the Mosaic law. Second, on the basis of the Mosaic law's promised negative sanctions: captivity. "Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath" (v. 18). Trade on the sabbath was not a victimless crime. The state had to intercede in order to keep God's negative sanctions at bay. Third, because of the nation's act of corporate covenant renewal. "And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt (Neh. 10:31).

He then replaced his servants with Levites. It was their job to police the sabbath, with the civil government backing them up. "And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy" (v. 22).

This involved mixing church and state. This mixture had always existed under the Mosaic law. The priests and Levites had always served as counsellors to civil judges.

If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; And thou shalt come unto **the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days**, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more pre-

sumptuously (Deut 17:8–13).

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, **before the priests and the judges**, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you (Deut. 19:15–20).³

Conclusion

The civil government, in association with the Levites, policed the gates on the sabbath. The wall and the gates served as barriers to entry. They served as a means of separation between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers.

The decision of Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem culminated in his act as governor to separate buyers from sellers on the sabbath. Without the wall, this would have been far more expensive to enforce. The wall was not to separate Israel from Persia. That judicial connection was maintained in the person of Nehemiah. It was Persian authority, under the Mosaic law, that made possible the separation of buyers and sellers.

The fears of the Samaritans and other opponents of God's law had been justified. They feared that the enforcement of the Mosaic law would undermine their local authority and wealth. The temple and the wall were threats to them.

3. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 45.

CONCLUSION TO NEHEMIAH

In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? (Neh. 13:23–27).

The Jews were at it again. Ezra had ended his book with an account of the national oath to put away covenant-breaking wives and children (Ezra 10:10–19).¹ This commitment had not lasted more than a few years. The covenantal separation within the families no longer existed.

Nehemiah was not in a position to break up the families of the common people. But, for the sake of the integrity of the sacrificial system, he broke up the families of the Levites and priests.

And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business (Neh. 13:28–30).

There is no question that, in the Persian empire, he possessed the authority to do this as governor. There is also no doubt that he possessed God-authorized authority over the priesthood. He exercised

1. Conclusion to Ezra.

this authority in the name of God. He would not allow syncretism inside the families of those who offered sacrifice on behalf of the Jews and also on behalf of the rulers of Persia, who had funded the rebuilding of the wall. Maintaining the confessional and covenantal integrity of the priesthood was more important than any theoretical separation of church and state. It was also more important than maintaining the marriage covenants in question. There had to be walls of separation between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Syncretism was not an option for the Levites. There is no indication anywhere in the Bible that Nehemiah did the wrong thing.

CONCLUSION

The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them (Deut. 1:6–8).

The books that make up the historical books of the Old Testament tell the story of Israel's unwillingness to conquer the land of Canaan and the land all the way to the Euphrates. They tell of Israel's adoption of the gods of the land. They tell of God's repeated deliverance of the nation into bondage to enemy nations surrounding them. Then came captivity: Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. The people were carried off to the Euphrates as captives, not conquerors.

Their economic lessons were many, but they all boiled down to this: the fulfillment of the promises of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, meaning the predictability of corporate sanctions. When they obeyed the Mosaic law, they prospered. When they disobeyed, they did not. Mostly, they disobeyed.

The historical books from Isaiah's day to Malachi's should be read in association with the prophetic books. The prophets came to the people with warnings. The historical books provide information regarding the fulfillment of these warnings.

A. Basic Themes

The Book of Joshua begins with the story of God's recapitulation of what He had told Moses.

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to

give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:6–9).

Joshua was strong and courageous; the Israelites were not. He had confidence in God's sanctions; the Israelites did not.¹ They did not conquer all of Canaan. They allowed some of the Canaanites to remain in the land.

The conquest was preceded by covenant renewal: national circumcision. The daily manna ended when they crossed the Jordan River. From that time on, they had to live by conquest and then by productivity.² The supernatural subsidies from God ended.

Jericho was the first city to fall. Only Rahab and her family survived. This conquest was to be total: God alone would collect the spoils. This meant the disinheritance of Jericho.³ But Achan stole valuable things: a representative sin for which 36 Israelite warriors paid with their lives at Ai.⁴ For this, Achan's family came under the same total ban that God had applied to Jericho.⁵

Israel did not collect its promised inheritance. It did not extend its conquest all the way to the Euphrates.⁶

The issue of inheritance is the central issue of the story of Jephthah's daughter. She was not sacrificed as a literal burnt offering. She was put up for adoption into the tribe of Levi, cut off from any inheritance in her father's household.⁷

Adoption and inheritance are the central themes of the Book of Ruth. Ruth was adopted by marriage into the family of Elimelech. After her husband died, she was adopted into Boaz's family line by mar-

1. Chapter 1.

2. Chapter 2.

3. Chapter 3.

4. Chapter 4.

5. Chapter 5.

6. Chapter 6.

7. Chapter 7.

riage, for he became her kinsman redeemer. Through Boaz's commitment to her and to Elimelech's family name, he extended the promised covenant line. His branch of the family had originated through another adoption by marriage, when Salmon married Rahab (Ruth 4:21–22).⁸

The ministry of Samuel, who was both prophet and judge, was based on God's intervention into history. His birth was an answer to his mother's prayer and a priest's blessing. She sang a song in response: God intervenes in history, overturning the prevailing social order.⁹ God later brought sanctions against the nation for the sake of Eli's evil sons. He next brought sanctions against the cities of Philistia for the sake of the Ark of the Covenant. God, not chance, was the source of the sanctions.¹⁰

Samuel warned Israel against the tax tyranny to come under kings, but the people did not care. They wanted to go to war behind a king.¹¹ They got their wish, again and again until the captivity. There was a brief time of peace and prosperity under Solomon, whose wisdom led to increased national wealth. He had good judgment regarding the disputes of others.¹² He had poor judgment in his personal life. The nation gained wealth through trade. The kingdom of God profited through this increase in wealth.¹³ Solomon built the temple, where God resided.¹⁴ But Solomon broke the Mosaic laws of kingship (Deut. 17). He centralized political power. His son Rehoboam lost the kingdom. This break-up decentralized political power.¹⁵ Rehoboam had threatened to impose high taxes. The resulting tax revolt divided the nation.¹⁶ It never came together again under Israelite kings.

Ahab was a wicked king who centralized power. Elijah challenged him and his pagan religion. Ahab later stole Naboth's inheritance. For this, he and his heirs lost their inheritance.¹⁷ This remained the pattern for the kings of Israel and Judah. The evil done by a king brought negative sanctions on the nation. The kings represented the people. The people were contented with this arrangement, which their forefathers

8. Chapters 8–11.

9. Chapter 12.

10. Chapter 13.

11. Chapter 14.

12. Chapter 15.

13. Chapter 16.

14. Chapter 18.

15. Chapter 19.

16. Chapter 20.

17. Chapter 22.

had demanded under Samuel. When the kings were evil, the people suffered from negative sanctions. The sanctions of God were predictable.¹⁸ The people never really believed this. Neither did most of the kings.

They learned during the captivity that they had to trust God for deliverance. Deliverance came, but only a handful of Jews took advantage of it initially: under 50,000. This time, they were more careful about not sharing authority with strangers. They paid for the rebuilding of the temple. Outsiders were not allowed to participate.¹⁹ They had to battle against these rejected outsiders to finish both the temple and Jerusalem's wall. When the gates of the city were finally completed after 36 years,²⁰ the governor could enforce the law against business activities on the sabbath.²¹

The book of Esther does not mention God. It also does not offer any economic information. But it offers this message: the Jews as a people were protected. An individual Jew or a family line was not.

Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esth. 4:13–14).

B. Economic Insights

The historical books present a number of insights governing economic theory. The fundamental insight is that inheritance assumes disinheritance.²² The Promised Land was the Surrendered Land for the Canaanites. In addition,

A welfare economy is a slaves' economy.²³

Gleaning was a good way to bring hard-working poor people to the attention of productive people with land.²⁴

18. Chapter 31.

19. Chapter 35.

20. Chapter 39.

21. Chapter 41.

22. Chapter 1.

23. Chapter 2.

24. Chapter 9.

Circumstances change, and there can be great reversals of wealth.²⁵

High taxes can lead to political resistance.²⁶

A creditor in Israel had a right to the labor of a defaulting debtor's sons until they reached age 20.²⁷ If you have a lot of wealth, it is a good idea not to show off to those who would like to take it away from you.²⁸

If you hire independent contractors, you do not need to get an account from them about how they spent the money you paid to them. On the other hand, if they are hired servants on your payroll, you need to get an account.²⁹

Bureaucrats have self-interested agendas that can offset their official agenda of public service.³⁰

Sunk costs—money that has been spent and is gone—are not true costs. Money still owed is a real cost.³¹

Debt is a form of servitude.³²

Economic inequality is as basic to life as all other forms of inequality.³³

Conclusion

The people of Israel did not obey the Mosaic law. They suffered setbacks as a result. They had been told by Moses that this would happen. They did not act in terms of this warning. For Israel, it was one step forward and two steps back until the captivity. After their remnant's return to the land, it was one step forward and one step back. The final word in the Old Testament is "curse."

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5–6).

25. Chapter 12.

26. Chapter 20.

27. Chapter 24.

28. Chapter 28.

29. Chapter 29.

30. Chapter 27.

31. Chapter 33.

32. Chapter 38.

33. Chapter 40.

PREDICTABILITY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON JOB

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PREDICTABILITY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON JOB

GARY NORTH

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PREFACE

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (Job 1:6–8).

A. A Strange Book

First, the format of the book is like no other in the Bible. It is a series of debates. The characters are like stage figures in a play. We hear one, then another. Most of the book is dialogue. It is not poetry, as the Psalms are. It is not aphorisms, as the Book of Proverbs is.

Because of this, I use the present tense to analyze it. In the other commentaries, I use the past tense. But the dialogue in this book forces us to think of the book as a stage play being performed in front of us.

Second, the book is also strange in terms of content. It begins with two strange chapters. I regard Job 1 and 2 as the strangest chapters theologically in the Bible. The story they tell challenges what most Christians believe about God, man, law, causation, and time. If everything that people knew about God were based on the first two chapters of Job, they would have a strange religion. On the other hand, if everything they knew about God were based on the Bible, but without the first two chapters of Job, people would have a seriously incomplete religion. Because so few Christians take seriously the Book of Job, most of them have a seriously incomplete religion.

Consider the following. “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them” (v. 6). What was Satan doing in the presence of the sons of God? For that matter, who were these sons of God? Was this

an assembly of all deceased redeemed males? Were angels present? What was the meeting about?

God spoke to Satan. There is no other passage in Scripture in which God speaks to Satan. In the garden, He spoke to the representative agent of Satan: the serpent. Jesus spoke to Satan in the wilderness in His office as perfect man: the second Adam.¹ Jesus quoted the Old Testament to answer Satan, as a righteous person should. He did not use power against him. Satan's religion is the power religion.

In Job 1, God cross-examines Satan. What does Satan think about Job? Job is blameless, God taunts Satan. Satan responds by saying that Job is perfect only for the sake of the benefits that he receives from God. Take away the benefits, and Job will curse God. God then lets Satan take away Job's benefits.

Then comes the description of a very bad day. Job loses almost everything. In losing almost everything, those around him do lose everything. The herds of cattle were stolen, and all the herdsmen put to death, except the messenger. The sheep were killed by fire out of heaven. So were the shepherds, save one: a messenger. The camels were stolen, and the drivers put to death, save one: a messenger.

B. Dead Servants and Children

Have you ever heard a sermon on these dead servants? No. The first chapter of Job reveals an unpleasant fact: these faithful servants died in a single day, through no fault of their own, to settle a verbal contest between God and Satan. God placed all of these men at the mercy of Satan. Did they say their prayers that morning? If so, the prayers did them no good. Did they have big dreams about the future? Of course. These dreams were snuffed out in one day. Did they trust in God because they trusted Job? Yes. That was what doomed them.

What of Job's 10 children? Satan killed them all. That would have ended Job's inheritance, had he owned anything to leave behind. He didn't. It was all gone: inheritance and heirs.

Why? To settle a verbal wager between God and Satan. "Job is good." "No, he's not." "Yes, he is." "No, he's not. I can prove it. I dare you to let me prove it." "OK, you're on." This was more like a contest between two pre-teen boys in a schoolyard than the solemn court of the most high God. But it *was* the solemn court of the most high God.

1. "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45).

This is where life-and-death matters get settled, once and for all.

C. God Did Not Explain

The Book of Job indicates that God never explained Himself to Job. Job never heard about the cosmic wager that led to the deaths of everyone close to him except four messengers and his embittered wife.

You have never heard a sermon on this. There is a reason for this. Pastors are unable to come to grips with the God of Job and retain their theology. This God is not the God of uplifting sermons. Uplifting sermons are what people want to hear. A preacher who ceases preaching uplifting sermons will wind up carrying front-and-back “Repent!” placards on street corners, or else selling life insurance.

D. What God Is This?

What kind of God do we deal with—really deal with? The God of Job.

I contend that until a person comes to grips with the God of Job, he does not understand the God of the Bible. That was also Rushdoony’s contention. In his first book, he said that the Book of Job plagued him in his undergraduate days. He had been raised in a Christian household by a Presbyterian minister, yet he suffered from “a lack of theology and theological direction that made me helpless in the face of the contemporary scene. In the course of my thinking, it was the book of Job that gave direction to my theology.”²

I recommend that it give direction to yours.

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1959] 1995), p. 189.

INTRODUCTION

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause (Job 2:3).

A. Cursings Without Cause

This is a perplexing ethical passage. It says that Satan persuaded God to bring negative sanctions against a perfect man. God admitted that he did this without cause.

God did the same thing to Jesus.

What did God mean, “without cause”? He meant that the negative sanctions that had been imposed on Job were not in response to anything evil that Job had done.

The same was true of Jesus.

Job’s children died as a result of this judgment. So did all but four messengers. Those who had perished had done nothing wrong—nothing to deserve this. Good servants perished.¹

The same was true of Stephen and James, who were disciples of Jesus.

Job ritually sacrificed animals on behalf of his children in order to placate God’s wrath. Jesus ritually sacrificed Himself on behalf of God’s adopted children in order to placate God’s wrath.

God allowed Satan to persecute a perfect man in order to test that man’s integrity. God allowed Satan to tempt Jesus in the wilderness in order to test His integrity (Matt. 4;² Luke 4³).

1. Those who survived had not done anything different from those who perished. They survived only because they had bad news to convey to Job.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

Job suffered catastrophic negative sanctions, only to be raised even higher at the end. Jesus suffered catastrophic negative sanctions, only to be raised even higher at the end.

There are important lessons here for those who recognize them.

B. The Book's Underlying Assumption

The Book of Job rests on an assumption: *God blesses the righteous in history, and He curses the unrighteous in history*. The book makes no sense on any other assumption. The book rests on the truth of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28: the sections of the Mosaic law that deal with historical sanctions.

The Book of Job is to negative sanctions what Psalm 73 is to positive sanctions. Both books offer an initial anomaly. Job offers this one: negative sanctions for the righteous. "For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause" (Job 9:17). Psalm 73 offers this one: positive sanctions for the unrighteous. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2–3). The Book of Job resolves this in the final chapter: the restoration of prosperity to the righteous. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10). Psalm 73 also resolves this: the restoration of adversity to the unrighteous. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:18–19).⁴

Again, none of this makes sense if the covenantal sanctions of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 do not prevail in history. If historical sanctions are not predictable in terms of a person's conformity to the Bible-revealed laws of God, then the Book of Job makes no sense. Neither does Psalm 73.

It was the contention of amillennial theologian Meredith G. Kline that the covenantal sanctions of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 no longer apply in New Covenant. He insisted that any New Testament connection between visible blessings and covenant-keeping is, humanly speaking, a random coincidence. "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 19.

mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.”⁵ Kline was attacking Greg L. Bahnsen’s book, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977).⁶ He correctly saw that the heart of theonomy, as defended by Rushdoony, Bahnsen, and the other theonomists, rests on the assumption of the predictability of God’s sanctions in history. As Ray Sutton made clear in *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (1987), point four of the biblical covenant is sanctions. These sanctions are related to point three: biblical law.⁷ These, in turn, are related to point five: inheritance.⁸

C. Predictability and Social Science

Predictability is basic to all science and all social theory. *Predictability is an inescapable concept*. It is never a question of predictability vs. no predictability. It is a question of what insures predictability, what kind of predictability, the degree of predictability, and in what time frame? As the priests of Philistia said,

Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us (I Sam. 6:7–9).⁹

It was not chance.

For almost two millennia, Christian theologians and social thinkers have debated the issue of historical predictability. This issue is

5. Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

6. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2002).

7. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 3, 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), chaps. 4, 5.

8. Sutton, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

9. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

closely associated with ethics. They have come to no agreement.

The most familiar Christian theories of social causation have rested on a schizophrenic foundation: biblical law coupled with one of two schizophrenic and irreconcilable concepts of classical Greek natural law, either Platonic (Eastern Christianity) or Aristotelian (Western Christianity). With the triumph of Darwinism in the West, natural law theory was uprooted and cast aside by the intelligentsia. To the extent that natural law theory persists, it is a pre-Darwinian anachronism, one that is not well understood by its defenders. Any appeal to natural law is futile today within academia. It is as unpopular as the concept of intelligent design in nature, and for the same reason: Darwinism's commitment to cosmic impersonalism. But what can take its place? This is the crucial epistemological question facing Christian social theorists today. They avoid this question like the plague—except for the theonomists.

Conclusion

The Book of Job is about cosmic personalism. It is about *predictable historical sanctions in a world of cosmic personalism*.¹⁰ Job did not argue for random historical sanctions. Neither did his three comforters-turned-critics. Neither did Elihu, who spoke for God. Neither did God, who also spoke for God. But Meredith G. Kline did.

10. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

1

SANCTIONS AND PREDICTABILITY

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil (Job 1:1).

The theocentric principle here is the fear of God.

A. A Perfect Man

Job was perfect, the text says. This does not mean that he had been born without original sin. Later in the book, Job refers to the sins of his youth. “For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth” (Job. 13:26). In his maturity, however, Job is said to be perfect. God later testified to the righteousness of Job. Ezekiel announced this testimony.

The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 14:12–14).

Daniel was no longer in the land by this time. He had been carried off to Babylon (Dan. 1). Noah had escaped the Flood with his life and the lives of seven others. Job would have escaped, but not his wife. What would they have escaped? Negative sanctions. Why were these sanctions imposed by God? Because of widespread disobedience to the Bible-revealed laws of God.

Job was perfect. This creates a problem for interpreters. Isaiah announced: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities,

like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6). Jeremiah said: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Did these observations not apply to Job? They did not. Why not? Because Job was judicially covered. "And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually" (Job 1:5). Job followed the laws of sacrifice. There was no sin left uncovered. He had right standing with God. How? Because of his faith.

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28).

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure (Heb. 10:4–6).

What distinguished Job from all the other men and women of faith was *the comprehensive nature of his faith*. He avoided evil, and he sacrificed on behalf of himself and his children. *He was beyond reproach*. This was the basis of God's challenge to Satan.

B. God's Challenge to Satan

"And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:8). He was the archetype of the righteous man. *He was therefore representative of Jesus: the center of God's cosmic challenge to Satan*. Here was a man whom Satan had not corrupted.

Satan replied in terms of the Mosaic law's system of predictable sanctions. "Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land" (Job. 1:9–10). Job did not serve God for free. He was being paid by God. God was buying Job's allegiance: quid pro quo. Satan offered a challenge: "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (v. 11). God took up this challenge. "And the

LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD" (v. 12).

Satan was denying that there can be true righteousness if there is any personal benefit accruing to the righteous person. This was the argument of Immanuel Kant, the premier philosopher of the modern West.¹ God accepted this challenge on behalf of Job. He chose to let Job prove that he would meet this challenge. Job met the challenge. "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:20–22).

Satan had been publicly humiliated. Job proved him wrong. Having goaded Satan into the first challenge to His representative agent, God did it again.

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause (Job 2:1–3).

God here admits that Satan had moved God to move against Job. God did not blame Satan as an independent agent, for God had authorized Satan to destroy Job's environment. God admitted that He had ruined Job without cause. Job had not violated God's law.

Satan took the bait. "And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 2:4–5). That was what God had been waiting for. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (v. 6).

1. Immanuel Kant, "The Lawgiver," *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper, [1780?] 1963), p. 52. Cf. "Reward and Punishment," p. 57.

So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips (Job 2:7–10).

Job's wife did not pass the test. Job did.

Satan then disappears from the story. He is replaced by Job's three comforters. "Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him" (Job 2:11). The debate over ethics and sanctions fills the remainder of the book.

C. From Effect to Cause

The three comforters rapidly became cross-examiners. Their shift of opinion came in response to Job's questioning of the nature of ethical cause and effect. Job raised a series of questions. They all boiled down to this: "Why me?" He offered a list of reasons why he cursed his birth. But it was not these things, in and of themselves, that called forth his wailing. Rather, it was the underlying system of causation.

Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in? For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters. For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came (Job 3:23–26).

1. A System of Ethical Causation

Here, he admits that he had relied on a system of ethical causation. He had obeyed God and had offered sacrifices as coverings, yet negative sanctions had come. He is admitting that Satan had been right about his motivation. He does not curse God, but he curses the day he was born. "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived" (Job 3:3). He does not curse God, but he curses his own history, a history over which God

was sovereign. He does not deny the sovereignty of God. He questions its outcome.

His compatriots immediately recognize the underlying theology of his complaint. Job is saying that God is not fair. They rush to defend God's honor. They challenge Job to search his soul. They challenge him to identify the sin that had resulted in the loss of his goods and his children. Given the magnitude of the negative sanctions, this must have been a very large sin.

Eliphaz leads off.

Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed (Job 4:7–9).

He affirms the predictability of God's historical sanctions. Effects have causes. Great effects have great causes. The causes are ethical.

Eliphaz is not content to draw conclusions from the facts. He claims special revelation.

Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? (vv. 12–17).

Who is Job to call God's system of historical sanctions into question? Job's children had all died. This was not random. Effects have causes. Eliphaz says that he has seen all this before.

I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them. Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance (Job 5:3–5).

Eliphaz knows what he would do if he were in Job's sandals.

I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things

without number: Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields: To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety. He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise (Job 5:8–12).

God is sovereign. Look to God.

2. Unpredictable Sanctions

Job knows that God is sovereign. This is what baffles him. God is sovereign over history. He brings sanctions. But these sanctions are not always predictable, Job had learned. They are not always responses to a man's ethical conformity or his sacrifices. He knows he is righteous, yet negative sanctions had come. Job is correct. God had already admitted as much to Satan. "Thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause" (Job 2:3).

Job is baffled. This is because he knows nothing of God's challenge to Satan and Satan's challenge to God. But Eliphaz is not baffled in the slightest. He makes a prediction. "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee" (Job 5:17–19). In the final chapter, this prediction came true.

Yet Eliphaz is profoundly wrong. So are his two companions, who extend his argument. We know they were wrong because of what God told them at the end of their verbal exchanges.

And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job (Job 42:7–8).

Eliphaz affirms the covenantal predictability of God in history. Job denies it. Eliphaz predicts that Job will overcome adversity. Job has no faith in this outcome. Then why is Eliphaz wrong? Most of the book of Job is a detailed recitation of the arguments on both sides. The reader

must pay close attention to these arguments if he is to sort out the wheat from the chaff.

Conclusion

Job was not at fault for the negative sanctions that came upon him. These sanctions were a test. They were a test of his faith.

The test involved cursing. Satan argued that Job blessed God verbally and ritually because God had blessed Job economically and biologically. If God cursed Job economically and biologically, Job would curse God verbally. This was the heart of Satan's challenge. Satan lost the argument, twice.

Job's sin was to curse the historical cursings in the name of an inherent covenantal unpredictability in history. Eliphaz's sin was to affirm covenantal predictability in history as a way to challenge Job's prior righteousness. But Job's prior righteousness was unquestionable. It, and it alone, had been the basis of God's challenge to Satan.

Satan moved logically from effect to cause: from Job's external blessings to his covenantal obedience. Eliphaz moved logically from effect to cause: from Job's external cursings to his covenantal disobedience. Both were wrong.

2

FROM WOMB TO TOMB

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD (Job 1:21).

The theocentric principle here is God's absolute sovereignty in history.

A. Historical Sanctions

The Book of Job is about historical sanctions. It is also about inheritance in history. We know this because the book ends with the story of Job's second set of 10 children.

He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days (Job 42:13–17).

His inheritance had been cut off by Satan, acting as God's agent. God restored it at the end. The first 10 children remained dead. The second 10 prospered. Even the daughters received an inheritance. The first inheritance was cut off. The second inheritance was not. This was the Bible's consummate story of disinheritance and inheritance until the incarnation: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

B. "Why Me?"

Job affirms here that nakedness marks man's entrance into this world, and nakedness marks his exit. "How much did he leave behind?" "All of it!"

In between are blessings and cursings. These come from God. If we praise God as the giver, we should praise Him as the taker. He is no less sovereign as giver or taker.

When men win, they rarely ask, “Why me?” They assume that they deserve this. When men lose, they are tempted to ask, “Why me?” They assume that they do not deserve this. At this stage in the temptation process, Job did not ask, “Why me?” He verbally affirmed the sovereignty of God.

The question, “Why me?” assumes the existence of cause and effect. If there were no system of cause and effect, “Why?” would have no meaning because it would have no answer. The question, “Why me?” implies a search for cause and effect. It also implies a search for another answer: “How can I avoid another round in the future?”

Job affirms that he was as content with blessing as with cursing. This is a statement of great faith. Paul wrote: “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (I Thes. 5:18). To do this requires faith in both the sovereignty of God and the righteousness of God.

In the third phase of his trials, Job did begin to ask, “Why me?” He sought an answer based on his understanding of covenantal causation. Without such understanding, he recognized, life is meaningless. He did not want to live in a meaningless universe.

C. Corporate Progress

If we enter naked and depart naked, does blessing have any advantage over cursing, other than for hedonism’s sake? When pleasure ends at death, what does life matter, one way or the other, to the departed? There has been no relevant economic progress, one way or the other.

If what applies to the individual also applies to society, there is no meaningful corporate progress, one way or the other. This is the outlook of cosmic evolution: from the big bang to the heat death of the frozen universe.¹ Nakedness swallows meaning.

Job declares his equal acceptance of wealth or poverty, because poverty—nakedness—marks the beginning and the end of each person’s life. Yet, if taken literally, blessings are equal to cursings. But God has promised blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience

1. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

(Lev. 26; Deut. 28). If they are equal, then are obedience and disobedience equal? Obviously not.

Then what was Job's point? This: *God is sovereign over both blessings and cursings*. Pleasure is better than pain. It is better to be rich and healthy than it is to be poor and sick. In God's system of covenantal causation, we enter into an inheritance when we are born, and we leave an inheritance behind when we die. The inheritance is supposed to be greater at the end than at the beginning. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).²

If the accumulation of wealth in one lifetime is the only thing under consideration, then Job's words apply. There is no progress. This was Job's point with respect to praising God. Having nothing or having a great deal makes no difference in the grand scheme of one lifetime. We depart just as we arrived: naked. But this ignores two factors: (1) inheritance beyond the grave, where accumulation is not only possible but ethically mandatory;³ (2) generational inheritance in history.

From womb to tomb is too short a time perspective. That is because covenantal inheritance is always a factor in history. This inheritance is to be the focus of our efforts in history.

If there is no covenantal economic predictability in history, then economic progress has no ethical relevance. Economic effects are then unrelated to ethical causes. Economic effects that are not connected ethically have no relevance covenantally. They are just random events. Nakedness triumphs.

The same criticism applies to *intergenerational inheritance*. Economic growth then has no economic relevance. Neither does any other area that is marked by the expansion of alternatives: science, technology, education, medicine. Nakedness triumphs.

The Book of Job rejects this outlook. It reasserts the message of the Book of Deuteronomy: corporate inheritance matters, because it is part of a process of covenantal expansion in history. This process is at bottom ethical-judicial.

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

3] . "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20). Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

Conclusion

Job affirmed the sovereignty of God over history. We are to acknowledge this sovereignty, in good times and bad, in sickness and health, for better or worse, till death's nakedness arrives. But the message of the Book of Job is steadfastly opposed to any view of life that begins with the womb and ends with the tomb.

History displays progress. This progress is covenantal. History displays the sovereignty of God, the authority of man over creation, the Bible-revealed law of God, historical sanctions, and inheritance.

3

POOR ME, POOR SYSTEM

After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day (Job 3:1).

The theocentric principle here is the consistency between ethical cause and outward effect.

A. Job's Lament

Job here begins a lament. He curses his birth. "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived" (v. 3). He sees the devastation around him. He had been singled out for cursings. One day destroyed everything he had of value. Yet this had not initially produced this response. It had taken a week of silence to produce this outburst (Job 2:13). The more he thought about it, the more he lost confidence in the positive historical sanctions of God. "Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?" (v. 11).

Time has become his enemy. He has no confidence that time would produce a reversal of fortune. *He no longer sees time as governed by ethical cause and effect.* Better the rest of death. "For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest, With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves" (vv. 13–14). "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest" (v. 17). He sees the nakedness of death as superior to the negative sanctions of life. Life is a curse. It is no longer an opportunity. Why not? Because there is no predictability of historical sanctions. He had thought there was safety in righteousness. "I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came" (v. 26).

This is nihilism. This is a self-conscious abandonment of the concept of covenantal inheritance in history.

B. Eliphaz Invokes Predictability

In response, Eliphaz invokes covenantal predictability. “Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?” (Job 4:7). He recognizes that Job has abandoned covenant theology at this point. Job has broken from his past.

Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? (vv. 3–6).

There is nothing new going on, Eliphaz argues. This is the same old cause-and-effect system that Job had invoked when teaching others to overcome the limitations of history. Now, Job has abandoned confidence in that system.

Eliphaz invokes a vision. “Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men” (vv. 12–13). A spirit had approached him (v. 15). It asked a rhetorical question. “Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?” (v. 17). Eliphaz implies that Job had become such a man. Job is criticizing his environment, which he had previously attributed to God’s sovereignty. Who is Job to call God’s providence into question?

God’s sanctions are still operative. “For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one” (Job 5:2). Nothing has changed.

I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them. Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance (vv. 3–5).

There will come judgment. “He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong (vv. 12–13). There is still hope, as there was before. “So the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth” (v. 16). God will deliver Job (vv. 19–20). But there is a catch. “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty” (v. 17). He reminds Job that the afflictions were not ran-

dom. They were part of a chastening process. God is calling Job to mend his ways—his secret ways. Then God’s positive sanctions will return.

C. A Man Without Hope

Job launches into a long passage in which he describes his afflictions. His calamity is heavy (Job 6:2). God is against him. “For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me” (v. 4). He still prefers death (v. 9). There is no hope. “What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?” (v. 11).

Job’s lament presumes that the cause-and-affect system that was announced in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 does not apply in his case. Hopelessness is the result. History is no place for a righteous man, he implies. That is what he had learned from events in his life. “What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?” (v. 11).

Job wants a reward for his righteousness. “As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work, So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me” (Job 7:2). There is no deliverance. “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good” (vv. 6–7). Death is preferable (v. 15).

Job cries out to God. Man is so insignificant. Why should God care about man, one way or the other? “What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?” (vv. 17–18). He recognizes that God is still sovereign. He does not blame an impersonal cosmos or chance. But he sees no reason for his affliction. It is meaningless. Why? Because it does not conform to the system of sanctions in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

D. Bildad Invokes Predictability

Bildad asks a related pair of rhetorical questions. “Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?” (Job 8:3). Effects have causes. These judgments are not the product of God’s perversity, he insists. As for Job’s dead children, “If thy children have sinned

against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression” (v. 4). This comforter’s first words are vicious, but he thinks he is defending God.

Job’s problem, says Bildad, is that he has cut himself off from God, who predictably rewards righteousness.

If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase. For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers (vv. 5–8).

If Job has no hope, he should examine his ways. It is the hypocrite who is without hope.

Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite’s hope shall perish: Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider’s web (vv. 12–14).

Job has no hope because he is not a perfect man, and never was. “Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers” (v. 20).

E. Job’s Critique of the System

Job has no illusions that the system is random. God is sovereign.

He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:3–8).

Point one of the biblical covenant is two-fold: God as transcendent and God as present.¹ Job has no problem with the first. He has problems with the second. “Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not” (v. 11). “If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>).

voice" (v. 16). Why not? Because of the *lack of correlation* between the negative sanctions and his own righteousness. Job announces to his hearers what God had announced to Satan. "For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause" (v. 17). The system is morally perverse.

This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, and who is he? (vv. 22–24).

This is the heart of the matter, Job insists. *The system is not random. It is perverse.* It is the reverse of what Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 declare. In operation, Job's world is upside-down ethically. Yet God is in total control. So, there is no hope.

Bildad wants Job to inquire of God. This is not realistic, Job says. "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment" (v. 32). If only there were a higher court, a higher authority. "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me: Then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me" (vv. 33–35).

This self-deprecating announcement does not last for even one more sentence. "My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me" (Job 10:1–2). He demands that God give an account of Himself and His corrupt system. He asks God a rhetorical question. "Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?" (v. 3).

Job is sure that his actions were not to blame for his afflictions. "Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand" (v. 7). Then what is going on here? "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me" (v. 8). He then offers a pair of analogies for his condition: poured like milk, curdled like cheese (v. 10). "If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head. I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction" (v. 15). But it just keeps getting worse. "Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war are against me" (v. 17).

He wants God's neutrality: to be left alone. "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little" (v. 20). Better to be dead (v. 21).

F. Zophar Escalates the Accusation

Job talks too much, Zophar says (Job 11:2). Job is a liar.

"Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes" (vv. 3–4). If only God would speak and silence Job. "But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee" (v. 5). Not only is Job not innocent, he has been given a light sentence for his iniquity. "And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (v. 6).

Zophar is in the know. Job isn't. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (vv. 7–9). Job is to blame for his troubles. It is time for a change. "If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles" (v. 14). If Job would just follow Zophar's advice, and the advice of his colleagues, things would improve. "And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety" (v. 18).

G. Job Is Not Impressed

Job has had enough. It is time for sarcasm. "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" (Job 12:2–3). He understands the truth, he says.

1. A Perverse System of Causality

The system of causation is perverse. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly" (v. 6). Everyone knows this. The beasts of the field know this (v. 7) The fishes know this (v. 8). "Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?" (v. 9). He is sovereign. "In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the

breath of all mankind" (v. 10).

With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding. Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth (vv. 13–15).

Job then offers a list of events in which God is sovereign (vv. 17–23). "He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man" (vv. 24–25). He is describing himself.

He now gains enough confidence to speak with God. "Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God" (Job 13:3). In contrast, his accusers are liars. "But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value" (v. 4). They say that they speak on behalf of God, but they do not know what they are talking about. "Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? Will ye accept his person? will ye contend for God?" (vv. 7–8). They should fear God (vv. 9–11).

2. A Declaration of Trust

Job insists that he trusts in God, no matter what. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him" (v. 15). He declares confidently, "Behold now, I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified" (v. 18). He implores God to cease persecuting him. Then the two of them can talk.

Withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid. Then call thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me. How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy? (vv. 21–24).

Once again, he criticizes the system of causation. Something is deeply wrong. He has done nothing wrong, yet he is under God's negative sanctions. "Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths; thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet" (v. 27). Job insists that he deserves an explanation. This becomes Job's theme until the final chapter.

Man's time is determined by God. "Seeing his days are determined,

the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:5). The system of sanctions should be withdrawn from mankind, Job says. Death should constitute the only negative sanction. Anything more than this is too difficult to bear. A man under negative sanctions cannot accomplish his work. "Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day" (v. 6). The grave will swallow all men. "So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep" (v. 12). He has no hope in the resurrection. "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come" (v. 14). What change? Death. "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands" (v. 15). Man has no hope. God washes away mankind's works. "The waters wear the stones: thou wastest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away" (vv. 19–20).

For Job, history offers no hope. Neither does the grave. A dead man sees no inheritance. "His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them" (v. 21). Life offers no hope. "But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn" (v. 22). Everything is hopeless. Therefore, he prays to God to give him rest and death.

H. Eliphaz Defends Predictable Negative Sanctions

Eliphaz replies. Job speaks folly. "For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou choosest the tongue of the crafty" (Job 15:5). Where is Job wrong? By not understanding that God's negative sanctions come on the wicked. "The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days, and the number of years is hidden to the oppressor. A dreadful sound is in his ears: in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him" (vv. 20–21). He implies that this had been Job's situation. Job had been prosperous. Then poverty came in one day. Such a man loses faith in the future. "He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword" (v. 22). This is Job's situation. Well should Job lose faith. The man who challenges God is asking for trouble. "For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty" (v. 25). Is there hope for him? No. "He shall not be rich, neither shall his substance continue, neither shall he prolong the per-

fection thereof upon the earth” (v. 29).

The problem for Job was that he had come under negative sanctions, yet he had been a faithful man. There is therefore no predictable relationship between righteousness and positive sanctions. Eliphaz and the other two visitors do not believe Job, because they believe in the predictability of God’s historical sanctions. Job had been rich. Then he lost his wealth. This testified against his claim of righteousness. The fact that Job called on God to explain Himself was another sign of Job’s rebellion. No explanation is necessary, Eliphaz is saying. The negative sanctions testify against Job.

I. Job Insists on His Innocence

Job dismisses their words. “I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all” (Job 16:2). He has had enough. “Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest?” (v. 3). “God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked” (v. 11).

Job says that God has broken him (v. 12). But he insists that this was through no fault on his part. “Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure” (v. 16). This is not just his opinion, he says. “Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high” (v. 19). The negative sanctions came, but they were not imposed as a punishment for Job’s supposed evil. There was no evil. *This means that historical sanctions are not always predictable in terms of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.* They are predictable for most righteous people. “The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger” (Job 17:9). But they are not for him. “If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness” (v. 13). He has no hope. “I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in the dust” (v. 15).

J. Bildad Judges Job on God’s Behalf

Bildad returns to the theme of the three comforters: Job committed sin, and by defending himself verbally, he is digging himself into a hole. His light will be put out by God. “Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine” (Job. 18:5). Job’s self-defense will not stand. “The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down.

For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare” (vv. 6–8).

Bildad waxes eloquent for verse after verse, warning Job that Job has cast his lot with the doomed. The very creation will move against him. “The snare is laid for him in the ground, and a trap for him in the way” (v. 10). The list is comparable to the list of negative sanctions in Deuteronomy 28. Job will have no name. “His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street” v. 17). There will be no heirs. “He shall neither have son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings” (v. 19).

All of this rests on a presupposition, namely, that God’s negative historical sanctions are imposed only on those who deserve them.

K. Job Identifies God as the Sanctions-Bringer

Job does not blame fate or chance for his condition. He blames God. “Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net” (Job 19:6). Job did nothing wrong. God does not hear his cry. “Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment” (v. 7). He is speaking of a verbal accusation by God, an explanation. He has no hope. “He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree” (v. 10).

He recognizes that his critics are not acting autonomously. They are part of God’s system of sanctions. All those who once were his friends are his enemies (vv. 11–19). He then utters a phrase that has come down through the ages: “My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth” (v. 20). Teeth have no skin.

Yet, in the midst of this lament, Job still refuses to abandon God. “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth” (v. 25). This is a declaration of *resurrection*: the strongest in the Old Testament. “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (v. 26).

Yet his condition is not his fault. It is the critics’ fault. “But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?” (v. 28). *He warns them of the wrath to come.* “Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment” (v. 29). *There is judgment in history.* It can come at any time, just as it has come upon him.

L. Zophar Affirms Deuteronomy 28

Zophar returns to the theme of the visitors. These sanctions are not random. They are deserved. The bigger men are, the harder they fall.

That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him (Job 20:5–9).

He continues on in this vein, providing a litany of sanctions to come. “He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly” (v. 15). He accuses Job of serious moral infractions.

That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein. Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not (vv. 18–19).

Job’s future, should he remain intransigent in his profession of innocence, will be ruinous. “The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him” (v. 27). There is no escape. “This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God” (v. 29).

M. Job’s Faith in Eventual Predictability

His critics have brought warnings and accusations to him, based on his condition as a man under comprehensive negative sanctions. *But sanctions are not predictable in the short term*, he insists. This is true of positive sanctions, too. The wicked prosper for a time.

Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and

rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave (Job 21:7–13).

These people grow confident as a result of their outward prosperity. “Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” (vv. 14–15). They view their success as independent from God and His sanctions.

This is a mistake. “How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein” (vv. 17–18). In any case, no one escapes death (vv. 30–33).

N. Eliphaz Adds More Lies

Eliphaz asks what he thinks are two rhetorical questions. They are anything but rhetorical.

Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect? (Job 22:2–3).

This is a profound pair of questions. They reflect what Cornelius Van Til called the *full-bucket paradox*. God’s glory is like a full bucket of water. How can adding anything to this full bucket fill it even more? God is infinite, yet the creation is something extra. It is not part of God’s being. It is different from His being: subordinate, yet real. Furthermore, God is infinite in His glory, yet we are to glorify Him. How do we add anything to a full bucket? Yet we do. History has meaning. We have meaning.

Eliphaz is trying to prove that Job is nothing compared to God. Eliphaz is incorrect. Man is something compared to God. He is the image of God. It was very important to God that Job was righteous. It was so important that God twice goaded Satan about Job’s righteousness. Job’s refusal to curse God was the whole point. This proved God’s point. The debate between God and Satan from the garden of Eden until the final judgment is about the righteousness of covenant-keepers in relation to covenant-breakers. The outcome of this debate is so

important to God that God has imposed a system of covenantal historical sanctions that structures the historical inheritance of both groups. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).² By denigrating the importance of a man's ethics in God's outlook, Eliphaz calls this system of sanctions into question, yet he has rested his case against Job on the basis of the predictability of these sanctions.

Job has denied his sin. This denial has lured Eliphaz and his compatriots into making ever-more preposterous accusations. "Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing" (vv. 5–6). Job has withheld bread to the hungry (v. 7). "Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken" (v. 9). Therefore, Job is under God's sanctions. "Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee; Or darkness, that thou canst not see; and abundance of waters cover thee" (vv. 10–11).

Job has admitted repeatedly that God is the sole source of His afflictions. Eliphaz has not listened. He accuses Job of spiritual blindness. Job refuses to confess his sin, as if God cannot see this sin. "And thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven" vv. 13–14). Job is blind to the predictability of God's negative sanctions. "Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood: Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?" (vv. 15–17). Eliphaz calls Job to repentance. "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles" (v. 23). If Job will do this, he will be rich once again. "Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks" (v. 24). The sanctions are predictable.

O. Job Wants a Judicial Hearing

Job remains confident that he has done nothing wrong. He cries out for a judicial hearing. "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

fill my mouth with arguments" (Job 23:3–4). Job is confident in his own righteousness. "I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge" (vv. 5–7). The problem is, God will not give him a hearing. "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him" (vv. 8–9). But if he ever gets his hearing, God will declare him innocent. "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (v. 10). Why? "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined" (v. 11).

The problem is, *God is sovereign*. He cannot be moved. "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (v. 13). He is in control. "For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him" (v. 14). Conclusion: "Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him" (v. 15).

Eliphaz has accused Job of being blind to God's ability to see into Job's heart. Job counters by affirming God's omniscience. Covenant-breakers do not perceive this. "Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days?" (Job 24:1). Some steal by moving landmarks (v. 2), contrary to Deuteronomy 27:17. "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen." Others steal animals from orphans. They take the widow's pledge (v. 3), contrary to Deuteronomy 24:17. "Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge." They sin in many ways (vv. 7–11). But there is a problem: they get away with it. "Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them" (v. 12). Eventually, they die. "Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned" (v. 19). The sinner is forgotten (v. 20).

The sinner does not know when God's wrath will come upon him. "Though it be given him to be in safety, whereon he resteth; yet his eyes are upon their ways" (v. 23). Their end draweth nigh. "They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn" (v. 24).

Job does not deny negative sanctions. He only denies that they are readily predictable. Bad things happen to bad people, but bad things also happen to good people. Job is one of these.

P. Bildad Invokes Worms

This is the final response of the three comforters. It is short. He invokes God's dominion. "Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, Dominion and fear are with him, he maketh peace in his high places" (Job 25:1–2). Job has affirmed this point repeatedly. Bildad does not undercut Job's affirmations with this affirmation.

He then asks a rhetorical question. "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (v. 4). The answer is simple: *redemption*. God has provided a way of redemption, in which God justifies a man. Job has argued that such had been his case prior to the negative sanctions. He had not sinned before God. The sanctions are not consistent with his new condition. To counter this, Bildad invokes finitude rather than ethics. The heavenly spheres are nothing, compared to God. "Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight" (v. 5). Then comes what he regards as the coup de grace. "How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?" (v. 6).

This misses the point. Worms are not ethically responsible to God. Men are. God's system of historical sanctions applies to earth's creatures only insofar as they are under men's jurisdiction. As covenantal subordinates to man's dominion, they suffer. Paul later wrote:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:19–23).³

Man is a creature. In this sense, he shares the condition of a worm. He is not God. But he is made in God's image. He is far more than a

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

worm. Bildad's response is irrelevant to the issue of Job's condition.

Conclusion

Job began his defense with a curse on his condition. It would have been better if he had not been born. He did not criticize God directly. He criticized Him indirectly. He criticized the results of God's providence. Here is his argument. God is in charge. He is therefore responsible. Job's condition was inconsistent with the system of sanctions God had announced to Moses. That system is not rigorously predictable. It does not provide a sure pathway to everyone's success.

On hearing this lament, his three comforters immediately became critics. They affirmed that the system of sanctions is predictable. The fault is not in the system, they insisted. It is in Job's behavior. Causes have predictable effects. Negative sanctions point back clearly to some sin in Job's life that warrants his condition. Because his condition is disastrous, the hidden sin must be substantial.

Job denied their argument by denying the universality of God's system of ethical cause and effect. It is not legitimate to draw conclusions about causes from the visible effects—not in his case, anyway. The three critics regarded this argument as additional evidence of Job's lack of accurate self-judgment. God's judgment is always warranted, they argue. Trust it.

This is an argument about predictability in history. How can there be an increase in ethical self-discipline if external effects are not consistent with ethical causes? How can men learn what pleases God and what angers Him if His system of sanctions does not provide motivation for covenant-keeping? Job was calling into question God's covenant governing each individual. The system produces perverse results. Nice guys finish last—not always, but often enough to call into question the covenant. The critics recognized this line of reasoning, and they challenged his conclusion.

The reason why these exchanges are difficult to understand is that *both sides appealed to what the Bible teaches*. First, there is a system of sanctions. Second, we know what Job did not know, namely, that God ignored this system of sanctions because of Satan's response to God's challenge to Satan. The violation of the sanctions was necessary for God to prove to Satan that Job was not righteous for the sake of the positive sanctions. He was righteous for the sake of God. Satan was silenced by Job's initial responses: acceptance.

This was not true of the visitors. They were not silent. There was a reason for this. In response to the initial challenges from Satan, Job did not demand an explanation from God. He held his peace. But, after thinking for a week in silence about what had happened, he reversed course. He did not curse God. Instead, he cursed God's providential gift of life to Job. The gift was not a gift, Job said. It was a curse. The three visitors answered by laying blame at Job's doorstep. Do not blame God, they said; blame yourself.

Job then justified himself in a long soliloquy: Job 26 through 31.

4

JOB ON JUSTICE AND SANCTIONS

Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing (Job 26:6–7).

A. The Sovereignty of God

Thus begins Job's lengthy affirmation of the sovereignty of God. He is no less committed to this doctrine than his three critics are. He affirms God's mastery over creation. "He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end" (vv. 8–10). The debate between Job and his critics is not over point one of the biblical covenant: sovereignty. It is a debate over point four: sanctions.

He declares his commitment to predictable negative sanctions. "This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread" (vv. 13–14). God had warned Israel through Moses, "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity" (Deut. 28:41). God had also warned Israel, "Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof" (Deut. 28:30). Rebellious men's inheritance will be cut off. God was speaking of conquerors inheriting. Job affirms something similar. "Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver" (vv. 16–17). This corresponds to Solomon's dictum, "A good man leaveth

an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).¹ The rich man will lose his wealth in a night. Job declares:

The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he openeth his eyes, and he is not. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place. For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place (vv. 19–23).

His critics have defended God's predictable negative sanctions. He in no way disagrees. They have concluded that he is under negative sanctions because of a hidden sin. He denies this. He is correct in his self-defense, as Job 1–2 reveals. He is the victim of a debate between supernatural beings. He does not know this, but he knows the outcome: negative sanctions without an ethical cause. He is innocent.

Job then moves to the identification of God as all-powerful and all-knowing. "He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing" (Job 28:9–10).

Men seek wisdom. Where is it found? (v. 12). Men do not know the price of wisdom (v. 13). Gold will not buy it (v. 15). "It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold" (vv. 16–17). This reaffirms what Solomon taught. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her" (Prov. 3:13–15). Job is affirming his commitment to the covenant's scale of economic values. From whence comes wisdom (v. 20)? From God. "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof" (v. 23). Job affirms God as the source of original assessment: point four of the biblical covenant.

For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

the lightning of the thunder: Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out (vv. 24–27).

Having confessed his commitment to points one and four of the biblical covenant, Job then declares his innocence.

B. A Declaration of Innocence

1. Positive Sanctions

God had been with him, he declares. “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; When his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness” (Job 29:2–3). He had been the recipient of God’s positive sanctions. God had been with him; so had his children (v. 5). He had been honored by the community (vv. 8–11). Why? “Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy” (vv. 12–13). He had been generous, not an oppressor, contrary to what his critics had claimed. “Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem” (vv. 12–14). In short, he had been a source of positive sanctions. This gave him confidence in the future. “Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand” (v. 18). There was covenantal correlation: point three (ethics), point four (judgment), and point five (the future).

2. The Great Reversal

Then came the great reversal. “But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock” (Job 30:1). They had been his social inferiors. Now they deride him. They had been paupers and refugees (vv. 3–7). “They were children of fools, yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth. And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword (vv. 8–9). They now do what they can to make his life miserable (vv. 10–14).

Job does not say that his three critics are ethically base men. He

merely describes what ethically base men have done to him. He lets them draw the logical conclusion. They are allied with ethically base men.

How did this happen? God did it.

He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes. I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me. Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance (vv. 19–22).

All this was true. Job is not inventing stories. God, by unleashing Satan, brought Job low. But why? Job had empathised for the poor, as God requires. “Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? (v. 25). Yet reversal has come. “When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness” (v. 26).

3. Inheritance

He raises the issue of inheritance. “For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?” (Job 31:2–3). This does not threaten him. “Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?” (v. 4). He wants God’s formal judgment.

Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity. If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands; Then let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out (vv. 6–8).

4. Charity

Job does not defend himself merely in terms of his not having actively done evil. He defends himself in his not neglecting to do good: showing charity.

If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother’s

womb;) If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone (vv. 16–22).

He had always been afraid of God. “For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure” (v. 23).

5. Trust in God

He insists that he has not trusted his wealth. “If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much” (vv. 24–25). The positive sanctions have not been the heart of his religion. In this, he denies Satan’s original accusation. “Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face” (Job 1:10–11).

He challenges God to bring a charge against him.

Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book. Surely I would take it upon my shoulder, and bind it as a crown to me. I would declare unto him the number of my steps; as a prince would I go near unto him (vv. 35–37).

Conclusion

Job did not deny that God brings negative historical against covenant-breakers. He affirmed this. What he denied was that the negative sanctions that God had brought against him were justified in terms of God’s law. He had not committed sin. He also had done positive good. He had been rich. He never trusted his riches. He always feared God.

He ended his defense with a call for negative sanctions in response to any evil he had done. “Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended” (v. 40).

5

ELIHU ON GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job (32:1–3).

We are three-quarters of the way through the Book of Job. This is the first mention of Elihu, whose name means “his God.” He had restrained himself, for he was young. “Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he. When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled” (vv. 4–5).

A. Elihu's Challenge

He lays down a challenge. “Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment” (v. 9). They are older; he is younger; nevertheless, they should still listen to him.

He says that the three had not answered Job (v. 12). Obviously, they had answered him verbally. But they had not answered him theologically. Why had Elihu said nothing? Because Job's words had not been directed at him. “Now he hath not directed his words against me: neither will I answer him with your speeches” (v. 14). He recognizes that they had responded to Job without coming to grips with Job's reasoning.

He does not attempt to win over his opponents by softening his preliminary words. “For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away” (v. 22).

Having identified himself as the opponent of Job's critics, he then turns to Job. “Wherefore, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and

hearken to all my words” (Job 33:1). He insists that he speaks on behalf of God. “Behold, I am according to thy wish in God’s stead: I also am formed out of the clay” (v. 6). He summarizes Job’s argument to his critics.

Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths (vv. 8–11).

This is a good summary of Job’s self-defense. Job did not commit an offense, yet God imposed negative sanctions on him. Elihu’s response: “Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man” (v. 12). Job has repeatedly called on God to explain Himself. “Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters” (v. 13). He identifies the theology of God’s declaration: *I am God; you are not*. This declaration is supreme in history.

Furthermore, God is not silent. “For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction” (vv. 14–16). God’s goal is to keep every man from following his autonomous purpose. “That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man” (v. 17). Why? Because man is self-destructive. “He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword” (v. 18). But men do not listen to God apart from negative sanctions.

He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers (vv. 19–22).

This had also been Eliphaz’s initial response to Job. “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole” (Job 5:17–18).

Elihu affirms that God will respond to anyone who repents.

He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteous-

ness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light (vv. 26–28).

This had also been the message of Eliphaz in his first response to Job. “Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth” (Job 5:21–22). Eliphaz repeated this message in his final response to Job. “If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver” (Job. 22:23–25). So far, Elihu has said nothing new.

He repeats Job’s argument. “For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment” (Job 34:5). Job has rejected the relevance of sanctions. “For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God” (Job 34:9). This was indeed the implication of Job’s self-defense. This means that *God is not a reliable judge*. His law promises positive sanctions for obedience (Deut. 28:1–14). Elihu responds: “Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity” (v. 10). “Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment” (v. 12).

B. Has God Made a Mistake? Is He Unfair?

Elihu reminds Job of the sovereignty of God and the non-sovereignty of men in general and Job in particular.

Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. If now thou hast understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words. Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands (vv. 13–19).

Job has called God’s judgment into question. He has said that he is

under negative sanctions, yet he did nothing to deserve these sanctions. The reader knows that this is true. In fact, it was Job's righteousness that was the original source of the confrontation between God and Satan. If Job had not been perfect, God would not have initiated this confrontation.

Elihu does not know about this. He would not change his line of reasoning if he did. *Job is not in a position as a creature to call God's decisions into question.* "For he will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God" (v. 23). God has not explained Himself to Job. So what? "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only" (Job 34:29).

He offers advice to Job. It is all right to ask why God has brought sanctions, but only so that he does not pursue evil. "Surely it is meet [fit] to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more" (vv. 31–32). Why is this legitimate? Because a man should not follow his own judgment autonomously. "Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest" (v. 33). But Job had not asked for correction. He had insisted that he was not in need of correction. Fine. Then the correct response would have been to sit there and shut up. "Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom" (Job 34:35).

Job has transgressed. "My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God" (vv. 36–37). Job had answered the three critics, all wicked men. He should have just sat there and remained silent, just as he had done initially.

C. Does God Owe Job an Explanation?

Job had insisted that God answer him. Who is Job to demand this? Does God owe Job anything? "Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?" (Job 35:2). God has the right to sit there and shut up. Job should do the same. As for the absence of positive sanctions, "For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin? I

will answer thee, and thy companions with thee” (vv. 3–4). He asks a rhetorical question. “If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? (v. 7).

Elihu then notes a familiar pattern of behavior. Men cry out when things go wrong, but they do not praise God when things go right. “By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry: they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night; Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?” (vv. 9–11). So, God does not reply when they call out for deliverance in bad times. “There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it” (vv. 12–13).

Job is impatient. *God has His own timetable*. God brings sanctions in His own good time.

Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him. But now, because it is not so, he hath visited in his anger; yet he knoweth it not in great extremity: Therefore doth Job open his mouth in vain; he multiplieth words without knowledge (vv. 14–16).

D. On Behalf of God

Elihu says that he speaks on God’s behalf. “Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God’s behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker” (Job 36:2–3). He asserts that he is correct. “For truly my words shall not be false: he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee” (v. 4).

God does bring judgment in history, he insists.

Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom. He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted. And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction” (vv. 5–8).

God warns rulers. If they turn from evil, they are rewarded. If not, they come under negative sanctions.

Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and com-

mandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge (vv. 9–12).

So far, Elihu has said nothing about God's historical sanctions that Job has not said and his critics have not said.¹

Elihu asks a rhetorical question. "Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength" (v. 19). But Job has already affirmed this: "For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure. If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much" (Job 31:23–25). Elihu warns: "Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place" (v. 20). But Job had gone on at considerable length in describing the night as the preferred time for evil-doers.² Elihu is telling Job nothing new.

Elihu describes God as the source of changes in nature (Job 36:27–37:13). He then says, "Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God" (v. 37). But Job already knows this. "Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth" (Job 12:15). He has described God as sovereign over nature (Job 26). Elihu has yet to add anything to Job's knowledge.

Elihu asks Job rhetorically, "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?" (v. 16). He continues in this vein until his speech ends (vv. 17–22). He ends with this: "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any that are wise of heart" (vv. 23–24).

1. Job (Job 27:13–23); Eliphaz (Job 7–9; 5:16–20; 15:20–35); Bildad (Job 18:5–19; 36:1–20); Zophar (Job 20:5–29).

2. "Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them. They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death" (Job 24:12–17).

Conclusion

Elihu began by criticizing the three critics, but then spent his time attacking Job. He used numerous arguments against Job that Job had already affirmed. Elihu affirmed the reliability of God's sanctions. Job did, too, but added that this was not true in his case. Elihu wanted Job not to call into question God's reliability. Elihu also called on Job to refrain from insisting that God should answer him. God owes no one an explanation, Elihu said. Elihu affirmed God's control over nature. Job did, too.

There was not much new in Elihu's speech. He insisted that he represented God, but the only new ideas that he added to the discussion were these: (1) Job should not cast aspersions on God's judgment; (2) Job's time frame is too short; (3) God owes Job no answer.

6

GOD ASKS RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me (Job 38:1–3).

Here begins the longest passage in the Bible that is attributed to God. God elsewhere speaks directly to men on occasion, but never with this degree of detail.

A. I'm God, and You're Not

His speech is a long series of rhetorical questions. They all have the same theme: *God's sovereignty over the operations of nature*. The section is one long announcement of "I'm God; you're not." This section is addressed to no one in particular.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding (v. 4).

Here, He announces His creation of the earth. He begins with the earth, not the heavens.

He is sovereign over the seas (vv. 8, 11). He rules night and day (vv. 12–13). He controls death (v. 17). He controls the rain (v. 28). He controls the seasons (v. 29). He controls the pathways of the stars (v. 31). He controls the animal world (Job 39).

Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? (vv. 26–27)

B. Job Gets His Interview

Chapter 40 begins with these words:

Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it (vv. 1–2).

Job immediately recognizes his sin. It was the sin that Elihu had identified: *challenging God's judgment*.

Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further (vv. 4–5).

Job had demanded that God explain Himself. God now explains Himself. “Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me” (v. 7). Elihu had asked rhetorically: “Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God’s?” (Job 35:2). God extends Elihu’s insight. “Wilt thou also disdain my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?” (v. 8). If so, do the following.

Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in secret. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee (vv. 10–14).

This has to do with ethical judgment, not control over nature. God began with His absolute sovereignty over nature. He now gets to the point: *His power to evaluate right and wrong and then impose justice*. Is Job ready to do this? If he is, then he can save himself.

C. Job Sees the Light

This was sufficient for Job.

Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not (Job 42:1–3).

He then says he will speak. “Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me” (v. 4). His speech was brief: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (vv. 5–6).

That was what God had been waiting for. He now turns his attention to the three critics.

And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job (vv. 7–9).

Negative sanctions came on them. Had it not been for Job, who served as their priest, greater negative sanctions would have been imposed by God.

God said nothing to Elihu. This indicates that He regarded Elihu as well-meaning, a spokesman for God who understood the sins of Job: (1) demanding an explanation from God; (2) calling God’s judgment into question; (3) a short time perspective and impatience.

D. Restoration

“And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before” (v. 10). As soon as it was clear that Job was in God’s favor and on top of the economic pile, everyone wanted to be his friend.

Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold (v. 11).

The world is filled with sycophants. Job now knew the degree of loyalty to him and what it would take to retain this loyalty. To this de-

gree, he was better off than before. They, unlike him, conformed to Satan's description of Job. They were loyal for the benefits' sake.

"He had also seven sons and three daughters" (v. 13).

"After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations" (v. 16). Job was the oldest person in the Bible after Moses' declaration of mankind's new, shortened life span (Ps. 90:10).

Conclusion

God is absolutely sovereign over the creation. He is absolutely sovereign over judgment in history. He is God, and man is not. He owes men no explanations. His dispenses sanctions as He sees fit, according to His will.

Job became again the great beneficiary of God's grace. He had gone through a great trial. This trial was necessary to put Satan in his place, which was never revealed to Job. It was also necessary for putting Job's three critics in their places. It was necessary finally to put Job in his place.

Then there were his first 10 children and all but four of his former servants. Their deaths were necessary to convey a theological truth to mankind, a truth encapsulated by a layman, Otto Scott. "God is no buttercup."

CONCLUSION

This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. Those that remain of him shall be buried in death: and his widows shall not weep. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver (Job 27:13–17).

At no time did Job believe that God does not impose negative historical sanctions on the wicked. He believed that the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. He doubted that this system of sanctions was being applied fairly to him, but he was incorrect. “And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

A. Job’s Children

What is clear in the Book of Job is that this system of historical sanctions did not apply to Job’s servants and his first 10 children. There is no escape from this conclusion. They were under Job’s covenantal authority, and they perished because of this. *His righteousness doomed them.* God turned Satan loose on them in order to prove a point. There was no protection for them. There was no covenantal predictability at the end of their lives. Their time ran out before the experiment ended.

They did not die by chance. They died by design. Their deaths have come down through history as a great anomaly. But if this is an anomaly, it is an anomaly based on a predictable pattern. *The deviation from the pattern of historical sanctions is what makes their deaths covenantally relevant.* A day like that is not statistically likely. Its abnormality points to the providence of God. This providence includes God’s right to kill you for His own amusement. He was playing with Satan, goading him. Part of God’s playfulness resulted in a lot of

deaths. This is the God of the Bible.

Christians do not want to think of God in this way. Such a God is an affront to their concept of God. It was an affront to Job's concept of God, too. Job made this plain to his visitors. This is why God finally presented Himself to Job and asked him pages of rhetorical questions about His power compared to Job's. God is not capricious. God is sovereign. He does not answer to creatures. Creatures answer to God. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome,

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Rom. 9:10–21).

This passage is an affront to most Christians. It does not conform to their concept of God.

B. God's Sovereignty and Predictability

We learn two fundamental principles in the story of Job.

1. God is absolutely sovereign.
2. God is not absolutely predictable by men.

The second principle is implied by the first. God used unpredictable historical sanctions as a way to persuade Job of the first principle.

Satan understood the first principle. He knew that he could not interfere with Job apart from God's permission. He believed that Job was predictable. Anyway, he spoke as if he did. He did not suggest that God was predictable. He believed that God was upholding Job. That alone made Job predictable. God called Satan's bluff. Twice.

The three critics believed that God is absolutely predictable. They also attributed to covenantal law an absolute quality that belongs only to God. By means of their observation of the negative sanctions, they drew conclusions about why those sanctions had been applied by God. There was only one possible explanation, they believed: sin in Job's life. Job denied this. The critics then escalated their accusations.

They believed that men can gain knowledge of God's motivations as well as other men's spiritual condition merely by observing the sanctions. To this extent, they believed that they gained authority over Job. They would assess his degree of sin, on behalf of God. They believed in the fixed relationship between law and sanctions.

Satan believed the same thing. He believed that God's positive sanctions were the sole basis of Job's obedience. The critics believed that God's negative sanctions were sole proof of Job's disobedience. Both Satan and the critics allowed their judgment to be governed exclusively by God's historical sanctions. Satan was wrong. The critics were wrong.

God's demonstration that Satan was wrong became the basis of the critics' conclusion that Job was sinful. They did not know that God's imposition of negative sanctions served a higher purpose: the public humiliation of Satan. God had goaded him into making a challenge. He then allowed Satan to impose extreme negative sanctions. Satan was ruthless; he was determined to prove his point regarding Job's sole motivation. Satan's degree of ruthlessness led the three critics to draw an inaccurate conclusion: Job had been in sin.

C. The Limits of Predictability

Both Satan and the critics had a theory of probability that turned out to be incorrect. Satan thought Job was predictable. The critics thought God is predictable. Satan drew conclusions about what Job would do. The critics drew conclusions about what Job must have done. The conclusions were wrong.

God retained His sovereignty in all of this. He did not regard His positive sanctions as the basis of Job's obedience. He knew that Job's

motivation was ethical rather than economic. God also retained His sovereignty by the imposition of negative sanctions on Job. His system of historical causation reflected His commitment to His own agenda, which included a public challenge to Satan. His agenda here was of greater importance than the predictability of His sanctions. In short, *because God is sovereign, His historical sanctions are not*. He does not transfer His sovereignty to a system of written law and supernatural sanctions that is capable of being understood comprehensively by man. *The legal order is not a tool by which men can gain control over God.*

There was a cartoon in the late 1960s. It showed two rats in a cage. There was a large lever and also a slot extending into the cage. One rat said to the other, "I have this psychologist trained. Every time I press this lever, he sends food pellets down the slot." This is legalistic man's view of God, authority, law, sanctions, and time.

God's covenantal law-order is sufficiently predictable to produce respect for both the law and for the God who enforces it. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are the primary passages in the Pentateuch that describe the structure of the sanctions. These results apply to the society at large. That is, *the sanctions apply to a large number of people*. They are predictable within a society in much the same way as statistics applies to large numbers of people. The predictability of the sanctions is sufficient for people to assess the community's degree of conformity to the law. But, even here, there is a delay of time. In the interim, the law-order does not seem predictable. Asaph commented on this in Psalm 73.

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Ps. 73:3–12).

The sanctions were not random, Asaph said. They were perverse. Bad guys finished first. But the positive sanctions were part of a long-

term pattern. Solomon later announced this pattern. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).¹ Asaph noted this. “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (Ps. 73:18–19).²

Americans have a saying: “He gave them enough rope to hang themselves.” It applies to the system of sanctions described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. It does not apply to Meredith G. Kline’s concept of ethical causation. “And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.”³

D. Economic Sanctions

Deuteronomy’s sanctions include economics in the narrow sense, such as money, but also in the broad sense: people’s goals in life. Goals are ends for which we sacrifice consumption in the present. We buy them, in other words. The Mosaic law specified a law-order in which the sanctions rewarded ethical behavior and penalized unethical behavior. The goal of the Mosaic civil law was a decrease in unethical behavior. “And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you” (Deut. 13:11).

The predictability of sanctions furthers the commitment of righteous people to conform themselves to God’s Bible-revealed standards. Positive economic sanctions increase their authority in society. These sanctions provide capital, which is a tool of dominion. But there is an ethical threat in all systems of positive sanctions. The sanctions can become ends in themselves. This was Satan’s accusation against Job. Satan was unimpressed with Job’s ethical behavior. He told God, “Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands,

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 18.

3. Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 1:10–11). God removed the hedge as a way to demonstrate that Job was not in it for the positive sanctions. Satan was thwarted by this demonstration.

Thwarting Satan was more important to God than maintaining the hedge. This is why the Book of Job is so disturbing to covenant-keepers. It shows, beyond a shadow of doubt, that *God has an agenda that is much broader than providing benefits to covenant-keepers*. Readers can rejoice retroactively with Job in the birth of children 11 through 20, but this does not resurrect children one through 10. As for the deceased faithful herdsmen, nothing is said of them in Chapter 42. They were grist for God's mill. They were pawns in God's game of cosmic chess with Satan. If they were pawns, then what about you?

Job's critics were very concerned about their own status. If Job was not in misery as a result of some hidden sin, then they were in much greater jeopardy than he was. They could not match him in the perfection contest, yet here he was in the pit. If God would do this to a perfect man, what was He willing to do to run-of-the mill covenant-keepers? They had to defend the predictability of the sanctions, because, if the sanctions are not predictable, covenant-keepers are at risk. Bad things could overtake them at any time.

This is why the Book of Job has always been a puzzle for covenant-keepers. Most covenant-keepers want to believe in the efficacy of their works. They want to believe that bad guys finish last. They want to believe that honesty is the best policy—not simply for ethics' sake, but also for personal prosperity's sake.

Conclusion

The arguments back and forth produced no reconciliation. The intervention of God did.

The participants were not told about the interaction between God and Satan which began this book. The reader knows; the participants didn't. The reader sees what God's hidden agenda was; the participants didn't.

The theological issue dividing the participants was the doctrine of predictable historical sanctions. Are they predictable? Job said they are, but not in his case. The three critics said they were, and this included Job's case. Elihu said they are, but not in Job's case. God did not

address this issue. He affirmed His own sovereignty, which all of the participants had affirmed.

The sovereignty of God could be exercised to make the sanctions predictable within a specific time frame. This is not the case, as the Book of Job makes clear. The Book of Job illustrates a neglected passage in Deuteronomy.

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law. And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul (Deut. 29:29–30:2).

Meredith G. Kline taught that all this has been put aside under the New Covenant. He never came close to proving this exegetically. He never suggested what the implications are for social theory. But he knew that the annulment of systematic historical sanctions would undermine the case for postmillennialism. *There is no biblical case for the triumph of God's comprehensive kingdom in history if God's historical sanctions are not tied to biblical law.* Without the connection between biblical law and predictable historical sanctions, there is no biblical case for distinguishing the performance of God's kingdom from autonomous man's kingdom. History would be covenantally random. This is Kline's theological position. It is not mine. It was not Job's in Chapter 42.

The story of Job is the precursor of the story of Jesus. To thwart Satan, God the Father placed Jesus under negative sanctions that He did not deserve. He cut Himself off from Jesus, just as God had cut Himself off from Job. "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). All this was preparatory for a great reversal.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of

the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).

The judicial basis of dominion in the New Covenant era—the Great Commission⁴—was the temporary unpredictability of the sanctions. But the system of sanctions is in fact predictable. Had Satan seen this, he might not have inspired the enemies of Christ to bring Him under historical sanctions. Satan was as wrong about Christ's response as he had been about Job's response. The historical sanctions prevailed. Jesus died, not because of His sins, but because of the sins of man. The negative sanction did not last long: three days.

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

CONFIDENCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON PSALMS

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CONFIDENCE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON PSALMS

GARY NORTH

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This book is dedicated to
Robert Thoburn
whose optimism has been constant

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Psalms is the premier book on optimism in the Bible. As such, it is the premier book of optimism in the ancient world. Nothing else comes close.

While many psalms are anguished cries regarding the psalmist's sinful condition, the book presents a picture of *the irreversible kingdom of God in history*. There is nothing in Psalms that even hints at the possibility that God's kingdom will not transform the whole world.

The basis of this optimism is God's covenant with Israel. This covenant has a structure. This structure rests on five principles: the absolute sovereignty of God; His delegation of authority to redeemed representatives of His kingdom; the Bible-revealed laws of God; the sanctions—positive and negative—that are inescapably bound to God's law; and the comprehensive inheritance in history of His people.¹

This optimism has implications. God expects covenant-keepers to maintain confidence that *their lives will positively transform the world to the extent that they conform themselves to God's Bible-revealed laws. The future is not booby trapped by God to threaten covenant-keepers. It is booby trapped by God to threaten covenant-breakers. History is not a level playing field. The contest between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan is rigged against Satan*. From Genesis 3:5 to Revelation 22, this is the message of the Bible. Until you accept this, you will never understand the Bible.

Entrepreneurship is an economic term that applies to people's (1) forecasting of the economic future and (2) designing plans to meet that future with a minimal expenditure of scarce resources. In four words, it is this: *buy low, sell high*. But entrepreneurship applies to all areas of life, not just the money economy. Everyone must deal with the future. The covenant-keeper is to buy low in the broadest sense, and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), chaps. 1–5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), chaps. 1–5.

also sell high in this sense. He is supposed to use the resources that God has granted to him as tools of kingdom-extension. The greater his confidence in the success of his efforts, the more likely he is to commit to a program of investing. He must invest time, money, and emotional commitment to the Great Commission.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).²

This commission involves far more than bringing the message of personal salvation through Christ's redemption (repurchase). It involves the redemption of the world.³ It involves *the replacement of sin with righteousness in every area where sin now reigns*. Sin is not given an eschatological King's X until the final judgment. Satan is not given a free ride. The Christian gospel, when it preaches the Bible, is a comprehensive gospel.⁴

A person who is convinced that this task is impossible, according to the Bible, is not going to make the same degree of commitment as a person who sees his efforts as part of a program ordained by God for success. *This is why confidence is crucial for success*. This is not self-confidence. It is confidence in a foreordained plan of God. Psalms presents the broad scope of this comprehensive program of cultural victory. No other book in the Bible rivals it in this regard.

Psalms is a didactic literary work, not primarily an historical work. It is intended to persuade. It is not an historical work in which there are literary activities mentioned, unlike the Old Testament's historical books or the Book of Acts. It is also not a prophetic work, set in specific times with an accompanying historical narrative. I therefore use the present tense when describing what the psalmists wrote. They wrote in the past, but their message was directed at covenant-keepers

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

3. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

4. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis on the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gn-world>)

throughout history. A didactic literary work is written for a particular era, but it is also expected to convey its message down through the ages. The psalmists spoke to their contemporaries, yet they also speak to us as contemporaries. Their words should be treated as contemporary.

1

INDIVIDUAL ETHICAL CAUSE AND EFFECT

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away (Psalm 1:1–4).

A. Theonomy and Causation

The theocentric issue here is God's law. The Book of Psalms begins with an affirmation: the righteous individual who avoids contact with evil individuals is blessed. The psalm says that an individual must not sit in the seat of the scornful or scoffers. These people are contemptuous. Contemptuous of what? God's law. In contrast, the righteous individual delights in the law of God. He meditates on the law day and night. He studies the law of God and thinks about how it should be applied in specific circumstances. He does not simply study the law as an academic exercise. He studies God's law in order to become an expert in rendering judgment.

This psalm describes such an individual as being like a tree planted by the rivers of water. A tree planted by water produces fruit according to the proper season. It does not wither prematurely. It has access to water. The tree does not dry up. The analogy of a tree planted by the water applies to *a life that is productive because it does not lack an important resource*. Therefore, the psalmist says, the righteous individual will prosper in whatever he does.

This affirmation is designed to increase men's faith in the predictability of their environment. There is a cause-and-effect relationship

between ethics and productivity. *There is a positive sanction for righteousness: prosperity.* An individual who is ethically righteous has an advantage over an evildoer. The righteous individual finds that he is blessed by God with greater wealth. *This gives him a competitive advantage.*

This is in contrast to the ungodly individual. Such an individual is like the chaff which the wind blows away. The symbolism here is that of winnowing or separating wheat from chaff. In a windy environment, a harvester tosses wheat and chaff into the air. The chaff weighs less than the wheat, so the wind blows the chaff away. This leaves wheat, which is a valuable resource. Chaff is not.

The psalmist says that the ungodly individual is like the chaff. He will not prosper. So, to the extent that individuals conform themselves to the law of God, they become the owners of greater resources than those people who disobey God's law. The psalmist specifically says that "the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (v. 6).

This is a short psalm. The psalmist is making a major covenantal point. He applies to the individual the same cause-and-effect system of ethics that Moses said applies to a nation. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses set forth a list of the sanctions that apply to nations. Righteous nations prosper; unrighteous nations do not. Leviticus 26 affirms the same cause-and-effect relationship. The Mosaic law rested upon a particular view of causation. It affirmed faith that righteousness is blessed, and unrighteousness is cursed. *The world around us is predictable in terms of the ethics and historical sanctions of the Mosaic law.*

The psalmist here affirms that biblical law is the correct standard of ethics. He also affirms that this ethical standard produces predictable effects for individual behavior. If an individual seeks prosperity, he should conform himself to the comprehensive, Bible-revealed law of God. If he wishes to avoid the negative sanction of poverty, he should avoid violating the laws of God. Covenant-keepers who conform themselves to biblical law have a competitive advantage over covenant-breakers who violate it. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 affirm this with respect to corporate groups. This psalm affirms it with respect to individuals.

B. Individual Self-Interest

Psalm 1 teaches that covenant-keeping produces blessings in his-

tory. In contrast, covenant-breaking produces losses in history. An individual who is self-interested should therefore conform himself to the Bible-revealed laws of God.

This psalm does not affirm righteousness solely as an end in itself. It affirms righteousness in terms of *individual self-interest*. It begins with the phrase, “blessed is.” It assumes that individuals prefer blessings to curses. They prefer positive sanctions to negative sanctions. To the extent that an individual prefers blessings over curses, he should study the Bible-revealed laws of God and then seek to apply them consistently to the environment around him. This is not to say that the comprehensive law of God should not be appreciated for its inherent qualities. An individual is to delight in the law of the Lord, the psalmist says. There is a delightful element about the consistency of God’s law. But such delight is not limited to aesthetic enjoyment or intellectual satisfaction. It is preliminary to action. An individual is not simply to be a hearer of the law; he is to be a doer of the law (James 1:22).¹ When he is a doer of the law, he positions himself to be a recipient of positive sanctions.

The existence of positive sanctions points to the fact that individuals want to be practical. They do not wish to act against their own self-interest. God has created an environment for mankind that rewards covenant-keeping. This provides an added incentive for an individual to study the laws of God. It is not sufficient that the laws of God are consistent with each other, and that they present a comprehensive system of government, beginning with self-government. Obedience to these laws must also produce positive sanctions. These sanctions reinforce man’s confidence in the legitimacy of the laws of God. As Moses put it, “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).²

The unrighteous individual does not believe this. To the extent that he believes in an ethical cause-and-effect universe, he believes that unethical behavior produces greater blessings than righteous behavior does. He adopts the words of baseball coach Leo Durocher: “Nice guys finish last.” This psalm teaches otherwise.

1. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. ??

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

Conclusion

Psalm 1 introduces a comprehensive body of wisdom which rests on this presupposition: personal righteousness produces positive sanctions, while personal unrighteousness produces negative sanctions. This psalm rests on a view of the universe in which ethics is primary. This is taught throughout the Bible. It is taught repeatedly in Psalms. Unfortunately, it is not taught by the modern church.

2

A COMPREHENSIVE INHERITANCE

I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession (Psalm 2:7–8).

This is a messianic psalm. We could even say that it is *the* messianic psalm. Here we read: “this day have I begotten thee.” This passage is quoted twice in the epistle to the Hebrews as applying to Jesus Christ.¹

God speaks to the Messiah in this psalm. He says for Messiah to ask Him to give Him the heathen for His inheritance. He also promises Him the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. This does not refer to the world beyond the grave. The psalmist speaks of the heathen as being present in the world. The theocentric issue here is inheritance.

A. Eschatological Views

There are three main approaches to eschatology: the doctrine of last things. Each has its distinctive features. Each has a specific social theory.²

This passage makes things exegetically difficult for amillennialists. It is possible for both premillennialists and postmillennialists to take this passage literally. The postmillennialist applies it to the final phase of the kingdom of God in history, in which the gospel of Jesus Christ spreads across the whole face of the earth. The premillennialist interprets it as an aspect of the millennial reign of Christ on earth prior to

1. “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?” (Heb. 1:5). “So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee” (Heb. 5:5).

2. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

the final judgment.

The amillennialist cannot interpret this passage literally. This passage makes no sense in the context of the amillennialist hermeneutic. There can be no question that this psalm is talking about the worldwide dominion of Jesus Christ in history. This language does not refer to some kind of spiritual or emotional state of mind, in which Christians, who have little influence in history, and who may be under the oppression of heathen, somehow reinterpret their situation to mean that they are in a position of authority. The only way for the amillennialist to interpret this passage literally is for him to say that Jesus Christ never does bother to ask God for the heathen as His inheritance or ask for the uttermost parts of the earth as His possession. Somehow, Jesus is not interested in extending His kingdom to include dominion over the heathen and possession of the uttermost parts of the earth. This makes even less sense than the amillennialist tradition of interpreting all biblical prophetic language of cultural victory as applying only to the psychological feelings of oppressed and culturally impotent Christians.

B. Inheritance

In Psalms, we have promises of inheritance. Covenant-keepers are told that they will inherit the earth in history.³ *The psalms do not refer to the world beyond the grave.* The Old Testament does not speak of exercising dominion after the resurrection. There are only a few Old Testament passages relating to the bodily resurrection,⁴ and they do not speak of dominion.

This psalm goes on to say that the Messiah will break His enemies with a rod of iron. He will break them in pieces like a potter's vessel. I know of no hermeneutic that does not interpret these words as symbolic. When the Bible speaks of a rod of iron, it does not mean a literal rod of iron. When it speaks of bashing people to pieces, it does not mean literal pieces of people scattered around the ground. It does not mean frozen corpses hacked into solid pieces by a literal rod of iron. It refers to political and judicial dominion. It refers to the dominion exercised by a king over his realm. This is why the psalm goes on to say: "Be wise now therefore, all ye kings: be instructed, the judges of the earth" (v. 10). *This is judicial language.* It has to do with the civil covenant in history. The psalmist is not instructing the kings of the earth

3. Psalms 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34; 82:11.

4. Job 14:14–15; Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:1–2, 13; Hosea 13:14.

to join the church and thereby place themselves under the rule of elders. The Scriptures do not speak of elders as people who exercise dominion with a rod of iron. *This language refers to the civil covenant.*

The inheritance is economic. It encompasses the uttermost parts of the earth. It is a comprehensive inheritance. It is not simply a political inheritance; this inheritance is much wider than mere politics. The Messiah will inherit more than political office. The Bible teaches comprehensive redemption.⁵ This redemption is the action of covenant-keepers who, as stewards of the Messiah, buy back (redeem) the whole world on behalf of the Messiah. It is the action of reclaiming every area of life in the name of Jesus Christ, by means of the Bible-revealed law of God, and by means of personal productivity. This redemption encompasses all three of the institutional covenants: church, family, and state.

C. Representation

A king rules through subordinates. They represent him judicially in the civil courts. In economic affairs, the stewards of the king act as agents of the king, who build up the equity value of the king's domains. They report to the king, and the king evaluates the efficiency of their service. When this text speaks of the outermost parts of the earth as the possession of the Messiah, it is speaking of a system of representative government. This is not limited to civil government. It is government in the most comprehensive sense. It means to exercise dominion over the earth. This is what God requires of all mankind, as He revealed in Genesis 1:26–28. This is what I call the dominion covenant.⁶ This covenant defines mankind. It preceded the four covenants: individual, church, family, and civil.

The psalmist says that when the Messiah asks God for His inheritance, He will be granted the outermost parts of the earth. Jesus declared after His resurrection that this messianic promise had been fulfilled definitively in history. He said that all power had been given to Him, and that the disciples were to preach the gospel to all the earth

5. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

(Matt. 28:18–20).⁷ This is the Great Commission. It is comprehensive.⁸ Jesus ratified His position as the Messiah by His affirmation of the fulfillment of this messianic promise. Through progressive sanctification and through evangelism, this psalm will be fulfilled in history.

The psalm closes with a promise: “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” This is a positive sanction.

Conclusion

This psalm announces the comprehensive rulership of the future Messiah. His inheritance is the uttermost parts of the earth. This means the whole world. The language is literal.

As with any monarch or estate owner, the Messiah rules through a system of hierarchy. His stewards represent Him judicially. They manage His estate on His behalf and for His benefit.

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

8. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

3

ETHICS, NOT POWER

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour (Psalm 8:4–5).

A. Creation and Dominion

The theocentric issue here is hierarchy. This psalm begins with an affirmation of God's excellence. "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens" (v. 1). This places God high above the creation. His name is authoritative. He possesses authority over the enemy and the avenger (v. 2).

He possesses this authority because He is the Creator. The psalmist speaks of the heavens as the work of God's fingers (v. 3). This is obviously poetic language. It points to God as sovereign over the creation. God has ordained the moon and the stars (v. 3).

The psalmist then speaks of God as the creator of mankind. There was a purpose in His creation of mankind. God made man to have dominion over the works of His hands. God has put all things under mankind's feet. This is an aspect of the hierarchy of creation. While God is sovereign over the creation, He has delegated authority to that aspect of the creation made in His image: mankind. Mankind exercises God's authority over the creation. This is both judicial and economic authority.

The psalmist says that man exercises authority over sheep and oxen and beasts of the field (v. 7). He also exercises authority over the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea. This psalm reaffirms what I have called the dominion covenant.¹ It was first revealed in Genesis 1:26–28. God specifically created mankind to exercise authority over the cre-

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

ation. The passage explicitly speaks about fish and the birds (v. 28).

Men do not directly exercise control over wild birds and fish in the sea. Men do not tell birds to fly this way or that. The authority that men exercise over birds and fish relates to *the authority of consumption*. Men have the right to kill birds and fish. Generally, this is done for food. Man's authority over these species is rarely done for training purposes. It is possible to train certain kinds of birds to perform tricks, and it is equally possible to train some large fish in the same way. But this is not what the psalmist is speaking about. He is talking about a general dominion, which is an affirmation of man's authority to use the birds of the air and the fish of the sea for his own purposes.

B. Angels

The passage also speaks of angels. It says that God has placed mankind a little lower than the angels. He has crowned mankind with glory and honor.

This is a peculiar passage. It indicates that the angels are in some way superior to man. In what way? They are superior in terms of power, but this does not refer to dominion. God has not placed the birds of the air and the fish of the sea under the jurisdiction of angels. This is man's responsibility. So, if men are under angels, and they are also over the fish of the sea, do men represent angels? There is nothing in the Scriptures that indicates that this is the case. Men represent God to the creation, and they represent the creation to God. Man is the intermediary between God and the creation. Yet the text is explicit: man is a little lower than the angels.

Paul says in First Corinthians 6 that covenant-keepers will someday judge the angels. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life" (I Cor. 6:3)?² This indicates that, in terms of the *final judgment*, mankind will possess *authority over the angels*. But the psalmist indicates that men are under the angels. So, which is it? Does mankind possess authority over the angels, or do the angels possess authority over mankind?

If we consider the issue of power, the angels exercise authority over mankind. In the first chapter of the book of Job, we read of a debate between God and the fallen angel, Satan. God tells Satan that he has authority to inflict sickness or pain on Job. God restricts Satan

2. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

from killing Job, but He does not restrict Satan from killing Job's children. All of them are then killed (vv. 18, 19).³ Angels possess superior power to man.

This indicates that *the fundamental issue that divides mankind from the angels is ethics rather than power*. If it were a question simply of power, the angels would always win the confrontation. Yet there is no indication in the Bible that angels are at war with men physically. They occasionally exercise power, as we see in the New Testament's account of the demon that attacked the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:14–16). But the fundamental issues of life are ethical. They are not primarily matters of power. If the great debate between God and Satan were based simply on power, Satan would lose the conflict in every instance. So, the issues of life are primarily ethical. This is why God gave an ethical command to Adam regarding the forbidden fruit. It was not that Adam did not possess sufficient power to pick the fruit and eat it. It was that Adam was ethically prohibited from taking the fruit and eating it.

Conclusion

The psalmist asks a question: Who is man? He answers this by reaffirming the account of God's creation week (Gen. 1). He presents man as lower than the angels, yet crowned with glory and honor. Man has authority over the birds and fishes. He is also ruler over "all things under his feet." This is comprehensive authority: earth, air, and water.

This authority is not based on man's power, for he possesses less power than the angels. Man's hierarchical authority is not based on power but on judicial authority. This is a matter of law, not power. It is a matter of the covenant: God's sovereignty, man's delegated authority, God's law, historical sanctions, and final judgment, in which covenant-keeping men will judge the angels.

3. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1:B.

4

DELIVERANCE OF THE POOR

For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever (Psalm 9:18).

A. A Great Reversal

The theocentric issue here is God as the judge. This passage appears within the context of a psalm that deals with God's judgment against the wicked. In verse 9, we are told that the Lord "will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble." In verse 15, we read that "the heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken." This is another way of saying that the evil which they had planned to impose on others snares them. *This is a reversal of fortune.* In verse 16, we read: "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executed: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." Again, the theme is a great reversal: the evil that men plan against others is the source of their own destruction. It is within this context that we read this verse: "For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever." The psalmist then declares: "Arise, O Lord; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight" (v. 19).

These passages deal with God's judgment. They are not primarily economic passages; they are judicial passages. The psalmist says that God rules over history. God rules in terms of the covenant, and every covenant has law and sanctions.¹ The psalmist says that those who are oppressed will be delivered at some point. There are limits to oppression. It is within the context of the theme of *deliverance from oppression* that he declares that the needy will not always be forgotten. He

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 3, 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), chaps. 3, 4.

says that the expectation of a poor man will not perish forever. This does not mean that every needy person will eventually achieve middle-class status. The expectation of the poor man that someday he will escape his poverty may not be fulfilled. But the general expectation of deliverance for those people who are poor as a result of oppression by evildoers will at some point come to pass. *There will be a reversal of fortune.* Those who are oppressors will find that their oppression has turned upon them, and they will be destroyed.

B. Oppression

The text does not say that people who were formerly poor will oppress their former oppressors. It says that God will destroy these oppressors. God does not authorize those who have been delivered from oppression to impose a new system of oppression. *The biblical concept of oppression is the misuse of civil law to deprive others of what should be lawfully theirs.*² God upholds legitimacy of His law. The psalmist is saying that those who oppress others will be snared by their own system and destroyed.

People in this passage are poor because of oppression. *Someone has misused the civil law in order to oppress them.* They are not poor as a result of their own incompetence. They are not poor because they lacked productivity. They are poor because they are the victims of evildoers.

The Bible does not teach that every poor individual will gain middle-class wealth or riches. It says only that at some point, *there will be widespread deliverance from judicial oppression.* If men are poor because they are oppressed by a corrupt legal order, they will at some point no longer be poor.

Nowhere in the Bible do we see a call for the civil government to impose a system of wealth redistribution from rich people in general to poor people in general. That would be a form of oppression: the use of the ballot box by the majority to extract wealth from a minority. This is exactly what the Bible prohibits. People are not to oppress the poor by means of illegitimate legislation. *No group is to misuse the civil law in order to extract wealth from another group.*

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012). Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

C. Psalm 10

Psalm 10 extends the message of Psalm 9. We read that wicked people persecute the poor. In Psalm 9, the psalmist writes that there will be a great reversal. The oppressor will find that his actions have led to his own destruction. This is a familiar theme throughout the Bible.³ In Psalm 10, the psalmist says that the oppressors will be taken by their own devices. “The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined” (v. 2). They have planned to oppress victims, but their schemes and dreams will blow up in their faces.

The wicked person is confident about his goals. He has great plans, the psalmist says. He boasts of his heart’s desire (10:3). He blesses covetous people, yet covetous people are abhorred by God (10:3). In other words, he sees the world as a perverse mirror image of God’s reality. What God criticizes, the wicked person praises. What God prohibits, the wicked person pursues.

In verse 10, the psalmist describes the evildoer. “In secret places, he murders innocent people. His eyes are set against the poor.” This is a person who systematically violates biblical law. In verse 9, we read: “He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net.” This is a description of an individual who self-consciously breaks the Mosaic law. This is a classic oppressor.

The psalmist then calls on God to break the arm of the wicked person (10:15). This is a call for God to intervene in history and impose direct negative sanctions on men who systematically violate God’s law in order to oppress the innocent. In Psalm 12, he writes: “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him” (v. 5). There are historical sanctions. “The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us” (Psalm 12:3–4)?

Conclusion

The psalmist announces that the oppressed poor will be delivered by God. The world is neither ethically random nor ethically perverse.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

It is governed by ethical cause and effect. The poor have legitimate hope that the oppressive judicial system will be removed by God at some point.

5

OWNERSHIP: ORIGINAL AND DELEGATED

The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein (Psalm 24:1).

This verse is the single most important verse in Christian economics. It is theocentric to the core. God owns the world.

A. Original Ownership

Every economic theory has a concept of ownership. This is rarely stated at the beginning of an economics textbook. It is almost as if economists were deliberately concealing the fact that *the most fundamental principle of economic theory is the doctrine of ownership*.

Adam Smith began *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) with a discussion of the division of labor. He did not begin with the concept of private ownership. This left economic theory vulnerable to socialists and communists in the nineteenth century.¹ Because Smith did not begin his analysis with a theoretical defense of private property, socialists and communists had no difficulty in dealing with the concept of the division of labor from the point of view of state ownership of the means of production. There is nothing inherent in socialist production that is opposed to the concept of the division of labor. So, from a theoretical standpoint, Adam Smith left modern free market theory vulnerable, because he refused to deal systematically with the concept of ownership. It was not until the 1960s that free market economists began to develop a detailed theory of private ownership, despite the fact that their predecessors had built economic theory in terms of this concept.²

1. Tom Bethel, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages* (New York: St. Martins, 1998), ch. 7.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

B. Self-Ownership and Autonomy

Almost all free market economists begin with some variation of the theory of self-ownership. This concept rests on a doctrine of human autonomy. *There is no academic discipline that is more self-conscious in its affirmation of human autonomy than economics.*

Some economists believe that the economy is best established by means of the political order. We call these people socialists. Free market economists emphasize the importance of personal responsibility, and therefore they emphasize the benefits of the private ownership of the means of production. They argue that people are far more responsible over the administration of assets that they own, when compared to their administration of assets that they do not own.

1. Christian Economics

No system of humanist economics begins with the concept of God's ownership of all assets, including the means of production. Only Christian economics begins with this presupposition, and I know of no other economist other than myself who has begun his economic theory with this presupposition.³

This means that the reconstruction of economic theory to conform to biblical principles requires, above all, that economic theory begin with the presupposition, declared in Psalm 24:1, that God is the owner of all things. *God owns all things because He created all things. He owns all things because He is sovereign over all things.* He is responsible only to Himself. He answers to nobody, except when He wants to, as the book of Job affirms. This is the central message of the book of Job.⁴

The psalmist declares that God owns everything. When we combine this insight with the declaration of God in the first chapter of Genesis that man will exercise dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:27–28),⁵ we encounter the biblical theory of *delegated ownership*. God is the primary owner; man is the secondary owner. God owns everything absolutely and comprehensively; man owns subordinately: point two

3. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

4. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012).

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

of the biblical covenant model.⁶ God establishes the terms of ownership. Man is required to adhere to these terms of ownership: point three of the biblical covenant model.⁷

This principle is most clearly displayed in the Bible's discussion of the Fall of man. God established boundaries around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He forbade man from eating from it. Any violation of this law was a violation of God's absolute property rights. So supreme were these property rights that God threatened to kill Adam if he transgressed this boundary. As it has turned out, God has sent the vast majority of individuals to hell, and will resurrect them only to deposit them in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15), because *Adam and Eve violated God's property rights*. The Fall of man is presented in the Bible as a violation of property rights: eating from a forbidden tree that belonged exclusively to God.⁸ This is how important the concept of property rights ought to be in theology. Yet theologians rarely discuss the Fall of man in terms of property rights.

God establishes a boundary around specific pieces of property, and He expects the boundary to be honored by non-owners. *Man's ownership is delegated ownership, not original ownership*. A man owns property only as a steward of God. He is responsible to God for the administration of this property. This is affirmed clearly in Jesus' parable of the property owner who delegates the administration of his property to three stewards, and then leaves on a long journey. He returns and requires an accounting of their administration of the property which he delegated to them (Matt. 25:14–30).⁹

2. Property Rights

Property rights are absolute with respect to God. They are not absolute with respect to anyone else. Therefore, the familiar defense of the free market by non-economists, namely, that private property rights are absolute, is erroneous. With the exception only of the followers of Murray Rothbard, modern economists do not speak of prop-

6. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

7. Sutton, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 9.

9. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

erty rights as being absolute. They are defenders of the legitimacy of intervention by the state to establish the terms of ownership, exchange, and judicial arbitration. With the exception of anarchist economists, modern economists affirm the necessity of some intervention by an institution that is not established on the basis of the free market principle of high bid wins.

If Christian economists were consistent with what they say they believe about the authority of the Bible, they would go to Psalm 24:1 in search of the most fundamental of all economic principles: original ownership. If we do not know who is the owner of a piece of property, we are not in a position to enforce the law governing the administration of that piece of property. Property that is not owned is wasted. If owners do not purposefully administer their property, then the property will be wasted.

3. *God's Autonomy*

The crucial biblical concept of ownership is that the only autonomous agent in the universe is God. He sets His own law. He answers to no one. Therefore, *autonomy is an incommunicable attribute of God*. The common incommunicable attributes that are listed in systematic theologies are these: omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. These are indeed incommunicable attributes. *But from the point of view of social theory, the most important incommunicable attribute of God is autonomy*. Once we understand this fundamental principle of theology, we are less likely to make the fundamental error of humanist economics and humanist social theory, namely, that mankind, either collectively or through individual ownership, possesses autonomy. This means that man does not establish the rules of ownership or anything else. Man is subordinate to God, and God lays down the rules. God has established the covenant with man, and the covenant takes precedence over voluntary contracts, or any other social arrangements, that individuals establish with each other.

4. *Man's Ownership Is Hierarchical*

The doctrine of God's sovereignty and absolute ownership leads to the doctrine of delegated ownership and stewardship. This means that *man's ownership is hierarchical*. It is fundamentally hierarchical. It is also horizontal, in the sense that individuals own specific pieces of property, and they make voluntary exchanges among each other. Prop-

erty ownership is not exclusively hierarchical, but it is fundamentally and originally hierarchical. This is why there has to be *a chain of command*, established by the civil government, in which the principle of the free market, namely, *high bid wins*, does not operate. The Bible makes it clear that the principle of high bid wins is not only illegitimate in the civil government, it is immoral. Any importation of the principle of high bid wins into civil government means that corruption is being substituted for justice. Bribery triumphs.

The concept of ownership is therefore grounded in the judicial category of the covenant. It is not grounded in the economic principle of efficiency. Efficiency is maximized in terms of a hierarchical judicial system that enforces property rights. *The civil judicial system is outside the system of private property rights.* The civil judicial system is a monopoly. It is not the outcome of competitive bidding in an open market. God has established a hierarchical system of property, meaning delegated ownership, which is enforced by a hierarchical system of sovereign civil courts. This was established in Exodus 18.¹⁰

There can be no exclusively horizontal ownership of property. Ownership is not a system in which autonomous individuals own pieces of property and exchange property with each other. There must always be an enforcement system, and the civil enforcement system relies on violence. *A system of exclusively horizontal ownership always leads towards a system of warlordism.* Those individuals who amass greater wealth then purchase armies, and they use these armies to gather even greater wealth. There is no escape from judicial hierarchy. There is no autonomous ownership for mankind.

Conclusion

Psalm 24:1 announces the fundamental principle of Christian economics: *God owns everything.* Any attempt to build economic theory on any other concept of ownership leads to error. As Cornelius Van Til used to say, it does not matter how much you sharpen a crooked buzz saw, it will not cut straight. The precision of modern economic analysis does not cut straight.

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

6

A TRUSTWORTHY INHERITANCE

The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed (Psalm 37:21–26).

A. Rival Views of Property

The theocentric issue here is the connection between ethics and inheritance. David contrasts the righteous and the wicked in terms of their attitude toward property. He says that the wicked person borrows but then refuses to repay. The righteous individual shows mercy by giving away resources. The wicked person is grasping. The righteous person is openhanded. The wicked person promises to repay as a way of gaining access to someone else's wealth. He then refuses to repay his debt, thereby becoming a thief. The righteous person not only does not ask to be repaid, he actually gives away wealth on the assumption that he will not be repaid.

The difference in attitude has to do with trust. The wicked person gains the trust of someone who lends him assets. He then refuses to repay the debt. He has violated the trust. He has used the other person's trust as a means of extracting wealth from him. In contrast, the generous person trusts God not to let him sink into poverty. Because he trusts God to repay, he feels confident that he can safely give away assets. The wicked person misuses the trust of the other person. The righteous person trusts God, knowing that God will not abandon him.

David says in the next verse that the blessed individual will inherit the earth. In contrast, the people whom God curses will be cut off. We

see a parallel contrast. The wicked person misuses the trust of a generous person, or at least a person who has wealth to lend, and he attempts to cut off the generous person. He cuts off the person who trusted in him; God will in turn cut off this wicked borrower who refuses to repay. David contrasts this person with the righteous person, who trusts in God rather than the word of the person to whom he gives an asset. He trusts that God will repay him in history. He trusts in God, and therefore he has the courage to give away a portion of his wealth. Such a person, David says, will inherit the earth. In other words, he gives away a minimal amount of wealth, and he eventually inherits the earth. This is not about inheriting heaven—pie in the sky by and by. It is about inheriting wealth in this world.

David wrote these words a thousand years before the birth of Christ. People in his era who were generous did not inherit the earth. Then what is the meaning of the phrase? It means that the covenantal heirs of the righteous will, in the advanced phase of the millennial kingdom, inherit the earth. *There is a progressive transfer of wealth in history from covenant-breakers to covenant-keepers.* Over time, covenant-keepers prosper, and covenant-breakers do not. This is the cause-and-effect process that is described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

B. Righteousness and Risks

In the next passage, David says that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (v. 23). The Lord delights in the way of a good man (v. 23). If a good man falls, he will not be cast down by God (v. 24). The Lord upholds him with his hand. This teaches that *the righteous individual has special protection from God.* It means that he can do righteously, including give away wealth, without risking destruction. God intervenes in history to take care of the righteous individual. God orders his steps.

David then makes a remarkable announcement. “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (v. 25) David testifies that righteous people he has seen have never been reduced to such poverty that they had to beg bread. David lived in a time in which righteousness was more common than it was two centuries later in Israel and Judah. This was an era of prosperity for the nation, and it was an era of general righteousness. David, as the king, was representative of civil government generally. It

was a righteous society, comparatively speaking, and so the righteous individual was in a position to be confident that God would protect him. He would not have to beg bread. Because of this, David says, the righteous person is ever merciful, and he lends money or assets to the poor. His seed is blessed by God. Notice that the positive sanctions are part of an inheritance.

David is testifying to the existence of an ethical cause-and-effect process that governed the social order of Israel. God upholds a righteous man. This gives confidence to the righteous man that he can safely give away his wealth. David says that he will inherit the earth. This means that in the covenant line, over time, the heirs of covenant-keepers will inherit the earth. *This is a uniquely postmillennial concept.* It is repeated often in this psalm.¹ It testifies to the existence of positive sanctions for covenant-keeping in history. It testifies also to negative sanctions for covenant-breaking in history.

This passage reinforces what Moses had told the Israelites just before the conquest of Canaan. Moses told them that covenant-keeping produces positive sanctions in history (Deut. 28:1–14). Covenant-breaking produces negative sanctions in history (Deut. 28:15–68). David reiterates this, not by appealing back to the words of Moses, but by testifying to what he has seen with his own eyes. God upholds the generous person. This serves as a down payment on the long-term system of inheritance which Moses taught to Israel, and which David reaffirms here. Covenant-keepers will inherit the earth.

C. Cutting Off the Wicked

The disinheritance of the wicked is as sure as the inheritance of the righteous. “For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off” (v. 28). It is not just that the biological seed will be cut off. The inheritance will be cut off. *The inheritance of evildoers is transferred to covenant-keepers.* “The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever” (v. 29). The link between seed and land under the Mosaic law was tight. This had to do with the messianic promise given by Jacob. “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). The basis of this inheritance is covenant-keeping—ultimately, the representative covenant-keeping of

1. Verses 9, 11, 22, 29, and 34.

Jesus Christ.

Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found (vv. 34–36).

For a time, wickedness prospers. It grows in influence. It appears to be dominant. This does not last. “But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off” (v. 38).

This is consistent with Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Conclusion

David distinguishes wicked men from righteous men by means of their attitude toward wealth. The wicked man trusts wealth so much that he betrays his own trust. He borrows but does not repay. He undermines his reputation. In contrast is the righteous man who trusts God to uphold him. His trust is so great that he gives away wealth.

David testifies that he has personally seen the outcome of righteousness. He has not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his children begging bread. The generous inherit the earth. The wicked are cut off.

AN UNCERTAIN INHERITANCE

Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them (Psalm 39:6).

This is a universal condemnation. Everyone is subject to this. Men live their lives in a vain show. The translators used this phrase rather than *image*, which is how it usually is translated.¹ He is saying that *we live our lives as images*. Of course, we live as images of God, but we try to create our own public images. This is a form of public relations.

A. Who Will Inherit?

The theocentric issue here is inheritance. David is concerned about the long-term effects of the wealth that he accumulates. He attributes to others the problem that he faces personally. He speaks of other people as building up riches, but without knowledge regarding who will inherit these riches. This same theme can be found in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun (Eccl. 2:18–20).²

This is always a major problem with accumulated wealth. This wealth may survive the death of the person who accumulated it. A rich

1. Genesis 1:26; 5:3; I Samuel 6:5, 11; II Kings 11:18.

2. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

person wants to believe that the influence he establishes in history will be continued through his accumulated wealth. The problem he faces is this: he will not be in a position to administer this wealth. *Wealth is a tool of production, but the producer will eventually lose control over it.* At that point, his influence may be continued by others, or it may be re-directed. The tool of great wealth can be put to many uses. It can be put to many ends. A dead man has no control over the uses or ends to which his wealth will be put.

This problem is related to the fifth point of the biblical covenant: inheritance. It is the problem of succession.³ An individual builds wealth in terms of a particular set of values (point three)⁴ and a particular set of skills. He builds this wealth in terms of the prevailing opinions and standards that exist during his lifetime. But these standards can and do change over time. Those who inherit his wealth will face decisions of how to put this wealth to some use. They will have to decide which values should govern the administration of this accumulated wealth. This is the issue of rendering judgment: point four.⁵

The problem of succession faces every successful individual and organization. It is built into the creation. This is why the biblical covenant addresses the problem. From the moment that death entered the world, the problem of succession became one of the central problems of everyone's existence.

Wealth involves personal responsibility. We build up wealth in many forms during our lifetime. We are commanded by God to subdue the earth on His behalf (Gen. 1:27–28).⁶ This requires that we accumulate wealth in one form or another. This wealth may be in terms of books written, organizations launched, students trained, and all the other aspects of what we call a legacy. The same problem faces every person who leaves behind a legacy. He does not know who will inherit this legacy.

A father may believe that his sons will administer his wealth in a particular way, according to a particular set of values. But he has no guarantee that he has not been deceived by one or all of his sons. Also,

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program For Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1987] 2010), ch. 5.

4. Sutton, ch. 5. North, ch. 3.

5. Sutton, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

as we know from the parable of the prodigal son, a son may rebel against his father.⁷ This can take place during a father's lifetime, but it can also take place after the father has died. The heirs may be skilled deceivers.

Alternatively, once they receive the inheritance, they may go through a fundamental change in their thinking. Great wealth transfers great opportunities, and great opportunities always involve great responsibilities. Some people do not want the responsibilities, but they thoroughly enjoy the opportunities. This is why inheritances can get squandered by the heirs within a few years. The stories of such squandering are common. They are certainly more common than the stories of families that have maintained enormous wealth through several generations.

The supreme goal of history is the extension of the kingdom of God *in* history. This requires compound growth. The biblical concept of kingdom expansion is one of *conquest through service*. One kingdom grows at the expense of the other. This is why Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven as being like a mustard seed or leaven (Matt. 13:31–33).⁸ It grows in influence.

B. Confession of Faith

Maintaining the same confession, meaning the same view of life, is very difficult inter-generationally. One child who rebels against the confession of the founder of the legacy can deflect succeeding generations' commitment to those principles. *It is easy to break the chain. It is not easy to re-establish the chain.* This is why Jesus established His church. The institutional church maintains the original confession down through the generations. The institutional church is more committed to the transmission of the legacy than the family is or the civil government is. The church historically has been more successful in maintaining the original confession of the Founder than either the family or the state.

This is why *maintaining the confession of faith is more important than maintaining the accumulated wealth*. A man's first responsibility is to train up his children in the way they should go, so that they will

7. The parable was about two sons who rebelled. One of them repented: the prodigal (Luke 15:11–32). Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 30.

not depart from it in their old age (Prov. 22:6). This is another way of saying that they will not depart from it after the death of their father. They will put whatever inheritance they received from him to effective use in terms of his confession.

A man rarely lives long enough to see his great-grandchildren grow to young adults. They are toddlers who have not embraced a confession of faith. A good man leaves a legacy to his children's children, but he is incapable of leaving the confession that enables him to extend his legacy when it comes to the lives of his great-grandchildren. He may keep a journal for them to read. Journals are written on paper that can last physically, but they are easily lost and easily ignored. He may record his ideas on digital media, but there is no way that an image on a screen or waves on a digital audio file can assure the founder of a dynasty that his legacy will be maintained by his children's grandchildren.

Time replaces the dead. It covers them up the way that dirt covers up a casket in a grave. Western Christendom once had a ceremony at the graveside.⁹ Someone—maybe several people—would shovel dirt onto the casket. The symbol of this covering up is a good one. It reminds us that *most of what we do in life is covered up*. We are not much responsible for the distant consequences of our legacy, because we have virtually no authority over those consequences. Responsibility is associated with authority. When authority declines, responsibility declines.

This is why accumulated wealth in any form is such an enormous responsibility for the person who accumulates it. If he is successful in maintaining his wealth, he must transfer it to others, who will put it to use after he has departed from the scene. The responsibility of entrusting such a legacy is very great. The stories of rich men who establish charitable foundations, which are then captured by their ideological enemies, are common.

This psalm reminds men of their mortality. It reminds them that, no matter how much they achieve during their lifetimes, they will exercise no direct postmortem authority over the outcome of their efforts. It reminds them that if they see themselves as solely respons-

9. The early New England Puritans did not have formal funerals, except a call to the cemetery, where the corpse was interred without ceremony. This began to change in the mid-seventeenth century. A funeral was held at the church, not at the graveside. Bruce Collin Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Puritan New England* (New York: Macmillan, 1995), p. 87.

ible for accumulating their wealth and transmitting their wealth, they are flying blind. They should retain confidence in God to administer the wealth left behind. They should have confidence in point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.¹⁰ In economic terms, they must have confidence in God as the owner of all wealth, and the Person in charge of transferring this wealth to stewards who will act on His behalf. If a man has no confidence in the sovereignty of God and the commitment of God to the kingdom of God by means of the system of stewardship established by the dominion covenant, he places too much responsibility on his own shoulders. He thereby asserts autonomous responsibility for the administration of his wealth long after his death.

Conclusion

This psalm reminds a man that he has little responsibility beyond his death, because he has almost no information about how or what the heirs will do with his legacy. So, a person who wants to extend his legacy through history in a way that benefits people in the future must come to grips with the fact that he is incapable of doing this alone with any degree of success. *Presumed autonomy ends with death.* He must face the limitations of his own mortality, and he must then strive to place his wealth in the hands of stewards who will administer this wealth on behalf of the confession of faith which enabled him to build this wealth. This is delegation. This is what God does with men. Men should do the same.

This psalm also reminds us that we are not very good stewards in our own lifetimes. We are nearly helpless in establishing the purposes to which our legacies will be put. The proper use of our legacies forces us to consider *the sovereignty of God in the hierarchy of all covenants*. It forces us to come to grips with *the covenantal nature of reality*. If we are unwilling to conform ourselves to God and His covenants, we will live under the curse of our inability to exercise control over the wealth which we accumulate. Presumed autonomy is self-destructive.

10. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

8

BELOW-MARKET PRICING

Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price (Psalm 44:12).

One of the fundamental assumptions of free market economic theory is that individuals enter into voluntary transactions only when each of the parties believes that he will better himself by completing the transaction. If either party does not believe that the exchange will benefit him, he will not enter into the exchange.

A. God's Negative Sanctions

The theocentric issue here is God as judge. In this verse, the psalmist tells God what God has been doing. This psalm contains a long list of negative sanctions that God has been imposing on the nation of Israel. It begins with a list of benefits that God had granted to Israel during the era of the conquest under Joshua. The psalmist sees God as the source of positive corporate sanctions as well as negative.

One of the negative sanctions that the psalmist lists is that God has sold His people without seeking a profit. This means that God has acted against the interests of those who are sold into servitude, yet He does not make a profit on the transaction.

From the point of view of free market economic theory, such a transaction is economically irrational. No one knowingly enters into a transaction in which he sells an asset for less than the asset is worth in a competitive market. To sell an asset for less than the asset is worth is to indulge in a form of charity. The seller of the asset is transferring wealth to the buyer, yet the seller does not insist on compensation comparable to the value of the asset being transferred.

From an economic standpoint, such a transaction makes no sense. The psalmist nevertheless announces that this is what God has done.

He does not say exactly how that God has sold His people. The implication is that God owns them, and that He has sold them to a high-bidding purchaser. Someone has purchased all of the servants whom God has put up for exchange. The psalmist does not say who this individual is. The implication is that Israel has been suffering from various forms of tyranny. God has arranged for Israel to suffer this tyranny. The meaning of being sold into servitude is that an individual loses authority over himself and his household. This authority is transferred to the purchaser of a servant.

The psalmist indicates that this is a form of judgment on the nation of Israel. The fact that God would sell His people without seeking to make a profit is indicative of the anger of God against the actions of Israelites. This is not a strictly economic transaction. As a strictly economic transaction, the sale of servants at no profit to the seller makes no sense. So, the psalmist is making a covenantal point. He is arguing that point four of the biblical covenant, sanctions,¹ is being upheld by God. God upholds the fourth point of the biblical covenant by selling His people into servitude. He refuses to intervene in order to deliver his people from bondage. He could have intervened, but He has not.

This psalm indicates that *God is bringing covenantal judgment against the nation of Israel*. It acknowledges that God is completely in control. It is an affirmation of God's sovereign action in history. This psalm therefore constitutes a covenant lawsuit. It is a warning, not to God, but to the hearers and readers of the psalm: the events that had taken place in Israel are not random. They were the outcome of God's enforcement of His covenantal law by means of covenantal sanctions. In this case, the sanctions are negative, because the sin of the nation is overt. The psalmist is not issuing some kind of covenant lawsuit against God. We must therefore view his complaints against God as a covenant lawsuit against the nation of Israel. He acknowledges that bad times have come, but he attributes these bad times to the systematic intervention of God into the society. He understands that it is God who has intervened on behalf of His law. The events are not random.

The psalm is indirectly a call for national repentance. It is presented in the form of a complaint against God, but it was written in order to persuade covenant-keepers that they should abandon their coven-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

ant-breaking practices and go back to the Mosaic law. The psalmist insists that Israel has not apostatized. The nation is still full of covenant-keepers.

All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death. If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart. Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever (vv. 17–23).

The psalmist is presenting a legal case for Israel. He calls on God to relent. The people have learned their lesson. God can conscientiously remove His curses. “For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies’ sake” (vv. 25–26). The nation has not earned God’s favor through righteousness, but instead relies on God’s grace.

B. Amos’ Covenant Lawsuit

Over three centuries later, Amos indirectly invoked the psalmist’s words. He applied them to covenant-breakers. “Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes” (Amos 2:6). The Hebrew word indicates that the shoes in this case were sandals. Silver was worth having, but a pair of sandals were surely not worth what a human being was worth. Why would anyone who owned a Hebrew servant sell him for a pair of sandals? This makes no sense economically.

The next verse throws additional light on the practice. Example: “That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek” (Amos 2:7a). The Hebrew word translated here as “pant” is elsewhere translated as “swallow.” “Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance” (Job 5:5). It is also translated as “devour.” “I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once” (Isa. 42:14). The sellers were driven by perversity: the enjoyment of destruction. They wanted to destroy poor people,

heaping dust on the heads of the poor. So, they sold them cheap, out of spite. So corrupt had men become that they did not care what price they received. They sold their victims because they enjoyed demonstrating their ability to oppress others. To oppress those who were poor and meek had become a great source of social status for people with wealth and political influence.

We say that “price is no consideration.” We mean that a high price is not a major barrier to a purchase. Amos was saying that human freedom was held in such low esteem by the sellers that any price was acceptable. They were walking away from money. They could get silver, but some of them sold their brethren for sandals. This was what the leftist American economist Thorstein Veblen called conspicuous consumption.² As in imperial Rome, when rich men—and Cleopatra—would publicly drop a ground-up pearl into a cup of wine and then drink the wine, so were the Israelite oppressors.

This must have been very profitable for those entrepreneurs who were engaged in the domestic slave trade, buying for sandals and selling for silver. But these sales could not have been easily predictable by slave traders. The sales must have been random. Two organized markets cannot have significant price differences for essentially the same product if free trade is allowed by the civil magistrates. Entrepreneurs will buy in one market, raising prices, and sell in the other, lowering prices. Prices will tend to equalize.

If we take Amos’ words literally, the sale of Hebrew slaves in Israel and Judah was not a quest for financial profit. It was a quest for status: conspicuous consumption. It was *status through oppression*. This indicated the extent of the moral decline and judicial corruption.

Amos accused lawless Israelites of doing what the psalmist says here that God has been doing. Amos condemned rich Israelites who sold slaves for a pittance. The implication of this prophetic message is that the sellers were acting in terms of rebellious attitudes. They were not trying to seek a profit; they were simply showing their authority over the lives of other men and women. They sold property, not to the highest bidder, but to anyone who wanted to buy the services of slaves. It was an assertion of wealth. It was a way to show other people that money does not matter.³ Yet this is the implication of what the psalm-

2. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, [1899] 1902), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 28.

ist asserts regarding the practice of God. God has sold His servants without seeking a profit. This is not because God is evil; it is because God upholds the terms of His covenant with Israel. He demonstrates that He is beyond the need to make a profit. He is sovereign. This is the same sort of statement that was made by covenant-breakers in Israel centuries later. They were also asserting that they were sovereign. They were also showing that money did not matter to them. But this attitude on the part of covenant-breakers is illegitimate. This was the message of Amos.

Conclusion

The psalmist acts as Israel's defense attorney in God's court. God has begun to apply the negative sanctions of His national covenant. The psalmist acknowledges God's actions. He then argues that the nation has not departed from God entirely. There are still covenant-keepers who honor God. He calls on God to show grace.

He argues that God is losing money from the imposition of negative sanctions. "Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price." Why keep doing this? He is asking: "What is in it for you?" Why not remove these sanctions? "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant" (v. 17). Economically, this makes no sense. Covenantally, it does. But the national covenant has not been completely broken. So, please withhold correction, the psalmist asks God.

9

THE FUTILITY OF RICHES

Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him (Psalm 49:5–7).

The theocentric issue here is God’s sanctions. These words introduce the most detailed discussion of economics that is found in the Book of Psalms. It begins with a description of negative sanctions, “when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about.” This is a strange passage. What is the meaning of “heel”? It appears to be from the same root as the word for someone who lies in wait to capture a person. “And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their **liers in wait** on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley” (Josh. 8:13).

A. Fear and Trust

The psalmist asks a rhetorical question: “Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil?” He is under attack, yet he says that he should not fear this. Why not? To answer this, he moves to a consideration of someone who trusts in riches, who boasts in the multitude of his riches. In the time of crisis, riches will not help those who possess them.

He says that rich men will not be able to redeem a brother, meaning a close relative. A rich man will not be able to give God a ransom for this relative. In such a time as this, the psalmist says, earthly riches count for nothing. An individual who boasts of his wealth in good times will find that his wealth does him no good in a time of extreme crisis.

The language of the two verses that follow indicates that the

psalmist is talking about redemption from physical death. “(For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption” (vv. 8–9). When he speaks of “the redemption of their soul,” he is not talking about eternal life in the sense of deliverance from the final judgment. He is talking about deliverance from the threat of imminent physical death. No one can escape physical death. No one lives forever, physically speaking, never to see corruption. That promise—not seeing corruption—is a messianic promise. “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10). Peter cited this passage in Acts 2, preaching to the Jews. He said that it was fulfilled by Jesus.¹ Even in this case, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, did taste physical death. He escaped bodily corruption, because of the resurrection and the ascension, but he did not escape death. He paid God’s ransom to God.

B. Physical Death

Here, the psalmist begins a description of the effects of physical death. This raises the issue of inheritance. He says that wise men die, and so do fools and brutish people (v. 10). Wise men leave their wealth to others. Every man hopes that his house, meaning the legacy of the household he established, will continue forever. He hopes that his influence and memory will extend to all generations. Men of great wealth or power even name their estates after themselves. The psalmist is making the point that no one escapes death, no house survives forever, no family name survives forever, and land is eventually renamed after someone else. All land will eventually fall into a conqueror’s hand. So, men who put their faith in the long-term impact of whatever it is that they leave behind are placing their trust in a vapor. Such trust is hopeless.

He goes so far as to say that a man who dies is like an animal that dies. There is no legacy of the animal, and there is no legacy of the individual. This does not mean that there is in fact no legacy whatsoever. A man is not an animal. The psalmist is making a comparison. Man is more like an animal with respect to the survival of his legacy than he is to an immortal creature whose reign extends down through history.

1. “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27). “He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:31–32).

The common burden of physical death strikes the wise man and the fool, the rich man and the brute. This common legacy of all men undermines the differences between the legacies between a rich man and a poor man, between a wise man and a fool. Most legacies eventually are severed from people's memory about the founders. Through many sons and daughters, through many generations, the heirs' memories of the founders fade. Those people who trust in wealth to sustain their memory in history ignore what should be obvious: *future generations forget*.²

He says that an individual's body is laid in a grave. This is the equivalent of an animal that is laid in the grave. He has a memorable phrase: "The upright will have dominion over them in the morning" (v. 14). This is an affirmation of the covenantal basis of dominion. The upright individual will exercise dominion on the day after the death of the person who puts trust in riches. The indication here is that the *inheritance is covenantal*. It is based on covenantal conformity to the Bible-revealed laws of God. The individual who trusts in God, and who obeys the laws of God, is a righteous person. This person will have dominion over the legacy of those who trusted in riches. The Book of Proverbs reasserts this emphatically. "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22b).³

The psalmist says that God will redeem his soul from the power of the grave. When death threatens, God will intervene and deliver him from the calamity that faces him. This is what he said at the beginning of this passage. He is not saying that he will somehow live forever, never tasting physical death. He is saying only that the individual who trusts in God is in a position to have confidence that God will deliver him. The individual who trusts in riches to deliver him is resting on a broken reed (Isa. 36:6).

The psalmist then tells the listener not to be afraid when someone else is made rich. The glory of that person's house is increased. This is a short-term phenomenon, for when he dies, "he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him" (v. 17). This theme is found throughout the Bible. Every individual dies physically. He is not capable of taking any of his earthly possessions to a world beyond the

2. Even with the Word Wide Web, with its seemingly permanent digital communications technologies, memories will fade. There will be too many forefathers for the descendants to study. Any short YouTube videos will not convey much information.

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

grave. His glorious achievements in history will in no way benefit him. During his lifetime, the psalmist says, he blessed his own soul. Men praised him. But he will go to the generation of his fathers. He will go into the grave. An individual who does not understand this in the days of his own glory, in the days when other men praise him, is like the beasts that perish (v. 20). Such an individual is as ignorant as a beast. He does not understand the temporary nature of his riches, his power, and his fame.

C. Mammon

The psalmist is talking about a major disaster that overtakes a man. His point is that men who trust in riches under such circumstances will find that they have put their trust in a false god. In contrast, he says that the individual who trusts in God will be delivered.

This is an early declaration of the truth that Jesus announced: a man cannot serve two gods, meaning God and Mammon (Matt. 6:24).⁴ He must choose one of these to serve faithfully. It is impossible to serve them both faithfully. Mammon is the immanent god who promises more in history for his followers. The God of the Bible promises to deliver those who are committed to Him covenantally, meaning those who work to extend His kingdom in history. Mammon tells believers that they can accumulate wealth, power, fame, and honor mostly by their own efforts.

God tells His followers that history has limits, and that only to the extent that people are committed to God and the extension of His kingdom will they achieve their goal: a memorable legacy. The psalmist does not say that God guarantees that an individual will be remembered by future generations. On the contrary, he says precisely the opposite. The implication is that God will remember, and this is the only memory that counts.

Conclusion

Here is the psalmist's message: everything that an individual accumulates for himself and his family in history will dissipate in history. Everything that an individual on his own authority attempts to do to guarantee his memory down through the generations will fail. Anyone who believes that he can achieve such immortality through future

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

memories is like a beast. The beast has no comprehension of the way the world works. Neither does the individual who trusts in the work of his own hands to achieve for himself a legacy of honor and fame in history.

10

ORIGINAL OWNERSHIP

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10).

Here, in a memorable phrase, is the biblical concept of God's original ownership. *There is no more fundamental doctrine for Christian economic theory.* This verse is reinforced by Psalm 89:11: "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them." This verse ties the doctrine of God's original ownership to God's creation of the world. Christian economic theory must begin here: *creation and ownership*. Any attempt to begin with any other presupposition will inevitably lead into humanism or idolatry. It will place sovereignty somewhere other than in God.

A Theocentric Universe

God is the center of the universe. God is primary; the universe is secondary. God is the Creator; the universe is created. This leads to a conclusion: *the universe is theocentric*. The Bible's account of God's relationship to the universe begins with God: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).¹ The entire story of God's relationship with the universe is therefore theocentric. Biblical law is theocentric. Everything is theocentric.

Christian economic theory is theocentric. The Christian economist should therefore begin with the biblical doctrine of creation. The biblical doctrine of creation leads to an inevitable economic conclusion: *God owns the world*. This is not simply a logical conclusion; it is the explicit statement in this passage. Man does not own the cattle on a thousand hills: God owns them. God also owns the thousand hills.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

This is why a Christian economist who is serious about defending economics as it really operates has a moral and intellectual obligation to begin his discussion of the way the world works economically with the Bible's doctrine of creation and the Bible's doctrine of God's primary ownership. *Primary ownership is exclusively God's ownership.* All other ownership is delegated. God delegates control over scarce economic resources to individuals and to individuals acting in collective associations. This is the economic application of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28).² This is the economic application of point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.³

B. Adam Smith's Secondary Starting Points

Adam Smith is widely regarded as the founder of modern economics. This is not because he was the best economist of his day, or because he was the original thinker who created modern economic thought. Neither was the case.⁴ He was the great popularizer, despite the fact that his economics book is over eight hundred pages.

The Wealth of Nations has two main ideas, which are introduced early in the book. The first idea is the division of labor (Chapter 1). Smith offers a discussion of a pin factory. He shows that by breaking down the tasks of creating a pin in such a way that a common laborer can master a particular task, a pin factory produces a much higher output of pins. This is a good insight, but it has almost no analytical application in the rest of the book. Also, a socialist economist can invoke the same doctrine of increased productivity through specialization of production and the division of labor. So, there is nothing uniquely free market in Adam Smith's use of the division of labor.

The second major concept of Smith's is that in order to persuade people to cooperate with you, you must offer them benefits. Smith begins with self-interest, but he extends the concept of self-interest to include service to others. In order to get what you want, you must give someone else what he wants (Chapter 3). This is the most important concept in *The Wealth of Nations*. It is the methodological starting

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

4. Murray Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, 2 vols. (Auburn Alabama: Mises Institute, [1995] 2006), I, ch. 16. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardET1>)

point for free market economics.

Smith devoted very little space in his book to the concept of private ownership. He did not discuss private ownership from a theoretical standpoint. He assumed private ownership, but he did not explain it. This set back free market economics by almost two centuries. It was not until the 1960s that free market economists began studying the concept of private property in terms of the analytical tools provided by economic logic. For 185 years, socialist economists had what amounted to a free ride.⁵

C. No Self-Ownership

The psalmist does not begin with the doctrine of human autonomy. He does not begin with the doctrine of the autonomous human logic. He does not begin with a series of logically irrefutable axioms. He does not begin with a detailed historical study of cattle on hills. He begins with a declaration: God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. This does not mean that God does not own the cattle on hill number 1001. It means that God owns everything.

God alone possesses absolute rights of ownership. This means that all subordinate rights of ownership are limited. There is no absolute right of private ownership. There is no absolute right of anything when we are speaking of man's rights. *Man's rights are derived from God's extension of rights to him.* Man's rights are not attained on his own autonomy.

This means that *man has no absolute right of self-ownership.* The most prominent forms of libertarian economics begin with the assumption of the absolute right of self-ownership. There is no such absolute right. It is merely an assertion of the self-proclaimed autonomous man regarding his own autonomy. There is also no absolute right of state ownership. The great intellectual battle that has gone on between free market economists and socialist economists has been framed in terms of a falsehood: the autonomy of man and the autonomous rights of man. There is no such autonomy, and there are no such absolute rights.

The sovereignty of God is point one of the biblical covenant.⁶ Its application in the field of economic theory is the absolute sovereignty

5. Tom Bethel, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages* (New York: St. Martins, 1998), ch. 20.

6. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 1.

of God over the creation. This means God's absolute rights of ownership over everything in the universe.

D. Professional Isolation

Because a Christian economist should begin with the biblical doctrine of creation, which leads to the biblical doctrine of primary ownership by God, he should not begin with common-confession principles that are shared by most other economists, let alone the general public. *A Christian economist should start with the Bible.* By starting with the Bible, he cuts himself off from the vast majority of those people who call themselves economists. As he will discover soon enough, he also cuts himself off from the vast majority of people who call themselves Christians.

Most Christians have been trained in tax-funded government schools. They are deliberately trained to reason on this assumption: the God of the Bible is irrelevant to logic, history, science, politics, economics, and everything else that is part of the curriculum of the modern secular university. It is illegal in the United States for a teacher in a tax-supported educational institution to argue that the Bible is authoritative in any area of the curriculum. A Christian teacher in such an institution must spend his career teaching what he knows is a lie: that the God of the Bible and the revelation of the Bible are irrelevant to academic endeavors. If he does not believe that it is a lie, then he is self-deceived. He has been taken in by the deceivers who certified him academically.

Christian economists today refuse to begin with the doctrine of creation as stated in the first chapter of Genesis. They therefore refuse to begin with the concept of God's absolute ownership of everything. They refuse to discuss human ownership as God-delegated ownership: stewardship for the original Owner. They adopt the presuppositions of the humanist worldview. *They begin with autonomous man.* Free market economists begin with autonomous individual man. Socialist economists begin with autonomous collective man. Christian economists should not begin with the methodology offered by either tradition, but they do. They do not do this self-consciously. They do it after years of training. They can think no other way.

Conclusion

The psalmist declares that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

This is the first corollary of Christian economic theory. The first axiom is that God created the heaven and the earth.

The biblical doctrine of creation should be the starting point of Christian social theory. It has been my starting for all volumes in my *Economic Commentary on the Bible*.

11

THE IRRELEVANCE OF STATUS

Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity (Psalm 62:9).

A. Social Position

The theocentric issue here is God as the imputer of status. God is the judge. The psalmist tells us that men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are vanity. Weighed in the balance, they are all found to be lighter than vanity. The point he is making is This: *your social position is irrelevant if your confession of faith is false*. It is vanity. The low man on the totem pole is no better off than the high man on the totem pole.¹ Every position in the social hierarchy is equally irrelevant.

He then tells the would-be criminal not to trust in oppression or wealth. “Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them” (v. 10). Criminal behavior is hopeless.

The biblical meaning of oppression is narrowly defined. It refers to the misuse of civil government to extract wealth or other assets from someone who does not possess judicial authority.² Anyone who trusts in oppression trusts in something that is inherently untrustworthy. *Oppression is a form of state-approved robbery*. The psalmist also says that robbery in general should not be relied on. What is the typical goal for someone who relies on robbery? The accumulation of riches.

1. A totem pole is a carved pole produced by American Indians in the Pacific Northwest of North America. The poles are associated with specific clans or families. The best-known style of totem poles has carved faces of demons, each face above the other.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

The psalmist then says not to trust in riches, either.

In verse 11, we read the following: “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God” (v. 11). God is in a position to bring judgment against those who misuse power in order to steal from others. The psalmist praises God as the source of mercy. “For thou render rest to every man according to his work” (v. 12). This is a warning to anyone who misuses power in order to steal from others. God is a judge, and He possesses the power to bring judgment against those who violate His law. Anyone who is familiar with the Bible understands that God has laws against theft. The commandment is: “Thou shalt not steal” (Ex. 20:15).³

B. Status: Beyond Mere Money

What is unique about this psalm is its forthright dismissal of social status. Most people spend their lives accumulating wealth in order to rise in the eyes of their neighbors. They do not wish to be known merely as having the ability to make money. They want to receive the acceptance of people who are honored for something other than money. Usually, the something other than money means membership in a self-policed, closed group to which they alone belong. Usually, access to high social status is based on the possession of old money. Old money is money that is inherited through several generations.

It is a well-known fact of life that the sons and grandsons of rich people tend to dissipate the inheritance. In medieval times, the way that families kept this from happening, in order to preserve the family name, was to give the family’s land to the oldest son. He was not allowed to sell this land, except to pay off debts. The younger sons received relatively little of the inheritance. This is opposed to the biblical principle of the double portion for the eldest son (Deut. 21:15–17).⁴ In contrast, the eldest son under the system of primogeniture received virtually the whole of the inheritance. This preserved the family name, but only by disinheriting younger sons who also possessed the family name.

Such a system of inheritance is expressly unbiblical. The eldest son under the Mosaic covenant received a double portion. Why? Because he had double responsibilities for the care of his aged parents. The

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

other sons were not cut off from the family inheritance. They were part of the inheritance because they bore the family's name. So, the effect of inheritance in a large Hebrew family was to dissipate the ownership of land especially, but also any other assets possessed by the family. The larger the family, the more the economic legacy was dissipated. This is the correct procedure. God does not want people to trust in an economic inheritance. *The primary inheritance is confessional and ethical.* This inheritance is the legacy of raising of children according to the word of God. It means passing down to them the same vision of the extension of the kingdom of God in history that the founder of the family fortune believed in. The family's primary legacy is therefore confessional and ethical.

Jesus warned against faith in Mammon (Matt. 6:24).⁵ Mammon's confession of faith is this: "More for me in history." It is a popular confession. When men believe in Mammon more than they believe in God, they want to preserve a legacy that will be remembered. They want to be famous for having established a legacy in the first place. They seek a kind of immortality through the memory of future generations. The Psalms say elsewhere that this goal is an illusion (Psalm 39:6).⁶ But men who believe in Mammon do not have a concept of history in which inheritance is the commitment to extend the kingdom of God, not to extend the kingdom of man. This is why Mammon offers a lie to his followers.

C. Social Climbing

The person who seeks to escape from the social status of low degree desires to enter the social status of a higher degree. The psalmist says that both positions are equally irrelevant. They are equally lightweight. They are lightweight because they rest, not on the sovereignty of God, but on the supposed sovereignty of man.

A person who seeks high status by accumulated wealth may be tempted to oppress people or rob people. What matters to him is rising in social status, not the means by which he rises. Yet social status is always concerned with means as well as ends. If anything, the means are more important than the ends. It is not sufficient to possess great wealth in the quest to rise in social status. The heirs of those who

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

6. Chapter 7.

long ago achieved great wealth do not want competition from newcomers who achieve great wealth. They do not want to be displaced by productive people who get rich by serving consumers. They want to maintain their high social status on the basis of characteristics other than making money. So, it is almost hopeless for a person to seek to become someone of high degree to do so by accumulating great wealth.

Social status is always imputed status. Someone who possesses high social status imputes to another person those characteristics which he says, and those among his peers say, make a person eligible to enter the company of those who possess high social status. People lower on the totem pole also impute high status to those whom they perceive to be members of a closed elite far above them. But, in either case, it is men who make the imputation of status, and the psalmist has no faith in men. God alone renders relevant judgment, not man. God renders to every man according to his works (v. 12). His imputation of status is what matters, not the imputation made by those within a closed circle, an elite, or by those who are excluded from the closed circle. The judgment of man cannot be safely trusted. Only the judgment of God can be safely trusted.

Conclusion

This psalm warns against concern over one's social status. It also warns against robbery and oppression. It reminds us that God is the sovereign Judge. He judges in terms of what we do, not where we are on society's totem pole.

12

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF RAIN

Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness (Psalm 65:9–11).

When we search for the god of a particular society, we should first examine the society's concept of covenant. The five-point biblical covenant exists in an altered form in every society.

It is sometimes said that the source of law is the god of a society.¹ Law is point three of the biblical covenant.² It can equally be said that the source of the sanctions of the legal order is the god of a society.³ So intertwined are society's ethical standards and its sanctions that the two should be considered as a unit. Therefore, we can say that the source of law and sanctions in a society is the god of a society. What people believe about the source of law and law's sanctions in history is important as a means of identifying what kind of god that members of a particular society believe in. The theocentric issue here is sanctions.

A. The Source of Water

In this psalm, we learn that God visits the earth and waters it. He enriches it with what the psalmist calls the river of God. This river is

1. T. Robert Ingram, *The World Under God's Law* (Houston, Texas: St. Thomas Press, 1962), p. 3; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 4.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

full of water. God also prepares grain. God is the source of both water and food. The psalmist speaks of God as actively intervening in history to provide water. God is said to water the ridges abundantly. He makes the land soft with showers. Then the psalmist declares with finality that God is the source of the goodness of the entire year. He describes the paths of society as marked by fatness.

1. Water, Life, and Prosperity

The psalmist says that God is the source of water. God supplies water, which in turn sustains prosperity and ultimately sustains life. God is therefore the source of life, for God is the ultimate agent in the universe. He, not autonomous nature, is the source of life. *There is no such thing as autonomous nature.* The psalmist, by proclaiming God is the source of water, is declaring that nature has no existence apart from God.

God is the source of sanctions in society, meaning the positive sanctions of life and agricultural prosperity. As the source of the positive sanctions of life and agricultural prosperity, God is therefore the God of society. To the extent that men retain faith in this psalm, they cannot maintain faith in autonomous nature. God is the source of the blessings and society, and nature is only a secondary cause.

The psalmist also declares that God waters the pastures of the wilderness. Men do not till the fields of the wilderness. He says that the little hills rejoice on every side. Obviously, this is not to be taken literally. Hills do not rejoice. The psalmist's point is that nature is subordinate to God, dependent on God, and produces nothing apart from God. If this is true of nature, then it is true of society in general.

2. Water on Mars

The psalmist extols God as the direct source of water. Without water, there is no life. Humanists understand the centrality of this claim. In the final decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, the United States government spent billions of dollars to fund unmanned probes to Mars. The goal of this program was never stated publicly, but almost every press release related to the Mars probes indicate what the goal was. The goal was to discover water on Mars. Constantly, the reports have said that there are indications that long in the past, there was water on Mars. The evidence is

extremely thin—almost as thin as the atmosphere on Mars.⁴

There is no question what the underlying purpose of the probes is: the discovery of the basis of life. Without the water, biological scientists do not believe that there can be life. So, if there are traces of water on Mars, there is supposedly the possibility of life on Mars at some time in the distant past.⁵ If there was ever life on Mars, then life on the earth is not unique. If life on the earth is not unique, then God's covenants with mankind in history that relate to the unique creation of the universe, which was the background to the creation of the earth, which is the background of the creation of Adam and Eve, are not unique. This would undermine man's faith in the covenant established by God with man. It would undermine faith in the biblical story of the transition from grace to wrath (Gen. 1–3). This in turn undermines the main story of the Bible, from Genesis 3 to Revelation 20: the transition from wrath to grace. The humanists who run the United States government are determined to use the tax money of Christians to fund probes to Mars that will be used to undermine Christianity.

This psalm is an affirmation of the sovereignty of God over all creation, including society. The entire psalm is an affirmation of God as the source of the central economic blessings in history. It is therefore an affirmation of the absolute sovereignty of God.

B. Modern Economic Theory

Such a view of economic causation is foreign to all modern economic theory. Economists trace all productivity to two sources: land and labor.⁶ The universe is assumed to be autonomous, and therefore man's world is autonomous. Man is believed to be the product of the world, and therefore man is autonomous from God. He is not autonomous from nature, nor is nature autonomous from man. The interrelationship between man and nature is an autonomous process, virtually all economic theory asserts. In any textbook in any university in any department of economics, there is no reference to God as being

4. A typical example: Kenneth Chang, "Scientists Find Signs Water Is Flowing on Mars," *New York Times* (Aug. 4, 2011). (<http://bit.ly/MarsWater2011>) On January 30, 2012, I searched Google for "Mars Probe" and "water." I got this result: about 500,000 hits.

5. "Mars Probe Confirms Water on Ancient Mars—Is Proof of Life Next?" *Daily Galaxy* (Dec. 9, 2011). (<http://bit.ly/MarsWaterLife2011>)

6. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 5:4. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

the source of the productivity of both land and labor. God is considered to be a hypothesis that cannot be verified by scientific methodology. Because economists regard economics as a science, they self-consciously strip all references to God out of the curriculum.

William Letwin argued that economics was the first social science to be self-conscious in its rejection of any concept of God or morality. He argued that early economic theory was a self-conscious reaction against the English Civil War, which was fought on the basis of rival views of Christianity. Late seventeenth-century economics was an attempt to create a science of society which did not invoke either Christianity or the Bible. Economists believed that there could be no reconciliation between rival theories of Christianity and the Bible. So, they self-consciously attempted to separate economic theory from morality in the Bible.⁷

This psalm categorically denies the foundation of modern economic theory. There is no possibility of reconciling this psalm with modern economic theory. No matter how hard those few Christians who happen to be certified academic economists attempt to segregate economic theory from the Bible, this psalm makes it clear that *God alone is the source of economic productivity associated with nature*. Whatever man does is subordinate to what God does. If God withholds the rain, it does not matter what men do. There will be drought.

Conclusion

This psalm extends its affirmation of God as the source of agricultural blessings to multiple blessings. In Psalm 68, we read: “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah” (v. 19). In Psalm 85, we read: “Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase” (v. 12). This confession was the basis of James’ affirmation a millennium later: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).⁸

This psalm undermines the operational presupposition of modern economic theory: the autonomy of nature and man. Economic theory must therefore be reconstructed in terms of a view of God which pro-

7. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1963).

8. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 32.

claims that He, and He alone, is the source of the rain. *There can be no autonomy for nature or mankind.* All economic theory, if it is to be accurate, must begin with the concept of God as the source of the productivity of land. This will require the rewriting of all texts and monographs related to nature as one of the two sources of productivity. Man is dependent on nature, and nature is dependent on God. Through the covenant, man gains control over nature. Therefore, man is dependent on God. This has to be the operating starting point of all economic theory, if economic theory is to be accurate. Modern economic theory implicitly begins with the assumption that this psalm cannot possibly be true literally. There is therefore an inescapable confrontation between humanistic economic theory and biblical economic theory.

13

TRIED AS SILVER

For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place (Psalm 66:10–12).

A. Affliction and Restoration

The psalmist presents the biblical procedure for extending the kingdom of God. There is a period of testing. It leads to a period of defeat. Then there is restoration. Restoration is a time for the visible blessings of God. This is in contrast to the time for the visible cursings of God. The theocentric issue here is sanctions.

The pre-exilic prophets came before Israel and Judah to warn the people of a time of corporate negative sanctions. The nation would be defeated militarily and carried into captivity. The prophets did not say that there was anything that the people could do to avoid this period of persecution. They promised Israel and Judah that there would be a time of restoration after the period of captivity. There was hope in the future, but not in the immediate future. There would be a time of sabbath rest for the land (Jer. 50:34), but first there would be a time of persecution and pain.

Isaiah used the imagery of silver smelting to describe what was coming. The nation had rebelled. “How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water” (Isa. 1:21–22).¹ Rebellion is the equivalent of debased silver—silver in need of purification. God promised to provide this purification. “And I

1. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness” (Isa. 1:25–27). To regain purity, the nation needed smelting. It needed negative sanctions.

The prophets warned of captivity to come. This had been Moses’ message six or seven centuries earlier.

Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day. Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods. Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear (Deut. 31:17–21).²

B. A Biblical Pattern

This pattern is found throughout the Bible. It is a consequence of the Fall of man. Prior to the Fall of man, there was to be a period of testing in the form of work. Adam was required to name the animals (Gen. 2:19–20) before he was given a wife (Gen. 2:21–22). There is performance before there is reward. There are requirements to which are attached sanctions. The sanctions, positive or negative, are consistent with the performance. God warned Adam that he would die if he ate from the forbidden tree. There was a command and a sanction.

Once Adam fell, mankind was placed under a system of sanctions that substituted persecution and defeat for work. In the garden, Adam was required to work. He was not required to suffer. The requirement

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 76.

that he would suffer did not come until after the Fall, when God specifically punished Adam's body and his environment (Gen. 3:17–19).³ From that time forward, mankind has worked under a curse.

When God substituted cursing for unimpeded labor, He made life more difficult for mankind. The psalmist reminds us of the message of Moses to the generation of the conquest. *Corporate ethical rebellion produces negative corporate sanctions*. The nation would therefore go into captivity.

The psalmist understood this Mosaic legal framework. He understood that Israel had suffered in the wilderness. The Amalekites had defeated them (Num. 14:45). He understood that the time of wandering had been a time of testing. God did not bring the people into the wilderness in order to destroy them, as they had repeatedly accused Him. He brought them into the wilderness in order to protect the exodus generation from enemies and also to strengthen the generation of the conquest. This was a successful venture. That generation did conquer Canaan.

The psalmist speaks of God's deliverance of the people into a wealthy land. This is another way of saying that the land possessed valuable resources. The Promised Land that had belonged to the Canaanites was set aside by God for the inheritance of His people. It took 40 years of wandering, plus a six-year war, for Israel to inherit this land. This was a time of testing. The psalmist dismisses the period of testing as irrelevant when compared to the blessings of inheriting the land of Canaan. The ends were worth the means.

The psalmist reminds his listeners that they should not pay much attention to the difficulties of life. These difficulties are part of the payment that is required for men to extend the kingdom of God in a cursed environment. Men should not give up hope that their efforts will be successful. They should be confident. This is an important message of this psalm.

Conclusion

The process of dominion is one of testing. Things get difficult. God's goal is not judgment unto oblivion but judgment unto restoration. First, negative sanctions; then, positive sanctions. God delivers His people into the hands of the enemy. Then He delivers them out.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

This pattern extends into the New Covenant. The bodily death-resurrection-ascension-enthronement of Jesus Christ is the model. It is the church's model for history, not eternity. The church does not pass from history into eternity on the basis of its cultural failure in history. There is continuity. The Book of Psalms, more than any other book in the Bible, affirms the historical basis of this continuity.

14

SILVER AND SUBMISSION

Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war (Psalm 68:29–30).

A. Symbols: Temple, Jerusalem, and Kings

There was never a time in which the kings of the earth came to Jerusalem to bring presents to God, which were presented at, or on behalf of, the temple. The original temple was destroyed by the invading Babylonians early in the sixth century B.C., and the rebuilt temple was destroyed by the invading Romans in 70 A.D. With the exception of a few dispensationalists, Christian expositors have argued that there is no building that serves the same purposes as the temple. So, Old Testament prophecies regarding the temple are fulfilled by the church international. These prophecies have nothing to do with Palestine. With respect to this prophecy, why will kings, whose Old Covenant office no longer exists, bring presents to Jerusalem? There is no temple today.

Jerusalem remains a city. It is not a city where kings will come to offer sacrifices. The theocentric issue here is hierarchy, yet also sacrifice.

There are also no kings. King Farouk, the puppet king of Egypt who was installed by the British in the mid-1930s, once commented, "There are only five kings in the world: the king of England, and the kings of clubs, diamonds, spades, and hearts." The last of the European kings departed immediately after World War I. The Czar of Russia was removed from office by the Bolsheviks in 1917. Royalty is no longer a factor in world affairs, except for occasional celebrations. Kings and queens today are at most minor celebrities, except in Great Britain.

With the exception of a variety of dispensationalism which teaches

that there will be a reconstructed temple in the era of Jesus' millennial reign on earth, every Christian principle of interpretation (hermeneutic) insists that this passage has to be interpreted in a symbolic way. The debate is over the correct symbols.

B. The Great Reversal

The psalmist calls on God to rebuke the company of spearmen and the multitude of the bulls. He calls on God to do this by means of the calves of the people. This is poetic language. The "company of spearmen" refers to an army. These are people who do battle for a civil government or for a warlord. The phrase, "the multitude of the bulls," could refer to invading kings. These bulls command the army of spearmen. The psalmist specifically says that he wants God to use "the calves of the people" to overcome the invading military forces. Who are they? Powerless Israelites who suffer invasion. He wants the weak to overcome the strong. Why should he want this? Because it is a testimony to the sovereignty of God whenever David defeats Goliath.

How long should the victory of the little people persist? The psalmist says that it will persist, or should persist, until everyone submits himself with pieces of silver. Who is "everyone"? The invading kings. This refers to a payment to the authorities of Israel. The payment of silver would be a token of subordination by those whom God had conquered.

When the psalmist speaks of everyone, he is referring to the company of spearmen and the multitude of the bulls. He is referring, in other words, to pagan invaders who will seek to conquer the nation of Israel. They will believe that the power of the sword is so great that they can conquer God's holy people. The psalmist rejects this outlook. He wants God to use the *common people*, whom he refers to as the *calves of the people*, to overturn publicly the spearmen and the bulls. He wants the powerful to submit to the weak, who represent God.

This theme is found throughout the Bible. I call it the great reversal. The reason why the great reversal is the preferred means of deliverance for the psalmist is because he wants God to get all of the credit. He wants the defeat of a strong invader to be so great that no one could cogently attribute this victory to any other force in history besides the God of the Bible.

C. Submission

To present silver to a conqueror is an act of submission. A conqueror here submits to little people, who act on behalf of the God of the temple. This is a public manifestation of the defeated conqueror's admission that God had conquered him. This is what the psalmist wants to see.

Whenever something valuable, such as silver, is handed over to a conqueror, the person handing over the asset is publicly acknowledging his own defeat at the hands of a victor. The psalmist wants a public manifestation of the kings' representative submission to God. He wants this to take place in full public view.

D. Anti-War

The spearmen and the secular powers behind them are warriors. The psalmist wants to see them scattered. He says specifically that he wants God to scatter the people who delight in war. This is an emphatic statement that *war is to be avoided whenever possible*. God does not delight in war. Elsewhere, we read that David was not allowed to build the temple, because he was a man of blood. He liked warfare. Such a man was not fit for building the temple of God.

Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood (I Chron. 28:2–3).

We must not say that offensive warfare in every instance is illegitimate. The conquest of Canaan was by military action. But Israel was not again called on by God to extend its borders by an act of war.

In this passage, the psalmist says that he wants people scattered who delight in war. He does not want to see them extend their influence. He wants the weak to defeat the mighty. This need not mean that the scattering process has to be military. It is quite possible that the scattering can be economic, or it can be caused by plague. The main thing the psalmist is concerned with is the message that *a nation that relies on military power to extend its kingdom is violating a fundamental biblical principle*. The psalmist calls for the overthrow of war-mongers.

This passage extols *nonviolence*. The psalmist is hostile to people who delight in war. So is God. While war is sometimes necessary to defend a particular territory, the use of military violence to extend the kingdom of God was limited under the Old Covenant, and it is never recommended in the New Covenant. The covenant of Jesus Christ is a covenant based on hearing. Paul tells us that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Preaching and discipling are to be Christendom's tools of dominion. Men are to preach the gospel of deliverance from sin and discipline their subordinates in terms of the principles of biblical law.

The psalmist is saying that the power of God is sufficient to scatter violent invaders. God honors the nation of Israel by raising up common people to expel the invaders. War is not to become a means for extending the kingdom of God in history.

Conclusion

The rulers of the nations will someday confess their subordination to the God of the Bible. They will do so by presenting their tithes to the church. This will be in history, when sin still exists and civil governments that restrict it still exist. It therefore cannot refer to the world beyond the grave.

Amillennialists interpret this passage as referring to the final judgment. The difficulty with this passage from an amillennial standpoint is this: during the era of the final judgment, there will be no kings. Kings were an aspect of civil government under the Old Covenant. Civil government deals with the suppression of covenant-breaking acts. There will be no covenant-breaking acts during or after the final judgment. The next verse refers to people who delight in war. There will be no war at the final judgment, although there may be one just before. This passage is one of the most difficult of all passages in the Bible for the amillennialist.

15

DELIVERANCE FROM POVERTY

But I am poor and needy; make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help and my deliverer; O LORD, make no tarrying (Psalm 70:5).

A. Avoiding Poverty

The theocentric issue here is sanctions. Sanctions are the basis of inheritance or disinheritance. This passage makes it clear that poverty is something to be avoided. *Poverty is a restriction on a person's ability to extend the kingdom of God in history.* It also makes it difficult to enjoy the blessings that God promises to His covenant people. Poverty is not something to be attained through some form of spiritual exercise. The correct goal for a covenant-keeping person is not to master the condition of poverty; it is to master the techniques for escaping poverty legally.

In Proverbs, we read a prayer against poverty.

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain (Prov. 30:7–9).¹

The author fears that if he is reduced to a condition of poverty, he may be tempted to steal. On the other hand, the same passage dismisses the quest for riches. The author fears that if he attains great riches, he will be tempted to forget God. So, on the one hand, poverty is a good motivation for overcoming poverty. It is a condition to be overcome. On the other hand, the goal of the overcomer should not be the amassing of great wealth. The goal of poverty is to escape poverty

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 84.

by means of God's grace and by means of those principles of covenant-keeping discipleship that produce wealth. The goal is not to produce wealth for its own sake, but rather to enable the victim of poverty to escape, and then give God the credit for the escape.

B. God's Covenantal Authority

This passage explicitly calls on God to deliver the poor person from his condition of poverty. The psalmist declares that God has the power to do this, so it would be foolish for a poor person not to call upon God to deliver him from a condition that is associated with Adam's curse. It is a curse when God removes the tools of dominion from a covenant-keeping person. One of the tools of dominion is capital. If a person cannot afford capital, he is restricted in his use of physical and conceptual tools of dominion.

The primary tools of deliverance out of poverty are not purchased in an open market. They include confidence regarding the future by means of the sovereignty of God and biblical law. There is also confidence that God brings positive sanctions to those who conform themselves to the standards of biblical law. These are matters of verbal confession and internal faith, not matters of competitive bidding in an open market. *These are matters of faith, not matters of commerce.* At the same time, these matters of faith can, do, and should affect the world of commerce.

Deuteronomy 28:1–14 assures us that covenant-keeping produces blessings in history. One of these blessings is increased wealth. "The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow" (v. 12). Deuteronomy 28:15–68 stands in contrast to the first section. This section lists the curses of God, and among these curses is poverty.

Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them (v. 31).

Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them (v. 39).

All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume (v. 42).

For a covenant-keeper to find himself in a condition of poverty is to find a reason to call upon God to deliver him. *Poverty becomes a test of a covenant-keeper's commitment to the covenant.* The covenant declares that a sovereign God rules the universe, and He governs the universe in terms of biblical law. When we call on God to deliver us from poverty, we implicitly call upon God to uphold His law. We call on Him to impose positive sanctions on acts of covenant-keeping. It is a call based on confidence that the universe is not impersonal, that it operates in terms of the biblical covenant, and that God, as absolutely sovereign, is capable of eradicating poverty in the life of anyone who conforms himself to the stipulations of the covenant.

The psalmist is declaring his faith that God does intervene in history to deliver His people from the curse of poverty. This is not a program of “think and grow rich.” On the contrary, it is a program that denies the legitimacy of thinking to grow rich. This program relies on a concept of a sovereign God who intervenes in history on behalf of His people. The psalmist finds himself in dire straits. He does not curse the dire straits; he praises God and calls upon God to deliver him from dire straits. He sees dire straits as an opportunity to call upon the God of the covenant to uphold the terms of His covenant and deliver him from the burden of poverty.

The passage calls upon God to intervene directly. This is not a call for national repentance. It is not a call for revolution. It is not a call for political action. It is simply a call for God to intervene and deliver the psalmist from the affliction of poverty. This is not pie in the sky by and by. This is an affirmation of the sovereignty of God. It is an affirmation that says that God is capable of intervening into the affairs of men to deliver covenant-keepers from the affliction of poverty.

C. Humanist Economics

Here we see a profound difference between biblical economics and humanist economics. Humanist economists call on men, not on God. Humanist economists see poverty as something to be avoided. They see it as something that should be overcome in history. They believe that specific programs will enable the bulk of people who are trapped in poverty to escape poverty over time. They do not call on God to deliver an individual poor person from dire straits. They believe that there are predictable patterns of behavior and specific social and political arrangements that will, over time, enable the vast majority of indi-

viduals to escape from poverty. So, they do not call upon God to intervene directly into the lives of the poor. They may call upon the state to intervene in specific areas, such as the enforcement of contracts, so that the innate creativity of individuals should be allowed to flourish.

Their goal is to reform individuals through the reform of civil institutions. Economists offer specific and competing programs of reform that are said to reduce the level of poverty per capita wherever these reforms are implemented. The Bible does not speak about such reforms. It speaks about the defense of property by means of laws against theft and violence. But the Bible does not make widespread deliverance from poverty one of its primary themes. The modern world does. The modern world therefore stands in contrast to the Bible's call for divine intervention. It calls for individuals to conform themselves to the standards of the marketplace or, in the case of socialism, to the standards of the central planners.

Humanist economics is impersonal economics. It does not affirm a sovereign God who has established specific laws and who threatens to impose specific negative sanctions for violations of these laws. Humanism's sovereign agent is man, either individual man in the case of free market economists, or else collective man in the case of socialist economists. In both cases, man is sovereign; God is not only not sovereign, He is rarely mentioned. He is analytically useless. He is to be dismissed by means of Occam's razor. He is not necessary to the hypothesis. He is extra baggage.

The psalmist says that God is the deliverer. This includes deliverance from poverty. He calls upon God to intervene in history to deliver him from the burden of poverty. This is a legitimate prayer. An individual wants to be delivered from poverty for multiple reasons, but the biblical reason, according to Jesus, is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. All the other things, meaning the trappings of wealth, will be added by God in response to covenant-keeping and prayer (Matt 6:33).²

The goal is not "more for me in history." That is the confession of Mammon, not the confession of God. Man's goal should be to escape poverty for the sake of God's kingdom, not man's kingdom. His goal should also be to escape riches, for exactly the same reason. Biblical economics is theocentric, not anthropocentric. The universe revolves around God, not around man. He who forgets this risks poverty.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Pres, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

Conclusion

A covenant-keeper should have confidence that poverty can be overcome. The conquest of poverty begins with an affirmation of the covenant. Specifically, it begins with a prayer to God for deliverance. It does not begin with a program of corporate reform—social, economic, or political.

16

GODLY RULE

He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor (Psalm 72:2–4).

The theocentric issue here is God as the judge. Psalm 72 is a messianic psalm. It begins with a description of the messianic ruler. This ruler exercises civil authority. He is not a priest. Or, if he is a priest, he is a priest who bears civil authority. The priesthood under the Mosaic law was associated with the tribe of Levi. The civil magistrate was associated with the tribe of Judah. Jacob prophesied: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). Under the Mosaic law, the two offices were separate. In the New Covenant, the two offices belong to Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy. He is the Messiah; therefore, He is the head of both church and state.

A. Protector of the Poor

The ruler described in this passage is a righteous man. The psalmist specifically identifies the poor as the beneficiaries of his rulership. “He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor” (v. 4). This is powerful language. Here is a judge who smashes to pieces all oppressors. Obviously, this is not to be taken literally. The messianic ruler does not put all oppressors into a deep freeze storage unit, and then use a hammer to smash them in pieces. The imagery is that of conquest. Another example of it in the Mosaic law is the term “rod of iron.” The rod of iron breaks to pieces all those who break covenant with the God of the

Bible.

This may sound like a program of political reform. The passage could be used to promote state intervention to confiscate the wealth of anyone, merely because he is wealthy, to give to the poor. This interpretation does not do justice to the passage. The evil person described here is not said to be rich; he is said to be an oppressor. An oppressor, biblically speaking, is a person who misuses the civil government in order to achieve his own ends. He uses violence or the threat of violence by the government in order to benefit himself.¹ This is the mark of injustice. The individual described in this passage is a just ruler, and so he will smash oppressors.

One of the benefits of living under the rule of the Messiah will be peace. This is a condition of permanent peace. It will last as long as the moon endures (v. 5). This is a mark of a peaceful kingdom. It has never come to this earth so far. This is clearly a messianic psalm. It applies to some future era of kingdom righteousness.

Verse eight says that he shall have dominion. He will rule from sea to sea and from the river to the end of the earth. This is an affirmation of his universal dominion. This is dominion that expands across all of humanity. This is not a ruler who operates in one nation or one tribe. This ruler is king over all the earth. He exercises dominion across the whole face of the earth.²

The psalmist says that his enemies will *lick the dust*. This is a symbolic reference to their *complete subordination*. The language applies to a condition of universal justice and universal peace. This is not necessarily a one-world civil government, but it is clearly a *one-world kingdom*. It is government in the sense of jurisdiction from on high. The premillennialist argues that Jesus Christ will reappear bodily and exercise such judgment over an international bureaucratic system of law. The postmillennialist argues that this judgment comes through Christ's earthly representatives, in time and on earth. It is representative rule, not direct rule. The amillennialist says that God's judgment of covenant-breakers comes only at the end of time.

The other kings will bring him presents. This indicates universal dominion. There are other civil governments operating, but they are

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

2. Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

under the jurisdiction of the Messiah. The kings of the earth show that they are subordinate to the Messiah because they bring tokens of this subordination: presents. This is a form of political tribute, but it is a symbolic token of subordination. The amillennialist spiritualizes the passage, i.e., denies that it will ever come true in history.

The psalmist once again invokes the plight of the needy. This ruler will deliver the needy when the needy cry out for justice. The same is true of the poor, to the extent that a poor man economically is different from a needy person, whose need may be different from a lack of money. He delivers the poor person who has no helper. This indicates that the mark of a rich man is his employment of servants. This ruler will spare the poor and the needy. This means that he will deliver them from evildoers, men who had previously occupied positions of civil authority. He will redeem the souls of the poor from deceit and violence. This does not mean spiritual redemption. A civil ruler is not in a position to grant salvation as part of his office. He is in a position to protect them from deceit and violence; this is the mark of civil authority.

He will receive the gold of Sheba (v. 10). This was fulfilled specifically by Solomon (I Kings 10:10). Sheba is no more. Solomon was a righteous judge, but he did not rule across the face of the earth. He did not rule from sea to sea. What he did was representative of what the messianic ruler will do when he exercises universal authority.

This was the final prayer of David the son of Jesse (v. 20). He had been a king, so he knew the responsibilities of exercising civil authority. He knew the pitfalls. He was asserting his confidence that there will be a king greater than he in the future.

Conclusion

Godly rule involves enforcing biblical law on all violators. The poor, when victims, are entitled to justice in the courts. A godly ruler will impose God's laws without consideration of the wealth of the citizens. The courts will be predictable. This is the rule of law.³

3. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 50.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men (Psalm 73:2–4).

A. Why Evil Men Prosper

Psalm 73 speaks to the issue of why evil men prosper. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 present a different picture. They begin with a relatively short list of blessings that come to covenant-keepers. Both spend most of the chapter dealing with curses that come to covenant-breakers. What bothers the psalmist here is that covenant-breakers seem to prosper, while covenant-keepers do not.

The importance of this psalm is that it returns at the end to the framework described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The psalmist concludes that he had been foolish for paying attention to the success of covenant-breakers. He says that their success is in fact a trap set by God to ensnare them. He uses the phrase “slippery places” (v. 18). He sees the prosperity of the wicked as a trap established by God in order to confirm His covenant.

The psalmist says that foolish and wicked people do not experience trouble as other men do (v. 5). They are not plagued with the same sorts of crises. He is speaking here about rich people. But most people in history are not rich. In every society ever studied, a relatively small percentage of the population owns most of the capital goods. This is called the Pareto 20/80 rule. It was discovered by sociologist-economist Vilfredo Pareto in the late nineteenth century. He published his findings in 1897. There have been no exceptions to his description of the distribution of capital in every Western, industrial society.

The majority of foolish and wicked people remain poor. They do not get rich. The ones who do get rich become the focus of concern for people who are distressed by the fact that covenant-breaking seems to prosper. Covenant-keepers want to believe that our world is governed by a sovereign God who rewards covenant-keeping and punishes covenant-breaking. This is taught explicitly in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

The psalmist says in verse 12 that the ungodly prosper in this world. They increase in riches. In verse 13, he says that he cleanses his heart in vain. He has washed his hands in innocency. In verse 14, he says that he has been plagued and chastened every morning. In verse 16, he says that the knowledge of this was painful to him. This led him into the sanctuary of God, and there he understood the end of covenant-breakers (v. 17).

In the language of the King James Version, God has set these people in slippery places. He casts them down into destruction (v. 18). God actively intervenes to destroy them. Ours is not a universe governed by cosmic impersonalism. It is a universe governed by a sovereign God who upholds His law by bringing sanctions against those who break it. In verse 19, the psalmist says that these people are brought to desolation in a moment. They become consumed with terror. The picture here is of a person who is flying high and then crashes. There is almost no interval between the high flying and the crashing.

B. Out of Darkness

In verse 21, he says that his heart had been grieved. The reason his heart had been grieved was that he was foolish. He admits this in verse 22. He says that he was as a beast before God. In other words, he was completely ignorant. He did not understand the full operations of covenantal cause and effect. He implies that he was deceived by the same deception with which God deceives the covenant-breakers.

The psalmist was upset initially because he accepted the description of ethical cause and effect that Moses presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. He did not understand that God actively intervenes in history to deceive covenant-breakers. God is willing to allow them to prosper for season, only to bring them down without warning in a moment. Their productivity and their success keep them from acknowledging that their blessings come only from the hand of God. God takes this arrogance and uses it against them. They make a mis-

take. They do not see a disaster coming. They are blind to what is about to overtake them, because they are blind to the ethical cause-and-effect nature of human affairs.

The psalmist is warning covenant-keepers not to make the same mistake that covenant-breakers are deliberately led to believe by God. It is not that God merely allows them to make these mistakes. The psalmist says, “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places.” This is a *deliberate policy* of God to keep people from understanding the truth of their own situation. It is deliberate on God’s part that these people not see that they have been placed in slippery places.

The psalmist then praises God. He says that God has held him by his right hand. He affirms that God will guide him with counsel and afterward receive him to glory. In other words, he affirms what Moses declares in the early sections of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. What had confused him for a time no longer confuses him. It seemed as though the covenantal cause-and-effect structure of human affairs was being violated by the success of covenant-breakers. No longer is the psalmist confused. He sees now that it is all a part of God’s plan. God specifically sets up covenant-breakers in positions of authority and wealth, only to tear them down later.

God does tell people about the nature of His cause-and-effect system of governing. But when people suppress the truth in unrighteousness, which the apostle Paul says that they do (Rom. 1:18), this suppression leads to their destruction. God sees that these people will not accept the truth, and so He uses positive sanctions in order to lower them into decisions that will produce negative sanctions. He raises them up in order to tear them down.

Few Christians view God in this way. They view Him as laying down the law and then standing aside to see what people will do. The psalmist asserts the opposite. He says that God sets people up—people who do not deserve to be raised to positions of wealth and influence. God does this deliberately to trick them, so that they will not see the disaster that is heading for them.

Isaiah said the same thing about presenting the prophetic message to the Israelites.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and

hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed (Isa. 6:8–10).

Jesus quoted this in Matthew 13 in answer to the question from the apostles about why He spoke in parables. He told them that He spoke in parables so that the Israelites would not understand what He was saying and therefore repent.

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear (Matt. 13:13–16).

The Apostle Paul cited Isaiah when he spoke to the Jews for the last time, at the end of the Book of Acts. Some believed his message; some did not.

And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves (Acts 28:25–29).

Again, this is not how most people, especially Christians, view the way that God deals with covenant-breakers. Yet it is how God has said He deals with them. It is how the psalmist said God deals with them. I think a wise conclusion is that this is the way He deals with them.

This is why we should not be concerned by the fact that covenant-breakers prosper more than covenant-keepers. The success of covenant-breakers is not only temporary, it is a trap. The positive sanctions that they receive from God are in fact *disguised negative sanctions*.

These accumulate over time, and they produce failure.

We can therefore have confidence that the world is governed by a system of ethical cause and effect. This is not an impersonal system of causation; it is a system actively governed by God. So actively is it governed by God, that God sometimes allows what appears to be a violation of His system of ethical cause and effect. Yet, in the end, it is not a violation of the system; it is an affirmation of the system.

Conclusion

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 were the background for the psalmist's concern over the economic success of the wicked. He learned in the sanctuary that God had not abandoned the covenantal system described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Not only does God still enforce it, He uses it against covenant-breakers. He sets them up by abandoning this structure of causation for a time, only to spring the covenantal trap on them without warning. Causation is not ethically random. It is not covenantally random. It is covenantally structured. He who argues otherwise must reject this psalm, either as it applied in the Old Covenant or in the New Covenant. He must reject its relevance in the New Covenant era. I ask: On what basis? I also ask: Are all the psalms equally irrelevant in terms of historical causation? If not, why not? I suggest that you also ask anyone who rejects this psalm's conclusions regarding historical causation. See if the answer is better than this: "Because I just don't like the idea of historical causation being both providential and covenantal. That would make me responsible for lots of things that I prefer to ignore. I don't want any extra responsibilities. I would prefer even fewer."

18

PROTECTING THE WEAK

Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name (Psalm 74:20–21).

A. A Call for Sanctions

The theocentric issue here is God as a judge. Psalm 74 is in the form of a lamentation. The psalmist declares that evildoers have been oppressing the entire society. They have gotten into power, and they are ruthless in tearing down all traces of God's covenant. They have broken up the carved work of skilled craftsmen (v. 6). They have cast fire into the sanctuary (v. 7), presumably meaning that they have burned down local synagogues (v. 8). They have defiled sanctuaries and synagogues wherever the name of God was being honored. They are systematic in this. They work together to burn down all traces of worship.

At the same time, God has removed all prophets from the land. No one is present who can forecast how long these evil actions will go on.

The psalmist asks God how long the adversaries of God will be able to reproach God (v. 10). Shall the enemy blaspheme God's name forever (v. 10)? It is clear the psalmist does not believe this is possible. These are rhetorical questions that are designed to persuade God to take action to defend His name.

The psalmist is concerned that God's sanctions are being withheld. The evildoers are getting more powerful, and righteous people are being ever-more oppressed. So, he asks God rhetorically: "Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom" (v. 11). He declares that God is his king of old, who works salvation in the midst of the earth (v. 12).

He then describes God's deliverances in the past. God divided the

sea by His strength (v. 13). This refers to the parting of the Red Sea. He says that He broke the heads of dragons in the waters. In other words, God is all-powerful. He controls nature. He controls the flood and the rain (v. 15). Everything belongs to God, night and day (v. 16).

Foolish people have blasphemed God's name, he reminds God. The enemy has reproached God (v. 18). By recounting these sins, the psalmist expects to persuade God to take action on His own behalf.

B. Invoking the Poor

He then invokes the poor. He speaks of the congregation of the poor. Then he reminds God to have respect for His covenant. Why? Because "the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (20). This means that evil deeds are being practiced on a widespread basis.

Then he calls on God not to let the oppressed return ashamed. He says to let the poor and needy praise God's name (v. 21). Why should the poor and needy praise God's name? Because of the intervention of God in history on their behalf. Again, the psalmist is attempting to persuade God to enter the affairs of men and impose the sanctions of His covenant on evildoers. The psalm has no relevance if there is no covenant or if the covenant does not promise that God will impose positive sanctions on covenant-keepers and negative sanctions on covenant-breakers. *If the covenant has no historical sanctions, the arguments used by the psalmist are irrelevant.*

He calls on God to arise and plead His own cause (v. 22). This is an appeal to the sovereignty of God: point one of the biblical covenant.¹ Foolish people are reproaching Him every day. This should be sufficient cause for God to enforce the terms of His covenant.

The psalm ends with a request: "Forget not the voice of mine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against the increase is continually" (v. 23). There seems to be nothing that can stop these people from continually challenging God. The only thing that can stop them is God. The psalmist therefore uses rhetoric and logic to persuade God to invoke the sanctions that His covenant promises.

Then the psalmist invokes the poor and the needy. He believes that God will defend the poor and the needy. God has respect for the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

weak people in His covenants. The covenants are filled with people of all income levels and wealth. The psalmist knows that God is especially concerned about the welfare of the poor and the needy. God recognizes that they are defenseless. They are easily oppressed. The psalmist reminds God that oppression is going on, and that in order to defend the poor and the needy, God will have to intervene into the affairs of men.

Conclusion

This psalm places the oppressed, the poor, and the needy at the forefront. The psalmist believes that God is especially concerned about these defenseless people. By appealing to God's sense of justice to act on their behalf, the psalmist seeks to reverse the power of oppressors, blasphemers, and scoffers.

MIRACLES AND DISCONTENTMENT

He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people (Psalm 78:16–20)?

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. The psalmist's account of the manna in the wilderness provides a good summary of events that seem difficult to explain. Liberal theologians have difficulties explaining the existence of the manna. What the psalmist refers to as angels' food (v. 25), at least one liberal theologian has described as insect excrement of two species: one in the mountains and the other in the lowlands.¹ This surely is a major difference of interpretation.

A. Ungrateful Israel

What seems difficult to believe in retrospect is the lack of gratitude on the part of the Israelites. Moses told the generation of the inheritance that they and their parents had wandered through the wilderness by means of a series of miracles. Their feet did not swell. Their clothing did not wear out. They were given manna to eat (Deut. 8:3–4). Yet, during the early phase of the wandering, Israel complained about the lack of meat.

And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to

1. F. S. Bodenheimer, "The Manna of Sinai," *The Biblical Archeologist*, X (Feb. 1947); reprinted in G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman (eds.), *The Biblical Archeological Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1961), pp. 76–79.

eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes (Num. 11:4–6).

The Israelites had highly selective memories regarding their life in Egypt. They had been slaves. These complaints indicated that life was really rather good in Egypt by comparison. Forgotten were their pleas to God to be delivered (Ex. 3:7–8).

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Ex. 3:7–8).

God gave them meat: the flesh of birds. They ate to their fill. “And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague” (Num. 11:33). God set them up. Then He tore them down.

B. Discontented Israel

In this passage, the psalmist describes their mental attitude. They were not content with water from a rock. They asked whether or not God could provide bread by means of the manna. God provided bread. The people then asked rhetorically, “Can He provide flesh for His people?” Whatever God provided by means of an astounding miracle, the Israelites dismissed as barely worth talking about. They wanted more. They were not going to be content with less. “Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came against Israel” (v. 21).

1. Unbelief

Why was God so angry with them? “Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation” (v. 22). But who did they imagine had performed miracles of deliverance and miracles of maintenance? They had already revealed what they believed in: the gods represented

by the golden calf.

They saw that a series of miracles were sustaining them. Nevertheless, they judged God as being tight-fisted, because they could not get all of what they wanted exactly when they wanted it. They were dissatisfied with whatever it was that God had provided.

This outlook is common to mankind in most societies. Men grow accustomed to whatever it is that they possess, and they are discontented about all that they do not possess. They are not satisfied with what they own; they are dissatisfied because of what they do not own. Man becomes accustomed to whatever he possesses, and he seeks even more. Man cannot be satiated. His wants are unbounded.

2. Economic Theory

The fact that a man's wants are infinite is one of the foundational principles of free market economics. This infinitude of wants is compared with the finitude of supply. At zero price, there is greater demand than supply. This is a fundamental law of economics. *The discrepancy between men's wants and their possessions is at the heart of the economists' concept of scarcity.*

God understood that this attitude of the Israelites pointed to rebellion against Him. They tempted Him verbally, implying that He was incapable of producing that which they did not yet possess. They rated God's performance, not by His miracles and the plenitude of what they possessed in a barren wilderness, but rather by what they did not yet possess. They did not see God as being great in providing them with abundance in the midst of a barren wilderness. They saw God as being half a god because He had not yet provided them with more than they remembered as having possessed in Egypt. They looked back to Egypt, and they invented a mental picture of a world of abundance which, as slaves, they had not enjoyed. This also made them discontented.

It was not just that the Israelites were insatiable. It was the fact that they dismissed God's provisioning of them as evidence of a god who is less than omnipotent. The Israelites were trapped by the religion of Mammon (Matt. 6:24–25).² The confession of faith of a dedicated Mammonite is this: *more for me in history*. Despite the fact that they were wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites were convinced that God owed them far more than He had provided. They looked at

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

the manna, they tasted the manna, and they concluded that it was just too plain to meet their standards. "But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Num. 11:6). They wanted meat. God gave them meat, in the form of birds. Then He brought a plague on them (Num. 11:33).

The religion of Mammon produces discontented people. This discontentment can be a powerful motivating force in the quest for greater wealth. This, in turn, leads to entrepreneurship. The way to profit in a free market economy is to provide goods and services to people who have the right to search elsewhere. Ludwig von Mises put discontentment at the heart of his theory of economics. It is because men are discontented, Mises argued, that they strive to better themselves, and in so doing, create wealth.³ The Israelites were not interested in entrepreneurship; they were interested in complaining. They believed that complaining against God's lack of provision for them was an efficient means of humiliating God, thereby persuading Him to provide more goods and services free of charge. They implied that God did not measure up to their expectations. God may have been doing the best He could, but it was clear to the Israelites that they had committed themselves to a God with limited power.

3. *Ethical Rebellion*

God understood what was in their hearts. He understood that this was a rejection of Him. "Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation" (v. 22), He brought negative sanctions against them.

The psalmist is warning his readers and listeners not to imagine that God is any less than the God of the creation just because He has not yet answered their prayers. He praises God early in this psalm. He says that God did mighty things in the sight of their fathers (v. 12). He divided the sea to let them pass through (v. 13). He led them with a cloud during the day and fire during the night (v. 14). He gave them water out of rocks (v. 15). There was no justification for discontentment regarding God's provision of His people. Complaints against God are a form of rebellion (v. 17).

The psalmist is not just saying that rebellion was common in Israel because of the supposed discrepancy between what the Israelites

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 1, Sec. 2. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

wanted and what God provided for them. The psalmist is saying that God is capable of providing every need and every want of everyone. He is the Creator and therefore the Owner of all the earth. *Discontentment regarding whatever God has provided is a form of rebellion, and it leads to God's negative sanctions in history.* Discontentment against God is not productive. It brings people under judgment; it does not lead to their enrichment.

Complaining was a continuing mistake of the Israelites in the wilderness. They acknowledged that God had provided for them, but they also implied that God had not fulfilled His end of the bargain. He had not sustained them in luxury in the wilderness. So, they kept raising rhetorical questions about God's ability to improve His performance on the job.

The psalmist knew that this attitude is basic to mankind. He wrote this psalm in order to warn men not to indulge in the sins of the forefathers.

Conclusion

The Israelites in the wilderness provoked God by calling into question His level of commitment to them and His ability to deliver the goods. *They believed that God could be manipulated through guilt. They were incorrect.* They paid a heavy price for this error. "They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel" (vv. 30–31). Even then, they did not learn. "For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works" (v. 32).

20

CLOSED MOUTHS, CLOSED EARS

I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me (Psalm 81:10–11).

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. The psalmist uses a peculiar set of contrasting images: mouth and ears. He says that God would have filled the open mouths of the Israelites if they had listened to Him. Open mouths are filled with food. The text says that God would have actively filled the mouths of His people, had His people listened to him, but they did not listen to Him. The contrast is between the negative sanctions of God and ethical rebellion against the law of God. This is the contrast that Moses revealed in the later sections of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

A. Honey in the Rock

When the Israelites refused to listen to God, meaning that they refused to obey biblical law, God gave them over to their own lust (v. 12). He refused to intervene to drag them back to ethical conformity to the Mosaic law. So, they walked in their own counsels. They decided which laws to obey or not obey. If they had obeyed God, he says, He would have subdued their enemies and turned His hand against their adversaries (v. 14). He would have given them victory. But, rather than choosing victory, they chose to walk in their own counsels. They preferred to exercise what they perceived as their autonomy.

Then comes a strangely worded revelation. “He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee” (v. 16). What is peculiar about this verse is that the psalmist speaks of God in the first clause, and then God speaks as God in the second. The message is consistent. Had they obeyed God, God would have fed them with the finest wheat. To

sweeten that wheat, He would have given them honey out of the rock. The phrase, “honey out of the rock,” refers back to Deuteronomy. Moses described God’s deliverance of Canaan into their hands. He spoke (sang) of Israel in the past tense. This was prophecy, not history. Israel had not yet captured Canaan.

He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not (Deut. 32:13–17).

Israel would turn its back on God, Moses said. The psalmist verifies that this had already happened.

B. Predictable Outcomes

This psalm rests on the ethical cause-and-effect system that is presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The psalmist reminds listeners that God is predictable. He is a predictable because He honors the terms of His covenants. His covenants are governed by laws that He has revealed to His covenant people. He enforces these laws by external sanctions. Because He conforms Himself to His covenants, it is possible for covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers to make sense of the world around them (Deut. 4:5–8).¹

Because God’s covenants provide predictability in the social order, people can pursue their goals with confidence that they can attain their goals, just so long as their goals are consistent with God’s covenants. If they obey His laws, He will bless their efforts. This makes it possible for them to comprehend social cause and effect. *They can achieve their goals because they understand social cause and effect.*

The economic goal that is mentioned by the psalmist is related to food. God would have filled their mouths if they had obeyed His law.

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

He would have fed them the best wheat and sweetened it with honey if they had obeyed His laws. Because they were disobedient, they did not enjoy low-cost, high-quality food. They walked away from wealth. The means of wealth, according to the psalmist, is to hearken to the word of God. If men will listen to God and obey what they hear, they will prosper.

There are still traces of this worldview in folk wisdom. Benjamin Franklin is famous for the phrase, “honesty is the best policy.” *Honesty is the best policy because we live in a world governed by biblical law.* God’s law repeatedly calls men to honesty. It also says that those who obey biblical law will prosper. This is the unstated theological foundation of Franklin’s confident assertion that honesty is the best policy. There is ethical causation in this world.

The covenantal goal of obedience is the extension of the kingdom of God in history. This is why God says that if the Israelites had hearkened to His word, He would have suppressed their enemies. This is another way of saying that He would have extended His kingdom in history. That would have been advantageous to Him, and it would have been advantageous to the Israelites. They would have been the head, and their enemies would have been the tail. This is promised in Deuteronomy 28. “And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them” (Deut. 28:13).²

Covenant-keepers can have confidence in the promise of God that He will uphold His people when they are obedient to Him. This is the way to wealth. *We do not live in a world governed by impersonal forces. We live in a world governed by an absolutely sovereign God.*³ This God covenants with His people, promising them to uphold their cause if they uphold His laws. There is positive feedback between obedience and prosperity. There is also negative feedback between disobedience and poverty. This is why the enemies of God can become the head, and covenant-keepers become the tail. This also is taught in Deuteronomy 28. “He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail” (Deut. 28:44).⁴

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

4. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 70.

The psalmist upholds the ethical cause-and-effect system that was presented in the Mosaic law. *This psalm makes no sense apart from the Mosaic law.* Anyone in the New Testament era who quotes this psalm, believing that it applies to him and his household, has imported the covenantal structure of the Mosaic law, whether or not he believes that the Mosaic law is still in force. *This psalm and the system of sanctions in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are inseparable.* To attempt to separate them is futile. It would mean invoking this psalm without invoking the system of ethical cause and effect that is presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. To import this psalm into the New Covenant era, while denying the legitimacy and continuing authority of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, is an act of theological schizophrenia.

Conclusion

The psalmist says that God was ready to feed His people with the best food. They rebelled against Him, so He did not treat them with the degree of favor that He would have shown to them. Moses in his song had prophesied that this would happen. This psalm rests on the presupposition that the corporate sanctions in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are still in force. There is continuity of biblical law and its corporate sanctions. This psalm makes no sense if the sanctions are no longer in force.

21

EXPLOITATION AND DELIVERANCE

A Psalm of Asaph. God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:1–3).

Psalm 82 is a psalm of judgment. The psalmist calls upon God to intervene in the affairs of men and bring justice to the nation.

A. Civil Magistrates

The psalm begins with a description of God, who stands in the midst of the congregation of the mighty. “He judgeth among the gods.” The meaning of *gods* here is *civil magistrates*. The Hebrew word, *elo-him*, is usually translated *God* or *gods*. Not in this passage. “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes” (Psalm 82:6–7).

God stands in the midst of the judges, and He calls them to account: “How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked” (v. 2)? What does it mean “to accept the persons of the wicked”? It means to show partiality to the wicked.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).¹

For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward (Deut. 10:17).

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 4.

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).²

B. Defend the Poor

Then God issues a command: “Defend the poor and the fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy” (v. 3). This was a requirement of the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law recognized that judges sometimes favor one group against another. The Mosaic law forbade judges from rendering judgment that is based on someone’s group membership. Each individual case is to be judged in terms of what the law says regarding the accusation. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15).³

Then God says, “Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked” (v. 4). This describes a poor person as being subjected to someone who is breaking the Mosaic law. The hand of the wicked has captured righteous people. The task of civil government is to see to it that justice is done by the rich and the poor to the rich and the poor. These wicked people walk in darkness (v. 3).

The psalmist says, “the foundations of the earth are out of course.” This is not to be taken as a statement regarding astrophysics. It is a statement regarding the foundations of morality in Israel. It has to do with the exercise of judgment by covenantal institutions. When judges render false judgment, the earth is ready to be shaken. Of the king of Babylon, Isaiah prophesied:

They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? (Isa. 14:16–17).

The foundations are not literal, any more than God’s nose is literal.

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 40.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind (II Sam. 22:8–11).

The psalmist says, “Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations” (v. 8). This is a call for God to exercise His sovereignty in history. The justification of this exercise of sovereignty is that He is the inheritor of the nations. The nations belong to God. He is their creator, and so He has the right of inheritance.

The psalmist speaks in the name of God. God calls the judges to render judgment righteously. The complaint is against the judges. This psalm is about civil judgment. This is why the references to the need for defense of the poor and fatherless are in the context of civil unrighteousness. The civil government has been misusing the power of the state to render judgments that are opposed to basic morality. These judgments have the force of law. God, who brings covenant lawsuits against covenant-breakers, calls the judges of Israel to render judgment righteously, without respect to persons.

Conclusion

This is not a psalm that favors wealth redistribution from the poor to the rich. It favors wealth redistribution from those who have misused the civil government to exploit the poor. Their victims are to be compensated. It is a call on civil judges to deliver the victims of oppression. Oppression in the Mosaic law involved the misuse of civil law to afflict people.⁴

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

A LAND FOR GOD'S LAW

And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people; That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the LORD (Psalm 105:44–45).

A. Canaan as Israel's Inheritance

The psalmist calls Canaan an inheritance. It was an inheritance through disinheritance. This is the theocentric issue.

The psalmist refers to the inheritance of the labor of the people. He did not mean that they would inherit labor in the form of slaves. On the contrary, they were not supposed to take any slaves of the people of the land. Only because the Gibeonites deceived them, and only because Israel's civil rulers made a covenant with the Gibeonites in the name of God, did God allow the Gibeonites to remain in the land (Josh. 9). So, the psalmist was speaking of *capital goods*: vineyards, orchards, buildings, and tools. This indicates that he understood what modern economists have insisted on, namely, that *capital is the product of land plus labor over time*.¹

The labor which the Canaanites had invested in the land produced capital. This capital became the property of the Israelites. This was their inheritance. It was an inheritance transferred by violence. It was the lawful and ethically mandatory transfer of what the Canaanites had intended to be their inheritance. God disinherited the Canaanites by means of extermination. Everything they had built in the name of their gods was to be transferred to the Israelites in the name of their God.

This is the model for the final judgment. *The final transfer of the inheritance is by violence*. This is the ultimate violence. "And death

1. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 5:4. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15).

B. Confiscation in the Name of God

The psalmist says that God gave them the lands of the heathen. Yet we also know that they confiscated the lands of the heathen. This confiscation by military violence was authorized by God. He gave them the land, but the means by which they extended their dominion over the land was military. The conquest generation was told to exterminate every heathen in the land.

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth (Deut. 7:1–6).

Anyone else remaining in the land was there only because the Israelites failed to do the job of confessional cleansing. It is clear in the Old Testament that God required this. Confessional cleansing was not an option; it was a command directly from God. They were to make no covenants of any kind with them, including a peace treaty. Only by deception did the Gibeonites successfully arrange a treaty with the Israelites. The price of that treaty was permanent servitude of the entire nation of the Gibeonites. They served as temple servants, cutting wood and carrying water (Josh. 9:3–17). Joshua announced to them,

Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for

the house of my God. And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing (Josh. 9:23–24).

This indicates that the Gibeonites fully understood what God planned for all of Canaan. They decided to avoid the looming genocide. They were successful.

C. Headquarters

The psalmist tells us one reason for giving the Promised Land to the heirs of Abraham. He was establishing a land in which there could be no excuse for anyone who failed to worship the God of the Bible in public places. He was establishing headquarters for the extension of His worldwide kingdom. He was establishing a place where all the people in the land who were covenanted to Him would be allowed to observe His statutes. They would fall under negative civil sanctions for not observing His statutes. God was setting up a theocratic, exclusivist, geographically identifiable region on earth in which He, and He alone, would be worshiped publicly. He was establishing a place in which the heathen would play no covenantal role whatsoever.

There was to be no rival God inside the geographical boundaries of the Promised Land. The inheritance was to be established covenantally under the God of the Bible. He was unwilling to tolerate any rival inheritance in the Promised Land. Only within the households of resident aliens could another god be worshiped. This is never stated in the Mosaic law, but it is clear that certain resident aliens, called in Hebrew *nokree*, were not covenant-keepers. They were not allowed to proselytize. But there is no indication that God authorized the civil government to bring sanctions inside the households of resident aliens regarding their worship. This worship had to stay inside their households. Even here, I am making the supposition only on the basis of silence. There is no law found in the Mosaic law that would give the state the right to enter the homes of covenant-breakers and execute them for worshiping a God that they had not been publicly forced to renounce when moving into the Promised Land.

The modern world, including modern Christianity, finds this story of genocide an embarrassment—a stain on the covenantal inheritance.

But there was a reason for genocide. The reason is given in verse 45. “The land was given to them by God that they might observe his statutes and keep his laws.” So important was it to God that the Israelites keep His laws that He commanded them to exterminate everybody in Canaan, without mercy, in order to clear the judicial decks. This command, if obeyed, would reduce the likelihood that the Israelites would be lured into worshipping foreign gods inside what had been the land of Canaan.

God wanted an absolute monopoly over the legal system of Israel. To gain this monopoly, He told the Israelites that they had to exterminate all of the Canaanites, tear down all of the idols, and not worship the gods of the land. God was so jealous about Himself that He tolerated no other legal order inside the boundaries of the Promised Land.

By adhering to the Mosaic law inside Israel, the Israelites were supposed to develop mastery of God’s tool of dominion: biblical law. They were to master the biblical art of *casuistry*: the application of the Ten Commandments and the case laws of Exodus² to specific situations. Under the Old Covenant order, this required a monopoly over the civil law. The land of Israel was to become a kind of judicial laboratory for biblical law. The experiment failed because of the Israelites’ lack of faith. This began at the time of the conquest.

Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out (Josh. 17:12–13).

After Israel’s return from captivity, they never again were called by God to extend His kingdom through military conquest. They never again had control over civil law as an independent nation.

Conclusion

The issue here is inheritance. Biblical inheritance is to be comprehensive, universal, and exclusive. This refers to the final judgment in the final inheritance/disinheritance. But, over time, progressive sanctification is will lead to the extension of the kingdom of God in history. This kingdom will extend God’s influence in history into every area of

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

life. Wherever sin reigns, the gospel will invade. There are no sanctuaries for covenant-breaking in the New Testament.

There is no exclusive geographical kingdom of God in the New Testament. There is no place of refuge, no sanctuary, that is exclusively governed by God and His people. The inheritance is supposed to be gained by means of evangelism. The goal is to bring covenant-keepers to saving faith in Jesus Christ, thereby appropriating their inheritance in the name of the God of the Bible. Inheritance and this inheritance are confessional issues. There is no comparable inheritance given by means of military action in the New Covenant.

23

LEAN-SOULED PEOPLE

*And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul
(Psalm 106:15).*

God is the judge. These words are among the most powerful in the Bible. The psalmist describes the spiritual condition of the Israelites immediately following their deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea. For a brief time, they saw what God had done, and they trusted in His words. “And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they His words; they sang his praise” (vv. 11–12). In the next verse, the psalmist says that they lost all recollection of His works. As a result, they ceased to wait on His counsel (v. 13).

A. The Demand for More

They departed from faith and adopted rebellion. They “lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert” (v. 14). These were discontented people. They continually asked God for more. They had adopted the religion described by Jesus as the religion of Mammon (Matt. 6:24–25).¹ The confession of faith of the followers of Mammon is this: “More for me in history.” With this as background, we can better understand the words of the psalmist: “He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

This description of the followers of Mammon is applicable in every culture in history. The followers of Mammon are concerned about what they have and what they do not have. What they have never satisfies them. What they do not have always agitates them. They are obsessed with *more*. By its very nature, *more* cannot be satisfied. It is

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

open-ended. It is a treadmill of discontent leading to greater discontent.

B. The Price of More

The psalmist describes a contrast. On the one hand, God gave them their request. He gave them more because they asked for more. But He did not give them more at zero price. He sent leanness into their souls. This is another way of saying that, as they became richer in terms of goods, they became poorer in terms of life. The meaning of *soul* in this passage is not confined to that portion of man that survives the death of the body. It is broader than this. It has to do with life itself. The soul in this sense defines the individual. The soul identifies the person's dreams, hopes, priorities, and sense of well-being.

When a person asks himself "How am I doing?" there are two ways of answering this question. First, he can look at what he has accumulated. He can assess how well he is doing by means of success indicators. He can look at the size of his house, the size of his income, the size of his bank account, or the size of his company. In modern America, the single greatest manifestation of great wealth is invisibility from the highway. A person who owns so much urban land that his house is not visible from the street is an extremely wealthy person. Ironically, it is the inability of his neighbors to see how much he possesses that is the mark of a man who possesses great wealth. His servants recognize his wealth; his peers recognize wealth; but the general public does not. The fact that he has servants is also indicative of great wealth. The average person has labor-saving machinery. The wealthy man has labor-saving machinery and a full-time staff to use this machinery in his service.

There is another way of answering the question. When he wants to know how well he is doing, a person focuses on his own soul. He focuses on his sense of accomplishment. He goes to the inner core of his being, and then he assesses the relationship between what he has dreamed about, what he has planned for, what he has worked for, and what he has actually achieved. The psalmist recognizes that an individual can accumulate possessions and nevertheless have a sense of leanness in his soul. Even worse, a person can be so lean in his soul that he does not perceive that his life is a failure. This was Jesus' point in his parable of the rich man who tore down his barns and built new barns to hold all of the grain he expected to accumulate. He died that

night. Jesus referred to him as a fool (Luke 12:15–21).²

The psalmist says that while the Israelites were granted what they wanted from God, God extracted payment from them by sending leanness into their souls. The psalmist is clear about God as the source of this leanness. It was not that God removed fullness; it was that He sent leanness. God imposed a negative sanction on them. This negative sanction affected the core of their being. Their lives were worth less in direct proportion to their possessions, which were worth more. What they gained in marketable wealth they paid for in a loss of contentment. As they accumulated wealth, they found themselves increasingly dissatisfied. This was the problem of the exodus generation. It began at the time that Moses and Aaron announced God's deliverance. At first, they rejoiced. But as soon as Pharaoh imposed negative sanctions on them for disobedience, the elders of Israel criticized Moses because they believed the Pharaoh would impose additional negative sanctions on them (Ex. 5:21). They did not want deliverance on these terms.

They did not want deliverance on any available terms. They continually complained to Moses that God had brought them into the wilderness to kill them. No matter what God did to demonstrate His care for them, they insisted that He had not done enough. They repeatedly asked: "What have you done for us lately?" They were obsessed by what they perceived as a discrepancy. They overestimated their own importance, and they underestimated the value of their deliverance. Their ability to assess value was crippled.

They were former slaves who were being called on by God to conquer Canaan and build a civilization. This was more than they were prepared to do. So, they wandered for 40 years until they all died off. Only after all of them were dead did God deliver Canaan into the hands of His people. The conquest generation was not the exodus generation.

From the beginning, these people were lean-souled people. Their spiritual condition grew worse as their economic conditions improved. They got what they wanted, but it did them no good. This was what Moses had warned them about. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:17–18).³

Conclusion

There is a price for pursuing and then attaining foolish goals: a lean soul. This comes to someone who confuses success indicators with actual success. He pursues and accumulates the trappings of success, unaware of the fact that these can lure him away from those things that matter most in retrospect at the end of his life. The lean-souled person does not perceive that he is paying for success by accumulating success indicators.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 21–22.

24

OVERCOMING FEAR

*They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;
These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep (Psalm
107:23–24).*

The theocentric issue here is the sovereignty of God. The psalmist's words introduce a passage dealing with the risks of sailing in the open sea, and God's intervention into the affairs of men to provide protection for them. He singles out seafaring men as people who face the manifestations of God's power regularly.

The King James translators translated the Hebrew word as *business*. More often, the word is translated *work*, *works*, or *workmanship*. It refers to a group of activities broader than just the conduct of business. Nevertheless, the common work of men who sail the seas is business. Water provides a way for individuals to ship large, bulky, and heavy goods at a relatively low cost per distance traveled. The shipping lanes are filled with ships whose owners seek a profit.

The text says that men who live on the sea or ocean see the works of God. The psalmist speaks of wonders in the deep. He says that God commands the sea, raising the stormy wind. This creates waves (v. 25). The waves are immense, the psalmist says; they rise like mountains and go down again into the depths. Men who sail the sea are fearful whenever storms like this occur. "They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end" (v. 27). At that point, they cry to the Lord in their trouble. God does not ignore their cry. He brings them out of their distresses (v. 28). Then He calms the sea. This was done by Jesus during His ministry as a way to demonstrate His office of Messiah (Matt. 8:23–27).

The psalmist says that the men are glad because the waves are quiet. God brings them to their desired haven. Then the psalmist draws a conclusion: "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his good-

ness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men” (v. 31).¹ This is altogether proper. Their praise of God should be public in the congregation (v. 32).

“He turneth the rivers into a wilderness, and the water springs into the dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein” (vv. 33–34). Here we see the twofold system of sanctions: positive and negative. It is not that God rewards covenant-keepers, and lets it go at that. It is that he also curses covenant-breakers. Water provides life in the wilderness, and God provides water. Then men sow the fields and plant vineyards. God is the source of the conditions of production. Men then add labor over time.

The psalmist affirms that God is the source of deliverance, because He is also the source of the crisis. He is the source of the gigantic waves that threaten those who go down to the sea in ships. They understand that God is in control of the sea, and therefore they pray to Him. He then intervenes in the affairs of the sea, thereby confirming the faith of those who prayed to Him. Cause and effect are governed by God.

The sovereignty of God is the basis of His control over nature. God is in complete control over nature, and therefore He can be trusted in the affairs of men. He has sufficient power to bring to pass whatever He chooses. The verbal picture here is of the power of the waves to smash ships. God has power over the waves, so the implication is that God is also in control of the ships. Those who believe that God is in control of the waves are in a much better position to have faith in God and to trust the fact that He can deliver them out of their crisis. By giving them confidence in their own efforts, as agents of an absolutely sovereign God, the psalmist raises the standard of performance. Just as God turned the fruitful land into barrenness, so He also turns the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into wellsprings. There is a great reversal.

The psalmist says that those who go down to the sea in ships are aware that God is behind the affairs of nature. This gives them an advantage. They can call upon the God who rules over nature to act on their behalf.

Conclusion

The covenant-keeper knows that he does not live in a random, im-

1. The psalmist repeats this four times in this psalm.

personal universe. He is supposed to believe that God is on the side of covenant-keepers. He prays accordingly.

Where this faith is widespread, men take greater chances. They are willing to commit more to their endeavors. They become entrepreneurs because they overcome the supreme barrier to entry: fear. Men who go down to the sea in ships should trust God. This is supposed to keep them doing business.

BUY LOW, SELL HIGH

He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein (Psalm 107:33–34).

A. Negative Sanctions

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. There is a famous saying which encapsulates the secret of economic success: buy low, sell high. In this passage, the psalmist describes the scenario known as “buy high, sell low.” This is the scenario of negative sanctions. But he also describes another scenario: buy low, sell high. This is the mark of positive sanctions. The psalmist indicates that both patterns are the result of God’s intervention into history.

In the first case, the psalmist describes the transformation of plenty into poverty. He says that God turns rivers into a wilderness, and the water springs into dry ground. Without water, land becomes barren. This is how the psalmist describes the results of God’s intervention. The fruitful land becomes barren. Why? “For the wickedness of them that dwell therein” (v. 34). Here we see the outworking of the covenantal system of cause and effect that Moses announced to the conquest generation. In Deuteronomy 28:15–68, we find a long list of negative sanctions. These sanctions are imposed by God against covenant-breaking societies. There is a predictable relationship between covenant-breaking and impoverished land. The psalmist appropriates this description, and he applies it to the condition of agricultural land. Water or the absence of water is the determining factor in the productivity of the land. He says that God supplies the water or removes it, according to the owners’ ethics.

B. Positive Sanctions

In contrast to God's transformation of productive, well-watered land into wilderness, the psalmist says that God turns the wilderness into standing water, and dry ground into water springs (v. 35). Once the land is improved by the addition of water, God supplies this newly productive land to hungry people (v. 36). Why does He do this? "That they may prepare a city for habitation" (v. 36). To build a city, they need agricultural productivity; therefore, they sow the fields and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase (v. 37). In other words, *out of agricultural productivity will come cities*.

As agriculture becomes more productive, competitive farms reduce the price of the food which they bring to market. They are able to sell all of their output by lowering their prices. City people, who specialize in tasks other than agriculture, can increase their consumption of food simply by paying farmers to sell them their crops. Agricultural surpluses make cities possible. The psalmist understands this principle.

The psalmist says that God multiplies the people. God also protects their cattle. "He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease" (v. 38). This is the fulfillment of two promises given to Israel in the Mosaic law. "And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil" (Ex. 23:25–26).¹

In the New Covenant, God does not deal with geographical Israel on the basis of direct intervention. What differentiates agricultural productivity today is scientific agriculture, water conservation, and other capital investments. The land's productivity is an outcome of science, technology, and capital. *God's historical sanctions have moved from land to the social order*. Different confessions of faith produce different productivity. Confession, not water, is the central issue.

This conclusion is rejected by humanistic economic theory. Few economists seek to relate theological confession and economic development. It is a blind spot that extends back to the origins of scientific economics, which was born in Great Britain as a reaction to the bloodshed of the Puritan revolt and the Civil War (1642–49), the Inter-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 55.

regnum (1649–59), and the restoration of Charles II to the throne (1660). The economists sought to create a science of wealth that did not rely on a confession of faith, either theological or moral.²

C. The Great Reversal

We see here another example of what I call the great reversal. People who live on productive land see their wealth diminish when God withholds water. He does this to uphold His covenant. He imposes negative sanctions on covenant-breakers. Paralleling this development, God brings water to unprofitable barren land. He does this so that He can plant His people on the land, so that they, in turn, can build cities. God sees agricultural productivity as providing the basis of a growing urban population. “And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation” (v. 36).

The next phase of the great reversal relates to politics. God pours contempt on princes. He causes them to walk in the wilderness (v. 40). Wilderness is the curse, and princes find themselves in the wilderness. There is no productivity in the wilderness. The mark of their downfall is the fact that God leads them into the wilderness. But this is only half the story. God raises up the poor on high from affliction (v. 41). He who is exalted is pulled down; he who is afflicted is raised up. There is no equality in this process; people go from riches to rags, and rags to riches. *This is a process of reversal, not a process of egalitarianism.* Nothing in the Bible points to the equalization of conditions between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. They have different destinies.

Conclusion

God actively intervenes to pull down covenant-breakers and raise up covenant-keepers. He imposes losses on covenant-breakers. Their high-priced land becomes low-priced land. He does the opposite with covenant-keepers. This pattern of ethical cause and effect is presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The psalmist relies on these two passages to draw a conclusion: God is the source of agricultural productivity.

2. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1963).

JUDICIAL OPPRESSION

I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yea, I will praise him among the multitude. For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul (Psalm 109:30–31).

A. Corrupt Judges

The theocentric issue of this passage is God as the judge. The context of this verse is a courtroom. The language of the passage indicates that the person is on trial. The Hebrew word, *shafat*, means “to judge.” This is how it is translated in most instances in the King James Bible. In this case, it is translated as “condemn.” To condemn a person’s soul refers here to a courtroom. The Hebrew word for “soul,” *nephesh*, means “life” or “breath.” It does not refer to the New Testament’s concept of a soul that survives physical death (Luke 16:19–31). The judges are not planning to sentence his eternal soul to hell. No Mosaic court had any conception of the court as an agency for imposing eternal sanctions. That prerogative belongs exclusively to God.

God stands beside the defendant, who is poor. He stands at his right hand. In the Old Testament, the right hand was associated with power. “Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy” (Ex. 15:6). The right hand was also the hand of man’s dependence. “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Psalm 73:22–24).

The judges are corrupt. They intend to condemn the poor man, who is unable to defend himself, because he is poor. What are the judges planning to do with the poor person? The language indicates that he is going to be sentenced to death.

This passage does not refer to economic oppression. Social Gospel expositors and their theological allies within evangelical churches tend to focus on the word “poor,” and then conclude that the passages relating to poverty and oppression are exclusively dealing with economic oppression. The text does not mention economic oppression. It mentions only that the poor person is on trial for his life. The court is not planning to sentence this person to servitude. It is planning to sentence this person to death.

B. No Respect for Persons

The person is poor. This puts him at a disadvantage in a courtroom. A corrupt courtroom is marked by the practice of respecting persons. This is condemned by the Mosaic law.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).¹

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).²

It is also condemned by the New Testament.

For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:11).

And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him (Eph. 6:9).

But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons (Col. 3:25).

But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (James 2:9).

Whenever any court shows respect for persons, meaning their social standing, or their importance in the community, or their celebrity status, or their wealth, the court is oppressive. The court is misusing the God-given monopoly of coercion in order to favor certain mem-

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 40.

bers of the community. This means that other members of the community are out of favor. This psalm refers to the poor person. This person is about to become a victim of the court.

The poor man suffers from a lack of social standing. He is no one of any great importance. He is not in a position to receive favorable treatment by a corrupt court. He cannot afford to pay a bribe.

C. God Intervenes in History

The psalmist says that God intervenes in the proceedings of the court. In some way, God will defend a poor person who is being unjustly accused of a capital crime. This person has his life at stake. The court does not respect God as a person, and therefore it respects important people in the community. The poor man is not an important person. His interests will be sacrificed by the court on behalf of those members of the community who do possess social status.

The psalmist believes that God intervenes in history in such a way that the outcomes of specific court decisions will not conform to the expectations of a corrupt court. The court believes that it is in a position of sovereignty. It does not believe that anything can impede its decisions. It also believes that the outcome of its decision is predictable. It will favor certain members of the community at the expense of other members of the community.

The psalmist says that God intervenes in history in order to thwart the evil intentions of the court. The people who believe that God is blind, or that God is impotent, or that God does not exist will find that things do not turn out as they had planned. This is because God intervenes in history on behalf of the oppressed. In this case, He intervenes on behalf of a poor person.

The text does not say that this person is a covenant-keeper. It says that this person is poor, and there are those who seek his life. God will see to it that the evildoers are thwarted in their attempt to take this person's life. God is a defender of those who are unjustly accused. He can be trusted to uphold His word by enforcing decisions counter to the plans and expectations of covenant-breakers who misuse the courts in order to oppress people without social standing in the community.

This psalm presents God as a just judge. This is a familiar theme in the Bible. God, as the supreme Judge, is supremely just. When earthly judges take a stand against the Bible-revealed law of God in their at-

tempt to thwart the kingdom of God, God intervenes on behalf of those who would otherwise have been destroyed by evildoers. God, as the supreme Judge, upholds justice. He does not forget. He does not ignore evildoing. He does not let courts get away with murder indefinitely.

Conclusion

The psalmist praises God as a defender of the poor. The psalmist does not indicate that God defends them merely because they are poor. He defends them because they are targets of judicial oppression. Someone seeks the life of the poor man, and God stands as a defense attorney who will uphold the targeted victim.

This verse has nothing to do with the idea of economic oppression. It has to do with judicial oppression.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE HEATHEN

He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant. He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen (Psalm 111:4–6).

The theocentric issue here is inheritance. The psalmist praises God because God has given meat to the people who fear Him. The psalmist immediately adds that God will ever be mindful of his covenant.

Here we have in one sentence the promise that God upholds His covenant by consistently providing positive sanctions to covenant-keepers. The person who fears God receives meat from God. This proves to the recipient that God is mindful of His covenant. The psalmist then says that God has showed His people the power of His works. God has intervened in history in a predictable manner, and therefore all those who call themselves covenant-keepers should have confidence in the future. Not to have confidence in the future is to deny the relevance of this passage.

A. Who Will Inherit What?

The psalmist says that God will give to His people the heritage of the heathen (v. 6). Inheritance is inherent in the structure of the biblical covenant. So is disinheritance.¹ Both are inherent in the progress of history from the Fall of Adam to the final judgment: the transition from wrath to grace. God intervenes in history in such a way that those

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1987] 2010), ch. 5.

who profess faith in Him, and who obey His laws, will inherit a legacy: the heritage of the heathen. This passage rests on this assumption: there is ethical cause and effect in history. It states clearly that the future belongs to covenant-keepers.

Psalm 136 records God's deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt (v. 11). He led them through the wilderness (v. 16). He slew famous kings: Sihon and Og (vv. 19–20). "And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever" (vv. 21–22). Inheritance involved disinheritance: first Egypt's firstborn, then Pharaoh, then the kings outside Canaan. This is the process of progress. God's kingdom replaces Satan's. It will involve comprehensive disinheritance at the last judgment.

The only way for this progress in history to be thwarted is that, for a time, covenant-keepers refuse to acknowledge the power of God's works in history. Because they refuse to acknowledge the power of God's works in history, they delay the comprehensive transfer of the heritage of the heathen to themselves and their confessional heirs. They do not trust God to do what God says He will do. They do not trust the power of God. In theory, they know that God possesses the power to intervene in history and move the world in a particular direction. At the same time, they deny that God has done this yet in the New Testament era, and they also deny that God will do so in the church's era. In other words, hypothetically speaking, God is all-powerful, but in history, God is self-limited. He is so self-limited with respect to the power of the gospel in history that He will transfer the inheritance of covenant-keepers to covenant-breakers.

Cornelius Van Til specifically taught this view of the future. He said that covenant-breakers will increase their power over the affairs of this world, and will also increase their persecution of covenant-keepers. This process will be brought to an end only when Christ returns in final judgment. He believed that covenant-keeping produces weakness, and covenant-breaking produces power.

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for "the day of grace," the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in

the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.²

B. Van Til's Vision

To summarize: as men become more consistent, covenant-breakers will exercise increasing control over society. They will seek out the increasingly defenseless covenant-keepers in order to destroy them. Van Til declared, in effect, "Thank God for inconsistent covenant-breakers today!" In short, he not only rejected what this psalm explicitly teaches, he argued that the opposite is in store for God's people.

While most amillennialists hesitate to declare publicly their acceptance of Van Til's view of the culmination of New Testament history, this is what they really believe. Some of them are more consistent than others in stating the comprehensive pessimism, culturally and historically, of amillennialism.

C. Covenantal Sanctions

These verses in Psalm 111 assert that God is mindful of His covenant. God brings positive sanctions to those who fear Him. God has visibly demonstrated to His people the power of His works in history. He demonstrates this in order to give them confidence that, in the long run, covenant-keepers will inherit the heritage of the heathen.

This is not an inheritance of earthly capital beyond the final judgment. The heritage of the heathen beyond the final judgment is irrelevant. The only heritage that covenant-keepers will receive in the era after the final judgment is that which they have stored up in history. Jesus was quite clear about this. *The way to build capital in eternity is to give away capital in history.* The way we transfer wealth in history to the world beyond the final judgment is to sacrifice for the kingdom of God in history.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19–21).³

2. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), reprinted in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*,

This post-final judgment inheritance has nothing to do with the heritage of the heathen. The heritage of the heathen is inherited only in history. *The psalmist affirms that covenant-keepers will inherit the heritage of the heathen.* This could not be any more clear. Because of their eschatological system, amillennialists deny the truth of this verse. They either ignore this verse or they reinterpret it to apply only to some kind of internal feel-good inheritance of the heritage of the heathen. While the heathens' heirs retain ownership of their visible heritage, somehow Christians are supposed to think of themselves as heirs of the heritage of the heathen. This makes no sense.

An alternative approach is to argue that God favored covenant-keepers under the Old Covenant, but the New Covenant church is not an heir to such support by God. In the New Testament era, amillennialists believe, there is neutrality or else randomness with respect to society-wide outcomes, or even actual opposition. Meredith G. Kline argued for randomness.

And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.⁴

This is a defense of *covenantal unpredictability* in history. He and the theologians who share his view of social causation in history—the overwhelming majority today—do not believe that God's kingdom will expand in history into every area of life, transforming the entire civilization as leaven transforms dough, i.e., the transformation described by Jesus. "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13:33).⁵

Here is the amillennialist's view. "The New Covenant church is more self-conscious and consistent than the Old Covenant church; therefore, God has removed positive sanctions for covenantal obedience." *The amillennialist has reversed the system of sanctions affirmed by the psalmist.*

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

4. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184. This essay is a critique of Greg L. Bahnsen's view of theonomy.

5. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 30.

Amillennialism teaches explicitly that covenant-keepers will not inherit the heritage of the heathen. The more consistent amillennialists teach something even more debilitating: the heritage of covenant-keepers will be transferred to covenant-breakers sometime in the future. This will take place either at the Great Tribulation, which supposedly is still in the future, or it will take place after the Great Tribulation. Covenant-keepers are cultural losers in history, while covenant-breakers are cultural winners in history: this is the amillennial position.

If amillennialist pastors were more open about this, preaching it several times a year from their pulpits, they would progressively empty their churches. Only masochists enjoy a steady diet of affirmations that they will fail in history, and if they do not fail personally, then their spiritual heirs will fail. I have called this a ghetto mentality.⁶ I have also called this the mentality of a prisoner in a concentration camp. I have referred to a denomination that preaches this consistently as the Barbed Wire Reformed Church.

It is not considered good form among Bible commentators to state things so blatantly, but I prefer the truth to good form. There comes a time when expositors have to lay things on the table. Ideas do have consequences. Eschatology does have implications.⁷ *Amillennialism cannot be conformed to these verses*. Amillennialism should therefore either be scrapped, or else our confidence in the reliability of God's word should be scrapped. You cannot logically hold to the plain teaching of these verses and simultaneously hold the view of Christianity's future that is maintained by amillennialism. You must say that the inheritance of the heathen never was transferred to covenant-keepers under the Old Covenant, and it will never be transferred in the New Covenant, either. In short, the psalmist either made a mistake historically or else adopted language that was sure to be misinterpreted as referring to history rather than eternity.

D. Social Pessimism

Both amillennialism and premillennialism are pessimistic with respect to social transformation.

6. Gary North, "Ghetto Eschatologies," *Biblical Economics Today* (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

7. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

1. Amillennialism

Amillennialists declare a radical discontinuity of covenantal administration, Old Covenant vs. New Covenant. They teach that God's promises to covenant-keepers regarding their future inheritance have been completely overthrown by Jesus. We are on our own in the New Covenant. This is why all contributions to social theory by amillennialists invoke natural law. Amillennialists do not believe in the continuing authority of biblical laws and their sanctions. This leaves them at the mercy of covenant-breakers and their competing theories of covenants and sanctions.

For the amillennialist, there is no biblically sanctioned cultural progress in history—no civil or cultural progressive sanctification to match individual progressive sanctification, family progressive sanctification, and ecclesiastical progressive sanctification. Amillennialists are forced to admit that the church progresses, Christian family government progresses, and Christian personal self-government progresses. But civil, social, and cultural life supposedly progresses only in terms of non-biblical standards and sanctions.

Herman Hanko, who was the senior theologian of the tiny Dutch-American denomination, the Protestant Reformed Church, held this view of social progress. Only Satan can grant widespread economic success in history, he taught.

I was compelled to warn God's people against the spiritual dangers involved in postmillennialism. It is my fervent hope and prayer that those who hold to postmillennialism do not actually promote the kingdom of Antichrist; but Herman Hoeksema was right when somewhere he warned God's people of the spiritual danger involved. It is not inconceivable that, if the saints are looking for a glorious kingdom on earth, they will be tempted to identify the kingdom which Antichrist establishes with the kingdom of Christ. It will be hard enough in that dreadful day to stand for the cause of Christ without putting other spiritual temptations in the way.⁸

I do not doubt that a kingdom of peace, of great plenty, of enormous prosperity and uncounted riches, of beauty and splendor such as the world has never seen, will some day be established. Scripture points us to that. What makes one cringe, however, is that this kingdom is

8. Herman Hanko, "Response to 'The Other Side' of Postmillennialism," *Standard Bearer* (April 1, 1990), p. 295. Cited by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997), p. 506. (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

described by Scripture as the kingdom of the beast (read Revelation 13). This makes postmillennial thinking of considerable spiritual dangers.⁹

Equally adamant that long-term economic prosperity is of the devil is the accountant and popular writer of paperback dispensational eschatology books, Dave Hunt. He wrote two books on this: *Peace, Prosperity, and the Coming Holocaust* (1983) and *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (1988). I reviewed them in 1992.¹⁰

This outlook implies that social success on a broad base is the result of the creative work of Satan. Satan has overcome the inherent tendency of the social world of the Mosaic law, in which covenant-keepers experience success, while covenant-breakers experience failure. While this was built into the Old Covenant, Van Til, Hanks, and Hunt have insisted that not only has this system of ethical causation been annulled, it has been reversed in the New Testament. In our era, covenant-keeping produces widespread poverty, while covenant-breaking produces widespread prosperity. This prosperity lures unsuspecting and naive covenant-keepers into accepting as legitimate the social goal of long-term economic growth, these authors have argued.

2. Premillennialism

Premillennialists are as pessimistic as amillennialists with respect to the premillennial age. Premillennialists believe that history will include a millennial victory for Christ, but only because Christ is physically present to give directions to an international bureaucracy of His covenant-keeping people, who will be in charge all over the world.

Premillennialists do not say whether they believe that a centralized hierarchy is the proper form of government for the millennial era. For the most part, they teach that local churches should be sovereign and independent. Presbyterian premillennialists teach that any hierarchical Court of appeals within ecclesiastical circles should be limited. In other words, with respect to the premillennial era, they believe in bottom-up civil government and ecclesiastical government. On the other hand, from the point of view of their view of the millennial era, they are silent.

9. Herman Hanko, "The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism," *Standard Bearer* (Jan. 1, 1990), p. 159. Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 506–7.

10. North, "Ghetto Eschatologies," *op. cit.*

Premillennialists do not write books on social theory. They do not describe civil and church government after the return of Christ. This has been true for two millennia, so this is not absent-mindedness. *They have nothing to say about church and state in the millennial era.* Premillennial Baptists who believe in local church autonomy do not deal with these two questions:

How will local churches get Jesus to intervene personally, dispute by dispute, if there are no hierarchical church courts?

How will Jesus avoid long lines, as described in Exodus 18: the lines in front of Moses' tent?

There are only so many hours in the day, and there will be millions of disputes per year.

Silence in the face of the simplest institutional questions reveals a lack of curiosity on a stupendous scale. Premillennialists do not discuss whether there will be judicial and institutional continuity between the church age and the millennial age. They have no suggestions with respect to the reform of social institutions or the economy in the church age, precisely because they think that the church age favors covenant-breakers and penalizes covenant-keepers.

They are pessimistic with respect to the church age. Their pessimism is matched by the amillennialists' pessimism. Both groups compete with one another on the basis of saying how bad the Great Tribulation is going to be.

The post-tribulation dispensationalist and the historic premillennialist share the view with amillennialism that the church will go through the Great Tribulation. This is one reason why pre-tribulation dispensationalism is popular. It teaches that the church will not go to the tribulation; only the Jews will go through the tribulation. The Jews will be almost completely annihilated: two-thirds.¹¹

11. Gary DeMar, "Dispensationalism's Predicted Jewish Holocaust" (2008). Pre-tribulation dispensationalists often work hard to bring Jews back to Palestine. Why? They believe that Israel will be surrounded during the Great Tribulation and be almost annihilated. Why bring Jews back to Palestine, where it will be more convenient for Satan and his evil rulers on earth to get revenge on the Jews during the Great Tribulation? This is a much more efficient system for destroying the Jews than to warn Jews not to come back Palestine, but remain wherever they are. See Gary North, "Fundamentalism's Bloody Homeland for the Jews" (Nov. 1, 2003): www.LewRockwell.com/north/north222.html.

E. Risk-Taking

Whenever Christians believe that God brings negative sanctions against them for covenant-keeping—obeying biblical law—they are far less willing to launch high-risk ventures in any area of life. People who take great risks believe there is a possibility of great rewards. When a person is told, from his youth to his deathbed, that the efforts of Christians to extend the kingdom of God in history will come to naught, culturally speaking, they are less willing to commit exceptional time and money to dead-end projects that cannot succeed. It is not just that there are supposedly heavy odds against the success of their projects. There are consistent, highly developed eschatologies that teach that there is absolutely no possibility in history that these projects will come to cultural fruition. There will only be the survival of a besieged little remnant of faithful believers, who will face the combined power of Satan and his dominion, until at the last day, Jesus comes to rescue them, either at the final judgment (amillennialism) or just before the Rapture (pre-tribulational dispensationalism), or just before the millennium (non-dispensational premillennialism and post-tribulational dispensationalism).

This outlook is the theological foundation of cultural despair. There are some theologians who revel in this cultural despair. They proclaim it as the highest form of theological wisdom.¹² The only amillennial churches that successfully grow in these circumstances are those in which the pastors ignore or avoid the inescapable implications of their theological position. They do not preach it. They are careful not to remind their listeners of what amillennialism teaches concerning the future.

This can also be said of premillennialists. The same pessimism applies to the era prior to the second coming of Christ to set up an earthly millennium. The church is seen as utterly impotent to change culture, to affect the transformation of civilization, or to reverse the march into Satanic nihilism. Only Jesus can do this, and He will do it only in person. This is the teaching of all premillennialism, not just dispensationalism.

¹² 12. In my day, David J. Engelsma is a good example. He is a theologian of the Protestant Reformed Church. See his editorial, "Jewish Dreams," *The Standard Bearer* (Jan. 15, 1995). (<http://bit.ly/JewishDreams>) Cf. Engelsma, "A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism (I): An Introduction," *Reformed Witness*, IX (July 2001). (<http://bit.ly/EngelsmaDefense>)

Conclusion

The psalmist says that there is a covenantal system of inheritance in history. The process of inheritance in history leads to the transfer of the inheritance of the heathen to the sons of God. God upholds His covenant. He gives meat to those who fear Him. The psalmist believed this. Premillennialists and amillennialists do not believe it.

The Great Tribulation is behind us.¹³ The inheritance of the heathen's inheritance is in front of us. Let us work accordingly.

13. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

OBEDIENCE AND WEALTH

Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever (Psalm 112:1–3).

A. Biblical Law and Personal Blessing

The theocentric issue here is the relationship between law and sanctions. I regard this passage as the most clear-cut statement in the Bible regarding the ethical cause-and-effect relationship between personal covenant-keeping and personal riches. The mark of covenant-keeping is explicitly stated here: delight in the commandments of God.

The passage begins with point one of the biblical covenant: the fear of the Lord. We are to fear God because He is absolutely sovereign. God's sovereignty is point one.¹ The text moves to point four: sanctions.² Blessed is the man who fears God. How does the psalmist define fear? By means of a biblical law: point three.³ The man who fears God is a person who delights greatly in God's commandments. The text does not say "blessed is the man who fears the Lord and who delights in natural law." It does not say that he delights in positive law: state-made law. It surely does not say that he delights in postmodernism: law for himself alone. It says that he delights greatly in God's commandments. Where do we find these commandments? In Psalm

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 4.

119, they are identified: biblical law.

The previous psalm had ended with this affirmation: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever” (Psalm 111:10). The Book of Proverbs affirm that wisdom is the supreme asset to pursue.

Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth (Prov. 4:5).

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding (Prov. 4:7).

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver (Prov. 16:16)!

The psalmist indicates here that the starting point of wisdom, the fear of the Lord, is manifested through conformity to His law. Then comes wealth.

B. Blessings Galore

In what does the blessing consist? “His seed shall be mighty upon the earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed” (v. 2). The blessing comes in the form of familistic blessings. A man’s seed, meaning his heir, is mighty upon the earth. This is a person whose family has influence.

It goes beyond his family’s influence. The individual who has great fear of the Lord and who delights in His commandments will be a rich man. When the text says “wealth and riches,” it does not mean spiritual wealth and spiritual riches. The language of the Psalms is concrete. This text is adamant: *the covenant-keeper who fears God will possess riches*. Furthermore, his righteousness endures forever. Whatever he does to benefit the kingdom of God extends through history. It has influence down through the ages.

Obviously, this passage did not apply to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. The Messiah was not a rich man. The Messiah was promised to be a man who suffered persecution (Isa. 53). *But the Messiah’s life is not the model that covenant-keepers are supposed to use*. Their model is the man in Psalm 112:3. This is a man who possesses wealth and riches. His influence will expand down through history. What more can someone ask for? Men seek wealth, influence, and fame. This

man, who fears the Lord and who delights in God's law, possesses all three.

The tendency towards wealth is inherent in obeying God's law. This psalm makes this point as clearly as any text in the Bible. It is *not random* that this individual possesses wealth and riches. He possesses wealth and riches, the text says, because he fears God. The mark of his fear of God is his delight in God's law.

Modern Christians sing a familiar hymn with this chorus: "O how love I thy law. It is my meditation all the day." I cannot think of any hymn as widely sung and less believed. To the extent that modern Christians ever hear a sermon on biblical law, they are told in no uncertain terms that they are *not* under biblical law. They do not hear sermon after sermon, week after week, on what the Mosaic law requires in every area of life. They are not encouraged to read the Mosaic law. They are not encouraged to obey the Mosaic law. They may get an occasional sermon on the Ten Commandments, but they do not get sermons on the case laws of Exodus,⁴ the laws of Leviticus,⁵ and the laws of Deuteronomy.⁶ They are completely ignorant of these books in Scripture. Why is this the case? Because pastors refuse to preach on biblical law. They do not believe in biblical law. They believe in natural law theory, or they believe in some sort of humanistic government-mandated law, but they do not believe in the authority of Bible-revealed law.

Because they do not believe in biblical law, they do not preach obedience to it. Yet they read in texts such as this one that obedience to biblical law brings personal success. If pastors preached regularly on the basis of personal success, including wealth, they would have to confront the issue of obedience to biblical law. *They do not choose to confront this issue, so they do not preach about wealth and success.*

C. Positive Confession Christianity

There is a group of fundamentalist Christians, sometimes called positive confession, sometimes called "name it and claim it," who do preach about God's standard: wealth. This text and other Old Coven-

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

ant passages make it clear that *wealth really is God's standard*. It is supposed to be a positive sanction for obedience to biblical law. But positive confession pastors do not preach biblical law. They are as hostile to the Mosaic law as their fellow pastors in other branches of the church. So, they preach wealth in the name of personal spiritual intensity in believing what is not yet visibly true. They tell poor people to believe that they can be rich and that they should be rich. They do not preach that it is their listeners' requirement to restructure their lives in terms of biblical law. They do not preach the necessity of a complete transformation of one's habits as the foundation of wealth. Instead, they preach that people merely need to *believe* that they will become wealthy, and they *really will* become wealthy.

This is a baptized version of what is sometimes called "think and grow rich." It is promoted by science-of-mind advocates and other representatives of non-Christian faiths. In the mid-1950s, there was a best-selling American book titled *The Power of Positive Thinking*. It was written by Rev. Norman Vincent Peale. Rev. Peale was a member of an officially Calvinist denomination, the Reformed Church of America, but his doctrines had nothing to do with Calvinism or the Bible.

D. Positive Judicial Sanctions

Wealth is supposed to be a confirmation of conformity to God's covenant (Deut. 8:18).⁷ Wealth is a positive sanction that God brings on people who delight in His law and who obey it. Wealth is not a blessing whenever it comes on the basis of anything other than covenantal conformity to God's law. Otherwise, it can be a deadly deception. It persuades individuals to believe that they are blessed of God when in fact they are on a slippery slope to perdition. This is taught specifically in Psalm 73.⁸

Because modern Christians are antinomian in their view of the Mosaic law, and because they do not believe in the New Covenant predictability of the specific sanctions attached to the supposedly defunct Mosaic law, *they do not believe in an ethical cause-and-effect universe*. They do not believe that if they conform to biblical law, they will receive positive blessings, including greater wealth. They have been told that this cause-and-effect relationship is no longer operational, although it was operational in theory under the Mosaic Covenant.

7. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

8. Chapter 17.

Without positive sanctions to confirm their confession of faith and their success in conforming to the laws of God, Christians search for other forms of verification or confirmation. They want to know that they are on the right track. So, they search for internal blessings. They are told that any search for visible, external blessings is somehow illegitimate. Spiritual feelings of joy replace specifics of God's law and visible wealth. But there is nothing in Psalms about spiritual feelings as valid substitutes for biblical law and wealth.

Conclusion

The psalmist announces that the man who fears God has an advantage: he is wealthy. His family has influence. What he does for God's kingdom will have effects down through history. All of these are highly respected positive sanctions in most cultures.

The psalmist's announcement rests on faith in the existence of a cosmos governed by ethical cause and effect. This universe is ruled by a sovereign God who enforces the ethical terms of His covenant. He enforces them by imposing visible sanctions. One of these is wealth.

CHARITABLE LENDING

A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion (Psalm 112:5).

The theocentric issue here is grace. This is an aspect of sanctions. The psalmist says that a good man shows favor to someone who is in a temporary crisis. He lends to such a person. The psalmist adds that the person will guide his affairs with discretion. The good man is willing to lend. He also shows good judgment in the management of his affairs. This man is unique. He knows how to make money, and he also knows how to give it away. His good management has led to sufficient wealth, so he is in a position to lend money at no interest to people who have fallen on hard times.

A. A Unique Ability

The ability to manage your affairs so that you gain wealth, when coupled with the ability to perceive when another person is in need through no fault of his own, is a unique ability. There are some people who have a gift for making a great deal of money. There are other people who have a gift for giving away money without causing harm. Rarely are these abilities found in the same person. There is specialization of labor in life, and these two specializations seem opposed to each other. If a person is good at making money, he does not want to surrender any of his money, because his chief ability is to multiply what he already owns. If he gives away a portion of his wealth, that portion will not multiply under his administration.

The psalmist insists that the ability to manage your affairs well involves the ability to make accurate judgments about giving away a portion of your wealth. The different skills of making money and the skills of giving away money, when combined in one person, are the model of

Christian stewardship. A person who is a good manager of his affairs is confident that, when it comes to wealth, there is more where that came from. He therefore does not fear the loss of revenue that he could otherwise have made by lending money in a commercial loan. He does not mind giving up the forfeited interest in a charitable loan. That income would have been minimal anyway. Compared to the blessings of God on a well-managed household, the forfeited interest on a charitable loan is next to nothing.

The psalmist affirms that a good man shows favor by lending money. He is speaking of a charitable loan.

B. A Zero-Interest Loan

In the Mosaic Covenant, a charitable loan paid no interest. “Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it” (Deut. 23:19–20).¹ It was morally mandatory for a man with money to lend to a poor brother.

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto (Deut. 15:7–10).

The psalmist adds this promise of a positive sanction: “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour” (v. 9). Gaining honor is a way to annoy the wicked. “The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 57.

shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish" (v. 10).²

The psalmist is not speaking of an economic decision to lend money at interest in a commercial venture. Lending money at interest for a commercial venture was legitimate under the Mosaic law. We know this because a person who fell into debt or poverty could be sold into slavery to a stranger in the land. He could be forced to serve for up to 49 years (Lev. 25:47–48).³ A failure to repay a commercial loan was a reason for servitude. In contrast, the failure to repay a charitable loan was up to six years of slavery (Lev. 25:1–2).

Lending money at interest to covenant-breakers was not only legitimate, it was a mark of God's favor on the lender. God encouraged His people to lend to covenant-breakers. "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6). This was a way of exercising dominion over them.⁴ "The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow" (Deut. 28:12).⁵ This kind of loan is not what the psalmist is talking about in this verse. He is talking about a morally mandatory charitable loan which paid no interest.

To lend at no rate of interest is a form of charity.⁶ Surrendering use over a present good in exchange for a promise to return that good or a comparable good in the future is an exchange of a better condition for a worse condition. *Present goods are worth more to us than the promise of future goods is.* We have the present goods; we do not have the future goods. We enjoy the use of present goods; we do not enjoy the use of future goods. This is why borrowers must promise to pay more in return than they receive as a loan. This is the origin of interest.⁷

2. Chapter 30.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

4. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 37.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

6. An exception took place in the United States in December 2008. The interest rate on 90-day United States Treasury bills fell to zero on three different days. This sacrifice of interest was a payment for perceived security: the guaranteed return of the money. Fear over bank failures had increased the public's perception that large deposits might not be returned.

7. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Con-

In the case of a charitable loan, the lender is prohibited from accepting interest in any form from a poor fellow covenant member. He therefore surrenders a present good for the promise of a return of a comparable future good. He forfeits the use of the good in the interim. This is a form of charity. This is required by God. Covenant-keepers are told to lend money to covenant-keepers who are in a crisis through no fault of their own. This is a form of social insurance in a covenant community. People who get into temporary trouble know that they can receive zero-interest loans to help them recover.

Conclusion

The psalmist equates an open hand with wise stewardship. It is not a question of one or the other. The biblical model involves both skills.

THE WICKED WILL MELT AWAY

He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour. The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish (Psalm 112:9–10).

The theocentric issue here is God's judgment in history, as reflected in the common judgment of men. This is a mark of success. The psalmist describes the activities of the righteous person. This person has dispersed, meaning he has given away wealth. The same Hebrew word is used by the author of Proverbs: "There is that **scattereth**, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty" (Prov. 11:24).¹ He has given this wealth to poorer people. The psalmist identifies charity as a mark of a righteous person. He then goes on to say that the righteousness of this person endures forever. "His horn shall be exalted with honor." The reference to horn is not specific. "Horn" can sometimes represent power, as with an animal with horns. At other times, it represents the source of blessings, as in a horn full of oil. At other times, it means proclamation. The sound of horns mobilized the nation (Lev. 23:24).

The psalmist says that the wicked man will see this, and it will grieve him. He is not grieving over the fact that the righteous man gave money to the poor. This may have been done in private. *What grieves the wicked person is that the righteous man is regarded as honorable.* He receives public recognition for his honorable life. This causes the wicked man to gnash his teeth and melt away. He disappears from the scene. He goes away annoyed, but he goes away.

The contrast is between the righteous person and a wicked person. The righteous person gives away a portion of his wealth. While the

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 32.

psalmist does not say that giving away assets is the immediate source of public honor for the righteous man, he does make the connection between charitable giving and widespread personal recognition. This recognition is visible to the wicked person. This is not something that was done in private. The giving was done in private, but the recognition is public. This indicates that his righteousness is comprehensive. He is not being recognized for his charitable activities. He is being recognized for *his way of life*, which is visible.

The righteous individual gains the advantage of public acceptance. This disturbs the wicked person. He does not want to think that a righteous man is publicly regarded as righteous. The contrast between the honor which the righteous man receives and the dishonor which the wicked man receives is too great for the wicked man to tolerate. He is annoyed, but his annoyance does him no good.

The psalmist paints a picture of a righteous individual who has dispersed a portion of his wealth to the poor. His righteousness endures forever, the psalmist says. This means that *his reputation endures*. The psalmist specifically says this: "his horn shall be exalted with honor." This is a public matter. It is so public that the wicked man is grieved by it. This is not some form of success that was achieved in secret. *This is public success*.

The psalmist says the desire of the wicked shall perish. His hopes and dreams will be cut off, in contrast to the reputation of righteousness and honor which are possessed by a righteous and honorable covenant-keeper. The covenant-breaker's future is cut off; the covenant-keeper's future is forever.

The contrast between the public condition of the righteous and the public condition of the wicked is sharp. It is so sharp that the wicked man is offended by it. He seeks to escape the testimony of his own eyes. He then melts away. This means that he disappears from the public scene. He loses influence.

This is an important passage because it affirms the relationship between covenant-keeping and visible success. One of the goals that most men have is recognition. Another goal is to be remembered. The psalmist says that the righteous man will not only receive recognition, he will receive it on a perpetual basis. Theologically, the reason for this is the imputation of righteousness by God. God does not forget. When God imputes righteousness to an individual, this imputation cannot be rescinded. It is perpetual. According to this passage, the righteous individual is the recipient of perpetual imputation, and this imputation

is one of honor. This is not a strictly subjective condition of the righteous person's mind. It is a matter of public confirmation. It is so public that the wicked man resents it.

The psalmist says that the desire of the wicked will perish. That which the wicked man upholds and desires will be overcome by righteousness in history. The process of historical development is covenantal. This is why righteousness produces external blessings, while unrighteousness produces external cursings. This is why the wicked man is said to be offended by the visible success of the righteous person.

According to the psalmist, there is predictable consistency between covenant-breaking and the failure to influence culture. This is not true in every era, but it is true with respect to the influence of the righteous, which is forever. *There is a compounding effect in history: righteousness increases, while wickedness melts away.* The wicked person will perish. He will melt away. This is in contrast to the reputation of the righteous person. The psalmist's declaration rests on a system of covenantal cause and effect. Righteousness produces benefits; unrighteousness produces impotence. The unrighteous person melts away. So does his legacy. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).²

Conclusion

The psalmist affirms that righteousness is rewarded in history. He also affirms that unrighteousness is rewarded with impotence in history. This worldview is in stark contrast to the worldview of both amillennialism and premillennialism. Amillennialism teaches that covenant-keeping produces persecution and visible failure. It also teaches that covenant-breaking produces power and influence. This perspective is categorically denied by these two verses of Scripture. Similarly, premillennialists believe that the gospel's long-term failure in changing culture for the better will be reversed only when Jesus comes again physically in absolute power to run a worldwide kingdom of God.

The psalmist is not affirming that the outcome of righteousness and the outcome of wickedness are random. The outcomes are not random. They are favorable to covenant-keepers and unfavorable to covenant-breakers.

2. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

31

UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people (Psalm 113:7–8).

The psalmist insists that God is sovereign over the economic affairs of men. God exercises power to raise up poor people. He is their deliverer. Their poverty need not be permanent. People can be born into poverty, but they can be raised out of it. The idea that poverty is necessarily inter-generational is incorrect. The psalmist says that *God breaks the cycle of poverty*. So completely does God break the cycle of poverty that a man who had been poor can find himself in the presence of the judicial equivalent of an Old Covenant king. He becomes a trusted counselor. Because the adviser has been raised out of poverty, the ruler trusts his wisdom and advice. This, at least, is the implication of the psalmist's assertion that the poor person will be in the presence of kings.

The story of Saul is a story of obscure man lifted up to the kingship. The story of David is much the same. God used Samuel to anoint both Saul and David on His behalf. God picked these men to serve as kings over Israel. Saul was a tall man, and looked like a king should look (I Sam. 9:2), but he had no particular leadership abilities to be king. God nevertheless raised him up out of obscurity to lead the nation of Israel.

The psalmist says that God does not place a social ceiling on the poor man. God has endowed the poor man to perform well enough to impress kings. God overcomes all of the barriers that would otherwise keep a person from entering the court of a king. An individual's talents are the limits on his success. Limits of social tradition, personal connections, formal education, and all of the other barriers to entry mean nothing to God, and should mean nothing to those whom God has

picked to represent His position in the courts of kings.

The picture here is *a society with open entry to markets*. Men of talent who gain information of how markets work are authorized by God to continue to improve their skills, master the markets, and gain all the money they can in a voluntary society. The productivity of an individual is not limited by barriers to social entry. God raises up the individual for His own glory, and the individual is put in charge of decision-making. This is the picture in Jesus' parable of the stewards. When the owner of the property returns and demands an accounting, some of the servants turn out to be very productive, but one servant does not. God brings that person under judgment (Matt. 25:14–31).¹

This is the familiar story of rags to riches. It was not always familiar. The suggestion that God raises up poor men to sit with kings was not familiar in the ancient world. It was a revolutionary suggestion. Even today, this degree of mobility is rare, although it is considered possible in theory. The West's acceptance of this degree of social mobility took centuries to achieve, but from the mid-seventeenth century until today, the ideal of upward social mobility has been basic to the democratic West. This outlook first became common during Cromwell's revolt against King Charles I. His New Model Army contained thousands of men who held such views, most notably the Levelers. These were democrats, not communists. The communists were the Diggers, and they had few representatives in Cromwell's army.

Conclusion

A society that allows individuals to rise economically, which does not put legal barriers against successful individuals to enter into social contact with others, is a free society. A free society is an economically productive society. The psalmist insists that Israel is to be a free society. In this way, the society is committed to the idea that God can raise up a poor person and place him in the company of kings. *Productivity is the distinguishing factor of a humanistic free society*. According to the psalmist, the sovereignty of God is the distinguishing feature of a biblical society.

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

A PRAYER FOR WIDESPREAD WEALTH

That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD (Psalm 144:13–15).

This passage appears as part of a prayer to a sovereign God. The psalmist asks God to deliver him from evil people—specifically, strange children (v. 11). Then he asks that Israel's sons will be as plants grown up in their youth, and that daughters will be as cornerstones. This prayer has to do with inheritance. He seeks liberation from rule by strangers. He calls for an inheritance for the children of Israel.

Then comes a prayer regarding agricultural blessings. The psalmist asks that Israel's granaries be full (v. 12). The granaries should contain all manner of stores. This means that they should contain many kinds of grain. The psalmist wants a variety of grains in his diet. He also asks that their sheep would multiply. He wants not merely thousands of sheep but tens of thousands in the streets (v. 13). He wants visible overflowing. He also wants strong oxen to do work. He wants no breaking in or going out. In other words, he wants the oxen penned in and safe. He asks that there will be no complaining in the streets, meaning in the community.

He closes the psalm with a declaration: "Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" (v. 15). *He equates happiness with national wealth.* He is saying, in no uncertain terms, that having overflowing granaries, tens of thousands of sheep in the streets, and strong oxen are all aspects of a society in which there should be no complaining, due to happiness.

A. The Pursuit of Happiness

Today, this psalm may appear to run counter to the New Testament's principle that men should not pursue great riches. This principle is also declared in the Proverbs. "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9).¹ Yet it sounds from this psalm as though great wealth per capita is an advantage worth praying for. It is an advantage that will produce happiness among the people. Why should increased wealth produce happiness? We are told that money cannot buy happiness, but it appears from these verses that grain, sheep, and oxen can buy happiness.

The psalmist is describing a free society. There are no foreign oppressors. There are no domestic oppressors. Sons and daughters inherit. Per capita wealth increases. *The marks of liberty involve economic growth.* Elsewhere in the psalms, we read that the pursuit of knowledge regarding the law of God is the basis of liberty. "And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts" (Psalm 119:45). This being the case, liberty under God should prove to be productive. *Covenant-keeping leads to greater per capita wealth.* This is the message of the early sections of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. There is a cause-and-effect system in which conformity to biblical law produces increased per capita wealth. The psalmist understands this, and so he prays that God will bring to pass that which He had promised in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. *The psalmist is calling on God to defend His covenant.* He is calling on God to do what He said he would do in Deuteronomy 8: bless His covenant people with great economic blessings so as to confirm the covenant (vv. 17–18).²

Any attempt to separate covenant-keeping from predictable prosperity runs against the words of this psalm. Any attempt to say that obedience to God's law produces poverty is an affront to what God has revealed regarding His covenant. Any attempt to say that the economic outcome of widespread covenant-keeping is random also flies in the face of Deuteronomy 26, Deuteronomy 28, and Psalm 144. Yet Bible commentators and especially theologians have argued that there is no relationship between covenant-keeping and economic success in the

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 21, 22.

New Covenant. They have argued that covenant-keeping produces either random results in terms of the specific blessings set forth in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28,³ or else it produces the opposite results that are set forth in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.⁴

The Christian church has labored for almost 2000 years under the instruction of theologians who have been hostile to economic growth as a mark of God's covenant blessings to those who obey His law. There has also been great hostility to biblical law. There has even been hostility to economic growth. There has been open hostility to the pursuit of profit. There has been hostility to merchants and businessmen. This hostility to ethical cause and effect in the realm of economic production restricted economic growth until the late eighteenth century. Christianity was not forthright in its advocacy of the kind of prayer that we find in Psalm 144. There has also been a disconnect between the covenantal framework of the Mosaic Covenant and what is presumed to be the covenantal framework of the New Covenant. It is widely assumed that there is been a total discontinuity between the two covenants. This means that Christians have rejected the testimony of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. They have therefore also rejected the testimony of Psalm 144. Theologians for over a millennium praised poverty as a goal for the spiritual elite, which includes religious orders bound together by vows of poverty. Theologians within the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions have praised these religious orders as being superior to the common realm of business. This attitude has negatively affected economic theory within Christian circles.

Conclusion

Psalm 144 is a declaration of independence from strange children (v. 11). It is also a declaration of independence from spiritual children, who do not recognize, accept, and proclaim the continuing authority of the Mosaic law regarding God's promised blessings for covenant-keeping.

3. This is Meredith G. Kline's position. See Chapter 27.

4. This is Cornelius Van Til's position. *Ibid.*

THE FOUNDATION OF CONFIDENCE

The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:14–16).

A. The Source of Strength

This passage affirms the comprehensive sovereignty of God over the affairs of this world: point one of the biblical covenant.¹ God imposes predictable sanctions: point four.²

The psalmist begins with an affirmation that God upholds all things that fall, and He also raises up all things that are bowed down. *This is an affirmation of faith in a God who protects covenant-keepers from disaster.* When covenant-keepers fall, God raises them up. Therefore, they should not lose faith in the efficacy of their efforts. The psalmist is speaking of covenant-keepers, not covenant-breakers. God does not raise up all those covenant-breakers who are bowed down. On the contrary, He structures the world so that covenant-breakers are subjected to negative sanctions.

Verse 15 is widely recited in formal church liturgies. “The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest of them of their meat in due season.” God provides sustenance for all the living creatures of the world. “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (v. 16). This does not mean that every living thing lives until a ripe old age. The desire of one creature may involve the loss of life of another creature. Verse 16 must therefore be interpreted in terms of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Sutton, ch. 4, North, ch. 4.

the provision of life for every living thing, while it lives. Every species survives only when it finds sustenance in its environmental niche. Not all species survive. Millions of them have perished.³ There is no guarantee of survival for every species under the authority of mankind. Only man is guaranteed survival by God.

The psalmist knew that members of a particular species survive through consuming members of a different species. This insight is not limited to modern man. What, then, is the psalmist attempting to convey? He is affirming the comprehensive authority of God over all living creatures. He is saying that no creature receives a benefit that God has not provided. God is the source of all life. God sustains all living creatures. No creature is autonomous. Every creature is dependent on God. "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry" (Psalm 147:9). If every living creature is dependent on God, then this includes mankind. The psalmist is making a point: *men should acknowledge that God is the source of all their benefits*. God is the source of their protection. This is the God who upholds the covenant-keeper who falls. This is the God who protects those who were covenanted to Him.

The psalmist then says that "the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth" (v. 18). This is not an indiscriminate promise to mankind in general. This is a promise to covenant-keepers who call upon God in truth. "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them" (v. 19). Again, this is not an indiscriminate promise of benefits in history. These are *covenantal promises*. "The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy" (v. 20). *There are covenantal curses to match covenantal blessings*. This psalm affirms the system of ethical causation that is found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The psalmist affirms God's sovereignty and therefore His ability to fulfill His promises. The promises that matter most, the psalmist implies, are the promises given to covenant-keepers. God also promises to undermine covenant-breakers. This system of sanctions favors those who confess faith in the God described by the psalmist.

B. A Covenantal World

The psalmist moves from the general to the particular. He moves from God's upholding of all creatures to His upholding of coven-

3. Kenneth J. Hsu, *The Great Dying* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986).

ant-keepers. God not only sustains the universe, He sustains covenant-keepers who seek to extend the kingdom of God in history. His *general sovereignty* is invoked by the psalmist in order to increase people's faith in His *specific sovereignty*. He favors covenant-keepers, and He disfavors covenant-breakers.

The psalmist affirms that the world is structured in terms of God's covenant. The creation is not ethically neutral. God structures it so that covenant-keepers prosper, while covenant-breakers do not. The world is not cosmically impersonal. It is entirely personal.⁴ God sovereignly controls all of it.

This outlook is antithetical to modern economic theory. It asserts that the universe is not ethically impersonal. It affirms ethical principles, which are embodied in biblical law. The world is not neutral. It is not a level playing field. It is a tilted playing field. It is tilted in favor of covenant-keepers.

The psalmist is encouraging covenant-keepers to be confident in the face of adversity. Their God will lift them up if they should fall. Their God provides meat in due season for the entire creation. He is certainly capable of providing it for covenant-keepers. God opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. He will surely satisfy the desire of covenant-keepers who faithfully work to extend the kingdom of God in history. Those who oppose them will face negative sanctions from God.

This is an outlook that favors a vision of victory. God has not stacked the deck against covenant-keepers. On the contrary, God has stacked the deck against covenant-breakers. This is why the long run belongs to representatives of this God.

This mental outlook favors entrepreneurship. It favors the individual who is confident about his ability to satisfy consumer demand. He expects to make a profit. He expects to use this profit to fund further business ventures. He believes that even if he loses his fortune, God will nevertheless intervene again and uphold him in his attempt to make a new fortune. This is not a matter of luck; it is a matter of covenantal obedience.

Conclusion

This psalm affirms God's comprehensive oversight of history. He

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

sustains all living things. There is nothing outside His control. This outlook is supposed to produce confidence. Covenant-keepers are to have confidence that their efforts will offset and overcome the efforts of covenant-breakers.

SANCTIONS AND STIPULATIONS

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever: Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners: The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous: The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down (Psalm 146:5–9).

The psalmist praises God as the creator who made heaven and earth. He is also the God who keeps truth forever. With this as background, the psalmist goes on to say that God executes judgment for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, and releases the prisoners (v. 7). He says that the Lord preserves strangers and relieves orphans and widows (v. 9). God also turns the way of the wicked upside down (v. 9). The psalmist ends the psalm with an affirmation that God will reign forever (v. 10).

A. Creator and Judge

The psalmist identifies God as the Creator and Judge. God is sovereign, and God imposes historical sanctions. God is a covenantal ruler. He intervenes in history to provide judgment for the oppressed and give food to the hungry.

The psalmist does not believe in a neutral universe. He believes in a universe which is totally under the sovereignty of God. This God operates in terms of ethical standards. He intervenes in history to execute judgment for the oppressed. Civil rulers who use civil law to oppress people can be sure that they will not escape the judgment of God.

The psalmist indicates that God intervenes to defend victims of

oppression in the same way that He intervenes to help the hungry. In verse eight, he says that the Lord loves righteousness. God therefore intervenes to help the poor, the powerless, the orphan, and the widow. These categories are familiar to anyone who is familiar with the Mosaic law. Strangers, orphans, and widows, along with the poor, are models of the powerless in the Mosaic law. These people are easily victimized. Throughout the Mosaic law, God tells his people that He intervenes in history on behalf of victimized individuals.

The focus of this psalm is civil government. There can be unjust civil government. The Mosaic law promises that God will intervene to defend victims of unrighteous civil government. “Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless” (Ex. 22:22–24).¹ The psalmist affirms this teaching in this psalm. It serves as a warning to magistrates who use the civil law to harm the innocent. It also offers hope to the innocent that God will intervene in history on their behalf.

This passage is favorable to judicial reform. But what kind of reform? The psalmist echoes the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law said that the civil government should not be used to oppress the innocent.² They may be weak, but they have a strong defender: God. Moses wrote down the laws that should govern civil government. It is the task of civil magistrates to enforce this law-order. When a society’s legal order conforms to the standards of the Mosaic law, there is justice. The psalmist warns covenant-breakers that God intervenes on behalf of victims of the legal order which does not conform to biblical law.

B. No Welfare State

This passage says nothing about taxation to raise funds to be distributed to the poor. It says nothing about tax policy. It does say that people can be oppressed. It says that there are hungry people, and God feeds them. It does not call on the civil government to feed them. To use passages that are favorable to the oppressed and the poor is legitimate when the critic of the prevailing social order has identified laws and practices that break the laws of the Mosaic covenant. But this is

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

2. *Idem*.

not what Social Gospel interpreters conclude about passages such as this one. They ignore the Mosaic law, and they emphasize the language of God's judgment. They see that God threatens negative sanctions against evildoers, but they do not go to the Mosaic law in order to find what God has said constitutes evildoing. *They invoke the language of social justice, but they do not cite the Mosaic law in order to discover what social justice is.* They use the language of outrage by the psalmists or by the prophets, but they do not invoke the standards that the psalmists and the prophets said were being violated. They call on civil magistrates to impose sanctions against evildoers, but they do not rely on the Mosaic law to identify the stipulations that the sanctions are supposed to enforce.

The Mosaic law does not lay down rules that would lead to a welfare state. There is no indication in the Mosaic law that the civil government is to be an agency for the redistribution of wealth from rich people to poor people, or from middle-class people to poor people. The only redistribution that the state calls for is restitution to victims of crime by the criminals who committed the crimes.³ This is not the same as a welfare state. This is not taxation of the rich simply because they are rich, nor is it the transfer of state funds to the poor simply because they are poor. No such system of civil government appears in the Old Testament. Yet the psalmists and the prophets invoked the language of God's judgment. It is deceptive to invoke the psalms or the prophetic books in a civil reform leading to a legal order that is opposed to Mosaic law.

Conclusion

The psalmist identifies God as both Creator and Judge. God defends the victims of oppression. The psalmist warns that God brings negative sanctions against evildoers and positive sanctions for victims of oppression. He echoes the Mosaic law on this point. To appropriate the psalmist's praise of God for His support of the oppressed without also invoking the Mosaic law, which served to define oppression, is deceptive. It promotes civil oppression by promoting a legal order in opposition to the stipulations of the Mosaic law.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 33. Cf. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

SPECIALLY REVEALED STATUTES

He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD (Psalm 147:19–20).

The theocentric issue here is God as the law-giver. The psalmist affirms that God showed his word to Jacob and His statutes and his judgments to Israel. This is poetic language, since Jacob and Israel are two names for the same person. The psalmist makes this statement in the context of listing God's gifts to Israel. Psalm 147 is a song of praise. It lists things that God has done for His people. He makes peace on Israel's borders (v. 14). He provides snow (v. 16). He melts the ice (v. 18).

With this as background, the psalmist describes God's gift of His law. Not only has He showed his word to Jacob and His statutes to Israel, He has shown them to no one else. "He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord" (v. 20). God has dealt in a special way with the nation of Israel, and *the mark of this special dealing with Israel is the Mosaic law*. This is how the psalmist ends psalm 147. The Israelites are to praise the Lord because of two things: He has shown His statutes to Israel, and He has not shown them to any other nation. Israel possesses a monopoly of justice.

When the prophets came before the nations of Israel and Judah, they called the people and the rulers back to the Mosaic law. The nation had violated this law, and the prophets came to the entire nation to warn them that judgment was coming. Centuries before, psalmists had proclaimed the way of the Lord by proclaiming the way of the Mosaic law. The psalmists and the prophets warned the rulers of Israel not to oppress the people. The way to oppress the people, as the psalmists and the prophets said repeatedly, was to ignore the Mosaic law. Because the nation had ignored the Mosaic law, God promised to

send the nation into captivity, the prophets warned.

To discuss the *message* of the psalmists and the prophets without relating this message to the *stipulations of the Mosaic covenant* is to practice deception. Such an analysis leads to the conclusion that the Mosaic law was not basic to the psalmists and the prophets. It implies that there can be social reform and political reform that is pleasing to God, but which has no relation to the Mosaic law. Such a proclamation is an attempt to mobilize covenant-keepers behind a political agenda whose details are not in conformity with the Mosaic law. It is an attempt to encourage Christians to work toward legal reform, but without going to the Bible in search of the legal categories and stipulations that constitute civic justice, according to the psalmists and the prophets. It is an attempt to invoke the authority of Psalms and the prophetic books in the name of God the Creator and God the Judge, but to abandon the specific laws by which He distinguished the nation of Israel from all the other nations.

The attempt by defenders of the Social Gospel to invoke the authority of Psalms and the prophetic books in the name of some version of socialist wealth redistribution reveals their hidden agenda. Their hidden agenda is to use the monopolistic power of the civil government to force their political opponents to pay for tax-funded programs that benefit their political constituents. It is an attempt to use the power of civil government to transfer wealth from one group to another group. This is done in the name of Christian charity, Christian justice, and Christian reform. Yet if the reforms do not conform to the stipulations of the Mosaic law, there is no biblical judicial basis for invoking the authority of Psalms and the prophetic books to support the political agenda of the Social Gospel.

I have surveyed those passages in Psalms that relate to economics. None of these passages has anything to do with the Social Gospel. On the contrary, the Social Gospel is antithetical to the system of private property which the Mosaic law established and which Psalms defends.¹

Conclusion

God's Bible-revealed laws are the tools of dominion.² The psalmist announces that God's gift of this law-order to Jacob constitute the

1. Joel McDurmon, *God Versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

basis for praise. This affirms that the laws of God offer a great benefit to the society that adopts them. They also provide a great benefit to any individual who follows them. *This benefit is dominion.* God blesses covenant-keepers.

Faith in this ethical system of cause and effect offers hope to covenant-keepers. They can extend God's kingdom in history by obeying God's Bible-revealed laws. God will reward obedience with blessings, including economic blessings. Covenant-keepers therefore possess a sure basis of confidence, just so long as they take the attitude of the author of Psalm 119.

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word (Psalm 119:15–17).

CONCLUSION

Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession (Psalm 2:8).

A. Legitimate Confidence

Much of the Book of Psalms is devoted to the theme of confidence-building. The psalmists call on covenant-keepers to accept biblical law and obey it. If God's people do this, they will be upheld supernaturally by God.¹

This form of confidence is not *self*-confidence. It rests on faith in the predictability of God's sanctions in history: the fourth point of the biblical covenant.² These sanctions are in turn governed by the laws of the covenant: the third point.³ The Mosaic laws and the Mosaic sanctions were a unit under the Old Covenant. God promised in His law to intervene on behalf of the victims of evil practices, especially civil court practices, that ignored the Mosaic law.

Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless (Ex. 22:21–24).

The Book of Psalms reinforces this declaration.

Covenant-keepers have a legitimate reason for their confidence regarding the positive outcome of their labors: the covenant itself. The psalmist says that individuals are blessed when they walk in God's

1. Chapters 6, 33.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 4.

counsel. This is not limited to corporate blessings. These are individual blessings. Obedience to biblical laws produces wealth.⁴ Cause and effect are ethical.⁵ *This system of ethical causation is the foundation of predictability in history.* It is the basis of Christian confidence regarding the future of God's kingdom in history.⁶

B. Inheritance and Disinheritance

The psalms describe history as a dual process of inheritance and disinheritance: the fifth point of the biblical covenant.⁷ This inheritance is comprehensive. It includes culture. The Messiah is the lawful heir in history. His representatives will inherit on His behalf.⁸ God directs the inheritance. Covenant-keepers are told by the psalmist that this inheritance in history is as reliable as God's word. Poverty is not the inheritance of covenant-keepers. The wicked shall be cut off in history.⁹ Their heaping up of riches is in vain. Their legacy will be dissipated.¹⁰ He who trusts in riches has misplaced his confidence.¹¹

The historical model for the disinheritance of the wicked is the defeat of the Canaanites by Israel. The lands of the heathen were inherited by Israel. This inheritance was comprehensive. Israel inherited everything.¹² Covenant-keepers will inherit the inheritance of the heathen in history. This is inheritance through disinheritance.¹³

This is why the psalmist prays for wealth.¹⁴ This is an aspect of the inheritance.

C. Success and Failure

Covenant-breakers have a rival view of the foundation of success in history: power. God's covenant establishes a different principle: *ethics over power*. God rules on the basis of His office as Creator. He rules by means of His law.¹⁵ He is the sovereign Owner. This is point one of

4. Chapter 28.

5. Chapter 1.

6. Chapter 20.

7. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 5. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 5.

8. Chapter 2.

9. Chapter 6.

10. Chapter 7.

11. Chapter 9.

12. Chapter 22.

13. Chapter 22.

14. Chapter 32.

15. Chapter 3.

the biblical covenant.¹⁶ He is autonomous. He alone possesses this attribute. Autonomy is an incommunicable attribute. All ownership is therefore theocentric. Men do not own themselves; God does.¹⁷ God delegates to stewards the responsibility of managing His property on earth and in time.¹⁸ This is point two of the biblical covenant: representation.¹⁹

God is the source of water, which sustains life. This fact denies the autonomy of nature.²⁰ God brings water or removes it. This is an aspect of the great reversal.²¹

The psalmist insists that foreign kings will bring their offerings to the temple. This is also an aspect of the great reversal. The weak will triumph over the strong.²² God protects the weak and defenseless.²³ God defends the poor defendant.²⁴ Corrupt judges should understand this. It should frighten them.²⁵

This warning indicates that covenant-breakers can triumph for a time. The wicked prosper. The psalmist admits that this bothered him. But he came to his senses. God is merely placing them in slippery places. Their downfall is assured.²⁶

The comprehensive triumph in history by covenant-keepers will be visible. This victory will grieve the wicked. They will melt away. They will lose influence.²⁷

The entrepreneur must conquer his fear of failure. Psalm 107 describes men who face waves on the sea. Covenant-keepers learn that God delivers them.²⁸

D. Optimism and Pessimism

Confidence is basic to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship involves predicting the economic future and then acting in the present to meet future consumer demand at a competitive price. The goal is to

16. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1.

17. Chapter 10.

18. Chapter 5.

19. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

20. Chapter 12.

21. Chapter 25.

22. Chapter 14.

23. Chapters 18, 34.

24. Chapter 26.

25. Chapter 21.

26. Chapter 17.

27. Chapter 30.

28. Chapter 24.

buy low and sell high. This mental and emotional outlook requires confidence: in the future, in cause and effect, in one's abilities. Psalms insists that this confidence is mandatory for covenant-keepers.²⁹

Pessimism about the future stifles entrepreneurship. When this pessimism is applied to culture in general, it leads to withdrawal and paralysis. Normal people do not commit to projects to transform a culture if they believe that they and those who share their views cannot win.

The psalms bring a message of confidence. They are filled with hope. They prophesy comprehensive victory for covenant-keepers.

The Book of Psalms is more openly optimistic than any other book in the Bible. It affirms that covenant-keepers will inherit civilization as surely as Israel inherited Canaan, which is the model of biblical inheritance in terms of its comprehensive character. There is therefore no book in the Bible more opposed to amillennialism. While premillennialists can consistently appropriate the Psalms' message of comprehensive inheritance, applying it to a discontinuous future millennial era, amillennialists must interpret the psalms of inheritance and victory as applying to the world beyond the final judgment. Until that day, covenant-breakers inherit, because they are in charge today and will be in charge tomorrow. How can such a view of eschatology be reconciled with the Psalms?

He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant. He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen (Psalm 111:5–6).

Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD (Psalm 149:5–9)

E. Inequality Forever

There is no equality in hell.³⁰ There is no equality in heaven. There

29. Chapter 27.

30. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have commit-

is no equality in history.³¹

This system of ethical cause and effect is affirmed in the Mosaic law. It appears in a concise form in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The psalmists invoked this system of causation. So did the prophets.³²

The Book of Psalms does not advocate a system of economic equality. It predicts a series of reversals. Dry land will become watered; productive land will become barren.³³ A great reversal is coming: the powerful will bring tribute to the weak.³⁴ Evildoers will be trapped by their own devices.³⁵ This, too, was set forth in the Mosaic law as the ideal.

The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them (Deut. 28:12–14).

There is nothing in the Book of Psalms that supports the statist theology known as the Social Gospel, let alone Marxist-tinged Liberation Theology. There is not one word about the state as an agency of wealth redistribution. There are invocations for justice, but justice is always defined in terms of the Mosaic law.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect

ted much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48). Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

31. "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:12–15). Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd. ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

32. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012).

33. Chapter 25.

34. Chapter 14.

35. Chapter 4.

the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).

Conclusion

The Book of Psalms proclaims victory in history for covenant-keepers. It announces the process of inheritance in history. Inheritance is ethical. This is affirmed in the Book of Deuteronomy, but it is affirmed far more eloquently and far more decisively in the Book of Psalms.

This should give covenant-keepers confidence. Their efforts in history will bear fruit in history. The efforts of covenant-breakers will be overwhelmed in history. There is not one word in the Book of Psalms about the final judgment and the world that will follow. *The psalms are entirely earth-bound and history-bound.* They do not talk about pie in the sky by and by. They talk about life on earth in history. They talk about pie on earth for covenant-keepers, and dregs for covenant-breakers. They talk about continuity for those who are meek before God, who will inherit the earth.

WISDOM AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS

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WISDOM AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS

GARY NORTH

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PREFACE

This book is part of a series, *An Economic Commentary on the Bible*. There has never before been an economic commentary on the Bible. This series is preliminary to what I hope will be a comprehensive volume on Christian economics. I decided in 1973 that I should not write such a book until I had completed the exegetical work. I wrote monographs on Christian economics, most notably *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (1973), *Honest Money* (1986), *Inherit the Earth* (1987), and *The Coase Theorem* (1991) before I completed my exegetical work in 2010.

In working with the texts of the Pentateuch, I discovered a hermeneutic¹ for assessing which Mosaic economic laws apply in the New Covenant and which do not. I summarized these in the Conclusion of my 1994 commentaries on Leviticus: the shorter *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary* and *Boundaries and Dominion*. These are:

1. Seed laws (annulled)
2. Land laws (annulled)
2. Priestly/holiness laws (annulled)
3. Cross-boundary laws (permanent)

The rules in the Book of Proverbs rest on cross-boundary laws. They are still in force.

As you will see when you read this book, I refer back to the Mosaic law when I discuss many of the economic proverbs. I sometimes also refer forward to the teachings of Jesus and Paul. I do this in order to establish my general point, namely, that these are permanent rules of action that rest on cross-boundary laws.

The proverbs are brief aphorisms that summarize or apply either a specific Mosaic law or else a principle undergirding the Mosaic law as a whole. They repeatedly call people to exercise wisdom, but a specific kind of wisdom: prudence.

This commentary can be read from start to finish as a unit. It can

1. Principle of interpretation.

also be read one proverb at a time. Most commentaries survive because they are read one verse at a time. Pastors read commentaries because they want help writing a sermon, and a sermon can cover only a few verses in detail. But a commentary that focuses on a particular academic discipline is more likely than most commentaries to be read from start to finish, because readers other than pastors are likely to attempt this. The readers want insight into a particular field, not just insight into the meaning of a few verses. This series is the first such commentary in 1900 years on a specific academic discipline.

Each chapter in this commentary can stand alone. Someone who seeks information about a single proverb or a related group of proverbs will find an exposition that deals with the passage. There is repetition in the book as a whole, because each chapter was written to stand alone. I will post each chapter separately on the Web: at GaryNorth.com and at biblicaleconomics.wordpress.com. As I have said, I do not expect everyone to read this commentary from start to finish. I expect a few people to do this—those who are ready to learn the Bible's comprehensive plan for personal success. This, we find in Proverbs.

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Proverbs can legitimately be regarded as the original self-help manual. It is a handbook for personal success. No comparable handbook has come down to us from the ancient world.

The section from chapter 10 through chapter 30 offers aphorisms. An aphorism can encapsulate great wisdom in a short, memorable, and memorizable phrase. The Book of Proverbs has lots of them.

There are three major problems with any compilation of aphorisms. *First*, it is not easy to keep them all in the back of your mind, ready to apply in a specific situation. The decision-maker must select the applicable aphorism and then apply it to a specific set of circumstances. This is not easy. This is why a young man who memorizes Sun Tzu's *Art of War* probably will not wind up as a successful general. A few may; most will not. *Second*, the collected aphorisms may not be consistent with each other. This will lead to inconsistencies in any comprehensive program of applied wisdom. *Third*, it is not always clear what the overall collection's integrating conceptual framework is, if there is one.

A. The Integrating Framework

There is an integrating conceptual framework for the Book of Proverbs: the contrast between the righteous man and the unrighteous man, meaning between the wise man and the fool, between the covenant-keeper and covenant-breaker. This theme is applied to economic issues in well over a hundred proverbs. Some of these proverbs are repeated. In this book, I discuss how the basic theme applies to more than 80 separate proverbs.

There are numerous sub-themes in those proverbs that are devoted to economics. Among these are:

1. The steps to personal success
2. The standards of personal success
3. Success indicators

4. Failure indicators
5. The function of riches
6. The basis of riches
7. The concept of ownership
8. The nature of economic causation
9. The marks of a biblical economy
10. The purposes of inheritance

Each of these themes has several proverbs associated with it. All of these themes are important for devising and implementing a lifelong plan of personal success.

As with all of the books of the Bible, the Book of Proverbs is theocentric. God is central; man is not. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1) The proverbs focus on what God demands from men—*holiness*—not what men want from God. Yet numerous proverbs appeal openly to personal self-interest. So, the book reflects a fundamental theme in the entire Bible: *the consistency between what God wants from men and what men want in this life*. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).¹

B. Economic Theory

The covenantal laws of society are found in the Mosaic covenant. These are the basis of the Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs encapsulates these laws in a way that we can more easily recall them.

This book makes clear that the society we live in is governed by ethical cause and effect. It is not governed by impersonal natural law. It is not governed by an evolving system of impersonal social laws. It is not governed by impersonal fate or impersonal chance. It is not governed by luck, either personal or impersonal. It is governed by God’s covenants. It is therefore governed by a comprehensive system of biblical law and the sanctions associated with this law.

This leads to a conclusion: *there is no value-free economic theory*. God is not neutral. His universe is not neutral. Any attempt to interpret the universe, including economic theory, in terms of the doctrine of value-neutrality is an assertion of man’s autonomy—collective mankind as well as the individual. Such an assertion is an act of coven-

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2102), ch. 15.

ant-breaking.

Conclusion

The Book of Proverbs presents a view of economic causation that is in opposition to all modern academic economic theory, which was a self-conscious attempt to strip God and morality out of economic science.² This view insists that God, not man, imputes final economic value to everything. Men impute economic value as image-bearers of God. They do not do this autonomously.

The free market social order first appeared in Western Europe because Western Europe and colonial America were more consistently biblical in their related concepts of law and causation than other societies were in the eighteenth century. Their legal order reflected biblical law's dual affirmation of private property and personal responsibility.

The Bible is hostile to all forms of socialism and the welfare state. I have spent over three decades proving this, verse by verse. So far, Christian socialists refuse to present detailed exegetical support for their case. They do not respond to me. Meanwhile, socialism has visibly died. Communism is defunct. There was never an intellectually coherent theoretical defense of socialism, and now it has failed visibly. It impoverished those nations that adopted it. Socialism is a dead mule. It was always sterile. It is time to bury the carcass.

2. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1963).

1

PERSONAL MOTIVATION FOR HOLINESS

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion (Prov. 1:1–4).

A. A Holy Kingdom

God wants His covenant people to be holy, for He is holy. “Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). This requirement extends into the New Covenant era. Peter affirmed this principle. “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Peter 1:16).

Holiness is made visible by obeying God’s Bible-revealed laws.

This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken (Deut. 26:16–19).

God wants all those who do obey His laws to become visibly successful as members of a uniquely holy people in a social order that has been established by means of *a public, corporate, oath-bound coven-*

ant. Visible blessings are basic (Deut. 28:1–14).¹ He wants people to use their success in this life to extend His kingdom in history. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).²

God has gone to extreme lengths to enable people to do this, even to the extent of sending His Son into this world to live the life required of all people, then to die on behalf of mankind in general (common grace)³ and for His covenant people in particular (special grace). God is highly motivated. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

B. Personal Motivation

In order to persuade His covenant people to become highly motivated to discover, develop, and implement their individual talents in a program of kingdom extension, God offers a comprehensive program of personal self-improvement. This program is presented in the Book of Proverbs. This book is God’s handbook for self-improvement. There is none like it in the literature of the ancient world.

Because the Book of Proverbs is deliberately motivational, we should expect to find in the book examples of highly motivational communications. Perhaps the book could even become a model for motivational communications, yet suitable for kingdom use. This is exactly what we find.

There is a rule governing direct-response advertising, which is a highly specific form of motivational literature: “Lead with the benefits. Follow with the proof.” Benefits motivate people to read your advertisement. If they are not motivated early, they will not read it. There is second rule: “Be explicit regarding the benefits unless the benefits are obvious to virtually everyone in your targeted audience.” The more obvious the benefits, the better. You then do not have to devote space to persuade people to read your advertisement. People are already highly motivated with respect to these benefits. There is a third rule: “Offer people hope.” If they have no hope, they will not act. If they will not

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

act, they will not change.

The introductory words of the Book of Proverbs adhere to all three rules. This passage identifies the author, who has a reputation for possessing two major benefits that are widely desired: wisdom and wealth. These benefits need no explanation. Because the reader knows who Solomon was, these two benefits are implicit rather than explicit. This also saves space. Finally, the passage motivates the reader by appealing to his hope that he, too, can become successful.

Only after doing this does the book present a long list of specific motivations: gaining specific benefits and avoiding specific liabilities. This motivational strategy conforms to direct-response advertising's fourth rule: "People respond to their immediate concerns. The more specific these concerns are addressed in the ad, the more likely people will take action." This is sometimes referred to as *the hot-button rule*.

So, there must be a combination of universally recognized benefits and highly specific benefits. The Book of Proverbs offers this combination as no other surviving document from the ancient world does.

C. Implied Benefits

The opening words of the book list the benefits.

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

Solomon does not spell out these benefits. He merely lists them. He assumes that they are well known by his targeted audience. This saves space.

1. *Wisdom*

The first benefit for reading this book is implied: to discover how Solomon, the son of David and the king of Israel, made his decisions. This is why the book begins with the identification of its source: Solomon. The text does not say that Solomon wrote the book, only that these are his proverbs. Beginning with chapter 25 and continuing through chapter 30, the proverbs are said to be Solomon's, but they were copied by scribes in King Hezekiah's reign. "These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied

out” (Prov. 25:1). Hezekiah’s reign lasted from about 716 B.C. to 687.⁴ This was over two centuries after Solomon’s reign. Either the proverbs had been memorized and passed down orally, or else they had been written down, passed down, and compiled at the later date. The author of the book’s opening words was intimately familiar with these proverbs—so intimate that he risked attributing them to the king. The presumption is that the compiler was Solomon or someone very close to him.

This identification of the source of the proverbs brings great authority to this collection within a targeted audience: *covenant-keepers*. They know who Solomon is. Not everyone does. Those who have read the Bible know. In his day, his reputation extended beyond the borders of Israel. He was internationally known for his wisdom, especially his good judgment as a ruler. Other rulers from the region came to see him execute judgment, and they marveled. The queen of Sheba came and witnessed his abilities as a judge. “And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard” (I Kings 10:6–7).

2. *Wealth*

The queen of Sheba was so impressed that she gave a large gift to him, “an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon” (II Chron. 9:9).

His career testified visibly to a close relationship between judgment and wealth. Great wealth came to him because of his wisdom, as the queen’s visit exemplifies. His life was a living testimony to the entire region that wisdom in judgment produces benefits for all, including the ruler who possesses such wisdom.

So, the second benefit is also implied: how to attain great wealth, just as Solomon did. This is a universally recognized benefit. These proverbs were compiled by a very rich man. *No book in the Bible provides more information regarding the way to wealth*. Yet what is striking about the Book of Proverbs is the centrality of its ethical framework. It initially focuses on ethics. Only when this issue is settled

4. This is the estimate of E. R. Thiele. W. F. Albright dated this from 715 to 687. “Hezekiah,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*. (<http://bit.ly/HezekiahWiki>)

early in the book does Solomon move on to the practical implementation of his strategy of success, which is at bottom ethical.

So, the introduction is both universal and specific. It offers wisdom and wealth on the authority of a man renowned as possessing both, a man whose name is recognized by members of a targeted audience. This combination of universal and specific is essential for a direct-response motivational communication.

3. Hope

Simple people recognize that they are simple. From long experience, they have learned that others are quicker to perceive the decisive conditions of social relationships. Others can make self-seeking decisions through this perception and their wits. How can a simple person compete in such a competitive world? This proverb says that the solution is instruction in wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity. These topics seem to be aspects of a realm of high-level decision-making. But this proverb says that simple people can be elevated into this realm as successful practitioners.

Jesus recognized this aspect of success in God's kingdom.

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:2–4).

The simple person is not to be childish but rather childlike. He is to be humble before God and His law, as a child is humble before his parents and their rules. He receives instruction in the basics of government. This instruction provides him with practical wisdom: the ability to make morally straight plans in a morally crooked world. Jesus said: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16).

Similarly, instruction provides a young person with knowledge and discretion. Solomon presumes that these gifts are not normally associated with young people, who tend to be impetuous. The reader also presumes this. The fact that instruction according to wisdom can overcome the impetuosity of youth testifies to its transformational power.

So, the third implied benefit is that simple people, young people,

and common people can master the rules of wisdom, which in turn produce success in life. This is an open book. It is available to all people. It is a manual of success that is available to mentally average people. Its implied promise: success for the wise. The wise need not be of above-average intelligence. They must be of above-average ethics.

The opening passage appeals to a person's positive self-image. Then it extends this appeal by asserting that this is not a matter of superior intelligence, but rather something open to all: ethics. It says, "You can do this."

D. The Power of Wise Instruction

Man is pictured in the opening words of Proverbs as being in need of instruction. A wise man receives instruction in wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity (fairness). The Hebrew words are revealing. The word for wisdom, *sakal*, means circumspect. It also means intelligent. There is the sense of prudence about the term. The word for justice, *tsedeq*, means rightness. It can also mean prosperity, which is worth noting. The word for judgment, *mishpat*, has the sense of rendering a verdict based on law. Finally, the word for equity, *meysar*, refers to straightness. This reminds us of the Hebrews' instruction to Joshua before they entered the land of Canaan. "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:7). The Hebrew word for "prosper" here is *sakal*—wisdom. We see in this passage a relationship between faithful law-keeping and prosperity.

The text also says that such instruction provides subtlety for the simple and discretion to the young. The Hebrew word for subtlety can have the sense of guile: trickery. "But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die" (Ex. 21:14). The Gibeonites were subtle, tricking the Israelites into making a binding covenant with them to remain in the land as servants. They were wily. "They did work wily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up" (Josh. 9:4). In most instances, this word has the sense of devious plans, but not always. It can mean wisdom. Solomon says in this book, "O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding

heart" (8:5). It can mean prudence. "I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions" (8:12).

The simple-minded person cannot rely on cleverness to achieve his ends. He lacks subtlety. Yet instruction can provide this missing ability. How is this possible? By providing the awareness of *social causation*, an awareness made possible by the lifelong experience of hearing the law of God in the context of real-world decision-making. This is what the Old Testament provided, in a way that no other ancient document did. It set forth the legal order of Moses in the context of the story of God's covenant people. That story was grounded in law. It was the manifestation of God's covenantal, law-bound dealings with a rebellious nation.

Conclusion

The Book of Proverbs begins by identifying the source of these proverbs: an internationally known ruler who possessed great wealth compiled them. This identification is sufficient to attract attention.

For those readers and listeners who recognize who Solomon was, the introduction offers three benefits: good judgment, personal success, and access for all. Through the information contained in this entire collection of proverbs, simple people can be made clever, and young people can be made discreet. Had these claims not come from a man of known integrity and widely known success, they would not be readily believed.

Early in this collection, Solomon sets forth the value of wisdom. He says that the kind of wisdom his instruction offers is something of great value. If it can make the simpleton subtle and the youth discreet, what can it do for the common man, who is neither simple nor young? What can it do for the clever person? Clearly, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (v. 5). This man is prudent.

Solomon invites the reader to consider the material in this collection. He says that wise people will do this. This implies that people who lack wisdom will not. He says, in effect, "If you are neither wise nor a person of understanding, you need not continue to read what I have to say." This is a form of screening: "Wise people only." This is a form of motivation. A reader presumably thinks he is wise, although not necessarily clever. He thinks: "This book is aimed at me." This is motivation to continue reading.

This promise of open access also implies that wisdom is not a matter of innate intelligence. If a simple person can be made subtle through a mastery of these proverbs, this is a great motivation for everyone to read and commit these proverbs to memory. It means that there is something beneficial here for everyone. Wisdom is presented here as a matter of ethics rather than a matter of innate intelligence. A simple person can learn what is right. This information, when coupled with a willingness to apply biblical ethics in day-to-day decisions, leads to success. People want success. They want to believe that they can attain success. So, there is great motivation presented here for mastering and applying these proverbs: to become like Solomon.

For approximately three thousand years, millions of people have considered carefully what he had to say.

2

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7).

Here is one of the fundamental verses in the Old Testament, on a par with “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut. 6:4). This proverb establishes the fundamental principle of epistemology, which asks: “What can a man reliably know, and how can he know it?”

A. God the Judge

The proverb does not say that knowledge of the Lord *in general* precedes knowledge in general. It says that the *fear* of the Lord is the starting point for all accurate knowledge. We do not learn about the God of the Bible from a careful study of His incommunicable attributes—omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence—let alone from any of medieval scholasticism’s five proofs of God. Instead, we learn of God as the supreme cosmic judge who brings negative sanctions in both time and eternity. This is the God of the covenant: *God, the sanctions-bringer*.¹ Ignore this aspect of God’s character, and you cannot possess accurate knowledge of either God or the cosmos. All such sanctions-denying knowledge, while potentially accurate in its observational details of specific cause and effect—drop the rock on your foot, and your foot hurts—keeps men ignorant of the cosmic drama: God vs. Satan, covenant-keeper vs. covenant-breaker.

The wise man accepts God as He says in the Bible that He is: the supreme agent of judgment. The fool does not. The wise man begins

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

with the fear of God. The fool does not. The mark of the fool is that he despises wisdom and instruction.

This does not mean that he despises all instruction. Everyone learns about cause and effect in history. Everyone has a concept of the way the world works. But in the context of this passage, wisdom and instruction refer to applications of the principle that the God of the Bible should be feared. Wisdom and instruction refer to the Bible's theory of causation. Isaiah announced:

I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? (Isa. 45:5–9).

The fool denies this. He believes that he operates in a world independent of the God of the Bible who brings judgment in history. The prophet Isaiah identified such a fool: the nation of Israel.

Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know (Isaiah 47:8–11).

Isaiah brought a covenant lawsuit. Every covenant lawsuit threatens the listener with God's negative sanctions.

B. Avoiding Losses

Negative sanctions, not positive sanctions, are the focus of this proverb. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. We do not fear His positive sanctions. We fear His negative sanctions. So, the beginning of knowledge points to the threat of loss. Jesus said to His disciples: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

A familiar theme in Western literature is the corrupt bargain with the devil. Someone seeks positive sanctions in history. In order to gain them, he makes a bargain—a contract—with Satan regarding the afterlife. He trades his soul in eternity for blessings in history. This theme is a variation of Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:8–9).² Here, Satan offered positive sanctions. He did not mention negative sanctions. Neither did the serpent mention negative sanctions to Eve. He did not have to. Eve knew. “And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Gen. 3:2–3).

The fool denies that God brings negative sanctions in history. To turn to God as the source of positive sanctions in history would imply faith in God as the source of negative sanctions. So, the fool seeks positive sanctions elsewhere: from nature, from the strength of his own hands, or from a corrupt bargain with others. This is what Solomon warns against in the early section of the book.

Proverbs, along with the entire Bible, teaches that the positive sanctions offered by Satan or his covenant-breaking subordinates are not worth the price: the negative sanctions imposed by God. Proverbs affirms a value scale and a theory of causation that stand in opposition to Satan’s. The wise man imputes great value to God’s positive sanctions, but this is not the starting point for biblical wisdom. The starting point is man’s imputation of negative value to covenant-breaking. *Covenant-keeping begins with the fear of God.* It is the avoidance of

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

God's negative sanctions, not the promise of positive sanctions, that initially motivates the covenant-keeper. This fear of God is the first step to covenantal maturity.

Men trust something to provide positive sanctions. They also fear negative sanctions. If men fear God as the sanctions-bringer in history and eternity, they are less likely to fear any aspect of the creation, whose sanctions are both temporal and subordinate to God's sanctions. By trusting God and by obeying God, covenant-keepers have a sure way to deal with the negative sanctions threatened by the creation. They can exercise dominion over the creation precisely because they fear God more than they fear any aspect of the creation. In every social philosophy, the source of negative sanctions occupies the peak of the hierarchy. This proverb is clear: God occupies this place of supremacy.

We must seek to avoid the negative sanction of loss. The New Covenant affirms that the supreme positive sanction is God's removal of the threat of negative sanctions in eternity.

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:13–15).³

The forfeiture of eternal salvation is the ultimate loss. In contrast, the loss of God's positive sanctions in eternity is tolerable. The imposition of God's negative eternal sanctions is not. They must be tolerated for eternity (Luke 16:19–31).⁴

Conclusion

The Book of Proverbs affirms God as the source of all sanctions, positive and negative. God has laid down His law in the Bible. This law is confirmed by sanctions, both positive and negative. Godly instruction affirms causality as governed by a sovereign God. The fool rejects such instruction.

The implication of this proverb is not intuitive, but it is crucial: *if*

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

you can avoid negative sanctions, positive sanctions will compound over time. Success begins with a systematic program to avoid losses. The Book of Proverbs supplies this program.

This implies that positive sanctions are more fundamental than negative sanctions. This in turn implies that dominion is more fundamental than linear history. It is not simply that time moves forward to final judgment. It is that there is progress in history, which is not limited to doctrinal precision. Covenant-keepers have legitimate hope for history. This begins with the fear of God.

3

RIVAL PROGRAMS OF INHERITANCE

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not (Prov. 1:8–10).

A. Inheritance and Disinheritance

This passage deals with inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹ A father tells his son that parental instruction and law are the equivalents of an ornament of grace—a crown—and a necklace. These are positive sanctions, clearly part of an inheritance: parents to son. The imagery here is of visible representations of power and wealth.

In contrast is disinheritance. The way of sinners is the way of death. Death comes in the form of temptation: to depart from the paths of righteousness. The father lists the enticements that sinners offer to righteous people in their effort to corrupt them. The list focuses on illegitimate ways to extract wealth from judicially innocent victims. These are crimes, for they involve either fraud or violence.

If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil (1:11–13).

This is an exceptionally clear framing of the crime of theft. The language invokes the image of the grave. The victims are to be murdered. To “wait for blood” is to plot to commit murder. Life is in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5, (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

the blood.

But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man (Gen. 9:4–5).

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

The goal is economic gain. “We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil.” This is disinheritance. The victims' heirs will someday deserve this wealth, but murderers plan to obtain it.

Then comes the proposed benefit. “Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse” (1:14). The gang of murderers shares a common purse. The wealth of the innocent victims will fill this purse. Then the criminals will share the proceeds of the crime. Nothing is said regarding the proportional shares that will be eventually handed out to the participants. Nothing is said of the structure of organizational authority that decides who gets what and when. The target of this enticement is expected to trust the intent and judgment of those criminals who possess institutional authority. This assumption is known by the phrase, “honor among thieves.”

B. A Criminal Conspiracy

The sinners entice a man into crime by offering him a share in the proceeds. But who is to police the thieves? Who is to monitor the purse? If it pays to spill innocent blood, why shouldn't it pay to spill the blood of one's partners in crime? The restraint of God's law is not part of the psychological makeup of criminals. There is not the same degree of *self-government* that we find in families that bring up their children to fear God and respect His law. Therefore, coercion within conspiracies must be far greater. Fear governs them.

Solomon is contrasting two ways of life: God-fearing and God-hating. He is contrasting the economic results of the two ways of life: prosperity and destruction. The righteous bring good judgment to their daily lives; the unrighteous bring bad judgment, violence, and destruction. The evil that men practice against the innocent becomes part of the psychological make-up of the evildoers. They cannot escape their habitual patterns of existence. They seek gain at the expense of

those who possess wealth. Their colleagues in crime share the spoils. In so doing, they become each other's targets.

Solomon understood this. "For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird, And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof" (1:16–19). What bird is he speaking about? Each member of the gang. They lay nets for each other, but not in plain sight. In the criminal conspiracy, the secret society, and the brotherhood of blood, the members are threatened by the inescapable results of their own ethics. They believe that non-members are fit for the slaughter. But this attitude cannot be restricted easily to the world outside the "household" of the brotherhood. It spreads into the inner circle.

C. Common Purse, Common Curse

The common purse guarantees their downfall. It becomes the supreme prize in an organization that imitates a family, but without the bond of love. As with a family's common purse, the gang's common purse is filled with money. What is the basis of the allocation of this money? In a family, the father allocates the family's wealth. In a criminal conspiracy, a pseudo-father does, or a council of would-be patriarchs. This raises the central organizational question: *Allocation by what standard?* Who imputes value to the individual efforts of the conspiracy's members?

Here is the central issue of all economic theory: *imputation*. Imputation is subjective. Value is therefore subjective. The epistemological question is this: How can men accurately impute economic value to the world around them? Specifically, how can they accurately assess the economic value of the contributions of other men?

The free market provides a constant assessment of each man's contribution to the production process. There is a gigantic *competitive auction* for labor, for capital goods, for raw materials, and for all other scarce economic resources. This auction process produces prices by which we can evaluate what we are worth to others in the market, as well as what they are worth to us. This competitive bidding process is based on a legal principle: open entry to a market, i.e., competition without coercion. Free pricing, the accountant's profit-and-loss report, and the legal right to transfer ownership are all essential to our know-

ledge of what different things really cost.² Economic freedom brings us accurate knowledge, and therefore more wealth.

In contrast to a free market, the criminal conspiracy is coercive. It is a collective. As in a socialist economy, it cannot permit open competition for men's services. Criminals cannot openly advertise their services to other "customers." Also, oath-bound brotherhoods are closed societies. Members cannot leave in response to higher bids from other criminal conspiracies. Thus, it becomes difficult—in fact, almost impossible—for the members of a criminal band to assess the economic contribution of each member.

Here is the curse of the common purse. The way that criminals decide who is to receive what portion is by coercion. The strongest get the largest portions. But this places a premium on ruthlessness. The bloodthirstiness of criminals is enhanced by the very nature of collective ownership. They all share one purse. The source of the capital in the purse is not economic production, but rather economic pillage and destruction. This is why criminal conspiracies and socialist governments are often allies. The concept of a common purse to be filled by stealing the wealth of productive people is common to both criminal conspiracies and socialist and communist political conspiracies. In both cases, to cite Hayek's famous tenth chapter in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), the worst get on top.

Secrecy is basic to such societies. But this secrecy is not limited to those outside the brotherhood. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (1:17). *Those who are intent on snaring unsuspecting birds become masters of concealing nets.* Traps are sprung on those who least suspect them. For this reason, every member knows that he is a potential bird, and he must live a life of continual wariness. To escape traps and to set traps: this is on the minds of members of a criminal band. They snare the helpless as a way of life. These skills are not abandoned within the conspiracy.

Satanism exhibits certain recurring features: secret oaths, signs, and communications; death threats to any who would break the vow of secrecy; malicious intent against those outside the secret order; the quest for wealth and power by means of coercion against the product-

2. The classic statement of this principle is Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920), reprinted in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935), ch. 3. (<http://mises.org/pdf/econcalc.pdf>) The academic community either ignored or actively denied the truth of Mises' insight until 1991, when the Soviet Union's socialist economy collapsed, and that enormous nation-empire ceased to exist.

ive members of society; and the common purse. It was not an accident that Judas was a thief, that he secretly conspired against Christ, that he was possessed by Satan, and that he controlled the disciples' common purse (John 12:6). The temptations associated with the common purse are so great that the New Testament specifies that those who control church finances—deacons—must live otherwise blameless, public lives (I Tim. 3:8–13).³ What goes into the common purse in a godly society is limited: the tithe for the church, and minimal revenues for the civil government. The society of Satan is the society of the universal common purse.

D. Faith in Violence

The intended targets of the conspiracy are judicially innocent. They also possess wealth. The conspirators devise a plan to reallocate this wealth into the common purse. They seek to substitute their goals for those of the innocent but economically successful victims. They seek to thwart the allocation of wealth that has been produced by society in a non-violent way. They propose to substitute violence for peace.

The teacher advises the listener to reject the offer and avoid the enticer. "My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood" (1:15–16). The mental image is of men moving in haste. They are not shuffling toward evil, nor walking at a brisk clip. They are running. This points to their self-conscious embrace of evil. There is no hesitation here. These conspirators are not ready to hear counsel from the righteous.

They know exactly what they are doing in the sense of self-conscious preparation. They do not know what they are doing in the sense of awareness of God's covenantal system of ethical cause and effect. Their understanding of causality is defective. They regard violence against the innocent as the basis of success in this life. They are power religionists.⁴ This assessment undergirds the following passage.

Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012) , Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof (1:17–19)

If a bird can see the net, it will not venture into the trap. Success in the hunt rests on successful deception of the victim. The conspirators understand this, which is why their plan involves lurking. Thus, the innocent will fall into their trap. This passage points to the larger picture. God has set a trap for the conspirators.

This trap has a trigger: the conspirators' trap. *In setting a trap for the innocent, they will be snared themselves.* God's covenantal system of cause and effect governs men's plans. But covenant-breakers do not acknowledge that they operate in a larger system of causation. They do not understand that, in setting a trap for the innocent, they set a trap for themselves. "And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives."

The passage ends with a summation: "So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof" (1:19). The father warns his son that there is a pattern of criminality. The criminal seeks to gain at the expense of a proposed victim. The example of a band of murderous thieves serves as the model. The group seeks to get rich at someone else's expense. This involves murder. It is at bottom a transfer of inheritance.

The conspirators do not operate in a universe in which power is supreme. They operate in a universe in which *ethics is supreme*, for God is absolutely sovereign. He is a God of law and justice. There is power, but this power does not rest on the principle that might makes right. It rests on the principle that supreme right is enforced by supreme might. As the Creator, God possesses supreme right and supreme power. He delegates power and wealth in terms of His decree and the legal order He has established to govern mankind. The laws of inheritance, not the exercise of power, are to govern the transfer of property, generation to generation. All attempts to interfere with these Bible-revealed laws of inheritance are a form of theft.

Conclusion

The Book of Proverbs presents the story of competition for inheritance in history. Rival organizations compete for the allegiance of men. Each offers a program of inheritance.

The father's offer of inheritance is based on ethics: covenant-keeping. The first nine chapters of Proverbs present the father's testament

to his son: godly wisdom. The father's inheritance correlates righteousness and success.

In contrast is a rival program of inheritance. It leads to death. It is based on an illegal attempt to steal the godly inheritance. Seduction is basic to this program of disinheritance. So are deception, theft, and murder. The archetype is the Fall of man in the garden. Its historical extension is described here in the Book of Proverbs: a challenge to the laws of righteousness by a conspiracy that promotes ethical rebellion.

4

WISDOM AND WEALTH

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? (Prov. 1:20–22).

A. The Lure of Two Women

Wisdom is personified as female in the Book of Proverbs. The first instance of this practice is here. There is no explanation for this in the proverb. My explanation is this: because covenant-breaking is pictured throughout the Old Testament as the equivalent of harlotry, and because the theme of the first nine chapters of Proverbs is the conflict between wisdom and foolishness, the personification of wisdom as female makes sense. *Wisdom is the faithful wife.*

Wisdom is pictured here as standing in the public square and calling men to return to her. There are three categories of listeners: simpletons, scornors, and fools. She goes into the streets, where people can be found. She goes into the concourse—the public square—which is where the streets come together: the center of the city. She also goes to the gates of the city, where civic judgment is rendered.

Biblical religion is a public faith for the public square. It is not a religion confined to the hearth and home. It is therefore not the religion of classical Greece, where a wife tended the household's fire as a family priestess,¹ but had no influence in the courts.² In classical religion—Greece and Rome—women had no public role to play in the religion of the city. A woman served as a priestess at the Oracle of Delphi: the Py-

1. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book II, Chapter IX.

2. *Ibid.*, I:VIII:2, III.

thia. Women served in Rome as vestal virgins who kept the city's fire burning. This was the only official religious role for Roman women. Women played no role in politics, since civic religion was the basis of politics.³ The women who exercised influence in the corridors of power in classical Greece were courtesans—adulterous mistresses of powerful married men. In Israel, Deborah served as a judge. This would have been inconceivable in classical Greece.

Wisdom in this passage serves the same role as a prophet did in Mosaic Israel: someone who brings a covenant lawsuit against the nation. She publicly identifies the sources of Israel's covenant-breaking: simpletons, scorners, and fools. The people have gone astray. This is not a conspiracy against the people by covenant-breaking rulers. *This is a conspiracy against God by the whole nation.* Wisdom cries out: "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you" (1:23).

Wisdom is personified. She offers to pour out her spirit on men. Wisdom here is presented as the personification of God. Wisdom is not pictured as impersonal, but rather as highly personal.

Wisdom is not the only woman in the public square. The harlot is there, too. She also seeks for those who will listen to her, and then follow her imprecations.

For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee (7:6–15).

B. The Correct Response

What is the correct response to these conflicting calls? "To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discre-

3. *Ibid.*, III:VII:3, XII.

tion” (1:2–4).

The early chapters of Proverbs are concerned with biblical wisdom: how to obtain it, cultivate it, and apply it. Proverbs also contrasts biblical wisdom with the false wisdom of this world, which lures the unsuspecting into the lusts of the flesh. It is stated repeatedly that wisdom is a valuable asset.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace (3:13–17).⁴

Of all capital assets, biblical wisdom has the highest rate of return.

The comparisons here are revealing. Gold, silver, precious gems, long life: wisdom is greater than all of these. Throughout the book, long life, riches, and honor are closely associated with biblical wisdom, indicating that wisdom leads to these external blessings. We are reminded of the words of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).⁵ The old hymn, “I’d rather have Jesus than silver and gold” really misses the point. Better to sing, “I’d rather have Jesus *and* silver and gold.” There is a relationship between (1) the exercise of biblical wisdom, biblical justice, and biblical judgment and (2) outward signs of prosperity.

Solomon was noted both for his wisdom (I Kings 4:29–34) and his wealth (I Kings 10). In fact, the queen of Sheba’s words linked the two. “And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard” (I Kings 10:6–7).

C. What Is Wisdom?

The emphasis in Proverbs is not on the possession of knowledge as a mass of facts, including economic facts. Proverbs encourages the

4. Chapter 9.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

quest for wisdom, which is associated with honest judgment, justice, and fairness (equity). It is also important to have the ability to impart this wisdom to the naive (“simple”) and the young, who are impressionable.⁶ This indicates that knowledge of God’s principles is not to be a monopoly of a priestly elite. “To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark [puzzling] saying” (1:6). The translation of the mental puzzles of the wise into the language of the people is deemed by the public to be a sign of true wisdom.

Wisdom is not simply right knowledge, but also right action. *Wisdom is applied ethics*. There are cause-and-effect relationships in this world that must be respected if men are to prosper. The fundamental principle is this one: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7).⁷ It is the awful (awe-full) *fear of God* that should begin a man’s education. *This is the first principle of cause and effect*. The wise man is a competent judge of people, as well as situations. He relates God’s principles of ethics to the concrete events of the day. Solomon’s wisdom was demonstrated in the case of the two women who argued over whose baby was whose. He threatened to cut the child in half. He then saw which woman agreed to give up the child to the other (I Kings 31:28). This case is the biblical archetype of wise judgment by a civil ruler. Relating God’s laws to men’s lives is the essence of biblical wisdom. This is biblical *casuistry* in action.

The Book of Proverbs is an eminently practical book. The introductory section creates interest by the reader in what is to follow, thereby increasing the likelihood that he will take the proverbs seriously. The first nine chapters are devoted to a presentation of the importance of wisdom. Then 21 chapters follow, which give us the proverbs of Solomon (who had 3,000 of them, along with 1,005 songs: I Kings 4:32). Then the final chapter gives us the insights of King Lemuel’s mother, whoever she was. These proverbs are supposed to be considered carefully and then acted upon.

These proverbs represent a form of capital. Adhering to the proverbs produces an increase in personal wealth. But an increase in personal wealth is not sufficient to guarantee success. This is one of the themes of the early section. What is needed to guarantee success is the wisdom to serve as a faithful steward of the wealth that is to come. To

6. Chapter 1.

7. Chapter 2.

present to men a handbook for increasing wealth is not enough; they need *moral capital* to make proper use of the forthcoming income.

Capital, in the Bible's perspective, comes from conformity to the laws of God (Deut. 28:1–14).⁸ Increasing per capita wealth is part of God's program of "positive feedback," wherein conformity to God's law increases a man's wealth (and a society's wealth), which in turn is to serve as a confirmation of the reliability of the covenant. "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).⁹ To establish His covenant, He gives faithful men their wealth. The progression is supposed to conform to this pattern: obedience . . . increase . . . greater obedience . . . greater increase . . . dominion.

In order to integrate the laws of economics with the facts of economic life, men need a guide. This guide is the Bible. The special revelation of God gives men the interpretive framework for understanding economic cause and effect. Men are not to misuse their knowledge of economic cause and effect. This is why we are given the introductory chapters of Proverbs, to convince us that *the ultimate goal of personal wealth is the increase of capital necessary to implement biblical wisdom in a corporate public form: the kingdom of God*. To use the knowledge found in Proverbs for any purpose other than the extension of God's kingdom is a form of rebellion.

8. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

D. The Market for Wisdom

It was perhaps the greatest of Greek myths—a myth held mainly by Socrates, Plato, and their followers—that if men *understand* the truth and the good, they will *believe* the truth and *do* the morally upright thing. In the Greek philosophical tradition, knowledge is the pathway to salvation. *Knowledge saves*. In contrast, the Bible affirms that wisdom is the pathway to salvation. But it teaches that wisdom is not a matter of precise logic or intuitive insight. *Wisdom is the product of God's grace*. The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14).¹⁰ Therefore, when wisdom is proclaimed in the streets, there may be few who respond favorably. The simpletons—moral simpletons, not people with low intelligence—do not come and sit at the feet of the wise teacher. “But ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would [have] none of My reproof” (1:25). Simpletons do not take seriously the sin-restraining wisdom of God’s law.

Solomon here equates wisdom with God. “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would [have] none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof” (1:28–30). The simpletons had refused the counsel of God, whose word had been proclaimed in the streets. Now they face calamity all alone. Fear, desolation, and destruction are therefore inevitable (1:27).

1. No Market for Wisdom

The market for wisdom in Israel was nonexistent. Yet this was the era of Solomon, the wisest and richest of Israel’s kings, at the peak of Israel’s influence. Even at zero price, there was far more supply of wisdom than demand for wisdom. In short, *wisdom was a glut on the market*—not on the supply side, but on the demand side. So vast was this glut in relation to demand that the supply would eventually be removed by God. Wisdom would someday be sought, but none would be found. The father taught his son that God hides Himself from those who do not regard His word as valid and valuable in good times as well as bad. When bad times come, men seek answers, but wise answers are not to be found by those who are in rebellion against God. They seek, but they cannot find. God reserves the right to restrict the easy avail-

10. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd. ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

ability of wisdom in times of crisis whenever men have failed to take Him seriously during prosperous times.

Built into the creation is a cause-and-effect system based on adherence to, or rejection of, God's Bible-revealed law. Over and over, we are told that the response of a man to the law of God determines his external circumstances. *Prosperity is the product of men's outward adherence to biblical law.* Poverty is the result of outward adherence to another legal order, or an anti-legal order. "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (1:31–33). All societies that reject God's wisdom have self-destructive aspects.

When the Assyrians came to take Israel away, there was no mass repentance. When the Babylonians came to carry Judah away, there was no mass repentance. Men may have called upon some sort of god—a god of their own creation—but the God of the Bible did not hear them, judicially speaking. When the ways of the wicked finally result in the destruction of their prosperity, men are left without moral guidelines. The moral order that they had trusted now collapses before their eyes, and they do not know or understand the biblical alternative.

2. *The Twentieth Century*

After the First World War (1914–18), a wave of debauchery and "high living" swept the West. Weimar Germany's cabaret society, America's speakeasies, France's dada art movement, and the British elite's open rejection of Victorian morality were all aspects of men's rejection of pre-War morality, which had been at least Christian on the surface. In America, historians call this period "the Roaring Twenties." The roaring twenties turned into the disastrous thirties. Economic depression broke the public's confidence in the West's economic order. Socialists, redistributionists, and populists of all varieties came into power, or close to power. Germany and Italy went fascist-socialist. Britain and the United States went Keynesian, which was basically a form of statism, as Keynes admitted in his long-neglected introduction to the German language edition of his *General Theory* in 1936. The corporate state is still with us, struggling wildly in its death throes, desperately trying to find a way to achieve rapid economic growth without price inflation and massive indebtedness.

The crises of the 1930s and 1940s did not lead to widespread repentance in any Western nation. People chased after a number of superficially different economic and political solutions, but these all were variations of the Moloch state. The public's theology did not change, so their solutions were no better than the problems they were intended to solve. The debauchery of Weimar Germany—the pornography, homosexuality, occultism, and nihilism—has become today's universal subculture, and is increasingly being absorbed into the common culture of the day. So has Weimar Germany's policy of monetary inflation, though not nearly that severe. So has despair, though not nearly that severe. Weimar ended in the tyranny and war launched by the National Socialist Democratic Workers' Party (Nazis). The West must change direction if it is to avoid a similar outcome.

3. Reform Without Biblical Wisdom

There is a tendency on the part of deeply ideological groups to work for the destruction of the present world order, which is run by an Establishment. Anti-Establishment ideologues work for social revolution on the assumption that their group will pick up the pieces. Without the destruction of the present order, they say, there is no hope. Simultaneously, the current Establishment is desperate to consolidate its much-heralded new world order. It does so by means of its traditional strategies: political manipulation, control over money, control over education, international treaties, government-regulated trade agreements, government subsidies to big business and large voting blocs, and elitist initiation.

Christians should recognize that the market for wisdom is almost always minimal, except in historically rare periods, such as the late Roman Empire, Europe in the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation, and America's two religious revivals.¹¹ A revival of interest in God's wisdom is abnormal. When societies self-destruct, they are not often replaced by a Christian social order. Christians should work toward the reconstruction of the existing social order, but they had better recognize that the market for wisdom is limited today. Their message has not been taken seriously, any more than it was taken seriously in Solomon's day. The distressed masses run toward new, radical variations of today's Moloch state. There is nothing new under the sun.

11. The First Great Awakening (1730–50) and the Second Great Awakening (1801–50).

They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them (1:30–32).

Occasionally the market for wisdom increases. “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (v. 33). That is our hope today—our realistic but currently utopian hope.

Conclusion

The introductory remarks in Proverbs are an expansion of the closing remarks of Ecclesiastes: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).¹² Wealth has a purpose. Wisdom tells us what this purpose is: a means of dominion. We are to think God’s thoughts after Him, bringing all things into judgment, according to His standards of righteousness.

This is not an exclusively private faith with exclusively private consequences. It is a public faith with public consequences. It is covenantal faith. It involves the whole of society. This is why wisdom must be in the streets, calling covenant-breakers to turn back from their poverty-producing ways.

12. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 45.

5

PATHS OF RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler [shield] to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path (Prov. 2:6–9).

The early sections of the Book of Proverbs deal with man's gaining wisdom from God: "To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding" (1:2). Wisdom is seen as the most valuable asset a person can possess. "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then thou shalt understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (2:4–5). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7).¹

The process begins with the word of God, this proverb says. "For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." This is *special revelation*. This is given uniquely to covenant-keepers. "He is a buckler [shield] to them that walk uprightly." That is, God defends His people in their walk before Him.

Here, as elsewhere in the Bible, wisdom is described as a pathway. Men walk down paths. A man walks on one path at a time. A pathway can head for destruction. This is the path of the unrighteous. In contrast is the path of righteousness. This proverb says that God preserves the way of the saints.

This preservation of their pathway is a gift of God. God grants to some people the wisdom to pursue judgment. The meaning here is judicial, but judgment is a broader concept than civil law. It means the ability to assess the events of life in terms of God's holy law. *Judgment*

1. Chapter 2.

is ethical.

"Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path." This proverb indicates that God directs men's steps down a particular path. Over time, the day-by-day obligation to make personal decisions creates understanding in the minds of the decision-makers. The indication here is that *the exercise of good judgment is cumulative.*

There are multiple paths of righteousness, according to Proverbs. These paths are revealed in the Bible. It is basic for long-term success that people walk in these paths. Those who leave these paths of righteousness thereby choose the ways of darkness (2:13), the paths to death (2:18). God calls the paths of righteousness, "the paths of life" (2:19).

To follow these righteous paths is to acknowledge and observe as morally and economically binding the biblically revealed foundations of long-term economic success: "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (2:21–22). The message here is this: in their respective pursuit of righteousness and unrighteousness, *covenant-keepers will displace covenant-breakers in history.* This comes as a result of the widespread exercise of righteous judgment. The positive sanctions of God's covenantal legal order overwhelm whatever positive benefits that are reaped by covenant-breakers through their adherence to the externals of biblical law. Over time, good gets better and bad gets worse, both ethically and culturally. *Covenant-keeping builds a permanent civilization. Covenant-breaking does not.*

As more people in society develop the skills associated with judging events and people's actions, the social order becomes more consistently biblical. Wisdom is not merely personal. It is corporate. This proverb says that God provides such wisdom. It is a form of grace, i.e., a *favor unmerited* by the person or society receiving the gift from God. This can be described accurately as *a subsidy from God.* He subsidizes His people. They in turn extend His dominion visibly in history.

This proverb provides insight into the process of dominion. This process is above all ethical. It is part of God's covenant with His people. Through the special revelation of biblical law, covenant-keepers extend the visible jurisdiction of God's kingdom. God then rewards them visibly, as members of His kingdom. The goal is the fulfillment of

the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28).² This is to take place in time and on earth.

Conclusion

The Book of Proverbs makes it clear that *the search for wisdom is the most important of all of men's investments*. We need a more complete wisdom than that which is innate to us (Rom. 2:14–15),³ for sin has distorted our judgment and our ability to follow what we know to be morally binding (Rom. 1:18–22).⁴ This wisdom must be paid for: search costs and self-discipline. This was Christ's point in His parable of the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:44–46).⁵ While men are given some wisdom through common grace⁶—sufficient to keep them alive for a time on earth, and also sufficient to condemn them on judgment day (Rom. 1:18–22)—this *unmerited gift* (the meaning of the word “grace”) is nevertheless incomplete. Men must search for wisdom. Men's knowledge of the paths of righteous judgment, and their subsequent willingness to walk in them—to become doers of the word and not hearers only (Rom. 2:13; James 1:22)—is the source of their long-term prosperity.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 31.

6. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

6

VISIBLE SUCCESS

My son, do not forget my teaching, but guard my commands in your heart; for long life and years in plenty will they bring you, and prosperity as well. Let your good faith and loyalty never fail, but bind them about your neck. Thus will you win favour and success in the sight of God and man (Prov. 3:1–4, NEB).

Normally, I use the King James Version to introduce each chapter, but in this case, the New English Bible brings out the substance of the passage far more graphically. The translation has a weakness, however: the translation of the Hebrew word, *torah*, as “teaching,” rather than “law.” It should read, “do not forget my law.” The link between biblical law and visible prosperity is made clear by Solomon. It is the same link that is established by Deuteronomy 28:1–14.¹ Adherence to God’s laws brings visible, external benefits. These benefits are long life and plenty.

A. Long Life

We have seen this before. The promise of long life is found in Exodus 20:12: “Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”² Paul wrote that this is the first commandment with a promise (Eph. 6:2). Long life is a universally recognized benefit. When a culture adheres to the tenets of biblical law, this proverb informs us, its inhabitants will be blessed by longer life spans. A biblical law-abiding civilization will be able to be differentiated from biblical law-transgressing civilizations by means of statistically measurable life expectancies.

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

One economically relevant effect of this would be inexpensive life insurance policies. The risks associated with insuring the life of a person within a given age group will be lower than the risks of insuring the life of a person within the same age group in a law-transgressing culture. In other words, a company that attempted to charge the same annual premium (fee) for both societies would experience financial losses. In the law-abiding society, the attempt to charge a premium schedule appropriate in a law-transgressing society would result in loss-producing price competition from companies that charge lower fees. Similarly, any attempt to charge the lower premiums of the law-abiding society in a law-transgressing society would also produce losses. The premiums would not cover losses from the payment of death benefits to the heirs. There would be too many deaths per thousand, compared with the number of deaths per thousand within the same age group in the biblical law-abiding culture. This is what I mean by the phrase “statistically measurable.” The differences would be statistically relevant, meaning financially relevant in this example.

Long life is a very specific promise. It is not something that can be relegated to the hypothetical realm of the exclusively spiritual. The Bible is not speaking merely of a “better outlook on life,” or a “deeper spiritual life,” but *statistically longer life expectancy* for members of any given age group. While good people can and do die young, more of them will survive into old age than in biblical law-transgressing societies. If the Bible is true, then certain predictions concerning life expectancy will be verifiable, and verifiable in economically relevant ways, namely, life insurance premium schedules. (I am speaking here of annual renewable term insurance—death-benefit insurance—rather than insurance policies that provide some sort of savings program.)

The life expectancy of those living in the West, and in nations that have adopted Western attitudes toward ethics, is higher than that which prevails in Third World cultures that are openly demonic or animistic, and also higher than in Third World cultures that have adopted Eastern monism as their philosophical foundation, which always includes mysticism as a way to escape the burdens of material existence. We have seen a steady increase in life expectancy in the West, especially since the Protestant Reformation. Western industrialism and Western agriculture combined with Western medical techniques to create a culture in which men have a legitimate hope for longer life. This culture was the product—though not exclusively—of the Protest-

ant religion.³

B. Plenty

If the benefits of adhering to biblical law are visible in the area of life expectancy, as promised, then the economic benefits described in verse 2 should also be visible. The promise of “plenty” and “prosperity” is not to be understood as applying exclusively to the inner realm of the converted man’s spirit. This promise must also apply to the external, measurable realm.

This is crucially important for a proper understanding of economic growth in the West, especially since about 1780, but also during the Middle Ages, as described by Prof. Lynn White, Jr. in his book, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1962). Biblical attitudes toward thrift, diligence in one’s occupation, the legitimacy of wealth (anti-envy), and faith in progress—in time and on earth (eschatological optimism/postmillennialism)—all combined to produce rapid economic growth, especially in the two societies most influenced by Puritanism, England and New England, and also in the Netherlands and Switzerland, which had been heavily influenced by Continental Calvinism. In Japan, an essentially Protestant attitude toward the future and toward the possibility of long-term progress has prevailed since the late nineteenth century.

Men will win favor in the eyes of other men and God if they show mercy and loyalty. They will be acknowledged as successful. This testifies to the existence of almost universally recognized signs of personal and national prosperity. There is sufficient revelation to men through nature and through their own minds to convince most men of the benefits of economic growth. Without this revelation, and without men’s ability to respond to it, we could devise no statistically measurable indexes of wealth. We could not even define wealth. Men are made in the image of God; so, they recognize the external tokens of His favor when they see it. The economic success of a society governed by biblical law is, in fact, a means of international evangelism. “Keep therefore and do them [my commandments]: for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and under-

3. Max Weber was closer to the truth than his critics were. *His Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905–6) presented the case. For my assessment, see Gary North, “The ‘Protestant Ethic’ Hypothesis,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976).

standing people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all the things that we call upon him for?" (Deut. 4:6–7).⁴ If men did not see before them the tokens of God's favor and success, and if there were no universally recognized standards of success, including economic success, then the testimony of God to pagan cultures would be drastically weakened. The common ground among men—the image of God—brings a degree of agreement concerning the general benefits of life that are worth pursuing. Such agreement is not perfect, for the image of God is twisted by sin, but there is at least a working agreement.

Conclusion

There should be no guilt associated with wealth gained through adherence to biblical law. Such wealth is, in fact, a legitimate reward for honoring God and a testimony of the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises, as the words of Proverbs explicitly state. Wealth earned in this fashion is a means of evangelism: not just money to finance missions, but wealth to display before pagans whose covenant-breaking economic philosophies—socialism, Marxism, Keynesianism—have produced either widespread poverty or slow economic growth.

The hostile attitude toward private, personal wealth—but not wealth controlled by state bureaucrats—that was displayed by Ronald Sider in his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), was in flagrant opposition to these verses. David Chilton was correct in his 1981 critique of Sider: we were *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*.⁵

With Red China's abandonment of Communism after Deng Xiao Ping's reform of 1978, soon making China the fastest growing large economy in history, and with the collapse and then disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991, the antipathy toward capitalism has grown muted, both within the humanist intelligentsia and Christian aca-

4. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

5. In the year Chilton died, 1997, Sider's 4th edition of *Rich Christians* was published. Here, he backed away from the hard-line anti-capitalist stance of the book's earlier editions. He even adopted several of Chilton's recommended anti-interventionist reforms of Keynesianism's state-regulated market, although without mentioning Chilton. The fifth edition appeared in 2005. In the four editions published after Chilton's book appeared, Sider never mentioned Chilton's book, which Chilton revised twice to deal with later editions of *Rich Christians*. For my review of Sider's 4th edition, see North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F: "The Economic Re-Education of Ronald J. Sider."

demia. In short, visible economic results eventually do persuade critics of the free market that the free market produces more rapid economic growth than any alternative system of ownership. Their criticisms then turn to other issues, which usually involve a critique of the tastes of the common man, who can buy more of what he wants under the free market social order.

THEOCENTRIC DECISION-MAKING

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil (Prov. 3:5–7).

A. God's Thoughts and Man's Thoughts

Solomon contrasts God with man's understanding. It should be clear that the words, "thine own understanding," refer to man's thoughts when they oppose God's thoughts—the failure of self-proclaimed autonomous man to think God's thoughts after Him. Solomon calls men to conform their thoughts to God's thoughts in any given historical situation. The alternative? "Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee, and thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know" (Isa. 47:10–11).

The whole of man's confidence should be in God, the sovereign Creator of the universe. None of man's confidence should be placed in any aspect of the creation. The authority of the Creator over the creation is thereby affirmed. God is trustworthy; the creation, including man, is not.

The *Creator-creature distinction* underlies Solomon's exhortation. Man must put his trust either in God or in some aspect of the universe. There is no third option. When he makes a decision, it must be in terms of information, personal evaluation of that information, and a concept of cause and effect. What undergirds cause and effect? What is the reliable source of knowledge regarding cause and effect? This is

the great debate over epistemology: “What can man reliably know, and how can he know it?” The Bible’s answer is clear: “Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed” (Ps. 37:3). Again, “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Ps. 37:5). “O, LORD, know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). If a man humbles himself before God, acknowledging his position as a wholly dependent creature, then God will favor him and see to it that he does not pursue an evil, self-defeating course of action.

God directs the steps of all men, sinners and faithful. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). The path a man walks is laid out by God beforehand. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The question is: Will a man admit his total dependence on God, seek God’s will, and then follow it?

How can a man seek God’s guidance? Does God whisper strategies in a man’s ear? The Bible says that men must turn to the Bible-revealed law of God to gain access to His guidance. To find God’s law is to find Him. “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:10–11). The mastery of God’s commandments gives to men the access to the wisdom required to achieve success.

B. Efficient Sinning

The modern economist assumes a universe devoid of cosmic personalism. He speaks about economic efficiency without any consideration of God’s law or the relationship between covenantal conformity to God’s law and external economic successes. Only men and men’s desires are relevant to him. If men want to gamble, or read pornography, or consort with prostitutes, or pursue homosexual experiences, then the free market will provide supplies to equal demand at market-clearing prices. Any civil law prohibiting such activities is discussed by free market economists in terms of such concepts as the resulting black markets, the increased costs of obtaining these consumer services and goods (including information costs), the misallocation of resources, and the structural inefficiencies created by the threat of coercion.

Methodological individualism offers no justification for such civil laws—or any civil laws, for that matter.¹

Without criminal charges from an injured party, economist and legal theorist F. A. Hayek argued, society cannot formulate rules against “victimless crimes,” if rules regarding “actions toward other persons” arise only from court disputes, which Hayek favored. He assumed atheism, yet did not offer any evidence. “At least where it is not believed that the whole group may be punished by a supernatural power for the sins of individuals, there can arise no such rules from the limitation of conduct against others, and therefore from the settlement of disputes.”² In short: *no God—no victimless crimes*, since there is no heavenly judgment against “innocent bystanders”—bystanders who refuse to press the claims of God’s law in the legislatures and the courts.

Contrary to modern philosophy, ours is a world of cosmic personalism.³ God is totally sovereign over all things. Therefore, when men ignore Him, even when pursuing their goals “efficiently,” they find in the end that they have achieved damnation at a cut-rate price. In fact, it is a sign of God’s grace to them and also to godly people that He intervenes and restrains men in their quest for efficient sinning. If nuclear and biological weapons become available at discount prices for quantity purchases, then men will better understand the grace involved in the limits that God puts on certain free-market quests.

Does God require that every decision we make throughout the day be prayed about? Do we need to pray each time we decide to cross a street? No. The psychology of total dependence is to lead to *responsible decision-making*, not to endless self-doubts and hesitation about our familiar daily activities. We should hide God’s word in our hearts, so that godly, careful behavior takes place instinctively, analogous to the way that a trained athlete does not think about each response, each move of his body. The athlete trains in advance; the Christian should do the same.

Conclusion

Eastern religions call for men to “empty” themselves and let un-

1. Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York University Press, [1982] 1998). (<http://www.mises.org/rothbard/ethics.pdf>)

2. F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, vol. 1, *Rules and Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 101.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

known forces take possession of their thoughts and actions. The Zen Buddhist trains for years in irrational “koans” (“What is the sound of one hand clapping?”) and in physical deprivation, including unpredictable punishments from the master for seemingly harmless acts. God’s way is different: a life of intellectual and moral discipline in terms of God’s Bible-revealed word, which is the foundation of rationality, predictability, and control over internal human nature and external nature. God’s chastisement is not irrational, nor is it to be despised (Prov. 3:11–12). It is the pathway to life and dominion, for it teaches us to master His Bible-revealed law and to rely on His grace in Jesus Christ, which is our way of acknowledging His sovereignty over our lives and His creation.

8

GOD'S RIGGED ECONOMY

Honour the LORD with thy substance; and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine (Prov. 3:9–10).

A. Firstfruits and Blessings

This is a very brief recapitulation of Exodus 22:29 and 23:19, regarding the requirement of the firstfruits offering, and Deuteronomy 28:8: “The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and He shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” The Lord commands His blessing upon those faithful to His law.

First, this was not a suggestion under the Mosaic covenant. The passages in Exodus are very clear: giving God the firstfruits is not optional. Exodus 22:29 reads: “Thou shalt not delay to offer first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give to Me.” The people of Israel had seen what happened to the firstborn sons of Egypt. They understood just how serious God is about collecting what is rightfully His. The Levites had been established as the representative firstborn sons of Israel (Num. 3:12–13). They were wholly God’s, dedicated to full-time service in the tabernacle (Num. 3:7).¹

Second, the firstfruits were a token offering. By far the greater expense was the lost time and long walk involved in journeying to the city where the tabernacle and then the temple were located. The firstfruits were part of Israel’s system of annual festivals. These festivals are no longer operational, for they had to do with Israel as a sanctuary: a uniquely holy nation, which meant a nation set apart by God for His

1. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3.

purposes.² The firstfruits were part of the Mosaic land laws and the priestly laws. These are annulled. This is not true of the tithe (Matt. 23:23).

Third, the command offers a profitable result: external blessings. Specifically, honoring God with the fruits of one's labor results in economic growth. Furthermore, the words "barns" and "presses" are plural. The covenantally faithful person should expect overwhelming economic success. The writer has directed his injunctions to his son (Prov. 3:1, 11), meaning a single individual. He is not speaking to a group. Thus, when the plural is used for barns and presses, it indicates wealth for an individual.

The relationship between blessing and firstfruits offerings is obvious. The firstfruits were grain and wine (Ex. 22:29). The blessings referred to in this proverb are full barns and full wine presses. In other words, *that with which men honor God is that with which God will honor men*. God says "them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2:30). God establishes with men a reciprocal relationship with respect to honor. Give God honor, and He will give you honor. Give God of your substance, and He will return the offering.

B. A Gambler's Delight

A gambler would be happy to play a game of chance that is rigged by "the house" to pay him more than he put "into the pot." If he could deduct one coin to pay to "the house" each time he won, in order to get the management to continue to rig the game in his favor, he would be happy to make this pay-off. Gambling casinos are well aware of this possibility. "Pit bosses" roam the floor, looking for signs that the casino's card dealers are favoring a particular player. If a player continues to receive winnings above what is statistically normal—that is, if a player continues to win at all—then management takes a close look at the dealer. The management assumes that the dealer could be being paid off by the winner.

God tells us that He, as the owner of the "house," has rigged "the game" in favor of those who honor Him. This proverb deals with the firstfruits offering, which is no longer operational under the New Covenant, since the firstfruits offering was tied to the holy land and the

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 54.

holy place of the tabernacle-temple. It was paid to the Levites. The tithe remains binding, even though the Levites are no more. Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matt. 23:23).³ We are not to leave the other—tithing—undone.

The general principle of honoring God, as the owner of creation in general and each individual in particular, by paying a tithe on our increase comes under the terms of this proverb. A person who pays a mere 10% of his increase above the capital he put into the investment will be permitted to “stay in the game” and collect his winnings. Just as surely as there are statistical regularities wherever the law of large numbers operates, God honors those who honor Him by giving their firstfruits to Him.

Why is it that gamblers continue to play a game that they know is rigged against them by the house, yet they refuse to work for a living in a universe that is rigged in favor of those who pay a mere 10% of their increase to the Management? Why is it that even God’s people refuse to acknowledge the relationship between tithing and economic success? *Because they believe in a world of cosmic impersonalism.*⁴ The gambler believes in a world of chance, fate, and luck, which are irreconcilable concepts. The serious gamblers also believe in statistical patterns, which is why they devote time to studying which cards have been dealt earlier in the game. They try to “beat the odds” scientifically, yet they know that the odds are against them from the moment they sit down at the table. They prefer to believe in impersonal “runs of luck” to overcome the impersonal “stacked deck” of statistical probability. In short, their faith is in cosmic impersonalism, not God. They prefer playing a supposedly impersonal game to working in a God-controlled personal universe.

These verses inform us of a universe that is totally personal. Its laws are established in terms of persons: God and men. Those who honor the person of God by paying a tithe on their increase will find that their works prosper in the sight of men. This cause-and-effect relationship is supposed to reinforce the faith of the faithful in the reliab-

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [2000] 2012), ch. 46.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

ility of this covenant (Deut. 8:18).⁵ It is also supposed to challenge the false religions of foreigners to the faith (Deut. 4:6).⁶

Such a universe warns men of their ultimate destiny. They are headed for judgment. The visible things of this world testify clearly to the invisible things (Rom. 1:20).⁷ Thus, the predictable relationship between faithful giving and God's faithful returning challenges men's faith in the impersonal laws of probability. In an impersonal universe, there should be no predictable relationship of the kind proclaimed by Solomon. Between hard work and output, yes; between future-oriented thrift and income, yes; between bribing an official and rewards, yes; but not between giving money to God's earthly agency of tithe-collecting—the local church⁸—and subsequent prosperity. Should such a relationship exist, the whole foundation of rebellious man's epistemology would be shattered. This is why rebels prefer gambling to tithing. Better to lose to a man-rigged, probability-governed wheel or a deck of cards than to prosper in terms of a God-rigged universe. Better to honor with all of one's substance the corporations that control the gambling tables than to honor God with 10 percent of one's increase. The ethical rebel is a statistically predictable loser; he knows it, the "house" knows it, and God knows it.

Conclusion

By honoring God through the payment of a tithe, we place ourselves under the principle of reciprocal honor: ". . . them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (I Sam. 2:30). This proverb, following the passages in Exodus governing the firstfruits offering, proclaims that a token economic honoring upward results in considerable economic honoring downward. This system of mutual honoring rested on a concept of cosmic personalism.

Gambling rests on incompatible concepts: impersonal chance, impersonal fate, impersonal luck, and impersonal laws of probability. Men seek what is statistically improbable: prosperity by betting against the odds. They believe they are somehow personally special in a world

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

8. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

of cosmic impersonalism. Lady luck may smile on them, assuming there is a lady who smiles, which they do not believe. So, they place at risk the goods that God has given to them. They honor the turn of a card or the spin of a wheel by giving back their wealth.

Sadly, those Christians who decry gambling but who do not believe in tithing have not understood the relationship between tithing and prosperity nearly so well as they have understood the relationship between gambling and poverty. They live in an epistemological no-man's land, caught between the impersonal laws of large numbers and the cosmic personalism of God's law. They cannot make up their minds about which kind of law really governs the day-to-day operations of the universe. They fail to believe in God's law as a tool of dominion. Until they make up their minds, they will remain neither big winners nor big losers.

Life is not a game. It is not governed by the law of large numbers. It is a brief period of testing in which men declare their faith publicly, both verbally and in terms of their actions, i.e., in word and deed. The firstfruits offering was a token public declaration of the Israelites' faith, both individually and corporately. God promised to reward those who made this token payment. While this annual festival is no longer required, the tithe is. The same principle applies: *a token payment to God yields a large reward*. The cause-and-effect system that governs investing reflects God's covenantal structure of sanctions. Economic law is rigged in favor of covenant-keepers who really do keep the terms of the covenant. This system of causation is neither impersonal nor random.

9

THE VALUE OF WISDOM

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her (Prov. 3:13–18).

Here, Solomon praises wisdom. Wisdom is the source of the two greatest measurable positive sanctions: wealth and long life. So, he insists that “the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies.” These things can be used to purchase anything offered in the marketplace. But wisdom brings these things. You cannot buy wisdom with silver, gold, and rubies. You can obtain silver, gold, and rubies through wisdom. He repeats this advice:

For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it (8:11).

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver! (16:16).

Speaking in the name of wisdom, he writes:

Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures (8:18–21).

Wisdom is the source of the goods that money can buy. Wisdom

therefore ought to be higher than these goods on a wise man's scale of values. The fact that so few people place wisdom above silver, gold, and rubies indicates that wisdom is in even shorter supply than silver, gold, and rubies.

A. What Is Wisdom?

When God asked Solomon what he wanted in life, Solomon asked for wisdom.

Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great? And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king (II Chron. 1:10–11).

His reason for asking for wisdom? Wisdom would enable him to judge the nation. So, God granted him his request. Solomon gained this ability, which the people recognized. “And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment” (I Kings 3:28).

Wisdom is the ability to make accurate judgments. How? By applying fixed ethical principles to specific situations. What are these fixed principles? Elsewhere, Solomon answered this question. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).¹ Covenant-keepers should think representatively, on behalf of God.² They should think ethically, applying biblical law to circumstances.³ They should think judicially, applying His Bible-mandated sanctions.⁴ They should think about the con-

1. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 45.

2. Point two of the biblical covenant model. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>); Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

3. Point three: *ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

4. Point four: *ibid.*, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

sequences of their decisions and also people's actions in the future.⁵

B. The Productivity of Wisdom

Wisdom brings to wise people the benefits that other people seek to purchase with gold and silver. Wisdom is the source of gold and silver, which in turn provide access to whatever is offered for sale. When a person can accurately assess the specifics of a situation, and then apply God's law to this situation, his decision will produce profit rather than loss. This world is governed by covenantal cause and effect. The wise person recognizes this and adheres to biblical law: the commandments of God.

It is possible to obtain gold and silver by defying God's law. The Psalmist recognized this (Ps. 73). But covenant-breakers face a world in which the system of inheritance is structured to transfer the wealth of the unjust to the just. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (13:22).⁶ The economy is rigged in favor of the covenant-keeper. "Honour the LORD with thy substance; and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (3:9–10).⁷

Conclusion

Biblical wisdom is a biblical law-based ability to make judgments, which in turn produce positive real-world results. This proverb's assertion of a connection between wisdom and wealth is based on God's covenant. So, it is wise to pursue wisdom rather than wealth. Wisdom can and does produce wealth. Wealth rarely produces wisdom.

5. Point five: *ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

6. Chapter 41.

7. Chapter 8.

10

PAYING DEBTS PROMPTLY

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. Devise not evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee (Prov. 3:27–29).

A. Protecting the Weaker Party

The Mosaic law specified that wages must be paid at the end of the working day. “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning” (Lev. 19:13). The worker is in a weak position. He expects prompt payment because the law mandates this. An employer who delays payment upsets the plans of his employees. They have made decisions based on the legitimate expectation of payment at the end of the work day. To force them to scramble for money, or to delay payment to others, is to disrupt the chain of payments. It increases the level of uncertainty.¹

The prompt payment of one’s debts is a moral obligation. The neighbor who comes and requests whatever is owed to him deserves full consideration. The person who owes his neighbor anything is supposed to pay him upon request.

In a world of debt, it pays the debtor to delay repayment as long as possible if he is not paying any interest. Interest is an inescapable factor in human action. It is not a phenomenon limited to modern industrial economies. It stems from the time-preference factor of all human decision-making. Men prefer the present use of a scarce econom-

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 13. See also Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 61.

ic resource to the use of the same asset in the future, other things being equal. Thus, there is *a discount of future goods against present goods*. This discount is called the rate of interest.

We normally say that the debtor “has the use of the money.” By this we mean that he has possession of scarce economic resources. These may be in the form of financial instruments, such as bank accounts, bonds, or other interest-producing assets. They may also be in the form of capital assets, such as tools. The point is, it is the debtor rather than the creditor who is able to use these assets in the present for his own personal benefit. He has control of the assets he borrowed.

B. Borrowed Gold

Consider the case of a monetary debt. A man owes his neighbor 20 ounces of gold. He has the gold on hand, but he believes that the paper money-denominated price of gold is likely to drop. He plans to sell the gold for a few days, take payment in paper money, and then repurchase the 20 ounces later at a lower price. He then pockets the difference between the original sales price in paper money and the later, lower repurchase price. This is what is known as “selling short.” It involves economic uncertainty, since no one can be certain of the economic future.

During the time in which the debtor uses the gold for this purpose, the creditor cannot collect his property. He could make the same transaction. He could pocket the extra paper money that a successful “short” strategy would produce. Or he might want to loan the gold to someone else for an interest payment. Or he might want to buy a capital asset of some sort with the gold, especially at today’s higher price for gold. If he cannot gain access to his gold, he loses the interest he might otherwise have received, or the opportunity to sell short, or the opportunity to buy the capital asset. Because the debtor has possession of the gold, he has an instrument of personal gain at his disposal.

The debtor wants the present use of the asset if he can avoid paying interest to the creditor. The creditor, on the other hand, has an economic incentive to repossess it on the agreed-upon date. Each man wants it in the present. There is a discount of future goods against identical present goods. Clearly, if you can retain possession of a more valuable asset (the asset in the present) and pay for its use by means of a less valuable asset (the discounted future value that you presently impute to the asset), you have an economic incentive to do so.

C. A Lying Debtor

Who should receive this asset? The Bible is clear: the owner, the one to whom it is due at a particular time. The existence of such a moral prohibition on retaining another man's property for an extra period of time is the result of God's awareness of a fundamental aspect of human action: *time-preference*, the foundation of the rate of interest.²

To keep possession of it when it is in one's hand is an "evil" (v. 29). It is a form of theft. The debtor, for whatever particular investment possibility, keeps it from the person who lawfully owns the asset. The rightful owner therefore forfeits whatever investment opportunities are available to him for the duration of the period of delay. This loss has been forced upon him by the debtor, who is profiting at the owner's expense.

The modern version of this evil is the familiar refrain, "Your check is in the mail." The creditor asks for prompt payment, and the debtor lies to him. Instead of saying "tomorrow I will give," the debtor says, "in a few days, you'll receive your money." This lie is even worse: it implies that the debtor has, in fact, already fulfilled his commitment. The creditor is not patiently foregoing payment, as in the case of the neighbor in Proverbs 3:28, who accepts the word of the debtor that he does not have the money, but will have it the next day. The creditor is led in this case to believe that the obligation has been met.

In the late medieval era, when all interest payments from loans to fellow Christians were prohibited, moneylenders developed a way to get around the prohibition by means of the ethics of this passage. Lenders would lend money, but only because the debtor made a verbal, unrecorded commitment to delay payment on the loan. Then the borrower would make a penalty payment—not technically an interest payment—to the lender because of the delay. The lender could go into a court of law or a church court, if necessary, and defend his acceptance of this extra money as a legitimate return for late payment (*more debitoris*). This was one of several legal technicalities (ethical subterfuges) by means of which a market for loanable funds was maintained in spite of an official prohibition on all interest payments.³

The reason why men resorted to such subterfuges is that the eccle-

2. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

3. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 103.

siastical authorities had misinterpreted the Old Testament passages that prohibited interest from a charitable loan to an impoverished fellow believer. They had interpreted these passages as universal condemnations of all interest, which they called “usury.” Thus, they established a price control—a price ceiling of zero—on “the price of money,” meaning a price control on the inescapable discount of future goods against present goods. The result, predictably, was a shortage of funds—at the artificially low price—on the legal loan markets.

Conclusion

Delaying payment is described here as an act of theft. Solomon reminds his listeners of what the Mosaic law requires. Prompt payment is mandatory.

The division of labor enables the vast majority to enjoy greater productivity and therefore greater wealth. The fulfillment of contractual and traditional obligations extends the realm in which the division of labor operates. Men cooperate with each other based on their expectation of mutual benefit. The employee expects prompt payment.

When men cannot trust each other to fulfill their obligations, they search for more reliable partners in production. The range of contacts is reduced. Output is reduced. Wealth is reduced.

11

SURETYSHIP: TRANSFERRING LIABILITY

My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth (Prov. 6:1–2).

Solomon is adamant about the necessity of avoiding surety. “Surety” is another word for co-signing for a loan. One man agrees to become responsible for the debts of another person, should that person default on his debt. The man who “strikes his hand” is obligated to honor the terms of the other man’s contract. He has accepted personal liability for another man’s economic performance.

Avoid such obligations, Proverbs teaches. “He that is surety for a stranger shall smart [know no peace, NEB] for it: and he that hateth suretyship is sure” (11:15). “A man void of understanding striketh his hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend” (17:18). “Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts” (22:26).

A. Collateralized Loans

There are rules for dealing with people who ignore this advice. A stranger is a person in the community who is not of the faith, and who therefore has no covenantal obligations either to the church or the wider covenanted community. If you lend to a stranger, be sure to take collateral from the person who has become the co-signer. The co-signer is now the “lender of last resort” for the stranger. The stranger may default. He may depart to a foreign land in the middle of the night. The person who has co-signed is therefore the most important individual in the transaction, as far as the creditor is concerned. Twice in Proverbs we find the following advice: “Take the garment that is surety

for a stranger: and take a pledge [collateral] of him for a strange woman" (20:16; 27:13).

The "strange woman" is synonymous with religious apostasy, which Proverbs contrasts with wisdom, meaning the fear of the Lord (Prov. 2). The strange woman represents the culture of Babylon (Rev. 17:3–6), a Jezebel culture. Anyone who would co-sign for such a person lacks good judgment. He is all too likely to be cheated by the predictably faithless debtor for whom he has co-signed. Collect collateral in advance from such a person.

The motives for co-signing are varied. The obvious one is friendship. A person is approached by a friend, who asks him to "strike hands," or in modern terminology, to "put his name on the dotted line."¹ Why is this necessary? Why doesn't the friend simply put his own name on the dotted line? The fact is, he does, but the creditor is doubtful about the ability of the first debtor to make good on the debt. The creditor may not be willing to transfer assets to this person, or at least not at the prevailing rate of interest. The creditor may want to extract a higher rate of interest in order to compensate himself for the extra risk involved in loaning to a high-risk debtor.

B. A Co-Signer

If this higher rate of interest is so high that the debtor is even less likely to repay the loan, the creditor simply refuses to make the loan. In order to decrease the risk of loss on the loan, the creditor imposes a new restriction. He tells the debtor to locate a more solvent person who will agree to repay the loan, should the original debtor default. This lowers the risk premium involved in the market rate of interest. Because the risk of loss is lower, the risk premium is lower, and therefore the rate of interest can be set lower. The creditor is protected. By spreading the risk of default, the creditor believes that his loaned funds are more likely to be repaid.

The co-signer therefore increases his own financial exposure. He is being asked to co-sign because a lender is doubtful about the character of the debtor, or about his competence, or whatever. The co-signer is saying that friendship, or his own personal evaluation of the debtor's ability and willingness to repay, counts for more than the evaluation of the potential creditor. He takes on the liability of repayment. He says, in effect, "the evaluation of my friend by the creditor is incorrect, and I

1. Contracts no longer have dotted lines. Perhaps they once did.

will demonstrate my confidence in my own superior judgment by co-signing.”

There is another possible motivation: charity. The co-signer expects his friend to default, but he co-signs anyway, in order to enable the first man to achieve his life’s goals. Co-signing such a loan is an act of grace—an unmerited gift. This was Christ’s motivation in laying down His life for His friends (John 15:13). He became surety for them (Heb. 7:22).

Insurance contracts were developed in the late Middle Ages that involved co-signing by risk-takers. Insurers would guarantee investors in a trading venture. If a merchant’s ship sank, they would repay the investors. For this, the insurers were guaranteed an insurance “premium”: a fixed percentage of the original investment. This was called “bottomry.” Because they bore the risk of failure, insurers made the venture possible, for investors would then put money into the project. But insurers (“co-signers”) were paid for taking this risk. They spread their risk by insuring numerous ventures.

Modern civil governments have taken on many responsibilities that private, voluntary co-signers might otherwise be asked to bear—and which they would decline to accept. But, unlike private insurers, the state does not enter the loan market in quest of financial profit. The state is buying political support and expanding state power by means of its ability to “sign the taxpayers’ names on the dotted line.” For example, the state creates guarantees for the repayment to lenders of private, profit-seeking loans to private companies or foreign nations, should the debtors default, thereby subsidizing both the lenders and the recipient companies or foreign governments. These state-subsidized debtors therefore obtain loans at below-market interest rates, since the risk premium in the private loans’ interest rates falls sharply.

The state also creates guarantees for depositors who put their money into government-insured banks and other lending agencies. This subsidizes these lending institutions and all those who borrow from them, since they can do business at lower interest rates. Higher-risk debtors can now obtain loans, because taxpayers are implicitly compelled by their rulers to co-sign for the government-insured lending institutions. Farmers receive guarantees for crop prices; they also gain access to below-market interest rates for home loans. The housing market especially has been subsidized ever since the 1930s in the United States by various loan-guarantee programs. An important political goal for any special-interest group is to become eligible for the

subsidy of government co-signed loans.

Because all loan markets are now linked directly to currency systems, domestic and international, the whole fabric of Western trade is threatened by default. The world has loaned to “strange women”; in fact, the whole system of modern political economy is operated by “strangers” to the faith. And because the co-signing is political and compulsory, few of the faithful can escape.

Modern interventionist civil governments have produced compulsory co-signing on a scale never dreamed of by Solomon. In effect, all tax-financed welfare programs are a form of surety. Citizens have become financially liable for each other’s mistakes, tragedies, and incompetence. The results are becoming clear: the threat of massive bankruptcies, either openly or through the concealed bankruptcy that is produced by monetary inflation.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of His people, He became surety for them (Heb. 7:22). The enormous cost involved in His becoming personally liable for His people’s eternal debts to God provides the most graphic example in all of history of the potential costs of one’s voluntary assumption of other men’s personal disabilities. *Christ bore unlimited liability.* Only a man fully willing to bear a great deal of risk—and who has the capital to repay the debt completely—should contemplate becoming surety for a friend. He must limit his liability.

Conclusion

Debt is always risky. The debtor can lose whatever collateral he possesses. Debt is more risky when a co-signing debtor does not know the economic position of someone he has co-signed for. Such debt places the preservation his wealth into the hands of someone who could not qualify for a loan, based on his own signature and assets. A co-signer’s plans can be disrupted by the failure of the primary debtor to pay his debt on time.

It is unwise to co-sign a note for anyone. It places your assets on the line. A person who does not have sufficient capital, including a good credit rating, to be granted a loan is a high-risk debtor. Creditors seek to protect their loans. They demand that a poor credit risk find someone else to put his name on the debt, meaning his wealth.

12

ANTS AND SLUGGARDS

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest (Prov. 6:6–8).

In Western folklore, the story of the grasshopper and the ant has been a familiar one for millennia. *Aesop's Fables* includes it. The diligent ant works through the summer, gathering food for the winter, while the carefree and careless grasshopper ignores the threat of winter. The grasshopper takes advantage of the summer weather to dance and sing, as if the good weather would last forever. He assumes that there are no future crises to prepare for by sacrificing today. When winter comes, he faces starvation. He then comes to the ant and begs for food. The ant refuses; there is insufficient food for both of them.

A. Survival and Success

This passage in Proverbs forces us to consider the requirements of survival and success. The New English Bible translates the passage as follows: “. . . but in the summer she prepares her store of food and lays in her supplies at harvest.” To imitate the ant, we must become future-oriented. We must begin to count the costs of our activities (Luke 14:28–30).¹ If we are unwilling to work hard today, we will come to poverty. “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth [as a robber, NEB], and thy want as an armed man” (vv. 9–11).

Sluggards resent the lifestyle of ants. The activities of ants testify to a world-and-life view different from that held by sluggards. The sluggard is content to sleep. He allows the events of life to pass him by. He

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

assumes that the peacefulness of sleep and the enjoyment of leisure can be purchased at zero cost or minimal cost. There is no crisis ahead, or if there is, nothing can be done to prepare for it successfully. There is no need to prepare for the future.

B. Class and Time Perspective

Edward Banfield, the Harvard political scientist, described this outlook as lower class. He said that class divisions in society are not based on the size of individual bank accounts or occupational status; they are based on a person's time perspective. Upper-class people are future-oriented. Lower-class people are present-oriented.² What characterizes the upper-class person is his diligence in sacrificing present pleasures for future productivity and achievement.³ Ludwig von Mises would say that upper-class people, as described by Banfield, have very low time-preference; they save for the future in response to very low interest rates. The upper-class society therefore enjoys relatively low rates of interest. Upper-class investors respond to low rates of interest, whereas the lower-class investor demands very high rates of interest in order to persuade him to forfeit the present use of his economic resources.⁴

Upper-class societies—future-oriented, high-thrift societies—tend to experience higher rates of economic growth. People buy what they want: future consumption rather than present consumption. In contrast, lower-class societies put a high premium on present consumption. They sacrifice future consumption in order to achieve this goal. Ants and sluggards have different goals and different time perspectives.

C. Pietism and Poverty

Pietism (e.g., certain types of fundamentalism and monasticism) and quietism (e.g., mysticism) focus their interest on “spiritual” goals, which are contrasted with material or “earthly” goals. Members of both groups believe that the proper perspective of New Testament believers is passivity toward the earthly future. They misinterpret Paul's

2. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 53–54.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–53.

4. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 18. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

words, “Be careful for nothing” (Phil. 4:6a), which can also be translated “be full of care for nothing,” or better yet, “have no anxiety” (NEB). They argue that Paul meant that we should not devote lots of resources to planning for the future and investing in terms of our plans. Christ’s warning in the Sermon on the Mount, “Take therefore no thought for tomorrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34), is interpreted to mean that all planning is unwise. Yet what Christ taught was the illegitimacy of a paralyzing worry about the future—a paralysis that leads to little planning, or planning to meet crises that never come. Such worry is wasteful. “But Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).⁵ The material blessings will follow when men concern themselves with establishing God’s kingdom.

The pietist interprets “kingdom of God” to mean the *kingdom of the internal*. He insists: “When men concern themselves with the details of prayer, church worship, and personal piety, then God will take care of them.” This belief is basic to the faith of the pietist. He believes that the practical, down-to-earth future-orientation represented by the behavior of the ant is a now-superseded Old Testament standard. With respect to material things, the pietist claims to be as unconcerned as the sluggard is. The pietist folds his hands for hours in prayer; the sluggard folds his hands for hours in slumber. In both cases, the approach is outwardly the same: folded hands. So is the outward result: poverty.

The biblical view is expressed by the actions of the ant: diligence concerning that which sustains life. “He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich” (10:4).⁶ Slack hands, folded hands: the result is poverty. “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (13:4).⁷ A fat soul and wealth can be compatible, although they can sometimes be incompatible (Ps. 106:15). Hard work, future orientation, thrift, attention to details, high income, and contentment under God: here is the Bible’s “wealth formula.”

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

6. Chapter 21.

7. Chapter 38.

D. Word and Bread

Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3b; Matt. 4:4⁸). Yet man does not live by the word of God alone, either, if by “word of God,” we mean an “internalized” word—reading only, prayer only, handing out tracts only, or preaching only. What is forbidden is the concept of separation of word and bread. We see this in 40 years of manna in the wilderness (Deut. 8:3a), and in Christ’s resumption of eating after the completion of His 40-day wilderness experience (Matt. 4:2). We also see it in the celebration of the Passover and the Lord’s Supper. What produced bread in the promised land of Canaan, when the manna ceased (Josh. 5:12), was not a program of strictly internal religious exercises, but attention to the whole of God’s word, including biblical law, and also including a thoughtful consideration of the ant, not to mention the sluggard.

Some American fundamentalists react in self-righteous outrage to Christians who spend money on dehydrated food storage programs, gold and silver coins—the economic equivalent of the construction of a tornado shelter. They say that such preparations for the future are a sign of a lack of faith in God, a humanistic concern with earthly cares of the world. Their shibboleth of shibboleths: “God will take care of me!” This really means that when a crisis comes, they will wind up on the doorsteps of those who did prepare, calling on them to show charity to them, which supposedly is their Christian duty. “God will take care of me” really boils down to “You ants will take care of me.” This is also the sluggard’s cry.

Jesus’ answer to these hand-folding critics is found in the parable of the 10 virgins, who awaited the return of the bridegroom. Five were wise and took oil in their lamps. Five were foolish and took no oil. “And all the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves” (Matt. 25:8–9). The result: “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (v. 10). Such is the fate of foolish virgins, sluggards, and pietists. God takes care of them, for sure, but not in the way they had hoped for.

8. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 1.

Conclusion

The ant is pictured here as future-oriented. She stores up food in summer. She sacrifices present consumption for the sake of future consumption.

The ant takes steps in summer to solve the problem of winter, when nature will produce no crops. The annual cycle of feast and famine is overcome by the actions of ants in laying up food in advance for the winter season.

No one tells the ant what to do. The ant does it naturally. Solomon tells the lazy person to imitate the ant, i.e., to become self-motivated. This is a feature of the free market. No government agency issues orders concerning what should be produced, yet self-motivated producers systematically provide goods and services that customers desire. This requires future-orientation and careful planning by producers.

13

FALSE SIGNALS AND UNRELIABILITY

A naughty [worthless] person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward [false] mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers. Frowardness [perversity] is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy (Prov. 6:12–15).

Moral worthlessness eventually translates into economic poverty. The person described here is someone who continually deals falsely with others. The wink, the crossed fingers, the special signals to partners in deceit: all are part of a pattern of unreliability. The person says one thing, but he communicates a different message to others who are part of the “inner circle” who understand the secret signs.

A. Deception and Discoordination

Secret signs and communications establish a psychological distinction between “them”—the suckers—and “us,” meaning those “in the know.” The deceiver is in fellowship with others who understand the meaning of the special signs. They see themselves as adversaries of those who do business with them. Others may adhere to their words and contracts, but the insiders do not feel bound by their own words. A promise is not seen as binding, and a contract is not to be fulfilled, unless it is immediately beneficial to the one who has made the promise.

The spread of such an outlook is disastrous for any society. Men must make decisions in life concerning the future. They are inescapably *interdependent* with other people. They attempt to achieve their goals through the voluntary cooperation of others, who are simultan-

eously pursuing their own goals. This *dovetailing of personal plans* is made possible by voluntary contracts. One man relies on another to assist him in completing his plans.

Deception increases the costs for everyone who is relying on the deceiver to fulfill the terms of his contract. The man is unreliable, yet other people have made plans in terms of his word. Even if they are not being defrauded deliberately, their plans will go awry. It will take extra time or capital to complete those plans because of the nonperformance of the deceiver.

This person actively spreads strife. He divides people from each other. Again, this increases other people's costs of cooperation. They find it more difficult to deal with each other because of mutual suspicions. One evil person is capable of disrupting the plans of many others. The dominion covenant is thwarted because the strife undermines the productivity that is the product of the division of labor. It takes longer and becomes more expensive to subdue the earth.

What is significant is the suddenness of his downfall. Normally, men receive warnings. They see other people grow wary of them. Their business revenues decline. They find it difficult to gain cooperation with other individuals, who fear they will go bankrupt and not perform their contractual obligations. In other words, as men conduct their daily affairs unwisely, other men call attention to their shortcomings, directly or indirectly. Unreliable people either learn from experience or else they see their income declining steadily.

There is another important factor to consider. The free market economy creates incentives to correct antisocial behavior. A man may learn directly from his profit-and-loss statements that he must restructure his business dealings. If he fails to repent (turn around), then some other person may be able to step in and offer to help the faltering business—for a fee, of course. Finally, competitors may step in and offer to buy up the business. Step by step, the free market economy allows other men to confront an inefficient man with the reality of his failures.

In contrast, this deceiver falls overnight. Whatever negative signals he receives are either ignored by him—he trusts no signals, being a misuser of signals—or else misinterpreted. Perhaps his partners in deception are now setting him up. They are doing to him what he did to others. Because he trusts the signals of his accomplices, he becomes vulnerable to them. Because he thinks fraud can overcome the pressures of the free market, he ignores signals from honest men. After all,

they are the suckers. A cunning man never gives a sucker an even break.

B. Price Controls

Government-enforced price controls are a form of false signals. The government tells the voters that they will be able to buy goods and services at below-market prices. But the bureaucrats are winking: at economic law, or at black market operators, or at insiders. Price controls misinform the public about the supposed availability of goods and services at prices that are artificially low (price ceilings). Those “on the inside” know better. They can arrange their economic affairs accordingly. Those who are not in the know—the majority of voters—become the suckers. The result: economic shortages (from price ceilings) or gluts (from price floors),¹ and the eventual disruption of the whole economy.

Price ceilings are especially insidious. The voters are deceived into believing that they can count on other citizens (sellers) when working out their respective plans. But sellers resist selling at a loss; they want unrecorded payoffs, or special barter deals, or other inducements to trade. This creates resentment and strife. It subsidizes envy. The controls generate improper responses to the true conditions of supply and demand. Eventually, the whole economy collapses or becomes stagnant. The more the false signals, the more devastating the collapse.

Calamity comes swiftly and without remedy. Nobody trusts the deceiver. He cannot gain cooperation of others because of the pattern of deception he has established. His “capital reserve”—a good reputation—is depleted. Without it, he finds it difficult to rebound from disaster. He needs cooperation, but he cannot find people who will sell it to him. He has priced himself out of the market. Dealing with him is too risky. Until the very end, he believes himself to be immune to false signals. This is his undoing: he fails to respond to accurate signals—signals that tell him to change his ways or else be judged.

Conclusion

Deception can be indulged in by individuals and civil governments. Individual deception has limited consequences, both to the deceiver and those deceived. Word gets out regarding a person’s lack of trust-

1. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 12:5.

worthiness. Government deception is more insidious, for it relies on people's trust in authority.

Price controls are forms of institutionalized deception. Government officials announce that an item must not be sold above a specific price. If free market conditions would produce a higher price, the item begins to go off the official, visible markets. Sellers refuse to sell for less than what the item is really worth, according to buyers' bids.

Deception increases the cost of doing business. It therefore reduces the amount of cooperation in the market. This reduces the division of labor and therefore productivity. A society's wealth is reduced from what it otherwise might have been.

In a free market, the penalties against deception reduce the quantity of deception at the margin: little by little. Negative feedback steadily pressures the deceiver to change his ways or else suffer more losses. In contrast, deception by governments continues, because the public's negative feedback rarely falls on the faceless officials who are enforcing the programs that rely on deception. There is not comparable pressure to change course.

THE LIGHT OF GOD'S LAW

My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life (Prov. 6:20–23).

A. Parents Represent God Judicially

Solomon identifies his own judgment with wisdom and the law. The early sections of Proverbs are focused on this theme: the importance of biblical wisdom, which is personified as female (Prov. 8) and equated with God, the source of life: “But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death” (8:36).

By making this identification, and also by including a mother's advice, Solomon asserts that it is possible for men to act as the legal representatives of God to their children. Parents come in the name of God, imparting His wisdom to their children. They bear lawful authority, and they have access to God's standards of righteous living.

It is a constant complaint against Christianity in our age that “No one knows the will of God.” This is used by relativists as a justification of opposing all civil law (anarchism), especially in sexual matters, or as a justification of the rejection of all Bible-based opposition to a particular civil law (statism). There is supposedly no law of God to infringe on man, either as an autonomous individual (anarchism) or as an autonomous collective species (statism). Because God is “wholly other,”¹ He cannot communicate with man; therefore, no man is mor-

1. The phrase is Karl Barth's, the most influential heretical Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. For critiques of Barth's theology, see Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism* (1947) and *Christianity and Barthianism* (1962), both published by P&R. Barth tried to shove God out of history and into Kant's unknowable noumenal

ally or legally bound to impose the terms of God's law on anyone else. God is so high that He cannot lift man up from sin. God is so pure that men need not strive to match the standards set by God. In short, the relativistic rebel asks, "Hath God said, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy' (Lev. 11:44)?" Then he answers his own question: "No; God says, 'Be ye unholy, for I alone am holy.'"

Solomon categorically rejects such argumentation. A parent who has personally mastered biblical law *does* have access to part of the mind of God. Paul wrote: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16).² This law is a revelation that is not the special wisdom of a closed priesthood. It is to be proclaimed to every citizen. In Israel, it was to be read every seventh year to the assembly of the people (Deut. 31:10–13).³ Because God holds men responsible for the performance of the terms of this law, He has revealed this aspect of Himself to men. Man is made in the image of God and can therefore receive God's law. The argument that God's mind is too far removed from man's mind is an attempt to deny man's nature as God's image-bearer. *It is an assertion of man's autonomy.*

B. Internalizing Biblical Law

Solomon tells his son that the law is to be mastered to such an extent that it is always with him. Its terms are to be indelibly etched into his heart, meaning the deepest recesses of his mind. The law is personified as a constant companion. "When thou goest, it shall go with thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee" (v. 22). When men ask mental questions, their answers should be structured by the very words of God. The mind is to encounter the law of God at all times. God's law is to guide men's thoughts.

When biblical guides men's thoughts, it should also guide their steps. *Without biblical law, men walk in darkness.* Like a blind man is he who departs from biblical law. He wanders aimlessly. Worse, he wanders into the pit of death. The reproofs of the law are "the way of life" (v. 23b). In other words, to be without biblical law's correction is

realm.

2. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

to be in the pathway of death.

C. Alive With God's Law

Is this different from New Testament teaching? Paul wrote: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death" (Rom. 7:9–10). What does this mean? It means exactly what Proverbs teaches. Sin deceives men; the law allows us to see what we are and where we are headed. The law points to our need for regeneration; without it, we perish. The law serves as our guide. If we did not have its testimony, we would not understand our fallen ethical condition.

To be "alive without the law" means to be ignorantly dead in our sins. It means that we do not understand our true spiritual condition. Paul was not saying that he was ethically pure, and therefore the possessor of eternal life, before he read the Mosaic law, for "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude [likeness] of Adam's transgression" (Rom. 5:14). The Mosaic law "killed" him in the sense that it showed him that he was already spiritually dead, as a son of Adam. Thus, the law pointed him toward the pathway of life, Jesus Christ.

Biblical law should be as basic to our decision-making as a flashlight's beam is on a dark night. A man who shines a light on the ground "naturally" steps only into the circle of light. He "naturally" avoids stepping into the darkness. He does not know what dangers lurk in the darkness, so in order to avoid possible dangers, he steps only on the lighted portion of the path.

We know that the very essence of the sin of man is to prefer spiritual darkness to light. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). *What is really "natural" to fallen man is to avoid the Bible's lighted ethical pathway.* Solomon therefore counsels his son to regard the ethical light cast by the law as he would regard the visible light cast by a lamp. The law is a "lamp unto our feet." But it takes training to learn to trust the light of the law. This trust is not instinctive in fallen man, which is why Solomon has given his son the Proverbs.

Conclusion

To keep from getting “tripped up” in life, men must adhere to the terms of biblical law. To have God’s law as your companion is to have a counselor who is looking out for your best interests. To act in terms of this law’s counsel is to walk in the pathway of life. Conforming instinctively to the law’s directing counsel should be like walking instinctively in the circle of light. It is our ethical responsibility to become instinctive conformers to the law.

15

RESTITUTION AND IMPARTIALITY

Men do not despise a thief, if he steals to satisfy his soul when he is hungry. But if he be found, he shall restore seven fold; he shall give all the substance of his house (Prov. 6:30–31).

A. Crime Against God and Man

Theft is a crime against God, the victim, and society. We should not argue that a “crime against property” is ethically subordinate to a “crime against mankind,” for property is simply “a bundle of rights of ownership,” and these rights are possessed by men under God. *A crime against property is therefore a crime against mankind.* Theft transfers wealth to law-breakers and away from those who have not broken a civil law. It transfers wealth from those who have served customers efficiently in a competitive market. It reduces the capital of those who have demonstrated their ability to meet the needs and wants of customers at prices the customers have been willing and able to pay. Theft therefore reduces the present wealth of individual victims, and it may reduce the future wealth of customers, who will not be equally well-served by those who had benefited them before—the productive victims of theft who have been decapitalized by the thieves. Theft also increases everyone’s uncertainty about his economic future, which in turn tends to raise the costs of protecting property, thereby lowering per capita wealth.

Another proverb announces: “Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (30:8–9).¹ Middle-class comfort is normally preferable to both poverty and great wealth, for both extremes involve temptations for sinning against God.

1. Chapter 85.

Neither grinding poverty nor great wealth is generally beneficial to the majority of men.

The poor man in this example has succumbed to the temptation. He has stolen bread, a staple of life. He is not a professional thief. He was hungry, and he took bread to satisfy his hunger. Who can blame him? *God blames him*. The law enforcement system blames him. He must pay “sevenfold” to the victim. Restitution is legally inescapable. Because he is poor, the extent of the restitution payment will hurt him greatly. He has so little that he stole bread. Any extra expense will disrupt his household. Nevertheless, he must pay up to “all the substance of his house.”

If he has no economic reserves at all, he will be sold into slavery to raise the money to pay his victim. This is great incentive for him to find the restitution payment money somewhere.

B. Restitution in the Mosaic Law

We should understand that the details of this incident are not to be taken literally. The law of God requires double restitution for all theft (Ex. 22:4),² except the theft and subsequent slaughter or sale of sheep (four-fold) and oxen (five-fold) (Ex. 22:1).³ Anyone familiar with biblical law knows that seven-fold restitution is a figurative term, like the seven-fold judgment of God on anyone who persecuted Cain (Gen. 4:15), and Lamech’s prideful boast of his ability to revenge himself 77-fold (Gen. 4:24), meaning eleven times greater than the God’s metaphorical restitution payment. Sometimes a number in the Bible is to be interpreted figuratively, not literally. Solomon knew that his audience would know the details of biblical law. What was his point in exaggerating? To make a point.

Few poor men would really be bankrupted by double restitution for a loaf of bread. The point is, the economic burden of the restitution payment would be proportionately greater for him than for a rich man who stole a loaf of bread. *The required restitution payment has nothing to do with the criminal’s ability to pay*. The law does not play favorites. God is not a respecter of persons (II Sam. 14:14). Both rich and poor must make restitution, which is based on the market price of the item stolen. Income, whether of the thief or his victim, has nothing to do

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, Tools of Dominion (1990), ch. 43.

3. *Idem*.

with the extent of restitution. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15).⁴ Restitution also has nothing to do with the victim’s feelings about the criminal. The criminal’s motivation is equally irrelevant. Rich or poor, hungry or fat, thieves must make restitution in terms of the value of the stolen property. The Bible condemns both deeper-pocket jurisprudence (deciding against the rich because they can afford the loss) and shallow-pocket jurisprudence (deciding in favor of the poor only because they are poor).

Solomon is warning us that if the Bible specifies punishment for a “trivial crime against property,” how much more is the punishment against adulterers, which is anything but trivial (vv. 32–35)? If a victim demands repayment from one whom he does not despise, will he allow his wife’s seducer to go free? If he refuses to show mercy to his wife, when biblical law is enforced, then the punishment must involve the death of both of adulterers (Lev. 20:10). The judicial issue here is victim’s rights.⁵

The predictability and impartiality of biblical law are to undergird the social order. All those who break the law are subject to its penalties. This points to the final judgment. God does not “grade on a curve.” Paul wrote: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). It may cost a convicted impoverished thief all that he owns to pay his debt to the victim. The debt must be paid. It will cost every ethical rebel an eternity in hell. The debt must be paid. The point is clear: *the debt must be paid*. There is no escape, no appeal to “circumstances,” no plea bargaining, and no suspended sentences. The law is rigorous, for the law’s Author is rigorous.

Conclusion

All men are equally protected when biblical law is enforced. Rich men are defended from poverty-stricken thieves; poverty-stricken owners are defended from rich thieves. *Economic uncertainty is reduced by the very certainty of the law’s penalties*. This benefits customers and producers, who can meet together and make exchanges, con-

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

5. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 33. Cf. Gary North, *Victim’s Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

fidest that all parties will be protected by law from fraud and theft. It leads to greater output through a more extensive division of labor—a division of labor based on voluntary exchange and the protection of private property.

LAW: NATURAL VS. CREATIONAL

Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth (Prov. 8:14–16).

A. Biblical law: A Tool of Dominion

God speaks in this chapter anthropomorphically as wisdom, a female source of power and blessings. “She crieth at the gates” (v. 3). Wisdom contrasts her ethics with Satan’s, also feminine (7:10–23). (This feminine identification is found only in Proverbs.) The conclusion: all those who hate me, says wisdom, love death (8:36b).

The link between understanding and strength is made explicit (v. 14). *Wisdom is a tool of dominion*. By following the counsel of wisdom, men attain power over external events. It is in terms of wisdom that kings reign, judges rule, and the nobility retains power. All the judges of the earth hold office by means of wisdom.

By identifying wisdom with God, the Bible proclaims the cosmic personalism of existence.¹ God is sovereign over all kings and rulers. He is not a manipulator behind the thrones of men. He is sovereign (Isa. 45). They are not.

Does this mean that all powerful rulers are God-fearing, or at least biblical law-abiding? No; Canaanite kings were reprobate and had to be destroyed. Does it mean that kings consciously understand that God is sovereign over them? Again, no; only after seven years of madness did Nebuchadnezzar acknowledge his dependence on God (Dan. 4). The Pharaoh of the exodus never did. Does it mean that there are universally understandable principles of natural law to which all rational men have access through human reason? No.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

B. Rival Legal Theories

The Bible teaches a creational version of natural law theory. This stands in contrast to humanism's natural law theories. Humanistic natural law theory asserts that there are universally valid governing principles in the world that can be discovered through the use of reason, meaning a neutral reasoning process unaided by God's special revelation in the Bible. Sometimes this reasoning capacity is called "right reason"—"wrong reason" being the process by which other natural law advocates reach conclusions that the defender of "right reason" disagrees with. The natural man studies logic and facts, and if he reasons correctly, the natural law theorist believes, this natural man can come to understand the governing principles of the universe. This reasoning process is inductive. A gathering of facts, when coupled with a study of logic, can result in the attainment of wisdom.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that all of creation is revelational. Ethically rebellious men hold down (or hold back) the truth in their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18–22).² Because all creation reveals God, it testifies to the existence of governing principles. Men choose to worship other gods and other principles. Whatever is creational, and therefore revelational, has been twisted by the natural man, who refuses to receive the things of the spirit (I Cor. 2:14).³ Whatever is creational is regarded by the natural man as unnatural—unnatural to his ethics and goals.

Nevertheless, this proverb insists that all kings and judges rule by means of biblical wisdom. This is what God testifies about Himself. There can be no rule by the authorities apart from wisdom. What can this mean? Clearly, rulers do evil things, and evil rulers do evil things continually. How can they be said to rule in terms of wisdom?

C. Obedience and Power

It means that, insofar as rulers wish to maintain their power, they must honor certain fundamental aspects of the creation. Satan does this. When he sought to curse Job, he came before God for permission to exercise power (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7). He possesses no power apart

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), pp. 20–21. Cf. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965) II, p. 37.

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

from his understanding of God. When he tempted Eve, he cited God's instructions to Adam (Gen. 3:1). When he tempted Christ, he cited God's words in the law (Luke 4:3–12).⁴ Christ, unlike Eve, cited the applicable passages of the Mosaic law to answer Satan, and then abided by them in order to overcome him. Eve cited the relevant law to Satan (Gen. 3:3), but then failed to act in terms of its requirements. Specially revealed law offered her guidance to overcome Satan, just as it offered to Christ, but she spurned the law and its guidance, and therefore she went into bondage to her adversary.

Power therefore is a product of ethical actions that are in conformity to biblical law. Weakness therefore is the product of ethical action not in conformity to biblical law. As men seek power, they discover regularities: by following the terms of biblical law, they increase their power. *Biblical law is a tool of dominion.*⁵ Inductively, power-seeking men learn to honor those regularities of creation that bring them power.

The revelation of God's law in the Bible speeds up the process of discovery. Without biblical revelation and special grace, men eventually refuse to follow the logic of creational law. Because men are perverse, and because God's mercy delays His wrath, rulers fail to discern the comprehensive legal-order that undergirds human power. They abandon biblical law. They are not immediately destroyed. They teach themselves a false lesson, namely, that ethical rebellion pays high dividends. They misinterpret the creational law-order.

The "trial and error" method of discovery leads men to an understanding of some of the principles of power, and so they rule in terms of them. But men's willful rebellion, when coupled with God's temporal mercy to His people, eventually brings weakness and external defeat, as in the case of Egypt in Moses' day. Without the restraint of special grace—personal regeneration and the Bible's revelation of God's law—rulers cannot perpetually maintain their control over external reality. Wisdom is ultimately presuppositional: men are to begin with wisdom; they cannot come to understand all of its rules and then conform themselves to these rules by means of inductive, trial-and-error reasoning. *Therefore, natural law theory leads to natural weakness and defeat.* It elevates the powers of unaided human reason, which is at war

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, Tools of Dominion (1990).

with wisdom's understanding.

Conclusion

The two forms of natural law theory—creational and natural—are applications of the two forms of knowledge: covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking, saved and lost. The mind of man was distorted by Adam's Fall. Only through God's special grace, which includes knowledge of the Bible, is the covenant-breaker able to escape the burden imposed by original sin.

The natural man does not receive the things of the spirit. Among these things not received is a correct understanding of the covenantal structure of the universe. Cause and effect in the universe are ethical. Obedience to biblical law produces outward success, including the attainment of power over the creation. This power includes authority over other people. There are regularities in society. These regularities are covenantal.

To attain success and then to keep it, the covenant-breaker must obey biblical law. He can do this in a preliminary sense by adhering to basic moral rules of behavior that have their origin in God's covenants. But he holds back the truth because of his anti-covenantal heart. Eventually, he breaks away from God's law. The more consistent he is with his anti-covenantal presuppositions, the sooner and the more radical this break will be. Without special grace, no society can indefinitely adhere to the principles underlying biblical law, even the legal order corrupted by the Fall.

All natural law theories that do not begin with the covenants of God and the Fall of man will produce a covenant-breaking legal order. They cannot produce a covenant-keeping legal order. They therefore cannot produce justice. All of them are unwise.

THE POSSIBLE DREAM

*I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.
Riches are honourable with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than
choice silver (Prov. 8:17–19).*

The Bible does not promise all men riches, fame, or power. It does not promise health or wealth to all men. But it does promise wisdom to all those who will seek it. This is one quest that will always be rewarded, and rewarded with treasures greater than gold or silver.

Wisdom in Proverbs is an anthropomorphic representation of God. We do not discover wisdom, meaning God, by means of some trial-and-error inductive reasoning process. We must therefore begin with God (wisdom) as our operating first principle. The New Testament proclaims: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). To *get* wisdom, we must first *have* wisdom. We must believe in order to exercise faith. We must be regenerate in order to seek salvation, for the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit; they are foolishness (anti-wisdom) to him (I Cor. 2:14).¹

Solomon is famous for his request of God. Like the pagan stories of the man who is offered a wish by a genie who lives in a metal lamp, Solomon asked in a dream for a gift from God: the greatest of all gifts, wisdom. Because he asked for wisdom rather than long life, riches, or victory in war, God granted him his request (I Kings 3:6–14). But the lure of idol-worshipping women—wisdom’s feminine antithesis, described in Proverbs 7—finally overcame his wisdom (I Kings 11). Which feminine principle of life will men worship: the harlot’s invita-

1. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

tion or God's wisdom?

Men pursue economic long-shots. They gamble rather than work. They pan for gold rather than set up stores to sell miners the pans. They hope for the miracle and neglect the productive. They seek out the big deal and forfeit numerous little deals that would equal the payoff of the big one, given enough time. They chase rainbows and ignore the sunshine. They "bet against the house" and pass by a sure thing.

God's wisdom is personified as a woman who loves those who seek her. The pagan's "lady luck" is also female, but she loves no one. She "smiles" on some men, but she is as capricious as her name implies. She cannot be safely trusted. God is not an impersonal, capricious force in the universe; His words can be trusted. Seeking after Him is not an exercise in futility. The universe is not impersonal or "rigged" against mankind. It is rigged against ethical rebels, but it is simultaneously rigged in favor of those who seek God.²

Proverbs 7 and 8 personify the two masters, God and Satan, by means of anthropomorphic language: the two women. The great harlot of Babylon—the antichrist's world order—is female (Rev. 18). The universe is not impersonal, but radically personal.³ Men serve one of two masters, not impersonal forces, whether inevitable (fate) or random (luck). Men inescapably seek after one woman or the other, the harlot or wisdom. Both call to men: the harlot from the twilight (7:9), and wisdom from the high places and the gates of the city (8:2–3).

How soon should men seek wisdom? Early. By seeking wisdom early, men are guaranteed success. The harlot calls to men in the twilight, to spend the night illicitly. Wisdom calls early, as at daybreak. The day is to be given over to seeking wisdom. He who is diligent in the quest will be rewarded.

By comparing the treasures of wisdom with the precious metals, Proverbs drives the point into the minds of men: *the most valuable asset of all is wisdom*. Solomon was already wise when he asked for wisdom; he recognized that he was asking for the most valuable of all assets. Wealth subsequently flowed to his kingdom (I Kings 10:14–21). The fame of this rule spread everywhere (I Kings 4:3–11). The powerful and wealthy came to him for counsel (I Kings 10:11–13). In short, he achieved indirectly, through wisdom, the goals that other men seek directly through intrigue, magic, and violence.

2. Chapter 8.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

God speaks clearly to men. They can understand His words because they are made in His image. He communicates to them by means of analogies and metaphors. When He compares the value of wisdom with gold, He speaks a universal language. Like the pocket-book parables of Jesus, the economic language of *wisdom personified* can be grasped by anyone, in the day of Solomon or in the twenty-first century.

The universality of gold and silver as desirable assets to lay up in one's treasury reinforces the words of wisdom. When men think about the universal forms of wealth, they think of gold and silver. Across the globe, men understand the value of the precious metals. Abraham's wealth was counted in these metals (Gen. 13:2). When men speak out against the economic importance of gold and silver, they speak nonsense. When John Maynard Keynes spoke of gold in 1923 as a barbarous relic,⁴ and when Lenin suggested in 1921 that the victorious Bolsheviks would someday use gold for public lavatories,⁵ they proclaimed utopianism ("utopia": no place). These two spokesmen of their era spoke for both sides of the Iron Curtain. Both men had contempt for Christian society. Keynes the atheistic homosexual and Lenin the atheistic revolutionary knew enough about Christianity to prefer the harlot of the twilight.

Conclusion

The quest for wisdom is man's only sure thing. Gaining wisdom is better than gaining gold and silver. Thus, the pay-off is very high, and the risk of failure is zero, if men continue to seek wisdom's face. Solomon ceased the quest and went to the harlot in his later years. He died, and his son—the son to whom the Proverbs were presumably addressed—rebelled and lost the northern kingdom. The quest must be begun early, and it must not end as twilight approaches.

4. John Maynard Keynes, "A Tract on Monetary Reform" (1923), in Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (London: Macmillan, 1931), p. 208.

5. V. I. Lenin, "The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism" (1921). (<http://bit.ly/LeninGold>). Reprinted in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 515.

18

PUBLIC PATHS OR PRIVATE CORNERS

I lead in the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of judgment: That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures (Prov. 8:20–21).

A. Rival Paths

The first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs serve as an introduction to the practical, concrete applications of God's proverbial wisdom to the affairs of life. These introductory remarks cover the fundamental principles of life. They lay the foundation. The main theme is this: *attaining and applying biblical wisdom are the chief end of life* (4:5–7). Everything that follows in Proverbs rests on this basic presupposition.

There are practical aspects of these early remarks. The themes of power, wealth, fame, and long life are not absent. The overriding themes are not these, however. Things that matter most are righteous judgment, covenantal faithfulness, avoiding the harlot, honest dealing, and the commandments of God. Above all, the commandments of God.

Wisdom is a guide for the way of righteousness—not an impersonal guide, but a living guide. *Wisdom in Proverbs is an anthropomorphic representation of God.* God guides men along the way of righteousness, as an experienced traveller guides a newcomer. Step by step, the traveler advances behind wisdom, who in this case is the original path-breaker. There is no possibility that the guide will lose her way.

The imagery of the pathway is explicit in Proverbs 8:20. This same imagery is used to describe the requirement of the people of Israel to follow strictly all rulings imposed by the priestly judges. “According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to

the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand, nor to the left" (Deut. 17:11). The path is obviously narrow; no deviation is permitted.¹ Christ reaffirmed this in His Sermon on the Mount: "Enter ye at the strait [narrow] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13–14).²

The concept of the path of righteousness refers to personal righteousness. The focus of concern for the father is the moral righteousness of his son. Nevertheless, this path also refers to public righteousness, including law enforcement. Self-government first; then comes the application of biblical law to areas of life under the jurisdiction of the righteous man. How could it be otherwise? Because self-government under biblical law produces wealth and influence, the extension of the rule of biblical law proceeds outward, from self-governed individuals to others under their lawful jurisdiction.

B. Obedience and Wealth

Does self-government under biblical law produce wealth and influence? Proverbs 8:21 affirms that it does. More than this: wisdom leads men along the path of judgment in order to cause those behind her to become prosperous. Those who love wisdom will inherit substance; those who love wisdom will have their treasuries filled.

This does not mean that all wise men will get rich. The true wealth is wisdom herself (God Himself): durable riches, fruit that is more valuable than gold (vv. 18–19). But because men who follow wisdom are promised *better forms of wealth*, one testimony of God to the reliability of His word is that covenant-keeping men will inherit inferior forms of wealth: earthly wealth. This is an affirmation of God's ability and willingness to deliver even greater riches in eternity.

We see an analogous example of this principle—God's delivery of lesser earthly riches, which testifies to God's ability to deliver greater, heavenly riches—in Jesus' healing of the palsied man. First, He said to the man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2b). Certain scribes murmured within themselves, "This man blas-

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [1999] 2012), ch. 41.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [2000] 2012), ch. 17.

phemeth” (v. 3). “And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. And he arose, and departed to his house” (vv. 5–7).

Men can see the results of righteousness. Christ healed the palsied man. “But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men” (v. 8). *Visible success strengthens the public authority of the righteous man*. In Christ’s case, it led to even greater resentment on the part of the religious leaders of His day, who saw the transfer of political power involved in Jesus’ demonstration of His lawful authority under God.

God wants to honor publicly those who honor Him publicly: “. . . for them that honour me I will honour. . .” (1 Sam. 2:20). One way is to grant them riches and honor (Prov. 8:18).³ To internalize these references to external economic success is to minimize the power of God to manifest His reliability and sovereignty, in time and on earth. Such a “spiritualizing” interpretation is too often governed by an impulse that is related to the hostility displayed by the religious leaders of Israel against Jesus. They deeply resented Jesus’ ability to heal men before the gaze of the multitudes. He was manifesting His power in public. They would have preferred Him to work His miracles privately, or not at all. They would have preferred to face a religion of strictly “internal” blessings. Such a religion would not have resulted in a public confrontation—the kind of confrontation that the Pharaoh of Moses’ day so deeply resented.

Paul understood the impact of a religion of publicly manifested power. He announced to a civil magistrate, “I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:25–26).

Pietists, like atheists and Satanists, prefer a version of Christianity that sits in a corner, not drawing attention to itself or to the God of might and power who controls all of life in terms of His decree. They prefer durable riches alone to durable riches with wealth and public honor. They sing, “I’d rather have Jesus than silver and gold,” while we

3. Chapter 17.

sing, "I'd rather have Jesus *and* silver and gold." They prefer a world of reduced public confrontation and minimal dominion. They prefer to pray in a corner and avoid the paths of civic judgment. They prefer cultural impotence to cultural responsibility.

Men generally achieve their goals in the long run when they are willing to pay the price; pietists are no exception. They have already achieved their goal of public irrelevance. While they continue to specialize in cultural irrelevance, dominion-oriented Christians can begin to specialize in occupying the paths of righteous public judgment. Pietists get what they want; they should stop complaining because dominionists expect to get what they want.

Conclusion

The Book of Proverbs teaches that wisdom is the chief goal of life. External, visible success is a mark of this wisdom. Obedience to God's laws produces blessings. These blessings are both external and internal.

Wisdom produces righteousness. This indicates that wisdom is an outworking of redemption, for the Bible is clear: fallen man does not work his way into salvation, either with the works of his hands or the works of his mind. Wisdom is a gift of God. Solomon understood this.

Wisdom so defined produces prosperity. This is an aspect of covenantal inheritance. *God visibly honors the righteous*. This visible honor testifies to the holiness of God and His law. He is not a failure in history. This message is rejected by the vast majority of Christians in my day, who are pietists: internal salvation (spiritual healing) only. The world at large is not seen as being affected by this internal transformation. The local church, yes. The family, yes. But not civil government. Not the civilization. Covenant-keepers with a pietistic outlook believe they have no responsibilities for the social order. This is not what Solomon's proverbs taught.

19

TREASURES OF WICKEDNESS

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death (Prov. 10:2).

There are two truths taught by this proverb: (1) there are measurable treasures that are the result of wickedness; (2) righteousness delivers men from death. Both of these truths demand an explanation derived from the texts of the Bible.

A. Choose Wealth

1. Wealthy wicked: The problem of the covenant-breaking wealthy plagued Asaph. “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Ps. 73:3–5). But Asaph then asserted that their success is the basis of their subsequent downfall: “Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than their heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily” (Ps. 73:6–8). They do not believe that God sees their deeds: “And they say, How doth God know? And, Is there knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches” (Ps. 73:11–12). The message is clear: ungodly men prosper. The exegetical challenge is to make sense of this principle in light of the outline of Deuteronomy 28, which proclaims that godly societies prosper, and rebellious societies are destroyed by the judgment of God. Does this principle not also apply to individuals? Is there a disconnect between economic causation for individuals and society?

The outline in Deuteronomy 8 provides the key. It presents a stage

theory of development. First, God gives covenant-keepers His Bible-revealed law, so that they might preserve and expand their wealth. Then He gives them a capital base to work with (8:1).¹ Second, they begin to prosper. This prosperity is supposed to confirm their faith in the reliability of God's covenant: "... for it is he that giveth thee the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (8:18).² The external blessings are to serve as spiritual reinforcement. Third, people are tempted to forget God, and to assert their autonomy. God warns men against this sin: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (8:17).³ Fourth, there is a period of judgment against those who rebel against God in this fashion (8:19–20).⁴

There is a fifth possible stage: restoration (Isa. 2). There are two kinds of negative judgment: judgment unto restoration and judgment unto oblivion. Whether a society experiences restoration depends upon the ethical response of the society to God's judgment.

The Bible is clear: there are covenantal blessings and cursings that involve the whole society. The Bible is equally clear about the possibility of wealthy wicked people. They may be wealthy in any of the five stages, but wealth in the hands of wicked people as a class is characteristic of the third stage: autonomy and rebellion, which is the prelude to stage four, i.e., the comprehensive judgment of God.

The point made by this proverb is that the treasure held by the ungodly person profits him nothing. In other words, he has made an *entrepreneurial error* by thinking that the pay-off was worth the corruption necessary to obtain it. The wicked man's efforts produce a personal loss.

Does this mean that wealth as such is unprofitable? No; it means that wealth is unprofitable for the wicked individual. There is *objective value* in a treasure—objective in the sense that God imputes value to it—but the wicked man does not appropriate this value without also gaining the vengeance of God. He sees only the value of the treasure and the ethical cost of attaining it; he does not see the hidden costs of rebellion. Thus, the subjective value of this treasure to the wicked is ultimately negative, what Proverbs 25:22 describes as "coals of fire" on

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 17.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

the heads of the unrighteous.⁵

B. Choose Life

2. *Mortality tables*: Long life is characteristic of covenant-keeping men. Men who honor their parents have long lives (Ex. 20:12).⁶ Long life is a universally agreed-upon blessing. Thus, all people can see this beneficial biological result of godliness in society as a whole (Deut. 4:6–8),⁷ and they are thereby encouraged to enter into a covenant with God.

Righteous men, in the aggregate, are delivered from death for a longer period of time than unrighteous men are. Individual righteous men may die young, and individual wicked men may die old, but in the aggregate, long life goes to the righteous. Because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), all men eventually die, in time and on earth.⁸ Nevertheless, long life points to eternal life. Men to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed by God's grace can expect eternal life and therefore long lives on earth. The gift of eternal life, which is publicly manifested at the final judgment, is preceded by an earthly parallel—not for every righteous man, but for men in general who adhere in general to the provisions of biblical law.

People in Third World nations have shorter life expectancies than people in Western, industrial countries. Why? Because Third World nations are characterized by such afflictions as animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and imported Western socialism. Socialism came early to these nations during their period of Westernization, not a century after free market economics created a massive capital base, as was the case in the industrial West. The oil-rich Muslim nations are exceptions to the rule regarding paganism, but their wealth is dependent upon the productivity of the West, which has discovered valuable uses for oil. Japan also has escaped the economic curses of paganism by imitating Western law and western technology. The Japanese have also adopted a Western, linear view of time, as well as Western doctrines of thrift and hard, smart work. Japan has adopted a Protestant ethic

5. Chapter 76.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

7. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

8. The only exceptions: those alive at the time of the Second Coming (I Thess. 4:17).

without adopting Protestant theology. The result has been rising per capita wealth. China after 1978 imitated Japan, with similar economic results.

Humanism is steadily eroding the capital base of the West, and if state regulation of the economy continues to be enforced by Western civil governments, then the West will eventually become poor by comparison to Asia. But, in terms of external law, the legal codes of Western nations are still closer to biblical law than the law codes of Third World nations are. So is Western humanism's view of linear time. The difference can be seen by comparing mortality tables of various societies.

Conclusion

Why do we see the wicked prosper? This question bothered Asaph. It bothers most covenant-keeping people at some point in their lives. There has to be an explanation that is consistent with what the Bible teaches about historical cause and effect.

Deuteronomy 8 presents a five-stage theory of history: from poverty to wealth to either poverty or greater wealth. Some wicked people prosper in every stage, but the third stage—wealth unto autonomy—offers the great threat to the continued success of society. Autonomy brings the historical wrath of God.

There are visible signs of a society that adheres to the principles of biblical law. One example is longer life. The West has enjoyed this since the at least mid-nineteenth century, when the social order more fully adopted biblical principles of private ownership and independence from the state. This longer life span is seen in lower life insurance rates.

20

FAMISHED SOULS AND EMPTY PURSES

The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance [cravings] of the wicked (Prov. 10:3).

The tenth chapter of Proverbs begins with a series of contrasts: wise sons vs. foolish sons (v. 1), ill-gotten wealth vs. righteousness (v. 2), righteous people vs. wicked people (v. 3), lazy people vs. industrious people (v. 4). These are not contrasts between people's capacities for work, or obtaining capital, or their basic intelligence. These contrasts are ethical.

This proverb is difficult to translate. Older versions (King James, American Standard) refer to the *soul* of the righteous; later versions (Revised Standard, New American Standard, New English Bible) refer to *hunger*. "The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry" (NEB). Is the focus of the passage primarily spiritual or primarily physical?

Psalms 106 offers parallel ideas and parallel problems of translation. Speaking of the Israelites in the wilderness, the psalmist says, "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness and tempted God in the desert And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (vv. 13–15). The contrast in the language of the King James is between physical or biological lusts (probably their demand for meat: Num. 11) and spiritual maturity. Problem: the New English Bible translates verse 15 as follows: "He gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting sickness among them" [margin reading: "in their throats"].

A. A Lack of Meat

The Israelites had complained in the wilderness about their lack of meat. The King James Version reads as though their request was spir-

itual: “. . . but now our soul is dried away.” The New English Bible translates it as: “Now our throats are parched” (Num. 11:6). In other words, the Hebrew language so closely links the human soul and physical attributes (e.g., throat) that the translators are not agreed concerning the proper focus of concern of the writers.

What presents a difficulty in translation also presents a lesson in biblical theology. The language of Old Testament so intertwined the spiritual and the physical that we are not always certain which aspect an author had in mind, or even if he clearly distinguished the two. But we do know this much: there was a close link in the authors’ minds between spiritual conditions and external conditions. The Israelites in the wilderness were given the physical meat that they had requested, yet they remained spiritually blind. They received meat in the form of the birds (Num. 11). They continued to grumble against God. Only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the promised land (Num. 14). The contrast is clearly between righteousness and unrighteousness, between trusting in God and complaining to God. Yet the language of the original request, which was unquestionably a demand for physical meat, can be translated so as to make the request appear to be a spiritual quest, “our soul is dried away” (King James).

Once we understand how closely they linked body and soul, we begin to understand the contrasts in Proverbs. Righteousness is linked with prosperity, while unrighteousness is linked with poverty. A man’s spiritual condition is understood as having predictable (statistically significant) consequences for his external economic situation. Few biblical doctrines are more resented by humanists and socialists than this one. It means that *men are responsible before God and other men for their overall success or failure*.

God will not starve a man who is ethically subordinate to Him. The hunger that godly men experience, both spiritual and physical, will be satisfied by God. Covenant-keepers can be confident in God. They can go about their daily tasks knowing that God will sustain them. This confidence encourages them to organize their lives according to biblical law, since they need not fear that temporary setbacks will bury them or destroy the long-term effects of their work.

B. Wealth Transfer

In contrast, the unrighteous are told that God will thwart their desires and plans. Either they will fail, in time and on earth, or else the

capital they accumulate will eventually be transferred to the righteous (Prov. 13:22).¹ They may work hard, build a capital base, and attempt to extend their dominion across the face of the earth, but they and their heirs will not achieve their covenant-breaking goals.

It is not that God casts away their substance—their capital base—as implied by the translation of the King James. He *transfers* it, putting it to uses different from those planned by the original developers. What is cast away is their *desires*. They may well achieve their goals in terms of building up a capital base; what is promised here is that their desires will not be achieved.

The Bible affirms the temporal efficacy of hard work, thrift, and the other personal disciplines that we associate with the phrase, “the Protestant ethic.” But these virtues are not sufficient to produce the results hoped for by the wicked. In the language of the economist, the Protestant ethic is “necessary but not sufficient” for long-term economic growth. This ethic must be sustained by the theology that created it. It is not an autonomous ethic that can be effectively adopted, long term, by any and all cultures, because covenant-breaking cultures cannot sustain this ethic indefinitely. They will either abandon it or else adopt the confession of faith that undergirds it.²

This proverb therefore gives confidence to the righteous and hopelessness for the wicked. By affirming hope for the righteous, God provides His people with the *attitude of victory* that is so necessary in any long-term program of dominion. By affirming despair for the unrighteous, God also strengthens His people. There is both a positive and a negative aspect to the dominion covenant: “we win; they lose.” We are “programmed” for victory. God’s enemies are “programmed” for defeat.

Conclusion

The righteous man receives a two-fold feeding: spiritual and physical. The Hebrews did not separate the two realms. The wicked man also is dealt with in a two-fold manner. Both his soul and his purse become lean (Hag. 1:6). *Two-fold feeding and two-fold starving*: this is the underlying theory of economic development in the Proverbs.

1. Chapter 41.

2. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

21

SLACK HANDS AND EMPTY PURSES

He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich (Prov. 10:4).

A. Work and Wealth

The Bible is quite clear about a major cause of personal poverty: a person's unwillingness to work. Proverbs returns to this theme repeatedly. The cause-and-effect relationship between slack hands¹ or folded hands and poverty is real, the Bible says. He who would avoid poverty must work diligently.

The Bible does not teach that poor people are always lazy. The Book of Ruth makes it plain that Ruth was a righteous woman, but she was poor. She had to glean for a living, indicating that she was extremely poor (Ruth 2).² Gleaning was hard, low-paying work. No one did it who had a regular job. Gleaning was a form of welfare, but it required hard work (Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:21).³ She was faithful—so committed to her mother-in-law that she was willing to leave her nation and journey to Israel to live. But it should be noted that Ruth did not remain poor. God delivered her into wealth through marriage to a generous wealthy man, Boaz (Ruth 4).⁴

Similarly, the Book of Job teaches that poverty can come upon a

1. Sometimes the Hebrew word is translated as “deceit” (Job 13:7; Job 27:4; Psalms 32:2; 52:2).

2. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 9.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62; cf. North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 11.

4. North, *Disobedience and Defeat*, ch. 11.

man despite his high moral character. The mistake of the first three of Job's four "comforters" was in concluding that God must have been visiting judgment upon him because of some sin on his part (Job 4:7–9). They understood the usual relationship between immorality and personal poverty; they failed to understand the sovereignty of God in His departure from this normal pattern in unusual circumstances. Again, it must be borne in mind that Job was subsequently delivered by God and elevated to an even higher position of wealth and status (42:12).⁵ He was not called upon to remain in poverty, although God made it clear to Job that it was well within God's sovereign right to cast Job down and keep him down, had it suited Him.

The slack hand reflects a moral weakness on the part of the lazy person. God calls men to work hard in order to exercise dominion. Man's work has been cursed ever since Adam's Fall, but it is still man's moral responsibility to labor, to attempt to overcome progressively the external effects of the curse. How? Through moral behavior, which includes hard work. *A man's character is reflected in his attitude toward work.* A man who is unwilling to work long and hard is not to be regarded as a paragon of biblical virtue.

Slack hands produce poverty. The cause-and-effect relationship between slack hands and poverty mirrors the relationship between diligence and riches. *This proverb appeals directly to men's economic self-interest.* The moral virtue of hard work is an underlying theme in the Bible, but the appeal here (and in most other passages) is not to morality as such, but rather to *the economic fruits of morality*. It is the universal (or nearly universal) desire of men to improve their economic circumstances. This is the underlying presupposition of this proverb. Only because there are God-created cause-and-effect relationships between morality and hard work, and between hard work and wealth, are large numbers of otherwise unconcerned and immoral men motivated to discipline themselves by means of hard labor. Their production blesses themselves and their families, and it also blesses

5. He lost his 10 children (Job 1:2, 19). The text in Job 42 does not mention this, but it hints at it. "He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren" (Job 42:13–15). Numerically, there was no difference. These daughters were special. But the other 10 children were dead. He did not have 20 children. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6:D.

those who benefit through peaceful trade with them. Per capita wealth of many people is thereby increased.

In sharp contrast to the thesis of socialistic “liberation theology,” God is not on the side of the poor as such. He is on the side of the righteous, including the righteous poor. Most of all, He is on the side of His own word, which sets forth the moral and occupational criteria for escaping poverty. Poverty is to be shunned, just as immorality is to be shunned. Wealth is a legitimate goal and a reward for shunning immorality in one’s occupation. More than any other specified cause of poverty, the Bible singles out *morally dissipated living*, whose chief occupational manifestation is slack hands.

B. Manual Labor

The contrast between lazy and diligent is not a contrast between manual labor and intellectual labor. Solomon, who compiled these proverbs (10:1), and who spoke 3,000 proverbs altogether (I Kings 10:32), was obviously not a manual laborer, nor did God or men expect him to be. His reputation as a wise judge was world renowned, even among kings (I Kings 4:34). This brought glory to God, for by upholding the law of God, a nation builds a foundation of long-term prosperity, and this in turn elevates God’s reputation throughout the world (Deut. 4:5–8).⁶ Rendering godly judgment in any occupation is as important a job as manual labor.

Nevertheless, God has called most men throughout history to be manual laborers. Not until the advent of the later phases of the Industrial Revolution, in the mid-twentieth century, was the capital base of northern Europe and the United States able to sustain a majority of working people in occupations that did not require hard physical labor. Until this period, the social division of labor between manual labor and intellectual labor had always been weighted heavily on the side of manual labor.

Output had always been low for most manual laborers because of the lack of capital, including intellectual and entrepreneurial capital. Per capita productivity did not permit the average family to store up a large quantity of surplus products beyond basic survival needs. So, there was little to offer in trade. Pre-industrial society was not sufficiently productive to permit large numbers of intellectual workers and professional tradesmen to exercise their callings. Low output per cap-

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

ita kept supplies of surplus goods low, so the division of labor was retarded.

C. Tools in Hand

Of course, we can also look at per capita productivity from the demand side. Until the laws and ethics of the West sanctioned non-manual, non-agricultural labor as a legitimate calling for the masses, and until the West's favorable outlook toward trade, money-lending, and entrepreneurship encouraged the development of a large number of non-manual laborers, the per capita productivity of the masses remained low. Because most workers could afford to buy only simple tools, and could sell into only minimally developed markets, only a few of them could increase their per capita productivity over the long haul. Until they had an opportunity to buy the mass-produced, price-competitive consumer and capital goods and services of urban, industrial civilization, they had only mere survival as their primary incentive to sacrifice present income for the sake of increasing their capital base of tools and education. Tools and education are the primary means of increasing productivity in a society already marked by long hours of hard work. In non-industrialized societies, once agricultural laborers have produced a sufficient number of goods to insure their survival for one more season, they generally reduce their work hours and their rate of savings, thereby reducing their ability to trade with non-agricultural workers. They prefer leisure to greater wealth. They count leisure as wealth, which it is. But it does not compound.

It was the so-called "Protestant ethic" of the West that enabled society to build up its capital base and simultaneously encourage the development of an extensive division of labor. The effects of this new world-and-life view were comprehensive. The entire civilization of Protestantism was transformed. This is what the Bible teaches men to expect. A shift in a civilization's theology has implications far beyond the confines of the sanctuary and the study.

Several of the medieval monastic orders displayed this same work ethic. The Cistercians and Benedictines are good examples. Monks took individual vows of poverty, worked long hours, consumed very little, invented new agricultural tools, increased output, and sold at low prices. The monasteries made great profits, which they re-invested. These orders grew rich. Then, every few centuries, they had to be re-formed to restore them to their original spirituality, which rested on

vows of poverty and celibacy.

Under Protestantism, especially Calvinism, but also Methodism, a new ethical outlook spread to the general population of Northern Europe. It affirmed that what the medieval sacerdotal orders had experienced—economic growth—is legitimate for all God-fearing, God-obeying people and societies.

Conclusion

Laziness produces poverty. This is a continuing theme in the Book of Proverbs. *Laziness is a manifestation of moral weakness.*

This proverb appeals to personal self-interest: visible success. This is a positive sanction. But more fundamental is the means of success: righteousness. God is on the side of the righteous. He shows this by blessing them for obedience.

Manual labor is rigorous. Mental labor can be rigorous. The contrast is not between categories of labor but rather qualities of labor.

What we call the Protestant ethic was basic to the coming of the Industrial Revolution and its high output. Max Weber was correct in 1905.⁷ This view has been denied by many scholars. Their bias against covenant-breaking religion as a cause of poverty is balanced only by their hostility to the idea of covenant-keeping religion as a cause of wealth. Either result indicates that religion has consequences economically. This thought is offensive to modern scholars, who begin with the assumption of the irrelevance of God except as a social delusion.

7. Gary North, "The 'Protestant Ethic' Hypothesis," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976).

HARVESTING IN DUE SEASON

He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame (Prov. 10:5).

A. A Time for Everything

Timing is practically everything. This is a continuing message in the Bible. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1).¹ An overriding concern of the godly man should be his lack of time. The strength of youth is not to be wasted. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain” (Eccl. 12:1–2). Jesus’ words reflect this same concern: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work” (John 9:4).

Solomon does not say that sleeping is wrong. What he says is that sleeping late during the days of harvest is wrong. The sleeper has failed to understand the relationship between timing and success. He has assumed that he can rest at his discretion. The Bible says no. People are to work for six days; they are to rest on the seventh (Ex. 20:10).² The sabbath rest comes at the end of time, when the ethical battles of life are over. We celebrate the sabbath before the final day of judgment because we honor ritually what God has promised definitively. But Paul’s image of the athletic event, especially the race, points to the necessity

1. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 7.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

of running fast and hard while the race is in progress (I Cor. 9:24;³ Phil. 3:14;⁴ see also Heb. 12:1).

The image of the harvest was used by Jesus to motivate His disciples. “Thus saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into the harvest” (Matt. 9:37–38). The wealth potential of the harvest is enormous. It is so great that the few harvesters available to do the work are insufficient, compared to the extent of the crop. In other words, the value of the laborer’s output is high because of the extensive crop. But time is short. The burden on the existing harvesters is very heavy, not because there is an insufficient potential return on their labor, but the opposite: there is a huge potential return, but also huge potential waste if the crop is not gathered in due season.

B. Pacing Ourselves

This proverb testifies to the existence of rhythms in life. A man must pace himself according to the conditions of the market. No successful distance runner runs equally fast throughout a long race, irrespective of the conditions of the course, the distance remaining, his energy reserves, and the speed of his competitors. Similarly, the farmer must pace himself in terms of the seasons. There are times during the year when the pay-off for hard labor is relatively low. There are times to sit and sharpen scythes, and there are times for working intensely from dawn to dusk, in order to take advantage of the brief period of the harvest. A dull scythe will wait another day in the dead of winter; in due season, the harvest will not. Whatever is not harvested on time will rot.

The imagery of the harvest points to an all-or-nothing situation. It comes once a year. All the work and capital that has been invested in order to produce a crop is “on the line” during the harvest season. *The labor theory of value is incorrect*. So is every other cost-of-production theory. Just because the labor or capital inputs were valuable at the time of planting in no way guarantees a profitable return on the investment. The unharvested crop is worth only what mulch is worth, no matter how much capital and labor was invested at the planting. The

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 12.

4. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles*, (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 21.

person who indulges himself and rests during the harvest throws away the potential value of the crop. If he sleeps, then he has placed a very high price tag on his slumber—not the value of the capital and labor over time that he invested, which is gone whether he sleeps or not, but the value of the crop. He has calculated foolishly, and he brings shame on his father, who is expected to have instructed him in wisdom.

Maximum production is achieved by proper pacing. The person who treats the whole year as if it were the harvest will deplete his resources without gaining a continually high return on his investment. He will waste his emotional and physical reserves, as well as his stock of capital. Life does not offer equally high rates of return every day. *What is important is performance over an entire life span.* There is a sort of “average rate of return” for an entire life. This is what men are responsible for.

C. Neglecting the Harvest

The man who neglects the harvest is a fool. His investment’s rate of return is totally dependent on his ability and willingness to harvest his crop in due season. The higher the value of the harvested crop, the higher his average rate of return on his investments over the whole year. If he fails to gather the crop during the harvest season, his total rate of return drops to zero, and so does his average rate of return. If the value of the harvest is zero, then the value of the investment is also zero. This is an agricultural application of the universally applicable economic doctrine of “sunk costs.”⁵ In the ground, the present value of the seeds, the fertilizer, and the worn-out equipment is utterly dependent on the *expected future value* of the crop. If the crop cannot be harvested, then the invested resources are of zero value. This investment is required if there is to be a harvest, but once in the ground, it is gone forever.

An analogy is the college student who works hard throughout the year, but who sleeps through the final exam. He has just lost a semester’s tuition payments for that course, and he may have lost his opportunity to return again for the next semester if this pulls down his grade point average. The failing grade is awarded irrespective of the amount of effort that the student put into his preparation for the exam, however important his preparation might have been, had he not

5. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 26. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

slept through the exam. But the analogy of the harvest is even more stark, for the sleeping student at least retains some of the information he learned, even if he fails the final exam. The sleeping harvester has nothing left except perhaps some tax-reducing written receipts for labor and capital expended in a missed opportunity.

Once the harvest season is over, the formerly sleepy harvester can do nothing to reap his return. This, of course, is analogous to the sleep of death. There is an irreversible aspect of time: “. . . it is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Eastern religions often teach the doctrine of reincarnation, a theology of nearly infinite opportunities over nearly eternal cyclical time. But the Bible teaches the doctrine of linear time. A lost harvest is forever lost. A lost life is forever lost. There is “only one life per customer,” just as there is only one harvest per crop.

This explicitly biblical perspective concerning time has made the West industrious and hard-working. *The concept of linear time made possible the concept of economic development.* Prior to the Protestant Reformation, and especially the seventeenth-century Puritans, neither theologians nor social philosophers, East or West, believed that long-term economic growth is possible. Long-term economic growth was not characteristic of Western culture before Christianity. The rapid economic growth of modern times began in Protestant Britain and spread to Protestant America. It has become an imported phenomenon in pagan Third World nations, made possible initially by an alien imported worldview and imported capital.

Conclusion

Work requires a sense of timing. There is a time to work hard. There is a time to work at a more leisurely pace. In times of harvest, long, hard work is required. He who ignores this will not have success. Each person needs to pace himself according to the season.

Time is linear. This outlook is uniquely biblical in origin. The ideas of creation, Fall, and redemption are presented in a linear fashion. This outlook made possible the concept of compound economic growth, but only when coupled with the eschatological optimism of postmillennialism, the view of some seventeenth-century Dutchmen and many seventeenth-century Puritans. Prior to the Puritans, the concept of linear history did not include the concept of permanent expansion.

The harvest is an all-or-nothing period. The investments made

during the planting season come to fruition or failure in the harvest. This indicates that the value of the inputs at the time they are put to use depends on the *expected final value of their output*. The harvest is the output. Thus, to slumber during the harvest is economically suicidal. The labor theory of value, like every cost-of-production theory, is refuted by this proverb. The result of slumber at harvest time is poverty, no matter what expenses were borne during planting.

23

VISIBLE BLESSINGS

Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked (Prov. 10:6).

A. Two Sets of Sanctions

When we see the word “blessing” or “blessed,” we are often dealing with a beatitude. There are numerous beatitudes in the Book of Proverbs.¹

The second half of this proverb is obscure. The King James translators contrast violence and blessings: both are visible. Violence “covers” the mouth of the wicked, while blessings “cover” the head of the righteous. But the New American Standard Bible translates the Hebrew word translated “cover” as “conceals.” The New English Bible translates it as “choked.”

The meaning of the verb is debated, but there can be no doubt that violence is associated with the mouth of the wicked, whether his mouth conceals it, is choked by it, or is covered by it. *The mouth is the place where violence lurks.* The schemes of the wicked man are set forth verbally. Eventually, his plans become plain. The tongue is compared to an untamed beast that requires a bridle to control it (Ps. 39:1; James 1:26; 3:2).

The righteous man controls his tongue; the unrighteous man does not. It eventually reveals what he is. The righteous man can be identified, this proverb tells us. He is known by the blessings on his head. Obviously, there is some literary reference here. Unless someone goes around wearing a crown of jurisdiction—and only kings, bishops, military officers, and police officers are identified in this way—blessings

1. They are: 3:13, 18, 33; 5:18; 8:32, 34; 11:26; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 22:9; 24:25; 28:14, 20; 29:18. Gary Brady, *Heavenly Wisdom: Proverbs simply explained* (Webster, New York: Evangelical Press, 2003), p. 252.

are not literally worn on a person's head. What is the frame of reference? Most likely, it is the oil of anointing. The words of Psalm 23 come to mind: "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (5b). It was God who anointed David. The effects of this anointing become ever-more visible to his enemies.

The contrast between the righteous man and the unrighteous man, between the wise man and the fool, is the underlying theme of Proverbs. There is a way of wisdom and a way of destruction. Those who travel down each path are eventually distinguishable, in time and on earth, according to Proverbs. *Whatever dwells in the heart of a man eventually manifests itself.* But this does not answer these questions: (1) Why should there be visible blessings and visible cursings? (2) Why are the differences not limited to visible differences in people's personal behavior? This is the question of covenantal sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.²

B. The Dominion Covenant

The garden of Eden was to have served as a training ground for man. It was a place where Adam could have developed competent judgment. His skills as a keeper (protector) and dresser (gardener) of the garden were to have become visible. Eventually, he was supposed to have taken these judgmental skills into the world outside the garden, in order to subdue it to the glory of God.

The dominion covenant involves visible blessings. The beauty of the garden was to have been aesthetically more pleasing to man and God than the natural beauty of the untamed earth. A man's success in exercising dominion was originally planned by God to have outward manifestations. The very process of developing godly judgment was a process of understanding and applying God's standards to every area of life. When applied, these standards were to have been visible, analogous to the visible goodness of the creation in response to God's perfect application of His own standards of performance. This is why He could evaluate his own workmanship and pronounce it very good (Gen. 1:31).³

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas; Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

There are principles of cause and effect in the creation. Righteousness leads to blessings in history, both spiritual (inward) and dominical (outward). The works of the righteous man's hands are intended to shine before men, just as his personal behavior is to shine. The works of a righteous nation (Deut. 4:5–8)⁴ and the church (Matt. 5:14–16)⁵ are also to shine before men, calling attention to the superiority of the Bible's principles of administration (garden keeping) to all other principles. God did not do sloppy work in His own name when He created all things. Neither individuals nor nations are to do sloppy work in the name of God.

How are we to judge performance? By the stated principles of the worker, and also by the results. *The righteous plant bears good fruit.* By their fruits ye shall know them, Christ said (Matt. 7:20).⁶ But the analogy of the garden should point to the need for visible blessings: successful performance of the gardening assignment was itself a reward, namely, a more beautiful environment.

The cause-and-effect universe created by God enables us to judge the quality of a person's performance by the results he achieves. God sees to it that righteousness receives blessings. These blessings are to serve as visible signs of the covenant, which call forth even more faithful adherence to that covenant: “. . . for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁷ *Blessings are given by God to reinforce men's good behavior.* Visible blessings are to remind men of the reality of the covenantal foundation of society. Good behavior is visible; so are God's blessings for good behavior.

C. Ethical Consistency

It may take time for these visible blessings to appear. If the mouth of the unrighteous eventually reveals the kind of character that lies behind it, why shouldn't the blessings of the righteous reveal the character of both the individual and the God who sovereignly controls the universe? Why should the power of God not be made manifest to all, just as the weakness of the unrighteous should be manifested? Why

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

7. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

should we regard it as odd that the rival cause-and-effect principles, righteousness vs. unrighteousness, should produce visibly different results?

In the short run, evil men can be blessed externally, as a prelude to their destruction (Deut. 8:11–20).⁸ In the short run, righteous men can experience poverty and external cursings (Job). In the long run, and in the aggregate (society as such), unrighteousness produces destruction (Deut. 28:15–68) and righteousness produces visible blessings (Deut. 28:1–14).⁹

There is a tendency for Christian pietists to recoil in horror to the idea that righteous behavior produces visible blessings. Pietists resent the biblical teaching that righteousness produces long-term affluence and power, and that ethical rebellion produces long-term poverty and weakness. They see widespread visible blessings of God as either random or else as a prelude to God's coming judgment.

The biblical doctrine of visible blessings teaches that redeemed men are given external blessings in order to confirm them in their faith, *so that they may take on additional responsibilities*. Pietists resent the whole idea of the dominion covenant, of which the doctrine of visible blessings is a part. They prefer to believe that faithful Christians will be burdened by *internal responsibilities only*, and therefore any blessings that God pours out on His people will be limited to the internal, psychological realm of man's spirit. They reject the idea that righteous behavior produces external blessings. They are even further away from an understanding of God's dominion covenant than a reprobate like Ben Franklin was, for he was still influenced by the Puritan thought, as he admitted in his autobiography.¹⁰ He could write that "honesty is the best policy," not because he believed in the God of the Bible, but because he had seen the external results of such a God-ordained principle. Modern pietists look at the wealth that the Protestant ethic has produced, and they hide their eyes in disbelief, hoping to find another explanation. So do humanists.

Conclusion

The undisciplined tongue tends toward violence. A righteous per-

8. *Ibid.*, chaps. 21–23.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

10. He read Cotton Mather's *Essay to Do Good* at the age of 11, he said in his autobiography. In a letter to Samuel Mather, 1773, he recounted a meeting he had with Mather's forebear when Franklin was 23.

son must exercise discipline over what he says. This is another application of the general theme in Proverbs: wisdom vs. foolishness.

There are two covenantal paths. One is righteous. The other is not. One leads toward dominion. The other leads toward death. Each path is visible. Each has visible consequences.

This proverb opposes sloppy work. *A man's work should reflect his confession.* A covenant-keeper's work should testify to the reliability of the God of the covenant. This means that there are visible results of confessions, and these results must reflect the lords of the rival covenants. If they do not, then one or both of the representatives are not acting consistently with his professed covenant's standards.

THE STRENGTH OF CAPITAL

The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty (Prov. 10:15).

The structure of each proverb in the tenth chapter presents a positive-negative contrast. First, a benefit or desirable goal is presented. This benefit is linked to wisdom and righteousness. Then a negative is presented. This undesirable outcome is said to be the product of foolishness or wickedness.

When Solomon speaks here of the rich man, there is no suggestion that the rich man is in any way morally compromised. The reference to him is in the first half of this proverb. Thus, it would be misleading to conclude that there is anything innately objectionable either to riches or to the idea that the rich man's wealth does serve as a means of safety for him.

Conversely, there is nothing said in favor of poverty. The poor man's condition is not desirable. His poverty constitutes his destruction. He is unable to place much confidence in his external condition. He has no high wall.

The question then arises: Why are riches referred to elsewhere in the Bible as a snare, a temptation? And why are poor people singled out repeatedly as being blessed by God? If this proverb is true, then what information are we missing in order to make sense out of all the other verses that seem to teach the opposite?

Man's premier temptation is to be as God (Gen. 3:5). Successful men look at their condition in life, and they make a false conclusion, namely, that the work of their hands is responsible for all that they possess. This temptation clearly is greater in the life and experience of a rich man. The poor man may prefer not to take credit for his impoverished condition. The rich man is proud of what his efforts sup-

posedly have produced (Deut. 8:17).¹

The danger for the successful person is that he begins to regard his “wall” as an autonomous source of protection for him. Like the walls that surrounded ancient cities, the rich man’s wall may appear to be nearly impervious to attack. His enemies are outside the gates; they cannot bring him down.

In contrast, the poor man sees his poverty and recognizes that he is already destroyed. What the rich man fears, the poor man is experiencing. He is less tempted to place his trust in his environment. His environment has already proven to be a weak source of defense. He is unlikely to place much confidence in it.

Is it an advantage to have a protecting wall? Most certainly. The fact that Jericho’s wall did not withstand the blast of God did not mean that Israel was to build cities without walls or to tear down the walls that existed when the Canaanites were destroyed. The people of Jerusalem were supposed to keep the walls in repair. Under Nehemiah, the people of Jerusalem began the reconstruction of the wall, which had been broken by Babylon (Neh. 2:17–18).

What good does a wall do? It forces an enemy to think twice about the cost of attacking a stronghold. The defenders have time to prepare a defense against the onslaught of enemy forces. The capital investment in the wall serves as a source of security later on, when troubles and dangers appear. *A wall is a standing testimony to the future-orientation of the builders.* They cared enough to sacrifice present consumption expenditures in order to defend themselves and their heirs from attack.

A wall is an admission that an unexpected event can overturn a city’s plans. It is a testimony to the power of the unexpected. The same is true of riches. Capital in the form of cash or other readily negotiable assets can be used to defend a business during hard times, or to buy legal advice, or to establish a new business when conditions change. The “high wall” of wealth is a barricade against hard times. It protects the rich man from disasters that would bankrupt a poor man, causing him to sell himself into slavery or to go deeply into debt.

The truly rich man is a man with net assets. He has little or no debt. His capital is his own. It is not a wall with a hole in it, as heavily indebted capital is. He is not on the verge of poverty. The market normally cannot bring him to his knees, making him destitute.

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

Walls can be breached. Destruction can come to all men, including the rich. But the rich man has a barrier that the poor man does not possess. The higher the wall, the more difficult it is for enemies to scale it. The rich man has a high wall. He is not easily overrun by his enemies.

Conclusion

This is the description of a desirable condition. All men want safety. All men fear the coming of destruction—the defenseless condition of the poor man. Thus, one of the blessings of covenantal faithfulness is wealth: capital resources that reflect economically the spiritually protected status of the redeemed man. The outward condition of the man who is blessed by God ideally reflects his inward, eternal condition.

25

JUST WAGES

The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin [punishment] (Prov. 10:16).

The contrast between righteousness and wickedness continues. This proverb informs us of two types of wages: life and punishment. The righteous man sells his labor services for a wage: life. This proverb confirms the teaching of the commandment to honor parents in order to attain long life (Ex. 20:12).¹ Long life is a universally pursued earthly goal. In contrast, the wicked man's income is punishment ("sin" in the KJV). There is a predictable correspondence between each type of behavior and its appropriate reward.

The relationship between ethics and economics is obvious. God declares certain actions righteous and others wicked. There is life for those who act righteously, but people who defy God and pursue wickedness are punished. The context of this proverb does not suggest an exclusively heavenly reward. *The preliminary manifestation of eternal wages is temporal.*

Paul's words parallel this proverb: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). His focus was more clearly that of the final judgment. But numerous proverbs make it plain that earthly affairs are indicative of the eternal condition that each person can expect. There is a *preliminary reward system* that reveals, however imperfectly, the spiritual status of society's members.

This contrast between the two forms of wages refutes what was once known as the labor theory of value. The classical economists from Adam Smith through John Stuart Mill, including Karl Marx, re-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

lied on some version of this theory of value. They assumed that human labor expended in production is the basis of market value. The more labor that is used to manufacture a product, the higher its market price.

Many unsolvable problems were produced by the intellectual labor of those who held this theory. Why is it more profitable to invest in capital in a leisure-oriented industrial nation than in sub-Sahara Africa, where there is so much human labor available at cheap wages to add to the production process? Why is a randomly discovered diamond mine or gold mine so valuable, compared to years of labor devoted to the development of a perpetual motion machine? Eventually, no matter how much time and effort its defenders spent on it—and Marx's second and third volumes of *Das Kapital* (published posthumously) are lasting monuments to just how much labor they expended—the market value of this idea continued to fall.

Beginning in the early 1870s, there appeared an unconnected trio of economists, subsequently called neoclassical economists,² who argued that the market value of labor is dependent upon the market value of labor's output. The production of a heavily demanded product or service that requires a highly specialized type of labor (e.g., brain surgery) will highly reward those who possess the particular skill or resources involved. The high price that customers are willing and able to pay will tend to lure other laborers into the labor market for this particular service. It is therefore not labor that gives value to the product, neoclassical economists argued, but market demand by customers. In other words, *customers' subjective preferences and objective purchases are economically authoritative in the marketplace*. Their preferences, revealed through market competition, create an objectively determined market value (price) for products and therefore for both labor and land (resource) inputs that produce these products.

Two forms of labor may be expended on a particular task by two different people. Their physically measurable labor may be close to identical. The righteous man in some instances may receive the same money wage as the wicked man, yet God rewards them differently in eternity. But can their earthly wages differ? The Bible says yes. So does economic theory.

How can this be? Doesn't the free market pay equal wages for equal work? No. It pays *equal wages for equal net value, after costs*,

2. Carl Menger (Austria), Léon Walras (Switzerland), and William Stanley Jevons (England).

produced by the workers. A lawless man is a higher-risk employee. The employer wants hard-working people who are honest and predictable on the job. He wants people with good reputations in the community. He wants people who will stay with the company for many years. The physically measurable daily labor output of two workers may be the same, but the net value of each man's output to the employer (and therefore to the consumer) may be very different in the long run. Their wages today may reflect this difference.

The Bible's perspective is even more subtle. There is more to economic rewards than the market's rewards. There is also the sovereignty of God. Ours is a personal universe created and sustained by a personal God. He brings glory to Himself by rewarding those who abide by His commandments and who thereby bring honor to Him. In the aggregate, righteous men buy themselves longer life spans (Prov. 10:2).³ It is God, not the market, who enables them to exercise dominion, on average, longer than the wicked can.

Conclusion

Earthly rewards reflect the spiritual kingdom for which a person labors: two different kingdoms, two types of reward. Thus, there are limits to the market as an institutional source of rewards for productive service. God sees men's hearts, and He rewards them accordingly, although the market is one factor in the distribution of these rewards, since God does not bless or punish men in an historical or institutional vacuum.

Men who work hard for the kingdom of God, honoring God's laws and proclaiming His righteousness, receive more valuable rewards than drunkards who rob, pillage, and die young. The external earthly rewards of most citizens will reflect, in the long run, their ethical condition, because their ethical condition regulates their economic performance. The more closely the social institutions of a society conform to those specified in the Bible, the more predictable the visible relationship will be between ethics and income.

3. Chapter 19.

26

LEGITIMATE RICHES

The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it (Prov. 10:22).

A. Riches and Stewardship

To begin, the Hebrew word translated here as “rich” means exactly what it means in English: *accumulation*. The context in earlier passages where the word appears is clear: wealth.

That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich (Gen. 14:23).

The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up (I Sam. 2:7).

Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him (Ps. 49:16–17).

He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich (Prov. 10:4).¹

It would be incorrect to interpret this proverb as dealing with spiritual riches in contrast to assets easily exchanged in a market. The kinds of riches here are marketable riches. A person could put a “for sale” sign on them.

The tip-off is the second part of the promise: “. . . he addeth no sorrow with it.” Why should Solomon have added this? Because in many passages in the Bible, riches are associated with negative sanctions and sorrow. Solomon here distinguishes riches as blessings from riches as cursings. This is an important passage. It makes clear that

1. Chapter 21.

riches as covenantal blessings are not to be regarded as a liability. They are not Trojan horses with sorrow hidden inside.

The spiritually wise man understands that riches increase one's personal responsibility. Jesus taught this clearly.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).²

There is an inescapable burden associated with riches: *stewardship*. Every asset's owner is legally God's agent and is therefore responsible to God for its administration (Luke 19:12–15).³

Solomon says that when riches come from God in the form of a *blessing*—a positive covenantal sanction—there is no negative sanction attached to it, i.e., sorrow, but there is added *responsibility*. This is an inescapable aspect of stewardship. This responsibility is not a threat to the covenant-keeper. The covenant-keeper sees an increase in his responsibility as a motivation to extend God's dominion in history. This is an honor, not a curse. It is a reason to rejoice, not shed tears. To use a military example, it is the equivalent of a promotion. The threat to a military career is a reduction of rank due to incompetence or disobedience to lawful authority. Yet a reduction in rank is a reduction in responsibility.

B. Covenant Sanctions

The Mosaic law affirmed the existence of a predictable relationship between covenantal faithfulness and external blessings.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God (Deut. 28:1–2).⁴

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 46.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

These are covenantal blessings. They are evidence of God's faithfulness to His covenant people. He extends their dominion through blessings of various kinds, which are listed in the passage. These are visible blessings. The Hebrew word translated as "blessings" in Deuteronomy 28:2 is the same Hebrew word in Proverbs 10:22.

This passage makes it inescapably clear that wealth is a covenantal blessing of God. This does not mean that it cannot be used by God as a lure into personal disaster. In Proverbs, there are numerous passages that say specifically that God uses wealth as a snare to trap covenant-breakers.

So, the presence of wealth in a person's possession is not, in and of itself, a sign that God looks favorably on the owner's efforts. When wealth is accompanied with a public profession of faith in the God of the Bible and also by outward conformity to God's Bible-revealed law, wealth can safely be presumed by the owner and those around him to be a legitimate blessing from God.

C. Hostility to Wealth

Within every civilization, there are people who pursue wealth fanatically. There are other people who scorn wealth universally. Both outlooks are marks of covenant-breaking. This proverb tells us that wealth is not random. God directs the flow of wealth. He does so within the context of *binding covenant oaths* under His authority. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).⁵ He does so outside His covenant.

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me (Isa. 45:1-4).

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

Solomon also warns: “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death” (11:4).⁶ “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (18:11).⁷

So, wealth must be seen within the context of the biblical covenant: confession and obedience. When it is the product of covenantal obedience, it is legitimate.

Conclusion

Riches can come without sorrow. They are tools of dominion. They enable the steward-owner to accomplish more for God’s kingdom, which is why he is held responsible for exercising greater responsibility (Luke 12:47–48). To imagine that wealth necessarily produces sorrow and should therefore be avoided is the equivalent of arguing that responsibility produces sorrow and should therefore be avoided. This is the belief of pietists everywhere. They resent any suggestion that the domain of responsibility is as broad and deep as the domain of Satan, the squatter. They seek to limit their responsibility. One manifestation of this attempt is to decry wealth as universally unholy. Solomon thought otherwise.

6. Chapter 30.

7. Chapter 54.

A MATTER OF INHERITANCE

The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation (Prov. 10:24–25).

Here is the familiar contrast between the covenant-breaker and the covenant-keeper. Here also is a discussion of sanctions. Each covenantal agent has his appropriate sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. A Matter of Vulnerability

We begin with the main fear that burdens the wicked. The wicked person has a dominant fear. Of course, he has more than one, but this proverb speaks of fear in the singular. This fear is a constant concern in his life. This proverb says that this dominant fear will come upon him. That which he has feared most will arrive in his life. That with which he has been obsessed will overtake him. He has hoped to avoid it somehow, but he will fail. God will thwart his plans to escape his fear.

This proverb does not mention the fact that most fears of most people never materialize. They worry, yet this emotional drain is wasted. Jesus said: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:33–

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

34).²

It is with this fact of life as a backdrop that this proverb's warning gains its sharpness. The covenant-breaker is not living in an impersonal universe operating in terms of a dialectical conflict between statistical randomness and unbreakable natural law. He is living in a universe governed by cosmic personalism.³

I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it (Isa. 45:5–8).

The sinner is known by God and identified accurately as an enemy of God. God has structured His universe to operate in terms of a covenantal, ethics-based system of causation. The sinner will be found out. His constant fear will eventually come upon him.

This condition of vulnerability is contrasted with the condition of the covenant-keeper. The covenant-keeper also lives in a world of cosmic personalism. The covenantal structure of cause and effect imposes sanctions in history. The sanctions for covenant-keeping are positive. So, the desire of the righteous shall be granted. Again, this proverb identifies a single concern: *desire*, in contrast to fear. This is the defining desire of the covenant-keeper, in contrast to the defining fear of the covenant-breaker. Jesus identified what should be the defining desire of the covenant-keeper: to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7).⁴ This had been Solomon's experience. He had a desire. He asked God to fulfill it. "Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?" (II Chron. 1:10).

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

4. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 16.

And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like (II Chron. 1:11–12).

B. Time and Eternity

The second, connected, proverb contrasts the respective conditions of the covenant-breaker and covenant-keeper. “As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.”

The image of the whirlwind is graphic. A tornado or its equivalent rolls through a community, leaving devastation in its wake. A few minutes before, there were homes, orchards, and storage buildings. In a brief period, these are all gone. The labor of many people’s hands over long periods was invested for the sake of future gains. They invested time and raw materials. They sacrificed. Then, in a few minutes, the whirlwind levels all of these dreams. The investments are now of greatly reduced value. They may be negative: the cost of hauling away the debris. This is the condition of the covenant-breaker. His future is little more than a pile of rubble. Whatever he built will be blown away. His efforts will leave no trace.

In contrast is the covenant-keeper. He is said to be a foundation. This foundation is anchored in eternity. The word can be translated “bottom.” It means what it does in English. “So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the **foundation** thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezek. 13:14). In God’s wrath, nothing remains of a structure, but a covenant-keeper’s foundation is eternal. The image here is of a collapsed wall. So, the passage is pointing, not to a person, but to *a person’s efforts in history*. The covenant-keeper’s efforts are secure. He will leave more than a trace. His work will serve as the starting point for successors.

This work will be everlasting. This is the same word that is used in a passage describing God’s covenant with mankind through Noah. “And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may

remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Gen. 9:16). It will extend down through the ages.

Conclusion

The sanctions are imposed by God in history. These sanctions are positive and negative. Positive sanctions are the fulfillment of a person's desire and the guaranteed extension of his legacy through time. Negative sanctions are the advent of a person's greatest fear in life and the obliteration of his work down through time. It is the difference between establishing and cutting off.

Ultimately, the distinction is a matter of inheritance, the fifth point of the biblical covenant.⁵ The sanctions have opposite effects: the destruction of a person's inheritance and the extension of inheritance through time.

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 5. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 5.

UNRELIABLE SUBORDINATES

As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him (Prov. 10:26).

This proverb deals with the issue of the delegation of authority. There is hierarchy in human institutions. Hierarchy is part of the structure of God's covenant.¹

The division of labor is mandatory for the extension of God's kingdom in history. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour" (Eccl. 4:9). This division of labor is both horizontal and vertical. We rely on those around us to provide what we want when we want it at a price we are able to pay. These people are outside our control. We must persuade them because we cannot command them. We also rely on people who are under us if we work in a hierarchical organization. These people to some degree are under our control. Economic progress is accompanied by the growth in the number of such organizations.

A. Neither Omniscience Nor Omnipotence

Men are not omniscient. We cannot see what is going on beyond a very limited view. We must trust others to provide them with accurate information. We can buy information from outside the organization. We can also obtain information from within the organization. This involves the classifying, identifying, collecting, selecting, evaluating, and packaging of information, so that those above and below in the chain of command can make effective decisions that enable the organization to fulfill its goals.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1980] 2012), ch. 2.

Beyond the assembling of information there is execution. Men are not omnipotent. They cannot force people to do exactly what they say. In every organization, there are tasks assigned to specific people by those who are higher in the chain of command. In a government bureaucracy, the funding is collected by legal force at the top of the pyramid. The money and authority are allocated downward. It is a top-down system. In contrast is the profit-seeking privately owned organization. Here, top decision-making is confined to budgeting, developing general guidelines, and establishing success indicators, i.e., standards of performance. Initiative in executing the plan lies at the bottom. It is a bottom-up system with respect to execution of the plan.²

B. Relying on Subordinates

Those higher in the chain of command become dependent on individuals at lower levels. Everyone in the middle has two sets of dependents: those higher and those lower. Those high in the operation rely on subordinates to execute plans: applying general plans to specific situations, i.e., a reconciliation of the one and the many. This in turn requires a degree of initiative by the plan's implementers. It involves personal responsibility. Others in the organization are dependent in the organization of the smooth, integrated, predictable fulfillment of assignments.

Those who are lower in the chain of command require guidance from those above them. Those above them are in charge of explaining the general rules to those below. Lower-level employees also require budgeted assets in order to fulfill their assignments. This demands attention to details and also leadership abilities. It is not enough to give orders. There must be follow-up.

In every organization there are go-getters and sluggards. The goal of the organization's directors is to hire more of the former and fewer of the latter. The sluggards require nagging in order to persuade them to do three things: (1) do what they said they would do; (2) do it with the assets allocated; (3) do it on time. They may also require other forms of negative sanctions.

Sluggards reduce the efficiency of the organization that employs them. Too much time and energy must be expended to get sluggards

2. On the differences between these two organizational models, see Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944). (<http://bit.ly/MisesBur>)

to perform at minimal standards. Those high in the chain of command who become dependent on sluggards must constantly intervene to get the sluggards to do their jobs well. Those higher up have their own operations at risk at all times. Sluggards increase this risk. They are like fools. “He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage” (Prov. 26:6).

Conclusion

The sluggard is an annoyance both to those above and below him. This proverb mentions only those above him. They are in charge. They will take the blame if the sluggard fails to deliver the specified goods or services on time and within his budget. Those below him will also suffer from his lack of attention to his assignment. They are dependent on the hierarchy to deliver the guidelines, interpretations, and assets necessary to complete their assignments. A sluggard threatens them, too.

29

MEASURING OUT JUSTICE

A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight (Prov. 11:1).

A. Weights and Measures

This is a comment on the Mosaic law: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:35–36).¹

Here, we are told how God responds to dishonest weights and measures, as well as to honest ones. The former angers Him; the latter delights Him. This message is repeated in Proverbs.

A just weight and balance are the LORD’S: all the weights of the bag are his work (16:11).²

Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD (20:10).³

Just weights are identified as God’s *work* (16:11). The same Hebrew word is found in the commandment to honor the sabbath, which is contrasted with work. “Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed” (Ex. 23:12). By identifying just weights as God’s work, this proverb implies that God took an active role in creating standards. They were not an afterthought, let alone the product of would-be autonomous men’s

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

2. Chapter 52.

3. Chapter 57.

would-be autonomous minds.

In Deuteronomy, this point is driven home.

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God (Deut. 25:13–16).⁴

Notice that there is a blessing attached to this law: long life. This same blessing is associated with the commandment to love one's parents (Ex. 20:12).⁵ While this proverb does not specifically say that the use of unjust weights will shorten men's lives, the idea is implied by the contrast.

Why should just weights have such importance that God would promise long life to those who honor this law? This is a major positive sanction—indeed, it is a universally sought-after sanction. Wherever this sanction is invoked by a text—and it is invoked only twice in connection with a Mosaic law—we should take the law seriously. The law is a life-and-death matter.

B. Representative Infractions

Weights and measures are representative of justice in general, as Leviticus 19:35 indicates: “unrighteousness in judgment.” Leviticus 19:37 brings the reader back to the chapter's overall topic. “Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.”

Tampering with weights is a form of deception. It is a form of theft. The seller, who is a specialist in his field, uses his specialized knowledge to defraud a buyer, who presumably is less well informed. The social division of labor, which is a blessing to society as a whole because of specialized production, is being misused by a person who possesses specialized knowledge. This kind of fraud is easy to perpetrate because so few people will recognize it. The seller makes a small

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

profit on every transaction—so small that few people will ever notice it. The fraud is widespread in the sense of multiple victims.

The Bible singles out this crime as representing crime in general. The perpetrator thinks he will not be caught. He thinks that God will not see or will not care or will not intervene on behalf of the victims. This is characteristic of criminals.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it (Ps. 10:4–11).

The Psalmist—Solomon's father—then called on God to avenge the victims.

Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none (Ps. 10:12–15).

Conclusion

God sees. He evaluates in terms of His permanent ethical standards. He judges men's weights and measures in terms of His weights and measures. Through the supernatural handwriting on the wall, God told Babylon's final king, "TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (Dan. 5:27).

A constant theme in the Mosaic law and Old Testament revelation is the necessity of honest weights and measures. This is a crucial manifestation of a society's commitment to God's covenant.

DEFENSIVE WALLS

Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death (Prov. 11:4).

A. The Day When Everything Changes

There is no concept of the final judgment in the Old Testament. The doctrines of the final judgment, hell, heaven, the lake of fire, and the post-resurrection new heaven and new earth are all exclusively New Testament doctrines.¹ So, this proverb refers to history. This is not to say that these dual principles do not apply also to eternity. They do. But that is not its focus here. If we are to understand how it applies to us, we must first understand how it was believed to apply under the Mosaic covenant.

The day of wrath in the Old Testament was a day of judgment that altered a person's life. This might be a military battle. It might be a personal confrontation between rivals. It was a day of judgment for men or institutions. Such an event would permanently change the pattern of history, either personal or national. The prophet Isaiah warned Judah of the day of the Lord.

The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low (Isa. 2:11–12).

When that judgment arrived over a century and a half later, the prophet Jeremiah lamented,

1. The new heavens and the new earth are both taught in Isaiah 65, but they refer to the earth. There are still sinners. There is still death (Isa. 65:17–20). This is a millennial prophecy, not a final judgment prophecy.

The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, and not pitied. Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the LORD'S anger none escaped nor remained: those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed (Lam. 2:21–22).

B. The Walls of Protection

Men build up walls. In the era of gunpowder, city walls no longer protect against invaders. Cities no longer bother to build walls. But there are walls nonetheless. The favored wall is wealth. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).² The rich man’s assumption is this: “Every person has a price.” He assumes that he can buy his way out of every predicament. But to do this, he needs wealth. The greater the predicament he expects, the greater the wealth he thinks he will require.

This proverb challenges this assumption. There will come a predicament that is too great for a rich man to escape through his wealth. When an invading army penetrates the city’s walls, its troops will collect the wealth of all the inhabitants. Why bargain with a rich man? Besides, who can enforce the terms of the agreement? The more ruthless the army, the less reliable the enforcement of contracts.

In contrast is the wall of righteousness. It offers hope that wealth does not. But why? This proverb does not say. But we know this: in an impersonal universe, there could be no such guarantee, no such hope. There would be no sovereign agent to enforce the promise. So, this proverb is a testimony to the cosmic personalism of the created universe.³ Causation is not impersonal, nor is it ethically neutral.

This being the case, this proverb’s message is that *ethics is preferable to riches as a way to avoid the threat of destruction*. The rich man’s wall will be breached by the enemy. The righteous man’s wall will not.

Conclusion

This proverb deals with faith. It raises this question: What should a wise person trust as his barrier against disaster, money or righteous-

2. Chapter 54.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

ness? This proverb is clear: righteousness. Yet this covenantal fact is difficult for even covenant-keepers to believe in their own lives. It takes years of self-discipline in terms of God's law to persuade a person that this proverb is true. A covenant-keeper should know this in principle from the day he reads this proverb and others like it, but it usually takes years of evidence to persuade him. People are slow learners. They are also evidentialists rather than presuppositionalists when it comes to truths that are difficult to believe.

31

A MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Prov. 11:14).

A. Corporate Society

Here we have a corporate view of society. The Hebrew word, *'am*, is a collective noun. The context is national. The national covenant forms the basis of this collective.

Societies require counselors. Every society has counselors. At every level of society, decision-makers seek counsel. So, the phrase, "where no counsel is," has to be a metaphor for unwise counsel. It is empty counsel. It counts for nothing. This principle is not limited to civil government.

In Israel, there were court prophets who were on the king's payroll. They were usually false prophets. They spoke what the king wanted to hear, but in the name of God. This counsel is contrasted with a multitude of counsel. So, it must be a form of poor counsel. This proverb's words contrast no counsel with a multitude of counsel. But this is never the situation, for someone is always advising the representatives of society to take a particular course of action on behalf of the society. I conclude that the contrast is between unitary counsel and a cross-section of opinion.

Unitary counsel has multiple defects. First, it must exclude competing views. To do this, there must be a system of information filtering, so that the decision-makers hear only one side regarding any decision. This filtering system must involve conscious deception of those at the top by those in charge of the flow of information. This proverb indicates that this kind of unitary counsel is the equivalent of no counsel at all.

The second problem is that a committee with a unified agenda is

after something. Its members have something to gain: fame, influence with key groups outside the counsel, money from a special-interest group, or the approval of the decision-makers, who hear only what they want to hear. When the decision-makers seek confirmation rather than counsel, the Bible speaks of this arrangement as being without counsel.

B. What Is Counsel?

Counsel is an assessment of the unknown future by specialists who know something about the past. The problem for the decision-maker is to assess the degree of correspondence of counsel regarding the past with that which is unknown about the future. First, counselors with expertise regarding the past are always in conflict. The more of them who are consulted, the greater the degree of disagreement over what really happened, what it meant, and what the objective results were.

Second, that which is asserted about the past must be assessed by the decision-makers in terms of three problems: its accuracy, its relevance to the problem at hand, and its enforceability by the hierarchical system of control available to the decision-maker. A decision-maker can issue lots of orders. Will the orders be carried out as he intended, or even at all? Bureaucrats are self-serving. They are also specialists in blocking or deflecting orders from above, as well as requests from below.

This proverb assumes that there is covenantal agreement, established by confession and institutional discipline, in the nation. That is, it assumes that there is a *unitary worldview* regarding God, man, law, causation, and time. This is a society created by covenant. There is a unitary confession: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4).

Second, this proverb assumes that within this unitary confession there is disagreement regarding the appropriate course of action. There are experts and non-experts in society who have strong opinions. They are in possession of truth. Information is widely dispersed. In order to gain the advantage of access to the truth that is relevant to the decision at hand and enforceable by the chain of command, the decision-makers must listen to a wide range of opinions.

These opinions are not matched with authority. They are opinions without judicial responsibility. The decision-makers have both authority and responsibility. They cannot evade the problem at hand. So, they

seek to deal with it by gaining access to information that a screening committee of court prophets could not possess.

C. The Division of Intellectual Labor

The economist and social theorist F. A. Hayek made this principle, the intellectual division of labor, the cornerstone of his long and distinguished academic career. In what has become a classic essay, “The Use of Knowledge in Society” (1945), Hayek argued against central economic planning because no committee of planners can possess the knowledge that individuals possess across the society. They know the relevant facts of their particular situations. No distant committee can know this.¹

Unlike a free market, which has a price system to adjust specific supply and demand, which in turn pressures market participants to adjust their plans in terms of prices, the central government possesses no comparable method of bringing this decentralized knowledge to bear on the problem at hand. The decision-makers are not able to collect and assess all the relevant information. So, they listen to representatives of particular groups or viewpoints. There is always screening of information. Decision-makers are not God. They are not omniscient. But by putting information suppliers on notice that many viewpoints will be heard and assessed, the decision-makers call forth far more information than a closed screening committee representing one interest group could possibly produce.

This proverb recommends that decision-makers listen to many points of view before deciding. Their goal should be better information. Solomon understood another principle of decision-making. “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him” (Prov. 18:17). This also applies to decision-making outside of the courtroom.

D. Every Level of Decision-Making

The principle of multiple counsel applies to every level of decision-making. The individual must make decisions. He should seek multiple counselors.

The free market is the consummate social institution for seeking

1. F. A. Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society” (1945), in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>)

and gaining counsel. The price system is a constant source of updated information. People buy and sell in terms of a price, which in turn sends more signals and therefore more information.

Everyone is responsible for what he does. Jesus warned: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:35–37). If this applies to words, how much more does it apply to deeds. This should create an incentive for every individual to seek counsel from others who have experience in the area of decision-making that faces him.

Conclusion

A society will fall when the people have no counsel. In this context, this refers to empty counsel: counsel in opposition to God’s counsel, as revealed in the Bible. A society of covenant-breakers operates in terms of empty counsel.

Within the covenantal confession of subordination to the trinitarian God of the Bible, there is a wide range of experience, information, and opinion. While decision-makers should be self-governed under biblical law, they also are told to seek a wide range of opinions. The one—the unitary covenant under the trinitarian God—must not exclude the many: a multitude of counsel. Biblically, this principle honors the Trinity. In the Trinity, the one and the many are equally ultimate. This unitary confession requires the consideration of many applications of the confession.

TURN LOOSE TO GATHER IN

There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it (Prov. 11:24–26).

This string of proverbs is held together by one theme: *scattering and prospering*. This concept relies on what appear to be contradictions or antinomies. Throw away and gather in; hold on tight and become poor: these seem contradictory. These linked proverbs point to a system of cause and effect that operates outside of men's familiar patterns.

Yet, on closer observation, these patterns are familiar after all. A farmer knows that by scattering seeds, he will reap a great crop. Similarly, if he withholds too much of his seed—more than is “meet,” meaning fit—and refuses to scatter them, he will reap almost no crop. He will fall into poverty.

This is a principle of investment. Investment requires future-orientation. A person looks at what he possesses now. He wants greater wealth in the future. In order to attain this goal, he must surrender control over that which he possesses today.

He can plant seed. This seed he cannot grind into flour and bake into bread. To eat seed that is fit—meet—for planting is to “eat your seed corn,” the traditional phrase tells us. We eat our future increase. We consume more in the present at the price of consuming less in the future. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

A. The Process of Time

Time is on the side of the righteous. All of cause and effect is. Paul wrote: “And we know that all things work together for good to them

that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).¹

When men scatter seed, they expect to prosper over time. When men become grasping, refusing to scatter seed, they become poor over time. The process of compounding—positive and negative—takes time.

Time is relentless. It waits on no man. It has a negative aspect for covenant-breakers and a positive aspect for covenant-keepers. An individual is soon forgotten, but covenant-keepers flourish through the ages. God intervenes to keep the inheritance of covenant-keepers growing.

As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them (Ps. 103:15–18).

The process of scattering and withholding are aspects of rival views of cause and effect. The covenant-keeper perceives that time is on his side and the side of his covenantal heirs. The covenant-breaker knows, as Satan knows, that his time is short. His legacy compounds at a negative rate. “For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.” Here today; gone tomorrow.

B. Ownership and Disownership

A farmer owns seed. He will also own any crop produced by this seed. He can increase his wealth in the future by surrendering seed in the present. He invests. What the individual knows to be true within the judicial context of ownership, this proverb implies—but does not explicitly say—also applies to the principle of wealth transfer. This proverb implies that *the same principle of wealth accumulation also applies to the realm of disownership*.

This is contrary to what the world regards as common sense. Cause and effect teach that if you give away wealth, you will possess less wealth. There is a finite quantity of goods, including time. That which is given away is transferred to someone else. Aristotelian logic says that one object cannot be in two places at once. Is this proverb ar-

1. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

guing against Aristotelian logic?

The farmer surrenders control over seeds in the present. He hopes to own more seeds in the future. The process of agricultural production takes time.

This proverb relies on the same concept of time. When men surrender control over their wealth in the present, they can accumulate greater wealth in the future. But in this case, the control is *legal* control. Donors will not own the increase, if any, of whatever they give away. When you turn grain into bread and then give away the bread, you have neither seed nor bread. You do not have grain in the ground, either. Yet this proverb says that in fact you do have the equivalent of seed in the ground. The Preacher—Solomon—wrote elsewhere: “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Eccl. 11:1).

“The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself” (v. 25). The Hebrew word, *berakah*, is translated “liberal.” This is a rare translation. In dozens of passages, it is translated as “blessing” or “blessed.” We see this in these related passages:

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lenient; and his seed is blessed (Ps. 37:25–26).²

He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor (Prov. 22:9).

A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent (Prov. 28:20).³

He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse (Prov. 28:27).

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again (Luke 6:38).⁴

The blessed soul is the liberal soul. He is also the *blessings* soul—the source of others’ blessings. He waters the parched soil. So will he

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

3. Chapter 83.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

be watered. There is cause and effect. This is a system of expansion—growth—but not for the covenant-breaker.

In contrast is the man who withholds corn in a crisis. “He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it” (v. 26). Note: the blessed man sells grain. He does not give it away. He asks for something in return. But the cursed man keeps grain for himself. Presumably, he is not planning to eat it. Someone with only enough corn to feed his family will not be the target of curses. The accused is a forestaller: a person who controls a sufficient quantity of grain to raise the price by refusing to sell it. What he does is in contrast with the liberal man.

What is unique here is the suggestion that the man who sells grain in a food shortage is like one who scatters his wealth. He will tend toward prosperity. In contrast, the man who holds onto more than is meet—fitting—tends toward poverty. Yet the grain seller receives less money than if he waited until the famine grew worse. The grain hoarder hopes to receive more money per quantity of grain. Yet he tends toward poverty.

This is not the system of cause and effect imagined by the modern economist, who affirms a world of cosmic impersonalism. It is rather the system of cause and effect proclaimed by God, in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus Christ is the ultimate liberal soul, the example of the system of prospering by letting go.

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal (John 12:23–25).

Conclusion

We live in God’s world. Men are governed by God in terms of the ethical principles of biblical law. This includes societies. God governs cause and effect in terms of biblical law. This is the Bible’s covenantal theory of sanctions.

This proverb describes the principle of turning loose in order to gather in. This principle applies to seeds in farming, where the farmer owns the seeds and also any future crop. It also applies to entire societies. So, a covenant-keeper can turn loose (disown a little) and confid-

ently expect to gather in (own more), even though he surrenders ownership of whatever is turned loose. This covenantal system of cause and effect operates within God's sphere of ownership, not just inside the individual's sphere of ownership. God owns everything: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).⁵ The individual covenant-keeper, acting as a steward of God's property, can safely give away God's property for covenant-honoring projects. More will follow, as surely as a crop follows planting, because it is God's property.

5. North, *Confidence and Dominion*, ch. 10.

33

TWO KINDS OF EXPANSION

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch (Prov. 11:28).

This proverb parallels Proverbs 11:4: “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.”¹ This proverb is more general. The earlier proverb is true because this proverb is true.

This proverb is an application of an even more general proverb: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). What is mammon? It is this principle: “More for me in history.”²

A. Across Generations

The Old Testament had no explicit concept of a final judgment. So, this proverb refers to this world: history. Yet we know that some people who pursue riches do not fall. They die rich. How can this fact—a fact acknowledged by Asaph in Psalm 73—be reconciled with this proverb? The proverbs are rules illustrating the operation of God’s covenant in history. The fifth point of the biblical covenant is inheritance.³ The following principle governs inheritance: “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁴ Applying this insight to this assertion—he who trusts in his riches shall fall—we conclude that

1. Chapter 30.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

4. Chapter 41.

the mammon-worshipping person falls by way of inheritance. What a man does in this life will be judged by God finally. This was not an Old Testament insight. But there is a preliminary manifestation of final judgment: *God's judgment of the heirs.* This is a constant theme of the Old Testament: Who will inherit, and what will he inherit? This was Abram's question to God in what he believed (inaccurately) was his old age.⁵

And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir (Gen. 15:2–3).

Inheritance was on his mind. Inheritance had been the positive sanction God had offered him before he left Ur.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3).

So, the biblical covenant testifies against any concept of personal success that is limited to the lifetime of the achiever. To assess a man's success, we must ask: "Who were his heirs, and what did they do with their inheritance?"

Solomon was a personal failure. His son Rehoboam lost the kingdom because of his policy of high taxation (I Kings 12). He did not possess his father's wisdom—a wisdom that his father had surrendered by marrying hundreds of wives (I Kings 11:3), which violated God's law for Israel's kings (Deut. 17:17),⁶ a law that Solomon's father David had also violated (I Sam. 25:42–43; II Sam. 5:13), with terrible consequences for his family (II Sam. 13).

Solomon did not pursue riches, but riches came to him. He did not give these riches away. Thus, he accumulated riches, in violation of God's law for Israel's kings. "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself,

5. "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah" (Gen. 24:67–25:2).

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42:C.

that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (Deut. 17:17).⁷ He acted contrary to his own principles, as set forth in the Book of Proverbs. These wealth-related proverbs are difficult to believe. They are even more difficult to implement personally.

B. A Flourishing Branch

In most instances, the KJV translators translated this Hebrew word as “leaf.” The word relates to foliage. Leaves are temporary things. Branches are more permanent. So, the translators selected “branch.” There are multiple Hebrew words translated as “branch.”

A leaf reflects the health of a tree. A deciduous tree with no leaves in summer is a dead tree. Leaves in abundance indicate growth. This proverb indicates that righteousness is like a flourishing leaf. To flourish is to possess a benefit. “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God” (Ps. 92:12–13).

To be righteous is to become the recipient of God’s tokens of the good life. There is expansion. Yet this is what the man who pursues riches also desires. He wants the expansion of his wealth because riches are a positive sanction. Yet this proverb and others tell us that the pursuit of riches is a snare and a delusion.

Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them (Ps. 39:6).⁸

The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness (Ps. 52:6–7).

Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven (Prov. 23:5).⁹

As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that

7. *Idem.*

8. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 7.

9. Chapter 72.

getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool (Jer. 17:11).

Conclusion

This proverb is clear: he who trusts in riches will fall. He trusts in a visible sanction rather than in the God who awards positive sanctions. This is what Moses warned against. “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:17–18).¹⁰

In contrast, the righteous man flourishes. It is not what he owns but *what he is ethically* that marks him as a beneficiary of covenant blessings. Ethical conformity to God’s law is of great positive consequence. The piling up of riches is of great negative consequence.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).¹¹

10. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21, 22.

11. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

34

CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE

The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand (Prov. 12:7).

This proverb deals with inheritance. Inheritance is the fifth point of the biblical covenant.¹

The proverbs refer to temporal affairs. There was no explicit concept of final judgment in the Old Testament. So, the events described here relate to history: in time and on earth.

A. Dreams and Schemes

The general contrast is between the wicked and the righteous. The wicked are overthrown. They do not survive. Yet no person survives. Death takes all men. So, in what does the contrast consist?

This proverb indicates that there is no trace of the wicked after they are gone. This does not mean that the historical record does not provide documentation of their deeds. It means that their dreams and schemes do not survive their overthrow. Their institutions do not persevere. In modern times, this was demonstrated on December 31, 1991, when the Soviet Union committed suicide. The Communist Party ceased to rule the nation. There was a revolution without bloodshed. The leaders simply gave up their attempt to rule as the Party had ruled since 1917. The Soviet Union was the largest empire in recorded history to surrender power without bloodshed.

The context of this proverb becomes clearer with respect to the righteous. This proverb says that “the house of the righteous shall stand.” Whereas the wicked are no more, the righteous leave an insti-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

tutional legacy: a house. It is not overthrown. It sustains the dreams and schemes of the founders.

The issue is covenantal. Covenants are established by confession, mutual promises, and oath-signs. To survive the process of time, these three factors must persevere. The confession may be modified. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD (Deut. 6:4) does not change, but it is modified. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (I Tim. 3:16). The promises do not change, but the recipients do.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (I Peter 2:9–10).

Finally, the requirement of the oath is not abolished, but the oath-signs are replaced with new ones. The Lord's Supper has replaced Passover. Baptism has replaced circumcision.

B. The Perseverance of the Saints' Legacy

There is preservation through time for the institutional legacy of the righteous. This does not apply to the wicked. There is an historical problem here: Islam. It came out of nowhere in 632. Islam conquered North Africa in eight decades, 632–712, and there has been no trace of reconquest by Christianity. In 732, Arab warriors crossed the Pyrenees and moved into what is now France. They were defeated at the Battle of Tours that year. They retreated back into Spain. They were not completely driven out by Spanish military forces until 1492. Today, Muslims are in the process of reconquering Spain through immigration and high birth rates. They are doing the same in Italy and France. Unless their birth rates fall—as seems to be happening—below the non-Muslim population's birth rates—this is not happening—Europe will go Islamic unless Muslims abandon Islam or else Christian revival sweeps through Europe's non-Muslim population.

If this proverb remains true, then it has yet to be proven by all the facts. Christianity and Islam are the two largest religions. They have about the same number of adherents. Each side professes belief in this

proverb. Each side awaits the disappearance—the overthrow—of the other.

C. Confidence in the Future

The righteous have a legitimate hope in the future. Their legacy will persevere. The legacy of the wicked will not. The capital and labor that they invest today will produce consequences in the future. *The work of the covenantally faithful is cumulative.* This proverb denies that the righteous will be overthrown in history. It affirms that the wicked will be overthrown, just as their covenant-breaking ancestors were overthrown. The forces of history are not impersonal. They are personal.² God in history brings to pass what this proverb insists must happen.

Covenant-keepers can confidently sacrifice present income and leisure for the sake of building up the house of the righteous. This house will not be overthrown in history. In contrast, covenant-breakers have no legitimate hope that their house will not be overthrown in history, for it will be. This proverb is clear.

Conclusion

Covenant-keepers possess legitimate hope in the process of compound growth. Their house will persevere. Investments made today in building up God's kingdom institutions will multiply: compound over time. This is not true of investments made by covenant-breakers. While some of their institutional legacy can persevere, covenant-keepers will inherit it. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).³

When covenant-keepers understand and believe this proverb, they receive a remarkable gift: confidence in the long-run pay-off of their efforts. This is a tremendous psychological advantage.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

3. Chapter 41.

35

MORE IS BETTER

He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread (Prov. 12:9).

Here are a pair of comparisons, each with two aspects. The first person is despised: a negative factor. He possesses sufficient wealth to afford a servant: a positive factor. The second person is a self-inflated person who possesses so little wealth that he lacks bread, which is a low-priced yet vital commodity. He therefore suffers from two negative factors. The first person is said to be better than the second.

In what sense is he better? The Hebrew word translated as “better,” *towb*, is as broad as the English word, “good.” It conveys the sense of positive. “And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness” (Gen. 1:4). It also can mean ethically good, as in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). It can mean good as in good looking. “And the damsel was very fair to look upon” (Gen. 24:16a).

The first man is despised. Those around him assess his contribution to society negatively. They impute a negative image to him. But no one doubts that he possesses wealth. He has a servant. He has therefore earned or inherited wealth. He is not respected as a person, but what he possesses is desirable.

The second man is a self-promoter. Perhaps he has great self-esteem. If so, he is severely self-deceived. He has achieved nothing of value. He does not sell a service to the community for which anyone is willing to pay him much. His lack of accomplishment is revealed by his economic condition: hunger. There is therefore a great discrepancy between his words and his deeds.

A. Wealth as a Positive Factor

This proverb contrasts two negatives: being despised and self-promotion that is not justified by actual performance. Being despised is a negative factor. Self-promotion is also a negative factor. “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (Prov. 27:2). But this proverb insists that the despised man is better than the self-promoter.

The distinguishing factor between them is wealth. This is why this proverb is important in an economic commentary on the Bible. The first man possesses wealth. The second man does not. The disparity is considerable. To have enough wealth to hire a servant is to possess considerable wealth. Human labor is the most versatile factor of production. It can be used to produce value in many ways. It therefore commands a high price, for many employers compete for labor services. A servant has numerous employment opportunities. If he is a slave, he is nonetheless valuable. Other men will bid for his labor services by seeking to purchase him from his owner. His owner has wealth.

In stark contrast to the servant’s owner, the self-promoter cannot even afford bread. Bread is a low-cost commodity in most circumstances. It is widely produced. It is at the low-price end of the food supply. It is also vital. A person who cannot afford bread is in desperate shape. He surely cannot afford more expensive food. Yet if he cannot obtain food, he will die of starvation. He is therefore close to becoming either a thief or a charity case. Anyone in Mosaic Israel who was a charity case had no services worth purchasing for the price of bread. Such a person might seek to become a gleaner during the harvest season, which did not last very long. The laws governing this form of charity were seasonal; they did the poor person no economic good outside of the harvest season. Gleaners worked hard in the fields to collect the morally compulsory charity that God specified for the poor (Lev. 19:10;¹ Deut. 24:26²). But that law applied only during the harvest season, a short period. This man is so destitute of productive skills that he cannot feed himself.

This proverb does not compare negatives: being despised vs. self-promotion. It compares a positive factor to a negative. The positive

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 11.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

factor is wealth. The negative is poverty.

This would seem to be a straightforward conclusion. Few societies would not recognize its truth. But in modern Christian socialist circles, this conclusion is unacceptable. The socialist endorses some version of egalitarianism. He insists that the primary economic role of civil government is forcibly to redistribute income and capital toward equality. The socialist regards great disparities of wealth as morally objectionable and therefore socially objectionable. So, he must reject the conclusion I have made regarding the presence of a significant disparity of wealth as being the biblically deciding factor in evaluating the preferability of being either a despised man with a servant or a hungry self-promoter.

If my conclusion is correct, then egalitarianism is a false ideal. The Bible not only does not recommend the use of force to redistribute wealth, it presents wealth as a legitimate success indicator. The despised man with a servant is better off than a hungry self-promoter. This concept of “better off” is to be taken here in a broad sense, not merely as an accounting concept.

B. Accurate Self-Assessment

The person who is despised is not despised for having a servant. From Abram to the kings of Israel, men hired servants. There are almost 600 references to the Hebrew word for “servant” or “servants” in the Old Testament.

Having a servant is part of the social division of labor. A servant does work of lower value, or work that is beyond the skill of his employer. More work gets done by two men working together than by one man working alone. The Preacher—Solomon—insisted: “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up” (Eccl. 4:9–10).³ A servant is low in the hierarchy, but he is nonetheless part of the social division of labor.

To hire a servant requires productivity or inherited wealth. This person has enough wealth or productivity to put a servant to work. He provides employment to the servant. Together, they provide output for others. For some reason, the person with the servant is despised. But

3. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

those who despise him are aware that he is sufficiently successful to hire a servant.

In contrast is a person who announces to others that he is a success. He honors himself. Yet he lacks sufficient wealth or productivity to buy bread, let alone hire a servant. This proverb says that he is a failure—worse than a despised person. He should not be imitated.

The Bible is clear on this issue: the self-promoter is self-deluded. He is skating on thin ice. Jesus warned:

When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 14:8–11).⁴

C. A False Front

This man lacks bread. In an urban setting, where most people do not know each other, he may be able to get away with the deception for a time. If he wears good clothes, using debt to buy these clothes, he may escape detection. A salesman may buy an expensive new car in an attempt to create the illusion of his success. But such subterfuge rarely works. He runs out of money before his false front produces the deals he hopes to make as his way out of poverty. In a rural or small-town community, this deception has no possibility of being successful. People know that he does not have money. They are well aware of the discrepancy between his talk and his performance.

This proverb does not indicate that this man is an urban resident. He is pictured as a more universal personality type. He is a man who seeks to inflate his own ego by claiming a degree of success that he does not possess. He has no success. He is poverty-stricken.

This proverb indicates that such a person is at the bottom of the social pyramid. He is the model of what not to be. He is used for comparison's sake. Better to be despised with only one servant than a self-honoring poor person. He lacks humility. As Jesus pointed out, such a person is ready to sit at the head of the table. But his self-assessment is

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 33.

not the assessment that matters. The host's assessment is what counts. The host is not deceived. He will lead the person to the lowest place—not exactly a place of dishonor, but barely inside the feast. It becomes a place of dishonor because the host leads the man, in full public view, to the fringes of social acceptance.

In some cases, according to Jesus, the stakes are even higher. “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22–23).

Conclusion

Wealth is not the only success indicator. This proverb implies that it would be better to be wealthy and loved than wealthy and despised. What society would not acknowledge this? But the contrast here is not between a wealthy despised man and a wealthy beloved man. It is between two negative conditions: being despised and being a self-promoter. The distinguishing characteristic is not found in the primary descriptions of these two men. It is the secondary characteristic: wealth vs. poverty. Wealth is better than poverty.

A self-promoter had better have a degree of success that corresponds to the level of his self-promotion. This is not the case here.

It is best to follow Jesus' recommendation: start at the bottom and let the host lead you to a higher position. Entry is easier at the bottom.

36

THE OBJECT OF OUR LABOR

He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding (Prov. 12:11).

A. Contentment

A farmer tills his land. He produces the grain that in turn produces bread. His labor input—tilling the soil—is part of the necessary process for producing bread. His labor has a specific goal: the production of bread. This is a universally known product. It is a source of life, but it is common. Common men produce it. There is nothing prestigious about producing bread. There is also nothing prestigious about producing the grain used to bake it.

The core issue here is personal satisfaction: contentment. This is one of God's greatest gifts. This is stressed in the New Testament far more than in the Old Testament.

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content (Phil. 4:11).¹

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content (I Tim. 6:8).²

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Heb. 13:5).³

The farmer has found his area of service to God and to the society at large. He is content to plow the fields. It is hard work, but he is con-

1. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 27.

2. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

3. North, *Ethics and Dominion*, ch. 29.

tent to be doing it. His work and knowledge and tools over time produce his food. He is not looking to do big things. He is looking to do personally important things, beginning with producing a crop.

B. The Pursuit of Vanity

The Hebrew word translated here as “vain” is elsewhere translated as “empty.” “And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it” (Gen. 37:24). The Bible compares this kind of moral emptiness with lack of moral weight. “And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired **vain** and light persons, which followed him” (Jud. 9:4).

We speak of someone important in his field as a heavyweight. We speak of someone without importance in his field as a lightweight. The word in this context goes beyond importance. These people are leaders. They are able to attract followers. Yet they themselves are empty. They do not perceive that they are empty. If they did, they would depart from their leadership positions. Their followers also do not perceive that they are empty. If they did, they would follow others.

The follower is devoid of understanding. So, there is a match-up. Empty people without sufficiently good judgment to assess their own emptiness attract followers who are devoid of understanding, who do not have the ability to assess the condition of their leaders. Jesus had a metaphor for this situation. “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:14).

If a vain person and his judgment-lacking followers pursue a goal, it is clear what the goal is: vanity. This is what the Preacher—Solomon—warned against in Ecclesiastes. “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Eccl. 1:14). Then what is to be done? After surveying the affairs of life, he comes to a recommendation:

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have

no pleasure in them (Eccl. 11:9–12:1).

This recommendation is based on a conclusion—a conclusion that in turn was based on a lifetime of contemplation, observation, and personal experience.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁴

C. Satisfaction With Conventional Returns

The issue of satisfaction is one of the most difficult to solve. The more opportunities that men possess for both service and consumption, the more complex the problem of satisfaction becomes. The dying words of Cecil Rhodes of Rhodesia come to mind: “So much to do. So little time.”

This proverb contrasts two people: a tiller of the soil and a follower of vain people. The farmer has a goal: bread. The goal of the follower is unspecified.

The farmer’s goal is limited. Bread is called the staff of life, but it is exceedingly common. It was far more common in Mosaic Israel. Grain was the chief product of most farming in the Middle East. For a low-productivity, pre-capitalist agricultural society, grain is the source of life. It sustains most of the population. A man toils over the ground to grow grain, which is used to make bread, which sustains life. Bread is a no-frills product that is central to society. Jesus’ recommended prayer request, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11),⁵ encapsulates the fundamental request: to sustain life.

This is a central goal. It is also a limited goal. The farmer must devote most of his time to the procedures of producing bread. There is neither significant spare time nor spare output in a pre-capitalist agricultural society. Output is low. The farmer is not easily sidetracked. He budgets his time and his capital well in advance. He pursues a narrow goal by means of a specific plan. The plan reflects decades of tradition. Things are to be done in a familiar pattern. There is limited creativity involved.

4. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 45.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12:A–B.

In contrast is the man who follows vain persons. The word for “follows” is literally “runs after.” The meaning of vanity here is emptiness. The person’s life is marked by vain pursuits. A later proverb says: “He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough” (Prov. 28:19).⁶ Following empty leaders, he comes up empty-handed.

People do not deliberately follow losers. They prefer to follow winners. They hope to participate in the successful ventures of successful people. They expect success to trickle down to them because of their joint participation.

The person described here is not following winners. He is following empty people. But these empty people radiate the trappings of success. Their followers do not perceive that the leaders’ dreams and schemes are futile. It is a case of the blind leading the blind into the ditch.

Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:12–14).

Folk sayings drive home the warning: “All that glitters is not gold.” In Texas, they say: “He is all hat and no cattle.” There is a deception as old as paper money: a roll of worthless counterfeit bills wrapped in a high-denomination bill. There is also the hidden phenomenon of consumer debt. A person may wear fine clothes and drive an expensive car, but he is living on the edge of bankruptcy.

Such people attract followers. If they also talk a good line, their appeal is even greater. But they are empty in every sense. They live a lie. Those who are attracted to them will participate, not in their success, but in their failure.

D. Rates of Return

The message of this proverb is this: the day-to-day activities of a farmer who plants seed and cares for his crop will pay off. He and his family will eat. There is no hint that he will get rich. But he will survive. In contrast is the vain pursuit of the man who follows empty

6. Chapter 82.

people. His plans will come to nothing.

The systematic pursuit of conventional returns on one's conventional labor is the working model of this proverb. There is nothing spectacular about bread. There is nothing spectacular about farming. Yet the man who diligently sets a conventional goal and follows a conventional plan will find success. The person who has big plans for achieving above-average returns, and who then seeks out smooth talkers who promise above-average returns, will find that he achieves below-average returns.

When a man adopts an innovation in the field in which he has experience, he is seeking an above-average rate of return. He is not satisfied with his previous level of success. He seeks greater output per unit of resource input. This is the motivation for economic progress. It is the underlying impetus for compound growth in every field. Does this proverb suggest that such a motivation is illegitimate?

The proverb's farmer is not being contrasted with a highly innovative farmer. He is being contrasted with a chaser after dreams. The man who runs after vain persons has no experience in the day-to-day activities of specialized production. Or, if he has such experience, he has abandoned it. He is not evaluating the potential success of a new technology in terms of his long experience with older technology. Instead, he is following after empty people. He does not recognize counterfeit claims and strategies when he sees them.

Real estate entrepreneur John Schaub sells a seminar, "Making It Big on Little Deals." The wealth-accumulation strategy works. For over three decades, I watched as he accumulated dozens of homes, now mostly paid off by his renters. He has done this one house at a time. His long-term goal is to leave most of them to charity when he dies, with the funds to be used to build housing for the working poor. Meanwhile, he has provided clean housing for renters at slightly below-market rents. This way, they move out of his houses less often, which saves him time and money in replacing them with new tenants.

In the congested field of get-rich-quick schemes, real estate is a popular one. Late-night television hucksters sell the dream of great wealth through real estate speculation. Schaub does not promote his courses or newsletter in this way. He barely promotes at all, as I have been telling him for three decades. He recommends buying strategies similar to those recommended by the hucksters, but accompanied by careful, self-disciplined, time-intensive preparation. He does not oversell his subscribers and attendees. He has made a fortune in real estate,

not through the sale of courses on real estate. He offers only two courses per year, always in the same two cities.

The difference between the two sorts of information sellers is the difference between plowing a field and speculating in grain futures. The farmer will probably bring in a crop and re-plant next season. The commodity speculator will probably lose his money. Most of them do.

Conclusion

The farmer is a steady-as-you-go fellow. The vanity-chaser is ready to buy based on flash, glitter, and promises. The farmer knows his field. The vanity-chaser does not. The farmer is satisfied with the most mundane of products: bread. The vanity-chaser is not satisfied with anything. The farmer wants bread. The vanity-chaser wants more. The pursuit of more is the pursuit of mammon. Jesus warned: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).⁷

Bread sustains life. *More* is unbounded: beyond mere sustenance. Bread is produced with a systematic plan with a specific time of completion. *More* is open-ended, which means that no plan is appropriate. Successful plans must have identifiable, measurable goals, i.e., limits. Vanity-chasers resist the concept of limits. Therefore, they reject the idea of systematic plans with limited, measurable goals.

The steady work of a farmer tilling his fields is preferable to a life spent in pursuit of goals announced by empty men. The grand schemes of empty men can absorb a lifetime of effort. But when life is over, all the effort has been wasted. It is like seed planted in rocky soil in a parched place (Matt. 13:5–6).⁸ The labor theory of value is incorrect. Labor's value derives from the value of labor's output. In the case of farmers: bread. In the case of vain men: emptiness that matches their spiritual condition.

7. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 14.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. ????

DILIGENCE AND DOMINION

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute (Prov. 12:24).

This proverb deals with hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.¹ There will always be rulers who rule over servants. The institutional question is this: What is the basis of hierarchy in any organization? This is an application of a more comprehensive question: What is the foundation of rulership in a godly social order?

What is the meaning here of “hand”? It means power in the sense of rulership. It implies taking responsibility. We see this meaning in God’s transfer of civil power to Noah after the Flood. “And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man” (Gen. 9:5).

What does “tribute” mean? It has to do with subordination. “Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out” (Josh. 17:13). This was tribute extracted politically. The Canaanites were forced to serve the Israelites by paying them something of value.

The text of this proverb does not imply political tribute. It implies economic tribute. But what is economic tribute? This proverb does not say.

Deuteronomy 28 outlines a two-fold system of sanctions: positive and negative. Verses 1–14 present the positive.² Among the list is this:

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).³

Verses 15–68 present the negative sanctions, among which is this:

The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail (Deut. 28:43–44).

The defining issue here is debt. He who is in debt is subordinate to his creditor. “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7).⁴ The servant is paying the ruler for the loan that the ruler had extended to him. He is in a form of legal bondage.

This proverb indicates that the slothful person is not in a strong bargaining position in relation to the diligent person. This could mean debt. It could also mean employment options. The slothful person has no economic reserves. When labor becomes plentiful at yesterday’s wages, the slothful person may have to lower his asking price for his labor. He has no money or food in reserve. He cannot take time to shop for better employment opportunities. He pays tribute to the employer in the form of low-cost labor services.

This proverb in no way hints that this hierarchical relationship is immoral. Throughout Proverbs, the reader is warned of negative economic sanctions that face slothful workers. These warnings are consistent with the negative sanctions presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. There is a system of ethical cause and effect in history. Ethical performance has predictable wealth effects. This is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant.⁵

The diligent person becomes the beneficiary of the tribute paid by the slothful person. The focus here is on production. The slothful person is not highly productive. This is his problem. He would be far better off financially if he were diligent. So, for that matter, would the dili-

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

4. Chapter 67.

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 4.

gent person be. It is better to hire the services of a productive person than an unproductive person. This is why the unproductive person must offer to work at low wages. This is all that his productivity warrants.

A diligent person is better off in a society of diligent people than in a society of slothful people. In a land of sloth, he may find more people to pay tribute to him, but their output is below par. This is why they are cheap to hire. He is a ruler in a land of losers. It is better to be a common person in a society of high producers. The economic competition is stiffer, but the wealth per capita is higher.

There is a phrase, "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." But he is king over people who cannot see. Better to be a two-eyed man in a society of two-eyed men.

Conclusion

Dominion through diligence is the pattern. The slothful person is unlikely to exercise dominion. He is more likely to be in debt to, or on the payroll of, the diligent person. The diligent person leads. He makes decisions as to what must be done. The slothful person is a follower. He is not in a position to make decisions for others. He does what he is told. He does this ineffectively.

CHARACTER AND CAPITAL

The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat (Prov. 13:4).

A. The Dreamer and the Doer

Here are another pair of contrasts: the sluggard and the diligent. The first is a dreamer. The second is a doer.

The Book of Proverbs is forthrightly opposed to sluggards. Lazy people are contemptuous of work, Solomon informs us in proverb after proverb. They are losers, and they deserve to be losers. A continuing message of Proverbs is that God's system of causation is rigged against sluggards (3:9–10).¹ They cannot win.

We have to deal with the Hebrew word translated here as “soul.” It refers to anything that breathes. It means “life.”

And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed (Gen. 19:17).

Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die (Gen. 19:19).

The soul of the sluggard, like the soul of the diligent, is his life. It defines him. His life is marked by longings. He wants to achieve certain things or obtain certain things. Yet he faces a problem: he has nothing. He has no capital. Without capital, he cannot finance projects that might enable him to buy the things of his dreams.

In contrast is the soul of the diligent. It will be made fat. What is

1. Chapter 8.

fatness? Sometimes, it refers to bodily weight. “The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat” (Prov. 15:30). In this case, the fatness promised is not the product of calories. The soul of man is not fattened up like an animal being prepared for the butcher. What does fat have to do with life? This passage refers to the fatness of life.

The sluggard has a lean soul. This condition is expressly attributed to the Israelites in the wilderness. “They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Ps. 106:13–15).² The word for soul here is *nephesh*—just as it is in this proverb.

B. Dreaming and Doing

This proverb says that the soul of the sluggard desires. The soul of the diligent will be made fat. This contrasts what the sluggard wants with what the sluggard possesses. The sluggard is frustrated by his lack of wealth. He has great dreams and no assets. There is a complete disconnect between dream and reality.

The diligent person is defined by his work. This proverb points to the connection between cause and effect. He works, and the result is fatness. His life is complete. He is not longing after things he cannot have. He has a strong work ethic. This is the source of his fatness. There is a tight connection between labor and reward. “He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich” (Prov. 10:4).³

One man dreams but does not do. The other man does and reaps a reward. These are two ways of life. The apostle James offered a similar connection: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). The sluggard is self-deceived. He has great dreams and no output. He does not have a path to his dreams based on diligent labor.

The diligent person also has dreams. “The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want” (Prov. 21:5).⁴ He has a pathway in mind: from here to there. What is the meaning of plenteousness? The Hebrew word only occurs three

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

3. Chapter 21.

4. Chapter 62.

times in Scripture. It is translated as “profit” and “preeminence.”

In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury (Prov. 14:23).⁵

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity (Eccl. 3:19).⁶

Plenteousness means *advantage*. The diligent person seeks personal advantage. He wants to distinguish his work, and therefore himself, from the run-of-the-mill performer. He has great things in mind. What distinguishes him from the sluggard is not the presence of dreams. What distinguishes him is his diligence. He does high quality work. God rewards him for both his dreams and his effort.

C. Fat Souls

The Hebrew word translated “soul” is *nephesh*. It can mean breath. It means life.

Fatness in the Old Covenant era was a thing to pursue. It was a sign of God’s blessing. “The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea” (Isa. 34:6). In a low-productivity agricultural world, meat was a special meal. Meat was for special occasions. Fat is what gives flavor to meat. Fat was reserved for God in the sacrificial system: the whole burnt offering (Lev. 1).⁷

The meaning of this proverb is that the diligent person’s life is marked by special blessing. There is therefore a predictable relationship between diligence and success. This success is not merely the accumulation of possessions. It is successful living generally.

D. Unfulfilled Dreams

In contrast to the full life of the diligent person is the life of the sluggard. This person is not committed to his work. He prefers leisure

5. Chapter 46.

6. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 7:C.

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 1.

to work. This attitude is reflected in his performance.

The sluggard desires success. He dreams of success. He possesses nothing. Here, the focus is on goods. The contrast between dream and reality is sharp.

Why does he possess nothing? This proverb does not say, but it implies that his performance is substandard. He is a sluggard. He is not marked by a commitment to labor. He is not diligent about his work.

The message here is clear: there is a relationship between laziness and poverty. The sluggard has great dreams, but these dreams are not translated into performance.

There is a book written by a mind-over-matter promoter, Napoleon Hill: *Think and Grow Rich*. It has sold millions of copies. His most famous statement is this: "What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve." This is humanism's creed. It is also a form of mysticism: an affirmation of temporal causation that is directed by autonomous thought without physical mediation. Those who adopt his techniques of mental visualization are generally unaware that these are techniques of eastern mysticism, which kept Asia poverty-stricken while the West grew rich, 1500–2000. The basic outlook of this philosophy of causation is this: "You can become anything you believe you can become. This is because you make your own reality through imagination." There is a pseudo-Christian variant of this philosophy, made famous in the 1950s by Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, especially in his best-selling book, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1953). Peale became a national figure in the United States. He was a pastor in the Reformed Church of America, whose official theology has nothing to do with Peale's philosophy.

This proverb challenges any philosophy of think and grow rich. The sluggard can think all he wants; he is still a sluggard. He can think of himself as overcoming the limits around him. He is still a sluggard. The biblical concept of causation has to do with a positive confession—not of faith in man but faith in God. It is tied to goal-setting and careful planning, not visualization and repetition of self-affirming formulas. The most famous of these formulas in the early twentieth century was French pharmacist Emile Coué's dictum, to be repeated at the beginning and end of each day: "Every day in every way, I am getting better and better." He called his system "autosuggestion."

Conclusion

The sluggard is not dreaming of achieving psychological satisfaction. He is dreaming of measurable wealth. He possesses nothing.

His condition is contrasted with the condition of the diligent person. This contrast leads to a conclusion. *The diligent person has a legitimate expectation of measurable wealth.* This success is not limited to psychological satisfaction, which is perceptible only to the individual. The fatness described here is not limited to the internal realm of feeling.

Solomon does not denigrate measurable wealth. On the contrary, he affirms its legitimacy. He disparages the slothful person because that man's dreams of success—dreams not matched by diligence—produce poverty. Poverty is seen as a liability.

Here is another presentation of the basics of success and failure. The sluggard is a moral failure; therefore, he fails visibly. His character marks him as a moral failure. He is lazy. His character manifests itself in his behavior and then in his capital. He has nothing.

The contrast is between laziness and diligence. This is a continuing theme in Proverbs. "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" (6:9). He is easily thwarted by discomfort. "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing" (20:4). He is conceited, believing himself to be beyond limits than hamper others. "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason" (26:16). In contrast is the diligent man. The diligent man is a moral success; therefore, he succeeds visibly. His character marks him as a moral success. He is not lazy. His character manifests itself in his behavior and then in his capital. He has a fat soul.

WEALTH AND POVERTY

There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches (Proverbs 13:7).

A. Success: Real and Illusionary

This proverb presents two views of wealth and poverty. The rival views divide over the correct covenantal definition of success. A man is described as successfully accumulating riches, yet he is really poor. Another man deliberately pursues poverty, yet he is rich.

Riches are an illusion, the proverb says. An individual heaps up possessions, yet none of it counts for anything. Why not? The author does not say. Poverty is also an illusion. A man pursues a life of poverty, yet he attains riches. How? The author does not say.

To make sense of this proverb, we must answer two questions. The first question is this: *Who is deceived by the illusion of wealth?* The person who has pursued wealth is self-deceived. But, given the widespread desire to attain marketable wealth, the illusion of a man's wealth is shared by those who know of the extent of his possessions. The proverb warns us not be taken in by the illusion.

The second question is this: *Who is deceived by the illusion of poverty?* Answer: all those who are deceived by the illusion of wealth. But the person who actually pursues poverty is not taken in. He understands that the road to great riches is poverty.

The author was familiar with the Mosaic law. He understood Deuteronomy 28, which lists sanctions for covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking.¹ He understood Deuteronomy 8, which speaks of wealth as a testimony to the covenant (v. 17).² Then why does he teach here

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

that wealth and poverty are illusions?

There are two views of wealth and two views of poverty. The first view can be described as trust in tangible riches. These are assets that can be bought and sold in markets. The second view can be described as trust in non-tangible riches. These assets cannot be bought and sold in markets.

We can say that riches are success indicators. They are not success. Wealth as a success indicator is valid, Moses said, but it is not a substitute for right standing with God. The psalmist said the same thing in Psalm 73. Evil men can attain wealth for a time, but they stand on slippery slopes (v. 18).³ This proverb describes such a condition. Those who regard themselves as rich are in fact impoverished.

There are poor men who are poor for the sake of the kingdom of God. Jesus is the supreme example. He did not have a place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20).⁴ He taught His disciples not to pursue marketable riches, but to seek first the kingdom of God. All these marketable things will be added (Matt. 6:33).⁵ It is not that they are wrong to own. It is that they are worth owning only when they are the result of covenant-keeping, not the result of autonomy.

B. The Source of Wealth

The source of wealth matters. It can be attained in two general ways: covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. The only basis of long-term wealth is covenant-keeping (Deut 28:1–14). The positive sanctions of God are visible and historical. But there are ways to attain wealth that are not the result of covenant-keeping.

The man described here as wealthy yet impoverished has mistaken the success indicator, marketable wealth, for success. Success is what the poor man attains. He has pursued a course of life that produces poverty. Think of the foreign missionary. A good example is J. Hudson Taylor, who started the China Inland Mission in the late nineteenth century. He ate and dressed like the Chinese in his region. He began a regimen of eating simple Chinese food in England, before he went on his first mission. He ate very little, just as most of his future cultural peers did. He pursued poverty for the sake of riches. These riches were

3. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 18.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 19.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

non-marketable.

Most religions maintain the distinction between wealth as a snare and poverty as a holy ideal. Biblical religion is no exception. But biblical religion sees marketable wealth as neither exclusively a snare nor a testimony of spiritual success. The criteria for judging the success or failure of wealth are ethical. This also applies to poverty as a failure indicator. Neither wealth nor poverty is an autonomous, self-justifying standard of success.

Jesus amplified the insight of this proverb. He asked a rhetorical question: What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul (Matt. 16:36).⁶ This contrast is based on the New Testament's doctrine of final judgment and resurrection. Jesus also taught that covenant-keepers are supposed to lay up treasures in heaven by giving away marketable wealth in history (Matt. 6:19–20).⁷ This was more explicit than anything taught in the Old Testament, but it was not inconsistent with Old Testament doctrine, as this proverb indicates.

Conclusion

The rich man accumulates marketable wealth, yet he is poor. The poor man accumulates little marketable wealth, yet he is rich. This gives an indication of God's evaluation of wealth and poverty. He imputes nothing of value to wealth accumulated on the basis of autonomy. It does not matter if the rich man obeyed biblical law or not, whether he was a thief or highly productive. What matters is his judicial standing with God: "guilty" or "not guilty." Legal standing is a matter of God's grace. It is not purchased by the recipient. The grace of eternal life is the greatest wealth of all, yet it is non-marketable.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

WEALTH ACCUMULATION

Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase (Prov. 13:11).

This proverb acknowledges that it is possible for morally empty people to accumulate wealth. It also asserts that this wealth will eventually be diminished. That which is accumulated in the short run is not retained in the long run.

In contrast, the fruits of labor are positive. In this case, labor means honest labor. It is not that vain people do not labor. It is that their labor is an extension of their worldview. They are spiritually empty. Thus, the visible results of their efforts do not persevere. This view is consistent with the more general proverb: “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (13:22).¹

What is vanity? The word appears again and again in Ecclesiastes. It refers to emptiness. Something looks appealing; in fact, it is empty. It does not deliver what the seeker had expected. Ecclesiastes dismisses as vanity all of the world’s preferred benefits.

Then there is outright deception. This also is a form of vanity. “The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death” (21:6).² This deception is literally suicidal.

A. Built on Emptiness

Men can accumulate wealth through vanity. Vanity is one basis of accumulation. But in what sense? Is this vanity in the mind of the seller or the buyer? Is the foundation of the accumulated wealth the producer’s vanity or the consumer’s?

1. Chapter 41.

2. Chapter 63.

To answer this, we must look at the contrast. The person who accumulates assets through honest labor will see his wealth increase. The focus of this proverb is the dedication of the producer. There is no mention of the buyer.

The vain person also heaps up wealth. This wealth is insecure. It rests on the efforts of a spiritually empty person.

Why should his wealth be threatened? If he is spiritually empty, but his product meets the desires of buyers, the buyers will continue to buy. The flow of funds from the buyers to the producer is not threatened by the spiritual condition of the producer, just so long as he meets the wants of the buyers at prices they are willing to pay.

There are several threats. First, the empty person or his heirs will squander the income, shrinking the net worth of the capital base. Second, the vain person will eventually reduce the value of his output by trying to cut costs by cutting quality. Third, demand will fall because of new competition. Fourth, the buying public's tastes will change, leading to falling demand. The producer's moral flaw will eventually begin to affect the competitiveness of his output.

B. Built on Honest Work

In contrast, the person who works honestly and pays attention to his budget will accumulate capital. He recognizes the positive relationship between good work and high income. He goes about his business in a methodical way. Over time, this attitude toward wealth produces an increase. The laborer does not attempt to take shortcuts that reduce the buyer's benefits. He may try to become more efficient, but the buyer is not short-changed.

This proverb promotes the idea of the value of labor. It does not teach that the value of labor's output is based on the labor's input. In other words, it does not teach the labor theory of value. It does not teach that labor, apart from consumer demand, produces wealth. It does teach that the person who seeks to gather through his own efforts has the correct attitude toward wealth. Wealth can be attained through vanity or through honest labor. The correct approach is honest labor, which secures increasing wealth. Labor is necessary for the preservation of wealth.

God labored to create the world. This gives meaning to the mandated day of rest (Ex. 20:11).³ This also serves as an example for those

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*

who seek wealth. God has built into the social order a system of causation. Labor, when added to land (the environment), produces lasting wealth.

Inherent in creation is the requirement that people work. All warnings that labor-saving machinery or software will produce widespread unemployment are misguided. Labor-saving innovations release men from laboring in one field. This does not reduce the quantity of labor required to maintain the social order. Human labor is the least specific of production inputs. It can be shifted to new fields. *There is always more work to be done.* Manufacturing in the twentieth century declined in economically advanced countries, but service industries replaced manufacturing. Labor became ever-more valuable as capital accumulated. This was because labor became ever-more productive as capital accumulated.

Conclusion

Built into the creation is a program of capital accumulation. At the heart of this process is labor. Men must devote time, thought, and energy in their quest to accumulate wealth. *Labor is desirable as a tool of self-dominion.* It is part of the dominion covenant.⁴ When labor is applied to a program of wealth accumulation, the results are positive. Any attempt to get rich apart from labor is a snare and a delusion. It is an empty quest. Such a quest may work for a while, but the program is self-destructive. It undermines long-term capital appreciation.

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

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ETHICS AND INHERITANCE

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22).

This is the most important verse in the Bible that deals with inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹ It establishes a principle of interpretation: *economic sanctions² are related to ethical performance.³* This brief aphorism summarizes the system of sanctions that is presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

A. Generation-Skipping

The proverb establishes the legitimacy of wealth accumulation. A good man accumulates wealth, which he passes on to his grandchildren. In summary, “you can’t leave it behind if there isn’t any.”

Why doesn’t the proverb specify children? Why does it refer to grandchildren? The text does not say, but I can offer possible suggestions.

First, the behavior of grandchildren reveals the success of their parents in transferring the ethical precepts of the grandparents. There is visible evidence of the degree of *intergenerational covenantal inheritance*. Depending on how old the grandchildren are, the grandfather can see which grandchildren are likely to extend the kingdom of God in history. This is a matter of their confession and performance: *word and deed*.

Second, parents should be accumulating capital to transfer to their

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 5.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

as yet unborn grandchildren. Wealth from the grandparents can be used to capitalize the grandchildren. This saves the parents money, which can then be used to build up family capital. Part of this accumulated capital will in turn go to their children.

Third, the grandparents should not let the parents inherit all of their wealth. The heirs may squander this legacy. By leaving wealth to grandchildren, a grandfather reduces the risk of the decapitalization of the family's inheritance. This is a strategy of risk diversification.

This raises the question of the administration of capital. The parents may not be effective trustees. If the grandparents place the grandchildren's legacy under the authority of the parents, the grandchildren may be disinherited through parental mismanagement. This is why trusts can be effective instruments for transferring wealth. An independent trustee, chosen by the grantor, will act on behalf of the trust's beneficiaries until they come of age, as specified by the trust.

B. The Flow of Funds

The second part of this proverb is the heart of the matter: *the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*.

There is a common saying: "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." This saying is refuted by the effects of compound growth in the West after 1780. The rich have indeed grown richer, but so have the poor. The poor person today lives better than most rich people did in 1800 or even 1900. He has access to far better medical care. His children are more likely to survive childhood diseases and accidents. He has more entertainment.

This proverb says that the righteous get richer at the expense of the unrighteous. How? Through inheritance. Wealth accumulated by the covenant-breaker is inherited by the covenant-keeper. How can this be?

There are two ways. First, the heirs abandon covenant-breaking for covenant-keeping. This is inheritance through adoption into the family of God. Second, covenant-keepers become more productive than covenant-breakers. The covenant-breaking heirs of rich covenant-breakers spend their inheritances on goods and services produced for sale by covenant-keepers.

This proverb rests on an assumption: *the structure of covenantal inheritance favors covenant-keeping over the long term*. There can be a build-up of wealth. But this is alienable wealth. Covenant-breakers

cannot maintain possession of it in the long run. The covenantal structure of society militates against covenant-breaking. *God has not established a level playing field. He has tilted it in favor of His covenant people.*

How is it tilted? In five ways. First, God is sovereign over creation. He who acknowledges this publicly is specially favored by God. “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (I Sam. 2:30).

Second, men must covenant with either God or Satan. God is the source of blessings. Satan is not. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).⁴

Third, society is governed by biblical law. This law is inherently ethical. There is a difference between right and wrong. This is the difference between covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking.

Fourth, there are predictable sanctions in history, positive and negative. Covenant-keeping brings positive sanctions (Deut. 28:1–14).⁵ Covenant-breaking brings negative sanctions (Deut. 28:15–68).

Fifth, the process of positive sanctions compounds wealth over time as a testimony to God’s covenantal faithfulness. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁶ This process transfers the inheritance of history to God’s people. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 37:9).

C. Per Capita Economic Growth

This proverb directs our attention to the future. It reminds us that our efforts in history extend down through history through our grandchildren. But they also come under the covenantal structure of inheritance. They will someday be reminded of the intergenerational nature of inheritance in history.

The compounding process through time is a way to extend God’s

4. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 33.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

dominion in history. Population multiplies. Heirship extends to numbers like the sand of the sea. God promised Abraham: “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:17–18). But the heirs do not get poorer as a result: same size pie, but with more pieces to share. On the contrary, they get richer. The promise of God’s covenant is per capita economic growth. There will be leisure for all of God’s people. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it” (Micah 4:4).⁷

Not only does the Bible teach *linear history*—creation, Fall, redemption, final judgment—it teaches *historical progress*: ethically, intellectually, economically. Nowhere in the Bible is this made clearer than in Isaiah 65.

And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord GOD shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name: That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes. For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them (Isa. 65:15–21).⁸

Conclusion

If the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just, then God’s people should be optimistic regarding the future. A high level of future-orientation should mark their thinking. Future-orientation is the premier

7. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 26.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

feature of an upper-class individual.⁹

To maintain this outlook, men must act consistently with it. This means that they should strive to build up an inheritance, not merely for their children but also for their grandchildren. They must transfer wealth and vision to grandchildren, who are too young to have secured their place in the world, but whose confessions and outward behavior mark them as covenant-keepers. Such a transfer of wealth takes faith that God will keep the terms of His covenant and not dissipate the inheritance.

9. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 48–50.

DESTRUCTIVE INJUSTICE

Much food is in the fallow ground of the poor, but it is swept away by injustice (Prov. 13:23).

This is the translation of the New American Standard Bible. The King James translation is not clear: “Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.”

A. Fallow Ground

The Hebrew word translated by the King James as “tillage” is translated as “fallow ground” elsewhere in the Old Testament.

For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns (Jer. 4:3).

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you (Hosea 10:12).

Fallow ground is ground that has not been plowed or seeded. It may be fallow for a season, as was to have been the case in the seventh, sabbatical year (Lev. 25:1–7).¹ It may be fallow only until plowing time.

The contrast of Proverbs 13:23 with Hosea 10:12 indicates that fallow land in this case was temporarily fallow. The prophet called on the Israelites to ethical behavior: “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy.” *Seeding the land* is described here as *practicing righteousness*. Repentance is the equivalent of plowing fallow soil, which precedes planting: “Break up your fallow ground.” When Israelites repent and work in terms of their new ethical vision, there will be a positive sanction from God: “rain righteousness upon you.” Then will come the

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

harvest. Hosea spoke of repentance and restoration in terms of plowing, seeding, and harvesting what had been fallow land.

This prophetic context points to the exegetical content of this proverb. The fallow ethical land of Israel contains the fruits of righteous labor. But to produce these fruits, there must be conformity to the Mosaic law. This was the continuing message of the prophets: a call to restore the nation by conforming to the Mosaic law.

B. Injustice

Injustice under the Mosaic covenant was any law enforcement that was in conflict with the terms of the Mosaic law, including its civil sanctions. The prophets did not come before the nation to call the people back to ethics in general or to natural law as revealed to autonomous human wisdom. King David set the example for every future king of Israel.

Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself (I Kings 2:1–3).

After the Babylonian captivity, the people who returned to the land of Israel made this public confession to God.

Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them (Neh. 9:33–34).

With this in mind, consider the message of this proverb. In fallow land there is a means of growing food. To fallow ground must be added labor: plowing it, seeding it, irrigating it, and keeping it free of crop-consuming insects. Labor must be paid for. So must seeds. All this takes time. Time has a price: interest.

Fallow ground does not normally produce a crop that will sustain an owner economically. So, for fallow ground to bear fruit, the owner or renter must add something of value. He makes an investment: time. A poor man makes a large investment proportional to his capital. He

has no reserves if he makes a mistake. Converting a fallow field to food is a high-risk proposition for him.

What is the effect of the threat of injustice on the motivation of a poor man? Highly negative. He is just barely scraping by. Now he faces a new uncertainty: the misuse of the legal system to reduce his income. People with power become his enemies. He can do little to thwart their plans, once his seeds are sown. His land cannot be concealed. The fruits of his labor will be visible to everyone. He is vulnerable. He has no money to hire a lawyer or bribe an official. He operates at the mercy of the legal system. But he cannot trust the legal system.

Injustice is like a harvesting tool. It sweeps away the crop. But this proverb does not say that a crop is ready for harvesting. It says that food is in a fallow field. It speaks metaphorically. Injustice is like a pre-planting harvesting tool. It sweeps away the crop that will not be planted. How is an unplanted crop swept away? By sweeping away the planter's willingness to plant.

C. Marginal Loss = Total Loss

Men make investments of land, labor, time, and capital for the sake of a hoped-for return on their investments. They expect to harvest a return that is higher than what they invested. They work in hope.

Hope is undermined by the threat of injustice. If the land's owner or renter does not expect to gain more than he invests, he will look for other places to make his investment. He will not willingly sacrifice money, time, and energy for the sake of a negative rate of return. He will not work for free in order to benefit unjust people.

Injustice is destructive. This proverb says that it is as destructive as a harvesting tool that sweeps away an entire crop. The threat of injustice at the margin produces the complete destruction of the crop. There will be no crop.

The disincentive produced by injustice is very great, this proverb says. It does not explain why this is true. Solomon expected the reader to understand how men plan for the future. But even if the reader does not understand the logic of the example, he perceives the basic message: injustice is destructive. It could be compared with a plague of locusts that strips away a crop.

Conclusion

Injustice is destructive. The poor man who does not plant a field is harmed. The would-be buyers of his crop are harmed. Even the purveyors of injustice are harmed. They will have less wealth to confiscate through their misuse of the legal system.

Injustice reduces production, but it does so in a way that cannot be perceived directly. A fallow field that remains fallow can be blamed on many factors. But the supreme factor, according to this proverb, is injustice. Someone had planned to gain part of someone else's crop at a below-market price. Now he will do without. So will everyone else.

COSTS OF PRODUCTION

Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox (Prov. 14:4).

The opening clause points to one seemingly beneficial aspect of low productivity: it takes less work. A man owns a stall, suitable for an ox. He does not own or lease an ox. The stall is economically useless unless it is inside a building, which could be used for storage. A holding pen for an animal is a highly specific form of capital. If there is no animal to be penned in, what good is it?

When used, an ox's stall is a mess. It is filled with droppings. Nobody wants the job of cleaning out an ox's stall. But the two available alternatives are even more unpleasant: an uncleaned stall or an empty stall. The former may kill the ox through disease. The latter indicates the lack of a tool of production.

A. Increasing Returns to Capital Investment

The second clause gets to the economic point: "much increase is by the strength of the ox." The Hebrew word translated here as "increase" is elsewhere translated as "fruit" or "fruits." The meaning is the same: the net output of the land.

Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years (Lev. 25:21).¹

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year (Deut. 14:22).²

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 27.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 34.

The man who owns an ox and land can combine these capital assets to produce a crop. Without an ox, the landowner is limited to whatever he and hired workers can plant by hand. The work is arduous and time-consuming. A man's physical strength is minimal compared to an ox's strength. So, the output of land plus human labor is low when compared to the output of land plus a trained ox's labor. It is a matter of strength, as this proverb says.

Farmland without an ox is not productive. This is because of the low output of human labor in agriculture, compared to an ox's labor. Land becomes far more productive agriculturally by the addition of an ox. Put in economic terminology, there is an increasing rate of return to both land and labor when the labor moves from human labor to ox labor. The ox makes the land more productive for the owner of the land. The land makes the ox more productive for the owner of the ox.

An owner was required to care for both the land and the ox. The land was not to be planted in year six (Lev. 25:1–6).³ Fallow land had time to be restored. The ox was to share a portion of this increased output with the ox. “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn” (Deut. 25:4).⁴ Paul invoked this law to make the same point with respect to men. “For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (I Tim. 5:18;⁵ cf. I Cor. 9:8–9⁶).

Separated, ox and land are not highly productive for their owner. Together, as part of an integrated system of production, they are quite productive. This is another example of the division of labor in action. By combining two different forms of capital, a person can greatly increase his wealth.

B. Good News and Bad News

The good news is that by adding an ox to the production mix, the owner can increase his wealth. The word “increase” is the equivalent of wealth. The bad news is that the ox requires additional capital: a stall. This tool of production must be maintained. Someone must clean the stall. Either the owner does this, or else he hires someone to do this.

3. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 25.

4. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62.

5. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

This is a cost of production.

The owner can defer this maintenance expense for a time. He can let the stall get worse and worse. But the end result will be the loss of his capital asset. The ox will get sick or die.

Of course, this same principle of maintenance applies to every capital good. Capital wears out. In a cursed world, though not in the pre-Fall uncursed world, this is the result of entropy: the tendency of everything to become random.⁷ Sharp blades get dull. Sharp minds get dull. Things wear out.

Land wears out, too. Agricultural land is depleted of minerals and vegetation. This is why farmers adopt counter-depletion measures: crop rotation, fertilizer, and fallow land for a season. In this sense, land is a capital good. There is pure land: bedrock support that does not wear out. Then there are topsoil, earthworms, and other living matter, which are consumed by agricultural production.

One of the nice things about the interrelationship between oxen and land is that the contents of stalls can then be spread over land to increase its productivity. This is more work to do, but the result of this work is increase.

All of this points to extra work for men. This is all part of the curse (Gen. 3:17–19).⁸

Conclusion

The lesson of scarcity is this: there are no free lunches. Output requires inputs. In the case of agricultural land, output requires input: land and work animals. Both land and work animals are capital assets. Capital requires additional investment in order to maintain it. This cost of production is required to maximize output.

When an asset's output is significantly increased by the addition of a complementary factor of production, the owner of the initial asset finds that it pays to buy or lease the complementary factor. But in making this decision, he should count the cost of maintaining the complementary factor. Only when the *expected* value of the *expected* increased output is greater than the *expected* value of the increased inputs should he hire or purchase the second factor of production.

7. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

BUYING FRIENDSHIP

The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends (Prov. 14:20).

The translators underplayed the power of riches. The Hebrew word translated as “friends” is more accurately translated as “lovers.” This word is stronger than the other Hebrew word for “friend” and “friendly.” “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a **friend** that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). The loving friend is more faithful than a brother. This is the meaning of friendship available to the rich person.

We teach our children that money cannot buy friendship. This proverb says the opposite. If we tell children that a friend loves us for ourselves, we must face the dual truth of this proverb. First, poverty produces hatred by neighbors who know a person. Second, wealth produces love. This hatred or love is specifically said to be the result of one’s economic condition.

A. The Use of Irony

Why should we imagine that parents in Solomon’s day taught their children any differently from the way parents teach their children today? Parents want to protect their children from false friends. From an early age, parents warn their children against trusting in friends who exhibit friendship for the sake of whatever the child possesses. Such friends are false friends. They are committed only to sharing the wealth of the possessor.

He who possesses great wealth usually has an entourage close by. Those who are poor do not have anyone close by. A popular song in the United States during the economic depression of the 1930s was *Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out* (1922). The song

closely paralleled Proverbs 14:20.

Nobody knows you when you're down and out.
 In your pocket, not one penny,
 And your friends, you haven't any.
 And as soon as you get on your feet again,
 Everybody is your long-lost friend.
 It's mighty strange, without a doubt, but
 Nobody wants you when you're down and out.

In his empty pockets phase, the person had no friends. This proverb goes even further: "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour." This is actual animosity. I think this is literary irony, just as "lovers" is. He is hated in the same sense that a rich man is loved. The poor person feels rejected. His neighbors abandon him. They are not part of his entourage. He has no entourage. The person with a lot of money has an entourage.

Solomon was not unaware of this love-and-hate phenomenon. He described life as it has been down through the ages. Some people's commitment to others is based on what they expect to receive from this commitment. The rich man is expected to spend money on his friends. The poor man is expected to ask his friends for a loan. So, people are generally favorable to the rich people they associate with. This is a great ethical error, Jesus warned the Pharisees. He said to consider the poor when making out the invitation list for your feast.

When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:12–14).¹

So, the neighbor described by this proverb is not neighborly. The lover is unlovely. Both are motivated by what they expect to receive from the other person. They are motivated by economic self-interest.

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 34.

B. Winners and Losers

This proverb describes something familiar. People are motivated by economic self-interest. To the extent that this motivation is at the foundation of personal relationships, friendship becomes a matter of wealth. To gain such a friend requires that you gain wealth first. To keep such a friend requires that you retain your wealth and share it. Such friendship is fleeting.

Those who are committed to a personal relationship because of wealth are generally poorer than the recipient of their commitment. The likelihood that they will be named in the person's will is remote. So is his death. The likelihood that he will hand over a large portion of his wealth to friends is also remote. So, the hanger-on is seeking only spare change. He may receive trickle-down wealth, but nothing substantial. He is not productive. He sees his time as most profitably spent with a rich man for the trickle-down wealth and the token benefits it may provide. He establishes a relationship of dependance. He sees this as the highest return on his time.

A seller of goods or services is not equally dependent. He establishes a relationship based on mutually beneficial exchange. He sells something he produces. In all likelihood, he does not seek to establish a relationship of friendship with a wealthy buyer. He keeps the relationship professional, for his competitive advantage in the marketplace is based heavily on the reputation of excellence that his output possesses. Excellence rests on *objective merit*, irrespective of favoritism based on personal friendship. He seeks repeat business. He also seeks referrals if he is a good marketer. If the rich man recognizes that the seller supplies an inferior product, which is offset only by friendship, he may not be ready to recommend the seller to his associates, for they will think him deceived. No one wants to appear to be hampered by poor judgment, least of all a highly successful person.

This means that the rich man's lovers are losers. They probably know this. They correctly perceive themselves to be dependent on creating an illusion of unself-interested friendship. If they do not recognize this, then they are self-deceived as well as self-interested.

Furthermore, their goals are minimal. They do not seek a professional relationship with the rich man based on their objective productivity. They do not seek a stream of predictable income based on supplying something desired by the rich person because of the advant-

age it gives him. Instead, they seek handouts disguised as participation in joint celebrations. Basically, they are party people. Their personal horizons are limited to whatever wealth can be obtained at a party. This is legitimate as a career, but only if you are a professional party planner or performer. The difference here is the difference between a fee for services rendered and a handout for old times' sake.

Conclusion

Solomon was a very rich man. He was also powerful. He possessed the power of life and death, even to the point of executing his conniving half-brother (1 Kings 2). Such men attract hangers-on. If they are wise, they do not let such people into their inner circles. They do not become dependent on them. They treat them, at best, as party people: fun people to have around at unimportant functions. Being invited to unimportant functions is important to unimportant people. A wise man recognizes this. An unscrupulous rich man will take advantage of this moral defect of hangers-on. They become his prey.

DEALING WITH THE POOR

He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he (Prov. 14:21).

This proverb follows a related one: “The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.”¹ Here, Solomon focuses on the neighbor, who is contrasted with the merciful person.

In the previous proverb, the neighbor’s hatred is related to his victim’s poverty. The contrast is between the poor man’s hating neighbor and the rich man’s hanger-on. The difference is not based on comparative moral fiber. Both are morally weak and short-sighted. But the hanger-on is not sinning. The hating neighbor is.

A. Pressured to Give

The hating neighbor has no judicially objective claim against his neighbor. He has not been harmed in any way. The poor man’s plight did not come at the expense of his neighbor. Thus, there is no legitimate reason for the hatred. Then on what is it based? The previous proverb tells us: the person’s poverty. This proverb is related to the previous proverb. We can legitimately conclude that this is based on the proverb’s contrast: the merciful person who gives to the poor.

The poor man is in need of charity. This may be in the form of a charitable zero-interest loan (Deut. 15:1–6).² It may be in the form of an outright gift. The point is, his presence places his neighbor in a painful moral situation. Will the neighbor turn his back on the suffering man, just as the priest and Levite did to the robbed man lying in the road (Luke 10:31–32)?³ Or will he lend, asking nothing in return?

1. Chapter 44.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd

Jesus commanded:

Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful (Luke 6:30–36).⁴

The sinner reacts by blaming the victim. He despises the victim because of his own dilemma: to give or not to give? He sees the poor man as the source of guilt. It is easier to blame the poor person for his condition than to open one's wallet. It is easier to find an explanation of his poverty that is related to some moral weakness on his part. He is seen as deserving his poverty. He is therefore deserving of condemnation. Condemnation then becomes hatred. Such hatred is sinful, this proverb says.

B. Happy to Give

In contrast to the hate-filled person is the merciful person who gives to the poor. This proverb says that this person is happy. This is consistent with what Jesus taught. Indeed, it is the foundation of what Jesus taught: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35b).⁵

Why should this be true? People are self-centered. Modern economics ever since Adam Smith has rested, above all, on this assertion: "After the assumption of scarcity, individual self-interest is the most fruitful assumption undergirding economic theory and practice." Why should we conclude that giving makes people happy?

We can begin with grandparents' attitude toward their grandchildren. This is the most obvious example, in every culture, at all times. Then there is gift-giving between spouses. This is not done in the spirit of mutual exchange. So, within the context of the family, giving is

ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

5. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000], 2012), ch. 9:A:2.

more common than mutual exchange. It is when we move beyond the family that most people's motivation moves to self-interest.

This proverb says that giving to the poor makes the giver happy. This is the testimony down through the ages of those who have been exceptional givers. But their number has been limited. Their attitude is generally respected, but their example is not widely imitated.

Why should this positive psychological connection between giving to the poor and happiness exist? To answer this, consider God, in whose image man is made. God is the source of all good gifts. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).⁶ Peter concluded:

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (I Peter 4:8–10).

Grace is best defined as an unmerited gift—unmerited by the recipient. God is the source of original grace. God has this advantage: *He is not affected by scarcity*. He did not have to pay for whatever He owns. He is the original owner. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).⁷ So, when He gives something, He loses nothing. Jesus taught that this is also true of covenant-keepers. What they give up in history for the sake of Christ and His kingdom, they amass in eternity. Jesus said:

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:32–34).⁸

Conclusion

The attitude we have toward the poor is important. If we despise them and blame them for their poverty in order to reduce the sense of

6. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five press, 2012), ch. 33.

7. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

8. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 26.

obligation that we should have for them, then we sin. If we open our wallets to them when they are in trouble through no fault of their own, we gain happiness. This is not a matter of giving in order to receive back from the poor. But it surely is a matter of giving in order to gain great gifts from God: happiness in history and treasure in eternity.

EXPENSIVE TALK

In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury (Prov. 14:23).

Here is another proverb of comparisons. One result is beneficial. The other is not. We should choose which action to take in terms of the respective result.

The opening clause is a universal statement: "In all labour there is profit." Did Solomon include theft, arson, and other crimes? No. Then why did he make such a sweeping statement? To emphasize this fact: *the superiority of labor over talk*.

There are people who talk for a living: teachers, preachers, television news anchors, and other members of the chattering class. Some of them make a lot of money. Was Solomon really convinced that talk always leads to poverty? No. Then why did he make such a sweeping statement? To emphasize the superiority of labor over talk.

There are times when a biblical author makes an outrageous statement for effect. This communications technique is called *rhetoric*. For example, a lazy man really does not defend his laziness by referring to a lion in the streets. Yet Solomon used this example twice (Prov. 22:13;¹ 26:13). This is a comparable example of rhetoric.

A: "Action Speaks Louder Than Words"

This is a familiar slogan in American history. Americans like to think of themselves as doers more than talkers. They contrast action, which produces objective results, with talk, which wastes time by not producing any results. This attitude is grounded in the message of Proverbs 14:23. A related passage is James 1:22. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." The main idea

1. Chapter 68.

in both passages is not to dismiss talk as worthless, for that would dismiss hearing as worthless. *What is worthless is talk without action consistent with the talk.* Americans have another saying: “You must walk the talk.” To act inconsistently with whatever you say you believe is hypocritical and self-destructive. To do nothing is equally hypocritical.

In this passage, “talk with the lips” means talk without action. A person talks in order to impress the listener with his own wisdom. But then the speaker does not take action. His words subsequently condemn him. In order for the talk to become meaningful, the speaker must take action—action that is consistent with what he said.

If a speaker is limited to talk, those around him are unwise to follow his advice. He is not “putting his money where his mouth is.” He does not really believe what he is saying, or if he does, then he suffers from mental paralysis. In either case, the listener should not follow his advice without verifying what he has heard. He should also not subordinate himself to this person.

This proverb says that *talk without action produces poverty*. Why should talk lead to poverty? Because action is what makes a profit. Doing nothing produces a loss. Why? Because of the curse of the ground. The land produces weeds and thorns (Gen. 3:17–19).² If left to itself, it reverts to wilderness. Wilderness is fit for beasts, not for men. Men are required by God to take dominion (Gen. 1:27–28).³ Put differently, taking no action leads to the triumph of entropy: nature’s constant movement toward disorder.

To work on projects that customers do not want to pay for produces a loss. Talk, when it leads to consumer-satisfying action, produces an increase. The deciding factor is ultimately a sanction. Someone with the power to provide a reward—a paying consumer—decides retroactively that the laborer’s effort was praiseworthy.

B. Wasted Time

Talk is cheap, an American proverb says. This proverb says that talk is expensive. It produces poverty. In contrast is labor, which takes effort but produces an increase. Effort is a cost, but this cost produces a profit: a net increase.

Solomon indicates here that talk without action appears to be

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

cost-free, but it produces poverty. It is therefore expensive. Why? Because the talker has wasted precious time, which is an irreplaceable resource. He is making a point: he who seeks something for nothing will fall into poverty. In contrast, labor is costly, but it produces an increase. Time spent on labor is profitable. The worker seeks something of greater value from the time he invests in labor. *The distinguishing feature is time.*

This conclusion is not stated in this proverb. But it is implied by this proverb. What do talk and labor have in common? Time. Neither the talker nor the laborer can escape the expenditure of time. Both must surrender time back to its owner: God. God gives it, then reclaims it, moment by moment. So, God expects us not to waste our time. We possess it only as stewards.

Conclusion

Solomon uses overstatement to make a point: the investment of time and effort in labor produces superior results to the investment of time and talk without labor. He who says nothing and then works will gain a better reward than he who talks and then does not work.

Jesus used this structure of cause and effect in a parable.

But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him (Matt. 21:28–32).

Action speaks louder than words.

OPPRESSION AND MERCY

He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor (Prov. 14:31).

A. Oppression Is Theocentric

This proverb highlights the ethical aspect of several Mosaic laws dealing with the economic oppression of the poor. Ultimately, the Mosaic laws prohibiting oppression are theocentric. *How you treat the poor reveals what you think of God.* The oppressor is said to reproach God. The Hebrew word can also mean “defy.” But the contrast here is with honoring in the sense of upholding. So, the translators chose an English word that is an antonym of “honoring.” To reproach God is to act as though God is not the kind of God He says He is. The person rebukes God in the sense of dishonoring him.

The merciful person has an open hand. Legally, he does not have to show favor to the poor man. This is a matter of voluntary action. *Mercy is optional, judicially speaking.* The Hebrew word is often translated as “gracious.” “And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be **gracious** to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy” (Ex. 33:19). Grace is an unearned or undeserved blessing from God. *God is not obligated to show His grace.* David called on God to lift him up. “Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death” (Ps. 9:13). The imagery here is that of God’s bending down and lifting up. He stoops to give aid.

This is the sense of the Hebrew word in this proverb. Someone lifts up another person, who has fallen. He puts the person back on his feet. This decision is at the discretion of the one who shows mercy or grace.

In my commentary on Leviticus 25:17, “Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God,” I made the point that this oppression involved the misuse of civil government. A political insider gains power over others through the monopoly of violence possessed by the civil government.¹ This same misuse of civil government applied in a law of Exodus, “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 22:21).² The element of *legalized coercion* was involved.

This connection with the state is not self-evident in this proverb. The reader is assumed by Solomon to be aware of Mosaic laws relating to oppression. Whatever the source of the advantage possessed by the oppressor, he reproaches God by taking advantage of the person subordinate to him. This same element of subordination is implied by the Hebrew word translated as “mercy” in this proverb. The hierarchical relationship is not to be used to take advantage of the weaker party. To do this is to make a statement about God.

God is the supreme party in every relationship. He possesses complete power. If He wishes to impose negative sanctions on anyone, for any reason, He is legally able to do so. This was the main lesson that God taught Job (Job 38–41).³ Judicially, man cannot claim innocence before God. He deserves whatever God hands out to him. But God is said to be merciful in history. So, in imitating God, covenant-keepers are not to take unfair advantage of the poor. On the contrary, they are to show mercy in the sense of grace: an unearned gift. This is what God does for mankind. Thus, when those calling themselves by His name show mercy and refrain from oppression, they testify accurately to the nature of God in history. They honor God.

B. The Welfare State

Verses such as this one can be misused in the name of God. Promoters of coercion by the state in the name of social justice invoke Old Covenant passages that commend mercy. But their appeal to such passages is a cover for oppression. *The heart of mercy is its voluntarism.*

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 26.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

3. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

The fact that a person is not compelled by civil law to lift up another person is what constitutes an act of compassion as merciful. If the person in need of assistance has a legal claim on compassion, then the issue is obedience to the civil law rather than grace.

Coercion goes beyond the undermining of mercy. The state takes money from one group and transfers it to another group. This transforms politics into special-interest competition. Gaining a majority in a civil government allows wealth redistribution by force. *This is the essence of judicial oppression.* It is common for defenders of the welfare state to justify this because the official targets of state power possess greater wealth than the official recipients. But the issue of economic oppression has to do with the use of the state's monopoly of violence to extract wealth from a targeted group of voters who did not win elections.

Consider the example of Nazi Germany. State laws restricting Jews and businesses operated by Jews were passed in the late 1930s. The fact that Jews as a voting bloc possessed greater per capita wealth than the Nazis who ran the government did not justify the use of state power to place them in a subordinate position. This should be obvious to every defender of the welfare state. So should the real name of the Nazi Party: the National Socialist Democratic Workers Party. But the universal response of welfare state advocates is to criticize these oppressive laws because of their racist and religious official justification, not because a socialist government took money from a group whose members possessed greater per capita wealth than the average German voter. They ignore the fact that had the German government not been socialistic, such legislation would not have been legal. It is the old issue of whose ox gets gored. It is not the fact of Nazi Germany's economic oppression that bothers welfare state proponents. Rather, it is the religious targets of this economic oppression that gains the criticism. Had the Jews been Presbyterians, welfare statists would be quite content with the state-enforced redistribution of wealth.

Conclusion

Oppression is evil. This includes economic oppression by the state. Mercy is righteous. Both statements constitute an affirmation of voluntarism. The state is to be put on a tight leash, neither oppressing the poor nor oppressing the less poor. In order to allow men to act mercifully, the state is not supposed to extract wealth by force from mem-

bers of one group and then transfer it to members of other groups, all in the name of mercy. State-enforced mercy is state-enforced compulsion. The state is to be an agency of justice, not an agency of plunder.

48

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith (Prov. 15:16).

Proverbs is filled with comparisons: better this than that. The *this* is usually reduced economic means. Consider the next proverb. “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith” (v. 17).¹ Or these:

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold (3:14).²

Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right (16:8).³

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver! (16:16).⁴

Solomon understood the universality of men’s quest for wealth. This quest was as all-encompassing then as it is today, whenever your today happens to be. Jesus referred to this desire to lay up treasure on earth. “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:20–21).⁵

The contrast here is between two conditions: (1) little with the fear of God and (2) great treasure with vexation or turmoil. The economist

1. Chapter 49.

2. Chapter 9.

3. Chapter 51.

4. Chapter 53.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

never wants to deal with rival conditions with more than one criterion in each. He wants to compare more with less. He wants especially to compare prices, which are conveniently numerical. He wants condition A with condition B, "other things being equal." But this is not the procedure of Solomon. He made his point by comparing mixtures.

He is really comparing the fear of the Lord vs. great treasure, but he adds qualifiers to catch our attention: a lack of wealth vs. vexation. Given the universality of the quest for great treasure, readers down through the ages and across borders have lived in societies that fully understood the benefits of wealth. Wealth is widely regarded as bringing happiness rather than vexation. Wealth is higher on most people's operational scale of values than the fear of the Lord. They spend more time worrying about their lack of wealth than worrying about their lack of any fear of the Lord.

To catch the reader's attention, Solomon compartmentalizes great treasure and vexation. This is what the great religious leaders have taught down through the ages, but it is still not widely believed by their followers. "I'm different," they think. "I would be content with great wealth." The great religious leaders have not been great in terms of the number of people, including their disciples, who personally adopted the leaders' teachings on wealth. There have always been more official believers than begging monks, which is why monks can make a living by begging. If there were more monks than followers, the competition for alms would be very great indeed.

Great treasure brings vexation to most people. This is because wealth has a social function. It requires owners to allocate it. There are many requests for wealth, many alternative and mutually exclusive uses for wealth. *With great wealth comes great responsibility.* Close behind wealth comes a stream of people, each with a suggestion about what the owner should do with his money. Jesus said, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48b).⁶

So, a wise person would rather possess little rather than accumulate trouble. But most people are not wise. Most people possess little and accumulate trouble. They think, "Better to have a lot plus trouble than little plus trouble." This is the economist's preferred decision. But Solomon does not offer this choice. He offers the fear of God accom-

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

panied by little vs. great treasure accompanied by vexation.

The assumption underlying this proverb is that the fear of the Lord will provide ways of dealing with poverty, whereas great treasure is impotent in the face of vexation. In other words, there is greater legitimate hope in overcoming poverty by fearing God than in overcoming vexation by accumulating wealth. This proverb does not teach that poverty is a likely outcome of the fear of the Lord. It does teach that vexation is a likely outcome of great treasure.

This proverb is about two rival quests: the fear of the Lord vs. treasure. We are told that the fear of the Lord plus poverty is better than treasure plus vexation. This comparison would elicit a universal “So what?” if this proverb’s presupposition were not that treasure leads to vexation.

This proverb does not assume that the fear of the Lord generally leads to poverty. The Mosaic law affirms the opposite (Deut. 28:1–14).⁷ It makes a comparison: the fear of the Lord plus poverty (possible) is better than great treasure plus vexation (probable). If this were not the case, this proverb would not persuade treasure-seeking men to mend their mammon-governed ways.

Conclusion

The central issue here is the fear of the Lord. This is the central theme of the Bible’s wisdom literature.

And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding (Job 28:28).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever (Ps. 111:10).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding (Prov. 9:10).

The comparison here is between great wealth and the fear of the Lord, which was also Jesus’ primary comparison fear or love of God vs. fear or love of mammon. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

6:24).⁸ Here is the proverb's argument. If the fear of the Lord accompanied by poverty is preferable to great wealth accompanied by vexation, how much more is the fear of the Lord with wealth preferable to wealth with vexation? It is not arguing that the fear of the Lord produces poverty. It is arguing that even if it did, poverty would be preferable to great wealth, for with great wealth comes vexation.

8. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 14.

LOVE IS NOT FOR SALE

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith (Prov. 15:17).

A. Love Before Wealth

Here we have another contrast where wealth is on the losing side: love vs. hatred. A dinner of herbs indicates poverty. There is no meat. There is no bread. There is basic nutrition, but calories are lacking. In contrast, there is an ox in a stall. There is capital. Presumably, there is productivity. The ox is working; his owner is benefitting. But his life is cursed by hatred.

Love, which is the superior possession, is accompanied by poverty. Love no more causes poverty than the fear of the Lord does, which is the superior possession in the previous proverb. This proverb rests on the possibility that love and poverty do go together on occasion.

The specific manifestation of poverty is worth considering. The dinner is sparse. Herbs are what people plant in a garden or collect in the woods. They provide flavor and some nutrition, but they cannot sustain life by themselves. If this diet lasts too long, the person dies of starvation. Eating only herbs is therefore a temporary condition. It reflects extreme poverty. This person is close to the bottom of the economic strata. Will he starve? No. David wrote: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).¹ Times will get better very soon, but the transition will be to reduced poverty, not wealth.

In contrast is a person with an ox and a stall. He is not facing disaster. He is nowhere near the bottom of the economic strata. But in his house is hatred. The very poor man will soon escape his life-and-death

1. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

situation. This man has no comparable assurance of deliverance from hatred. He may get richer. He may get poorer. In either case, his situation would remain less preferable than the poor man's, for the poor man has love.

B. Love and Hatred

In neither case is the person's economic condition said to be either the cause or the effect of his emotional condition. Love and poverty can and do accompany each other. So do wealth and hatred. So desirable is love in comparison with hatred that this proverb insists that poverty with love is superior to wealth with hatred. This is not to say that poverty and hatred would not be worse. They would be worse, as surely as love and wealth would be better than love and poverty.

The focus of concern is not the economic condition of each of the two people, but rather their respective emotional conditions. This proverb implies that love and hatred are of greater concern than wealth and poverty. It implicitly recommends that we deal with first things first. The nearly universal concern of the poor man is to escape poverty. The almost equally universal concern of the rich man is to avoid poverty. Rich people and poor people focus their concern on their economic situation. This proverb indicates that this is a mistake. Of much greater concern are matters of the heart.

It is possible to work your way out of poverty. More important, it is possible to sleep your way into poverty. Several of Solomon's proverbs say this. If you can sleep your way into poverty, the presumption is that you can work your way out. Love and hatred are not so easily dealt with. Someone who works three extra hours a day and saves his wages will begin to climb out of poverty. There is no comparably predictable procedure for working your way out of hatred.

This proverb does not say whether the hatred is directed outward or inward. Hatred being what it is, it is usually a joint effort. Someone who responds with love to one who hates steadily undermines the hater's ability to maintain the hatred. Love disarms hatred. Jesus said: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:43–44).² It

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

takes a supremely self-conscious hatred to survive the weapon of love.

People are more ready to pay for a program on how to get rich than they are for a program on how to achieve love. This may be because they are more interested in wealth than love. It could also be that they think they are less likely to achieve love than wealth. They go for what they believe is likely to have greater success.

People who do not have riches are so besieged with problems related to poverty, which are highly specific, that they cannot imagine that being delivered from these problems will not make them happy. But with greater wealth inescapably comes greater responsibility. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48b).³ These responsibilities involve greater care and wisdom to deal with than the decision to buy food at the market or to pay to get a car repaired.

There is a familiar aphorism: “Money can’t buy happiness.” Most adults are aware of this, yet they find it difficult to internalize it and make it a principle of their own decision-making process. The suggestion that money can buy love is not taken seriously even by children. In 1964, the Beatles had a #1 song, “Can’t Buy Me Love.” Supposedly, it expressed a fundamental principle of the revolutionary generation of 1965–70—“the ’sixties.”

Can’t buy me love, love
Can’t buy me love.

I’ll buy you a diamond ring, my friend, if it makes you feel all right.
I’ll get you anything, my friend, if it makes you feel all right.
’Cause I don’t care too much for money; money can’t buy me love.

The irony here is that the person singing it had been able to accumulate so much money that buying the listener a diamond ring was nothing special. The Beatles went on to make more money—hundreds of millions of dollars, yen, pounds, deutschmarks—than any singing group in history.

Can’t buy me love, everybody tells me so.
Can’t buy me love, no, no, no, no.

The group broke up in 1970, abandoning a gigantic stream of in-

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

come. They could no longer stand to work with each other. Each of the members had at least one divorce. Ringo Starr, the drummer, became an alcoholic. (Alcoholics Anonymous helped restore him to sobriety.) In 1980, John Lennon was shot in front of his New York City apartment by someone who a few hours before had him autograph a record album cover. He died a few hours later. Money did not buy them love—not for long, anyway.

As for their American fans, the 1970s became the “me decade,” marked by self-centeredness and the pursuit of wealth. The message of the 1964 lyrics did not stick.

Conclusion

The lure of wealth is great. So is the lure of love. Wealth is not evenly distributed. The ability to create it or receive it is limited to an elite. Love appears to be more randomly distributed, although proving this would be impossible. Wealth is expressed numerically. Love is not.

This proverb indicates that love is available to those who seek it. Otherwise, there would be no reason to put this in a long list of calls to ethical action. Men can pursue wealth. They can pursue love. But the ways to wealth are clearer than the ways to love.

MOVING FORWARD

The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain (Prov. 15:19).

A. Why Sloth Is an Ethical Issue

The contrast here is ethical: slothful vs. righteous. Initially, the passage seems to compare different patterns of behavior: sloth vs. righteousness. Sloth is a preference for doing as little as possible. Righteousness is a commitment to do that which is bounded by ethical standards. Why the contrast? It makes sense only if sloth is an ethical matter. A preference for doing as little as possible in any situation is identified here as a violation of God's ethical standards.

The Book of Proverbs is hostile to sloth. This proverb offers a unique assessment of sloth. It compares the slothful person's way of life with a hedge of thorns.

The way of the righteous person is different. The question is: In what way? The Hebrew word translated here as "plain" is misleading. It means to cast up or raise. "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: **extol** him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him" (Ps. 68:4). "**Exalt** her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her" (Prov. 4:8). "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; **cast** up, **cast** up the highways; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people" (Isa. 62:10). It is like a highway. It is raised higher than the drainage ditch at the side of the road. The righteous person's path in life is above the worst of the mud.

The indication here is that a slothful person's path is hedged by thorns. But why should this be? Does God direct the slothful person onto a pathway specially designed to thwart his efforts? Is life for a slothful person difficult because of an objective difference in his path-

way? Or is his pathway filled with thorns subjectively? Is it resistant because he finds all effort distasteful?

B. Subjective Effort

The slothful man prefers ease to effort. He does not like to work. This proverb indicates that his pathway in life is a burden compared to that which the righteous person experiences.

A burden must be either carried or set down. The slothful person wants to lay his burden down. The righteous person wants to carry his own load. He does not want to be a burden to others.

The slothful person faces a life of thorns. It is not just that his path resists him. It is that it inflicts pain on him. It scratches him and scars him as he moves forward. It is easier not to move. It is easier to wait for someone else to clear the path.

The righteous person moves along a different pathway. It does not resist him. He can move faster than the slothful person can. He can move with less pain. He can move for a longer period before resting.

The slothful person sees the world as being against him. The righteous person does not. The slothful person sees the world around him as a threat. The righteous person does not. The slothful person's assessment of the challenge he faces persuades him that it is safer to stand pat. The righteous person's assessment of the challenge he faces persuades him to keep moving forward because he is better off on the highway than in the ditch. Besides, if he sits down on the highway, he may get run over.

This passage identifies the covenant-keeper's path as objectively easier than the covenant-breaker's. Jesus taught the same thing.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28–30).

Yet He also taught this: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13–14).¹ The implication is that the more burdensome path is the

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 17.

wider path. Most people choose it. Therefore, either they hate righteousness so much that they prefer the extra burden of the wider path or else they do not perceive that the righteous life is less burdensome.

So, the contrast in this proverb is between the slothful person's perception of the challenge vs. the righteous person's perception of the challenge. By "perception," I do not mean a preliminary assessment of what lies ahead. I mean the actual experience.

This indicates that the righteous person will not only achieve more in life than the slothful person, his psychological experience will be superior. His tasks will seem easier to him than the slothful person's tasks will seem to him.

We are unable scientifically to measure difficulty, as perceived by one person. This is a subjective category. There are no measurements of subjective perception. We are unable to say just how much more difficult life seems to the slothful person in comparison to the righteous person. Yet this proverb speaks authoritatively to this issue. It tells us that life for the slothful person seems more of a burden to him than it seems to a righteous person.

Conclusion

The slothful person is hampered by his own ethical defect. Life seems too painful for him to commit the kind of resources and effort that are necessary to overcome life's challenges. In contrast, the righteous person perceives his challenges as those appropriate to highway existence. His environment does not seem as a threat to him.

Both perceptions are self-reinforcing. The slothful person does not like to work. He pays for this ethical defect by experiencing more trouble and no permanent triumph. In contrast, the righteous person is rewarded by experiencing a sense of liberation. His environment does not overcome his inner strength, which reinforces his perception that moving forward does not require superhuman effort.

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LAWFUL OWNERSHIP

Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right (Prov. 16:8).

A. Righteousness vs. Corruption

This is another comparison: righteousness and corruption. This contrast is heightened by a secondary contrast: more vs. less. This proverb does not call on the righteous person to pursue poverty rather than wealth. It calls on him to pursue righteousness rather than corruption.

The word translated “right” is the word *mishpat*. It usually relates to a judicial proceeding. “Thou shalt not wrest the **judgment** of thy poor in his cause” (Ex. 23:6). This law is aimed at members of a court. The sin of rendering false judgment can be the sin of judicial corruption. It can also be injustice, meaning the misuse of the civil law even though the case does not go to court.

This proverb makes its point by comparing a pair of combinations: poverty and righteousness vs. wealth and corruption. It does not imply that righteousness generally produces poverty. It does imply that one of corruption’s goals is wealth. It says that when righteousness is accompanied by poverty, it is preferable to corruption accompanied by wealth. The negative condition of poverty is preferable when the price of wealth is corruption.

This proverb does not say that the price of righteousness is poverty. One cannot purchase righteousness with poverty. This proverb is not an affirmation of a vow of poverty or a monastic life. On the other hand, one can sometimes purchase wealth with corruption. This proverb advises against this. It does so by comparing economic outcomes: wealth vs. poverty. Poverty is preferable.

This proverb makes ethical sense because the comparison is illus-

trated by rival economic conditions. Solomon knew that men rarely pursue poverty deliberately. Poverty is widely recognized as an undesirable condition. Later, we read: "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (30:8–9).¹ Yet Solomon says that poverty is superior to riches when riches have been achieved through corruption.

B. A Question of Sanctions

Poverty is not a sanction for righteousness, for it is a negative sanction. Wealth is a sanction for corruption. It is a positive sanction, for it is the goal of corruption. Men do not normally pursue negative sanctions when they break the law. We do not think of corrupt judges placing themselves at risk for the sake of poverty.

This proverb raises a question. Why is a negative sanction preferable to a positive sanction? The deciding factor is corruption. This raises a second question. What is it about corruption that weighs the case against wealth? Wealth is so universally perceived as something worth sacrificing for, and poverty is so universally avoided, that the deciding factor associated with corruption must be weighty indeed.

This proverb does not say what this factor is. There are several possible answers. First, corruption is its own curse, in the same sense that righteousness is its own reward. Corruption, like righteousness, stands alone as a negative value. There are ethical systems built in terms of this presupposition regarding righteousness for its own sake, most notably Immanuel Kant's.² Second, corruption brings inescapable eternal negative sanctions that are more fearful than the positive sanction of great wealth. This is the New Testament's teaching. Jesus said: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).³ Third, corruption may bring negative sanctions in history when it is discovered. This risk is not worth the benefits of great wealth. Fourth, corruption brings guilt, and guilt must be confessed publicly (Lev. 5:17; 6:4; Num. 5:6–7).

1. Chapter 85.

2. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1780–81?] 1963).

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

This proverb says that great wealth is not worth the price of being corrupt. It is not just that it is better not to gain the wealth that corruption can bring. It is actually better to be poor. Why, then, would a just and wise man become corrupt for the sake of wealth?

Conclusion

Injustice is to be avoided. No matter how much wealth a person can gain from injustice, it produces loss. The loss is so great that poverty is preferable.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

A just weight and balance are the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag are his work (Prov. 16:11).

This proverb presents the theological foundation of a related pair of Mosaic laws.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:35–36).¹

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God (Deut. 25:13–16).²

The law in Leviticus refers back to the exodus as the law's justification. This points to God's office as cosmic Judge. He executes judgment in history. He delivered the Israelites out of the injustice of slavery in Egypt. The law in Deuteronomy presents a positive sanction for obedience: long life in Canaan. This is the same promise that is attached to the commandment to honor parents (Ex. 20:12),³ which Paul identified as the first commandment with a promise (Eph. 6:2). Clearly,

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

this was a fundamental law in Mosaic Israel.

This proverb speaks of just (*mishpat*) weights as belonging to God. This is peculiar language. Everything belongs to God (Ps. 50:10).⁴ In what way are just weights uniquely His—sufficiently unique to be designated here as His?

Weights and measures are representative of God's law, meaning His ethical standards.⁵ To use a false weight is to substitute a deceptive standard for the true one. This is analogous to calling God a deceiver. He establishes standards, and men are to honor these standards. The false weight deviates from a representative standard. It is used to benefit the person who uses the false weight, who is generally the seller of a good. It means treating different people differently judicially. This is a violation of God's rule of law.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).⁶

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).⁷

The seller of goods is a specialist in these goods. He possesses specialized information, including information on how to cheat a buyer. Yet he is trusted by the buyer. So, when he uses false weights to deceive the buyer, he has adopted different weights. He buys from his professional suppliers with one set of weights, but he then sells to retail buyers with a different set. This is a violation of the rule of law.

Standard weights are mandatory for every society. These standards must be legally enforceable in a civil court. Of course, there can also be private courts that enforce specialized standards. But final jurisdiction in history requires an agency of law enforcement that possesses the lawful authority to impose negative sanctions on convicted violators. The civil government possesses this authority with respect to weights and measures. There is no other common government in society. Weights and measures are supposed to apply equally to everyone in-

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

5. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, *op. cit.*

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 4.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 40.

side the geographical borders of a civil government.

So important are predictable and legally enforceable weights and measures that this proverb identifies these as belonging to God. Therefore, any alteration of these standards by self-interested individuals constitutes theft. This is more than theft. This is theft of God's property.

God, as the creator and sovereign sustainer of the universe, possesses lawful ownership of the creation. He delegates to individuals, voluntary organizations, and lawfully covenanted associations the authority to impose negative sanctions for violating God's laws. The law of weights and measures is highly important in the overall civil legal order. This law decentralizes law enforcement to individuals whose profession requires weights and measures. In this sense, weights are a matter of civil law and therefore possess covenantal importance. Everyone is required to honor the law, but because the actual weights are owned by profit-seeking sellers, *sellers become agents of the court*. Any attempt on their part to tamper with these weights constitutes a flagrant violation of God's law. This is why a related proverb says, "Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD" (20:10),⁸ which is a recapitulation of Deuteronomy 25:16. An abomination in the Mosaic law was a flagrant sin. It was often associated with idolatry (Deut. 13:13–15; 17:1–4; 18:10–12).

Conclusion

This proverb identifies weights and measures as belonging to God. Tampering with them is a serious offense: the theft of God's property. A false weight is an abomination in God's sight.

The law of weights and measures decentralizes law enforcement. It begins with self-government. Civil law serves as a back-up to this law. But God warns men that He is the ultimate enforcer of this law. He weighs all men in His balances, which are reliable.

8. Chapter 57.

VALUE AND PRICE

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver! (Prov. 16:16).

A. Wisdom Over Gold

This is a famous proverb. It compares the value of wisdom to the value of gold. Understanding is similarly more valuable than silver.

In what way did Solomon contrast wisdom with silver? Gold is always worth more per ounce than silver. Does this proverb imply that wisdom is more valuable than understanding because gold is more valuable than silver? No. The Hebrew words for wisdom and understanding are found together at least 50 times in the same verses. The phrase, “wisdom and understanding,” is used as a kind of poetic device. We rarely find the phrase, “understanding and wisdom,” and the two most prominent cases where we do are in Daniel, in the mouths of Babylonians.

Solomon selects gold and silver as reference points in order to make a point: *the supreme value of wisdom*. Elsewhere, he selects rubies. “For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it” (8:11). Men throughout history have searched for gold and silver. They have sacrificed time and health to accumulate gold and silver. The metals’ desirability, coupled with their scarcity, gives them great value. The implication is that wisdom and understanding are even more scarce, but they are not equally desired. Solomon insists that they are even more desirable.

Why are they not highly desired? Because they are in short supply. It takes wisdom and understanding to perceive the high value of wisdom and understanding.

What is the essence of wisdom? Understanding the word of God and God’s interpretation of it. Solomon insists, “There is no wisdom

nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD” (21:30). Wisdom means being like-minded with God. It means thinking God’s thoughts after Him. Paul wrote: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5). In short, *wisdom is the ability to think theocentrically*. God, not man, is the center of the universe. Men should think accordingly.

B. Unreliable Riches

Once accumulated, riches can be lost. Solomon says, “Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (23:4–5).¹ Jesus said: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal” (Matt. 6:19).²

Wisdom can also flee, as Solomon discovered. In his old age, he worshipped the false gods of his wives (I Kings 11:4). But the implication of the Proverbs is that wisdom is more stable than wealth.

The Book of Proverbs from beginning to end is about the benefits of possessing wisdom. Everything else is second best, or even less. Yet the market for wisdom is limited. This is why Solomon compiled these proverbs. These proverbs are designed to impart wisdom. Part of that wisdom is the understanding that wisdom is so valuable. Most men do not recognize this, and fewer still follow what wisdom reveals, including Solomon. Solomon multiplied wives, which was prohibited to kings by the Mosaic law. “But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (Deut. 17:17).³ Solomon multiplied all of the above (I Kings 10:28). He kept his horses, wives, and gold. He lost his wisdom, which had brought him renown.

1. Chapter 72.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42:E.

C. Marketability

There is a ready market for gold and silver. Where such markets are prohibited by law, there are black markets for them. They are universally desired.

There is no comparable market for wisdom. There are markets for knowledge, since knowledge brings money, power, fame, and influence. Knowledge is not the same as wisdom. *Wisdom is knowing and obeying God's law.* Knowledge is information, and accurate information about the world's affairs can be marketed.

The wide market for gold and silver provides value. Value is imputed by acting individuals. They say, "this is valuable," and if they put their money where their mouths are, the price of the asset increases. In contrast, wisdom has no comparable market. Rulers through history have gone out of their way to exclude counselors who have possessed wisdom.

So, the market price of gold exceeds the price of wisdom. This fact is what gives this proverb its punch. Men can monitor the price of gold; they cannot monitor the price of wisdom.

There is a discrepancy between value and price. This discrepancy lies at the heart of economic theory. If value is subjective, as modern economists say that it is, then it cannot be measured. There is no objective measure of subjective value. There is more or less value, but not *exactly this much* more or less.⁴ In contrast, prices are objective. The price of harlotry is higher to the buyer than the price of the gospel is to the recipient. This does not mean that harlotry is more valuable than the gospel. The opposite is true.

Conclusion

There is a saying attributed to a skeptic, Oscar Wilde, that a cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. This saying is an application of this proverb's insight. The value of wisdom is higher than the value of gold. There is an objective price of gold at this moment. There is no objective price of wisdom at this moment. Wisdom can be purchased, which is what the Book of Proverbs is all about. *The price of wisdom is obeying God's word.* It is too high a price for imperfect men to pay. But Christ paid it, and He makes wisdom available through grace to His people. "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things,

4. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 1:5:A.

yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:15–16).⁵

5. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

THE HIGH WALL OF WEALTH

The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit (Prov. 18:11).

This proverb asserts that wealth is a rich man's strong city. A strong city in the ancient world was a walled city. A wall slowed down invaders. Wealth serves as the equivalent of an ancient high wall for the rich person. It resists invaders. The stated advantage here is the ability to insulate yourself from the calamities that poor people faced until the twentieth century in industrial societies, and which billions of poor people face in India and China in the early twenty-first.

The rich man's family is the next-to-the last to face starvation in a famine, after senior government officials. His family does not freeze in the winter. In summers, he and his family members can journey to a cooler location if he lives without air conditioning, which became universal in the middle-class West after 1960.

The rich man has a lot of money. Money is the most marketable commodity. At some price, everyone wants more of it. So, the rich man can buy protection from specialists who are in a position to provide it. This purchase of safety can take many forms. One is outright bribery of government officials. Another is "protection money" paid to a local criminal gang. Another is commercial insurance. A crisis that a rich man cannot escape through surrendering a portion of his wealth is usually either a society-wide crisis, such as a plague or a lost war, or else a disease that medical science has not yet eliminated.

Money offers protection because it is the most marketable commodity. People under almost all situations are willing to exchange goods and services for money. This means that whatever the circumstances, a rich man can find someone to sell him whatever he wants or needs. So, he need not plan carefully for the future. No matter what time brings, he will be able to buy whatever he wants. This puts him in

a situation that few people in history have enjoyed. He is part of an elite.

If events around a rich man cannot penetrate his shield of money, then he is tempted to imagine that he needs no outside agency to protect him. He forgets where he got his wealth. Moses warned against this attitude of confidence, “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:17–18).¹ Wealth has a covenantal purpose. It is not to make a man impervious to disaster, but rather to make him more aware of God’s covenant and its positive sanctions. He should also not forget its negative sanctions. “And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish” (Deut. 8:19).²

Men are to trust the God of the covenant. Men’s trust should be in the Giver, not the gift. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Yet men who accumulate great wealth tend to attribute their success to their own abilities. This is their downfall. “And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24).³

This proverb adds, “as an high wall in his own **conceit**.” This is an odd translation. The Hebrew word is usually translated as “image” (Lev. 26:1; Num. 33:52) or “picture” (Prov. 25:11). It is translated as “imagery” once (Ezek. 8:11). Closer to the meaning here is this: “Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could **wish**” (Ps. 73:7). The English word “wish” is misleading. The word “imagination” is much closer. The New American Standard Version translates the clause, “and like a high wall in his imagination.”

A high wall is his image of the meaning of his wealth. It surrounds him. It keeps troubles away.

This proverb makes this comparison of wealth and an image of

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

safety. It does not say that the wealthy person is self-deluded. It does not have to. Moses taught this in Deuteronomy 8. High walls offer no protection against negative covenant sanctions. This was the message of the fall of Jericho, the first city inside Canaan to fall to the invading Israelites.

Conclusion

We are not to trust in anything but the God of the covenant. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Ps. 20:7). Wealth is a weak reed to rest on in history. It is utterly useless to trust in wealth for eternity. “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (I Tim. 6:7).⁴

Wealth seems to offer protection. Under most circumstances, it does. But this protection for a time in history is an illusion in eternity. To trust in wealth testifies to spiritual error. Yet it is an almost universal error among adults. In this sense, children are much wiser. They trust in their parents, not in their wealth. They trust in a highly personal world of people and commitments. It is adults who trust more in pieces of metal, or worse, plastic.

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

RIVAL INHERITANCE PROGRAMS

House and riches are the inheritance of fathers and a prudent wife is from the LORD (Prov. 19:14).

This proverb identifies the proximate source of earthly blessings. A house and wealth come from one's father. God supplies a wise wife. The recipient gains all of these assets from others. Those men who are the heirs of great wealth should not attribute their success to themselves. Neither should a husband of a wise wife attribute this benefit to himself.

In some cases, a man may have accumulated houses and wealth through his own efforts. But a wise wife is uniquely a gift from God. He can take no credit for her. He may be tempted to attribute his economic success to his own efforts, but this is forthrightly a mistake when speaking of a wise wife.

Proverbs identifies a wise wife as an asset of greater value than jewels. "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies" (31:10).¹ So, Solomon offers a contrast: objects that can be inherited can be attributed to men's efforts, either the original wealth builder or the heir, but a wise wife is a gift from God. This is the greater gift. An inheritance is desirable, but a wise wife is a greater blessing. This greater blessing is not the work of any man's hands or efforts. It is the work of God.

This proverb points to the legitimacy of inherited wealth. The recipient is not warned to beware of his inheritance. This implies that the builder of a fortune can legitimately pass the wealth to his sons. Intergenerational wealth is a good thing. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (13:22).² Wealth gained through righteous behavior is not

1. Chapter 85.

2. Chapter 41.

stigmatized in the Bible. "The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 28:8). "And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee" (Deut. 28:11).³

So important was inheritance in the Mosaic law that a father was not permitted to disinherit a son without judicial cause. The eldest son of a despised first wife received a double portion, based on his legal status as firstborn, irrespective of a man's greater favor shown to a later wife (Deut. 21:15–17).⁴

The biblical law of inheritance was rejected by European societies. They substituted primogeniture, where the eldest son inherited the landed estate. Then they added entail: a prohibition on the sale of the landed estate. Inheriting eldest sons got around this by indebting the estate. They spent the money, and the creditors inherited the land.

In the twentieth century, this system came under attack. Heavy inheritance taxes stripped European families of large landed estates. Taxes also stripped them of large amounts of money, even if they had no land. A growing hostility of intra-family inheritance became visible, decade by decade. The most famous early advocate of heavy inheritance taxes was Andrew Carnegie, the atheistic, Darwinian American industrialist, in his 1889 essay, "The Gospel of Wealth."

The state has substituted itself for the family. It provides old age pensions and old age medical services, just as sons have done for millennia. It also pays for the education of children, and it has made school attendance compulsory. To pay for all this, the state has drastically increased taxes. So, sons now pay the state rather than their own parents. The inheritance-disinheritance system has become impersonal and statist. This way, politicians get credit for helping people supposedly in need, bureaucrats receive high salaries for administering the programs, and ethical considerations relating to family inheritance are abandoned. Numerical criteria, such as age and income level, are substituted for ethics.

Rich families have evaded taxes in the United States by setting up public trusts and foundations. They have transferred control of the

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 50.

family inheritance to boards of trustees, where the donors and their heirs sit. They can exercise indirect control over the use of what had been family assets. These funds legally must be used for government-approved purposes. The families have maintained influence over the specifics of how the now tax-exempt assets would be used down through the generations. Often, the foundations have borne the donating family's names. A major goal of great families—fame—has thereby been preserved.

Conclusion

We inherit things of real value. The family supplies houses and other physical assets. God the Father supplies a prudent wife. Both inheritances are governed by God's family covenant, which has laws. These laws are the basis of a good inheritance (Deut. 28:1–14).

There is a war against God's laws of inheritance. Unwise men choose imprudent wives. Then they squander their inheritances. The modern state also undermines the family inheritance by substituting tax-funded welfare programs. These programs undermine the ethical standards of the covenant. They substitute the political covenant for the family covenant.

LENDING TO GOD

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again (Prov. 19:17).

A. An Open Hand for the Poor

The Hebrew word here translated as “pity” elsewhere is translated as “mercy.” “He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he” (14:21).¹ “He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor” (14:31).² The idea is not that a person has silent emotional empathy—pity—for the poor but rather that he does something good for the poor.

He who gives something of value to the poor man, which would include his time, is said to lend to God. The meaning of the Hebrew word is the same as it is in the Mosaic law: “He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail” (Deut. 28:44). But does this language apply to someone who lends to God? Does God become his tail, to be wagged at will?

The relationship of God to man is always that of lender and borrower. Jesus told His disciples to pray: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12).³ This reflects a fundamental biblical principle: *grace precedes law*. Man is always beholden to God. So, in what way can it be said that by showing mercy to a poor person, a man lends to God?

The second part of this proverb supplies the answer: “and that which he hath given will he pay him again.” The English text suffers from what English teachers call “indefinite pronoun reference.” Who is

1. Chapter 45.

2. Chapter 47.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12:C.

“he” who will pay “him” again? It is obvious conceptually, though not grammatically, that God is the person who will repay. Can the giver count on God? Yes. God is reliable. But this willingness on God’s part to repay does not place the merciful person in a net creditor position in relation to God. Rather, it marginally reduces the magnitude of the debt owed to God, which is enormous.

Every good gift comes from God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).⁴ Moses said the same thing: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁵ The motivation to show mercy to the poor is no less a gift from God than any other mark of grace in someone’s life. The person who shows mercy to the poor is still in debt to God. But in terms of success in history, the message of this proverb is clear: that which is given up for mercy’s sake will return. “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Eccl. 11:1).

B. Representation

Why is a gift to the poor a loan to God? The answer is in the biblical doctrine of representation. Jesus taught this regarding the final judgment.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:34–40).

The act of mercy to the poor is an act of repayment to God. The

4. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 33.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

act of mercy to the poor man is not legally mandated. The repayment to God is legally mandated, but by God's court, not man's. Man does not possess sufficient wealth to repay God. God is not in need of repayment economically, but man is in need of a means of repayment judicially. God's honor must be upheld. Adam violated it. Justice, mercy, and humility are the coin of God's realm.

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (Micah 6:7–8)?

So, there is a great need for suitable representatives. The poor serve as God's representatives. What men do for the least of these, they do unto God.

C. Repayment in History

Jesus taught that whatever of marketable value is surrendered in history will be repaid in eternity.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19–21).⁶

The Old Covenant had no concept of eternity as a warehouse of treasure to be stockpiled in history. The Old Testament's concept of causation was historical. The kingdom of God is a temporal kingdom, the Old Testament taught. The New Testament teaches that God's kingdom is both temporal and eternal.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:32–34).⁷

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 26.

Being a temporal kingdom, there is repayment in history.

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matt. 19:28–29).⁸

So, covenantal causation is not limited to eternity. It operates in history, as a foretaste of eternity—a down payment or earnest payment. This inheritance is mediated by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13–14).

Conclusion

Showing mercy to the poor is both sacrificial and self-interested. It is an act of sacrifice on behalf of others—immediate loss—but also a self-interested act: future returns. The giver must have faith in God as a creditor who forgives. Otherwise, the act of mercy is perceived by the donor a one-way event. To imagine that it is a one-way event is to lack faith in God's system of covenantal causation. This reduces the amount of mercy shown, since it removes a positive sanction that is a great motivation.

We must not regard God as a debtor who faithfully repays. Such an outlook places man in control over God. After all, the borrower is servant to the lender (22:7).⁹ God's covenant is seen as a way to manipulate God. Yet the purpose of the sanctions is to reinforce men's faith in the reliability of God's covenant (Deut. 8:18).¹⁰ The incorrect view is analogous to a cartoon I saw in the early 1960s. Two rats are in a psychologist's rat-training cage, called a Skinner box in honor of experimental psychologist B. F. Skinner. In front of one rat is a horizontal lever and a vertical slot. The rat says to his associate, “I've got this psychologist completely trained. Every time I press this lever, he drops

8. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 39.

9. Chapter 67.

10. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

food through the slot.”

The giver represents God to the recipient: the true source of undeserved benefits, i.e., the source of grace. The giver is to give thanks to God. Simultaneously, the recipient represents God to the giver. Man lends to God by way of the recipient. He also is to give thanks to God: for the wealth to give, for the opportunity to give, and for the motivation to give.

DIVERSE WEIGHTS

Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD (Prov. 20:10).

This is a reconfirmation of Proverbs 11:1: “A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.”¹ It also recapitulates Proverbs 16:11: “A just weight and balance are the LORD’S: all the weights of the bag are his work.”² These are all brief summaries of the law: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:35–36).³ The link between the honest weights and justice is made explicit in this text.

The nature of the prohibition is clarified here: *deception*. There are more than one standard being used in exchanges. Presumably, this applies to the sellers of goods. They possess the technical tools of weighing and measuring. When they buy, they use one set. When they sell, they use another set. They play upon the ignorance of buyers and sellers. But it is more likely that buyers are the primary victims. In a division-of-labor society, there is a chain of sellers, from manufacturer to the final retailer. Sellers are likely to possess the weighing and measuring devices of their trade. A wholesaler is less likely to use diverse weights, because he knows that the buyer is a specialist in his particular market niche in the chain of distribution. He will have the same measuring devices. The likelihood of a successful deception is low. The more transactions take place, the more likely there is an opportunity for the deception to be revealed.

1. Chapter 29.

2. Chapter 52.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

The retail seller is therefore the most likely culprit. The consumer relies on the seller to use honest scales. He is more likely to be the first victim than a wholesaler further down in the chain of transactions.

The term is used for truly heinous infractions of the Mosaic law. Some were sexual. They threatened the land. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you" (Lev. 18:26). Others were related to witchcraft. These were crimes for which God drove the Canaanites out of the land. "For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee" (Deut. 18:12). Others were theological. "The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God" (Deut. 7:25). "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen" (Deut. 27:15). In short, these were the most serious crimes in Mosaic Israel.

This proverb identifies diverse weights as an abomination. This was also true of Proverbs 11:1. What is the nature of the infraction that justified such a condemnation? There is no other business practice that is so identified.

Conclusion

The use of deceptive scales is a form of theft. It is a continuing form of theft. The false weights are not used only one time. This crime reveals a mentality hostile to justice. God abhors it.

The judicial responsibility associated with every sin is in part related to the representation of God made by the sin in question. False measures seem disproportionately condemned. We should attempt to understand the reason for this condemnation. The use of diverse measures representatively attributes to God the character of an unjust ruler. Such a ruler refuses to honor the rule of law. "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (Ex. 12:49).⁴ God is pictured as pretending to honor the principle,

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985),

just as the businessman pretends to have one set of weights as both buyer and seller. God is therefore represented as a deceiver in His capacity as a judge. This is a false witness. We are reminded that God's justice is at the heart of the covenant.

THE HIGH PRICE OF SLUMBER

Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread (Prov. 20:13).

This is another proverb that identifies an unwillingness to work with poverty. A person who prefers sleep to work had better prefer poverty to wealth. In two other proverbs—actually one, which is then repeated—laziness is described as folded hands. “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep” (Prov. 6:10; cf. 24:33¹). From excessive slumber to poverty: this is causation. A demonstrated preference for sleep is sufficient to produce poverty.

This cause-and-effect relationship is the result of God’s curse of the earth (Gen. 3:17–19).² People must labor in order to get the earth to produce the goods they want in the quantities they want. People must become productive. This means that their output should be valued more highly than their inputs. The crucial input, for humanity and for most individuals, is labor. Without labor, the land’s output is insufficient to provide people with the environment they want.

We say that a person sees an opportunity. Rarely does anyone see an opportunity, other than a coin in a gutter. He *imagines* an opportunity. He *perceives* an opportunity. But we say that he sees an opportunity. This is poetic language. This proverb uses poetic language.

The second clause says, “open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.” Opened eyes are contrasted with closed eyes. Solomon is using sleep as a poetic identification of laziness. So, open eyes are the poetic identification of work. Literally, a person with open eyes who is watching a television screen is not productive. He might as well be sleeping.

1. Chapter 75.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

Causation in history is not from mere open eyes to bread, which is the poetic symbol of abundance. It is from work to bread. So, the terminology is poetic, not literal. A person could have his eyes closed and be imagining the details of some new invention. That could be very productive. Sleep is different. It is a mental escape from coherent causation. Dreams are not limited by the normal processes of nature.

Benjamin Franklin in a letter made the comment, “time is money.” He meant this: with time, you can make money. Waste time, and you will not make money.

He who is lazy is not merely a time-waster. He is a wealth-waster. He throws away a crucial source of wealth: time. The result of not gaining wealth is poverty. This proverb is clear about economic cause and effect.

“Open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.” To open one’s eyes is to wake up. Of course, waking up is not sufficient. Getting up is also important. So is getting busy.

To be satisfied with bread means to be filled with food, and the text can be translated this way. The person who is an active worker is unlikely to go hungry. The person who is lazy, unless he inherited wealth, is likely to be hungry.

Conclusion

This passage reaffirms a continuing theme in Proverbs. To gain poverty, all it takes is to do nothing. The manifestation of doing nothing is sleep. The sleeping person is not in touch with reality and its limitations. He does not change the world around him. The curse of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19) is not overcome by his active labor.

There is economic cause and effect in history. There is a predictable relationship between work and prosperity, and also between laziness and poverty. This proverb does not affirm the labor theory of value. It affirms the *labor theory of opportunity*. He who slumbers will miss out. He will not be able to make good use of the opportunities that are out there, ready to be implemented.

DECEPTIVE BARGAINING

It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth (Prov. 20:14).

The buyer is described as saying two different things about the same transaction. It is clear from this proverb that what he tells the seller is one thing. What he tells his associates is another.

In the first case, he is in a competitive situation. He is trying to avoid paying what the seller has asked for his good. The buyer wants to pay less. Free market economics ever since Adam Smith has rested on the axiom that people prefer to pay less than more, unless charity is involved. What the buyer says to the seller here is consistent with what free market economics teaches about pricing.

In the second case, he is the proud owner of the item he was seeking to purchase. Part of his pride stems from the low price he paid to purchase it. He wants to impress others with his skill as a bargainer. So, the item he told the seller was worth nothing, he now tells others was a tremendous bargain.

This proverb does not recommend this kind of sharp bargaining. It merely describes what was common in Solomon's day, and what is still common in my day.

A. Negotiating the Price

Buyers (sellers of money) want to buy low. They do not want to pay a seller more than the seller is willing to accept. The description here indicates that the market was open to bargaining. Sellers asked more than they expected to receive. Buyers offered less than they expected to pay.

"It is naught." The prospective seller knows that the prospective buyer does not really believe this. The phrase is merely rhetoric—a

code phrase for “offer me a lower price.” No one pays good money for something he believes is worth nothing. The fact that he is willing to spend time negotiating indicates that he thinks the item is worth something.

Why should the prospective buyer believe that the prospective seller is willing to lower the price? Because the marketplace is commonly marked by sellers who trade on the ignorance of buyers. Buyers do not know for sure what the seller is willing to accept. Sellers do not know what a particular buyer will pay. So, the two compete because of the existence of a zone of ignorance.

When someone walks into a large retail store that has priced all items with bar codes connected to a computer system, he does not bother to negotiate with a clerk. The clerk has no authority or ability to change the price. The price has been set by a third party who does not meet with buyers. The buyer pays and leaves. Pricing is established in terms of volume. The store makes a low profit margin per sale. Its profit comes from large volume: high turnover per unit of time. Large volume requires rapid individual sales. If the buyer wants a lower price, he must go to another store.

The zone of ignorance between buyer and seller is nonexistent in a store that sells with computerized bar codes. The buyer knows exactly what the seller is willing to take for the item. The seller is not concerned with what the individual buyer is willing to pay. Profit comes from high-volume sales, not from successful negotiation with each seller. The seller saves time by refusing to negotiate on price. So does the buyer.

If a buyer wants a lower price, he must spend time shopping. The seller competes against other sellers. The buyer competes against other buyers. In a market in which knowledge is widely distributed and cheap to buy, sellers do not compete against buyers. Such negotiation takes place only where there are zones of ignorance about alternatives. The broader the information base about a specific product, the less relevant is information about what a particular buyer or seller will accept as a transaction price.

The residential real estate market has zones of ignorance because each home is different. Sellers announce prices higher than they are willing to accept. Buyers offer lower prices than they are willing to pay. Negotiation is not face to face. It is done through intermediaries: real estate agents. But any home buyer who says “It is naught” in front of a seller is making a big mistake. The seller’s wife will resent such an as-

essment. The wise approach is to say, “This is lovely. It is too bad we just can’t afford it.” But in most cases, the agent who shows the home asks the seller to be absent at the time of the walk-through. Bargaining is much more impersonal. It is done with a signed contract and earnest money.¹

B. More Truth, More Sales

If a seller has a reputation for hard bargaining, well-informed buyers will either bargain sharply or go elsewhere to buy, because they do not think their bargaining skills are superior to the seller’s skills.

Sellers who do not stick to their initial prices invite sharp-bargaining buyers. They also lose time negotiating. The time cost per sale increases.

Modern capitalism is generally price competitive. It seeks to broaden the market by lowering prices. A seller seeks to increase his product’s market share by lowering prices and attracting buyers who had been priced out of the market.

There are niche markets that are not price competitive. These are usually markets for the rich or the poor. The seller who sells a unique service to rich people, like the junk dealer who sells one-of-a-kind used goods to poor people, does not price their goods to sell in large numbers. So, both men trade on buyers’ ignorance of alternatives. The vast majority of buyers do not shop regularly at junk stores or boutiques for custom-made goods.

Mass production encourages more truth. Buyers announce their best price and stick to it unless they are losing a lot of money. If they lose money, they change their pricing structure in one shot by entering new prices in the bar code computer.

Mass production encourages high-volume sales. By lowering prices, highly competitive sellers meet the market. They target a specific kind of buyer and price their goods accordingly. They try to figure out what a representative though hypothetical buyer will pay. This hypothetical buyer represents many buyers who will make a purchase. The seller is highly concerned about what this hypothetical buyer will pay. Once he decides, individual buyers matter only as members of a statistically relevant group.

1. Earnest money is money paid by the potential buyer in advance. It is forfeited if the seller agrees to the buyer’s contract, and the buyer then refuses to complete the transaction. It is also called “good faith” money.

Conclusion

This proverb applies to a pre-capitalistic society or to niche markets with one-of-a-kind products for sale. There is negotiation between buyer and seller because of zones of ignorance. Neither party knows what price the other party is willing to accept. Because of ignorance, buyer competes against seller. The less the ignorance, the more that buyers compete against buyers, and sellers compete against sellers.

60

DEMAND COLLATERAL FROM FOOLS

Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman (Prov. 20:16).

This proverb appears again in Proverbs 27:13. This indicates that Solomon took its message seriously.

A. Avoid Co-Signing

The old English word “surety” means “co-signer.” A co-signer pledges that if a debtor defaults on a loan, he will pay off the debt. He places his own assets on the line. Otherwise, the lender will not lend to the debtor. The lender wants someone who has a high credit rating to act as guarantor for the loan. The co-signer owns something worth accepting if the loan goes bad.

The Proverbs are clear: it is unwise to become a co-signer.

My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler (6:1–5).¹

He that is surety for a stranger [zoor] shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure (11:15).

A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend (17:18).

Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are

1. Chapter 11.

sureties for debts (22:26).

This proverb refers to taking a garment. This refers back to the Mosaic law.

If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious (Ex. 22:26–27).

The garment had to be returned in the evening. Thus, it was not useful to the lender directly. But it was very useful indirectly. It kept the borrower from indebting himself beyond the value of his assets: one garment, one loan. The lender made sure by collecting it during the day that the borrower was not using it to collateralize multiple loans.²

B. Foolish Debtors

This proverb rests on this assumption: a person who co-signs for a person outside the covenant is unwise. The word translated here as “stranger” is *zoor*. This word connotes perversion and rebellion. It is neither *geyr* nor *nokree*, which referred to foreigners residing inside Israel. It is something sinister.

And Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before the LORD (Num. 26:61).

They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger (Deut. 32:16).

It is always unwise to become a co-signer. It is doubly unwise when the debtor is *zoor*. So, this proverb instructs the listener to collect the garment from the co-signer. It assumes that the stranger will default. Thus, be sure that the co-signer possesses something of value.

The same applies to the strange woman. Here, the Hebrew word is *nokree*. It does not imply perversity, but it does imply foreign legal status. This is a foreign resident inside the land who has not covenanted with God, unlike a *geyr*. Proverbs warns against associating closely with such a woman. “To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flat-

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49:J.

tery of the tongue of a strange woman” (6:24). The co-signer not only associates with such a woman, he goes into debt on her behalf. This is a person devoid of good judgment. Take a pledge from such a person. You may need to foreclose.

Conclusion

It is not mandatory that a creditor demand collateral from a brother in the faith. Moses warned, “If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge. . . .” The key word is *if*. In contrast, this proverb says that a wise lender *must* take collateral from someone who co-signs for a covenant-breaker. This person is devoid of good judgment. If it is unwise to become a co-signer for a friend (6:1–5), how much more unwise is it to become a co-signer for a rebel?

61

EASY COME, EASY GO

An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed (Prov. 20:21).

A. Covenantal Inheritance

The concept of inheritance was central to Hebrew culture. Inheritance was part of the national covenant. The Book of Deuteronomy is structured in terms of this concept.¹ Inheritance was viewed as part of an intergenerational program of dominion. Each generation was required by God to build up capital to pass on. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (13:22).²

The inheritance was more covenantal-ethical than economic.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deut. 6:6–7).³

The foundation of a sustained inheritance was moral-judicial.

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).⁴

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

2. Chapter 41.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

B. Early Inheritance

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son rests on this proverb. The son asks for his inheritance early. His father gives it to him. He then goes to a far country, becoming a stranger in a strange land. He squanders his inheritance in riotous living. He is left with nothing (Luke 15:11–16).⁵

The message of this proverb is that an economic inheritance is not autonomous. It must be sustained by personal adherence to the covenantal legal order by which it was created. The heir must govern his life by the same moral order that governed his father's life. The inheritance is more comprehensive than mere wealth. Wealth is not autonomous. This was Moses' warning.

And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deut. 8:17–18).⁶

The heir is unwise to seek an early inheritance. It comes in a lump sum. The heir does not understand the process of the slow, steady accumulation of wealth. He does not understand that the economic surplus over time, which made possible his inheritance, was an outcome of covenant-keeping entrepreneurship. The heir does not understand how rapidly an inheritance can be consumed. The hasty inheritance can be squandered hastily.

C. Covenantal Sanctions

The sanctions were an integral part of the Mosaic covenant. The blessings of the covenant are listed in Deuteronomy 28:1–14.⁷ The cursings are listed in verses 15–68. These are corporate sanctions.

In this proverb, the absence of positive sanctions is a mark of God's negative response to an inheritance hastily received. These are personal sanctions. They apply to individual heirs. The person who inherits hastily, meaning without personal experience in administering wealth, should not expect to retain this wealth.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21, 22.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

This proverb is a warning to heirs. It is also a warning to parents. Parents have an obligation to train their prospective heirs in the basics of the covenantal administration of capital. *For a child to inherit great wealth without prior training in capital management is a curse.* It does not appear to be a curse at the time of the inheritance, but this will become obvious over time. The prodigal son learned this lesson firsthand. "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:17). By then, his inheritance had been transferred to the covenant-breakers who sold him all those good times.

The sanctions serve as a warning. God's blessings are not random. They are part of a covenantal legal order. We are to assess events as either blessings or cursings in terms of the content of God's Bible-revealed law. This is what the prodigal son did as he slept with the pigs. He had time to repent and then to return to his father's house. The external reality of his condition could not be denied. He had wound up exactly as this proverb says.

Conclusion

Inheritance is covenantal. It is part of the covenantal order established by God. Those who understand the covenant are more likely to recognize the threat of an early inheritance than someone who has not understood it. This proverb is a pithy summary of Deuteronomy 8:17–20.

PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS

The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want (Prov. 21:5).

A. Diligence as the Model

The diligent person serves as a morally correct model for others. The Book of Proverbs returns repeatedly to this theme.

This proverb can also be translated, “The thoughts of the diligent tend surely to plenteousness.” This is closer to the meaning of the text than any suggestion that a diligent person’s thoughts are focused solely on plenteousness or profitability. This proverb is saying that there is a correlation between a diligent person’s care in thinking through a plan of action and the outcome of this action, which is plenteousness.

Is this correlation 100%? The Hebrew text indicates that it is. The translators added “tend.” But did Solomon believe that diligent people’s plans produce plenteousness all the time? Elsewhere, he seems to. “The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute” (12:24).¹ Yet in the Bible, evil-doers are said to rule over the righteous. Psalm 73 is a good example.

But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. (Ps. 73:2–6).²

This is not a permanent condition, the Psalmist said. “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into de-

1. Chapter 37.

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

struction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (Ps. 73:18–19). But, for a time, the unrighteous do prosper. So, the translators added “tend” to the verse, which reflects the overall message of the Bible. Still, Solomon wrote more emphatically than this. He sought to persuade his readers that diligent attention to one’s plans produces personal success in history.

This is a case where an author’s rhetoric conveys what both he and readers know is not true. Diligent plans do not *surely* produce success in history for diligent individuals. The prophets were diligent, yet they suffered at the hands of covenant-breakers. Jesus told the disciples, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12). Diligence produces positive sanctions, but not always in history.

B. Haste Makes Waste

In contrast to the diligent planner is the hasty individual. “Every one that is hasty only to want.” Again, we find that hasty people sometimes do prosper. But the connection between hasty decisions and poverty does exist. Lot was hasty in his decision to choose Sodom as his dwelling place (Gen. 13:10–11). This eventually cost him his capital and his family (Gen. 19).

Diligence requires attention to detail. Haste involves great confidence that things will work out well despite a lack of attention to details. “Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant” (Isa. 56:12).

The hasty person believes that the world is based on luck. He does not delay taking action until he can verify the truth of what has been placed before him. He assumes that he has been blessed by impersonal fate or personal luck. This is thought to negate the risks of decision-making based on insufficient facts.

The Bible teaches that there is no such thing as luck. There is also no such thing as impersonal fate. The Bible teaches that God providentially sustains the universe and works out His decree for history.

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it.

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" (Isa. 45:8–9).

Proverbs speaks of wisdom as personified. "When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (8:29–30).

Careful planning, including diligent prayer, is basic to success in life. The hasty person does not believe this. He does not see the requirement to prepare oneself for years by studying God's law (Ps. 119). He does not think that years of attention to one's occupation are necessary for mastery. He thinks that enthusiastic commitment on short notice will overcome all resistance.

The hasty person thinks, "This is the opportunity of a lifetime. I must not allow it to get away." Yet a person's lifetime is in God's hand. God can bring other major opportunities. The question is: "Is this opportunity consistent with my calling—the most important thing I can do in which I would be most difficult to replace?" God called Moses to become His spokesman before Pharaoh and to lead Israel out of Egypt. This was surely more important than working as a shepherd for another 40 years. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. But it came after 40 years of herding sheep. With Aaron at his side, Moses became an overnight sensation as far as Pharaoh and Israel were concerned. But he had served time faithfully at a small task in preparation for this new calling.

Conclusion

Diligence is superior to haste as a way of life. Careful attention to detail is a reliable course of action. Haste is not.

The requirement of diligence points to the availability of sufficient time to complete our life's tasks before God. God is not in a hurry. His people should therefore not be in a hurry.

NOTHING FOR SOMETHING

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death (Prov. 21:6).

A. The Misuse of Deception

This proverb says that it is possible to gain treasure through deliberate deception. It is a form of vanity—chasing after emptiness. Solomon already has warned: “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase” (13:11).¹ In this passage, Solomon escalates the warning. Those who pursue wealth in this way are seeking death. To seek death is suicidal. We have already been informed, regarding wisdom, “But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death” (8:36). Pursuing treasure through deception requires that the pursuer hate wisdom.

The temptation of great wealth is one of the most powerful temptations in life. The question arises: Why? What is it about great wealth that lures people into death? In a very poor society, such wealth might mean the difference between life and death in a crisis, but in modern society, people rarely die from poverty. Great wealth does not add years compared to middle-class wealth. It allows people to live in special ways, yet even here, most people cannot say exactly what these ways are.

In terms of eating, sleeping, learning, and being entertained, the middle-class person has most of the advantages that a wealthy man has. There are middle-class men who would not want great wealth if it meant that their wives would drag them to the opera and ballet, then write large checks to support these narrowly appreciated arts. These men would prefer to write checks in order to escape attending.

The major differences between middle-class living and wealthy liv-

1. Chapter 40.

ing in my era are the ability to afford three things: full-time servants, very large homes, and homes located at a great distance from a street. A wealthy person hires numerous full-time servants to run his household. Given the value of his time, this is an economically rational decision. Second, the very rich live in large homes that cannot be seen from a highway. They can afford expensive land that offers seclusion to large homes. Their properties have long, winding driveways. Servants, large homes, and seclusion are social goods, sometimes called *positional goods*.² They identify wealth. Rich men usually want this recognition. So do rich men's wives, especially the second or third wife.

Positional goods are not life-and-death goods. To sacrifice one's integrity in order to obtain positional goods—or, more likely, merely an opportunity to obtain enough wealth to buy positional goods—is to become self-deceived. The price of the positional goods is too high. Jesus asked: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26).³ This rhetorical question is an extension of Proverbs 21:6 to eternity.

B. Vanity

The biblical meaning of vanity is a combination of success and emptiness. A person pursues something that he considers valuable or worth having, but when he obtains or attains it, he finds that it does not fulfil his expectations. The Book of Ecclesiastes dismisses all things pursued for their own sake as vanity.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity (Eccl. 1:2).⁴

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 1:14).⁵

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and

2. Fred Hirsch, *The Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

4. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1.

5. *Idem*.

vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun (Eccl. 2:11).⁶

The warning here is against *autonomy*. Nothing pursued *for its own sake* is anything but vanity. Only that which is pursued under the law of God for the glory of God escapes from vanity. Self-judgment must be conformed to God's judgment. Nothing is autonomous.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁷

Men pursue wealth because it seems to offer a wide range of options. But all of these options are vanity—empty. They all command a price. If wealth is pursued through deception, it produces death. This is nothing (vanity) for something (life).

Conclusion

Solomon identifies a common misconception: imagining that wealth is worth lying to attain. This is a monumental misconception. Yet the lure of treasure is so great that men sacrifice their integrity in order to attain it. Great wealth is vanity whenever pursued for its own sake: empty. When pursued by means of deception, it is suicidal.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 45.

MORAL CAUSATION

The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment (Prov. 21:7).

This is the common view of moral causation in the Mosaic law. Deuteronomy 28:15–68 presents it. There is moral causation in history. Morality shapes economic results. In this case, the message relates to a violation of morality: robbery. The word can also be translated as “spoil” or “oppression.”

A. Robbers Lose in History

Wicked men rob others. They do this to benefit themselves. They use coercion or the threat of coercion, or they use deception, to obtain wealth owned by others. They use ungodly methods to lay up treasure. That which God had delivered into the hands of other people, who had acted lawfully, the robbers obtain apart from moral performance or legal claim. The robbers attempt to thwart God’s allocation of resources. They seek ownership on a legal foundation other than God’s mandated legal order. They seek to establish a new world order, one which favors them uniquely.

This proverb says that robbers will reap a disaster for their efforts. It offers a reason for this: the refusal of the wicked to do judgment. By “judgment,” Solomon meant *righteous* judgment. The Mosaic law says: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15).¹ These are God’s judgments.

“Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:4–5).

B. Winners and Losers

The wicked person robs others. He does this in order to increase his wealth at the expense of his victims. His gain is their loss. The exchange between them is not voluntary. It is not an arrangement based on the expectation of mutual benefit. The victim may be the victim of deception, hoping for gain, but the robber understands in advance that the exchange will not rest on mutually shared benefits.

In a free market exchange, both parties benefit, or expect to benefit, from an exchange. Each understands that the other expects to gain from the transaction. The relationship is not based on the expectation of either party that he will gain at the other person's expense. Adam Smith, in Book I, Chapter 2 of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), wrote these words, which have survived the test of time.

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.

The exchange relationship is not a zero-sum game, where every gain comes at the cost of another player's loss. Both parties expect to gain.

The robber knows better. He knows that his victim will lose. He initiates the transaction on this basis. This is the essence of robbery. It relies either on coercion or deception. It is based on the assumption that gain results from loss. This is not the basis of the free market economy. It is also not the basis of biblical morality. God's law establishes a system of moral causation in history. *Righteousness produces materi-*

al benefits. These are not one-sided benefits. All the participants in society can perceive this, even covenant-breakers.

But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:4–8).²

So powerful is this testimony in the hearts of men that God says that the very unwillingness of an individual to evaluate the results of God's law in this positive fashion—in other words, to suppress this understanding—constitutes wilful rebellion against God, a form of rebellion which is the origin of idolatry: worshipping animals and insects (Rom. 1:18–23).³ The robber refuses to accept this. He believes that he can safely substitute deception or coercion in place of mutually beneficial voluntary exchange. He believes that he can benefit from a violation of God's covenantal legal order.

This proverb says that the robber's assessment is incorrect. It says that such wicked behavior will result in his destruction. The robber expects to benefit from his coercion, but he will not benefit. He will sustain a massive loss. He will become a far greater loser than his victim.

Conclusion

A just man is in a position to extend judgment in history. So is an unjust man. What men do in history reflects their concept of causation.

The robber denies the cause and effect relationship that God announces in His law governs the world of man. His actions reflect his denial of God's legal order. This proverb warns men not to act on any such assumption. It warns them to adhere to the standards established in God's revelation.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

THE CRY OF THE POOR

Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard (Prov. 21:13).

A poor person has a right to cry out to God for deliverance. The Hebrews in Egypt cried out to God for deliverance. God heard them and delivered them under Moses. God raised up Moses, who initially resisted the call (Ex. 4:1–13), to deliver His people.

A poor person may also cry out to men who possess more wealth than he does. He seeks deliverance from his immediate situation. He sees that another person may be in a position to help him. He asks for help.

Is this a loud cry? Sometimes the Hebrew word is correctly translated this way. “My heart shall cry out for Moab; his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old: for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up; for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction” (Isa. 15:5). It can also be understood as crying in the sense of shedding tears. “And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying” (II Sam. 13:19). It is more likely a cry in the sense of a corporate appeal in the midst of a crisis. It is not an audible cry. It is a representative cry. “At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations” (Jer. 50:46).

The Hebrew word translated here as “stoppeth” can mean “closed up.” It can also mean “narrow.” The meaning here is “an unwillingness to consider.” Poor people are in need. A somewhat less poor person is in a position to help, yet he does nothing.

There are cause and effect in God’s covenantal social order. What a person sows, so shall he reap. “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall

reap also bountifully” (II Cor. 9:6). “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). The laws of society are ultimately covenantal; hence, there is an ethical component.

A merciless person does not listen to the cry of a person in need. Neither will others listen to him, should he come under distress. Every person is threatened by something. Everyone can come under distress of some kind. There is no immunity from distress in this life. Solomon says that so personal are social cause and effect that the person who refuses to help the poor when he can help is going to be overtaken by external events that threaten him.

Hearing the cry of the poor is an ethical issue. Solomon does not call for the civil government to tax members of one income group in order to fund another group. He is not directing his warning to civil magistrates. He is warning people with assets to assist the poor.

Conclusion

The warning is personal. The threatened sanction is personal. Poor people in society should be able to present their case to the public at large. If their case has merit, yet no one lifts a hand to help, then those who have remained judicially deaf will find that their day of trouble will come. What they have sown, they will reap.

BIBLICAL BRIBERY

A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath (Prov. 21:14).

A. God Cannot Be Bribed

Solomon, as the king of Israel, was familiar with the strategic use of gifts. The Hebrew word translated as “gift”—*mattawn*—appears three times in Proverbs. The context of Proverbs 21:14 is not clearly that of civil government. It is in Proverbs 19:6. “Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.” Proverbs 18:16 may refer to civil rulers. “A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.” Great men may be civil rulers. If not, then these men have access to civil rulers.

The general principle governing these proverbs is found in Proverbs 18:8. “A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.” In this proverb, the Hebrew word is different: *sachad*. It is used repeatedly to describe bribery. In most, the texts are hostile. They are governed by this presupposition. “For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward” (Deut. 10:17). What applies to God must also apply to those who act as judges in His name.

And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous (Ex. 23:8).

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).

Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:25).

A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment (Prov. 17:23).

Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them (Isa. 1:23).

Then what of the proverb in question? “A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.” Why in secret? What anger is it pacifying? Isn’t the context the same as the other Hebrew word for gift?

B. What We Owe Corrupt Rulers

There is no question that God prohibits bribery that produces corrupt judgments. But this does not directly deal with the question of becoming a willing victim of a corrupt judgment. Corrupt rulers are marked by a willingness to accept bribes. This puts the covenant-keeper at a disadvantage. In a court of law, his opponent may have paid a bribe. A practical question arises: What should a covenant-keeper do to reduce the likelihood of being the victim of paid-for corrupt judgment?

Solomon does not suggest that anything is wrong with this: “A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath” (21:14). Nor here: “A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth” (17:8). Yet in the second case, the Hebrew word is *sachad*. We are faced with what initially appears to be an ethical dilemma. Solomon points to the benefits of bribery without condemning it.

There is a reason for this. The Bible condemns bribery. The question is, how does the Bible define bribery? There are two choices.

1. To pay a civil official to deliver a corrupt judgment, i.e., a judgment at odds with what biblical law mandates.
2. To pay a civil official to deliver a judgment different from what he otherwise would hand down.

The Bible clearly condemns the first practice. If the proverbs under consideration here, which deal with the benefits of giving gifts, do not refer to civil government, then bribery may be defined according to the second option. But nowhere in the Bible is gift-giving condemned in this way. Bribery is condemned because it perverts right-

eous judgment. There would have been a righteous decision handed down, but bribery has led to a different decision.

C. Rival Approaches to Law

Here, we see a fundamental difference between rival views of civil law. One view defines righteous judgment as consistent with a code of ethics. A decision is *substantively* righteous. Why? Because it upholds the ethical foundation of the specific statute or tradition. The other view defines righteous judgment as procedurally correct. A decision is *formally* righteous. Why? Because it is technically predictable. The modern world has moved systematically toward formal rationalism: procedure over ethics. It steadily has abandoned substantive rationalism: ethics over procedure.

If we define righteous judgment as procedurally correct law, then all bribery is condemned. If we define righteous judgment as ethically correct law, then bribery is condemned when it tempts a civil official to enforce ethically incorrect law.

The critic may respond: "Civil law should be both ethically grounded and procedurally predictable." Yes, this is what civil law should be. But what is the biblically correct view of bribery in an ethically corrupt legal system?

Jesus provided a practical answer to this question.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain (Matt. 5:38–41).¹

Did Jesus abandon the Mosaic law as an ideal? Moses declared: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:24–25).² The context was two men fighting, where an injured pregnant woman loses her child. If this law is no longer in effect, then the judicial case against abortion is surrendered.³

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 37.

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press,

Jesus was speaking to Jews who lived under Roman oppression. They were not in charge of the legal system. So, He recommended that people make an extra payment to those who used compulsion against them. This payment was not owed. It was not even demanded. In the context of civil compulsion, this is correctly identified as a bribe. It is a payment in advance to buy the favor of a person in authority.

There is another example. It involves a positive sanction in the context of a negative sanction. Jesus said,

There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me (Luke 18:2–5).

The widow faces an unjust judge. She wants justice. So, she bangs on his door. She nags him. She makes his life miserable. She offers a bribe: “I will stop pestering you if you render judgment.” He accepts the bribe. He decides to get some peace and quiet by rendering righteous judgment.

Jesus was illustrating the correct approach to prayer. Be persistent. Treat God as if He were an unjust judge.⁴ But if we are allowed to treat God as if He were an unjust judge, when He is not an unjust judge, then we are allowed to treat unjust judges similarly.

Conclusion

Solomon taught that paying a judge to render a judgment against what biblical law mandates is a corrupt form of bribery. God cannot be bought off to render unrighteous judgment. Therefore, do not try to buy off a judge to render unrighteous judgment.

Solomon also taught that “a gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.” When dealing with a judge who systematically renders ethically corrupt judgments, it is legitimate to persuade him to render an incorrupt judgment by paying him in secret. It may not be wise in a particular instance. It is always risky. But it is not morally corrupt.

There is no universal definition of justice that fits all cases. There

1973), pp. 263–69. Cf. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 37:A.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

is no neutral law. There is no neutral court procedure. There are God's law and man's law. There is covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. The quest for universal definitions of law and law enforcement that reconcile God's Bible-revealed law and man's law is an assault on the Bible, for it is an assertion of covenant-breaking man's ethical neutrality and judicial autonomy. It is an attempt to bring God's law into sovereign man's law court. So, there is no universal definition of bribery.⁵ This definition is biblically incorrect: "To pay a civil official to deliver a judgment different from what he otherwise would hand down." This definition is correct: "To pay a civil official to deliver a corrupt judgment, i.e., a judgment at odds with what biblical law mandates."

5. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 843–44.

ECONOMIC HIERARCHIES

The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7).

Hierarchy is not a bad thing. On the contrary, hierarchy is an incapable concept. It is point two of the biblical covenant structure.¹ The question that everyone faces is the nature of the multiple hierarchies under which he or she lives. The hierarchy described in this proverb is economic.

A. The Rich Rule Over the Poor

The rich man has many opportunities. This is the best definition of riches. The poor man has far fewer opportunities.

The rich man can make mistakes and still not have to change his lifestyle. The poor man must make many changes in his pattern of consumption if he makes mistakes. He will be in a weak bargaining position, for he has no economic reserves. The trade-off between money and time works against him. He has little money, so he soon runs out of time in a crisis. He could buy more time with money. He has no money. So, he must accept an employment or credit offer that he would not accept, had he not run out of money and if he were not running out of time.

When a rich man enters the free market and offers to hire less rich men, he faces competition from other rich men. Similarly, when a poor man enters the market, he is competing against other poor men. The free market is highly competitive, but it is not the competition of one-on-one competition between a rich man and a poor man, or a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

creditor and a debtor. Only when the contract is signed does the hierarchy become one-on-one.

Think of the analogous competition of courtship. Males compete against males; females compete against females. Only after marriage does a hierarchy prevail.

B. The Creditor Rules Over the Debtor

This proverb teaches that as surely as a rich man is in a superior position in relation to a poor man, so is a creditor in a superior position to a poor man. Poor men know this.

The hierarchy is based on a credit-debt relationship. For most people, it is better to be under economic authority. Most people are not entrepreneurs. They do not want to live with the extensive uncertainty that offers the entrepreneur the opportunity to make a profit, provided he is willing to risk taking a loss. No one can avoid uncertainty entirely, for only God is omniscient. But most people try to limit uncertainty in their lives. This is why most people prefer a wage to investing as a way to support themselves.

Earning a wage is a mark of subordination. A proverb could accurately announce, "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the wage-earner is servant to the wage-payer." The difference is, the wage-earner probably is bound by a revocable contract. He can lawfully quit, and his employer in a free society can lawfully fire him, unless there is a signed contract to the contrary.

A debt contract is more permanent than most wage contracts. It binds the debtor to a repayment schedule. This is a more rigid form of hierarchy. This proverb reminds a potential debtor that debt is a form of servitude.

Servitude is not morally wrong. The Mosaic law had a provision that allowed a servant to pledge lifetime service to his master or employer (Ex. 21:4–6; Deut. 15:16–17). Paul recommended that a slave remain content with his position (I Cor. 7:20). But if he is offered a legal way to go free, he should take it (I Cor. 7:21).²

Paul also recommended debt-free living. "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). But because almost every economic relationship has

2. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

a time component, there is always some short-term credit/debt.³

The debtor is a servant because he has promised to pay. He is less mobile because of this. This mobility may be geographical. It may be related to career. If the debt was used to purchase a capital asset, the income generated by the asset may be well above whatever is required to service the debt. This increases mobility. The problem is the uncertainty of future income compared to the certainty of the debt's repayment schedule. The inherent servitude of the permanent obligation stands as a threat to the person who has contracted the debt.

A debt secured by inanimate collateral is different from debt secured by personal obligation. If someone borrows money to buy a house, and the house serves as collateral for the mortgage, then the threat of foreclosure is always there, but it is not the equivalent of personal bondage. It is not the same as a loan secured by a person's earning ability. The debtor whose home is foreclosed for non-payment can move—indeed, will be probably be asked to move by the new owner of the home. But this threat does not extend to his person or his savings. He retains mobility.

Conclusion

The rich man rules over the poor man because he has financial reserves that the poor man does not have. He can offer a loan to a poor man in a poor man's time of crisis. The poor man is not in a strong bargaining position.

Similarly, the creditor is in a strong bargaining position in relation to the debtor. The debtor may be only one payment away from a crisis. Few creditors are.

The economic hierarchy in a free market is a hierarchy of competition. Rich men compete against rich men for the services of less rich men. Poor men compete against poor men. Creditors compete against creditors. Debtors compete against debtors. There are limits to the severity of the hierarchy.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

A LION IN THE STREETS

The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets (Prov. 22:13).

A. Excuses, Excuses

Actually, slothful men do not say this. It is doubtful that they said it in Palestine in Solomon's day. Who would believe it? That is Solomon's point. He is implying that all of the other excuses that slothful men offer for not leaving the house every morning are in the same category as worrying about being killed by a lion in the streets. Solomon's contempt for sloth is seen in a parallel passage later in this book.

The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason (26:13–16).

The slothful man rolls from side to side in his bed. He is too lazy to eat. He is puffed up. He is altogether a contemptible person.

He offers an excuse for his sloth: "A lion is in the street." Solomon's intense ridicule indicates that slothfulness in Israel was widely regarded as a moral defect. The slothful person searches for an acceptable excuse for not going to work. He does not want to come out and say, "Look, I am lazy. Work does not agree with me. It never has. I find it a lot more pleasant to just stay home and relax." The public, then as now, looks on such excuses as evidence of a weak moral character. People also think, "I am forced by external circumstances to go to work. Why should this person escape the negative sanctions of not going to work? Who does he think he is?"

There is a familiar American saying, "An honest day's labor for an

honest day's pay." Its opposite was popular in the Soviet Union before it collapsed in 1991. "We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us." Soviet work habits were terrible, and so was output. So was the currency system.¹ The American outlook on work is that it is more than a necessary evil. A man defines himself by what he does for a living, not what he does in his spare time. This is characteristic of Protestantism in general. There really was a Puritan work ethic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Work was regarded as a holy calling from God, something not to be taken lightly or escaped, even by rich men. Puritans had contempt for the Cavaliers, meaning Great Britain's upper crust society, which was based on inherited wealth in land, not on labor and especially commercial labor. Traces of this pro-work attitude remain in modern Anglo-American society.

B. Evading Responsibility

Work is a form of personal responsibility. Each person is called by God to exercise dominion on God's behalf in his appropriate boundary of responsibility. This is the biblical worldview from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

When a person refuses to exercise responsibility in preference for a life of leisure, he rebels against God. Because *service to God* in the realm of economics is *service to other men*, who represent God, a refusal to work is an attempt to evade service to others. It is not surprising that people recognize the threat to themselves posed by other people's sloth. It means that fewer goods and services are offered for sale or as charitable gifts. Almost everyone is a little poorer. Only those who sell to the slothful are benefited, and only for as long as the slothful have money to spend.

The most memorable case of a slothful man that I can recall was reported in the central column of the *Wall Street Journal*: the human interest section. It was the story of an heir who lived on cruise ships. He had never married. He would hire a prostitute to spend a week or two with him on a cruise. He would hire a different one for the next cruise. He would eat as much as he wanted; cruises are famous for their policy of unlimited servings. Eventually, he would gain so much weight that he would have to go to a weight-reduction "fat farm" for a

1. A humorous book on the irrationality of the Soviet economic system is Leopold Tyrmand, *The Rosa Luxemburg Contraceptives Cooperative* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

few weeks. Then he would return to the cruises. He had lived on cruise ships for all of his adult life. He was finally running low on money. He was unsure of how he would spend the rest of his life after the money ran out.

A vacation cruise is seen as a special treat for married couples. Because of price competition, it is possible for middle-class couples to take a cruise once or twice. There are expensive cruises, too. It does not take many cruises to become jaded with what they offer. But, as a lifetime special event, they have an appeal. Yet the thought of spending one's life on cruises as a passenger is unthinkable to most people, which is why the *Wall Street Journal* ran the story: the bizarre factor. Productive people know the difference between a life of work interspersed with leisure vs. a life of leisure interspersed with crash dieting. They prefer the former.

C. Dropping Out

In 1963, Timothy Leary, a Harvard University lecturer in psychology, was fired for recommending psychedelic drugs to his students. In the second half of the decade, he cashed in on a five-year international cultural rebellion of college-age students. He adopted flowing robes, as if he were an Indian mystic living a life of poverty. He flew around the United States to deliver well-paid lectures, which ended with this slogan: "Turn on. Tune in. Drop out." He became famous for this slogan. He was still promoting the use of psychedelic drugs: "Turn on." What his listeners were supposed to tune into was vague. To drop out would require continuing subsidies from members of the conventional society. His audiences were filled mostly with parentally funded teenagers and young adults, who had temporarily dropped out of middle-class society.

The counter-culture fad faded in 1970, when the United States went into an economic recession. Jobs became scarce. Leary continued to live a chaotic life thereafter, including two prison terms in the first half of the 1970s. He continued to lecture, though without much media attention. In the late 1980s, he resurfaced as a computer software writer. He died of cancer in 1996.

People with Leary's message are found in every society. Usually, they are on the society's fringes. Occasionally, they receive wide attention for a time, but they fade into the shadows again. Their outlook requires subsidies from productive people. Eventually, the subsidies end.

Scarcity was imposed on covenant-breaking mankind and the world in order to keep men from dropping out, i.e., forcing them to cooperate (Gen. 3:17–19).² The need to work is imposed by scarcity. Men understand that men who seek to escape from the scarcity-imposed requirement to work are a threat to the social order. The requirement to work preceded the curse (Gen. 2). Scarcity reinforced this requirement after the Fall.

Conclusion

This proverb uses ridicule to reject a view of life that threatens society and threatens the family headed by a person who adopts subterfuge to justify his sloth. It is not a lion in the streets that threatens him. Rather, his own rejection of work threatens him. If adopted widely, this outlook would threaten the progress of society.

The future will not be captured by men who are slothful. It will be captured by people who are not afraid of non-existent lions in the street, but who are afraid of a life of sloth.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

POVERTY PREVENTION

If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? (Prov. 22:27).

To understand this proverb, we must first understand the Mosaic law governing collateral.

If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious (Ex. 22:25–27).

A person comes to a potential lender, seeking a loan. The lender can lawfully ask for collateral. But it is a strange form of collateral. It must be returned in the evening. It is a coat or other covering for cold weather. So, the borrower can use it when he really needs it. It seems to be useless to the lender, who must return it when it is needed.

This form of collateral is in fact very useful. The borrower is restricted from using the collateral to secure multiple loans. The lender can lawfully require the person to hand over the coat during the day. When he hands it over, he cannot take it to another lender as security for a loan. This law restricts multiple indebtedness.¹

This proverb assumes the following scenario. A poor man has gone to a lender. As collateral, he has offered his bed. As with a coat, which must be returned to the borrower at night, the bed is useful during the night. The lender must return it during the night. Also like the coat, the bed is not needed during the day. The lender can lawfully de-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49:J.

mand that the borrower deliver it to him during the day.

This proverb says that someone is trying to take away a man's bed from under him. This would be illegal during the evening. So, if the bed is under the person, this is because the sun has risen. He should be off his bed and off to work. But he is still on his bed.

The lender sees the situation. The borrower is lazy. He does not want to get up in the morning. He has an aversion to work. This explains his poverty. This is why he needed a loan in the first place.

The lender has a problem. How will he be repaid? This debtor is a lazybones. He is not driven by conscience to repay loans. He has no money. There is a reason why he has no money. He is lazy.

He needs to change his ways. He needs motivation to change. One way for the lender to motivate him to change his ways is to demand that he surrender his collateral each morning. The lure of staying in bed in comfort can be removed. If the borrower wishes to sleep, he can sleep on the ground.

Solomon presents a rhetorical question: "If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?" The answer is this: "Because you are lazy. You prefer to spend your time in bed rather than at work. Your income will fall. You will have to go into debt. You have been so unwise in the past that the only item that you can offer as collateral is your bed. Now that you cannot pay what you owe, your bed will be removed by the lender every morning." This is a warning to lazy men not to stay in bed before they fall into poverty to such a degree that they must get a loan to stay afloat financially. If they are so unwise as to borrow on this basis, the lender may exercise his authority and demand that you get out of bed every morning.

At the same time, this proverb is a warning to lenders not to violate the law governing collateral. If a lender comes at night to collect this form of collateral, the borrower will not sleep well. If he does not sleep well, he will not be efficient on the job. If he loses his job or if his production on the job declines because of sleep deprivation, the lender is unlikely to be repaid. So, to increase the likelihood of being repaid, the lender should honor the law governing collateral.

Conclusion

This proverb is another in a series of proverbs warning men against the sin of laziness. This one is more subtle than the others. It reminds lazy men of a possible outcome of their refusal to work. They

will be in their beds when their creditors come to the door demanding the return of their only collateral: their beds. Here is the message: it is better to get out of bed early in the morning and go to work before poverty strikes.

LANDMARKS

Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set (Prov. 22:28).

This is a reaffirmation of a Mosaic law: “Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour’s landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it” (Deut. 19:14).¹ To this law, a curse was attached: “Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen” (Deut. 27:17).²

This proverb indicates that what Moses had revealed as judicially binding five centuries earlier (I Kings 6:1) was still in force in Israel. The landmarks were still visible and still legally binding. The Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were in the future.

A landmark was a rural land boundary marker. Landmarks marked off the property that had been distributed to Israelite families after the conquest of Canaan. Any land marked by these boundaries could not be transferred permanently to other families (Lev. 25:8–13),³ except under the unique condition of a broken and then unredeemed pledge to a priest (Lev. 27:15).⁴

This law was intended to produce social cooperation. It established property rights. This means that it increased the likelihood that families in specific tribes would cooperate with each other. If an heir resided on the family’s land, he would be familiar with the customs of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the owner could lawfully lease the land to anyone, including a covenantal stranger.

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 44.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 68.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 25.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 27.

These markers could be more easily removed and moved than boundary markers in a city. Because of the low cost associated with moving a marker, the law imposed a special curse. So binding was this curse that all those who heard this law read by Levites or priests were required to affirm it by shouting "Amen." This was a public, corporate covenantal act. God presented Himself as the guardian of land markers.

Conclusion

Boundary markers identify ownership. They literally apply in real estate: stakes placed on property. But the principle of marked ownership also applies to other items, such as automobiles. Records must be kept. Boundaries must be enforced by civil courts. To break continuity with boundaries is to break continuity with the past. This breaks continuity with the future.

IN THE PRESENCE OF KINGS

*Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings;
he shall not stand before mean men (Prov. 22:29).*

Here we find another example of the theme of diligence. The Hebrew word translated here as “business” is usually translated as “work” or “workmanship.”

The word for “stand” is sometimes translated as “present.” A person who stands in front of a king possesses some kind of authority. “And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me” (Ex. 8:20). This is repeated in Exodus 9:13. A different Hebrew word for “stand,” but conveying the same meaning, is found in the description of Joseph’s authority before Pharaoh. “And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:46). The ruler invested him with official authority because he trusted Joseph’s judgment.

The diligent man will not stand before “mean” men. The Hebrew word translated here as “mean” is found in only one other verse, where it is translated “drowned.” “Pharaoh’s chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea” (Ex. 15:4). The root Hebrew word means “dark.” In this context, the word means “obscure” (NASB), which is appropriate for such an obscure word.

This proverb conveys the idea that a diligent man will not have to waste his time dealing with obscure people. Taken together—kings and obscure people—this proverb conveys the sense of service. It is not that kings grant the diligent person some kind of award for good work. The parallel would not make sense. Obscure people do not grant

awards. They are too obscure. The awards would not mean anything. So, the sense of this proverb is that the diligent person serves in some kind of advisory capacity. Kings listen to him. Obscure people would also listen to him, but he has no time to advise everyone. So, he advises kings.

In the world of finance, we see an analogous procedure. As a money manager gains the reputation for making his clients lots of money, he finds that rich people want to invest their money with him. He can then screen access by raising the amount of money required to invest in his fund. Or he can charge a higher percentage for administering the funds. People without much money to invest cannot afford him. There was a time when he might have taken them on as clients, but no longer. There are only so many hours in the day. If a man must devote time to mastering a field, he might as well serve people with money or influence rather than poor people without influence. His time is scarce. He has to allocate it. Those without influence or wealth are no longer able to purchase his labor.

This proverb describes a positive sanction for diligence: to stand before kings. Why is this a positive sanction? Because most people wish to be in the presence of important people. They wish to be known as people with sufficient importance to gain access to the circles of the blessed. This is why people give favors to people who need no favors. They are not seeking money. They are seeking a kind of rubbed-off fame. The public imputes importance to famous people. Other people seek a kind of reflected fame by being in the circles of the famous. This is why people ask famous people to sign autographs. In a few cases, this may be for money, such as an autographed baseball made in a record-breaking game. But normally, people just want a scrap of paper with a celebrity's signature on it.

Here, King Solomon speaks of obtaining an audience before kings. The king wants top-quality service. This person is in a position to provide it. Kings do not want services rendered by obscure people, any more than people with expertise want to serve obscure people. Kings want the best and can afford the best. This person's performance on the job has won him a reputation for excellence. This is the kind of person kings wish to deal with.

So fundamental is diligence in a person's ability to deliver consistently above-average performance that Solomon says diligence will be rewarded by exceptional acclaim. This indicates that diligence is rare. If everyone were equally diligent, most people would not gain access to

kings. So, because diligence is exceptional, the reward is exceptional.

Conclusion

There are winners and losers in life. Kings are usually winners. So, to stand before kings is to bask in the reflected light of winners. Solomon presents this as a positive sanction for diligence. In contrast, obscure people are losers. Diligent people will not have to spend time dealing with losers.

This proverb makes it clear that it is better to win than lose. It calls men to greater diligence, so as not to be acclaimed by losers.

UNRELIABLE RICHES

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven (Prov. 23:4–5).

Solomon was rich. He had asked for wisdom and had gained great wealth. He did not lose his wealth. Instead, he lost his wisdom. He married too many women.

His wealth did not fly away. But he had not pursued kingship in order to gain wealth. He had hoped to gain the ability to provide sound judgment for the nation. He had achieved this goal. He lost it with respect to his own household. He worshipped the gods of his foreign wives. This cost his son Rehoboam the kingdom. The prophet told Jeroboam, Solomon's successor in the Northern Kingdom, that God would take action after the death of Solomon.

Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes (I Kings 11:34–35).

Solomon pursued wisdom, a good thing. He attained wisdom, a good thing. But wisdom then escaped him. That which he had pursued with all his might, he lost. He kept what he had not pursued, his wealth.

A. Pursuing Vanity

Nothing pursued for its own sake is reliable. *Autonomy fails to secure permanent benefits.* Solomon initially pursued wisdom for the sake of the nation. But he lost this vision. He turned against God's law. He broke the laws of kingship.

When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold (Deut. 17:14–17).¹

His heart turned away, just as Moses had predicted. This is the danger of anything pursued for its own sake or for what it offers to men in history. *To pursue anything for its own sake is to pursue the wind.* This is vanity.

This proverb singles out riches. Why riches? Why not the other parts of the triumvirate: sex and power? Because money is the most commonly available of the three. Almost anyone can pursue money. Power is not available to as many people as money is. The number of women available to any man is limited, other than through prostitution. There has been only one Solomon in this respect, and his unique example stands as a lasting testimony to the utter foolishness of the quest.

Money is the most marketable commodity. It makes available most of the other sins, which are for sale.

The popular T-shirt slogan, “He who dies with the most toys wins,” is popular for two reasons. First, people know it is not true, that it is a child’s outlook. Second, they also know that what the would-be rich and the already rich do to amass ever-greater wealth indicates that they really do believe it. Their behavior testifies to their belief in it. If they do not believe it, then they are sorely confused.

B. Riches Are Fleeting

The imagery of riches making wings to fly away is graphic. Riches are fleeting. So is life. *The fleeting nature of life should remind men of the fleeting nature of riches.* But, for most people, it is difficult to accept this fact emotionally. Jesus warned his disciples of this error.

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).²

Are riches uniquely fleeting, compared to other attributes of success? Solomon did not say they are. Isaiah indicated that all of life suffers from this condition of easy departure.

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass (Isa. 40:6–7).

Then why did Solomon single out riches? Because riches are the universal surrogate for all the other fleeting pursuits in life. The prices of the other popular vanities are usually denominated in money. If there is a market for a specific vanity, money is the unit of exchange. A person can change his mind about which vanity to pursue. Money lets him make this transition with the least loss to his accumulated portfolio of vanity. *Money is the lowest common denominator in the pursuit of vanity*, for it is the universal medium of exchange.

Riches are fleeting because wealth can be used to pursue so many false trails. Ecclesiastes described all the vanities that he pursued. Solomon had the money to indulge himself. Men with riches face many opportunities to dissipate their wealth, just as the prodigal son dissipated his (Luke 15:11–32).³

For most people, it is easier to spend money than to accumulate it. For a tiny elite, this is not true. Their wealth accumulates faster than they can spend it on themselves. There is not enough time in the day to spend it all in consumption. These people are uniquely dangerous to others when they attempt to put their wealth to use in a larger cause. Customers impose limits on wealth-seekers: objective profit and loss.

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.

Customers bid money to be served. But in giving money away, the rich man finds that there is no agreement regarding objective measures of success. Everyone encourages him to give away even more. He finds himself surrounded by men with grand plans to redeem the world through money—messianic men who dream of spending rich men's money to achieve their own agendas. For most wealth-pursuers, the world is better off when they pursue their wealth than when they begin to give it away.

Conclusion

The central question here is broad: "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?" That which is *not* is vanity.

Riches fly away. So does vanity in general. That which is pursued for its own sake becomes vanity. To accumulate it is to accumulate the wind.

It is difficult to see this with respect to riches, so Solomon singles out riches as the universal deceiver of the easily deceived. It is the common representative of man's autonomous wisdom. He warns us: "cease from thine own wisdom."

SUPERNATURAL SANCTIONS

Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee (Prov. 23:10–11).

This refers back to a previous proverb, “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set” (Prov. 22:28).¹ This in turn refers back to a Mosaic law: “Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour’s landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it” (Deut. 19:14).² This proverb adds two additional pieces of information: (1) there is special protection accorded to orphans; (2) a mighty redeemer will defend their cause against the proverb’s violator.

It is clear that the redeemer in question is God. The Hebrew word for redeemer, *ga’al*, is occasionally used to identify God. The most famous example is Job’s declaration: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth” (Job 19:25). God redeemed Israel from Egypt. “Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will **redeem** you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments” (Ex. 6:6). The word refers to the next of kin, who is not only the redeemer—one who buys his relative out of bondage (Lev. 25:48–49)³—but also the blood avenger. “The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him” (Num. 35:19). God holds this dual office with respect to His redeemed people: redeemer and blood avenger.

1. Chapter 70.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 44.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 32.

A. Pleading the Orphan's Cause

To plead a cause is to act as a defense attorney for the victim. But, unlike a modern attorney who merely argues a case, the person described here also executes judgment. God sees the evils done to the defenseless. He intervenes on their behalf.

Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless (Ex. 22:22–24).⁴

For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment (Deut. 10:17–18).

This is a description of a blood avenger. God declares that He serves as the blood avenger of those who have no earthly next of kin to intervene on their behalf.

This was common knowledge in Israel. So, Solomon did not have to go into detail regarding the background of his command here. When a person secretly moves a landmark to gain a little extra property for his family, he takes a high-risk step that threatens to undo him. When God pleads a person's cause, the offender has nowhere to hide. The Psalmist described what such people can expect.

They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep. But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded (Ps. 64:5–7).

The evil-doers do not experience immediate negative sanctions. This gives them confidence.

LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it (Ps. 94:3–7).

This proverb reminds such men that God does see what they do, and He will intervene in history to right such wrongs.

B. Beyond Cosmic Impersonalism

Thieves do cost-benefit analyses, just as other men do. They see how easy it is to move a landmark. They see how difficult this will be to detect, let alone prove in a court of law. They do not look beyond the social order to identify possible flaws in their plan. They do not believe that there is anything beyond the impersonal forces of history to bring them to judgment, should there be no human witnesses.

This is foolish, says this proverb. There is a God who intervenes in history. He judges in terms of a legal code. He does not withdraw indefinitely from the affairs of men.

It is not just modern man who views justice in history as a matter of power rather than ethics. In Solomon's day, there were men who took the same view of historical cause and effect as modern man does. While most people in Solomon's day may have believed in some sort of supernatural background for the universe, just as most moderns do, they did not regard this supernatural realm as sufficiently aware or sufficiently interested in men's affairs to intervene in order to bring justice to victims. Such intervention was too specific, too immediate, and too predictable to be taken seriously in a rational criminal's cost-benefit analysis.

Modern covenant-breaking men dismiss such a view of historical cause and effect as implausible. Modern covenant-keeping men accept this view as a statistical possibility, but they are not sufficiently persuaded of its validity to believe that God actually intervenes in specific cases when society refuses to enforce God's law. Most of them relegate God's Bible-revealed law to the Old Covenant. That is to say, they deny that the sanction described in this proverb is still a factor to be considered when thinking about the enforcement limits of written or customary law. Their view of God's intervention on behalf of the victim is not significantly different from covenant-breaking men's view. Both groups regard this proverb as expressing a view of God that is no longer relevant in modern times, because cause and effect no longer operate in this fashion.

This outlook makes law enforcement more expensive. It persuades

criminals that their acts of theft will not expose them to negative supernatural sanctions in history. They fear only the civil government. Similarly, covenant-keepers are equally persuaded that criminals' acts of theft will not expose them to negative supernatural sanctions in history. So, covenant-keepers are tempted to increase the power of the civil government to extend its techniques of law enforcement. They trust an expanded state, just as criminals fear it. Neither side fears God as a blood avenger.

Conclusion

This proverb presents a covenantal view of cause and effect. It asserts that the God who revealed His law to Moses is also the enforcer of last resort in history. This means that civil government need not be trusted to provide anything like the degree of justice presented in this proverb. It must not be so trusted. God is omniscient; the state is not.

UNDISCIPLINED LIVING

Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags (Prov. 23:20–21).

Wine-lovers and meat-lovers, drunkards and gluttons, and people who just cannot seem to keep their eyes open: they share a common destiny. They will eventually wind up in poverty. This proverb does not say why, but it takes little imagination to understand why. *They are undisciplined.*

It is not that they are all lazy. The sleepy fellow may be, but not the drunkard or the glutton. They share the same personality trait. *They do not say no.* The drunkard does not stop drinking. The party-goer does not stop attending parties. The glutton does not stop eating. They all waste time and money on excessive consumption. They are unwilling to make the adjustments necessary in their lives to bring their appetites under control. The self-discipline required to regain control over their lives is beyond their will.

It is not that they do not know what they are doing. They know, but they do not care enough to change their ways. This brief proverb identifies their character flaw. Solomon did not spend space by explaining why such behavior produces poverty. He merely reminded his readers of the existence of the cause-and-effect relationship between undisciplined living and poverty.

Thrift is based on deferred gratification. An individual sees something he would like to own or like to experience. It costs money. It costs time. The person then makes a judgment regarding time: now, later, or never. If he decides “now,” then he must forfeit the money and time that he could have used to invest.

He can also use the money and time to enjoy something else. He can consume many things. These are singled out as producing poverty

when consumed in large quantities: wine, meat, and food. They are irresistible to the people described in this proverb. Other things could be consumed in large quantities, but these are singled out. This one sounds odd to our ears: “riotous eaters of flesh.” This is because meat in the modern world’s industrial economies is so common that to eat it, even lots of it, is not considered deviant. Riotous parties where meat is consumed in large quantities are not common, not because riotous parties are uncommon, but because meat is so common. Until the mid-nineteenth century, meat was so expensive that a riotous party marked by high meat consumption would have been regarded as an expensive luxury available only to the rich. Anyone attending such parties on a regular basis would have had to be a party giver, not just a party attendee.

The person who is unable to say no to riotous, expensive parties, or to wine, or to food is a wastrel. He is wasting what could be exchanged for capital. He is consuming when he could be producing. More wealth is going out than is coming in. The end result is poverty.

A person who refuses to say no to his appetites is unable to budget. Yet budgeting is basic to success in a world under a cursed scarcity (Gen. 3:17–19). The curse was imposed in order to force men to choose among options. Left to themselves without the environmental restrictions imposed by scarcity, men would be murderous and destructive.¹ So, God has imposed limits on what men can accomplish with the resources they possess. This forces those who wish to maximize their accomplishments to allocate their wealth carefully. They must not surrender to their desire for present gratification. They must not allocate too much wealth to consumption.

Addiction to liquor, food, or partying is common in history. These seem to be irresistible for some people. This proverb warns readers that if they have difficulty resisting any of these, as well as sleep, then they should begin to exercise self-control now. The alternative is to risk becoming addicted. The reader is warned not to pursue a pattern of behavior based on self-indulgence. This is the warning: *to be addicted is to die in poverty*. The negative sanction of poverty is as universally feared as these behaviors are addicting. This proverb rests on a premise: poverty is to be avoided. If this were not the premise, then the threat of poverty in the long run could not overcome the lure of self-indulgence in the short run.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

Conclusion

If you want to avoid poverty, avoid addictive behavior. Addictive behavior leads to the undisciplined consumption of wealth. It undermines thrift. It undermines capital formation.

Why do you and most other people want to avoid poverty? Because poverty is a negative sanction in history. As a general rule, he who owns very little can accomplish very little. He does not possess tools of production: capital.

Those who fear poverty because they fear restrictions on their consumption are warned that if they are not self-disciplined, they will find themselves in tighter straits than they prefer: fewer choices. Those who fear poverty because they fear restrictions on their ability to extend the kingdom of God in history are warned that if they are not self-disciplined, they will find themselves in tighter straits than they prefer: fewer choices. The negative sanction is the same in both cases.

THE PRICE OF PROSPERITY

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man (Prov. 24:30–34).

This proverb has a structure different from all the others. It is not in the form of detailed instruction, as with the first nine chapters and chapters 30 and 31. It is also not in the form of pithy statements that convey a single idea. Instead, it is in the form of an observation, followed by an assessment of what Solomon had seen. The lesson learned affirms what Solomon had already announced: “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man” (Prov. 6:10–11).

Solomon says that he observed the condition of the capital assets owned by a slothful person—perhaps two people—who had no understanding. The assets were a field, a vineyard, and a stone wall. All showed signs of decay. The land was filled with thorns and nettles. These were signs of God’s curse of the ground in response to Adam’s rebellion. “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field” (Gen. 3:18).¹ They had covered over the ground. This was evidence of long-term neglect. The stone wall was broken down. A stone wall does not fall apart overnight, except in an earthquake. Whoever owned this property had allowed it to fall into autonomy.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 12.

A. Autonomous Nature

This proverb testifies to the existence of an environment that is hostile to mankind. Left to itself, it will cease to be productive in terms of the needs and desires of men. *Nature's autonomous productivity is a threat to mankind.* What nature produces on its own is contrary to the plans of productive men.

Solomon says that poverty is the outcome of men's acceptance of nature on nature's terms. Nature is uninterested in men. Men are interested in nature. They are supposed to bring nature under their dominion, which in turn brings nature under God's dominion. This is the requirement of the dominion covenant. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26).²

Solomon describes poverty as if it were active: like a person on a journey. He walks along and finds victims. The lazy person's lack of goods is also like the results of an attack by an armed thief. He who refuses to labor is like a person who disarms himself in a world of armed thieves. This indicates that *wealth is abnormal*. It is the product of labor. *Poverty is normal*. Do nothing, and it will arrive at your doorstep—your broken-down doorstep.

Things do not take care of themselves. Men must take care of them. *The environment resists alterations by man for man.* This is not passive resistance. It is active resistance. *That which is normal for nature brings poverty to man.* Men must therefore actively resist nature's normal operations in order to achieve their goals. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).³

It is clear throughout the Proverbs that *poverty is normal but not normative*. It is something to be avoided. Solomon pointed to sloth and slumber as two primary sources of poverty. He did not have to devote space to an explanation of why poverty is something to be avoided. *Poverty is a curse*. This fact is almost universally recognized.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

B. Overcoming Poverty

The first step, Solomon teaches here, is to avoid the lifestyle of the slothful. *This takes a change of heart.* This is why Solomon keeps returning to this message. Reformed lazybones, through their capital accumulation and their increased productivity, raise the operational living standards of all men. Poverty is then redefined upward. The West has experienced this, beginning around 1780.

It takes work to clear away thorns and thistles, to replace the fallen stones in fences. Solomon calls his listeners and readers to a life of hard work. This is what it takes to roll back the kingdom of poverty. *Sloth is the default mode of mankind*, which is why God cursed the land. Men must be motivated to work. Overcoming scarcity is the primary motivation for most people to get out of bed.

There is a saying in the United States: “You can get rich if you work just half a day. It doesn’t matter which half.” This saying recognizes the centrality of labor in overcoming poverty.

Yet hard work alone is not sufficient to overcome poverty. Men must work in order to produce something valuable enough and scarce enough to get paid for. If no one is willing to pay, then the labor will not achieve the goal of overcoming poverty unless God intervenes because He honors the specific work being performed at no pay. *Poverty-overcoming work must be buyer-directed work.*

Conclusion

The environment was redesigned by God after Adam’s Fall. It was re-designed to thwart man’s plans. It now automatically imposes costs on him. He must give up the things he wants in order to gain things he wants even more. One of the things he must give up is leisure. He has no free time. All of his time must be paid for.

REWARDING OUR ENEMIES

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee (Prov. 25:21–22).

A. Treating Enemies Lawfully

Most of this passage was quoted by Paul:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19–21).¹

This passage establishes a principle of action: *we must treat our enemies according to God's law*. But we must then go the extra mile (Matt. 5:41).² We must show mercy to them. This has the effect of disarming them. It also disarms us. To do good to our enemies makes us less willing to inflict harm if we are ever in a position to do so. Vengeance is God's, not ours.

This command rests on a fundamental principle: *vengeance really is God's*. He brings negative sanctions. This passage indicates that he brings these sanctions in history. But the image of coals on a man's head points to the final residence of covenant-breakers.

It rests on a second principle: God brings positive sanctions in history. "The LORD shall reward thee." For showing mercy to an enemy, the covenant-keeper accomplishes two things: (1) he delivers his enemy into God's hands for judgment; (2) he gains positive rewards for

1. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9:D.

himself. This is far better than sitting on the sidelines and seeing an enemy go hungry.

What is the cost? First, submission to a law of God. Second, some bread and water. The food is not the best. It sustains the beneficiary for a few hours. It gets him to the next step in his journey. Except in a famine or drought or a war, the cost is minimal.

The contrast between the low cost and the high return is striking. For the cost of bread and water, the covenant-keeper places his enemy under an extreme threat. He delivers him into God's court of justice. If the enemy is also God's enemy, this is a fearful place to be.

This proverb reminds men that their instinctive reaction is incorrect. They want to keep their enemies under a minimal restraint: either hunger or thirst. Their enemies' condition is little more than an annoyance to them, something that can be solved by bread and water. Instead of taking this approach, this proverb says, take an action that will bring the enemy under fearful sanctions.

B. Fearful Negative Sanctions

The passage rests on the assumption that God will impose fearful negative sanctions. This is an Old Testament passage, reaffirmed by Paul. The supposed contrast between the fearful God of the Old Testament and the loving Jesus of the New Testament is negated by this passage. The stated goal of this strategy is to place enemies under fearful negative sanctions. *The goal here is revenge, but revenge applied by a specialist in revenge.* Rather than revenge autonomously applied by withholding something of very little value, it is revenge of enormous proportions applied by God.

Negative sanctions are legitimate. They are necessary. They are part of the covenantal cause-and-effect system that governs human relationships. They are the foundation of positive sanctions shown to an enemy. But it goes beyond this. Negative sanctions are accompanied by positive sanctions shown to the person who shows low-cost mercy. Positive sanctions also are part of the created system of social causation in history.

This proverb calls covenant-keepers to show mercy in the name of God, who in turn will not show mercy when He gets the opportunity to deal with the recipients of His servant-mediated mercy. This promise points to hell (Luke 16:19–31) and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15).

Men receive God's common grace in history.³ Those who remain covenant-breakers then must suffer eternally for their lack of gratefulness to God for His common grace. The more common grace they have received, the greater their torment in eternity.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).⁴

The modern world hates Christianity, but people hate it more for its doctrine of hell than any other. Men in the West do not tolerate the thought that God does not tolerate them. This passage indicates just how complete God's hatred of them is. He calls His people to show mercy to them in order that He may punish them for more.

Negative sanctions are part of God's kingdom-building process. The extension of God's kingdom in history is accomplished by the rolling back of Satan's. By bringing the enemies of God under negative sanctions imposed by God, the covenant-keeper extends God's kingdom. The aid provided by bread and water is marginal. The negative sanctions invoked by this act of mercy are not marginal.

Conclusion

The covenant-keeper must show minimal mercy to his enemies. God will reward those who do. This reward includes the positive sanction of seeing one's enemies ruined. Covenant-keepers are encouraged to seek this end because God seeks it. He sets the pattern; His followers should imitate it. This is not the sort of God modern men want to believe in, but it is the only God there is.

This does not mean that covenant-keepers should not pray that their mercy will bring the recipients of mercy to repentance. *The goal is the expansion of God's kingdom in history.* This can be through either redemption or destruction. Both work well. God initiates both. But here, men are told that positive sanctions produce negative sanctions. The focus is on negative sanctions.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

THE LABORER'S REWARD

Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured (Prov. 27:18).

The imagery of keeping the tree hearkens back to keeping the tree in Eden. “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). Yet the Hebrew word for “keep” in Genesis 2:15 is the same as the word for “wait” in this proverb. The two tasks are similar.

The person who takes care of the fig tree establishes a moral claim to the fruit of the tree. Obviously, he is not a hired servant, whose pay is his reward for service. This case is different. The person invests time and effort in caring for the fig tree. He does not do this for the sake of the tree. He does it in expectation of a reward.

This is similar to a servant who serves a master, or should be, says Solomon. The Hebrew word for master here is used throughout the Old Testament for the person at the top of a hierarchy. So close was this master-servant relationship under the Mosaic law that it could be made permanent on request by the servant.

If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever (Ex. 21:4–6).¹

The servant is subordinate to his master. This proverb indicates that the servant is to exercise the same degree of concern for his mas-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia; Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 32:D:3.

ter as a husbandman does for his fig tree, whose output he will own. The motivation of the tree-owner is eating or selling the figs. The motivation of the servant is to gain praise from the master. Praise is said to be the equivalent of eating the fruit of one's labor.

Praise here is seen as a major benefit. This should not be surprising. Entertainers who perform in front of a live audience respond favorably to applause, which is a form of praise. The American comedian Bob Hope was popular longer than any other American entertainer: seven decades. He set a world record with his 61-year contract with the same network (radio and television). *The Guinness Book of World Records* also lists him as the world's most honored entertainer. He was extremely wealthy, worth several hundred million dollars. Yet he refused to retire until he could no longer perform because of deafness. He died at age 100 in 2003. When asked at age 59 why he had cut short a fishing vacation, he replied, "Fish don't applaud."

Public honor for a servant is a special reward. The servant's task is to serve selflessly. He is not to call attention to himself. Things under his administration should run smoothly. His focus is directed upward, toward his master. The relationship is personal, yet it is also one of reward for services rendered. It is not a father-son hierarchy.

This proverb does not say how the servant will be honored. The Old Testament had no clear concept of final judgment, so the frame of reference was social. Within the context of his role as a servant, he would someday receive honor.

This honor is therefore owed to him, even as figs are owed to the person who cares for the fig tree. The master builds up a debit account over time, one which is not in a household ledger book, but which is a liability nonetheless. Faithful service is a rarity, so the servant is entitled to some form of public recognition. In corporations, a man with decades of service commonly has a party held in his honor at company expense upon his retirement. Superiors make speeches, and the man may be given a symbolic gift, which used to be a gold watch, which was a symbol of his years of predictable service. But this recognition is not the same as that owed to a servant. These men were very often middle-level employees. They were never bound by loyalty to their superiors, but only to the company.

The servant's loyalty is to his master's person. It is also to his master's household. The element of personal service marks the relationship. Honor received in recognition of such service in this context is personal. It is earned. To withhold it is regarded as worse than an

oversight. Although it has no market value, because it cannot be sold, it is valuable. The master has an obligation to make public recognition of service rendered.

In Jesus' parable of the talents, this theme of public reward is basic. A ruler leaves his kingdom and places subordinates in charge.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord (Matt. 25:19–21).²

The grant of authority over many additional things was not part of the master's initial offer. He simply assigned each an area of responsibility: capital. They put this to productive use. They were doing this on his behalf. The parable appears in the section of the New Testament that deals with the final judgment.

So, the proverb regarding predictable praise has implications far beyond the master-servant relationship in a household. The relationship is central to the extension of God's kingdom in history. The servant's care for the master is a form of training. The goal is praise.

Conclusion

The laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7). In this case, because of the close personal relationship between master and servant, the final payment involves public honoring of the servant. This costs the master no money. It costs him only a public acknowledgment that the servant had made the master's own work more effective, that whatever the master had achieved rests heavily on the performance of his servant. This is too much for some masters to pay. But those who do will reap rewards: greater commitment from servants and hence greater output from them. Over time, those masters who understand and honor the motivation of their servants will replace those who do not. The free market is competitive. It rewards those who achieve greater output per unit of resource input. A servant is a resource input.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 47.

REDEMPTION AND PRICES

Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied (Prov. 27:20).

Hell in the Old Testament referred to the grave. As surely as graves will not fill up for as long as men are alive, so are the eyes of man not satisfied. The Hebrew word translated as “full” is the same word translated as “satisfied.” To speak of the eyes of man as full does not convey the meaning. The word “satisfied” does.

From the economic point of view, this proverb rivals the importance of the verse describing curse of the ground (Gen. 3:18).¹ Free market economic theory teaches that demand is unlimited at zero price. It also teaches that supplies are always limited: the doctrine of scarcity. This was Adam Smith’s starting point in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). The world does not supply at zero cost all the things that men want to use or own. Out of men’s study of the interplay of these two phenomena—demand and supply—has arisen the science of economics.

A. Mises on Discontentment

The economist who has made the most comprehensive use of the principle of permanent dissatisfaction is Ludwig von Mises. In his magnum opus, *Human Action* (1949), he included a section in Chapter 1 titled, “The Prerequisites of Human Action.” The first prerequisite is discontentment.

We call contentment or satisfaction that state of a human being which does not and cannot result in any action. Acting man is eager to substitute a more satisfactory state of affairs for a less satisfactory.

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

His mind imagines conditions which suit him better, and his action aims at bringing about this desired state. The incentive that impels a man to act is always some sense of uneasiness. A man perfectly content with the state of his affairs would have no incentive to change things.²

Mises was open about the origin of this theory of human action. It rests on hedonism. "The idea that the incentive of human activity is always some uneasiness and its aim always to remove such uneasiness as far as possible, that is, to make the acting men feel happier, is the essence of the teachings of Eudaemonism and Hedonism."³ This is Epicureanism, he says. It has never been refuted. "The theological, mystical, and other schools of a heteronomous ethic did not shake the core of Epicureanism because they could not raise any other objection than its neglect of 'higher' and 'nobler' pleasures."⁴ Mises rejected all such criticisms. Why? Because the individual is autonomous. There is no higher court of appeal.

The ultimate goal of human action is always the satisfaction of the acting man's desire. There is no standard of greater or lesser satisfaction other than individual judgments of value, different for various people and for the same people at various times. What makes a man feel uneasy and less uneasy is established by him from the standard of his own will and judgment, from his personal and subjective valuation. Nobody is in a position to decree what should make a fellow man happier.⁵

B. Destruction and Hedonism

Solomon compares death and destruction with human discontentment. Solomon had enormous wealth and power. In Ecclesiastes, he surveyed a representatively wide range of hedonism's options: the pursuit of pleasure and fame. It is all vanity, he concluded.

I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For

2. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 13. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

4. *Idem.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity (Eccl. 1:16–2:1).

His conclusion was straightforward: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁶

Mises and all those who claim ethical neutrality, methodological neutrality, and value-free analysis are wrong. Man is not autonomous. There are higher standards than those that men in their ethical rebellion adopt for themselves at any point in time. These standards apply in history and will govern the final judgment. God imputes—assigns and evaluates—value to all things, in terms of ethics and in terms of meaning. His imputation establishes the standard of value.

So, it matters what the source of dissatisfaction is. If it is the world’s lack of conformity to God’s standard of value, then dissatisfaction is legitimate. It reflects men’s desire to make things better in history.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain (I Cor. 9:24).⁷

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1).

In contrast, the quest for an unlimited and undefined “more” for oneself in history is illegitimate: the religion of mammon. This is an unbounded quest. That is why it is illegitimate: *man is finite and bounded*. Jesus warned: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).⁸ Jesus spoke these words of warning to His disciples regarding

6. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: an Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 45.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 12.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

the dead-end nature of this quest.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).⁹

And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you (Luke 12:22–31).¹⁰

C. Establishing Prices

In a free market, prices are established through competitive bidding. Individuals compete for scarce resources by offering something in exchange. The price system operates in terms of this general rule: “High bid wins.”

The array of prices reflects the competing bids. Covenant-keepers

9. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 26.

and covenant-breakers compete for resources. They seek to achieve their ends through the means of private property. The New Testament speaks of redemption. Redemption means buying back something originally owned. Jesus bought back the fallen world from God's wrath (common grace). This included individual souls (special grace).¹¹ "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4–5). His work was definitive, meaning complete. His people's representative redemptive work on His behalf is progressive. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

The price of everything reflects the efforts of all men to establish a kingdom in history: man's or God's. This is the war between mammon and God. It is a covenantal war that encompasses every area of life. The fact that evangelism is called redemption indicates the nature of the process. It involves purchasing the entire world, one item at a time, on behalf of Christ. This involves the whole world.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:22–23).¹²

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:25–28).¹³

Ownership is always stewardship. It is never autonomous. The distribution of property, like the array of prices, reflects men's stewardship on behalf of either mammon or God.

11. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

13. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 16.

Conclusion

The eyes of men are never satisfied. There is always more to buy. The question is: By whom and for whom is it being purchased? Secular free market economics focuses on the consumer: the final owner. Socialist economics focuses on the state: the final owner. Biblical economics focuses on God: the original owner, present owner, and final owner.

Each approach has a doctrine of stewardship. The free market economist proclaims the individual as steward on his own behalf and also on behalf of the highest-bidding consumer. The socialist proclaims the state bureaucrat as steward on behalf of the People, who are collectively sovereign. The Christian economist proclaims (or should proclaim) the individual and the association as stewards on behalf of the triune God.

The Christian should be dissatisfied with his previous performance, but not dissatisfied with its outcome.

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:11–13).¹⁴

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content (I Tim. 6:8).¹⁵

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Heb. 13:5).

14. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

15. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:B:1.

ENTROPY AND CAPITAL

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds. For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation? (Prov. 27:23).

This proverb is directed to those who have amassed capital. It focuses on what might be called the *entropy of capital*. Without an owner's attention to details, the entropy process takes control. Things grow more chaotic. Economic value declines. Solomon has already described this process. "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" (24:30).¹ Care of the flocks, like care of the fields, requires attention to details.

Riches are easily dissipated by heirs. "For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?" Heirs can squander their inheritance. This reverses the expansion of family wealth over time. A family's dominion is thereby reduced. In the process of redemption—buying back the kingdom of Satan—the dissipation of family capital is a threat.

In good times, the owner is tempted to imagine that they are permanent. This proverb reminds owners that this is not the case. Circumstances change, and he who wants to maintain his capital must adjust accordingly. While successful men prefer to think that they deserve their wealth, this proverb points to the fact of capital dissipation. It takes active efforts to preserve capital.

There is a phrase in agricultural circles: "The best fertilizer is the owner's shadow." Because he cannot oversee everything personally, the owner delegates authority to his employees. They are unlikely to take the same care with his resources as they do with their own. Fur-

1. Chapter 75.

thermore, if they were as productive as the owner, they would not be employees. They would own their own businesses. Their skills at making a profit are limited. So, the owner has an economic incentive to monitor the management of his subordinates. This proverb encourages this kind of responsible oversight.

Solomon asks rhetorically: “Doth the crown endure to every generation?” It does not. What crown? Probably his own. Kingly crowns are passed from father to son. But sons who cannot defend their authority lose their crowns. This happened to Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, with respect to the northern tribes: Israel. They revolted and separated from the nation. He retained authority only over Judah and the tribe of Benjamin (I Kings 12:21). God had revealed to Solomon that this would happen (I Kings 11:11–13).

Conclusion

This proverb is simple. It advises people with capital to “mind the store.” Things do not autonomously take care of themselves. God requires owners and managers, as good stewards of His capital, to monitor it. Someone must monitor capital. This service is not done at zero cost. It must be paid for. This means that purely passive income is a form of capital consumption. This proverb warns against passive income. Passive income is an illusion.

THE MYTH OF VALUE-FREE ECONOMIC THEORY

Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich (Prov. 28:6).

A. Righteousness Above Wealth

This proverb reminds men that righteousness is more important than wealth. It is an extension of Proverbs 1:1–4.¹ Few religions have ever taught anything else. Even murderous cults, such as thuggee, have a concept of ethics governing those inside the cult.

Throughout history, people have taught their children this principle. Also throughout history, men have pursued wealth at the expense of ethics. The lure of great wealth is so powerful that people with the ability to get rich through evil actions have done so. They have abandoned the ethical principles they learned in their youth and in school.

This proverb makes a value judgment. It does not pretend to be ethically neutral. It does not deal with means to the neglect of ends. It makes a judgment regarding ends and means. The end of great wealth, when attained through ethically perverse means, is not worth the cost. To make plain the extent of the high cost of perversity, Solomon compares the rich man with a poor man. The poor man is better off than the rich man. The deciding factor is ethics, not wealth.

Solomon does not hesitate to tell his listeners which condition is best. The suggestion of modern free market economists that such a judgment is not scientifically valid, because it makes interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, would not have impressed Solomon. This is because God does not begin with the hypothetically autonomous value scale of the acting individual. He begins instead with His

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covenant with mankind, which has established a system of moral cause and effect in society.

Christian economics makes no pretense of value neutrality. Value neutrality is a myth, and a highly unneutral one, given the fact of God's assertion of absolute sovereignty. *Value neutrality constitutes a rebellion against God and His covenant.* Its defenders assume that each individual is autonomous. But on such a basis, there can be no scientifically valid universal ethical system, including the ethics of neutrality.

Such an assertion of individual men's autonomy is inherently a form of *nominalism*: every man is a king, no man is a servant. Reality is whatever individual men think it is. Each person imputes meaning to the universe. But he does not impute corporate meaning. What he imputes has authority only for himself.

Under such a philosophy, the quest for wealth and power easily becomes an obsession. If the universe reflects what an individual thinks and does, then to gain immunity from other men's rival imputations and power, the self-proclaimed autonomous individual must seek to establish his own authority. This outlook leads to the error described in this proverb: seeking wealth perversely. Wealth is seen as a means of buying immunity and power.

Who imputes good or evil, success or failure, to anyone or any group? God does. Deny God this ability, and you must attribute it to something else. The state has been an obvious candidate through the ages. For a few theorists, the free market has replaced God as the agency of imputation. But the free market is merely the social arrangement that has developed as a result of the concept of private property. This concept rests on ethics: "Thou shalt not steal." "The Lord is not a respecter of persons." "Do not move thy neighbor's landmark." The free market has no external source of legitimacy in a world without God or permanent ethics. Everything is said to evolve. Power-seekers then seek to direct evolutionary forces to their benefit.²

B. Poverty

Poverty is best defined as a lack of affordable options. The individual poor man has fewer choices than a rich man does. It appears that a poor man operates at the mercy of the wealthy or else in the shadows, where the wealthy pay no attention. Poverty is the absence of

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

immunity. Poverty is weakness.

Then why should Solomon insist that a poor man in his righteousness is better than a rich man in his perversity? What did he mean, *better*? The Hebrew word can be translated “good,” in the sense of righteousness. As in English, it can also mean valuable, as in “good land.” It can be translated as “prosperity.” “Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever” (Deut. 23:6). It can mean “better off.” “And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?” (Num. 14:3).

Then why is righteousness in poverty better than perversity in prosperity? This proverb does not say, but there is enough information in the Bible to answer the question. “Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God” (Deut. 18:13). “Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day” (I Kings 8:61). Jesus warned: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

In contrast is the rich perverse man. His condition was summed up by Jesus. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).³

Conclusion

There is no neutrality. There is also no neutral science. Neutrality is always a disguise for man’s pretended autonomy. It begins with a presupposition: whatever is logical for all men is neutral. First, there is this problem: all men never agree on what is logical. There are many forms of logic, and lots of illogical men. Second, God establishes what is logical and true; men’s individual minds do not.

There is ethical causation in history. The Bible teaches that societies that adopt laws that are more consistent with biblical laws get richer than societies whose laws are less consistent with biblical laws (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). In contrast, for individuals there can be anomalies (Ps. 73). So, this proverb brings us to the great religious rivals, God and mammon, by way of anomalies: righteous poverty and perverse wealth. Better the former than the latter, this proverb teaches.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

THE DISINHERITANCE OF COVENANT-BREAKERS

He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor (Prov. 28:8).

This proverb is a variation of another: “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).¹ It presents a view of economic causation that is tied directly to ethics. Righteousness is a predictable source of wealth. The generous will inherit. This proverb is not saying that righteousness is its own reward. It is saying that righteousness brings positive economic sanctions in this life. It also announces that unrighteousness is a predictable source of impoverishment: gathering for others. Bad actions produce bad results. The world is not ethically random.

It takes things a step further. It says that he who devotes his efforts to unrighteousness ultimately is working on behalf of the person who deals righteously with people. Previously, Solomon announced that the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. Here, he repeats this assertion.

This system of covenantal economic causation does not announce that the good do well and the evil do poorly. It says that *the good do well at the expense of evildoers*. It is not that there are two fields of grain, with one field flourishing and the other field blighted. It goes far beyond this. It says that the output of one field will benefit the owner of the other field.

A. Dominion Through Inheritance

This proverb rests on a concept of inheritance that is unique to the Mosaic covenant. This concept of inheritance is symbolized by the

1. Chapter 41.

conquest of Canaan. That was a conquest by force, a one-time event. But the nature of the transaction is clear from this proverb: *inheritance through disinheritance*.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name (Deut. 6:10–13).

The covenant-breaker labors to build up an inheritance that he can pass on to his heirs. He makes himself a name. He leaves behind a legacy. The concept of intergenerational wealth transfer is inherent in humanity. This is an aspect of the dominion covenant. Adam was supposed to multiply and fill the earth. The concept of economic growth as stewardship on behalf of God is misapplied by covenant-breakers, who labor for themselves. The goal of dominion through expansion of wealth is legitimate (Deut. 28:1–14).² The question is: *Dominion on whose behalf?*

This proverb reinforces the earlier one, which clearly places wealth in the context of inheritance. The sense of long-term inheritance through the transfer of accumulated wealth is inescapable. This proverb is less forthright regarding the context of inheritance. The phrase, “he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor,” does not specify a time frame. It does not indicate when the wealth transfer will take place: in the lifetime of the covenant-breaker or in his heirs’ lifetimes. This proverb is silent on whether this transfer will be intergenerational or not. The man who uses unethical practices to accumulate wealth may not see his capital transferred to a righteous man of his own generation. But Solomon gives a warning to every such person: the end result of his efforts will be to enlarge the inheritance of his covenantal enemies.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

B. Kingdoms in Conflict

This is God's message to Satan throughout history. The kingdom of God will replace the kingdom of Satan, not just in eternity, but also in time. "And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:14–15). This will be manifested in civil rule.

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision (Ps. 2:1–4).

A Psalm of David. The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies (Ps. 110:1–2).

This principle of dominion applies in economic affairs in the same way. The expansion of God's kingdom in history is not limited to one manifestation of His covenantal order, but extends to all. The conquest is comprehensive because redemption is comprehensive.³

This proverb teaches that the covenant-breaker may well be able to expand his control over wealth through usury. He can increase his wealth by lending at interest to covenant-keepers who are in poverty through no fault of their own. This proverb does not say that unrighteousness produces losses from beginning to end. On the contrary, it affirms that the covenant-breaker can build up wealth. It says only that this wealth will eventually wind up under the control of a covenant-keeper. This is the essence of the dominion covenant: *the steady replacement of covenant-breakers by covenant-keepers*. The social world operates in terms of a covenantal order that elevates ethics over all other sources of economic success.

Why is this historical process not obvious to covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers alike? Why are two proverbs necessary to re-

3. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

mind economic actors of the nature of economic causation? One answer is that covenant-breakers suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18–22).⁴ But this does not explain why covenant-keepers seem equally blind to economic causation. The most likely answer is the long-term nature of this process of wealth transfer. Asaph suffered from an inability to see that covenant-keepers' success would eventually lead to their destruction.

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily (Ps. 73:3–8).

But Asaph eventually came to his senses. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:17–19).

Conclusion

Economic causation is covenantal. It is hierarchical, because God controls events. It is ethical, because God establishes rules of right and wrong. It is predictable, because God governs through a system of sanctions. Finally, it is eschatological, because of the structure of inheritance in history: inheritance through disinheritance.

This proverb reflects the covenantal structure of kingdom history. Satan is disinherited in history. This means that, for a time, he accumulates capital that is worth inheriting in history. He build up a kingdom. Then he loses it. Sometimes redemption is strictly by purchase. Covenant-keepers buy back the kingdoms of man. They offer for sale what covenant-breakers want. They exchange trinkets for ownership of long-term, culture-transforming capital. But they also inherit. The ideal way is through conversion. The heirs of rich sinners transfer allegiance to a new king and a new kingdom. In doing so, they disinherit their forefathers, who had other goals for their wealth.

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd. (Dallas, Georgia: [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough (Prov. 28:19).

This is a variation of Proverbs 12:11: “He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.”¹ The contrast there is between steady though uninspiring physical labor vs. following the schemes and dreams of vain (empty) people. Here, the contrast is between plenty of bread and “poverty enough.” This is a poetic phrase. Solomon could have said “poverty” and conveyed the idea. But “poverty enough” puts an edge to it, a kind of ridicule. It raises the question: Poverty enough to do what? The idea here is *sufficient poverty to make God’s point*.

A. Unreliable Leaders

What is God’s point? This: there are vain people in every society who lure unsuspecting and naive followers into making economically disastrous decisions. These people thrive on having followers. They get a sense of satisfaction out of the deference shown to them, even if this deference comes from people with minimal ethical awareness. Solomon reminds his readers of the danger associated with following such people. The end result is poverty.

But why would anyone follow vain leaders? The implication is that the followers are unwilling to submit to the requirements of conventional labor: tilling one’s own land. Such labor is undistinguished in an agricultural society. The fact that a man owns land, tools, and seed does not distinguish him from all the other farmers who also own land, tools, and seed. It distinguishes him from field hands who own no land, tools, or seed, but he does not have his eye on those whom he

1. Chapter 36.

might employ. He has his eyes on his peers. He wishes to stand out from them in the way that he stands out from field hands: higher.

Most people dream of attaining personal distinction in life. They want to be remembered as people who stood out from the crowd in some way, even if this means joining another crowd. Becoming the follower of an unconventional person who has the gift of attracting followers seems to many people to be the pathway to distinction. Men seek distinction through being represented by significant people. The fact that these people are empty does not register in the thinking of their followers.

Solomon says that it is wise to stick with what is conventional and thereby put bread on the table rather than venturing into unknown realms as followers of vain people. Stick with the tried and true. If you fail to stand out from the crowd, but you have bread on your table, you are better off than dreaming of wealth untold in the entourage of vain people.

B. Conventional Roads to Success

This proverb affirms tilling as the road to success, with success defined as bread on the table. This is an affirmation of conventional labor, long and hard, in the mid-summer sun. It affirms a theory of conventional labor. He who wishes to escape from this conventional pathway to success is opening himself to poverty-inducing leadership by vain people.

Until the advent of mass agricultural production, which accelerated rapidly with mechanical harvesters in the 1840s, and also with the transportation revolution of the railroads, which began in the same decade, most people tilled the soil for a living. They did not produce enough food to support a predominately urban society. Most people lived on farms, whether they raised grains or edible-wearable animals. A farmer pursued a vocation that extended back into the mists of unrecorded history. This occupation has been the archetype of conventional production.

The Bible speaks of bread as the symbol of life: that which sustains life. It teaches that bread is necessary but insufficient for sustaining life. Moses spoke to the generation of the conquest, reminding them of God's four decades of miracles in the wilderness: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make

thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). This was spoken about a generation that lived in the presence of constant daily miracles. These miracles occurred in order to confirm their faith in God. But the manna ceased after the nation crossed the Jordan River and entered the promised land (Josh. 5:12). Their faith in God was supposed to remain intact, despite the removal of daily miracles.² Jesus quoted Moses' words: "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). This was a warning against the quest for miracles—turning stones into bread—as a substitute for faith.³

In Canaan, farming replaced manna-gathering. The drudgery of daily labor in the fields became the basis of success from then on. But this was not the only basis of success. Adherence to God's covenantal legal order was also required (Deut. 28:1–14).⁴ It was this combination of conventional labor and adherence to biblical law that repelled (and still repels) those who seek personal success by identifying with vain people, who offer other, less rigorous avenues to success.

Conclusion

The common visual representation of a traditional farmer tilling his fields is a picture of a man behind a plow. Pulling the plow is an ox or a mule or a water buffalo. The common visual representation of a traditional follower of vain persons is a picture of a huge political rally. At the center is a now-dead, notorious, and defeated politician raising his fist. His victorious enemies paint the pictures and publish the archived photos. These images are essentially correct.

There is a famous painting of an old man, head bowed, giving prayerful thanks for a loaf of bread. In front of him on the table is an old, fat book—probably a Bible—with his metal-rimmed glasses folded on top of it. This is the most accurate visual representation of all. He is no longer of working age, but he has a full loaf of bread in front of him. He did not follow vain men.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

4. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

NO SHORTCUTS TO SUCCESS

A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent (Prov. 28:20).

He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him (Prov. 28:22).

These are reinforcing proverbs. A common warning is given to a person who is impatient in his goal to gain riches. Proverbs 28:20 indicates that riches are legitimate. What is not legitimate is riches as a goal. “Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom” (Prov. 23:4).¹ Even less legitimate is the desire to get rich quick.

A. Positive Sanctions in History

In verse 20, we are informed of the way to positive sanctions in life: faithfulness. Faithfulness is an attribute of God. “And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints” (Ps. 89:5). What this proverb says regarding an individual, Deuteronomy 28:1–14 says of Israel as a nation. “And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God” (Deut. 28:2). “The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 28:8).²

This proverb says the blessings shall abound. This indicates considerable wealth. It is not speaking of a comfortable life. It is speaking of a life marked by exceptional blessings. This need not be limited to wealth. The passage in Deuteronomy 28 is comprehensive in its des-

1. Chapter 72.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

cription of the variety of blessings. This proverb indicates something comparable for the individual.

Then why does Solomon warn against riches more than once? Why is something which is a legitimate outcome of faithfulness not legitimate as a personal goal? If there is a predictable covenantal relationship between ends and means, why are the means legitimate, the end legitimate, but not the goal of attaining the end? Why would Solomon encourage faithfulness by pointing to the positive sanctions that result from faithfulness, yet warn people not to pursue riches?

B. Success vs. Success Indicators

There are success indicators in life, yet they do not always indicate success. Here is a familiar example. A student is encouraged to learn. To aid him in his quest for knowledge, the teacher enforces a system of sanctions: grades. Poor grades indicate a lack of success in gaining knowledge. Good grades indicate success. The student is then motivated to achieve good grades. He learns the tricks of taking examinations. His grades rise. He learns how to take shortcuts on studying. His grades rise. He finds that he can cram for an exam the night before the exam and get better grades, although whenever he does this, he forgets most of what he has studied as soon as the exam is over. His grades rise. At some point, the pursuit of good grades undermines his quest for knowledge.

It may go beyond this. He may find ways to cheat on the exams. The quest for good grades then undermines his morality. The success indicators no longer measure his success. They measure his failure.

In every field of life, this dilemma appears. It is a universal problem. Success indicators do not automatically detect performances that are based on illegitimate means—means that are counter-productive to the end for which the indicators were designed. No matter what the objective indicators of success are, they can be misused by performers when adopted as ends in themselves.

Money is a universal success indicator. There are few others that are valued more highly. Of those indicators that are readily measured, only life extension is higher on most men's scales of value, at least when death is imminent. Yet even here, mere temporal extension of life can become a false standard. A man may be granted a longer life for betraying something or someone. Every society has standards that are said to be superior to life extension. But these are not equally

measurable: honor, integrity, and reliability. Money and time are supremely objective and universally honored. This is why they are morally dangerous. But money is more dangerous than time, for it is exchangeable at all times. There may not be a buyer for whatever one is willing to give up in order to gain extra time. There is always a ready market for money.

The Bible is clear on this point: *riches alone are illegitimate as a success indicator*. Blessings are more comprehensive than riches. To the extent that someone defines success exclusively as riches, he has misunderstood life's proper goal. Such a person is easily tempted to adopt means to riches that are inconsistent with covenantally defined blessings. If a person's sole end is money, the means selected are likely to be illegitimate. If the means are illegitimate, the end will be the opposite of the goal sought. "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him" (v. 22).

Conclusion

God's blessings are a legitimate goal in life. They are basic to covenantal cause and effect. *But the moral cause is more precious than the measurable effect*. Men should remain faithful to God even in cases where the immediate effect is negative. The positive blessings are God's means to confirm the legitimacy of the moral means. Moral cause and positive effect together confirm God's covenant. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).³

Riches are the outcome of a life of covenantal faithfulness. He who seeks shortcuts to wealth is like the student who seeks shortcuts to wisdom. He will not only not achieve his goal, he will achieve its opposite: poverty.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

THE POOR MAN'S JUDICIAL CAUSE

The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it (Prov. 29:7).

The issue here is the system of justice. A poor person comes into a court of law, and the righteous person considers his case. The wicked pay no attention. This is what Jeremiah later identified as the ethical condition of Israel.

Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? (Jer. 5:25–29).

The context is civil judgment. God warned the Israelites that they had to obey His law. “Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 18:4). This is repeated over and over in the Mosaic law. The rule of law was to govern Israel. “Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 24:22).¹ Everyone inside the boundaries of Israel came under biblical law. “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it

1. For the exegesis of this principle, see my comments on Exodus 12:49. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

unto me, and I will hear it" (Deut. 1:17).²

This proverb, like the Mosaic law as a whole, in no way authorizes the perversion of justice on behalf of the poor. It does not teach, nor did the Mosaic law teach, that the poor man is entitled to anything except an impartial application of the Mosaic law to his case. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour" (Lev. 19:15). This law is opposed to the welfare state's programs of coercive wealth-redistribution.³

The wicked person ignores the cause of the poor man. Note: this does not say that he ignores the cause of the poor man's poverty. He ignores his cause, meaning his judicial case against an opponent. This is a strictly judicial matter, not an economic matter. The Mosaic law was clear: the judge must not respect persons, meaning favor one person or the other in a lawsuit based on the person's national origin or economic condition. The New Testament is equally clear. "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11). God's court is the model. "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons" (Col. 3:25). A court must not care what a person owns, only what he has done. It must seek to reflect God's judgment.

The wicked man in this proverb pays no attention to the poor man's cause or case. He is unconcerned with the outcome of the court. He has no concern with justice. He is ignorant of the principle of the rule of law. He is unaware of such matters. This proverb does not say that he is a self-conscious oppressor. He is barely conscious at all, judicially speaking.

This is a wicked person, this proverb says. Such a lack of concern with the law of God is the mark of a wicked person. To turn a blind eye to the judicial cause of the poor is to imagine that God is equally blind and also does not care. The Bible insists that God does care. "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" (Jer. 5:29).

Conclusion

He who turns a blind eye to the poor's judicial cause is a wicked

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

person. Why? Because he disregards the rule of law. But if this is the reason, then he who turns a blind eye to the rich man's judicial cause is also a wicked person. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour" (Lev. 19:15).

The modern-day defender of the welfare state turns a blind eye to the judicial cause of the rich man. The law punishes the rich man, not for breaking a statute, but for achieving success.

Both the rich man and the poor man should be protected by the terms of biblical law. They should both be secure in their property, their marriages, and their liberties. Both should seek to extend God's kingdom in history. Neither should therefore infringe on the other's God-assigned stewardship responsibilities.

A MIDDLE-CLASS LIFESTYLE

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain (Prov. 30:7–9).

Here, Solomon equates vanity and lies with both poverty and riches. Yet he was very rich. He was rich enough to support 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3). Why would he warn men against riches? Possibly because of what he had learned from having 700 wives and 300 concubines.

A. A Warning Against Riches

Are the two requests related? Yes. A person with great wealth is under constant pressure to spend his money in ways that benefit suppliers of motivation. These motivation-suppliers are called salesmen. They sell vanity. They also sell lies. Of course, vanity and lies are not sold as vanity and lies. They are disguised. They are packaged as must-have and must-do items. They are sold by means of deception, so their essence is lies. Inside the packaging is vanity: emptiness.

Solomon uses food as the representative symbol of what he seeks. He asks for neither too much nor too little food. If he has too much food, he will become full. When he is full, he will deny God. He will say, “Who is the Lord?” This response is what Moses had warned against. God had fed them in the wilderness with manna, Moses reminded the generation of the conquest. Here was the great temptation: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day”

(Deut. 8:17–18).¹

On the other hand, a person with too little food is hungry. He may capitulate to his hunger by stealing food. The heart of this sin is to bring God's name into disrepute, to "take the name of my God in vain." Why is this the case? Because of the five-point covenantal structure of the Ten Commandments: a parallel pair of five commandments, the first priestly and the second kingly.²

The third commandment places a legal boundary around God's name. "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7).³ Boundaries are an aspect of part three of the five-point biblical covenant.⁴ Commandment three is in the first group of five commandments, dealing with priestly matters. The eighth commandment is the prohibition against theft. "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15). This commandment is the third in the second series of five, dealing with kingly matters. It places a legal boundary around property.⁵ By stealing, which is a boundary violation of property, a covenant-keeper necessarily also takes God's name in vain. As a covenantal representative of God, he brings God into disrepute.

B. Middle-Class Income

The proper goal is middle-class income. Whatever the distribution of wealth is at any point in time, the covenant-keeper should seek middle-class income. He should not seek poverty, which is generally a curse. He should not seek riches, which is generally a curse. The cursed aspect of the first condition is more readily apparent than the second condition, but this proverb indicates that both are more likely to be curses than blessings. Poverty is a curse because it reflects the curse of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19): more weeds than fruit. Riches are a curse because they bring great temptation. Jesus affirmed this cursed

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), Preface.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

4. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstyp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

5. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 28.

status of riches when He said, “Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:23b–24).⁶

When men seek riches, they do not compare riches in history with poverty in eternity. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).⁷ Instead, they compare riches in history with poverty in history. They then choose riches over poverty.

So, the question of wealth arises: “Compared to what?” Most Americans, Canadians, Western Europeans, Australians, New Zealanders, and Japanese are middle class. They think of themselves as middle class. Yet in terms of the distribution wealth worldwide, they are upper class. They are the dominant groups in the top 20% of the world’s population, who own 80% of the capital. To be in the middle class in the United States in the early years of the twenty-first century is to be wealthy by the world’s standards.

So, when people think of themselves as middle class, they think of their neighbors. In the United States, we have a phrase: “Keeping up with the Joneses.” The Jones family lives next door, or else lives in the circle of acquaintances in which we travel. We judge our economic success in terms of what we can see of theirs. Presumably, they do the same with us.

This is a serious error. First, we do not know about their level of consumer debt. They may be at the ragged edge of bankruptcy. Second, they are not representative of the masses of the world’s population. There are billions of people who live in such poverty that middle-class Westerners cannot empathize with them. We have no criteria for comparison. Even the poor people we may see on the streets are wealthy by comparison. We see a mentally disturbed person walking up and down a downtown sidewalk, pushing a shopping cart full of junk. That shopping cart represents a capital base not shared by a billion poor people in the unpaved streets of Asia.

C. Class Morality

It has long been common among the heirs of upper-class fortunes

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

to dismiss middle-class morality. From Great Britain's Puritan era in the late sixteenth century to the Victorian era in the late nineteenth century to the jet set today, middle-class people have been likely to be tradesmen, entrepreneurs, and skilled professionals. For centuries, they were dismissed by the landed ruling classes as either middle class or on their way to becoming newly rich. Money-grubbing was not for the rich. The Puritans and their social successors, the Protestant dissenters, favored hard work, thrift, attention to business details, and customer service. This was correctly viewed as middle-class morality by the ruling classes, whose wealth was protected by primogeniture laws (oldest son inherits all) and entail laws (forbidding the sale of an oldest son's land). Members of the ruling landed class could gamble their land away, but their gambling peers were of the same class.

The working classes had a similar contempt for middle-class morality, much preferring the lifestyle of the rich and famous, which was their lifestyle, but without the money to fund it. The features of these lifestyles were the same, but the poor could afford them only part-time: leisure (unemployment), gambling, partying (gin mills), and mistresses (prostitutes).

Middle-class living has a tendency over time to produce economic growth. It produces steadily rising income. From monks who took vows of poverty in the medieval era, and whose orders grew rich over centuries as a result of hard work and reinvested capital, to immigrant Jews whose sons became lawyers and accountants, and whose grandsons became media moguls and real estate tycoons, the story has been the same: middle-class morality produces society-wide economic growth and occasional individual wealth. Two percent growth per annum, compounded over two and a half centuries, has produced the modern world. In contrast, the lifestyle of the rich and famous rests on capital consumption. Eventually the heirs run out of money.

Middle-class morality is biblical morality. It is the bedrock foundation of wealth accumulation. When men pray for middle-class income and then work for it, their heirs become incomparably rich by the criteria of their grandparents. My grandparents were born in a world without automobiles, airplanes, commercial electricity, radio, and most of the other common features of middle-class life in the West. Their grandparents were born in a world without railroads, steamships, anesthetics, or even something as common as toilet paper. Their grandparents' grandparents were born in a world that would have been recognizable by Moses. This transformation of the world

did not take very long.⁸

Two percent per annum, either up or down, is barely observable in any area of life. Yet over decades, such slow, directional change will transform the social landscape. Middle-class morality can be maintained in the conditions of compound economic growth, just as it was in North America from 1750 to 1960. But if it declines at a steady rate—the divorce rate or the illegitimacy rate—over time, it erodes the foundations of positive growth (Deut. 28:15–68). Such social orders are eventually replaced (Deut. 8:19–20).⁹

D. Compounding Responsibility

As wealth grows, responsibility grows. Ownership is inescapably a social function.¹⁰ The owner of every asset is a steward acting on behalf of God the Creator, but this stewardship must be manifested in history. Other men, made in God's image and also acting as His stewards, bid for ownership or control over every scarce resource, which is what defines a scarce resource. The owner must decide what to do with his property. Whose bid will he accept, including his own? He can consume it, invest it, let it waste away on its own, or give it away. He must make a choice. There are no choices without personal responsibility. The more we own, the more choices we have, and therefore the more responsibility we have. Jesus warned:

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).¹¹

This being the case, there had better be a parallel development: moral decision-making and economic decision-making. A person had

8. John Tyler, President of the United States in 1841–45, was born in the first term of George Washington's presidency (1790), less than a year after the French Revolution began. His grandson, Harrison Ruffin Tyler, is still alive (2012) and lives on his grandfather's land. His brother Lyon is also alive. I interviewed him in December 2010.

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

10. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 28. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

11. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

better get rich slowly, because he improves his understanding of moral causation slowly. He develops his moral skills slowly. Theologians call this process *progressive sanctification*. Wealth accumulated over decades is not the threat to a person that overnight wealth is. Overnight wealth is far easier to achieve than overnight moral maturity. The only widely sought-after goal more dangerous than “get rich quick” is “get power quick.”

A man should learn how to handle his wealth through experience—experience evaluated in terms of God’s Bible-revealed law. He should learn from others’ experience, too. These others are likely to be people in his own social circle and economic class. The upper classes’ contempt of newly rich people has rested on an accurate insight. The newly rich do not “mind their manners,” i.e., are unfamiliar with the rules of polite society, which is confident about its future because it has long held the reins of both wealth and power. The newly rich are still intent on “making it,” when their concern should be focused on “conserving it.” Yet the rich and powerful are rarely reliable judges of what is required to conserve social order. They have abandoned middle-class morality.

Conclusion

This proverb warns against both riches and poverty. We readily understand the warning against poverty. But few people pray, or have ever prayed, against riches. Solomon did not pray soon enough. He prayed for wisdom (II Chron. 2:10), received wisdom (I Kings 4:29–30) and riches (I Chron. 29:4), and then lost wisdom (I Kings 11:4). His son lost most of his kingdom. Solomon would have been better off with wisdom in a cave than wisdom and riches in a palace. He would have been a far better prophet than a king. We would still read two of his books, which are more prophetic than kingly. As for his Song, one wife would have been sufficient. Better one wife like her than 699 like the other ones he married, let alone the 300 concubines without dowries.

VIRTUE AND PRODUCTIVITY

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies (Prov. 31:10).

A. A Virtuous Woman

This introduces the longest section in the Bible describing the characteristics of a virtuous woman. The advice comes from a woman. “The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him” (Prov. 31:1). The passage leads to a conclusion. “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised” (31:30). This is surely good advice to every son. Solomon ignored it on a scale unmatched in recorded history. But his end confirmed it.

And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father (I Kings 11:3–6)

Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father’s sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son (I Kings 11:11–12).

B. Value Measured in Rubies

There is a familiar phrase, “as good as gold.” The phrase here presents an even more favorable comparison: “Her price is far above rubies.” It indicates that a man with a virtuous wife would be foolish to sell her for rubies if such a market existed. This is poetic, not literal. It does not mean that there was an active market for wives in Solomon’s day, in which men bid for other men’s wives. (Such a practice did exist—illegally but traditionally—in Great Britain for several centuries, ending only in the late nineteenth century. A man who was tired of his wife would bring her into the town square, where men bid for her. The highest bidder got her.)¹

The comparison is economic: the price of a wife in terms of the price of multiple rubies. Yet the passage deals with a virtuous woman. The connection between her virtue and her family’s increased wealth is inescapable. There is no passage in the Bible that is more detailed in this regard. Proverbs presents a series of pithy snippets on the ways to wealth. It then culminates with this, the key passage in the Bible on the ways to wealth.

C. Trustworthy

“The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil” (v. 11). What has spoil—confiscated military booty—have to do with a wife? Nothing. The translators did a poor job here. The New American Standard Bible is on target: “He will have no lack of gain.” The rest of the chapter describes why he will have no lack of gain.

This raises a question: What has his trust in her got to do with his prosperity? There are two answers: income and outgo. She makes money as an entrepreneur, and she also buys carefully. She watches the ledger.

The woman is reliable: trustworthy. “She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life” (v. 12). What is the nature of this good? “She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands” (v. 13). The Hebrew word translated as “willingly” is elsewhere translated as “pleasure” or “desire.” It indicates an active, enthusiastic performance of duties. “She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar” (v. 14). A merchant journeys to distant places in search of

1. Samuel Menefee, *Wives for Sale: An Ethnographic Study of British Popular Divorce* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1981).

underpriced, undiscovered bargains to bring back home in order to sell at a high mark-up. So does the virtuous wife. She goes looking for bargains in out-of-the-way markets, where there are fewer buyers making competitive bids and therefore lower prices.

This woman has a servant's heart. "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens" (v. 15). She serves her maidens, whose job is to serve her. This shows kindness, but this fact appears in the midst of a passage describing economic productivity. Why should the person in charge of the household sacrifice time and effort for her servants? Because of the response. The maidens will see that they are not slaves, but are members of a working household. The evidence of this is the service rendered downward from the wife to the maidens. The wife works extra hard for everyone in the household. The maidens perceive themselves as parts of this household. What is the morally correct response? To work at least equally hard. The entire household then benefits. The division of labor increases everyone's output. A maiden, left on her own while the wife looks for bargains in distant markets, will be less likely to reduce her efforts. It would look bad to the other maidens. She would appear to be a slacker, not a model to be imitated. The model to be imitated is the wife. This model was adopted by Christ as the model for leadership in the church.

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25–28).²

It is not just that the virtuous wife is thrifty and hard working. She also is an investor. "She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard" (v. 16).

"She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms" (v. 17). She works hard physically. Her body reflects this commitment to hard work. She has strong arms. She does some heavy lifting. She is not spending time at the local gymnasium, a Greek invention and a place for men. She does not need an exercise program.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 41.

“She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night” (v. 18). She understands that she has a competitive edge in what she produces. She keeps at it late into the evening. Yet she also rises early. “She riseth also while it is yet night.” Late to bed and early to rise.

She sews. “She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff” (v. 19). She gives. “She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy” (v. 20). “She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet” (v. 21). As the colloquial phrase puts it, she has everything covered. Come what may, her family is prepared.

She dresses well. “She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple” (v. 22). Purple clothing was for rich people in the ancient world. Purple dye was expensive. She recognizes that her success is reflected in how she dresses. She dresses well. Her attire reflects the level of her performance. She has given to the poor. So, she thinks nothing of spending a lot of money on clothing. She is not guilt-ridden about this. Queens dress well, Queen Elizabeth II’s hats to the contrary. She is not putting on airs. Her clothing reflects her status as biblically virtuous.

“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land” (v. 23). Her husband has leisure to serve as an advisor. He has leisure because she generates income for his household. She has social status in the community because he has social status. He has status because she knows how to make money and run an orderly household. He is not tied down at home, making decisions and settling disputes.

She is running a small business. “She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant” (v. 24). The merchants rely on her as a source for products to sell. This means that her product line has a good reputation. It is in constant demand. More than one merchant understands this. She makes them look good to their customers. This guarantees repeat business and higher prices: more bidders for her products.

She is already well known. “Strength and honour are her clothing” (v. 25a). She will become even better known: “and she shall rejoice in time to come” (v. 25).

She has good judgment. “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (v. 26).

“She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the

bread of idleness” (v. 27). We are back to the earlier description: care about others as head of the household, and not one to waste time.

D. Her Great Reward

She has a good reputation. She has a vineyard. She has a successful business. Her family’s income serves as protection in cold times: scarlet clothing. Yet the culmination of her life of successful production is the praise her family will give her. “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her” (v. 28). Her husband tells her, “Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all” (v. 29). He pronounces judgment. His judgment matters to her. This is a powerful positive sanction.

She labored within her household. She ran businesses. She was a real estate developer. She slept little. But she never forgets her assignment: to serve her children, her maidens, and above all, her husband. She was not in this for the money. The money was a tool of dominion. Her household’s dominion expanded: in business, in real estate, in charity, and in her husband’s influence in the gates, i.e., civil authority and judgment.

Then comes the warning of the king’s mother: “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised” (v. 30).

The book concludes with this: “Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates” (v. 31). This is of course poetry. Her works do not literally praise her. It means that those who see her works praise her. They are objectively superior, a fact perceived subjectively by those who are aware of what she has accomplished.

Conclusion

A good-looking good woman is hard to find and harder to marry. But a virtuous woman is much harder to find. If a woman is one in a hundred in looks, one in a hundred in wisdom, and one in a hundred in business savvy, then she is one in a hundred times a hundred times a hundred, i.e., one in a million. These odds are against even kings, let alone the average guy. Reduce these odds, the king’s mother advised. If the prospect is one in a hundred in wisdom and one in a hundred in business savvy, she is one in ten thousand. One in ten thousand is as much as any husband can legitimately expect. So, sacrifice good looks

for wisdom and business savvy.

Solomon understood this from experience. “As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion” (Prov. 11:22). He married more than his share of women without discretion.

CONCLUSION

The overall theme of the Book of Proverbs is the contrast between the wise man and the fool.

The supreme economic theme in the Book of Proverbs is this: *biblical ethics is the basis of personal success*.¹ Proverbs deals with success. It identifies what success is: diligent living in conformity to God's Bible-revealed laws.² Diligence is required.³ Solomon contrasts success with success indicators. Success indicators can sometimes be the product of diligent living in defiance of God's Bible-revealed laws.⁴ Personal success generally includes visible riches.⁵ Success is not limited to riches. Biblical wisdom counts for more than riches.⁶ Nevertheless, biblical wisdom generally brings riches.⁷ The goal of riches is to serve as a means of exercising dominion.⁸ This requires stewardship, which in turn requires private ownership.⁹ It also requires the accumulation of assets for the purpose of inheritance.¹⁰

The Book of Proverbs' distinguishing feature, compared to other rule books for personal success, is its assertion of *God's providential system of cause and effect*. Biblical causation is based on the concept of cosmic personalism. The universe is under God's sovereignty because it was created out of nothing by God's verbal command. So, economic causation operates in terms of God's Bible-revealed laws.¹¹

If there is success, then there is also failure. What produces poverty, which is a universally recognized mark of personal failure?

1. Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 19, 20, 21, 25, 30, 41, 64, 78, 80, 81, 85.

2. Chapters 14, 16, 62, 79.

3. Chapters 61, 71, 77.

4. Chapters 33, 48, 49, 53, 73, 83, 85.

5. Chapters 6, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 38, 82, 83.

6. Chapters 1, 4, 5, 9, 17, 18, 53.

7. Chapters 9, 18, 20, 63, 80.

8. Chapters 4, 8, 21, 25, 26, 34, 81.

9. Chapters 67, 70, 75, 85.

10. Chapters 3, 9, 18, 27, 33, 34, 40, 41, 55, 56, 61, 79, 81.

11. Chapters 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 20, 21, 27, 30, 32, 61, 64, 73, 81.

Two things are identified: laziness¹² and debt.¹³

What are the supreme marks of biblical ethics in an economy? Honest weights and measures.¹⁴

Solomon compiled these proverbs at the height of Israel's power and wealth. After Solomon, things went downhill rapidly and never recovered. There is no better evidence in history of the causal relationship between visible success and temptation unto destruction, which was the theme of Deuteronomy 8. No sooner had Solomon attained visible success than he began violating the terms of kingship set forth in Deuteronomy 17. He began accumulating gold and horses (I Kings 10:26–28). He also accumulated foreign wives. The wives tempted him to worship their gods (I Kings 11). No sooner had Solomon died than his son and his counselors hiked taxes (I Kings 12). The result was Jeroboam's successful revolt and the separation of Israel into two rival kingdoms, northern (Israel) and southern (Judah).

This reminds us of a painful principle: "Nothing fails like success." Biblically speaking, this statement is incorrect. It should read: "Nothing fails like positive success indicators in a covenant-breaking society." Moses said it best:

And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:17–20).

Solomon was wise enough to compile the Book of Proverbs. He was not wise enough to implement them in his own life or in the life of the civil government that he commanded. His failure, as well as the failure of his son, testifies to the fundamental message of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation: *knowledge does not save. Grace saves.*

He knew this. He then forgot. He was God's servant. Servants have a common characteristic: "A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand he will not answer" (Prov. 29:19). God spoke

12. Chapters 21, 22, 37, 38, 50, 58, 68, 69, 74, 75.

13. Chapters 9, 10, 11, 60, 67, 69.

14. Chapters 29, 52, 56.

to him, but he did not listen (I Kings 11:10). So, God corrected him by telling him that his son would lose the kingdom which he would inherit from his father (I Kings 11:11–12).

The truth of the Book of Proverbs is found in its opening words.

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not (Prov. 1:5–10).¹⁵

This truth is consistent with the closing words of Ecclesiastes.

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:12–14).¹⁶

Solomon's example down through the ages testifies against the fundamental error of Greek philosophy, which proclaimed that to know what is good is to do what is good. Greek philosophy proclaimed a *two-step religion*: salvation by knowledge leading to salvation by works. The history of Western civilization has been marked by a struggle between Greek philosophy and biblical wisdom. Biblical wisdom points to the need for God's grace. If Solomon became the wisest fool in history, then the precepts of wisdom are not sufficient to save. This was the message of the prophet Habakkuk: "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). This is why the proverbs, for all their specific wisdom, point to the New Covenant.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8–10).

15. Chapter 3.

16. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 45.

AUTONOMY AND STAGNATION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES

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AUTONOMY AND STAGNATION
AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES

GARY NORTH

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a series of pithy observations on the human condition. No other book in the Bible, and surely no other book in ancient literature, matches it for the profoundness of its insights in so short a document.

The main theme of the book is the hopelessness of the philosophy of autonomy. The key word is *vanity*. The book conveys this theme by means of two connected sub-themes: inheritance¹ and death.²

A. A Major Problem

There is a major problem with this book. It offers profound insights that are inconsistent with each other. Some of them are screamingly, defiantly inconsistent. Let me provide three examples.

On the benefits of labor:

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? (Eccl. 1:2–3).

Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion (Eccl. 5:18).

On the superiority of wisdom:

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 2:15–17).

1. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 8, 13, 16, 21, 23, 25, 26, 30, 34, 45.

2. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 7, 21, 22, 23, 25, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 39, 44, 45.

Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city (Eccl. 7:19).

On the benefits of riches:

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease (Eccl. 6:1–2).

Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God (Eccl. 5:19).

Well, which is it? In each case, which is it? This trio of conflicting observations cannot all be correct. We must pick and choose. On what basis? By what standard?

Why must we pick and choose? Why not say this? “You have heard it said. . . . But I say unto you.” Jesus did. The Preacher didn’t.³

B. Goads and Goadings

As you read the Book of Ecclesiastes, keep these words in mind: “The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd” (Eccl. 12:11). Obscure, aren’t they? These words appear almost at the end of the book. Two verses later, the book concludes with these words:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁴

These words are not obscure. They are specific, explicit, and altogether humbling to the reader.

What are goads? There is only one other reference in the Bible to goads. “Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulter, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads” (I Sam. 13:21). This, too, is obscure. There is a reference to an ox goad in Judges, but the Hebrew word is different. “And after him was Shamgar

3. “Preacher” is an English identification of the Hebrew word, Qoheleth. It has no literal translation.

4. Chapter 45.

the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel (Jud. 3:31). The article on “goad” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1915) says this:

The goad used by the Syrian farmer is usually a straight branch of oak or other strong wood from which the bark has been stripped, and which has at one end a pointed spike and at the other a flat chisel-shaped iron. The pointed end is to prod the oxen while plowing. The flattened iron at the other end is to scrape off the earth which clogs the plowshare. The ancient goad was probably similar to this instrument. It could do villainous work in the hands of an experienced fighter (Judges 3:31).

So, we are not really sure what the goad of Ecclesiastes was. We do know how the word was used. It was a metaphor. It was a metaphor based on a device that may have been used as a cattle prod and also as a tool to scrape dirt off a plow in order to make the plow more efficient. If this was the goad that the Preacher had in mind, then it was tool for getting things moving forward.

C. Rival Covenantal Outlooks

The Preacher presents a series of observations and conclusions in this book. His arguments are brief and graphic. But exactly what is he getting at with his book? This question is at the heart of the expositor's problem. This is his challenge.

I have come to a conclusion. *The Book of Ecclesiastes is directed against the philosophy of human autonomy.* Its observations regarding the futility of life—life's all-encompassing vanity—are inescapable conclusions of the logic of human autonomy.

The Preacher also offers counter-observations. These observations are consistent with man's complete subordination to the law of God: theonomy (Eccl. 12:13–14). There is nothing more for him to say, and so he does not say it. (This is a very good rule for authors in every era.)

The supreme task of an expositor of the Book of Ecclesiastes is to identify the category of each of the observations and conclusions. There are two categories. One category is *autonomy*: man's self-law. The other category is *theonomy*: the law of God. The first category proclaims man's independence from God. The second category proclaims man's dependence on God.

Each view is marked by a covenant. All outlooks are. The biblical

covenant establishes the framework for every covenant. This model is as follows: (1) sovereignty, (2) authority, (3) law, (4) judgment, and (5) progress.⁵ The biblical covenant proclaims the following.

Sovereignty. God alone is sovereign. He is the source of meaning in eternity and also in history.

Authority. The special revelation of God in history is authoritative. It represents God.

Law. God has revealed his law in the Bible.

Judgment. God imputes meaning to all things: what is worthwhile and what is not.

Progress. History is both linear and progressive. God grants inheritance to His people in history.

In contrast is the covenant of self-proclaimed autonomous man, as described by the Preacher.

Sovereignty. Death is sovereign. It consumes all things.

Authority. The mind of each man is authoritative for himself, but only for as long as he lives.

Law. All law is subject to flux.

Judgment. Men proclaim judgment, but death triumphs over life. Death imputes no meaning.

Cycles. History is cyclical. Progress is an illusion.

The Preacher highlights what he believes are the fundamental dividing lines between autonomy and theonomy. The main one is death as the final judge vs. God as the final judge. Death is impersonal. God is personal. Death does not impute meaning to the world. God does. Death does not distinguish performance in terms of ethical standards. God does.

Autonomous man does not accept the concept of an absolutely sovereign God who cannot be manipulated by man, only persuaded (Ex. 32:9–15). Such a God denies man's autonomy.

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010).

D. The Preacher's Methodology

The Preacher uses a combination of testimony and logic. He testifies to what he has seen. He has seen a great deal. He uses logic, not to develop the case for theonomy but rather to develop the case against autonomy. He uses a unique approach: following the logic of autonomy to its inescapable conclusions. He lets people see where a rival view of God and man leads: to despair.

Man is not sovereign, the Preacher reveals. Either death is sovereign or else the God of the Bible is sovereign. The Preacher argues throughout his presentation that these are the only two options: the sovereignty of death or the sovereignty of God. In his final words, he announces his conclusion: God is sovereign, not man and not death.

The crucial dividing point between the Preacher's two sets of observations is this: *imputation*.⁶ The Preacher's use of imputation involves three steps: the assessment of life's meaning, the public declaration of this assessment, and the imposition of visible historical sanctions in terms of this assessment. Who wins? Who loses?

The Preacher never openly says that imputation is the central philosophical issue he is raising. He never says the following:

There are only two possible sources of meaning: God and death. God and death are interpreted in radically different ways by the philosophy of autonomy and the philosophy of theonomy. Autonomy cannot escape the sovereignty of impersonal death. Theonomy proclaims the sovereignty of a personal God. The dividing line between autonomy and theonomy is the answer to this question: "Which factor is sovereign in history: God or death?"

The Preacher's discussion of imputation centers on this distinctly economic issue: *inheritance*. Inheritance is the supreme economic issue in the Book of Ecclesiastes, because the inescapable factor dividing autonomy from theonomy is death. The Preacher explores the implications of death for every person's life. He presents inconsistent conclusions, because he speaks as a one-man debate team.

The Preacher's methodology is to present the case against autonomous man by offering brief summaries of what he has personally observed about the way the world works. These observations conflict with each other. He recognizes that all facts are interpreted facts. Facts are neither autonomous nor self-evident. Van Til called these hypo-

6. Chapters 2, 3, 4.

thetically autonomous facts “brute facts.” He denied that brute facts can exist.

Scripture teaches that every fact in the universe exists and operates by virtue of the plan of God. There are no brute facts for God. As to his own being, fact and interpretation are co-extensive. There are no hidden unexplored possibilities in God. And as to the universe, God’s interpretation logically precedes the denotation and the connotation of all facts of which it consists.⁷

Believer and non-believer have opposite philosophies of fact and opposite philosophies of law. They also have, behind both of these, opposite views of man. Corresponding to the idea of brute fact and impersonal law is the idea of the autonomous man. Corresponding to the idea of God-controlled fact and law is the idea of God-controlled man. The idea of creation out of nothing is not found either in Greek or in modern philosophy.⁸

Because all facts are interpreted facts, the Preacher presents fundamental aspects of the world as autonomous man sees them. Then he presents these same aspects of life as a covenant-keeper sees them. They do not see the world in the same way.

Conclusion

The book of Ecclesiastes confuses Christians. They do not understand that the bulk of this book is devoted to refuting foolishness in the name of foolishness. It is an attempt to draw out the consequences of foolishness from the presuppositions of foolishness. The author presents his case against autonomous man. He does so in the name of God, but this is not clear until the final chapter of the book. There, he affirms theonomy: the law (*nomos*) of God (*theos*).

The book has two fundamental themes: (1) autonomy vs. theonomy; (2) the sovereignty of death vs. the sovereignty of God.

7. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1978), p. 64.

8. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), p. 6.

1

CYCLICAL HISTORY VS. PROGRESS

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again (Eccl. 1:2–7).

A. The Ancient World

The ancient world in every culture except Israel's affirmed cyclical history.¹ Men saw the cycles of nature, and they adopted cycles as the basis for understanding man's history and future.² In this passage, the Preacher speaks in the name of autonomous man.

The Preacher asks a question that thoughtful men throughout history have asked: "Of what profit is a man's labor?" As with other thoughtful men in history, he looks to the future as a way of verifying the worthiness of his labors. He says that one generation passes away, and another generation comes. The earth abides forever (v. 4). The sun rises and sets. The wind goes toward the south; then it goes toward the north. It whirls around continually and returns again to its circuits (v. 6). Rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full (v. 7).

1. Stanley Jaki, *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), ch. 6.

2. The great cycle was astrology's Great Year: the 26,000-year cycle called the precession of the equinoxes. The zodiac slowly changes in relation to the sky. This comes from the inclined axis of the earth. The poles change their position. New stars become the north star. The ancients were well aware of this. See Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time* (New York: Gambit, 1969).

There are patterns in life, but these patterns do not seem to establish relevance. All things are full of labor, he says, but the eye is not satisfied with seeing, and the ear is not filled with hearing. The thing that has been is the thing which shall be, and that which is done is that which will be done. "There is no new thing under the sun" (v. 9).

This is a famous passage. It indicates that life is futile. Life comes and goes without progress. Things change, yet they do not change. In the famous phrase of the French, the more things change, the more they stay the same. There is no satisfaction. There is no conclusion to men's labors. There is no meaning to men's labors. There is no memory of former things, and neither will there be memory of things that are to come (v. 11).

This is the worldview known as cyclical history. There appears to be progress, but there is no progress. Everything that takes place today is essentially the same as everything that took place yesterday, and is not fundamentally different from everything that will take place tomorrow.

This outlook destroys the concept of progress. Without the concept of progress, men are tempted to despair about the meaning of their own existence. Thoughtful men worry that even their thoughtfulness is irrelevant. This worry is the essence of almost all of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The effect of the concept of cyclical history, when widely accepted in a civilization, is to undermine science, technology, economic growth, and progress in general.³ If the future is the same as the past, and the past cannot be distinguished from the present, then anything we do in the present is irrelevant. The present does not develop anything from the past, and it does not leave a legacy to the future. Man finds himself in a universe governed by meaninglessness. Whatever appears to be progress is an illusion.

B. The Preacher's Legacy

This is why the Preacher asks the question regarding the profit of his labor. If he cannot supervise how his legacy will be used, and if his legacy will be used in much the same way as any legacy is ever used, meaning that is squandered, then what is the use of laboring hard for a lifetime in order to accumulate sufficient goods to constitute a legacy? One generation passes away, and another generation comes. The earth

3. Jaki, *Science and Creation*.

endures forever, but generations come and go. This means that legacies come and go.

Labor is hard work. It must be endured by most people, but this was not the case with the Preacher. He was in a position not to work. Thus, his labors were a liability. They did not gain him anything of long-term value. Nothing he could do would have any effect on the long term. Things come and go. But if things must be labored for and sacrificed for in order to come, then of what use is the labor? Why bother to sacrifice? It is all vanity.

“Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.” This is a famous phrase from the book of Ecclesiastes. Everywhere the Preacher looks, he sees vanity. Success is an illusion. People are proud about what they own or what they have accomplished. Yet of what good is any of it? Things come and go. Everything that comes eventually goes. The earth abides forever, but the works of men do not. This is the worldview of most of the Book of Ecclesiastes. The Preacher examines numerous philosophies of life, and he finds them all to be vanity. They lead nowhere.

His conclusion is pessimistic. He has seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, they are all vanity and vexation of spirit (v. 14). *This is a counsel of despair.* He continues in his despair. He says that whatever is crooked cannot be made straight, and whatever is lacking cannot be numbered (v. 15). Nothing can be changed. But if nothing can be changed, then of what use is labor? It is vanity. It is futile. It is a gigantic waste of time.

He says that he gave his heart to know wisdom, and also to know madness and folly. It is all vexation of spirit (v. 17). If wisdom is equated with madness and folly, then wisdom is without value. Yet we know from the Book of Proverbs that wisdom is most valuable. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7). The author of Ecclesiastes was in all likelihood the author of Proverbs.⁴ Why are we told to get wisdom if wisdom is not fundamentally different from madness and folly? This makes no sense.

This is the point of the Book of Ecclesiastes. The philosophies of life which the Preacher summarizes are madness and folly. They are all vanity.

What matters, he concludes in the final chapter, is to obey God’s law. This is the correct conclusion. But men, especially intelligent men

4. “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel” (Prov. 1:1). “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Eccl. 1:1).

who think about the meaning of life, do not like this conclusion. They prefer their own economy. They want to make their own laws. They do not wish to subordinate themselves to the cosmic Lawgiver. So, they indulge in vanity. They seek meaning in a world that cannot provide meaning. They seek meaning as autonomous men in an autonomous universe. Neither they nor the universe are autonomous. Their search ends in vanity.

He says that he communed with his own heart. He says that he had inherited a great estate. He has gotten more wisdom than those who had been before him in Jerusalem. His heart had great experience with wisdom and knowledge (v. 16). He gave his heart to know wisdom and also to know madness and folly. He concludes that “in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (v. 18). Grief and wisdom are equated; so are sorrow and knowledge. Things which are widely believed to be good lead to things that are widely acknowledged to be bad.

It takes concentration and effort and leisure to develop wisdom, yet wisdom produces much grief. Why should any rational person continue the hard work of seeking and obtaining wisdom, when success in attaining wisdom leads to grief? Philosophers have been asking themselves this question for a long time. They have not come up with any agreed-upon answers.

C. Economic Progress

From an economic standpoint, the philosophy of time that is articulated in this passage undermines economic progress. Economic progress requires capital. Capital is formed by combining land and labor over time.⁵ All three must be paid for: rent, wages, and interest. Why should people sacrifice land and labor over time if all that their efforts ever produce is vanity? Whenever people believe that this cause-and-effect system is universal—that hard work produces nothing of value—they cease to work hard. They eat, drink, and are merry rather than forfeit present value on behalf of future value.⁶ Why forfeit the pleasures of the present for the sake of vanity in the future? If pleasure is vanity, and hard work is vanity, let us pursue pleasure. Pleasure is fun. Pleasure is now. Get pleasure. Pleasure is the principal thing.

5. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 7:4–5.

6. Chapter 31.

Throughout the Bible, but especially in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, we find a completely different view of history. Moses told the generation of the conquest that God blesses covenant-keeping and curses covenant-breaking. He told them that if they obeyed the laws of God, God would prosper them. There is no hint in either passage that poverty is a benefit.

Men legitimately strive in order to amass property. They are not to do this as if property were of any value in and of itself. Nothing is autonomous except God. Only He has value in Himself. Men are to amass property for the sake of God. Their administration of His assets is a moral and legal responsibility. So, *the view of history that the Preacher presents in the Book of Ecclesiastes is utterly pagan*. It is in opposition to the biblical worldview. The biblical worldview affirms the legitimacy of progress. It therefore assumes the legitimacy of economic growth.

There is a big difference between wealth and poverty. There is also a big difference between wisdom and folly. This difference increases over time. Covenant-keepers are supposed to extend the kingdom of God in history. Covenant-breakers are supposed to surrender their kingdom. The kingdom of God is not vanity. It must not be equated with the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of man, which is the same kingdom.

If men were to accept the philosophy of life that is presented in this initial chapter, there would be no sustained economic progress. If there is no progress from the past into the present or from the present into the future, then all is meaningless. The author of the book does not accept this philosophy of life, as he shows in the final chapter. But he argues this philosophy in a straightforward way in this book. He shows that its conclusion is unpalatable: everything is vanity in its own way.

Conclusion

Because the book of Ecclesiastes is a sophisticated rejection of the philosophy governing the first chapter, covenant-keepers have had a view of time very different from the cyclical view presented here. The linear and progressive view of time that is taught by both Judaism and Christianity has stood as a challenge against the entire ancient world and its view of cyclical time.

The centrality of Christianity's view of the future on Christian so-

cial thought⁷ is rarely mentioned in Christian circles, but it is sometimes perceived by humanists. They understand that the view of time presented in the Bible, which is not presented in this chapter, is a powerful incentive for self-sacrifice in the present on behalf of the future. It is a call to thrift. It is a call to future-orientation at the expense of present-orientation.

7. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

2

IMPUTATION AND VALUE

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun (Eccl. 2:11).

A. Compared to What?

In Ecclesiastes 1, the Preacher dismisses life as being filled with vanity. Everything that a person does is vanity. He offers a counsel of despair. He says that one thing follows another, but there is no progress, no meaning, and much vexation of spirit. He concludes the lesson by saying that he had given his heart to know wisdom, but in much wisdom there is much grief. He who increases his knowledge increases his sorrow (vv. 17–18).

In Ecclesiastes 2, he reports on his journey down a different track. He has pursued laughter and pleasure (vv. 1–2). But this also is vanity. He equates laughter and madness. He has pursued wine as well as wisdom (v. 3). He has pursued folly in order to see what is good for mankind (vv. 3, 12). In other words, he has explored the full range of human emotion and human experience, in order to make sense of it. His conclusion: it makes no sense.

By assessing what he has experienced, he renders judgment. He draws a conclusion. He has compared his experience with a standard. He does not tell us what this standard is. *This is the universal problem for self-proclaimed autonomous man. He has access to no self-validating, self-revealing standard.* How can anyone assess anything without a fixed standard? There is a story of a man who has just been told that Einstein's theory of relativity teaches that space is curved. He retorts: "Compared to what?" This is the Preacher's problem. He concludes that everything is vanity. Compared to what?

B. The Futility of Accumulation

As part of his pursuit of experience, he built great works. He built houses. He planted vineyards (v. 4). He planted gardens and orchards (v. 5). He planted trees that bore many kinds of fruit. In other words, he invested for the future. He spent wealth on the creation of long-term capital goods. He sacrificed in the present in order to benefit in the future.

He also accumulated servants and maidens. He had a large enough household of servants so that children were born in his house. He had great possessions of cattle. He lived in the capital city of Jerusalem (v. 7), which was the most expensive real estate in the nation. This was where the center of population was, because it was where the temple was.

He accumulated silver and gold. He accumulated goods associated with kings. He brought in male and female singers. He experienced the delights of mankind, which included music (v. 8). He describes his condition: "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me" (v. 9). He appeared to have the best of life. "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor" (v. 10).

He then looked at all that he had accumulated, and he concluded, once again, that it was all vanity and vexation of spirit. Conclusion: there is no profit under the sun (v. 11).

He continued to pursue wisdom, madness, and folly (v. 12). He despaired of the present because there is no progress in life. Everything that follows is simply a repetition of everything that has preceded (v. 12). This is his theme of cyclical history.¹ On the one hand, he concludes that wisdom is better than folly, in the same way as light is better than darkness (v. 13). The wise man can see, but the fool walks in darkness. On the other hand, one event happens to both the wise man and the fool (v. 14). *Death swallows up all of a person's legacy*. The Preacher will die, as surely as a fool dies. "For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool" (v. 16). Then why is he any wiser than the fool? No good reason. Conclusion: it is all vanity. "Therefore I hated life; because the

1. Chapter 1.

work that has wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit” (v. 17).

Conclusion

The Preacher explored the main avenues of autonomous human performance and enjoyment. Everything he tried on this basis was vanity. It meant nothing. He acted in terms of various theories of autonomous human achievement and meaning, and he found them all lacking. They are all swallowed up by death and uncertainty.

This is humanism. When men claim autonomy, they thereby abandon the foundations of meaning and value. Death is life’s common denominator. It is impersonal. It undermines all meaning. *Without imputation by God, there is no meaningful imputation by man.*

This has the methodology of modern economics ever since the 1870s. It teaches that all economic value is imputed subjectively by individuals. But mortals cannot impute authoritatively and finally. *Man’s imputation is vetoed by death.* It is also undermined by uncertainty about the future and therefore about the present.

3

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DEATH

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 2:15–17).

A. In Defense of Autonomy

The Preacher speaks here on behalf of the philosophy of autonomy. His observations reflect the autonomous man's supreme stumbling block: the sovereignty of death. For autonomous man, death is the great equalizer. Death swallows all men: good and evil, wise and fool, rich and poor. Nothing is remembered about any of them. *Death undermines men's confidence.* The Preacher lays out the case against the philosophy of autonomy by articulating the concerns of someone who does not believe in the sovereignty of the God of the Bible.

A person capable of thinking carefully about the central issues of life has greater perception than a person who drifts through life. The former thinks of himself as wise. He is wise enough to perceive that wisdom in a world governed by death has no advantage over foolishness. *Death does not distinguish between wisdom and foolishness. Both are grist for its cosmic mill.* "Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity." "And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

B. Life and Death

Life is the source of hope. Death overcomes this hope. Life does not overcome death. The Preacher insists that “one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever” (Eccl. 1:4). Surely, this is an affirmation of life. It may seem so on first glance, but it is not. Every generation passes away. It dies off.¹ *The only way for life to overcome death is through inheritance.* The inheritance of each generation from the preceding one aids it in overcoming the effects of sin in history, thereby thwarting the effects of death. Each generation can leave a predictably positive legacy to the next generation. But the Preacher denies that there is any legitimate hope in this intergenerational inheritance. How? By raising the issue of uncertainty.

Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil (Eccl. 2:18–21).²

If there is no legitimate hope in inheritance, then there is no legitimate hope in progress. If there is no hope in progress, then history remains undifferentiated. Good and bad, wisdom and foolishness, wealth and poverty can and do offset each other. Death, being impersonal, does not care, one way or the other. Death does not differentiate. Inheritance is not guaranteed.

C. Imputation

For autonomous man, death does not impute—assess and declare—anything to history. It just swallows up history. Death does not favor one belief over another, or one behavior over another. It imposes the same negative sanction on all living creatures: the end.

The Preacher sees this, and he despairs. “Therefore I went about to

1. Chapter 1.

2. Chapter 4.

cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun” (Eccl. 2:20). He loses hope. He does so representatively on behalf of autonomous man. He declares his confidence that death swallows all living creatures. It does so indiscriminately. There is no meaning to death. Therefore, there is no meaning to life, which death overcomes, species by species. The sovereignty of death is greater than the sovereignty of life.

D. Laying Down the Law

Faith in the sovereignty of death stands in sharp contrast to faith in the sovereignty of God. The Book of Ecclesiastes presents both positions. This is why it is difficult for expositors to deal with this book.

The Preacher makes his case against autonomy in terms of the most fundamental fact in the philosophy of autonomy: death. The philosophy of autonomy declares its commitment to mankind, but mankind is composed of dying men. The Preacher reminds his readers of the sovereignty of death. He does not want his readers to avoid this most fundamental doctrine of autonomy. Autonomy declares that, because no God has laid down the law, man gets to. This means, paraphrasing C. S. Lewis, that some men lay down the law for others.³ Here is a great incentive for ambitious men to obtain positions of authority. They want to lay down the law to others, not have the law laid down to them. Their religion is the power religion.⁴

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Touchstone, [1944] 1996), pp. 68–70.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

Conclusion

Death is sovereign in the philosophy of autonomy. There is no eternal God who lays down the law and imposes sanctions. Lacking a cosmic personal sovereign who lays down the law to the cosmos, autonomous man attempts to lay down the law to nature. But man is part of nature. Every living creature dies. Death swallows up all legal claims. Man's legal claim to the right to lay down the law to nature, including other men, is based exclusively on power. *Autonomy leads to the power religion.* But death swallows up every man. Autonomous man is ultimately powerless against death. He cannot legitimately declare, as Paul declared, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory" (I Cor. 15:55).⁵

5. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

4

UNCERTAIN INHERITANCE

Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil (Eccl. 2:18–21).

A. Laboring in Vain

In retrospect, he says, he hates all of his labor. Why? Because he must leave it to the person who will inherit it. There is no way for him to know whether the person who will inherit the works of his labor will be a wise man or a fool. In either case, he will rule over all of the Preacher's labor (v. 19).

The Preacher understands the meaning of labor. A person labors to buy goods, and these goods are then inherited by someone else. This is the same, economically speaking, as inheriting the person's labor. Labor is manifested in its fruits. It is also manifested in capital equipment. We say that labor is embodied in this equipment. This is a metaphor, not a measurable phenomenon. It is not a metaphysical process.¹

The Preacher has an implicit argument. The value he places on his

1. Karl Marx spoke of capital as being congealed labor time. "As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labour-time." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867) (New York: Modern Library edition, a reprint of the 1906 edition, published by Charles H. Kerr), p. 46. He really did believe that labor time's role in establishing value is somehow measurable. He built his system on this fallacy. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnmrro>)

past labor is dependent on the value of uses to which his capital will be put in the future. He believes that if a fool inherits his capital, he has wasted his time. He has accumulated wealth for a fool. The fool may value this inheritance, but he will use it foolishly. In this sense, it would have been better had the Preacher not devoted labor to accumulating his vast stores of capital. This inheritance can be squandered by his heir. There is no way of knowing in advance whether or not the heir will be competent.

This passage points to the inescapable connection between past, present, and future. He assesses the value of his past labor, but in doing so, he must make an assessment of the uses to which the output of his labor will be put in the future. This establishes a fundamental principle of economic imputation: *the retroactive value of the past is dependent upon the expected value of the future*. If a fool inherits his wealth, the value of his present goods is an illusion. It is nothing but vanity. He has wasted his time.

He imputes value to his present capital on the basis of his assessment of its future value in the hands of a fool. He therefore concludes that all is vanity. This presumes that a fool will inherit his wealth. But a wise person may inherit his wealth. The Preacher does not know who will inherit his wealth. But, because he cannot be sure that the outcome will be positive, he imputes no value to his present goods. He also retroactively imputes zero value to his past labor. He calls it all vanity. Nothing has any value, because he cannot be sure that the person who inherits his wealth will be competent.

The Preacher is legitimately concerned about the use to which his capital will be put. But the fact that he does not know for sure what use his capital will be put leads to a false conclusion: all is vanity. On the basis of his inability to impute future value to his present goods, he imputes no value at all to his future goods, and retroactively dismisses the value of his past labor. Because he is not omniscient regarding the future, he concludes that all is vanity.

This is a counsel of despair. No one can know the future exhaustively. No one can be sure that the person who inherits his legacy will put it to productive use. For a covenant-keeper, the fact that the future is uncertain is not the same as saying that the future is vanity. Covenant-keepers lay up treasure in the present in order that their heirs will continue to put it to good use. They trust in God's promises of inheritance by covenant-keepers. This inheritance is the foundation of the expansion of the kingdom (civilization) of God in history.

B. No Autonomy

Autonomous man's error is to assume that his lack of omniscience is sufficient to dismiss all value and meaning. The Preacher is arguing on the assumption that an individual is sovereign in imputing value to the present and the past. Because he cannot accurately predict the future use of his capital, he imputes no value to the future, the present, or the past. He calls it all vanity. This is the statement of a self-professed autonomous man. But no man is autonomous. God is autonomous, but man is not. God imputes value in a sovereign way, but man does not. *The fact that man is not God is not a legitimate reason to conclude that all is vanity.* Some things are vain, but other things are not. God imputes value and meaning, so covenant-keepers, who are made in God's image, are also supposed to impute value and meaning. Indeed, there is no way for any rational person to escape this responsibility, for which he will be judged. Men are to use God's standards to do this. They are not to act as autonomous beings. They are to regard themselves as subordinate evaluators who are working on God's behalf as God's stewards.

The Preacher is arguing in terms of the logic of self-professed autonomous man. He is showing that the assertion of autonomy is futile. Because no man is omniscient, every assertion of autonomy leads to a conclusion: all is vanity. Because man cannot impute final value, he supposes that no one can. If no one can, then there is no final value. *If there is no final value, then there is no present value.* All is vanity.

Here is the economic application of this logic. *The value of capital goods in the present is dependent on expectations of the value of capital's output in the future.* This is the logic of modern economics, beginning with the marginalist revolution of the early 1870s, when economists began abandoning the labor theory of value as well as all cost-of-production theories of value. Value is imputed subjectively, economists concluded. Capital's value today is dependent on expected consumer demand.

The Preacher speaks of the wise use of an inheritance. The economist does not speak of wise use. He speaks of profitable use. But both analyses depend on *present imputation of expected future value*. If the value of capital goods today is dependent upon the wise uses to which these goods will be put in the distant future, this creates *an endless chain of meaninglessness*. Because we cannot perfectly foresee the future use of our capital, and because those who inherit will also not be

able to see into the future, value and meaning disappear. Future value is like the mythological elephant that supports the world. It stands on a giant turtle. What does the turtle stand on? Another turtle. It is turtles all the way down. *There is no system of imputation that autonomous man can legitimately establish as authoritative.*

Expectations regarding the future always shape the present. Uncertainty regarding the future reduces the value of assets in the present. If the future is uncertain, then the present value of everything is equally uncertain. If the present is uncertain, the Preacher says, it is vanity.

The implication of this passage is that humanism has no way of confidently declaring that something is either good or bad, valuable or worthless, or anything in between. If the correct assessment of the present is dependent on an autonomous and infallible prediction of the future, then *there can be no correct assessment of value in the present.* The Preacher calls all such imputation vanity. He has already argued that death swallows up the fool and the wise man. Death is the common denominator. The only way for an individual to assess accurately the present value of anything is to know what value it will have in the future, after his own death. But death swallows up all imputations. Every person who imputes will die. Every person who imputes value lacks knowledge of the future. So, the Preacher says, all is vanity.

Imputation is a process in time. It is dependent on expectations about the future. *Christian economics rests on the theory of an omniscient Creator who sees the future perfectly. This God also imputes value authoritatively in terms of His standards.* He makes no mistakes. He perfectly assesses the meaning and value of everything in terms of His own permanent ethical standards. *God knows the future, so He can accurately impute value in the present.* He can also impute value retroactively, which He will do at the final judgment. Imputation by God is past, present, and future. God is omniscient.

In coming to the conclusion that all is vanity, the Preacher speaks as a consistent humanist must speak. He speaks in the name of an uncertain future. He concludes that uncertainty undermines the concept of value. Everything in the future is like a kaleidoscope's image: constantly shifting. Result: vanity.

C. Subordinate Imputation

Christian economics affirms the absolute sovereignty of God, the

absolute accuracy of God's imputation of economic value, and the perfection of the final judgment. Christian economics also teaches the men are made in the image of God. Therefore, they possess the ability to think God's thoughts after Him. They can impute economic value in history because God imputes economic value in history. Also, they can impute economic value because they have access to permanent standards of judgment. They have access to the Bible and Bible-revealed law. They can make accurate assessments as creatures because they are made in the image of God. God holds them responsible for making assessments in the present. They must do so on the basis of what they know is coming, which is the final judgment. They possess the law and the prophets. They possess the revelation of Jesus Christ. They possess access to the Bible. So, they are capable of making imperfect but relevant judgments regarding the past, present, and future.

Not until the final section of the Book of Ecclesiastes does the Preacher issue his conclusion. He states it plainly. Men are to obey God's law. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13–14).² If covenant-keepers do this, they will make *accurate though imperfect economic judgments*. They will perceive that all is not vanity. Having perceived this, they can work confidently in the present for the sake of an uncertain future. It is uncertain to them, but it is not uncertain to God. God imputes value to their work in the present, because He imputes value to the work of their heirs.

D. Inheritance and Historical Linearity

In the name of autonomous man, the Preacher has affirmed the death of every generation. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (Eccl. 1:4). This statement appears in a passage that affirms the cyclical pattern of natural events.

The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come,

2. Chapter 45.

thither they return again (Eccl. 1:5–7).

This outlook favors the ancient world's assumption that history is cyclical.³ Without inheritance, the replacement generations do not change the pattern of life.

The Old Covenant rejects such a view of history. It affirms that a personal God created the universe. God also brings judgments in history. History is linear. The proof of this linearity is the pattern of inheritance.

What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant (Psalm 25:12–14).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Psalm 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Psalm 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Psalm 37:22).⁴

E. Death and Inheritance

Whether the heir is a wise man or a fool makes no difference to death. Death is sovereign.

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 2:15–17).⁵

No assured ethical principle governs the inheritance, once the autonomous owner dies. No pattern of predictable sanctions exists to direct the inheritance to covenant-breakers.

3. Chapter 1.

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

5. Chapter 3.

All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? (Eccl. 7:15–17).⁶

Because death is impersonal, there is no meaning. Because death swallows up all forms of life, life is meaningless. Because inheritance is random in its effects, there is no pattern of victory or growth.

This is a counsel of despair. The Preacher recognizes this. He says that he has despaired over this knowledge. But he says this as a partisan of the philosophy of autonomy. He is making his case against autonomy by presenting the world as interpreted by autonomous man.

Conclusion

The uncertainty of inheritance undermines men's confidence in their posthumous futures. This makes men less effective entrepreneurs and accumulators of capital. Consumption is preferable to capital accumulation. "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (Eccl. 8:15).⁷

The value of capital in the present is dependent in part on its value in the future. But that is true of the future, too. There is no sure economic value in the present if there is no final imputation of economic value in the future. There is no final judgment, the Preacher says. There is only cyclical nature, cyclical history, and individual death. This is vanity.

6. Chapter 27.

7. Chapter 31.

5

TRANSITION TO BIBLICAL COVENANTALISM

For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God (Eccl. 2:22–24).

When presented as a unit, these three verses create confusion. Without warning, the Preacher moves from a counsel of despair to a counsel of confidence. Why?

The Preacher asserts that the burdens of labor are great, and the results of our labor are problematical. He asks a rhetorical question: “For what hath man of all his labour, and of the taxation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun” (v. 22)? So far in the book of Ecclesiastes, we have read that all is vanity. If all is vanity, then the output of labor is vanity. Then what are the blessings of labor, in and of themselves? There are none. “For all his days are sorrows, and his travails grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity” (v. 23).

A. Adam’s Curse

The curse on Adam involved the curse of his labor. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19).¹ The negative sanction brought pain to mankind. Labor was not originally a painful activity. It was a responsible activity, but it was not painful. The pain of labor is God’s curse for the sin of

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

Adam. It is not surprising that the Preacher has discovered that labor is filled with grief. That was the whole idea of the curse. If labor were constantly joyful, then the curse would be removed. The curse has not been removed, so labor has negative features.

God has brought judgment in history, and He will bring final judgment at the end of history. The pain of labor points to the pain of final judgment. But this pain will not be experienced by covenant-keepers. The pain of labor can be regarded as an advantage, for it points to deliverance in the future. This deliverance is based on progressive sanctification in history.

The Preacher is presenting the arguments of a covenant-breaking man. He finds that everything is vanity. It is vanity because covenant-breaking man asserts his autonomy from the God of the Bible, the law of the Bible, and the sanctions of this law. Autonomous man wants to believe that he does not have to consider the covenant. This is a fatal mistake. The Preacher is exploring covenant-breaking man's hoped-for avenues of escape from the sanctions of God. One of the negative sanctions of God is the curse on man's labor. The Preacher insists that his own labor has been futile. It has produced nothing but vanity. Because it has produced nothing but vanity, it can be said that labor itself is vanity. It is a waste of time. It is more than a waste of time; it is negative in and of itself.

B. A Call to Enjoyment

Next, he says that there is nothing better for a man to do in life than to eat and drink. A man should make his soul enjoy his labor. At this point, the expositor faces a challenge. Is this conclusion an extension of the logic of autonomous man, or is it a transition to biblical covenantalism?

Autonomous man is present-oriented. Death is sovereign.² Incompetents inherit.³ This exhortation to enjoy what you possess could be a logical conclusion of autonomy. Thrift is a curse. Thrift builds up capital for another person to inherit. So does excessive work. The past is vanity. The future is vanity. The present is enjoyable. Why not enjoy whatever you have accumulated so far? The present is assured. The future is uncertain. A bird in hand is worth two under the bush.

But there is a phrase that indicates that he has made a transition:

2. Chapter 3.

3. Chapter 4.

“he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour.” Why should autonomous man enjoy his labor? Isn’t labor a burden? Isn’t it vanity? This is what he has just said. “For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night.”

Then, without warning, he praises labor. He says that his insight is based on this fact: a man’s wealth and labor are from the hand of God (v. 24). This appears to be an affirmation of the God of the Bible. This interpretation is confirmed by what he says in verse 26. “For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.”⁴ “In verse 24, he has begun his move from pessimism to optimism. *He has moved from autonomy to theonomy.* He will soon praise ethics as the basis of prosperity (v. 26).

Conclusion

In these verses, we see a shift of argumentation from covenant-breaking to covenant-keeping. The Preacher switches arguments because he switches his perspective. What he has said previously applies to the covenant-breaker. It does not apply to the covenant-keeper. Labor is vanity and vexation of spirit for covenant-breakers. It should not be for covenant-keepers.

4. Chapter 6.

6

PREDICTABLE ETHICAL SANCTIONS

For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 2:26).

A. Vanity and Vexation

Moses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 announced that God brings positive corporate sanctions to covenant-keeping societies. God also imposes negative corporate sanctions on covenant-breaking societies. This passage announces that God does the same with individuals. The Preacher then announces that this is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Why should he regard this system of historical sanctions as vanity and vexation of spirit? Throughout the book, he refers to the sovereignty of death as dominant.¹ Death swallows all of a man's output in life. Through the wealth left behind at a man's death, an heir will inherit. The accumulator of capital does not have any control over what his legacy will accomplish. The morality and skills of the heirs are indeterminate.²

He says that the sinner is given travail, "to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God." This is what Solomon announced: "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).³ Why should this be vanity and produce vexation of spirit?

For a covenant-keeper, this system of historical causation can and

1. Chapters 3, 7, 30, 33, 35.

2. Chapters 2, 4, 5, 7, 13, 19, 21.

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

should serve as the basis of an explicitly covenantal view of history. It offers legitimate hope for compound growth in every area of life. It means that the kingdom of God will steadily and inevitably dislodge the kingdoms of men in history. The wealth of the just is not laid up for the sinner. The covenant affirms that positive sanctions compound over time. The Preacher affirms this in this passage.

Then why does he dismiss this system of causation as vanity and vexation of spirit? Because he is speaking about the covenant-breaker's assessment of cause and effect. The covenant-breaker is vexed, not the covenant-keeper.

B. A Search and Expose Mission

The Preacher is conducting a search-and-expose mission against the philosophy of autonomous man. For a defender of autonomous man to realize that God has structured His system of individual sanctions in history to take away wisdom and joy from covenant-deniers, leaving them the unpleasant task of heaping up capital that will be inherited by covenant-keepers, is a form of vexation. The righteous get both wisdom and joy; the unrighteous get a life of meaningless hard labor.

The Preacher complains repeatedly about the hard work that careful thinking involves. The end of wisdom is a dead end. It is futile.

When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it (Eccl. 8:16–17).⁴

Yet righteous men escape this burden. They get wisdom plus joy. This fact is vexatious for a covenant-breaker. It means that *the universe is a personally rigged system*. The battles of life do not take place on a level playing field. They take place on a playing field that is tilted to give advantages to covenant-keepers. The teams do not change sides on the field in the second half.

4. Chapter 32.

Conclusion

There is no clearer statement in the Bible than this verse with respect to the ethical basis of God's covenantal structure of individual causation. Covenant-keepers get blessings and capital. Covenant-breakers get the hard labor, risk, and the uncertainty involved in accumulating wealth, only to see it transferred to covenant-keepers. The Preacher acknowledges that this system was operational in his day. That it did exist vexes him. It vexes him in his self-designated capacity as a debater on the side of autonomous man.

If this system of ethical causation were annulled by the New Testament, it would no longer vex the Preacher, were he still alive, insofar as he spoke in the name of autonomous man. Autonomous man hopes that economic causation is not rigged in favor of covenant-keepers. So do millions of Christians.

Christians who fear the increase in personal responsibility that always accompanies greater wealth and influence (Luke 12:47–48)⁵ may find the Preacher's observations compelling: vanity and vexation. This is their theological problem. They do not understand that the reason why God gives wealth and influence to covenant-keeping individuals and societies is so that they can exercise greater responsibility. Responsibility-evading Christians do not acknowledge the dominion covenant.⁶

Unless this system of ethics-based economic causation has been explicitly reversed by the New Covenant, it still operates in New Testament times. I began studying this question in detail in 1973. It is now 2012. I have written 31 volumes indicating that this system of ethical causation still operates in economic affairs. It is the critics' responsibility to provide counter-evidence. So far, they have refused to respond to my evidence. I have waited a long time. I gather that I will have to wait even longer.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, Christian Economics, 2012), ch. 4.

7

GODLY TIME AND BEASTLY TIME

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven (Eccl. 3:1).

A. Time for Everything

The third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes is probably its most famous chapter.¹ Chapter three describes familiar aspects of life. It covers the full range of human experience.

There is a poetic aspect to the chapter that makes it memorable.

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace (vv. 2–8).

This list covers life-and-death issues and also minor issues. The reigning principle is this: *each event has its own time*. Each event is associated with comprehensive purposes under heaven. The timing of each event is not random. “He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end” (Eccl. 3:11).

This passage is not only poetic; it is profound. It is profound because it rests on a dual presupposition: the omniscience of God and

1. There was a popular song in the 1960s, *Turn, Turn, Turn*, which was based on this chapter. (<http://bit.ly/TurnByrds>). Millions of young people heard it, never knowing its origin.

the providence of God. It begins with the concept of purpose. If there is a time for every purpose under heaven, the implication is that *purpose is simultaneously divine and temporal*. The events of life are related to the events of eternity. This is why he says that the events cannot be changed. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" (Eccl. 3:14). These events are permanent. Furthermore, God judges them. The Preacher speaks of the judgment of God in relation to purpose for every work. "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work" (v. 17).

B. Rival Views in One Passage

There are elements of this passage that indicate that he is still arguing on the basis of cyclical history.² He says that what happens today has happened before. "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past" (v. 15). This was the common view of history in the ancient pagan world. It was only after the triumph of Christianity that the concept of linear time spread beyond the geographical limits of Palestine.

What does the author mean by saying that what is today has already been? If this is to be reconciled with the concept of linear history, which was a uniquely biblical concept in his day, then it must refer to *the decree of God*. It refers back in time to God's plan for the ages. If there is a time for every purpose under heaven, this purpose is God's purpose. If it is God's purpose, then it is part of a decree which unfolds in time. This decree rests on the concept of the sovereignty of God. Events are not random.

Cyclical history is not the primary meaning of this passage. The idea that the past cannot be changed is clearly based on the concept of linear history. *If history is cyclical, then the past is irrelevant*. It has happened before, and it will happen again. There is nothing unique about any event in history if history is cyclical. In contrast, if history is linear, then one thing leads to another. *If there is coherence in history, and if there is meaning in history, then each event plays a role*. This is the message conveyed by chapter three. There is a time for every purpose under heaven. Each period of time has relevance in relationship to all the other periods of time.

2. Chapter 1.

If history is linear, and if God judges every aspect of history, then history has meaning in terms of the imputation of meaning by God. God judges every aspect of history (v. 17). If God judges historical events, then He judges in terms of standards. This imputation of meaning to every event in history secures the relevance of every act in every man's life.

The concept of linear history is basic to Western civilization. It underlies another concept, which has its origin in Deuteronomy 28:1–14: long-term economic growth. The Book of Ecclesiastes does not speak of long-term economic growth, but this passage does indicate that history is linear.

C. The Role of Death

The chapter contains inconsistent principles. The author keeps referring back to death. He had already done this in chapter 3. *The divide between biological life and death is the fundamental divide in the thinking of non-Christians.* For Christianity, there is also a divide between life and death, but it takes place in history. There is physical death, but there is also eternal death. The division between eternal life and eternal death is grounded in history. *The divide between covenantal life and death is the fundamental divide in Christianity.* This divide takes place in history. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). Physical death delivers an individual into eternity. Eternity is marked by life and death. The Bible calls eternal death the second death. “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14). Entry into eternal life takes place in history. It is confessional. It is judicial. It has to do with the special grace of God.

None of this was revealed under the Old Covenant. The division between physical life and physical death was seen as the supreme division. There are only a few passages in the Old Testament relating to life beyond the grave.³ The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes focuses on the division between physical life and death. He does so from the perspective of the covenant-breaker. He equates the life of the beast with the life of a man, because both of them die physically. “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one

3. Job 14:14–15; Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:1–2, 13; Hosea 13:14.

breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccl. 3:19–20). He is emphatic: "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts" (v. 18). He also equates the life of the wise man and the fool, because both of them die physically (Eccl. 2:14).⁴

But he also says that God judges the righteous and the wicked (Eccl. 3:17). *Because God judges the righteous and the wicked, then the differentiating criterion is ethics. It is not death.* Autonomous death is impersonal and universal. If a man is no different from a beast, then ethics has nothing to do with the individual's judicial status or his role in history. But if man is judged by God, in every act in his life, then ethics serves as the relevant criterion to distinguish man from beast, a fool from a wise man, the righteous from the wicked. Chapter 3 presents both viewpoints. This is why the chapter is difficult to interpret.

He says that a beast and a man go to the same place (v. 20). This is an application of one aspect of God's curse on Adam. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).⁵ If Adam had not been made in God's image, then the end of Adam and the end of every beast would be the same: dust. But are they the same? The author indicates that they are not. He raises a question. He asks if anyone knows the spirit of man that goes upward and the spirit of the beast that goes downward into the earth (v. 21). So, there is a difference between a beast and a man. There is more to a man than there is to a beast. The author does not speak of God's judgment of the beasts. He does speak of God's judgment of men (v. 17).

D. What Is Good for Man

He says that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for they are his portion (v. 22). Why does he conclude this? He asks this rhetorical question: Who shall bring him to see what shall be after him (v. 22)? The implied answer: no one. So, he has

4. Chapter 3.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

to be content with whatever he does in his life, because he does not know how his legacy will turn out. He does not know how his legacy will be used by his heirs. This theme is found in the second chapter. The Preacher is concerned about legacy. He is concerned about what the legacy is after the death of the testator.

The recurring theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes is vanity, i.e., hopelessness. The Preacher repeatedly insists that time is characterized by vanity. Then how can covenant-keepers make sense of time? If time is cyclical, then it has no meaning. There is no cosmic judge. Everything repeats itself. Therefore, everything is equally irrelevant. On the other hand, if God judges men's actions in history, then these events are relevant in terms of the purposes of God. Individuals have purposes, but God is the judge. God evaluates the righteousness or wickedness of a particular act. *Everything that takes place takes place in terms of the decree of God*. There is a time for every purpose under heaven.

From an economic point of view, the concept of linear time makes possible the linked concepts of progress and economic growth. If time is cyclical, there is no permanent progress or economic growth. Everything will repeat itself. Everything that takes place today is as relevant or as irrelevant as everything that took in a previous identical yesterday.

Conclusion

In Ecclesiastes, we are presented with rival views of time until the last few verses. The Preacher goes back and forth between the pagan view of time and the biblical view, between meaninglessness and providence. The internal debate is clearest in chapter 3. If history is cyclical, it is without purpose.⁶ If history is purposeful, it is not cyclical. It is linear: beginning, development, culmination, followed by God's judgment. Then it is transcended by glorification. This is the message of the Bible and its imitations.

6. The highly popular comedy film, *Groundhog Day* (1993), is a good presentation of this theme. A man who is trapped in a recurring day unsuccessfully seeks suicide. The movie cheats, because he does recall the previous days. He learns. Eventually, he repents.

8

THE JOY OF CONSUMING

I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God (Eccl. 3:10–13).

A. The Fruits of Our Labor

The Preacher continues his exposition of the purposefulness of historical events.¹ God is in charge. He has made everything beautiful in His time. He is sovereign over time. This is not autonomous man speaking.

The King James' translators made a mess of the next two verses. "I know that there is no good in them." No good in what? This makes no sense. The phrase "in them" is not in the Hebrew. The American Standard Version, published in 1901, is much clearer. It substitutes "for them" for "in them."

He hath made everything beautiful in its time: also he hath set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and to do good so long as they live (vv. 11–12).

Quite similar is the recent English Standard Version.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing

1. Chapter 7.

better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live (vv. 11–12).

The Preacher makes three points. First, men have a sense of eternity in their hearts. This testimony confronts them all their lives. Second, men have limited understanding of past events. The details of God's work in history are closed to them. History is extremely complex. Third, men are to be content with their limited knowledge. They are to spend their lives doing good. This ethical framework undergirds this entire passage. It is clearly covenantal in its perspective.

A person should enjoy the fruits of his labor. "And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God." This emphasis on consumption is found in several passages in his book.² This is guilt-free consumption. This is not the lifestyle of an ascetic, nor is it the way of a monastic order.

B. Legitimate Consumption

The good products of a man's labor are God's gift to him. He possesses them lawfully. Therefore, he can consume them legitimately. There is no suggestion that consumption is some form of ethical deviation. A man has expended what lawfully belonged to him: his labor. From this expenditure has come a reward. The Preacher calls it a gift from God.

This is not the first time he uses the language of consumption. "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (Eccl. 2:24). The context of this affirmation was one of despair and futility. The fruit of a man's labor can be inherited by another. This seems to be a great waste.

For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity (Eccl. 2:21–23).³

The future is uncertain. The present is certain. Therefore, he con-

2. Chapters 5, 8, 20.

3. Chapter 5.

cluded, a wise man should enjoy whatever belongs to him for as long as he can. *There is no hope in inheritance.* This is a present-oriented outlook. It makes sense for autonomous man.

How much sense does it make for a covenant-keeper? Here, he concludes the same as he did before, but he does so on a different basis. It has to do with the providence of God. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" (Eccl. 3:14). God is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of men. When labor produces fruits, they may lawfully be consumed by the owner. But this legal right of consumption is not the result of despair over the future. On the contrary, the Preacher affirms that God is in control over all things. Why should a godly man despair? *Consumption is an affirmation of the future.* "There is more where that came from!"

C. The Decree of God

Then the Preacher adds something that has baffled commentators. "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past" (v. 15). The Hebrew word translated "requireth" is obscure. Commentators and translators cannot agree about its meaning. Some have translated it as "driven away" (ESV). Others have translated it as "passed away" (ASV). Another: "does everything over and over again" (CEV).⁴ The mid-nineteenth-century commentator, E. W. Hengstenberg, invoked a Psalm to explain it. "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:16). He explained the passage as a matter of God's decree. The decree is past; the event is recent. He wrote that "our whole existence from beginning to end is pre-ordained by God. . . . What was (or became) is already, existed already in the divine counsels before it was openly manifested, and hence we learn, that God's decrees decide everything. . . ."⁵ The phrase, "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been," refers to the decree of God. The events of today and tomorrow have their origin in the distant past, before the foundation of the

4. Contemporary English Version.

5. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1860), p. 111.

world. Paul wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:3–6).

This approach to the text makes more sense than numerous commentators' convoluted attempts to explain this passage without adopting the theory of cyclical history that the Preacher presents in the book's opening words. One commentator proclaims, "It is *God* who keeps the cycles of nature and history going; the believer's hope is as immutable as the pessimist's despair."⁶ But if history is cyclical, where is the hope of progress? That is the heart of the pessimist's despair.

D. Judgment and Progress

The Preacher then ties what he has said about a time for every purpose under heaven to the doctrine of God's judgment. *This is the doctrine of sanctions*. Recall that the Preacher was speaking of history, not eternity. The chapter is about the events of history. "And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work" (Eccl. 3:16–17). God will judge evil judges in His good time. He will restore justice.

The idea here is that history is not random, nor is it cyclical. It is under the sovereignty of God, whose decree governs all things. Unjust judges will be brought under God's judgment. The reign of evildoers will end. Later, he declares: "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they" (Eccl. 5:8).⁷

The hope of a *future reign of justice* is not thwarted by the doctrine of cyclical history. It is strengthened by the doctrine of the providence

6. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p. 82.

7. Chapter 17.

of God. What appears to be a reaffirmation of cyclical history—"That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been"—is in fact its refutation. History moves forward according to God's decree. His promise to Adam and Eve is inescapable. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

Conclusion

The Preacher recommends joyful consumption, not because this is man's only refuge in a hostile, meaningless world in which the future is uncertain, but because God is in complete control. *We can consume today because we have hope in tomorrow.* As the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed, "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him" (Lam. 3:22–24).

Covenant man is a producer and a consumer. He consumes in confidence because the fruits of his labor are assured, not just in his own lifetime but in years to come. Given God's decree before the foundation of the world, "That which is to be hath already been."

9

OPPRESSION AND THE OPPRESSED

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter (Eccl. 4:1).

A. A Sign of Corruption

One of the marks of a corrupt society is this: there is extensive oppression of the weak. The weak are generally categorized by three groups: widows, orphans, and strangers. Throughout the Old Covenant, there are warnings to oppressors. The Mosaic law was hostile to oppressors. The Preacher is hostile to oppression.

This passage says explicitly that the oppressor uses power to oppress people. What is the meaning of “power”? The Hebrew word means what it does in English: *strength*. It also can refer to ability. “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).¹ The Preacher says that the oppressors have power, but the victims have no comforter. This indicates that the Preacher is concerned about the misuse of power. The oppressors had power on their side; the oppressed had no one. This indicates that both the power and the comforter were personal. *He was not speaking of impersonal forces. He was speaking of judicial authorities.* He was speaking of people standing ready to intervene on one side or the other.

B. No Comforter?

The Preacher identifies the problem: *the misuse of power by oppressors*. These people know that the civil government will not inter-

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

vene to defend the victims. The victims have no comforter. They are helpless. This is why the oppressors are in a position to oppress them.

The Preacher is ignoring what the Bible teaches about God as the Comforter. The psalmist cried out: "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man" (Psalm 43:1). The Psalms contain many passages about God as Deliverer. The phrase "right hand," referring to God's power, appears repeatedly.

I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech. Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them (Psalm 17:6–7).

We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions. Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright (Psalm 20:5–8).

So, the Preacher is speaking as a covenant-breaker. He is not testifying faithfully to the character of God. He is saying that the oppressed appear to be without a comforter.

What he saw with his eyes is not in fact the case. The vanity that he sees in this oppression is an illusion. There is a source of justice in history. "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psalm 89:13–14).

C. Biblical Law

The Preacher does not suggest a reform in this passage, but he does in the final verses of the book. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13–14).²

There is a standard of justice: biblical law. The question then is this: What does biblical law teach about oppression and deliverance?

2. Chapter 45.

First, it tells the oppressed to call on God's name. "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD" (Psalm 104:35).

Second, it provides standards of justice: biblical statutes. Those seeking deliverance from injustice need to have a standard of justice that is reliable and permanent. This standard exists.

Biblical economic law rests on the concept of God as sovereign Owner. Its fundamental economic law of justice is this: "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15).³ Then there is the principle of restitution.

If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double (Ex. 22:1-4).⁴

The principle of the landmark must be obeyed. This is another defense against theft.

Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it (Deut. 19:14).⁵

Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set (Prov. 22:28).⁶

The Mosaic law protected society against oppressors. When it was not enforced by government, beginning with self-government, oppressors began to emerge.

This view of oppression is rarely discussed by the social critics who want to substitute other law-orders for biblical law.

D. The Social Gospel

Defenders of the Social Gospel and other proponents of increased

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 5.

4. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 44.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 70.

state power in the name of Christian evangelicalism see the words “oppress” and “oppression,” and they conclude that the text is talking about rich people who oppress poor people by hiring them at low wages or by paying them too little money for the goods they sell. The focus of their outrage is the free market. They are hostile to the principle of voluntary exchange. They are hostile to the concept of a social order which is based on voluntary exchange, contracts, and markets for making bids to buy and sell. They believe that the free-market social order is characterized by oppression. They never explain the free-market as the product of the private property system which the Mosaic law required, and which Jesus and the authors of the New Testament epistles did not oppose and did not criticize. Their hostility to the free market is total. They give no sign whatsoever of understanding even the most fundamental of free-market principles, such as supply and demand. They are actively opposed to that other fundamental principle of the free market: *high bid wins*. They want other winners and other winning principles. They do not discuss the details of these alternatives, such as allocation by political power or allocation by standing in line. Then there is that other familiar distribution system, allocation by sexual favors.

This hostility to the free-market social order colors everything that Social Gospel advocates write about the economy or what the Bible supposedly says about economics.⁷ This is to be expected. What I write is colored my understanding of the free-market social order, which is the result of the system of private property which was established by the Mosaic law. There is no escape from one’s presuppositions about the way the world works. The main question is not what the writers’ presuppositions are. The main question is what the Bible really says.

7. Joel McDurmon, *God Versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

Conclusion

“So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.” The Preacher is speaking as a covenant-breaker. He is criticizing the social order around him. If he was Solomon, as seems likely, he was in a position to deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressors. He could serve as a comforter. Why such despair?

He was commenting on the way of the world. This is the way the world operates in the eyes of decent autonomous men. There is no deliverance from oppression. All this is vanity. It is also incorrect.

10

ENVY UNDERMINES SUCCESS

Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 4:4).

A. Envious Neighbors

The Preacher speaks representatively as a covenant-breaker. He speaks as if there were no God who evaluates human actions, and who then brings judgment, both in history and eternity.

He says that men—literally *males*, the Hebrew word indicates—are envied by their neighbors. Those close to a man are his silent enemies. They resent him. Why? Because of the advantages he possesses: right works. The phrase is not talking about good works in the sense of charitable works. It means works that offer a person an advantage.

The man works hard, the text says. Tasks impose costs. The man does not operate on the assumption that he can get something for nothing. He sacrifices in the present for the sake of the future. This buys him no favor with his critics. They resent his success just as much as if he had inherited his wealth. It is his success that they resent. He is unable to justify his wealth to his critics.

The Preacher understands that envy is a common sin in every society that has not taken active steps to reduce it. I do not mean judicial steps. I mean social steps. Children must be taught from an early stage not to resent those who are more successful than they are. Much of the process we call socialization is a system of instruction to increase social cooperation by reducing people's indulgence in envy.

B. The Seeming Futility of Success

In a society in which envy is common, success is not worth the

effort it requires. The Preacher dismisses success as vanity. It elicits envy. Who needs success on these terms?

This assumes that success is generic, that no one distinguishes one success from another. Success of every kind elicits envy. Because most people seek to avoid envy, their quest for success is futile. Their success comes not only at the price of the travail required to reach it and maintain it. It comes at the price of envy.

But what if this assumption is incorrect? What if other people do distinguish one form of success from another? What if envy is selective? What if people do possess and honor standards of success that distinguish between vanity and productivity? In a society that resents all success, then the Preacher's point is well taken. To achieve success is vanity. It will not satisfy the achiever if he wishes to be respected or loved or honored. This is the society the Preacher perceives. It is a society that is not affected by biblical preaching.

Success is legitimate. It is the appropriate reward for covenant-keeping.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Josh. 1:8).

And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself (1 Kings 2:3).

The Preacher is not speaking on behalf of a society that is governed by the providence of God in terms of His law. It is governed by some other god or principle of judgment.

Conclusion

The Preacher disdains success. He does so in the name of a covenant-breaking society. He is hammering another nail into the coffin of covenant-breaking society. Success is not worth the required price, either on the front end—travail—or the back end: envy. He performs a cost-benefit analysis of success in a covenant-breaking society, and concludes that success is not worth the effort. *Autonomy leads to a view of the world that despairs of permanent progress.* Such an outlook is anti-

growth. Growth requires sacrifice in the present and a transfer of an ever-larger inheritance to successive generations. The cost of this sacrifice is too high for the uncertain benefits obtainable.

11

SLOTH AND STARVATION

The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh (Eccl. 4:5).

A. Folded Hands, Empty Stomach

This is a graphic metaphor. The image of a man eating his own flesh is memorable. But what does the metaphor mean?

The key to understanding this metaphor is the image of folded hands. In the Book of Proverbs, the author repeats this proverb: “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man” (Prov. 6:10–11; 24:33–34).¹ Folded hands are an image of sloth. They are not folded in prayer.

The Preacher has provided a proverb. This proverb is placed in between two observations about the futility of the pursuit of wealth.

Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit (v. 4).

Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit (v. 6).

Yet this proverb rejects sloth as a way of life. *Sloth is a way of death.* It is a form of consumption: self-consumption. It purchases leisure with poverty. That is too high a price to pay, he says.

This is a covenant-keeper talking. A covenant-breaker is talking in verse 4. The Preacher in his role as a covenant-breaker dismisses all great productivity as vanity. It gets a man envied in a covenant-break-

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 75.

ing society.² The price is too high.

If a man folds his hands together, he cannot work to redeem society: to buy it back subordinately because Christ bought it back definitively (Matt. 28:18–20).³ He cannot get rich. He cannot make any significant impact on society. He is a consumer of wealth, not a producer of wealth. He is a fool.

B. Hostility to Poverty

The Bible is hostile to poverty as a way of life. It is a condition that people are supposed to avoid.

Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain (Prov. 30:8–9).⁴

They should pray for deliverance, not parity, just as Mary prayed.

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away (Luke 1:51–53).⁵

The Preacher dismisses great wealth as a source of anxiety (Eccl. 2:26).⁶ Here, he dismisses sloth as source of poverty. He recommends avoiding both.

He blames poverty on sloth. Sloth is a fool's game. It is destructive. It is like feeding on your own limb. It is suicidal.

He could have blamed poverty on oppression. He had already dealt with oppression (4:1).⁷ He could have referred back to oppression, but he did not. Instead, he came up with a metaphor that has survived the test of time. Three millennia later, people still imagine a man eating

2. Chapter 10.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48. Cf. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/klgggc>)

4. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

6. Chapter 6.

7. Chapter 5.

part of his body.

Conclusion

This metaphor targets sloth. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity, but sloth is foolish vanity, which is worse than street-smart vanity. Better is one handful with quiet than two hands full with vexation of spirit. Better two hands full with vexation of spirit (v. 6)⁸ than two hands folded and therefore empty. Something is better than nothing.

8. Chapter 12.

12

PEACE AND QUIET

Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 4:6).

A. A New Experience

The Preacher was a man with great wealth. He could afford to savor all sides of life in his quest for meaning, including leisure and high consumption. Either he inherited his wealth or else he earned it. He had not experienced quietness.

He sees the advantages of quietness. It is preferable to travail and vexation of spirit. He has experienced travail and vexation of spirit. He sees vanity everywhere. This vexes his spirit. Here, he compares less with more. He recognizes that travail and vexation of spirit often accompany more. Better to have less.

He is not comparing something with nothing. He is comparing more with less. He speaks of a handful in one situation and two hands full in another. There is a two-to-one ratio. Under such circumstances, better one handful than two.

He is admitting that sometimes it is possible to avoid travail and vexation of spirit. He does not compare one handful, accompanied by half the travail and vexation of spirit, with two hands full and twice the travail and vexation of spirit. The negatives associated with two hands full are not present with one handful. The implication is that a person can attain a life free of the negatives.

He is not saying that there is a fixed relationship between fewer possessions and the absence of vexations. He is saying only that when the opportunity exists to choose a lifestyle with fewer goods and no vexation, a wise man takes it. A case in point was Lot. He chose the more desirable region to live in when he departed from Abraham (Gen. 13:10–11). In Sodom, he was vexed (II Peter 2:7–8). He was sur-

rounded by evil men. His wealth did not relieve his vexation. God delivered him by taking him away from Sodom. He lived in the hills with only his two scheming daughters to comfort him. But this was better than remaining in Sodom, even in its pre-judgment days.

B. The Spirit of Enterprise

The Preacher recommends quietness. This is not the road to riches. To accumulate great wealth peacefully, a person must be entrepreneurial. He must be willing to bear uncertainty.¹ He can lose substantial portions of his wealth. Few entrepreneurs live lives of quietness, especially when they are accumulating their wealth.

This raises a crucial question. How can the economy grow if there are few entrepreneurs? How will technology be improved? If having a little with quietness is better than having a lot with anxiety, then the God-fearing entrepreneur must either give up innovating and take a salary or else succeed in being *a calm entrepreneur*. This skill is so rare as to be unheard of. Yet this is what the covenant-keeping entrepreneur must strive to become. If he lives a life of constant turmoil in his quest for profit, he has fallen into a trap.

He must trust in God. The Psalms are filled with advice in this regard, most famously, the twenty-third Psalm. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). If death does not scare him, why should he worry about a 23% decline in earnings in the third quarter?

C. The Apostles

What of the early apostles? They did not experience quietness. They also did not possess great wealth. Their work was kingdom-building. Yet Paul had a form of quietness: contentment.

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to

1. From the point of view of economic theory, he does not take risks. Risks can be dealt with by insurance because they are part of a class of events governed by the law of large numbers. The entrepreneur deals with events that are not part of a class. These events cannot be insured. The classic study on this is Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:11–13).²

For Paul, quietness was a matter of inner peace, not a low-risk environment.

With increased wealth comes increased responsibility. Jesus said,

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).³

If added responsibility creates anxiety in someone's life, then the solution is to avoid additional wealth. This also applies to power, fame, and prestige.

Conclusion

To reduce the disquietude of wealth, either reduce your wealth or else reduce your concern about wealth. There is no third option. Both strategies require faith. The first requires faith that you will not fall into poverty. The second requires the same. It also requires faith that becoming less rich is not a setback worth worrying about.

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

13

MINDLESS ACCUMULATION

There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail (Eccl. 4:8).

A. Labor on Whose Behalf?

This is a lone wolf talking. He has no close relatives. In terms of the Mosaic law, his kinsman-redeemer was distant. Who would inherit his property? No one close to him. Nevertheless, he works hard. He accumulates wealth. In the words of the Preacher, his eye is never satisfied. He is a devoted practitioner of the religion of Mammon (Matt. 6:24–25). Mammon’s disciples work out their confession: “More for me in history.”¹

He does not sit quietly to examine his life. “Neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?” By “soul,” the Preacher does not mean eternal soul. He means life. But Jesus extended this to refer to his eternal soul.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

12:16–21).²

The Preacher recognizes the foolishness of the lone wolf. This is a rugged individualist. The Preacher does not say that he works alone. The man's isolated status is familistic. He has no close heirs. He slaves away for the benefit of near-strangers. He does so knowingly, unlike the residents of Canaan in the years before the invasion of the Israelites.

A man in Israel who had no heir had no name. The law governing the inheritance of a married man without a son required his nearby brother to father a child with the widow. Why? To maintain his name in Israel.

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel (Deut. 25:5–6).³

This law applied only to a brother who lived in close proximity. It did not apply to a distant brother.

The man described by the Preacher has no child and no brother. It is not said whether he has a wife. As far as his inheritance mattered—his name in Israel—this did not matter. There would be no brotherly marriage. If he died and his widow remarried, the land would go to her children. Her new husband's name would be established in Israel. His would be forgotten—judicially forgotten. This was a great curse in Mosaic Israel.

B. Rugged Individualism

There is an American tradition extolling the rugged individualist. Given the intensely cooperative history of the United States, this is a tradition without meaningful examples. There were trappers and explorers in early America, but they are extolled for their exploits of bravery and survival, not their legacy. The most famous of these rugged individualists, Daniel Boone, was in fact a land developer in the

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

late eighteenth century. He moved west, but only after he had established a community: Boonesborough, Kentucky. He left for Missouri in 1799 when he could not get his land claims settled.

Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting the United States for less than a year in the spring of 1831, penned these memorable words, widely read and widely accepted, which were published in 1840 and which have remained in print ever since.

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds—religious, moral, serious, futile, extensive, or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found establishments for education, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; and in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. If it be proposed to advance some truth, or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. Wherever, at the head of some new undertaking, you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association.⁴

The Preacher has little use for the rugged individualist. He has no use for any kind of individualism. Men are covenant creatures. They live in communities bound by covenants. They are bound to each other through family, tradition, exchange, and formal covenants.

The man who works exclusively for himself is an aberration. He has given his life to the pursuit of vanity. If there is one character in Anglo-American literature who embodies this lifestyle, it is Ebenezer Scrooge. His deliverance—his redemption—is achieved through holiday celebration of a Christless Christmas. His heir, through his own choice, is Tiny Tim. The rugged individualist dies when he sees the grave of Christmas future.

C. Methodological Individualism

The logic of the free market explains economic motivation as self-interest. The Preacher explains this as a matter of blindness. He is accumulating an inheritance for strangers. His legacy is under his control only for a few years. His ability to shape the use of that inheritance is

4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols., translated by Henry Reeve (Gutenberg Project, [1840]), II:II:V.

non-existent. This does not apply to him: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). He has no child.

This means that the methodological individualism of Adam Smith's economics is also a matter of blindness. Economic theory must be qualified by covenantal considerations, the most important being inheritance. Family inheritance, like family resource allocation, is not governed by the free market's supreme law of pricing: high bid wins.

The principle of methodological covenantalism governs Christian economics. The free market is more than a system based on private property and voluntary exchange. Covenant is superior to contract, both judicially and conceptually.

Conclusion

The Preacher identifies a blind man. He accumulates wealth, but for what purpose? His covenantal legal status is in conflict with his contractual economic status. He is building up wealth for strangers to inherit. He is a one-generation man. Such a person is blinded by vanity, according to the Preacher.

14

THE DIVISION OF LABOR

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Eccl. 4:9–12).

A. Trinitarian Economics

The origin of this recommendation is the Trinity. God is three persons. In relation to the creation, each has specific tasks. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit,

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26–27).

He said of Himself, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49b). The context was work.

But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work (John 5:17).

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me (John 5:30).

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but

as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (John 8:28–29).

B. Adam's Labor

With respect to point two of the biblical covenant, hierarchy,¹ mankind reflects what God is. God promised Himself that He would provide a partner for Adam. Adam needed help. God promised a helper fit (meet) for him. But first, Adam had to complete an assignment. He would learn about work. This work was definitional. He would name the animals. He would define them and their place in the world.

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him (Gen. 2:18–20).

Then God gave Eve to Adam. He immediately named her in terms of her origin. “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23).

Before sin, there was a harmony of interests. People were not at war with each other. They were supposed to cooperate. This would make their work more productive.² The original goal for mankind has not changed: exercising dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:27–28).³ This involves the extension of man's authority over nature. This is a cooperative venture.

C. Scattering and Dominion

God thwarted the sin of man at the Tower of Babel by scattering them. This reduced their power. Otherwise, they would have pursued

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 10.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

their goal of building a symbolic tower that would reach to heaven.

And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city (Gen. 11:6–8).

This weakened mankind politically and culturally, for it decreased the division of labor. The people were no longer one. Yet this geographical scattering also extended man's influence over nature. Mankind spread out across the face of the earth. Subsequently, international trade made possible the division of labor.⁴ There was a re-establishment of unity through diversity: diversity of talents, vision, and programs. The quest for profit brought limited cooperation. But one factor above all others maintained separation: *confession of faith*. Man had been of one tongue, both linguistically and theologically. He had worshipped man. "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4). They wanted to make a *name* for themselves: to *define* themselves and their place in the world. God put a stop to this. Their greatest fear became God's negative sanction against them: scattering.

D. Overcoming Individualism

Individualism is rugged. It is rugged because it is inefficient.

The division of labor benefits those who are less rugged. They can achieve together what they could not have achieved individually. The division of labor makes each of the participants more efficient. It also reduces risk for all participants. "But woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

The text indicates that more is better than fewer. "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." The larger the community of cooperation, the less there is to fear from invaders.

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour." They both benefit, which means their output is increased

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

more than two-fold.

The introductory chapters of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) is an application of this passage. Smith shows that a team of men of limited skills can cooperate to produce a simple pin. A solitary producer must be highly skilled to make a pin. He can produce few per day. A factory with the proper equipment can produce thousands of pins. Pins become common consumer goods because of mass production and price competition. This is made possible by the specialization involved in the division of labor. Each person concentrates on what he does best.

Conclusion

The division of labor has empowered the weak. It has made all participants more productive. This has increased per capita wealth. What one person cannot accomplish, two can do. It pays them both to do it.

This is not the central fact of Christian economics. Neither is scarcity. Ownership is. God's ownership is the starting point. Adam Smith made the division of labor the starting point. Modern economists make scarcity the starting point. Both of these starting points can be subsumed under the physical limits of nature. This makes them seem morally neutral starting points. They conceal the fundamental fact of Christian economics: *God owns everything*. This fact is anything but neutral.

By subsuming the division of labor under the doctrine of the Trinity, I have made my discussion of the division of labor highly unneutral. That is my task in every volume in this commentary: to make Christian economics unneutral. That which is theocentric is not neutral, and everything in creation is theocentric. Nothing is anthropocentric. Nothing is diabolocentric.

WISDOM AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor (Eccl. 4:13–14).

A. Hierarchy and Social Mobility

Here, the Preacher speaks as a covenant-keeper. He announces that someone is better than someone else. This means that there is a standard of performance. *Wisdom is the decisive differentiating factor between better and worse.* In contrast, autonomous man says that there is no difference between wisdom and foolishness, for death consumes everyone (Eccl. 2:15–17).¹

The biblical structure of society allows for two-way social mobility. Individuals can rise and fall. There is no security in any high position, and there is also no permanent servitude. Ezekiel warned the kings of Israel: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezek. 21:26–27). This was a messianic prophecy regarding the prophecy made by Jacob/Israel in his old age. “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10).

This prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. His mother had prophesied before His birth, “He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent

1. Chapter 3.

empty away" (Luke 1:51–53).²

Here, the Preacher speaks of the biblical basis of upward mobility: wisdom. The poor but wise child has better prospects than a king so unwise as to be beyond correction. The meaning of the Hebrew word for "child" is the same as in English. It does not specify age. It generally refers to a young child, but not always. The child in this passage is older: "For out of prison he cometh to reign." The role model here is Joseph, who was in Pharaoh's prison and rose to become second in command in Egypt. He was wise, but his wisdom did not keep him out of prison. On the contrary, it got him into prison.

The Hebrew is obscure. The King James reads: "He that is born in his kingdom becometh poor." The English Standard Version translates the verse differently: "For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor" (v. 14). This is the accepted translation in modern translations. It is not speaking of downward mobility.

For a prisoner to become king was possible in the ancient world only through a military victory or a domestic revolution. Even today, it is unlikely that an ex-convict will lead a nation apart from a military victory or a revolution. The normal career path to supreme authority does not include time behind bars. But the Preacher is making a point. So empowering is wisdom that a wise person has an enormous advantage. So great is this advantage that it can lead to a reversal of status on the scale of a prisoner's becoming king.

The Preacher is not warning unwise kings to become wise. Basic to a lack of wisdom is a refusal to hear counsel. He is warning the rest of us. Better to imitate a wise youth than remain stubbornly closed to advice. *Old age is not a substitute for wisdom.* We presume that wisdom is associated with age, but this text indicates that this rule of thumb is not universal. Wisdom is the key asset—not age, not power.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her (Prov. 3:13–15).³

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 9.

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding (Prov. 4:7).

For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it (Prov. 8:11).

Conclusion

If you want riches, cultivate wisdom. If you want power, cultivate wisdom. Wisdom is the royal road to wealth and power. While this passage does not define wisdom, it identifies its benefits. Wisdom is the basis of progress in the life of a covenant-keeper.

16

VOWS AND PROMISES

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay (Eccl. 5:4–5).

A. Vows as Debt

A vow is a promise made to God. The Preacher warns against taking a vow. A vow cannot lawfully be revised later. It locks in the vow-taker. Although conditions may change, the obligation does not change. The vow is like a burden that must be carried. It places the vow-taker in a position of servanthood.

By committing himself to the performance of some obligation, the vow-taker establishes a binding debt. *A vow is the most binding form of personal debt.* No other debt has comparable authority. A vow to God is binding. The Mosaic law had a detailed set of rules governing vows (Num. 30). It began with this: “If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth” (Num. 30:2).¹

Covenants are established by vows. A marriage is established by a vow before God. People are supposed to take marriage vows seriously. Unless one of the partners dies, either physically or covenantally by committing a biblically specified sin, the marriage vow remains binding.² The Preacher’s warning against taking a vow applies to marriage. Neither party can lawfully be compelled to take such a vow. This applies to arranged marriages. Either party can lawfully veto the decision

1. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

of the parents. The vow is established by public verbal profession.

Civil government is established by vows. These may be explicit or implicit. This is why there is no right of revolution for an individual acting outside of civil government. Only lower magistrates may lead a revolution, and only for violations by the higher government of the terms of the covenant.

A church covenant is binding. There are only three ways out of a church covenant: by death, letter of transfer, or excommunication. The vow is established by baptism.

B. To Break or Not to Break

A vow is not the same as a promise. It has greater authority. A vow is analogous to a covenant. A promise is analogous to a contract. A promise can lawfully be broken for the sake of covenantal authority.

Israel's most famous lawfully kept promise in the Old Covenant was its fulfilling of its promise to the Gibeonites that they could remain in the land. Although they tricked the Israelites, they had secured the promise. God had told Israel to exterminate all of the Canaanites, but they dared not obey. "But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them" (Josh 9:19).

The most famous lawful broken promise in Scripture is Solomon's.

And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign: howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the LORD. And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on. And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, (for he will not say thee nay,) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife. And Bath-sheba said, Well; I will speak for thee unto the king.

Bath-sheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand. Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; I pray thee, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay. And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother

to wife. And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah.

Then king Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life. Now therefore, as the LORD liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell upon him that he died (I Kings 2:13–25).

The best explanation for Adonijah's request has to do with inheritance. He thought that by taking as his wife the woman who had slept beside his aged father, he might enhance his position with the people. He had already revolted against David, establishing himself as king. It had taken the intervention of Bathsheba to reverse this. She went to David on his deathbed and asked who should succeed him. He said Solomon (I Kings 1).

Adonijah planned to deceive her. He tested her. He began with a false statement. "Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign." It was not his by inheritance. It was his by usurpation. All of Israel had not revolted against his usurpation. This did not mean that they were behind his revolt. Would she deny his assertions? If so, she would be unlikely to cooperate. This would cost him nothing. He would not be at risk. But she did not challenge him. He therefore proceeded with the rest of his strategy.

Adonijah was still after the throne. The legal issue here was lawful inheritance. This inheritance was covenantal: family and state. Adonijah's request was another move to capture the state. Solomon had him executed. He broke his promise to his naive mother. His promise had not been a vow before God, as a biblical vow must be.

C. Quid Pro Quo

The vow-taker must consider carefully the cost of performance. What is in this for him? What is the benefit? A vow may be part of an exchange. The vow-taker can promise to do something if he receives a specific benefit. If he promises God that he will do something specific, he must assume that the specific benefit received came from God. He

is obligated to perform as vowed. He owes the service to God. He therefore must regard the benefit received as coming from God.

This acknowledges God as sovereign over history. The vow-taker wants God to intervene in order to achieve his goal. The positive sanction received from God is evidence of the negative sanctions implied by God for non-performance. Neither the Preacher nor the Mosaic law specifies what these negative sanctions are. Presumably, they are double the positive sanctions. The Mosaic law specified double restitution for theft (Ex. 22:4).³ Refusing to perform the terms of a vow is a form of theft. It is value unpaid for value received.

Conclusion

The Preacher is wary of vows. They impose considerable risk for non-performance. It is easy to let the terms of obligation slide. It is better not to take the vow than to let it slide.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, Tools of Dominion (1990), ch. 43.

DELAYED SANCTIONS

If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they (Eccl. 5:8).

This is a covenant-keeper speaking. He understands that God intervenes in history to defend the oppressed. God is active in history. He rules the oppressors. There is hierarchy.¹

A. Civil Government

The oppression of the poor is here related to civil government. There is perversion of civil justice. This civil focus is consistent with the Mosaic law. As I have argued, *economic oppression in the Mosaic law was always an aspect of civil government*. The Mosaic law was not being enforced by the civil courts. There is no biblical definition of economic oppression in terms of percentages or other numerical indicators.² When the civil law is perverted in order to benefit one party or group over another, this is oppression, as defined by the Mosaic law and identified by the prophets.

The person who sees injustice should not be astounded. Why should he be astounded in the first place? Isn't injustice common? The Preacher is concerned with the temptation to become cynical about God's sovereign control over the universe. He is heading off the refrain of the atheist: "If God is just, He is not omnipotent. If He is omnipotent, he is not just." The Preacher says that God is in control. He uses a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

rhetorically powerful phrase to identify God's authority: *higher than the highest*. This refers to the highest court in the land, the final court of appeal.

B. Final Court of Appeal

God is not under the judicial hierarchy. He is above it. He is not unobservant. He is not the distant hypothetical god who was proclaimed by a handful of eighteenth-century deists. He did not wind up the cosmos like a clock eons ago and then retreat into the shadows to see how things would work out.

God observes the affairs of men. He is opposed to oppression. His Bible-revealed law warns against oppression of the weak.

Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless (Ex. 22:22–24).³

And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terrible-ness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey (Deut. 26:7–9).

The humanist proclaims a universe closed to God. If he believes in any god, it is not the God of the Bible, who executes judgment, in time and eternity, in terms of Bible-revealed law. He sees the events of history as independent of any divinely revealed legal code. In such a universe, there can be no meaningful appeal to anything outside of human institutions, let alone outside of history.

This assertion of autonomy transfers the authority to make changes to men who possess power. Civil power is the most important power men can possess, most humanists believe. He who opposes such a view of social causation must look to a higher power to overturn the decisions of corrupt judges, who see no authority above them.

Sometimes the critics of prevailing power look to revolutionary violence as deliverance. Other critics look to free market institutions and

3. *Idem*.

power to overturn the decisions of civil governments. Others look to foreign armies. But all of these are subject to the same sort of corruption.

The person who sees oppression all around him cannot legitimately hope for predictable deliverance unless there is a court of appeal with the power to impose negative sanctions on evildoers. The Preacher says that there is such a court of appeal. God's court is always in session. The fact that He has not yet imposed negative sanctions is not a legitimate reason for believing that His court does not exist.

C. Eternal Standards

There is a standard of justice: biblical law. The Preacher is aware that his readers and listeners can and do perceive the discrepancy between this standard and the injustice around them.

The author was Solomon. Under him, there was little injustice. He had an international reputation for providing justice. So, he wrote these words for all societies at all times. This indicates that God's law is universal. All men understand it. Paul wrote: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;" (Rom. 2:14–15).⁴ God's law crosses borders. It extends through time. People reading his words millennia later can still understand injustice when they see it. His affirmation of the existence of a superior court is still as reliable today as it was then.

Men can have legitimate confidence in God's law. They can have legitimate confidence in God's court. They can have legitimate confidence in God's justice. The Preacher is not providing motivation for praying to a local god in his own day. He is affirming the existence of an eternal God who imposes sanctions in terms of a permanent legal code that has authority across borders. It is not that God was above all human courts only in the Preacher's day. It is that God is above all human courts throughout the ages.

Conclusion

This passage is an affirmation of God's law, which includes God's

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

system of sanctions. The fact that, at any point in time, rival human courts are imposing sanctions in terms of a rival system of law does not mean that God's law and God's sanctions are not operative. The timing of the trial is in God's hands, not man's hands.

18

PURPOSEFUL NATURE

Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field (Eccl. 5:9).

A. The Earth as a Servant

The Preacher affirms that the earth is a servant. It serves the king. It serves mankind. *If the earth serves man, it means that man is superior to the earth.* His desires are met by the productivity of nature. There is a hierarchy: man > nature.

The Preacher is not making an observation. He is saying that there is justice in this hierarchy. It is not that man exploits nature. He is saying that the land serves man. The Preacher is not an animist. He is not saying that Mother Earth dutifully serves mankind. He is saying that the output of nature legitimately belongs to the human race.

The profit of the earth is for all. This implies purpose. If something is for another, that other is superior. The earth is subordinate to mankind. This is not merely a matter of power. It is a matter of design. In Genesis 1, we read: “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so ” (vv. 14–15). The heavens were made for man. The very cosmos was purposeful, made to serve a being not yet created. No passage in the Bible is more antithetical to Darwinism.¹

B. Ownership

“The profit of the earth is for all.” This verse could be used by socialists to defend the concept of state ownership. But this does not get

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 2.

to the heart of the problem. There can be various civil governments, each insisting on monopolistic control over a particular geographical territory. This does not solve the problem of resource allocation. The three-part question must be answered by every legal system: *What, how, and for whom?*

The fact that the output of the entire earth is for the benefit of everyone raises issues of production and distribution. It also raises the question of time. The earth survives longer than individuals do. So, future generations have a legal claim on the present generation. Who is to decide what constitutes that claim and what system of allocation honors it? Who is to enforce it? By what standard? By what sanctions?

Private ownership establishes a representative who acts on behalf of future claimants. Civil magistrates also claim this authority in many cases. But a civil magistrate holds his office briefly. His time frame of personal costs and personal benefits is limited. In contrast, a man who owns property recognizes the claims of future heirs. He plans for this. He wants to leave an inheritance. Furthermore, an investor wants his investment to remain profitable. If others perceive that the value of a company's assets is falling, they will sell their shares of ownership, thereby driving the market price of shares even lower. *The future counts heavily in assessing present value.* This is why the owner in a private property system has a greater stake in acting as the agent of future consumers and future owners.

Someone must be in charge of any particular asset. Someone must take responsibility for its use. If it is not under someone's judicial authority, there will be fierce competition for it if its value is significantly greater than the cost of obtaining it. Think of fishermen sailing in the oceans. No one can establish legal title to the fish. The result is open competition outside predictable civil law. The threat of war may impede fishermen. But any international legal code must be enforced through tradition unless there is a one-world civil government.

The text does not specify a system of ownership. The Mosaic law did. The Preacher operated under the Mosaic law. There is no suggestion that the civil government should assert its inherently monopolistic authority over all the land within its jurisdiction. He said only that the earth in general is for all mankind in general.

Conclusion

Nature is not impersonal. It is highly personal. It is not self-con-

scious. It is nevertheless purposeful. This is because it was created by a personal God to serve man, who is the image of God, both individually and corporately.

Ownership is personal. It is also hierarchical. Men serve God. Nature serves men. *The authority that men exercise over nature rests on the authority that God exercises over men.* This biblical hierarchy of authority is the basis of biblical ownership. There is no hint anywhere in the Bible that the civil government should exercise bureaucratic authority over nature on behalf of God.

19

INSATIABLE DISCONTENT

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind (Eccl. 5:10–16)?

This is a lengthy passage. It has one theme: the vanity of riches. *This is the most comprehensive critique of the pursuit of wealth found in the Old Testament.*

A. Insatiability

C. S. Lewis wrote that torture would be to eat food that makes you hungry. His point was that one of the joys of desire is that it can be fulfilled. If it could not be fulfilled, it would be a curse.

Addiction is marked by an insatiable desire to consume more. The individual is trapped by a lust to consume. This addiction can apply to different substances or practices, depending on the individual.

The Preacher identifies *the addiction to more*. This addiction is not discriminating. Silver is a sign of this addiction, but the addiction is to abundance in general.

Elsewhere, I have summarized the confession of faith of Mammonites: “More for me in history.” This religion attracts followers in every generation and across all geographical borders. Its followers are dis-

contented. Jesus identified this addiction as the most widespread alternative to faith in God.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they (Matt. 6:24–26)?¹

The Apostle Paul described the outlook of Mammonism's rival religion: Christianity.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (I Tim. 6:6–11).²

Paul was echoing the words of the Preacher.

B. The Economic Function of Discontent

One of the familiar teachings of economic science is this: "Men's desires are infinite. Resources are finite." If nothing else, time is limited. We are mortal. The disparity between wants and resources is the origin of scarcity. Scarcity is manifested in price. At zero price, there is greater demand than supply.

1. *Scarcity and Priorities*

Scarcity mandates priorities. What are we willing to pay for first? Second? Third? We cannot afford to purchase everything, but we can

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

2. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

afford to buy more when we become more productive. If I want more, and if I resort neither to stealing nor voting to enrich myself, then I must increase my productivity in order to purchase goods that I regard as lower on my scale of priorities, i.e., my scale of values.

Ludwig von Mises placed discontentment the center of his economic theory. In *Human Action*, his magnum opus, he wrote that man is distinguished from God by means of discontent.

Scholastic philosophers and theologians and likewise Theists and Deists of the Age of Reason conceived an absolute and perfect being, unchangeable, omnipotent, and omniscient, and yet planning and acting, aiming at ends and employing means for the attainment of these ends. But action can only be imputed to a discontented being, and repeated action only to a being who lacks the power to remove his uneasiness once and for all at one stroke. An acting being is discontented and therefore not almighty. If he were contented, he would not act, and if he were almighty, he would have long since radically removed his discontent.³

The Preacher presents discontentment as a sin. Why? Because it is inherently insatiable. This form of discontentment cannot be satisfied. It always wants more.

Economists of all persuasions see the summum bonum of an economy as economic growth. It is seen as the universal cure-all. A growing number of people are enabled to satisfy their desires because of economic growth.

2. The Theoretical Problem of Addiction

This assumes that the problem of addiction does not exist. If someone said that greater efficiency in the production of heroin or cocaine would be a benefit to individual addicts and society in general, because the price of the substance would fall, would you agree? I would not. The problem is not a lack of supply; rather, it is the short-sighted, present-oriented nature of demand. *Where addiction exists, the goal should be the reduction of demand, not an increase in supply.*

To identify an addiction, we must have standards of evaluation. These standards are moral. “Addiction is bad.” The modern economist denies that morality has anything to do with economic science. Economic science is said to be value-free. But if it is, then economists

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 69. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

should not recommend economic policies. They should not proclaim the benefits of either efficiency or economic growth. But they do. Economists draw conclusions that they say favor economic growth. This is inconsistent with the premise of moral neutrality.⁴

3. *The Pursuit of Riches*

The Bible acknowledges the legitimacy of economic growth, for it reduces poverty, which the Bible views as a curse to be overcome. But the Bible does not recommend the pursuit of riches. Solomon wrote of wealth and poverty, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).⁵

Vilfredo Pareto in 1897 published his discovery of the 20-80 distribution of capital in modern society. Twenty percent of the population owns 80% of the capital. This unequal distribution of capital has been found in all societies. There are no exceptions. To raise a nation’s masses out of poverty, society must therefore allow a minority of rich people to become very rich. A fifth of the population must become comparatively rich, and 4%⁶ of the population very rich. About 1% become super-rich. This is the inescapable cost of economic growth in every society.

4. *Accumulation as Addiction*

The Preacher identifies the problem: insatiability for personal wealth. It is vanity. It is vanity because it is autonomous. It does not put God at the center. Men seek to accumulate goods for themselves. Jesus said this is foolishness.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to be-

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5; Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix H.

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

6. That is, 20% of 20%.

stow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment (Luke 12:16–23).⁷

These words are among the Bible's most difficult ethical injunctions to implement. People who would not be tempted to violate any of the Ten Commandments have difficulty believing these words. If they did truly believe them, they would not worry about money. But they do.

There is nothing wrong with barns. Barns store food, and food benefits the poor. Barns make possible laying up food in the harvest for sale and distribution in the months just before the next harvest, when the supply of food is low. The ethical issue here is motivation. "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." His dream was to be contented. He never achieved his dream. Time ran out that night.

C. Increased Expenses

The Preacher indicates that increased wealth increases costs. "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?" *The rich man increases his level of responsibility.* He must surround himself with people to carry out his plans.

Rich men also attract hangers-on. These are people who want hand-outs. They want to attend the rich man's parties. They want to become part of his entourage. These people are difficult to escape or get rid of. They congregate where the rich man visits. This is one reason why very rich people live in houses that are remote from a highway. They have gates around their property. They employ screeners. But screeners must be paid for.

Related to hangers-on are visionaries who want the rich man to

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

fund their projects. They paint glowing pictures of all that can be accomplished. Rich men often listen to these dreamers. They fund their visions. Rarely do these visions succeed, which is true of all new ventures. There is a long line of replacement visionaries, each with a story to tell and a dream to be achieved.

D. Responsibility and Worry

“The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.” I suggest that the difference between these sleep patterns has to do with the level of personal responsibility. A laboring man does his job as assigned, goes home, has a meal, and sleeps. He has no further responsibility to his employer. His degree of responsibility is limited. In contrast, the owner of a company has many employers to keep contented: customers. They can change their minds at any time. They ask: “What have you done for me lately? And what do you intend to do for me next week? I intend to shop around.” He also has many employees to keep contented.

A rich man must stay ahead of the competition if he is to increase his wealth, or even preserve it. He must manage his wealth in a world of uncertainty.⁸ He could lose his money by a bad investment or an unexpected new source of competition. Possessing more money, he has more responsibility. Jesus said, “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:47–48).⁹ This responsibility troubles his sleep.

The Preacher says, “There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.” He has already explained why riches kept for owners hurt their owners. First, the owners are not satisfied. Second, their production costs rise. Third, their sleep fades.

E. Nothing to Show for His Labor

“But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and

8. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 6.

9. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

there is nothing in his hand.” The Hebrew words translated as “evil travail” can also be translated as “adverse business.” The context of these words indicates that the latter is a better translation. His wealth has disappeared. His heir will not inherit, because there is nothing left to inherit. This family’s story is the story of rags to riches to rags.

The accumulator loses his riches. But he could not have retained ownership anyway. “As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind.” The correct answer to the old question, “How much did he leave behind?” is clear to the Preacher: “All of it!”

The Preacher here speaks of a man’s legacy in terms of the assumption of personal autonomy. A man has labored to accumulate riches. If he dies before this legacy erodes away, he still cannot benefit personally. *The assumption of autonomy leads to a conclusion: the individual works for himself.* But he will die just as he arrived: naked. The clothing he put on is left behind with the body it clothed. What remains of the person who accumulated this wealth? On the assumption of autonomy, nothing.

The Preacher is speaking of a specific form of wealth: “riches kept for the owners thereof.” The accumulator labored in vain, for when he departed, the riches remained behind. To be used by whom? Someone else. For what purposes? The heir’s.

If this wealth does somehow achieve much good, what is that to the departed? He will not know. He will not rejoice. He will not impute value to the outcome of his labor. Any value that it may retain will be imputed by the heirs and by market participants.

In an estate sale, the assets are auctioned off, piece by piece, to the highest bidders. The owner in his lifetime can offer no assured evaluation of his estate’s future value. He offers this representatively, on behalf of future decisions of the buyers. His evaluation will carry no weight after he is dead. That which is past carries weight only representatively. “What would the founder have thought?” At an estate sale, nobody cares. High bids win, asset by asset, with no consideration of the opinions of the deceased. Such is the fate of everyone’s legacy, given the assumption of human autonomy.

Conclusion

The Preacher warns that discontent, when applied to money or goods, is vanity. It is wasteful. It is not fulfilling. Yet there is no suggestion in the Bible that the accumulation of tools is inherently vain. The questions are: “What is the accumulator’s motivation for accumulating tools? For himself as an autonomous agent or as God’s steward?” The former is vanity. The latter motivation is not dealt with here. It is dealt with in the last verses of the book. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).¹⁰

All people are discontented. This is a consequence of sin. Men’s desires far outstrip their wealth. The more they own, the more they want. They soon get used to the pleasure and satisfaction of new possessions.¹¹ To restore their lost satisfaction, they seek to accumulate even more. The treadmill of accumulation has no end and offers no rest. They incarnate the most famous lyric of the supremely recognizable song of the rock and roll era: “I can’t get no satisfaction. I can’t get no satisfaction. ‘Cause I’ve tried. And I’ve tried. And I’ve tried. And I’ve tried.”¹²

10. Chapter 45.

11. In the field of economics known as behavioral economics, this phenomenon is called the hedonic ratchet. Only the transition out of extreme poverty offers a permanent increase in personal satisfaction. By God’s grace, this phenomenon works both ways. People who have experienced a major loss soon adjust. Their former level of satisfaction returns.

12. Comparatively few people have ever deciphered the lyrics of the loud, muddled, and most memorable song that catapulted Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones to worldwide fame in 1965. He made a fortune with this anti-consumption song. He has never ceased trying to get satisfied. In their mid-sixties in 2006–7, the Rolling Stones had a year-long worldwide tour that grossed an estimated \$437 million, when gold was around \$625 an ounce.

IN PRAISE OF CONSUMPTION

Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart (Eccl. 5:18–20).

He is speaking as a covenant-keeper. How do we know? Because he identifies as a blessing a man's ability to rejoice in his labor. In his positioning as an autonomous man, he always identifies labor as vanity, chasing after wind. Not here. In an earlier passage, he favorably compares the lifestyle of the laboring man to that of a rich man. "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much," in contrast to the rich producer: "the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" (Eccl. 5:12).¹ In this passage, the rich man possesses enough wealth so that he does not eat little, unless he is on a diet. The Preacher twice says that such a condition is the gift of God: "Every man also to whom God hath given riches" and "God answereth him in the joy of his heart." This is not the outlook of autonomy.

The Preacher speaks only of the present: "For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart." The person who takes his advice and celebrates the present will not dwell on the past. "For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart."

He has recommended this consumption-affirming lifestyle previously. "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This

1. Chapter 19.

also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (Eccl. 2:24).² "And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God" (Eccl. 3:13).³

The kingdom of God is to be enjoyed in the present. The kingdom grows through present sacrifices, another word for thrift. Thrift funds the creation of tools. Without tools, there is no advance. Peter and the disciples fished with nets. Those nets allowed a great catch.

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men (Luke 5:4–10).

If they had spent more on additional nets, they would have caught more fish. Jesus was making a point: better to bring men the gospel than to catch lots of fish. But had they possessed additional nets and boats, the point would have been that much more memorable. We are limited by a lack of tools. We can always use better tools. They must be paid for.

Conclusion

The Bible does not teach asceticism. The Preacher made this clear. He repeatedly told his readers that they should enjoy the comforts of success. These are God's gift to men. Men are not to despise God's gifts. But there is still the question of wisdom in allocating these gifts. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3). There were better uses for his money and time.

2. Chapter 5.

3. Chapter 8.

21

WHEN A STRANGER INHERITS

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease (Eccl. 6:1–2).

The Preacher returns to a familiar theme in his book: inheritance. This means death. Death is the inescapable barrier to meaningful accumulation, he argues. No matter how much wealth a person accumulates, he will not be able to enjoy it for long. No matter how much honor is imputed to him by those around him—those whose opinions matter in society—it will not last.

A. The Issue is Death

Why do I think the issue here is death? First, the problem he mentions is universal: “common among men.” Second, it applies to rich men, not just common people. Third, it has to do with power: “God giveth him not power to eat thereof.” The lack of what kind of power keeps a rich man from eating his own food? I can think of only two things: lack of life or lack of wealth. He either dies or loses his wealth. Fourth, “a stranger eateth it.” This is the difficult case.

If the issue here is not death, then it is the loss of wealth. How might a rich man lose his money? Military conquest, but this is not common. Then what about bad business ventures? This is possible. But how common is this? Not very. Most people do not own businesses. Most people keep most of what they possess most of the time. This is especially true in a predominately agricultural society. A man dies on the farm he was born on, if he inherited the farm from his father.¹ The Preacher is dealing with a problem that is universal. It applies

1. This has not been true in the United States, but the United States is arguably the

to common people, too.

Even if the issue he is dealing with is not death, but rather the loss of a man's wealth due to poor business dealings, this is still the problem of inheritance. He leaves nothing to his heirs. The Preacher has already mentioned this. "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand" (Eccl. 5:13–14).² The heirs of a dead man's legacy will be strangers. So, the Preacher's warning here could be related to the loss of his goods in his lifetime. Given his assessments that follow, I think it is more likely that his concern in this passage is death.

If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place? All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living (Eccl. 6:3–8)?

He asks rhetorically, "do not all go to one place?" That has to be the grave. He is speaking about eating: "All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled." He does not mean that we labor only for food. He also mentions honor. Furthermore, the early sections of this book deal with his experiment: to taste all of life. Everything came out the same: vanity. "For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living." It all comes down to this: the grave. It all goes down to this, too.

B. The Stranger

A stranger eats the rich man's food. The Hebrew word translated here as "stranger" is *nok-ree*. This referred to a foreigner who refused to covenant with God. He was outside the faith confessionally. He was

most mobile (and rootless) large nation in history. From the first generation of Puritans in the seventeenth century, Americans moved to better land. Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1963).

2. Chapter 19.

uncircumcised. He had no part in the congregation of the Lord. It was legal to lend to him at interest in a charitable loan (Deut. 23:20).³ If this is who the Preacher has in mind, then the inheritance is transferred either to a foreign conqueror or else to a successful foreign businessman living inside Israel. Neither of these events would have been common in Israel. Surely, they were not universal features of life outside of Israel in the Preacher's day. They have been non-existent in the world since the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

I think the stranger who eats the rich man's food is his son. A man thinks he knows his own son, but no man can know the heart of another. No one knows what his son will do with his inheritance. He may act as a stranger acts. This is a common fear in history. The prodigal son of Jesus' parable is a rarity: one who inherits early, squanders the inheritance, and returns unto his father's house (Luke 15:11–21).⁴

A rich man is concerned about the heir. A son may squander his father's posthumous legacy. This concern has been universal in history, among rich men and poor men alike. The Preacher is saying that the concern of the successful man is the same as the concern of the common man: the *posthumous wasting* of all that he strived for in life. The man worked to eat, meaning that he worked to be successful—in modern American slang, “to know where his next meal is coming from.” He achieved his goal. He did not have to worry about “putting food on the table.” Yet he knows that his inheritance may fall into the hand of a confessional stranger.

C. So What?

If a man lives only to eat, what does it matter what happens to his wealth after he dies? Who cares? The Preacher cares because he knows what most men know: we do not work hard only to eat. We work hard to leave a legacy of some kind. If a man's legacy is dissipated in one generation, what did all his work accomplish? What if the inheritance is put to worthless uses? This is the Preacher's concern. “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun” (Eccl. 6:12)?⁵

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 56.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

5. Chapter 19.

The accumulator will die. So will the man who leaves no visible legacy. Are their legacies really the same? In a world of pure autonomy, the answer is yes. The only thing that matters for a purely autonomous man is his personal use of whatever it is that he accumulates. Yet even self-proclaimed autonomous men seek honor. They want to be remembered. Why? What does it matter if future autonomous people honor a dead man's efforts? He cannot enjoy the acclaim. Also, to the extent that his sense of success depends on future generations' retroactive imputation of honor, he is not autonomous. He is dependent on prevailing future standards, future events, and future people he cannot control. *This is a denial of autonomy*. It is an affirmation of dependence on others.

So, maintaining the legacy matters. If a man's legacy is maintained, his work today is meaningful. The Preacher believed this. How do we know what he believed? Because he told us what the basis of meaningless work is: a squandered inheritance. He did not argue that an inheritance maintained down through the generations is equally meaningless as an inheritance squandered by the heir or maintained by a stranger. This implies that a legacy maintained or even expanded by confessionally orthodox heirs is meaningful. It is the threat of inheritance by a stranger that makes a man's work vanity. An autonomous man should not care. But he does care. Hence, he does not really regard himself as autonomous.

Conclusion

The Preacher writes of a common fear: *inheritance by someone who does not share the confession of the accumulator*. If a rich man cannot buy a solution to this problem, then no one can. The problem cannot be solved through exchange in a free market or in any other institutional arrangement. The problem is common because the lack of a solution is universal.

If a man's wealth is inherited by a confessional stranger, then his efforts were in vain. This is the Preacher's concern. The rich man eats well, but life is more than eating well. If life were merely eating and drinking, then death would end all of our concerns. It would not matter one way or the other who eats and drinks with the wealth we leave behind. This concern over a stranger's inheritance has meaning only in a world in which life is more than eating and drinking. *The meaning of our efforts has to do with covenantal inheritance in the broadest sense.*

This is the primary message of Ecclesiastes. It is a message conveyed in a subtle way. It requires that the reader think carefully about what he reads.

AUTONOMY VS. ECONOMIC GROWTH

All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun? (Eccl. 6:7–12).

A. The Philosophy of Autonomy

In developing his case against the philosophy of human autonomy, the Preacher here uses a metaphor of man's journey through life: eating. He knows, as we know, that men work to do far more than eat, yet he speaks as though man is merely an organism of consumption. The mouth is his metaphor of man's consumption. Men eat and are soon hungry. "The appetite is not filled." They must constantly feed themselves. More than once a day, they must shove food into their mouths. There is no permanent contentment. If they cease to eat, they will die of starvation. They are reminded daily of their dependence on food and therefore their dependence on labor. "He that laboreth laboreth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him" (Prov. 16:36).

He returns to the theme of the vanity of equality. The fool possesses as many things of value as the wise man. "For what hath the wise more than the fool?" He has wisdom, but how does this make his life different? He, too, must fill his mouth daily. He has to work to consume. He is trapped on the same treadmill as the fool. The basics of their lives are the same. Wisdom counts for nothing.

This conclusion is contrary to the Book of Proverbs, where wis-

dom is the supreme good. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7). Wisdom is the true source of happiness. “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding” (Prov. 3:13). Therefore, we must regard the Preacher’s statement as part of his critique of the logic of autonomy. *Wisdom rejects autonomy*. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7).

The philosophy of autonomy sees nothing superior to man. Man is not subordinate to a higher authority. So, he must derive meaning from himself. The Preacher is exploring answers to this question: “What is the essence of autonomous man’s condition?” Here, speaking on behalf of the philosophy of autonomy, he says that the wise man and the fool are equally men. To exist as a man is sufficient to establish a man’s authority. There is no higher standard. In the world of human autonomy, who has the authority to impute (assess and declare) superiority to a wise man over a fool? The wise man may like to think that he possesses this authority, but where is the proof? What is the basis of his claim? Not his humanity as such. A fool possesses humanity. A wise man is as trapped by dependence on food as a fool . . . or a beast. His autonomy is constrained by his need to eat. It is also constrained by death, as the Preacher noted in the previous passage: “Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place” (v. 6). He makes this same conclusion repeatedly.¹ Death swallows meaning as surely as men swallow food. *Death is the great equalizer: the equality of nothing*.

Similarly with the poor man. “What hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?” The poor man has nothing of value other than his ability to survive, to “walk before the living.” But he is a dead man walking. His advantage over the dead will end soon enough.

Then one way of life is as good as another . . . or as bad. It is all vanity. Conclusion: “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.” In other words, be content with what you possess or can easily possess. This is so much easier than striving after more. The wandering of desire is insatiable.

If nothing matters, because everything is vanity, then a wise man seeks to buy vanity at the lowest possible price. Do not seek wisdom or

1. Ecclesiastes 2:15–17; 3:19–20.

wealth. To do so is the wandering of desire. What is the point? You are a dead man eating. You are a dead man walking. You might as well limit your goals. This is so much more pleasant.

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 2:15–17).²

B. Reduced Economic Growth

The philosophy of autonomy undermines the impetus for economic growth. If all of life's results are equal, then what is the point of sacrificing in the present for the sake of the future? "Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun" (vv. 11–12). The heirs will inherit, and what they will do with the inheritance is uncertain. Only death is certain. *The philosophy of autonomy, when pursued to its logical conclusion—the equality of vanity and death—is intensely present-oriented.*

Present-orientation, or what Ludwig von Mises called high time preference, leads to high interest rates.³ People are not induced to save unless they are offered high rates of interest by borrowers. High rates of interest reduce the number of profitable projects. Profits are what remain after all expenses. Interest rates are an expense. People who care little about the future are willing to pay high interest rates in order to consume now. The competition for funds in a present-oriented society favors consumption loans at the expense of production loans. This reduces economic growth. People get what they pay for: present consumption at the expense of greater future consumption.

Wherever the philosophy of autonomy is both understood and widely pursued, it leads to stagnation. It leads to consumption rather than economic growth. The man who dreams of wealth without sacrifice in the present believes in a fantasy. Isaiah described this outlook

2. Chapter 3.

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

two centuries later. “Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant” (Isa. 56:12).

Conclusion

The Preacher continues his exploration of the implications of the philosophy of human autonomy. He concludes that the wise man has no advantage over the fool. The poor man is wiser than the rich man, because he does not sacrifice in the present in order to live the same kind of life that the rich man leads: a life of vanity. The poor man pays so much less to live in vain. This shows wisdom on his part, assuming that wisdom offers an advantage, which it does not, according to the Preacher’s assessment of the philosophy of human autonomy.

23

AUTONOMY AND SORROW

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth (Eccl. 7:1–4).

A. Reputation After Death

In the preceding section, the Preacher made the case against the philosophy of autonomy by arguing that, in terms of this philosophy, death swallows up everything. Nothing has meaning, because death has no meaning and is the great equalizer.

Death mandates inheritance. It is folly to labor long and hard to build up an inheritance that will be appropriated by people of uncertain character. It makes no sense.

In this passage, he abandons the argument of the previous section. He does so in the name of autonomy. He fully understands that those who defend the philosophy of autonomy will resist the conclusions that he had previously drawn from its presuppositions. These conclusions are just too pessimistic for the average man, who will search for an alternative. The Preacher here discusses one hoped-for alternative: a good reputation. Surely, this survives one's death. Surely, this is worth sacrificing for. The Preacher examines this possibility. "A good name is better than precious ointment." But why is this the case? He does not say. The philosophy of autonomy offers no reason to believe this, so he merely states it as a fact. He then explores its implications.

B. The Economics of a Good Name

If a good name is worth having because it survives death, how does someone obtain it? After all, we do not get something for nothing.

Most people assume that a good name cannot be purchased with money in a marketplace. This is incorrect. In the early twentieth century, a new profession arose: public relations. It made scientific what civil rulers had learned centuries before, most notably in Machiavelli's book, *The Prince*: public opinion can be manipulated. Rich men and corporations began to hire specialists in developing and promoting a good name. These specialists wrote favorable news reports and persuaded newspapers to run them as if they were neutral feature articles. They used many other sophisticated techniques.¹ Most people would say that a good name attained through public relations is ersatz: fool's gold, not real gold. But who is to say? A good name is always conferred, meaning imputed. If those doing the conferring are deceived, or at least manipulated, what does this matter to the beneficiary? He gains the benefit.

A good name is always purchased. This purchase involves forfeiting something of value in exchange for obtaining a good name. This fact is not widely understood. Generally, people assume that a person's high integrity cannot be purchased. They are incorrect. Integrity has a price: *forfeited income*. A good name implies that a person has sacrificed something of value to obtain it. It is true that you do not buy integrity with your excess earnings, although you can buy the public's perception of integrity. Here is how you buy integrity: avoid excess earnings, which are taxable, by adhering to your principles. The economic outcome is the same as if someone had bought integrity in a market: *less wealth*. What is inescapable is this exchange: *integrity for money*.

Integrity is not directly marketable, but it is marketable indirectly. You can profit from it. A person with a good reputation for repaying debt can borrow money at a lower rate of interest than a man with a bad reputation for repaying debt. "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth" (Psalm 37:21).² A person with a good reputation can gain cooperation from

1. The most famous of these specialists was the nephew of the psychologist Sigmund Freud, Edward Bernays (1891–1995). He wrote many books on his techniques. The other founder was Ivy Lee. Scott Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations. A History* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Eichelbaum Associates, 1994).

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms*

others at a low price. There is less risk in dealing with him. As we say, “His reputation precedes him.” To gain a reputation for integrity, a person sacrifices marketable wealth in the present. To obtain what? His future reputation. Again, his reputation will precede him. It will open doors. It will gain him respect.

Is this autonomy? No, it is dependence. Others must impute to him his good reputation. These others must be “the right sort of people.” But how do they obtain their reputations for being the right sort of people? From others? This merely pushes the question out another step. From themselves? Then by what authority?³ By what standard?⁴ With what sanctions?⁵ With what long-term impact?⁶

The Preacher says that a good name is a very good thing. But why is this true? Because of what it can do for you in the future. Why is it better than precious ointment? Because precious ointment is used only once and is gone. A good reputation is permanent. Well, not quite. It is as permanent as the reputations of those who impute a good name. It is as permanent as the memories of those who impute a good name. It is as permanent as the ability of those who impute a good name to impose sanctions that uphold their judgment. But there is one thing a good name is not: autonomous.

C. The Day of Death

The Preacher once again returns to the theme of death. The day of death is better than the day of one’s birth. Why should this be true? Because death puts an end to responsibility, to sacrifice in the present, and to striving after wind. On that day, a good name is neither here nor there. This is because the deceased is no longer here.

So, that which is better than precious ointment is lost forever to the autonomous man on the day of his death. If anything, this is his day of precious ointment. Jesus said: “For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial” (Matt. 26:12). Conclusion: “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

3. Part two of the biblical covenant. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

4. Part three of the biblical covenant. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

5. Point four of the biblical covenant. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

6. Point five of the biblical covenant. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.”

Death ends both production and consumption. It ends vanity. There is no more striving after wind. For autonomous man, this is his day of deliverance. But, as a day of deliverance, it is also a day of meaninglessness. Death is impersonal. It imputes nothing. It is also supreme. It overcomes all imputation. The good reputation, the bad reputation, the absence of reputation: death swallows all.

What is the logical implication of all this? The Preacher tells us: “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.” Visiting a house of mourning prepares us for the inescapable reality of death. Death is not autonomous man’s crowning achievement. Death is the annulment of all achievement. Death ratifies nothing. Get used to it, the Preacher says. “The living will lay it to his heart.” The Preacher was highly skilled in laying such things on his heart, as his book reveals.

“Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.” Why is this the case? Because death is sorrowful. To contemplate the triumph of death is a sorrowful activity, but it is a realistic one. Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth-century literary critic who is famous today only because of James Boswell’s multi-volume biography of him, once quipped to Boswell: “Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” He thought a great deal about death, and the thought horrified him, despite his Christianity.⁷

For autonomous man, death is the end of all that has meaning. Nothing has meaning, because of death. For the modern cosmic evolutionist, who believes that everything will end with the heat death of the universe—absolute zero—however distant in time, impersonal death swallows up meaning as surely as it did for the Preacher’s autonomous man.⁸ This is a sorrowful thought. Most men prefer not to think about it, just as David Hume, a believer that death ends everything, preferred not to think about it.

7. *Mortality Quotes: The Samuel Johnson Sound Bite Page.* (<http://bit.ly/JohnsonDeath>)

8. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

Conclusion

The Preacher did not say that the transition from life to death is easy. It is sorrowful. If death is the final end of man, then this sorrow spreads its tentacles across the living. *Sorrow is superior to laughter because death is not a laughing matter.* The more realistic the heart, the better the heart, he says. For the autonomous man, realism produces sorrow.

The deliverance from this death-induced sorrow was announced by Jesus Christ. “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Paul told us why sorrow is not to be preferred to laughter.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (I Cor. 15:54–58).⁹

Both Jesus and Paul rejected the philosophy of autonomy. So did the Preacher.

9. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

OPPRESSION AND BRIBERY

Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart (Eccl. 7:7).

A. The Meaning of Oppression

I have argued ever since 1990 that the Mosaic law did not define oppression exclusively in economic terms. The Mosaic law did not set forth objective economic criteria for identifying oppression.¹ It did identify oppression as a great evil.

The context of the word sometimes points to a violation of civil law, always with the cooperation of judges. This verse rests on such a view of oppression. The Preacher had previously written: “If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they” (Eccl. 5:8).² The context was the perversion of justice—a legal context.

Here, he connects oppression with gifts. The Hebrew word translated here as “gift” refers to a donation. Usually, the word’s context indicates a gift to God: a sacrifice.³ It is also used as an offering to an idol.⁴ It is not the other Hebrew word that is translated as “gift,” whose frequent context is bribery. So, grammar does not confirm that the context here is bribery. But it does not deny it, either.

Consider the context. First, why would an offering to God destroy the heart? It wouldn’t. Second, the context does not indicate idolatrous worship. The context is oppression. By a process of elimination, the context indicates bribery.

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

2. Chapter 17.

3. Exodus 28:38; Leviticus 23:38; Numbers 18:6–7, 29.

4. Ezekiel 20:26, 31.

B. Oppression by the Wise

A wise man is a man who understands God's law. Such a man possesses wisdom and understanding. David had told this to Solomon.

And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever. Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee. Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong, and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed (I Chron. 22:7–13).

A wise man therefore understands the great evil of oppression, for the Mosaic law repeatedly identifies oppression as a sin. The word “oppression” here could refer to economic oppression, but then the reference to the gift would make no sense. Why would a private party oppressor receive a gift? He wouldn't. A corrupt judge would.

The context indicates that a wise man is sitting as a judge. He has received a bribe to persuade him to impose a decision that violates biblical law. He knows that this is a corrupt bargain, but he nevertheless accepts the gift. In a courtroom setting, this destroys the heart. Why? Because the wise judge knows this transaction is wrong.

The Preacher also says that this transaction will make him mad. The Hebrew word here indicates madness, not anger.⁵ It is madness in the sense of *judicial foolishness*: “He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools” (Job 12:17). “That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men back-

5. “And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard” (I Sam. 21:13). “Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad” (Jer. 51:7).

ward, and maketh their knowledge foolish” (Isa. 44:25).

The Preacher understood that the wise man’s wisdom is dependent on his conformity to biblical wisdom. He knew what biblical wisdom is. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁶ When the wise man succumbs to bribery, he corrupts his own heart. He no longer can be trusted to declare an act as having conformed to or violated God’s law. He abandons the art of casuistry: applying God’s law to specific cases.

Conclusion

This verse indicates a concern with corrupt judgments by a civil judge. It is not talking about cheating by a businessman. Oppression here is not an economic act. It is a judicial act. It is a corrupting act.

6. Chapter 45.

25

FAITH IN PROGRESS

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this (Eccl. 7:8–10).

This verse announces that the end is better than the beginning. Speaking as an autonomous man, he has already argued that sorrow is preferable to laughter. Why? Because sorrow is more realistic than laughter regarding the implications of death. The end of life is better than the beginning, because death puts an end to vanity.¹

What is patience? The Hebrew word translated here as “patient” is translated as “slow” in all other cases in the King James Version. The Preacher contrasts a slow spirit with a hasty one. What is the meaning of hasty? The Hebrew word generally means troubled, vexed, or fearful. The context usually implies agitation. So, by “slow,” the Preacher means calm. The phrase “steady as you go” is appropriate.

A. Patience vs. Pride

Why is the patient spirit better than the proud spirit? What does he mean by “proud”? The Hebrew word is best translated as “high.” “Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs” (Ezek. 31:3). The patient spirit focuses on the future: the end of the process. The proud spirit revels in the present: success attained as a result of the past. The patient spirit pays attention to the pathway to the future. The proud spirit rejoices in what has already been accomplished. The patient spirit has a goal: moving up by moving forward. The proud spirit rejoices in previous attainments.

1. Chapter 23.

The patient spirit sees the future as better than the present. The proud spirit sees the past as superior to the present. The proud spirit asks: “What is the cause that the former days were better than these?” The patient spirit sees the future as an uphill process. The proud spirit sees the future as a downhill process. The patient spirit sees victory in the future. The proud spirit sees defeat in the future. The patient spirit sees the future as progress. The proud spirit sees the future as decline. The patient spirit sees a benefit in exchanging the present for the future. The proud spirit sees the threat of loss in exchanging the present for the future.

The proud person rejoices in what he has attained. But when you are king of the hill, moving forward means moving down. The proud person wants to defend territory. The cost of moving forward is moving into the unknown. What is already known is success. The cost of moving forward is to risk the loss of success.

For the patient person, moving forward is an advantage. He sees the future as superior to the present. He believes this: “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” The past is inferior to the present. The future is superior to the present.

B. An Uphill Battle

The Preacher advises this: “Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this” (v. 10). For a person who is engaged in the work of extending the kingdom of God, all of life is an uphill battle. This work requires patience. Patience in turn requires confidence in the outcome of one’s efforts. Confidence in the outcome of one’s efforts requires confidence that the present is superior to the past. If the present is inferior to the past, then there is no legitimate confidence that the future will be better than the present. If things are going downhill, why would a wise person apply himself to an uphill task? Defending territory already secured is as much as a wise man would commit to. A program for moving uphill is illogical. It would waste resources. In the words of the dispensationalist radio pastor of the 1950s, J. Vernon McGee, “You don’t polish brass on a sinking ship.”

The proud man and the historical pessimist share a commitment to the present. The proud man counts the cost of change. The odds seem poor. Why risk success in the present for the chance of attaining even more? The economist would analyze this in terms of marginal

utility theory. Each additional unit of utility is worth less to a decision-maker than the previous unit. With each new unit of income, we satisfy those wants that are highest on our scale of economic value. Past wants were higher on our scale of value than those that remain now, other things remaining equal. Why continue to lay up treasure—success—when the cost of laying up treasure involves putting one's existing treasure at risk? Only if success is addictive—"The more you get, the more you want"—would such risky behavior make economic sense. The historical pessimist concludes much the same. Why risk whatever little remains when it takes everything we have just to slow the speed of sliding down even faster? The emphasis in both cases is on preserving existing territory rather than extending dominion.

The person who believes that the future will be superior to the present could take the attitude of sitting back and letting things drift. But he also knows that things roll down, not up. Things drift downstream, toward either the falls or the end of the river. Things do not drift upward. Put in scientific terms, entropy in a closed system inevitably undermines the remaining order of the present. The only way to reverse entropy is to import energy from outside the system. This is what God's grace provides: access to order from outside the sin-cursed realm of history.² This is why progressive sanctification, both personal and institutional, requires patience. It requires attention to detail. It requires time and capital.

Conclusion

The Preacher had faith in progress. He believed that the end is better than the beginning. He presented this perspective from the point of view of rival worldviews: autonomy and biblical covenantalism.

The autonomous man announces that the end is better than the beginning. Death is superior to birth. Sacrificing benefits in the present for benefits in the future is vanity. Why? Because death negates all success and all meaning. Death transfers the inheritance to a stranger of questionable motives and habits. The dissipation of the inheritance is inevitable. In modern terms, entropy rules the cosmos. Conclusion: there is no progressive sanctification. There is only vanity.

In contrast is biblical covenantalism. The end is better than the beginning. Death is not the end. God brings final judgment. He distin-

2. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

guishes between success and failure, between meaningful labor and vanity, between patience and pride. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).³

The Preacher keeps exploring the implications of human autonomy. They lead only to dead ends.

3. Chapter 45.

WISDOM AND KINGDOM

Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it (Eccl. 7:11–12).

A. Wisdom: Good or Meaningless?

The Preacher returns here to biblical covenantalism. He extols wisdom. Wisdom along with an inheritance is a good thing. Wisdom provides a profit. The Hebrew word translated as “profit” is more often translated as “more.” It means “better.” This observation is in contrast to an earlier observation:

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit (Eccl. 2:15–17).¹

There is no meaningful wisdom, he writes. A fool and a wise man end up the same: dead. As for the value of an inheritance,

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease. If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no

1. Chapter 3.

burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place? All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? (Eccl. 6:1–8).²

Here, we have rival concepts of the light of day. One is positive. “There is profit to them that see the sun.” The other is negative. “For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.”

Unless we recognize that the Preacher is conducting a literary debate, theonomy vs. autonomy, we cannot make sense of the Book of Ecclesiastes. It is filled with contradictory observations.

B. A Wise Inheritance

The Preacher sees the great advantage that a wise man receives from an inheritance. The inheritance produces more, meaning a profit. But why is possessing more an advantage? To possess more means that a person becomes responsible for its management. With every increase in wealth comes an increase in opportunities. With every increase in opportunities comes an increase in responsibility.

And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).³

But what is the profit of profit? The Preacher wrote earlier: “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun” (Eccl. 2:11).⁴ He denied

2. Chapter 21.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

4. Chapter 2.

that there is such a thing as vanity-free profit. This is a correct implication of life outside the covenant.

Life inside the covenant is different. When a man is inside the covenant, he has access to wisdom. If he gains an inheritance, he can put it to profitable uses. His wisdom allows an increase in the inheritance. This is the covenantal system of inheritance: increase through time.⁵ Using modern economists' terminology, this is value-added production.

Their key asset is wisdom, not the inheritance. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Prov 4:7). "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!" (Prov. 16:16). Without wisdom, the inheritance can be dissipated. It can be put to unwise uses. *It is wisdom that puts the inheritance to good uses.*

The goal here is capital accumulation. Increased capital is necessary for the expansion of the kingdom. The kingdom of God competes with the kingdom of Satan. Each asserts total sovereignty in history. Each demands unconditional surrender of the other.⁶ Each occupies territory. Each requires capital to occupy existing territory and to add to territory occupied.

A wise man inherits from the previous generation. How did the previous generation have capital to pass down? Because it had the skills of capital accumulation. *The requirement of kingdom expansion in history requires capital accumulation.* Each generation is to pass down more than it inherited to the next generation.

This refers more to intellectual and moral capital than to physical or economic capital. Intellectual and moral capital are multiplied by the number of covenantal heirs. The larger a family, the smaller the per capita monetary inheritance. The Psalmist wrote: "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:4–5). The recommendation here is a large family. This dilutes the per capita inheritance of physical or economic capital, but it multiplies the inheritance of intellectual and moral capital. This is an implication of this: "Two

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2010), ch. 5.

6. North, *Unconditional Surrender*.

are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour” (Eccl. 4:9).⁷ The principle of the division of labor applies to intellectual labor. The broader the base of those who hold to a covenant, the more effective each member’s knowledge and skills become, assuming that the covenant is favorable to cooperation.

The kingdom of man at the tower of Babel possessed an extensive division of labor. This offered that kingdom more opportunities.

And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city (Gen. 11:6–8).

God scattered the people of the tower. This is the final outcome of autonomy. People do not cooperate in hell. A kingdom that begins with the autonomy of man as its presupposition cannot complete a tower stretching to heaven.

God undermined that kingdom by scattering it. But, through trade, men can overcome the limits of separation.⁸ This is because *trade is a denial of autonomy*. It is a form of mutual dependence.

Conclusion

Biblical wisdom is required for the long-term building of the kingdom of God in history. So is an inheritance, which extends through history. An inheritance is more than physical. It is ultimately confessional. The scattering of mankind at Babel was linguistic and geographical, but it was also confessional.

7. Chapter 14.

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 19.

LUKEWARM ETHICS

All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? (Eccl. 7:15–17).

Here, the Preacher speaks in terms of a way of practical living. He rejects the systematic pursuit of righteousness and wisdom. The middle path is the place of minimum expense. The rigorous pursuit of either righteousness or wisdom is contrary to an accurate cost-benefit analysis, he says.

Why should anyone believe this? Because he believes that there is no predictability of the Bible's specified covenantal sanctions. "There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness." If a person pursues perfection as his goal in this world, the Preacher says, that person is self-deceived. Such a pursuit will get him nowhere. It could destroy him. Somewhere in between righteousness and wickedness lies safety and sanity. This also applies also to wisdom and foolishness. Life is not black and white; it is mostly gray. A prudent man walks a path between extremes, says the Preacher.

A. Psalm 73

This position rests on a rejection of what Psalm 73 teaches. The psalmist had observed that the sanctions seem to be perverse, not just random.

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued

like other men (Psalm 73:3–5).

They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth (Psalm 73:8–9).

Subsequently, he concluded that his initial observations were misguided. “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (Psalm 73:16–19).¹ He chastised himself. “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee” (Psalm 73:22).

The system of covenantal sanctions in history is ethically reliable, the psalmist said. Psalm 73 is an affirmation of the long-term reliability of these sanctions.

B. The Counter-Argument

The Preacher has an odd way of arguing. He presents an argument in one section. He counters it in another. Here, he argues on behalf of autonomous man. Later, he will argue on behalf of covenant-keeping man.

And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God (Eccl. 8:10–13).²

This encapsulates the argument of Psalm 73. There is ethical cause and effect in history. The covenant-breaker is lured into a trap by the delay of judgment. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” He walks on a slippery slope.

1. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

2. Chapter 30.

The Preacher immediately responds on behalf of autonomous man. "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity" (Eccl. 8:14). Conclusion: "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (v. 15). This does not answer the supreme question for an ambitious autonomous man: *the fate of his legacy, on which his relevance rests*. This is point five of the biblical covenant.³

How can the reader resolve this constant back-and-forth debate? Where is solid ground?

Autonomous man does not trust the social order to provide predictable sanctions. Neither does he trust God to provide such sanctions. Prudence under such circumstances involves finding a middle ground between righteousness and wickedness. He does not believe that there is a God who calls men to a high standard, nor does he believe that God enforces such a standard.

This outlook was condemned by the author of the Book of Revelation.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Rev. 3:14–16).

Conclusion

The Preacher speaks for those who see no connection between the pursuit of righteousness and the expectation of positive sanctions. Such people are content with half-way measures.

This outlook undermines the pursuit of excellence. The pursuit of excellence begins with the pursuit of righteousness. This pursuit is a lifetime pursuit. It should begin young.

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1987] 2010), ch. 5.

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes (Psalm 119:9–12).

CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions (Eccl. 7:29).

A. Creativity

The Hebrew word translated “upright” has to do with ethics. The word is used to designate a righteous person.¹ The Hebrew word translated “inventions” refers to devices of any kind. It is used only twice in the Old Testament. It is derived from a root word meaning “inventive.” The implication of this verse is that righteous people are creative.

This verse does not say that unrighteous people are not creative. It does say that righteous people are creative. This implies that *a characteristic feature of the kingdom of God is its creativity*. Members of this kingdom seek out new ways of achieving their goals. They are not content with the range of opportunities they possess now. They imagine that there are better ways of doing things. They devote time and money to their search for better ways. There are several implications associated with such a view of righteous living.

This goes back to the creation week.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26–28).

1. Exodus 15:26; Numbers 23:10; Deuteronomy 6:18; 12:25; 21:9; 32:4.

First, the dominion impulse is built into mankind.² Second, this fact was manifested in the garden of Eden. “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15).³ In paradise, there was room for improvement.

B. Entrepreneurship

To discover a new way of doing things takes a combination of skills that are possessed by everyone. To some extent, everyone who seeks a better way of achieving his goals is an entrepreneur. But there are specialists who possess these skills in a unique combination.

The entrepreneur looks into the future to see if there might be a market for a new way for people to achieve their goals. He looks at available products and services. He also imagines future demand. Then he seeks out new ways of meeting this expected demand.

He must buy resources: raw materials, land, capital, and labor. He then puts these to work in the production of a new product or service. He prices it to sell. He buys low in order to sell higher. His goal is either money or service. Either he uses the service as a way to accumulate money, or else he uses the money to continue to supply the service. The first goal is Adam Smith’s self-interest. The second goal adheres more closely to the biblical standard of stewardship: service to God through service to His creation.

The world of the entrepreneur is filled with uncertainty.⁴ Others have not seen this opportunity. Or maybe they have seen it and regard it as a trap. The entrepreneur may be confident that some service will be profitable in the future, but he cannot be sure. He could lose his money. In the United States, the number of patented inventions that fail to find a profitable market is high. The actual percentage is higher, because not all inventions are patented. Only those inventions whose inventors or financial backers think are worth the money to patent get patented. Estimates of failures of patented inventions range between 80% (Pareto’s law) and 99.9%.⁵ No one knows. The percentage is either high or astronomically high—probably the latter.

The entrepreneur bears uncertainty for the sake of a large profit.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

4. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

5. “Odds of Success for Inventors.” (<http://bit.ly/InventionSuccess>)

He wastes his time and his money—and then investors’ money—in the vast majority of cases. Yet the rate of progress of invention is high. Technological progress is so high that our world changes noticeably every other decade. Technological obsolescence is a way of life in the modern world. The rate of invention seems to be accelerating. This unquestionably is true in what is by far the most important single area of social transformation: the cost of accumulating, storing, and retrieving information.⁶

So, what is almost a sure thing—the failure of any given new invention—is the foundation of what has been attained by modern society, beginning no earlier than 1775 in Great Britain and no later than 1820: compound economic growth. The social process of transforming that which is doomed individually into that which guarantees benefits for society is the private property order and ethical outlook required by the Bible.

C. Confidence

For a person to invent a product, gain funding for it, and market it successfully is statistically so close to impossible that it would seem that no rational person would attempt it. Yet millions of people do. Small improvements in existing systems are common in every successful business. These are inventions. They are not patented inventions. Each one offers improvement so small that there is no way to measure it in the economy. Yet, taken as a whole, they provide sufficient economic growth to change the world we live in every other decade.

An inventor must be confident that his sacrifice in the present will produce a benefit in the future that is great enough to repay him for his effort. Jesus warned us to count the cost.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish (Luke 14:28–30).⁷

Despite the costs, covenant-keepers are supposed to innovate. This is not just for the foreign mission field, where the Wycliffe Bible trans-

6. Raymond Kurzweil, “The Law of Accelerating Returns” (2001). (<http://bit.ly/AcceleratingReturns>)

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

lation program is innovative linguistically. It is for innovations of all kinds. There is room for improvement in every area of life. This includes economic theory.

Conclusion

The greater the level of confidence imparted by a worldview to its adherents, the more likely they will bear the uncertainty associated with innovation. The Psalms provide such confidence.⁸ The Book of Ecclesiastes is divided. Most of it is not intended to inspire confidence. It is intended to expose the dead ends of the philosophy of autonomy. But this passage is surely confidence-building.

8. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012).

29

THE UNCERTAINTY OF TIMING

Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? (Eccl. 8:6–7).

Is the Preacher speaking on behalf of the covenant-keeper or autonomous man? I think it is the latter. This is because autonomous man does not believe in prophecy or prophets. Under the Mosaic Covenant, there were prophets who did have access to God's purposes and His timing. Before the Mosaic Covenant, Joseph was given this ability in Egypt.¹ The lack of reliable guidance on the timing of decisions, great and small, produces misery, the Preacher says. This is a great burden for autonomous man.

For covenant-keepers, this lack of authoritative guidance is not a source of misery, or should not be. It is a source of confidence. They know that they have access to God's law as stewards of God. They are more likely to be the recipient of guidance than covenant-breakers are. They have a competitive advantage.

A. Using the Advantage

Do covenant-keepers take advantage of this advantage? The Bible provides evidence that they do not. One example is the reaction of the disciples to the death and entombment of Jesus. They scattered. Yet the Jewish authorities were well aware of what Jesus had taught about His resurrection.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 32.

spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said (John 2:19–22).

The disciples did not initially understand Jesus' words. The Jewish authorities were unaware that the disciples were unaware of what Jesus had taught.

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch (Matt. 27:62–66).

The disciples not only did not plan to steal the body, they had no understanding that Jesus had predicted His resurrection.

Covenant-keepers often seem to possess no advantage over covenant-breakers. This is because of their unwillingness to do what the Bible says they must do: obey God's law. The issue is ethics, not foreknowledge.

B. Ethics, not Foreknowledge

A covenant-keeper is supposed to believe that God is in charge of all things. God intervenes in history to achieve His purposes.

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens,

and all their host have I commanded (Isa. 45:7–12).

The fact that covenant-keepers do not know the timing of events should not discourage them. God knows. He does not need to reveal Himself to covenant-keepers regarding His plans. They have God's Bible-revealed law to guide them. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). The predictable sanctions of God's law offer sufficient guidance: positive and negative feedback.

The Jewish leaders asked Jesus about the timing of the kingdom of God.

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you² (Luke 17:20–21).

The disciples asked what they imagined was the same question.

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:6–8).

So, from the point of view of God, covenant-breakers' lack of knowledge about timing should not be a source of misery for covenant-keepers. Because covenant-keepers have the law and the prophets, but members of competing kingdoms do not, they have an advantage. They may decide not take advantage of this advantage, but they possess it. The key factor in the extension of the kingdom of God is ethics, not timing.

Conclusion

The Preacher identifies a source of misery: our lack of knowledge about the correct timing for implementing our purposes. "Because to

2. The Greek words translated as "within you" (*entos humone*) should probably be translated "in your midst," according to expositor Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Luke to Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 155.

every purpose there is time and judgment.” *Implementation* is what he means by judgment.

The knowledge of timing is not crucial for covenant-keepers. It is useful, but it is not crucial. Time is not a threat to them, because God is sovereign over history. Timing is crucial for covenant-breakers, because they are running out of time. Time is their enemy, for the final judgment is their enemy (Rev. 20:14–15). Time is a tool for them, but it is a tool that works against them. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).³

What is crucial for covenant-keepers is ethics. Biblical ethics rests on biblical law. This is the conclusion of the Preacher in the final verses of his book. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁴

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

4. Chapter 45.

30

TIME RUNS OUT

And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God (Eccl. 8:10–13).

Here, the Preacher speaks on behalf of covenant-keeping man. Previously, he presented a goad in his case against autonomous man by pointing to the indeterminacy of ethical outcomes in autonomous man's cosmos. "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness" (Eccl. 7:15).¹ Here, he presents an explanation for this randomness: insufficient time.

A. Death

He begins here with death, which was his starting point in his critique of autonomous man. Autonomous man cannot escape death and its implications. Death is impersonal. Death impersonally consumes generations. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (Eccl. 1:4).² Death impersonally consumes individuals. "For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool" (Eccl.

1. Chapter 27.

2. Chapter 1.

2:16).³ This is one of the book's recurring sub-themes. "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath" (Eccl. 9:2).⁴

Autonomous man is defenseless against the limited sovereignty of time, a defenselessness manifested in the final sovereignty of death. Nothing escapes death. *The philosophy of autonomy begins with the sovereignty of time, but then perishes in the sovereignty of death.* For modern man, this is the heat death of the universe: the cosmic triumph of impersonal entropy.⁵ Each generation hopes to discover a way to structure its worldview in terms of life, but this attempt always fails. Autonomy is a philosophy of death.

The Preacher has already laid the groundwork. He continues to develop this theme. "And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity." These people had gone in and out of the temple for years. They had escaped judgment on their evil deeds. The ecclesiastical authorities had not brought successful covenant lawsuits against these sinners. They had enjoyed free access to the house of God. They had seemed to be beyond negative sanctions. But then death arrived. Soon, they were forgotten.

Why did this matter? Because, in terms of the philosophy of individual autonomy, fame is all that remains after death. The economic inheritance, if any, passes to men of unknown commitments and talents (Eccl. 4:8).⁶ It passes to strangers (Eccl. 6:1–2).⁷ Men can take no legitimate hope in the outcome of their accumulation of riches. This leaves them with only hope in their fame. Here, the Preacher shuts the door on that hope. They will not be remembered.

3. Chapter 3.

4. Chapter 33.

5. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

6. Chapter 13.

7. Chapter 21.

B. The Death of Time

Time is the god of autonomous man, for time alone is creative in his system. But time runs out. Death is like an ogre's mouth at the end of days, chewing up everything that enters. The sinner has a fixed amount of time.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted (Eccl. 3:1–2).⁸

I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work (Eccl. 3:17).

For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them (Eccl. 9:12).

The end comes. *When time is your god, death is your devil.* In the cosmos of autonomous man, the devil wins. The creativity of time ends for every living thing. For modern man, time itself ends in the heat death of the universe. Time's arrow falls to the frozen ground. There is no future; there is no memory of the past. Meaninglessness envelops all things. The end.

C. Delayed Sentencing

Sinners had come and gone from the temple with impunity. This had given them confidence. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." This is an insecure confidence.

Men who escape sentencing for many years do not thereby escape judgment. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." There are ethical standards. These standards do govern the imposition of God's sanctions. God is the source of the standards and the sanctions.⁹ The future therefore belongs to God and

8. Chapter 7.

9. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler,

His people.¹⁰

Delayed sanctions constitute slippery places. David had seen delayed sanctions, and what he saw disturbed him for a while.

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Psalm 73:3–12).

He did not understand that delayed sanctions are a judgment against sinners.

When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee (Psalm 73:16–22).¹¹

The Preacher did understand this. He was not fooled by the delayed sanctions. The days of wicked are like a shadow. Reality is permanent.

Conclusion

The Preacher denies here that the philosophy of autonomy has legitimate hope. Good is not the same as evil. Wisdom is superior to foolishness. Time is not swallowed up by death. The end of life is not

Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 3, 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstypm>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), chaps. 3, 4.

10. Sutton, ch. 5; North, ch. 5.

11. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

the end. Sinners will not finish well.

This gives legitimate hope to covenant-keepers. The wicked will be forgotten. "And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity." The Preacher does not say here that covenant-keepers will be forgotten. He says elsewhere that they will be, but there, he speaks on behalf of autonomous man.

The work that a covenant-keeper does today has influence in the future. Death does not swallow up the future. The inheritance can compound over time.

31

EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun (Eccl. 8:14–15).

A. Causation

The Preacher speaks here as autonomous man. The world is still all vanity. The world is ethically random. Good men lose. Bad men win. Yet he is beginning to waver. While it is true that good men lose and bad men win, the normal course of events is the opposite. The key phrase is “according to the work of.” “There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth **according to the work of** the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth **according to the work of** the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.”

For autonomous man, there is no good reason why good men should prosper and bad men should lose. He has affirmed such a view before. “All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness” (Eccl. 7:15).¹ He is arguing against a rival view, the view presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. There is predictability between covenant-keeping and success. There is covenantal predictability between righteousness and a long life, and also between covenant-breaking and a short life.

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon

1. Chapter 27.

the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Ex 20:12).²

This applies also to life-threatening diseases.

And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee (Ex. 15:26).

If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed (Deut. 28:58–61).³

The Preacher here comes in the name of autonomous man. He challenges the reliability of these covenantal patterns of sanctions in history. He calls into question the promises of God.

B. Let the Good Times Roll

He says that there is no reliable covenantal predictability based on obedience to God's Bible-revealed law. This leads to a conclusion. "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (v. 15). His labor sometimes produces food, drink, and leisure. This is what abides with him during his lifetime. This is what lasts. This is what has continuity. But not for long. After he dies, there will be nothing. *Death ends all continuity.*

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after (Eccl. 1:11).

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool (Eccl. 2:16).

Because death ends continuity, death is sovereign.⁴ Death is the only continuous thing is history. The god of autonomous man is death. All other gods bow down to death. No other god can deliver man from death. Death inescapably imposes the great discontinuity. It is therefore the only continuity.

The Preacher affirms the benefits of enjoying the good times. He has done this before. He will do it again (Eccl. 9:7–12).⁵ He has done so in the name of autonomous man. He has done so in the name of covenant man. As autonomous man, he recommends enjoyment as the best that we can hope for, while we have the opportunity. Nothing else is secure. “For that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.”

Conclusion

The present-orientation of the Preacher is obvious. If the present enjoyment of consumer goods is the one thing that we can count on, then thrift is a will-o-the-wisp.

Its outcome is unsure. Capital consumption is wise; capital formation is problematical. This is a prescription for impoverishment. This undermines inheritance. It undermines economic growth, including the growth of the kingdom. Because there is no predictability between ethical conformity to covenantal law and economic growth, he concludes that capital consumption is logical. The world is upside-down ethically. The wise course of action is to grab what you can whenever you can.

4. Chapter 3.

5. Chapter 33.

IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS

When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it (Eccl. 8:16–17).

A. A Speechless God

This is autonomous man speaking. The Preacher acknowledges that there is a god, but he insists that this god does not reveal himself to men, even to wise men. This god is therefore wholly other: transcendent unto irrelevance.

The Preacher insists that a wise man cannot discover the work of God. This is incorrect. He can discover it in the Bible. It is legitimate to say that the wise man cannot discover all of the work of God (Deut. 29:29). Man is not omniscient. But the fact that he cannot discover the work of God comprehensively does not mean that he cannot discover it truly. Van Til summarized this position.

Berkouwer quite rightly says that on the biblical approach there is no dualism in the idea of God. But this does not mean that man claims to have at any point an exhaustive understanding of things. It does not even mean that in some field, for instance, the field of science or that of philosophy, man aims at an exhaustive knowledge of reality. On the contrary, the biblical views involve the recognition of mystery everywhere. There is no fact in the universe that man understands or will understand comprehensively. But his presupposition is that, because God has created all things, therefore he also controls and directs all things. Of course the believer does not seek to prove the existence of such a God. This God must be presupposed as the

basis of all proof in any field. Thus the biblical position is not like that of rationalism or like that of irrationalism. Nor is it like any combination of these two. It is based on the presupposition that man knows truly though not comprehensively because God does know all things in terms of his self-contained being and has revealed himself to man.¹

The Preacher comes as the Kantian theologian Karl Barth came: in the name of autonomous man.² The god of autonomous man is so far above man, so mysterious, that it does no good for man to search out the works of this god or the ways of this god. This has always been the underlying presupposition of autonomous men, for they seek to deny the God who brings final judgment (Rev. 20:14–15). If He has not revealed his work to men, then men are not responsible subordinate agents. This makes them supreme autonomous agents for as long as they can enforce their claim against god or any rival claimant. The god of autonomous man does not bring predictable judgments in history. History is the realm of autonomous man, who seeks to bring history under his control. This not the God of the Bible. Van Til wrote:

No one has an exhaustive knowledge of God as revealed in the world. The Parmenidean idea that man has or can have such knowledge of God presupposes that man is autonomous. The Kantian notion that man can have no knowledge of the triune God also presupposes that man is autonomous. . . .

As a covenant being man must seek to implicate himself into the revelation of God. If he is to see the facts of his environment for what they are, he must see them as being nothing more or less than bearers of the covenant requirements and promises of God. We may therefore say that man's proper method of obtaining knowledge is that of implication into God's revelation. . . .

Our basic approach then is to accept on authority what Christ says in Scripture. Our basic presupposition is based on our belief that in Scripture God speaks to us. We cannot comprehend, i.e., exhaustively understand, what God says to us about anything.³

1. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), pp. 432–33.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Van Til, in E. R. Geehan (ed.), *Jerusalem and Athens Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971), p. 302.

B. A Matter of Responsibility

The Preacher, in the name of autonomous man, offers a counsel of despair. He says that a wise man can have no knowledge of the work of God. This, if true, places man outside the covenant. Logically speaking, as the Preacher speaks, we are not responsible if we have no knowledge of what God requires. But his premise is false. Men do have knowledge of what God requires. This condemns them. Paul wrote: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)" (Rom. 2:14–15).⁴

The Preacher uses a phrase that has confused translators: "there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes." Does this refer to him in his quest for knowledge? Some translators have so translated it. The English Standard Version reads: "how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep." This refers to the magnitude of the task of understanding God's work.

The Preacher has hit the barrier announced by Moses: "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut. 29:29a). This is an aspect of God's omniscience, which is an incommunicable attribute of God. When man confronts a barrier established by this attribute, he is supposed to back off. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour" (Rom. 9:20–21). To seek a degree of knowledge comparable to what God possesses is to seek to become God.

Autonomous man does not rely on the doctrine of the omniscience of God to provide his own derivative understanding. He does not believe that there is understanding derived from God. Thus, he must grasp the cosmos by means of his own mind. He builds his kingdom as the people at the Tower of Babel built theirs: without reference to God.

Conclusion

The Preacher articulates a fundamental presupposition of autono-

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

mous man: God has not revealed himself to us. This, autonomous man believes, gets him off the covenantal hook. He will die, but that will end things. Autonomous man is willing to live in despair about history, despair about the meaninglessness of a life spent in a universe that is governed by death. For him, the first death is acceptable, just so long as he does not face the second death. “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14). The Bible reveals a very different God and a very different end for covenant-keeping men.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:1–4).

DEAD LIONS AND ECONOMIC STAGNATION

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion (Eccl. 9:2–4).

A. Death and Differentiation¹

The Preacher returns to one of his two major sub-themes regarding autonomous man: *the absolute sovereignty of death*. He goes to the heart of the matter once again.

For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun (Eccl. 9:5–6).

He then says something that has become an aphorism in the Christian West: a living dog is better than a dead lion. It would make a fine inscription on the tombstone of autonomous man.

He speaks here on behalf of autonomous man. His observations are consistent with the philosophy of autonomy. He concludes that thinking defines a person. When thinking ceases because of death, everything else ceases. “For the living know that they shall die; but the

1. Chapter 3.

dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten” (v. 5). The living know that they shall die. What does this mean for the living? That there is nothing to hope for. There will be no reward after death. There will be no memory of the dear departed, either. Even if there is some recollection initially, this will pass with the deaths of those who remember. The hope of fame comforts an elite among the living. It is a false hope.

What will remain of today’s activities, emotions, and dreams? Nothing. “Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun” (v. 6). History is all there is, and once a person departs from history, there is nothing.

These verses are used by defenders of the concept of soul sleep to deny the existence of hell. But these passages, so interpreted, are equally as effective in countering heaven as hell. They are supportive of autonomous man in history. The price paid by autonomous man to gain such support is the destruction of meaning and hope. Without differentiation in terms of either ethics or historical significance, the present has no meaning. *When death swallows up everything, it swallows up differentiation.* Love, hatred, and envy are relevant in life because of the pleasure or pain they bring in the present, but there is no ratification by the future. “All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked” (v. 2).

B. Dogs and Lions

A dog in Bible times was not a respected animal.

But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel (Ex. 11:7).

And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods (I Sam. 17:43).

But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog (Psalm 22:19–20).

In contrast, a lion was respected as a beast of prey.

Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a

young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain (Num. 23:24).

He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee (Num. 24:9).

And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head (Deut. 33:20).

The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul (Prov. 20:2).

When the Preacher writes that it is better to be a live dog than a dead lion, he is making a powerful statement in favor of life over death. Death transforms a lion to such an extent that being a live dog is preferable. The fame of a dead lion is nothing. A live dog is better off.

C. Live It Up

Autonomous man lives without hope. He can enjoy only the present. The Preacher recommends this.

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them (Eccl. 9:7–12).²

Time and chance happen to all living things. There is no predictable cause and effect in history. The earthly future of autonomous man is random. Death alone is predictable: the termination of cause and

2. Chapter 34.

effect.

In such a world, future-orientation is naive, even foolish. The present is here; the future is problematical. The grave is certain.

In such a worldview, high interest rates are the result. To persuade a person to give up the use of consumer goods in the present in order to gain additional consumer goods in the future is a difficult sell to a consistent autonomous man. Sacrifice in the present for the sake of greater wealth in the future is a high-risk venture. There is no advantage worth paying for, since time and chance are supreme. The present alone is sure.

This outlook is hostile to economic growth. It is hostile to progress. Economic growth and progress are financed by thrift. People turn over to entrepreneurs the money or tools that could be used for present enjoyment in order to fund future output. The more present-oriented a culture is, the higher the rate of expected return must be in order to persuade people to save.³ Also, entrepreneurs must compete with present-oriented consumers for the funds made available by savers. Consumer loans pay higher rates of interest on producer loans.

Conclusion

The Preacher recommends present-orientation. On behalf of autonomous man, he proclaims a philosophy of life.

Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun (Eccl. 8:15).⁴

This is a philosophy of stagnation, of history without progress.

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

4. Chapter 31.

34

WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest (Eccl. 9:7–10).

A. The Sovereignty of Death

The Preacher again relies on his now-familiar exhortation regarding the sovereignty of death.¹

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten (Eccl. 9:2–5).²

Here, he draws a conclusion: enjoy the moment. Live for the moment. The moment is all that we have. He had already come to this conclusion.³ But the final component of his conclusion here does not

1. Chapter 3.

2. Chapter 33.

3. Chapters 5, 20.

make sense, given the other implications of his worldview. Why should anyone work with all his might? The Preacher had already denied the wisdom of such effort with respect to the pursuit of righteousness and wickedness.

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? (Eccl 7:14–17).⁴

He concludes that the ethical randomness of the lifetime outcomes of our labor should lead us to take things easy. To strive to attain either righteousness or wickedness is a waste of time and effort. “Go with the flow. Lighten up. Easy does it. Don’t work yourself to death.” “Why shouldest thou die before thy time?”

B. Hard Work

Then, without warning, he recommends hard, relentless work. He offers this reason: there will be no work in the grave. So what? If no man’s memory survives in the grave (v. 10), and if no inheritance is secure,⁵ and if the world will eventually forget about you,⁶ what possible advantage is hard work in the present? Work for its own sake is madness. Work is either for the worker, or for itself, or to help others. He says here that work is for the sake of the worker, whose work will cease in death. But why should the worker revel in work? Why not revel in leisure? “Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.”

He speaks here in the name of autonomous man, who has no hope in the future. He has only the present. He must therefore savor all things, one by one, in the present. He must put his heart and soul into his work, for he has only the present.

This is present-orientation with a vengeance. It is grasping at straws. It is vanity. He knows it is vanity. “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath

4. Chapter 27.

5. Chapters 4, 13, 21.

6. Chapters 3, 30.

given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.” He previously had said that both righteousness and wickedness should be pursued moderately. But what applies to ethics does not apply to work.

There is no logic to this conclusion, yet he draws it. The conclusion does not follow from his presuppositions regarding autonomous man. He is thrown back to the original covenant, the dominion covenant.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26–28).⁷

This covenant defines man. Man cannot be understood correctly apart from this. The Preacher invokes hard work because hard work, not consumption, defines man. High consumption is a product of hard work, but only randomly, according to the Preacher (Eccl. 9:10–11).⁸ Hard work is its own reward. This is the essence of autonomy: the quest for self-reliance. It affirms that the Bible’s system of covenantal sanctions in history is not reliable. It says that God does not bring sanctions in history according to His ethical requirements. Autonomy opposes theonomy.

In God’s kingdom, work is always for God’s sake, as mediated (represented) by some aspect of the creation. This is an implication of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. The Preacher not only does not make this clear here, he recommends a philosophy of life that militates against the covenantal view of work.

C. Why Invoke God?

The Preacher says: “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works” (v. 7).

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

8. Chapter 35.

On what basis can autonomous man invoke God? The Preacher has done this before. “There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God” (Eccl. 2:24).⁹

This god grants blessings, but these blessings are not predictable. So, a man should enjoy them while he can. They are not reliable. They are not the product of ethical causation. They are the random blessings of a god who does not grant blessings on the basis of ethical conformity to His law.

In such a universe, man is a co-laborer with god. God has greater power, but He is not the god of the biblical covenant. A man does not need to subordinate himself to this god, through grace by faith. He merely enjoys whatever blessings this god arbitrarily bestows on people, according to no predictable system of causation. This is the god of autonomous man. This god allows men to make their own way through life. He intervenes, but capriciously. He is like a rich uncle who occasionally sends his nephew a present for no known reason. The nephew enjoys it while he can.

D. Present-Orientation vs. Entrepreneurship

The Preacher exhorts us to live for the moment, for the moment is all we have. Nothing else has any reliable foundation. The future is inherently unreliable. It leads to death, and death is sovereign.

The present-orientated person is ready to sacrifice future income for present consumption. The future is insecure, at best. The present is here. A bird in hand is better than two under the bush. Why risk a loss when the present is doing well?

This attitude is hostile to entrepreneurship. The future is too uncertain to justify entrepreneurship. The accent is on consumption now.

The Preacher recommends hard work. This is not logical. If the future is insecure and besieged by randomness, then hard work is no guarantee of future success. At best, it is indulged in for the pleasures it brings. But it brings pleasure only because God has made man in His image. God worked six days out of seven. The Preacher, in the name of autonomous man, rests his case for work on nothing. The recommendation makes sense only on the assumption that man is under the

9. Chapter 5.

God of the covenant, not the god of autonomous man.

Hard work is not the essence of entrepreneurship. The laborer digging a ditch with a shovel works hard. He is not an entrepreneur. The driver of an earth-moving machine works less hard and accomplishes far more. Entrepreneurship is the vision, the forecasting, and the uncertainty-bearing¹⁰ that are required to invent a better earth-moving machine.

The world is transformed more by entrepreneurs than by ditch-diggers. The Preacher here offers no encouragement to entrepreneurs. He does offer a way of self-justification for ditch diggers. He offers *the labor theory of value*: work for its own sake.¹¹

Conclusion

The Preacher offers what appears initially to be a counsel of hope to offset his counsel of despair. His doctrine of the sovereignty of death offers no meaningful hope. Impersonal death swallows up everything in the end, thereby undermining all meaning. Some men seek power; others prefer escape. Neither strategy makes any meaningful difference in the cosmology of autonomous man. The Preacher therefore abandons all meaning in the name of consumption. Enjoy! Yet he also recommends hard work. Why would anyone enjoy work in preference to leisure? With this philosophy of history, a commitment to hard work undermines the commitment to leisure. Hard work is not logical in a world in which death is sovereign, inheritance is uncertain, and outcomes are ethically random.

The Preacher is grasping at logical straws, for this is what autonomous man does. In full public view, the Preacher is making the case for autonomous man's worldview. This worldview is self-defeating. It is a counsel of despair.

10. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

11. This was the error of classical economics. The subjective value revolution in economic theory that began in the early 1870s rejected the labor theory of value.

THE SECONDARY SOVEREIGNTY OF CHANCE

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all (Eccl. 9:10–11).

A. Random Outcomes

The Preacher speaks here as autonomous man. For him, death is the ultimate sovereign.¹ Time is a tertiary sovereign. Why? Because time cannot overcome death. Time is governed by the secondary sovereign: chance. For autonomous man, chance governs history until death intervenes. It is death > chance > time.

He says here that there is no predictable causality between swift-ness and victory in a race, or between strength and victory in a war. There is no predictable bread to the wise, nor predictable riches to men of understanding. The outcomes are inherently random, no matter what history seems to indicate. *Men are deceived by randomness.* What appear to be causal sequences are in fact illusions. Autonomous man should not count on anything.

The priests of Philistia knew better. When the victorious army brought back the Ark of the Covenant, each city that hosted it was struck by a plague. Each city then passed the Ark on to the next city, and the scenario was repeated. The priests decided that the presence of the Ark might be the source of the plagues. So, they devised a test.

Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a

1. Chapter 3.

trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us.

And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh (I Sam. 6:7–12).

The priests recognized the difference between God's negative sanctions and random events. The priests were not intimidated by what might have been chance. They saw that they had to make a decision. They let untrained but domestic animals do this for them. They even rigged the test in favor of the retroactive explanation of chance. They left the calves inside Philistia. The outcome was what they had suspected.²

B. Covenantal Causation

God revealed to Moses that social causation is governed by ethics. There are positive sanctions.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. (Deut. 28:1–2).

There are also negative sanctions.

And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these

2. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee (Deut. 28:14–15).³

This outlook is what the Preacher, speaking on behalf of autonomous man, forthrightly denies here. He is making the case against the predictability of the world around us. If all things are governed by chance, then the case for righteousness is blunted. So is the case against sin. Men should seek a middle way.

All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? (Eccl. 7:15–17).⁴

The concept of covenantal causation militates against such a view. When it comes to righteousness, here is the rule: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (v. 10a). This places work within a covenantal context.

Conclusion

The Preacher is not arguing for chance in preference to necessity, as modern man does. He is arguing for chance in preference to the covenant. The covenant affirms predictability in terms of God’s law and God’s sanctions in history (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The Preacher here denies such predictability.

When Christians deny that covenantal predictability exists in the New Covenant, they must move in one of three directions, toward: (1) the Preacher’s affirmations here; (2) modern man’s affirmation of necessity (Kant’s phenomenal realm of science) over chance; or (3) modern man’s affirmation of chance (Kant’s noumenal realm of personality) over impersonal scientific necessity.⁵ None of these views self-consciously promotes the extension of the kingdom of God.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

4. Chapter 27.

5. Richard Kroner, *Kant’s Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956).

MONEY AND POWER RELIGION

There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard (Eccl. 9:14–16).

A. Poverty and Influence

The Preacher says that the poor wise man may be able to persuade rulers to adopt a city-saving policy, but only when the city is visibly facing a defeat. After it survives, no one remembers the name of the poor man.

Why should this be? He implies that this is because wisdom is associated with wealth. There is a phrase, “If he’s so smart, why isn’t he rich?” Put another way, “Intelligence is as intelligence does.” If a man does not use his intelligence to accumulate a lot of money, what good is it?

This is a misunderstanding of wisdom and wealth. The author of the Book of Proverbs prayed this:

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die:
Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee,
and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain (Prov. 30:7–9).¹

Biblical wisdom is casuistry: the application of biblical law to specific circumstances. The pre-eminent passage in the Bible on wisdom is Psalm 119, which is devoted to declaring the magnificence of God’s

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

law. It is not a declaration of natural law.

B. Power Religion

The Preacher is speaking on behalf of autonomous man. He describes autonomous man's autonomous society. There, a wise man's wisdom is accepted only when there is no alternative. Everyone else has offered his opinion. No one's opinion offers legitimate hope. There is no escape. Now what? "Now there was found in it a poor wise man." In other words, someone went looking for a person who could offer a plausible way of escape. This man was nobody's first choice of counsel. He had no ready access to the corridors of power. He was out of the loop.

This was a unique situation. It is not every day that a king besieges a city. Those inside the gates had no experience in dealing with such a problem. The experts had been caught flat-footed. Their opinions carried little weight. There was no plausible plan of action. Defeat was imminent. Only at this point did the recommendation of a wise man have an opportunity to be heard. Only then did the Establishment allow an outsider to invade its turf. As soon as the emergency had passed, the Establishment dismissed the wise man. It did not elevate him to a place of permanent influence. It covered up the evidence that an outsider had saved the city. He was soon forgotten.

The premier example biblical of this process of rags to riches to forgetfulness is Joseph. He was a poor man: a foreigner in a prison. He was found—remembered—by the king's servant, but only after none of the wise men of Egypt could interpret Pharaoh's dream. He saved Egypt from the worst effects of famine. Yet within 135 years,² "there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (Ex. 1:8). Egypt had no profitable use for the God of Joseph any longer. It wanted profitable slaves, not heirs of a prophet.

Autonomous man wants the benefits of subordination to an all-powerful God. He does not want actual subordination. He wants strength, not wisdom. "Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." Autonomous man and autonomous society seek power, not subordination. Theirs is the power religion. The Pharaoh of the exodus

2. The Israelites' stay in Egypt was 215 years: half of the 430 years mentioned by Paul (Gal. 3:17). Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1:A:1. The exodus took place when Moses was 80 (Ex. 7:7).

was a representative of the power religion. He was completely defeated. He did not perceive the value of wisdom. Biblical wisdom begins with subordination to God. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).

Conclusion

Autonomous man equates wisdom with money, and money with power. He wants power. He does not want subordination.

The Preacher describes a city that was facing the ultimate subordination: military defeat. No one had a plan to escape defeat. Only then did a poor man get a hearing. After his plan worked, the powers that be made sure that the public's memory of his victory and their embarrassment was suppressed.

This criticism does not apply to biblical religion. Moses was never forgotten in Israel after the exodus. He was not remembered as a shepherd. David, another ex-shepherd, was not forgotten as a king. Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), is not forgotten as the King of kings. All three demanded and received subordination. Those who rejected this subordination perished: Korah and Dathan, Nabal and Ahithophel, and Judas Iscariot.

HIERARCHY AND JUDGMENT

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth (Eccl. 10:5–7).

A. A Poor Judge

A ruler rules by exercising judgment. He assesses the circumstances; then he issues a command. The language here indicates that a ruler has shown poor judgment.

This ruler elevates folly to a position of dignity. He sets the rich in a low place. The Preacher sees this as a reversal of correct priorities. The foolish ruler places something first that ought to be last. Folly is clearly something to be avoided. The Preacher contrasts this with placing something at the bottom that ought to be at the top: the rich. The contrast does not make sense if the rich do not belong on top.

The Preacher is speaking here as a covenant-keeper. He does not declare that bad judgment is vanity. Everyone knows this. When he speaks as an autonomous man, there is equality of vanity. Judgment makes no difference. Wisdom makes no difference. Folly makes no difference. By identifying folly as occupying the high position, he is invoking the concept of permanent standards. This implies the existence of wise judgment—judgment that conforms itself to permanent standards. This ruler does not exercise wise judgment.

The Preacher's contrast between riches and folly rests on a conclusion: *riches as legitimate rather than evil*. A wise ruler ought to acknowledge that rich men have attained their wealth through wise judgment. They either accumulated wealth or else maintained an inheritance. In either case, they are doing something right. Not many men are rich. These men have distinguished themselves from others, who do

not possess the skills required to get rich.

The Preacher is not saying that the ability to get rich is the sole criterion for being elevated to a position of dignity. He is saying that the ability to get rich is superior to folly. *Wealth is an objective criterion of superior performance.* Those people who perform in a superior way ought to be regarded by a ruler as people whose judgment is more reliable than the judgment of those who are undistinguished. If a ruler is to receive wise counsel, he should consult with rich people.

B. Criteria for Judgment

William F. Buckley, Jr., the most prominent American political conservative intellectual in the second half of the twentieth century, once quipped that he would rather be governed by the first 200 people whose names appear in the Boston telephone directory than by the faculty of Harvard University. He did not say this because he graduated from Yale. His book-long critique of Yale, which he wrote at age 25, made him a national figure overnight.¹ He was making a point that was not unlike the Preacher's: folly is not to be elevated to high civil office. He regarded the criteria for being appointed to Harvard's faculty by a committee of Harvard professors as resting on ideological folly. Thus, their superior academic performance is evidence of ineligibility in positions of civil responsibility.

We could dismiss the quip as clever but not to be taken seriously. Yet in one crucial area of Anglo-American civilization, we demand that the principle of judgment underlying Buckley's quip be honored by law: *jury selection*. One foundation of liberty is a jury of one's peers. Any attempt by the state's judicial agents to screen access to a jury by means of academic criteria employed by the Harvard faculty to screen itself would be regarded by common men and most educated men as a threat to their liberty.

A candidate for a politically appointed judgeship might gain an advantage by having graduated from the Harvard Law School. A judge is supposedly a skilled interpreter of the law. But in criminal cases, people in Anglo-Saxon nations do not want judges to interpret the criminal law. They want juries to interpret the criminal law. They want judges to confine themselves to ruling on matters of courtroom procedure. This is not the same thing as exercising rulership.

Wealth is one criterion for exercising rulership. The Preacher

1. William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale* (Chicago: Regnery, 1951).

singles out wealth as the opposite of folly. It is better to be rich than a fool. It is better for a ruler to listen to rich people than to listen to foolish people. They are more likely to be wise than fools.

The Preacher assumes that the criteria for becoming rich are not based on corruption or violence. What disturbs him in this passage is that objective standards for success are not honored by rulers and those who imitate foolish rulers. “I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.” There is always a hierarchy of values in a society.² There is always a hierarchy of performance in terms of this hierarchy of values. Winners are few.

C. The Religion of Revolution

Hierarchy is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of hierarchy vs. no hierarchy. It is always a question of which hierarchies, in which spheres of life, enforcing which laws and values. Those who meet the criteria for rulership must not be treated as servants, nor should servants be treated as rulers. It was one of the great evils of ancient pagan societies that they celebrated Chronos festivals, where fools would rule for a week and then be executed. Such an inversion of hierarchy was regarded as a source of social regeneration: chaos over order. This was an intensely anti-biblical worldview. I wrote the following in the mid-1960s.³

* * * * *

In all but the Biblical cosmology, the creation was seen as the imposition of order upon a chaotic matter. Thus, in the festivals and other rituals of chaos, society was thought to have access to that vital matter which existed before form was imposed to stifle its free action. Roger Caillois has explained this pagan cosmology, focusing his attention on the festival: “It is a time of excess. Reserves accumulated over the course of several years are squandered. The holiest laws are violated, those that seem at the very basis of social life. Yesterday’s crime is now prescribed, and in place of customary rules, new taboos and disciplines

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2012), ch. 2.

3. Gary North, *Marx’s Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989), pp. 74–75. (<http://bit.ly/gnmr>)

are established, the purpose of which is not to avoid or soothe intense emotions, but rather to excite and bring them to climax. Movement increases, and the participants become intoxicated. Civil or administrative authorities see their powers temporarily diminish or disappear. This is not so much to the advantage of the regular sacerdotal caste as to the gain of secret confraternities or representatives of the other world, masked actors personifying the Gods or the dead. This fervor is also the time for sacrifices, even the time for the sacred, a time outside of time that recreates, purifies, and rejuvenates society. . . . All excesses are permitted, for society expects to be regenerated as a result of excesses, waste, orgies, and violence.”⁴

The festival is a ritual recreation of some key event in the life of a society. Perhaps the most famous of the creation festivals were the Saturnalia, the New Year, and the spring fertility rites. There was an identification with those first days of the universe where no rules bound creation. “It is the Golden Age: the reign of Saturn and Chronos, without war, commerce, slavery, or private property.”⁵ “It was an age of total abundance, but also one of terror, where dark forces were loose in the universe. Both elements were therefore present in the festivals.”⁶ Here was the primitive conception of the form-matter controversy or the nature-freedom scheme: law was seen both as a limitation on man and simultaneously a barrier against the terrors of the unknown. The function of the excesses was to pour vitality into the world of order: “All living things must be rejuvenated. The world must be created anew.”⁷ “The traditions of the festival have been preserved in modern times in isolated primitive cultures, as well as in many folk customs, such as the Mardi Gras and the Carnival.”⁸

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4. Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959), p. 164. Cf. Thorold Jacobson's analysis of the meaning of festivals in Henri Frankfort, *et. al., Before Philosophy* (Baltimore, Maryland: Pelican, [1946] 1964), pp. 213-16. This volume was previously published by the University of Chicago Press under the title, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*. [It has been republished under the older title.]

5. Caillois, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

6. Sir James George Frazer, *The Scapegoat*, vol. 4 of *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 306-7.

7. Caillois, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Cf. A. J. Wensinck, “The Semitic New Year and the Origin of Eschatology,” *Acta Orientalia*, Old Series, I (1923), pp. 158-99.

8. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

Conclusion

Social order is strengthened by a consistent implementation at every level of biblical ethics, which in turn should be governed by biblical law. This is the judicial art of casuistry: the application of biblical law to specific situations. The Bible's hierarchy of values is to be visibly honored by rulers.

Rich people are winners in a godly society. Wherever rich people are not regarded as winners, a society is not consistently biblical. This is an inescapable conclusion inferred from this passage. Another conclusion is that men who are eligible for high office should not walk when servants ride. Society always honors hierarchy. It had better honor a biblical hierarchy.

JUSTIFYING PARALYSIS

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby (Eccl. 10:8–9).

A. A Threatening Environment

The Preacher speaks here in the name of autonomous man. This autonomous man is not the self-confident image of autonomy that Karl Marx liked to promote as his lifetime model: Prometheus.¹ Rather, he sees himself as surrounded by threatening limits. Whenever he makes a cost-benefit analysis, he sees mostly costs.

The Preacher's predictions represent a pattern of causation. They are all negative. Men are surrounded by limits that hamper their efforts to change their environment. Everywhere autonomous man turns, his environment constitutes a threat. Anyone who takes these predictions seriously begins at a disadvantage when compared with someone who sees God as absolutely sovereign and the cosmos under the dominion of covenant-keepers. He sees costs where the covenant-keeper sees opportunities.

The covenant-breaker sees the universe as hostile to man. The covenant-keeper sees the universe as under man's lawful authority. The covenant-breaker sees risk and uncertainty everywhere. These negative forces undermine most people's efforts to overcome them, the Preacher says. The covenant-keeper believes that these limits are part of God's curse, and that this curse can be progressively overcome in history, which is what God revealed to Moses, and through Moses to the people of God.

1. Leonard P. Wessell, Jr., *Prometheus Bound: The mythic structure of Karl Marx's scientific thinking* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

B. God's Curse

The limits described here are aspects of God's curse on Adam and Adam's field of dominion (Gen. 3:17–19).² The goal of this dual curse was two-fold: to restrict mankind's ability to commit gross evil and to offer hope of dominion through God's grace. The first aspect of the curse is reflected in the traditional saying, "The devil loves idle hands." When covenant-breakers possess extended leisure, they are dangerous. They will pursue evil because they have time on their hands. The common curse on man and his labor is God's common grace of restricting debauchery and violence.

The second aspect of the curse offers a way of release from this curse. Through grace-initiated adherence to biblical law, covenant-keepers can advance both their self-interest and the kingdom of God. The system of covenantal sanctions described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 reveals a world in which there are positive sanctions for obedience and negative sanctions for disobedience. *This ethical cause-and-effect system favors the extension of the kingdom of God at the expense of the kingdom of man.* Autonomous man rejects the thought of lifelong individual and corporate covenantal subordination to God's Bible-revealed law-order. He wants to avoid such subordination. So, he is at a competitive disadvantage to covenant-keepers whenever they conform themselves to God's law.

The covenantal system of cause and effect is a subsidy to covenant-keepers. It is a subsidy to the kingdom of God. The world is not a level playing field between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. It is a rigged arena that favors covenant-keepers.

Covenant-breakers do have two major advantages. First, there is common grace.³ Covenant-breakers are numerous. They are influential. They receive God's blessings. Second, the division of labor favors those societies and civilizations that are united through confession. During those periods of covenant-breaking in which there is widespread social co-operation, through voluntary exchange or empire or both—as in Jesus' day—the kingdom of man advances alongside the kingdom of God. The division of labor is productive for all men. It extends men's dominion. Because the Adamic covenant extends so widely, those who are united by various confessions of faith opposed to the

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

God of the Bible enjoy high productivity. Think of the hundreds of millions of covenant-breaking graduates of the modern humanistic education system. Compare their numbers and opportunities with the graduates of under-funded Christian day schools and Bible colleges. The humanists are committed to building a civilization. They possess enormous capital. They have an extensive division of labor. By comparison, the tiny numbers of Bible college graduates or Christian liberal arts college graduates are not interested in building a civilization, and they possess little capital.

Nevertheless, covenant-breaking man cannot remain permanently committed to a social order that honors the externals of biblical law: private property, personal responsibility, profit and loss, the rule of law, decentralized civil government, and the enforcement of contracts. Sooner or later, covenant-breakers rebel.⁴ They lose their advantages. *The fall of the Roman Empire and its replacement by Christian civilization is the consummate indicator of this process.* The replacement took two forms, eastern and western Christendom, but neither was Roman. Polytheism disappeared, except as underground aspects of folk culture.⁵

C. Reversing the Curse

The Preacher's points are well taken. "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it." There is a solution. "And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein. The owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his" (Ex. 21:33–34).⁶ By an expenditure of time and money, a person can reduce the threat by covering the pit. Biblical law offers an incentive to do this: responsibility. There are negative sanctions for causing an injury.

"Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him." Serpents live in hedges. So, a wise man uses tools to break down a hedge. He watches for serpents. He beheads them with a spade or other tool. The serpent is ultimately subservient to man. His resistance shall be overcome.

4. *Ibid.*, chaps. 6, 7.

5. John Cuthbert Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1910] 1964). Published originally by Cambridge University Press.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 41.

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:14–15).

“Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith.” Quarrymen do face risks. This is why they have safety codes. Every high-risk profession does.

“He that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.” Wood-splitting is dangerous. There are few occupations more dangerous than logging. Men should therefore be careful with their tools. One of the ways to do this is to sharpen the axe’s blade. The Preacher knew this. “If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct” (Eccl. 10:10). Axes are a threat, too. The Mosaic law acknowledged this.

As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live: Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past (Deut. 19:5–6).

This was the law of the blood avenger.⁷ The negative sanction—execution for manslaughter—was an incentive to take care of dangerous tools. Safety is important. There are ways to reduce the likelihood of injury. These ways increase short-term costs, but they reduce long-term costs by reducing injuries.

Conclusion

For each limit placed on the sons of Adam there are ways of overcoming it. A consistent covenant-keeper seeks out these ways. A consistent covenant-breaker is content to remain hedged in. His goal is consumption, not increased production. “Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to

7. It was annulled operationally after the return from the exile: no cities of refuge, and no civil government that enforced the Mosaic code. It was annulled theologically when the office of high priest was annulled at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (Eccl. 8:15).⁸ The dual motivations reflect rival covenants.

8. Chapter 31.

39

WASTED EFFORTS

The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city (Eccl. 10:15).

The foolish man suffers from a lack of information. He works, but his efforts are wasted. He knows how to achieve a limited task, but he does not know how to market his output. He grows weary in his labor, but when he has produced whatever it is that he has labored to produce, he does not know how to profit from it.

The Preacher uses the city as a metaphor of the market place. A city is a place of commerce. There, the division of labor is more extensive than in the countryside. There is a higher population density. Urban people do not consume the output of their labor. They exchange their output for money. They buy most of what they consume. Their per capita output is greater than in the countryside.

The foolish person does not know the way to the city. He does not understand how to access the place of commerce, where his output will find a ready market. He is able to produce something of value, but he is unable to maximize the value of his output by carrying it to a city, where there will be far more bidders for his output.

It is not sufficient to know how to produce something of value. If you do not know how to find a market for your output, you will waste your effort. You can invest time and money in the production process, but this is not enough. Products do not sell themselves. Marketing sells products. *The foolish man believes in the labor theory of value.* He thinks that just by producing an item, he will benefit from its sale. This is incorrect. The key to profitability is the ability and willingness to bring the work of your hands to a buyer.

There are more buyers in cities than in the countryside. But the fool does not possess the information required to turn his output into income. He needs to know the way to the city. This means that must

know how to market whatever he produces. He must know how to give consumers the opportunity to bid against each other for his product.

Conclusion

The futility of working for a rate of return that does not compensate the fool for his time and effort wearies him. Weariness is more burdensome to someone who is not profiting from his work than to someone who is. He loses hope. He cannot get from here to there —“there” being success.

The Preacher dismisses as a fool anyone who does not understand how to find a market for his output. His efforts are wasted.

THE COSTS OF SLOTH

By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through (Eccl. 10:18).

A. Entropy and Time

Things wear out. This is a universal observation. Entropy is a manifestation of the second law of thermodynamics. Things move toward randomness. Order breaks down. *Order is not a free resource.* The second law of thermodynamics is this: in a closed system, heat moves from hotter to colder. Put differently, energy disperses over time.

The Preacher did not know the second law of thermodynamics, but he recognized its operation. It takes effort to keep things from wearing out. The world is under a curse. The curse is not the tendency toward randomness. A carburetor would have operated in the garden of Eden. So would the distribution of molecules to men's olfactory organs. Flowers would have smelled good to men there. The curse is the extension of the decay of randomness to aspects of the creation who had not been affected before God cursed the ground (Gen. 3:17–18).¹

To offset the universal decay associated with the second law of thermodynamics, men must invest time, raw materials, and labor. They must forfeit the use of these valuable assets in order to repair the erosion that time causes. To do nothing is to fall behind.

Time is an irreversible capital asset. Once gone, it cannot be recovered. Within the confines of time, a person can reverse the effects of entropy. He can offset disorder. This takes effort and resources. This means that the slothful person faces a challenge. Whatever he

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

owns is under assault. His sloth places him at a disadvantage with an industrious person. *A slothful person lets time get away from him without converting it into something useful to anyone else.* Time gets away from everyone, but the fruits of time are different for different people. The slothful person does not devote labor and resources to overcoming the corrosive effects of entropy. Things wear out, including people. At some point, entropy kills all living forms.

The sovereignty of death can be seen in entropy. But entropy is not final. God's final judgment is final. Then the curse will be removed from covenant-keepers and all things under their jurisdiction. Paul wrote:

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:20–23).²

Because entropy can exist without the sovereignty of death in an open system, the world under God's grace can and will overcome death. This is taught in First Corinthians 15.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death (I Cor. 15:25–26).

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body (I Cor. 15:42–44).

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (I Cor. 15:53–55).³

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

B. The Greatest Reversal

The greatest reversal is the transition from wrath to grace. This is seen in the transition from death to life. John the Baptist announced: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

The transition from death to life is seen in economic growth. The effects of entropy are overcome through the combination of raw materials and labor over time, which produces capital.⁴ As capital increases, assuming that it is used efficiently by future-oriented entrepreneurs to serve God through serving the creation, the effects of entropy are reversed. This reversal is an aspect of the grace of God. The universe is not a closed entity. It is open to God, who created it and sustains it.

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:13–17).

Thus, Paul wrote, “Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1:29). God worked in him, overcoming weariness. This was a form of supernatural capital.⁵

Conclusion

The slothful man is a loser. He loses capital. That which he owns erodes away if he does nothing to reverse this process. The Preacher describes the negative effects of sloth. He does not call for a slothful man to labor. He merely warns him of the consequences of not laboring. This warning assumes that the listeners do not want to see their buildings decay and their houses fall. But this desire must be qualified with the economist’s universal qualification, “at some price.” At some very high wage, a slothful person may work. But slothful people place a

4. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 7:3–5.

5. Gary North: *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

high value on the present and a low value on the future. “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man” (Prov. 6:9–11). He who wishes to hire a slothful person must offer above-market wages. This reduces the quantity demanded.

41

MONEY: THE MOST MARKETABLE COMMODITY

A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things (Eccl. 10:19).

The Preacher announces what is obvious. A person who wants an opportunity for laughter should attend a feast. There, laughter is expected. It is part of the celebration. At a feast, wine is consumed. This increases the likelihood of laughter. People are less inhibited, more merry.

Why did he announce this? What was his point? To make a contrast between feasting and drinking on the one hand and money on the other. But what is the nature of this contrast? What is it about feasting and drinking that sets them apart from money?

Specialization. If a person wants laughter, he pays for a feast. If he wants to be merry, he pays for wine. *A specific desire is fulfilled by a specific asset.* The Hebrew word translated “feast” is the word for “bread.” The uses of bread are varied, but they are not universal. The same is true of wine. If you want laughter, the price is the consumption of food. If you want to make merry, the price is the consumption of wine. Food is the means to an end: laughter. Wine is a means to an end: merriment.

A. The Universal Means to Multiple Ends

In contrast is money. Money is a means to multiple ends. The Preacher uses poetic language: “money answers all things.” A specific goal figuratively cries out for specific means. As a means to laughter, bread cries out: “Use me.” As a means to merriment, wine cries out: “Use me.” As a means to all things, money cries out: “Use me.”

The Preacher recognizes the universality of money. There is no

money that does not offer near-universality. That is money's claim to fame. Money is widely recognized as a means of exchange. It can be used in many situations as a means to achieve one's goals. It can be used to pay for a feast or pay for wine. Caterers of feasts are happy—even insistent—to be paid in money. So are sellers of wine. Wherever we turn, there are sellers who are ready to hand over ownership of whatever it is that they sell in exchange for money.

Economists identify money as possessing these characteristics: (1) recognizability, (2) divisibility, (3) durability, (4) portability, and (5) high value per unit of weight. Some economists identify money as a means of exchange. Others identify it as a store of value. Others identify it as a unit of account. Ludwig von Mises identified it as the most marketable commodity.¹ He said that the other characteristic functions of money are secondary.²

Money is desired because people see that it has been highly desired in the past. They extrapolate this into the future. They see money as possessing market value in the future. This is the store-of-value function. It is more accurate to say that money is a valuable thing to store. There is nothing of intrinsic value to money, or anything else. All economic value is imputed subjectively. If this were not true, then the money would not have failed in the second year of the famine in Egypt (Gen. 47:15–16).³ It would not have failed in Jerusalem during the famine in Elisha's day (II Kings 6:25).

B. Autonomous Man and Money

The Preacher generalizes: “money answereth all things.” But is this really true? No. There are many things that money cannot buy. One of these is the supernatural power to perform miracles on behalf of God. Simon the magician tried to buy this.

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip

1. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1912] 1953), pp. 32–33. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>)

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–37.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 34.

preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:9–12).

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee (Acts 8:18–22).⁴

Money makes possible the modern division of labor. Without money, the division of labor would be that of a barter society: primitive. Money buys whatever is offered for sale by money. Yet most aspects of man's social life are not based on the exchange of money. Most services inside the family are not purchased by money. The same is true of churches, fraternal groups, and other voluntary associations. Money does not answer all things. It is used in the area of market exchange. To say that money answers all things is to deify the market. Clearly, the Preacher speaks here as representing autonomous man.

Conclusion

The Preacher offers a view of man that is misleading. He says that money answers all things. It does not answer the most important things: confession of faith, marriage, honor, voluntary sacrifice, integrity, and most other human relationships. His statement is a classic case of reductionism: reducing man and reducing society to self-interest and market exchange.

Money is the most marketable commodity. It is the basis of the modern division of labor. It makes possible modern mass production. It is far more important today than it was in the Preacher's day. Yet he made this statement. He knew it was not true. But autonomous man acts as though he believes it is true. We can see this in folk wisdom. "Every man has his price." "If he is so smart, why isn't he rich?"

4. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

CHARITY PAYS DIVIDENDS

*Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.
Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what
evil shall be upon the earth (Eccl. 11:1–2).*

A. A Positive Rate of Return

The Preacher speaks as a covenant-keeper here. He says that there is a positive rate of return (ROI) on charitable giving. There is therefore a system of ethical cause and effect in history. This is not what he has said previously in his role as autonomous man.

What does it mean to cast bread upon waters? This is not a familiar phrase. Some expositors have thought it refers to casting seeds into lakes or rivers. John Gill, the eighteenth-century Baptist who commented on every verse in the Bible and who had a mastery of the Talmudic literature, invoked images of tears. This exegesis is stretching the phrase out of shape.

... a man casts seed into the earth; but here it is said to be “upon the waters”; bread is to be given to such as are in distress and affliction, that have waters of a full cup wrung out unto them, whose faces are watered with tears, and foul with weeping, from whom nothing is to be expected again, who can make no returns; so that what is given thorn seems to be cast away and lost, like what is thrown into a river, or into the midst of the sea; . . .¹

The idea of casting something onto a flowing river or into the sea does seem to relate to what the Preacher advises. Were it not for this confirmation, a man who gives away food would have no way of knowing that his generosity will ever be repaid. What is not intuitive is said to be part of a system of causation. A man surrenders ownership over

1. Gill had an almost pathological hatred of periods.

food, yet he can rest assured that he will find it again “after many days.”

This text does not say that he will make a profit, only that the bread will be returned. In the next verse he explains that the world is uncertain. “Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.” A man cannot know all of the dangers that may threaten him. He is in this sense flying blind. But the previous verse reassures the generous man that his gift will not be in vain. “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight.” Open your hand wide, the Preacher advises. The threats are many. This calls for exceptional generosity.

B. Return on Investment

A standard measurement in business is return on investment (ROI). Money goes out. Even more money had better come back in. If it does not, then a profit-seeking enterprise is doomed. It will run out of funds.

The Preacher recommends that a man be generous because life’s threats are uncertain. In the Preacher’s day, there was no way for a man to estimate these threats. Today, there is: the law of large numbers. Certain kinds of events can be classified together. The probability of a particular type of event within this large class can be estimated mathematically. This is the basis of insurance. This discovery transformed medieval civilization in the West.² It led to modern society.

A man can insure against an evil event by participating in a community. Communities are marked by generosity. Membership provides access to aid from others. But the Preacher does not use this argument. He says that bread cast upon the waters does return. Men should therefore be highly generous.

It takes exceptional faith to act in terms of the Preacher’s discussion of cause and effect. When someone surrenders ownership of an asset without receiving something in return, he is poorer. His net worth is less. Yet the Preacher says that he is not that much poorer. The bread will be returned.

This return would actually be a negative because of the phenomenon of interest: a discount of future goods against present goods.³ If I will receive that which I surrender, I lose the use of the as-

2. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

set for a time. Present goods are more valuable than the same future goods. So, other things remaining equal, a return of my forfeited bread constitutes a loss. But other things do not remain equal. There are unknown evils out there. The uncovered pits of life are many, and it is dark outside. The Preacher says that generosity will be repaid. He does not say how.

C. Voluntarism

Generosity must be voluntary. Gill understood this.

... it must be "thy" bread, a man's own; not independent of God who gives it him; but not another's, what he owes another, or has fraudulently obtained; but what he has got by his own labour, or he is through divine Providence in lawful possession of; hence alms in the Hebrew language is called "righteousness": and it must be such bread as is convenient and fit for a man himself, such as he himself and his family eat of, and this he must cast, it must be a man's own act, and a voluntary one; his bread must not be taken and forced from him; it must be given freely, ...

This denies legitimacy to the welfare state and its theological foundation, the Social Gospel. Gill understood the principle, "thou shalt not steal." He knew that the commandment did not say, "thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote." The Preacher recommends charity, not special-interest legislation that uses state coercion to transfer wealth from one voting bloc to another.

Conclusion

Charity pays dividends. It returns after many days. All is not lost. Furthermore, what you do to others in need will reduce your risk of unknown disasters. He does not say how. To assert such a system of causation implies a system of providence.

This is why I conclude that he is speaking as a covenant-keeper here.

INPUTS AND OUTPUT

If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good (Eccl. 11:3–6).

A. If . . . Then

The Preacher begins with an observation. “If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.” This is an “if . . . then” explanation of causation. Men have no control over the *ifs* of nature. They therefore have no control over the *thens*.

A farmer who is a keen observer of nature makes decisions about his proper course of action. “He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.” Wind blows away the seed. Rain ruins harvested crops. He can control his labor. He can plant or not; he can reap or not. He has no control over nature. He must adjust to nature.

This explanation of causation ignores magic and prayer, both of which assume that the nature can be influenced by individual actions within a cosmos broader than nature. Magic relies on ritual manipulation within a cosmos governed by this principle: “As above, so below.” We can supposedly manipulate nature by manipulating representative physical objects. Sovereignty is not final. It is shared between man and

a personal cosmos.

Prayer relies on a petition before the throne of God, who is sovereign over history. Moses' prayer invoked God's reputation in response to God's threat to destroy the Israelites and create a new nation for Moses.

And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness (Num. 14:13–16).

God answered this prayer.

Nature is under God. It operates predictably in general, but unpredictably in specifics. Weather forecasting is a good example. Men can predict the path of a tornado, but they cannot predict where one will form. With the advent of weather satellites, predictions have become far more accurate. But as to what causes patterns, there is great disagreement. As for controlling the weather, little can be done. We must adjust to nature.

B. Man's Ignorance

The Preacher asserts that man knows very little—nothing important—about the specifics of either nature or God. “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.” This is not a denial that we know the patterns of both. Human pregnancies generally last nine months.

We work all day. We are not sure of the outcome. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” Yet there is a pattern over time. What are the actions recommended by the Preacher? The first is work. “In the morning sow thy seed.”

What is the second recommendation? “Withhold not thine hand.”

The meaning of this phrase is obscure. It appears nowhere else in the Bible. If it also refers to work, then it is work associated with the evening. This is not reaping, which is the contrast of the earlier verse: refusing to reap because of the rain clouds. Farmers do not reap when the sun is going down.

The phrase could refer to some other form of labor. Not withholding one's hand would then be the opposite of folding one's hands in sloth. "The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh" (Eccl. 4:5). A refusal to work produces poverty.¹ If this is the meaning, then the Preacher is recommending work from morning to evening. But no matter how hard one works or how long, the outcome is random.

I think it refers to charity. This is a carry-over from verse 2: "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."² Why give charity? Because of the ethical cause-and-effect system of the universe. Why should charity produce the same positive result as labor? In what kind of cosmos is charity an input, in the same way that labor is? Answer: a world governed by the God who is both sovereign and ethical.

The Preacher here insists that the daily outcome is unknown. "Thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Labor in the morning may produce a good outcome, or it may not. Charity in the evening may produce a good outcome, or it may not. Both may produce good. The outcome is unknown, in contrast to the inputs, which are known.

This reveals man's condition. We know what outcomes will cost: the cost of inputs. We make plans in terms of these costs. We forfeit leisure and consumption to fund these plans. Yet we cannot be sure that at the end of the day, we will be ahead of schedule or behind. The specifics are elusive in the morning. But we can still have legitimate confidence in the outcome of the overall plan.

In the free market, most innovations fail. This is not the same as saying that most plans fail. Most of life is in maintenance mode. Most plans are successful. By sticking to tried and true practices, men achieve success. They must also innovate in order to continue to succeed or succeed at a rate above average. A standard recommendation based on Pareto's law would be 80% maintenance and 20% innovation. This allows for a failure rate of innovations of 80%: 16% of everything.

1. Chapter 11.

2. Chapter 42.

The Preacher is saying something different: a failure rate in maintenance mode of 50%, i.e., random. This is a denial that men learn from history, selecting those production processes that produce a positive rate of return. Success in the past offers no guidance in the present. There is no historical continuity. There would not only be no progress, there would be capital consumption. This would lead to death. This is a counsel of despair.

C. Theonomy or Autonomy?

In whose name is the Preacher speaking: covenant-keeping man or autonomous man? In the view affirmed here, is causation biblical or humanistic? His conclusion: men should be hard working and charitable. This is consistent with the Bible. It is inconsistent with any system of cosmic causation that relies on the view of the cosmos as impersonal, whether random or deterministic.

Men do not possess omniscience. "Thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." Men do not know all of the works of God, but they can know His law. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). This is why he concludes: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13–14).³ This is theonomy.

The Preacher here is affirming the randomness of daily output, not randomness of final output. The producer must sacrifice leisure in the morning and assets in the evening, day after day. He must forfeit present income, which includes leisure. Why? Because, if he refuses, he will surely fail.

Conclusion

The Preacher affirms the randomness of daily economic cause and effect. A producer can add inputs to the production mix until the cows come home. The cows, if they even come home, may be either fat or lean. The inputs, including accurate knowledge of nature, do not determine the daily outcome. There is no predictable daily relationship

3. Chapter 45.

between inputs and output. But there can be predictability of patterns in nature. This is why men should pay attention to the weather if they farm. Similarly, there is predictability between obeying God's law and success.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away (Psalm 1:1–4).⁴

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1.

THE VANITY OF DEATH

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity (Eccl. 12:5–8).

A. The City's Cycle

The Preacher returns to the theme of cyclical history. He concludes much as he began: in despair over the cycles of life. He began with the cycles of nature (Eccl. 1:2–7).¹ He concludes here with the cycle of the city. Once, the city had been productive and optimistic. It had become wealthy. But the day of decline will arrive. The golden bowl will be broken. The pitcher and the wheel will be broken. He begins with this decline, but he ends with the most fundamental decline. Every man will die. “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” What is the conclusion? “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.” He ends where he began. “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). This is appropriate. If you argue logically from a presupposition, you will arrive right where you began. But you will have better arguments. There is progress in argumentation.

The Preacher has surveyed the way the world works. He has done so from two perspectives: the sovereignty of death and the sovereignty of God. He has devoted more space to the sovereignty of death.

At first, his commitment to cyclical history seemed to be an

1. Chapter 1.

affirmation of life. “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). There is no permanent progress. But there is also no permanent decline.

B. Beginning With Nature

The problem here is that he begins with nature. Nature was never to be autonomous. It was meant to be under man’s authority, as the designated agent of God. To use nature as a model for man is to misunderstand both man and nature. God, through the dominion covenant, commanded Adam (Gen. 1:27–28)² and later Noah (Gen. 9:1–3)³ to subdue the earth. Adam was to make a perfect world better: to dress it. This mandates progress. It therefore implies linear history, but not just linear history: progressive history. In personal matters, we call this progressive sanctification. This is not limited to individuals. It is to apply to nature and to civilization. The kingdom of God is the civilization of God.

Nature is under the curse of Adam (Gen. 3:17–19).⁴ Adam is under the curse of death. So is nature. Had the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ not delivered man from the second death (Rev. 20:14), nature would be doomed. Denying the redemption of Christ, modern science affirms the death of the universe. Because most scientists believe that the universe is a closed system, they see it as subject to the second law of thermodynamics. All energy is therefore moving from potential energy to kinetic energy, never to return again, never to work again, never to provide heat again. This final end is called the heat death of the universe.⁵ Modern autonomous man is even more committed to the philosophy of autonomy than ancient man was. He is therefore more aware of *the linearity of nature: from life to death*. This is the progress of the philosophy of autonomy. It is more consistent. It is better informed scientifically.

C. The Death of the City

The Preacher was aware of progress. Every society understands

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

5. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

progress. Men want things to get better. They forego the present use of resources for the sake of income in the future. This is why people save. They make tools. They use their minds to solve new problems.

The ancients did not believe that progress can be sustained.⁶ They saw the dust of death as covering the inheritance of every city. They had no long-term hope.

The Preacher uses the dying of the city to return to his theme of the sovereignty of death. Men die. Nature goes on as before, but everyone dies. Every city dies. Men come and go. Cities come and go. Nature stays the same. Nature is immune from death, but nothing that man builds is. The sovereignty of death extends its rule over man.

Modern physical science completes the investigation. It is not just cities that die; nature itself is dying. The process takes enormous quantities of time, but it is no less relentless, no less sovereign. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust: frozen dust. If anything will still move, it will be electrons. Electrons do not progress. They are not linear.

Conclusion

The Preacher offers no hope. How could he? The city of man dies. Men also die. What they build will not survive. Nothing of permanent value is transferred to the next generation. The stable cycles of life in nature are only background for the cycles of death for man and his works. Nature does not care that its cycles roll on meaninglessly. Man does care. Nature is without self-awareness. Man is. Nature imputes nothing to itself. Man imputes vanity to himself.

The Preacher has reached the end of the road. In terms of his own philosophy of autonomy, this road is a circle. There is no end to it. He arrives just where he began: with vanity. If he is better informed, this is a paradox. There has been progress in his understanding of the futility of progress. He has written it all down, but to what end? No end. "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Eccl. 12:12).

6. Stanley Jaki, *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), ch. 6.

THE ANSWER IS THEONOMY

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13–14).

A. Transferring the Inheritance

The Preacher at long last returns to his father's deathbed instructions. As part of the covenantal transfer of the inheritance of kingship, David delivered to his son the same charge that Moses delivered to Joshua. "And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore unto them: and I will be with thee" (Deut. 31:23). It was the same charge that the elders of Israel delivered to Joshua.

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:6–9).¹

1. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1.

Here is the account of this covenantal transfer of inheritance.

Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel (1 Kings 2:1–4).

B. The Lesson Learned

The Preacher has devoted his book to a consideration of two worldviews: autonomous man and covenant man. Here, he reaches a conclusion: the resolution of this debate is a return to biblical law.

He does not explain the logic of this conclusion. Instead, he relies on what he has already presented. He has presented a case against autonomous man by showing the futility of life, according to the presuppositions of autonomous man. The Preacher says that he has personally lived the life of autonomous man, and he presents his conclusion: vanity, all is vanity.

The Preacher was probably Solomon. We know this because of the opening words, which identify the author as a son of David (1:1). It is unlikely that any other son of David experienced all that the Preacher experienced and then wrote it down. Having experienced all this, he returned to his father's original admonition.

We are told that Solomon was a wise king. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:29–30). Yet we are told by the Preacher that he tasted all that he describes in this book. He discovered firsthand that all roads to and from autonomy lead to vanity. A wise man should have known this from the beginning. Yet the Preacher was unwilling to abide by his father's admonition, which his father had learned by violating God's law repeatedly. David had multiple wives, in opposition to biblical law. The Mosaic law restricted the king of Israel in this regard. "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his

heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (Deut. 17:17). Solomon multiplied wives far beyond anything dreamed of by his father (I Kings 11:3). He also multiplied gold (I Kings 10:14–23). He lived the life he describes in this book. When it was over, he returned to his father’s admonition a wiser man.

C. Covenant Man Is Theonomic Man

The Preacher’s conclusion is straightforward. God will bring final judgment. Every secret thing will be examined in terms of God’s law, “whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” This is point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.² Man therefore has a duty to obey God’s laws: point three.³ “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” There is nothing complicated here.

This passage is one of the most powerful defenses of biblical law in the Bible. In two verses, the Preacher summarizes a lifetime of investigation—philosophical, ethical, and practical. These two verses affirm biblical law as the resolution of the debate between autonomous man and covenant man.

He does not invoke the law of nations. He does not mention natural law, which is supposedly in the possession of every rational person. He says that God’s law is the key to a life well lived. What could be plainer?

It is too plain. Expositors generally prefer not to mention the context, which was the law of Moses. The long-winded Matthew Henry did include this brief comment in a long, rambling exposition of the verse.

The rule of religion is the law of God revealed in the scriptures. Our fear towards God must be taught by his commandments (Isa 29:13), and those we must keep and carefully observe. Wherever the fear of God is uppermost in the heart, there will be a respect to all his commandments and care to keep them. In vain do we pretend to fear God if we do not make conscience of our duty to him.

When this is all that an expositor can derive from the Preacher’s consummation of the most detailed philosophical book in the Bible, he

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

3. Sutton, ch. 3; North, ch. 3.

is not deeply interested in getting to the heart of the matter, as defined by the Preacher. But, compared to his contemporary, Baptist John Gill, the semicolon's friend, Henry's comments are both precise and incisive. Gill wrote:

fear God, and keep his commandments: "the fear of God" includes the whole of internal religion, or powerful godliness; all the graces of the Spirit, and the exercise of them; reverence of God, love to him, faith in him, and in his Son Jesus Christ; hope of eternal life from him; humility of soul, patience and submission to his will, with every other grace; so the Heathens call religion "metum Deorum" (q), the fear of God: and "keeping of the commandments", or obedience to the whole will of God, is the fruit, effect, and evidence of the former; and takes in all the commands of God, moral and positive, whether under the former or present dispensation; and an observance of them in faith, from a principle of love, and with a view to the glory of God; . . .

Writing a century later, Charles Bridges refused to admit even Gill's sliver of light regarding God's law.

The keeping of the commandments—at least in the case of the disciples of the Lord—primarily regards the great commandment—"to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ." ⁴The gospel, therefore, is not obscured, even when the terms of it are not completely given; so that—rightly understood, we fully identify the free grace and spiritual obedience of the gospel with the more legal exhortation to *fear God, and keep his commandments*.⁵

This is blindness, and it is self-conscious, because it is motivated by a hatred of biblical law. The Preacher was writing for Jews in the days of Israel's unified kingdom. The nation had covenanted with God at Sinai (Ex. 19).⁶ The terms of that covenant are found in the Mosaic law: the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20)⁷ and the Case laws (Ex. 21–23).⁸ The Preacher was not looking forward to the disciples. He was looking backward to Sinai. He was reaffirming what the nation had known from the beginning. He was warning the nation not to abandon God's

4. See 1 John, iii.23.

5. Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1860] 1961), p. 310.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion*, ch. 20.

7. *Ibid.*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986).

8. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

covenant law in a vain search for meaning and hope in autonomy. He was reaffirming theonomy as the antidote to the counsel of despair offered by autonomy. That Bridges could so completely twist the meaning of the consummation passage of the book indicates the extent to which evangelicalism at the highest levels has been cursed by antinomianism for centuries.

Hengstenberg refused to elaborate on the details of the law or the role of biblical law in the covenant. “To fear God and keep his commandments is the duty of all men, because all bear His image, and can have no true life of growth except in connection with the primal source of their existence: they must also be punished with destruction if they criminally and violently break this connection.⁹ What does “the primal source of their existence,” meaning all men, have to do with the Preacher’s call to obey the law of God? All men are under Adam’s curse. It does not take a criminal and violent breaking of this connection—whatever this connection refers to—to bring people under God’s judgment. Original sin does that all by itself.

Eaton’s 1983 commentary recognized that the book is a debate between two worldviews. He did not label the first *autonomy*, possibly because he did not label the second *theonomy*.

The body of the book has simply placed two alternative views of life over against each other and the life of faith has been commended. Now in the epilogue, almost as an aside, it is pointed out that such a life will have implications. It must not be restricted to the Mosaic law. It refers to all that is known to be God’s will.¹⁰

Notice the sleight-of-hand operation here? “It must not be restricted to the Mosaic law.” This shifts the reader’s attention away from the Mosaic law. Yet what did Eaton think the Preacher was referring to, if not the Mosaic law? If the Preacher had something else in mind, he owed it to his readers to tell them what it was. These were Jews under covenant to God.

To escape the obvious—and it is obvious—Eaton broadened the context, as if broadening the context solves his exegetical problem. “The last phrase reads literally: ‘For this is the whole of the man.’ Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, however, the ‘whole of the man’ is a Hebrew

9. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes, With Other Treatises* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1860), pp. 267–68.

10. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p. 156.

idiom for 'every man' (cf. 3:13; 5:19). The sense, therefore, is 'This applies to every man.'¹¹ He did not consider the implication of what he had just written, namely, that the Mosaic law applies to all men. By broadening the context, he implied but refuses to say explicitly, that we can discard the Mosaic law, which is the context of the entire book. The Preacher had something else in mind. What, Eaton did not say. The Preacher also did not say. But it is obvious to Eaton that he must have had something else in mind. Otherwise, the Preacher was calling for a universal extension of theonomy—and that is clearly unacceptable.

Derek Kidner was the supreme master in this regard. He devoted not one word to explaining the phrase "the commandments."¹² He did not acknowledge their existence in his text. Here is the core of the book, its consummation, according to the Preacher, and Kidner had nothing to say.

H. C. Leupold, a Lutheran, did not identify those commandments which all men are supposed to keep. He ended by asking a rhetorical question, which I would ask of him and the other expositors. "How can anyone overlook so obvious a thing as this practical suggestion, seeing that it is the duty of all alike?"¹³ My answer: an unwillingness to accept the Preacher's announcement that theonomy is the biblical alternative to autonomy.

The commentators have little or nothing to say about the covenantal context of the Preacher's definition of "the commandments," because they have rejected the continuing authority of the Mosaic law. They wax eloquent and sometimes quite long explaining the book, up to the final two verses, which the Preacher said explained the book. At that point, without warning, they say nothing judicially coherent, and they say it succinctly. This is not random. This is also not because the text is unclear. This is because the text is inescapably clear.

Conclusion

The Preacher built a case against covenant-breaking autonomous man. He marched the reader down a series of dead ends, each of which was marked by futility because of death. Then he pointed to the solu-

11. *Idem.*

12. Derek Kidner, *A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 107.

13. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 300.

tion to his dilemma. That solution is the judgment of God. This judgment establishes the duty of man. Man's duty is two-fold: "Fear God, and keep his commandments." It is consistent with what Solomon wrote. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).¹⁴ "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). This is also consistent with what David wrote in defense of God's law in Psalm 119.

14. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 2.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a puzzle for many readers—I suspect most readers. Some of it rings true to the God-fearing man, yet other parts—most of its parts—ring false. This is because most of it is false.

The reader is faced with a challenge: how to sort the wheat from the chaff. There is a lot of chaff. But it is brilliant chaff, chaff that registers in the hearts and minds of those who are approaching the end of their ropes. The Book of Ecclesiastes is the personal testimony of a man who had a great deal of rope and a lifetime to reach its end.

A. Autonomy vs. Theonomy

The book is best understood as a series of observations about the human condition. It is written from one viewpoint as a means of rejecting the other. But the author adopts a peculiar method to make his case. He presents most of his observations and conclusions in the name of the philosophy of life he opposes: human autonomy. He offers only token resistance until his final words. Then he publicly breaks with autonomy in the name of theonomy: the law of God.

The book presents a series of dead ends for autonomy. It blocks avenues of escape for autonomous man. Death is on every side, and death is absolutely sovereign. Autonomous man cannot legitimately have hope in the grave. He cannot have legitimate hope in his heirs. He will be forgotten. Vanity, all is vanity.

Why vanity? To make this judgment, a man needs a standard. What is the standard for autonomous man? Death. Death vetoes all hopes. Death consumes all productivity. Death ends all dreams. Death nullifies all fame. Death makes all of life vanity. That is because death is meaningless and without purpose. It makes life meaningless and without purpose. Vanity.

The book's conclusion is straightforward. For someone who wants escape from the sovereignty of death, he should begin by fearing God, the final Judge. He does so by obeying God's law. Simple. But this simplicity is lost on expositors with a bias against biblical law. They do not

want to affirm theonomy. They also do not want to affirm autonomy. So, they do what they can to avoid commenting.

The Preacher affirms the doctrine of God's law: theonomy. He recommends living in conformity to God's law. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). Why? "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14).¹ God will judge all men in terms of His law. This is the Preacher's conclusion. It structures his arguments throughout the book. He is trying to box in his readers. He gives them an analogous choice to the one that Elijah gave the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word (I Kings 18:21).

B. Autonomy and Economics

The Preacher begins by affirming cyclical history.² This is an implicit rejection of the idea of progress. Human progress comes and goes, signifying nothing. If progress is an illusion, then striving for progress is a delusion. It is a huge waste of time, money, and effort. The Preacher repeatedly asserts that this is the case.

Accumulation takes effort, but it is futile. It is vanity.³ Why is it vain? Because there is only a meaningless contest between cyclical purposeless nature and purposeless death. Death is universal. It does not discriminate. It judges nothing. It imputes nothing.⁴ Life is all that is worth having, yet it must end.⁵ Death swallows all. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity" (Eccl. 12:7–8).⁶

The value of today's capital is dependent on the future value of this capital. That will be determined by others, who will impute value to the surviving capital. Will they have good judgment or bad judgment?

1. Chapter 44.

2. Chapter 1.

3. Chapter 2.

4. Chapter 3.

5. Chapter 33.

6. Chapter 44.

No one knows today. Their assessment of the value of capital will in turn be dependent on their assessment of the imputations of their heirs. *There is no final value because there is no final judgment.*

Who will inherit? A fool or a wise person? The accumulator does not know. This undermines his work.⁷ To sacrifice consumption in the present for wealth beyond mere consumption in the future is vanity. Consumption is a good thing, but accumulating treasure is not. What will happen to treasure? It will be inherited. By whom? No one can be sure. This is sure: it will do the accumulator no good.⁸ Even his own son may turn out to be as a stranger.⁹

Oppression is universal. "So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter" (Eccl. 4:1). A man cannot trust the legal system. There is no predictability based on righteous laws.¹⁰ The practice of oppression corrupts the judges. It drives them mad.¹¹

He who is successful will be envied. This is vanity.¹²

Autonomous man can be trapped by the lust to accumulate wealth. It is an addiction. He is never satisfied. He may be productive, but his productivity does him no good.¹³ No one knows whether riches are worth anything or not. This is vanity.¹⁴

Conclusion: sorrow is better than laughter. Sorrow testifies to the ultimate sorrow: death.¹⁵

This outlook undermines autonomous man's commitment. He sees no ethical cause and effect in history. It is easier to pursue ethics moderately. The middle of the road is safest. It is also easier.¹⁶

Autonomous man despairs over his lack of knowledge. He does not have enough insight to understand timing.¹⁷ He thinks it all depends on him. He is wrong. Nothing depends on him. It all depends on God. The covenant-keeper understands this. It gives him confidence.

7. Chapter 4.

8. Chapter 13.

9. Chapter 21.

10. Chapter 9.

11. Chapter 24.

12. Chapter 10.

13. Chapter 19.

14. Chapter 22.

15. Chapter 23.

16. Chapter 27.

17. Chapter 29.

He can rely on ethics rather than foreknowledge. Autonomous man is obsessed with his lack of knowledge.¹⁸

Whatever death does not dominate, chance does. There is no predictability of outcomes.¹⁹ Wisdom counts for nothing. Money counts. A wise poor man will be forgotten.²⁰

Rulers are not predictable. Some of them have terrible judgment.²¹ The world is one gigantic booby trap. Every project has its deadly pitfalls.²² The curse overwhelms the blessing. This outlook leads to paralysis.

C. Theonomy and Economics

Our world is governed by God, and God is supremely ethical. He has laid down the law to men. Men should obey it.²³

Because God has laid down His law, He judges in terms of this law. He judges in history. He rewards those who obey His law. He penalizes those who disobey. "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God" (Eccl. 2:26a).²⁴ Consumption is a gift from God.²⁵

There is purpose in history because everything that happens happens on time. Time is purposeful.²⁶ It has meaning. This meaning is imputed by the God whose decree governs time. This gives meaning to a man's work. It provides confidence regarding his efforts, despite his ignorance of the future. "Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him" (Eccl. 3:22)? There is legitimate joy in consuming.²⁷

There is economic cause and effect in history. The slothful man will live in poverty.²⁸ But anxiety over obtaining wealth is a mistake. People should be content with basic necessities accompanied by peace

18. Chapter 32.

19. Chapter 35.

20. Chapter 36.

21. Chapter 37.

22. Chapter 38.

23. Chapter 45.

24. Chapter 6.

25. Chapter 20.

26. Chapter 7.

27. Chapter 8.

28. Chapter 11.

and quiet in preference to wealth with anxiety.²⁹

The division of labor is a great benefit to mankind. It makes our work more productive. The covenant-breaker sees this. This insight began Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776). But the phenomenon of the division of labor is grounded in the Trinity.³⁰

Wisdom is a benefit. Successful kings rule in terms of it. A man of low birth and even prison can become a king, if his wisdom is sufficient.³¹ Wisdom is not vanity. Wisdom with an inheritance is even better.³²

God is the enforcer. He enforces vows.³³ He sees the evil that men do, and rules over human courts.³⁴ We do not live in a world governed by either cycles or death. Nature is purposeful.³⁵ It therefore is not cyclical.

God-fearing people can have faith in progress. The end is better than the beginning. Patience is the proper attitude.³⁶

God has made man upright. The result is inventions of all kinds.³⁷ This is an important aspect of progress and economic growth.

There is ethical causation in this world. The normal pattern is blessings for the man who obeys God's law and cursings for the man who doesn't. Thus, when a good man receives his reward, he can enjoy it. He can eat, drink, and be merry.³⁸

This being the case, theonomic man should apply himself to his work with great devotion and energy. Anything worth doing is worth doing well.³⁹

The labor of the fool is wasted. He does not know how to market.⁴⁰ This gives the wise man an advantage. The slothful person is also a weak competitor. He lets things drift.⁴¹

Charity pays dividends.⁴² This indicates that this world is governed

29. Chapter 12.

30. Chapter 14.

31. Chapter 15.

32. Chapter 26.

33. Chapter 16.

34. Chapter 17.

35. Chapter 18.

36. Chapter 25.

37. Chapter 28.

38. Chapter 31.

39. Chapter 34.

40. Chapter 39.

41. Chapter 40.

42. Chapter 42.

by ethics. It is not totally random. A wise man pays attention to the signs.⁴³

Conclusion

When autonomous covenant-breakers live consistently with their own presuppositions about the nature of God, man, law, sanctions, and time, they cannot compete effectively with covenant-keepers who live consistently with their presuppositions about the nature of God, man, law, sanctions, and time. This has to do with sanctions in history, which produce covenantal victory.

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Psalm 37:11).

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).⁴⁴

The Book of Ecclesiastes offers rival views of the world and rival motivations. Autonomous man is on the defensive in a world that he perceives as meaningless because it is cyclical in the aggregate and fatal individually. Covenant-keeping man lives in a world governed by God, who judges in terms of His law. The world is coherent because God is coherent. History is linear because God brings His kingdom to victory. The first outlook, when followed, leads to economic stagnation. The second view, when followed, leads to compound economic growth.

43. Chapter 43.

44. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

RESTORATION AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE PROPHETS

Other Books by Gary North

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RESTORATION AND DOMINION

*AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON
THE PROPHETS*

GARY NORTH

**Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the
Prophets**

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PREFACE

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day (Deut. 30:1–8).

This passage was the judicial foundation of the message of the prophets before the dual exiles of Israel and Judah to Assyria and Babylon, respectively. The pre-exilic prophets brought covenant lawsuits against the northern and southern kingdoms. They warned of national exile to come. But they also promised geographical restoration, just as Moses had promised.

There would be no escape from captivity, Jeremiah told Judah. He told them that Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant (Jer. 27:6). All nations would serve him (v. 7). Any nation that resisted, God would punish (v. 8). There were no loopholes. There was no fallback position. God was serious about enforcing the ultimate negative corporate sanction that was associated with the Mosaic law: captivity.

Isaiah had brought a similar message over a century earlier.

“Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed” (Isa. 1:24–28). First captivity, then restoration. Some might call it *reconstruction*.

A. Covenant Lawsuits

The prophets served as judicial agents of God under the Mosaic Covenant. They brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. These lawsuits invoked specific Mosaic laws. The two nations had broken these laws. Then the prophets warned of God’s sanctions in history: positive and negative. The main passages in the Old Covenant that undergirded the sanctions associated with these covenant lawsuits were Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Anyone who attempts to explain the message of any prophet, but who does not begin with *the Mosaic statute invoked by the prophet*, is likely to misinterpret his message. This is even more true of an assessment of the prophets taken as a whole. The message of the prophets was clear. The nations of Israel and Judah had a covenantal obligation to honor the Mosaic law’s statutes—in thought, word, and deed. The two nations had failed to do this. Judgment was coming, but geographical restoration would come after judgment’s negative sanctions.

This line of argumentation should seem revolutionary to no one. Yet in this, the second decade of the twenty-first century, Christians in the pews are unfamiliar with this perspective. The people in the pews have not been taught that *the prophets’ warnings were carefully structured covenant lawsuits*. They have never heard of a covenant lawsuit. Few of them have ever heard a sermon on what a covenant is, let alone a covenant lawsuit. This is not taught at seminary, either, except perhaps in an elective course on the prophets, which few students take.

The prophets’ message had to do with reform. Specifically, the message of the prophets was for a restoration of social justice through the action of the civil government. They demanded widespread repentance. *This repentance involved restoring the institutional arrange-*

ments mandated by the Mosaic law. The looming negative sanctions were corporate; hence, the reformation demanded by the prophets was corporate. It would come after national captivity.

Above all, repentance required *a reformation of the courts*, both civil and ecclesiastical. The courts had violated three of four laws—three Mosaic laws and a fourth which had been announced by God to Moses just before the exodus from Egypt.

One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you (Ex. 12:49).¹

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause (Ex. 23:6).

Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause (Ex. 23:3).²

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).³

They had honored only Exodus 23:3. Any discussion of the prophets that does not include a discussion of these four laws is misleading. These four verses established the greatest gift of the Old Covenant to modern civilization: *the ideal of the rule of law*. The rule of law is summarized in this phrase, which appears repeatedly in both testaments: “no respect for persons.”

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).⁴

In modern American parlance, this phrase describes the fundamental violation of the rule of law: “Different strokes for different folks.” This principle of law leads to favoritism, injustice, and tyranny. Left unchecked, it produces social breakdown. *Built into God’s social order are negative sanctions against injustice.* Honesty really is the best

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

2. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 50.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 4.

policy. Dishonesty produces poverty.⁵ If this built-in system of social causation is widely ignored, God will eventually intervene. The prophets warned Israel and Judah of God's looming intervention into history. To avoid this, the prophets said, the rebellious nations had to restore God's law: the same strokes for different folks.

B. Judicial Impartiality and Economic Inequality

When God's law is enforced impartially, the result is inequality in every area of life. This is because people with different talents, visions, commitments, and expectations will produce different results whenever God's law is enforced without respect to persons. In order to be able to promise the voters to produce anything like economic equality, a civil government could not enforce the law equally.⁶ It would have discriminate between economic classes. This is what Exodus 12:49 prohibits.

The Bible specifically teaches against equality of results. It teaches the reversal of social and economic positions. When the nation repents, those who were on top fall; those who were on the bottom rise. The finest biblical statement of this reversal is Mary's testimony, sometimes called the *magnificat*. The language of the King James Version has come down to English-speaking Protestants through the centuries.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away (Luke 1:50–53).⁷

The Bible teaches economic inequality between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Deuteronomy 28 is quite specific, both with

5. The greatest modern example of this is the Soviet Union, which visibly collapsed economically in the late 1980s and then collapsed politically on December 31, 1991. Its people had been poor from the beginning in 1917. They remained significantly poorer than citizens in the West until the very end.

6. In fact, no society in the last century of study has ever achieved anything like equality. The famous 20%-80% distribution revealed by Alfredo Pareto in 1897 reigns supreme. About 20% of a nation's inhabitants own about 80% of the wealth. No one knows why this 20-80 rule operates in the area of income distribution, let alone so many other areas of life, but it does.

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion; An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

respect to positive economic sanctions and negative economic sanctions.⁸

The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).

The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenest not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee (Deut. 28:43–45).⁹

Economic equality? This doctrine is not taught in the Bible. There are always economic winners and losers in history. This outcome is built into biblical law, which involves judicial sanctions, and is also built into God's general sanctions as the cosmic judge. The prophets came to warn the people against God's looming sanctions: positive for the invaders, negative for the Israelites. Their listeners would either repent or be brought low. They did not repent. Therefore, they were brought low. For the defender of equality, the testimony of the prophets is an affront, a sacrilege. So, they select carefully from the prophetic lawsuits.

The Bible teaches this principle: *equality before the law*. F. A. Hayek, the legal theorist and Nobel Prize-winning economist, has summarized the economic implication of the principle of equality before the law: *inequality of economic outcomes*.

From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either one or the other, but not both at the same

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

time. The equality before the law which freedom requires leads to material inequality.¹⁰

C. The Social Gospel and Liberation Theology

There is a system of interpretation of the prophets that implicitly denies the principle of the rule of law. The promoters of this view ignore three of the four verses. They may quote Exodus 23:6, “Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause,” but they never quote Exodus 23:3: “Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.”¹¹ These expositors are defenders of what is known as the Social Gospel. A more radical version of this message is known as Liberation Theology. Liberation theologians in the Roman Catholic Church, especially in Latin America, from the mid-1960s through the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, insisted that the prophets brought a message consistent with Marxism. Their peers in Protestant American pulpits did not go this far. They claimed merely that the prophets were advocating a welfare state economy, probably close to that of Scandinavia.

The older form of the Social Gospel, which had become dominant in America’s mainline denominations by 1960, first appeared in the 1880s. It was promoted by theological liberals who denied the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible, the virgin birth, and the doctrine of hell. After 1960, mainline denominations began to shrink. Beginning in the late 1960s, the economic conclusions of the Social Gospel began to be imported into evangelical churches by young men who had been radicalized by their opposition to the Vietnam war (1963–75) and by their participation in the early phase of the civil rights movement (1956–70).¹² They still claimed to be evangelicals, but they came with the old Social Gospel’s agenda for reform. They attempted to mix biblical oil and welfare state water. They still do.¹³

Because they correctly perceive that the Mosaic law testifies against their economic views, they have adopted a self-conscious tactic of obfuscation. They appeal to the prophets rather than to the Mosaic law. This raises a major problem: *the prophets never mentioned any re-*

10. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 87.

11. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 50.

12. It was possible to oppose the Vietnam War and promote racial equality in the civil justice system without being radicalized. I am living proof. I read and approved of Martin Luther King’s book, *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), in 1960.

13. Joel McDurmon, *God versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009), Part 2.

form that even remotely resembled the forced redistribution of wealth by the state. They called for individual restitution, as the Mosaic law required, case by case, for individuals' specific violations of the Mosaic law. But there was no hint in the message of the prophets that economic inequality could or should be remedied by government actions: by graduated income taxes, or the regulation prices, or food stamps (digits), or any other program associated with the modern welfare state. So, the economic reforms called for by liberation theologians and defenders of the Social Gospel are superimposed on the language of the prophets and said to be not only consistent with what the prophets taught but morally mandatory for any society that calls itself Christian. This is deception: either self-deception or self-conscious deception, but deception nonetheless.

These proponents of coercive wealth redistribution by the state call for the reform of oppressive social structures. So did the prophets. But the prophets called for a return to those structures that had been mandated by the Mosaic law. The promoters of the Social Gospel always insist that they have no such agenda. Instead, they say that they want merely to return to the true meaning—the hidden meaning—of the Mosaic law, not its specifics. There is a reason for their refusal to invoke the Mosaic law. *The Mosaic law defended the private property social order.* This defense began with a commandment: "Thou shalt not steal."¹⁴ Social Gospel advocates want to modify this commandment as follows: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

D. Bait and Switch

In the United States, there is a marketing practice called bait and switch. A local company advertises that it has a low-cost item for sale. The shopper arrives at the store, ready to buy. He is then told by the salesman that the item is out of stock. Then the salesman uses his selling skills to sell the shopper a higher priced product. This practice is illegal in most jurisdictions. It is based on fraud. It steals people's time. It also steals their hopes.

Any theologian or social theorist who invokes the authority of the Old Testament prophets, but who then refuses also to affirm the continuing judicial authority of the Mosaic statutes that were invoked by the prophets, is using a bait-and-switch marketing technique. He is at-

14. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 28.

tempting to gain authority for his suggested economic reforms. He seeks such authority from the prophets. Then, having gained the listener's attention and even support, he switches. He affirms, in the name of the prophets, some half-baked theory of economic reform suggested by his socialistic professor of sociology two decades ago in college.

The defenders of the Social Gospel constantly cite the prophets, but they do not cite them in search of specific Mosaic statutes. Instead, they invoke the prophetic tradition—undefined—as a justification for some Left-wing reform project. In all cases, they call for state coercion in the name of social justice. They conflate state and society, as if the state were not just one aspect of society, which includes families, churches, voluntary associations, businesses, and schools. When they say “society,” they really mean “state.” This is a serious misunderstanding of the biblical concept of society.

In this book, I exegete every passage in the prophets that refers to economics. As you will see, *nothing that any prophet said had anything to do with central economic planning, state wealth-redistribution projects, or the expansion of government-funded industries*. Except for Isaiah, they had little to say about economics. What little they said had to do with the enforcement of Mosaic statutes.

E. Economic Sins: Low Priority

What is striking is how little attention the prophets paid to economics. This calls into question the theological relevance of liberation theologians in mainline American denominations and their allies within the evangelical camp. They have rested much of their case in favor of socialism or the welfare state on the prophets. They have created an illusion that the prophets were concerned greatly about economic matters.

The prophets were concerned about ethical rebellion and religious apostasy. They did not ignore these issues as manifested in the economy, but economic transgressions were not high on their list of representative evils.

Their condemnations were invariably tied to case laws of the Mosaic law. They brought covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. They invoked the Mosaic law. The liberationists rarely cite the specific case laws, nor do they provide detailed exegesis of how these laws were to be applied, what the results were when enforced, and what God's

negative sanctions were when they were not enforced. There is a reason for this silence. The liberationists know that *the Mosaic law was overwhelmingly on the side of private property and hostile to what we call the welfare state*. Samuel warned the Israelites against ordaining a king.

And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day (I Sam 8:14–18).¹⁵

The modern state taxes at least four times higher than what the tyrannical king would tax. The liberationists condemn the modern state for not taxing and spending even more. So, they do not want their followers to go to the Mosaic law in search of the specifics of economic oppression. The Mosaic law identifies the main oppressors as rulers who misuse the authority of the courts to defraud residents.

Conclusion

The modern Christian world has been deceived by pastors and theologians who are wolves in sheep's clothing. Their self-appointed task is to move Christian opinion in the direction of the humanist political Left. They have done this by selectively quoting from the prophets and then interpreting them by means of the humanist Left's political agenda. They ask this: **What Would Jesus Steal?** In the name of love, they recommend the creation of a welfare state that extracts four times to six times more than the tithe. Samuel warned Israel against a king, for the king would extract 10% of their production. Modern liberation theologians and Social Gospel promoters would regard such a king as a Right-wing Judas, who would reduce taxes on the rich by at least 75%. They would dismiss such a king as a front man for the Right, a king who would oppress the poor by imposing a flat tax.

When you hear a call for "the economics of love," start looking for the hidden gun. Christian love in this context can only be achieved

15. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary of the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

through armed agents of the state showing up at men's doors to demand a large portion of their income—all in the name of justice. Ask yourself these three questions:

1. Where is the gun?
2. Who is holding the gun?
3. At whom is the gun pointed?

The commandment is this: "Thou shalt not steal." It is not this: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

INTRODUCTION

Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate (Zech. 7:12–14).

Here, Zechariah surveyed the history of what had happened to Israel and Judah. He was a prophet of the post-exilic period, which began after Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king, allowed the Israelites to return to the Promised Land. His decree was issued around 536 B.C.

A. Prophetic Theme

The pre-exilic prophets had warned the inhabitants of Israel and Judah of the captivity to come. Isaiah was so specific that, two centuries before Cyrus's decree, Isaiah mentioned him by name (Isa. 44:28–45:1). The captivity would be the culmination of a long series of negative corporate sanctions imposed by God because of the Israelites' disobedience. These sanctions were part of what theologians call a covenant lawsuit.

The heart of Old Covenant prophecy was the covenant lawsuit. Predictions were a subordinate aspect of the covenant lawsuit. Predictions came in two forms: first, an *if . . . then* ethically conditional prediction; second, a specific and unconditional prediction.

A covenant lawsuit was a warning made by a person who had been called by God to warn the nation. If the nation continued to rebel against God by breaking the statutes of the Mosaic law, God would bring corporate negative sanctions against the nation. Some lawsuits were brought against Judah, the southern kingdom. Some were

brought against Israel, the northern kingdom. Some were brought against both. Some were brought against nations outside the Promised Land: Jonah's ministry.

The covenant lawsuit rested on the five points of the biblical covenant: (1) the transcendence/presence of God, (2) the hierarchical structure of covenantal institutions, (3) the law of God, (4) the oath to God, and (5) the inheritance of all things by covenant-keepers.¹ In terms of the covenant lawsuits, the prophets affirmed the following: (1) the sovereignty of God over history, (2) the subordination of Israel to God, (3) the Mosaic law, (4) God's positive and negative corporate sanctions in history, and (5) the restoration of Israel as a nation.

It is common to refer to two classifications of prophets: major prophets and minor prophets. This is a conceptual error. It leads to additional errors. One of the worst of these errors is to regard Zechariah as a minor prophet. We should instead classify the ministries of the prophets in terms of their relation to the two captivities: exile from the land.

B. The Exile

Israel's captivity began in 722 B.C. Israel fell to Assyria, which in turn fell to Babylon in 612 B.C. Judah's captivity began in 586 B.C. Judah fell to Babylon, which in turn fell to the Medo-Persians in 539 B.C. The Medo-Persian empire allowed the Israelites to return to Israel in 536 B.C. One group of prophets we can call pre-exilic. The other group we can call post-exilic.

Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet. He preached to those few Israelites who had decided to return from what had been the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon, which had carried their parents into captivity. As a post-exilic prophet, he offered a message of hope. He did not come before the nation, as the pre-exilic prophets had, with a message of imminent or potentially imminent doom. He came with this message: if they obeyed God's law, as revealed by Moses, the land would prosper. He came with a message of repentance.

As he made clear, his predecessors had also come with that message. They had encountered stiff-necked resistance. "Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law." The

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010).

Torah, revealed by God to Moses, and revealed by Moses to the exodus generation (Ex. 20–23) and then, four decades later, to the generation of the conquest (Deuteronomy), was binding. It had been clear on this point: a future generation would rebel against God by breaking His law. God would bring comprehensive negative sanctions against them (Deut. 28:15–66), culminating in their forced captivity abroad. Moses had prophesied this.

Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt: For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them: And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book: And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day (Deut. 29:24–28).

The pre-exilic prophets came before Israel to call the nation to repentance. Repentance meant invoking God alone as their redeemer, and then obeying the Mosaic law as a sign of their covenantal subordination. The Israelites refused to do either. “Therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 7:12b).

The pre-exilic prophets brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel and Judah. They warned their listeners of the comprehensive negative sanctions to come. These sanctions had been described in the Torah. They had accompanied the statutes. *Without sanctions, there is no law. Without law and sanctions, there is no covenant.*

The post-exilic prophets were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. They also brought a covenant lawsuit. But theirs was different. The negative corporate sanctions had already been applied by God. To escape them, and then to gain comprehensive positive sanctions, the people had to repent. During the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, they did. The manifestation of their repentance was their completion of the temple, which had sat in ruins for a dozen years or more.

Any attempt to understand the prophets apart from the Mosaic law and its sanctions is doomed to failure. Any attempt to build an economic system in theory and practice in terms of the message of the prophets, without also adopting the Mosaic statutes and sanctions which they invoked, is equally doomed to failure.

Conclusion

The prophets called their listeners to repentance. This repentance would have corporate consequences: *the extension of the kingdom of God in history*. The fruits of repentance were not limited to hearts and souls. They were not limited to families and centers of worship. They were no more limited than sin's domain is limited, and no less limited.

As surely as sinning in Israel and Judah led to captivity—the visible contraction of the kingdom of God in history—so would repentance reverse this contraction and lead to dominion. This had been the message of the pre-exilic prophets, beginning with the greatest of the Old Covenant prophets, Moses.² This was also the message of the post-exilic prophets.

2. "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10).

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Isa. 1:1).

Isaiah identified the era in which he served as a prophet. This was a long period of service. King Uzziah's reign was a long one, over half a century. He died sometime around 740 B.C. Hezekiah's reign ended with his death in 687 B.C.

We are not sure when in Uzziah's reign Isaiah's prophetic ministry began. It must have been late. We do know that Isaiah lived until at least 15 years before Hezekiah's death. The prophet told him that God would give the king another 15 years of life. Isaiah 39 records this revelation. The remaining 27 chapters provide additional prophecies, so he lived for years after this meeting.

Isaiah included far more material related to economics than the other prophets did. I have identified 15 passages. The largest number in any other prophet's book is three. The book of Isaiah is long—the second longest book in the Bible after Psalms. So, as a percentage of the book, his comments on economics are minimal.

This is typical of the prophets. They did not pay much attention to economic sins.

1

THE REMNANT

Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah (Isa. 1:7).

A. Continuing Prophetic Theme

The theocentric issue here is inheritance in history: point five of the biblical covenant.¹ The remnant of Israel would persevere through time. The remnant of Israel is a recurring theme in the writings of the prophets. This remnant is sometimes a remnant of righteous covenant-keepers within a society of covenant-breakers. In other cases, it refers to a small number as such, such as Isaiah's prophecy regarding the return of a relatively small number of Israelites to the land after the Babylonian captivity. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness" (Isa. 10:20–22).

At the beginning of his book, Isaiah referred to a saving remnant. It was not large enough to transform Israelite society, but it had a representative judicial function. Because of its presence in the land, God would not destroy the nation in the way that He had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This remnant had the same judicial function as the hypothetical remnant in Sodom would have had as a result of Abraham's

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

bargaining with the angelic representatives of God to spare the city for the sake of a remnant as few as 10 people (Gen. 18:23–32).

Elijah had not known of the existence of this remnant when he fled from Ahab and Jezebel. God spoke to him while he was hiding in a cave in the wilderness. God asked him why he was there. Elijah lamented, “I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (I Kings 19:14). He saw himself as the last man standing. God informed him that he was incorrect. “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him” (I Kings 19:18). On account of them, God did not allow the nation to be carried off in Elijah’s era. But time eventually ran out for the nation.

B. For the Sake of the Few

The scriptural principle of the saving remnant applies to all of history. Covenant-keepers have usually been outnumbered. They may be sufficiently numerous to have influence in a particular society and era, or they may not. God recognizes that whenever His remnant is small, it therefore deserves protection. He deals with this remnant in a special way. This applied to Israel among the nations. Moses said:

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7:6–8).

This special arrangement also applied to the covenantally faithful remnant within the nation, after the nation had apostatized.

Because the remnant is small, the members’ individual productivity does not account for very much most of the time. To remain productive, they require an extensive division of labor within the context of a much larger society. The skills and efforts of many people result in high output per capita. The remnant participates in a social order that benefits from voluntary exchange. They are richer as individuals be-

cause of the division of labor. This was Lot's situation until the angels led him out of Sodom just before the destruction of the city (Gen. 19).

The doctrine of common grace rests on the assumption that God gives grace—unmerited blessings—in history to covenant-breakers, so that they might provide the historical framework for the development of the rival covenants, God's and Satan's. This common grace heals, but it does not provide entrance into the kingdom of God in history and thereby in eternity.² The crucial verse in the Bible regarding common grace is this one: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).³ *Specially* is the key word. God saves some people generally, in the sense of preservation; others He saves specially, in the sense of redemption.

C. Salt and Light

Jesus referred to covenant-keepers as salt and light. "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matt. 5:13).⁴ The remnant serves as salt in the sense of a means of preservation. But salt also destroys.

And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt (Jdgs. 9:44–45).

The remnant possesses both of these attributes of salt. The remnant's presence brings God's preserving grace to the general society, yet His presence also condemns the society by comparison. Covenant-breakers perceive this threat. They reject the remnant's testimony. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is suffi-

2. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

cient for these things?” (II Cor. 2:15–16).

God administers His transforming grace for the sake of the remnant and also through the remnant. All of history moves toward the final judgment, when the remnant inherits the accumulated capital of human history. Psalm 37 emphasizes this theme.

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:9–11).

Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off (Ps. 37:34–38).

Solomon put it succinctly. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁵ The remnant inherits in eternity. These texts are clear: *the remnant also inherits in history*. The sanctifying presence of the remnant leads to its inheritance in history.

D. The Remnant Becomes the Majority

The message of Isaiah was that the remnant will not remain the remnant permanently. There will come a time when it becomes the dominant force in society. He ended his book with a description of this triumph.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them (Isa. 65:17–21).⁶

The sinner will die young at age one hundred. The covenant-keeper will live far longer. This cannot possibly refer to eternity. It refers to history. This is the long-run vision of Isaiah. It offers hope to the remnant through the ages. The remnant's work is cumulative. It expands. The result will be comprehensive inheritance in history.

Conclusion

The remnant was the reason for God's preservation of Israel in the land. But this preservation was temporary. Captivity was coming.

Isaiah presented the sovereignty of God. This is made clear in Isaiah 44 and 45, where he prophesied regarding the restoration of Israel to the land, specifically naming King Cyrus the Medo-Persian, two centuries in advance. "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28). The context of this sovereignty provides the meaning of the remnant. Its work perseveres through history through covenantal succession. "Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time" (Isa. 60:21–22).

Faith in linear history, faith in compound growth, and faith in the absolute sovereignty of God over both history and growth: these constitute the confession of the remnant.

These three concepts lead to a society that experiences long-term economic growth. Without the first two, people will not save at high rates. They do not trust the future. The third intensifies men's commitment to the future.

The West has been committed to the first belief ever since it became Christian. It has come to accept the second, beginning in the seventeenth century: Puritan and Presbyterian postmillennialism, a view of time that was secularized by the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The third belief has been limited to Augustinians and Calvinists, which have been minority positions in their respective ecclesiastical traditions.

6. Chapter 15.

2

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isa. 1:16–17).

A. National Repentance

The theocentric issue here is judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ God, through Isaiah, listed these ethical requirements as part of a program of national repentance. God said that He would not tolerate their formal acts of sacrifice unless they reform their ways. He directed His commands first to the nation's rulers, who represented the nation. Immediately thereafter, He targeted the common people. No one was immune.

Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (vv. 10–15).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Isaiah's contemporary, Micah, made a similar challenge to Judah.

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (Micah 6:6–8).

B. Judicial Context

The focus of the passage is on the nature of righteousness. After warning his listeners that acts of formal sacrifice carry no independent weight with God, Isaiah invoked the language of cleanliness. "Wash you, make you clean." In the context of the Mosaic law, this refers to ritual washings. But God had already made it clear that He was not impressed with their ritual obedience. He was interested in their ethics. "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well." But how? "Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." These are judicial matters.

This warning was aimed at the rulers of the two nations. Rulers are in charge of the judicial institutions of society. In the remainder of the chapter, Isaiah listed specific infractions of the rulers. They were corrupt to the core. The mark of this corruption was their oppression of the weak.

The Mosaic law identified this test of the law's correct enforcement: protection of widows, orphans, and strangers in the land. There must be honest judgment in the courts. Judgment must never be in terms of persons but always in terms of the application of the Mosaic law to specific cases. The weak are entitled to the same consideration as the rich. This is how God judges. The general rule is here:

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).²

The references to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger are

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

here:

For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment (Deut. 10:17–18).

Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge (Deut. 24:17).

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands (Deut. 24:19).³

Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:19).

These rules applied to civil courts and Levitical courts. Each covenantal institution had its own courts. Each court system was bound by the general rule of law enforcement: no respect of persons.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).⁴

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Deut. 16:18–20).⁵

It is clear from Isaiah's accusation against the rulers that they had been violating this rule. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (v. 23).

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 39.

C. Misinterpreting This Passage

There is a tradition of biblical interpretation that is associated with the Social Gospel movement of the twentieth century,⁶ which presents the prophets as advocates of wealth redistribution from the rich to the poor. Whenever the words appear regarding oppression, the Social Gospel expositors interpret this as oppression by the rich and powerful through the market economy.

To make this interpretation, they are forced to ignore the most fundamental principle of biblical civil justice: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15). The expositors do not merely ignore it; they implicitly deny it. Both socialism and welfare state economics rest on a violation of this law.⁷ Because their principle of interpretation is so clearly a violation of Leviticus 19:15, the expositors prefer to ignore the passage.

The judicial issue for Isaiah’s covenant lawsuit was corrupt judgment in favor of oppressors. The use of the courts to oppress people had angered God. The essence of oppression in the Old Testament was the misuse of the law enforcement system to favor one group against another. The law identified widows, orphans, and strangers as the most vulnerable of residents in the land. They were representatives of the oppressed. When these people were being oppressed, the court system had become corrupt and therefore subject to God’s corporate negative sanctions.

Socialism and the welfare state indulge in this same sin, but in the name of the oppressed. Leviticus 19:15 is clear: neither the poor nor the mighty are to be oppressed by the law enforcement system. In both cases, the state has become the oppressor.

Conclusion

The essence of oppression under the Mosaic law was the use of the courts to favor one person or pressure group over another. The context of the Mosaic law’s prohibition of oppression was the justice system.

When Isaiah came before the rulers and the people, he singled out

6. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975). (<http://bit.ly/SingerUA>)

7. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 14.

the rulers as corrupt. He warned them that their repentance would require a turnaround from their misuse of the courts to oppress the weakest members of society.

Repentance for the prophets was not primarily personal. It was corporate. The prophets did not come before individuals and tell them to stop doing evil things. They came before the entire society and told them all that they were corrupt. *The supreme mark of their corruption was injustice in the courts.*

The Social Gospel/liberation theology advocates are correct in their discussions of the prophets as reformers. *The prophets were above all judicial reformers.* But the reform they called for was a return to the Mosaic law. The Social Gospel/liberation theology advocates deny that this is legitimate in the New Testament era. So, in the name of judicial reform, they advocate either full socialism or the welfare state. They cannot find either system in the prophets or the Mosaic law. On the contrary, the Mosaic law affirms a private property social order that is the antithesis of both socialism and the welfare state. There was no central economic planning by the state possible in the decentralized social and legal order of the Mosaic law.

The prophets were neither defenders of pietism—souls-only redemption—nor the welfare state. They were defenders of God's specially revealed law: the Torah. They called for national repentance and national judicial reform. For pietists and liberationists to invoke the prophets in their respective programs of reform is illegitimate until they show exegetically how the prophets' call for a return to the specifics of the Mosaic law can be conformed to the agenda of either pietism or liberationism. The pietists reject the Social Gospel, and the liberationists reject pietism. They cannot both be correct. But they can both be wrong, and are.

3

DEBASEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS

Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water (Isa. 1:22).

A. A Conditional Prophecy

The theocentric issue here is obedience to God's law: point three of the biblical covenant.¹ But it is related to the law prohibiting false weights and measures, which was symbolic of honest judgment: point four.² The Book of Isaiah begins with a warning: Israel has rebelled against God. This is a prophecy against Israel. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (1:3). Yet Isaiah did not mention the northern kingdom. He referred to "the faithful city," which has to be Jerusalem, a city of Judah, the southern kingdom. So, the prophecy has to be regarded as one that encompasses both kingdoms, Israel and Judah.

Isaiah's prophecy was conditional. It has the characteristic feature of offering a way of escape from the negative corporate sanctions to come. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (vv. 19–20).

He began with a brief summary of the origin of Jerusalem's plight. "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers" (v. 21). This points to *judicial corruption*. Isaiah described a process of debasement in history, with disastrous results. First, there was moral decline: an increase of harlotry. Over a century later, Jeremiah used harlotry as a metaphor for religious idolatry (Jer. 3). Isaiah did not make this connection. He

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Sutton, ch. 4; North, ch. 4.

spoke of harlotry as a sexual practice. Both Israel and Judah had gone from harlotry to injustice. The result of injustice was the corruption of the faithful city, where the Ark of the Covenant resided. The city was now full of murderers. There had been an increase in deadly crimes. The moral order had been corrupted by harlotry; then the judicial system was corrupted; then society faced rising crime. This corruption was, in modern terminology, a package deal.

B. Comprehensive Debasement

This is the background of a very specific condemnation: “Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water” (1:22). What was dross? It was a base metal, meaning a low-cost metal. That which appeared to be genuine, a bar of silver, was in fact not genuine. It was corrupt. It looked valuable on the outside, but inside there was a low-cost metal.

1. Judicial Corruption

This image of debasement was used by the prophets as a metaphor of judicial corruption. This metaphor went back to a linked pair of Solomon’s proverbs. “Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness” (Prov. 25:4–5). But most graphic of all was Ezekiel’s language, which looked back at the message of Isaiah, after the southern kingdom of Judah had been carried off into captivity by the Babylonians, the conquerors of Assyria, which had carried off several of the tribes of the northern kingdom in 740, about the time of Uzziah’s death. So, what Isaiah had prophesied as imminent for Israel had taken place a century and a half before the ministry of Ezekiel began. He described what had taken place to Judah in 686 B.C.

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my

wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you (Ezek. 22:17–22).

Dross was for Ezekiel the metaphor of God's wrath. God had just done to Judah what the rulers of Judah and Israel had done to the system of civil justice. They had debased civil justice; so, God debased the nation's social order. Rich and poor, powerful and helpless, good and evil: all had been put into the furnace.

It was in the lifetime of Ezekiel that the invention of the coin took place in Lydia in Western Asia Minor. Small, round tokens of gold, silver, and a mixture of the two called electrum came into circulation in the second half of the seventh century. The date is commonly estimated as 660 B.C., a quarter century after the Babylonian conquest of Judah.

Verse 22 points to the "drossification" of silver. This could refer to silver in general, or it may have been limited to the monetary unit. In either case, *the legal issue was fraud by deception*. That which was debased was circulating as something valuable. This produced analogous results. The wine was mixed with water. The debasement of silver, the metal of honesty and trade, had led to the debasement of a representative consumer good. Why? Because monetary inflation is based on deception. This deception then becomes universal as prices rise. Producers cut corners. The illusion of high quality products is maintained, just as the illusion of high quality money is maintained. In the modern phrase, "what you see is what you get," no longer applied. What men saw was not what they got. They knew this, which was why Isaiah used the metaphor of dross. He knew they would recognize the connection.

In the passage immediately following this one, Isaiah extends his condemnation to the judicial system. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (v. 23). There should be no doubt that the primary targets of his condemnation were the civil rulers. He is calling on them to repent: to turn around.

So, he begins with the judicial system in verse 21, moves to the monetary system in verse 22, and returns to the judicial system in verse 23. We should therefore interpret verse 22 as pertaining to civil justice. Yet to ignore the harlotry in verse 21 and the monetary practice in verse 22 would miss the point. Isaiah's condemnation would

have made metaphorical sense to his listeners only if it was accurate historically. Harlotry really was widespread in Jerusalem. So was monetary debasement. So was product debasement.

2. Judgment as Fire

After summarizing the moral, judicial, social, monetary, and economic condition of the holy city, he offers a warning. This warning invoked the metaphor of the metal foundry's fire.

Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city (vv. 24–26).

God's negative corporate sanctions in history are consistent with society's acts of rebellion. The extent of this debasement is universal, Isaiah said. Debasement encompasses sexual morality, judicial practice, criminal behavior, monetary policy, and economic production. But the sin went deeper: idolatry. "And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with sticks" (Jer. 3:9). With stones and sticks they had constructed idols. This was the ultimate debasement. Isaiah warned both nations that God's negative corporate sanction—captivity—will match this supreme debasement: idolatry. This sanction was imminent for the northern kingdom.

The southern kingdom did not learn from the experience of the northern kingdom. Jeremiah reminded them over a century later:

The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also (Jer. 3:6–8).

C. Monetary Inflation as Debasement

“Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water.” This two-fold description of debasement could be interpreted as two separate, unrelated conditions. But Isaiah had just argued systematically for a causal relationship among harlotry, judicial corruption, and murder. Why would he switch at this point to identify two additional yet unrelated aspects of Israelite society? The closeness of the description in this verse indicates that it is a single process. But how? What has silver got to do with wine?

Debasement is a form of counterfeiting. The public expects the number of currency units to be limited in circulation. Only if there are exports of goods and services to foreign countries should there be an increase in the number of currency units in the domestic economy, unless someone has discovered a gold or silver mine. So, people bid for goods and services on the assumption of a relatively stable currency.

Then a counterfeiter finds a way to increase his purchase of goods by means of spending newly created money. It is cheaper for him to create these monetary units than it is for him to earn them by producing something of value. These new currency units look like all the others, but they are not the same. They are more plentiful because they contain base metals.

As they circulate, prices of goods and services begin to rise slightly. The counterfeiter buys at yesterday’s prices. But as more counterfeiters enter the markets with newly created money, prices rise more rapidly. People on fixed incomes are hurt. They must pay more for what they buy. Those who get early access to the new currency units buy cheaper than those who get access late. Wealth is transferred from some groups to other groups.

As the counterfeiting process continues, more and more people lose confidence in the value of domestic money. They search for ways to hedge against price inflation. They go into debt, so as to pay off loans with cheaper money. Lenders then seek to protect themselves by raising long-term interest rates.

As prices rise, sellers of goods seek to keep ahead of rising costs. But rising prices may meet resistance from buyers. So, sellers imitate the counterfeiters. They reduce the quality of their goods. They use cheaper inputs. They cut costs by cutting corners. Their goods look the same, just as the monetary units look the same. A debasement process spreads to the manufacturing sector.

This is what happened in Israel in Isaiah's time. Cheating through debasement had become a way of life. What looks like a high-quality item is in fact a lower-quality item. It is debasement through deception. On the surface, things appear to be the same. In reality, things are not the same.

D. Corrupt Rulers

Isaiah's focus was moral and judicial. He began with a consideration of harlotry. Then he moved to civil law. Then he moved to social chaos: murderers. Only then did he take up the issue of product debasement. Then he returned to civil law. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (v. 23).

The decline was first manifested in sexual debauchery. Then it moved to politics. Then it moved to economics. What began as a personal sin spread to the rest of society. The acceptance of harlotry by the general public corrupted the rulers. The public turned a blind eye to sin within the gates. Then the rulers indulged themselves, for they were in a position to gain what they wanted because they possessed power.

Isaiah said that the princes are profiting from the corruption of civil law. They seek bribes. They are offered bribes. The text does not say that the government debased the silver. It does not identify the source of the debasing. What is clear from the passage is that the civil government did nothing to stop it. It allowed false weights and measures. This is the essence of judicial sin, as the Mosaic law stated.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:35–36).³

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

God (Deut. 25:13–16).⁴

Solomon returned to this theme. “Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 20:10).⁵ “Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good” (Prov. 20:23). The mark of righteous government is constancy in weights and measures.

A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the LORD’S: all the weights of the bag are his work. It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness (Prov. 16:10–12).⁶

Isaiah came before the nation and pointed to the evidence of widespread corruption in society. This evidence was as close at hand as the money used in transactions. The monetary unit testified against the nation, but above all, the rulers. The rulers had consented to the debasement of weights and measures. As the law in Leviticus warned, unrighteousness in judgment would be reflected in false weights and measures.

In most societies, the state has insisted on a monopoly of money creation. This is justified in the name of honest money. Counterfeiting is illegal. The civil government is pictured as beyond temptation. Yet, with only the exception of the Byzantine empire (325–1453), all civil governments have corrupted the currency. They have sought to spend more money than they collect in taxes or borrow. All national currency units end up debased. Civil governments can no more resist the short-run benefits of monetary debasement than private counterfeiters can. No one can prosecute the civil government for fraud.

Civil governments should declare the legal standard—weight and fineness—for coins acceptable for the payment of taxes, including warehouse receipts to coins. Then the civil government should open the market to all producers of coins or issuers of warehouse receipts. The state should prosecute those producers of coins or bullion who debase the various private currency units. Producers would also have an incentive to monitor each other’s production, reporting to the civil

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 57.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 52.

authorities every known infraction by a rival. The cost of policing the monetary unit would be decentralized and overwhelmingly privatized.

This procedure would apply to all banks. No bank would be allowed to issue more warehouse receipts for deposited precious metal coins or bullion than it has in reserve. Banks would profit from storage fees and other services. They would not profit by lending warehouse receipts for precious metals that they did not have in storage. Second, no bank would be allowed to lend money for any period of time unless the depositor has surrendered in writing his legal right to withdraw his funds on demand during this loan period. This is 100% reserve banking—no counterfeiting.⁷ This is how the Bank of Amsterdam operated for 170 years, 1609–1780.⁸

Civil rulers want to be able to debase the nation's coinage so as to increase spending without raising visible taxes. They also want banks to buy government debt. So, they retain a monopoly over the coinage, so as to monopolize counterfeiting. Second, they legalize fractional reserve commercial banking. Third, they grant to a national central bank a monopoly over money creation by commercial banks. This agency promises commercial bankers to protect them from bank runs by depositors, and it promises the government to “make a market” for the government's debt, i.e., buy the debt with newly created fiat money. Banks are allowed to operate in terms of fractional reserves: issuing promises to pay gold coins on demand, when in fact all depositors cannot redeem these promises on the same day because there are insufficient reserves. The result is monetary inflation, then price inflation, and then the boom-bust business cycle.⁹

Conclusion

Isaiah was clear: Israel's civil government was corrupt. The rulers had followed a path to moral corruption personally. Then they compromised with criminals. By Isaiah's day, the corruption was universal.

7. Murray N. Rothbard, “The Case for a 100% Gold Dollar,” in Leland B. Yeager (ed.), *In Search of a Monetary Constitution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 94–136. (<http://mises.org/story/1829>)

8. Jesús Huerta de Soto, *Money, Bank Credit, and Economic Cycles* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, [2002] 2006), pp. 98–106. (<http://mises.org/books/desoto.pdf>)

9. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), chaps. 19, 20. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>) Murray N. Rothbard, *What Has Government Done to Our Money?* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, [1964] 2010). (<http://bit.ly/mrmoney>)

The rulers had even debased the money supply. By fostering debased money, judicial corruption had also fostered debased quality standards governing production. Quality was declining because prior quality standards were no longer being honored. Private producers had begun to cut corners. Israel was foreshadowing the economy of the Soviet Union, in which this slogan was familiar: “The government pretends to pay us, and we pretend to work.”

Isaiah warned that God would bring corporate negative sanctions in response to this corruption. The symbol of these sanctions was the metal worker’s furnace. “I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.” The historical form would be captivity: the northern kingdom fell to Assyria; the southern kingdom fell to Babylon. This followed God’s warning, given through Moses. “Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity” (Deut. 28:41). After the return to the land by a small remnant, they would be ruled by foreign empires. That, too, had been promised by God.

The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever (Deut. 28:43–46).¹⁰

10. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 70.

4

PROSPERITY WITH IDOLS

Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not (Isa. 2:6–8).

A. Covenant Lawsuit

The theocentric issue here was idolatry, a false hierarchy. Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant.¹ Isaiah here speaks to God in the presence of listeners. He acted as an intermediary: a representative of God. This description of the condition of the nation is an introduction to his lengthy condemnation of the nation. He gives them fair warning.

Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low (vv. 10–12).

Negative corporate sanctions are coming, he says. These sanctions will disabuse them of their trust in themselves and in their idols.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth (vv. 17–21).

The nation was so rich that individuals could afford to make household idols out of precious metals. Although these idols were seen as gateways or mediators to supernatural forces, they declared the co-sovereignty of man, for it was men who made these idols. “They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.” So, Isaiah ends this prophecy with a phrase that has been cited for generations. “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of” (v. 22)?

B. Covenant-Breaking Prosperity

Isaiah makes clear the covenantal foundations of Israel’s prosperity: covenant-breaking. First, the land is filled with idols. These were not idols built by the governments of Israel, civil and ecclesiastical. Uzziah was generally a righteous king (II Kings 15:34). So was his son (II Chron. 26:4). So, these idols are household idols. These households had gold and silver to decorate the works of their hands.

Second, “their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots.” Horses and chariots were prohibited to kings by the Mosaic law (Deut. 17:16).² These were offensive weapons. The kings were not to accumulate such weapons.

The text does not reveal whether Uzziah obeyed these restrictions, but it is likely that he did not. Solomon had disobeyed them with a vengeance. “And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem” (I Kings 10:26). Jehosaphat had gone to war against Syria alongside Ahab, who was mortally wounded in his chariot (I Kings 22:34).

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

Josiah was the first king after Solomon who is said to have self-consciously obeyed the law in this regard. "And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire" (II Kings 23:11). His kingship was late. Judah fell to Babylon about 23 years after his death.

There were no restrictions in the Mosaic law regarding the private ownership of these weapons. Here, we see a unique aspect of the Mosaic law. Citizens, tribes, cities, and even strangers were allowed to possess weaponry that the king, as the nation's commander of God's holy army, was not allowed to own.³ This was another aspect of the decentralized political order under the Mosaic law.

In his prophecy regarding God's corporate negative sanctions, Isaiah did not say that the chariots will be abandoned by fearful covenant-breakers. Idols will be abandoned; chariots are not mentioned. It is clear from the text that privately owned horses and chariots will not protect the Israelites from captivity. Nothing will protect them. Isaiah cried out to God, "therefore forgive them not." God hearkened to Isaiah's prayer.

Horses and chariots were expensive. If individuals had bought them, then there was great wealth in the nation.

Conclusion

The text indicates that the two nations' wealth was dispersed widely. So were idols. This indicates that covenant-breaking does not lead to negative corporate sanctions overnight. It takes generations of economic growth to accumulate great per capita wealth. But the sanctions eventually come. Isaiah reminded his listeners of this fact immediately following his description of the wealth of the two nations. This wealth would be cut off by God. This came true for Israel within two decades of the beginning of Isaiah's ministry, meaning during his ministry. The northern kingdom went into captivity to Assyria in 722 B.C. This was not true of Judah. Isaiah's early years of ministry took place over a century and a half before Judah fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.

3. The Mosaic law was silent with respect to privately owned weapons. The general principle of the Mosaic law was analogous to the law in Eden: that which was not explicitly prohibited by law or a principle of the law was legal.

5

CONSEQUENCES OF OPPRESSION

For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water (Isa. 3:1).

The threocentric issue here was God's judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ This was a prophecy. The captivity of Jerusalem did not come until 586 B.C., well over a century after Isaiah spoke these words. But, in between Isaiah's day and the arrival of the Babylonians, the southern kingdom experienced a downward drift morally, as covenant-breaking became a way of life. Not even Josiah's three-decade righteous reign reversed this drift.

A. Inverted Judicial Hierarchy

The preliminary mark of God's corporate negative sanction of captivity was an inversion of the judicial hierarchy.² "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them" (v. 4). In the case of Josiah, who became king at age eight, this was a great advance. His reign had been prophesied over three centuries earlier by an unnamed prophet in the days of Jeroboam, the king who rebelled against Solomon's son Rehoboam. Jeroboam set up a rival altar in the northern kingdom. There would be negative consequences, the prophet warned.

And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Sutton, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out (I Kings 13:1–3).

This prophecy was fulfilled literally almost 350 years later.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem (II Chron. 34:1–5).

Prior to Josiah's reign, there would be a series of corrupt rulers. These rulers would reflect a social inversion which would be considered a curse. The social inversion would be a consequence of the moral inversion. "And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable" (Isa. 3:5).

B. Judicial Oppression

The text provides neither a judicial nor a moral definition of oppression. It also does not describe the specifics. Thus, we are left with only the Mosaic law as the source of our definition. This is not a liability. The Mosaic law was what the prophets invoked as the basis of their covenant lawsuits brought against Israel and Judah.

Oppression in the Mosaic law was marked by the misuse of the civil law. Corrupt rulers and corrupt citizens of the holy commonwealth used the civil government to gain unfair advantages over their neighbors. They refused to enforce the Mosaic law.

The negative model was Egypt. God told Moses, “Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them” (Ex. 3:9). God delivered the Israelites from Egypt. In the process, He killed Egypt’s firstborn sons, delivered their inheritance to the Israelites, and destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. When God revealed the details of the Mosaic law through Moses a few weeks later,³ he used Egypt as the negative model: “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 22:21).⁴ The focus was exclusively judicial.

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous. Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex. 23:6–9).⁵

So, the essence of oppression in Mosaic Israel was the refusal of the judges to enforce the whole of the Mosaic law, including its specific negative sanctions. Thus, the prophets came before the people and their rulers in the name of the Mosaic law. They brought a series of covenant lawsuits against the two kingdoms. They warned of negative corporate sanctions which were inescapable unless the people repented.

C. Consequences

These negative sanctions manifested the predictable, consistent relationship between covenant-keeping and outward success, and covenant-breaking and outward failure (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). So, God told Isaiah to bring this message. “Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him” (vv. 10–11).

The primary problem was the nation’s leadership. This leadership caused the people to sin. “As for my people, children are their oppress-

3. A common opinion of commentators is that the giving of the law took place 50 days after Passover.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 52.

ors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths" (v. 12). With greater power comes greater responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).⁶ Thus will come greater punishment.

The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the LORD GOD of hosts (vv. 13–15).

The princes—civil rulers—and the ancients, who were influential, are using their positions of authority to steal from the people, including the poor. God will not tolerate this indefinitely, Isaiah warns.

There is no question that the oppression was economic. The question is: How was this possible? The answer was simple: *a failure to enforce the Mosaic law*. But how had this taken place? Because of widespread sin in the broadest sense. "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves" (v. 9).

Isaiah then identified the signs of the nation's sin: delicate, haughty women. He presented a list of practices that are an affront to God: sexual provocation, jewels, and high fashion. God will replace their beauty and finery with sickness (vv. 16–24). They will no longer be protected by their men. "Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war" (v. 25). Jerusalem, spoken of as female, will suffer the consequences; "And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground" (v. 26).

There was nothing new in Isaiah's message. Moses had presented the system of covenantal causation seven centuries earlier. It was highly specific.

The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates (Deut. 28:56–57).

D. Repentance

Isaiah does not bring a new message to his listeners. He announces that the negative sanctions revealed by Moses were still in operation. The same kinds of negative corporate sanctions that were listed in the Mosaic law would inevitably be applied to Israel and Judah if both the rulers and the people refused to repent. The fact that Isaiah invoked the same negative sanctions testifies to the fact that the required repentance involved a return to the Mosaic law. The civil rulers were required to change their judicial ways. They were required to apply the Mosaic law.

The central event of Josiah's reign was the discovery of the lost scroll of the Mosaic law, recorded in II Kings 22. The king, already a covenant-keeper, immediately recognized what was required by God: national repentance. The mark of this repentance was a restoration of the Mosaic law in the courts, both civil and ecclesiastical, Moses said.

And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us (II Kings 22:11–13).

Josiah's reward was that he did not live to see the consequences of a national refusal to repent, despite his leadership.

Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again (II Kings 22:19–20).

He died in battle a little over two decades before Judah went into

captivity in Babylon.

Conclusion

The context of Isaiah's warning against oppression was judicial. His definition of honest dealing was faithfulness in enforcing the terms of the national covenant: the Mosaic law. His definition of oppression was this: the refusal of the rulers to enforce the terms of the national covenant. Because the Mosaic law was not being enforced, it was every man for himself. "And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour" (v. 5a). Rebellion was universal. Repentance therefore had to be universal. It was not enough that the rulers repent. Everyone was required to repent. Otherwise, they would live in universal oppression until the corporate negative sanction came: captivity. This, too, had been part of the Mosaic law. "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity" (Deut. 28:41). But this would not be captivity unto oblivion. It would be captivity unto restoration, Moses had prophesied.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:1–5).⁷

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 72.

6

RESTORING THE JUBILEE

What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it (Isa. 5:4–6).

The theocentric issue here was God’s negative sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Isaiah spoke in God’s name. He spoke as if he were God. The message here is clear: negative corporate sanctions are coming.

A. God’s Investments

God had loved Israel. Now He sang a song to the nation, which is elsewhere described as God’s son and heir.

Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes (Isa. 5:1–2).

The language here is that of a husbandman who devotes himself to planting a vineyard. It takes time and capital to plant a vineyard. It takes work. The husbandman hopes for domesticated grapes with a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

specific flavor, color, and texture. In this case, his hopes were thwarted by the vines. He got wild grapes.

As the faithful husbandman, God looked at the fruit of His labors. He found a bad crop. He asked the nation to judge the rightness of His cause. They had enough knowledge of God's law and His character to understand right from wrong.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes (vv. 3–4)?

This was the preliminary announcement of a covenant lawsuit. A covenant lawsuit always invokes the threat of negative sanctions.

And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it (vv. 5–6).

To maintain a vineyard's productivity, the owner must make constant investments: capital. God announced that He will no longer make these capital investments. The result will be capital depletion: wasted land. But this form of waste is better than the waste of reaping a harvest of wild grapes. This waste will at least conserve economic resources.

God had already done this in man's history. He cursed the ground with thistles and thorns (Gen. 3:17).² He ejected Adam and Eve from the garden, cutting them off from the tree of life (Gen. 3:23–24).³ He had placed them in the garden to care for it and to defend it (Gen. 2:15).⁴ They had refused to defend it against the serpent, so He chose to keep them from caring for it. Better to see the garden overrun by the wildness of cursed nature than to allow men to occupy it for evil purposes. Nothing is better than something whenever something is self-consciously wicked.

What was God's point? This: the existence of widespread coven-

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

antal rebellion. “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry” (v. 7). What form did this oppression take? Accumulating land. “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!” (v. 8).

God threatened to fill the vineyards with briers and thorns. He repeated this prophecy (Isa. 7:23–24). While God had placed man on earth to dress it, He was willing to let the land go back to wild nature rather than have it pruned by covenant-breaking Israelites. Better to have cattle keep the hills stripped of briers and thorns (Isa. 7:25) than to have ethically rebellious Israelites carefully prune the land.

B. Violating the Jubilee Land Law

The jubilee land law established a principle of inheritance governing rural land. Every 49 years, the heirs of those families that had faithfully committed genocide against the Canaanites would inherit the land that had been allocated by tribe and by lot: land that was not enclosed by the gates of Canaan’s cities (Lev. 25:8–10). The ownership of rural property in Mosaic Israel was based on genocide, and this principle of ownership was not to be violated.

So crucial was genocide to land ownership in Israel that two and a half tribes were not allowed to inherit land which the Israelites had conquered outside the boundaries of the Jordan River until they had fought side by side their brethren to kill everyone inside the boundaries of the Jordan. The Israelites had just annihilated several nations on the far side of the Jordan, but they had not originally done this for the sake of land. Those Canaanite tribes had unwisely initiated war with them, and the Israelites had destroyed them completely. Then the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh decided that they preferred the land outside the Jordan rather than inside. Moses told them this was fine, on one condition: more genocide.

And Moses said unto them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over Jordan, every man armed to battle, before the LORD, and the land shall be subdued before you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession: But if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan. And the children of Gad and the children of

Reuben answered, saying, As the LORD hath said unto thy servants, so will we do. We will pass over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, that the possession of our inheritance on this side Jordan may be ours. And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about (Num. 32:29–33).

Land ownership in Mosaic Israel was grounded judicially in covenantal extermination. The exterminators' heirs were required by God's law to honor this covenantal foundation of property rights. The Israelite calendar was governed by the jubilee year. It re-set every 50 years. Year 49 was the jubilee year. "In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession" (Lev. 25:13).⁵

The price of rural land was governed by this return of land to the families of the original owners. As the year of jubilee drew closer, the redemption price of land was reduced. Not to honor this pricing system was specifically designated by the Mosaic law as oppression.

And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God. Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and he shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety (Lev. 25:14–19).⁶

This is the background of Isaiah's condemnation of the Israelites. "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (Isa. 5:7).⁷

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

7. Chapter 6.

C. Grounded in Genocide

There is an old saying, "I'm not greedy. All I want to own is the land contiguous to mine." That, of course, means that he wants everything, one piece at a time. This was also the goal of successful farmers in Isaiah's day. They wanted to own their next-door neighbor's land. So, they accumulated land by purchase.

This may sound as though land accumulation is morally wrong. It is nowhere identified as morally wrong in this text. What was morally wrong was the nation's refusal to enforce the jubilee land law. It had become legally possible for high-efficiency farmers to buy the land of their less efficient neighbors. This was a form of oppression. Why? Because it substituted a principle of rural land ownership that was foreign to Mosaic Israel: ownership by efficiency rather than ownership by legacy. The legacy was specific: genocide. God had delivered their enemies into their hand. This was *efficiency of military conquest*.

This was God's testimony down through the generations. He is sovereign. He delegates land to those whom He chooses. He chose the Israelites. He hated the Canaanites, whose deeds were evil. He had instructed His people accordingly. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee" (Deut. 7:16).

Deuteronomy 7 records God's very specific instructions to His people regarding the Canaanites. Because sermons are rarely preached on Deuteronomy 7, it is appropriate to reproduce the passage verbatim, for it is unfamiliar to modern Christians. *This passage was the judicial foundation of the jubilee's laws of inheritance.*

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and

cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them (Deut. 7:1–11).

As Otto Scott once wrote, God is no buttercup.

The Israelites in Isaiah's day had refused to honor the terms of God's national covenant. The leaders had allowed successful farmers accumulate land based on their efficient production: money to buy out their neighbors. Isaiah correctly designated this policy as oppression.

Once again, I must remind readers that oppression in Mosaic Israel was a judicial concept. It was the policy of refusing to enforce the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law regarding rural land was clear. The heirs of each plot were to inherit their share of the land in year 49. It did not matter how economically inefficient they were. It did not matter how little money they possessed. If they were heirs of the conquest generation, they were to receive their share of the land.

This meant that no family could lawfully accumulate land as an inheritance beyond the jubilee year. To do so, the family had to gain the cooperation of the civil rulers, who would agree not to enforce the jubilee land law. *This was heart of the oppression identified by Isaiah.* Rural land ownership in Mosaic Israel was grounded covenantally in blood: genocide. No other principle of rural land ownership could lawfully be substituted by the rulers.

This is not how other Bible commentators have discussed the jubilee land laws. The underlying principle of the jubilee laws—genocide—is unacceptable to the commentators. So, they search for other reasons for the existence of the laws. They refuse to go to Deuteronomy 7,

which embarrasses them.

D. The Annulment of the Jubilee Laws

The reason why the jubilee law no longer applies is because Jesus annulled it in Luke 4. He read from Isaiah 61.

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:17–21).⁸

With the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the Mosaic land laws disappeared forever. Nothing of the old land laws extends into the New Covenant. Why not? Because they were grounded in God's mandatory genocide of the Canaanites. *There is no mandatory genocide in the New Covenant.* So, anyone who suggests that there is some continuing role for the so-called "economic principle of the jubilee year" is necessarily also calling for a return to the genocidal foundation of both rural property ownership and permanent slavery (Lev. 25:44–46).⁹ Of course, he would deny any such motivation. He can deny the motivation all he wants, but if he refuses to cease calling for the enforcement of some version of state-mandated redistribution of wealth in the name of the jubilee, he is in effect baptizing New Testament genocide and slavery. He cannot legitimately have it both ways. He must either abandon the so-called economics of the jubilee year or else abandon a world that no longer recognizes the legitimacy of the inheritance of slaves as part of a slave-owning family's legacy to its children.

Conclusion

Isaiah warned his listeners against the sin of refusing to enforce the Mosaic law-order. Such a refusal constituted oppression. He went

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31.

on to identify the violation of a specific case law: the jubilee land law governing rural property. The rulers had not enforced it. Thus, some families had amassed rural property. “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth (Isa. 5:8)!” Woe also to the rulers who collaborated with these land grabbers.

Without repentance, Isaiah warned, the vineyard known as Israel will lose God’s protection. It will be trodden down. It will be invaded. “Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst” (Isa. 5:13). This took place in the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. It took place in the southern kingdom in 586 B.C. It took place inside the land when it fell to Alexander the Great, and then Rome. Finally, it took place with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Israel did not learn the covenantal lesson, namely, that there are predictable corporate sanctions in history, both positive and negative.

JUDICIAL CAUSATION

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? (Isa. 10:1–3).

The theocentric issue here was God’s judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The Hebrew is not clear in verse 1. The word translated as “write” is the same as the word translated as “prescribed.” The New American Standard version translates the phrase as “record unjust decisions.” The New English Bible reads “publish burdensome decrees.” The sense of the verse is that of a court which declares unjust laws and then publishes them by writing them down, thereby sending a message to future disputants. The message is that injustice reigns in the court. The righteous know in advance that they are expected to submit to unjust rulers and unjust citizens whose causes are favored by unjust rulers.

Isaiah warned such rulers of the consequences: “And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?” There is an underlying judicial principle being invoked here, one which was clearly stated by Jesus. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:2).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. Judicial Cause and Effect

The Mosaic law established a system of negative judicial sanctions: an eye for an eye, also called the *lex talionis*. “And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again” (Lev. 24:19–20). In modern terminology, *the punishment should fit the crime*.

When the civil government of any society refuses to honor this principle, God intervenes to enforce that which the civil government has refused to enforce. He imposes negative sanctions on the entire society. On what judicial basis? This: *the people are responsible for the judicial sins of their rulers*. This principle was set forth in Leviticus 4. The people had to offer atoning sacrifices for the sins of their civil and ecclesiastical rulers.²

Modern theology, jurisprudence, ethical theory, and political theory stand forthright against this principle of judicial cause and effect. All deny that God in the New Testament era brings predictable corporate sanctions, positive or negative, in history. They affirm that corporate sanctions in history are endogenous: self-generated. Corporate sanctions are said to have their origin in either nature or society. If sanctions originate in nature, they are not seen as sanctions. They are seen as impersonal and purposeless. If they originate in society, then mankind is seen as autonomous. David described this mindset.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it (Ps. 10:4–11).

David had a response to those who believed this.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn [provoke] God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none (Ps. 10:12–15).

Isaiah here affirmed the reality of the Mosaic law's system of judicial causation. This affirmation rested on David's concept of God's judicial intervention in history. This was true of all of the prophets, including those who brought covenant lawsuits against covenant-breaking nations. Without the *universality of this system of judicial causation*, no prophet could have brought a valid covenant lawsuit to a foreign nation. Jonah's ministry would have made no sense.

Most Christian expositors have asserted or assumed that the system of judicial causation that undergirded the Mosaic Covenant does not operate in the New Covenant era. Yet we also find that contemporary expositors and especially politically liberal Christian political activists invoke the prophets' language regarding judicial causation. They then substitute politically liberal humanist causes for the statutes of the Mosaic law. They insist that Christians have a moral obligation to lobby for this or that political program in the name of Jesus. They cite the language of the prophets, yet they deny the system of judicial causation invoked by the prophets, the specific negative corporate sanctions promised by them, and the specific Mosaic statutes and penalties that undergirded the prophets' covenant lawsuits.³

Conclusion

Isaiah warned his listeners about what they could expect. Their rulers had acted unjustly with respect to the poor, to widows, and to orphans. These were the helpless members of society. He told them that God would bring desolation to the nation. There would be no es-

3. The most flagrant example of this sort of exegesis that I have ever read appeared in *The Alabama Law Review* (Fall 2002): Susan Pace Hamill, "An Argument for Tax Reform Based on Judeo-Christian Ethics," pp. 1–112. Hamill was Professor of Law at the University of Alabama. This article became the basis of a tax reform proposal pushed by the newly elected Republican governor of Alabama, Bob Riley, in 2003. He was a vocal Christian. "Alabama governor calls tax hike Christian duty," *USA Today* (July 30, 2003). The proposal failed when the voters rejected it, two-to-one, in a referendum in September, 2003. "Alabama Voters Crush Tax Plan Sought by Governor," *New York Times* (Sept. 10, 2003).

cape.

Predictable sanctions are basic to God's system of *eternal judicial causation*: heaven or hell (Luke 16), followed the New Heavens and New Earth of the resurrection or the lake of fire of the resurrection (Rev. 20:14–15). Covenant-keepers affirm this today. The prophets were unaware of this final judgment. There is an analogous system of *temporal judicial causation*. Most covenant-keepers deny this. The prophets affirmed this.

Christian social theory should incorporate the personal sanctions of eternity and the corporate sanctions of history. So should Christian economic theory. The fact that this still has not happened helps to explain why Christian social theory and Christian economic theory are not Christian. They are unstable hybrid mixtures of humanism and Christianity. "And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (II Cor. 6:15).

8

MESSIANIC JUSTICE

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked (Isa. 11:1–4).

A. A Messianic Prophecy

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ This is a messianic prophecy. Later in the chapter, we read this: “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious” (v. 10). Paul cited this verse as having been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. “And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust” (Rom. 15:12). So, we know this was a messianic prophecy.

Isaiah says here that the Messiah’s concern will be the treatment of the poor by the courts. “He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.” The Hebrew word translated as “reprove” means “to judge.” It usually has the connotation of a negative pronouncement, often within

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

the context of a court. The Messiah will judge as a king judges. He is the heir of Jesse, meaning a son of David.

The text does not say that the Messiah will defend the poor and meek. Rather, He will judge them. But He will not judge them by what He hears about them or sees: their weakness. He will judge solely in terms of God's standard of righteousness. This is in stark contrast with the rulers of Isaiah's day. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (Isa. 1:23). The messiah will be on the side of justice.

B. Unfulfilled Prophecies

The following has not been fulfilled in history: "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." When will this be fulfilled? This question divides the major eschatological positions.

Amillennialists must interpret this prophecy as having to do with the final judgment. From the perspective of amillennialism, this reign of justice cannot ever be fulfilled in history. Christ did not fulfill it. He did not leave Palestine during His earthly ministry. He has not literally reigned over the gentiles. He reigns only spiritually, amillennialists believe. Surely, they argue, the church has never extended earthly justice on this worldwide scale. None of the three major branches of Jesse's branch—Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism—has ever ruled society in such a way that the other two have acknowledged either its legitimacy or its ethical coherence. So, this passage is a problem passage for amillennialism, which denies the eschatological possibility of a comprehensive institutional incorporation of the messianic kingdom in history.

Premillennialists look forward an earthly messianic kingdom which will last a thousand years before the final judgment. Yet we find no premillennial treatises on the details of the judicial system that will be imposed and enforced by Christ and His international civil court system.

Historic premillennialists—mostly Calvinists—do not believe that this messianic kingdom will be in any way related to the Mosaic law's mandated civil order. So, the legal order represents a major discontinuity separating the Old and New Covenants. They do see judicial

continuity between the New Testament church and the future messianic kingdom. But they remain discreetly silent with respect to the judicial principles that will be enforced by civil government in the future kingdom. The medieval church used Roman Stoicism's natural law theory to construct its system of casuistry. So did a handful of Puritan and Anglican pastors in the seventeenth century, most notably Richard Baxter and Jeremy Taylor. Their detailed ethical systems were never widely accepted, let alone enforced, in Protestant churches. So, historic premillennialists are silent on the nature of civil justice in the future kingdom.

In contrast to historic premillennialists, dispensational premillennialist theologians believe that the messianic kingdom will be marked by a restoration of the Mosaic civil law. The discontinuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant is emphasized by dispensationalists.² I can summarize the position's assessment of judicial theory. "The messianic kingdom will restore much of this lost continuity with the Mosaic era. Just as there was a major discontinuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the Church Age, so will there be a major discontinuity between the Church Age and the messianic kingdom. This discontinuity is so great that it would be a waste of time today to develop the details of the future kingdom. These details have no authoritative, Bible-mandated application in the Church Age. Christians alive at the end of the Church Age will be removed from history by the Rapture, so none of them will be in positions of authority during the messianic kingdom. The world therefore can and should wait for Jesus to implement His preferred legal system in person when He returns to rule the nations. There is no good reason to struggle to develop these details now, as through a glass, darkly, prior to the Rapture." So, there is no dispensational treatise on the broad outlines of the legal system of the messianic kingdom.

There is also no dispensational treatise on Christian social ethics for the Church Age. This is understandable. Because the categories and content of the Mosaic law do not extend into the Church Age, which the major dispensational theologians have insisted is the case, there is no theological basis in the Church Age for identifying one legal order as more legitimate than another, biblically speaking, because the New Testament is silent on such matters. Thus, we have yet to see a

2. This is less true of the "progressive dispensationalists," who have yet to produce a systematic theology presenting their position. The position was developed in the 1980s. It has not been widely adopted in local churches.

single published dispensational book on social ethics. Yet the movement began in 1830.

Historic Presbyterian postmillennialism is tied to the Westminster Confession and the two catechisms (1647), as accepted by Scottish Presbyterianism in 1648. The key passage is the answer to Question 191 in the Larger Catechism: the conversion of the Jews. But the Westminster Confession and the catechisms do not reveal a detailed concern with civil government. What little there was did not survive the American revision of the Confession in 1787, which paralleled the writing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. The Constitutional Convention began the week following the close of the Presbyterian Synod. Both assemblies were held in Philadelphia. Both documents were ratified by representative regional assemblies in 1787–88. Both documents reflected the natural law doctrines of the Scottish Enlightenment by way of John Witherspoon, who was the spiritual father of both documents, having been Madison's professor at the College of New Jersey (Princeton).³ The social views of historic postmillennialists were closely tied to nineteenth-century classical liberalism, which was an extension of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment. Their social views were not self-consciously Christian, nor were they grounded in texts from the Bible.

This leaves theonomic postmillennialism as the obvious source of such treatises. And so it has been: the New England Puritans during the first generation (1630–60) and Christian Reconstructionists today.

Conclusion

The prophecy was messianic. It pointed to Jesus Christ, who will serve as judge. This text did not refer to the final judgment. It referred to a restoration of the holy commonwealth after the captivity. "And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt" (Isa. 11:16). This was never fulfilled. So, its fulfillment must still be in the future.

The context of the prophecy was civil justice. This means the content was the Mosaic law. To argue otherwise is to argue that the prophets called on Israel and Judah to adopt a new law-order. For this,

3. On the links between the revised Confession and the Constitution, see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>) cf. Gary North, *Conspiracy in Philadelphia* (Draper, Virginia: NiceneCouncil.com, [2004] 2011), ch. 1.

there is no evidence anywhere in the Bible. So, the prophets believed that justice will eventually be enforced in history by the Messiah. Their concept of justice was Mosaic—not Greek, Roman, medieval, Renaissance, or Enlightenment.

The question is: When? Another question is: How? In person? Or representatively by His covenanted people? To what extent will the principles of civil law that governed the prophets also govern during the Messiah's reign? How do the principles of continuity and discontinuity apply? When do they apply? Throughout the entire New Testament era or only in a special future segment of this era: the messianic kingdom? These questions are rarely raised individually. They are almost never raised together. This is because the broad Christian tradition offers no answers to them. Men rarely ask questions that have not been answered for two millennia. They also do not ask questions whose answers will require them to serve as prophet-like men in an era of agnostic skepticism and Christian pietism. This is because responsibility is always a difficult thing to market. Jesus' account of the prophets was clear on this point.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:29–36).

It is not this bad for Christians in our day in most nations, although it is in some Islamic societies. But the typical response of covenant-breakers to the Mosaic law is one of disdain or contempt, as is the response of most covenant-keepers. Modern man dismisses God's Bible-revealed laws and then accepts the modern messianic state's laws. He therefore finds himself in bondage.

9

WITHOUT PITY OR PRICE

Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it (Isa. 13:15–17).

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Here, Isaiah prophesied against Babylon. This is a passage that appalls theological liberals. First, it is a prophecy regarding events that were two centuries away. The Babylonian empire will fall to the Medo-Persian empire, Isaiah said. The Medo-Persian empire did not exist at the time of this prophecy. Second, God identified Himself as the source of these corporate negative sanctions, which include the destruction of children.

A. The Ruthlessness of God

War is a period in which normal activities cease to be normative. Because war authorizes violence, the moral standards that prevail in peacetime are suspended by the rulers with regard to the treatment of the enemy. Ruthless acts that would be regarded as pathological in peacetime win medals for their perpetrators during wartime. That which the Bible identifies as immoral becomes commonplace on the battlefield.

That God would bring such negative sanctions against any nation seems inconceivable to liberals and pietists. Yet He did this during the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

conquest of Canaan.

And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them (Deut. 7:2)

And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee (Deut. 7:16).

But the LORD thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed (Deut. 7:23).

This destruction was to be total: annihilation. This was genocide. This destruction was not to be mitigated for the sake of personal gain. Achan discovered this after he hid some of the treasure which he had found in Jericho. The punishment for this was the annihilation of his household: adults, children, and animals.

And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day (Josh. 7:24–26).²

So total was this destruction that the pile of stones became a memorial. The very name of the region testified to a time when God spared none of His enemies. The mandate was clear: total destruction.

This is not normal, nor is it normative for peacetime. But there is no doubt that God is sometimes utterly ruthless. In fact, God is utterly ruthless for all eternity, which is the message of the existence of hell and the lake of fire. He is to be greatly feared by both friend and foe. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix A: “Sacrilege and Sanctions.”

of the holy is understanding” (Prov. 9:10).

B. The Impotence of Gold

Gold will not protect you when the Medes invade Babylon, Isaiah warns those who would be alive two centuries later. Zephaniah warned the residents of Judah a century later: “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land” (Zeph. 1:18). The Medes will be committed to destruction. Their commitment will be single-minded. The invaders will not be dissuaded from their errand of destruction by offers of silver or gold.

Under normal circumstances, the offer to exchange silver or gold is taken seriously by the recipient of the offer. He evaluates the benefits available to him by becoming the owner of this silver or gold. He compares these benefits with the costs of surrendering ownership of whatever the offerer seeks. Negotiation begins.

In the invasion, prophesied Isaiah, a Babylonian will ask for his life. His life will be of little value to an invader unless the invader is harvesting a crop of slaves. So, the problem facing the future Babylonian will be that the Medes will not be interested in personal economic gains. Their goal will be the destruction of their enemies. By sparing a person’s life, the Mede would be compromising the military’s commitment to destroy the enemy. So committed to destruction will the Medes be, Isaiah implied, that the offer of gold or silver will be rejected. The individual benefit of exterminating one more Babylonian will exceed the value of the silver or gold.

A warrior is not a businessman. He is not motivated by commercial goals.³ A warrior has a different ethic. A businessman’s ethic includes such standards as adherence to contracts, a commitment to cutting costs, the legitimacy of profit—“buy low, sell high”—the legitimacy of “high bid wins,” a service mentality, a commitment to rationality, and self-interest. The warrior’s ethic includes courage, honor, comradeship, group loyalty, obedience to orders, controlled destruction, and steadfastness under fire. Without these, an army cannot win. A warrior is not supposed to surrender to the temptation of personal gain at the expense of his military unit.

There are exceptions. Every army has its unofficial experts in com-

3. Booty is not commerce. He gets booty through victory, not as a bribe.

merce, who do possess the skills of the businessman. They are unlikely to possess the businessman's ethic, only his skills of negotiation and entrepreneurship. These specialists operate for the benefit of senior officers in their own units. They benefit those close to them or those over them. An army would disintegrate immediately if all of its members were committed to these skills. But it would become very inefficient if none of them was. An inefficient army loses battles.

There is a common saying, "Every person has his price." This is universally true, as Jesus' parable of the pearl of great price indicates (Matt. 13:45–46).⁴ But this universal principle is applied differently in different circumstances by different people. The asking price of the invading Medes is honor in battle. The offer of silver or gold is the offer of a lower-value good to the warrior seeking honor in battle. He has a price, but the price must be paid by the victim's death. The more committed the warrior is to the warrior ethic, the less likely he will be tempted by an offer of gold or silver. In the view of the warrior, the victim has nothing of value to offer other than his own death. This does the victim no good.

In times of crisis, gold and silver may not help their owners: a terminal disease, a terminal military invasion, a terminal revolution. In normal times, precious metals have granted their owners opportunities to evade the effects of threats.

Conclusion

Isaiah told his listeners that Babylonians will someday face a crisis so intense that its silver and gold will not buy them out of danger. The Medes will be in no mood to truck and barter. Future Babylonians will find that they have put their trust in false deliverers: gold and silver.

This message reminds the listeners that God is sovereign. He is men's only reliable hope. Isaiah identifies God as being against Babylon. Its gold will not save it.

4. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45–46).

10

DELAYED NEGATIVE SANCTIONS

Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee (Isa. 33:1).

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Isaiah here affirms the existence of a system of moral cause and effect in history. He brings a covenant lawsuit against the spoilers. They deal unjustly with people. They will not get away with it.

He speaks of the spoiler. The Hebrew word can be translated as “destroyer.” It can also mean “robber.” “The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly” (Job 12:6). It can mean “oppressor.” The psalmist sought deliverance “from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about” (Ps. 17:9). It is a negative term.

This person once defrauded victims. Nothing happened to him. He did it again. There were no negative consequences. There will be. At some point in the future, someone else will do to him as he did to others. The same thing is characteristic of the person who deals deceitfully. He is pictured as a transgressor. “The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor” (Prov. 22:12). Isaiah said, “When thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.”

There is a temporal delay, almost as an echo is delayed. This delay persuades the covenant-breaker that there are no negative con-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

sequences in history. He gets away with whatever he is doing. This serves as confirmation of his assumption that God does not see his evil. "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it" (Ps. 10:11). Because he regards God as blind, he also regards Him as impotent. God is supposedly not in a position to impose negative sanctions on evil-doers.

The delay can serve either as a period for repentance or as a period of repeated corruption. Isaiah implies that this is a period of corruption. But, at some point, the sinner ceases to practice his evil. Those around him are no longer his victims. He lowers his guard. He deals honestly with others. Then, without warning, he finds that he has become the victim of someone just like he had been. The negative sanctions are imposed by someone as corrupt as he had been.

There is a saying, "what goes around, comes around." This is another way of saying evildoers reap what they sow. "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:8). "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).² The delay confirms them in an error: "There is no predictable cause and effect system in history." They become forgetful. They are not alert to those as deceitful or as oppressive as themselves. When they cease from their evil deeds, though not out of a change of heart, they find that their environment is not neutral. It is vindictive.

Isaiah affirms a system of moral causation in history. Ours is not a world governed by cosmic impersonalism. It is governed by cosmic personalism.³ The events of history may appear to be random, but they are not.

Covenant-keepers are therefore not to despair. They are to wait on God's judgments in history. "O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou [our]⁴ arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble" (Isa. 33:2).

This gives hope to the righteous person, Isaiah affirms. "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

4. American Standard Version, English Standard Version.

seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure" (Isa. 33:15–16). The person who shakes his hands so that no bribe money passes into them understands the moral necessity of honest judgment. Bribery indicates that the context is judicial. This person is a judge. He turns away from evil. He does not listen to evil schemes. He does not let his eyes look upon situations in which he would be tempted to issue a corrupt judgment.

Conclusion

The oppressor will be oppressed. The deceiver will be deceived. The world is covenantal. It is governed in terms of an ethical code, and this code has sanctions. If individuals are not self-governed, then they will be governed by civil governments that impose negative sanctions. If civil governments are corrupt, then other agents will impose negative sanctions: evil-doers who find people to exploit who were once just like them.

There is no escape from the ethical standards that undergirded the Mosaic law. There is no escape from negative sanctions that are imposed by God when covenant-breakers do not repent, change their ways, and make restitution.

11

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WILDERNESS

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water (Isa. 41:17–18).

A. Theonomy and Society

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ These promises appear in the context of a series of promises to Israel. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel” (v. 14). The language indicates a complete transformation of the environment. “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together” (v. 19). This transformation had as its goal the widespread acknowledgment of God as sovereign over history. “That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it” (v. 20).

Is this to be taken literally? No. Why should God plant trees when the people who own the land can plant them? Are there fir trees in the desert? Pine trees? No. But myrtle wood comes from Palestine. There are olive trees inside the modern nation of Israel. They were not planted by God. They were planted by men.

Then what was the meaning of the passage? It asserts that God is

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

behind the flowering of a wilderness. How? By means of His law. When men make peace, when their civil courts enforce the Mosaic laws governing property, and when men fulfill their contractual promises, society will be blessed. Productivity will increase. Wealth will increase. Out of the desert will spring trees. This promise has been fulfilled in the modern State of Israel. Irrigation systems, modern agricultural technology, and capital have made it possible for those living inside the borders of the nation to export agricultural produce to Europe.

Then how does God get the credit? The same way that He did under the Mosaic law: through a widespread realization that God's Bible-revealed laws are the basis of the good society.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).²

But what happens when men's faith in God is replaced by faith in the autonomous free market order? Or when they see civil law as the product of men's minds? Or when civil law is seen either in terms of universal logical categories of autonomous man, or else in terms of the political compromises of voting blocs? At that point, men move from the worship of God to the worship of man. Men cease to give credit to God.

This is nothing new, as Isaiah said in the remainder of the chapter. Bring your case before me, God tells Israel (v. 21). Give us your historical background (v. 22). Then tell us what will come next. "Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come" (v. 23). Israel cannot safely do this. God then renders judgment. "Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you"

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

(v. 24). “Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion” (v. 29).

B. Miracles Are Not Required

Isaiah spoke of God as the source of blessings. God will provide water to those who are thirsty. This is a messianic prophecy. It may not seem like it, but it is. It speaks of one who comes to judge kings in God’s name. “I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay” (v. 25). This person could be seen as Cyrus, but Cyrus did not come in God’s name. The next chapter speaks of this person in detail. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:1). “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (vv. 6–7). Jesus declared at the beginning of His ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18).³ He also told the woman at the well, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13–14).

Isaiah paints a verbal picture of God watering the wilderness. The land will bloom. This is not a prophecy of God literally planting pine trees in the desert. It is a prophecy of the transformation of the earth through the work of the Messiah. The Messiah will deliver prisoners from bondage. He will bring sight to the blind. He will call men to a great harvest. “Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few” (Matt. 9:37).

The poor need deliverance. This is the deliverance from sin and bondage. When this is accomplished through God’s grace, men can

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

then begin the transformation of the wilderness. This will be seen in a literal blooming of deserts. This blooming is to serve as a visible verification of God's system of corporate covenantal sanctions. It is to reinforce the covenant. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).⁴ This is why any assertion of man's autonomy threatens to restore the wilderness. Isaiah repeatedly offered images of the return of wilderness as an image of God's negative sanctions.

Yet the defenced city shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof. When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour (Isa. 27:10–11).

Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation (Isa. 64:10).

Isaiah brings a message of *judgment unto desolation*, yet also *judgment unto restoration*. First will come the wilderness, then the restoration.

Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field (Isa. 32:13–16).

Conclusion

Isaiah presented his message of restoration in terms of the miraculous intervention of God. God will provide flowing water in the wilderness. He will plant trees in the wilderness. Isaiah was not prophesying

4. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21, 22.

the advent of God as a kind of Johnny Appleseed,⁵ planting apple trees across the land. He is prophesying the coming of the Messiah, who will make men fruitful through God's grace and their own repentance. They will in turn go into the fields to reap a harvest. The imagery is that of miraculous intervention in a wilderness. The meaning is this: *the redemption of entire societies*. The fruitfulness of the gospel, when applied, will bring productivity to a thirsty world.

Jesus promised this to the woman at the well. Then she recognized how to begin: by bringing the message of His presence to people in her community. She was the new fruit. She was evidence of the transformation of the wilderness.

The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him (John 4:28–30).

So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world (John 4:40–42).

5. The model for the legendary character was John Chapman (1774–1845), who established orchards in the states of Ohio and Indiana.

12

INVOKING THE MOSAIC LAW

Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart (Isa. 42:23–25).

A. Covenants Lawsuits

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The prophets came before Israel and Judah to present a series of covenant lawsuits. God directed them to bring these lawsuits on His behalf. These lawsuits had a specific form: a list of national sins, a warning of coming negative corporate sanctions, a call to repentance, and a promise of restoration after a time of suffering, which would include national captivity.

These lawsuits warned of specific negative corporate sanctions. These sanctions were grounded judicially in the original covenant between God and national Israel. Every covenant has sanctions: positive and negative. The Mosaic Covenant's list of positive sanctions was much shorter than the list of negative corporate sanctions. The lists can be found in two places: Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Here, Isaiah speaks of negative sanctions as already operating in the life of the nation. "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned?" The sins have been going on for some time. Preliminary negative sanctions

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

had already been applied by God. The implication is that God had waited to send Isaiah to bring a covenant lawsuit until a preliminary manifestation of the negative sanctions was visible to all.

There could be no legitimate doubt regarding the source of these negative sanctions: God. These sanctions were not random. They were effects grounded judicially in God's covenantal law-order. They were also not the exclusive result of conventional military or economic causes. They had come because of the actions of the people. "They would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law."

To discuss the prophets apart from a detailed consideration of the Ten Commandments and their applications in the case laws of Exodus 21–23 is to avoid discussing the central issue of the ministry of all of the prophets: bringing a covenant lawsuit. Every covenant has stipulations. This means that it has laws that are based on an ethical system. *Without stipulations and sanctions, there is no covenant.*

God's covenant with Israel had stipulations. We call these laws the Mosaic law. They were the laws associated with national Israel from Moses to the captivity. There were changes in the law after the return of Israelites to the land. For one thing, the laws governing the inheritance of rural land changed. The gentiles who had been moved by Assyria and Babylon into the land were not to be dispossessed by the returning Israelites. Ezekiel announced this.

And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 47:22–23).²

So, there were modifications. By the time of Jesus, Israelites lawfully celebrated the Passover apart from their families. Jesus' Upper Room discourse was delivered only to men (John 13–17).

The prophets brought their covenant lawsuits in the name of the Mosaic Covenant. "They would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law." This rebellion had already brought on God's negative sanctions. "Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle." But Israel had not perceived the covenantal consistency of these sanctions with the Mosaic law itself.

2. Chapter 22.

“It hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.” Israel was so far advanced in its covenant-breaking that the people had forgotten that the law itself had warned of negative sanctions. The Israelites were less covenantally self-conscious as the Philistines had been in the days of Samuel. The Philistines had experienced an outbreak of boils, city by city, as the captured Ark of the Covenant passed from city to city. Their priests said to send it back to Israel by a unique method.

Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us (1 Sam. 6:7–9).

When the cattle turned toward Israel, the Philistines knew that their afflictions had not been due to a random plague.³ The people of Israel in Isaiah’s day did not understand covenantal cause and effect equally well.

The prophets came before the people to remind them of the Mosaic law: its statutes and its sanctions. God is the source of Israel’s afflictions, Isaiah warns them. This was not a new message. It was built into the original texts of the law. This law was supposed to be read to the assembled nation every seventh year, the sabbatical year.

And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (Deut. 31:10–13).⁴

3. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deutero-*

If this law was still being obeyed, which seems unlikely, the Israelites did not take seriously the sanctions promised by God for disobedience. The prophets came before the people to remind them that what they had heard was not mere theory. It was a standing threat to their very survival individually. When God brings negative sanctions against the nation, they warned, many would suffer terrible deaths.

The nation ignored them. They were not taken seriously. The counsellors of the kings prophesied good times. The people wanted it this way. God told Isaiah,

Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits (Isa. 30:8–10).

Conclusion

Isaiah warned his listeners that God had placed the nation under visible judgment. He told them that they had not recognized the source of their troubles. But why not? Because they had violated God's law with impunity. This was not natural law or the supposed law of nations. This was the Mosaic code.

They should have known from the beginning that God's negative corporate sanctions were coming. The law had spelled them out in detail. But they had paid no more attention to the sanctions than they had to the stipulations. In this, they were like contemporary Christians, who also pay no attention to the law's stipulations. They also do not worry about the sanctions.

13

THE PROMISE OF ABUNDANCE

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness (Isa. 55:1–2).

A. Come and Buy

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Isaiah tells the thirsty person to come and drink. He tells the person with no money to come and buy. Buy with what? With nothing. “Buy wine and milk without money and without price.” This cannot be taken literally. If you buy something, you give up the use of something else. If you buy something, you pay a price. This is what it means to buy. So, the verse was not meant to be taken literally.

He then asks a pair of questions: “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” The implication here is that they were wasting their money. Bread sustains life. These people were spending their money on that which does not sustain life. They were not even getting satisfaction for their money. They were therefore wasting their lives.

He then calls them to change their ways. “Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” He begins the passage with a call to buy milk and wine without money. He cannot have been talking about milk and wine. He is talking about things that are more valuable than milk and wine, yet free.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Jesus told the same thing to the woman at the well. “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13–14). This was not a new message in Jesus’ day. It was the fulfillment of an old message.

B. A New Covenant

Isaiah then introduced the context of this offer of free food. “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (v. 3). This new covenant will be brought by a new leader. “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people” (v. 4). The gentile nations will respond to this new covenant. “Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee” (v. 5). There should be no doubt: these are messianic promises.

The issue here is ethics. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (v. 7). Here is true abundance: *the abundance of God’s mercy*.

Isaiah compares the transforming message of redemption with agricultural productivity.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (vv. 10–11).

The fulfillment of all this began with the ministry of Jesus. He twice fed thousands of people with bread (Matt. 14; 15). This was free food for the asking. Yet the bread He offered them was the bread of life.

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto

him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:32–35).

Jesus fulfilled the promise of Isaiah regarding bread. He brought the same message: *redemption from sin*. The people did not grasp this, any more than their predecessors had grasped Isaiah's message. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:29) He warned them, as Isaiah had warned his listeners: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27). They responded appropriately: "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:28–29).

Jesus later announced a new meal, which we call the Lord's Supper, in terms of bread and wine. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it" (Matt. 26:26–27).

C. Redemption

Isaiah again returns to the theme of thorns and briers. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (v. 13). The curse which he prophesied in Isaiah 5:4–6² will be removed, just as he said in Isaiah 32:13.³ Thorns and briers will no longer characterize the deserted land of Israel and Judah.

The language of agricultural productivity is used with respect to redemption. The hearts of the people will be changed by God through the message of His Messiah. *This message of redemption will produce agricultural transformation*. There is a relationship between covenant-keeping and outward prosperity (Deut. 28:1–14).⁴ The prophets re-

2. Chapter 6.

3. Chapter 11.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

affirmed this system of covenantal confirmation.

The modern world has rejected the relevance of this connection. Covenants are seen as primarily political. The covenants of church and family are relegated to the private sphere, as is the individual covenant with God. Moderns do not accept as operational the system of covenantal causation described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. This includes most modern Christians. They assume that the laws of economics, if any, are separate from theological confession.

Conclusion

Isaiah here told people who lack money or assets that God had not abandoned them. God offered water for the thirsty and food for the hungry. But his language indicated that this offer related to spiritual matters. It relates to a messianic promise of covenantal restoration. "Let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. He gave water to the thirsty woman and food to hungry crowds. He did this as visible testimonies that confirmed His office as messiah. He did literally what Isaiah had declared figuratively. Then he moved His listeners back from literalism to ethics, which Isaiah had intended all along.

14

THE DECLARATION OF COVENANTAL LIBERTY

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn (Isa. 61:1–2).

A. The Kinsman Redeemer

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ This passage is based on the jubilee laws of Leviticus 25. In the jubilee year, all leased rural land was to be returned to the heirs of the conquest generation (vv. 14–17,² 23–24³). The heirs of the conquest generation were also to be freed from debt bondservice (vv. 39–43).⁴ If an heir had been sold into debt servitude to a stranger, he could be liberated at any time by his nearest of kin, the kinsman-redeemer, through the payment of a prorated redemption price (vv. 47–55).⁵

This is a messianic prophecy. We know this because Jesus cited it in the first public presentation of His ministry.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 26.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 30.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 32.

stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:16–21).⁶

Jesus accomplished this by acting as the Kinsman-Redeemer. At the cross, He paid the price to redeem those in bondage. What was the task of a kinsman-redeemer? This:

And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption (Lev. 25:47–52).⁷

This was the judicial basis of liberation under the Mosaic law. Someone had to pay the price if the bondsman could not afford to redeem himself. This is the case with all mankind. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).⁸ Man has nothing of value to offer God. “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

7. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 32.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6).

B. Comprehensive Restoration

Isaiah made it plain to his listeners that he was talking about restoration. He used the symbolism of desolate people. “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (v. 3). A tree of righteousness is an ethically restored tree. He then shifted the imagery of desolation to geography. “And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations” (v. 4).

The supreme threat offered by the prophets was captivity. But this will not be permanent captivity. There will be restoration of covenantal social hierarchy: *the righteous will be on top*. “And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers” (v. 5). *There will be a great reversal*. “But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves” (v. 6).

Such a reversal was announced by Mary when she learned of the meaning of her pregnancy.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever (Luke 1:50–55).⁹

These passages testify against the ideal of economic equality. *The ideal of economic equality is the devil's own lie*. It rests on the lie of a world that is not governed by predictable covenantal sanctions. It assumes that corporate obedience to God's Bible-revealed laws does not bring economic benefits, a denial of Deuteronomy 28:1–14.¹⁰ It denies

9. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 1.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

that corporate disobedience to God's Bible revealed laws does not bring economic loss (Deut. 28:15–68). Every attempt to pursue the politics of economic equality is a defiant rejection of the Mosaic law, the prophets, and the New Testament doctrine of heaven and hell. Even in heaven, there will be inequality (I Cor. 3:10–15).¹¹ Even in hell there will be inequality (Luke 12:47–48).¹²

The crucial issue for Israel was righteousness. “For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations” (v. 11).

Conclusion

The jubilee year began on the day of atonement. “Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land” (Lev. 25:9). This was the announcement of God's covering of the sins of the nation. Only then could the year of deliverance begin.

Men's deliverance from sin is the essence of this release from bondage. When covenant-keepers grow like trees of righteousness, we can expect the great reversal of the social order. The foundations of this reversal were laid by Christ as the Kinsman-Redeemer.

11. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

12. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

15

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them (Isa. 65:20–23).

A. The Context Was Healing

The context of this prophecy was Isaiah's announcement of God's creation of the New Heavens and New Earth. "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (v. 17). The theocentric issue was inheritance in history: point five of the biblical covenant.¹

Amillennialists argue that this is figurative language that refers to the post-resurrection world. The problem with such an interpretation is the fact that sinners will still be present. "The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." Saints and sinners will not intermingle in the world beyond death. Jesus, in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, put these words in Abraham's mouth: "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Luke 16:26). So, the amillennialist prefers

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

to avoid mentioning this Isaiah passage. It is the number-one passage in the Bible that refutes amillennialism. In his book, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (1958), amillennialist Archibald Hughes took the novel approach of refusing to comment on this passage, despite the title of his book, and despite the fact that the phrase appears in the Bible only five times.² This was not an oversight. This was an admission of defeat. Other amillennial commentators spiritualize away the language. They deny what the text clearly says. They strip it of all reference to history.³

The passage refers to history. No covenant-keeping Hebrew would have argued otherwise in Isaiah's day. The prophets dealt with the present in terms of the *historical* future. They did not come before their listeners to warn them of judgment outside of history and beyond the grave. They warned them of historical consequences for covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. Moses had done the same (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

B. Long Life and Dominion

The standard greeting to a king in the ancient world was this: "O, king, live forever."⁴ No one meant it literally, nor did kings assume that anyone did. History imposes boundaries on men, and the chief boundary is time. Time is not unlimited, either for individuals or nations.

Long life in good health is a universally recognized blessing. This is why health care expenditures are a large percentage of an economically wealthy nation's expenditures. People can afford to pay for better health, and they do. This prophecy says that at some point in the future, long life will be widespread. Dying at age one hundred will be considered abnormal. "The child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." This means that *the years of productivity will be vastly extended*. People will be able to master their crafts, or have time to launch and perfect new careers. Knowledge will not suffer the discontinuity associated with old age and death. The skills achieved by someone over long years of work will accumulate.

2. I commented on this fact in my book, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), p. 97. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

3. An example of this is Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 202. I show the weakness of his argument in *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 98–106.

4. Deut. 6:10; 1 Kings 1:31; Neh. 2:3; Dan. 2:4; 3:9.

The downside of this is that the skills of covenant-breakers will also accumulate. The shortening of life spans from Noah to Caleb placed covenant-breakers at a disadvantage. Their societies are cut short. Covenant-keeping societies are not. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:5–6).⁵ “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face” (Deut. 7:9–10). *Continuity is an advantage to a covenant-keeping society.* The church extends across generations and borders. Rival forms of religious organization do not. Where this is not the case, as with Islam, the conflict continues.

This prophecy refers to an era in which God restores long life spans because covenant-breakers are not dominant. Covenant-keepers are not threatened by this extension. This prophecy has to refer to an era in which saving faith has been extended to a broad majority of people.

C. The Fruits of One’s Labor

There will be consistency between reaping and sowing. “And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” This was seen in Isaiah’s day as a great blessing. I can think of no society in which it would not be seen by laborers as a blessing.

The great motivation for labor the hope is that it will produce valuable results. The person who works wants to enjoy the benefits produced by the final products. It is a curse when he who plants does not reap. It was a curse on the Canaanites when the Israelites invaded. God delivered their handiwork into the hands of His people, “to give

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: A Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full” (Deut. 6:10b–11).

The fact that men will live in a world where the curse of Canaan no longer operates indicates the coming of an era of widespread covenant-keeping. Such a world is not an option for covenant-breakers, nor is it an option for covenant-keepers who are committing evil acts inconsistent with their profession of faith. Moses warned Israel,

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).⁶

In an era of widespread covenant-keeping, property rights will be secure. Men will be able to invest time and money in developing their farms and businesses because the civil courts will defend their rights—immunity from seizure—as owners of titles to property.

This development will increase everyone’s sense of personal responsibility. The consequences of the actions of owners will be borne by the owners. This will make them more attentive to their actions than would be the case in a world in which others bear these consequences, whether positive or negative. The word “mine,” when enforced by courts and custom, leads institutionally to the phrase, “my responsibility.” This is consistent with the biblical concept of judgment. “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16).

D. Guaranteed Productivity

It will not only be that covenant-keepers in the coming era will retain the fruits of their labor. They will also avoid wasting time and money on fruitless labor. “They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble.” There is a reason for this. “For they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.” This indicates that in a world marked by covenant-keeping, covenantal inherit-

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

ance will reveal in history what it will reveal in eternity.

This prophecy also indicated that in the long era in which covenant-keeping is not widespread, there is less consistency between labor and emptiness, between labor and trouble. Isaiah lived in such an era. “Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God” (Isa. 49:4). He had already prophesied that covenant-breaking nations would eventually be characterized by emptiness. “It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion” (Isa. 29:8).

Conclusion

Isaiah testified throughout his ministry to the system of covenantal sanctions presented by God through Moses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Covenant-keeping brings positive corporate sanctions in history, while covenant-breaking brings negative corporate sanctions. So, over time, covenant-keeping societies replace covenant-breaking societies. This is basic to the biblical concept of inheritance. The culmination of this historical process is presented in this passage.

Isaiah prophesied here regarding a better world to come in time and on earth. It will be characterized by long life in general, much longer life for covenant-keepers, private property, covenantal inheritance, and fruitful labor. This world is still in the future, but with respect to the increase of life expectancy, the extension of private property, and the increase in productivity, the West since about 1750 is far closer to literal fulfillment than anything that came before. The primary cause was the extension of the private property legal order, which was the result of centuries of Christian preaching against adultery, theft, envy, and covetousness. It is also the fulfillment of the fifth commandment: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Ex. 20:12).⁷

7. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 25.

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH

Jeremiah's ministry was aimed at Judah and the holy city, Jerusalem. He preached in the era immediately preceding the Babylonian captivity. His book of Lamentations was written after the captivity began in 586 B.C.

Jeremiah is identified as a major prophet. Among the prophets, his book is second in length only to Isaiah's. We might expect to find considerable material relating to economics, but there is almost nothing. In Chapter 22, he criticized those who do not pay wages. In Chapter 32, he recorded his purchase of a field from a relative. In Chapter 34, he commanded the people to release their Hebrew slaves. That is the extent of his concern with economics. There is nothing at all in Lamentations.

Economic sins did not loom large in his ministry. Neither did God's threat of negative corporate economic sanctions.

16

NON-PAYMENT OF WAGES

Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and putteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it (Jer. 22:13–17).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The economic crime mentioned here involved the non-payment of wages. “Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour’s service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.” This was a crime under the Mosaic law. “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning” (Lev. 19:13).²

How could an individual avoid paying his neighbors for their labor services? It might be possible to do this a few times. But word would eventually get out: this person does not pay wages. This sort of information spreads rapidly. The would-be employer would soon find that there was no one willing to sell his labor services to him. There would be a shortage of supply at the price paid: zero. The non-payment of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 13.

wages was therefore not a free market phenomenon. Voluntarism would have made this practice uneconomical. So, what we have here is a system of compulsory labor. The house builder was using violence or the threat of violence against workers. This would have been possible only through the corruption of the civil courts.

Jeremiah asked a rhetorical question: "Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?" What was his point? Israel had become economically productive over time by means of justice. This meant civil justice. The forefathers had not been equally corrupt. They dispensed greater justice in the courts than this generation. "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD." This reign of justice had led to God's blessing in the form of economic growth.

In contrast, Jeremiah warned, the present generation saw itself only in terms of economic blessing, not its cause. "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?" They had causation backwards. They regarded the stepping stone to rulership as paved with the trappings of wealth. This wealth was the product of oppression, Jeremiah says.

Conclusion

This is the first economic crime mentioned by Jeremiah in his covenant lawsuit against Judah. This comes over one-third of the way into the written record of his ministry. This should make it clear that economic issues were not front and center in his list of accusations against Judah.

This accusation was a crime: non-payment of wages. It is theft. If a delay of one night constituted a crime under the Mosaic law, then refusal to pay was a far greater crime. This crime was part of a mindset, he said. People believed that the accumulation of the trappings of wealth would bring them positions of leadership. He asked rhetorically, "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?" The answer was no, they would not reign. They would be carried into captivity.

His ministry was straightforward. He warned his listeners that God's negative corporate sanctions were about to be applied by God on the entire nation. Why? Because these people had rebelled against God. They worshipped idols. They did not pursue justice in the courts.

These were indicators of imminent punishment by God. “And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands” (Jer. 1:16).

This national evil had begun with the leaders. They had refused to enforce God’s law. “The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit” (Jer. 2:8). This was comprehensive rebellion. Its cure would be comprehensive negative sanctions.

FAITH IN THE FUTURE

And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it (Jer. 32:6–7).

A. The Right of Redemption

This is a difficult text to interpret. What is the meaning of “the right of redemption”? It is central to the text, yet it is unclear.

The theocentric issue here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹ Under the law of the jubilee, an individual who was an heir of the conquest generation had the right of inheritance of rural land.

In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession. And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee (Lev. 25:13–16).²

The general law of the jubilee was that it would occur in the year of the seventh sabbatical year. This was year 49, or the 50th year, in the same way that a person who just turned 49 is said to be in his 50th

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 26.

year.

And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family (Lev. 25:8–10).

This law was clear. A piece of land could be leased out, but there was a time limit on the lease: 49 years. In the jubilee year, family members of the conquest generation inherited their share of the property. But there is no mention of the right of redemption in this passage. The reference comes later in the chapter. “The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land” (Lev. 25:23–24).³

What was this right of redemption? It applied to the terms of the lease. The owner of the property or his relative had the right to buy back the land at any time. The price was fixed by statute: a pro-rated price based on the original lease price and the number of years until the jubilee year.

If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubile: and in the jubile it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession (Lev. 25:25–28).

The right of redemption referred to the right of a close family member (the kinsman-redeemer) to redeem the property from the person who had paid the owner a flat price in order to take control of the land. With this in mind, we must now examine the nature of the offer made by Hanameel to his cousin Jeremiah.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

B. The Offer

Hanameel came to Jeremiah and offered to sell him a piece of land. He said that Jeremiah possessed the right of redemption.

So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver (Jer. 32:8–9).

This is inconsistent with the law of the jubilee year except on the following supposition: Jeremiah had leased the land to Hanameel. Hanameel had paid Jeremiah a flat price for the land. Now he wanted his money back. He would have been entitled to the pro-rated price based on the time remaining until the next jubilee year.

It is possible that this had been the arrangement, but it is not probable. The jubilee year occurred in the year of the seventh sabbatical year after the previous jubilee. Yet there is internal evidence in the book of Jeremiah that the sabbatical year had not been observed in Judah. The first piece of evidence is Jeremiah's condemnation of the owners of Hebrew debt servants that they had not released their servants, as required by Deuteronomy 15:1–6 (Jer. 34:8–9).⁴ The second piece of evidence is Jeremiah's assertion that the captivity to come was God's punishment on both Israel and Judah for their having failed to rest the land, as required by the same Deuteronomic law. Their time in Babylon would therefore be limited. "To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (II Chr. 36:21). Jeremiah would subsequently tell his listeners: "Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name: he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 50:34). The indication is that Judah had not honored the sabbatical year of rest for almost half a millennium. Seventy years of captivity were equal to 490 (70 x 7) years of land without rest. If Judah had not honored the laws of the sabbatical year, it is unlikely that the nation had honored the laws of the jubilee, which was the seventh sabbatical year. Ten jubilees had passed with-

4. Chapter 18.

out observance.

If this was the case, then Hanameel must have assumed that the sale of his land would be permanent. There was a 490-year tradition to this effect in Judah. So, he spoke to Jeremiah of Jeremiah's right of redemption, as if this right was Jeremiah's right as his nearest of kin. Jeremiah did not contradict him. He arranged for the sale in full public view. Yet there was no such right under the Mosaic law.

C. The Motivation

To understand Hanameel's motivation, as well as Jeremiah's, we must understand the setting. Jeremiah was in prison. He had been thrown in prison by King Zedekiah in his tenth year of reigning over Judah. He reigned under the auspices of Nebuchadnezzar, who had put him on the throne. After 11 years, he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24:17–20).

This was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He had led his army to besiege Jerusalem. Jeremiah had prophesied publicly that the city would fall to the Chaldeans. The king would not escape, he had announced, but would be taken captive and placed before Nebuchadnezzar. Then Nebuchadnezzar would bring Zedekiah to Babylon (Jer. 32:1–5).

It was in prison that Jeremiah completed the transaction with his cousin. Hanameel must have believed Jeremiah's message. He came to his cousin in search of liquid capital: silver. What good was land to Hanameel if he was about to be taken captive? But silver might prove to be very useful. He might be able to buy his way out of bondage, or bribe a guard, or buy goods that would offer a better life to a slave.

In contrast, what good was land to Jeremiah? He would go into captivity with his people. He would not be able to collect rent from someone occupying the land, assuming anyone did. The land would be given its rest. He knew that their return would be decades in the future. He might not live that long. Yet Jeremiah agreed to the transaction. Why?

The details of the exchange are important for our correct understanding of the issues involved.

And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: And I gave the evidence of the pur-

chase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days (Jer. 32:10–14).

“Many days,” the text says. He fully understood just how long he would be outside the holy land. Here was visible testimony to those at the prison that he believed his own message.

This message was not just a message of captivity. It was also message of hope. “For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land” (Jer. 32:15). Then he recounted the history of God’s deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. He reviewed God’s covenant lawsuit against the nation.

And they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: Behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord GOD, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans (Jer. 32:23–25).

God had told him to buy the field precisely because the city was about to fall to the Chaldeans. That which had led Hanameel to sell his birthright had led Jeremiah to purchase it. Here was God’s promise of deliverance.

Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over

them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD (Jer. 32:37–44).

Jeremiah bought a field with money. He did this in front of witnesses. This was his public affirmation of faith in God's promise: "I will cause their captivity to return." As we say in the United States, he put his money where his mouth was. As we also say, action speaks louder than words.

Conclusion

Jeremiah bought an illiquid asset in exchange for a liquid asset. He bought an asset that he could not personally put to productive use. He bought it in exchange for an asset that could be put to productive use. He did so for a reason: God had told him to. Why had God told him to do this? To affirm his confidence in God's promise to bring the remnant of Israel back into the land.

This was a visible display of Jeremiah's faith in the future. This was not necessarily faith in his future in the land. If anything, it was a testimony of his lack of faith in his future in the land. He would in all likelihood die outside the land. He had already announced God's time frame.

And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations (Jer. 25:11–12).

THE RELEASE OF HEBREW BONDSERVANTS

This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother (Jer. 34:8–9).

The theocentric issue here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹ This is evidence that the laws governing the sabbatical year were not being honored in Jeremiah's era. This was a violation of the laws governing the seventh or sabbatical year in Israel. It was part of a law governing morally compulsory zero-interest charity loans.

At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release (Deut. 15:1–2).²

This year of release from a zero-interest charitable loan also applied to everyone who had been placed in household captivity because he had defaulted on a charitable loan. Because the debt was annulled, the term of service was also annulled.

And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day (Deut. 15:12–15).³

When the people heard Jeremiah's warning, they released their Hebrew servants (Jer. 34:10). But they soon changed their minds. They subjected them again to servitude (v. 11). This indicates that they used violence. The civil government acquiesced to this re-subjugation. It may even have abetted it.

God's word then came to Jeremiah. God had established a covenant with Israel (v. 13). This covenant had a stipulation. "At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear" (Jer. 34:14).

There was a specific sanction associated with the sabbatical year of release: the threat of national defeat, which captivity surely was. In the midst of the law governing the sabbath year, God told them that if they obeyed, they would lend to foreign nations. This had to do with reigning.

Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee (Deut. 15:5–6).⁴

In contrast, captivity would follow disobedience. Captivity is mentioned in the same passage as borrowing from foreigners—again, an issue of reigning.

Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity. All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume. The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 36:C:2.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.

thou shalt be the tail (Deut. 28:41–44).⁵

Jeremiah came before the nation with a warning: national captivity is imminent. He got right to the point: release your Hebrew servants. They complied, then reneged. That sealed their doom. “Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth” (v. 17). The punishment would soon fit the crime. They had placed their previously released servants in bondage. God would therefore bring the Babylonians to place them in bondage. This was the *lex talionis* in action: eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

Conclusion

This is the second economic crime announced by Jeremiah. The first was their refusal to pay wages. Like the first crime, this was a specific violation of a Mosaic statute. They had kept poor brethren in bondage beyond the sabbatical year of release. They had made themselves doubly liable by re-subjecting them after they had released them. The punishment would be comparable: bondage abroad.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL

The book of Ezekiel is the third longest of the prophetic books, behind Isaiah and Jeremiah. Ezekiel had no more to say about economics than Jeremiah did. There are only three themes, although one of them is repeated. The first relates to oppression. It appears three times.

And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 18:7–9; cf. vv. 16–17; 22:7, 12–13).

The second relates to the success of pagan kingdoms.

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness (Ezek. 28:1–7).

The third relates to the inheritance of rural land after the Israelites' return from captivity.

So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which

shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel (Ezek. 47:21–22).

In short, there is not much on economics in Ezekiel. In this respect, he was typical of all the prophets except Isaiah.

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AVOIDING OPPRESSION

And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 18:7–9).

A. Oppression Is Judicial

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ A righteous person avoids oppression. As I have argued in this commentary and in my previous commentaries on the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), *the Old Testament's context of oppression was almost always judicial*. Oppression generally involved the misuse of the civil court system in order to gain some advantage over judicially innocent people. This judicial context is clear in Ezekiel's condemnation of the rulers: the princes of Israel.

Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in thee to their power to shed blood. In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow (Ezek. 22:6–7).

In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD. Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made,

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee (Ezek. 22:12–13).

Ezekiel here presents characteristics of a righteous person by describing what a righteous person does and then contrasting his actions with what an unrighteous person does. The list relies heavily on the Mosaic law. He provided a shorter list in verses 16 and 17.

Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, That hath taken off his hand from the poor, that hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.

To understand what he was getting at, we need to compare his list with the Mosaic law's statutes governing economics.

B. Debt

The righteous person restores the pledge to the debtor. This refers to the law's requirement that a debtor pledges an asset as collateral. If he refuses to repay or is unable to, the lender gets ownership of the asset. But, until such time as the debtor defaults, he has access to the item if it is basic to his comfort or his work. One example is a garment for keeping warm.

If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious (Ex. 22:26–27).

Of what use is such collateral? The lender cannot use it. The debtor gets to use it. Yet it still has an important function. It limits the borrower's debt. He cannot pledge the asset against multiple loans. Because he surrenders it to the lender every day, he cannot indebt himself any further.²

There was a related law of pledges. "No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge" (Deut. 24:6). This prohibited the removal of a debtor's tool of produc-

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49:J.

tion. This tool will enable him to pay off the debt.³

One goal of the Mosaic law was to keep covenant-keepers out of debt. Covenant-keepers are supposed to be lenders, not debtors. “The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow” (Deut. 28:12). It is a curse to be in debt to covenant-breakers. “He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail” (Deut. 28:44).

C. Peace

The righteous man “hath spoiled none by violence.” He has not used the threat of violence to achieve his ends.

The Mosaic law placed restrictions on violence. When two men fought, and one of them was injured, the other one had to pay for the injured man’s forfeited time in recovering (Ex. 21:18–19).⁴ A master who injured his slave so severely that the slave lost a tooth or an eye had to set the slave free (Ex. 21:26–27).⁵ All personal vengeance was prohibited. “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste” (Deut. 32:35). The nearest of kin, in his office as blood avenger, was authorized to pursue and execute someone suspected of manslaughter, but this right was limited (Deut. 19:4–6). Cities of refuge served as sanctuaries for suspected criminals (Num. 35:9–13). The goal of the laws of the blood avenger was to eliminate family blood feuds.⁶ The blood-avenger was the kinsman-redeemer.

To use violence as a means of gaining one’s goals was anathema under the Mosaic economy. This was the mark of the covenant-breaker. The author of Proverbs warned his son:

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious sub-

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 60.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 35.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 39.

6. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 21.

stance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood (Prov. 1:10–16).⁷

The civil government was supposed to bring negative sanctions against convicted perpetrators of violence. When rulers refused to enforce the law by means of the mandated civil sanctions, God threatened to bring judgment. Again, “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste” (Deut. 32:35).

The question arises: What about civil governments that use the threat of violence to benefit one group of judicially innocent people at the expense of another group? This is the fundamental judicial issue of the welfare state. The welfare state rests on this judicial principle: “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote.”

Because the Mosaic law opposed the use of violence as a means of attaining individual gain, by extension the law also opposed the use of violence by the state to attain one’s own gain. The familiar phrase, “robbing Peter to pay Paul,” expresses the essence of wealth redistribution by violence.

D. Charity

A mark of the righteous person is that he “hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment.” This is an almost universal view of righteousness in every religion and every society.

This has nothing to say about the righteousness of civil government. Civil government uses compulsion to extract wealth from those under its jurisdiction. Civil government does not govern by voluntarism.

Compulsion is a denial of charity. When voters A and B decide that voter C should turn over half of his income to the government, and voter A will administer the transfer of funds to voter B at a fee of 50% of the money extracted from voter C, there is no charity. “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote” is based on a specific definition of democracy. “Democracy is the system of civil government whereby

7. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 3.

two wolves and a sheep vote on what to have for dinner.”

Liberation theology and its less revolutionary Protestant versions of the Social Gospel proclaim that civil government should be an agency of charity. They proclaim that modern civil government lacks righteousness because it does not extract a large enough percentage of income from the rich to distribute to the poor.

They also deny the principle that governs the tithe: a flat percentage of income. They call for “progressive” taxation, which is graduated taxation, which is a clear violation of Exodus 12:49: the rule of law. “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.”⁸ It also violates Leviticus 19:15. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.”⁹ They do not refer to these verses when presenting their plans for the state to redistribute income by force. They assume that their readers will not make the connection, which is generally an accurate assumption.

E. Usury

Another defining characteristic of a righteousness person is this: “He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase.”

What is usury, as defined by the Mosaic law? It is (1) any interest payment (2) taken from a poor person who has asked for (3) a charitable loan, and (4) who has pledged himself as collateral, should he fail to repay the loan. All four elements must be present in order for an interest payment to be classified as usury.

I have gone over this material in several places for several decades. Because most readers are not familiar with this background material, I review it here.

1. Any Interest Payment

Usury does not mean a large interest payment. It means any interest payment at all, in money or goods. The texts in the Mosaic law are clear on this point. A search of the Hebrew word translated in this

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

passage and in Ezekiel 22:12¹⁰ as “usury” produces the following examples.

If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury (Ex. 22:25).¹¹

Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase (Lev. 25:36–37).¹²

Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it (Deut. 23:19–20).¹³

There is not a word about “excessive interest” or anything similar. The concept of usury as excessive interest was an interpretation of medieval theologians, a view which was taken up by Protestants.

2. Poor People

Again, the text in Exodus is clear. “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury” (Ex. 22:25).

In Deuteronomy 15, the law of the year of debt release appears in the first six verses.

At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD’S release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; **Save when there shall be no poor among you;** for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: Only if

10. “In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 22:12).

11. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

12. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 29.

13. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 56.

thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.¹⁴

So, this law had to do with the poor. The law will remain in force until such time as “there shall be no poor among you.”

The national blessing associated with this law is the transformation of covenant-keepers into lenders to covenant-breakers. “Thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.” So, usury is a good thing when extracted from covenant-breakers.¹⁵

Additional evidence that this law applied only to poor people appears in the next section of Deuteronomy 15.

If there be among you a **poor man** of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against **thy poor brother**, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land (vv. 7–11).

This moral injunction to lend—it was not a civil law—applies only to “a poor man of one of thy brethren.”

3. A Charitable Loan

The loan bore no interest. This constituted a gift to the recipient. A business loan could impose an interest payment. The mark of a business loan was the fact that it did impose interest. It also had a stiffer penalty for failure to repay: he could be sold into slavery until the next

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.

jubilee year, which could be almost half a century in the future. In the same chapter that prohibits usury to a poor brother in the covenant (Lev. 25:36–37), this appears.

And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption. And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight. And if he be not redeemed in these years, then he shall go out in the year of jubile, both he, and his children with him (Lev. 25:47–54).¹⁶

We know this has to refer to a non-charitable debt because the Hebrew in bondage because of failure to repay a zero-interest charitable loan had to be released in the sabbatical year.

And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him (Deut. 15:12–14).

4. *A Pledge of Servitude*

Deuteronomy 15:12–14 indicates that there was a temporal limit to debt servitude: the seventh year. When the debt was legally cancelled in the seventh year, so was the requirement to repay through servitude. The cancellation of the debt brought the term of servitude to a close.

16. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 32.

Why was there a term of servitude? There can be only one logical answer: the debtor's failure to repay the debt. Which kind of debt? A charitable loan. What was its characteristic feature? No interest payment.

F. Iniquity

The next mark of a righteous person is this: he “hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man.” The term “iniquity” is a wide-ranging classification. The Hebrew word is used in more than 50 passages in the Old Testament. It is used in the Pentateuch only in the context of court judgments. Ezekiel is bringing a covenant lawsuit against Judah. This means that he is referring back to the Mosaic law, which had established the terms of the national covenant. So, he narrows the application of “iniquity” to the judicial sphere: “executed true judgment between man and man.” There are the references to iniquity in the Mosaic law—the only times the word is used in the Pentateuch.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).¹⁷

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure (Lev. 19:35).¹⁸

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he (Deut. 32:4).

The seeming exception is not an exception: “For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deut. 25:16). Its context is just weights. “But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (v. 15). Honest weights and measures in the Mosaic law was a reference to honest judgment in a court.

The righteous person “hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly.” This is self-government under God, which means self-government under God's Bible-revealed laws.

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

18. *Ibid.*, ch. 19.

Conclusion

As with all of the prophets, Ezekiel is best understood as bringing a covenant lawsuit against the nation.

When he listed the economic sins of the people, he relied exclusively on the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law established the terms of the national covenant. The covenant has been broken by the people, including the rulers. So, he identified the economic sins of the people by showing how the people have broken certain Mosaic laws governing economics.

Ezekiel did not come before the nation to call them to establish a welfare state. He did not call them to establish by civil law some scheme for compulsory wealth redistribution through new forms of taxation. In the rare cases when he mentioned economics, he called them to obey the Mosaic laws governing economics. To imply otherwise is to mislead the public.

20

RICHERS AS A SNARE

By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness (Ezek. 28:5–7).

A. A Warning to Tyre

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Ezekiel addresses this to the pagan king of Tyre. Ezekiel first condemns Tyre for its arrogance against Jerusalem.

Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people: she is turned unto me: I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock (Ezek. 26:2–4).

The island city is doomed. Babylon will capture it, just as it would soon capture Jerusalem.

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies,

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

and much people. He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee (Ezek. 26:7–8).

With this as background, God brings this warning against the king.

Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee (Ezek. 28:2–3).

At this point, Ezekiel presents his warning in terms of Tyre's wealth. He affirms the wisdom of Tyre. This wisdom has created a maritime trade economy: traffic. This prosperity has led the king to regard himself as an autonomous sovereign. "Thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God." This is the ancient sin of man that leads to destruction: to seek to be as God (Gen. 3:5).

B. Autonomous Wealth

The sin of the Tyre's ruler was the sin of autonomy: the belief, as Moses put it, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).² This sin was also the sin of the king of Babylon. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13–14). Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he would succumb to this same temptation.

It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him (Dan. 4:22–23).

That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility (Dan. 4:25–27).

This was fulfilled, as Nebuchadnezzar admitted in his confession of faith. “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (Dan. 4:37).

Through the common grace of cultural wisdom and geography, a nation can attain great wealth for a time. The system of economic cause and effect assures societies that if they abide by the principles governing biblical law, they can reap the economic blessings. The problem they face is the lure of autonomy. They will come to believe that they have prospered as a result of the might of their hands or a wisdom unique to them. Isaiah had prophesied over a century before Ezekiel’s ministry regarding Tyre.

Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth? The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth. Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength. He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof (Isa. 23:8–11).

The Bible’s system of economic causation leads from obedience to prosperity. Prosperity is supposed to reinforce men’s confidence in the reliability of covenant law. It is supposed to confirm the covenant. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).³ But prosperity can lead also to the sin of autonomy. This, Ezekiel announced to the king of Tyre, results in destruction. This, too, confirmed the covenant.

3. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

It confirmed it by way of the negative corporate sanctions (Deut. 28:15–66).

Conclusion

Ezekiel told the king that he and his nation are under God's authority. Tyre has prospered, but this prosperity will end soon. Tyre will fall to Babylon as surely as Israel fell.

Ezekiel's message to covenant-breaking societies was simple: all are under God's law. The general principles of economics within the borders of Israel apply outside. Other nations can achieve prosperity, but they cannot retain it when they attribute their success to their wisdom, their power, or their local gods. They cannot retain it if they attribute their wealth to their autonomous wisdom.

21

FREE FOOD IN RIVAL KINGDOMS

Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it (Ezek. 34:21–24).

A. A Message of Hope

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Ezekiel was a prophet of the exile era. Judah was in captivity when his ministry began (Ezek. 1:1–2). So, he was not warning the nation of negative sanctions to come. They had already come. Instead, he was warning them that their deliverance was assured. They should accept God's punishment gracefully, for they would not be captives forever. Here is God's promise, he announces.

As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country (Ezek. 34:12–13).

This was a message of hope. Ezekiel reminds God's people of His power: the power to deliver out of captivity. "And as for you, O my

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats" (v. 17). Therefore, his message was also a warning to the Babylonians. God's promise to deliver His people from captivity is a promise of negative sanctions against anyone who would oppress His people in the interim. "Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?" (v. 18).

This is the background for the passage under consideration here. Someone had been acting as an oppressor. There was a victim. Ezekiel speaks of both groups. "Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle" (v. 21). So, God's message of deliverance is also a threat of negative sanctions against oppressors.

This threat was fulfilled in 539 B.C., when the Medo-Persians conquered Babylon in one night. The immediate cause was Belshazzar's feast, in which the guests ate off of the golden plates that had been taken from the temple. Daniel told the king in front of his nobles: "And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UP-HARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:25–28).

Having directed a warning to the Babylonians, Ezekiel proclaims the restoration of David's kingship. "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it" (vv. 23–24).

B. A Future David

Obviously, this did not refer to a resurrected David. It referred to a future son of David, who would serve as a shepherd. From this time on, however, Israel never again had a king from the ranks of the nation. Always, Israel would be under the rule of an empire: Medo-Persian, Alexandrian, and Roman. So, who was this prophesied king? Je-

sus. He was a son of David in both genealogies (Matt. 1:6, Luke 3:31). He was King of kings, and Lord of lords (I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

Would He sit on a throne in Roman Israel? No. So, the prophecy never came true in a literal sense. It was not a literal prophecy. Yet the text says that this future king will feed the nation. This, He did, literally, on two occasions: the feeding of the crowds.

And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children (Matt. 14:20–21).

And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children (Matt. 15:34–38).

This feeding of the masses was evidence of His status as Messiah. But He immediately departed from the crowds both times.

Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone (John 6:14–15).

Still, the crowds sought Him out. He warned them against their misinterpretation of His miracles: belief in deliverance through a political kingdom.

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (John 6:26–29).

Jesus understood the lure of free bread. Rome was a society built on free bread and circuses. Any political order that promises to deliver

free bread to the masses will find followers. Jesus warned His listeners against any such faith in any such promise. Such a promise has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. On the contrary, it is an extension of Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:3–4).²

Then what was Ezekiel's promise of a king all about? This king would be a shepherd and feed his sheep (v. 23). Previously, Ezekiel had prophesied this. "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day" (v. 12). Jesus was clearly referring to this passage when He announced:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:7–11).

The Shepherd had sheep. This was the background of Jesus' assignment to Peter.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15–17).

So far, we know the following. First, Jesus was the son of David, the lawful king of Israel. Second, He rejected the idea that He should be a king over Israel based on His ability to distribute free bread. Third, He

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

was the Good Shepherd. Fourth, He fed His sheep. Fifth, He delegated this responsibility to Peter as a representative figure of all pastors.

This had to do with spiritual feeding.³ The frame of reference was not literal food provided by a king to the poor, meaning the civil government.

C. Misreading the Text

It should be obvious that Ezekiel's prophecy had nothing to do with a civil government's program of providing food stamps or other forms of taxpayer-subsidized food to poor people. But this was not obvious to Stephen Mott and Ronald J. Sider. Citing this passage in Ezekiel, they wrote:

This ideal ruler will take responsibility for the needs of the people as a shepherd: "He will feed them and be their shepherd" (Ezek. 34:23). Ezekiel 34:4 denounces the failure of the shepherds (i.e., the rulers) of Israel to "feed" the people. . . . This teaching on the role of government applies not just to Israel but to government everywhere.⁴

Those who cannot care for themselves should receive from their community a liberal sufficiency of the necessities of life provided in ways that preserve dignity, encourage responsibility and strengthen the family.⁵

Notice the identification of two separate concepts: society (voluntarism) and civil government (coercion). "Governmental action to empower the poor is one way we implement the truth that economic justice is a family affair."⁶ The state is like a family, they insisted. This mixing of covenantal categories is basic to the Social Gospel's call for a tax-funded welfare state in the name of social justice.

Mott and Sider fell into the same error as the people did who saw Jesus' feeding of the crowds. These people wanted more free food. They were willing to subordinate themselves to any king who would rule over them on this basis. Mott and Sider regarded political legitimacy in the same way. They called on Christians to set up a welfare state that will provide free food and much more to the masses.

3. Chapter 13.

4. Stephen Mott and Ronald J. Sider, "Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm," in David P. Gushee (ed), *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), p. 44.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Conclusion

Ezekiel in this passage warned the Babylonians not to become oppressors of the Israelites. He also promised the Israelites of deliverance to come. They would be delivered out of the hands of their Babylonian oppressors.

They would also have a king in the line of David. But, as we know, this prophecy was never fulfilled by a literal heir of David seated on a literal throne in Israel. This was a prophecy of Christ's messianic rule in history. It was not a prophecy of the construction of an international welfare state in the name of Jesus.

A SHARED INHERITANCE

So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 47:21–23).

A. Altering the Jubilee Land Inheritance Law

The theocentric issue here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹ This prophecy announced a fundamental break in the Mosaic economy. The laws that had governed rural land ownership, announced in Leviticus 25, would be superseded when Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity. Prior to the captivity, the jubilee was supposed to mark the origin of rural land ownership: Israel's conquest of Canaan. God had destroyed the Canaanites through the conquest. "I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God" (Lev. 25:38). This marked God as the owner of the land.

In Leviticus 26, God prophesied what would happen to Israel. The nation would rebel. The people would not honor the law of the sabbatical year, when the land was not to be planted. "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

field, nor prune thy vineyard” (Lev. 25:3–4). Because of the leaders’ refusal to enforce this law, the nation would be carried into captivity in order that the land be given its rest.

And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it. And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies’ lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them (Lev. 26:32–39).

Jeremiah had told the people of Judah that this prophecy was about to be fulfilled. Ezekiel was on the far side of its fulfillment. But Moses’ prophecy had not ended with captivity. There would be restoration.

Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD (Lev. 26:42–45).

B. Strangers in the Land

During the time of the captivity, only a few very poor Israelites were allowed to remain in the land. “But Nebuzaradan the captain of

the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time” (Jer. 39:10). They became the stewards of land which they had not enjoyed, never having been owners. The land inheritance law of the jubilee had not been honored by the authorities. The land had not been returned to the heirs of the conquest generation in year 49. Now the poorest members of the old order were allowed to become administrators of rural land.

The Assyrians had brought in foreigners to live in the northern kingdom. The Babylonians did the same with land in the southern kingdom. Jeremiah lamented: “Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens” (Lam. 5:2). These strangers remained in the land after a remnant of Israel returned under the Persians’ rule. They became the Samaritans, who adopted a form of religion similar to the Israelites’ religion.

Ezekiel made it clear that these people were not to be evicted from the land at the return of the Israelites. The tribes would again divide the land, but resident aliens were not to be dispossessed. *This implied a new form of landed inheritance.* It would be by possession, not confession. The strangers had not been covenant-keepers when they were brought in. Still, they were able to occupy the land. They did not honor the jubilee law. There was no need. The land would receive its rest in this sense: not being worked by a nation covenanted to God, which then defied His law regarding the sabbatical year. Outsiders who were under the authority of a pagan nation were brought in to care for the land. Fewer people would occupy the land. The intensity of agriculture would diminish. There would still be no year of rest for the land. These strangers would establish their legal claim to the land by occupying it and caring for it. This would not be ownership by confession and circumcision.

A new order would arrive when Israel returned. Never again would the nation fall into the sin of animism or polytheism. The sins of Israel would be the rival systems of legalism and Hellenism. These were ethical and philosophical departures from the Mosaic Covenant, not sacramental departures. Israel’s imported replacements in the land had not been associated with the sacramental practices of the Canaanites, which were tied to local gods. Baal worship would no longer be a problem for Israel.

Far fewer Israelites returned than were carried off. “The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and

threescore, Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women" (Ezra 2:64–65). These figures were closely corroborated in Nehemiah 7:66–67. By comparison, there were a little over 600,000 fighting men who conquered the land under Joshua (Num. 26:51). There was plenty of land per family for the returning Israelites. There was no need for the resident aliens to be dispossessed.

Conclusion

The new system of rural land ownership was still tied to the tribal system of the Mosaic Covenant. The separation of the tribes was still to be maintained until the fulfillment of Jacob's messianic prophecy: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). But the Samaritans would be land-owning resident aliens from that time forth. They were not to be adopted into the tribes apart from confession and ritual practice, but they were not to be treated as non-heirs in the jubilee year. The basis of rural land ownership went from heirship of the conquest (genocide) to residency while Israel was in captivity. The older judicial foundation of rural land ownership—genocide—changed forever.

There is no biblical evidence or known extra-biblical evidence that the empires that ruled Israel after the exile honored the pre-exilic distribution of family-owned plots of land. There is also no evidence that the jubilee land laws were ever enforced.

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA

Hosea's ministry was contemporary with Isaiah's. He served from Uzziah to Hezekiah (1:1). These were the same kings listed in Isaiah 1:1.

The book begins with an economic issue: prostitution. The Mosaic law said of prostitution, "Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness" (Lev. 19:29). Yet God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2). This was an act of grace on God's part. Normally, such a woman would not be eligible for marriage.

God told him to name their children with names that indicated God's covenant lawsuit against Israel (vv. 5, 6, 9). Yet the negative sanctions will not be permanent, God said.

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (vv. 10–11).

Hosea contains only two sections dealing with economics. Hosea 2:8–9 presents a prophecy of God's removal of the covenantal blessings. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness." Hosea 12:7–8 describes a corrupt merchant. "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." As with all of the prophets except for Isaiah, Hosea did not have much to say about economics.

This should serve as an indicator: *economics was not a major concern of the prophets*. Compared to modern men, the prophets barely bothered about the issue. Economics was important only insofar as visible blessings and cursings are covenantal. Modern man denies that economics is covenantal, yet he is obsessed with economic growth. He believed that societies are judged, above all, in terms of their experience of economic growth.

23

THE DESTRUCTION OF WEALTH

For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness (Hosea 2:8–9).

A. The Source of Blessings and Cursings

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Job's response was correct: "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21b). This was not the response of Israel and Judah.

God is the source of all good things. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).² Israel and Judah had attributed to false gods the benefits they had received from the true God. This was a violation of the Mosaic law. This violation had specific negative consequences.

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:18–20).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 34.

This negative corporate sanction was a form of disinheritance.³ God told Hosea to speak to Israel and Judah as if they were not children of the covenant. God referred to both nations by the opposite names that He had given to the children of Hosea, Lo-ammi and Lo-ruhamah. The Hebrew “lo” is a negative. “Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ru-hamah. Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts” (Hosea 2:1–2). The two nations thought of themselves as being God’s people (ammi) and pitied (ruhamah). Covenantally, they had rebelled. They had become negatives: not God’s people and not pitied. They were children of harlotry. They were not heirs of the promise.

Of course, they were still heirs of the promise. That was because they were still under the covenant’s sanctions. But they would be treated for a time by God as if they had been disinherited. Then, He would restore them.

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel” (Hosea 1:10–11).

B. Comprehensive Losses

The visible blessings of God involved economic prosperity. This was part of the Mosaic law (Deut 28:1–14).⁴

Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store (Deut. 28:5).

The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Deut. 28:8).

And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow (Deut. 28:11–12).

Israel and Judah had prospered. This could have been interpreted as the covenantal blessing of God. But it was not. They imitated the Israelites in the wilderness, who built a golden calf. “And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 32:3–4). Israel had literally done this.

Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure. For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers (Hosea 8:5–9).

They attributed to the calf the blessings they had received from God. So did their descendants. “For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal” (2:8).

Hosea brought a covenant lawsuit against them for this act of idolatry. The promised punishment will be what the Mosaic law had promised the negative sanction would be. “Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness” (v. 9). Moses had warned their forefathers: “Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store” (Deut. 28:17). The form of the judgment would be exile, Moses had warned.

Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not

be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long; and there shall be no might in thine hand. The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed away (Deut. 28:30–33).

Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit (Deut. 28:39–40).

The prophets came with a covenant lawsuit. They told their listeners that the promised sanctions would come. There would be captivity. Others would inherit their land. Their punishment was consistent with their crime. They deserved captivity. They had worshipped false gods inside the land. The punishment was to serve men who served false gods outside the land. This was the specified Mosaic sanction.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell (Deut. 4:26–28).

Conclusion

Hosea charged the people with having offered sacrifices to Baal. To do this, they used the fruits of their labors. These fruits had been given to them by God. So, God promised, He would remove these fruits. They would become poor.

This was a covenant lawsuit. It referred back to the Mosaic law and its sanctions. This was not a new message. It was a recapitulation of an old message. As was true of the other prophets, Hosea's message rested on specific judicial revelation.

24

CORRUPT RICHES

He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin (Hosea 7:7–8).

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Ephraim was one of the tribes of Israel. Here, God singled out this tribe for condemnation. But Ephraim was not alone.

Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him (Hosea 12:1–2).

Hosea was bringing a covenant lawsuit in the name of God. There had to be a specific infraction: a violation of some Mosaic statute. Ephraim's specific crime was oppression. "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress." A false balance was a specific infraction of the Mosaic law that was representative of civil corruption. It was the essence of oppression, which was a judicial matter under the Mosaic law.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:35–37).²

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*,

Hosea accuses the tribe of judicial oppression. As a merchant tribe, it used false weights and measures. This was theft by fraud. The tribe had prospered as a result of this deception.

As a merchant tribe, Ephraim collectively prospered. “And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.” The usage of the Hebrew word for “found” was the same as it is in English. It meant “to discover.” “If one be found slain in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him” (Deut. 21:1). So, Ephraim corporately believed that the tribe had prospered as a result of its righteousness. This, at least, was its public self-testimony.

The text does not indicate whether the tribe actually believed this or not. The assertion may have been a matter of self-deception. Or it may have been a false front for public consumption. If it was self-deception, then the tribe’s use of tools of deception had led to covenantal self-deception. This in turn was leading to God’s comprehensive negative sanctions.

There was nothing suspect about its merchant status. There is no condemnation of this trade in the Mosaic law. It is rarely mentioned. But the word translated as “merchant” is the same as “Canaan.” It almost always appears in that context. So, the implication is that the Canaanites were merchants. They had prospered for a time. Then God brought negative corporate sanctions. The same sanction threatened national Israel.

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).³

Hosea does not accuse Ephraim of worshipping false gods. He accuses the tribe of using deception to defraud the innocent.

The tribe had become rich. This was additional evidence that covenant-breaking can produce wealth for a season. Wealth can lead to greater covenant-breaking. This had disturbed the Psalmist.

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Ps. 73:3–12).⁴

Wealth can and does confirm covenant-breaking in the minds of covenant-breakers as surely it can and does confirm covenant-keeping in the minds of covenant-keepers. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁵ The wealth of covenant-keepers compounds. The wealth of covenant-breakers is cut short. “For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee” (Ps. 73:27).

Conclusion

To interpret this covenant lawsuit as a comprehensive condemnation of trade as a career would be to mistake fraud for profit. Hosea was specific in his accusation. Ephraim had violated a specific Mosaic statute. This statute was representative of civil injustice as a whole. It necessarily involved the civil government, whose magistrates refused to enforce the law against false weights. This was government-sanctioned fraud. The practice was therefore biblical oppression.

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

INTRODUCTION TO MICAH

Micah is a short book. It is a good summary of God's covenant lawsuit against Judah and Samaria, i.e., Israel. It contains the themes of the so-called major prophets. It was written sometime in the eighth century, B.C.

Micah said almost nothing about economic sins. His lawsuit accused the leaders of condoning theft. What was being stolen? Rural land. How was this being stolen? By a refusal to enforce the jubilee law of rural land inheritance. By undercutting rural land inheritance, the rulers were undermining the political and economic decentralization that accompanies land ownership.

CAPTIVITY AS DISINHERITANCE

And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil (Micah 2:2–3).

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Micah presents a covenant lawsuit against Judah and Samaria, meaning Israel (1:1). He referred to the sin of covetousness, a reference to the tenth commandment: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Ex. 20:17). This law referred to specific pieces of property, not categories of property. This was not a prohibition against keeping up with the Joneses. It was a command against lusting after anything that Jones was unwilling to sell or which was illegal to sell, such as his wife. It had to do with an obsession to own another person’s property.²

Micah says that this lust has resulted in specific illegal actions, namely, violence and oppression. The target of this lust is rural land and homes. Under the Mosaic law, rural land was under a specific lease arrangement with God. It could not be sold on a permanent basis. It could be leased for no more than 49 years. In the jubilee year, all rural land that was not in the possession of a priest (Lev. 27:19–20)³

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 30.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*,

had to be returned to the heirs of the original conquest generation (Lev. 25:13).⁴

The thieves are oppressors: "They oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage." Oppression in the Mosaic law was a judicial category having to do with the misuse of civil law.⁵ These thieves had gained the cooperation of the civil government, which had not brought negative sanctions against them for either their violence or their violation of the jubilee law regarding rural property.

The goal of these thieves was the transfer of another family's property to their family's inheritance. Land in Mosaic Israel was a uniquely inheritable form of capital due to the jubilee land law. Families could not legally transfer ownership of land to non-family members. The only exception was a transfer to a priest as the result of a broken vow. So, anyone who sought to obtain another family's property was accumulating land for his family. Micah warns that this theft will result in God's negative sanctions against the thief's family. "Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil." A family-based sin produces a family-borne punishment.

This sin was the sin of Ahab, who had coveted Naboth's field. His wife Jezebel had false witnesses accuse Naboth of blasphemy, which was a capital crime (Lev. 24:10–13). After Naboth was executed, the king illegally confiscated his land. God sent Elijah to him while the king was in Naboth's vineyard. God told Elijah what to say. "And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (I Kings 21:19). He made the same prophecy against Jezebel. This was a covenant lawsuit. The prophesied sanction was applied to the king (I Kings 22:37–38) and his wife (II Kings 9:36–37).

Micah warns Israel that the sanction against theft will be applied by God: eye for eye, tooth for tooth. "In that day shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 37:C, E.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields” (Micah 2:4). They had stolen others’ fields; their fields will be stolen. They had sought to transfer others’ inheritances to their families. God will transfer their inheritances to foreign families. This transfer will be permanent, Ezekiel announced after the captivity. “So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel” (Ezek. 47:21–22).⁶

Micah leaves no doubt as to the sin involved: it was Ahab’s. “For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing; therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people” (Micah 6:16).

Conclusion

Micah offered a critique of an economic sin, covetousness, that had become an economic crime: land-grabbing. Covetousness is at root a sin of disinheritance: the desire to disinherit another’s inheritance in order to increase one’s own. God’s threatened negative sanction was captivity. “And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver” (Micah 5:7–8). Those who had sought to appropriate their neighbors’ fields were removed from their own fields. Others inherited these fields.

6. Chapter 22.

26

PRIVATE PROPERTY: A COVENANTAL BLESSING

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it (Micah 4:4).

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The prophets brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. These lawsuits predicted that negative corporate sanctions would be applied by God for covenant-breaking. But the covenant is also enforced by positive sanctions. The prophets did not prophesy judgment unto oblivion. They prophesied judgment unto restoration. There was always a positive sanction for Israel. This had been assured by Moses, the original prophet to Israel.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:1–5).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. Peace and Property

Micah tells his listeners that a day will come when the people of Israel will once again own property. This will not be collective ownership. The concept of collective ownership was foreign to the Mosaic law. Micah appeals to the desire of his listeners to own their own piece of ground. They wanted to call a place “home.” God will bring this to pass, Micah told them.

They had lived in fear for a long time. This fear was well-founded. First, the rich and powerful coveted their land. The civil government was corrupt. The civil rulers were in league with the oppressors. They refused to enforce the jubilee land laws, which required that rural land be returned to the heirs of the conquest generation (Lev. 25:13).² Second, distrust was universal. “Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own house” (Micah 7:5–6). In such an environment, voluntary cooperation was hopeless. Therefore, so was economic growth. Zechariah, a post-exilic prophet, described this environment retroactively.

For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things (Zech. 8:10–12).³

Micah tells them that their heart’s desire will come true. At some point, covenant-keepers will sit under their fig trees, enjoying the leisure that comes to those with sufficient capital to support them. “None shall make them afraid.” This is the promise of peace. Peace is a requirement for productivity.⁴ Productivity is a tool of dominion.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

3. Chapter 32.

4. *Idem.*

B. No Social Gospel

Proponents of the Social Gospel and liberation theology have misrepresented the message of the prophets. The Mosaic law mandated the legal order in which capitalism flourishes: a legal order based on private property. The Social Gospel and the post-Marxist versions of liberation theology proclaim the civil government as an agent of wealth redistribution. The state is supposedly authorized to use the power of the gun to take property from the rich and transfer it to the poor. Liberation theologians invariably ignore the enormous costs of administration by the state. They also ignore or dismiss the cost to society of reduced production.

They refuse to discuss the fact that incumbent politicians have passed election campaign laws that protect incumbents. This has made it difficult for voters to remove them. The liberationists also ignore the effects of legislation passed in the late nineteenth century that have insulated government bureaucrats at the national level from interference by politicians. In the name of bureaucratic expertise and efficiency, American politicians in the late nineteenth century passed Civil Service laws that reduced the power of politicians to appoint government officials. Jobs are gained through competitive examination. Bureaucrats are rarely fired. This legislation has undermined local political machines, which had gained their power through the jobs that they could promise to constituents. This undermined the spoils system, i.e., operational democracy. This transferred political power to wealthy individuals and to large corporations, which have the money to fund specific politicians. It made the politicians dependent on the moneyed elite rather than on local political machines that mobilize local voters.

The prophets knew better than to trust the state to reform itself. They recognized that the state had become corrupt, that the rulers could not be trusted to uphold the Mosaic law. They recognized that the people lived in constant fear. They told the people what the source of this fear was: their own covetousness.

The Social Gospel and liberation theology both rest on a theology of the state which proclaims the civil government as morally reliable, in contrast to the private property order, which tends toward corruption. In the view of the liberationists, the restoration of institutional righteousness in society can come only when the voters entrust to the politicians and bureaucrats the authority to redistribute wealth by threat of violence. They do not acknowledge what should be obvious,

namely, that this was precisely the judicial order of pre-exilic Israel and Judah.

Conclusion

Micah brought a message of long-run hope. There will come a day when God-fearing men will enjoy the fruits of their labor and their capital. They will sit in their vineyards in leisure, enjoying the blessings of prosperity. They will not live in fear. They will not live at the mercy of corrupt civil rulers.

THE TREASURES OF WICKEDNESS

Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth (Micah 6:10–12).

A. The Elite and the State

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Micah reminds his listeners of what they already knew: the rich were rich because of their alliance with the civil rulers. The government did not prosecute the Mosaic laws against false weights and measures.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:35–36).²

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God (Deut. 25:13–16).³

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deutero-*

The rich were corrupt. They were oppressors, meaning that they used the state to gain their wealth. They used the state's near-monopoly of violence to steal from the innocent.

Micah warns them of judgment to come. This judgment will be applied to the entire nation. "Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins" (v. 13). The corruption of the rich and the civil rulers was a reflection of the corruption of the people. *The people were responsible for the corruption of their rulers.* This was not a new message. It was the moral foundation of Leviticus 4, which specified that the sins of the rulers had to be atoned for by sacrifices offered by the people.⁴

B. Productivity Without Consumption

Micah describes what was about to come.

Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine (vv. 14–15).

This was not a new message. It was basic to the story of Israel's conquest of Canaan. Moses had told them prior to the conquest:

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full (Deut. 6:10–11).

Immediately after these words, Moses warned them of what they would be tempted to think and do. "Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you" (Deut. 6:12–14). If they did this, they would suffer the consequences. What God had done on

onomy, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

4. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

their behalf to the Canaanites, He would do on His behalf to them.

And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:17–20).⁵

Micah came before the people to remind them that they were still under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. They had done exactly what Moses had warned against. They had forgotten God. They had worshipped idols.

C. Success for a Season

There were rich people in Israel and Judah. They had gained their wealth through corruption. They had used fraudulent weights. They had used violence. They had relied on corrupt civil rulers to advance their economic agenda at the expense of their victims. Micah says all this in full public view.

His covenant lawsuit acknowledges that corruption, fraud, violence, and oppression can prosper for long periods of time. The prophets did not come to the nation with a message of recent corruption. They came with a message of long-term moral corruption, from bottom to top. This corruption had made evil men wealthy. Nothing seemed to stand in their way.

The prophets told the nation that God stood in their way. He was about to close the pathway to moral destruction. He would bring invaders who would carry the people into a foreign land.

This was a message of hope. First, oppression by fellow Israelites would cease. Foreigners would become their oppressors. This was preferable to having brothers oppress brothers. Second, they would be carried into captivity. This had not been the fate of most of the Canaanites. They had been eradicated, though not completely. God had not told the Israelites to make them slaves. That was the Israelites' error, in the case of the Gibeonites (Josh. 9), and Israel's compromise,

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21–23.

in the case of other Canaanites. “And they drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day, and serve under tribute” (Josh. 16:10). “Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out” (Josh. 17:13). There would be a remnant of Israel that would return to the land. The Hebrew oppressors in the meantime would lose their ability to oppress.

Conclusion

Micah did not doubt that corruption can prosper for a season. For this to happen, corrupt people must gain control over the rulers. The Mosaic law would then not be enforced. Micah and the other prophets always invoked the Mosaic statutes when bringing their covenant lawsuits against the nation. They called the people to repent. This meant a widespread return to the Mosaic law.

Corruption can prosper, but not indefinitely. If the people will not call it to a halt then God will. God intervenes in history to uphold his overall covenant: the dominion covenant.⁶ He also intervenes to uphold His covenants with His people: individual, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil. He does this by imposing His covenantal sanctions, both negative and positive, both individual and corporate.

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

INTRODUCTION TO AMOS

Amos was a former shepherd (Amos 7:14). He was a contemporary of Isaiah. King Uzziah reigned (Amos 1:1). This was in the mid-eighth century, B.C.

His primary economic concern was slavery. He was critical of slave buyers who paid little for their slaves. His concern was not slavery as such. The Mosaic law authorized slavery of foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46).¹ Amos was narrowly focused: the purchase and re-sale of Hebrew servants by Hebrew masters for very little money. It was illegal to re-sell Hebrew slaves (Lev. 25:42).² The mark of oppression was the fact that such sales went on at all. The mark of wanton oppression was the fact that this was being done at bargain basement prices.

He also brought a lawsuit against businessmen who used false weights and measures to defraud the public. This practice was a violation of a specific Mosaic law, which appears in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Apart from these two practices, Amos had nothing to say about economic oppression. As was true of the prophets, economics was not at the forefront of his covenant lawsuit.

The promoters of the evangelical version of the Social Gospel cite Amos repeatedly. There is a reason for this. Amos had so little to say about economic sins that it is difficult to draw any economic conclusions based on the texts. So, it is easy to read into the texts the collectivist welfare state program of the Social Gospel. They seek to harness Amos' rhetoric to their own political agenda.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 30.

FORCED ENSLAVEMENT

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes (Amos 2:6).

A. Re-Selling Hebrew Slaves

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ What was the nature of this transgression? This was not the sale of a criminal in order to raise money to make restitution to his victims. Such a forced sale was legal under the Mosaic law.

If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double (Ex. 22:2–4).²

Because Amos identifies those who had been sold as victims, not thieves, this passage cannot be the legal context.

It was legal to sell a man into servitude if he had defaulted on a commercial debt. The creditor was entitled to be repaid. There was a law governing such a sale.

And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return (Lev. 25:39–41).³

So, a man sold under the terms of this law was not a victim of oppression.

Then was this kidnapping? The penalty for kidnapping was execution. “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:16).⁴ Amos does not mention the kidnapping of those sold into slavery.

So, the nature of the infraction is not straightforward.

There is a passage relating to female Hebrew slaves that might apply.

And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her (Ex. 21:7–8).

A woman sold on this basis—the promise of marriage—was legally adopted into the bridegroom’s family. He could not decide later to sell her.⁵

There was a similar passage, already cited, applying to those sold to raise money to pay off a debt (Lev. 25:39–41). To this law was appended this restriction: “For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen” (Lev. 25:42).

By the process of elimination, we come to this conclusion: it is likely that the infraction identified by Amos had to do with the re-sale of temporary Hebrew bondservants. A Hebrew lawfully had become a servant in a household, but was then sold by that household to someone in a foreign nation or to a resident alien. Additionally, the jubilee law of release that governed Hebrew servants was not enforced; so, the victims were permanently enslaved. They could not buy their way out, nor could a close family member purchase their freedom prior to the jubilee year.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 34.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 31:B.

B. Pricing the Slaves

Amos said that “they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.” The Hebrew word indicates that the shoes in this case were sandals. Silver was worth having, but a pair of sandals were surely not worth what a human being was worth. Why would anyone who owned a Hebrew servant sell him for a pair of sandals? This makes no sense economically.

The next verse throws additional light on the practice. “That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek” (Amos 2:7a). The Hebrew word translated here as “pant” is elsewhere translated as “swallow.” “Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance” (Job 5:5). It is also translated as “devour.” “I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once” (Isa. 42:14). The sellers were driven by perversity: the enjoyment of destruction. They wanted to destroy poor people, heaping dust on their heads of the poor. So, they sold them cheap, out of spite. Later in the book, Amos announces:

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? (Amos 8:4-6).

In Amos 2:7, he criticizes the sellers of the poor. In the later passage, he criticized the buyers. This is economically consistent. For every sale, there must be a purchase. The question is: Why sell a poor man for a pair of sandals when someone else will pay silver? Why sell low when you can sell high? The rule of the free market is “high bid wins.” The motivation of the sandal-sellers is clear: a low price for a slave. What about the motivation of the slave-sellers?

Economists do not believe that an “unexploited opportunity” can last for long. If an entrepreneur learns that he can buy someone for a pair of sandals in one market and then re-sell him for silver in another market, soon the price of cheap slaves will rise, and the price of expensive slaves will fall. This process is called *arbitrage* [AWR-bi-trawzh]. There will not be multiple prices for essentially the same item. Except for transaction costs and transportation costs, the prices

in two markets will be the same in a free market society.

So, if this two-price condemnation was literal, why wasn't there an active market for Hebrew slaves: buying low and selling high? In a free market society, the economic situation of slaves-for-shoes and slaves-for-silver would not have lasted long. Yet Amos implied that this practice had been a common condition for a considerable time—long enough to infuriate God. “The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks” (Amos 4:2). Again, this assumes that we take his condemnation literally rather than poetically, i.e., a widespread disregard for human freedom and the Mosaic law.

This much is true: Israelites were selling other Israelites into slavery. The sellers were oppressors. They were violating the Mosaic law. The civil magistrates were allowing this. Amos refers to injustice in the gates. The term “gates” was used in the Old Testament to identify the place of civil judgment in a community. “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land” (Prov. 31:23). Amos says: “For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right” (Amos 5:12). *This was oppression by the civil government*: the quest for bribes. So widespread was the corruption of the courts that prudent men said nothing. “Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time” (Amos 5:13).

So corrupt had men become that they did not care what price they received. They sold their victims because they enjoyed demonstrating their ability to oppress others visibly. To oppress those who were poor and meek had become a source of social status for people with wealth and political influence. We say that “price is no consideration.” We mean that a high price is not a major barrier to a purchase. Amos is saying that human freedom was held in such low esteem by the sellers that any price was acceptable. They were walking away from money. They could get silver, but some of them sold their brethren for sandals. This was what the leftist American economist Thorstein Veblen called conspicuous consumption.⁶ As in imperial Rome, when rich men—and Cleopatra—would publicly drop a ground-up pearl into a cup of wine and then drink the wine, so were the Israelite oppressors. This must have been very profitable for those entrepreneurs who were en-

6. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, [1899] 1902), ch. 4.

gaged in the domestic slave trade: buying for sandals and selling for silver, rather like pearl sellers in Rome. But these sales could not have been easily predictable by slave traders. The sales must have been random. Two organized markets cannot have significant price differences for essentially the same product if free trade is allowed by the civil magistrates.

If we take Amos' words literally, the sale of Hebrew slaves in Israel and Judah was not a quest for financial profit, but a quest for status: conspicuous consumption. It was status through oppression. This indicated the extent of the moral decline and judicial corruption.

Conclusion

Amos brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel and Judah on the basis of widespread corruption. This included judicial oppression. The courts allowed rich Hebrews to sell their poor brethren into servitude, something prohibited by the Mosaic law.

By identifying multiple selling prices for these slaves—silver and sandals—Amos identified a moral teaching: *the low value placed on liberty in Israel and Judah*. They had both become slave societies. The quest for social status had overcome rational economic calculation. Men sold other men for sandals when they could have sold them for silver. These people were not in the slave trade for money but rather for status.

Note: In the United States today, some rich women pay a thousand dollars or more for a pair of high-fashion sandals.⁷ This is conspicuous consumption to the point of absurdity, but it is not based on a self-conscious commitment to the destruction of the poor. Rather, it is a commitment to frivolous self-amusement by empty-headed women—a pastime mentioned by Isaiah (Isa. 3:16–24).

7. Hillary de Vries, "Those Aren't Just Sandals, Darling, They're Destiny," *New York Times* (Sept. 25, 2005). This meant a little lower than an ounce of gold.

UNJUST JUDGES

Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph (Amos 6:3–6).

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

Amos directs this criticism to a specific group: men of high position. “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!” (v. 1). They possessed leisure, as befits rulers who are the chief men of the nation. They were the people to whom the masses of Israel came. There should be no confusion here: these were civil officers. They occupied the seat of violence (v. 3). The Hebrew word is sometimes translated as injustice. “Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure” (Job 16:17). It can refer to something false, as in false witness. “False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not” (Ps. 35:11). But, usually, it is translated as violence. “For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces” (Amos 3:10). This is poetic language. No one actually stores up a basement full of violence and a pantry full of robbery.

Their crime was injustice. It was violence. These were not businessmen who had become rich through economic oppression. These

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

were corrupt civil rulers who had become rich through injustice.

They were indolent and rich. They lived sumptuously. They drank too much. They ate too much expensive food. They were not saddened by the debased spiritual condition of their brethren. So, Amos prophesies, they would maintain their positions of leadership in a unique way. “Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed” (v. 7). They would be at the head of the line when the Babylonians departed for home.

It would be a mistake to view their primary crime as economic. They had not grown rich through free market transactions. They had grown rich through judicial corruption. Isaiah had delivered the same message.

Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin (Isa. 1:23–25).²

The leisure and wealth they enjoyed came from their misuse of their high offices. To see the prophet as singling them out because of their wealth is to fail to ask the question: How did they obtain their wealth? Wealth was not their problem. Judicial corruption was.

Conclusion

Amos brought his covenant lawsuit against corrupt judges who had misused their high offices to enrich themselves. They had sold justice to the highest bidders. They had engaged in oppression.

This is not a condemnation of riches as such. It is a condemnation of the source of riches. Interpreters who present this passage as proof of oppression as inequality have not understood Moses on the blessings of inequality.

The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and

2. Chapter 3.

thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).³

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 70.

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OPPRESSION THROUGH FALSE BALANCES

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? (Amos 8:4–6).

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ This indictment of the businessmen of the nation is simple to understand. They had two sets of balances, one for selling goods and the other for buying goods. The balances were used to deceive buyers. Buyers believed they were being sold one weight's worth of goods, but in fact they were being sold less. This was a form of theft. The Mosaic law specified this practice as a moral evil.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:35–36).²

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

God (Deut. 25:13–16).³

Amos, as a prophet, brings a covenant lawsuit against the nation. He linked this practice with the oppression of buying and selling Hebrew slaves. The people had a dream: “that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes.” He had already brought this charge against them (Amos 2:6).⁴

They were not sabbath-breakers, but they chafed under the restriction on selling which the law of the sabbath imposed. They grumbled, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” They wanted no rest, nor did they intend to provide it. They wanted income, and they were willing to violate the statutes of the Mosaic law to achieve this goal.

These people were oppressors. The innocent were taken advantage of by the people who possess influence. To do this, the oppressors had gained the cooperation of the judges, both ecclesiastical and civil. This joint winking of the eye constituted the sin of Israel. Amos and the other prophets warned that God’s corporation national judgment was coming if the rulers did not repent.

Conclusion

There was nothing new about this accusation. The business community had indulged in theft through deception. These people had ignored God’s law by tampering with the scales. This crime was the representative crime of injustice in the Mosaic law. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure” (Lev. 19:35).⁵ Solomon reinforced this connection.

A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the LORD’S: all the weights of the bag are his work. It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness (Prov. 16:10–12).⁶

Amos made no call for general wealth redistribution by the state. It was a call for restitution. The crime was specific: fraud.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

4. Chapter 28.

5. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 19.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 51.

INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built (Hag. 1:1–2).

Haggai was a prophet in the immediate post-exilic era. His contemporary was Zechariah. “Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them” (Ezra 5:1). God raised up both of them to deal with the same issue: the refusal of the Israelites to complete the temple.

By the time Haggai’s ministry began, the people had been in the land for 16 years. They had returned in 536 B.C. They began to build the temple in the second year after their return (Ezra 3:8). Immediately, the leaders of the Samaritan residents of the land protested in writing to the king, asking him to order work to cease (Ezra 4:1–23). “Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (Ezra 4:24).

Darius of Persia came to the throne in 521 B.C. Haggai’s ministry began “in the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month” (Hag. 1:1a). He chided them about their failure to complete God’s temple. His message persuaded them.

And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king (Hag. 1:14–15).

And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the

prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king (Ezra 6:14–15).

It took about four years for them to finish this work. They had waited for 14 years after they ceased working on the temple two years after their return. It is clear that, had they persisted, they could have completed the temple within a few years after their return.

As a post-exilic prophet, Haggai did not have to deal with widespread idolatry. That national temptation ended forever during the exile. The Israelites learned first-hand what it was like to live under the rule of false gods. This was a Mosaic negative sanction.

And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind (Deut. 28:64–65).

The Israelites' leaders had taken a stand against all such worship. The people accepted this. They maintained their separate existence as strangers in a strange land by invoking the name of God and Him alone. Most of them remained behind when it came time to return to the land. Those who did return were not again tempted to worship idols.

So, the task of the three post-exilic prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—was not to call them to abandon idols. Rather, their task was to call the people to act positively in terms of the Mosaic Covenant. The primary sins of the nation were not sins of commission, but rather sins of omission. So, the covenant lawsuits of the post-exilic prophets did not include a warning of corporate negative sanctions to come. Rather, they pointed to the absence of positive sanctions as evidence that God was displeased with them. They did not warn of negative sanctions to come if the people failed to repent. They warned of positive sanctions to come if the people did repent.

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A BAG WITH HOLES

Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled [paneled] houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes (Hag. 1:4–6).

A. Under a Curse

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The Israelites were under a curse. The curse was specific: a low rate of return on all of their investments. No matter what project they tried, it failed to prosper.

In the United States, there is a saying: “Don’t pour money down a rathole.” A rathole absorbs whatever is of value that you pour into it. You will not make a profit. A project described as a rathole is perceived as a losing proposition. Haggai described a series of five ratholes. They were all losing propositions. He used five metaphors: planting, eating, drinking, dressing, and wage-earning. He described all as acts of futility. The results will disappoint the one who pursues any of them.

Haggai’s phrase, “a bag with holes,” has come down through the centuries as a description of expensive futility. Haggai tells them that as surely as it is useless to replenish lost coins in a bag with holes, so is it useless to continue to follow the same old routine.

What is the routine? Individuals who were suffering these losses continued to put themselves and their desires at the top of their indi-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

vidual lists of priorities. The construction of the temple was not on the list.

He begins with an introduction: a rhetorical question. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:3b–5). Haggai used this introduction to prepare them for his explanation of the negative sanction of a consistent failure: their lack of success in all of their various projects, symbolized by their failures in five areas of planning.

B. Covenantal Causality

The pre-exilic prophets came before Israel and Judah and warned of terrible negative sanctions to come if they refused to repent. They said: "Do not look at your prosperity and conclude that God is favorable to you and your works. He hates your works. He will prove this by removing your wealth." Their covenant lawsuits identified specific economic practices that were violations of specific Mosaic statutes. They invoked the Mosaic law. They warned of negative corporate sanctions that were found in the Mosaic law. There were no exceptions to the structure of their lawsuits. *The Israelites' economic transgressions were found in the Mosaic law, and so were the negative sanctions.* A prophet merely recapitulated what the Mosaic law said: stipulations and negative sanctions. His message was clear: the prophesied negative sanctions would be imposed by God through foreign invaders. What God had told Moses repeatedly that He would do, He would surely do. Then He did.

The post-exilic prophets preached in the era following the comprehensive manifestation of the predictability of the Mosaic law's corporate negative sanctions. These sanctions were such that Israel never again turned to idols. God had finally gotten their attention. But they were still slow learners. They did not yet trust what the Mosaic law said regarding the positive sanctions.

Haggai brings a message. He tells them that they lacked visible success because they had placed their personal and family priorities above God's. They had built houses for themselves but no house for God.

He does not invoke a Mosaic statute, because there was no Mosaic statute regarding the construction of a temple. There were detailed requirements regarding the Ark of the Covenant and its immediate en-

vironment: a series of concentric areas of holiness. But there is no evidence that the Ark was still in existence after the captivity. There were rules for the tabernacle, but not for the temple. There were individual negative sanctions associated with violating the tabernacle's zones of holiness, but there were no corporate negative sanctions associated with not building the temple.

Haggai does not invoke a Mosaic statute. He does invoke the optimism of Deuteronomy 28:1–14. This was the section devoted to positive sanctions for obedience to the Mosaic law. He tells his listeners that they did not prosper because they had not built the temple. The system of covenantal sanctions still operated.

Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands (Hag. 1:9–11).

The negative sanctions had already been imposed. There had been no prophet who warned them 14 years earlier what the penalties would be if they ceased work on the temple. Why not? Because God expected them to understand the system of covenantal causality. There are visible positive sanctions for obedience to the Mosaic law, just as there are visible negative sanctions for disobeying it. Israelites should have learned this in the captivity. With respect to idolatry, they did. With respect to the temple, they didn't.

Haggai came to tell them to consider cause and effect. Their projects failed because they had put themselves first. Haggai called them to obey. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD" (Hag. 1:8). But what were they asked to obey? Not a statute from the Mosaic law. They were asked to obey their consciences. Their covenantal understanding should by now have been greater than had been true before the captivity. They should have been able to add covenantal two plus two and get four. So far, they had not done this.

Haggai's prophetic message implied that there should be spiritual maturity over time, both individually and corporately. While there was

no Mosaic statute compelling them to build a temple, God expected them to build it. While there were no statutes specifying God's negative sanctions in response to such neglect, God expected the people to understand that Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 were still in force. He expected them to recognize covenantal causality in their lack of success. They did not recognize this, so He sent Haggai to remind them.

The people had matured. The leaders immediately responded to his message. Then the people did, too.

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD. And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God (Hag. 1:12–14).

Conclusion

Haggai set forth the fundamental principle of biblical covenantal economics when he announced, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts" (2:8). The nation had forgotten this, just as nations generally do. His ministry was consistent with this principle of ownership. First things first. God's things come first.

He did not warn the nation of bad things to come despite contemporary prosperity, as the pre-exilic prophets had done. He reminded them of good things to come despite contemporary failure. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts" (2:9). Before the exile, Israelites had been the beneficiaries of wealth, but they had attributed this to other gods. After the exile, they had experienced comprehensive failure, but they had attributed this to nothing in particular. Haggai reminded them that God is the God of both negative sanctions and positive sanctions. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 had asserted this, but the post-exilic generation was almost as blind to this as the pre-exilic generation had been. Almost, but not quite. God, through Haggai, opened their eyes.

INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH

Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy (Zech. 1:12–14).

As a post-exilic prophet, Zechariah did not bring a message of imminent destruction. He brought a message of hope. Of all the prophets, he was the messenger of comprehensive hope.

His message matched that of his contemporary, Haggai. His message was simple: finish the temple. “Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem” (Zech. 1:16). There would soon be positive sanctions. “Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem” (Zech. 1:17). Negative sanctions were coming, but not to Israel.

For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee (Zech. 2:8–11).

Of all the books in the Bible that bring the message of the compre-

hensive victory of covenant-keepers, in time and on earth, Zechariah is the most detailed.

PEACE AND PROSPERITY

For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things (Zech. 8:10–12).

A. The Division of Labor

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Zechariah describes what it was like to live inside the land during the days of exile for the Israelites. The Samaritans and the few Israelites who had not been carried off lived in a society in which there was no trust, “for I set all men every one against his neighbour.” The division of labor had collapsed because there was no cooperation. Hence, there were no wages.

What was also missing was peace. “Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction.” The Hebrew word translated “affliction” is usually translated “enemy” or “adversary.” This was not competition, where one man competed with another for a job. There were no jobs. It was more in the nature of warfare.

This meant that output must have collapsed. Economic cooperation allows the division of labor to increase production due to specialization. Each person concentrates on what he does best. The result is

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

greater output per unit of resource input.

This was about to change. "But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts." The Hebrew word translated as "residue" is usually translated as "remnant." Example: "And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things." The remnant in this context was the relative handful of Israelites who had returned from the Babylonian captivity. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness" (Zech. 8:7–8).

B. A Healed Environment

Zechariah proclaims that the environment would change. "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things." The phrase, "the heavens shall give their dew," indicates that the environment had been under a curse.

The land had been given comparative rest. God had promised this centuries before.

And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it (Lev. 26:33–35).

The desolation of the land was also its healing. Because the rains slowed, the land was not overworked by the new inhabitants. What had functioned as a curse for Israelites functioned as a healing process for the land.

Jeremiah had foreseen what would happen in his lifetime.

And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years (II Chron. 36:20–21).

The period of rest for the land had come to an end. Now its productivity would flourish under the care of the restored remnant. The restoration of the people to the land had also been predicted by God. Moses had told them:

Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD (Lev. 26:42–45).

C. The Restoration of Production

Zechariah announces God's revelation regarding the new situation. "But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts." There would not be the universal fear and distrust that had governed society during the exile. There would be peace. So, there would be prosperity. "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase."

Cooperation is the basis of prosperity. Peace is the basis of cooperation. Members of a peaceful society do not spend extensive time and money to defend themselves. They can live their lives without worrying about violence. They can, in the familiar phase, go about their business. Business expands.

As the division of labor expands, output per unit of input rises. Seeds grow. Vines produce fruit. The ground gives its increase. The division of labor does not affect rainfall, but it makes rainfall more productive. Whatever the land was capable of producing, peace would make such production more likely.

Peace was part of a liturgical blessing.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise [in this way] ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep

thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace (Num. 6:22–26).

A curse would become evident whenever peace and prosperity were removed.

And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven (Deut. 29:19–20).

D. War and Poverty

Modern textbooks speak of war expenditures as productive economically. The Bible does not teach this. It teaches that peace produces prosperity. Then what does war produce? Poverty. Speaking of the Amorites and Moabites, Moses said: “Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever” (Deut. 23:5–6).

Mercantilists and Keynesians agree: war can be profitable. For a minority of individuals, yes. For society as a whole, no. The capital used to produce a weapon could have been used to produce a consumer good. The taxes necessary for military production could have been left in the hands of taxpayers, to spend or invest. The debt used to finance a war could have financed factories and research. The fractional reserve banking system’s fiat money, which is used to buy the government’s debt, lowers the value of the currency unit. This impoverishes those on fixed monetary incomes. Only when armaments do not lead to war, or when they are used to repel invaders, do they make society richer, for they protect the peace or a social order based on peace.

Conclusion

Peace and prosperity are covenantally linked. They are closely related positive corporate sanctions. The close connection between peace and prosperity extends across the boundaries of time and geo-

graphy. So does the connection between war and poverty.

There had been a time in Israel when individuals had little peace, little cooperation, and little prosperity. Those days were over, Zechariah announced. A new day had dawned. If the nation conformed to the Mosaic law-order, it would prosper. The prophet called them to repentance, just as pre-exilic prophets had done. The people had not listened before the captivity. Zechariah offered their descendants an opportunity to gain the positive corporate sanctions offered by the Mosaic Covenant.

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

Malachi means “my messenger.” His ministry is believed to have begun after the remnant’s return from Persia in 536 B.C. The common estimate is mid-fifth century. There is no solid evidence for this. It is sometimes argued that he used the Persian word for *governor* in Malachi 1:8, but the same word is used in I Kings 10:15 and 20:24. He referred to the temple in Malachi 3:1, but the context of this reference is a future messenger. This does not prove that the second temple had been built yet. The strongest evidence is the text’s shared commitment with themes in Nehemiah: marriages with foreign women (Mal. 2:11–15; Neh. 13:23–27), failure to pay the tithe (Mal. 3:8–10; Neh. 13:10–14), and priestly corruption (Mal. 1:7–14; Neh. 13:7–9). Nehemiah’s return from Persia is commonly believed to have taken place in 444 B.C.

The book of Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. This is appropriate, for Malachi was the last prophet to leave a written record that became canonical. He prophesied regarding the coming of a greater prophet. “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 3:1). Jesus identified this prophet: John the Baptist.

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will re-

ceive it, this is Elias [Elijah], which was for to come (Matt. 11:7–14).

In between Malachi and John the Baptist, we have no written record of any prophet who brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel.

Malachi's covenant lawsuit was direct and comprehensive. He blamed the priests for the post-exilic era of corruption. "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:7–8). *The ecclesiastical leadership was corrupt.* "Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. 2:17). This was the same accusation that Isaiah had brought against Judah three centuries earlier. He had prophesied that this willful perversity of judgment would eventually end. "The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful" (Isa. 32:5). Malachi warned them: it had not ended yet.

It had not ended in John the Baptist's day, either. The religious leaders were still corrupt. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. 3:7).

It would be a mistake to interpret Malachi as anything but remotely concerned with economic reform. His concern with economic matters was limited. He had two complaints. First, the sons of Levi were oppressors and connivers with oppressors. God therefore threatened judgment. "And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:5). Second, the nation refused to pay the tithe (Mal. 3:8–9). This passage is widely quoted and even more widely disobeyed today. The Israelites in Malachi's day did not take the warning seriously. Neither do Christians today.

The final word in the book, meaning the final word in the Old Testament, is *curse*. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall

turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5–6). It was a warning of destruction by God. It was also a call to repentance.

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STEALING FROM GOD

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation (Mal. 3:7–8).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The fundamental principle of Christian economics is this: *God owns everything*. Christian economics begins with this principle. It therefore also ends with it. Christian economics is circular, as is true of every consistent system of human thought. That which is presupposed logically leads to a conclusion: the affirmation of that which is presupposed. In the same sense that God is both creator and final judge, so does the conclusion affirm the presupposition, not just in Christian thought but in Western thought generally.

The economic mark of God's ownership is the tithe. All men owe God a specified percentage of their income. Covenant-breakers are required to affirm this and then conform themselves to it. From other passages, we learn that a tithe was 10% of a rural land owner's net agricultural income. Under the Mosaic law, this was owed to the Levites (Lev. 27:32; Num. 18:21). Prior to the Mosaic law, Abram paid a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem (Heb. 7:1–3).²

A. Theft = Not Paying

Here, Malachi introduces a fundamental judicial concept: *refusing to give what is required by God constitutes theft*. This is a broad judicial

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 29.

concept. It applies to everything covenantal. It establishes the judicial concept of property rights to a stream of income. There is no difference between *stealing legal title* to a judicially mandatory stream of income vs. *refusing to supply* this stream of income.

This principle of covenantal law establishes a principle of economics: *there is no economic autonomy*. It is therefore illegitimate to begin economic theory on the assumption that an individual, other than God, is sovereign over his property. He is subordinate to God, and God has mandated that other covenantal institutions have legitimate legal claims to a portion of his income.

These claims may not be legally enforceable in a civil court. This does not negate the claims. God's prophets warned Israel that He would enforce the legal claims of the Levites in His court. He had already intervened in history to impose negative sanctions. Haggai had told them: "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6).³ God now offered Israel another opportunity to test the reliability of His covenantal sanctions in history. He offered positive sanctions.

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts (Mal. 3:10–12).

This offer had to do with visible blessings. Other nations would see God's sovereignty at work. But, if the Israelites refused to change their collective ways, the visible losses would continue.

B. Hierarchy and Tithing

Every oath-bound covenant has a hierarchy.⁴ In the family covenant, the husband represents the wife before God, and the parents represent the children. The husband works to support his family. The

3. Chapter 31.

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2; North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

flow of funds is downward. But, in their old age, parents are entitled to support by children. The flow of funds is upward when the children have wealth and their parents do not.⁵

In the other two covenantal governments—ecclesiastical and civil—administration is supported from the bottom up. The flow of funds is upward. The institutional church is entitled to a tithe from its members. The civil government is entitled to taxes of residents. Both church and state are under restraint. The church is entitled to no more than 10%. The state is entitled to less than 10%. Anything more than this constitutes civil tyranny, as Samuel warned Israel (I Sam. 8:14, 17).⁶

The judicial issue here is *covenantal representation*. All those who are represented by the leaders in a covenantal institution must pay for this privilege in some way. There are no free lunches and no free representation.

The tithe is an aspect of the priesthood. This was true in the Old Testament era before Moses. Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek, for Melchizedek was the priest of Salem. In his own household, Abram was a priest and not under priestly authority. He paid no tithe. In Salem, he was under priestly authority, and therefore he paid a tithe for the privilege of being represented by the high priest (Gen. 14:18–21).⁷

In Moses' day, rural Israelites paid tithes to the Levites, who owned no rural land, and the Levites paid tithes to the family priests who officiated at the temple. The Levites were the tribe of Levi. The families were Merari, Gershon, and Kohath. Kohath supplied the priests, for it was the family of Aaron. The temple priests did not pay a tithe. They were the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. No one represented them ecclesiastically.

The tithe has to do with priestly representation. It had to do with the Mosaic sacrificial system only for as long as that representational system was mandatory. The tithe is a matter of the priesthood: Melchizedek's and Levi's.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

6. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 21.

C. A Single Storehouse

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 3:10a). The language is clear. First, there is a single storehouse. Second, it belongs to God. Third, God calls it His house.

Which tithe was Malachi talking about? The tithe of tithes, which went to the temple priests. This had always been required in Mosaic Israel. The Mosaic law was clear. The tithes of rural people went to the local Levites. They in turn tithed to the Aaronic priests, who oversaw the sacrifices at the tabernacle-temple (Num. 18:26–27). This was a bottom-up flow of wealth.

Note: the temple priests did not tithe. There was no one to tithe to. They were at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Israel was a hierarchy of priests. God had told Moses, just before the giving of the Mosaic law, “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Ex. 19:6).⁸

The captivity had removed the people from the land. Very few Levites returned: 341 (Ezra 2:40–54). In contrast, 4,289 priests returned (Ezra 2:36–39). The priests were Levites, as members of the tribe of Levi, so they were supported by their share of the tithe. But the temple priests were paid extra to officiate at the temple. The Levites and priests submitted themselves to the Mosaic law on this point: a tenth of the tithe went to the temple priests. The people also understood this. They corporately confessed their faith in an act of covenant renewal. “They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God’s law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes” (Neh. 10:29). They understood their responsibilities. They paid the Levites locally, but the tenth of a tenth was sent to the temple. This was the common storehouse.

... that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 20.

shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house (Neh. 10:37–38).

Why the temple? Because it was the earthly residence of God. It was where the holy of holies was, which had once housed the Ark of the Covenant, which had contained the covenantal implements that had been placed inside the tabernacle at the exodus: the golden censer, the tablets of the law, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod (Heb. 9:4). The tabernacle-temple had always been referred to as the house of the Lord. "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the LORD thy God" (Ex. 34:26a). "Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God" (Deut. 23:18).

So, the house of the Lord was the storehouse for the tithe of the tithes. Building the temple was the focus of concern in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. This was Malachi's concern, too. Thus, he reminds the nation of the national collection point for the tithe. He had to be speaking of the priestly tithe, not the Levitical tithe, which is why the Levitical tithe was collected locally, as we have seen (Neh. 10:37).

The temple tithe was judicially representative, just as the sacrifices were judicially representative. The tithe went to the priestly tribe, which had no inheritance in rural land. It was collected locally, but a representative 10% was sent to the priests at Jerusalem. This was the common storehouse. It was common because it was judicially representative.

D. The New Testament

There are only three references to Levites in the New Testament.⁹ These references do not describe the Levites' specific functions. Levites were part of the religious leadership. "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?" (John 1:19). The Sadducees were closely associated with the temple. They served as the priests.¹⁰ The Pharisees were rivals of the Sadducees.¹¹ The Pharisees and scribes were interpreters of the law. The New Testament does not explicitly indicate how they

9. Luke 10:32; John 1:19; Acts 4:36.

10. "Sadducees," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–6), pp. 630–33. (<http://bit.ly/SadduceesJE>)

11. "Pharisees," *ibid.*, pp. 661–66. (<http://bit.ly/PhariseesJE>)

were paid.

The scribes and Pharisees were not the officiating priests of the temple. The Sadducees were. So, the Pharisees and scribes owed tithes either to the Levites, or if they were themselves Levites, to the temple priests. Christ condemned the scribes and Pharisees for not being sufficiently faithful to the Mosaic law. They did tithe, He said, and this was proper. But it was not enough. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matt. 23:23).¹² Jesus’ warning makes it clear that tithing is still required. We are not to let “the other”—tithing—undone. When I say clear, I mean “clear to anyone not trying to escape his requirement to tithe.”

Theologians who deny the legitimacy of the tithe in the New Testament era try to escape the plain teaching of Christ. They deny that Matthew 23:23 applies to Christians or the church. Some say that He was preaching only to the scribes and Pharisees, who were still under the Mosaic order. This is an odd way to argue, since Christ Himself was under that order, as He said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17–18).¹³ We are asked to believe that He was speaking only to those two groups, not anyone else in Israel, and surely not speaking to us.¹⁴ Others argue that the New Testament era is exclusively post-70 A.D., when the Mosaic sacrificial system ended with the Roman legions’ destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Therefore, every rule announced by Christ was authoritative only for the Jews of His era, for He lived under the Mosaic sacrificial system. We do not. This line of reasoning is inherently antinomian. It leaves Christians with no uniquely biblical source of law, including the Ten Commandments. Dispensational pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse is representative of this line of reasoning. He wrote: “It was a tragic hour when the Reforma-

12. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 46.

13. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2002).

14. Andreas J. Köstenberger and David A. Croteau, “Will a Man Rob God?” (Malachi 3:8): A Study of Tithing in the Old and New Testaments,” (2006), p. 19. (<http://bit.ly/RobGod>)

tion wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds.”¹⁵

I have said that the tithe is an aspect of the priesthood. Jesus is the high priest. This is the message of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace (Heb. 6:20–7:2).¹⁶

This is the supreme priesthood. We know this because Melchizedek represented Abram before God, serving him bread and wine (Gen. 14:18).¹⁷ Abram, not yet Abraham, had no son. Yet Abram represented Isaac, who represented Jacob, who represented Levi. Therefore, Hebrews insists, “Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him” (Heb. 7:9–10). Paying tithes “in Abraham” is covenantal language. It has to do with *legal representation*. Melchizedek had represented the unborn patriarchs in Salem. The argument of Hebrews is that he also represents us, as followers of the God of Abram. Jesus, as the heir of Melchizedek’s office of high priest, represents us.

The author of Hebrews said that Jesus has forever replaced Levi as the high priest. Thus, there has been a change in the law. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12). We know that the church, like Israel, is a nation of priests. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (I Peter 2:9). Just as rural members of the nation of priests under Moses were required by biblical law to pay tithes to the Levites, and just as the Levites were required by biblical law to pay tithes to the temple priests, so are Christians, a royal priesthood, required by biblical law to pay

15. Cited by S. Lewis Johnson, “The Paralysis of Legalism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120 (April/June 1963), p. 109. *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1963 was published by Dallas Theological Seminary, then the world’s leading dispensational institution of higher education.

16. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 29.

17. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 21.

tithes to the institutional church.¹⁸ If they refuse, there will be negative corporate sanctions on the church. If they obey, there will be positive corporate sanctions.

E. Land and Tithe in Post-Exilic Israel

There is no evidence, biblical or extra-biblical, that the empires that controlled Israel after the exile enforced the pre-exilic land distribution of the families. They did not enforce the jubilee laws governing the return of land to the heirs of the conquest generation.

This created a problem for the law governing the Levitical tithe. The Levites were entitled to the tithe of the increase from the land. This was their inheritance. They did not receive rural land, as the other tribes did. They could own property in the 48 Levitical cities. They could own land in walled cities, as anyone could. But they could not inherit rural land. This allowed them to live in all of the tribal regions.

The Mosaic civil government enforced the Levitical tithe because this was a matter of a property right. It was to be as secure as rural land. I have argued that only the increase from rural land was subject to the tithe because this was the Levites' alternative to land ownership. Those living in walled cities and Levitical cities did not owe the tithe because, in those jurisdictions, the Levites were not discriminated against in terms of property ownership.

After the exile, all this changed. Anyone could own land, as far as the evidence indicates. There is no indication in the New Testament that Levites were exclusively urban property owners. So, if the Levites suffered no disadvantage, on what basis were they eligible for a tithe? Because the civil government no longer had a lawful role in enforcing the Levitical tithe, the hierarchy shifted from the civil government to the church. The tithe became an obligation for all those who were part of the ecclesiastical community. The pre-exilic structure of the tithe still existed in the post-exilic era: a tenth of the Levites' tenth went to the temple priests (Neh. 10:38). What had changed was the enforcement agency. The tithe was now owed by all covenant-keepers, not just owners of rural land. But the basis of this obligation was now ecclesiastical service, not tribal inheritance. The requirement to tithe became geographically universal. This is why Jesus told the Pharisees that they owed the tithe (Matt. 23:23).

18. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

Conclusion

Malachi made it clear that he came in the name of God. He accused the nation of cheating God by not tithing. He called this theft. He offered corporate positive sanctions for repentance: the open window of heaven and the rebuke of the devourer. Haggai had already told them that they were under negative sanctions: a money bag with holes in it.

Because the tithe he spoke of was to be placed in a common storehouse—specifically, God’s house: the temple—he had to be speaking of the Levites’ tithe to the temple priests. This was a representative tithe of the Levites’ right of inheritance. We know this from both the Mosaic law of the priestly tithe and from the account in Nehemiah regarding the collection of the priestly tithe.

The tithe in question was the two-fold Mosaic tithe: Levitical and priestly. It went to the priests of the temple. It was a temple tithe because it was a priestly tithe. If the Levites had to tithe to the temple priests, as the Mosaic law required, then surely the nation had to tithe to the Levites. If they obeyed, they would be blessed with positive corporate sanctions. That was Malachi’s message to post-exilic Israel. If they disobeyed, there would be negative corporate sanctions. That was Haggai’s message to post-exilic Israel.

CONCLUSION

Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them (II Kings 17:13–15).

A. Covenant Lawsuits

The prophets brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. They prophesied corporate negative sanctions, culmination in national captivity. These lawsuits were ignored by the people and their leaders. The corporate negative sanctions came, as prophesied, culminating in the final round of sanctions: the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.¹ Furthermore, the prophets invoked the Mosaic law as the legal foundation of their covenant lawsuits against the nation. The Mosaic law was authoritative because it specified institutional sanctions: familial, civil, and ecclesiastical. Without these sanctions, the Mosaic law would have been merely a catalogue of moral suggestions. The prophets would have been moral philosophers, comparable perhaps to Socrates and Plato, but no more authoritative.

For modern Christian critics of the prevailing economic order to invoke the prophets as witnesses against the prevailing economic order is disingenuous if they do not also affirm the existence of God's

1. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 2007). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>) David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

predictable, visible, corporate covenantal sanctions in history. The prophets possessed lawful authority to speak on God's behalf. They lawfully invoked God's negative historical sanctions. They warned Israel of negative corporate sanctions to come if the nation ignored their warnings and did not repent.

B. The Authority of Biblical Law Today

What relevance do the prophets' warnings have for Christians who live in the New Testament era? Here, most Protestant theologians do whatever they can to avoid answering. If they say the prophets' message has judicial relevance, then corporate covenantal sanctions must still be in force. This conclusion is much too controversial, for it raises the judicial issue of theonomy and the political issue of Christian Reconstruction. But if they say "no judicial relevance," this makes them sound like antinomians, which they are, hermeneutically speaking. So, they write paragraphs such as the following, in order to avoid dealing straightforwardly with the judicial and moral problem.

An important consideration in connection with this pericope [Mal 3] is whether the demands and the promises are also applicable in the NT dispensation, as they were under the OT dispensation. Our answer must be "Yes" and "No." Yes, because there is continuity in connection with both our obligation to fulfill our stewardship and the promises of God's blessing in our lives. This cannot be denied. At the same time our answer must be "No," because we also have a discontinuity pertaining to the specific relationship between the OT and the NT and the relative dispensations. The discontinuity consists especially in the outward scheme of things, regarding both the obligations and the promises.²

This is theological doubletalk. Prophecy in the Old Testament was covenantal. It had to do with covenant lawsuits, to which were attached covenantal corporate sanctions. So, in order to invoke the authority of the prophets, a New Testament era critic of society must also invoke the authority of biblical law: its oaths, its institutional hierarchies, its stipulations, and its sanctions.

2. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 311. Cited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and David A. Croteau, "Reconstructing a Biblical Model for Giving: A Discussion of Relevant Systematic Issues and New Testament Principles" (2006), p. 8. (<http://bit.ly/GivingModel>). I have offered an extended critique of Croteau's position on tithing in *Perspectives on Tithing: 4 Views*, ed. David A. Croteau (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2011), ch. 9.

The social critics rarely do this. Apart from the theonomists and British Israelites, the economic critics reject the Mosaic law, as well as any New Testament social order based on extensions into the New Testament era of its stipulations and sanctions. They do not offer a hermeneutic that provides guidance as to which Mosaic laws extend into the New Testament era and which do not. They reject the theonomists' hermeneutic: still binding unless annulled by New Testament revelation, i.e., "innocent until proven guilty."³

C. Rewriting the Prophets

Within the evangelical community in the Anglo-American world are church members who are committed to the welfare state. They not only accept the tenets of the welfare state's political order, they actively promote it within their circles.

In their search for justification of their political commitment, they return again and again to the prophets. They also cite a handful of texts in the Mosaic law, most notably the jubilee laws (Lev. 25),⁴ which were all annulled with the ministry of Christ (Luke 4:16–21).⁵ If the jubilee was not annulled by the New Testament, then the law authorizing intergenerational slavery would still validate the practice (Lev. 25:44–46).⁶ Liberation theologians never mention this aspect of the jubilee. They also categorically refuse to accept the judicial authority of the vast bulk of the Mosaic law's economic passages. Above all, they refuse to go to this verse:

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).⁷

When men invoke the prophets as moral guides for modern times, it is utterly illegitimate for them to deny the law-order that the prophets invoked as justifying their covenant lawsuits. Yet the liberation theologians, some of whom were Marxists before the embarrassing collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, do exactly this. They invoke the

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 25–32.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

6. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

prophets, yet they dismiss the Mosaic law as no longer judicially binding. *This is not an oversight. It is self-conscious deception by supposed experts in the Scriptures.* They come in the name of God as would-be prophets, bringing their would-be covenant lawsuits against society in general and Christians in particular. Their listeners are told that they are accomplices of economic oppressors. The accusation is true, for they are partial supporters of the welfare state, which is a system based on oppression on a massive scale. The welfare state rests on this commandment: “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote.”

The liberation theologians’ criticism is that the modern American state has not gone far enough, since it extracts only about 40% of the nation’s output through taxes and regulation. This 40% is twice the tax rate imposed by the Pharaoh under Joseph. “And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh’s” (Gen. 47:26). This was God’s judgment on Egypt, which worshipped a supposedly divine god-king.⁸ The modern world would have to cut taxes by half in order to get back to the most bureaucratic social order of the pre-Mosaic world. Our would-be prophets never mention this, for obvious reasons. In the name of Jesus, they cry out for even greater taxation than twice the taxation of Pharaonic Egypt.⁹

Within American Protestant evangelicalism, their movement is tiny and is generally limited to people who majored in the liberal arts in college. They are not popular within the broader evangelical, Lutheran, and fundamentalist community. But, because they gain the support of Left-wing humanists in the media, they receive a lot of publicity. This makes their movement seem larger than it is.

D. The Economics of the Prophets

I have systematically exegeted the Mosaic economic laws, verse by verse, beginning in 1973. I have completed the exegesis. This has been a long, arduous task. I find that the critics who publicly invoke the

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 32:C.

9. For critiques of this position, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1996). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>). See also *Questions for Jim Wallis*, at www.GaryNorth.com. See also my responses in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984). (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

prophets' economic criticisms of Israel rarely refer to the Mosaic statutes invoked by the prophets. They also never refer to any of my economic commentaries on the Mosaic law, which total 14 volumes: Exodus 20 to Deuteronomy 31.

Thus, a reader would be wise to examine carefully the alleged connections between the prophets and the social critics' recommended economic reforms, which are too often calls for coercive intervention into the economy by the state. The reader should ask these questions.

Did the prophets call on the civil government to intervene in the Old Testament passages cited by the critics?

Did the relevant Mosaic statutes call on the state to intervene?

Does the critic identify the Mosaic statute in each passage from the prophets?

Does the critic explain the context of the Mosaic statute?

Does the critic's proposed economic reform violate any Mosaic statute?

Does the critic argue that the Mosaic law offers us an authoritative blueprint for economics?

Does the critic in fact deny that the Mosaic law offers a blueprint for economics?

Does the critic invoke the New Testament as offering a blueprint for economics?

Does the critic refer to a comprehensive study of the New Testament which identifies the structure and details of this alleged blueprint?

Be alert to the possibility that the critic is systematically misusing the prophets in order to promote some version of liberation theology—not the dead Marxist version of the 1970s and 1980s, but rather a softened version of socialism or Keynesian interventionism aimed at Protestant audiences.

E. Principles of Interpretation

The prophets came before Israel and Judah with covenant lawsuits. They invoked the Mosaic law. They therefore warned of negative corporate sanctions to come, but also offered hope: positive corporate

sanctions to come. They called on their listeners to repent. This repentance would have corporate implications. It would also require corporate reforms.

In their catalogue of transgressions, individual and corporate, were economic sins. With the exception of Isaiah, the prophets listed very few economic transgressions. As a percentage of the size of the book of Isaiah, the list of economic sins constituted very little.

This should serve as a warning to contemporary readers. First, the prophets invoked the Mosaic law. Second, they invoked corporate sanctions in terms of specific Mosaic statutes. Third, the context of their predictions of specific things to come was the Mosaic law: statutes and sanctions. Fourth, they called on their listeners to repent.

The fifth point relates to the specific economic transgressions listed by the prophets. There were few of them, and they all referred back to the Mosaic law. Therefore, all contemporary Christian critics of contemporary economic institutions and practices who invoke the Old Testament prophets, but who then refuse to turn to the Mosaic law as the judicial basis of their criticisms are practicing deception, beginning with self-deception. They implore their readers to take seriously the moral issues raised by the prophets, yet they themselves do not take seriously the judicial context of the prophets' criticisms of the social order and economic practices of their contemporaries. The judicial context was the nation's abandonment of the Mosaic law.

I have never argued that all of the statutes of the Mosaic law carry over into the New Covenant. The bulk of them do not. I have argued that there is a Bible-based hermeneutic that lets us filter out the annulled laws. This hermeneutic distinguishes among four categories.

1. Land laws
2. Seed laws
3. Priestly laws
4. Cross-boundary laws¹⁰

Only laws in the fourth category of Mosaic laws carry over into the New Covenant. Many of these cross-boundary laws were economic laws. Among the civil laws that did not carry over were the laws associated with the Jubilee, which included chattel slavery (Lev. 25:44–46), the laws mandating the civil enforcement of the tithe for the Levites, laws governing real estate ownership in walled cities, laws governing land inherited by daughters, gleaning laws, and the laws of levirate

10. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Conclusion.

marriage. Civil laws that did carry over are laws prohibiting false balances, laws enforcing restitution for theft, laws prohibiting the withholding of wages, laws discriminating against non-citizens, laws favoring one group against another, and laws against fraud.

In contrast are the contemporary critics of modern free market capitalism who call for an extension of the welfare state's policies of coercive redistribution of private wealth. The two most prominent organizations in the United States that promote this view are Sojourners and Evangelicals for Social Action, by which they mean state action. Not one of their representatives has written so much a single volume of exegesis of the Mosaic economic laws. Not one of them has offered a book on the hermeneutic principles governing the application of Mosaic statutes in the New Covenant era. Not one of them has offered a systematic book on Christian economic casuistry: the application of biblical moral principles to specific economic practices. We have waited for over 40 years. So, until one of them does, and until a dozen of his fellow collectivists hail his breakthrough as authoritative, and then write their critiques of contemporary economic practice in terms of his methodology, I suggest that you impose your own "prophetic" judgment: "Case not proven."

Conclusion

The title of this book is *Restoration and Dominion*. Restoration is the outcome of repentance. What has repentance got to do with dominion? We can see this most clearly in the message of the prophets, but especially Zechariah.

The prophets brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. They were essentially the same lawsuit. The two nations had abandoned the Mosaic law. Unless they repented, God would impose the negative sanctions of the law listed in the longer, later sections of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. On the other hand, if they did repent, God would withdraw the negative sanctions and bring the positive sanctions, as promised in the shorter introductory sections of these two passages.

In investing, there is a saying: "Cut your losses, and let your profits run." If an investor can eliminate his losses, the gains will compound. The secret of investment success is this: do not lose money. This assumes that growth is inherent in capitalism. But economic growth is not inherent. It is the outcome of a combination of factors: private

property, the enforcement of contracts, stable money, future-orientation, entrepreneurship, and the rule of law. Where these exist, there will be economic growth if negative sanctions are avoided: war, plague, and famine. These negative sanctions are restricted by God in response to a society's obedience to His Bible-revealed law.

The prophets offered dominion, but only on God's covenantal terms. Israel rejected these terms. Their inheritance was removed in 70 A.D. It was transferred to the church. The same covenantal terms apply. The same interrelated system of law and sanctions applies. The same offer applies: repentance and dominion.

PRIORITIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW

Other Books by Gary North

- An Economic Commentary on the Bible, 31 vols. (1982–2012)
 Marx's Religion of Revolution (1968, 1989)
An Introduction to Christian Economics (1973)
 Puritan Economic Experiments (1974, 1988)
 None Dare Call It Witchcraft (1976)
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PRIORITIES AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW

GARY NORTH

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This book is dedicated to

John Schaub

a businessman who has his priorities straight

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INTRODUCTION

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. 6:33).

A. The Centrality of God's Kingdom

Jesus made it clear that seeking God's kingdom is priority number one for the individual. Most people today and in the past have not acknowledged this fact, not even to themselves. They suppress the truth that their own nature and the creation reveal about God (Rom. 1:18–25).¹ This does not mean that Jesus was wrong about mankind's top priority. It means only that most men are in rebellion against God.

Evangelical Christians too often believe that God's top priority is the salvation of men. This is a man-centered viewpoint, a kind of baptized humanism for Christians. It makes them think that they are the center of God's concern. They are not. God is the center of God's concern. *The universe is theocentric.*

If the salvation of men were God's primary concern, then He is surely suffering a massive program failure, for comparatively few people so far have been saved. The glory of God, which includes hell (Luke 16:23) and the post-final judgment lake of fire (Rev. 20:15), is God's chief priority. The salvation of men is God's means of extending His kingdom in history, but the way in which it is built, which includes the eternal destruction of those who oppose His kingdom, is part of God's decree. As Paul wrote, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:17–18). The destruction of His enemies glorifies God.

Jesus defined a person's personal salvation in terms of entering

1. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press. [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

into the kingdom of God. This kingdom is *spiritual* because men enter it through the Holy Spirit. “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). It is also *eternal* (Rev. 21; 22). It is also *historical*. As the parable of Lazarus and the rich man indicates, men enter God’s kingdom only in history (Luke 16:19–31).² *There is continuity between the historical and eternal aspects of God’s kingdom.* This continuity will be revealed for all to see at the Second Coming/general resurrection (I Cor. 15:40–50) and the final judgment which immediately follows: the corporate spiritual inheritance of the saints (I Cor. 15:51–57).³ There is also continuity personally: heavenly eternal rewards will be handed out in terms of a person’s earthly productivity in building God’s historical kingdom.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:11–15).⁴

Finding and then building the kingdom of God in history is the central theme of the New Testament, culminating in the fulfillment of the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22). This theme is an extension to the gentile world of a commandment and promise of the Old Testament: the building of God’s city, Zion. This theme is ultimately a recapitulation of the pre-Fall dominion covenant: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26–28).⁵ Adam, as God’s agent, was assigned this task representatively for all mankind. Through their adoption by God, God’s people are commanded to extend His kingdom.

God’s kingdom is not limited to the church or the Christian family. It is all-encompassing. God is the creator. Everything that He created is part of His kingdom. To deny this is necessarily to affirm that Satan, through Adam’s rebellion, possesses a legal claim to part of the creation. He does not have such a legally valid claim. Adam was merely God’s steward, not the original owner. Adam could not forfeit to Satan what he did not own. God’s kingdom is therefore co-extensive with the earth: every realm in which men work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Wherever there is sin, there is an area fit for reconquest.

B. All These Things

Man’s top priority is seeking, finding, entering, and building the kingdom of God, but a legitimate secondary priority is the accumulation of wealth, in history and eternity. “All these things” is a comprehensive promise. This is the reward to God’s people for kingdom-building. As redeemed men build it, step by step, they are provided with additional capital by God. The same system of *positive economic feedback* that Moses announced to the Israelites also applies to the New Covenant: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁶

“All these things” summarize *the ultimate success indicators for the church in history*: the spoils of a spiritual war and the fruits of the church’s labors. The accumulation of wealth is a positive sanction of God’s covenant. Rewards are designed to increase covenant-keeping men’s faith in God’s covenant. The compounding of wealth, including population, is a sign of God’s covenantal presence, whenever this wealth is accompanied by faith in God. But compound growth becomes a snare and a delusion when it is stripped of its kingdom-building context. When men move from the kingdom of God to the king-

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

dom of man, marked by a shift from theonomy to autonomy, their wealth testifies against them, and compound growth accumulates negative sanctions in history and eternity. The greatest Old Covenant model of this covenant-breaking autonomy is Egypt. The disinheritance of Egypt at the exodus involved a restitution payment for the enslavement of the Israelites.

C. The Kingdom of God

The Gospel of Matthew,⁷ written by a former tax collector, is dedicated to the theme of God's kingdom in history. The other Gospels touch on the same theme, but this Gospel makes it central. The movement from the kingdom of man to the kingdom of God was illustrated by Matthew's visible transfer of allegiance from Caesar to Christ. A symbol of this transfer of allegiance was Matthew's decision to leave the money table and join the disciples.⁸

The kingdom of God is central to history, Matthew teaches. This means that the kingdom is in history, and it shapes history. It overcomes resistance in history. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Gates are defensive. Hell has gates. Satan's kingdom is on the defensive today. The gates of hell are historical, part of the historical conflict between good and evil. The conflict is now. The church will not batter down hell's gates in the nether world. There is no point of contact between heaven and hell beyond the grave; a great gulf separates them (Luke 16:26). So, the points of conflict are historical. The gates of hell must refer to the kingdom of Satan in history.

The church is never said to have gates, but because of their pessimistic eschatologies, millions of Christians have a mental image of a besieged church, whose gates cannot be battered down completely by Satan's agents. This outlook reverses the imagery in the text. The church is on the offensive in New Covenant history; Satan's forces are on the defensive. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church *in history*. This points inescapably to postmillennialism.

More than the other Gospels, Matthew's is explicitly postmillennial. That is because its theme is the kingdom of God. The kingdom par-

7. I capitalize Gospel when I am speaking of a book of the Bible, in contrast to the general good news (gospel) of Christ.

8. Chapter 21.

ables of Matthew 13 assert *historical continuity*, meaning that there will be no Rapture into the clouds prior to the general resurrection and final judgment. The imagery of the mustard seed and the leaven (Matt. 13⁹) indicates *the growth of the kingdom*: from a tiny seed to a tree, or the leavening of the world's dough. Both images are distinctly postmillennial: a world steadily transformed by a process of continuous growth. As the world is transformed by the gospel, the gates of hell are rolled back.

D. The Dominion Covenant: Discipling the Nations

Matthew's Gospel is the only Gospel in which the Great Commission is announced (Matt. 28:18–20). This call to discipling the nations is comprehensive.¹⁰ It is the New Covenant's application of the dominion covenant.

I have called Genesis 1:26–28 a covenant. Why? Man here takes no covenantal oath to God. No negative sanctions are listed. This is because the covenant here begins with God. Man was not yet created. The members of the Godhead—the language is plural—agreed to make man in their image. There was hierarchy: man under God and the creation under man. There was a law involved: to multiply and subdue the earth. The sanctions were announced only after Adam was created: possession over everything except the forbidden tree, but death for the violation of this sacred boundary. There was an inheritance implied through multiplication: the whole earth subdued by Adam's heirs.

This pre-Adamic covenant defines man and his relation to the creation. The other four covenants require some sort of self-maledictory oath between man and God. Man calls down God's negative sanctions, should he break the oath's terms. This was not true of the dominion covenant. It did not require an oath-bound ratification on man's part. God enumerated the sanctions on man's behalf: *inherit the earth or lose your life*. God spoke on behalf of Himself and man, thereby ratifying the covenant representatively. Mankind through Adam could break the specific terms of the Edenic covenant, and did, but there is no way that he can ever escape the general dominion covenant in history. Only in hell can covenant-breaking man escape it: the negative

9. Chapter 30.

10. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

sanction of impotence.

Through Adam's breaking of this covenant in Eden, mankind now faces death. The gospel of Jesus Christ comes with the offer of life. Men are to choose life. This requires each person's ratification of a new covenant: oath-bound subordination to God through His only-begotten son. This new covenant does not annul the original dominion impulse of the broken covenant. It reaffirms it in the Great Commission. The subduing of the earth must proceed corporately: the disciplining of the nations. Nations must be formally brought under the terms of the New Covenant. This is achieved by the four oath-bound covenants: personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil.

E. Christian Social Theory

This emphasis on the socially transforming effects of the gospel makes the Gospel of Matthew an important document in presenting the legal basis of an explicitly Christian social theory. The author was a Jew. More important, he was a Levite. His name in the other Gospels is identified as Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). He was probably a member of the priestly tribe. This is why the Gospel of Matthew is the most Hebraic of the four Gospels. It is more concerned than the others with the kingdom promises given to Israel that the church has now inherited (Matt. 21:43).

This emphasis on the kingdom is why the book has such a strong emphasis on the continuity of God's Old Testament law. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17–18). Matthew is the first book in the New Covenant. This is as it should be: its theme of judicial continuity between the two covenants is strongly emphasized. The book was written on the assumption that its readers would be familiar with the Old Covenant.

The development of Christian social theory begins with the assumption of judicial continuity between the two covenants. Without the continuing judicial authority of the Old Covenant, it would not be possible to develop an explicitly Christian social theory or an explicitly Christian economics. The New Covenant does not abandon Old Covenant social law. On the contrary, it assumes that those sections of the law that were not uniquely tied to Mosaic Israel's seed laws and land

laws are still in force. This is why a detailed understanding of Matthew is so important for the development of Christian economics. The Gospel of Matthew moves from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant by way of the transfer of the kingdom from national Israel to the church (Matt. 21:43).

F. Three Questions

There are three questions that every decision-maker should ask himself before establishing a plan of action:

What do I want to achieve?
How soon do I want to achieve it?
How much am I willing to pay?

The first question is the issue of priorities. The Gospel of Matthew raises the issue of priorities again and again. There are individual priorities, but there are also corporate priorities. Covenants are made by individuals, but only one covenant is between God and man alone: the covenant of salvation. The three others are corporate: church, family, and state. Taken as a unit, these four comprise one covenant: the dominion covenant. They define covenant-keeping man.

If men as individuals do not get their priorities into conformity with God's priorities for them, then their efforts will produce inferior results. This is true of societies, too. Covenant-breaking men seek to build a kingdom on behalf of other gods. All other kingdoms must fail. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Dan. 2:44–45). God has established that His people shall inherit the earth.¹¹ To build on behalf of another god is to build as the Canaanites built: so that God's people might inherit the work of other men's hands (Deut. 6:10–11). This is why "all these things" shall be added unto His people—not just in eternity but progressively in history.

11. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

Conclusion

This Gospel is most obviously the transitional document between the Old Covenant and the New: *the transfer of Israel's inheritance to the church*. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). As such, this Gospel is crucial for our understanding of covenantal cause and effect in history. Christian economic theory must begin with the assumption of judicial continuity—sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and inheritance—between the two covenants. Without this continuity, Christian economics would be some baptized version of autonomy. It would be no more permanent than the minds of autonomous men. Matthew's Gospel provides considerable information on the nature of covenantal continuity.

I see the dominion covenant as undergirding all four oath-bound covenants. In the Old Covenant, it was more obviously familistic and tribal. In the New Covenant, it is more openly ecclesiastical. This is because the church is the new family of God. The Gospel breaks apart the unanimous confession of the Mosaic family covenant (Matt. 10). But, ultimately, the dominion covenant defines man as God's agent in history who must subdue the earth representatively on God's behalf. The dominion covenant was sworn representatively by the persons of the Godhead on behalf of mankind: "Let us make man in our image." This was the original covenant—prior to church, family, or state. Men may seek to substitute other gods, but in the final analysis, there are only two: God and Mammon.

1

STONES INTO BREAD: POWER RELIGION

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:1–4).

The theocentric principle of this law is the centrality of the law of God in man's life. This is point three of the biblical covenant: law.¹

A. The Wilderness Experience

The story of the wilderness temptation appears in two of the four Gospels: Matthew and Luke. This event was a recapitulation of the temptation in the garden. But there were differences. First, Jesus was not in the midst of plenty. Second, He was suffering from hunger. Adam had labored under neither of these burdens. There was a third important difference: there was no intermediary tempter. This time, Satan did not use a serpent as his covenantal agent, nor was there a woman involved. He approached Jesus directly. In short, Jesus was tempted under especially difficult circumstances.

The issues were these: Whose word should man use to help him set his priorities? Was the priority of immediate gratification worth the act of transforming stones into bread? Or was there a higher priority? What is the main source of man's satisfaction: earthly assets or the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

word of God? Here Jesus gave us the answer: God's word. Our desires in life must be met by relying on God's word, not by relying on whatever we own or whatever we can obtain on our own authority. *The ultimate source of treasure in life is God's word.*

In this first temptation, the devil did not ask Jesus to do anything inherently wrong. Jesus subsequently used His supernatural power to turn a few loaves of bread and a few fishes into a meal that fed thousands (Matt. 14:21). Then He did it again (Matt. 15:38). Why did the devil use this temptation to begin the series? It was a matter of historical context. The question before Jesus was the question of causation. Which is more fundamental, power or obedience? Jesus made it plain: obedience. The word of God is superior to autonomous power. It is also superior to a man's temporary desires. By appealing to the Bible, Jesus made it plain that He would not sacrifice law to expedient power.

The context of Jesus' scriptural citation was the wilderness experience of the Israelites. Moses recounted to the conquest generation the miracles of God in sustaining the people in the wilderness for four decades. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3).² That is, God had granted them a miracle—manna—which they made into bread. The manna had demonstrated God's power over nature and history. It also demonstrated His grace to His people.³ They could trust Him to sustain them. In the future, they would need bread, but they had needed it in the wilderness, too, and God had supplied it supernaturally.

God had made it plain to them: He is sovereign over history. He had given them His law at Sinai.⁴ His law is sovereign over history. To gain the blessings of God in history, men must obey His law (Deut. 28:1–14).⁵ What sustains man in history is God's specially revealed word, which includes His specially revealed law.

The heart of the wilderness experience was not the manna or the clothes that did not wear out. The heart of that experience was the

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986).

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

self-discipline of having faith in God. The transfer of authority from the exodus generation to the conquest generation came through the latter's experience of a daily miracle: manna. They had grown up in the context of miracles. But, upon entering the Promised Land, submitting to circumcision, and eating Passover, the Israelites were immediately cut off from the miracle of manna (Josh. 5:12). They would henceforth eat the fruit of the land. To remain in the land, they were required to obey God's revealed law (Deut. 8:19–20).⁶

Jesus reminded the devil of the requirement for maintaining the kingdom grant: obedience.⁷ *Prosperity is not a matter of power; it is a matter of covenantal obedience.* His power over the stones was unquestioned. The devil did not suggest otherwise. In fact, the temptation rested on the presupposition that Jesus possessed such power. The nature of this temptation was an appeal to power. This was one more example of the power religion vs. the dominion religion.⁸ Jesus refused to invoke power rather than ethics.

B. Miracles as Welfare⁹

The exodus from Egypt to Canaan is a model of the move from slavery to freedom. The model for a free society is not found in Israel's miraculous wilderness experience, where God gave them manna and removed many burdens of entropy.¹⁰ The predictable miracles of the wilderness era were designed to humble the people before God: subordination. The wilderness experience was not marked by economic growth but by economic stagnation and men's total dependence on God. They were not allowed to save extra portions of manna, which rotted (Ex. 16:20). On the move continually, they could not dig wells, plant crops, or build houses. At best, they may have been able to increase their herds, as nomads do (Num. 3:45; 20:4; 32:1). The wilderness experience was a means of teaching them that God acts in history to sustain His people. The wilderness economy with its regular miracles was not to become an ideal toward which covenant-keepers should strive. Israel longed for escape from the wilderness. It was

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 17:C.

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion*, pp. 1–3.

9. This section appeared originally in North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21:B.

10. On entropy, an aspect of the second law of thermodynamics, see Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

God's curse on the exodus generation that they would die in the wilderness with full stomachs and like-new clothes.

The wilderness economy was a welfare economy. The Israelites were supplied with basic necessities even though the people did not work. But they lacked variety. People without the ability to feed themselves were fed by God: same old diet. People without the ability to clothe themselves were clothed by God: same old fashions. Israel wandered aimlessly because the nation had refused to march into war against Canaan (Num. 14). They were not fit to lead; so, they had to follow. They were welfare clients; they had no authority over the conditions of their existence. They took what was handed out to them. As is so often the case with welfare clients in general, they constantly complained that their lifestyle just wasn't good enough (Num. 11). They had been unwilling to pay the price of freedom: conquest. God therefore cursed them to endure four decades of welfare economics. The only good thing about the wilderness welfare program was that it did not use the state as the agency of positive blessings. No one was coerced into paying for anyone else's lifestyle. God used a continuous series of miracles to sustain them all. There was no coercive program of wealth redistribution. Israel in the wilderness was a welfare society, not a welfare state.

The lure of the welfare state remains with responsibility-avoiding men in every era. It was this lure which attracted the crowds to Jesus. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:26). They wanted a king who would feed them. They viewed Jesus as a potential candidate for king because He could multiply bread. They associated free food with political authority, which was the same presumption that the urban proletariat in Rome was making. If accommodated, this outlook would end in political tyranny and national bankruptcy. Jesus knew this, so He departed from them (John 6:11–15).

Men in their rebellion against God want to believe in a state that can heal them. They believe in *salvation by law*—civil law. They prefer to live under the authority of a messianic state, meaning a healer state, rather than under freedom. They want to escape the burdens of personal and family responsibility in this world of cursed scarcity. They want to live as children live, as recipients of bounty without a price tag. They are willing to sacrifice their liberty and the liberty of others in order to attain this goal.

One mark of spiritual immaturity is the quest for economic miracles: stones into bread. The price of this alchemical wealth is always the same: acceptance of magic. Modern welfare economics teaches that the state can provide such miracles through positive economic policy, i.e., by taking wealth from some and transferring it to others, either directly or through monetary inflation. This belief is the presupposition of the Keynesian revolution, which dominated twentieth-century economic thought after 1950. The self-taught economist (B.A. in mathematics) John Maynard Keynes actually described credit expansion—the heart of his economic system—as the “miracle . . . of turning a stone into bread.”¹¹

When Israel crossed into the Promised Land, the identifying marks of their wilderness subordination were removed by God: the manna and their permanent clothing. *This annulment of the welfare economy was necessary for their spiritual maturation and their liberation.* The marks of their subordination to God would henceforth be primarily confessional and ethical, beginning with circumcision (Josh. 5:8). The only food miracle that would remain in Israel would be a triple crop two years prior to a jubilee (Lev. 25:21). God promised to substitute a new means of Israel’s preservation: economic growth. No longer would they be confined to manna and the same old clothing. Now they would be able to multiply their wealth. The zero-growth world of the welfare society would be replaced by the pro-growth world of covenantal remembrance.

C. Something for Nothing

The devil offered Jesus a familiar temptation: something for nothing. Jesus could easily have taken something common and without economic value and converted it into something valuable. A stone was a common item in the wilderness. It commanded no price. There were more stones available at zero price than there was demand for them. Not so with bread. Bread commanded a price. For a hungry man with money to spend, bread commands a high price if there is only one seller. In the wilderness, Jesus was hungry. He presumably would have paid for bread, but either there was no nearby seller or He had no money. How would He relieve His hunger?

11. Keynes (anonymous), *Paper of the British Experts* (April 8, 1943), cited in Ludwig von Mises, “Stones into Bread, the Keynesian Miracle,” *Plain Talk* (1948), reprinted in Henry Hazlitt (ed.), *The Critics of Keynesian Economics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1960), p. 306. (<http://bit.ly/HazlittCKE>)

The answer was obvious to the supreme master of the power religion: convert stones into bread. Say the word, and it would be done, Satan told Jesus. Just say the word. Invoke power. But under these circumstances, this would not be power from above; it would be power from below.¹² Why? Because of the context of the temptation. This was a recapitulation of the setting of the Fall of man. Adam had the power to eat the forbidden fruit, but he lacked the lawful authority to do so. Jesus had the power to turn stones into bread; like Adam, He also lacked the lawful authority to do so. Why? Was He not God? Yes, but He was also man. He was under authority. This authority was judicial. He was under the word of God, the authority over man.

Satan was suggesting a shortcut to satisfaction: no work, no payment of money, no delayed gratification. All it would cost was . . . what? A return to the welfare society of the wilderness. The Israelites had been sustained miraculously, but they had no other way to survive. The wilderness could not sustain them. Miracles could. To gain wealth in the Promised Land, they were required to work (Deut. 8:10). The miracle of the manna had ceased. The mature way to wealth is through sacrifice of present consumption for the sake of future income: thrift. The devil was offering Jesus miracles in the wilderness as a way of life. This meant leaving the devil in control of society through his disciples: the power religion. There would be no righteous conquest through covenant-keeping. All Jesus had to do was formalize the power religion to satisfy his hunger. He refused.

What is the basis of life? God's grace. It is an unmerited gift.¹³ Grace precedes law. But law always follows grace. Man maintains his grant from God through obedience to God.¹⁴ This ability to obey is also a form of grace. The basis of the church's extension of God's kingdom in history is the grace of God through the predictability of His sanctions. Obedience to the word of God is the basis of wealth. Anything that detracts from this social cause-and-effect relationship should not be trusted.

God's grace is unearned by its recipients. They gain something for nothing. Jesus paid something; men receive it for nothing. *Because all life rests on grace, the concept of something for nothing is inherent in*

12. R. J. Rushdoony, "Power from Below," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I (Summer, 1975).

13. The gift is unmerited by fallen man. It is merited by the perfect life of Jesus Christ in history.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 17:C.

creation. The sun, moon, and stars were made for man (Gen. 1:14–17). But, ever since the Fall of man, there has always been a price required by God for every benefit enjoyed by any creature: *the death of an acceptable sacrifice*. God has a doctrine of something for nothing: grace grounded in a substitutionary atonement. The devil was asking Jesus to substitute his version of something for nothing in place of God's version. Yet Satan's offer was and is an illusion: a price must be paid for whatever men receive from him. Satan is no less a recipient of God's common grace than man. He does not deserve life, power, or time, but God grants these gifts to him. He owns nothing on his own; God supplies him with everything.¹⁵ So, the person who believes in Satan's version of something for nothing—the invocation of supernatural power to achieve man's autonomous ends—has become his servant. His servants will pay the price in eternity.

D. Living by God's Word

The devil asked Jesus to substitute power religion for dominion religion. Just say the word, he suggested. But the word that counts most is God's word, not man's word, Jesus replied. As a creature who is dependent on the creation, man lives by bread, but not by bread alone. He lives by God's word. *This is a denial of the twin doctrines of common grace and natural law as stand-alone principles of social order.* Man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Modern man wants to find laws that operate autonomously from God's word. Modern economics is a self-conscious attempt to reason about social cause and effect without any appeal to morality or the supernatural. But such an attempt is an illusion; it always imports values through the back door. Specifically, in order to justify public policies by means of an appeal to economic science, economists pretend that political representatives can make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of other individuals' subjective utility, as if there were a common value scale across independent, autonomous people. But no such value scale exists.¹⁶

Similarly, in political theory, some men still appeal to Stoic principles of natural law and natural morality. The state is supposedly not

15. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

16. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

to invoke God's word as the basis of legislation and judicial decision-making. The natural law theorist insists that man can live apart from every word that proceeds from God's special revelation. Not only can man do so, he must do so. Any appeal to the Bible as a standard above the common reason of all mankind is said to be an illegitimate appeal.¹⁷

To invoke a hypothetical common moral reasoning process, let alone agreed-upon logical conclusions, of covenant-breaking man, is comparable to commanding stones into bread. Modern man believes in stones into bread on this basis: a world not under God's Bible-revealed law. He wants his daily bread only on these terms. Jesus announced that man does not live by bread alone. This means that man cannot live by his own word. Any appeal to man and man's wisdom as the source of bread is an illegitimate appeal. Eventually, such an appeal will produce hunger in history and terror in eternity.

Conclusion

Jesus here denied the validity of power religion in its supernatural form: *magic*. But, by appealing to the word of God, He also denied power religion in its natural form: *autonomy*. Man lives by bread, but also by every word that God has uttered. God's word is the supreme form of wealth. It is intangible wealth. It is more fundamental than tangible wealth, even bread in the life of a hungry person. When man forgets this, he eventually suffers the consequences in history and eternity.

This passage does not dismiss bread as irrelevant. On the contrary, bread is said to be a source of life. Jesus referred to Himself as the bread of life (John 6:35, 48). But the word of God is superior to bread as a source of life. It was not bread that had sustained Jesus in the wil-

17. Wrote Norman Geisler, a premillennial follower of Thomas Aquinas: "The cry to return to our Christian roots is seriously misguided if it means that government should favor Christian teachings. . . . First, to establish such a Bible-based civil government would be a violation of the First Amendment. Even mandating the Ten Commandments would favor certain religions. . . . Furthermore, the reinstitution of the Old Testament legal system is contrary to New Testament teaching. Paul says clearly that Christians 'are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14). . . . The Bible may be informative, but it is not normative for civil law." Norman L. Geisler, "Should We Legislate Morality?" *Fundamentalist Journal* (July/Aug. 1988), p. 17. He continued: "What kind of laws should be used to accomplish this: Christian laws or Humanistic laws? Neither. Rather, they should simply be just laws. Laws should not be either Christian or anti-Christian; they should be merely fair ones." *Ibid.*, p. 64. For my response, see North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 66:I.

derness; it was God's word, which He proved by using it against Satan. This passage places bread in subordination to word. It therefore places tangible wealth in subordination to the intangible wealth of God's verbal revelation.

Jesus invoked God's word to defeat Satan, who suggested a way to eat bread without a recipe (planning), grain, or labor: something for nothing. Jesus rejected this religion of magic. He proclaimed a religion of faith and ethics, word and deed. To live biblically means to obey God. This is the basis of true wealth in its broadest meaning.

The top priority here is the substitution of covenantal faithfulness for power. Obedience is primary; positive sanctions in history are secondary. The lawful means of gaining what we need and want is our reliance on God's word. In economic theory, this means the rejection of all explanations of national wealth that are based on an appeal to the productivity of autonomous, God-ignoring schemes or philosophies. This outlook rejects the humanist ideal of the state as a healer, and also the libertarian ideal of the state as a morally neutral night watchman.

2

RISK-FREE LIVING: POWER RELIGION

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God (Matt. 4:5–7).

The theocentric principle of this law is God as the deliverer: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Tempting God

This is the second wilderness temptation in Matthew. It is the third in Luke's Gospel. I think the chronological sequence in Matthew is more likely. The temptation began with tempting Christ's to resort to magic: stones into bread. The second was God's to invoke deliverance of Him by way of angels. The third was open worship of Satan: the heart of the matter.

The offer here was risk-free living. This is a long-desired goal for man. It cannot be attained in this life, but risk-reduction is a universal practice. The modern science of statistics was initially developed by men who were seeking to lower their risk.² Risk-reduction does not come at zero price. The question is: How high a price? What was Satan asking Jesus to exchange in order to demonstrate His legal claim to

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

this promise? What was this demonstration worth to Jesus? Did Jesus even possess such a legal claim to this promise? If He did, why did He surrender it here?

Jesus answered the devil in the first temptation by an appeal to the Bible, i.e., the word of God. Having allowed the text of the Bible to establish this principle of authority, He cited the Bible again: “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” The full text of the verse throws light on the context. “Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah” (Deut. 6:16). The context of the Israelites’ infraction was their cry for water in the wilderness, and their accusation that God had to prove Himself by the provision of water.

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not? (Ex. 17:1–7).

God provided them with water. Moses struck the rock, and water flowed out of it. This was a demonstration of God’s power. But it was a demonstration that condemned them to second-class citizenship. They became psychologically dependent on repeated supernatural displays of God’s power over nature. They did not learn to trust His covenant law. They learned to complain again and again, whining for their desires. “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Ps. 106:16). They never grew up. Even Moses was later snared by their commitment to magic as a way of life. He struck the other rock twice to draw water out of it, despite the fact that God had told him to

speak to the rock, not strike it (Num. 20:10–12). He used ritual instead of relying on God’s word—the essence of magic.³

B. To Protect the Messiah

The devil cited a portion of Psalm 91.⁴ This is sometimes regarded as a messianic psalm. It refers to long life for the person spoken of. But long life was what was *not* granted to the Messiah in his role as redeemer. Jesus died young. How could this passage have applied to Him? “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. **With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation**” (Ps. 91:10–16).

1. A Suffering Messiah

Satan cited a verse which, if applied literally to Jesus, would have meant that He could not serve as the Passover’s sacrificial lamb, a young sacrifice. The Mosaic Covenant’s sacrificial animals were young.⁵ If this passage applied literally to Jesus in His pre-resurrection phase, then it meant that the world would not have a savior. He would survive the fall from the temple, but mankind would not survive a Messiah blessed with longevity. Israel might gain a long-lived king; it would not gain a savior.

The difficulty in interpreting this prophecy as messianic is the opposite message in a crucial messianic prophecy, a prophecy of substitutionary atonement.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 11.

4. Luke’s citation is from the Septuagint, Psalm 90:11, 12. See William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 238.

5. Leviticus 1:14; Numbers 28:19; Numbers 29:13; Luke 2:24.

root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:1–12).

If this applied to Jesus, then the prophecy in Psalm 91 either did not apply to Jesus in His office as Messiah, or else it applied as an inheritance that He abandoned. The question is, if the passage in Psalm 91 did not apply to Jesus, to whom did it apply? No one in Old Covenant history claimed it as his own. If not Jesus, then who? I conclude that this psalm offered this set of unique conditions to Jesus, but He refused to claim the inheritance as His. He refused it here, and in response, God the Father refused to honor it on Calvary. On the cross, Jesus called out to God: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46b). God remained silent. Yet the passage affirms: “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation” (Ps. 91:14–16). This promise was no longer in force. Why not?

Because Jesus forfeited any claim to it by fulfilling the role of the suffering Messiah. So, the psalm was not messianic.

2. A Leap of Faith

Satan proposed a test. If Jesus failed it, there would be no substitutionary sacrifice, no execution. There would only be a dead body on the ground. On the other hand, if Jesus survived, then He was a premature heir to this promise, and therefore He could not be the prophesied lamb led to the slaughter. It was a lose-lose situation for Jesus, and a win-win offer for Satan. Jesus declined to accept the challenge.

Jesus cited the law against tempting God. Yet Gideon had doubted and had proposed a pair of tests involving a fleece (Jud. 6:37–40). What is wrong with such demonstrations of God's intentions? Nothing, just so long as the information desired has not been revealed authoritatively in the Bible. Gideon had no way to be sure that he was speaking to a representative of God. There was no written revelation that applied to his situation. Not so with Jesus. He knew that the verse cited was applicable to Him, but only as a statement of the protection available to Him, not as a prophecy the actual details of His life. He was not going to prove its applicability in a way that might produce His immediate death or validate His non-messianic long life. Neither result was appropriate for His work on earth.

The reason why this leap of faith would have constituted the tempting of God was because such a life-or-death test was imposed by man on his own authority. The Israelites had made this mistake: "Is God with us?" they had asked. "Let him prove it by offering us life-sustaining water." But God had already done so: at the Red Sea. The life-sustaining water for Israel was the death-inducing water for Egypt. They had seen this miracle, but it no longer made any impression on them. They required another test. And another. There would be no end to the required tests if the Israelites of the exodus had anything to say about it.

Their addiction to miracles was very great. It was part of their slave's mentality. The slave relies on someone else to sustain him with capital. He is not ready to become an independent person. The exodus generation had not been willing to accept the responsibility of war against Canaan (Num. 14). They had to wander for a generation until they died off.

Jesus was not addicted to miracles for His own sake. He provided

them for Israel's sake. He used them to establish a covenant lawsuit against Israel. "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:23–24). That generation would die in its sins as surely as the exodus generation had.⁶

C. Life Has Risks

Life has risks. We dash our feet against stones. We slip and fall. Because of sin, we suffer the negative sanctions of pain and failure. We suffer death. In this sense, we live a high-risk existence.

Satan was offering Jesus risk-free living. For the Messiah, such risk-free living would mean the death of man. The Messiah was to experience separation from God on behalf of man—the ultimate risk. For Him, there was no escape, so that for His people there is an escape. There was no way that Jesus could live risk-free and still perform His work as redeemer.

Men want to lower their risks. This is legitimate, in the same sense that seeking to lower any of our costs is legitimate. But to seek risk-free living is to seek slavery and death. It is comparable to seeking cost-free living. Such a quest is demonic in history: the overcoming of sin's curse without overcoming sin.

The most successful technical means of reducing risk is economic growth. We gain more wealth, which can be used to shield us from unpleasant events. Then there is the discovery of the laws of mathematical probability.⁷ This has greatly reduced risk. But no means of risk reduction should be elevated above God's offer of protection: not insurance, not wealth, not power. Any rival source of risk reduction will eventually be worshiped by man. It will then demand sacrifice.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a vast bureaucracy was created by law that seeks to reduce risks for all people under the jurisdiction of the state. But risks must be borne by someone. The cost of paying for unforeseen negative events must be borne by someone. Increasingly, the state insists that it will pay for the errors of men. The

6. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

7. Bernstein, *Against the Gods*.

state imposes taxes on the successful in order to compensate those who have failed. This is not an insurance transaction in which men contract with each other through a third party to insure against statistically predictable losses. It is not a transaction based on a cost-benefit estimation of those who are asked to pay. The costs are imposed by coercion on those who do not possess effective political influence.

This coercive wealth redistribution policy raises costs. Employers bear a heavy load of responsibility in the government's many systems of risk reduction. So, employers seek out employees who are less likely to be injured, fail, or in other ways cost the employer extra money. Those who are required to pay seek ways of excluding from the arrangement those who are statistically more likely to be paid.

The modern administrative law order has extended the definition of social risk and has extended its net to haul in more people to bear such risk. Men seek to be protected by the state's many economic safety nets, yet they also seek to escape the nets tossed out to entrap those with capital. The end of such a game of hide and seek is sure: the increase in the number of those who are promised safety and the loss of freedom for those who are required to pay. At some point, the safety net will break, breaking men's faith in the state, and breaking the state's nets of entrapment. When this happens, all those who are dependent on the broken safety nets will find themselves weak and defenseless against social change. The very collapse of the nets will accelerate social change, increasing risks for all.

Conclusion

The Messiah had to bear risks. The messianic state must also bear risks. The Messiah did not attempt to test the existence of a safety net from God. He bore His own risks and ours as well.

The messianic state seeks to transfer risks to taxpayers and others with capital. The result will be an unprecedented disaster. Hundreds of millions of people have been lured into one or another of the state's safety nets. When these nets break, those caught inside them will have a great fall.

The top priority of this passage is to live by God's word, but not by expectations of abnormal supernatural intervention. A religion of risk-defying acts in defiance of God's law is a religion of magic. Biblical religion is not magical. It does not rely on man-invoked supernatural miracles to enable man to achieve the good life. It also does not invoke the

state as a provider of safety nets against the economic results of either risk-avoiding failure⁸ or needlessly risky foolishness.

8. The parable of the talents: the man who buried his (Matt. 25:18). See Chapter 47.

3

THE KINGDOMS OF MAN: POWER RELIGION

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:8–10).

The theocentric principle of this law is the absolute sovereignty of God: point one of the biblical covenant.¹ He is not to be trifled with for man's purposes. He is not to be called to account by man—the message of the book of Job.²

The choice here was obvious: the kingdom of God vs. the kingdoms of man. The test involved an assessment of costs and benefits. A present-oriented power-seeker would have picked the kingdoms of man. Jesus did not choose this. We can infer several reasons for this refusal.

A. Who Owns the Earth?

This is the third wilderness temptation in Matthew. It is the second in Luke's Gospel. I believe the account in Matthew is chronologically more likely. It ends with Satan's offer of all of man's kingdoms. This seems to be the culminating offer available to Satan.

It is obvious that this vision of the kingdoms of man was no earthly

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

vision. The earth is a globe. There is no earthly mountain that allows you to view all of man's kingdoms at one time. This was a representative mountain, the pinnacle of man. It was what the Tower of Babel was meant to be: "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4).

This was a place where man would imitate God, viewing his kingdoms.

On what legal basis did Satan make this offer? None. It was a lie. He did not possess either the power or the authority to reward Jesus for worshipping him. He did not possess such power, for he is a creature under God. He did not possess such authority, because he is in rebellion.

Then why is Satan described as the prince of this world (John 12:31; Eph. 2:2)? Because mankind transferred covenantal allegiance to him through Adam. Adam surrendered allegiance to God and substituted allegiance to his own judgment. But in doing so, he merely substituted the worship of Satan for the worship of God. Adam was in a position to choose whose word he would accept: God's or the serpent's. He was never in a position to establish himself as lord of creation. God alone has this authority. To imagine that man possesses it is to substitute foolishness for wisdom. It is to worship power rather than lawful authority. But Satan possesses more power than man. Man will lose this contest. Power religion is Satan's religion. Man cannot come out on top in this religion.

Because God delegated authority to man, Adam possessed the ability to switch his allegiance. In doing so, he came under the dominion of sin. Sin now rules man. Satan and his fallen cohorts exercise power from time to time, but man's sin is their avenue to power in history. This is why Paul wrote: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:12–14). This describes a spiritual war. It is a spiritual war fought on the battleground of ethics. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

So, when Satan offered the kingdoms of man to Jesus, he was offering to give to the last Adam (I Cor. 15:45) what the first Adam had surrendered to him. If Jesus had accepted the offer, He would have recapitulated the Fall. This offer was a variation of the serpent's original offer: to render unto Satan what belongs to God. The worship of Satan was implicit in man's acceptance of the truth of the offer, both in the garden and on the mountain. In the name of man's sovereignty, Satan lured Adam into subordination to him. He tried this again with Jesus.

B. No Other God

Jesus' answer was clear: only God may be lawfully worshipped. The kingdoms of man must be formally restored to their previous legal condition: a unified kingdom of God. There is one God, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). There is therefore only one legitimate kingdom in history. Any man who seeks to exercise sovereignty over all the kingdoms of man is calling for unification of these kingdoms under himself. He has fallen for the old lure, "ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5).

Jesus had come to restore covenantal unity to the kingdoms of man: *a unity of confession*. He was God's agent in this restoration. His was the kingdom prophesied by Daniel. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). Any man who would challenge the establishment of God's kingdom in history would be wise to heed Daniel's warning to Nebuchadnezzar: "That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:25).

There is no other God. There is no other permanent kingdom. But there are pretender gods. There are pretender kingdoms. Satan was a pretender god offering Jesus pretender kingdoms. Jesus did not accept the offer, for He knew the truth: there is no other God but God. Satan could not deliver on his promise.

C. The Lure of a Kingdom

In a frequently quoted but rarely believed passage, Jesus warned,

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). Men build sand castles and call them kingdoms. These may be large sand castles or more modest ones. But their fate is the same: to be washed away (Matt. 7:25–27).

This warning was not given only to that handful of men in history who believe they are in a position to build a kingdom. It was given to every man who believes that he can construct walls around his life that cannot be penetrated by his enemies. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11). The only possessions that are guaranteed to stand the test of time are stored outside of time. “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:20–21).³

Satan’s offer of all the kingdoms of this world was a last, desperate attempt to retain his power. This was his third appeal to a man who had previously refused to invoke magic to feed himself, and had also refused to invoke the Bible to gain risk-free living. What else was left? The lure of a universal kingdom: the desire to make a name for oneself. If this temptation failed, Satan would be out of relevant temptations. It failed.

This temptation has been used again and again in history to lure men to destruction. In the twentieth century, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao all sought to build permanent kingdoms, and all failed.⁴ The kingdoms of man all suffer the same fate: to be swallowed up by time.

Satan’s lure is a powerful one. Arrogant men build political kingdoms in confidence. Fearful men build economic kingdoms because they know no other way. The effort in both cases is futile. Economic kingdom-builders are afflicted by a kind of madness. “A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease” (Eccl. 6:2). The rich man builds up an inheritance for others. He cannot control what his heirs will do with this accumulated wealth.

3. Chapter 13.

4. Hitler’s promised thousand-year reich lasted from 1933 to 1945. Stalin’s kingdom lasted from his access to power 1928 to its collapse under Gorbachev in 1991. Mao’s still exists in name and as a military force, but his successor, Deng, allowed the peasants of Red China to adopt capitalist ownership in 1979. Private ownership of the means of production spread rapidly through the Chinese economy. So did an economic boom. So has the Christian church.

D. Wealth, Safety, and Power

The first temptation had to do with the creation of wealth. If man can take stones and turn them into bread, he escapes the curse of nature. He returns to the garden of Eden on his own authority, on his own terms. The second temptation offered life without the risk of pain. Man escapes another curse of nature. If he then rules over all of men's kingdoms, he replaces God. He imposes curses and blessings as a sovereign.

The first temptation offered pure autonomy to Jesus: on His own authority, to turn stones into bread. The second asked Him to acknowledge His physical subordination to God and the angels, but not His ethical subordination: forfeiting His messianic redemptive assignment. The third got to the covenantal point: His worship of Satan. The previous temptations had sought to lure Him away indirectly from the worship of God. This one called Him to break covenant with God openly.

The first temptation involved the sin of magic. The second was ethical: tempting God. The third was political. The first two offered to place Jesus outside of nature's constraints. The third offered to place Him outside of history's constraints. All three offered Him below-market costs of living. Food, safety, and power could be His for the asking. But there is never something for nothing outside of God's grace. There was an implied exchange: the surrender of Jesus' soul. This exchange is always a bad bargain. The hidden costs are eternal.

Why did Satan believe that Jesus might fall for one of these temptations? Did he believe that Jesus' perfection was vulnerable? He must have. He understood that Jesus was a representative of the race of man. He believed that he had an opportunity to lure Jesus into a recapitulation of the Fall of man: the acceptance of power religion. Satan has great faith in power. These were the lures that tempted him. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:12–14). This was Isaiah's warning to Babylon (Isa. 13:19). But to warn Babylon, he invoked the imagery of the archetype of all political kingdom-building: Satan's rebellion. I conclude that Satan must view God's exercise of

power as power for power's sake, not as extensions of God's character. He is himself blinded ethically by the lure of power. Satan's religion is the power religion.

Conclusion

Jesus did not substitute allegiance to Satan for allegiance to God. He understood the fundamental principle of biblical religion: man's covenantal subordination to God. Man is under God (Gen. 1:26–28). He is required to honor God by worshipping Him as the sovereign Creator. Jesus refused to break covenant with God by adopting either magic or empire-building politics, which are forms of the power religion. He recognized the hidden costs of the power religion: the loss of one's soul. Power religion publicly offers something for nothing. In fact, it demands something supremely valuable (eternal soul) for something far less valuable (temporary power). *Power religion is ultimately a religion of nothing for something*. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. 13:12).⁵

Our priority as covenant-keepers is to affirm the kingdom of God by shunning the kingdoms of man. We must seek to transform man's kingdoms through evangelism. This is not a call to pietistic withdrawal from social involvement. On the contrary, it is a call to worldwide dominion in history—a dominion guaranteed by Christ for His people.⁶

5. Chapter 27.

6. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

4

MEEKNESS AND INHERITANCE

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

The theocentric focus of this passage cannot be meekness as such, for God is not meek. What, then? It has to be meekness before God. Humanist theologian John C. Raines has written of Calvin: “Calvin understood the Christian life not as ‘a vessel filled with God’ but as an active ‘tool and instrument’ of the Divine initiative. But this is precisely our point. Active toward the world, the Christian knows himself as utterly passive and obedient toward God, whose Will it is his sole task to discover and obey.”¹ This is the heart of the matter: subordination under God and His law: hierarchy.² Dominion is by covenant. The result is inheritance: point five.³

Inheritance is a blessing. Inheriting the earth is a very large blessing. It has to be corporate. It has to be ecclesiastical. It is the people of God, members of the church, who inherit. The issue here is historical. Is this inheritance historical? Or is it confined to the post-resurrection world, after Satan and his angels have been consigned to the lake of fire? Subordination is surely historical. What about inheritance?

A. Subordination to Unrighteous Men

The passage that we call Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was delivered to an assembly of Jews who were living under Roman rule. Jews

1. John C. Raines, “From Passive to Active Man: Reflections on the Revolution in Consciousness in Modern Man,” in Raines and Thomas Dean (eds.), *Marxism and Radical Religion: Essays Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 114.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

3. Sutton, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

had not lived under their own kings for over half a millennium. What they knew was political weakness. They had learned how to survive as subordinates to foreign rulers.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was filled with the imagery of pain and weakness. The beatitudes—"blessed are the . . ."—were a series of contrasts between the pain of the present and hope for the future. This future was earthly as well as heavenly. The phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," in Matthew was used as a synonym for the kingdom of God, which was not confined to the realm of departed spirits or the post-resurrection world. The promise of earthly inheritance had been placed by God before Israel for fourteen centuries. It was a kingdom promise. They would not have imagined that the following referred exclusively to the post-resurrection world: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:3–12).

The contrast here was between life under unjust men and life under God's rule. Injustice must be borne patiently, but life on earth need not be forever unjust. The promise of a world to inherit made it clear that there is hope for the Christian in his work. The contrast between the present and eternity appears only in the final verse, which deals with persecution by Jews. The persecution of the prophets had been a continual problem in the Promised Land, which was one reason why Israel was living under Roman rule. God had applied sanctions to the nation for this transgression of His law: the law of false witness. Israel had killed the true prophets and had honored the court prophets.

Matthew 5:5 is not confined exclusively to Israel. Its offer of earthly hope is valid in every age in which Christians suffer because of their faith. The kingdom of heaven is not an exclusively Jewish phe-

nomenon.⁴ But the focus of the passage is on the contrast between times of suffering and a future era of victory. Compared to the promised future blessings, the suffering of God's people is a minor affair. It is also temporary.

B. Under God, Over the Creation

Matthew 5:5 is an extension of the dominion covenant: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26–28).⁵ Man was created by God to extend His kingdom on earth. Man is God's agent in history. He is under God and over the creation.

Matthew 5:5 should not be interpreted in terms of a personality trait. It is not a statement that identifies a group of people who share this trait as those best equipped to run the world. *Biblical meekness is a matter of law*. The people who will inherit the earth are those who acknowledge themselves as subordinates to God and His law, and who use their knowledge of His law to subdue the earth to God's glory. Biblical meekness is correctly understood in relation to Jesus Christ: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29).⁶ Just as Christ acknowledged His subordination to God the Father, so are we to take Christ's yoke and imitate Him. Our position as covenantal subordinates to a sovereign God is supposed to create in us an appropriate sense of inner peace: "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,

4. Traditional dispensationalism drew a sharp contrast between the kingdom of heaven in Matthew and the kingdom of God in the other gospels. The kingdom of heaven supposedly referred only to Israel before Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70 and to a future millennial era after Jesus returns in person to set up an earthly kingdom. This contrast has faded in the writings of dispensationalists ever since the publication of the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

6. Chapter 25.

which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Pet. 3:4).

Jesus was not meek when He twice used a whip to drive the moneychangers out of the temple area, at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:15) and at the end (Matt. 21:12).⁷ There was nothing meek about His use of pejorative language against His opponents: hypocrites (Matt. 15:7), whited sepulchres (Matt. 23:27), serpents, generation of vipers (Matt. 23:33), thieves (Mark 11:17), sons of the devil (John 8:44). Jesus' rhetoric was inflammatory. He did not hold back verbally in His rejection of the rabbis' authority over Him. On what basis could He have lawfully used such language against the religious rulers of Israel? Only on the basis of His office as the judge of Israel. He was in authority over them because He obeyed His Father perfectly. When they tried to silence Him, He spoke out in public. When they told Him to speak, He remained silent (Matt. 27:12). He was not meek before them; He was a thorn in their flesh, challenging their ethics and their willingness to teach the truth about the Bible.

C. Under the Creation, Over God

The covenant-breaker worships idols. Schlossberg calls these idols of nature and idols of history.⁸ Ancient man believed in local spirits that exercised rule over him. Modern man believes instead in impersonal forces that exercise rule over him: meaningless, purposeless forces. Or he may trust in impersonal chance or impersonal fate, just as classical man did.⁹ He fears the state, just as classical man did,¹⁰ for it is the most powerful institution that man lives under. In all of these cases, he does not worship a God who created everything out of nothing by the power of His word. The god of covenant-breaking man always shares power with the creation. To the extent that mankind can gain power over the creation, man becomes co-regent with this god.

Man seeks to worship a god with enough power to assist him in his quest to gain power. But this god is not to be so powerful that he lays down the law to man. Some law, yes, but not comprehensive law. Man

7. Chapter 42.

8. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

9. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957), p. 159. (<http://bit.ly/CNCCACC>)

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy*, 2nd ed. (Vallecito, California [1971] 2007), chaps. 2, 3. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

is therefore willing to subordinate himself to nature in order to escape complete subordination to God. He invents gods of nature in order to escape the God who created nature. Paul wrote:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:18–23).¹¹

One of the themes of modern evolutionary humanism is that man is a destroyer of nature. He is a polluter who seeks his own ends at the expense of nature, which deserves respect as an equal, if not a superior. The ecology movement is a reaction to society's perceived exploitation of nature. The "deep ecology" movement, while tiny, is dedicated to the proposition that modern society is evil because it refuses to become subordinate to the forces of nature. Man is not supposed to use science to extract from nature the resources necessary to sustain a middle-class lifestyle for large numbers of people. The deep ecologists correctly observe that man in his self-proclaimed autonomy is a destroyer. But their answer is not to recommend placing man and society under God through the four oath-bound covenants—personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil—but to place mankind under an implicit covenant with nature. In some cases, nature is seen as alive, having a hidden agenda. "Mother nature" is seen as more than a phrase; it is seen as a personal force. This borders on nature worship and animism—a very ancient religion. Sometimes it crosses the border.

When men subordinate themselves to any aspect of the creation, they become idolatrous. They seek both power and meaning apart from the God who created nature. They ignore the Bible as the source of law. They reject God's demand that man exercise dominion over nature. They reject the suggestion that man alone is made in God's im-

11. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

age, and that he possesses lawful authority over nature on this basis. In short, they place God in the dock and seek to bring a covenant lawsuit against God by bringing one against His people and His Bible.

D. Inheritance and Meekness

Inheritance is point five of the biblical covenant model. Deuteronomy is the book of the inheritance in the Pentateuch, and it is the fifth book in the Pentateuch.¹² It is also the book of God's law. "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 16:18–20).¹³ The Psalms repeat this theme.¹⁴

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).

Conclusion

Jesus here set forth a principle of Godly rule: meekness before God produces authority over creation. The hierarchy of authority from God to man to nature implies that man must be meek before God and confident before nature. Covenant-keeping men are to be confident in their prosecution of covenant lawsuits against God's enemies. They are not to be meek before the shepherds of the goats of this world. They are to be meek before the Shepherd whose voice they recognize (John

12. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 39.

14. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 2.

10).

The promised reward for such behavior is the inheritance of the whole world, which is the judicial basis for the church's progressive working out of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28).¹⁵ This will finally be accomplished after the final judgment, but there is *a down payment in history*: the New Heavens and New Earth.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands (Isa. 65:17–22).¹⁶

15. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 4.

16. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15; cf. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

5

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men (Matt. 5:13).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ "And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. 2:13). This is point two of the biblical covenant.

A. Salt and Sanctions

Salt is an aspect of covenant sanctions. Salt is a two-fold sanction: positive (flavor) and negative (permanent destruction). The parallel passage in Mark is even more terrifyingly explicit: "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark 9:47–50).

Jesus here referred back to the offerings of the temple (Lev. 2:13). Salt confirmed the Old Covenant: "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee" (Num. 18:19). How did salt confirm the Old Covenant? By being present in the burnt offerings, which were negative sanctions applied to dead animals rather than dead men. The salt provided savor; God then consumed these sacrifices. The imagery is that of a God who delights in the burning flesh of the damned. This is harsh imagery, which modern man rejects. Jesus did not reject it. To it He added the worm that refuses to die.

There is no question that salt in the Old Covenant was a testimony to God's covenant. It testified to the negative sanctions and the positive sanctions. The sanctions were positive for covenant-keepers, negative for covenant-breakers.

Jesus contrasted savory salt with tasteless salt. Tasteless salt is good for nothing but to be trodden down by men. It once was a source of savor; it becomes a means of destruction, just as it was in the ancient world. Salt was used to destroy the land's productivity: "And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt" (Jud. 9:45). In this sense, salt was a negative sanction of a covenant.

B. A Nation at Risk

Savorless salt: this is Jesus' description of covenant-keepers who cease doing God's work. They are fit for destruction as agents of destruction. They are cast out and walked over, driving them into the earth to destroy the earth's productivity. They become signs of God's wrath against hypocrisy. He uses them as a victorious ancient army used salt: to seal the cutting off of the enemy's future.

The context of Jesus' remarks was the nation of Israel. Israel was under negative sanctions: Roman rule. It had been under foreign rule since the captivity. Jesus was speaking to residents of a defeated nation. Israel was the salt that had lost its savor. It was fit for grinding underfoot. This grinding had already begun. In A.D. 70, the process was completed, judicially speaking,² although it took until the failure of Bar Kochba's two-year rebellion for the Romans to disperse the nation completely in A.D. 135. Jesus was warning the nation that the day of judgment was coming. It was time to repent. The Sermon on the

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

Mount was a call to repentance, to a new way of life. Those who were trodden down would rise up. Those who were being treated badly would see God: victory. There was hope available, but to claim it, men would have to become salt. They would have to add flavor to others' food. They would have to become a benefit to others.

Jesus was telling Jews that Israel was doomed. Their righteousness would have to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Unless they became positive sanctions among men, they would become negative sanctions among men. They would be trodden down as examples. This, the Romans did a generation after Jesus spoke these words.

C. Good Works in the Salt Shaker

The heart of the matter was righteousness. The metaphor was savor.

1. Salt Is Good

Salt is good, Jesus said, but it must be salty. It must add flavor. When it ceases to be marked by flavor, it ceases to be useful as a positive force. It is then useful only as a negative force. Jesus went on to use another analogy: the candle under a bushel. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16).³ Salt without savor is analogous to a hidden light: useless.

The issue here is good works. Good works are the saltiness of holy salt, the brightness of light. Without these positive characteristics, salt and light are good for nothing, i.e., destructive. Good works performed by God's judicial representatives testify to His goodness. Bad works testify falsely to the true character of God. False witness is to be avoided. The negative sanction against false witness is the punishment that would have been applied to the victim. "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sin-

3. Chapter 6.

neth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. 19:15–21).⁴ Therefore, the penalty for false witness against God is death, as Adam learned.⁵

2. *Good Works Reflect God*

Good works reflect God, who is the source of every good gift. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Evil does not come out of good. Jesus said this repeatedly. "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 7:17–19).⁶ "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). Christian commentators identify the corrupt tree as Israel, but Israel itself was an example of a more inclusive phenomenon: God's destruction of the unrighteous.

3. *Covenant-Keepers*

The person who identifies himself as a covenant-keeper must keep

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), Appendix E.

6. Chapter 18.

the laws of God (Matt. 5:17–18).⁷ Israel's problem was not sin in general. That problem was what the gentile nations represented. Israel's problem was the visible discrepancy between its covenant standards and its behavior. That is, Israel's problem was visible unrighteousness in the name of righteousness, evil works in the name of good works. Israel as a nation was like the unclean man who drew near to the temple: the closer he came, the more dangerous was his unclean legal status. Eventually, he had to be stopped from drawing closer, or else God would destroy him. "And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?" (Num. 17:12–13). If many unclean people were allowed to draw near, God would depart from the temple. This was what took place a generation later, in A.D. 70.⁸

This is as true under the New Covenant as it was under the Mosaic Covenant. God brings negative sanctions against those who do evil in His name. But these verses indicate that more is required than merely avoiding evil. It is not sufficient to do no evil in God's name. Covenant-keepers must do good works. They must bring positive sanctions in history. To fail to do this is the judicial equivalent of doing evil. There is no neutrality. There are no neutral acts. This is the message of Matthew 25, which describes the final judgment.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matt. 25:41–46).

4. Good Works and Salvation

Then do good works save men? Absolutely. Without good works,

7. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

8. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

men cannot enter heaven. Then is salvation by good works? Absolutely. James was explicit in this regard. “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:18–24).

The theological question is this: *What is the source of these good works?* The New Testament’s answer is clear: the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Mosaic law perfectly. God imputes—declares judicially—Christ’s comprehensive and representative good works to covenant-keepers at the moment of their conversion. As surely as Adam’s sin is imputed judicially by God to all men who are devoid of saving grace,⁹ so is Christ’s righteousness imputed to covenant-keepers. The doctrine of imputation holds for both groups: covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers.¹⁰ For covenant-keepers, this is the doctrine of *definitive sanctification*. Covenant-keepers are told to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). This is the doctrine of *progressive sanctification*. The Sermon on the Mount is a guide to working out this salvation.

Saving *faith* in Christ is faith in the saving *works* of Christ. This is why theological liberalism cannot save. The liberal asserts his faith in Jesus, called the Christ, but this Christ is said to be an imperfect man who did not serve as man’s judicial representative before God. He was a great moral teacher, we are told, but He was not fundamentally different from what we are. He was not perfect, just as we are not perfect. He was evolving, just as we are. Liberal faith is judicial nonsense. Faith in a Christ who was not a perfect sacrifice on God’s altar does not save man from God’s eternal wrath. Faith in a blemished sacrifice does not save anyone. It is faith without works—Christ’s perfect works. Christ is the vine; His people are the branches (John 15). The

9. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1959] 1992).

10. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 124–25.

perfection of the vine is the source of the branches' fruit. There is consistency between vine and fruit. The goodness of the fruit testifies publicly to the perfection of the vine. *Bad fruit testifies to an imperfect vine, which is false testimony.* This is why God the Father brings negative sanctions in history and eternity against those who testify falsely about the moral character of His Son.

D. Good Words, Good Works

“Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6). The imagery of salt as something positive is retained in this passage. *There must be consistency between word and deed.* Good words must not be refuted by bad works. The issue of consistency is basic to the Sermon on the Mount. This is not logical consistency; it is *ethical* consistency. Verbal testimony is confirmed by visible testimony. This is why salt must not lose its savor, and candles must not be hidden under baskets.

The works of Jesus confirmed His words. Consider the miracles of feeding and healing. He brought positive sanctions into the lives of those who could not buy them. Some of these sanctions were not available at any price. *The magnitude of His words were confirmed by the magnitude of His works.*

And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men (Matt. 9:2–8).

Covenant-keepers are to imitate Christ. While only rarely can they perform miracles of healing, they can offer acts of healing at no price to the recipients. Like Jesus, they can bring healing to those who cannot afford to pay. Again, Matthew 25 is the model:

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye

blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:33–40).

Jesus' works confirmed His words. His words alone could have condemned all mankind, but He offered *saving words*, and these required *saving works*. The covenant has sanctions. These sanctions are historical. Jesus brought positive sanctions and occasional negative sanctions to confirm His words. The negative sanction against the fig tree was representative of what would come upon Israel in a generation.

And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there. Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. 21:17–22).

There is a tendency among Protestants to separate good works from good words. This is partially the result of a deep and abiding antinomianism: Christianity as a covenant with neither law nor sanctions. It is partially the result of a doctrine of Christ's salvation that ignores the imputation of His perfect works to covenant-keepers. The result of such a truncated doctrine of the covenant is salt without savor, i.e., positive confession without positive sanctions. God brings comprehensive negative sanctions against hypocritical faith. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James

2:20). Dead faith is publicly buried by a living God.

E. Good Works in Charity and Business

Charity is a good work. When men give away their time or wealth in the name of Christ, they testify to their faith in God. They proclaim their confidence that “there’s more where that came from.” As covenant-keepers, they affirm the cause-and-effect nature of wealth in history: wealth as a public affirmation of the covenant. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).¹¹ He testifies to his faith in the linearity of growth: wealth, obedience, greater wealth, greater obedience.

Charitable giving lowers men’s resistance to the gospel. It opens doors. Men begin to ask themselves why the person is showing such charity. His acts of charity impress them. They know that selfless giving is a good thing. They want to know why the individual is confident that his giving will not reduce him to poverty.

There is another factor: imitation. Men may begin to imitate the giver. They perceive that the world is better off because of charity. They may test the proposition with respect to their own lives. This is positive for them and for society.

In business, charitable dealing is also beneficial. There is a phrase known to those who do repeat business: “Leave something on the table for the other guy.” Business success is usually dependent on repeat business. The cost of generating a new customer is high. The cost of generating a repeat sale is much lower, but only if the buyer is happy with the first exchange. So, the wise businessman is careful to deliver more than he agreed to in the original contract. He adds an extra benefit. This impresses the buyer, who gets more than he paid for. He can afford to do business with this seller. His risks are reduced, meaning that his costs is reduced. When a seller decreases the buyer’s price of doing business, he gains more business.

Jesus spoke of going the extra mile with the tyrant. The same principle applies to business. The buyer perceives that he can trust the seller. He is willing to send more business his way. In business, there is a procedure for reducing risk called *tit for tat*: repayment in kind. If a seller drives a hard bargain this time, the buyer will drive a hard bar-

11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

gain next time. The best way for both parties to secure a stream of benefits from each other is to give more in exchange.

Conclusion

The top priority here is to become flavorful salt. This requires extra effort on the part of covenant-keepers. Later in this sermon, we read: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19–21).¹² Jesus laid the groundwork for this conclusion in the earlier passages. This is one of those passages.

The issue here is salt as a positive or negative sanction in history. Salt can supply flavor or it can destroy growth. God wants it to supply flavor. His people are to allocate their assets of money and time to those kingdom-building works that have personal consequences in eternity because such works have social consequences in history. The salt of the earth must not become salt in the earth. God’s people are to make the world a better place than it was before they arrived on the scene. This mandates progress in history.

God’s covenant is a covenant of salt. Salt flavors and it also destroys its enemies. It brings both positive and negative sanctions. As it extends through society, it satisfies the good and destroys the evil. God uses savorless salt to cut off rival kingdoms, but this is no comfort to the savorless salt.

12. Chapter 13.

6

THE CITY ON A HILL

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14–16).

The theocentric focus of this passage is an aspect of God: light. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:5–7). Men are to represent God: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Imagery of Light

The first image is that of a world-illuminating light. The second is a city on a hill. The third is a candle in the darkness. The entire passage clearly rests on the imagery of light, including the image of the city. The imagery of the city implies a city at night, a place surrounded by darkness. Men light candles for their homes, and these lights testify at a distance to the existence of a city. At night, men cannot see the buildings of the hilltop city, but they see its lights. A candle is singular and testifies only to its owner. A city full of shining candles testifies to the existence of the city. Similarly, an individual does good works, testifying to his own righteousness, but taken together, those who do

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

good works jointly testify to something larger than any one individual: the city of God.

Jesus called each of His listeners to a life of good works.² He reminded each of them regarding the power of a candle in a dark house. It gives light to everyone in the house. That is, one person's good works improve life for those around him. The righteous individual positively affects others. But in calling many men to good works, Jesus reminded them of the corporate effect of their good works: to illuminate the city on a hill. Those who do good are not alone. They are part of a larger entity. Good works are cumulative and reinforcing.

A candle's light is a positive thing in a dark place. In the brightness of the day, men do not light candles. Flames on candles can barely be seen in the daylight. But at night, one candle can keep many people from stumbling. The darker the surroundings, the greater the positive sanction of light. To a community in great darkness, a candle makes life easier. Men will be less likely to stumble, to grope slowly in confusion, and to be rendered nearly powerless. The positive sanction of one candle becomes a benefit to many. This is what Christ's analogy of the single candle was intended to convey.

There is a famous saying: "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." But for some, darkness is a blessing. It hides their evil deeds. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:17–21). For evil-doers, light is a negative sanction. This is another good reason to light a candle.

The candle imagery emphasizes the benefits to many from the righteousness of one. But there is more to the corporate aspect of the sanction of light than what is provided by the solitary candle. In a city, many people light candles. The light of one candle has positive effects beyond the room of the house. Windows allow a light to shine outside

2. Good works are predestinated by God: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

the house. The distant traveller can see many household lights on the hill. He knows the location of his destination. He is not yet at the gates of the city, but he can see it.

One candle benefits many in the house. Many candles in the same city benefit those at a distance, if that city is on a hill. Jesus was conveying to His listeners the idea that they would not be alone in their righteousness. The good deeds of one person would have a greater effect because of the good deeds of another. How much light is sufficient to be seen at a distance? Not much. Consider military strategy. It was the policy of the Germans and the Allies in World War II to bomb cities from the air, despite the presence of civilians. Saturation bombing was a standard tactic of both sides in Europe. Bombers that flew at night were harder to shoot down than those that flew by day, but their bombing was less accurate. It was difficult for them to identify their targets. A light in a window identified a potential urban target. A cluster of lights made the area a target. This is why European cities had blackouts. No one was allowed to light a light in his home unless the home's windows were sealed by black curtains or black paper. If a light could be seen from the street, it was illegal, for it could be seen from the sky.

B. The Free Rider Problem

The person who lights a candle benefits himself. He makes his own way clearer. But there are “free riders” in his house: beneficiaries who do not pay. They, too, are able to see more clearly. Because of their status as family members or guests, the man with the burning candle is content to let them enjoy the light as a gift. But there may also be beneficiaries outside his house. Those on the street outside have a little more light because it shines through his window. Also, while one candle may not be seen at a great distance, many candles can be seen. Men in a city on a hill who light their individual candles thereby produce an unintended consequence: those travelling to their city can locate it. This is a free benefit to the travellers and to those who rent out lodging in the city.

1. The Free Rider

The free market economist struggles with the theoretical problem of the free rider. He believes with all his heart, mind, and soul that there is no such thing as a free lunch or a free light. Someone must

pay. If some people benefit from another person's expenditure without paying for it, they will tend not to provide that service for themselves. Thus, less of it will be produced than people are willing and able to buy. The economist sees this free service as an inefficient solution to society's problem of allocating scarce resources.

His conclusion is theoretically unjustified because he cannot measure interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. No such collective scale exists. No unit of measurement exists even for the individual. An individual is unable to measure exactly how much more he values A over B. Therefore, the economist has no way to speak scientifically of a society's benefits or losses. He has no way to measure aggregates of subjective utilities.³ Yet, with few exceptions, economists offer politicians suggestions for economic policy whenever asked, and even when they are not asked. To put it bluntly, the economist is faking it, but he gets away with this deception because all of his peers are faking it, too. They pretend that their individualistic epistemology can lead to state-imposed solutions for collective problems.⁴ This is not to say that the real-world problem of the free rider does not exist. It does exist, but humanistic economic science is unable to solve it and also remain consistent with its presuppositions.

If someone can benefit from another person's actions, should he be compelled by the state to compensate the other person? In most cases, says the free market economist, the answer is no. But, he asks, what about those cases where the capital owner will not perform the service unless he is paid? If all of the beneficiaries of his action are not compelled to pay, why should any of them pay? But if none of them pays, the service will not be provided. Society—a conceptual aggregate—obtains less of the service than its members would be willing to pay for if all of them were compelled to pay. The classic example is national defense. If money spent by citizens A through M to defend their city also protects citizens N through Z, why shouldn't citizens N through Z be compelled to repay citizens A through M for N through Z's share of the costs of the defense project? If they refuse to pay, citizens A through M may not pay. The city will then be defended less effectively.

The economic problem here is the identification of ownership.

3. Murray N. Rothbard, "Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics" (1956), in Rothbard, *Economic Controversies* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 2011), ch. 17.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

Citizens A through M do not own all of the property that the enemy's bombers may target. If citizens A through M cannot protect their portion of the city from bombing without also protecting the lives and property citizens N through Z, shouldn't the latter be asked to pay their share of the anti-aircraft equipment and operations? Citizens A through M cannot establish ownership of the territory owned by citizens N through Z. They also cannot effectively protect just one part of the city. But without the funding by citizens N through Z, the anti-aircraft system is too expensive for citizens A through M to build, i.e., they are unwilling to fund it. Everyone is less safe because members of the second group refuse to pay. If anyone in the city can easily escape the economic burden, few people will voluntarily contribute.

2. Negative Civil Sanctions

To solve the dilemma of who should pay under which conditions, we must invoke biblical covenant theology. We begin with this presupposition: *the state does not have the authority to bring positive sanctions*. Its God-given task is to impose negative sanctions on convicted evil-doers. In this light, the invading military force is an evil to be destroyed, i.e., placed under negative sanctions. An anti-aircraft system is a negative sanction against enemy bombers. It is the civil government's function to protect everyone under its jurisdiction from foreign governments that would otherwise impose negative sanctions against the legitimate state and the residents it protects. Defense expenditures buy the implements of negative covenantal sanctions, i.e., the means for the suppression of evil. The expenditure-reducing effects of the free rider must be reduced. The free rider must be compelled to contribute his share of the defense against evil.

This is not an argument against the legitimacy of the free rider in the area of positive sanctions. If I want to paint my home, thereby improving the value of other real estate in my neighborhood, this is not a legitimate reason for me to threaten civil sanctions against those neighbors who do not choose to pay me to paint my home. It is also not a legitimate reason for me to seek government intervention to force every neighbor to improve his home, so that my expenditure will not be wasted. There is no covenantally legitimate reason that would justify the state's coercion in this matter. The free riders should be allowed to enjoy the ride.

When those living in a city on a hill light candles to light their

homes, travellers at a distance become free riders. The men who light those candles have no legal claim on the income of those being guided by their lights. Besides, how could any traveller know how much to pay any particular candle owner? The government could collect a “candle tax” at the gates of the city, distributing a prorated share to all candle lighters. This would create a bureaucratic nightmare, with candle-lighters adding unneeded candles if the subsidy is made on the basis of candles actually lit. Also, there would have to be a candle police unit to search the town for cheaters who collected the light-a-candle subsidy without actually lighting all of their candles.

Because of the private property system, a free rider lawfully enjoys access to a positive sanction paid for by someone else. As long as this sanction is positive and no fraud or violence is being imposed by the beneficiaries on the provider of the benefit, the civil government has no legitimate role in allocating access to or payment for the benefit. But when the sanction is negative against outsiders, such as invaders, the state sometimes has a legitimate role in imposing defense costs on free riders.

3. *The Positive Sanction of Grace*

This text imposes an obligation on the recipients of God’s grace. They must light candles. They light them for themselves, but they must rest content that others may freely benefit from the light. In this way, the city on a hill will remain a beacon to the lost.

The entire world is a free rider on God’s grace.⁵ The fact that God did not immediately kill Adam and Eve testifies to their status as free riders in history. *Common grace is the doctrinal basis of free rider economics*. God grants life, power, knowledge, and time to covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers alike. He then calls on His people to do the same. *Good works to others are visible signs that God’s people acknowledge their status as free riders*. “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8).⁶

C. Cumulative Good Works

The more candles burning, the less the darkness. Each person’s in-

5. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

6. Chapter 22.

dividual candle removes some darkness. The farther away from the source of light, the dimmer the surroundings. For someone to get through the town without stumbling, every household must light a candle close to a window. The more burning candles, the safer the wanderer. There will be fewer lost people and fewer crimes committed by the haters of light.⁷

The spread of the gospel is to be accompanied by the spread of good works. These good works add up. They make life in the community of saints more pleasant. Even those who do not share the confession of faith are benefitted. They see the good works of the faithful, and they glorify God (v. 16). This is what God wants.

Darkness is driven out by light. Darkness is not the equal of light. It cannot withstand light. The power of light is positive; darkness is a negative factor. Darkness exists only where there is no light. God dispelled darkness on the first day of creation (Gen. 1:3). It took a positive act to accomplish this, but this positive act was triumphant.

There is a problem with light, however. As more candles are lit, each one provides a reduced percentage of the total light. The law of diminishing returns sets in. In the initial phase of the candle-lighting process, each candle reinforced the growth of light, driving away shadows that the first candles produced. But as more and more are lit, they may even bother the guest. All he can see is a sea of candles. There comes a point when it does not pay to light another candle, other things being equal. But, down the road, things are still dark. There, the brightness has not penetrated. Men are to take their candles to dark areas where there is no light. The extent of the darkness is so great that any extra candles always have a role to play, though not in the local area. We are to export light by exporting our candles.

Jesus was calling for world evangelism. It was not merely that His listeners were to light their candles. They could carry their candles, nicely lit, to help others light their candles. Like a torch used to light other torches, so is the gospel. The light of candles can also light a candle-producing factory throughout the night. Two or three shifts of candle-makers can be employed in winter months, when the nights are long.

The law of diminishing returns is even a factor in the production of righteousness. It leads to a kind of apathy about doing more good works. As the environment in which we live gets less threatening, we

7. There may be more fires.

become complacent. But there is so much darkness in this world, so much work to be done, that there is always a place for another candle. It just may not be in the house or city where candles are common.

As good works multiply, society is transformed. Just as candles placed in the windows of every home will throw light onto the streets, thereby reducing crime, so are good works. They have a spillover effect. As each person follows God's lead, those around him are benefitted. There is no way that Christianity can transform souls only. Souls-only evangelism is an impossibility. The cumulative effect of good works is to reform society.

D. A Model for Other Cities

A well-lit city on a hill will attract visitors. This will decrease income for residents of dark cities in the valleys. Those who see the benefits of living in a city on a hill will move to one. Others will try to imitate it. The competition for righteousness grows because of the positive effects of righteousness. Good works have good consequences.

Actions that produce positive sanctions are worth imitating. This is why light is superior to darkness. The forces of darkness have an advantage only because men are born sinners. But this advantage is offset by the negative effects of sin. The consequences of sin are such that people seek to avoid them. More and more, they seek the fruits of righteousness without the ethical roots. Bank robbers like to drive on safe streets, even if they drive too fast immediately after their bank robberies. Criminals want access to physicians whenever they get sick or are shot. No one wants to live in darkness all of the time.

The city on a hill stands out. It becomes a working model for other cities. So does righteousness. That was Jesus' point. It was not that righteousness brings persecution every time. On the contrary, those who persecute the righteous will eventually fail. In a world of liars, truth-tellers have an advantage. In a world of slothful people, industrious people have an advantage. In a world of sloppy work, the careful producer has an advantage. That anyone should put a candle under a basket is foolish: the only way that any light will be generated is if the basket catches on fire. What good is a candle under a basket? Similarly, what good is salvation without good works? Salvation without good works is as foolish as a burning candle under a basket. It takes an act of stupidity to place a burning candle under a basket. It defeats the purpose of lighting the candle, and it also threatens the basket. Similarly,

it takes an act of stupidity to hide one's salvation by refusing to do good works. It is not merely that personal salvation will always produce good works, i.e., positive sanctions; it is that it takes a self-conscious act of stupidity to restrict salvation-generated good works. Such an act is contrary to the essence of salvation. Jesus told His opponents: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:11–13).⁸ The city on a hill is supposed to reveal God's grace in action. Good works are attractive to fallen men. Good works are a form of evangelism, just as God's law is (Deut. 4:4–8).⁹ Rare is the man so judicially blind that he does not appreciate good deeds—if not shown to him, then at least to his children. Members of other nations, other religions, and other ways of life are to see the good works of Christians, and say: "This is a better way." Light is better than darkness.

Conclusion

The imagery of light applies to the city as well as the candle. It is corporate as well as individual. Individual salvation is supposed to produce social salvation (healing). The difference between Christianity and its rivals should be as clear as the difference between light and darkness. The city on a hill is worth imitating. The burning candle is worth removing from under the basket. Christians are supposed to let their lights shine, despite the free rider problem. Those around Christians are supposed to be the recipients of common grace: the crumbs that fall from the tables owned by Christians. If others are blessed because of the righteousness of covenant-keepers, God is pleased. What the economists call *externalities*—unowned overflow—should increase in the presence of covenant-keepers. These should be positive externalities. Negative externalities we call pollution. The civil government should act to reduce negative physical externalities—at some price.¹⁰

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 22.

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix H.

This passage's top priority for Christians is to produce light, not to get others to pay for it. This light is both spiritual and visible. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17).¹¹ The goal is an increase in the production of good fruit. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). Put another way, the goal of the passage is the increase of positive externalities. In a godly city, these become cumulative. The wealth of all is increased by the willingness of covenant-keepers to allow free riders to share the blessings of righteousness. The darkness surrounding covenant-breakers is reduced at no extra charge. It is more important for the covenant-keeper to increase light than to collect a fee from all who benefit.

11. Chapter 18.

RECONCILIATION BEFORE FORMAL SACRIFICE

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matt. 5:22–24).

The theocentric basis of this law is peace with God. This is an aspect of the peace treaty: God's covenant. The doctrine of the covenant is point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Brotherly Peace

If a man's brother is not at peace with him, then he cannot be at peace with God. His brother has a complaint against him—a cause. This has disrupted the bond between them. It has therefore disrupted the bond between the man offering the gift and God. In this sense, his brother represents God to him. If he cannot get things settled with his brother, he cannot please God with the gift. The gift is in this sense profane: a violation of a sacred boundary. The sacred boundary is the altar: the place of God's unique judicial presence. Judicial peace should prevail in this holy place. But there is no judicial peace between the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

covenant-keeper and his brother. The gift is therefore unholy. It is in this sense unclean. To offer it on the altar is to profane the altar. It must be left in front of the altar, but not burned or otherwise used by the priest or ecclesiastical representative.

This gift is in addition to the tithe. It is something special, comparable to one of the first three Mosaic offerings (Lev. 3).² The tithe is owed to God by all covenant-keepers. It is not given to win favor with God. It is given because it belongs to God by way of the local church.³

The text says to leave the gift before the altar. That is, the person is not to bring the gift, remember the brother's cause, and then decide not to offer it. He is to leave the gift before the altar, i.e., leave it behind. He is then to get matters straightened out with the brother. Then he is to return to offer the gift. The gift is no longer in his possession once he brings it to the altar. It is held by the ecclesiastical leader in charge of the altar. This gives an economic incentive to the man to get the matter settled. Until he does, he is neither to offer his gift nor take it back. It is doing him no good, either as a capital asset or as a gift to God.

It is not the responsibility of the priestly representative of God to enquire regarding the spiritual life of every covenant-keeper who comes to make an offering. The priest is not expected to know the details of every gift-offerer's life. Those making gifts are presumed innocent. But if the priest knows of a unsettled dispute between the gift-offerer and his brother, he is not to accept the gift. He is to encourage the giver to get the matter settled. But he is also to remind him to leave the gift with the church, as he had originally intended to do.

God is not in need of our gifts. This means that the ecclesiastical representative must discipline himself to do without profane gifts. He must not act as though he is dependent on profane gifts, for that would testify to the church's dependence on men rather than God. The more he is in need of the gift, the greater is his incentive to intervene to help settle the dispute. This means that the church is the institution with the greatest economic incentive to restore peace among its members and their relatives or fellow believers.

The gift-giver cannot lawfully reclaim his gift. The priest wants the gift. God will be pleased with the gift if it is not profane. The giver is

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 1–3.

3. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

now trapped. He must settle the matter with his brother. The question is: How?

B. Who Is at Fault?

The dispute is a matter of law, once the gift is brought into God's presence. The dispute must be settled lawfully. The gift-giver knows there is a dispute. Can he get it settled? Must he capitulate to the brother, just because the brother has something against him? No. But they can bring it before the church courts if they can't settle it.

The brother may be wrong. He may be at fault himself. The gift-giver is not presumed guilty by God. He is merely considered to be out of fellowship with his brother and therefore not fit to offer the gift.

The settling of disputes is a judicial matter, but it need not be settled by a court. It may have to be, however. The matter must be laid to rest if the gift is to be acceptable.

If a church court announces the terms of the settlement, and the gift-giver conforms, he is now free to offer the gift. If his brother still resents him, the gift is nevertheless valid. Some men cannot be reconciled to their brothers. They will not forgive. The gift-giver is not to be made a permanent victim, unable to offer his gift, just because his brother is stubborn. The church is not to be penalized because of an unforgiving brother. The court's declaration heals the matter judicially. This is sufficient to transform the status of the gift from profane to acceptable.

Conclusion

The top priority of this law is reconciliation of brothers. The healing of disputes within the community of the faithful is sufficiently important that the church may not knowingly accept a gift from a participant in such a dispute. Peace is more important to God than gifts. It should be more important to the church, too.

8

EARLY CONFESSION

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing (Matt. 5:25–26).

The theocentric principle of this law is the authority of God to bring eternal punishment against His enemies: sanctions. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹ God is the adversary who brings a covenant lawsuit in history against those who have broken His covenant. Covenant-breakers are warned to settle with God before the day of judgment, when they will be delivered over to the judge, sentenced, and cast into prison. In prison, a man cannot earn enough to buy his freedom.

Though it is not clear from this passage, prison here is analogous to hell. Jesus' parable of the unjust steward makes this clear: "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:34–35).

The presumption of this passage is that the listener is guilty. His adversary is God. Man does not come before God in a guiltless legal condition. Jesus warned every guilty man against refusing to make restitution to this innocent victim before the case comes before the judge.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. Discount for Early Confession

In the Mosaic law, there was a lower penalty for admitting guilt before the trial. The thief had been accused by the victim, but he had avoided a trial because he had sworn falsely to his neighbor that he was innocent. “Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour’s goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good” (Ex. 22:11).² The thief was required to repay whatever he had stolen, plus 20%. “Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering” (Lev. 6:4–5).³

The presumption here is that the thief had already sworn falsely. His adversary comes to him and demands payment. Does he have new evidence? Can he now prove that the thief had in fact stolen his goods? If so, the thief faces a greater penalty if convicted: double restitution (Ex. 22:4),⁴ plus a trespass offering—a slain ram (Lev. 6:6)—to the church in payment for the false oath.

The Mosaic law offered a discount for timely confession: before the false oath, no trespass offering was required, though restitution was. After the false oath to the neighbor, a 20% penalty was required and a trespass offering. After the trial, double restitution and a trespass offering were required. This system reduced the expense to the victim or the civil court for gaining a conviction. It lowered the price of civil justice.

B. New Evidence

The guilty man in this case thinks that he can avoid making restitution to his victim. His adversary confronts him, but still he persists in his deception. His adversary suspects that he has committed the crime. Nevertheless, the guilty party refuses to admit this and pay the

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 46.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 43.

victim.

The key question for the guilty party is this: Can the victim prove his case in a court? Has he additional evidence that will lead to his conviction? The assumption of Jesus' warning here is that the victim possesses additional evidence. Perhaps he has witnesses. Whatever he has, the victim is offering the criminal one more opportunity to "come clean." He is being given another opportunity to confess his guilt and escape from the court by means of a reduced payment. Jesus warned His listeners: accept the offer. Do not risk suffering a far harsher penalty when the judge hands down his decision.

The guilty party may think to himself, "I have successfully avoided conviction previously. I think I will avoid it this time, too. Yes, there is some risk, but I would rather bear this risk than make a settlement with my victim now." This is unwise, Jesus said. Confess now. Make restitution now.

The assumption of this passage is that the victim has new evidence—compelling evidence—and will gain a conviction. Theologically speaking, the criminal is dealing with an omniscient God who is his judge. In His court, no guilty party will ever escape conviction. The force of the passage comes from the presumption that the adversary possesses evidence that will hold up in court.

C. The Merciful Victim

The biblical principle of justice is victim's rights.⁵ The victim has approached the guilty party and has graciously offered him one more opportunity to clear up the matter. He is under no obligation to do this. He has already confronted the criminal, and he has sworn that he was innocent. This oath may have been taken in private, or it may have been taken in public. God heard it.

The victim understands this law court. It will impose the penalty of prison. In this court, the risk is permanent incarceration. Such a penalty offers no hope for the convict, other than restitution made on his behalf by a free man. This was not a Mosaic penalty. The Mosaic penalties were flogging, restitution, and execution.⁶ Jesus was speaking

5. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

6. There was a unique penalty imposed on a wife who grabbed the genitals of her husband's opponent when he and her husband were fighting (Deut. 25:11–12). The King James translators translated the penalty as cutting off her hand. James Jordan says it meant deeply cutting her hand through the palm. The word in Deuteronomy

to an audience in the Roman Empire. Rome used prisons as the means of punishment. The Mosaic law aimed at restoration through restitution to the victim. Execution was the means of delivering a convicted man into God's court. There was no prison system, precisely because prison is God's monopoly. *Hell is God's prison*. Everyone sentenced to this prison receives an eternal life sentence. There is no way to buy your way out. There is no mercy shown.

This is why the victim in this passage is merciful. He has the evidence that will convict the man. Nevertheless, he approaches him one more time to persuade him to admit his guilt and pay what he owes. If the case comes to trial, the guilty party will have no hope. The language Jesus invoked here is a sentence without mercy: payment to the last farthing—to the last penny, in other words.

What kind of person, knowing his guilt, would reject the offer? Only someone who assumes that the victim does not have the evidence. In other words, he underestimates his victim. He trusts in his own cleverness in covering up the crime. He also underestimates the severity of the court. After all, he has previously escaped a permanent penalty. Why not again?

Ultimately, Jesus was calling men to recognize Him as the victim who has the evidence necessary to convict them. The heavenly judge will recognize the legitimacy of this evidence and will convict. The criminal will surely suffer the penalty. What He was saying was that every man is guilty before God. But there is a way of escape. The guilty person can declare his guilt to the victim and make restitution to him privately. The dispute will not go to court. The case can be settled in advance of a trial.

Payment in advance assumes that the criminal is economically capable of making restitution. If he isn't, then he needs to find someone who will pay the victim on his behalf, while the opportunity for making a substitute payment is still available. After the court declares his guilt, this opportunity will be lost. The man will be cast into prison and forced to pay. But in prison, he cannot gain access to the money necessary to make this restitution payment. Hence, his punishment will be permanent. He will never get out. The language of the

25:12 is *kaph* or *kaf*, which Strong's Concordance defines as "the hollow hand or palm (so of the paw of an animal, of the sole, and even of the bowl of a dish or sling, the handle of a bolt, the leaves of a palm-tree); fig. power:-branch, + foot, hand ([-ful], -dle, [-led]), hollow, middle, palm, paw, power, sole, spoon." To cut a palm is different from cutting off a hand.

passage implies life imprisonment. The theology of the passage implies eternal life imprisonment. It implies that God is content with extracting payment through tormenting rebels forever.

Conclusion

One goal of biblical law is the early confession of guilt. A reduced penalty payment is offered to those who admit their guilt before the trial begins. Jesus warned His listeners that they should settle with their adversary early. This presumed that they were guilty.

The top priority here is gaining the admission of guilt prior to trial. The cost of obtaining justice is less when guilty men admit their guilt early. This is a benefit for the victims of crime. It is a benefit for society, which gains justice at a lower cost. He who is guilty is required by God to admit this fact early. The system of eternal judgment rests on the validity of this principle.

9

BRIBING TYRANTS

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away (Matt. 5:38–42).

The theocentric issue here is the judgment of God on a rebellious nation: sanctions. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Purpose of Tyrants

God brings tyrants to power in order to use them as rods of iron in history. Tyranny, especially through invasion and defeat, is God's response to injustice in a covenanted nation. Isaiah warned:

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets (Isa. 10:1–6).

These laws require the covenant-keeper to subordinate himself meekly to covenant-breakers. The proper response to injustice, Jesus said here, is acceptance. The victim of injustice must not only accept it, he must open himself for greater injustice. He must bear the cost of injustice and then offer an additional payment. He must submit to tyranny.

Tyranny must be seen in its covenantal and historical context. Jesus was speaking to a captive people. Jews in the northern kingdom had been carried away into Assyria. Jews in the southern kingdom had been carried into Babylon. Those few who returned under Medo-Persia lived under foreign rule. Their heirs lived under the heirs of the Macedonian Empire, which fell to Rome. Israel had been under foreign rule for over six centuries. They had known nothing but captivity and foreign domination. They had learned to live under foreign law as a captive nation.

B. An Open Conspiracy²

Jesus did not call His listeners to revolt. He called them to obedience. He did not teach revolution through power. He taught revolution through moral example. His concern was the kingdom of God. In its historical manifestation, this kingdom is one of justice and righteousness. The program to defeat tyranny is a return to personal justice and righteousness. The answer to bad civil laws begins with good personal rules. This is not the final answer, however. It is only the first step.

Tyranny is systematic. It is part of a corporate system. It becomes a way of life. Corruption spreads. This corruption eventually undermines it. What will replace it? A new tyranny? If men die in revolutionary violence or conspiracy, only to lay the foundation for a new tyranny, where is the gain? What the French Revolution launched and the Communist revolutions completed was a social experiment: violence for the sake of cleansing, and power for the sake of power.

Violence breeds violence. Conspiracy breeds more conspiracy. The kingdom of God is to be proclaimed openly. “Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the

2. The phrase is from H. G. Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928).

temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing” (John 18:20). He spoke in parables, but He spoke openly. He did not create a secret society that was bound by a self-maledictory blood oath. He created a church that was bound by a self-maledictory public sign: baptism.

The church is an open conspiracy. Members conspire: breathe together. They do so openly. Preaching is public. The sacraments are taken in public. Only when tyrannies place negative sanctions against these otherwise public activities are Christians called by God to go into the shadows.

What is visible is righteousness. What is visible are good works. This theme appears throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus called on His listeners to go the extra mile. Why? Because doing so would buy peace. Peace makes it easier for the open conspiracy to enlist new adherents. Paul wrote: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:1–4).³

C. Turning the Cheek

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (vv. 38–39). This seems to be a rejection of the *lex talionis*: eye for eye (Ex. 21:24;⁴ Lev. 24:20;⁵ Deut. 19:21⁶). Eye for eye means that the punishment should fit the crime. This principle of justice undergirds civil sanctions in the Mosaic Covenant. Was Jesus rejecting the Mosaic Covenant? Hardly: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 37.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17–19). Then why did He preface his command to turn the other cheek with "ye have heard it said"? This phrase usually appears as His preface to a rejection of a traditional Jewish law which was not supported by the Mosaic law.

The context was civil power. A person who would strike one of Jesus' listeners was a man in authority or who had the support of the civil authority. There was nothing the victim could do to repay, eye for eye, without resorting to private justice. But God had placed His covenant people under foreign rule for many centuries. This subordination was no temporary affliction. It was a way of life. Their fathers had sinned against God's law for so long that He never again allowed Israel to run its own political affairs.

Jesus warned "that ye resist not evil." Yet we read elsewhere: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The devil is the very incarnation of evil. Why, then, did Jesus say to resist not evil? Because evil in this context was *the evil of tyranny*. It was God's judgment on His people that they had been forced to live under a series of legal systems not based on biblical law. Such a civil condition is a mark of God's negative sanctions against a nation. Jesus told them to put up with tyranny for the time being. He told them to go the extra mile.

D. Something Extra

"And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also" (v. 40). The context is civil authority. The man was not a common thief. He had the force of law behind him. He had proven this. He had won the case. He had won the coat. What was the proper response. Offer him more.

Why? Because a free man can usually earn another cloak. A man in prison cannot. If the victorious plaintiff decided to sue again, the victim would probably lose. The strategy here is to give the litigious man something extra. Let him sue somebody else. The man may enjoy going to court. For most people, going to court is a traumatic, expensive experience. When you have lost to a man who is allied with the au-

thorities, it is wise to stay out of court. The strategy here is to buy him off, the same way Jacob bought off Esau when he sought to return to Canaan through Esau's land: give him gifts he did not deserve (Gen. 32).⁷

“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (v. 41). The same principle applies in this example. The victim is operating under compulsion. He is not a free man. Go the extra mile. Heap eternal coals of fire on his head (Rom. 12:20). This is a generally safe tactic to use against the enemy. But it has short-run costs. You pay extra now to avoid trouble in the future. You reduce future costs by incurring present costs.

“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away” (v. 42). Here is another example of giving something extra. Normally, this verse would lead to bankruptcy. If a person who has capital gives away money to everyone who would like to borrow, he will soon have no capital. The offer of free money will be accepted by most people. Why would Jesus recommend stripping His people of their capital? Is this a permanent requirement?

This requirement must be seen within the context of tyranny. A man with political connections comes to a successful victim and asks for a loan. In all likelihood, he does not intend to repay it. He understands how the legal system works. It is on his side. This loan will be difficult to collect. The man with capital is to assess the power of the would-be borrower. Is this man in a position to create problems? Can he use his authority illegitimately? If so, avoid trouble: give him what he wants.

E. Implicit Bribes

When a person gives something extra to a poor person, the gift is not a bribe. It is a gift. It is an extension of mercy. But when a person gives a gift to someone with power over him, we generally call the gift a bribe.

What is the Bible's view of bribery? That depends on whether you are a victim of tyranny or a ruler. The mark of an unrighteous ruler is his acceptance of bribes. “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 26.

not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous" (Deut. 16:18–19).⁸ But for the righteous man trapped in a corrupt legal system, offering a bribe is one way to gain justice. "A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth" (Prov. 17:8). "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16). "A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath" (Prov. 21:14).⁹

This passage provides guidance for righteous people who are trapped in a corrupt legal order. Instead of fighting back, Jesus said, make peace. Instead of seeking vengeance, seek peace. When you are confronted with a man who has the power to take what he wants from you, offer it in advance. Honor this power by offering something extra: more than he deserves. This is the way to peace. It appears to be a costly way to peace, but in fact it is the less expensive way. It requires an extra payment in the present, but it lowers the cost of righteous living over the long run. To gain peace is a way to gain time. Time is what righteous men need to begin to construct an alternative to tyranny. It gives them time to learn the ways of righteousness and productivity. This is especially true when tyranny is increasing in both evil and power.

F. Accelerating Evil

Economics tells us that we discount the future. This discount is the origin of interest.¹⁰ The investor must be given a promise of more goods in exchange for the use of his present goods. Why did Jesus tell men to hand over present goods to evil-doers with power? Because evil in this context was getting worse. The evil-doer will demand more in the future—lots more. He will demand so much more that it is wiser to gain his cooperation now. This is what happened in A.D. 66–70. The Jewish Zealots became more tyrannical. Rome reciprocated, and then some. Old Covenant Israel was coming to an end in Jesus' day. Jesus was warning His listeners not to participate in revolutionary movements against the oppressors. Better to cooperate now and avoid de-

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 40.

9. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 837–48.

10. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

struction later.

Christians went through a year of persecution under Nero in A.D. 64. The horrifying stories of this persecution have come down to us for almost two millennia. Christians were singled out as judicially separate from the Jews, who were under special legal protection. But this legal separation by persecution was the church's deliverance. In A.D. 66, Israel revolted against Rome. The church, no longer seen by Rome as being part of Israel or Judaism, escaped destruction.¹¹ Now the prophesied days of vengeance on Israel had arrived.¹²

Submission can be seen as weakness or strength. If the one who submits is seen as cowardly, he invites more persecution. But if his submission is seen as a pattern of behavior based on helping the weak as well as the strong, then submission is seen as a product of a higher ethic, or a higher calling. If the man lends a hand to rich and poor, strong and weak, then he is seen as not being servile but superior. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement of *non-servile subordination*. Submission to authority is not a mark of cowardice if it is part of a program of personal ethical transformation based on extending grace—unearned gifts—to all men. This extension of grace is exactly what the Sermon on the Mount teaches.

G. Revolution Through Cooperation

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee" (Prov. 25:21–22). This program of victory over one's enemies was articulated in the days of Solomon's rule, the period of Israel's greatest power. It is therefore a strategy for all seasons. Jesus merely articulated a variant of it. Paul placed it within the context of civil government:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth

11. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), pp. 48–51.

12. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Rom. 12:19–13:2).

The individual is not to seek personal vengeance against his enemy. Surely, he is not to seek vengeance against a civil magistrate. Yet the context of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a nation under foreign domination. Israel was a nation in bondage. This was why the Jews' response to His message was ludicrous: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (John 8:31–33). Later, the chief priests (Sadducees) were more honest: "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:13–15).

Then how can the man in bondage, or a nation in bondage, gain freedom? By faithfully obeying God's laws. By building up the habits of obedience to God and His revealed word. There is an old political slogan: "You can't beat something with nothing." What works best as a program of national liberation is a program of liberation from sin. Again, consider the context of Jesus' words to His followers: "They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:33–34). To escape from bondage, He said, avoid sin. There can be no escape from bondage without an escape from sin. *Sin is the ultimate form of bondage in history. But God's judgment against sin in eternity is the ultimate form of bondage.* There is no escape from hell and the lake of fire.

Jesus' program of systematic cooperation is a program of heaping coals of fire on tyrannical heads. Yet it is also a program of evangelism. Men who repay evil with good do catch the attention of many people, including tyrants. There is something special about such a response to evil. Men ask: "Why?"

Good undermines evil. Evil is not self-sustaining. It is parasitical. It

undermines productivity. This produces weakness. Tyranny does not persist indefinitely. It recedes in the face of goodness, or it collapses in a display of weakness. The collapse of the Soviet Union, 1989–1991, is the most remarkable collapse of tyranny in the history of empires. It collapsed without a fight. It was a nearly bloodless abdication of what had been unprecedented power.

Conclusion

The top priority of this passage is outward subordination to tyrannical authority. It is not anti-revolutionary as such; it is anti-vengeance. It is a revolutionary strategy designed to replace tyranny with liberty, which rests on God's Bible-revealed law. The revolutionary aspects of this program are moral. The passage must be seen in the context of Israel's political subordination to Rome. It must also be seen in the context of God's program of grace. His people are to extend grace to others, just as God extended grace to them. Their outward subordination to authority—extending more to tyrants than they deserve—is part of a general program of grace.

This passage is not a guide for the exercise of political power. Civil authority is based upon justice: eye for eye. Victims may extend grace to criminals; the state may not.¹³ The passage deals with individuals in political bondage to a state that refuses to extend justice to all. Jesus was here laying down a program of resistance to tyranny, a program based on nonviolent replacement of power. The Sermon on the Mount was a unit. This section deals with powerlessness: a way to gain victory over evil. Heap coals of fire on evil men's heads.

13. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

10

COMMON GRACE, SPECIAL PEACE

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? (Matt. 5:43–47).

The theocentric focus of this passage is found in the middle of the passage: “for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (v. 45). God is sovereign: point one of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Non-Discriminatory Blessings

God is sovereign over nature. He sends rain and sunshine in due season on all men, good and bad. He offers all men access to nature’s means of production. If God shows mercy to His enemies, then His people should show mercy to their enemies.

What this says is that God does not discriminate. His gifts are widely distributed. Such gifts from God are unearned by the recipients. An unearned gift is called grace in the Bible. God showers and shines His grace on all men. In history, this common grace is to the benefit of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

covenant-breakers. In eternity, it works against them retroactively. “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom. 12:20). “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:47–48).²

This passage is important in establishing the truth of the doctrine of common grace.³ Common grace in history is given freely to all men. For the just, it is a sign of God’s favor toward them. For the unjust, it is the means of God’s eternal wrath against them. In both cases, the grace is not earned by the recipient.

Grace is a word for salvation. God grants salvation to all men, but especially to the covenant-keeper. “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” (I Tim. 4:10).⁴ The covenant-keeper is the recipient of special grace and common grace, but the covenant-breaker is the recipient of only common grace.

Does this doctrine imply universal salvation in eternity? No; it implies the opposite: greater wrath for covenant-breakers in eternity. The salvation referred to by Paul in I Timothy 4:10 is God’s healing grace in history. It is salvation as *salve*: healing ointment. It allows the just and the unjust to work out their respective eternal conditions. Paul also wrote: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).⁵ But as the unjust man works out his salvation in history, he condemns himself eternally. He forgets that God is the source of His life, knowledge, authority, and income. He says in his heart, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17b).⁶ This condemns him.

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [201] 2012), ch. 6.

5. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deutero-*

But what about an entire society that says this? Common grace condemns that society. “And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God” (Deut. 8:19–20).⁷ The lure of autonomy from the God of the Bible is great; it leads individuals and societies to destruction.

B. Nature as a Sanctioning Agent

Jesus’ announcement meant that the New Covenant has broken with the Mosaic Covenant’s system of special favor for Israel. In the Mosaic Covenant, God had promised special blessings for national Israel that included nature itself. Nature in Israel had been unnatural. It had been a means used by God to bring His covenantal sanctions. Nature had been a sanctioning agent.

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit (Lev. 26:3–4).⁸

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD’S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you (Deut. 11:13–17).⁹

When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people

nomy, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

8. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 33.

9. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 28.

Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance (I Kings 8:35–36).

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word (I Kings 17:1).

Jesus announced the end of nature as a sanctioning agent. No longer would nature serve as a means of God's special cursings and special blessing to covenanted nations. God's special presence inside Israel was about to cease. The temple and the sacrifices had only one generation to go, although Jesus did not announce a specific time limit on the Mosaic sacrifices. God would no longer dwell specially in Old Covenant Israel; nature would no longer be the means of God's corporate sanctions on Israel.

C. Love Your Enemies

The New Covenant reaffirms an Old Covenant requirement: to love our enemies. This love is judicial: showing mercy and justice. God's common grace toward all men is to be revealed by covenant-keepers' general love for all men. God sends sunshine and rain in due season to all men. This is merciful. Covenant-keepers are to pray for all men. God does good to all men through nature. He proposes to do good to all men through His people. In the same way that nature no longer plays favorites in the New Covenant, so covenant-keepers are not to play favorites. They must do good to all men.

This does not mean that covenant-keepers are required to subsidize evil. They are to visit prisoners; they are not to smuggle in tools for their escape. They are to help specific poor people; they are not to give wealth away indiscriminately to every poor man, irrespective of how he became poor. They are not to give alms to drunkards who will use the money to buy more alcohol. They are to give alms to rescue missions that feed and preach to street people who are alcoholics.

The love shown to our enemies is the same kind of love that God shows to us. God provides everyone with sunshine and rain in due season. The enemy here is not a criminal. He is merely an adversary of the individual Christian. He is not a destroyer who uses his skills to prey upon the weak. He is an opponent. God shows mercy in history to His opponents; His people should do the same for their opponents.

When God's people do this, they extend God's common grace. God uses them in a way analogous to how He uses nature: as a means of revealing God's grace in history. By this grace, God brings some to repentance and others to everlasting destruction. Good works heap coals of fire on some heads and soul-transforming blessings on other heads. We cannot know in advance which effect our love and good works will have. Even if we did know, we should obey God's law anyway. He knows which people will respond to His common grace by repenting and which will worship other gods, including man. Yet He still sends rain and sunshine in due season.

By showing love to all men, covenant-keepers set themselves apart from other men. Their universal love makes them seem different. Lost men ask: "Why?" Peter wrote:

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison (I Pet. 3:14–19).

One of the most effective yet little known ministries in the United States is the Kairos prison ministry.¹⁰ Twice a year, a team of Christians goes into a prison, usually a maximum security prison, for a three-day weekend. They bring in food baked by Christians. Forty-two prisoners assemble for the weekend to eat cookies, lasagna, hamburgers, fresh salads, and ice cream—food that is rarely available in prison. The number of cookies consumed in that weekend is staggering: up to 60,000. Cookies are given to the prisoners and the guards. One of the exercises is for prisoners at the end of the second day to take a bag of one dozen cookies to their worst enemy. The prisoners hear very simple applied gospel messages for three days. They are shown love by the outside team. They sing. They pray simple prayers. And by the end of the weekend, as many as half of them make professions of faith.

10. <http://www.kairosprisonministry.org>

Why does this program work? Because people from the free world with nothing visible to gain treat criminals with friendship. For prisoners, this makes no sense. They keep asking themselves: “Why?” They keep thinking: “What is in it for them? What are they after?” And for a few—sometimes many—the answer dawns: “Because Jesus loves me.” These prisoners are brought into God’s kingdom. Even those who are not brought in speak well of Kairos from then on. Word spreads. Then, when team members come back once a month to visit with the prisoners, word really spreads. For prisoners, Kairos makes no sense. That is its strength.

D. Program for a Captive People

The context of the Sermon on the Mount is important: Roman domination. Covenant-breakers were in control. For most societies, this has been the case throughout history. The ethical principles in the Sermon on the Mount are universal, but they are most appropriate for those in judicial bondage. Loving one’s enemies is not a widely shared ethical principle among captive peoples. Conquerors cannot readily understand it; neither can revolutionaries.

Jesus was telling His listeners that they were captives of sin. This is the universal form of captivity among men. “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). The Greek word for “servant” can also be translated “slave,” and in this passage, it should be. The way out of slavery is grace. It begins with God’s common grace to all men. Without this, life would be impossible. Then He shows special grace. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). His people are a means of common grace. They are also a means of special grace. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Common grace is shown to all men by God through nature. Covenant-breakers take God’s common grace for granted. They see it as only what they deserve. But common grace shown by enemies, they do not take for granted. They are moved to ask: “Why?” This question can serve as a first step to a correct answer. There are two possible correct answers: (1) “God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life”; (2) “God hates me and has a horrible plan for my life.” Nebuchadnezzar discovered the first answer (Dan. 4). Judas discovered the second answer. “And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe

unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22).

E. Justice and the Free Market

Legal predictability is a foundation of the free market social order. So is equality before the law. Every person’s property is protected by law from thieves and predators and government officials. The expectation of justice allows men to reduce their expenditures on defending their property or hiding it. Social cooperation becomes less expensive.

The Bible requires the rule of law: one law for all. “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49).¹¹ This was not Roman jurisprudence. Jesus told His followers to treat all men justly, irrespective of the prevailing civil law. If obeyed, this law makes it more likely that Christians will gain cooperation from other people. Because of their law-abiding practices, Christians should gain access to a larger market than their competitors: production markets and retail markets. By lowering the risks of doing business with them, Christians can lower their own costs of production.

Enemies can still do business with each other. This is a benefit. Doing business leads to greater peace. Becoming dependent on another’s production raises the cost of breaking off the business relationship. By treating all men justly, Christians would gain the reputation as being low-risk associates. This would increase the number of opportunities offered to them.

In contrast is the practice of Christians’ unwillingness to perform as promised on the basis of their demand for mercy, which is supposedly owed to the Christian on account of his unique legal position before God. The Christian who expects others to grant him mercy for poor performance is a man who is violating the rule of law. He is demanding a subsidy for his substandard performance. He is pressuring others to treat him as outside the rule of law. Word will get out that this man is a high-risk associate. His opportunities to extend the kingdom of God will therefore shrink.

Conclusion

The top priority in this passage is for God’s people to pray for and

11. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

treat justly all men, including their enemies. This is what sets God's people apart from other people. "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" God extends mercy and grace to all men in history; so should God's people. This mercy and grace brings some to repentance and others to destruction. It is up to God to determine which outcome results from His common grace. It is not up to men.

11

CHARITY GIVEN IN SECRET

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:1–4).

The theocentric focus of this law is the fact that God gives rewards openly to those who give alms secretly for His sake: sanctions. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Public Displays of Generosity

There is no doubt that there are rewards for giving charity. The question is: Who is the targeted source of the rewards? Is it men or God? Do alms-givers seek the praises of men or of God? There are rewards in history and eternity. The question is: Who gives these rewards? The answer that men give is revealed by their actions. If they give alms in public, then their reward is the praise of men. If they give alms in secret, then their reward is God's praise, possibly in history, but surely after the resurrection.

The message is clear: donors should not go to any expense in publicizing their personal charitable activities. This does not mean that they may not announce the existence of their activities. If an institution exists to do charitable work, how will potential recipients learn of its existence if it remains entirely secret? How, for example, is a public

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

foundation to give away its money if it cannot lawfully announce its existence? Only if it gives to “insiders,” i.e., individuals or groups that are selectively informed by the informal information grapevine that money is available. The broader the organization’s vision for giving, the more important it is for potential recipients of the money to present their needs to the organization. How can this be done in secret?

In the United States, a public foundation must report its activities and expenditures to the Internal Revenue Service. If it refuses, it loses its legal status as a tax-deductible organization. Those donating money to it will no longer be able to deduct this money from their taxable gross income. They will be taxed on it even though they gave it away. The tax authorities legally monitor the use of the money. The organization’s funds must be used to support the charitable activities that it was set up to support.

What Jesus was condemning was a publicity campaign by the givers for the sake of the givers. To announce that a foundation gives away funds to certain causes is a legitimate reason to have a publicity campaign, although these costs should be minimized. The campaign may be used to gain both donations and outlets for the donated funds. It should be designed to attract more deserving recipients for the funds. It should not be designed to publicize the donors.

This is a reason why family names should not be placed on charitable organizations. When they give away money, this should not bring fame or good reputation to the families that set up these foundations. The Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, and all the other family-created foundations with family names on them violated this basic principle. Even William Volker, known posthumously as Mr. Anonymous,² violated this principle when he set up the Volker Charities in the early decades of the twentieth century.

There is another reason: well-funded non-profit organizations have almost always been taken over by people who hold opposite views from their founders, unless the founders were political liberals. The more conservative the donor and the larger the size of his foundation’s capital base, the faster it has been taken over by liberals. When Henry Ford II resigned from the liberal Ford Foundation in disgust in the mid-1970s, he admitted what had happened. Conservatives do not

2. Herbert C. Cornuelle, *Mr. Anonymous: The Story of William Volker* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1951).

capture liberal foundations; liberals capture conservative foundations. Why? Because the educational institutions that produce the managers that run large bureaucracies are liberal. Another reason: liberals use long-term planning to infiltrate and capture rich or influential conservative organizations.³

B. Rewards as Positive Sanctions

This passage does not condemn the giving of charity for the sake of rewards. On the contrary, *it identifies personal rewards as the primary goal of charity*. Nothing here is said of the needs of the poor. The issue here is the source of the rewards: God or men. When the donor's goal is to gain the praises of men, he may very well receive this reward, but this is the only reward he will receive. Jesus condemns His opponents: "They have their reward." All they have is the praise of men. In eternity, this counts for nothing. It condemns rather than upholds.

The system of covenantal cause and effect in history and eternity is based on a system of rewards, i.e., sanctions. Point four of the biblical covenant model has to do with sanctions.⁴ Without God's covenantal sanctions, men would be trapped in a universe where either impersonal chaos and chance or impersonal determinism would rule the affairs of man. In either case, meaning would have to be imputed by men to their environment, an environment beyond man's control. Either the environment would be too chaotic to control or too deterministic for man to be anything but a cog in a great machine.

Charity is a good thing because rewards are a good thing. The question is: How good are the rewards? Rewards from men's praise are a good thing, but not at the expense of rewards from God. Jesus made it plain here that the reward-seeker must choose between rewards. He must not seek both. By seeking God's reward, he may receive the praise of men as an unintended consequence. By seeking men's praise, the giver can be sure that he will not receive God's reward. The system of covenantal sanctions is clearly weighted on the side of seeking God's reward. The system, in the peculiar language of economists, is asymmetric. But, then again, God's creation is asymmetric. Even though it often appears as if it were asymmetric on the side of covenant-break-

3. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996). (<http://bit.ly/ncrossed>)

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4; North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 4.

ers, it isn't. It is on the side of covenant-keepers.⁵

There is no doubt that it is unwise to choose the praise of men when such praise negates the praise of God. To do so is to make a catastrophic choice, which is part of a more comprehensive system of choices: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).⁶

Seeking the praises of men is a variant of mammon worship.⁷ Instead of seeking wealth, the donor seeks praise. Instead of serving the buyers in order to amass riches, he serves the objects of his charity. His goal is the same: personal rewards in history. He uses his talents in order to build up his supply of rewards in history. This is false worship. True worship has as its goal eternal rewards through service to God. Earthly rewards come as a consequence of service to men as surrogates for God (Matt. 25:34–40).

C. Uncoordinated Giving

"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (v. 3). This is an odd saying. It sounds as though the proper approach to giving is some sort of indiscriminate handing out of funds. Is this what the passage means?

What Jesus is condemning is a system of giving which is calculated to gain the praise of men. The giver chooses his charities carefully in terms of a plan. This plan is designed to benefit the giver by enhancing his reputation as a charitable person. Everything the giver does is calculated to win him the praise of men. His giving is designed to buy him the praise of men.

Then is it wrong to design charitable giving plans in order to buy rewards? No, for Jesus says that a reward from God is a legitimate goal of charity. The question is: Who is the source of the rewards? It is a question of sovereignty. Who is the true God? Whose standards governing charity are sovereign? God is hidden from sight; men are in plain view. Should the giver seek his rewards from the invisible God or the visible gods? Jesus' answer is clear.

The command not to let the right hand know what the left hand is doing is a command for two-handed charity. Men should give away

5. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

6. Chapter 35.

7. Chapter 14.

alms with both hands. What Jesus was saying is that there should be no coordinated plan of giving—two-handed giving—if it involves making calculations regarding the praises of men.

God sets forth standards for covenantally faithful giving. First, giving should be structured to please God and thereby gain His rewards. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:19–20).⁸ Second, it should be two-handed: generous, not to a fault, but to a benefit. Third, it should be for the sake of the recipients. If giving to a recipient who needs help but will not bring the praises of men, ignore the praises of men.

Conclusion

To give alms wisely requires a plan. Giving is not to be uncoordinated. The question is: Whose plan? The top priority of this passage is to identify the sovereign source of rewards for alms. That source is God, who sees in secret now and rewards in public: sometimes in history but always in eternity. The presumption is that God’s rewards do not come immediately. Those who seek the praise of men already have their reward. God will publicly reward only faithful givers. This is future tense.

This forces men to act in faith: faith either in the near-term praise of men or the long-term praise of God. People give now, but they hope for praise. There is a time factor in making one’s choice: immediate vs. indeterminate. There is also a source factor: men or God. Choose well which time frame and which God to serve, this passage warns us.

8. Chapter 13.

12

THE LORD'S PRAYER

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Matt. 6:9–13).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God, who answers prayer. It identifies God as the father of His people. He is personal. He is present with His people: point one of the biblical covenant.¹ As a father, He loves His children. They can come to Him in prayer without fear of reproach.

A. Corporate Prayer

This is a corporate prayer. Those marked by God's covenant sign of baptism are told to raise their voices to heaven. They publicly identify God as the one who dwells in heaven. He is above the earth. This implies that He is sovereign over the creation. The second identification is His name. It is hallowed, i.e., holy or set apart. Those who have been set apart by God are told to announce the set-apart status of God.

Then comes the first request: that God's kingdom will come. But it is already here. Jesus said: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt 12:28).² Then why must we pray that it come? Because that which is definitively here

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. The parallel in Luke is unexpected: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20).

already is also progressively arriving. At some point, it will be here finally: at the last judgment. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25–26).³ By praying for the kingdom's advent, Christians extend the kingdom of God in history. They are praying for time to end, when heaven and earth will be equated morally.

This leads to the second request. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." God's will is for men to be ethically perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The ethical perfection of heaven is to be progressively manifested in history: first, through individuals; second, through the institutions they influence. Men's obedience is one of the means by which God's kingdom comes. Obedience is the basis of dominion.⁴

Only when we have affirmed God's glory and holiness and have called for His kingdom's advent in history do we come to our requests for our own benefits.

B. Daily Bread

Before the advent of capitalism, hunger was a universal threat. "Give us this day our daily bread" was no idle refrain. The experience of hunger was familiar to all but a tiny handful of rulers and those who served them. Famine was always a possibility: too much rain, too little rain, locusts, etc. Famine was one of God's three primary corporate judgments. "When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Jer. 14:12).

Bread is the symbol of the food which sustains life. Jesus contrasted God's word with bread as the staff of life. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4b).⁵ This was an Old Testament doctrine (Deut. 8:3). Nevertheless, bread deserves its due. We are creatures. We must eat to live. Bread is a universally recognized food.

When covenant-keepers pray for bread, they are praying for life. They are asking God to enable them to survive another day. The token of God's favor is daily bread, just as the manna was in the wilderness.

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3.

5. Chapter 1.

To pray for daily bread is not selfish. It acknowledges that God is the source of life, and that men are dependent on Him for their lives.

The modern capitalist order has produced bread in such abundance that this request has become more of a ritual than a serious request. Because God has provided the grace of the free market, a social institution that produces unprecedented wealth, He has already answered this prayer in the West. He has created the legal and social arrangements by which bread is supplied in abundance by third parties. The problem is, men no longer recognize the historical and cultural uniqueness of bread in abundance. They do not sense that they are in the presence of a miracle: an unplanned economic system by which most men will not starve in peacetime unless they are the targets of political oppression. Men fall into the trap of pretended autonomy which is described in the same chapter of Deuteronomy in which the warning against ignoring God's word in favor of bread appears. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).⁶

The prayer for daily bread appears after the prayer takes men through the doctrine of God: His fatherhood, sovereignty, holiness, and righteousness. Those who affirm mentally what they have prayed for openly have both confessed and believed that this God is the source of bread. This is what God insists on. It is illegitimate to ascribe to man what has its source in God. This is a great evil of humanism, including modern free market theory. Economists ascribe to impersonal market forces and social arrangements that which God provides in His grace.

One of the most important teachings of modern economics is that the value of each additional unit of any scarce resource is less to the individual than the previous unit. This is the doctrine of declining marginal utility.⁷ An application of this law is men's declining thankfulness about bread. Men become less thankful for food as they become full. The enormous output of food in the modern world has left bread as a

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

7. The assumption here is that tastes do not change. If tastes do change, this law is not always applicable. Certain addictive substances may be marked by increasing marginal utility for a time, as the addiction takes hold. Cigarettes are a good example.

nearly ignored substance. It takes active mental discipline to pray this prayer meaningfully. Men must learn to thank God for the means of such massive production of bread, including the social order.

If bread were removed for a time, men would learn to pray this prayer enthusiastically. But that would be a time of judgment. The difficulty is to maintain the attitude of reverential subordination to the God who provides bread, the symbol of life. Men tend to forget God when they get rich. Wealth, which is a blessing of God for covenantal faithfulness (Deut. 28:1–14),⁸ becomes a snare. Solomon said it best: “. . . give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8b–9). This is a prayer worth repeating. The lust for more food, like the lust for more money, is a mark of addiction. Solomon knew this, too. “When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat. Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom” (Prov. 23:1–4). He had tasted many dainties. This had produced only vanity.

C. Forgiven Debts

The next request acknowledges that men are debtors. They are debtors above all to God, who sustains them, but they are also debtors to other men.

1. *Broken Contracts*

The familiar liturgical version of this prayer, “forgive us our trespasses,” does not appear in this text or a parallel. The verses immediately following do mention trespasses: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15). The two words have similar applications, but “debts” is the more judicial language. The word conveys the idea of a contract. The one who prays the prayer is the guilty party. He has broken the contract. But others have broken debt contracts with him. When covenant-keeping men forgive others, they are themselves forgiven by God. The debts to God are cancelled. Whatever amount was owed to

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

the man in debt to God counts as a representative payment—a token payment—to God.

In some corporate sense, men can say, “we owe the debt to ourselves.” But to say this, there must be a way to settle up the accounts, cancel all debts, and send everyone home a debt-free person. Only God can do this. Only He can settle all of the accounts. He alone can do this because of the magnitude of the debts owed to Him by all men. Whatever men owe to others is dwarfed by what they owe to God. They owe God everything, for His grace is the source of everything they own. He is therefore in a position to cancel any man’s debts. This prayer asks God to cancel a person’s debt to Him. God then asks him who prays to do the same, but on a much smaller scale.

What kind of debts are in view here? The context of the prayer is the sovereignty of a holy God. The context is ethics. Every person is in debt to God ethically. The debt is the equivalent of a trespass. We have broken God’s laws. Others have broken His laws by injuring us. When we come to God asking for forgiveness for an ethical trespass, He asks us to do the same for others. But God does not ask us to forgive every trespass and every trespasser. He asks us to forgive those who ask for forgiveness, even as we ask God for forgiveness. Even as we may be asked to make a restitution payment to God, so they may be asked to make a restitution payment to us. And just as there are times when we cannot or will not make our restitution payment to God, yet still ask for His forgiveness, so sometimes are we to forgive those who make no restitution payment to us, yet still ask for our forgiveness.

2. A Token Payment

Restitution is basic to settling ethical debts, i.e., transgressions.⁹ When a man calls on God to forgive him, he must be ready to make restitution. But He cannot pay God all of what he owes to God. His restitution payment is a token. When a transgressor calls on his victims to forgive him, he must be ready to make restitution. This restitution can involve lifetime servitude if he is a criminal. If he is a less flagrant debtor, he may owe money, service, or goods. But what if he owes more than he can restore? Then he is in the same predicament that we are in with respect to God. This prayer reminds us that we can repay God by not demanding all of the restitution payment that is owed to us

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

by some debtor. We accept a token payment from him, just as God accepts a token payment from us.

The token payment is important, however. It is a mark of humility, an admission that a larger debt is owed. It allows the debtor to admit his debt. He must ask for an act of grace on our part—an undeserved gift. After all, this is what God does for us. To ask God for forgiveness without offering any restitution payment is not to take seriously either the debt or the debt relationship.

The ultimate restitution payment was made by Jesus Christ on the cross. But this does not negate the necessity of a token payment. If we have sinned against another person, and we cry out to God for forgiveness, we must make restitution to our victim. If we have sinned against God, we can and should suffer some token loss. Under the Mosaic Covenant, this would have been an animal sacrifice (Lev. 6:6).¹⁰ Under the New Covenant, it is a dedicated life: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1–2).¹¹ A life of full-time service is our token payment.

When we have given God everything, how can we give Him anything extra? How can we make a token payment if we have nothing to spare? By distinguishing between faithful service in general and faithful service in particular. We serve God when we make a profit. We also serve Him by giving things away. But the two forms of service are not equal. Giving things away is blessed spiritually. Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35b).¹² It takes spiritual discipline of a high order to internalize this fact and make it a way of life. So, when a man owes a debt to God, a good way to pay his token is to give something away to someone who can make good use of it. It is good for the recipient, and it is good practice for spiritual growth. The giver is the judge of what constitutes a meaningful token. It must not be too great, for man should never imagine that he can buy God’s favor.¹³ It

10. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 7.

11. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

12. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

13. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 56; North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch.

must not be too small, persuading the believer that a trespass is a trifle. The token payment, like the punishment, should fit the trespass. The token mentioned here is our forgiveness of what others owe to us. We forgive a little to others; God forgives much to us.

3. A Web of Debt

Economic debt is a secondary application of this verse. Debt is here seen as a liability, something to be avoided, and if this is not possible, then forgiven. The modern world is now engulfed in an ocean of debt. Promises have been made that cannot be kept. In civil government and fractional reserve banking, these promises have made an entire civilization dependent on the continual expansion of debt in order to pay off past obligations, both political and economic. If either debt or economic growth should falter, the entire debt system will collapse in a wave of broken promises: bankruptcy. At this late date, the public's confidence in the social order is based on faith in an escalating supply of promises that cannot be kept.

The enormous wealth produced by the capitalist system has made the prayer for daily bread a formality. But the prayer for debt forgiveness has grown more relevant under capitalism, as the world's assets have been monetized through the banking system. People eat better than ever, but they are in debt for most of their lives. Debt has become a way of life. The burden of debt is not seen as much of a burden. But when economic depressions come, men feel the pressures of debt. This is why governments prefer to inflate. There are more debtors who vote for short-run debt relief through inflation than lenders who vote for monetary policies that offer long-term restrictions on money creation.

There is so much debt today that no one can calculate it or trace its effects. We live in a gigantic web of debt. The connections are subtle. Most capital assets for which there are organized markets have debts on them or on the institutions that own them. In the investment world, the threads of debt encompass every nook and cranny of the capital markets. No one has designed this system. It has evolved through the borrowing and lending decisions of individuals. It is an example of what Adam Ferguson two centuries ago described as the product of human action but not of human design.¹⁴ Should the credit

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14. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), p. 187; cited by F. A. Hayek, "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design" (1967), in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago

system break down, due to a banking crisis, this will pull every institution down with it. Debt forgiveness—repudiation—will be accomplished through universal bankruptcy.

Our bread is produced by means of a debt-encumbered system of production. A breakdown in the credit markets would call into question the ability of all producers to get their products into the hands of customers. This applies to farmers above all. In the United States, about two percent of the population lives on farms. These people feed the rest of the nation and much of the world. Agriculture has always been heavily dependent on debt. But today's debt system extends beyond the farms into every aspect of the food chain. When men one day cry out in desperation, "forgive us our debts," God will grant them their request. But on the next day, they will be praying for their daily bread. The web of debt will be shred to pieces by the breakdown of the credit system, which means the breakdown of fractional reserve banking. The breakdown of the bank payments system will contract the division of labor: the interdependent system which puts bread on our tables, the economists insist. There will be less bread on our tables when all of our debts are forgiven in a massive wave of bankruptcies.

D. Deliverance

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This is a call for guidance. To minimize the opportunities for sinning, men are to call upon God to keep them out of temptation. This is a call for a subsidy. Men should desire to smooth the crooked paths of life, to walk neither to the right nor to the left. "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:7–8).

Deliverance from evil implies that we are already trapped in the vice of sin or the devices of evil-doers. We got into the mess; now we want out. We call out for God to pull us out of the mire.

We seek a subsidy in both cases. We admit that we cannot achieve these goals in our own strength. The sinner acknowledges that he is a

sinner. He does this so that he will be enabled to sin less. This is the kind of subsidy that God wants to provide. It is *a subsidy to righteousness*. Such a subsidy is a necessity in a world under the effects of original sin. Were it not for this subsidy, men would be totally depraved. Society would be like the pre-Flood civilization: fit for destruction. It could not continue. But God subsidizes righteousness for His glory's sake. This enables His people to extend His kingdom in history.

E. Kingdom, Power, and Glory

These are three marks of a king. God is here acknowledged to be the great king under whose authority all other kings operate. The Lord's prayer moves from God in heaven to God in history. Men are to pray their prayers of request as a means of achieving this extension of the kingdom from heaven to earth. We pray to the God of heaven for our daily bread, debt annulment, reduced temptations, and deliverance from evil so that we might better extend God's kingdom, power, and glory in history.

Our prayers for ourselves are sandwiched in between God's kingdom in heaven and His kingdom on earth. That which was definitive when Christ cast out demons becomes progressive through the prayers of His people.

The suggestion that God's kingdom has no institutional manifestation in civil government, yet does in church government and family government, is to restrict the reign of the king. Kingdom, power, and glory are thereby confined to the spheres of the voluntary. When magistrates bring civil sanctions, however, they are supposedly not allowed to see themselves as oath-bound covenantal agents of the God of the Bible. The kingdom of God is said to lack visible incorporation in the civil realm. There is neither formal power or public glory for God in the civil realm, according to modern political theory.

Forever is more than a long time. God's kingdom, power, and glory extend from history into eternity. This points to progressive sanctification in history, which will culminate in the defeat of death and the end of time (I Cor. 15:26). The prayers of Christians are to extend God's kingdom, glory, and power in history.

This implies a goal of victory in history: *the replacement of Satan's kingdom by God's*. This is *social sanctification*. This is not exclusively a trans-historical sanctification; it must also be historical. The request to have God's will done on earth as well as in heaven testifies to the his-

torical frame of reference.¹⁵

There is continuity between today's kingdom, power, and glory and tomorrow's. This continuity is manifested by the prayers of God's people—above all, the Lord's prayer. As surely as His people pray today for daily bread and their deliverance from evil, so have other sons prayed in the past and will pray in the future. *The continuity provided by this prayer points to the continuity of God's kingdom, power, and glory in history.* If men expect their prayers for bread and deliverance to be answered, then they must expect progressive personal sanctification. Similarly, when they pray the closing words, they must expect to see God's kingdom, power, and glory to persevere in history. But if there is no expansion, then what kind of a kingdom is it? What kind of power will He exercise? What kind of glory will be His? He exercises power representatively, through mankind. To pray this prayer is to pray for the regeneration of mankind. This may take millennia, but it will not take forever.

Conclusion

The Lord's prayer moves from heaven to earth and from the present into eternity: forever. It proclaims a comprehensive kingdom of God in history, which extends into eternity. It calls for an ethical subsidy to covenant-keepers, which is a subsidy to the progressive establishment of God's kingdom. Such a subsidy is necessary to offset, let alone overcome, original sin.

God offers us bread for the asking. He offers forgiveness of our debts. We, in turn, are to forgive the debts of others. Our forgiveness is a token payment to God for what we owe him. The debts here are moral debts: violations of God's law. To a lesser extent, they are economic debts. The message is clear: don't build up debts to others, either moral or economic.

The top priority of this passage is the power of corporate prayer in transforming history, to bring history into conformity to eternity's standards. The kingdom of God is at the beginning and end of this prayer. The kingdom of God provides the context of our daily bread and our mercy: received and extended.

15. Are we to imagine that God requires the church to pray corporately ("Our Father," not "My Father") for something that can never come to pass? Yet this is the teaching of amillennialism.

13

INCORRUPT TREASURE

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19–21).

The theocentric principle here is God as the rewarder of those who diligently serve Him: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.¹ “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

A. The Goals of Treasure-Builders

This passage proclaims the superiority of eternity over time. That which we lay up for ourselves on earth is subject to risk. That which we do for the cause of God will surely last. Time is not a reliable vault for treasure. Things can change overnight that destroy the best-laid plans of men. Where should men put their faith? Not in things temporal.

The passage forbids laying up treasures on earth for ourselves. Two things are involved here: self-aggrandizement and time. The person who amasses wealth on earth is too short-sighted. He is also too risk-oriented. He is building up capital that may be lost and will surely be useless to the capitalist after his death. The post-funeral question, “How must did he leave behind?” has a universal answer: “All of it.”

The passage does not condemn treasure left behind for one’s heirs

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

or one's favorite causes. Inheritance is too prominent a theme in the Bible for any such conclusion. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). The inter-generational transfer of wealth is basic to fulfilling the dominion covenant. The long-term growth of capital in the hands of covenant-keepers is one aspect of the extension of the kingdom of God in history.

What is condemned is the amassing of wealth for oneself. It reveals a false religion: faith in man and faith in time. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11). The wealth that men accumulate on earth is a temptation to other men. Thieves break in. Rust corrupts. The erosion of value, like the erosion of life, threatens all forms of wealth except perhaps gold, which does not rust. But gold is a favorite target of thieves. And it can be lost.

Why do men build treasures? No single answer exists. The quest for safety from the unknown, the desire for recognition—a name—the delight in the challenge of wealth accumulation as a game: all of these have motivated men. But death comes to every man. If all that matters is what other men impute to you and your works—recognition, fame, respect, net asset value—then your work is dependent on the wisdom of other men. Those who impute value to your works are mortal. Death is the great leveller. The Preacher wrote:

Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it. For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and

their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun (Eccl. 8:17–9:6).

If death makes all things the same, then mortality threatens all meaning, all differentiation. The good and the bad in history end the same way. If there is no immortal agent who imputes meaning to that which is temporal and therefore mortal, then there is no permanent meaning. Everything is vanity.

What truly matters, Jesus warned, is not exclusively material. He who rests his faith on that which can be accumulated on earth has placed his trust in a weak god.

B. Treasures of the Heart

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” This is a profound insight. What a man values most captures his heart. He dreams of it, plans his life in terms of it, and sacrifices for it. Treasure captures men. Men dream of buried treasure, yet treasures bury men. Men whose dreams are in things have been captured by these things, metaphorically speaking. Their desires restructure their lives. The focus of their desires is temporal. This cuts them off from treasures in eternity.

To dream, plan your life, and sacrifice for the sake of treasures in heaven are marks of one’s subordination to God and one’s future-orientation. Those who accumulate treasures in heaven by forfeiting consumption in history are radically future-oriented and therefore radically upper class.² It takes faith to do this. It requires trust in Jesus’ doctrine of the world of heaven and the post-resurrection new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21). Jesus made it clear that a man’s heart is captured by his treasure. It is as if treasures had cords attached to them that stretch out and ensnare a man’s heart. Men are either pinned to the earth or pulled into heaven by these cords. *Their treasures define where their dreams are.* The implication is that as we build ever-larger treasures, these cords become more binding. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:23–24).³

2. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 48–50. On the middle class, see pp. 50–53. On the lower class, see pp. 53–59.

3. Chapter 38.

Nothing in this passage implies that it is wrong for men to store up treasures for themselves. What Jesus warned against was earthly treasures. To pursue righteousness for the sake of an eternal reward is wise. Paul wrote: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14). Sacrifice in the present for the sake of a future reward reveals where our hearts are.

Jesus also said: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Matt. 12:35). Here we see another variation of the same theme. There are distinctions between treasures. There are incorrupt treasures as well as corrupt treasures. A good treasure of the heart brings forth good things. It leads men toward greater righteousness.

Where is your heart? Where your treasure is. Jesus made it clear that treasures on earth are a snare and delusion. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

C. Capital Accumulation

Then what of tools? Are not tools a means of extending man’s dominion over the earth? Tools are capital: the product of labor and land over time.⁴ Tools require reduced consumption in the present in order to construct them. There is nothing in Jesus’ words to suggest that men should not strive to gain greater mastery over the creation by means of thrift, which is required to build tools. Then how can we ethically sort out treasure from tools?

Treasure implies a final reward. It is the end of one’s production —“end” in terms of one’s goal and also in terms of one’s chronology. It is a *final consumer good*: the cessation of production. The vision of the miser, surrounded by boxes of gold coins, is accurate. Even better would be the miser buried with his gold—an unlikely event, as all the pharaohs’ graves save one indicate.⁵ It is the story of King Midas, whose touch transformed his daughter into gold: the touch of death.

4. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 7:4–5.

5. King Tut was a minor pharaoh whose tomb was so insignificant that the grave robbers lost track of it.

Treasure in heaven implies an end to one's earthly striving, an end to one's earthly production. It implies the individual's completion of his term of service in history. To sacrifice in history for the sake of consumption in eternity is not the touch of death. It is the opposite. Men are to strive to build up *capital*, not treasure. They are to build up an *inventory of tools for dominion*.

The great threat of capital accumulation is that it can become earthly treasure in men's hearts. The misery of Scrooge, in Dickens' story, "The Christmas Carol," is the outcome of capital transformed into treasure. Scrooge and Marley were good businessmen, but their accumulation of capital ensnared them. The chains on Marley's ghost were the product of the cords that had bound him to earthly treasure. Dickens' story is a secularized account of a man's regeneration. Scrooge is initially given two supernatural visions: what he had been and what he is. He has become bound ever-more tightly by the cords of the great god More. Then, in the third vision, he sees the result: a sparsely attended funeral and a home stripped of its few valuable treasures by thieves. But what if his funeral had been attended by kings and his home transformed into a world-famous museum? He would have been just as dead. What a corrupt man imputes in his autonomy is death: the dead burying the dead (Matt. 8:22).

The movie *Citizen Kane* is sometimes heralded as the greatest movie ever made. This is not my assessment, but its considerable power is derived from this same theme: the vanity of treasure. The real-life model of Kane, William Randolph Hearst, did accumulate a vast art collection—so much that he lost track of what he had. His collection was piled up in boxes. He had his agents search for one piece of art for years, and they discovered that it resided in his boxed collection. The movie's power was in its brilliant ending. His verbalized treasure in the last moments of his life, seen at the beginning of the movie, was something or someone called Rosebud. No one ever learned what it was. The next to last scene shows workers tossing piles of junk into a furnace, and one item was a child's winter sled: "Rosebud." The final scene is a column of smoke ascending from the chimney. "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (I Cor. 3:12–13).⁶

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

D. How Literal Is This Warning?

Was Jesus using hyperbole, or was He establishing guidelines? Was He really against the amassing of valuables that serve as consumption items rather than tools? Was He calling on those, like Hearst, who build their own personal treasure hoards to open them to the public? I think He was. The best Christian example of this in the United States is the art collection assembled by Bob Jones, Sr., for Bob Jones University: the finest collection of late medieval and early modern religious paintings anywhere in the United States and possibly on earth. He assembled this collection immediately after World War II, when prices were low because of the poverty of the victims. The collection is now worth more than the physical grounds of the university. Yet it can be toured for free. But very few people know of its existence. Visitors are few.

What of the woman who buys a few lovely items to enjoy and to leave to her daughters? What of the lover of antiques? The answer depends on the heart of the collector—the extent of his love. Is the collection his passion? Is it his consuming fire? Then it is his treasure. He should sell it or give it to some institution open to the public. Its cords are too binding. “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:21–23).⁷

Conclusion

In the final analysis, treasure is whatever one’s god bestows on his servant for a lifetime of faithful service. He who strives for earthly treasure serves a finite god. This god may be other men, or a cause, or a demon, or oneself. But a god that can bestow only earthly treasure is not the God of the Bible.

The top priority here is the accumulation of treasure in heaven: the reward bestowed by God on His faithful servants when their work is finished. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be

7. Chapter 38.

made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:11–15).

There is an allocation problem here. Wealth spent to build one's personal earthly treasure cannot simultaneously be used in kingdom service that builds a heavenly treasure. This is why the Christian walk involves the exercise of judgment. Capital can become treasure. Tools can become an end. Anything that ends in history can become a treasure that binds its accumulator with heavy cords.

14

RIVAL MASTERS, RIVAL KINGDOMS

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? (Matt. 6:24–25).

The theocentric focus of this passage is service to God: hierarchy, which is point two of the biblical covenant.¹ A person must serve either God or mammon. He has no third option. There is no neutrality. The legitimate goal is service to God.

A. What Is Mammon?

Mammon is man's greed. The Greek word can also be translated "confidence." *Of all false gods in history, mammon is by far the most common.* Men trust in the things that they accumulate. They place their confidence in things. That is to say, they worship aspects of the creation that they seek to place under their authority. What do I mean by worship? Above all, I mean *sacrifice*. That to which you give your life—your time, your dreams, your reputation—is your god. You invest your emotions and efforts in this god. You also expect something in return. It might be happiness, pleasure, fame, power, respect, or any of mankind's long list of personal goals. Men sacrifice to their gods for the sake of rewards—positive sanctions. *A god that offers no rewards is not taken seriously.* Men ask themselves, "What's in it for me?" Then

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

they decide which god to worship.

The worship of any god involves making estimates. Which rewards are worth sacrificing for? Which are actually available? What is the likelihood of non-payment by the god? What is the past performance of the god in question? How much is expected of me? What happens if I promise to pay, but fail to deliver?

Then there is the question of loyalty. Is there a bond other than legal between man and his god? Is there a personal relationship? Is there grace? Does a god extend mercy to his worshippers?

But there can be no question of service. *A god that has no servants is not a god.* To gain what man wants from his god, he must serve. He may receive something for nothing from a gracious god, but not everything for nothing. No god extends all of his blessings gratuitously. Jesus made this plain in this passage: choose wisely which god to serve.

B. Jealous Gods

The Mosaic Covenant repeatedly warned men that the God of the Bible is a jealous God. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex. 20:5).² “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex. 34:14). “For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24). “God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies” (Nahum 1:2). He tolerates the worship of no rival gods.

Jesus made it plain in this passage that the gods in question need not be idols or demons or the fantasies of men. *All rival gods boil down to one: mammon.* They may be supernatural gods, or gods of the marketplace, but they must offer men rewards for service. Men pursue their own goals through service to something that can reward them. The God of the Bible can reward men. On their own authority, rival gods promise to reward men. This promise is a lie. These other gods are nothing apart from the one true God. They are all creatures. They possess no autonomous authority. They have only the scraps of power

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

which God grants to them for His own purposes.

God and mammon are mutually exclusive, Jesus warned. Neither god tolerates the claims of the other. Each comes before man with a claim: "Worship only me, and I will reward you." The God of the Bible makes His claim exclusive. Mammon excludes only God, because God excludes mammon. God and mammon do not tolerate each other's claims. God's exclusivism is intolerable for mammon. Mammon's polytheism is intolerable for God. Mammon may publicly invite men to worship both him and God, but the invitation is spurious. Mammon treats God as if God were one among many. God rejects all such challenges to His exclusive authority.

So, men face a decision. In which god will they put their trust? Which will they serve faithfully in their quest for rewards? Which god's name will be on their tongues and in their hearts? They cannot serve both. If they attempt to serve both, they will alienate both.

C. Worship as Freedom from Worry

Jesus said: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (v. 25). This is odd language. One goal of worship is to gain rewards. Here is Jesus, telling His listeners that they should take no thought about what they shall possess, from life itself to food, drink, and clothing. Did He mean that such things are not important? On the contrary, they are very important. Life is surely important, and life is sustained by food, drink, and clothing. What is *not* important, He said, is *worrying* about such matters. It does no good to worry, for neither man nor mammon has any ability to gain them on his own authority or by his own efforts.

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things

do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Matt. 6:26–32).

Our Father in heaven knows our needs. Is this not enough? When He calls us into His service, He will provide the tools of this service. The tools of service are the very rewards that men seek. Conclusion: seek to serve; stop seeking the tools of service. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:33–34).³ This passage lays it on the line. *Our first priority should be the kingdom of God.* This is what we are supposed to seek. All the other things that are presented before us as objects worth seeking are afterthoughts, or better put, *tools of more effective service.* They come as part of God’s program of worldwide dominion. *Because God demands complete servitude, He provides us with the implements of comprehensive service.* All of these things shall be added unto us as rewards for faithful service. But everything that we receive from God adds to our responsibility. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48b).⁴ We *receive more* in order that we can *achieve more.* The kingdom of God thereby extends its influence across the earth.

An expanding kingdom implies growth and development in history. *As the kingdom of God grows, it extends the division of labor.* More hands and minds are brought into His kingdom. More servants mean greater wealth for every servant, for population growth allows greater output per unit of resource input. This is the blessing of the division of labor. As dedicated servants of God are added to the kingdom, day by day, the kingdom gains knowledge and wealth, as the newcomers bring their skills and capital in with them. The wealth of the kingdom increases. This means that there is less and less to worry about. *The safety net of God’s kingdom is there to catch any covenant-keeper if he falls.*

Worrying about a lack of food and raiment is like worrying about one’s lack of height. “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” It does no good to worry about such matters.

3. Chapter 15.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

God is the source of all of these blessings. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." These are among the most difficult words in the Bible to accept emotionally. When we find someone who lives in terms of them, we generally refer to the person as a saint. Yet Jesus spoke these words to a crowd, not to an intimate circle of initiates. He made it clear that all of His followers are to cease worrying about their economic condition. *The greater their faith, the less their worry.* The mark of an immature faith is worry about economic matters, or even life-and-death sickness, "o ye of little faith." It is all in God's hands. God is sovereign; man is not. God is sovereign; mammon is not.

D. The Religion of More For Me

Mammon has a kingdom. This religion is the religion of never-ending more for me in history. He who worships at the shrine of more for me in history can never be satisfied. He is addicted to more as a heroin addict is addicted to heroin. C. S. Lewis once wrote that it would be a terrible curse to eat food that makes us hungry. Yet mammon's food is precisely this kind of hunger-producing food.

In the 1970s, there was a television commercial for a brand of potato chip in which Burt Lahr, the actor who became famous as the cowardly lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, was dressed in a devil's suit. He holds a bag of the potato chips. He reaches in and takes one out. "Bet you can't eat just one," he says to the viewer. The imagery implied evil—forbidden fruit. Yet it was a light-hearted ad; it used a lovable comedian as the devil. It implied that it was perfectly all right to eat more than one. How much more, the ad did not say. But if you are in business to sell potato chips, you surely want to get people to eat more than one chip per sitting. The advertising jingle for Schaeffer's beer had a similar message: "Schaeffer's . . . is the . . . one beer to have . . . when you're having more than one!"

God has a kingdom. It grows over time. God's religion is the religion of *temporally bounded* more. God wants his kingdom to expand to the ends of the earth. Sin reigns nowhere that is not God's target for escalating victory. God seeks the redemption of sinners. As part of this goal, he provides His people with tools. They can use more tools. The

spread of the gospel is not achieved free of charge. We live in a world of scarcity.

Then in what way is *mammon's religion of more* different from *God's religion of more*? In many ways. First, God's offer of more is trans-historical. He offers communion with Him in eternity, a world beyond time. This goal is extremely future-oriented. Second, God's goal has a time limit: the final judgment (Rev. 20:14–15). Technically, so does mammon's: the heat death of the universe, i.e., absolute zero. But this theoretical event is so far into the future that it might as well be endless temporal succession. Third, God's goal is His own glory. To achieve this, He grants grace to men: something for nothing. Mammon's deceptive goal is the glory of man, either collectively or individually. In fact, greed destroys men. It is Satan's seductive tool. Satan grants something for something and sometimes nothing for something, if he can get away with it. But he never grants something for nothing except as bait to lure men to destruction.

The ultimate reward is eternal life. Compared to this, gaining the whole world for oneself is less than nothing. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). So, the biblical pursuit of more has limits. We are warned that even if more meant everything in history, it would not be enough to compensate us for the loss of communion with Him in eternity. This puts the goal of "more" into proper perspective. If everything is insufficient, more for man has temporal limits. Life is not unbounded.

It is sometimes said that men's desires are unbounded—infinite. Better put, given the limits on each man's life, his unfulfilled desires are beyond his means. At a lower price, he will buy more. But his greatest desire—more time—is surely bounded. He who forgets this fact in making daily decisions is a fool.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke

12:16–21).⁵

The desires of men are not limitless; they are merely beyond men's means. Everything finite is bounded. Creation is finite. It is beyond our ability to measure, but God measures it. So, mammon's religion of more is ultimately a religion of man's deification. It is a religion of "more for me in history." It is an assertion of each man's divinity.

E. Rival Economic Orders

The man who worships God legitimately seeks rewards for himself, but this must be in the context of better service to God. *Service to God through the creation is the mark of his salvation.* "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10).

Free market economic theory relies on an analogous insight. A man gains what he wants by selling to others. He must offer something they want in exchange for something he wants. Each party gains from the transaction. Most free market transactions are not zero-sum transactions.⁶ They are not examples of "I win; therefore, you lose." A representative of one spiritual kingdom can lawfully do business with a representative of the other kingdom. Both parties benefit. Both parties expand their wealth. Each party extends his god's kingdom. God can afford to let Satan extend his kingdom in this way because of the eschatological structure of inheritance. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). God's people ultimately inherit the earth.⁷

Satan cannot be equally magnanimous to God. Eschatology is against him. He is running out of time. Satan operates with stolen goods. He is a squatter in history. He lured Adam into a transfer of allegiance and therefore a transfer of assets, but Adam owned nothing of his own. He was merely a designated steward of God's assets. So, *mammonism is inherently a religion of theft: stealing from God to benefit man.* It is self-centered greed. Its ultimate goal is "more for me and

5. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 25.

6. An exception is a commodity futures transaction, where one investor gains at the expense of the other, and the broker gains from both.

7. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

less for you.” One man grows in stature by exceeding his fellows. While he may pursue “more for me and more for you, too” in the short run through voluntary exchange, he ultimately seeks to convert these gains into capital for covenant-breaking conquest. The religion of autonomy seeks to enslave others or kill them. This is what autonomy means: “The world serves me at its expense.”

Conclusion

Serving God means learning to be content with whatever God supplies today. The faithful man thinks, “there is more where this came from.” God will supply the tools that His people require for service to Him. These tools include such things as life, food, drink, and clothing. This outlook was the basis of Paul’s warning:

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (I Tim. 6:7–11).⁸

What do covenant-keepers need? Whatever God gives them. No more than this? No more. Later, they may receive more, for the kingdom’s sake and the covenant’s confirmation. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁹

What do men want? Usually, they want more than God has given to them. In the modern world, where the worship of economic growth is the most widely practiced religion, men want far more than what God has given to them. They are trapped on mammon’s treadmill to oblivion. Their religion is expressed on a humorous tee-shirt: “He who dies with the most toys, wins.” Substitute any aspect of the creation for “toys,” and the meaning is the same. It is a false religion. “For what

8. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The top priority in this passage is service to God, which is also its theocentric principle. The mark of this priority in our lives is contentment with whatever wealth God has provided. What must be avoided at all costs is service to mammon: the god of "more for me." This god of man's self-confidence and accumulation is a false god—*the* false god. It is the worship of man's would-be autonomy and therefore his would-be divinity. Men place confidence in the things they can accumulate. They sacrifice their lives to the accumulation of things. Yet the things that were supposed to serve man become his slave-drivers. Like Pharaoh's task-masters, these dumb idols cry out: "More! More! We demand more!" Most of all, they demand more of men's time, the irreplaceable resource.

15

ALL THESE THINGS

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:31–34).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the rewards: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Faith as a Method of Risk-Reduction

How do we seek God's kingdom? How do we seek God's righteousness? This passage does not say. Jesus had already outlined the answer to these two questions in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the context of this passage, covenant-keepers are said to be able legitimately to expect to receive something that they would not have received, had they not had faith. The context is food, drink, and clothing. The person who trusts in God is supposed to trust that he will not fall into any form of adversity that cannot be overcome through God's intervention.

The language of this text makes it plain: *do not resist when all these things are added unto you*. The desire to gain all these things—the basics of life—is legitimate. But the means are not widely understood: seeking first the kingdom of God. The ethical imperative is to seek the kingdom. The result of this quest is the ownership of those as-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

sets that preserve peace of mind. To begin with the search for the things that provide safety is to miss the nature of economic cause and effect.

Men save money or make personal contacts so that they can call upon these reserves in times of adversity. This is a form of thrift. Men rely on these things in order to overcome the unforeseen events of life that upset their plans unpleasantly. They do not mind having their plans upset by good news. It is bad news that scares them. They cannot see the future, so they accumulate savings to protect them.

This passage indicates that a program of capital accumulation to deal with unforeseen adversity is not nearly so important as extending the kingdom of God in history. Capital that might otherwise have been invested in an insurance program or retirement program can be used to fund missionaries or some other kingdom-building venture. The kingdom grows at the expense of the forfeited investment.

The text does not say that either capital or insurance is not worthwhile. It says that all these things shall be added unto the investment in kingdom expansion. What things? Food, drink, and clothing—things we really need. But what about things we want? That depends. Why do we want them? Because they make our lives more pleasant? Because they make us more productive? Because they will enable us to do more for God's kingdom? Our wants must be as kingdom-driven as our needs—in fact, even more so. Our needs do not readily identify us uniquely as covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. Our wants do.

When the price of anything is reduced, more of it is demanded. By *reducing worry* about the future, this promise enables kingdom-builders to *bear more risk* with whatever capital they possess. They can afford to pass up an investment opportunity because there is always another that will come along. Covenant-keepers have access to supernaturally supplied reserves. They can therefore afford to commit more resources to their efforts in kingdom-building than they otherwise would have committed. This faith in God is supposed to *release assets for kingdom-building* that would otherwise have been reserved for risk-reduction or capital accumulation.

This raises an important issue. There is no doubt that enormous amounts of capital are invested in pension funds today. Pension funds in modern America are huge pools of capital. This capital is used to fund economic growth. Capital provides present employment for the sake of future income for the investors. What if men reduced their commitment to thrift for the sake of charitable, kingdom giving?

Would this reduce economic growth?

If other things remained equal, it would. But other things are not equal. God is ready to defend covenant-keeping individuals and societies. For example, individuals and societies will make fewer errors if men adhere to faith in God and the discipline of the tithe. I can think of no statistical way to prove this, but the presumption of the text is that worry regarding the economic future is forbidden to the covenant-keeper who prays, tithes, and does his work well. If he seeks protection from unforeseen adversity, he must begin with faith in God's providential decree, not capital accumulation. In this decree, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28b).²

There is an old secret of gaining wealth: don't make mistakes. The investments need not produce a high rate of return if the investor makes no mistakes. Any rate of growth, if unbroken, eventually produces a base that approaches infinity as a limit. This is the exponential curve in action.³ The secret of wealth, generation after generation, is the strategy outlined by the Christian real estate investor, John Schaub: making it big on little deals. The difficult part is avoiding bad investments.

Kingdom projects are not always profit-seeking enterprises. Their success cannot be judged by a profit-and-loss statement. Yet, considered as a unit, they do produce a positive rate of return. They make society better. Money invested in them produces a positive eternal return for the investor, whether they succeed or fail in history. They constitute a kind of insurance policy for society. They reduce social risk. The differences between a kingdom project and an insurance policy are these: there is no legally binding contract with kingdom giving; there is no verifiable law of large numbers operating that will insure a fixed rate of return or reduction of risk; there is no identifiable pool of capital reserves to draw on in case of project failures. But there is promise made by God, the Creator. There is a pool of capital assured by the Owner of the universe. There is no legally fixed rate of return, but there is a positive rate of return. The text guarantees this.

It is a question of trust. Should we trust bank statements or God's

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

3. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970), reprinted in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

promise? Should we trust digital wealth or God's promises? We are back to the issue of God or mammon. Men place their faith in would-be autonomous institutions at their peril. Ultimately, the things of this world cannot completely insure us against the disasters that this world brings. We must begin with faith in God. Then all these things, including insurance and pensions funds, will be added.

John Wesley's Sermon 50, *The Use of Money* (1744), on Luke 16:9⁴, is divided into three imperatives: gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can. Men are to allocate their funds wisely. Wesley was a great believer in thrift, as were the English Methodists generally in the eighteenth century. But this imperative to save money through the reduction of frivolous expenses was to be tempered by the command to give. Men are not to pursue the god of More.

B. Outside, Looking In; Inside, Looking Out

To whom was Jesus speaking? Were His words aimed at all of His listeners? Or were they aimed at a different group?

1. *The Jews*

Jesus' visible audience for this sermon was the Jews. They should have been vaguely familiar with the doctrine of the kingdom of God. But this doctrine is not prominent in the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant kingdom was Israel. It was not thought to extend beyond Israel's borders. David did speak of God as ruler of a kingdom. God's kingdom was what entitled David to his kingdom. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Ps. 45:6–7). But the only reference to the kingdom of God on earth was prophetic: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). Jesus was announcing that the time had arrived. The fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy was at hand.

The Jews were about to become outsiders, looking in. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given

4. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9).

to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). He was warning them here to seek first God’s kingdom. But where was it to be found? In Jesus’ ministry. “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matt. 12:28). Paul later wrote: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17).

Seeking the kingdom meant seeking God’s righteousness. Men can become progressively righteous because God is perfectly righteous. “For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:45). “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). This was Jesus’ message about the kingdom to those outside the kingdom.

2. The Disciples

For those inside the kingdom—His disciples—He spoke in greater detail. Matthew 13 is the great chapter regarding the kingdom. The emphasis in this chapter is on the kingdom’s expansion in history. “And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold” (Matt. 13:3–8).⁵ In good soil, the seed would flourish.

“Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Matt. 13:33).⁶ The kingdom would expand like yeast, filling the loaf.

Jesus was speaking to insiders. This was why He spoke in parables. This was a fulfillment of prophecy.

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to

5. Chapter 27.

6. Chapter 30.

them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Matt. 13:10–17).⁷

The disciples were being prepared to direct a program of world-wide conquest. They were looking outward toward the world: the kingdom of mammon. This enormous task would require capital. This would not be a major problem: “all these things shall be added unto you.”

There would first be a preliminary trial run inside Israel. “And he called unto him the 12, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6:7–13). Then, just before His crucifixion, He gave them to a new assignment: the worldwide extension of the kingdom. It had different rules. “And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one” (Luke 22:35–36). This time, they would require capital. They had cap-

7. Chapter 27.

ital in one form; he told them to convert it into a new form suitable for traveling.

The first stage of conquest required no physical capital. This was analogous Israel's dependence on the manna in the wilderness. The second stage would require capital. This was comparable to the conquest of Canaan. Manna had proved to Israel that God was with them. So did the first stage of evangelism. But, once proven, there was need of capital. They had some already; they would have more, as needed. All these things would be added unto them.

C. Tools of Dominion

The ultimate tools of dominion are God's laws.⁸ But we need food and clothing to do our work. Of course, this food and clothing may be minimal. "And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey" (Matt. 3:4). What about a roof over our heads? What about bricks and mortar? Nice, but not required, at least not in the early stages of a campaign. "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).⁹

What the disciples had learned in three years of wandering is that they could do without their own homes. They ate. They did not freeze to death. They lived off the generosity of others. They got by. They had the tools they needed to do their work.

This is the context of the promise that all these things would be added unto them. Jesus told the crowd this, but He taught it first-hand to the disciples. The crowd did not wish to follow Him. They were interested in hearing a lecture. They were not ready to sell everything and follow Him. They were still outside, looking in.

The governing presumption of this passage is that men should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In this search, they will be given the capital they require to continue their search. But they probably have the capital already, just as the disciples had. Jesus had to tell them not to take a purse on stage one. This presumes that they had purses and money. They had to leave their tools behind. They had to learn how to live off the land, i.e., live off of the equivalent of manna.

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

9. Chapter 19.

God would provide them with whatever they needed. The same was true of His listeners. They were burdened with too much capital. It was an impediment to their search. “The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Matt. 19:20–22). What the young man lacked was poverty. Jesus was trying to teach the young man that all that he needed to follow Jesus would be added. First, he had to cease trusting in his own wealth. But the young man was not yet ready to go into the wilderness and become dependent on the charity of others. He chose to remain an outsider, looking in.¹⁰

Once men experience the inner workings of the kingdom, they become insiders, looking out. Then they are allowed to carry their purses, and a sword, too. They have already learned the lesson of dependence on God. Having learned this, they are to carry purses, which God fills as required. Required by what? By the work of the kingdom.

The point is not that God promises to provide all the things we want. *He promises to provide all the things we need to carry out our portion of His kingdom plan.* We are to be content with whatever he provides that enables us to do His kingdom work. Anything more than this is ours to keep, but is not guaranteed. We are allowed to enjoy more than what we need to carry out His work. The tithe shows us just how much more than this we are allowed to keep.

D. The Tithe

God initially funds His own kingdom. He provides the initial capital, just as He did for Adam. Under men’s administration, the kingdom begins to grow. It throws off additional capital. Men are allowed to keep 90% of this. The tithe is man’s reinvestment—a minimal commitment. Special people, such as missionaries, invest more. They are kept in the field by the tithes of others. The missionaries invest time, the irreplaceable resource. This is the greatest commitment open to men, with martyrdom at the top: the forfeiture of time.

God does not under-fund His kingdom. His people may, however. They choose not to tithe. They refuse to give offerings above the tithe. They waste the assets entrusted to them. They lose their original vis-

10. Chapter 38.

ion. But the kingdom expands nevertheless. God finds new people with a better sense of purpose to continue His work. The others become outsiders, looking in.

The tools will be provided by God. What is in short supply is good men, not money. *What holds back a ministry is not the lack of money but the lack of vision or common sense.* It is extremely difficult to teach Christian volunteers this principle, even as it is difficult to teach them to tithe.

The tithe teaches people that they are not autonomous, that they cannot achieve their goals through money alone. They take a token 10% and give it to the local church.¹¹ This token payment symbolizes their complete dependence on God. The tithe also supports the institutional church. It provides the tools needed to extend the work.

The principle of compound growth tells us that any base figure, no matter how low the rate of growth, eventually becomes exponential and approaches infinity as a limit. This is a fundamental principle of the kingdom. It eventually fills the earth. “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44).

As the kingdom grows, the division of labor inside its boundaries increases. Its tasks increase in complexity. It throws off more wealth as output increases. As God’s people faithfully work out their salvations with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), they experience the effect of compound growth. They have more capital to work with.

At this point, two things can happen. First, men can reinvest more, and the rate of economic growth increases. Second, they can consume more, and their lifestyle gets softer and more pleasant. Their tastes change. They find things to buy and dream about buying that their forebears would not have imagined possible, let alone impossible to live without. We would imagine that as residents in God’s kingdom get richer, they would give a larger percentage to God’s work. Modern economics teaches that as we receive more income, we allocate the marginal income to less valuable items on our scale of values. But this insight applies perfectly only in a hypothetical world in which there is no time, and tastes do not change. But tastes do change as income changes. The problem is addiction. Men begin to worship at the shrine

11. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

of the great god More. They become mammonites. The more they get, the more they want. The more their neighbors get, the more they want. The kingdom of God slips lower on their list of priorities. God no longer receives 10% “off the top.” He receives whatever is left over after the more important expenditures are made.

Thus, men lose their vision or their forefathers’ vision. Society grows wealthier, and so do its residents. But this new wealth alters their tastes. It alters their priorities. The array of prices changes. Things that had never seemed possible to buy now become affordable, if tithe money can be allocated to buy them. It should be easier for men to tithe in an expanding economy, because the additional income is used to purchase goods and services that are ever-lower on men’s scale of values. But their scale of values changes as their income rises. They find it more difficult to tithe. They also find it more difficult to save. Present-orientation increases. The rate of capital formation decreases. The rate of economic growth therefore decreases.

E. Breaking the Addiction

What is promised here is that God’s people will be supplied with all that they need to promote the work of God’s kingdom. Jesus did not say that they will receive all that they want. Mammon’s kingdom makes that promise, and then reneges by raising men’s wants ever higher: “The more you get, the more you want.” This addiction threatens men’s work in the kingdom. The tithe is God’s primary counter-measure to mammon’s addiction.

What is primary is the kingdom of God: searching for it and, having found it, working to extend it. There is no guarantee implied in this passage that good men will receive all that they want. In fact, they may lose much of what they have. If they are addicted to more, they must break the habit. If they refuse, then they will move into the kingdom of mammon. As God’s kingdom expands and produces more wealth, covenant-keepers must be ever-more alert to this addiction. If they succumb to it, God will either take the kingdom away from them or else impose a setback that will break the addiction. This is the message of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

When hard times arrive, men’s tastes change. When they are hungry, they do not worry about the latest fashions. When they face eviction from their homes, they do not worry about new carpeting. They hunker down. They do not buy new items just because they are

new. They make do with what they own. They grow more appreciative about what they still have when they have lost much of what they had.¹² Or they may lose hope. If they had worshipped too long at mammon's shrine, they are more likely to lose hope. The worst of the addicts may even become cannibals:

And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave: So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates (Deut. 28:53–57).

F. Anti-Procrastination

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (v. 34). This sounds as though Jesus was promoting a radical present-orientation. This was not the case. What he was warning against was worry. The evils of tomorrow are too many to worry about effectively. Concern yourself with today's immediate problems.

Does this mean that we are not to think about the possible negative effects tomorrow of what we do today? No, but it does mean that we must be aware of the reality of time. *We are responsible today for what we do today*. We are not omniscient. We cannot see equally clearly what will happen tomorrow. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (I Cor. 13:12). The further we peer into the

12. ‘*We Had Everything But Money*’ (Greendale, Wisconsin: Country Books, 1992). This is a book of reminiscences about the Great Depression of the 1930s in the United States.

future, the less we can forecast accurately. So, we are not to worry about all the bad things that might happen. We should deal with today's evils. These are the evils that we must do something about.

But this still does not answer the question: Are we not to think about the possible effects of today on tomorrow? Are we to focus only on today? How can we make plans? A military commander who does not think about tomorrow will not prepare today for tomorrow. What we do today depends heavily on what we think will happen tomorrow. This is especially true of upper-class people, who are future-oriented. Is the New Testament present-oriented? No.

What is here forbidden are worry and anxiety. The same Greek word translated as *thought* in this verse is translated elsewhere translated as *careful*. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6–7). It means *full of care*, not *cautious*.

Worrying about the future is counter-productive. It paralyzes people. Worrying about the near future is short-lived. Jesus said to deal with today's worries today, and stop worrying about tomorrow. He was warning against procrastination. Sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof. Concentrate your concern on today's problems. Tomorrow's may not arrive.

We have only limited resources, including emotional resources. We must allocate them carefully, i.e., cautiously. We must not waste them. Work on today's problems today. Identify tomorrow's problems only for the purpose of dealing with their preliminary aspects today. If they cannot be dealt with today, ignore them. Focus on what you can do something about. Then get a good night's sleep. You have done all you can. God does not you accountable for doing more than you can.

Conclusion

The first things we are to seek are God's kingdom and His righteousness. The thing we need in order to find the kingdom is trust in God rather than in ourselves. Then, after we are in the kingdom, we will receive whatever we need to continue our work. "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life

more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (Matt. 6:25).¹³ “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” (Matt. 6:31).

The top priority here is exercising faith and seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This may even involve giving up the wealth that enables us to deal with lower priorities. That was the case with the rich young ruler. He had too many other, higher priorities. Had he already found the kingdom, he might have put his wealth to better uses than before, but Jesus knew that his wealth was what was keeping him from the search. Because covenant-keepers are supposed to know that their kingdom work is important to God and will be funded, they can stop worrying about the future. Because they are extremely future-oriented—heaven and eternity—they are not supposed to worry about the near-term future, i.e., tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Instead, they are to do all they can today in dealing with those problems that can be dealt with today.

13. Chapter 14.

16

THE GOLDEN RULE AND GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:7–12).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the heavenly Father who gives whatever His children ask: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.¹ On this principle rests what has come to be called the golden rule: “Do unto others what you would have others to do unto you.” This phrase never actually appears in this form in the Bible. It says, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” And it adds, “for this is the law and the prophets.”

A. A Program of Cost-Effective Seeking

This passage includes one of the greatest promises in the Bible: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” It is comparable to this promise: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Re-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

move hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20b). What are we to make of all this?

1. The Faith to Seek

First, seeking is the outworking of faith. We have already seen that *faith is a means of risk-reduction*.² But this passage goes further: *active seeking is a means of wealth accumulation*. The good things of life are available for the seeking—not just for the asking, but the seeking. *Seeking* is a program that combines faith, identification of the items desired, planning to gain these items, and a unique means of securing the completion of the plan. This final stage is generally referred to as the golden rule. All elements must be present for the program to work as outlined here.

The first step listed here is asking, but it is not the first step in the seeking process. The seeker must already have identified whatever it is that he wants. This takes great spiritual maturity. This is the most difficult aspect of the entire procedure. He must identify his own scale of values. Put another way, he must identify his priorities and the reasons for them. He must seek conformity of his priorities to God’s written revelation. The Gospel of Matthew makes it plain that the supreme priority is the kingdom of God. This is the covenant-keeper’s method of fulfilling the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26-28).³

The second step is the planning stage: “seeking.” Once he knows what it is he is after, he must think about how he can attain this goal. He must develop a plan of action. He must get from here to there. I have argued elsewhere that this plan consists of two parts, once the goal is identified: (1) estimating the price; (2) estimating the time frame. The shorter the time frame, the more it will cost to complete the plan. We do not get something—above all, time—for nothing.

The third step—knocking—is Jesus’ way to describe prayer. His definition underlies another passage on prayer, the parable of the woman and the unjust judge. “. . . There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow

2. Chapter 15.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith" (Luke 18:2–6). This is the model for persevering prayer. We are to pray to God as if He were an unjust judge.⁴

We see this in another passage on prayer—indeed, *the* passage on prayer. Immediately after presenting what we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus presented an analogy. As we shall see, this passage includes the same words as this chapter's text.

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:5–13).⁵

2. Repetition

He who prays must be stubborn. If a prayer is worth praying, it is worth praying again. But what if God's answer is a clear-cut "no"? Then we should stop praying. Paul wrote: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:7–10). Paul had to learn to live with his thorn in the flesh. But most men cannot be sure that a prayer will not be answered until death removes the opportunity—either the death of the person who prays or the one being prayed for.

The frustration of unanswered prayer is always a threat to the faith of the godly person who prays in faith. *Unwavering faith is basic to getting prayers answered.* "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5–8). It takes courage to pray this way: *the courage to expect God to answer the prayer.* Unanswered prayer is a temptation to disbelieve the promise and therefore the One who made the promise.

Moses told Joshua to exercise courage. "And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed" (Deut. 31:7–8).⁶ The same kind of courage must underlie successful prayer. This degree of courage is not given to every Christian, or even most Christians, in most periods of history.

B. Good Things for the Asking

"How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" The child asks for bread. The father does not give him a stone. The child asks for fish. The father does not give him a scorpion. The first request is minimal: bread. The second is for something extra: fish. Giving a stone is an evil response to a child's request for bread. Giving a scorpion for the request for fish would be even worse. What was Jesus' point? That men, being evil, do good things to those whom they love. How much more does God do good things for those whom He loves.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 74.

But what if the child had asked for a stone to cast at an enemy? Would a wise father grant him his request? No. How much more would a wise father not grant a child's request for a scorpion? Of what good use is a scorpion to a child? What Jesus maintained here was that a legitimate request from a child should be answered by his father. So is God's open hand in relation to His children.

What seems legitimate in our eyes may be the equivalent of a scorpion in our lives: a deadly gift. We lack insight into our own hearts. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:9–10). We are not always good judges of character, especially our own.

The father's gift to a child in response to a legitimate request should be our model for understanding God's responses to our prayers. If we do not get our prayers answered, then the fault may be in our assessment of our needs or perhaps our assessment of the times. The father gives his son bread, but not every time the son may ask throughout the day. Similarly, God gives us what we need when we need it. What defines our need? God's calling and timing. We must see our needs in terms of God's kingdom. The theme of God's kingdom is found throughout Matthew. The kingdom is central; we are not.

Job asked God for death. "Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort; yea, I would harden myself in sorrow: let him not spare; for I have not concealed the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?" (Job 6:8–11). God had other plans for Job: blessing (Job. 42). He did not grant this request.

What is good for man? Whatever is good for God. *The criterion of good is theocentric.* Through the power of prayer, men are enabled to participate in the extension of God's kingdom. They see their prayers come to pass in history. But these answered prayers extend God's kingdom in history. Prayers are answered in history; the kingdom is extended through answered prayers in history.

C. What We Do Unto Others

The passage ends with the reminder that when we make requests

to God, we should heed requests by men. Doing unto others what we would have others do unto us is, above all, a description of our relation to God. We are His agents. We represent God to others. They see us. When He tells us to do to others what we would have them do to us, He is calling us to exercise justice. This is not a law for the governing of relationships among drug addicts, for example. We must judge what is good for us in terms of God's kingdom. Then we are to extend grace to others in terms of God's kingdom. This is what we expect from others, beginning with God. We go to Him to plead our cases. Others come to us to do the same. We expect God to grant us our requests. Others expect us to do the same. The fundamental issue here is justice tempered with mercy.

We do good unto others. We thereby represent God to them. We want good done to us by others. We must therefore serve as good models for them, as God's covenantal representatives. We must treat others well; otherwise, we should not expect them to treat us well. When we treat others well, God honors this by granting us our legitimate requests. This, too, is a testimony to others. They see our prayers being answered, and they learn something about covenantal cause and effect in history. But if we treat others poorly, then we testify falsely to them about God. We hinder the extension of His kingdom. We risk having our prayers go unanswered. This, too, testifies to covenantal cause and effect in history.

We should give good gifts to our enemies. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:42–44).⁷ We wear them down with kindness. We show them God's love in history. This either is a means of grace or a means of cursing. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20).

Doing good to others means that others will learn to trust us. Our positive, predictable behavior lowers their risk of dealing with us. A basic law of economics is this: when prices fall, more is demanded. In this case, we are talking about more opportunities for mutual exchange. When we take advantage of these opportunities by not taking

7. Chapter 10.

advantage of people, this increases our wealth.

God will not grant every frivolous request that catches our fancy. Neither are we to grant requests to everyone who asks us for something frivolous. The key issue is how our requests of God, like their requests of us, fit into God's overall kingdom work.

Conclusion

There are priorities for prayer. They must reflect a reconstructed scale of values: kingdom first. Men are to ask in faith, praying diligently for good things. These good things are good from the kingdom's point of view, and therefore from covenant-keeping man's point of view. The kingdom of God is the top priority. Our prayers are to enable us to fit our plans into God's plans for the kingdom. Answered prayers enable us to see God's plans coming to fruition. So do unanswered prayers. The positive sanctions and the negative sanctions are to train us in the discipline of kingdom-building.

Prayer is a discipline that takes a lifetime to develop. Men call upon God, and in His own good time, He answers prayers that extend His kingdom. To the extent that men prayer kingdom-building prayers, they will see their prayers answered. The secret of getting one's prayers answered is to conform oneself to God and be alert to one's role in this kingdom. We must become like the children of Issachar. "And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment" (I Chron. 12:32).

Treating others as well as we expect to be treated increases the likelihood that others will want to cooperate with us. We become lower-risk trading partners. We will be presented with more opportunities to extend our range of choices—our wealth—because others know that they will be treated fairly in ventures with us.

17

THE TWO GATES

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13–14).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the gatekeeper. He built the gate to eternal life. He established its boundaries, i.e., the pathway's ethical boundaries. This is point three of the biblical covenant.¹ God told Joshua: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:7–8).

A. Choose Life

Every man has a choice before him: life or death. Moses warned Israel at the end of his life:

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and **to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments**, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore **choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:15–20).²

The basis of life is clearly stated: “To love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments.” But no man can keep the law perfectly. So, the law testifies that every man needs grace. But this grace is not cheap grace. It is granted by God on only one judicial basis: Jesus Christ’s perfect fulfilling of the law, with God’s curse placed on Him nonetheless (Gal. 3:13).

The gate to life is narrow. Does this mean that the way is too difficult for most people? Or does it mean that the way is hidden from most people? If the way is too difficult for most people, then this must mean that it is not too difficult for some people. This means that the way to life is the way of the law, of good works. Paul preached the contrary view in the synagogue at Antioch: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39).

If, on the other hand, the narrow gate is hidden to most people, then some do get through the gate on the basis of their having found it. Evidence for this interpretation is found in Jesus’ discussion of His ministry. He did not come to show the truth to everyone. He showed in only to a few. “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25).

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is giv-

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 73.

en unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matt. 13:10–17).³

This was a fulfillment of Isaiah: "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. 6:9–10). This *selective revelation* is God the Father's work. "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:15–17).

These passages prove that the narrow gate is not closed to most people on the basis of their sin. It is closed to *all* people on the basis of their sin. Then how can it be open to anyone? Only on the basis of Christ's perfection, which is imputed to them by God. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are

3. Chapter 27.

past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:20–26). "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:5–8).

B. Many Called, Few Chosen

Narrow is the way, Jesus said. The question is: Is it closed to most men forever? Or was Jesus speaking only of His own era, the waning days of Old Covenant Israel?

1. Harvest of Souls

His words indicate that He was speaking of conditions in His own era, not necessarily about the future. More than this: things would soon change. That which Jesus had taught to His followers would soon be heard by many people. Did this mean many men in general or many Jews? The context indicates: many Jews. "In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, in-somuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:1–3). He told the disciples: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together" (John 4:35–36). "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is

plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:35–38).

2. The Wedding Feast

Christ’s parable of the king’s wedding feast for his son seems to indicate that on the final day, there will be more people left outside the feast than the number of those inside. “And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:11–14).

This passage is one of those commonly used against postmillennialism. Critics ask: How can postmillennialists believe in a great outpouring of faith? After all, many are called, but few are chosen. But the critics neglect the context of this parable. This is the parable of the wedding feast. The king is God; His Son is Jesus Christ. *Jesus presented this parable in the context of opposition from the Pharisees.* “And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet. And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come” (Matt. 21:45–22:3). It was clear to the Pharisees that they were the targets of this parable, for immediately after He gave it, “Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk” (Matt. 22:15).

The prophetic context of this passage was Jesus’ warning to the Pharisees: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). This was a warning that the way of life was about to be opened to the gentiles. More than this: the way of life would soon be closed to Israel on any basis other than membership in the universal church. This meant that Jews would be outnumbered by gentiles. Jews would not gain access to the kingdom of God based on their Jewishness: their claim of descent from the patriarchs, their adherence to

what later were called Talmudic traditions, or any other exclusively Jewish possession.

The parable of the wedding feast is about socially acceptable people, who demanded entrance on their own terms, dressed in their own garments, in relation to the undesirables, who were content to allow the king to clothe them. The parable says that the best people initially slew the agents of the king (Matt. 22:6). This was a clear reference to the practice of the Jews: slaying the prophets in the past and slaying Christ's disciples in the near future. The king was fed up with this rejection. He then opened the feast to the least desirable elements. "Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests" (Matt. 22:8–10). On the highways of Israel were gentiles, as the parable of the Good Samaritan indicates. The servants invited both Jews (good) and gentiles (bad) without distinction. The wedding feast was now open to anyone brought in by the servants. But it was not open to those who came on their own, dressed in their own garments. The Pharisees knew exactly what Jesus was saying. They immediately took counsel against Him.

"Many are called, but few are chosen." *This referred to the Jews of Jesus' day.* The narrow confines of the Old Covenant were about to be shattered by the New Covenant. The Jews would not accept this. They would not accept entrance into the kingdom of Christ on these terms: open entry by the gentiles without their circumcision.

3. *Jews vs. Gentiles*

This is even clearer in a similar account in Luke. The contrast is between those who claim to be the descendants of Abraham and the patriarchs vs. those who arrive from all directions: gentiles. The former will not gain access to eternal life, and the latter will.

And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying,

Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last (Luke 13:22–30).⁴

Immediately following the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the faithful centurion: “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11–12). The same imagery appears: gentiles coming from afar, sitting in the presence of the patriarchs, with Jews outside, under the curse, gnashing their teeth.

The Pharisees were greatly offended. That is because they fully understood what Jesus was saying about them and their nation. They wanted Him to stop preaching such things. They wanted Him to leave town. “The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee” (Luke 13:31). What the Pharisees clearly understood has not been understood by Christian expositors, who interpret Christ’s words apart from their context: the imminent transfer of the kingdom of God from Old Covenant Israel to the New Covenant church.

Many were called: many Jews in His day. Few were chosen. The contrast in these passages is not between the number of lost people in history vs. the number saved. It is between the number of Jews saved in Jesus’ day vs. the number of Jews not saved. He was saying that the Jews of His day were not God’s chosen people. They were the “called but rarely chosen” people.

C. Heeding the Call

The call is for repentance and acceptance of a judicial substitute before God. The call is not for the listener’s works righteousness, but

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 32.

for *Jesus Christ's works righteousness*. "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:23–24).

Jesus called men to obedience. He did not say that the path is too difficult for most men. On the contrary, He said it is easier than what men in sin must face. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–30).⁵ To interpret the metaphor of the narrow gate as if it were a call to ascetic moral discipline is to miss the point entirely. That was what the Jews thought the gate was: fenced in with innumerable laws that only Jews and a few of their proselytes could obey.

The broad gate that leads to destruction is not merely the path of easy virtue; it is equally the path of ascetic self-discipline. All robes but the wedding garments provided by the king are unacceptable, Jesus warned. All righteousness other than Christ's imputed perfection is substandard. The Jews wanted to work their way through the narrow gate. The gentiles wanted much the same, if not ethically, then at least ritually. Hardened sinners wanted to avoid thinking of such matters. But all were headed toward the broad gate that leads to destruction. What they all needed was what men in every era need: a judicial substitute that is acceptable to God. *They needed an acceptable sacrifice*. "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:10–14).

Jesus is the acceptable sacrifice. He offered Himself, once. Then He "sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." This footstool metaphor is found throughout the Bible. Psalm 110 is the premier passage. The author of Hebrews used the metaphor a second time. "But to which of the angels said he at any times, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (Heb. 1:13). Jesus will remain seated at God's right hand until all of His enemies are conquered, for they are His footstool.

5. Chapter 25.

The text is clear about this. He will not return to earth to reign on a throne in Jerusalem or anywhere else. The last enemy is death. “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (I Cor. 15:25–26).⁶ When death is conquered, Jesus will return to judge the world. The two events are the same event: resurrection to eternal life and resurrection to the second death (Rev. 20:11–15). At that time, it will be visible to all just which of the two gates each man passed through on his journey from history to eternity.

Conclusion

Man’s top priority in this passage is to walk through the narrow gate. This gate is not narrow in the sense of being difficult to pass through. It is narrow in the sense of being inaccessible except through God’s special grace. Otherwise, it is a closed gate. The gate leading to destruction is wide open. Anyone can pass through: the ascetic, the hedonist, the ritualist, the libertine. Lawyers are especially welcome. “And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers” (Luke 11:46).

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

18

BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:15–20).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the owner of the orchard, who cuts down any tree that does not bear good fruit. As the creator, He has standards of productivity. He evaluates men's output in this life. Their output in history indicates what their output will be in eternity. Some He will spare, and some He will burn. This relates to sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. To Judge a Prophet

This passage is important for laying down a principle of judgment: what a man does in history testifies to his eternal condition. What he says may be judged by what he does and what his followers do.

1. The False Prophet

The context of these remarks is the false prophet. The false prophet may sound plausible initially. The listener may have trouble determining whether the prophet's message is true or false. Jesus said to

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

watch carefully for the results of the prophet's ministry. There is continuity between what a man says and what the results are.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the prophet possessed lawful authority over both priests and magistrates. He had special revelation from God. The judicial marks of his prophetic office were two-fold: His call to worship the God of Israel and the fulfillment of his predictions.

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee (Deut. 13:1–5).

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:20–22).

The Old Covenant was still in force in Jesus' day. Prophets still existed. John the Baptist was a prophet (Luke 7:28). He condemned religious leaders in harsh terms, calling them vipers (Matt. 3:7). He condemned a king, although this cost him his life. It was not easy for men to know for certain whether they were hearing a true prophet or a false one. If his words sounded plausible, what else could men use to judge the legitimacy of his office? Jesus said: by the fruits of this office. The ministry of a true prophet will be productive of righteousness. The ministry of a false prophet will not.

2. Hierarchical Responsibility

This means that the actions of a man's followers will testify to the legitimacy of his claim. He is responsible for their actions. He is their representative, their spokesman. He cannot disassociate himself from them. If he will not impose negative sanctions against them, then he must be assumed to be in agreement with them. By their fruits we will know him.

Gamaliel understood this principle in discussing the ministry of the apostles. "Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply [it happen] ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:34–39). The ministries of previous prophets had come to nothing. The religious authorities should wait and see, he advised. They took his advice.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, prophetic ministries bore their respective fruit rapidly. There was time to wait and see. Korah and Dathan rebelled against Moses, but their rebellion did not last long. Negative sanctions came rapidly.

And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into

the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation (Num. 16:28–33).

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the judgments of God in history were down payments on His judgments in eternity. Men could make accurate judgments on the basis of God's visible judgments. But would they? Or would they take their stand with the false prophets and the kings who hired them? Time after time, the Israelites sided with the false prophets. They did not rebel when their leaders imprisoned and killed the true prophets. For this, they eventually paid the price: captivity. Their sin had gone on for generations. As had been true of the Egyptians and Amalekites before them, the multi-generational bills eventually came due.

Evil men had rebelled against good fruit. That was their great sin. Jesus repeated this accusation: the forefathers had persecuted the prophets. They had brought negative sanctions against the true prophets. This accusation had judicial merit because of the visible relationship between a prophet's words and their outcome. Covenant-keepers would have recognized the difference. That Israel had not recognized the difference, generation after generation, had condemned the nation. The fact that still they had not changed would soon condemn the nation forever. Jesus, as the final prophet, brought His covenant lawsuit against them in the name of the former prophets.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:27–

36).

B. Christ's Three Covenantal Offices

The New Covenant has none of the Mosaic Covenant's offices: prophet, priest, or king. There is no covenantal prophet today. No one is granted the authority to speak God's word authoritatively, commanding civil and religious leaders to do what he says on pain of God's immediate sanctions.² No one's voice of authority exceeds the Bible's. There is no covenantal priest today, mediating sacrifices between God and man. There is no covenantal king, anointed by a priest or a prophet in God's name. Jesus alone retains the three-fold title. He referred to Himself as a prophet: "Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). Hebrews calls Him high priest: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1). Revelation calls him king of kings. "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). These offices have ceased; Christ holds them as monopolies.

This has changed the application of Jesus' law governing false prophecy. The office of true prophet has been annulled in history. One mark of the true prophet was his ability to invoke immediate sanctions. "And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight" (II Kings 1:10–13). This time constraint no longer operates in the New Covenant. God's histor-

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch.43:D.

ical sanctions are predictable, but only in the broad sense: if men continue in their sins, then they will suffer corporate judgment. As to when, we do not know.

C. Ethical Cause and Effect

The delay of sanctions makes it more difficult to judge correctly about the quality of a movement's fruits. The question is: Does this cause-and-effect relationship still exist? Some, if not most, theologians assume that such predictable historical sanctions no longer exist. They agree with Meredith G. Kline, who writes that ethical cause and effect in history are, humanly speaking, essentially random. Kline is speaking of what he called the common grace order, which is not a familiar concept to most Christians, but they would agree with his view of historical sanctions (except when their nation is at war). "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways." But if this is correct, then we are faced with an enormous burden: judging a movement by its fruits. If there is no cause and effect relationship between bad theology and bad ethics, or bad ideology and the visible outcome, then making accurate judgments becomes far more difficult than it was under the Mosaic Covenant. It is difficult enough already: longer time frames for roots to produce visible fruits. But if there is no predictable relationship whatsoever, then we must judge strictly on theological content—a task that few Christians are well-equipped to perform.

What of fruits other than prosperity? "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:19–24). Here we can surely make judgments. These are individual fruits.

What are the economic effects of these rival lists of fruits? Does

evil consistently produce wealth? Does righteousness consistently produce poverty? Or are the outcomes random, as Kline says? If they are random, then no expressly biblical economic theory is possible. If the outcomes are perverse, then we must search for institutional means of converting evil personal motives into positive effects. This is what most versions of free market theory have sought to do, from Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714) until the present.³

The profit motive, when coupled with private ownership, produces incentives for serving others. Men's greed becomes their motivation to meet the demands of other men. Free market economic theory has this great advantage over socialist theory: it recognizes original sin. It does not assume, as socialism assumes, that concentrated political power—legalized force—makes those who wield it either wiser or kinder. On the contrary, free market theory assumes the opposite: power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.⁴

Economists are self-consciously agnostic with regard to God. They never mention God, except as a belief that produces predictable responses. If we accept either the covenantal randomness of corporate effects of common confessions, or the covenantal perversity of individual results, we cannot construct biblical economic theory. We must then appeal to this or that humanistic theory. But if righteous roots produce positive fruits in history, and unrighteous roots produce undesirable fruits, then biblical social theory becomes possible.

D. Individual and Corporate Fruitfulness

The passage refers to false prophets: individuals. Yet in another context, the parable of the fig tree, Jesus was referring to Old Covenant Israel (Luke 13:6–9). So, the concept of fruit as a manifestation of spiritual roots applies to both individuals and corporate entities.

Applying this principle to societies, we conclude that there are

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

4. Lord Acton, letter to Bishop Creighton (April 5, 1887). *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, vol. II, *Essays in the Study and Writing of History* (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1986), p. 383. Acton's aphorism is immediately followed by another aphorism, also famous: "Great men are almost always bad men. . . ." The context was an attack on the medieval Inquisition, the responsibility for which Creighton had shifted away from the Papacy: *History of the Papacy during the Period of the Reformation*, vols. 3, 4 (1887), which Acton had reviewed.

standards of productivity that we can apply to assess the rightness or wrongness of that society. There also has to be human discernment of these standards and their proper application in history. “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” This statement is an extension to individuals of the corporate principles of Leviticus 26⁵ and Deuteronomy 28.⁶ The theologian who argues that Jesus substituted individual predictability for corporate predictability has to assume that the covenant’s continuity applies only to individuals. But then what of families? What of churches? Does this principle apply only to individuals? Doesn’t it also apply to movements based on the teachings of individuals?

Pietism denies this principle’s applicability to the world outside a Trinitarian covenant, and then seeks to deny the legitimacy of this covenant to civil government. Christian self-government under biblical law, yes. Christian family government under biblical law, yes. Christian church government under biblical law, yes. But not Christian civil government. “There can be no such thing as Christian civil government. What existed in Mosaic Israel before the captivity has been annulled in principle.” A problem with pietism is that it openly surrenders to covenant-breakers the authority to establish their civil covenant over covenant keepers. Somehow, we are expected to believe that a Christian civil covenant will not produce the positive fruit that a non-Christian civil covenant will produce. For the pietist, the realm of the civil covenant is governed by a reverse covenantal system of sanctions: biblical law produces tyranny, while “neutral” civil law produces good.⁷

Jesus’ words here create an enormous exegetical problem for pietism, one which the pietists for over three centuries have dealt with by ignoring it. Jesus’ words, if they were ever dealt with exegetically by pietistic social theorists, would force them to declare the existence of a realm of government in which a false confession produces good fruit, and where a true confession—faith in the Trinity—produces bad fruit. What is not true for the other three oath-bound covenants—individu-

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 33–35.

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 69, 70.

7. Except, dispensationalists say, in the State of Israel. There, we are told, the state may lawfully and profitably impose Talmudic law, which sometimes is applied Mosaic law, on recalcitrant Arabs and Christians, as well as on recalcitrant secular Jews.

al, ecclesiastical, and familistic—is somehow true for the civil covenant. This was surely not taught by the Old Covenant. The opposite was taught. It is not formally taught by the New Covenant. A covenantal system of cause and effect applies to individuals and to their movements, such as Phariseeism, Jesus taught. What He taught was consistent with the Mosaic system of corporate sanctions. But the pietist claims to have discovered a principle in natural law theory or democratic theory which supersedes both the Mosaic law and Jesus' teaching on roots and fruits. This principle, discovered in the mid-seventeenth century by Rhode Island's Roger Williams, and elaborated in the eighteenth century by deists and atheists, teaches the reverse of what Jesus taught here, yet it has to be true, pietists assure us. It has to be true because modern democratic theory teaches it. To oppose it would be theocratic, and we all know how bad theocracy is, meaning Trinitarian theocracy. A humanistic theocracy—the reign of democratic man—is supposedly what we need. This is supposedly what God wants. Why, we are not told.

E. Free Market Theory

If Jesus' words are true, then modern free market theory labors under an enormous burden: Mandeville's curse. Free market economic theory promotes a view of society that says that supernatural ethics is irrelevant. Evil men, if they live under a private property system, will produce good things. Compared to what evil men produce under socialism, this statement has been proven true in both theory and practice, i.e., fruits and roots. But the ultimate test of free market theory is not its success over socialism. It is its success over God's corporate sanctions in history.

The free market is not autonomous, for man is not autonomous. The free market can produce, and has produced, wealth untold for hundreds of millions of people. But it has also placed urban men in great peril. The division of labor has been extended to such a degree that men are cut off from the soil. They cannot feed themselves. They live in highly interdependent environments that can sustain life only through extensive exchange—an exchange system that rests on fractional reserve banking and computerization. Everything that sustains life for most urban people is in some way dependent on public utility systems, banks, trains, and traffic control systems, which are operated by or regulated by the civil government.

This is only one example of the risks facing modern man. Modern biological warfare is another. So is the proliferation of small-scale nuclear weapons. Our cities are vulnerable. The free market has made possible the creation of vast interdependent production systems that have sustained a huge growth of population. The free market has done this irrespective of men's confessions of faith. This professedly neutral system of universal blessings has allowed the evolution of a society that is vulnerable to any number of universal curses. Yet men do not repent. They do not see how vulnerable they are. They do not see the looming sanctions of God. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:17–20).⁸

We speak of the market as an impersonal mechanism. We think of mechanisms as tools. Then we insist that tools are neutral. By this, we mean that they can be used for good or evil. But tools are not morally neutral. Nothing is morally neutral. Tools are the products of social systems, and social systems are not morally neutral. Tools extend the systems that furthered their production. Tools make us dependent on these systems. If we rely on our tools, we thereby rely on the social system that created them. But what if that social system is founded on a false oath? Has it not become the corporate equivalent of a false prophet? Was it not built in terms of false prophecies, such as the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, to quote a well-known document written mainly by a well-known unitarian?

Common grace is a great blessing, but it cannot be maintained apart from special grace.⁹ A society built on some version of common grace theology—the common confession of man—rests on a fragile foundation. If God withdraws His special grace, leaving only the economic fruits of abandoned confessional roots, the tree will eventually cease bearing fruit. Surely Europe is now in such a spiritual condition.

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly.gndcg>)

Asia has never even had the roots. Asians imported the free market and its computers in the hope of escaping poverty. For a while, Asia did begin to escape poverty. But the Asians are trapped by their tools, copied from the West and mass produced, and also by the international banking system.

Social systems are package deals because they are based on worldviews. Worldviews are package deals.¹⁰ The dependence of free market ideas and practices on a specifically Western, biblical-covenantal view of the world, the free market economist is loathe to admit. Such an admission undercuts his claims of *autonomy and universality*: of economics as a science, of capitalism as a social system, and of man as a product of impersonal evolution. I am not saying that demand curves do not slope downward and to the right in Asia, as they do in the West. I *am* saying that there is no such thing as a demand curve outside of the economist's conceptual toolkit. Demand curves are abstractions based on assumptions that can never be true in the real world, and which are then taught as truths to gullible undergraduates by far more gullible professors.¹¹ I am not saying that people do not respond predictably to incentives. I *am* saying that humanistic capitalism's incentives are being sold to millions of people at low prices that do not reflect the true risk of subsequent transactions. Godless capitalism is being sold almost as an addictive drug is sold. "There's no risk. Try it. You'll like it." No doubt they will. They will also become addicted to the division of labor that comes with it—a division of labor based on a confession: "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."

Conclusion

There is a predictable connection between confession and visible results, between invisible roots and visible fruits. This connection takes longer to manifest itself in the New Covenant, for prophetic sanctions have been transferred to Christ. Jesus warned His followers to examine the fruits when they are not sure of the roots. While the in-

10. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetics: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1998), pp. 102–103.

11. These impossible assumptions include: (1) men respond to price changes that are infinitesimal, i.e., unobservable; (2) a curve exists at one instant in time, yet men's decisions are made over time; (3) other things remain equal in a world in which we cannot change just one thing; (4) men's tastes do not change when prices change. There are no doubt lots of others, but my expected cost of recalling them is higher than my expected gain.

troductory verses indicate that He was discussing the office of prophet, the general principle is universal: a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

The priority here is developing wise judgment. Wise judgment begins with a confession of faith in the God of the Bible. It matures through a careful study of God's law (Ps. 119) and obedience, i.e., applying the written law to our decisions. As we develop wise judgment, we can better assess the claims of those who come to us in God's name, as Old Covenant prophets used to come. We can hear their confessions and see the results of these confessions. On the basis of what we see, we can assess the truth of what we hear.

19

FIRST THINGS FIRST

And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead (Matt. 8:19–22).

The theocentric principle here is that God expects permanent commitment: hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.¹ There is a hierarchy of values.

A. The Uprooted

In these two incidents, Jesus was approached by men who said they wanted to follow Him. He did not send the first man away. Rather, He gave him a reason not to commit. The second man was willing to commit, but only after burying his father. Jesus warned this man to ignore his dead father's funeral. These seem to be opposite cases. The first man wanted to come; Jesus discouraged him. The second wanted to bury his father first; Jesus discouraged him. In both cases, Jesus was motivated by the same principle: first things first. This is the principle of priorities. It is the governing principle of the Gospel of Matthew: priorities within the kingdom of God.

The scribe wanted to follow Jesus. This was surely not a normal request. Scribes constantly confronted Jesus publicly, trying to undermine His authority through questioning. Perhaps this man was seri-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

ous; perhaps he was an informer. In either case, Jesus challenged him to pay a high price. Jesus had no home, no place to call home, no permanent pillow. He was in a condition like Jacob's in his flight from Esau. "And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep" (Gen. 28:11). Jacob had become a wanderer, a man without a home.

This is not a normal condition. Wandering is usually a curse. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness; this was surely a curse on the exodus generation. They wanted to rest. They wanted a place to rest. They did not receive their wish. One of the basic ideas of rest is to have a place of one's own to call home. A place of rest serves as headquarters for our dominion. We work; then we return home to rest. The Promised Land was Israel's place of rest.

Jesus' ministry required that He wander. Those who followed Him also wandered. They gave up their places of rest. They also gave up predictable sources of income. Their seemingly patternless wandering broke their familiar pattern of work outside the home, return to home, and rest. Wandering had also broken the exodus generation's prior pattern of limited dominion: servitude in Egypt.

In the wilderness, the Israelites had been sustained by the manna. We are not told how Jesus and His disciples were sustained. It may have been charity. Perhaps they took odd jobs. Somehow, they had money. Judas kept the bag (John 12:6). But the scribe, hearing that Jesus had no place of rest, must have understood that he also would have to forfeit more than a place of rest. He would forfeit the normal pattern of dominion. He could no longer rely on a steady stream of income.

Jesus was telling the scribe that he faced risk. How would he deal with this risk? By relying on others? By relying on Jesus' persuasion of others? By relying on odd jobs, or money shared by the other disciples who might find odd jobs? The pattern of dominion was broken by Jesus' way of life. He refused to stay in His own region, where He was not taken seriously. "And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not

without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:54–58). Familiarity had bred contempt. So, He walked unfamiliar pathways to do His work.

Jesus was nearing the end of His time on earth. He was at the beginning of the next stage of His ministry: covenantal representation by His church. To prepare His followers, He first broke the patterns of their lives. He reshaped their lives by reshaping their dominion patterns. He took away their pillows. He substituted rocks instead.

God did the same with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He took away their places of rest. He uprooted them. He drove Jacob and his sons into Egypt. He drove Moses out of Egypt, and then out of his home in Midian. He did it to David in his time with the Philistines (I Sam. 27:7) and during Absalom's rebellion (II Sam. 16). He did it to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). He did it to Paul. The uprooting process is part of the next phase of the expansion of the kingdom.

Jesus' parents were uprooted when they took Him into Egypt (Matt. 2:14). His public ministry began with His uprooting out of Galilee. The familiar environment that had sustained Him was removed. His hope for rest could not be placed in geography. It had to come from above. God the Father would sustain Him. Jesus would do His work of building the kingdom without the capital asset that most men rely on: a predictable place of rest.

Missionary activity is always based on an uprooting. Irish monks in the sixth century spread across northern Europe, building monasteries.² In the United States, the Baptists and Methodists captured what was then the Western part of the nation by adopting circuit-riding. These men had no permanent homes. John Wesley was the model, who spent most of his adult life on horseback. While ministers in the traditional Calvinistic denominations stayed at home east of the Allegheny Mountains, the Baptists and Methodists worked for little pay and no place of rest in the West. There were 750 Congregational churches in 1780, and about 500 Presbyterian congregations and 450 Baptist congregations. The Methodists were barely visible. By 1900, there were almost 50,000 Baptist congregations, almost 54,000 Methodist congregations, 15,452 Presbyterian, 5,604 Congregational (liber-

2. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Talese-Doubleday, 1995). This is a popularly written book, not a scholarly history.

al), 6,264 Episcopal (liberal). There were over 10,298 Disciples congregations: two-thirds of the number of Presbyterians.³ Episcopalians and Congregationalists were hardly visible in the West.

Jesus was telling the scribe that to follow Him, he would have to become one of the uprooted. He did not tell him he could not join the disciples, but He warned him of the high price.

B. Let the Dead Bury the Dead

The second inquirer was already a disciple, but not one of the permanent wanderers. He was ready to join the wanderers, almost. But first he had to go and bury his father. Jesus dismissed the ritual as trivial. “Let the dead bury the dead.” This statement was an epitaph on the grave of Old Covenant Israel.

Filial piety is basic to almost every civilization. It was the heart of classical religion. It was also important in Israel. Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury Abraham (Gen. 25:9). Jacob and Esau buried Isaac (Gen. 35:29). Yet Jesus told the prospective disciple to break with tradition and immediately join the band of wanderers. In a sense, Jesus’ inner circle wandered in circles. They were no longer part of the normal pattern of family life in Israel.

The would-be wanderer had to assess the importance of becoming one of the inner circle, being present at the creation of a new world order. Was it worth defying convention? To defy this convention would be to move outside of polite society. He would become an outcast. If he did not bury his father, his son might not bury him. This, in fact, was quite likely. Jesus later warned them: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:34–38).

But it was more than this. The man would have to participate in the burial of Israel. It was not just that his father was dead; it was that his nation was dead. The old order was dead. The new Israel of God

3. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 44, Figure 33.

was being born.⁴ This new Israel would not attend the burial of the old Israel. In fact, the new Israel was warned to flee from the old Israel when the signs of the imminent burial appeared (Luke 21:20–22). When Rome's legions arrived, the church was to have departed, which church tradition subsequently said they did, fleeing to the non-Judaic town of Pella.

Conclusion

Jesus warned both men to put first things first: to set their top priority. Joining the wanderers would mean giving up home, bed, and pillow. Jesus had done this; His followers would, too. Was the scribe ready to pay this price? Joining the wanderers would also mean giving up traditions. Burying one's father was a very old tradition in Israel. That tradition was about to go. The new Israel would soon be at war with the old Israel. The household would be divided. The would-be wanderer was told it was time to choose: covenantal life or covenantal death. Jesus told him to choose life.

He was telling them both that the New Covenant would supersede the Old. To join Him would be to take a new covenant oath. They could no longer live halfway between the Old World Order and the New World Order. For a brief time, it might have looked as though that was possible, but it was not. The dead would have to bury the dead. The living would have to wander. Within one generation, they would have to flee. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20–22).

4. The church is called the Israel of God. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). This has always been a problem text for dispensationalists.

THE LURE OF BUSINESS

And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts (Matt. 8:28–34).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's ability to deliver men from demon possession.¹ God is more powerful than devils. The message of the passage is that men do not want to pay the price of such deliverance.

Jesus delivered the possessed man by exorcising the devils. The devils asked to be allowed to dwell in a nearby herd of swine. As soon as Jesus allowed the demons to enter the swine, the pigs ran into the sea and drowned.

The parallel passage in Mark throws additional light on these events: "And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch.24.

had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (Mark 5:14–17).

One of the two had remained behind with Jesus.² "And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel" (Mark 5:18–20).

Why did the demons request to be allowed to reside in the bodies of swine, only to direct their new hosts into a suicidal run into the sea? If the demons needed places to live, why did they destroy their new places of residence?

The demons did not want a place to live in the sense of a dwelling. They wanted a place to live in the sense of a region. They operated in a region in which herds of pigs were kept. This indicates that pork had a local market. The Mosaic dietary laws were not being honored by residents in the region. Was this a region filled with gentiles? The text does not say so, nor does any other text in the New Testament. What it says is that the townspeople were afraid and asked Jesus to leave.

What were they afraid of? Being delivered from demons? This seems unlikely. Demonic possession was a curse to be avoided. The fact that someone locally had been delivered caught their attention. They came out to see for themselves what had happened.

What had happened? Two men had been delivered. One remained behind to testify of his deliverance. But his deliverance had involved the destruction of a herd of swine. This was surely bad for the herd's owner. The swineherders had already told the townspeople the story of the drowned herd. In fact, the passage indicates that the news about the swine preceded the news about the delivered men. As soon as the townspeople received confirmation of the story from the formerly possessed victim, they asked Jesus to leave the region. He complied.

This left the demons behind, without Jesus to bother them until the time of His resurrection and ascension. The demons had asked Him, "art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" They knew

2. The accounts in Mark and Luke mention only one man.

the timetable for their demise.

Why would the townspeople not want to have Jesus living nearby, ready to cast out demons? The answer seems to be His mode of casting them out. He allowed them to enter into a herd of pigs that perished shortly thereafter. Jesus was seen as a kind of polluter. He allowed the overflow—in this case, demons—to destroy private property. The fact that Jews were prohibited from eating pigs and therefore from bidding up their market price made no difference to the townspeople. They were far more fearful about the economic effects of Jesus' action than they were about the threat of demonic possession. They preferred to share their environment with demons, who inhabited men, rather than risk another outbreak of "mad pig disease."

Swine were regarded as an economic asset in that region. If two men could house an entire legion of demons, this seemed a small price to pay for leaving pigs to roam the land and eventually grace the tables of many local residents. That two men would suffer the horrors of possession was, in the eyes of the townspeople, a small price to pay, since the townspeople were not paying it. There was risk of future possession, but they regarded this risk as less of a burden than the threat of the loss of herds of swine.

The demons had recognized the perversity of the local residents. They had planned their spiritual counter-attack well. They would let the townspeople be their spokesmen with Jesus. All it might take was a fast entrance into a herd of swine, and a mad dash down a hill into the water.

Luke added this important information regarding the event. "Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him" (Luke 8:37–40).

Jesus usually instructed those whom He had healed to say nothing publicly. This was a major exception. The personal testimony of the healed man was so convincing that the townspeople subsequently reversed their opinion of Jesus and His ministry. But it took personal

testimony of a local resident to accomplish this. Their initial reaction was negative.

Conclusion

When men disobey God's law, they find it difficult to keep their priorities in conformity to God's priorities for them. They move from one violation to another. They substitute their priorities for God's. This is why it is important for men to keep the whole of the law. Law-breaking is a slippery slope to destruction (Ps. 73:18;³ Jer. 23:12).

The men in this region ignored the dietary law against pork. From this seemingly minor infraction came a perverse set of priorities. They valued the preservation of the local swine market more than they valued men's deliverance from spiritual oppression. They feared the risk to pigs more than they feared the risk of demonic forces. For them, men's lives were worth less than pigs' lives.

The townspeople were sensitive to business values. Private property had to be protected. Jesus was threatening business. This was an offense worse than demonic possession. They asked Him to leave. He left. Only the subsequent personal testimony of the healed man persuaded them to reverse their opinion of Jesus.

3. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

21

CALLING VS. OCCUPATION

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him (Matt 9:9).

The theocentric principle here is obedience to God's call. God possesses the lawful authority to call us into His service, point two of the biblical covenant.¹ We are required to heed this call. But to heed the call, we must trust the person who issues it.

A. Publicans

Matthew was a publican: a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated more in the ancient world than they are today. Today's tax collector is the agent of an elected government. This provides a degree of legitimacy to the tax system that Rome did not possess in the eyes of tribute-paying foreigners. The government immediately sold to companies the right to collect taxes. These companies bid for this privilege. The government collected its revenue in advance from the bidders, who in turn sent agents out to collect the taxes from the people. This system is known in retrospect as tax farming.

Tax farming had prevailed under the Roman Republic. Investors in a tax farming company expected to reap more than they sowed. If the group's bid won the privilege of collecting taxes from a particular region, the investors expected to collect more money than they had paid to Rome. Tax farmers were allowed considerable discretion in establishing the amount of taxes owed by any individual. They estimated how much they could collect before they placed their bids.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

The Roman government had stood behind these tax farmers. A revolt against the tax man, then as now, was a revolt against civil government authority. But publicans were businessmen. They represented a profit-seeking business as well as the government. Their job was to extract as much money as they could from taxpayers. There was no government tax code. They were not bureaucratic agents of the state. The taxpayers were at a great disadvantage in dealing with them.

Under such a system, tax collectors had an incentive to overcharge taxpayers, and taxpayers had an incentive to lie. Many taxpayers would have known about the nature of the tax farming system. It was to the taxpayers' advantage to pay as little as possible. If tax revenues dropped, the bids at the next tax farming auction might be lower. What was it to them if some profit-seeking Roman monopoly made less profit than its investors had hoped? If Rome collected less as a result, the tributaries would shed no tears.

The tax farming system was abolished under Augustus in Christ's day. He substituted tax collecting by local governments, which then paid the central government. This system was less arbitrary than the tax farming system had been.² But there was still a possibility that local tax collectors might overcharge taxpayers, just as their predecessors had done under the tax farming system. John the Baptist recognized this temptation and dealt with it openly: "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3:12–13).³ The tax collector in the Roman world was assumed to be dishonest. John's comment went to the heart of this distrust. But he did not tell them that they were immoral for being tax collectors. He told them only they were immoral if they raised taxes on their own authority and then kept the difference. At every level, he implied, the rule of law should be honored. Tax collectors should know in advance what they are expected to collect. This means that taxpayers should know in advance what they are required to pay. *The predictability of law is to apply to taxation.* The tax farming system was inherently corrupt because it made possible theft on a massive scale. The system imposed the monopolistic force of law without the rule of law.

2. James Macdonald, *A Free Nation Deep in Debt: The Financial Roots of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), p. 54.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

B. Occupation

There is a familiar saying in English that is equally true in every other language: “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.” Every civil government must collect taxes in some form. Taxpayers prefer to keep more of their wealth than less, so they resist the imposition of taxes. Although they know that some taxation is necessary for their protection, they prefer to have other taxpayers pay. They resent taxes, and they resent tax collectors.

A Jew who served as a tax collector would have been especially resented in Israel. Most of all, a member of the tribe of Levi would have been resented. Levi was the priestly tribe. The parallel accounts say that Matthew was also named Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27).⁴

1. Walking Away

Matthew was sitting at a table, collecting taxes. As soon as he heard Jesus’ call, he walked away from his job. But he did more than this, according to Luke’s account. He left the money behind. Then he invited in fellow publicans to hear Jesus. In doing so, He gave Jesus another opportunity to confront the religious leaders of the nation. “And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. **And he left all**, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:27–32). Levi left it all behind. Then he had a party.⁵

Matthew-Levi recognized that Jesus was offering him a higher calling. He was making money at his job. He probably was making a lot of money. He left the money behind. He owed most of it to his superiors unless he was extremely crooked: skimming off receipts. By walking away from it, he became liable to make up the difference out of his own capital. He must have had capital. He could also afford to enter-

4. Matthew was one of three brothers who became apostles. He was the son of Althaeus (Matt. 10:13; Mark 2:14). James was the son of Althaeus (Luke 6:15). Judas (not Iscariot) was the son of Althaeus (v. 16).

5. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 7.

tain guests at a feast. He invited other tax collectors, and they came. He was probably not a low-level official. He had money to spend on entertaining and gaining influence among his peers.

Why did he walk away from his money? That was an odd thing to do. He could have turned it in. Instead, he left it sitting there. Perhaps he thought that no one would steal it. But that took considerable faith on his part. Fear of Roman soldiers might have restrained men from reaching into the box⁶ to grab a handful of coins, but such theft would be difficult to prove unless soldiers were present next to Levi, which no text indicates. He must have counted the cost of losing the money that he had collected so far.

Leaving the money behind was a symbolic act. To pick up a box of money would not have required much effort. He did not pick it up. He walked away from it. He soon joined the disciples (Luke 6:15). He became an apostle (Acts 1:13). Visibly, he switched sides: from Rome to Jesus. He did so in a way that could not have failed to gain attention. Word about a Levite publican who had walked away from a box of money would have spread very fast.

Jesus had called him. He heeded the call immediately. He did not hesitate. Others did. "And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59–62).⁷

Levi's occupation was tax collecting. He left it for a calling: to be a disciple of Jesus. There was a conflict between the two. He would have found it difficult to remain a tax collector and become a disciple. Surely, he could not have been part of Jesus' closest associates, for Jesus was constantly on the move. He could not have become an apostle. But Matthew did not know anything about the apostolate. All he knew was that Jesus had called him.

2. *Bad Company*

When he invited other publicans to come to a party, they came.

6. I assume that he had a box or other container for the money. This is not a major assumption.

7. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 20.

Word must have spread to them, too. One of their colleagues had walked off the job, leaving the money behind. Why? Then he invited them to come to dinner and meet the man who had called him. Here was an opportunity to get answers to their question.

Tax collectors had a bad reputation. The scribes and Pharisees linked publicans with sinners. Jesus did not deny this link. Instead, He turned their criticism against them. He was a physician who healed the sick. The guests were on the list of the sick. His critics were not on the guest list. They did not regard themselves as sick men; thus, they believed that they had no need of a physician. They were critical of the Great Physician's methods of healing, including sharing a meal with tax collectors. Jesus was condemning them. They were as sick as the guests. They were in need of healing.

Matthew had humbled himself before Jesus by walking off the job. As a man protected by Roman troops, he possessed great authority. He would soon possess greater authority as an apostle. But the road to this authority was a walk into unemployment. He possessed wealth. He would soon possess a share of God's kingdom. But that kingdom was barely visible. He had a choice of two masters: God or mammon. He chose God. There is no clearer New Testament example of a man who made the correct choice in the face of such an explicit set of circumstances. He was the opposite of the rich young ruler, who made the incorrect choice.

C. Calling

Jesus had important tasks for Matthew-Levi. The most important, presumably, was writing the first Gospel.⁸ But Jesus did not call to him with this offer: "Leave the money behind, and you'll be able to write the first book in the New Testament, a book that will re-shape the world. Your name will be known by millions of people down through the ages." He just called him to follow. Matthew heeded the call.

1. Profitability

What was the most profitable thing Matthew could have done: collect taxes or write the first Gospel? In retrospect, most people would probably say "write the book." Men want to be remembered favorably. Fame is a powerful lure; so is a good reputation. Combine the two, and

8. Because the Matthew account alone refers to the tax collector as Matthew rather than Levi, Bible scholars have assumed that he was the author of the book.

you have a powerful offer. Jesus did not verbally offer the first. The second—a good reputation—was part of the deal, but only by comparison to the universally bad reputation of tax collectors. He would go from being despised by nearly everyone to being misunderstood by many and hated by a few.

To gain this long-term profit—fame and a good name—he would have to pay. What he paid was the income that he would otherwise have received. This payment was symbolized by the box of money he left behind. That abandoned box of money was an earnest—a down payment—on all the other money that he would not receive.

He entered a world of far greater uncertainty. He had been a tax collector. This was one of the more certain occupations in Rome.⁹ Income was assured: a form of rent. In contrast, it was not clear to him where the income would come from as Jesus' disciple, wandering the roads of Judaea. Matthew became an entrepreneur. He chose uncertainty over rent. He ceased being a Roman bureaucrat.

There was no question that he was not going to have the same level of money income as a follower of Jesus. He knew that. He demonstrated this understanding by walking away from the money box. He was abandoning his occupation. Why? Because he had been called to something more profitable. He had received a higher calling.

His calling was in opposition to his occupation. What do I mean by his calling? I mean that way of life and that work which Jesus would assign to him. This was the most important work he could do. He could make more money on the old job, but this work was not very important compared to Jesus' work. Money income was higher as a tax collector, but money income was less profitable to him than Jesus' work. He was faced with a choice: occupation or calling. He chose the calling.

I define that calling as follows: *the most important work a person can do in which he would be most difficult to replace.*¹⁰ The account of Matthew's calling is illustrative of this definition. Jesus had a new career for him. His old career was profitable financially, but he could be replaced. There is no doubt that the tax collecting agency hired a replacement. We do not know his name. He is no longer important. He

9. Two centuries later, it was equally certain but one of the most burdensome occupations. Tax collectors had to pay the state, despite their future revenue, which fell as Rome became impoverished. It became an inherited office which could not be abandoned. It became a form of slavery.

10. Gary North, "The Calling," *Christian Reconstruction* (March/April 1981), (<http://bit.ly/gncalling>)

was important to himself, his employers, and the taxpayers, but he is no longer important. He left no visible legacy. Matthew did.

The Gospel of Matthew cannot be replaced. The other three Gospels supplement it, but they did not replace it. It is only in Matthew's account that we are told of the virgin birth of Christ, although one passage in Luke presupposes the virgin birth: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23). It is only in Matthew that we read the account of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).¹¹ Can you imagine the history of the church without these two passages?

2. Non-Monetary Bidding

Matthew's choice was not based on monetary income. The organization that employed him paid more money than Jesus offered. Jesus offered nothing in the way of monetary compensation. This is typical for most people. Their place of highest-value service is rarely their place of greatest monetary income.

A bidding war was in progress. The organization that employed him had bid up his income to keep him in a job that suffered from a major social liability. Jesus offered him nothing except discipleship. He had a choice: remain a social pariah or become a social eccentric. Go with the money or go with . . . what? God and mammon were bidding against each other. The high bid wins, but the individual must decide in terms of his own scale of values what the high bid is. Rarely is the high monetary bid the high bid from God's point of view. "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).¹²

Callings are only occasionally salary-producing occupations, such as minister of the gospel or teacher. Because so few men are ever directly confronted with a choice between calling and occupation, they

11. Chapter 48. See also Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

12. Chapter 38.

do not think much about their callings. They may think more about this when they reach their mid-40s, when they see their mortality more clearly. But the kind of life-changing decision that Matthew made is rare. Few men ever hear the call of God so plainly.

D. The Division of Labor

The division of labor has increased dramatically in the modern world ever since the late eighteenth century. Occupations have become more specialized. Low-level or entry-level jobs have become plentiful. It does not take seven years of apprenticeship training to teach a person to be a clerk in a fast food restaurant. It takes just a few days. But it takes far more training to become a physician than it did in medieval times. The assembly line of the modern factory has made average men productive, but factory jobs tend to move to less developed nations or regions. It takes more education and training to become a knowledge worker than an assembly-line worker.

As specialization increases, people find more opportunities to exercise their talents. They achieve greater productivity because their creativity progressively matches customer demand. They find their niche in the labor market. This benefits customers, who gain a wider selection of products and services to choose from, and more highly skilled producers working to serve them.

Were it not for the decrease in the cost of information, it would be increasingly difficult to replace workers in the capital-intensive job market. Information costs have dropped, however, offsetting the fact that the closer a person's skills match the requirements of the production process, the more difficult it is to find his replacement. To retain him in the production process, his employer must pay him enough to keep him from seeking employment elsewhere. Because of more accurate and more widely available information about rates of pay, people can bargain to their advantage with employers. Meanwhile, employers can locate replacements. The zones of ignorance have narrowed, meaning that workers are paid closer to what their services are worth to the customer by way of the employer. Only a few people in the organization provide such unique services that the organization's decision-makers cannot replace them readily.

Job-switching is common today. Men seek out better-paying jobs. They are not locked into one job for life. When a person asks: "What is my most productive area of service?" he means for a few years. Men

change their occupations and their specialties within organizations.

The bidding war for jobs goes on, day by day. The results can be seen in the price of labor. But nothing comparable exists for the bidding system for callings. There is no visible indicator comparable to the money wage. There is no numerical value that men can place on the calling. While there has been an increase in information regarding callings, there is nothing comparable to the wage system.

With the increase in the division of labor, callings have become more specialized. But without a unique numerical success indicator, the participants and would-be participants in the market for highest service are still as blind, comparatively, as Matthew was. When God calls us into service, He does not present us with an employment contract enforceable in a court of law, with fringe benefits listed. He just says, "Hey, you! Come." There is great uncertainty. Why some men respond while others do not remains a mystery. They do not base this decision on quantitative measures. There is some unexplained factor that is at work in God's issuing of a call. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut. 29:29a).

Because we cannot know the future exhaustively, an element of faith exists in every decision. What distinguishes market decisions is the degree of specificity possible in assessing the future. There are prices. Prices are the result of men's decisions regarding the present value of expected future supply and demand. Men bid for resources in terms of these assessments. The result of this bidding process is an array of prices. So, there is less faith required to make a market decision than a decision regarding the calling. Accepting a calling is more like taking a wife than hiring a housekeeper. The potential is greater, a mistake is more permanent, and the terms of employment are less specific.

Conclusion

Matthew had to make a decision. He had to assess the call of Christ and compare its potential with that of his occupation. No decision would still have been a decision: to stay right where he was. He made his decision in an instant. We are not told what factors motivated him. Maybe it was only that Christ had called him, despite his position as a social outcast. Maybe he had been looking for a way out the tax collection field. Or maybe it was something beyond his own power to explain. He wrote the account, yet he did not explain his motiva-

tion.

Jesus' call persuaded him to act in terms of his priorities. Because he had not sought out Jesus, I assume that the call initiated a major shift in these priorities. The visible indicator of this shift was the money box. The more radical the shift, the less likely that he would take the box with him. Would he trust money or Christ, mammon or God? He trusted Christ.

NO VISIBLE RESERVES

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat (Matt. 10:6–10).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the paymaster: sanctions.¹ He sustains His workers. The worthy workman will receive his meat.

A. Bringing Israel Under Judgment

The context of this passage is the condemnation of Israel. The means of this condemnation was evangelism. “These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:5–8). It sounds as though Jesus was offering positive sanctions only through His disciples. But the negative sanctions were also present. “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents,

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues” (Matt. 10:14–17). Jesus knew that the disciples would not be received with open arms. He also knew that God’s judgment against Israel would come (Matt. 24; Luke 21).²

This was not an ordinary strategy of evangelism. The fact that Jesus forbade them from going to gentile cities, or even Samaritan cities, is indicative of the special nature of this assignment. He was sending them to the covenant people in order to gain a few converts and condemn the nation.

This was, in effect, preliminary to another exodus. Just as Moses had confronted Pharaoh inside the boundaries of Egypt, so would they confront opponents. Like Pharaoh, these opponents would bring negative sanctions against them. Like Moses, they would receive supernatural aid that would enable them to deal with their opponents. “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt. 10:19–20). The first phase of the exodus took place immediately after the stoning of Steven. “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1). The second phase took place sometime prior to the Roman army’s final surrounding of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (According to ancient church tradition, the Jerusalem church fled to the gentile city of Pella.)³

Jesus was commanding them to bring a covenant lawsuit against Israel. By announcing the advent of a new kingdom, they were announcing the end of the Old Covenant order. This was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus wanted them to learn that the Spirit was with them. He sent them among wolves in order to break their fear of the established order.

B. Money and Uncertainty

“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/cddov>) Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

3. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Isaac Boyle, trans. (Grand Rapids: Baker, [325?] 1955), III:V, p. 86.

own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).⁴ The rich man trusts in his money. He expects it to shield him from catastrophes, just as a wall shielded an ancient city. The disciples were ordered not to carry money with them. Then what would serve as their high wall? God.

Money is the most marketable commodity. Put differently, it is the most liquid asset. This means that money can be sold (exchanged for assets) rapidly and without transaction costs. Men hold money because they cannot accurately foresee the future. They do not know what opportunities will arise. They want to be able to take advantage of these opportunities. They do not know what kind of calamities will arise. They want to be able to buy their way out of these calamities. Money is their means of taking action. Because of money’s liquidity, its holders have a wide range of options available to them. They reduce their costs of information by accumulating money.

Jesus sent them into an uncertain environment without money. He told them in general what would happen to them. Some people would welcome them. Others would persecute them. Through all of their experiences, the Holy Spirit would guide them and protect them. The Spirit was above circumstances. They could rely on Him to be their high wall.

Money is a tool. Men own this tool. They grow confident in the use of this tool. They grow confident in themselves as tool masters. Jesus was telling the disciples that their own efforts would not be the source of their success or protection. They could not manipulate the Holy Spirit in the way that they could manipulate money. They would be in the Spirit’s hands; He would not be in their hands. He would put the proper words in their mouths. He would not echo their words.

The dominion hierarchy is God > man > nature (Gen. 1:27–28).⁵ Jesus was warning them against having faith in autonomous man’s hierarchy: man > money > other men. The task He was giving them was beyond anything that money would buy.

He was giving them a preliminary assignment, just as God gave Moses. This assignment was designed to increase trust in God’s sovereignty over history. They faced considerable uncertainty. The future is never uncertain to God. Jesus was teaching them that *the most effective way to deal with uncertainty is to trust in God*. To trust in the most

4. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

marketable commodity is legitimate, though exclusive trust is idolatry. Proverbs refers to it as conceit. The same Hebrew word is used for an idol.⁶

C. Spiritual Reserves

If they were not to trust in the most marketable commodity, then what about a fall-back position? What about spare clothing? Jesus forbade that, too. Nothing that they could carry in their purses or on their backs would suffice. Only the Spirit of God would suffice.

They would have reserves: God's Spirit. This is always sufficient. Yet in His grace, God does not ask us to avoid other reserves. This assignment was unique. It was a training mission. Just before His crucifixion, He reminded them: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:35b–36). What had been appropriate for a training mission would not be appropriate in the future. This did not mean that they would no longer have to rely on the Spirit. The Spirit would come in full force only after Christ's ascension (John 14:26; 16:7; Acts 1:8). From that point on, the disciples would be fully equipped: Spirit, purse, and sword.

The training mission was a means of strengthening their faith. This meant that they had to learn to trust in invisible reserves. Men find it very difficult to do this. They must be trained to do this. Moses was not ready for his assignment at the time that he first met God at the burning bush. Men trust in what they can see and what they have learned through successful experiences. Jesus removed their visible reserves in order that they might gain successful experiences. He reminded them of their success just before His crucifixion. They still did not believe Him. They still had not learned. It took the crowing of the cock for Peter to learn. In the passage immediately preceding His reminder of their successes without a purse, Jesus prophesied Peter's public denial of Him. It was that event, rather than the triumph of the empty purse, that finally persuaded him. It was his prophesied failure, not his previous success, that enabled him to put his trust where it be-

6. "Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any **image** of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 26:1).

longed. Yet both events were essentially of the same character. Both stripped Peter of autonomous reserves. The first left him without money; the second left him without honor.

D. Predictable Payment

Jesus sent them among wolves. He sent them out in what appeared to be a defenseless condition. It was important for them to learn not to trust in their own strength. Their own strength was too puny. Their own reserves were too minimal. They had to trust in God's reserves. They could do this because of God's adherence to His own principle of payment: "The workman is worthy of his meat." The parallel passage in Luke puts it this way: ". . . the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house" (Luke 10:7b). God does not expect His people to work for free.

At the same time, He expects His workers to serve others. "Freely ye have received, freely give." Just as He supplies His workers with whatever they need to do their work, so are they to serve those who have not yet entered the kingdom. Jesus said that they would be sustained miraculously. Similarly, they would perform miracles. For this, they would earn the hostility of the wolves.

God's principle of payment means that even though His servants do not now possess visible reserves, they can expect them. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). The servant of God receives; he is therefore to lend freely. "He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed" (Ps. 37:26).⁷ The servant can become a visible blessing to others because he knows, in the familiar phrase, "there's more where that came from." Furthermore, this stream of predictable income extends to his children.

Uncertainty is reduced by a stream of income. The greater the predictability of this income, the less the uncertainty. The economist calls a stream of income *rental income*. An asset generates income. Men who seek asset-generated income are called *rent-seekers*. They seek to gain reduced uncertainty by buying a stream of income.

In contrast is the entrepreneur. He thrives on uncertainty. He knows that it is through the conversion of uncertainty into certainty that he can gain a profit. When he converts an uncertain future into a

7. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

more predictable future, he gains a stream of income. He can then sell this stream of income for money. He capitalizes it. Rent-seekers will pay to buy it. He profits because he perceived a stream of future income where his competitors did not. They did not offer what the stream of income was worth. The entrepreneur places his capital at risk by buying the otherwise unpredicted income stream and converting it into a predictable stream. For this service he gains a one-time entrepreneurial profit—an above-average return on his invested capital.⁸

God's people are supposed to become bearers of uncertainty. They are to gain kingdom profits, the parable of the talents tells us (Matt. 25:14–30).⁹ But uncertainty has its downside. Sometimes men forecast incorrectly. They lose their capital. What they thought would be a stream of income turns out to be a sink-hole for their capital.

The parable used the language of commerce to explain kingdom expansion. What Jesus told the disciples before sending them on their mission was that God would supply them with whatever they required. What appeared to them initially as a highly uncertain project without visible means of support would be well-supplied. If they did their work faithfully, they would receive what they needed to continue.

Their faith, coupled with a supernaturally guaranteed supply of income, would enable them to do effective kingdom work. What appeared to be uncertain was in fact certain. They needed faith to begin. They needed visible confirmation to continue.

Uncertainty is the major barrier to entry. It is what keeps out competitors who would bid up the price of the resources and tools needed to produce the stream of income. This is what enables people with very little capital to become rich. They see an opportunity—or sense it—where others do not perceive it. They enter the market with whatever reserves they possess and commit it to developing the stream of income. Like gold prospectors with a newly discovered tattered map or inventors with a dream, they rush in where competitors fear to tread.

Jesus told them that God's payment was predictable. They could

8. The profit occurs once, for after the rise in the capitalized price of the asset, the owner reaps only an average rate of return. If it is worth an ounce of gold when he buys it and 10 ounces after his efforts, he can sell it for 10 ounces. The buyer will earn an average rate of return on his investment of 10 ounces. But what is true of the buyer is also true of the entrepreneur if he decides not to sell the asset. The income stream he receives is an average rate of return on the new value of the asset.

9. Chapter 47.

trust God. They could therefore safely rush in where others feared to tread. And so they did. This tiny band of men without visible capital began a ministry that has transformed the world.

Conclusion

This was a special assignment. It became a standard that should remind men of what God can do, just as the miracles in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea were to remind Israel of what God can do. Such miracles were not supposed to become familiar events. The manna ceased when Israel crossed the Jordan by another miracle of divided waters (Josh. 5:12). After that, they were to plant and build. Similarly, Jesus told the disciples immediately prior to His crucifixion to get a purse and a sword. They were not to forget what God had done for them. He specifically reminded them of what God had done for them. But He told them to use conventional reserves—capital—to pursue their callings.

They were to establish priorities in their valuation of capital: God first, then money and a weapon. They were to trust the Spirit first; then they were to trust in visible reserves. No asset is to be spared in the extension of God's kingdom. It is not that we are to work without assets. It is that we are to subordinate our visible reserves to God's invisible reserves.

Perhaps the greatest example of invisible reserves is found in Elisha's lesson to his servant. "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (II Kings 6:15–17). Seeing is believing. But not every servant of God is enabled to see in this way. He must accept on faith the testimony of the Bible that his covenantal predecessors have seen such things. What they saw strengthened them. What we read should strengthen us.

23

CONFIDENT FEAR

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:29–31).

The underlying theocentric principle here is God's omniscience. He sees everything. He is sovereign: point one of the biblical covenant¹ The practical application of this principle is this: God's people, being worth more than an inexpensive bird, should have confidence in His support.

A. Omniscience and Entrepreneurship

Omniscience is one of the incommunicable attributes of God. God knows everything. This is one aspect of His infinity. Not being omniscient, man cannot comprehend infinity. Jesus therefore discussed God's infinity in terms that men can understand, such as knowing the number of hairs on a man's head. No man can count them because he will lose track of which hairs he has already counted. Meanwhile, some hairs will fall out. We know only that the number of hairs is many.

The philosophical implications of God's omniscience are many, but this much is sure: *nothing surprises God*. Nothing sneaks up on Him. Therefore, His people should not allow their surprise to paralyze them. They are in His sight and His care. Men are vulnerable to the unexpected. This vulnerability is an aspect of man's lack of omniscience. But if a man is part of God's remnant, this vulnerability is temporary. To the extent that he is acting as a dominion agent, he can

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

overcome the challenge of the unknown. He does so by means of his own efforts, but also by the joint efforts of church members. He is not alone. God is with him, and the church is with Him.

Another implication is that cause and effect are not random. There is no zone of indeterminacy for God. He knows both the location and speed of the electron and the galaxy. Man is not trapped in a world governed by chance.

A third implication is that life is not a discovery process for God. He never discovers anything that He did not know before.

Man sees the future as through a glass, darkly. He can be surprised. Lots of things sneak up on him. For him, cause and effect often seem random. Life is a discovery process for man. Because of these limitations on man's knowledge, man is necessarily an entrepreneur.

The entrepreneur confronts uncertainty. He must deal with it. He looks into the future and makes decisions in the present. He takes action in the present. He exchanges one set of circumstances for another in the present. He does not do this with complete confidence unless he is a fool. He does not know the outcome of his actions because he does not know everything that contributes to cause and effect in history. The complexity of life is too much for man to deal with. He deals with creation representatively: by models and laws. The question is: Which models and which laws?

Reality is complex. It is interdependent. Anything can affect anything else, or so some people think. Perhaps everything else affects anything, or at least could affect anything under certain circumstances. We do not know, for we are not omniscient. We cannot make sense of infinity. Biblically speaking, there are degrees of infinity. It comes in varying sizes. The infinitude of the creation is less than the infinitude of God, in a way analogous to the infinitude of eternity, which it is less for resurrected men than for God, who got here first.

Men could not act rationally if they had to know everything exhaustively before they could know anything truly.² They would be paralyzed. Men make decisions based on information that constitutes a nearly infinitesimal amount of data. Yet they make progress. They learn. For them, life is a discovery process.

The entrepreneur tries to discover coherence in the present so that he can improve his situation in the uncertain future. A successful entrepreneur learns from his successes and his errors. He improves his

2. Cornelius Van Til made this point repeatedly.

decision-making ability. Out of the mists of uncertainty comes information in the form of feedback. The feedback that he receives from reality enables him to deal more successfully with reality the next time.

Men are supposed to pray for wisdom (James 1:5–8). This wisdom is from above, but it is also from this world. Men are to ask for a clearer understanding of their restricted area of responsibility, i.e., their zone of dominion. They should expect to receive this information from the God who is larger than infinity and above it. But covenantal wisdom is more than knowing; it is also obeying. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). We learn by doing.

B. Reducing Our Fear of the Future

God is aware when a sparrow falls. How important is a sparrow? Less important than a man. We cannot measure how much less important, but we know that it is less important.

Jesus used this contrast to persuade His followers that their concerns are known to God. God is not some distant monarch who does not know what is happening. He is omniscient. He can see the sparrow fall; He can see us fall. He is present with the sparrow when it falls; He is present with us when we fall.

For the covenant-keeper, this information is intended to reduce his fear of the future. “Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” The future should be terrifyingly fearful for covenant-breakers, but not for covenant-keepers. The reason why it should not be fearful for covenant-keepers is because God is omnipotent. He brings His eternal decree to pass in history. This is the message of the last four chapters of Job. There is no uncertainty for God.

Job was not afraid of the future. He was confused by the past. He despaired because of the covenantal unpredictability of the future—the lack of correspondence between his faithfulness and the visible results. It was not that he was cut down; it was that he was cut down for no apparent covenantal reason. There seemed to be a discrepancy between covenantal predictability—blessings for obedience—and his sacramental past and unpleasant present. As a forecaster, he had failed to foresee these events. He was unable to make sense of cause and effect. His past gave him no useful information about his expected future. As an entrepreneur, he had previously been successful in dealing with uncertainty. He had obeyed God, and He had prospered. But

cause and effect had become worse than random; it had become perverse. This baffled him. God's answer was clear: "I'm God; you're not. I get to do what I want."

The reason why the Book of Job is so difficult to explain is that this answer seems to deny covenantal cause and effect. But this is not the book's message. On the contrary: "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses" (Job 42:12). But in the interim, God did what He pleased. When dealing with fallen man, God's law is all grace, and so is covenantal cause and effect. Man has no legal claim on God, for man is in rebellion. It is grace alone that brings positive sanctions and restricts negative ones.

We are not to fear the future, because God is in control of the future, and we are His adopted children. He cares for us. Whatever happens to us is not a mistake on God's part. Our temporal and temporary afflictions are not the result of God's absent-mindedness. They are part of our lifelong discovery process. What we are supposed to discover is that God loves His people and has a wonderful plan for their lives (Mal. 1:2; Rom. 9:13a).

Fear thwarts this discovery process. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (I John 4:18). God's love is perfect. It casts out fear. Our love is imperfect. The proof of this imperfection is our fear. We are tormented by fear. This thwarts our progressive sanctification.

Yet we also know that fear is an attribute of faith. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Ps. 111:10). So, the deciding factor is not fear but the object of our fear. Do we fear God or the creation? Jesus had already made it plain to the disciples what we are to fear. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). This leads us to another conclusion: God hates His enemies and has a horrible plan for their lives (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13b).

C. Fear of God and Confidence in the Future

Men are told to fear God. He is over the creation. By fearing God,

men subordinate themselves to Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Men are told not to fear those who can kill them. This means that no aspect of the creation should make men afraid, *as long as they are doing God's work*. The creation is a threat to those who are in rebellion against God. It testifies against them.

So, men are to fear God and remain confident regarding the future. If they are legitimately confident about their eternal future, then they should remain confident about the temporal future. Covenant-breakers are threatened far more by hell than by death. They are threatened far more by God than by any aspect of the creation. The limit of the creation's negative sanctions is death. In a world of sin, this fact should reinforce the hierarchical aspect of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28).³ The covenant-keeper is subordinate to God; therefore, he is the delegated king of creation in his legitimate area of responsibility.

Uncertainty should therefore be less of a barrier to entry for the covenant-keeper than for the covenant-breaker. Covenant-keepers should be willing to take big chances for the sake of extending God's kingdom in history. Covenant-keepers' fear of the future thwarts their work in extending the kingdom. It is proof of their lack of love toward God. They must fear God above all and love God above all.

Confidence in the future of the kingdom encourages a man to take risks for the sake of God's kingdom, even though he may fail. The entrepreneur knows that many projects fail for every great one that is achieved. What is true in the experience of one entrepreneur is also true for the kingdom. Many men's work may come to naught as far as they and others can see, but in the corporate realm of God's kingdom, they play a part. There is a pattern in life that was first discovered by the late-nineteenth century sociologist-economist, Vilfredo Pareto. It is called the 80-20 rule. About 80% of a system's productivity comes from 20% of its resources. Conversely, 80% of its problems comes from 20% of its operations. This means that the productivity of the 20% rests on the other 80%, which contributes the seemingly unproductive support elements in the system. Something like this rule seems to operate in God's kingdom. A tiny minority of successful churches get most of the publicity, but the multitude of little ones that get no recognition meet the spiritual needs of the vast majority of Christians. For

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

over two centuries, the average Protestant congregation in the United States has been about 75 to 100 adult members.⁴ There have been a few large, influential congregations in every era, but the little ones do the unspectacular maintenance work of the kingdom.

Similarly, there are failures. Some men work to plant churches that never take root. Some foreign missions programs fail to impact local communities, or seem to. Christians send money to non-profit organizations that never seem to prosper. Pioneering efforts often do little more than clear a rough path through a large forest. Civilization later follows some of these rough paths, but not all of them. Of those paths followed, most will eventually be abandoned, to be grown over with trees, leaving little trace. This is the risk of becoming a pioneer. Civilization may not follow your path. But without pioneers, there would be no paths. *The price of civilization includes the paths that failed.* Some pioneers fail. God does not fail. His work goes forward. If a man works for the sake of the kingdom, he can be confident about the success of his efforts. They may not produce the crop he hopes for, but they are part of God's comprehensive plan. The pioneer is doing his work faithfully. He will receive his reward, either in history or in eternity. Paul wrote:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work

4. It was about 75 members in 1776. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, [1992] 1994), pp. 24, 26. In 1998, average church attendance at Protestant churches was 91. It had been 100 in 1997, 102 in 1992, and 98 in 1987. Barna Research Group, "Profile of American Churches Shows Them to be Conservative, Evangelical, Seeker-Sensitive—and Losing Ground" (Sept. 8, 1998).

shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:6–15).⁵

The confidence that a covenant-keeping man has in God should motivate him to sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom. God will bless his efforts. Other men who do not have this confidence will tend to turn back, but the man of faith moves forward. The kingdom of God moves forward towards the conquest of the world because covenant-keepers remain faithful in their tasks. The slow, steady, plodding work of millions of faithful people is what produces long-term victory. Their confidence in this fact encourages them to stick to their tasks, come hell or high water.

Conclusion

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the creation is therefore the beginning of foolishness. If men fear the creation—circumstances—more than they fear God, they will have a hard time taking risks. They will hold onto what they have and sit tight. This does not lead to world conquest. But if they fear neither God nor man, they are fools. They will take big risks on their own behalf. They will probably lose, for most new ventures fail, but even if they succeed, they will lose. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

God cares about His people. He may lead them into disasters, just as He led the remnant of Israel into captivity along with the sinful majority, but He brings His good work to pass in history. The captivity of the remnant had a purpose. It made their faith stronger, as we see in the case of the three young men in Nebuchadnezzar’s court. They feared God more than fire. “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:16–18). Their testimony in the face of death led to the king’s profession of faith (Dan. 4). We remember this story, but what we can be sure of is the fact that there were other faithful Israelites in the land whose prayers and simple obedience made possible

5. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

the survival of Israel in a foreign land. The three men were spectacular representatives of God who demonstrated publicly what God can do. But the day-to-day preservation of the faithful is God's conventional means of extending His kingdom. We are to honor the memory of the three young men because we need evidence of God's faithfulness to us. We are to honor the memory of Christ's bodily resurrection for the same reason. Death, the great enemy, will be progressively overcome in history (Isa. 65:17–20). "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25–26).

Jesus' resurrection is at one end of the spectrum of God's protection in history. God's care for the sparrows is at the other end. We are somewhere in between, but closer to Jesus, our covenantal representative, than to the sparrows.

When we believe this, it should be easier for us to set our priorities. We are to decide what to do, not in terms of fear of the future but in terms of what benefits God's kingdom. The fear of negative sanctions from the creation is not to restrain us when we count the cost (Luke 14:28–34).⁶ Fear of man or the creation is not to be factored into these cost projections. We are not to deny the existence of risk. Risk we will always have with us. But we are to set our priorities in terms of what is best for the kingdom of God, not what is safest for us. The Book of Jonah is the premier testimony to this truth. Avoid whales.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

24

LIFE: LOST AND FOUND

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 10:39).

The theocentric principle here is that Jesus Christ is the Lord of life. This implies that He is also the Lord of death. The Bible tells us this specifically. “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18). Life and death are in Jesus Christ’s hands. This is an aspect of God’s sovereignty: point one of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Life Is the Crucial Capital Asset

Without life, we can accomplish nothing. This is why the author of Ecclesiastes wrote, “For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Eccl. 9:4). David wrote: “What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?” (Ps. 30:9).

Jesus announced that the man who finds his life will lose it. This is a peculiar saying. What was He getting at? To find out, we must consider the second half: “He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” The distinguishing feature here is the phrase, “for my sake.” The man who loses his life shall find it if he loses it for Christ’s sake. The positive sanction—gaining life—comes as a result of losing one’s life for Christ’s sake.

This implies that the discovery of life in the first half of the statement has something to do with false worship. A man thinks he has found his life on some basis other than Jesus Christ’s sovereignty. He

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

has found life for something else's sake. Because he has worked to find life for something other than Christ's sake, he is faced with ultimate loss. He will lose his life. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Eternal life is also the supreme form of grace. It is God's unearned gift to man. Temporal life is analogous to eternal life, though not equally valuable in God's eyes. It is a gift of God. As with any gift in a fallen world, it can be misused. Some covenant-breaking men view temporal life as supreme. Others view life lived for the sake of a false god as supreme. This passage makes it clear that temporal life lived for Christ's sake is supreme. This implies that temporal life lived for Christ's sake is an aspect of eternal life.

In this passage, life is representative of capital. Eternal life is the supreme form of capital in history. Temporal life is next. Gold, silver, and other forms of wealth are secondary to life. This is why men will sometimes pay large sums to hospitals and physicians in the hope of extending their lives. Other things being equal, the marginal value of longer life is greater than the marginal value of assets that can be enjoyed only in life. Other things may have more value to an individual than temporal life: personal honor, personal reputation, children's inheritance. But without life, no one can enjoy the income generated by capital.

Finding life is desirable. If life is worth more than capital, then securing capital is secondary to finding life. This puts capital in its proper perspective. It is a tool of life. The individual uses capital. He seeks to attain his goals by means of capital. But if his quest for capital undermines the goal of life, meaning life lived for Christ's sake, meaning eternal life, then it is a foolish quest. Covenant-breaking men too often forget this principle. Riches usually testify against the wise judgment of those who possess great capital. "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).² There can be exceptions (v. 26), but these are rare.

By using life as the goal of the quest, Jesus invoked most men's supreme goal. So, if a man's quest for life and his seeming attainment of life lead to the loss of his life, then surely the same is true of all other goals: money, power, fame, etc. What is true of a primary quest must also be true of secondary quests.

2. Chapter 38.

B. Temporal Applications

Jesus taught clearly that eternal life and death are attained temporally. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Life lived for Christ's sake is eternal life. Life lived for anything else's sake is eternal death, i.e., the loss of eternal life. The concern here is eternal life.

Does this have implications for temporal life? Yes. In this passage, finding life and losing life are accomplished in the present. One person believes he has found life in history. The other knows that he has lost his life in history. In other words, he has *died covenantally* in history. Paul wrote: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). We are buried with Christ covenantally; therefore, we shall live with Him eternally. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:3–9). "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12).

Our new life today is secured by Christ's definitive work in the past. Our new life is sealed by our baptism: judicial death and resurrection. We must *die judicially* in order to *live eternally*. This is what it means to lose our lives for Christ's sake. Conversely, to live by anything other than Christ's definitive work in the past is to secure eternal death. It is to affirm the sovereignty of something other than Jesus Christ. It is to hope in eternal deliverance from the torments of hell and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15) on some basis other than Christ's perfect judicial work.

What was *accomplished judicially in history by Christ* serves as the

basis of the *extension of His kingdom in history*. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:18–20).³ This is the Great Commission. What Jesus *accomplished representatively and definitively in history*, His people are to manifest progressively in history. This is the meaning of the Great Commission.⁴

C. Baptism and Life

The Great Commission is given to individuals and corporate bodies, beginning with the institutional church, which alone can lawfully baptize. Covenant-keepers place themselves under its jurisdiction through baptism. Life lived for Christ is lived judicially through baptism, as Paul taught. Baptism publicly incorporates us into Christ’s life though the church.

The old dogma, “there is no salvation outside the church,” is true. The church is the incorporated body of Christ. While a redeemed person can be outside of membership in a church, this judicial status is abnormal for the believer. The sacraments are available only in and through the institutional church. Life is found only in the church. The public death of the old sinful man through baptism is the mark of the new life. We lose our lives in baptism and thereby find life. The life we find is an earnest—a down payment—on eternal life. “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:11–14).

The church is the model for other corporate endeavors. It is not based on biology, as the family is. It is based on confession. Member-

3. Chapter 48.

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

ship is open to all confessing people, unlike the family, which is a closed institution.⁵ The unity of purpose that a shared confession establishes enhances men's efforts to achieve both their personal goals and corporate goals. Paul used the metaphor of the body to describe the interdependent life of the church (Rom. 12;⁶ I Cor. 12⁷) seventeen centuries before Adam Smith described the capital-intensive division of labor of the pin-making factory. Corporate efforts are more effective than isolated individual efforts. Without corporate structures to serve as vessels of vision, the individual's efforts are tightly circumscribed: capital constraints, insufficient skills, insufficient information, and short life expectancy. We extend God's kingdom in history through our cooperative efforts. To imagine that isolated individual efforts in spiritual affairs are equal in their effects to participation in the church is to imagine that the isolated inventor can achieve success without factory production.

Conclusion

Man's top priority is service to God, not eternal life. Service to God is theocentric. Life is theocentric. Through service to God, a man demonstrates his possession of eternal life, meaning life lived for Christ's sake. By placing anything other than life lived for Christ as his top priority, a man becomes anthropocentric.

The public manifestation of the attainment of eternal life is participation in the sacraments. These are corporate marks of individual conditions. Incorporation is vital to the life of the believer. It is also vital to the extension of God's kingdom.

What is said here of life applies far more forcefully to lesser goals. He who finds his riches solely in history has lost riches in eternity. He who finds his riches in a promise of eternal inheritance gains riches in history. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).⁸

5. Adoption is possible, but not legally mandatory.

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd electronic edition (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

8. Chapter 15.

25

LIGHTLY YOKED

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28–30).

The theocentric principle here is that Jesus Christ is the one who can give rest to men. The promise of rest is sabbatical. The sabbath is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Christ is Lord of the sabbath (Matt. 12:8).²

A. Yoke: An Inescapable Concept

The yoke is an aspect of work—specifically, for beasts of burden. The Lord of the sabbath is also Lord of work. The implication here is that Christ is Lord of the week. The lightness of His yoke is manifested by the sabbath. He who honors the weekly day of rest testifies to the lightness of the yoke in his life.

Men must work. They grow weary. They seek rest. Christ offers rest to weary men. He then calls them to bear a yoke. Christ's yoke is a means of lightening their load, of giving them rest.

How can more be less? How can adding a burden lighten a man's load? The implication here is that men are already burdened down. Specifically, they are burdened with sin. Sin exacts a heavy toll. It interferes with man's dominion. So do the results of original sin: weeds

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Pont Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24. Cf. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapter 26.

and thorns (Gen. 3:17–19).³ Men labor under a curse.

This passage says that Christ's yoke is light. This is comparative. It is lighter than something else. What might that be? Another, heavier yoke. The implication is that it is not a question of yoke vs. no yoke. It is a question of whose yoke. Men cannot escape some yoke.

Masters place yokes on their work animals. Men labor under one of two masters: God or mammon (Matt. 6:24).⁴ Whose yoke is preferable? Christ's. With His yoke, men can get rest. *With mammon's yoke, there is no permanent rest.* The traditional phrase, "there is no rest for the wicked," reflects this biblical truth.

A yoke has several purposes. First, it trains an animal to be subservient. It reminds the animal that it is under authority. Second, it directs the animal's steps. It causes it to go where the master wants it to go. Third, it is attached to a plow or other tool. It is designed for pulling. All of these purposes are the master's.

A yoke restrains an animal. An animal finds it difficult to escape its environment. This is a benefit or a liability, depending on the treatment it receives from the master and the safety it is afforded in its environment. Whether this feature is a blessing or a curse depends on the master. The yoke makes the animal more productive. If the master does not share this increase with the animal, the animal is a loser: too much pulling, not enough food. The Mosaic law required the owner to share the wealth with his work animal. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4).⁵

Christ said that His yoke is light. It is less of a burden than any rival yoke. This implies that His treatment of those under his yoke will be good. They will share in their own productivity. There is an element of restraint in wearing His yoke, but this is part of an overall process in which he benefits.

The implication is that the rival yoke—mammon's—will not provide equal benefits. The master is self-serving. He extracts more from those under his authority than Christ demands from those under His authority. Mammon is man's greed.⁶ Its yoke is burdensome.

Some people may think they are autonomous. If so, they will see Christ's yoke as an extra burden, one which they can avoid. But their

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

4. Chapter 14.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

6. Chapter 14.

assumption of autonomy is incorrect. They are under authority. They wear a yoke. They may be used to its weight. They may not perceive that it is extracting a heavy toll on them. They are operating under an illusion. They are not autonomous. Adam placed all mankind under another yoke. It can be removed only by the substitution of a lighter yoke.

A wise man recognizes the weight of his yoke. But if he has nothing to compare it with, he must make a decision based on faith. Not all men believe Christ's words, which must be taken on faith. His yoke is light. He was saying that a man's present yoke is heavy. A man can exchange a heavy yoke for a light one. But to see the advantage, he must feel the weight of his existing yoke.

Christ announced this regarding Himself: "I am meek and lowly in heart." His incarnation is proof of this statement. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5–8).⁷ "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9). The psychological basis of Jesus Christ's victory was His humility. He subordinated Himself to God the Father and then to evil men. In doing this, He established the judicial basis of the victory of His people. As a perfect man, He achieved total victory. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. 2:9–10). We achieve an analogous moral victory in history, both definitively⁸ and progressively, and then finally at the resurrection.

B. Rest vs. Autonomy

The weary man feels the burden. He seeks rest. Christ offers rest. He tells the laborer that there is rest available on request. He tells the emotionally weary person that there is rest for the soul (v. 29). But to

7. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

8. God imputes Christ's moral perfection to His people. See North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2:D:2.

obtain this rest, a man must admit to himself that he really is weary. He must acknowledge that he is having trouble bearing his existing work load. For the person who is still confident that he can bear his own load, this offer has little appeal. The self-proclaimed autonomous man does not want to admit that his tasks are getting beyond his ability to deal with them. To admit this would be to admit that he is not autonomous. He is dependent. But the idea of dependence alienates some men. Even if they are willing to admit that they need some help, they are unwilling to admit that they cannot complete their work without surrendering to someone who offers rest—a complete cessation of work. Christ says, in effect, “I’ll take over from here.” But that means surrendering to someone who denies all autonomy to others.

Christ promises rest. But this had also been promised to Israel. This is one of the themes in the Epistle to the Hebrews. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world” (Heb. 4:1–3). “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (vv. 9–11).

This idea is crucial: “For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” *The man who has ceased from his own works has surrendered any claim to autonomy.* A man at rest is subordinate either to God or the creation. He becomes an extension of God’s covenant or the creation. When he surrenders to his environment, he becomes passive. He goes into retirement. He is now at the mercy of others like himself, or else he is trapped by the impersonal forces of nature or society.

He who achieves rest in history has had to subordinate himself to another: God or nature. Either he has acknowledged God as the source of his rest and his success, or else he has acknowledged nature as the source of his rest and therefore his victory. Men who surrender to God can extend His dominion over the creation. Men who surrender to the creation—their environment—must end any hope of making society or nature conform to their ends. They become an extension of the cre-

ation. To this extent, they become depersonalized.

C. Dominion Through Rest

Rest in the biblical sense is not passivity. In the same epistle in which we read of rest, we also read, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1–2). It is the ascended Christ who offers rest to His people. *Subordinate to the author of rest, they can work without the heavy burden of fear of failure.* This takes considerable faith—the same faith that announces that Christ’s yoke is light. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. He can make both promises: rest and a light yoke.

Rest is an attitude based on a confession of faith: “I am empowered by a sovereign God to do my work. I can count on Him to bring it to fruition.” Put another way, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (I Cor. 3:6–7). It is the great sin of autonomy to deny the validity of this confession. “Religion is a crutch,” we are told. But a crutch is a wonderful tool for a one-legged man. He who refuses to admit his condition as a man with one leg must do without a crutch. In a world of two-legged men, he appears foolish. In a world of one-legged men who hop hither and yon, he appears normal. Sinners are one-legged people.

The mental attitude of rest requires either foolishness or else faith and self-discipline. One of the marks of the covenant-keeper with this attitude of rest is sabbath-keeping. A man who believes in Christ’s promise of rest knows he can afford to rest one day in seven. God is fully in control. God has told man to rest one day in seven, so man can safely do this. He will not lose anything of value by resting. A sovereign God who is the source of every blessing⁹ will not let His followers suffer a loss because they exercise their prerogative and rest. They testify to their faith in the ultimate rest beyond history by resting one

9. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

day in seven.

This cessation of Christians' dominion efforts one day in seven does not set back the kingdom of God. On the contrary, sabbatical rest extends it. Men are strengthened by resting. So are domesticated work animals. They can achieve more.

Conclusion

The top priority here is to accept Christ's victory in history as our own. This is our starting point for dominion, both personal and corporate. His victory *in* history is behind us: the resurrection. So is His victory *over* history: the ascension. His ascension has empowered His church. He told the apostles just before His ascension: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We can have confidence in our work because Christ's victory was definitive: complete and finished. We can extend His kingdom in history because He achieved complete victory in the past. We can rest emotionally because He is sovereign over history. We can safely rest one day in seven because He has commanded it. This sabbatical rest is a mark of the lightness of Christ's yoke. We are to acknowledge the lightness of this yoke by turning over to God our cares about the outcome of our labors. Sabbath rest is visible evidence of this confidence.

OPEN FIELDS AT HARVEST TIME

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day (Matt. 12:1–2).

The theocentric principle of this passage is stated clearly a few verses later: “For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day” (Matt. 12:8). It is God and God’s work that govern the sabbath and its judicial applications. The sabbath is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Common Property

The Pharisees did not criticize the disciples for stealing. The Mosaic law exempted this activity from the laws of theft. “When thou comest into thy neighbour’s vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn” (Deut. 23:24–25).

Because of the importance of this passage for a correct understanding of the Bible’s view of private property, I am reprinting Chapter 58 of my commentary on Deuteronomy. Some readers may not have access to that book. I have reprinted the entire chapter.

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24. Cf. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is that God, as the owner of the creation, has the exclusive right to specify the terms of the leases which He offers to his stewards. His rural leasehold's contract announced to the land owner: "You do not possess absolute sovereignty over this land. Your neighbor has the right to pick a handful of grain or grapes from this field. Your right to exclude others by law or force is limited." In this sense, God delegated to a farmer's neighbors the right to enforce God's claim of exclusive control over a symbolic portion of every field. The land owner could not lawfully exclude God's delegated representatives from access to his crops. The fact that he could not lawfully exclude them testified to his lack of absolute sovereignty over his property.

In the garden of Eden, God placed a judicial boundary around one tree. This boundary was there to remind Adam that he could not legitimately assert control over the entire garden. Over most of it, Adam did exercise full authority. But over one small part, he did not. It was off-limits to him. Adam's acceptance of this limitation on his authority was basic to his continued residence in the garden. More than this: it was basic to his life. God interacted with man on a face-to-face basis in the garden. He no longer deals with man in this way. Instead, God has established a system of representative authority that substitutes for a verbal "no trespassing" sign around a designated tree. The neighbor is God's agent who comes into another man's field and announces, in effect: "This does not belong exclusively to you. As the original owner, God has a valid legal claim on it. So do I, as God's agent."

In this text, God forbade land owners from excluding visitors from their fields. A visitor had the right to pick something to eat during the harvest season. He lawfully reaped the fruits of another person's land, labor, and capital. The legal boundaries that delineated the ownership of a field did not restrict access by the visitor. The visitor had a legal claim on a small portion of the harvest. He had to appear in person to collect this portion. Put a different way, outsiders were co-owners of a portion of every field's pickable crop.

One question that I deal with later in this chapter is whether this law was a cross-boundary law rather than a seed law or land law.² If it

2. On the difference, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Conclusion:C.

was a cross-boundary law, then God was making this law universal in its jurisdiction. He was announcing this system of land tenure in His capacity as the owner of the whole earth, not just as the owner of the Promised Land.

B. Exclusion by Conquest

The Israelites were about to inherit the Promised Land through military conquest. Their forthcoming inheritance would be based on the disinheritance of the Canaanites. The specified means of this transfer of ownership was to be genocide. It was not merely that the Canaanites were to be excluded from the land; they were to be excluded from history. More to the point, theologically speaking, their gods were to be excluded from history (Josh. 23:5–7).

The Israelites would soon enjoy a military victory after a generation of miraculous wandering in the wilderness (Deut. 8:4). There could be no legitimate doubt in the future that God had arranged this transfer of the inheritance. He was therefore the land's original owner. They would henceforth hold their land as sharecroppers: 10% of the net increase in the crop was to go to God through the Levitical priesthood. This was Levi's inheritance, which the tribe held in lieu of rural land (Num. 18:21).³

Before the conquest began, God placed certain restrictions on the use of His holy land: the formal terms of the lease. As the owner of both the land and the people who occupied it, God's restrictions were designed to protect the long-term productivity of His assets. Yet He imposed these laws for their sakes, too. Land-owning Israelites had to rest the land every seventh year (Lev. 25:4).⁴ They had to allow poverty-stricken gleaners to come onto their land and pick up the leftovers of the crops (Lev. 19:9–10;⁵ 23:22;⁶ Deut. 24:21⁷). This passage further erased the legal boundary between the land's owners and non-owners. Whatever a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands was his to take prior to the harvest. He had legal title to this share of his neighbor's crop. It did not belong to the land owner. Ownership of land, seeds,

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

4. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

and prior labor did not entitle him to that portion of the crop which a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands. That is, his prior investment was not the legal basis of his ownership. *The conquest of Canaan was the legal basis of Israel's rural land ownership.*

Legal title in Israel had nothing to do with some hypothetical original owner who had gained legal title because he had mixed his labor with unowned land—John Locke's theory of original ownership.⁸ There had once been Canaanites in the land, whose legal title was visibly overturned by the conquest. The Canaanites were to be disinherited, Moses announced. They would not be allowed to inherit, because they could not lawfully be neighbors. The conquest's dispossession of the gods of Canaan definitively overturned any theory of private ownership that rested on a story of man's original ownership based on his own labor. The kingdom grant preceded any man's work. The promise preceded the inheritance. In short, grace precedes law.

The neighbor in Mosaic Israel was a legal participant in the kingdom grant. He lived under the authority of God. His presence in the land helped to extend the kingdom in history. The land was being subdued by men who were willing to work under God's law. The exclusion of the Canaanites had been followed by the inclusion of the Israelites and even resident aliens. Canaan was more than Canaanites. It was also the land. The conquest of Canaan was more than a one-time military victory; it was a process. The fruits of the land belonged to all residents in the land. The bulk of these fruits belonged to land owners, but not all of the fruits.

In this sense, the resident alien who owned no land but who had legal access to the land was analogous to the beast that was employed to plow the land. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4).⁹ Although the neighbor was not employed by the land owner, he was part of the overall dominion process inside Israel. The fact that God had included him inside Canaan made it more difficult for those who served other gods to occupy the land. A man's access to the courts and to the fruits of the field gave him a stake in the land, something worth defending. Israel was no pluralistic democracy. It was a theocracy. No law but God's could lawfully be enforced by the state. Only God's name could be lawfully invoked publicly inside Israel's boundaries (Ex. 23:13; Deut. 18:20). By remaining inside the land, a resident alien was publicly acknowledging his allegiance to Is-

8. John Locke, *On Civil Government: Second Treatise* (1690), section 27.

9. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62.

rael's God rather than to another god. He was acknowledging God's legal claim on him. God in turn gave him a legal claim on a small portion of the output of the land.

C. Jesus and the Corn (Grain)

Verse 25 is the partial background for one of Jesus' more perplexing confrontations with the Pharisees.

And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Luke 6:1–5).

The Pharisees did not accuse the disciples of theft; rather, they accused the disciples of not keeping the sabbath. Had the disciples been guilty of theft, their critics would have taken advantage of this opportunity to embarrass Jesus through His disciples' actions, which the disciples had done right in front of Him. The reason why they did not accuse the disciples of theft was that in terms of the Mosaic law, the disciples had not committed theft. Their infraction, according to the Pharisees, was picking grain on the sabbath. Picking grain was a form of work.

Jesus' response was to cite an obscure Old Testament incident: David's confiscation of the showbread. The circumstances surrounding that incident are even more perplexing to the commentators than Jesus' walk through the field. David was fleeing from Saul. To gain five loaves of bread—surely not a life-and-death supply for a band of men¹⁰—David lied to a priest and confiscated the showbread, which was always to be on the table of the Lord (Ex. 25:30).

Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech

10. There was not enough bread to save their lives from starvation. These loaves were not, in and of themselves, crucial for David's survival. But as one meal among many, the bread was part of a program of survival. These loaves might not be the last ones confiscated by David.

was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away (I Sam. 21:1–6).

Jesus was implying that David had not done anything wrong in this incident, either by lying to a priest about his mission or by taking what belonged to God. David invoked the status of his men as holy warriors on the king's official business, which was why the priest raised the issue of their contact with women. David's answer—they had had no contact with women for three days—pointed back to the three days of abstinence prior to the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 19:15). David, as God's anointed heir of the throne of Israel (I Sam. 16), possessed kingly authority. Jonathan, Saul's formally lawful heir, had just re-confirmed his *inheritance-transferring oath* with David (I Sam. 20:42).¹¹ Because of this oath, David had the authority to lie to a priest and to take the showbread for himself and his men, even though Saul was still on the throne. To preserve his life, and therefore his God-designated inheritance, David acted lawfully. David acted as Jacob had acted when he tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing which was lawfully his by revelation and voluntary transfer by Esau (Gen. 27).¹²

The priest told David that there was no common bread available. This indicates that this was a sabbath day: no cooking. There was no fresh bread or hot bread, which was why the showbread was still there: it had not been replaced by hot bread. So, David asked for holy bread on a sabbath. There was no question about it: he was asking for holy

11. The original covenant had been marked by Jonathan's gift of his robe to David, symbolizing the robe of authority, as well as his sword (I Sam. 18:3–4).

12. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 28.

bread on a holy day in the name of the king. The priest gave it to him. On what legal basis? The text does not say, but David's invoking of Saul's authority indicates that a man on a king's mission possessed lawful authority to receive bread set aside for God if there was no other bread available. God had said, "thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway" (Ex. 25:30). But this situation was an exception which the priest acknowledged as valid. The desire of the king's men superseded this ritual requirement. There was no Mosaic law authorizing this legal principle, yet the priest accepted David's explanation, and so did Jesus. So did His critics, who did not reply. David, as the anointed future king, fed himself and his men on holy bread, based on their need to escape the wrath of the present corrupt king over Israel. Jesus, as the lawful king of Israel, allowed his men to feed themselves on the sabbath, despite the hostility of the present religious rulers, who were allied to a pagan king, Caesar. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Because of this, within a generation, there would be neither showbread nor temple.

Unlike Calvinist commentators,¹³ the Pharisees did not criticize David's actions. Jesus cited this incident in defense of His own actions. He was thereby declaring His own kingly authority. As surely as David's anointing by Samuel on God's behalf had authorized him to deceive a priest and take the showbread on the sabbath, so had the Holy Spirit's anointing of Jesus authorized Him to have His disciples pick grain on the sabbath. As surely as the king's men were authorized to eat the showbread on the sabbath, so were Christ's disciples author-

13. Puritan commentator Matthew Poole called David's lie to the priest a "plain lie." *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1683] 1962), I, p. 565. John Gill, a Calvinistic Baptist and master of rabbinic literature, referred to David's lie as a "downright lie, and was aggravated by its being told only for the sake of getting a little food; and especially to a high priest, and at the tabernacle of God. . . . This shows the weakness of the best men, when left to themselves. . . ." John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 4 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, [1764] 1853), II, pp. 196–97. Neither commentator criticized David for taking the showbread on the sabbath, which was the judicial heart of the matter. Christ sanctioned this action retroactively, which puts Christian commentators in a bind. So, they focus instead on David's lie, just as commentators focus on Rahab's lie, while refusing to raise their voices in protest against the significant ethical issue: her treason. This is a common blindness among pietistic commentators: straining at ethical gnats and swallowing what appear to be ethical camels. Cf. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), especially pp. 838–42.

ized to eat newly picked grain on the sabbath. Jesus then took the matter a step further: He announced that He was Lord of the Mosaic sabbath. This meant that He was announcing more than kingly authority. He was declaring His messianic heirship at this point: the son of man, Lord of the Mosaic sabbath. If David, as the prophetically anointed but not-yet publicly sanctioned king of Israel, had possessed temporary authority over a priest for the sake of his lawful inheritance of the throne, far more did Jesus Christ, as messianic heir of the kingdom of God, possess authority over the sabbath in Israel.

One thing is certain: the judicial issue was not grain-stealing.

D. A Foretaste of Bread and Wine

The visitor eats grapes in the vineyard, but he cannot lawfully carry them off his neighbor's property. He cannot make wine with what he eats. Neither can two hands full of grain make bread. This case law does not open a neighbor's field to all those who seek a finished meal. A free sample of the raw materials of such a meal is offered to visitors, but not the feast itself. This is not a harvest in preparation for a feast; it is merely *a symbol of a feast to come*. To prepare a feast, productive and successful people must bring to the kitchen sufficient fruits of the field. The full blessings of God are displayed at a feast. This case law does not offer a feast to the visitor. It offers a full stomach to a person walking in a field, but not a feast in a home or communion hall. It offers sufficient food to a hungry man to quiet the rumblings of his stomach, but it does not provide the means of celebration. It offers a token of a future feast. It is symbolic of blessings to come, a down payment or earnest of a future feast.

Grapes and grain point to the sacramental nature of the coming feast: a communion meal. The two crops singled out in this law are corn (grain) and grapes. The fact that these two crops are the raw materials for bread and wine is not some random aspect of this case law. *This law pointed forward to the communion feast of the New Covenant.* The Mosaic Covenant was, in effect, the grain and grapes that pointed forward to the New Covenant's bread and wine. The New Covenant's bread and wine in turn point forward to the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9). The communion table of God brings together people of a common confession and a common community who look forward to the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God in history at the end of time. So it was also in Mosaic Israel. The eschatological

aspect of the Book of Deuteronomy, as the Pentateuch's book of the inheritance, provides a framework for interpreting this case law.

God gives to every man in history a foretaste of a holy meal to come: *common grace*. Not every man accepts God's invitation. Not every man is given access to God's table, either in history or eternity. The fellowship of God is closed to outsiders by means of a common confession that restricts strangers from lawful access to the table. But a free foretaste of the bounty of God's table at the consummate marriage supper of the Lamb is given to all those who walk in the open field and pick a handful of grain. A handful of this bounty is the common blessing of all mankind. This is the doctrine of common grace.¹⁴

The visitor is not allowed to bring a vessel to gather up the bounty of his neighbor's field. Neither is the covenant-breaker allowed access to the Lord's Supper. The visitor is allowed access to the makings of bread and wine. Similarly, the covenant-breaker is allowed into the church to hear the message of redemption. He may gain great benefits from his presence in the congregation, or he may leave spiritually unfed. So it is with the visitor in the field. "I take no man's charity," says one visitor to a field. "Religion is a crutch," says a visitor to a church.¹⁵ Such a willful rejection of either blessing indicates a spirit of autonomy, a lack of community spirit, and a lack of a shared environment.

E. Neighborhood and Neighborliness

Grapes and grain remain ripe enough to eat in the field only for relatively short periods of time. Either they are not yet ripe or they have just been harvested. The neighbor in Israel was not allowed to bring a vessel to carry away the produce. The presumption was that the neighbor was visiting, became hungry, and ate his fill right there in the field. This is what Jesus' disciples did. The neighbor, unless very hungry, did not walk over to the neighbor's house three times a day to get a quick meal. He had his own crop to harvest. If he was landless, he might come into a field and eat. He could even bring his family. The landless person would have gained access to free food, but only briefly, during the harvest season.

The two crops explicitly eligible for picking were above-ground

14. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

15. A good reason for not passing a collection plate in church is that visitors may believe that a token payment will pay for "services rendered." So, for that matter, may non-tithing members.

crops. This law did not authorize someone to dig a root crop out of the ground. The eligible food was there, as we say in English, “for the picking.” Were these two crops symbolic for all picked crops, or did the law authorize only grapes and grain? I think the two crops were symbols of every crop that might appear on the table of a feast. This would have included fruit trees, vine-grown berries, but almost no bread grains. This meant that the hungry neighbor had a limited range of crops at his disposal.

If he was also a local farmer, then his own crop was similarly exposed. His concerted effort to harm a neighbor by a misuse of this law would have exposed him to a tit-for-tat response. If he used this law as a weapon, it could be used against him as a weapon.

Who was the neighbor? The Hebrew word, *rayah*, is most commonly used to describe a close friend or someone in the neighborhood. “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Ex. 20:17).¹⁶ It can be translated as “friend.” “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers” (Deut. 13:6). It was a next-door neighbor: “Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour’s landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it” (Deut. 19:14).¹⁷

But did it always mean this? In Jesus’ answer to this question by the clever lawyer, He used the story of the Samaritan on a journey through Israel who helped a beaten man, in contrast to the priest and the Levite who ignored him (Luke 10).¹⁸ Jesus was arguing that *ethics*, not friendship, confession, or place of residence, defines the true neighbor. The Samaritan was the injured man’s true neighbor because he helped him in his time of need. The lawyer did not disagree with Jesus’ assessment. He understood that this interpretation was consistent with the intent of the Mosaic law. This means that a law-abiding man on the road in Mosaic Israel was a neighbor. The crop owner had to treat a man on a journey as if he were a local resident. This included

16. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 30.

17. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 43.

18. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 22.

even a foreigner.

The Greek word used to translate *rayah* in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament is *pleision*, which means “near, close by.”¹⁹ This indicates that the Jewish translators regarded the neighbor as a local resident. The neighbor was statistically most likely to be a fellow member of the tribe. Rural land could not be sold permanently. It could not be alienated: sold to an alien. The jubilee law regulated the inheritance of rural land (Lev. 25).²⁰ This means that the neighbor in Mosaic Israel was statistically likely a permanent resident of the community.

Nevertheless, this law opened the fields to people on a journey, just as the Samaritan was on a journey. As surely as the Samaritan was the injured man’s neighbor, so was the land owner the hungry traveler’s neighbor. This law was a reminder to the Israelites that God had been neighborly to them in their time of need. After the exile, such permanent geographical boundaries were maintained only if the occupying foreign army so decided. Jesus walked through the field under Rome’s civil authority, not Israel’s.

Why would God have designated these two above-ground crops as open to neighborly picking? This law made neighbors co-owners of the fruits of a man’s land, labor, and capital. The land owner was legally unable to protect his wealth from the grasping hands of non-owners. He was left without legal recourse. Why? What judicial principle undergirded this case law? What benefit to the community did this law bring which offset the negative effects of a limitation of the protection of private property? To answer this accurately, we must first determine whether this case law was a temporary law governing only Mosaic Israel or a permanent legal statute.

F. Seed Laws and Land Laws

Seed laws and land laws were temporary statutes that applied only to Mosaic Israel. I have argued previously that the seed laws of the Mosaic Covenant were tied to Jacob’s messianic prophecy regarding Judah: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws and land laws served as

19. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 678.

20. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

means of separating the tribes, thereby maintaining the continuity of each tribe until the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy, which rested on tribal separation.²¹ The jubilee inheritance laws were land laws that were designed by God to accomplish this task.

One aspect of tribal separation was the creation of a sense of unity and participation in a larger family unit. Members of each tribe were linked together as descendants of one of the patriarchs. There was an aspect of brotherliness within a tribe that was not shared across the tribe's boundaries. There is a social distinction between brotherhood and otherhood. Boundaries mark this distinction. The main boundary for Israel was circumcision, but tribal boundaries also had their separating and unifying effects.

By allowing the neighbor to pick mature fruit, the Mosaic law encouraged a sense of mutual solidarity. The local resident was entitled to reap the rewards of land and labor. The land belonged ultimately to God. It was a holy land, set apart by God for his historical purposes. To dwell in the land involved benefits and costs. One of the benefits was open access to free food, however temporary. The staff of life in effect was free. In harvest season, men in Israel would not die of starvation. But their source of sustenance was local: their neighbor's field. Would this have created animosity? Sometimes. Everything in a fallen world is capable of creating animosity. But what about the owner's sense of justice? It was his land, his effort, and his seeds that had made this wealth possible. Why should another man have lawful access to the fruits of his labor?

One possible answer ties this law to the Promised Land. Israel was a holy land that had been set aside by God through a program of partial genocide. (God had specified total genocide,²² but the Israelites had failed.) The land was exclusively God's. It was His dwelling place. He fed His people on His land. God, not their own efforts, was the source of their wealth (Deut. 8:17).²³ Israel's holy status was still true in Jesus' day because of the temple and its sacrifices. But there is a problem with this explanation: strangers in Jesus' day dwelled in the land, and in fact ruled over the land. Furthermore, Jesus identified the Good Samaritan as a neighbor. The Samaritan therefore would have quali-

21. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11, Conclusion; ch. 17:C; ch. 33:A; Conclusion:C:1.

22. "And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deut. 7:2).

23. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

fied as a man with lawful access to an Israelite's field. The Promised Land fails as the basis of this case law.

A second possible explanation is this: the tribes existed in order to complete God's plan for Israel. Local solidarity was important for maintaining the continuity of the tribes. Problem: this law was still in force in Jesus' day, yet the tribes no longer occupied the land as separate tribal units. The seed laws in this instance seem to have nothing to do with this case law.

Third, it could be argued that Israel was a holy army. An army does not operate in terms of the free market's principle of "high bid wins." In every military conflict in which a city is besieged, martial law replaces market contracts as the basis of feeding the population. The free market's principle of high bid wins is replaced by food rationing. Solidarity during wartime must not be undermined by a loss of morale. A nation's defenders are not all rich. The closer we get to the priestly function of ensuring life, the less applicable market pricing becomes. Problem: Israel was not a holy army after the exile. It was an occupied nation. Yet this case law was still in force. There was no discontinuity in this case between the Mosaic Covenant and the post-exile covenant.

G. The Farmer and the Grocer

The Mosaic law authorized a neighbor to pick grapes or grain from another man's field. It did not authorize a man to pick up a free piece of fruit from a grocer's table. What is the difference? What underlying moral or organizational principle enables us to distinguish between the two acts? In both cases, the "picker" wanted to eat a piece of fruit for free. He was not allowed to do this in the second case.

Let us consider the economic aspects of this law. Both the farmer and the grocer sought a positive return on their investments. The farmer planted seeds in the ground, nurtured the seedlings, and sold the crop to someone, possibly the grocer or his economic agent. The grocer made his money by purchasing a crop in bulk from the farmer or his economic agent, transporting it to a central location, and displaying it in a way pleasing to buyers. What was the differentiating factor? Time? Soil? Location? Money?

The difference seems to have been this: *control over rural land*. The farmer in Mosaic Israel worked the land. He cared for it directly. The grocer did not. The farmer profited directly from the output of this land. The grocer profited indirectly. The farmer had a unique

stake in the land itself. The grocer did so only indirectly, insofar as food that was imported from abroad was much more expensive for him to buy, except in Mediterranean coastal areas and regions close to the borders of the nation. The distinction between grocers and land owners may also have had something to do with the jubilee land laws.²⁴ Rural land was governed by the jubilee law. Urban real estate was not. Unlike urban land, prior to the exile, rural land was the exclusive property of the heirs of the conquest, though not after the return (Ezek. 47:22–23).²⁵

Those who lived on the land and profited from it as farmers were required to share a portion of the land's productivity with others, as we have seen. To this extent, the fruit of the land was the inheritance of those who dwelled close by or who wandered by on a journey when the crop was ripe.²⁶ In this case, those farmers whose land was located close to highways would have had lower transportation costs but higher sharing costs. It is not hard to imagine that highway properties would have been ideal locations for general stores. Their agricultural produce was not subject to picking. For farmers whose inheritance bordered on highways, setting up a general store would have made good sense. During the feast of firstfruits, they at least could have sold other items, such as wine, to accompany a free handful of grain. They could also have planted only root crops, which were not eligible for picking.

This law would have strengthened the sense of community in a society that was bound by a national covenant that was tied to land. Travel would have been less costly in harvest time. Also, the local poor would have had something to eat in the harvest—a sense of participation in the blessings of God. A brief safety net was in place. To gain access to a full safety net—a lawful bag in which to put the picked produce—the poor had to work as gleaners.²⁷ While the state was not authorized to send crop collectors into the fields to collect food to redis-

24. As I shall argue below, I do not think this was covenantally relevant: "Has This Law Been Annulled?"

25. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

26. Passover was a pre-harvest feast. Booths (Ingathering/Tabernacles) was post-harvest. So, free produce would rarely have been on the vine or stalk when these two great marches took place. Pentecost was the time of firstfruits (Ex. 23:16). Any farmer who had not yet harvested his crop would have had to share it with travellers to the firstfruits festival.

27. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, chaps. 11, 22.

tribute to the poor, the Mosaic civil law did not enforce sanctions against those who came into a field to eat a handful of food. It was not legal for land owners to enforce physical sanctions against those who took advantage of this law. The civil law did not compel wealth redistribution in Mosaic Israel, but it defined the land owner's property rights in such a way that the state was prohibited from bringing negative sanctions against those people who picked a handful of the crop.

H. A Shared Environment

Let us consider a difficult application of this case law. Did this law open every man's fields to wandering hordes during a famine? Times of famine have been times of great disruption of the social order. Wandering bands of hungry people fan out across the countryside. Whole populations move from region to region in search of food.²⁸ This happened repeatedly in Europe from the late medieval era until the late seventeenth century, and well into the twentieth century in Russia.²⁹ Similar famines have occurred in China in modern times.³⁰ Before the advent of modern capitalism, famine was a regular occurrence. Even within capitalist society, Ireland suffered a nearly decade-long famine in the 1840s. The absentee landlords in England did not foresee the threat to the potato crop posed by the blight at its first appearance in 1841. Over the next decade, these landlords paid for their lack of foresight with huge capital losses; a million Irish paid with their lives.

Are wandering strangers in search of food the judicial equivalent of a neighbor? Is a desperate family on the road in search of food entitled fill their stomachs with a farmer's corn or apples? If enough of these people were to show up at harvest time, their economic effect would be comparable to a swarm of locusts. Locusts in the Bible are seen as the judgment of God (Ex. 10:4–6; Deut. 28:38). The land owner planted a crop and cared for it in the expectation that his family would eat for another season. Was he now required to sit idly by and watch strangers consume his family's future? Was the state prohibited by this case law from defending his interests? If so, then what would be his incentive to go to the expense of planting and nurturing his next crop? Would he even survive to plant again? Was Israel's society benefitted

28. For historical examples, see Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity* (New York: Dutton, 1942), pp. 107–109.

29. For a list of dozens of these famines, see *ibid.*, p. 132.

30. Pearl S. Buck's novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), tells this story.

by opening the fields to all comers in every economic situation? Was the nation's future agricultural output threatened by a definition of "neighbor" that includes an open-ended number of strangers in search of free food?

The goal of this law was the preservation of community. Its context was a local neighborhood in which families share the same environment. A crop failure for one family was probably accompanied by a crop failure for all. They were all in the same boat. Mutual aid and comfort in times of adversity were likely in a community in which every person had a symbolic stake in the community's success. These people shared a common destiny. This law was an aspect of that common destiny.

As for the Samaritan in the parable, he was not on the road for the purpose of stripping fields along the way. The Samaritan assisted the beaten man; he did not eat the last grape on the man's vine. The Samaritan found an injured man on the road. They had both been on a journey. They shared a similar environment. They were both subject to the risks of travel. The threat of robbery threatened all men walking down that road. What had befallen the victim might have befallen the Samaritan. It might yet befall him. Perhaps the same band of robbers was still in the "neighborhood": the road to Jericho.

Men who share a common environment share common risks. When men who share common risks are voluntarily bound by a shared ethical system to help each other in bad times, a kind of social insurance policy goes into effect. Risks are pooled. The costs that would otherwise befall a victim are reduced by men's willingness to defray part of each other's burdens. But, unlike an insurance policy, there is no formal agreement, nor does the victim have any legal claim on the non-victim. The beaten man had no legal claim on the Samaritan, the Levite, or the priest. Two of the three went their way. They broke no civil law, but their act of deliberately passing by on the other side of the road revealed their lack of commitment to the principle of community: shared burdens and blessings.

The ethics of neighborliness is mutual sharing when the resources are available. The ethics of neighborliness did not mandate that the state remain inactive when hordes of men whose only goal is obtaining food sweep down on a rural community. The harvest was shared locally because men have struggled with the same obstacles to produce it. This law assumed a context of mutual obligations, not the asymmetric conditions in a famine, when the producers face an invasion from out-

side the community by those who did not share in the productive effort.

I. Community and Economy

One of the favorite contrasts of sociologists is community vs. economy. The most famous example of this in sociological literature is Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), which he wrote at age 32. In this pioneering work, the author contrasted the small, medieval-type village with the modern city. He argued that the demise of the personal relationships of village life has led to the impersonal rationalism and calculation of the modern city.³¹ He used the now-familiar metaphors of organic life and mechanical structure to describe these two forms of human association.³² He viewed the family as the model or ideal type of *Gemeinschaft*.³³ The business firm, which is a voluntary association established for a limited, rational purpose (profit), would seem to serve well as a model for *Gesellschaft*.

In American history, there have been few defenders of *Gemeinschaft*. Thomas Jefferson heralded the independent yeoman farmer, but Jefferson was no advocate of village life. A group of intellectuals and poets known as the Nashville agrarians in 1930 wrote a brief defense of southern agrarian life in contrast to modern urbanism, but they have had no influence and have long been regarded at best as regional utopians, even in the South.³⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were contemptuous of "the idiocy of rural life,"³⁵ and most social commentators have agreed with them. Most social commentators have been urban.

The movement of vast populations from the farms to cities has been a continuing phenomenon worldwide, beginning no later than the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century. The advanced division of labor, which was made possible by close contact in urban

31. He did not argue, as Marx and other sociologists and economists have argued, that it was the rise of capitalism that undermined the village life. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 78.

32. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1887] 1957), pp. 33–37.

33. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, p. 75.

34. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, [1930] 1977). Cf. Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

35. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 6, p. 488.

areas, the transportation revolution, the mechanization of agriculture, the revolution in electrical power, and government-funded road systems and water systems have combined to concentrate populations in vast urban complexes. The modern world is unquestionably an urban civilization.

The Bible promotes both cultures. The farms of Israel were held together as a civilization by the Ark of the Covenant, which was housed in a city. The New Heaven and New Earth is described as a city in which the tree of life grows (Rev. 22:2). In the Old Covenant, the city was supported by the farms. In the New Covenant's imagery of the final state, the image is different: the city contains the tree. The tree feeds the inhabitants. The symbolism seems to be *from farm to city*. This was also the thrust of the jubilee legislation: ever-smaller farms for an ever-growing population.³⁶ Yet, covenantally, an heir of the conquest always had his historical roots in the land. The land was his inheritance. His name was associated with the land.

This judicial link to the soil ended with the New Covenant. The land ceased to be a holy place after the fall of Jerusalem. But the imagery of the tree of life, like the imagery of bread and wine, ties members of the New Covenant community to the soil. The preference of suburban Americans for carefully mowed lawns, of Englishmen and Japanese for gardens, of the Swiss and Austrians for flowers growing in window gardens and for vegetable gardens all testify to man's desire to retain his links to the soil from which he came.

There is a story told about the German free market economist Wilhelm Röpke. He was living in Geneva at the time. He invited another free market economist (said by some to be Ludwig von Mises) to his home near Geneva. He kept a vegetable garden plot near his home. The visitor remarked that this was an inefficient way to produce food. He countered that it was an efficient way to produce happiness.³⁷

The division of labor is a powerful social arrangement. Specialization increases our economic output as individuals. We can earn more money per hour by specializing than by performing low division of labor tasks. But we also increase our dependence on the social institutions that have promoted the division of labor. Above all, we increase

36. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24:G.

37. Russell Kirk says that Röpke said it was Mises. In 1975, I heard the same story from another economist, Röpke's translator, Patrick Boarman. I do not recall that Mises was the target of the remark, but he may have been. See Kirk's 1992 Foreword to Wilhelm Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, [1942] 1992), p. ix.

our reliance on banks, transportation systems, and other arrangements run by computers. We have delivered our lives into the hands and minds of computer programmers. The payments system is governed by fractional reserve banking. This is risky. There is an economic case for investing in a lower division of labor lifestyle with a portion of our assets and our time.

There is more to community than efficiency. Community is more than property rights. Community in Mosaic Israel was based on a series of covenants. The right of private property was defended by the commandment not to steal, but the definition of theft did not include eating from a neighbor's unharvested, above-ground crop. This exception was unique to rural land. It applied to a form of property that was not part of the free market system of buying and selling. God was uniquely the owner of the land in Mosaic Israel. He set different requirements for ownership of rural land. These rules were designed to provide a brief safety net in an area of the economy in which it was illegal to alienate family property.

In the final analysis, this law was far more symbolic than economic, for the harvest time would not have lasted very long. The sense of community had to be preserved in a system that restricted buying and selling. Those who did not own the best land or even any land at all had a stake in the success of local land owners, despite the law's restrictions of the permanent sale of inherited property. This symbol of participation in the fruits of the land was important for a society whose members celebrated the fulfillment of God's prophecy regarding the inheritance of a Promised Land (Gen. 15:16).³⁸

J. Has This Law Been Annulled?

Is there any Mosaic covenantal principle whose annulment also annulled this law? We know that a similar law is still in force. Paul cited the law prohibiting the muzzling of the working ox, applying it to the payment of ministers. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Tim. 5:17–18).³⁹ But this case law applies more generally to the Chris-

38. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

39. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

tian walk: "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (I Cor. 9:9–10).⁴⁰ There is a down payment in history—an earnest—of the covenant-keeper's kingdom victory in eternity. This down payment is an aspect of the inheritance.

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:10–14).

The tribal system was annulled in A.D. 70. Was this law exclusively tribal? The same kinds of psychological benefits seem to apply outside the tribal context: commitment to the community, a sense of participation in the blessings of this community, a willingness to defend it against invaders. What is missing today is Mosaic Israel's public exclusion of the names of other gods. A man's presence in the land does not, in and of itself, testify publicly to his willingness to serve under the law of God. The mobility of rival gods is like the mobility of the God of the Bible in the Old Covenant. The universality of their claims makes them different from the gods of the ancient Near East in Moses' day. To this extent, the situation has changed. But religions that claimed allegiance to universal gods appeared in the Near East and Far East at about the time of the Babylonian exile. Nevertheless, people in Israel in Jesus' day were still allowed to pick grain in their neighbors' fields.

This law seems to be a cross-boundary law. The neighbor, defined biblically, has a legal claim to a handful of any crop that he can pick, though not dig up. The biblical hermeneutical principle is that any Old Covenant law not annulled explicitly or implicitly by a New Covenant

40. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

law is still valid.⁴¹ There seems to be no principle of judicial discontinuity that would annul this law. Because I see no judicial discontinuity between the covenants regarding this law, I conclude that the distinction between the grocer and the farmer was not based on the jubilee law, which has been annulled.

This law applies to rural land during the harvest season but before the harvest takes place. The goal of this law is to increase the sense of community. All of its members are supposed to know that they have a small stake—a symbolic stake—in the prosperity of the land. There seems to be no discontinuity between the two covenants with regard to this law. It was a theocratic law, but whenever a nation covenants with the Trinitarian God of the Bible, this law is still in force.

The modern world is politically polytheistic.⁴² It denies legitimacy to the principle of civil theocracy. It also passes legislation that excludes neighbors from any man's field. It then extends the principle of exclusion to the nation itself. It creates "no trespassing" boundaries around the nation. Access to a man's field is analogous to access to the nation; the modern state is consistent in this regard. Immigration legislation excludes outsiders because they may become a threat to a national covenant that is not confessional. Immigrants may gain the vote and use the state to redistribute wealth. The same kind of exclusivism operates in laws legalizing abortion, which is another barrier to entry into the land.

This law testifies against geographical exclusivism because it is part of a system of covenantal order that is confessionally exclusivist. *Open borders are the rule for biblical theocracy: access to the visible kingdom of God in history.* Here is the logic of "open borders openly arrived at." You may freely walk into a local church; therefore, you may also freely walk into the nation in which that church operates. Any Christian who promotes closed national borders is saying, in effect, "Until some church sends a missionary to your nation, or until your entire population has access to the Internet, you must content yourself with going to hell. Sorry about that."

The message of this law is clear: access to God's promised land is to be accompanied by access to the fields of the promised land at harvest time. This gives non-owners and non-citizens a stake in the main-

41. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), chaps. 15, 16. (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>)

42. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/polpol>)

tenance of a biblically theocratic society. This law makes it clear that *private property is not an absolute value in human society*. Private property is an absolute right for God, as the boundary placed around the forbidden tree in Eden reveals; it is not, however, an absolute right for man. *Nothing is an absolute right for man, for man is not absolute*. This case law breaches the boundaries of rural land. Owners are not allowed to use force to exclude a neighbor from picking a handful of the crop to eat in the field. The state may not defend owners' legal title to this token portion of the crop. This means that they have no legal title to all of it. This is clearly a violation of libertarian definitions of private ownership. The Bible is not a libertarian document, any more than it is socialistic. It is a covenantal document. The neighbor has lawful access to what he can pick, but the state may not lawfully come in with vessels to pick crops in the name of the people (minus 50% for administration).

* * * * *

Conclusion

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees pointed to the sabbath principle as a means of liberating men. The disciples were hungry. Food was nearby. They could lawfully pick grain, but they did not cook it. They had to do some minimal work, but any food preparation activity is work. They were not violating the sabbath. They were walking and talking with the Lord of the sabbath. This was the top priority of the disciples.

The sabbath is not to be used as a means of interfering with recreation that leads to better knowledge of God's work. A stroll on the day of rest is legitimate. So is discussion of spiritual matters. So is food preparation that does not disrupt the day's pattern of rest. Man is not to become enmeshed in a formidable array of rules governing the day of rest. Men are to be liberated by the day of rest. They are not to be placed in such bondage that they cannot enjoy the day. The sabbath is liberation from work and liberation from fear. It is not to be turned a means of subjugation by means of a handbook of man-made restrictions.⁴³

43. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 24.

THE RICH GET RICHER; SO DO THE POOR

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matt. 13:10–13).

The theocentric principle of this passage is God's absolute sovereignty in granting the gift of salvation to those whom He favors, and to remove everything from everyone else. Sovereignty is point one of the biblical covenant.¹ This is not something that covenant-breaking man wants to hear. In fact, it is not something that most covenant-keeping men want to hear. It implies that God is absolutely sovereign in His distribution of the gift of salvation. He sends His people out to preach the gospel, but He clogs the ears of all those listeners whom He eternally opposes.

A. The Kingdom of God

The issue in Matthew is the gospel of the kingdom. Who would receive it? Not those whom God opposed, Jesus said. Who might that have been? The context made it clear: the Jews. Then who was favored by God? Years later, Paul answered: the gentiles. The word of the Lord has come to them, Paul wrote, and they have responded in faith. Not

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

so with Israel. Israel heard, yet she did not hear—exactly as Jesus said. Paul wrote:

For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people (Rom. 10:11–21).

Paul here cited Isaiah: “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isa. 6:10). So did Jesus in this passage: “And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (Matt. 13:14–16).

Israel desperately needed salvation. Their ears had grown dull; their heart had waxed gross. Nevertheless, Jesus spoke in parables so that the majority of His listeners would not understand His offer of salvation. He did not seek to sharpen the hearing of all who listened to Him. His words in this passage are inescapably clear: His offer of the gospel was presented in such a way that Israel would *not* hear and respond in faith. Calvinists understand this passage and accept it. Anti-Calvinists prefer not to discuss it, and when commenting on it, they

have great difficulties. They have the same difficulties with Paul's similar words in the Book of Acts:

And when they [the Jews] had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it (Acts 28:23–28).

B. He Who Has, Gets

The Jews had the law and the prophets. This was something of great value. The gentiles did not. Yet the Jews were about to be passed over by God. The gentiles weren't. This seems to imply that he who has, loses; he who has nothing, gets. "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).² Yet this passage states the reverse: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that [which] he hath." How should we understand this?

Consider Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees regarding social outcasts. "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:11–13). The implication here is that all men are sick unto death. Some men recognize this; others do not. Those who acknowledge that they are sick will seek the services of a physician. Those who do not, won't.

2. Chapter 24.

What did Israel possess? Not good spiritual health, surely. What she possessed was *the means of diagnosis*: the law and the prophets, which testified to the spiritual sickness of mankind. Jeremiah warned: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Isaiah warned: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities" (Isa. 64:6–7). The Pharisees knew these ancient warnings, but they did not perceive that the warnings applied to them. Israel had the kingdom of God, but it was about to be taken away from them: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

What was the deciding factor in maintaining the kingdom grant? Good fruit. Jesus earlier had said: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:33–37). He had called for ethical consistency. He had called men to live out their confessions of faith. He wanted them to see exactly what they are from God's point of view. He called for *ethical self-consciousness*.

It is not the mere possession of God's law that can secure salvation. Men must obey it. But they do not obey it. Thus, they are in need of a savior, a kinsman-redeemer. The gentiles recognized this need; the Jews did not. The Jews had known of the coming savior (Isa. 53), but this did them no good. The gentiles had not known, but they would soon recognize Him when His disciples brought word of His redemptive work on their behalf.

What was it that the gentiles possessed? *The knowledge of their own covenantally bankrupt status before God*. This knowledge would soon bring them the kingdom grant: incorporation into the church. What did the Jews lack? This same knowledge. They would soon be

disinherited: excluded from this incorporation. He who had nothing, gained; he who had something, lost.

This passage deals prophetically with men's respective positions after the inheritance had been transferred. The kingdom of God would go to the gentiles, Jesus later warned the Pharisees. Then the traditional covenantal system of rewards and curses would prevail: those who have will receive. Those who have nothing will lose even that which they had possessed.

If I have nothing, how can I lose it? This initially makes no sense. But it makes sense within the context of Old Covenant Israel. The Jews had something valuable: the Mosaic law. Paul wrote: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:12–14). To ignore the law's testimony is to risk losing everything, Paul warned. The Mosaic law tells us that we have nothing of value to bring before God. Conclusion: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). James agreed: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). This was the fate of Old Covenant Israel: possessing something valuable, the law of God, Israel had nothing except the law's condemnation. Having nothing, i.e., a having *a false hope in salvation by law*, Israel soon had the kingdom taken away. The gentiles, not having received the Mosaic law, having only the work of the law written on every person's heart (Rom. 2:15),³ accepted the gospel's message of redemption. The gentiles received something: redemption.

From this point on, the covenantal system of historical sanctions goes into operation: he who has, gets. God's grace pours down visibly on those who have already received the grace of redemption. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).⁴ The covenant's blessings reinforce men's faith in the covenant. As a result, they exercise greater faith. The process of linear economic growth begins.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

C. A Thing of Value

We learn in this passage that he who has nothing nevertheless will eventually receive great gain. How can this be? We find the same seeming anomaly in Proverbs. “There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Prov. 13:7).⁵ The man who attains great tangible wealth, but nothing else, possesses nothing of value in God’s eyes. The man who makes himself poor in the world’s things for God’s sake thereby gains something of great value in God’s eyes. He who gives up the pursuit of the world’s treasure for the sake of God’s eternal treasure has made a wise exchange. He who fills his life with things that deflect him from service to God has made an unwise exchange. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).⁶

The “nothing” that the rich man possesses is the thing that he shall lose: treasure. His tangible wealth has no exchange value in the marketplace of souls. If he loses his soul, he loses his tangible wealth, too. This is how a man with nothing can lose that which he has. He has nothing of value in God’s eyes: no marketable capital. God then condemns him to hell because he possesses nothing of eternal value. Eternal life is obtained in this life or not at all. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

But what of the man to whom something of eternal value has been given by God? On the basis of this gift, he will eventually possess greater abundance. More than this: the tangible wealth of the one who has nothing of eternal value is transferred to the man who has received something of eternal value. This wealth transfer is also taught in Proverbs. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁷ The man who seeks great tangible wealth at the cost of God’s kingdom may achieve it, but over time, his accumulated wealth will flow to covenant-keepers. The process of spiritual gains and losses is eventually reflected in the realm of economics.

This passage indicates that God’s people will inherit the earth in history. The tangible wealth of covenant-breakers will eventually be

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 40.

6. Chapter 35.

7. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

transferred to covenant-keepers. This may be by the conversion of covenant-breakers: God's dispossession of Satan in history.

D. Regression to the Mean

There is an old saying, "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." As it applies to things of the spirit, this is an accurate summary. It corresponds to what Jesus taught in this passage. But does it also apply to economics? If it does, then this process somehow overcomes the statistical phenomenon known as regression toward the mean.

Free market economic theory teaches that if an entrepreneur discovers a new way to generate an above-market rate of return, other entrepreneurs will seek to discover his secret. Profitable information is bought and sold and stolen. Over time, new profit-producing techniques spread across the economy. As they do, their rate of return decreases, as more producers adopt the once-secret technique. This is why above-market rates of return tend to disappear. The economist calls this the unhampered free market's *tendency toward equilibrium*. Few concepts are more important than this one in modern economics.

There is an anomaly, however—one that is almost never discussed: the highly unequal distribution of income. My failure to recognize this in Chapter 67 of *Inheritance and Dominion* (1999) was an error. I wrote: "There is a bell-shaped distribution of wealth within a society because of the predictable outcomes of increased temptations that occur on the far ends of capital's spectrum." But there is no bell-shaped curve for either income or wealth. I had not recognized the continuing relevance of Vilfredo Pareto's discovery. This is why in the 2003 revision, I removed this section from the book. I discuss Pareto's law in the revised Chapter 69.⁸

1. Pareto's 20-80 Rule

The Bible's recommended goal is middle-class wealth. Jesus said, "For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always" (John 12:8). This statement appears in three of the Gospels (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7), but not Luke's. If we will always have the poor with us, then we will always have the rich. The question is: What percent-

8. This following subsection and the one that follows ("Moral Capital") are reprinted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), Introduction.

age of rich people will we have? Even more important, how much tangible wealth will the rich control? The answer is, most of it.

The shape of either a nation's wealth distribution curve or its income distribution curve does not resemble the shape of its population curve. The population curve bulges with the middle class. Both the income distribution curve and the wealth distribution curve bulge with the rich, generation after generation. This does not mean that the same families stay rich. It does mean that the richest 20% of the population own most of the wealth and gain most of the income at any given time. The shape of the income distribution curve resists alteration, generation after generation.

Italian sociologist-economist Vilfredo Pareto in the late nineteenth century made detailed investigations of the distribution of income in Europe. He discovered an amazing fact: the slope of the income curve, from the richest to the poorest members of society, was similar in every nation that he studied. The richest members gained most of the nation's income. This statistical relationship, first published in 1897,⁹ has not changed over the last century, irrespective of the economic policies of individual industrial nations. Later studies by other economic historians indicated that in 1835–40, 1883, and 1919 in Great Britain, the top 10% earned 50% of the nation's income.¹⁰ This statistical relationship has come to be known as the Pareto Law or the Pareto Rule, although Pareto did not ascribe a law's degree of predictability to it, at least not in his later work. A 20-80 distribution has been found to apply in social institution after institution, as well as in their diverse operations.¹¹ No one seems to know why. An economist wrote in 1965: "For a very long time, the Pareto law has lumbered the economic scene like an erratic block on the landscape; an empirical law which nobody can explain."¹²

A 1998 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards in Ottawa, Canada, reveals that the 20-80 rule still applies quite well in the United States. The top 20% of the population owned 81% of house-

9. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d' Economie Politique*, vol. 2 (1897), pp. 370–72. The book has still not been translated into English, although it remains famous.

10. D. H. Macgregor, "Pareto's Law," *Economic Journal* (March 1936), pp. 81, 86. Reprinted in Mark Blaug (ed.), *Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923)* (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 21, 26.

11. Richard Koch, *The 80-20 Principle: How to Achieve More With Less* (Garden City, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1998).

12. Josef Steindl, *Random Processes and the Growth of Firms: A Study of the Pareto Law* (London: Charles Griffin, 1965), p. 18. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 3.

hold wealth in 1962, 81.3% in 1983, 83.5% in 1989, 83.7% in 1995, and 84.3% in 1997. For the top 1%, the figures are as follows: 1962: 33.4%; 1983: 33.8%; 1989: 37.4%; 1995: 37.6%; 1997: 39.1%.¹³ The changes have been in the direction of greater concentration of tangible wealth in the United States.

This seems impossible. Don't middle-class people own their homes? No; they reside in them, but they borrow to buy them. They pay mortgages. The rich are the holders of these mortgages. Title is passed to the home owner, but the asset has a debt against it. Most middle-class people own very little debt-free marketable wealth. They use debt to buy depreciating assets: consumer goods. They do not save. The rich use their money to buy appreciating assets and income-producing assets. They save a much higher percentage of their wealth. When the rich in one nation cease to save at high rates, the rich in another nation will replace them. "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43–44).¹⁴

There is no known way for any industrial society to alter significantly the share of tangible wealth owned by the rich. When political force has been applied in the form of tax policy, the percentages have stayed pretty much the same. It is not even clear that there will be different wealth holders after the new taxation policies are in force, unless the existing wealth owners are deliberately expropriated or executed, as they were in Communist nations. Finally, there is no legitimate biblical justification for using the monopolistic force of civil government to redistribute private wealth in order to achieve greater equality.

The key economic issue regarding wealth distribution is this: the lawful means for gaining control over tangible capital. How do producers gain their share of national wealth in a particular nation? By power, by bribery, by political skills, or by satisfying customer demand? To benefit the largest number of people in society, civil governments should establish legal guarantees to all owners of property. This will encourage the self-interested rich to continue to use their wealth for customer-satisfying purposes. The rich should continue to save, in-

13. John Schmitt, Lawrence Mishel, and Jared Bernstein, paper prepared for a panel on "Economic Well-being in North America," Canadian Economic Association Meetings, May 31, 1998, Table 7.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

vest, and provide tools for their employees. The legal protection of all people's right to own and use property will also encourage the bottom 80% to do the same. Through competition to satisfy customers, members in lower-income groups will replace those in the higher-income groups. The percentage of tangible capital in each quintile will not change very much, but the amount of wealth produced by this capital will increase dramatically over time, as the compound growth process takes over.

Capital accumulation by the rich is the most important measurable source of a capitalist society's increasing tangible wealth. The rich provide the money that buys the tools that raise the wealth of the other classes. But tools are not enough to make a society rich among nations. A society's other classes must possess *moral capital*, such as the willingness to work hard, future-orientation, honesty, and a good reputation. Moral capital is intangible, but it is nonetheless real. It produces income for its owners.

Pareto's anomaly is a real one. If 10% of the population receives half of the national income, or if 20% of the population receives 70 or 80%, and this continues generation after generation in nation after nation, where is the evidence of equilibrium? Why shouldn't the distribution curves of both income and wealth be more continuous? Why should they be permanently skewed to the right? If there is open entry into the capital markets for the bottom 80% of the population, why shouldn't wealth be more evenly distributed? Is there some psychological barrier to entry, such as a widespread fear of losing investment capital or the fear of becoming self-employed, that keeps the distribution curves skewed?

There is continuous movement into and out of the top 20%. The story of rags to riches to rags in three generations is a familiar one. Some very wealthy families do seem to maintain their presence over several generations. This may be due to political favoritism, i.e., restrictions on competition. It is hard to say. Detailed academic studies of permanent intergenerational wealth at the top are not common.¹⁵ But there appears to be considerable mobility into and out of the top quintile for most of its members. But there is not mobility of the distri-

15. In the United States, Ferdinand Lundberg wrote several books on this topic, but he was always considered a maverick historian by academic historians. His books are not cited by historians very often, especially *The Rich and the Super-Rich: Who Really Owns America? How Do They Keep Their Wealth and Their Power?* (New York: Lyle Stewart, 1968).

bution curve itself.

2. Moral Capital

If we consider moral capital as income-producing capital, then the Pareto rule does not apply. There is only so much moral capital that any person can possess. The rich cannot amass moral capital in the way they can amass tangible capital. If the members of all economic classes in a society were to have approximately the same moral standards and degree of adherence to them, then the shape of the curve of society's moral capital would match the shape of the population curve.

Let me clarify my argument by an example. Assume that in nation A, only the rich are literate. This means that the national rate of illiteracy is 80%. In nation B, there is almost universal literacy. Without knowing anything else about the tangible wealth of either nation, which one would you guess has the richest rich people? I am speaking only of the top 20% of the population. I would guess nation B. But what if I am wrong? What if nation A is richer, perhaps because it is a small, oligarchical, oil-exporting nation? Which group of rich people do you think will be richer in a century if the literacy rates stay the same in both nations, assuming that the rich in both nations do not send their investment capital outside their respective countries? I would still guess nation B. This has nothing to do with investment decisions made by the rich. It has everything to do with the determination of the less rich to learn how to read—a determination based on their moral capital. A rising tide of literacy raises all economic ships: poor, middle class, and rich. I argue that this same principle of national wealth formation applies to moral capital in general.

Without widely distributed moral capital, today's rich people could not retain the market investment capital for long. Competent and honest employees would value of their become increasingly scarce and costly, thereby lowering the value of investment capital. Voters would become envy-driven. They would elect politicians who would seek to confiscate the wealth of the rich in the name of the poor on behalf of middle-class voters (minus 50% for government handling). Per capita productivity would slow, stagnate, or fall. So would the nation's wealth. The shape of the wealth distribution curve would remain the same—heavily concentrated in the top 20%—but the growth of wealth in this society would slow down or even decline.

E. To Inherit the Earth

The Bible teaches that covenant-keepers will inherit the earth.¹⁶ If the covenant-breaking rich continue to own most of the wealth, how can covenant-keepers inherit the earth? Or are we to believe that this inheritance is post-historical? The Old Covenant texts that forecast this inheritance do not indicate that the inheritance is post-historical.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).¹⁷

How can Christians inherit the earth if the rich own most of it, and Christians are told not to seek riches? The answer: postmillennialism.¹⁸ God's kingdom will be extended by widespread religious conversion. The vast majority of people in all income groups will be brought to saving faith. Even the rich minority will be converted. If they aren't, then they will be replaced by Christians who become wealthy through serving customers more efficiently. Inheritance of the earth will be by conversion, not by a minority of Christians buying up the assets of the world. Redemption is spiritual, not financial.

F. The Spread of the Gospel

The key factor in contributing to the permanent wealth of nations is saving grace. Special grace is fundamental. Contrary to free-market economic theory, private property is a secondary issue, for it is an out-working of God's common grace. Without special grace to some members of society, common grace cannot be sustained indefinitely.¹⁹ The

16. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

17. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 40.

18. Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

19. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress*

nation will eventually adopt capital-reducing measures based on envy or the desire to preserve the existing distribution of wealth. The statistical law of large numbers operates in nations.

If Pareto's rule applies internationally, as it seems to today,²⁰ then there will continue to be inequality, but the same minority of nations will not retain the advantage over the others. The international wealth distribution curve will continue to be skewed to the right, but those nations inside the top quintile will change. The key issue is this: On what basis does a nation enter the top fifth? By covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking? In either case, no nation is likely to stay on top permanently. Either negative sanctions will come against covenant-breaking nations, or else other covenant-keeping nations will be blessed even more by God. But in the second instance, every covenant-keeping nation will get richer, as will rich and poor residents in all of them.

Jesus said, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). The evil tree is eventually cut down: "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:17–20).²¹

So, the spread of the gospel produces positive economic effects. God rewards covenantal faithfulness with prosperity (Deut. 8:18).²² This prosperity is not to become a snare: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).²³ If it does snare the unrighteous society, then the "nothing" which it has—its wealth—will be removed from it.

The long-term movement of the kingdom of God is from poverty to wealth. To sustain their wealth and expand it, covenant-keepers must sustain their confession and their obedience to God's law. The mark of their commitment is their willingness to spend a portion of their wealth to take the good news of salvation and wealth to others. They must share their tangible capital with others, but more import-

(Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

20. Eighty percent of the world's wealth is owned by 25 percent of the world's population. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 22.

21. Chapter 18.

22. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

ant, share the covenantal basis of their tangible capital: their moral capital. They must seek to take the gospel to those who suffer poverty because of their rebellion to God. *Covenant-keepers are to use their economic capital to capitalize the poor in spirit.* If those who have received wealth from God on the basis of their confession and obedience are successful in their efforts to share the wealth, the poor will get richer, and so will the rich. *Increasing productivity for all is produced when the productivity of the poor increases.* The increase in capital will increase the division of labor.

G. Unequal Distribution of Wealth

The nagging question does not go away: What about income inequality? In every modern society that economists have investigated, there is huge inequality. Twenty percent of the population owns most of the tangible wealth. Even after almost a century of steeply graduated income taxes and graduated inheritance taxes, steep inequality persists.

Pareto did not explain the existence of income inequality. In the century since he published his findings, no economist has come up with anything approaching a widely accepted explanation. We do not know why this inequality continues to exist in the face of both free market competition and socialist taxation.

The disparity in income and wealth may have something to do with disparities in future-orientation. Most people are not highly future-oriented. They are not willing to save money at low rates of interest. They prefer to borrow. They go into debt in order to buy consumer goods that depreciate. They do not get on the growth side of compound interest.

The disparity in income and wealth could be the result of inherent productivity of innovation. We might argue that successful new production methods produce enormous wealth for their early discoverers, who retain their wealth until innovative competitors find replacement methods. This explanation relies on a concept of economic growth that is overwhelmingly based on entrepreneurial skills rather than on moral capital. Surely, Christians' moral capital has not elevated them into the top 20% of wealth holders over the last century.

The entrepreneur bears a heavy load of uncertainty. Most people prefer to avoid this. They prefer predictable wages to market risks and uncertainty. They are willing to accept less income in order to avoid

the loss of both capital and income. Those few entrepreneurs who survive free market competition become rich. Thus, the rich are always a minority.

An entrepreneurship-based explanation of income inequality reinforces the idea that Christians' inheritance of the earth will take place as a result of widespread conversions, not by any uniquely confession-based advantages possessed by Christians. Moral capital sustains the social order that allows entrepreneurship to produce wealth for all, but mainly for those who possess the skills. Moral capital does not make a majority of people wealthy. It does not even make Christians wealthy in comparison to successful entrepreneurs. But it makes all men richer over time. It makes sustained economic growth possible.

Few people believe this today. Almost no economist believes it. Economists believe that the free market social order is self-reinforcing and expansionist, irrespective of God, Christianity, or supernaturalism generally. They believe that the economic fruits of capitalism will persuade voters of the truth of its roots, and the roots are found in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: private property and personal self-interest. God's covenant has nothing to do with it.²⁴

Conclusion

The rich will get richer if their tangible wealth rests on their covenantal faithfulness, i.e., their moral capital. The expansion of covenantal wealth is based on the process of *obedience-abundance-greater obedience, greater abundance* (Deut. 8:18). This is a system of positive feedback. But if the tangible wealth of the rich is based on their faith in their own autonomy, they will eventually get poorer. Positive feedback reverses (Deut. 8:19–20).²⁵

Richard Koch, who has written a book on profitable applications of Pareto's rule, thinks that positive feedback is the key to understanding why the 20-80 phenomenon exists. "In the absence of feedback loops, the natural distribution of phenomena would be 50/50—inputs of a given frequency would lead to commensurate results. It is only because of positive feedback and negative feedback loops that causes do not have equal results. Yet it also seems to be true that powerful positive feedback loops only affect a small minority of the inputs. This helps

24. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

explain why those small minority of inputs can exert so much influence.”²⁶

Do the poor get poorer? Yes, if their poverty is spiritual. No, if their poverty is the result of their open hands to others. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. . . . But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (II Cor. 8:9, 14–15).²⁷

One goal of the gospel is to make all men rich spiritually. But, in achieving this, the gospel necessarily must make men tangibly richer. The covenant’s upward movement of confession-obedience-wealth will spread the blessings of both tangible and spiritual wealth to more people. But it will not spread tangible wealth evenly, according to Pareto.

The top priority in this passage is to gain the abundance that comes to him who has something. “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” This possession is redemption. He who has nothing—no redemption—will lose even the wealth that he has. This threat points to final judgment.

This process of spiritual development—positive feedback—is reflected in the realm of economics. There is a means by which the rich get richer, long term. They get richer under free market capitalism by enabling the poor to get richer. They invest capital, which provides the tools that increase the productivity of workers. The rich increase their incomes when the poor increase their incomes. Economic theory teaches that the rich do not get rich by exploiting the poor. On the contrary, they get rich by extending to others their knowledge of way to long-term wealth, i.e., compound economic growth. To sustain this process long term requires an open, merciful hand.²⁸

26. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 15.

27. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 5.

28. Chapter 10.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matt. 13:18–23).

The theocentric principle undergirding this passage is not immediately apparent. We are told that the fruitfulness of the soil determines the result of the sowing. The seed-sower—God—distributes the same seeds, but the results are different. This passage seems to minimize the work of the sower. But verse 22 provides a clue: “the deceitfulness of riches.” The same Greek root word for deceitfulness is found in another passage that deals with Satan’s work of deception. “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all **deceivableness** of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thess. 2:7–12).

God sends a strong delusion on those whom He hates in order that they might believe a lie. It is the same with the soils. God is sovereign in salvation, both as seed-sower and soil-maker. This is an aspect of God's sovereignty: point one of the biblical covenant.¹ But this sovereignty is manifested in a specific area: evaluation, meaning imputation. This is point four: judgment.²

A. Wealth and Autonomy

This passage is an explanation of the previous passage:

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold (Matt. 13:3–8).

Riches are here compared with thorns. The cares of this world and riches overwhelm a man's faith in the word of God. This points back to the curse on Adam: "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field" (Gen. 3:18). The thorns are hindrances that thwart man's work. The work in question in the parable is the work of extending the kingdom of God in history. The measure of earthly success is wealth, yet wealth is what threatens the hearer's work. The cares of the world undermine his kingdom efforts. One such care is the amassing and care of riches. Great wealth requires great care to maintain it.

Riches are said to deceive men. What is it about riches that deceives men? Moses made this clear: *the sin of autonomy*. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).³ The author of Proverbs wrote: "The rich

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Sutton, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).⁴ "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9).⁵

What is it about wealth that persuades men that they are autonomous? One aspect is the great *range of alternatives* open to men with wealth. In fact, wealth is best described in terms of this range of alternatives. We say that a person's wealth has increased in direct proportion to the increase over his previous range of choices. The man of great wealth is tempted to trust in his wealth because it seems to endow him with him a Godlike power of decision-making. This is a delusion. The range of choices open to any man is minuscule compared to what God can do. God is infinite; He can do whatever He chooses. The rich man is blinded by his wealth because it is his preferred means of comparison with other men, not with God.

Another aspect is the *seeming impersonalism* of wealth. Wealth is a tool of dominion. Tools appear to be impersonal. They are not, but they appear to be. Wealth extends a man's power and influence over others in a seemingly impersonal way. A tool is usually regarded as impersonal device that extends the personal decisions of its owner. *Wealth is seen as existing independently, or only as an extension of the owner.* This is a delusion. Wealth does not exist independent of the decisions of other men. Other men impute value to the rich man's capital or to the services that he sells that provide him with his wealth. If their opinions change, he can be reduced to poverty. The familiar example of the buggy whip industry is correct. When the automobile came, the buggy whip business was doomed, except among the Amish.

Men seek those forms of wealth that insulate them from the changing opinions of other men. They accumulate money because money is more constant in value than the opinions of their customers. It is the most marketable commodity. We are now back to the issue of the wide range of choice. But when an invading army comes, or plague comes, or famine comes, or some other disaster comes, money is of little or no value. The environment that made wealth what it was has changed.

To attribute to any aspect of the creation a power associated with God is to move from theonomy to autonomy. Men are tempted to at-

4. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 85.

tribute to wealth or power this kind of autonomy. But most men recognize the inherent danger of power. It calls forth others who wish to claim such power by whatever means. Power is too personal to be shared easily; it must either be monopolized or surrendered.⁶ But wealth can be gained in many ways. Others can become wealthy without threatening the status of the wealthy man.⁷ So, wealth is the more common means adopted in the quest for autonomy.

B. Riches vs. Fruitfulness

The deceitfulness of riches leads to unfruitfulness. This is because men are tempted to focus on the temporal. Riches are a convenient means of assessing productivity. Because of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28),⁸ men are inescapably confronted with the results of their own productivity in the task of subduing the earth. They seek to discover *agreed-upon success indicators* that will reveal their degree of success. In almost every society, money has been the most familiar success indicator, the one open to the widest audience. Unlike beauty or power or artistic creativity, wealth is open to a wide range of talents. In this sense, it is a more impersonal success indicator.

Because so many people acknowledge wealth as a measure of success, men are lured into pursuing it. Other men impute value to wealth as the measure of a man's life. It is easy to listen to the crowd and to evaluate one's own performance in relation to the economic success of others.

This is a snare and a delusion, Jesus taught. The crowd is wrong. What constitutes riches is right standing with God. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were

6. In bureaucracy, power is divided up more finely and made less dependent on anyone's personal attributes. Bureaucratic power can be allocated widely. But it is circumscribed by rules. Bureaucracy is the common man's way to power.

7. If many people become wealthy, this can threaten his status. Some goods are *positional goods*. They are valuable only because they are in short supply. If mass production makes them widely available, they lose their status-giving power. Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), ch. 3. This is one reason why free market capitalism is hated by members of groups that have attained their social status in a pre-capitalistic economy, where wealth is not widely shared.

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:23–26).⁹

Then what is fruitfulness? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23). Money does not buy these or empower these. The deceitfulness of wealth wars against these. Wealth is not inherently opposed to them, but the deceitfulness associated with it does undermine such fruitfulness.

The success indicators of spiritual maturity are not quantifiable. Wealth is. The lack of a quantifiable success indicator bothers most men. They want to “keep score” in life. They seek a numerical indicator. “He who dies with the most toys, wins” proclaims a popular American tee-shirt.

Did Jesus warn men not to use wealth as their success indicator, except perhaps as a negative indicator? If He did, then He broke with the Mosaic law’s covenantal principle of inheritance. There is no doubt that wealth was a legitimate success indicator under the Mosaic law. “The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 28:8).¹⁰ Wealth was a success indicator even before the Mosaic law. “And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2). The loss of wealth was seen as a curse. “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways” (Hag. 1:6–7).¹¹ Consider your ways, God told them. The disparity between their input (sown much) and their output (bring in little) was a lack-of-success indicator. It was to motivate them to spiritual introspection. There was a positive relationship between covenantal faithfulness and economic success. Did Jesus deny this relationship? If He did, then the New Covenant represents a sharp discontinuity with the Old Covenant, for the visible sanctions have changed.

9. Chapter 38.

10. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

11. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 32.

C. Exchange Rate: Temporal Wealth vs. Eternal Wealth

The text does not say that riches lead men astray; their deception does. Man is easily deceived by riches, as we have seen. Riches are temporal; so, they focus man's attention on the temporal. The *time-bound nature of riches* is a snare and a delusion. Jesus kept teaching about the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth. He kept saying that the rate of exchange is low, but men—especially rich men—think it is high. Why lay up treasure on earth, Jesus asked, where thieves break in? Is this not foolish? But the rich man cannot see the foolishness. Why? Because he refuses to see that *he is as temporal as his wealth*. They both dissipate—he more certainly than his wealth. But he turns a blind eye to his mortality. Even an old man thinks he has at least five years left to live.

1. Declining Marginal Utility

Economics teaches that as a person accumulates units of one asset, each additional unit is worth less to him than the previous unit. This is the law of decreasing marginal utility. It leads to the statement, “enough is enough.” So, a rich man should be progressively willing to surrender ownership of a unit of this asset to gain a unit of an asset that he does not own: eternal wealth. But there is an assumption behind the law of diminishing marginal utility: the person's tastes do not change. If there is an addictive aspect of the item, then the law of diminishing marginal utility applies differently. The enjoyment produced by each unit declines, as economic theory says it must, but demand nevertheless increases. To get the same thrill as before, the user must consume more of the drug per dose. To avoid painful withdrawal symptoms, the addict must consume more doses per unit of time. More and more units of the drug are demanded by the addict. Jesus' description of the deceitfulness of riches and the inability of the rich man to enter heaven implies that *temporal wealth is addictive*.

If temporal wealth were not addictive, then, in the eyes of a rich man, the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth would shift in favor of eternal wealth. As a man accumulates more temporal wealth, he should find the value of each additional unit worth less to him. Eternal wealth would look more appealing to him. He would be willing to exchange some of his earthly wealth for a greater supply of eternal wealth. But this is rarely the case, Jesus taught.

This points to earthly wealth as addictive.

Yet the same can be true of the accumulation of eternal wealth. It, too, can become addictive, but not for many people. Still, the idea has had a fascination for Americans. In 1933, in the worst economic phase of the Great Depression, a 1929 novel by Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas, became a best-seller: *Magnificent Obsession*. The title reveals the theme: giving away wealth for God's kingdom becomes an obsession. As a few men learn this lifelong discipline, they prosper. The book was made into a popular movie in 1935 and again in 1954.¹² But most people find the suggestion hard to implement, especially rich men.

2. Radical Change

There is another explanation for the rich man's resistance: the non-marginal nature of the exchange. Eternal life is not sold for temporal wealth, unit by unit. It is given away as a package deal through special grace: *definitive sanctification*. This package is supposed to be filled over time by *progressive sanctification*.¹³ Marginal exchange is the meaning of this verse: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:20).¹⁴ Laying up treasures is not a one-time event. It is *a lifetime process of exchange*, unit by unit, good work by good work. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). These exchanges begin only after legal access to the eternal treasury is transferred to the recipient.

Prior to receiving grace, the poor man is more likely than the rich man to think, "If this life is all there is, then I will consider eternal life." The rich man thinks, "This life is good for me. I cannot be sure about

12. Douglas was a theological liberal. He was the minister of the large and influential First Congregational Church of Los Angeles in the late 1920s. He wrote the book in an emotional depression, when the church's leaders were discussing his dismissal. He resigned, finished the book, then wrote a dozen more, several of which became best-sellers and movies. His most famous novel was *The Robe* (1942), which became the first movie in Cinemascope (1953), the wide-screen technology.

13. John Murray, "Sanctification," *Collected writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

14. Chapter 13.

eternal life. If I must sacrifice this life for that life, I shall stick with what I know and have come to depend on.” *Riches focus a rich man’s attention and hope on the temporal, where he is successful.* He will not readily believe that portions of his temporal wealth can be exchanged for eternal wealth. If he does believe this prior to special grace, he is deceived once again: works religion. He cannot open an account at heaven’s treasury on his own signature. Regeneration is the radical change that must precede the exchange process.

The price of radical change is lower for the poor man. He is not giving up much. *The price of radical change is higher for the rich man. He surrenders much: his would-be autonomy.* Radical decisions are rare. Most decisions are made at the margin: surrendering a little of this to get a little of that.

Jesus indicates here that the required change is radical: surrendering faith in this world’s ability to offer eternal bliss. You cannot buy your way into eternal life. So, it is not that the rich man is asked to give up his wealth that alienates him. He is asked only to tithe, just as the poor man is asked. But he *is* asked to surrender faith in his riches as a gateway to eternity. This is the great stumbling block of the gospel for the rich man: *he cannot buy his way in.* It is not much a stumbling block to the poor man, unless he is poor because of some addictive sin. The rich man is asked to see his riches as God’s gift, which God may remove at any time, just as He removed Job’s wealth. Job proclaimed, in the midst of his new-found poverty, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). The rich man is asked to proclaim this testimony in the midst of his treasure. Few do. They trust in their treasure.

Men generally see their success as well-deserved.¹⁵ They see any set-backs as deviations from justice. The poor man who comes to grips emotionally with his poverty can look forward to a better world after death. He is told by God that his poverty is part of God’s plan for him in this world. His poverty is no longer a curse or an injustice; it is merely an environment—even a predestined environment. He can mentally surrender faith in this world. But the rich man will not readily see his wealth as merely as a God-imposed environment. He sees his wealth as his legitimate reward for his own meritorious behavior, or at least his shrewd behavior. He is asked by God to turn loose of his

15. When they do not, they may be eaten up with guilt.

positive, autonomous self-image, which is the product of the deceitfulness of riches. He refuses. His wealth reinforces—validates—his positive self-image. The gospel unquestionably removes this validation. He sees his wealth as a kingdom-building tool for his little kingdom. God says that his wealth is a kingdom-building tool for God's kingdom. The rich man sees his wealth as his tool. God says that both he and his wealth are God's tools. For a believer in autonomy, this is a bitter pill.

D. Inheritance

The issue of wealth is the issue of inheritance. Jesus told a parable of a rich man who dreamed of building new barns. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16–21).¹⁶ His dream of new barns was legitimate. Grain must be stored. What was illegitimate was his thought that the barns would be his. He did not recognize his own mortality. He did not think about inheritance. He did not ask himself the question: "Whose shall those assets be?"

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Those who are meek before God will inherit.¹⁷ The rich man is deceived into believing that the might of his hand has gotten him his wealth. This was as true under the Mosaic Covenant as under the New Covenant. Jesus warned them that the success indicator of expanding wealth is not a legitimate substitute for being rich toward God.

But how can a person be rich toward God? Through worship. This was Haggai's warning to Israel. They had not built God's house of worship. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it

16. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

17. Chapter 4.

home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands” (Hag. 1:8–11).¹⁸

The open purse will be filled. The closed purse will be emptied. The open purse is open at the top, where its owner can reach in and pull out money to give at his discretion. The closed purse has a hole in the bottom. Its owner has no discretion as to what happens to the contents. *The authority of a man over a full purse is based on his submission to God.* This was as true in Haggai’s day as in Christ’s.

The inheritance that Christ spoke of is the whole earth. What greater accumulation of wealth could there be? It is accumulated by His people. How? By their wisdom, faithfulness, and generosity. By their efficiency, too. *Honest wealth is the result of serving others, namely, customers.* He who does not waste resources can serve customers better. Over time, this wealth builds up as His people extend the kingdom of God in history. This is the fulfillment of the dominion covenant.

Christ was warning His followers not to make the same mistake that those of Haggai’s generation made: *the mistake of the tight purse.* We are to be rich toward God. This is the basis of wealth accumulation under the New Covenant, just as it was under the Old. There is no discontinuity. The sanctions are the same. The law is the same. The sin is the same: autonomy.

Conclusion

The deceitfulness of riches chokes the word. What word? The word of God. The passage in Mark adds lusts. “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful” (Mark 4:19). The lusts that riches can temporarily fulfill blind men to the word of God.

The top priority here is to deal with riches in such a way as to avoid the great deception: autonomy. This was what Moses warned Is-

18. North, *Restoration and Dominion*, ch. 32.

rael; this is what Jesus also warned Israel. This warning is universal. Riches are either a covenantal blessing or a prelude to a covenantal curse. The man who dreamed of building barns was under a curse. He was a fool. He was building them for himself. He forgot about his own mortality. Mortals cannot enjoy the experience of wealth accumulation indefinitely. Either their time runs out or their wealth does. Jesus warned every rich man of the deception of riches. Riches seem to validate the rich man's presumption of immortality and autonomy. The rich man's wealth makes him feel autonomous and therefore divine. But men die, unlike God. The man with the barn-building plans forgot this.

To be rich with God is not to dissipate one's wealth. It is to sew up the hole in the bottom of one's purse. Accounts receivable continue to exceed accounts paid. To be rich with God is also to accumulate wealth in the world beyond the grave. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).¹⁹ This investment program restores the lost continuity that individual mortality imposes. We inherit beyond the grave. By giving up the lust for autonomy in history, we can become our own heirs in eternity. We leave an inheritance behind, yet we immediately collect it in heaven. We can have our cake and eat it, too. He who succumbs to the deceitfulness of riches either consumes his cake before he dies or leaves it behind for others to enjoy. In either case, he is left without cake.

Men trust in wealth. The questions are these:

In what does permanent wealth consist?

Where is it accumulated?

When is it accumulated?

How is it accumulated?

When is it inherited?

Where is it inherited?

The content of a person's faith—his trust—is revealed by his answers to these questions.

19. Chapter 13.

CONTINUITY AND CIVILIZATION

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matt. 13:24–30).

The theocentric focus here is God's final judgment: sanctions.¹ In this passage, Jesus says that there will be no great discontinuous event that will precede this final judgment. The wheat and the tares will grow together in the same field until the reapers come to cut down the tares and destroy them.

A. Rival Kingdoms

The disciples were not sure what this parable meant. Jesus told them in private. "Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:36–43).

First, this parable is about history and its consummation. The son of man sows the wheat: Jesus Christ. The field is the world. This is the arena of history. So, the parable concerns the development of history. This development is a contest between two kingdoms. The children of God constitute one kingdom; the children of Satan constitute the other.

Second, the two kingdoms develop in the field without any discontinuous event. The reapers do not enter the field until the wheat and the tares have fully developed. Each kingdom has extended its principles into the world. Each has sought to fill the field.

Third, the contest between the two kingdoms culminates in the final judgment: "The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world." The great discontinuity is the final judgment. In it, the tares are removed from history; the wheat remains.

Fourth, neither kingdom establishes itself monopolistically in history. The tares remain; so does the wheat. History is the working out of the two kingdoms.

B. Eschatology and Development

The wheat and the tares develop over time. Neither can legitimately expect complete victory over the other. The contest will go on until the end of time. Each side strives to fill the field. Development is a feature of both sides.

As each side develops, it reduces the influence of the other. This parable does not indicate which side becomes dominant in history. It does indicate that there is no discontinuous event that will intervene to stop the development of either side. Neither side is cut off in the midst of time. Neither side sees its efforts completely reversed. Wheat

and tares can hope for the future. The tares have no legitimate eternal hope, but they have legitimate earthly hope. They will never see their influence wholly suppressed in history.

1. Premillennialism

The premillennialist avoids dealing with this passage whenever possible. The premillennial interpretation of history rests on a view of the future that will contain a great discontinuity a thousand years prior to the final judgment. Historic premillennialists say that there will be a great tribulation period ahead for the church. After this period of persecution, Jesus will return bodily to set up His kingdom on earth. These expositors are post-tribulationists. There are very few historic premillennialists still writing. Pretribulation dispensational premillennialists say that Jesus will remove his church from history for seven years, or possibly three and a half years, during which the great tribulation will come on national Israel. Then Jesus, His church, the resurrected dead, and angels will return to set up a millennial kingdom.²

In both interpretations, the prior work of the kingdom is cut off in history, either by the Great Tribulation or the church's Rapture, which precedes the tribulation of national Israel. That is, whatever success the church has achieved culturally will be reversed. The world will become dominated by covenant-breakers. They will overcome the kingdom of God. It will take a cosmic discontinuity—the bodily return of Jesus—to overcome this great reversal.

This means that the investment, sacrifice, and commitment of Christians throughout history will not culminate in cultural dominance. Their efforts will be reversed in a great discontinuity: the Great Tribulation. Rather than compound growth's leading to cultural dominance, we are assured that virtually all of the church's work in history

2. The possibility of mixing resurrected saints and fallen humanity during the coming millennium has not been taken seriously by professionally trained dispensational theologians (e.g., John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost), but popularizers of the dispensational position (e.g., Dave Hunt, an accountant) have asserted that this will take place. See John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1979), p. 86; J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Relation between Living and Resurrected Saints in The Millennium," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 117 (Oct. 1960), pp. 337, 341. Hunt offers his contrary opinion: "After the Antichrist's kingdom has ended in doom, Jesus will reign over this earth at last. Which of these kingdoms we will be in depends upon the choice we make now—for God's truth or for the Lie." Dave Hunt, *Peace Prosperity and the Coming Holocaust* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1983), p. 263.

will come to ruin. Without the direct intervention of Jesus and His angels, the work of the church cannot produce cultural victory. There will be little or no trace of Christian institutions after the Great Tribulation. Covenant-breakers will make a clean sweep of history. Only Christ's overcoming of the process of history will restore Christian civilization. This implication is so horribly pessimistic that premillennialists rarely put it into print, but it is an inescapable conclusion of their system of interpretation.

2. Amillennialism

In contrast to the premillennialist, the amillennialist affirms continuity. He also affirms the progressive defeat of the church and Christian civilization (if any). Evil remains dominant in history. Some amillennialists place the Great Tribulation ahead of us. Premillennialism's pessimism regarding the pre-Second Coming church is also characteristic of the amillennial system of interpretation. What will save the church and Christians is the cosmic discontinuity of final judgment. Amillennialism teaches either a continuity of stalemate or a continuity of cultural surrender as the last day approaches.

Any suggestion that Christians should expect to see their efforts produce a transformed society is rejected by amillennialists as either naive or actually heretical. There supposedly can be no Christian civilization in history, and all attempts to build one is a manifestation of "triumphalism" or worse, "Constantinianism." Christian civilization is dismissed as a chimera and a false ideal that will always produce tyranny in the name of Christ. Amillennialists defend the idea of a religiously neutral civilization or even a covenant-breaking civilization as a preferred alternative to Constantinianism. Better to have tyranny in man's name than tyranny in God's name, they say. Their view of history predicts the universal rule of one or another form of tyranny. The preaching of the gospel can at best ameliorate this tyranny by creating pockets of righteousness: Christian ghettos. Yet even this protection will be lost during the Great Tribulation.³

3. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 76–92. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>) Cf. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), pp. 22–36; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997), Appendix A. (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

3. *Postmillennialism*

The postmillennialist argues that there will be a time of kingdom success and blessings prior to the final judgment. The kingdom of God will extend its influence across the earth. Rival kingdoms will be in minority opposition to the dominant culture, which will be Christian.

This means that Christians' efforts today to extend God's kingdom will produce permanent fruit in history. The eschatological continuity of history is a continuity of victory for God through His people. The dominion covenant will be progressively fulfilled in history. So will the Great Commission.⁴

The compounding process operates to the advantage of Christianity. Compound growth over time means that righteousness increases its dominance in history. Low rates of growth produce very large results if they are not interrupted or reversed. This means that a small investment today that compounds at a low rate will produce huge returns in the distant future. The inheritance of the righteous will grow. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9). "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:11).

C. Continuity and Risk

This promise of historic continuity lowers the risk of present investments for the person who looks beyond his own death. His heirs will reap the fruit of today's investment in the kingdom of God. By lowering the risk of a great reversal, Jesus' promise of continuity raises the reward to those who are future-oriented, i.e., those who have the kingdom of God as their goal rather than their own wealth.

The covenant-keeper who looks into the future and sees success for the kingdom of God rejoices. He defines himself by Christ's name. He claims the future victory of Christ's kingdom as his own. By identifying himself with the kingdom, he appropriates for himself its success or failure in history. The pessimillennialist announces the kingdom's cultural failure apart from an eschatological discontinuity. But if only a discontinuity can bring cultural victory to Christ's kingdom, then the return on any present investment in the kingdom will be culturally

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

negative in the final analysis. The final victory of Christ's kingdom will have nothing to do with any investment made today. The risk of negative returns on today's cultural investments is total.

This pessimillennial assessment of risk redirects Christian investment into narrowly defined activities, such as personal evangelism, church building projects, and defensive efforts to preserve a minimal degree of freedom from state interference. Because all efforts more comprehensive than these are said to be eschatologically doomed to failure, it is seen as a waste of scarce resources to attempt anything else. "You don't polish brass on a sinking ship," announced dispensational preacher J. Vernon McGee in the 1950's. Peter Lalonde, McGee's spiritual heir, says of the theonomic postmillennialist: "It's a question, 'Do you polish brass on a sinking ship?' And if they're working on setting up new institutions, instead of going out and winning the lost for Christ, then they're wasting the most valuable time on the planet earth right now, and that is the serious problem in his thinking."⁵ His is the theology of the rescue mission, not Christian civilization.⁶

The eschatological continuity described in Matthew 13:24–30 is in stark opposition to all forms of premillennialism. The pessimism of amillennialism is consistent with the parable of the wheat and tares, as is the optimism of postmillennialism. The parable does not say which seed will dominate the field. The pessimism of premillennialism is not consistent with the parable, for it affirms a discontinuity that the parable denies.

The kingdom parable of the mustard seed (v. 31) is consistent only with postmillennialism.⁷ The mustard seeds starts small and expands. Thus, Matthew 13 rejects premillennialism and promotes postmillennialism. When believed, postmillennialism promotes investments in culture-wide Christian projects. This outlook promotes future-orientation. It also declares that the return on today's investment in Christendom will produce a positive return. Future-orientation—the willingness to accept a low interest rate—when coupled with the promise of compound growth produces the investments that produce the capital that gets compounded.

5. "Dominion: A Dangerous New Theology," Tape 1 of *Dominion: The Word and New World Order*.

6. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 199–203.

7. See Chapter 30.

D. Continuity and Success

We are told to pray as a widow who bangs on the door of an unjust judge, until she receives judgment (Luke 18:2–6).⁸ That is to say, do not stop. Keep at it. Overcome resistance by persistence. The same strategy applies to our callings. “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).⁹ We do not plow for the sake of plowing. We plow for the sake of harvesting and consuming or selling the harvest.

1. Line Upon Line

It is the steady worker who stays resolutely at his task who wins. The story of the tortoise and the hare are part of Western man’s worldview. Making it big on little deals is the correct procedure. “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (Isa. 28:13). “And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land” (Ex. 23:28–30).

Inheritance extends across generations. So does God’s covenant. So do His commandments. “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them” (Deut. 7:9–11). The kingdom of God extends through history. Its persistence is its greatest strength. It does not go away.

Success parallels the kingdom in history. In fact, success is defined correctly only in terms of the kingdom of God. It is not my autonomous success that defines my success; rather, it is the part I play in the kingdom of God. Success is therefore based on continuity. It is also

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

based on expansion. It is not that the kingdom holds its own; it spreads, as leaven spreads. The kingdom of God is not a holding action. It is a program of conquest.

2. Amillennial Pessimism and Paralysis

The amillennialist looks at the kingdom and sees, at best, a holding action. Usually, he sees cultural surrender. He sees the church as a tiny band of stalwarts, surrounded by an ever-increasing enemy. Even those amillennialists who, like Van Til, rejected pietism, have created bleak expectations that paralyze long-term projects and commitments. Van Til warned against the temptation succumbed to by the premillennial fundamentalism of his day to “spend a great deal of their time in passive waiting instead of in active service. Another danger that lurks at a time of apostasy is that the few faithful ones give up the comprehensive ideal of the kingdom and limit themselves to the saving of individual souls.”¹⁰ He warned against ethical individualism. He understood that such individualism is a denial of covenant theology.

He believed with all his heart that evil triumphs visibly in history, and righteousness loses the culture war. He taught throughout his career that the principles of evil produce visible power and victory, whereas the principles of righteous living under God produce historical defeat. History is not neutral; one side or the other wins; one ethical system or the other produces victory; and Van Til sided with those who proclaim that Satan’s system works (wins) in history. He made this plain: “But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for ‘the day of grace,’ the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.”¹¹

Notice especially his words, “we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for ‘the day of grace,’ the day of undeveloped differentiation.”

10. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, vol. 3 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), p. 122.

11. Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85.

This is nothing short of a ghastly reworking of the idea of God's grace. He knew it, too, which is why he puts the words the day of grace in quotation marks. He knew that it is the opposite of grace that Christians are not fully self-conscious epistemologically, and more to the point, ethically. But his amillennialism had a stranglehold on his theory of ethics. He viewed today's earlier so-called "day of grace" as a day in which covenant-breakers are also not fully self-conscious, and this, in the amillennialist's universe of progressive Church impotence and progressive humanist power, is a good thing for covenant-keepers in an external, cultural sense. In short, as time goes on, covenant-breakers will retain control—Satan's doctrine of "squatter's rights"¹²—and steadily consolidate their hold over world civilization as they become more consistent with their religion, while covenant-keepers will fail to gain or lose control over civilization because they become more consistent with their religion. This is the ethical outlook of both premillennialism and amillennialism. Ethics is tied to eschatology. *If your eschatology is incorrect, your ethics will be incorrect if your worldview is internally consistent.* To teach that the progress of the gospel in history is not progressive, i.e., that the gospel does not lead to worldwide dominion by covenant-keepers, is to teach that ethical cause and effect in history is perverse, testifying not to a God who keeps His promises in history but rather to a god who breaks them.¹³

3. *Lost-Cause Evangelism*

Those in the amillennial and premillennial camps who are upset that we theonomic postmillennialists dismiss their eschatological views as if they were not worth considering have failed to recognize that our uncompromising hostility to rival eschatological views is based on our commitment to biblical ethics. Our eschatology is deeply influenced by our view of biblical law and its effects in history. It is not this or that rival interpretation of this or that prophetic Bible passage that is the primary focus of our concern. It is rather the overall view held by our eschatological opponents, which affirms the culture-losing effects of biblical law in history, that draws our fire. Their view of history is not neutral; it is not random; and it surely is not "even." It is perverse: a belief that God will not bless covenant-keeping in history,

12. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 61. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

13. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

and will not curse covenant-breaking.

Most people will not sacrifice for a guaranteed lost cause. They will be interested mainly in escaping the worst things that a life of assured defeat has to offer. It is naive to expect men to commit everything they own to a campaign which God has announced in advance that His people must lose. Only a handful of suicidal fanatics will do this, and the church is not built up by such people.

For those Christians who believe that God has abandoned history to the devil, mysticism is one way out. The Eastern church has adopted weekly mysticism through intensive liturgy as its way to cope with an oppressive history. The Western church has sometimes had mystical movements, but on the whole, Western Christianity is too judicial for mysticism to gain a foothold. Protestant amillennialists have adopted the fortress mentality: the church as a defensive institution. They call people into the fortress. They call people out of cultural confrontation and into the cloister. The churches hesitate to conquer occupied ground, for they teach that such ground will eventually be reconquered by the enemy. To spend time, money, and emotional commitment to conquer territory that will have to be surrendered later is no general's idea of a successful strategy. A good general does not call on all of his men to die for a lost cause.

What the Bible teaches is cultural victory through generational inheritance.¹⁴ It teaches that God's people can and will extend His kingdom into every nook and cranny of existence. Wherever sin holds territory, there must the conflict take place. The two kingdoms issue comprehensive claims. They have comprehensive programs and strategies. Christianity conquers slowly, but it conquers comprehensively. Whenever it surrenders territory, it must mark that lost ground for a future conflict. This is not done today, because Christians have denied the biblical covenant model. They have substituted an Arminian view of God for Augustine's, Luther's¹⁵ and Calvin's predestinating God. They have substituted a doctrine of polytheistic civil government for Trinitarian theocracy. They have substituted natural law for biblical law. They have denied that God brings corporate sanctions in history in terms of biblical law. They have substituted eschatologies of guaranteed cultural defeat for the church in place of postmillennialism. They have redefined the kingdom of God to apply only to souls,

14. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

15. Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (1525).

families, and churches. Then they have called men to extend this truncated kingdom by means of gospel tracts, rescue missions, and toe-tapping music with lyrics only marginally more challenging theologically than children's songs. Having set their sights low, Christians have achieved even less.

Conclusion

Eschatology is important for culture. Rival views of the future produce different plans and different results. This passage teaches that there will be no discontinuous reversal in history for covenant-keepers. The great discontinuity comes only at the end of time: final judgment. This means that Bible passages that are invoked to defend a future secret Rapture in the midst of history are being misused. They apply only to the events immediately preceding the final judgment.

The top priority derived from this passage is the building of confidence in the kingdom's cultural future. There will be no great eschatological reversal in the midst of history. Covenant-breaking society will not overturn the kingdom work of covenant-keepers. An investment made today in the building of any aspect of the kingdom of God has the potential for compounding over time. This lowers the risk of making such investments. Such investments are not doomed eschatologically. When believed, this eschatological outlook will increase the number of such investments for two reasons: increased future-orientation and reduced risk of failure.

HOPE AND COMMITMENT

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened (Matt. 13:31–33).

The theocentric focus here was the kingdom of heaven, which in the other gospels is referred to as the kingdom of God. The issue was growth: point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Small Beginnings

Jesus spoke these words to residents of a tiny nation which was under the rule of a great empire. His listeners were a captive people. Their nation had been under the rule of other empires for six centuries. Here was a limited audience indeed. Yet Jesus spoke to them in terms of great expectations.

The kingdom of God had been bottled up in Israel until the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Then it gained limited influence outside the borders of the Promised Land. But this influence had not transformed the empires that had ruled over Israel. A few kings had been impressed with the God of Israel, but this did not change the religious commitment of their empires.

The temple of Jesus' day was a great structure, but its rebuilding had begun over four decades earlier under a gentile king, Herod—the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

king who later sought to kill the infant Jesus.² The sacrifices still went on, but the world did not come to Israel in supplication. The kingdom of God was visible to those who wanted to see it, but few did. The Old Testament was available on scrolls, but only a handful of people possessed copies. The kingdom of God in Jesus' day was a highly circumscribed phenomenon.

This was not to remain true much longer, but Jesus' listeners did not know this at the time. They had seen no victories. All they saw was foreign tyranny. They longed for deliverance, but there was no evidence that deliverance was possible. Yet Jesus was preaching victory: the expansion of the kingdom of God. He spoke of small beginnings and large results. There was no doubt in His mind: the kingdom of God was not a small matter. Despite the fact that His was a day of small beginnings, He told His listeners that something significant was in their midst. They could become part of a great kingdom. He had just told them, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28).³

They had seen this or had heard of it. Jesus was telling them that a new period of kingdom growth was imminent.

This was hard to believe. For too long, Israel had been isolated, trodden down by gentiles. The nation had never been large. After all these centuries, would the nation of Israel now become a significant factor in world history? Or did Jesus mean something else? Was the kingdom about to be separated from the nation? What did He really mean? Even His disciples were confused, which is why they came to Him in private for explanations of His kingdom parables.

B. The Mustard Seed

The mustard seed is small. Its results are great. The disparity between what is visible at the beginning and what takes place at the end is the heart of this analogy. Elsewhere, Jesus made the same comparison with respect to men's faith. "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a

2. Herod was a major builder. See Dwayne W. Roller, *The Building Program of Herod the Great* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

3. In Luke's account, we read: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20). This points back to the giving of the law. "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18).

grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). "And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Luke 17:6).

The message was clear: that which is visibly small can have important results in the future. Do not be fooled by the initial indications. What lies ahead is much greater than what is visible today. He who focuses solely on what is visible today will be misled by what he sees. That which is visible today is not representative of that which will be visible later. *Without faith, the tyranny of the present will overwhelm the faithful.* Rome looked large; the kingdom of God looked small. Rome had great power; the kingdom of God did not seem to. But this was an illusion, Jesus said. The mustard seed does not reveal the future results. Those who knew something of mustard seeds could understand what Jesus was saying. Those without this knowledge could not.

What is visible today should not paralyze faithful men by undermining their confidence in the future. The mustard seed today is not what is important; what it will become is important. The same is true of God's kingdom. Jesus told His listeners of great things to come. The reality of these great things would have to be accepted on faith. But for those who took His words seriously, this new optimism would motivate them to work to extend God's kingdom in history.

C. The Transforming Effect of Leaven

Another brief analogy continued the theme of growth. The kingdom is like leaven. Leaven is inserted into dough in order to make it rise. A small amount produces visible growth throughout the dough. The loaf rises because of the presence of the leaven. The leaven spreads through all of the dough, affecting all of it.

Elsewhere, Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees. "Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). At first, they did not understand His meaning, but later they did. "Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:12). The doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees would produce a different kind of loaf. Jesus

was setting forth the image of dough that would accept either form of leaven. The leaven of the kingdom is also doctrinal. It presents a specific view of God, man, law, sanctions, and the future. Rival kingdoms are based on rival views of these same covenantal doctrines.

Leaven can be positive or negative, Jesus said. In the temple sacrifices, leaven was never offered on the altar (Lev. 2:11).⁴ But the firstfruits offering had to be leavened bread (Lev. 23:17). So, leaven was not a symbol of evil. It was a symbol of growth. The question is: Which leaven will raise the dough of history? Whose leaven will succeed in transforming the dough of civilization? God's or Satan's?

Jesus was arguing that the leaven of the kingdom raises the dough of history to produce the good bread. The leaven of the firstfruits is to be seen as representative of the final bread. The kingdom of God in history will be triumphant. The whole loaf is raised up, Jesus said. The loaf is a metaphor for history.

D. Eschatology and Hope

These two analogies—mustard seed and leaven—offer hope to God's people, and not just hope for eternity, but hope for history. The eschatology of these two analogies is clearly optimistic. It is based on the comprehensive transforming power of God's kingdom in history.

This hope which is designed to motivate God's people to extend His kingdom. The extension of God's kingdom is the essence of the dominion covenant. The whole world is to be subdued by God's people for the glory of God. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) is the New Covenant's reaffirmation of the original dominion covenant given to Adam (Gen. 1:26–28).⁵

Hope undergirds action. He who is without earthly hope finds it costly to commit resources to projects that cannot succeed. Jesus set forth a vision of the world transformed. *He called His servants to participate in this endeavor.* He told them of the world-transforming results of their earthly efforts. He did not tell them that their efforts would always be overshadowed by the leaven of rival kingdoms. He called them to replace the rival leavens with the leaven of God's kingdom.

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 2:B.

5. Chapter 48. See also Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

Hope is a powerful motivation. Confidence in the future is a personally transforming force. The Communists once possessed this hope.⁶ They saw themselves as the vanguard of the proletarian victory. Their efforts transformed one-third of the world in the twentieth century and influenced much of the remainder. But when they lost hope, they faltered. The Communist movement died an embarrassing death, August 19–21, 1991, in the failed Communist Party coup in the Soviet Union. In a few days, the world was laughing at the seemingly drunken bureaucrats who had attempted to reclaim leadership for the Communist Party. Laughter doomed Russian Communism.

Hope for the future lowers the cost of action in the present. A law of economics is this: as the cost of anything falls, more of it is demanded (other things remaining equal). Here is an application of this principle: *greater hope for the future produces greater sacrifice in the present*. The investment of capital in the present finances the growth of the kingdom. By promising great things in the future, Jesus was presenting the case for His followers' increased commitment of resources to building the kingdom.

Conclusion

God extends His visible rule in history through the efforts of Christians. His kingdom replaces the rival kingdoms of Satan. Because God is sovereign, His kingdom cannot fail in history. No matter how small it seems at any time, it will expand in history. Its invisibility today is in contrast with its visibility in the future.

The top priority for covenant-keeping man is the extension of God's kingdom in history. This has been true ever since God told Adam to subdue the earth. Sin has made this task more difficult. Rival kingdoms now compete for control in history.

Jesus told His listeners that the kingdom of God would not always remain small. It would expand. He was inviting His listeners to participate in this expansion. They were not to despise the day of small beginnings. Instead, they were to commit themselves to a process that would transcend time and borders.

He gave them hope. This hope was to serve God's people as a motivation for their sacrificial commitment, generation after generation. Without this hope of earthly success over time, commitment to the dominion covenant becomes more expensive. Men are less likely to

6. F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1974).

commit the resources necessary for victory if they do not expect victory. The cost is too high.

31

HIDDEN TREASURE

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. (Matt. 13:44–46).

The theocentric principle here was the high value of the kingdom of God. It is so high that a wise man will sell all that he has in order to buy it if it is available for purchase. The next parable in the passage reinforces this one: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matt. 13:45–46). The covenantal issue was sanctions.¹

A. Lost and Found²

This parable seems to be contradictory to the Mosaic law of lost property: “Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost things of thy brother’s,

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

2. This section and the one that follows is taken from Chapter 51 of Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again" (Deut. 22:1–4). Why isn't Jesus' example a case of lost property? Why isn't the finder required to report it to the presumed owner, i.e., the owner of the field? Because the treasure had been deliberately hidden.

Jesus was challenging Old Covenant Israel to cease hiding the treasure of salvation in a morass of legalism. The kingdom of heaven is not supposed to be hidden; it is to be shared with all the world. But someone had taken the treasure and had hidden it, He said. This was similar to the action taken by the responsibility-averse wicked servant who refused to multiply his master's goods as a faithful steward—another kingdom parable.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:24–30).³

The person who discovers a hidden treasure is not under any obligation to inform the owner of the field of its existence. Someone had taken steps to hide the asset. The original owner had decided to invest the treasure merely by hiding it. This is not the best way to increase wealth except in times of warfare or widespread theft. It is better to put the asset to work. The hidden asset probably is not being used productively. The finder takes a great risk by selling everything he owns to make a bid on the field. The field's owner, if he knows about the treasure, may dig it up and then sell the field—now far overpriced—to the finder. But if the field's owner does not know about the hidden treasure, the buyer is not under any moral obligation to tell him about it.

3. Chapter 47.

The field's buyer is reclaiming the asset from the heirs of the original treasure-hider, who know nothing about the whereabouts of the treasure and who did not hide it. They have no legal claims on this property. They are not like the owner of lost property, who does have a legal claim. The treasure in the field is not marked. It is not the responsibility of the discoverer to seek out the heirs, who may be scattered across the face of the earth, depending on how long the treasure has been hidden. The person most likely to put the hidden treasure to productive use is the treasure-finder who is willing to sell all that he has to buy the field.

The Jews had hidden God's kingdom in Jesus' era. They were hoarding it. They were not taking it in its pure form to the gentiles. They had encrusted it with layers of man-made law, thereby hiding it. This was hampering the growth of the kingdom. This is why Jesus also said: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Jesus was telling His listeners that they had found the hidden treasure: the kingdom of heaven. It was time for them to commit everything they owned to the spread of the good news of redemption to gentiles as well as to Jews. The Jews refused to admit that what they had done by way of legalism and nationalism had concealed the kingdom from gentiles. Thus, the kingdom would soon rightfully be the property of the church, which would strip the message of redemption from its legalism and share it with the world. It was not that the kingdom had been lost; it had been deliberately hidden by the Jews and kept out of plain sight. Thus, the Mosaic law of lost property did not apply in this parable.

B. Idle Resources and Entrepreneurship

The economic principle governing hidden treasure is what W. H. Hutt called the theory of idle resources. Hidden treasure is not idle if it is the object of human decision-making. It is invested in a particular way. When resources are deliberately not being used to produce goods and services, this may be because of the owners' lack of information about how to maximize the value of the unused asset, i.e., to make it worth more in production than it is sitting idle. Or it may be because the owner is highly risk-averse. Hutt's economic analysis also identifies bottlenecks of information created by government policy, such as

minimum wage laws or other forms of price control.⁴

When an idle resource is idle because no one recognizes it as valuable, or because the owner has forgotten where it is hidden, then the way to get it back into production is to allow a finder to buy it. This is an application of the Austrian school's theory of entrepreneurship: profit as the result of the decision of an entrepreneur who bears the economic uncertainty associated with production. He believes that he possesses better knowledge regarding future customer demand than his competitors do. He buys a productive good at a price that is lower than it would be if all producers recognized its highest future use. If his forecast is correct, and if he puts the underpriced asset to cost-effective use, then he gains his reward: an above-average rate of return on his investment. If his forecast is incorrect, or if he misallocates the resource, then he reaps losses.

To maximize the spread of accurate information and any customer benefits associated with this information, the free market social order allows entrepreneurs to buy fields containing "hidden treasure." These fields are in the form of scarce resources that are not priced as high as they would be if other entrepreneurs knew the truth: hidden treasures are buried in them, i.e., there are benefits that customers will be willing to pay for. These treasures are analogous to forgotten or ignored resources that are not being put to their maximum customer-satisfying uses. In short, accurate information regarding the future is not the equivalent of a lost sheep that has wandered off and will soon be missed by the owner. It is the equivalent of a treasure buried long ago: taken out of production by a previous owner, and then forgotten. There is no moral reason why someone who finds a way to serve the public better through putting that treasure back into production should be required to broadcast this information to anyone. But he must not steal it; he must buy the field in which it is hidden. He must bear the costs of gaining ownership.⁵

C. Risk and Information

Consider what the man in the parable was doing. He stumbles across an important piece of information. There is a valuable treasure

4. W. H. Hutt, *The Theory of Idle Resources: A Study in Definition*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1977).

5. The remainder of the chapter, though not the Conclusion, is taken from an essay that appeared in *The Freeman*: "Exploitation and Knowledge" (Jan. 1982). (<http://bit.ly/gnexploit>)

hidden in a field. He is not sure just who it was who hid it, but it is there. He presumes that the person who hid it is not the present owner of the field. He is not certain of this at first, but he is willing to take a major step. He hides the treasure again, and goes out and sells everything that he owns. I suppose he did some preliminary investigating, just to see if the present owner will sell the field. But the present owner may change his mind. Or he may have known about the treasure all the time, and he is luring the speculator into a disastrous decision. The treasure may not really be that valuable. The discoverer cannot be certain. But he takes a chance. He sells everything, and goes to the owner with his money. He buys the field. Now he owns the treasure. He took advantage of special information: his knowledge of the existence of a treasure in a particular field. He took a risk when he sold everything that he owned to come up with the purchase price. Then he went back to the owner, thereby alerting the owner to a possible opportunity—the possibility that something valuable is connected to the field. Maybe it would be unwise to sell it after all. But finally he decides to sell. The entrepreneur—the man with the information and some venture capital—has closed the deal. He has attained his goal.

D. The Socialist View

The modern socialist would be outraged at this parable. He says, “The entrepreneur, who was striving to better his position, was acting immorally. First, the land he was on should have been owned by the people, through the state. Second, he had no business being on the land, without proper papers having been filed with the state in advance. Third, he should never have hidden the treasure again. It was the state’s. Fourth, if it was not the property of the state, then he should have notified the private owner of the property. Fifth, failing this, he was immoral to make the offer to buy the property. He as stealing from the poor man who owned the property. Sixth, should he attempt to sell the treasure, the state ought to tax him at a minimum rate of 80 per cent. Seventh, if he refuses to sell, the state should impose a property tax, or a direct capital tax, to force him to sell.”

What the socialist-redistributionist really objects to is mankind’s lack of omniscience. The economy should operate as smoothly, as efficiently, and as profit-free as an economy in which each participant has perfect knowledge. Knowledge, in a “decent” social order, is a univer-

sally available free good, equally available to all, and equally acted upon by all. It is only the existence of private property, personal greed, and a willingness to exploit the poor that has created our world of scarcity, profits, and losses. Knowledge about the future should be regarded as a free good. Profits are therefore evil, not to mention unnecessary, in a sound economy. This has been the argument—the real, underlying, implicit argument—of all those who equate profits and exploitation.

Men are not God; they are not omniscient. This angers the socialists, and they strike out in wrath against the market order which seeks to encourage men to search for better information so that they can profit from its application in economic affairs. The socialists prefer to stop the search for information concerning the uncertain future, rather than to allow private citizens to profit personally from the use of knowledge in society.

E. The Transfer of Knowledge

Accurate knowledge of the future is a valuable asset. How can society profit from its discovery and application? Not everyone wants to take the time and trouble to forecast the future. No one can take the time and trouble to search out all the possible bits of information concerning an uncertain future that might be useful to him or his family. So, we allow specialists to bear the risks of action, and sell us the results at a price that we are willing and able to pay. We customers become the users, and therefore the beneficiaries, of the entrepreneur's willingness and ability to peer into the future, take steps to meet the demand of the uncertain future, and deliver the finished product—consumer good, consumer service, or spiritual insight—at a price we are willing to pay. Why should we care what price he paid or what risks he bore when we pay the price? Of course, if we knew what he paid, we might guess that he is willing to take less than what he is asking, but why should we care from a moral standpoint what he paid versus what he is asking us to pay?

Besides, the existence of a profit on a transaction, if recognized by others, encourages other entrepreneurs to search out similar opportunities to present to us in the future. Let us consider the entrepreneur-worker. He accepts the job with ABC Widgets. The workers throw a farewell party for him. The conversation inevitably gets around to the reason why he is leaving. "Hey, Charlie, why are you leaving XYZ Widgets? Haven't we had great times together? What are you trying to

do, get on their bowling team or something?” And Charlie may be willing to say, now that he knows he has his new job. He can look like a smart operator in front of his friends. “I’m leaving because I’m going to make twice my present pay, that’s why. Why should I stay here at XYZ Widgets and work for less than I’m worth?” That bit of information will make itself felt in the labor market of XYZ Widgets very, very fast. The management of XYZ Widgets will have to do some explaining, and perhaps make some wage adjustments for the workers, as the effects of the new knowledge are felt. Workers leave for ABC Widgets. The spread of information is rapid because the pay-off for those who have it is immediate and personally beneficial for those who act in terms of it.

F. Profiting from Better Knowledge

Knowledge is a scarce economic resource. It is a good thing for members of society to act in terms of accurate information. It is certainly a wise policy to allow citizens to profit from the use of better knowledge. That way, there is an economic incentive for others to enter the “knowledge market” and take advantage of whatever knowledge is available. The spread of accurate knowledge is increased because of the profit potential offered to acting individuals. If better knowledge is a valuable asset, then its sale in the market should be encouraged.

Inaccurate knowledge should be abandoned rapidly. How do we best stop the transfer of inaccurate knowledge? Make it expensive to act in terms of inaccurate knowledge. This is why we need opportunities to make losses as well as profits. Make the use of inaccurate knowledge expensive to those who use it, and you will discourage its transfer through the whole society. This is perhaps more important than encouraging the production or discovery of new, accurate knowledge. There are always more good ideas available than capital to finance them. But the continued use of bad ideas—loss-producing ideas—inhibits the build-up of capital. It is always very risky to launch a new project, since there are so many variables. But dropping a bad economic idea is an immediate benefit to society, for it increases the capital base—the information base—by removing a major source of capital consumption. The existence of losses testifies to the existence of inappropriate plans in an economy. Without negative feedback—the loss portion of the profit-and-loss sheet—society has no effective way to

eliminate bad economic ideas. If men see the danger of establishing censorship boards to reduce the spread of knowledge, they had better cling to the free market's mechanism for eliminating erroneous information.

Conclusion

The ethics of the parable is based on the suggestion that a treasure in a field belongs to the owner of the field. The field in this case belonged to Old Covenant Israel. This would not be true for much longer (Matt. 21:43). Hidden in that field was a lost treasure: the kingdom of God. To obtain possession of this treasure, the discoverer was told to commit everything he owns.

The top priority here is extending the kingdom of God. The proper response to the news of the kingdom is for a person to commit everything he owns to its extension. It is more valuable than personal wealth. It is the ultimate form of wealth.

There is another implication: *do not hide this treasure*. Israel had hidden it and was therefore about to lose possession of it. To keep ownership of it, a person or a society must share it. Its value increases as it is shared with others. The kingdom's division of labor increases when more people come into it. Its productivity increases because every participant's wealth increases. As with the telephone or other communications technology, the more people who use phones, the greater the value of the system to everyone. One telephone is useless. Two are not worth much. A large telephone system is very valuable. Each additional installed telephone increases the value of all of them, even though mass production decreases its price. So it is with the kingdom of God.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old (Matt. 13:52).

The theocentric principle here was progress in history, point five of the biblical covenant.¹ The kingdom of God offers those who understand it a way to preserve what is good in history, yet also innovate.

A. The Old Covenant Scribe

The Old Covenant scribe knew the Mosaic law. He was literate. He could read and write. He possessed authority because he possessed this technical understanding. But this was not enough. He also was supposed to understand God's written word. Jesus recognized that His disciples would have to possess comparable knowledge if they were to replace the scribes as agents possessing authority. "Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord" (v. 51). They were confident that they understood, despite the fact that they had just come to ask Him what His parable of the tares and wheat meant.

The disciples had to become masters of understanding and exposition, for the New Covenant church was about to replace the old priestly order. The office of priest would disappear when the temple and its sacrifices ended. What would replace this office? Jesus made the answer clear in this long-ignored passage. *A New Testament expositor would be a scribe.* He would have to declare the word of God in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

terms of the Old Covenant and the New. He would have to be a master of the Old Covenant and a minister of the New. Only through such public declaration could he gain greater authority than that possessed by the Old Covenant scribes.

Jesus had already begun this transfer of authority. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28–29).

Jesus had just finished describing the kingdom of God in a series of parables, analogies, and metaphors. Now He added a final analogy: the scribe, in his capacity as an interpreter of the kingdom, is like a householder with a treasure. Once again, Jesus moved the framework of discussion to the realm of economics.

B. *Oikos*

The word "economics" comes from the Greek word for house: *oikos*. This is the Greek root word for "householder," which we find in this passage. The household is the fundamental economic unit because it is where the division of labor begins. Wives help husbands; husbands support wives; both support children. The household is the starting point for a correct understanding of exchange and specialization.

The successful householder possesses treasure. This treasure includes old things: antiques. It also possesses new items. The mix of old and new is basic to the successful household. It is therefore basic to an economy.

The old items represent tradition. Men look back to the past in search of meaning. Who they are today, what they do, and what they possess depend on what took place in the past. Men respect the past because it made possible the present. It shaped the present. Men keep old objects that remind them of what went before, especially whatever went before that endures and is worth preserving.

The passage speaks of treasure. Items from the past have value because they are testimonies to the ways of success. They are also scarce. They are not being produced any longer. They are in limited supply. This makes them valuable when there is demand for them.

The passage also speaks of new items of value. The successful householder is alert to change. He lives in a changing world. He must respond to new demand and new techniques of production employed by his competitors. He must look into the future and guess what con-

ditions will be like then. He must make plans now in order to prepare for the unknown future.

This is why new things are important. The householder possesses new things to make his life more productive or enjoyable. History does not stand still. There is progress. The wise man is alert to the reality of change. He buys or makes new possessions that enable him to keep up. To fail to do this is to fall behind. It is to remove oneself from the world of one's contemporaries.

C. The New Covenant Scribe

The New Covenant was about to replace the Old Covenant. Jesus' ministry was the first stage of this transition. "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). His death and resurrection would inaugurate the second stage, which lasted 40 days. On the basis of His resurrection, He announced His new power: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). Then came His ascension to heaven (Acts 1), which was followed by the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Finally, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 marked the completion of the transition—the end of Old Covenant Israel and the cessation of new revelation.²

This was a covenantal discontinuity. The church would henceforth serve as the scribe: announcing what was still in force of the Old Covenant while applying the New Covenant to specific circumstances. The break from the past was not total. There was continuity, for the same God who revealed Himself in the Old Covenant has revealed Himself in the New. How was the church to regard the kingdom? As something old and new. As something that extended to the whole world that which God had begun in Israel.

The New Covenant scribe therefore looks back to the past and proclaims the future. He honors the past while working toward a far better future. He tells old stories and announces new applications of lessons learned. He is neither a priest nor a prophet. He does not offer sacrifices, nor does he speak with such authority that kings must obey him. He receives no authoritative revelations from God. The canon of Scripture is closed. His authority comes from his understanding of the written word of God, just as the Old Covenant scribe's authority came.

2. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/klgbjf>)

The New Covenant scribe applies to the present the written word's declaration of the past and future. He brings forth treasures of the past and the present. He looks to the future. He is future-oriented in a way that the scribes in Jesus' day should have been but were not.

D. The Inheritance

The biblical concept of inheritance links past, present, and future. Each generation is to add to the inheritance it has received. The inheritance is not so much a bloodline inheritance as confessional. The kingdom of God expands because it is cumulative. It extends over time; therefore it extends over borders. It develops.

Inheritance is normally associated with families. The *oikos* is the place where children learn of their inheritance: what was left to the household by the forefathers, and what will be left to it. The inheritance is both name and capital. The transition takes place with the death of the testator.

The crucial New Covenant inheritance is eternal life. This inheritance was suggested in the Old Covenant in Daniel 12:1–3. “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” Second, in Job 19:25–27: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” In the New Covenant, eternal inheritance replaces family inheritance as the central concept of inheritance.

The Epistle to the Hebrews ties eternal inheritance to the death of Christ. “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of

the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Heb. 9:13–17).

The biblical doctrine of inheritance provided the basis of the concept of economic growth. *Linear history is affirmed by the biblical concept of inheritance.* But because the inheritance promised the whole world to the righteous,³ it implied the doctrine of corporate economic growth. The inheritance of the faithful will compound over time. This was a revolutionary idea in the ancient world, which believed in cyclical history. Not only is time linear, Jesus taught, it is progressive.

The inheritance passes down through the generations. It is therefore both past-oriented and future-oriented. The past has value today because it confirms God's faithfulness over time. It reinforces covenant-keeping men's faith in the future. The past testifies to the future. The continuity provided by covenantal inheritance gives covenant-keepers confidence in the future.

E. The Idea of Progress

Confidence in the future is vital for risk-bearing and uncertainty-bearing.⁴ It is vital to progress. The covenant-keeper can afford to risk much in his efforts to extend God's kingdom. He has inherited much. He has confidence in God's sustaining hand. This or that project may fail, but the kingdom expands. He may fail, but others involved in kingdom projects will succeed. His efforts are part of a comprehensive program of corporate dominion.

The past testifies to the existence of progress. This is the lesson of the householder in the analogy. He has old treasures and new treasures to show as his inheritance. The West is the product of this worldview. Linear history, economic progress, and the covenantal link between past, present, and future have all contributed to the West's doctrine of progress. Men have had faith that their efforts will lead to a better world, not just in heaven but also in history. Progress in the past has proven the reliability of their faith in the future. While this vision of

3. Psalm 25:13; 37:9; 37:11; 37:22.

4. The two are different. Risk is statistically calculable in advance through probability theory. Uncertainty is not. See Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

linear progress has become increasingly secularized since the seventeenth century, its roots go deep in the West's theology.⁵

Conclusion

The scribe, not the priest, is the model of the New Covenant pastor. He is to declare the whole counsel of God. He is to seek in the Old Covenant standards for the New. He is to apply Old Covenant principles to New Covenant situations. He is to affirm the continuity of the covenants, just as the householder brings out old and new treasures.

The top priority of the faithful scribe is to understand the progressive continuity of the kingdom of God. He must not neglect the old or the new. He is to look to the past in search of standards for the present. He is to look to God's word in his attempt to envision the future. He works toward the future in the present on the basis of revelation given in the past. He sees cumulative successes in the past and thereby gains hope for the future.

A church that cuts itself off from the present for the sake of the past will wind up out of touch with the present. Its message will carry little authority, just as the Old Covenant scribes in Jesus' day did not possess much authority. It will become a museum for antiquarians. It will not shape the future because it does not attempt to change the present. It calls people out of the present in the name of the past. It calls people to celebrate the past in the name of continuity. But the continuity of evil compounds if it is not overcome by the leaven of righteousness. *A call to the past in the name of the past is an abdication in the present in the name of eternity.* It cuts the present off from eternity except by way of the past. It ignores the doctrine of progressive corporate sanctification. It leaves the world in the hands of Christ's enemies.

On the other hand, a church that cuts itself off from the past will be forever exhausted trying to keep up with the present. Having no history—no testament, no inheritance—it will also have little authority. Having no rudder, it will lose direction in the waves of change. In the name of the present, it destroys faith in the future. Having dismissed the past, the church thereby dismisses the relevance of the present, for why should its heirs in the future honor the present? The tyranny of the present is no less a tyranny than the tyranny of the past, and no less doomed to failure. If anything, the tyranny of the past is

5. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 And All That," *Commentary* (June 1968).

more likely to persevere. The tyranny of the past has persevered, so it is likely to continue to persevere.

This is equally true of any organization. A business must keep old customers and attract new ones. A political party must keep old voters and recruit new ones. Any organization that ignores its existing supporters, whose capital and tastes are linked to the past, will be cut off financially. The bulk of any organization's income comes from past customers or supporters. Yet any organization that caters primarily to its existing supporters will find itself buried when they are. The answer is continuity: past, present, and future. The kingdom of God is the model of such continuity, for it extends into eternity (Rev. 21; 22).

BUDGETS REVEAL PRIORITIES

But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition (Matt. 15:3–6).

The theocentric principle here was that God is honored more by obeying His law than by obeying man's law. There is a hierarchy of priorities, point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. First Things First

The commandment to honor parents takes precedence over gifts to the temple. This point is made even clearer in Mark's account: "But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free" (Mark 7:11). Corban was a gift to the temple. When Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver, "the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury [corban], because it is the price of blood" (Matt. 27:6).

The Pharisees' personal pattern of expenditure reflected their commitment to a particular view of law. Jesus warned them that their budgets were in error. Their budgets revealed that the law to which they were committed was not God's moral law, as revealed by the commandment to honor parents.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

B. Undermining Authority

The Pharisees had criticized Jesus' disciples in an attempt to undermine His authority. If He allowed them to get away with something, this meant that He approved of their actions. It was safer for His critics to attack His subordinates than to attack Him directly. Yet it was clear who the target was: Jesus.

Jesus took a more direct approach. He undermined their authority by attacking their hypocrisy. When it came to their pocketbooks, they placed second things first. They placed their public reputation above their familial responsibility. They gave to the temple, not to their parents. They were trying to be holier than God's law.

The Pharisees had constructed an elaborate system of law around the Mosaic law. They established man-made legal "fences" around the law. To keep people from violating the law, they added extra laws that supposedly would make the violation of a Mosaic law more difficult.² This system was a failure, Jesus warned. It made hypocrites of those who enforced it. They became more concerned about the fences than about the core ethical principles of the Mosaic law.

But then He went beyond this first-stage criticism of the hedge system. He rejected a distinguishing principle of the Mosaic law: the law of defiled food. He announced that this law had been a temporary principle of holiness. To this extent, it had been a hedge. It had segregated Old Covenant Israel from the nations. But that separation was about to end. The gentiles were about to be called into the church, and the kingdom transferred to the church (Matt. 21:43). Jesus here announced a moral principle that undermined the judicial authority of the Mosaic food laws. It therefore undermined the Mosaic law's separation of Jew and gentile. This is what God told Peter in Acts 10, just before the arrival of Cornelius, a gentile.

C. The Economics of Obedience

Jesus was not here undermining the Ten Commandments. On the contrary, He appealed to the commandment to honor parents as having superior authority to gifts to the temple. Jesus used an example

2. This is the source of the same tradition in rabbinical Judaism. The rabbis frequently cite Leviticus 18:30: "Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God." The Hebrew word for "ordinance," on which rests the rabbinical tradition of man-made laws as fences, does not offer support for such an interpretation. It means "charge," "keep," or "watch."

with economic implications as His means of undermining the Pharisees' authority. They had criticized the disciples' ritual negligence; He criticized them for elevating supplemental gifts to the temple over debts owed to parents. Jesus was saying that how people spend their money reveals more about their loyalties than the issues of religious ritual.

Money is the most marketable commodity. It can buy more things than any other commodity can. So, a budget reveals the budget-maker's priorities. He can use money to buy many things. By seeing what he buys, we can see what he regards as most important. The Pharisees' budgets revealed that they regarded their acceptance at the temple as more important than support of their parents. Jesus had warned His listeners:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:1–6).³

In private, His critics refused to support their parents. In public, they gave gifts to the temple. It was clear where their priorities were: the praises of men. "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42–43). Paul later warned against this: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:28–29).

3. Chapter 11.

There was no doubt that Jesus was publicly undermining the Pharisees' authority. "Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:12–14). He was warning His listeners not to follow the Pharisees. If they did, they would wind up in the ditch. They would wind up being rooted up by God. This prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70.⁴

Conclusion

A budget is a revealing document. It is normally kept very private. People rarely discuss their pattern of expenditures with others. To see a man's budget is to invade his privacy. But God sees each man's life-time budget. He knows where men's priorities are. He can determine from the budget whether a man seeks God's praise or men's praise. The budget that God requires of each man must reflect God's priorities for him. God's law must be reflected in their pattern of expenditures. This begins with a tithe paid to the local church.⁵ This expenditure, more than any other, is to be the mark the covenant-keeper. The budgetary pattern of obedience extends to the support of aged parents. It also extends to the poor. God's presence among men and authority over men is to be reflected by His people's pattern of expenditures.

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

5. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gnithing>)

THE CRUMBS OF LIFE

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour (Matt. 15:21–28).

The theocentric principle here was that God is the source of all healing. The issue was sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. In a Gentile Nation

In Jesus' day, this healing extended outward from His ministry to Israel. The world of the gentiles was generally untouched by His ministry at this point. But this gentile woman recognized the source of healing: Jesus, the son of David. She viewed Him as the heir of the most famous king in Israel's history. She may even have understood some of the prophetic implications of His heirship.

Jesus was outside of the land of Israel. He was in a far country: Phoenicia. We are not told why. A woman who had heard of His ministry in Israel came to Him, requesting that her daughter be healed.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

“But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

She might have answered Him defiantly. “Then what are you doing in my country? Get back to where you belong!” It was a response that the religious authorities in Tyre and Sidon might have given. She might have rejected her one hope of healing for her daughter. But as a representative of someone she loved, she restrained herself. In fact, she subordinated herself. “Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.” He then escalated His rhetoric: “But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” This was harsh language. He compared her to a dog. He was comparing all gentiles to dogs. The bread of healing was for God’s children, the Jews, He said.

She was not deterred. “And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” She was the dog; He was the master. Was she not therefore entitled to some crumbs? He said that she was. He healed her daughter at a distance.

Her subordination was to the point of humiliation. This was the proof of her great faith. “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith.” To prefer to be among the dogs rather than away from the master’s table was the mark of true faith for a gentile.

The woman judicially represented her daughter. But she did more than this. She represented the gentile world. Her confession of faith was in sharp contrast to that of the leaders of Israel, who did their best to trap Jesus in some judicial contradiction, either Mosaic or Roman. She did not seek to contradict Jesus; she sought His greater consistency. “Yes, we are dogs, my daughter and I. But we are domesticated dogs. We are under the table, not out in the streets. Surely, domesticated dogs are entitled to some consideration.” This confession of faith gained for her what she had sought.

It was a matter of confession. She confessed Jesus as master, as the son of David: a messianic office. Outside the land of Israel, this was a powerful confession. It was a greater confession than the Pharisees offered when they heard that He had cast out demons. “This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (Matt. 12:24b). Her daughter had a devil. She wanted to have it cast out. There was demonic possession in Israel and in the gentile world, but this gentile welcomed Jesus as an exorcist; the Pharisees had not. She acknowledged the need for healing in her daughter. The Pharisees did not any such need. That was what condemned them. Jesus had

warned them: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:12b–13).

What was Jesus doing in the gentile coasts? He was announcing His authority. His authority was not confined to Israel. The proof of this was His ability to cast out unholy spirits in their land. “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matt. 12:28). A major sign that the kingdom of God extended beyond the borders of Israel was the healing of her daughter. But it took her repeated confession of faith and personal subordination for this kingdom extension to take place.

What was true of this woman would soon be true of the nations. Her confession was an earnest—a down payment—on what would soon come under the auspices of the church, especially with Paul’s ministry. The gentiles would be blessed through their confession.

B. Dog Food

The dogs under the table are entitled to crumbs. This confession led to her daughter’s healing. It was a confession by a gentile. It was accounted as true faith.

Was her faith the equivalent of the faithful Israelite’s? No, for she was outside the boundaries of the land. This put her in an inferior position. Until the scattering of the Jerusalem church after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), this geographical separation served as a visible mark of the confessing gentiles’ second-class status. As for nonconfessing gentiles, they were like dogs in the street. They had the status of covenant-breaker.

Yet in a broader sense, covenant-breakers do have status as sons of God through Adam—disinherited sons. They are dogs under the table. They are entitled to crumbs. They participate in the community of man. They are under the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).² They are under God’s law. The work of the law is written in their hearts (Rom. 2:15).³

There is a division of labor in society. Each individual is productive

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia, Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3–4.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

in some way.⁴ Each brings any excess output of his labor for others to use. In this sense, each increases the wealth of others. For the sake of the adopted sons of God, the disinherited sons are allowed their time in history.

When God showers His blessings on a society, everyone is a recipient. “. . . he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45b).⁵ This means that everyone becomes responsible for thanking God. With blessings come responsibilities. With common grace, all men come under the judgment of God. There is no escape. Paul wrote: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom. 12:18–20).⁶ With every undeserved benefit, God places eternal coals of fire onto the heads of covenant-breakers.

Common grace is like dog food. It is not what God intends for His people. It is suitable for His enemies. It keeps them alive. It is nutritious. But it is not the best. It is not special grace. “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” (I Tim. 4:10).⁷ All men are saved, i.e., are temporarily healed from the death-producing curse of Adam. But all men are not given eternal life.

Conclusion

The Phoenician woman’s top priority was the healing of her demon-possessed daughter. To achieve this, she was willing to suffer repeated rejection by the only person who could heal her daughter. She kept coming back. She always had a correct answer. She claimed what was hers by right: dog food. She was not arrogant, but she was persist-

4. This assumes that he is not helpless. Babies, imbeciles, and Alzheimer’s victims are excluded from the ranks of the productive. But they provide a service to society: tests of how men treat them. “Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me” (Matt. 25:45).

5. Chapter 10.

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

7. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

ent. She was like the widow of the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:2–5).⁸ She kept banging on the door. She eventually got her request.

Her confession was more than an admission of Jesus' power. It was an admission of His office as master, the Davidic office. She was not deterred by His initial rejection of her request. The prize was worth pursuing. The testimony was worth confessing. By subordinating herself to God, she gained her top priority.

This is a lesson for all mankind. Subordination to God is basic to the dominion covenant. Confession of one's subordination to God is the first step to dominion. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:24–26).

The theocentric principle here was the final judgment of God. Every man faces the final judgment. Compared to the loss of one's soul at this judgment, the gaining of everything that life has to offer is nothing. The issue was sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Free Grace Is Not Cheap

Jesus here warned His disciples that there are no free lunches in life. There is free grace, but it comes at a price. It comes, first and foremost, at the price of the death of Jesus Christ. Redeemed people owe a lifetime service to God through Christ (Rom. 12:1).² But this service is insufficient to pay for eternal life. We know this because of the subsequent comparison: all the world could not redeem one man's soul. Anything less than this is also insufficient.

Obviously, these words are not to be interpreted literally. Nobody is asked to take up a literal cross. Perhaps some follower of Jesus was asked to do so under Roman rule, but we are not informed of this. Crucifixion is no longer any nation's means of execution except possibly in rare cases where Christians are executed this way as a symbol

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

of their subordination to an anti-Christian state. In any case, one does not carry a cross through a lifetime of service.

The imagery here is that of a burden that costs a person his life. The cross is heavy. At the end of the journey, it becomes the means of his execution. Taking up the cross means taking up the pre-resurrection life of Christ. It means death to the things of this world. A man carrying a cross is not going to be easily distracted by the things of this world. He has other things on his mind . . . and on his back.

The text warns: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." This is not a call to literal suicide. It is a call for *covenantal death*. The old man is executed. The old Adamic nature is executed. Paul provided a commentary on this passage:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (Rom. 6:3–12).

To say that we pay a price is to say that we give up something. What do we give up? Our old ways: the sins of the flesh. We forfeit the use of these attributes of Adam. Whatever pleasures or benefits they bring in history, we must give them up. This is the economist's meaning of cost: the most valuable thing foregone. There are no free lunches. We must give up something to gain eternal life. But the basis of our entrance into eternal life is not our payment.

B. The Fearful Exchange

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

(v. 26). There is a joke about lawyers. Satan comes to a newly certified lawyer and says: “I will give you the gift of persuasion. You will become a world-famous defense lawyer. I will enable you to get juries to declare guilty criminals innocent, for which these evil men will pay you huge fees. You will become the envy of your peers. All I ask in return is your eternal soul at the end of a life of enormous success.” To which the lawyer replies: “What’s the catch?”³

Jesus warned against this exchange. If gaining the whole world is a bad bargain for the loss of one’s soul, then gaining anything less is a worse bargain. This is what present-oriented men do not acknowledge. They either reject the thought of eternal judgment on these terms or else they discount the future cost to such a low level that the exchange seems worth it. This exchange of the eternal in favor of the temporal is the essence of foolishness.

Time offers what appear to be ways out of trouble. There is always an option, a way of escape. This faith is a reflection of an ethical truth: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). But eternity does not possess this characteristic feature of time. In eternity, there is no escape. This is unimaginable to the time-bound sinner who thinks he can find a way not to pay for his sins. There is only one such way: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9–10). But this way of escape places a new perceptual burden on man: his recognition of *the high price of sin*. As the price of sin rises, less of it will be demanded, other things being equal.

The problem is, when sin is involved, other things do not remain equal. *Sin has the characteristic feature of being addictive*. The more you get, the more you want. The insatiable nature of sin leads some men into early death. They cannot control their addiction. Sin is like a ratchet upward: one level becomes normal, so new sins are sought out.

3. The existence of hundreds of anti-lawyer jokes in the United States indicates a widespread distrust and resentment against lawyers as against no other profession. The public understands that the legal profession offers great wealth to those who pervert the intention of the law, i.e., to be a terror to evil-doers. Lawyers are not penalized professionally for misusing the law in order to get rich by terrorizing the innocent.

But in a redeemed person, the insatiable nature of sin is reversed. He reaches a level of sinning that he recognizes as self-destructive. He sees the high price of sin. He then demands less of it. In fact, he can create an *ethically positive ratchet*: as he indulges in fewer sins, he finds that his taste for old ones and even new ones is reduced.

Such a transformation runs counter to what economics teaches. Economics teaches us that when the price of something is reduced, more of it is demanded. This is expressed graphically by a demand curve that slopes downward and to the right. Price is expressed on the vertical axis, and quantity is on the horizontal axis.

God's redemption of sinners lowers their eternal price of an individual sin. This is because the redeemed person is not condemned eternally when he sins. Why, then, should he not indulge himself all the more? After all, the price is lower. Answer: because *redemption changes his taste for sin*. In the terminology of graph-addicted economists, his entire demand curve for sin shifts to the left: reduced demand for sin all along the curve.

Paul understood the logic of economics in this application, and he rejected the conclusion. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 5:19–6:2). Other things, such as the demand curve for sin, do not remain equal. The redeemed sinner's taste for sin is reduced.

Redemption increases a man's perception of eternity. It lengthens a man's time perspective. It increases his future orientation. This makes it possible for him to count the cost of his thoughts and actions (Luke 14:28–30).⁴ Man always discounts the future. The more distant in the future an expected event, the less it affects a person's decision-making today. The payoff, discounted to the present, is too low, for either benefits or losses. But, if a man discounts eternity's effects to nearly zero, in the way that he discounts events a century hence, he has made a disastrous miscalculation. He does not grasp how important time is for the outcome in eternity. He compares time to time. He

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 35.

should be comparing time to eternity. The discount that he applies to very distant events is influenced by his knowledge that he will not be here to see the results of his actions. But eternity is different. He will be there to see the results of his actions, and to experience them (Luke 16:23; Rev. 20:14–15).

Conclusion

Men set their priorities in terms of their values and their expectations about the future. Jesus said that our values should reflect the future—specifically, eternity. Any set of values that does not incorporate expectations about eternity must be wrong, He taught. The soul survives beyond the grave. Thus, any cost-benefit analysis in history should include costs or benefits in eternity.

The price of eternal life is sacrificial living in history. Christ's life of complete subordination to God and His undeserved death have set the judicial standard. He definitively paid the price. Taking up the cross and losing one's life for Christ's sake are aspects of the great exchange: a costly eternity vs. a beneficial eternity. Life is the constant exchange of one set of conditions for another. This includes eternal life. One way of life is exchanged for one kind of eternity. This exchange is *definitive* in history: God's judicial imputation to sinners of Christ's righteousness (Rom. 3:24–25; Phil. 3:9). It is also *progressive*: working out one's salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). It is also *final* (Matt. 25; Rev. 20:14–15).

The marketplace of the soul is history. A man cannot buy back his soul. Either it has been bought back by Christ or it cannot be bought back at all. From whom is it bought back? From God, who is sovereign over the souls of men.

36

TRIBUTE MONEY

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented [anticipated] him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee (Matt. 17:24–27).

The theocentric focus of this passage was what we owe to God. The great king of the universe takes tribute from strangers, not from His sons. This is hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Tribute and Sanctions

The Romans imposed their will on the Mediterranean world. They extracted payments from the captive nations. The mark of a captive nation was its requirement to pay tribute. This was not a tax that citizens paid. It was a military exaction. The Roman Empire singled out defeated peoples as tribute payers.

Tribute was common in the ancient world. One benefit of operating an empire was the government's ability to transfer to subject peoples the costs associated with governing them. *They paid for their own political subordination.* The payment of tribute was a way of reminding the victims that they were not part of the ruling class. They

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

were part of a mass of subjects without rights. They were not citizens of a larger commonwealth.

There were ways out from under: a successful revolt, buying one's citizenship, being granted citizenship for special service to Rome, personal escape into another jurisdiction, or the breakdown of the empire from internal causes. Israel attempted the first approach, but this led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple.²

Roman rule brought advantages. Rome's navy cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. Roman roads made transportation and communication easier. Roman law created an international economy. All of this was good for trade. It increased the division of labor and specialization. This increased output per unit of input. People generally got richer as a result of Rome's system of administration. The Pax Romana was in its early stages in Jesus' day—peace that offered many economic opportunities. These benefits were paid for by beneficiaries. When the Pharisees challenged Jesus regarding the payment of tribute, He had them bring him a coin. "Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:19–21).³ Caesar's government had extended trade to the Roman Empire. A tribute coin, which the denarius was,⁴ became the coin of the realm. The coin used for paying taxes was also used to increase trade and wealth.

So, there were positive and negative sanctions associated with the Roman Empire. The positive sanctions were mainly economic. The negative sanctions were mainly political.

B. Born Free

Freedom in Rome's Empire meant Roman citizenship. This gave a person special legal privilege. For example, a Roman citizen could not be physically punished without a trial. This was a mark of civil liberty. Paul, who was a Roman citizen, reminded the centurion of this prior to a whipping.

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

3. Chapter 44.

4. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 122–23. (Reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2008.)

The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him (Acts 22:24–29).

1. *Jesus' Subordination*

Jesus told His disciples to pay tribute. He then provided them with a miracle. If they went fishing, they would be able to pay their tribute money. A fish would provide the coin. Furthermore, Jesus said that this payment would be on His behalf, not just theirs. He was announcing that He was under Roman authority. He proved this by submitting to arrest by the agents of Rome. He told Pilate, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53–54).

He was the true son, yet He accepted Rome's designation of a stranger. He refused to give offense. He was telling His disciples not to revolt against Rome. This message was lost on the Jews a generation later. It was the church's subordination to persecution in A.D. 64/65 under Nero that gained it separate legal status from Israel. Previously, the special legal status of Israel had protected Christians. Not after A.D. 63.⁵ So, when Israel revolted in A.D. 66, the Jews' status as revolutionaries did not extend to the Christians. The Christians' subordination to persecution earlier was what saved them from the Great Tribulation: the destruction of Israel.⁶

The true-born sons of God—sons of the Great King—are required to pay a tithe to God's church.⁷ This is not tribute. This is citizenship

5. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996). pp. 48–51.

6. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

7. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

money. Their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). The mark of their sonship is the payment of the tithe. Yet they also pay taxes in times of military defeat and tyranny. They do so in order not to give offense to civil rulers.

There is an old slogan, “one rotten apple spoils the barrel.” In the New Covenant, this is not the case. The freeborn sons incorrupt the rotten whole. Rome fell to the church, not the other way around. *Evil is far more threatened by good than good is threatened by evil*. This was not the case under the Old Covenant. Israel was separated from the nations by rituals and laws governing land and seed. Egypt’s corrupt leaven was a threat to Israel. This is why they celebrated Passover: a week without leaven. But under the New Covenant, the old laws of ritual cleanliness have been replaced by the law of the Lord’s Supper, which is open to all who subordinate themselves to Christ. Separation is not based on a threat of corruption through eating. It is based on a promise of incorruption by eating.

2. Salvation’s New Birth

The new birth of salvation establishes a man’s status as an adopted son of the Great King. This is an important doctrine for citizenship. Christians are citizens of heaven, and they are to work to bring this citizenship down to earth (Phil. 3:20).⁸ The Lord’s Prayer says, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).⁹ Christians are to work for the creation of Christian nations, covenanted formally under the Trinitarian God of the Bible. They are to become citizens of the same kingdom, heavenly and earthly.

If they must pay tribute for a time in order not to give offense to their rulers, this is not to be seen by them as a permanent condition. They are sons of the Great King. His kingdom is forever. They must serve as leaven of righteousness. They pay tribute as strangers today in order to pay taxes as citizens of the holy commonwealth tomorrow. The goal is dominion in history by subordination and loyalty to God’s commonwealth. A mark of this loyalty is their acceptance of temporary tribute-paying status.

This means that ethics is more powerful than power. Dominion religion is more powerful than power religion.¹⁰ In the long run, right-

8. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gnhealer>)

9. Chapter 12.

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus*

eousness triumphs in history.¹¹ This is why Christians can afford to be patient. They bear the burden of tribute payment for the sake of a larger program of world conquest. It is not that the pen is mightier than the sword. It is that the word is mightier than the sword—the word of God. Freeborn sons bring the message of *liberation through adoption* to a disinherited world. Men pay tribute to Satan through their sin. Liberation from bondage begins with liberation from sin. Paul wrote: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:16–18). “For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom. 6:20–22). Liberation from sin leads to liberation from fear. Paul wrote: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:14–17). “Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

C. From Tribute to Taxes

I remember hearing a speaker offer the example of the fish and the coin in defense of the requirement to pay taxes. A tax protester responded: “The fish paid the tax.” Clever, but wrong. Once the disciples had the coin in their possession, it was their responsibility to pay tribute. They could have used the coin to buy something rather than pay tribute. That which they might have purchased was their cost of paying tribute. They, not the fish, bore this cost.

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

11. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

Taxes become tribute payments when those who pay them are not part of the household of faith that collects the taxes. The household of the king was religious. To be a citizen of Rome meant being part of the Roman system of religion—Rome’s confession. Citizenship, like sonship, is confessional. When men take an oath of citizenship, they announce their loyalty to a system of ideals, laws, and sanctions. This oath is religious.

Jesus did not tell His disciples not to pay tribute. He told them to pay. Why? Because their presence inside the borders of the Roman Empire was a means of conquest. They would work to spread the confession of adopted sonship. As more people confessed faith in God’s son, they would threaten the basis of Rome’s confession. The new confession would undermine Rome’s confession, which ceased in the fourth century with the death of the last pagan emperor, Julian the Apostate, in 363. The freeborn sons of God inherited the kingdom of Rome. This was an aspect of “thy kingdom come.” From that time on, they ceased to be tributaries. They became citizens. They continued to call this kingdom Rome, but Romulus would not have recognized it. Neither would Pontius Pilate.

Citizens can protest the level of taxation in a way that noncitizens cannot. Citizens are part of the oath-bound civil covenant. In a democracy or a republic, they can bring political sanctions against their rulers. What they pay may resemble tribute, but the confession and the sanctions indicate that they are paying taxes. They are part of the household of the national faith.

Conclusion

Jesus set forth a principle of dominion: do not give offense to those foreigners who rule over you. They have a rival confession. This confession can be undermined through preaching and obedience to God, which involves outward obedience to civil rulers. It can be transformed. The basis of this transformation is not revolutionary action. Rather, it is confessional and ethical: word and deed evangelism.

Jesus here established a program of conquest: *dominion by subordination*. He established priorities: *the payment of tribute* rather than giving offense by revolutionary action. The church’s acceptance of these political priorities is what saved it from the Great Tribulation in A.D. 70.

The top priority here was peace. By paying tribute, His disciples

avoided a confrontation with Rome. This gained time for the work of evangelism. Evangelism eventually undermined Rome's confession. Rome was baptized in the fourth century, as the Great Commission mandates (Matt. 28:19).

HIERARCHY OF INDEBTEDNESS

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt (Matt. 18:23–30).

The theocentric focus of this passage was God, the money-lender. He sets the model for forgiveness and for condemnation. The issue was subordination, point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Unforgiving Steward

This parable is famous for its comparison of hell with debtors' prison. But the economic principle of this parable is not immediately apparent. This much is clear: the parable has to do with obligations owed, large and small. What is generally not understood is the hierarchy of debt.

A servant who owed a gigantic amount to his master was condi-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

tionally forgiven of this debt by his master. The *judicial conditionality of salvation* is clearly taught in this passage. The master has the right to revoke the debt release. He did revoke it. The steward was cast into prison until he should pay the debt in full. Then what kind of salvation is under discussion here? The *salvation of common grace*: the salvation granted to mankind apart from a complete and final repayment of the debt owed to God.

The servant then demanded the immediate repayment of a comparatively tiny amount from a poor debtor, and when the poor man could not pay, the steward had him thrown into debtors' prison. Then the master revoked his mercy and delivered the servant to debtors' prison. "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:32–35).²

If we take this parable as a representation of God's judicial relationship with fallen man, we must conclude that God's forgiveness of a man's debts is conditional.³ These conditions are two-fold. First, a man's acceptance of Christ's payment to God on his behalf. Second, his grant of the same debt-free status to those who owe him anything beyond their ability to repay. The neighbor, according to the parable of the Good Samaritan, is that person who walks the same road we do who has been harmed along the way through no fault of his own (Luke 10:30–37).⁴ When I help him, I should not insist on immediate repayment if it threatens his ability to perform his work and eventually to repay the debt.

Why should this be true? Because the debt-credit relationship is inescapably hierarchical. The borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7). When God grants me credit, and I in turn grant someone else credit, that person has become God's servant through me. This is why biblical law recommends that God's people become creditors to cov-

2. Chapter 37.

3. Ray R. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

enant-breakers, but not become debtors to them (Deut. 28:12).⁵

What commentators rarely (if ever) mention is this: *the poor debtor still owed the money to the rich master*. The steward had merely served as an economic and legal middleman—a representative of the master. The steward had advanced the person money that did not belong to the steward; it had been borrowed from the master. The steward had legal control over the money *temporarily*; he did not own it. This is the definition of all stewardship: temporary legal control over the use of another person's asset. This leads to an important conclusion: *the master's legal annulment of the debt owed to him by the steward was therefore also a legal annulment of the debts of all debtors under the steward's economic authority*. In other words, the obligation was hierarchical: from the poor man to the master through the steward.

Why was the steward unjust? His sin was more than ethical injustice to a poor person; it was judicial rebellion against the master. By trying to collect payment from the poor man, the steward was saying: "I am no longer a middleman, now that my debt has been forgiven. I am now the exclusive owner of assets. The credit that I extended with borrowed money is still owed to me irrespective of my previous obligations. I am therefore no longer a steward. I am no longer under a hierarchy. I can now collect what is lawfully mine from those who are under me." His refusal to cancel the debt that *had been owed to the master through the steward's lending* was a rebellious declaration of independence. He became a thief and a usurper, for he was trying to collect for his own account assets that, economically speaking, had belonged to the master. He was trying to profit from the master's mercy. He refused to acknowledge the *economics of forgiveness*: the master had implicitly released the poor man from his debt, which had been owed to the master by way of the servant, the day the master released his steward from his obligation. The unjust steward refused to acknowledge the legality of this indirect (representative) release. He held to the letter of the law—the terms of the original debt contract—rather than to the underlying economics of the transaction: hierarchical representation and lawful subordination. So, the master reimposed the original debt in order to remind the steward that he was still nothing but a steward, that he was still under the master's lawful authority.

However, by consigning the unjust steward to prison, *the master*

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 70.

was *implicitly reimposing the debt on the poor man*. The master in the parable did not order the release of the poor man. Why not? Because such a unilateral act of debt release would have been theft: stealing from the steward, i.e., taking away an asset that the steward could use to repay his debt. The master could forgive the poor debtor only by forgiving the steward's debt by the same amount. The steward's wife or heirs were legally empowered to collect everything owed to him in a vain attempt to pay off the master.

The day of reckoning—an accounting concept—had come for both the steward and the poor debtor. Time had run out for both of them. Their debt pyramid had toppled. The hierarchy of debt repayment would now be felt up and down the chain of obligations. Those foolish enough to have indebted themselves would now be reminded of the hierarchical nature of debt. The master had at last pressed his lawful claims. *By indebteding himself to an unjust steward, the poor man brought the master's judgment on his own head*. Covenant-keepers should learn this lesson well: do not become indebted to covenant-breakers. "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43–44).⁶ When God periodically collects His debts from covenant-breakers in history, all those obligated to them or dependent on them feel the economic pain, including covenant-keepers. Anyone who doubts this should consider carefully what happens to debtors and everyone who sells goods and services to debtors during a deflationary economic depression. Of course, if the deflation is so severe that no one can pay, then the debtor escapes in a universal moratorium on repayment.

B. Representative Forgiveness

There was only one reasonable hope for the unjust steward: his kinsman-redeemer. Legally, he was still the head of his household, but economically his kinsman-redeemer was in authority. Only if someone possessing legitimate authority would show mercy on his behalf could he escape. There were only two ways for the kinsman-redeemer to help: (1) pay off the debt; (2) offer to replace the steward in prison. This much is sure: the poor debtor's fate was not in his own hands. He required mercy to escape: from the master or from his kinsman-re-

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 70.

deemer.

When God granted the grace of additional time to fallen mankind, He thereby also granted the grace of time to the creation, which was (and remains) under man's lawful authority. The covenant's hierarchical authority structure remained (and remains) in place. Fallen man still owes the restitution payment to God; nature is still under God's authority through man, and therefore is under God's curse on man (Rom. 8:19–22).⁷ Fallen man is told to treat those under his authority with mercy analogous to the mercy shown by God to fallen man. What is the evidence of God's mercy? A system of representative blood sacrifice.

1. Animal Sacrifices

Why did God require animal sacrifices? What had the animals done to deserve this? Biblically, the answer is simple: they fell with their commander, Adam. Their legal representative fell, and they came under a curse. This is why certain animals could serve as sacrificial offerings acceptable to God. The animal had to be slain before it was placed on the altar. This symbolized the death of a cursed being, fallen man. After death comes fire with salt.⁸ The sacrifice announced symbolically: "Either the dead animal roasts in history or else the dead sinner roasts in eternity." In order to preserve man's relationship with God, man must offer sacrifice. Old Covenant man had to offer animal sacrifices. These sacrifices also preserved the animal world's relationship with God. The sacrificed animals represented both the animal world and fallen man's world.

The animals came under God's judgment when Adam did. When God annulled the debts of all those who will ever come representatively under the debt protection of His son Jesus Christ, He also annulled the sacrificial system that had previously governed His set-apart covenant people. Animals today need no representative sacrifices by other animals, since their debts, like the debts of God's covenant people, have been paid representatively by Jesus Christ. When covenant-keeping men's debts were forgiven, so were the debts of the animal world, debts that had been paid representatively from Abel's day by the sacrifice of certain animals. This debt cancellation took place

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

8. Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; Mark 9:47–49.

definitively with the crucifixion of Christ and finally with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

There can be no mercy without sacrifice. God's mercy to mankind as a whole is demonstrated in his willingness to sacrifice His son, a perfect man.⁹ Men's mercy to the animal kingdom as a whole under the Mosaic system was demonstrated by the Israelites' willingness to sacrifice their own blemish-free animals. The fact that God was willing to sacrifice His son testifies to His protection of mankind. Similarly, the Israelites' willingness to sacrifice their most valuable animals testified to their hierarchical obligation to protect the creation. *God's required sacrifices were testimonies to His mercy.* When men refuse to offer God's mandatory sacrifices, they become progressively merciless.¹⁰ In the New Covenant, the blood sacrifices are no more. There is only one sacrifice: the death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:12). But all men are required by God to acknowledge this sacrifice: verbally, ritually, ethically, and financially, i.e., the tithe.

2. Deferred Payment

Man's debt to God was not forgiven under the Old Covenant economy; its repayment was only deferred. In a sense, the sacrifices could at most meet the required "interest payments" to God; they did not repay the principal. Analogously, whenever Israel quit paying because of her rebellion, these missed payments were added to the principal owed. Israel's debt to God grew ever-larger.¹¹ Finally, in A.D. 70, God called in the debt.¹² Israel went bankrupt publicly. "Forgive us our

9. Jesus did not die to save all men from hell, but His death provided the legal basis of the gift of life in history: common grace. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

10. The animism and the pantheism of the modern ecology movement are denials of the God of the Bible and His required system of sacrifice. If this movement's stipulations are enforced by international civil law, we can expect tyranny on an international scale. Men will seek to overturn the Bible's hierarchical system: God > man > nature. Mankind will be sacrificed to nature. For a defense of just this sort of sacrifice, see Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989).

11. In real estate, this is called a *backward-walking mortgage*: the missed monthly mortgage payment is added to the principal owed, so the subsequent payments must be larger. The national debt of the United States government in 2012 is well advanced into a backward-walking phase. The deficit is running \$1.3 trillion a year. (The median price for a house was \$70,000.)

12. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997); (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>) Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

debts” (Matt. 6:12) is no idle phrase. The presence of the required sacrifices in the Mosaic economy testified to the continuing presence of the debt in God’s account books, and also to each man’s need to repay God in the future. The cosmic Creditor will eventually demand repayment of everything owed to Him. On that final day of reckoning, every person will have to produce one of two things: sufficient funds to repay his debt (impossible) or evidence that he had already accepted the generosity of the Kinsman-Redeemer who had repaid his debt. At the final judgment, the books are forever closed. So is the exit from the ultimate debtor’s prison.

By forgiving a sin against us, we symbolically and legally forgive *a debt owed to God* through us. This is why one version of the Lord’s prayer says “forgive us our sins” (Luke 11:4), while the parallel in Matthew (the former tax collector) says “forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12).¹³ By extending forgiveness as God’s representative agents, we show God’s mercy to God’s debtors in God’s name: “as we forgive our debtors.” Offering up a scarce economic resource to God as a sacrificial offering is economically the same as forgiving a debt legally owed to us.

Consider the words of Jesus, the long-awaited representative who offered up Himself to God as a holy sacrifice: the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer. He prayed to God from the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots” (Luke 23:34). He legally annulled this horrendous sin for those who had truly acted out of ignorance—most obviously, the Roman guards who gambled for His clothing. His death and His words annulled *these specific debts* to God the Father. These men had sinned against God the Father by sinning against Jesus. When He forgave them, He did so as the judicial victim. The principle of victim’s rights allows such forgiveness.¹⁴ He thereby also forgave them on His Father’s account, as God’s legal heir and representative agent.

The forfeited value of a sacrifice made to God symbolizes two things: (1) God’s payment of His own Son, the Messiah, and (2) the patience that we have shown to those who had sinned against us. We are stewards, not owners. When we forgive others, we offer up a sacrifice

13. Protestant churches that place heavy emphasis on liturgy (i.e., sacrifice-oriented) often pray “forgive us our trespasses.” This is closest to the covenantal focus of Leviticus: boundaries and their violation.

14. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix M.

to God: extending grace to sinners by forfeiting whatever they legally owed to us.¹⁵ Of course, we are gaining heavenly resources by doing this. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:19–20).¹⁶

C. Seek Nothing in Return

God has forgiven us. We are to forgive others. This has to do with sin. But does it include debt? Are we literally to forgive all debts owed to us? In another passage, Jesus indicated that this is the case. “For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:32–35).

This is a hard saying: hard to understand and hard to obey. When we deposit money in a bank, we lend to the bank. The bank lends to others. Are we never to get our money back? The parable of the talents indicates otherwise. The steward who buried his coin was rebuked by the master. “Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury” (Matt. 25:27).¹⁷ The steward was not told to lend the master’s money to the bankers and then forgive the debt. He was told that he should have collected interest on the master’s behalf. Then what did Jesus mean, “lend, hoping for nothing again”?

He meant that we are to make charity loans to desperate people for God’s sake, not our own. In the Mosaic Covenant, interest payments on such charitable loans to brothers in the covenant was prohibited (Ex. 22:25).¹⁸ The New Covenant has broadened this classification. Those outside the confessional brotherhood are entitled to in-

15. We can still lawfully ask for economic restitution, but we can also forgive this payment or any penalty payment.

16. Chapter 13.

17. Chapter 47.

18. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

terest-free loans and the forgiveness of debt in a crisis.

Then who has enough money to give money to all of those in need? Only God. A human lender will run out of money very fast: more demand at zero price than supply. If every person with money must loan to every poor man without money, the debt market will disappear fast. If poverty constitutes a moral claim on capital, there will soon be no capital. Without capital, poverty will become universal. Did Jesus call for universal poverty? No. God gives us capital; we are supposed to increase it.

If capital is to be preserved and increased, the lender will have to allocate his money based on considerations other than the mere poverty of the borrower. But he will also have to allocate it based on considerations other than an interest return. He will have to make judgments about people's reasons for needing a loan and their ability to put the assets to productive use. In short, *he must substitute moral evaluation for interest rate considerations*. The righteous poor man is more deserving than the unrighteous poor man. He is also more likely to repay the principal. But interest is still prohibited. The Mosaic law on this point has not been annulled. On the contrary, it has been broadened to include those outside the covenant.

God requires us to increase the capital that He has given us. That which we use as our investment capital is to be expanded, and expanded greatly. But we must do this only on one assumption: *we are acting on God's behalf*. If we act autonomously, we sin. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).¹⁹ In our business dealings, we are to be wise investors who seek a high return: ten talents from five, four from two. But we are not to abandon mercy. When someone in our debt falls into arrears through no fault of his own and asks for more time, we are to honor this request. Our success as producers is to increase our success as givers.

A huge sum of money can be given away systematically only through the establishment of a bureaucracy. This usually leads to the capture of the capital by salaried, formally educated bureaucrats who are hostile to the free market that led to its creation. The richest men in early twentieth-century America—John D. Rockefeller, Sr., Andrew

19. Chapter 13.

Carnegie, and Henry Ford—set up charitable foundations that were immediately captured by humanists who had an anti-free market agenda. Many were lawyers, and they wanted economic control through the state, not free market competition. Rare is the donor who practices charity throughout his years as an accumulator of capital.²⁰ It takes practice to give money away. This is why rich men rarely succeed as donors. They know how to amass capital; they have no practice in giving it away.

D. The Debt Pyramid

1. Charitable Loans

The charitable loan is a top-down loan. It is extended from the richer to the less rich. Those with greater knowledge of money and how to accumulate it make loans to those with less knowledge. The owners of capital make risk calculations, knowing that they may not be repaid. They do not depend on income derived from these extensions of charitable debt. In fact, the Bible tells them not to become dependent on income from charitable debt: no interest rate.²¹ Those with greater economic authority are in control of the debt structure. They extend credit in the full knowledge that they are dealing with subordinates who possess less knowledge about wealth and its accumulation.

The debt pyramid of the parable is a top-down structure. The rich man had lent a great deal of money to the steward. He was rich enough to forgive the steward. He thereby granted a large gift to the steward. But the steward refused to extend the same mercy to the poor man whose money was not enough to make a difference to the steward.

Had the steward extended credit to other poor people? Had he become a money-lender to the poor? Was he seeking an interest return from charitable loans? This is what seems to be the case. He had not made a business loan to one of his peers. He had not become an investor in some profit-seeking venture. He had lent money to a poor

20. The best example I know of is William Volker, who created the Volker charities. He tithe from the age of 12. See Herbert Cornuelle, *Mr. Anonymous: The Story of William Volker* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1951). Volker's money led to the creation of many libertarian organizations, including the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE). I was employed by the Volker Fund in the summer of 1963 and by FEE in 1971–73.

21. North, *Tools of Dominion*, ch. 23.

man. Not only was he not to expect an interest return, he was to lend, hoping nothing in return, Jesus warned elsewhere. He had no money of his own. He was too deeply in debt to his master. He was technically bankrupt. After the master revoked the gift and called in the loan, he was legally bankrupt. This parable warns that this is the condition of every man in relation to God: technical bankruptcy leading to legal bankruptcy apart from the intervention of the kinsman-redeemer (Lev. 25:23–24).²²

2. Business Loans

The charitable loan is a top-down loan. A business loan in the modern economy is different. First, the huge accumulation of capital in the modern world has been made possible by the loans and investments of millions of people. While Pareto's 20-80 wealth distribution predominates everywhere, it is also true that middle-class people make investments in pension funds that in turn make loans to large companies, customers, and anyone else who promises to repay and whose credit worthiness is acceptable. Pension funds also make investments. Investors are either dependent on income from these loans or will be upon retirement.

Capitalism's loans are commercial endeavors. Millions of people enter the credit markets in search of a positive return. Millions of other people borrow money. Millions of lenders (e.g., bank account depositors, pension fund owners) are also debtors (e.g., owners of mortgaged homes). The web of debt envelops the whole economy, which in turn becomes dependent on contractual repayment. This web is complex beyond calculation. The survival of a high-division-of-labor society is dependent on the permanent maintenance of this credit-debt structure. If the web fails through widespread default, the society fails. The division of labor contracts. Men's income disappears.

Second, the modern debt pyramid is based on fractional reserve banking. The banking system makes a promise to lenders: they may withdraw their funds at any time. But if even a small percentage of depositors do this in the absence of deposits made by others, the banking system faces a crisis. It has to call in loans. Businesses cannot pay off these loans. The banks stop making new loans. A wave of bankruptcies spreads through the economy. This produces a recession. It can pro-

22. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28:B.

duce a depression. Then the central bank steps in and buys assets in order to reflate the money supply. A new wave of inflation and debt begins.

In a debt-based society, the failure of repayment at the bottom—the banks—threatens the entire capital structure. From bottom to top, the inverted pyramid of debt collapses. Contracts written in terms of the older economic conditions become unenforceable. The enforcement of debt contracts leads only to universal bankruptcy. This, of course, reflects fallen man's legal condition before God.

The more extensive the economy's reliance on debt, the more devastating the collapse. The more widespread the use of money substitutes, the more deflationary the collapse. The more deflationary the collapse, the greater the shrinking of the division of labor. Society's wealth disappears when the economic output provided by the division of labor disappears. When contracts become unenforceable in the courts, the rule of law disappears if men are not self-governed and merciful.

Conclusion

The parable of the unjust steward reveals the reason why we are required by God to forgive others: we are forgiven by God. Their sins against us are ultimately sins against God. We are representatives of God, made in His image and adopted by His grace. This is point two of the biblical covenant model: representation. Point two also includes hierarchy. When we forgive the sinner in history for the sin, God forgives him in history for the sin. (We do not have the authority to forgive him in eternity.) If we receive forgiveness from God and then refuse to forgive, we are insisting that the unforgiven sinner owes his debt to us rather than to God. We thereby act on our own behalf, as if we had not been representatives of God. We insist on our autonomy.

Mercy is a positive sanction, but it implies a negative sanction. God's common grace in history implies a negative future sanction for continued disobedience. That is the message of this parable. The debtor's obligation accumulates. The threat of a demand for repayment hangs over him. Paul cited Proverbs 25:21–22: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20).²³ That is why we are to pray, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"

23. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

(Matt. 6:12).

The top priority in this parable is to obtain and retain our judicial status as forgiven sinners. This requires our acceptance of others who need forgiveness of debts of all kinds, including money. God has extended His kingdom in history through us. We have made loans, placing others in our debt. But this places them in God's debt. He forgives us; therefore, as His agents, we are to forgive those who owe God through us.

Does God's spiritual forgiveness mandate our economic forgiveness? If so, this would destroy all commercial lending. It would make impossible the allocation of risk to those entrepreneurs who want varying degrees of it, which is what commercial loans do. The text indicates that the forgiveness is like for like: God forgives us spiritually; we forgive others spiritually. If God forgives us an economic debt, such as an unpaid vow, then we are to do the same.

When we lend to those in need, our priority should not be economic profit. Someone has fallen on hard times. We help him now, so that others, by God's grace, will help us if this ever happens to us. Lending to the poor is like an insurance policy. But the context of this passage is desperate need, not consumer lending or commercial lending. It is the kind of relationship we have with God. He is not our partner; He is our master. In our relations with subordinates, we are to show mercy because God has shown mercy to us.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible (Matt. 19:16–26).

This is commonly referred to as the story of the rich young ruler. He was young (Matt. 19:20). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

The theocentric principle here is God's criteria for entry into the kingdom of heaven. This was the issue of sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.¹

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

A. Access to Eternal Life

God has established standards of entry into His kingdom. The Ten Commandments are the summary of these standards, Jesus told the enquirer. But there is another barrier to entry: faith in God rather than faith in riches. The previous section had dealt with the same theme: entry into the kingdom. Men must become as little children, Jesus said. That is, they must trust God with the same confidence that a child trusts his father. In His answer to the enquirer, Jesus amplified this principle. Those who trust in money have transgressed one of the standards of entry. They have substituted a rival faith.

The young man was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He understood something of the doctrine of the resurrection. He sought eternal life. Jesus then referred to the kingdom of heaven. The entry into eternal life takes place in history. The kingdom of heaven must have manifestations in history. What men do or fail to do in history, Christ implied, determines their inheritance.

Can men earn their way into heaven? The young man thought so: he had kept the commandments. Jesus showed him that he had more to do: sell his goods and give them to the poor. But this seems to make access to heaven a matter of good works. He implied that the young man had not done enough by keeping the commandments. He had to do more. Taken at face value, this passage teaches works religion: man can earn his salvation. Such a view of salvation is antithetical to biblical religion. Then why did Jesus not verbally challenge the man to re-think his religion? Why did He imply that the man could buy his way into heaven? Why did He tell the man to give away his money to the poor? Was this what is always required of those who would follow Jesus?

B. Trust Not in Riches

What was Jesus really telling this man? The parallel passage in Mark makes Jesus' position clearer: "And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24). David had said something similar a thousand years earlier: "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a

ransom for him” (Ps. 49:5–7).²

Jesus returned to this theme repeatedly in His parables and His dealings with rich men. Solomon had, too. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).³ The rich man trusts in his power to get wealth. He trusts in the creation. Moses warned against this: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).⁴ This is the sin of autonomy. It is the belief that man is the primary source of wealth.⁵ It is also the belief that this wealth is the coin of the realm in God’s kingdom. But it isn’t. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).⁶

The lure of wealth is a powerful lure. Wealth seems to offer to man the ability to buy the good things of life. Money is the most marketable commodity. It seems to be a surrogate for wealth. This outlook proclaims: “Anything can be bought; every man has his price.” Jesus warned that this is a false premise. So did David: “For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever” (Ps. 49:8).

The enquirer had not understood Jesus’ warning about the worship of God rather than mammon. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).⁷ The enquirer had not examined his own soul. He had not seen clearly regarding his faith. He still trusted in his riches.

What did his wealth buy him that was worth access to God’s kingdom? Wealth can buy many things: luxury, safety, fame, deference by others. But all of these are as fleeting as riches. Remove the wealth, and everything that wealth had bought disappears. *Mammon is a fickle god*. It leaves without warning, taking with it all that it had previously distributed.

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 54.

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 202), ch. 21.

5. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

6. Chapter 35.

7. Chapter 14.

C. Give to the Poor

“If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (v. 21). Jesus called this would-be disciple to a complete rejection of his former way of life. Why? Does He call all men to the same rejection? If not, why not?

He told the man to sell his wealth and give the money to the poor. But, to do this, he had to sell his goods to someone. His wealth was not to be burnt on a pyre; it was to be exchanged for a more liquid asset: money. Money can be handed out in discrete units, a little at a time. *The rich young man was to learn how to give money away.* Then he was to follow Jesus—not before.

This was a *two-fold transfer of wealth*: to those who bought it for money and to those who received the money. The rich young ruler was to become a *middleman* in the transfer of wealth. The more money he received from the sale of his wealth, the more money he could give away. He was to negotiate a top price from the buyers, and he was then to become a wise giver. *He was to become more skilled as an administrator of capital.* He was to put it to better use: service to God.

Others were allowed to buy his wealth. Did this mean that Jesus was condemning the buyers to eternal torment? Is wealth illegitimate? No. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁸ The question, then, is the context in which the wealth is held: man’s or God’s. *The theological issue is theonomy vs. autonomy.* To whose use is the wealth to be put? Does the owner see himself as a steward of God?

The rich young ruler had a problem. He was at a turning point in his life. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was held by means of a legal framework. He was under the authority of Rome. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was no safer than this hierarchy. A generation later, Rome would crush Israel’s political revolt. Most wealth owned by Jews would be destroyed by war and their subsequent dispersion by Rome. Unless he died young, he lived to see this great destruction of wealth. Mammon cannot be safely trusted.

The young man was beguiled by his possessions. Jesus offered him a pathway to clarity regarding his priorities, but he went away troubled.

Jesus asked him to become poor. Wandering around Judea with a

8. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

group of unemployed disciples was not a way of life preferred by most rich men. Matthew-Levi was an exception, but there were not many.⁹ Jesus called the young man into poverty as a way into the kingdom of God. This man's priorities were arranged differently from those required for faithful service in an era of definitive covenantal transition. He did not understand the times.

D. Hierarchies of Faith

"Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 23–24). This indicates that a rich man is rare in the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven operates in history. We enter it in history.

The disciples replied: "Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." Why did they ask this? There are few rich people in any population; Pareto's wealth-distribution curve assures this. If it didn't, the bell-shaped curve would. Jesus said more than once, "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16;¹⁰ 22:14). This was not a startling doctrine for Jews. (There were no gentiles in the kingdom during Jesus' ministry.) Why should the disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?" Just because a rich man cannot be saved, why should this raise any question about most men?

Jews expected victory in history. They did not believe they would be under foreign domination forever. They had read Deuteronomy 28:

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways" (Deut. 28:4–

9. Chapter 21.

10. Chapter 40.

9).¹¹

They expected earthly rewards at some future time. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 37:9). Yet here was Jesus telling them that these blessings would constitute a threat to Israel’s salvation. How could this be?

Jesus answered that, with God, all things are possible. That is, such salvation is abnormal but possible. Jesus’ point was clear: wealth is a great temptation. *Those who get wealthy risk being snared by the doctrine of autonomy.* The Old Covenant warned the rich man not to take advantage of the poor or to imagine that he was beyond the circumstances that afflict them.

Jesus’ answer indicated that wealth is a snare. Proverbs had said the same thing. “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).¹²

Autonomy’s lure is strong. Those who possess any special advantage that provides them with a barrier against life’s common burdens are tempted to regard themselves as beyond God’s negative sanctions. These advantages include wealth, power, beauty, and health. *But wealth is the most universally sought-after advantage, for it offers the broadest range of immunities life’s common burdens.* Of course, it adds new burdens. With an increase in the number of choices (wealth) comes an increase in responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).¹³

The message is clear: we should not expect to see many rich people subordinating themselves to God through the gospel. The rich are not willing to pay the price, namely, a transfer of their faith from wealth to Christ. Wealth seems to be under their control; Christ isn’t. Wealth extends their power; faith in Christ extends God’s dominion. They appear to be at the top of a hierarchy of wealth; not so with the kingdom of God. The rich man prefers to be at the top.

E. Continuity and Discontinuity in Jesus’ Teachings

Jesus did not break with the Old Covenant’s view of wealth and its

11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

12. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

13. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

inherent risks. *What made His teaching different was His lack of emphasis on the covenantal basis of corporate wealth.* There is not much in His teaching about the relationship between covenant-keeping and a society's accumulation of wealth. There are only occasional reaffirmations of the Old Covenant's system of corporate sanctions. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). This cites Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." *Jesus placed most of His emphasis on the idea of wealth as a snare to the individual rather than as a tool of dominion.* There is no doubt that this New Testament emphasis is overwhelmingly promotes the idea of great wealth as a risk to the soul.

There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates that economic growth as a goal for society is wrong. There is nothing wrong with reducing the number of poor people by increasing their productivity. Capital accumulation increases men's productivity. Better tools make men more productive. Personal thrift increases capital accumulation. Men have discovered no better way to increase the supply of capital than to allow investors to reap the fruits of their investments. The goal of greater personal wealth is the lure that increases per capita investment in a society. That which is dangerous to the soul—the quest for wealth—is also what reduces the number of poor as well as their degree of poverty. Not charity but thrift and wise investing are the secret of reduced poverty in society. *This crucial fact is not taught in the New Testament.* It is implied in the Old Testament, however, which teaches the legal and moral right of private ownership and the legitimacy of wealth. *When obeyed, the legal framework of the Mosaic Covenant will produce a capitalistic social order.*¹⁴

There are those who argue that Jesus did not adopt Old Testament standards. In fact, most Christians affirm this. But they affirm it selectively. At some point, they are forced to admit that sometimes He assumed the continuity of Mosaic standards. For example, conservatives¹⁵ insist that Jesus was not opposed to the free market, and was even favorable to it. Yet they also insist that He did not affirm a theocratic system of civil government, or any other political system. Liberals¹⁶ insist that He opposed both the free market and theocratic civil government. Trapped between the two are pietistic Christians who say

14. This is the most important conclusion of the 31 volumes in this commentary.

15. Those in the Scottish Whig tradition by way of Edmund Burke.

16. Those in the French Revolutionary tradition.

that Jesus was indifferent to social issues; He was concerned only with personal salvation. They can appeal to the obvious fact that He was as silent on the free market social order as He was on theocratic civil government. Why this silence? Because He implicitly accepted both? Because He implicitly opposed both? Because He implicitly accepted one but not the other? Or because He was indifferent to both?

Theonomists assume covenantal continuity in the absence of specific annulments or a change based on the end of Israel's status as the Promised Land of the priestly nation.¹⁷ So, theonomists insist that *Jesus accepted both the free market and theocratic civil government*, since the Mosaic Covenant mandated both, and there is nothing in the New Covenant that annuls either institutional arrangement. He did not break with Moses on either point. His emphasis on the spiritual danger of wealth also did not break with Moses. He just skipped over the legacy of the Old Covenant that affirmed the legitimacy of great wealth, with Abraham and Job as leading examples. This was a matter of emphasis. *The temporal emphases of the two testaments are different*. This does not mean that the testaments are in opposition. For instance, the New Testament teaches the doctrine of the resurrection; the Old Covenant mentions it: Daniel 13:1–3; Job 19:25–27. The two covenants are not in opposition regarding the resurrection. Jesus was far more concerned with the doctrine of the resurrection than the doctrine of economic growth.

The *personal* economic goal recommended by the Old Testament was middle-class wealth (Prov. 30:8–9).¹⁸ There is nothing in the New Testament that would call this goal into question. Paul wrote, citing the account of the manna (Ex. 16:18): “As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (II Cor. 8:15).¹⁹ But, in a world without manna from heaven, *the output sufficient to fill most men's stomachs will make some men rich*. Like the poor, Pareto's curve is with us always. *Output sufficient to feed all men will make some men very rich*. The question is: What will these rich men do with their wealth? Share it? Accumulate more of it? The rich young ruler had his answer straight from Jesus. He went away troubled.

17. Seed laws, land laws, and priestly laws. See Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion.

18. North, *God's Success Manual*, ch. 85.

19. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

F. Jesus' Priorities

The rich young ruler had a problem with the content of his faith. He trusted in what he thought he could do and had always done: keep all of God's commandments. Jesus showed him that his faith was in himself and therefore defective. His faith was leading him to eternal death. His law-keeping and his wealth had become his high walls. By challenging him to tear down the second of these two walls, Jesus forced him to reconsider the content of his faith. His problem was not his good works or his wealth; his problem was his belief in the spiritual efficacy of works religion. He could not earn eternal life.

To show to him how wrong he was, Jesus went to the heart of his faith: his wealth. He was a follower of mammon. What he had to do in order to gain eternal life was beyond his ability. What all men have to do to gain eternal life is beyond their ability. It is the task of the evangelist to identify whatever it is that an anxious enquirer cannot do or will not do for the sake of the prize: the good work that is just too much for him, the wall that he cannot climb over. The evangelist must then confront the enquirer with the existence of this wall, which is a barrier in between him and the eternal prize. Then the enquirer may be ready to hear the correct answer: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). How does a man deny himself? By affirming faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thou house" (Acts 16:31).

Jesus placed the attainment of personal wealth very low on any man's list of priorities—far lower than generosity to the poor. He placed charity to the poor as the basis of attaining wealth (Luke 6:38).²⁰ He also did not place national per capita economic growth on the list. Yet the second condition, economic growth, follows from the first: the attainment of riches by the few. Without rich men's willingness to save money and invest it in their quest for wealth, there can be no widespread reduction in poverty: *insufficient per capita capital*.

The third point follows from the first two. He emphasized personal charity, which ameliorates individual cases of poverty but does not automatically solve the problem of widespread poverty. Only economic growth does this, but economic growth is the product of systematic

20. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

investing by the richest 20% of the population. Many religions emphasize charity, but only in the West, where Christianity and especially Calvinist theology laid its economic foundations, has a two centuries-long period of compound economic growth occurred.²¹ Whether this can continue in the face of widespread apostasy, including debauchery and legalized abortion, remain to be seen.

Compared to eternal life, economic growth is a pale sanction, but this does not deny the moral legitimacy of economic growth. *Economic growth need not be a negative sanction.* John Wesley's refrain is valid: "Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."²² It was this outlook that moved Methodists in England and the United States out of grinding poverty into middle-class respectability in a little over a century, 1740 to 1860. But, by 1900, Methodist bishops had adopted theological liberalism. The history of the twentieth-century mainline denominations in the United States is evidence of the truth of Christ's warning to the rich young ruler. Better to be a Methodist layman in a wretched hut in 1740 than a Methodist theologian in a wretched seminary in the early twenty-first century.

The New Testament does not mention any corporate economic goal. The economic goal of the Old Testament was middle-class comfort for the covenanted nation. *Middle-class comfort for the masses takes generations of compound economic growth.* This was not achieved in any society until the twentieth century, during which Western Christianity went into spiritual decline.

Conclusion

The rich young ruler had a problem with the content of his faith. He trusted in what he thought he could do and had always done: keep all of God's commandments. Jesus showed him that his faith was in himself and therefore defective. His faith was leading him to eternal death. *His law-keeping and his wealth had become his high walls.* By challenging him to tear down the second of these two walls, Jesus challenged him to reconsider the content of his faith. The young man's problem was not his good works or his wealth; *his problem was his belief in the spiritual efficacy of works righteousness.* He could not earn eternal life.

21. Whether it can continue in the face of widespread apostasy, increasing debauchery, and legalized abortion remains to be seen.

22. Sermon 50 (1744): "The Use of Money."

To show to him how wrong he was, Jesus went to the heart of his faith: his wealth. He was a disciple of mammon. What he had to do in order to gain eternal life was beyond his ability. What all men have to do to gain eternal life is beyond their ability. It is the task of the evangelist to identify whatever it is that an anxious enquirer cannot do or will not do for the sake of the prize: the good work that is just too much for him, the wall that he cannot climb over. The evangelist must then confront the enquirer with the existence of this wall, which is a barrier in between him and the eternal prize. Then the enquirer may be ready to hear the correct answer: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). How does a man deny himself? By affirming his faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

The New Testament is hostile to the quest for tangible riches. Yet it is favorable, as is the Old Testament, to middle-class living. But to attain middle-class comfort for the masses, a few people will get rich. *Like the poor, the rich we shall always have with us.* But if the way to riches is by serving paying customers, as it is under free market capitalism, then *the greater the wealth of the rich minority, the less grinding will be the poverty of the poor* (Luke 8:18).²³ The problem is, when the poor have become less poor because wealth-seeking entrepreneurs have been allowed to get exceedingly rich, both the rich and the poor can fall into the trap: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."²⁴

The modern pietistic Protestant hymn is correct: "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold." But the theonomists' goal is better: "I'd rather have Jesus *and* silver and gold." So far, no society has achieved this. Without widespread conversions and widespread obedience to biblical law, no society can.

23. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 16.

24. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

HUNDREDFOLD GROWTH

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first (Matt. 19:27–30).

The theocentric focus of this passage was the name of Jesus: “for my name’s sake.” For His name’s sake, it is worth sacrificing everything we own. By this sacrifice, His followers will gain a huge return. This was the issue of expansion: point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Status: Thrones of Judgment

Peter’s question was in response to Jesus’ warning about how few rich men will enter the kingdom of heaven. Peter reminded Him that he and the other disciples had forsaken all, which included their families. They were not rich. He asked: “What’s in it for us?” He was looking for assurance of a positive sanction. Christ promised two. *First*, they would exercise authority. They would sit at 12 thrones alongside of Christ. They would judge the 12 tribes of Israel (v. 28). In Luke, we are given another account of this same promise. It relates to the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1988] 2012), ch. 5.

appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28–30). What did this mean? Why was this related to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper? The link was sanctions. The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament of judgment: self-judgment, church judgment, and God’s judgment.² *Second*, they would gain the kingdom. The Jews would lose it, He told them. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). Old Covenant Israel was coming to the end of the road. The church was about to inherit the kingdom-related promises of God. One aspect of this kingdom is the rendering of judgment. Jesus had already told them: “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:18).

The apostles, by bringing the *gospel of the kingdom* to Israel, were bringing a *covenant lawsuit* against Israel. Like the prophets before them, they would suffer persecution by the Jews because of this covenant lawsuit. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12). These were negative sanctions. This was not what Peter wanted to hear. What about the positive sanctions? Jesus told them that they would be agents of judgment against Israel. They would bring judgment against the Jews, who were bringing judgment against them. How would they do this? He did not say. He did not promise them that they would do this in heaven. This may have been His frame of reference, but then they would all have to die before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when judgment arrived.³ Jesus may have had in mind their preaching of the kingdom. This would be a means of bringing judgment. What He did say is that they would participate with Him in the rendering of judgment against the 12 tribes. The dozen apostles (minus Judas, plus Matthias) would replace the dozen tribes of Israel.⁴

2. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Cor. 11:28–30).

3. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

4. Levi, the priestly tribe, was replaced by the church. The priesthood ceased: no more animal sacrifices.

They would serve judicially as representative agents of the New Israel of God, the church.⁵

This was a major blessing. They would become the patriarchs of a new Israel. They would become founders, not in the sense of biology, but rather as forefathers. Their names would extend down through the ages.⁶ So few people are remembered in history that becoming part of the historical record of a civilization is generally regarded as a great honor. Fame ranks with money and power in the minds of most people: the desire not to be forgotten. Wealth is far easier to achieve than fame.

B. Inheritance: Multiplication

Exercising authority would be one positive sanction. Second, “every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (v. 29). They would receive a hundredfold. This is an image of great wealth.

What had they forfeited? Above all, their families. Also listed is land. This was the context of the promise of a hundredfold increase. This is confusing. If they paid for their time spent with Jesus by losing contact with their families, or possibly losing the trust of their families, how could they be repaid a hundredfold? With money? How much money? How can anyone place a market value on lost family life? In any case, what income? Not monetary income from wandering the roads of Judea.

The context indicates the multiplication of families. The apostles had lost those things closely associated with family life. They would gain access to a new family inheritance. Their efforts in spreading the gospel of the kingdom would lead to a new family: the family of God. *A new era of mass adoption by God was at hand.* The founders of the church would be welcomed into households everywhere. They would become founders of a new family, a family analogous to the family of Old Covenant Israel.

5. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

6. “Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:14-16). “And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

They would be involved in the burial of the old family of God. Israel's inheritance would come to them as the nearest of kin. "And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses" (Num. 27:11). Old Covenant Israel would die without leaving biological heirs. The covenantal heirs would inherit.

The inheritance of Old Covenant Israel would soon pass to the church. The patriarchs of the church would become heirs of all of Israel's promises. Through them, this inheritance would pass to the adopted children of God. The agents of this adoption were the apostles. *They would receive the inheritance of Israel as trustees.*

This did not necessarily mean that they would receive the inheritance in history. The language of their judging Israel on thrones of glory pointed to the opposite: their deaths, one by one, prior to the fall of Jerusalem. But inheritance is covenantal. It is *inheritance by confession*. Their confessional heirs would inherit the promises. In this sense, the apostles would inherit in the name of their heirs. They would inherit definitively in history, though not finally.

C. The First Shall Be Last

"But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." This cryptic statement appears repeatedly in Matthew's gospel. It is quoted by Christians far more widely than it is understood. At least two very different interpretations are possible, given the context of this passage. One flows from what Jesus had just said. The other makes sense because of what Jesus would say next.

The immediately preceding context indicates that Jesus was talking about the apostles. Peter had asked the question: "What shall we have?" The question regarding Jesus' discussion of first and last is this: In relation to whom, future converts to the faith or the Jews? Which did Jesus have in mind? I will examine both possibilities.

As in English, "first" and "last" in Greek can refer to either status or sequence. I will examine both possibilities.

1. The Apostles and Future Converts

The context of Jesus' statement reflects both interpretations of "first" and "last": status and inheritance. Jesus had spoken to them of judging on 12 thrones: judicial status. He had also spoken of a hun-

dredfold inheritance. The preceding context—though not the subsequent context—indicates that He was speaking of their personal futures, not the future of Christians in general. But was He? It is possible to make a case for such a corporate view.

Consider “first” and “last” in terms of status. “But many that are first [in status] shall be last [in status]; and the last [in status] shall be first [in status].” This makes no sense. The apostles would judge Israel. This meant that they would be first in status. They would occupy 12 thrones “when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory” (v. 28). Taken literally, this means that they would die prior to the fall of Jerusalem. James was executed in A.D. 62.⁷ We do not know about the others. Tradition says that John survived until the 90’s, but this is based on a late dating of the Book of Revelation. This late dating is difficult to defend. The book was probably written in A.D. 64 or 65.⁸

Consider “first” and “last” in terms of inheritance. “But many that are first [to inherit] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [to inherit] shall be first [to inherit].” This also makes no sense. Those who died before Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70 would not see their inheritance in history. Those who came later would receive the visible inheritance, yet they were not the first to inherit. The apostles were first. Jesus said so. This was their reward for following Him. This was His answer to Peter’s question.

What about a combination of status and inheritance? “But many that are first [in status] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [in status] shall be first [to inherit].” The apostles were clearly first in status. This was their reward for being the first to forsake all and follow Jesus. But to exercise this honor as judges on thrones, they would either have to die prior to the fall of Jerusalem—heavenly thrones, which seems likely—or perish in the terrible crisis, or escape it by fleeing the city. The first view is more likely: rendering final judgment against Old Covenant Israel from heaven. They would not be the historical recipients of the final inheritance. Rather, they would administer it from heaven. Conversely, the first to receive Israel’s covenantal inheritance—those Christians who survived Jerusalem’s Great Tribulation in A.D. 70⁹—would be last in status. They would become the forgotten generation.

7. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D’Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 47. They cited Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX: 197–203.

8. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: The Date of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/kgbjf>)

9. Chilton, *Great Tribulation*.

So it was. Nothing written survives of the generation immediately following the fall of Jerusalem: the generation that inherited. The earliest surviving writings of the early church are thought to be from the period of the 90's, over two decades after the fall of Jerusalem. *There would be no remembrance for members of the first generation who inherited.* All we know is that the church survived the Roman wars in Palestine. Church history records that the Jerusalem church fled to the town of Pella, a gentile city, but this information comes from Eusebius, who wrote in A.D. 325.¹⁰ We know almost nothing about the church in the period of the final inheritance.

Inheritance, like sanctification,¹¹ is definitive, progressive, and final. The apostles received the definitive inheritance. Christ promised it to them. Their work for a generation in bringing the covenant lawsuit against Israel served as the legal basis of the transfer of the inheritance from Israel to the church. This was a progressive inheritance. It took a generation. It involved a war between the false heirs and the true heirs. When the persecutions began, the Jerusalem church fled; only the apostles remained behind to proclaim the covenant lawsuit (Acts 8:1). The apostles died before the final transfer was visible. *They were first in inheriting but last in receiving.* They were like the three patriarchs of Israel and the sons of Jacob: the promise of inheritance in the land had come definitively to Abraham, but none of them lived to see it.

This interpretation places the hundredfold inheritance in the possession of the apostles—an inheritance exercised by faith, not by sight. They became the church's forefathers. This was their reward, along with the reward of sitting on 12 thrones. But if we restrict this promise of hundredfold inheritance to the apostles, this does not answer the question of the inheritance for Christians throughout history. Are we not also participants in the great inheritance? Surely we all "shall inherit everlasting life." Why not also the inheritance? The second interpretation broadens this inheritance.

2. *The Apostles and Israel*

The second interpretation makes sense in the light of what Jesus said in the next exposition: "So the last shall be first, and the first last:

10. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Chap. V.

11. John Murray, "Sanctification," *Collected writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

for many be called, but few chosen” (Matt. 20:16). In the parable of the householder who goes into the public square to hire workers throughout the day, paying them all a penny per day, the contrast is between the group that worked all day and those groups that arrived throughout the day. The earliest workers complained to the employer that he had made the late-comers equal to them, even though the former had worked the whole day. They thought they deserved more, since they had worked longer.¹² The context of the parable indicates that the complainers were the Jews. Jesus was prophesying that they would resent the fact that God was about to make an offer to the gentiles: equal access to the New Covenant kingdom and also equal payment at the end of the kingdom in history, i.e., eternal life. The Jews would not be given any special consideration in the kingdom for their years of prior service. Furthermore, entrance into heaven would not be based on years of service.

If Jesus’ statement here of the first-last dichotomy is interpreted in terms of the next parable, then the comparison is not between the apostles and future converts, but between the apostles and members of Old Covenant Israel, whom the apostles would judge in A.D. 70 from thrones in heaven. The “first” in this context is *Old Covenant Israel*. The “last” is the predominantly *gentile church*, which was represented judicially by the apostles. The text would therefore read: “But many that are [chronologically] first [Israel] shall be last [to enter the New Covenant kingdom]; and the last [the church] shall be first [to enter the New Covenant kingdom].”

Most Jews, hearing of this, would resent it. Jews had long regarded themselves as first in terms of status because they were chronologically first in terms of God’s calling. But what they ignored was their history of rebellion, which would soon culminate in the crucifixion of Christ. Old Covenant Israel would continue to reject the message of the disciples. The nation would suffer the consequences. “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city” (Matt. 10:14–15). “But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which

12. Chapter 40.

have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:22–24).

The inheritance here is the inheritance of the kingdom throughout history, not just in the first century. The Jews will remain as would-be heirs. They will inherit their share of the kingdom only by being grafted into the church (Rom. 11),¹³ which grants access on the same terms, with the same rewards, to all men. They will enter the kingdom as lawful heirs, but they will enter last. They came into the Old Covenant church first, but this unique honor does not carry into the New Covenant. They would gain access to the kingdom as everyone else does: through the church.

3. A General Promise

Jesus told them, "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." This was not a promise to the apostles only, but to Christians in general. Their multiplication through time will encompass the whole earth. The church's progressive fulfillment of the Great Commission will extend the dominion covenant to the uttermost limits.¹⁴

The second interpretation—apostles (first) and Israel (last)—seems more consistent with this interpretation of the promise. *The promise is to every generation*. He who forsakes all to follow Christ is adopted into a confessional family. He gains his inheritance through his brethren. The division of labor increases as the body of Christ expands (Rom. 12;¹⁵ I Cor. 12¹⁶). This increase in the division of labor increases every member's productivity and wealth, and also the wealth of those outside the church through common grace.¹⁷ Even the covenant-breaking dogs under the table will feast on the abundance of crumbs.

13. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

14. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

15. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

16. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

17. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

This is why Paul could write of the future conversion of the Jews: “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?” (Rom. 11:11–12). When the gentile church achieves something worth being jealous of—the widespread extension of God’s kingdom in history—the Jews will join.

Conclusion

The promise of multiplication had to do with inheritance. Whatever the apostles had already lost and would continue to lose as disciples of Christ, they would regain a hundredfold through their spiritual heirs. The church down through history constitutes their inheritance. They would have lost their inheritance anyway, had they remained loyal to Old Covenant Israel, whose time had come. The transfer of Israel’s inheritance—the kingdom of God—was at hand. The apostles would become the original trustees in the transfer of the inheritance to their covenantal heirs. As forefathers, they would see their heirs and their heirs’ wealth multiplied. They would see this in history only by the eyes of faith, just as Abraham had seen his inheritance.¹⁸ But the transfer was as secure as Abraham’s had been. They had Christ’s word. They could trust Him.

This promise of inheritance extends to every generation. Adoption into the church brings every Christian into covenantal union with others of the same confession. Their inheritance is the whole earth.¹⁹ This inheritance is open to everyone who follows Christ. The expansion of this inheritance is achieved through the extension of God’s kingdom throughout history: the Great Commission.

This places top priority on the preaching of the gospel. The apostles’ task is our task, too: to work for the multiplication of heirs through adoption by God. The task in proclaiming the gospel was two-

18. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:8–10).

19. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

fold, for the covenant's sanctions are two-fold: blessing and cursing, inheritance and disinheritance. The apostles would gain their inheritance through their covenantal heirs. This would require the disinheritance of Old Covenant Israel, which they would oversee from the 12 thrones.

THE RIGHTS OF OWNERSHIP

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen (Matt. 20:1–16).

The theocentric principle here was the sovereignty of God in choosing who is to be redeemed and who is not. The passage dealt with stewardship: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder

A. The Right of Voluntary Contract

This is one of Jesus' pocketbook parables. Most people understand the affairs of the marketplace far better than they understand theology. Jesus used pocketbook parables to communicate fundamental theological truths.

The householder had authority over his vineyard. He had the right to offer to hire whomever he pleased. No one had to accept his offer. The laborers were sovereign over their decision to accept his offer or reject it. Between the householder and a laborer, a bargain was possible.

The householder's primary goal was to care for his vineyard. This is an extension of God's assignment to Adam: to dress and defend the garden. He sought assistance in this task. He made use of the division of labor. He could not do everything that needed to be done. So, he went into the marketplace to hire workers. He went out early in the morning. He found men who were willing to work. He offered them a penny a day. They accepted his offer and headed for the vineyard. Then he went out at the third hour (nine in the morning by Roman standards).² He found other men standing idle. This time, he offered work on a different basis: "whatsoever is right I will give you" (v. 4). They trusted him, accepted the offer, and headed for the fields. He repeated this three hours later and six hours later. At the eleventh hour—late in the day—he did it again. "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." They accepted. They trusted him. Then came the time of payment. He faithfully followed the Mosaic law. He paid them on the day of their labor. "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning" (Lev. 19:13).³ He abided by God's law. He was a just man.

He told his steward, "Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made

Spring, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. The sixth hour after sunrise in the Roman calendar was noon. The length of the hour varied according to the seasons.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 13.

them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.” He had promised the early laborers a fixed wage. He paid them what he had promised. He had promised the others a fair wage. He paid them what he had paid the full-day laborers. Surely this was fair to the part-timers. But the full-day laborers begin to complain as soon as they received their pay. “This is unfair.” They had worked so much longer. They deserved more. So they said.

The employer’s answer rested on the moral validity of contracts. “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” They had been paid what he had promised. What was the moral basis of their complaint?

B. Imperfect Knowledge and Risk

Earlier that morning, they had not known that there was going to be employment later in the day for a full day’s wages. They had wanted employment at the wage offered. He had offered it to them. The arrangement was perceived by employer and employees as mutually beneficial. The workers went to work. They received what they had been promised. No one had been cheated. The employer had not known that he would hire more people later in the day. Even if he had known, he had no moral obligation, and surely no legal obligation, to reveal this to the early workers.

Those who came later were more trusting of the employer. He had not said exactly what he would be paid. They would be paid what was right. They agreed to this verbal contract. They would not have an enforceable contract in any court if he paid them too little—too little from their point of view. Nevertheless, they decided that he was a righteous man who would not cheat them. They were proven correct at the end of the day.

The early workers had borne less risk. They had an enforceable contract. The later workers bore more risk. They did not have a specific contract. When men bear greater risk, they seek a higher rate of return to compensate them for the extra risk. The men who had gone to work early received a lower hourly rate of compensation, but they had borne less risk. The others received a higher hourly rate, but they had borne greater risk. There was nothing inherently out of order with the respective pay scales.

The parable ends with final payment. This parable has as its focus the entire history of the kingdom of God. The employer's final payment symbolizes final judgment. There would not be work available the next day. Had there been another day of work, cunning workers would have put off going into the marketplace until the afternoon, hoping to reap a full day's wages for a partial day's work. But the parable is not about second chances. The laborers in this parable did not have advanced information on the outcome of everyone's efforts. They had only a promise: a penny (early comers) or "what is right" (late comers).

The parable is not about long-term labor-management relations. It is about the kingdom of God in history. Men make decisions about what they can expect from God for their obedience. They think about the risk-reward ratio of their decisions. The early morning workers compared the risk of nonpayment vs. payment. They also compared expected wages with the likelihood of better employment offers later in the day. They concluded that a day of work in the vineyard was the best available offer. They did not have information about the employer's previous payment practices.

Those who came into the fields later did not have specific information about their pay. They could not spread the word to other workers that they were being paid a penny for less time in the fields. That might have created a walk-out on the part of the early workers. Only at the end of the day did they all receive information about comparative hourly rates of pay. By then, their work was completed.

God comes to every man, whether late in his life or early, and offers to pay what is right. Some men trust Him; others do not. For those who truly love their kingdom work, it matters little who gets paid what, just so long as they remain in favor with the Employer. The opportunity to work is what matters most to them. If they were recruited early, so much the better: they had more time to serve God.

C. False Expectations

The parable speaks of groups of workers. They are grouped by the time of day at which they were recruited. There is a collective aspect of this hiring process. It is not just a person-by-person recruiting process. It is this collective aspect that reveals what the parable is really about: Jews and groups of gentiles.

The workers who had toiled through the day had expected a penny

for their efforts. But then came the time of payment. The paymaster eventually paid the early workers a penny, but he did not pay them first. He began with the latest comers and moved backward. None of the late comers who had arrived at the ninth hour complained about the pay given to the eleventh-hour arrivals. None of those who had arrived at the sixth hour or third hour complained.

As the pennies were handed out, the earliest comers may have grown worried. Each worker was being paid a penny, no matter how long he had toiled. Would the original contract still apply to them? Or would it be revised at the last moment? Doubt must have spread among the members of the first group, as each group was paid. What was going on here? Everyone was being paid the same. Yet no one was complaining. The third-hour arrivals had worked almost a full day, yet they did not complain. This was very strange. Why were they silent? This pay schedule was clearly unfair. But the earliest comers did not speak up in protest until their turn came, and each received his penny. They did not risk protesting until it was clear that their contract would not be revised upward. Then they complained bitterly. “Thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.”

Equality. That was what bothered them. Not the money as such, but the equality it implied. It was all right with them that the others had been treated as equals to each other, no matter how early or late they went to work. But why should any of these late comers be regarded as the equals of the earliest comers? Yes, all the other late comers deserved a penny, no matter when they arrived on the job. But the earliest workers thought they deserved more. It did not matter what they had agreed to. The fact that late comers were being paid a penny made the early comers resentful. They were somehow being cheated—not contractually but morally. They knew they deserved more. When, at the end of the day’s labor, all of the workers were paid the same, the early comers could not contain their anger at the employer.

It is obvious who the complainers were in this parable: the Jews. Jesus made it plain in this parable that the final reward—access to heaven—would be handed out equally to all those who had worked in the vineyard. *This was clearly a matter of mercy to the gentiles.* The same reward would be obtained by all, irrespective of the time of day they arrived on the scene. All of the late arrivals accepted this, but the original workers did not. There should have been something extra for

them, they believed.

The employer told them otherwise. “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” Their eye was intensely evil. *They deeply resented the grace shown by the employer to the other employees.* It made the late comers appeal equal to the original men in the fields. This equality led them to protest. They were deeply opposed to the idea that the employer’s grace was the basis of their income. They believed that they had a legal claim on the employer beyond the contract. They had earned their wages fair and square, unlike the late comers.

D. Few Are Chosen

Jesus said, “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (v. 20). Who had been called? All of the unemployed workers had been called. All those who responded to the call had been chosen to work. Then what did Jesus mean about few being chosen? Chosen for what? It is clear: eternal life.

The payment was the same for all. This has to refer to payment at the end of the day, i.e., final judgment. There would be no tomorrow. This time frame is history. They had all worked. They were all paid the same. The first ones to go to work were the last to be paid. The first nation to go to work in God’s Old Covenant kingdom was Israel. The parable warned the Jews that those who would arrive later—the gentiles—would be paid the same as the Jews, who had arrived first.

The Jews had long been told about what covenant-keepers would receive: the earth. “What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 25:12–13). “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 37:9). The basis of this inheritance is ethics, not race or nationalism. There had never been any doubt about this on God’s part. But the Jews misinterpreted this promise. They saw it in terms of nationalism. The victory would go to Israel. Gentiles could gain a share of this by becoming Jews, but access to the kingdom would always be through Israel. Israel would always have priority.

Not so, Jesus warned in this parable. Access to God’s kingdom is always by God’s grace. God would invite other groups throughout his-

tory, Jesus said. Nation by nation, gentiles would enter the kingdom. Late arrivals would gain the same reward: eternal inheritance.

In the parable, the late arrivals were paid first. The earliest arrivals did not know for sure that they would be paid the same amount. This parable made it clear: the Jews would be paid the same. The gentiles had not yet been invited into the kingdom at the time that Jesus gave this parable, but they soon would be. The sovereignty of God is the basis of who gets chosen. God had called the Jews, but they would soon lose title to the kingdom. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). They would no longer be first in terms of status. Jesus knew their hearts. He knew God’s plan. *They would not accept final payment—salvation—on the basis of equality with the gentiles.* Many Jews were being called, but few would be chosen.

Jesus understood the pride of the Jews. Because they had been working longer, they thought they should be paid more. They wanted eternal life, plus something more, presumably status. Jesus’ previous lesson indicated that the plus—status—would go to the apostles, who would sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28).⁴ Jews and their representatives would be subordinate in the kingdom to the founders of the church.

This parable was a warning to the Jews. If they objected in advance to the payment offered for participation in the kingdom, they would not enter the kingdom. The earliest workers in the parable had not been told that others would come later, work shorter hours, and be paid the same. But the Jews were now being told this. The complaining workers of the parable clearly would not have accepted their jobs on these terms. Jesus warned them: you had better accept payment on God’s terms. The New Covenant would not favor any group, He said. Each group would have to accept its equality of legal status, i.e., judicially saved by grace.

When Christ said that many are called but few are chosen, He was referring to two groups, Old Covenant Israel and the gentiles. He was not referring people in general. He was not speaking of the percentages of people brought to saving faith in every generation in relation to the general population.⁵ He was referring to the percentage of Jews

4. Chapter 39.

5. This passage is not a valid proof text for amillennialists or premillennialists who would use it against postmillennialists.

who would enter the kingdom in the long period prior to their eschatological grafting in.⁶ In this parable, all of the late comers—the gentiles—gratefully accepted their pay. It was the original workers who complained. The employer asked: “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” This was what Christ was asking the Jews. Were they going to interpret God’s looming act of grace to the gentiles as something evil because the gentiles would arrive in the kingdom later than the Jews had? Were the Jews going to reject the offer of eternal life because the same offer would soon be made to the gentiles? In the parable, Christ did not answer the question, but He made it clear that the morning workers resented equality with the late comers. The implication was that they would never have accepted the job on this basis. Many are called, but few are chosen.

The reference to groups of workers symbolizes nations. The Jews constituted one nation. Gentile nations would also come into the kingdom. This parable is not exclusively about individuals; it is also about groups. The Jewish nation was one group among many. This was the stumbling stone of Jesus’ message.

It is clear that the parable is about salvation: payment at the end of the day. All of the workers will be paid the same, Jesus said. This has to refer to eternal salvation. But isn’t eternal salvation strictly individual? Not according to the Bible. God brings nations into eternity. “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9–10). “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night

6. “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?” (Rom. 11:23–24). Cf. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1864] 1950), p. 365; Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Mac Dill Air Force Base, Florida: MacDonald Pub. Co., [1839] 1958), pp. 632–33; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), II, pp. 65–103.

there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it” (Rev. 21:23–26). God deals eternally with men as they lived in history: members of large groups. The equal ultimacy of the one and the many in the Trinity will be reflected in humanity’s condition in eternity, just as it is in history. Only in hell and the lake of fire will individualism be absolute: God’s judgment on covenant-breakers’ self-professed autonomy.

This parable deals with nations or peoples: Jews and gentiles. Jesus said that gentile nations will come into the kingdom over time. He was warning the Jews: accept this arrangement or have the kingdom removed from you. They did not heed His warning. So, He removed the kingdom from them. The gentiles became the heirs.

E. The Owner’s Rights

The employer asked the ungrateful workers, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” (15a). Few verses in the Bible more eloquently defend the principle of private ownership. This parable is about God’s sovereignty in inviting gentiles and Jews on equal terms to participate in the New Covenant kingdom. But its language defending this doctrine of God’s sovereignty is not theological; it is judicial. The employer affirms his legal right to dispose of his own property as he sees fit.

This answer was intended to confound Jesus’ critics. It is God’s right to invite anyone He chooses into His kingdom. It is His right to grant to gentile converts access to the kingdom on exactly the same judicial basis that He grants it to Jews. The first to gain title to the New Covenant kingdom will be the gentiles, Jesus told the Jews. Paul made this even clearer in Romans 11.⁷

In the interim period when both covenants were in force, before the deaths of the apostles, Old Covenant Israel was given equal access to the kingdom. The kingdom was definitively transferred to the church with Christ’s resurrection (Matt. 28:18–20). It was progressively transferred after Pentecost. In A.D. 70, the kingdom was finally taken from the Jews and transferred to a new nation, the church. After the fall of Jerusalem, Old Covenant Israel ceased to exist. Rabbinic Judaism replaced it: the triumph of the Pharisees over the Sadducees, who had been associated with temple sacrifices. Herbert Danby, whose

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

English translation of the Mishnah is still considered authoritative by the scholarly world, both Jewish and gentile, commented on the undisputed triumph of the Pharisees after the fall of Jerusalem (which lives on as Orthodox Judaism): "Until the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70 they had counted as one only among the schools of thought which played a part in Jewish national and religious life; after the Destruction they took the position, naturally and almost immediately, of sole and undisputed leaders of such Jewish life as survived. Judaism as it has continued since is, if not their creation, at least a faith and a religious institution largely of their fashioning; and the Mishnah is the authoritative record of their labour."⁸

This parable teaches that the authority of the owner over the use of his property is analogous to the authority of God over the terms of salvation. This parable is a therefore stumbling block for every defender of socialism, communism, fascism, and the Keynesian economy. This parable sets forth a judicial principle of individual ownership and contract labor that leads to an inescapable conclusion: *the modern welfare state is biblically illegitimate*. Critics of biblical economics who argue that the Old Testament may have laid down laws that will produce a free market economy, but the New Testament does not, have steadfastly refused to comment on this parable.

Conclusion

When the parable says many are called but few are chosen, it refers to the Jewish nation. When it says that the first shall be last, it refers to the Jewish nation. The groups of workers in the parable came into the field at different times. Members of each group were paid at the same time. The later arrivals were paid first, from the latest to the earliest. The first nation—the Jews—was paid last. Workers were also paid the same.

This parable asserts the sovereignty of God in establishing the terms of access to the kingdom of God and payment for participation. It does so by invoking the right of property owners to do as they please with their property. It affirms the right of voluntary contracts between employers and employees. It defends the private property order against those who think that some higher principle of justice should override the terms of a labor contract. Occasionally, the Bible reveals

8. Herbert Danby, Introduction, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

such principles, such as the requirement that employers pay their employees no later than the end of the working day (Lev. 19:13).⁹ The Bible informs us of such exceptions to the sovereignty of contracts. Disgruntled workers or their political and academic spokesmen are not the source of authoritative information on the nature of contracts.

The top priorities set forth in this parable are faithful adherence to contracts and righteous dealing with others. An employer is allowed to give more to a worker than the worker expects. The employer is not to be criticized by those workers who receive what they had previously agreed to.

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 13.

41

THE PRINCIPLE OF SERVICE

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25–28).

Jesus announced the same principle later in His ministry: “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:11–12). The theocentric principle undergirding this principle of rulership is the need for a ransom payment to God. God’s wrath must be placated. Someone must pay. This was the issue of servitude: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Jesus Paid It All

Jesus identified Himself as the one who would pay this ransom on behalf of man. For paying this price, God the Father granted Jesus absolute power. “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18b). This was God’s gift to Jesus. His sacrificial death led to His glorification in history.

Jesus gained absolute power over history, not solely in His status as God, but also in His status as human. He had possessed absolute power prior to His incarnation, but not in His status as human. To achieve this on man’s behalf, He had to humble Himself in His status

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

as God. Paul wrote: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5–11).²

What God did, covenant-keeping men must imitate. To achieve dominion in history, they must subordinate themselves to God. The evidence of this subordination is their service to other men. They must become servants.

B. Dominion Through Service: Covenantal

Jesus here made it plain that *dominion is a legitimate goal*. This has to mean dominion over others, i.e., holding an office. God has placed man over the creation (Gen. 1:26–28).³ Some men are placed legally over other men. This is the doctrine of judicial representation—also an aspect of point two. The question is: What are the legitimate means of attaining dominion?

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

1. *Military Command*

We begin, as Jesus did, with a description of ecclesiastically illegitimate means. He said that the princes of the gentiles exercise authority over their subordinates. This means that they issue commands, and these commands must be followed. Those who refuse to obey necessarily risk the pain of negative sanctions. This system of rule requires a top-down chain of command. This is the kind of authority that Jesus exercised over sickness. When the Roman centurion described his own authority over his troops as analogous Jesus' authority over illness, Jesus praised this confession of faith. He healed the man's servant from a distance, which the centurion had affirmed that He could do, so great was His authority (Matt. 8:8–10).

This form of military command is not the model for the church's government. The military is a subset of civil government. The military serves the nation. Officers serve the nation best by placing at risk their lives and the lives of their men. Yet even here, the successful leader places his men's interests above his own. He protects his men's lives before he protects his career. He obeys orders that place his men at extreme risk, not to advance his career, but to serve as a model for his men. A battle plan sometimes involves the deliberate sacrifice of some units. Even here, the Western military tradition encourages volunteerism: high-risk operations are very often staffed by volunteers or special forces.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples in their capacity as church members. He was not speaking to a group of soldiers. The principle of leadership that He laid down here is not appropriate for the army, whose task, as one officer has put it, is "to kill people and break things." Leaders in the church are supposed to be servants, not military commanders. The proper pathway to authority in the church is the way of service. Paul made this clear in his first epistle to Timothy. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (I Tim. 3:2–4).⁴ The person so described is self-sacrificing.

That this is the avenue to ecclesiastical authority is not intuitively

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

obvious. The exercise of power is the more common avenue to public greatness. The strong man compels obedience. He also rewards it. He rules by means of sanctions, positive and negative. But how is this different from authority in the church? The distinction is not easy to state. For example, we can say that the way to authority in the church is through service to those without any power, but this is not true in a church where members vote. Members have sanctions to impose. They vote to hire or fire a pastor. They vote for officers. If a man's goal is high office, the favor of those possessing these sanctions is surely valuable to him. Similarly, in the worldly quest for power, men serve those who possess greater power. They subordinate themselves to those who can reward them. But church members who vote can also reward others with leadership positions. Those seeking authority do subordinate themselves to those with the votes. Where is the distinction between church authority and other forms of authority? What did Jesus mean? "But it shall not be so among you."

2. Service Unto Death

Christ's service was service unto death. This places His service beyond the ability of men to repay. He did not die to placate men. He died to placate God. He subordinated Himself to evil men in history in order to liberate men from sin and death.

Service in the church is to be analogous. The legitimate road to dominion is through service to those who cannot repay. God will raise up such a servant to a position of leadership. Yet in the modern church where members vote, almost everyone can repay. This is also true in civil government. To understand what Jesus was getting at, we must consider His era.

In the gentile world in Jesus' day, democracy was a relic of the past. Rome had moved from a republic to an empire under Caesar Augustus in the generation before Jesus' birth. The trappings of representative government were still visible, but not the substance. To gain and hold power, men had to seek favor with members of the oligarchy that held power. The people could not grant political office or withhold it from those above them. There was no public veto over the affairs of state. Power was granted from above.

3. Ecclesiastical Office

The church reflected this hierarchy. When it came time to replace

Judas, the eleven apostles made the decision regarding who would be the two candidates. Then they turned it over to God. "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23–26). On what basis did the apostles narrow the list of candidates? The text does not say. But we know what it was from Jesus' words: those in authority decided in terms of the service of the two men. The standard was not service to the apostles, but service to the congregation.

Those with power in the church should heed Christ's words. They must use service to others than themselves as the criterion for screening the candidates for high office. It is clear from the passage in Acts that democracy was not part of the procedure. They used the casting of lots to allow God to make the final decision. This practice had to be replaced in A.D. 70: the fall of Jerusalem, when judicially authoritative divine revelation ceased.

Then to what extent is the Book of Acts a legitimate model for today? Hierarchy has not been annulled. How do Jesus' words apply to church hierarchy? First, there must be a screening procedure. The standard of service to others must be applied by those who are not being served. The screening committee must not become self-serving. It must not choose its successors based on service to the personal interests of members of the hierarchy. Committee members must be able to perceive that a potential candidate is active in his service to the members.

Second, there must be competition. There must be more than one candidate for each office. The screening committee can and must apply the criteria, but it must not assume that only one person is capable of holding office. This assumes too much wisdom on the part of a committee. Committees are rarely creative. They function best as naysayers. They veto bad ideas. They should decide only what things in general should be done and not done, and to hire and fire the senior officer. Implementation must be left to individuals who answer to the committee.

Third, there must be third-party sanctions. Someone other than the screening committee must have the final decision. In the case in

Acts, God was the third party. *To lodge final authority in the representative body is to create an implicit tyranny.* The representatives should always face a veto by those represented. As in the case of a committee, the large body that comprises those represented cannot devise and implement specific policies. They covenant with each other in a mutual quest of general goals. Then they choose who will lead them. But they cannot escape responsibility before God. If their leaders fall, they fall (Lev. 4).⁵

The gentiles served those above them. Obedience to an ever-more narrow hierarchy was the way to power. Rulership was a matter of coercion: issuing orders to those below. The authority to issue orders was seen as the great prize. Jesus announced a different system of hierarchy: the principle of servanthood. Instead of issuing orders to those beneath, the ruler is to serve them. Coercion is thereby minimized.

G. Servants' Rights

Men pervert this rule when they seek leadership roles by serving only those who can repay them with the robes of authority. They imitate rebellious Absalom, who stood in the city's gates and promised justice to all men.⁶ They pretend to serve. They flatter those served in a strategy of gaining the power to issue orders.

How can those served protect themselves? First, by not consenting to a system of administrative rule. They must keep church government weak. All government is a system of hierarchy, but the biblical model for church and state (but not family) is a bottom-up hierarchy. Rulers are judges who hear disputes (Ex. 18).⁷ They are not to issue orders that do not arise from either the formal settling of disputes or from the

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

6. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (II Sam. 15:2–6).

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

application of God's Bible-revealed law. Court decisions can become precedents. Precedents can be codified. Law books summarize court decisions. But the idea of a legislature that issues new laws by fiat is contrary to the principle of the appeals court.

Second, those served must exercise judicial sanctions from time to time. They must decide who will rule over them. In doing so, they exercise a veto over the decisions of the representative body, either directly or indirectly.

Third, they must decide whether to remain in covenant with a local congregation. Competition among congregations is as good a thing as competition among candidates for church office. Servants should be allowed to vote with their feet. Original sin teaches that men cannot be trusted with unilateral power. If power is exercised only downward, the result is tyranny. If a self-appointing hierarchy determines the distribution of the inheritance, those who provide the funding should reduce that inheritance by transferring their membership and their tithes.

D. Dominion Through Service: Free Market

The free market order is based on a principle of service analogous to the one that Jesus set forth as binding in the church. The producer must serve the customer if he wishes to maximize his return. He must act in the present as a representative of future customers. He must forecast what they will be willing and able to pay in the future. Then he must enter the market for production goods. He must buy or rent them, restructure them, store them, advertise them, and deliver them to paying customers. If he misforecasts, he will produce losses. If he forecasts correctly, he will produce profits.⁸

Customers are legally sovereign over their assets. The customer decides whether or not to buy an item offered for sale. The seller has no legal compulsion over him in a free market economy. The seller has a legal claim on his own products, but he does not have a legal claim on the customer's money. The seller of goods is legally sovereign over what he owns, just as the potential customer is legally sovereign over what he owns. But the customer is economically sovereign. Why? Because he possesses the most marketable asset: money. The seller owns a specialized asset. It has a much narrower market. There are far fewer

8. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

people rushing to give him money in exchange for his asset than there are sellers who are pursuing customers for their money. The customers, because they own money, are economically sovereign.

In rare instances, the producer is sovereign. These cases usually are unique life-and-death situations. The physician at the scene of an accident is sovereign over a critically injured person. The injured person is not in a position to negotiate. But such cases are exceptions. The general market principle is this: customers are economically sovereign over producers. While both parties are buyers and both are sellers, he who sells money is considered the buyer. He is economically sovereign because he owns the most marketable commodity.

To maximize their returns, sellers must conform to the demand established by buyers. The structure of the free market is not a pyramid-like hierarchy. Sellers and buyers meet on equal legal terms: as legal owners of marketable assets. Neither is legally sovereign over the other. Neither can compel the other to meet his demands. The only negative sanction that either of them can impose on the other is the refusal to enter into an exchange. The free market is therefore not a covenantal institution.

In a covenantal institution, there is a hierarchy of legal authority. Subordinates take an oath before God that they will defer to the decisions of ordained superiors. They owe them allegiance, for they owe God allegiance, and their superiors represent them before God (Lev. 4).⁹ The superior has a legal claim on his subordinates. This is not the legal relationship between buyers and sellers in a free market economy.

Any attempt to insert the legal structure of a covenant into market relationships undermines the economic sovereignty of asset-owning customers. Other would-be customers, who do not possess sufficient assets, or who wish to use their assets for other purposes, may decide to call for the state to redistribute wealth. They may call on the state to compel producers to meet their demand at below-market prices by legally forbidding the bids of competing customers. The substitution of one party's legal sovereignty over mutual exchange undermines the sovereignty of customers in general.

Legislation favoring certain groups is introduced and passed on the basis of a deception. The public is told that the legislation protects an entire group, when it really favors one segment of this group at the

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

expense of most of the other members. Above-market returns are possible only because one segment of the group is protected by law from competition from other segments. The higher the returns, the fewer the beneficiaries: fewer participants to share the loot. Consider legislation passed in the name of *producers' sovereignty*: tariffs, import quotas, cartels, quality controls, price floors, compulsory trade union laws, and regulation in general. Or consider legislation passed in the name of defending *customers' sovereignty*: price ceilings, quality controls, laws barring racial discrimination in renting or selling, and rationing. Such legislation annuls the legal sovereignty of *excluded* producers and customers over their own property. It forcibly removes them from the competitive bidding process. In doing so, it restricts the market, thereby lowering the division of labor and reducing output per unit of resource input. It reduces the wealth of those discriminated against, all in the name of the public interest. In the name of a "government-business partnership," it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled producers. In the name of "consumerism," it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled customers. It restricts men's legal right to bid.

Conclusion

The principle of hierarchical service governs the biblical covenant. The covenant is bound by an oath to God, implicit or explicit. It involves legal claims. Where hierarchy is biblically covenantal, rulers are to seek dominion by serving the needs of their subordinates. God honors those with the power to enforce their will on others when they restrain themselves and sacrifice their own interests for the sake of their subordinates. This is what Jesus did in both of His offices: God and man.

The top priority here is service to others. This rule governs all men: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3–4). But it especially governs those who have been entrusted with authority by God and man.

MONOPOLY PRICING

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves (Matt. 21:12–13).

The theocentric principle here is the holiness of the worship of God: point three of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Holy Housecleaning

This was the second time that Jesus performed this cleansing of the temple. The first time was during the week before the Passover, three years earlier. “And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise” (John 2:13–16). Here, He did it again. Liberals argue that the two accounts are scrambled chronologically. Conservatives argue that the priests were slow learners.

Jesus was not arrested either time. This is very strange. He clearly had violated other people’s property rights. He had used force. He had entered a holy place and called the resident exchangers harsh names. By doing so, He was challenging those in charge of the temple. They

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

allowed this to go on. But what, exactly, was going on? Something that Jesus called theft. This was a very serious accusation. Yet the authorities did nothing. They did not formally accuse Jesus of being a false witness.

There was a reason: they were guilty as charged. But what were they guilty of? In John's account, He called them merchandisers. In Matthew's account, He called them thieves. Why was it theft to be a merchandiser? Why would Jesus have twice singled out those inside the temple as the objects of His wrath? Scripture gives no indication that He ever physically assaulted anyone else, yet He used a whip on these people the first time.

2. *Holy Space*

The temple was holy space, God's sanctuary. Inside its walls a higher ethical standard was to prevail. The closer that men came to the holy of holies, the greater the threat to them of their own moral pollution. God might bring sanctions against them. This is why the three families of Levi served as guardians of the temple, surrounding it in concentric circles (Num. 3; 4).²

When the merchants set up shop within the walls of the temple, they accepted greater responsibility for dealing righteously. They were not selling items in a market with open entry to competitors. Their merchandise had to meet high standards. The body of no blemished animal could lawfully be burned on the altar.³ Thus, the animals sold for sacrifice had to be screened by the priests or their agents. To do this screening conveniently, the priests brought the merchants' tables inside the boundary of the temple.

One of the forms of sacrifice was a coin, the shekel. The temple originally had its own shekel.⁴ It was the standard of weight and fineness for temple assessments. "This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is 20 gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD" (Ex. 30:13). It was therefore unlawful to bring a coin from outside the temple unless it was of the same weight and fineness.

In Jesus' day, Jews came from around the Mediterranean to offer sacrifice. They brought many different kinds of coins. The Jews did not

2. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3:D.

3. Leviticus 1:3; 3:1; 4:3, 23, etc.

4. Exodus 30:24; 38:24–26; Leviticus 5:15; Numbers 7.

approve of coins with people's likenesses on them, especially the emperor's, which bore proclamations of his divinity.⁵ During the Bar Kochba rebellion (133–35 A.D.), the Jews hammered out the images of the emperors on Roman coins and drew in scenes from the temple.⁶ To bring a Roman coin to make an offering would have been a sacrilege. These coins had to be exchanged for temple coins.

2. False Dealing

This would have created opportunities for false dealing. The temple coins could have been sold at a premium beyond the weight and fineness of the coins' metals. It is likely that the moneychangers had been given a special dispensation by the priests. Moneychangers inside the walls of the temple would not have faced competition from rivals who were not authorized by temple authorities. Over decades and centuries, devious practices would have become common. The opportunity for above-market returns is always tempting and rarely resisted for long. Higher prices charged by the temple's moneychangers would have raised suspicion about the priests' collusion. To transfer the monopoly power to charge higher than open-entry prices is to transfer wealth. Those who possess such power are unlikely to transfer it free of charge. Once transferred, such a monopoly is difficult to revoke. Those who pay in advance for it expect to be compensated. They bid up the entry price on the basis of expected future income. They resist any attempt to lower the price unless they are offered refunds.⁷

Jesus identified their practices as theft. They were stealing from the faithful who came to offer sacrifice. They were also stealing from God. They were undermining His reputation. False weights and measures are an abomination to God. "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 25:15).⁸ "A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just

5. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 125–27. (Reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2008).

6. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

7. This observation applies to all forms of licensing that require extra training or initial payment.

8. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

weight is his delight" (Prov. 11:1).⁹ The misuse of a monopoly granted in God's name was the judicial equivalent of false weights.

The priests did not prosecute Jesus. Why not? The most obvious reason is that they were in collusion with the merchants who were extracting monopoly returns.

B. Who Owned the Temple?

Jesus asserted that He was the Son of the Owner. In Matthew's account, Jesus cited an Old Testament passage: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer;¹⁰ but ye have made it a den of thieves."¹¹ But, in John's account, He made a claim: "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:16). He was the true heir. He was coming on behalf of the Owner of the temple.

Jesus twice invaded the outer court and overturned the tables. This violation of property rights was grounded in law: as the designated agent of the Owner, He was authorized to enforce the terms of the lease. This was a house of prayer; it had been turned into a place where thieves took advantage of worshippers. They were using the sacred character of the temple to extract monopoly profits. They were cashing in on God's name.

1. Squatters

Jesus rightly regarded them as squatters. They presumably had been authorized by the chief priest to conduct their operations. By physically assaulting the moneychangers, Jesus was announcing His revolt against the religious authorities. He was challenging the faithfulness of the hierarchy, i.e., the priesthood. They were false priests, He indirectly asserted. They deserved no better treatment than the moneychangers. In fact, they deserved worse. They knew better. They

9. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 29.

10. "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:6-7).

11. "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD" (Jer. 7:11).

bore greater responsibility. “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:47–48).¹²

The agent of the Owner routed the agents of the priesthood. The priests claimed to act on God’s behalf in His name. Jesus visibly challenged this claim by forcibly driving out the priests’ agents. This was a conflict between authorities: a self-ordained establishment vs. a man baptized by an outsider who was regarded by the people as a prophet. This was one more confrontation between a prophet and the priesthood. Prophets had usually lost these confrontations, and the ecclesiastical winners subsequently perished at the hand of some invading military power. So it would be again, but this time the invader would end the Old Covenant order by burning the temple.

Jesus’ violation of the property rights of the economic agents of the priests was based on His superior claim of ownership. He did not appeal to the existing authorities to enforce His claim. He acted on His own authority, for He had been given this authority by the Owner. Soon thereafter, the priests would attempt to undermine His authority. “And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things” (Matt. 21:23–27). Once again, He undermined their authority by His answer.

12. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

2. Superior Authority

The priests feared the people. The people respected John's memory. Jesus had been baptized by John. If the people could not be swayed in their opinion regarding Jesus' authority, the priests were powerless to reassert their authority. Their hold on the affections of the people was tenuous. The question was: What about Jesus' hold on the people's affections? Could this be broken? He had used force against their agents. They would soon use force on Him, first in a trial before the Sanhedrin, and then by trials by Roman authorities.

Control over the temple was at the heart of the question of authority in Israel. *Through His actions against the moneychangers, Jesus was asserting a superior claim of authority.* He had already made this claim: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:56–58). *A prior legal claim is a superior claim.* He was asserting a claim that predated the temple.

The Jewish leaders had to silence His claim. If they could not do this, their claim of representation would be undermined. They would be overthrown. To silence Him, they finally appealed to Rome. They invoked Rome's authority in order to eliminate Jesus' authority. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Jesus attacked the invaders of the temple. He did so in the name of God. He claimed to be the lawful heir. He referred to the temple as "my Father's house." In the context of what had taken place immediately prior to this confrontation, this was a sensational claim. The people had just proclaimed Him as the heir of David's throne. "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:8–9). Now He was asserting jurisdiction over the temple. David could not have made such a claim. He had been a king, not a priest. He was of the family of Judah. Levi was the priestly family.

One man in history had possessed such authority: Melchizedek.

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God” (Gen. 14:18). To him Abraham presented tithes (v. 20). Jesus was therefore announcing a new priesthood, meaning a new hierarchy. “Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:20). This meant that a New Covenant would be in force, with new laws. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 7:12–17).

3. Resurrected Temple

The legal right of Jesus to throw out the moneychangers was verified by His resurrection. By this, He demonstrated publicly that He was God’s designated agent. He possessed the right to enforce the terms of the lease. When the priestly leaseholders refused to cleanse the temple of thieves, they forfeited their right to represent God. God demonstrated this by tearing down the temple in A.D. 70.

The argument between Jesus and the Jews from beginning of His ministry to the end had centered on the temple. He invoked the language of the temple to describe the resurrection. Immediately following His first scattering of the moneychangers, the Jews asked Him for a sign to validate this authority. “Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:18–22). The Jews remembered this at the time of His trial, even though the disciples had temporarily forgotten. “And there arose certain [men], and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him

say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together” (Mark 14:57–59).

Which temple was doomed to permanent destruction? Jesus’ body or the temple? At the resurrection, the world had half of its answer. In A.D. 70, the world had the other half.

Conclusion

The temple was a house of prayer. By using the sacred authority of the temple to establish monopolistic pricing, the priests and the moneychangers had profaned the temple, i.e., had violated sacred space. Jesus drove out the moneychangers because they were thieves. It was not the fact that there was exchange going on that outraged Him. It was convenient for men to buy unblemished beasts to sacrifice. It was convenient that they could buy coins acceptable in worship. But the moneychangers had become thieves, exploiting their delegated position as agents of the priesthood. Their corruption reflected the priesthood’s corruption. Jesus drive them out.

The top priority established in this passage is to avoid using God’s holy office of ecclesiastical minister as a means of exploiting worshippers. When men seek church offices to gain income based on a misuse of authority, they violate this rule. Paul wrote: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous” (I Tim. 3:2–3).¹³ This is an extension of the top priority in this passage. Men who misuse God’s holy office by stealing will be driven out.

13. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

CONFISCATION IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him (Matt. 21:33–39).

The theocentric principle here was the sovereignty of God over inheritance. God is the creator. He sets the terms of the leasehold. His Son, Jesus Christ, is the true heir in history and eternity. This was the issue of inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Davidic Inheritance

Jesus gave this parable to the religious leaders in the week preceding Passover. The people had strewn palm branches before Him as He entered the Jerusalem. They had acclaimed Him as the heir of David. “And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matt. 21:9). This was a messianic declaration. Jacob had prophesied: “The sceptre shall not depart from

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1988] 2012), ch. 5.

Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). No Jewish king had reigned in Israel since the Assyrian captivity. No Jewish king had reigned in Judah since the Babylonian captivity. Yet the crowds were proclaiming Jesus the son of David. They were acknowledging that He was Shiloh, "and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Jesus had the right to wear the sword of Judah. So said the Jewish masses.

This declaration offended the Jewish rulers. "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased" (Matt. 21:15). They sought to entrap Him by forcing Him to declare this authority, and then place Him under sanctions for blasphemy, as they did a week later. "And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21:23).

As He did so often, and with such devastating effect, He answered their question with a question: "I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things" (Matt. 21:24b–27). They feared being placed under the public's sanctions. So, they could not pursue Him by means of this strategy. He escaped from their trap once again.

The people had declared Him the heir of David's office. This threatened the Jewish establishment, which had a working alliance with Rome. David had been the great warrior king of Israel. If the multitude ordained Jesus as king, this could undermine the Jewish establishment's arrangement. It was clear to Pilate a week later that this was what bothered them. He understood that it was not religion that had motivated them, but politics. He also understood that Jesus was uninterested in politics, for He was self-consciously unbending to power. He was not afraid of Pilate or his sanctions. Jesus stood His ground with Pilate, and Pilate respected Him for this.

Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar (John 19:10–15).

The Jewish rulers crawled before Rome's power at the expense of their theology. Jesus had challenged Pilate in terms of His theology. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." Jesus told him that God was over him, and therefore the man who had delivered Him to Pilate—presumably, the chief priest—had the greater sin. Why? Because the chief priest's theology declared that God is in control, yet he had brought Pilate into this religious dispute because Pilate possessed the civil power of execution.

Pilate recognized the nature of the game that the Jewish rulers were playing, with him as the pawn. They were placing him between the rock and the hard place: either do their bidding or face public disorder which would undermine his reputation in Rome. As a politician, he recognized the political nature of what the priests were doing at his expense. They were painting him into a corner. Jesus had verbally put him in his place in terms of biblical authority, which Pilate did not respect, but Jesus was not trying to use him for His purposes. The priests were, and they invoked Roman politics in their manipulation: "We have no king but Caesar." Politicians do not like to be manipulated by other politicians. Pilate therefore preferred to let Jesus go. So, when he finally capitulated to the Jewish rulers for the sake of Roman politics, he gained symbolic revenge. "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate,

Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (John 19:19–22). He thereby publicly announced that Jesus was the heir to David's throne, and he, Pilate, had smashed it. Rome got the credit, not the Jewish politicians. This greatly annoyed the Jewish politicians, which was Pilate's goal.

B. Stealing the Inheritance

Jesus' parable of the owner of the vineyard rested on the Bible's theology of inheritance. An only son would inherit all of his father's property. This was not simply a matter of preserving a family's wealth. Far more important, it was a matter of preserving a man's name in Israel. What we call the levirate marriage law reveals the importance of a firstborn son's preservation of a man's name. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut. 25:5–6). Brothers who shared the same landed inheritance shared more than land. They shared mutual responsibility to preserve each other's name through procreation. The land that was part of the dead brother's inheritance would go to the firstborn son who was fathered by the surviving brother. This biological son would carry the dead brother's name. None of the land inherited by this son from the dead brother would be shared, at his death, with the heirs of the biological half-brothers born to his biological father. Family name was more important than bloodline inheritance in Israel.²

The owner in the parable had funded the planting of the vineyard. He then leased it out to people whose task was to care for it. He then went on a far journey. The imagery here is obvious: it is a recapitulation of Eden. The main difference is, the owner went on a far journey, not a morning excursion, as God did in the garden. The husbandmen could expect payment for their services, but only when the crop came in.

They cared for the vineyard. The issue was not the quality of their labor. It was the quality of their morals. They were thieves and mur-

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

derers. They were intent on building up an inheritance of their own. But they had none. They had not funded the planting of the vineyard. It was not their land. They were hired hands. This inheritance belonged to the owner's son.

This legal arrangement offended the hired hands. After all, had they not remained in the field, in good weather and bad? Had not they remained on duty, defending the vineyard from predators, whether human or otherwise? Had they not invested years in the building up of the property? Did they not have an independent legal claim to part of the crop? To a large part of the crop? To all of the crop? To all future crops? Of course they did, they thought. And there was no one to tell them differently.

Then the harvest season approached, and the owner sent his servants home to administer the harvest and the distribution of the crop. The hired hands beat them and stoned them. He sent more servants. The same thing happened. Then he sent his son. This time, the hired hands saw a great opportunity: to collect not just the crop but the entire inheritance. "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (vv. 38B–39).

Jesus then asked the rulers of Israel to render public judgment on the literary hired hands. "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt. 21:40–41). What Jesus did here was what Nathan had done to David. He told a story and asked those in authority to render judgment. As in the case of Nathan's judicial challenge, the targets condemned themselves. And, like Nathan, Jesus wasted no time in declaring the judicial equivalent of "thou art the man." "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:42–44).

With these words, the lawful heir of David's throne surrendered His claims to that throne and all of the associated inheritance. He transferred the kingdom to another nation, the church. Shiloh had

come, and with His advent, as Jacob had prophesied, the sword was removed forever from Judah. That was because it was removed forever from Israel.

The parable was about a forced disinheritance: *disinheritance by illegal execution*. The judicial solution, the Jewish rulers understood, was the execution of the hired hands and the transfer of administrative responsibilities to new employees. But there was a crucial problem with this solution: the absence of heirs. The solution might solve the management problem; it could not solve the inheritance problem. The priests assumed that the father was still alive, as the parable indicated. But where would the owner get another son? The answer should have been obvious: by adoption.

The new heirs would care for the vineyard. They would not be hired hands. As adopted sons, they would have a stake in the inheritance. They would share the harvest. The gentiles would inherit.

But was not Israel the true son? Jesus had already lured them into publicly forfeiting any legal claim to that office. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:28–32). The gentiles had long refused to go into the vineyard, but they were now about to go. The Jews had said they would go, but now they refused. The true son does the will of his father. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10).

C. His or Ours?

1. Hired Hands

The hired hands asserted a claim of ownership. Standing between them and this claim was the owner, who was far away, and his servants, who were no match for the hired hands, and the son. The son

was the least of their problems, as long as the owner stayed away. But, of course, he would not stay away, once word of his son's murder came to him. The rulers had understood this: "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." In the matter of power, the hired hands were superior to the servants and the son, but the owner was armed and dangerous.

The hired hands decided to confiscate the inheritance by killing the heir. In the name of the people—the workers of the world—they united to kill the son. When they did this, they secured their own judgment. They would not retain their stolen goods indefinitely. The owner would come and destroy them. But they did not foresee this. They did not believe that he would return from the far country. They were fools.

2. Darwinism

The twentieth century, more than any in history, was the century of the rebellious hired hands. Because they adopted the Darwinian view of God, voters became convinced that the cosmic owner of the vineyard is not even in a far country; He is a figment of superstitious men's imaginations. Within a quarter century of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), Lester Frank Ward wrote *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), which asserted the right and obligation of the state's scientific planners to direct society, including the economy, into evolutionary progress. By 1900, this view of central planning had captured the minds of the leading intellectuals.³ The Progressive movement in the United States and the social democracy movement in Europe invoked Darwinism as the model for, and justification of, centralized economic planning.

Social planning requires power. It also requires funds. Through state power, social planners have laid their hands on other people's money. They have transferred the inheritance of families into the coffers of the state. Taxation grew 10-fold or more in the twentieth century. The Bible-based observation that God has placed restrictions on lawful taxation—less than 10% of one's income (I Sam. 8:15, 17)—is greeted with hoots of derision, not only from social Darwinists but

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

from Christian professors of social science, who have publicly baptized the recommendations of social Darwinism. "Don't give us that Old Testament stuff!" the Christian professors insist. What they really mean is, "Give us a state that taxes us at 40% of our income, twice the rate that Pharaoh extracted from the Egyptians." They call this "economic democracy." It is based on a revision of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The suggestion that the Bible sets forth as binding a private property social order is rejected without detailed consideration of what the Bible teaches.

3. *Wiser Than God*⁴

The vast majority of Christians have always believed that they can improve on the Mosaic law. On their own authority, they revise God's law by coming to conclusions in the name of God that deny the specific teachings of God's revealed law. Then they proclaim their annulment-through-interpretation as being in conformity with "the true spirit of God's law" or "the underlying principles of God's law." As part of this improvement, they reject the binding authority of God's law. In doing so, they necessarily become advocates of some system of law proposed by one or another group of covenant-breakers. They refuse to ask themselves the obvious question: "If not God's law, then what?" They refuse to deal with the ethical question: "By what *other* standard?"⁵

As an example, consider the assertion of John Gladwin, a defender of central planning, who later became a bishop in the Anglican Church. In a chapter in a book devoted to Christian economics, he rejected the concept of the Bible as a source of authoritative economic guidelines or blueprints. In fact, he assured us, it is unbiblical to search for biblical guidelines for economics. "It is unhelpful as well as unbiblical to look to the Bible to give us a blueprint of economic theory or structure which we then apply to our contemporary life. We must rather work in a theological way, looking to the Bible to give us experience and insight into the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This then helps us discover values and methods of interpretation which we can use in understanding our present social experience."⁶ Furthermore,

4. The following passage is taken from North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62:B.

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

6. John Gladwin, "A Centralist Response," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and*

“There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy.”⁷ He contrasted biblical law unfavorably with theology. He then goes on to praise the welfare state as an application of theological, rather than legal, insights.⁸ Theology informs us that “there is no escape from the need for large-scale state activity if our society is to move into a more equitable future at social and economic levels.”⁹ Clearly, neither the Mosaic law nor the New Testament teaches this, but theology supposedly does. Whose theology? Reinhold Niebuhr’s.¹⁰

So, we are assured, there are no authoritative economic guidelines or economic blueprints in the Bible. On the other hand, there are numerous vague and non-specific ethical principles which just about any Christian social theorist can invoke when promoting his recommended reconstruction of society. All it requires to baptize socialism is a series of nice-sounding pat phrases taken from the book of theological liberalism, which Gladwin offered in profusion: “the bounds of Christian principles of human concern,” “the righteousness revealed to us in God himself,” “the good,” “structural framework of law and social values,” “gross and deepening disparities in social experience,” “spontaneity of love,” “the light of the gospel,” and “the most humane principles of social order.”¹¹

Lest you imagine that Gladwin is an aberration, consider the fact that the two other anti-free market essayists in the book adopted the same anti-blueprint hermeneutics. William Diehl, a defender of Keynesianism’s state-guided economy, confidently affirmed: “The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will

Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 124. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

7. Gladwin, “Centralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 183.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 125–26

9. Gladwin, “Centralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 193.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 197. He cited *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). It is an odd book to cite. It was written by the author in reaction against his youthful fling with Marxism, a book in which he proclaimed that Jesus “did not dwell upon the social consequences of these moral actions, because he viewed them from an inner and a transcendent perspective.” Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner’s, [1932] 1960), p. 264.

11. See my critique in *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 200.

have to do it in another way.”¹² Art Gish, a defender of small communities of Christians who hold property in common, informed us that “Since koinonia includes the participation of everyone involved, there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers.”¹³

The fact that these statements appear in a book on Christian economics should come as no surprise. These comments are typical of the opinions of humanist-educated Christian intellectuals. Christians who have spent their lives in humanist educational institutions, and who then have fed their minds on a steady diet of humanist publications, in most cases have adopted the worldview of one or another variety of humanism. They have felt emotionally compelled to baptize their adopted worldview with a few religious-sounding phrases. But just because someone keeps repeating “koinonia, koinonia” as a Christian mantra does not prove that his recommended policies of common ownership will actually produce koinonia.¹⁴ What produces peace, harmony, and increasing per capita output is widespread faithfulness to God’s law.

It is unwise to attempt to become wiser than God. “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Cor. 1:25). This is why it is our job to become familiar with God’s Bible-revealed law. Biblical law, not the latest academic fad, is to be our guide, generation after generation.

12. William Diehl, “The Guided-Market System, *ibid.*, p. 87.

13. Art Gish, “Decentralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 154.

14. If you wonder what “koinonia” means, you are probably not a left-wing advocate of common ownership. Understand, I am not suggesting that voluntary common ownership is anti-Christian, any more than I am saying that voluntary celibacy is anti-Christian. Paul recommended celibacy (I Cor. 7:32–33). He did so, he said, because of “the present distress” (v. 26). Similarly, the Jerusalem church held property in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Shortly thereafter, a great persecution of the church began. The entire church fled the city, except for the apostles (Acts 8:1). This exodus created the first foreign missions program in church history: “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). The fact that they had sold their property enabled them to leave the city without looking back, as Lot’s wife had looked back. So, for temporary purposes in times of great trial, voluntary celibacy and voluntary common ownership are legitimate, even wise. But to make either practice a recommended institutional model for all times and places is a misuse of historical events. The one institution where common ownership has been productive for longer than one generation is the monastery. However, it takes celibacy to make this system work for longer than a few years. As soon as there is a wife saying, “He’s earning as much as you are, but you’re far more productive,” koinonia ends. In the modern state of Israel, the kibbutz collective farms faded rapidly as important sources of national production.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is the primary conclusion of this 31-volume commentary. It is this: *a private property social order is mandated by biblical law. Whenever biblical law is enforced, free market capitalism has to develop.* Modern fundamentalists in the pews generally believe in capitalism, but they do not believe that biblical civil law is still valid. So, their defense of capitalism implicitly rests on some baptized version of secular epistemology, whether natural law (Adam Smith), natural rights (Murray Rothbard), Kantianism (Ludwig von Mises), or empiricism (Milton Friedman). Meanwhile, the neo-evangelicals go off to college and come back mostly confused.¹⁵

The top priority in this parable is honoring the rights of ownership. As surely as men should honor the God of creation and His Son, so should they honor God's ownership of this world and His delegation of stewardship to his servants. *Delegated ownership is the basis of maintaining the kingdom grant.* The state has no legitimate claim that matches the church's: the tithe.¹⁶ But modern Christians, wiser than God, have dismissed the tithe as "Old Testament stuff," and have wound up paying less than a tithe to the church and four times a tithe to the civil government. God is not mocked.

God's judgment will surely come on this society of murderous, thieving hired hands. "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:26–27). When this happens, Christians had better be well prepared in advance for the collapse of the hired hands' Darwinian order. They had better not be dependent on it. But most of them will be. They live under a regime that rests on taxation twice as confiscatory as Pharaoh's, and their academic spokesmen praise it as democratic capitalism. These people view democracy as a system whereby two wolves and a lamb vote to decide what to have for lunch.

15. Ronald J. Sider is probably the best example. Compare the first edition of his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), with the 1997 edition. For my comparison, see *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F.

16. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntoththing>)

RENDERING UNTO CAESAR AND GOD

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way (Matt. 22:15–22).

The theocentric principle here was the distinction between God's ownership and man's. Men owe God for the use of His goods, in the same way that they owe the government for services rendered. If the state has the power to enforce payment, surely God does, too. This was the issue of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Tribute Money

Accompanying the Pharisees were Herodians, a priestly party allied with the Sadducees.² Herod was the regional monarch. He was un-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. "Herodians," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), IV, p. 360.

der Rome's authority. He was an Idumean, meaning an heir of Esau.³ Those who were allied to Herod were normally not friends of the Pharisees. But Jesus was a problem for both groups. He was undermining their authority. The two groups joined forces on the assumption that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"—until the enemy is removed. Jesus recognized the nature of this temporary alliance and warned His disciples against both groups.⁴ Forty years later, the Idumeans joined forces with the Jews to resist Rome, then turned on the Jews when the siege of Jerusalem began. They looted the Jews. Titus slew some and sold an "immense" number of them into slavery after the city fell.⁵

The Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus. The Romans were hated by the Jews. Roman rule was regarded as tyrannical. If Jesus could be lured into acknowledging the legitimacy of Roman rule, He would lose favor with the Jews, for they resented this rule. They paid their taxes, but they did so grudgingly. On the other hand, if He denied the legitimacy of taxation by Rome, the Herodians would surely report this to the Roman authorities. He would be trapped, or so they imagined.

They began with flattery: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men." In other words, "Say your piece loud and clear, sucker; then we'll be rid of you forever." Jesus was not fooled. He identified them for what they were: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" The hypocrite feigns righteousness but in fact is a sinner.

He asked them to show him a coin. "Shew me the tribute money." They brought it to Him. At that point, He had them trapped. The "penny" was a denarius. This was a coin used specifically to pay taxes. If taxes were not legitimate, why did his critics possess one? Furthermore, it bore an image. It also had an inscription. The inscription invoked the language of divinity. The Jews regarded this as idolatrous. But they had brought Him a coin. What were they doing with such coins?⁶

Jesus asked them specifically: Whose image? Whose inscription? Caesar's, they answered. What else could they say? "Then saith he

3. "Herod," *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also, "Edom."

4. "And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15).

5. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI:VIII:2.

6. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), ch. 8. (Reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2008.)

unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." By acknowledging that they possessed a tax coin, they were also acknowledging that Rome brought civil order. Such order must be paid for. If Caesar's image and inscription were on the coin, then those who used such coins in trade were gaining a benefit: money. By using money to gain what they wanted to buy rather than bartering, they were extending the division of labor. This increases men's output per unit of resource input. It makes them wealthier.

Caesar's rule had brought social stability. It had created international legal framework for economic growth. It was Rome, not Israel, that had built the highways and had cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. There are no free lunches, and Rome was merely collecting what belonged to it. Jesus was saying that the benefits of economic growth had to be paid for. The beneficiaries owed something to the state.

A coin was a mark of state sovereignty in the ancient world. It still is. The theology of Rome was visible on Rome's coins. The image and the inscription announced the divinity of the emperor: "Emperor Tiberius august Son of the august God."⁷ This is what angered the Jews. But the agents of the Pharisees or their Herodian allies had such a coin in their possession. The Herodians were content with the coins. The Herod of Jesus' infancy had been a ruthless tax collector.⁸ But the Pharisees were indeed hypocrites. This is why Jesus said a bit later, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).⁹

Jesus was not arguing that Caesar owned everything that he laid claim to. On the contrary, men are to render to God what God possesses. What Caesar owned was legal sovereignty over the political system that provided the Roman Empire's money. This legal system had to be supported by taxes. Israel was benefitting from this system, despite the system's inequities. Besides, Israel was under judgment, and had been since the captivity. Living under foreign domination was nothing new for Israel. Rome had brought greater trade and prosperity by opening up new markets. Israel was benefitting from the arrange-

7. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.

9. Chapter 46.

ment. On what basis should Israelites have refused to pay taxes? Jesus had the answer: none. But He gave this answer in such a way that the Pharisees could not embarrass Him.

B. What Belongs to God

The Israelites' tithe money went to support the priests. The priests were Sadducees, the Pharisees' rivals.¹⁰ By reminding the people of their obligations to God, Jesus was undermining the authority of the Pharisees. He was reminding them that they owed a tithe. This meant that they owed God by way of the Sadducees' faction. This was a public challenge to the Pharisees.

Jesus used this incident to lay the foundation for a comprehensive covenant lawsuit against Israel. God is owed far more than the tithe, He warned them, and they had not paid God what He was owed. Judgment was coming.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the

10. Herbert Danby, Introduction, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:23–36).¹¹

Jesus passed the dilemma back to the Pharisees. If they denied Rome's right of taxation, they risked political suppression by Rome. If they affirmed this right, they would have undermined their popularity with the more radical factions of the people. If they affirmed the tithe, they also had to affirm the Sadducee party. If they denied the tithe, they had to oppose Moses. So, they went away . . . again. Jesus had successfully silenced them, just as they had sought to silence Him . . . again.

C. Tithes and Taxes

The tithe is mandatory. It preceded the Mosaic law. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20). There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this law has been annulled. Only the recipients have changed: from the local Levites to the local churches. Through Christ, the church is the heir of the Melchizedekan priesthood. "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:5–6). "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace" (Heb. 6:20–7:2). Covenant-keepers owe the local church their tithes.¹²

What do they owe the state? Less than a tithe. Any system of civil government that takes as much as 10% is tyrannical, Samuel warned.

And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over

11. Any Christian who argues, as so many do, that confrontational language is not Christian has not come to grips with this passage's rhetoric. When the self-assured critic has this passage pointed out to him, the standard response is: "Well, you're not Jesus." This is quite true, but the critic may well be Pharisaical.

12. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010); Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day“ (I Sam. 8:11–18).

The Israelites refused to heed this warning (v. 19). In the twentieth century, Christians did not cry out when the state extracted four times the tithe or even more from them. They lived under what the Bible clearly identifies as tyranny, yet they called it democratic liberty. What roused their ire was any suggestion that they owed a tithe to their local churches. “We’re under grace, not law!” they proclaimed. In fact, they were under pagan law, pagan bureaucrats, pagan tax collectors, and pagan lawyers. This has yet to change.

Pagans have denied that the Old Testament applies to modern times. Christians have agreed. Pagans have asserted the sovereignty of the state to extract money far beyond the tithe. Christians have agreed. Pagans have affirmed the right of the tax collector to require comprehensive income records from every taxpayer. Christians have agreed. Yet any suggestion that a church’s officers possess a similar right would be met with total opposition by church members. No one suggests that such authority is possessed by the church. Well, not quite. No one other than me. I argue that every *voting* church member must prove that he tithes, and this requires him to submit such records to the elders.¹³ But no one agrees with me. Protestant churches offer voting membership to any adult who joins. Non-tithing members are given the right to vote for leaders who will decide how to spend the church’s money.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

D. Revolt: Tax or Tithe

If it is wrong for the state to collect taxes beyond the tithe, is it right for citizens to revolt when taxes exceed the tithe? Not if they can change the law legally. Not if they can legally beat the tax system individually. A tyranny involves more than high levels of taxation. Tax rates identify a tyranny, but tyranny is a package deal. The Bible identifies as rebellious every civil government that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible as sovereign. But the solution is not armed revolt; the answer is evangelism, followed by the invocation of a new civil covenant. A new personal covenant is only the beginning of the Great Commission. The long-term goal is a new civil covenant. This is an implication of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).¹⁴

Jesus told His followers to obey the Pharisees, even though He knew that they taught men's traditions rather than the Mosaic law. "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt. 23:1–4). He knew the religious leaders were hypocrites; nevertheless, He told His followers to obey them. Why? Because the Old Covenant had not yet been annulled historically. The temple still stood. Until the sacrificial fires were extinguished forever, the religious leaders possessed legitimate authority. The Christians would have to wait for deliverance. It came in A.D. 70.¹⁵

There is no need to rush when it comes to throwing off a self-imposed tyranny. God will eventually destroy it. His people must work to replace it, not through violence, but through principled non-violent resistance and political mobilization. (Educating their children with an

14. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

15. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

explicitly Christian curriculum is basic to such a strategy.) The apostles refused to obey when told not to preach the gospel (Acts. 5:29), but they willingly suffered the consequences of this disobedience. “[A]nd when they [the Jewish council] had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:40b–42).

Conclusion

Jesus made it clear that the state is entitled to taxes. He implied that the church is entitled to money. If we do not turn to the Old Testament to find out what the limits of taxes and church contributions are, we shall forever be caught between the tax collector and the church in their quest for funding. The Old Testament provides information on these limits. For the church, the limit is 10% of our net income. For the state, the limit is less than 10%. The state does not have the right before God to extract from residents as high a percentage as the church has the right to demand of its voting members. Any state that demands as much as 10% is a tyranny. The total level of taxation, from local civil government upward, must be less than 10% of a person's net income.

The modern church does not believe this. The result is a church that does not have the courage to demand tithes of its voting members, and a state that cannot resist extracting at least four times more than the tithe. Christians have sought to starve God's church by refusing to tithe. Meanwhile, the messianic state extracts their wealth unmercifully. God is not mocked.

The top priority in this passage is social budgeting based on the Bible. The Bible identifies what God is legally entitled to and what the state is legally entitled to. This, the modern world has refused to acknowledge. The result in our day is the widespread acceptance of the welfare state. The end result of this is personal dependence on the state and eventual economic and social bankruptcy.

COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37–40).

The theocentric focus of this passage was the law of God. The Ten Commandments rest on the authority of the mandatory love of God and our neighbors. This was a matter of extending grace: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Love of God

We usually think of the love of God as a downward phenomenon. We should think, “What comes down should go up.” Love is our response. But this love is judicial. We are to obey God and deal justly with our neighbors.

The famous phrase, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” is preceded by a more fundamental phrase: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” The command to love our neighbor appears in Leviticus: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18). The command to love God appears in Deuteronomy. “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5). The context of the Leviticus passage is civil justice.² The context of the Deuteronomy passage is inheritance in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*,

the Promised Land.³ We begin by loving God.

Jesus here confirmed the Decalogue in terms of two Old Testament passages. He did not argue that the Decalogue is no longer legally or morally binding in the New Covenant era. On the contrary, He validated the Decalogue by citing as authoritative the two passages in the Old Testament. Through His validation, Christians can be certain of the authoritative, binding nature of the Ten Commandments today. It is the mark of theological heresy to argue, as some have, that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding because of their close—a word left undefined—connection with the Mosaic law, which supposedly was completely annulled by the New Covenant. Jesus Christ undermined such an argument by saying that the Ten Commandments were grounded judicially on these two commands to love God and man, which are permanently binding in history.

The consequence and evidence of our love of God is our love for our neighbor. This is New Testament doctrine as well as Old Testament doctrine. It applies to interpersonal relationships within the Christian community as well as to relationships with people outside the church. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (I John 4:20–21).

Jesus gave this summary of the law in response to a question from a lawyer. In Luke’s account, the lawyer responded, “And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29b). Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan as His reply.⁴ The answer focused on charity shown by a righteous foreigner to a man who had fallen on hard times on the same road to Jericho. Our neighbor is someone who is traveling down the same road that we are. The question is: How wide a road is it, and how long?

B. The Judicial Context

The command to love one’s neighbor, first and foremost, mandates equal treatment before the civil law. This command has many other applications, but it begins with civil justice. This is not where

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 16.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 15.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

most modern commentators begin their expositions. They do not think judicially, which means that they do not think covenantally. They do not begin their analysis of Jesus' words with a detailed study of the context of the original commandment. The context of the Leviticus passage is judicial. It appears in a section that sets forth rules that govern the enforcement of civil law.

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:15–18).

This passage reinforces a fundamental biblical concept: equality before the law.⁵ The Bible repeatedly forbids judges to respect persons in administering justice.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).

Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts (II Chron. 19:7).

These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment (Prov. 24:23).

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:11).

The rule of biblical civil law meant that all residents in Israel were

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

supposed to receive justice, even if they were not citizens or even Israelites. This testified to God as a universal God with universal standards. The nation was to execute civil laws impartially on all residents. There would be protection for strangers.

This predictability of civil law was designed to reduce the cost of production in Israel. Participants in the market knew that private ownership would be defended by the civil government. Theft through economic oppression was not allowed (Ex. 22:21–24;⁶ Deut. 24:14–15⁷). Instead of spending time and money to defend property, producers could re-direct this capital to improve the quality of goods and services, or lowering their prices, or both. Predictable law promotes economic growth by reducing uncertainty.

C. The Economic and Social Context

The law prohibiting respect of persons also applied to relationships between masters and servants. “And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him” (Eph. 6:9). Within the church, the same rule has applied. “But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (James 2:9). The context of this injunction was discrimination in the church against poorer members.

For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (James 2:2–9).

Historically, the practice of self-conscious discrimination in

6. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

7. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 61.

churches has been associated with seating. James' words indicate this. "Ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool." A practice begun in Anglo-American churches in the eighteenth century was to rent pews to families. The poor had to sit on the floor or in the back or in a balcony. Pew rentals continued sporadically into the second half of the twentieth century.⁸

Protestant churches have unofficially but universally dealt with this problem by voluntarily and unself-consciously dividing in terms of family income. There is a hierarchy of denominations in terms of family income. In the United States, at the top of the income ladder are Episcopalians. This denomination is by far the most liberal theologically. Below the Episcopalians are mainline Presbyterians. Below them are Lutherans. Baptists are below Lutherans. At the bottom of the income ladder among whites are pentecostal congregations. These are by far the most conservative associations theologically. The move toward theological conservatism parallels the move toward low income.

Racial segregation is unofficial but universal. Blacks and Mexican-Americans are at the bottom of the income ladder.

No civil law in the United States formally compels such a distribution. In fact, any civil law that officially attempted to do this would be declared unconstitutional. There are other laws, however, that tend to structure communities, called zoning laws, and these are usually legal. A local zoning commission establishes rules for construction. These rules re-direct capital and people into certain parts of the community. Zoning substitutes political compulsion for market allocation. But it seems to be an unbreakable law of society that there will never be homogeneous distribution of anything that is scarce. Some win and some lose in the competition for scarce resources.

The range of income within a modern Protestant congregation is vastly less than the range of income of worldwide society. The range is reduced as we move from nations to regions to cities to neighborhoods. There is no escape from this process of narrowing. It is part of a much wider context, which today is called clustering.

Neighborhoods are divided even more rigorously and more finely in terms of income. The degree to which this is true was not under-

8. For an example of an Episcopal Church parish with pew rents in the 1960s, see St. Mark's in Philadelphia. The by-laws were changed in 1957 to abolish new pew rents, but existing rentals were maintained. (<http://bit.ly/StMarksPewRents>)

stood until the combination of modern computers, nine-digit postal zip codes (in the United States), government census reports, mapping technology, and direct-marketing techniques made possible precise neighborhood income and affinity studies. This marketing-demographic strategy is called clustering. As of 1995, there were at least 60 different income/social classifications. These firms rent demographic information to direct-mail companies and other marketing organizations. Statistically significant differences in response rates in each of these neighborhood classifications allows the firm and its competitors to rent this information to marketers, who will pay for it in order to save money in marketing goods and services to targeted groups.

No government planning agency created these measurable clusters of residents. No one knew that this many categories existed until after the results of the 1990 census were published and analyzed. The number of identifiable clusters increased by 50% as a result of the 1990 census.⁹ There is no question that the number of clusters will increase as demographic sampling technology improves.

People somehow sense where they fit most comfortably when they pick a neighborhood to live. No one knows how people make these assessments. There is no known means of perception. All that the demographers know for certain is that these clusters exist. These clusters reveal statistically significant residence patterns—significant enough for marketers to buy the information.

The early church faced analogous distributions of income among its members. There have always been economically identifiable neighborhoods in towns. As the number of congregations grew in New Testament times, and as the distance between them grew, patterns of membership would have reflected differences in income. There are always rich and poor within any congregation, but the range of income in any congregation is far less than the range of all congregations within a city. This was also true in James' day, though of course with fewer divisions in a lower division of labor society. But in the huge city of Rome, there would have been many clusters.

D. A Matter of Taste¹⁰

The humanist has a problem with the moral injunction to love our

9. Susan Mitchell, "Birds of a Feather," *American Demographics* (Feb. 1995). (<http://bit.ly/ZipCodeClusters>)

10. This appeared first in North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 53:B.

neighbor as ourselves. The problem was best stated in George Bernard Shaw's play, *Man and Superman* (1903): "Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same." There is an implicit lawlessness in this, as he says forthrightly in the same play: "The golden rule is that there are no golden rules." If each man is autonomous, and therefore utterly unconnected with other men by feelings and interpretations, then life is anarchy. But on the basis of the logic of autonomous man, there is no sure reason to believe that there are such connections. It may be convenient to believe that there are, if only to make sense of reality, but there is no way to prove that empathy serves as a means of unifying mankind.

But there is a link, the Bible tells us: the image of God in man. Man is made in God's image, and he is therefore responsible to God covenantally with respect to his own life and the creation, which is entrusted to him by God, which is basic to man's definition as man (Gen. 1:26–28).¹¹ There are common emotional and ethical bonds in all men. These bonds can be actively suppressed, in the same way that the knowledge of God is actively suppressed by sinful men (Rom. 1:18–22).¹² Nevertheless, these bonds serve as the basis of social cooperation, which in turn requires people to make ethical judgments.

The Israelites were reminded that they had been strangers in Egypt. "Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). They should therefore not imitate their tyrannical captors by imposing unrighteous judgments on those who are under their God-given authority. If they should do so, then God will remove this authority from them and punish them in the same way. To escape God's temporal covenantal judgments, men must obey God's law. *They must subordinate themselves to this law in order lawfully to execute righteous judgment on those beneath them.* As they do unto others, so will God do to them.

Then what about differing tastes? What about using our feelings as guides for dealing with others? If tastes are ethically random, or even ethically neutral, how can we rely on introspection as a guide to external behavior? The biblical response is clear: tastes are neither random nor ethically neutral. Tastes are inherent in men as God's

11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3–4.

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

creatures, although this testimony can be suppressed and twisted to covenant-breaking purposes. Because of sin, tastes must be governed by the standards of God's law.

E. A Common Humanity

The image of God in man is the basis of common tastes. Ethical systems rely on some theory of a common humanity. The Bible provides the basis of this common humanity: the fatherhood of God. Paul preached at Athens,

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring (Acts 17:24–28).

Men are responsible for dealing in love with other men. This means that men should deal honestly with others, truthfully, and without malice. They are to treat others as they wish to be treated. They begin with self-awareness. They then move to an awareness of others' behavior in response to their own actions. Sin has marred men's awareness and their self-control, but the standard is fixed: to love neighbors as ourselves.

This does not mean that negative sanctions are banned. We want the best for ourselves, and we know that this requires negative sanctions. We deal with our children by means of negative sanctions. We enforce the law. So, treating others in love is not the same as ignoring every affront or turning the other cheek to oppressors when resistance is called for.¹³

F. Cooperation and Competition as Correlative

In economic transactions, buyers and sellers benefit when they deal honestly with each other. The greater their cooperation, the bet-

13. Chapter 9.

ter off both parties are. Honesty really is the best policy, as Ben Franklin wrote so many years ago. The greater the love—honest dealing—the greater the likelihood of a completed transaction. This increases the division of labor.

As for competition, sellers compete against sellers, and buyers against buyers. As a buyer and a seller move closer to a transaction, the about-to-be-excluded buyers and the about-to-be-excluded sellers face growing competition. This is inescapable. Competition is the other side of cooperation. An increase in competition is beneficial for society, for it teaches buyers and sellers how to cooperate with each other more effectively.

The economic goal is cooperation: a completed transaction between a buyer and a seller. The correlative effect of cooperation is competition: sellers vs. sellers, buyers vs. buyers. Competition is beneficial because it makes available better opportunities for buyers and sellers. Imitators learn what works to complete a transaction.

The moral threat is that the quest to cooperate, buyer and seller, can lead to an increased concern to impose losses on competitors. The seller's motivation should be "serve the customer." It can turn into "ruin my competitor." Christ's words focus on the former. The buyer's motivation should be "reward the most efficient seller." It should not be "keep ahead of other buyers." The economic effect of sin in a free market economy is to shift our motivation to the defeat of our competitors. One result is improved service for customers. One great advantage of the free market is to extract social benefits from personal sin.¹⁴ The economic effect of love in a free market economy is to shift men's motivation to improving their condition through cooperation in a division of labor economy.

Perhaps we can understand this correlative relationship more clearly through an analogy: courtship. When a man and a woman move closer to marriage, each by pleasing the other, the about-to-be-excluded rivals of both sexes face increased competition. The exclusionary aspect of marriage creates inherently competitive courtships. The proper goal of the couple is to please God by pleasing the other. If either of them has as the chief goal the exclusion of some rival, the

14. The awareness of this aspect of the free market goes back to Adam Smith, and even earlier, to the book by Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees; or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714). Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), Appendix C.

marriage will have problems. The goal should not be to make life more unpleasant for a rival suitor. The goal is to please the one being courted. But this process may involve making a self-conscious assessment of the strengths of one or more rivals and overcoming these strengths.

One of the worst aspects of games is that there must be winners and losers. Without winners, there would not be games. But games are played only for the enjoyment of creating winners and losers. This is not true of the free market. There are constant winners and losers in free market competition, but the context of competition is not a game played for its own sake, but rather the cooperative overcoming of limits in the environment. The division of labor helps men to overcome these limits. Cooperation is central; competition is the by-product. In a game, competition is central; team cooperation is a by-product. Inherently, games are structured in terms of the destructive side of man.¹⁵ Sports also have this characteristic feature. Competition in sports can lead to aesthetically remarkable performances, such as we see in ice skating, but the personal goal of the athlete is always the forced exclusion of all competitors. The goal of the game is “winner take all or almost all.” The goal of the free market is not. It is the satisfaction of buyers and sellers through voluntary cooperation.

Conclusion

Jesus taught that the love of God leads to the love of one's neighbor. So did the Old Testament. The original Mosaic context of the law to love your neighbor was judicial: civil justice. The principle applies to every area of social life, including economics. In economics, it leads to the ideal of service. In a free market social order, efficient service to customers is what produces profits. The free market social order is a system that produces mutual benefits through cooperation.

The inescapable by-product of cooperation is the exclusion of competitors, but it is a by-product. Even here, the by-product is productive: better service of future customers through the reallocation of capital to customer-satisfying competitors. The free market converts an evil—the desire to displace one's rivals—into a benefit: the quest to serve customers better.

15. I say this with a distinct bias. I have rarely enjoyed games, and I have for many years refused to play them. The pressure to win is too great for me emotionally. I am not like the chess Grand Master, Bobby Fischer, who as a teenager was asked why he loved chess. His response: “I like to see them squirm.” His personal life as an adult was a disaster.

THE MANDATORY TITHE

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel (Matt. 23:23–24).

The tithe rests on God as the Creator and Owner of the world. He has delegated to men the responsibility of managing the world. As a token of obedience, men are to pay God a tithe of 10% on the net increase they produce. This was a matter of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. A New Testament Requirement

Jesus told the religious leaders of Israel that paying their tithes was the minimal requirement. They had ignored the weightier matters. This implies that the tithe is less weighty. But He made it clear that it was not optional even though it was not weighty. It was mandatory. So were the other requirements: judgment, mercy, and faith.

The church has not preached the tithe in generations. There is almost a hostility on the part of preachers to the doctrine of the tithe. We might imagine that preachers, in their quest to increase income for their churches, would emphasize this doctrine. Such is not the case. Theologians have generally relegated the law of tithing to the Mosaic law.

Jesus spoke of the tithe as so minimal a burden as to be almost not worth considering. “Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swal-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

low a camel.” They had tithed on the smallest of increases. They had sought to keep the letter of the Mosaic law, but they had ignored the spirit of that law-order. He told them that they were not remiss in paying close attention to their tithes. They were remiss in not paying equal attention to the weightier matters of the law. All are worth upholding.

This passage could be dismissed as pertaining only to Old Covenant Israel. But if this line of argumentation is valid, then everything that Jesus recommended or commanded is subject to the same easy dismissal. He spent His earthly ministry preaching to people who lived under the Mosaic Covenant. To strip His words of their binding authority because Jesus and His listeners were under the Mosaic Law is to turn the gospels into Old Testament documents.

God is both Creator and Owner under the New Covenant. To imagine that the tithe is no longer morally and legally binding in the New Testament era is to sever the dominion covenant’s hierarchy. Man is then seen as not being under any legal requirement to pay God His lawful percentage of all economic increases. What has changed in the New Covenant to establish such a covenantal discontinuity? What is the New Testament principle that has severed the binding relationship between owner and steward? The tithe is a manifestation of this hierarchy of ownership.

Man is God’s sharecropper. God provides capital to His stewards. This is capital in the broadest sense: talents, opportunities, raw materials, money, and an understanding of the laws of cause and effect. God also provides life. Most of all, God provides a legal covering—redemption—in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The sharecropper is supposed to pay a fixed percentage return on the output of this capital. To deny the legal obligation of the tithe is either to assert a fundamental legal autonomy for man, or, in contrast, a much greater degree of economic obligation than the tithe, which implies that man can placate God’s wrath by offering gifts of greater value than the tithe.²

The New Testament principle of covenantal subordination is manifested in the same three oath-bound covenantal institutions: church, family, and state. There is no indication in the New Testament that children owe less to parents than children owed under the Mosaic law. Paul wrote: “Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 56.

mayest live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:2–3). This passage indicates that the church is entitled to the tithe, just as Melchizedek the priest of Salem was entitled to Abram’s tithe (Gen. 14:20), and just as the Levites were (Num. 18:21, 26).³ There is also no indication that a system of civil government that takes as much as a tithe in taxes is any less a tyranny than the prophesied king in Israel (I Sam. 8:15, 17).

The two other Mosaic tithes were tithes of celebration. There was a mandatory annual celebration held in Jerusalem, funded by a tithe (Deut. 14:23). There was another celebration held locally every third year (Deut. 14:28).⁴ These were national and tribal celebrations. They were land laws. They did not extend into the New Covenant.

We are often told that the tithe is not legally binding, but we should give “as the Holy Spirit leads.” But why would the Holy Spirit lead people to donate less than a tithe? The Bible teaches that the tithe is the minimum payment.

B. Guilt and Government

By placing a minimum on what men owe, God’s law reduces the burden of guilt. The person who pays his tithe to his local congregation has met his legal obligation to God.⁵ If God calls him to give more than a tithe, this request can be regarded as a special obligation, one that is in some way consistent with the special situation of the donor. The situation is not normal. The general obligation has both a floor and a ceiling: a tithe.

The man who sees his obligation as greater than 10% has some reason to think this. He could be incorrect. If he makes a mistake here, there is no reason for him to worry that he has not done enough for God. A mistake is not a moral infraction. He has met the minimum requirement with his tithe.

The reduction of guilt is important for building men and societies that are innovative. Bearing measurable risk or unmeasurable uncertainty is important in overcoming the limits placed on the creation by

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10. Cf. North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

5. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithe>)

God's curse (Gen. 3:17–19).⁶ A man who is burdened by guilt has trouble functioning in a balanced manner. He never knows when he will receive negative sanctions for his rebellion. Guilt can produce workaholics, but it can also produce alcoholics. Overcoming guilt is not to be a motivation for extending the kingdom of God in history. Such motivation places too much reliance on the works of men in pleasing God.

Paul's ministry could be interpreted as the work of a man attempting to overcome guilt. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (I Tim. 1:15). It would be a mistake to see Paul as guilt-motivated. He continued: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Tim. 1:16). His call into service to God began with God's mercy. That was what had overcome his guilt. His work was a response to this legal condition of judicial innocence. He was first among sinners and first among the redeemed. His life was to serve as a pattern for others similarly redeemed from guilt.

Paul gave far more than a tithe. He recounted his suffering for the gospel.

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (II Cor. 11:23–27).

His was not a normal Christian life, but it was consistent with the call to comprehensive sacrifice. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1–2).⁷

Then why doesn’t God require more than a tithe? Because the tithe is judicially representative. It declares, “I give up 10% of my net income as a symbol of my subordination.” God has established a symbol of subordination: the tithe. This percentage is sufficient to eliminate most of those whose faith is not sufficient to identify them as reliable leaders. They do not obey; so, they are not reliable to lead. They refuse to adhere to the terms of the church covenant; so, they should not be allowed to impose ecclesiastical sanctions, which includes voting in church. He who does not acknowledge the legitimacy of covenantal sanctions above him should not be allowed to impose covenantal sanctions on those below him. We understand this hierarchical principle in family government and civil government. Many Christians do not understand it in church government.

The problem is, too many pastors are not convinced that God has mandated a tithe for today’s Christians. They do not preach tithing. Congregations do not use the tithe to differentiate voting members from non-voting communicant members. The result is a weakening of church authority and a reduction of church income. Pastors are reduced to begging their congregations to fund the work of Christ’s kingdom. This fosters a mental image of Jesus as a beggar. He is not a beggar. He is the king who demands tribute from His vassals.

Conclusion

Jesus told the Pharisees that they owed God a tithe on the smallest portion of their income. They owed God a lot more than this, but the obligation was not economic. They owed judgment, mercy, and faith. Tithing and judgment are two sides of the same coin. Similarly, to seek to exercise judgment, mercy, and faith apart from obeying the law of the tithe also testifies against the qualifications of the would-be judge.

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

PROFIT AND INTEREST

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:14–30).

The theocentric principle here was God's ownership of the creation. He establishes the terms of tenancy. Men possess resources only as stewards of God. God will come at the end of history to judge each person's performance as a steward. This was hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Delegated Ownership²

This passage appears in the same section as Jesus' description of the final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46). This parable is a kingdom parable. It follows the five-point covenant model that was discovered by Ray Sutton. First, the master calls his servants before him (sovereignty). Second, he delegates authority to them as his economic representatives by transferring money to them (hierarchy/representation). Third, while it is not stated explicitly, he commands them to produce an increase (law/dominion). We know this because all three immediately take steps to obey his implicit economic command. Fourth, he returns and imposes positive sanctions: blessings to the profitable servants. Fifth, the blessings that he gives them involve rulership (succession/continuity). He then imposes negative sanctions against the unprofitable servant, casting him into outer darkness (disinheritance).

This parable contains several theological messages, but the three main ones are these: first, God owns all things; second, He delegates temporary control over these things to men; third, men are required to increase the value of whatever God has entrusted to them.

There are also secondary implications. First, the servants were required to act on their own initiative for an indefinite time period. The master was not present to tell them precisely what to do. Second, he imposed a profit management system of control, a bottom-up hierarchy.³ He wisely decentralized his investment portfolio before he departed. He allowed his subordinates to make their own decisions regarding the proper use of his capital. He held them legally responsible

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. This bulk of this chapter appeared first in Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944). Reprinted by Libertarian Press, 1983. (<http://bit.ly/MisesBUR>)

for the results. Third, he had plans beyond this first stage of stewardship. He was using this stage as a test.

B. Profitability

Profit is a residual that remains after all expenses have been paid, including the entrepreneur's salary as a manager. The entrepreneur buys or rents resources, holds them and possibly alters them, and sells them for more than he paid. He can do this only because his competitors did not recognize the opportunity. They did not enter the free market for factors of production and bid up their prices. Their lack of foresight is what enabled the entrepreneur to buy up the resources at prices lower than those which prevailed when he sold them later. He had an advantage based on better knowledge and the courage of his convictions.

The economist distinguishes between risk and uncertainty.⁴ Risk can be estimated in advance; uncertainty cannot be. Risk is the kind of calculation that applies to insurance. In certain well-defined situations, the law of large numbers applies. The probability of an event, such as an economic loss through a fire, can be estimated within statistical limits. There is risk, but it can be calculated. Not so with uncertainty. An uncertain event is not part of a larger class of events. Its probability cannot be calculated in advance.

The man who received five talents made a return of 100%. So did the man who received two talents. The owner granted them rewards because of their productivity. Clearly, this has to do with rewards beyond the grave. But these rewards are based on performance in history. This is consistent with Paul's teaching: "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:12–15).⁵

The corollary of profit is loss. A man may misforecast the future. He buys or rents resources, only to discover later that they are worth

4. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

5. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

less than he paid for them. The fear of loss is an important factor in restricting the market for entrepreneurship. It is a major barrier to entry.

C. Marxism as Covenant-Breaking

What about the person who takes no risks, buries his talent, and returns to the master only what he had been given initially? This man has produced a loss for the master. He is a highly unprofitable servant. He has not performed according to minimum standards.

Like so many other incompetent, slothful people in history, the servant of the parable tries to justify his poor performance by blaming the master. He accuses the master of being a thief, or at least an unscrupulous exploiter. "Then he which had received one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine" (vv. 24–25).

What was the slothful servant's accusation of the master? Clearly, he was accusing him of being a *capitalist*. The master is rich, yet he does not go into the fields to labor. the master expects a positive return on his money, even though he goes away on a journey. In short, the servant is an incipient Marxist. He believes, as Marx did, in the labor theory of value. He also believes in Marx's exploitation theory of profits. Anyone who gets money without working for a living is nothing but an exploiter, living on the labor of the poor. The servant calls him "a hard man." (Theologically speaking, this is the covenant-breaker's accusation against God: God is an unfair exploiter.)

The master accepts the ideological challenge. He reminds the servant that he is indeed a hard man, meaning someone who has the lawful authority to establish standards of profitable performance, as well as the authority to hand out rewards and punishments. He admits freely to the servant that, as a successful capitalist, he does not personally go into the fields to plant and reap, yet he reaps a profit. "His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed" (v. 26). Then he tells the servant the minimum that he is entitled to, an interest return: "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury" (v. 27). Luke 19:23 reads: "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I

might have required mine own with usury?"

D. The Legitimacy of Interest

The King James translators used the English word "usury" to translate a Greek word that is more accurately translated as "interest." This discussion of interest here is very revealing, for two reasons. First, *this parable of God's kingdom acknowledges that interest-taking is legitimate*. God eventually comes to every person and demands a positive return on whatever had been entrusted to him by God. The master had done without the use of his funds during his absence. He is therefore entitled to a minimum return: interest.

Second, *the parable clearly distinguishes between profits and interest*. The other two stewards each produced a profit of 100%. They received the greater praise and greater visible rewards. The minimum required performance was an interest payment. The slothful servant had been unwilling to take even the minimal risk of handing the money over to specialists in money-lending, who would seek out entrepreneurs to lend the money to, entrepreneurs who would then pay a competitive return to the money-lenders on this passively managed investment.

In other words, the master's capital was supposed to enable the servants to become productive. Each steward had to become an entrepreneur, or else had to seek out an entrepreneur who would put the money to economically productive uses. The talent was not to sit in the earth; it was to perform a socially useful function.

1. The Entrepreneur and the Banker

The economic agent who is on the cutting edge of both prediction and production is the entrepreneur. The first two men in the parable were entrepreneurs. They went out and found ways of investing the master's money that produced a positive rate of return. As the parable presents it, this rate of return was higher than what could have been earned by depositing the money with money-lenders. Thus, the entrepreneur is understood to be someone who bears much greater risk than someone who deposits money in a bank. The economist calls this form of risk *uncertainty*. It cannot be estimated in advance. It involves guesswork, unlike the depositor who is promised a specific rate of interest when he deposits his money.

The only way that the banker can afford to pay out a promised re-

turn is because he successfully seeks out borrowers (entrepreneurs or customers) who produce an even higher rate of return. The banker makes his living on the difference between the interest payment which the borrower pays to him and what he in turn pays to the depositors.

The future is uncertain to men. We do not know it perfectly. We barely know it at all. We see the future as though we were peering through a darkened glass (I Cor. 3:12). Nevertheless, all of life involves forecasting. There is no escape. We must all bear some degree of uncertainty. But some people are willing to bear more of it than others, and of these, some are more successful in dealing with it. In economic terminology, some people produce greater profits than others. Profit is a *residual* that remains, if at all, only after all costs of the business have been paid, including interest.

2. *Banking: Reducing Uncertainty*

The banker is able to offer a special service to investors. He can diversify depositors' uncertainty by lending to many people—people who, like the servants in the parable, have performed successfully in the past. They have “a track record,” to use the language of horse racing. By lending out money to many borrowers, the banker therefore converts a portion of the depositors' uncertainty into risk, meaning from the statistically incalculable to the statistically calculable. The banker is like an insurer. In fact, in the Middle Ages, the bank was an insurance company, since both church and state had made it illegal for Christians to ask or pay interest.⁶ The modern profession of banking grew out of the marine insurance guild, which was legal in the Middle Ages.⁷

What does an insurance company do? Its statisticians (actuaries) calculate the likelihood of certain kinds of undesirable events in large populations. These unpleasant events cannot be statistically calculated individually, but they can be calculated collectively if the population involved is large enough. The seller of insurance then persuades members of these large populations to pay periodic premiums so as to “pool” their risks. When one member of the pool suffers the event that has been insured against, he is reimbursed from the pool of assets.

6. Jews could legally lend to Christians, which is why Jews from the Middle Ages onward have been found in banking. It was a near-monopoly granted to them by Christian legislators.

7. John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), ch. 10.

Hence, some of life's inescapable and individually incalculable uncertainties are converted to calculable risk by means of diversification: "the law of large numbers."⁸

The same is true of banking. Borrowers will seldom all go bankrupt at once. Most borrowers will repay their debts as specified in their loan agreements. Bad loans are more than offset by the good ones. Thus, the banker can offer a fixed rate of return to depositors. In almost all cases, depositors will be repaid as promised because most of the borrowers repay their loans as promised. (The exception is in a depression, when banks fail. Depressions are the result of prior monetary inflation, which in our day means fractional reserve banking.)⁹

What we must understand is that the master in this parable protects his funds in much the same way. He seeks out a group of potential entrepreneurs. He gives each of them an amount of money to invest. He makes predictions regarding their future performance based on their past performance, and then he allocates the distribution of his assets in terms of this estimation. He protects his portfolio by diversification.

The master is not an interest-seeking banker, however. The money he invests is his own. He is not acting as the legal agent of other depositors. He legally claims all of the profits. He does not contract with borrowers who agree in advance to pay him a fixed rate of interest. The entrepreneurs are strictly his legal subordinates, unlike the relationship between banker and borrower.

E. The Forfeited Productivity of Inaction

The master in the parable is outraged by the coin-burying servant. The parable is intended to show the subordinate (indebted) position of all men before God. The servant was cast into outer darkness because he was an unprofitable servant (v. 30). The parable stands as a warning to all men because the Bible teaches that all people apart from grace are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).¹⁰ This is why we need a profit-

8. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

9. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 20. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

10. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 41. This was published first as "Unprofitable Servants," *Biblical Economics Today* (Feb./March 1983). (<http://bit.ly/gnservants>)

able servant as our intermediary before God, our perfect sin-bearer. But to understand our relationship of indebtedness to God, the parable's language must be taken seriously. We cannot make accurate theological conclusions about the broader meaning of the parable if the symbolic reference points of the parable are themselves inaccurate, let alone immoral.

There is no question that the master not only approves of taking interest, he sends the servant to the nether regions for not taking it. This is strong imagery! *The interest payment belongs to the master.* By having refused to deposit the master's money with the money-lenders, the servant has in effect stolen the master's rightful increase. The servant was legally obligated to protect the master's interests, and interest on his money was the minimum requirement. He failed. The master's judgment of the servant's past performance had been accurate; he was entitled to only one talent initially, for he had not demonstrated competence previously. Had he been given more, he would have wasted more.

The idea that the interest return was the master's minimum expectation leads us to the question of *the origin of interest*. Why did the master deserve an interest return? Because he had possession of an asset that could have been put to productive use, but was not. He had forfeited the use of his money. Any asset that a person possesses in the present is worth more to him than the possession of the same asset in the future. We apply a discount to future assets in relation to those same assets in the present.¹¹ Additionally, by transferring the coin to a third party, the owner was forfeiting control over an asset. He was therefore taking on risk: the possibility of no repayment. This risk had to be paid for by the servant.

The dual issues of time-preference and risk relate to the existence of a rate of interest: money-lending. But there was an additional issue, which relates to income: *forfeited opportunities*. A lender transfers to another person the use of an asset, monetary or nonmonetary. He has given up whatever other opportunities might have been available to him. The steward owed him something extra in return. Yet the steward accused the master of being a hard man, meaning an unfair man. The steward thought he owed nothing to the owner beyond what had been entrusted to him.

The master in the parable was being gracious to the servant. He re-

11. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

cognized from the beginning that the man was not very competent. The master did not tell the servant that he had failed because he had not made 100% on the money entrusted to him. He told him only that he had failed because he had not earned an interest payment. This is the least that the master legitimately expected.

The master probably could have doubled his money by entrusting it to either of the first two servants. But he had sought greater economic safety instead. He had adopted the principle of *risk reduction through portfolio diversification*. You get a lower rate of return but a more sure return. But the master had been cheated. He could have deposited his money directly with the money-lenders instead of giving it to the servant. That would have been safer—greater diversification through the bank—and it almost certainly would have produced a positive rate of return, however low. Instead, he received only his original capital in return.

He had forfeited his legitimate interest payment because he had transferred the asset to the slothful, risk-averse servant. This servant is a model of wickedness, not because he was actively evil, but that he was *passively unproductive*. He did nothing with that which had been entrusted to him. Doing nothing is sufficient to get you cast into hell, when doing the minimum would at least quench the Master's wrath. (Warning: only one man in history has ever performed this minimum: Jesus Christ.)

F. Interest and Capitalization

Is interest-taking morally legitimate? This debate has been going on since at least the days of Aristotle, who regarded money as sterile and interest therefore unnatural.¹² But if money is sterile, why have men throughout history paid lenders interest in order to gain access to its use for a period? How are so many people fooled into paying for the use of a sterile asset? Besides, interest is a phenomenon of every loan, not just loans of money. Modern economics teaches this; so does the Bible.¹³

12. "For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term interest, which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money because the offspring resembles the parent. That is why of all modes of getting wealth, this is the most unnatural." Aristotle, *The Politics*, I:9, Stephen Everson, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 15.

13. "Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase" (Lev. 25:37). "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of

It is obvious that the phenomenon of interest is not confined to money. Aristotle was incorrect. *The phenomenon of interest applies to every scarce economic resource.* We always discount future value. Whatever we use in the present is worth more to us than the prospect of using that same item in the future. *The present commands a price premium over the future.*

The present is now. Our responsibility is now. We deal with our responsibility now. God holds us responsible now. We make all of our decisions in the present. We enjoy the use of our assets in the present. While wise people plan for the future by purchasing expected streams of future income by buying assets that they expect to produce net income over time, they purchase these hoped-for streams of income at a discount. The *rate of discount* that we apply to any stream of expected future income is called the *rate of interest*. Mises called it *time-preference*.¹⁴

Thus, the rate of interest is not exclusively a monetary phenomenon. *Interest is a universal discount that we apply to every economic service that we expect to receive in the future.* We buy a hoped-for stream of income. We can buy it for cash, but we usually demand a discount for cash. This purchase at a discount for cash is called *capitalization*. It is the heart of capitalism. It is the heart of every society more advanced than the utterly primitive.

The person who lends money at zero interest is clearly forfeiting a potential stream of income. He will seldom do this voluntarily, except for charitable reasons. The ownership of the asset offers him an expected stream of income: psychological, physical, or monetary. If it did not offer such a stream of income, it would be a free good. It would therefore not command a price. The owner expects to receive a stream of income. He chooses the degree of risk that he is willing to accept, and he then refuses to lend the asset for less than the interest rate appropriate to this degree of risk.

The borrower compensates the owner for his use of the owner's asset, or its exchange value, for a specified period of time. He borrows it only because he values its stream of services more highly than he val-

money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deut. 23:19–20). Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 57.

14. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

ues the extra payment (interest) to the owner above the rental income generated by the asset. He expects to make a profit of some kind on the temporary exchange of control over it.

Conclusion

Non-fractional reserve banking and the taking of interest are both biblically legitimate. The parable of the talents should be sufficient proof for anyone who is not trying to make an overnight theological reputation for himself based on the promotion of the utterly fantastic. We should take the Bible seriously in preference to Aristotle, and also in preference to the “economics of love.”¹⁵ The capitalization of long-term assets, including human services, is biblically legitimate.

Again, I acknowledge that men, in their quest for autonomy from God, are willing to become slaves of sin, and therefore in principle slaves of other men. I recognize the New Testament principle that it is best to owe no man anything (Rom. 13:8a).¹⁶ I also recognize that modern economics has promoted the ideal of perpetual debt for perpetual prosperity, and has then monetized the national debt.¹⁷ A world so constructed will eventually collapse. But there is no biblically or economically valid justification for passing civil laws that prohibit voluntary credit-debt transactions. Such legislation rests on a denial of the inescapable discounting (capitalization) process between the present value of present goods and the present value of expected future goods. *Usury laws are price controls that try to equate present value and future value.* They inevitably misallocate resources.

With respect to capitalized debt, if both the lender and the borrower agree that a piece of collateral is acceptable in exchange for the defaulted loan, then the debtor is not in debt, net. He has an offsetting asset. He wants money in cash; the lender would rather have money over time. The existence of the collateral reduces the likelihood that the debtor will default. The debtor is therefore not a servant of the lender in this case. Nevertheless, if the loan involves the potential loss of a man’s home, meaning his status and his own self-evaluation, then he is in a form of bondage. But if he owns investment assets (a house, for example) with a mortgage on it, and he risks losing the house if he

15. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix J: “Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney.”

16. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

17. The central bank purchases debt by creating money to purchase it.

defaults, then this voluntary transaction is merely a shifting of risk to the liking of both transactors. The lender feels better about the future with a stream of income guaranteed by the value of the collateral. The borrower feels better about owning the collateral and paying the money. Neither is a servant; neither is a master.

The top priority here is the multiplication of assets in the broadest sense. God grants assets to His stewards. He demands a positive rate of return.¹⁸ He who hides his assets is comparable to the person who hides his candle under a basket. God is cheated by such seemingly low-risk investing.

18. This is possible only because He wipes away the effects of sin.

DISCIPLING THE NATIONS

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).

This is the Great Commission. Its theocentric focus is the resurrected Christ as sovereign over heaven and earth in history. This was the issue of inheritance: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Discipline and Law

A disciple is under discipline. He is under authority. If he breaks the rules imposed by the authority, he is punished, i.e., disciplined.

This text, more than any other in the New Testament, places the nations under Jesus Christ. The text calls on Christians to discipline the nations, i.e., the various peoples of the earth. The word “nations” implies collectives. This is not a call to make disciples of individuals as covenant-free individuals. It is a command to bring covenanted nations under God’s authority by way of their rulers and citizens. This means that the entire individual is to be redeemed in all of his institutional covenantal relationships: church, family, and state.

To bring someone under discipline means that you must have rules. The discipling of the nations is inescapably a judicial matter: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” The question is: What has the church been commanded?

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him (John 14:21).

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love (John 15:10).

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (I John 2:3–4).

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us (I John 3:24).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (I John 5:2–3).

The New Testament's focus is on the individual and the church. Family government is mentioned, but not nearly so often as ecclesiastical government. There are issues of life and death that concern civil government, but these are rarely discussed specifically in the New Testament. This has led conservative Bible commentators to conclude that the New Testament is not concerned with social and political issues. But this assertion raises a major question: How are we to disciple the nations? If there are no explicitly biblical standards for right and wrong—economically, politically, socially, militarily—then how can the national discipling process take place?

B. Old Covenant Civil Laws

I have categorized the Mosaic law under seed laws/land laws, priestly laws, and cross-boundary laws.² Those laws having to do with the fulfillment of Jacob's messianic prophecy—seed laws and tribal

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion.

laws—were annulled with the resurrection/ascension of Christ. This prophecy announced: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws were tribal laws that preserved Judah’s line. Next, there were land laws, which had to do with the conquest of Canaan and the genocide of the Canaanites. These were modified with the return of Israel from captivity (Ezek. 47:22–23). They were annulled with the declaration by Jesus of the Jubilee year (Luke 4:18–21).³ The priestly laws were annulled in principle with the advent of Christ: “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:12–16). They were annulled historically with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

This leaves the cross-boundary laws. It was these that God mandated for Nineveh. They are still in force unless annulled by the New Testament. The New Testament does not explicitly repeat most of these cross-boundary laws. An obvious one is bestiality. “And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them” (Lev. 20:15–16). Most conservative commentators argue that for an Old Testament civil law to be mandatory in the New Covenant era—let alone the specified civil sanction—it must be explicitly recapitulated in the New Testament. They have a major problem with this passage. This sin is not mentioned in the New Testament, yet commentators have not rushed to announce its abrogation. But they do not know what to do with it and its mandatory capital sanction.

The preservation of any social order requires laws and civil sanctions. The question is: What is the proper source of these laws? Is it the Bible? Or is it fallen man’s mind, which is under the authority of one or another god, ending with would-be autonomous man? The

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

Great Commission points out the inescapable task of bringing all societies under God. But how can this be done if there is no legal order that is uniquely Christian? This is the Great Commission's great dilemma for political pluralists.

Conclusion

The Great Commission is a call to the comprehensive subduing of the whole world. It is the New Covenant's recapitulation of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).⁴ It is not limited to personal evangelism. Personal evangelism is the beginning of the discipling of the nations, but it is not the end. Modern pietism would like to limit the Great Commission to personal evangelism, church government, and family renewal—three of the four covenants. But the pietist joins the humanist when it comes to civil government. He rejects any suggestion that civil government or society at large must be brought formally under the kingship of Christ, at least during the era of the church before Christ comes again physically to set up an earthly kingdom (premillennialism).

The Great Commission is greater than pietism. It is comprehensive. *Wherever sin reigns, there the Great Commission applies.* To argue otherwise is to argue either that the Great Commission does not have as its standard the eradication of sin, or else that natural law—the hypothetically unified civil and moral order that springs from the minds of fallen men—is somehow without the taint of sin. This latter proposition is difficult to reconcile with the doctrine of original sin. The Great Commission applies to the state as well as the family and the church.⁵

This means that civil laws regulating the exchange of goods and services, contracts, and justice must come from the Bible. But the New Testament rarely comments on these matters. Thus, we must turn to the Old Testament for guidance. We must ask, "If not biblical law, then what?" We must ask, "By what other standard?"⁶ The Great Commission should move us back to the Bible, not to pagan natural law theory.

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

6. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

CONCLUSION

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. 6:33).

The theme of the kingdom of God/heaven pervades Matthew. This Gospel is the premier Gospel of the kingdom. We learn that *the kingdom of God should be man's supreme earthly goal*—a kingdom based on righteousness. All other temporal goals are secondary.

This raises the question of the dominion covenant. God gave man his marching orders: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26–28).¹

A. Top Priority: God's Kingdom

If the kingdom of God is supposed to be man's top priority, than what has become of the dominion covenant? Nothing. It still operates. Kingdom-first is the same requirement. What was universal under Adam prior to his rebellion has become the specific requirement for God's covenant people. The general requirement also remains, which is why there is a powerful impetus in cultures to extend their wealth and power. The dominion covenant is embodied today by two rival manifestations: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Both are supernatural. Both reveal themselves in history. An increase in one

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3–4.

in history is offset by a decrease in the other: wheat vs. tares.

It is basic to man's nature to extend his control over the creation. Covenant-breakers still obey the dominion covenant, but they do this for the sake of other gods, including man. But because of biblical adoption, assets built up in Satan's kingdom can wind up in Christ's. This is one of God's ways of appropriating the wealth of the wicked. What the wicked lose as covenant-breakers they inherit as covenant-keepers. Because they come under a new covenant, so do their assets.

The New Testament has not abrogated the dominion covenant. The kingdom of God is not in conflict with the dominion covenant. On the contrary, it is the fulfillment of it. The world was always supposed to be subdued by man for the glory of God. This means that covenant-keeping man must do the bulk of the subduing if the dominion covenant is to be fulfilled appropriately. If covenant-breakers do the bulk of the subduing throughout history, then the Bible is incorrect: "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).² If the wealth of the just were laid up for the sinner, then sinners would permanently inherit in history. Satan's kingdom would then permanently displace God's by way of Adam. This would mean that Christ's resurrection and ascension have not definitively overcome the effects of Adam's Fall and will in history progressively overcome them. Then how should the following be interpreted?

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:20–28).

Or this?

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them (Isa. 65:17–21).

The prophecy in Isaiah refers to history, not heaven, for sinners still are present. They live to an old age. Only by denying both the context and the language of the text can amillennialists get it to refer to heaven or the post-resurrection state.³ This is the most difficult passage in the Bible for amillennialists to deal with, so they prefer to avoid it. A good example of this deliberate policy of avoiding the actual text of Scripture is Archibald Hughes, in his book, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*.⁴ He does not discuss this passage; he only lists it in a list of five passages in Isaiah (p. 139). He also does not comment on Isaiah 66:22, the only other Old Testament passage in which the New Heaven and the New Earth are mentioned. He builds his case exclusively on the four New Testament texts. This is an adult's version of the children's game of "let's pretend."

B. The Theme of Priorities

God or mammon? This is what each person must decide. Once this decision is made, then the individual must assess his priorities. A person's priorities are established in terms of one of the two kingdoms.

Matthew sets forth the idea that man is subordinate either to God or mammon.⁵ Man is never autonomous. He makes decisions as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. If he is self-consciously subordinate to God, he can work more effectively to extend God's kingdom. The extension of the kingdom's influence is accomplished by the faithful obedience of God's people. Obedience is what gives them what they need. Obedience, not magic, is the proper means of attaining what we

3. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

4. Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958.

5. Chapter 14.

need.⁶ Covenant-keepers are humble before God—meek—and therefore active in relation to the creation.⁷ They are to march forward confidently because they are under the supreme Commander.

Matthew reminds the reader that he is responsible to God. Responsible people carry the burden of Christian activism. They are more ready to take risks for God and the kingdom. Their fear is reduced because they know that God is sovereign. As His agents, they are part of a large endeavor that spans time and geography. This larger endeavor gives meaning to their efforts, even when they fail. God does not make mistakes; He sees everything in advance.⁸ Men's work has meaning and purpose in terms of the comprehensive judicial claims of God on man and the kingdom that manifests these claims in history.

In setting his priorities, the faithful man is to decide how his work can extend the kingdom of God. He is to honor this principle: first things first.⁹ Eternal life is man's primary reward.¹⁰ This requires being part of God's kingdom: surrendering authority over one's own life in history for the sake of eternity. Therefore, the kingdom of God is primary. Money is not. Those who pursue riches are playing with fire, Matthew teaches. Greed is the religion of mammon: self-gratification and self-worship.¹¹ Man cannot serve two masters.

The underlying lure of wealth is personal autonomy. Wealth seems to provide this by increasing a person's range of choices. God calls us to exchange assets in our earthly treasury for assets in the eternal one.¹² This is a low-risk exchange. Assets in heaven cannot be lost. This is what the rich young ruler failed to understand.¹³ Jesus asked him to sell everything as a condition of joining His disciples. He has not asked most of His followers to do this, then or now. He does ask them to tithe. The tithe is a token payment that declares that the tither is dependent on God.¹⁴ It also drastically reduces the likelihood of addiction to the pursuit of money. Men must trust in God's reserves, not their own, which is why Jesus sent out the disciples the first time

6. Chapter 1.

7. Chapter 4.

8. Chapter 23.

9. Chapter 19.

10. Chapter 17, Chapter 24.

11. Chapter 14.

12. Chapter 13, Chapter 28.

13. Chapter 27.

14. Chapter 15.

without any money or assets.¹⁵ This trust enables men to rest.¹⁶

Saving faith produces service to God by means of service to others.¹⁷ Jesus called this taking up the cross.¹⁸ The bearing of burdens for the sake of the kingdom affirms eternity's priority over time. But only future-oriented people can fully understand this affirmation. Covenant-breakers discount the value of eternity to close to zero. Present blessings are preferred too much to present sacrifice because future blessings are discounted too heavily. The more present-oriented a person is, the more steeply he discounts the present value of future income.

C. Wealth as a Tool of Dominion

Matthew's focus is the kingdom of God. This gospel calls men to repentance, service, and a reordering of their priorities. The kingdom is clearly both earthly and corporate. While the personal goal of service is eternal life, the kingdom itself is corporate. God's servants are part of a larger enterprise.

The message is conquest over adversity through personal subordination. This conquest is more than the subduing of individual sins. It is corporate. The tares and wheat grow together in the field of history. The goal of members of each kingdom should be to replace the other kingdom's influence.¹⁹

Then what of capital? If wealth is a lure to autonomy, how can God-fearing men safely accumulate capital? Only through commitment to the principle of service. Economic growth is inescapable in a social order that obeys God's laws. Jesus told the disciples that by men's fruits we shall know their character. Good men produce good fruits.²⁰ When applied to business, this principle means that serving the customer to his satisfaction produces wealth.²¹ In a faithful society, the rich get richer, but so do the poor, even faster. The means of this increase in wealth per capita is capital formation. But the most universal motive for capital formation is the desire to increase one's wealth. Thus, the means of reducing poor people's poverty is the desire of in-

15. Chapter 22.

16. Chapter 25.

17. Chapter 6, Chapter 10, Chapter 41.

18. Chapter 35.

19. Chapter 27.

20. Chapter 18.

21. Chapter 41.

vestors to get richer.²²

There seems to be a conflict here. Jesus praised sacrifice, warned again too much wealth, yet suggested that covenantal faithfulness will produce a kingdom victory. If wealth is to be avoided, but the kingdom is to be victorious in history, does this mean that this victory is exclusively spiritual, i.e., beyond per capita investment, even including tithe-funded missionaries' salaries? There are Christian traditions that affirm this. Are they correct?

Matthew must be read in terms of the first five books of the Bible. It is clear in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that covenantal faithfulness produces corporate wealth, while covenantal rebellion produces poverty. Jesus did not break with this covenantal system of cause and effect, but He did not spend time teaching it, either. He was concerned with what happens when men achieve wealth: they forget God. That was Moses' concern, too (Deut. 8:17–18). This is the sin of autonomy.

Obedience to God is the key to personal success in history as well as kingdom success.²³ But Jesus focused on kingdom expansion, not wealth expansion. He was so aware of the positive economic effects of tithing²⁴ and using one's talents effectively²⁵ that He felt compelled to warn men against the effects of covenantal self-discipline: wealth leading to the sin of autonomy. This was Moses' theme and Solomon's (Prov. 30:8–9).

D. All These Things

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (Matt. 6:31). These are the basics. What of shelter? It is not mentioned here. Yet building a house is basic to man's dominion. This is why God had Solomon build His house.

Is this passage a defense of a minimal lifestyle? Is it saying that the most we can hope for is food, drink, and clothing, and only after we seek the kingdom? In the modern industrial world, most people have these things. This was also true of Israel under the kingship. David wrote: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). Modern man has a great deal more than these things. Steady economic growth,

22. Chapter 28.

23. Chapter 6.

24. Chapter 15.

25. Chapter 47.

compounding year after year, created wealth in the year 2000 that would have been inconceivable in 1800.

Are we to imagine that God has placed before us poverty as an ideal? Are we to seek no more than a poor man owns in our day? Or are these three things—food, drink, and clothing—representative of all the comforts of home, including a home? I think the context indicates that this is the case. The kingdom of God is comprehensive. It encompasses everything. Therefore, the things promised are equally comprehensive.

Long-term economic growth is the cure for widespread poverty. Nothing else has ever worked. Charity ameliorates the conditions of a few, but it is limited by the resources of charitable people—always a minority. Economic growth provides sources of productivity and therefore income for an increasing population. What able-bodied, mentally capable poor people personally need for economic success is this: opportunity, self-discipline, a sense of personal responsibility, specialized knowledge, a work ethic, and future-orientation. What they need environmentally is this: a private property law-order, a high division of labor, high rates of investment, social peace, open markets.

Is the kingdom of God opposed to any of this? No. Does it promote wealth for all? Yes. Does it promote riches for all? No. Its view of riches is the same as Solomon's: riches can be hazardous to our spiritual health. Just as great beauty can be a temptation to the woman who possesses it,³²⁶ so is great wealth to its owner.

When the Pareto's 20-80 wealth-distribution curve moves to the right, this means that everyone gets richer. But, because the increase in wealth is so slow, most people do not perceive that they are gaining wealth. They mentally adjust to greater wealth. Their tastes change. Their appetites increase. They perceive ever-greater wealth as normal: their just deserts. Then covenant-breakers are tempted to forget God. They attribute their wealth to themselves. When they do this, they depart from the source of their wealth. If their wealth increases after this, it becomes a snare to them and to the whole society. Negative sanctions will eventually be imposed by God.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Matthew does not present the case for great wealth.

26. "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion" (Prov. 11:22).

It presents the case against great wealth. Jesus set forth principles of obedience that produce wealth, according to the Mosaic law, yet He warned against great personal wealth. This was not because wealth is achieved primarily through disobedience to God's law. It was because it is achieved through outward obedience. It then becomes a snare. This could also be said of great beauty, but beauty is not earned. It could be said of great political power, but this attainment is limited to a handful of people in history. Wealth is the more universally desired blessing, and more easily attained than the others. The only blessings to match its appeal are good health and long life—again, rarely believed to be attainable by one's efforts until the rise of the modern health movement, itself a product of unprecedented social wealth.²⁷

The New Testament makes plain what was taught but not emphasized in the Old Testament about the dangers of wealth. Wealth can be a snare. It can lead men to seek autonomy. Solomon understood this. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).²⁸ Wealth is the fruit of covenantal faithfulness that readily becomes a root of autonomy. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18). Jesus paid far more attention to this dilemma than Moses did, just as Moses paid more attention to the covenantal origins of wealth than Jesus did.

What was revolutionary about Jesus' teaching was His doctrine of the afterlife. Only in Daniel 12:1–3 and Job 19:25–27 do we find any Old Testament references to the resurrection. Jesus made clear the extent to which a person's participation in one of two kingdoms in history places him on one side or the other of impenetrable barriers between heaven and hell (Luke 16).

27. The thought of paying for an expensive exercise club or exercise machine does not occur to peasants. They also do not go jogging.

28. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 54.

TRUST AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON MARK

Other Books by Gary North

- An Economic Commentary on the Bible, 31 vols. (1982–2012)
Marx's Religion of Revolution (1968, 1989)
An Introduction to Christian Economics (1973)
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None Dare Call It Witchcraft (1976)
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TRUST AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON MARK

GARY NORTH

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Mark is shorter than the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, or John. With respect to the subject of economics, 10 of the 20 passages in Mark are found in Matthew's Gospel. Two are found in Luke. In most cases, these other two Gospels provide additional information to Mark's accounts.

The primary economic theme in Matthew's Gospel is setting priorities. First, people must choose between Christ and mammon. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).¹ Second, they must arrange their hierarchy of priorities in terms of this more fundamental decision. In English, there is a verb that describes this process: to prioritize.

Mark's Gospel is dedicated to the theme of trust. In choosing between God and mammon, which is not mentioned by name in Mark, people must exercise trust. They must decide between two pathways to eternity. They must trust their judgment. They are responsible agents. What they decide has eternal consequences. Both Matthew and Mark quote Jesus on this fundamental choice.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)²

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36)³

This mandates the choice between one of two covenants. Both covenants offer positive sanctions. Mammon's offers worldly possessions and attainments. God offers eternal life. Mammon's does not

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

3. Chapter 11.

offer this.

The question then arises: Does God's covenant also offer worldly possessions and attainments? Is His covenant either/or or both/and? Is it as one-sided as mammon's? Christianity has yet to come to a theologically developed answer to this, but the vast majority of Christians since the mid-eighteenth century have concluded "both/and." Theologians have followed the lead of laymen, but they have not presented systematic, Bible-based reasons for this. I have. I draw on the five books of Moses to defend my position, most notably Moses' words in Deuteronomy 8. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (v. 18).⁴

Those theologians who adopt a "New Testament only" doctrine of God's New Covenant are hampered by the fact that Jesus said very little about economics. Neither did He say much about politics. He did not have to. He preached to Israelites who had the law and the prophets. He did not come before the Israelites with a theology of the blank slate. He came in the name of the Mosaic inheritance.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17–20).⁵

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:12).⁶

Paul preached to both Jews and gentiles, warning the Jews not to block the entrance of the gentiles into the inheritance that was promised by the law and the prophets. He also told the gentiles about the promised inheritance.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, [1977] 2002).

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 16.

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25–26).

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22).

Mark's Gospel does not call men to trust in a covenant without judicial content or without sanctions in history. It calls men to trust in a comprehensive covenant that serves as the basis of establishing the kingdom of God in history. Because the kingdom of God is in history, it relies on a system of laws and sanctions. Christ's kingdom manifests itself in history. It is as much a kingdom as Satan's. Satan's makes earthly promises and requires earthly sacrifice. So does Christ's. Satan's kingdom makes claims regarding the whole world. So does Christ's.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:8–10).⁷

Conclusion

Every person must decide which kingdom will be the focus of his efforts in history. There is no escape from this choice.

Jesus warned: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). To decide which kingdom to serve, each person must exercise trust. This is a continuing theme in Mark's Gospel.

Trust is an important issue for economic theory and practice. A society with low levels of trust suffers from high costs of cooperation.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

A high-trust society has lower transaction costs. The difference in economic growth rates is statistically verifiable.⁸

Christianity teaches that men can trust God. They can also trust the covenantal cause-and-effect judicial system that God has established for society. If this system were not predictable, men would be blind in their assessments of the costs and benefits of trusting each other.

8. Frances Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

1

TRUST AND COSTS

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him (Mark 1:16–20).

A. Heeding God's Call

The theocentric principle here was obedience to God's call: hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.¹ Jesus called to four fishermen. He used the metaphor of fishing to describe their new lives. He asked them to leave their occupations and become fishers of men. He literally called to them. This is why we describe a person's career as a calling. A calling may be more than an occupation. A calling defines a person. It is his unique service to God or men.

Two sets of brothers immediately left their occupations. They did not sell their share of the businesses. They left their capital behind. They made no preparation for the sale of their property. In the case of James and John, the brothers had considerable equity. They had nets, they had a ship, and they had hired servants. Their father stayed behind. Their father was in a position to manage the capital. Nevertheless, he had relied on them as part of the family business, and they left him without warning. They placed at risk the value of the capital

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

which the family business had accumulated. This intangible capital included their prior commitment to remain in the business with whatever skills they possessed. It called into question the future of the family enterprise.

As we will see in a subsequent passage, Jesus did this with Levi. “And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him” (Mark 2:14).² Levi was a tax collector. Jesus called him, and he left immediately. He even left behind the money that he had collected. “And he left all, rose up, and followed him” (Luke 5:28).

B. A Cost-Benefit Analysis

When Jesus called them, He did not give them any time to make a decision. They did not demand time to make a decision. They immediately decided that they would leave their occupations for a new calling. Jesus did not tell them what, exactly, this calling would be. They had to make their decision based on their trust in His offer, His good judgment in exercising His authority, and the willingness of others either to support the ministry by donations or to hire them part-time after they became disciples.

They had no time to make a careful cost-benefit analysis. They had spent their lives in a profit-seeking occupation. There was a market for the output of their labor. They caught fish, and they sold fish. It was an ancient occupation, and they did it well enough to remain competitive producers. They were exchanging the predictability of an established profit-seeking business for the unpredictability of a non-profit ministry. They would not subsequently sell their services directly to buyers. They would not advertise their services. There would be far less predictability associated with a ministry than there had been with fishing. There was nothing to compare the two careers.

Jesus did not spend any time explaining what He wanted them to do. He said that they would be fishers of men, which presumably meant that they would bring Jesus’ message to other people. These people would be brought into the circle of listeners and supporters of Jesus. The disciples would walk with Jesus for three years, be instructed by Jesus, yet learn almost nothing about His ministry. Again and again, they failed to understand what He was saying and teaching. They remained at His side, but they learned very little. Most import-

2. Chapter 3.

ant, they did not return to their previous occupations.

Jesus gave them an opportunity to serve God in a special way. They became His disciples. Their degree of commitment to Him personally had been manifested by the fact that they had asked no questions when He made the call to them. They did not hesitate. They did not count the costs in any systematic fashion. They committed their lives to Him, even though it cost them whatever capital they had possessed as fishermen. They walked away from their accumulated capital into a new career which was completely unknown to them. In other words, they exercised great faith.

Jesus wanted men of great faith, for such men would become the founders of the Christian church. Men of great faith respond rapidly to a call from God to commit to Him their lives and whatever resources they possess. This is what the disciples did with Jesus.

Jesus called them, and they responded. By normal standards, this was a high-risk decision on their part. It relied on enormous trust. But this is what faith is all about. Men commit in a major way to someone who possesses a unique ministry. In this case, they committed to a man, based only on His calling to them. He trusted them, and they trusted Him. The Gospel of John indicates that Peter and Andrew had already spoken with Jesus (John 1:35–42). There is no textual evidence that He had spoken with James and John.

This incident indicates that Jesus' call contained elements of the supernatural. He knew how they would respond. He knew that they would stick with Him for a long period of ministerial training. He had confidence that they would serve as the organizational foundation of the Christian church. He had supernatural knowledge of their capacities.³ They had almost no knowledge of His capacities. It was a one-sided transaction. Nevertheless, they accepted the terms of exchange. They gave up a steady income for the sake of spending time with Jesus, performing tasks He would assign to them.

This indicates that they had great confidence in the benefits of becoming disciples of Jesus. They counted the costs in a matter of seconds. They dismissed these costs as economically irrelevant. What were these costs? Whatever they would have earned as fisherman. This is the economic meaning of *cost*: the expected value of the most valu-

3. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee" (John 1:47–48).

able alternative path that men necessarily surrender when they take a course of action. These men had skills as fishermen. They abandoned the occupation in which they had a competitive advantage. Whatever stream of income that they had counted on as fishermen, they dismissed as being of far less value than whatever income they would receive as disciples of Jesus. It was clear that this stream of income would be something other than money. Jesus had no money,⁴ and He did not indicate that this was going to change anytime soon.

From the point of view of rational economic analysis, it is difficult to understand why the four brothers immediately abandoned their nets and followed Jesus. Jesus later recommended counting the cost of one's actions (Luke 14:28–30).⁵ In this case, He gave the four fishermen little time to count the costs. He gave them no information of substance regarding what He would ask them to do as part of His ministry. Americans would call this a decision to buy a pig in a poke, but Jews in Jesus' day would not have used this phrase. This much is clear: the details of the transaction were not clear.

C. Turning Point

This was the most significant turning point in the lives of these four fishermen. They must have sensed that this was the case, because they abandoned everything that was familiar to them. They joined the ministry of a man who had no current disciples, who had just begun preaching. They would learn soon enough that He had been a carpenter, and He had abandoned His occupation, just as they had abandoned theirs. In none of the Gospels do we find out what their new source of income was. They always seemed to have a little money, but we are never told the source of this money. Despite the seeming uncertainty of remaining as disciples of Jesus, all of them stayed with Him until the end, even Judas.

This account of the calling of the first four disciples indicates the nature of the commitment which Jesus requires of those who would be His disciples. They are to respond positively to His offer to follow Him. He may call them to abandon all that is seemingly secure for the sake of ministry. He may call them to walk away from their occupations: their sources of income. He may call them to exchange the familiar for

4. "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

the unfamiliar. In short, He may call them to do what very few people in any society have ever done or will ever do. He calls every disciple to a life of faith in which the only certainty that they possess is guaranteed access by prayer to the sovereign God of the universe. Nevertheless, most of His followers throughout history have not believed that God is absolutely sovereign. Augustinianism and Calvinism have been minority positions.

Jesus asked the four to discount sharply the value of their expected streams of income. Compared to His offer to join Him, whatever streams of income that they expected to receive were to be discounted sharply. Compared to the eternal stream of income that Jesus offers to His disciples, whatever the world offers is to be considered irrelevant. As He said later in his ministry, what profit is it that a man in the whole world and lose his soul (Mark 8:36)?⁶ He was calling them to serve as disciples in terms of such a view of the future.

This indicates that Jesus believed that He was establishing a life-and-death ministry. This gives some indication of the value of the gospel. Jesus believed that His offer to exchange a relatively safe career for an uncertain career was a rational offer. It was a rational offer only because the stakes were so high. This was a life-and-death decision. It was more than that; it was an eternal life-and-death decision. All four of the brothers made the decision that Jesus asked them to make.

This was the meaning of the phrase, “fishers of men.” Jesus and the disciples would fish men out of destruction. If we are to take seriously His metaphor of fishing, the disciples would throw down nets and ensnare the souls of men. This indicates that God deals with men in much the same manner as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee dealt with fish. The fisherman is in control, once the fish are in his nets. Jesus called them to serve as fishers of men’s souls.

There should be high perceived value in such a calling. The importance of rescuing the souls of men from destruction is very great. It was surely much greater than the value to be gained by catching and selling fish. There is no comparison, Jesus implied. The four brothers agreed with Him, and they immediately abandoned their nets, their colleagues, their ships, and their future as fishers of fish.

D. A Symbolic Act

This abandonment was a symbolic act. It was an act of lifetime

6. Chapter 11.

commitment. The disciples would become the core unit in the founding of a new religious movement. They would eventually break from Judaism. They would also resist the polytheism of the Roman Empire. This required courage and dedication. So, the nature of this act was to abandon their previous occupations and to submit themselves to the authority of Jesus. They would not be the same. Their lives would not be the same. Their world would not be the same. This was symbolized by the fact that their occupations would not be the same.

What appears to be an irrational decision was in fact a highly rational decision. It was rational because of the authority of Jesus and the trust which these four men had in the words of Jesus. They trusted His words more than they trusted their nets and the supply of fish. This was altogether rational, but it was rational only on the assumption that Jesus represents God. He represents God as the Redeemer. Because the four men had some glimmer of understanding regarding the absolute nature of the authority which Jesus possessed, they readily abandoned their familiar surroundings.

This is what Paul meant years later, when he said that we are to sacrifice ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).⁷ This is liturgical language. It has to do with the altar of the temple. If we are living sacrifices to God, then God should be pleased in the same way that the burnt offerings and other sacrifices of the temple pleased Him. In Mark's account, we learn that God publicly affirmed the fact that He was pleased with the ministry of Jesus (1:11; 6:22). Indirectly, as representatives of Jesus, and as subordinates of Jesus, the disciples participated in the pleasure that God showed for Jesus. They received favor from the King.

Conclusion

Jesus called the four fishermen into lifetime service in a non-profit ministry. They abandoned their occupations. They exchanged an occupation for a calling.

In doing this, they had little time to count the costs of their actions. They forfeited whatever income they might have gained as fishermen. They gained whatever income they would receive as disciples. They made a rapid decision. This was consistent with the magnitude of the disparity between the two streams of income.

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

Their decision was based on mutual trust. Jesus trusted them. They trusted Jesus. They exercised exceptional faith from the very beginning. This degree of faith was important for their perseverance as saints.

The success indicators for a calling are not numerical, unlike success indicators for most occupations. Men must trust their non-numerical judgment in allocating their time and capital to their callings.

2

PRICING AND DEMAND

And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter (Mark 1:40–45).

The theocentric principle here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ This passage is the first of several with the same theme: the tremendous demand for Jesus' services as a healer.²

A. Responding to Others' Needs

Jesus performed miracles of healing. He also performed miracles of feeding. These miracles validated His ministry. They added evidence that His claims were trustworthy. He asked people to have faith in God and faith in His ministry. To secure their trust, He performed miracles. The cost of increasing people's trust in Him was the sacrifice of His privacy and His time.

Jesus healed the leper at the request of the leper. He did not seek

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Mark 6:55–56; 7:32–36.

out an opportunity to heal. On the contrary, the leper sought out the opportunity for Jesus to heal. The leper recognized in Jesus the supernatural ability to heal the human body. He suffered from the most feared of all diseases in ancient Israel. He was an outcast because of his disease (Lev. 13:46).³ The only way for him to regain his health and to regain his legal standing was to be healed.

Jesus was moved by compassion, the text says. He put out His hand and touched the leper. Lepers in Israel were required to announce their physical and legal status by shouting “unclean, unclean” whenever they came near to anyone else (Lev. 13:45). This leper had to announce his condition in order to be healed. Jesus nevertheless reached out and touched the man. He verbally commanded the man to be cleaned. The text says that as soon as He had spoken, the leprosy departed.

At this point, Jesus gave him instructions. The instructions were clear. Jesus told him to go to the priest and make the appropriate sacrifices. This was required by the Mosaic law (Lev. 14:10–32). Jesus did not violate the Mosaic law. This healing was to be a testimony to the priests. But He told the man not to say anything about the healing to anyone else. Nevertheless, the man went out and began to tell others about the miracle. Word spread so fast that Jesus could no longer go into the city. The crowds were too thick. He went into the desert, and still the people came to Him from around the region.

B. Free Goods and High Demand

This healing established a pattern. When Jesus came into a community and healed anyone, the demand for His services rose rapidly. He was offering a unique service: deliverance from sickness and even birth defects. No one else could offer such services with the same degree of reliability. Under any circumstances, demand for His services would have risen dramatically. But He offered these services free of charge. The definition of *scarcity* is this: *greater demand than supply at zero price*. Jesus offered something of exceptional value at zero price. The result was predictable. Many people thronged to gain the blessing of physical deliverance.

Jesus was in a situation analogous to the condition Moses had been in, when Moses served as the judge for all of Israel free of charge. The

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

lines of people were very long in front of his tent. His father-in-law, Jethro the priest, warned him that this would wear him out. It would also wear out the people. He recommended that Moses set up a system of hierarchical courts that would take most of the cases under consideration. Moses did so (Ex. 18).⁴

Jesus was not yet in a position to set up any system of hierarchy that would reduce the demand for His services. Later, He did this, when He empowered the disciples and others to perform healings (Mark 3:15; Matt. 10:1–8). But, at this early stage of His ministry, He did not do this. So, all of the demand for healing was concentrated on Him. The number of people who wanted to be healed at zero price was very large.

Jesus warned the leper not to tell anyone else. He knew what the man would do, but He made sure that He was not the initiator of what soon became a sensation. He responded to this demand in many instances, but He did not originally initiate it. In some cases, He did His best to escape from the demand, but as this passage indicates, His efforts were unsuccessful. People sought Him out, despite the fact that He went into the desert in order to avoid them.

There were times when He preached to large crowds. In two instances, He performed a miracle in order to feed them.⁵ Word also spread regarding these miracles. The miracle increased the demand for His services as a political messiah. “Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone” (John 6:14–15). He did not want this demand, and He did his best to avoid it. But He knew the this demand was a direct result of His ability to feed large numbers of people through a miracle. He understood fully that the masses did not come to Him seeking political deliverance because of anything He said. The people were not looking for bread and circuses. They were looking for bread and revolution.

C. Building an Audience

His ability and willingness to heal people added to His authority.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

5. Chapter 9.

This validated His ministry. It increased people's trust in what He said. This was *word and deed evangelism*. Effective long-term evangelism always is. By performing the miracles of healing free of charge, He built up His ministry. He did not initially seek to build up His ministry in this way, but this became a major factor in people's willingness to listen to what He had to say.

Some people may have approached Him for healing, but they were also willing to listen. This was like a rescue mission, where men in search of a free meal sit through a sermon, which is always presented first. But, unlike a rescue mission, some people came mainly to listen. A few even decided to join His following. They needed attention. This required time. There is no such thing as free time.

On the one hand, His healing ability increased His audience. On the other hand, it decreased the time that He had to teach the disciples and others who were interested in hearing His message of deliverance. He needed a way to share the responsibility and burden of healing people, yet He knew that by performing miracles, He would increase His audience.

There is a limited supply of physical healing. There is tremendous demand for physical healing by people who are afflicted. If someone has the ability to heal in the way that Jesus did, he can expect to spend the rest of his days surrounded by people who want to be healed. Because Jesus did this free of charge, only geographical barriers could serve as a way to reduce the demand for healing services. This is why He fled into the wilderness.

He knew that most people sought out His services of healing rather than His services of teaching. He knew they were interested in physical deliverance rather than spiritual deliverance. His ability to offer physical deliverance reinforced His claim of authority to teach. People understood that He was especially gifted in healing people. They therefore assembled to hear what He had to say about other matters. So, in this sense, his ability and willingness to heal people reinforced His spiritual message. This made Him seem trustworthy.

Jesus did not tell the crowds to worship Him as God. He was entitled to such worship, but He did not seek it. On some occasions, He affirmed His legal status as the Son of God,⁶ but He did so in such a

6. "But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61–62). "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you,

way that He did not declare openly that He is God. Nevertheless, the Jewish authorities understood the implications of what He was claiming, and they sought to silence Him and finally to execute Him.

The message He preached survived because it was written down. Then it was read aloud to churches. Those who did the reading were not able to perform the healing services that Jesus performed. The epistle of James did establish a formal healing liturgy (James 5:14), but the church has never had the same degree of success in healing people that Jesus experienced. Healing launched Christianity, but it has only rarely extended Christianity. The church still has grown.

There is always a trade-off between money and time. Jesus did not charge anything for His services, so He had to donate time. People did not have to pay money for His services, but they had to spend time to seek Him out, especially during those periods in which He was in the wilderness. There are no free lunches in life, other than the grant of salvation. That grant had to be paid for by Jesus at Calvary.

We make choices about how to gain whatever it is we want. We can spend more time shopping for discount prices, or we can save time by purchasing at retail prices. The more valuable a person's time, the less time he should spend searching out bargains. Jesus' time was extremely valuable, but He nevertheless devoted time to healing people. He did not charge money for these services. He demonstrated through healing the supernatural nature of His ministry. He also demonstrated that He was a servant. His ministry of service was a model for the ministries of His followers. The means of spreading the gospel of spiritual deliverance from the bondage of sin is sacrificial service. Jesus sacrificed time for the sake of serving the afflicted.

D. The Economists' Dilemma

Economists have difficulty explaining such behavior. They would probably explain Jesus' behavior as being motivated by the desire to establish a new religious movement. The healing ministry reinforced the preaching ministry. The healing ministry multiplied the audience available for the teaching ministry. The economist would say that this was a self-interested strategy.

The question then arises: What was Jesus' motivation for coming into history to be crucified? Who was the beneficiary? His ministry does not make sense to economists, unless they assume that His prim-

Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

ary goal in life was personal fame. But why would someone seek fame through a needless death? Why would anybody go out of his way to heal people, only to gain notoriety for a message that would motivate His enemies to have Him executed? This makes no economic sense.

When someone invests time and money in order to make more money, the economist is satisfied with the conventional explanation: *self-interest*. When someone invests time and money in order to make so much money that he purchases lots of leisure time at the end of his life, the economist accepts this as a rational economic strategy. But when someone invests time without having any strategy for increasing the flow of money, and simultaneously risks his life, thereby cutting short his available time, the economist finds it difficult to explain the person's motivation. He surely has trouble explaining the motivation of the person's full-time followers. Even more difficult to explain is the degree of sacrifice demonstrated by his posthumous followers. What is the point?

Conclusion

Because Jesus' actions do appear to be economically irrational—sacrificial rather than self-interested—it is not just the economists who are baffled. This was part of Jesus' strategy of evangelism. *It is precisely the seeming irrationality of the ministry that gains followers for the ministry*. Paul said that the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. He also said that Christians are fools in the eyes of those who are perishing (I Cor. 1:18).⁷ This foolishness calls attention to the magnitude of the claims of those people who donate time and money to the cause of Christ. The very strangeness of their behavior gains them an audience. The audience wants to know why. The answer has to do with service to God through service to others.

To exercise faith is to exercise trust. Jesus used miracles to increase people's trust in Him, His Father, and His ministry. Later, the disciples performed similar miracles as part of their evangelism. They sacrificed their time and privacy for the sake of the kingdom.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 1.

3

CALLING VS. OCCUPATION¹

And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him (Mark 2:14–15).

The theocentric principle here was obedience to God's call. God possesses the lawful authority to call us into His service. We are required to heed this call. It takes trust to do this. In the case of Levi, it took exceptional trust. Authority is point two of the biblical covenant.²

A. Publicans

Levi was a publican: a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated more in the ancient world than they are today. Today's tax collector is the agent of an elected government. This provides a degree of legitimacy to the tax system that Rome did not possess in the eyes of tribute-paying foreigners. The government initially sold to companies the right to collect taxes. These companies bid for this privilege. The government collected its revenue in advance from the bidders, who in turn sent agents out to collect the taxes from the people. This system is known in retrospect as tax farming.

Tax farming had prevailed under the Roman Republic. Investors in a tax farming company expected to reap more than they sowed. If the group's bid won the privilege of collecting taxes from a particular re-

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

2. . Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

gion, the investors expected to collect more money than they had paid to Rome. Tax farmers were allowed considerable discretion in establishing the amount of taxes owed by any individual. They estimated how much they could collect before they placed their bids.

The Roman government had stood behind these tax farmers. A revolt against the tax man, then as now, was a revolt against civil government's authority. But publicans were businessmen. They represented a profit-seeking business as well as the government. Their job was to extract as much money as they could from taxpayers. There was no government tax code. They were not bureaucratic agents of the state. The taxpayers were at a great disadvantage in dealing with them.

Under such a system, tax collectors had an incentive to overcharge taxpayers, and taxpayers had an incentive to lie. Many taxpayers would have known about the nature of the tax farming system. It was to the taxpayers' advantage to pay as little as possible. If tax revenues dropped, the bids at the next tax farming auction might be lower. What was it to them if some profit-seeking Roman monopoly made less profit than its investors had hoped? If Rome collected less as a result, the tributaries would shed no tears.

The tax farming system was abolished under Augustus in Christ's day. He substituted tax collecting by local governments, which then paid the central government. This system was less arbitrary than the tax farming system had been.³ But there was still a possibility that local tax collectors might overcharge taxpayers, just as their predecessors had done under the tax farming system. John the Baptist recognized this temptation and dealt with it openly: "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3:12–13).⁴ The tax collector in the Roman world was assumed to be dishonest. John's comment went to the heart of this distrust. But he did not tell them that they were immoral for being tax collectors. He told them only they were immoral if they raised taxes on their own authority and then kept the difference. At every level, he implied, the rule of law should be honored. Tax collectors should know in advance what they are expected to collect. This means that taxpayers should know in advance what they are required to pay. *The predictability of law is to*

3. James Macdonald, *A Free Nation Deep in Debt: The Financial Roots of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), p. 54.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

apply to taxation. The tax farming system was inherently corrupt because it made possible theft on a massive scale. The system imposed the monopolistic force of law without the rule of law.

B. Occupation

There is a familiar saying in English that is equally true in every other language: “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.” Every civil government must collect taxes in some form. Taxpayers prefer to keep more of their wealth than less, so they resist the imposition of taxes. Although they know that some taxation is necessary for their protection, they prefer to have other taxpayers pay. They resent taxes, and they resent tax collectors.

A Jew who served as a tax collector would have been especially resented in Israel. Most of all, a member of the tribe of Levi would have been resented. Levi was the priestly tribe. The parallel account in Matthew says that Levi was also named Matthew (Matt. 9:9).⁵ Matthew refers to himself as Matthew the publican (Matt. 10:3).

Levi was sitting at a table, collecting taxes. As soon as he heard Jesus’ call, he walked away from his job. But he did more than this, according to Luke’s account (Luke 5:27). He left the money behind. Then he invited in fellow publicans to hear Jesus. In doing so, He gave Jesus another opportunity to confront the religious leaders of the nation. “And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. **And he left all**, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:27–32; cf. Matt. 9:9–13). Levi left it all behind. Then he had a party.⁶

Matthew-Levi recognized that Jesus was offering him a higher calling. He was making money at his job. He probably was making a lot of money. He left the money behind. He owed most of it to his superiors unless he was extremely crooked, skimming off receipts. By walking

5. Matthew was one of three brothers who became apostles. He was the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:13; Mark 2:14). James was the son of Alphaeus (Luke 6:15). Judas (not Iscariot) was the son of Alphaeus (v. 16).

6. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 7.

away from it, he became liable to make up the difference out of his own capital. He must have had capital. He could also afford to entertain guests at a feast. He invited other tax collectors, and they came. He was probably not a low-level official. He had money to spend on entertaining and gaining influence among his peers.

Why did he walk away from his money? That was an odd thing to do. He could have turned it in. Instead, he left it sitting there. Perhaps he thought that no one would steal it. But that took considerable faith on his part. Fear of Roman soldiers might have restrained men from reaching into the box⁷ to grab a handful of coins, but such theft would be difficult to prove unless soldiers were present next to Levi, which no text indicates. He must have counted the cost of losing the money that he had collected so far.

Leaving the money behind was a symbolic act. To pick up a box of money would not have required much effort. He did not pick it up. He walked away from it. He soon joined the disciples (Luke 6:15). He became an apostle (Acts 1:13). Visibly, he switched sides: from Rome to Jesus. He did so in a way that could not have failed to gain attention. Word about a Levite publican who had walked away from a box of money would have spread very fast.

Jesus had called him. He heeded the call immediately. He did not hesitate. Others did. “And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:59–62).⁸

Levi’s occupation was tax collecting. He left it for a calling: to be a disciple of Jesus. There was a conflict between the two. He would have found it difficult to remain a tax collector and become a disciple. Surely, he could not have been part of Jesus’ closest associates, for Jesus was constantly on the move. He could not have become an apostle. But Matthew did not know anything about the apostolate. All he knew was that Jesus had called him.

When he invited other publicans to come to a party, they came. Word must have spread to them, too. One of their colleagues had

7. I assume that he had a box or other container for the money. This is not a major assumption.

8. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 20.

walked off the job, leaving the money behind. Why? Then he invited them to come to dinner and meet the man who had called him. Here was an opportunity to get answers to their question.

Tax collectors had a bad reputation in Israel. The scribes and Pharisees linked publicans with sinners (Luke 18:10–11). Jesus did not deny this link. On the contrary, He affirmed it. “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt. 18:17). Instead, He turned their criticism against them. He was a physician who healed the sick. The guests were on the list of the sick. His critics were not on the guest list. They did not regard themselves as sick men; thus, they believed that they had no need of a physician. They were critical of the Great Physician’s methods of healing, including sharing a meal with tax collectors. Jesus was condemning them. They were as sick as the guests. They were in need of healing.

Matthew had humbled himself before Jesus by walking off the job. As a man protected by Roman troops, he possessed great authority. He would soon possess greater authority as an apostle. But the road to this authority was a walk into unemployment. He possessed wealth. He would soon possess a share of God’s kingdom. But that kingdom was barely visible. He had a choice of two masters: God or mammon. He chose God. There is no clearer New Testament example of a man who made the correct choice in the face of such an explicit set of circumstances. He was the opposite of the rich young ruler, who made the incorrect choice.⁹

C. Calling

Jesus had important tasks for Matthew-Levi. The most important, presumably, was writing the first Gospel.¹⁰ But Jesus did not call to him with this offer: “Leave the money behind, and you’ll be able to write the first book in the New Testament, a book that will re-shape the world. Your name will be known by millions of people down through the ages.” He just called him to follow. Matthew heeded the call.

1. The Cost of Discipleship

What was the most profitable thing Matthew could have done: col-

9. Chapter 13.

10. Because the Matthew account alone refers to the tax collector as Matthew rather than Levi, Bible scholars have assumed that he was the author of the book.

lect taxes or write the first Gospel? In retrospect, most people would probably say “write the book.” Men want to be remembered favorably. Fame is a powerful lure; so is a good reputation. Combine the two, and you have a powerful offer. Jesus did not verbally offer the first. The second—a good reputation—was part of the deal, but only by comparison to the universally bad reputation of tax collectors. He would go from being despised by nearly everyone to being misunderstood by many and hated by a few.

To gain this long-term profit—fame and a good name—he would have to pay. What he paid was the income that he would otherwise have received. This payment was symbolized by the box of money he left behind. That abandoned box of money was an earnest—a down payment—on all the other money that he would not receive.

He entered a world of far greater uncertainty. He had been a tax collector. This was one of the more certain occupations in Rome.¹¹ Income was assured: a form of rent. In contrast, it was not clear to him where the income would come from as Jesus’ disciple, wandering the roads of Judaea. Matthew became an entrepreneur. He chose uncertainty over rent. He ceased being a Roman bureaucrat.

There was no question that he was not going to have the same level of money income as a follower of Jesus. He knew that. He demonstrated this understanding by walking away from the money box. He was abandoning his occupation. Why? Because he had been called to something more profitable. He had received a higher calling.

His calling was in opposition to his occupation. What do I mean by his calling? I mean that way of life and that work which Jesus would assign to him. This was the most important work he could do. He could make more money on the old job, but this work was not very important compared to Jesus’ work. Money income was higher as a tax collector, but money income was less profitable to him than Jesus’ work. He was faced with a choice: occupation or calling. He chose the calling.

I define that calling as follows: *the most important work a person can do in which he would be most difficult to replace*.¹² The account of Matthew’s calling is illustrative of this definition. Jesus had a new ca-

11. Two centuries later, it was equally certain but one of the most burdensome occupations. Tax collectors had to pay the state, despite their future revenue, which fell as Rome became impoverished. It became an inherited office which could not be abandoned. It became a form of slavery.

12. Gary North, “The Calling,” *Christian Reconstruction* (March/April 1981). (<http://bit.ly/gncalling>)

reer for him. His old career was profitable financially, but he could be replaced. There is no doubt that the tax collecting agency hired a replacement. We do not know his name. He is no longer important. He was important to himself, his employers, and the taxpayers, but he is no longer important. He left no visible legacy. Matthew did.

The Gospel of Matthew cannot be replaced. The other three Gospels supplement it, but they did not replace it. It is only in Matthew's account that we are told of the virgin birth of Christ, although one passage in Luke presupposes the virgin birth: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23). It is only in Matthew that we read the account of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).¹³ Can you imagine the history of the church without these two passages?

2. *High Bid Wins*

Matthew's choice was not based on monetary income. The organization that employed him paid more money than Jesus offered. Jesus offered nothing in the way of monetary compensation. This is typical for most people. Their place of highest-value service is rarely their place of greatest monetary income.

A bidding war was in progress. The organization that employed him had bid up his income to keep him in a job that suffered from a major social liability. Jesus offered him nothing except discipleship. He had a choice: remain a social pariah or become a social eccentric. Go with the money or go with . . . what? God and mammon were bidding against each other. The high bid wins, but the individual must decide in terms of his own scale of values what the high bid is. Rarely is the high monetary bid the high bid from God's point of view. "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).¹⁴

13. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

14. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

Callings are only occasionally salary-producing occupations, such as minister of the gospel or teacher. Because so few men are ever directly confronted with a choice between calling and occupation, they do not think much about their callings. They may think more about this when they reach their mid-40s, when they see their mortality more clearly. But the kind of life-changing decision that Matthew made is rare. Few men ever hear the call of God so plainly.

D. The Division of Labor

The division of labor has increased dramatically in the modern world ever since the late eighteenth century. Occupations have become more specialized. Low-level or entry-level jobs have become plentiful. It does not take seven years of apprenticeship training to teach a person to be a clerk in a fast food restaurant. It takes just a few days. But it takes far more training to become a physician than it did in medieval times. The assembly line of the modern factory has made average men productive, but factory jobs tend to move to less developed nations or regions. It takes more education and on-the-job training to become a knowledge worker than an assembly-line worker.

As specialization increases, people find more opportunities to exercise their talents. They achieve greater productivity because their creativity progressively matches customer demand. They find their niche in the labor market. This benefits customers, who gain a wider selection of products and services to choose from, and more highly skilled producers working to serve them.

Were it not for the decrease in the cost of information, it would be increasingly difficult to replace workers in the capital-intensive job market. Information costs have dropped, however, offsetting the fact that the closer a person's skills match the requirements of the production process, the more difficult it is to find his replacement. To retain him in the production process, his employer must pay him enough to keep him from seeking employment elsewhere. Because of more accurate and more widely available information about rates of pay, people can bargain to their advantage with employers. Meanwhile, employers can locate replacements. The zones of ignorance have narrowed, meaning that workers are paid closer to what their services are worth to the customer by way of the employer. Only a few people in the organization provide such unique services that the organization's decision-makers cannot replace them readily.

Job-switching is common today. Men seek out better-paying jobs. They are not locked into one job for life. When a person asks: "What is my most productive area of service?" he means for a few years. Men change their occupations and their specialties within organizations.

The bidding war for jobs goes on, day by day. The results can be seen in the price of labor. But nothing comparable exists for the bidding system for callings. There is no visible indicator comparable to the money wage. There is no numerical value that men can place on the calling. While there has been an increase in information regarding callings, there is nothing comparable to the wage system.

With the increase in the division of labor, callings have become more specialized. But without a unique numerical success indicator, the participants and would-be participants in the market for highest service are still as blind, comparatively, as Matthew was. When God calls us into service, He does not present us with an employment contract enforceable in a court of law, with fringe benefits listed. He just says, "Hey, you! Come." There is great uncertainty. Why some men respond while others do not remains a mystery. They do not base this decision on quantitative measures. There is some unexplained factor that is at work in God's issuing of a call. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut. 29:29a).

Because we cannot know the future exhaustively, an element of faith exists in every decision. What distinguishes market decisions is the degree of specificity possible in assessing the future. There are prices. Prices are the result of men's decisions regarding the present value of expected future supply and demand. Men bid for resources in terms of these assessments. The result of this bidding process is an array of prices. So, there is less faith required to make a market decision than a decision regarding the calling. Accepting a calling is more like taking a wife than hiring a housekeeper. The potential is greater, a mistake is more permanent, and the terms of employment are less specific.

Conclusion

Levi-Matthew had to make a decision. He had to assess the call of Christ and compare its potential with that of his occupation. No decision would still have been a decision: to stay right where he was. He made his decision in an instant. We are not told what factors motivated him. Maybe it was only that Christ had called him, despite his po-

sition as a social outcast. Maybe he had been looking for a way out the tax collection field. Or maybe it was something beyond his own power to explain. He wrote the autobiographical account, yet he did not explain his motivation.

Jesus' call persuaded him to act in terms of his priorities. Because he had not sought out Jesus, I assume that the call initiated a major shift in these priorities. The visible indicator of this shift was the money box. The more radical the shift, the less likely that he would take the box with him. Would he trust Jesus or mammon?

He trusted Jesus. He trusted Jesus more than he trusted his employer, his money, or his reputation as a sane man. He walked away from his safe occupation for the sake of his uncertain calling. He thought his future was certain, because he trusted Jesus. For an outsider, this made no sense, but it was a powerful personal testimony.

4

OPEN FIELDS AT HARVEST TIME¹

And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Mark 2:23–28).

The theocentric principle of this passage was stated clearly a few verses later: “For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day” (Matt. 12:8). It is God and God’s work that govern the sabbath and its judicial applications. This is point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.²

The Pharisees did not criticize the disciples for stealing. The Mosaic law exempted this activity from the laws of theft. “When thou comest into thy neighbour’s vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn” (Deut. 23:24–25).

Because of the importance of this passage for a correct understanding of the Bible’s view of private property, I am reprinting

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 26.

2. . Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Chapter 59 of my commentary on Deuteronomy. Some readers may not have access to that book. I have reprinted the entire chapter.

* * * * *

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is that God, as the owner of the creation, has the exclusive right to specify the terms of the leases that He offers to his stewards. He establishes boundaries.

A. Rural Leaseholds in Israel

This law announced certain terms of God's rural leasehold. It announced to the land owner: "You do not possess absolute sovereignty over this land. Your neighbor has the right to pick a handful of grain or grapes from this field. Your right to exclude others by law or force is limited." In this sense, God delegated to a farmer's neighbors the right to enforce God's claim of exclusive control over a *symbolic portion* of every field. The land owner could not lawfully exclude God's delegated representatives from access to his crops. The fact that he could not lawfully exclude them testified to his lack of absolute sovereignty over his property.

In the garden of Eden, God placed a judicial boundary around one tree. A symbolic portion of the garden was reserved by God. This boundary was there to remind Adam that he could not legitimately assert control over the entire garden. Over most of it, Adam did exercise full authority. But over one small part, he did not. It was off-limits to him. Adam's acceptance of this limitation on his authority was basic to his continued residence in the garden. More than this: it was basic to his life.

God interacted with man on a face-to-face basis in the garden. He no longer deals with man in this way. Instead, God has established a system of representative authority that substitutes for a verbal "no trespassing" sign around a designated tree. The neighbor is God's agent who comes into another man's field and announces, in effect: "This field does not belong exclusively to you. As the original owner, God has a valid legal claim on it. So do I, as God's agent."

In this text, God forbade land owners from excluding visitors from their fields. A visitor had the right to pick something to eat during the harvest season. He lawfully reaped the fruits of another person's land, labor, and capital. The legal boundaries that delineated the ownership of a field did not restrict access by the visitor. The visitor had a legal

claim on a small portion of the harvest. He had to appear in person to collect this portion. Put a different way, *outsiders were co-owners of a portion of every field's pickable crop*.

One question that I deal with later in this chapter is whether this law was a cross-boundary law rather than a seed law or land law.³ If it was a cross-boundary law, then God was making this law universal in its jurisdiction. He was announcing this system of land tenure in His capacity as the owner of the whole earth, not just as the owner of the Promised Land.

B. Exclusion by Conquest

The Israelites were about to inherit the Promised Land through military conquest. Their forthcoming inheritance would be based on the disinheritance of the Canaanites. The specified means of this transfer of ownership was genocide. It was not merely that the Canaanites were to be excluded from the land; they were to be excluded from history. More to the point, theologically speaking, their gods were to be excluded from history (Josh. 23:5–7).

The Israelites would soon enjoy a military victory after a generation of miraculous wandering in the wilderness (Deut. 8:4). There could be no legitimate doubt in the future that God had arranged this transfer of the inheritance. He was therefore the land's original owner. They would henceforth hold their land as sharecroppers: 10% percent of the net increase in the crop was to go to God through the Levitical priesthood. This was Levi's inheritance (Num. 18:21).⁴

Before the conquest began, God placed certain restrictions on the use of His holy land: *the formal terms of the lease*. As the owner of both the land and the people who occupied it, God's restrictions were designed to protect the long-term productivity of His assets. Yet He imposed these laws for their sakes, too. Land-owning Israelites had to rest the land every seventh year (Lev. 25:4).⁵ They had to allow poverty-stricken gleaners to come onto their land and pick up the leftovers of the crops (Lev. 19:9–10;⁶ 23:22;⁷ Deut. 24:21).

3. On the difference, see Appendix J.

4. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

This passage further erased the legal boundary between the land's owners and non-owners. Whatever a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands was his to take prior to the harvest. He had legal title to this share of his neighbor's crop. This portion did not belong to the land owner. Ownership of land, seeds, and prior labor did not entitle him to that portion of the crop which a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands. That is, *his prior investment was not the legal basis of his ownership*.

God's promise to Abraham and the nation's military conquest of Canaan were the joint legal basis of Israel's rural land ownership. Legal title in Israel had nothing to do with some hypothetical original owner who had gained legal title because he had mixed his labor with un-owned land—John Locke's theory of original ownership.⁸ There had once been Canaanites in the land, whose legal title was visibly overturned by the conquest. The Canaanites were to be disinherited, Moses announced. They would not be allowed to inherit, because they could not lawfully be neighbors. The conquest's dispossession of the gods of Canaan definitively overturned any theory of private ownership that rested on a story of man's original ownership based on his own labor. The kingdom grant preceded any man's work. The promise preceded the inheritance. In short, *grace preceded law*.

The neighbor in Mosaic Israel was a legal co-participant in the kingdom grant. He lived under the authority of God. His presence in the land helped to extend the kingdom in history. The land was being subdued by men who were willing to work under God's law. The exclusion of the Canaanites had been followed by the inclusion of the Israelites and even resident aliens. Canaan was more than Canaanites. It was also the land. The conquest of Canaan was more than a military victory; it was a process of kingdom extension. The fruits of the land belonged to all residents in the land. The bulk of these fruits belonged to land owners, but not all of the fruits.

In this sense, the resident who owned no land, but who had legal access to the land, was analogous to the beast that was employed to plow the land. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4).⁹ Although the neighbor was not employed by the land owner, he was part of the overall dominion process inside Israel. The fact that God had included him inside Canaan made it more difficult for those who served other gods to occupy the land. A man's ac-

8. John Locke, *On Civil Government: Second Treatise* (1690), section 27.

9. Chapter 63.

cess to the civil courts and to the fruits of the field gave him a stake in the land, something worth defending. Israel was no pluralistic democracy. It was a theocracy. No law but God's could lawfully be enforced by the state. Only God's name could be lawfully invoked publicly inside Israel's boundaries (Ex. 23:13). By remaining inside the land, a resident was publicly acknowledging his allegiance to Israel's God rather than to another god. He was acknowledging God's legal claim on him. God in turn gave him a legal claim on a small portion of the output of the land.

C. Jesus and the Corn

Verse 25 is the partial background for one of Jesus' more perplexing confrontations with the Pharisees.

And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Luke 6:1–5).¹⁰

The Pharisees did not accuse the disciples of theft; rather, they accused the disciples of not keeping the sabbath. Had the disciples been guilty of theft, their critics would have taken advantage of this opportunity to embarrass Jesus through His disciples' actions, which the disciples had done right in front of Him. The reason why they did not accuse the disciples of theft was that in terms of the Mosaic law, the disciples had not committed theft. Their infraction, according to the Pharisees, was picking grain on the sabbath. Picking grain was a form of work.

1. *David and the Showbread*

Jesus' response was to cite an obscure Old Testament incident: David's confiscation of the showbread. The circumstances surround-

10. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

ing that incident are even more perplexing to the commentators than Jesus' walk through the field. David was fleeing from Saul. David lied to a priest and confiscated the showbread, which was always to be on the table of the Lord (Ex. 25:30).¹¹

Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away (I Sam. 21:1–6).

Jesus was implying that David had not done anything wrong in this incident, either by lying to a priest about his mission or by taking what belonged to God. David invoked the status of his men as holy warriors on the king's official business, which was why the priest raised the issue of their contact with women. David's answer—they had had no contact with women for three days—pointed back to the three days of abstinence prior to the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 19:15). David, as God's anointed heir of the throne of Israel (I Sam. 16), possessed kingly authority. Jonathan, Saul's formally lawful heir, had just re-confirmed his *inheritance-transferring oath* with David (I Sam. 20:42).¹² Because of this oath, David had the authority to lie to a priest and to take the showbread for himself and his men, even though Saul was still on the throne. David acted lawfully. David acted as Jacob had acted when

11. There was not enough bread to save their lives from starvation. These loaves were not, in and of themselves, crucial for David's survival. But as one meal among many, the bread was part of a program of survival. These loaves might not be the last ones confiscated by David.

12. The original covenant had been marked by Jonathan's gift of his robe to David, symbolizing the robe of authority, as well as his sword (I Sam. 18:3–4).

he tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing which was lawfully his by revelation and voluntary transfer by Esau (Gen. 27).

The priest said that there was no common bread available. This indicates that this was a sabbath day: no cooking. There was no fresh bread or hot bread, which was why the showbread was still there: it had not been replaced by hot bread. So, David asked for holy bread on a sabbath. There was no question about it: he was asking for holy bread on a holy day in the name of the king. The priest gave it to him. On what legal basis? The text does not say, but David's invoking of Saul's authority indicates that a man on a king's mission possessed lawful authority to receive bread set aside for God if there was no other bread available. God had said, "thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway" (Ex. 25:30). But this situation was an exception which the priest acknowledged as valid. The desire of the king's men superseded this ritual requirement.

Down through the centuries, Protestant Bible commentators have struggled with the story of David and the showbread. They have accused David of being a sinful liar. Puritan commentator Matthew Poole called David's lie to the priest a "plain lie."¹³ John Gill, a Calvinistic Baptist and master of rabbinic literature, referred to David's lie as a "downright lie, and was aggravated by its being told only for the sake of getting a little food; and especially to a high priest, and at the tabernacle of God. . . . This shows the weakness of the best men, when left to themselves. . . ."¹⁴ Neither commentator criticized David for taking the showbread on the sabbath, which was the judicial heart of the matter. Christ sanctioned this action retroactively, which puts Christian commentators in a bind. So, they focus instead on David's lie, just as commentators focus on Rahab's lie, while refusing to raise their voices in protest against the significant ethical issue: her treason. This is a common blindness among pietistic commentators: straining at ethical gnats and swallowing what appear to be ethical camels.¹⁵

The Pharisees did not criticize David's actions. Jesus cited this incident in defense of His actions. *His answer indicates that He was declaring His own kingly authority.* As surely as David's anointing by Samuel on God's behalf had authorized him to deceive a priest and

13. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1683] 1962), I, p. 565.

14. John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 4 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, [1764] 1853), II, pp. 196–97.

15. Cf. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), especially pp. 838–42.

take the showbread on the sabbath, so had the Holy Spirit's anointing of Jesus authorized Him to have His disciples pick grain on the sabbath. As surely as the king's men were authorized to eat the showbread on the sabbath, so were Christ's disciples authorized to eat raw grain on the sabbath.

2. Lord of the Sabbath

Jesus then took the matter a step further: He announced that He was Lord of the Mosaic sabbath. This meant that He was announcing more than kingly authority. *He was declaring His messianic heirship at this point: the son of man, Lord of the Mosaic sabbath.* If David, as the prophetically anointed but not-yet publicly sanctioned king of Israel, possessed temporary authority over a priest for the sake of his lawful inheritance of the throne, far more did Jesus Christ, as messianic heir of the kingdom of God, possess authority over the sabbath in Israel.

One thing is certain: the judicial issue was not grain-stealing.

D. A Foretaste of Bread and Wine

A visitor eats grapes in the vineyard, but he cannot lawfully carry them off his neighbor's property. He cannot make wine with what he eats. Neither can two hands full of grain make a loaf of bread. This case law does not open a neighbor's field to all those who seek a finished meal. A free sample of the raw materials of such a meal is offered to visitors, but not the feast itself. *This is not a harvest in preparation for a feast; it is merely a symbol of a feast to come.* To prepare a feast, productive and successful people must bring to the kitchen sufficient fruits of the field. The full blessings of God are displayed at a feast. This case law does not offer a feast to the visitor. It offers a full stomach to a person walking in a field, but not a feast in a home or communion hall. It offers sufficient food to a hungry man to quiet the rumblings of his stomach, but it does not provide the means of celebration. It offers a token of a future feast. It is symbolic of blessings to come, a down payment or earnest of a future feast.

Grapes and grain point to the sacramental nature of the coming feast: a communion meal. The two crops singled out in this law are corn (grain) and grapes. The disciples picked corn, not wheat. Corn can be eaten raw; wheat cannot. The fact that these two crops are the raw materials for bread and wine is not some random aspect of this case law. *This law pointed forward to the communion feast of the New*

Covenant. The Mosaic covenant was, in effect, the grain and grapes that pointed forward to the New Covenant's bread and wine. The New Covenant's bread and wine in turn point forward to the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9). The communion table of God brings together people of a common confession and a common community who look forward to the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God in history at the end of time. So it was also in Mosaic Israel. The eschatological aspect of Deuteronomy, as the Pentateuch's book of the inheritance, provides a framework for interpreting this case law.

God gives to every man in history a foretaste of a holy meal to come: common grace. Not every man accepts God's invitation. Not every man is given access to God's table, either in history or eternity. The fellowship of God is closed to outsiders by means of a common confession that restricts strangers from lawful access to the table. But a free foretaste of the bounty of God's table at the consummate marriage supper of the Lamb is given to all those who walk in the open field and pick a handful of grain. A handful of this bounty is the common blessing of all mankind. This is the doctrine of common grace.¹⁶

The visitor is not allowed to bring a vessel to gather up the bounty of his neighbor's field. Neither is the covenant-breaker allowed access to the Lord's Supper. The visitor is allowed access to the makings of bread and wine. Similarly, the covenant-breaker is allowed into the church to hear the message of redemption. He may gain great benefits from his presence in the congregation, or he may leave spiritually unfed. So it is with the visitor in the field. "I take no man's charity," says one visitor to a field. "Religion is a crutch," says a visitor to a church.¹⁷ Such a willful rejection of either blessing indicates a spirit of autonomy, a lack of community spirit, and a lack of a shared environment.

E. Neighborhood and Neighborliness

Grapes and grain remain ripe enough to eat in the field only for relatively short periods of time. Either they are not yet ripe or they have just been harvested. The neighbor in Israel was not allowed to bring a vessel to carry away the produce. The presumption was that the neighbor was visiting, became hungry, and ate his fill right there in the field.

16. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

17. A good reason for not passing a collection plate in church is that visitors may believe that a token payment will pay for "services rendered." So, for that matter, may non-tithing members.

This is what Jesus' disciples did. The neighbor, unless very hungry, did not walk over to the neighbor's house three times a day to get a quick meal. He had his own crop to harvest. If he was landless, he might come into a field and eat. He could even bring his family. The landless person would have gained access to free food, but only briefly, during the harvest season.

The two crops explicitly eligible for picking were above-ground crops. This law did not authorize someone to dig a root crop out of the ground. The eligible food was there, as we say in English, "for the picking." Were these two crops symbolic for all picked crops, or did the law authorize only grapes and grain? I think the two crops were symbols of every crop that can be picked in a field. The neighbor was like an ox that treaded out corn; he could not lawfully be muzzled (Deut. 25:4).¹⁸ This meant that the hungry neighbor had a limited range of crops at his disposal. If he was also a local farmer, then his own crop was similarly exposed. His concerted effort to harm a neighbor by a misuse of this law would have exposed him to a tit-for-tat response. If he used this law as a weapon, it could be used against him.

Who was the neighbor? The Hebrew word, *rayah*, is most commonly used to describe a close friend or someone in the neighborhood. "Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maid-servant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Deut. 5:21). It can be translated as friend. "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers" (Deut. 13:6). It was a next-door neighbor: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it" (Deut. 19:14).¹⁹

But did it always mean this? In Jesus' answer to this question by the clever lawyer, He used the story of the Samaritan on a journey through Israel who helped a beaten man, in contrast to the priest and the Levite who ignored him (Luke 10). Jesus was arguing that *ethics*, not friendship, confession, or place of residence, defines the true neighbor. The Samaritan was the injured man's true neighbor because

18. Chapter 63.

19. Chapter 44.

he helped him in his time of need.²⁰ The lawyer did not disagree with Jesus' assessment. He understood that this interpretation was consistent with the intent of the Mosaic law. This means that a law-abiding man on the road in Mosaic Israel was a neighbor. The crop owner had to treat a man on a journey as if he were a local resident. This included even a foreigner.

The Greek word used to translate *rayah* in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament is *pleision*, which means "near, close by."²¹ This indicates that the Jewish translators regarded the neighbor as a local resident. The neighbor was statistically most likely to be a fellow member of the tribe. Rural land could not be sold permanently. It could not be alienated: sold to an alien. The jubilee law regulated the inheritance of rural land (Lev. 25). This means that the neighbor in Mosaic Israel was statistically most likely a permanent resident of the community.

Nevertheless, this law opened the fields to people on a journey, just as the Samaritan was on a journey. As surely as the Samaritan was the injured man's neighbor, so was the land owner the hungry traveler's neighbor. This law was a reminder to the Israelites that God had been neighborly to them in their time of need. After the exile, such permanent geographical boundaries were maintained only if the occupying foreign army so decided. Jesus walked through the field under Rome's civil authority, not Israel's.

Why would God have designated these two above-ground crops as open to neighborly picking? This law made neighbors co-owners of the fruits of a man's land, labor, time, and capital. The land owner was legally unable to protect his wealth from the grasping hands of non-owners. He was left without legal recourse. Why? What judicial principle undergirded this case law? What benefit to the community did this law bring which offset the negative effects of a limitation of the protection of private property? To answer this accurately, we must first determine whether this case law was a temporary law governing only Mosaic Israel or a permanent legal statute for all Trinitarian covenantal societies.

20. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 21.

21. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 678.

F. Seed Laws and Land Laws

Seed laws and land laws were temporary statutes that applied only to Mosaic Israel.²² I have argued previously that the seed laws of the Mosaic covenant were tied to Jacob's messianic prophecy regarding Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws and land laws served as means of separating the tribes, thereby maintaining the continuity of each tribe until the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy, which rested on tribal separation.²³ The jubilee inheritance laws were land laws that were designed by God to accomplish this task.

One aspect of tribal separation was the creation of a sense of unity and participation in a larger family unit. Members of each tribe were linked together as descendants of one of Jacob's sons. There was an aspect of brotherliness within a tribe that was not shared across the tribe's boundaries. There is a social distinction between brotherhood and otherhood. Boundaries mark this distinction. The main boundary for Israel was circumcision, but tribal boundaries also had their nationally separating and locally unifying effects.

By allowing the neighbor to pick mature fruit, the Mosaic law encouraged a sense of mutual solidarity. The local resident was entitled to reap the rewards of land and labor. The land belonged ultimately to God. It was a holy land, set apart by God for his historical purposes. To dwell in the land involved benefits and costs. One of the benefits was access to food, however temporary. The staff of life in effect was free. In harvest season, men in Israel would not die of starvation. But their source of sustenance was local: their neighbor's field. Would this have created animosity? Sometimes. Everything in a fallen world is capable of creating animosity. But what about the owner's sense of justice? It was his land, his effort, his time, and his seeds that had made this wealth possible. Why should another man have lawful access to the fruits of his labor?

One possible answer ties this law to the Promised Land. Israel was a holy land that had been set aside by God through a program of partial genocide. (God had specified total genocide, but the Israelites had failed.) The land was exclusively God's. It was His dwelling place. He fed His people on His land. God, not their own efforts, was the source

22. Appendix J.

23. Appendix J.

of their wealth (Deut. 8:17).²⁴ Israel's holy status was still true in Jesus' day because of the temple and its sacrifices. But there is a problem with this explanation: strangers in Jesus' day dwelled in the land, and in fact ruled over the land. Furthermore, Jesus identified the Good Samaritan as a neighbor. The Samaritan therefore would have qualified as a man with lawful access to an Israelite's field. The Promised Land fails as the basis of this case law.

A second possible explanation is this: the tribes existed in order to complete God's plan for Israel. Local solidarity was important for maintaining the continuity of the tribes. Problem: this law was still in force in Jesus' day, yet the tribes no longer occupied the land as separate tribal units. The seed laws have nothing to do with this law.

Third, it could be argued that Israel was a holy army. An army does not operate in terms of the free market's principle of "high bid wins." In every military conflict in which a city is besieged, martial law replaces market contracts as the basis of feeding the population. The free market's principle of high bid wins is replaced by food rationing. Solidarity during wartime must not be undermined by a loss of morale. A nation's defenders are not all rich. *The closer we get to the priestly function of ensuring life, the less applicable market pricing becomes.* Problem: Israel was not a holy army after the exile. It was an occupied nation. Yet this case law was still in force. There was no discontinuity in this case between the Mosaic covenant and the post-exilic covenant.

If a Mosaic law was not a land law, a seed law, or a priestly law, then it was a cross-boundary law. This means that it remains in force in the New Covenant era. The problem is to identify in what ways this law can be applied in a relevant way in the New Covenant era.

G. The Farmer and the Grocer

The Mosaic law authorized a neighbor to pick grapes or grain from another man's field. It did not authorize a man to pick up a free piece of fruit from a grocer's table. What is the difference? What underlying moral or organizational principle enables us to distinguish between the two acts? In both cases, the "picker" wanted to eat a piece of fruit for free. He was not allowed to do this in the second case.

Let us consider the economic aspects of this law. Both the farmer and the grocer sought a positive return on their investments. The farmer planted seeds in the ground, nurtured the seedlings, and sold the

24. Chapter 21.

crop to someone, possibly the grocer or his economic agent. The grocer made his money by purchasing a crop in bulk from the farmer or his economic agent, transporting it to a central location, and displaying it in a way pleasing to buyers. What was the differentiating factor? Time? Soil? Location? Money?

The difference seems to have been this: *control over rural land*. The farmer in Mosaic Israel worked the land. He cared for it directly. The grocer did not. The farmer profited directly from the output of this land. The grocer profited indirectly. The farmer had a unique dependence on the land. The grocer did so only indirectly, insofar as food that was imported from abroad was much more expensive for him to buy, except in Mediterranean coastal areas and regions close to the borders of the nation. The distinction between grocers and land owners may also have had something to do with the jubilee land laws.²⁵ Rural land was governed by the jubilee law. Urban real estate was not. Unlike urban land, prior to the exile, rural land was the exclusive property of the heirs of the conquest, though not after the return (Ezek. 47:21–23).

Those who lived on the land and profited from it as farmers were required to share a portion of the land's productivity with others, as we have seen. To this extent, the fruit of the land was the inheritance of those who dwelled close by. This law would have strengthened the sense of community in a society that was bound by a national covenant that was tied to land. The local poor would have had something to eat in the harvest—a sense of participation in the blessings of God. A brief safety net was in place. To gain access to a full safety net—a lawful bag in which to put the picked produce—the poor had to work as gleaners (Deut. 24:19–22).²⁶ While the state was not authorized to send crop collectors into the fields to collect food to redistribute to the poor, the Mosaic civil law did not enforce sanctions against those who came into a field to eat a handful of food. *It was not legal for land owners to impose physical sanctions against neighbors who took advantage of this law.* The civil law did not compel wealth redistribution in Mosaic Israel, but it defined the land owner's property rights in such a way that the state was prohibited from bringing negative sanctions against those who entered the field to pick a handful of the crop.

25. As I shall argue below, I do not think this was covenantally relevant: "Has This Law Been Annulled?"

26. Chapter 62.

H. A Shared Environment

Let us consider a difficult application of this case law. Did this law open every man's fields to wandering hordes during a famine? Times of famine have been times of great disruption of the social order. Wandering bands of hungry people fan out across the countryside. Whole populations move from region to region in search of food. This happened repeatedly in Europe from the late medieval era until the late seventeenth century, and well into the twentieth century in Russia.²⁷ Similar famines have occurred in China in modern times.²⁸ Before the advent of modern capitalism, famines were a regular occurrence. Even within capitalist society, Ireland suffered a nearly decade-long famine in the 1840s. The absentee landlords in England did not foresee the threat to the potato crop posed by the blight at its first appearance in 1841. Over the next decade, these landlords paid for their lack of foresight with huge capital losses; a million Irish paid with their lives.²⁹

Are wandering strangers in search of food the judicial equivalent of a neighbor? Is a desperate family on the road in search of food entitled fill their stomachs with a farmer's corn or apples? If enough of these people were to show up at harvest time, their economic effect would be comparable to a swarm of locusts. Locusts in the Bible are seen as the judgment of God (Ex. 10:4–6; Deut. 28:38). The land owner planted a crop and cared for it in the expectation that his family would eat for another season. Was he now required to sit idly by and watch strangers consume his family's future? Was the state prohibited by this case law from defending his interests? If so, then what would be his incentive to go to the expense of planting and nurturing his next crop? Would he even survive to plant again? Was Israel's society benefited by opening the fields to all comers in every economic situation? Was the nation's future agricultural output threatened by a definition of "neighbor" that includes an open-ended number of strangers in search of free food?

The goal of this law was the preservation of community. Its context was *a local neighborhood in which families shared the same environment*. A crop failure for one family was probably accompanied by a crop failure for all. Mutual aid and comfort in times of adversity were

27. For a list of dozens of these famines, see Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity* (New York: Dutton, 1942), p. 132.

28. Pearl S. Buck's novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), tells this story.

29. A good summary of the story is Christine Kinealy, *The Great Hunger in Ireland* (Chicago: Pluto, 1997).

likely in a community in which every person has a symbolic stake in the community's success. These people shared a common destiny. This law was an aspect of that common destiny.

As for the Samaritan in the parable, he was not on the road for the purpose of stripping fields along the way. The Samaritan assisted the beaten man; he did not eat the last grape on the man's vine. The Samaritan found another man on the same road. They were both on a journey. They shared a similar environment. They were both subject to the risks of travel. The threat of robbery threatened all men walking down that road. What had befallen the victim might have befallen the Samaritan. It might yet befall him. Perhaps the same band of robbers was still in the "neighborhood": the road to Jericho.

Men who share a common environment also share common risks. When men who share common risks are voluntarily bound by a shared ethical system to help each other in bad times, a kind of social insurance policy goes into effect. Risks are pooled. The costs that would otherwise befall a victim are reduced by men's willingness to defray part of each other's burdens. But, unlike an insurance policy, there is no formal agreement, nor does the victim have any legal claim on the non-victim. The beaten man had no legal claim on the Samaritan, the Levite, or the priest. Two of the three ignored him. They broke no civil law, but their act of deliberately passing by on the other side of the road revealed their lack of commitment to the principle of community: shared burdens and blessings.

The ethics of neighborliness is mutual sharing when the resources are available. The ethics of neighborliness did not mandate that the state remain inactive when hordes of men whose only goal is obtaining food sweep down on a rural community. The harvest was shared locally because men have struggled with the same obstacles to produce it. The original struggle was the conquest of Canaan, which was a tribal effort in each region. This law assumed a context of mutual obligations, not the asymmetric conditions in a famine, when the producers face an invasion from outside the community by those who did not share in the productive effort.

I. Community and Economy

One of the favorite contrasts of sociologists is community vs. economy. The most famous example of this in sociological literature is Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), which he

wrote at age 32. In this pioneering work, the author contrasted the small, medieval-type village with the modern city. He argued that the demise of the personal relationships of village life has led to the impersonal rationalism and calculation of the modern city.³⁰ He used the now-familiar analogies of organic life and mechanical structure to describe these two forms of human association.³¹ He viewed the family as the model or ideal type of *Gemeinschaft*.³² The business firm, which is a voluntary association established for a limited, rational purpose (profit), would seem to serve well as a model for *Gesellschaft*.³³

In American history, there have been few defenders of *Gemeinschaft*. Thomas Jefferson heralded the independent yeoman farmer, but Jefferson was no advocate of village life. A group of intellectuals and poets known as the Nashville agrarians in 1930 wrote a brief defense of southern agrarian life in contrast to modern urbanism, but they have long been regarded at best as regional utopians, even in the South.³⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were contemptuous of "the idiocy of rural life,"³⁵ and most commentators have agreed with them. Most commentators have been urban.

The movement of vast populations from the farms to cities has been a continuing phenomenon worldwide, beginning no later than the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century. The advancing division of labor was made possible by close contact in urban areas, the transportation revolution, the mechanization of agriculture, the revolution in electrical power, and government-funded road systems. This has concentrated populations in vast urban complexes.

The Bible promotes both cultures. The farms of Israel were held together as a civilization by the Ark of the Covenant, which was housed in a city. The New Heaven and New Earth is described as a city

30. He did not argue, as Marx and other sociologists and economists have argued, that it was the rise of capitalism that undermined the village life. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 78.

31. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*) (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1887] 1957), pp. 33–37.

32. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, p. 75.

33. His theme—the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from communalism to rationalism—became an integrating theme in the works of the great German sociologist, Max Weber. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

34. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, [1930] 1977). Cf. Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

35. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 6, p. 488.

in which the tree of life grows (Rev. 22:2).³⁶ In the Old Covenant, the city was supported by the farms. In the New Covenant's imagery of the final state, the image is different: the city contains the tree. The tree feeds the inhabitants. The symbolism seems to be *from farm to city*. This was also the thrust of the jubilee legislation: ever-smaller farms for an ever-growing population.³⁷ Yet, covenantally, an heir of the conquest always had his historical roots in the land. The land was his inheritance. His name was associated with the land.

This judicial link to the soil ended with the New Covenant. The land ceased to be a holy place after the fall of Jerusalem. But the imagery of the tree of life, like the imagery of bread and wine, ties members of the New Covenant community to the soil. The preference of suburban Americans for carefully mowed lawns, of Englishmen and Japanese for gardens, of the Swiss and Austrians for flowers growing in window gardens and for vegetable gardens all testify to man's desire to retain his links to the soil from which he came.

There is a story told about the German free market economist Wilhelm Röpke. He was living in Geneva at the time. He invited another free market economist (said by some to be Ludwig von Mises) to his home near Geneva. He kept a vegetable garden plot near his home. The visitor remarked that this was an inefficient way to produce food. He countered that it was an efficient way to produce happiness.³⁸

The division of labor is a powerful social arrangement. Specialization increases our economic output as individuals. We can earn more money per hour by specializing than by performing low division of labor tasks. But we also increase our dependence on the social institutions that have promoted the division of labor. Above all, we increase our reliance on banks, transportation systems, and other arrangements run by computers. We have delivered our lives into the hands and minds of computer programmers. The payments system is governed by fractional reserve banking. This is risky. There is an economic case for investing in a lower division of labor lifestyle with a portion of our assets and our time.

36. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 21. (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

37. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

38. Russell Kirk said that Röpke said that it was Mises. In 1975, I heard the same story from another economist, Röpke's translator, Patrick Boarman. I do not recall that Mises was the target of the remark, but he may have been. See Kirk's 1992 Foreword to Wilhelm Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, [1942] 1992), p. ix.

There is more to community than efficiency. Community is more than property rights. Community in Mosaic Israel was based on a series of covenants. The right of private property was defended by the commandment not to steal, but the definition of theft did not include eating from a neighbor's unharvested crop. This exception was unique to the land. It applied to a form of property that was not part of the free market system of buying and selling (Lev. 25). God was the owner of the land in Mosaic Israel. He set unique requirements for ownership of Mosaic Israel's rural land. These rules were designed to provide a brief safety net in an area of the economy in which it was illegal to transfer family ownership down through the generations.

In the final analysis, this law was far more symbolic than economic, for the harvest time would not have lasted very long. The sense of community had to be preserved in a system that restricted buying and selling. Those who did not own the best land or even any land at all had a stake in the success of local land owners, despite the law's restrictions of the permanent sale of inherited property. This symbol of participation in the fruits of the land was important for a society whose members celebrated the fulfillment of God's prophecy regarding the inheritance of a Promised Land.

J. Has This Law Been Annulled?

Is there any Mosaic covenantal principle whose annulment also annulled this law? We know that a similar law is still in force. Paul cited the law prohibiting the muzzling of the working ox, applying it to the payment of ministers. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Tim. 5:17-18).³⁹ But this case law applied more generally to the Christian walk. "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (I Cor. 9:9-10).⁴⁰ There is a down payment in history—an earnest—of the covenant-

39. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

40. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

keeper's kingdom victory in eternity. This down payment is an aspect of the inheritance (Eph. 1:10–14).

The tribal system was annulled in A.D. 70. Was this law exclusively tribal? The same kinds of psychological benefits seem to apply outside the tribal context: commitment to the community, a sense of participation in the blessings of this community, a willingness to defend it against invaders. What is missing today is Mosaic Israel's public exclusion of the names of other gods. A man's presence in the land does not, in and of itself, testify publicly to his willingness to serve under the law of God. The mobility of rival gods is like the mobility of the God of the Bible in the Old Covenant. The universality of their claims makes them different from the gods of the ancient Near East in Moses' day. To this extent, the situation has changed. But religions that claimed allegiance to universal gods appeared in the Near East and Far East at about the time of the Babylonian exile. Nevertheless, people in Israel in Jesus' day were still allowed to pick grain in their neighbors' fields.

This law seems to be a cross-boundary law. The neighbor, defined biblically, has a legal claim to a handful of any crop that he can pick. The biblical hermeneutical principle is that any Old Covenant law not annulled explicitly or implicitly by a New Covenant law is still valid. There seems to be no principle of judicial discontinuity that would annul this law.⁴¹

* * * * *

Conclusion

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees pointed to the sabbath principle as a means of liberating men. The disciples were hungry. Food was nearby. They could lawfully pick grain, but they did not cook it. They had to do some minimal work, but any food preparation activity is work. They were not violating the sabbath. They were walking and talking with the Lord of the sabbath. This was the top priority of the disciples.

The sabbath is not to be used as a means of interfering with recreation that leads to better knowledge of God's work. A stroll on the day of rest is legitimate. So is discussion of spiritual matters. So is food preparation that does not disrupt the day's pattern of rest. Man is not

41. Because I see no judicial discontinuity between the covenants regarding this law, I conclude that the distinction between the grocer and the farmer was not based on the jubilee law, which has been annulled (Luke 4:18–22). North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

to become enmeshed in a formidable array of rules governing the day of rest. Men are to be liberated by the day of rest. They are not to be placed in such bondage that they cannot enjoy the day. The sabbath is liberation from work and liberation from fear. It is not to be turned a means of subjugation by means of a handbook of man-made restrictions.⁴²

42. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 34.

5

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES¹

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful (Mark 4:18–19).

The theocentric principle undergirding this passage was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.²

A. Strong Delusion

In this parable of the seeds, we are told that the fruitfulness of the soil determines the result of the sowing. The seed-sower—God—distributes the same seeds, but the results are different. This passage seems to minimize the work of the sower. But verse 19 provides a clue: “the deceitfulness of riches.” The same Greek root word for deceitfulness is found in another passage that deals with Satan’s work of deception.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all **deceivableness** of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thess. 2:7–12).

Here, we learn that God sends a strong delusion on those whom He hates in order that they might believe a lie. It is the same with the soils. God is sovereign in salvation, both as seed-sower and soil-maker.

B. Wealth and Autonomy

This passage is an explanation of the previous passage:

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (Mark 4:2–9).

Riches are here compared with thorns. The cares of this world and riches overwhelm a man's faith in the word of God. This points back to the curse on Adam: "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field" (Gen. 3:18).³ The thorns are hindrances that thwart man's work. The work in question in the parable is the work of extending the kingdom of God in history. The measure of earthly success is wealth, yet wealth is what threatens the hearer's work. The cares of the world undermine his kingdom-building efforts. One such care is the amassing and care of riches. Great wealth requires great care to maintain it.

Riches are said to deceive men. What is it about riches that deceives men? Moses made this clear: *the sin of autonomy*. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).⁴ The author of Proverbs wrote: "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit"

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 12.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

(Prov. 18:11).⁵ “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).⁶

What is it about wealth that persuades men that they are autonomous? One aspect is the great *range of alternatives* open to men with wealth. In fact, wealth is best described in terms of this range of alternatives. We say that a person’s wealth has increased in direct proportion to the increase over his previous range of choices. The man of great wealth is tempted to trust in his wealth because it seems to endow him with him a Godlike power of decision-making. This is a delusion. The range of choices open to any man is minuscule compared to what God can do. God is infinite; He can do whatever He chooses. The rich man is blinded by his wealth because it is his preferred means of comparison with other men, not with God.

Another aspect is the *seeming impersonalism* of wealth. Wealth is a tool of dominion. Tools appear to be impersonal. They are not, but they appear to be. Wealth extends a man’s power and influence over others in a seemingly impersonal way. A tool is usually regarded as impersonal device that extends the personal decisions of its owner. *Wealth is seen as existing independently, or only as an extension of the owner.* This is a delusion. Wealth does not exist independent of the decisions of other men. Other men *impute economic value* to the rich man’s capital or to the services that he sells that provide him with his wealth. If their opinions change, he can be reduced to poverty. The familiar example of the buggy whip industry is analytically correct. When the automobile came, the buggy whip business was doomed, except among the Amish.

Men seek those forms of wealth that insulate them from the changing opinions of other men. They accumulate money because money is more constant in value than the opinions of their customers. It is the most marketable commodity. We are now back to the issue of the wide range of choice. But when an invading army comes, or plague comes, or famine comes, or some other disaster comes, money is of little or no value. The environment that made wealth what it was has changed. So, people’s imputation of value has changed.

To attribute to any aspect of the creation a power associated with

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 85.

God is to move from theonomy to autonomy. Men are tempted to attribute to wealth or power this kind of autonomy. But most men recognize the inherent danger of power. It calls forth others who wish to claim such power by whatever means. Power is too personal to be shared easily; it must either be monopolized or surrendered.⁷ But wealth can be gained in many ways. Others can become wealthy without threatening the status of the wealthy man.⁸ So, wealth is the more common means adopted in the quest for autonomy.

The issue of autonomy vs. theonomy is the issue of trust. Who do we trust? God or nature? God or ourselves? God or money? *The issue of trust is ultimately the issue of worship.* We subordinate ourselves to that which we trust.

C. Riches vs. Fruitfulness

The deceitfulness of riches leads to unfruitfulness. This is because men are tempted to focus on the temporal. Riches are a convenient means of assessing productivity. Because of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28),⁹ men are inescapably confronted with the results of their own productivity in their God-assigned task of subduing the earth. They seek to discover *agreed-upon success indicators* that will reveal their degree of success. In almost every society, money has been the most familiar success indicator, the one open to the widest audience. Unlike beauty or power or artistic creativity, wealth is open to a wide range of talents. In this sense, it is a more impersonal success indicator.

Because so many people acknowledge wealth as a measure of success, men are lured into pursuing it. Other men impute value to wealth as the measure of a man's life. It is easy to listen to the crowd and to evaluate one's own performance in relation to the economic success of others.

This is a snare and a delusion, Jesus taught. The crowd is wrong.

7. In bureaucracy, power is divided up more finely and made less dependent on anyone's personal attributes. Bureaucratic power can be allocated widely. But it is circumscribed by rules. Bureaucracy is the common man's way to power.

8. If many people become wealthy, this can threaten his status. Some goods are *positional* goods. They are valuable only because they are in short supply. If mass production makes them widely available, they lose their status-giving power. Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), ch. 3. This is one reason why free market capitalism is hated by members of groups that have attained their social status in a pre-capitalistic economy, where wealth is not widely shared.

9. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, chaps, 3, 4.

What constitutes riches is *right standing with God*. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:23–26).¹⁰

Then what is fruitfulness? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23). Money does not buy these or empower these. The deceitfulness of wealth wars against these. Wealth is not inherently opposed to them, but the deceitfulness associated with it does undermine such fruitfulness.

The success indicators of spiritual maturity are not quantifiable. Wealth is. The lack of a quantifiable success indicator bothers most men. They want to “keep score” in life. They seek a numerical indicator. “He who dies with the most toys, wins” proclaims a popular American tee-shirt.

Did Jesus warn men not to use wealth as their success indicator, except perhaps as a negative indicator? If He did, then He broke with the Mosaic law’s covenantal principle of inheritance. There is no doubt that wealth was a legitimate success indicator under the Mosaic law. “The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 28:8).¹¹ Wealth was a success indicator even before the Mosaic law. “And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2). The loss of wealth was seen as a curse. “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways” (Hag. 1:6–7).¹² Consider your ways, God told them. The disparity between their input (sown much) and their output (bring in little) was a lack-of-success indicator. It was to motivate them to spiritual introspection. There was a positive rela-

10. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 38.

11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

12. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 31.

tionship between covenantal faithfulness and economic success. Did Jesus deny this relationship? If He did, then the New Covenant represents a sharp discontinuity with the Old Covenant, for the visible sanctions have changed.

E. Exchange Rate: Temporal Wealth vs. Eternal Wealth

The text does not say that riches lead men astray; their deception does. Man is easily deceived by riches, as we have seen. Riches are temporal; so, they focus man's attention on the temporal. The *time-bound nature of riches* is a snare and a delusion. Jesus kept teaching about the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth. He kept saying that the rate of exchange is low, but men—especially rich men—think it is high. Why lay up treasure on earth, Jesus asked, where thieves break in? Is this not foolish? But the rich man cannot see the foolishness. Why? Because he refuses to see that *he is as temporal as his wealth*. They both dissipate—he more certainly than his wealth. But he turns a blind eye to his mortality. Even an old man thinks he has at least five years left to live.

1. Declining Marginal Utility and Addiction

Economics teaches that as a person accumulates units of one asset, each additional unit is worth less to him than the previous unit. This is the law of decreasing marginal utility. It leads to the statement, “enough is enough.” So, a rich man should be progressively willing to surrender ownership of a unit of this asset to gain a unit of an asset that he does not own: eternal wealth. But there is an assumption behind the law of diminishing marginal utility: the person's tastes do not change. If there is an addictive aspect of the item, then the law of diminishing marginal utility applies differently. The enjoyment produced by each unit declines, as economic theory says it must, but demand nevertheless increases. To get the same thrill as before, the user must consume more of the drug per dose. To avoid painful withdrawal symptoms, the addict must consume more doses per unit of time. Jesus' description of the deceitfulness of riches and the inability of the rich man to enter heaven implies that *temporal wealth is addictive*.

If temporal wealth were not addictive, then, in the eyes of a rich man, the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth would shift in favor of eternal wealth. As a man accumulates more

temporal wealth, he should find the value of each additional unit worth less to him. Eternal wealth would look more appealing to him. He would be willing to exchange some of his earthly wealth for a greater supply of eternal wealth. But this is rarely the case, Jesus taught. This points to earthly wealth as addictive.

Yet the same can be true of the accumulation of eternal wealth. It, too, can become addictive, but not for many people. Still, the idea has had a fascination for Americans. In 1933, in the worst economic phase of the Great Depression, a 1929 novel by Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas became a best-seller: *Magnificent Obsession*. The title reveals the theme: giving away wealth for God's kingdom becomes an obsession. As a few men learn this lifelong discipline, they prosper. The book was made into a popular movie in 1935 and again in 1954.¹³ But most people find the suggestion hard to implement, especially rich men.

2. Radical Change

There is another explanation for the rich man's resistance: the non-marginal nature of the exchange. Eternal life is not sold for temporal wealth, unit by unit. It is given away as a package deal through special grace: *definitive sanctification*. This package is supposed to be filled over time by *progressive sanctification*.¹⁴ Marginal exchange is the meaning of this verse: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:20).¹⁵ Laying up treasures is not a one-time event. It is *a lifetime process of exchange*, unit by unit, good work by good work. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). These exchanges begin only after legal access to

13. Douglas was a theological liberal. He was the minister of the large and influential First Congregational Church of Los Angeles in the late 1920s. He wrote the book in an emotional depression, when the church's leaders were discussing his dismissal. He resigned, finished the book, then wrote a dozen more, several of which became best-sellers and movies. His most famous novel was *The Robe* (1942), which became the first movie in Cinemascope (1953), the wide-screen technology.

14. John Murray, "Sanctification," *The Collected Works of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

15. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

the eternal treasury is transferred to the recipient.

Prior to receiving grace, the poor man is more likely than the rich man to think, "If this life is all there is, then I will consider eternal life." The rich man thinks, "This life is good for me. I cannot be sure about eternal life. If I must sacrifice this life for that life, I shall stick with what I know and have come to depend on." *Riches focus a rich man's attention and hope on the temporal, where he is successful.* He will not readily believe that portions of his temporal wealth can be exchanged for eternal wealth. If he does believe this prior to special grace, he is deceived once again: works religion. He cannot open an account at heaven's treasury on his own signature. Regeneration is the radical change that must precede the exchange process.

The price of radical change is lower for the poor man. He is not giving up much. *The price of radical change is higher for the rich man. He surrenders much: his would-be autonomy.* Radical decisions are rare. Most decisions are made at the margin: surrendering a little of this to get a little of that.

Jesus indicates here that the required change is radical: surrendering faith in this world's ability to offer eternal bliss. You cannot buy your way into eternal life. So, it is not the fact that a rich man is asked to give up his wealth that alienates him. He is asked only to tithe, just as the poor man is asked. But he *is* asked to surrender faith in his riches as a gateway to eternity. This is the great stumbling block of the gospel for the rich man: *he cannot buy his way in.* It is not much of a stumbling block to the poor man, unless he is poor because of some addictive sin. The rich man is asked to see his riches as God's gift, which God may remove at any time, just as He removed Job's wealth. Job proclaimed, in the midst of his new-found poverty, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).¹⁶ The rich man is asked to proclaim this testimony in the midst of his treasure. Few do. They trust in their treasure.

Men generally see their success as well-deserved.¹⁷ They see any set-backs as deviations from justice. The poor man who comes to grips emotionally with his poverty can look forward to a better world after death. He is told by God that his poverty is part of God's plan for him in this world. His poverty is no longer a curse or an injustice; it is

16. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 2.

17. When they do not, they may be eaten up with guilt.

merely an environment—even a predestined environment. He can mentally surrender faith in this world. But the rich man will not readily see his wealth as merely as a God-imposed environment. He sees his wealth as his legitimate reward for his own meritorious behavior, or at least his shrewd behavior. He is asked by God to turn loose of his positive, autonomous self-image, which is the product of the deceitfulness of riches. He refuses. His wealth reinforces—validates—his positive self-image. The gospel unquestionably removes this validation. He sees his wealth as a kingdom-building tool for his little kingdom. God says that his wealth is a kingdom-building tool for God's kingdom. The rich man sees his wealth as his tool. God says that both he and his wealth are God's tools. For a believer in autonomy, this is a bitter pill.

E. Inheritance

The issue of wealth is the issue of inheritance. Jesus told a parable of a rich man who dreamed of building new barns. “And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:16–21).¹⁸ His dream of new barns was legitimate. Grain must be stored. What was illegitimate was his thought that the barns would be his. He did not recognize his own mortality. He did not think about inheritance. He did not ask himself the question: “Whose shall those assets be?”

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Those who are meek before God will inherit.¹⁹ The rich man is deceived into believing that the might of his hand has gotten him his wealth. This was as true under the Mosaic Covenant as under the New Covenant. Jesus warned them that the success indicator of expanding wealth is not a legitimate substitute for being rich toward God.

18. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

19. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 4.

But how can a person be rich toward God? Through worship. This was Haggai's warning to Israel. They had not built God's house of worship. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands" (Hag. 1:8–11).²⁰

The open purse will be filled. The closed purse will be emptied. The open purse is open at the top, where its owner can reach in and pull out money to give at his discretion. The closed purse has a hole in the bottom. Its owner has no discretion as to what happens to the contents. *The authority of a man over a full purse is based on his submission to God.* This was as true in Haggai's day as in Christ's.

The inheritance that Christ spoke of is the whole earth. What greater accumulation of wealth could there be? It is accumulated by His people. How? By their wisdom, faithfulness, and generosity. By their efficiency, too. *Honest wealth is the result of serving others, namely, customers.* He who does not waste resources can serve customers better. Over time, this wealth builds up as His people extend the kingdom of God in history. This is the fulfillment of the dominion covenant.

Christ was warning His followers not to make the same mistake that those of Haggai's generation made: *the mistake of the tight purse.* We are to be rich toward God. This is the basis of wealth accumulation under the New Covenant, just as it was under the Old. There is no discontinuity. The sanctions are the same. The law is the same. The sin is the same: autonomy.

Conclusion

The deceitfulness of riches chokes the word. So do other lusts. What word? The word of God. The lusts that riches can temporarily fulfill blind men to the word of God.

20. North, *Restoration and Dominion*, ch. 32.

The top priority here is to deal with riches in such a way as to avoid the great deception: autonomy. This was what Moses warned Israel; this is what Jesus also warned Israel. This warning is universal. Riches are either a covenantal blessing or a prelude to a covenantal curse. The man who dreamed of building barns was under a curse. He was a fool. He was building them for himself. He forgot about his own mortality. Mortals cannot enjoy the experience of wealth accumulation indefinitely. Either their time runs out or their wealth does. Jesus warned every rich man of the deception of riches, which validates the rich man's autonomy: *the presumption of immortality and autonomy*. The rich man's wealth makes him feel autonomous and therefore divine. But men die, unlike God. The man with the barn-building plans forgot this.

To be rich with God is not to dissipate one's wealth. It is to sew up the hole in the bottom of one's purse. Accounts receivable continue to exceed accounts paid. To be rich with God is also to accumulate wealth in the world beyond the grave. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).²¹ This investment program restores the lost continuity that individual mortality imposes. We inherit beyond the grave. By giving up the lust for autonomy in history, we can become our own heirs in eternity. We leave an inheritance behind, yet we immediately collect it in heaven. We can have our cake and eat it, too. He who succumbs to the deceitfulness of riches either consumes his cake before he dies or leaves it behind for others to enjoy. In either case, he is left without cake.

Few men believe this. Of those who say they believe it, few consistently act in terms of it. Men must trust God to deliver them from evil in history, and to provide their daily bread. But to believe that treasure is accumulated in eternity, based on the surrender of wealth in history, requires enormous trust in Jesus' teachings. It is easier for a poor man to believe it than a rich man. The poor man does not trust his wealth. A rich man does.

Rich men trust in their wealth. They do not have correct answers for these questions.

In what does permanent wealth consist?

21. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

Where is it accumulated?

When is it accumulated?

How is it accumulated?

When is it inherited?

Where is it inherited?

The content of a person's faith—his trust—is revealed by his answers to these questions.

6

THE RICH GET RICHER; SO DO THE POOR¹

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath (Mark 4:24–25).

The theocentric principle of this passage was God's absolute sovereignty in granting the gift of salvation to those whom He favors, and to remove everything from everyone else. This is the issue of sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.² This is not something that covenant-breaking man wants to hear. In fact, it is not something that most covenant-keeping men want to hear. It implies that God is absolutely sovereign in His distribution of the gift of salvation. He sends His people out to preach the gospel, but He clogs the ears of all those listeners whom He eternally opposes.

The parallel passage in Matthew reads:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matt. 13:10–13).

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 27.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. The Kingdom of God

The issue is the gospel of the kingdom. Who would receive it? Not those whom God opposed, Jesus said. Who might that have been? The context made it clear: the Jews. Then who was favored by God? Years later, Paul answered: the gentiles. The word of the Lord has come to them, Paul wrote, and they have responded in faith. Not so with Israel. Israel heard, yet she did not hear—exactly as Jesus said. Paul wrote:

For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people (Rom. 10:11–21).

Paul here cited Isaiah: “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isa. 6:10). So did Jesus in this passage: “And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (Matt. 13:14–16).

Israel desperately needed salvation. Their ears had grown dull; their heart had waxed gross. Nevertheless, Jesus spoke in parables so

that the majority of His listeners would not understand His offer of salvation. He did not seek to sharpen the hearing of all who listened to Him. His words in this passage are inescapably clear: His offer of the gospel was presented in such a way that Israel would *not* hear and respond in faith. Calvinists understand this passage and accept it. Anti-Calvinists prefer not to discuss it, and when commenting on it, they have great difficulties. They have the same difficulties with Paul's similar words in the Book of Acts:

And when they [the Jews] had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it (Acts 28:23–28).

B. He Who Has, Gets

The Jews had the law and the prophets. This was something of great value. The gentiles did not. Yet the Jews were about to be passed over by God. The gentiles were not. This seems to imply that he who has, loses; he who has nothing, gets. “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 10:39).³ Yet this passage states the reverse: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that [which] he hath.” How should we understand this?

Consider Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees regarding social outcasts. “And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physi-

3. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 24.

cian, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:11–13). The implication here is that all men are sick unto death. Some men recognize this; others do not. Those who acknowledge that they are sick will seek the services of a physician. Those who do not, won't.

What did Israel possess? Not good spiritual health, surely. What Israel possessed was *the means of diagnosis*: the law and the prophets, which testified to the spiritual sickness of mankind. Jeremiah warned: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Isaiah warned: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities" (Isa. 64:6–7). The Pharisees knew these ancient warnings, but they did not perceive that the warnings applied to them. Israel had the kingdom of God, but it was about to be taken away from them: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

What was the deciding factor in maintaining the kingdom grant? Good fruit. Jesus earlier had said: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:33–37). He had called for ethical consistency. He had called men to live out their confessions of faith. He wanted them to see exactly what they are from God's point of view. He called for *ethical self-consciousness*.

It is not the mere possession of God's law that can secure salvation. Men must obey it. But they do not obey it. Thus, they are in need of a savior, a kinsman-redeemer. The gentiles recognized this need; the Jews did not. The Jews had known of the coming savior (Isa. 53), but this did them no good. The gentiles had not known, but they would

soon recognize Him when His disciples brought word of His redemptive work on their behalf.

What was it that the gentiles possessed? *The knowledge of their own covenantally bankrupt status before God.* This knowledge would soon bring them the kingdom grant: incorporation into the church. What did the Jews lack? This same knowledge. They would soon be disinherited: excluded from this incorporation. He who had nothing, gained; he who had something, lost.

This passage deals prophetically with men's respective positions after the inheritance had been transferred. The kingdom of God would go to the gentiles, Jesus later warned the Pharisees. Then the traditional covenantal system of rewards and curses would prevail: those who have will receive. Those who have nothing will lose even that which they had possessed.

If I have nothing, how can I lose it? This initially makes no sense. But it makes sense within the context of Old Covenant Israel. The Jews had something valuable: the Mosaic law. Paul wrote: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:12–14). To ignore the law's testimony is to risk losing everything, Paul warned. The Mosaic law tells us that we have nothing of value to bring before God. Conclusion: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). James agreed: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). This was the fate of Old Covenant Israel: possessing something valuable, the law of God, Israel had nothing except the law's condemnation. Having nothing, i.e., a having *a false hope in salvation by law*, Israel soon had the kingdom taken away. The gentiles, not having received the Mosaic law, having only the work of the law written on every person's heart (Rom. 2:15),⁴ accepted the gospel's message of redemption. The gentiles received something: redemption.

From this point on, the covenantal system of historical sanctions goes into operation: he who has, gets. God's grace pours down visibly on those who have already received the grace of redemption. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).⁵ The covenant's blessings reinforce men's faith in the covenant. As a result, they exercise greater faith. The process of linear economic growth begins.

C. A Thing of Value

We learn in this passage that he who has nothing nevertheless will eventually receive great gain. How can this be? We find the same seeming anomaly in Proverbs. "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches" (Prov. 13:7).⁶ The man who attains great tangible wealth, but nothing else, possesses nothing of value in God's eyes. The man who makes himself poor in the world's things for God's sake thereby gains something of great value in God's eyes. He who gives up the pursuit of the world's treasure for the sake of God's eternal treasure has made a wise exchange. He who fills his life with things that deflect him from service to God has made an unwise exchange. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Mark 8:36–37)?⁷

The "nothing" that the rich man possesses is the thing that he shall lose: treasure. His tangible wealth has no exchange value in the marketplace of souls. If he loses his soul, he loses his tangible wealth, too. This is how a man with nothing can lose that which he has. He has nothing of value in God's eyes: no marketable capital. God then condemns him to hell because he possesses nothing of eternal value. Eternal life is obtained in this life or not at all. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

But what of the man to whom something of eternal value has been given by God? On the basis of this gift, he will eventually possess greater abundance. More than this: the tangible wealth of the one who has nothing of eternal value is transferred to the man who has received something of eternal value. This wealth transfer is also taught in Proverbs. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children:

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 39.

7. Chapter 11.

and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁸ The man who seeks great tangible wealth at the cost of God’s kingdom may achieve it, but over time, his accumulated wealth will flow to covenant-keepers. The process of spiritual gains and losses is eventually reflected in the realm of economics.

This passage indicates that God’s people will inherit the earth in history. The tangible wealth of covenant-breakers will eventually be transferred to covenant-keepers. This may be by the conversion of covenant-breakers: God’s dispossession of Satan in history.

D. Regression Toward the Mean

There is an old saying, “The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.” As it applies to things of the spirit, this is an accurate summary. It corresponds to what Jesus taught in this passage. But does it also apply to economics? If it does, then this process somehow overcomes the statistical phenomenon known as regression toward the mean.

Free market economic theory teaches that if an entrepreneur discovers a new way to generate an above-market rate of return, other entrepreneurs will seek to discover his secret. Profitable information is bought and sold and stolen. Over time, new profit-producing techniques spread across the economy. As they do, their rate of return decreases, as more producers adopt the once-secret technique. This is why above-market rates of return tend to disappear. The economist calls this the unhampered free market’s *tendency toward equilibrium*. Few concepts are more important than this one in modern economics.

There is an anomaly, however—one that is almost never discussed: the highly unequal distribution of income. My failure to recognize this in Chapter 68 of *Inheritance and Dominion* (1999) was an error. I wrote: “There is a bell-shaped distribution of wealth within a society because of the predictable outcomes of increased temptations that occur on the far ends of capital’s spectrum.” But there is no bell-shaped curve for either income or wealth. I had not recognized the continuing relevance of Vilfredo Pareto’s discovery. This is why in the 2012 revision, I removed this section from the book. I discuss Pareto’s law in the revised Chapter 69.⁹

8. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

9. This following subsection and the one that follows (“Moral Capital”) are reprinted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), Introduction.

1. Pareto's 20-80 Rule

The Bible's recommended goal is middle-class wealth. Jesus said, "For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always" (John 12:8). This statement appears in three of the Gospels (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7), but not Luke's. If we will always have the poor with us, then we will always have the rich. The question is: What percentage of rich people will we have? Even more important, how much tangible wealth will the rich control? The answer is, most of it.

The shape of either a nation's wealth distribution curve or its income distribution curve does not resemble the shape of its population curve. The population curve bulges with the middle class. Both the income distribution curve and the wealth distribution curve bulge with the rich, generation after generation. This does not mean that the same families stay rich. It does mean that the richest 20% of the population own most of the wealth and gain most of the income at any given time. The shape of the income distribution curve resists alteration, generation after generation.

Italian sociologist-economist Vilfredo Pareto in the late nineteenth century made detailed investigations of the distribution of income in Europe. He discovered an amazing fact: the slope of the income curve, from the richest to the poorest members of society, was similar in every nation that he studied. The richest members gained most of the nation's income. This statistical relationship, first published in 1897,¹⁰ has not changed over the last century, irrespective of the economic policies of individual industrial nations. Later studies by other economic historians indicated that in 1835–40, 1883, and 1919 in Great Britain, the top 10% earned 50% of the nation's income.¹¹ This statistical relationship has come to be known as the Pareto Law or the Pareto Rule, although Pareto did not ascribe a law's degree of predictability to it, at least not in his later work. A 20-80 distribution has been found to apply in social institution after institution, as well as in their diverse operations.¹² No one seems to know why. An economist wrote in 1965: "For a very long time, the Pareto law has lumbered the economic scene

10. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d'Economie Politique*, vol. 2 (1897), pp. 370–72. The book has still not been translated into English, although it remains famous.

11. D. H. Macgregor, "Pareto's Law," *Economic Journal* (March 1936), pp. 81, 86. Reprinted in Mark Blaug (ed.), *Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923)* (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 21, 26.

12. Richard Koch, *The 80-20 Principle: How to Achieve More With Less* (Garden City, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1998).

like an erratic block on the landscape; an empirical law which nobody can explain.”¹³

A 1998 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards in Ottawa, Canada, reveals that the 20-80 rule still applies quite well in the United States. The top 20% of the population owned 81% of household wealth in 1962, 81.3% in 1983, 83.5% in 1989, 83.7% in 1995, and 84.3% in 1997. For the top 1%, the figures are as follows: 1962: 33.4%; 1983: 33.8%; 1989: 37.4%; 1995: 37.6%; 1997: 39.1%.¹⁴ The changes have been in the direction of greater concentration of tangible wealth in the United States.

This seems impossible. Don't middle-class people own their homes? No; they reside in them, but they borrow to buy them. They pay mortgages. The rich are the holders of these mortgages. Title is passed to the home owner, but the asset has a debt against it. Most middle-class people own very little debt-free marketable wealth. They use debt to buy depreciating assets: consumer goods. They do not save. The rich use their money to buy appreciating assets and income-producing assets. They save a much higher percentage of their wealth. When the rich in one nation cease to save at high rates, the rich in another nation will replace them.

There is no known way for any industrial society to alter significantly the share of tangible wealth owned by the rich. When political force has been applied in the form of tax policy, the percentages have stayed pretty much the same. It is not even clear that there will be different wealth holders after the new taxation policies are in force, unless the existing wealth owners are deliberately expropriated or executed, as they were in Communist nations. Finally, there is no legitimate biblical justification for using the monopolistic force of civil government to redistribute private wealth in order to achieve greater equality.

The key economic issue regarding wealth distribution is this: the lawful means for gaining control over tangible capital. How do producers gain their share of national wealth in a particular nation? By power, by bribery, by political skills, or by satisfying customer demand? To benefit the largest number of people in society, civil govern-

13. Josef Steindl, *Random Processes and the Growth of Firms: A Study of the Pareto Law* (London: Charles Griffin, 1965), p. 18. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 3.

14. John Schmitt, Lawrence Mishel, and Jared Bernstein, paper prepared for a panel on "Economic Well-being in North America," Canadian Economic Association Meetings, May 31, 1998, Table 7.

ments should establish legal guarantees to all owners of property. This will encourage the self-interested rich to continue to use their wealth for customer-satisfying purposes. The rich should continue to save, invest, and provide tools for their employees. The legal protection of all people's right to own and use property will also encourage the bottom 80% to do the same. Through competition to satisfy customers, members in lower-income groups will replace those in the higher-income groups. The percentage of tangible capital in each quintile will not change very much, but the amount of wealth produced by this capital will increase dramatically over time, as the compound growth process takes over.

Capital accumulation by the rich is the most important measurable source of a capitalist society's increasing tangible wealth. The rich provide the money that buys the tools that raise the wealth of the other classes. But tools are not enough to make a society rich among nations. A society's other classes must possess *moral capital*, such as the willingness to work hard, future-orientation, honesty, and a good reputation. Moral capital is intangible, but it is nonetheless real. It produces income for its owners.

Pareto's anomaly is a real one. If 10% of the population receives half of the national income, or if 20% of the population receives 70 or 80 percent, and this continues generation after generation in nation after nation, where is the evidence of equilibrium? Why shouldn't the distribution curves of both income and wealth be more continuous? Why should they be permanently skewed to the right? If there is open entry into the capital markets for the bottom 80% of the population, why shouldn't wealth be more evenly distributed? Is there some psychological barrier to entry, such as a widespread fear of losing investment capital or the fear of becoming self-employed, that keeps the distribution curves skewed?

There is continuous movement into and out of the top 20%. The story of rags to riches to rags in three generations is a familiar one. Some very wealthy families do seem to maintain their presence over several generations. This may be due to political favoritism, i.e., restrictions on competition. It is hard to say. Detailed academic studies of permanent intergenerational wealth at the top are not common.¹⁵

15. In the United States, Ferdinand Lundberg wrote several books on this topic, but he was always considered a maverick historian by academic historians. His books are not cited by historians very often, especially *The Rich and the Super-Rich: Who Really Owns America? How Do They Keep Their Wealth and Their Power?* (New York:

But there appears to be considerable mobility into and out of the top quintile for most of its members. But there is not mobility of the distribution curve itself.

2. Moral Capital

If we consider moral capital as income-producing capital, then the Pareto rule does not apply. There is only so much moral capital that any person can possess. The rich cannot amass moral capital in the way they can amass tangible capital. If the members of all economic classes in a society were to have approximately the same moral standards and degree of adherence to them, then the shape of the curve of society's moral capital would match the shape of the population curve.

Let me clarify my argument by an example. Assume that in nation A, only the rich are literate. This means that the national rate of illiteracy is 80%. In nation B, there is almost universal literacy. Without knowing anything else about the tangible wealth of either nation, which one would you guess has the richest rich people? I am speaking only of the top 20% of the population. I would guess nation B. But what if I am wrong? What if nation A is richer, perhaps because it is a small, oligarchical, oil-exporting nation? Which group of rich people do you think will be richer in a century if the literacy rates stay the same in both nations, assuming that the rich in both nations do not send their investment capital outside their respective countries? I would still guess nation B. This has nothing to do with investment decisions made by the rich. It has everything to do with the determination of the less rich to learn how to read—a determination based on their moral capital. A rising tide of literacy raises all economic ships: poor, middle class, and rich. I argue that this same principle of national wealth formation applies to moral capital in general.

Without widely distributed moral capital, today's rich people could not retain the market value of their investment capital for long. Competent and honest employees would become increasingly scarce and costly, thereby lowering the value of investment capital. Voters would become envy-driven. They would elect politicians who would seek to confiscate the wealth of the rich in the name of the poor on behalf of middle-class voters. Per capita productivity would slow, stagnate, or fall. So would the nation's wealth. The shape of the wealth distribution curve would remain the same—heavily concentrated in the top 20%—

but the growth of wealth in this society would slow down or even decline.

E. To Inherit the Earth

The Bible teaches that covenant-keepers will inherit the earth.¹⁶ If the covenant-breaking rich continue to own most of the wealth, how can covenant-keepers inherit the earth? Or are we to believe that this inheritance is post-historical? The Old Covenant texts that forecast this inheritance do not indicate that the inheritance is post-historical.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).¹⁷

How can Christians inherit the earth if the rich own most of it, and Christians are told not to seek riches? The answer: postmillennialism.¹⁸ God's kingdom will be extended by widespread religious conversion. The vast majority of people in all income groups will be brought to saving faith. Even the rich minority will be converted. If they aren't, then they will be replaced by Christians who become wealthy through serving customers more efficiently. Inheritance of the earth will be by conversion, not by a minority of Christians buying up the assets of the world. Redemption is spiritual, not financial.

F. The Spread of the Gospel

The key factor in contributing to the permanent wealth of nations is saving grace. Special grace is fundamental. Contrary to free-market economic theory, private property is a secondary issue, for it is an out-

16. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

17. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

18. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

working of God's common grace. Without special grace to some members of society, common grace cannot be sustained indefinitely.¹⁹ The nation will eventually adopt capital-reducing measures based on envy or the desire to preserve the existing distribution of wealth. The statistical law of large numbers operates in nations.

If Pareto's rule applies internationally, as it seems to today,²⁰ then there will continue to be inequality, but the same minority of nations will not retain the advantage over the others. The international wealth distribution curve will continue to be skewed to the right, but those nations inside the top quintile will change. The key issue is this: On what basis does a nation enter the top fifth? By covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking? In either case, no nation is likely to stay on top permanently. Either negative sanctions will come against covenant-breaking nations, or else other covenant-keeping nations will be blessed even more by God. But in the second instance, every covenant-keeping nation will get richer, as will rich and poor residents in all of them.

Jesus said, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). The evil tree is eventually cut down: "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:17–20).²¹

So, the spread of the gospel produces positive economic effects. God rewards covenantal faithfulness with prosperity (Deut. 8:18).²² This prosperity is not to become a snare: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).²³ If it does snare the unrighteous society, then the "nothing" which it has—its wealth—will be removed from it.

The long-term movement of the kingdom of God is from poverty to wealth. To sustain their wealth and expand it, covenant-keepers must sustain their confession and their obedience to God's law. The

19. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

20. Eighty percent of the world's wealth is owned by 25% of the world's population. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 22

21. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 18.

22. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

mark of their commitment is their willingness to spend a portion of their wealth to take the good news of salvation and wealth to others. They must share their tangible capital with others, but more important, share the covenantal basis of their tangible capital: their moral capital. They must seek to take the gospel to those who suffer poverty because of their rebellion to God. *Covenant-keepers are to use their economic capital to capitalize the poor in spirit.* If those who have received wealth from God on the basis of their confession and obedience are successful in their efforts to share the wealth, the poor will get richer, and so will the rich. *Increasing productivity for all is produced when the productivity of the poor increases.* The increase in capital will increase the division of labor.

G. Unequal Distribution of Wealth

The nagging question does not go away: What about income inequality? In every modern society that economists have investigated, there is huge inequality. Twenty percent of the population owns most of the tangible wealth. Even after almost a century of steeply graduated income taxes and graduated inheritance taxes, steep inequality persists.

Pareto did not explain the existence of income inequality. In the century since he published his findings, no economist has come up with anything approaching a widely accepted explanation. We do not know why this inequality continues to exist in the face of both free market competition and socialist taxation.

The disparity in income and wealth may have something to do with disparities in future-orientation. Most people are not highly future-oriented. They are not willing to save money at low rates of interest. They prefer to borrow. They go into debt in order to buy consumer goods that depreciate. They do not get on the growth side of compound interest.

The disparity in income and wealth could be the result of inherent productivity of innovation. We might argue that successful new production methods produce enormous wealth for their early discoverers, who retain their wealth until innovative competitors find replacement methods. This explanation relies on a concept of economic growth that is overwhelmingly based on entrepreneurial skills rather than on moral capital. Surely, Christians' moral capital has not elevated them into the top 20% of wealth holders over the last century.

The entrepreneur bears a heavy load of uncertainty. Most people prefer to avoid this. They prefer predictable wages to market risks and uncertainty. They are willing to accept less income in order to avoid the loss of both capital and income. Those few entrepreneurs who survive free market competition become rich. Thus, the rich are always a minority.

An entrepreneurship-based explanation of income inequality reinforces the idea that Christians' inheritance of the earth will take place as a result of widespread conversions, not by any uniquely confession-based advantages possessed by Christians. Moral capital sustains the social order that allows entrepreneurship to produce wealth for all, but mainly for those who possess the skills. Moral capital does not make a majority of people wealthy. It does not even make Christians wealthy in comparison to successful entrepreneurs. But it makes all men richer over time. It makes sustained economic growth possible.

Few people believe this today. Almost no economist believes it. Economists believe that the free market social order is self-reinforcing and expansionist, irrespective of God, Christianity, or supernaturalism generally. They believe that the economic fruits of capitalism will persuade voters of the truth of its roots, and the roots are found in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: private property and personal self-interest. God's covenant has nothing to do with it.²⁴

Conclusion

The rich will get richer if their tangible wealth rests on their covenantal faithfulness, i.e., their moral capital. The expansion of covenantal wealth is based on the process of *obedience-abundance-greater obedience, greater abundance* (Deut. 8:18). This is a system of positive feedback. But if the tangible wealth of the rich is based on their faith in their own autonomy, they will eventually get poorer. Positive feedback reverses (Deut. 8:19–20).²⁵

Richard Koch, who has written a book on profitable applications of Pareto's rule, thinks that positive feedback is the key to understanding why the 20-80 phenomenon exists. "In the absence of feedback loops, the natural distribution of phenomena would be 50/50—inputs of a given frequency would lead to commensurate results. It is only because

24. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

of positive feedback and negative feedback loops that causes do not have equal results. Yet it also seems to be true that powerful positive feedback loops only affect a small minority of the inputs. This helps explain why those small minority of inputs can exert so much influence.”²⁶

Do the poor get poorer? Yes, if their poverty is spiritual. No, if their poverty is the result of their open hands to others. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (II Cor. 8:9).²⁷ “But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (II Cor. 8:14–15).²⁸

One goal of the gospel is to make all men rich spiritually. But in achieving this, the gospel necessarily must make men tangibly richer. The covenant’s upward movement of confession-obedience-wealth will spread the blessings of both tangible and spiritual wealth to more people. But it will not spread tangible wealth evenly, according to Pareto.

The top priority in this passage is to gain the abundance that comes to him who has something. “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” This possession is redemption. He who has nothing—no redemption—will lose even the wealth that he has. This threat points to final judgment.

This process of spiritual development—positive feedback—is reflected in the realm of economics. There is a means by which the rich get richer, long term. They get richer under free market capitalism by enabling the poor to get richer. They invest capital, which provides the tools that increase the productivity of workers. The rich increase their incomes when the poor increase their incomes. Economic theory teaches that the rich do not get rich by exploiting the poor. On the contrary, they get rich by extending to others their knowledge of way to long-term wealth, i.e., compound economic growth. To sustain this

26. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 15.

27. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 5.

28. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

process long term requires an open, merciful hand.²⁹ But this requires trust in the Bible's covenantal system of economic causation. It mandates trust in a supernaturally designed social order. The laws governing society are personal. They are under God's sovereignty. God has established laws of society, and these involve predictable sanctions, positive and negative. To believe this requires great faith.

29. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 10.

SUFFICIENT RESOURCES

And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats (Mark 6:7–9).

The theocentric principle here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Testing Period

There is a parallel passage in Luke: “Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way” (Luke 10:4). In Luke, it is clear that this was a temporary command. Toward the end of His pre-resurrection time of instruction, Jesus gave a new command. “And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one” (Luke 22:35–36). Why a sword? “Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3). There is a time for lambs to arm themselves against wolves. When is this? When the testing period is over. What testing period? God’s test of those who commit to Him, which is their period for testing the sovereignty of God and the reliability of God’s promises in history.

This was a special time of evangelism. They were to preach the gospel of repentance. This was before the death, resurrection, and as-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

cension of Christ. They had already been empowered to cast out evil spirits. “And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils” (Mark 3:14–15). Now they were to begin the ministry of calling Israel to repentance. This was comparable to the ministry of John the Baptist. This was to be a guerilla operation. They were not to become permanent missionaries. They were not to build churches. They were not to rent permanent quarters. They were to preach and depart.

And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them (vv. 10–13).

B. Supernatural Resources for the Task

Their major supernatural resource was their ordination by Christ. He had given them the power to heal the sick and cast out demons. This had previously been His exclusive power. Now it was delegated to His subordinates. *This was the establishment of covenantal hierarchy.* This hierarchy was empowered supernaturally. The disciples now possessed the positive sanctions of healing and exorcism. The first is a universally respected power. The second is crucial in societies in which demon-possession is widespread.

The other supernatural resource was their ability to raise money. This may have involved part-time labor, but probably not. They would stay in the homes of listeners. This means there would be listeners with homes and hearts for hospitality. This is supernatural. It is surely not natural. It was also temporary, as we have seen. Jesus later commanded them to take a purse and a sword.

The goal here was the presentation of the message that John the Baptist had offered: repentance. It mandated an ethical transformation. It mandated a readiness to follow Jesus, wherever that might lead and require. This was before His death, resurrection, and ascension. This was before Pentecost. It was before the establishment of the church. This was an Old Covenant ministry of preparation.

Under the best of circumstances, this would have been a high-risk endeavor. Who would listen to them? Why? Only because they possessed supernatural powers of healing. Supernatural authority would validate their message. It would lead some listeners to trust them. There would be some people who would respond favorably, providing food and shelter. But most would not respond favorably, any more than the masses had responded favorably to Jesus' call to repentance. For most listeners, the disciples' ministry would serve as a ministry of confrontation and rejection.

Theirs was not a ministry of kingdom-building. It was a ministry of kingdom rejection. Their task was to make a general call to repentance, on the assumption that few would respond. Few did. This was a first-stage ministry, just as John the Baptist's was a first-stage ministry. *The entire Old Covenant was a first-stage ministry.*

The resources required for the task were temporary. They had no money, no food, and no weapons of self-defense. They also had no long-term program of church planting. They had the power to heal the sick and exorcise demons. These powers were sufficient to attract attention, gather a crowd, and make possible the call to repentance. These were insufficient to build a permanent church. That would come only in phase two: after the ascension of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Their powers to heal were designed to increase their trust in Jesus and His ministry. His ministry was covenantal. There would be a transfer of authority. This was a major preliminary transfer of authority: authority over sickness.

C. A Stage-One Ministry

Jesus provided sufficient resources for them to complete their initial assignments. These assignments were two-fold: (1) to give Israel an opportunity finally to reject the first-stage message of repentance, and (2) to give the messengers confidence in their access to supernatural power. Luke recorded that this grant of authority extended to 70 more disciples. "After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come" (Luke 10:1). They would take the ministry of repentance to the entire nation.

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I be-

held Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight (Luke 10:17–21).

Their success in healing and casting out demons was to confirm them in their faith. It was to give them confidence. To do what? To enter God's second-stage ministry: the New Covenant.

Their activities confirmed prophecies of the Old Covenant regarding the coming of the New Covenant.

And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Luke 10:23–24).

But there were also failures. These failures had a function in the training of the disciples. They were to convey to the disciples a far wider vision. The disciples were merely tapping into a few of the supernatural resources that would later be made available to them.

Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:19–21).

Mark's version of this interaction was incomplete. "And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:28–29). They were to accomplish more than just heal people. They were to change history. They were to move mountains: entire cultures.

At the end of His ministry, Jesus gave a new assignment to the surviving 11 disciples.

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and up-

braided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues (Mark 16:14–17).

There would be extensions of supernatural power to those who received the gospel. This would be the first stage of God's second-stage ministry: the New Covenant.

Conclusion

The initial miracles of the final phase of the first-stage ministry of the Old Covenant confirmed the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. He delegated supernatural powers to His disciples. The exercise of these powers confirmed their ordination. It gave them confidence. It increased their trust in Jesus. It also increased their trust in themselves, by way of their subordination to Jesus. It opened a vision of far greater challenges that would extend far beyond the geography of the nation of Israel.

Jesus told the disciples not to take money, food, or swords in their journey through the land. They would not need these economic resources. They had been giving healing power. That was sufficient. But it was sufficient only for this final phase of God's first-stage ministry of the Old Covenant. After that covenant ended, the disciples would possess the same supernatural power, but they were to plan as well. They would need money, food, and swords. The miracles would be necessary, but not sufficient for their task. Like manna in the wilderness, their supernatural powers were gifts from God to increase their trust in Him. Once this trust was secure, Jesus changed the rules. They could once again trust money, food, and weapons. They would henceforth see these capital assets as operating within a framework of supernatural power. They would not see this capital as either impersonal or autonomous.

They had to trust God for the capital necessary to complete their first assignment. They were not to trust capital goods: money, food, or swords. They needed success without marketable capital in order to prepare them for the next stage of their ministry as disciples. Success would confirm their trust, enabling them to exercise greater trust. Pos-

itive sanctions are given to confirm the covenant. As Moses told the Israelites, “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).

8

THE COST OF POOR JUDGMENT

And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother (Mark 6:21–28).

The theocentric principle here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The story of the girl who danced for King Herod is more generally known as the dance of the seven veils. She has come down through history as Salomé. There is no textual evidence in any of the Gospels regarding her name or what she wore. This indicates that the embellished story has considerable independent appeal to the general public. People are fascinated by this story of a girl and her mother.

The Bible's story conveys above all the hatred of the mother toward a man who had publicly accused her husband of having violated a Mosaic law. This is not how the general public understands the story. It is also not how most Christians understand the story.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. The Prophet and the Ruler

John The Baptist was a prophet. Jesus called him a great prophet under the Old Covenant. “For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28). As a prophet, he brought a covenant lawsuit against individuals: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2b).

He brought a covenant lawsuit against Herod, who had married his brother’s wife. The Mosaic law was clear. “Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother’s wife: it is thy brother’s nakedness” (Lev. 18:16).

For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly (Mark 6:17–20).

The prophet publicly humiliated Herod and his wife by his accusation. This was an assault against civil power. His accusation undermined Israelites’ confidence in Herod’s leadership. Herod had openly violated a Mosaic law. It would have been widely known that he had done so, but here was a prophet bringing a covenant lawsuit against Herod publicly, based on Herod’s violation of a Mosaic statute.

Because so many Christians believe that the specifics of the Mosaic law do not extend into the New Covenant era, they do not see the confrontation between John the Baptist and Herod in terms of a covenant lawsuit. They do not understand that the function of the Old Testament prophet was to bring a covenant lawsuit in full public view against those who had violated an important Mosaic law. Modern Christians do not think a great deal about the marital statutes of the Mosaic law. John the Baptist did think about them. He thought about them so much that he brought a covenant lawsuit against Herod.

B. A Woman Scorned

This public confrontation between John the Baptist and Herod enraged his wife. So enraged was she that when she was given an oppor-

tunity to advise her daughter regarding payment for the dance, she did not recommend that her daughter gain any economic advantage whatsoever. She advised her daughter to ask that Herod fulfill his vow by executing her enemy.

Even though John the Baptist had confronted Herod, Herod was not his enemy. Herod understood that he had violated a Mosaic statute, and he also understood that John the Baptist was a prophet. He understood that the function of the prophet was to bring covenant lawsuits against violators of the Mosaic law. He threw John the Baptist into prison because of the pressure that his wife put on him. Now, she would exact public tribute from him. He had promised her daughter—his stepdaughter and niece—that she could have anything she wanted, up to half his kingdom. He said this in a moment of weakness. To refuse her would be to go back on his word, which he had given in full public view. It would expose him as unreliable. So, he consented to her request.

Herodias is reminiscent of Jezebel. She knew what she wanted: to destroy the prophet of God. So did Jezebel. Her husband, like Jezebel's husband Ahab, also did not have good independent judgment. John the Baptist paid a heavier price than Elijah paid. He paid that price because a young woman was devoid of common sense.

C. Limited Expectations

The girl could dance well. She had no ambitions beyond being a good dancer. She had no idea of what she should request of her stepfather. She could have received economic resources, such as land or a home. This would have constituted a dowry for her marriage. But she was entirely present-oriented. She had no ability to think for herself. She was also completely dependent on her mother. She trusted her mother's judgment. This trust was misplaced.

Her mother had exceptionally poor judgment. Instead of advising her daughter to ask for something of real value for her daughter's life and future, she used this opportunity to extract vengeance on her enemy. She imposed the ultimate negative civil sanction against him: execution. More than this, she demanded his beheading. John the Baptist's head would be presented to her on a plate. She wanted symbolic vengeance against him, not just his death.

From a common-sense standpoint, the daughter paid a heavy price. What did she pay? First, she paid a price in demonstrating that

she was a fool. People knew that she could have asked for a great deal of wealth. She could have secured her future. Instead, she asked for the head of John the Baptist, despite the fact that John the Baptist never accused her of doing anything wrong. She was obviously acting as an agent of her mother. Second, she forfeited all of the economic benefits that her stepfather would have been willing to give to her. Third, she forfeited the favor of her stepfather, for her request pressured him into doing something that he would not otherwise have done. She sacrificed her future for the sake of her mother's vengeance. She did not have to follow her mother's advice, but she did. She placed herself under the authority of a vicious woman with extremely poor judgment. This was the comprehensive price that she paid for the death of John the Baptist.

She has come down through history with the reputation of being one of the truly shortsighted women of all time. The public has heard the story of a girl who could dance, and who refused to profit from her opportunity. Her story is one of the classic stories in history of somebody who had an opportunity and bungled it. She had been gifted in terms of her physical ability, but was remarkably un-gifted with respect to judgment. She was present-oriented. She had no independent judgment of her own. She took the advice of somebody who had even worse judgment than she did. She became the agent of an evil woman. She had no perception of just how evil mother was long before she sought her mother's advice. She obviously had no ethical judgment whatsoever. She was, in the modern phrase, an airhead.

D. Comparing Costs and Benefits

From the point of view of modern economic theory, she made a rational calculation. She compared expected future costs and expected future benefits that would result from her decision. She decided in terms of benefits. Thus, the dancing girl did not make an irrational decision. It was entirely rational. The economist says that we always ask this question: "What's in it for me?"

From a biblical standpoint, this is too narrow a focus of concern. The covenant-keeper is supposed to ask: "What's in it for the kingdom of God?" This also includes the question of self-interest. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).²

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew* ,

We have surveyed the costs of her decision. The benefits she forfeited constituted the cost of whatever benefit she gained. If a person is unaware of a lost opportunity, it is not a cost to him when he makes his decision. It is a cost to him only if he finds out. This is the logic of subjective value theory. Ignorance is bliss. It reduces our costs of action.

Covenant-keepers are supposed to believe that men should seek more information. They should also seek more wisdom.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding (Prov. 3:13).

Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth (Prov. 4:5).

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding (Prov. 4:7).

This necessarily increases our costs of decision-making and action. Why? Greater responsibility.

The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).³

The goal of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28) is the extension of the kingdom of God in history.⁴ This is also the goal of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).⁵

Maybe the dancing girl did calculate the cost of obeying her mother versus the cost of not obeying her mother. We do not know what she thought. We know only what she did. But, on the basis of what she

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000]), ch. 28.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>). Cf. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

did in response to her mother's advice, the world has listened to the story of her decision because her decision was so preposterously stupid. She lacked wisdom.

Conclusion

This story reveals the lack of wisdom of a king, who made an outrageous promise in a moment of weakness. Second, it reveals a young woman's lack of wisdom in following her mother's immoral advice. Third, it reveals a mother's unwillingness to place her daughter's interest above her own. These decisions had consequences. One of them was the fact that this story has long extended into the general culture of the West. It is a classic account of people with poor judgment. The other was that the last of the great prophets of the Old Covenant died. He was replaced by the Great Prophet, Jesus Christ. So close was Christ to John the Baptist that Herod wondered if Jesus was John resurrected (Mark 6:16). The transition to the New Covenant involved the death of John the Baptist and the death and resurrection of Jesus. Herod was in a position to spare both of their lives. He refused.

And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves (Luke 23:7–12).

Herod could have let Him go free. But he did not have good judgment. Later, he had James the brother of John executed (Acts 12:12). He had Peter imprisoned. Finally, he trusted the judgment of sycophants who surrounded him.

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied (Acts 12:21–24).

From beginning to end, he had poor judgment. He paid a heavy price. The cost of poor judgment is high.

9

FEEDING THE MULTITUDES: A JOINT VENTURE

And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men (Mark 6:40-44).

The theocentric principle here was Jesus' sovereignty over nature. He demonstrated His supernatural authority over nature in front of huge crowds. Authority is point two of the biblical covenant.¹

This was the first feeding of the multitudes. The parallel passage in Matthew provides additional information. First, Jesus healed people before He fed them. "And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14). Second, there were women and children. "And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children" (Matt. 14:21). He fed them all.

The difference between 5,000 and, say, 20,000 is marginal. The impossibility of feeding 5,000 is sufficient. Beyond that, the extra numbers were superfluous. The entire scene was inconceivable.

Jesus did not feed them directly. There was insufficient time for Him to separate loaves and fishes, one at a time, to feed 20,000 people. If it took five seconds to divide a fish and a loaf, feeding 20,000 people would have taken 27 hours. That is just dividing the fishes and loaves. That does not count the time it took for passing the broken pieces to

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

the crowd. Jesus could multiply the food, but He was constrained by time. Conclusion: Jesus passed broken pieces of the bread and the fishes to His disciples, and they in turn passed additional broken pieces to people in the front ranks of the multitudes. Family by family, people divided the food and passed it along. It was a joint venture.

You may have heard more than one sermon on the feeding of the multitudes. Did the preacher ever mention the time constraint? I think not. The mental picture is a stop-action image of Jesus dutifully dividing the loaves and fishes. But if He did this miracle alone, the mental image should be a speeded-up moving picture, with Jesus as some sort of impossibly fast divider of food.

Did they locate hundreds of baskets to pass out food to a crowd of 20,000? This is unlikely. There were 12 filled baskets at the end of the miracle. That means one basket per disciple. This is conceivable. Each disciple shared his food basket. But how did Jesus get the food to the masses? He used the 12 baskets. Each family had to receive a basket, remove food, and pass the basket along. The baskets kept filling up with food. If only 12 baskets were involved, it took about 400 transfers, family head to family head, to pass the baskets to 5,000 families. At 10 seconds per transfer, that is 4,000 seconds, or a little over an hour. This is conceivable.

It should be clear that this miracle was a joint venture. So was the second miracle of feeding.

And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away (Mark 8:6–9).

Mark said the crowd numbered 4,000. We learn from Matthew that there were women and children (Matt. 15:38).

This time, the multitudes had waited for three days for a second miracle of feeding (Mark 8:2). Clearly, word had spread about the first miracle. People wanted to see one just like it. They also wanted to participate in it, just as the first witnesses had. Jesus made them wait. This was a three-day fast. He could have performed the same miracle at any time. He refused. He tested their commitment. Did they trust Him?

A. The Division of Labor

Neither miracle would have been possible in the time available, had Jesus not adopted the power of the division of labor. Had he stood in front of the assembled masses, dutifully dividing loaves and fishes, using only a dozen baskets, the miracle would have taken days. There was only one way for the miracle to occur: through joint participation.

This was a miracle comparable to the manna in the wilderness. There were about 2.5 million Israelites in the wilderness.² The manna appeared every evening (Ex. 16:13–14).³ The Israelites filled containers with manna (vv. 16–18). The stored manna rotted after one day (v. 20). It melted on the ground in the afternoon (v. 21). This daily miracle was compounded by the fact that on the sixth day of the week, there was a double portion. The next day, the sabbath, there was none (vv. 22–27). There was no time to lose. The families had to gather manna before morning. They were joint participants in this daily miracle for 40 years.

Jesus' miracle of the feeding hearkened back to the manna. He provided a miracle at the front end of the process, but to appropriate it for themselves, people had to participate. Jesus' time spent in breaking apart the loaves and fishes would have been minimal: a few minutes, at most. He divided the loaves and fishes, placed them in the baskets, and handed them to others, presumably the disciples. Then each disciple handed his basket to someone in the crowd. The heads of households took their families' share and passed on the basket. If baskets were not used, then the heads of households did this by hand. They divided fishes and loaves. This is conceivable, although the use of baskets would have been more convenient. The disciples shared their baskets, first with Jesus, then with the crowd.

The crowd participated. They saw the miracle take place in front of their own eyes. They saw food multiplied as it was passed along. Each family performed its role in a mass miracle. Each family would remember the day when the head of the household performed a minor part of a miracle. Word would have spread rapidly.

The fact that there was food left over was confirmation that there was sufficient food for all. This was a clear violation of the laws of physics. This was a form of re-creation. It was not performed at the

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

front of a large audience by a magician barely visible to the people at the back of the crowd. Every family participated face-to-face.

The miracle took place only because everyone passed along a basket. Every household head took what his family needed and then passed on the basket. In the wilderness, this had been the experience of the people.

This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating (Ex. 16:16–18).

This was also the experience of those who participated in the feeding of the multitude.

Anyone who kept a basket called a halt to the miracle. The pressure to pass on the basket must have been intense. There was internal pressure: to be a full participant, a person had to pass on the blessing, not end it. There was external pressure: the next family's desire to participate. The baskets kept moving down the lines.

The miracles of the two feedings were possible only because there was joint participation. The more the participation, the greater the miracle. Each family had a small role to play. Each family was rewarded: a free lunch. But there is no such thing as a free lunch, economists tell us. Most of the time, they are correct. But in these two cases, there were free lunches for tens of thousands of participants.

Each task was easy: divide the loaves and fish, and then pass on the leftovers. Jesus started this. The disciples continued it. The multitudes participated. No one could easily deny the reality of the miracle, because everyone participated. It was just like the manna. Word spread. The second crowd waited three days to participate.

B. Time and Productivity

The two miracles of feeding the multitudes was made possible in the time available only by joint participation. The division of labor made the miracles possible.

We have limited time in our lives. We have limited resources. The miracles of the feeding rested on this promise: *the limitation on men's resources is less important than the limitation on men's time. Time is*

the crucial resource. Jesus multiplied loaves and fish. He did not multiply time. The second crowd had to wait three days to participate in the miracle. Jesus could have divided fishes and loaves, day and night, to perform a one-man miracle. Instead, he made them wait. He wanted their active participation, not their passive receptivity to a free lunch.

Jesus reminded His followers that they had roles to play. He initiated the two miracles. The crowds implemented them, piece by piece. *A sense of community was part of the miracle.* He fed their stomachs. He gave them hope. But they could benefit from both food and hope only through their active participation.

Conclusion

The principle of the division of labor was reinforced by the division of loaves and fishes. The participants could say, “Look what we did.” They were allowed to become miracle workers. Everyone participated. The tasks were simple: receive a basket, divide the food, remove a portion of the food—probably half—and pass on the basket. The lesson? “There’s more where that came from.” This built men’s confidence. God is sovereign over creation. The curse of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19) is temporary.

The lack of time is more of a restriction than the lack of food. This is true for all mankind. We are mortal. When food runs out, we can usually get more food. When time runs out, we cannot get more time. Jesus’ parable of the barn builder made this plain.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).⁴

The rich man trusted in himself rather than God. This cost him dearly.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

The participants in the miracle trusted Jesus to feed them. Their trust was rewarded. The second crowd trusted Him for three days, based on the story of the previous feeding. Their trust was rewarded. Yet they did not follow Him after His crucifixion. Their trust ran out. They trusted in what they had seen, but they did not trust the story of resurrection from the dead. That seemed too far-fetched. They had trusted their own eyes, but that was the limit of their trust. More trust is needed in order to enter the kingdom of God. "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

10

SUPPORTING OUR PARENTS

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye (Mark 7:8–13).

The theocentric principle here is trust in the written law of God: point three of the biblical covenant.¹ This is contrasted with trust in the oral traditions of men.

A. Oral Tradition

These words are Jesus' response to the Pharisees' criticism of His ministry. The Pharisees had pointed out that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating bread. There is nothing in the Mosaic law that indicates any such requirement. The Pharisees had added this requirement much later. They had done so on the basis of a misinterpretation of what defiles a person.

According to the Mosaic law, certain ritual washings were required when a person was ritually defiled, such as by coming in contact with a dead body (Num. 19:16). Leviticus 14 and 15 list a number of these required ritual cleansings. The Pharisees had extended a spe-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

cific but highly circumscribed liturgical requirement—washing one's hands—to apply to eating. This interpretation assumed that there is something defiling in unwashed hands, something that is transferred to all food. So, the Pharisees required their followers to wash their hands before eating anything. Mark 7:4 records that there were other requirements, such as the washing of cups, pots, bronze vessels, and tables.

These requirements were part of what Jesus called the tradition of the elders. They were part of an oral tradition. This oral tradition was not yet written down. That would begin about a century later: the Mishnah.

It was on the basis of this oral tradition that the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why his disciples did not walk according to the traditions of the elders. Why did they eat bread with unwashed hands? In response, Jesus cited the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had identified certain Israelites as hypocrites who honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from God (Isa. 29:13). This was more than a theological response. It was a covenant lawsuit. Jesus was identifying them as having broken the law in the name of keeping the law. They were keeping the traditions of men rather than following the commandments of God. This was a very serious accusation.

B. Honoring Parents

He then gave a specific example of this substitution of tradition for the Mosaic law. He cited the law regarding the honoring of parents (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). He also cited the law that prohibited the cursing of one's father or mother.

And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death (Ex. 21:17).

For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him (Lev. 20:9).

The law against cursing parents had a specific negative sanction: the death penalty. Anyone who violated a law that was so important that it mandated the death penalty had violated an extremely important law. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees had violated such a law.

He did not say that they had verbally cursed their parents. He did say that they had attempted to escape from their responsibilities for

supporting their parents. They escaped these responsibilities by invoking a higher principle: *corban*. This was a special gift that someone presented to God. It was part of a vow. Jesus said that they were using this as an excuse not to support their parents financially. They owed the support to their parents, but they gave the money to the temple instead.

Why was this a violation of the fifth commandment? Isn't it the case that a gift to God takes precedence over a gift to parents? This is indeed the case, but that was not the judicial issue facing the Pharisees. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees owed payment to the parents. This payment was not a gift. Instead of paying what they owed to their parents, they tried to gain credit for themselves by making a special gift in the name of God. They were not giving their own money, Jesus implied. They were giving money that they owed to their parents.

In the first case, namely, supporting their parents, they had no option in the eyes of God. It was a moral and legal responsibility that they support their parents. They did not have the authority to transfer wealth to anyone else, if this wealth belonged to their parents, as mandated by biblical law. Jesus was saying that this money belonged to their parents. They were to act as stewards of this money on behalf of their parents.

This was a strong support of one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus was saying that a specific Mosaic ordinance took precedence over gifts to the temple or anyone else. Because the money belonged to the parents, with the children acting as stewards on behalf of the parents, the children did not have the authority to give the money to any other organization or person. Jesus said that the Pharisees allowed individuals to escape their obligations to their parents by transferring funds to the temple. He was saying that this was an example of their hypocrisy. In the name of God, they transferred wealth that did not belong to them. The goodness of the cause did not abrogate their responsibility to their parents. The parents had first legal claim on the money.

On what legal basis do parents possess such a claim? On the basis of the Mosaic law. God has established in His law the system of authority that families are required to honor. One of the requirements of family authority is that children are to support their parents whenever their parents are no longer able to support themselves. This is an aspect of the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12)². So important is this com-

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch.

mandment, Jesus said, that to violate it is the equivalent of cursing father and mother. So important is this legal claim to financial support that Jesus criticized the Pharisees as having committed the equivalent of a capital crime. By refusing to support their parents, they were acting as criminals. God did not look favorably on their gifts to Him whenever these gifts were in fact owed to the parents. The Pharisees could buy no favor with God, because they were acting as thieves. They were stealing wealth of belonged to the parents in using this wealth to fund the temple.

C. A Defense of Theonomy

This is a strong affirmation of the continuing validity of the Mosaic law in New Testament times. Jesus invoked one of the Ten Commandments in his criticism of the Pharisees. He used the Mosaic law to expose them as hypocrites.

He went so far as to take a Mosaic case law relating to the family, namely, the law prohibiting the cursing of parents, and applied this law to what would seem to be a relatively minor infraction: paying money to the temple. This was a major infraction. The refusal to support one's parents is the equivalent of cursing one's parents. This was not intuitive from a reading of the Mosaic law, but it is how the followers of Jesus are supposed to interpret the fifth commandment and its applications.

Those Christians who insist that the Ten Commandments do not apply in New Testament times are worse than the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not deny that they were under the authority of the Ten Commandments. They invented a loophole, one which was based on the transfer of wealth to the temple. They did not try to keep the money for themselves. Modern Christians, in contrast, insist on keeping the money for themselves. They do this by denying the continuing authority of the Mosaic law in New Testament times. They say that they are under grace, not law. They regard Jesus' words as no longer binding on Christians. He spoke these words to Pharisees during the Old Covenant era. His words here supposedly have no binding legal authority today. Christians insist that neither modern Pharisees (Orthodox Jews)³ nor modern Christians are under the terms of the Mosa-

25.

3. Orthodox Jews self-consciously identify themselves with the Pharisees, who replaced the Sadducees after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

ic Covenant, and therefore it is illegitimate to invoke the Mosaic law regarding the support of parents, let alone the Mosaic law prohibiting the cursing the parents. Those laws are seen as completely annulled. They have no continuing authority.

D. Old Age Insurance and Trust

By requiring sons to support their parents financially, biblical law establishes an economic framework based on trust. Parents need not fear old age as much as they would if they were not guaranteed support. Children understand their obligations. God has imposed this system. Their parents' legal claim to support rests on biblical law. The parents are in this sense agents of God. Their presence reminds children of their obligations to God. The parents are representatives of God.

This system of family insurance reduces risk. It allows people greater confidence in the future. They become less grasping, less driven by a need to accumulate wealth in preparation for old age. They are willing to bear more risk in their efforts to extend the kingdom of God in history. They can trust in God because they can trust in their children.

This gives them an incentive to teach biblical law to their children. The requirement to support aged parents is part of a comprehensive system of law. People are supposed to trust all of it. If they do not trust all of it, on what basis can they trust any of it? Conclusion: parents had better teach all of it.

Conclusion

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being hypocrites. They had added to the Mosaic law an oral tradition that they believed had greater authority than biblical law. They made these additions in the name of Moses. This was illegitimate, Jesus said. It was hypocritical.

He made His point by pointing to a substitution of a practice of voluntary giving to the temple in place of a law of moral obligation. In the name of God, they substituted that which was voluntary for that which was required. In doing this, they had committed a serious crime—so serious that it was the judicial equivalent of cursing one's parents, a capital crime.

11

TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD¹

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul (Mark 8:36–37)?

The theocentric principle here is the final judgment of God: sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant. Every man faces the final judgment. Compared to the loss of one's soul at this judgment, the gaining of everything that life has to offer is nothing.

A. Mammon vs. God: Trust

To understand this message, we need to consider the parallel passage in Matthew.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Matt 16:24–28).

Jesus was speaking of lifelong service to Him through the cross. This was a reference to His death, although they did not know this at the time. He carried His cross to Golgotha. He lost His life. He gained total power as a result. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). He

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

was the model.

He posed this to His disciples. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).² Moses presented a similar challenge. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deut. 30:19). Mammon is a principle, not a god. It is a confession of faith: “More for me in history.”³

B. Free Grace Is Not Cheap

Jesus warned His disciples that there are no free lunches in life. There is free grace, but it comes at a price. It comes, first and foremost, at the price of the death of Jesus Christ. Redeemed people owe a lifetime service to God through Christ (Rom. 12:1).⁴ But this service is insufficient to pay for eternal life. We know this because of the subsequent comparison: all the world could not redeem one man’s soul. Anything less than this is also insufficient.

Obviously, these words are not to be interpreted literally. Nobody is asked to take up a literal cross. Perhaps some follower of Jesus was asked to do so under Roman rule, but we are not informed of this. Crucifixion is no longer any nation’s means of execution except possibly in rare cases where Christians are executed this way as a symbol of their subordination to an anti-Christian state. In any case, one does not carry a cross through a lifetime of service.

The imagery here is that of a burden that costs a person his life. The cross is heavy. At the end of the journey, it becomes the means of his execution. Taking up the cross means taking up the pre-resurrection life of Christ. It means death to the things of this world. A man carrying a cross is not going to be easily distracted by the things of this world. He has other things on his mind . . . and on his back.

The text warns: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 16:25). This is not a call to literal suicide. It is a call for *covenantal death*. The old Adamic nature (old man) is executed. Paul provided a commentary on this passage:

2. *Ibid*, ch. 14.

3. *Idem*.

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (Rom. 6:3–12).

To say that we pay a price is to say that we give up something. What do we give up? Our old ways: the sins of the flesh. We forfeit the use of these attributes of Adam. Whatever pleasures or benefits they bring in history, we must give them up. This is the economist's meaning of cost: the most valuable thing foregone. There are no free lunches. We must give up something to gain eternal life. But the basis of our entrance into eternal life is not our payment.

C. The Fearful Exchange

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” There is an American joke about lawyers. Satan comes to a newly certified lawyer and says: “I will give you the gift of persuasion. You will become a world-famous defense lawyer. I will enable you to get juries to declare guilty criminals innocent, for which these evil men will pay you huge fees. You will become the envy of your peers. All I ask in return is your eternal soul at the end of a life of enormous success.” To which the lawyer replies: “What’s the catch?”⁵

Jesus warned against this exchange. If gaining the whole world is a bad bargain for the loss of one’s soul, then gaining anything less is a

5. The existence of hundreds of anti-lawyer jokes in the United States indicates a widespread distrust and resentment against lawyers as against no other profession. The public understands that the legal profession offers great wealth to those who pervert the intention of the law, i.e., to be a terror to evil-doers. Lawyers are not penalized professionally for misusing the law in order to get rich by terrorizing the innocent.

worse bargain. This is what present-oriented men do not acknowledge. They either reject the thought of eternal judgment on these terms or else they discount the future cost to such a low level that the exchange seems worth it. This exchange of the eternal in favor of the temporal is the essence of foolishness.

Time offers what appear to be ways out of trouble. There is always an option, a way of escape. This faith is a reflection of an ethical truth: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). But eternity does not possess this characteristic feature of time. In eternity, there is no escape. This is unimaginable to the time-bound sinner who thinks he can find a way not to pay for his sins. There is only one such way: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9–10). But this way of escape places a new perceptual burden on man: his recognition of *the high price of sin*. As the price of sin rises, less of it will be demanded, other things being equal.

The problem is, when sin is involved, other things do not remain equal. Sin has the characteristic feature of being addictive. The more you get, the more you want. The insatiable nature of sin leads some men into early death. They cannot control their addiction. Sin is like a ratchet upward: one level becomes normal, so new sins are sought out. But in a redeemed person, the insatiable nature of sin is reversed. He reaches a level of sinning that he recognizes as self-destructive. He sees the high price of sin. He then demands less of it. In fact, he can create an ethically positive ratchet: as he indulges in fewer sins, he finds that his taste for old ones and even new ones is reduced.

This fact runs counter to what economics teaches. Economics teaches us that when the price of something is reduced, more of it is demanded. This is expressed graphically by a demand curve that slopes downward and to the right. Price is expressed on the vertical axis, and quantity is on the horizontal axis.

God's redemption of sinners lowers their eternal price for an individual sin. This is because the redeemed person is not condemned eternally when he sins. Why, then, should he not indulge himself all the more? After all, the price is lower. Answer: *because redemption*

changes his taste for sin. In the terminology of graph-dependent economists, his entire demand curve for sin shifts to the left: reduced demand for sin all along the curve.

Paul understood the logic of economics in this application, and he rejected the conclusion. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 5:19–6:2). Other things, such as the demand curve for sin, do not remain equal. The redeemed sinner’s taste for sin is reduced.

Redemption increases a man’s perception of eternity. It lengthens a man’s time perspective. It increases his future-orientation. This makes it possible for him to count the cost of his thoughts and actions (Luke 14:28–30).⁶ Man always discounts the future. The more distant in the future an expected event, the less it affects a person’s decision-making today. The payoff, discounted to the present, is too low, either for benefits or losses. But if a man discounts eternity’s effects to nearly zero, in the way that he discounts events a century hence, he has made a disastrous miscalculation. He does not grasp how important time is for the outcome in eternity. He compares time to time. He should be comparing time to eternity. The discount that he applies to very distant events is influenced by his knowledge that he will not be here to see the results of his actions. But eternity is different. He will be there to see the results of his actions, and to experience them (Luke 16:23; Rev. 20:14–15).

Conclusion

Men set their priorities in terms of their values and their expectations about the future. Jesus said that our values should reflect the future—specifically, eternity. Any set of values that does not incorporate expectations about eternity must be wrong, He taught. The soul survives beyond the grave. Thus, any cost-benefit analysis in history should include costs or benefits in eternity.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

The price of eternal life is sacrificial living in history (Rom. 12:1).⁷ Christ's life of complete subordination to God and His undeserved death have set the judicial standard. He definitively paid the price. Taking up the cross and losing one's life for Christ's sake are aspects of the great exchange: a costly eternity vs. a beneficial eternity. Life is the constant exchange of one set of conditions for another. This includes eternal life. One way of life is exchanged for one kind of eternity. This exchange is *definitive* in history: God's judicial imputation to sinners of Christ's righteousness (Rom. 3:24–25; Phil. 3:9). It is also *progressive*: working out one's salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).⁸ It is also *final* (Matt. 25; Rev. 20:14–15).

The marketplace of the soul is history. A man cannot buy back his soul. Either it has been bought back by Christ or it cannot be bought back at all. From whom is it bought back? From God, who is sovereign over the souls of men. So, trust God.

7. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 8.

8. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

12

THE SERVICE PRINCIPLE¹

And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all (Mark 9:35).

The theocentric principle here was the servanthood of Christ in His capacity as the son of man, i.e., representative man. This is point two of the biblical covenant: representation or hierarchy.²

But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 10:42–45).

He did this also in His capacity as the Son of God.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 51.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11).³

Jesus also said this: “He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26). Jesus made it plain that dominion is a legitimate goal. But it is a peculiar kind of dominion. To be great, one must serve. To give commands, one must serve those who are commanded. This implies hierarchy. God has placed man over the creation (Gen. 1:26–28).⁴ Some men are placed legally over other men. This is the doctrine of *judicial representation*—also an aspect of point two. The question is: What are the legitimate means of attaining dominion?

A. Hierarchy

A man wants to be first: the top of the hierarchy. This is a widespread desire. Jesus said that the princes of the gentiles exercise authority over their subordinates. This means that they issue commands, and these commands must be followed. Those who refuse to obey face negative sanctions. This is the kind of authority that Jesus exercised over sickness. When the Roman centurion described his own authority over his troops as analogous Jesus’ authority over illness, Jesus praised this confession of faith. He healed the man’s servant from a distance, which the centurion had affirmed that He could do, so great was His authority (Matt. 8:8–10).

This form of military command is not the model for the church’s government. The military is a subset of civil government. The military serves the nation. Officers serve the nation best by placing at risk their lives and the lives of their men. Yet, even here, the wise officer places his men’s interests above his own. He protects his men’s lives before he protects his career. He obeys orders that place his men at extreme risk, not to advance his career, but to serve as a model for his men. A battle plan sometimes involves the deliberate sacrifice of some units. Even here, the Western military tradition encourages volunteerism: high-risk operations are very often staffed by volunteers or special forces.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples in their capacity as church members. He was not speaking to a group of soldiers. The principle of

3. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

leadership that He laid down here is not appropriate for the army, whose task, as an aphorism put it, is “to kill people and break things.” Leaders in the church are supposed to be servants, not military commanders. The proper pathway to authority in the church is the way of service. Paul made this clear in his first epistle to Timothy. “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (I Tim. 3:2–4).⁵ The person described here is self-sacrificing.

That this is the avenue to ecclesiastical authority is not intuitively obvious. The exercise of power is the more common avenue to public greatness. The strong man compels obedience. He also rewards it. He governs by means of sanctions, positive and negative.

But how is this different from authority in the church? The distinction is not easy to state. For example, we can say that the way to authority in the church is through service to those without any power, but this is not true in a church where members vote. The members have sanctions to impose. They vote to hire or fire a pastor. They vote for officers. If a man’s goal is high office, the favor of those possessing these sanctions is surely valuable to him. Similarly, in the worldly quest for power, men serve those who possess greater power. They subordinate themselves to those who can reward them. But church members who vote can also reward others with leadership positions. Those seeking authority do subordinate themselves to those with the votes. Where, then, is the distinction between church authority and other forms of authority? What did Jesus mean when He said, “But it shall not be so among you”?

1. Service Unto Death

Christ’s personal service was service unto death. He did not die to placate men. He died to placate God.

Service in the church is to be analogous. *The legitimate road to dominion is through service to those who cannot repay.* God will raise up such a servant to a position of leadership. Yet, in the modern church where members vote, almost everyone can repay. This is also

5. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

true in civil government. To understand what Jesus was getting at, we must consider His era.

In the gentile world in Jesus' day, democracy was a relic of the past. Rome had moved from a republic to an empire under Caesar Augustus in the generation before Jesus' birth. The trappings of representative government were still visible, but not the substance. To gain and hold power, men had to seek favor with members of the oligarchy that held permanent power. The people could not grant political office or withhold it from those above them. There was no public veto over the affairs of state. Power was granted from above.

2. Ecclesiastical Office

When it came time to replace Judas, the 11 apostles made the decision regarding who would be the two candidates. Then they turned it over to God. "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23–26). On what basis did the apostles narrow the list of candidates? The text does not say, but we know what it was from Jesus' words: those in authority decided in terms of the service displayed by the two men. The standard was not service to the apostles, but service to the congregation.

Those with power in the church should heed Christ's words. They should use service to others as the criterion for screening the candidates for high office. It is clear from the passage in Acts that democracy was not part of their screening procedure. They could lawfully use the casting of lots to allow God to make the final decision. This practice had to be replaced in A.D. 70: the fall of Jerusalem, when judicially authoritative divine revelation ceased.

Then to what extent is Acts a legitimate model for today? Hierarchy has not been annulled. How do Jesus' words apply to church hierarchy? First, there must be a screening procedure. The standard of service to others must be applied by those who are not being served. The screening committee must not become self-serving or self-perpetuating. It must not choose its successors based on service to the personal interests of members of the hierarchy. Committee members

must be able to perceive that a potential candidate is active in his service to the members.

Second, there must be more than one candidate for each office. The screening committee can and must apply the criteria, but it must not assume that only one person is capable of holding office. This assumes too much wisdom on the part of a committee. Committees are rarely creative. They function best as nay-sayers. They veto bad ideas. They should decide only what things in general should be done and not done, and to hire and fire the senior officer. Implementation must be left to individuals who answer to the committee.

Third, there must be third-party sanctions. Someone other than the screening committee must have the final decision. In the case in Acts, God was the third party. To lodge final authority in the representative body is to create an implicit tyranny. *Representatives should always face a veto by those represented.* As in the case of a committee, the larger association that comprises those who are represented cannot both devise and implement specific policies. They cooperate with each other in a joint structuring of general goals. Then they choose a manager who will implement these general goals in specific instances. But they cannot escape responsibility before God. If their leaders fall, they fall (Lev. 4).⁶

The gentiles served those above them. Obedience to an ever-more narrow hierarchy was the way to power. Rulership was a matter of coercion: issuing orders to those below. The authority to issue orders was seen as the great prize. Jesus announced a different system of hierarchy: the principle of servanthood. Instead of issuing orders to those beneath him, the ruler is to serve them. Coercion is thereby minimized.

B. Servants' Rights

Men pervert this rule when they seek leadership roles by serving only those who can repay them with the robes of authority. They imitate rebellious Absalom, who stood in the city's gates and promised justice to all men.⁷ They pretend to serve. They flatter those ostensibly

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

7. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and

served in a strategy to gain the power to issue orders. They become courtiers to the crowd.⁸

How can those being served protect themselves? First, by not consenting to a system of centralized administrative law. They must keep church government weak. All government is a system of hierarchy, but the biblical model for church and state (but not family) is a bottom-up hierarchy. Rulers are judges who hear disputes (Ex. 18).⁹ They are to honor biblical law, including Mosaic case laws that have not been annulled by the New Testament.¹⁰ Court decisions become precedents. But the common law ideal of judges-made law (the many) is as anti-biblical as the Roman law ideal of legislature-made law (the one). Both views make man the law-giver. Neither can reconcile the one and the many. Biblical law does.

Second, those served must exercise judicial sanctions from time to time. They must decide who will rule over them. In doing so, they exercise a veto over the decisions of the representative body, either directly or indirectly.

Third, members must decide whether to remain in covenant with a local congregation. Competition among congregations is as good a thing as competition among candidates for church office. Servants should be allowed to vote with their feet. Original sin teaches that men cannot be trusted with unilateral power. If power is exercised only downward, the result is tyranny. If a self-appointing hierarchy determines the distribution of the inheritance, those who provide the funding should reduce that inheritance by transferring their membership and their tithes.

C. Dominion Through Service: Free Market

The free market order is based on a principle of service analogous

right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (II Sam. 15:2–6).

8. Ray Eldon Hiebert, *Courtier to the Crowd: The Story of Ivy Lee and the Development of Public Relations* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1966).

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

10. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

to the one that Jesus set forth as binding in the church. The producer must serve buyers if he wishes to maximize his return. He must act in the present as a representative of future buyers. He must forecast what they will be willing and able to pay in the future. Then he must enter the market for production goods. He must buy or rent them, store them, restructure them, store the finished products, advertise them, and deliver the to paying customers. If he misforecasts customer demand, he will produce losses. If he forecasts correctly, he will produce profits.¹¹

What distinguishes this form of service from hierarchical authority is the horizontal nature of the relationship between buyer and seller. Each possesses legal sovereignty over his assets. Neither possesses legal sovereignty over the other person or the other person's assets. *The economic relationship is horizontal.*

A customer is legally sovereign over his own money. He decides whether or not to buy an item offered for sale. The seller has no legal compulsion over him in a free market economy. The seller has a legal claim on his own products, but he does not have a legal claim on the customer's money. The seller of goods is legally sovereign over what he owns, just as the customer is legally sovereign over what he owns. But the customer is dominant. Why? Because he possesses the most marketable asset: money. The seller owns a specialized asset. It has a much narrower market. There are far fewer people rushing to give him money in exchange for his asset than there are sellers who are pursuing customers for their money. The customers, because they own money, are economically dominant.

In rare instances, the producer is dominant. These cases usually are unique life-and-death situations. The physician at the scene of an accident is dominant over a critically injured person. The injured person is not in a position to negotiate. But such cases are exceptions, and juries in disputes over payment possess the authority to overturn the terms of the verbal contract on behalf of the buyer. The general market principle is this: *customers are economically dominant over producers.* While both parties are buyers and both are sellers, he who sells money is considered the buyer. He is economically dominant because he owns the most marketable commodity.

To maximize their returns, sellers must conform to the demand established by buyers. The legal structure of the free market is not a

11. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

pyramid-like hierarchy. *Sellers and buyers meet on equal legal terms: as owners of marketable assets.* Neither is legally sovereign over the other. Neither can compel the other to meet his demands. The only negative sanction that either of them can impose on the other is the refusal to enter into an exchange. The free market is therefore not a covenantal institution.

1. Covenant vs. Market

In a covenantal institution, there is a hierarchy of legal authority. Subordinates take an oath before God that they will defer to the decisions of ordained superiors. They owe them allegiance, for they owe God allegiance, and their superiors represent them before God (Lev. 4).¹² The superior has a legal claim on his subordinates.

This is not the legal relationship between buyers and sellers in a free market economy. Any attempt to insert the legal structure of a covenant into market relationships undermines the authority of money-owning customers. Other would-be customers, who do not possess sufficient money, or who wish to use their money for other purposes, sometimes call for the state to redistribute wealth. They sometimes call on the state to compel producers to meet their demand at below-market prices by legally forbidding the bids of competing customers. The substitution of one party's legal sovereignty over mutual exchange undermines the economic authority of buyers in general.

Legislation favoring certain groups is introduced and passed on the basis of a deception. The public is told that the legislation protects an entire group, when it really favors one segment of this group at the expense of most of the other members of the community. A politically successful segment of the larger population gains protection by law from competition from other segments. Above-market economic returns are legislated for the benefit of a subgroup. The higher these returns, the fewer the beneficiaries: fewer participants to share the wealth.

Consider legislation passed in the name of producers' sovereignty: tariffs, import quotas, cartels, quality controls, price floors, compulsory trade union laws, and licensing. Or consider legislation passed in the name of customers' sovereignty: price ceilings, quality controls, laws barring racial discrimination in renting or selling, and rationing.

12. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

All such legislation annuls the legal sovereignty of *excluded* producers and customers over their own property. It forcibly removes them from the competitive bidding process. In doing so, it restricts the market, thereby lowering the division of labor and reducing output per unit of resource input. It reduces the wealth of those discriminated against, all in the name of the public interest. In the name of a “government-business partnership,” it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled producers. In the name of “consumerism,” it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled buyers.

Conclusion

The principle of top-down hierarchical service by rulers governs the three institutional covenants: ecclesiastical, familial, and civil. A covenant is bound by an oath to God, implicit or explicit. It involves legal claims. Where hierarchy is covenantal, rulers are to seek dominion by serving the needs of their subordinates. God honors those with the power to enforce their will on others when they restrain themselves and sacrifice their own interests for the sake of their subordinates. This is what Jesus did in both of His offices: God and man.

This rule governs all men: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:3–4).¹³ But it especially governs those rulers who have been entrusted with delegated authority from God and man. The structure of authority is vertical.

Free market authority is contractual, not covenantal. A contract is not established by a formal oath before God. It is established through voluntary mutual agreement. The customer is supreme in the free market. This is because he owns the most marketable commodity: money. Producers must serve customers. *The structure of service is horizontal because the free market is not a covenantal institution.* It is an extension of the individual. The individual who produces something for sale to others must serve their desires. The principle of service to others governs the free market. Individuals serve each other through mutually beneficial exchange. This is not hierarchy except in the general economic sense that the customer is dominant because he possesses the most marketable commodity, money.

13. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 19.

13

FORFEITING POSSESSIONS¹

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions (Mark 10:17–22).

This is commonly referred to as the story of the rich young ruler. He was young (Matt. 19:20). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

The theocentric principle here was the price entry into the kingdom of heaven: sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.²

A. Access to Eternal Life

God has established standards of entry into His kingdom. The Ten Commandments are the summary of these standards, Jesus told the enquirer. But there is another barrier to entry: faith in God rather than faith in riches. The section prior to the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew's account deals with the same theme: entry into the kingdom.

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch 38.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Men must become as little children, Jesus said.³ That is, they must trust God with the same confidence that a child trusts his father. In His answer to the enquirer, Jesus amplified this principle. Those who trust in money have transgressed one of the standards of entry. They have substituted a rival faith.

The young man was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He understood something of the doctrine of the resurrection. He sought eternal life. Jesus then referred to the kingdom of heaven. The entry into eternal life takes place in history. The kingdom of heaven must have manifestations in history. What men do or fail to do in history, Christ implied, determines their inheritance.

Can men earn their way into heaven? The young man thought so: he had kept the commandments. Jesus showed him that he had more to do: sell his goods and give them to the poor. But this seems to make access to heaven a matter of good works. He implied that the young man had not done enough by keeping the commandments. He had to do more. Taken at face value, this passage teaches works religion: man can earn his salvation. Such a view of salvation is antithetical to biblical religion. Then why did Jesus not verbally challenge the man to re-think his religion? Why did He imply that the man could buy his way into heaven? Why did He tell the man to give away his money to the poor? Was this what is always required of those who would follow Jesus?

B. Trust Not in Riches

Rich men do not enter God's kingdom, Jesus said. "And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24). David had said something similar a thousand years earlier: "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Ps. 49:5–7).⁴

3. "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence" (Matt. 19:13–15).

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 9.

Jesus returned to this theme repeatedly in His parables and His dealings with rich men. Solomon had, too. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).⁵ The rich man trusts in his power to get wealth. He trusts in the creation. Moses warned against this: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).⁶ It is the sin of autonomy. It is the belief that man is the primary source of wealth.⁷ It is also the belief that this wealth is the coin of the realm in God’s kingdom. But it isn’t. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36–37).⁸

The lure of wealth is a powerful lure. Wealth seems to offer the ability to buy the good things of life. Money is the most marketable commodity. It seems to be a surrogate for wealth. This outlook proclaims: “Anything can be bought; every man has his price.” Jesus warned that this is a false premise. So did David: “For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever” (Ps. 49:8).

The enquirer had not understood Jesus’ warning about the worship of God rather than mammon. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).⁹ The enquirer had not examined his own soul. He had not seen clearly regarding his faith. He still trusted in his riches.

What did his wealth buy him that was worth access to God’s kingdom? Wealth can buy many things: luxury, safety, fame, deference by others. But all of these are as fleeting as riches. Remove the wealth, and everything that wealth had bought disappears. Mammon is a fickle god. It leaves without warning, taking with it all that it had previously distributed.

C. Give to the Poor

“If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

7. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

8. Chapter 11.

9. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matt. 19:21). Jesus called this would-be disciple to a complete rejection of his former way of life. Why? Does He call all men to the same rejection? If not, why not?

He told the man to sell his wealth and give the money to the poor. But, to do this, he had to sell his goods to someone. His wealth was not to be burnt on a pyre; it was to be exchanged for a more liquid asset: money. Money can be handed out in discrete units, a little at a time. The rich man was to learn how to give money away. Then he was to follow Jesus—not before.

This was a two-fold transfer of wealth: to those who bought it for money and to those who received the money. The rich young ruler was to become a middleman in the transfer of wealth. The more money he received from the sale of his wealth, the more money he could give away. He was to negotiate a top price from the buyers, and he was then to become a wise giver. He was to become more skilled as an administrator of capital. He was to put it to better use: service to God.

Others were allowed to buy his wealth. Did this mean that Jesus was condemning the buyers to eternal torment? Is wealth illegitimate? No. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).¹⁰ The question, then, is the context in which the wealth is held: man's or God's. *The theological issue is theonomy vs. autonomy.* To whose use is the wealth to be put? Does the owner see himself as a steward of God?

The rich young ruler had a problem. He was at a turning point in his life. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was held by means of a legal framework. He was under the authority of Rome. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was no safer than this hierarchy. A generation later, Rome would crush Israel's political revolt. Most wealth owned by Jews would be destroyed by war and their subsequent dispersion by Rome. Unless he died young, he lived to see this great destruction of wealth. Mammon cannot be safely trusted.

The young man was beguiled by his possessions. Jesus offered him a pathway to clarity regarding his priorities, but he went away troubled.

Jesus asked him to become poor. Wandering around Judea with a group of unemployed disciples was not a way of life preferred by most rich men. Matthew-Levi was an exception, but there were not many.

10. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

Jesus called the young man into poverty as a way into the kingdom of God. This man's priorities were arranged differently from those required for faithful service in an era of definitive covenantal transition. He did not understand the times.

D. Hierarchies of Faith

After this confrontation, we read the following.

And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible (Mark 10:23–27).

This indicates that a rich man is rare in the kingdom of heaven. The disciples replied: “Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.” Why did they ask this? There are few rich people in any population; Pareto's wealth-distribution curve assures this. If it did not, the bell-shaped curve would. Jesus said more than once, “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 20:16;¹¹ 22:14). This was not a startling doctrine for Jews. (There were no gentiles in the kingdom during Jesus' ministry.) Why should the disciples ask, “Who then can be saved?” Just because a rich man cannot be saved, why should this raise any question about most men?

Jews expected victory in history. They did not believe they would be under foreign domination forever. They had read Deuteronomy 28:

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest

11. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 40.

thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways (Deut. 28:4–9).¹²

They expected earthly rewards at some future time. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 37:9). Yet here was Jesus telling them that these blessings would constitute a threat to Israel’s salvation. How could this be?

Jesus answered that with God, all things are possible. That is, such salvation is abnormal but possible. Jesus’ point was clear: *wealth is a great temptation*. Those who get wealthy risk being snared by the doctrine of autonomy. The Old Covenant warned the rich man not to take advantage of the poor or to imagine that he was beyond the circumstances that afflict them.

Jesus’ answer indicated that wealth is a snare. Proverbs had said the same thing. “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).¹³

The lure of autonomy is strong. Those who possess any special advantage that provides them with a barrier against life’s common burdens are tempted to regard themselves as beyond God’s negative sanctions. These advantages include wealth, power, beauty, and health. But wealth is the most universally sought-after advantage, for it offers the broadest range of immunities from the common burdens of life. Of course, it adds new burdens. With an increase in the number of choices (wealth) comes an increase in responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).¹⁴

The message is clear: we should not expect to see many rich people subordinating themselves to God through the gospel. The rich are not willing to pay the price, namely, a transfer of their faith from wealth to Christ. Wealth seems to be under their control; Christ isn’t. Wealth extends their power; faith in Christ extends God’s dominion. They appear to be at the top of a hierarchy of wealth; not so with the kingdom of God. The rich man prefers to be at the top.

12. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

13. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

14. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

E. Continuity and Discontinuity in Jesus' Teachings

Jesus did not break with the Old Covenant's view of wealth and its inherent risks. *What made His teaching different was His lack of emphasis on the covenantal basis of corporate wealth.* There is not much in His teaching about the relationship between covenant-keeping and a society's accumulation of wealth. There are only occasional reconfirmations of the Old Covenant's system of corporate sanctions. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).¹⁵ This cites Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." *Jesus placed most of His emphasis on the idea of wealth as a snare to the individual rather than as a tool of dominion.* There is no doubt that this New Testament emphasis overwhelmingly promotes the idea of great wealth as a risk to the soul.

There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates that economic growth as a goal for society is wrong. There is nothing wrong with reducing the number of poor people by increasing their productivity. Capital accumulation increases men's productivity. Better tools make men more productive. Personal thrift increases capital accumulation. Men have discovered no better way to increase the supply of capital than to allow investors to reap the fruits of their investments. The goal of greater personal wealth is the lure that increases per capita investment in a society. That which is dangerous to the soul—the quest for wealth—is also what reduces the number of poor as well as their degree of poverty. Not charity but thrift and wise investing are the secret of reduced poverty in society. *This crucial fact is not taught in the New Testament.* It is implied in the Old Testament, however, which teaches the legal and moral right of private ownership and the legitimacy of wealth. When widely obeyed, the legal framework of the Mosaic Covenant necessarily produces a capitalistic social order.¹⁶

There are those who argue that Jesus did not adopt Old Testament standards. In fact, most Christians affirm this. But they affirm it selectively. At some point, they are forced to admit that sometimes He assumed the continuity of Mosaic standards. For example, conservat-

15. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 4.

16. I have written 17 volumes on the economics of the Pentateuch that prove this point. It is the responsibility of critics of my thesis to produce something comparable that proves otherwise.

ives¹⁷ insist that Jesus was not opposed to the free market, and was even favorable to it. Yet they also insist that He did not affirm a theocratic system of civil government, or any other political system. Liberals¹⁸ insist that He opposed both the free market and theocratic civil government. Trapped between the two are pietistic Christians who say that Jesus was indifferent to social issues; He was concerned only with personal salvation. They can appeal to the obvious fact that He was as silent on the free market social order as He was on theocratic civil government. Why this silence? Because He implicitly accepted both? Because He implicitly opposed both? Because He implicitly accepted one but not the other? Or because He was indifferent to both?

Theonomists assume covenantal continuity in the absence of specific annulments or a change based on the end of Israel's status as the Promised Land of the priestly nation.¹⁹ So, theonomists insist that Jesus accepted both the free market and theocratic civil government, since the Mosaic Covenant mandated both, and there is nothing in the New Covenant that annuls either institutional arrangement. He did not break with Moses on either point. His emphasis on the spiritual danger of wealth also did not break with Moses. He just skipped over the legacy of the Old Covenant that affirmed the legitimacy of great wealth, with Abraham and Job as leading examples. This was a matter of emphasis. The emphases of the two testaments are different. This does not mean that the testaments are in opposition.

The *personal* economic goal recommended by the Old Testament was middle-class wealth (Prov. 30:7–9).²⁰ There is nothing in the New Testament that would call this goal into question. Paul wrote, citing the account of the manna (Ex. 16:18): “As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (II Cor. 8:15).²¹ But in a world without manna from heaven, output sufficient to fill most men's stomachs will make some men rich. Like the poor, Pareto's curve is with us always. Output sufficient to feed all men will make some men very rich. The question is: What will these rich men do with their wealth? Share it? Accumulate more of it?

17. Those in the Scottish Whig tradition by way of Edmund Burke.

18. Those in the French Revolutionary tradition.

19. Seed laws, land laws, and priestly laws. See Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Conclusion.

20. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

21. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

The rich young ruler had his answer straight from Jesus. He went away troubled.

F. Jesus' Recommended Priorities

The rich young ruler had a problem with the content of his faith. He trusted in what he thought he could do and had always done: keep all of God's commandments. Jesus showed him that his faith was in himself and therefore defective. His faith was leading him to eternal death. His law-keeping and his wealth had become his high walls. By challenging him to tear down the second of these two walls, Jesus forced him to reconsider the content of his faith. His problem was not his good works or his wealth; his problem was his belief in the spiritual efficacy of works religion. He could not earn eternal life.

To show to him how wrong he was, Jesus went to the heart of his faith: his wealth. He was a follower of mammon. What he had to do in order to gain eternal life was beyond his ability. What all men have to do to gain eternal life is beyond their ability. It is the task of the evangelist to identify whatever it is that an anxious enquirer cannot do or will not do for the sake of the prize: the good work that is just too much for him, the wall that he cannot climb over. The evangelist must then confront the enquirer with the existence of this wall, which is a barrier in between him and the eternal prize. Then the enquirer may be ready to hear the correct answer: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). How does a man deny himself? By affirming faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

Jesus placed the attainment of personal wealth very low on any man's list of priorities—far lower than generosity to the poor. He did not place per capita economic growth high on the list. He did not place it on the list at all. The second point follows from the first, for without men's willingness to save in their quest for wealth, there can be no widespread reduction in poverty: insufficient per capita capital. Jesus also did not place the elimination of poverty on the list. The third point follows from the first two. He emphasized personal charity, which ameliorates individual cases of poverty, but does not solve the problem of widespread poverty. Only economic growth does this, but economic growth is the product of widespread personal wealth-seek-

ing; thrift. Many religions emphasize charity, but only in the West, where Christianity and especially Calvinist theology had its roots, has a two centuries-long period of compound economic growth occurred. Whether this can continue in the face of widespread apostasy, increasing debauchery, and legalized abortion remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Compared to eternal life, economic growth is a pale sanction indeed. But this does not deny the legitimacy of economic growth. It need not be a negative sanction. John Wesley's refrain is valid: "Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."²² It was this outlook that moved Methodists out of grinding poverty into middle-class respectability—and theological liberalism—in less than two centuries. The history of the twentieth century mainline denominations in the United States is evidence of the truth of Christ's warning to the rich young ruler. Better to be a Methodist layman in a wretched hut in 1740 than a Methodist theologian in a wretched seminary in the early twenty-first century.

The economic goal of both testaments is the same: middle-class comfort for the masses. This takes generations of compound economic growth. It was not achieved in any society until the twentieth century, during which Western Christianity went into spiritual decline. Like the poor, the rich we shall always have with us. But if the way to riches is by serving buyers, as it is under free market capitalism, the more rich people we have, the less grinding is the poverty of the poor. The problem is, when the poor have become less poor because entrepreneurs have been allowed to get exceedingly rich, both rich and poor can fall into the trap: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."

The modern pietistic Protestant hymn is correct: "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold." But the theonomists' goal is better: "I'd rather have Jesus *and* silver and gold." So far, no society has achieved this. It takes widespread conversions and obedience to biblical law.

22. Sermon 50 (1744): *The Use of Money*.

14

HUNDREDFOLD INHERITANCE¹

Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first (Mark 10:28–31).

The theocentric focus of this passage was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.²

A. Status: Thrones of Judgment

Peter's question was in response to Jesus' warning about how few rich men will enter the kingdom of heaven. Peter reminded Him that he and the other disciples had forsaken all, which included their families. They were not rich. He asked: "What's in it for us?" He was looking for assurance of a positive sanction. Christ promised two. *First*, they would exercise authority. In Luke, we are given another account of this same promise. It relates to the meaning of the Lord's Supper. "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28–30). What did this mean? Why was this related to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 39.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 5.

The link was sanctions. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of judgment: self-judgment, church judgment, and God's judgment.³ *Second*, they would gain the kingdom. The Jews would lose it, He told them. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Old Covenant Israel was coming to the end of the road. The church was about to inherit the kingdom-related promises of God. One aspect of this kingdom is the rendering of judgment. Jesus had already told them: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18).

The apostles, by bringing the gospel of the kingdom to Israel, were bringing a covenant lawsuit against Israel. Like the prophets before them, they would suffer persecution by the Jews because of this covenant lawsuit. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11–12). These were negative sanctions.

This was not what Peter wanted to hear. What about the positive sanctions? Jesus told them that they would be agents of judgment against Israel. They would bring judgment against the Jews, who were bringing judgment against them. How would they do this? He did not say. He did not promise them that they would do this in heaven. This may have been His frame of reference, but then they would all have to die before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when judgment arrived.⁴ Jesus may have had in mind their preaching of the kingdom. This would be a means of bringing judgment. What He did say is that they would participate with Him in the rendering of judgment against the 12 tribes. The dozen apostles (minus Judas, plus Matthias) would replace the dozen tribes of Israel.⁵ They would serve judicially as representative agents of the New Israel of God, the church.⁶

3. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup..For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:28–30).

4. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

5. Levi, the priestly tribe, was replaced by the church. The priesthood ceased: no more animal sacrifices.

6. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and

This was a major blessing. They would become the patriarchs of a new Israel. They would become founders, not in the sense of biology, but rather as forefathers. Their names would extend down through the ages.⁷ So few people are remembered in history that becoming part of the historical record of a civilization is generally regarded as a great honor. Fame ranks with money and power in the minds of most people: the desire not to be forgotten. Wealth is far easier to achieve than fame.

B. Inheritance: Multiplication

Exercising authority would be one positive sanction. Second, “every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:29). They would receive a hundredfold. This is an image of great wealth.

What had they forfeited? Above all, their families. Also listed is land. This was the context of the promise of a hundredfold increase. This is confusing. If they paid for their time spent with Jesus by losing contact with their families, or possibly losing the trust of their families, how could they be repaid a hundredfold? With money? How much money? How can anyone place a market value on lost family life? In any case, what income? Not monetary income from wandering the roads of Judea.

The context indicates the multiplication of families. The apostles had lost those things closely associated with family life. They would gain access to a new family inheritance. Their efforts in spreading the gospel of the kingdom would lead to a new family: the family of God. *A new era of mass adoption by God was at hand.* The founders of the church would be welcomed into households everywhere. They would become founders of a new family, a family analogous to the family of Old Covenant Israel.

They would be involved in the burial of the old family of God. Israel’s inheritance would come to them as the nearest of kin. “And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his

upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

7. “Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:14-16). “And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses" (Num. 27:11). Old Covenant Israel would die without leaving biological heirs. The covenantal heirs would inherit.

The inheritance of Old Covenant Israel would soon pass to the church. The patriarchs of the church would become heirs of all of Israel's promises. Through them, this inheritance would pass to the adopted children of God. The agents of this adoption were the apostles. *They would receive the inheritance of Israel as trustees.*

This did not necessarily mean that they would receive the inheritance in history. The language of their judging Israel on thrones of glory pointed to the opposite: their deaths, one by one, prior to the fall of Jerusalem. But inheritance is covenantal. It is *inheritance by confession*. Their confessional heirs would inherit the promises. In this sense, the apostles would inherit in the name of their heirs. They would inherit definitively in history, though not finally.

C. The First Shall Be Last

"But many that are first shall be last; and the last be first" (v. 31). This cryptic statement appears repeatedly in Matthew's gospel. It is quoted by Christians far more widely than it is understood. At least two very different interpretations are possible, given the context of this passage. One flows from what Jesus had just said. The other makes sense because of what Jesus would say next.

The immediately preceding context indicates that Jesus was talking about the apostles. Peter had asked the question: "What shall we have" (Matt. 19:27)? The question regarding Jesus' discussion of first and last is this: In relation to whom, future converts to the faith or the Jews? Which did Jesus have in mind? I will examine both possibilities.

As in English, "first" and "last" in Greek can refer to either status or sequence. I will examine both possibilities.

1. *The Apostles and Future Converts*

The context of Jesus' statement reflects both interpretations of "first" and "last": status and inheritance. Jesus had spoken to them of judging on 12 thrones: judicial status. He had also spoken of a hundredfold inheritance. The preceding context—though not the subsequent context—indicates that He was speaking of their personal futures, not the future of Christians in general. But was He? It is possible

to make a case for such a corporate view.

Consider “first” and “last” in terms of status. “But many that are first [in status] shall be last [in status]; and the last [in status] shall be first [in status]” (Matt. 19:30). This makes no sense. The apostles would judge Israel. This meant that they would be first in status. They would occupy 12 thrones “when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory” (Matt. 19:28). Taken literally, this means that they would die prior to the fall of Jerusalem. James was executed in A.D. 62.⁸ We do not know about the others. Tradition says that John survived until the 90s, but this is based on a late dating of the Book of Revelation. This late dating is difficult to defend. The book was probably written in A.D. 64 or 65.⁹

Consider “first” and “last” in terms of inheritance. “But many that are first [to inherit] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [to inherit] shall be first [to inherit].” This also makes no sense. Those who died before Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70 would not see their inheritance in history. Those who came later would receive the visible inheritance, yet they were not the first to inherit. The apostles were first. Jesus said so. This was their reward for following Him. This was His answer to Peter’s question.

What about a combination of status and inheritance? “But many that are first [in status] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [in status] shall be first [to inherit].” The apostles were clearly first in status. This was their reward for being the first to forsake all and follow Jesus. But to exercise this honor as judges on thrones, they would either have to die prior to the fall of Jerusalem—heavenly thrones, which seems likely—or perish in the terrible crisis, or escape it by fleeing the city. The first view is more likely: rendering final judgment against Old Covenant Israel from heaven. They would not be the historical recipients of the final inheritance. Rather, they would administer it from heaven. Conversely, the first to receive Israel’s covenantal inheritance—those Christians who survived Jerusalem’s Great Tribulation in A.D. 70¹⁰—would be last in status. They would become the forgotten generation.

So it was. Nothing written survives of the generation immediately following the fall of Jerusalem: the generation that inherited. The earli-

8. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D’Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 47. They cite Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX:197–203.

9. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: The Date of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/klgbjff>)

10. Chilton, *Great Tribulation*.

est surviving writings of the early church are thought to be from the period of the 90s, over two decades after the fall of Jerusalem. *There would be no remembrance for members of the first generation who inherited.* All we know is that the church survived the Roman wars in Palestine. Church history records that the Jerusalem church fled to the town of Pella, a gentile city, but this information comes from Eusebius, who wrote in A.D. 325.¹¹ We know almost nothing about the church in the period of the final inheritance.

Inheritance, like sanctification,¹² is definitive, progressive, and final. The apostles received the definitive inheritance. Christ promised it to them. Their work for a generation in bringing the covenant lawsuit against Israel served as the legal basis of the transfer of the inheritance from Israel to the church. This was a progressive inheritance. It took a generation. It involved a war between the false heirs and the true heirs. When the persecutions began, the Jerusalem church fled; only the apostles remained behind to proclaim the covenant lawsuit (Acts 8:1). The apostles died before the final transfer was visible. *They were first in inheriting but last in receiving.* They were like the three patriarchs of Israel and the sons of Jacob: the promise of inheritance in the land had come definitively to Abraham, but none of them lived to see it.

This interpretation places the hundredfold inheritance in the possession of the apostles—an inheritance exercised by faith, not by sight. They became the church's forefathers. This was their reward, along with the reward of sitting on 12 thrones. But if we restrict this promise of hundredfold inheritance to the apostles, this does not answer the question of the inheritance for Christians throughout history. Are we not also participants in the great inheritance? Surely we all "shall inherit everlasting life." Why not also the inheritance? The second interpretation broadens this inheritance.

2. *The Apostles and Israel*

The second interpretation makes sense in the light of what Jesus said in Matthew's exposition: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). In the parable of the householder who goes into the public square to hire workers

11. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Chap. V.

12. John Murray, "Sanctification," *The Collected Works of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

throughout the day, paying them all a penny per day, the contrast is between the group that worked all day and those groups that arrived throughout the day. The earliest workers complained to the employer that he had made the late-comers equal to them, even though the former had worked the whole day. They thought they deserved more, since they had worked longer.¹³ The context of the parable indicates that the complainers were the Jews. Jesus was prophesying that they would resent the fact that God was about to make an offer to the gentiles: equal access to the New Covenant kingdom and also equal payment at the end of the kingdom in history, i.e., eternal life. The Jews would not be given any special consideration in the kingdom for their years of prior service. Furthermore, entrance into heaven would not be based on years of service.

If Jesus' statement here of the first-last dichotomy is interpreted in terms of the next parable in Matthew, then the comparison is not between the apostles and future converts, but between the apostles and members of *Old Covenant Israel*, whom the apostles would judge in A.D. 70 from thrones in heaven. The "first" in this context is Old Covenant Israel. The "last" is the *predominantly gentile church*, which was represented judicially by the apostles. The text would therefore read: "But many that are [chronologically] first [Israel] shall be last [to enter the New Covenant kingdom]; and the last [the church] shall be first [to enter the New Covenant kingdom]."

Most Jews, hearing of this, would resent it. Jews had long regarded themselves as first in terms of status because they were chronologically first in terms of God's calling. But what they ignored was their history of rebellion, which would soon culminate in the crucifixion of Christ. Old Covenant Israel would continue to reject the message of the disciples. The nation would suffer the consequences. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:14–15). "But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more toler-

13. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 40.

able for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Matt. 11:22–24).

The inheritance here is the inheritance of the kingdom throughout history, not just in the first century. The Jews will remain as would-be heirs. They will inherit their share of the kingdom only by being grafted into the church (Rom. 11),¹⁴ which grants access on the same terms, with the same rewards, to all men. They will enter the kingdom as lawful heirs, but they will enter last. They came into the Old Covenant church first, but this unique honor does not carry into the New Covenant. They would gain access to the kingdom as everyone else does: through the church.

3. A General Promise

Jesus told them, “every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:29). This was not a promise to the apostles only, but to Christians in general. Their multiplication through time will encompass the whole earth. The church’s progressive fulfillment of the Great Commission will extend the dominion covenant to the uttermost limits.¹⁵

The second interpretation—apostles (first) and Israel (last)—seems more consistent with this interpretation of the promise. *The promise is to every generation.* He who forsakes all to follow Christ is adopted into a confessional family. He gains his inheritance through his brethren. The division of labor increases as the body of Christ expands (Rom. 12;¹⁶ I Cor. 12¹⁷). This increase in the division of labor increases every member’s productivity and wealth, and also the wealth of those outside the church through common grace.¹⁸ Even the covenant-breaking dogs under the table will feast on the abundance of crumbs. This is why Paul could write of the future conversion of the Jews: “I say

14. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

15. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GnetryGGC>)

16. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

17. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

18. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom. 11:11–12). When the gentile church achieves something worth being jealous of—the widespread extension of God's kingdom in history—the Jews will join.

Conclusion

The promise of multiplication had to do with inheritance. Whatever the apostles had already lost and would continue to lose as disciples of Christ, they would regain a hundredfold through their spiritual heirs. The church down through history constitutes their inheritance. They would have lost their inheritance anyway, had they remained loyal to Old Covenant Israel, whose time had come. The transfer of Israel's inheritance—the kingdom of God—was at hand. The apostles would become the original trustees in the transfer of the inheritance to their covenantal heirs. As forefathers, they would see their heirs and their heirs' wealth multiplied. They would see this in history only by the eyes of faith, just as Abraham had seen his inheritance.¹⁹ But the transfer was as secure as Abraham's had been. They had Christ's word. They could safely trust Him.

This promise of inheritance extends to every generation. Adoption into the church brings every Christian into covenantal union with others of the same confession. Their inheritance is the whole earth.²⁰ This inheritance is open to everyone who follows Christ. The expansion of this inheritance is achieved through the extension of God's kingdom throughout history: the Great Commission.

This places top priority on the preaching of the gospel. The apostles' task is our task, too: to work for the multiplication of heirs through adoption by God. The task in proclaiming the gospel was two-fold, for the covenant's sanctions are two-fold: blessing and cursing,

19. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8–10).

20. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

inheritance and disinheritance. The apostles would gain their inheritance through their covenantal heirs. This would require the disinheritance of Old Covenant Israel, which they would oversee from the 12 thrones.

15

JESUS' CLAIM OF OWNERSHIP

And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither (Mark 11:1–3).

The theocentric principle here is Christ's ownership of the world in His capacity as the Son of God: point one of the biblical covenant.¹

Jesus told His two disciples to borrow a colt without asking permission. Only if they were asked why they were taking the colt should they explain, He said. This was exactly what happened.

And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go (Mark 11:4–6).

The text does not say that the owner was among the group that asked the disciples what they were doing. In Luke, the text refers to these people as lords (Luke 19:33). This implies ownership, but it does not prove it.

Jesus was ready to have them remove the colt from its known location, even if the owner did not authorize the action. He knew what the chain of events will be. He knew there would be inquiries. But He added this information only after He had told them to take the colt. Fur-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 1.

thermore, He added it as part of a conditional clause introduced by the word *if*. If no one asked them why they were taking the colt, the owner deserved no explanation.

Jesus was asserting ownership. He did the same thing when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers (Mark 11:15). Both acts would have been prohibited to someone who had no legal claim of ownership. He told the two disciples to have a ready answer for anyone who challenged them. "Say ye that the Lord hath need of him." He also made a prophecy: "Straightway he will send him hither." The fact that Jesus needed the colt was judicially sufficient to justify their consent. Anyone raising a question about their action would both understand and consent. This is exactly what took place.

He did not tell them to explain who the lord was who needed the colt. The implication was that God needed it. The Greek word *kurios* means *lord*. The same Greek word was used to describe the status of those who challenged the disciples (Luke 19:33). These lords recognized the superior claim that God had on this property.

On what legal basis did Jesus command His disciples to bring back the colt? On the basis of prophecy, which had legal standing in Israel. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9). The Israelites of Jerusalem briefly honored this legal claim.

And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest (Mark 11:7–10).

Conclusion

Jesus' command to His disciples was an affirmation of His kingship in Israel. Its legitimacy was understood by those who challenged the disciples when they obeyed Jesus' command and took the colt.

This passage should not be understood as biblical justification of unlimited authority over private property by civil government in general. It should be understood as a condemnation of Israel for having demanded a king to rule over them.

16

CASTING OUT THE MONEYCHANGERS¹

And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves (Mark 11:15–17).

The theocentric principle here was the holiness of God: boundaries, point three of the biblical covenant.²

A. Holy Housecleaning

This was the second time that Jesus performed this cleansing of the temple. The first time was during the week before the Passover, three years earlier. “And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting; And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise” (John 2:13–16). Here, He did it again. Liberals argue that the two accounts are scrambled chronologically. Conservatives argue that the priests were slow learners.

Jesus was not arrested either time. This is very strange. He clearly

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 3.

had violated other people's property rights. He had used force. He had entered a holy place and called the resident exchangers harsh names. By doing so, He was challenging those in charge of the temple. They had allowed this to go on. But what, exactly, was going on? Something that Jesus called theft. This was a very serious accusation. Yet the authorities did nothing. They did not formally accuse Jesus of being a false witness.

There was a reason: they were guilty as charged. But what were they guilty of? In John's account, He called them merchandisers. In Matthew's account, He called them thieves. Why was it theft to be a merchandiser? Why would Jesus have twice singled out those inside the temple as the objects of His wrath? Scripture gives no indication that He ever physically assaulted anyone else, yet He used a whip on these people the first time.

1. *Holy Space*

The temple was holy space: God's sanctuary. Inside its walls a higher ethical standard was to prevail. The closer that men came to the holy of holies, the greater the threat to them of their own moral pollution. God might bring sanctions against them. This is why the three families of Levi served as guardians of the temple, surrounding it in concentric circles (Num. 3; 4).³

When the merchants set up shop within the walls of the temple, they accepted greater responsibility for dealing righteously. They were not selling items in a market with open entry to competitors. Their merchandise had to meet high standards. The body of no blemished animal could lawfully be burned on the altar.⁴ Thus, the animals sold for sacrifice had to be screened by the priests or their agents. To do this screening conveniently, the priests brought the merchants' tables inside the boundary of the temple.

One of the forms of sacrifice was a coin, the shekel. The temple originally had its own shekel.⁵ It was the standard of weight and fineness for temple assessments. "This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is 20 gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD" (Ex. 30:13). It was therefore unlawful to bring a coin

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3:C.

4. Leviticus 1:3; 3:1; 4:3, 23, etc.

5. Exodus 30:24; 38:24–26; Leviticus 5:15; Numbers 7.

from outside the temple unless it was of the same weight and fineness.

In Jesus' day, Jews came from around the Mediterranean to offer sacrifice. They brought many different kinds of coins. The Jews did not approve of coins with people's likenesses on them, especially the emperor's, which bore proclamations of his divinity.⁶ During the Bar Kochba rebellion (A.D. 133–35), the Jews hammered out the images of the emperors on Roman coins and drew in scenes from the temple.⁷ To bring a Roman coin to make an offering would have been a sacrilege. These coins had to be exchanged for temple coins.

2. False Dealing

This would have created opportunities for false dealing. The temple coins could have been sold at a premium beyond the weight and fineness of the coins' metals. It is likely that the moneychangers had been given a special dispensation by the priests. Moneychangers inside the walls of the temple would not have faced competition from rivals who were not authorized by temple authorities. Over decades and centuries, devious practices would have become common. The opportunity for above-market returns is always tempting and rarely resisted for long. Higher prices charged by the temple's moneychangers would have raised suspicion about the priests' collusion. To transfer the monopoly power to charge higher than open-entry prices is to transfer wealth. Those who possess such power are unlikely to transfer it free of charge. Once transferred, such a monopoly is difficult to revoke. Those who pay in advance for it expect to be compensated. They bid up the entry price on the basis of expected future income. They resist any attempt to lower the price unless they are offered refunds.⁸

Jesus identified their practices as theft. They were stealing from the faithful who came to offer sacrifice. They were also stealing from God. They were undermining His reputation. False weights and measures are an abomination to God. "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee"

6. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 125–27.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

8. This observation applies to all forms of licensing that require extra training or initial payment.

(Deut. 25:15).⁹ “A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight” (Prov. 11:1).¹⁰ The misuse of a monopoly granted in God’s name was the judicial equivalent of false weights.

The priests had betrayed the trust of the nation by delegating authority over exchange rates to profit-seeking men. They had imposed false weights and measures. Jesus overturned their tables in the name of God. God was trustworthy; the moneychangers and priests were not. Jesus, as God’s Son, was trustworthy.

The priests did not prosecute Jesus. Why not? The most obvious reason is that they were in collusion with the merchants who were extracting monopoly returns.

B. Who Owned the Temple?

Jesus asserted that He was the Son of the Owner. In Matthew’s account, Jesus cited an Old Testament passage: “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer;¹¹ but ye have made it a den of thieves.”¹² But, in John’s account, He made a claim: “Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise” (John 2:16). He was the true heir. He was coming on behalf of the Owner of the temple.

Jesus twice invaded the outer court and overturned the tables. This violation of property rights was grounded in law: as the designated agent of the Owner, He was authorized to enforce the terms of the lease. This was a house of prayer; it had been turned into a place where thieves took advantage of worshippers. They were using the sacred character of the temple to extract monopoly profits. They were cashing in on God’s name.

Jesus rightly regarded them as squatters. They presumably had been authorized by the chief priest to conduct their operations. By

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

10. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 29.

11. “Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Isa. 56:6–7).

12. “Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD” (Jer. 7:11).

physically assaulting the moneychangers, Jesus was announcing His revolt against the religious authorities. He was challenging the faithfulness of the hierarchy, i.e., the priesthood. They were false priests, He indirectly asserted. They deserved no better treatment than the moneychangers. In fact, they deserved worse. They knew better. They bore greater responsibility. “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:47–48).¹³

The agent of the Owner routed the agents of the priesthood. The priests claimed to act on God’s behalf in His name. Jesus visibly challenged this claim by forcibly driving out the priests’ agents. This was a conflict between authorities: a self-ordained establishment vs. a man baptized by an outsider who was regarded by the people as a prophet. This was one more confrontation between a prophet and the priesthood. Prophets had usually lost these confrontations, and the ecclesiastical winners subsequently perished at the hand of some invading military power. So it would be again, but this time the invader would end the Old Covenant order by burning the temple.

Jesus’ violation of the property rights of the economic agents of the priests was based on His superior claim of ownership. He did not appeal to the existing authorities to enforce His claim. He acted on His own authority, for He had been given this authority by the Owner. Soon thereafter, the priests would attempt to undermine His authority.

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell.

13. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things (Matt. 21:23–27).

Once again, He undermined their authority by His answer.

The priests feared the people. The people respected John's memory. Jesus had been baptized by John. If the people could not be swayed in their opinion regarding Jesus' authority, the priests were powerless to reassert their authority. Their hold on the affections of the people was tenuous. The question was: What about Jesus' hold on the people's affections? Could this be broken? He had used force against their agents. They would soon use force on Him, first in a trial before the Sanhedrin, and then by trials by Roman authorities.

Control over the temple was at the heart of the question of authority in Israel. *Through His actions against the moneychangers, Jesus was asserting a superior claim of authority.* He had already made this claim: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:56–58). *A prior legal claim is a superior claim.* He was asserting a claim that predated the temple.

The Jewish leaders had to silence His claim. If they could not do this, their claim of representation would be undermined. They would be overthrown. To silence Him, they finally appealed to Rome. They invoked Rome's authority in order to eliminate Jesus' authority. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Jesus attacked the invaders of the temple. He did so in the name of God. He claimed to be the lawful heir. He referred to the temple as "my Father's house." In the context of what had taken place immediately prior to this confrontation, this was a sensational claim. The people had just proclaimed Him as the heir of David's throne. "And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest" (Mark 11:8–10). Now He was asserting jurisdiction over the temple. David could not have made such a claim. He had been a king, not a

priest. He was of the family of Judah. Levi was the priestly family.

One man in history had possessed such authority: Melchizedek. “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God” (Gen. 14:18). To him Abraham presented tithes (v. 20). Jesus was therefore announcing a new priesthood, meaning a new hierarchy. “Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:20). This meant that a New Covenant would be in force, with new laws. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 7:12–17).

1. Resurrected Temple

The legal right of Jesus to throw out the moneychangers was verified by His resurrection. By this, He demonstrated publicly that He was God’s designated agent. He possessed the right to enforce the terms of the lease. When the priestly leaseholders refused to cleanse the temple of thieves, they forfeited their right to represent God. God demonstrated this by tearing down the temple in A.D. 70.

The argument between Jesus and the Jews from beginning of His ministry to the end had centered on the temple. He invoked the language of the temple to describe the resurrection. Immediately following His first scattering of the moneychangers, the Jews asked Him for a sign to validate this authority. “Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:18–22). The Jews remembered this at the time of His trial, even

though the disciples had temporarily forgotten. “And there arose certain [men], and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together” (Mark 14:57–59).

Which temple was doomed to permanent destruction? Jesus’ body or the temple? At the resurrection, the world had half of its answer. In A.D. 70, the world had the other half.

Conclusion

The temple was a house of prayer. By using the sacred authority of the temple to establish monopolistic pricing, the priests and the moneychangers had profaned the temple, i.e., had violated sacred space. Jesus drove out the moneychangers because they were thieves. It was not the fact that there was exchange going on that outraged Him. It was convenient for men to buy unblemished beasts to sacrifice. It was convenient that they could buy coins acceptable in worship. But the moneychangers had become thieves, exploiting their delegated position as agents of the priesthood. Their corruption reflected the priesthood’s corruption. Jesus drive them out.

The top priority established in this passage is to avoid using God’s holy office of ecclesiastical minister as a means of exploiting worshippers. When men seek church offices to gain income based on a misuse of authority, they violate this rule. Paul wrote: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous” (I Tim. 3:2–3).¹⁴ This is an extension of the top priority in this passage. Men who misuse God’s holy office by stealing will be driven out.

The incident of the moneychangers forced people to decide who was worth their trust.

14. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press. [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

CONFISCATION IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE¹

And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty (Mark 12:1–3).

The theocentric principle here is the sovereignty of God over inheritance. God is the creator. He sets the terms of the leasehold. His Son, Jesus Christ, is the true heir in history and eternity.

A. The Davidic Inheritance

Jesus gave this parable to the religious leaders in the week preceding Passover. The people had strewn palm branches before Him as He entered the Jerusalem. They had acclaimed Him as the heir of David. “And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest” (Mark 11:9–10). This was a messianic declaration. Jacob had prophesied: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). No Jewish king had reigned in Israel since the Assyrian captivity. No Jewish king had reigned in Judah since the Babylonian captivity. Yet the crowds were proclaiming Jesus the son of David. They were acknowledging that He was Shiloh, “and unto him shall the gathering of the people

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

be.” Jesus had the right to wear the sword of Judah. So said the Jewish masses.

This declaration offended the Jewish rulers. “And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased” (Matt. 21:15). The authorities set another trap for Him. “And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?” (Mark 11:27–28). As He did so often, and with such devastating effect, He answered their question with a question: “I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things” (Mark 11:29–33). They feared being placed under the public’s sanctions. So, they could not pursue Him by means of this strategy. He escaped from their trap once again.

The people had declared Him the heir of David’s office. This threatened the Jewish establishment, which had a working alliance with Rome. David had been the great warrior king of Israel. If the multitude ordained Jesus as king, this could undermine the establishment’s arrangement. It was clear to Pilate a week later that this was what bothered them. He understood that it was not religion that had motivated them, but politics. He also understood that Jesus was uninterested in politics, for He was self-consciously unbending to power. He was not afraid of Pilate or his sanctions. Jesus stood His ground with Pilate, and Pilate respected Him for this.

Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he

brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar (John 19:10–15).

The Jewish rulers crawled before Rome's power at the expense of their theology. Jesus had challenged Pilate in terms of His theology. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." Jesus told him that God was over him, and therefore the man who had delivered Him to Pilate—presumably, the chief priest—had the greater sin. Why? Because the chief priest's theology declared that God is in control, yet he had brought Pilate into this religious dispute because Pilate possessed the civil power of execution.

Pilate recognized the nature of the game that the Jewish rulers were playing, with him as the pawn. They were placing him between the rock and the hard place: either do their bidding or face public disorder which would undermine his reputation in Rome. As a politician, he recognized the political nature of what the priests were doing at his expense. They were painting him into a corner. Jesus had verbally put him in his place in terms of biblical authority, which Pilate did not respect, but Jesus was not trying to use him for His purposes. The priests were, and they invoked Roman politics in their manipulation: "We have no king but Caesar." Politicians do not like to be manipulated by other politicians. Pilate therefore preferred to let Jesus go. So, when he finally capitulated to the Jewish rulers for the sake of Roman politics, he gained symbolic revenge. "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (John 19:19–22). He thereby publicly announced that Jesus was the heir to David's throne, and he, Pilate, had smashed it. Rome got the credit, not the Jewish politicians. This greatly annoyed the Jewish politicians, which was Pilate's goal.

B. Stealing the Inheritance

Jesus' parable of the owner of the vineyard rested on the Bible's theology of inheritance. An only son would inherit all of his father's property. This was not simply a matter of preserving a family's wealth. Far more important, it was a matter of preserving a man's name in Israel. What we call the levirate marriage law reveals the importance of a firstborn son's preservation of a man's name. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut. 25:5–6). Brothers who shared the same landed inheritance shared more than land. They shared mutual responsibility to preserve each other's name through procreation. The land that was part of the dead brother's inheritance would go to the firstborn son who was fathered by the surviving brother. This biological son would carry the dead brother's name. None of the land inherited by this son from the dead brother would be shared, at his death, with the heirs of the biological half-brothers born to his biological father. Family name was more important than bloodline inheritance in Israel.²

The owner in the parable had funded the planting of the vineyard. He then leased it out to people whose task was to care for it. He then went on a far journey. The imagery here is obvious: it is a recapitulation of Eden. The main difference is, the owner went on a far journey, not a morning excursion, as God did in the garden. The husbandmen could expect payment for their services, but only when the crop came in.

They cared for the vineyard. The issue was not the quality of their labor. It was the quality of their morals. They were thieves and murderers. They were intent on building up an inheritance of their own. But they had none. They had not funded the planting of the vineyard. It was not their land. They were hired hands. This inheritance belonged to the owner's son.

This legal arrangement offended the hired hands. After all, had they not remained in the field, in good weather and bad? Had not they remained on duty, defending the vineyard from predators, whether

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

human or otherwise? Had they not invested years in the building up of the property? Did they not have an independent legal claim to part of the crop? To a large part of the crop? To all of the crop? To all future crops? Of course they did, they thought. And there was no one to tell them differently.

Then the harvest season approached, and the owner sent his servants home to administer the harvest and the distribution of the crop. The hired hands beat them and stoned them. He sent more servants. The same thing happened. Then he sent his son. This time, the hired hands saw a great opportunity: to collect not just the crop but the entire inheritance. "But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard" (Mark 12:7–8).

Jesus then asked the rulers of Israel to render public judgment on the literary hired hands. "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others" (Mark 12:9). What Jesus did here was what Nathan had done to David (II Sam. 12:1–4). He told a story and asked those in authority to render judgment. As in the case of Nathan's judicial challenge, the targets condemned themselves. And, like Nathan, Jesus wasted no time in declaring the judicial equivalent of "thou art the man." "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:42–44).

With these words, the lawful heir of David's throne surrendered His claims to that throne and all of the associated inheritance. He transferred the kingdom to another nation, the church. Shiloh had come, and with His advent, as Jacob had prophesied, the sword was removed forever from Judah. That was because it was removed forever from Israel.

The parable was about a forced disinheritance: *disinheritance by illegal execution*. The judicial solution, said the Jewish rulers, was the execution of the hired hands and the transfer of administrative responsibilities to new employees. But there was a crucial problem with this solution: the absence of heirs. The solution might solve the man-

agement problem; it could not solve the inheritance problem. The priests assumed that the father was still alive, as the parable indicated. But where would the owner get another son? The answer should have been obvious: by adoption.

The new heirs would care for the vineyard. They would not be hired hands. As adopted sons, they would have a stake in the inheritance. They would share the harvest. The gentiles would inherit.

But was not Israel the true son? Jesus had already lured them into publicly forfeiting any legal claim to that office. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:28–32). The gentiles had long refused to go into the vineyard, but they were now about to go. The Jews had said they would go, but now they refused. The true son does the will of his father. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10).

C. His or Ours?

The hired hands asserted a claim of ownership. Standing between them and this claim was the owner, who was far away, and his servants, who were no match for the hired hands, and the son. The son was the least of their problems, as long as the owner stayed away. But, of course, he would not stay away, once word of his son's murder came to him. The rulers had understood this: "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." In the matter of power, the hired hands were superior to the servants and the son, but the owner was armed and dangerous.

The hired hands decided to confiscate the inheritance by killing

the heir. In the name of the people—the workers of the world—they united to kill the son. When they did this, they secured their own judgment. They would not retain their stolen goods indefinitely. The owner would come and destroy them. But they did not foresee this. They did not believe that he would return from the far country. They were fools.

The twentieth century, more than any in history, was the century of the rebellious hired hands. Because they adopted the Darwinian view of God, voters became convinced that the cosmic owner of the vineyard is not even in a far country; He is a figment of superstitious men's imaginations. Within a quarter century of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), Lester Frank Ward wrote *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), which asserted the right and obligation of the state's scientific planners to direct society, including the economy, into evolutionary progress. By 1900, this view of central planning had captured the minds of the leading intellectuals.³ The Progressive movement in the United States and the social democracy movement in Europe invoked Darwinism as the model for, and justification of, social planning.

Social planning requires power. It also requires funds. Through state power, social planners have laid their hands on other people's money. They have transferred the inheritance of families into the coffers of the state. Taxation grew 10-fold or more in the twentieth century. The Bible-based observation that God has placed restrictions on lawful taxation—less than 10% of one's income (I Sam. 8:15, 17)—is greeted with hoots of derision, not only from social Darwinists but from Christian professors of social science, who have publicly baptized the recommendations of social Darwinism. "Don't give us that Old Testament stuff!" the Christian professors insist. What they really mean is, "Give us a state that taxes us at 40% of our income, twice the rate that Pharaoh extracted from the Egyptians." They call this "economic democracy." It is based on a revision of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The suggestion that the Bible sets forth as binding a private property social order is rejected without detailed consideration of what the Bible teaches.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A:N.

1. *Wiser Than God*⁴

The vast majority of Christians have always believed that they can improve on the Mosaic law. On their own authority, they revise God's law by coming to conclusions in the name of God that deny the specific teachings of God's revealed law. Then they proclaim their annulment-through-interpretation as being in conformity with "the true spirit of God's law" or "the underlying principles of God's law." As part of this improvement, they reject the binding authority of God's law. In doing so, they necessarily become advocates of some system of law proposed by one or another group of covenant-breakers. They refuse to ask themselves the obvious question: "If not God's law, then what?" They refuse to deal with the ethical question: "By what *other* standard?"⁵

As an example, consider the assertion of John Gladwin, a defender of central planning, who later became a bishop in the Anglican Church. In a chapter in a book devoted to Christian economics, he rejects the concept of the Bible as a source of authoritative economic guidelines or blueprints. In fact, he assures us, it is unbiblical to search for biblical guidelines for economics. "It is unhelpful as well as unbiblical to look to the Bible to give us a blueprint of economic theory or structure which we then apply to our contemporary life. We must rather work in a theological way, looking to the Bible to give us experience and insight into the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This then helps us discover values and methods of interpretation which we can use in understanding our present social experience."⁶ Furthermore, "There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy."⁷ He contrasts biblical law unfavorably with theology. He then goes on to praise the welfare state as an application of theological, rather than legal, insights.⁸ Theology informs us that "there is no escape from the need for large-scale state activity if our society is to

4. The following passage is taken from North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62, section on "Wiser Than God."

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

6. John Gladwin, "A Centralist Response," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 124. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

7. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid.*, p. 183.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 125–26

move into a more equitable future at social and economic levels.”⁹ Clearly, neither the Mosaic law nor the New Testament teaches this, but theology supposedly does. Whose theology? Reinhold Niebuhr’s.¹⁰

So, we are assured, there are no authoritative economic guidelines or economic blueprints in the Bible. On the other hand, there are numerous vague and non-specific ethical principles which just about any Christian social theorist can invoke when promoting his recommended reconstruction of society. All it requires to baptize socialism is a series of nice-sounding pat phrases taken from the book of theological liberalism, which Gladwin offers in profusion: “the bounds of Christian principles of human concern,” “the righteousness revealed to us in God himself,” “the good,” “structural framework of law and social values,” “gross and deepening disparities in social experience,” “spontaneity of love,” “the light of the gospel,” and “the most humane principles of social order.”¹¹

Lest you imagine that Gladwin is an aberration, consider the fact that the two other anti-free market essayists in the book adopted the same anti-blueprint hermeneutics. William Diehl, a defender of Keynesianism’s state-guided economy, confidently affirms: “The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way.”¹² Art Gish, a defender of small communities of Christians who hold property in common, informs us that “Since koinonia includes the participation of everyone involved, there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers.”¹³

The fact that these statements appear in a book on Christian economics should come as no surprise. These comments are typical of the opinions of humanist-educated Christian intellectuals. Christians who

9. Gladwin, “Centralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 193.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 197. He cited *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). It is an odd book to cite. It was written by the author in reaction against his youthful fling with Marxism, a book in which he proclaimed that Jesus “did not dwell upon the social consequences of these moral actions, because he viewed them from an inner and a transcendent perspective.” Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner’s, [1932] 1960), p. 264.

11. See my critique in *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 200.

12. William Diehl, “The Guided-Market System,” *ibid.*, p. 87.

13. Art Gish, “Decentralist Economics,” *ibid.*, p. 154.

have spent their lives in humanist educational institutions, and who then have fed their minds on a steady diet of humanist publications, in most cases have adopted the worldview of one or another variety of humanism. They have felt emotionally compelled to baptize their adopted worldview with a few religious-sounding phrases. But just because someone keeps repeating “koinonia, koinonia” as a Christian mantra does not prove that his recommended policies of common ownership will actually produce koinonia.¹⁴ What produces peace, harmony, and increasing per capita output is widespread faithfulness to biblical law.

It is unwise to attempt to become wiser than God. “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Cor. 1:25). This is why it is our job to become familiar with God’s Bible-revealed law. Biblical law, not the latest academic fad, is to be our guide, generation after generation.

Conclusion

A private property social order is mandated by biblical law. Where biblical law is enforced, free market capitalism has to develop. Modern fundamentalists in the pews generally believe in capitalism, but they do not believe that biblical civil law is still valid. So, their defense of capitalism implicitly rests on some baptized version of secular epistemology, whether natural law (Adam Smith), natural rights (Murray Rothbard), Kantianism (Ludwig von Mises), or empiricism (Milton

14. If you wonder what “koinonia” means, you are probably not a left-wing advocate of common ownership. Understand, I am not suggesting that voluntary common ownership is anti-Christian, any more than I am saying that voluntary celibacy is anti-Christian. Paul recommended celibacy (I Cor. 7:32–33). He did so, he said, because of “the present distress” (v. 26). Similarly, the Jerusalem church held property in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Shortly thereafter, a great persecution of the church began. The entire church fled the city, except for the apostles (Acts 8:1). This exodus created the first foreign missions program in church history: “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). The fact that they had sold their property enabled them to leave the city without looking back, as Lot’s wife had looked back. So, for temporary purposes in times of great trial, voluntary celibacy and voluntary common ownership are legitimate, even wise. But to make either practice a recommended institutional model for all times and places is a misuse of historical events. The one institution where common ownership has been productive for longer than one generation is the monastery. However, it takes celibacy to make this system work for longer than a few years. As soon as there is a wife saying, “He’s earning as much as you are, but you’re far more productive,” koinonia ends. In the modern state of Israel, the kibbutz collective farms faded rapidly as important sources of national production.

Friedman). Meanwhile, the neo-evangelicals go off to college and come back mostly confused.¹⁵

The top priority in this parable is honoring the rights of ownership. As surely as men should honor the God of creation and His son, so should they honor God's ownership of this world and His delegation of stewardship to his servants. *Delegated ownership is the basis of maintaining the kingdom grant.* The state has no legitimate claim on income that matches the church's: the tithe.¹⁶ But modern Christians, wiser than God, have dismissed the tithe as "Old Testament stuff," and have wound up paying less than a tithe to the church and four times a tithe to the civil government. God is not mocked.

God's judgment will surely come on this society of murderous, thieving hired hands. "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:26–27). When this happens, Christians had better be well prepared in advance for the collapse of the hired hands' Darwinian order. They had better not be dependent on it. But most of them will be. They live under a regime that rests on taxation twice as confiscatory as Pharaoh's, and their academic spokesmen praise it as democratic capitalism. These people view democracy as a system whereby two wolves and a lamb vote to decide what to have for lunch.

15. Ronald J. Sider is probably the best example. Compare the first edition of his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), with the 1997 edition. For my comparison, see *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F.

16. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithe>)

RENDERING UNTO CAESAR AND GOD¹

And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him (Mark 12:14–17).

The theocentric principle here was the distinction between God's ownership and man's. Men owe God for the use of His goods, in the same way that they owe the government for services rendered. If the state has the power to enforce payment, surely God does, too. The issue was hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.²

A. Tribute Money

Accompanying the Pharisees were Herodians, a priestly party allied with the Sadducees.³ Herod was the regional monarch. He was under Rome's authority. He was an Idumean, meaning an heir of Esau.⁴ Those who were allied to Herod were normally not friends of the

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 44.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

3. "Herodians," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), IV, p. 360.

4. "Herod," *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also, "Edom."

Pharisees. But Jesus was a problem for both groups. He was undermining their authority. The two groups joined forces on the assumption that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”—until the enemy is removed. Jesus recognized the nature of this temporary alliance and warned His disciples against both groups.⁵ Forty years later, the Idumeans joined forces with the Jews to resist Rome, then turned on the Jews when the siege of Jerusalem began. They looted the Jews. Titus slew some and sold an “immense” number of them into slavery after the city fell.⁶

The Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus. The Romans were hated by the Jews. Roman rule was regarded as tyrannical. If Jesus could be lured into acknowledging the legitimacy of Roman rule, He would lose favor with the Jews, for they resented this rule. They paid their taxes, but they did so grudgingly. On the other hand, if He denied the legitimacy of taxation by Rome, the Herodians would surely report this to the Roman authorities. He would be trapped, or so they imagined.

They began with flattery: “Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.” In other words, “Say your piece loud and clear, sucker; then we’ll be rid of you forever.” Jesus was not fooled. He identified them for what they were: “Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?” The hypocrite feigns righteousness but in fact is a sinner.

He asked them to show him a coin. “Shew me the tribute money.” They brought it to Him. At that point, He had them trapped. The “penny” was a denarius. This was a coin used specifically to pay taxes. If taxes were not legitimate, why did his critics possess one? Furthermore, it bore an image. It also had an inscription. The inscription invoked the language of divinity. The Jews regarded this as idolatrous. But they had brought Him a coin. What were they doing with such coins?⁷

Jesus asked them specifically: Whose image? Whose inscription? Caesar’s, they answered. What else could they say? “Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” By acknowledging that they possessed a tax coin, they were also acknowledging that

5. “And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod” (Mark 8:15).

6. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI:VIII:2.

7. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), ch. 8.

Rome brought civil order. Such order must be paid for. If Caesar's image and inscription were on the coin, then those who used such coins in trade were gaining a benefit: money. By using money to gain what they wanted to buy rather than bartering, they were extending the division of labor. This increases men's output per unit of resource input. It makes them wealthier.

Caesar's rule had brought social stability. It had created international legal framework for economic growth. It was Rome, not Israel, that had built the highways and had cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. There are no free lunches, and Rome was merely collecting what belonged to it. Jesus was saying that the benefits of economic growth had to be paid for. The beneficiaries owed something to the state.

A coin was a mark of state sovereignty in the ancient world. It still is. The theology of Rome was visible on Rome's coins. The image and the inscription announced the divinity of the emperor: "Emperor Tiberius august Son of the august God."⁸ This is what angered the Jews. But the agents of the Pharisees or their Herodian allies had such a coin in their possession. The Herodians were content with the coins. The Herod of Jesus' infancy had been a ruthless tax collector.⁹ But the Pharisees were indeed hypocrites. This is why Jesus said a bit later, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).¹⁰

Jesus was not arguing that Caesar owned everything that he laid claim to. On the contrary, men are to render to God what God possesses. What Caesar owned was legal sovereignty over the political system that provided the Roman Empire's money. This legal system had to be supported by taxes. Israel was benefitting from this system, despite the system's inequities. Besides, Israel was under judgment, and had been since the captivity. Living under foreign domination was nothing new for Israel. Rome had brought greater trade and prosperity by opening up new markets. Israel was benefitting from the arrangement. On what basis should Israelites have refused to pay taxes? Jesus had the answer: none. But He gave this answer in such a way that the Pharisees could not embarrass Him.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.

10. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 46.

B. What Belongs to God

The Israelites' tithe money went to support the priests. The priests were Sadducees, the Pharisees' rivals.¹¹ By reminding the people of their obligations to God, Jesus was undermining the authority of the Pharisees. He was reminding them that they owed a tithe. This meant that they owed God by way of the Sadducees' faction. This was a public challenge to the Pharisees.

Jesus used this incident to lay the foundation for a comprehensive covenant lawsuit against Israel. God is owed far more than the tithe, He warned them, and they had not paid God what He was owed. Judgment was coming.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:23–36).¹²

11. Herbert Danby, Introduction, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

12. Any Christian who argues, as so many do, that confrontational language is not

Jesus passed the dilemma back to the Pharisees. If they denied Rome's right of taxation, they risked political suppression by Rome. If they affirmed this right, they would have undermined their popularity with the more radical factions of the people. If they affirmed the tithe, they also had to affirm the Sadducee party. If they denied the tithe, they had to oppose Moses. So, they went away . . . again. Jesus had successfully silenced them, just as they had sought to silence Him . . . again.

C. Tithes and Taxes

The tithe is mandatory. It preceded the Mosaic law. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20). There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this law has been annulled. Only the recipients have changed: from the local Levites to the local churches. Through Christ, the church is the heir of the Melchizedekan priesthood. "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:5–6). "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace" (Heb. 6:20–7:2). Covenant-keepers owe the local church their tithes.¹³

What do they owe the state? Less than a tithe. Any system of civil government that takes as much as 10% is tyrannical, Samuel warned.

And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his

Christian has not come to grips with this passage's rhetoric. When the self-assured critic has this passage pointed out to him, the standard response is: "Well, you're not Jesus." This is quite true, but the critic may well be Pharisaical.

13. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011); Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithe>)

chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day“ (I Sam. 8:11–18).¹⁴

The Israelites refused to heed this warning (v. 19). In the twentieth century, Christians did not cry out when the state extracted four times the tithe or even more from them. They lived under what the Bible clearly identifies as tyranny, yet they called it democratic liberty. What roused their ire was any suggestion that they owed a tithe to their local churches. “We’re under grace, not law!” they proclaimed. In fact, they were under pagan law, pagan bureaucrats, pagan tax collectors, and pagan lawyers. This has yet to change.

Pagans have denied that the Old Testament applies to modern times. Christians have agreed. Pagans have asserted the sovereignty of the state to extract money far beyond the tithe. Christians have agreed. Pagans have affirmed the right of the tax collector to require comprehensive income records from every taxpayer. Christians have agreed. Yet any suggestion that a church’s officers possess a similar right would be met with total opposition by church members. No one suggests that such authority is possessed by the church. Well, not quite. No one other than me. I argue that every *voting* church member must prove that he tithes, and this requires him to submit such records to the elders.¹⁵ But no one agrees with me. Protestant churches offer voting membership to any adult who joins. Non-tithing members are given the right to vote for leaders who will decide how to spend the church’s money.

The state has merely imitated the Protestant churches in opening the vote to non-taxpaying citizens. It collects tax money from every resident on a graduated basis, and it exempts some citizens from paying taxes.¹⁶ Yet it allows any citizen to vote, irrespective of the percent-

14. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

15. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 3.

16. The poor who are on government welfare pay no income taxes in the United States. Income derived from income from municipal bonds is also income tax-free.

age of his income that the state collects. This is the judicial basis of the modern welfare state and the politics of plunder. What the church allows to its non-tithing members, the state allows its non-taxpaying citizens. A few Christians argue that the graduated income tax is wrong, but they never see that the graduated income tax system was pioneered by Protestant churches that do not distinguish a voting member from a communicant member by means of the tithe. They see no contradiction here. The tax-funded school system has done its work well.

D. Revolt: Tax or Tithe

If it is wrong for the state to collect taxes beyond the tithe, is it right for citizens to revolt when taxes exceed the tithe? Not if they can change the law legally. Not if they can legally beat the tax system individually. A tyranny involves more than high levels of taxation. Tax rates identify a tyranny, but tyranny is a package deal. The Bible identifies as rebellious every civil government that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible as sovereign. But the solution is not armed revolt; the answer is evangelism, followed by the invocation of a new civil covenant. A new personal covenant is only the beginning of the Great Commission. The long-term goal is a new civil covenant. This is an implication of the Great Commission: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:18–20).¹⁷

Jesus told His followers to obey the Pharisees, even though He knew that they taught men’s traditions rather than the Mosaic law. “Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt. 23:1–4). He knew the religious leaders were hypocrites; nevertheless, He told His followers to obey them. Why? Because the Old Covenant had not yet been

17. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

annulled historically. The temple still stood. Until the sacrificial fires were extinguished forever, the religious leaders possessed legitimate authority. The Christians would have to wait for deliverance. It came in A.D. 70.¹⁸

There is no need to rush when it comes to throwing off a self-imposed tyranny. God will eventually destroy it. His people must work to replace it, not through violence, but through principled non-violent resistance and political mobilization. (Educating their children with an explicitly Christian curriculum is basic to such a strategy.) The apostles refused to obey when told not to preach the gospel (Acts. 5:29), but they willingly suffered the consequences of this disobedience. “[A]nd when they [the Jewish council] had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:40b–42).

Conclusion

Jesus made it clear that the state is entitled to taxes. He implied that the church is entitled to money. If we do not turn to the Old Testament to find out what the limits of taxes and church contributions are, we shall forever be caught between the tax collector and the church in their quest for funding. The Old Testament provides information on these limits. For the church, the limit is 10 percent of our net income. For the state, the limit is less than 10 percent. The state does not have the right before God to extract from residents as high a percentage as the church has the right to demand of its voting members. Any state that demands as much as 10 percent is a tyranny. The total level of taxation, from local civil government upward, must be less than 10 percent of a person’s net income.

The modern church does not believe this. The result is a church that does not have the courage to demand tithes of its voting members, and a state that cannot resist extracting at least four times more than the tithe. Christians have sought to starve God’s church by refusing to tithe. Meanwhile, the messianic state extracts their wealth unmercifully. God is not mocked.

18. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

The top priority in this passage is social budgeting based on the Bible. The Bible identifies what God is legally entitled to and what the state is legally entitled to. This, the modern world has refused to acknowledge. The result in our day is the widespread acceptance of the welfare state. The end result of this is personal dependence on the state and eventual economic and social bankruptcy.

19

THE WIDOW'S GIFT AND GRADUATED TAXATION¹

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living (Mark 12:41–44).

The theocentric issue here is God as omniscient: He searches people's hearts and then sovereignly imputes value to their actions. Imputation, or judgment, is point four of the biblical covenant.²

A. Interpersonal Comparisons of Subjective Utility

This passage rests on an assumption: *God has the ability to make accurate interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.* Jesus announced that the poor widow had given away more than the rich men had given collectively. They had given away only a small fraction of their wealth, but the widow had given all of her money. Jesus looked into their minds and hers, and He drew conclusions regarding comparative rates of sacrifice. His conclusion: giving away all the money that a person owns is a greater sacrifice than giving away only part of the money that another person owns.

Is this observation universally true? If it is, should civil govern-

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 50.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

ments adopt this principle to guide tax policy? This is a major logical problem of all modern economic theory, which is grounded in epistemological subjectivism. The problem appears to have no solution in terms of the presuppositions of subjective economics. The presumed inability of economists or anyone else to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility is a fundamental flaw of modern economic theory. Economists rarely discuss this problem because it has not been solved scientifically or philosophically. To get from the subjective utility scales of individuals to objective social utility is scientifically impossible, according to the logic of individualism. This strips economic theory of all relevance for social policy. But economists want to believe that what they teach can become relevant for social policy. So, they ignore this epistemological problem. They offer policy suggestions to politicians and bureaucrats as if it had been solved. If there is a solution, we have waited for over seven decades for someone to prove it.

To make comparisons between two people's individual utilities, the evaluator has to assume that there is *a common value scale* between them. The evaluator must also be able to intuit this scale on the basis of *introspection*. This common value scale must exist in order for the assessment to be accurate. For example, if the widow had been a religious fanatic who believed that all money is cursed, her gift would not have constituted a great sacrifice. She was merely getting rid of something that would destroy her. In her opinion, she was exposing the recipients of her money to a curse. But, while the widow in theory could have been operating in terms of such a view of money, Jesus and His listeners assumed that she was basically like most people. Giving away her last coins was a major sacrifice on her part, evidence of her trust in God to supply her with additional money in the near future.

Modern subjectivist economic theory denies the existence of a common ethical standard, common tastes, or a common evaluator on the day of judgment. It affirms that each person is different. This destroys the concept of a common humanity. It therefore destroys the possibility of a common objective scale of values linking all men. This means that there can be no scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Nevertheless, we make such comparisons all the time. Jesus' comparison rested on the assumption of a common humanity with common values. He could not otherwise have compared accurately the collective value of the rich men's gifts with the widow's.

B. Grading Examinations

Let me use an analogy based on classroom examinations and grading. Jesus graded the woman's performance in terms of her economic capacity. He did the same with her fellow students. He gave her a higher grade, even though her competitors received higher numerical scores.

A grading system that ignores everyone's numerical score and substitutes a teacher's subjective estimations of the intellectual capacity of each student would destroy the examination system, because it would destroy the predictability of any relationship between performance and reward. The brighter students would conclude that no teacher is able to make such comparisons. They would regard the grading system as unfair, arbitrary, and therefore not worth studying for.

Yet, not only does this passage teach that God can make such comparisons, it assumes that other people can do this, too. Jesus would not have used this example to make His point regarding the sacrificial nature of giving, had He not expected His listeners to understand Him and agree with Him.

This raises the issue of application. What did Jesus want His listeners, including us, to do with this information? I think most readers would agree with His point: the widow gave more sacrificially than the rich men did. She was putting her life at risk. What if she could not earn another coin? Where would her next meal come from? She was trusting God to care for her. Her trust was greater than the trust of the rich donors. By giving more sacrificially, Jesus said, she gave more, economically speaking.

But what can we legitimately do with this information? We can praise the widow. We can pray to God for comparable trust in Him and His care for His people, so that we can become more like the widow. We can also remind ourselves that the generosity of the rich does not impress God. But we cannot do much more than this.

We cannot run a business or a government or a church on such a principle of sacrificial giving. We surely cannot afford to sell new cars to poor widows who are willing to pay everything they own to buy one. We cannot legitimately establish a tax system that is based on the assumption that tax collectors can make interpersonal comparisons of everyone's subjective utility, as if they can know what the comparative psychological burden of each taxpayer is and assess an equal psychological burden for all taxpayers by assessing unequal numerical rates of

taxation. We cannot run a church this way, because the church is governed by the principle of the tithe: a flat rate of 10 percent.³ Then why did Jesus raise the question of the widow's gift?

C. Another Challenge to the Religious Leaders

Immediately preceding His assessment of the donors' gifts, Jesus had announced: "Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation" (Luke 20:46–47). These men wanted public acclaim and approval. They were in fact thieves. They devoured widows' estates. They appeared to be righteous. They were not. They loved acclaim more than they loved justice.

Jesus was once again pulling them down from their lofty positions. Their damnation, He said, will be worse than the damnation handed out to common criminals. On judgment day, God will compare their lofty claims of righteousness with their actual performance. This is why they will be damned with greater pain. God expects more from those who have been given more information (Luke 12:47–48).⁴

With His assessment of the widow's two mites, Jesus made a judicial point. With respect to the final judgment, He said, God will hand out negative sanctions and positive sanctions, first, in terms of His knowledge of each person's innate capacities. Second, He will grade redeemed men in terms of what they did in history in relation to His holy law, which is written in their hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Third, He will judge Old Covenant saints in terms of what His revealed law said, although it was not written on their hearts. Fourth, He will judge covenant-breakers in terms of the work of the law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:15–16).⁵ Fifth, He will grade all men in terms of what they understood about their responsibilities and were capable of obeying. Being infinite, God can justly hand out final rewards and punishments in terms of an objective standard—God's Bible-revealed law—and also in

3. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011); Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithe>)

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

terms of what men knew subjectively and what they did objectively in history.

No man can exercise such comprehensive, complex judgment in history. No earthly institution has been established by God with the covenantal, oath-bound authority to do this. Such a human institution would become arbitrary and corrupt very soon. Its defenders would be claiming its divinity, and by implication, the divinity of its employees acting collectively.

D. The Graduated Income Tax

In 1912, A. C. Pigou's book appeared, *Wealth and Welfare*. He was a professor of economics at Cambridge University. In this book, and in his more famous *Economics of Welfare* (1920), he argued for higher rates of income taxation on the rich. He defended his recommendation by an appeal to subjective value theory.

The marginalist revolution of the 1870s by 1912 had led most economists to conclude that the subjective value to the individual of each additional unit of monetary income is worth less than the previous unit. He satisfies his highest remaining wants with each additional monetary unit; therefore, each additional unit is worth less to him, for it satisfies wants of reduced value. Then Pigou made a leap of faith. He said that an additional monetary unit in a rich man's income stream is worth less to him than an additional unit is worth to a poor man. The poor man will satisfy much higher-level wants with his additional monetary unit than the rich man will satisfy on his scale of wants.⁶

This sounds similar to Jesus' assessment of the widow's mite. The logic of Jesus' assessment rests on something like Pigou's comparisons. We recognize the truth of both. But there is this crucial difference: Jesus did not recommend any institutional policy on the basis of His assessment of the widow and the rich donors. Pigou did. Jesus was talking about God's final judgment and men's ability to understand today the righteousness of God's final judgment. He was not recommending that men delegate to civil government the authority to impose graduated taxes backed up by the threat of public sanctions. Jesus did not assume that tax collectors possess God's ability to make precise interpersonal comparisons of individuals' subjective utilities, nor do they possess His ability to make precise subjective assessments of other men's

6. A. C. Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 89–91.

actions in relation to their varying individual capacities to understand and obey His objective law.

Pigou was implicitly asserting that tax policy should be formulated in terms of an assumption, namely, that tax collectors have the ability to mimic God's final judgment, including the imposition of negative sanctions for anyone's failure to pay taxes. This was exactly what politicians wanted to hear. The income tax was imposed in England in 1911. It was about to be voted on in the United States in 1912.⁷

Pigou's message was what economists wanted to hear, too. They wanted to believe that they, as neutral scientists, possess the ability to make such comparisons accurately and then advise politicians regarding socially optimum rates of graduated taxation. This unique scientific ability makes economists indispensable in setting public policy.

It may have seemed as though Pigou was a disinterested scholar. He was anything but disinterested. He was a secret admirer of the Bolsheviks. He had been corresponding with various Bolshevik leaders in exile as early as 1905.⁸ In the 1920s, he secretly recommended to the Soviet spy apparatus operating in England the names of businessmen who might engage in Soviet trade. The businessmen had no idea he had suggested them.⁹ In 1937, he wrote the following: "If, then, it were in the writer's power to direct his country's destiny, he would accept, for the time being, the general structure of capitalism; but he would modify it gradually. He would use the weapon of graduated death duties and graduated income tax, not merely as instruments of revenue, but with the deliberate purpose of diminishing the glaring inequalities of fortune and opportunity which deface our present civilization. He would take a leaf from the book of Soviet Russia and remember that the most important investment of all is investment in the health, intelligence and character of the people."¹⁰ When Pigou spoke of graduated

7. The imposition of an income tax by the United States government required a Constitutional amendment. The 16th amendment was voted on in 1912. It did not pass, according to the legal requirements governing amendments. Thirty-six of the 48 states had to ratify it to amend the Constitution. At least 16 states did not ratify it, or did not ratify it properly. But the U.S. government announced that it had passed, and in 1913, the government levied a graduated income tax. On the failure of the amendment to pass, see R. W. Beckman and W. Benson, *The Law That Never Was*, 2 vols. (South Holland, Illinois: Constitutional Research Associates, 1985, 1986).

8. John Costello, *Mask of Treachery* (New York: Morrow, 1988), p. 646n. He cites Richard Deacon, *The British Connection* (London: Hasmish Hamilton, 1979), pp. 66–67.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–71.

10. A. C. Pigou, *Socialism Versus Capitalism* (London: Macmillan, 1937), pp. 137–

income taxation as a weapon, he spoke correctly. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), Marx and Engels anonymously recommended a system of graduated income taxation as step two of 10 steps to move a nation into socialism.¹¹ Pigou was following the Party Line, but with a more sophisticated argument.

In 1932, Lionel Robbins offered his critique of the use of the concept of declining marginal utility to justify graduated income taxes. He said that it is impossible for economists to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.¹² He was correct. The problem was, this denial also applied to all known examples of social policy. This means that economists, as scientists, must stay silent regarding the costs and benefits of any public policy. Roy Harrod made this point in response to Robbins in an essay in the *Economic Journal* in 1938. In a 1939 response, Robbins backed away from his sweeping statement regarding the limits of economics in policy-making. He did not explain why his earlier argument had been wrong. He merely affirmed the ability of economists to make some policy recommendations. So, the debate ended. Graduated income taxation is with us still, and most economists seem content with it in principle.

The Bible lays down the principle of the tithe: a flat tax imposed by God on His people for the support of the local institutional church. No church enforces this on its voting members. No church has a separate category of membership—voting members—which mandates the tithe. God imposes the requirement, but churches have not dared to enforce it. The tithe has become a matter of conscience.

What is true of the modern church is not true of the modern state. The modern state mandates different rates of taxation according to income levels. It does so in the name of social justice or fairness. Rich people are supposed to pay their “fair share.” Their fair share is always officially higher—before any special-interests’ loopholes are quietly inserted into the tax code—than the tax rates imposed on a majority of the voters by the politicians.¹³

38.

11. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), end of Part II.

12. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature & Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 136–41. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

13. Gary North, “The Politics of the ‘Fair Share,’” *The Freeman* (Nov. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/gnfairshare>)

Conclusion

The widow trusted God far more than she trusted her money. The much richer donors trusted God far less than she did. They did not transfer all of their money to the temple.

When the widow donated every coin that she had, she sacrificed a great deal. Her gift was more impressive as a token of her faith than the larger gifts made by rich men. Jesus used this example to make a point: God is not greatly impressed by gifts from the rich. He is also not greatly impressed by rich scribes who steal from widows.

The fact that the widow gave more, in the sense of having trusted God more, is not to become the basis of a graduated taxation scheme. Jesus did not say that the officials of the state can accurately make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Every piece of legislation is based on some view of benefits and losses to members of society, which means that there is a vague way to assess broadly a society's social utility, but any suggestion that policy-makers can perceive fine distinctions of men's comparative assessments of value is fraudulent.

To protect church members from guilt manipulation or actual extortion for receiving the sacraments, God established the limit of the tithe. He also revealed to Israel that a level of civil taxation as high as the tithe is tyranny (I Sam. 8:15, 17). So, the suggestion that the ability of people to make broad comparisons of subjective utility cannot be used legitimately to justify a scientific case for graduated taxation or graduated tithing.

HOLY WASTEFULNESS

And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always (Mark 14:3–7).

The theocentric principle here is the right of Jesus to receive sacrifices from His followers. This was a form of tribute. The woman placed a higher value on Jesus than on her ointment. This was an issue of hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.¹

This passage provides the context for the oft-quoted phrase, “the poor you have with you always.” The context is crucial for understanding the crucifixion.

A. Two Hosts Named Simon

Jesus had visited the home of another man named Simon, at Simon’s request, at the beginning of His ministry. Simon was a Pharisee. He was curious about Jesus. So, he invited Jesus to dinner (Luke 7:36).

1. The First Foot-Washing

An almost identical incident had taken place. “Behold, a woman in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (Luke 7:38–39).

This bothered Simon, for he had thought Jesus was a prophet.

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Jesus then demonstrated that He was indeed a prophet. He read Simon's mind. He then responded to Simon's thoughts.

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace (Luke 7:39–50).

Jesus publicly called Simon to task. This woman had been a sinner. She obviously had repented. He reminded Simon that this woman had repented of widely known sin. Why shouldn't she express publicly her knowledge of the extent of her deliverance? "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

The disciples had seen this. They had learned that Jesus was not

opposed to holy wastefulness when circumstances warranted it. This woman wanted an opportunity to express her devotion and her thankfulness. Holy wastefulness was appropriate.

2. The Second Foot-Washing

The second incident also took place in another Simon's house three years later. It took place shortly before the Passover. I am reprinting these accounts in their entirety in order to show that they describe the same encounter. Here is Matthew's version.

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her (Matt. 26:6–13).

Matthew then records the most significant historical fact relating to this incident.

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him (Matt. 26:14–16).

In this incident, Jesus' confrontation was with His disciples, not His host. This time, the woman was not a prostitute. This time it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who lived in the area. Jesus had only recently raised him from the dead (John 11). John recorded additional details.

Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and

wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always (John 12:1–8).

We learn that the family of Lazarus arranged and financed the feast in his honor. It was a feast of resurrection. The feast was held in Simon's house. He was willing to open his home to Jesus on Lazarus' behalf. This took courage. Lazarus was a marked man.

Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus (John 12:9–11).

Second, we learn that Judas was a thief. He concealed his greed in a cloak of caring. He publicly accused Jesus of not stopping Mary from her act of holy wastefulness. Only Jesus had the authority to stop her. He had refused. Jesus had robbed him of a great opportunity, and he was outraged. He lured the other disciples into moral self-righteousness. They joined with him in their criticism of Jesus.

He soon made an offer to the religious leaders who wanted to kill Lazarus. Why waste time and effort to kill Lazarus? Why not kill the man who raised Lazarus from the dead? All it would take was an inside man, who could identify Him. All it would take was thirty pieces of silver—a bargain!

Judas was a fool—the supreme fool in all of human history. No one else comes close.

B. Holy Wastefulness

Two women anointed Jesus' feet with ointment. The first was a prostitute. The second was a friend. In both instances, those who saw it were upset by the incident. Simon the Pharisee was upset because he thought he was not entertaining a prophet after all. The disciples were upset by Jesus' consent to holy wastefulness. Judas was upset because he had lost a fine opportunity for a large profit.

Jesus was not upset. The women were displaying their devotion by sacrificing something of high economic value. They were subordinating themselves to Jesus by washing His feet with their hair. This was a liturgical act. Foot washing was a way of showing devotion. Within hours, Jesus washed the disciples' feet at the last supper.

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him (John 13:3–16).

C. The Permanent Poor

There are always poor people. The distribution of wealth is uneven. The famous law of Vilfredo Pareto is this: every society has the same pattern. About 20% of the population owns 80% of the capital. There have been no exceptions after over a century of research.

Jesus' comment pointed to what all men know: there will always be winners and losers. There will be people at the top and people at the bottom. But these people will change over time. A person's relative position is not permanent in commercial societies.

No matter how much help the rich give, there will always be poor people. In any case, the rich have their assets in tools of production.

They can give what this capital produces in income. They cannot give away the capital to the poor. In any case, the poor would just sell it. The poor do not know what to do with sophisticated capital investment. Almost no one knows what to do with it.

What constitutes poverty in one society might be middle-class wealth in another. The same is true over time. People today live better than the wealthiest people a century ago. There is a rising tide of economic growth that elevates everyone.

Jesus was saying that the opportunity for giving away wealth to the poor is permanent. The opportunities for publicly showing great devotion are limited. Great economic sacrifices are rare events, precisely because they are great. They deplete capital. Showing such public devotion to Jesus was possible for only three years. These two women are the archetypes of such devotion.

Conclusion

The devotion shown by these two women was great. It cost them plenty. They revealed their thankfulness in a way understood by everyone: forfeited wealth. Their devotion did not gain them cheers from religious leaders or trainees: Simon the Pharisee or the disciples. But Jesus praised them.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Mark has a primary economic theme: trust. It is not a theme which runs through his Gospel as consistently as “priorities” runs through Matthew and “treasure” runs through Luke. It sometimes is subsumed under “faith.” But the theme is common enough to identify.

The book begins with an account of Jesus’ call to four men, two sets of brothers, who were preparing their fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee. He called them to follow Him. He said they will become fishers of men. They immediately left their boats to follow him.¹ This is the visible exercise of trust. It is representative of Jesus’ call to people throughout history. Most people in the West do not receive such an all-or-nothing call. The civilization has been Christian in the past. A Christian cultural echo still exists. Those people who are called in the midst of a pagan culture are asked to make such a change.

The brothers made rapid economic assessments. They decided in favor of Christ’s call. They had to pay for their individual decisions. They lost whatever net income their careers as fishermen might have produced. They also became eccentrics. They were men with capital, yet they abandoned it to follow a wandering preacher. This was not normal behavior. It still isn’t.

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 10:38–39).²

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in ex-

1. Chapter 1.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 24.

change for his soul? (Matt. 16:24–26).³

Levi-Matthew followed the career path that the other disciples did. His degree of trust was symbolized by leaving his money box behind.⁴ He left the certainty of money for the uncertainty of a new life's work. A person's occupation has a quantifiable marker: money. His calling rarely does.

Jesus warned against trusting in money. Riches are deceptive, He taught. To trust in riches requires that you serve riches. This is the great paradox of riches. That which seems to liberate men from worldly cares in fact ensnares them. They subordinate themselves to the procedures that produce wealth. Riches are time-bound. They are addictive. They betray a person's trust. Riches are mammon: the desire to accumulate marketable assets.⁵

As part of Jesus' call to trust Him, He healed people. He fed crowds. This led to multitudes following Him in a quest for political deliverance from Rome. They trusted in politics rather than His words. He rejected such followers. His miracles were designed to reinforce people's trust in His message.⁶

Jesus empowered His disciples to perform miracles of healing. Then He sent them to bring the message of repentance. He told them not to take along food, money, or weapons. They were to trust God, their ability to perform miracles, and the generosity of local disciples to house them and feed them. They were to trust in supernatural capital. This was a recapitulation of the miracle of manna in the wilderness, which had been temporary. Once they had strengthened their faith, based on this exercise of trust, Jesus told them to carry a sword.⁷

The story of Herod and his dancing stepdaughter was a story of misplaced trust. A present-oriented king made a commitment to a present-oriented young woman. Her vindictive mother told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. She trusted her mother. All three exercised poor judgment.⁸

Jesus fed tens of thousands of people with only a few loaves of bread and fishes. This mass feeding required each family to participate in performing the miracle. This required the division of labor. Some

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

4. Chapter 3.

5. Chapter 5.

6. Chapter 2.

7. Chapter 7.

8. Chapter 8.

trusted His message because they had experienced the miracle.⁹

Jesus told the Pharisees that they stole from their parents when they gave money to the temple in God's name. They undermined the trust that parents placed in their children for their support in their old age.¹⁰

The great issue of trust is seen in Christ's warning that men cannot serve two masters: God and mammon. They must choose. This is a matter of trust: trust for the things in this world and the world beyond the grave. Mammon promises more in this world. It ignores the after-life. Jesus taught that God is trustworthy for supplying the good things of both worlds.¹¹

The rich young ruler sought eternal life. Jesus told him to sell his goods and give to the poor. Then he could follow Jesus. The man went away troubled. This was the choice: God or mammon. He found it difficult to choose to follow Christ. He placed his trust in wealth, for he possessed wealth. He placed faith in himself and his own works.¹²

Jesus told the apostles that they would receive a hundredfold inheritance. They were to serve as trustees of His kingdom. Their inheritance would be representative: inheritance through those who would be adopted into the kingdom.¹³

Mark's Gospel recorded the incident of Jesus and the money-changers. He drove them out of the grounds surrounding the temple. He did so in the name of God, His Father. He did so as a trustee for God. They were acting as agents of the priests. They had betrayed the people's trust in the priests.¹⁴

Jesus confronted the religious rulers of Israel with the parable of the rich man who delegated wealth to his subordinates and went away. The subordinates betrayed his trust. They beat the agents of the owner. Then the killed his son. There would be judgment when the owner appeared.¹⁵

The Pharisees tried to trap him with their question relating to the payment of taxes. He had them bring a coin, which was used for tax payments. It also functioned as currency. He told them to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.

9. Chapter 2.

10. Chapter 10.

11. Chapter 11.

12. Chapter 13.

13. Chapter 14.

14. Chapter 16.

15. Chapter 17.

This was a matter of subordination. So are all forms of trust. Men trust in the continuing supply of benefits. They acknowledge this trust by acts of subordination.¹⁶

The story of the poor widow who gave all her money to God was the story of total trust. Richer men who gave more trusted God less.¹⁷

Finally, the story of the two women who anointed Jesus feet with sweet-smelling expensive oil was the story of subordination and trust. They trusted Him rather than money. The second incident led Judas to betray Christ to the religious leaders. The symbolism of such trust was more than he could bear. He trusted money: mammon.¹⁸

A. Trust and Cooperation

People make plans. To facilitate such plans, they cooperate with others. When Jesus fed the crowds, they had to cooperate with each other in order to gain the benefit of a free meal and the thrill of participating in a miracle. Greater cooperation reduces costs. It increases output through specialization.

Faith is a form of trust. Christian faith is strengthened by exercises in trust that pay off as expected. When Jesus sent the disciples out to the cities of Israel without food, money, or swords, He invited them to strengthen their trust. This was required for future service.

Without trust, the cost of cooperation increases. Less cooperation is demanded. This reduces the division of labor. It reduces output per unit of resource input.

Kingdom-building requires cooperation. It therefore requires trust. God calls on His disciples in every era to build His kingdom in history. He calls on them to cooperate. This requires trust that others will prove trustworthy. Without this trustworthiness, kingdom-building is hampered.

Covenant-keepers' trust in God should lead to their trust in each other. This is what God requires.

Conclusion

People are dependent on God as the source of their benefits. God requires signs of acknowledgment from those who are the recipients of His blessings. They do not earn His blessings. They do acknowledge

16. Chapter 18.

17. Chapter 19.

18. Chapter 20.

them by minimal public sacrifice: rendering to God the things that are God's. This is a token of the total sacrifice that God requires. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).¹⁹

This mandates trust. The Gospel of Mark reminds us of the nature of this trust. They must trust either God or mammon. They must subordinate themselves to one or the other.

19. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

TREASURE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LUKE

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TREASURE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON LUKE

GARY NORTH

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Printed in the United States of America.

This book is dedicated to

George Grant

a specialist in helping the poor,
who is my choice to write a how-to manual

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PREFACE

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?
(Luke 6:46).

This is Christianity's supreme question, generation after generation. It was originally a rhetorical question. It implied that His followers did not take His commands seriously enough to obey them. Two millennia later, Christians still suffer from the same hesitation. They are not sure what Jesus wants them to do. They wear **WWJD?** (What Would Jesus Do?) sweatshirts, but they have no clue as to how they might begin to answer their question, should anyone ask them to, which no one does. Their lack of specific answers to specific social, political, and economic questions is due to the fact that they have cut themselves off from the source of specifically biblical answers by means of another popular slogan, "We're under grace, not law!" As a result, they are under humanistic civil courts and lawyers.

What Jesus said He wanted His followers to do in the sphere of personal economics seems utopian to a fault, so His commands are ignored by most preachers. They always have been. In the recorded history of the church, the vast majority of Christians have not tithed. Unwilling to tithe, how seriously have they taken these words? "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" (Luke 12:33).¹ Not very. Yet Jesus said these words. What would Jesus do? Exactly what He personally did. "And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).²

Writing an economic commentary on the Gospel of Luke has been an emotionally unsettling experience for me. As I was writing the first edition, day by day, I found that the words on my computer's screen called me either to rethink or repent. In trying to explain Jesus' words,

1. Chapter 26.

2. Chapter 20.

I found that my summaries of, and comments on, His words that dealt with personal economics placed me under conviction. I found in His words no acceptance of the supreme belief of the industrial and post-industrial West: faith in the socially redemptive power of compound economic growth. Instead, I found warnings against the personal pursuit of riches. *Yet **the pursuit of personal gain** is at the heart of all modern intellectual justifications of free market capitalism, and has been for over two centuries.* Jesus warned against the worship of mammon, while modern economists have placed mammon worship at the center of their analysis of how the world really works, and how it must work if we are to attain economic efficiency. Writing my economic commentary on Matthew's Gospel should have produced the same awareness, but Luke's is even more unrelenting in its condemnation of the pursuit of riches.

A. Wealth and Happiness

Today, the West is awash in riches, not only by all previous standards of living but also by the prevailing standard of living of three-quarters of the world's population, who do not live in the West, or in an oil-exporting Middle Eastern nation, or in one of the "Asian tigers."³ But the attainment of unprecedented personal wealth has not produced satisfaction in the hearts and minds of most Westerners. On the contrary, their unprecedented wealth has inflamed their desire to attain even greater wealth. In 1999 and 2000, when I was writing the first edition of this commentary, popular magazines in the United States were dominated by cover stories promoting the systematic pursuit of wealth. This topic has remained popular. It has been popular for as long as men have attempted to improve their lives.

We live on the threshold of the conquest of world poverty. The West's economic growth rate of 2% to 3% per annum since about 1800 is now spreading to the impoverished masses of the world. It is conceivable that the poorest of the poor will live far better lives within a generation as the communications revolution spreads through smart phone technology, the Internet, computerization, and decentralized information.⁴ This possibility was not visible as recently as 1999, when I wrote the first edition of this commentary. The economic return on

3. Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

4. Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

information technology is accelerating. This is a violation of what has been regarded as a fundamental economic law: *the law of diminishing returns*. It applies in the realm of matter. It appears not to apply in the realm of ideas.⁵

If economic growth continues, it will not produce satisfaction. We know that men operate under what can be described as a hedonic ratchet. They adjust to greater wealth, expecting more. Happiness does not increase in relation to increasing wealth, once men have gone beyond mere subsistence. This psychological fact protects men from major losses. They adjust downward, too. An affliction that they would have regarded as devastating before it struck them is not devastating to many. They learn to cope. Their total happiness recovers.⁶ This is a blessing. This is why Paul could write that he was content, no matter what his condition was (Phil. 4:11–13).⁷ His hedonic ratchet adjusted rapidly.

Increasing wealth poses a challenge to Christianity. First, the process appears to be autonomous. It is not the result of covenant-keeping (Deut. 28:1–14).⁸ Negative economic sanctions (vv. 15–68) do not come. If permanent, this autonomous growth reverses the biblical social sanctions.⁹ Second, Christians seem as caught up in the lust for wealth—for more—as other members of society.

B. American Christian Schizophrenia

The United States is socially Christian. Most of its citizens tell pollsters that they are church-attending followers of Jesus Christ. Most Americans think of themselves as reasonably faithful servants of Christ, but their magazine reading habits and television viewing habits indicate that they are spiritually adrift in a sea of unprecedented

5. This is consistent with biblical theology. God is infinite. Man is made in his image. Man can never become God. Mankind cannot reach infinity as a limit. There is always more to learn about God and His relation to the creation. The creation is finite. God is not. Learning more about God is not a curse. Its rate of return does not decline. There is always room for more. We should expect knowledge to produce accelerating returns.

6. Gary North, "Honeymooner Politics," LewRockwell.com (July 23, 2008). (<http://bit.ly/gnrstchet>)

7. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

8. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

9. It does raise the issue of future widespread conversions as a way to transfer the wealth of nations to covenant-keepers: inheritance by adoption.

prosperity. Christ's words of warning regarding the corrupting effects of great wealth seem to have come to pass for the nation that supports more foreign missionaries for Christ than any other nation. The lifestyle of poverty that is adopted by indigenous missionaries in an economically backward foreign nation is verbally honored by the Christians who fund world missions. Yet most of these donors are caught up emotionally in the pursuit of riches. How can this be? Have they not understood Christ's words? Are they disobedient? Or do Christ's words mean something different from what they seem to mean?

In economic affairs, the modern church seems to be in violation of Jesus' explicit teachings. The church's silence on Jesus' call to sacrificial service and sacrificial charitable giving reveals a widespread complacency regarding the spiritual perils of prosperity, both personal and corporate. Jesus said, "And that [seed] which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection" (Luke 8:14).¹⁰ The church rarely preaches on the moral requirement of tithing. Yet Jesus told the religious leaders of Israel, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23). *These ought ye to have done*: this requirement surely applies to members of Christ's church if it applied to the Pharisees as a minimal requirement.¹¹ But pastors rarely mention this obligation to their congregations. They tell their followers to give generously, as the Holy Spirit leads. But the Holy Spirit seems to lead them to give much less than a tithe.

In stark contrast to most modern evangelical preaching, Jesus in the three synoptic Gospels is pictured as being hostile to the pursuit of riches. (John's account generally ignores economics.) The pursuit of great tangible wealth is both a spiritual snare and a delusion, Jesus warned. To pursue riches is foolishness that threatens the soul. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).¹² In Luke, this message dominates most of the accounts of Jesus' discussion of money. Jesus made it clear that He had in mind tan-

10. Chapter 15.

11. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2013), ch. 46.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 35. See chapter 19, below.

gible wealth in history, not intangible wealth in eternity. He recommended laying up treasure in heaven.

C. The Problem of Poverty

Christ's hostility to the pursuit of tangible wealth raises an intellectual problem. Ever since the publication of Adam Smith's book, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the personal pursuit of tangible wealth has been seen by free market economists as the sole engine for the reduction of widespread poverty.¹³ If we had no other revelation from God except the Gospels, we would have to conclude that Smith's book is among the most wrongheaded in history. This would compel Christians to draw one of two conclusions: (1) every covenant-keeping society must learn to live with widespread poverty; or (2) charity is the only legitimate means of reducing widespread poverty. But charity alone has never been shown to be successful in reducing widespread poverty. Individual charity is ameliorative on a case-by-case basis, but there is no evidence that it has ever produced compound economic growth, which alone has reduced the burden of poverty on a society-wide basis.

This is a dilemma for Christians that can be solved only by an appeal beyond the Gospels to the Old Testament. We possess more written revelation from God than what we have in the Gospels and the New Testament's epistles. There is no doubt that the New Testament ignores the issue of national economic growth. Paul was generally hostile to the pursuit of personal wealth (I Tim. 6).¹⁴ To find a biblical justification for national economic growth, we must search the Old Testament. This search should begin with Genesis 13:2: "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." His biological heirs were the designated beneficiaries of the covenant between God and Abram (Gen. 15; 17). But beneficiary status extended beyond biological sonship. It extended to all nations. "And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:17–19). This prophecy is

13. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

significant for economic theory because the Old Testament links national obedience to God's law with national prosperity. "And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow" (Deut. 28:11–12).¹⁵ Christians must go to the Old Testament in search of permanent economic principles, or else they must content themselves with repeated calls to personal poverty, which few Christians will heed.

Here is the Christian economist's problem: the Old Testament is what millions of Protestant Christians insist we must avoid in any search for authoritative standards. (Non-Protestant Christians also avoid the Old Testament. Instead, they go to natural law theory when they go to anything at all.) They tell us, "We're under grace, not law!" If this view of the Old Testament is correct, then modern Western man's tangible wealth—unprecedented in mankind's history—is not the product of institutional arrangements that are themselves the products of Christian principles. In fact, this great wealth is a snare and a delusion. Christians should therefore reject it and call men to return to the ideal of poverty, beginning with themselves. Such a message, not surprisingly, we do not hear very often. When we do hear it, it tends to be announced by an upper middle-class social studies professor, tenured and therefore immune to dismissal, at a humanist-accredited Christian liberal arts college.¹⁶

D. Jesus' Social Theory

In a review of a book by Robert Royal, *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century* (Crossroad Publishing, 2000), libertarian and Catholic columnist Joseph Sobran wrote: "Unlike most spiritual leaders and moral leaders, Jesus of Nazareth offered no formula for worldly happiness and social order. Just the opposite: he told his disciples to take up their crosses (an image he used well before the Crucifixion) and to expect suffering. He warned them that the world would hate them as it hated Him; it was their destiny as Christians."¹⁷ His view is shared by

15. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

16. *Ibid.*, Appendix F: "The Economic Re-Education of Ronald J. Sider."

17. Joseph Sobran, "The Church of Silence" (May 18, 2000). (<http://bit.ly/SobranSilence>)

most Christians today.

The problem for those who hold this view of Jesus' ministry arises as soon as any society embraces Christianity. This happened under the emperor Constantine and his successors, as Sobran noted. Martyrdom for Christians ceased. It reappeared with a vengeance in the twentieth century—the most militantly anti-Christian century since the fall of Rome. In the intervening centuries, how were Christians supposed to discover God-given answers for the multitude of social and political issues that confront leaders in every era? If Jesus really offered no social theory, then how could He have expected His followers to have known how to rule society from 325 A.D. to, say, 1700, when the moral art of casuistry began to disappear in the West? Without casuistry—the application of Christian principles to specific cases—the church becomes dependent on promoters of one or another nonchristian social theory.¹⁸ The twentieth century revealed where this voluntary defection by Christians ends: either in the persecution of Christians, which is the left wing Enlightenment's answer to Christianity, or in their political marginalization, which is the right wing Enlightenment's answer.

It is true that Jesus did not teach a comprehensive social theory. He did not have to. He taught from the Old Testament. He said that He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament (Luke 4:16–21).¹⁹ In His divine nature as the second person of the Trinity, He co-authored the Old Testament. Why would any Christian believe that Jesus annulled this judicial heritage? Why would He have done this? He did not say that He did this. Where is the evidence from Scripture that Jesus annulled the social theory that had been taught from Moses to Malachi?

If Jesus did annul all of the Old Testament law, His followers have a major problem: He did not explicitly replace it with anything. He has therefore seemingly left His people culturally impotent. The old political slogan, "You can't beat something with nothing," haunts all Christians who maintain this view of the Old Testament. They must defer socially and politically to anti-Christians, and do so in the name of Christ.

Ask these pro-annulment Christians if they believe in the Ten Commandments, and they say that they do. Then ask: On what basis? Ask them if they think that bestiality is immoral, and they assure you they do. Then ask them if they think that bestiality should be made illegal. They begin to get nervous. Finally, ask them if they think that

18. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 40.

19. Chapter 6.

bestiality should be made a capital crime, and they back off. Yet the passages in the Bible where bestiality is condemned as morally evil call for the death penalty for those who practice it.

And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast (Lev. 20:15).

And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:16).

The New Testament is silent on the practice of bestiality. So, in order to make a biblical case against the practice, a Christian must appeal to Leviticus. But most Christians do not want to have anything to do with Leviticus. That book is just too . . . too theonomic! Theonomy in turn is too theocratic. Christians prefer legalized bestiality to theocracy. Step by step, this is what they are getting.

This judicial schizophrenia of modern Christians has led to their political and cultural paralysis. Their paralysis has led either to their persecution or their marginalization politically. In the case of marginalization, most of them have praised the result. They have joined with humanists in an alliance called political pluralism.²⁰ They cry out, "Equal time for Jesus!" But equal time for Jesus has steadily become no time for Jesus in the public arena. Millions of pietistic Protestants prefer it this way. They believe that their retreat from public issues in the name of Jesus reduces their level of personal responsibility. It doesn't. It merely increases their vulnerability.

Mammon and Jesus cannot make a permanent alliance. Jesus taught: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).²¹ Mammon's followers are increasingly consistent: they seek to remove Jesus from the public arena. Christians are not equally self-conscious. They still seek to achieve in politics what Jesus said is impossible anywhere in the universe. Then they wonder why they have so little influence. They invent eschatological systems to explain and even justify such a lack of influence.²²

20. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

21. Chapter 39.

22. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

Conclusion

How can we make sense of Jesus' repeated warnings against the accumulation of earthly treasure? We must search both testaments for guidance. We must learn the ways in which Jesus accepted or modified the Old Testament in His teachings on wealth. This is why the Gospel of Luke is so important in the quest for a balanced biblical view of economics. Its account of Jesus' words on tangible wealth is not balanced. If we believe that biblical truth is balanced because it is universally applicable, then we must assume that something is missing in Luke's account, for there was balance in the Mosaic law. We must search for whatever is missing and why.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is most adamant about the spiritual dangers of riches. If long-term economic growth is the supreme evidence of God's common grace in modern history, as free market economists would insist that it is if they believed in either God or common grace, then why does the Gospel of Luke display such hostility to riches? I do my best to answer this question in this commentary.

(Note: in this book, I capitalize the word for the four written Gospels, which I differentiate from the gospel of Christ and the gospel of the kingdom. For these four books, the word "gospel" is a title.)

INTRODUCTION

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:32–34).

A. Heavenly Treasure

The Gospel of Luke, more than the other three, returns continually to the theme of personal treasure. Jesus' economic message is encapsulated in these words: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (v. 34).

Treasure is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of treasure vs. no treasure. It is a question of the form, value, security, and location of one's treasure. Jesus told the rich young ruler, "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22b). Jesus therefore told him to exchange treasure in history for treasure in eternity.¹ The young man's wealth was tangible. Jesus told him to exchange it for intangible wealth, i.e., wealth that cannot be lost or stolen, only accumulated.

Jesus strongly recommended the accumulation of heavenly treasure. This means that His disciples should adopt extreme future-orientation. In assessing the future, all men discount the value of expected future income. Economists call this rate of discount the rate of interest. The further away in time that an expected unit of income is, the less valuable it is in the present. The same discounting process also applies to expected future costs, although economists rarely discuss this aspect of the interest rate, except when they are discussing the economics of crime. They assume that expected future income is net income, with costs already deducted. This discounting process is a law of

1. Chapter 42.

human action.² A positive interest rate cannot be avoided. The only question is: How high a rate of interest does a person use to discount his expected future income and future costs?

Jesus told His followers to elevate eternity above history in making their plans. First, He told them to fear hell more than any punishment in history. “But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 12:5). “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).³ Second, He also told them to elevate the benefits of heaven far above any benefits attainable in history. This is why Christians are to lay up treasure in heaven. In economic terms, this means that the stream of income that will begin in heaven is guaranteed by God to last forever. In contrast, all streams of income in history are both uncertain and of short duration. “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20).⁴ The parable of the barn-builder is found only in Luke. This is consistent with Luke’s concern with Jesus’ words regarding the spiritual threat of riches.

B. The Author of This Gospel

No author is mentioned by name in the text of any of the four Gospels, yet the church has long identified each Gospel by the name of an author. A man named Luke had been Paul’s travelling companion (Col. 4:14; Phm. 24; II Tim. 4:11).⁵ Paul called Luke the beloved physician (II Tim. 4:14). There are indications in the text that the anonymous author was interested in the details of sickness.⁶ Most conservative commentators assume that Luke the physician wrote the Gospel whose title has long carried his name. If this identification is accurate, then his main audience was the gentile world, just as Paul’s was.

The Gospel of Luke emphasizes Jesus’ warnings against the quest for riches more than the other three do. Gentiles were more likely to

2. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35. See chapter 19, below.

4. Chapter 25.

5. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 4.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

be caught up in the temporal quest for riches than Jews were. Gentiles had no concept of an absolutely sovereign God. Their gods were not sole creators. No absolute god of the gentiles was said to own the earth. No god of the gentiles claimed this for himself: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Psalm 50:10–13). The local gods of classical civilization demanded feeding. The head of a household placed food on the altar of local spirits of the field in order to keep them from haunting his home. The Jews knew better. They understood that animal sacrifices were not the care and feeding of God.⁷ Animal sacrifices were judicially representative. They testified to men's own iniquity.

Jesus' words in the Gospel of Luke are uncompromising in their identification of riches as a snare. This is not to say that Matthew and Mark do not record many of these warnings. They do. But Luke's Gospel emphasizes them. This is especially evident in Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Compare it to Matthew's account, which is far more comprehensive and much less focused on the sins of tangible wealth.⁸

C. Was Jesus Anti-Capitalistic?

What do I mean by the word, "capital"? I mean any asset that produces income for its owner. Capitalism is a social order that always results from a system of civil law that establishes a legal claim by individual owners to their capital assets and the fruits thereof. This system of private property is what biblical law establishes. This is why Christian critics of capitalism are hostile to biblical law. This is why they tell us that the Bible, meaning the Old Testament, must not be used by Christians to discover blueprints for economics.⁹

In my analysis of Jesus' attitude toward earthly riches, I consider two forms of capital: tangible and intangible. Tangible capital can be sold or transferred in discrete units that will produce income for the new owners: money, tools, and land. Other forms of capital are called human capital: morality, knowledge, reputation, managerial skill, eco-

7. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 59.

8. Chapter 9.

9. Chapter 48:C:2.

conomic forecasting ability, etc. Human capital is intangible. The output of human capital can be sold, but not the capital asset itself, unless (1) slavery is legal and (2) slaves are expected by potential buyers to remain obedient. These two forms of wealth should be kept distinct in the mind of anyone who tries to explain Jesus' hostility to riches. He was not hostile to human capital.

Jesus' hostility to the accumulation of great tangible wealth raises an important question: Was He anti-capitalistic? He was not opposed to privately owned property. He was not an advocate of high taxation or discriminatory rates of taxation, today called graduated taxation or progressive taxation. What makes His message so very different from the intellectual defense of the free market offered by secular economists—and most economists have been intensely secular—is that He recommended the exchange of earthly tangible capital for eternal intangible capital. He recommended charitable giving.

A question then arises: Did Jesus abandon the Old Testament's teachings on tangible wealth? Most notably, there is the section in Deuteronomy 28 that links wealth and dominion in history. "And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them" (Deut. 28:11–13).¹⁰ Deuteronomy announced a predictable relationship between a nation's moral capital—its obedience to God's Bible-revealed law—and its tangible capital in the broadest sense (vv. 1–14). It also declared the reverse: disobedience to God and reduced tangible wealth (vv. 15–68).

Was this covenantal promise tied exclusively to the nation of Israel? Has this relationship between tangible wealth and dominion in history ceased in the New Covenant? Jesus' teaching on wealth seems to indicate that it has. But if Jesus really did annul the Old Covenant's view of tangible wealth, then the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28)¹¹

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis*,

has either ceased to apply in the New Covenant, or else it is to be fulfilled in ways very different from what Moses revealed to God's people.

Then there is the question of inheritance. If a man has given away his goods, what can he pass on to his sons? The Old Covenant recommended leaving an earthly inheritance. "Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it" (Ps. 37:34). "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).¹² "House and riches are the inheritance of fathers and a prudent wife is from the LORD" (Prov. 19:14).¹³ Does a prudent wife remain a sought-after New Covenant gift from God, but not the inheritance of fathers?

There is no question of the following fact. Jesus did not quote any Old Testament passages that recommend the accumulation of tangible wealth, even as a tool of dominion. He preached against the quest for personal riches. But so had the author of Proverbs. "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9).¹⁴ The author of Proverbs, who was by far the richest king in Israel's history, recognized the threat of great riches: autonomy. A rich man is tempted to say, "Who is the Lord?" This is an extension of Moses' warning against thinking autonomously, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).¹⁵

The logic of modern capitalism is this: personal thrift produces saving, saving leads to investment in tools, tools increase men's output, and output produces personal wealth. This was surely Adam Smith's logic in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). There is no trace of this logic in the Gospels. Jesus recommended charity rather than the accumulation of tangible capital. But personal charity is regarded by economists as ameliorative at best. Because charity does not usually increase the supply of tangible capital, society will remain poor to the extent that men give their money away to the poor. Better for the poor when people in-

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

12. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 55.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 85.

15. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

vest their money rather than give it to the poor. Writes F. A. Harper,¹⁶ a libertarian economist who mentored me in 1961: “Both fact and logic seem to me to support the view that savings invested in privately owned economic tools of production amount to an act of charity. And further, I believe it to be—as a type—the greatest economic charity of all.”¹⁷ Henry Hazlitt, whose book, *Economics in One Lesson* (1946), became the most widely read defense of the free market in the twentieth century, quoted this statement approvingly.¹⁸ Such is the logic of most defenders of the free market. I did not fully trust this analysis in 1961, and I still don’t. It is incomplete. But in terms of reducing poverty, nothing has rivaled the free market, with its principle of enlightened self-interest.

Can Jesus’ words be reconciled with Adam Smith’s? If not, must Christians abandon Adam Smith? Or was Jesus speaking only to His first-century disciples? If He was speaking to His disciples down through the ages, then what is the New Testament’s solution to poverty? Does it offer one? Capitalism does.

D. The Reduction of Poverty

Adam Smith’s famous book is known by its abbreviated name, just as Charles Darwin’s is. Its full title is *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. (Darwin’s is *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.) Smith could just have easily titled his book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Poverty of Nations*, but he was interested in wealth and how it can be increased. He believed, accurately, that most men are interested in increasing their tangible wealth and the wider range of choices that accompanies it. Smith was interested in discovering the causes of economic growth, not the causes of economic stagnation. Economic stagnation needed no explanation in Adam Smith’s day or Adam and Eve’s day. Economic growth did.

Beginning in Smith’s era, the West has experienced an increase of

16. Paul L. Poirot, “The Writings of F. A. Harper—A Review,” *The Freeman*, XXIX (Aug. 1979). (<http://bit.ly/HarperWritings>)

17. F. A. Harper, “The Greatest Economic Charity,” in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 99. (<http://bit.ly/MisesFest1>)

18. Henry Hazlitt, *The Conquest of Poverty* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1973), ch. 19, note #4. (<http://bit.ly/HazlittConquest>)

tangible wealth at about two percent to three percent per annum.¹⁹ England's industrial revolution—the first sustained compound economic growth revolution in history—began in earnest about the time that Smith's book appeared. Compound economic growth has gone on in the West for over two centuries. This has made the West rich. By today's standards, the richest nations in Smith's day would be underdeveloped nations today. How did this transformation happen? Not by any great increase in people's rate of giving to the poor. There had been government poor laws for over two centuries in England prior to 1776. There had been private charity.²⁰ But there had not been sustained economic growth.

The modern defense of the private property social order has usually invoked capitalism's widespread elimination of mass poverty. No other social system has been equally successful in raising hundreds of millions of people out of abject poverty. There have been very few defenders of capitalism who have invoked its ability to make a few people very rich. The main exceptions were a few free market social Darwinists in the late nineteenth century,²¹ who defended capitalism as the survival of the fittest. In fact, the very phrase attributed to Darwin—the survival of the fittest—was first used by the premier social Darwinist, sociologist (and former railway engineer) Herbert Spencer (1820–1903),²² and was adopted by Darwin in a later edition of *Origin of Species*. This short-lived defense of capitalism had fallen into disrepute by 1910.

The economic question is this: Should we expect to see those who have become covenant-keepers increase their tangible wealth? This generally does take place, for men become more self-disciplined and more future-oriented after they are redeemed by God's grace. But if all Christians were to give away most of their goods to the poor, would society continue to experience increasing per capita wealth? Would many of the poor recipients of these donations squander most of the money, leaving them and the donors decapitalized? Would this decapitalization thwart the compounding process? If charity does not pro-

19. Walt W. Rostow, *The World Economy: History & Prospect* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), p. 48.

20. W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480–1660* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959). This is a summary volume of three other regional studies.

21. These social Darwinists should be distinguished from the pro-government planning social Darwinists of the same era and beyond, most notably Lester Frank Ward. See North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix A.

22. Spencer, *Principles of Biology* (1864).

duce the wealth-compounding process that reduces abject poverty, then wouldn't a great spiritual revival lead to the impoverishment of the West?

E. The 20-80 Rule

The Bible's recommended goal is middle-class wealth. Jesus said, "For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always" (John 12:8). This statement appears in three of the Gospels (see Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7), but not Luke's. If we will always have the poor with us, then we will always have the rich with us. The question is: What percentage of rich people will we have? Even more important, how much of the world's tangible wealth will the rich control? The answer is, most of it.

1. *The Distribution of Wealth*

The shape of either a nation's wealth distribution curve or its income distribution curve does not resemble the shape of its population curve. The population curve in a Western nation bulges with the middle class. In an economically undeveloped nation, it bulges with the poor. In contrast, both the income distribution curve and the wealth distribution curve bulge with the rich, generation after generation. This does not mean that the same families remain rich. It does mean that the richest 20% of the population owns most of the wealth and gains most of the income at any given time. The shape of the income distribution curve resists alteration, generation after generation, in every nation.

Italian sociologist-economist Vilfredo Pareto in the late nineteenth century made detailed investigations of the distribution of income in European nations. He discovered an amazing fact: the slope of the income curve, from the richest to the poorest members of society, was similar in every nation that he studied. The richest members received most of a nation's income. This statistical relationship, first published in 1897,²³ has not changed significantly over the last century, irrespective of the economic policies of individual industrial nations. Later studies by other economic historians indicated that in 1835–40, 1883, and 1919 in Great Britain, the richest 10% received 50% of the nation's

23. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d' Economie Politique*, vol. 2 (1897), pp. 370-72. The book has still not been translated into English, although it remains famous.

income.²⁴ This statistical relationship has come to be known as the Pareto law or the Pareto rule or the 20-80 rule. A 20-80 distribution has been found to apply in social institution after institution, as well as in their diverse operations.²⁵ No one seems to know why. An economist wrote in 1965: "For a very long time, the Pareto law has lumbered the economic scene like an erratic block on the landscape; an empirical law which nobody can explain."²⁶

A 1998 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards in Ottawa, Canada, revealed that the 20-80 rule still applied quite well in the United States.²⁷ The top 20% of the population owned 81% of household wealth in 1962, 81.3% in 1983, 83.5% in 1989, 83.7% in 1995, and 84.3% in 1997. For the top one%, the figures are as follows: 1962: 33.4%; 1983: 33.8%; 1989: 37.4%; 1995: 37.6%; 1997: 39.1%. These changes have been in the direction of greater concentration of tangible wealth in the United States.

This seems impossible. Don't middle-class people own their homes? No; they reside in them, but they borrow to buy them. They pay mortgages. The rich are the holders of these mortgages. Title is passed to the home owner, but the asset has a debt against it. Most middle-class people own very little debt-free marketable wealth. They use debt to buy depreciating assets: consumer goods.

The rich use their money to buy what they hope will be appreciating assets and income-producing assets. They save a much higher percentage of their wealth. When the rich in one nation cease to save at high rates, the rich in other nations replace them as the source of capital. "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43-44).²⁸

There is no known way for any industrial society to alter significantly the share of tangible wealth owned by the rich. When political

24. D. H. Macgregor, "Pareto's Law," *Economic Journal* (March 1936), pp. 81, 86. Reprinted in Mark Blaug (ed.), *Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)* (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 21, 26.

25. Richard Koch, *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret of Achieving More With Less* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1998).

26. Josef Steindl, *Random Processes and the Growth of Firms: A Study of the Pareto Law* (London: Charles Griffin, 1965), p. 18. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 3.

27. John Schmitt, Lawrence Mishel, and Jared Bernstein, paper prepared for a panel on "Economic Well-being in North America," Canadian Economic Association Meetings, May 31, 1998, Table 7.

28. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

force has been applied in the form of tax policy, the percentages have stayed pretty much the same. It is not even clear that there will be different wealth holders after the new taxation policies are in force, unless the existing wealth owners are deliberately expropriated or executed, as they were in Communist nations. The Bible does not authorize the use of the monopolistic force of civil government to redistribute private wealth an attempt to achieve greater equality.

The key economic issue regarding wealth distribution is this: the lawful means for gaining control over tangible capital in a particular society. How do the rich gain their share of the national wealth? By power, by bribery, by political skills, or by satisfying customer demand? To benefit the largest number of people in society, civil governments should establish legal guarantees to all owners of property.²⁹ This will encourage the self-interested rich to continue to use their wealth for customer-satisfying purposes. The rich should continue to save, invest, and provide tools for their employees. The legal protection of all people's right to own and use property will also encourage the bottom 80% to do the same. Through competition to satisfy customers, members of lower-income groups will steadily replace those in the higher-income groups. Technological innovation is especially conducive to this replacement phenomenon. The percentage of tangible capital in each quintile will not change very much, but the amount of wealth produced by this capital will increase dramatically over time, as the compound growth process takes over.

Capital accumulation by the richest 20% of the population is the most important measurable source of a capitalist society's increasing tangible wealth. The rich provide the money that buys the tools that raise the output and wealth of the other classes.

But tools are not enough to make a society rich among nations. A society's other classes must possess moral capital, such as the willingness to work hard, future-orientation, honesty, and a good reputation. Moral capital is intangible, but it is nonetheless real. It produces income for its owners.

2. Moral Capital

If we consider moral capital as income-producing capital, then the Pareto wealth distribution curve does not apply. There is only so much

29. Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity through the Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

moral capital that any person can possess. The rich man cannot amass moral capital in the way that he can amass tangible capital.

Let me clarify my argument by an example. Assume that in nation A, only the rich are literate. This means that the national rate of illiteracy is 80%. In nation B, there is almost universal literacy. Without knowing anything else about the tangible wealth of either nation, which nation would you guess has the richest rich people? I am speaking only of the top 20% of the population. I would guess nation B. But what if I am incorrect? What if nation A is richer, perhaps because it is a small, oligarchical, oil-exporting nation? Which group of rich people do you think will be richer one century later if the literacy rates stay the same in both nations, assuming that the rich in both nations do not send their investment capital outside their respective countries? I would still guess nation B. This has nothing to do with investment decisions made by the rich. It has everything to do with the determination of the less rich to learn how to read—a determination based on their moral capital. A rising tide of literacy raises all economic ships: poor, middle class, and rich. I argue that this same principle of national wealth formation applies to moral capital in general.

Without widely distributed moral capital, today's rich people could not retain the market value of their investment capital for long. Competent and honest employees would become increasingly scarce and costly, thereby lowering the market value of investment capital. Voters would become envy-driven. They would elect politicians who would seek to confiscate the wealth of the rich in the name of the poor on behalf of middle-class voters (minus 50% for government handling). Per capita productivity would slow, stagnate, or fall. So would the nation's wealth. The shape of the wealth distribution curve would remain the same—heavily concentrated in the top 20%—but the growth of wealth in society would slow down or even decline.

F. When Christians Get Richer

Most rich people in history have not responded positively to the gospel of eternal salvation. Jesus said this repeatedly. His analogy of the camel going through the eye of a needle is representative of His view regarding the eternal abode of the rich. Their resistance to the gospel has not changed since Jesus' era. Far more middle-class people respond. Far more poor people respond.

1. *Capital and Wealth*

This creates a peculiar anomaly in a capitalist society. Rich covenant-breakers own most of the marketable wealth, but covenant-keepers become beneficiaries of wealth accumulation by the rich. This is because increasing per capita investment by the rich produces increasing per capita income for workers. Wages go up when workers' productivity rises. The owners of capital bid against each other to employ workers who can put the owners' tools to profitable use.

The rich want to get richer, so they invest. They do not consume all that they own. They do not invest in order to increase the incomes of the lower 80%. Their motivation is not charitable, yet the reduction of poverty under free market capitalism is greater than any system of charity has ever produced. Poverty is alleviated or eliminated for large numbers of people. Those people who are statistically most likely to reject the gospel of Christ make self-interested investment decisions that help the poor. Non-rich members of society are made richer by means of capital accumulation by the rich. The rich trust in their tangible wealth, and this eschatologically misplaced trust lures them into eternal destruction. This trust also produces increasing tangible wealth for both the middle class and the poor in capitalist societies.

This presents a dilemma for Christian economists. It is a theological version of the moral dilemma posed by Bernard Mandeville's poem and book-long defense, *The Fable of the Bees: Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714): greedy acts by rich individuals produce socially beneficial results. Greed in a free market society mitigates the poverty-inducing effects of sin. This view creates a moral obligation on the part of moral reformers to suggest workable social alternatives to the greedy behavior they seek to eliminate. James McCosh, the president of the College of New Jersey (re-named Princeton University in 1896), a Calvinist and moral philosopher, wrote in 1875:

Mandeville, in "The Fable of the Bees," had advanced some curious and doubtful speculations as to private vices being public benefits; showing that the power and grandeur of any nation depend much upon the number of people and their industry, which cannot be procured unless there be consumption of manufactures; and that the intemperance, luxury, and pride of men consume manufactures, and promote industry. The author has here caught hold of a positive and important truth, the explanation of which carries us into some of the deepest mysteries of Providence, in which we see good springing out of vice, and God ruling this world in spite of its wickedness, and by

means of its wickedness, but without identifying himself with it. But Mandeville was not able to solve the profound problem, and in dealing with it he uses expressions which look as if he intended to justify, or at least to palliate vice.³⁰

Mandeville's book showed that spending on luxuries by the rich provides employment to the poor, which is a public benefit. Far better for the poor, argue free market economists, is for the rich to reduce their spending on luxuries and invest their savings in capital goods that provide employment for the poor, who then produce consumption goods for the middle class or the poor, who greatly outnumber the rich—hence, broader markets. But the dilemma for Christian economists remains the same: the wealth-creating substitution of investment for charity. Jesus recommended charity, not investing.

2. *Evangelism and Tangible Wealth*

The long-term increase in tangible wealth owned by the bottom 80% under capitalism does not automatically produce better-funded evangelism programs. Put another way, this increased wealth does not automatically increase the moral capital of society. It may even reduce it. Moses made this clear: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).³¹ So did Jesus in the parable of the four soils (Luke 8:11–15).³²

Historically, the extension of the gospel has been funded mainly by the middle class and the poor. The rich do not accept the gospel or fund its extension. Because an increase in a society's moral capital will increase its per capita tangible wealth, we can safely conclude that when Christians use their tangible wealth to fund missionaries, to provide children with a Christian education, and to do all of the other things that extend the kingdom of God in history, society will become visibly richer over time. There can be positive feedback between moral capital and tangible capital. Moses made this clear, too. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).³³

30. James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy: From Hutcheson to Hamilton* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers., 1874), p. 56. (<http://bit.ly/McCoshSP>)

31. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

32. Chapter 15.

33. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

3. *Negative Feedback*

The problem is, there may not be positive feedback. Increasing tangible wealth can make covenant-keepers forgetful about the source of their wealth: God. This is the great spiritual threat posed by tangible wealth and most forms of intangible wealth, such as the information imparted by higher education (humanistic). The key social asset is moral capital, which in turn rests on a Trinitarian confession of faith and a resulting response: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27b).

Christians in the industrial West have become progressively richer over time, along with most members of their society. Today, they are able to save more money and give away vastly more money than they could have done two centuries ago. Their basic needs are being met by their capital-engendered productivity, which in turn is based heavily on investment by the covenant-breaking rich. We might imagine that Christians would donate ever-larger percentages of their income to missions and other non-profit, kingdom-building projects as their tangible wealth increases. Yet such has not been the case. The modern Western Christian does not tithe. He can afford to, but he refuses. The vast majority of Christians living in the industrial world are rich by the standards of the rest of the world and also by the standards of most of mankind’s history, yet they do not tithe. As they become richer, they begin to take on the attributes of the covenant-breaking rich. They forget to acknowledge God as the source of their wealth.

So, we are back to my original question: What is the Bible’s program for reducing poverty? The Old Covenant had a solution: the Mosaic law. David declared: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).³⁴ But if Jesus abandoned the Mosaic laws governing wealth creation, then Christians have a responsibility to discover in the New Testament some other system of economic cause and effect, some other way of raising large numbers of poor people out of abject poverty—a way that is more reliable in this regard than capitalism. I am aware of no theory of compound economic growth that recommends as the growth process’s initiating act the overnight de-capitalization of all Christians on behalf of the masses of poor people, who can easily con-

34. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

sume in a few weeks whatever wealth that Christians are willing to transfer to them.

G. From Mission Society to Transformed Society

In Chapter 26, I argue that Jesus' command to His disciples to sell everything they possessed and give the money to the poor was a call to world missions. He was laying down rules that would govern the church's initial missionary society, which was the church itself. He was calling His disciples to break visibly and emotionally with Old Covenant Israel. By surrendering ownership of all their encumbering assets, including money, they would strip themselves of any connection to national Israel and its doomed future. They would bring the gospel to the gentiles.

1. Geographical Mobility

Those disciples who followed His advice became sufficiently mobile so that they successfully fled from Jerusalem at the time of the first great persecution, which began after the stoning of Stephen. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). This initial scattering produced Christianity's first great missionary outreach.

Consider foreign missions as a program of capital exportation. The capital in question is moral capital. As a result of a successful foreign missions program, the targets of the missionaries' preaching will adopt the message as their own. This message will eventually transform a covenant-breaking pagan society into a covenant-keeping one. The new converts will begin to re-structure their lives according to the gospel. But men cannot change just one thing. One change begets another, as men adjust to the changes. This is a good thing. There is much in a covenant-breaking society that needs to be changed. Salvation is as comprehensive as sin is.³⁵ The gospel produces massive changes in any covenant-breaking social order. One of these changes is the increase of per capita wealth. People in general become richer. A different group

35. Gary North, "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology of Social Action," in *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VIII (Summer 1981). Reprinted in Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

of people will replace the existing holders of great wealth in the top 20%.

Every society must be governed by moral and legal standards. This raises the question: By what standard? If not biblical law, then what?³⁶ If the Mosaic law were to become the basis of a nation's judicial system, private property would be protected. Men are commanded not to steal (Ex. 20:15).³⁷ They are told not to covet their neighbor's property (Ex. 20:17).³⁸ They are commanded not to secretly change the boundaries of their land (Deut. 19:14).³⁹ They are told not to use false weights and measures (Deut. 25:13).⁴⁰ The protection of privately owned property eventually produces economic growth. The crushing burden of poverty is lifted from most members of a redeemed society. The rich get richer, but so do the poor.⁴¹

Once the capital-accumulating system of compound economic growth begins, how valid is Jesus' command that His disciples sell all their possessions and give to the poor? Wouldn't this impoverish the entire society? What if Christians have become the richest people in the society, as a result of their greater diligence, honesty, and productivity? Should they de-capitalize themselves in a wave of charitable giving? Should they sell their income-producing assets to covenant-breakers? Wouldn't this transfer social influence to covenant-breakers? Wouldn't this reduce national economic growth by transferring the tools of production into the hands of less morally reliable people who are less productive?

2. Social Redemption

These questions raise the issue of social redemption: the systematic buying back of public institutions through Christian social action. God's law heals institutions as well as individuals. This creates new levels of responsibility. With greater benefits come greater responsibilities.⁴² Is an economic strategy that was appropriate for the early

36. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gnnos>)

37. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986) ch. 28.

38. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

39. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 44.

40. *Ibid.*, ch. 65.

41. Chapter 16.

42. Chapter 28.

church's initial missionary venture equally appropriate for the period of covenantal consolidation of a newly redeemed social order? The institutional church has always said *no*. Has the church been wrong?

A rich man who sells his assets and gives to the poor has completed a one-time transaction. His wealth-generating assets have now been transferred to someone else. If the donor is a Christian, then the new owner is probably a covenant-breaker, who may use these capital assets to fund a rival kingdom. So, the question is: Is this strategy of using charity to ameliorate individual poverty, but at the expense of the decapitalization of Christians, a universal requirement? Will this strategy, if obeyed by Christians (which it rarely is), lead to a greater reduction of poverty over time than a program of thrift and investment would? Will it lead to a greater extension of God's kingdom, once a society has adopted the biblical covenant? The secular economist would say *no*. So do I.

The Gospels do not discuss the possibility of social transformation. The Old Covenant did. "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:3–5). Those Christians who argue that Jesus annulled all of the Mosaic laws have a major problem. They do not have any answer to this post-redemption question: "How should we live now?" They have instructions from Jesus regarding the sale of all of their goods and distribution of this money to the poor, which they have not obeyed personally. Is this all the economic guidance they can offer to new converts?

Conclusion

Jesus recommended an investment strategy: the exchange of earthly treasure for eternal treasure. "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12: 33–34). The issue here is two-fold: the permanence of one's treasure and the focus of one's hopes.

Jesus told the disciples to avoid trusting in tangible wealth. They

were to trust in God. Anything that threatened to undermine their faith in God by substituting faith in earthly treasure in place of God is a snare and a delusion, He warned. His disciples had to break the lure of a substitute faith in mammon. They were to do this by self-imposed poverty.

But what about the rest of us? Can we break our addiction to our confidence in tangible wealth, but without giving away everything we own, unlike what the disciples were told to do? Does tangible wealth offer the same degree of risk to every Christian that alcohol offers to every recovering alcoholic? The institutional church has always said *no*.

Protestant fundamentalists argue that a person should never drink alcohol, because he might become addicted, even though the vast majority of people who drink alcohol do not become alcoholics. Fundamentalists never say this about money. But Jesus' words indicate that the threat of addiction to money is far more widespread than the threat of addiction to alcohol, a threat which He did not bother to mention.⁴³

Jesus said nothing against the private ownership of the means of production, but He repeatedly advised his followers to avoid extensive ownership. He told them to sell what they owned and give to the poor. If this command is a universal rule, obedience would mandate that capital be transferred to non-Christians, sale by sale. Christians would live as permanent strangers in the land. They would remain as stewards of covenant-breaking capital owners rather than becoming capitalist stewards under God by way of serving customers.

To determine whether this really is what Jesus has required of His people down through the ages, we must carefully consider the Gospel of Luke. We must consider especially Jesus' concept of treasure.

(Unless otherwise noted in the text, when I write of wealth or riches in this commentary, I have in mind income-producing tangible assets.)

43. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix G.

1

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE: COVENANTAL SANCTIONS

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away (Luke 1:51–53).

The theocentric principle undergirding this passage is God as the sanctions-bringer in history. He brings positive sanctions on covenant-keepers, but negative sanctions on covenant-breakers. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Magnificent Magnificat

Mary made this eloquent declaration in front of her relative, Elizabeth. Elizabeth had just confessed, “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (v. 42a). Elizabeth had affirmed her faith in the fulfillment of an angelic prophecy to Mary: “And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (v. 45). What had Mary been told by the angel? This: “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (vv. 31–33). The issue here was judicial: Jesus possessed legal title to the throne of David. The issue was also eschatological: His perman-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

ent kingdom reign. This was obviously a messianic prophecy. Mary's response to this prophecy was a declaration of God's imposition of sanctions in Israel's history. The supernaturally imposed sanctions of the past testified to God's ability to impose sanctions in the future. Her son would be the sanctions-bringer, the Messiah.

Mary's response to Elizabeth's affirmation appears in the passage that is sometimes called the Magnificat, referring to the first word in the passage in Latin translation: "My soul magnifies (glorifies) the Lord." The passage is itself magnificent. That a young woman could formulate such a profound theological passage with such poetic power as this testifies to the power of the liturgical effects of worship in the synagogue. The power of her language reflects years of exposure to the psalms.

Her summary of God's acts in history indicates a challenge to "the powers that be." Mary declared that God elevates the powerless and casts down the powerful. He is sovereign over the affairs of men. Her personal experience would be proof of God's power to lift a person out of obscurity into prominence. Mary saw herself as a nobody who was about to become a somebody: "For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (v. 48). This would be her personal reversal of fortune.

She also affirmed the existence of the God who had previously intervened in Israel's history to overturn rich and powerful oppressors. "He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (vv. 51–53). He did this out of mercy. "And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation" (v. 50). God's mercy in history is beneficial for the downcast and a disaster for those people in power.

Why should this be the case? Why should mercy to the poor involve negative sanctions against those in power? Why must there be a reversal of fortune downward as well as upward? The biblical answer is covenantal ethics. Previously prevailing social orders in history had been based on anti-biblical legal principles. By defying God's law, rulers had been able to rule oppressively. God has repeatedly intervened in Israel's history, she declared, to overturn these oppressive regimes.

Mary's declaration pointed to an imminent overturning. It was to be *the* overturning in Israel's history: the advent of the Messiah. It

would involve the overturning of Israel's political order. Ezekiel had announced: "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because, I say, that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand. And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (Ezek. 21:24–27). Ezekiel's prophecy looked back to Jacob's prophetic blessing on Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49: 10). Mary's son Jesus would be the fulfillment of both prophecies. He would be the one to overturn the old order in the name of a new order. But this new order would not violate the ethical standards of God's Old Covenant. On the contrary, the new order would fulfill the old order and extend it into the hearts of redeemed people. We read this in Hebrews, which cited Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 31:33–34): "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:10–13).

B. The Hungry and the Rich

The mark of poverty in Israel was hunger. David had declared, "For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:22–25).² In his day, David

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms*

implied, righteousness was sufficiently honored in Israel, so that good men were not reduced to begging for bread. Mary was implying that those days were long gone. God has repeatedly had to intervene to feed the hungry as a sign of His mercy. But God has not left it at that; He has also pulled down the rich. Mary's declaration implied that the hunger of the righteous has been the result of the power of the unrighteous.

Jesus later used this same contrast in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar (Luke 16:19–31).³ He described their reversal of fortune as permanent. The beggar was taken to heaven; the rich man was sent to hell. The rich man cried out to Abraham for relief. The reply was negative. "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (vv. 25–26).

This theme of the exclusion of rich men from the kingdom of heaven is found repeatedly in Jesus' teaching. Nevertheless, God is pictured repeatedly as a rich man who had gone to a far country, and who then returns to require his servants to give an accounting. The theological issue is therefore not wealth as such, but rather stewardship: the faithful administration of assets that belong to God. He who is rich in history is less likely to be rich in eternity. "For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:25–27).⁴

The truth of Mary's testimony is not limited to eternity. Yet, it is almost certain that she had in mind only history. The twin doctrines of heaven and hell are Jesus' addition to our understanding of covenantal sanctions. The pleasure-pain distinction of the afterlife is not found in the Old Testament. So, Mary would not have been aware of this distinction. Mary declared what God had done in Israel's history. He had intervened to reverse the fortunes of the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor.

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

3. Chapter 40.

4. Chapter 43. Cf. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

She and her husband were poor. We know this because they offered two turtledoves at the temple when they presented Jesus, according to the law of purification (Luke 2:24). This law required an offering for the temporarily unclean status of the mother of a newborn. She had to bring a lamb and a pigeon or a turtledove (Lev. 12: 6). If she could not afford a lamb, she had to offer two turtledoves (Lev. 12:8).⁵ Mary saw her own role as a poor girl who would bear the Messiah, who would in turn bring a reversal of fortune to oppressed Israel, just as God had done in the past: “He hath holpen [helped] his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy” (v. 54).

As it turned out, Jesus achieved this by overturning Old Covenant Israel forever. He elevated the spiritual remnant of Israel at the expense of the nation, which was in rebellion against God. He told the religious leaders, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). The gentiles—a new covenantal nation—were to be brought in to worship God alongside the remnant of Israel. The church would become the new Israel, which Paul called “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). God’s blessings would be upon it.

Mary’s words went beyond politics. They included economics. The hungry had been filled with good things by God. The rich had been sent away empty-handed. Here we see a two-fold reversal of fortune. It was not merely that the hungry had been fed by God; it was that the rich had been stripped of their wealth. The hungry had become filled; the rich had become poor. In this sense, *poverty is pictured as a negative sanction*, not a condition to be abolished for all mankind. Her words do not proclaim an egalitarian social order. They proclaim hierarchy, both political and economic. In His dealings with Israel, Mary declared, God’s acts have honored the covenantal principle of hierarchy.⁶ He has not undermined it; He has instead reversed the hierarchical status of the participants.

C. Zacharias’ Subsequent Confirmation

Shortly before the birth of John, his father regained his speech (v. 64) and was filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 67). He announced a two-part prophecy. The first concerned Jesus, who was in the covenant line of Judah through David. “And hath raised up an horn of salvation for

5 5. The King James Version says “turtles.” This is a translation error.

6. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

us in the house of his servant David" (v. 69). This could not refer to his son John, who was in the priestly family of Levi.

Like Mary, Zacharias spoke of the God of covenant. "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant" (vv. 70–72). The issue was *national deliverance*, guaranteed by God's covenantal oath to Abraham: "The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (vv. 73–75). Only after making this declaration of God's covenant rule did Zacharias refer to his own son: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways" (v. 76).

These prophetic utterances assumed the continuation of God's covenantal sanctions in history. They assumed the permanence of the covenant. They viewed Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of David's: the civil enforcement of God's covenant law in Israel. *Covenant law is undergirded by covenant sanctions*. In the future, as in the past, the supernatural imposition of God's covenant sanctions would be evidence of the validity of God's covenant law.

D. Why the Great Reversal?

God is not capricious. He honors His covenant. This was what Mary announced in her conclusion: "As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever" (v. 55). So, the heart of the matter was the covenant. Mary did not believe that the Old Covenant's system of sanctions would end with the coming of the Messiah, her son. What God had done in the past to uphold the ethical provisions of His covenant, He would do again.

Mary's declaration assumed that the rich and the poor had achieved their respective positions in terms of a prevailing social order. This social order was antithetical to the biblical covenant. Had this not been the case, God would have had no reason to intervene to reverse the fortunes of many. It was not that wealth is inherently immoral, for God had previously elevated the hungry to the status of wealthy, to enjoy the good things.

Mary did not view her son's role as reversing the biblical coven-

antal standards that had governed the attainment of both wealth and poverty in Israel. She saw His role as an extension of what God had previously done in history to liberate Israel from bondage (v. 50). She did not see her son as a revolutionary against the covenant, but as a revolutionary against the prevailing social order, in which Israel was in bondage. She saw His role as prophetic: bringing a covenant lawsuit against the rulers of the day in the name of the God of the oppressed. But this role, being prophetic, had to be ethically based. The prophet's message in Israel was always a call to national repentance.

Was her proclamation accurate? Was the prevailing social order reversed by Jesus' ministry? Yes, and the proof of this great reversal came in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem fell to Rome, and the temple was burned, thus ending the Mosaic sacrifices.⁷

Did Jesus replace the covenantal standards of righteous rulership? Did He challenge the rulers of the day in terms of a new covenant or the old? On the contrary, He invoked the standards of the Old Covenant. He challenged the Jewish leaders on behalf of Moses in the latter's prophetic office. This challenge is clearest in John's Gospel. "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:42–47).

The great reversal would soon arrive, both in Israel and the gentile world. The evidence of Christ's new world order was already visible. "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20).

E. Liberation Theology

Egalitarianism is an ancient tradition in the history of the church, but it has generally been confined to monastic orders, small and short-lived sects, and heretical movements. In twentieth-century liberal theology, as well as the short-lived, post-1965 movement known as liberation theology, egalitarianism was assumed to be the biblical ideal.

7. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

Both movements advocated the use of political coercion to achieve economic equality.⁸

There is no trace in biblical law of the use of state coercion to promote wealth redistribution and economic equality. First, the Mosaic law is not egalitarian. Second, the state is not endowed by biblical law with sufficient power to make egalitarianism possible. A central civil government that extracts as much as 10% of the people's wealth is seen by God as tyrannical: His judgment on a rebellious nation (I Sam. 8:15, 17).⁹ *A civil order that extracts less than a tithe is in no position to claim to be egalitarian. It cannot command the resources to achieve such status.* This is why theological liberals who promote modern levels of taxation in the name of Jesus regard Samuel's warning as irrelevant. This warning does not play a role in their speculations regarding the kingdom of God in history. This is because it testifies against them.

1. Egalitarianism in the New Testament

Evidence for egalitarianism as a recommended voluntary practice in the New Testament is found in John the Baptist's warning to the multitudes to share: "And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:10–11). This was voluntarism. It had nothing to do with politics. It was the recommendation of a prophet in the transition period from the Old Covenant (John's culminating ministry) to the New Covenant (Christ's replacement ministry). John baptized: a New Covenant sign. Those who came out to the wilderness to see John were introduced to the New Covenant's founder-prophet by an Old Covenant prophet. John gave advice to those who asked. Those who asked were a remnant. His ministry was not aimed at civil rulers. He was speaking to people who recognized that some sort of revolutionary transformation was coming. This is why they went into the wilderness to see him.

And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out

8. The main publisher of liberation theology materials in English is Orbis Books. The Maryknoll Order of the Roman Catholic Church has been the most vocal group in the intellectual defense of the position.

9. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appavelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he (Luke 7:24–28).

John told His listeners to break with the economic practices of his era—of every era—in preparation for a new era. Those who followed His advice about giving away their goods would publicly demonstrate their commitment to the idea that the old order, meaning Old Covenant Israel, was about to be replaced. This would include the established hierarchical system.¹⁰ Faithfulness under these circumstances involved the surrender of any commitment to the old order, including even the family. Jesus said, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law” (Luke 12:51–53). *This represented a fundamental break with the Old Covenant social order.* It was in this context that John had recommended voluntary egalitarianism.

The second example of egalitarianism in action is the practice of common property in church in Jerusalem. “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2: 44–45).¹¹ “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32).¹² The sale of their real estate and other possessions later enabled them to flee the city without looking back when the persecution began after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Never again in the history of the church have all of its members followed this example. This was a one-time event.

10. Chapter 2.

11. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

The gentile churches founded by Paul and other evangelists did not practice common ownership. Members of gentile churches had never been part of the Old Covenant order. But what about egalitarianism as an ideal? Paul did warn the church at Corinth regarding the need for sacrificial giving in order to aid a distant congregation's impoverishment: the church at Jerusalem. This was a unique historical situation, though his recommendation is legitimate as a model of personal righteousness. Paul said specifically that he was not speaking authoritatively in God's name. He was offering advice, not laying down a law.

I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack (II Cor. 8:8–15).

Paul held out the promise of future rewards to those who would give generously. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:6–7). The motivation to give was personal: to reap bountifully. The mark of obedience is cheerfulness. Charity is not to be a matter of sullen duty. It is to be a matter of joyful self-interest. It is surely not to be a matter of state compulsion.

What Paul recommended to Corinth was voluntary generosity. The members of the church at Corinth had previously promised to give. Now Paul was calling on them to honor their promise. He was not speaking about the civil government, nor was he laying down a new law. "I speak not by commandment" (v. 8).

2. Charity Does Not Satisfy Liberationists

Liberation theologians are not content with recommending voluntary charity within the church. This would confine their recommended reforms to individual church members. What they want is power—power for the state and power for those who advise the state. They want politicians and bureaucrats to be able to impose economic equality on threat of civil violence and in the name of God. They seek to empower the modern messianic state in the name of the New Testament's Messiah. By invoking the name of Jesus, they seek to annul Samuel's identification of the messianic state as a high tax state. What Samuel identified as God's negative sanction against rebellious Israel, liberationists see as God's positive sanction on a faithful New Testament political order.

From the beginning, Liberation Theology was the product of liberal theology and either socialist economic theory or Marxist revolutionary theory. Its humanist origins and goals were deliberately concealed by means of biblical language. The liberationists would select a few passages, such as the jubilee year (Lev. 25), in order to deceive the faithful in the pews. But they refused to invoke all of the Mosaic law to defend their system. This was because the Mosaic law does not support socialism or the welfare state.

Their strategy has failed for two reasons. First, liberation theology suffered a mortal wound with the repeated admissions by Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988–91 that the Soviet Union's economy was bankrupt. He went begging for more Western money, in addition to the tens of billions that the Soviet Union had already received from Western governments. His public embarrassment paralyzed the liberationists' efforts to persuade people that their recommended socialistic reforms would benefit society. They were promoting a visibly bankrupt idea in the name of Jesus. Then came the almost bloodless collapse of the Soviet Union, December 31, 1991.¹³ Both Marxism and liberation theology became passé overnight. Power religion worships power, and when power departs, so do power religion's adherents, who renew their search for social redemption elsewhere.

Second, Bible-believing Christians in the pews were almost never attracted to Liberation Theology. They recognized it as foreign to the Bible and the Bible's concept of economic liberty. Only a handful of academics, who had spent their lives in the academic cloisters—usu-

13. A total of three men were killed.

ally tax-supported—were taken in by Liberation Theology’s deception.

The liberals and liberationists had remained inside the halls of ivy for too long. For too long, they had sought formal certification by the humanist academic system. They had internalized its outlook along with its methodology, a methodology that teaches, “The Bible has no authority to judge academic learning.” The liberals and liberationists justified their adoption of this academic methodology by proving to their humanist peers, to themselves, and to the people in the pews that the New Testament is true because it conforms to the teachings of the campus egalitarians. They allowed a radical form of political humanism to judge the New Testament. As for Samuel’s warning, that was based on the Old Testament. The whole Christian world had long since abandoned confidence in the Mosaic law, so the liberationists thought they could afford to ignore Samuel’s warning. The man in the pew would not invoke Samuel’s authority against their creed, for he, too, had lost faith in the Old Testament’s authority. This is why the modern state today extracts four times the tithe or more, yet Christians merely grumble. They do not cry out to God for deliverance. But the man in the pew at least grumbles at the tax burden. The liberals and liberationists grumble because of an insufficient tax burden—on the rich.

Conclusion

Mary’s testimony here makes plain that *economic hierarchy is a permanent condition*. There will be no equality of wealth and influence in the new order to come. There will still be hierarchy. What will change is the ethical system governing success and failure. What will also change is the individuals who occupy the top position. She does not say that all poor people will become rich. That would require an inverted pyramid of wealth and power: 80% (the poor who become rich) ruling 20% (the rich who become poor). She is saying that the minority who are oppressed for righteousness’ sake will become rulers. Their oppressors will lose their high positions. The issue is not wealth or poverty as such; rather, it is the ethical question of covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. God’s system of historical sanctions will create a new world order in which the righteous will flourish as rulers, and the oppressors will lose their high offices.

Mary’s description of God’s intervention on behalf of Israel was a declaration of His covenantal authority. She said specifically that God

had brought sanctions in history in terms of His covenant with Abraham and his successors. “As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever” (v. 55). God would do so again through her son. She had no doubts in this regard. Her prophecy indicates that the covenant with Abraham was still in force. God’s covenantal promises to Abraham would not be annulled by her son. Paul made it clear in his letter to the Galatians that the promises to Abraham were to Mary’s son. These promises now extend to the gentiles through the gospel.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator (Gal. 3:13–19).

God does not capriciously raise up some men and pull down others. He upholds His covenant in history. He stands behind the humble, the powerless, and the hungry in a covenant-breaking social order because He stands behind His covenant. He opposes the proud, the powerful, and the rich in a covenant-breaking social order because He stands behind His covenant. His covenant is hierarchical. There can and must be individual reversals of fortune within the hierarchy because there cannot be a permanent overturning of God’s covenant. There will never be a leveling of the hierarchy.

2

THE END OF THE OLD COVENANT ORDER

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages (Luke 3:9–14).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer. He will lay an axe to the tree. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Sharing as a Prophetic Witness

Three decades (Luke 3:23) after the joint prophecies by Mary and Zacharias (Luke 1:46–56, 68–79),² Zacharias' son John began his public ministry in the wilderness (v. 2). He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (v. 3). The multitudes came to him. He warned them: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (v. 8). The judgment was coming soon, he said. The axe was already being laid to the tree. The listeners responded appro-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapter 1.

priately: “Then what shall we do?” This is the same question that every new convert to Christ should ask. But was John’s answer a universal answer, binding on all generations of new converts?

1. Widespread Poverty

His answer was to recommend charity to the poor by the slightly less poor. If you have two tunics, he said, share one with someone who has no tunic. The person with food should share with the person who is hungry. This announcement came in a society that did not enjoy the massive output of modern capitalism. There were many poor people in Israel. When it came to poverty, there was plenty of it available.

John told his listeners to share some of their wealth with those who had nothing. The recipients were not just poor; they were in desperate trouble. They had no cloak to keep them warm, no food to fill their stomachs. They were facing a personal disaster. For people in this condition, charity was the way to restore their bodies and their hope. Paul later wrote: “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (I Tim. 6:7–8).³ The designated recipients of John’s recommended but limited charity had no warm clothing or no food, and possibly neither food nor warm clothing. They were truly destitute. They faced an immediate crisis. They were in need of immediate assistance.

Was this a call to covenant-keepers to adopt near-poverty status as a result of their helping to alleviate other men’s complete poverty? Did this mean that a person with almost nothing—two cloaks—would now have only one? Wouldn’t this mean that a person with three cloaks should give away two? Would everyone in society have only one cloak? If taken literally, this is what John’s words had to mean.

To whom was he speaking? To those who had come into the wilderness to listen. What message were they hearing? That the old order was about to end. Which old order? The Old Covenant order. Jesus was about to begin His ministry. John was the forerunner. “John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will th[o]roughly purge his floor,

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 9.

and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable” (vv. 16–17). This was a life-and-death matter—eternal life and death.

John had a transitional ministry. He was a great Old Covenant prophet. Jesus said of him, “For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (Matt. 11:10–13). John was great in the Old Covenant era, but he was a minimal figure compared to a typical covenant-keeper in the New Covenant era. This statement did not diminish John; it diminished the Old Covenant in comparison with the New Covenant.

John’s message to the Jews was that they were living in the final days of the Old Covenant order. The axe was being laid to the tree. In this, the final phase of the Old Covenant, Jews should not pride themselves on being sons of Abraham, he said. They should understand the times. It was time to start giving generously. It was time to recognize the transitional nature of earthly wealth.

2. Economic Hierarchy

No society has ever existed without an economic hierarchy. The rules by which people advance themselves differ, society to society, but the hierarchical structure is universal. No church has ever enforced economic equality on its members over a long period of time. If it attempts to do this, it isolates itself, becoming a small sect and more likely a cult. Economic equality is utopian. Yet John seemed to advocate an egalitarian utopia—the opposite of what Mary had prophesied: “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away” (Luke 1:53).⁴ How can we explain this apparent discrepancy?

John recognized the transitional nature of both his ministry and the Old Covenant order. He knew that Jesus would replace him. John was the herald of a new order. When he told his listeners to share with the destitute, he was telling them to break with the existing social or-

4. Chapter 1.

der. There was not much time remaining to do this. What was most important at that moment in Israel's history was not the preservation of personal wealth—not even an extra cloak—but entrance into a new kingdom. By giving to the truly destitute, a person would declare his confidence in the coming order and his lack of confidence in the traditional means of social advancement: wealth. John was not laying the foundations for the social theory of the new kingdom. He was announcing the end of the Old Covenant.

John lived as he preached. He lived in the wilderness, wearing a camel's hair loin cloth, "and his meat was locusts and wild honey" (Matt. 3:4). He was telling his listeners to adopt the mentality of an end-times prophet. Jesus later reminded His listeners about the kind of ministry John's had been. "And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Matt. 11:7–10). People's sacrificial economic actions would serve as evidence of their belief that a new order was imminent.

John was not calling on every future generation to adopt an end-times prophetic witness. He was calling only his listeners to do this. That was because he was living in the last days—the last days of the Old Covenant. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews later confirmed this. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath **in these last days** spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1–2). Common people had come into the wilderness to hear John's message. This was his message: live as though the traditional hierarchy is about to be upended. Live for the sake of those in great need. Do not cling to extra wealth as if there were a future to such wealth. Acknowledge the fact that the axe is being laid to the tree.

He said this to Jews, who would be tempted to use their descent from Abraham as a justification for their continuing hope in the continuation of the Old Covenant order. He had a different message for Israel's Roman rulers.

B. Contentment Without Oppression

“Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (vv. 12–14). Tax collectors and soldiers not only came to hear John, they accepted his kingdom message. But this means that they viewed themselves as under his covenantal warning. The soldiers were not Jews, yet they recognized their need for repentance. They recognized that John was not espousing a system of ethnic ethics. He was prophesying a radical change.

John knew how this tax collection system worked. Local agents were tempted to collect more than the local government had been assessed by Rome to pay. He told the tax collectors to collect only what they had been assigned. They were not to use the civil power to collect more than this. To do so would be a misuse of civil power. It would be fraud.

To the soldiers, he said much the same. Do not accuse anyone falsely. Do not use the civil power to gain anything beyond wages. Do not use lawful power for personal gain. In other words, *do not oppress people*. This had been the message of the prophets ever since the great prophet, Moses, confronted Pharaoh. The use of civil power to oppress people economically is wrong.⁵ There is always a temptation to use power in this way. This temptation should be resisted, John said.

This message challenged the misuse of civil authority. It placed limits on the bureaucrats who served the state. It was a call for legal predictability. Tax collectors were to collect only what was actually owed. Soldiers were not to extort money from people on threat of violence. Under such a restricted system, the public was supposed to be able to estimate the costs of civil peace that the state was established to secure. The public would then benefit from legal predictability. This is always an advantage. It allows people to count the cost (Luke 14:28–30).⁶

The ethical issue was justice. John called on the rulers to act justly. Righteousness for rulers begins with the establishment of justice. Un-

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. ch. 48.

6. Chapter 35.

righteousness begins with oppression, i.e., the misuse of state power for personal advancement.

Conclusion

John was a prophet. He brought a covenant lawsuit. It was a lawsuit against Old Covenant Israel. He warned his listeners that it was time for them to change their ways. The axe was being laid to the tree. A great time of change was imminent. It had to do with the advent of the promised Messiah.

John was telling his Jewish listeners to expect a great change. For economically oppressed Jews, it was time to begin sharing their wealth with their poorer brethren in expectation of this change. This would demonstrate their commitment to acting righteously. Fearless charity was an ethical principle for a time of covenantal transition, a mark of true brotherliness. This was not a universal denial of the legitimacy of economic inequality in society.

For Roman officials who heard his message, it was time to stop using the state to advance their personal fortunes. The strong are not to oppress the poor. The use of the state's monopoly of violence to gain personal economic advantage is wrong, John said. This remains a valid principle of civil justice. *Theft is wrong, and oppression of the politically defenseless through state coercion is theft.* This message is not limited to men who were living at the end of the Old Covenant order, yet outside its authority, as these Romans were.

Why isn't economic equality a valid principle for all time? Because of the covenantal principle of hierarchy. Different people have different skills, different degrees of responsibility, and different callings before God. One level of income does not compensate fairly all people. Building and running a society require the division of labor. Not all skills are equally valuable to customers. People must be paid according to their contribution in satisfying customers, who pay the bills. But what about after payment? Why not voluntary equality? Because people's responsibilities vary. *They require different levels of wealth to achieve different levels of service.*

John was not calling on every Jew to strip himself of wealth, the way that he himself had done. He was telling those Jews who recognized the radical nature of his ministry that the end of the Old Covenant order was at hand. God's axe was being laid to the roots of the tree. The old ways were no longer appropriate. The best way to acknow-

ledge this was selfless charity to the destitute.

Jesus echoed John's warning throughout His earthly ministry, which was aimed at Jews. John's covenant lawsuit against Israel was also His. This is why Jesus' message of personal commitment mandated an unconventional degree of charity.⁷ In a time of national disruption, some people will find themselves in great need. Those with extra assets should be ready to share with their impoverished brethren.

7. Chapter 26.

3

STONES INTO BREAD: POWER RELIGION¹

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God (Luke 4:1–4).

The theocentric principle of this law is the centrality of the law of God in man's life. This is point three of the biblical covenant: law.²

A. The Wilderness Experience

The story of the wilderness temptation appears in two of the four Gospels: Matthew and Luke. This event was a recapitulation of the temptation in the garden. But there were differences. First, Jesus was not in the midst of plenty. Second, He was suffering from hunger. Adam had labored under neither of these burdens. There was a third important difference: there was no intermediary tempter. This time, Satan did not use a serpent as his covenantal agent, nor was there a woman involved. He approached Jesus directly. In short, Jesus was tempted under especially difficult circumstances.

The issues were these: Whose word should man use to help him set his priorities? Was the priority of immediate gratification worth the

1. This chapter is adapted from chapter 1 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

act of transforming stones into bread? Or was there a higher priority? What is the lawful source of man's satisfaction: earthly assets or the grace of God? Here Jesus gave us the answer: God's word. Our desires in life must be met by relying on God's word, not by relying on whatever we own or whatever we can obtain on our own authority. *The ultimate source of treasure in life is God's grace-based revelation in His word.*

In this first temptation, the devil did not ask Jesus to do anything inherently wrong. Jesus subsequently used His supernatural power to turn a few loaves of bread and a few fishes into a meal that fed thousands (Matt. 14:21). Then He did it again (Matt. 15:38). Why did the devil use this temptation to begin the series? It was a matter of historical context. The question before Jesus was the question of causation. Which is more fundamental, power or obedience? Jesus made it plain: obedience. The word of God is superior to autonomous power. It is also superior to a man's temporary desires. By appealing to the Bible, Jesus made it plain that He would not sacrifice law to expedient power.

The context of Jesus' scriptural citation was the wilderness experience of the Israelites. Moses recounted to the conquest generation the miracles of God in sustaining the people in the wilderness for four decades. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3).³ That is, God had granted them a miracle—manna—which they made into bread. The manna had demonstrated both God's power over history and His grace to His people.⁴ They could trust Him to sustain them. In the future, they would need bread, but they had needed it in the wilderness, too, and God had supplied it supernaturally.

God had made it plain to them: He is sovereign over history. He had given them His law at Sinai.⁵ His law is sovereign over history. To gain the blessings of God in history, men must obey His law (Deut. 28:1–14).⁶ What sustains man in history is God's specially revealed word, which includes His specially revealed law.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion; An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion*, ch. 18.

5. *Ibid.*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986).

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

The heart of the wilderness experience was not the manna or the clothes that did not wear out. The heart of that experience was the self-discipline of having faith in God. The transfer of authority from the exodus generation to the conquest generation came through the latter's experience of a daily miracle: manna. They had grown up in the context of miracles. But, upon entering the Promised Land, submitting to circumcision and eating Passover, the Israelites were immediately cut off from the miracle of manna (Josh. 5:12). They would henceforth eat the fruit of the land. To remain in the land, they were required to obey God's revealed law (Deut. 8:19–20).⁷

Jesus reminded the devil of the requirement for maintaining the kingdom grant: obedience.⁸ *Prosperity is not a matter of power; it is a matter of covenantal obedience.* His power over the stones was unquestioned. The devil did not suggest otherwise. In fact, the temptation rested on the presupposition that Jesus possessed such power. The nature of this temptation was an appeal to power. This was one more example of the power religion vs. the dominion religion.⁹ Jesus refused to invoke power rather than ethics.

B. Miracles as Welfare¹⁰

The move from Egypt to Canaan is a model of the move from slavery to freedom. The model of a free society is not Israel's miraculous wilderness experience, where God gave them manna and removed many burdens of entropy.¹¹ The predictable miracles of the wilderness era were designed to humble them, not raise them up. The wilderness experience was not marked by economic growth but by economic stagnation and total dependence. They were not allowed to save extra portions of manna, which rotted (Ex. 16:20). On the move continually, they could not dig wells, plant crops, or build houses. At best, they may have been able to increase their herds, as nomads do (Num. 3:45; 20:4; 32:1). The wilderness experience was a means of teaching them that God acts in history to sustain His people. The wilderness economy with its regular miracles was not to become an ideal toward which covenant-keepers should strive. Israel longed for escape from the wilderness. It was God's curse on the exodus generation that they

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 17:C.

9. North, *Authority and Dominion*, pp. 1–3.

10. This section appeared originally in North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

11. Chapter 18

would die in the wilderness.

The wilderness economy was a welfare economy. The Israelites were supplied with basic necessities, even though the people did not work. But they lacked variety. People without the ability to feed themselves were fed by God: same old diet. People without the ability to clothe themselves were clothed by God: same old fashions. Israel wandered aimlessly because the exodus generation had refused to march into war (Num. 14). They were not fit to lead; so, they had to follow. They were welfare clients; they had no authority over the conditions of their existence. They took what was handed out to them. And, like welfare clients generally, they constantly complained that their life style just wasn't good enough (Num. 11).¹² They had been unwilling to pay the price of freedom: conquest. God therefore cursed them to endure four decades of welfare economics. The only good thing about the wilderness welfare program was that it did not use the state as the agency of positive blessings. No one was coerced into paying for anyone else's life style. God used a series of miracles to sustain them all. There was no coercive program of wealth redistribution. Israel was a welfare society, not a welfare state.

The lure of the welfare state remains with responsibility-avoiding men in every era. It was this lure which attracted the crowds to Jesus. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:26). They wanted a king who would feed them. They viewed Jesus as a potential candidate for king because He could multiply bread. They associated free food with political authority. He knew this, so He departed from them (John 6:11–15).

Men in their rebellion against God want to believe in a state that can heal them. They believe in salvation by law. They prefer to live under the authority of a messianic state, meaning a healer state, rather than under freedom. They want to escape the burdens of personal and family responsibility in this world of cursed scarcity. They want to live as children live, as recipients of bounty without a price tag. They are willing to sacrifice their liberty and the liberty of others in order to attain this goal.

One mark of spiritual immaturity is the quest for economic miracles: stones into bread. The price of this alchemical wealth is always the same: the worship of Satan. "And when the tempter came to him,

12. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 7.

he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:3–4).¹³ Modern welfare economics teaches that the state can provide such miracles through positive economic policy, i.e., by taking wealth from some and transferring it to others, either directly or through monetary inflation. This belief is the presupposition of the Keynesian revolution, which dominated twentieth-century economic thought, 1936–1990. John Maynard Keynes actually described credit expansion—the heart of his system—as the “miracle . . . of turning a stone into bread.”¹⁴

When Israel crossed into the Promised Land, the identifying marks of their wilderness subordination were removed by God: the manna and their permanent clothing. This annulment of the welfare economy was necessary for their spiritual maturation and their liberation. The marks of their subordination to God would henceforth be primarily confessional and ethical. The only food miracle that would remain in Israel would be the triple crop two years prior to a jubilee (Lev. 25:21).¹⁵ God promised to substitute a new means of Israel's preservation: economic growth. No longer would they be confined to manna and the same old clothing. Now they would be able to multiply their wealth. The zero-growth world of the welfare society would be replaced by the pro-growth world of covenantal remembrance. But then they would forget the source of their economic success.

C. Something for Nothing

The devil offered Jesus a familiar temptation: something for nothing. Jesus could easily have taken something common and without economic value and converted it into something valuable. A stone was a common item in the wilderness. It commanded no price. There were more stones available at zero price than there was demand for them. Not so with bread. Bread commanded a price. For a hungry man with money to spend, bread commands a high price if there is only one

13. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

14. Keynes (anonymous), *Paper of the British Experts* (April 8, 1943), cited in Ludwig von Mises, “Stones into Bread, the Keynesian Miracle,” *Plain Talk* (1948), reprinted in Henry Hazlitt (ed.), *The Critics of Keynesian Economics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1960), p. 306. (<http://bit.ly/HazlittCKE>)

15. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 26.

seller. In the wilderness, Jesus was hungry. He presumably would have paid for bread, but either there was no nearby seller or He had no money. How would He relieve His hunger?

The answer was obvious to the supreme master of the power religion: convert stones into bread. Say the word, and it would be done, Satan told Jesus. Just say the word. Invoke power. But under these circumstances, this would not be power from above; it would be power from below.¹⁶ Why? Because of the context of the temptation. This was a recapitulation of the setting of the Fall of man. Adam had the power to eat the forbidden fruit, but he lacked the lawful authority to do so. Jesus had the power to turn stones into bread; like Adam, He also lacked the lawful authority to do so. Why? Was He not God? Yes, but He was also man. He was under authority. This authority was judicial. He was under the word of God, the authority over man.

Satan was suggesting a shortcut to satisfaction: no work, no payment of money, no delayed gratification. All it would cost was . . . what? A return to the welfare society of the wilderness. The Israelites had been sustained miraculously, but they had no other way to survive. The wilderness could not sustain them. Miracles could. To gain wealth in the Promised Land, they were required to work (Deut. 8: 10). The miracle of the manna had ceased. The mature way to wealth is through sacrifice of present consumption for the sake of future income: thrift. The devil was offering Jesus miracles in the wilderness as a way of life. This meant leaving the devil in control of society through his disciples: the power religion. There would be no righteous conquest through covenant-keeping. All Jesus had to do was formalize the power religion to satisfy his hunger. He refused.

What is the basis of life? God's grace. It is an unmerited gift.¹⁷ *Grace precedes law, but law always follows grace.* Man maintains his grant from God through obedience to God.¹⁸ This ability to obey is also a form of grace. The basis of the church's extension of God's kingdom in history is the grace of God through the predictability of His sanctions. Obedience to the word of God is the basis of wealth. Anything that detracts from this social cause-and-effect relationship should not be trusted.

16. R. J. Rushdoony, "Power from Below," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I (Summer, 1975).

17. The gift is unmerited by fallen man. It is merited by the perfect life of Jesus Christ in history.

18. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 17:C.

God's grace is unearned by its recipients. They gain something for nothing. Jesus paid something; men receive it for nothing. *Because all life rests on grace, the concept of something for nothing is inherent in creation.* The sun, moon, and stars were made for man (Gen. 1:14–17).¹⁹ But, ever since the Fall of man, there has always been a price required by God for every benefit enjoyed by any creature: *the death of an acceptable sacrifice.* God has a doctrine of something for nothing: grace grounded in a substitutionary atonement. The devil was asking Jesus to substitute his version of something for nothing in place of God's version. Yet Satan's offer was and is an illusion: a price must be paid for whatever men receive from him. Satan is no less a recipient of God's common grace than man. He does not deserve life, power, or time, but God grants these gifts to him. He owns nothing on his own; God supplies him with everything.²⁰ So, the person who believes in Satan's version of something for nothing—the invocation of supernatural power to achieve man's autonomous ends—has become his servant. His servants will pay the price in eternity.

D. Living by God's Word

The devil asked Jesus to substitute power religion for dominion religion. Just say the word, he suggested. But the word that counts most is God's word, not man's word, Jesus replied. As a creature dependent on the creation, man lives by bread, but not by bread alone. He lives by God's word. *This is a denial of the twin doctrines of common grace and natural law as stand-alone principles of social order.* Man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Modern man wants to find laws that operate autonomously from God's word. Modern economics is a self-conscious attempt to reason about social cause and effect without any appeal to morality or the supernatural. But such an attempt is an illusion; it always imports moral values through the back door. Specifically, in order to justify public policies by means of an appeal to economic science, economists pre-

19. No passage is more hostile to Darwinism than this one, for it teaches that something in the creation was made for man's benefit—the ultimate testimony against Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection. Darwin's theory rests on the mandatory idea that all benefits to any creature that it obtains from another creature were originally for the benefit of the other creature. Nothing exterior to any creature can be said to have been designed for its benefit.

20. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

tend that political representatives can make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of other individuals' subjective utility, as if there were a common value scale across independent, autonomous people. But no such value scale exists.²¹

Similarly, in political theory, some men still appeal to Stoic principles of natural law and natural morality. The state is supposedly not to invoke God's word as the basis of legislation and judicial decision-making. The natural law theorist insists that man can live apart from every word that proceeds from God's special revelation. Not only can man do so, he must do so. Any appeal to the Bible as a standard above the common reason of all mankind is said to be an illegitimate appeal.²²

To invoke a hypothetical common moral reasoning process, let alone agreed-upon logical conclusions, of covenant-breaking man, is comparable to commanding stones into bread. Modern man believes in stones into bread on this basis: a world not under God's Bible-revealed law. He wants his daily bread only on these terms. Jesus announced that man does not live by bread alone. This means that man cannot live by his own word. Any appeal to man and man's wisdom as the source of bread is an illegitimate appeal. Eventually, such an appeal will produce hunger in history and terror in eternity.

Conclusion

Jesus here denied the validity of power religion in its supernatural form: *magic*. But, by appealing to the word of God, He also denied power religion in its natural form: *autonomy*. Man lives by bread, but

21. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5; cf. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

22. Wrote Norman Geisler, a premillennial fundamentalist follower of Thomas Aquinas: "The cry to return to our Christian roots is seriously misguided if it means that government should favor Christian teachings. . . . First, to establish such a Bible-based civil government would be a violation of the First Amendment. Even mandating the Ten Commandments would favor certain religions. . . . Furthermore, the reinstitution of the Old Testament legal system is contrary to New Testament teaching. Paul says clearly that Christians 'are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14). . . . The Bible may be informative, but it is not normative for civil law." Norman L. Geisler, "Should We Legislate Morality?" *Fundamentalist Journal* (July/Aug. 1988), p. 17. He continues: "What kind of laws should be used to accomplish this: Christian laws or Humanistic laws? Neither. Rather, they should simply be just laws. Laws should not be either Christian or anti-Christian; they should be merely fair ones." *Ibid.*, p. 64. For my response, see North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 65:H:2.

also by every word that God has uttered. God's word is the supreme form of wealth. It is intangible wealth. It is more fundamental than tangible wealth, even bread in the life of a hungry person. When man forgets this, he eventually suffers the consequences in history and eternity.

This passage does not dismiss bread as irrelevant. On the contrary, bread is said to be a source of life. Jesus referred to Himself as the bread of life (John 6:35, 48). But the word of God is superior to bread as a source of life. It was not bread that had sustained Jesus in the wilderness; it was God's word, which He proved by using it against Satan. This passage places bread in subordination to word. It therefore places tangible wealth in subordination to the intangible wealth of God's verbal revelation.

Jesus invoked God's word to defeat Satan, who suggested a way to eat bread without a recipe (planning), grain, or labor: something for nothing. Jesus rejected this religion of magic. He proclaimed a religion of faith and ethics, word and deed. To live biblically means to obey God. This is the basis of true wealth in its broadest meaning.

The top priority here is the substitution of covenantal faithfulness for power. Obedience is primary; positive sanctions in history are secondary. The lawful means of gaining what we need and want is our reliance on God's word. In economic theory, this means the rejection of all explanations of national wealth that are based on an appeal to the productivity of autonomous, God-ignoring schemes or philosophies. This outlook rejects the humanist ideal of the state as a healer, and also the libertarian ideal of the state as a morally neutral night watchman.

4

THE KINGDOMS OF MAN: POWER RELIGION¹

And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Luke 4:5–8).

This temptation is the third and final one in Matthew (Matt. 4:9–10). The chronological sequence provided in Matthew's Gospel is more likely than the one in Luke's, because it ends with the culminating desire of man: to rule his own kingdom. The first temptation is the same in each gospel: stones into bread. Jesus was called on to do this. The second in Matthew is leaping from the temple. The angels were to protect him. The third was this one. Here, Satan is the sovereign bringer of rewards. This seems consistent with the series of temptations: Satan as the replacement god, as he was for Adam and Eve.

The theocentric principle here is the worship of God: point one of the biblical covenant.² It is not clear which passage in the Old Covenant that Jesus was paraphrasing. One possibility: "Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name" (Deut. 6:13).³ It may have been this: "I am the LORD thy God, which brought

1. This adapted from chapter 3 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

3. This is Hendriksen's opinion. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Comment-*

thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me” (Deut. 5:6–7).

The choice here was obvious: the kingdom of God vs. the kingdoms of man. The test involved an assessment of costs and benefits. A present-oriented power-seeker would have picked the kingdoms of man. Jesus did not choose this. We can infer several reasons for this refusal.

A. Who Owns the Earth?

It is obvious that this vision of the kingdoms of man was no earthly vision. The earth is a globe. There is no earthly mountain that allows you to view all of man’s kingdoms at one time. This was a representative mountain, the pinnacle of man. It was what the Tower of Babel was meant to be: “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).⁴ This was a place where man would imitate God, viewing his kingdoms.

On what legal basis did Satan make this offer? None. It was a lie. He did not possess either the power or the authority to reward Jesus for worshiping him. He did not possess such power, for he is a creature under God. He did not possess such authority, because he is in rebellion.

Then why is Satan described as the prince of this world (John 12:31; Eph. 2:2)? Because mankind transferred covenantal allegiance to him through Adam. Adam surrendered allegiance to God and substituted allegiance to his own judgment. But, in doing so, he merely substituted the worship of Satan for the worship of God. Adam was in a position to choose whose word he would accept: God’s or the serpent’s. He was never in a position to establish himself as lord of creation. God alone has this authority. To imagine that man possesses it is to substitute foolishness for wisdom. It is to worship power rather than lawful authority. But Satan possesses more power than man. Man will lose this contest. Power religion is Satan’s religion. Man cannot come out on top in this religion.

Because God delegated authority to man, Adam possessed the ability to switch his allegiance. In doing so, he came under the domin-

ary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 237.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 19.

ion of sin. Sin now rules man. Satan and his fallen angels exercise power from time to time, but man's sin is their avenue to power in history. This is why Paul wrote: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:12–14). This describes a spiritual war. It is a spiritual war fought on the battleground of ethics. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

So, when Satan offered the kingdoms of man to Jesus, he was offering to give to the last Adam (I Cor. 15:45) what the first Adam had surrendered to him. If Jesus had accepted the offer, He would have recapitulated the Fall. This offer was a variation of the serpent's original offer: to render unto Satan what belongs to God. The worship of Satan was implicit in man's acceptance of the truth of the offer, both in the garden and on the mountain. In the name of man's sovereignty, Satan lured Adam into subordination to him. He tried this again with Jesus.

B. No Other God

Jesus' answer was clear: only God may be lawfully worshipped. The kingdoms of man must be formally restored to their previous legal condition: subordinate to a unified kingdom of God. There is one God, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). There is therefore only one legitimate kingdom in history. Any man who seeks to exercise sovereignty over all the kingdoms of man is calling for unification of these kingdoms under himself. He has fallen for the old lure, "ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5).

Jesus had come to restore covenantal unity to the kingdoms of man: *a unity of confession*. He was God's agent in this restoration. His was the kingdom prophesied by Daniel. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). Any man who would challenge the establishment of God's kingdom in history would be wise to heed Daniel's warning to

Nebuchadnezzar: “That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:25).

There is no other God. There is no other permanent kingdom. But there are pretender gods. There are pretender kingdoms. Satan was a pretender god offering Jesus pretender kingdoms. Jesus did not accept the offer, for He knew the truth: there is no other God but God. Satan could not deliver on his promise.

C. The Lure of a Kingdom

In a frequently quoted but rarely believed passage, Jesus warned, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).⁵ Men build sand castles and call them kingdoms. These may be large sand castles or more modest ones. But their fate is the same: to be washed away (Matt. 7:25–27).

This warning was not given only to that handful of men in history who believe they are in a position to build a kingdom. It was given to every man who believes that he can construct walls around his life that cannot be penetrated by his enemies. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).⁶ The only possessions that are guaranteed to stand the test of time are stored outside of time. “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:33–34).⁷

This temptation has been used again and again in history to lure men to destruction. In the twentieth century, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao all sought to build permanent kingdoms, and all failed.⁸ The kingdoms

5. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 35. See chapter 19, below.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

7. Chapter 26. See also North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

8. Hitler’s promised thousand-year reich lasted from 1933 to 1945. Stalin’s kingdom lasted from his access to power 1928 to its collapse under Gorbachev in 1991. Mao’s People’s Republic of China began in 1949 and still exists in name and as a military force, but his successor, Deng, allowed the peasants of Red China to adopt capitalist ownership in 1978. Private ownership of the means of production spread rapidly

of man all suffer the same fate: to be swallowed up by time.

Satan's lure is a powerful one in history. Arrogant men build political kingdoms in confidence. Fearful men build economic kingdoms because they know no other way. The effort in both cases is futile. Economic kingdom-builders are afflicted by a kind of madness. "A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease" (Eccl. 6:2). The rich man builds up an inheritance for others. He cannot control what his heirs will do with this accumulated wealth.

D. Wealth, and Power, and Safety

The first temptation had to do with the creation of wealth. If man can take stones and turn them into bread, he escapes the curse of nature. He returns to the garden of Eden on his own authority, on his own terms. The third temptation in Luke's account offered Jesus life without the risk of pain. Man escapes another curse of nature. If he then rules over all of men's kingdoms, he replaces God. He imposes curses and blessings as a sovereign.

The first temptation offered pure autonomy to Jesus: on His own authority, to turn stones into bread. The third asked Him to acknowledge His physical subordination to God and the angels, but not His ethical subordination: forfeiting His messianic redemptive assignment. The second got to the covenantal point: His worship of Satan. The previous temptation had sought to lure Him away indirectly from the worship of God. This one called Him to break covenant with God openly.

The first temptation involved the sin of magic. The third was ethical: tempting God. This one was political. The others offered to place Jesus outside of nature's constraints. This one offered to place Him outside of history's constraints. All three offered Him below-market costs of living. Food, power, and safety were all His for the asking, Satan assured Him. But we are never offered something for nothing, except God's grace. There was an implied exchange: the surrender of Jesus' soul. This exchange is always a bad bargain. The hidden costs are eternal.

through the Chinese economy. So did an economic boom. So has the Christian church.

Why did Satan believe that Jesus might fall for one of these temptations? Did he believe that Jesus' perfection was vulnerable? He must have. He understood that Jesus was a representative of the race of man. He believed that he had an opportunity to lure Jesus into a recapitulation of the Fall of man: the acceptance of power religion. Satan has great faith in power. These were the lures that tempted him. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:12–14). This was Isaiah's warning to Babylon (Isa. 13:19). But to warn Babylon, he invoked the imagery of the archetype of all political kingdom-building: Satan's rebellion. I conclude that Satan must view God's exercise of power as power for power's sake, not as extensions of God's character. He is himself blinded ethically by the lure of power. Satan's religion is the power religion.

Conclusion

Jesus did not substitute allegiance to Satan for allegiance to God. He understood the fundamental principle of biblical religion: man's covenantal subordination to God. Man is under God (Gen. 1:26–28). He is required to honor God by worshipping Him as the sovereign Creator. Jesus refused to break covenant with God by adopting either magic or empire-building politics, both of which are forms of the power religion. He recognized the hidden costs of the power religion: the loss of one's soul. Power religion publicly offers something for nothing. In fact, it demands something supremely valuable (eternal soul) for something far less valuable (temporary power). *Power religion is ultimately a religion of nothing for something.* "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have" (Luke 8:18).⁹

Our priority as covenant-keepers is to affirm the kingdom of God by shunning the kingdoms of man. We must seek to transform man's kingdoms through evangelism. This is not a call to pietistic withdrawal from social involvement. On the contrary, it is a call to worldwide

9. Chapter 16.

dominion in history—a dominion guaranteed by Christ for His people.¹⁰

10. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

5

RISK-FREE LIVING: POWER RELIGION¹

And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God (Luke 4:9–12).

The theocentric principle of this law is the holiness of God: point three of the biblical covenant.² He is not to be trifled with for man's purposes. He is not to be called to account by man—the message of the book of Job.³

A. Tempting God

This is the second temptation in Matthew. I think the chronological sequence in Matthew is correct.⁴

The offer here was risk-free living. This is a long-desired goal for

1. This is adapted from chapter 2 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

3. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

4. Matthew's account ends with the biggest offer from Satan: the kingdoms of this world. He was making the offer. In the first two, Satan was relying on Jesus (stones into bread) and the angels (protection). In the third temptation, Satan pretends to possess the lawful authority to act as God does: being worshipped and extending kingdoms.

man. It cannot be attained in this life, but risk-reduction is a universal practice. The modern science of statistics was initially developed by men who were seeking to lower their risk.⁵ Risk-reduction does not come at zero price. The question is: How high a price? What was Satan asking Jesus to exchange in order to demonstrate His legal claim to this promise? What was this demonstration worth to Jesus? Did Jesus even possess such a legal claim to this promise? If He did, why did He not assert His claim here?

Jesus answered the devil in the first temptation by an appeal to the Bible, i.e., the word of God. Having allowed the text of the Bible to establish this principle of authority, He cited the Bible again: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The full text of the verse throws light on the context. "Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah" (Deut. 6:16). The context of the Israelites' infraction was their cry for water in the wilderness, and their accusation that God had to prove Himself by the provision of water.

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not? (Ex. 17:1-7).

God provided them with water. Moses struck the rock, and water flowed out of it. This was a demonstration of God's power. But it was a demonstration that condemned them to second-class citizenship.

5. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

They became psychologically dependent on repeated supernatural displays of God's power over nature. They did not learn to trust His covenant law. They learned to complain again and again, whining for their desires. "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:16). They never grew up. Even Moses was later snared by their commitment to magic as a way of life. He struck the other rock twice to draw water out of it, despite the fact that God had told him to speak to the rock, not strike it (Num. 20:10–12). He used ritual instead of relying on God's word—the essence of magic.⁶

B. To Protect the Messiah

The devil cited a portion of Psalm 91.⁷ This is sometimes regarded as a messianic psalm. It refers to long life for the person spoken of. But long life was what was *not* granted to the Messiah in his role as redeemer. Jesus died young. How could this passage have applied to Him? "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. **With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation**" (Ps. 91:10–16).

6. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 11.

7. In Luke's account, the citation comes from the Septuagint, Psalm 90:11–12. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 238.

1. A Suffering Messiah

Satan cited a verse which, if applied literally to Jesus, would have meant that He could not serve as the Passover's sacrificial lamb, a young sacrifice. The Mosaic Covenant's sacrificial animals were young.⁸ If this passage applied literally to Jesus in His pre-resurrection phase, then it meant that the world would not have a savior. He would survive the fall from the temple, but mankind would not survive a Messiah blessed with longevity. Israel might gain a long-lived king; it would not gain a savior.

The difficulty in interpreting this prophecy as messianic is the opposite message in a crucial messianic prophecy, Isaiah's prophecy of substitutionary atonement.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the

8. Leviticus 1:14; Numbers 28:19; Numbers 29:13; Luke 2:24.

transgressors (Isa. 53:1–12).

If this applied to Jesus, then the prophecy in Psalm 91 either did not apply to Jesus in His office as Messiah, or else it applied as an inheritance that He abandoned. The question is, if the passage in Psalm 91 did not apply to Jesus, to whom did it apply? No one in Old Covenant history claimed it as his own. If not Jesus, then who? I conclude that this psalm offered this set of unique conditions to Jesus, but He refused to claim the inheritance as His. He refused it here, and in response, God the Father refused to honor it on Calvary. On the cross, Jesus called out to God: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46b). God remained silent. Yet the passage affirms: “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation” (Ps. 91:14–16). This promise was no longer in force. Why not? Because Jesus forfeited any claim to it by fulfilling the role of the suffering Messiah. So, the psalm was not messianic.

2. A Leap of Faith

Satan proposed a test. If Jesus failed it, there would be no substitutionary sacrifice, no execution. There would only be a dead body on the ground. On the other hand, if Jesus survived, then He was a premature heir to this promise, and therefore He could not be the prophesied lamb led to the slaughter. It was a lose-lose offer for Jesus, and a win-win offer for Satan. Jesus declined to accept the challenge.

Jesus cited the law against tempting God. Yet Gideon had doubted the call from God, and had proposed a pair of tests involving a fleece (Jud. 6:37–40). What is wrong with such demonstrations of God’s intentions? Nothing, just so long as the information desired has not been revealed authoritatively in the Bible. Gideon had no way to be sure that he was speaking to a representative of God. There was no written revelation that applied to his situation. Not so with Jesus. He knew that the verse cited was applicable to Him, but only as a statement of the protection available to Him, not as a prophecy the actual details of His life. He was not going to prove its applicability in a way that might produce His immediate death or validate His non-messianic long life. Neither result was appropriate for His work on earth.

The reason why this leap of faith would have constituted the tempting of God was because such a life-or-death test was imposed by

man on his own authority. The Israelites had made this mistake: “Is God with us?” they had asked. “Let him prove it by offering us life-sustaining water.” But God had already done so: at the Red Sea. The life-sustaining water for Israel was the death-inducing water for Egypt. They had seen this miracle, but it no longer made any impression on them. They required another test. And another. There would be no end to the required tests if the Israelites of the exodus had anything to say about it.

Their addiction to miracles was very great. It was part of their slave’s mentality. The slave relies on someone else to sustain him with capital. He is not ready to become an independent person. The exodus generation had not been willing to accept the responsibility of war against Canaan (Num. 14). They had to wander for a generation until they died off. Jesus was not addicted to miracles for His own sake. He provided them for Israel’s sake. He used them to establish a covenant lawsuit against Israel. “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Matt. 11:23–24). That generation would die in its sins as surely as the exodus generation had.

C. Life Has Risks

Life has risks. We dash our feet against stones. We slip and fall. Because of sin, we suffer the negative sanctions of pain and failure. We suffer death. In this sense, we live a high-risk existence.

Satan was offering Jesus risk-free living. For the Messiah, such risk-free living would mean the death of man. The Messiah was to experience separation from God on behalf of man—the ultimate risk. For Him, there was no escape, so that for His people there is an escape. There was no way that Jesus could live risk-free and still perform His work as redeemer.

Men want to lower their risks. This is legitimate, in the same sense that seeking to lower any of our costs is legitimate. But to seek risk-free living is to seek slavery and death. It is comparable to seeking cost-free living. Such a quest is demonic in history: the overcoming of sin’s curse without overcoming sin.

The most successful technical means of reducing risk is economic

growth. We gain more wealth, which can be used to shield us from unpleasant events. Then there is the discovery of the laws of mathematical probability.⁹

This has drastically reduced risk. But no means of risk reduction should be elevated above God's offer of protection: not insurance, not wealth, not power. Any rival source of risk reduction will eventually be worshiped by man. It will then demand sacrifice.

In the second half of the twentieth century, vast bureaucracies were created around the world that sought to reduce risks for all people under the jurisdiction of the state. But risks must be borne by someone. The cost of paying for unforeseen negative events must be borne by someone. Increasingly, the state insists that it will pay for the errors of men. The state imposes taxes on the successful in order to compensate those who have failed. This is not an insurance transaction in which men contract with each other through a third party to insure against statistically predictable losses. It is not a transaction based on a cost-benefit estimation of those who are asked to pay. The costs are imposed by coercion on those who do not possess effective political influence. This coercive wealth redistribution policy raises costs. Employers bear a heavy load of responsibility in the government's many systems of risk reduction. So, employers seek out employees who are less likely to be injured, fail, or in other ways cost the employers extra money. Those employers who are required to pay seek ways of excluding from the arrangement those who are statistically more likely to be paid.

The modern administrative law order has extended the definition of social risk and has extended its net to haul in more people to bear such risk. Men seek to be protected by the state's many economic safety nets, yet they also seek to escape the nets tossed out to entrap those with capital. The end of such a game of hide and seek is sure: the increase in the number of those who are promised safety and the loss of freedom for those who are required to pay. At some point, the safety nets will break, breaking men's faith in the state, and breaking the state's nets of entrapment. When this happens, all those who are dependent on the broken safety nets will find themselves weak and defenseless against social change. The very collapse of the nets will accelerate social change, increasing risks for all.

9. Bernstein, *Against the Gods*.

Conclusion

The Messiah had to bear risks. The messianic state must also bear risks. The Messiah did not attempt to test the existence of a safety net from God. He bore His own risks and ours as well.

The messianic state seeks to transfer risks to taxpayers and others with capital. The result will be an unprecedented disaster. Hundreds of millions of people have been lured into one or another of the Stare's safety nets. When these nets break, those caught inside them will have a great fall.

The top priority of this passage is to live by God's word, but not by expectations of abnormal supernatural intervention. A religion of risk-defying acts in defiance of God's law is a religion of magic. Biblical religion is not magical. It does not rely on man-invoked supernatural miracles to enable man to achieve the good life. It also does not invoke the state as a provider of safety nets against the economic results of either risk-avoiding failure¹⁰ or needlessly risky foolishness.

10. The parable of the pounds: the man who buried his (Luke 19:12–15). See Chapter 46.

6

LIBERATION FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised [downtrodden, oppressed], To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:16–21).

The theocentric principle here is God as liberator, the defender of the weak. Deliverance is point two of the biblical covenant.¹ The model is God as the deliverer of Israel in Egypt.²

A. Deliverance

This passage invokes the language of deliverance. It is from Isaiah 61:1–2. The prophet’s language promised longed-for deliverance. The jubilee year was the year of deliverance for the poor of Israel under the Mosaic law (Lev. 25). It was the archetype of liberation, the restoration of the family’s land to those who had been dispossessed or sold into

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

servitude.

The Hebrew Masoretic text does not mention sight to the blind. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) does. William Hendriksen mentioned an alternate reading of the Hebrew text, “to those bound opening of eyes.”³ But the Septuagint’s rendering is “to the blind recovery of sight,” just as Jesus quoted it.⁴ Jesus gave sight to the blind on several occasions. These miracles were literal fulfillments of the prophecy in Isaiah, as recorded in the Septuagint.

The phrase, “to set free the oppressed,” does not appear in the Hebrew Masoretic text, the Greek Septuagint, or the Aramaic Peshita. There is no obvious explanation for this discrepancy. Was this phrase Jesus’ comment on the text, offered without warning in the middle of the reading? If He had added to the text, some of His listeners would have recognized this discrepancy. This would have undermined His authority. But there was no objection. Did this scroll differ from the copies that we have today? This seems unlikely, given the Jews’ care in making exact copies and destroying imperfect ones. Did Luke add these words? Did some early scribe? I wish I had a definitive answer. I don’t.

The jubilee law authorized the intergenerational enslavement of foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46). Christ’s announcement here of liberty for the captives suggests that the end of the Mosaic law of permanent enslavement was at hand, along with the rest of the jubilee laws.⁵ It is on this basis, and I believe *only* on this basis, that abolitionism can be defended biblically by someone whose hermeneutic assumes that a Mosaic law remains in force unless it was annulled by the New Testament. In contrast, for those whose hermeneutic assumes that a Mosaic law must be reasserted in the New Testament in order for it to be valid, abolitionism remains a problem because of Paul’s Epistle to Philemon. I find that those who reject abolitionism as an unbiblical movement of Unitarians and humanists tend to ignore this passage in Luke, while those who affirm abolitionism as morally biblical tend to neglect Philemon.

3. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 253.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

B. The Dispossessed

The groups named in Isaiah were the dispossessed: the poor, the enslaved, and the blind. They were the brokenhearted and bruised. These people were at the bottom of the social and economic pyramid. Isaiah had singled them out as the objects of God's concern. They would be liberated in the future. Now, Jesus was saying, the day of liberation was at hand.

The day of liberation would not be welcomed by those at the top of the economic pyramid. Yet Jesus did not object to an economic pyramid as such. He merely warned the rich of their eternal risk (Luke 18:25). His mother had testified of God: "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:53). Her implicit prophecy of her son's ministry was not a call for economic equality; it was a call for the replacement of the individuals in the hierarchy.⁶

Jesus' message was not well received that day. He made it clear to His listeners that this prophecy of liberation did not apply exclusively to Israel. Worse; He implied that the liberation of the gentiles would constitute the fulfillment of this prophecy. "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (vv. 25–27). The dispossessed were not limited to those who were politically oppressed citizens of the Jewish nation. For His implying this, the entire synagogue threw Him out and tried to toss Him off a cliff (vv. 28–29). These were ruthless, rebellious, lawless men.

Jesus regarded Himself as a prophet, as He announced to the members of the synagogue: "And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country" (v. 24). This also would not please His listeners, as He well knew. By invoking the prophecy of Isaiah, He was announcing a great reversal of fortune, just as His mother had.⁷ But this reversal would not be limited to the circumcised. It would apply universally. This was what moved the application of this prophecy far beyond the boundaries of the covenanted nation. Jews

6. Chapter 1.

7. Chapter 1.

were willing to imagine that they, as conquered subjects of Rome, would someday be released from bondage. They did not have in mind the liberation of the gentiles. But Jesus made it clear that He did, and if He was a true prophet, then Isaiah had, too.

There are Christians who claim that Jesus had no social concerns, no program of liberation. They also argue that His ministry was the annulment of the Mosaic economy. Both claims are wrong. His fulfillment of this prophecy annulled one aspect of the Mosaic economy, namely, the jubilee laws, but in so doing, this fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. He announced that the day of liberation had arrived. This liberation meant that the dispossessed would now gain a stake in society. What society? The kingdom of God. Gentiles were among the oppressed. How do we know this? Because Jesus told the Jews, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). As heirs of the kingdom, gentiles were also heirs of Isaiah's prophecy.

The dispossessed would soon have new hope in Christ. The acceptable year of the Lord meant liberation from the status of dispossessed. But if this promise also applied to the gentiles, then Israel would lose its unique covenantal status. This is exactly what Jesus implied when He reminded them that the widow of Zarephath and Naaman had been blessed when Israelites were not. This was a direct challenge to traditionalists in Israel, who saw Israel as the unique recipient of the covenantal blessings of God.

The various deliverances in the text of Isaiah were not limited to the spiritual realm. Isaiah's language referred to physical deliverance, economic status, and liberty. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn" (Isa. 61:1-2). The implication here is that Jesus' message regarding spiritual liberation from sin will have positive visible effects in the lives of those granted spiritual liberation. Jesus did heal the blind as part of His ministry, but He did not go into prisons and release people. He did not send slaves away from their owners. Then what did He have in mind? He realized that His message of liberation from sin would, over time, provide liberty in the broadest sense.

Definitively, the captives were going to be set free by His ministry.

That is, judicially speaking, those in sin were about to be freed from their bondage. But, over time, there would be a progressive fulfillment of this definitive liberation. *This promise had to do with the social effects of God's law and the work of the Holy Spirit in history.* Jesus was not a revolutionary who called for violent action for the immediate liberation of masses of dispossessed people. He was a revolutionary in the messianic sense: providing the supernatural basis of covenant-keepers' progressive liberation over time. Spiritual liberation produces social, judicial, and economic liberation.

C. The Abolition of Slavery

Jesus' declaration was the judicial basis for the abolition of the Old Covenant's system of intergenerational slavery. The laws governing intergenerational slavery in Israel appear in Leviticus 25, the laws governing the jubilee year. "Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour" (vv. 44–46). Jesus' fulfillment of the jubilee year annulled it definitively. It was annulled finally in A.D. 70, with the destruction of the temple. That event ended the Old Covenant order forever. It also ended the biblical justification for intergenerational slavery.⁸

This implies that abolitionism is biblical. The problem is then to explain why it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that abolitionism as a movement first appeared. Why did it take so long for the realization to become widespread that intergenerational slavery is unlawful, according to the New Testament?

Conclusion

The gospel liberates men from the tyranny of sin. Jesus' pre-crucifixion ministry was laying the foundations of the gospel. What was definitive—liberation—was broader than the internal life of the spirits

8. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31. See also North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. ????

of men. Jesus was extending Isaiah's prophecy to the whole world and its institutions. The jubilee year had come definitively, not just for Israel, but for redeemed mankind everywhere. Jesus was laying the foundations for liberty. This included economic liberty. The poor would be the beneficiaries.

CALLING VS. OCCUPATION¹

And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him (Luke 5:27–28).

The theocentric principle here is obedience to God’s call. God possesses the lawful authority to call us into His service. This is point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.² We are required to heed this call. But to heed it, we must trust the person who issues it.

A. Publicans

Matthew was a publican: a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated more in the ancient world than they are today. Today’s tax collector is the agent of an elected government. This provides a degree of legitimacy to the tax system that Rome did not possess in the eyes of tribute-paying foreigners. The government initially sold to companies the right to collect taxes. These companies bid for this privilege. The government collected its revenue in advance from the bidders, who in turn sent agents out to collect the taxes from the people. This system is known in retrospect as tax farming.

Tax farming had prevailed under the Roman Republic. Investors in a tax farming company expected to reap more than they sowed. If the group’s bid won the privilege of collecting taxes from a particular region, the investors expected to collect more money than they had paid

1. This chapter is adapted from chapter 21 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

to Rome. This meant that tax farmers were allowed considerable discretion in establishing the amount of taxes owed by any individual. They estimated how much they could collect before they placed their bids.

The Roman government had stood behind these tax farmers. A revolt against the tax man, then as now, was a revolt against civil government authority. But publicans were businessmen. They represented a profit-seeking business as well as the government. Their job was to extract as much money as they could from taxpayers. There was no government tax code. They were not bureaucratic agents of the state. The taxpayers were at a great disadvantage in dealing with them.

Under such a system, tax collectors had an incentive to overcharge taxpayers, and taxpayers had an incentive to lie. Many taxpayers would have known about the nature of the tax farming system. It was to the taxpayers' advantage to pay as little as possible. If tax revenues dropped, the bids at the next tax farming auction might be lower. What was it to them if some profit-seeking Roman monopoly made less profit than its investors had hoped? If Rome collected less as a result, the tributaries would shed no tears.

The tax farming system was abolished under Augustus in Christ's day. He substituted tax collecting by local governments, which then paid the central government. This system was less arbitrary than the tax farming system had been.³ But there was still a possibility that local tax collectors might overcharge taxpayers, just as their predecessors had done under the tax farming system. John the Baptist recognized this temptation and dealt with it openly: "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3:12–13). The tax collector in the Roman world was assumed to be dishonest. John's comment went to the heart of this distrust. But he did not tell them that they were immoral for being tax collectors. He told them only they were immoral if they raised taxes on their own authority and then kept the difference. They were part of a chain of command. At every level, he implied, the rule of law should be honored. Tax collectors should know in advance what they are expected to collect. This means that taxpayers should know in advance what they are required to pay. *The predictability of law is supposed to apply to taxation.*

3. James Macdonald, *A Free Nation Deep in Debt: The Financial Roots of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), p. 54.

B. Occupation

There is a familiar saying in English that is equally true in every other language: “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.” Every civil government must collect taxes in some form. Taxpayers prefer to keep more of their wealth than less, so they resist the imposition of taxes. Although they know that some taxation is necessary for their protection, they prefer to have other taxpayers pay. They resent taxes, and they resent tax collectors.

A Jew who served as a tax collector would have been especially resented in Israel. Most of all, a member of the tribe of Levi would have been resented. Levi was the priestly tribe. The parallel accounts say that Matthew was also named Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27).⁴

Levi was sitting at a table, collecting taxes. As soon as he heard Jesus’ call, he walked away from his job. But he did more than this, according to Luke’s account. He left the money behind. Then he invited in fellow publicans to hear Jesus. In doing so, He gave Jesus another opportunity to confront the religious leaders of the nation. “And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. **And he left all**, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5: 27–32). Levi left it all behind. Then he held a party.

Levi recognized that Jesus was offering him a higher calling. He was making money at his job. He probably was making a lot of money. He left the money behind. He owed most of it to his superiors unless he was extremely crooked. By walking away from it, he became liable to make up the difference out of his own capital. He must have had capital. He could afford to entertain guests at a feast. He invited other tax collectors, and they came. He was probably not a low-level official. He had money to spend on entertaining and gaining influence among his peers.

4. Matthew was one of three brothers who became apostles. He was the son of Althaeus (Matt. 10:13; Mark 2:14). James was the son of Althaeus (Luke 6:15). Judas (not Iscariot) was the son of Althaeus (v. 16).

Why did he walk away from his money? That was an odd thing to do. He could have turned it in. Instead, he left it sitting there. Perhaps he thought that no one would steal it. But that took considerable faith on his part. Fear of Roman soldiers might have restrained men from reaching into the box⁵ to grab a handful of coins, but such theft would be difficult to prove unless soldiers were present next to Levi, which no text indicates was the case. He must have counted the cost of losing the money that he had collected so far.

Leaving the money behind was a symbolic act. To pick up a box of money would not have required much effort. He did not pick it up. He walked away from it. He soon joined the disciples (Luke 6:15). He became an apostle (Acts 1:13). Visibly, he switched sides: from Rome to Jesus. He did so in a way that could not have failed to gain attention. Word about a Levite publican who had walked away from a box of money would have spread very fast.

Jesus called him. He heeded the call immediately. He did not hesitate. Others did. "And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59–62).⁶

Levi's occupation was tax collecting. He left it for a calling: to be a disciple of Jesus. There was a conflict between the two. He would have found it difficult to remain a tax collector and become a disciple. Surely, he could not have been part of Jesus' closest associates, for Jesus was constantly on the move. He could not have become an apostle. But Levi did not know anything about the apostolate. All he knew was that Jesus had called him.

When he invited other publicans to come to a party, they came. Word of his peculiar decision must have spread among them, too. One of their colleagues had walked off the job, leaving the money behind. Why? Then he invited them to come to dinner and meet the man who had called him. Here was an opportunity to get answers to their question.

Tax collecting had a deservedly bad reputation. The scribes and

5. I assume that he had a box or other container for the money. This is not a major assumption.

6. Chapter 20.

Pharisees linked publicans with sinners. Jesus did not deny this link. Instead, He turned their criticism against them. He was a physician who healed the sick. The guests were on the list of the sick. His critics were not on the guest list. They did not regard themselves as sick men; thus, they believed that they had no need of a physician. They were critical of the Great Physician's methods of healing, including sharing a meal with tax collectors. Jesus was condemning them. They were as sick as the guests. They were in need of healing.

Levi had humbled himself before Jesus by walking off the job. As a man protected by Roman troops, he possessed great authority. He would soon possess greater authority as an apostle. But the road to this authority was a walk into unemployment. He possessed wealth. He would soon possess a share of God's kingdom. But that kingdom was barely visible. To use the language of modern investing, he sold power and wealth short and went long in kingdom futures. He had a choice of two masters: God or mammon. He chose God. There is no clearer New Testament example of a man who made the correct choice in the face of such an explicit set of circumstances.

C. Calling

Jesus had important tasks for Levi. The most important, presumably, was writing the first Gospel.⁷ But Jesus did not call to him with this offer: "Leave the money behind, and you'll be able to write the first book in the New Testament, a book that will re-shape the world. Your name will be known by millions of people down through the ages." He just called him to follow. Levi heeded the call.

1. Profit

What was the most profitable thing that Levi could have done: collect taxes or write the first Gospel? In retrospect, most people would probably say "write the book." Men want to be remembered favorably. Fame is a powerful lure; so is a good reputation. Combine the two, and you have a powerful offer. Jesus did not verbally offer the first. The second—a good reputation—was part of the deal, but only by comparison to the universally bad reputation of tax collectors. He would go from being despised by nearly everyone to being misunderstood by many and hated by a few.

7. Because the Matthew account alone refers to the tax collector as Matthew rather than Levi, Bible scholars have assumed that he was the author of the book.

To gain this long-term profit—fame and a good name—he would have to pay a price. What he paid was the forfeited income that he would otherwise have received. This payment was symbolized by the box of money that he left behind. That abandoned box of money was an earnest—a down payment—on all the other money that he would not receive.

He entered a world of far greater uncertainty. He had been a tax collector. This was one of the more certain occupations in Rome.⁸ Income was assured: a form of rent. In contrast, it was not clear to him where the income would come from as Jesus' disciple, wandering the roads of Judaea. Levi became an entrepreneur. He chose uncertainty over rent. He ceased being a combination of Roman bureaucrat and Jewish businessman.

There was no question that he was not going to have the same level of money income as a follower of Jesus. He knew that. He demonstrated this understanding by walking away from the money box. He was abandoning his occupation. Why? Because he had been called to something more profitable. He had received a higher calling.

His calling was in opposition to his occupation. What do I mean by his calling? I mean that way of life and that work which Jesus would assign to him. This was the most important work he could do. He could make more money on the old job, but that work was not very important compared to Jesus' work. Money income was higher as a tax collector, but money income was less profitable to him than Jesus' work. He was faced with a choice: occupation or calling. He chose the calling.

I define the calling as follows: *the most important work a person can do in which he would be most difficult to replace.*⁹ The account of Levi's calling is illustrative of this definition. Jesus had a new career for him. His old career was profitable financially, but he could be replaced. There is no doubt that the tax collecting agency hired a replacement. We do not know his name. He is no longer important. He was important to himself, his employers, and the taxpayers, but he is no longer important. He left no enduring legacy. Levi did.

Matthew's Gospel cannot be replaced. The other three Gospels

8. Two centuries later, it was equally certain but one of the most burdensome occupations. Tax collectors had to pay the state, despite their future revenue, which fell as Rome became impoverished. It became an inherited office which could not be abandoned. It became a form of slavery.

9. Gary North, "The Calling," *Christian Reconstruction* (March/April 1981). (<http://bit.ly/gncalling>)

supplement it, but they could not replace it. It is only in Matthew's Gospel that we are told of the virgin birth of Christ.¹⁰ It is only in this Gospel that we read the account of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (28:18–20). Can you imagine the history of the church without these two passages?

2. Non-Monetary Bidding

Levi's choice was not based on monetary income. The organization that employed him paid more money than Jesus offered. Jesus offered nothing in the way of monetary compensation. This is typical for most people. *Our place of highest-value service is rarely our place of greatest monetary income.*

A bidding war was in progress. The organization that employed him had bid up his income to keep him in a job that suffered from a major social liability. Jesus offered him nothing except discipleship. Levi had a choice: remain a social pariah or become a social eccentric. Go with the money or go with . . . what? God and mammon were bidding against each other. The high bid wins, but the individual must decide in terms of his own scale of values what the high bid is. Rarely is the high monetary bid the high bid from God's point of view. "For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).¹¹

Callings are rarely salary-producing occupations, such as minister of the gospel or teacher in a Christian school. Because so few men are ever directly confronted with a choice between calling and occupation, they do not think much about their callings. They may think more about this when they reach their mid-40s, when they see their mortality more clearly. But the kind of life-changing decision that Levi made is rare. Few men ever hear the call of God so plainly.

10. One passage in Luke presupposes the virgin birth: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23).

11. Chapter 43.

D. Competitive Bidding: Calling vs. Job

Job-switching is common today. People seek better-paying jobs. They are not locked into one job for life. When a person asks: "What is my most productive area of service?" he means only for a few years. People change their occupations and their specialties within employing organizations.

The bidding war for labor services goes on, day by day. The results can be seen in the fluctuating price for labor services. No comparable bidding system exists for callings. There is no visible indicator comparable to the money wage. There is no numerical value that men can place on their callings. As with everything else, there has been an increase in information regarding callings, but there is nothing comparable to the job market.

With the increase in the division of labor, callings have become more specialized. But without a unique numerical success indicator, the participants and would-be participants in the market for highest service are still as blind, comparatively, as Levi was. When God calls us into service, He does not present us with an employment contract enforceable in a court of law, with fringe benefits listed. He just says, "Hey, you! Come." There is considerable uncertainty. Why some men respond while others do not remains a mystery. They do not base this decision on quantitative measures. There is some unexplained factor that is at work in God's issuing of a call. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut. 29:29a).

Because we cannot know the future exhaustively, an element of faith exists in every decision. What distinguishes market decisions is the degree of specificity possible in assessing the future. There are prices. Prices are the result of men's decisions regarding the present value of expected future supply and demand. Men bid for resources in terms of these assessments. The result of this bidding process is an array of prices. So, there is less faith required to make a market decision than a decision regarding the calling. Accepting a calling is more like taking a wife than hiring a housekeeper. The potential is greater, a mistake is more permanent, and the terms of her employment are less specific.

Conclusion

Levi traded present tangible wealth for intangible future treasure. This exchange was symbolized by the money that he left behind. This

is the exchange that Jesus told His disciples that they all had to make. “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:33–34).¹² This principle has not changed: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

When Jesus called him, Levi had to make a decision. He had to assess the call of Christ and compare its potential with that of his occupation. No decision would have been a decision to stay right where he was. He made his decision in an instant. We are not told what factors motivated him. Maybe it was only that Christ had called him, despite his position as a social outcast. Maybe he had been looking for a way out the tax collection field. Or maybe it was something beyond his own power to explain. He wrote down an account of the event, but he did not explain his motivation.

Jesus’ call persuaded Levi to reassess the location of his treasure: in heaven or in the money box. Because he had not sought out Jesus, I assume that this call initiated a major shift in his outlook. The visible indicator of this shift was the money box. The money box had great relevance for his job, but none for his calling. He left it behind.

Levi had been employed by an occupying force. From the standpoint of his social standing in the community, his abandonment of his occupation for the sake of a new calling was a move up. But it was also a move out: to a fringe religious group. There was a trade-off. He was better off socially, but he was worse off economically. What he did would have created confusion in the minds of those around him: his employer, his colleagues, and his fellow Jews. Word would have spread rapidly. That, too, was a form of evangelism.

12. Chapter 26.

OPEN FIELDS AT HARVEST TIME¹

And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Luke 6:1–5).

The theocentric principle of this passage is stated clearly, “the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.” God and God’s work govern the sabbath and its judicial applications. This relates to point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.² It relates to the fourth commandment.³

A. Common Property

The Pharisees did not criticize the disciples for stealing. The Mosaic law exempted the disciples’ activity from the laws of theft. “When thou comest into thy neighbour’s vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour,

1. This appears as chapter 26 in Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn" (Deut. 23:24–25).

Because of the importance of this passage for a correct understanding of the Bible's view of private property, I here reprint Chapter 57 of my commentary on Deuteronomy.⁴ Some readers may not have access to that electronic book. I reprint here the entire chapter.

* * * * *

The theocentric principle here is that God protects His people as a shepherd protects his flock. He places boundaries around them.

A. Subordination and Debt

The text specified that the covenant-keeping lender was to imitate God by not lending at interest to a brother in the faith, i.e., a person who publicly confesses faith in the God of the Bible and who had subordinated himself to the covenanted ecclesiastical community by means of an oath-sign.⁵ Those who were outside of the covenanted ecclesiastical community could be lawfully treated as a shepherd would treat sheep outside his flock. These sheep did not recognize his voice. These sheep were not under his authority; therefore, they were not under his protection.

What is judicially crucial here is the biblical concept of becoming a brother's protector. The shepherd-sheep relationship implies *subordination by the sheep*. "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7).⁶ The Mosaic law recognized that a sheep enters the debt relationship as a subordinate. As we shall see, the cause of this subordination was to be a factor in the lender's decision as to which kind of loan is involved: charitable or business. The poor brother who had fallen on hard times through no moral fault of his own was morally entitled to a zero-interest charitable loan (Deut. 15:1–7).⁷ This subordination aspect of a loan is universal. This

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

5. Under the Old Covenant, circumcision; under the New Covenant, baptism. See Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), pp. 86–89. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 67.

7. Chapter 35.

law was therefore not a land law.⁸ It had implications for the Israelites' maintenance of the kingdom grant, but its legitimacy was not based on this grant.

This law indicates that God protects covenant-keepers in a way that He does not protect covenant-breakers. He regards the former as deserving of special consideration. This is a matter of inheritance.

The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever (Ps. 37:21–29).

There was a positive sanction attached to this law: “that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it.” Moses promised that God would provide visible blessings in the land. The land was not the positive sanction attached to this law, for it would soon be their inheritance. But comprehensive blessings inside the land's boundaries would be the result of honoring this law. There can be no doubt about this law's importance. This law was highly specific, but the blessings attached to it were so comprehensive that they were unspecified.

B. Two Kinds of Loans

In the other case laws dealing with zero-interest loans, it was the poor brother who was to be benefited. “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury” (Ex. 22:25).⁹ This protection extended to the resident alien. “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger [*geyr*], or a sojourner [*toshawb*]; that he may live with thee.

8. On land laws, see Appendix J.

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase” (Lev. 25:35–37).¹⁰ There were two deciding factors in making a zero-interest loan: the would-be borrower’s poverty and his status as legally protected.

One biblical principle of interpretation is this: the more narrowly specified text is considered authoritative over the more broadly specified text. That which is narrowly defined is clearer. It provides more data on how the text is to be understood. We should move from the clear to the less clear, from the specific to the general.

In the interpretation of this case law, we conclude that if God had prohibited covenant-keepers from charging interest to everyone, He would not have excluded the stranger from the prohibition. Similarly, if He had prohibited covenant-keepers from charging interest to other covenant-keepers, He would not have specified poor brethren as coming under the prohibition. There would have been no need for God to identify a smaller group among the brethren as deserving of special treatment if all brethren were equally deserving of such treatment.

Not only was the economic status of the circumcised brother a criterion, so was the kind of loan. A charitable loan was morally compulsory. “If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth” (Deut. 15:7–8).¹¹ To this type of loan was attached a negative civil sanction for a debtor’s failure to repay: a period of bondage that lasted until the next national year of release (Deut. 15:12). This could be up to six years of bondage. Yet it was also possible for a debtor to be enslaved for a much longer period for a failure to repay a debt: until the next jubilee year (Lev. 25:39–41).¹² This could be up to 49 years of bondage. This raises a major question: What criteria distinguished sabbatical-year

10. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28.

11. Moral compulsion is not legal compulsion. The state was not to impose negative sanctions on anyone who refused to lend. God would provide positive sanctions on those with open wallets: “Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto” (Deut. 15:10).

12. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 29.

debt servitude from jubilee-year debt servitude?

The first criterion was the presence of an interest rate. If a poor man sought a morally compulsory zero-interest loan from his brother in the faith, he placed himself at risk for up to six years. At the end of that time, either the loan was automatically cancelled by law or else he, having previously forfeited repayment, was released from bondage and sent out with food and drink by his creditor (Deut. 15:13–14). A second criterion was that a charitable loan did not require a man's landed inheritance as collateral. Collateral was either goods or else his willingness to become a bondservant for defaulting. The text does not indicate that he was required to pledge his family's landed inheritance in order to collateralize a charitable loan.

If a man who possessed a rural inheritance that he could use as collateral decided to seek a non-charitable loan, he had no moral claim on the lender, nor could he reasonably expect to receive an interest rate of zero. This loan would have been either a business loan or a consumer loan. This would-be debtor was not truly poor unless his land holdings were too small to support him. The presence of jubilee-bondage loans in addition to sabbatical year-bondage loans indicates that there were commercial loans in Israel. If the interest-bearing commercial debt contract placed him at risk of bondage, then by forfeiting payment on the loan, the debtor placed himself in a much longer term of bondage. This is evidence that commercial loans were much larger than charitable loans. Such loans could be made for longer periods of time than six years. The collateral was the income stream of the land and even the individual for up to forty-nine years. In short, a commercial loan could place at risk the fruit of a man's inheritance until the next jubilee.

C. Two Kinds of Aliens

The alien or stranger [*nokree*] was eligible for an interest-bearing loan at any time. Loans to him were permanent; the year of release did not benefit him. "And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner [*nokree*] thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release" (Deut. 15:2–3). The foreigner here was an alien who either was not a property-owning resident in Israel or was not circumcised. He was not a per-

manent resident who had settled in a city, i.e., a sojourner.

The Mosaic law distinguished between the two kinds of aliens in other ways. In the law governing unclean meat, we read: “Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger [geyr] that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien [nokree]: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God” (Deut. 14:21a). The permanent resident could receive the unclean meat as a gift, but it could not be sold to him, i.e., it offered no profit for the Israelite. In contrast, it was lawful to sell ritually unclean meat to a foreigner [nokree].¹³

The permanent resident [geyr] was to be treated as a brother: he was not to be charged interest on a charitable loan, as we have seen (Lev. 25:35–37).¹⁴ He was a kind of honorary Israelite. Not being a citizen of Israel—a member of the congregation—he could not serve as a judge. If he was not circumcised, he could not enter the temple or eat a Passover meal. But as a man voluntarily living permanently under biblical civil law, he was entitled to the civil law’s protection, including the prohibition against interest-bearing charitable loans. Permanently residing voluntarily under the law’s authority, he was under its protection.

Lending at interest was one of God’s means of bringing foreigners under the authority of Israel. “For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee” (Deut. 15:6).¹⁵ This was an aspect of *dominion through hierarchy*: “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7).¹⁶ The foreigner was fair game for a program of profitable money-lending. This included loans to poor foreigners. When a foreigner was desperate for money, an Israelite was allowed to take advantage of the situation and lend to him at interest. In contrast, the resident alien was legally protected; he was to be treated as a brother. He was already voluntarily under God’s civil law and some of the ritual laws, such as ritual washing after eating meat that had died of natural causes (Lev. 17:15). There was no need to bring him under dominion through debt. He had already acknow-

13. Chapter 34.

14. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 28.

15. Chapter 37.

16. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 67.

ledged his debt to God.

D. Which Jurisdiction?

The negative sanction for forfeiture was a period of bondage. This placed the Mosaic debt laws under the civil government. But there were no stated penalties for a lender's refusal to lend, despite the moral compulsion aspect of the charitable loan. God promised to bring negative sanctions against the individual who refused to honor this aspect of the law (Deut. 15:9) and positive sanctions for the man who honored it (v. 10). The state is not a legitimate agency for bringing positive sanctions. The state lawfully imposes only negative sanctions. It enforced bondage on those debtors who defaulted, but it did not compel lenders to make loans.

This means that the lender was under God's sanctions directly, while the debtor was under God's sanctions indirectly. The lender might give him the positive sanction of a charitable loan, and the state would enforce the penalty for non-repayment. The debtor's obligations were specific: pay back so much money by a specific date or suffer the consequences. The lender's obligations were not specific: lend a reasonable amount of money and subsequently receive unspecified blessings from God. There was no earthly institution that could lawfully enforce specific penalties on such unspecific transactions.

Biblical civil law prohibits specific acts. The state lawfully enforces contracts, but these contracts are narrowly specified in advance by the parties. The state enforces justice, which includes imposing negative sanctions on those who violate contracts. But it is not the state's responsibility to mandate that potential lenders provide loans of a specific size and duration to borrowers.

E. Not Restricted to Money Loans

"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals [food], usury of any thing that is lent upon usury" (v. 19). This clause in the law makes it plain that usury, meaning a positive interest rate, applies across the board to all items lent. The phenomenon of interest is not limited to money loans. It is a universal aspect of lending, which is why the law specifies that the prohibition applies to loans in general, not merely money loans.

1. Interest and Rent

There is an ancient and widespread error going back at least to Aristotle that interest on money loans is unproductive because money, unlike animals, does not reproduce itself. In other words, money is sterile. Therefore, Aristotle concluded, “of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural.”¹⁷ Yet the critics of usury have generally viewed rent on land as legitimate.¹⁸ If I loan someone 20 ounces of gold and charge him one ounce per year in interest, I am viewed as a usurer and somehow morally questionable. If, on the other hand, I let the same person use my farm land, which is worth 20 ounces of gold, and I charge him one ounce of gold per year as rent, I come under no criticism. Why this difference in opinion? In both cases, I give up something valuable for a period of time. I can either spend the gold or invest it in a business venture. Similarly, I can either sell the farm or plow it, plant it, and reap a crop. In both cases, I allow someone else to use my asset for a year, with which he can then pursue his own goals. I charge him for this privilege of gaining temporary control over a valuable asset. I charge either interest or rent because I do not choose to give away the income which my asset could generate during the period in which the other person controls it.

To expect me to loan someone my 20 ounces of gold at no interest is the same, economically speaking, as to expect me to loan him the use of my farm on a rent-free basis. In fact, the thing which people conventionally call *rental income* is analytically *interest income*. Because a payment for the use of land is seen as morally neutral, men describe the interest income generated by land by means of a morally neutral term: rent. Because a payment for the use of money is seen as morally reprehensible, men describe the interest income generated by money loans by means of a morally loaded term: usury. But the transactions are analytically identical. *Interest income and rental income are the same thing: payment for the use of a marketable asset over time.*

There is a tendency to see interest as something exploitative and rent as something legitimate. Interest income is not seen as productive; rental income *is* seen as productive. Why the difference? Probably because people think that the creation of value is limited to the creation of goods and services. This outlook is incorrect, and the best ex-

17. Aristotle, *Politics*, I:X, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, [1946] 1958), p. 29.

18. This would be an extension of Aristotle’s argument: “acquisition of fruits and animals.” *Ibid.*, p. 28.

ample is the discovery of a new idea. It is not physical. We can see this analytical error at work in a series of examples.

2. The Deciding Factor Is Not Material

Example number one. I sell a one-year lease to my abandoned gold mine, which no longer produces any gold. I charge one ounce of gold for this opportunity, payable at the end of one year. The lease-holder discovers a new deposit, digs out two hundred ounces of gold in one year, and pays me one ounce of gold. Nobody thinks this arrangement is exploitative on my part. He gets rich, and I get my agreed-upon ounce of gold. Even if he fails to find any gold, most people would regard my net income of one ounce of gold as legitimate. After all, I let him use my abandoned gold mine for a year. He made a mistake, but he might have struck it rich.

Example number two. An inventor comes to me. He thinks that he has discovered a way to increase the output of gold mines—say, a chemical method of extracting more gold out of the ore. He does not have the money to complete his final experiment and file for a patent. I lend him 20 ounces of gold for a year at one ounce of gold interest. During this year, he completes the testing, files the patent, and sells the patent for a fortune. He returns my 20 ounces plus one ounce of gold. Have I exploited him? No. But what if his final test proves that the process does not work? Or what if he files the patent incorrectly and someone steals his idea, leaving him without anything to show for his effort? Am I an exploiter because I demand the return of my 20 ounces plus one? I was not a co-investor in the process. I would not have shared in his wealth had everything gone well. His use of my gold did allow him to follow his dream to its conclusion, whether profitable to him or not.

Example number three. What if he borrows my 20 ounces of gold to complete tests on another invention that is unrelated to gold mining? Has the economic analysis changed? No. The borrower seeks his own ends by means of the 20 ounces of gold. Meanwhile, the lender seeks his ends: an interest payment. Each party to the transaction pursues his own individual goals. Each believes that he can benefit from the transaction.

Conclusion: the physical nature of the asset lent for a fixed payment over time has nothing to do with the analytical basis of the transaction, but it has a lot to do with people's confusion about interest.

The heart of the matter¹⁹ is not material; it is temporal. The lender gives up something of value for a period of time, and he will not do this voluntarily without compensation unless he believes that his refusal to make a zero-interest loan to a poor brother will result in negative sanctions from God, which it did in Mosaic Israel. “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee” (Deut. 15:9).

Deuteronomy 23:19–20 acknowledges the identical nature of these lending transactions irrespective of the physical composition of the items lent: money, food, or anything else. An interest payment was not to be charged on the kind of loan described here: a charitable loan to a brother in the faith. The *charitable aspect* of the loan was the *interest income foregone* by the lender. He could have used the asset to generate income for himself; instead, he lent freely and asked only that what he has lent be returned to him. He was charitable because he forfeited the income which his asset would have generated for him in the business loan market. He gave away this income to the borrower, who paid nothing for it.

F. Compensation for Risk

It is not simply that the lender forfeits income that others would otherwise pay him to use his asset for a year. The lender also bears risk. First, he bears the risk that the loan will not be repaid. The text governing charitable loans makes this clear: “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee” (Deut. 15:9). Charitable debts became unenforceable in Israel in the seventh year. All those who were in debt bondage for having failed to repay a charitable loan went free (Deut. 15:12), so the loan’s collateral in the form of the borrower’s future work would not be available to the lender as compensation for a default.

Second, the lender today bears the risk that, if he lends money, the government or the central bank may inflate the nation’s domestic

19. We call a mental concept “matter” when we really mean “issue” or “question.” We refer “central importance” as “heart.” The language of the material invades the mental.

money supply, thereby lowering the value of the money which he receives at the end of the loan period. To compensate him for this risk, the lender adds an inflation premium to the interest rate. The threat of price inflation due to monetary inflation is one reason why self-interested lenders should organize politically to pressure the government: (1) not to increase the money supply; (2) to prohibit the central bank from doing so.²⁰

The lender must be compensated for known risk; otherwise, he will not make the loan. In commercial loans, borrowers compensate the lender for this risk. The risk of one borrower's default is paid for by a *risk premium factor* in the interest rate which is charged to all borrowers within the same risk classification. In the case of the charitable loan to the poor brother, God becomes the risk-bearer. He offers the lender the same shepherd-like protection in hard times that the lender offers the poor brother in hard times. The lender's faith in God's protecting hand is revealed by his willingness to lend at no interest to a righteous poor brother. Also, he thereby acknowledges that God has given him his wealth: "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6).²¹

G. Uncertainty vs. Risk

The free market economist offers a distinction between uncertainty and risk. Risk is a statistically calculable negative event. Certain classes of events can be forecasted accurately, i.e., within statistical limits. The discovery of this social fact made possible the modern economic world.²² In contrast, uncertainty cannot be measured in advance. Some kinds of events cannot be forecasted by means of statistical techniques, e.g., inventions or the discovery of a gem or a gem of

20. If the money is gold or silver, and there is no fractional reserve banking, there will be a slow decline in prices over time in a productive economy, since increasing economic output (supply of goods and services) will lower prices in the face of the relatively fixed money supply. The price of goods approaches zero as a limit: the reversal of God's curse in Eden. In such a world, the lender of money reaps a small return: the money returned to him will buy slightly more than it would have bought when he lent it. In such a monetary environment, the borrower would be better off to borrow consumer goods rather than money.

21. Chapter 37.

22. Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

an idea. Risk is different from uncertainty.²³

While we all are to some degree both risk-bearers and uncertainty-bearers, there are only a few people who are professional uncertainty-bearers. We call them *entrepreneurs*. These people forecast the economic future and then buy and sell goods and services in terms of their forecasts in order to profit from their hoped-for accurate knowledge. When successful, they reap profits. When unsuccessful, they reap losses. Because the kinds of events they deal with have not yet been successfully converted into risk events, the market does not enable investors to deal with these events in a scientific, analytical manner. We call such events high-risk events, but this is incorrect analytically. They are uncertain events.

Lenders who seek a legally predictable rate of return lend money at interest. In contrast, investors who are willing to put their money “at risk”—really, *at uncertainty*—in order to share in any profits must also share in any losses. The gains and losses of entrepreneurial ventures are not predictable, or at least not predictable by most people.²⁴ People who are uncertainty-averse but not equally risk-averse lend to people who are willing to bear uncertainty, but who prefer to gain the capital necessary to develop a venture by promising lenders a legally enforceable fixed rate of return. The distribution of risk and uncertainty to those who are willing to bear each of these is made possible through the market for loans. Those entrepreneurs who make statistically unpredictable breakthroughs that benefit society can be funded in their ventures by others who are unwilling to bear uncertainty but who are willing to bear some degree of risk. Without such a social institution, only two kinds of entrepreneurs could fund their ventures: (1) those with capital of their own to invest; (2) those who are willing to share their profits with co-owners of any discovery, and who also have the ability to persuade these investor-owners to put their money into the venture.

* * * * *

23. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>); Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

24. An entrepreneur who has discovered a way to deal with formerly uncertain events by means of proprietary or as yet not widely recognized statistical techniques is in a position to make a great deal of money until others discover or steal these techniques.

Conclusion

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees pointed to the sabbath principle as a means of liberating men. The disciples were hungry. Food was nearby. They could lawfully pick grain, but they did not cook it. They had to do some minimal work, but any food preparation activity is work. They were not violating the sabbath. They were walking and talking with the Lord of the sabbath. This was their top priority.

The sabbath is not to be used as a means of interfering with recreation that leads to better knowledge of God's work. A stroll on the day of rest is legitimate. So is discussion of spiritual matters. So is food preparation that does not disrupt the day's pattern of rest. Man is not to become enmeshed in a formidable array of rules governing the day of rest. Men are to be liberated by the day of rest. They are not to be placed in such bondage that they cannot enjoy the day. The sabbath is liberation from work and liberation from fear. It is not to be turned a means of subjugation by means of a handbook of man-made restrictions.²⁵

25. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 24.

9

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE: BEATITUDES AND WOES

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep (Luke 6:20–25).

The theocentric principle here, as in so many passages in Luke, is God as the sanctions-bringer. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Beatitudes

Luke's account of the beatitudes ("blessed are") is more economics-oriented than Matthew's account (Matt. 5:1). It is also much shorter. Therefore, a greater percentage of them are economics-oriented.

This passage's prophecies of reversals of fortune are consistent with Mary's account of God's covenantal dealings with Israel. Mary announced that God had in the past reversed the fortunes of hungry people and rich men: "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:53).² Jesus here announced

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapter 1.

that this would happen again. In fact, such reversals are basic to God's covenant sanctions in history.

The reference to the poor is separated from the references to the rich by an account of looming ostracism. Men will hate Jesus' followers, He predicted. His followers will suffer reproach. By committing themselves to Jesus, His disciples will suffer negative sanctions.

Is this ostracism a universal phenomenon, a prophecy for all seasons? Will nations never be discipled? Will the people in power always be opposed to the gospel? If so, then the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) can never be accomplished in history. Does the Bible teach this view of the Great Commission? No.³ Then are Jesus' words here always applicable? No. Where covenant-breakers are in authority, this kind of persecution can and does exist, but rulers are not always equally self-conscious and consistent in their opposition to Christ's kingdom. This prophecy applied to the period prior to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Jesus comforted the poor with a promise of better times to come, and He warned the rich of bad times to come. As in the case of the persecutions, the assumption here is that the political hierarchy is run by covenant-breakers. This is why He could say that His followers would be spurned. The powers that be will reject His message, He said. This is because they are evil. Evil men will refuse to accept His message. Jesus said this specifically about them: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). But, in a society in which biblical righteousness is honored, the promise of a reversal of fortune for rich and poor would not apply. The deciding issue is covenantal faithfulness. Ethically speaking, how did the rich get rich and the poor become poor?

Jesus spoke to oppressed people. Rome's political rule was oppressive, and so was the rule of Israel's religious leaders. Jesus warned, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they them-

3. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>) Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

selves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt. 23:2–4). The political system rewarded corruption. So, those who were rich would soon face negative sanctions if they had achieved their success by milking the political system. Jesus assumed that, in general, this is how they had achieved their success. In His day, the political system that established the terms of trade was oppressive. But the end of the Old Covenant order was at hand. Those who had prospered from it would find themselves in dire straits.

He told His disciples that their persecution would be recompensed in heaven. There is no comparable heavenly reference for the other reversals. Mary’s retrospective account of God’s dealings had been earthly, not heavenly. We know this because it was Jesus who first taught authoritatively the twin doctrines of heaven and hell. Mary’s covenantal affirmation had to do with God’s actions in history. Thus, I see no reason to assume that all of the prophesied reversals are exclusively post-historical. But eternity is surely the model.

B. A Merciful Heart

Jesus did not call for a political revolt. He called for charity and good will toward all. “But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Luke 6:27–28). This is not the normal response to political oppression. This response takes courage: the courage to endure. It also takes a regenerate heart. “For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same” (vv. 32–33).

Then Jesus announced an ethical standard for a nation under bondage to a tyrannical state.⁴ “And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke [tunic—undergarment] forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again” (vv. 29–30). His disciples were to give help to those in power who ask. They were also not to prosecute those in power who take.⁵ The goal here was peace for the oppressed. The setting was political tyranny. This is not a universal standard of private ownership.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

5. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 350.

If it were, this economic principle would subsidize thieves. It is a command for dealing with people who possess political power.

Jesus recommended that His followers lend money, even to their enemies. “And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (vv. 34–36).⁶ Presumably, these were enemies who have fallen on hard times. This was not a call to subsidize men who will use the borrowed funds to commit evil. It was a call for peace. God is merciful to sinners; so should Jesus’ followers be.

These words are among the most difficult for us to accept that Jesus ever uttered. They condemn us. They point to the radical nature of God’s love for us, a love that could announce from the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23: 34a). How could anyone be this forgiving? This is beyond our comprehension. We are supposed to imitate Christ, lending even to our enemies. This is not easy. It takes great faith. There is nothing easy about the New Testament’s ethical requirements. They are so rigorous that a careful listener who seeks to obey God must cry out for God’s grace to enable him to obey. In this sense, the New Covenant is more rigorous than the Old Covenant.

C. Capital Accumulation

1. *Tangible Wealth*

The Old Covenant clearly recommended the accumulation of tangible wealth. It recommended lending to foreigners:

For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee (Deut. 15:6).

The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee,

6. Chapter 10.

if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:8–13).⁷

Jesus said to lend, expecting nothing in return. This raises major questions. Did Jesus abandon the Old Covenant on the issue of tangible wealth accumulation? Was He recommending a life of one-way giving? Was He recommending actions that would impoverish His followers? If He was, then their participation as investors in capitalist production methods is called into question morally. This command would make them wage earners forever. Why would the God of the Old Covenant reverse Himself in the New Covenant on the issue of capital formation by His followers? Or did He?

First, Jesus' recommended lifestyle is not poverty. He recommended wealth accumulation in history. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6: 38).⁸ This language rests on the analogy of a container filled with grain. By shaking it with the grain inside, and by pressing the grain, the container will hold more. The image is that of an overflowing container.⁹ We should therefore give bountifully if we want to reap bountifully. Paul echoed the same idea: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (II Cor. 9:6).

Second, God's system of covenantal sanctions in history favors personal generosity. We must accept on faith this standard of righteousness. This takes a great deal of faith, as Jesus knew. Furthermore,

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

8. Chapter 11.

9. Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 356.

this system of economic sanctions is not merely corporate, i.e., applying statistically to members of large groups. It is clearly individual. Jesus told His listeners to be generous with whatever they owned. Helping others, seemingly selflessly, is based on earthly self-interest. Our reward will come from God. Jesus said elsewhere, “But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:3–4).¹⁰ Note that the reward is not merely internal; it is public. It is not just feeling good about being generous; it involves obtaining visible wealth, so that we can be generous again.

2. *Charity as Investing*

What Jesus said here is at odds with the standard theories of long-term wealth accumulation. Jesus taught that charity is a form of personal investing—indeed, the most reliable form of investing, for God secures the giver’s return in history. Modern free market economists, following Adam Smith,¹¹ teach that savings—income over expenditures—increase the amount of tangible capital available to businesses, and this in turn leads to increased productivity and therefore increased per capita wealth. Capital accumulation through thrift is seen by free market economists as the secret of the ages, the key that unlocks the economic cornucopia. Per capita output increases when there is an increase in per capita investment in a society, assuming that owners are allowed by the civil government to keep most of their income. Or, in the familiar words, a rising tide raises all ships. Tools and education, not charity, are what raises large numbers of people out of poverty, according to modern economic theory. Charity is seen as individually ameliorative, not socially transformational.

Jesus’ recommendation requires faith in the sovereign God of the Bible who intervenes in history to fulfill His promises. God tells us to be generous to the poor. He says that He will see to it that we will be rewarded in history. Again, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” When we give generously, we

10. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 11.

11. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

will receive generously. This is guaranteed by God. We do not live in an impersonal universe. We live in a God-sustained universe. One way to affirm our faith in such a universe is our willingness to give to the poor. Then, when we begin to prosper, we can invest our earnings. This way, we provide capital for workers to use. We also increase our giving.

In the Proverbs, we read a similar message: “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet [appropriate], but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself” (Prov. 11:24–25).¹² This passage does not say that a generous man will receive charity, should he subsequently fall into poverty. On the contrary, it says that he will be prosperous. This indicates that economic cause and effect system in history is ethical. It implies that if charity were widespread, prosperity would be widespread. Economic growth would then become culture-wide. This says nothing about investment per capita. It was written almost three millennia before the Industrial Revolution, which launched the compound economic growth process. Jesus’ words must be taken on faith. It is far easier to make a statistical case for high per capita investment as the basis of sustained economic growth than the case for high per capita charitable giving. The statistical sample is larger. People save their money more readily than they give it away.

The words of Jesus in this passage seem to be opposed to free market principles of wealth accumulation. How can giving away our wealth enable us to build up our wealth? The answer Jesus gave was this: God sees our commitment to faith in His providential care of us, and He rewards this faith. He sees that we are willing to step out in faith to help the poor in His name, even though this seems to reduce our reserves in case bad things happen to us in the future. When we give away money, we seem to be less prepared for unforeseen bad news, as well as for unforeseen opportunities. But our faith must be in God and His providence. God, not impersonal market forces, is the source of our comfort and success.

John Wesley offered a way to reconcile modern economics and Jesus’ command to give. His Sermon 50, *The Use of Money* (1744), on Luke 16:9,¹³ is divided into three imperatives: gain all you can, save all

12. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 32.

13. “And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unright-

you can, give all you can. Covenant-keepers are to allocate their funds wisely. Wesley was a great believer in thrift, as were the English Methodists generally in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. But this imperative to save money through the reduction of household expenses was always to be tempered by the command to give generously. Wesley's Methodist movement transformed the tangible wealth of hundreds of thousands of very poor people in England, 1740–1840, and as many in America, 1790–1860. They became middle class. Their increasing moral capital increased their tangible capital.

3. *A Matter of Trust*

Covenant-keepers are commanded repeatedly not to trust in riches. They are to trust in God. This is very hard for a rich person to accept. It forces him to transfer his faith in himself to God. A successful man wants to believe that his wisdom and power got him his wealth: "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17b).¹⁴ Jesus made it plain that the only wealth that is worth having is what men receive from God in terms of His sovereign grace and in obedience to His law. Anything else is a snare, a temptation to believe in ourselves.

There is no doubt that very few Christians have ever personally tested this theory of personal prosperity. Charitable giving must be in addition to the tithe, which goes to the institutional church.¹⁵ Very few Christians tithe. Their charitable giving, if any, is stolen from the local church's required portion.

Then there is the question of anonymity. "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:3–4).¹⁶ If such an open-hand program of giving really works, how will this information ever get to the general public? How can the practice be investigated by others? Obviously, it cannot be investigated if no one supplies the data. So, the truth of it must be taken on faith.

A popular American novel on this system of concealed giving,

eousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). See chapter 40.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

15. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gnttithing>)

16. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 11.

Magnificent Obsession (1929), which was twice made into a motion picture (1935, 1954), was written by a theologically liberal Congregationalist pastor, Lloyd C. Douglas. At the time that he wrote it, in 1929, his church's officers were trying to find a way to fire him. He was the pastor of the largest Congregational church in the United States, First Congregational Church of Los Angeles. The book became a best-seller in 1932 and 1933, in the worst phase of the Great Depression. The novel describes an experiment in secret giving. The protagonists believed that their giving would enable them to achieve anything in life that they wanted to. It would bring them unquestioned success. This idea has a great deal of appeal, as the book's success indicates, but mainly in theory. The author actually wrote this scene into the novel. Speaking of a notebook written in code that described the experiment, the book's hero says: "If it were done in a book, it would sell a hundred thousand! People would pronounce it utterly incredible, of course; but they would read it—and heartily wish it were true."¹⁷ This mediocre novel sold far more than a hundred thousand copies. More than this: it launched one of the most successful literary careers in American history. Three more Douglas novels reached the top ten best-selling titles in the 1930s. Then came the blockbuster: *The Robe*, a story about the effects of Jesus' robe on a Roman centurion. It sold over six million copies. According to one list of best-sellers, it was #7 in sales in 1942, #1 in 1943, #2 in 1944, and #2 in 1945. These sales came in the years of America's participation in World War II. In 1953, it became the basis of the first Cinemascope (wide screen) movie, and the book reached the #1 spot again. In 1949, *The Big Fisherman* was #1. In 1949, it was #2. Six of his novels were made into movies—twice for *Magnificent Obsession*. He died in 1952.

People want to believe that they can do well by doing good, but it takes great faith in the existence of a benign providential order. Such faith is lacking in today's Darwinian intellectual world. It was lacking in Jesus' day, too.

D. Woe to the Rich

Jesus' language is hostile to those who own great wealth. There is no way around this. He offered what appears to be a universal condemnation. "But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your

17. Lloyd C. Douglas, *Magnificent Obsession* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929), p. 182.

consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (vv. 24–25). But why is there a condemnation of those who laugh? Is laughter a universal sin? The presence of this peculiar warning should alert us to the non-universal nature of Jesus' condemnation of the rich. As in the case of laughter, it depends on why men are rich, how they attained their wealth, and what they do with it.

1. *A Merciless God: Mammon*

What is sinful is the lust for wealth, the addictive pursuit of "more for me in history." Jesus referred to this addiction as mammon.¹⁸ He referred to this addiction as a god that rivals the God of the Bible. It is the idol that represents man's simultaneous quest for power over his environment and autonomy from his environment. Only God possesses this two-fold attribute. Mammon therefore offers the serpent's temptation to Eve: to be as God (Gen. 3:5). The quest for great personal wealth is man's attempt to shield himself from the risks of life. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).¹⁹

The quest for more wealth is a substitute for faith in an infinite God. More wealth can never deliver the security offered by God. More wealth can always become less. Men can suffer reversals of fortune. A war, an illness, or a catastrophic accident can upset the plans of any man. Ultimately, death is the guaranteed reversal of fortune for all wealthy men. "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (I Tim. 6:7).²⁰ To pursue more wealth is a fool's quest, for it is ultimately the pursuit of an autonomous immortality: a lie. It ends with the inescapable dead end: ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

The pursuit of more for me in history is addictive. It is comparable to feasting on food that makes people hungry (C. S. Lewis). It cannot satisfy. Yet God in the Mosaic law offered more to His people (Deut. 28:1–14).²¹ An increased quantity of tangible wealth was a legitimate reward for obedience. It was a national covenantal blessing. How can we reconcile Jesus' warnings with this aspect of the Old Covenant? This question has baffled commentators for centuries. My attempt to

18. Chapter 39.

19. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 54.

20. North, *Hierarchy and Dominion*, ch. 10.

21. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

reconcile them may not satisfy anyone. The solution has to do with responsibility, both individual and corporate.

2. Tangible Wealth and Responsibility

Greater tangible wealth brings greater responsibility, including the crucial responsibility of thankfulness to God. Dominion in history requires increasing knowledge, wealth, and authority. God extends His earthly kingdom through the efforts of His redeemed people.²² He increases their responsibility over an expanding range of choices. This is what tangible wealth offers: *an increase in its owner's range of choices*. God grants to covenant-keepers the gifts of competence and success as they learn to obey Him better. *Tangible wealth is a tool of dominion*. It is to be put at the service of God.

There is never an end in history to men's battle with sin and its comprehensive cultural effects. We always need more grace because we are not removed by God from the cultural battlefield until we die or are incapacitated with Alzheimer's disease. This means that we can always use additional assets. We are told by God to buy back the world—redeem it—as His stewards. Jesus' definitive repurchase of the world took place at Calvary. The visible proof of this redemptive purchase was Jesus' bodily resurrection and His bodily ascension, both of which took place in history. Progressively, the redemption of the world is accomplished representatively through the work of covenant-keepers. The final redemption will be at the end of time, when Jesus comes in final judgment.

Grace is a free gift of God. This free gift can include wealth, but it is not limited to wealth. As a person's tangible wealth increases, his opportunities to sin increase. Therefore, the more wealth that we receive, the more spiritual grace we need to deal with it successfully. The Christian's quest for more in history is therefore primarily the quest for more grace to deal with his own sin. Wealth without spiritual grace is a curse. *Spiritual grace enables us to deal with wealth as a tool rather than as an idol*. When men view their wealth as an extension of their own autonomous efforts (Deut. 8:17),²³ they cut themselves off from spiritual grace. At that point, their wealth becomes their master, a merciless god that will give them no rest, a god that never announces "enough."

22. Gentry, *Greatness of the Great Commission*.

23. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

The grace of tangible wealth is sometimes removed by God as an act of mercy to a covenant-keeper who suffers from pride. In Paul's life, we see an example of God's deliberate imposition of physical restraints on a covenant-keeper. Paul suffered from a physical affliction. God would not relieve him. His affliction thwarted his pride. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:7–10). This was grace, *the grace of less*. God sometimes announces, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Less is more: less wealth, more grace.

We are to define ourselves in terms of God and His grace. Those people who define themselves in terms of any aspect of the creation have placed their self-image into the hands of an idol. When this idol grants less or takes away what a man has, the worshiper suffers greatly. He cannot safely trust in more, yet his personal solution to "not enough" is "more." He cannot rest in the kingdom of "more."

3. *Luxury*

Wealth-seeking can also manifest itself in the quest for luxury. Of course, one society's luxury may be another society's poverty. Luxury, like tangible wealth, is always comparative—governed by time and place. But what is wrong with luxury? Why should hard living be preferable to soft living? For a warrior, soft living is a threat, but for a businessman or other civilian, what is wrong with luxury? The Bible's answer is ethical. *The curse of luxury is the risk of autonomy*. Moses told the Israelites that luxury in Canaan would lead to their rebellion: "For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant" (Deut. 31:20). Almost a thousand years later, Ezekiel told the king of Tyre: "By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy

riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas” (Ezek. 28:5–8). The Book of Proverbs provides a solution: the limited personal goal of middle-class wealth. “Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:7–9).²⁴

To trust in anything other than God to provide us with our security, our meaning, and our power is to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Those who trust in anything finite are in rebellion against God. So, those who trust in their wealth are in rebellion against God. Wealth is an almost universal idol. It serves as a surrogate for so many other personal idols, most of which are for sale. Like money, which is the most marketable commodity, tangible wealth is the most widely honored alternate to trusting in God.

Jesus taught that those who trust in their wealth will suffer a great reversal of fortune in eternity. “And when Jesus saw he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:24–27).²⁵ The grim model of misplaced trust is the rich man in hell in the parable of Lazarus: “But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented” (Luke 16:25).²⁶ A reversal of fortune may come in history, as Mary said that it had come in the past, but the primary focus of Jesus’ warning is eternity. The previous passage, on persecution, is explicit: the reversal of fortune will come in heaven. “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall re-

24. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

25. Chapter 43.

26. Chapter 40.

proach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven." Heaven is the focal point for His warnings against wealth.

Conclusion

There will be reversals of fortune in eternity. Covenant-breakers will lose whatever goods they possessed in history. Covenant-keepers will inherit the earth on a judicially final basis.²⁷ At that point, the earth will no longer suffer from the Adamic curses of God.

But what about history? Will the conditions of eternity ever be reflected in history? The answer divides postmillennialists from both amillennialists and premillennialists. The Mosaic covenant indicated that covenant-keeping will produce corporate success (Deut. 28:1–14), while covenant-breaking will produce corporate defeat (Deut. 28: 15–68). Did Jesus annul the Mosaic Covenant's corporate historical sanctions? He did not say that He did. Did He emphasize them? No. Did He assume the Mosaic Covenant's continuing judicial validity for society? Theologians rarely discuss this, but on the whole, they have been hesitant to affirm that Jesus did assume the continuing validity and applicability of the Mosaic Covenant's system of historical sanctions. In contrast, Christian Reconstructionists argue that Jesus did assume covenantal continuity with respect to God's corporate sanctions in history.

The historical reversal of fortune, Jews vs. Christians, came in rapid succession from A.D. 64, the year of the persecution of Christians by Nero, to A.D. 70, the year Jerusalem fell. The persecution of Christians had the effect of judicially separating the Church from Israel. The Church had been regarded by Rome's judicial system as a variety of Judaism, and therefore legally protected. Not after 64.²⁸ This pleased the Jews. Their pleasure did not last long. In A.D. 66, the Jewish revolt began, and in A.D. 70, it ended with the destruction of the temple. Jesus had prophesied to the Jews, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple ended the Old Covenant forever. The Mosaic law's sacrificial system ended forever. "But Christ being come an high

27. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

28. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), pp. 48–51.

priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:11–12).

Jesus made it clear that the covenant’s two-fold sanctions will be applied individually in eternity. The Mosaic covenant announced that these sanctions will also be applied corporately in history. There is nothing in this section of the Sermon on the Mount that indicates that the historical aspect of the Mosaic sanctions have been annulled. Jesus preached to people who would have known about these sanctions. What His listeners had been waiting for was a reversal of national fortune based on these sanctions: the restoration of greatness to Israel. Even His closest disciples awaited this event. “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus told them to quit concerning themselves with this question. “And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (v. 7). The issue was no longer the restoration of Old Covenant Israel’s greatness; rather, it was the transfer of this kingdom to the church (Matt. 21:43). “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (v. 8). Jesus did not deny corporate greatness to His kingdom. He did deny future kingdom status to Old Covenant Israel.

It is only on the assumption that the historical aspects of the economic sanctions have not been annulled that makes it possible to develop a uniquely biblical economic theory. There must always be economic sanctions. The question is: Who imposes them? If only the state and the free market impose them, then economic theory necessarily becomes humanistic, for historical cause and effect in such a world is exclusively immanent. Jesus taught that economic sanctions are imposed in history by God. God rewards men visibly in history for giving away their money to the poor and even to their enemies without hope of repayment. This is surely supernatural causation.

Most Christians find this message difficult to accept. Few Christians tithe, let alone give wealth to their enemies. They do not discover God’s special blessings that are attached to obedience to these commands. This retards the expansion of Christ’s kingdom.

10

A MERCIFUL HAND

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful (Luke 6:27–36).

The theocentric principle that undergirds these laws is stated explicitly: God “is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (v. 36). God brings predictable sanctions in history: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ This could not be any clearer. What is not clear is the range of this passage’s application.

A. The Golden Rule

These are very difficult words for us to believe. They are even more difficult to apply. They seem to oppose common sense. Are we to

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

allow our enemies to impoverish us through a never-ending series of loans to them that they never repay?

Jesus was speaking to politically oppressed people. The Romans were in control. Israel had been politically oppressed by foreigners ever since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Israelites had long lived in empires whose rulers did not have the Israelites' best interests at heart.

Politics means power. There were Jewish rulers who were low-level enforcers of Roman power, but the typical Jew was outside of the power structure. He was on the receiving end of political power. So, he was in a position of weakness. What is the proper response in such a situation? Jesus here described a plan of action: *give away more than you expect to get*.

The parallel passage in Matthew mentions the Mosaic Covenant's legal principle of *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye (Ex. 21:24).² "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. 5:38–42). The context of the passage in Matthew is more clearly politics and civil law. Here, I reprint my comments on the Matthew passage.³

* * * * *

These rules require the covenant-keeper to subordinate himself meekly to covenant-breakers. The proper response to injustice, Jesus said here, is acceptance. The victim of injustice must not only accept it, he must open himself to greater injustice. He must bear the cost of injustice and then offer an additional payment. He must submit to tyranny.

Tyranny should be understood in its covenantal and historical context. Jesus was speaking to a captive people. Jews in the northern kingdom had been carried away into Assyria. Jews in the southern

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 38.

3. The following section is adapted from chapter 9 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

kingdom had been carried into Babylon. Those few who returned under Medo-Persia lived under foreign rule. Their heirs lived under the Macedonian Empire, which fell to Rome. Israel had been under foreign rule for over six centuries. They had known nothing but captivity and foreign domination. They had learned to live under foreign law as a captive nation.

C. An Open Conspiracy⁴

Jesus did not call His listeners to revolt. He called them to obedience. He did not teach revolution through power. He taught revolution through moral example. His concern was the kingdom of God. In its historical manifestation, this kingdom is one of justice and righteousness. The program to defeat tyranny is a return to personal justice and righteousness. The answer to bad civil laws begins with good personal rules. This is not the final answer, however. It is only the first step.

Tyranny is systematic. It is part of a corporate system. It becomes a way of life. Corruption spreads. This corruption eventually undermines it. What will replace it? A new tyranny? If men die in revolutionary violence or conspiracy, only to lay the foundation for a new tyranny, where is the gain? What the French Revolution launched and the Communist revolutions completed was a social experiment: violence for the sake of social cleansing,⁵ and power for the sake of power. Violence breeds violence. Conspiracy breeds conspiracy.

The kingdom of God is to be proclaimed openly. "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20). He spoke in parables, but He spoke openly. He did not create a secret society that was bound by a self-maledictory blood oath. He created a church that was bound by self-maledictory public signs: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The church is an open conspiracy. Its members conspire: breathe together. They do so openly. Preaching is public. The sacraments are administered in public. Only when tyrannies place negative sanctions against these otherwise public activities are Christians called by God to go into the shadows. What is visible to the public is righteousness:

4. The phrase is from H. G. Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928).

5. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1968] 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnmrror>)

good works.

This theme appears throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus called on His listeners to go the extra mile. Why? Because doing so would buy peace. Peace makes it easier for the open conspiracy to enlist new adherents. Paul wrote: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1–4).⁶

D. Turning the Cheek

“And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also” (Luke 6:29). This seems to be a rejection of the *lex talionis*: eye for eye. Eye for eye means that the punishment should fit the crime. This principle of justice undergirds civil sanctions in the Mosaic Covenant.⁷ Was Jesus rejecting the Mosaic Covenant? Hardly: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17–19).⁸ Then why did He preface his command to turn the other cheek with “ye have heard it said”? This phrase usually appears as His preface to a rejection of a traditional Jewish law which was not supported by the Mosaic law.

The context of Jesus’ discussion of turning the other cheek was civil power. The person who would strike one of Jesus’ listeners was likely to be a man in authority or someone who had the support of the civil authority. There was nothing that the injured victim could do to repay, eye for eye, without resorting to private justice, which is a form

6. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

7. North, *Tools of Dominion*, ch. 12.

8. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacodoches, Texas: Covenant Media Foundation, [1977] 2002).

of injustice.⁹ God had placed His covenant people under foreign rule for many centuries. This subordination was no temporary affliction. It was a way of life. Their fathers had sinned against God's law for so long that He never again allowed Israel to run its own political affairs.

Jesus warned "that ye resist not evil." Yet we read elsewhere: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The devil is the very incarnation of evil. Why, then, did Jesus say not to resist evil? Because evil in this context was the evil of political tyranny. It was God's judgment on His people that they had been forced to live under a series of legal systems not based on biblical law. Such a civil condition is a mark of God's negative sanctions against a nation. Jesus told them to put up with tyranny for the time being. He told them to go the extra mile.

E. Something Extra

But what of the cloak? "And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also" (v. 29). The context in Matthew's version is clear: civil law. "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also" (Matt. 5:40). The man was not a common thief. He had the force of law behind him. He had proven this. He had won the case. He had won the coat. What was the proper response? Offer him more.

Why? Because a free man can usually earn another cloak. A man in prison cannot. If the victorious plaintiff decided to sue again, the victim would probably lose. The strategy here is to give the litigious man something extra. Let him sue somebody else. The man may enjoy going to court. For most people, going to court is a traumatic, expensive experience. When you have been oppressed by a man who is allied with the authorities, it is wise to stay out of court. The strategy here is to buy him off, the same way Jacob bought off Esau when he sought to return to Canaan through Esau's land: give him gifts he did not deserve (Gen. 32).¹⁰

"And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain"

9. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

10. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982], ch. 30.

(Matt. 5:41). The same principle applies in this example. The victim is operating under compulsion. He is not a free man. Go the extra mile. Heap coals of fire on his head (Rom. 12:20).¹¹ This is a generally safe tactic to use against the enemy. But it has short-run costs. You pay extra now to avoid trouble in the future. You reduce future costs by incurring present costs.

“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away” (Matt. 5:42).¹² Here is another example of giving something extra. Normally, this verse would lead to bankruptcy. If a person who has capital gives away money to everyone would like to borrow, he will soon have no capital. The offer of free money will be accepted by most people. Why would Jesus recommend stripping His people of their capital? Is this a permanent requirement? This requirement must be seen within the context of tyranny. A man with political connections comes to a wealthy victim and asks for a loan. In all likelihood, he does not intend to repay it. He understands how the legal system works. It is on his side. This loan will be difficult to collect. The man with capital is to assess the power of the would-be borrower. Is this man in a position to create problems? Can he use his authority illegitimately? If so, avoid trouble: give him what he wants.

Let us not mince words. This is bribery. It is a way to buy off evil-doers who are in a position to misuse political power to harm you.

F. Implicit Bribes

When a person gives something extra to a poor person, the gift is not a bribe. It is a gift. It is an extension of mercy. But when a person gives a gift to someone with power over him, we generally call the gift a bribe.

What is the Bible’s view of bribery? That depends on whether you are a victim of tyranny or a ruler. The mark of an unrighteous ruler is his acceptance of bribes. “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deut. 16:18–19). But for the righteous man trapped in a corrupt legal system, offering a bribe is one way to gain justice. “A gift

11. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 11.

12. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 9.

is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth" (Prov. 17:8). "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16). "A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath" (Prov. 21:14).¹³

The Sermon on the Mount provides guidance for righteous people who are trapped in a corrupt legal order. Instead of fighting back, Jesus said, make peace. Instead of seeking vengeance, seek peace. When you are confronted with a man who has the power to take what he wants from you, offer it in advance. Honor this power by offering something extra: more than he deserves. This is the way to peace. It appears to be a costly way to peace, but in fact it is the less expensive way. It requires an extra payment in the present, but it lowers the cost of righteous living over the long run. To gain peace is a way to gain time. Time is what righteous men need to begin to construct an alternative to tyranny. It gives them time to learn the ways of righteousness and productivity. This is especially true when tyranny is increasing in both evil and power.

G. Accelerating Evil

Economics teaches that we always discount the future. This discount is the origin of the interest rate.¹⁴ The investor must be given a promise of additional future goods in exchange for the use of his present goods. Why did Jesus tell men to give up present goods to evil-doers with power? Because evil in this context was getting worse. The evil-doer will demand more in the future—lots more. He will demand so much more that it is wiser to gain his cooperation now. This is what happened in A.D. 66–70. The Jewish Zealots became more tyrannical, so Rome reciprocated, and then some. Old Covenant Israel was coming to an end in Jesus' day. Jesus was warning His listeners not to participate in revolutionary movements against the oppressors. Better to cooperate now and avoid destruction later.

Christians went through a year of persecution under Nero in A.D. 64. The horrifying stories of this persecution have come down to us for

13. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 66. See also Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), Appendix.

14. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

almost two millennia. Christians were singled out as judicially separate from the Jews, who were under special legal protection. But this legal separation by persecution was the church's deliverance. In A.D. 66, Israel revolted against Rome. The church, no longer seen by Rome as being part of either the nation of Israel or Judaism, escaped destruction in the war that followed.¹⁵ Now the prophesied days of vengeance on Israel had arrived.¹⁶

Submission can be seen as either weakness or strength. If the one who submits is seen as cowardly, he invites more persecution. But if his submission is seen as a pattern of behavior based on helping the weak as well as the strong, then submission is seen as a product of a higher ethic or a higher calling. If the man lends a hand to rich and poor, strong and weak, then he is seen as not being servile but superior. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement of *non-servile subordination*. Submission to authority is not a mark of cowardice if it is part of a program of personal ethical transformation based on extending grace—unearned gifts—to all men. This extension of grace is what the Sermon on the Mount teaches.

H. Revolution Through Cooperation

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee" (Prov. 25:21–22).¹⁷ This program of victory over one's enemies was articulated in the days of Solomon's rule, the period of Israel's greatest power. It is therefore a strategy for all seasons. Jesus merely articulated a variant of it. Paul placed it within the context of civil government: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the

15. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), pp. 48–51.

16. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

17. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 75.

ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom. 12:19–13:2).

The individual is not to seek personal vengeance against his enemy. Surely, he is not to seek vengeance against a civil magistrate. The context of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a nation under foreign domination. Israel was a nation in bondage. This was why the Jews' response to His message was ludicrous: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (John 8:31–33). Later, the chief priests (Sadducees) were more honest: "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19: 13–15).

Then how can a man in bondage, or a nation in bondage, gain freedom? By faithfully obeying God's laws. By building up the habits of obedience to God and His revealed word. There is an old political slogan: "You can't beat something with nothing." What works best as a program of national liberation is a program of liberation from sin. Again, consider the context of Jesus' words to His followers: "They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:33–34). To escape from bondage, He said, avoid sin. There can be no escape from bondage without an escape from sin. *Sin is the ultimate form of bondage in history. But God's judgment against sin in eternity is the ultimate form of bondage.* There is no escape from hell (Luke 16:26) and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15).

Jesus' recommended program of systematic cooperation with the politically powerful is a program of heaping coals of fire on tyrannical heads. Yet it is also a program of evangelism. Men who repay evil with good do catch the attention of many people, including tyrants. There is something special about such a response to evil. Men ask: "Why?"

Good undermines evil. Evil is not self-sustaining. It is parasitical. It kills productivity. This produces weakness. Tyranny does not persist

indefinitely. It recedes in the face of goodness or it collapses in a display of weakness. The collapse of the Soviet Union, 1989–1991, is the most remarkable collapse of tyranny in the history of empires. It collapsed without a fight. It was a nearly bloodless¹⁸ abdication of what had been unprecedented political power.

The requirement of this passage is outward subordination to tyrannical authority. The message is not anti-revolutionary as such; it is anti-vengeance. This is a revolutionary strategy designed to replace tyranny with liberty, which rests on God's Bible-revealed law. The revolutionary aspects of this program are moral. The passage must be seen in the context of Israel's political subordination to Rome. It must also be seen in the context of God's program of grace. His people are to extend grace to others, just as God extended grace to them. Their outward subordination to authority—extending more to tyrants than they deserve—is part of a general program of grace.

This passage is not a guide for the exercise of political power. Civil authority is based upon justice: eye for eye. Victims may extend grace to criminals; the state may not.¹⁹ The passage deals with individuals in political bondage to a state that refuses to extend justice to all. Jesus was here laying down a program of resistance to tyranny, a program based on nonviolent replacement of power. The Sermon on the Mount was a unit. This section deals with powerlessness: a way to gain victory over evil. Heap coals of fire on evil men's heads.

* * * * *

I. Luke's Version

The language in Luke's version of the sermon is broader than politics. It refers to enemies, not just political oppressors.

Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and

18. Three men died.

19. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful (vv. 30–36).

The general principle is to *love your enemy*, not merely by doing whatever the law requires, but *going the extra mile*. This applies to political enemies, including oppressors, but it applies more generally. The reason: “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (v. 36).

Mercy is always in short supply. This is because it is a free gift. There is more demand for it than the supply of it. The theological issue is God’s kindness: “for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (v. 35b). Yet Paul placed obedience to magistrates in the context of God’s kindness to all mankind in Christ: “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:1–5). So, our obedience to higher authorities and our mercy go together.

The same merciful attitude is mandatory with respect to our enemies. We are to act positively toward them, not merely avoid harming them. One way to act positively is to lend. But not just lend—lend, with nothing expected in return. “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest” (v. 35). This is an astounding statement. It has the sound of utopianism. How can we afford to lend, expecting nothing in return? We would soon be out of money to lend. We might even be forced by circumstances to become borrowers in a world not governed by Jesus’ sentiments.

The Mosaic law announced: “The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow” (Deut. 28:12). Becoming a lender

is a means of dominion.²⁰ But Jesus seems to indicate that becoming a lender is a means of charity. The lender's reward will be heavenly, not earthly. Did Jesus here repudiate the Old Covenant principle of lending?

J. Replacing Deuteronomy 15

Deuteronomy 15 informs covenant-keepers that they are to forgive debts in the year of release, the seventh year in the national cycle. "And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it" (Deut. 15:2–4).²¹ These loans were zero-interest charity loans. Any debtor who defaulted on a charity loan had to serve as a bondservant until the year of release. The creditor could legally sell him into bondservice to get back his money. "And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee" (Deut. 15:12).²²

The national year of release was annulled by the fall of Jerusalem. The charitable debt law was tied to the year of release, which was in turn tied to Israel's military conquest of the land. The land of Israel no longer is holy. So, the legal basis of Deuteronomy 15 is annulled.

Jesus replaced the old law with a new law. The indication in Luke's text is that the borrower is poor. He is in need of mercy. He is not a businessman in need of a commercial loan. In the Mosaic law, the Jew was to lend freely to a poor brother without asking an interest payment (Ex. 22:25;²³ Lev. 25:35–37²⁴). He could lend at interest to a foreigner who did not reside permanently in the land (Deut. 23: 19).²⁵ But Jesus said that we are to lend without hope of any repayment at all. We

20. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

21. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

22. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.

23. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

24. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 56.

are not merely granting forfeited interest as a gift; we are granting the principal, too. Jesus did not limit the list of eligible debtors to covenant-keepers. He extended it even to enemies. This means that the New Testament's ethical standard here is more rigorous than the Old Testament's. This does not mean that we are to tell the recipient that we do not expect repayment. But we are to lend without hope of repayment. That is, we are to lend to a poor person even though there is a high risk that he will not be able to repay. He should be encouraged to repay. He has a moral obligation to repay. But we should loan the asset knowing that we may not be repaid.

There will be repayment in heaven. This is difficult for most people to believe. The repayment is beyond time. A would-be lender must be extremely future-oriented for the promise of heavenly payment to motivate him to make a loan. He must value heaven's rewards above history's rewards. This takes a great deal of faith and a great deal of future-orientation.

We cannot afford to lend to everyone in need, either with or without an interest payment, with or without repayment of capital. We must assess the need and the reason for the need of the borrower. We are not to subsidize evil. Lending money to a drunkard is subsidizing his addiction. But we are to manifest charity by lending even to our enemies when we know we may not be repaid. This is an exercise of faith. It is a way for us, as well as the borrower, to assess the commitment we have to Christ, His promises, and His mercy.

We are in need of mercy. So is the borrower. So, Jesus asks us to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6: 12).²⁶ This is a reciprocal relationship. We are shown mercy, and we are to extend mercy. Debt-forgiveness is the mark of mercy in the Lord's prayer. It is *the* representative sign of our position as recipients of God's grace. What we have received freely from God, we are to extend freely to men in need.

Conclusion

Jesus' words are difficult to accept. They seem to place a heavy burden on His followers. His followers are to have mercy in abundance, even for their enemies. This is the evidence of their faith in God's compassion. He, too, shows mercy to His enemies, a category that once included all of the redeemed.

26. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 12.

Lending to our enemies is a sign of mercy. Lending to them without hope of repayment is a greater act of mercy. This is what God does to us when He redeems us. Without God's grace, men are all unprofitable servants. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).²⁷ Christ made full payment on our behalf. We can repay only a token of what we owe apart from Christ's full payment, and even this token payment is provided by God (James 1:17).²⁸

It is not our God-mandated task to bankrupt ourselves in unlimited lending. It is our task to provide evidence of our faith in God's promise of heavenly reward. It is also our task to provide *token payments to God* by making loans to impoverished enemies. We should do this, not hoping to be repaid by men. We will be repaid by God.

The context of this requirement was political oppression. This program of lending was part of a peaceful revolution that is designed to substitute God's kingdom for man's kingdoms. The goal was not to make Christians permanent slaves in history. Its goal was the opposite: to elevate them to positions of rulership. What is different about Jesus' program is the basis of such rulership: ministry rather than the exercise of power (Mark 10:42–45).

27. Chapter 41.

28. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 34.

11

FULL MEASURE, RUNNING OVER

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again (Luke 6:38).

The theocentric focus of this verse is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Sowing and Reaping

In his exhortation to members of the Corinthian church to make good on their promise to support the Jerusalem church in its time of need, Paul warned them: “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever” (II Cor. 9:6–9).² In another epistle, he warned: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).³ In his assertion of a predictable relationship between a person’s actions and God’s response, Paul was following Jesus’ argument in this passage.

Jesus told His listeners that there are predictable sanctions in his-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 8.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

tory. These sanctions have been established by God. God oversees His creation to bring to pass what His law has announced. In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, God set forth a system of corporate covenantal sanctions: blessings for those who obey God's Bible-revealed law, and curses for those who disobey.⁴ The Greek text here indicates that Jesus was speaking to a group. The second person plural is used, which is why the translators adopted the phrase, "ye measure." The "ye" is plural.

The use of the plural does not necessarily mean that Christ was restricting the application of God's historical sanctions to a covenanted group. The corporate focus of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 did not exclude the concept of individual applications. In the Mosaic Covenant, men were told that God would bless or curse individuals in history in terms of their actions. For example, God told men to lend to poor people in the year prior to the national year of release, when all zero-interest charitable debts would be canceled. The state was not the enforcer. God was the enforcer, case by case. "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto" (Deut. 15:10). Charitable loans were interest-free loans. "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious" (Ex. 22: 25–27).⁵ God is the enforcer.

All of these passages point to a conclusion: the relationship between God's Bible-revealed law and historical sanctions is not random. There is predictability between covenant-keeping and external blessings, including economic blessings.

B. Open Hand, Larger Purse

"For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." The judicial background of this passage is the law

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

governing honest scales. “Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deut. 25:13–16).⁶ The literal meaning of Jesus’ words is this: when you measure out something by means of a scale, someone in the future will use the same measure to compensate you. This was a warning: *do not cheat the buyer, for someday you will be a cheated buyer.*

The context of this, the third clause, implies a much broader application than its literal meaning, which related to honest scales. The focus of the entire verse is not the tool of measurement; rather, it is the quantity of goods that was on the scale. We know this because of the second clause: “Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.” Jesus was saying that *when you give away wealth to those in need, you are securing future blessings.* He was not saying that generosity constitutes some sort of *cosmic insurance premium.* He was not saying that if you are generous to a poor person, you will find a generous donor if you should ever fall into poverty. He was saying something very different: *if you have an open hand with the poor, God will have an open hand with you.* God’s open hand is not dependent on your finding yourself in circumstances similar to the poor man’s. On the contrary, *you will not find yourself in the circumstances of the poor man.*

Jesus taught here that God has no intention of keeping faithful covenant-keepers in poverty or even middle-class circumstances. The accent is on abundance. It is on “running over.” This language directs us back to Psalm 23: “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Ps. 23: 5–6).

Jesus taught that charity and prosperity are linked. There is no legitimate exegetical way around this conclusion. This verse is not limited to spiritual blessings, for the test of faithfulness is an open hand with economic assets. “Give, and it shall be given unto you.” The blessings are as material as the donations.

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 65.

C Contra Amillennialism

This verse creates an enormous exegetical problem for amillennialists. To keep from being forced to conclude that individual covenantal faithfulness produces individual economic blessings and therefore worldly success, the amillennialists argues that the donations are economic, thereby depleting the net worth of the donor, but the blessings are spiritual. Thus, the cheerful giver remains cheery as his net worth is reduced because of his open hand. Money flows out; good feelings flow in. Pretty soon, the donor will find that he is low on material assets, so he can no longer afford to be equally generous. "The more you give now, the less you will be able to give later." Thus, the kingdom of God shrinks in influence to the extent that its members follow Jesus' warning and remain generous. Donors, in their new-found poverty, get all tingly with joy because they know that they, too, will soon be destitute. This view of economics is inescapable, once you define the charitable gifts as material and the subsequent blessings as spiritual. This is not only an inescapable economic conclusion of amillennialism; it is the *theological essence* of the position.

The only way for the amillennialist to get out of this trap is for him to argue that, while the cause-and-effect relationship is true, i.e., generous covenant-keepers will get rich, in fact covenant-keepers will never be sufficiently generous. The cause-and-effect relationship remains as an ideal, but Christians in their sin will only rarely meet this standard.

To take this line of reasoning, an amillennialist must present a woefully depressing view of Christ's redemption. Christ's resurrection and ascension, both historical events, are insufficient to transform covenant-keepers ethically. That is, the gospel saves souls from hell, but it does not heal individual Christians to the degree that they will adopt charity as a way to get rich. Either covenant-keepers will remain blind to the promise of God or else they will self-consciously avoid wealth by remaining closed-handed in dealing with the poor. "Starve, my friend; I don't want to risk getting rich by helping you out."

Because of the terrible embarrassment of arguing that God's covenant-keeping remnant becomes ever-more tight-fisted and therefore ethically immature, amillennialists do not publicly argue that the church, in contrast to the world, will forever remain tight-fisted with the poor. The amillennialist argues that God's people do get more mature spiritually over time. This, in fact, is what will bring the wrath of

covenant-breakers on their heads. As Cornelius Van Til put it,

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for “the day of grace,” the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.⁷

It is possible for someone holding Van Til’s viewpoint to argue that the very economic success of God’s open-handed people will cause covenant-breakers to envy them. After all, we have seen African and Indonesian tyrants persecute the economically successful citizens of another race. But, over time, tyrants have ceased doing this. It costs them too much in forfeited tax revenues and lost jobs. They begin to call for members of these foreign groups to send capital and managers, to return to the land whose politicians had expelled their parents. They want the economic benefits of capital.

The cause-and-effect relationship described in Luke 6:38 does not point to an ever-richer group of Christians surrounded by a hostile, impoverished majority. It points instead to the cultural triumph of Christianity. Christians will not get rich by being closed-handed exploiters. They will get rich by showing mercy to the poor. This generosity will impress members of covenant-breaking societies. Because of the presence of common grace,⁸ few societies resent those who give to the poor. We know that anti-Christian nations open their borders to Christian medical missionaries. Why should this cease?

This is why amillennialists have problems with Luke 6:38. This is why amillennialists prefer to ignore Luke 6:38. The verse presents a view of historical cause and effect that is completely hostile to the amillennialist’s view of New Covenant history. It teaches that covenantal faithfulness—charitable giving—produces individual prosperity

7. Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85. For my critique of Van Til’s ethics, see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

8. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

in the broadest sense.

Conclusion

Here, in the Gospel most noted for its hostility to wealth and the wealthy, is *a theology of wealth accumulation*. Jesus argued that by giving generously, a covenant-keeper will become wealthy. This is not a cause-and-effect relationship acknowledged by either covenant-breakers or amillennialists, but it is unquestionably a theology of wealth accumulation. Wealth replacement will not merely keep pace with generosity; it will overwhelm it: “. . . good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.”

12

BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh (Luke 6:43–45).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's standards of productivity: point three of the biblical covenant (law).¹ He evaluates men's the value of men's output: point four (imputation).² We are to do the same. We must estimate the value of our own output as well as the output of others. We are to compare the value of this output with what the Bible says is truly valuable and also with what men say of themselves. We can do this because there is consistency between what a man does and the true status of his heart.

A. Ethical Cause and Effect

The parallel passage in Matthew 7:15–20 reveals the context: false prophets. False prophecy was a judicial matter under the Mosaic Covenant. But there is no mention of this judicial context in Luke's account. Luke's account seems to be broader: men in general. There is a consistency between the heart and external actions.

Luke's account speaks of treasure, good and evil, not the office of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Sutton, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

prophet. Jesus said that *the treasure in a person's heart reflects both his confession and his character*. Readers of Luke's account would have been motivated to examine their own actions and the actions of others in terms of biblical standards. If they were gentiles, then they would have had to learn more about the Mosaic Covenant. Under the Mosaic Covenant, there was a corporate cause-and-effect relationship between covenantal roots and fruits (Deut. 28). Obedience to righteous laws promoted corporate economic blessings.³ Luke's account indicates that this cause-and-effect relationship applies to individuals. Jesus uses "treasure" in the broadest sense: that which is loved or treasured by the possessor. Instead of economic wealth, Luke's account focuses on men's tongues. Their tongues reflect who they are and what they treasure.

What of fruits other than prosperity? "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:19–24). These are individual fruits.

What are the economic effects of these rival lists of fruits? Does evil consistently produce wealth? Does righteousness consistently produce poverty? Or are the outcomes random? If they are random, then no expressly biblical economic theory is possible. If the outcomes are perverse, then we must search for institutional means of converting evil personal motives into positive effects. This is what most versions of free market theory have sought to do, from Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714)⁴ until the present. *The profit motive, coupled with private ownership, produces incentives for serving others*. Men's greed becomes their motivation to meet the demands of other men. Free market economic theory has this great advantage over socialist theory: it recognizes the effects of original sin. It does not assume, as

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

4. Introduction, above. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

socialism assumes, that concentrated political power—legalized force—makes those who wield it either wiser or kinder. On the contrary, free market theory assumes the opposite.

Free market economic theory has been self-consciously agnostic with regard to God. The supernatural realm is ignored. Cause and effect in every realm is seen as exclusively natural. If we accept either the covenantal randomness of corporate effects of common confessions, or the covenantal perversity of individual results, then we cannot construct biblical economic theory. We must then appeal to this or that humanistic theory of human action. But if righteous roots produce positive fruits in history, and if unrighteous roots produce undesirable fruits, then biblical social theory becomes possible.

Jesus did not cite Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28, which deal with God's corporate covenantal sanctions in history. There is no indication that Jesus abandoned the Mosaic law's principle of corporate covenant sanctions. He did offer a supplemental principle of covenant sanctions: by the results, we can know the truth of men's covenantal confessions.

B. Pietism's Confession

In another context, the parable of the fig tree, Jesus was referring to Old Covenant Israel (Luke 13:6–9). So, the concept of fruit as a sign of spiritual roots applies to both individuals and corporate entities.

Applying this principle to societies, we conclude that there are *standards of productivity* that we can apply to assess the rightness or wrongness of that society. There also has to be human discernment of these standards and their proper application in history. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." *This statement is an extension to individuals of the corporate principles of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.* The theologian who argues that Jesus substituted individual predictability for corporate predictability has to assume that the covenant's continuity applies only to individuals. But then what of families? What of churches? Does this principle apply only to individuals? Doesn't it also apply to movements based on the teachings of individuals?

Pietism denies this principle's applicability to the world outside a Trinitarian covenant, and then seeks to deny the legitimacy of this covenant in civil government. Christian self-government under biblic-

al law, yes. Christian family government under biblical law, yes. Christian church government under biblical law, yes. But not Christian civil government. Pietists say, “There can be no such thing as Christian civil government. What existed in Mosaic Israel before the captivity has been annulled in principle.”

A major problem with pietism is that it affirms the right of covenant-breakers to establish a civil covenant on their terms. Somehow, Christians are expected to believe that a Trinitarian civil covenant will not produce the positive fruits that a non-Christian civil covenant will produce. For the pietist, the realm of the civil covenant is governed by *a reverse covenantal system of sanctions*: biblical law produces tyranny, while “neutral” civil law produces good.⁵ Pietists rarely say this openly, but this really is what they believe. They may say that they do not believe in neutrality, but in the realm of civil law, they do believe in neutrality. They much prefer humanism’s supposed judicial neutrality to Old Testament civil laws and sanctions. They believe there can be *equal time for Satan and Jesus in matters of civil law*. Even when humanists shove Jesus out of the civil realm, the pietist still affirms his faith in neutrality. I call this blind faith.

Jesus’ words here create an enormous exegetical problem for pietism, one which pietists for over three centuries have dealt with by ignoring the problem. Jesus’ words, if they were ever dealt with exegetically by pietistic social theorists, would force them to declare the existence of a realm of government in which a false confession produces good fruit, and where *a true confession*—faith in the Trinity—*produces bad fruit*. What they admit not to be true for the other three oath-bound covenants—individual, ecclesiastical, and familistic—they say is somehow true for the civil covenant. This worldview was surely never taught in the Old Covenant. The opposite was taught. It is never formally taught in the New Covenant, either. Covenantal cause and effect applies to individuals and organizations, Jesus taught. What He taught was consistent with the Mosaic system of corporate sanctions, even though He did not cite these passages directly.

The pietist claims to have discovered a principle in natural law theory or democratic theory which now supersedes both the Mosaic law and Jesus’ teaching on roots and fruits. This political principle, articulated in the mid-seventeenth century by Rhode Island’s Roger Wil-

5. Except, dispensationalists say, in the State of Israel. There, we are told, the state may lawfully and profitably impose Talmudic law, which sometimes is applied Mosaic law, on recalcitrant Arabs and Christians, as well as on recalcitrant secular Jews.

liams, and elaborated in the eighteenth century by deists and unitarians, teaches the reverse of what Jesus taught here, yet it has to be true, pietists assure us. It has to be true because modern democratic theory teaches it. To oppose it would be theocratic, and we all know how bad theocracy is, meaning Trinitarian theocracy. A humanistic theocracy—the reign of democratic man—is what we need, pietists assume. This is what God wants. Why, we are not told.

C. Free Market Theory

If Jesus' words are true, then modern free market theory labors under an enormous burden: Mandeville's curse. Free market theory promotes a view of society that says that *supernatural ethics is irrelevant*. Evil men, if they live under a private property system, will produce good things. Compared to what evil men produce under socialism, this statement has been proven true in both theory and practice, i.e., roots and fruits. But the ultimate test of free market theory is not its success over socialism. The ultimate test is its success over God's corporate sanctions in history.

The free market is not autonomous, for man is not autonomous. The free market can produce, and has produced, unprecedented tangible wealth for hundreds of millions of people. But it has also placed urban men in great peril. The division of labor has been extended to such a degree that men are cut off from the soil. They cannot feed themselves. They live in highly interdependent environments that can sustain life only through extensive exchange—an exchange system that rests on fractional reserve banking and computerization. Everything that sustains life for most urban people is in some way dependent on public utility systems, banks, trains, and traffic control systems.

This is only one example of the risks facing modern man. Modern biological warfare is another. So is the proliferation of small-scale nuclear weapons. Our cities are vulnerable. The free market has made possible the creation of vast interdependent production systems that have sustained a huge growth of population. The free market has done this irrespective of men's confessions of faith. This supposedly neutral system of universal blessings has allowed the evolution of a society that is vulnerable to any number of universal curses. Yet men do not repent. They do not see how vulnerable they are. They do not see the looming sanctions of God. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt re-

member the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:17–20).⁶

We speak of the market as an impersonal mechanism. We think of mechanisms as tools. Then we insist that tools are neutral. By this, we mean that they can be used for good or evil. But tools are not morally neutral. Nothing is morally neutral. *Specific tools are the products of particular social systems, and social systems are not morally neutral.* These tools extend the social systems that promote their production. *Tools make us dependent on particular social systems.* If we rely on our tools, we thereby rely on the social system that created them and sustains them. *But what if this social system is founded on a false oath?* Has it not become the corporate equivalent of a false prophet? Was it not built in terms of false prophecies, such as the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, to quote a well-known document written mainly by a well-known deist?

Common grace is a great blessing, but it cannot be extended indefinitely apart from special grace.⁷ A society built on some version of common grace theology—the common confession of autonomous men—rests on a fragile foundation. If God withdraws His special grace, leaving only the economic fruits of abandoned confessional roots, the tree will eventually cease bearing fruit. Surely Western Europe is now in such a spiritual condition. Asia, apart from South Korea, has never had the covenantal roots. Asians have imported the free market and its technology in the hope of escaping poverty. But Asians are now trapped by their tools, copied from the West and mass produced, and also by the fractional reserve banking system.

Social systems are package deals because they are based on specific worldviews. Worldviews are themselves package deals.⁸ The dependence of free market ideas and practices on a specifically Western, bib-

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21–23.

7. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

8. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetics: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1998), pp. 102–103.

lical-covenantal view of the world, the free market economist is loathe to admit. Such an admission undercuts his claims of *autonomy and universality*: of economics as a science, of capitalism as a social system, and of man as a product of impersonal biological evolution.

A secular economist might ask rhetorically, "Isn't a demand curve universal?" I am not saying that demand curves do not slope downward and to the right in Asia, just as they do in the West. I *am* saying that there is no such thing as a demand curve outside of the economist's conceptual tool kit. Demand curves are abstractions based on assumptions that can never be true in the real world.⁹ They are teaching tools that illustrate abstract truths of economic theory. I am also not saying that people do not respond predictably to incentives. I *am* saying that humanistic capitalism's incentives are being sold to millions of people at low prices that do not reflect the true risk of subsequent transactions. Godless Communism was murderous in its atheism, but Godless capitalism is equally committed analytically to the autonomy of man. Godless capitalism is being sold almost as an addictive drug is sold. "There's no risk. Try it. You'll like it." No doubt they will. They will also become addicted to the division of labor that comes with it—a division of labor based on a confession: "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."

Conclusion

The treasure in a person's heart defines him. It determines what he wants and what he says. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (v. 45). The abundance in a person's heart can be good or evil.

There is a predictable connection that joins faith, confession, and visible results. There is a predictable connection between invisible roots and visible fruits. This connection takes longer to manifest itself in the New Covenant, for prophetic sanctions have been transferred to Christ. Jesus warned His followers to examine the fruits whenever they

9. These impossible assumptions include: (1) men respond to price changes that are infinitesimal, i.e., unobservable; (2) a curve exists at one instant in time, yet men's decisions are made over time; (3) other things remain equal in a world in which we cannot change just one thing; (4) men's tastes do not change as prices change. There are no doubt lots of others, but my expected cost of recalling them is higher than my expected gain.

are not sure of the roots. While the context in Matthew's Gospel indicates that Jesus was discussing the office of prophet, the general principle is universal: a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Wise judgment begins with a confession of faith in the God of the Bible. It matures through a careful study of God's law (Ps. 119) and obedience, i.e., applying Bible-revealed law to our decisions. As we develop wiser judgment, we can better assess the claims of those who come to us in God's name, as Old Covenant prophets used to come. We can hear their confessions and see the results of these confessions. On the basis of what we see, we can assess the truth of what we hear.

13

OBEDIENCE BRINGS SECURITY

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:46–49).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Hearing and Doing

1. A House's Foundation

Jesus told His followers to obey Him. Any follower of Christ who does not obey Him is like a man who builds his home on foundations of dirt. The security of the house is no greater than the security of its foundation. There is no doubt what the foundation rock is: obedience to Christ.

The same language of hearing and doing is found in the Epistle of James: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholde-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

th himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (James 1:22–24). The person who hears Christ's words but fails to obey them is as unstable as a dirt foundation in a storm. He does not know who or what he is.

The image of a house built on a rock is compelling. The house will withstand storms. This is a metaphor for life. The Christian life is supposed to be a life that cannot be washed away by life's inevitable disruptions. Obedience to Christ's words is the basis of this security, which in turn rests on Christ's perfect obedience to His Father's words.

This warning appears at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, Jesus presented a series of difficult obligations regarding wealth and its uses. He hit His listeners where it hurts most in every generation: in their wallets. Then He called them to obey His words.

Does this mean that salvation is by works? Yes, it does. But the works are Christ's, not ours. Jesus lived a perfect life as a perfect representative man. His perfect righteousness is imputed judicially to us by God the Father. God the Father declares us to be not guilty. Paul wrote: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:17–19). Thus, Jesus' works become our works by God's judicial declaration to redeemed people: "Not guilty." This is the legal basis of our access to eternal life.

Then what about our good works? Do they count for anything? If we take Jesus' words seriously, they count for a great deal. But they, too, are gifts from God. Paul wrote: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). So, everything that we possess of any value is ours solely by God's grace. James wrote: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).²

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 35.

2. *A Solid Rock*

We are to obey Christ. As we become more obedient, we will become more firmly grounded in the faith. We are building on a rock. We learn to trust God for the success of our efforts. We test the truth of Jesus' difficult words and find that they are reliable. When we rely increasingly on the cause-and-effect relationships described in Luke 6, we discover that what seemed improbable at first is in fact reliable.

It takes great faith to begin this testing procedure. We are transferring our trust from this world to God. We are surrendering faith in our own efforts. We are acknowledging that God is really sovereign in our affairs. This is what it means to obey God rather than mammon. We must step out in faith. Our faith will then be ratified by the results. It will be strengthened. In this sense, our faith must be tried by fire. This fiery purification ordeal may take more time than we expect or think we can endure. Our pain and doubt may be intense for a time. We may cry out to God, "How long, O Lord, how long?" But, over time, we will come to trust more in God's system of causation instead of the world's.

It is not easy to begin. Jesus said that we must place our scarce economic resources in service to God by serving the poor and even our enemies. We are to lend, expecting nothing in return from a poverty-stricken debtor.³ This is not easy, but it is what Jesus told His followers to do. We begin tentatively, almost as toddlers take their first hesitating steps. We find it hard to believe that God will intervene in our economic affairs in order to enable us to succeed. But He must intervene if we are to succeed. Were God not to intervene on our behalf, how else could zero-interest loans to the poor (Ex. 22:25) match the return on interest-bearing commercial loans?

Jesus promised His followers great tangible wealth, i.e., exceptional wealth (Luke 6:38).⁴ This, despite the fact that Jesus indicated repeatedly that great tangible wealth is a spiritual snare. It has eternal risks attached to it. The authors of the first three Gospels recorded Jesus' statements to this effect. The story of the rich young ruler is recorded by all three. Jesus told the rich man to sell his goods, give away the money as charity, and follow Him. "And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24).⁵

3. Chapter 10.

4. Chapter 11.

5. Chapter 43.

In 1897, the Italian social scientist Vilfredo Pareto reported a previously unsuspected statistical fact: the slope of the curve of national income, from the richest to the poorest recipients, remained remarkably constant, nation by nation in Europe.⁶ This was irrespective of tax policies or the time period. The statistics that he compiled indicated that about 20% of the population earned about 80% of the income, though there was some variation, country to country. Similar findings for both income distribution and wealth distribution appear in all twentieth-century industrial nations, despite varying tax systems.⁷ This 20-80 rule has become known as Pareto's Law. Pareto later wrote, "This law being empirical, it may not always remain true, especially not for all mankind. At present, however, the statistics which we have present no exceptions to the law; it may therefore be accepted as universal."⁸ There is no agreed-upon explanation for this uniformity. There are very few attempts to explain it. What seems true is this: the rich we shall always have with us, and they will own most of the income-producing tangible capital.

It is obvious from Christ's words that Christians should not self-consciously strive to enter the ranks of the rich minority. If exceptional wealth comes to a Christian as a byproduct of his customer-satisfying services to others, or by inheritance, this is legitimate, but great tangible wealth should not be pursued actively. Christians should remain content as middle-class people. A middle-class lifestyle is the biblical standard for covenant-keepers. "Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:7–9).⁹ But if Christians live as middle-class members of a nation whose citizens own a significant percentage of the world's wealth, they should not feel guilt-ridden.¹⁰

6. Pareto, *Cours d' Economie Politique*, vol. 2 (Lausanne, 1897), pp. 370–72.

7. See Introduction:E, above.

8. Pareto, *Journal of Political Economy*, V, p. 501; cited in Vincent J. Tarascio, *Pareto's Methodological Approach to Economics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 115.

9. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

10. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1985] 1996). (<http://bit.ly/dcsider>)

B. Wealth and Security

Money is the most marketable commodity.¹¹ He who has lots of money is a person who has a large number of options or choices. He has financial reserves in case of unforeseen disasters. This is why the author of the Proverbs wrote: “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).¹² Money is seen by most people as the basis of their security. *The acknowledged source of a person’s security is his god.* This is why money is described by Christ as a rival god: mammon. “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).¹³ Jesus made it clear: all men serve gods. The question is: Which god?

Money is impersonal. God is personal. Money seems to be under control by its owner. God is not under anyone else’s control. Money seems subordinate to man, yet money is a god, a master, according to Christ. How can something under man’s ownership be his master? Answer: in the same sense as a pain-killing drug can become addictive. The drug initially is the servant of man. Then it becomes his master. *Money, as the provider of safety, becomes addictive.* To lose money is to lose safety. It is also to lose social status and self-image. The fear of losing money can become a powerful motivator. Men then adjust their lives to this motivator. They begin this adjustment by reducing their fears through seeking safety in money. They end in the clutches of fear: fear of losing money. That which they had hoped would liberate them from fear becomes a source of their fear. They had sought peace; they receive worry. They had sought money to free them from life’s cares; they steadily increase their cares about money. The parable of the four soils is clear on this point. “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14).¹⁴

What is the basis of a Christian’s security? Answer: obedience to Christ. *Increasing our reliance on Christ liberates us from cares regarding the creation. We become ever-more dependent on Christ without*

11. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1912] 1953), p. 32. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>)

12. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 53.

13. Chapter 39.

14. Chapter 15.

becoming addicted to something that threatens us. We appeal to Christ for mercy. First, we need the mercy of the grace of faith to enable us to obey Him. Paul wrote: “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal. 3:1–5). Second, we need the mercy of the grace of forgiveness when we disobey Him. This mercy is available free on request. John wrote: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Grace is what the economist calls a free lunch. It is free because Christ paid the bill on Calvary. There are not even any transaction fees other than prayer time and humility.

If obedience to Christ provides us with security—our foundation rock—and if our obedience is itself a free gift of God, then *our true security-providing wealth is a free good*. Yet few people ever claim this security as their possession. Why not? Because it takes great faith to claim it. Faith is a free gift, but it is not given to everyone. The same degree of faith is not given by God to every Christian. The grace of trust in God to provide a person’s security is available, but it is not universally given by God to His followers. In fact, it is given to very few of them. It must be requested. “Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:23–24).

The gift of faith is free, but our response imposes a cost on ourselves. The cost of acquiring this *faith in God’s provision of our security* is our surrender of our trust in mammon. We must switch our allegiance. This begins with our acknowledgment of God’s ownership of our things and our very lives. In the *Student Manual* of the Small Group Financial Study produced by Crown Ministries, we read this: “Consistently recognizing God’s ownership is difficult. It is easy to believe intellectually that God owns all you have, but yet still live as if this were not true. Everything in our culture—the media, even the law—say[s] that what you possess, you, and you alone, own. Genuinely acknowledging God’s ownership requires nothing less than a total

change of perception.”¹⁵

All people innately know that they are not the sole, exclusive owners of all that they possess. The work of the law is written on their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15).¹⁶ They know that they are not the true owners because they know that they cannot safely entrust all of their security to themselves as sovereign individuals. They want to trust something more powerful than themselves, something that can guarantee their security. But many people do not seek God. So, modern men seek security from that other would-be owner: the state. When they look to the state as the true owner, they perceive themselves as stewards of the state. This places them in bondage to other men who act collectively as agents of the state. This is another form of mammon worship, i.e., trust in an aspect of the creation.

Conclusion

Christ called His followers to obedience. The Sermon on the Mount laid down some extremely difficult economic requirements. These requirements take great faith to accept and then follow, especially if the listener is rich. The rich man has money. He has greater physical security than most other men. He does not worry about where his next meal is coming from. He does not understand that he is in service to the world through mammon. Still, grace is readily available. God is gracious and will provide sufficient faith on request. The trouble is, it takes faith even to make the request. Not many rich men possess such faith. Not many Christians do, either.

The wealth distribution curve is not bell-shaped. It is skewed overwhelmingly to the right-hand side, with about 20% of the population owning 80% of the wealth. In industrial nations, most Christians are neither rich nor poor, though more of them are poor than rich. This is as it should be until such time as a large percentage of all five wealth quintiles are heavily represented by Christians. In such an era, Christians may then more safely dwell in the right-hand side of the wealth distribution curve, for the acknowledged basis of everyone’s material wealth will then be men’s obedience to Christ’s words.

What is not as it should be today is this: the lifestyle of most Western Christians is middle class, but their obedience to the Christ’s rules

15. *Student Manual* (Longwood, Florida: Crown Ministries, 1995), p. 16.

16. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2003] 2012), ch. 3.

mandating charity is not significantly above average. They are too much like their covenant-breaking, middle-class neighbors. They do not lend to the poor at zero interest, hoping for nothing in return. They do not lend to interest-paying debtors. They are more likely to be heavily in debt themselves than net lenders.

A middle-class lifestyle is available in two honest ways: Christian and non-Christian, either *primarily* through an open hand or *primarily* through thrift, education, and long hours of work. Those few Christians who have thought seriously about the basis of their middle-class lifestyle have generally accepted the second path, too often at the expense of their family life. Obedience to Christ builds on the rock's foundation, not obedience to the standard secular rules of thrift, education, and hard work, which are unreliable substitutes for Christian faith. It takes great faith to accept Christ's view of the proper origin of middle-class tangible wealth.

The economic benefits of diligence in our work are mentioned in the Proverbs. Sloth leads to subservience. Dominion is by diligence. "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute" (Prov. 12:24).¹⁷ Sloth is destructive. "He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster" (Prov. 18: 9). But Christ made it clear that the road to trustworthy economic security is through faith-based giving, not long hours of hard work. Charity begins in the heart. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). To seek security apart from an open hand is to substitute man's ways for God's way.

17. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 32.

INTERPERSONAL COMPARISONS OF SUBJECTIVE UTILITY

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged (Luke 7:41–43).

The theocentric focus here is God as the source of forgiveness: the removal of sanctions. God's forgiveness here, as in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:12),¹ is equated with His forgiving a debt. This has to do with point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.²

A. Repaying a Debt

All people are in greater debt to God than they can ever repay. All people should therefore seek His forgiveness on His terms. Most people have refused. They seek forgiveness on their own terms if they seek it at all.

God forgives some people eternally, and all people historically, providing them with undeserved common grace.³ Everyone is in debt, including Satan and his host. When salvation comes, a redeemed person remains in debt to Christ. In fact, he is in greater debt than before, for he has now received special grace. This can be repaid only by addi-

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

tional grace. Grace compounds. It approaches infinity as a limit, as all compounding numbers do.

This text says that one forgiven sinner was much worse ethically than the other before saving grace came. Jesus asked: Which of the two redeemed sinners (debtors) will love God more? The answer is clear: the one who was forgiven more. Simon the Pharisee understood that this is the case, and Jesus affirmed it, too.

This passage raises several crucial issues for economic theory, but before I get to them, I must first consider Jesus' teaching regarding degrees of love and a common humanity.

B. Comparing Degrees of Love

Jesus' example assumes that we can compare the love of one forgiven debtor with the love of another forgiven debtor. We can legitimately say "more" or "less" love. There is no indication that we can accurately say, "this much greater" or "this much less." But if we cannot say how much, then how can we make the comparison at all? The parable rests on the fact that we can make the comparison. But how can we do it? How is such a procedure possible for a third party?

1. A Common Humanity

The comparison begins with an admission by both redeemed men: "I have been forgiven. I am grateful to the one who forgave me." Second, there has to be some common value scale that says, "To be forgiven much is better than to be forgiven little." Third, there has to be something in both men that relates the size of the forgiven debt with the love owed to the merciful creditor. *Simon's conclusion rested on the assumption that a common humanity implies a common value scale.* This common element is what made it possible for Simon to make a judgment regarding their comparative degree of thanks.

The Bible teaches that every person is made in God's image. *There is a common humanity.* This is the source of the common value scale in all people. All people fear dying, or should. Adam did not fear death enough. God gave a law to Adam: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Adam broke this law, and death has come to mankind. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Everyone is responsible to God be-

cause of Adam's rebellion. Everyone understands that he, too, is a sinner in rebellion against God. Everyone is a debtor to God for the common grace already received, and everyone knows this. This is not to say that people acknowledge their debt to God. This knowledge can be repressed (Rom. 1:18).⁴ But in every society, most men believe in a god or gods. They sacrifice to their deities, offering them time, money, or slain animals.

Jesus Christ has paid in full every redeemed person's debt to God, but this imposes responsibility on the redeemed: thankfulness. Grace precedes law, but law follows grace. Jesus in this passage affirmed that a forgiven sinner owes thankfulness to God, which is the proper response to grace. *Thankfulness is the sinner's token coinage for debt repayment to Christ.* Men owe gold. They pay copper. God accepts this as payment only because Christ paid in gold. The greater the degree of forgiveness, the greater the thankfulness owed.

The Jews were not thankful to God. This was a continuing theme in Jesus' ministry. It was Jesus' bone of contention with Simon, who was representative of the Pharisees, just as Christ was representative of God. The sinful woman who had ministered to Jesus was doing so out of thankfulness. She had obviously repented. She was showing her gratitude to God by subordinating herself visibly before Jesus in the home of a Pharisee. Simon dismissed both her repentance and Jesus' status as a prophet because of what she had been, not what she had become. "Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39).

Jesus condemned Simon's lack of gratitude to Him as the true redeemer. Jesus did this by making her an example of deep-felt thankfulness. "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven" (Luke 7: 44–

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

48). Her love had produced her gifts to Christ. These gifts testified publicly to her love. She paid in copper. Simon paid nothing and then complained. He thereby increased his own unpaid debt.

Jesus was telling Simon that he had not understood his own condition of indebtedness to God. The Jews generally shared Simon's self-assessment, especially the religious leaders. Their lack of gratitude indicated their lack of understanding of the magnitude of their sins and their desperate need of forgiveness. Jesus warned them about this. When Jesus ate a meal at the home of Levi/Matthew, the former tax collector, a meal which other tax collectors attended, the Pharisees had criticized Him. His response is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31; cf. Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17). The Pharisees were sick, too. They were in need of a spiritual physician, too.

2. Thankfulness and Response

Jesus' healing of the 10 lepers is a representative case. He told them all to go to the priest for examination, as required by the Mosaic law (Lev. 13, 14). They were not yet healed, but they obeyed. As they walked away, they were all healed. Only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank Him. "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke 17:15–19). All 10 had obeyed Jesus. They had at least this degree of faith. All 10 were healed. But only one was visibly thankful: a non-Jew.

The degree of thankfulness varies among men. These varying degrees of thankfulness are manifested in how they respond to the grace of God in their lives. Simon the Pharisee said that he who is forgiven more will love the creditor more than he who is forgiven less. Jesus concurred. Jesus' question regarding degrees of love rested on an ethical assumption: *the proper response to greater mercy is greater thankfulness and greater love*. He was speaking of what should be, not what is. Simon recognized the truth of this assumption and accepted it. It is not that he who is forgiven much *will* love the creditor more than he who is forgiven little. It is that he *should* love him more. Jesus con-

curred.

He then turned Simon's confession against him. He said that greater forgiveness should produce greater love. Simon did not love Christ as much as the woman did. Simon had become skeptical of Jesus' prophetic ministry because Jesus accepted ministering from a sinner. Didn't He know what she was? Jesus knew exactly who she was and what she had done, as He revealed in His condemnation of Simon. Simon's demonstrable lack of gratitude to Jesus was evidence that he did not see himself as being in need of Jesus' forgiveness. In contrast, the woman did. Jesus' response was not what Simon had expected. Jesus publicly forgave her (v. 48) and publicly upbraided Simon.

Every man owes Christ thanks. This is a debt. Offering thanks does not imply that man can pay off Christ for the debt that Christ paid to the Father. On the contrary, it was the magnitude of man's debt to the Father that made Christ's atoning sacrifice mandatory, for sinful man cannot afford to pay it. Men's heartfelt thanks, however, does constitute a token payment. Their degree of thanks is revealed by the gifts that people offer to Christ. This was Jesus' point with Simon. The woman was generous in her giving. Simon was not.

3. *Debtor's Ethic*

In an otherwise exemplary book, John Piper wrote two chapters against viewing gratitude for our salvation as a form of debt repayment to Christ. Significantly, he did not discuss Jesus' confrontation with Simon. He discussed the woman only in the context of her shame.⁵ He also does not discuss the incident of the lepers. These passages deal with gratitude and obligations.

Chapter One of Part I is titled: "The Debtor's Ethic: Should We Try to Pay God Back?" This is the wrong question. It should be: "Should We Try to Pay Christ Back?" Christ has paid God the Father in full on behalf of His people. Whatever we owe now, we owe to Christ. Piper wrote: "The trouble starts with the impulse that we now owe a 'gift'. What this feeling does is turn gifts into legal currency. Subtly the gift is no longer a gift but a business transaction. And what was offered as free grace is nullified by distorted gratitude."⁶ He offered examples of what he regards as inappropriate questions: "God has

5. John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), pp. 137–38.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

done so much for you; now what will you do for him?” Another: “He gave you his very life; now how much will you give to him?”⁷

The problem with Piper’s thesis is the example of Simon, who refused to ask himself either of these questions. This failure on his part was what separated him ethically from the woman. She was grateful, and she showed this by her gifts. Simon was not grateful, and he showed this by his lack of gifts. They both had obligations to Christ. Only one of them understood this. Simon was the recipient of God’s common grace. The woman was the recipient of God’s special grace. She loved Christ more because she had been forgiven of more. But Simon was not debt-free.

Piper was arguing for his thesis regarding future grace. He said that covenant-keepers should sacrifice in history for the kingdom of God because God offers us future rewards for faithful service. I quite agree. *The Gospel of Luke has this as its predominant economic theme: exchanging earthly treasure for heavenly treasure.* But, in making his case for future grace, Piper rejected what is obviously a major aspect of the gospel, namely, that we are always in debt to Christ, and we owe Him visible tokens of our love in history. We can never pay off what we owe, let alone get into a creditor’s position with Christ. Jesus Christ never becomes obligated to us. Our account is always in the debt column, for we receive ever-more grace as time goes on. This is why we need continual grace: to enable us to continue our repayment schedule. Our sacrifices are mere tokens of our gratitude. They are not repayments in the sense of ledgers in a banker’s repayment book. Our payments are tokens of our debt, but they are to be offered in love, as a marriage partner offers to a spouse. These payments do not settle our accounts; only death does. They acknowledge a continuing obligation. Christ settled our accounts definitively with God the Father: paid in full. Covenant-keepers never settle their accounts with Christ. He extends grace continually.

Are these payments legal obligations? No. We do not lose our salvation because we fail to show gratitude. Are they moral obligations? Yes. *We lose some of our blessings by not making our token payments.* “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).⁸ Jesus embar-

7. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

8. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

rassed Simon by pointing to his *lack of love*, which was demonstrated by his *lack of gifts*. Negative verbal sanctions were publicly imposed on Simon by Christ, based on Simon's silent criticism of both Christ and the woman, and based also on his visible lack of gratitude. If God imposes negative sanctions for failing to show gratitude, then there has to be an element of debt involved in our receiving grace.

Piper wrote: "If grace be free—which is the very meaning of grace—we cannot view it as something to be repaid."⁹ But grace surely is something for which we owe Christ *visible tokens of our grateful love*. If we do not owe such tokens, then why would Jesus have used Simon the Pharisee and the nine Jewish lepers as examples of ingratitude on the part of Israel, which He contrasted with gratitude shown by a sinful woman and a Samaritan? What other point was He making, if not this one?

There is a debtor's ethic. We teach it to our children. A parent, acting as a third party, tells a child who has just received a gift from a second party: "Say thank you, dear." And if "dear" refuses, negative sanctions are appropriate. God the Father is the parent. Christ is the second party. We are "dear." We had better say, "thank you" with more than words. Talk is cheap.

The *debtor's ethic* can become *legalistic*: past grace. But so can the *producer's ethic*: future grace. The theory of future grace can lead to a theory of token payments made in expectation of great heavenly rewards. These token payments no more legally obligate God to repay the donor than men's tokens of gratitude legally repay Christ in full for His grace. *Legally and economically, rebels are always in debt to God. God is never in debt to them.* The best example of legalistic future grace at work is revealed by God's response at the last judgment. Many will say, "Lord, Lord," based on what they thought they had done for God. His response: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Legalism can corrupt any spiritual relationship when men confuse their token payments to God with payment in full.

C. Common Ethics, Common Humanity

Simon's confession was that the person who had been forgiven much should show greater love to the merciful creditor. Jesus agreed with this assessment. But this assumes a common value scale among

9. Piper, *Future Grace*, p. 45.

men. This value scale is ethical.

What is the source of this common value scale? A common humanity. *Man is made in God's image. Built into every person is the work of the law.* This is what condemns every person before God. Paul wrote: "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew **the work of the law written in their hearts**, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom. 2:12–16). God's law is not written on all men's hearts, but the work of the law is.¹⁰ This is sufficient to condemn them.

Every covenant-breaker is in deep debt to God, both as a result of Adam's sin and his own sins. The level of personal debt is not equal in each person, although our Adamic debt is the same, which is why all people physically die. There are varying degrees of sinfulness in people. There will therefore be varying degrees of punishment for covenant-breakers in the world to come. In hell and the lake of fire, there will be no equality. This is the inescapable theological implication of Christ's warning regarding the two servants. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).¹¹

There is a common judge of man: God. There is a common humanity: the image of God. There is a common standard of righteousness: the law of God. There is a common scale of values: the work of the law written on every human heart. This means that *there are ethically mandatory degrees of appropriate thankfulness and love among the forgiven*. But men are in varying degrees of rebellion and understanding. They do not acknowledge these mandatory degrees of thankfulness. This condemns them before God.

10. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 4.

11. Chapter 28.

God makes interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. He makes no mistakes. He applies to specific cases His universal ethical requirements for all mankind. Because His ethical standard is objective, and His subjective evaluation is also objective, men are held accountable by God. This means that the existence of varying degrees of thankfulness among men does not refute the existence of a *universal objective standard* of appropriate thankfulness. It also does not refute the existence of a universal Judge, to whom sinners are in varying degrees of debt.

Simon's confession was grounded in objective ethics. Without an objective ethical standard, his confession could not have been true. Jesus said Simon's judgment was correct. If ethics varies, person to person, and if men's ethical evaluations also vary, and if there were no overarching objective ethical standard above individual subjective ethical standards, then there would be no way to conclude logically that greater forgiveness should produce greater love. There would be at most a statistical correlation over large numbers of people between objective forgiven debt and subjective love. But there *is* an overarching objective ethical standard above individual subjective ethical standards. This is why Simon's assessment was accurate.

We come at last to the economic issue raised by this passage: an application of subjective value theory.

D. Subjective Value Theory and Objective Policy-Making

This text raises a major theoretical problem for modern economics. Modern economics is grounded in epistemological subjectivism. The individual is said to impute value to scarce resources. He uses his own personal scale of values to make this evaluation. He places his ends in a *hierarchy of values*, and he then allocates his wealth, including his time, according to this hierarchy or scale of values. Here is the epistemological problem: *the values of one imputing agent cannot be compared scientifically with the values of another.*¹² But if there is no common scale of values, then it becomes impossible for anyone to make scientifically valid judgments regarding the overall social value of any government policy. There is no common scale of values that would enable an

12. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature & Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

economist to say, scientifically, that one policy will produce greater social value than another. *There is also no scientifically valid scale of social value.* Therefore, *there is no such thing as social value*, scientifically speaking.¹³ Economists rarely admit this, but it is an inescapable implication of methodological subjectivism.

I have returned to this theme repeatedly in my economic commentaries, beginning with *Genesis*.¹⁴ The presumed inability of economists or anyone else to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility is a fundamental flaw in modern economic theory. Economists rarely discuss this problem, because it has not been solved scientifically or philosophically. To get from the *subjective utility scales* of individuals to *objective social utility* is scientifically impossible, according to the logic of individualism. This strips economic theory of all scientific relevance for choosing or rejecting any social policy. But economists want to believe that what they teach can become relevant for making social policy. So, they ignore this epistemological problem. They offer policy suggestions to politicians and bureaucrats as if this epistemological problem had been solved.¹⁵ They pretend to be scientists when they offer advice.

This passage acknowledges that *there is a common scale of values possessed by all men: the work of the law written in all men's hearts.* Therefore, it is possible for outside observers to make estimates of interpersonal subjective utilities regarding who owes God what degree of thanks. *But these estimates cannot be defined as scientific, given the standards of modern humanism.* To appeal to a biblical concept—the work of the law written in all human hearts—is considered non-scientific. Economists must not appeal to supernatural sources of information, we are told by economists. Economics must be value-free, we are told. But if economics really is value-free, then economists cannot legitimately invoke or assume a common value scale for humanity, i.e., “this is best, this other is next best, and this over here is not too important.” Welfare economics in particular and policy-making in

13. Murray N. Rothbard, “Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics,” in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956). (<http://bit.ly/Mists-Fest1>)

14. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5. See also North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, Tools of Dominion (1990), Appendix H.

15. Chapter 50.

general are then removed from consideration by economic science. But economists refuse to let loose of welfare economists.

In 1920, A. C. Pigou, the Cambridge University economist who had taught economics to the young mathematician, John Maynard Keynes, wrote in his book, *The Economics of Welfare*, that welfare economics assumes the existence of a common "mental constitution" among all men.¹⁶ If men had different mental constitutions, he said, economists could not establish that a government program of graduated income taxation is beneficial to society. In 1912, he had written, "If we assume all members of the community to be of similar temperament. . . ."¹⁷ But on what theoretical basis can a methodological subjectivist legitimately assume this? It was in response to this line of argumentation that Robbins wrote Chapter VI of *The Nature & Significance of Economic Science* (1932), which deals with value judgments and policy-making. There is no common value scale, so there is no legitimate case for graduated taxation in terms of declining marginal utility of money to each individual.¹⁸

Conclusion

Modern subjectivist economic theory denies the existence of a common ethical standard, common tastes, and especially a common evaluator on the day of judgment. It affirms that each person is different. This destroys the concept of a common humanity. It therefore destroys the possibility of a common objective scale of values linking all men. This means that there can be no scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Nevertheless, men make such comparisons all the time, just as Simon did. Without such comparisons, there would be no way to assess the economic results of the court system or the legislative system. There would be no way to say accurately that any judicial policy is economically superior to another. So, while economists deny the scientific basis for making such comparisons, they ignore this presupposition when it comes time to recommend one policy over others.¹⁹

There is no neutrality. There is no escape from responsibility, in-

16. A. C. Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. 90.

17. A. C. Pigou, *Wealth and Welfare* (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. 24.

18. Chapter 50.

19. The best example is Robbins' capitulation to Roy Harrod in 1938. See North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5:C.

cluding civil responsibility (Lev. 4).²⁰ Men in their God-delegated and inescapable offices as judges must make assessments of their own actions and the actions of others. Civil magistrates must decide which actions are acceptable to God and men, and which are not. They must apply civil sanctions in terms of social ethics, which cannot be neutral. Civil sanctions are objective. Judges in a biblical commonwealth must therefore seek to discover an *objective social ethics* that authorizes *objective civil sanctions*. They must seek to conform their society's civil standards to what God requires for all civil governments. The closer that men come to applying God's Bible-revealed law to historical circumstances, the greater the objective blessings of God on their affairs (Deut. 28:1–14).²¹ This is surely an objective benefit—a positive supernatural sanction.

20. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

21. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

15

CHOKED WITH RICHES¹

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:11–15).

The theocentric principle is this: God delegates to mankind the responsibility of managing the earth. This is point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.² This places each man in the office of steward, whose work God will judge: point four.³

A. Tangible Wealth and Autonomy

What has economic stewardship got to do with seeds? The parable speaks of a seed-sower—God—who distributes the same seeds, but the results are different. The varying fruitfulness of the soils determines the varying results of the sowing. This passage minimizes the effects of the sower. He merely distributes the seeds. The parable focuses attention on the *varying environments of the seeds*, not on the sower's work.

1. This is modified from chapter 28 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), "The Deceitfulness of Riches."

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

3. Sutton, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

What makes the difference in output is the quality of the soils.

Verse 15 provides a clue: “choked with cares and riches.” This is a different emphasis from Matthew 13:33, where Jesus spoke of the deceitfulness of riches. This passage deals with the *cares* of riches, i.e., management responsibilities.

Why should a Christian desire more cares? The cares of this world and riches overwhelm the man’s faith in the word of God. In Matthew 13:22, the comparison is with thorns. “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” This points back to the curse on Adam: “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field” (Gen. 3:18). The thorns are hindrances that thwart a man’s work. The work in question in the parable is the work of extending the kingdom of God in history. *The common measure of earthly success is wealth, yet wealth is what threatens the gospel-hearer’s work.* The cares of the world undermine his kingdom efforts. One such care is the amassing and care of riches. Great wealth requires great care to maintain it.

Riches deceive men. What is it about riches that deceives men? Moses identified this self-deception as *the sin of autonomy*. “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).⁴ The author of Proverbs wrote: “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).⁵ What is it about great wealth that persuades men that they are autonomous? One aspect is the great *range of alternatives* open to men with wealth. In fact, increasing wealth is defined by some economists as an increasing range of alternatives available at the former price. A person’s wealth has increased in direct proportion to the increase beyond his previous range of choices. So, the man of great wealth is tempted to trust in his wealth because it seems to endow him with him a Godlike power of decision-making.

This confidence in tangible wealth is a delusion. The range of choices open to any man is minuscule compared to what God can do for him or to him. God is sovereign; He can do whatever He chooses. The rich man is blinded by his wealth because it is his preferred means

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 53.

of comparison with other men, not with God.

Another aspect is the *seeming impersonalism* of tangible wealth. This form of wealth extends a man's power and influence over other people in a seemingly impersonal way. Money is a tool of dominion. Tools appear to be impersonal. They are not, but they appear to be. Nothing in the creation is impersonal.⁶ A tool is usually regarded as impersonal device that extends the personal decisions of its owner. *Wealth is seen as existing independently, or only as an extension of the owner. This is a delusion.* The market value of a man's tangible wealth does not exist independent of the decisions of other people. Other people *impute value* to the rich man's capital or to the services that he sells that provide him with his wealth. If their opinions change, he can be reduced to poverty. The familiar example of the buggy whip industry is correct. When the automobile came, the buggy whip business was doomed, except among the Amish.

Men seek to own those forms of wealth that best insulate them from the changing opinions of other men. They accumulate money because money is more constant in value than expenditures by their immediate customers. Money is the most marketable commodity. We are now back to the issue of the wide range of choices. Nevertheless, when an invading army comes, or plague comes, or famine comes, or some other social disaster comes, money is of little or no value. "And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver" (II Kings 6:25). The environment that had made tangible wealth what it was had changed.

To attribute to any aspect of the creation a power associated with God is to move from theonomy to autonomy. Men are tempted to attribute autonomy to wealth or political power. But most men recognize the inherent danger of political power, which calls forth others who wish to claim such power by whatever means.⁷ Power is too personal to be shared easily; it must either be monopolized or surrendered.⁸ But tangible wealth can be gained in many ways. Others can

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

7. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), ch. 10.

8. In bureaucracy, power is divided up more finely and made less dependent on anyone's personal attributes. Bureaucratic power can be allocated widely. But it is circumscribed by rules. Bureaucracy is a common man's way to power, if he can pass examinations.

become wealthy without threatening the status of the wealthy man.⁹ Men seek wealth as the least risky means of autonomy.

B. Cares and Responsibility

The text speaks of cares. What cares are these? *Cares of administration*. Wealth creates responsibility. Great wealth creates great responsibilities. This is because *ownership is a social function*. To own something is to be responsible for its use.¹⁰ We are stewards of God, the cosmic Owner. Not everyone believes this, of course. God nevertheless reminds them of their stewardship by imposing costs on them.

A cost is defined by the economist as the value of the highest-value use foregone. If I use my money to invest in an investment that pays 5% per year, I cannot use it to invest in something that pays 4%. Someone else wants me to let him use my money, and he is willing to pay me 4%. It therefore costs me the forfeited four percent to earn five percent. I surely cannot get 9% by lending the same capital to both of them. In other words, I am not a fractionally reserved bank. Or maybe I want to buy a new car with the money that I can invest at 5%. To accurately assess the car's cost, I must imagine the future. If I buy the car, I will not have any of the things that this forfeited interest income will buy me, plus my money back at the end of the loan period. So, when I drive down the road, it will not cost me merely the price of the gasoline and the depreciation of the car's value. It will also cost me whatever that day's 5% would have bought me for the day's driving. After I junk the car, it will still cost me 5% per year. The car will be gone, but that forfeited investment opportunity will stay with me as an imputed cost. The interest from the bond that I decide not to purchase will continue to be paid, but not to me.

Whatever we own that commands a market price is the object of continual bidding by potential buyers or renters. The reason why an item has a market price is because people are bidding to gain control over it. Moment by moment, the owner incurs a cost of ownership. He

9. If many people become wealthy, this can threaten his status. Some goods are *positional goods*, a term coined by Fred Hirsch. They are valuable only because they are in short supply. If mass production makes them widely available, they lose their status-giving power. This is one reason why free market capitalism is hated by members of groups that have attained their social status in a pre-capitalistic economy, where wealth is not widely shared.

10. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 28. This is a reprint of "Ownership: Free, but not Cheap," *The Freeman* (July 1972). (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

is turning down offer after offer: "Sell it to me!" *The owner cannot escape the cost of his decision not to sell.*

The owner uses an item in a particular way. He cannot simultaneously use it in another way. All of the buyers or renters who want him to use it in another way are bidding against each other to change his mind. The top bidder in the list of losing bidders is imposing a cost on him. Perhaps he owns some land. He can rent it to a local farmer. He can build a house on it. He can hold it out of production for speculation. Whatever he does with it, this decision costs him the highest-value use foregone.

This system of competitive bidding imposes cares on every owner. The more money that he possesses, the more the available uses for his money. What should he do with it? What risks must he bear? All the time, the market price reminds him of the existence of the bidding process: the uses foregone, the investments foregone, the profits missed, the losses incurred. The more wealth that a person piles up, the more cares he has. His responsibility is greater because his opportunities are greater.

In the United States, extremely rich people, especially heirs of extremely rich dead people, hire administrators of their wealth. They seek to escape the day-by-day responsibilities of managing their wealth. They do this by delegating management. But this only hides their responsibility. What if they had hired wiser administrators? Wouldn't they be richer?

At some income level, the very rich cease to care about the size of their fortunes. They abandon concern over their money. They think they are too rich to suffer a major change in their lifestyles because of either a reduction or an increase in their wealth. Perhaps they may seek to live more simply. Or they may decide to spend it all in their lifetime. Whatever they decide, they attempt to avoid any responsibility for the care and handling of their wealth. But they do not thereby escape their stewardship function. They merely conceal this from themselves. They are still responsible, despite their delegation of management tasks.

God owns everything. He is in need of nothing. He can therefore delegate administrative control over His assets without suffering losses when the administrators fail. Men are not God. They lose when their administrators lose.¹¹ God is made no richer when His stewards make

11. This also applies to Satan, who is a creature.

a profit, but estate owners are made richer.

C. Choked by Pleasures

The two great motivators in life are pleasure and pain, or their variations, greed and fear. We have already considered the pain that is imposed by wealth: cares. Now let us consider the pleasures.

The book of Ecclesiastes is the Bible's great testimony to the vanity of pleasures.

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun (Eccl. 2:1–11).

The pursuit of pleasure, even when these pleasures are not illicit, cannot satisfy a wise man. This inherently futile quest for satisfaction may take many years before a rich man recognizes this. He may never become wise enough to recognize its futility. When he does, he cannot regain any of those lost years and lost opportunities. Memories fade, the capacity to enjoy pleasure fades, and the missed opportunities to do a better job of stewardship for God are gone forever.

But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh

is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them (Eccl. 11:8–12:1).

Jesus was not announcing a new doctrine of wealth. He was confirming the words of the Preacher, probably Solomon, a wise king who had become unwise about polygamy, a rich king whose wealth did not comfort him.

A man who is choked by pleasures is a man who is trying to swallow too much. He loses his ability to balance his intake. Like a diabetic who cannot stop eating sweets, so is a rich man choking on pleasures. His tangible wealth enables him to pursue many pleasures, to fill his life with what is pleasant. He is addicted to the pursuit of pleasure. He cannot become fruitful for God.

D. Riches vs. Fruitfulness

Riches are a convenient means of assessing a person's economic productivity. Because of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28),¹² men are inescapably confronted with the results of their own productivity in their task of subduing the earth. They seek to discover *agreed-upon success indicators* that will reveal their degree of success. In every economically developed society, money has been the most familiar success indicator, the one open to the widest audience. Unlike beauty or power or artistic creativity, the possibility of accumulating money is open to a wide range of individuals. In this sense, it is a more impersonal success indicator than beauty or power or fame.

Because so many people acknowledge wealth as the primary measure of personal success, men are lured into pursuing it. Other men impute value to this wealth as the measure of a man's life. It is easy to listen to the crowd and evaluate one's own performance in relation to the economic success of others. Money and goods are a convenient way to keep score. They always have been. "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2). The question is: How important is the game?

12. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 3.

The active pursuit of wealth is a snare and a delusion, Jesus taught. The crowd is wrong. What constitutes wealth is right judicial standing with God. “And when Jesus saw that he [the rich young ruler] was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:24–27).¹³

Then what is true fruitfulness? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23). Money does not buy these or empower these. The deceitfulness of tangible wealth undermines them. Tangible wealth is not inherently opposed to them, but the deceitfulness associated with it does undermine such fruitfulness.

Tangible wealth is quantifiable. The success indicators of spiritual maturity are not quantifiable. The lack of a quantifiable success indicator bothers most men. They want to keep score in life. They seek a numerical indicator. “He who dies with the most toys, wins” proclaims a popular American tee-shirt. Wins what? Not more toys. Not more time to play the game. Posthumous fame as a great game-player, perhaps. But a corpse cannot enjoy fame.

Did Jesus warn men not to use wealth as their success indicator, except perhaps as a lack-of-success indicator? If He taught this, then He broke with the Mosaic law’s covenantal principle of inheritance. There is no doubt that wealth was a legitimate success indicator under the Mosaic law. “The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 28:8).¹⁴ Wealth was a success indicator even before the Mosaic law. “And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2). The loss of wealth was seen as a curse under the Old Covenant. “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your

13. Chapter 43.

14. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

ways” (Hag. 1:6–7).¹⁵ Consider your ways, God told them. The disparity between their input (sow much) and their output (bring in little) was a lack-of-success indicator. It was to motivate them to spiritual introspection. There was a positive relationship between covenantal faithfulness and economic success. Did Jesus deny this relationship? If He did, then the New Covenant represents a sharp judicial discontinuity.

E. The Exchange Rate: Temporal Wealth vs. Eternal Wealth

The text does not say that riches lead men astray; their cares and pleasures do. Riches are temporal; so, they focus a rich man’s attention on the temporal. *The time-bound nature of riches is a snare and a delusion.* Jesus kept teaching about the rate of exchange between earthly wealth and eternal wealth. He kept saying that the rate of exchange is low, but men—especially rich men—think it is high. Why lay up treasure on earth, Jesus asked, where thieves break in? Is this not foolish? But the rich man cannot see the foolishness. Why? Because he refuses to see that *he is as temporal as his wealth*. They both dissipate. If he is very rich, he will dissipate more certainly than his wealth. *But he turns a blind eye to his own mortality.* An old man thinks he has at least five years left to live, but a year later, he does not reduce this estimate to four.

1. Decreasing Marginal Utility

Economics teaches that as a person accumulates units of a particular asset, each additional unit is worth less to him than the previous unit. This is the law of decreasing marginal utility. It leads to the statement, “enough is enough.” So, a rich man should be progressively willing to surrender ownership of a unit of these accumulating temporal assets in order to gain a unit of a uniquely valuable asset that he does not yet possess: eternal wealth.

There is an unstated assumption behind the law of diminishing marginal utility: a person’s tastes do not change. If there is an addictive aspect of the item, then the law of diminishing marginal utility applies differently. The enjoyment produced by each unit declines, as economic theory says it must, but demand nevertheless increases. To get

15. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 32.

the same thrill as before, the user must consume more of the drug per dose. To avoid painful withdrawal symptoms, the addict must consume more doses per unit of time. Jesus' description of the deceitfulness of riches and the inability of most rich men to enter heaven implies that *tangible wealth is addictive to most rich men*.

If tangible wealth were not addictive, then, in the eyes of a rich man, the exchange rate between earthly wealth and eternal wealth would shift in favor of eternal wealth. As a man accumulates temporal wealth, and as he gets older, he should find that the value of each additional unit of wealth is worth less to him than the previous unconsumed unit. Eternal wealth would look more appealing to him, even though it is not tangible in this life. He would be willing to exchange some of his earthly wealth for a greater supply of eternal wealth. But this is rarely the case, Jesus taught. This may be because (1) wealth is addictive; (2) rich men have no belief in eternal wealth; (3) they have no understanding of the exchange rate between temporal and eternal wealth; or (4) a combination.

Yet the same can be true of the accumulation of eternal wealth. It can become addictive, though not for many people. Still, the idea has had a fascination for Americans. In 1932 and 1933, in the worst economic phase of the Great Depression, a 1929 novel by Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas, became a best-seller: *Magnificent Obsession*. It was made into a popular movie in 1935 and again in 1954.¹⁶ The title hinted at the book's theme: giving away wealth for God's kingdom becomes an obsession. The book promotes a non-ecclesiastical "science of mind" sort of religion. The protagonists do not attend church, nor are they interested in traditional religion. But the story does rest on Jesus' command to give with an open hand, with the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. Whenever men learn this lifelong discipline of giving, they prosper, the book said. Few men ever learn about this relationship, the book implies. They may want to believe something like this, but they cannot bring themselves to begin the experiment. They find the theory too difficult emotionally to implement systematically, especially rich men. Yet rich men should find it easier to begin the experiment, for if the theory proves unworkable, they will still have plenty of tangible wealth remaining. But Jesus' comment on the widow's gift of two small coins—all the money she owned (Luke 21:4)¹⁷—indicates that the poor, not the rich, are more likely to understand

16. On Douglas' spectacular writing career, see Chapter 9.

17. Chapter 48.

the principle of exchanging temporal wealth for eternal wealth.

2. *Radical Change vs. Marginal Changes*

There is another explanation for the rich man's resistance: *the non-marginal nature of the exchange*. Eternal life is not sold for temporal wealth, unit by unit. It is given away as a completed transfer of ownership through special grace: *definitive sanctification*. Definitive sanctification is the grace-based transfer of the complete moral perfection of Jesus Christ, which is imputed judicially to each redeemed person at the historical moment of his redemption.¹⁸ The believer is then supposed to mature in the faith by progressive sanctification: working out in fear and trembling the salvation that is already his (Phil. 2:12).

Marginal exchange is the meaning of this verse: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6: 20).¹⁹ Laying up treasures is not a one-time event. It is *a lifetime process of exchange*, unit by unit, good work by good work. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). These exchanges can begin only after legal access to the eternal treasury is transferred to the recipient: justification by grace through faith.

Prior to receiving special, saving grace, a poor man is more likely than a rich man to think, "If this life is all there is, then I will consider eternal life." A rich man thinks, "This life is good for me. I cannot be sure about eternal life. If I must sacrifice part of this life for all of that life, then I shall stick with what I know and have come to depend on." Riches focus a rich man's attention and hope on the temporal, where he is demonstrably successful. He will not readily believe that portions of his temporal wealth can be exchanged for eternal wealth. If he does believe this prior to receiving special grace, he is deceived once again: works religion. He cannot open an account at heaven's treasury on his own signature. Regeneration is the radical change or *non-marginal change* that must precede the exchange process.

18. John Murray, "Sanctification," *Collected writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:1.

19. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

The price of such a radical change is lower for a poor man. He is not giving up much. The price of radical change is higher for the rich man. He surrenders much: faith in his would-be autonomy. Radical decisions are rare, which is why they are called radical. Most decisions are made at the margin: surrendering a little of this to get a little of that. So, it is more difficult for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (Luke 18:25).²⁰

Jesus indicated here that the required change is radical: surrendering faith in this world's ability to offer eternal bliss. A man cannot buy his way into eternal life. So, it is not that the rich man is asked to give up his wealth that alienates him. He is asked only to tithe, just as the poor man is asked. But he *is* asked to surrender faith in his riches as a gateway to eternity. This is the great stumbling block of the gospel for the rich man: he cannot buy his way in. Salvation's price is too great for him; it can be obtained only as a gift from God. Surrendering faith in the treasures of this world is not quite so great a stumbling block to the poor man, who has little hope of gaining temporal treasures, unless he is poor because of some addictive sin.

The rich man is asked to see his riches as God's gift, which God may remove at any time, just as He removed Job's wealth. Job proclaimed, in the midst of his new-found poverty, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). The rich man is asked to proclaim this testimony in the midst of his treasure. Few ever do.

Successful men generally see their success as well-deserved.²¹ They see life's set-backs as deviations from justice. The poor man who comes to grips emotionally with his poverty can look forward to a better world after death. He is told by God that his poverty is part of God's plan for him in this world. His poverty is no longer a curse or an injustice; it is merely an environment—a predestined environment. He can mentally surrender faith in this world. But the rich man will not readily see his wealth as merely as a God-imposed environment. He sees his wealth as his legitimate reward for his meritorious behavior, or at least his shrewd behavior. He is asked by God to turn loose of his positive, autonomous self-image, which is the product of the deceitfulness of riches. He refuses. His tangible wealth seems to reinforce—val-

20. Chapter 50.

21. When they do not, they may be eaten up with guilt.

idate—his positive self-image.

The gospel unquestionably removes this validation. God says that his wealth is a kingdom-building tool for God's kingdom. The rich man sees his wealth as his tool. God says that both he and his wealth are God's tools. For a believer in his own autonomy, this is a bitter pill. It takes God's saving grace for him to swallow it.

F. Inheritance

The issue of tangible wealth is the issue of inheritance.²² Jesus told a parable of a rich man who dreamed of building new barns. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16–21).²³ His dream of new barns was legitimate. Grain must be stored somewhere. Why not in his own barns? What was illegitimate was his thought that these future barns would be his. He did not recognize his own mortality. He did not think about inheritance. He did not ask himself the question: "Whose shall those assets be?"

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Those who are *meek before God* will inherit.²⁴ The rich man is deceived into believing that the might of his hand has gotten him his wealth.²⁵ This was as true under the Mosaic Covenant as under the New Covenant. Jesus warned them that the success indicator of expanding wealth is not a legitimate substitute for being rich toward God.

But how can a person be rich toward God? Through worship. This was Haggai's warning to Israel. They had not built God's house of worship. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye

22. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*; North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

23. Chapter 25.

24. Chapter 4.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands” (Hag. 1:6–11).

The open purse will be filled by God. The closed purse will be emptied by God. The open purse is open at the top, where its owner can reach in and pull out money to give or buy at his discretion. The closed purse has a hole in the bottom. Its owner has no discretion as to what happens to the contents. *The authority of a covenant-keeper over a full purse is based on his submission to God.* This was as true in Haggai’s day as in Christ’s.

The inheritance that Christ spoke of is the whole earth. What greater accumulation of temporal treasure could there be than the whole earth? *Treasure is accumulated over time by His people. How? By their wisdom, faithfulness, and generosity. By their efficiency, too.* Honest wealth is the result of serving others, namely, customers. He who does not waste resources can serve customers better. Over time, this wealth builds up as His people extend the kingdom of God in history. *This is the fulfillment of the dominion covenant.*

Christ was warning His followers not to make the same mistake that those of Haggai’s generation made: the mistake of the closed purse. We are to be rich toward God. This is the basis of wealth accumulation under the New Covenant, just as it was under the Old. There is no discontinuity. The sanctions are the same. The law is the same. The sin is the same: autonomy.

Conclusion

To accumulate temporal treasure is to risk becoming unfruitful for God. God is responsible for the world. He delegates to men the responsibility of allocating their wealth. He then sees how they handle this responsibility. The parable of the soils deals with how men handle this God-given responsibility.

The cares and pleasures of tangible wealth may choke a person. His life will be spent dealing with wealth-allocation decisions or else

avoiding them in an vain attempt to avoid responsibility. Everything that commands a price imposes responsibility on its owner. The free market imposes costs on every owner. Bidders are constantly crying out, "Serve me! I'll pay!" The noise of these bids may deafen an owner. It may drive him to spiritual irresponsibility.

To accumulate riches is to accumulate cares. If you prefer to avoid cares, avoid riches. But doesn't the poor man also have cares? Yes. He is at severe risk from unforeseen disasters. He has no financial reserves to deal with these disasters. So, the book of Proverbs recommends middle-class wealth. "Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:7-9).²⁶

Then what of the open purse as an avenue to wealth (Luke 6:38)?²⁷ This wealth accumulates marginally. It is less of a threat spiritually because of the mode of accumulation: dispersal. You give in order to receive. The self-discipline of charity, not the self-discipline of thrift, is Jesus' recommended method of becoming rich in history. Giving away wealth helps to immunize a person to both the addiction and deception of riches. It also reduces the cares.

26. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

27. Chapter 11.

16

THE RICH GET RICHER; SO DO THE POOR

Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have (Luke 8:18).

The theocentric issue here is God as the sanctions-bringer. This is pont four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.¹

A. The Purpose of Parables

There is an old phrase: “The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.” This is said in the context of either psychological resignation to a reform-proof economics. It is never used to justify any economic system.

This passage seems to teach the same principle. Those who have, get. But there is an oddity here that makes no sense: those who have not will lose even that which they do not have. What does this mean?

To find out, we begin by studying its context. This message is also found in Matthew 13:12, the premier New Testament chapter on the kingdom of God/heaven.² The context in Matthew and Luke is Jesus’ use of parables. First, Luke: “And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand” (Luke 8:10). Second, Matthew: “And the disciples came, and said unto

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are interchangeable concepts. Matthew uses the kingdom of heaven twenty-eight times and the kingdom of God five times.

him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. 13:10–13). *Jesus used parables to keep some people from understanding His message and embracing it.* Specifically, Jesus kept it from the Jewish leaders.

This was another example in Israel's history of *God's deliberate imposition of spiritual blindness on the nation*. He had done this before. Isaiah wrote: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. 6:8–10). This blindness and deafness were part of God's judgment on the nation. God imposed this dual condition. Theologians call this grim condition *judicial blindness*. It could as easily be called judicial deafness. God imposed it in preparation for negative sanctions against Israel.

Paul in Rome used the passage in Isaiah to explain why the Jews were divided over his message:

And they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves (Acts 28:25–29).

The specific parable at issue in both Matthew 13 and Luke 8 is the parable of the four soils.³ It has to do with widely varying individual re-

3. Chapter 15.

sponses to the message of personal salvation. The theocentric principle of both passages is God's absolute sovereignty in granting the gift of salvation to those whom He favors, and withholding it from everyone else. This is not something that covenant-breaking man wants to hear. In fact, it is not something that most covenant-keeping men want to hear. It conveys a message that directly challenges man's autonomy, namely, that *God is absolutely sovereign in His distribution of the gift of salvation*. He sends His people out to preach the gospel, but He clogs the ears of all those listeners whom He opposes, so that they cannot understand the message and respond to it in humble submission.

The typical response of Christians to this message is, "Well, that's not the kind of God I believe in!" They also refuse to accept the truth of what the prophet Micaiah told King Ahab about the vision that Micaiah had seen.

Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the LORD said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee" (II Chron. 18:18-22).

God made this same point quite clear to Ezekiel: "And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel" (Ezek. 14:9). Paul said the same thing. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming; Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That

they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thes. 2:7–12).

This explicitly biblical message is not acceptable to most Christians, so they refuse to believe it. They prefer to believe falsehood. Hearing, they will not hear. Seeing, they will not see. The God of the Bible is a great offense to them. He was a great offense to Israel, too. Israel's wilful blindness was the context of this passage.

B. A Thing of Value

We learn in this passage that he who has nothing will nevertheless lose whatever he has. What is the meaning of "nothing"? It means *wealth separated from saving faith*. The man who attains great tangible wealth, but nothing else, possesses nothing of value in God's eyes. In contrast, the man who makes himself poor in the world's things for God's sake thereby gains something of great value in God's eyes. He who gives up the pursuit of the world's treasure for the sake of God's eternal treasure has made a wise exchange. He who fills his life with things that deflect him from service to God has made an unwise exchange. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).⁴

The "nothing" that the rich man possesses is the thing that he will lose: *treasure*. His tangible wealth has no exchange value in the marketplace of souls. If he loses his soul, he eventually loses his tangible wealth, too. This is how a man with nothing can lose that which he has. He has nothing of value in God's eyes: no marketable capital. God then condemns him to hell at his physical death because he possesses nothing of eternal value. Eternal life is obtained in this life or not at all. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

But what of the man to whom something of eternal value has been given by God? On the basis of this gift, he will eventually possess greater abundance. More than this: the tangible wealth of the one who has *nothing of eternal value* is transferred to the man who has received *something of eternal value*. This wealth transfer is also taught in Proverbs. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children:

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35. See chapter 19, below.

and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).⁵ The man who seeks great tangible wealth at the cost of God’s kingdom may achieve it, but over time, his accumulated wealth will flow to covenant-keepers. The process of spiritual gains and losses is eventually reflected in the realm of economics.

This passage indicates that God’s people will inherit the earth in history. *The tangible wealth of covenant-breakers will eventually be transferred to covenant-keepers in history.* This cannot refer to the post-resurrection world. Incorruption does not inherit corruption. “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (I Cor. 15:50). Of course, this transfer of tangible treasure from covenant-breakers to covenant-keepers can be accomplished by the redemption of covenant-breakers. This is part of God’s dispossession of Satan in history. Through saving grace, God reclaims both the souls and the wealth of Satan’s disciples.

C. Regression Toward the Mean vs. Pareto’s Rule

Consider the phrase, “The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.” As it applies to things of the spirit, this is an accurate summary of God’s sanctions in history. It corresponds to what Jesus taught in this passage. But does it also apply to economics? If it does, then this process somehow overcomes the statistical phenomenon known as regression toward the mean.⁶

Free market economic theory teaches that if an entrepreneur discovers a new way to generate an above-market rate of return, other entrepreneurs will seek to discover his secret. Profitable information is bought and sold and stolen. Over time, new profit-producing techniques spread across the economy. As they do, their rate of return decreases, as more producers adopt the once-secret technique. This is why above-market rates of return tend to disappear. The economist calls this the unhampered free market’s tendency toward equilibrium. Few concepts are more important than this one in modern economics.

There is an anomaly, however—one that is almost never discussed: the highly unequal distribution of income. My failure to recognize this in Chapter 67 of the 1999 edition of *Inheritance and Dominion* was an

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69:B:1.

error. I wrote: "There is a bell-shaped distribution of wealth within a society because of the predictable outcomes of increased temptations that occur on the far ends of capital's spectrum." But there is no bell-shaped curve for either income or wealth. I had not recognized the continuing relevance of Vilfredo Pareto's discovery.⁷ Pareto's anomaly is a real one. If 10% of the population receives half of the national income, or if 20% of the population receives 70 or 80%, and this distribution curve continues generation after generation in nation after nation, where is the evidence of equilibrium? Why shouldn't the distribution curves of both income and wealth be more continuous? Why should they be permanently skewed to the right? If there is open entry into the capital markets for 80% of the population, why shouldn't wealth be more evenly distributed? Is there some psychological barrier to entry, such as a widespread fear of losing investment capital or the fear of becoming self-employed, that keeps the world's income distribution curves skewed?

There is continuous movement into and out of the top 20%. The story of rags to riches to rags in three generations is a familiar one in the United States. A few very wealthy families have maintained their fortunes over many generations.⁸ To achieve this, senior members in control of the family have had to adopt tight control over which family members are elevated into positions of financial authority. Somehow, these families have found ways to combine patriarchalism and the presumably unevenly distributed talent for making money. Little is known about how they do this. Detailed academic studies of permanent intergenerational wealth at the top of society are not common.⁹

There does appear to be considerable mobility into and out of the top wealth quintile for most of its members. Still, there is no mobility of the wealth distribution curve itself. No one seems to know why. This is one reason why it is so rarely discussed by academic economists. As one economist wrote in 1965, "For a very long time, the Pareto

7. See my Introduction:E.

8. In the United States, the DuPonts of Delaware are the best example. This family has maintained its wealth for almost two centuries. In Europe, the best known example is the Rothschild family. Less well known is the Sassoon family. Both have kept their wealth for two centuries.

9. In the United States, Ferdinand Lundberg wrote several books on this topic, but he was always considered a maverick historian by academic historians. His books are not cited by historians very often, especially *The Rich and the Super-Rich: Who Really Owns America? How Do They Keep Their Wealth and Their Power?* (New York: Lyle Stewart, 1968).

law has lumbered the economic scene like an erratic block on the landscape; an empirical law which nobody can explain.”¹⁰ In income distribution, there is no regression toward the mean. The phenomenon is known as the 20-80 or 80-20 rule. It is also known as Pareto’s rule. The anomaly appears in process after process in seemingly unrelated fields.¹¹

Pareto’s rule does not teach that the rich get richer when the poor get poorer. It teaches that the richest 20% and the rest of society move in the same direction economically. Whichever way they move, up or down, the income distribution curve remains skewed heavily to the right.

D. To Inherit the Earth

The Bible teaches that covenant-keepers will inherit the earth.¹² If the covenant-breaking rich continue to own most of a society’s wealth, how can covenant-keepers ever inherit the earth? Or are we to believe that this promised inheritance is exclusively post-historical? The Old Covenant texts that forecast this inheritance do not indicate that the inheritance is exclusively post-historical.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).

How can Christians inherit the earth if the rich own most of it, and Christians are told not to seek riches? The answer: postmillennialism.¹³

10. Josef Steindl, *Random Processes and the Growth of Firms: A Study of the Pareto Law* (London: Charles Griffin, 1965), p. 18. Cited in Richard Koch, *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret of Achieving More With Less* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1998), p. 3.

11. Koch, *op. cit.*

12. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*; North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

13. Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

God's kingdom will be extended in history by widespread religious conversions. The vast majority of people in all income groups will be brought to saving faith in the atoning work by Jesus Christ. Even the rich minority will be converted. If they aren't, then they will be replaced by Christians who become wealthy through serving customers more efficiently, though not by deliberately seeking great wealth. I think inheritance of the earth will be by widespread conversion, not by a minority of Christians buying up the assets of the world.

E. The Spread of the Gospel

The key factor contributing to the permanent wealth of nations is saving grace. Contrary to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, the division of labor is at most a secondary fact—less important than private property.¹⁴ Without special grace for some members of society, common grace cannot be sustained indefinitely.¹⁵ A nation will eventually adopt capital-reducing measures based on political envy or the desire to preserve the existing distribution of wealth.

If Pareto's rule applies internationally, then there will continue to be inequality among nations, but the same minority group of nations need not permanently retain their advantage over the others. The international wealth distribution curve will continue to be skewed to the right, but those nations inside the top quintile will change.

If the Pareto wealth distribution curve really is a universal phenomenon, as it seems to be, then the key question regarding this curve will always be this: *On what basis do people gain entrance into the top fifth?* Theologically, we ask: By covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking? If it is by covenant-keeping, then the society in question does not face the negative sanctions of God. But however men gain access, no nation can stay at the top of the curve permanently. Either negative sanctions will come against a rich covenant-breaking nation, or else other covenant-keeping nations will be blessed even more by God, and overtake the former winner. In the second case, every covenant-keeping nation will get richer, as will rich and poor residents in all of them.

Jesus said, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). The evil tree is eventually cut down: "Even so

14. Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity through the Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), p. 97.

15. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:17–20).¹⁶

The spread of the gospel produces positive economic effects. God still rewards corporate covenantal faithfulness with prosperity (Deut. 8:18).¹⁷ This prosperity is not to become a snare to successful men: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).¹⁸ If it does snare an unrighteous society, then the "nothing" which it has—its wealth—will be removed from it.

The long-term development of the kingdom of God is from temporal poverty to temporal wealth. To sustain the kingdom's wealth and expand it, covenant-keepers must sustain their confession and their obedience to God's law. The mark of their commitment is their willingness to spend a portion of their wealth to take the good news of salvation and wealth to others. They must share their tangible capital with others, but more important, they must share the covenantal basis of their tangible capital: their moral capital. They must seek to take the gospel to those who suffer poverty because of their rebellion to God. Covenant-keepers are to use their economic capital to capitalize the poor in spirit.

If those who have received tangible wealth from God on the basis of their confession and their obedience are successful in their efforts to share their faith—the basis of their moral wealth—then the poor will get richer, and so will the rich. *Increasing productivity for everyone is produced when the productivity of the poor increases.* The increase in moral capital will increase the division of labor, which may in turn produce greater economic equality, but will surely produce greater wealth for all.

F. Unequal Distribution of Wealth

This nagging question does not go away: What about income inequality? In every modern society that economists have investigated, there is huge inequality. Twenty percent of the population owns most

16. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 18.

17. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. ch. 22.

18. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

of a nation's tangible wealth. This is the basis of men's unequal incomes. Even after almost a century of steeply graduated income taxes and graduated inheritance taxes, steep inequality persists in every developed nation. It persisted before modern times, but the historical data are sparse and difficult to evaluate.

Pareto did not explain the causes for income inequality. In the century since he published his findings, no economist has come up with anything approaching a widely accepted explanation. We do not know why this inequality continues to exist in the face of both free market competition and socialist taxation.

The disparity in both income and wealth may have something to do with disparities in future-orientation. Most people are not highly future-oriented. They are not willing to save money at low rates of interest. They prefer to borrow. They go into debt in order to buy consumer goods that depreciate. They do not get on the growth side of compound interest.

The disparity in income and wealth could be the result of inherent productivity of innovation. We might argue that successful new production methods produce enormous wealth for their early discoverers, who retain their wealth until innovative competitors find replacement methods. This explanation relies on a concept of economic growth that is overwhelmingly based on entrepreneurial skills rather than on moral capital. Surely, Christians' moral capital has not elevated them into the top 20% of wealth holders over the last century. Is this because their moral capital is in short supply because of the prevailing theological antinomianism? The familiar phrase, "We're under grace, not law!" may have negative economic effects on those who believe it.

The entrepreneur bears a heavy burden: *uncertainty*. Most people prefer to avoid uncertainty. They prefer predictable wages to both statistically calculable market risk and statistically incalculable uncertainty. They are willing to accept less income in order to avoid the loss of either their capital or their income. Those few entrepreneurs who survive free market competition become rich. Thus, the rich are always a minority.

An entrepreneurship-based explanation of income inequality reinforces the idea that Christians' inheritance of the earth will take place as a result of widespread conversions, not by any uniquely confession-based advantages possessed by Christians. *Moral capital sustains the social order that allows entrepreneurship to produce wealth for all, but mainly for those who possess entrepreneurial skills.* Moral capital does

not make a majority of people wealthy. It does not even make Christians wealthy in comparison to successful entrepreneurs. But it makes most men richer over time. It makes sustained economic growth possible.

Few people today take into consideration the wealth-producing effects of the moral capital that is distributed widely by Christian conversion and instruction. Economists rarely study this aspect of wealth creation.¹⁹ Most economists believe that the free market social order is self-reinforcing and expansionist, irrespective of God, Christianity, or supernaturalism generally. They believe that the economic fruits of capitalism will persuade voters of the truth of its roots, and these roots are found in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: the division of labor, private property, and the personal incentive of self-interest. God's covenant law and its sanctions in history have nothing to do with it, they believe.

G. Positive Economic Feedback and Charitable Giving

Positive feedback prevails in the realm of economics. There are means by which the rich get richer, long term. They get richer under free market capitalism by enabling the poor to get richer, although this is not the primary goal of the rich. Their primary goal is personal wealth accumulation. They use their savings to invest in tangible capital that provides the tools that increase the productivity of workers. The rich increase their incomes when the poor increase their incomes. Free market economic theory teaches that the rich do not get rich by exploiting the poor. On the contrary, they get rich by extending to others their knowledge of the ways to long-term wealth. The classic example of this was Henry Ford's decision in 1914 to double the daily wage of his workers to \$5 a day, while reducing their work day from nine hours to eight. The previous year, Ford had introduced the first moving assembly line in large-scale manufacturing. Absenteeism under this production system was a major liability to Ford. He solved this problem brilliantly: he paid to eliminate it. Ford Motor Company immediately attracted the best workers in Detroit. Ford reduced the work day to eight hours in order to create three equal shifts of eight hours,

19. An exception was the English economist, Peter T. Bauer, an expert in economic development, who died in 2002. His academic work gained him an appointment to the House of Lords. Another exception is also a member of the House of Lords, economist Brian Griffiths. He served as Margaret Thatcher's advisor.

thereby maximizing the output of his fixed capital. Output improved dramatically. So did profits.

Jesus did not speak about any system to attain positive economic feedback, although Moses did (Deut. 28:1–14).²⁰ Jesus recommended charity. Putting these two views together leads to a conclusion: long-term economic growth requires an open, merciful hand to sustain it.²¹ This is not taught by free market economists. They teach that long-term economic growth is based on private property, future-orientation, thrift, entrepreneurship, open entry into markets, investment in education, and technological innovation. Charity has little or nothing to do with it. Jesus did not mention any of the economists' favorite explanations. He also did not discuss national economic growth. The topic of the wealth of nations did not appear in any of his recorded sermons. He stressed charity.

It is far easier to assemble historical evidence that supports the economists' explanation of economic growth than Jesus' explanation, for Jesus did not offer one. The evidence for Jesus' *implied view* is not easily available because so few people have ever had the courage to adopt Jesus' position on charitable giving, and those who have done so have not talked about the results. Jesus said, "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. 6:3). This was not a call to indiscriminate charity. It was a call to secret charity. "That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:4).²² But note well: the Father openly rewards charitable givers.

The question is: How openly? Has it been sufficiently open to offer historical evidence of God's economic blessing in response to widespread charitable giving? We know that charities founded in sixteenth-century England mainly by successful Puritan businessmen were important in the rise to political power of the Puritans in the seventeenth century.²³ These charities provided political legitimacy. The level of charitable giving by the Puritans was higher than any other group. Some of these institutions survived intact until the state took them over in the twentieth century. Next, giving by English Methodists after the movement's founding by John Wesley in 1740 was high in propor-

20. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

21. Chapter 10.

22. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

23. W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480–1660* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959).

tion to their low incomes. We could call this “widow’s mite” giving.²⁴ England in the late eighteenth century was the first nation to experience the industrial revolution. We also know that the level of charitable giving in the United States was higher than in any other nation in the twentieth century. The United States has also experienced the longest period of sustained economic growth. But I am aware of no economic historian who has attempted to prove cause and effect between widespread voluntary charity and national economic growth. At this point in history, Christians must accept Christ’s words mainly on faith.

Conclusion

The rich will get richer if their tangible wealth rests on their covenantal faithfulness, i.e., their moral capital. The expansion of covenantal wealth is based on the process of *obedience–abundance–greater obedience–greater abundance* (Deut. 8:18).²⁵ This is a system of positive feedback. But if the tangible wealth of the rich is based on their faith in their own autonomy, they will eventually get poorer. Positive feedback eventually reverses (Deut. 8:19–20).²⁶ This is what modern man, led by the economists, does not believe.

Richard Koch, who has written a book on profitable applications of Pareto’s rule, thinks that positive feedback is the key to understanding why the 20-80 phenomenon exists. “In the absence of feedback loops, the natural distribution of phenomena would be 50/50—inputs of a given frequency would lead to commensurate results. It is only because of positive feedback and negative feedback loops that causes do not have equal results. Yet it also seems to be true that powerful positive feedback loops only affect a small minority of the inputs. This helps explain why those small minority of inputs can exert so much influence.”²⁷

Do the poor get poorer? Yes, if their poverty is spiritual, for this spiritual poverty will eventually produce wealth-eroding sins. No, if their poverty is the result of their open hands to others. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. . . . But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a

24. Chapter 50.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

26. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

27. Koch, *The 80/20 Principle*, p. 15.

supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack" (II Cor. 8:9, 14–15).²⁸

One eschatological goal of Christ's gospel is to make all men rich spiritually. In achieving this, the gospel necessarily makes covenant-keepers tangibly richer. The covenant's positive-feedback process of confession–obedience–wealth will spread the blessings of both tangible and spiritual wealth to more people. But it will not spread tangible wealth evenly, according to Pareto's law.

The person who has nothing in history—no supernatural redemption—will lose whatever he possesses. This points to final judgment, but it also includes judgment in history. Covenantal sanctions—non-random—are applied by God in history and eternity.

28. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

THE LURE OF BUSINESS¹

Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again (Luke 8:33–37).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's ability to deliver men from demonic possession. God is more powerful than devils. The message of the passage is that men do not want to pay the price of such deliverance. Deliverance is point two of the biblical covenant: authority.²

A. Demon Possession

Two men were possessed by demons, according to Matthew's account. "And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way" (Matt. 8:28). Luke and Mark mention only one man, which is accurate

1. This appears as chapter 20 in Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

but incomplete information. We must go by Matthew's account, since it offers additional information.

Jesus delivered the possessed men by exorcising the devils. The devils asked to be allowed to dwell in a nearby herd of swine. As soon as Jesus allowed the demons to enter the swine, the pigs ran into the sea and drowned.

The parallel passage in Mark throws additional light on these events: "And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (Mark 5:14–17). One of the two men had remained behind with Jesus. "And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel" (Mark 5:18–20).

Why did the demons request to be allowed to reside in the bodies of swine, only to direct their new hosts into a suicidal run into the sea? If the demons needed places to live, why did they destroy their new places of residence?

The demons did not want a place to live in the sense of a dwelling. They wanted a place to live in the sense of a region. They operated in a region in which herds of pigs were kept. This indicates that pork had a local market. The Mosaic dietary laws were not being honored by residents in the region. Was this a region filled with gentiles? The text does not say so, nor does any other text in the New Testament. What it says is that the townspeople were afraid and asked Jesus to leave.

What were they afraid of? Being delivered from demons? This seems unlikely. Demonic possession was a curse to be avoided. The fact that someone locally had been delivered caught their attention. They came out to see for themselves what had happened.

What had happened? Two men had been delivered. One remained behind to testify of his deliverance. But his deliverance had involved the destruction of a herd of swine. This was surely bad for the herd's owner. The swineherders had already told the townspeople the story

of the drowned herd. In fact, the passage indicates that the news about the swine preceded the news about the delivered men. As soon as the townspeople received confirmation of the story from the formerly possessed victim, they asked Jesus to leave the region. He complied.

This left the demons behind, without Jesus to bother them until the time of His resurrection and ascension. The demons had asked Him, “art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” They knew the timetable for their demise.

Why would the townspeople not have wanted to have Jesus living nearby, ready to cast out demons? The answer seems to be His mode of casting them out. He allowed them to enter into a herd of pigs that perished shortly thereafter. Jesus was seen as a kind of polluter. He allowed the overflow—in this case, demons—to destroy private property. The fact that Jews were prohibited from eating pork and therefore from bidding up the market price of pigs made no difference to the townspeople. They were far more fearful about the economic effects of Jesus’ action than they were about the threat of demonic possession. They preferred to share their environment with demons, who normally inhabited men, rather than risk another outbreak of “mad pig disease.”

Swine were regarded as an economic asset in that region. If two men could provide a dwelling for an entire legion of demons, this seemed a small price to pay for leaving pigs to roam the land and eventually grace the tables of local residents. That two men would suffer the horrors of possession was, in the eyes of the townspeople, a small price to pay, since the townspeople were not paying it. There was risk of future possession, but they regarded this risk as less of a burden than the threat of the loss of herds of swine.

The demons had recognized the perversity of the local residents. They had planned their spiritual counter-attack well. They would let the townspeople be their spokesmen with Jesus. All it would take was a fast entrance into a herd of swine, and a mad dash down a hill into the water.

Luke added this important information regarding the event. “Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his

way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him" (Luke 8:37–40).

Jesus usually instructed those whom He had healed to say nothing publicly. This case was a major exception. The personal testimony of the healed man was so convincing that the townspeople subsequently reversed their opinion of Jesus and His ministry. But it took personal testimony of a local resident to accomplish this. Their initial reaction was negative.

Conclusion

The men in this region ignored the Mosaic dietary law against pork. They valued the preservation of the local swine market more than they valued men's deliverance from spiritual oppression. They feared the risk to pigs more than they feared the risk of demonic forces. For them, men's lives were worth less than pigs' lives.

The modern world has taken this twisted worldview to far more perverse lengths. Humanists battle politically for animal rights, but they also call for legalized abortion. At least the townspeople had not suggested killing the two possessed men in order to deliver them from the burden of their unloved condition.

The townspeople were sensitive to business values. Private property had to be protected. Jesus was threatening business. This was an offense worse than demonic possession. They asked Him to leave. He left. Only the subsequent personal testimony of the healed man persuaded them to reverse their opinion of Jesus.

NO VISIBLE RESERVES¹

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece (Luke 9:1–3).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the paymaster, the sanctions-bringer.² He sustains His workers. The worthy workman will receive his meat. But this was not a permanent command. Jesus later revised it. “And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one” (Luke 22:35–36).

A. Bringing Israel Under Judgment

The context of this passage was the condemnation of Israel. The means of this condemnation was evangelism. “These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:5–8). It sounds as though Jesus was offering only positive sanctions through His disciples, but the negative sanctions were also present.

1. This appears as chapter 22 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues” (Matt. 10:14–17). Jesus knew that the disciples would not be received with open arms. He also knew that God’s judgment against Israel would come (Matt. 24; Luke 21).³

This was not an ordinary strategy of evangelism. The fact that Jesus forbade them from going to gentile cities, or even Samaritan cities, is indicative of the special nature of this assignment. He was sending them to God’s covenant people in order to gain a few converts and also condemn the nation.

This assignment was, in effect, preliminary to another exodus. Just as Moses had confronted Pharaoh inside the boundaries of Egypt, so would they confront opponents. Like Pharaoh, these opponents would bring negative sanctions against them. Like Moses, they would receive supernatural aid that would enable them to deal with their opponents. “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt. 10:19–20).

The first phase of the new exodus took place immediately after the stoning of Steven. “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1). The second phase took place sometime prior to the Roman army’s final surrounding of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁴

Jesus was commanding them to bring a covenant lawsuit against Israel. By announcing the advent of a new kingdom, they were also announcing the end of the Old Covenant order. This was an extension of the message of John the Baptist.⁵ This was done in the power of the

3. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>) Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

4. According to church tradition, the Jerusalem church fled to the gentile city of Pella.

5. Chapter 2.

Holy Spirit. Jesus wanted them to learn that the Spirit was with them. He sent them among wolves in order to break their fear of the established order.

B. Money and Uncertainty

“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).⁶ The rich man trusts in his money. He expects it to shield him from catastrophes, just as a wall shielded pre-gunpowder cities. The disciples were ordered not to carry money with them. Then what would serve as their high wall? God.

Money is the most marketable commodity. Put differently, it is the most liquid asset. This means that it can be sold (exchanged for assets) rapidly and without transaction costs. Men hold money because they cannot accurately foresee the future. They do not know what opportunities will arise. They want to be able to take advantage of these opportunities. They do not know what kind of calamities will arise. They want to be able to buy their way out of these calamities. Money is their means of taking action. Because of money’s liquidity, its holders have a wide range of options available to them. They reduce their information costs by accumulating money.

Jesus sent them into an uncertain environment without carrying any money. He told them in general what would happen to them. Some people would welcome them. Others would persecute them. Through all of their experiences, the Holy Spirit would guide them and protect them. The Spirit was above circumstances. They could rely on Him to be their high wall.

Money is a tool. Men own this tool. They grow confident in the use of this tool. They grow confident in themselves as tool masters. Jesus was telling the disciples that their own efforts would not be the source of their success or protection. They could not manipulate the Holy Spirit in the way that they could manipulate money. They would be in the Spirit’s hands; He would not be in their hands. He would put the proper words in their mouths. He would not echo their words.

The dominion hierarchy is God > man > nature (Gen. 1:26–28).⁷ Jesus was warning them against having faith in autonomous man’s hierarchy: man > money > other men. The task He was giving them

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

was beyond anything that money would buy.

He was giving them a preliminary assignment, just as God gave to Moses. This assignment was designed to increase trust in God's sovereignty over history. They faced considerable uncertainty. The future is never uncertain to God. Jesus was teaching them that the most effective way to deal with uncertainty is by trusting in God. To trust the most marketable commodity more than less marketable commodities is legitimate, although exclusive trust is idolatry.

C. Spiritual Reserves

If they were not to trust in the most marketable commodity, then what about a fall-back position? What about spare clothing? Jesus forbade that, too. Nothing that they could carry in their purses or on their backs would suffice. Only the Spirit of God would suffice.

They would have reserves: God's Spirit. This is always sufficient. Yet, in His patient grace, God does not usually ask His people to avoid other reserves. This assignment was unique. It was a training mission. Just before His crucifixion, He reminded them: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:35b–36). What had been appropriate for a training mission would not be appropriate in the future. This did not mean that they would no longer have to rely on the Spirit. The Spirit would come in full force only after Christ's ascension (John 14:26; 16:7; Acts 1:8). From that point on, the disciples would be fully equipped: Spirit, purse, and sword.

This training mission was a means of strengthening their faith. It meant that they had to learn to trust in invisible reserves. Men find it very difficult to do this. They must be trained to do this. Moses was not ready for his assignment at the time that he first met God at the burning bush. Not until after his confrontations with Pharaoh and after the plagues was he in a position to lead the exodus. Men trust in what they can see and what they have learned through successful experiences. Jesus removed the disciples' visible reserves in order that they might gain successful experiences. He reminded them of their success just before His crucifixion. They still did not believe Him. They still had not learned. It took the crowing of the cock for Peter to learn. In the passage immediately preceding His reminder of their suc-

cesses without a purse, Jesus prophesied Peter's public denial of Him. It was that event, rather than the triumph of the empty purse, that finally persuaded him. It was his prophesied failure, not his previous success, that enabled him to put his trust where it belonged. Yet both events were essentially of the same character. Both stripped Peter of autonomous reserves. The first left him without money; the second left him without honor. Both events left him without excuse.

D. Predictable Payment

Jesus sent them among wolves. He sent them out in what appeared to be a defenseless condition. It was important for them to learn not to trust in their own strength. Their own strength was too puny. Their own reserves were too minimal. They had to trust in God's reserves. They could safely do this because of God's adherence to His own principle of payment: "The workman is worthy of his meat." The parallel passage in Luke puts it this way: ". . . the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house" (Luke 10:7b). God does not expect His people to work for free.

At the same time, He expects His workers to serve others. "Freely ye have received, freely give." Just as He supplies His workers with whatever they need to do their work, so are they to serve those who have not yet entered the kingdom. Jesus said that they would be sustained miraculously. Similarly, they would perform miracles. For this, they would earn the hostility of the wolves.

God's principle of payment means that even though His servants do not now possess visible reserves, they can expect them. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25).⁸ The servant of God receives; he is therefore to lend freely. "He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed" (Ps. 37:26). The servant can become a visible blessing to others because he knows, in the familiar phrase, "there's more where that came from." Furthermore, this stream of predictable income extends to his children. His seed is blessed.

Uncertainty is reduced by a stream of income. The greater the predictability of this income, the less the uncertainty. The economist calls a stream of income *rental income*. An asset generates income. Men who seek asset-generated income are called *rent-seekers*. They seek to

8. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Pint Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

gain reduced uncertainty by buying a stream of income.

In contrast is the entrepreneur. He thrives on uncertainty. He knows that it is through the conversion of uncertainty into certainty that he can gain profit. When he converts an uncertain future into a more predictable future, he gains a stream of income. He can then sell this stream of income for money. He capitalizes it. Rent-seekers will pay to buy it. He profits because he perceived a stream of future income where his competitors did not. They did not offer to pay what the stream of income was worth. The entrepreneur places his capital at risk by buying the otherwise unpredicted income stream and converting it into a predictable stream. For this service he gains a one-time entrepreneurial profit—an above-average return on his capital.⁹

God's people are supposed to become bearers of uncertainty. They are to gain kingdom profits, the parable of the pounds tells us (Luke 19:12–15).¹⁰ But uncertainty has its downside. Sometimes men forecast incorrectly. They lose their capital. What they thought would be a stream of income turns out to be a sink-hole for their capital.

The parable uses the language of commerce to explain kingdom expansion. Jesus told the disciples before sending them on their mission that God would supply them with whatever they required. What appeared to them initially as a highly uncertain project without visible means of support would be well-supplied. If they did their work faithfully, they would receive what they needed to continue.

Their faith, coupled with a supernaturally guaranteed supply of income, would enable them to do effective kingdom work. What appeared to be uncertain was in fact certain. They needed faith to begin. They needed visible confirmation to continue.

Uncertainty is a major barrier to entry. It keeps out competitors who would otherwise bid up the price of the resources and tools that are needed to produce the stream of income. Courage in dealing with uncertainty, when coupled with accurate knowledge, enables people with very little capital to become rich. They see an opportunity—or sense it—where others do not perceive it. They enter the market with whatever economic resources that they possess and commit them to

9. The profit occurs once. After the rise in the capitalized price of the asset, the owner reaps only an average rate of return. If it is worth an ounce of gold when he buys it and 10 ounces after his efforts, he can sell it for 10 ounces. The buyer will earn an average rate of return on his investment of 10 ounces. But what is true of the buyer is also true of the entrepreneur if he decides not to sell the asset. The income stream he receives is an average rate of return on the new value of the asset.

10. Chapter 46.

developing the stream of income. Like gold prospectors with a newly discovered tattered map, or inventors with a dream, they rush in where competitors fear to tread.

Jesus told His disciples that God's payment to them was predictable. They could safely trust God. They could therefore safely rush in where others feared to tread. And so they did. This tiny band of men without visible capital began a ministry that has transformed the world.

Conclusion

This was a special assignment. It soon became a standard that should remind men of what God can do, just as the miracles in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea were to remind Israel of what God can do. Such miracles were not supposed to become familiar events. The manna ceased when Israel crossed the Jordan by another miracle of divided waters (Josh. 5:12). After that, they were required to plant and build. Similarly, Jesus told the disciples immediately prior to His crucifixion to get a purse and a sword. They were not to forget what God had done for them. He specifically reminded them of what God had done for them. But He told them to use conventional reserves—capital—to pursue their callings.

They were to establish priorities in their valuation of capital: God first, then money and a weapon. They were to trust the Spirit first; then they were to trust in visible reserves. No asset is to be spared in the extension of God's kingdom. It is not that we are to work without assets, but *we are to subordinate our visible reserves to God's invisible reserves.*

Perhaps the greatest example of invisible reserves is found in Elisha's lesson to his servant. "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (II Kings 6:15–17). Seeing is believing. But not every servant of God is enabled to see in this way. He must accept on faith the testimony of the Bible that his covenantal predecessors have seen such

things. What they saw strengthened them. What we read should strengthen us.

TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD¹

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? (Luke 9: 23–25).

The theocentric principle here is the final judgment of God: sanctions.² Every person faces the final judgment. Compared to the loss of one's soul at this judgment, the gaining of everything that life has to offer is nothing.

A. Free Grace Is Not Cheap

Jesus here warned His disciples that there are no free lunches in life. There is free grace, but it comes at a price. It comes, first and foremost, at the price of the death of Jesus Christ. Redeemed people owe a lifetime service to God through Christ (Rom. 12:1).³ But this service is insufficient to pay for eternal life. We know this because of the subsequent comparison: all the world could not redeem one man's soul. Anything less than this is also insufficient.

Obviously, these words are not to be interpreted literally. Nobody is asked to take up a literal cross. Perhaps some follower of Jesus was asked to do so under Roman rule, but we are not informed of this. The one known example of a cross-carrier was not a follower of Jesus. "And

1. This appears as chapter 35 in Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus" (Luke 23:26). Crucifixion is no longer any nation's means of execution except possibly in rare cases where Christians are executed this way as a symbol of their subordination to an anti-Christian state. In any case, one does not carry a cross through a lifetime of service.

The imagery here is that of a burden that costs a person his life. The cross is heavy. At the end of the journey, it becomes the means of his execution. Taking up the cross means taking up the pre-resurrection life of Christ. It means death to the things of this world. A man carrying a cross is not going to be easily distracted by the things of this world. He has other things on his mind . . . and on his back.

The text warns: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (v. 24). This is not a call to literal suicide. It is a call for *covenantal death*. The old man is executed. The old Adamic nature is executed. Paul provided a commentary on this passage:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (Rom. 6:3–12).

To say that we pay a price is to say that we give up something. What do we give up? Our old ways: the sins of the flesh. We must forfeit the use of these attributes of Adam. Whatever pleasures or benefits they bring in history, we must give them up. This is the economist's meaning of cost: the most valuable thing foregone. Sin is valued highly by sinners. In this sense, it is valuable—dear. There are no free

lunches. We must give up something to gain eternal life. But the basis of our entrance into eternal life is not our payment.

B. The Fearful Exchange

“For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?” (v. 25). There is a joke about lawyers. Satan comes to a newly certified lawyer and says: “I will give you the gift of persuasion. You will become a world-famous defense lawyer. I will enable you to get juries to declare guilty criminals innocent, for which these evil men will pay you huge fees. You will become the envy of your peers. All I ask in return is your eternal soul at the end of a life of enormous success.” To which the lawyer replies: “What’s the catch?”

Jesus warned against such an exchange. If gaining the whole world is a bad bargain for the loss of one’s soul, then gaining anything less is an even worse bargain. This is what present-oriented men do not acknowledge. They either reject the thought of eternal judgment on these terms or else they discount its future cost to such a low level that the exchange seems worth it. This exchange of the eternal in favor of the temporal is the essence of foolishness.

Time offers men what appear to be ways out of trouble. There is always an option, always a way of escape. This faith is a reflection of an ethical truth: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). But eternity does not possess this characteristic feature of time. In eternity, there is no escape. This is unimaginable to the time-bound sinner who thinks he can find a way not to pay for his sins. There is only one such way: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9–10). But this way of escape places a new perceptual burden on man: his recognition of *the high price of sin*. As the price of sin rises, less of it will be demanded, other things being equal.

The problem is, when sin is involved, other things do not remain equal. *Sin has the characteristic feature of being addictive*. The more you get, the more you want. The insatiable nature of sin leads some

men into early death. They cannot control their addiction. Sin is like a ratchet upward: one level becomes normal, so new sins are sought out. *But in a redeemed person, the insatiable nature of sin is reversed.* He reaches a level of sinning that he recognizes as self-destructive. He sees the high price of sin. He then demands less of it. In fact, he can create an *ethically positive ratchet*: as he indulges in fewer sins, he finds that his taste for old ones and even new ones is reduced.

Such a transformation runs counter to what economics teaches. Economics teaches us that whenever the price of something is reduced, more of it is demanded. This is expressed graphically by a demand curve that slopes downward and to the right when price is expressed on the vertical axis, and the quantity demanded is on the horizontal axis. God's redemption of sinners lowers their eternal price of an individual sin. This is because the redeemed person is not condemned eternally when he sins. Why, then, should he not indulge himself all the more? After all, the price is lower. Answer: because *redemption changes his taste for sin.* In the terminology of graph-addicted economists, his entire demand curve for sin shifts to the left: reduced demand for sin all along the curve. Paul understood the logic of economics in this application, and he rejected the conclusion. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 5:19–6:2). Other things, such as the demand curve for sin, do not remain equal. The redeemed sinner's taste for sin is reduced. In addition, he becomes sensitive to sin's affront to God. This raises its price, lowering the quantity demanded.

Redemption increases a man's perception of eternity. It lengthens a man's time perspective. It increases his future orientation. This makes it easier for him to count the cost of his thoughts and actions (Luke 14:28–30).⁴ Man always discounts the future. The more distant in the future an expected event, the less it affects a person's decision-making today. The payoff, discounted to the present, is too low, for either benefits or losses. But, if a man discounts eternity's effects to

4. Chapter 35.

nearly zero, the way he discounts events a century hence, he has made a disastrous miscalculation. He does not grasp how important time is for the outcome in eternity. He compares time to time. He should be comparing time to eternity. The discount that he applies to very distant events is influenced by his knowledge that he will not be here to see the results of his actions. But eternity is different. He will be there to see the results of his actions, and to experience them.

Conclusion

The ultimate treasure that any man possesses temporarily is his own soul. He owns it only as a steward temporarily controls the use of an asset. This passage deals with an exchange: present treasure in exchange for a man's soul. *A man's core values will determine his decision regarding the terms of this exchange.* Jesus said that our core values should reflect the future—specifically, *eternity*. Any set of values that does not incorporate expectations about eternity must be wrong, He taught. The soul survives beyond the grave. Thus, any cost-benefit analysis in history should include costs or benefits in eternity.

The price of eternal life is sacrificial living in history. Christ's life of complete subordination to God and His undeserved death have set the judicial standard. He definitively paid the price demanded by His Father. Taking up the cross and losing one's life for Christ's sake are aspects of the great exchange: a costly eternity vs. a beneficial eternity. Life is a constant exchange of one set of conditions for another. This includes eternal life. One way of life is exchanged for one kind of eternity. This exchange is *definitive* in history: God's judicial imputation to sinners of Christ's righteousness (Rom. 3:24–25; Phil. 3:9). It is also *progressive*: working out one's salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). It is also *final* (Matt. 25; Rev. 20:14–15).

The marketplace of the soul is history. A man cannot buy back his soul. Either it has been bought back by Christ or it cannot be bought back at all. From whom is it bought back? From God, who is sovereign over the souls of men.

FIRST THINGS FIRST¹

And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:57–62).

The theocentric principle here is that God expects permanent commitment. This reveals the continuity of His purpose. This is point five of the biblical covenant: succession/continuity.²

A. The Uprooted

In these three incidents, Jesus was approached by men who said they wanted to follow Him. He did not send the first man away. Rather, He gave him a reason not to commit. The second and third cases were similar.³ The second man was willing to commit, but only after burying his father. Jesus warned this man to ignore his dead father's funeral. The third man was willing to commit, but only after returning home to say farewell. He was warned not to look behind, but

1. This is modified from chapter 19 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

3. Matthew did not mention the third man (Matt. 8:19–22).

to march forward without delay.

They seem to be opposite cases. The first man wanted to come; Jesus discouraged him. The second wanted to bury his father first; Jesus discouraged him. The third wanted to visit his family; Jesus discouraged him. In all three cases, Jesus was motivated by the same principle: first things first. This is the principle of priorities.

1. Wandering

The first man—a scribe, according to Matthew 8:19—wanted to follow Jesus. This was surely not a normal request. Scribes constantly confronted Jesus publicly, trying to undermine His authority through questioning. Perhaps this man was serious; perhaps he was an informer. But, in either case, Jesus challenged him to pay a high price. Jesus had no place to call home, no permanent pillow. He was in a condition like Jacob's when he fled from Esau. "And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep" (Gen. 28:11). Jacob had become a wanderer, a man without a home. So had Jesus.

This is not a normal condition. Wandering is usually a curse. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness; this was surely a curse on the exodus generation. They wanted to rest. They wanted a place to rest. They did not receive their wish. One of the basic ideas of rest is to have a place of one's own to call home. A place of rest serves as headquarters for our dominion. We work; then we return home to rest. The Promised Land was Israel's place of rest.

Jesus' ministry required that He wander. Those who followed Him also wandered. They gave up their places of rest. Some of them gave up their predictable sources of income.⁴ Their seemingly patternless wandering broke with their familiar daily pattern: work outside the home, return to home, and rest. Wandering had also broken the exodus generation's pattern of limited dominion: servitude in Egypt.

In the wilderness, the Israelites were sustained by the manna. We are not told how Jesus and His disciples were sustained. It may have been charity. Perhaps they took odd jobs. Somehow, they had money.

4. The exceptions were the sons of fishermen who owned their boats. Peter went back to fishing after Jesus died, but before Peter believed in the resurrection. "Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing" (John 21:3).

Judas kept the bag (John 12:6). The scribe, hearing that Jesus had no place of rest, must have understood that he would have to forfeit more than a place of rest. He would also forfeit his normal pattern of dominion. He could no longer rely on a steady stream of income.

2. *Uncertainty*

Jesus was telling the scribe that he faced uncertainty. How would he deal with this uncertainty? By relying on others? By relying on Jesus' persuasion of others? By relying on odd jobs, or money shared by the other disciples who might find odd jobs? The familiar pattern of dominion was broken by Jesus' way of life. He refused to stay in His own region, where He was not taken seriously. "And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, in-somuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:54–58). Familiarity had bred contempt. So, He walked unfamiliar pathways to do His work.

Jesus was nearing the end of His time on earth. He was at the beginning of the next stage of His ministry: *covenantal representation by His church*. To prepare His followers, He first broke the daily patterns of their lives. He reshaped their lives by reshaping their dominion patterns. He took away their pillows. He substituted rocks instead.

God did the same with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He took away their places of rest. He uprooted them. He called Abram out of Ur. He sent a famine; Isaac went to Abimelech, the Philistine (Gen. 26:1). He sent a famine; Jacob and his sons went to Egypt. He drove Moses out of Egypt, and then out of his home in Midian. He did it to David in his time with the Philistines (I Sam. 27:7) and during Absalom's rebellion (II Sam. 16). He did it to Israel (into Assyria) and Judah (into Babylon). He did it to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). He did it to Paul. *The uprooting process is part of the next phase of the expansion of God's kingdom.*

Jesus' parents were uprooted when they took Him into Egypt

(Matt. 2:14). His public ministry began with His uprooting out of Galilee. The familiar environment that had sustained Him was removed. His hope for rest could not be placed in geography. It had to come from above. God the Father would sustain Him. Jesus would do His work of building the kingdom without the capital asset that most men rely on: a predictable place of rest.

3. Missions

Missionary activity is always based on an uprooting. Irish monks in the sixth century spread across northern Europe, building monasteries.⁵ In the United States, the Baptists and Methodists captured what was then the Western and Southern part of the nation by adopting circuit-riding. These men had no permanent homes. John Wesley was the model, who spent most of his adult life on horseback. While formally educated ministers in the traditional Calvinistic denominations stayed at home east of the Allegheny Mountains, earning good salaries, Baptist⁶ circuit-riding preachers worked without pay,⁷ and the Methodists worked for very low salaries.⁸ Neither group of missionaries had a permanent place of rest. There were 750 Congregational churches in 1780, and about 500 Presbyterian congregations and 450 Baptist congregations. The Methodists were barely visible. By 1900, there were almost 50,000 Baptist congregations, almost 54,000 Methodist congregations, 15,452 Presbyterian, 5,604 Congregational (liberal), 6,264 Episcopal (liberal).⁹ Episcopalians and Congregationalists were hardly vis-

5. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Talese-Doubleday, 1995). This is a popularly written book, not a scholarly history.

6. At the outbreak of the Second Great Awakening (1800–40), Baptists in the South were Calvinistic. Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997), p. 153. American Baptists' confession of faith was the Philadelphia Confession (1707), which was basically the Second London Confession (1689), a modification of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). See William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Nashville, Tennessee: Judson Press, 1969).

7. They were supposed to have secular employment. This included permanent ministers. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, [1992] 1994), p. 104.

8. About \$80 a year in the early 1800s, raised to \$100 after the death of Bishop Francis Asbury in 1816: *ibid.*, p. 115. Gold was at \$20 per ounce in that era.

9. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 44, Figure 33.

ible west of Appalachia or south of the Mason-Dixon line, except in large cities.

Jesus was telling the scribe that to follow Him, he would have to become one of the uprooted. He did not tell him he could not join the disciples, but He warned him of the high price.

B. Let the Dead Bury the Dead

The second inquirer was already a disciple, but not one of the permanent wanderers. He was ready to join the wanderers, almost. But first he had to go and bury his father. Jesus dismissed the ritual as trivial. "Let the dead bury the dead." This statement was an epitaph on the grave of Old Covenant Israel.

Filial piety is basic to almost every civilization. It was the heart of classical religion.¹⁰ It was also important in Israel. Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury Abraham (Gen. 25:9). Jacob and Esau buried Isaac (Gen. 35:29). Yet Jesus told the prospective disciple to break with tradition and immediately join the band of wanderers. In a sense, Jesus' inner circle wandered in circles. They were no longer part of the normal pattern of family life in Israel.

The would-be wanderer had to assess the importance of becoming one of the inner circle, of being present at the creation of a new world order. Was it worth defying convention? To defy this convention would be to move outside of polite society. He would become an outcast. If he did not bury his father, his son might not bury him. This, in fact, was quite likely. Jesus later warned them: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law" (Luke 12:51-53).

But it was more than division within households. The followers of Jesus would have to participate in the covenantal burial of Israel. It was not just that his father was dead; it was that his nation was dying. The Old Covenant order was dying, which included the Mosaic order. The

10. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book II.

new Israel of God was being born. This new Israel in history is the church.¹¹ This new Israel would not attend the burial of the old Israel. In fact, the new Israel was warned to flee from the old Israel when the signs of the imminent burial appeared (Luke 21:20–22). When Rome's legions arrived, the church was to have departed, which church tradition subsequently said it did, fleeing to the non-Judaic town of Pella.

C. Don't Look Back

The third man wanted to return home to say farewell to his family. This surely is an acceptable practice in any culture. But Jesus did not tolerate any delay. "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (v. 62). The classic example of looking back is Lot's wife. She looked back to Sodom and was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). The text does not say why she looked back. Her motivation may have been curiosity.

This passage uses a metaphor: plowing. The plowman has begun to plow the field. He is not to look back. The allusion does not have anything to do with determining if the furrow is straight. It has to do with looking back at the place of rest. In this case, the man wanted to go home. Jesus warned him that any delay would make him ineligible for kingdom service.

The man who begins his kingdom labor may be dissuaded by family in the early stages. There are many reasons why a man's relatives might discourage him. They may have other plans for him in the family inheritance. They may regard Christ's message as controversial. They have influence over him. They may be successful in their efforts to bring him back to normal. Jesus warned him that nothing should lure him back, not even a glance to the rear.

Conclusion

Jesus warned these men to put first things first: to set their top priority. Joining the wanderers would mean giving up home, bed, and pillow. Jesus had done this; His followers would, too. Was the scribe ready to pay this price? Joining the wanderers would also mean giving up traditions. Burying one's father was a very old tradition in Israel.

11. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). This has always been a problem text for dispensationalists.

That tradition was about to go. The new Israel would soon be at war with old Israel. The household would be divided. The would-be wanderer was told it was time to choose: covenantal life or covenantal death. Jesus told him to choose life. The third man was told much the same: do not put family concerns above kingdom concerns.

He was telling them that the New Covenant would supersede the Old. To join Him would be to take a different covenant oath. They could no longer live halfway between the Old World Order and the New World Order. For a brief time, it might have looked as though that was possible, but it was not. The dead would have to bury the dead. The living would have to wander. Within one generation, they would have to flee. “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:20–22).¹²

12. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

21

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? (Luke 10:30–36).

The theocentric principle here is God as a healer and defender. He is the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Selfless Assistance

This parable was given in response to a lawyer's trick question: "Who is my neighbor?" In other words, "What person am I supposed to love as much as I love myself?" Jesus' answer: your neighbor is the person, because he is nearby, whom you should personally assist in his time of crisis.

The Samaritan was a stranger in Israel. On a journey, he came across an injured man. The man had been lying in the road. First, a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

priest had passed him by; then, a Levite did the same. Having received no help from these religious officers, he was then assisted by a Samaritan, i.e., a religious rival.

Why did they pass him by? Perhaps they feared that the man's assailants were still in the neighborhood. Better to walk away quickly and avoid danger. Or perhaps they believed he was dead. If a Jew touched a dead man's body, he became unclean for a week. "He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean" (Num. 19:11–12). This was a nuisance, but it was not a disaster. It meant that he could not enter the temple (Num. 19:13). Perhaps they had business to conduct at the temple.

The wounded man was not a ritualistic threat to a Samaritan, who would not be entering the temple. The Samaritan was willing to examine the man closely to see if he was alive. He was also willing to assist him with his wounds. He took him to an inn, paid for his lodging, and promised the innkeeper that he would return and pay for any additional expenses incurred by the innkeeper in treating the wounded man.

This was selfless assistance. The Samaritan had no guarantee of repayment. Still, he helped the man. Why? Because he understood that the man was his neighbor. They were both on the same road, facing the same risks. They shared a common environment. They were therefore neighbors. The Samaritan understood Jesus' ethical principle, which we call the golden rule: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31).²

This was a warning to the lawyer: do not define "neighbor" on the basis of shared religion. Define it by *shared community*. People who are in close proximity are neighbors. They share the same risks. They should help each other in a time of crisis, expecting nothing in return. "Love thy neighbor as thyself, but choose your neighborhood," quipped Louise Beal. This is what most Americans do today. We choose our neighborhoods very well. We choose them so well that marketers can use our postal zip codes to estimate what brands of automobiles we are most likely to own, or which magazines we probably subscribe to. The final four digits in our nine-digit zip codes reveal such neighborhood information: as many as 66 separate lifestyle types.³ Marketers know, through computerized data, what we do not

2. Chapter 10.

3. Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustering of America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

even rationally perceive when we choose our neighborhoods: just how astoundingly well we choose them.

The good Samaritan did not choose his neighborhood that day on the basis of “safety first” or “live close to neighbors who will not need much assistance.” He chose it as a way to get to Jericho. When he found a beaten man in his temporary neighborhood, he aided him.

The action of the Samaritan was comparable to making a charitable loan. “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35).

B. Self-Interested Assistance

The commentators never discuss the importance of the innkeeper. This is a mistake. The innkeeper was important to both the Samaritan and the wounded man. He offered a place for the wounded man to stay. He offered care. He also offered credit for the Samaritan. Without these services, the Samaritan’s task would have been far more expensive and difficult.

The innkeeper had to make a decision to trust the Samaritan. There was no guarantee that he would be paid beyond the initial payment. He had to make an assessment of the Samaritan’s character. His decision was made easier by the situation. Here was a religious stranger who was treating a wounded man as a brother. He was paying for services rendered. Could he be trusted to pay any extra expenses? The Samaritan seemed reliable. He was an ethical person, as far as the innkeeper could see.

Nevertheless, there was risk involved. How did the innkeeper know that the Samaritan would return? Who would pay if he failed to return? The wounded man? His family? But who was he? Where did his family live? The innkeeper had to judge the likelihood of repayment based on his previous experience. He had to decide whether to accept this obligation at the request of a stranger.

The innkeeper offered a service. He hoped for a return on his expenditures. He was in business to serve others. He was not running a nonprofit charity. But his business made the task of the charitable

At the time of publication, only 40 cluster neighborhoods had been identified. A test site on the World Wide Web allows you to specify any United States zip code and learn its five most common lifestyles, based on the less precise five-digit zip code (www.yawyl.claritas.com). The company’s slogan is “You are where you live!”

Samaritan much easier.

A society needs innkeepers. It needs people who offer services for payment. The charity of the Samaritan was exceptional. The good Samaritan has served for centuries as a fine model of ethical behavior, but a society cannot be run on the assumption that such behavior will become common. Even if it should become common, charities still need to buy specialized services. There will be far more of these services offered for sale in a society that allows profit-seeking entrepreneurs to sell them profitably.

C. The Socialist Alternative

The socialist believes that the innkeepers of this world should be compelled to act as charitable Samaritans. He knows that innkeepers will not act charitably in most cases. So, he calls for the state to confiscate wealth from taxpayers and then use the money to fund the care of wounded travelers—and millions of other victims.

This raises many problems. Which government agency should pay the innkeeper? How much should he be paid? After all, profit-seeking innkeepers should not be allowed to gouge the government. There must therefore be fixed prices and enforceable standards of care. There must be forms to fill out and submit. There may be long delays in payment. Some innkeepers will try to get out of the business of providing services to government-funded victims on a regulated basis. Should this be allowed? If it is allowed, this will place a heavy burden on all of the other innkeepers.

Innkeepers are rarely good Samaritans. Neither are most taxpayers. What can the state's employees do about this? The state possesses no resources that it does not gain apart from the threat of violence. The only way for the state to deal with the problem of wounded victims is by coercion. But coercion predictably reduces both voluntary cooperation and the standard of care. It turns health care into a government-funded bureaucratic profession.

This parable rests on the assumption that a moral obligation to help a victim is not a legal obligation to be enforced by civil law. Individuals are encouraged to offer positive sanctions. The state is not supposed to make such an offer, for it holds a legal monopoly of violence. Its function is to impose negative sanctions on evil-doers (Rom. 13:1–7).⁴ Its task is not to make men righteous. That is God's exclusive

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*

prerogative.

D. Who Is My Neighbor?

Rev. Timothy Keller discussed this parable in his chapter in a book written by the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (1990). He wrote: “*Anyone* in need is my neighbor—that is the teaching of the Good Samaritan parable.”⁵ Nowhere have I heard this argument more forcefully presented: the Jericho road is every highway and byway on earth, and all the off-road residences as well. This statement, if taken seriously—and no one on earth has ever taken it seriously *institutionally*, including Rev. Keller—means that there is no escape from the ideal of absolute economic equality. No matter where we are on earth, if we have a brass farthing more than anyone else on earth, we are not being good Samaritans.

If believed and obeyed, his position would de-capitalize faithful Christians. They would feel morally compelled to give away everything they own for the sake of the poor in general. The church has never believed this. Why, then, did Rev. Keller make the statement?

Perhaps Rev. Keller would add qualifications. Maybe he really didn’t mean that *anyone* in need is my neighbor, if that also means that I am in any way legally or morally obligated to help my neighbors. (If it does not mean this, however, why did he bring it up?) He may mean something else. But he never said what he meant. What he wrote is theologically radical.

Rev. Keller presented his theology of welfare in the section, “The Issue of Conditions.” In it, he attacked Ray Sutton’s paper, “The Theology of the Poor.” Rev. Sutton argued there that churches are not required by God to give money to drug addicts and drunks. A chronic repeater of some offense is also not entitled to aid. “To give to him unconditionally, sight unseen, is a waste of God’s money.” The underlying covenant theology—a covenant theology with *sanctions* (point four of the biblical covenant)⁶—led Rev. Sutton to this conclusion. This conclusion is precisely what repelled Rev. Keller. Rev. Sutton replied to Rev. Keller in detail in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*.⁷ Here I need

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

5. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 275.

6. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

7. *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

only to summarize Rev. Keller's position.

Rev. Keller insisted that "When God's grace first comes to us, it comes unconditionally, regardless of our merits."⁸ Rev. Keller then made this leap of faith: "*At first*, we should show mercy to anyone in need, as we have opportunity and resources. We should not turn them away by analyzing them as 'undeserving' even if sin is part of the complex of their poverty."⁹ Where is a single Bible reference that supports this view? Are we omniscient, the way God is? No. Then why discuss our obligations to give charity in the context of what a sovereign God does? Why not turn to biblical law to decide what we are responsible for? Answer: *because that would be theonomic*. Rev. Keller did not think much of theonomy. "Many of my criticisms of their response to the poor rest on deeper reservations I have with their interpretation of the Old Testament civil code."¹⁰ Furthermore, "the reconstructionists in their mode of interpretation and application of the Old Testament do not appear to me to be sensitive to the progress of biblical theology."¹¹ But, of course, "Nothing that I just said is meant to deny that Israel's code is full of God's wisdom and is all applicable to our own culture. No area of life is untouched by God's law."¹²

Year after year, theonomists receive this sort of criticism. "No, we don't want Old Testament laws. Yes, these laws are valuable. No, there are no biblical blueprints. Yes, we must honor biblical principles. No, we must not appeal to the Old Testament law code for our civil laws. Yes, we must respect them. No, we should not be biblicists. Yes, we must pay attention to God's moral principles." It gets confusing. You would almost think that these people are theologically schizophrenic.

Conclusion

The parable of the good Samaritan deals with the question of loving one's neighbor. The Samaritan was the wounded man's neighbor because he helped the man when the opportunity arose. The opportunity arose because they were both travellers on the same road. The priest and the Levite were also travellers on that road, but they did not help. They refused to act as neighbors. Jesus chose the highest ecclesiastical officers as His examples of how not to serve as neighbors. This

8. Keller, p. 276.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 276–77.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 288–89.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

deliberate provocation could not have been missed by members of both groups. He was making it clear that the concept of neighbor is broader than either race or confession. It has to do with shared circumstances and close proximity. It also has to do with need or weakness. It has to do with the golden rule (Luke 6:32).¹³

13. Chapter 10:A.

ANSWERED PRAYER: SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:9–13).

The theocentric principle here is this: God is absolutely sovereign over history. He possesses the power to answer any prayer. This is point one of the biblical covenant: transcendence.¹

A. Persistent Prayer

A question that everyone who prays will eventually ask himself (and God) is this: “Why has God refused to answer this particular prayer?”

In the immediately previous passage, Jesus compared the correct prayer strategy with a request by a man late at night for his neighbor to lend him three loaves of bread, so that he can feed a surprise guest. The neighbor refuses; he is already in bed. The supplicator asks again. The listener eventually capitulates. “I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth” (v. 8). The same

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

view of persistent prayer appears in Luke 18:1–6: the parable of the unjust judge and the nagging widow. She receives a verdict because she will not leave him alone.²

These are very peculiar commands. They indicate that we should pray to God as if He were either inconsiderate, lazy, or unjust. We should keep coming back with our request, as if we could nag God into action on our behalf. These are “as if” commands. God really is not like this, yet we should deal with Him as if He were.³ Effective prayer is supposed to be a form of nagging. We are not supposed to expect God to answer an important request just because we have made our request known to Him, once.

There is an exception to this strategy of nagging prayer. Paul had an unspecified affliction that was interfering with his ministry, or so he thought. God refused to heal him. God told him that the affliction was there to keep him from becoming exalted and therefore proud. Pride would have hurt his ministry more than the affliction did. So, after three requests, Paul ceased to pray for deliverance. “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (II Cor. 12:7–10). So, some prayers are not going to be answered positively—what we might call requests for scorpions. The supplicator thinks that a

2. Chapter 42.

3. Another “as if” doctrine is the doctrine of erasure from the book of life. “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5). “And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:19). How do we know that these are “as if” teachings? Because of Paul’s doctrine of perseverance. “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom. 8:33–35). “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come” (Rom. 8:38).

hoped-for egg will do him good. He is wrong. It is a scorpion's egg.

B. The Holy Spirit

The greatest of all answers to prayer is the gift of the Holy Spirit. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (v. 13). We must begin with this presupposition: we are evil. We do not deserve God's grace, i.e., His economic subsidy to us of answered prayer. Effective prayer must begin with this implicit confession. Sometimes it has to be explicit. "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13–14).

Having heard this confession, the Holy Spirit will then pray on our behalf. This is intercession: point two of the biblical covenant: representation.⁴ He will pray comprehensively, beyond what we can imagine. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26–27). This passage precedes one of the most comforting verses in the New Testament: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (v. 28).

C. Prayer and Predestination

Faithful prayer must be seen in the context of Romans 8:28. The key phrase is "all things." This does not imply that a Christian who does not pray will have bad things happen to him as a necessary consequence. Painful things may happen to him, but not bad things. God's predestination is comprehensive. The comprehensive plan of God and the comprehensive sovereignty of God work together to secure *exclusively good results* for covenant-keepers. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:29–32).

1. *The Wish*

The covenant-breaker's equivalent of a prayer is the wish. Middle Eastern stories of genies that offer three wishes are beloved by children in the West. "If only I could get my three wishes!" The person who dreams of having his wishes come true does not recognize that we cannot change just one thing. There are always unforeseen and unintended consequences of our actions. A magical wish would compound these consequences, for such a wish upsets the limits that God has placed on historical cause and effect. A magical wish seeks to remove the wish-maker from the limits imposed on creation by God's curse (Gen. 3:17–19).⁵ So does a prayer, but there is this crucial difference: a wish, if granted by a supernatural power, would be granted by something without omniscience to someone without omniscience. The wish would produce unintended consequences. These consequences would place the supplicator more deeply into the power of a supernatural creature.

God does not grant wishes. He answers prayers. There are no unintended consequences for God. When He answers a prayer, the new conditions are part of His comprehensive predestination. He does not predestinate in either a vacuum or a sea of chance. *The context of prayer is God's comprehensive predestination* (Rom. 8:29–30). The context of wishes is either chance (luck) or fate, both of which are impersonal.⁶ An answered supernatural wish might well gain a person's limited goal, but only on the assumption that both the wish-maker and the wish-provider operate in an impersonal universe. The universe is not impersonal. It is personal—cosmically personal.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

6. On the fate vs. luck dualism in pagan Roman culture, see Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study in Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957), pp. 158–60. (<http://bit.ly/cnccacc>)

2. *God's Providential Plan*

Our prayers are part of God's providential plan. They have been predestined by God. We pray, and God responds positively to us. The problem we have as creatures is this: not being omniscient, we cannot see the hoped-for but limited results of any of our prayers whenever they are treated by God as uninformed wishes. God refuses to grant us our poorly informed requests. In fact, if He did grant such a request, we would be harmed. This is what happened to the Israelites in their rebellion in the wilderness. "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:15). He brought them under judgment. Psalm 106 recounts their continual rebellion. They survived only because Moses intervened before God on their behalf (v. 23). He prayed the most powerful prayer that anyone can pray, a prayer that upholds God's name and reputation.

And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people (Ex. 32:9–14).

God grants our requests, but He does so by way of His omniscience. He knows what we really need. We often do not know. He also knows our hearts. We are too often self-deceived. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:9–10). He answers our prayers the long way around, granting us the things that are good for us, not always granting the things we request.

Here, I reprint my comments on Matthew 7:7–12.⁷

* * * * *

D. A Program of Cost-Effective Seeking

Here is one of the greatest promises in the Bible: “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Luke 11: 9). It is comparable to this promise: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20b). What are we to make of all this?

First, seeking is the outworking of faith. Faith is a means of risk-reduction.⁸ But this passage goes further: active seeking is a means to wealth accumulation. The good things of life are available for the seeking—not just for the asking, but the seeking. Seeking is a program that combines faith, identification of the items desired, planning to gain these items, and a unique means of securing the completion of the plan. This final stage is generally referred to as the golden rule. All elements must be present for the program to work as outlined here.

The first step listed here is *asking*, but it is not the first step in the seeking process. The seeker must already have identified whatever it is that he wants. This takes great spiritual maturity. This is the most difficult aspect of the entire procedure. He must identify his own scale of values. Put another way, he must identify his priorities and the reasons for them. He must seek conformity of his priorities to God’s written revelation. The Gospel of Matthew makes it plain that the supreme priority is the kingdom of God. This is the covenant-keeper’s method of fulfilling the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28).⁹

The second step is the planning stage: *seeking*. Once he knows what it is he is after, he must think about how he can attain his goal. He must develop a plan of action. He must get from here to there. I have argued elsewhere that this plan consists of two parts, once the goal is identified: (1) estimating the price; (2) estimating the time frame. The shorter the time frame, the more it will cost to complete

7. This is adapted from chapter 16 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

9. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 4.

the plan. We do not get something—above all, time—for nothing.

The third step—*knocking*—is Jesus' way to describe prayer. His definition underlies another passage on prayer, the parable of the woman and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–6). This is the model for constant prayer. We are to pray to God as if He were an unjust judge. He who prays faithfully must be stubborn. If a prayer is worth praying, it is worth praying again.

The frustration of unanswered prayer is always a threat to the faith of the godly person who prays in faith. *Unwavering faith is important for getting prayers answered*. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5–8).¹⁰ It takes courage to pray this way: the courage to expect God to answer the prayer. Unanswered prayer is a temptation to disbelieve the promise and therefore the One who made the promise.

Moses told Joshua to exercise courage. “And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed” (Deut. 31:7–8).¹¹ The same kind of courage must underlie successful prayer. This degree of courage is not given to every Christian, or even most Christians.

E. Good Things for the Asking

“How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” The child asks for bread. The father does not give him a stone. The child asks for fish. The father does not give him a scorpion. The first request is minimal: bread. The second is for something extra: fish. Giving a stone would be an evil response to a child's request for bread. Giving a scorpion for the request for fish would be even worse.

10. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 32.

11. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 74.

What was Jesus' point? That men, being evil, do good things to those whom they love. How much more does God do good things for those whom He loves?

But what if the child had asked for a stone to cast at an enemy? Would a wise father grant him his request? No. How much more would a wise father not grant a child's request for a scorpion? Of what good use is a scorpion to a child? What Jesus maintained here was that a legitimate request from a child should be answered by his father. So is God's open hand in relation to His children.

What seems legitimate in our eyes may be the equivalent of a scorpion in our lives: a deadly gift. We lack insight into our own hearts. We are not always good judges of character, especially our own.

The father's gift to a child in response to a legitimate request should be our model for understanding God's responses to our prayers. If we do not see our prayers answered, then the fault may be in our assessment of our needs or perhaps our assessment of the times. The father gives his son bread, but not every time the son may ask throughout the day. Similarly, God gives us what we need when we need it. What defines our need? God's calling and timing. We must see our needs in terms of God's kingdom. The theme of God's kingdom is found throughout Matthew. The kingdom is central; we are not.

Job asked God for death. "Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort; yea, I would harden myself in sorrow: let him not spare; for I have not concealed the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?" (Job 6:8–11). God had other plans for Job: blessing (Job. 42). He did not grant Job's request.

What is good for covenant-keeping man? Whatever is good for God. *The proper criteria of good are theocentric.* Through the power of prayer, covenant-keepers are enabled to participate in the extension of God's kingdom. They see their prayers come to pass in history. But these answered prayers extend God's kingdom in history. Prayers are answered in history; the kingdom is extended through answered prayers in history.

F. Something for Nothing

Prayers are a way to gain our objective without paying for it in full. They are a way to get something for nothing. For example, we pray for guidance. This is another way of saying that we ask God to lower our search costs. We pray for a positive outcome from our investment of money, time, and labor. We are asking for an above-market rate of return. We pray for success. We are asking for a reduced risk of failure.

A prayer is our admission to God that the risk-reward ratio is too high for us. *We request a subsidy from God.* We admit that, apart from God's intervention on our behalf, we are likely to fail. God then searches our hearts. Why are we pursuing the matter? What is our motive? Is it personal success for ourselves? If so, we are placing ourselves at risk spiritually. "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20–21).¹¹² *Rich toward God:* here is the correct motive.

The extension of God's kingdom requires capital. It requires dedicated people. It requires confident people. God provides His servants with capital, dedication, and confidence. Prayer is important as a source of supply for all three shortages.

Prayer offers advantages to covenant-keepers who are active kingdom-builders. It opens the door to God's subsidies to Himself by way of His people. It gives them an advantage over covenant-breakers. While covenant-breakers sometimes invoke incantations or other formulaic appeals to the occult supernatural realm, their requests suffer from these major defects: their own covenant-breaking status, the implacable hostility of their wish-providing sources, their own lack of omniscience, and the lack of omniscience of their wish-providing sources.

Covenant-keepers are encouraged strongly to pray. *God wants to grant these subsidies.* He knows that the world is too complex for us to understand and deal with on our own. He wants us to adopt standard free market techniques for gaining success: thrift,¹¹³ diligence in our

12. Chapter 25.

13. "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up" (Prov. 21:20).

work,¹⁴ investment in our education,¹⁵ honest dealing,¹⁶ steadfastness,¹⁷ and so forth. But these are insufficient in the long run to produce compound economic growth across the generations. We must also pray, tithe, attend church, confess our sins to God, and exercise all of the other spiritual disciplines. So must our heirs.

Humanistic economics denies this. The humanistic economist assumes that the God of the Bible and His covenant law are important only insofar as men think they are. Prayer, church attendance, and other acts of subordination to God may motivate some men to greater effort, but the economist is agnostic regarding the existence of a God who objectively rewards such behavior. The economist's faith insists that men's faith in the future, not the content of their faith, is what matters in motivating them to plan for the future. Their faith in the future lowers their acceptable rate of interest, but God's historical sanctions are not part of the equation.

The judicial basis of God's subsidy to us is the cross. We receive something for nothing, but only because Jesus Christ paid the full penalty for our sin. *Prayer is therefore an aspect of grace: a gift unearned by us but earned by Christ.* He was not paid what He deserved, so that we might escape being paid what we deserve.

Conclusion

God is ready to hear the prayers of every covenant-keeper, day or night. *He is ready to answer these prayers, but only when they are to His advantage.* If they are to His advantage, then they are also to the advantage of His people. He who prays fervently prays on behalf of himself, but he is also implicitly or explicitly praying on behalf of the kingdom of God. *The extension of God's kingdom is more fundamental than anyone's self-interested wish list.* The Oscar-winning song in Walt Disney's full-length cartoon, *Pinocchio* (1939), declares the dream of covenant-breakers throughout history: "When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are." This theory of cause and effect is

14. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23–24).

15. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be asamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

16. "Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have" (Lev. 19:36a).

17. "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

incorrect. It makes a very great difference who you are with respect to answered prayer. The deciding issue is one's kingdom membership.

23

TITHING IS NOT ENOUGH

And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Luke 11:39–42).

The theocentric principle here is that God is the cosmic owner of everything, so a token payment to Him is required of His stewards. This is an aspect of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Tithe

Jesus had been invited to a meal in the home of a Pharisee. The Pharisee mentally noted (“marvelled”) that Jesus did not wash his hands before eating (v. 38). This practice was not an Old Covenant requirement; it was a later addition to traditional Jewish law. Jesus then stung him with these words. There was nothing polite about His response. He was merciless in His condemnation, not just of this one Pharisee but of all of them. He would say the same thing in public on another occasion: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matt. 23:23)²

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 46.

The tithe is man's affirmation of God's sovereign original ownership of the creation. The Bible is clear about what this percentage is: 10%. "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD" (Lev. 27:32).³ "For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace" (Heb. 7:1–2).⁴

It is frequently argued in my day that the Mosaic law required a tithe, but the New Testament does not impose this requirement. Both of these assertions are misleading. First, the payment of a tithe preceded the Mosaic law. As we have seen, Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, the priest of Salem (Gen. 14:20). Second, Luke 11:39–42 is explicit: the Pharisees owed a tithe on the smallest portion of their income. "These ought ye to have done."

A critic of mandatory tithing could argue that Jesus cited an Old Covenant requirement, but it does not bind us today. In other words, this command is found in the New Testament, but it was part of the Old Covenant order. The problem with this line of reasoning is that there is no passage in the New Testament that exempts the Israel of God—the church (Gal. 6:16)—from the tithe. What is the judicial basis of the supposed exemption? What has changed judicially? Is God any less the owner of the universe? Is He any less sovereign over history? Is the New Testament priesthood not entitled to the tithe that Melchizedek was entitled to, despite the fact that the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches that the New Testament church rests on Jesus' office as high priest, which is after the order of Melchizedek?

"But," the critic hastens to add, "Christians may want to give more than 10%!" A few might. Most of them give way, way less. No denomination today collects anywhere near 10%. This has been true throughout church history. But even if men choose to give more, this extra giving is part of their offerings. Old Covenant believers also gave offerings. The judicial issue then as now was this: What percentage of their net income do men owe God as His stewards?

The requirement to tithe 10% of one's income was not laid on the

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 37.

4. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 29.

Pharisees alone. Jesus was not limiting His discussion of the tithe to the religious leaders. The tithe is God's portion, which is owed to His sacramental agency, the institutional church.⁵ Abraham paid Melchizedek, who had presented Abraham with bread and wine: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18).⁶ The Mosaic law required the Israelites to pay the Levites 10%, who in turn were to pay the priests 10% (Num. 18:26).⁷ The priests were those members of the tribe of Levi who offered sacrifices in the temple. Only the priests were exempt from the tithe, as the final recipients of the tithe. There was no group above them to act as God's representatives for tithe-collection. (This principle of final recipient applies to the income received by ministers from the church.)⁸

The tithe is related to the sacraments because they are tokens of God's gracious provision to His people of the past atonement for our sins (baptism) and a future shared meal with Him (Lord's Supper). The Lord's Supper is a prelude to the marriage supper of the lamb to His bride, the church (Rev. 19:7–9). Because the sacraments are not to be sold, they are offered to all communicant church members, even those who do not pay their tithes. But the moral obligation to pay the tithe is still there, even for those who are not members of the church in their legal capacity as sons of Adam, who was a priest. This obligation relates to the priesthood of all believers. The tithe is what all men owe to God. God does not delegate to the state the authority to compel such payments. Covenant-keepers are supposed to honor God by paying 10% to the local church that sustains its share of God's common grace order in history. This is voluntary. Voting members should tithe as a condition of exercising the ecclesiastical franchise. This restriction is important in order to protect the church's treasury from members with personal agendas that they are not willing to fund by means of their own proportional giving to the church.

Offerings are given by church members in addition to the tithe.

5. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 21.

7. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

8. The church can pay a minister enough to enable him to tithe back to the church, but this is just a form of internal accounting for the church.

Offerings can lawfully be donated to the church or to other charitable institutions. They are a way to express our thanks to God beyond the minimal requirement of the tithe. The common pastoral phrase in American Protestant churches is this: “We will now bring our tithes and offerings.” Then designated agents pass collection plates down the aisles. The phrase is “tithes *and* offerings.” It is not “tithes *or* offerings.” But it is generally interpreted as the latter, even by pastors.

The tithe is a representative admission by man that God owns everything, which He does (Ps. 50:10).⁹ It is a token payment that symbolizes God’s original ownership of everything, including mankind. Ownership is theocentric. Christian economics begins with a declaration of God’s original ownership.¹⁰ In contrast, secular economics begins with scarcity, i.e., the results of God’s curse (Gen. 3:17–19).¹¹ By beginning with scarcity, the secular economist begins with a fact of life that is acknowledged by most observers. Beginning with God’s ownership would be regarded as theological, unprovable, and therefore epistemologically irrelevant.

B. Weightier Matters

The tithe is every man’s minimal obligation to God. Beyond this, Jesus said, are weightier matters: the law, judgment, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23),¹² as well as giving alms and the love of God (Luke 11: 41–42). The tithe was not identified by Jesus as one of the weighty matters. Yet men’s refusal to pay the tithe is universal, and has been throughout church history. *Covenant-keepers have enormous trouble in fulfilling what Jesus identified as a relatively minor matter.* It is therefore not surprising that they have even greater trouble with weightier matters.

The tithe is a token payment to God that testifies to His complete ownership of the creation. But it is a token in another sense: a token of covenant-keepers’ ability to exercise law, judgment, mercy, and faith. When covenant-keepers pay their tithes to the local church, they are declaring that they are spiritually ready to begin considering the weightier requirements of the faith. *When they refuse to pay their tithes to the local church, they are saying that they are not ready to be-*

9. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

10. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

11. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch.12.

12. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 46.

gin considering these weightier matters. This is what Jesus told the Pharisees in no uncertain terms. He condemned them publicly, yet they paid their tithes. Nevertheless, most Christians believe that Jesus does not offer an even worse condemnation of them when they refuse to pay their tithes, despite their greater knowledge of God through Christ.

Dominion begins with the payment of the tithe to the local church. Only then are covenant-keepers in a position to begin to extend God's comprehensive kingdom in history through law, judgment, mercy, faith, alms, and the love of God.

The institutional church finds itself on the defensive today. Christians have offered many excuses for the impotence of today's church: pessimistic eschatologies, original sin, easy believism, people's lack of theology, carnal Christianity, and so forth. This is not where we should begin our analysis. *Jesus implicitly began with men's failure to tithe.* He criticized the Pharisees because they had systematically refused to deal with weightier matters, even though they had paid their tithes. But Christians rarely pay their tithes.

In his commentary on Luke, Hendriksen denies the obvious, namely, that Jesus was here affirming the mandatory nature of the tithe. He interprets Jesus' words as requiring this of the New Testament Christian: ". . . (a) he should give systematically and proportionally, that is, in proportion to his ability (I Cor. 16:2); and (b) he should give generously and cheerfully (II Cor. 9:7)."¹³ This nonspecific approach places Christians in a difficult position, not knowing how much is too little and therefore an insult to God. This confusion produces needless guilt in those who pay their tithes, and it also produces a seared conscience (I Tim. 4:2) in those who refuse.

Conclusion

The dominion covenant mandates tithing. The Christian who cannot bring himself to pay to the local church 10% of his net increase lacks both faith and self-discipline. He is like a would-be soldier who cannot bring himself to go through basic training. He is untrained in the basics, yet he hopes to give a good account of himself before God and men on the battlefield. He has handicapped himself in advance.

We should be cheerful about paying a tithe and even more. We

13. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 640.

should see this as an honor. We should learn to trust God for our provisions. Jesus said, “Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Luke 12:27–31).¹⁴ This takes faith to believe. Tithing is an initial practical step that allows us to test both our faith and God’s response.

14. Chapter 26.

VALUE, PRICE, AND FEAR

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows (Luke 12:6–7).

The theocentric principle here is God's position as the one who imputes value. He does so in His office as cosmic Judge. He brings sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. An Omniscient, Omnipotent God

1. *The Fear of God*

Fallen men live in fear. Fear is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of fear vs. no fear. It is a question of *what* we should fear. Adam did not fear God enough. We fear the world too much. Jesus warned: "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:4–5). Because God brings the maximum sanction, Jesus told the disciples not to fear lesser sanctions. In the American slang expression, "Don't sweat the small stuff." For a covenant-keeper, the affairs of this life, other than God's redemption, is small stuff.

God sees the sparrows. They are inexpensive birds. God also sees His people. They are worth more than sparrows. God has numbered the hairs on men's heads. This is a graphic way to describe God's omniscience. He understands our fears, needs, desires, hopes. He can

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch.42.

evaluate the value of men in relation to sparrows.

God is a friend to all those who fear Him. Such people are wise. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever” (Ps. 111:10). The more that men fear God, the more they seek His grace to obey His law. The more that they fear God, the more He empowers them to obey Him. This is a tremendous blessing. Men learn to rely on Him for guidance and support.

Nevertheless, even faithful people are tempted to transfer their fear from God to the creation. The cares of this world seem to roll in on Christians like ocean waves in a hurricane. We feel overwhelmed by them. We fear these events because we feel that we are all alone. Somehow, God has forgotten us. He does not see that we are overwhelmed.

Jesus warned His listeners against thinking this way. God has not abandoned us. He has not forgotten us. Jesus used an economic comparison to make this point clear. What is the price of a sparrow? Not much. Yet God has not forgotten the sparrow. What is the value of a person? Far above the value of a sparrow. God knows how many hairs are on a person’s head. God is aware of the intimate details of every man’s condition. Jesus told His followers not to fear the external world. God has not abandoned His people. He is not unaware of what is happening to them. They do not sense His presence, but He is with them, day and night.

2. Stormy Waters

A good example of this was the experience of the disciples in the storm-tossed boat. Jesus was asleep. The storm did not awaken Him. The frantic efforts of the disciples to bail out water did not awaken Him, nor did the water. “And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him” (Luke 8:24–25).

The disciples at first had allowed Jesus to continue to sleep. They had worried about the storm. Then they had worried about the water pouring in. Finally, they woke Him up, admitting their helplessness.

They really imagined that God was about to sink the boat in which His son was sleeping. They really imagined that Jesus, in His sleep, was unaware of the storm. He must not have known what was going on, they concluded. Neither did God the Father. It was a case of the storm against the disciples, and the disciples were at wit's end. They had run out of solutions. They cried out to Jesus in despair.

Why bother to awake Jesus? What could He do? Calm the waters? They were amazed when He did this, so they must not have expected this. Then why did they awake Him? To say goodbye? That is not what they said. They were crying out in desperation, not knowing what to do or what to expect. They were out of proposed solutions.

There is no indication that they prayed before they awakened Him. They did not cry out to God, "Oh, God, your son is in the boat. We call upon you to protect Him and us by delivering us." They turned to Jesus only when they had run out of possible solutions, but not including prayer. It was this that was the essence of their unbelief: *autonomy first*. To bail water in a storm is sensible. To do so without invoking the name of Jesus is not sensible. Their refusal to do this, with Jesus actually present in the boat, indicates their lack of faith in God the Father to act on behalf of His son.

Jesus asked: "Where is your faith?" What a humiliating phrase! Yet these words condemn most Christians throughout their lives. We are supposed to be humble before God, so that we can exercise dominion over His creation. But when fear of the creation comes, we become humble before the creation and neglect our duties to God.

3. Fearing the Creation

For some Christians, learning this lesson is the most difficult spiritual task in their lives. They struggle with lack of trust in God. They fear even the storms of life that have not yet arisen. They are too much like the wicked: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). They live lives of quiet desperation. Yet the God whom they publicly profess is sovereign over everything. They know this. They say they believe that Jesus is Lord. Yet they worry. They do not exercise faith.

Why do covenant-keepers fear the creation? Do they really disbelieve what Jesus said here? Do they really think of themselves as of less value to God than a sparrow? God sent His son into this world as a man, not as a sparrow. This shows us how valuable a man is in God's

sight. But covenant-keepers have difficulty internalizing this information and living in terms of it. They are eaten up with fear. This is one of the covenantal curses listed in Deuteronomy 28. "And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see" (Deut. 28: 66–67). Christians who live in fear of the creation should pray that God will deliver them from this terrible curse.

B. Risk and the Kingdom

To extend the kingdom of God in history, covenant-keepers must take risks. This is the message of the parable of the 10 stewards (Luke 19:13–27).² One steward buried his coin, fearing that the owner would judge him harshly if he lost it. The owner was angry with this risk-avoiding servant. "For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him" (Luke 19:26).

Fear hinders our kingdom work. It makes us low-return investors of God's assets. We should have great confidence in our efforts if we are being obedient to God. We should rely on His grace, which is His free gift. But this takes a degree of spiritual maturity, which is quite rare.

Perhaps we distrust our own judgment. Then we should seek counsel. "For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Prov. 24:6). But when fear of any aspect of the creation dominates us, we should recognize that we are in sin. We have forgotten how valuable we are in God's sight. We have forgotten the value of His dear son's life, which God the Father sacrificed in order to deliver His people from the threat of hell, which is the ultimate threat in history.

When fear hampers our work, we should seek God's counsel through prayer, Bible reading, and advice from other Christians who have faced similar problems. Where fear exists in the stomachs of God's people, there is a spiritual problem present in their hearts. Such fear is evidence of unbelief or some other sin.

2. Chapter 46.

C. The Value of a Covenant-Keeper

Jesus did not say specifically that a covenant-keeper is more important than a sparrow. He said he is more valuable. He compared a person's value with a sparrow's price.

Price is important as an indicator of value. This is a crucial presupposition of free market economic theory. Without this assumption, there could be no economic theory. The fact that the things that men value can be expressed in prices is what enables producers to allocate scarce resources to meet customer demand. Prices convey information to producers regarding what men value enough to pay for. People bid high prices to obtain something of great value. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45–46).³ Customers' competitive bidding against each other raises the price of the item being offered for sale. The presumed equivalency of value and price is what provides information to producers and customers about the state of supply and demand.

If there were no relationship between value and price, then high prices would not attract producers of those goods and services that buyers value highly. High-priced items would stay high priced even if they could be produced less expensively: no competition. The information delivered by prices would not affect future supply and demand. This would create economic chaos. Low-valued items would still be produced at the expense of producing too few highly valued items. Prospective customers would not be able to lure additional producers into offering highly valued items for sale at a lower price.

Oscar Wilde described a cynic as a person who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. This aphorism has been applied repeatedly to economists. There are good reasons for this. The economist's view of men's motivation can be intensely cynical. "Every man has his price" is an unspoken law in economics. But value and price can sometimes be very different. There is far greater value in God's grace, which has no market price, than in gold or silver. Jesus warned: "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Luke 19:25).⁴

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 31.

4. Chapter 19.

Nevertheless, Jesus compared a person's value with a sparrow's price. He was well aware of the fact that there is a familiar relationship between price and value. His comparison rested on this relationship. He was making a spiritual point by describing an economic relationship. In the day-to-day affairs of life, value and price are closely related.

Conclusion

Jesus sought to comfort fear-plagued saints by reminding them that the God of their covenant is omniscient. He sees everything. God has not forgotten His people. Far from it. He has not even ignored a sparrow. Because a covenant-keeper is more valuable in God's eyes than a sparrow, how much more does He pay attention to His people's circumstances! They should not become desperate.

TREASURE AND GREED

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:15–21).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Full Barns, Empty Life

The Gospel of Luke emphasizes the theme of the spiritual danger of great personal wealth. This passage is found only in Luke. Jesus applied the tenth commandment, which prohibits covetousness, to the building up of wealth. The King James translators always translated the Greek word as “covetous,” but the meaning is closer to “greed.” Greed is the insatiable desire for more.² Jesus warned that greed has to do with amassing personal wealth at the expense of God. He made clear the theocentric nature of greed: robbing God. But, ultimately, it

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 662.

means robbing one's own eternal future. It is as if we were to spend our retirement portfolio on ourselves before our retirement.

The rich man in the parable possessed great wealth. In a world in which hunger was common, he could not store all of his excess food, which was overflowing. He had to make space for it. The same shortage of space afflicted his other possessions.

It was not good enough to build new barns. He wanted to tear down his old ones. He wanted the latest thing in barns. The man was afflicted with an edifice complex. He wanted the existence of his great wealth visible to those around him.

He saw the issue in terms of his earthly future. "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (v. 19). The Greek word for "soul" here is *psuché*, more often translated as "life." "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). This rich man defined his life in terms of his goods. He believed that his life was about to enter a new phase, an era of ease. It was time to retire. It was time to eat, drink, and be merry.

There is nothing wrong with eating and drinking and being merry, but if this is all that a man enjoys, his soul is at risk. In exploring the various ways of life open to mankind on his own authority, Ecclesiastes wrote, "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (Eccl. 8:15).³ But there is a better way, he concluded at the end of his speculations: to obey God. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13–14).⁴

Jesus' parable paralleled the passage in Ecclesiastes on the merry heart. At any time, He reminded His listeners, a man may die. The evil time may come upon him unexpectedly. Enjoy what you have, because you may lose it at any time. This was also the recommendation in Ecclesiastes. Work hard, said the Preacher, for the unpredictable events of this life can overtake you without warning.

3. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 31.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 45.

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them (Eccl. 9:7–12).⁵

Jesus warned that the evil day for this rich man was not part of his plans. He did not take death seriously. He looked into the future and saw years of soft living ahead. He would have time to enjoy the fruits of his labor. He would no longer have to work hard, or perhaps not work at all. Retirement beckoned.

With no higher purpose than personal enjoyment, this man was blind to eternity. He would be called on before the night was over to give God an account of his stewardship. His barns had been full, but his life had been empty. The commitment of his life, not the size of his barns, was what would count that night. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).⁶

B. Inheritance

“But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (v. 20). The issue of accumulated wealth is an issue regarding inheritance. A man leaves behind earthly treasure for his heirs. He has no control over who inherits what after this initial distribution.

A man inherits treasure in heaven based on what he has done in history for God and His kingdom. “Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 34.

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35. See chapter 19, above.

hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).⁷ By surrendering in history a portion of his earthly estate, a man transfers this portion into eternity (Matt. 6:19–21).⁸ This is what it means to be rich toward God. Recipients of charity receive these gifts on behalf of God. They are His collection agents. They are His representatives.

Inheritance should always be a concern for a rich man. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).⁹ To secure the future of his children's earthly inheritance, a man needs righteousness. His treasure is to be put to good use in the kingdom. The Bible teaches that the kingdom has two realms, historical and eternal. A covenant-keeper stores up wealth in both realms. He leaves behind an inheritance in history, yet he also accumulates an inheritance for himself in eternity. The differentiating factor in the eternal inheritance is ethics: charitable giving.

The parable's rich man believed that he was storing up treasure for himself. He was actually storing it up for his heirs, who would inherit his treasure soon. He would not live to enjoy the fruits of his labor. His life was spent, though his barns were full. His eternal life's account read "insufficient funds."

C. Abundance Is Not Necessary for Missions

"And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life [zoé], what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on" (v. 22). There is no "therefore" in the Greek text. It is implied, however, in the opening words: "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (v. 15). The care of one's soul requires careful attention to the allocation of one's resources. Covetousness involves laying up treasure in history at God's expense.

Jesus was equipping His disciples for missionary activity.¹⁰ They were not to worry about what they should eat or wear. He provided a detailed passage that describes the correct attitude of a person on a missionary journey.

7. Chapter 43.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

9. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2013), ch. 41.

10. Chapter 26.

The life [*psuché*] is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:23–34).

Jesus again made the comparison between the value of a faithful man and the value of a bird—in this case, ravens rather than sparrows (Luke 12:7).¹¹ The ravens do not store up food in barns, but God still feeds them. So will He feed the disciples. They were to believe this so totally that they would forget about worrying about food and clothing. They were to live as the Israelites lived in the wilderness: without fear a lack of food or clothing. Moses told the generation of the inheritance: “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years” (Deut. 8:3–4). God takes care of His people.

The disciples were not to “take thought” about such matters. The Greek word is sometimes translated as “care” or “careful,” meaning *full of care*. “And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things” (Luke 10:41). Paul wrote: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto

11. Chapter 24.

God" (Phil. 4:6). It means worry.¹² The disciples were not to worry about their food and clothing. These would be supplied by God.

Is this attitude toward disbursing capital a universal requirement for covenant-keepers? Are they not to be thrifty, laying up reserves for an uncertain future? Other texts in the Bible indicate otherwise. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Prov. 6:6–8).¹³ How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

Jesus' command was directed at a small band of missionaries, preparing them for a time of persecution. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). Nevertheless, to the extent that every Christian is at risk of such persecution, we should all be ready to dispense with our concerns about food and clothing. God provides His people with the capital that they require in order to complete their dominion tasks, just as He provides the ravens with food. This capital includes food and clothing.

The key message in this passage is to trust God. "And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind" (v. 29). The work is more important than the supplies. The task is more important than the tools. Devote time and prayer in order to identify the task. The tools are secondary. Why are they secondary? First, because they can be lost without warning, but the work must continue. Second, because they can be replaced by God without our planning.

Jesus was speaking to the disciples. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). They were not yet a society, let alone a nation. They were at best an untrained team. The rules governing them were not the rules governing a civilization. Their rules implied extreme mobility.

The rich man's soul was highly mobile. His barns were not. He did not recognize the extreme mobility of his soul. The disciples were being warned not to think as a barn-builder does. They were to remain mobile. They were not to weigh themselves down with immobile capital. They were to be ready to march.

12. Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 667.

13. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 6.

Such geographical mobility is not common to civilizations. A civilization is built on immobile capital. Someone must own it. What is mobile is ownership. *Legal title to property is highly mobile*. This is what capital markets provide: mobility, also known as liquidity. A person can buy or sell ownership of a liquid asset rapidly and inexpensively without high advertising expenses or time constraints. Money is the most liquid asset.

The kingdom was at hand. It had already arrived, Jesus had told them. “But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you” (Luke 11:20).¹⁴ This language pointed back to the giving of the law. “And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Ex. 31:18). God would give the kingdom to them. This would require them to be mobile, unencumbered with possessions.

D. Heart and Treasure

But what of this principle? “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 34) Is this limited to missionaries? Besides, as pilgrims in this world, every Christian is a missionary.

The location of an owner’s treasure is also the location of his heart. The rich man’s treasure was his food and barns. This was his spiritual problem. His covetousness toward God prevented him from accumulating treasure in God’s heavenly storehouse, to be held in permanent reserve. His heart was buried in history. His soul was not. His body would soon be buried in history. His soul would not.

Jesus made it clear that the general principle of biblical ownership is in opposition to covetousness, as defined by the parable of the rich man and his barns. *Generosity to the poor is the special mark of faithful Christian stewardship*. This is *self-interested generosity*. The donor is accumulating treasure in heaven.

It is legitimate to be self-interested. Paul said to his listeners: “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).¹⁵ What is the source of our blessings? Do we trust God to provide for us? Are our

14. In Matthew’s account, we read: “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matt. 12:28).

15. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

hearts faithful? Do we prefer our blessings in history or eternity? What distinguishes covenant-keepers from covenant-breakers with respect to the pursuit of self-interest is their identification of the source of the blessings. Beware, Moses had warned the people, that “thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).¹⁶

Jesus warned against pursuing earthly treasure. It is too easy to turn earthly treasure into an idol, i.e., a misperceived source of our comfort and security. *A man's god is his source of security.* Heavenly treasure, not being accessible in history, is not idolatrous. The realm of all idols is history. There will be no idols in heaven or hell.

Our hearts are easily deceived (Jer. 17:9). We are lured away from the pathway of stewardship by earthly treasure or the hope of earthly treasure. Jesus repeated this so often that He must have believed this temptation to be very great. Treasure may come to a man in response to honest dealing or hard work or a creative mind or an inheritance. But it must be dealt with as fire: a destroyer when out of control.

Conclusion

The rich man was rich toward himself but poor toward God. He built up capital for his heirs in history and nothing for himself in eternity. He looked at history as his retirement center, but eternity replaced it. He was short-sighted. He was a fool.

Jesus told His disciples that they should not pursue wealth. They needed practically nothing. What little they needed, God would provide. Jesus was instructing the church's first evangelists. Their job was to spread the gospel in a hostile nation. As the kingdom's path-breakers, their focus had to be on heavenly rewards. As a society is brought under God's institutional covenants through personal discipleship (Matt. 28:18–20),¹⁷ those who are building up this Christian society have a much wider range of tasks than a missionary. They must build a civilization. This takes capital and the division of labor. Capital is treasure. Societies need barns to store grain from the harvest through the year. Someone must own these barns. Someone must become responsible for administering the grain. Kingdom tasks go bey-

16. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

17. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

and missionary evangelism. So do capital requirements.

The temptation of earthly treasure still remains. Tangible wealth blinds most men. The more they get, the less they share with God. Their addiction to earthly treasure increases. Mammon, like God, is a jealous god.¹⁸ He does not want God to participate in men's economic blessings. He blinds men's eyes to eternity. He focuses men's attention on an exclusively earthly future. This is idolatry.

18. Chapter 39.

MISSIONARY FINANCES

And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:22–34).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. A Call to Missions

Jesus seemed to be calling His disciples to complete dependence

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

on God to supply all of their financial needs. These needs were minimal: food, drink, and clothing. These were needs in the technical sense, not wants. Without food and drink, life ceases. Without clothing, social activity ceases. A shortage in these any of areas lies beyond what economists call the substitution effect. Dead men do not seek substitutes. Naked men find it socially difficult to seek substitutes.

1. Mobility

How should we interpret this call? After His ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit, residents in Jerusalem interpreted it as a call to common ownership. “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:44–47). This freed them from local real estate, which enabled them to flee the persecution that began after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). But how should we interpret it today?

Jesus was calling His disciples to become missionaries in a hostile Jewish world. A missionary is uniquely dependent on God. He leaves his familiar environment and goes off into the unknown. He receives very little moral support from those around him in the new environment. Surely, he receives little or no financial support from local sources unless he has services to sell. He may be given something to sustain him financially by the church back home. But Jesus was speaking to founders of the original church back home. Their missionary venture would establish the model for missions, both foreign missions and home missions. There would be no outside financial support from earthly sources.

2. Self-Denial

The disciples were in need of financial support. So, what did Jesus command? He told them to sell their goods and give their money to the poor. This would make them completely dependent on God to supply their needs. This would take great courage on their part. Courage was basic to the life He was calling them into. Christ’s missionary boot camp began by training men to abandon confidence in physical

possessions.

This act of economic self-denial would also reveal to themselves and those around them the extent to which they had broken with Old Covenant Israel on behalf of the New Covenant church. They had already entered into the kingdom of God, which would soon be transferred from national Israel to the international church (Matt. 21:43). By selling their goods and giving away the proceeds to the poor, the disciples would demonstrate their faith in a looming covenantal discontinuity: the progressive transfer of God's kingdom to the church, which was completed in A.D. 70 at the fall of Jerusalem.² This is why Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

3. *Fear Not*

"Fear not." These two words have condemned Christ's followers, generation after generation. Down through the ages, we have been told to "fear not," and still we fear. We have been told, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment" (vv. 22–23). Yet we continue to worry, as the modern phrase says, "about where our next meal is coming from." But it is worse than this. The modern capitalistic West is so productive that very few of us ever worry about where our next meal is coming from. We worry instead about paying our debts, keeping our jobs, and paying our taxes. We worry about lawsuits. We worry about how people regard us. What good does our worrying accomplish? Nothing. "If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?" (v. 26).

Very few covenant-keepers believe Christ's instruction here. They do not live as though they believe these words. They rarely quote these words. When they do quote them, they seek ways to deflect their application. So, they do not really believe them. And when I say "they," I mean "we."

Most middle-class Christians stand condemned before God in this area of their lives. Nobody likes to be condemned. But to be condemned by the person we say we love, to whom we entrust our very souls throughout eternity, is painful. So, we assuage our guilt-driven

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

pain by arguing that Jesus did not really mean what He said. He must have meant something else. But what?

4. Faith Missions in History

If Jesus meant that missionaries should become totally dependent on God to supply their income, then there should be examples of such missionary ventures in history. There are over a hundred of them today. They are referred to as faith missions. The pioneer faith missions organization, the China Inland Mission, was founded by J. Hudson Taylor in 1865. He first went to China in 1854. But, even before this, he had adopted as a way of life a policy of trusting in God for all of his income. He wanted to test God, to see if God would supply all of his funding. God did. There were times when the money came at the last minute—literally.³ These experiences persuaded him to adopt the same policy for the China Inland Mission. He took no fixed salary. He did not solicit funds for the mission, even at meetings held in churches where he had been invited to speak. He said, “Are we not told to seek first the kingdom of God—*not means to advance it*—and that all these things shall be added unto us? Such promises are surely sufficient.”⁴ He wrote to a Council member, “When our work becomes a begging work, it dies.”⁵ It was also to be a debt-free work.⁶ Today, his successors in the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) follow his example.⁷ They receive money from supporters back home, and they get a proportional share of whatever comes into the regional ministry’s office for the month, but no salary is guaranteed.⁸ The stories about checks or cash to the penny that arrive without warning at a moment of crisis are common with the OMF.⁹

A major financial supporter of Taylor’s ministry was George Müller (1805–98). He ran his orphanages the same way. He had mir-

3. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* (Philadelphia: China Inland Mission, 1935), ch. 4.

4. Marshall Broomhall, *Our Seal* (London: The China Inland Missions, 1933), p. 11; cited in Daniel W. Bacon, *From Faith to Faith: The Influence of Hudson Taylor on the Faith Missions Movement* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1984), p. 29.

5. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *J. Hudson Taylor: God’s Man in China* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 238, cited in *ibid.*, p. 30.

6. Bacon, *From Faith to Faith*, p. 30.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

9. *When God Provides* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1986).

acle after miracle in his career. In addition, however, he had the equivalent of a newsletter. He communicated with the ministry's supporters regarding the miracles. He wrote in 1845, "Though now for about seven years our funds have been so exhausted, that it has been a *rare* case that there have been means in hand to meet the necessities of more than 100 persons for three *days* together; yet I have been only once tried in spirit, and that was on September 18, 1838, when, for the first time the Lord seemed not to answer our prayer."¹⁰ The ministry had no earthly endowment.

B. Predictable Income Streams

This system of funding missionaries has numerous advantages. The main one is a reduction in capital requirements for launching new ventures. Capital generates income. It takes income to sustain any long-term venture. If a venture can be successfully funded by a predictable stream of monthly income from individually unpredictable sources, then the organization need not raise capital or purchase capital assets in advance. The organization need not spend time and money to buy capital assets.

The major capital assets in ministries today are mailing lists of donors. It takes years to build up such lists. If an organization can gain a stream of predictable income to fund its activities, but without accumulating capital assets for which others are competing constantly, it can launch its venture early. A head start is important for opening up new mission fields.

Jesus' recommended method for funding missions assumes that an organization's income stream is supernatural. Taylor proved that it was. Other missionary ventures have also proven it to their satisfaction. But this kind of predictability is based on faith and the self-discipline to abide by the terms of the program: not begging for support. This income stream cannot be capitalized or sold, meaning that it has no market price. This reduces capital costs to almost zero, not counting sinful worry and required prayer time, which is cheap: there is no developed free market for prayer time. Economists define a cost as the highest use foregone. If there is no capital asset that can be sold or rented, then it costs the organization nothing except prayer to generate income. If you pray to God to send money to fund project A, and God

10. *Answers to Prayer* from *George Müller's Narratives*, compiled by A. E. C. Brooks (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 37.

sends it, then this money is used free of charge. God is not sending it to fund project B. There is no “highest alternative use” for this money—not without undermining the organization’s supernatural source of future funding, which is so high risk that managers will generally not risk it. They know that a deliberate, systematic misallocation of funds will dry up the funding. This increases the cost of misusing funds. Economics teaches that the higher the cost of anything, the less of it that will be demanded. So, because there is no low-risk alternative use for the money, the money is used nearly free of charge.

A shortage of funds restricts access to any market. A shortage of funds limits access to mission fields to those organizations that adopt the faith missions strategy or those with considerable capital in reserve. Faith-based income is formally attainable on request. A faith-based income stream can be obtained by people with no financial capital and little monetary income. This opens up any God-designated mission field to faithful people who have not yet built up either experience in fund-raising or other capital assets. In the worldwide competition for souls, faith-based funding keeps the playing field not only level but tilted in favor of the God of the Bible.

Faith-based missions train people to work with very little. Taylor learned how to live on practically nothing, years before he went to China. He always gave away half or more of his tiny income. This is cost-cutting as a way of life. By reducing costs, this form of organization gains a tremendous long-term advantage. It can keep its people in the field when donations to rival organizations dry up in hard times.

Only a handful of people volunteer for a lifetime of service that has no visible economic security. This system of funding screens out people who do not possess enormous commitment. The screening process is continual. In the early stages of any enterprise, the staff’s dedication is a highly valuable asset. The quest for personal security will undermine innovation. An organization may be able to operate in terms of the normal quest for security in its later stages, after it has developed conventional streams of income, but in the early stages, the screening process is crucial for success.

C. Just-in-Time Money

In 1875, the China Inland Mission’s expenses during one month exceeded its income by almost 235 pounds sterling. The money had to be sent to China. Taylor was in England at the time. He and the staff

prayed, and that evening, a check arrived for 235 pounds, 7 shillings, 9 pence.¹¹ On another occasion, when Taylor was returning from a meeting, a man riding in the cab reached into his pocketbook and gave Taylor a bill. Taylor saw that it was a 50-pound note. He asked the man if he meant to give so much. The man admitted that he had intended to give a five-pound note. Taylor offered to return the larger note, but the man refused. When Taylor arrived at headquarters, he found that the staff was about to send out a remittance to China. It was short forty-nine pounds, eleven shillings. With the note, they were now nine shillings ahead.¹² In 1887, Taylor set a goal of a hundred new volunteers—an increase of the staff of more than fifty percent. To fund them, the mission would need \$50,000. Also, the money had to be donated in large individual amounts in order not to bog down the staff in correspondence. The result? They received 102 volunteers and \$55,000 from a total of eleven donors.¹³ In 1927, 22 years after Taylor's death, the organization suffered a drop in donations of \$114,000. The money remitted to the Mission in China had to be converted into silver coins. The price of silver coins constantly fluctuated. That year, however, the exchange rate favored foreign currencies. The organization profited on the exchanges by \$115,000.¹⁴

Another missionary who relied exclusively on the same fund-raising approach was Amy Carmichael, who created an orphanage in India in 1901. Its doors are still open. An example of last-minute money came with the final construction plans for their house of worship in 1927. They had spent all of their money. The building needed screening to keep out squirrels and bats. The cost was 260 rupees. The mission received a check from the United States. When translated into rupees, it came to 270 rupees. The donor had written an explanation: "Something had impelled me to send you this further small sum with the word *that it is to finish something*."¹⁵ It was mailed months before the mission had decided to make the purchase. Of course, it must also be said that Amy Carmichael was one of the most gifted prose writers in her day—presumably the most gifted among English-speaking foreign missionaries—as well as a superb poet, who wrote over three dozen books. That got a lot of publicity for her mission. But she never

11. Taylor & Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, pp. 143–44.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

15. Cited in Elisabeth Elliot, *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Revell, 1987), p. 293.

publicly mentioned money.

In 1971, Franklin Graham, the son of evangelist Billy Graham, decided to go on a missionary venture. He would deliver a Land Rover to a medical mission run by two women in Jordan. He persuaded his father to have his ministry pay for the Land Rover. London's office manager went to the dealership to buy the car, which had to be equipped for the desert. When she arrived at the dealership, she asked to buy such a vehicle. Impossible, she was told; the order would take several months. Every car was built on demand. She told the salesman she had to have it on Monday. He told her this would not be possible. She asked him to look around the building; maybe he would find an available car, fully desert-equipped. He dutifully did so, and found the car. It had been ordered by a Middle Eastern resident, but had not been picked up.¹⁶ Graham and a friend drove it to Jordan.

At the mission, he received other lessons in faith funding. One Friday, he joined a prayer meeting. The mission was short \$1,355. It owed the money to a Swedish medical company, but there was no money to pay the bill. On Monday, an envelope arrived. Inside was a check for \$1,355. On another Friday, they prayed for \$3,000. It was the largest bill they mentioned to him during his stay. Within a week, they had the money. On another occasion, they asked him to pray for \$500. He did, but he did not think the prayer would be answered. The next week they received a check for \$480.¹⁷ That was close enough for God's work.

D. A Missionary's Lifestyle

A missionary relies on God's provision to a degree that the rest of us do not. He trusts God to sustain him, or else he would not have become a missionary. The rest of us can only think, "more grace to him." Our faith is overshadowed by his. Yet he probably claims that he is only heeding his call. He says that he is not doing anything special. But he is doing something tremendously special, and the rest of us understand this. In the presence of a missionary to a foreign land, we should all hang our heads and think, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24b).

The missionary lives closer to the ragged edge of uncertainty than

16. Franklin Graham, *Rebel With a Cause* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 87.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

we do. He has few visible financial reserves to draw upon. Nevertheless, most people are only a few paychecks away from missionary-like dependence on God. The enormous productivity of modern capitalism's division of labor shields us from an awareness of how dependent we are on God's financial grace to us. A farmer two centuries ago was much more aware of how dependent he was on natural forces that were outside his control. He recognized his vulnerability to the weather. He was also at risk from sickness, fire, and accidental injury to an extent that modern industrial man is not. Modern insurance contracts have reduced individual risk by distributing it. The statistical law of large numbers seems to protect us.¹⁸ So, we have learned to trust our social devices rather than God, who has graciously allowed the once-Christian West to discover the power of the free market to make our lives easier. We have forgotten Moses' warning: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).¹⁹

Has Jesus called every disciple to be a missionary? No. But He does call us to support missionaries through morally mandatory tithes to the local church and through special offerings. Because we prosper, we can afford to send out more missionaries. But how many Christians pay 10% of their net income to the local church? Very few. Of those who do, how many support missionaries with substantial additional offerings? Very few. In his challenging book, *Desiring God*, John Piper made an important point: "God does not prosper a man's business so he can move from a Ford to a Cadillac. God prospers a business so that thousands of unreached peoples can be reached for the gospel."²⁰ Piper was a strong advocate of foreign missions, especially frontier missions, which are aimed at completely unreached societies where nobody has preached before.²¹ He quoted Ralph Winter, professor of foreign missions at Fuller Theological Seminary.

How hard have we tried to save others? Consider the fact that the

18. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

19. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 21–22.

20. John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books, 1996), p. 169.

21. *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

U.S. evangelical slogan, “Pray, give, or go” allows people merely to pray, if that is their choice! By contrast the Friends Missionary Prayer Band of South India numbers 8000 people in their prayer bands and supports 80 full-time missionaries in North India. If my denomination (with its unbelievably greater wealth per person) were to do that well, we would not be sending 500 missionaries, but 26,000. In spite of their true poverty, those poor people in South India are sending 50 times as many cross-cultural missionaries as we are.²²

Those of us who remain behind have an obligation to support those who go into the mission field. We are like soldiers who are on duty at the rear of the front lines. We do have a duty. Our duty is to supply the front-line combatants. We are not out of the war just because we are not in the front lines. But because we do not hear the shells or see the wounded, we pretend that no war is going on. We pretend that there is not a continual conflict of kingdoms (Luke 16: 13).²³

Service in frontier missions is a front-line calling. There are other front-line callings. A chaplaincy in a prison is such a calling. A ministry in a crime-ridden urban ghetto is, too. The conflict between the kingdoms is all around us. There are many ways to serve God. But Jesus made it inescapably clear that the mark of a Christian warrior is a *willingness* to adopt the missionary’s lifestyle, whether or not God calls him to do this. We must become like freedom-seekers who lived behind Communism’s barbed wire fences for over seven decades. We must have our bags mentally packed. We must also have our ownership papers mentally signed. If we are assigned by God to high-income duty, fine. We must then use our high income to support kingdom-building efforts of all kinds. If we use our high income to buy comforts that we do not need, then we have missed Christ’s call.

E. Rising Standards of Living

The Mosaic law established a cause-and-effect relationship between national obedience and national prosperity and success (Deut. 28:1–14).²⁴ Jesus did not annul this relationship. To the extent that missionaries’ efforts are successful in persuading men to switch their covenantal allegiance from Satan to God, they are laying the founda-

22. Ralph Winter, “Reconsecration to a Wartime, not a Peacetime, Lifestyle,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), p. 815. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 171.

23. Chapter 39.

24. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

tions of an alternative civilization. This civilization will be more productive than the one it replaces. The question then will be exactly what it was in Old Covenant Israel: Whom will men praise for this increase, God or themselves? Success always leads to a great temptation: to return to Adamic worship patterns in a futile quest to be as God. This temptation must be resisted by covenant-keepers. Tithing is one way to resist. Resting from business efforts on the sabbath day is another. But having all of one's deeds of ownership mentally signed and ready to transfer is the supreme economic test of commitment. God can call them in at any time.

As we grow wealthier, we should be able to afford to give away a higher percentage of our income. We are able to buy necessities with a declining fraction of our income. But this is not what happens. Those faithful South Indians who supported 80 full-time missionaries in the late 1970s put the rest of us to shame. They had very low incomes, yet they supported lots of missionaries. As Christians get richer, they seem to become more grasping. As they enjoy more comforts, they seek more comforts. They become *addicted to comfort*. Piper wrote: "The measure of your longing for life is the amount of comfort you are willing to give up to get it."²⁵

Piper's book is not a call for duty-generated giving. It is the opposite. It is a call for joy-seeking giving. He called this *Christian hedonism*. Jesus set forth the basis of attaining joy: personal sacrifice. This lifelong process should begin in the life of every Christian with a self-conscious break from the lust for riches.

F. Home Sweet Home: Securing Territory

Jesus argued as follows. First, take no thought about your future: what you will wear or eat. If this command is both literal and universal, it would annul all long-term planning by Christians. Second, look to nature for your examples, He said. God takes care of the ravens. He makes the lilies beautiful. But, on the other hand, God burns up the grass in summer. He cares too much about His people to do this, however. So, stop worrying about food and drink and clothing.

Food and drink and clothing are not supposed to be concerns for departing missionaries. Jesus never mentioned a home in this list of things not to be concerned about. Yet having a roof over their heads is one of the chief desires of geographically settled people. Men want

25. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

shelter. Jesus did not possess shelter. “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).²⁶ Jesus was not a settled man. He was a wandering prophet. But societies are not built by wanderers. They are built by people with a stake in the land. This is why the Promised Land was crucial to the generation of the exodus. Their children would inherit a place. This hope for the future consoled parents during their 40 years of wandering.

Biblical inheritance involves a place. God’s visible reign through His people—their lawful kingdom inheritance—is earthly. A place to live in history is a down payment on their final inheritance (Rev. 21; 22). The extension of God’s kingdom in history necessarily involves home-building, just as it did in the land of Canaan. This goal requires secured territory. God’s most visible curse in history has been His servants’ surrender of territory and culture as the kingdom has moved westward. Christianity has surrendered huge amounts of territory.

G. Home Lost Home: Surrendering Territory

Beginning in the seventh century, when Christians surrendered militarily to Islam in North Africa, the domain of Western Christianity has moved westward in a narrow band of about 2,000 to 2,500 miles. Like a narrow beam of light that moves westward, Western Christianity has left European nations in darkness that had once been Christian. This darkness is now darker and more effectively secured by the enemies of Christ than it had been before Christians took dominion. Sweeping away the worst traces of evil is not enough. *Evil must be replaced by something that is biblically sanctioned.* Jesus said as much. *Christians cannot defeat something with nothing.* “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Luke 11:24–26).

Roman Catholicism for centuries did secure the Iberian peninsula and Latin America, but always through state coercion, and always by way of compromise with secular natural law theory. Compromise is the legacy of the attempted medieval synthesis of the Bible, canon law,

26. Chapter 20.

Greek philosophy, and Roman jurisprudence. Meanwhile, Protestant Christianity has surrendered its briefly secured territory. Luther never intended to secure territory except to secure freedom for Protestant worship. Neither did the Anabaptists, who have been predominantly pietistic ever since 1535. Radical Anabaptists disappeared after the debacle at Münster in 1533–35, where a pair of re-baptizing tyrants adopted communism, the community of women, polygamy for themselves, and military rule over the saints, only to be defeated by outside military forces led by a bishop. Calvinists tried for about 150 years to transform culture and secure territory, but for the last three centuries, this vision has generally been missing from Calvinist churches, which is honored at best only by an occasional brief reference to Abraham Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898).²⁷ Premillennial Calvinist Francis Schaeffer never did answer his book title's question: *How Should We Then Live?*

Christian theologians ever since the days of the church fathers have made major intellectual compromises with one or another secular social theory. Christians have generally adopted the outlook of the culture in which they grew up. This has led to various forms of pluralism in social theory and the defeat of syncretistic Christian cultures by covenant-breakers. Territory is no longer secured by Protestants; it is at best temporarily shared. Anyone who doubts this should read a government school textbook. See how much praise Christ and the Bible receive. Yet most Christians send their children to government schools.

H. Mobility Through Poverty

Jesus told His disciples that their first step of discipleship was self-induced poverty. He said, "follow me." That meant abandoning job, family, and goods. Levi/Matthew was the supreme model. "And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him" (Luke 5:27–28). Levi held a party for Jesus at his home (v. 29). But then he joined the disciples in their wandering.

The next step was the sale of their real estate. This was a fundamental break with social permanence. The only thing to match this for an observant Jew was permanent separation from the temple. This

27. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, [1898] 1933).(<http://bit.ly/KuyperLOC>)

separation came in A.D. 70. After that event, Christians went their way, and the Pharisees substituted Judaism for the sacrificial system. The Sadducees, uniquely associated with the temple, disappeared from history.²⁸ Finally, there was the nation's forced dispersion out of Palestine. This came after the failed rebellion by Bar Kochba in 133–35. But Jewish Christians had begun their dispersion prior to the fall of Jerusalem. They had been warned by Jesus a generation before. “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:20–22).²⁹

Jesus told His disciples in Israel to be ready to move. This meant that they had to be unencumbered with property. They had to be mentally ready for the end of the Old Covenant. They had to discover new ways to live. Paul did not impose similar obligations on the gentiles. He asked some of them to donate money to the impoverished church in Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:1–3).³⁰ He did not call them to a life of poverty themselves.

The church through the ages has resisted any suggestion that every member is subject to Jesus' call to poverty. This call is for a minority. It is considered to be a calling above and beyond the normal call of duty. The church has long assumed that most of its members will stay where they are. And, until the development of modern capitalism, most of them did.

I. Mobility Through Wealth

With the rise of capitalism came the funding of technology. This technology included macadamized roads and steamships and trains. These developments have led to enormous mobility by reducing the cost of travel. In the United States, families on average move into different housing every five years. Employment offers lure men into new homes and new cities. Modern man has become mobile as never

28. Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), I, ch. XIII.

29. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

30. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd. Ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 17.

before. The costs of moving have dropped. When the price of anything drops, more of it is demanded. Geography is no longer destiny. The ideal of roots in a community has been ripped out of men's thinking. People's institutional loyalties are shallow. Their friendships are impermanent. They are on the move, like the Israelites in the wilderness.

This mobility has been achieved through the wealth produced by capitalism. Modern man has been willing to bear the costs of this mobility because there have been benefits to offset the costs. The benefits have seemed to be higher than the costs. The costs are rarely quantifiable; the benefits are. Some obvious costs of modern mobility include the geographical scattering of adult children, the weakening of grandparent-grandchildren links, the erosion of neighborhood loyalty, and the loss of long-term teamwork in employment.

Jesus recommended mobility to His listeners, beginning with the words, "Follow me." But the mobility that is imposed by a call to missionary service is uncommon, for the call to distant missions is not given to many people. Modern man has substituted the call of occupation for the call to missions. This call involves the offer of greater income, not a call to reduced income. Tens of millions of people heed this call every year. The result has been the creation of millions of functional nomads: people on the move without a final destination.

J. False Worship

Luke 12:22–34 is paralleled in Matthew's Gospel. There, the religious issue is presented far more starkly. Men's failure to heed Jesus' words is said to be evidence of false worship. To fall into the sin of worry over money is to worship Jesus' chief rival, mammon. His words could not be more clear.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say to you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of

these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:24–34).³¹

Hold up these words as a mirror, and gaze into the reflection. What do you see? Does it make you proud? Does it make you think, “well done, thou good and faithful servant”? Probably not.

The more we possess, the more we worry. We worry about losing our sources of income. We worry about our pension plans. We worry that we might lose our familiar lifestyle—a middle-class lifestyle richer than anything enjoyed by kings two centuries ago. (The good old days? Think “dentistry,” said the libertarian humorist, P. J. O’Rourke.) This points to the addictive nature of wealth. The more we have, the more we want. The more we rely on our own resources, the more we worry about our vulnerability to unexpected changes, which are usually perceived as threatening.

Conclusion

Jesus called His Jewish disciples to break with the Old Covenant order. One way for them to do this was to sell their goods and give to the poor. This was the most radical break that a person could make during the transitional period between the covenants, other than to become a foreign missionary, as Paul did. To make this break with the old order, a person had to have complete faith in God. His needs would be met by God, Jesus said. This took great faith to accept. The disciple would have to learn to trust God completely. This was a form of self-discipline designed to create a dedicated cadre of followers. This would not be a large group. Few people would ever do this. This Jewish flock would remain little. But the church would grow.

Before drawing final conclusions about the scope of Jesus’ call to poverty, let us recall that at least four of the original disciples were fishermen. They were members of family-owned businesses (Matt.

31. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

4:19–24). They walked with Jesus for three years, but there is no record that they ever sold their boats. They kept their capital in reserve. After the resurrection, Jesus met with Peter and four other disciples at the shore of the sea of Tiberias. They were still fishing (John 21:1–3). They were still small-scale capitalists. When persecution came, they remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

Jesus gave His command in terms of a general principle. “But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.” The general principle is trustworthy: by seeking first the kingdom of God, the basic needs of this life will be provided—supernaturally, if necessary. This is not limited to missionaries. It is the basis of the three institutional covenants’ positive sanctions.

The modern industrial world is supplied with the basics: food, drink, and clothing. It has forgotten God, as Moses warned. It is addicted to more. Mammon, the god of “more for me in history,” has captured modern man.³² The free market has made most people richer than ever imagined in Jesus’ day, or even in Wesley’s day. But the addiction to more has grown worse. The price of obtaining more has fallen, so the amount demanded has increased. Today, men neither trust nor fear nature or nature’s Creator. They trust or fear the stock market.

32. Chapter 38.

REWARDS FOR PERSEVERANCE

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants (Luke 12:35–38).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Staying on the Job

This is not a well-known passage. It contains one of the most remarkable promises in the Bible. “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12:37). The Master will serve the servants.

The context is the final judgment. The text refers to a wedding. This is the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:7–9). God’s people are assigned the task of administering God’s estate until He returns. He returns at the time of the consummation, as a bridegroom should. When He does, He will serve those servants who remained faithful to the end of their term of service.

Jesus praised those servants who will be found working diligently at His return. The later at night He comes, the more blessed will be

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

these servants. These servants will not have given up hope of the master's return. They will not have forgotten the promise of His return. They will have continued to do their duty until the very end.

When the Master returns from the wedding, He will serve these servants. This is a reversal of roles. Elsewhere, Jesus described the servant as not deserving to be eat dinner until after the master has eaten. "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow [think] not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:7–10).²

Why will the Master serve the faithful servants? Because of His grace to them. They will have performed well, due to His grace in their lives. Performance will be rewarded. Jesus Christ served God the Father well. "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21–22). The Father rewarded Jesus with an inheritance after the resurrection: all power in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). At the marriage supper of the lamb, which follows the wedding (final judgment), Jesus will specially honor all those who were on duty at the end. This is a strong motivation for every Christian in every generation to remain on duty until he is lawfully relieved either by death or the return of the Bridegroom.

At the last supper, Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:5). This was a token of His office as the suffering servant. But on the day of judgment, He will no longer be a suffering servant. He will be a visibly triumphant king. Yet He will specially serve His followers who were found on the job at His return.

The text does not speak of the host of saints. It speaks only of those on duty on the last day. They will be singled out for special consideration. *The last will be first*. But all of the saints will be served by Jesus in the final resurrection, which is the wedding. Without excep-

2. Chapter 41.

tion, they will enter the perfected New Heaven and New Earth through grace. Jesus has already served His people on the cross and again at the first resurrection. After the resurrection, He fed His disciples some broiled fish (John 21:13). The meal that will be served by Him to His servants after the marriage supper of the lamb will be an extension of His service to them.

B. Rewards for Faithful Service

The idea that a good deed must never be self-seeking is not biblical. Jesus taught here that there will be rewards for those who remain faithful to Him until the end. If Jesus says that He will personally serve a meal to faithful servants, why should we imagine that rewards for good service are not legitimate?

By promising a meal, Jesus was encouraging His people to remain on the job until they die or else He returns in final judgment. He offered a unique reward: to be served by God. The very creator of the universe (Col. 1:13–17) will in effect wait on tables. He will assume the role of a servant.

This reward will consummate history. It will be a token of good things to come forever and ever. It will be a representative meal, even as the Lord's Supper is a representative meal. The grace implied by the Lord's Supper will be extended visibly and eternally. The marriage supper of the lamb will be the great transition event into the sinless new creation. His people will rejoice because they, as members of His church, will become the visible objects of Christ's love. The joy of mutual service in marriage is the model for our service to Christ in history. We serve because we look forward to the consummation of Christ's kingdom in history. When the entire church moves into eternity, the days of expectation will end. Great joy will come. The rewards will be handed out (I Cor. 3:9–15).³

These rewards are not exclusively eternal, nor are they exclusively spiritual-emotional. "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matt. 19:29–30).⁴ A man's new life in Christ becomes the

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 39.

entry point in history for participating in the confessional family of God. He enters into new relationships with new brethren. Mutual love and mutual support are rewards in history.

These rewards are tokens of eternity. In eternity, there will be great rewards for those who remain faithful to God. Christ kept promising these rewards. Then He called His listeners to sacrificial obedience: give to the poor, support the brethren, pray for enemies. These are costly actions for redeemed sinners in history. They require faith. But there is no doubt that Jesus promised rewards for such actions. He did not expect His people to practice sacrificial service without hope of reward.

Conclusion

An oppressed servant may hope for a future reversal of roles. He may dream of being the master, with his present master struggling to be his servant. This dream would appeal to the sinful impulse of revenge. This is not the impulse that is to govern covenant-keepers.

Jesus promised something very different: *loving service for loving service*. He called His people to sacrificial love. He Himself is the model for such love. The disciples did not fully understand this until after Christ's ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). His sacrificial service laid the judicial foundation for His people's sacrificial service. Jesus promised to consummate the kingdom in history by becoming a servant at His own marriage supper with His church. The sacrificial service that He began in His miracles of healing will end history at the wedding feast, which follows the wedding: final judgment.

His model of sacrificial service to His servants is to be our model for service to others in history. "But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25–28).⁵ He became the servant of all, as He demonstrated on the cross. His reward from God the Father was great: He became first. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 41.

heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).⁶ He provided the model. We should follow it by means of His grace.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 45. Cf. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

COMPOUNDING GRACE AND ESCALATING RESPONSIBILITY

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:42–48).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Final Judgment

This parable deals with the final judgment. It teaches that there will be a final accounting to God by every steward. God will impose appropriate sanctions, positive and negative, on that day. But He will announce preliminary judgment at the time of each person's death. There will be a preliminary day of judgment at the time of each per-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

son's death (Luke 16:19–25).²

The parable announces the servanthood status of all men. Every person is a steward under God, whether or not he or she acknowledges this. Every person has been given administrative authority over resources, including himself or herself. These resources belong to God as the Creator. They are not handed out free of charge by God to autonomous men. Every steward is responsible to God for the use of the resources entrusted to him or her by God. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2).

The theme of stewardship is a familiar one in Jesus' parables. An owner transfers control over some of his resources to several stewards. Then he goes on a journey. He returns, assembles the stewards, and asks for the return of his assets, plus any increase. This is the owner's prerogative. Some stewards have performed well. Others have not. Each receives an appropriate reward (Luke 19:12–27).³

This theme has its origin in the garden of Eden. God provided Adam with life, knowledge, resources, experience (naming the animals), and a wife. He also gave Adam a command to which a negative sanction was attached: do not eat from a particular tree or else you will die. He then departed, leaving Adam in charge of His assets. Later, He returned to assess Adam's handling of these assets. He then handed out appropriate negative sanctions, though with a promised positive sanction. He promised the serpent that an heir of Adam would injure the head of the seed of the serpent: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This means covenantal deliverance for redeemed mankind.

The final sanctions will be consistent with the performance of the recipients. "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5). Were it not for the grace of God, which is based on the perfect performance of the promised seed, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16), final judgment would doom every person, for we are all unprofitable servants apart from God's grace. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).⁴ We have all broken God's law (Rom.

2. Chapter 40.

3. Chapter 46.

4. Chapter 41.

3:23). But Christ's perfection becomes the possession of every redeemed person. His performance becomes our performance.

This raises a major question: Will every redeemed person receive the same reward, since the basis of all rewards is Christ's perfection? Will there be equality in heaven? This passage indicates that there will be varying rewards and varying punishments on judgment day. So, there are degrees of grace and degrees of reward, despite the fact that Christ's perfection is the sole basis of our entrance into heaven and then the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth. This is not easy to explain.

B. The Faithful and Wise Steward

The first steward in this parable has been faithful to the master. He has also been competent. His administration of the master's assets is praiseworthy. He receives a positive sanction: authority over all of the master's possessions (v. 44).

Obviously, this steward is Jesus Christ. He is the heir of God's kingdom. No one but Christ is entitled to receive control over all of God's household. God is uniquely pleased with Christ's performance. This is explicitly taught in the New Testament as a fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; And charged them that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust (Matt. 12:14–21).

The judicial transfer of the master's entire household has already taken place. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18).⁵ As God the

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 45. Cf. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

Father's lawful heir, Jesus Christ is now the Master. Jesus' inheritance from God the Father is behind us historically. His resurrection from the dead was preliminary evidence of this transfer. His visible ascension into heaven was additional evidence. His sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was second-party confirmation. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26–27). Then came the fall of Jerusalem, which was the final covenantal disinheritance of Old Covenant Israel and the definitive historical transfer of God's kingdom to the church.

The final transfer of God's household to Christ has not yet taken place. The progressive transfer is still going on. The transfer will be publicly revealed at the final judgment. This will coincide with the culmination of the church's work to extend God's kingdom in history.

The model of faithful stewardship is Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. He demonstrated faithfulness unto death.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:11–18).

The faithful steward in the parable cares for those servants who are under his authority. We know this because of the practice of the unfaithful steward: he beats his subordinates. "But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken" (v. 45). The faithful steward's care for his subordinates reveals that he can be trusted to care permanently for every servant in the master's household. "And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give

them their portion of meat in due season?" (v. 42). This steward will feed them all.

Jesus Christ is the good steward. He has inherited all of the household. Covenant-keepers are openly under His authority as subordinate stewards in history. We have received a share in His inheritance as adopted sons. But we are still required to demonstrate our ability to administer God's assets. We are in only a preliminary phase of the inheritance. We are like sons who have been given an earnest (down payment) of their inheritance as a means of testing their dedication and competence. The final distribution of the inheritance by God on judgment day will be in terms of our performance in history.

C. Two Unfaithful Stewards

In contrast to the faithful steward are the unfaithful stewards. One of them beats his subordinates and drinks to excess. He treats the master's property carelessly. He is not interested in building up his master's property. He is interested in consuming it.

This passage indicates that there are degrees of mismanagement. The differentiating factor here is knowledge of the master's will. One of the stewards has more accurate knowledge of his master's will. This difference determines the severity of the negative sanctions imposed by the master. "The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (vv. 46–48).

This indicates that there is no equality in hell (Luke 16:23–31), which is temporary, or the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15), which is permanent, any more than there is in heaven (I Cor. 3:9–15), which is equally temporary, or the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth, which is permanent (Rev. 21; 22). Men's performances differ. They are judged accordingly. This passage indicates that God's final judgment is also based on men's knowledge as well as actual performance. This complicates the issue of judgment.

The New Testament's supreme model of an unfaithful steward is

Judas. He walked with Jesus for several years. He heard His words. Yet he remained a thief. He was also a liar who posed as the spokesman of the poor. “Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (John 12:4–6). Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15). His judgment was severe. “And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22).

Gamaliel was no follower of Jesus. He was a religious leader. At a key point in time, he recommended toleration for the church in Jerusalem. The council listened to him and followed his advice for a while (Acts 5:34–40). Only after the stoning of Stephen did persecution break out (Acts 8:1).

Judas was actively evil. Gamaliel was passively evil. The former sought to destroy Jesus. The latter did not come to embrace the apostles’ message, but he recommended that they be left alone. Judas was the greater sinner.

In every generation, there are covenant-breakers of intense evil and others who seem to be men with religious wisdom. The representative extreme figures of the twentieth century are Hitler and Gandhi, although some analysts would substitute Stalin or Mao for Hitler. The final judgment of God will fall on all covenant-breakers. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). But there are degrees of rebellion and therefore degrees of punishment. Gandhi was not a monster. Hitler, Stalin, and Mao were.

D. The Burden of Knowledge

This passage indicates that the degree of rebellion is related to the rebel’s knowledge of God’s will. He who knows more about the Bible-revealed will of God necessarily possesses greater responsibility to obey God. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). This raises some difficult theological problems.

1. Judgments in History

Does this principle apply to God’s judgments in history as well as

eternity? If it does, then this would seem to place limits on what any person or society can attain in the extension of the kingdom of God. If ever-greater knowledge imposes an ever-greater responsibility on individuals and societies, then at some point, they will not perform up to this ever-increasing standard. They may be increasing in faithfulness according to the standard imposed on them at the beginning of the dominion process, but the standard keeps rising. At some point, God will bring negative sanctions against them. These sanctions are chastisements, not destructive. They are *judgments unto restoration*. They are accompanied by grace. Where, then, is worldwide dominion, if increasing knowledge always brings with it a great reversal when men fail to meet the ever-higher standards?

If this principle of reversal applies to historical judgments, then it is even worse for covenant-breakers. As they become more consistent with their God-denying presuppositions, they increase in the knowledge of evil. God becomes more outraged. He brings *judgment unto oblivion* against them. This seems to be what the second commandment teaches. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:5–6).⁶ The rebellious society is cut off in history after a few generations. It cannot compound its evil over long periods of time. It loses influence.

2. Compound Grace

Grace is not static. It can and does increase, both in history and eternity. Our increased knowledge of God’s will for our lives can and should bring with it our increased reliance on His grace. Our blessings are intended to increase our confidence in God’s covenant with us. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁷ There is *positive feedback* in history for covenant-keepers: grace empowers us to obey; obedience produces blessings; and blessings increase our confidence in

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

God's covenant, which should lead to greater obedience.

The great risk here is the lure of *works righteousness*. Redeemed men are tempted to believe that their good works are the basis of their blessings from God. This is a major theological error. A man's good works are God's predestined gifts to him. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). He does not produce good works autonomously, the way a spider spins a web.

Paul warned the church at Galatia not to imagine that the source of their obedience was from anything except the Spirit of God. We do not receive the Holy Spirit by means our conformity to God's law. We receive Him by faith. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1–3).

Each redeemed sinner's *progressive sanctification* in history is as much a matter of *undeserved grace* to him as his definitive sanctification was at the time of his conversion. He should use his conformity or lack of conformity to God's law as an indicator of his progressive sanctification, but he brings nothing of value to God on his account. *God does not reward anyone in terms of his autonomous works*. He rewards His saints in terms of the grace that He has given to each of them. *His grace alone has enabled them to obey*. By honoring obedient saints, God the Father honors Jesus Christ, who alone is the source of their obedience.

We dare not forget this: *the sole source of our obedience is God*. We therefore must return in prayer to God in the name of Jesus Christ, day after day, begging for more grace to obey. We must plead daily for the gift of obedience. We must ask daily for forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). We must not turn our eyes from the sole source of our obedience: the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. If we imagine that our works impress God after our conversion, leading Him to give us more benefits as a matter of contractual obligation with us, then we are under the same illusion that keeps covenant-breakers in spiritual darkness before their conversion. Works

righteousness is a constant temptation for fallen man.

Works righteousness breaks the compounding of grace. Works righteousness always falls short of the mark. Stewards who believe that they must try harder, work more, and accumulate more on behalf of God are trapped on a treadmill that keeps going faster than they can comfortably walk. They will eventually stumble and fall. They believe that their efforts will impress God. They are incorrect. *Only Jesus Christ's efforts impress God.* What every covenant-keeper needs is constant reliance on God's grace to meet the requirements of the law. Increased grace is supposed to match each increase of responsibility that accompanies God's external blessings. *Without additional grace, a redeemed man's successes in overcoming sin do not compound so rapidly as his responsibility to God does.* He always falls behind his knowledge of what God requires from him. To the extent that he attributes anything positive that he does for God to anything other than God's grace through faith, he is caught in this trap: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (v. 48b).

E. Fruits of the Spirit

Paul listed the fruits of the Spirit: "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (I Tim. 6:11). Peter offered a similar list: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (II Pet. 1:5–9).

In his commentary on Galatians, Luther presented his case for grace as the sole basis of man's justification. But grace is the sole basis of redeemed men's sanctification, too. Luther called this grace the fruits of the Spirit. "Wherefore all the duties of a Christian man, as to love his wife, to bring up his children, to govern his family, and such like (which unto them are worldly and carnal) are the fruits of the spirit."⁸ Redeemed people are transformed by the Holy Spirit.

8. Comment on Galatians 3:3. Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, Erasmus

Also by the same power of the Holy Ghost from being adulterers, wrathful, impatient, and covetous persons, ye are become chaste, gentle, patient, and lovers of your neighbours. . . . Now, to love thy neighbour so heartily, that thou art ready to bestow thy money, thy goods, thine eyes, and all that thou hast for his salvation, and moreover to suffer patiently all adversities and afflictions, these, no doubt, are the effects and fruits of the Spirit, and these, saith he, ye received and enjoyed, before these false teachers came among you. But ye received these things not by the law, but of God, who ministered unto you, and daily increased in you by His Holy Spirit, that the gospel had a most happy course among you, in teaching, believing, working and suffering.⁹

The fruits of the Spirit are the marks of our progressive sanctification in history. They are not the result of our efforts to try harder. *They are a free gift from God.* The faithful Christian should pray to God for these daily fruits. These fruits testify to the faithfulness of God in helping His stewards to remain productive for Him. *Biblical law provides the guidelines, but the Holy Spirit provides the actual fruit.* We judge the quality of the fruit that we display in our lives by means of biblical law, but apart from the Holy Spirit, we cannot begin to meet the law's requirements. Biblical law is too holy. Its standard is too rigorous. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

Conclusion

The wise steward in the parable is Jesus Christ. He has already received from God full authority over God's entire household. This household is the kingdom of God.

As stewards under Christ, we are required to show a profit. We cannot do this apart from God's progressive grace to us over time. Progressive grace is the sole source of our ability to meet Jesus' ever-increasing demands on His people as they mature spiritually. Why does He increase His demands on us? Because He gives more success to us. This increases our knowledge of how God's covenants work. It also increases the burden on us. The only legitimate way to deal with this ever-heavier burden is to plead for more grace from God. His grace must match our increased responsibility, or else we will fail. We will either lay down our burden or be crushed by it.

Middleton trans. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1979), p. 120.

9. Comment on Galatians 3:5. *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 123.

The compounding of wealth or other forms of kingdom success brings covenant-keepers under ever-greater requirements. *The load keeps getting heavier because the blessings keep compounding.* The only legitimate way of escape is a systematic appeal to God for more grace to obey God's law. Redeemed men cannot bring sufficient works before God to repay Him for the grace they have already received. *Grace always precedes law.* We cannot use our obedience to God's law to repay God for His grace to us. *We are always debtors on our own account.* We need to draw on Christ's account to pay our ever-increasing debt. There is no other way. *Our debt keeps getting bigger.* Only His account is large enough to enable us to stay ahead of our liabilities.

The possibility of kingdom expansion is always with us because God's grace is freely available. *The kingdom expands in history because God provides compound grace to faithful stewards. This grace matches their ever-increasing responsibilities.* Without grace to match responsibility, the kingdom of God would reach the limits of redeemed men's performance and then fall back. It could not get very far. In a self-funded dominion march around the world, redeemed men in Jerusalem would never even reach Emmaus.

EARLY CONFESSION¹

When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite (Luke 12:58–59).

This warning appears in Matthew early in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:25–26). The theocentric principle of this law is the authority of God to bring eternal punishment against His enemies: sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.² God is the adversary who brings a covenant lawsuit in history against those who have broken His covenant.

A. Discount for Early Confession

Covenant-breakers are warned to settle with God before the day of judgment, when they will be delivered over to the judge, sentenced, and cast into prison. In prison, a man cannot earn enough to buy his freedom. Though it is not clear from this passage, prison here is analogous to hell. Jesus' parable of the unjust steward makes this clear: "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:34–35).

The presumption of this passage is that the listener is guilty. His adversary is God. Man does not come before God in a guiltless legal

1. This appears in chapter 8 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

condition. Jesus warned every guilty sinner against refusing to make restitution to this innocent victim before the case comes before the judge. In the Mosaic law, there was a lower penalty for admitting guilt before the trial. The thief had been accused by the victim, but he had avoided a trial because he had sworn falsely to his neighbor that he was innocent. “Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour’s goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good” (Ex. 22:11).³ The thief was required to repay whatever he had stolen, plus 20%. “Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering” (Lev. 6:4–5).⁴

The presumption here is that the thief had already sworn falsely. His adversary comes to him and demands payment. Does he have new evidence? Can he now prove that the thief had in fact stolen his goods? If so, the thief faces a greater penalty if convicted: double restitution (Ex. 22:4),⁵ plus a trespass offering—a slain ram (Lev. 6:6)⁶—to the church in payment for the false oath.

The Mosaic law offered a discount for timely confession: before the false oath, no trespass offering was required, though restitution was. After the false oath to the neighbor, a 20% penalty was required and a trespass offering. After the trial, double restitution and a trespass offering were required. This system reduced the expense to the victim or the civil court for gaining a conviction. It lowered the price of civil justice.⁷

B. New Evidence

The guilty man in this case thinks that he can avoid making restitution to his victim. His adversary confronts him, but still he persists

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 46.

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 7.

5. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 43.

6. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 7:B–C.

7. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 44..

in his deception. His adversary suspects that he has committed the crime. Nevertheless, the guilty party refuses to admit this and pay the victim.

The key question for the guilty party is this: Can the victim prove his case in a court? Has he additional evidence that will lead to his conviction? The assumption of Jesus' warning here is that the victim possesses additional evidence. Perhaps he has new witnesses. Whatever he has, the victim is offering the criminal one more opportunity to "come clean." He is being given another opportunity to confess his guilt and escape from the court by means of a reduced payment. Jesus warned His listeners: accept the offer. Do not risk suffering a far harsher penalty when the judge hands down his decision.

The guilty party may think to himself, "I have successfully avoided conviction previously. I think I will avoid it this time, too. Yes, there is some risk, but I would rather bear this risk than make a settlement with my victim now." This is unwise, Jesus said. Confess now. Make restitution now.

The assumption of this passage is that the victim has new evidence—compelling evidence—and will gain a conviction. Theologically speaking, the criminal is dealing with an omniscient God who is his judge. In His court, no guilty party will ever escape conviction. The force of the passage comes from the presumption that the adversary possesses evidence that will hold up in court.

C. The Merciful Victim

The biblical principle of justice is victim's rights.⁸ The victim has approached the guilty party and has graciously offered him one more opportunity to clear up the matter. He is under no obligation to do this. He has already confronted the criminal, who has sworn that he is innocent. This oath may have been taken in private or it may have been taken in public. God heard it.

The victim understands this law court. It will impose the penalty of prison. In this court, the risk is permanent incarceration. Such a penalty offers no hope for the convict other than restitution made on his behalf by a free man. This was not a Mosaic penalty. The Mosaic penalties were flogging, restitution, and execution.⁹ Jesus was speaking

8. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

9. There was a unique penalty imposed on a wife who grabbed the genitals of her husband's opponent when he and her husband were fighting (Deut. 25:11–12). The

to an audience in the Roman Empire. Rome used prisons as the means of punishment. The Mosaic law aimed at restoration through restitution to the victim. Execution was the means of delivering a convicted man into God's court. There was no prison system, precisely because prison is God's monopoly. *Hell is God's prison*. Everyone sentenced to this prison receives an eternal life sentence. There is no way to buy your way out. There is no mercy shown.

This is why the victim in this passage is merciful. He has the evidence that will convict the man. Nevertheless, he approaches him one more time to persuade him to admit his guilt and pay what he owes. If the case comes to trial, the guilty party will have no hope. The language Jesus invoked here is a sentence without mercy: payment to the last farthing—to the last penny, in other words.

What kind of person, knowing his guilt, would reject the offer? Only someone who assumes that the victim does not have the evidence. In other words, *he underestimates his victim*. He trusts in his own cleverness in covering up the crime. He also underestimates the severity of the court. After all, he has previously escaped a permanent penalty. Why not again?

Ultimately, Jesus was calling men to recognize Him as the victim who has the evidence necessary to convict them. The heavenly Judge will recognize the legitimacy of this evidence and will convict. The criminal will surely suffer the penalty. What He was saying was that every man is guilty before God. But there is a way of escape. The guilty person can declare his guilt to the victim and make restitution to him privately. The dispute will not go to court. The case can be settled in advance of a trial.

Payment in advance assumes that the criminal is economically capable of making restitution. If he isn't, then he needs to find someone who will pay the victim on his behalf, while the opportunity for making a substitute payment is still available. After the court declares his guilt, this opportunity will be lost. The man will be cast into prison and forced to pay. But in prison, he cannot gain access to the money necessary to make this restitution payment. Hence, his punish-

King James translators translated the penalty as cutting off her hand. James Jordan says it meant deeply cutting her hand through the palm. The word in Deuteronomy 25:12 is *kaph* or *kaf*, which Strong's *Concordance* defines as "the hollow hand or palm (so of the paw of an animal, of the sole, and even of the bowl of a dish or sling, the handle of a bolt, the leaves of a palm-tree); fig. power:-branch, + foot, hand ([*-ful*], *-dle*, [*-led*]), hollow, middle, palm, paw, power, sole, spoon." To cut a palm is different from cutting off a hand.

ment will be permanent. He will never get out. The language of the passage implies life imprisonment. The theology of the passage implies eternal life imprisonment. It implies that God is content with extracting payment through tormenting rebels forever.

Conclusion

One goal of biblical law is the early confession of guilt. A reduced penalty payment is offered to those who admit their guilt before the trial begins. Jesus warned His listeners that they should settle with their adversary early. This presumed that they were guilty.

The top priority here is gaining the admission of guilt prior to trial. The cost of obtaining justice is less when guilty men admit their guilt early. This is a benefit for the victims of crime. It is a benefit for society, which gains justice at a lower cost. He who is guilty is required by God to admit this fact early. The system of eternal judgment rests on the validity of this principle.

AN UNFRUITFUL FIG TREE

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down (Luke 13:6–9).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ This is a passage about negative sanctions.

A. Bear Fruit or Die

This parable deals with an unfruitful fig tree. The owner of the vineyard was tired of waiting for the fig tree to bear fruit. He ordered it cut down. His gardener asked him to spare the tree for one more season. He promised to fertilize it and care for it. “Be patient for one more season!”

The fig tree was a metaphor for Old Covenant Israel. God had grown tired of waiting for the nation to bear fruit. But the gardener pleaded for mercy. Who was the gardener? Jesus Christ. His earthly ministry was aimed at Israel. “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Mary mistook the resurrected Jesus for a gardener (John 20:15). He really was Israel’s gardener, metaphorically speaking. He asked for an additional period of grace on behalf of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

the nation. God granted His request. But this grace ended in A.D. 70.²

The land owner asked: “Why cumbereth it the ground?” The Greek word translated “cumbereth” means “to destroy” or “to use up.” The land owner was asking: “Why waste space on it any longer? It is using up a scarce economic resource: fertile ground.” The implication is clear: *there must be a positive return on God’s investment*. If there isn’t, God will eventually cease to invest any more resources in a failed project. He will plant another tree. But he will first rip out the fruitless tree.

The gardener had an answer. He would fertilize the soil. He would dig the soil to loosen it. With this assistance, the fig tree might at last bear fruit.

The gardener was being gracious to the fig tree. His care of the soil on behalf of the fig tree would cost him extra work. He did not have to do this. The land owner was ready to devote the soil to another tree. This was his vineyard. There were other uses for his land. But the gardener pleaded on behalf of the fig tree. “Don’t give up on it yet. Give me an opportunity to make it bear fruit.”

He had already waited three years. These years were gone forever. He could not get them back. Whatever he had invested in caring for the fig tree was gone. What was past was past. Any expenses that the land owner had borne had become what economists call *sunk costs*: gone forever. The question facing the land owner was this: “How much will I have to invest in order to make this tree profitable?”

The land owner had to make a decision. Was it worth caring for the soil on behalf of an unfruitful tree? How long should he be patient? By planting another tree, he might be able to get a return on the use of his land. The fig tree was absorbing resources and not paying off.

The gardener had a suggestion: wait one more year. If the land owner could get the tree into production in a year, this would be a good return on the investment, as of year three. *Whatever had been invested previously was economically irrelevant. It was unrecoverable. It was gone*. It would be better, implied the gardener, to regard the tree as a one-year investment.

But there was a problem: What if the tree was inherently unfruitful? Maybe it was from a bad seed. The evidence pointed to this possibility: three years with no fruit. So, one year’s delay followed by fruit would be a good investment, but if the tree was from bad stock, the ex-

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

tra year would not pay. What to do?

B. An Extra Generation

Jesus devoted the bulk of His ministry to bringing the message of repentance to Israel. He only rarely went to gentiles. He was giving the fig tree one last opportunity to repent, to become fruitful for God.

His ministry was cut short sometime around A.D. 30, or possibly in A.D. 33.³ The temple was burned by the Romans in A.D. 70. Old Covenant Israel was therefore granted one more generation by God after the crucifixion. When national repentance did not come, God uprooted Israel. Jesus had prophesied this. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). The church has inherited God’s promises to Israel. It has become the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Gentile members of the church have become the sons of Abraham (Rom. 4:16).

The additional generation was evidence of God’s mercy. Jesus had said on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34b). The extra generation was God’s response to this prayer. But judgment came, according to the words of the Jewish people. “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt. 27:25).

Conclusion

The parable of the unfruitful fig tree reveals a fundamental biblical principle: *God expects all men to bear spiritual fruit. He holds them accountable.* He has invested resources in them. We call these resources God’s grace. He expects a positive return. But a man cannot provide this on his own. He is inherently unfruitful. For him to bear fruit, he needs additional grace.⁴ The gardener supplies this. Jesus Christ offers care and feeding for unfruitful fig trees. He volunteers to do this on behalf of both the owner and the trees. That is, Christ’s mercy is a gift to God by way of the presently unfruitful trees.

This mercy has time limits. At some point, God will destroy every

3. If Herod died in 4 B.C., as Josephus argued and most historians still believe, then Jesus died sometime around A.D. 30. But if Herod died in January of A.D. 1, then Jesus died in A.D. 33. John P. Pratt, a Mormon scholar, makes a cogent case for the later date for Herod’s death. Pratt, “Yet Another Eclipse for Herod,” *Planetarium*, XIX (Dec. 1990), pp. 8–14. (<http://bit.ly/HerodEclipse>)

4. Chapter 41.

unfruitful fig tree. On this point, Israel is again the model. “And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matt. 21:19–21).

The vineyard is kingdom of God. The owner is God. He expects a positive rate of return. Only Christ can provide this. Only through Christ can any tree become fruitful in God’s eyes. Old Covenant Israel is the example of how not to become fruitful.

31

HOPE AND COMMITMENT¹

Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened (Luke 13:18–21).

The theocentric focus here is the kingdom of God, which in Matthew's Gospel is referred to as the kingdom of heaven. God extends His visible rule in history through the efforts of Christians. His kingdom progressively replaces the kingdom of Satan in history. Because God is sovereign, His kingdom cannot fail in history. No matter how small it seems at any time, it will expand in history. Its near-invisibility today is in contrast with its visibility in the future. The kingdom of God is associated with point three of the biblical covenant: law.² But growth is associated with point five: succession/inheritance.³

A. Small Beginnings

Jesus spoke these words to residents of a tiny nation which was under the rule of a great empire. His listeners were a captive people. Their nation had been under the rule of other empires for six centuries. Here was a limited audience indeed. Yet Jesus spoke to them in

1. This is adapted from chapter 30 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

3. Sutton, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

terms of great expectations.

The kingdom of God had been bottled up in Israel until the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Then it gained limited influence outside the borders of the Promised Land. But this influence had not transformed the empires that had ruled over Israel. A few kings had been impressed with the God of Israel, but this did not change the religious commitment of their empires.

The temple of Jesus' day was a great structure, but its rebuilding had begun over four decades earlier under a gentile king, Herod⁴—the king who later sought to kill the infant Jesus. The sacrifices went on, but the world still did not come to Israel in supplication. The kingdom of God was visible to those who wanted to see it, but few did. The Old Testament was available on scrolls, but only a handful of people possessed copies. The kingdom of God in Jesus' day was a highly circumscribed phenomenon.

This was not to remain true much longer, but Jesus' listeners did not know this at the time. They had seen no victories. All they had seen was foreign tyranny. They longed for deliverance, but there was no evidence that deliverance was possible. Yet here was Jesus, preaching victory: the expansion of the kingdom of God. He spoke of small beginnings and large results. There was no doubt in His mind: the kingdom of God was not a small matter. Despite the fact that His was a day of small beginnings, He told His listeners that something significant was in their midst. They could become part of a great kingdom. He had previously told them, "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20).⁵ Jesus was telling them that a new period of kingdom growth was imminent.

This was difficult to believe. The nation of Israel had never been large. For centuries, Israel had been isolated, trodden down by gentiles. After all this time, would the nation of Israel now become a significant factor in world history? Or did Jesus mean something else? Was the kingdom about to be separated from the nation? What did Jesus really mean? His disciples were confused, which is why they came to Him in private for explanations of His kingdom parables.

4. Herod was a major builder. See Dwayne W. Roller, *The Building Program of Herod the Great* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

5. In Matthew's account, we read: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28).

B. The Mustard Seed: Growth

The mustard seed is small. Its results are great. The disparity between what is visible at the beginning and what takes place at the end is the heart of this analogy. Elsewhere, Jesus made the same comparison with respect to men's faith. "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). "And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Luke 17:6).

The message was clear: that which is visibly small today can have important results in the future. Do not be fooled by the initial indications. What lies ahead is much greater than what is visible today. He who focuses solely on what is visible today will be misled by what he sees. That which is visible today is not representative of that which will be visible later. *Without faith, the tyranny of the present will overwhelm the faithful.* Rome looked large; the kingdom of God looked small. Rome had great power; the kingdom of God did not seem to. But this was an illusion, Jesus said. The mustard seed does not reveal its future results. Those who knew something of mustard seeds could understand what Jesus was saying. Those without this knowledge could not.

What little is visible today, Jesus said, should not paralyze faithful men by undermining their confidence in the future. The mustard seed today is not important; what it will become is important. The same is true of God's kingdom. Jesus told His listeners of great things to come. The reality of these great things would have to be accepted on faith. But for those who took His words seriously, this new optimism would motivate them to work to extend God's kingdom in history.

C. The Transforming Effect of Leaven

Another brief analogy continued the theme of growth. The kingdom is like leaven. Leaven is inserted into dough in order to make it rise. A small amount produces visible growth throughout the dough. The whole loaf rises because of the presence of the leaven. The leaven spreads through all of the dough, affecting all of it.

Previously, Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees. "In the mean

time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). At first, the disciples did not understand His meaning, but then they did. “Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt. 16:12). The doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees would produce a different kind of loaf. Jesus was setting forth the image of dough that would accept either form of leaven. The leaven of the kingdom is also doctrinal. It presents a specific view of God, man, law, causation, and the future. Rival kingdoms are based on rival views of these same covenantal doctrines.

Leaven can be either positive or negative, Jesus said. In the temple sacrifices, leaven was never offered on the altar (Lev. 2:11). But the firstfruits offering had to be leavened bread (Lev. 23:17). So, leaven was not a symbol of evil. It was a symbol of growth.⁶ The question is: Which leaven will raise the dough of history? Whose leaven will succeed in transforming the dough of civilization? God’s or Satan’s?

Jesus was arguing that the leaven of God’s kingdom raises the dough of history to produce good bread. The leaven of the firstfruits is to be seen as representative of the final bread. The kingdom of God in history will be triumphant. The whole loaf is raised up, Jesus said. The loaf is a metaphor for history.

D. Eschatology and Hope

The mustard seed and leaven: these two analogies offer hope to God’s people—not just hope for eternity, but hope for history. The eschatology of these two analogies is clearly optimistic. It is based on the comprehensive transforming power of God’s kingdom in history.

This hope is supposed to motivate God’s people to extend His kingdom. The extension of God’s kingdom is the essence of the dominion covenant. The whole world is to be subdued by God’s people for the glory of God. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) is the New Covenant’s reaffirmation of the original dominion covenant given to Adam (Gen. 1:26–28).⁷

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 3.

7. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

Hope undergirds action. He who is without earthly hope finds it costly to commit resources to projects that he believes cannot succeed. *Jesus set forth a vision of the whole world transformed.* He called His servants to participate in this endeavor. He told them of the world-transforming results of their earthly efforts. He did not tell them that their efforts would always be overshadowed by the leaven of rival kingdoms. *He called them to replace the rival leavens with the leaven of God's kingdom.*

Hope is a powerful motivation. Confidence in the future is a personally transforming force. The Communists once possessed this hope.⁸ They saw themselves as the vanguard of the inevitable proletarian victory. Their efforts transformed one-third of the world's population in the twentieth century and influenced much of the remainder. But when they lost hope, they faltered. Russian Communism died an embarrassing death, August 19–21, 1991, in the failed Communist Party coup in the Soviet Union. The world laughed at the seemingly drunken bureaucrats who had attempted to reclaim leadership for the Communist Party. Laughter doomed Russian Communism—laughter and an empty treasury. But before this was the loss of hope.

Hope for the future lowers the psychological cost of action in the present. A law of economics is that as the cost of anything falls, more of it is demanded (other things remaining equal). Here is an application of this principle: *greater hope for the future produces greater sacrifice in the present.* The investment of capital in the present finances the growth of the kingdom. By promising great things in the future, Jesus was presenting the case for his followers' increased commitment of resources to build the kingdom.

Conclusion

The top priority for every man should be the extension of God's kingdom in history. This has been true ever since God told Adam to subdue the earth. Sin has made this task more difficult. Rival kingdoms now compete for control in history.

Jesus told His listeners that the kingdom of God would not always remain small. It would expand. He was inviting His listeners to participate in this expansion. They were not to despise the day of small beginnings. Instead, they were to commit themselves to a process that would transcend time and borders.

8. F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1974).

Jesus offered them legitimate hope. This hope was supposed to serve God's people as a motivation for their sacrificial commitment, generation after generation. Without this hope in the kingdom's earthly success over time, commitment to the dominion covenant becomes more expensive psychologically. Men are less likely to commit the resources necessary for victory if they do not expect victory. The cost is too high. They may commit resources to projects that they believe will lay up treasure in heaven for them individually. These projects do extend the kingdom in history. But the motivation is personal or familial, so there will be no joint plans among Christians to integrate their efforts into a world-transforming program. This retards the fulfillment of the dominion covenant.

THE NARROW GATE¹

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out (Luke 13:23–28).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the gatekeeper. He built the gate to eternal life. He established its boundaries, i.e., the pathway's ethical standards. This is point three of the biblical covenant: law.² God told Joshua: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:7–8).³

1. This is adapted from chapter 17 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

3. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1.

A. Choose Life

Every man has a choice before him: life or death. Moses warned Israel at the end of his life:

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and **to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments**, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore **choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:15–20).⁴

The basis of life is clearly stated: “To love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments.” But no sinner can keep God’s law perfectly (Rom. 3:23). So, God’s law testifies to the fact that every man needs grace. This grace is not cheap grace. It is granted by God on only one judicial basis: Jesus Christ’s perfect fulfilling of the law, with God’s curse placed on Him nonetheless. Paul wrote in his greatest epistle on God’s grace: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

1. Two Gates

In Matthew’s account, two gates are mentioned. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13–14).

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 73.

The gate to eternal life is narrow. Does this mean that the way is *too difficult* for most people? Or does it mean that the way is *hidden* from most people?

If the way is too difficult for most people, then this must mean that it is not too difficult for some people. This means that the way to life is the way of the law, of good works. Paul preached the contrary view in the synagogue at Antioch: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13: 38–39).

If, on the other hand, the narrow gate is hidden to most people, then some do get through the gate on the basis of their having found it. Evidence for this interpretation is found in Jesus’ discussion of His ministry. He did not come to show the truth to everyone. He showed in only to a few. “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25).

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Matt. 13:10–17).

This was a fulfillment of Isaiah: “And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with

their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isa. 6:9–10). This selective revelation is God the Father’s work. “He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:15–17).

2. The Narrow Gate

These passages prove that the narrow gate is not closed to most people on the basis of their sin. It is closed to *all* people on the basis of their sin. Then how can it be open to anyone? Only on the basis of Christ’s perfection, which is imputed to him judicially by God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:20–26).

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom. 4:5–8).

B. Many Called, Few Chosen

Narrow is the way, Jesus said. The question is this: Is the way closed to most men forever? Or was Jesus speaking only of His own era, the waning days of Old Covenant Israel?

1. The Harvest of Souls

His words indicate that He was speaking of conditions in His own

era, not necessarily about the future. More than this: things would soon change. That which Jesus had taught His followers would soon be heard by many people. Did this mean many men in general or many Jews? The context indicates: many Jews. "In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, in-somuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:1–3). He told the disciples: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together" (John 4:35–36). "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. 9: 35–38).

2. The Wedding Feast

Christ's parable of the king's wedding feast for his son seems to indicate that on the final day, there will be more people left outside the feast than the number of those inside. "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:11–14).

This passage is one of those commonly used against postmillennialism. Critics ask: How can postmillennialists believe in a great outpouring of faith? After all, many are called, but few are chosen. But the

critics neglect the context of this parable. This is the parable of the wedding feast. The king is God; His son is Jesus Christ. *Jesus presented this parable in the context of opposition from the Pharisees.* “And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet. And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come” (Matt. 21:45–22:3). It was clear to the Pharisees that they were the targets of this parable, for immediately after He gave it, “Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk” (Matt. 22:15).

The prophetic context of this passage was Jesus’ warning to the Pharisees: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). This was a warning that the way of life was about to be opened to the gentiles. More than this: the way of life would soon be closed to Israel on any basis other than membership in the universal church. This meant that Jews would be outnumbered by gentiles. Jews would not gain access to the kingdom of God based on their Jewishness, i.e., their claim of descent from the patriarchs, their adherence to what later were called Talmudic traditions, or any other exclusively Jewish possession.

The parable of the wedding feast is about *socially acceptable people*, who demanded entrance on their own terms, dressed in their own garments, in relation to the undesirables, who were content to allow the king to clothe them. The parable says that the acceptable people initially slew the agents of the king (Matt. 22:6). This was a clear reference to the practice of the Jews: slaying the prophets in the past and slaying Christ’s disciples in the near future. The king was no longer willing to tolerate this behavior. He then opened the feast to the least desirable elements. “Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests” (Matt. 22:8–10). On the highways of Israel were gentiles, as the parable of the good Samaritan indicates. The servants invited both Jews and gentiles without distinction. The wedding feast

was now open to anyone brought in by the king's servants, but it was not open to those who came on their own, dressed in their own garments. The Pharisees knew exactly what Jesus was saying. They immediately took counsel against Him.

"Many are called, but few are chosen." *This referred to the Jews of Jesus' day.* The narrow confines of the Old Covenant were about to be shattered by the New Covenant.

The Jews would not accept this message. They would not accept entrance into the kingdom of Christ on these terms: open entry to the gentiles without their circumcision.

3. *Jews vs. Gentiles*

This point is even clearer in Luke. The contrast is between those who claim to be the descendants of Abraham and the patriarchs vs. those who arrive from all directions: gentiles. The former will not gain access to eternal life, and the latter will. The context of the passage under consideration in this chapter reveals the contrast.

And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last (Luke 13:22–30).

Immediately following the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the faithful centurion: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:11–12). The same imagery appears: gentiles coming

from afar, sitting in the presence of the patriarchs, with Jews outside, under the curse, gnashing their teeth.

The Pharisees were greatly offended by this. They understood what Jesus was saying about them and their nation. They wanted Him to stop preaching such things. They wanted Him to leave town. “The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee” (Luke 13:31). What the Pharisees clearly understood has not been understood by Christian expositors, who interpret Christ’s words apart from their context: the imminent transfer of the kingdom of God from Old Covenant Israel to the New Covenant church.

Many were called: many Jews in His day. Few were chosen: few Jews in His day. The contrast in these passages is not between the number of lost people in history vs. the number saved. It is between the number of Jews saved in Jesus’ day vs. the number of Jews not saved in Jesus’ day. He was saying that the Jews of His day were no longer God’s chosen people. They had become the “called but rarely chosen” people.

C. Heeding the Call

The call is for repentance and acceptance of a judicial substitute before God. The call is not for the listener’s works righteousness, but for *Jesus Christ’s works righteousness*. “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:23–24).

Jesus called men to obedience. He did not say that the path is too difficult for most men. On the contrary, He said it is easier than what men in sin must face. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30).⁵ To interpret the metaphor of the narrow gate as if it were a call to ascetic moral discipline is to miss the point entirely. That was what the Jews thought the narrow gate was: fenced in with innumerable laws that only Jews and a few proselytes could obey.

The broad gate that leads to destruction is not merely the path of easy virtue; it is equally the path of ascetic self-discipline. All robes except the wedding garments provided by the king are unacceptable, Je-

5. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 25.

sus warned. All righteousness other than Christ's imputed perfection is substandard. The Jews wanted to work their way through the narrow gate. The gentiles wanted much the same, if not ethically, then at least ritually. Hardened sinners wanted to avoid thinking of such matters. But all were headed toward the broad gate that leads to destruction. What they all needed was what men in every era need: a judicial substitute that is acceptable to God. *They needed an acceptable sacrifice.* It was available. "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:10–14).

Jesus is the acceptable sacrifice. He offered Himself, once. Then He "sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." This footstool metaphor is found throughout the Bible. Psalm 110 is the premier footstool passage. The author of Hebrews used the metaphor a second time. "But to which of the angels said he at any times, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (Heb. 1:13). Jesus will remain seated at God's right hand until all of His enemies are conquered, for they are His footstool. He will not return to earth to reign on a throne in Jerusalem or anywhere else. The last enemy is death. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25–26). When death is conquered, He will return to judge the world. The two events are the same event: resurrection to eternal life and resurrection to the second death (Rev. 20:11–15). At that time, it will be visible to all just which of the two gates each man passed through on his journey from history to eternity.

Conclusion

Man's top priority in this passage is his top priority in history: to walk through the narrow gate. This gate is not narrow in the sense of being difficult to pass through. It is narrow in the sense of being inaccessible except through God's special grace, without which it is a closed gate. The gate leading to destruction is wide open. Anyone can pass through: the ascetic, the hedonist, the ritualist, the libertine. Law-

yers are especially welcome. “And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers” (Luke 11:46).

THE QUEST FOR RECOGNITION

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee (Luke 14:7–10).

The theocentric issue here is God's authority to award status. He is the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Feasting on the Sabbath

The setting for Jesus' discourse was a feast in the home of a Pharisee. It took place on the sabbath. Jesus had just healed a man. He had reminded the Pharisees that they were willing to pull an ox out of a well on the sabbath. This was also His justification for healing a man on the sabbath (Luke 14:1–6).

A Pharisee had been willing to host a feast on the sabbath. This indicated that he understood that the sabbath is a day to forego our own pleasures for the sake of others. Even if the person hosting the feast takes pleasure in the feast, he bears the expense. So, hosting a feast on the sabbath was officially seen as legitimate. Jesus saw it this way. He attended.

Jesus used this occasion to present a parable. The parable pictured

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

a feast. Specifically, it was a wedding feast. The wedding feast in the New Testament is a symbol of the final judgment: the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9–21).

B. Hierarchy: By Appointment Only

In every organization, there is a hierarchy: a chain of command. Someone at the top is responsible for whatever takes place below him. Hierarchy is basic to the biblical covenant model.² It is built into the dominion covenant: God > man > creatures (Gen. 1:26–28).³

The focus of the parable is a wedding feast. Initially, there is no one visible who directs each guest to his seat. Not being a modern dinner party, there are no name tags on the table. There are empty seats. Because of the arrangement of the seats, some positions are clearly suitable for people of distinction.

The guests begin to arrive. They do not know who is supposed to sit where. They must make individual decisions about where to sit. Jesus here suggested the proper approach to selecting a seat: choose a seat suitable for a person with minimal distinction. The reason: there is a presently unannounced seating arrangement. At some point before the wedding feast begins, the host who is giving the feast will appear and direct people to their pre-selected seats. Anyone who is sitting at a place of honor had better be the one selected by the host for that seat; otherwise, he will be asked to stand up and move to a position of less honor. This will cause embarrassment for the person who is asked to move.

Sit at the lowest place, Jesus recommended. Then, when the host directs you to your seat, you will have the honor of being visibly honored by the host. There is nothing wrong with being honored. *This parable affirms the legitimacy of the quest for public acclaim.* But this acclaim must be conferred by the person in charge. It is not to be assumed in advance by the person seeking it. Until the host makes his announcement, public acclaim should be self-consciously avoided.

Most people will have their seats in between the highest and lowest positions. The bell-shaped statistical curve applies to the allocation of positions of high honor and low honor. This means that the person who selects the highest position and the person who selects the lowest

2. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

position will probably be asked to move. The odds are, both of them have guessed wrong.

Jesus was applying Proverbs. "Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen" (Prov. 25:6–7). The Jews were quite familiar with this principle of self-assessment.

C. Self-Assessment

The guests cannot avoid the task of assessing their own degree of honor. They must think about their importance in the eyes of the host. They must think his thoughts after him. They do not know who else has been invited. They do not know which of those invited will actually attend. The task of self-assessment is much too difficult. The guests possess insufficient information.

Jesus recommended that we forego the task of self-assessment in such a situation. It is safer to sit down at the seat of lowest honor. The food will taste the same. Perhaps others will be served their meals first, depending on the rules of etiquette. But what is that to a guest? The important thing is to have received the invitation. Even more important is to honor the invitation by attending (Matt. 22:1–14).

There are only so many seats available. Others may have arrived earlier. If the lowest positions are already taken, then take whatever is available at the low end of the scale of honor. There is no shame in being asked to sit elsewhere if there was no other position available at the low end.

The chief issue here is incorrect self-assessment. "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (v. 11). For the guest, the selection process is both active and passive. Self-assessment is active. It is also preliminary. Final assessment is passive, imposed by the host. Jesus made it clear that self-assessment is risky. It is safest to select the lowest available position and allow the host to make the final determination.

Whatever the host decides is correct. It is his feast. He is paying for it. It is also his guest list. He sent out the invitations. The guests are subordinate to the host. He who selects the lowest available position acknowledges that the host is in the best position to know who belongs where. The host can sort it out before the feast begins.

In the parable of the self-exalting Pharisee and the spiritually humble tax collector, we read the same words: “. . . for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14b). In this case, however, the theological issue is justification, not glorification. “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. . .” (v. 18a). It is not a matter of self-seating at the wedding feast; it is a matter of seeking an invitation to attend.

Conclusion

Jesus warned His listeners to avoid self-glorification, but He did not deny the legitimacy of seeking glory. In fact, He encouraged this quest. This is why He told people to sit at the lowest available position. You will gain public glory when the host moves you to a higher position, He said. But this glory comes at the end of time, and it is allocated by God, not man.

This recommendation parallels Jesus’ recommendation regarding the quest for wealth. We are told to store up treasure in heaven by refusing to seek riches in history. Similarly, we are told to gain glory in eternity by foregoing the quest for glory in history. We are told to forego rewards in history in order to gain rewards in eternity.

RESURRECTION BLESSINGS

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:12–14).

The theocentric principle here is God's grace, which is shown to the undeserving. He is the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Return on Investment (ROI)

This continues Jesus' sermon at the feast. Here He directed His remarks to the Pharisee who had invited Him. Jesus' words assumed that hosting a feast is an investment in the future. There will be a return on this investment. The question is: When? Once again, Jesus focused on *time vs. eternity*. People naturally seek rewards in history. They seek a return on their investment. This is a mistake whenever history and eternity are in conflict.

This feast was being held on the sabbath (Luke 14:1). Temporally self-interested work was forbidden on the Jewish sabbath (Ex. 20: 10).² To be lawful, this feast had to be a means of service to others. When making a feast on behalf of others, Jesus said, invite only those who

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch.2 4.

cannot pay you back in history. Use the feast to give pleasure exclusively to others. Do not use it as a way to get invited to other feasts. To do so is to turn your feast into a worldly investment.

Jesus was saying that He would not be in a position to repay the host in history. Jesus was one of the poor. He enjoyed a kind of notoriety, but this notoriety would soon be of a negative variety. He was a celebrity, but not one whom Pharisees would choose to associate with in His final days before the resurrection. In this sense, Jesus belonged at the feast, but this was not why He had been invited.

The feast was being held on the sabbath. Jesus healed a man at the feast. The Pharisees and lawyers at the feast were told by Jesus that this was lawful because the healing was the equivalent of an act of mercy to a domesticated animal (vv. 1–7).

A Pharisee was holding a feast on the sabbath. Was this feast an act of mercy? Jesus indicated that it was more of an investment than an act of mercy. If it had been strictly an act of mercy, the Pharisee would have invited only poor people who were in no position to return the favor. This feast was self-serving. The host expected to enjoy invitations to many feasts in the future. He had invited people of his own status. We can call this an act of horizontal, self-interested service.³

Temporally self-interested work is a misuse of the sabbath. Jesus said at the time of the healing that what distinguishes lawful work from unlawful work is the *economic status* of the act. To pull an ox out of a well is an act of mercy, even if it is your ox. The animal is in need of assistance. The dependence of the animal on the rescuer is what identifies the act of mercy.

Jesus then healed the man. The man was not in a position to return the favor. Jesus' act was an act of mercy. All of His sabbath healings were acts of mercy. Not only was He not compensated by those whom He healed, the very act of healing got Him in trouble with the religious authorities (Luke 6:11). We can call this an act of *vertical charitable service: reaching downward*.⁴

Jesus identified this feast as a temporally self-interested act. For a feast to be an act of mercy, it should not benefit the host except insofar as he honors a general principle: it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).⁵ The host should make the expenditure because he

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2n ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Introduction:G:2.

4. *Idem*.

5. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed.

seeks the benefit of the attendees. *The mark of such a self-sacrificing feast is the low economic status of the attendees.* A man invites those who are lower on the social and economic scale. He reaches downward in order to lift up those beneath him.

B. A Future Return

Once again, Jesus announced the legitimacy of a quest for blessings. Invite the poor to your feast, He said, “And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (v. 14). *The reward that is most worth seeking in history is the reward that will come beyond history.* History is the arena for investing; eternity is the crucial arena for recompence, although not the only one.

“And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting” (Luke 18:29–30). *Men sow in history and reap both in history and eternity.* What they sow determines what they will reap. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7–8). How much they sow determines how much they will finally reap. “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (II Cor. 9:6).⁶ “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).⁷

It takes considerable faith to accept this dogma. It begins with faith in the *resurrection of the dead*. The Pharisees, unlike the Sadducees, believed in the resurrection of the dead. “For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:8). Jesus was in the home of a Pharisee, and Pharisees were attending the feast. He could safely assume that they all believed in the resurrection.

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

6. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: A n Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 8.

7. Chapter 11.

Next, it takes faith in *legal cause and effect*. Specifically, it takes faith in God's bestowing of final rewards in terms of men's acts in history. Men will reap eternally what they have sown in history.

Third, it takes *extreme future-orientation*, i.e., a low personal interest rate. Men should not discount the present value of eternal rewards to the point of so little value that they will not live righteously in the present, which means foregoing present benefits for the sake of eternal rewards. In the chapter on faith, the author of Hebrews praised Moses' future-orientation: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:24–27).

Jesus warned His listeners that they were not living in terms of eternity. The feast itself testified to their short-sightedness. They were in the habit of attending each other's feasts. So popular was this practice among them that the host had scheduled his feast for the sabbath. He knew that he would not be criticized for this by his strict sabbatarian peers. Jesus became his critic. The host was being short-sighted. He was not taking the rewards of the final resurrection seriously enough. The way to increase these rewards is to hold feasts for the poor and crippled and blind. These guests cannot provide earthly rewards. To entertain them is to declare publicly one's commitment to rewards beyond history.

C. Social Mixing

The host was a man of prominence. He was a religious leader. His guest list reflected this position. Jesus told the listeners that they should step out of their tight-knit social circles and invite people with a much lower social status.

Such a mixed social event is rare in any society. People do not normally associate with those outside their own social circles. There are a few exceptions. Prior to the twentieth century, members of the English landed aristocracy sometimes would invite their poor tenants to a Christmas celebration. These festivities were understood as honoring Christ or tradition, and therefore were open to all social groups. But,

in general, such events are rare or nonexistent.

Men find it uncomfortable to mix with people who are in a different income bracket or social status. They do not know how to act. They are afraid of saying or doing something inappropriate. There is a sense of being “a fish out of water.” Lower-class groups are especially uncomfortable. They are unlikely to invite the rich into their homes for a feast. They do not have the economic resources, including space, to become hosts. They also fear being regarded by their peers as social climbers—“putting on airs.” So, the initiative to mix socially must come from those in the higher classes. They must send out the invitations.

The institutional church is to be a place where social classes mix. James wrote:

For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Harken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called (James 2:2–7)?

Nevertheless, within any congregation, the array of social classes is narrow. In a parish ministry of a geographically organized denomination, such a Roman Catholicism, a neighborhood shapes a congregation's range of social classes. In Protestantism, denominations tend to attract people of specific social classes. The automobile has intensified this process of segregation. People can drive to a congregation where people much like themselves worship.

The archetype of downward social mixing for the sake of personal exaltation in the future is Jesus Christ. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of

things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5–11). His willingness to mix with the likes of fallen men was the basis of His post-resurrection exaltation as a perfect man.

There can be social mixing because of people’s sense of participation in a greater cause. *The social hierarchy does not end at the visible top. It ends at the throne of God.* All people are common laborers in a common cause, though each has his place in any given project. There can be a social event with a larger goal: honoring God. He is present at the feasts of those who honor Him. Social unity is furthered, meaning the community is strengthened.

This principle is better understood in wartime than in times of peace. When the survival of their nation as an independent judicial entity is at stake, men of all classes cooperate more readily than during peacetime. They understand that a common effort is vital to their survival. There is a higher principle involved than the maintenance of social distinctions. In the United States Army, a man without formal education can rise in the ranks to commissioned officer status during wartime if he demonstrates leadership, especially on the battlefield. The fact that he did not attend college or Officers Candidate School is deemed to be of less importance than his performance in battle as a leader. The hierarchical screening process of battle during wartime is regarded by the American military establishment as more relevant than the screening process of formal instruction prior to battle. Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1840 that this is why democratic armies favor war more than aristocrat-led armies do. War opens up positions that are closed to the noncommissioned ranks in peacetime.⁸

Conclusion

The host of a feast has the authority to decide who will be invited. Jesus warned His upper-class listeners to invite social undesirables to their feasts. Let those with no opportunity to attend a feast enjoy a shared banquet. This means spending money on those who cannot repay. It means associating with a different class of people, which is uncomfortable at first. It means being regarded by one’s peers as “putting on airs,” not by upward social climbing but by downward social climbing. By familiar social standards, such a feast is an aberration.

8. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1840), II:XXII.

Why do this? Jesus did not say that this would be for the benefit of the poor. He said that it would be for the benefit of the rich. This was not obvious to His listeners. He said that this is a way for a rich man to increase his eternal rewards. He turned rich men's thoughts toward eternity.

The host should look to his eternal future. He should assess the present value of an eternal reward. What is the future value of God's promised reward? We are not told. We know only that Jesus recommends this above investing in a feast where we invite our friends. Our future reward for hosting a feast for the poor should be worth more to us today than the hope of future dinner invitations from our friends. Rewards in eternity exceed the value of rewards in history by so much that they should have a higher present value when discounted by a decision-maker's current rate of interest.

COUNTING THE COSTS OF DISCIPLESHIP

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply [it happen], after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:28–33).

The theocentric principle here is that of God's imposed boundaries: barriers to entry. These boundaries impose costs. These are negative sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Transfer of Assets

Jesus warned His listeners about the cost of being His disciple. The cost is high by the world's standards. The disciple must forsake everything that he possesses (v. 33). "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19:27). Elsewhere, however, Jesus said that his yoke is easy: "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). How can we reconcile these two passages?

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

1. *Hierarchy of Leadership*

To answer this question, I begin with the most important biblical economic principle: *God owns the world*. He created it; therefore, He owns it. “A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods” (Ps. 24:1–2). The whole creation is God’s possession. “The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them” (Ps. 89:11). This is the presuppositional starting point for Christian economics.²

The redeemed person’s formal covenantal surrender to God necessarily mandates the formal surrender of his possessions to God, beginning with title to his own life. Baptism is an oath sign that acknowledges God’s complete legal claim on a person. The Lordship of Christ involves His taking possession of all of the covenant-keeper’s possessions. The Christian surrenders his goods to Christ.

Few Christians ever formally go this far in their walk with Christ. They do not mentally or publicly sign over all of their assets to God.³ Then how can they become Jesus’ disciple? Only because Jesus does this for them. He makes a perfect confession to God on their behalf. When He died for the sins of His people, he died for all of their sins. If one of these sins is stubborn possessiveness, then this sin is covered by Christ’s perfect righteousness, which is imputed to them judicially by God the Father.

Paul tells us to conform our lives to Christ’s life. “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11:1).⁴ The Greek word translated as “followers” is *mimetes*: to mimic or imitate. Through the free grace of progressive sanctification, we are supposed to conform our thoughts and actions to His standards. Christ now owns the entire world as the true heir of God.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and

2. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

3. A formal, public, signed transfer of one’s assets to God is part of the financial training program of Crown Ministries: www.crown.org.

4. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 14.

the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? (Heb. 1:1–5).

Christians are supposed to acknowledge this fact. *We are to surrender all of our assets to Christ.* This transfer of assets includes our bodies and minds. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1–2). We are not to hold back anything. It is all to be put at God’s service.

2. Gaining the Inheritance

Is this a heavy burden? Jesus said it is not. *We gain title to a great inheritance by surrendering everything to Christ.* This is because of our adopted sonship. We become the lawful heirs of God the Father through Jesus Christ, His only begotten son. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:14–18).

To gain our inheritance, we must surrender ownership. This inheritance is surely eternal, but it is also historical. Covenant-keepers will inherit in history. This is a kingdom promise. We read in the Book of Psalms:

What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:12–13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall

not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:9–11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and longeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever (Ps. 37:22–29).

When covenant-keepers surrender to God through Christ's grace everything that they possess, they thereby admit that they are God's stewards rather than original owners. They are agents of God. *They own nothing personally. They hold everything administratively.* As stewards, they will have to present a final accounting to God regarding their administration of His assets. All men will be required to give such an account. They will have no choice. *Adam was God's steward; so are all of his heirs.* But the covenant-keeper acknowledges in history his subordinate position. This is what distinguishes his stewardship from the covenant-breaker's, who refuses to acknowledge ultimate ownership by the God of the Bible.

B. A Transfer of Allegiance and Ownership

Jesus warned men against becoming disciples if they were not prepared to pay the price. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26–27). These are strong words. Why should a man hate his father? Because of the division within families that his discipleship will create. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not

worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:34–38).

Jesus did not recommend that anyone become His disciple without counting these costs. The person who becomes His disciple, only to defect later on, will suffer ridicule: “. . . all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.” This is a great embarrassment. There are high costs of temporary discipleship. *A disciple of Christ must permanently switch allegiance from mammon to God.* He makes a new personal covenant. His old personal covenant is thereby broken. He acknowledges a new, superior sovereign in his life. He acknowledges a new, superior chain of authority over him. He surrenders ownership of everything he owns. This is a major transformation in a person’s life. It should not be entered into lightly.

This covenantal transformation is like a marriage. When a man and a woman covenant with each other for a lifetime, they must break old allegiances and relationships. They accept new responsibilities and costs. They expect benefits from the new relationship, but they cannot gain these benefits free of charge. Once entered into, the marriage is supposed to last until one of them dies. People should not take marriage vows lightly.

Christ asks His disciples throughout history to count the cost of transferring their allegiance to Him. He does not invite people to come under His discipline on the assumption that they will not be asked to pay a price. Jesus paid the supreme price on behalf of the world (John 3:16) and His disciples: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). His prospective disciples are here told to think through the costs of discipleship before they commit to Him.

C. Assessing Future Costs

When a man and a woman marry, they have only the vaguest notion of what lies ahead. They can only guess the costs. The benefits seem to be immediate. The costs seem far removed. This is one reason why so many people get married. But costs eventually come due. This is why, in our day, so many people get divorced. Society has lowered the price of divorce; so, more divorce is demanded. The price of staying married rises as troubles multiply, and the immediate price of get-

ting divorced drops. The rate of divorce goes up.

Making an estimation of future costs is not easy. Some of these costs will appear without warning. No one can foresee all of these costs in advance, but enough of them are known in advance to enable a person to make an intelligent estimate. Jesus mentioned hostility in family relationships. There would be other burdens for the disciples prior to the fall of Jerusalem. "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Luke 21: 12–13).

To make such an assessment of future costs, men must look to the past. What has happened before will probably happen again. This was bad news for wavering disciples in Jesus' day. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11–12). Persecution in the immediate future would lead to blessings in the distant future—eternity—but for partially committed disciples, looming persecution was bad news. A *faithful disciple had to be future-oriented*. He had to assess the present value of his hoped-for eternal blessings more highly than he assessed the present costs of prophesied near-term persecution. This involved a high degree of confidence in the fulfillment of Christ's promises regarding eternity.

The more temporally distant a cost or a blessing, the more steeply it is discounted by decision-makers. This is why men naturally look to near-term consequences when they make most of their decisions. Jesus kept telling His listeners that this near-term focus is a mistake. Decision-makers should look to the long-term results. They should consider eternity. This is surely the case with costs. "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:4–5). It is also the case with blessings. "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:29–

30).⁵

D. The Discount for Time

Men apply a discount to future costs and benefits. We call this the interest rate. The higher this discount rate, the less that people pay attention to distant events, i.e., the more present-oriented they are. This is another way of saying the more lower class they are.⁶

Jesus said it again and again: to be His disciples, men must take seriously the eternal realm. Men normally apply a high discount to the very distant future because they know they will be dead and gone. Jesus warned Nicodemus that in the distant future, there will be eternal life only for covenant-keepers. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16–18).

Eternity is a permanent condition. He who gains eternal life in history has a joyous eternity before him. He has the promise of blessings that will roll in forever. *To apply a steep discount to eternity’s blessings is foolish.* The positive returns, being permanent, are not subject to removal through death. They will be made available sooner than covenant-breakers think. James wrote: “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:13–14). James also wrote, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways” (James 1:9–11).

Eternity may be very close to a decision-maker. “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then

5. Chapter 44.

6. Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 53–54.

whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12: 20).⁷ Long life delays the inevitable, but in relation to eternity, long life is the blink of an eye. *Therefore, to apply a discount to the future that does not take eternity into consideration is suicidal.* It places too low a value on eternity's permanent sanctions. It also assumes too high a value for the various possible income streams available in history. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).⁸

E. Public Failure

Jesus used two examples in this passage: a man who begins building a tower and a king who makes plans for a war. In planning for the future, a person should assess future costs. He should decide early whether he possesses sufficient resources to complete the project. If he does not, he should not begin it, for when the uncompleted project stands empty before all men, they will ridicule the builder. As for a king who plans a war, he should recognize that a failure could cost him his kingdom and his life. He should count the costs carefully.

The costs of failure are high. It is not simply the cost of the time and materials that are wasted on an uncompleted project. It is the cost of ridicule. In fact, Jesus mentioned this cost rather than the construction costs. Public ridicule for a visible failure is what most men fear more than losing money. An economic loss suffered in private is preferable to one suffered in public.

The cross was the ultimate ridicule. "And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself" (Luke 23:35–37). Jesus knew that His disciples would be mocked, too, by Jews and gentiles alike. This took place. "Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:13). "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17:32).

Jesus did not tell His listeners that they should never risk failure

7. Chapter 24.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35. See chapter 19, above.

for the sake of the kingdom. On the contrary, He called them to take such risks. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:24). What Jesus taught was that *the disciple should abandon his pride in advance*. He told His followers to take the seats of lowest honor (Luke 14:7–10).⁹ Paul extended this idea. Christians must first become fools in the eyes of the world.

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence (I Cor. 1:23–29).

This is all part of *surrendering ownership in advance* all those possessions that we, as God’s stewards, do not own anyway. Jesus told His listeners that they should count the costs of failure. *The way to escape these costs is to surrender everything to God in advance*. This way, a person is freed up to make mistakes on behalf of Christ’s kingdom. His losses, if any, will come at Christ’s expense, not his. He may forfeit a larger reward, but future losses are transferred. Most people fear losses more than they covet rewards. So, he can bear greater risks than the person who holds on tightly to all that he has, including his pride. But he should not bear these risks blindly.

F. The Exchange of Treasures

The faithful steward seeks to make a profit on God’s behalf. This means that he accumulates capital that can be used for God’s kingdom. If he loses it because of bad investing, this will be revealed at the final accounting before God.

Jesus used money as a metaphor of final accounting in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12–27).¹⁰ In Matthew, this is the parable of the

9. Chapter 33.

10. Chapter 46. See also North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

talents (Matt. 25:14–30). A talent was an English unit of weight. The word was specifically applied by the King James translators to precious metals.¹¹ But it is obvious from the punishment of the unprofitable servant that the issue was not money. “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30). God does not send people to hell because they have not made a lot of money. On the contrary, those who make a lot of money are more likely to be sent to hell. “For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:25–27).¹² The servant was punished because he buried his talent. He did nothing with it on behalf of the owner.

God entrusts to all men the singular blessing of temporal life. They are supposed to exchange temporal life for eternal life. This exchange takes place in history. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). This exchange is the essence of faithful stewardship. Men are told to be faithful stewards. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (I Cor. 4:2).¹³ Faithful stewardship involves a transfer of assets, Jesus said. “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

The essence of *kingdom profitability* is the exchange of temporal treasure for eternal treasure. “And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:29–34).¹⁴

Jesus told His disciples to learn the techniques of eternal account-

11. Exodus 25:39; I Kings 9:28; 10:10; 10:14.

12. Chapter 43.

13. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 5.

14. Chapter 26.

ing. *We are supposed to exchange what the world regards as high-value assets for what it regards as low-value assets.* The exchange ratio is in our favor. Unlike temporal assets, heavenly assets cannot be lost. They also cannot be liquidated. Accumulating heavenly assets is the investment strategy known as “buy and hold.” Heavenly treasure purchased now is like an annuity: you will collect your return at a future date. A treasure stored in heaven is a man’s secure inheritance as an adopted son of God. This treasure will be transferred to him publicly at the resurrection. The New Heaven and New Earth of the post-resurrection world is the ultimate location for treasure laid up in heaven. Heaven is a temporary place of residence for the disembodied souls of covenant-keepers. The final judgment brings covenant-keepers back to a transformed earth (Rev. 20, 21). It is here that men will put to eternal use the treasures they have accumulated in history and stored in heaven.

These treasures are ethical. They are classified under the category of *wisdom*. The wise steward is the rich steward, for he is the heir. “And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath” (Luke 12:42–44).¹⁵ Jesus is this wise steward. He died on the cross, stripped even of his robe and any dignity that it had provided. He died as the true heir, the wisest of all God’s stewards. He collected His earthly inheritance at the resurrection (Matt. 28:18).¹⁶ His faithful disciples inherit through Him.

G. Accurate Accounting

Count the cost, we are warned. But what is the proper unit of account? For earthly affairs, it is money: the most marketable commodity. For heavenly affairs, this unit of account is presently unstated. There is no published exchange rate: today’s money vs. the heavenly unit of account. We must act in faith in making these exchanges on the assumption that God will not cheat us for having exchanged earthly treasure for heavenly.

The most valuable things that we possess as God’s stewards have no price tags. For example, what is the value of a virtuous wife? We are

15. Chapter 28.

16. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

not sure. All we know is that it is above rubies (Prov. 31:10).¹⁷ The monetary value of close personal relationships is unknown and presumably unknowable. *Where there is no market for exchanges, there is no numerical accounting system.* We can sometimes establish an ordinal hierarchy of value—first, second, third—but not a cardinal hierarchy of value: exactly this much more or less.

God asks us to move from numerical treasure—money—to eternal treasure, but without stated prices or a stated exchange rate. We must therefore act entirely on faith. *We must believe that God will not cheat us.* If we have doubts about God, heaven, and the value of eternal treasure, then we will be sorely tempted to look to our tangible wealth as a practical way to determine our net worth. God's estimation is then no longer ours. Whenever we do this, we divinize an aspect of the creation: money. This is idolatry. This is why Paul wrote:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses (I Tim. 6:6–12).¹⁸

When we retroactively count the costs of our previous decisions, we mentally use money to estimate our success or failure, our profit or loss. This procedure applies correctly only to those things whose prices can be quantified. It leaves out anything that is really important in life, even earthly life. To assess the success of a marriage, monetary calculation will not do. The same is true of the other things that we value most highly. We cannot legitimately use money to estimate the value of whatever has really counted in our lives. *Whatever really counts in this life cannot be counted.* This is even more true of assessing costs and benefits in the future.

17. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 86.

18. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

People can estimate the monetary cost of building a tower. This procedure makes it cheaper to build towers. By budgeting our costs in advance, we reduce our costs by reducing our mistakes. This reduces waste. When we reduce waste, our total future output increases. There is no doubt that monetary accounting, especially double-entry book-keeping, has revolutionized the world. It is one of the great creations of the mind. Without monetary calculation, we could not have a high division of labor economy. We would become impoverished.¹⁹ But the vast increase in productivity that is attributable to the development of cost accounting is still limited to things and events governed by market pricing.

The modern world's multiplication of consumer goods is impressive. This increase in wealth has led to the vast increase in population. There are today more survivors of childhood diseases and other disasters. In this sense, cost accounting is an enormous blessing. But the billions of people who are alive today, if they are not brought to saving faith through grace in their lifetimes, will suffer terribly in eternity. The blessings of history will then become the cursings of eternity.

This places a special burden on Christians today, who possess the message of eternal life. To fund the many programs of evangelism that are necessary to bring Christ's gospel of redemption to billions of people in one lifetime, Christians must sacrifice economically. *They should view their wealth as a kingdom tool in a life-and-death race against time.* Time is running out for billions of people. The laying up of treasure in heaven through funding world missions is an important heavenly wealth-building strategy—more important today than at any time in history. There are more lives at stake than ever before.

Conclusion

Decision-makers are told to count the cost of their actions. This means that they should estimate future costs. They must seek ways to estimate accurately what they will have to forfeit in order to buy whatever they need to complete their projects.

There is no way in the present that we can be sure what anything will cost in the future, but we can improve our productivity when we find better ways to accomplish this task. Jesus warned His listeners to regard a decision to become His disciples as risky. If they begin their

19. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 231. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

journey and then fall away, they will suffer great embarrassment. They should not rush into this decision. "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).²⁰

The initial cost of becoming Christ's disciple is the permanent surrender to God of everything we own. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). This forsaking only rarely involves a literal depletion of all of a person's tangible assets. It is rather a *covenantal* surrendering. It is like donating the money to create a bank account with God's name on it, with the donor serving as a salaried trustee over what had been his money. God may never ask the trustee to spend all of the money on an account-emptying project. But we are told that in order to become Christ's disciples, we must acknowledge God as the absolutely sovereign owner and our roles as His stewards.

Not every Christian does this mentally. Most do not. So, are there almost no disciples? After all, if this is what it takes to be a disciple of Christ, there are not many who have paid the price. Yet there are many disciples. How can this be?

The answer is God's imputation of Christ's moral and judicial righteousness to us: *definitive sanctification*. Christ surrendered everything that He possessed to God the Father. He took nothing of marketable value onto the cross. His atoning sacrifice becomes ours. We conform ourselves to this standard imperfectly, but Christ's perfect conformity is our possession judicially. *Every redeemed disciple possesses Christ's perfect performance, judicially speaking*. His assignment is to imitate Christ's performance historically. The early disciples did this. We should, too.

The doctrine of *progressive sanctification* teaches that covenant-keepers are required to conform themselves in history to the perfect humanity of Christ.²¹ Their ability to do this is increased by their actual performance on the job, almost as muscles are strengthened through active use.

20. Chapter 20.

21. North, *Hierarchy and Dominion*, ch. 10:A:1.

RECOVERING WHAT WAS LOST

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:8–10).

The theocentric issue here is the grace of God in our rejoicing in accepting His grace. This is an aspect of sanctions: point four of the covenant.¹

A. A Lost Coin

This parable is placed in between two far more familiar parables: the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the prodigal son.² All three parables present the same theme: *the high value to God of recovering one lost sinner*. Jesus offered all three parables in response to the Pharisees' criticism: "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:1–2).

The woman had lost a coin. She still had nine. Her concern was with finding the lost coin, not preserving the nine. Why?

We assume that whatever we possess is physically secure. Normally, this is a correct assumption. There is continuity of ownership. But then comes a day when we lose part of what we had thought was secure. We then focus on the missing item. *Our main concern is the*

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapter 37.

recovery of what is now lost. This valuation is even clearer in the parable of the lost sheep. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (Luke 15: 4). The shepherd leaves behind the 99 other sheep. His concern is with the one lost sheep, which is under his care legally. It is now lost. He feels greater responsibility for that lost sheep than for the ones that never strayed. *The loss manifests his failure in stewardship.*

This indicates that men normally trust in God's providence or in some other force to protect the bulk of what they possess. They assume that things will probably go all right for the nine remaining coins or 99 remaining sheep. What bothers them is the missing item. They want to reassure themselves that the missing item is not permanently missing. *They want reassurance that all is fundamentally right with their world.* They go looking for the missing item. The recovery of that lost item concerns them more than the preservation of what they already possess. They do not like to suffer losses.

The fact that the owner went looking for the lost sheep, leaving 99 behind, indicates that he was confident about those 99. He assumed that they would not also wander off. So, he focused his efforts on recovering the lost sheep. If men expected additional disasters to fall on them, they would be far more concerned about protecting whatever remains of their possessions. But they are optimistic. They expect good times to persist. They have faith in the future. When they do not, that lost sheep had better be able to find his way back to the flock.

Men rely on God far more than most of them admit to themselves. They rely on the *continuity of ownership*. They assume that things will go well with them most of the time. This is why their loss concerns them. The loss is an anomaly: bad news in otherwise good times. They want to restore the status quo ante as a symbol of more good times to come. They feel the burden of the loss more than they feel the benefits of preservation. The loss testifies against them. They were careless. They do not want to be known as careless. So, when they recover what they had lost, they celebrate. They invite their friends to celebrate with them. But they remained silent about their loss until they recovered it.

Jesus said that this attitude toward lost souls is true of residents in heaven and angels. "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (v. 7). "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that

repenteth" (v. 10).

B. A Warning to the Pharisees

Jesus was criticizing the Pharisees. His goal was to save the lost. The Pharisees believed that they were among the saved. They knew that the tax collectors were lost. So did Jesus. Jesus also knew that the Pharisees were equally lost, but their hard hearts resisted His message of redemption.

He said that the recovery of one lost soul is worth more to God than the preservation of the righteous. This was an indirect assault on the self-righteous Pharisees. He was saying, "So, you think you are righteous and not in need of grace. Very well. But this does not prove that God is more interested in you than in these tax collectors. He is more interested in recovering them than worrying about you." The same message is conveyed in the other two parables. The lost coin and the recovered son were the focus of concern of the persons who were responsible for their care. Their primary focus of concern was not the nine coins or the outwardly responsible older brother.

Had the Pharisees admitted their own need of salvation, they would have self-consciously entered the category of "lost sheep." They would have perceived their need of a searching shepherd. Their resistance to this self-awareness was evidence of their lost condition. The tax collectors welcomed Jesus: "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him" (v. 1). The Pharisees and the scribes pulled away because of the presence of the tax collectors. In the parable of the prodigal son, the older brother pulled away, too.

The three parables may appear to be about the restoration of the previously redeemed, as if men could fall from grace. But this is not what they are about. They are about a category of humanity: fallen man. Adam became lost. His heirs are born in a lost condition. These are stories of redemption.

Were the 99 sheep saved? Did the nine coins represent the redeemed? Was the elder brother regenerate? If we compare the elder brother to the 99 sheep, we see that the brother was rebellious. He did not love his younger brother. He resented the celebration that their father organized. He thought he deserved this public celebration for having dutifully remained at home. The seemingly faithful elder brother was in need of redemption.

The *parable of the lost sheep* is a parable about the *lost* 99. The lost

sheep was found. The residents of heaven rejoiced when the shepherd restored it to the flock. The restored sheep represented visible sinners who gained redemption. Ultimately, it represented the gentiles. While the 99 sheep were still formally under the authority of the shepherd, they were judicially like the elder brother. They were in need of salvation. They just did not know this.

The text says, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (v. 7). These self-righteous 99 were the Pharisees. They were in need of repentance. Jesus had told them this at previous feast. "And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:29–32). All men are sick, Jesus had implied, including the Pharisees. So, the righteous 99 were not really righteous. They were merely self-righteous. But even if the Pharisees had been righteous, this would not have changed Jesus' statement. The residents of heaven really do rejoice more over the redemption of one unredeemed person than the preservation of the redeemed. In this sense, they are the opposite of the elder brother.

C. Sunk Costs and Reservation Demand

1. *The Pain of Loss*

The pain of loss is exceeded by the joy of recovery.³ The recovery calls for a party. The owner has the feeling that his affairs have been restored to their previous condition, which is as it should be. Things are even better than before.

The shepherd did not estimate the value of his time before he began his search for the lost sheep. He did not consider purchasing a replacement sheep, any more than the disappointed father imagined adopting a replacement son. There was a personal relation involved. This went beyond monetary calculation. The shepherd had compas-

3. This is one of the most important discoveries of behavioral economics. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Choices, Values, and Frames" (1983), in *Choices, Values and Frames*, eds. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 1.

sion on the single lost sheep, for the sake of that sheep. The father had the same emotional commitment to his lost son.

The woman searched diligently for the lost coin. It was an inanimate object. Jesus indicated that the same principle was operative: concern for the lost. There is something about the lost object that makes it special in the eyes of the owner. It had been under the authority of the owner; now it is lost. This breaking of the bond of ownership bothered the woman. She did not estimate the value of lost time spent in looking for the coin. She did not ask whether her time might be more profitably employed on the job. She wanted that lost coin back in her possession.

2. Sunk Costs

The economist argues that the rational person should not concern himself about the wealth he has lost. The only question worth asking is this: *How can I recover the economic equivalent of this lost wealth least expensively?* What is gone is gone. Let bygones be bygones, the economist says. There is no use crying over spilled milk. Instead, find a way to get replacement milk at a competitive price.

The libertarian economist Murray Rothbard once bought an ice cream cone. His wife bought a different flavor. He asked her to let him have a bite of her ice cream. He liked it much better than his. He walked over to the trash container, dropped his ice cream cone into it, and bought one like hers. She was appalled. "Murray, you just threw away your money!" He corrected her. "I spent my money when I bought the cone. My money was gone. I could not get it back. I wanted a cone like yours more than I wanted either my original cone or the money I just paid to buy the new one." This is the economist's concept of sunk costs, i.e., irrecoverable costs. What is past is unrecoverable.

The doctrine of sunk costs dismisses as *economically* uninformed a major *psychological* fact: if a man loses money in an investment, he wants to make the money back in that same investment. This, he thinks, will prove to himself that he was not wrong in making it in the first place. But this strategy ignores the fact that he should have waited to buy the investment until its price went down. He could have bought more for the same price. The market has already imposed a loss on him, whether or not he admits this by selling the asset and buying what he hopes is a better investment. He could also have bought more of the substitute investment with the money he spent on the invest-

ment that dropped in price.

The loser does not want to admit publicly that he made a mistake by buying too early. He wants to validate his original decision. Is this rational? In His dealings with Old Covenant Israel, God implied that sometimes it is rational. God told Moses that He wanted to destroy Israel and raise up a new nation for Moses to lead. Do not do this, Moses replied; your reputation is at stake. “And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (Ex. 32:11–14). Better to bear with the existing nation than to raise up a new one, Moses advised God. Why? Because God’s reputation was at stake. God should not allow Himself to become regarded publicly as a loser, Moses said. Reputation counts.

Was Rothbard a loser for having selected a less preferable flavor of ice cream? Yes. But his loss was insufficient to justify eating that cone, he believed—and what he believed counted. He had available a cheap replacement: cone number two. He tossed away cone number one, and bought a replacement. His wife thought he was being wasteful. She regarded this public loss as too great. He did not.

3. Defending Our Dreams

An element of ownership can sometimes be highly personal. Our dreams, expectations, and self-worth are bound up in certain tangible possessions. A man may be willing to fight an intruder in order to defend a trophy whose market price is surely not larger than the value of the life insurance policy that his wife owns on his life. The same man may not fight to defend a full wallet from a thief. He probably would not fight to keep an antique that his wife bought that is worth more than the trophy or the money in his wallet. *His commitment to the defense of his property depends on the dreams that he has for the respect-*

ive pieces of property. The deciding factor may not be an item's market value. "It's the principle of the thing! This is mine!"

The modern economist tends to discount to zero the economic value of the owner's dreams. What matters, he argues, is the market price of the item. But the owner's dreams may be bound up in a piece of property, and even though the market will not pay him for this value, his demand to retain ownership—called *reservation demand*⁴—registers in his subjective valuation. He will fight to defend it or pay a great deal above its market price to remain its owner.

High reservation demand is what God has for certain members of the lost. He cares deeply about those people whom He has picked out to redeem from among the disinherited family of Adam (Eph. 1:3–7). He is like the good shepherd who seeks for one lost sheep. He is like the father who rejoices when his lost son returns. He is like the woman who locates her lost coin.

Rothbard did not care deeply about his ice cream cone. He had no dreams invested in owning it. He preferred the taste of his wife's ice cream. He tossed his into the trash. His wife could not understand this. She thought that his purchase of that ice cream cone implied some sort of commitment on his part.

The doctrine of sunk costs should not be used as an explanatory device without some consideration of reservation demand. God had a reservation demand for Israel for many centuries. He still retains it.⁵

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? (Rom. 11:11–12).

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the first-fruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches (Rom. 11:15–16).

Israel in Moses' day meant more to God than the first ice cream cone meant to Rothbard. Rothbard had made no public promises re-

4. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), pp. 247–48, 253. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

garding his ice cream cone. His reputation was not tied up in eating that cone. As soon as he tasted his wife's ice cream, his reservation demand dropped precipitously. But God was jealous about His good reputation. He was unwilling to toss Old Covenant Israel into the trash until there was a replacement heir available for His kingdom: the church of Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:43).

Economist Joseph Schumpeter argued in 1942 that when property becomes depersonalized in the form of corporate shares in the stock market, the owners' will to fight in order to defend such ownership is reduced. "Dematerialized, defunctionalized and absentee ownership does not impress and call forth moral allegiance as the vital form of property did."⁶ He believed that this shift had reduced men's willingness to defend capitalism from socialists. The "Nashville Agrarians" who wrote *I'll Take My Stand* in 1930 understood this aspect of the ownership of tangible property. They were not economists. They did not use such terminology as "non-monetary reservation demand."

Conclusion

Jesus used three parables to show that God cares for lost souls. The redemption of one lost soul provokes more rejoicing in heaven than the preservation of many redeemed souls, let alone self-righteous souls. God retains high reservation demand for His elect. He does not intend to replace them in the book of life. He does not regard all mankind as a sunk cost, completely unrecoverable, gone forever.

The underlying theme of all three parables is the spiritually lost condition of the Pharisees, who regarded themselves as members of God's faithful flock. Jesus was warning them not to take comfort in their imagined status as saved sheep. They needed redemption.

6. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1942), p. 142.

RESTORED SONSHIP AND INHERITANCE

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (Luke 15:11–24).

The theocentric issue here is the grace of God in our rejoicing in accepting His grace. This has to do with sanctions: point four of the covenant.¹

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. Premature Inheritance

The parable of the prodigal son involves the economic issue of inheritance. The theocentric issue is God in His office as Father. He owns an estate. Who will inherit this estate? When? On what legal basis?

The younger son was unwilling to wait for his inheritance. He wanted it immediately. He had no self-discipline. He did not imagine that he had anything more to learn from his father. He had little future-orientation. He did not understand the power of compound interest to multiply wealth. He was ready to dissipate his inheritance.

His father granted his request. This seems to have been unwise. The son was not ready for this increased responsibility. But the father let him have his way. Some adult children learn only the hard way. Their parents decide not to protect them from their own folly. This is very risky, but it is sometimes the best option.

The son left the family estate and went to a far country. In other parables, it is the owner who goes to a far country, leaving the servants behind. But here, the son leaves. The son then wasted his inheritance. He did not look to the future. He was intensely present-oriented. He did not budget his money. He did not find employment to replace what he was spending. Then judgment came on the foreign land: famine. He possessed no reserves. He found himself in poverty and great distress.

He took a job feeding swine. For a Jewish audience, the message of the parable was clear: the son could fall no lower on the social scale without becoming a criminal. Caring for swine was a suitable job only for gentiles. He had become a hired hand to a gentile. But it was even worse. The job was poorly paid. He was not given food before he went into the field. He was worse off than the swine.

He was not dead yet. He was facing starvation, but he might still possess sufficient strength to walk home. He was running out of time and strength. He had to make a decision, fast: stay with the pigs or leave for home immediately. He could not be sure he could get home if he waited. The day of decision had arrived. He remembered that his father's servants were well fed. He decided that he would rather be a well-fed servant in his father's household than a hungry one in a foreigner's household.

At long last, he began to think ahead. He came up with a plan. "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have

sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” Thinking ahead was a new experience for him. So was humility. He recognized that he had been a rebel against God and his father. The text says that he had come to himself (v. 17). That is, he had come to his senses. He now recognized what he had done. He had sinned before God and his father. He was now suffering the consequences of his sin. At home, the consequences would be far less painful. He would have food and a roof over his head. But the price would be high. If he wanted food to swallow, he would have to swallow his pride. He would have to acknowledge that he was not worthy to be called his father’s son. This recognition marked his psychological acceptance of his redemption. This mental act of ethical subordination, he would soon learn, would become the judicial basis of the restoration of his original sonship, his transition from an economically self-disinherited son to a judicially restored son.

He made his journey home. His father saw him coming. “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (v. 20). His father took the initiative. He did not wait. He did not play the role of a stern parent. He did not lay down the law. He showed grace to the prodigal. He let him know that he was welcome back into his household.

The son followed his original plan of reconciliation. He did not use his father’s gracious welcome to negotiate a better deal for himself. He confessed his sin. He said that he was not worthy to be called the man’s son (v. 21). *This verbal confession marked his restoration to sonship.* But his father acted as though he had not heard this confession, though obviously he had heard it. In fact, this confession made the father’s next steps a legal confirmation of the son’s redemption. He called his servants and had them bring a robe and a ring and shoes. These were tokens of faithful sonship. Then he told them to bring a fattened calf for a feast. It was time to celebrate. There had been a covenantal resurrection. “For this my son was dead, and is alive again” (v. 24). It was not merely his return (deed) that had proven his sonship. It was his confession of repentance (word). “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34:18).

B. The Elder Brother

The parable's focus then shifts to the elder brother.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found (vv. 25–32).

He had been in the field, working. He had not been at home to greet his younger brother. No servant had been sent to invite him to the festivities. His father had been too excited to do this, apparently. The elder brother felt neglected.

He deeply resented the feast on behalf of brother. He refused to go in. So, his father came out to him, taking the initiative once again. The brother complained: “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf” (vv. 29–30). He was self-righteous. He reminded his father of the obvious: he had remained faithful, while the younger brother had been unfaithful. He had stayed on the job, while his brother spent the money on fast women. Yet the wastrel now has a feast thrown on his behalf. This just wasn't fair!

The elder brother was looking to the past. His father was looking to the future. The former wastrel was a wastrel no longer. What was in the past was gone. The future now offered hope: family restoration. *The issue for the father was covenantal.*

The elder brother was also looking to the future. The return of the prodigal might threaten his own inheritance: another division of the estate. *The issue for the elder brother was economic.*

His father understood his fears, so he sought to allay them. “And

he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine” (v. 31). The father had nothing left to give to the younger brother. The rest of the estate belonged to the elder brother, who had legal title to the double portion, according to the Mosaic law. “If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his” (Deut. 21:15–17).²

Jesus’ listeners would have understood the Mosaic law governing the inheritance of sons. They would have understood that the father in the parable would not defraud the elder brother, for the father was a righteous man. They would have seen that the elder brother was in fact mentally accusing his father of being a lawbreaker who much preferred the younger brother to him, and who was contemplating the theft of the elder brother’s portion.

The primary issue was not inheritance. That had been settled when the younger brother received his portion. *The primary issue was the covenantal restoration of the family.* The younger brother had returned. His admission of guilt constituted his restoration into the family. This called for a celebration, his father told the elder brother. “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (v. 32).

Nevertheless, the issue of inheritance remained an open question. There was still the possibility of *a legal disinheritance of the elder brother.* This, in fact, is what this parable is all about.

C. The Covenantal Economics of the Parable

To understand this parable correctly, we must first understand that the covenant has vertical economic relationships as well as horizontal. Covenantal service takes place within this two-fold framework. I have discussed this in the Introduction to my commentary on I Timothy, *Hierarchy and Dominion*.³ Covenantal service—the gratuit-

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Introduction:E.

ous provision of valuable resources to recipients—can therefore be either vertical (within a covenantal institution, i.e., church or family, but not the state, which legitimately offers no positive sanctions⁴) or horizontal (from inside the covenantal institution to those outside).⁵ The same two-fold relationship also applies to non-covenantal service: vertical (charitable gift: gratuitous) and horizontal (voluntary exchange: benefit-seeking).⁶

The younger son had regarded sonship solely as a deserved economic inheritance. He was the recipient of a steady flow of support from his father. This was insufficient, he believed. He wanted all of his inheritance in a lump sum immediately, before his father died, just as Isaac had received his inheritance after he married Rebekah, but before Abraham died (Gen. 25:5). Unlike Isaac, he had no wife and acknowledged no family responsibilities.

As soon as he received his inheritance, he departed from his father's house. He went to a foreign country, which in the context of the parable meant a country with a rival confession and a rival god. He found friends there, who remained his friends only for as long as his inheritance flowed to them. He squandered all of his inheritance on celebrating with his party-going friends. Then the days of judgment came: a famine. His friends departed from his presence when the free flow of funds ceased, just as he had departed from his father's presence when the free flow of funds ceased. *They treated him just as he had treated his father.* But the light had not yet dawned. He did not yet see that he had been repaid in the same currency as he had paid.

He did not seek charity from foreigners. He sought employment. He asked only to receive payment in exchange for services rendered. This was non-covenantal mutual service. He was hired to serve the needs of pigs. He became a mediator between a pig farmer and his pigs—not a good job for a Jew. Here, he was treated worse than the pigs he was serving.

2. *The Flow of Funds*

The light then dawned. The contrast between his father and his present employer was stark. His father was a better employer, who paid his workers well. In the *mutual horizontal service of the market-*

4. *Ibid.*, Introduction:F.

5. *Idem.*

6. *Ibid.*, Introduction:G.

place, his father was an honorable man, who treated his employees as men rather than as lower than swine. “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” (Luke 15:17). He headed home, anxious to become a hired servant in his father’s house, anxious to enter into non-covenantal service: a mutual exchange of work for food. He would not ask for special treatment as a son. He would not ask for charity. His inheritance was gone, but he could still do an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. The former party boy was ready to go to work. His maturity had begun.

In response, his father treated him with a fatted calf and a party. The son was once again the recipient of a flow of funds. But this time, it was clear to one and all that the downward flow of funds was based exclusively on the father’s grace, not on the son’s legal entitlement to an inheritance or even to a job. The father was publicly announcing the re-establishment of the legal relation of sonship, a relationship that could be re-established only by the return of the son to his father’s house.⁷ The son had remained a son, but a self-disinherited son. He had squandered his inheritance. He was therefore not entitled to a fatted calf, but, purely out of grace, he now received one. The father demonstrated publicly that *sonship is more than a legal claim on one’s economic inheritance*. The son, who had previously seen sonship merely as economic inheritance—a legal claim on future assets—now saw it as something more.

His elder brother didn’t. The elder brother suffered from the same covenantal blindness that had afflicted his younger brother. He saw sonship as a flow of funds downward. He was angry. He refused to attend the party. His father came to him and asked why. “And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends” (Luke 15:29). In short, where was his fatted calf? Sonship, in his view, is earned. In his brother’s view, it had been owed. But, in both viewpoints, sonship was viewed as a flow of funds downward: no flow of

7. Maurice Malkin chose this title for his memoirs: *Return to My Father’s House* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1972). The son of an Orthodox Jew, born in Russia, he and his family immigrated to America in 1914. In 1919, he became one of the founders of the American Communist Party. His father had warned his sons to avoid Communism, but two of Malkin’s older brothers joined the Russian Communist Party before he came to America. One of them died in Stalin’s purges in the 1930’s. In 1939, Malkin left the Party and became an active anti-Communist thereafter.

funds; therefore, no sonship. Both sons wanted to celebrate with their friends at their father's expense. They wanted to receive their inheritance prematurely. The younger son saw his inheritance as owed: *blood covenant*. "I'm your son. Give me my money." The older son saw his inheritance as earned: *works religion*. "I have worked hard. You gave my brother his inheritance, and he wasted it on partying. Now he gets another party. Give me my money." *Neither son saw sonship as a matter of grace.*

This parable was a verbal body blow in the solar plexus of Israel's works religion.

D. A Warning to the Jews

In the parable, the elder brother represented Israel. The younger brother represented the gentiles. The younger brother had become a covenantal gentile by abandoning his father's household and living among gentiles, wasting his inheritance inside their economy. He had transferred his share of the family inheritance to gentiles. He had decapitalized the family's future, a grave evil in Israel: an assault on the family name.⁸ By adopting the gentiles' ways, he had broken covenant with his father and his father's God.

Now the young man had returned. He had abandoned the covenant-breaking gentile world. He had come to his senses. He recognized what he had done. He had sinned against God and his father. He was ready to humble himself and live as a servant in the household of faith.

The elder brother was being asked by his father to welcome a recent convert into the family. This gentile was asking to serve in the household of covenant-keepers. He was ready to become the judicial equivalent of a Gibeonite (Josh. 9). He was not requesting full inheritance. He was requesting merely servanthship status. He was not asking to be adopted back into the family. He was asking only to have a place to live and work and eat.

The father made it clear that the younger brother's act of repentance had re-established the ex-wastrel's sonship in his eyes. But sonship had not re-established his economic inheritance, which had been collected in advance and spent. The younger son had no legal claim on his brother's inheritance.

If the elder brother were now to recognize this, and publicly rejoice at the restoration of the family, he would identify himself as a

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 64.

faithful son. But there was an implied warning: *rebellion against the father could take other forms than partying*. It was not necessary to go to a far country to abandon the family name. A son could become a spiritual prodigal while staying on the job. He could continue to regard his inheritance as something owed by his father: if not by blood, then by works. He could refuse to welcome his brother back into the household, thereby breaking up the now-restored family. He could break his father's heart by refusing to rejoice at the restoration of his brother.

Here is the tremendous irony of this parable. The younger brother was looking only to become a hired servant: payment for services rendered, i.e., a horizontal economic relationship with the father. This restored him to sonship: covenantal hierarchy. The elder brother resented his brother's restoration, but by viewing his own inheritance as lawful payment for services rendered, was willing to relegate his legal status of son to that of hired servant, i.e., disinherit himself. The self-disinherited son was now willing to become a hired servant in his father's house, and thereby became a son through humility. This was achieved through deed (his return to his father's house) and word: "I'm not worthy." The inheriting son was willing to abandon his position as an inheriting son, and therefore become a hired servant, through deed (his refusal to enter his father's house) and word: "I'm worthy."

This parable reinforced Jesus' story of the lost sheep. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (Luke 15:4). That story also ended with a feast. "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15:6). If a man rejoices at the return of a lost sheep, how much more at the return of a lost son!

The Jews would inherit the double portion, but only if they remained faithful sons. If they went into spiritual rebellion—a stay-at-home rebellion—then they would forfeit title to their inheritance. They would be disinherited. The younger brother would then inherit the rebellious brother's estate. This was what Jesus prophesied to the Jews: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

In the parable of the lost sheep, the owner represents God. So does the father of the prodigal. Jesus was saying that God takes the initiative in searching for the one lost sheep. He also takes the initiative in

restoring the now-humble son to visible sonship. The Jews were being told not to overestimate the importance in God's eyes of sheep that do not wander or sons who do not wander. The recovery of lost sheep and lost sons is high in God's priorities. The party begins when the lost are found.

Conclusion

The parable of the prodigal son pointed to the future: the restoration of all gentiles who will humble themselves before God. It also warned of a coming disinheritance: self-righteous Israel, who would resent the re-entry of gentiles into the status of sons. To maintain their inheritance—the double portion—Israelites would have to acknowledge that they, too, had once been gentiles, and abandoned gentiles at that. Without God's gracious adoption of the nation, it would have perished (Ezek. 16). What God had done with Israel, He would do again: adopt gentiles. What God had done to the gentiles through Adam, He would do to Israel if Israel continued to rebel: disinherit.

The deciding issue of final inheritance is one's willingness to be present at the feast (Matt. 22:1–15). "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Rev. 19:7–9). This would be the deciding issue for Old Covenant Israel's inheritance in history: to celebrate the arrival of gentiles into the family of faith. God said, "Let's party!" Old Covenant Israel refused. It would have been Israel's party (Acts 2) to which gentiles were invited (Acts 10). That party's invitation ended in A.D. 70.⁹ Israel still has a standing invitation to a party, but it is now a gentile party to which Israel is invited (Rom. 11).¹⁰ RSVP.

9. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

10. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

UNRIGHTEOUS MAMMON

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? (Luke 16:1–12).

The theocentric principle here is God as the judge, the bringer of sanctions: point four of the covenant.¹

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. Joint Ventures in Fraud

This is by far the most difficult to interpret of all of Jesus' parables.² It appears only in Luke.

The parable seems to recommend cleverness involving deliberate embezzlement. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (v. 9). Yet this message is utterly opposed to the overall message of Luke, namely, the danger of mammon. How can we make sense of this parable? By correctly identifying "everlasting habitations."

The parable tells the story of a rich man. As it unfolds, we find that this man is so enamored with self-interest as an ideal of human action that he praises a steward who had tried to defraud him. "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely" (v. 8a). The Greek word for "commend" is elsewhere translated as "praise" or "laud."³ The rich man was clearly unscrupulous. He recognized in his steward a fellow crook. The steward had offered kickbacks to the owner's debtors, so that they might reward him after his day of reckoning. Discovering this strategy, the owner praised the steward. The steward had done what he himself might have done, had he been in a similarly tight situation. His steward was almost as clever as he was. His main weakness was that he got caught.

Why would the rich man keep such a servant on his payroll? The obvious reason is that the steward could be called upon in the future to defraud others on behalf of his employer. Of course, the rich man would have to monitor the steward even more carefully than he had done in the past. But the steward might see the light and become faithful to his employer in his unscrupulous activities. After all, his master had discovered what he had done. It would be unwise for the steward to assume that he would not find out in the future. So, a mutually profitable arrangement was possible, one crook to another.

This parable offers a description of a criminal hierarchy. The person at the top must defend his interests from his subordinates. He must monitor them carefully. They are ready to defraud him. But their skills can be put to profitable uses. They can become agents of fraud.

In many of the parables, the rich man represents God. In this par-

2. Kistemaker called it the most puzzling of all the parables. Simon Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 228.

3. Romans 15:11; I Cor. 11:2; 17, 22.

able, the rich man represents Satan. He, too, is the master of a household. His servant is both incompetent and unscrupulous. Yet the master praises the servant. He is quite willing to employ such an unethical person. He does not intend to punish him or ask him to change his ways. He prefers these ways.

In the 1967 comedy film, *Bedazzled*, Peter Cook plays the devil. Cook's long-term partner in comedy, Dudley Moore, plays a man ready to exchange his soul for seven wishes. Cook initially brings Moore to his office, which is located in a below-street-level tavern. The tavern is filled with obnoxious characters: the devil's employees. One man is yelling. "Anger," Cook says. Another is asleep, his head on the bar. "Sloth," Cook says. "I just can't get reliable help," he complains. "It may have something to do with the wages."

Satan cannot trust his subordinates at anything like zero price. This makes any delegation of authority risky to him. Nevertheless, he must delegate authority in order to extend his influence. He is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. He must rely on others: the division of labor. So, he must balance his need to monitor everything they do, which is impossible for him, with his desire to extend his power. When a creature attempts to be God, he creates problems for himself.

B. Eternal Habitations

"And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (v. 9). Jesus here used sarcasm to make His point. He had already revealed the motivation of unrighteous mammon: *personal advancement through corruption*. He now tells His listeners to become friendly with corruption. Trust those who will defraud you. So, when you fail in the end, they will welcome you with open arms into their everlasting habitations.

There is no discussion in the Old Testament of eternity. Jesus introduced the doctrine of hell: a place of permanent agony for the departed souls of covenant-breakers (Luke 16:19–25).⁴ When He spoke here of everlasting habitations, He had in mind the world beyond the grave. He was not speaking of heaven. He was speaking of the permanent place of residence of morally corrupt people.

Among His listeners were Pharisees. "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him" (v. 14).

4. Chapter 40.

Once again, Jesus was identifying the practices of His loudest critics, the nation's religious leaders. He was warning His listeners about the fraudulent dealings of His critics. They did not practice what they preached. In another context, we read: "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt. 23:1-4).

To speak of being received into the everlasting habitations of unrighteous mammon is to speak of the tender mercies of the devil and his host. Trust unrighteous mammon, Jesus implied, in the same way that you would trust a servant who defrauded you after he had wasted the resources that you had entrusted to his administration. In short, do not trust unrighteous mammon.

C. Injustice

There are two ethical standards: faithfulness and injustice. Whatever men do in small matters reflects their ethical commitment. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (v. 10). We can indirectly observe a man's larger outlook by means of his specific performance in small matters.

There is no doubt that Jesus was criticizing the unjust steward. He was also criticizing the employer. The evil that the unjust steward did reflected the ethical commitment of both himself and the employer.

Then what is the meaning of this verse? "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (v. 11). Does it mean that the righteous person should mimic the unjust steward? The employer regarded the efforts of his steward as wise. He seemed pleased. Is injustice in this case the pursuit of the employer's immediate preference (collecting whatever was owed to him) or his long-term preference (defrauding others)?

Jesus sided with the employer against his debtors. Jesus did not praise the unjust steward's acts of self-interested fraud. Being faithful to unrighteous mammon means adhering to the letter of contracts. Being faithful to the unjust employer means collecting whatever was owed on behalf of the owner.

A righteous steward's adherence to contracts is what secures his own possessions. "And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (v. 12). The unrighteous steward had sought to advance his own position by deliberately short-changing his employer. "And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given" (Mark 4:24).

Conclusion

The parable of the unjust steward warns against fraudulent dealings. It also affirms competence as an aspect of faithfulness. The unjust steward began as an incompetent steward: ". . . the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods." The Greek word means "wasted" in the sense of "scattered." The steward had squandered the master's assets.

This parable uses sarcasm, which has created confusion in the minds of interpreters. Jesus said, "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (v. 9). The everlasting habitations of the unrighteous are not where a covenant-keeper wishes to reside.

The parable recommends faithfulness to an unrighteous master. "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" If a person defrauds an unrighteous master, he himself is unrighteous. In doing so, he has placed his own possessions at risk. "And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"

RIVAL MASTERS, RIVAL KINGDOMS¹

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Luke 16:13).

The theocentric focus of this passage is service to God. A person must serve either God or mammon. He has no third option. There is no neutrality. The legitimate goal is service to God. This is an aspect of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.²

A. What Is Mammon?

Mammon is man's greed. The Greek word can also be translated "confidence." Of all the false gods honored by covenant-breaking men throughout history, mammon has been by far the most common. In Isaiah's day, this god of abundance was undermining men's faith in God. "Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant" (Isa. 56:12). Ezekiel castigated Israel for having adopted the chief sins of Sodom, which were the sins of mammon worship. "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ezek. 16:49). The people of Sodom had sought and achieved the lifestyle of the rich. This

1. This is adapted from chapter 14 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

led to the city's destruction when these sins of autonomy led to flagrant covenant-breaking in other areas (Gen. 19:4–6).

Men usually trust in the things which they accumulate. They worship those aspects of the creation that are under their authority. What do I mean by worship? Above all, I mean “sacrifice for.” That to which you sacrifice your life—your time, your dreams, your reputation—is your god (Rom. 12:1).³ You invest your emotions and efforts in this god. You also expect something in return. It might be happiness, pleasure, fame, power, respect, or any of mankind's long list of personal goals. Men sacrifice to their gods for the sake of rewards—positive sanctions.⁴ Men ask themselves, “What's in it for me?” Then they decide which god to worship. *A god that offers no rewards is not taken seriously.*

The worship of any god involves making estimates. “Which rewards are worth sacrificing for? Which rewards are actually available? What is the likelihood of non-payment by the god? What is the past performance of the god in question? How much is expected of me? What happens if I promise to pay but fail to deliver?”

Then there is the question of loyalty. “Is there a bond other than legal between me and this god? Is there a personal relationship? Is there grace? Does this god extend mercy to all of his worshipers?”

A god that has no servants is not a god. To gain what man wants from his god, he must serve. He may receive something for nothing from a gracious god, but not everything for nothing. No god extends all of his blessings gratuitously. Jesus made this plain in this passage: choose wisely which god to serve.

B. Jealous Gods

The Old Covenant repeatedly warned men that the God of the Bible is a jealous God. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex. 20:5).⁵ “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 4.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

34:14). “For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24). “God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies” (Nahum 1:2). He tolerates the worship of no rival gods.

Jesus made it clear in this passage that the gods in question need not be physical idols or demons or the fantasies of men. All rival gods boil down to one: mammon. They may be supernatural gods, or gods of the marketplace, but they must offer men rewards for service. Men pursue their own goals through service to something that can reward them. The God of the Bible can surely reward men. On their own authority, rival gods promise to reward men. This promise is a lie. These other gods are nothing apart from the one true God. They are all creatures. They possess no autonomous authority. They have only the scraps of power which God grants to them for His own purposes. “For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods” (Ps. 95:3).

God and mammon are mutually exclusive, Jesus warned. Neither god tolerates the claims of the other. Each comes before man with a claim: “Worship me, and I will reward you.” The God of the Bible makes His claim exclusive. Mammon excludes only God, because God excludes mammon. God and mammon do not tolerate each other’s claims. God’s exclusivism is intolerable for mammon. Mammon’s polytheism is intolerable to God. Mammon may publicly invite men to worship both him and God, but the invitation is spurious. Mammon treats God as if God were one among many. God rejects all such challenges to His exclusive authority.

So, men face a decision. In which god will they put their trust? Which will they serve faithfully in their quest for rewards? Which god’s name will be on their tongues and in their hearts? They cannot consistently serve both.

C. Worship as Freedom from Worry

In the parallel passage in Matthew 6, Jesus added: “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (Matt. 6:25).⁶ This is odd language. The whole point of worship is to gain rewards. Here is Jesus, telling His listeners that they should take no thought about what they

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 14.

shall possess, from life itself to food, drink, and clothing. Did He mean that such things are not important? On the contrary, they are very important. Life is surely important, and life is sustained by food, drink, and clothing. What is *not* important, He said, is *worrying* about such matters. It does no good to worry, for neither man nor mammon has any ability to gain them on his own authority or by his own efforts.

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Matt. 6:26–32).

Our Father in heaven knows our needs. Is this not enough? When He calls us into His service, He provides the tools of this service. The tools of service are the very rewards that men seek. Conclusion: seek to serve; stop seeking the tools of service. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:33–34).⁷ This passage lays it on the line. *Our first priority should be the kingdom of God.* This is what we are supposed to seek. All the other things that are presented before us as objects worth seeking are afterthoughts, or better put, *tools of more effective service.* They come as part of God’s program of worldwide dominion. *Because God demands complete servitude, He provides His servants with the implements of comprehensive service.* All of these things shall be added unto us as rewards for faithful service. But everything that we receive from God adds to our responsibility. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48b).⁸ We *receive more* in order that we can *achieve more.* The kingdom of God thereby

7. *Ibid*, ch. 15.

8. Chapter 28.

extends its influence across the earth.

An expanding kingdom implies growth and development in history. *As the kingdom of God grows, it extends the division of labor.* More hands and minds are brought into His kingdom. More servants mean greater wealth for every servant, for population growth allows greater output per unit of resource input. This is the blessing of the division of labor. As dedicated servants of God are added to the kingdom, day by day, the kingdom of God gains knowledge and wealth, as the newcomers bring their skills and capital in with them. The wealth of the kingdom increases. This means that there is less and less to worry about. *The safety net of God's kingdom is there to catch any man if he falls.*

Worrying about a lack of food and raiment is like worrying about one's lack of height. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" It does no good to worry about such matters. God is the source of all of these blessings. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1: 17).⁹

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." These are among the most difficult words in the Bible to accept emotionally. When we find someone who lives in terms of them, we generally refer to the person as a saint. Yet Jesus spoke these words to a crowd, not to an intimate circle of initiates. He made it clear that all of His followers are to cease worrying about their economic condition. *The greater their faith, the less their worry.* The mark of an immature faith is worry about economic matters, or even a life-and-death sickness situation. It is all in God's hands. God is sovereign; man is not. God is sovereign; mammon is not.

D. The Religion of More

Mammon has a kingdom. This religion is the religion of never-ending more. He who worships at the shrine of more can never be satisfied. He is addicted to more as a heroin addict is addicted to heroin. C. S. Lewis once wrote that it would be a terrible curse to eat food that makes us hungry. Yet mammon's food is precisely this kind

9. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 35.

of hunger-producing food.

In the 1960s, there was a television commercial for a brand of potato chip in which Burt Lahr, the actor who became famous as the cowardly lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, was dressed in a devil's suit. He holds a bag of the potato chips. He reaches in and takes one out. "Bet you can't eat just one," he says to the viewer.¹⁰ The imagery implied evil—forbidden fruit. Yet it was a light-hearted ad; it used a lovable comedian as the devil. It implied that it was perfectly all right to eat more than one. How much more, the ad did not say. But if you are in business to sell potato chips, you surely want to get people to eat lots more than one chip per sitting. The advertising jingle for Schaeffer's beer had a similar message: "Schaeffer's . . . is the . . . one beer to have . . . when you're having more than one!"

God has a kingdom. It grows over time. God's religion is the religion of *temporally bounded* more. God wants his kingdom to expand to the ends of the earth. Sin reigns nowhere that is not God's target for escalating victory. God seeks the redemption of sinners. As part of this goal, he provides His people with tools. They can use more tools. The spread of the gospel is not achieved free of charge. We live in a world of scarcity.

Then in what way is *mammon's religion of more* different from *God's religion of more*? In many ways. First, God's offer of more is trans-historical. He offers communion in eternity, a world beyond time. This goal is extremely future-oriented. Second, God's goal has a time limit: the final judgment (Rev. 20:14–15). Technically, so does mammon's: the heat death of the universe.¹¹ But this theoretical event is so far in the future that time might as well be endless succession. Third, God's goal is His glory. To achieve this, He grants grace to men: something for nothing. Mammon's deceptive goal is the glory of man, either collectively or individually. In fact, greed destroys men. It is Satan's seductive tool. Satan grants something for something and sometimes nothing for something, if he can get away with it. But he never grants something for nothing except as bait to lure men to destruction.

The ultimate reward is eternal life. Compared to this, gaining the whole world for oneself is less than nothing. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or

10. <http://bit.ly/LahrJustOne>

11. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).¹² So, the biblical pursuit of more has limits. We are warned that even if more meant everything in history, it would not be enough to compensate us for the loss of communion in eternity. This puts the goal of "more" into proper perspective. If everything on earth is insufficient, then "more for man" has temporal limits. Life is not unbounded.

It is sometimes said that men's desires are unbounded—infinite. Better put, given the limits on each man's life, his unfulfilled desires are beyond his means. At a lower price, he will buy more. But his greatest desire—more time—is surely bounded. He who forgets this fact in making daily decisions is a fool. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16–21).¹³

The desires of men are not limitless; they are merely beyond men's means]. Everything finite is bounded. Creation is finite. Creation is beyond our ability to measure, but God measures it. So, mammon's religion of limitless more is ultimately a religion of man's deification. It is a religion of "more for me in history." It is an assertion of each man's divinity.

E. Rival Economic Orders

A man who worships God seeks legitimate rewards for himself, but this search must be in the context of better service to God. Service to God through the creation is the mark of his salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10).

Free market economic theory relies on an analogous insight. A

12. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 35. See chapter 19, above.

13. Chapter 25.

man gains what he wants by selling at a profit to others. He must offer something they want in exchange for something he wants. Each party gains from the transaction. Most free market transactions are not zero-sum transactions.¹⁴ They are not examples of “I win; therefore, you lose.” A representative of one kingdom can lawfully do business with a representative of the other kingdom. Both parties benefit. Both parties expand their wealth. Each party extends his god’s kingdom. God can afford to let Satan extend his kingdom in this way because of the eschatological structure of inheritance. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).¹⁵ God’s people ultimately inherit the earth.¹⁶

Satan cannot be equally magnanimous to God. Eschatology is against him. He is running out of time. Satan operates with stolen goods. He is a squatter in history. He lured Adam into a transfer of allegiance and therefore a transfer of assets, but Adam owned nothing of his own. He was merely a designated steward of God’s assets. So, *mammonism is inherently a religion of theft: stealing from God to benefit man*. It is self-centered greed. Its ultimate goal is “more for me and less for you.” One man grows in stature by exceeding his fellows. While he may pursue “more for me and more for you, too” in the short run through voluntary exchange, he ultimately seeks to convert these gains into capital for covenant-breaking conquest. The religion of autonomy seeks to enslave others or kill them. This is what autonomy means: “The world serves me at its expense.”

Conclusion

Serving God means learning to be content with whatever God supplies today. The faithful man thinks, “there is more where this came from.” God will supply the tools that His people require for faithful service to Him at any point in time. These tools include such things as life, food, drink, and clothing. This outlook was the basis of Paul’s warning: “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be there-

14. An exception is a commodity futures transaction, where one investor gains at the expense of the other, and the broker gains from both.

15. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

16. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

with content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (I Tim. 6:7–11).¹⁷

What do covenant-keepers need? Whatever God gives them. No more than this? No more. Later, they may receive more, for the kingdom's sake and the covenant's confirmation. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).¹⁸

What do men want? Usually, they want more than God has given to them. In the modern world, where the worship of economic growth is the most widely practiced religion, men want far more than what God has given to them. They are trapped on mammon's treadmill to oblivion. Their religion is expressed on a ironic tee-shirt: "He who dies with the most toys, wins." Substitute any aspect of the creation for "toys," and the meaning is the same. It is a false religion. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).¹⁹

The top priority in this passage is service to God. The mark of this priority in our lives is contentment with whatever wealth God has provided. What must be avoided at all costs is service to mammon: the god of "more for me in history." This god of man's self-confidence and accumulation is a false god—the false god. It is the worship of man's would-be autonomy and therefore his would-be divinity. Men place confidence in the things they can accumulate. They sacrifice their lives to the accumulation of things. Yet the things that were supposed to serve man become his slave-drivers. Like Pharaoh's task-masters, these dumb idols cry out: "More! More! We demand more!" Most of all, they demand more of men's time, the irreplaceable resource.

17. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

18. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

19. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 35. See chapter 19, above.

ETERNAL REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented (Luke 16:19–25).

The theocentric issue here is sanctions: final judgment and eternal separation. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Doctrine of Hell

This parable—if it is a parable and not history—is the pre-eminent New Testament passage on the doctrine of hell as a place of torment after bodily death, a doctrine that is found only in the New Testament. This parable is found only in Luke.

The parable of the beggar and the rich man identifies the beggar as a righteous man. He gains entrance into heaven, which is here alone in the Bible called the bosom of Abraham. There is no doubt where the rich man resides: hell. It is a place of full consciousness and memory. It

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

is a place of fiery torment. “And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24).

This is the Bible’s most detailed passage on hell. Those who defend the idea of soul-sleep or unconsciousness after bodily death have serious exegetical problems with this text. They often quote from Ecclesiastes. But the New Testament has authority over the Old Testament. Jesus’ interpretations and insights have greater authority than Old Testament speculation, which was based on incomplete information. Jesus made it as clear as can be that the rich man was in pain, had memory of the past, and was able to communicate with Abraham. He was surely not unconscious.

Defenders of soul-sleep usually dismiss this passage as an example of literary hyperbole. How the image of being in flames serves as hyperbole for a condition of unconsciousness is never made clear. The reference to torment is consistent with Jesus’ parable of the overindebted servant who is cast into prison by the creditor. “And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Matt. 18:34–35).² An appeal to a literary technique does not solve their main problem: dismissing also the final place of torment after the bodily resurrection of all men. “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14–15). Hell is temporary. After the resurrection, things will get much worse for covenant-breakers. There will be eternal bodies that will suffer in flames.

The rich man is not named, but he has become known down through the ages as Dives (DEEvez), the Latin word for wealthy. The adjective “rich” that is found in Latin translations is “dives.”³ His way of earthly life had been sumptuous. The way of life for Lazarus had been the opposite. There has been a reversal of fortune. The rich man asks Abraham for some minimal token of physical comfort, to be supplied by the former beggar, who presumably must temporarily experi-

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

3. Simon Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 237n.

ence the pain of hell's environment on behalf of the rich man. This is not what he receives. He receives a theological lecture instead.

Luke's Gospel has an obvious bias against rich people. Matthew's Gospel contains many of the same parables, but it offers a less narrowly focused critique of covenant-breakers. Matthew's Gospel does not record this parable.

The rich man and the poor man exchange lifestyles when death intervenes. Similar reversals in history are a repeated theme in Luke.⁴ In this parable, he who had enjoyed creature comforts in history experiences creature discomforts in eternity. "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (v. 25). There is no initial indication of any covenantal distinction between the two men, other than their respective places of residence: a matter of covenantal sanctions.

B. A Matter of Faith

Later in the parable, the distinguishing feature is revealed: faith. The rich man initially asks for mercy for himself. He wants Lazarus to supply mercy. Impossible, says Abraham. "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (v. 26).

Next, the rich man appears to become magnanimous. "Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment" (vv. 27–28). If I cannot be comforted, he pleads, then at least warn my brothers. This request is a self-justifying attempt to deceive Abraham. If the rich man's five brothers deserve to hear from a resurrected dead man, then so had he. No comparable warning had come to him. So, why is he being unjustly tormented? Abraham sees through the deception. "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (v. 29). In short, they have exactly what the rich man had: authoritative witnesses, i.e., the writings of Moses and the prophets. The rich man had chosen in history not to pay sufficient attention to these witnesses.

On the contrary, the rich man is implicitly saying, this testimony was not sufficiently persuasive. It was not his fault that he did not un-

4. Chapters 1, 9.

derstand the message; it was the fault of God, who did not supply him with sufficiently persuasive evidence. “And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent” (v. 30). His brothers should have what he never had: a messenger from the grave. Abraham sees through the deception. “And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (v. 31). Jesus here alluded to His own death and resurrection, which would not persuade Israel to repent.

The distinction between Lazarus and the rich man was belief vs. disbelief. Lazarus had both understood and believed Moses and the prophets. The rich man had not. Jesus was making the point that His opponents were in the same blind condition that had afflicted the rich man. Even Jesus’ disciples were myopic in this regard. After His resurrection, He spoke harshly to the pair of disciples who had, unrecognized, accompanied Him on the road to Emmaus. “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25–27).

C. Riches and Covenantal Blindness

Jesus’ use of comparative wealth as the visible mark of the two rival covenants indicates the close correspondence between great wealth and covenant-breaking. This correspondence is not one to one, as He told the disciples (Luke 18:27). Nevertheless, it is close enough for making reliable judgments. “For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:25).⁵

Great tangible wealth fosters a man’s sense of autonomy. Moses had warned Israel: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:17–18).⁶ Tangible wealth also creates a sense of security. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an

5. Chapter 43.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 21, 22.

high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).⁷ It leads men to discount eternity too steeply. “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20).

Riches are a great snare because of their deceitfulness (Matt. 13:22).⁸ They fool men into elevating the temporal over the eternal. This error affects everything that rich people think and do. They can no longer think straight. Eventually, they can no longer speak straight (orthodoxy).

Conclusion

The parable of the beggar and the rich man testified against the Pharisees. This parable followed the parable of the unjust steward, which also testified against them. “And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him” (v. 14). Israel’s theologians had been taken in by the deceitfulness of riches. Jesus warned His listeners not to make the same mistake.

Hell is real. Avoid it. The way to avoid it is to take seriously Moses and the prophets. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead as a confirming testimony, but if a person refuses to believe Moses and the prophets, he will not believe the testimony regarding Christ’s resurrection.⁹

7. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 53.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

9. This is the great evil of the academic discipline known as higher criticism. It undermines men’s faith in Moses and the prophets. It therefore undermines men’s faith in Christ’s resurrection.

41

UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS¹

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow [think] not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do (Luke 17:7–10).

The theocentric issue here is service to God: hierarchy. This is point two of the biblical covenant.²

A. Man Begins in Debt

A servant works hard all day. He then comes in from the field. What does his master owe him for his day of service? Nothing yet. The servant's work day is not over. Now it is time for the servant to prepare the evening meal for the master, and serve it. Only then is he entitled to his own meal. Even then, he is not entitled to any special thanks. He has merely performed his duty.

Jesus made it clear in this parable that God owes men no special thanks for their labors on His behalf. *The cosmic Master is owed everything plus even more that men bring to Him as tokens of their appreciation.* Men have not done enough. Men cannot do enough. Everything that men do well for God is their minimum duty. And still,

1. Much of this chapter appeared first in Gary North, "Unprofitable Servants," *Biblical Economics Today*, VI (Feb./March 1983).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

they owe more.

From the beginning, every man is in God's debt. God has provided us with more than we deserve. He has given us life. We now deserve death. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). As the covenantal heirs of disinherited Adam, we are all dead men walking. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6).

Man is put in his proper place by the gospel. Man is identified as being in need of grace, which has come only through Jesus Christ. Until covenant-breaking man knows *what* he is in the eyes of God, he cannot understand *who* he is. Man is an unprofitable servant. All men except one are net consumers of God's resources. They are unprofitable. There has been only one exception in history: Jesus Christ. He turned a profit. Through His pre-resurrection life and death, He transferred this profit back to God on behalf of mankind. God therefore extends to all men unearned blessings. This is God's common grace.³ God extends eternal life to some people. This is God's special grace: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).⁴

God should not be expected to serve man. Man is expected to serve God. The master should not have to wait for his servant to finish his meal before enjoying his. But God's special grace has reversed this expected social order. All men will see this great reversal on judgment day. "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37).⁵

The master owns all of the assets that are used by the servant to produce an income. Without these assets, the servant would starve. The servant should be grateful to the master for having provided him with life-sustaining capital. He should know that he is in debt to the master.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndgc>)

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

5. Chapter 27.

The servant was hired or purchased by the master to perform daily tasks for the master. The fact that he completes these tasks is not a cause for public rejoicing by the master. This is not some great achievement on the part of the servant. How much less cause for the master's rejoicing would be the completion of only part of these tasks, e.g., field work without serving an evening meal.

Paul also used the analogy of the unprofitable servant. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10–12). All men face condemnation: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). No man is washed clean by the good works that he performs on God's behalf. *Our half-completed works do not impress God.* Where is the master's meal? What are we doing, sitting down to eat while the master goes hungry? Who do we think we are? More to the point, who do we think the master is? Just another slave who has also not completed his tasks and is equally under condemnation?

Had Adam not sinned, thereby undermining his dominion efforts, he would have been profitable to God. God had given Him life, weed-free land, authority over the animals, knowledge, and a wife to help him. God was also prepared to give him children, who would have extended the division of labor, making Adam's work more productive. *The day that Adam rebelled was the day that God's rate of return on Adam moved into the loss column.* Adam did not possess any resources independently; he could not make up the difference to God, even if he had autonomously chosen to do so.

What is the rational response to an asset that is producing losses? Sell it, if possible; or melt it down for scrap, if there is no secondary market. If necessary, throw it away. *The longer that you use an asset that is producing losses, the more you will lose from your capital base.* You cannot "make it up on volume" if it costs you three ounces of gold to bring in two ounces. The more the number of transactions, the larger your losses. Six thousand years of Adam's heirs, all of them performing at varying rates of loss, would not only not "make up the original loss"; such a continued operation of the "business" would compound the losses. This is why God told Adam that on the day of rebellion, he would surely die. The old investing rule must be honored: *cut your losses, and let your profits run.*

Did God fail to honor this rule? No; He honored it completely.

Then why did He allow Adam and Adam's race to multiply His losses? Because God had a way of getting Adam and some of his heirs back into the "expected rate of return" category. He had a way to compensate Himself for the losses incurred as a result of Adam's poor performance. Once this payment was made, this would return His servants to the profit column.

The compensating balance was paid by Jesus Christ. Jesus was a profitable servant in God's estimation. "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Thus, through a substitution of Christ's death for the death of Adam and his heirs, God has allowed a transfer of capital to all of these heirs (I Tim. 4:10).⁶ All men are placed in positions of servitude; some of them become profitable.

How is this possible? *Because God has erased the red ink of loss from the lives of the redeemed.* He has cancelled their debts. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:10–14). By removing their liabilities, Christ placed His people into the net profit column.

B. Are Covenant-Keepers Profitable Servants?

Jesus was still criticizing the Pharisees. They believed that they were profitable servants who were still meeting their obligations to God. Jesus subsequently ridiculed this idea in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:11–14). *The Pharisees did not understand*

6. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

how deeply in arrears they were on their debt payments to God. They did not understand how much in need they were of a kinsman redeemer who would settle their account with God. The kinsman redeemer was the family's agent of judgment and redemption (Lev. 25:47–50).

Jesus was not criticizing the performance of His own servants. He was telling His listeners that if they trusted in the spiritual capital delivered to them by their father Adam, they were nothing short of bankrupt. Nothing they could do would ever settle this account. They were too far in debt. On the other hand, they could get their personal accounts into a positive position if they operated in terms of the profit statement that would soon be delivered to them by the second Adam, Jesus Christ. They would no longer be in a fiscal hole financially if they would present Christ's profit statement to God. Their own efforts would become positive because their debts would be paid in full.

Without this gracious transfer of capital, men cannot earn enough to meet the interest payments on the debt they already owe. Their debts will get ever-larger, just as Satan's debt builds relentlessly. Satan has never bothered to pay off his debt. He suffers from no illusions regarding his permanent debt position. He knows that he will be declared bankrupt at the end of time. He will be thrown into debtor's prison (Matt. 18:34).⁷ "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). In contrast to Satan, most covenant-breaking men do have illusions of solvency. These good intentions of eventual repayment by rebellious men are hopeless but nonetheless real.

Covenant-keepers are profitable servants because they operate with *an eternally positive profit-and-loss statement* that was given to them by grace through their faith in Jesus Christ as their kinsman redeemer. Despite their losses from time to time, through their mismanagement of funds entrusted to them by God, or by unexpected reversals of fortune, covenant-keepers are not called on by God to make up these losses. Their losses will not be counted against them on judgment day. At worst, they will come before the judge with a "zero balance" in their accounts (I Cor. 3:15).⁸ They will not be in the debt column. Christ has paid their debts forever.

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

8. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

This should reduce our fear of failure. We need not bury our talents in the ground because we fear our Master (Luke 19:12–15).⁹ We can speculate—not speculate wildly, but do our best to predict the future and invest in terms of our foresight. We can take risks and bear uncertainty in order to build a better world.¹⁰ Meanwhile, covenant-breakers will be tempted to gamble their wealth on the turn of a card or the throw of the dice in games rigged against them statistically. This world is “rigged” in favor of God’s law and those who, through God’s empowering grace, operate in terms of His law. It is rigged against Satan and his followers, but they play on, as professional gamblers play on, knowing they will go bankrupt if they play the game long enough. Their end is clear, and so is ours. They do not know how far in the hole they will be when their time is up. We do not know how many talents we will have in our portfolio when our accounts are called by God, but we know this much: we will not be in the hole. Exercising dominion is not gambling, and gambling is not exercising dominion.

C. Satan’s Portfolio

God demands a positive rate of return on His investments. He expects the world to be subdued in history to His glory by means of the kingdom-extending activities of His servants. This was His plan from the beginning of time, and man is defined as God’s authorized agent of dominion (Gen. 1:26–28).¹¹ Satan’s efforts therefore involved economics: turning potentially profitable servants into loss-producing assets in God’s portfolio. Satan realized that God was determined to see the earth subdued by mankind, and as a rebel, Satan sought to thwart the plans of his Enemy. Satan is an envy-driven destroyer, the one who sows tares in God’s field, in an attempt to ruin the harvest (Matt. 13:24–30; 36–43).¹² He seeks to reduce the value of God’s portfolio to zero, if possible, or better yet, to a debt position. Satan would be delighted to haul God into bankruptcy court—with Satan as the judge, jury, and enforcer.

9. Chapter 46.

10. On the difference between risk and uncertainty, see Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on: Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

12. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

God is not in debt. He does not use borrowed money to “leverage” His efforts in order to produce a fast profit. Because of the death of His son, God will receive a positive rate of return on His total portfolio, Genesis 3:6 to Revelation 20:13.

Because of Adam’s transfer of allegiance to Satan at the Fall, Satan has become the administrator of that portion of God’s portfolio that is now producing losses. He is the ultimate unprofitable servant. His work force is made up of unprofitable servants. He possesses only borrowed assets, which he is allowed to invest during his period of borrowed time. Satan is the debtor who will be hauled by God into bankruptcy court on judgment day. He is the archetype of all indebted servants who cannot pay their masters when the accounts come due (Matt. 18:23–35).¹³

Conclusion

Men without God’s special grace are unprofitable servants. They begin life in debt to God, and they can never catch up apart from God’s special grace. God cancels the debts of His people by transferring payment from Christ’s account. They can therefore produce a positive return in history, both individually and corporately. But without this debt cancellation, men are inescapably in a loss position before God. They remain unprofitable.

The covenant-keeper should examine his own efforts and be persuaded that he is unprofitable on his own account. This should remind him that he owes to Christ alone his legal status as a profitable servant.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.

PERSISTENT PRAYER

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith (Luke 18:1–6).

The theocentric principle here is God as the Judge, the sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. To Nag God

This is a remarkable passage. Jesus told His disciples to pray until they received an answer. This meant that they should treat God as if He were an unjust judge. This is an “as if” parable. An “as if” parable pictures an event that cannot happen and then calls disciples to work as though it could happen.

The widow understood that the judge had no intention of pursuing justice. If left to himself, he would remain silent. But his silence would keep her as a victim of an unjust persecutor. Her adversary had the upper hand. To reverse his upper hand, the widow required the intervention of a judge. But this judge was not an honorable man. Jesus describes him as admitting to himself mentally, “I fear not God, nor regard man.” When a man in authority does not fear God nor regard the needs of men, he has placed himself above the law. He sees himself

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

as beyond sanctions. He is a potential tyrant.

This judge had a problem: the nagging widow. He thought, "Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." His motivation was personal: to escape her constant nagging. She was imposing negative sanctions on him. He responded by becoming willing to impose negative sanctions on her adversary.

This indicates that he was not yet in a position to implement his tyranny. Something in society restricted him. Otherwise, he would have imposed negative sanctions on the widow. Her adversary was giving him no grief. It would have been easier, and more delightful, to have imposed negative sanctions on his tormenter. Instead, he decided to impose negative sanctions on her adversary.

The widow understood her adversary, her condition, and the judge. She understood the limitations placed on everyone. She decided that nagging him was more likely to result in justice than remaining silent, bearing the burden of injustice.

B. What Kind of God Is This?

Jesus was not saying that God the Father is unjust and uncaring, uninterested in justice. But He was clearly saying that there is more required from justice-seekers than an occasional prayer offered to God. The unjust judge decided initially to ignore the widow's plea for justice. Jesus was saying that God sometimes decides to ignore our prayers, which presumably plead for justice. Just as an unjust judge, for his own reasons, sometimes ignores the plight of the victim, so does God sometimes fail to respond in justice to the pleas of the oppressed.

For covenant-keepers, this is one of the most disturbing aspects of God's character. Why should God delay bringing justice in history? Answer: for the same sorts of reasons that he does not bring low the high-minded covenant-breakers. David complained in the early section of Psalm 73, "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily" (Ps. 73:3–8). God delays judgment. But righteous judgment eventually

comes. “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (vv. 18–19). “For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works” (vv. 27–28).²

Covenant-keepers should learn what their responsibility is in the interim period, before judgment comes. This parable instructs covenant-breakers regarding the proper approach to take: persistent prayer. This persistence can and should border on nagging. Covenant-keepers are to be as persistent in prayer as some highly motivated widow is when she faces the lack of interest in the life of a judge who thinks he is above God, law, and man.

This means that it is a mistake for anyone to regard God as a slave at the feet of any man, even a covenant-keeper. God is not a cosmic magician who subordinates Himself to the temporary whims of men. If He treats covenant-keepers as a corrupt judge treats a victimized widow, how should covenant-breakers regard Him? Their view of God should be shaped by Jesus’ revelation of a God who requires people with a righteous cause. Like some switchboard operator in a busy office, God puts callers on hold. He may not even provide music for them to listen to while they are waiting.

C. Paying a Price

When seeking justice from God, let alone divinely subsidized goods, the supplicant is required to demonstrate his commitment to his ends by means of repetition. This is not the same as mindless chanting. *Prayer is not to become a mantra*. “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matt. 6:7–8). There must be frequent prayers, brought at different times. This is not the same as the same request, which is repeated mindlessly in a sequence.

God is not an automated dispenser of free goodies. To convey this idea of God to His audience, Jesus pictured God as a stubborn judge

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

whose will to resist can be worn down over time by a persistent suppliant. The model for this in the Bible is Jacob, who wrestled with the stranger all night until the stranger gave him his blessing. "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there" (Gen. 32:24–29). Many Christian theologians believe that the stranger was a theophany, like the burning bush: a pre-incarnation appearance of God.

God is testing us. We are not testing Him. "You want it? Ask for it. More than once." This is an aspect of perseverance. It builds character. It also allows us to assess how important some goal is in our lives. If it is sufficiently important to pray about, presumably it is important enough to pray about more than once.

This aspect of prayer moves prayer out of men's category of a wish list and into the category of a tool of dominion. *Prayer is a means of reducing our costs, but it is not to be regarded as magic.* It is not a technique to manipulate God. On the contrary, *it is a technique for God to manipulate men.* He tests His people. He forces them to count the costs of their plans of action. One of these costs is patience.

Conclusion

Jesus offered hope to people seeking justice. This also offered hope to people seeking a supernatural subsidy. He told His listeners that as surely as an unjust judge will finally capitulate to repeated requests for justice, so will God respond to persistent prayer. The fact that a suppliant does not receive an immediate fulfillment of his request should not dissuade him from pursuing his chosen course of action. He should then remind God that he is proceeding, if he is proceeding, and that a subsidy would be helpful in speeding up the process.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER¹

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God (Luke 18:18–27).

This is commonly referred to as the story of the rich young ruler. He was young (Matt. 19:20). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

The theocentric principle here is God's criteria for entry into the kingdom of God: law. This is point three of the biblical covenant.²

A. Barriers to Entry

Man's entry into eternal life takes place in history, Jesus taught. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not

1. This is adapted from chapter 38 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). What men do or fail to do in history, Christ implied, determines their final inheritance.

God has established standards for entry into His kingdom. The Ten Commandments are the summary of these standards, Jesus told the enquirer. But there is another barrier to entry: faith in God rather than faith in riches.

The previous section had dealt with the same theme: entry into the kingdom. "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein" (Luke 18:17). Men must become as little children. That is, they must trust God with the same confidence that a child trusts his father. In His answer to the enquirer, Jesus amplified this spiritual principle. Those who trust in money have transgressed one of the standards of entry. They have substituted a rival faith.

B. Access to Eternal Life

The young man was a ruler (v. 18). He understood something of the doctrine of the bodily resurrection. He sought eternal life. Jesus then referred to the kingdom of God. Here was the issue: *Can men earn their way into heaven?* The young man thought so: he said that he had kept the commandments. Jesus told him that he had more to do: sell his goods and give the money to the poor. He implied that the young man had not done enough by keeping the commandments. But this statement seems to make access to heaven a matter of a person's good works. Taken at face value, this passage teaches works religion: man can earn his salvation. Such a view of salvation is antithetical to biblical religion. Then why didn't Jesus verbally challenge the man to rethink his works religion? Why did He imply that the man could buy his way into heaven? Why did He tell the man to give away his money to the poor? Is this what is always required of those who would follow Jesus?

What was Jesus really telling this man? The parallel passage in Mark makes Jesus' position clearer: "And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24).³ David had said something similar over a

3. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

thousand years earlier: “Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him” (Ps. 49:5–7).⁴ The man trusted in his tangible wealth to provide him with the good things in life. Jesus recognized this. Jesus returned to this theme repeatedly in His parables and in His dealings with rich men. He echoed the Old Testament. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11).⁵ The rich man trusts in his power to get wealth. He trusts in the creation. Moses warned against this: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17).⁶ This is the sin of autonomy. It is the belief that man is the primary source of wealth.⁷ It is also the belief that earthly wealth is the coin of the realm in God’s kingdom. It isn’t. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).⁸ The parallel passage in Luke is Luke 9:25: “For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”⁹

The lure of tangible wealth is a powerful lure. Tangible wealth seems to offer to a man the ability to buy the good things of life. Money is the most marketable commodity. Gold and silver are forms of wealth (Gen. 13:2). This outlook proclaims: “Anything can be bought; every man has his price.” Jesus warned that this is a false premise. So did David: “For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever” (Ps. 49:8).

The young man had not understood Jesus’ warning about the worship of God rather than mammon: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).¹⁰ The young man had not examined his own soul in the

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

7. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

8. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 35.

9. Chapter 19.

10. Chapter 39.

light of this. He had not seen clearly regarding his faith. He still trusted in his riches. What could his wealth buy him that was worth forfeiting access to God's kingdom? Wealth can buy many things: luxury, safety, fame, and deference by others. But all of these are as fleeting as riches. Remove wealth, and everything that wealth had bought disappears. *Mammon is a fickle god*. It leaves without warning, taking with it all that it had previously purchased, just as a creditor collects his debts by reclaiming the borrower's goods. This leaves the formerly rich man in a weakened condition to the extent that he had relied on his wealth to provide his strength.

Jesus said, "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). Jesus called this would-be disciple to a complete rejection of his former way of life. He told him to sell everything he owned. But Jesus did not call the tax collector, Zacchaeus, to such a complete sacrifice. On his own initiative, Zacchaeus promised to give half of his goods to the poor and make four-fold restitution to anyone he had defrauded. This was sufficient. "And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9).¹¹

Jesus told the young man to sell all of his wealth and give the money to the poor. To do this, he would have to sell his goods to someone. His wealth was not to be burnt on a pyre; it was to be exchanged for a more liquid asset: money. Money can be handed out in discrete units, a little at a time. The rich young man was to learn how to give his money away. Then he was visibly to follow Jesus—not before.

This would be a *two-fold transfer of his wealth*: to those who bought it for money and to those who received the money. The rich young ruler was to become a *middleman* in the transfer of all of his wealth. The more he received from the sale of his wealth, the more he could give away. He was to negotiate a top price from the buyers, and he was then to become a wise giver. *He was to become more skilled as an administrator of capital*. He was to put it to better use: service to God.

Others were allowed to buy his wealth. Does this mean that Jesus was condemning the buyers to eternal torment? Is wealth illegitimate? No. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and

11. Chapter 45.

the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).¹² The question, then, is the context in which the wealth is held: man’s ownership or God’s. *The issue is theonomy vs. autonomy.* To whose use is the wealth to be put? Does the owner see himself as a steward of God?

The rich young ruler had a problem. He was at a turning point in his life. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was held by means of a legal framework. He was under the authority of Rome. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was no safer than this hierarchy. A generation later, Rome would crush Israel’s political revolt. Most of the wealth owned by Jews would be destroyed by war and the subsequent defeat by Rome. Unless he died young, the young man lived to see this great destruction of wealth. Mammon cannot be trusted.

The young man was beguiled by his possessions. Jesus offered him a *pathway to clarity* regarding his priorities, but he went away troubled.

Jesus asked him to become poor. Wandering around Judea with a group of unemployed disciples was not a way of life preferred by most rich men. Jesus called the young man into poverty as a way into the kingdom of God. This man’s priorities were arranged differently from those required for faithful service in an era of definitive covenantal transition. He did not understand the times.

C. Hierarchies of Faith

“Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (vv. 23–24). This indicates that a rich man is rare in the kingdom of God.

The disciples replied: “Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” Why did they ask this? There are few rich people in any population. Why should the disciples ask, “Who then can be saved?” Just because a rich man cannot be saved, why should this raise any question about poor men?

Jews expected Israel’s victory in history. They did not believe that they would be under foreign domination forever. They had read Deuteronomy 28:

12. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways (Deut. 28:4–9).¹³

They expected earthly rewards at some future time. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 37:9). Yet here was Jesus telling them that these economic blessings would constitute a threat to Israel’s salvation. How could this be?

Jesus answered that with God, all things are possible. That is, such salvation is abnormal but possible. Jesus’ point was clear: tangible wealth is a great temptation. Those who become wealthy risk being snared by the illusion of autonomy. The Old Covenant warned the rich man not to take advantage of the poor or to imagine that he was beyond the circumstances that afflict them.

Jesus’ answer indicated that wealth is a snare. Proverbs had said the same thing. “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).¹⁴

The lure of autonomy is strong. Those people who possess any special advantage that provides them with a barrier against life’s common burdens are tempted to regard themselves as beyond God’s negative sanctions. These advantages include wealth, power, beauty, social status, and health. But wealth is the most universally sought-after advantage, for it offers the broadest range of immunities from the common burdens of life. Of course, it adds new burdens. With an increase in the number of choices (wealth) comes added responsibility.¹⁵

The message is clear: we should not expect to see many rich

13. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

14. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

15. Chapter 28.

people subordinating themselves to God through their acceptance of the gospel. The rich are not willing to pay the price, namely, *a transfer of their trust from riches to Christ*. Wealth seems to be under their autonomous control; Christ isn't. Wealth extends their power; faith in Christ extends God's dominion. They appear to be at the top of a hierarchy of wealth; not so within the kingdom of God. The rich man prefers to be at the top. He chooses not to subordinate himself to God. That had been Adam's problem, too.

D. Continuity and Discontinuity In Jesus' Teaching

Jesus did not break with the Mosaic Covenant's view of wealth and its inherent risks (Deut. 8:17–20).¹⁶ What made His teaching different was His lack of emphasis on the covenantal basis of corporate wealth. There is nothing explicit in His teaching about the relationship between covenant-keeping and a society's accumulation of wealth. There are only occasional reconfirmations of the Mosaic law's system of corporate sanctions. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).¹⁷ This cited Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." *Jesus placed most of His emphasis on tangible wealth as a snare to the individual rather than as a tool of dominion*. There is no doubt that the New Testament's emphasis overwhelmingly promotes the idea of great wealth as a risk to the soul.

There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates that economic growth as a goal is always wrong (Luke 6:38).¹⁸ There is nothing wrong with reducing the burden of poverty by increasing men's productivity. Capital accumulation increases men's productivity. Better tools make men more productive. So does education. Personal thrift increases capital accumulation. Men have discovered no better way to increase the supply of capital in society other than to allow investors to reap the fruits of their investments. The goal of greater personal wealth is the lure that increases per capita investment in a society. That which is dangerous to the soul—the quest for personal wealth—is also what reduces the number of poor, as well as their degree of poverty. Not charity alone but thrift and wise investing are the secrets

16. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21–23.

17. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 4.

18. Chapter 11.

of reduced poverty in society. *This crucial fact is not taught in the New Testament.* It is implied in the Old Testament, however, which teaches the legal and moral right of private ownership and the legitimacy of tangible wealth. *The legal framework of the Mosaic Covenant produces a capitalistic social order.*¹⁹

There are people who argue that Jesus did not adopt Old Testament standards. In fact, most Christians affirm this. But they affirm this selectively. At some point, they are forced to admit that sometimes Jesus assumed the continuity of Mosaic standards. For example, political conservatives²⁰ insist that Jesus was not opposed to private property, and was even favorable to it. Yet they also insist that He did not affirm a theocratic system of civil government, or any other political system. Political liberals²¹ insist that He opposed both the private property order and theocratic civil government. Trapped between these two groups are pietistic Christians who say that Jesus was indifferent to social issues; He was concerned only with personal salvation. They can appeal to the obvious fact that He was as silent on the private property social order as He was on theocratic civil government. Why this silence? Because He implicitly accepted both? Because He implicitly opposed both? Because He implicitly accepted one but not the other? Or because He was indifferent to both?

Theonomists assume covenantal continuity in the absence of specific annulments or a change based on the end of Israel's status as the Promised Land of the priestly nation.²² So, theonomists insist that *Jesus accepted both the private property social order and theocratic civil government*, since the Mosaic Covenant mandated both, and there is nothing in the New Covenant that annuls either institutional arrangement. Jesus did not break with Moses on either point. His emphasis on the spiritual danger of wealth also did not break with Moses. He just skipped over the legacy of the Old Covenant that affirmed the legitimacy of great wealth, with Abraham and Job as leading examples. This was a matter of emphasis. *The temporal emphases of the two testaments are different.* This does not mean that the testaments are in op-

19. I wrote 14 volumes on the economics of the Mosaic law to prove this point. It is the responsibility of critics of my thesis to produce something comparable that proves otherwise.

20. Those in the Scottish Enlightenment tradition by way of Edmund Burke.

21. Those in the French Revolutionary tradition.

22. Annulled are the seed laws, land laws, and priestly laws. See Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion:C.

position. For instance, the New Testament teaches the doctrine of the bodily resurrection; the Old Covenant mentions it: Daniel 13:1–3, Job 19:25–27. Jesus was far more concerned with the doctrine of eternal life than the doctrine of economic growth.

The recommended economic goal of the Old Testament was middle class wealth (Prov. 30:8–9).²³ There is nothing in the New Testament that would call this goal into question. Paul wrote, citing the account of the manna (Ex. 16:18): “As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (II Cor. 8:15).²⁴ But in a world without manna from heaven, the output sufficient to fill most men’s stomachs will make a few men rich. Output sufficient to feed all men will make a few men very rich. The question is: What will these rich men do with their wealth? Share it? Accumulate more of it? The rich young ruler had his answer straight from Jesus. He went away troubled.

E. Economic Growth: Low Priority

Jesus placed the attainment of riches very low on any man’s list of priorities—far lower than generosity to the poor. In fact, He placed charity to the poor as the basis of attaining wealth (Luke 6:38).²⁵ He did not place national per capita economic growth on the list. He never even mentioned this topic. Yet the second condition, economic growth, follows from the first: the attainment of riches by the few. Without rich men’s willingness to save money and invest it in their quest for greater personal wealth. Without thrift by the wealthy, who own most of a nation’s wealth, there can be no widespread reduction of poverty. There will be insufficient per capita investment in capital goods. But note carefully: *Jesus also did not place the elimination of poverty on His list of goals.* The third point follows from the first two. He emphasized personal charity, which ameliorates individual cases of poverty but does not automatically solve the problem of widespread poverty. Only economic growth does this, but economic growth is the product of systematic investing by the richest 20% of the population. Many religions emphasize charity, but only in the West, where Christianity and especially Calvinist theology laid its economic foundations, has a two centuries-long period of compound economic growth oc-

23. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

24. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

25. Chapter 11.

curred.²⁶ Whether this can continue in the face of widespread apostasy, including debauchery and legalized abortion, remain to be seen.

Compared to eternal life, economic growth is a pale sanction, but this does not deny the moral legitimacy of economic growth. *Economic growth need not be a negative sanction*. John Wesley's refrain is valid: "Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."²⁷ It was this outlook that moved Methodists in England and the United States out of grinding poverty into middle-class respectability in a little over a century, 1740 to 1860. But, by 1900, Methodist bishops had adopted the Social Gospel.²⁸ The history of the twentieth-century mainline denominations in the United States is evidence of the truth of Christ's warning to the rich young ruler. Better to be a Methodist layman in a wretched hut in 1740 than a Methodist theologian in a wretched seminary in the early twenty-first century.

The New Testament does not mention any corporate economic goal. The economic goal of the Old Testament was middle-class comfort for the covenanted nation. Middle-class comfort for the masses takes generations of compound economic growth. This was not achieved in any society until the twentieth century, during which Western Christianity went into spiritual decline.

Conclusion

The rich young ruler had a problem with the content of his faith. He trusted in what he thought he could do and had always done: keep all of God's commandments. Jesus showed him that his faith was in himself and therefore defective. His faith was leading him to eternal death. *His law-keeping and his wealth had become his high walls*. By challenging him to tear down the second of these two walls, Jesus challenged him to reconsider the content of his faith. The young man's problem was not his good works or his wealth; *his problem was his belief in the spiritual efficacy of works righteousness*. He could not earn eternal life.

To show to him how wrong he was, Jesus went to the heart of his faith: his wealth. He was a disciple of mammon. What he had to do in

26. Whether it can continue in the face of widespread apostasy, increasing debauchery, and legalized abortion remains to be seen.

27. Sermon 50 (1744): "The Use of Money."

28. George D. McCain, "The History of 'The Social Creed,'" *Interpreter* (April 1988), pp. 19–21. (<http://bit.ly/MethodistSocialCreed>)

order to gain eternal life was beyond his ability. What all men have to do to gain eternal life is beyond their ability. It is the task of the evangelist to identify whatever it is that an anxious enquirer cannot do or will not do for the sake of the prize: the good work that is just too much for him, the wall that he cannot climb over. The evangelist must then confront the enquirer with the existence of this wall, which is a barrier in between him and the eternal prize. Then the enquirer may be ready to hear the correct answer: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). How does a man deny himself? By affirming his faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

The New Testament is hostile to the quest for tangible riches. But to attain middle-class comfort for the masses, a few people will get rich. *Like the poor, the rich we shall always have with us.* But if the way to riches is by serving paying customers, as it is under free market capitalism, then *the greater the wealth of the rich minority, the less grinding will be the poverty of the poor* (Luke 8:18).²⁹ The problem is, when the poor have become less poor because wealth-seeking entrepreneurs have been allowed to get exceedingly rich, both the rich and the poor can fall into the trap: “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:18).³⁰

The modern pietistic Protestant hymn is correct: “I’d rather have Jesus than silver and gold.” But the theonomists’ goal is better: “I’d rather have Jesus *and* silver and gold.” So far, no society has achieved this. Without widespread conversions and widespread obedience to biblical law, no society can.

29. Chapter 16.

30. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

PROFITS IN HISTORY¹

Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting (Luke 18:28–30).

The parallel passage in Matthew makes clear the theocentric focus of this passage: the name of Jesus as the source of positive sanctions. Sanctions are point four of the biblical covenant.² “Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:27–29). The key phrase is “for my name's sake.” For His name's sake, it is worth sacrificing everything we own. By this sacrifice, His followers will gain a huge return.

A. Status: Thrones of Judgment

Peter's question was in response to Jesus' warning about how few rich men enter the kingdom of God. Peter reminded Him that he and

1. This is adapted from chapter 39 in Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

the other disciples had forsaken all, which included their families. They were not rich. He asked: “What’s in it for us?” He was looking for assurance of a positive sanction. Christ promised two.

First, they would exercise authority. They would sit as judges on 12 thrones alongside of Christ. They would judge the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). In Luke, we are given another account of this same promise. It relates to the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28–30). What did this mean? Why was rulership related to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper? Answer: because of sanctions. The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament of judgment: self-judgment, church judgment, and God’s judgment.³

Second, they would gain stewardship over God’s kingdom. The Jews would lose it, He told the leaders. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). Old Covenant Israel was coming to the end of the road. The church was about to inherit God’s kingdom and its promises. One aspect of this kingdom is the rendering of judgment. Jesus had already told them: “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:18).

The apostles, by bringing the *gospel of the kingdom to Israel*, were also bringing a *covenant lawsuit against Israel*. Like the prophets before them, Jesus told them, they would suffer persecution by the Jews because of this covenant lawsuit. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12).

These would be negative sanctions on the apostles. This was not what Peter wanted to hear. He wanted to hear about positive sanctions. Jesus told them that they would be agents of judgment against Israel. They would bring judgment against the Jewish nation. How would they do this? He did not say. He did not promise them that they

3. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (I Cor. 11:28–30).

would do this in heaven. This may have been His frame of reference, but for all of them to exercise such heavenly judgment, they would all have to die before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when historical judgment arrived.⁴ Jesus may have had in mind their preaching of the kingdom. This would be a means of bringing judgment. What He did say is that *they would participate with Him in the rendering of judgment against the 12 tribes*. The dozen apostles (minus Judas, plus Matthias) would replace the dozen non-priestly tribes of Israel.⁵ They would serve judicially as representative agents of the New Israel of God, the church.⁶ This was a major blessing. They would become the patriarchs of a new Israel. They would become founders, not in the sense of biology, but rather as forefathers. Their names would extend down through the ages.⁷ So few people are remembered in history, that becoming part of the historical record of a civilization is generally regarded as a great honor. Fame ranks with money and power in the minds of most people: *the desire not to be forgotten*. Wealth is far easier to achieve than fame.

B. Inheritance: Multiplication

Exercising authority would be one positive sanction. Second, “every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19: 29). They would receive a hundredfold. This is an image of great wealth.

What had they forfeited? Above all, their families: parents, brethren, wives, and children. Also listed in Matthew’s account is land. In Luke’s, houses are mentioned. Here is the context of the promise of a hundredfold increase.

This is confusing. If they paid for their time spent with Jesus by losing contact with their families, or possibly losing the trust of their families, how could they be repaid a hundredfold? With money? How

4. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

5. Levi, the priestly thirteenth tribe, was replaced by the church. The priesthood ceased: no more animal sacrifices.

6. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

7. “Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:14–16). “And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

much money? How can anyone place a market value on forfeited family life? In any case, what would be the form of this income? It would not be monetary income from wandering the roads of Judea.

The context indicates the *multiplication of families*. The apostles had lost those things closely associated with family life. They would gain access to a new family inheritance. Their efforts in spreading the gospel of the kingdom would lead to a new family; the family of God. *A new era of mass adoption by God was at hand*. The founders of the church would be welcomed into households everywhere. They would become founders of a new family, a family analogous to the family of Old Covenant Israel.

They would be involved in the burial of the old family of God. Old Covenant Israel would die without heirs. The church would therefore inherit. Israel's inheritance would come to them as the nearest of kin. "And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses" (Num. 27:11). The patriarchs of the church would then become heirs of all of Israel's promises. This was as meaningful a promise to a Jew in Jesus' day as it had been for Abraham, who inherited Canaan only representatively through God's promise of inheritance by his heirs (Gen. 15:16).

This did not necessarily mean that they would receive the inheritance in history. The language of their judging Israel on thrones of glory pointed to the opposite: their deaths, one by one, prior to the fall of Jerusalem. But inheritance is covenantal. It is *inheritance by confession*. Their confessional heirs would inherit the promises. In this sense, *the apostles would inherit God's kingdom in the name of their heirs*. They would inherit definitively in history, though not finally.

Conclusion

The promise of multiplication had to do with inheritance. Whatever the apostles had already lost and would continue to lose as disciples of Christ, they would regain a hundredfold through their spiritual heirs. *The church down through history constitutes their inheritance*. They would have lost their inheritance anyway, had they remained loyal to Old Covenant Israel, whose day of reckoning came in A.D. 70. The transfer of Israel's inheritance—the kingdom of God—was at hand. The apostles served as the *original trustees* in the transfer of the

inheritance to their covenantal heirs. As forefathers, they would see their heirs and their heirs' wealth multiplied. They would see this in history only by the eyes of faith, just as Abraham had seen his inheritance.⁸ But the transfer was as secure as Abraham's had been. They had Christ's word.

This promise of inheritance extends to every generation. Adoption into the church brings every Christian into covenantal union with others of the same confession. Their inheritance is the whole earth.⁹ This inheritance is open to everyone who follows Christ. The expansion of this inheritance is achieved through the extension of God's kingdom throughout history: the Great Commission.¹⁰

This places top priority on preaching the gospel. The apostles' task is our task, too: to work for *the multiplication of heirs through adoptions by God*. The task in proclaiming the gospel was two-fold, for the covenant's sanctions are two-fold: blessing and cursing, inheritance and disinheritance. The apostles were told that they would gain their inheritance through their covenantal heirs. This would require the disinheritance of Old Covenant Israel, which they would oversee from the 12 heavenly thrones. So it is with their heirs. The disinheritance in history of covenant-breakers is as much as part of the gospel's effects in history as the inheritance of the kingdom by covenant-keepers. As Christ's kingdom grows, Satan's kingdom shrinks. Covenant-keepers are supposed to inherit the earth progressively in history because Christ inherited it definitively in history at Calvary. He will inherit finally at the last judgment.

8. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8–10).

9. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

10. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

STATUS WITHOUT RICHES

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:2–10).

The theocentric issue here is restitution: the payment by Jesus to God the Father. This is representation: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Tax Collectors

When Jesus called Levi/Matthew into apostolic service, Levi responded by inviting his colleagues to a feast which Jesus attended. “And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” (Luke 5:29–30).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

Publicans and sinners were equated. Tax collectors in Israel had low social status. They were placed in the same category as prostitutes. They might be very wealthy, but their wealth could not buy them social acceptance among Israelites. They were outcasts.

When Jesus invited Himself into the home of Zacchaeus, He was making a statement. He was saying that He was ready to accept Zacchaeus as a disciple, should Zacchaeus decide to subordinate himself to God. By feasting among tax collectors once again, Jesus was saying that repentant tax collectors could achieve acceptance in His social circle. The Jewish leaders again responded by implying that Jesus' social status was none too good.

Zacchaeus was a publican: a tax collector. He was chief of the tax collectors. The flow of funds from the other tax collectors moved upward into his hands. He, in turn, would have remitted a portion of these funds to his superiors. The tax system lent itself to extortion, though not to the extent that the tax farming system of the Roman Republic had. This is why John the Baptist told tax collectors to collect no more than what was owed. "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3: 12–13).²

Zacchaeus promised to pay four-fold restitution to anyone whom he had defrauded. It is not clear that he had defrauded anyone. But if he had, he was willing to repay four-fold. Why four-fold? The Mosaic law established two-fold restitution in cases of secret theft. "If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double" (Ex. 22:4). But the rule was different in the case of violence. "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep" (Ex. 22:1). These laws applied to the criminal whose crime was discovered. He paid less if he admitted it on his own: 20%.³

Tax collecting involves coercion and the threat of coercion. The state enforces the tax laws. Its agents collect wealth from those under the state's jurisdiction. Those who refuse to pay are threatened with violence. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. His occupation depended on Rome's ability to impose violence on all those who resisted Zacchaeus' authority to extract wealth from them. The element of violence is what

2. Chapter 2.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990) ch. 45:E:1.

differentiated tax fraud by the authorities from private fraud. He could legally oppress the sheep: Israel. Sheep were symbolic of weakness. Zacchaeus understood this. He seems to have had considerable knowledge of the Mosaic law and its implications.

B. Remarkable Charity

Zacchaeus promised to give half of his goods to the poor. He said this in public. Half of a rich man's goods constitutes an abnormally high commitment to righteousness. Luke's Gospel emphasizes the close relationship between a man's religious commitment and his treasure. Zacchaeus understood what Jesus had been preaching about money. By turning loose of half of his goods, he was announcing publicly his conversion to Christ. Jesus confirmed this: "And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (v. 9).

This money was not for restitution purposes. This was in addition to any restitution payments. This money would go to the poor. The poor represented God. Regarding the final judgment, Jesus warned in a prophecy: "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). Zacchaeus did not offer his money to Jesus. He knew that he could not purchase his salvation for money. He also knew that the *righteous* poor—the least of Christ's brethren—represented God. Jesus had no need of his money. The righteous poor did.

He was declaring his trust in Christ rather than in his tangible wealth. This attitude is basic to every comprehensive conversion. *The convert is told by God to abandon reliance on tangible wealth.* His wealth cannot autonomously protect him from adversity in either history or eternity. Job's experience testifies to this covenantal truth. But rich men rarely understand this. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).⁴ This is why so few of them enter the kingdom of God.

C. Altered Status

Jesus called Zacchaeus out of the tree and into the kingdom of God. The test of his transformation was two-fold: public subordination

4. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

to Jesus through providing a meal in his home and then his financial restructuring.

This meal was not a sacred meal. It was not eaten inside the boundaries of the temple's sacred space. It was a meal of hospitality. To offer such a meal, the provider had to open his home. Zacchaeus joyfully received Jesus into his home. Jesus had singled him out in full public view. Jesus had treated him as if he had been a righteous man. Jesus honored Zacchaeus publicly by requesting and then accepting a meal from him. In response, Zacchaeus honored Jesus by abandoning reliance on his wealth.

The covenantal issue here was subordination. Zacchaeus had been in a position of authority over Israel because he was under Rome's authority. This hierarchy was political. The economic mark of this political subordination was the upward flow of tax money. Zacchaeus had possessed both the legal authority to collect taxes and the power to defraud taxpayers. He renounced his power to defraud when he offered four-fold restitution to any victims.

His announcement of the transfer of half his goods to the poor was an announcement of a shift in his subordination. His subordination to Rome had filled his house with treasures. Now he publicly switched allegiance. This shift was not political. It did not involve an oath to a rival civil government. It did involve an oath to a rival kingdom.

When Jesus invited Himself to dinner, He moved from celebrity status to redeemer status in Zacchaeus' eyes. Jesus' public request for a meal announced that Zacchaeus' status was no longer that of an outcast in His eyes. Jesus raised Zacchaeus' status in His eyes. Zacchaeus then responded by raising Jesus' status in his eyes. They became a mutual admiration society.

Once again, Jesus fell in status in the Jews' eyes. "And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner" (Luke 19:7). They kept on lowering His status until they finally persuaded Pilate to hang Him on a cross in the company of thieves. One of these thieves acknowledged that Jesus possessed superior status to his: innocence. "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:39-41). He then acknowledged Jesus' supreme status as divine. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me

when thou comest into thy kingdom” (v. 42). He recognized what the Jews did not. He therefore gained what the Jews did not. “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (v. 43).

Conclusion

Zacchaeus possessed great tangible wealth but low social status in the eyes of the Jews. He was an economic agent of Rome. Jesus possessed no tangible wealth and low social status in the eyes of the Jewish leaders. The public was divided on this question, however, just as the two thieves on the cross were. But the nation’s respectable spokesmen, who conferred social status, were generally in agreement: Jesus was at the low end of the social hierarchy. Pilate fully understood their attitude. This provided an opportunity for him to have a little fun at the Jews’ expense. “And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written” (John 19:19–22).

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus so much that he climbed a tree to get a better view. Why did he bother? He must have known something about Jesus’ teachings, as his subsequent financial restructuring revealed. Why would someone like this want to see Jesus?

Someone like Zacchaeus would not normally want to see Jesus, except insofar as Jesus was a celebrity. Jesus had made it clear that very few rich men had any permanent interest in His teachings. His message of complete dependence on God was and is an affront to the rich. The message is too closely tied to economics: the economics of self-sacrifice in history for the sake of treasure in eternity.

Zacchaeus was ready to repent when he climbed the tree. His initial interest in Jesus and his immediate response to Jesus’ request for a meal indicate that he was ready to listen. He understood Jesus’ message about the deceitfulness of riches, even before he climbed the tree, for at the feast, he publicly surrendered half of his wealth. Yet today, almost two millennia later, most of Jesus’ followers appear not to understand His economic message this clearly. If they do understand it, they do not believe it. They do not act in terms of it. Zacchaeus was

ready to give half of his wealth to the poor. Modern Christians do not give 10% of their income to the church, as required,⁵ let alone half of their goods to the poor.

5. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

PROFIT AND INTEREST¹

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading (Luke 19:12–15).

The theocentric issue here is God's hierarchical rulership over the world that He created: point two of the biblical covenant.²

A. Servants and Citizens

The parallel parable in Matthew is the parable of the talents (*talanton* = talent). Here, the Greek monetary unit is a *mina*, translated as pound, the common monetary unit of England.

The theocentric principle here is God's ownership of the creation. He establishes the terms of tenancy. Men possess resources only as stewards of God. God will come at the end of history to judge each person's performance as a steward. The passage in Matthew appears in the same section as Jesus' description of the final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46).

Luke's account adds a seemingly extraneous verse: "But his citizens

1. This is adapted from chapter 47 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (v. 14). What has this to do with the internal operations of the man's business affairs? Some of the nobleman's servants subsequently went about their business, using his money. They did not openly rebel against him. Yet the text refers to his calling to account of "these servants."

The complaining citizens were rebels. Some of his employees were not rebels. They were all under his civil rule. The complainers went into rebellion as soon as he departed. He had departed in order to receive a kingdom. He would return eventually, and he would be more powerful than when he had departed. Nevertheless, the citizens sent him a message, telling him of their act of rebellion. This was a high-risk proposition on the part of the rebels. The nobleman would surely not tolerate a rebellion. A successful revolt at home would call into question his ability to maintain order over his new kingdom. He might lose both kingdoms if he tolerated the loss of the first. He would therefore return, prepared to fight.

There can be no question about who these rebellious citizens were: the Jews. Jesus was telling them that God had received their rebellious message. They would soon lose their status as citizens of God's kingdom. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Judgment would come.

Who were the servants? One was an unproductive, resentful rebel who buried the nobleman's money. Some were faithful stewards who were not in revolt. Each had been placed in authority over a portion of the owner's assets during his absence. They all knew there would be a day of accounting. Here, Jesus told them there would be sanctions, positive and negative, after the day of accounting.

B. Delegated Ownership³

This parable is a kingdom parable. It follows the Bible's five-point covenant model.⁴ First, the master calls his servants before him (sovereignty). Second, he delegates authority to them as his economic representatives by transferring money to them (hierarchy/representation).

3. This bulk of this chapter appeared first in Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 23. It is now found in *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 49.

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*.

Third, while it is not stated explicitly, he commands them to produce an increase (law/dominion). We know this because at least three of them immediately took steps to obey his implicit economic command. Fourth, he returns and imposes positive sanctions: blessings to the profitable servants. Fifth, the blessings that he gives them involve rulership (succession/continuity). He then imposes negative sanctions against the unprofitable servant, casting him into outer darkness (disinheritance).

This parable contains several theological messages, but the three main ones are these: first, God owns all things; second, He delegates temporary control over these things to men; third, men are required to increase the value of whatever God has entrusted to them.

There are also secondary implications. First, the servants were required to act on their own initiative for an indefinite time period. The master was not present to tell them precisely what to do. Second, he imposed a profit management system of control, a bottom-up hierarchy.⁵ He wisely decentralized his investment portfolio before he departed. He allowed his subordinates to make their own decisions regarding the proper use of his capital. He held them legally responsible for the results. Third, he had plans beyond this first stage of stewardship. He was using this stage as a test.

C. Economic Language, Political Language

The phrase in the King James, “Occupy till I come” (v. 13), is misleading. The Greek word, *pragmateuomai*, means “do business” or “trade.” The Greek word occurs only in this verse. Yet it is clear from the context that the assignment was not strictly economic. This is true of Matthew’s version, too. Jesus used an economic parable to convey information about each person’s responsibility before God for the proper administration of all the personal skills he possesses.

In Luke’s version, the respective performances were far less equal than in Matthew’s account. In Matthew’s version, the most profitable servant gained 100%: five talents from five talents. The second servant also gained 100%, but on only two talents—not so difficult, presumably, as gaining five from five. The third buried his talent. Not so in Luke. Each man was given one pound. The initial distribution was equal. The results of their activity were the same as in Matthew: *un-*

5. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/MisesBUR>)

equal performance.

Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him (Luke 19:16–26).

The first servant made a return of 10 to one. The second servant gained five to one. The owner then granted them rewards because of their productivity. These rewards were political: rulership over cities. In Matthew, the rewards are not specified. The placement of the parable in Matthew is in a passage dealing with final judgment. Clearly, this has to do with rewards beyond the grave. But the passage in Luke seems to refer to history. *Economic success produces political success.* Economic failure produces only economic failure: the loss of the capital originally entrusted to the risk-avoiding servant. Significantly, the owner gave the third man's pound to the servant who had made 10 to one. But there is no reference to any further judgment, unlike the version in Matthew: "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30).

The judgment of the risk-avoiding servant was followed by the judgment of the rebellious citizens: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). These servants had been self-conscious in their revolt against the nobleman's authority.

The nobleman returned with his new kingdom. Is this the New Covenant kingdom? Or is it the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22)? If it is the latter, then the judgment of the

rebels is not limited to the Jews, who seem to be the rebels who had sent their declaration of independence. If it is the New Covenant kingdom, then the political judgment has to be the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁶ But this would not leave enough time for the Christians to serve as cultural stewards.

I argue that the citizens in the pre-departure phase were Jews. They publicly threw off the rule of Christ at the crucifixion. His inheritance of the kingdom took place at the resurrection. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).⁷ Jesus did not come in final judgment at His resurrection. He departed at the ascension to collect His kingdom. He rules from a distance now.

At the final judgment, He will return with His kingdom. This kingdom is the post-judgment New Heaven and New Earth. At that time, he will call His servants to account. Then He will permanently judge the rebels. But by the time of the final judgment, the rebellion against Him will have spread. There will be many besides Jews who will not allow Christ to reign over them. The rebellion launched by the Jews at the crucifixion spreads far beyond the geographical boundaries of Israel.

Why the political language? Why cities? Why citizens? For that matter, why the economic language? Why usury? Why money? Because these are the most familiar contexts for the extension of a man’s influence: money and power. God is master of both. He allocates both. “Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all” (I Chron. 29:12).

The two profitable servants had been trading. They had demonstrated various degrees of success in the limited sphere of business. The successful ones are then rewarded with cities. Why cities? Why not more wealth? Because men generally regard political rulership over populations as being more prestigious than amassing wealth. People are more likely to speak of “mere money” than “mere power.” God is described in the Bible as a king, not as a merchant. There is no word in English that conveys the image of economic success that is comparable to kingship in politics, even in the century in which the

6. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

7. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 45.

kings finally departed.⁸ We speak of “a meal fit for a king,” not “a meal fit for a billionaire.”

To inherit a city is to inherit civil authority. Christ is king of kings and lord of lords. He will retain both offices in the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth. So, *the language of political rulership is a rhetorical way to convey a sense of consummation*. Covenant-keepers are said to do business in history in order to inherit thrones in eternity. Yet their kingdom assignments in history extend far beyond business, and their eternal reward will be better than sitting stiffly, listening to lawyers and settling disputes.

D. Profitability

Profit is a residual that remains after all expenses have been paid, including the entrepreneur’s salary as a manager, which he could have earned by working for somebody else. The entrepreneur buys or rents resources, holds them and possibly alters them, and sells them for more than he paid. He can do this only because his competitors did not recognize the opportunity. They did not enter the free market to gain control over these scarce factors of production, bidding up their prices. Their lack of foresight is what enabled the entrepreneur to buy up the resources at prices lower than those which prevailed when he sold them later. He possessed an initial advantage based on better knowledge, capital, and the courage of his convictions.

The corollary of profit is loss. A man may misforecast the future. He buys or rents resources, only to discover later that they are worth less than he paid for them. The fear of loss is an important factor in restricting the market for entrepreneurship. It is a major barrier to entry.

Profit and loss have to do with uncertainty. The economist distinguishes between risk and uncertainty.⁹ Risk can be estimated in advance; uncertainty cannot be. Risk is the kind of calculation that applies to insurance. In certain well-defined situations, the law of large numbers applies. The probability of a specific kind of event, such as a fire, can be estimated within statistical limits. Forecasters cannot say that a particular building will burn down, but they can say that one building in a large group will burn down. Not so with uncertainty. An uncertain event is not part of a larger class of events. Its probability

8. Kings ceased to be able to declare war on their own authority at the end of World War I (1918).

9. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), ch. 7. (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

cannot be calculated in advance.

In the parable, two stewards dealt successfully with uncertainty. They succeeded where their competitors do not. They showed a profit. The third steward refused to deal with uncertainty. He feared the loss of the money entrusted to him. He buried the coin.

E. Marxism as Covenant-Breaking

What about the person who takes no risks, buries his coin, and returns to the master only what he had been given? This man has produced a loss for the master, who could either have lent the coin at interest or buried it himself where only he knew its location—less risk. Instead, he had allowed the steward to use it, which increased the owner's risk of loss. The only reason for allowing a subordinate to use it during his absence was the hope of gain. Part of the gain was *monetary*: the return of money in addition to the coin. Part of the gain was *informational*: testing the performance of his subordinates.

The third steward is a highly unprofitable servant. He has not performed according to minimum standards. Like so many other incompetent, slothful people in history, the servant of the parable tries to justify his poor performance by blaming the master. He accuses the master of being a merciless exploiter. "For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow" (Luke 19:21).

What was the heart of slothful servant's accusation of the master? Clearly, he is accusing him of being a *capitalist*. The master is rich, yet he does not go into the fields to labor. He expects a positive return on his money, even though he goes away on a journey. Such is the servant's accusation. *The servant is an incipient Marxist*. He believes, as Marx did, in the labor theory of value. He also believes in Marx's exploitation theory of profits. Anyone who gets money without working for a living is nothing but an exploiter, living on the labor of the poor. The servant calls the owner "a hard man." Theologically speaking, this is the covenant-breaker's accusation against God: God is an unfair exploiter.

The master accepts the ideological challenge. He reminds the servant that he is indeed a hard man, meaning someone who has the lawful authority to establish standards of profitable performance, as well as the authority to hand out rewards and punishments. *He is the sanctions-bringer*. He admits freely to the servant that, as a successful cap-

italist, he does not personally go into the fields to plant and reap, yet he reaps a profit. "And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow" (v. 22). Then he tells the servant the minimum that he is entitled to, an interest return: "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" (v. 23).

F. The Legitimacy of Interest

1. *Profits and Interest*

The King James translators used the English word *usury* to translate a Greek word that is more accurately translated as *interest*. This discussion of interest here is very revealing, for two reasons. First, this parable of God's kingdom acknowledges that interest-taking is legitimate. God eventually comes to every person and demands a positive rate of return on whatever had been entrusted to him by God. The master had forfeited the use of his funds during his absence. He is therefore entitled to a minimum return: interest.

Second, the parable clearly distinguishes between profits and interest. The other two stewards each produced a profit. They received the greater praise and greater visible rewards. The minimum required performance was an interest payment. The slothful servant had been unwilling to take even the minimal risk of handing the money over to specialists in money-lending, who would seek out entrepreneurs to borrow the coin and subsequently pay a competitive return to the money-lenders on this passively managed investment. Then the money-lender would return an equivalent coin to the steward, plus extra money.

The master's capital was supposed to become productive in the stewards' hands. Each steward had to become an entrepreneur or else seek out an entrepreneur who would put the money to economically productive uses. The coin was not to sit in the earth. The owner could have buried it himself, if zero was all the return he expected.

2. *The Entrepreneur and the Banker*

The economic agent who is on the cutting edge of both prediction and production is the entrepreneur. The first two stewards in the par-

able were entrepreneurs. They went out and found ways of investing the master's money that produced a positive rate of return. As the parable presents it, this rate of return was higher than what could have been earned by depositing the money with money-lenders. Thus, the entrepreneur is understood to be someone who bears a much greater threat of loss than someone who deposits money in a bank. The economist calls this form of risk *uncertainty*. It cannot be estimated in advance. It involves guesswork, unlike the depositor who is promised a specific rate of interest when he deposits his money.

The only way that a banker can afford to pay out a promised rate of return is because he successfully seeks out borrowers who agree to pay the bank an even higher rate of return. The banker makes his living on the difference between the interest payment which the borrowers pay to him and what he in turn pays to the depositors.

The future is uncertain to men. We do not know it perfectly. We barely know it at all. We see the future as though we were peering through a darkened glass. Nevertheless, all of life involves forecasting. There is no escape from this responsibility. We must all bear some degree of uncertainty. But some people are willing to bear more of it than others, and of these few, some are successful in dealing with it. In economic terminology, some produce greater profits than others. Profit is a *residual* that remains, if at all, only after all costs of the business have been paid, including interest.

2. Banking: Reducing Uncertainty

The banker is able to offer a special service to investors. He can diversify depositors' uncertainty by lending to many people—people who, like the servants in the parable, have performed successfully in the past. They have “a track record,” to use the language of horse racing. By lending money to many borrowers, the banker converts a portion of the depositors' uncertainty into risk, meaning from the statistically incalculable to the statistically calculable. The banker is like an insurer. In fact, in the Middle Ages, the bank was an insurance company, since both church and state had made it illegal for Christians to ask or pay interest.¹⁰ The modern profession of banking grew out of the marine insurance guild, which was legal in the Middle Ages.¹¹

10. Jews could legally lend to Christians, which is why Jews from the middle ages onward have been found in banking. It was a near-monopoly granted to them by Christian legislators.

11. John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Massachusetts:

What does an insurance company do? Its statisticians (actuaries) calculate the likelihood of certain kinds of undesirable events in large populations. These unpleasant events cannot be statistically calculated individually, but they can be calculated collectively if the population involved is large enough. The seller of insurance then persuades members of these large populations to pay periodic premiums so as to “pool” their risks. When one member of the pool suffers the event that has been insured against, he is reimbursed from the pool of assets. Hence, some of life’s inescapable and individually incalculable uncertainties are converted to calculable risk by means of diversification: “the law of large numbers.”¹²

The same is true of banking. Borrowers seldom all go bankrupt at once. Most borrowers will repay their debts as specified in their loan agreements. Bad loans are more than offset by the good ones. Thus, the banker can offer a fixed rate of return to depositors. In almost all cases, depositors will be repaid as promised because most of the borrowers repay their loans as promised. (The exception is during an economic depression, when banks fail along with their borrowers. Depressions are the result of prior monetary inflation, which in our day means fractional reserve banking.¹³)

The master in this parable protects his funds in much the same way. He seeks out a group of potential entrepreneurs. He gives each of them an amount of money to invest. He makes predictions regarding their future performance based on their past performance, and then he allocates the distribution of his assets in terms of this estimation. He protects the value of his total portfolio by asset diversification.

The master is not an interest-seeking banker, however. The money he invests is his own. He is not acting as the legal agent (fiduciary) of other depositors. He legally claims all of the profits. He does not contract with borrowers who agree in advance to pay him a fixed rate of interest. The entrepreneurs are strictly his legal subordinates, unlike the relationship between banker and borrower.

G. The Forfeited Productivity of Inaction

The master in the parable is outraged by the coin-burying servant.

Harvard University Press, 1957), ch. 10.

12. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

13. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 20. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

The parable is intended to show the subordinate (indebted) position of all men before God. The servant in Matthew's account was cast into outer darkness because he was an unprofitable servant (Matt. 25:30).¹⁴ The parable stands as a warning to all men because the Bible teaches that all people apart from grace are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).¹⁵ This is why we need a profitable servant as our intermediary before God, our perfect sin-bearer. But to understand our relationship of indebtedness to God, the parable's language must be taken seriously. We cannot draw accurate theological conclusions about the broader meaning of the parable if the symbolic reference points of the parable are themselves inaccurate, let alone immoral.

The master in Matthew's account not only approves of taking interest, he sends the servant to the nether regions for not taking it. This is strong imagery! *The interest payment belongs to the master.* By having refused to deposit the master's money with the money-lenders, the servant has in effect stolen the master's rightful increase. The servant was legally obligated to protect the master's interests, and interest on his money was the minimum requirement. He failed.

The idea that the interest return was the master's minimum expectation leads us to the question of *the origin of interest*. Why did the master deserve an interest return? Because he had possession of an asset that could have been sold, but was not. He had forfeited an economic return that could have been his: whatever consumer goods or services that the coin could have purchased. This concept of *postponed consumption* is at the heart of interest rate theory in Austrian economics. A scarce economic resource is worth more in the present to owners, potential owners, and potential users than the same asset is worth in the future. Economic actors apply a *discount* to the future value of every asset.¹⁶ This is why there is a time value of money.

This raises the whole question of *cost*. What is the cost of any action or any purchase? It is the value of whatever has to be forfeited, i.e., the personal value of *the most valuable foregone use*. If I do one thing with my money, I cannot do something else with it. The value of whatever I would actually have done but did not do is what it costs me to do whatever I do. If I cannot use the asset for a period of time because I have entrusted it to someone else, I necessarily bear a cost. There are no free lunches in this life. There are also no free loans.

14. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

15. Chapter 41.

16. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

The master in the parable was being gracious to the servant. He probably recognized from the beginning that the man was not very competent in economic matters. The master did not tell the servant retroactively that he had failed because he had not made 100% on the money entrusted to him. He told him that he had failed only because he had not earned an interest return. This is the least that the master legitimately expected.

As it turned out, the master could have made a far greater return on his investment by entrusting the coin to either or both of the first two servants. But he had sought greater economic safety instead. He had adopted the principle of *risk reduction through portfolio diversification*. He received a lower rate of return, but a more sure return. But the master had been cheated. He could have deposited his money directly with the money-lenders instead of giving it to the servant. That would have been safer—greater diversification through the bank—and it almost certainly would have produced a positive rate of return, however low. Instead, he received only his original capital.

He had forfeited his legitimate interest payment because he had transferred the asset to the slothful, risk-averse servant. This servant is a model of wickedness, not because he was actively evil, but because he was *passively unproductive*. He did nothing with that which had been entrusted to him. Doing nothing is sufficient to get you cast into hell, when doing the minimum would at least quench the master's wrath. Only Jesus Christ has met this standard.

H. Interest and Capitalization

Is interest-taking morally legitimate? This debate has been going on since at least the days of Aristotle, who regarded money as sterile and interest as unnatural.¹⁷ But if money is sterile, why have men throughout history paid lenders interest in order to gain access to its use for a period? How are so many people fooled into paying for the use of a sterile asset? Besides, interest is a phenomenon of every loan, not just loans of money. Modern economics teaches this; so does the Bible.¹⁸ Aristotle was incorrect. *The phenomenon of interest applies to*

17. "For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term interest, which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money because the offspring resembles the parent. That is why of all modes of getting wealth, this is the most unnatural." Aristotle, *The Politics*, I:9, Stephen Everson, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 15.

18. "Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for

every scarce economic resource. We always discount future value. Whatever we own in the present is worth more to us now than the promise of owning that same item in the future. Promises to repay can be broken (the risk factor), but more to the point, *the present commands a price premium over the future*.¹⁹

We live in the present. We make all of our decisions in the present. We enjoy the use of our assets in the present. While wise people plan for the future by purchasing assets that they expect will produce net income over time, they purchase these hoped-for streams of income at a discount. The *rate of discount* that we apply to any stream of expected future income is called the *rate of interest*. Mises called it *time-preference*.

Thus, the rate of interest is not exclusively a monetary phenomenon. *Interest is a universal discount that we apply to every economic service that we expect to receive in the future*. We buy a hoped-for stream of income. We can buy it for cash, but we expect a discount for payment in cash. This purchase at a discount for cash is called *capitalization*. It is the heart of capitalism. It is the heart of every society more advanced than the utterly primitive.

The person who lends money at zero interest is clearly forfeiting a potential stream of income. He will seldom do this voluntarily, except for charitable reasons. The ownership of the asset offers him an expected stream of income: psychological, physical, or monetary. If it did not offer such a stream of income, it would be a free good. It would therefore not command a price. An asset owner expects to receive a stream of income from the asset. He chooses the degree of risk that he is willing to accept, and he then refuses to lend the asset for less than the interest rate appropriate to this degree of risk.

The borrower compensates the owner for his use of the owner's asset, or its exchange value, for a specified period of time. He borrows it only because he values its stream of services more highly than he values the extra payment (interest) to the owner above the rental income generated by the asset. He expects to make a return of some kind on

increase" (Lev. 25:37). "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deut. 23:19–20). Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [1999] 2012), ch. 57.

19. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

the temporary exchange of control over it.

Conclusion

Non-fractional reserve banking and the taking of interest are both biblically legitimate. The parable of the talents or pounds should be sufficient proof for anyone who is not trying to make an overnight theological reputation for himself based on the promotion of the utterly fantastic. We should take the Bible seriously in preference to Aristotle, and also in preference to the “economics of love.”²⁰ The capitalization of long-term assets, including human services, is biblically legitimate.

Again, I acknowledge that men, in their quest for autonomy from God, are willing to become slaves of sin, and therefore in principle slaves of other men. I recognize the New Testament principle that it is best to owe no man anything (Rom. 13:8a).²¹ I also recognize that modern economics has promoted the ideal of perpetual government debt for perpetual prosperity, and that a world so constructed will eventually collapse. But to place temporal limits on the judicial enforceability of the discounting of future long-term human services, because the Bible requires that we restrain man’s overconfidence about his long-term future, is not the same as denying that there is an inescapable discounting (capitalization) process between the present value of present goods and the present value of expected future goods.

With respect to capitalized debt, if both the lender and the borrower agree that a piece of collateral is acceptable in exchange for the defaulted loan, then the debtor is not in debt, net. He has an offsetting asset. He wants the money in cash; the lender would rather have the money over time. The existence of the collateral reduces the likelihood that the debtor will default. The debtor is therefore not a servant of the lender in this case. Nevertheless, if the loan involves the potential loss of a man’s home, meaning his status and his own self-evaluation, then he is in a form of bondage. But if he owns investment assets (a house, for example) with a mortgage on it, and he risks losing the house if he defaults, then this voluntary transaction is merely a shifting of risk to the liking of both transactors. The lender feels better about the future with a stream of income guaranteed by the value of the collateral. The

20. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix J.

21. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

borrower feels better about owning the collateral and paying the money. Neither is a servant; neither is a master.

The top priority here is the multiplication of assets in the broadest sense. God grants assets to His stewards. He demands a positive rate of return.²² He who hides his assets is comparable to the person who hides his candle under a basket. God is cheated by such seemingly low-risk investing.

22. This is possible only because He wipes away the effects of sin.

MONOPOLY PRICING

And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him (Luke 19:45–48).

The theocentric principle here is the centrality of the worship of God. The temple was sacred space. Theft inside the physical boundaries of the temple was sacrilege: a boundary violation. This profaned God's house.¹ Boundaries are point three of the biblical covenant.²

A. Holy Housecleaning

1. The Moneychangers

This was the second time that Jesus performed a cleansing of the temple. The first time was during the week before the Passover, three years earlier. "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise"

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

(John 2:13–16). Here, He did it again. Theological liberals argue that the two accounts are scrambled chronologically. Theological conservatives argue that the priests were slow learners.

Jesus was not arrested either time. In Luke's account, the authorities allowed Him to remain in the temple area, teaching the people. This is very strange. He had clearly violated other people's property rights, unless He was God or God's legally delegated agent, in which case He was the owner. He had used force. He had entered a holy place and had called the resident moneychangers harsh words. By doing so, He was challenging those in charge of the temple. They were allowing certain economic dealings to go on. But what, exactly, was going on? John's Gospel refers to money changing. The two Greek words translated as "changers" and "money" come from the same root word, which means "coin." It is used in Mark's account: "And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves" (Mark 11:15).

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus called their activities theft. This was a very serious accusation, yet the authorities did nothing to stop Jesus. They did not formally accuse Him of being a false witness. There was a good reason for their hesitation: they were guilty as charged. But what were they guilty of? In John's Gospel, Jesus called them merchandisers. Here, He called them thieves. Why was it theft to be a merchandiser? Why would Jesus have twice singled out those inside the temple as the objects of His wrath? Scripture gives no indication that He ever physically assaulted anyone else, yet He used a whip on these people the first time.

2. Holy Space

The temple was holy space, God's sanctuary.³ Inside its walls a higher ethical standard was to prevail. The closer that men came to the holy of holies, the greater the threat of their own moral pollution. God might bring sanctions against them. This is why members of the three family lines of Levi served as guardians of the temple, surrounding it in concentric circles (Num. 3; 4).⁴

When the merchants set up shop within the walls of the temple,

3. The Greek root word is also used for sanctified: set apart.

4. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3C.

they accepted greater responsibility for dealing righteously. They were not selling items in a market with open entry to competitors. Their merchandise had to meet high standards. The body of no blemished animal could lawfully be burned on the altar.⁵ Animals sold for sacrifice had to be screened by the priests or their authorized agents.

The men sitting at the tables had replaced the Levites as the authorized guardians of the temple's boundaries. There is no doubt that they were guardians. Mark's account identifies this function: "And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple" (Mark 11:16). The guardians' task was to see that the temple was not profaned.

Someone had to sell sanctioned animals to the public. The priests had licensed the merchandisers to do this. The sacred authority of the priesthood sanctioned these businessmen.

One of the ancient forms of temple sacrifice was a coin, the shekel. The temple originally had its own shekel.⁶ It was the standard of weight and fineness for all temple assessments. "This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD" (Ex. 30:13). It had originally been unlawful to bring a coin from outside the temple to pay any obligation to the priests.

In Jesus' day, Jews came from around the Mediterranean world to offer sacrifices. They brought many different kinds of coins. The Jews did not approve of coins with people's likenesses on them, especially the emperor's, which bore proclamations of his divinity.⁷ During the Bar Kochba rebellion (A.D. 133–35), the Jews hammered flat the images of the emperors on Roman coins and drew in scenes from the temple.⁸ To bring a Roman coin to make an offering would have been a sacrilege. These coins had to be exchanged for ritually approved animals or approved coins.

3. *False Dealing*

This would have created opportunities for false dealing by the moneychangers. The temple's authorized coins could have been sold

5. Leviticus 1:3; 3:1; 4:3, 23, etc.

6. Exodus 30:13, 24; 38:24–26; Leviticus 5:15; Numbers 7.

7. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 125–27.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

at a premium beyond the weight and fineness of these coins' metals. It is highly likely that the moneychangers had been given a special dispensation by the priests to set up their tables inside the temple's boundaries. Moneychangers inside the walls of the temple would not have faced free market competition from rivals, who were not authorized by temple authorities. Over decades and centuries, devious practices would have become common. The opportunity for above-market returns is always tempting and is rarely resisted for long. Higher prices charged by the temple's moneychangers would have raised suspicions about the priests' collusion. To transfer the monopoly power to charge higher than free market prices is to transfer wealth. Those who possess such power are unlikely to transfer it free of charge. Once transferred, such a monopoly is difficult to revoke. Those who pay in advance for the privilege of controlling such exchanges expect to be compensated. They bid up the entry price on the basis of expected future income. They will resist any attempt to lower the price unless they are offered refunds.⁹

Jesus identified their practices as theft. They were stealing from the faithful who came to offer sacrifices. They were also stealing from God. They were undermining God's reputation. False weights and measures are an abomination to God. "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 25:15).¹⁰ "A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight" (Prov. 11:1).¹¹ The misuse of a monopoly granted in God's name was the judicial equivalent of false weights.

The priests did not prosecute Jesus. Why not? The most obvious reason is that they were in collusion with the merchants who were extracting monopoly returns.

B. Who Owned the Temple?

1. Property Rights

Jesus asserted that He was the son of the Owner. In Matthew's ac-

9. This observation applies to all forms of licensing that require extra training or initial payment.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

11. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 29.

count, Jesus cited the Old Testament: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer;¹² but ye have made it a den of thieves."¹³ But in John's account, He made a claim: "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:16). He was the true heir. He was coming on behalf of the supernatural Owner of the temple.

Jesus twice invaded the outer court and overturned the tables. This violation of property rights was grounded in law: as the designated agent of the Owner, He was authorized to enforce the terms of the lease. This was a house of prayer; it had been turned into a place where thieves took advantage of worshipers. Thieves were using the sacred character of the temple to extract monopoly profits. They were cashing in on God's name.

Jesus rightly regarded them as squatters. They presumably had been authorized by the chief priest to conduct their operations. By physically assaulting the moneychangers, Jesus was announcing His revolt against the religious authorities. He was challenging the faithfulness of the hierarchy, i.e., the priesthood. They were corrupt priests, He indirectly asserted. They deserved no better treatment than the moneychangers received. In fact, they deserved worse. They knew better. They bore greater responsibility. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).¹⁴

The agent of the Owner expelled the agents of the priesthood. The priests claimed to act in God's name. Jesus visibly challenged this claim by forcibly driving out the priests' agents. This was a conflict between authorities: a self-ordained establishment vs. a man baptized by an outsider who was regarded by the people as a prophet. Jesus was

12. "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:6–7).

13. "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD" (Jer. 7:11).

14. Chapter 28.

born of David's tribe, Judah. He was not a Levite. This was one more confrontation between a prophet and the priesthood. Prophets had usually lost these confrontations in Israel, but the ecclesiastical winners subsequently perished at the hand of some invading military power. So it would be again, but this time the invaders would end the Old Covenant order by burning the temple. This final profaning of the temple by gentiles ended the continual profaning of the temple by priests.

Jesus' violation of the property rights of the agents of the priests was based on His superior claim of ownership. He did not appeal to the existing authorities to enforce His claim. He acted on His own authority, for He had been given this authority by the Owner. Soon thereafter, the priests would attempt to undermine His authority.

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things (Matt. 21:23–27).

Once again, He undermined their authority by His answer. The priests feared the people. The people respected John's memory. Jesus had been baptized by John. If the people could not be swayed in their opinion regarding Jesus' authority, the priests were powerless to reassert their authority. Their hold on the affections of the people was tenuous. The question was: What about Jesus' hold on the people's affections? Could this be broken? He had used force against the priests' agents. The priests would soon use force on Him, first in a trial before the Sanhedrin, and then by bringing Him before Pilate.

2. A Lawful Claim

Control over the temple and its sacrifices was at the heart of the question of religious authority in Israel. Through His actions against the moneychangers, Jesus was asserting a superior claim of authority.

He had already made this claim: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:56–58). *A prior claim is a superior claim.* He was asserting a claim that pre-dated the temple.

The Jewish leaders had to silence His claim. If they could not do this, their claim of ecclesiastical representation would be undermined. They would be overthrown. To silence Him, they appealed to Rome. *They invoked Rome's authority in order to eliminate Jesus' authority.* "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Jesus attacked the profaners of the temple. He did so in the name of God. He claimed to be the lawful heir. The first time, He had referred to the temple as "my Father's house." In the context of what had taken place immediately prior to this second confrontation, this retroactively became a sensational claim. The people had just proclaimed Him as the heir of David's throne. "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:8–9). He was again asserting jurisdiction over the temple. David could not have made such a claim. He had been a king, not a priest. He was of the family of Judah. Levi was the priestly family.

One man in history had lawfully possessed such dual authority: Melchizedek. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18). To him Abraham presented tithes (v. 20). Jesus was announcing a new priesthood, meaning a new hierarchy. (The Greek word for priest is *hiereus*.) "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 6:20). This meant that a New Covenant would be in force, with new laws. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made,

not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 7:12–17).

3. Resurrected Temple

The legal right of Jesus to throw out the moneychangers was subsequently confirmed by His bodily resurrection. By this supernatural act, He demonstrated publicly that He was God’s designated agent. He had therefore possessed the right to enforce the terms of the temple’s lease. When the priestly leaseholders refused to cleanse the temple of thieves, they forfeited their right to represent God. God demonstrated this by tearing down the temple in A.D. 70.¹⁵

The argument between Jesus and the Jews from beginning of His public ministry to the end had centered on the temple. He invoked the language of the temple to describe the resurrection. Immediately following His first scattering of the moneychangers, the Jews asked Him for a sign to validate this authority. “Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:18–22). The Jewish leaders remembered this at the time of His trial, even though the disciples had temporarily forgotten. “And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together” (Mark 14:57–59).

Which temple was doomed to permanent destruction: Jesus’ body or the one Herod had built? At the resurrection, the world had half of its answer. In A.D. 70, the world had the other half.

Conclusion

The temple was a house of prayer. By using the sacred authority of the temple to establish monopolistic pricing, the priests and the

15. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

moneychangers had profaned the temple, i.e., had violated sacred space. Jesus drove out the moneychangers because they were thieves. It was not the fact that there was exchange going on that outraged Him. This was convenient for men to buy unblemished beasts to sacrifice. It was convenient that visitors could buy coins acceptable in worship. But the moneychangers had become thieves, exploiting their delegated position as agents of the priesthood. Their corruption reflected the priesthood's corruption. Jesus drive them out.

When men seek church offices to gain income based on a misuse of authority, they violate this rule. Men who misuse God's holy office by stealing will be driven out.

CONFISCATION IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE¹

Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid. And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them (Luke 20:9–19).

The theocentric principle here is the sovereignty of God over inheritance. God is the Creator. He sets the terms of the leasehold. His son, Jesus Christ, is the true heir in history and eternity. God will enforce the legal claims of His son. This is about inheritance: point five of

1. This is adapted from chapter 43 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

the biblical covenant.²

A. The Davidic Inheritance

Jesus offered this parable to the religious leaders during the week preceding Passover. The people had strewn palm branches before Him as He entered the Jerusalem. They had acclaimed Him as the heir of David. “And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:36–38). This was a messianic declaration. Jacob had prophesied: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). No Jewish king had reigned in Israel since the Assyrian captivity. No Jewish king had reigned in Judah since the Babylonian captivity. Yet the crowds were proclaiming Jesus the son of David. He was Shiloh, “and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” Jesus had the right to wear the sword of Judah, they proclaimed.

This declaration offended the Jewish rulers. “And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples” (Luke 19:39). They sought to entrap Him by forcing Him to declare this authority, and then place Him under sanctions for blasphemy, as they did a week later. “And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?” (Luke 20:2).

As He did so often, and with such devastating effect, He answered their question with a question: “And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things” (Luke 20:2–8). They feared

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

being placed under the public's sanctions. So, they could not pursue Him by means of this strategy. He escaped from their trap once again. Then He offered this parable.

The people had declared Him the heir of David's kingly office. This threatened the Jewish establishment, which had a working alliance with Rome. David had been the great warrior king of Israel. If the multitude ordained Jesus as king, this could undermine the Jewish establishment's arrangement. It was clear to Pilate a week later that this was what bothered them. He understood that it was not a deep concern for religion that had motivated them, but politics. He also understood that Jesus was uninterested in politics, for He was self-consciously unbending to Rome's power. Jesus was not afraid of Pilate or his sanctions. Jesus stood His ground with Pilate, and Pilate respected Him for this.

Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar (John 19:10–15).

The Jewish Establishment crawled before Rome's power at the expense of their theology. Jesus had challenged Pilate in terms of His theology. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (v. 11). Jesus told Pilate that God was over him, and therefore the man who had delivered Him to Pilate—presumably, the chief priest—had the greater sin. Why? Because the chief priest's theology declared that God is in control, yet he had brought Pilate into this religious dispute because Pilate possessed the civil power of execution.

Pilate recognized the nature of the political chess game that the Jewish rulers were playing, with him as the pawn. They were placing

him between the rock and the hard place: either do their bidding or face public disorder, which would undermine his reputation in Rome. As a politician, he recognized the political nature of what the priests were doing at his expense. They were painting him into a corner. Jesus had verbally put him in his place in terms of biblical authority, which Pilate did not respect, but Jesus was not trying to use him for His purposes. The priests were, and they invoked Roman politics in their manipulation: “We have no king but Caesar.”

Politicians do not like to be manipulated by other politicians. Pilate therefore preferred to let Jesus go. So, when he finally capitulated to the Jewish rulers for the sake of Roman politics, he gained symbolic revenge. “And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written” (John 19:19–22). He thereby publicly announced that Jesus was the heir to David’s throne, and he, Pilate, had smashed it. Rome got the credit, not the Jewish politicians. This greatly annoyed the Jewish politicians, which was Pilate’s goal.

B. Stealing the Inheritance

Jesus’ parable of the owner of the vineyard rested on the Bible’s theology of inheritance. An only son would inherit all of his father’s property. This was not simply a matter of preserving a family’s wealth. Far more important, it was a matter of preserving a man’s name in Israel. What we call the levirate marriage law reveals the importance of a firstborn son’s preservation of a man’s name. “If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband’s brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband’s brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel” (Deut. 25:5–6).

Brothers who shared the same landed inheritance shared more than land. They shared mutual responsibility to preserve each other’s name through procreation. The land that was part of the deceased

brother's inheritance would go to the firstborn son who was fathered by the surviving brother. This biological son would carry the dead brother's name. None of the land inherited by this son from the deceased brother would be shared, at his death, with the heirs of the biological half-brothers born to his biological father. Family name was more important than bloodline inheritance in Israel.³

The owner in the parable had funded the planting of the vineyard. He then leased it out to people whose task was to care for it. He then went on a far journey. The imagery here is obvious: it is *a recapitulation of Eden*. The main difference is, the owner went on a far journey, not a morning excursion, as God did in the garden. The husbandmen could expect payment for their services, but only after the crop came in.

They cared for the vineyard. The issue was not the quality of their labor. It was the quality of their morals. They were thieves and murderers. They were intent on building up an inheritance of their own. But they had none. They had not funded the planting of the vineyard. It was not their land. They were hired hands. The vineyard belonged to the owner's son.

This legal arrangement offended the hired hands. They no doubt asked themselves a series of rhetorical questions. Had they not remained in the field, in good weather and bad? Had not they remained on duty, defending the vineyard from predators, whether human or otherwise? Had they not invested years in building up the property? Did they not have an independent legal claim to part of the crop? To a large part of the crop? To all of the crop? To all future crops? Of course they did, they thought. And there was no one around to tell them differently.

Then the harvest season approached, and the owner sent back a servant to administer the harvest and the distribution of the crop. The hired hands beat him. The owner sent more servants. The same thing happened. Then he sent his son. This time, the hired hands saw a great opportunity: to collect not just the crop but the entire inheritance. "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (v. 14b).

Jesus asked a question and then answered it. "What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others" (v. 15b–16a). The Jewish rulers answered, "God forbid" (v. 16b). Then Jesus warned them of the magnitude of the coming judgment. "And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Luke 20:17–18).

"He shall give the vineyard to others." With these words, the lawful heir of David's throne surrendered His claims to a regional throne and all of the associated inheritance. He announced the imminent transfer of the kingdom of God to another nation, the church (Matt. 21:43). Shiloh had come, and with His advent, as Jacob had prophesied, the sword was removed forever from Judah. This was because it was removed forever from Israel.

The parable was about an attempted disinheritance: *disinheritance by illegal execution*. The judicial solution, the Jewish rulers understood, was the execution of the hired hands and the transfer of administrative responsibilities to new employees. But there was a crucial problem with this solution: the absence of heirs. The solution might temporarily solve the management problem; it could not solve the inheritance problem. The priests assumed that the father was still alive, as the parable had indicated. But where would the owner get another son? The answer should have been obvious: *by adoption*.

The new heirs would care for the vineyard. They would not be hired hands. As adopted sons, they would have a stake in the inheritance. They would share the harvest. The gentiles would inherit.

But was not Israel the true son? Jesus had already lured them into publicly forfeiting any legal claim to that office. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:28–32). The gentiles had long refused to go into the vineyard, but they would soon go. The Jews had said they would go, but now they refused. The true

son does the will of his father. “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10).

C. His or Ours?

1. *Hired Hands*

The hired hands asserted a claim of ownership. Standing between them and this claim was the owner, who was far away, and his servants, who were no match for the hired hands, and the son. The son was the least of their problems, as long as the owner stayed away. But, of course, he would not stay away, once word of his son’s murder came to him. Jesus warned them: “What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid” (vv. 15a–16). But God would not forbid. In the matter of power, the hired hands were superior to the servants and the son, but the owner was armed and dangerous.

The hired hands decided to confiscate the inheritance by killing the heir. In the name of the people—the workers of the world—they united to kill the son. When they did this, they secured their own judgment. They could not retain their stolen goods indefinitely. The owner would come and destroy them. But they did not foresee this. They did not believe that he would return from the far country. They were fools.

The twentieth century, more than any in history, became the century of rebellious hired hands. Because men adopted the Darwinian view of God, they became convinced that the cosmic Owner of the vineyard is not even in a far country; He is a figment of superstitious men’s imaginations. Within a quarter century of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), Lester Frank Ward wrote *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), which asserted the right and obligation of the state’s scientific planners to direct society, including the economy, into evolutionary progress. By 1900, this view of central planning had captured the minds of the leading intellectuals.⁴ The Progressive movement in the United States and the social democracy movement in Europe invoked Darwinism as the model for, and justification of, the national government’s central economic planning.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

Economic planning requires power. It also requires funds. Through state power, economic planners have laid their hands on other people's money. Through massive inheritance taxes, they have transferred the inheritance of economically successful families into the coffers of the state. Taxation in general grew 10-fold or more in the twentieth century. The Bible-based observation that God has placed restrictions on lawful taxation—less than 10% of one's income (I Sam. 8:15, 17)⁵—has been greeted with hoots of derision, not only from social Darwinists but from Christian professors of social science, who publicly baptized the recommendations of social Darwinism. "Don't give us that Old Testament stuff!" the Christian professors have insisted. What they really mean is, "Give us a state that taxes us at 40% of our income, twice the rate that Pharaoh extracted from the Egyptians." They have called this system "economic democracy." This outlook is based on a revision of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote." The suggestion that the Bible sets forth as binding a private property social order is rejected by the secular intellectuals and their Christian academic agents without any detailed consideration of what the Bible teaches.

2. *Wiser Than God*⁶

The vast majority of Christians have always believed that they can improve on the Mosaic law. On their own authority, they revise God's law by coming to conclusions in the name of God that deny the specific teachings of God's Bible-revealed law. Then they proclaim their *annulment-through-interpretation* as being in conformity with "the true spirit of God's law" or "the underlying principles of God's law." As part of this improvement, they reject the binding authority of biblical civil law. In doing so, they necessarily become advocates of some system of civil law proposed by one or another group of covenant-breakers. They refuse to ask themselves the obvious question: "If not God's law, then what?" They refuse to deal with the ethical question: "By what *other* standard?"⁷

As an example, consider the assertion of John Gladwin, a defender of central planning, who later became a bishop in the Anglican

5. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

6. The following passage is taken from North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 63:B.

7. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

Church. In a chapter in a book devoted to Christian economics, he rejected the concept of the Bible as a source of authoritative economic guidelines or blueprints. In fact, he assured us, it is unbiblical to search for biblical guidelines for economics. "It is unhelpful as well as unbiblical to look to the Bible to give us a blueprint of economic theory or structure which we then apply to our contemporary life. We must rather work in a theological way, looking to the Bible to give us experience and insight into the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This then helps us discover values and methods of interpretation which we can use in understanding our present social experience."⁸ Furthermore, "There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy."⁹ He contrasted biblical law unfavorably with theology. He then went on to praise the welfare state as an application of theological, rather than legal, insights.¹⁰ Theology informs us that "there is no escape from the need for large-scale state activity if our society is to move into a more equitable future at social and economic levels."¹¹ Clearly, neither the Mosaic law nor the New Testament teaches this, but theology supposedly does. Whose theology? Reinhold Niebuhr's.¹²

So, we are assured, there are no authoritative economic guidelines or economic blueprints in the Bible. On the other hand, there are numerous vague and non-specific ethical principles which just about any Christian social theorist can invoke when promoting his recommended reconstruction of society. All it requires to baptize socialism is a series of nice-sounding pat phrases taken from the book of theological liberalism, which Gladwin offers in profusion: "the bounds of Christian principles of human concern," "the righteousness revealed to us in God himself," "the good," "structural framework of law and social values," "gross and deepening disparities in social experience," "spon-

8. John Gladwin, "A Centralist Response," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 124. (<http://bit.ly/ClouseWAP>)

9. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid.*, p. 183.

10. Gladwin, "A Centralist Response," *ibid.*, pp. 125–26

11. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid.*, p. 193.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 197. He cited *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). It is an odd book to cite. It was written by the author in reaction against his youthful fling with Marxism, a book in which he proclaimed that Jesus "did not dwell upon the social consequences of these moral actions, because he viewed them from an inner and a transcendent perspective." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner's, [1932] 1960), p. 264.

taneity of love," "the light of the gospel," and "the most humane principles of social order."¹³ (Gladwin in 1996 received considerable public attention when he spoke at the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Lesbian/Gay Christian Movement.)¹⁴

Lest you imagine that Gladwin is an aberration, consider the fact that the two other anti-free market essayists in the book adopt the same anti-blueprint hermeneutic. William Diehl, who is a defender of Keynesianism's state-guided economy, confidently affirms: "The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way."¹⁵ Art Gish, a defender of small communities of Christians who hold property in common, informs us that "Since koinonia includes the participation of everyone involved, there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers."¹⁶

The fact that these statements appear in a book on Christian economics should come as no surprise. These comments are typical of the opinions of humanist-educated Christian intellectuals. Christians who have spent their lives in humanist educational institutions, and who then have fed their minds on a diet of humanist publications, in most cases have adopted the worldview of one or another variety of humanism. They have felt emotionally compelled to baptize their adopted worldview with a few religious-sounding phrases. But just because someone keeps repeating "koinonia, koinonia" as a kind of Christian mantra does not prove that his recommended policies of common ownership will actually produce the fellowship of koinonia.¹⁷ What

13. See my critique in *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 200.

14. Bishop Gladwin's text was Ephesians 4:6: "There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." He announced: "Powerful and ungodly homophobic forces are at work in our culture undermining and destroying peoples lives." Furthermore, "I believe passionately in an inclusive church. A church in which the contrasting and conflicting experiences of human life are joined together into something new and better in Jesus Christ. Such a church gives its members space to bring who they are to God. Yes, commitment to truth means that it refuses to avoid the conflicts however difficult. Yes, we all of us have so much to learn. It is God who heals us and unites us. It is God who energises us to bind up the wounds, to gather together the scattered fragments and to bear witness to the hope of something better." Anglican News Service (19 Nov 1996).

15. William Diehl, "The Guided-Market System," *ibid.*, p. 87.

16. Art Gish, "Decentralist Economics," *ibid.*, p. 154.

17. If you wonder what "koinonia" means, you are probably not a left-wing advoc-

produces peace, harmony, and increasing per capita output is widespread faithfulness to God's Bible-revealed law.

It is unwise to attempt to become wiser than God. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Cor. 1:25). This is why it is our job to become familiar with God's Bible-revealed law. Biblical law, not the latest academic fad, is to be our guide, generation after generation.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is the conclusion of the entire commentary series, Genesis to Revelation. A private property social order is mandated by biblical law. Wherever biblical law is enforced, free market capitalism has to develop. Modern fundamentalists in the pews generally believe in capitalism, but they do not believe that biblical civil law is still valid. So, their defense of capitalism implicitly rests on some baptized version of secular epistemology, whether natural law (Adam Smith), natural rights (Murray Rothbard), Kantianism (Ludwig von Mises), or empiricism (Milton Friedman). Meanwhile, the neo-evangelicals go off to college and come back mostly confused, as we can see by comparing the first edition of the best-selling book by Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), with the twentieth anniversary edition (1997), which abandoned a great deal of the first edition's economic analysis and all of its class warfare rhetoric.¹⁸

The parable of the murderous hired hands is a reminder: we must

ate of common ownership. Understand, I am not suggesting that voluntary common ownership is anti-Christian, any more than I am saying that voluntary celibacy is anti-Christian. Paul recommended celibacy (I Cor. 7:32–33). He did so, he said, because of "the present distress" (v. 26). Similarly, the Jerusalem church held property in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Shortly thereafter, a great persecution of the church began. The entire church fled the city, except for the apostles (Acts 8:1). This exodus created the first foreign missions program in church history: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The fact that they had sold their property enabled them to leave the city without looking back, as Lot's wife had looked back. So, for temporary purposes in times of great trial, voluntary celibacy and voluntary common ownership are legitimate, even wise. But to make either practice a recommended institutional model for all times and places is a misuse of historical events. The one institution where common ownership has been productive for longer than one generation is the monastery. However, it takes celibacy to make this system work for longer than a few years. As soon as there is a wife saying, "He's earning as much as you are, but you're far more productive," koinonia ends. In the modern State of Israel, the kibbutz collective farms faded rapidly as important sources of national production.

18. See my comparison: *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F.

honor the rights of ownership, which include inheritance. It was Israel's refusal to do this that led to the transfer the kingdom of God to the gentiles. As surely as men should honor the God of creation and His Son, so should they honor God's ownership of this world and his delegation of stewardship to authorized servants. *Responsible control over delegated property is the basis of maintaining the kingdom grant.*

The Bible teaches that the state has no legitimate claim on anyone's income that matches the church's: the tithe.¹⁹ But modern Christians, wiser than God, have dismissed the tithe as "Old Testament stuff," and have wound up paying less than a tithe to the church and four times a tithe to the civil government. God is not mocked.

God's judgment will surely come on this society of murderous, thieving hired hands. "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:26–27). When this happens, Christians had better be well prepared in advance for the collapse of the hired hands' Darwinian social order. They had better not be economically dependent on it. But most of them will be. They live under a regime that rests on taxation twice as confiscatory as Pharaoh's (Gen. 47:24), and their academic spokesmen praise it as democratic capitalism. These people view democracy as a system whereby two wolves and a sheep vote to decide what to have for dinner. This political arrangement is said to bring social justice. In the name of the people, rebellious hired hands grab the wealth of the true owner. But they will not get away with this attempted transfer of inheritance, any more than Old Covenant Israel did.

19. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011); Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

RENDERING UNTO CAESAR AND GOD¹

And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them. And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace (Luke 20:19–26).

The theocentric principle here is the distinction between God's ownership and man's. Men owe God for the use of His goods. This is a matter of hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.²

A. Tribute Money

Accompanying the scribes (Pharisees: Matt. 22:15) were Herodians, a priestly party allied with the Sadducees.³ Herod was a regional

1. This is adapted from chapter 44 of Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

3. "Herodians," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), IV, p.

monarch. He was under Rome's authority. He was an Idumean, meaning an heir of Esau.⁴ Those who were allied to Herod were normally not friends of the Pharisees. But Jesus was a problem for both groups. He was undermining their authority. The two groups joined forces on the assumption that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"—until the enemy is removed. Jesus recognized the nature of this temporary alliance and warned His disciples against both groups.⁵ Forty years later, the Idumeans joined forces with the Jews to resist Rome, then turned on the Jews when the siege of Jerusalem began. They looted the Jews. Titus slew some and sold an "immense" number of them into slavery after the city fell.⁶

The Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus. The Romans were hated by the Jews. Roman rule was regarded as tyrannical. If Jesus could be lured into acknowledging the legitimacy of Roman rule, He would lose favor with the Jews, for they resented this rule. They paid their taxes, but they did so grudgingly. On the other hand, if He denied the legitimacy of taxation by Rome, the Herodians would surely report this to the Roman authorities. He would be trapped, or so they imagined.

They began with flattery: "Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly" (v. 21). In other words, "Say your piece loud and clear, sucker; then we'll be rid of you forever." Jesus was not fooled. He identified them for what they were: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" The hypocrite feigns righteousness but in fact is a sinner. Within a week, the hypocrites would declare their true allegiance. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

He asked them to show him a coin. "Shew me the tribute money." They brought it to Him. At that point, He had them trapped. The "penny" was a denarius. This was a coin used specifically to pay taxes. If taxes were not legitimate, why did his critics possess one? Furthermore, it bore an image. It also had an inscription. The inscription invoked the language of divinity. The Jews regarded this as idolatrous. But they had brought Him a coin. What were they doing with such

360.

4. "Herod," *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also, "Edom."

5. "And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15).

6. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI:VIII:2.

coins?⁷

Jesus asked them specifically: Whose image? Whose inscription? Caesar's, they answered. What else could they say? "And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (v. 25). By acknowledging that they possessed a tax coin, they were also acknowledging that Rome brought civil order. Civil order must be paid for. If Caesar's image and inscription were on the coin, then those who used such coins in trade were gaining a benefit: money. By using money to gain what they wanted to buy rather than bartering, they were extending the division of labor. This increases men's output per unit of resource input. It makes them wealthier.

Caesar's rule brought social stability. It created an international legal framework for economic growth. It was Rome, not Israel, that had built the highways and had cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. There are no free lunches, and Rome was merely collecting what belonged to it. Jesus was saying that the benefits of civil government have to be paid for. The beneficiaries owe something to the state.

A coin was a mark of state sovereignty in the ancient world. It still is. The theology of Rome was visible on Rome's coins. The image and the inscription announced the divinity of the emperor: "Emperor Tiberius august Son of the august God."⁸ This is what angered the Jews. But the agents of the Pharisees or their Herodian allies had such a coin in their possession. The Herodians were content with the coins. The Herod of Jesus' infancy had been a ruthless tax collector.⁹ But the Pharisees were indeed hypocrites. "But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Luke 11:42).¹⁰

Jesus was not arguing that Caesar owned everything that he laid claim to. On the contrary, men are to render to God what God possesses. What Caesar owned was legal authority over the political system that provided the Roman Empire's money. This legal system had to be supported by taxes. Israel was benefitting from this system, despite the system's inequities. Besides, Israel was under judgment, and

7. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), ch. 8.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.

10. Chapter 23.

had been since the captivity. Living under foreign domination was nothing new for Israel. Rome had brought greater trade and prosperity by opening up new markets. Israel was benefitting from the arrangement. On what basis should Israelites have refused to pay taxes? Jesus had the answer: none. But He gave this answer in such a way that the Pharisees could not embarrass Him.

B. What Belongs to God

The Israelites' tithe money went to support the priests. The priests were Sadducees, the Pharisees' rivals.¹¹ By reminding the people of their obligations to God, Jesus was undermining the authority of the Pharisees. He was reminding them that they owed a tithe. This meant that they owed God money by way of the Sadducees' faction. This was a public challenge to the Pharisees.

God is owed far more than the tithe, Jesus had warned them, and they had not paid God what He was owed. Judgment was coming. Jesus had warned them of this previously.¹²

And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them. Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also. And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay

11. Herbert Danby, Introduction, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

12. In Matthew's account, this warning appears in the chapter following the incident of the tax coin (Matt. 23:23–26).

and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation. Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered (Luke 11:39–52).

Jesus passed the dilemma back to the Pharisees. If they denied Rome's right of taxation, they risked political suppression by Rome. If they affirmed this right, they would undermine their popularity with the more radical factions of the people. If they affirmed the tithe, they also had to affirm the Sadducee party. If they denied the tithe, they had to oppose Moses. So, they went away . . . again. Jesus had successfully silenced them, just as they had sought to silence Him once again.

C. Tithes and Taxes

The tithe is mandatory. It preceded the Mosaic law. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20).¹³ There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this law has been annulled. Only the recipients have changed: from the local Levites to local churches. Through Christ, the church is the heir of the Melchizedekan priesthood. "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:5–6). "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace" (Heb. 6:20–7:2). Men owe the local church their tithes.¹⁴

What do they owe the state? Less than a tithe. Any system of civil government that takes 10% is tyrannical, Samuel warned.

And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over

13. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 21.

14. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. **And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.** And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. **He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.** And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day (I Sam. 8:11–18).¹⁵

The Israelites in Samuel's day refused to heed this warning (v. 19). In the twentieth century, Christians did not cry out when the state extracted four times the tithe or even more from them. They lived under what the Bible clearly identifies as tyranny, yet they called it democratic liberty. What roused their ire was any suggestion that they owed a tithe to their local churches. "We're under grace, not law!" they proclaimed. In fact, they were under pagan law, pagan bureaucrats, pagan tax collectors, and pagan lawyers.

Pagans have denied that the Old Testament applies to modern times. Christians have agreed. Pagans have asserted the authority of the state to extract money far beyond the tithe. Christians have agreed. Pagans have affirmed the right of the tax collector to require comprehensive income records from every taxpayer. Christians have agreed. Yet any suggestion that a church's officers possess a similar right would be met with total opposition by church members. No one suggests that such authority is possessed by the church. Well, not quite. No one other than me. I argue that every *voting* church member must prove that he tithes, and this requires him to submit such records to the elders.¹⁶ But no one agrees with me. Protestant churches offer voting membership to any adult who joins. Non-tithing members are given the right to vote for leaders who will decide how to spend the church's money.

15. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

16. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 3.

D. Revolt: Tax or Tithe

If it is wrong for the state to collect taxes beyond the tithe, is it right for citizens to revolt when taxes exceed the tithe? Not if they can change the law legally. Not if they can legally beat the tax system individually. A tyranny involves more than high levels of taxation. Tax rates identify a tyranny, but tyranny is a comprehensive system. The Bible identifies as rebellious every civil government that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible as sovereign. The biblical answer to such rebellious civil authority is not armed revolt. The answer is evangelism, followed by the introduction of a new civil covenant. A new personal covenant is only the beginning of the Great Commission. *The long-term goal is a new civil covenant.* This is an implication of the Great Commission: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:18–20). The Great Commission has judicial implications for civil government. It is not limited to souls-only evangelism.¹⁷

Jesus told His followers to obey the Pharisees, even though He knew that they taught men’s traditions rather than the Mosaic law. “Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt. 23: 1–4). He knew the religious leaders were hypocrites; nevertheless, He told His followers to obey them. Why? Because the Old Covenant had not yet been annulled historically. The temple still stood. Until the sacrificial fires were extinguished forever, the religious leaders possessed legitimate authority. The Christians would have to wait for deliverance. It came in A.D. 70.¹⁸

There is no need to hurry when it comes to throwing off a self-im-

17. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

18. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/dctrib>)

posed tyranny. God will eventually destroy it. His people must work to replace it, not through violence, but through principled non-violent resistance and political mobilization. (Educating their children with an explicitly Christian curriculum is basic to such a strategy.) The apostles refused to obey when told not to preach the gospel (Acts. 5:29), but they willingly suffered the consequences of this disobedience. “[A]nd when they [the Jewish council] had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:40b–42).

Conclusion

Jesus made it clear that the state is entitled to taxes. He implied that the church is also entitled to tithes. If we do not turn to the Old Testament to find out what the limits of taxes and church contributions are, we shall forever be caught between the tax collector and the church in their quest for funding. The Old Testament provides information on these limits. For the church, the limit is 10% of our net income. For the state, the limit is less than 10% (I Sam. 8:15, 17). The state does not have the right before God to extract from residents as high a percentage as the church has the right to demand of its voting members. Any state that demands as much as 10% is a tyranny. The total level of taxation, from local civil government upward, must be less than 10% of a person’s net income.

The modern church does not believe this applies in the New Covenant. The result is a church that does not have the courage to demand tithes of its voting members, and a state that cannot resist extracting four or five times the tithe. Christians have sought to starve God’s church by refusing to tithe. *Meanwhile, the messianic state extracts their wealth unmercifully.* The Bible identifies what God is legally entitled to and what the state is legally entitled to. This, the world has refused to do. The result in our day is the widespread acceptance of the welfare state. The end result of this is personal dependence on the state and social bankruptcy. God is not mocked.

THE WIDOW'S GIFT AND GRADUATED TAXATION

And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had (Luke 21:1–4).

The theocentric issue here is God as omniscient: He searches people's hearts and then sovereignly imputes value to their actions. This is God as transcendent but also present: point one of the Biblical covenant.¹

A. Interpersonal Comparisons of Subjective Utility

This passage rests on an assumption: *God has the ability to make accurate interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.* Jesus announced that the poor widow had given away more than the rich men had given collectively. They had given away only a small fraction of their wealth, but the widow had given all of her money. Jesus looked into their minds and hers, and He drew conclusions regarding comparative rates of sacrifice. His conclusion: giving away all the money that a person owns is a greater sacrifice than giving away only part of the money that another person owns.

Is this observation universally true? If it is, should civil governments adopt this principle to guide tax policy?

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

1. *Subjective Value Theory*

In Chapter 14, I discussed the epistemological problem of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. This is a major logical problem of all modern economic theory, which is grounded in epistemological subjectivism. The problem appears to have no solution in terms of the presuppositions of subjective economics. As I wrote, "The presumed inability of economists or anyone else to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility is a fundamental flaw of modern economic theory. Economists rarely discuss this problem because it has not been solved scientifically or philosophically. To get from the subjective utility scales of individuals to objective social utility is scientifically impossible, according to the logic of individualism. This strips economic theory of all relevance for social policy. But economists want to believe that what they teach can become relevant for social policy. So, they ignore this epistemological problem. They offer policy suggestions to politicians and bureaucrats as if it had been solved." If there is a solution, we have waited for over seven decades for someone to prove it.

To make comparisons between two people's individual utilities, the evaluator has to assume that there is a *common value scale* between them. The evaluator must also be able to intuit this scale on the basis of *introspection*. This common value scale must exist in order for the assessment to be accurate. For example, if the widow had been a religious fanatic who believed that all money is cursed, her gift would not have constituted a great sacrifice. She was merely getting rid of something that would destroy her. In her opinion, she was exposing the recipients of her money to a curse. But, while the widow in theory could have been operating in terms of such a view of money, Jesus and His listeners assumed that she was basically like most people. Giving away her last coins was a major sacrifice on her part, evidence of her trust in God to supply her with additional money in the near future.

I wrote also this in my conclusion to Chapter 14: "Modern subjectivist economic theory denies the existence of a common ethical standard, common tastes, or a common evaluator on the day of judgment. It affirms that each person is different. This destroys the concept of a common humanity. It therefore destroys the possibility of a common objective scale of values linking all men. This means that there can be no scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Nevertheless, we make such comparisons all the time. . . ." Jesus' com-

parison rested on the assumption of a common humanity with common values. He could not otherwise have compared accurately the collective value of the rich men's gifts with the widow's.

2. Grading Examinations

Let me use an analogy based on classroom examinations and grading. Jesus graded the woman's performance in terms of her economic capacity. He did the same with her fellow students. He gave her a higher grade, even though her competitors received higher numerical scores.

A grading system that ignores everyone's numerical score and substitutes a teacher's subjective estimations of the intellectual capacity of each student would destroy the examination system, because it would destroy the predictability of any relationship between performance and reward. The brighter students would conclude that no teacher is able to make such comparisons regarding students' intellectual gifts. They would regard the grading system as unfair, arbitrary, and therefore not worth studying for.

Yet, not only does this passage teach that God can make such comparisons, it assumes that other people can do this, too. Jesus would not have used this example to make His point regarding the sacrificial nature of giving, had He not expected His listeners to understand Him and agree with Him.

3. Applications

This raises the issue of application. What did Jesus want His listeners, including us, to do with this information? I think most readers would agree with His point: the widow gave more sacrificially than the rich men did. She was putting her life at risk. What if she could not earn another coin? Where would her next meal come from? She was trusting God to care for her. Her trust was greater than the trust of the rich donors. By giving more sacrificially, Jesus said, she gave more, economically speaking.

But what can we legitimately do with this information? We can praise the widow. We can pray to God for comparable trust in Him and His care for His people, so that we can become more like the widow. We can also remind ourselves that the generosity of the rich does not impress God. But we cannot do much more than this.

We cannot run a business or a government or a church on such a

principle of sacrificial giving. We surely cannot afford to sell new cars to poor widows who are willing to pay everything they own to buy one. We cannot legitimately establish a tax system that is based on the assumption that tax collectors can make interpersonal comparisons of everyone's subjective utility, as if they can know what the comparative psychological burden of each taxpayer is and assess an equal psychological burden for all taxpayers by assessing unequal numerical rates of taxation. We cannot run a church this way, because the church is governed by the principle of the tithe: a flat rate of 10 percent.² Then why did Jesus raise the question of the widow's gift?

B. Another Challenge to the Religious Leaders

Immediately preceding His assessment of the donors' gifts, Jesus had announced: "Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation" (Luke 20:46–47). These men wanted public acclaim and approval. They were in fact thieves. They devoured widows' estates. They appeared to be righteous. They were not. They loved acclaim more than they loved justice.

Jesus was once again pulling them down from their lofty positions. Their damnation, He said, will be worse than the damnation handed out to common criminals. On judgment day, God will compare their lofty claims of righteousness with their actual performance. This is why they will be damned with greater pain. God expects more from those who have been given more information (Luke 12:47–48).³

With His assessment of the widow's two mites, Jesus made a judicial point. With respect to the final judgment, He said, God will hand out negative sanctions and positive sanctions, first, in terms of His knowledge of each person's innate capacities. Second, He will grade redeemed men in terms of what they did in history in relation to His holy law, which is written in their hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Third, He will judge Old Covenant saints in terms of what His revealed law said, although it was not written on their hearts. Fourth, He will judge covenant-breakers in terms of the work of the law written on their hearts

2. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009); Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

3. Chapter 28.

(Rom. 2:15–16).⁴ Fifth, He will grade all men in terms of what they understood about their responsibilities and were capable of obeying. Being infinite, God can justly hand out final rewards and punishments in terms of an objective standard—God's Bible-revealed law—and also in terms of what men knew subjectively and what they did objectively in history.

No man can exercise such comprehensive, complex judgment in history. No earthly institution has been established by God with the covenantal, oath-bound authority to do this. Such a human institution would become arbitrary and corrupt very soon. Its defenders would be claiming its divinity, and by implication, the divinity of its employees acting collectively.

C. The Graduated Income Tax

In 1912, A. C. Pigou's book appeared, *Wealth and Welfare*. He was a professor of economics at Cambridge University. In this book, and in his more famous *Economics of Welfare* (1920), he argued for higher rates of income taxation on the rich. He defended his recommendation by an appeal to subjective value theory.

The marginalist revolution of the 1870s by 1912 had led most economists to conclude that the subjective value to the individual of each additional unit of monetary income is worth less than the previous unit. He satisfies his highest remaining wants with each additional monetary unit; therefore, each additional unit is worth less to him, for it satisfies wants of reduced value. Then Pigou made a leap of faith. He said that an additional monetary unit in a rich man's income stream is worth less to him than an additional unit is worth to a poor man. The poor man will satisfy much higher-level wants with his additional monetary unit than the rich man will satisfy on his scale of wants.⁵

This sounds similar to Jesus' assessment of the widow's mite. The logic of Jesus' assessment rests on something like Pigou's comparisons. We recognize the truth of both. But there is this crucial difference: Jesus did not recommend any institutional policy on the basis of His assessment of the widow and the rich donors. Pigou did. Jesus was talking about God's final judgment and men's ability to understand today the righteousness of God's final judgment. He was not recommending

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

5. A. C. Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 89–91.

that men delegate to civil government the authority to impose graduated taxes backed up by the threat of public sanctions. Jesus did not assume that tax collectors possess God's ability to make precise interpersonal comparisons of individuals' subjective utilities, nor do they possess His ability to make precise subjective assessments of other men's actions in relation to their varying individual capacities to understand and obey His objective law.

Pigou was implicitly asserting that tax policy should be formulated in terms of an assumption, namely, that tax collectors have the ability to mimic God's final judgment, including the imposition of negative sanctions for anyone's failure to pay taxes. This was exactly what politicians wanted to hear. The income tax was imposed in England in 1911. It was about to be voted on in the United States in 1912.⁶

Pigou's message was what economists wanted to hear, too. They wanted to believe that they, as neutral scientists, possess the ability to make such comparisons accurately and then advise politicians regarding socially optimum rates of graduated taxation. This unique scientific ability makes economists indispensable in setting public policy.

It may have seemed as though Pigou was a disinterested scholar. He was anything but disinterested. He was a secret admirer of the Bolsheviks. He had been corresponding with various Bolshevik leaders in exile as early as 1905.⁷ In the 1920s, he secretly recommended to the Soviet spy apparatus operating in England the names of businessmen who might engage in Soviet trade. The businessmen had no idea he had suggested them.⁸ In 1937, he wrote the following: "If, then, it were in the writer's power to direct his country's destiny, he would accept, for the time being, the general structure of capitalism; but he would modify it gradually. He would use the weapon of graduated death duties and graduated income tax, not merely as instruments of revenue, but with the deliberate purpose of diminishing the glaring inequalities

6. The imposition of an income tax by the United States government required a Constitutional amendment. The 16th amendment was voted on in 1912. It did not pass, according to the legal requirements governing amendments. Thirty-six of the 48 states had to ratify it to amend the Constitution. At least 16 states did not ratify it, or did not ratify it properly. But the U.S. government announced that it had passed, and in 1913, the government levied a graduated income tax. On the failure of the amendment to pass, see R. W. Beckman and W. Benson, *The Law That Never Was*, 2 vols. (South Holland, Illinois: Constitutional Research Associates, 1985, 1986).

7. John Costello, *Mask of Treachery* (New York: Morrow, 1988), p. 646n. He cites Richard Deacon, *The British Connection* (London: Hasmish Hamilton, 1979), pp. 66–67.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–71.

of fortune and opportunity which deface our present civilization. He would take a leaf from the book of Soviet Russia and remember that the most important investment of all is investment in the health, intelligence and character of the people.”⁹ When Pigou spoke of graduated income taxation as a weapon, he spoke correctly. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), Marx and Engels anonymously recommended a system of graduated income taxation as step two of 10 steps to move a nation into socialism.¹⁰ Pigou was following the Party Line, but with a more sophisticated argument.

In 1932, Lionel Robbins offered his critique of the use of the concept of declining marginal utility to justify graduated income taxes. He said that it is impossible for economists to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.¹¹ He was correct. The problem was, this denial also applied to all known examples of social policy. This means that economists, as scientists, must stay silent regarding the costs and benefits of any public policy. Roy Harrod made this point in response to Robbins in an essay in the *Economic Journal* in 1938. In a 1939 response, Robbins backed away from his sweeping statement regarding the limits of economics in policy-making. He did not explain why his earlier argument had been wrong. He merely affirmed the ability of economists to make some policy recommendations. So, the debate ended. Graduated income taxation is with us still, and most economists seem content with it in principle.

The Bible lays down the principle of the tithe: a flat tax imposed by God on His people for the support of the institutional church. No church enforces this on its voting members. No church has a separate category of membership—voting members—which mandates the tithe. God imposes the requirement, but churches have not dared to enforce it. The tithe has become a matter of conscience.

What is true of the modern church is not true of the modern state. The modern state mandates different rates of taxation according to income levels. It does so in the name of social justice or fairness. Rich people are supposed to pay their “fair share.” Their fair share is always officially higher—before special-interest loopholes are quietly inserted into the tax code—than the tax rates imposed on a majority of the

9. A. C. Pigou, *Socialism Versus Capitalism* (London: Macmillan, 1937), pp. 137–38.

10. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), end of Part II.

11. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature & Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 136–41. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

voters by the politicians.¹²

Conclusion

When the widow donated every coin that she had, she sacrificed a great deal. Her gift was more impressive as a token of her faith than the larger gifts made by rich men. Jesus used this example to make a point: *God is not greatly impressed by gifts from the rich*. He is also not greatly impressed by rich scribes who steal from widows.

The fact that the widow gave more, in the sense of having trusted God more, is not to become the basis of a graduated taxation scheme. Jesus did not say that the officials of the state can accurately make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Every piece of legislation is based on some view of benefits and losses to members of society, which means that there is a vague way to assess broadly a society's social utility, but any suggestion that policy-makers can perceive fine distinctions of men's comparative assessments of value is fraudulent.

To protect church members from guilt manipulation or actual extortion for receiving the sacraments, God established the limit of the tithe. He also revealed to Israel that a level of civil taxation as high as the tithe is tyranny (I Sam. 8:15, 17).¹³ So, the suggestion that the ability of people to make broad comparisons of subjective utility cannot be used legitimately to justify a scientific case for graduated taxation or graduated tithing.

12. Gary North, "The Politics of the 'Fair Share,'" *The Freeman* (Nov. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/gnfairshare>)

13. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

DOMINION THROUGH SERVICE¹

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:25–30).

The theocentric issue here God as the source of all authority: point two of the biblical covenant.²

A. Church Hierarchy

Jesus here set forth a unique view of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The kingdom of God is revealed through the sacraments, but the Lord's Supper has a heavenly model. The apostles will eat and drink with Christ in heaven. They will also judge the 12 tribes of Israel. "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Rendering judgment is an aspect of the Lord's Supper that is rarely mentioned in churches, yet here Jesus made this the focal point

1. This is adapted from Chapter 41 in Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd electronic edition (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Dominion Educational Ministries, Inc., [2000] 2003).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

of this sacrament. *The communion meal is linked to a major aspect of dominion: rendering judgment.*

“He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (v. 26). Jesus here made it plain that *dominion is a legitimate goal*. But it is a peculiar kind of dominion. *To be great, one must serve*. To give commands, one must serve those who are commanded. This implies hierarchy. God has placed man over the creation (Gen. 1:27–28).³ Some men are placed legally over other men. This is the doctrine of *judicial representation*—also part of point two. The question is: What are the legitimate means of attaining dominion?

1. Rule by Princes

We begin, as Jesus did, with a description of ecclesiastically illegitimate means. Jesus said that the princes of the gentiles exercise authority over their subordinates. This means that they issue commands, and these commands must be followed. This is the kind of authority that Jesus exercised over sickness. When the Roman centurion described his own authority over his troops as analogous Jesus’ authority over illness, Jesus praised this confession of faith. He healed the man’s servant from a distance, which the centurion had affirmed that He could do, so great was His authority (Matt. 8:8–10). But this form of military command is not the model for the church’s government. The military is a subset of civil government. The military serves the nation. Officers serve the nation best by placing at risk their lives and the lives of their men. Yet, even here, the wise officer places his men’s interests above his own. He protects his men’s lives before he protects his career. He obeys orders that place his men at extreme risk, not to advance his career, but to serve as a model for his men. A battle plan sometimes involves the deliberate sacrifice of some units. Even here, the Western military tradition encourages volunteerism: high-risk operations are very often staffed by volunteers or special forces.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples in their capacity as church members. He was not speaking to a group of soldiers. The principle of leadership that He laid down here is not appropriate for the army, whose task, as one aphorism puts it, is “to kill people and break things.” Leaders in the church are supposed to be servants, not military commanders. The proper way to authority in the church is the way

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

of service. Paul made this clear in his first epistle to Timothy. “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (I Tim. 3:2–4).⁴ The person described here is self-sacrificing.

That this is the avenue to ecclesiastical authority is not intuitively obvious. The exercise of power is the more common avenue to public greatness. The strong man compels obedience. He also rewards it. He governs by means of sanctions, positive and negative.

2. Ecclesiastical Service

But how is this different from authority in the church? The distinction is not easy to state. For example, we can say that the way to authority in the church is through service to those without any power, but this is not true in a church where members vote. The members have sanctions to impose. They vote to hire or fire a pastor. They vote for officers. If a man’s goal is high office, the favor of those possessing these sanctions is surely valuable to him. Similarly, in the worldly quest for power, men serve those who possess greater power. They subordinate themselves to those who can reward them. But church members who vote can also reward others with leadership positions. Those seeking authority do subordinate themselves to those with the votes. Where, then, is the distinction between church authority and other forms of authority? What did Jesus mean when He said, “But it shall not be so among you”?

Christ’s personal service was service unto death. He did not die to placate men. He died to placate God. Service in the church is to be analogous. *The legitimate road to dominion is through service to those who cannot repay.* God will raise up such a servant to a position of leadership. Yet, in the modern church where members vote, almost everyone can repay. This is also true in civil government. To understand what Jesus was getting at, we must consider His era.

In the gentile world in Jesus’ day, democracy was a relic of the past. Rome had moved from a republic to an empire under Caesar Augustus in the generation before Jesus’ birth. The trappings of representative

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

government were still visible, but not the substance. To gain and hold power, men had to seek favor with members of the oligarchy that held permanent power. The people could not grant political office or withhold it from those above them. There was no public veto over the affairs of state. Power was granted from above.

When it came time to replace Judas, the 11 apostles made the decision regarding who would be the two candidates. Then they turned it over to God. "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23–26). On what basis did the apostles narrow the list of candidates? The text does not say, but we know what it was from Jesus' words: those in authority decided in terms of the service displayed by the two men. The standard was not service to the apostles, but service to the congregation.

Those with power in the church must heed Christ's words. They should use service to others as the criterion for screening the candidates for high office. It is clear from the passage in Acts that democracy was not part of their screening procedure. They could lawfully use the casting of lots to allow God to make the final decision. This practice had to be replaced in A.D. 70: the fall of Jerusalem, when judicially authoritative divine revelation ceased. Then to what extent is Acts a legitimate model for today?

3. Church Hierarchy

Hierarchy has not been annulled. How do Jesus' words apply to church hierarchy? First, there must be a screening procedure. The standard of service to others must be applied by those who are not being served. The screening committee must not become self-serving or self-perpetuating. It must not choose its successors based on service to the personal interests of members of the hierarchy. Committee members must be able to perceive that a potential candidate is active in his service to the members.

Second, there must be more than one candidate for each office. The screening committee can and must apply the criteria, but it must not assume that only one person is capable of holding office. This as-

sumes too much wisdom on the part of a committee. Committees are rarely creative. They function best as nay-sayers. They veto bad ideas. They should decide only what things in general should be done and not done, and to hire and fire the senior officer. Implementation must be left to individuals who answer to the committee.

Third, there must be third-party sanctions. Someone other than the screening committee must have the final decision. In the case in Acts, God was the third party. To lodge final authority in the representative body is to create an implicit tyranny. Representatives should always face a veto by those represented. As in the case of a committee, the larger association that comprises those who are represented cannot both devise and implement specific policies. They cooperate with each other in a joint structuring of general goals. Then they choose a manager who will implement these general goals in specific instances. But they cannot escape responsibility before God. If their leaders fall, they fall (Lev. 4).⁵

The gentiles served those above them. Obedience to an ever-more narrow hierarchy was the way to power. Rulership was a matter of coercion: issuing orders to those below. The authority to issue orders was seen as the great prize. Jesus announced a different system of hierarchy: the principle of servanthood. Instead of issuing orders to those beneath him, the ruler is to serve them. Coercion is thereby minimized.

B. Servants' Rights

Men pervert this rule when they seek leadership roles by serving only those who can repay them with the robes of authority. They imitate rebellious Absalom, who stood in the city's gates and promised justice to all men.⁶ They pretend to serve. They flatter those ostensibly

5. Gary North, *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 4.

6. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (II Sam. 15:2–6).

served in a strategy to gain the power to issue orders. They become courtiers to the crowd.⁷

How can those being served protect themselves? First, by not consenting to a system of centralized administrative law. They must keep church government weak. All government is a system of hierarchy, but the biblical model for church and state (but not family) is a bottom-up hierarchy. Rulers are judges who hear disputes (Ex. 18).⁸ They are to honor biblical law, including Mosaic case laws that have not been annulled by the New Testament.⁹ Court decisions become precedents. But the common law ideal of judges-made law (the many) is as anti-biblical as the Roman law ideal of legislature-made law (the one). Both views make man the law-giver. Neither can reconcile the one and the many. Biblical law does.

Second, those served must exercise judicial sanctions from time to time. They must decide who will rule over them. In doing so, they exercise a veto over the decisions of the representative body, either directly or indirectly.

Third, members must decide whether to remain in covenant with a local congregation. Competition among congregations is as good a thing as competition among candidates for church office. Servants should be allowed to vote with their feet. Original sin teaches that men cannot be trusted with unilateral power. If power is exercised only downward, the result is tyranny. If a self-appointing hierarchy determines the distribution of the inheritance, those who provide the funding should reduce that inheritance by transferring their membership and their tithes.

C. Dominion Through Service: Free Market

The free market order is based on a principle of service analogous to the one that Jesus set forth as binding in the church. The producer must serve the customer if he wishes to maximize his return. He must act in the present as a representative of future customers. He must forecast what they will be willing and able to pay in the future. Then he must enter the market for production goods. He must buy or rent

7. Ray Eldon Hiebert, *Courtier to the Crowd: The Story of Ivy Lee and the Development of Public Relations* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1966).

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), , ch. 19.

9. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

them, store them, restructure them, store the finished consumer products, advertise them, and deliver the to paying customers. If he misforecasts customer demand, he will produce losses. If he forecasts correctly, he will produce profits.¹⁰

1. Sovereignty and Authority

What distinguishes this form of service from hierarchical authority is the horizontal nature of the relationship between buyer and seller. Each possesses *legal sovereignty* over his asset. Neither possesses legal sovereignty over the other person or the other person's assets. The economic relationship is horizontal.

A customer is legally sovereign over his own money. He decides whether or not to buy an item offered for sale. The seller has no legal compulsion over him in a free market economy. The seller has a legal claim on his own products, but he does not have a legal claim on the customer's money. The seller of goods is legally sovereign over what he owns, just as the customer is legally sovereign over what he owns. But the customer is dominant. Why? Because he possesses the most marketable asset: money. The seller owns a specialized asset. It has a much narrower market. There are far fewer people rushing to give him money in exchange for his asset than there are sellers who are pursuing customers for their money. The customers, because they own money, are economically dominant.

In rare instances, the producer is dominant. These cases usually are unique life-and-death situations. The physician at the scene of an accident is dominant over a critically injured person. The injured person is not in a position to negotiate. But such cases are exceptions, and juries in disputes over payment possess the authority to overturn the terms of the verbal contract on behalf of the buyer. The general market principle is this: *customers are economically dominant over producers*. While both parties are buyers and both are sellers, he who sells money is considered the buyer. He is economically dominant because he owns the most marketable commodity.

To maximize their returns, sellers must conform to the demand established by buyers. The legal structure of the free market is not a pyramid-like hierarchy. *Sellers and buyers meet on equal legal terms: as owners of marketable assets*. Neither is legally sovereign over the

10. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

other. Neither can compel the other to meet his demands. The only negative sanction that either of them can impose on the other is the refusal to enter into an exchange. The free market is therefore not a covenantal institution.

2. *Covenant vs. Market*

In a covenantal institution, there is a hierarchy of legal authority. Subordinates take an oath before God that they will defer to the decisions of ordained superiors. They owe them allegiance, for they owe God allegiance, and their superiors represent them before God (Lev. 4).¹¹ The superior has a legal claim on his subordinates.

This is not the legal relationship between buyers and sellers in a free market economy. Any attempt to insert the legal structure of a covenant into market relationships undermines the authority of money-owning customers. Other customers, who do not possess sufficient assets, or who wish to use their assets for other purposes, sometimes call for the state to redistribute wealth. They sometimes call on the state to compel producers to meet their demand at below-market prices by legally forbidding the bids of competing customers. The substitution of one party's legal sovereignty over mutual exchange undermines the economic authority of customers in general.

Legislation favoring certain groups is introduced and passed on the basis of a deception. The public is told that the legislation protects an entire group, when it really favors one segment of this group at the expense of most of the other members of the community. A politically successful segment of the larger population gains protection by law from competition from other segments. *Above-market economic returns are legislated for the benefit of a subgroup.* The higher these returns, the fewer the beneficiaries: fewer participants to share the loot.

Consider legislation passed in the name of *producers' sovereignty*: tariffs, import quotas, cartels, quality controls, price floors, compulsory trade union laws, and licensing. Or consider legislation passed in the name of *consumers' sovereignty*: price ceilings, quality controls, laws barring racial discrimination in renting or selling, and rationing. All such legislation annuls the legal sovereignty of *excluded* producers and customers over their own property. It forcibly removes them from the competitive bidding process. In doing so, it restricts the market,

11. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

thereby lowering the division of labor and reducing output per unit of resource input. It reduces the wealth of those discriminated against, all in the name of the public interest. In the name of a “government-business partnership,” it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled producers. In the name of “consumerism,” it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled customers.

Conclusion

The principle of top-down hierarchical service by rulers governs the three institutional covenants: ecclesiastical, familial, and civil. A covenant is bound by an oath to God, implicit or explicit. It involves legal claims. *Where hierarchy is covenantal, rulers are supposed to seek dominion by serving the needs of their subordinates.* God honors those with the power to enforce their will on others when they restrain themselves and sacrifice their own interests for the sake of their subordinates. This is what Jesus did in both of His offices: God and man.

This rule governs all men: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:3–4). But it especially governs those rulers who have been entrusted with delegated authority from God and man. The structure of authority is vertical.

Free market authority is contractual, not covenantal. A contract is not established by a formal oath before God. It is established through voluntary mutual agreement. The customer is supreme in the free market. This is because he owns the most marketable commodity: money. Producers must serve customers. The structure of service is horizontal because the free market is not a covenantal institution. It is an extension of the individual. The individual who produces something for sale to others must serve their desires. The principle of service to others governs the free market. Individuals serve each other through mutually beneficial exchange. This is not hierarchy except in the general economic sense that the customer is dominant because he possesses the most marketable commodity, money.

CONCLUSION

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:29–34).

This is the same economic message that Jesus offered in the Sermon on the Mount. “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:31–33).¹

This message runs counter to man’s fallen nature. Man finds himself in a cursed world. God cursed the ground in response to Adam’s sin. He also cursed Adam’s work (Gen. 3:17–19). Fallen man battles nature to secure his daily bread. The war between man and nature is economic. Man seeks to squeeze productivity out of nature.

Free market capitalism is the most successful method in history for squeezing productivity out of nature. It is mankind’s most successful means for reducing the economic effects of God’s curse of the ground. For example, air conditioning today overcomes the sweat on most industrial workers’ brows. Farmers ride in air conditioned tractors. The question is: Can a society maintain its commitment to the curse-reducing free market social order when Christian faith wanes? Will God allow the curse of the ground to be progressively reduced in a social order that denies God?

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

The modern humanistic economist argues that the free market social order is autonomous. It supposedly does not rest on religious pre-suppositions. It brings blessings to every society that embraces it, irrespective of the nation's theology. In short, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17a).² This, too, is a theology: the theology of autonomous man. Free market economic theory is one of many religions of the kingdom of man that compete for men's allegiance: *the kingdom of economic growth*. As Robert Nelson has described it, "Economists think of themselves as scientists, but as I will be arguing in this book, they are more like theologians. . . . Economic efficiency has been the greatest source of social legitimacy in the United States for the past century, and economists have been the priesthood defending the core social value of our era."³

A. The Accumulation of Treasure

Jesus said that covenant-keepers have God on their side in the battle against scarcity. They will not starve. God will provide whatever His servants require to accomplish their God-assigned tasks. God will not abandon them.

But there is a conditional aspect of this promise. God requires covenant-keepers to forego the quest for earthly treasure. They must not become caught up in the endless quest for more. Such a quest reveals men's lack of faith in God. It reveals their worship of mammon: the internal, insatiable god of "more for me in history."⁴

Men seek protection from the unpredictable hazards and burdens of life. This is legitimate: an appropriate response to God's curse of the ground. The question is: *Where should men seek this protection?* In God or in their possessions? Where are men's economic reserves? In God or in gold? Life is a challenge because it is unpredictable and because sin is loose in the world. To accumulate sufficient gold to match the level of reserves offered free of charge by God, a covenant-keeper would have to accumulate a mountain of gold. Even this would not be sufficient, for gold can be stolen. Nature cannot supply sufficient reserves to match the reserves promised by God. Furthermore, nature drives a very hard bargain. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

3. Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: from Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). p. xvi.

4. Chapter 39.

gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).⁵ Treasure is a good thing. Jesus said repeatedly that covenant-keepers are supposed to amass it. But located where? In heaven or on earth?

Most men seek earthly treasure, or at least they dream of attaining it. This quest is a huge mistake, Jesus told His disciples. Men should seek heavenly treasure. Jesus told them that God was going to give them the kingdom. They were therefore not to fear. Fear what? The world, with all of its shortages. "And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind" (Luke 12:29).⁶

The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as a harsh critic of earthly riches. The same Jesus appears in the other Gospels, but Luke's Gospel presents events in the ministry of Jesus that focus on the snares and cares of riches.⁷ It should be obvious to anyone who reads Luke carefully that the author was highly suspicious of riches. In this respect, he faithfully followed the teaching of Jesus.

How does a God-fearing person accumulate treasure in heaven? By surrendering treasure in history. Jesus told the rich young ruler, "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:33–34).⁸ There is a *currency exchange market* in history where covenant-keepers (though not covenant-breakers) can buy eternal treasure. They can build up treasure that they will collect beyond the grave. It takes great faith to believe this. Such faith is available only as a gift from God. Covenant-keepers must learn to trust God for everything that they need in this life, as well as for their access to eternal life. God monitors their faith in His promise of eternal life by viewing their responses to His promises regarding temporal life.

B. Trusting God

1. *What Not to Trust*

Jesus taught His disciples that they were supposed to trust only in God for everything important in this life. They could no longer trust their own families. Yet the family has been the most universal agency of social welfare in history. Jesus said: "Suppose ye that I am come to

5. Chapter 19.

6. Chapter 26.

7. Chapter 15.

8. Chapter 42.

give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law" (Luke 12: 51–53). They could not trust the state, either. "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake" (Luke 21:12). Finally, they could not trust money. "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).⁹ They would have to trust God. God knew their needs, and He would not abandon them.¹⁰

Jesus in this passage assured them that God would provide them with the basics: food, shelter, and clothing. What about homes? What about steady employment? Jesus did not mention these. Yet a steady job and a place to call home have been among the most desired assets in history. A piece of ground with trees and vines had eschatological implications for Israel.

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it (Micah 4:1–4).¹¹

The idea of coming home is basic to eschatology (Rev. 21; 22). It is

9. Chapter 39.

10. Chapter 24.

11. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 26.

also basic to building a civilization.

How can people exercise dominion as wandering nomads? Only marginally. Yet Jesus had no home. “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). He did not live long enough to buy one. He called His disciples to a life of wandering.¹² He knew that there was no hope for Old Covenant Israel.¹³ Nowhere in Scripture is this made any clearer than in Luke’s Gospel. In a passage that appears only in Luke, we read: “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:20–24). The disciples could trust God to deliver the church from this eschatological event for Old Covenant Israel, which He did. Jesus told His followers that bad days lay ahead for national Israel, but not for the church. The persecution of the church would be a temporary phenomenon. The destruction of Old Covenant Israel would be permanent.¹⁴

2. *History and Eternity*

Jesus warned His disciples not to put their faith in anything rooted in history. This is always good advice, but especially in His era. History was about to take an unexpected turn. A new world order was coming into existence through Christ’s ministry: the fifth and final kingdom prophesied by Daniel. “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44). Jesus promised that God would soon give this kingdom to the disciples and their covenantal heirs. It would be taken from the Jews,

12. Chapter 20.

13. Chapter 2.

14. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

Jesus had told the Pharisees. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43).

Jesus told His disciples that *history is transformed by eternity*. The way for covenant-keepers to shape history is to abandon any faith in history as the source of permanence. His people must be *in* history, but they must not be *of* history. It took great faith to believe this message. It took even greater faith to act in terms of it. It still does.

The kingdom of God is visibly manifested in history. What will be true in eternity is reflected in history. As surely as the creation testifies to the Creator (Rom. 1:20), so will history progressively testify to the final victory of Jesus Christ in eternity. Christ’s victory at the end of time will not be a great reversal of His covenantal representatives’ failure in history. They will not fail.¹⁵ This is because His victory was attained in history (Matt. 28:18–20), reversing Satan’s victory over Adam, which also took place in history. *The war for eternity is conducted primarily on earth and in history.*

There are many promises in the Bible that deal with the positive transformation of civilization. Some of these involve inheritance, which is the fifth point of the biblical covenant model.¹⁶

What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:12–13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

C. Jesus on the Covenant’s Sanctions

Jesus reaffirmed this promise in the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). In the Mosaic Covenant, this inheritance was promised by God as a blessing in response to men’s corporate covenantal obedience to His Bible-re-

15. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

16. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. ([Http://bit.ly/rstymp](http://bit.ly/rstymp)) North, *Inheritance and Dominion*.

vealed law. "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God" (Deut. 28:1–2).

Jesus did not cite this passage, nor did He discuss the relationship between corporate obedience and external wealth. He rejected tangible wealth as an ideal of holy living. This requires an explanation. Did He break with the Old Covenant law and its divine sanctions in history? If so, why did He say that the meek will inherit the earth? That was an Old Covenant promise. But if He did not break with the Old Covenant, why did He reject the ideal of great wealth as a blessing of God and therefore a tool of dominion in history?

I offer two answers. First, Jesus' doctrine of eternal sanctions significantly modified the Old Covenant. *The Old Covenant had offered no doctrine of eternal sanctions.* Reaping and sowing were perceived as exclusively historical. Eliphaz testified to Job, "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:8). The Old Covenant's relationship between plowing and reaping was visible and therefore historical. More than this: it was exclusively historical. The biblical doctrine of eternal sanctions was introduced by Jesus. Jesus warned of hell for covenant-breakers who live in luxury in this life, and offered hope of heaven to covenant-keepers who live in poverty.¹⁷ Paul subsequently applied the reap-sow relationship to history-eternity. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7–8).

Second, *Jesus emphasized the addictive power of riches.* The worship of mammon is the worship of "more for me in history." Men can never attain enough for themselves when they pursue the accumulation of more. They can never gain peace when they want more. Paul's warning was an extension of Jesus' teaching. "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men

17. Chapter 40.

in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (I Tim. 6:6–12).¹⁸

Paul said he had learned to be content with whatever his circumstances were. "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:11–12).¹⁹ *This contented state of mind is given by God to very few people.* This same resting in faith is what Jesus recommended. It is the essence of trusting God. Hebrews 4:1–11 is the supreme New Testament passage on the rest promised to God's people. This rest is three-fold: definitive, progressive, and final. A fundamental aspect of progressive sanctification in history is progressive emotional rest.

D. Wealth and Dominion

In the Mosaic Covenant, national wealth was a tool of God's dominion. "And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them" (Deut. 28:11–13).²⁰

The gospels do not record that Jesus ever referred to this passage, nor did He recommend anything like this economic approach to dominion. He was launching a new organization, the church. He said

18. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

19. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

20. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 68, 69.

that the church was about to inherit God's kingdom. Did His silence on the economic promises of God's covenantal law mean that the kingdom of God would be stripped of economic success in the New Testament era? To answer this, we must consider when and where His disciples lived.

The Old Covenant ended forever in A.D. 70.²¹ Did this include the Old Covenant's command to exercise dominion? On the contrary: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20). What are the tools of dominion? God's Bible-revealed law.²² To these laws are attached supernatural corporate sanctions. Positive corporate sanctions include an increase in national wealth. This does not mean that these judicial tools are sufficient. They are not. Grace is required to empower covenant-keepers to use the tool of biblical law effectively.

Did Jesus announce a new way to dominion? To the disciples, He did. This new way is *sacrificial economic service to God*. A man must be rich toward God. "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20–21).²³ It involves charity.²⁴ "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" (Luke 12:33). But does the recommendation of voluntary poverty apply to all of Jesus' disciples throughout history? The church has always said no. Sects and monastic orders have occasionally adopted the lifestyle recommended to the apostles, but these have always been small fringe groups. In the case of medieval monastic orders, they kept getting rich because of their thrift and discipline. This led to a series of monastic reform movements that called the members back to the founders' vows of poverty. Christianity has the effect of increasing the wealth of its adherents as they bring themselves

21. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*.

22. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

23. Chapter 25.

24. Chapter 10.

progressively under the discipline of Christ. This is consistent with the Mosaic economy.

Jesus called the apostles into missionary service.²⁵ Not every person is called to be a missionary. Some people are called to support missionaries financially. This usually requires a stream of income. A stream of income requires a job or investment capital. Investment capital is accumulated wealth. This, Jesus promised: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).²⁶

E. Missions and Wealth

Middle-class comfort is the biblical economic ideal. “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).²⁷ The means for the world’s masses to achieve middle-class wealth is steady compound economic growth over centuries. Until the advent of free market capitalism in the Christian West, there was no known way to achieve long-term economic growth. The concept of permanent economic growth did not exist prior to the seventeenth century.

Missionaries bring the gospel, along with its rules against theft, covetousness, and envy. This is the first step historically on the pathway to permanent middle-class wealth for the masses of a society. It took seventeen centuries for this aspect of the gospel to become institutionalized.

As part of the church’s initial missionary venture, Jesus called on his disciples to sell their goods and give to the poor. I argue that this command was historically conditioned. It is not a universal command. The church has assumed this view through most of its history.

Jesus did not tell His disciples to burn their goods and follow Him. He told them to sell their goods, give the money to the poor, and follow Him. This raises a key question regarding the universal application of this command: How is it possible for all of Jesus’ followers to obey it

25. Chapter 26.

26. Chapter 11.

27. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

if their numbers increase through time? It would be impossible for all rich men to follow Jesus' command to sell their goods and give to the poor. Sellers need buyers. The primary wealth-defining asset of the rich is their capital. When they sell their capital, they transfer the primary source of their income to the buyers. The buyers remain rich: owners of future income streams. Someone must own these income streams. Therefore, *somebody in every society must be rich*. The rich we will always have with us.

This raises a crucial eschatological question. Which group, covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers, will be in control of most of the world's wealth when Christ comes in final judgment? The Bible is clear on this point: covenant-keepers. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9). But covenant-keepers cannot inherit the earth if, one by one, they sell their capital to covenant-breakers, and then give their money to the poor, thereby disinheriting their children. Their lawful inheritance would be transferred to covenant-breakers. Wealth would then compound for covenant-breakers. The wealth of the righteous would flow to sinners. This is contrary to Scripture. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).²⁸ Conclusion: Jesus did not intend for this command to become permanent.

Jesus gave this command to a small group. He called them a little flock. This command makes less and less sense, the larger the flock becomes. The Great Commission is the great missionary venture. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20a). The stated goal is to convert all nations and bring them to comprehensive obedience to God.²⁹ But when this goal is achieved, covenant-keepers would have to sell their goods to other covenant-keepers. This would make the command impossible for every covenant-keeper to obey.

This command was temporary. *The more successful the Christian missionary venture is, the less relevant this command becomes*. As the proportion of Christians rises in the population, it becomes increas-

28. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

29. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

ingly difficult for Christians to obey the command. As the kingdom of God in history progressively approaches the ideal of the kingdom of God in eternity, the number of potential covenant-breaking buyers decreases in relation to potential covenant-keeping sellers.

The command for Christians to decapitalize themselves for the sake of the poor is not universal. It was a temporary strategy for the first wave of missionary activity. *Its primary goal was to screen out the less committed followers of Jesus.* Its primary goal was not to help large numbers of poor people. There were not a sufficient number of disciples to help large numbers of poor people.

The most effective way to help the poor, long term, is to enable them to increase their productivity. With greater productivity, they earn larger incomes. For the poor, the beneficial effects of charity are individual and temporary. To raise the largest number of people out of poverty, the richest 20% of the population must invest in tools that the poor can use to increase their productivity. This is free market capitalism's way to greater per capita wealth: for both the rich and the poor.³⁰

F. Success and Success Indicators

Great wealth is pictured in Luke's Gospel as a source of great cares. It is pictured in Matthew as deceitful (Matt. 13:22).³¹ Jesus made it clear that *the care and feeding of earthly riches is a spiritually risky calling.* Does this mean that Christians should never seek earthly riches? Yes. Does it mean that Christian should never get rich? No. Becoming rich and seeking to become rich can be two different things, although they seldom are. A person may inherit a fortune. He may discover some way to please many customers, who pay him well to keep on pleasing them. He may be the owner of land on which treasure is discovered. But he is not to seek great wealth. Christ was clear about this.

1. The Quest for Riches

Nevertheless, the quest for riches motivates many men. They seek ways to gain wealth by serving customers better. Their goal is not to serve men for the sake of serving them. It is to serve them in order to get paid. He who seeks something of value from another person usually must offer something of value to him in exchange. He must appeal

30. Chapter 16.

31. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 28.

to the other person's self-interest. This view of wealth accumulation was made famous in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776). In contrast, Jesus told the Pharisee who held the feast for his peers on the sabbath that this was not the way to act. Instead, He said, invite those who are not able to repay you, and thereby gain a reward in eternity (Luke 14:14).³²

Jesus taught that earthly wealth should be given away, for this is the way of heavenly wealth accumulation. But it is also the way of wealth accumulation in history. "There is [he] that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is [he] that withholdeth more than is meet [fit], but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. 11:24–25).³³ The question is: How much of a Christian's earthly wealth should he give away? At least 10%, Jesus taught.³⁴ Beyond this, Jesus gave no universal answer. What appears to be a universal answer in this passage is an illusion, as we shall see.

Two separate allocation issues are involved in the practice of accumulating riches. The first is the issue of *earthly wealth vs. heavenly wealth*. This is the issue that Jesus dealt with continually. The second is the issue of accumulating either *success* or *success indicators*. The second issue is not well understood. It is possible to gain success indicators and reap failure. This error in choosing which to pursue is encapsulated in Jesus' account of the final judgment: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22–23). Another New Testament example: casting out demons was a publicly visible activity. It was thought to indicate spiritual success. The disciples surely thought it was. "After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. . . . And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name" (Luke 10:1, 17). Jesus warned them that this was not enough. "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

32. Chapter 34.

33. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 32.

34. Chapter 23.

The pursuit of an economic success indicator as a goal in itself rather than as a means of improving the level of service that produces economic success is spiritually suicidal. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:18–21).

2. *The Temptation of Substitution*

Men are tempted to substitute the pursuit of success indicators rather than actual success, which is based on effective service. A student may pursue high grades at the expense of learning. He masters the techniques of cramming for exams, but he does not spend enough time to internalize the material, making it part of his thinking, which is what the official goal of education is. Worse; he may cheat to get better grades. A politician may pursue votes rather than pursuing justice. But the proper goal of civil government is justice. Worse; he may take bribes to fill up his campaign fund. A businessman may pursue money at the expense of producing a better product or service, but the goal of business is to serve customers. Worse; he may cheat his customers in order to increase his profits. *There is always tension between success and visible success indicators.* Sometimes this temptation moves from bad motivation to bad ethics.

Jesus told His followers to extend His kingdom. He made it clear that the success indicator of great wealth is not to be substituted for faithful service. The Old Covenant had connected the success indicator of national riches with national covenantal obedience, i.e., faithful service to God. Jesus kept warning His followers that there is more to success in life than riches. Riches, in fact, are a constant threat to success because they are so widely defined as success. Yet Jesus promised wealth to His obedient followers (Luke 6:38).³⁵

Jesus knew men's hearts. He knew how easily that men can be sidetracked from their individual dominion tasks by the pursuit of success indicators. His doctrine of final sanctions announced a new success indicator: heavenly treasure. The Old Covenant had not men-

35. Chapter 11.

tioned final sanctions: heaven and hell. Jesus shifted the emphasis of His discussion of *success indicators* from history to eternity. Jesus shifted the emphasis of His discussion of *wealth* from history to eternity. He did not abandon the idea of dominion in history. He also did not abandon the promise of earthly inheritance.³⁶ What He did was to announce a new success indicator: heavenly treasure.

Jesus did not revoke the Old Covenant's doctrine of kingdom inheritance. Inheritance is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of inheritance vs. no inheritance. It is always a question of whose inheritance. Will Satan inherit in history, or will Christ? Because Satan and Christ dwell in a realm beyond history, this is another way of asking: Will Satan's representative agents inherit world civilization, or will Christ's? *Jesus taught that those who are meek before God will inherit. This is what the Old Covenant had also taught.* Jesus did not break with the Old Covenant on this point.

Covenant-keepers are to extend God's kingdom in history. As with any corporate project, there are personal success indicators. What is unique about the personal success indicators in this corporate project is this: they constitute the actual successes. Paul wrote: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5: 22–23). Peter wrote: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1:5–11).

G. Wealth Exchange: Temporal vs. Eternal

God places a price tag on men's pursuit of earthly capital: their non-attainment of equivalent eternal capital. This exchange system is inescapable. Jesus told His disciples to choose eternal treasure, which

36. Chapter 36.

is safe, in preference to temporal treasure, which is not safe. Eternal treasure is stored where thieves cannot break in. We might also say that its market price cannot fall.

Price theory teaches that the continuing cost of owning item A is forfeiting the use of item B, which the owner could buy with the money he could gain by selling item A. Day by day, the owner of item A does without item B. The economist says that item B is the next highest item on the owner's value scale. Jesus said that the heavenly wealth is worth more than temporal wealth. So, by hanging on to temporal—and therefore temporary—wealth, a covenant-keeper is forfeiting permanent ownership of a higher value asset. He is sacrificing the greater for the sake of the lesser. This is unwise, Jesus said.

Is there any legitimate kingdom function for great temporal wealth? Yes. It provides an income stream that can be used to fund kingdom projects. The *income* generated by the asset is *exchanged piecemeal* for eternal wealth. Instead of a one-time exchange, the owner of a capital asset retains ownership for the sake of future kingdom projects. The risk here is that the owner may lose his enthusiasm for funding kingdom projects. He may become addicted to the income generated by his capital. Or his heirs may not share his commitment.

A parent accumulates wealth for his children and grandchildren. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).³⁷ But he must also train his heirs in the proper administration of the inheritance. "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed" (Prov. 20:21).³⁸ *The inheritance is supposed to enable the heirs to continue building God's kingdom.* So, capital can sometimes remain a tool of dominion. But very few large family inheritances survive long term, and fewer still continue to finance God's kingdom. Either the inheritance is dissipated or else the faith of the heirs changes. To keep an inheritance intact, the heirs must remain productive. This is rare. The other alternative is primogeniture: eldest son inherits everything. This is unbiblical. Younger sons should inherit their portion. "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated,

37. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

38. *Ibid.*, ch. 61.

which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut. 21:15–17).³⁹

The money will be spent eventually. While it is under the control of a covenant-keeper, he can allocate it according to God's standards, as he understands them. He cannot be sure how it will be allocated after he dies. He is responsible before God while he is still legally in control. Jesus taught that men should make effective use of their wealth while they still can. This means an exchange of temporal wealth for eternal wealth.

H. Capital Accumulation and Poverty

Capitalism is a system of private ownership that allows people to save and invest. They surrender money—the most marketable commodity—to buy income-generating assets. A capital asset is a tool used by non-owners, including workers, to generate future income, which is why it can generate future income for its owner. With better tools, workers improve their productivity and therefore raise their income.

Free market capitalism is the only historically tested way to increase wealth for all and great wealth for a few. No other economic arrangement has ever achieved compound per capita economic growth for a period of over two centuries. We should by now have learned that if a society does not offer the legal possibility of great wealth for a few people, it cannot achieve middle-class comfort for most people.

In modern society, about 20% of a nation's population owns 75 to 85% of the wealth. This is irrespective of tax laws and other state action. This statistical fact is variously known as Pareto's law or Pareto's rule or the 20-80 rule.⁴⁰ This fact presents Christian theologians and social theorists with a major dilemma. So far, the only demonstrated way for a society to achieve the Bible's economic goal of middle-class wealth for a large majority of people is its adoption of free market capitalism. This goal is achieved through personally self-interested actions that are motivated by the quest for increased wealth. This seems incompatible with Jesus' recommended way of righteousness for covenant-keepers. If a society seeks to achieve the middle-class blessings of Proverb 30:8–9, how can it do this without violating Jesus' rule against

39. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 50.

40. Chapter 13.

the quest for individual wealth accumulation? If the answer is, “it can’t,” then this seems to require the exclusion of Christians from entering the ranks of the rich. But this would close off the spread of the gospel to 20% of the nation’s population: the rich, who own 80% of the wealth.

If all Christians should ever decide to obey Jesus’ command about selling their goods and giving the money to the poor, the world’s primary wealth-owners could never be Christians. Either rich Christians would have to become poor, or else poor Christians could never become rich. But power and influence follow wealth. This means that *in a world of wealth-abandoning Christians, covenant-breakers would permanently dominate law-making*. They would support non-Christian politicians and non-biblical laws. That which is generally the case today in politics would become permanent. How could covenant-keepers ever overcome the systematic resistance of the rich in the extension of God’s kingdom in history?

Jesus said that rich men only rarely enter God’s kingdom. Will this be true throughout history? If Jesus’ repeated warnings against wealth accumulation are valid for all times and all places, then Christians face a dilemma: either Pareto’s 20-80 income distribution rule is temporary, or else Christians must fail in their earthly efforts to replace Satan’s kingdom with God’s.

I. Eschatology

Here, we come to eschatology. Sooner or later, we must. Eschatology matters. It is part of the biblical covenant model.⁴¹ There are three views: premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. They all refer to the timing of the bodily return of Jesus Christ: before Jesus’ in-person earthly victory era (premillennialism), after Satan’s kingdom victory era (amillennialism), or after Christianity’s earthly victory era (postmillennialism). Each view of the future of God’s kingdom on earth has specific approaches to social theory. These approaches are not compatible because their underlying eschatologies are not compatible.⁴²

Premillennialists are silent about the details of Christ’s millennial reign after His bodily return. All that we are told is that prior to

41. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 5.

42. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

Christ's bodily return to set up a one-world civil government, Christianity will fail to overcome anti-Christianity's control of this world. Amillennialism teaches that Christians will not defeat non-Christians in their competition to extend their respective kingdoms in history. Both of these eschatological views are consistent with Jesus' command to surrender earthly wealth today for eternal wealth. The rich will reject the gospel anyway. So, Christians must not seek or expect great wealth.

Because premillennialists and amillennialists do not publicly present a developed, self-consciously biblical economic theory, they do not tell us whether Christians should expect poverty or middle-class living. They also do not discuss Pareto's rule of income distribution. Then what do they preach regarding economic success? Premillennial and amillennial pastors in the West do not preach a message of perpetual poverty, either as an ideal or an eschatological necessity. Most of them may preach political and cultural impotence, but they do not preach poverty as an ideal. They may tell their followers to be content with political and cultural impotence, but they do not tell them to be content with poverty. *Pastors do not want their own income to be dependent on the donations of poor people.*

Postmillennialism teaches that the Great Commission will be successful in history.⁴³ Jesus Christ will exercise worldwide dominion through the cultural and institutional success of His people prior to His second coming.⁴⁴ So, postmillennialism must implicitly assume either (1) that Pareto's 20-80 wealth distribution phenomenon is temporary, or (2) that covenant-keepers will eventually gain sufficient spiritual wisdom and self-control to enable them to accumulate tangible wealth safely. How will this wealth accumulation take place? First, the rich will be brought to saving faith. Second, covenantal faithfulness will produce personal riches. The poor will become less poor because of capital accumulation by covenant-keepers.⁴⁵

Should postmillennialists accept the conclusion that Jesus' warnings against owning great wealth were temporary? Were these warnings confined to His day, when He was calling His followers into missionary service? Were these warnings confined to missionary periods, before the gospel takes root in a targeted society?⁴⁶ I see no alternative:

43. Gentry, *Greatness of the Great Commission*.

44. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*.

45. Chapter 16.

46. Chapter 26.

the answer to all three questions is *yes*. Two facts have led me to this conclusion. *First*, postmillennialism forecasts the successful spread of the gospel worldwide, which will be followed by the transformation of civilization, including long-term per capita economic growth. When a society obeys God's law, men's individual efforts will prosper. *Postmillennialism implies that no income group is permanently beyond the work of the gospel.* Postmillennialism therefore implies that the eye of the needle will eventually become quite large. *Second*, capitalism implies that the rich we will always have with us. The biblical standard of middle-class wealth can be achieved socially, as far as we know today, only by allowing entrepreneurs to become rich—a rich minority. My conclusion is that Jesus' warning against temporal wealth accumulation by His followers was historically grounded, i.e., temporary.

Covenant-keepers are not to seek riches without designating in advance specific kingdom goals for these hoped-for riches. They must recognize in advance that the cost of achieving any goal through riches is the accumulation of cares. They must count the cost.⁴⁷ They are not to adopt the religion of mammon: "more for me in history."

If I am incorrect about the temporary nature of Christ's command to adopt poverty for the sake of the kingdom, then my critics have a responsibility to show how it is that a society can achieve widespread middle-class wealth and also obey Christ's warning against accumulating riches, i.e., capital. If middle-class wealth is a valid goal for a Christian society, which Proverbs says it is, then how is it that a society's only known means of attaining this goal are immoral, or at least highly dangerous to the soul? The only historically verified way for a society to attain the goal of widespread middle-class wealth is by successful entrepreneurship, coupled with thrift by the wealthiest 20% of the population. (Charity to the poor is added by the Bible.)

Is entrepreneurship a morally dangerous act? The answer depends on the motivation of the entrepreneur. Is he seeking to accumulate earthly riches, or is he seeking to serve customers?

J. Entrepreneurship and Customer Service

Free market economic theory teaches that the only predictable way for a society to increase its per capita wealth is by allowing entrepreneurs to serve customers through open competition: entrepreneurs vs. entrepreneurs, customers vs. customers. Economists like to say that

47. Chapter 35.

the customer is sovereign. Actually, only God is sovereign. Economists should say that the customer possesses *delegated economic authority*. Customers determine the success or failure of entrepreneurial ventures because customers possess the most marketable economic good: money. The customer has a wider range of choice than the producer does because he owns money. The producer has a much narrower range of choices: ownership of specialized goods offered for sale in a narrow market. He seeks money in exchange for his goods in order to increase his range of choices. The seller of goods does not possess final economic authority except in rare cases, such as the Pharaoh during the famine (Gen. 47). Even this case is not a good example, for the Pharaoh had used the monopolistic power of the state to accumulate the grain that gave him this final economic authority.

Free market capitalism is an economic system based on the private ownership of property. Customers have the dominant economic position in such a system. They have money, and once they have paid their taxes, they are not compelled by law to spend their money in any particular way. Producers must persuade customers to buy from them. *The way to wealth under capitalism is service to customers*. The successful entrepreneur increases his wealth by serving customers more effectively than his competitors do. He may legally accumulate great personal wealth, but he can keep it only by continuing to serve customers more efficiently than his competition. The free market system rewards customers by allowing customers to reward entrepreneurs.

Free market economists, who today are almost always humanists, use analytical tools that do not invoke the supernatural. For that matter, so do most Christian economists. Economists almost always present the case for capitalism in terms of service to customers. Adam Smith began this tradition.⁴⁸ Austrian School economists and those Chicago School economists who adopt Frank H. Knight's theory of profit⁴⁹ regard all profit as a residual. So do those Austrian School economists who accept Ludwig von Mises' theory of entrepreneurship.⁵⁰ Profits are the result of dealing successfully with market uncertainty, which by definition is statistically unpredictable, in contrast to risk.

The motivation of every entrepreneur, as with the motivation of

48. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

49. Frank Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>)

50. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 15. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

every customer, is the same, as far as the economist is concerned: to improve his condition. The entrepreneur seeks to exchange one set of conditions for another. The free market economist argues that a society that seeks per capita economic growth should seek ways to lower transaction costs in economic exchanges. The crucial element for lowering the transaction costs of men's voluntary exchanges is a legal system that allows open entry and competition: customers vs. customers, entrepreneurs vs. entrepreneurs.

Service to customers is the free market's way for an entrepreneur to achieve his goal of gaining an above-market rate of return on his investment of time and capital, whatever his profit (if any) will be used for. The tools of economic analysis apply to all entrepreneurs, irrespective of their personal motivation. What interests the economist is the means of entrepreneurial profits: delivering superior services to customers in an uncertain world.

Jesus said that His followers should not seek great tangible wealth. He did not say that His followers should not seek to serve customers more efficiently. He did not say that they should not become entrepreneurs. What He warned against was mammon: the service of oneself. Mammon is the goal of "more for me in history."

The motivation of a covenant-breaking entrepreneur is "more for me in history." He serves mammon, the god of earthly self-interest. His means of achieving his goal is service to customers. *The sole motivation of the covenant-keeping entrepreneur should be service to God. He achieves his goal by serving the customer.* If he is successful, he can give more to the church (tithe) and more to the poor (offerings). The means is the same in both cases: serving customers.

Because earthly treasure should be exchanged systematically for heavenly treasure, the New Testament covenant-keeper has a very difficult spiritual task—far more difficult than the Old Covenant saint's task. He must allocate his capital between the temporal and the eternal, but he must also allocate it between the present and the future in history. This is the covenantal issue of inheritance: his own eternal inheritance and his heirs' earthly inheritance. Inheritance is an eschatological issue.

He should begin with this view of God's providence: "And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you"

(Luke 12:29–31).⁵¹ A covenant-keeper's necessities will be taken care of by God, one way or another. This reduces his future risk. Once he intellectually and emotionally acknowledges this lower risk, he can more accurately decide what to do with his wealth. Perhaps he will decide to make an immediate exchange of temporal wealth for heavenly wealth. "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" (Luke 12:33). This builds up his eternal inheritance. He should also begin to teach his children to be covenant-keepers, in preparation for their earthly inheritance.⁵² "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6: 5–7). Jesus quoted the introductory words of this passage: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). The disciples would have known its Old Covenant context.

Jesus *modified* the Old Covenant's covenantal relationship between corporate obedience and corporate wealth. He did so by adding another dimension: *eternity*. Wealth-allocation decisions by covenant-keepers must now take into account their personal inheritance beyond the grave in heaven, as well as their covenantal heirs' inheritance beyond the grave in history. Jesus strongly recommended the laying up of personal treasure in heaven. By building up the kingdom of God in history through sacrificial giving, a covenant-keeper builds up his personal inheritance in heaven. Jesus tied the covenant-keeper's personal inheritance in heaven to the church's inheritance of the kingdom in history. He told the apostles to sell fearlessly everything that they owned. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

By announcing the existence of an eternal inheritance and also the terms of exchange, Jesus modified the Mosaic Covenant's view of capital accumulation. The Mosaic Covenant had recommended the accumulation of earthly wealth, but it had presented the way to great national wealth as obedience to biblical law. Jesus recommended the ac-

51. Chapter 26.

52. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 15.

cumulation of heavenly wealth at the expense of great earthly wealth. He did this at the beginning of the church's mission. He did not lay down a new economic law for Christian society that was at odds with the Mosaic law. He was the co-author of the Mosaic law.

Conclusion

Biblical economic theory as I define it rests on the doctrine of the covenant: the absolute sovereignty of a trinitarian God, the delegated authority of mankind over nature, the law of God as the primary tool of dominion, the predictable sanctions of God in time and eternity, and the historical expansion of the kingdom of God in response to God's historical sanctions. Biblical economics is at bottom different from humanistic economics, both free market and socialist.

Free market theorists pretend not to be covenantal but rather contractual, yet free market economics is deeply covenantal. Free market economics places the sovereign individual in God's place. It teaches that the individual is legally sovereign. As to why he is sovereign, there is debate. The main line of argument stems from John Locke: *individual self-ownership*. Next, a self-owning individual establishes a valid legal claim to property—somehow. He owns property, especially his labor, but also money, which is the most marketable commodity. Money gives him *economic sovereignty*, as contrasted with legal sovereignty. But there is an unsolved problem. Somebody in this theoretical system must legally hold the biggest gun: the means of finally settling disputes. Theorists divide over who lawfully holds it.

So much for point one of the free market covenant model. Two, hierarchies are formed contractually. Members report back to (up to) those who founded them or their legal successors. A hierarchy possesses *no independent legal authority* beyond the contract. Three, economic law is a matter of *scarcity and its constraints*, which are overcome through the *contractual division of labor*. Four, the only sanctions that matter analytically are profit and loss. Somehow, objective prices denominated in money can serve individuals and society as valid *representational indicators of subjective value*. Five, economic growth substitutes for the kingdom of God. Lacking in the theory is any agreement on who holds the gun and on what legitimate basis. How are disputes to be settled? Institutionally, anarcho-capitalism cannot prevent the *warlord solution*: one group wins the war for final sovereignty and imposes its will by force, which is the negation of free market theory.

In contrast, theorists of limited civil government cannot agree on the moral basis of civil government in a world in which a common moral value scale cannot be shown to exist. Yet one is needed in order to unify sovereign, autonomous individuals.

For socialism, collective mankind possesses original and final sovereignty. The individual does not. This universality of humanity implies a world without national borders. Mankind is therefore responsible to mankind, which means that most men are responsible to an elite, which is an inescapable concept in all hierarchies. Authority is political: political representatives own the big gun. *This is rule by committee in the name of the People*. There is no such thing as economic law. There is only power. Civil sanctions include physical violence, thought control, imprisonment, and execution. Profit and loss are irrelevant, as is economic theory. The politicized kingdom of man is the final end, except in Marxism, where there is no description of the necessary final resting place for mankind in history.

Biblical economics has a different theory of sovereignty, a different theory of hierarchy, a different theory of law, a different theory of causation, and a different goal for both history and eternity. It shares with free market theory a respect for private property (stewardship), customer authority (horizontal service), contracts (individual legal predictability), the rule of law (corporate legal predictability), the division of labor (cooperation), profit and loss (sanctions), and economic growth (the extension of man's rule over nature). But, because of its concept of final sanctions imposed by a sovereign God, biblical economics subordinates economic growth to kingdom growth. It insists that economic growth without judicial respect for *God-mandated, Bible-revealed, non-market covenants* is morally destructive. It subordinates temporal profit and loss to eternal profit and loss. This can be seen most clearly in Jesus' discussion of treasure: temporal *vs.* eternal more often than temporal *and* eternal.

The dividing issue is the issue of sovereignty. Moses warned the Israelites in Deuteronomy 8 against believing that God's blessings came from their hands. He warned them that they would respect the gift and forget the Giver. This would lead to their expulsion from the land, just as it had with the Canaanites (Deut. 8:19–20).⁵³ Modern man believes that God will not impose such a corporate negative sanction, yet he lives in fear of terrorism. By lowering the cost of technology and by ad-

53. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

vancing scientific progress, capitalism has provided society with weapons of mass destruction. As the price of these weapons falls as a result of capitalism's productivity, more will be demanded. The technological genie is out of the bottle (or vial). Sin still operates.

Taking this theme of covenantal cause and effect, biblical economists should regard the power of the free market to create wealth as a spiritual threat, just as Jesus said the pursuit of mammon always is. By piling economic blessing after economic blessing onto the denizens of the free market social order, God extends greater responsibility to all. An increase in wealth always brings with it an increase in responsibility, both to God and society. Owners must decide whose high bid to honor, for others are constantly bidding, or stand ready to bid, for ownership. "Sell it to me! Rent it to me! Donate it to me!" By ignoring anyone's bid, an owner loses the revenue or satisfaction associated with that bid. As the bids multiply due to ever-increasing ownership, the level of responsibility rises. The owner must say no to so many people. I call this horizontal responsibility.

There is also vertical responsibility (Luke 12:48).⁵⁴ Every blessing in history is an eternal liability to the covenant-breaker. His debt to God increases day by day. This is not a justification of socialism, with its inescapable inefficiency and reduction of freedom. But it is an acknowledgment of the fact that *there are no free lunches in history*. God's common grace in history becomes special curses to covenant-breakers in eternity. Adam Smith failed to consider this.

In the final economic analysis—really, truly *final—biblical economics subordinates time to eternity*. It does so because it subordinates man's sovereignty to God's.

54. Chapter 28.

SACRIFICE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON ACTS

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SACRIFICE AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON ACTS

GARY NORTH

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INTRODUCTION

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:1–5).

A. The Last Days

The Book of Acts offers a narrative of the last days of the Old Covenant order. The last days had begun with Jesus' ministry. A new era of direct revelation from God had marked its beginning. The last days were announced by the Epistle to the Hebrews. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1–2). These last days would end in A.D. 70 at the fall of Jerusalem, when covenantally authoritative revelation from God ceased.¹

During the preliminary phase of the last days, the author of Hebrews said, God had spoken to the apostles through Jesus Christ. But, after Christ's ascension to heaven, God began to speak to the apostles by the Holy Ghost, as we read in the second chapter of Acts. Jesus had said of the Holy Ghost, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/klgbjf>)

shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:12–15). The last days were marked by direct verbal revelation from God through Jesus Christ, and subsequently through the Third Person of the Trinity. The first two chapters of Acts describe this transition.

B. Two Covenants

During this transitional era, Christians lived under two covenants, Old and New. The Mosaic Covenant’s priesthood still offered sacrifices in the temple, even after Jesus, the supreme high priest, had offered the final sacrifice. “And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:11–18).

This was a transitional era because the two covenants overlapped. Direct revelation from God was given to New Covenant apostles and Old Covenant prophets, John the Baptist being the greatest of the latter. “For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28). God still spoke to men authoritatively, who in turn spoke and wrote down God’s words authoritatively. We are now under the authority of a written Bible that was put onto parchment during those last days. We are to shape our thoughts and lives by means of the information in the Bible. The New Covenant is marked by conditions, and the Bible is where we learn what these conditions are.

This places considerable responsibility on anyone who seeks to sort out what was transitional in the last days from what is permanent in the New Covenant era. The Book of Acts is a document of the transition. Some of the things it records are no longer mandated for

Christians. For example, it records the existence of joint prophesying that each listener heard in his native language (Acts 2:4–8). It describes a system of common property owned by the Jerusalem church and administered by church officers (Acts 2:41–42; 4:33–37). It records the public testimony of an accused man whose message was confirmed to him alone by a vision from the Holy Ghost, and whose verbal description of this vision cost him his life (Acts 7:55–58). It speaks of female prophets (Acts 21:8–9). It tells of a man who was immune to a deadly snake bite (Acts 28:3–6). On these matters, we have not been told by Jesus, “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37b).

Nevertheless, there are modern expositors who would have us go and do likewise with one or another of these transitional practices. But there is a noticeable selectivity on the part of those who do tell us that we should do this. Rural American congregations whose members still pick up poisonous snakes as a church ritual do not practice common ownership. Neither do those congregations that subordinate themselves to women who claim to be prophets. Some Christians affirm the continuing existence of authoritative revelation from people who speak in an unrecognizable tongue during a church service, but they do not send out teams of missionaries to speak in an unearthly tongue that listeners will hear in their own languages. This is smorgasbord Christianity: a little of this, none of that, and all in terms of personal taste.

The Book of Acts is famous for its description of a system of commonly held property in the Jerusalem church. The apostles accepted donations—very large donations—from members of the Jerusalem church. This practice has been used by defenders of Christian socialism as an example to be imitated by the modern world. But these socialists do not cite Peter’s words to Ananias regarding the latter’s property: “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” (Acts 5:4a).² The common ownership of the Jerusalem church was voluntary, limited in Acts to that one congregation, and administered by men who had special revelation from God. What has this to do with modern socialism, which is compulsory, imposed on all people in a society, and is administered by bureaucrats backed up by the police? Nothing.

2. Chapter 4.

C. The Economics of the Book of Acts

There is not much information in the Book of Acts regarding economic practice, and even less regarding economic theory. The narrative is concerned with missionary activity: first in Jerusalem, then in the Mediterranean world. Much of the book is taken up with the ministry of the apostle Paul. To a lesser extent, it describes the early activities of Peter and other apostles in Jerusalem. We learn that persecution was the order of the day: from Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem and Roman officials in gentile cities. Paul described what he had suffered, “in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (II Cor. 11:23–27).

In the midst of this persecution, God was active in sustaining His messengers by miracles. Peter was released from prison by an angel—an act that cost his Roman escorts their lives (Acts 12). Paul and Silas had the option of an escape as a result of a miraculous earthquake, but they remained in their cells, along with all the other prisoners—an even greater miracle—which led to the conversion of their jailer (Acts 16). These were not normal events. They had nothing unique to do with economics.

The author of the Book of Acts is assumed to be Luke, for both documents are addressed to the same man, Theophilus (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1). The Gospel of Luke is detailed in its account of Jesus’ words on economics.³ The author in Acts described certain practices of the early church, but he did not relate them to his account in the Gospel of Luke. This presents a problem. The expositor must discover whether the practices of the early church described in Acts are unique to the last days before the fall of Jerusalem or whether they were permanent aspects of the New Covenant order.

What becomes apparent from Acts is the love that church members had for one another. They also had remarkable trust in the sound

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

economic judgment apostles, to whom they entrusted the church's money. Yet, even here, the apostles were not immune from criticism. The dispute in the church at Jerusalem over the distribution of church funds to widows (Acts 6) reveals that money was a divisive topic then, as now.⁴

Christians shared their money with one another. They saw their mission to the world as mandating a sacrificial degree of charity to fund this missionary effort. They understood that they were members of a revolutionary organization that was committed to peace. They were to pray for peace. Paul wrote: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:1–2).⁵ They recognized that they were challenging the social order of the day. Persecution was all too common. "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1b). So, they shared. They took capital that they would normally have held in reserve for themselves and their families, and they gave it to other Christians through the apostles and local church officers. They saw their efforts as common, and they pooled their capital in order to reduce their personal risks. The church functioned as a kind of insurance agency, which an extended family is.

The degree of sharing revealed more than an insurance company in action. There was true sacrificial giving. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth regarding the money collected in Macedonia for the church at Jerusalem: "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (II Cor. 8:1–4). In their poverty, the Macedonians had given liberally.

4. Chapter 5.

5. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd. ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

D. Condemnation of Today's Christians

There can be no doubt that the modern church has lost the vision of the church in Acts. As it has grown richer, it has become less liberal with its money. That is to say, as Christians have grown wealthy, they have grown stingy. Their giving is not marked by liberality.

Modern economic theory teaches that a person allocates his money to deal with his most pressing desires first. These desires include dealing with problems: *the reduction of discontent*. As he allocates his money over time, the less important problems get dealt with later in the process. *People use their income to solve problems or gain advantages in a declining order of importance*. He who is dying of thirst spends his money on water before he buys salt. This is the doctrine of marginal utility. The doctrine of marginal utility rests on an assumption: unchanging tastes. But, over time, people's tastes do change. As they gain more income, their tastes change. They get a taste for more income.

If men's tastes did not change, their proportional giving to charity would increase as they gained more income. They would use their early income to deal with their minimal needs, but as these needs were satisfied, one by one, they would be more likely to give money away. Competition for their money on their personal scale of values would decline in the level of intensity. Yet we rarely find that men's proportional giving increases as they grow richer. Wants replace biological needs at the top of their wish list as their needs are satisfied by their rising income. When men no longer face starvation, they develop a taste for more expensive food. They move from poverty in the direction of gluttony. Concern over their weight replaces any concern over possible starvation, including third-world starvation. What they spend on diet programs and exercise programs, they might have spent on world missions, had their tastes not changed from their days of low income. But their tastes did change.

The Macedonian church in its poverty gave more, proportionally, than the richer church at Corinth had given. Like the widow in Jesus' lesson regarding the mites (Luke 21:1–4),⁶ the poverty-stricken Macedonians were more generous than their richer brethren in Corinth. This phenomenon has not changed since the last days of the Old Covenant order. As men become richer, their dedication wanes. As Christians become more able financially to rely on their capital to sustain

6. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 48.

them, and as the price of necessities falls in relation to total income, they donate a smaller proportion of their income to the church. Churches usually finance local building programs before they finance foreign missions.

I suggest a reason for this seeming anomaly. As Christians become richer, they trust more in their own devices to sustain them (Deut. 8:17–18).⁷ When they possess next to nothing, they trust God for their futures, for there is no one else to trust with confidence. But, as people grow richer, they transfer hope from God to their possessions. They become more self-confident. But they know that they lack omniscience. So, they feel compelled to amass ever-more capital to protect them from unforeseen hard times and for their old age. They can never amass enough capital to substitute for God's providence, but they try. They begin by questioning the moral requirement of the tithe.⁸

Conclusion

The Book of Acts does not contain much information on economics. That is why this commentary is short. It took less time to write than any of the others. But the account of common property in the Jerusalem church has become so well known, and so misunderstood, that I thought it wise to write this short commentary.

I have titled this commentary, *Sacrifice and Dominion*. The title reflects the practice of sacrificial giving and sharing by members of the earliest local congregations, not just in the church at Jerusalem. These early Christians trusted God greatly, and the degree of this trust can be seen in their level of giving. They gave to the church the capital that had previously provided them with streams of income. They counted on God to replace these income streams.

The Book of Acts is a book about missionary activity. Members of the early congregations regarded themselves as part of a great missionary effort. They took seriously the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 21–22.

8. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).⁹

Two millennia later, the incomparably wealthy American churches have generally lost this vision. Meanwhile, European nations that were conquered in Christ's name after the collapse of the Roman Empire have adopted a Christ-denying humanism. There is little trace of any Christian influence in Protestant Europe today. Christianity has steadily surrendered both its territory and its influence. The population explosion of the last two centuries has led to a foreign mission field that has more souls in desperate need of redemption than ever before. This has been paralleled by an increase of missionary activity by Protestant churches, which were not committed to foreign missions prior to the Moravian church's foreign missionary activity in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁰ But, as a percentage of Christians' personal income worldwide, which includes Catholicism, funding for foreign missions remains tiny. One recent estimate puts it at less than one-tenth of one percent.¹¹ This limited worldwide missionary impulse is dominated by the United States. The rest of the Western world is even less dedicated in its support of foreign missions. The dual discrepancies between spiritual need and giving, and between personal wealth and giving, do not improve significantly with the increase in wealth.

"Sacrifice" is not a word popular among contemporary Christians in the West. This is why Christianity is in retreat in the West.

9. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

10. Baptist William Carey went to India in 1793. The International Bible Society was established in 1809. Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission in 1865.

11. Personal income for Christians: \$12.7 trillion. Income for global foreign missions: \$12 billion. In 1900, the respective figures were \$270 billion and \$200 million, so things are slightly better today. The world's population was 1.6 billion in 1900 and 6 billion today. "Status of Global Mission, 2000, in context of 20th and 21st centuries," published by the Global Evangelization Movement. Source: David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (Jan. 2000). Such estimates are better than guesses, but we should not place too much faith in them. The older the recorded data, the less confidence we should have.

1

COMMON OWNERSHIP

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common (Acts 2:41–44).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the fear of God: sanctions.¹ The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever” (Psa. 111:10). The fear of God comes in many forms. In this case, it persuaded thousands of new converts to Christ to pool their property with other new converts. This was an unprecedented declaration of faith.

A. Family-Like Authority

For heads of households to transfer their wealth to the church, they had to assume that the church would be run as a family is run. Family members may pool resources, but someone with final authority must make the spending decisions. The presumption is that he will make these decisions on the basis of his perception of family priorities. When these new converts gave their wealth to the church, they were making the same assumption about the apostles' judgment. They viewed them as heads of the wider household.

Church members began to participate in joint activities that had family meals as the central event. “And they, continuing daily with one

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). These family-based meals marked the new community of the church as separate from the temple. These shared meals identified the church as a subset of the Jewish community. The members still attended the temple, but they attended other meals.

The church was not a family. It was and remains a separate covenantal institution. But the Jerusalem church would soon have a special function. It was to become the headquarters of what would become a worldwide missionary movement (Acts 15). The apostles had been commanded by Jesus to return to the city. "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me" (Acts 1:4). To this command a positive sanction was attached: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8).

There was another factor. Jesus had warned the disciples about a coming judgment on the city. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20–22). Those who knew about this prophecy did not know when this event would take place, but they knew that they had better not be encumbered with a lot of property, especially real estate, when the day arrived.

The response of listeners to Peter's first sermon in Jerusalem was overwhelming. Three thousand people shifted their commitment from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant in one day. This was an immense number. There were no microphones and loudspeakers to amplify Peter's voice. This was in response to a fisherman's appeal.

They perceived that they were joining a remarkable movement. They adopted the apostles' doctrine. The apostles performed signs and wonders. This added to their authority. Those who were part of the new organization were in fear of the apostles. This was not merely awe; it was motivational fear. The Greek word for fear in this passage also appears in the account of the earthquake after Christ's death. It indicates great fear. "And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the

angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men” (Matt. 28:2–4).

The authority possessed by the apostles was considerable. New converts trusted them and feared them. This was the basis of their pooling of funds. They regarded the apostles as reliable stewards of church funds because the apostles were in possession of supernatural powers. This indicated supernatural authority. The members believed that if they sold their goods and transferred their money to the apostles, they would not be cheated. They probably believed that the corporately held funds would serve as a form of insurance, as with assets held in trust by the head of a household.

B. Shared Faith, Shared Goods

The English text says that the disciples were together. The Greek text does not. It says, “all believed all common.” The Greek work for “common” can mean “unholy,” in contrast to “clean.” The word is used this way repeatedly in the Book of Acts. “But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). As in English, it can also mean jointly held. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). It is used in this sense in this passage.

They shared a confession. This shared confession led to their baptism and their membership in the church. This placed them under the authority of a shared eldership. They shared all these things before they shared their wealth with other members.

The sale of their possessions to those outside the circle of faith created strong bonds with those inside. Members had transferred their capital and consumer goods to covenant-breakers. Then they transferred the money to covenant-keepers who acted as trustees for the assembly. This transfer of assets was a means of demonstrating publicly their commitment to the local assembly. This, in turn, was a means of evangelism. “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be

saved" (Acts 2:47).

What people do with their money testifies strongly to what they believe. These new members were transferring control over their money to officers in a new organization. When 3,000 local residents sold their property and give their money to a group of former wanderers who are now performing miracles, word got around fast. It was not just a matter of giving money away, which is always remarkable. It was a matter of self-interest. When 3,000 people start selling of their families' inheritances, buyers get in line. There might be some real bargains! This phrase would have been everywhere: "Have you heard?"

The outsider's question, "How serious are these people?" had an answer. This answer testified to their degree of commitment. These men had transferred all of their wealth, which would then be used on behalf of a new assembly. This is not a normal practice. The abnormality of the practice matched the abnormality of both the group and its leaders. The question, "Why?" would have been common.

C. The Way to Poverty

Common property is not normally the way to wealth. It can be, however, in very rare cases. Medieval agricultural monasteries repeatedly grew rich, which led to periodic calls for reform. They began with vows of poverty, and a few centuries later, they were centers of opulence. The Benedictines were renowned for their ability to amass wealth. Their members initially lived frugal lives. The abbots poured any surplus resources back into production. The monasteries accumulated capital, including intellectual capital. Monks devoted time to the science of agriculture. Output kept increasing.

At the center of a monastic order was the abbot. He had authority over the members. Discipline was tighter than family discipline in society at large. The monasteries functioned as families. Members were celibate. They did not accumulate property to be passed on to their children. The inheritance was corporate. Capital formation was corporate.

Leaders of the church in Jerusalem could not expect to establish anything comparable to a monastic order in Jerusalem. They knew that judgment on the city was coming. They could not legitimately expect to retain the social structure of an extended family. Yet, initially, this is what the Jerusalem church was.

In a family, no member achieves wealth apart from claims on this

wealth from other members. These claims come to the patriarch, who collects wealth from all members and then distributes it from a common treasury. The welfare of all members is maintained by a patriarch who must try to balance these competing claims. If he fails, discontented sons will secede. The greater the number of opportunities to gain replacement income, the lower the cost of secession. A large number of employment opportunities is what keep Western families from becoming extended families. Before Western capitalism spread to southern and eastern Europe, immigrants to the United States and Canada arrived who had come from cultures where extended families were common. As individuals became integrated socially, the extended family disappeared. The third generation rarely remained under the same roof, real or figurative, with the patriarch, unless the patriarch was living in the household of a third-generation member. Some Asian immigrant families seem to be able to retain the older structure longer than other immigrant groups, but this solidarity is usually reinforced with a family-run business. A bachelor's degree serves as a kind of honorable discharge from full-time service inside a patriarchal family. Patriarchal families have disappeared.

The Hutterites still maintain some degree of common property. Their agricultural communities are economically successful, but by the standards of the society around them, their members are individually poor. These communities exist in isolation from the general culture. Their system of common ownership is a major factor in maintaining this separation. This is why members consent to the arrangement. They seek separation for religious purposes. These communities practice tight discipline. They are protected by the laws of a surrounding society that leaves them alone and protects their property. But if birth rates inside and outside these communities were to remain constant for several centuries, the Hutterites would replace the general society. Long before then, the problems associated with common ownership would challenge the survival of these separatist agricultural communities.

In Jerusalem, the primary social foundation of personal wealth accumulation ceased when a family transferred its capital to the church. This created a barrier to future capital formation. The incentive to save, invest wisely, and build up capital is reduced when the sacrificing agent does not possess a legal claim on the fruits of his labor. Thus, the practice of sharing property is a disincentive to increased family income and thrift. It tends to equalize family income among the mem-

bers. Under such an arrangement, Christians in Jerusalem would have become poorer than the community average. If the days of vengeance were delayed for a generation, members of the church in Jerusalem would either suffer reduced income or else they would cease sharing their property. The days of vengeance were delayed for a generation.²

We know that Paul repeatedly took up collections for the Jerusalem church. “But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Rom. 15:25–26). “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem” (I Cor. 16:1–3).³ The Jerusalem church suffered repeated persecutions by the local authorities (Acts 8:1). Its members also could not plan for their long-term futures because of Jesus’ prophecy regarding the days of vengeance.

Conclusion

The apostles initially possessed authority based on both doctrine and miracle-working. This made them trustworthy stewards of God and men in the opinion of thousands of heads of households in Jerusalem. This is what made possible a system of hierarchical economic authority over the funds collected by the church. Without the apostles’ perceived authority under God, a system of voluntary common property would not have been possible, for the heads of households would not have had sufficient trust in those who were administering the church’s funds on behalf of all of its members.

The threat of God’s judgment on the city was another factor that persuaded members to surrender ownership of real estate. Expectations of a long-term return on real estate were undermined. But this eschatological factor does not explain the practice of common property. It only explains the sale of the real estate.

By accepting responsibility over the assets of church members, the apostles converted the early church into a large extended family. This

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 17.

is not the normal pattern for a church. Church leaders do not want to take on the authority of family patriarchs. There are too many competing claims to the wealth generated by members. Church leaders no longer perform miracles. They no longer generate the same degree of confidence among members in their unique access to divine wisdom. Without largely voluntary assent to the decisions of church leaders, a common property system cannot come into existence, let alone survive for generations. Such assent is rare.

2

BETTER THAN MONEY

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength (Acts 3:1–7).

The theocentric principle here is God as the agent of healing in history: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Authentication

This passage is famous because of the King James Version's phrase, "Silver and gold have I none." These two apostles, who have become the best known of the dozen throughout history, were trustees for the funds of the Jerusalem church, but they were carrying no money. They did not possess assets of their own to share with this crippled beggar.

1. Public Healing

The way that the man was healed was ideal for the spread of the gospel. It was during the hour for public prayer: the ninth hour, or

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

three in the afternoon. This was the same hour that Jesus died on the cross (Luke 23:44). The apostles were just outside the temple. The beggar had secured for himself a permanent spot near a gate of the temple. He was well known by sight and site. We could say that he was a fixture. More local residents recognized him than recognized the apostles. Thus, after he was healed, word would get around fast.

The man did not know who they were. “And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.” He did not associate them with Jesus, who had performed many miraculous acts of healing. He was not a church member. Peter then announced, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” Jesus’ name was well known. He was the criminal who had been crucified instead of Barabbas (John 18:40). Peter linked himself with Jesus by means of this invocation. The subsequent healing magnified Christ’s name.

The event became known immediately. “And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” (Acts 3:8–10). This was preparatory for Peter’s second public sermon.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot [know] that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled (Acts 3:12–18).

2. *Covenant Lawsuit*

Peter here delivered a covenant lawsuit against Old Covenant Israel. This sermon would have been far less impressive, had he not just healed a lifelong cripple. The positive sanction of healing to some considerable degree authenticated Peter's authority to bring a covenant lawsuit that announced negative sanctions. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:19–23). Jesus had possessed a prophet's ability to heal. Now it was possessed by Peter. The prophet's task was to bring a covenant lawsuit. Peter was doing this.

A gift of money would not have gained the cripple permanent relief, nor would it have provided Peter with the authority that this act of healing provided. The very poverty of Peter in this instance augmented his authority. He did not heal anyone for money, although anyone who possessed such power could have gained enormous wealth by selling his services to the sickly rich. Peter had just healed a beggar who obviously could not repay him. In this, he imitated Christ, who had healed many poor people in the name of God the Father, and who did not accept payment even from those who could afford to pay.

The effectiveness of this approach to public confrontation can be seen in the result. In response to this sermon, another 5,000 men believed in Christ (Acts 4:4). So, with just two sermons, the church grew by 8,000 people. The first sermon had been accompanied by the miracle of tongues: each listener heard the message in his region's local language. The second sermon had been preceded by physical healing. It was even more successful.

The healing and the subsequent sermon raised the ire of the Sadducees, who were closely associated with rulership in the temple. They had Peter and John forcibly brought into their presence. Peter then brought a covenant lawsuit against them. "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made

whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:9–12). The Greek word translated here as “saved” is from a root meaning “to make whole.” It is also used twice in this passage in the sense of physical healing. It is used in the same way in other New Testament passages. “My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live” (Mark 5:23).

Peter had healed a man in full public view. He had then delivered a sermon regarding the means of personal salvation. He used a single physical healing to lead many men to spiritual healing. When challenged by the religious authorities, he used the opportunity to preach to them. He used the same argument: from physical healing to spiritual healing.

B. Money as Counter-Productive

1. Not for Sale

The origin of the gift that Peter had provided to the beggar precluded a monetary payment. Peter did not use a healing technique that was available for purchase. In fact, any attempt to purchase it would place a man’s soul in danger. This was Peter’s warning subsequently to Simon the magician, who sought to buy the power to give the Holy Spirit. “And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (Acts 8:18–20).²

If this ability cannot be purchased with money, then the blessing conveyed by it must not be sold for money. Peter could have sold the service of physical healing, at least for a time, but in doing so, he could not have given Christ the glory. Christ had imparted this unique ability free of charge to the apostles. He did this as a means of authenticating

2. Chapter 6.

His church, His kingdom, and His New Covenant. The miracles of healing were designed to gain attention for His representatives and their message. From the moment that Peter healed the beggar, he had a ready-made audience. He could not have purchased such an audience.

The presence of a monetary payment always raises a question in the mind of a potential purchaser: “What’s in it for me?” If the payment actually brings physical healing, this is a sufficient answer. A market-completed exchange ends the obligation for both parties. But Peter’s message was not confined to physical healing. In fact, it was only secondarily related to physical healing. Physical healing represented spiritual healing. The same Greek word applied to both forms of healing. Peter was preaching men’s need to repent—repentance exclusively through faith in Christ and His substitutionary atonement on the cross. This message required initial validation for maximum acceptance. One means of such validation was public healing. Christ had already indicated that this would be the case.

And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men (Matt. 9:2–8).

2. *Money and Reciprocity*

Money is the most marketable commodity.³ It is applicable to the world of reciprocity and exchange. But the reciprocity between God and men is not based on payments from Adamic men to God. It is based on one ethically perfect man’s representative payment to God, once. “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to

3. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1912] 1953), pp. 32–33. (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>)

bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:26b–28).

The use of money implies a continuing series of exchanges. Money is valuable in exchange today because men expect it to be valuable in exchange tomorrow. In contrast, an act of supernatural healing implies a one-time event. The healed person is expected to stay healed. He will need no return trips to an earthly physician. This is what Jesus had implied to the woman at the well. “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13–14).

Peter was not creating a monetary obligation on the part of the beggar. He was creating a spiritual obligation. This obligation existed independently of the healing. It is owed to God by every son of Adam. But the healing reminded the beggar and all who subsequently saw him that they owed God worship and thanks. There is always reciprocity between God and man. It begins with God’s grace to man. Grace precedes law. Man is always in debt to God. The continuing grace of God through Christ is what enables a man to repay his debts, moment by moment. God takes the initiative; men respond in faith or rebellion. Peter was showing men how to respond in faith.

Conclusion

The supernatural gift of being able to heal implied an unwillingness to accept payment for healing. Peter had no money. He was a poor man—a poor man with a message. His ability to heal was a free gift from God. The economist defines “free” as being cost-free. A cost is the most valuable use foregone. Peter had not foregone any asset in order to gain this gift. His ability to heal sick people was also cost-free for him to employ. He was foregoing monetary income by not charging the beneficiaries. But this cost was more than offset by the prohibitive expense of charging for the benefit: either the loss of his gift or the loss of his soul, as he later warned Simon the magician. The potential benefit of monetary income was a potential liability. So, it cost Peter nothing to heal the man. This gift was an asset to God’s kingdom. When used in public, it always drew a crowd. It publicly validated the message. In this sense, the ability to heal was better than money, both for the healer and the healed.

3

ABANDONING REAL ESTATE

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:33–37).

The theocentric principle here is the fear of God.¹

A. At Their Feet

The apostles continued to demonstrate their authority over the church's members by means of their miraculous powers. The apostles witnessed to the authority of Christ by means of their displays of miraculous power. Church members were thereby persuaded to commit everything they owned to Christ by means of their gifts to the church.

Twice in this passage, we learn that the money from the sale of real estate was laid at the apostles' feet. This is to be taken literally. This was a ritual act of subordination to the apostles. A person transferred his assets to the church by placing the money at the feet of the leaders of the church. This would have required bowing down or kneeling. The text does not say that they tossed money at their feet. To have thrown down their money would have indicated lack of respect or even contempt. "Then Judas, which had betrayeth him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sin-

1. Chapter 1.

ned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matt. 27:3–5).

The act of subordination to the apostles was two-fold: bowing and paying. The transfer of money revealed a high degree of trust in the apostles. Real estate in Jerusalem was high priced. Presumably, it was the highest priced real estate in Israel because of the presence of the temple. The crowds coming to the temple’s feasts would have bid up the price of rental property. Anyone who owned land in Jerusalem owned a highly marketable asset.

The disciples now converted their most valuable assets into money, and then gave the money to the church. This was an act symbolizing their *transfer of covenantal allegiance* from Old Covenant Israel to the church. They were announcing publicly that they had little confidence in the future of the temple and its sacrifices.

They were saying that they had no trust in a stream of income generated by either land or money. The stream of income from a home was collected mainly in the form of personal living space. The stream of income available from money was commercial. Both income streams would have led to economic independence. The disciples publicly revoked their trust in economic independence in favor of economic dependence on God, which was mediated through the trusteeship of the apostles. They were saying that they expected a stream of income from the hand of God. They were abandoning faith in the most familiar forms of revenue-generating tangible capital—land and money—in favor of reliance on intangible capital. They were exchanging tangible treasure for intangible treasure, both in history and eternity. This is what Jesus had told His listeners to do.²

Allegiance is a matter of trust. A person trusts the person to whom he swears allegiance. Even if he does not trust him, he nevertheless becomes dependent on him. Covenantal allegiance is formal. In the church, it is initially sealed by an oath sign: baptism. It is renewed by the Lord’s Supper.³ Laying money at the feet of the apostles was a non-sacramental demonstration of formal allegiance. When every member who owned real estate sold his property and gave the money to the

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

3. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968).

church, they set an example. This example was based on trust in God to provide an alternative stream of income. It also involved trust in the apostles to use the money in a God-honoring way.

B. The Whole Congregation

The text says that as many people who owned real estate sold it and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. This was extraordinary. There is nothing to match it in church history. I doubt that there is anything to match it in any organization's history. All of the land-owning members sold their property and gave the money to the church. The result was that no member was in economic need. This condition did not last. Paul more than once took up collections for the Jerusalem church at later dates (Rom. 15:25–26; I Cor. 16:1–3). Members of the Jerusalem church had been scattered by persecution after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). When they returned to Jerusalem after the persecution died down, they did not enjoy economic security. The local deacons became dependent on voluntary donations by foreign gentiles.

The membership bonds were initially very strong. The apostles distributed charitable funds. Men trusted the good judgment of the apostles. They did not believe they were being cheated. This good will did not last long. Complaints soon arose. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1). The apostles then created the office of deacon to administer the funds.⁴ This restored confidence.

The degree of faith in the message of the apostles was high. It extended deep into rich men's wallets. Not everyone owned real estate. Those who did sold it. They moved from the ranks of the prosperous into the ranks of the propertyless. This was a public testimony to those around them regarding their shift in faith. Presumably, the former owners moved out of their homes and into much less luxurious quarters. They had given up not only their homes but the investment income that a sale price would have provided. They were not just switching from one tangible capital asset to another; they were giving away their tangible capital. This must have seemed utterly foolish to their peers. Their peers must have asked their departing neighbors why. Why would anyone with substantial assets do such a thing? This was an opportunity for witnessing to their faith in Jesus.

4. Chapter 5.

The apostles healed sick people. Church members with real estate money sold it. Church members without money did not suffer economically. All of this testified in a powerful way to the presence of a new order within the old order. This was no monastic order. These were not Essenes. They did not move out into the desert to live a life of poverty. They remained residents of the most important city in Israel. Those who had owned real estate moved downward economically and socially. They had pulled up their social and economic roots, but they did not pull up their geographical roots. Not yet. Not until the persecution began.

The Jerusalem church was living in expectation of a major change. Part of this expectation was eschatological. Jesus had warned: “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:20–22). Selling real estate when the signs appeared would not be wise. Better to sell before they appeared. How much before? They could not be sure. But all of them did sell their real estate holdings, so we can be confident that they had abandoned faith in the income streams produced by local land. As it turned out, they were able to leave the city less expensively when the persecution began, for they were not leaving behind valuable but immobile property. They were not forfeiting valuable land.

C. The End of the Old Order

In the days when Nebuchadnezzar’s troops marched against Jerusalem, a relative of the prophet Jeremiah came to him with an offer. He asked if Jeremiah would buy the family property. Jeremiah did. He paid silver for it. “Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. So Hanameel mine uncle’s son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle’s son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money,

even seventeen shekels of silver” (Jer. 32:7–9). In giving up money for land in a time of invasion, Jeremiah was making a public statement. He was announcing his faith that God would someday bring the people, or their sons, back into the land. He was extending his heirs’ stake in the future of Israel by purchasing land.

In the months after the ascension of Christ into heaven, the apostles adopted Hanameel’s vision of the Israel’s future. But they did not take the money and run. They took the money, distributed it to poorer members, and prepared the members to run, which they soon did (Acts 8:1). It was clear that the apostles had no confidence in the future of Jerusalem. The members understood this, and they acted rationally to this perception. They sold their land. This was a public demonstration of their belief that Old Covenant Israel’s days were numbered. God had put Old Covenant Israel into the balance, and it was found wanting. The handwriting was not on the wall—the temple’s wall—but it was coming. He who had eyes to see sold his land. He thereby broke his allegiance to the Old Covenant order. This was a negative confession.

The next question was this: What would replace Old Covenant Israel? The answer was the church (Matt. 21:43). This is why they gave their money to the apostles. This was a positive confession that matched their negative confession. They understood the reality of the political slogan, “You can’t beat something with nothing.” They had a place to put their trust: heaven. “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:33–34).⁵ The apostles represented heaven.

D. Outside Support

Paul later raised funds for the church at Jerusalem. This was after the scattering (Acts 8:1) and the missionary activities of those who were scattered. “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). It appears that sometime in the 50’s, the Jerusalem church fell on hard times. Sometime in the mid-40’s, there was a famine. It took place during the reign of Claudius. There are independent records regarding this famine that identify the

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 26.

mid-40's as its date. "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:27–30). This fund-raising was for Judea in general, not just Jerusalem.

Paul's epistles to the Corinthians appealed for funds to send to the Jerusalem church. These epistles were probably written in the early to mid-50s. It would be unwise to draw any connection between the church's pre-persecution practice of common property and its need for outside support over two decades later. We do not know when the practice of holding property in common ceased. We also do not know if most of those who fled the city in Acts 8 returned after the persecution died down. Those who had fled had no real estate to return to. Perhaps many of them failed to return.

By having sold their real estate, they were ready to leave the city on short notice. This was wise, given Jesus' prophecy regarding the days of vengeance. It was also providential, given the severity of the persecution after the death of Stephen. The system of common property gave security to converts who were in poverty or who fell on hard times. But there can be little doubt that the practice retarded capital formation among the brethren. When men cannot establish legal claims to capital assets or the income generated by these assets, they are generally unwilling to take the risks associated with capital formation.

Conclusion

When every member who owned real estate sold it and gave the money to the apostles as trustees, the church received more than money. It received publicity. When people give their money away, they exchange one future for another. This is well understood, both by those making the exchange and those viewing it. When men exchange their futures, they have already exchanged their visions of the future.

What took place in Jerusalem was a miracle. Jesus had said, "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25). Only the direct interven-

tion of God can overcome this resistance. “And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:26–27).⁶ Some of the church’s members possessed real estate. They were not poor. Some of them may have been rich. They marched through the eye of the needle.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 43.

4

IN DEFENSE OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him (Acts 5:1–6).

The theocentric principle here is the omniscience of God: sovereignty, point one of the biblical covenant.¹ A man and his wife attempted to deceive the church regarding the degree of their commitment to God. God knew the truth. He brought direct sanctions against them for lying to the church. It is foolish to try to deceive God.

A. A Good Reputation

Ananias and his wife saw that members of the Jerusalem church were selling their real estate and giving the sale price to the church. To do this was considered sacrificial. There were positive social sanctions associated with this dedication. It was considered an honorable thing to do.

Ananias and his wife decided to buy themselves respectability at a discount price. They would deceive their peers. They would sell their

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

land, secretly retain some of the proceeds, give the remainder to the church, and bask in the glory. They would gain the reputation of being sacrificial in their devotion to God. This would include a reputation for trusting God to care for them. But if bad times came, they would have money in reserve. They would not be completely dependent on God. They would also be eligible to receive financial support from the church.

1. Revelation

The problem with this strategy was the fact that God revealed their deception to Peter. God did this with prophets, but there were few prophets in Israel. Jesus had been a prophet. More than this: He had been the prophet predicted by Moses.

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him (Deut. 18:15–19).

In his second sermon, Peter had cited this passage and applied it to Jesus: “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:22–24).

The couple had heard who Jesus was. They had joined the church on this basis. But they did not recognize that the leaders of the church would possess the prophetic power of revelation. They should have known this. Peter had miraculously healed the crippled man (Acts 3:7).² This gift of healing was a mark of a true prophet. Jesus had

2. Chapter 2.

healed many people in the same way. The couple should have understood that the leaders of the Jerusalem church were apostles. One or more of these apostles would be given access to information that was not available to men under normal circumstances.

They did not care what God knew. They cared only what men knew. They did not take God's wrath into consideration. They took men's opinions into consideration. They were man-centered in their frame of reference. They wanted to please men at the expense of pleasing God. Paul later warned against this. To seek to please men is to abandon servanthood. "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

2. Social Approval

There was a strong element of peer pressure to transfer family-owned property to the church, which is why Ananias and Sapphira decided to sell their land and give part of the money to the church. They wanted to be regarded as team players. Members of the team in Jerusalem pooled their resources. But there was no threat of compulsion. Peter's words made this clear. No one had to donate all of his goods to the church in order to be a member in good standing. Peter asked Ananias: "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?" He did not expect an answer. Ananias would not live long enough to answer. Peter regarded their deception as satanic. It was an attack on the integrity of the apostles, the integrity of the church, and ultimately the integrity of God.

What was so wrong about their act? People are often untruthful in this world, but God does not immediately execute them. What was unique about this act of deception? Peter said, "thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." It had to do with church authority. They had lied to God through the church. They had tried to elevate themselves in the eyes of the church. Why did they care what church members thought? It had to do with the church's claims to represent God in history. The church could not provide social acceptance among Jews. What other benefits could it provide? Perhaps they wanted an economic safety net, which the church seemed to be able to provide. But this would continue only if new converts with assets continued to join and also continued to give their wealth to the church. What did they expect to gain? To some degree, they were seeking approval from God

through the approval of other church members. By seeking to deceive the members who represented God, they were seeking to deceive God. This is what Peter told them.

Why would anyone expect to gain the blessings of God while deceiving God? Why would anyone expect to gain the approval of an omniscient God through church members who do not possess such omniscience? Why would anyone want the social approval of people who are so easily deceived? Ananias had not been thinking straight.

B. Voluntary Charity

Peter challenged Ananias: “But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” The land had been theirs. After it was sold, the money was theirs. They had derived benefits from the land. They could have derived benefits from the money. They recognized this, which is why they retained a portion of the sale price. Peter said that there was nothing wrong with their desire to keep these benefits in reserve. What was wrong was their attempt to deceive other church members regarding their degree of sacrifice and their degree of trust in God.

Peter’s challenge to Ananias revealed a New Testament principle of ownership. In the midst of an unprecedented program of voluntary charity within the church at Jerusalem, there was still a commitment to the principle of private ownership. The apostles’ practice of holding property in trust for members of the local church was not based on any principle of compulsion. No one’s membership was at risk for refusing to donate. The apostles were not threatening any property-owning member with the loss of access to the Lord’s Supper.

Peter asked rhetorically, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” This was the basically same rhetorical question asked by the land owner in Jesus’ parable of the hired hands. “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” (Matt. 20:15a). It was on the basis of this principle of private ownership that Jesus used this parable to teach about the sovereignty of God in making the offer of eternal life.³ Peter here reaffirmed the same principle of private ownership.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

Socialism is the rejection of the private ownership of the means of production. This is why it is impossible to prove the case for socialism by the practice of the church in Jerusalem. There was an underlying commitment to economic equality through voluntary charity, but this has nothing to do with socialism. Voluntarism has nothing to do with socialism. The civil government in a socialist economy confiscates privately owned capital. This reduces the former capital owner's ability to exercise charity. Socialism substitutes the threat of physical violence for voluntarism. Socialism sends the tax collector to the door of the property owner. He demands the transfer of ownership to the state. If the property owner refuses to submit, the tax collector sends the police, who are armed, to take whatever the tax collector demands. Socialism is based on the threat of physical compulsion.

Peter's statement to Ananias stands as a barrier to the socialist's invocation on behalf of his cause of the Jerusalem church's practice of common property. The Jerusalem church's members possessed property. This is why they were able to create a system of common ownership. There was a free market for capital goods. Capital had been privately owned in ancient Israel, and it was privately owned in the Roman Empire. There was a capital market. Therefore, members could sell their less liquid capital assets for money, and then give this money to the apostles as trustees.

C. Sapphira

Ananias was guilty of trying to deceive God. Was his wife also guilty? Peter would soon determine this through a verbal examination. "And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:7–11).

Peter probably knew that she was a co-conspirator with her husband. Nevertheless, he allowed her to condemn herself. He conducted an investigation. This was for her sake as much as for the church's.

The event taught members that God would defend His church through the imposition of negative sanctions. Peter knew the nature of the sanction in this case: death. When Sapphira affirmed her husband's lie, she condemned herself to his fate. No wonder that "great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."

The church was slowly being substituted for Old Covenant Israel as the representative of God's kingdom. Jesus had told the Jews, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

The church did not possess any authority to impose negative physical sanctions. It could restrict a person from the sacraments, but it did not possess the sword of civil government. God, however, did possess a sword. By publicly confirming Peter's verbal judgment against Ananias and Sapphira, God validated Peter's office.

D. New Sanctions, New Covenant

The text continues: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch" (v. 12). God was validating the apostles' authority by means of visible sanctions. These sanctions were part of the New Covenant. Without sanctions, both positive and negative, there is no covenant.⁴

Neither civil magistrates nor church officers are given the ability to read men's minds. To build any system of government on any leader's possession of such an ability is to misunderstand the nature of New Covenant authority. Some of the apostles sometimes possessed this unique power. This marked the transfer from the Old Covenant to the New. The New Covenant needed validation. God provided this. But once the Old Covenant was visibly ended, which took place at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, miracles ceased to be available on demand to church officers. This is not to deny that some miracles do take place. But church officers do not possess them automatically upon accession to office. Civil magistrates in Israel never did possess such power as part of their office.

The socialist must assume for the state the power to read men's minds on a scale never possessed by the apostles. The socialist planning board must match aggregate supply and demand. This means

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

that board members must find a way for would-be producers and would-be customers to coordinate their plans. Central planners must first assess which customer demands are legitimate, meaning beneficial for the entire community. Then they must determine who in society can meet this demand most efficiently. Then they must devise a system of predictable sanctions, positive and negative, to persuade producers and customers to consummate an exchange of services. The socialist must presume a God-like omniscience by the members of the various central planning boards. Their bureaucratic plans must be jointly coordinated somehow, so that they are mutually consistent. Then these plans must be implemented. The socialist must therefore also assume a God-like omnipotence on the part of civil magistrates in enforcing the plans issued by the central planning boards.

The New Covenant does not authorize such powers of observation and enforcement to civil government. Even in the case of the early church, the apostles did not rely on church authority to enforce their miraculous ability to know men's secrets. They relied on God to enforce directly their miracle-based judgments.

Conclusion

The judicial case of Ananias and Sapphira stands as a defense of private property. Peter invoked the principle of private property in condemning them. It was their attempt to deceive God, Peter said, that was satanic, not their ownership of property.

The socialist who seeks moral justification for socialism's ideal of economic equality should not use the example of common property in the Jerusalem church. The socialist who does invoke the practice of the Jerusalem church has not come to grips with Peter's words of condemnation against Ananias. "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?"

5

THE DIACONATE

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1–4).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God in His office as the defender of the poor. This is point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.¹

A. Competition for Resources

The text tells us that there were divisions in the Jerusalem church. These divisions were based on language and culture. The general categories were Jew and Greek. These were Greek-speaking Jews, also called Hellenes.² Presumably, they were men who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and Pentecost, and had been converted to faith in Jesus either by Peter's preaching or by hearing the gospel in their own language, when the Holy Spirit led to the disciples' speaking in tongues, which had been a miraculous though temporary reversal of the curse of the tower of Babel. They now believed that the widows of Hellenes were not receiving their fair share of the charitable resources

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. This was different from Hellenists, who were Jews who had adopted Greek philosophy.

of the church. They began to murmur.

Murmuring is an early manifestation of institutional conflict. It is an unofficial form of complaining. Murmurers are complaining against the system, meaning the way things are. The presumption of the murmurer is that if things were done differently, the world would be a better place.

What was the basis of their complaint? Visible representatives of one identifiable subgroup of church members were not receiving the same proportion of the church's charitable resources. The text does not say who was in immediate authority over the distribution of resources to the widows. Presumably, it was the apostles as a group. Church members had sold their homes and lands, placing the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. The apostles were acting as trustees for these funds.

Who were these Grecians? They were Greek-speaking converts to Christian faith. Some may previously have been pagans who had been doing business in Jerusalem. Others may have been converts to Old Covenant religion, called proselytes. Others were Jews who had come to Jerusalem from Greek-speaking provinces. "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). What were these men doing in Jerusalem? The most likely guess is that they were involved in foreign trade. They may have been skilled craftsmen. Under Rome's authority, men had free access to the cities of the Empire. There was great mobility.

The identifying marks of distinction were linguistic fluency, either in Greek or Hebrew. The Greek-speaking members were sufficiently numerous that there were impoverished Greek-speaking widows on the membership rolls of the church. The Greeks regarded the apostles' treatment of these widows as representative of how the Greeks were being treated generally by Jews. Jews had a disparaging view of gentiles. The Greeks did not want to be regarded as subordinate to Hebrew-speaking, circumcised church members. They regarded distribution of funds to widows as representative of how they were regarded by the leadership. They believed they were being discriminated against.

B. The Division of Labor

The practice of the church had been to help all of the members who were in need. "And sold their possessions and goods, and parted

them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:45). "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold. And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:34–35). So, in the early weeks of the church's existence, everyone in need received aid. Now there was a change. The murmuring began.

The apostles did not confirm or deny the accusation against them. They responded by creating a new office in the church, which later was called "deacon." Those men who held this office would administer the charitable funds. The apostles said they were too involved in the preaching of the gospel to spend time in waiting tables, which was a phrase symbolizing charitable work. Charitable work they saw as a lesser calling to preaching.

The apostles had limited resources of time. They had to allocate their time among competing uses. Low on their list of priorities was the administration of the church's charitable funds. They were saying that saving souls through preaching is more important than caring for widows. Others could do this more mundane task. The number of men who could faithfully serve as deacons was greater than the number of those who had lawful access to the office of apostle.

The division of labor had now begun within the church's hierarchy. The apostles would henceforth do the work of evangelism and church oversight, and the deacons would distribute funds to the poor. The deacons would report to the apostles. This system of hierarchy had two immediate advantages. First, it relieved the apostles of the burden of overseeing church charity. Second, it established an intermediate agency that would become responsible for giving away the funds. This would make deacons the first line of defense against future murmuring about widows. They could sort out the problems. If they could not satisfy the murmurers, then the apostles could step in and deal with the dispute. This magnified the office of apostle.

C. Legal Claims vs. Moral Claims

The money being used to care for widows was supposedly available to every member's widow on the basis of her need. The murmurers were arguing their subgroup's widows were not being aided to the same degree that the widows of Hebrew-speakers were. This was unfair, they implied.

Fairness became an issue because the beneficiaries had no legal title to the charitable funds. There was more demand for these funds by non-owners than there was supply of these funds by the apostles. The apostles had gained control over these funds because of their promise to care for the poor. This promise was not being fulfilled to the satisfaction of the critics. The issue of fairness arose because of the structure of ownership. The Hellenes believed that their group's widows had a moral claim on the funds, even though they did not have a legal claim. By collecting money in terms of a moral goal—helping impoverished church members—the apostles had exposed themselves to criticism from those who believed that they had a moral claim to the money. This was not an insurance contract, yet the system functioned analogously to such a contract. There was a crucial difference, however: a contract is a document that is legally enforceable in a court. The apostles' implied arrangement was not a legal contract.

A moral claim is difficult to define and describe, which is one reason why moral claims are not formally agreed to in advance by participants in an institution. Written contracts do not apply well to cases governed by moral criteria. Acceptable performance is difficult to specify. A theory of an implied contract may be offered retroactively to justify moral claims to scarce resources. The terms of implied contracts are vague or highly complex. The moral principles that supposedly govern these implied contracts may be disputed. This is why disputes over moral claims to scarce economic resources are not easily settled to the satisfaction of all those who make these claims.

The murmuring began because there was no way for the Hellenes to establish a legal claim to church funds on behalf of their subgroup's widows. The Hellenes did not own these funds. The funds were owned by the church. The apostles administered these funds on behalf of widows and other moral claimants. In dealing with this problem, the Hellenes faced a barrier: fear. The fatal experience of Ananias and Sapphira had put fear in the hearts of church members (Acts 5:5, 11).³ A direct confrontation with the apostles was viewed as too risky. So, the critics began to murmur. They criticized the results of the distribution, but they did not directly challenge those officers in charge of this distribution.

The issue facing the apostles was two-fold: the moral foundation of their trusteeship and their efficiency in performing their duties. They

3. Chapter 4.

did not immediately address the moral issue of which subgroup deserved what. They dealt with their problem institutionally by creating a new office in the local church. They delegated responsibility over the distribution of charitable funds. Members had delegated this authority to the apostles when they laid money at the apostles' feet. The apostles now shifted part of this responsibility downward.

The apostles did not say that the widows of Hellenes were not morally entitled to a share of the church's funds. They also did not admit that they were at fault morally. They did imply that their own handling of the matter had been inefficient. They proposed an institutional solution: the creation of a bureaucracy of specialists in waiting on tables.

D. Free Market Competition

In a free market, competition for resources takes the form of a giant, highly complex auction. Men bid against each other for the legal right to use scarce economic resources. They offer assets that legally they now possess, or think they will possess, in exchange for assets that they hope to possess. Owners of resources compete against each other economically in order to gain legal title to a different mix of resources.

A free market social order rests on a legal system that enforces legal titles to resources. Competition for resources shifts from moral claims to legal claims. Adjudication shifts from individual violence to institutional violence. Decisions by civil courts are backed up by the monopoly over violence that is lawfully possessed by the civil government. In order to reduce violence in men's competition for scarce resources, the legal system enforces legal title and voluntary contracts.

Vengeance is God's monopoly. "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste" (Deut. 32:35). "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).⁴ God has delegated a portion of His monopoly of violence to the civil government (Rom. 13:1–7).⁵ He has done this in order to increase social peace. Legal predictability is a means of increasing social peace. So is legal title to property.

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

A moral claim to scarce resources may be legitimate in God's eyes. A moral claim may be granted by God to a non-owner because of the non-owner's weakness. In Old Covenant Israel, the non-owners who were most often singled out by God as deserving of special consideration by owners were widows, orphans, and strangers. Nevertheless, God distinguishes moral claims from legal claims. Under the Mosaic law, God granted very few legal claims to members of these three categories. He granted to property owners the moral right to determine which members of these categories they would help. Land owners determined which poor people would gain access to their fields as gleaners. The example of Boaz and Ruth was representative (Ruth 2).⁶ Money owners determined which poverty-stricken Israelites would receive zero-interest charitable loans (Deut. 15).⁷

The locus of final authority to enforce moral claims against legal claims remains with God. He brings positive historical sanctions for obedience. "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto" (Deut. 15:7–10). He brings negative historical sanctions for disobedience. "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless" (Ex. 22:21–24).⁸

A property owner has a legal right to exclude others from the use

6. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 9.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

of certain resources. He announces, "This is mine." Covenantally speaking, this means: "God has delegated to me legal control over this asset." To challenge this claim successfully in a court of law, the critic must show that God has not delegated such ownership to him, or that God has placed limits on the exclusive use of the property by the existing legal owner.

Conclusion

The apostles faced a series of problems. First, their claim of ownership as trustees was based on an implied moral claim: they would use the money to help impoverished church members. This claim implied equal access to these funds by all poor widows of church members. Second, the apostles faced time constraints. To administer the funds properly would take time. Third, there was a division in the church based on linguistic-cultural differences.

Their solution was to create a new ecclesiastical office: deacon. This added a layer of bureaucracy in between church members and trustees. The apostles retained their authority to adjudicate disputes, but they passed down to the deacons the task of settling these issues initially. This took advantage of the division of labor.

6

THINGS THAT MONEY CANNOT BUY

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me (Acts 8:18–24).

The theocentric basis of this incident was the free grace of God in delivering men from the bondage of sin. The Holy Spirit uses men for His purposes. They are not to attempt to use Him for theirs. This is a matter of hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Simon the Magician

This incident took place in Samaria. In Samaria, there were traces of biblical religion. The Samaritans refused to worship at the temple. They knew of God and His promises, but they would not subordinate themselves to the Jews. All this was about to change. Jesus had told the Samaritan woman at the well, “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spir-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

it: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:22–24). Now God's Spirit had come. He was transforming men. Simon recognized this. He wanted a large role in this method of transformation. He had the money to buy in early, or so he imagined.

There had already been an effective work of evangelism in Samaria through Philip's preaching.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done (Acts 8:5–13).

Simon had been a sorcerer. He had been persuaded by Philip's message of salvation. He had submitted to baptism, but the Holy Spirit had not come upon him at the time of this baptism. "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:14–17). This indicates that the giving of the Holy Ghost was not then simultaneous upon conversion. The Samaritans were in the same condition as the disciples had been before Pentecost.

This separation between salvation and the giving of the Holy Ghost continued in the gentile world.

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost

since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve (Acts 19:1–7).

When Simon saw that Peter and John had the ability to impart the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands, he decided that he wanted this power. He offered to buy it from them. This also indicates that Simon did not think that the apostles were using tricks to perform this transfer. He believed that the power was real, and that it was for sale.

Peter's response to Simon was immediate and harsh. Such power was not for sale, he told Simon. "But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." Simon's money was earthly. So was his soul, Peter implied. It was not just Simon's body that was at risk. His soul was at risk. The issue was ethical rebellion. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

B. Repentance Unto Salvation

Simon had committed such a great sin that Peter cursed him. Simon had imagined that the power possessed by the apostles was for sale. He imagined that God serves on command of certain men. The apostles must have had some sort of power over God's Spirit, Simon concluded. This was not trickery; it was supernatural. Simon wanted to share in this supernatural ability.

Peter warned him that his soul was at risk. Simon had publicly testified his faith in Philip's message of redemption by submitting to baptism. He had thereby brought himself under the authority of God and God's church. But when Simon saw that the apostles had the ability to impart the Holy Spirit, he sought to buy the ability. He was not interested in receiving the Holy Spirit personally. He did not ask to receive the Holy Spirit. He was interested only in possessing the ability

to grant the Holy Spirit to selected believers. He wanted to be in charge of administering the Holy Spirit. He was not seeking to become an agent of the Holy Spirit. Simon's hope was the hope of every seeker after power. He wants to use power for his purposes without becoming ensnared by it.

To receive the Holy Spirit meant to come under God's hierarchy directly. It meant submission to God. It also meant submission to the apostles. Simon was not interested in submitting. He was interested in gaining submission. What was he really after? Power? Probably. Holy office? Yes. But he did not recognize that a man who is under God's covenant is under God's covenant law and its sanctions. Peter warned him that he had broken God's law and was now facing eternal sanctions. Simon had been baptized, which is a New Covenant oath sign.² He was therefore formally under the stipulations of the covenant.³ He could not escape its sanctions.⁴

Why did he imagine that the ability to impart the Holy Spirit was for sale? Why did he think that the apostles could transfer this ability to him or anyone? Simon was in the grip of an idea, namely, that God is on call to man. If a man could somehow learn the secret of gaining control over God, he could achieve great things. It was worth a lot of money to Simon to gain this power.

The text says that Simon had previously possessed great influence locally. "To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God." He had been seen by Samaritans as a man of God. Yet Peter made it clear to him that Simon was no man of God. He was under God's wrath. The worst thing possible was going to happen to him if he refused to repent.

Simon believed Peter. This is additional evidence that he knew that the apostles possessed supernatural power, not just the ability to deceive people. He was not trying to purchase the secret of deceiving people. He was trying to purchase supernatural authority over a manifestation of God in history. Simon wanted more power, more public acclaim for his mediatory position between God and man.

Peter recognized the evil intent behind this request. He warned Simon that he was risking God's judgment. Simon immediately asked Peter to pray to Peter's God. He saw in Peter a man with mediatory au-

2. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968).

3. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

thority. God paid attention to Peter. Peter could pray on Simon's behalf.

Simon understood prayer. He understood that prayer is different from the power to work miracles, including the miracle of imparting the Holy Spirit. Prayer was a request to God. He who prayed on another person's behalf could have his prayer answered. Simon did not trust his own standing with God. He wanted Peter to intercede for him. He did not offer to pay Peter for offering up such a prayer. He understood that the ability to get prayers answered was not for sale. He did not assume that there was a market for effective prayers. What Peter had just said to him had frightened him. He did want to compound his sin. He wanted forgiveness.

We are not told what Simon did next. "And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (v. 25). But what Simon attempted to do was remembered for centuries. The term *simony* refers to the practice of buying a high ecclesiastical office. This practice became acceptable during the Middle Ages. It was a way for the Papacy to raise funds.

C. The Magician's Bargain

Why did Simon initially think that such power was for sale? There is no New Testament record of anyone else who made such an offer to the apostles. Simon must have had knowledge of supernatural power's being sold by its possessors. This power would only have been available through demonic activity. Satan had tempted Christ by challenging Him to purchase the kingdoms of this world from Satan.⁵ This offer was based on a lie, however: Satan did not possess lawful title to these kingdoms. Simon believed that others had purchased supernatural abilities from existing holders. He wanted to make a similar arrangement. Simon was sinful because he imagined that such power was for sale by the apostles. His sin was not skepticism; it was commercialism.

Skepticism is more common today. There are modern illusionists who argue that all of the miracles performed by people in the Bible were either illusions or events that did not take place. I once exchanged a series of letters with a Christian who was a professional illu-

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

sionist. He insisted that Satan does not possess such supernatural abilities. He went so far as to argue that the contest between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians involved illusions on both sides. He denied that the rods had become snakes. The text says that this transformation did take place, but he insisted that we must not take these words literally. I pointed out to him that he had adopted the materialistic worldview of skeptics. His methodology was rationalist. He was interpreting the Bible in terms of rationalism's explanation of cause and effect, not the Bible's view. I told him that he was doing what the illusionist and rationalist skeptic James Randi does with every biblical reference to God's supernatural manifestations in history. He refused to admit this. He preferred to interpret the Bible in terms of what he and his professional peers can do, yet he would not accept the suggestion that he had adopted presuppositions that are hostile to biblical supernaturalism. He would not acknowledge that the methodological broom that he was using in his attempt to sweep away the Egyptian magicians' serpents could also be used, and is being used, by his peers in their attempt to sweep away his God.

Simon was not under an illusionist's illusion. He had used sorcery to gain a reputation for himself as a man of God. He did not want to lose this reputation. Philip had performed miracles. Now the senior officers of the church had arrived, and they could transfer the Holy Spirit to others. Here was power worth paying for.

Peter told him that the suggestion that such a commercial transaction with God is even possible testified to Simon's sinfulness. "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Simon was still under spiritual bondage. God is not in the business of establishing some sort of commercial franchise for the sale of supernatural power. Man can offer nothing to God in exchange for such ability. The ability to lay on hands was God's gift to the holder, not a means of enriching him. This ability was not transferrable on request.

Simon had misunderstood both the purpose and the basis of such power. The apostles had been given miraculous powers in order to testify to the power of God to regenerate men. The apostles also had the power to confirm this regeneration by the laying on of hands. The Holy Spirit was added to regeneration. Philip had not demonstrated such an ability. The possession of this power was indicative of high ecclesiastical office. It later confirmed Paul's ministry as an apostle. "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on

them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). Simon wanted this power.

What he imagined was that there is a shortcut to power and therefore to ecclesiastical authority. In one sense, this had been Adam’s belief, too. Adam believed he could attain a power that God possessed by eating from the forbidden tree. He was unwilling to wait for God to give him lawful access. He was in a hurry. Simon also hoped to speed up his rise in the ranks, from a new convert to an apostle. Money was his hoped-for means of promotion.

In men’s affairs, money can speed up processes. There is a familiar trade-off between time and money. To save money takes time, and vice versa. The value of any income stream is discounted by the prevailing rate of interest, which is a payment for the use of an income-generating asset over time.⁶ The higher men’s time-preference is, meaning the lower their future-orientation, the more they are willing to pay to buy instant gratification. They discount the future sharply. This was Simon’s weakness. He was unwilling to wait for God’s gift. He wanted the marks of high office, and did not want to wait.

This is the magician’s worldview. It is also Satan’s. Satan is short of time. Time is running out on him. He knows that his ability to disrupt the kingdom of God is temporally bounded. He cannot afford to be a long-run planner. He can plan for a much longer run than most men do, but compared to God, Satan is a short-term thinker.

Conclusion

Simon believed that he could attain the power of an apostle by purchasing this power. He may have imagined that the office would come along with the power. He did not say this; he asked only for the power. Peter warned him that his soul was in danger for suggesting such a transaction. There are some things that money cannot buy, and the power of apostles was one of them. Not only was Simon unable to rise to apostolic office by purchasing its power, he was at risk eternally for thinking that he could.

It is an error to believe that all power derives from nature. It is also an error to believe that he who possesses power can sell it. Some forms of power are nontransferable. For example, personal skills and attributes that produce power are not transferrable. So are supernatural

6. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

powers that God endows on some men in order to extend God's kingdom. It is not true that everything has a market price. The things that the Bible says are most valuable in this world and the next do not have a price that men can afford to pay. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:24–26).⁷

7. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 35.

CHURCHES THAT SHARE

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:25–30).

The theocentric principle here was the fatherhood of God among believers: point two of the biblical covenant.¹ Brothers help brothers in times of need.

A. Confirmation of Gentile Faith

Antioch was a gentile city, the capital of Roman Syria in Asia Minor. Barnabas went there after he had found Paul. He knew that Paul had been called to preach the gospel to the gentiles. The two of them remained in Antioch for a year. The city had a large population of Jews, possibly as many as 45,000.² This explains why Jewish prophets came to warn them about a coming famine, which took place

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Elizabeth McNamer, "Antioch: Trailblazer of Christianity," *Scripture from Scratch* (May 2002). (<http://bit.ly/AntiochTrailblazer>)

around A.D. 45.³

The text indicates that the church at Antioch collected money to send to the church in Judea even before the famine struck. This indicates great faith in the prophecy. It also indicates that the gentiles in Antioch regarded the converted Jews in Judea as their brethren.

Paul wrote of the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jews and gentiles in Christ. "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Eph. 2:14). This was an early example of this principle in action. When men sacrifice money for a principle, they believe in the principle. Here, early in the history of the church, the gentiles took the initiative. They acknowledged their faith in Christ by sending money to Jews who also had announced their faith in Christ.

They trusted Barnabas and Saul to deliver the money. They had been taught by both men for some time. Their trust in the message led to their trust in the men. The mark of this trust was their transfer of money to them.

B. Faith in the Future

The church at Antioch had confidence in God. The prophet Agabus had warned them of a famine to come soon. He did not say that it would only strike Judea. On the contrary, he said that it would hit the Roman world. The response of the Antiochan church was to take money that could have been used to buy food, in advance, to be used by the local congregation, and to give this money to Paul and Barnabas. The local church believed Agabus. Yet the members did not think of protecting themselves first. They thought about other Christians who might be harder hit.

As the capital city of the region, Antioch would receive special consideration from the Roman state. This would reduce the risk of famine for members of the local church. They made an estimate of comparative risk for the two regions and concluded that the church in Judea was at greater risk. So, they decided to donate money to the Judean church.

Famine was nothing to be taken lightly. The modern West has not faced a famine since the Irish potato crop failure in the late 1840s. We have forgotten what it means to be without basic foods. We have not lived under such conditions unless we have lived in a war zone. The

3. "Agabus," Wikipedia (May 3, 2012). (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agabus>)

prophecy of famine would have created fear in most people's hearts in Antioch. Nevertheless, they gave money to help the Jewish church. The text does not indicate that the prophets from Jerusalem had asked for money. Paul and Barnabas, not the visiting prophets, took the money back to the church in Jerusalem. This indicates that the church at Antioch made the decision to donate the money later on.

Their faith in God's providence was remarkable. They trusted the Jewish prophets. They believed that these men were telling the truth. God really was going to impose a famine on the region. They also trusted God. They believed that God would protect them. He had sent prophets to warn them, so He would protect them when the famine struck.

The prophets had come to help the church. They presumably had warned the Jerusalem church. They had set aside time and travel expenses to journey to Antioch to warn the gentile church. The gentiles in the church of Antioch responded by sending money back to Judea. A bond of faith in God and His providence united the two churches. Money was the visible mark of this bond.

Conclusion

The generosity of the church at Antioch was evidence that Paul's message of reconciliation had begun to be taken seriously in the gentile Christian world. But the prophets from Jerusalem also shared this faith. Otherwise, why would they have come all the way to Antioch to warn the gentiles?

The money was the testimony to this new faith. It marked the commitment of Christians to support one another, care for one another, in times of trouble. A new faith had appeared, and it crossed geographical and racial boundaries. They had preached reconciliation. Now they put their money where their mouths were. Their faith was real.

8

OCCUPATION AND CALLING

And because he was one of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers (Acts 18:3).

A. “What Do You Do?”

Protestants refer to Paul as the Apostle Paul. Roman Catholics refer to him as St. Paul. No one refers to him as Paul the tentmaker. Yet that was what he was.

In the United States, one of the first questions that one man asks another man after their formal introduction is this: “What do you do?” That means: “What do you do for a living?” This refers to a person’s occupation. To begin a relationship, American men assess their relationship by means of information regarding their income-generating work.

There are specialists in marketing who train their students in the 30-second “elevator” presentation: a brief, carefully crafted summary of what they do, meaning what they sell. The goal of this presentation is to stimulate a follow-up contact, which in turn will lead to a sales presentation at some point. The elevator is used as the example of a very brief encounter: the time between floors. From the time the elevator’s doors close to the time it opens, and one of them steps out of the elevator, the skilled student should have made his presentation, along with a follow-up action step. He hands the other person his business card.

If anyone had asked Paul “What do you do?” what would he have said? “I’m an apostle of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.” Or “I am a messenger from God, bringing the good news of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Or this: “I make tents.” The answer would have depended on the circumstances of the meeting. It is quite conceivable to imagine that Paul would have answered “I make

tents” if the person had just met him at a restaurant in the part of the city where people went to buy items for a long journey.

Paul, as we say, “put food on the table” by selling tents. Yet he was not famous in his day as a master tentmaker. He did not achieve his fame in history based on his tents.

Jesus is not famous for His carpentry, either. Yet He spent far more years as a carpenter than He did as the founder of a world religion.

B. Occupation

A man’s occupation defines him in the eyes of most people, including his own. He explains his place in life in terms of what he does for a living. Why? Because of the dominion covenant. God gave to mankind the task of subduing the earth (Gen. 1:26–28).¹ This defines mankind, along with man’s creation in the image of God. A man’s occupation requires more hours per day than anything else, except possibly sleeping. What he does for a living seemingly defines his life.

Yet in the day of judgment, no one will ask him how many hours he spent at the office. In matters eternal, the occupation is the person’s backdrop. It is not irrelevant, but it is surely not the fundamental issue of life. The Bible makes this clear.

A man’s occupation is his primary area of income-generating service. He must serve customers. He is their economic agent. They pay him to provide services. His success on the job is measured in part by the income he receives. He regards his income as positioning him in importance in the marketplace. He wants a raise in pay because this indicates his personal success in satisfying the demand of paying customers.

His income lets him support his family. This points to a curious conclusion: his occupation is subordinate to his role as financial supporter of his family. His family has initial claims on his income. Men declare to wives, “I’m doing this for you and the children.” They justify their absence by means of this assertion. Surely, it is plausible in the case of seamen. They are rarely home. The woman who marries one knows that she will not have a husband nearby for most of his years of employment.

This does not justify hours lost to television. This is time taken

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

away from interaction with the children. But it is common in the modern industrial world. Digital entertainment opportunities are available day and night.

Income from an occupation is hierarchical. Customers are economically sovereign. They possess the most marketable asset: money. They determine who wins and who loses. But income flows to the family. So, the occupation is in the middle of the flow of funds.

Yet for most men, their occupation defines them, not their role as fathers and husbands. Economically, work on the job is merely functional: a means to an end. Yet for most men, their occupations are far closer to an end in life. The more they enjoy what they do, the truer this is.

Why is there this substitution? Final judgment is not said to rest on one's performance on the job. Their economic account books point to people's highest priorities, which are usually associated with the family. Yet men do not spend a lot of time planning the future of their roles as heads of households. They are far more likely to spend time planning their next promotion.

There is a substitution of the occupation's position in the hierarchy of life: from being economically subordinate to customers and family members to the primary position.

Why? Because men get occupation confused with calling.

C. Calling

Paul's calling was to serve as an apostle to the gentiles. This is what he is famous for. He changed Western civilization by founding local congregations, visiting local congregations he had founded, and writing a few letters to local congregations.

He is not famous for his tentmaking. He is famous as an apostle. Why is this the case? Wasn't tentmaking important? Only as a means of financial support. The lives he changed fundamentally with his tents are not recorded anywhere. The lives he changed as a churchman are in the hundreds of millions.

Which was more important? His tentmaking or his apostleship? To ask the question is to answer it.

His tentmaking was his occupation. His apostleship was his calling. I define calling as follows: **the most important thing a person can do in which he is most difficult to replace.**

Jesus' calling was to serve as Savior of the world. He was irreplace-

able. He alone was irreplaceable. Paul's calling was to persuade gentiles of the truth of Jesus' calling. He was barely replaceable. Possibly Apollos could have done this. Possibly John Mark could have. But it is clear in retrospect that Paul was the uniquely gifted person who performed this ministry as assigned.

His occupation helped him maintain his financial independence from churches. He made this plain to the church at Corinth in his famous fund-raising section of his second letter (II Cor. 12:16–18).² He was "his own man," meaning God's own man. He owed nothing to those whom he oversaw as an apostle. He only owed satisfactory tents to customers.

We define Paul by means of his calling. His occupation was a means to several ends: supporting his minimal needs of food and shelter, serving his customers, and maintaining his financial independence from congregations. It was important as a means to these ends, but it did not define him. His calling defined him.

It should define every person. It doesn't, but only because so few people ever identify their callings. Of those who do define their callings, most get sidetracked by the affairs of this life. They invest their time, money, and dreams into other zones of their lives.

D. Both Calling and Occupation

Paul used his occupation to finance his calling. Jesus abandoned His occupation for the sake of His calling. He became a wandering teacher, dependent on donations from mostly unknown people. Lazarus was an exception. There were few others.

Jesus was willing to subordinate His ministry to unknown donors, because He had so little time. He verbally called His disciples away from their occupations and callings (if they had any) in order to adopt a unique calling. They became dependent on Him, just as He was dependent on God the Father, as He said so often in the Gospel of John. He was confident about financial support, because He was equally confident about the end of His earthly ministry. He knew what was coming, when it was coming, and how it would turn out. He had no need to worry about donations.

All of the disciples abandoned their occupations. After Jesus' ascension, they never again found ways to fund their callings by way of

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

their callings. There was a complete separation of occupation and calling in their lives. The disciples did not even serve as donors of the church's money (Acts 6:1–4).³ They were too important teaching and ruling. Their calling was their occupation: ministry.

Occasionally, we find other occupations that have this characteristic of fusion. A handful of teachers often are paid to do what they do best. Professional athletes for a few years have this advantage. This has only been true in modern times: post 1900. Judges have this advantage. A few lawyers do, though there are far too many who do not. Screen actors have this advantage. Think of movie “extras” who do not,⁴ or struggling actors who wait tables, hoping to be in a position to fuse calling and occupation.

Conclusion

The calling is only rarely the same as the occupation. The most important thing that a person can do in which he would be most difficult to replace is closer to apostleship than tentmaking. Men should identify their callings and then subordinate their occupations to their callings. Paul did. One alternative is to abandon the occupation and let donors pay for the calling. Jesus did this. So did the disciples. Finally, a person can seek to fuse the two. Jobs in the judicial system seem to do this. So do jobs in the health care field. These are rare.

3. Chapter 5.

4. One of the few movies ever made about an extra, Billy Crystal's *Memories of Me* (1988), was not a success artistically and was a flop financially.

TO SUFFER LOSS FOR THE GOSPEL

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed (Acts 19:13–20).

The issue here was the hierarchy of God, who forbids the worship of idols: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Sacrificing Wealth for the Gospel's Sake

The gospel transformed the lives of many people in Ephesus. Some of these people had been occultists. They had made a living by using demonic powers. People who wanted to gain their ends apart from the normal practices of life paid these occultists to call forth power from below.

These occultists owned books that revealed the secrets of calling forth demons to serve men's requests. These books were very valuable.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

Their value was based on the income that they could generate for those who owned them and followed their instructions. Competition for the information contained in these books had bid up their market value.

The owners of these books had to make a decision. If they were no longer willing to rely on the information contained in these books, their stream of income would be cut off. They could no longer sell their services as miracle workers. The books would nevertheless retain value in the market. While the present owners could no longer in good conscience use these books to generate income, other people were ready to replace them as miracle workers. These would-be replacements lacked access to the formulas, but they were willing to pay to obtain the secret information. They looked into the future and estimated a stream of income available to practitioners of these dark arts. They were willing to pay money the owners of the books in order to purchase what they imagined was considerable income.

The books retained value because the information they contained was believed by would-be replacements to contain practical information on gaining power from below. The owners of the books also believed that the books did contain such information. This indicates that the new converts had been calling on occult forces to gain their ends. The books were not books on trickery or illusion. They contained descriptions of rites and formulas that produced supernatural outcomes.

The owners now faced a dilemma. They were no longer willing to invoke supernatural powers that were in opposition to Christ. But the market value of their books remained high. They could gain considerable wealth by selling permanent access to the income streams that these books provided. But to do this, they would be acting to perpetuate the forbidden practices promoted by the books. Any money gained by such sales would have been tainted.

The alternative was the bonfire. They could figuratively burn piles of money. They could retard the spread of occult information, but only at a high price. They would have to destroy their capital.

Jesus had told the rich young ruler to sell his goods and give the money to the poor (Luke 18:18–25).² But these people knew that this command did not apply to them. Their property was inherently immoral. To sell it was to extend its influence. God did not want them to sell these goods, not even for the sake of helping the poor. God's law

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

was clear on this: “Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog,³ into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deut. 23:18). They could have rationalized the sale of these books. They could have said to themselves, “Someone will sell them these books. It might as well be us.” By burning the books, the owners would raise the price of such books by restricting the existing supply. This would increase the wealth of covenant-breaking owners of similar books. This made no difference morally. By raising the market value of their competitors’ books and practices, these new converts were restricting supply of the occult services rendered. This was more important to God than the wealth-transfer effects of the book-burning.

B. Sacrificing the Gospel for Wealth’s Sake

In contrast to these new converts was the guild of idol makers. This guild was successful in Ephesus, where the temple of Diana (Artemis), a goddess of fertility in Ephesus, dominated worship in the city. By Paul’s day, it had been reconstructed several times over the previous five or more centuries. The major rebuilding began in 356 B.C., after an arsonist had burned down its predecessor. Two centuries later, Antipater of Sidon listed it as one of the seven wonders of the world. It survived until about 262 A.D., when the Goths destroyed it during a raid.⁴

These silversmiths made small silver shrines for home worship. They had considerable self-interest in preserving the public’s faith in Diana.

For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And

3. Bestiality.

4. It was discovered in 1869 by the British Museum’s John Turtle Wood, after a six-year search. Later excavations indicated that there had been five temples on the same site, each constructed on top of the other.

when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:24–28).

Their protest against Paul led to a near-riot in the city's assembly area, the theater. "And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre" (Acts 19:29). "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together" (Acts 19:32). This went on for two hours (Acts 19:34).

At this point, a local bureaucrat stood up and delivered a classic bureaucratic speech: a defense of proper procedure.

And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:35–41).

His speech ended the uproar. "And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia" (Acts 20:1).

The reaction of the silversmiths to Paul's message was the opposite of the reaction of the new converts, who had decided to sacrifice their income for the sake of God. The silversmiths decided to fan the passions of the crowd in order to undermine the work of God. Their primary concern was not the defense of the proper forms of worship. Their primary concern was the defense of their income. Paul's message of redemption by faith in Christ was threatening their business. As people adopted this new faith, they abandoned their idolatry. The silversmiths were in the business of making idols.

The owners of the books were convinced that the information contained in them did convey supernatural power to the users. This is

why the books had value. So, they burned their own books. The silversmiths were worried about falling sales due to a shift in faith regarding the supreme local god. The town clerk indicated that Paul had not preached specifically against Diana. Nevertheless, Paul's preaching of the gospel was sufficient to undermine his listeners' faith regarding idolatry. This threatened to cut into the business of the silversmiths. They took action to prevent this outcome.

Conclusion

The gospel always imposes losses on converts, who must abandon their old ways. In the case of the Ephesians, two groups recognized these reality of these costs: the owners of the occult books and the silversmiths. Members of the former group decided to bear these costs by forfeiting both their income and their capital. Members of the second group decided to remove the source of any reduction in their income. The book owners had been true believers in occultism; now they had become true believers in Christ. The silversmiths were true believers in money: mammon.⁵ Only secondarily did they care about the reputation of Diana. Their first order of business was business. Both groups understood the implications of Paul's message: the illegitimacy of idols made with hands. Both groups responded in terms of their underlying faith. The first sacrificed earthly wealth to defend the message. The second defended earthly wealth by sacrificing the message. The book owners testified to their faith in Christ. The silversmiths testified to their faith in mammon. Both groups illustrated the truth of Jesus' words: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

5. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 39.

10

THE JOY OF GIVING

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

The theocentric focus here is the reliability of God in providing whatever His people need when they are generous to Him through giving to the weak. This is a matter of sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Support the Weak

Paul was returning to Jerusalem from his final missionary journey as a free man. In Jerusalem he would be arrested and then sent to prison in Rome.

This final meeting was with the elders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). He knew that he would not see any of them again. “And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more” (vv. 22–25). We could say that this was his parting shot, the message that these elders would be most likely recall in later years. This message was a kind of last will and testament.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

1. Never a Financial Burden

He reminded them that he had not been a financial burden to them. “Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.” Paul was a maker of tents (Acts 18:3). He had used his skills as a tentmaker to support himself. He had also reminded the Corinthian church that they had not funded him. “Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?” (I Cor. 12:14–18).

Paul was always concerned that he not be regarded as being in the gospel ministry for the money. Yet he assured his readers that an elder was worthy of his hire. He cited Deuteronomy 25:4. “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.”² This obscure Mosaic law was still binding, he said, and it pointed to more than the treatment of oxen. It pointed to the legitimate claim that a minister has on a portion of the income of church members. Nevertheless, he told them, he had not exercised this prerogative. He had maintained both his independence and his immunity from criticism that he was in the ministry for the money. He gloried only in the gospel, not in money. No man could legitimately take this glorying away from him by asserting that his motivation was financial.³

Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 63.

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more (I Cor. 9:6–19).

Paul said much the same thing to the elders at Ephesus. Why? Because, as he had done with the Corinthians, he wanted them to understand a fundamental economic principle of the gospel: it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). This familiar phrase is not found in any of the gospels. It is found only here. Paul attributed these words to Jesus. Either God had informed him that Jesus had said this or else one or more of Jesus' disciples had.

2. Grandparents' Blessing

This principle of giving is not widely accepted, with this universal exception: grandparents. In the relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren, a bond of love exists that enables a grandparent to receive joy from giving wealth to the grandchild. Parents often complain to their parents about their excessive generosity. Parents fear that their children will be spoiled by the gifts. By this, they mean that the children will conclude that money comes too easily in life.

The grandparent sees in the grandchild an opportunity to become a benefactor to a blood relation without having to do this full-time. The grandchild is not his legal or moral responsibility. He can be generous without compromising his authority over the child, because he has very little authority over the child. Neither he, the child, nor soci-

ety regards the grandparent as possessing responsibility for the child's upbringing. So, the grandparent can be generous without fear.

Why is it that this same attitude is not present in any other permanent relationship? The grandparent rejoices in the fact that he can be generous to another person, expecting nothing in return. Is he trying to buy affection? Perhaps, but he would not admit this. He is giving for the sake of another sort of return: the blessedness of seeing another person—a weak person—benefit from the gift. But what men and women see with respect to their grandchildren they do not see in other relationships. The covenant of the family produces this response, but this response is unique. Paul was saying that this same perspective should govern our relationships with weak people outside our families.

Paul was saying, on behalf of Jesus, that giving generously to the weak produces a benefit. The benefit will be in heaven, but it will also be in history. God will be glorified by the recipients of the gift. This is great reward for the faithful man, and the evidence that Paul believed this is his own unwillingness to accept money for his services as an apostle. He told the Corinthians in his appeal for funds on behalf of the church at Jerusalem.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection into the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift (II Cor. 9:6–15).

God has given a gift to us, the death of His son so that we might not perish eternally. We in return give to the weak, just as God gave to us. God is glorified when we give. This is as it should be, for God gave

the unspeakable gift to us, cheerfully.

B. Declining Gratitude

A grandchild is happy with little things. The grandparent has limited resources, but the grandchild, especially when young, receives great joy from a small gift. The giver can produce joy in others less expensively with grandchildren than with anyone else.

As the grandchild grows older, his desires grow larger. The gift from the grandparent seems less significant. The grandchild must possess considerable maturity to appreciate the sacrificial aspect of the gift. It is not so much the price of the gift as the sacrifice involved in giving it that should impress the recipient. This is the principle of the widows' mites: she who gave all that she owned gave more than the rich men who gave more coins (Luke 21:2–4).⁴ But grandchildren do not always possess such maturity. The payoff to the giver declines as the recipients grow older but not wiser.

The recipients of charity do not always appreciate it. Envious people may even resent the gift. They do not want to be reminded that others have more money than they do. They do not want to be beholden in any way to the giver. They curse the giver as they curse their poverty. This is sinful behavior, but it does exist.

The covenantally faithful giver is giving to God by way of the recipient. God is always appreciative. He does not need the giver's gift, but He understands the nature of the sacrifice. He always remembers to say, "Thank you," for He is the great Giver who rarely receives a thank you (Luke 17:12–18).

The giver is the one blessed by the act of giving. But to receive the blessing, he must imitate God. He must receive from his own sacrifice a sense of achievement, just as the grandparent does. He must rejoice in the fact that his special redemption by God has enabled him to store up wealth in heaven by being generous in history.⁵ "And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 50.

5. *Ibid.*, chaps. 26, 34.

the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:29–34).⁶

Conclusion

It is more blessed to give than to receive. Very few people believe this. This is why they lay up treasure on earth. They do not test Christ's words. Why not? Perhaps they worry about the unknown future. Or they become addicted to the "good life," meaning a life of constant spending. They define themselves and their success by the market value of their assets. Then they use debt to increase the illusion of their success. Jesus warned against all this, but even His followers do not really believe Him. If they did, they would more than tithe. But few Christians even tithe. They do not experience the joy of giving.

The testimony of the New Testament is against the joy of hoarding. Yet this testimony is ignored. Christians read these words, not their heads in agreement, and refuse to alter their spending habits to conform to what they say they affirm. Budgets are a reflection of personal commitment. God allows us to retain 90% of our net productivity. Mammon lures us into a life of reduced blessedness by promising us joy through retaining some portion of God's 10%, as if keeping or spending God's 10% could bring us joy when our 90% does not. That ten percent is a token of our faith in either God or mammon.

Paul told the elders to give in order to receive. It was not that they would necessarily receive money in return. It was that they would necessarily receive God's blessings in the broadest sense. Paul was challenging their faith. His words have challenged the faith of Christians down through the ages.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 26

CONCLUSION

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

There is not much information in the Book of Acts that deals specifically with economics. What little there is reveals an historically exceptional degree of generosity within the fellowship of the early church. Two famous economic passages in the book deal with shared property among members of the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:41–42; 4:33–37).¹

A third deals with a husband and wife who pretended to share with the church everything they had gained from the sale of their real estate, but who held back a portion of the sale price. For this, God killed them (Acts 5:1–10).²

This produced great fear in the local church, but this fear had been preceded by great generosity.

A. Common Ownership

The church at Jerusalem did practice common ownership. The elders/apostles administered funds that were donated to the church by its members. They used the money to help those in need. “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need” (Acts 4:34–35). When complaints arose against them as administrators, they Conclusion Conclusion created the office of deacon (Acts 6).³ From this time on, the deacons distributed funds to those in need.

The office of deacon has survived. The practice of common prop-

1. Chapters 1, 3.

2. Chapter 4.

3. Chapter 5

erty has not. This practice was never imitated by gentile churches. Church members have never been expected to sell their land and homes in order to give the money to the church. The church has in the past has allowed this degree of sacrifice from a few volunteers, including members of monastic orders, but it has recognized that such devotion involves a special call from God. Monks separate themselves into hierarchical orders, live in celibacy, and perform special labors on behalf of the church at large.

The church in Jerusalem had been warned by Jesus that a day would come when members of the church should flee the city. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter therinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20–22). To remove any attachment to the city, members sold their real estate. As it turned out, the days of vengeance did not come for a generation, in A.D. 70,⁴ but members who had heard Jesus say this did not know when the judgment would come. They chose to be mobile. They sold their real estate. They thereby announced their faith in the accuracy of Jesus' prophecy. This enabled them to flee the city when the first persecution began (Acts 8:1).

The fact that they had sold their property did not compel them to give away their money to the church. Peter told Ananias, "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God" (Acts 5:4).⁵ Ananias had not been asked, let alone compelled, to share his wealth with the church. He tried to take advantage of the reputation for righteousness that such a sacrificial donation would produce among the members. He kept money from the sale in reserve, as a means of financial safety. He gave the appearance of having trusted God completely, but he did not trust God completely. For having deceived men, he had lied to God. This doomed him.

The Jerusalem church remained poor. It was the object of charity for the gentile churches (Acts 11:25–30; I Cor. 16:36⁶). By transferring

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

5. Chapter 4.

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Cor-*

their capital to the church, the members cut off their links to the Old Covenant order. But they also stripped themselves of the streams of income that their capital would have provided. Their wealth was transferred, first, to other residents of Jerusalem; second, the proceeds of the sale of their property became immediate income streams to poorer members. The local church consumed the capital of the richer members, but those in need lived better for a time than they could have lived without this permanent transfer of capital to non-members.

The early church believed strongly in charity. The gentile churches helped the Jerusalem church. Members of the Jerusalem church helped each other economically. There was an institutional break with the idea that tangible wealth is superior to faith in God as a means of preserving life. But Christians also understood that they could not preserve their lifestyles under such conditions of generosity. Jewish churches faced the prophesied judgment that would fall on Old Covenant Israel. All churches faced persecution from an empire that rested on a system of religious syncretism—polytheism—in which citizens and residents would soon be compelled ritually to honor the genius of the emperor, meaning his participation in divinity. This, the Christians could not in good conscience do.⁷

The economic practices of the Jerusalem church led to the geographical mobility of its members but also their impoverishment. Common property did not produce wealth for all. It produced a local economic safety net for a brief period, followed by dependence on the giving of gentile churches. The experience of the Jerusalem church is not to be universalized. The post-apostolic church did not practice common property, although it allowed the practice for monastic orders. But monastic orders required tight discipline by abbots and celibacy for their members. Family life was excluded. A brotherhood of common confession and common discipline replaced martial vows and family discipline.

B. A Visibly Different Lifestyle

The Book of Acts reveals a new community based on a radical break with the surrounding community. They had been called out of

inthians, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 17.

7. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955). Within a decade of Paul's arrival in Rome, Nero launched a great persecution of Christians (A.D. 64/65). The church did not gain permanent liberty of religious practice until Constantine gained the throne in the early decades of the fourth century.

those communities, just as Abram had been called out of Ur of the Chaldees. Stephen began his self-defense with this reminder: “Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell” (Acts 7:2–4). But the Christians’ departure from their communities was not geographical; it was confessional. They had been called out, but they had also been called into the church, the ecclesia, the called-out covenantal community of faith.

This new community was based on a common confession. This confession was both historical and eschatological. It was based on a new vision of a supernatural King who is also human, and a supernatural kingdom that operates in history, for its battle with rival kingdoms takes place primarily in history. Service to the King involves a fundamental break with a person’s previous history. It involves a move into eternity. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). This break with the past and the past’s legacy in the present also affirms history in terms of history’s future transformation. It affirms the Great Commission.⁸

One manifestation of this break with the past was visible to all Jerusalem in the members’ disdain for real estate, but it can also be seen in their lack of concern regarding their economic futures. This was true in both branches of the early church. They shared their wealth with others inside the church. They regarded God as the source of their hoped-for streams of future income. They believed, correctly, that it was not what they owned but what they affirmed that would secure their lifestyle in the future. They dared not trust in family, former friends, or wealth. They trusted in God and His called-out people. This trust was manifested in their sacrificial giving.

The Book of Acts is notable for its emphasis on church members’ sharing of their possessions. This message is consistent with the picture of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: a spiritual revolutionary who was disdainful of riches. The same author wrote both documents. The

8. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

Book of Acts describes churches whose members acted consistently with Jesus' teaching regarding the laying up of treasure in heaven by giving away treasure on earth. Jesus' economics was missionary economics.⁹ The early church adopted His economics.

The members separated themselves from the cultures around them. They created a new culture based on an ethic of service to God through service to men, especially oppressed and suffering men. Paul wrote: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:7–10).

This spiritual outlook produced economic practices that were visibly different from those in the surrounding cultures. The budgets of church members testified to their break with the prevailing world-views, in Jerusalem and Ephesus and Corinth and Macedonia. They trusted in God and trusted in each other. They saw themselves as a separated community of faith which was uniquely protected by God. This was especially true of the Jerusalem church, whose members knew of the coming judgment on the city (Luke 21:20–22). They structured their budgets accordingly. Their pattern of expenditure reflected their faith. Jesus had said that this should be the case. "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25). Paul warned: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). This followed his call to complete sacrifice: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).¹⁰

The followers of Jesus in the Book of Acts did not trust the world. They saw themselves as spiritual strangers in this world. The question was this: To what extent was their world identified by God as part of the Old Covenant Order? Are Christ's followers to remain equally ali-

9. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 26.

10. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

enated from the world if Christian principles ever transform it as a result of both the Great Commission and common grace?¹¹ To what extent may Christians conform themselves to the world around them after the world has been begun to be transformed by the gospel?¹² These questions are not answered by the Book of Acts. Paul answered them: “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:11–13).¹³ In good times and hard times, Paul learned to be content. This way, he could be a missionary in any social environment. External circumstances would not affect him.

Conclusion

The Book of Acts offers the history of the origins of the earliest communities of Christian faith. It offers the history of early Christian missions. Local churches became missionary outposts. This was especially true of Jerusalem and Ephesus. Church members regarded themselves as missionaries or supporters of missionaries. They saw their personal wealth as spiritual capital for the funding of the gospel message and the temporary support of the hard-pressed members of the community of faith.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Is this a temporary principle or a universal one? It is universal. Paul placed no qualifications on it. But blessedness can come in both history or eternity. In this sense, generous giving is always wise, but the resulting blessedness in history is never fully predictable, either in terms of its form or its timing.

Men must trust God to provide these blessings. They must trust God’s grace. This takes faith. It ought to take greater faith for a man in poverty than for a wealthy man, for the poor man has experienced fewer of God’s blessings. He does not how to accumulate riches. He

11. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

12. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

13. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

gives sacrificially, just as the widow gave. He has no visible economic reserves. The rich man does. The rich man risks less when he gives, for he knows how to replenish his reserves. In practice, however, God grants confident faith more often to those in poverty than to those with many assets. Least of all does He provide such faith to the rich. "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). God grants to the poor a strong faith in a God-ordained future. They give sacrificially more readily than do the rich.

COOPERATION AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON ROMANS

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COOPERATION AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON ROMANS

GARY NORTH

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Romans**

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This book is dedicated to

Rev. Paul Sagan

who has moderated a congregation without factions

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PREFACE

Seventeen centuries before Adam Smith wrote his famous passage about the division of labor in a pin factory, the Apostle Paul wrote the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. In that chapter, Paul described the church as a body. In order to function properly, a body must have members. Each member has a unique role to play in the body. Paul also pursued this theme in the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians. This is a defense of the idea of the division of labor, which was one of Smith's two fundamental analytical presuppositions, the other one being personal self-interest as the primary motivating factor in a free market.

Smith's discussion of the output of a pin factory (high) compared to the output of a highly skilled pin-maker (low) is probably the most famous passage in the history of economic thought. Paul's discussion of the church as an interdependent body is less familiar, despite the fact that we call church members *members*.

This commentary rests on Paul's concept of the division of labor in a covenantal setting: the institutional church. The free market is not a covenantal institution, for it is not created by a self-maledictory oath before God. Rather, it is the creation of voluntary agreements and contracts under law. With respect to the division of labor, the church is one model for the free market. The other model is the family. These are separate models. Paul did not discuss the church as an extension of the family, nor did he discuss the state as an extension of the family. These three covenantal institutions are separate. They are judged by separate standards.

With this as the background, let us begin a study of the Epistle to the Romans as a guideline for economics.

In this book, I refer to Paul as writing in the present tense in Romans. I refer to him as writing in the past tense whenever I am commenting on his Romans commentary. Adam Smith wrote this:

The division of labour, however, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportionable increase of the productive

powers of labour. The separation of different trades and employments from one another seems to have taken place in consequence of this advantage. This separation, too, is generally called furthest in those countries which enjoy the highest degree of industry and improvement; what is the work of one man in a rude state of society being generally that of several in an improved one. In every improved society, the farmer is generally nothing but a farmer; the manufacturer, nothing but a manufacturer. The labour, too, which is necessary to produce any one complete manufacture is almost always divided among a great number of hands. How many different trades are employed in each branch of the linen and woollen manufactures from the growers of the flax and the wool, to the bleachers and smoothers of the linen, or to the dyers and dressers of the cloth! The nature of agriculture, indeed, does not admit of so many subdivisions of labour, nor of so complete a separation of one business from another, as manufactures. It is impossible to separate so entirely the business of the grazier from that of the corn-farmer as the trade of the carpenter is commonly separated from that of the smith. The spinner is almost always a distinct person from the weaver; but the ploughman, the harrower, the sower of the seed, and the reaper of the corn, are often the same. The occasions for those different sorts of labour returning with the different seasons of the year, it is impossible that one man should be constantly employed in any one of them. This impossibility of making so complete and entire a separation of all the different branches of labour employed in agriculture is perhaps the reason why the improvement of the productive powers of labour in this art does not always keep pace with their improvement in manufactures.

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), ch. 1

INTRODUCTION

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:12–13).

A. Healing the Breach

The primary theme of Paul's epistle to the Romans is the relationship between Jews and Greeks, meaning God's Old Covenant people and His newly recruited New Covenant people. The church in Rome was to be a living example of this truth: there is no ecclesiastical difference between covenant-keeping Jews and covenant-keeping gentiles. They stand judicially before God equally.¹ This was a major theological and institutional issue in Paul's day because the Old Covenant was still in force. It ended in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the temple.²

The absence of covenantal differences between redeemed Jews and redeemed Greeks pointed to the healing of a breach that extended back to Abraham, a breach marked by confession and by a physical sign: circumcision. A new confession had replaced both Abraham's and the Greeks': "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). A new sign had replaced circumcision: baptism. This was the fulfillment of the promise made by God to Abraham, not its negation. God's promise to Abraham, that he would be a father of nations (*abraham*), had always been appropriated by Abraham and his heirs through faith, not law. Paul writes in this epistle:

And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise,

1. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 3.

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:12-17).

The church of Jesus Christ, grounded in saving faith, should therefore be an institution marked by cooperation between formerly divided confessional groups. The healing of this ancient breach, according to Paul, was intended by God to enable His church to experience the advantages of the division of labor (Rom. 12). Jews and Greeks together could build the church and thereby build the kingdom of God on earth and in history. They were told by Paul to cooperate with each other. The New Covenant church would soon completely replace the Old Covenant church, he taught. It would be stronger than its predecessor because it brings Jews and gentiles together in a joint effort.

B. The Position of the Jews

Jews and gentiles in the church were identified as covenant-keepers. They stood together judicially through their oath of allegiance to Christ and through the dual oath-signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper.³

1. *Equal Footing?*

This fact raised a crucial question: What of covenant-breaking Jews and covenant-breaking gentiles? Did they also stand equally before God? Clearly, they did not stand equally with covenant-keepers. They stood condemned. "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become un-

3. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968).

profitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:9–12). But did they stand equally with each other, i.e., equally condemned?

This question raised a second question: Would covenant-breaking Jews and covenant-breaking gentiles stand before God in history equally condemned after the close of the transition era, which, in retrospect, we know ended in A.D. 70 with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple? It is this question that Paul answers in Romans 11.⁴ His answer is that a future era will arrive in which covenant-breaking Jews will, in large numbers, become covenant-keepers, joining the New Covenant church. This will mark the culmination of the era that Paul designated as the fulness of the gentiles.⁵

The church in Paul's day, as in ours, was an institution filled overwhelmingly with gentiles, and almost devoid of ex-Jews. "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom. 11:25–27). This will not always be the case, Paul taught.

The difference between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers is God's special grace. This has always been the difference. But during the transition era, special grace was not shown to large numbers of Jews. Nevertheless, they continued to believe that they were under God's special grace, and they had evidence to prove it: the law, the prophets, and the temple. Paul in Romans presents the case against them: not possessing special grace, they were outside the New Covenant, which is the only way to salvation. Peter had announced this same message to the Jews: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

2. *The Jews' Delusion*

Jews were suffering from a delusion, always Paul taught. They believed that they were God's permanently chosen people. They were in the process of losing this legal status. They were being progressively

4. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), II, ch. XVII.

5. Chapter 7.

disinherited. God's final historical demonstration of this disinheritance came in A.D. 70, but the definitive announcement had already been made by Jesus. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The church, Paul teaches in Romans, is the true heir. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:13–17).

Jesus had told the Jews that they were without excuse. "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:43–47). Biblical law condemned them. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:19–20).

C. Self-Knowledge and Common Grace

If a covenant-breaking man stands condemned before God, how does he know this? If he is eternally responsible before God because he has failed to meet God's standard, how does he know this? The Jews had God's written revelation. They knew. But what about the gentiles? Were they equally responsible? Are they still?

If gentiles are equally responsible, then how can God's revelation to them be unequal to the revelation that He gave to the Jews? How can gentiles be as responsible before God as covenant-breaking Jews are unless they have been given equal revelation? After all, as Jesus said: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much re-

quired: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48b).⁶ If they are equally condemned, did they receive equal revelation? In other words, is general revelation equal in authority to special revelation?

1. Revelation

The Old Covenant was fading away in Paul's day. The period from Christ's ministry to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a transition period. Jesus announced, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). He was obviously inaugurating His kingdom during the earthly phase of His ministry. But a great transfer of the kingdom still lay ahead. In His final week, before His crucifixion, He told the chief priests and elders of the Jews: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This transfer began at Pentecost (Acts 2) and was completed in A.D. 70. In between was the period in which the gospels and the epistles were written. After centuries of silence, God had begun to speak authoritatively once again to certain individuals, who then wrote down what they had been told. This intervention had begun again with the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews called this transition period *these last days*. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1–2). This transition period closed in A.D. 70.⁷

The revelation given to the Jews was superior to anything given to the Greeks. The Jews had been given God's biblical law. "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1–2). "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). The Jews of Paul's era had seen Jesus and heard His warnings. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

7. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*.

for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:21–24). So, the gentiles were not under the same degree of responsibility as the Jews were. In the hierarchy of horrors throughout the eternal judgment, covenant-breaking Jews will be in worse shape than covenant-breaking gentiles.

2. Epistemology

In the first two chapters of Romans, Paul raises the question of epistemology: "What can men know, and how can they know it?" All men, not just Jews, are supposed to call upon the name of the Lord for their deliverance from sin and its effects. God requires this. But how can all men know that they must call upon God? In the first two chapters, Paul explains why: they are all condemned by God's revelation of Himself in nature. Some are also condemned by the written law of God: Jews. Others are condemned by the work of the law that is written in their hearts: Greeks. But all are condemned.

Men's initial knowledge of nature, including themselves, condemns them. This knowledge is the preparatory work of general revelation. It prepares all men for either their public condemnation at God's final judgment or their reception of saving grace in history. Their practical knowledge of God's law through general revelation carries with it a negative eternal sanction, but it also carries with it positive sanctions in history: blessings associated with law and order, meaning God's law and God's order. Without the restraining factor of common grace, there could be no history. Life would be a relentless war of all against all, as Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan* in 1650. This war would destroy the basis of human society through fallen mankind's total depravity run amok. God, in His grace, restrains this war by means of common grace.⁸

Men can know what God requires of them because they are made in God's image. *This image is the basis of the dominion covenant that binds everyone.* "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and

8. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: God's Program for Victory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26–28).⁹ Men know what God requires of them because God has made them both personally and corporately responsible to Him for the lawful administration of whatever God has placed under their authority.

Then what is the path of men’s access to God’s deliverance? Paul’s answer: by hearing the word of God. “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:14–17). This is special revelation. General revelation condemns all mankind. Special revelation, whenever men are enabled to believe by God’s special grace, redeems them.

D. Economics: Right and Left

What has all this got to do with economics? Paul’s sections on epistemology help us to answer the epistemological questions of economics: “What can men know about economics, and how can they know it?”

The economist faces the same question that faces every social theorist: “Should I begin my investigation of the way the social world works with the assumption of the sovereign individual or the sovereign collective?” This is the question of the one and the many.¹⁰ How can these be reconciled? Humanistic philosophers struggle with this question interminably. Christian philosophers can answer it by an appeal to

9. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007). (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

the doctrine of the Trinity: the equal ultimacy of unity and plurality.¹¹

In economics, the two theoretical extremes are laissez-faire individualism and socialism-communism. In my day, these two extremes have been personified by Murray Rothbard, an anarcho-capitalist, and . . . ? Who? Who has best defended the idea of pure socialism, in which all of the means of production are owned by the civil government? I can think of no one. There have been Marxist economists, such as Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran, but they have followed the lead of their master, Karl Marx. They have refused to spell out the details of how such an economy can work, either in practice or theory. If the government owns all of the means of production, most notably human beings, how can it allocate them rationally? How can central planners call forth men's best ideas, however risky these ideas may be to implement? How can state bureaucrats assess both the risk and the uncertainty of any project, rewarding entrepreneurs according to their contribution to the overall value of production? For that matter, how can the value of production be accurately estimated by anyone in a world without either free markets or free-market prices?

Oskar Lange attempted in the late 1930s to respond to Ludwig von Mises' critique of socialism. Mises had argued that the socialist economy is irrational because it has neither private ownership nor free-market prices. Without free markets, especially capital markets, no one knows the value of total production or any component of it.¹² To answer Mises, Lange relied on the idea of a central planning bureaucracy that would set all prices by trial and error, seeing which prices would "clear the market."¹³ No Communist government ever tested his theory, including his beloved Poland, which appointed him Ambassador to the United States and then to the United Nations, beginning in 1945, after the Communist take-over. In 1949, he returned to Poland, where he obtained a minor academic post. He never was able to persuade the Polish government, or any government, to implement his

11. This was one of Cornelius Van Til's themes. Cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *ibid*, ch. I:3.

12. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in a Socialist Commonwealth" (1920), in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1935] 1963). A new translation appears on the website of the Ludwig von Mises Institute, located in Auburn, Alabama. (<http://www.mises.org/econcalc.asp>)

13. Oskar Lange, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). This is a reprint of Lange's articles that appeared in the *Review of Economic Studies*, IV (1936–37). The book also contains Fred M. Taylor's essay, "The Guidance of Production in a Socialist State," which was published originally in the *American Economic Review*, XIX (1929).

theory. He never published a description of the institutional arrangements necessary to implement his theory. Yet from 1937 to 1991, economists who had heard of this debate—very few—usually dismissed Mises with a brief remark that “Lange completely refuted Mises.” It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union that Mises got even a minor hearing among academic economists. Only one major economist, the millionaire socialist Robert Heilbroner, publicly admitted the truth: “Mises was right.”¹⁴

The existence of prices implies the existence of money. It also implies the ideal of customer choice—a most unsocialistic idea. What kind of monetary system would be consistent with the government’s complete ownership of the means of production? This question was never answered by any Communist Party economist, either in theory or practice. Finally, in late 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed politically, mimicking its moribund economy, without theoretical or practical answers ever having been offered by its defenders. Like the Soviet Union’s publishing of the complete works of Marx and Engels in English, the experiment failed before the project was completed.

Most economists are somewhere in between anarcho-capitalism and full communism, just as most social theorists are somewhere in between radical individualism and radical collectivism. But merely being in between two extremes is not an epistemologically coherent position unless the theorist has offered a way to reconcile the two extremes in a consistent, comprehensive system of interpretation, which none of them ever has, or if he has, no one else believes him and follows him.¹⁵ An academic defender of the mixed economy should be able to present a theoretical case for the system. But economists generally shy away from presenting a theoretical case for the mixed economy, as opposed to supposedly practical, *ad hoc* defenses of this or that intervention by the state. Economic theory today has become an arcane mixture of statistical data, abstract mathematical theorems, and ever-popular *ceteris paribus* (“other things being equal”) assumptions. But, in the real world, nothing remains constant—a fact noted long ago by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus.

Paul’s case for men’s universal knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18–22)¹⁶

14. Robert Heilbroner, “After Communism,” *The New Yorker* (Sept. 10, 1990), p. 92.

15. Of course, there is the problem raised by Kurt Gödel’s bothersome theorem: no system can be both internally consistent and complete, i.e., autonomous. But that is for philosophers to contend with.

16. Chapter 2.

and the work of God's law written on every heart (Rom. 2:14–15)¹⁷ provides the basis of a systematically biblical, self-consciously Christian epistemology. Here is the basis of shared knowledge, which in turn makes possible the development of a covenantal theory of knowledge that integrates the idea of individual knowledge with the idea of shared knowledge. *The Christian theorist should begin with the image of God in man as the foundation of social theory.* He need not despair about not being able to move logically from individual knowledge and decisions to shared knowledge, which in turn makes corporate policy-making theoretically compatible with individual valuations. Men are not autonomous. They are not autonomous evaluators. They are members of multiple corporate entities that are responsible before God and whose decision-makers can and must act as God's lawful representatives.

E. The Division of Labor

Adam Smith began *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) with a discussion of the economic benefits of the division of labor. This set the pattern for economic analysis ever since. It would have been better if he had begun with a consideration of private ownership,¹⁸ but the question of ownership raises the question of God, who as the creator established His legal title to the creation. Smith was trying to avoid theological issues in *The Wealth of Nations*. The issue of the division of labor seemed less theological, more universal, as indeed it is. But it does not get to the heart of the supreme economic question: Who owns this?

The division of labor is the issue of cooperation. Smith argued that personal wealth is increased through economic cooperation: voluntary exchange. So is national wealth. He recommended the abolition of civil laws that restrain trade. Trade increases the participants' wealth, and the nation's wealth, too. This was the great insight of Smith's book.¹⁹ Economists have been debating this issue ever since. So have politicians.

Trade is based, Smith said, on mutual economic self-interest. But trade assumes a common universe of discourse: common understanding and perception. How does this common universe of discourse

17. Chapter 3.

18. Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity through the Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), ch. 7: "The Economists' Oversight."

19. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

come into existence? Its existence is not self-evident. This is the issue of epistemology. It is this issue that Romans answers.

Conclusion

The epistle to the Romans deals with the issue of the traditional division between Jews and Greeks. It is concerned with healing divisions between groups of covenant-keepers. In discussing the basis of this healing, Paul provides answers to the wider social issues of knowledge, trade, and economic cooperation.

The epistle to the Romans is generally known as a book about grace. Indeed, it is the premier book in the Bible on grace. But it is a book about common grace as well as special grace. It raises the question of how God's general revelation to mankind serves only to condemn them all, but saves no one. This general revelation of God is held back in unrighteousness by Jew and gentile alike (Rom. 1:18–22).²⁰ It is this active, willful suppression of the truth of God that God's special grace overcomes. This general revelation of what God requires of every person also condemns them, for all of them disobey the revelation that God has given to them regarding His law (Rom. 2:14–15).²¹ This condemnation is also overcome by special grace. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Because the epistle to the Romans is about common grace, it is about cooperation. Covenant-breakers can cooperate with covenant-keepers because of common grace in history. Because Romans is about special grace, it is about cooperation: Jews with Greeks in the church. Paul's imagery of the church as a body in chapter 12 can also be used to describe the functioning of a free market economy. It is less a great machine than a great organism.

The doctrine of common grace has been misused by theologians who have defended a doctrine of common ground that is based on natural law theory. They have argued that civil government can and must rest on natural law, for otherwise there is no third way in between (1) the rule of covenant-breakers at the expense of covenant-keepers and (2) theocracy. They perceive that the first alternative produces tyranny, but they are equally convinced that the second alternative also produces tyranny. They seek liberty in a third way: natural law

20. Chapter 2.

21. Chapter 23

theory. This they equate with common grace.

The problem with such a perspective is found in Paul's epistle to the Romans. Paul teaches that covenant-breakers actively suppress the truth which God has given to them in natural revelation. Only to the extent that covenant-breakers are inconsistent with what they believe about God, man, law, sanctions, and time can they become productive. There is no common ground system of law, civil or otherwise, which both sides can logically prove and affirm. Only when one side or the other is inconsistent with its first principles can there be cooperation. God, through His common grace, restricts covenant-breakers from becoming consistent with their first principles. This protects His people from either extermination at the hands of covenant-breaking tyrants or from the collapse of productivity which would result if covenant-keepers acted consistently with their presuppositions, i.e., a vast contraction of the division of labor.

1

HIERARCHY

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name (Rom. 1:1–5).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹ God appointed of Paul to represent the Son of God. Paul comes to the church at Rome as an official agent of God.

A. Who Is in Charge?

God is in charge. It is only on this judicial-covenantal basis that Paul asserts His authority. God had separated him for service to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Paul brings the good news (gospel) of Christ to Rome. He does so as a slave or servant of Christ: the Greek word is the same.

Who is Jesus Christ? He is the Son of God and also the heir of David. Christ's authority in the flesh has to do with judicial inheritance in the kingly line of David. But there was another aspect of Christ's authority: His resurrection from the dead. It was this triumph over the curse imposed by God on Adam that marked Christ as both holy and powerful. His resurrection declared who He was. He is our Lord, Paul says—"Jesus Christ, the Lord of us" (v. 4), which for some reason, the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

King James translators ignored.²

Paul says that God has delegated to Paul apostolic authority. (He says “we,” but he can hardly mean that every Christian is an apostle.) God has called His people to obey the faith in all nations on behalf of Christ’s name. This is the doctrine of *judicial representation*, which is associated with point two of the biblical covenant model, which in turn has to do with hierarchy.³

Paul here is establishing his own authority as God’s spokesman in the church. He is also establishing the authority of the church’s members to serve as spokesmen for Christ in the nations. “Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ; To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 6–7).

This epistle deals with cooperation among the saints. Chapter 12 is the primary chapter dealing with this theme, but it is found throughout the epistle. In order to establish the institutional and legal framework for such cooperation, Paul begins with the doctrine of hierarchy. There is a hierarchical chain of command in the church: God > Christ > Paul > the members. The theme of hierarchy is pursued in greater detail in Paul’s first epistle to Timothy.⁴

Cooperation within the church is both covenantal and hierarchical. I call this vertical hierarchy. The kind of economic cooperation that is described by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* is horizontal.⁵ It is cooperation by contract or agreement under civil law. The cooperation that Paul describes in this epistle is ecclesiastical: under the church, not under civil law. It is cooperation among a group of holy people: separated by God for His special work. This requires, he says, “obedience to the faith.” Economic exchange requires obedience to civil law and market custom, but not obedience to the faith.

B. Insiders and Outsiders

To be inside is necessarily to be separated from the outside. This is the issue of *boundaries*: point three of the biblical covenant. The church at Rome was separated from the world, yet it was in the world.

2. The phrase appears in the Greek textus receptus and the other standard texts.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012).

5. *Ibid.*, Introduction.

Paul deals here with the calling of the Christian to *represent* God in the world: point two of the biblical covenant.

The spirit of holiness is the spirit of separation. Holiness is an ethical boundary that separates those serving God by His call from those who have not received the call or who have not responded to it in faith. “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Matt. 20:16).⁶

The division between those inside the circle and those outside has been described as *brotherhood vs. otherhood*. There is no doubt that Paul had something like this in mind in this epistle. This epistle is about God’s grace to mankind: special (saving) grace in both history and eternity and common (healing) grace in history.⁷ God is the source of both forms of grace.

The distinction between insiders and outsiders has to do with Christ. Separation from the world is required for servants of Christ. Yet service in the world is also required. Covenant-keepers are in the world but not of the world. They are representatives of another world that has outposts in this world. Their service is supposed to reflect their dual citizenship. “For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

Conclusion

Paul here establishes his authority as an apostle by means of a discussion of a vertical hierarchy. He represents Christ. So do the members of the church at Rome. The community has been set apart from the world by God. Members of the church are supposed to be obedient to the faith. This is a matter of subordination to God and men.

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

7. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

2

REASON, SOCIAL UTILITY, AND SOCIAL COOPERATION

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen (Rom. 1:18–25).

The theocentric issue of this passage is God as the Creator and Sustainer of life: Point one of the biblical covenant.¹ The secondary issue is man as the image of God: point two.² The philosophical question raised by this passage is the question of the common knowledge of God by all men: knowledge sufficient to condemn every man for rebellion.

A. Active Suppression of the Truth

We are told here that covenant-breaking men reject the clear

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Sutton, ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

knowledge of God as Creator that is presented in nature. The Greek word translated here as “hold” sometimes has the connotation of “hold back” or “suppress.”³ This implies an active suppression of the truth.

Covenant-breakers worship aspects of the creation. Some of them worship images of corruptible man. Others worship beasts. None of them worships the Creator God of the Bible, who created the world out of nothing by His command. To worship the Creator, Paul says in this and other epistles, fallen men must receive special grace from God. Those who have not received it are God’s enemies. Their god is their belly (Rom. 16:17–18; Phil. 3:17–19). So, what may seem initially to be a case of mistaken Divine identity is in fact an act of willful rebellion. God holds men responsible for their active suppression of the truth, for holding it back in unrighteousness. If there were no image of God in men, they would not be held accountable by God. It is the common image of God in all men that leads to God’s condemnation of unregenerate men.

This passage teaches that there is a common humanity. Every human being is defined by God in terms of his creaturely legal status as God’s image. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26).⁴ This fact serves as the foundation of a distinctly biblical social philosophy, including economics—a social philosophy that offers a way out of the dilemma of individualism vs. collectivism.

B. Epistemology: From Individualism to Collectivism

“What can a man know, and how can he know it?” This is the two-part question raised by epistemology. This question is basic to every system of philosophy.

Socrates began with a command: “Know thyself.” From Plato, we learn that this phrase appeared on a wall inside the temple of Delphi

3. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), II, p. 37. Murray cites this passage: “And now ye know what **withholdeth** that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way” (II Thes. 2:6–7).

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

(*Alcibiades* 1.129a). In sharp contrast, the Bible begins with an account of God's creation of the world: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The Bible is theocentric. Greek philosophy was anthropocentric. Western philosophy has followed the Greeks in this regard. It begins with the individual and what he can know about himself.

Modern economics also begins with the individual. This has been true ever since the epistemological revolution of the early 1870s, which is also called the marginalist revolution.⁵ This intellectual revolution formally abandoned the concept of objective economic value, which had dominated classical economics for a century. It substituted individual valuation. Prices are objective, but the individual value scales that underlie market competition are not. A price in money is an objective result of competitive bids by would-be owners, including existing owners who want to retain ownership at prices lower than some subjectively imposed threshold. These bids are based on subjective scales of value that cannot be compared scientifically with each other because there is no objective measure of subjective utility. This is the heart of modern economics' epistemological dilemma. It arises from the starting point: the individual. Methodological individualism creates a series of unsolvable epistemological dilemmas.⁶

1. *Crusoe and Friday*

A standard approach to teaching economics today is to begin with a discussion of a single decision-maker, usually called Robinson Crusoe. This pedagogical approach is consistent with Adam Smith's decision to begin *The Wealth of Nations* with a discussion of the division of labor. After discussing Crusoe's plans and actions, the author adds another decision-maker to his narrative, usually called Friday. The economist adopts this approach in order to discuss the added productivity provided by an increase in the division of labor. He seeks to prove that total utility increases when two people enter into a voluntary exchange. Each person benefits, or else he would not make the exchange. Through an increase in the division of labor, the value of total

5. The pioneers, writing independently, were William Stanley Jevons (England), Leon Walras (Switzerland), and Carl Menger (Austria).

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 4; Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix B.

economic output increases more than the cost of the resource inputs, including labor.

The epistemological problem is this: How can we define “total value” scientifically? We have moved from a discussion of the individual actor to a discussion of society. When we begin our economic analysis with the sovereign individual, and then move to the idea of a society made up of equally sovereign individuals, we encounter a philosophical problem: How can we maintain the initial autonomy/sovereignty of each individual and also defend the concept of collective value? An individual has a value scale. This is regarded by humanistic economists as an aspect of his sovereignty over himself: he decides for himself in terms of his own values. There is no value scale for a collective unless this collective also partakes in sovereignty, i.e., its ability to decide collectively what is good for the collective. How can we move logically from an analytical system based exclusively on individual sovereignty to an analytical system based on social sovereignty, which requires the surrender of some portion of individual sovereignty?

We can begin to understand this epistemological problem by asking a series of questions. How can an individual surrender a portion of his legal sovereignty and still remain the same individual? How much legal sovereignty can be surrendered to society before the individual loses so much of his original sovereignty that he can no longer be considered a legally sovereign individual? How can an analytical system that begins with the legally sovereign individual be maintained theoretically when individuals surrender any of their sovereignty to a collective? Do the analytical tools of individualism apply to collectives? If so, how? Can this be proven in terms of the logic of individualism?

The economist must also prove that social cooperation is based on a shared perception of the way the world works. How does sovereign economic actor A know that sovereign economic actor B understands the world in the same way that he does, or at least a similar way? How does he gain the cooperation of the other person? What appeal for cooperation will work? Why will it work? Would another type of appeal work even better, i.e., gain cooperation at a lower price? Even to begin considering strategies of persuasion, the economic decision-maker must make assumptions regarding a common mode of discourse. He has to assume that the other person will understand his own personal self-interest. The first person must also assume that he can understand enough about the other person’s understanding so that he can make

intellectual contact. There must be a shared perception of the world before there can be shared discourse.

The difficulty for economists who attempt to make a plausible claim for economics as a science is that *this crucial assumption of shared perception has yet to be proven*, either by economists or philosophers. More than this: it must be proven in terms of the individualistic presuppositions of economics. Beginning with the assumption of the fully autonomous individual, the economist must then bring other equally autonomous individuals into the epistemological castle of common perception. To do this, he must let down the drawbridge of objective truth. But the moment that he lets down this drawbridge, his assertion of pure subjectivism is compromised. In fact, it is destroyed. There has to be an objective perception that unifies the free market's participants in order to gain their cooperation.

This epistemological problem becomes a major problem in establishing state-enforceable rules that govern voluntary exchange. The moment that an economist defends any policy of civil government in terms of increased common benefits, he abandons individualism. This is because of the nature of civil law. A civil government threatens negative sanctions against those who violate the law. If this threat of coercion were not necessary to influence human action, then civil government would not be needed.

To tell an individual that he is not allowed to do something that he wants to do is to reduce his personal utility. So, in order to justify the imposition of force, the policy's defender must argue that the protesting individual's loss of utility is not sufficient to offset the increase in utility for other members of society. The economist, in his role as a policy advisor, has to assume that social utility will increase as a result of his recommendation, even though one person's utility will decrease. So, he has to make assumptions about additions to and subtractions from social utility. He has to assume that a *common value scale* exists and that he, as a scientist, can recognize it and apply it to historical situations.

2. Social Utility

How can the defender of free market economics prove his case scientifically? He must invoke a conceptual aggregate: social utility. Does this aggregate actually exist? If it does, how can it be discovered? There is no known objective measure of personal utility. Then how can men

discover a common scale of utility? But without a common scale of utility, there is no way to measure increases or decreases in social utility. There is no way to measure an increase or decrease in individual utility, either. No one can demonstrate that he has increased his personal utility by exactly this much. The most that he can legitimately claim is that at this moment, he believes that his new condition has improved. There is no objective unit of measurement that tells him *by how much* his subjective condition has improved.

If an objective unit of measurement does not exist for the individual, then the epistemological individualist cannot logically assume that it exists for society. *For a strict methodological individualist, there is no way that he can consistently defend the existence of social utility. He cannot prove its existence, even though he assumes its existence.* He cannot logically move from personal utility to social utility. *To defend logically the existence of social utility, he must first surrender his defense of epistemological individualism.* He must adopt some degree of epistemological corporatism. He now faces that age-old question: “How much is too much?” For this question, there has never been a widely agreed-upon answer.

C. Methodological Covenantalism

Long before the social science of economics was developed, and centuries before Socrates, Solomon wrote: “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:9–12).⁷ Long before Solomon, the story of the tower of Babel made the same point. “And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city” (Gen. 11:6–8).⁸

7. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

8. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 19.

The truth of the superiority of the division of labor does not rest on the subjective assessment of any man or group of men. In order to justify the concept of the division of labor, we do not have to assume the existence of a common scale of subjective values among all men, a concept which is inconsistent with methodological individualism. The objective superiority of the division of labor does not rest on the subjective assessments of a multitude of individuals, whose subjective assessments may be inconsistent with each other. Instead, it rests on the biblical doctrine of God.

First, God is a sovereign person who brings judgments in history. Second, man is God's vassal, made in God's image. He is required by God to worship God. Third, obedience to God's laws is an aspect of proper worship. When men choose to worship other gods, they break God's law. Fourth, disobedience to God brings men under God's negative sanctions. Paul writes: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (v. 18).

1. Protestant Social Theory

Christian social theory must begin with methodological covenantalism, not methodological individualism or methodological collectivism.⁹ Protestant covenantalism usually begins with implied covenants among the three persons of the Trinity. There is no explicit biblical revelation that any three-way intra-Divine agreements took place before time began. These agreements' existence is deduced from revelation regarding the relationship between God and mankind. The covenant of salvation is one of these assumed pre-historic covenants. Paul elsewhere wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:3–6). This covenant of salvation includes the good works that are its outgrowth. "For by grace are ye

9. In the field of philosophy, this means that Christians must begin with covenantalism, not nominalism or realism. In the theology of the sacraments, this means that Christians must begin with covenantalism, not memorialism or the doctrine of the real presence. God is judicially present in the sacraments, not bodily present.

saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8–10).

Protestant covenantalism moves from implied, pre-temporal, intra-Divine covenants to the idea of formal legal agreements in history between man and God and also among men under God. For these events, there is abundant evidence, beginning with Genesis 1:26–28. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”¹⁰ This is the dominion covenant. It defines mankind. The Bible’s four additional oath-bound covenants—individual, church, family, civil—are the epistemological foundations of any biblical social philosophy, including economics. Without a covenantal foundation, Christian social theory becomes a mixture of the Bible and natural law theory or some other form of humanistic rationalism.

The terms of God’s covenant with all mankind are these: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex. 20:3–5).¹¹ We know that these terms bind all mankind, because Paul in Romans 1 identifies men’s violation of these laws as sinful. There is no record of Adam’s having formally agreed to this covenant, but such an agreement is implied by God’s original command to Adam to subdue the earth. God brought the Flood on mankind because of men’s rebellion against Him. “And GOD saw that the

10. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 3.

11. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:5–8) God re-confirmed the Adamic covenant with Noah. "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things" (Gen. 9:1–3).¹² This was an act of covenant renewal between God and man.

2. Assumptions

Methodological covenantalism assumes the following. First, a covenant is *judicially objective*. It is established by formal words or rituals that are judicially objective. It involves laws that are judicially objective. The covenant's ratifying oath invokes objective sanctions by God, should the oath-taker violate the terms of the covenant. A covenant extends over time, binding judicially the past, present, and future. Second, a covenant is *perceptually subjective*. God imputes meaning to it. God is a person. Men can understand the terms of a covenant because God understands it and defines it, and men are made in God's image.

God's imputation of meaning is central to the biblical concept of historical objectivity. Moment by moment, He subjectively declares the objective truth or falsity of any subjective interpretation by a man. God is the source of the meaning of history. He is omniscient, so He can accurately assess the importance and effects of any event. This Divine objectivity undergirds all historical interpretation. There is an objective standard against which every subjective interpretation is measured by God.

This objectivity in history makes it possible for men, who are all made in the image of God, to approach questions of social utility with a legitimate hope of solving them. Their knowledge of the truth testi-

12. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 18.

fies to them. God's original objectivity offers men a way to gain social benefits by placing civil sanctions on anti-social behavior, but without sacrificing the ideal of liberty.

When liberty is based exclusively on an ethical theory of pure individualism, any imposition of civil sanctions undermines the theory and opens the door to tyranny. Pure individualism denies that social justice is possible, because of the absence of an objective common scale of ethical values. But the Bible tells us that there is a common ethical core that unites all men, even though its existence produces rebellion in covenant-breakers as they become more consistent in their defiance of God. *Because men are all made in God's image, there is a shared outlook that enables them to come to agreements on social policy.* There is no unanimity. There will not be unanimity, given the fact of men's sin, but there is an inescapable knowledge of God at the core of man's perception. It condemns covenant-breaking men.

Without a doctrine of God's common grace,¹³ i.e., God's *restraining grace*, men could not gain agreement regarding which behavior is subject to civil sanctions. If covenant-breaking men were allowed by God to become fully consistent with their presuppositions regarding God, man, law, sanctions, and the future, there would be a complete loss of social order. This is why God intervened at Babel. God restrains evil. This is grace—an unearned gift from God.

Conclusion

Paul teaches here that men actively rebel against the truth of God. They know God. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (v. 20). They actively suppress this truth, which nature provides. This includes the nature of man. The image of God in man is basic to man's personality. He cannot escape this objective testimony, no matter how much he suppresses it. It condemns him before God.

Man's rebellion is shaped by objective truth. He worships aspects of the creation, but he does worship. He subordinates himself to something, even though the object of his worship is not God. The pattern of his rebellion reflects the covenantal structure of man and his institu-

13. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

tions. There are institutional hierarchies in life (Rom. 13:1–7).¹⁴ The common knowledge of God makes possible men’s pursuit of freedom and justice through the imposition of civil sanctions. Even though there is no common scale of ethical values that enables men to quantify social benefits, men can come to God-honoring, blessing-generating decisions to suppress by force certain forms of evil public behavior. “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake” (Rom. 13:3–5).

Men’s natural reason is not reliable for the proper worship of God. This is Paul’s message in this passage. Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The insufficiency of natural reason is why all men need the revelation found in the Bible regarding God, man, law, sanctions, and the future. They need biblical revelation to correct covenant-breaking man’s misleading interpretations of natural revelation. This is why God required Israel to meet once every seven years to hear the written law of God preached publicly.

And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (Deut. 31:9–13).¹⁵

This was in addition to the preaching of the law locally by the Levites.

Paul in this section teaches that all men possess objective know-

14. Chapter 11.

15. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

ledge of God. Nature objectively testifies to this objective God. Covenant-breaking men subjectively suppress this objective knowledge. It is not simply that all men know that God exists; they know what He expects of them, too.

If all knowledge is subjective, and solely subjective, then the familiar modern slogan, “do your own thing,” must become “think your own thing.” When it does, what happens to communications, i.e., to the foundations of social order? This is the epistemological dilemma of methodological individualism, which is pure subjectivism. When this purity surrenders to objective truth, in whatever form or to whatever degree, so does methodological individualism. What will replace it?

3

THE WORK OF THE LAW AND SOCIAL UTILITY

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel (Rom. 2:12–16).

The theocentric basis of this passage is the image of God in man: point two of the biblical covenant.¹ At the core of every man's being, his conscience testifies to the existence of God and His law. Men are therefore without excuse when they rebel against God by breaking His law.

A. Conscience

Romans 1:18–22 describes the nature of man's rebellion: worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. In Romans 2, we learn about the consequences of this rebellion.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:1–11).

Covenant-breaking men will be condemned by God on the day of final judgment, but they will not arrive before the judgment seat of God without any warning from God in history. Nature testifies daily to the existence of the Creator God of the Bible. Men's hearts also testify to them about the specifics of the law of God. Men actively rebel against the truth, Paul writes. For this rebellion, they will be condemned. Some of them will have been without God's written law; others will have been under the covenantal terms of this law and condemned by it. "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (v. 12). Paul is here building a judicial case for every person's need of saving grace. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Without saving grace, he says, every person will perish: those covenantally under biblical law and those not under biblical law.

1. The Work of the Law

Paul says that the *work* of the law is written on the heart of every person. He does not say that the law of God is written in every man's heart. This latter ethical condition is an aspect of regeneration, i.e., an aspect of special grace. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied regarding a new covenant which would be written on the hearts of God's people.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that

I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31–34).

This has been fulfilled by the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. At the time of a person's regeneration, he becomes the recipient of this promised blessing. The law of God is at that point in time written on his heart definitively. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:8–13).

Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 10:15–17).

This is not what Paul is speaking about in Romans 2. What Paul describes in Romans 2 is God's common grace of the human conscience, which leads to a common condemnation by God at the final judgment. Paul says that the work of the law, not the law itself, is written on every man's heart. Men's consciences testify as witnesses to the

existence of the work of the law.² Men know by conscience what they are not supposed to do outwardly. They know which acts are condemned by God. They know, but they do not always obey.

2. Knowledge of the Law

How is the knowledge of the work of God's law different from the knowledge of the law itself? Paul does not say. We know from Jeremiah and the Epistle to the Hebrews that having the law of God written in covenant-keeping men's hearts is the fulfillment of prophecy. This is not a universal condition of mankind. Paul says here that having the work of the law written in the heart is the common condition of mankind. There has to be a distinction between these two forms of legal knowledge, but this text does not identify what the distinction is. Cornelius Van Til, the Calvinist philosopher, wrote:

It is true that they have the law written in their hearts. Their own make-up as image-bearers of God tells them, as it were, in the imperative voice, that they must act as such. All of God's revelation to man is law to man. But here we deal with man's response as an ethical being to this revelation of God. All men, says Paul, to some extent, do the works of the law. He says that they have the works of the law written in their hearts. Without a true motive, without a true purpose, they may still do that which externally appears as acts of obedience to God's law. God continues to press his demands upon man, and man is good "after a fashion" just as he knows "after a fashion."³

Some people never know about God's Bible-revealed law. Paul says, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law." They will perish. Why? If they have no knowledge of God's law, then why does God hold them responsible for having broken His law? Paul's answer: because they are not without knowledge of the work of the law, and this knowledge is sufficient to condemn them. Everyone possesses this knowledge in his or her nature as God's image. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves" (v. 14).⁴

2. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), I, p. 75.

3. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Vol. V of *In Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1978), p. 105.

4. Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 73.

B. Covenant

When Paul speaks of “their conscience also bearing witness” (v. 15), he has in mind the inescapability of the terms of God’s covenant, for mankind is God’s image-bearer. Man in Adam is required to exercise dominion in God’s name and by His authority (Gen. 1:27–28),⁵ a covenant that God renewed with Noah (Gen. 9:1–2).⁶ I call this the dominion covenant. This covenant defines mankind. It has stipulations. First, men are to exercise dominion. This is a positive task. Second, the original conditions applied in the garden. Adam was told not to eat from a particular tree. This was a negative command. It placed a legal boundary around God’s property. This command served as a test of man’s obedience.

The broken covenant brought death to man and his heirs. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come” (Rom. 5:12–14). This historical sanction has been applied by God and continues to be applied. Death reigned before God gave the written law to Moses. So, there has to be a more universal law than the Mosaic law, or else death would not have been imposed from Adam to Moses. It was not because men kept eating from a forbidden tree that they died, Paul says. They died because of Adam’s sin. But why? Because this sin was judicially representative, even as Jesus’ righteousness is judicially representative.

For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

shall many be made righteous (Rom. 5:15b–19).

The covenant's sanction of physical death is applied to mankind throughout history because of the judicially representative status of the original law-breaker, Adam. By breaking one law, he broke all of them. James wrote: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Adam's sin was representative for all mankind. The law he broke was representative of all of God's laws.

The covenant between God and man was broken by Adam when he ate the forbidden fruit. The law's negative sanction is now applied to all men. Paul writes in Romans 2 that the negative sanction of final judgment is sure. Men will not be caught unaware by the final judgment, because they know enough about what God's law requires of every person for them to conclude that final negative sanctions are coming on "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (v. 16). Paul is arguing the following: the ethical terms of the covenant are sufficiently well known to all men in history so as to render them without excuse before God. Men also know enough about God's final sanctions so as to render them without excuse. What kinds of evidence offers them such condemning testimony? Sanctions that are imposed by governments, including civil government. Men see that evil is punished in history by civil government and other lawful governments. Paul writes: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1).⁷ Men know that every society requires such sanctions. They also know that these universal systems of governmental sanctions point to God's final judgment. But covenant-breaking people actively suppress this testimony of their consciences, just as they actively suppress the testimony that God must be worshiped in spirit and in truth.⁸

C. Corporate Action

The free market economist generally begins with the assumption of individual self-determination: man as the owner of his own person. The socialist economist begins with the state as the proper agency of economic representation: the owner of the means of production, including men's labor time. The free market economist cannot logically

7. Chapter 11.

8. Chapter 3.

move from the sovereignty of an individual's value preferences to a concept of corporate social value that relies on state coercion that violates a law-breaker's individual values and preferences. The socialist economist cannot logically move from the sovereignty of the state's corporate social value scale to a concept of sovereign individual values and preferences. Yet, in practice, most free market economists do affirm the legitimacy of the state, and socialists do allow individuals to retain some degree of control over their persons and goods, if only for the benefits in improved efficiency that private ownership produces in individuals. There is a logical dilemma here. It involves the philosophical problem of the one and the many: dealing with hypothetically autonomous individuals and their underlying unity in society.⁹

A Christian economist has available to him a solution to this epistemological dilemma: the covenant. God established a covenant with mankind through Adam. This covenant still is binding, even though Adam violated its terms. It is still judicially representative. This doctrine of judicial representation rests on the doctrine of man as God's image in history (Gen. 1:26). In every person, there is a conscience that imparts some knowledge of what God's laws require. God brings sanctions, positive and negative, in terms of men's obedience to His laws. These sanctions are historical as well as final. They are both individual and corporate, but they are more predictably corporate (Deut. 28) than individual.¹⁰ Sanctions are less predictably applied in individual cases.

A Psalm of Asaph. Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men (Ps. 73:1–5).

Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning (Ps. 73:12–14).

Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a

9. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007). (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 1999] 2012), ch. 69.

moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee (Ps. 73:17–22).

Because the Bible authorizes civil governments to impose negative sanctions on behalf of God, it is possible for a society to avoid some of God's negative sanctions by enforcing God's civil laws. These laws are revealed in the Bible. Men can understand them. These biblical laws are consistent with the work of the law written in men's hearts. There is a common humanity. This common humanity involves a common perception of right and wrong. This ethical information is actively suppressed to one degree or other by sinful men. That men believe in God is clear from Romans 1:18–20.¹¹ That they do not come to a widely shared conclusion about what God is or how He wants men to worship Him is equally clear. Common revelation and common logic do not persuade covenant-breaking men that the God of the Bible has mandated specific forms of worship (Rom. 1:21–22).

The same is true of men's individual responses to God's law. Men know what the work of God's law requires, but they suppress this information in an attempt to escape the law's burdens and its sanctions. There is no system of logic that can persuade covenant-breaking men that the Bible's laws are mandatory. Even the Israelites needed regular reinforcement of this idea. The king was told to read the texts of God's law. "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (Deut. 17:18–19). The nation was to assemble every seven years to listen to a reading of the law. "And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law" (Deut.

11. Chapter. 1.

31:10–12).¹² The work of the law of God is written in every human heart, but rebellious men nevertheless need written revelation and regularly scheduled reinforcement through hearing this written revelation.

D. Natural Law Theory

Natural law theory originated after the conquest of the Greek city-states, first by Alexander the Great and then by Rome. Stoic political philosophers had to replace their theory of the autonomy of the polis and its laws. They wanted to find some theoretical foundation for their ethical system, which had previously relied on intellectual defenses based on the sovereignty of the polis. Natural law theory was their solution.¹³

Natural law theory assumes that there is a common logic among men. This common-ground logic is said to bind all men, so that by adopting it, we can persuade all rational men of truths regarding social and political ethics. Christian philosophers have adopted this idea. They have confused it with the *work of the law* written on all men's hearts, which is a doctrine of *common-ground ethics*, not common-ground logic. The main effect of natural law theory today has been to persuade Christians to abandon the Bible as the basis of civil law and to begin a quest for common civil laws and common civil sanctions.

*The theoretical problem with natural law theory is that covenant-breakers suppress the truth in unrighteousness.*¹⁴ Their powers of reasoning have been negatively affected by sin. *They begin with the assumption of their own intellectual autonomy.* They cannot logically conclude from this assumption the existence of the absolutely sovereign God of the Bible and His binding law.¹⁵ Natural law theory is a logical system that begins with the assumption of man's autonomy, which means that natural law theory has nothing in common with the assumption of God's sovereignty. Natural law theory assumes that covenant-breaking men can build and sustain a just society on the basis of natural laws, natural rights, and universal logic.

12. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 75.

13. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), pp. 77–82.

14. Chapter 2.

15. This was an argument in the philosophy of Cornelius Van Til. See Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1998), pp. 309–10, extract from Van Til's *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture* (P&R, 1967), pp. 12–13.

Natural law theory also assumes that sin and its effects have not adversely distorted the image of God in man. It assumes that fallen men do not actively suppress the truth. These two errors lead to a false conclusion, namely, that an appeal to common-ground logic can persuade fallen men. But if Paul was correct, how can natural men be persuaded to obey God, based on natural law theory? Paul entertained no such hope. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14).¹⁶ God’s law is spiritually discerned, but only by those who are spiritual—and not even by very many of them, as the history of Christian political theory indicates. The work of God’s law is naturally discerned to a degree sufficient to condemn men for disobeying it, but not sufficiently to enable them to build a biblically moral society. The natural man suppresses the testimony of creation regarding God the Creator, reinterpreting God to conform to his covenant-breaking interpretation of reality. Why should Christians believe that the natural man will not do the same thing with the work of the law written on his heart? Why should Christians believe that an appeal to natural law should be any more successful in bringing men to judicial truth than to theological truth?

Today, Christian scholars are among the few remaining defenders of natural law theory. *Darwinism has undermined faith in natural law theory among most humanists.* Autonomous, evolving, impersonal nature is widely believed to offer no moral standards. The survival of a species is not a moral imperative. Darwinian nature has no moral imperatives. *For Darwinism, there is no permanent natural law.* Everything evolves, including ethics. Because man’s social and physical environments change, says the Darwinist, any ethical standards that do not promote the survival of humanity must be abandoned if mankind is to survive, yet survival is not an ethical imperative of nature unless man somehow represents nature on behalf of . . . whom? Man? God? Nature?¹⁷ There is no agreement among Darwinists regarding either the existence or the content of fixed ethical precepts that are derived from nature. Darwinian ethical systems are shaped by mankind’s uniquely understood requirement to survive in a constantly changing environment. This is the creed of social Darwinism, whether statist

16. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

17. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1989).

(e.g., Lester Frank Ward) or individualist (e.g., Herbert Spencer).¹⁸ This is also the creed of free market economists, Rothbard excepted.¹⁹

Natural law theory in Christian circles is always an attempt to fuse Jerusalem and Athens. It is an attempt to reconcile autonomous man and the God of the Bible. No such reconciliation is possible. Because of God's common grace, covenant-breaking men are restrained in their suppression of the work of the law in their hearts. But, as they think more consistently with their presuppositions regarding God, man, law, consequences, and time, they become more hostile to the work of the law in their hearts. Logic does not persuade them.

E. The Witness of Common Grace

God has revealed to all men what they must do to gain His positive sanctions in eternity: trust and obey. God has also given them sufficient revelation in nature to distinguish good laws from bad laws. God's Bible-revealed laws are the good laws that some covenant-breakers do recognize as beneficial. Moses told the generation of the conquest: "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:5–8).²⁰

The fact that some covenant-breakers can and do recognize the beneficial corporate results of God's laws, including His civil laws, does not mean that they will adopt these laws or enforce them faithfully whenever they do adopt them. No foreign nation around Israel ever adopted Israel's legal system, although the people of Nineveh did repent temporarily from their most blatant personal sins (Jonah 3). The

18. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix A.

19. Rothbard defended the idea of permanent ethical standards, which he believed are derived from Aristotelian natural rights theory. Rothbard broke with Mises' utilitarianism and Hayek's social evolutionism. Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, [1982] 1998). (<http://bit.ly/RothbardEOL>) On Hayek, see North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, Appendix B.

20. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

Queen of Sheba did come for specific counsel from Solomon (I Kings 10:1–10).

These incidents in Israel's history indicate that on specific issues, covenant-breakers do recognize the wisdom of God's law. A covenant-breaking society may adopt certain aspects of God's law in personal ethics or even social ethics, but it will not adopt biblical law as a comprehensive system of justice. Apart from God's gift to a society of widespread, soul-saving, special grace, God does not empower a society to maintain its commitment to those few biblical laws that it may have adopted. *Eventually, covenant-breakers rebel*, just as Nineveh rebelled before Assyria invaded Israel. Common grace requires special grace in order to overcome mankind's ethical rebellion.²¹

F. Social Utility

1. Law Enforcement

Covenant-breaking men do recognize the existence of certain benefits from the enforcement of certain biblical laws. This offers Christian social theorists a solution to the epistemological problem of social utility. *Because of the image of God in every man, all men can and do perceive the benefits of obeying God's law.* They can see the positive results of God's law, meaning God's positive corporate sanctions for obeying God's civil laws. As we have seen, the Bible teaches this explicitly. The problem is, covenant-breakers suppress this testimony. Israel did, too. Men in their rebellion deny to themselves that God's law is valid. They deny that its benefits offset its costs.

Nevertheless, God restrains men's rebellion against His law, just as He restrains rebellion against false worship. He does not allow covenant-breaking men to become completely consistent in their rebellion. Because there is a shared perception among all the sons of Adam, due to God's image, it is possible for a civil government to pass laws against certain forms of public evil. These laws produce society-wide benefits. Evil-doers lose in this arrangement. This is one of the law's major benefits. Paul says that this is God's purpose for all civil law. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou

21. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcgg>)

do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. 13:3–4).²² The disutility produced by biblical civil sanctions in the life of the evil-doer is a benefit to society. His loss is society's gain. *There is a net increase in social utility when evil-doers suffer losses for their evil deeds*, either after they are judged by civil judges or before, when they decide not to seek their evil ends because of their fear of civil sanctions. Through natural revelation, covenant-breaking men know that this is the case, even though they partially suppress this truth. This is why all societies enforce laws against certain forms of public evil, such as murder.

2. Methodological Individualism

Methodological individualism, in its strict formulation, denies the existence of measurable social utility. It denies that there is any scientific case for social utility, because of the absence of any value scale common to all men.²³

Humanistic economics also denies the legitimacy of any appeal to God, and this includes any appeal to the biblical doctrine of the image of God in man. In theory, say free market economists, there can be no aggregating of individual utilities. Then most of them pull back from their conclusion. They do not become fully consistent.²⁴

To deny social utility is to deny to the free market economist the ability to assess scientifically the net social benefit of any proposal, public or private. The economist can legitimately say that a participant in a voluntary exchange entered into that exchange in the hope of benefitting from it, but social utility remains an illusion. *He cannot logically say anything about social utility*. This forces a consistent methodological individualist to remain silent when asked about the social utility of any piece of civil legislation. *To use civil coercion in a quest to increase total social utility is to violate the principle of methodological individualism*. Civil law discriminates against those who act in certain prohibited ways. But the consistent methodological individualist views all of men's actions as equally the result of utility-maximization. *All utilities are equal*, he says. The economist seeks to be ethically neutral,

22. Chapter 11.

23. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, [1932] 1945), ch. VI. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

24. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2011] 2012), Appendix B.

as true scientists supposedly should. So, he is trapped by his individualism and his claim of ethical neutrality. If he remains consistent, he cannot recommend or discourage any piece of legislation in his capacity as a scientist. He can say nothing about how to increase or decrease social utility, which does not exist as a scientifically valid category.²⁵

Do we find methodological individualists who remain silent regarding the positive or negative effects of legislation? Rarely. They have strong opinions on how to increase net social utility, which they attempt to defend scientifically. They use their skills as economists to take stands for or against specific civil laws. They say that a law would be a benefit or a liability to society. They implicitly rely on the concept of social utility to justify their support of or opposition to civil laws. In this sense, we can say that God restrains their consistency both as methodological individualists and as ethical neutralists. As fully consistent methodological individualists and as fully ethically neutral, they would remove legitimacy from all civil governments, which would undermine the God-ordained covenantal authority of the state. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1).

Paul identifies the office of civil magistrate as a ministry. “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom.

25. Murray N. Rothbard deduced from a voluntary exchange an increase in social utility. Rothbard, “Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics” (1956), in Rothbard, *The Logic of Action I: Method, Money and the Austrian School* (Lyme, New Hampshire: Edward Elgar, 1997), ch. 10. (<http://www.mises.org/rothbard/toward.pdf>) But he faced a major epistemological problem: envy. If each of two people increases his personal individual utility through voluntary exchange, but a third party resents this, the economist cannot legitimately say that there has been an increase in social utility. He cannot measure the increase in personal utility of the two traders and then subtract from this the disutility of third-party resentment. There is no common value scale. So, to make the logical case for his reconstruction, Rothbard had to deny envy, which he explicitly did. He said the economist must ignore envy because there is no way to know if a person really is envious. Years later, in one of his most important essays, Rothbard adopted sociologist Helmut Schoeck’s thesis of equalitarianism as the product of envy, which Schoeck presented in *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace, [1966] 1969). When Rothbard did this, he undermined the justification in his 1956 essay for saying that voluntary exchanges increase social utility. Rothbard, “Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism and the Division of Labor” (1971), in Rothbard, *Egalitarianism: A Revolt Against Nature* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1974] 2000). (<http://bit.ly/RothbardEnvyYes>)

13:4).²⁶ God therefore restrains methodological individualists and ethical neutralists in their war against the legitimacy of the civil covenant. They abandon their epistemological commitments for the sake of their own relevancy in public discourse. They do not announce, “I’m sorry; I can say nothing about the social costs or benefits of this policy.” On the contrary, they encourage legislators and judges to estimate social costs and social benefits of some civil law in the state’s legitimate quest for greater social efficiency. They may even promote their own assessments of the policy in terms of social justice, which is usually seen by them as efficient, too.

Conclusion

In my studies of biblical economics, I have repeatedly returned to the themes of social utility and social cost, which are ultimately epistemological questions regarding the possibility of conceptual aggregation.²⁷ Economics as a science faces the same epistemological dilemma that political philosophy faces: logically reconciling the one and the many.²⁸ To move from the presupposition of the autonomous individual to a discussion of society-benefitting civil sanctions requires a leap of faith by methodological individualists. This leap of faith is eventually taken by all of them. They rarely explain why this procedure is valid, given their presuppositions.²⁹

Christianity offers the epistemological solution: the doctrine of man as the image of God, who Himself is both one and many, three persons yet one God. Men have the work of the law written in their hearts. A sufficient number of people in a society can come to agreements regarding the imposition of legitimate civil sanctions, thereby increasing total social utility. This is possible because they understand covenantal cause and effect as it applies to civil government, even

26. Chapter 11.

27. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, Tools of Dominion (1990), Appendix H.

28. Rushdoony, *One and the Many*.

29. This includes Lionel Robbins, who reversed himself in 1939, fleeing from the inescapable conclusion in his *Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1932) that all policy advice is illegitimate because of the impossibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. He backtracked in his debate with Roy Harrod: Lionel Robbins, “Interpersonal Comparisons of Subjective Utility” *Economic Journal*, XLVIII (1938), p. 637. For a discussion of this retreat, See North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5:C:1.

though they suppress this knowledge to one degree or other.

Paul's discussion in Romans 1 of covenant-breaking man's willful suppression of the truth offers insights into his discussion of the work of the law in Romans 2. All men know who the Creator God is, Paul insists, but they suppress this revelation. They prefer to worship gods of their own imagination. Similarly, they perceive what God requires of them ethically, but they prefer to obey laws of their own creation.

The image of God in man enables a covenant-breaking legislator to perceive the social benefits of certain biblical laws, but covenant-breakers hold back³⁰ this perception in unrighteousness. They cannot completely suppress the truth, for God restrains them in their rebellion. This is why legislators do not pass utterly destructive laws. This is why civil judges can serve as ministers of God. It is also why economists can perceive the socially destructive effects of some pieces of free market-undermining legislation. But any moral or intellectual appeal to natural law subsidizes the enthronement of autonomous man. Autonomous man will eventually pursue programs that lead to his destruction. "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36).

30. Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 37.

4

IMPUTATION AND THE LAWS OF ECONOMICS

Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law (Rom. 3:30–31).

The theocentric focus of this passage is sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.¹ God is merciful, who justifies sinners by means of their faith in His son, Jesus Christ, who died for their sins. God upholds His law, yet He also grants mercy. The gospel of God's sovereign grace through the exercise of faith is not in conflict with the law of God. The law is established by faith.

Before we get to the implications of this passage for economic theory, we must first understand the passage in relation to its context: man's objective legal standing before God.

A. Imputation: Objective and Subjective

Paul clarifies what God has done on behalf of His people. He reminds his readers that the basis of their hope in God is not their personal fulfillment of the terms of God's law, which they have not done and cannot do. Rather, their only legitimate hope is in Christ, who died for their sins. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

God has declared His people righteous. That is to say, God has *imputed* righteousness to them. Here is the meaning of justification: God's declaration of a person's lawful judicial standing before Him. This is a judicial act, sometimes called a forensic act. The early

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

chapters in Romans deal with God's imputation of righteousness to His people. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). The Greek word translated here as "conclude" is the same as the word translated "impute." It should probably be translated here as "declare." The translators also translated the word as "reckoned" and "counted."

Now to him that worketh is the reward not **reckoned** of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is **counted** for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God **imputeth** righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not **impute** sin (Rom. 4:4–8).

How was it then **reckoned**? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be **imputed** unto them also (Rom. 4:10–11).

And therefore it was **imputed** to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was **imputed** to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be **imputed**, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:22–25).

God declares a sinner justified in His sight. This declaration is a judicial act. God sovereignly decides not to count a man's sins against him. He announces, "Not guilty." He does this because of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, whose moral perfection God transfers to the redeemed person at the time of his redemption.² Jesus Christ lived an objectively perfect life and died under God's objective curse. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Peter 3:18). God the Father made Jesus Christ to be sin for His people, to suffer objectively on behalf of His people in their place. ". . . God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as

2. John Murray, "Definitive Sanctification" (1967), in *The Collected Works of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), II, ch. 21.

though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:19–21).

Sin and its consequences are objective. The sinner comes under God's objective negative sanctions because of his sins. Jesus Christ suffered objectively on the cross. *Justification is objective*: right legal standing before God. *Imputation is objective*: God's declaration of the innocence of those who have put their faith in Christ's objective atonement as their substitute. *Sanctification is objective*: the transfer of Christ's moral perfection to the redeemed at the time of his redemption. All of these aspects of regeneration are objective. *Yet they are also subjective*, in the same sense that God's day-by-day witness to the goodness of His work of creation was subjective (Gen. 1). There is a *subjective perception of an objective condition*.

When God declares a person "not guilty," He makes a personal judgment. The sovereign Subject declares what is objectively true. The objective truth is assessed subjectively by God. Then He declares the truth objectively. But God does more than declare it; He has predestinated the objective historical conditions that make His declaration possible, beginning with the crucifixion. "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:26–28).

There is the story of an umpire who makes a judgment regarding a violation of the game's rules. A player complains against the call. The umpire says one of three things in his defense. "I call them as I see them." This makes the game dependent on his perception; the violation does not have independent existence. This is the approach of philosophical nominalism. "I call them as they are." The violation has objective existence, and the umpire faithfully declares its existence. This is the approach of philosophical realism. "They are what I call them." This places sovereignty in the perception of the umpire. The violation derives its existence from the umpire's categories and his application of these categories to the perceived facts. This is Kantianism.

What is the correct view? When speaking of a declaration by the

God of the Bible, the correct view is covenantalism: “I call them as I have foreordained them.” The event is what God had originally predestined it to be, and now He accurately assesses it. Then He declares it. When speaking of a declaration by a man, however, covenantalism applies differently: “I call them as I believe God has predestined them, but I am not God. The game, however, must go on.” A perfect call is possible only for God, but men can make progressively improved calls when they diligently study God’s rule book and gain experience over time by applying the rules to the real world. Even those umpires who have not studied the rule book can make calls sufficiently accurate to keep the game going, for the work of the rules are written on every observer’s heart (Rom. 2:14–15).³

Paul asks: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (v. 31). Faith is a subjective act on man’s part, but it has objective results. Through a person’s subjective faith comes his objective deliverance from sin. Sin is not merely subjective. It is objective. Men objectively break God’s law. They come under objective sanctions because of their sin. Their faith in Christ then objectively redeems them from the worst objective consequences of sin.

B. The Laws of God and Nature

This two-fold aspect of redemption—subjective and objective—raises the question of God’s law. God’s law is more than a category of human thought. It is more than a conventional opinion of men in society. It is not the product of a subjective agreement among men. It is the objective product of subjective agreement among the three persons of the Godhead. God declares His law objectively. This declaration is based on subjective agreement. The declaration by God makes the law objectively true, just as He spoke the universe into existence out of nothing (Gen. 1).

1. Declared Law

Law is declared by God. He has revealed His law verbally to men in the past, beginning with Adam. “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16–

3. Chapter 3.

17). God caused Moses to write down God's law. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" (Ex. 34:27–28). God subsequently raised up prophets to declare His law publicly. *God's law is therefore both objective and subjective*. It has been declared objectively in history by the Creator and Judge of man. But God is simultaneously three persons and one person—subjective. Law is under His authority. Law has no independent existence apart from God. It has no independent authority alongside God. It surely has no independent existence above God.

God has created the universe to be run by His laws, yet He actively sustains it. Specifically, this is the work of the second person of the Trinity. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet [fit] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:12–17).

2. *Natural Laws*

Men speak of the existence of natural laws. The archetype is the law of gravity, first described mathematically by Newton, but recognized and honored by all mankind. Newton could not explain gravity: attraction at a distance.

There is no record in the Bible of God's announcement of the law of gravity, but there is a description of its operation. "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Matt. 4:5–6).⁴

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

We say that the law of gravity is a natural law because its operation does not depend on men's opinions. Even today, scientists do not know how it operates; they can only describe some of its effects. Scientists do not know how stars and planets attract each other physically in the vacuum of interplanetary space; they only know that this attraction exists, and that scientists can describe its operations mathematically. Furthermore, scientists do not know why the subjective logic of mathematics should describe the objective, impersonal operations of the natural world. It is unreasonable to imagine that certain subjective, common laws of men's minds should describe so precisely the physical operations of objective physical reality, but this is what science declares.⁵

The debate begins when men seek to defend natural laws as either laws of creation or laws of evolution. Did God create these laws, or did they evolve within an uncreated, impersonal universe? Modern science asserts the latter. Darwin's theory of the evolution of all species through impersonal, purposeless natural selection has been widely accepted by scientists because this theory extends modern science's theory of cosmic impersonalism to the origin and development of life. *Modern science begins with the assumption of the autonomy of nature: naturalism.* "Nature giveth, and nature taketh away. Blessed be the name of nature." Nature has produced mankind. Scientists can discover nature and nature's laws. "Evolutionary scientists giveth, and evolutionary scientists taketh away. Blessed be the name of evolutionary scientists."

C. The Logic of Economics

When we speak of economic laws, such as the law of supply and demand, we are not describing legislation that has been passed by a civil government. But the law of supply and demand does not exist independently of the opinions of men to the same degree that the law of gravity does. The way this law operates is shaped by legislation and enforcement. Nevertheless, the law of supply and demand is not dependent on government legislation, nor can it be repealed by legislation. In this sense, it is thought by some economists to be natural.

The law of supply and demand is not comparable to the laws of

5. Eugene P. Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics*, XIII (1960), pp. 1–14. (<http://bit.ly/WignerMath>) Wigner won the Nobel Prize in Physics.

planetary motion, although economists have often adopted the mathematical style of the astronomer or the physicist in formally describing the law's operations. The economist offers a causal explanation for certain perceived regularities in human action. Men recognize these *patterns of behavior*; the economist offers reasons for these recurring patterns. He does so in part through *introspection*, although he may not admit this when he presents his explanations. First, he thinks about how he makes decisions; then he extends his discoveries to other men. The astronomer does not look inward in his attempt to understand the laws of planetary motion, which are exclusively physical. Economic laws are not physical. They are the product of human action in a God-cursed world of finite resources, i.e., the world of God's curse of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19).⁶

1. Epistemology

How can men discover the laws of economics? This is the question of epistemology. Economists are not in agreement on the answer. Ludwig von Mises hypothesized a deductive logic of human action. He sought to discover a few universal axioms of human action. From these, he believed, an entire system of economics can be deduced logically. Mises was unique in this defense of axiomatic laws of exchange, a science that he called *catallactics*. Catallactics is a subset of a more general science of the laws of human action, a science which he called *praxeology*.⁷ Few economists have adopted this deductivist approach, and in this century, those who have adopted it have generally been followers of Mises.

In contrast to Mises, most economists say that they begin with tentative hypotheses regarding how men universally act in their quest to conserve scarce resources. Economists then look for supporting evidence in history. They also predict the outcome of certain market processes. But these predictions are of a peculiar kind. Economists adopt an “if . . . then” logic to make their predictions. “If the money sup-

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

7. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), chaps. 1–3. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>) Mises' distinction between praxeology and catallactics was his admission of the distinctions in the allocation and distribution of scarce resources in an institutional framework based on private ownership and open bidding (the free market) vs. institutions that are not based on these legal principles: family, church, state, and charitable agencies.

ply increases, and if production does not increase, then some prices will rise.” Then they look for examples in history of monetary expansion, stable production, and generally rising prices, i.e., a rising index of prices. But there are times when the money supply increases, yet the official price index does not rise. This in no way disturbs economists. There are several ways around this discrepancy. “Prices would have fallen had there not been an increase in the money supply.” Or, “The velocity of money fell, despite the increase in its supply. People held onto money longer, so prices did not rise.” Or, “The official index of prices is no longer correctly weighted statistically to reflect the items that most people are buying.” Or, “The older definition of money is no longer applicable.” Economists remain committed to their theories long after these theories no longer describe what is taking place in the world of entrepreneurial decision-making.

Economists assert a similar “if . . . then” logic to validate their epistemology. “If my ‘if . . . then’ predictions come true more often than the results of flipping a coin—random outcomes—*then* my hypothesis regarding a particular operation of the laws of economics should be accepted as provisionally true.” This methodology is called positivist: descriptive rather than prescriptive. It is also said to be empirical, i.e., ratified by observed evidence. To this extent, economics is said to be inductivist: derived from historical facts.

2. Human Autonomy

Both the deductivist (*a priori*) economic methodology and the inductivist (*a posteriori*) economic methodology begin with the assumption of the autonomy of man.⁸ Economists in both camps insist that any explanation that relies on the assumption of God, providence, or the supernatural has no place in economic science. Supernaturalism is said to be scientifically unverifiable. What economists do not mention is the fact that scientists have adopted standards of verification that exclude God, providence, and the supernatural. Modern science is methodologically naturalistic, *a priori*. Scientists assume what they need to prove: the autonomy of the universe, i.e., the absence of the providence of God.

Economists believe that the laws of economics are more than so-

8. Gary North, “Economics: From Reason to Intuition,” in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976).

cial conventions. These laws are said to govern human affairs irrespective of what men believe about them. These laws influence men's social relationships. Some of these laws' effects can be predicted, though not with absolute precision. For example, *if* civil government passes a law that sets a price of an item lower than the free market price, *then* shortages of the regulated items will develop at the official, legal price. More of these items will be demanded than supplied at the legal price. This law of economic cause and effect is not found in the Bible. It is also not discovered mathematically, although it is often described by economists with the use of mathematics or graphs. This law's results are sometimes visible, most notably when long lines form in front of stores that sell the price-controlled item.

3. Supply and Demand

The Bible records examples of the fundamental economic law of supply and demand. Consider the account of the siege of Samaria in Elisha's day. "And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver" (II Kings 6:24–25). This siege would soon be lifted, Elisha prophesied. Soon after it is lifted, Elisha said, prices will fall. "Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria" (II Kings 7:1). He was implicitly announcing that an objective increase in the supply of goods would soon produce an objective decline in prices. Elisha's economic forecast implicitly assumed that there would be no objective increase in demand to offset the objective increase in supply. Elisha used the imminent outcome of the law of supply and demand—lower prices—to present his prophecy of the end of the siege. He did not say that the Syrian troops would soon leave; he said that the siege-induced prices would soon fall. He knew that his listeners would understand what he was saying about the siege. The law of supply and demand operated in ancient Israel, but a detailed description of the logic undergirding this law—the logic of the auction—is not provided in the Bible.

4. Economic Imputation

According to modern economic thought, prices are the objective result of men's subjective evaluations regarding the value of scarce resources. Economists call this process "imputation." People are said to impute value to a good or a service. Different men impute different value, depending on their individual value scales. This imputation process is purely subjective, but it applies to objective conditions: supply, demand, and market price. Through objective bidding among sellers, and also through objective bidding among buyers, an objective price appears in the market. *The market is a giant, complex auction system.* The law of supply and demand therefore operates both objectively and subjectively. It operates in the affairs of men because men objectively bid for scarce resources that they subjectively believe are objectively necessary for them in order for them to attain their subjectively generated goals for the future.

The law of supply and demand is objectively true. It governs the economic decisions of men even though they may not understand it. Those who heard Elisha's forecast were expected by the prophet to understand it. His prophecy was a prophecy regarding the siege far more than it was a forecast of prices, but it was presented as a forecast of prices. He expected his listeners to deduce from this forecast that the siege would end before the next day was over. In this sense, the law of supply and demand was presumed by the prophet. So was the widespread public understanding of this law. Had this not been true, his prophecy would have been unintelligible.

Conclusion

God subjectively assesses a person "guilty" because of the objective guilt of the sinner. God objectively declares a redeemed person "not guilty" because of the objective innocence of Jesus Christ, which is then by grace transferred by God to the sinner. *God's imputation is subjective, but it is based on objective conditions.*

A man subjectively imputes value to one additional unit of a scarce economic resource in terms of his subjective perception of objective conditions: his existing supply of the good and the estimated objective supply held by other owners. His scale of values is subjective. He decides what is important to him, from most important to least important. But his scale of values is not autonomous. It does not exist independent of God, who has made man in His own image. *The common*

*image of God in all people makes possible socially objective agreements about what is important.*⁹

The laws of economics are objective because man's image is objective, and also because God's curse of man's work and his environment is objective. Subjective imputations by men who live in an objectively cursed, finite environment lead to their objective decisions, which in turn establish objective market conditions: supply, demand, and prices. A man's subjective imputations make him objectively responsible before God, even before he takes objective action. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27–28). He is also responsible for the actions that result from his subjective decisions. "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:18–19). God imputes meaning to each man's subjective imputations, his objective decisions, and the objective outcomes of his decisions. God does this in terms of His own subjective scale of values—moral values. These divine values govern God's establishment of analogous values that are to govern men, who are made in God's image. These analogous values become objective for men, either because of the work of the law objectively written on their subjective hearts (Rom. 2:14–15)¹⁰ or the law objectively written on their subjective hearts (Heb. 8:8–13; 10:15–17).

Humanistic economists deny that a supernatural realm affects the operation of the market. While they do admit men's subjective opinions about the supernatural realm may influence the array of prices, the supernatural is said by economists not to be an objective factor in economics. There is no divine objective scale of values, nor is the image of God in man a relevant issue for economic theory—so economists assume. There is no theoretically valid appeal beyond the realm of the creation, which is said to be autonomous. Man calls things as he sees them, or calls them as they are. Ultimately, things are what man calls them, the modern humanist insists. But which man? The sovereign individual or the sovereign state that represents collective man? On this, economists disagree. So do political philosophers.

9. Chapter 1.

10. Chapter 3.

5

SUBORDINATION AND DELIVERANCE

For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now (Rom. 8:19–22).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's curse on the creation (Gen. 3:18).¹ This is an aspect of sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.² Paul says that the deliverance of the creation from this curse will take place at some point in the future.

A. The Sons of Men

The creation awaits “the manifestation of the sons of God.” The word translated as “manifestation” is *apokalupsys*. It can be translated as “appearing.” Example: “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (I Peter 1:7). It is also the word for “revelation.” “Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?” (I Cor. 14:6). “The Revelation of Je-

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

sus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (Rev. 1:1).

The final revelation regarding the sons of men—all mankind—is the final judgment. “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:13–15).

Who are these sons of men? Does this phrase mean mankind in general? In the Old Testament, the phrase sometimes is applied to mankind in general. “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:4). “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help” (Ps. 146:3). The phrase appears most frequently in Ezekiel to name the prophet. “And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee” (Ezek. 2:1). Daniel referred to the son of man as a messenger of God. “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him” (Dan. 7:13). God spoke to Daniel using this phrase. “So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision” (Dan. 8:17). In the New Testament, Jesus used this phrase to identify Himself. “And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20).³ “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house” (Matt. 9:6).

What is the context of the phrase in Romans? It refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating men. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:14–17).

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 19.

Here, the revelation of the sons of men has to refer to the coming of Christ's gospel in history. This revelation had already begun in Paul's day, but it had not yet transformed either Roman or Jewish society. The creation still awaits this greater manifestation, Paul says. What does the creation await? Deliverance from the bondage of corruption. "Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). But why should the creation expect such a thing? Because this deliverance will come for the sons of men. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). This points to the final deliverance from sin. The sufferings of the present do not compare to the glory of the post-resurrection world.

B. Progressive Deliverance from Sin and Its Curses

Will there be any corporate manifestation in history of this final personal deliverance from sin? This raises the issue of eschatology. The amillennialist does not believe that history manifests this final deliverance, except insofar as the church reflects it, but the church is surrounded by a hostile world, and this non-delivered condition will continue until the end of history. The premillennialist believes the same until the Second Coming of Christ inaugurates His earthly kingdom's millennial reign. During this millennial reign, the premillennialist might say—if premillennialists ever commented on such matters—that the creation may begin to be delivered from God's curse because of the deliverance of human society from sin's effects. But this deliverance will not come prior to Christ's bodily return into history. Until then, the church will remain an oasis of deliverance from sin in a desert of evil. The creation will continue to groan.

Paul's revelation in this passage is a New Testament application of Isaiah's prophecy regarding the New Heaven and New Earth. "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred

years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:17–20). Isaiah's prophecy cannot refer to the post-resurrection state, for it speaks of sinners, who will not be present in the post-resurrection covenanted community (Rev. 20:14–15). Isaiah's prophecy has to do with history. So, therefore, does Paul's. Isaiah's prophecy is related to his previous messianic prophecy.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:1–9)

The creation will at some time cease to be a war zone. This passage refers to warring nations. It uses a metaphor to drive home this prophecy into the reader's consciousness: the peaceful interaction between fierce animals and the normal victims of their ferocity. Isaiah discussed nature, but he had in mind the transformation of Israel.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the

west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them (Isa. 11:11–14).

Paul's words also invoke nature. Deliverance takes place in nature, not merely in society. The metaphor is not a metaphor after all. Or is it? Is Paul merely retaining the metaphorical character of Isaiah's messianic prophecy about animals? Is he saying that human society will alone be delivered from sin? Is nature really going to change? Paul's message is that there will someday be a removal of God's curse on nature. The creation was placed under bondage by Adam's Fall. Adam judicially represented nature (Gen. 1:26–28).⁴ Nature came under a curse placed by God on Adam. The principle of subordination is basic to the biblical covenant.⁵ Those who are under the authority of a superior suffer when he does, or triumph when he does. Paul here refers back to Genesis 3, not to Isaiah 11.

Isaiah 65:17–20 prophesied an era in history in which children will die at age one hundred. This indicates a restoration of man's pre-Flood lifespan. There will be a transformation of human biology that enables men to live much longer. It is not said that this will be a scientific breakthrough, although it could be. Paul is saying that the creation under man will participate in a comparable removal of the effects of sin. The curse of God will be progressively removed from man and nature. Isaiah did not say that only the redeemed will be blessed with longer lifespans. So will sinners. This indicates that Isaiah was not speaking of Israel alone, but of mankind in general. *The process of redemption will affect all mankind*. This does not mean that every person will be redeemed, for sinners will still be sinners. It does mean that mankind's world, including human biology, will be transformed. It means that God's common grace will bring blessings to all.⁶

Why should the creation be relieved from some of the effects of God's curse? Because mankind is partially delivered from sin. But why should mankind be partially delivered? Because of God's grace of progressive sanctification in human society. As men become less rebellious against God, God will begin to bless both them and nature. He will remove the biological limitation that He imposed in order to restrain the evil behavior of mankind: short lifetimes. Moses wrote of his era,

4. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, chaps. 3, 4.

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

6. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

which applies to ours: “For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:9–10). Yet at age 130, Jacob called his days short (Gen. 47:9). Moses saw the shortened lifespan as a curse on mankind. Isaiah said that this curse will be reversed.

C. Progressive Social Sanctification

Paul’s words imply that there will be a time when the gospel will be so widely believed that most men will structure their outward behavior in terms of it. The revelation of the sons of men will be widespread. What at first is limited to the church will spread to all mankind. Jeremiah prophesied:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name (Jer. 31:31–35).

The author of Hebrews applies this prophecy to the church. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:10–12). This is why the Old Covenant order is about to disappear, he says. “Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he

had said before, In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13). It is being replaced. And so it was, in A.D. 70.

The church is international. It is no longer geographically bottled up in Palestine. This is why Isaiah’s prophecies regarding nature (Isa. 11:1–9) and man (Isa. 65:17–20) can be fulfilled in history. The knowledge of God’s law—not just the work of the law in all men’s hearts (Rom. 2:15)⁷—will become widespread. The curse on nature will be progressively removed because God’s law will be progressively obeyed.

This is *progressive social sanctification*. The social laws of God will be progressively obeyed. This will bring His positive social sanctions in history. This is what Isaiah prophesied. It is within this prophetic context that Paul’s discussion of the redemption of the creation should be understood. Full redemption must await the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21, 22). But partial redemption of nature is not only possible, it is prophetically inevitable.

As to whether this visible redemption will be accomplished by science or by God’s direct intervention, Paul does not say. Neither did Isaiah.

D. Economic Growth

God placed Adam under a curse in order to make his work less productive. “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field” (Gen. 3:18). The curse on nature was a curse on Adam. Nevertheless, in all of God’s temporal curses, there is grace present.⁸ Adam’s reduced production gave him an incentive to cooperate with others to increase their individual output. “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up” (Eccl. 4:9–10). This incentive for cooperation increases the cost of murder and war. The curse on fallen man and his environment can in some cases reduce the level of violence.

Cooperation among men is comparable to a joint effort between man and nature. It makes men wealthier. Any reduction in the resistance of nature in surrendering her fruits increases men’s wealth. Paul here prophesies a future in which nature will be delivered from its

7. Chapter 3.

8. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, ch. 2.

present groaning. *This is necessarily a forecast of increased economic output.*

Nature was cursed by God in order to pressure men to cooperate. Because men can increase their wealth through cooperation, men cooperate. If the curse of nature is reduced, there will not be so great a need for men's cooperation. The closer society approaches zero prices for factors of production, tastes remaining equal, the less need for the division of labor. But if the increase in nature's productivity is in response to mankind's greater covenant-keeping, as this passage suggests will be the case, then the result is greater dominion rather than increased leisure. Output rises, and people use this greater output to subdue the earth less expensively. In contrast, if nature's output should increase apart from covenant-keeping, its increased output will lead to reduced cooperation. Men will pursue more leisure. They will not feel the same environmental pressure to cooperate in order to increase their individual wealth. So, the cause of the increase is significant in assessing its results. An increase in nature's output will have different effects, depending on men's ethical commitment and vision of the future.

Economic growth is a positive sanction attached to God's covenant law. The early sections of both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 list blessings for corporate obedience. These passages include increased economic growth. "Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store" (Deut. 28:4-5).⁹ "The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 28:8). Paul is forecasting a time when the earth will provide more of its wealth to men. This is part of a general removal of Adam's curse.

Because God had given Israel *a vision of linear history*, from the original creation to the expansion of God's kingdom, the Israelites had *the foundation of a doctrine of progress*. Deuteronomy 28 applied progress to economic affairs. Paul here extends this hope to the world at large. It is not just the land of Israel that will be blessed. It will be the whole earth. The gentiles can participate.

This passage is a standing testimony against those who declare

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

that there should be laws passed to restrict economic growth. They are arguing against the blessings of God. They are attempting to overturn this prophecy in the name of wealth-redistribution by agents of the state.

There are reasons for this hostility to economic growth. If economic growth is legitimate, then population growth is legitimate. The modern secular West hates population growth. This is why abortion has become legal in the West. Sinners seek an increase in their personal wealth by killing their own children. Collectively, they seek an increase in their per capita wealth—their lifestyle—by killing their unborn children. They also see that the continual expansion of population in a finite world points to the end of time. They rightly fear God's final judgment. Filling the earth with people means fulfilling the God's dominion covenant given to Adam (Gen. 1:26–28) and Noah (Gen. 9:1–2).¹⁰ Covenant-breakers seek to delay God's final judgment by turning back both economic growth and population growth. They seek to escape their duties under God's dominion covenant. Here is the underlying theology of the zero-growth movement: *deferring God's final judgment*.

Conclusion

Paul prophesied the redemption of nature from God's curse. Nature had come under a curse because of Adam, Paul said. "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope" (Rom. 8:20). But a second Adam has come, Jesus Christ. He has reversed the curse definitively. "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:17–19). What Christ began at His resurrection will be extended in history. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have

10. *North, Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 18.

put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:22–26).¹¹ The reign of Christ will progressively overcome His enemies in history, culminating in the triumph over death at the final judgment. Death is the last enemy to be overcome. This means that before death is finally overcome at the end of history, the curses associated with Adam's fall will be overcome.

Paul was saying that the gospel will be extended throughout the earth, and to the extent that man's society is redeemed by special grace, so will nature be redeemed by common grace. Nature will come under the reign of Christ. The prophecies in Isaiah 11 will be fulfilled. So will the prophecies in Isaiah 65.

11. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

6

THE ORIGIN OF SOCIAL ORDER

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

The theocentric focus of this verse is the absolute sovereignty of God over every aspect of history.¹ Those who love God can legitimately be confident about the beneficial personal outcomes of their decisions. They can also be confident that God will thwart the outcomes of the decisions of God's covenantal enemies. God providentially sustains the universe in such a way that His people will be victorious in the end. Every fact of history leads to this victorious end.

A. Good Results from Evil Decisions

Paul says here that all things work for good for God's elect—not just a few things, but all things. There is no indication in the text that “all” means anything except “all.” Even the painful things that afflict covenant-keepers in history are for their good, just as Paul's thorn in the flesh was for his good (II Cor. 12). *The universe is completely rigged by God in favor of God and His people.* It is inherently good, but only for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. For covenant-breakers, the reverse is true: all things in history work against them in eternity. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

It takes enormous faith to believe this. It flies in the face of many visible facts in the lives of Christians. In the chapter immediately preceding his discussion of the thorn in his flesh, Paul wrote of his own experience: “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" (II Cor. 11:23–29). Nevertheless, Paul tells us here that all things work for the good of those who love God. To believe this requires the adoption of a personal eschatology of victory. In fact, no passage in the Bible is more expressive of a personal eschatology of victory than this one. This verse is the great affirmation of personal victory.

The cross is the supreme example of this two-fold process of historical causation. It initially appeared to bring an ignominious end to Jesus' ministry. His enemies believed that it had. So did His disciples. They scattered. The cross was so horrendous a prospect that Jesus asked God the Father that this burden might be kept from Him (Matt. 26:39). Nevertheless, without Jesus' bodily victory over death after the cross, there would be no guarantee of the promise of Romans 8:28. Paul wrote this twice: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (I Cor. 15:14). "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17). Christ's bodily resurrection is the legal foundation for covenant-keepers' confidence regarding the comprehensive, one-sided benevolence of the providence of God.

Jesus said of Judas before the betrayal, "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). Judas had his goal and motivation; God had His. The Jewish leaders had their motivation; God had His. "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people,

and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death" (John 11:47–53).

1. Joseph in Egypt

Consider the story of Joseph in Egypt. Things turned out very differently from what his brothers had planned for him, as well as what Potiphar had planned for him. After their father died, Joseph's brothers feared that Joseph would impose vengeance on them. They had kidnapped him and then sold him to slave traders. Now he was second in command in Egypt, and they were dependent on Egypt for food. "And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him" (Gen. 50:15). "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:19–20).

Here we have the clearest statement in the Old Testament regarding the superiority of God's decree over the plans of men. Man proposes, but God disposes. There is no doubt that the brothers had acted in an evil manner. Their intentions had been evil. Yet their actions resulted in their blessing. Joseph assured them, "Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them" (v. 21). Out of evil came good—not just for Joseph but for the brothers, too. Their decision to sell him to slave traders became the means of their families' deliverance from famine.

The Pharaoh of the exodus provides another example of evil's producing good, though not for the perpetrator. His refusal to allow the Israelites to make a three-day journey to sacrifice to God led to their complete deliverance from Egypt. This was God's doing. "And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses" (Ex. 9:12). In the next chapter of Romans, Paul uses this example in his defense of God's absolute sovereignty in God's electing some to salvation and some to perdition. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto

Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Rom. 9:16–17). Pharaoh had his priorities; God had His. God's were triumphant.

God was sovereign over the decisions of the brothers, Joseph said. God had intended their actions for good. The brothers had an evil motivation, and this had led to their action. This evil action led to other evil actions: lies by Potiphar's wife, forgetfulness by the Pharaoh's butler. Each evil action put Joseph closer to the office of deliverer. God had not only intended the brothers' evil actions for good, He had intended all of the evil actions that had afflicted Joseph to result in good for the family of Jacob. The brothers and their families would be blessed. God had predestinated the entire process. This is what Joseph told his brothers. There had never been any doubt in God's mind about the outcome of this series of decisions by people whose intentions were evil. They had their goals; God had His. They had their motivations; God had His. Both God's motivation and His goal were for good for the sons of Jacob. Joseph told them that they had done evil, but the results were good. Joseph honored God's goal. He did not seek to avenge himself on them. In imagining otherwise, they had thought evil of him, again. They were wrong, again.

B. Coordination from Above

The doctrine of God's absolute predestination undergirds Paul's promise in Romans 8:28. In Romans 9, he spells out this doctrine in detail. God is the grand coordinator of all events. Because the free-will theology of Arminianism is today almost universal in Christian circles, even as Calvinism had been almost universal in Protestant circles in the days of Arminius, Christians refuse to accept the plain teaching of these passages. They may give lip service to them, but they do not emotionally and intellectually accept them. They do not believe Paul when Paul writes: "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid" (Rom. 9:10–14). Before Esau had done good or evil, God hated him. And why not? Esau

was an heir of Adam. The amazing fact is that God loved Jacob, not that he hated Esau. But the Arminian reverses this assessment. He is amazed that God hated Esau. He is more than amazed; he does not believe it. But the text is quite clear. God hated Esau in the womb. Calvinist commentator John Murray has commented on this passage. "Since the oracle points to a discrimination that existed before the children were born or had done good or evil (vs. 11), so must the differentiation in the present instance. Thus the definitive actions denoted by 'love' and 'hatred' are represented as actuated not by any character differences in the two children but solely by the sovereign will of God, 'the purpose of God according to election' (vs. 11)."² The Bible teaches that there is coordination from above. There are human actions in history, but coordination is imposed by God from beyond history. God is completely in charge.

I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? (Isa. 45:5–10).

Paul paraphrased this passage in chapter 9 of Romans. "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:19–21). Murray writes: "The similitude is that of the potter making vessels of different character from the same lump of clay, one to serve a high purpose, another a less noble. No one questions his right to make these distinctions. He has not merely the power; he has the *au-*

2. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), II, p. 23.

thority.”³

There is an objective decree over history: God’s. His decree is not a matter of guesswork on God’s part. Neither is its outcome. His decree comes to pass in history. “The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand” (Isa. 14:24). With his sanity restored after seven years of madness, Nebuchadnezzar announced: “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:35). The coordination of human affairs and nonhuman affairs is theocratic: God rules. There is a one-to-one correlation between what God proposes and what God disposes.

C. The Source of Economic Order

Social theorists who deny Augustinianism/Calvinism must offer some other theory of social coordination. These theorists search for cause-and-effect patterns within the creation that provide an explanation for the presence of social order in the midst of innumerable events that no man can begin to comprehend, and which no god is allowed to interfere with except sporadically. They search for an explanation for the correspondence between the one and the many, between the social order and the myriad decisions of individuals. Every time a new explanatory system is suggested by some social theorist or historian, it is refuted by other theorists as being insufficient as an explanatory device.

Adam Smith made famous the phrase, “the invisible hand.” His metaphor was supposed to explain how it is possible for public good to emerge from self-interested decisions by individuals who buy and sell.⁴ This metaphor invoked an image of an all-powerful God along the lines of Scottish Presbyterian Calvinism. But Smith did not believe in Calvin’s God. He believed in a more deistic sort of God, more Newtonian than Calvinistic. He did not believe that God personally inter-

3. *Ibid.*, II, p. 32.

4. “Every individual necessarily labors to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally indeed neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. He intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.” Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, [1776]), p. 432.

venes in history to bring social utility out of individual utility, social order out of seeming chaos. He believed that the free market performs this crucial service. Yet he used the metaphor of an invisible hand. A century later, Darwin adopted the same rhetorical strategy. He denied that nature has goals, yet his language of natural selection implied that something did the selecting. He compared nature to a professional breeder, even as he denied that nature did any such thing.

Smith was part of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment. He and his intellectual peers believed in undesigned social evolution. Smith's intellectual predecessor Adam Ferguson had argued in the mid-eighteenth century that society is the outcome of human actions, but not of human design.⁵ There is no designer of social order. Darwin used this insight a century later to structure his theory of evolution through natural selection. Darwin taught that there is no cosmic designer; nevertheless, there is biological order.⁶

A rival view of the Scottish Enlightenment's theory of decentralized social order was more common on the European continent, especially in France. Order was seen as the product of rationalism. The French Enlightenment believed that the state can and should direct the economy into profitable lines—for the state. This had been the view of the mercantilists for at least a century by 1776. It became the view of the French revolutionaries under Robespierre. It has been the view of socialists, communists, and Keynesian economists ever since.

Hayek contrasted these two views of Enlightenment rationalism in his book, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (1954). The debate continues, though with much less confidence on the part of the defenders of government planning than existed before the visible collapse of the Soviet Union's economy in the late 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet government itself in late 1991. Socialists may today be willing to accept grudgingly the fact that the free market is more efficient than socialism in the delivery of goods and services to customers, but they deny that the initial distribution of wealth was morally just. Those who have the money to consume do not *deserve* to consume all that they consume, the socialist-interventionist argues. Thus, the free market's greater effi-

5. F. A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 264. This is from Ferguson's book, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), p. 187.

6. Ibid. pp. 264–65. This is an essay on the influence of Bernard Mandeville's famous poem and his commentary, *Fable of the Bees*. See Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

ciency is not good enough for the socialist—good enough in all senses: social, moral, and economic. There must also be fair play—non-market intervention by the state—in order to establish a just society. State coercion is required to redistribute wealth and thereby ensure morally fair outcomes of individual decision-making in the marketplace.

Individual economic decisions to buy and sell can and do produce a stable economic order. This is no longer widely debated. On this point, the intellectual defenders of the free market triumphed in the final decade of the twentieth century, a triumph that did not seem remotely possible in 1974, the year that Hayek won the Nobel Prize in economic science, which he shared with the socialist, Gunnar Myrdal. Hayek was taken far more seriously in the final decade of the twentieth century (he died in 1992) than he was in 1974. Before 1974, he was not taken seriously by most economists, and he was regarded as an anomalous throwback to the nineteenth century by the few non-economists in the academic community who had heard of him.⁷ The conservative book publisher, Henry Regnery, in 1975 described the American academic community's treatment of *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek's most famous and best-written book.⁸

In 1944 the University of Chicago Press published an unassuming looking scholarly book without fanfare of any kind and in a very small first printing, which soon became the center of discussion and shook the liberal position to its foundations. This was F. A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*. It had first been published in England—Hayek at the time was professor of economics at the University of London [error: London School of Economics]—and had been rejected by several American trade publishers, in one case on the basis of the report of a reader who stated that, although he thought the book would enjoy a good sale, it was “unfit for publication by a reputable house.”⁹ The thesis of the book, simply stated, was that centralized economic planning—socialism, in other words—must inevitably lead to complete collectivism and the loss of personal freedom. The book was quite obviously the work of a serious scholar whose interest was not indul-

7. The most notorious example is Herman Finer's long-forgotten book, *The Road to Reaction* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945), written by a political scientist at the University of Chicago, whose faculty Hayek joined in 1945. Presumably, Finer wrote it before Hayek arrived in the United States, and before he received the offer to join the tiny Committee on Social Thought, but not the Economics Department.

8. Henry Regnery, “The Age of Liberalism,” *Modern Age*, XIX (Spring 1975). (<http://bit.ly/HayekReviews>)

9. From a letter to W. T. Couch from William Miller, quoted in “The Sainted Book Burners,” *The Freeman*, April 1955, p. 423.

gence in ideological polemics but the preservation of the free society. The *New York Times*, to its everlasting credit and the astonishment of many, gave the book an excellent and favorable review in a prominent place by Henry Hazlitt, and the *Reader's Digest* made its ideas widely available by means of a skillful condensation. Such attention quickly mobilized a counterattack. Alvin H. Hansen, then much quoted as a "leading authority" on economic questions, pronounced categorically in the pages of the *New Republic*: "Hayek's book will not be long lived. There is no substance in it to make it long lived."¹⁰ The *Library Journal* spoke of its "abstract presentation and poor organization"¹¹ but the major attack came from Professor Herman Finer of the University of Chicago in a polemical, abusive book called *The Road to Reaction*, which is of much less interest now, except as a period piece, than the acclaim it inspired. The Kirkus Book Review Service, which was then, and still is, widely used by libraries in the selection of books, described the Finer book as "An exciting book—and a much needed one—the atomic bomb to explode the thesis of the reactionaries' *Mein Kampf*, Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*."¹² In the *New York Times*, S. E. Harris of the Harvard faculty of economics welcomed Finer's polemic with the words, "This brilliant, persuasive volume . . . exposes his [Hayek's] fallacies and errors of fact." Finer, of course, was "a world authority," and his book one "no reader can afford to disregard."¹³

Of Herman Finer's intellectual legacy there remains barely a trace. The climate of opinion has blown him into a well-deserved obscurity, and has taken Seymour Harris with him.¹⁴ Hayek is correctly regarded as one of the most important intellectuals of the twentieth century.¹⁵

The debate today is over ethics: the moral legitimacy of the outcome of market transactions. There is also the secondary issue of market failure, especially economic recessions. Here, most economists agree: there is a legitimate role for the state, especially the state-granted monopoly of central banking. But the role of civil government is today viewed as limited, more supplementary than determinative.¹⁶

10. *The New Republic*, January 1, 1945.

11. *The Library journal*, September 15, 1944.

12. Kirkus Book Review Service, September 15, 1945.

13. *New York Times*, December 9, 1945.

14. The best test of obscurity is a Wikipedia entry. Finer's has three sentences. It has this entry: "This biography of a political scientist is a stub." Harris does not even have a stub. (May 5, 2012)

15. A Google search produced over one million hits. (May 5, 2012) I interviewed him in the summer of 1985. (<http://bit.ly/HayekInterview1985>)

16. Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: from Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

This represents an intellectual victory of the Scottish Enlightenment over the French Revolution's Enlightenment. Today, there is not much opposition to Smith's basic insight that a productive form of economic order predictably arises from the decisions of individuals to enter into voluntary exchange. Out of billions of exchanges arises a recognizable market order. Although no one planned this order, it nevertheless exists. It provides the means of subsistence and far more than mere subsistence. There is coordination through the price system. Hayek called this the spontaneous order. This view of society is evolutionistic.¹⁷

D. Coordination and Cooperation

Hayek's theory of social order rests on the insight of the Scottish Enlightenment rationalists, especially Ferguson, that the coordination of society is unplanned. It is the unintended product of individual human action. This is a powerful argument, though it is difficult to believe for most people. When most men hear the words, "invisible hand," they imagine a god or demon that pushes people around. The metaphor is either not understood as a metaphor or else it is not understood at all. The same problem of perception undermines Darwin's metaphor of nature as an animal breeder. It makes nature sound providential or at least scheming—the exact opposite of what Darwin was arguing.

When men see a watch, they think "watchmaker." When men see order, they think "planner." They find it comforting to attribute social order to a benevolent administrator. If this administrator is not supernatural, then he must be a bureaucrat. He must have planned, decreed, and brought to pass. Yet it is obvious that no administrator coordinates the complex affairs of the market. *But if there is no administrator, how can men be confident in the benevolence of the system?* This is the rhetorical question that socialists have asked ever since the early nineteenth century. They keep offering the same conclusion: *people's confidence in the free market is misplaced*. The familiar phrase, "President Roosevelt saved capitalism from itself" is representative. The capitalist order is neither self-sustaining nor self-justifying, its critics insist. They seek an administrator who can secure the benevolence of the system. This is true in the realm of cosmology.¹⁸ It is also true in the

17. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix B.

18. Michael J. Denton, *Nature's Destiny: How the Laws of Biology Reveal Purpose in the Universe* (New York: Free Press, 1998). Denton was Senior Research Fellow in

realm of economics.

Ethics is important. Legitimacy is important. Appeals to economic efficiency have not answered the nagging doubts of the masses, let alone professors of sociology. Men want to believe that things will work out well for them. They want a world in which their children will have an opportunity to live happily ever after. It takes an act of faith to believe in the benevolence of an impersonal market that is the product of human action but not design. There is a tendency for men to search out inherent defects in the market order—"market failures," as they are called—in order to assure themselves that the market is not autonomous, that it responds positively to creative political tinkering, that administrators can make it better and secure the benevolence that systemic impersonalism cannot guarantee. Men do not wish to entrust their futures to impersonalism, whether cosmic or economic.

When men trust each other, there is greater cooperation. The institutional cost of policing deception and unreliable performance falls. The degree of trust in a society, and its distribution among contending institutions, dramatically shape and limits a national economy. The chief issue here is the division of labor—social cooperation. Where trust is lacking in institutions, economies remain backward, limited to family businesses and local trade.¹⁹ *The degree of men's faith in the benevolence of the economic order affects the degree of social cooperation.* If they believe that things will go well for them in the end, they are more willing to invest time and money in present projects than if they suspect that things may go badly. *This is why optimism regarding the long-term benevolence of the social order in the broadest sense is so important in calling forth men's commitment.* When people believe that the system is stacked against them, they will seek for ways to beat the system. One of the major ways that they attempted to beat the system in the twentieth century was to transfer their allegiance to the state.

Men also want to believe that positive outcomes are a product of moral behavior. They want to believe that right makes might, that truth will triumph over lies, that honesty is the best policy. They want to believe that their sacrifice on behalf of morality will be rewarded, at least in heaven but preferably in history. They are convinced that the relationship between justice and earthly success must be enforced by someone in authority. If this is not God, then it has to be someone

molecular genetics at the University of Otago in New Zealand.

19. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Macmillan, 1995).

with a great deal of political power. Men do not readily believe that impersonal market forces, described by value-free economists, are reliable enforcers of moral cause and effect.

E. The Need for Legitimacy

Academic economists assure the public and their students that their science is value-free. They insist that they are not coming in the name of a higher morality. On this point, they are self-deluded. There is no neutrality. Every social theory rests on a view of moral cause and effect. Every social theory offers a system of law and a system of sanctions.

For example, the anarcho-capitalist denies the legitimacy of civil law. He offers a theory of customer sovereignty that places negative economic sanctions into the hands of customers: their legal authority to refuse to buy. Profit and loss are the system's sanctions. To defend this system intellectually, the anarcho-capitalist equates customer sovereignty with moral right. It is regarded as morally wrong—unjust—for the civil government to interfere with private ownership and the right of contract: an act of theft. But why is theft wrong? Why is an economic order that promotes such theft illegitimate? The theory rests on morality that is outside the market. Rothbard recognized this. He was an Aristotelian. But most economists, including Mises, prefer to appeal to utilitarianism rather than morality. They invoke efficiency rather than morality.

Free market economists come in the name of buyer's sovereignty: "high bid wins." They also come in the name of seller's efficiency: "low bid wins." This is the famous law of supply and demand. Economists favor certain government policies. They speak of social utility as if they or others who use scientific economics can add up the utilities of individuals, and then subtract from this total all individual disutilities. They assume that they can make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.²⁰ They are wrong on this point. They cannot make such comparisons scientifically. Their methodological individualism prevents this. They cannot, as neutral scientists, move from individual value scales to corporate value scales. There is no common utility scale. There is no measure of individual utility. There are rankings—"first, second, third"—but no measure: "how much more."

20. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, [1932] 1945), ch. VI. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

Thus, they cannot legitimately invoke social utility in their defense of the free market's social order. At best, they can defend the individual property owner against theft. But even here, some free market economists are unwilling to do this. The school of thought known as law and economics specifically denies the suggestion that civil judges must always defend the existing property rights of owners. Instead, they say, judges must use social utility as their guide, determining who owes whom what payment based on the maximization of social utility.²¹

Social theorists continue to debate the moral legitimacy of the outcomes of economic decisions by profit-seeking individuals. Most men want to believe that they are doing the right thing. Economists want to believe that their recommended form of society honors valid, authoritative standards of justice. Yet they also want to separate economic science from all moral and theological assumptions, just as physics supposedly is separated. Academic defenders of the free market necessarily must surrender the case for justice whenever they come in the name of value-free economic analysis. But this is how almost all economists come.

Adam Smith did not attempt to prove in *The Wealth of Nations* the moral legitimacy of the outcome of free-market competition. He assumed that all men prefer greater wealth as individuals. That is, men will choose a lower price over a higher price, other things being equal. He used this motivation to describe the increasing wealth of nations as the result of allowing individuals to pursue their economic self-interest through trade. Smith's economics rests on the idea of ever-increasing wealth as a legitimate goal of both individuals and nations. To the extent that the pursuit of wealth is not a self-validating moral goal, Smith's economics lacks moral legitimacy.

Jesus taught that the pursuit of ever-increasing individual wealth is not a legitimate goal, if it is a man's only goal or his main goal.²² Yet Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, in contrast to his earlier book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), offered no analytical tool other than the pursuit of individual wealth. Economists have rarely read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and the morality-based analytical tools suggested in that book were not developed by Smith in *The Wealth of*

21. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix H.

22. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

Nations.²³ Modern economics rests on an assumption: more is better than less because individuals want more. Jesus taught that more is worse than less if individuals pursue only this world's wealth. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).²⁴ "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26a).²⁵

Smith explained the social market order in terms of men's pursuit of individual self-interest. He demonstrated that national wealth is normally increased by adopting the political policy of laissez-faire, but he proved this by implicitly assuming that it is analytically possible to add up individual wealth to compare aggregate wealth among nations. He offered a strong case for the idea that economic order is the result of individual decisions far more than it is the result of central planning by government bureaucrats. But this argument from description did not make the case for the moral legitimacy of the corporate outcome produced by the free market.

F. The Good Society

Paul here sets forth the case for the comprehensive providence of God. It is a beneficent providence for covenant-keepers. All things work for good for covenant-keepers. This is true in every period of history, under every social order. This means that providence is malignant for covenant-breakers: vessels of dishonor. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:18–21).

The question then arises: Is one social system superior to another? If all things work together for good, does it make any difference which

23. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

24. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

25. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

social order is dominant? It surely mattered under the Mosaic Covenant. Biblical law was mandatory for Mosaic Israel. God also sent Jonah to Nineveh to call that nation to repentance. In modern times, Christians have abandoned Old Testament law in the name of . . . what? They do not say. All they say is that the Mosaic law was temporary and confined to Israel, and therefore it must be completely abandoned unless the New Testament revives one or another of the Mosaic statutes. (The New Testament does not revive the Mosaic statute against bestiality,²⁶ so New Testament antinomians conveniently ignore bestiality as a legal issue.) They have concluded that any social order is superior to the one that God revealed to Moses. They assure us that Christians can live holy lives under any social order, except one—the Mosaic law—which is wrong to defend because God has annulled it. They attack biblical law—and only biblical law—in the name of Christ. They proclaim, “We’re under grace, not law!” In fact, they are today under humanistic lawyers and bureaucrats.

This hostility to the Mosaic law has left Christians as defenders of this or that system of humanist economics. Generally, most of them defend the economic status quo: either the academic status quo or the political status quo. Those few Christians who have attended graduate school in the social sciences or humanities tend to be more socialistic than the people in the pews, but neither group believes that the Mosaic law sets forth fundamental principles of social and economic order. They do not believe that the Bible provides a blueprint for economics. They may selectively defend this or that Old Testament law, but only as an example of the “Christian spiritual attitude.” There is no attempt to look at the whole of the Mosaic law and then use it to develop a framework for jurisprudence. This is why no one wrote an economic commentary on the Bible before mine. The same holds true for other academic disciplines: education, political science, sociology, law.

Thus, Christian social theory has not previously been Bible-based. It has been humanistic and eclectic. Except for the theonomists, Christian social theorists do not come in the name of God and His written revelation to declare the nature of the good society. They have surrendered social theory to humanists. They have baptized this or that humanist theory, usually one that is a decade or more out of date in

26. “And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them” (Lev. 20:15–16).

humanist circles. They have not sought to develop a uniquely biblical social theory. The New Testament does not offer sufficient guidance, they say, and the Old Testament is not to be trusted.

This has created a condition in which Christians have been excluded, with their consent, from debates about the good society. Since about 1700, Christians have had to choose between right-wing Enlightenment social theory and left-wing Enlightenment social theory. They have baptized Locke, Smith, Burke and their disciples, or else Rousseau, Marx, Sorel, and their disciples—all filtered through the cosmic impersonalism of Darwinism.

In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, we read of God's corporate sanctions in history. The covenantal issue in both passages is society's obedience to God's specially revealed civil law, not just civil law in general. If Christians reject the idea of God's predictable corporate sanctions in history, they are left intellectually defenseless in the debate over social theory. This has been the case for three centuries. Before 1700, they were compromised by Aristotelian categories imported by the medieval scholastics.

Today, a tiny minority of Protestant Christians have begun to understand that there is no neutrality. Nevertheless, they still remain defenders of "equal time for Jesus." They do not perceive that the humanists' "equal time" doctrine was historically conditioned. It was formulated to silence the few traces of Christianity that still remained in public discourse. The slogan was always an illusion. This became obvious in the early 1920s in the United States when William Jennings Bryan challenged the right of tax-funded schools to teach Darwinism. He lost.²⁷ Today, it is illegal to teach anything in tax-funded schools regarding origins except materialistic evolution. There is no neutrality. But the moment that a Christian declares, "There is no neutrality," he faces a question: "If not biblical law, then what?" Modern Christians hate this question. They hate it almost as much as they hate this question: "If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, why was Pharaoh responsible?" Paul answered this question in Romans 9.

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who

27. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), ch. 7.

hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Rom. 9:17–21).

Conclusion

God predestinates all things to work together in order to benefit covenant-keepers. God proposes, and God disposes. Men have their purposes; God has His. God's are absolute. Men's are conditioned.

Paul makes it clear that God brings His decree to pass in history. Men are responsible for what they think and do, but God brings all things to pass according to His decree. "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22) There is order in history. God provides it. Men make individual decisions, but God directs the outcome. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). God is absolutely sovereign; men are nonetheless responsible. This is what Paul teaches. He is rarely believed.

This passage is important for social theory. It teaches that there is social order despite individual decisions. Men make plans; God brings His plan to pass. *The source of social order is the decree of God.* Any theoretical system of cause and effect that does not rest on the decree of God is man's attempt to escape Paul's plain teaching in Romans 8 and 9.

Adam Smith explained social order as the product of self-interested decision-making by individuals. He established this as the methodological starting point of modern economics. It is a powerful paradigm, and it has steadily triumphed over rival views. But his conclusion rests on assumptions that are inconsistent with methodological individualism. His disciples cannot prove scientifically that increased wealth is a morally legitimate ideal, or that economic growth benefits the whole society. Smith's analytical tools in *Wealth of Nations* left no place for morality, which is the basis of social legitimacy. The free market social order is the product of certain legal arrangements, but their legitimacy is still debated. There is no religious neutrality when it comes to morals. There is therefore no religious neutrality when it comes to the wealth of nations.

THE REDEMPTION OF THE JEWS AND KINGDOM BLESSINGS

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway. I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? (Rom. 11:7–12).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ The issue: His providential administration of Israel: Old Covenant Israel and New Covenant Israel. It raises a secondary issue: God's providential administration of the Jews in between the demise of Old Covenant Israel and their incorporation into New Covenant Israel.

A. Separation and Integration

A continuing theme in Romans is the separation of Christians from the covenant-breaking world. This raises a question that Paul deals with in the first two chapters in Romans: On what basis can separated Christians be part of the general culture? His answer is two-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

fold: *common humanity* and *common revelation*. All men are made in God's image. They have all been given general revelation. They see nature, and nature testifies to God (Rom. 1:18).² There is also a common judicial revelation: the work of the law written on all human hearts (Rom. 2:14–15).³ Because of their *shared humanity in Adam*, Christians and non-Christians can cooperate. All men possess a common revelation in nature and a common understanding of God's ethical requirements. Covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers are covenantally separate, but mankind is still united, almost as competing half brothers are united, Paul preached in Athens: a shared father. God, he said, "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Also, the dominion covenant that God made with Adam is still binding (Gen. 1:26–28).⁴ It still unites humanity.

In Romans 9–11, but especially 11, Paul raises a related issue: the separation of the Jews. The Old Covenant separated Jews from gentiles. The New Covenant separates Christians from non-Christians. But what of the disinherited (Matt. 21:43) sons of the Old Covenant? The Jews were still a political force when Paul wrote to the church in Rome. At the Jerusalem council, the church had formally broken with the "taste not, touch not" aspects of the Mosaic law (Acts 15), but a final break with the Old Covenant did not take place until A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed by soldiers in the victorious Roman army.⁵

What of the covenantal separation after A.D. 70? Paul did not know when this separation would come, but he knew that it would be soon. The Old Covenant order would soon perish, he taught (Rom. 13:12). Were Jews then going to be dealt with by God as just another covenant-breaking people? There would be only two kinds of people, as always: covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. But would there be covenantal distinctions among covenant-breakers? Would the Jews, as covenant-breakers, be dealt with by God as a separate people, ana-

2. Chapter 2.

3. Chapter 3.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 4, 5.

5. An Israeli fringe group, Temple Mount and the Land of Israel Faithful Movement, is attempting to begin the rebuilding of the temple on the property of the Dome of the Rock, the Arab mosque in Jerusalem. The group sees this as prophetically necessary. (www.templemountfaithful.org)

logous to the way that He had dealt with them under the Abrahamic Covenant and those covenants that followed, which were all part of one covenant: the Old Covenant? If so, how could a clear-cut distinction be made between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers?

This was another aspect of the separation-cooperation issue. The issue that Paul raises in Romans 11 is this: How will the church and Judaism interact in the future? Judaism would no longer be Old Covenant religion, for the Old Covenant was about to perish. After A.D. 70, Phariseeism triumphed over Sadduceeism, for the Sadducees had been associated closely with the administration of temple sacrifice.⁶ Judaism replaced the religion that Christians refer to as Old Covenant religion. The Jews recognized this change, for the temple was no more. Their religion had to change, and it did change.

Paul was writing before this final separation had taken place, perhaps a decade before Nero's persecution of the church in A.D. 64 separated the church from Judaism in Roman law. The date of A.D. 55 is common for this epistle.⁷ Paul raised this question: What would be the future relationship between Jews and Christians? In asking this, as well as by answering it, Paul recognized that there would be a three-way covenantal relationship in history, at least until the conversion of the Jews: New Covenant, Adamic Covenant, and Jewish Covenant. The Jews would continue to be dealt with by God as a separate people—separate from Christians, but also separate from covenant-breakers in general. Paul's teaching has complicated covenant theology by inserting a prophetic element into it.

Paul teaches in Romans 11 that there will be a three-way separation for an unspecified period of time. But, at some point in the future, this three-way separation will become two-way, just as it was before Christ's ministry. Jews as a separate people will be absorbed into the church. Jews will no longer be dealt with by God as a separate people.

B. God's Covenant People, Emeriti

Paul speaks here of Jews as a covenantal, corporate entity. In cruci-

6. Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), I, ch. XIII. After Rome's destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the Sadducees disappeared. *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zvi and Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1965), p. 340. The Pharisees replaced them as the leaders of Judaism, which is the religion taught by the rabbis.

7. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), I, p. xvi.

fying Jesus, Jews had rebelled against God as a corporate unit—nationally—although not all of them did. Paul had been one of these rebels. Paul teaches in Romans 11 that Jews will someday be redeemed as a corporate unit, though not necessarily all of them.

The logic of Paul's argument rests on a temporal contrast between the ways that God deals with Jews as a corporate entity. The contrast is between how God dealt with the Jews in Paul's day and how He will deal with them in a future era. In Paul's day, a few Jews had been granted salvation by God, but most had been deliberately blinded by God. Paul writes that "God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day" (v. 8). As surely as God had hardened Pharaoh's heart, Paul says, so has He hardened the hearts of the majority of the Jews. Paul in this epistle had previously described what God did to Pharaoh. "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:15–18). The context of this discussion of Pharaoh was the blindness of the Jews in Paul's day.

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee [Hosea], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha. What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness,

hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed (Rom. 9:22–33).

There was another corporate entity involved: the gentile church. God had dealt with gentiles differently prior to Christ's advent. They were outside of God's covenant of salvation. This was corporate discrimination. Now some of them were being grafted into His covenant, Paul explains here. The question Paul raises is this: What of the future? Will God deal with redeemed gentiles differently at some point? Paul's answer is yes. God will bless them as never before.

Paul is using two sets of contrasts to make a point. The first contrast is between (a) Jews who were corporately excluded from God's kingdom in Paul's day, and (b) Jews who will be corporately integrated into the church in the future. The second contrast is between (a) gentiles who were corporately excluded from God's kingdom before the era of the church, and (b) redeemed gentiles, who will be corporately blessed by God in the future. If we do not acknowledge and then accurately apply the corporate aspects of both contrasts, we miss the point of Romans 11.

C. The Conversion of the Jews

Paul in this chapter develops a unique argument. The Jews *as a people* have been cast aside by God, so that the gospel can come to gentiles *as a people*. The nation of Israel had long constituted God's visible earthly kingdom. In Paul's day, this visible kingdom was being transferred to a predominately gentile church, just as Christ had prophesied to the Jews: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

The Jews as a people are like a domesticated olive tree, Paul says. Its branches have been broken off, so that God can graft in wild olive branches.

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted

in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (Rom. 11:17–24).

God's goal here is two-fold: extending salvation to gentiles and extending unprecedented blessings to the church after the Jews as a corporate people are brought to saving faith. Paul uses a "how much more" argument. He is saying, "If redeemed gentiles have been blessed by God's cutting off of the Jews corporately, how much more will gentile Christians be blessed when the Jews are someday granted saving faith corporately by God's sovereign grace?" Paul says that it is unnatural that wild olive branches should be grafted into holes made by cutting off the natural branches. How much more natural than this grafting in of gentiles would be the re-grafting in of Jews? Far more natural. So, Paul says, gentile Christians should expect this re-grafting in to take place. Someday, Jews as a people will gain access to membership in God's kingdom once again. This will be unlike the situation in Paul's day, when a few Jews were entering into God's kingdom through membership in the church, but most were not.

The argument is *not* this: "Jews were cut off corporately for the sake of the gentile church, and in the future, individual Jews will be brought into the church, leading to great blessings." The reason why this is not Paul's argument is the fact that individual Jews were being brought into the church continually in his day. Paul knew this; he was one of them. There is a great change coming, Paul says: a drastic contrast from his day, which will produce unprecedented blessings for the church. What will this change be? The corporate conversion of the Jews, after the era of the gentiles' near-exclusivity in the church is complete, i.e., after the fulness of the gentiles. The conversion of the Jews as a people will mark the end of the gentile era of the church, when "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (v. 25).

Paul's point is, first, that God in his day was dealing corporately with the Jews: blinding their eyes. Second, that God will deal with

them differently, but equally corporately, in the future. Someday, they will not be deliberately blinded by God for the sake of redeeming the gentiles. Jews will be given eyes to see. This will be beneficial for both them and the gentiles in the church. Conclusion: *God retains in His prophetic plan a positive role for the Jews as a people.* There remains one unfulfilled prophecy that must be fulfilled after the era of the gentiles has ended, but before the final judgment. Paul continues:

For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes (Rom. 11:24–28).

As with Job, who lost his wealth in order that he might learn some theology and then become even wealthier, so with the Jews. Individual Jews today are excluded from God's kingdom, except by abandoning their own people covenantally. In the future, they will join the church in such large numbers that there will be hardly any Jews remaining behind in their status today: members of a broken national covenant. They will come into the church *en masse*. John Murray wrote:

If we keep in mind the theme of this chapter and the sustained emphasis on the restoration of Israel, there is no other alternative than to conclude that the proposition, "all Israel shall be saved", is to be interpreted in terms of the fulness, the receiving, the ingrafting of Israel as a people, the restoration of Israel from unbelief and repentance. When the preceding verses are related to verse 26, the salvation of Israel must be conceived of on a scale that is commensurate with their trespass, their loss, their casting away, their breaking off, and their hardening, commensurate, of course, in the opposite direction. This is plainly the implication of the contrasts intimated in fulness, receiving, grafting in, and salvation. In a word, it is the salvation of the mass of Israel that the apostle affirms.⁸

It is worth noting briefly at this point that the refrain, which has

8. Murray, *Romans*, II, p. 98.

been taught for decades to students in dispensational theological seminaries, that covenant theologians have no place for corporate Israel in New Testament prophecy, applies accurately to continental Calvinists in the amillennial and Dutch traditions, but it has not applied to Calvinists in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. The Scottish Presbyterian tradition has been the dominant Reformed ecclesiastical tradition in the United States. William Hendriksen, a Dutch-American amillennialist, refers to this Scottish interpretation of the conversion of the Jews, which he does not accept, as the most popular theory.⁹ Decade after decade, dispensational seminary professors have steadfastly ignored comments on the conversion of the Jews that appear in commentaries by Charles Hodge, Robert Haldane, and John Murray—comments that refute the accusation that corporate Israel plays no role in the eschatology of covenant theology.

D. Postmillennialism

Romans 11 has long been viewed by Scottish Presbyterians as supporting postmillennialism. In the nineteenth-century commentaries on Romans by Hodge and Haldane, this view is presented clearly. In John Murray's 1965 commentary, the language is more guarded. The comments are less forthright. But Murray did acknowledge that an era of blessing for the church will follow the future conversion of the Jews. Had he wanted to defend an amillennial interpretation of Romans 11, he could have written, "This era of future blessings describes the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth." He did not do so. Instead, he wrote: "The fulness of the Gentiles' denotes unprecedented blessing for them but does not exclude even greater blessings to follow. It is to this subsequent blessing that the restoration of Israel contributes."¹⁰ Even more forcefully, he wrote:

The 'fulness' of Israel, with the implications stated above, is presupposed and from it is drawn the conclusion that the fulness of Israel will involve for the Gentiles a much greater enjoyment of the gospel blessing than that occasioned by Israel's unbelief. Thus there awaits the Gentiles, in their distinctive identity as such, gospel blessing far surpassing anything experienced during the period of Israel's apostasy, and this unprecedented enrichment will be occasioned by the conversion of Israel on a scale commensurate with that of their

9. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 379.

10. Murray, *Romans*, II, pp. 95–96.

earlier disobedience. We are not informed at this point what this unprecedented blessing will be. But in view of the thought governing the context, namely, the conversion of the Gentiles and then that of Israel, we should expect that the enlarged blessing would be the expansion of the success attending the gospel and of the kingdom of God.¹¹

Murray kept returning to this theme in his commentary on Romans. "This restoration of Israel will have a marked beneficial effect, described as 'life from the dead'. Whatever this result may be it must denote a blessing far surpassing in its proportions anything that previously obtained in the unfolding of God's counsel. In this respect it will correspond to the effect accruing from the fulness of Israel (vs. 12)."¹² Murray presented a postmillennial interpretation of Romans 11 in the tradition of Scottish Presbyterianism and Answer 191 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, where Christians are told to pray for the conversion of the Jews.¹³

God's New Covenant kingdom operates in history. It was present even before Christ's crucifixion. Jesus said, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). He repeatedly cast out devils. Then what about a future millennial era? How will it be different from today? Unlike today, large numbers of people will give Jesus Christ full credit for historical progress. There will be enormous progress in every realm of life, as there has been in our day, but most people will no longer attribute this progress to anything but Jesus Christ, who works through His redeemed people to extend His kingdom in history.

The question is: When will this awareness become widespread? The obvious answer is this: after the conversion of the Jews. This may not be the correct answer, but given Paul's arguments in Romans 11, it is the obvious one. Those who reject this answer ought to suggest and then defend exegetically a better one. And it ought to be consistent with the rest of biblical prophecy, especially Isaiah 65:17–20, which prophesies an era of rejoicing by God's covenant people and the ad-

11. *Ibid.*, II, p. 79.

12. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 81–82.

13. His postmillennialism was not acknowledged by most of his students at Westminster Seminary. This was because his lectures on systematic theology did not take a postmillennial position. In the spring of 1964, I audited his class in senior systematics, on eschatology, and his class on Romans 9–16. I noticed that he was presenting a postmillennial position in the latter class and an apparently amillennial position in the former. He did not take a preterist position on Matthew 24:1–34.

vent of long lives for all mankind (pro-postmillennial), and the parable in Matthew 13 of the tares and the wheat, which says specifically that no separation between them in history (the field) will take place until the day of final judgment (anti-rapture).

1. Economic Blessings

Will the blessings of the post-conversion world be limited to spiritual matters? Or will these blessings include economics? Paul does not say in this passage. What he says is that the blessings will be unprecedented: “how much more.” God’s casting away of the Jews has brought the gospel to the entire world. Paul wrote to the church at Colossae: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and **which was preached to every creature which is under heaven**; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Col. 1:21–23). His words are clear: “preached to every creature which is under heaven.” These words were not meant to be taken literally. The gospel had not literally been preached to every worm, mosquito, and tiger on earth. Then what did Paul mean? He meant that the gospel had been carried across the earth. It had spread fast. Representative people in the tribes of man had heard it. The kingdom of God was no longer bottled up in Palestine.

The Jews were steadily losing the kingdom of God, which was being transferred to the church. The final transfer came in A.D. 70.¹⁴ Did this kingdom involve economic blessings? Of course. The positive sanctions attached to corporate obedience were in part economic.

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store (Deut. 28:4–5).¹⁵

The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall es-

14. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

15. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

tablish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:8–13).¹⁶

Why should covenant-keeping gentiles expect anything less than this? Why would the transfer of the institutional kingdom of God from national Israel to the church strip away the desirable economic benefits that had been offered to the nation of Israel? Why should these universally acknowledged economic benefits not be part of God's inheritance to His church, the heir of His earthly kingdom? There are no good biblical reasons.

God had told the Israelites that corporate obedience to His specially revealed law would bring them corporate economic blessings. Paul says here that the Jews someday will corporately come to Christ and thereby re-enter the kingdom through membership in the church. Why should this corporate act of covenant-keeping not re-establish their access to the original covenantal promises given to them through Moses? Why should their temporary removal from membership in the visible kingdom during the era of the gentiles forever remove from them the blessings that had been available to them under the Mosaic Covenant? Paul is prophesying that their conversion will produce unprecedented blessings. If these blessings do not include the realm of economics, then these blessings will not only not be unprecedented, they will be inferior. The Mosaic Covenant will then be shown to the world as having provided greater blessings to ancient Israel than the New Covenant provides to covenant-keepers, even during its most glorious time in history as a result of its combined gentile-Jewish membership. In short, "how much less." This is not what Paul is arguing.

16. *Idem.*

E. Jealous Jews

What will be the great motivation for the Jews to convert corporately to saving faith in the work of Jesus Christ? Paul says it will be their jealousy regarding the gentiles as members of the church. “And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway. I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy” (vv. 9–11). But this jealousy in Paul’s day had not produced their conversion. Rather, it had produced their wrath against the church. Paul himself had been an active agent of this wrath.

There must someday be sufficient jealousy that the Jews, as a nation, will conclude, “The kingdom inheritance that was once ours has been transferred by God to the gentiles. We must affirm our faith in Christ and abandon hope in the restoration of kingdom blessings apart from Christ.” This has not happened. Most Jews for almost two millennia believed that their messiah would come and restore dominion to them as a people. This faith began to wane only after Napoleon gave Jews full citizenship after 1800. Jews subsequently divided into three main camps: Orthodox,¹⁷ Reform, and Conservative. Reform Jews have sought worldly success through participation in the economic life of Western capitalism, but they have increasingly been assimilated into the non-Christian gentile world. Jewish birth rates dropped in the second half of the twentieth century. Intermarriage with gentiles in late twentieth-century America steadily decreased the number of young Jews who were raised to observe their ancient traditions.¹⁸ Most of the adult Jews who do still observe a few of the more famous traditions do so mainly for cultural reasons, not religious reasons, which produces a far less powerful commitment. The trappings of religion are not a long-term corporate substitute for a shared faith in a confession that specifies God’s dealings with man.

An unprecedented situation has developed since 1948: Jews today live mostly in the United States and the State of Israel. In the United States, Reform Jews are steadily being assimilated into the gentile cul-

17. Originally, “Orthodox” was a term of opprobrium applied by liberal, assimilating Western European Jews to Talmudic Jews in the early nineteenth century. The intellectual leader of the Talmudic Jews in Western Europe, Samson R. Hirsch, decided to accept the term and build on it after 1850.

18. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix D.

ture. They constitute the majority of Jews, so Jews are disappearing statistically. In the State of Israel, Jews are vulnerable to a military defeat. It will take only one such comprehensive defeat to threaten their survival as a people. There are very few European Jews in reserve, either in urban ghettos or rural ghettos, as there have always been before. From the days of the Babylonian Empire until the European phase of World War II began on September 1, 1939, they were never threatened as a people by persecution by any one nation or alliance of nations.¹⁹ Now they are. Never before have they deliberately concentrated their numbers geographically. Now they have. Their decision to return to Palestine after World War II has placed half of their eggs in one basket.

Intermarriage and humanism's assimilation processes are systematically reducing the number of eggs in the other basket: the United States. Their greatest threat is not persecution; it is acceptance, but on this basis: "Welcome aboard! Don't maintain a separate economy. Take advantage of the division of labor. Here is a scholarship. Go to college." But in college, the rule is clear: "Leave your religious presuppositions behind." Pluralism is Judaism's greatest enemy, the one which Jews have not successfully resisted as a people.

The same temptation faces Christians. Jews and Christians alike have been seduced by pluralism. The lure of higher education and participation in the general economy and culture has offered Christians and Jews a Faustian bargain—not directly with the devil but indirectly: with the humanist kingdom of man. Jews are still not strongly tempted to become Christians, but they are strongly tempted to abandon Judaism. They are not yet jealous of Christians. They are jealous of humanists. The humanists have lured them out of Judaism by promoting a lie: "A religious person can be equally pious even after he has abandoned his religion's supernatural assumptions about God, man, law, causation, and the future. Supernatural religion, when stripped of its kingdom in history, is still equally valid." This has been an enormously successful lie.

Millions of Christians in the United States have resisted this lie by turning their backs on the benefits of participation in the general culture. Those denominations and congregational associations that have experienced the fastest growth through evangelism are least likely to

19. During the war with Rome, there was a large community of Jews in Persia, descendants of those Jews—a large majority—who did not return to Israel under Ezra and Nehemiah.

have members who plan to attend the best universities or attend graduate school. Those denominations whose members are more likely to attend the best schools have been growing more slowly or actually shrinking since 1926, the year after the Scopes trial.²⁰ The cultural choice that took place in 1925—Darwin vs. the Bible—led to a self-conscious rejection by most American fundamentalists of any desire to exercise leadership in the general culture. The humanists' offer of participation on humanism's terms was less effective among fundamentalists, who concentrated on expanding their numbers. The fundamentalists made people this offer: "Come out from among them!" Millions of Americans did so, 1926–1976.²¹ Whenever American fundamentalists have sought political influence, they have done so far more self-consciously as members of a non-loyal opposition. The post-1975 political/ethical issue that made this non-loyal positioning ethically mandatory in the eyes of millions of Christians was the Supreme Court's legalization of abortion in 1973. There is no middle ground of compromise between a dead baby and a live one. It was the abortion issue, more than any other, that persuaded a minority of fundamentalists to adopt the slogan, "there is no neutrality." They do not really believe this, as their continuing opposition to biblical law indicates, but at least they now say it.

Jews today are not jealous of Christians. They are jealous of gentiles. Pluralism offers them the legal right to compete in the quest for the things of this world. They compete very well. Their problem is, they surrender their covenantal identities when they surrender their supernaturalism. As soon as they see success as the fruit of aggressive competition rather than the fruit of adherence to Talmudic tradition, they have abandoned the covenant of Judaism. They have done this by the millions, and they have justified this decision by telling themselves that to be a good Jew does not require personal faith in the authority of

20. Joel A. Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929–1942," *Church History*, 49 (1980).

21. In 1976, the Presidential candidacy of Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter lured fundamentalists back into the political arena as self-conscious Christians. When Carter turned out to be no different from other humanistic political liberals, Ronald Reagan's 1980 candidacy attracted large numbers of fundamentalists. After Reagan decisively defeated Carter, he retained the support of fundamentalists during his eight years as President. In private conversations with fundamentalist pastors, Reagan indicated that he believed in Christ as his savior, but he was never open about this. Prior to his 1966 election as Governor of California, he had attended Bel Air Presbyterian Church in the West Los Angeles area, whose pastor, Donn Moomah, was an evangelical.

the Torah, the prophets, the Talmud, and rabbinical law. Yet these are what served as the core of Judaism after A.D. 70. What kept Jews together as a separate people were its claims regarding God's supernatural dealings with the Jews as a people, which involved, above all, a messianic future. Remove Jews' faith in a literal messiah, and Judaism becomes a cultural religion. Insert Zionism, and Judaism becomes a political religion. Political religions do not last for millennia. Neither do nations that rest on political religion.

Paul says that Jews will survive as a self-consciously separate people until the fulness of the gentiles arrives. This means that today's political-cultural Judaism cannot dominate Judaism indefinitely. Birth rates and intermarriage rates indicate that liberal Judaism has no future. Unless liberal Judaism does what liberal Protestantism has failed to do—recover its lost growth—Orthodox Judaism will replace liberal Judaism until the fulness of the gentiles.

Conclusion

Romans 11 is an important eschatological passage. It tells us that an event must intervene before Jesus brings the final judgment. This event is the conversion of the Jews. God will someday redeem the Jews as a people, meaning that a large percentage of them will, in a brief period of time, abandon Judaism and convert to Christianity, which will vastly increase God's blessings on His church. Future positive sanctions on God's church are tied prophetically to God's special grace shown to the Jews as a people. This conversion will be an act of corporate inheritance analogous to God's act of corporate disinheritance, which was taking place in Paul's day. But there would be a difference. If the cutting off of the Jews corporately has brought the blessing of redemption to gentiles corporately through membership in the institutional church, how much more should gentile Christians expect when the Jews are at last brought back into the kingdom corporately through membership in the church!

8

THE WHOLE OF OUR LIVES

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1–2).

The theocentric focus in this passage is God as the owner of every man. He places a legal claim on the whole of our lives. This is point one of the biblical covenant: sovereignty.¹

A. The Meaning of Sacrifice

Paul, in Romans 11, presented the case for the future conversion of the Jews to saving faith as a separate people. Here he switches to the theme of total sacrifice. He is writing to Romans. For Romans, total sacrifice meant human sacrifice. This is what it meant for the Greeks, too. Both societies had originally practiced human sacrifice.² Rome in Paul's day still imposed the death penalty on any vestal virgin who allowed the city's sacred fire to go out. She was buried alive.³ Paul was not advocating this form of living sacrifice. He did not want redeemed people to die; he wanted them to live.

For Jews, the image of a total sacrifice hearkened back to the whole

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Lord Acton, "Human Sacrifice" (1863), in *Essays in Religion, Politics, and Morality*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1988), III, ch. 19.

3. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), III:VI, p. 147.

burnt offering (Lev. 1). But this could not be a living sacrifice. A sacrificial animal had to be slain before it was placed on the altar. The exception, theologically speaking, was Jesus Christ. He was placed on the altar alive: a perfect sacrifice, unlike bulls, lambs, turtledoves, and goats.

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (Heb. 9:28–10:4).

Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:8–10).

We do not sacrifice ourselves on our own behalf in order to gain right legal standing with God. Jesus Christ has done this for us. Yet Paul speaks here of presenting our bodies to God as living sacrifices. We call upon God to consume us, just as He consumed the Old Covenant sacrifices. We become in effect drink offerings before God (Num. 15:5, 7, 10). We are poured out before Him. This requires our complete break with this world: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (v. 2). We must surrender the whole of our lives. This involves both body and mind, appearance and confession.

God possesses a legal claim on all men. This claim is made visible in the rite of baptism. The Christian acknowledges publicly that God possesses this legal claim, or else his parents acknowledged this publicly on his behalf through infant baptism. Earlier in this epistle, Paul described one implication of baptism: death to sin. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been

planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:3–6). Here he describes a positive implication: service to God. Our lives are no longer our own. They belong to Christ.

Christ’s followers are supposed to regard their lives as utterly forfeited. They must place themselves completely at Christ’s disposal. This donation to God is their reasonable service. Paul makes it plain that everything we possess of any value rightfully belongs to God. We are to offer this to God, holding nothing back.

The highest military honor in the United States is the Congressional Medal of Honor. It is awarded, generally posthumously, to men who have performed “above and beyond the call of duty.” This phrase can never apply to Christian service. The Christian’s call of duty is total. He cannot go beyond it. He must not think of himself as superior to others when he performs well. He has only met his call of duty. “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (v. 3). A sober assessment of one’s performance, given the presupposition of the requirement of total sacrifice, leads to a sober conclusion. The individual has performed well, but this was only what was expected.

B. God’s Monopoly of Service

God possesses a legal monopoly: complete ownership of each person. He is the sole owner as well as the soul’s owner. He does not share this legal claim with anyone. But there are false contenders.

The Communist Party at one time commanded a degree of loyalty comparable to God’s. Benjamin Gitlow was one of the founders of the Communist Party of America in the early 1920s. He was expelled by Stalin in 1929. In 1924 and 1928, he was the Communist Party’s candidate for Vice President of the United States. He defected from the Party in the late 1930s. He testified against the Party in front of a Congressional investigating committee. He chose as the title of his study of American Communism, *The Whole of Their Lives* (1948). He understood what the Party had demanded from him and all other members: complete sacrifice. This aspect of Party rule was discussed by other de-

fectors. Douglas Hyde, a high official in the Communist Party of England in the 1940s, made the same point in his memoir, *Dedication and Leadership* (1956). Hyde joined the Roman Catholic Church at the time of his defection from the Party.

No human institution may lawfully place such a claim on any man's life. Organizations may officially do this, but they cannot sustain such loyalty, generation after generation. I wrote to Hyde in the 1980's, hoping to get the right to reprint a series of lectures he had presented to church workers. He had taken certain Communist Party training techniques and had reworked them for application in service within the church. He refused to allow me to reprint the lectures. He told me that they had been delivered in an era in which such dedication by Party members was common. By the mid-1980s, this degree of dedication had disappeared. He did not want the public to imagine that the Communist Party still represented the threat that it had. He was correct about the threat. By 1989, faith in Communism had visibly departed inside the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed.

For any human institution to claim such dedication from its followers is to make a false claim of divinity. It requires the divinization of some aspect of the creation. God will not tolerate such claims. He is a jealous God.

C. Dedication and Profitability

God requires total dedication. This dedication is always mediated institutionally. It is not just that people are required to pray to God. They are also required to obey Him. This means that they must serve Him in history and through history. They serve Him by serving in the church, family, and state. They serve Him in their occupations. They serve Him enthusiastically. Paul writes: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:22–24).

The goal here is dedicated, enthusiastic service to those people in lawful authority. Men serve those in authority above them. In the free market, this means that producers ultimately serve customers. It is the customer who possesses final authority in the free market, for he pos-

sesses the most marketable commodity: money. Money is the free market's means of bringing sanctions. Customers decide to buy or not to buy. This imposes positive sanctions on some sellers, and negative sanctions on others.

In the next section of chapter 12, Paul describes the division of labor in the church. The church is described as a living organism with specialized organs: members. Each organ has a function that supports the rest of the body.⁴ The goal is service to God. In the early verses, Paul establishes the individual basis of the church's corporate life: personal sacrifice. When people adopt this attitude of service, the church prospers.

This is true of any institution whose members adopt this view of service. No institution may lawfully claim total service, but it can become the beneficiary of workers who have as their personal ideal their complete dedication to God. *Christians who adopt this outlook and who then discipline themselves to achieve it become highly valuable members of whatever organization employs them.* The attitude of complete dedication to God produces employees who are profitable. They put more wealth into the employing organization than their competitors do. They in effect buy attention from their employers.

There should be a premium on hiring covenant-keepers. *Organizations should recognize that covenant-keepers perform better than their rivals at any given wage.* This should make them more desirable employees. They should be near the top of the list of those who are "first hired, last fired." If this is not the case, then there is an abnormality. Perhaps they are not being faithful to Paul's injunction. Or perhaps employers do not yet recognize their superior performance. But, over time, faithful service gains attention. It is always rare. It calls attention to itself. The supreme Old Testament example is Joseph, who faithfully served Potiphar, the jailer, and the Pharaoh's cup-bearer. Another is Ruth, the gleaner.

Dedicated service increases social cooperation. It reduces the risk of failure. *A society filled with people who possess this ideal of service will gain greater wealth, including greater wealth per capita, than a society that lacks it.* The earth will be subdued by people who possess this outlook on service. The dominion covenant is fulfilled in such a way that those who obey God on this point become the heirs of the world. "What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in

4. Chapter 9.

the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 25:12–13).

Conclusion

Paul announced God’s comprehensive claim on His people. God’s redeemed people are supposed to serve God without reservation. They are to hold back nothing. They do, of course, just as Ananias and Sapphira did (Acts 5).⁵ But Jesus Christ did not hold anything back. His perfect sacrifice, in life and death, becomes the possession of all those who are redeemed by grace through faith. Christ’s perfect righteousness is imputed—transferred judicially—by God the Father to Christ’s followers.⁶

The goal of perfect service is inescapable. We are to become living sacrifices. As God’s people approach this ideal, however imperfectly, they serve God by serving other men. They serve in institutions and in institutional settings. They begin to gain a reputation for humble, efficient service to humanity. This advances the kingdom of God in history.

They become more valuable employees because they do serve their employers faithfully. This is how they serve God. This makes covenant-keepers more desirable employees.

5. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

6. Chapter 4.

9

THE CHURCH AS AN INTERDEPENDENT BODY

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:4–8).

The theocentric focus of this passage is Christ. Christ is head of His church: hierarchy. This is point two of the biblical covenant.¹ Elsewhere, Paul writes of Christ: “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:17–18). The church is Christ’s body.

A. The Metaphor of Members

Membership today means “belongs to.” People are members of clubs, associations, teams, and churches. The original meaning of “member” is closer to Paul’s metaphor: an appendage of a body. This usage is not common today. Because of this, the metaphor has lost much of its power. It is still a useful metaphor. Paul describes the church as a living organism, a body. He does not say it is *like* a living organism. He does not offer an analogy. He says that we *are* members

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 1.

of a living organism. The church's members participate in a society called the church, but Paul describes it as a body. Members in a *judicial* sense he describes as members in a *biological* sense. Paul does not describe church members as cogs in a great machine. He describes them as appendages—members—of a body.

Sociologist Robert Nisbet observed that "The organism serves not only as a model of growth for contemplating the world, but also as a model of structure, of the articulation of separate entities, such as the heart and lungs. To emphasize the harmonious interaction of parts in an organization, it is customary to use 'organic' as highest praise."² Metaphors of organic change are more commonly used than metaphors of mechanical change. This may be because mechanical change is cyclical. A machine does not grow. It performs a limited task over and over. A machine has no sensations. A person does not normally look at a broken machine and then make a comparison with himself. He does not see a broken machine rusting in a junk yard, and think to himself, "How terrifying!" A machine has a maker, an owner, or a user, but it has no head. A body has a head. A body develops through time. This is why the organic analogy is far more powerful than mechanism for describing social processes or organizations.

As surely as a body dies without a head, so does an institution die without leadership. It may merely flounder at first. The phrase, "running around like a chicken with its head cut off," is used to describe an organization that has no leadership. It runs around aimlessly before it dies. But, of course, organizations do not literally run around. They have no feet. Either they stay in operation or they close. The proper question is: Does an organization operate in terms of a shared vision? A leader must articulate this vision and impose sanctions in terms of it. For a hierarchy to function, there must be a representative agent who speaks with authority, and who makes decisions to delegate part of this authority. There must be a hierarchy in order to gain the advantages of the division of labor.³ Institutional cooperation is structured by a hierarchy with a representative figure who possesses the authority to impose sanctions.

Paul describes Christ as the head of the church. This head cannot die, nor can the body, which extends into eternity (Rev. 21; 22). But this body can lose appendages. A body that is missing an appendage

2. Robert Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 219.

3. Chapter 1.

does not function as well as a body with all of its appendages. If an appendage does not work properly, the body suffers. Paul calls on members of the church at Rome to do their work well. This will benefit the church even as a body benefits from healthy appendages. Paul expects his readers to understand what he is getting at: strife is bad for a church. He calls them to righteous behavior. “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:9–13).

There are conceptual weaknesses with organic metaphors that describe institutions. Unless organic metaphors are carefully qualified, they are not perceived as judicial; they become merely functional. *The covenantal issues of life are judicial*. It is not simply that an institution has a leader. The leader serves *representatively*: in between the organization and the individuals who lawfully own it.

Paul could have limited his language to strictly judicial categories. He could also have invoked the image of a family. He did neither. What is it about a body that is so powerful an image? I suggest that the economic principle of the *division of labor* is best understood in terms of an *organic metaphor*. We can easily understand the operation of a social organization when it is described as a body. A body that experiences conflict among its members may become helpless. A person whose body suffers epileptic seizures is unreliable. A person who suffers from spastic discoordination is limited in what he can do. People see such afflictions in others and shudder. “What if I were so afflicted?” It frightens them. The affliction is of a specific kind: discoordination.

Paul takes this common fear and makes use of it. How terrible when a church suffers from conflicts. This discoordination threatens to paralyze the church. He is making a comparison: if you fear becoming physically afflicted in such a way, you should fear that the church of Christ should become similarly afflicted. Paul wants Christians to regard strife in the church as they would regard epileptic seizures. Christians should not take lightly such disruptions inside the church.

B. Joint Productivity, Joint Service

Paul says that we possess different gifts, “gifts differing according

to the grace that is given to us.” This diversity of gifts is a benefit to the church. The church has within its membership people with many kinds of abilities. They can offer their gifts to the church in faithful service. The church is then in a position to offer to its members and to the world a wide range of assistance. The church becomes a clearing house for a diversity of services. The larger the church grows, the greater its range of services.

The same principle of organization operates in the world outside the institutional church. An increasing division of labor is a major benefit to a society. Men have been given many different skills and insights. A social order that encourages people to offer their services for sale to others is able to increase the wealth of its participants, meaning an increasing range of choices. Adam Smith, in Chapter 1 of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), relied on the principle of the division of labor to explain how people can increase their personal wealth through voluntary exchange and production for a market.

The institutional church is not a profit-seeking entity. It is funded by the tithes and donations of its members, not by profit. It offers healing of all kinds to its members, beginning with physical healing. “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). Service begins with love. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35). “Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits” (Rom. 12:16). As the church grows, more people are brought into the community of saints. Some of them have needs that they cannot satisfy outside the covenant community. Others possess abilities that can meet the needs of others. The church enables those with needs to gain the help required to restore them. As they become restored to health in the widest sense, they can become sources of aid to those who are not yet healthy.

Covenant-keepers serve Christ by serving each other. This is true inside the institutional church and outside. Then what is unique or different about the institutional church? Answer: it alone offers the sacraments. God’s *special judicial presence* in the sacramental rites is unique. Participation in sacramental rites brings God’s people under God’s judgment. Sanctions are dispensed to church members by God as a direct result of their participation in the sacraments. These sanc-

tions can be positive⁴ or negative.⁵ A sense of community is one result of participation in the sacraments. Church members participate in a community that has been called by God to leave a world that is ultimately perishing, yet they must return to this perishing world when the worship service ends. Their worship inside is designed to make them better citizens outside. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). Formal worship strengthens them in their status as residents of two worlds: eternity and time. Jesus prayed publicly to His Father: “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:14–18).

Paul in this passage calls his readers to faithful service inside the institutional church. His goal is to persuade his readers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to Christ. The starting point for their sacrificial service is the institutional church. The proper motivational impulse is charity, not earthly profit.

The division of labor aids church members in their ability to serve each other. Each member knows that there are other members who possess skills that may benefit him sometime. He can put his mind at greater rest because the church includes people who are willing to serve each other. The church in this respect seems more like a family than a body, yet Paul describes the church in terms of a body. It is almost if he is reluctant to encourage his readers to associate the church with the family. A family is the more obvious mental association, yet Paul uses a metaphor instead: body. Otherwise, many people would be tempted to proclaim the structure of a family to serve as a model for the church. The church is not a family.⁶ It has sacraments. A family does not. The church extends into heaven. Men there have access to the ultimate sacrament, the tree of life. “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). A family does not

4. “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

5. “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (I Cor. 11:30).

6. Gary North, *Baptized Patriarchalism: The Cult of the Family* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1995). (<http://bit.ly/gnbap>)

continue in heaven. "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30).

A church member knows that whatever he lacks, others in the church may possess. The larger the church or association of churches, the more likely that there will be providers of every kind of service. A member does not have to master every area of service, which is beyond his abilities. He need only concentrate on the limited range of services that he performs best. The same message appears in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12.

C. The Institutional Church

Paul is not speaking here of the church in the sense of believers in general, i.e., the invisible church. He is speaking of the body of Christ as an identifiable organization that uniquely represents Christ in history and eternity. Paul's audience was a group of Christians who were assembled together to hear the reading of his letter. This organization had members. (Our term for a group reflects Paul's metaphor: **organization**.) It had a structure: hierarchy. This hierarchy had sanctions. The focus of his concern in this section is the smooth functioning of an institution. The same is true of I Corinthians 6 on church courts.

The body of Christ represents Christ visibly in a way that the family and the civil government do not. This is why the church extends into eternity. The family and civil government do not. *This means that the central institution in God's kingdom is the institutional church.* Sociological analysis often begins with the family. The idea of the centrality of the family is not a biblical principle. It is far more pagan than Christian. It places biological relationships above sacramental relationships. It places loyalty to death-bound people above loyalty to the resurrected Christ, who is represented in history by His body. Jesus severely condemned the idea of family loyalty's being superior to loyalty to Him. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:34–37). The idea of the centrality of the state is pagan. This was the great heresy of Classical civilization.

This ideal, too, is in conflict with the biblical principle of the centrality of the church. It is the church alone that lawfully offers the dual covenantal oath-signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are eternal sanctions, not just temporal.

The state can represent Christ judicially. So can the family. But both institutions can also represent other worldviews, other gods. The church is uniquely Christ's. The sacraments are *judicial oath signs* that point uniquely to *God's final judgment*. The sanctions that are imposed by family and state do not uniquely point to God's final judgment. Excommunication—separation from the sacraments—judicially represents hell. Paul never uses the following language with respect to family or state. "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Cor. 5:3–5).

Family and state sanctions do not covenantally deliver a man's body to Satan, nor do they involve a man's spirit. Family and state are common-grace institutions. Their covenantal blessings are available to all people irrespective of people's personal confessions. The church is a special-grace institution that is lawfully open only to those who confess Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). The church is uniquely Christ's body.

Conclusion

The church is the body of Christ. It has many members, Paul says here. It possesses unity. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." It also possesses diversity: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." Each member is to serve God by serving others. This fulfills Paul's initial command: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

The division of labor strengthens the church. It creates a broad range of talents and services. Individuality is affirmed by this broad range of talents, yet institutional unity is also established: a more self-

sufficient entity.

Paul places no restrictions on either this diversity or this unity. He does not suggest that members should not cooperate with each other. The range of services is limited only by the size of the church. There is no indication that the church is to be broken into non-cooperating subdivisions. On the contrary, the church is Christ's body. It cannot be broken up into noncooperating subdivisions without injuring it. The range of the division of labor is limited only by the size of the church. The church is international. The division of labor within the church is international. In the midst of international violence, there should be a beacon of peace. In the midst of noncooperation among peoples and nations, there should be an example of cooperation. The church is designed by God to be the premier example. When it is not the premier example, then either it is at fault or the observers are.

10

COALS OF FIRE

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17–21).

The theocentric basis of this passage is God as the final judge: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Goal of Peace

A continuing theme in Paul's epistles is the goal of peace. He wrote to Timothy: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:1–2).² The quest for peace is important in the spread of the gospel. Peace allows Christians to bring the message of salvation to people in a non-threatening way. Peace is good for the gospel in the same way that peace is good for trade. It reduces costs.

The more that people must spend to defend their property, the less money remains to improve services and products. The same is true of building the church. The more that Christians must spend in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

defending themselves in courts, the less they have for helping the poor, sending missionaries, and building schools.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the savings which peace provides will not be used to fund personal luxury. The wealth that peace provides can also be used to confirm men in their assertion of autonomy. This is what Moses warned against. “And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:17–18).³ So, peace is a factor of production, one that is paid for by peaceable behavior and prayer. These are the currency of peace, not gold or silver. Gold and silver purchase protection when peace is in short supply.

B. Rendering Good for Evil

Jesus offered a similar plan of action.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matt. 5:39–44).

When facing tyrants, Jesus said, go out of your way to cooperate with them. Call attention to yourself as a person who does not cause trouble. We can call this strategy “bribing tyrants.”⁴ When facing evil men, do not challenge them directly. Do not give them an opportunity to get even with you. They are evil. They have bad motives. They delight in revenge. Recognize this in advance, Jesus implied. When facing a hammer, do not look like a nail.

Paul writes: “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 21, 22.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (vv. 20–21). This is a direct citation from Proverbs: “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee” (Prov. 25:21–22). Paul here makes the connection between Jesus’ instruction in the Sermon on the Mount and Solomon’s instruction a millennium earlier. Paul clarifies the strategy by calling attention to the negative sanction: coals of fire. The strategy has a positive aspect, which Jesus referred to: love your enemies. But it also has a negative aspect, which Solomon referred to: heap coals of fire on their heads.

How can the positive sanctions and the negative sanctions be reconciled? By the doctrine of final judgment.

C. Final Judgment

The Old Covenant had almost nothing to say about life after death. Daniel refers briefly to the final judgment.

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12:1–3).

This is the clearest statement of final judgment in the Old Covenant. Job’s statement is less clear: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25–26). There are no other statements. There was Samuel’s appearance to Saul and the “witch” of Endor (I Sam. 28:15).

Solomon’s statement did not refer to final judgment. In the New Testament, Jesus’ doctrine of hell makes clear what was implied by Daniel’s statement, “shame and everlasting contempt.” Jesus warned: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The description of hell in Luke 16 is graphic.⁵ Even

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd

more explicit is John's statement regarding final judgment: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15).

There is no doubt that Paul's reference to coals of fire refers to the final judgment. But how can being good to an evil-doer increase the number of coals on his head, i.e., increase his eternal misery? Because of Jesus' teaching about information and responsibility.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).⁶

The principle is this: *greater knowledge creates greater responsibility*. Therefore, when an unregenerate person receives blessings from God, including blessings from God's designated covenantal agents (covenant-keepers), his responsibility increases. If he remains unregenerate until his death, these undeserved blessings—grace—testify against him. All of the blessings in history become curses in eternity.

D. Means of Special Grace

There is the positive side of righteous dealing. The covenant-breaker can see that a covenant-keeper is not reacting as expected. He is not returning evil for evil. This sets the covenant-keeper visibly apart from other people. Jesus discussed this in the context of His command to return good for evil. "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:46–48).⁷ If you are no better than a publican—a tax collector—then you are not much good at all, Jesus said.

The evil person is not morally blind. He has the work of the law written in his heart, Paul insists (Rom. 2:14–15).⁸ He can see the difference in attitude between the typical sinner and the untypical coven-

ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

7. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 10.

8. Chapter 3.

ant-keeper. The policy of returning good for evil eventually eats at the evil man's conscience. He may try to provoke an evil response by further evil, but then his evil-doing is more of a challenge to the covenant-keeper's ability to keep the faith than it is a desire to inflict evil for its own sake. It is a test of commitment, a measure of commitment. It takes an abnormally self-conscious evil-doer to persist in this sort of exercise. The typical evil-doer grows weary of such testing. It is more desirable to inflict his will on someone who fights back. This resistance provides him with an opportunity to display his power. To use a modern example, a thug may steal an old woman's purse, but he is unlikely to return to taunt her. Beating up an old woman does not demonstrate his manhood. It may even lead to a challenge to his manhood by a rival thug, who has little respect for someone who beats up old women.

The testimony of non-resistance is powerful. It disorients the evil-doer. He may not understand that this non-resistance comes from a position of emotional strength. In one of the most significant events in the history of the United States, the baseball player, Jackie Robinson, was brought up from the Negro League to the major leagues, which were all-white, by the Brooklyn Dodgers' general manager, Branch Rickey. Rickey had hired him in 1945 and assigned him to the Dodgers' all-white minor league team in Montreal, Canada, where there was much less racial discrimination and very few blacks. (Two decades earlier, Rickey had been the first owner to buy a minor league team to use as a recruiting-training system.) In 1945, no other black athlete was allowed to play in a major professional team sport in the United States. Robinson would test the color barrier in professional team sports.⁹ He had been legendary in the Negro League for his temper and for his resistance to racial discrimination by whites whenever he could get away with it without going to jail.¹⁰ As an Army officer, he had been court martialed, though not convicted, in 1944 for his refusal to sit in the back of an Army bus in the South, where the requirement was universal in non-military buses. Rickey promised to bring him up to the Dodgers in 1947, but with one proviso: for three seasons, Robinson could not fight back in any way against racial slurs from fans or players, which might even include Dodgers players. He could not fight

9. Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

10. When a gasoline station attendant refused to let him use the toilet, he told the team's bus driver to stop filling the tank, which was a big sale: 100 gallons. The attendant then relented. This was the first time anyone in the black league had risked this, or even thought of it: "no toilet facilities—no gasoline sale."

back off the playing field, either. Rickey asked him if he would agree to this. Robinson did not answer immediately. He mentally counted the cost. Then he agreed. He kept his part of the bargain. So did his wife as she sat in the stands. By the end of three years, he was so well respected by the other players that he no longer faced the problem. Meanwhile, other teams had hired players out of the Negro League. Robinson was a highly talented player, but talent was not enough. He had to swallow his pride and his anger in order to serve as a wedge for other members of his race.¹¹

Paul's requirement was covenantally based. It was tied to eternal sanctions: heaven or hell. It went beyond this division. The coals of fire would accumulate in hell. There are differences in rewards in eternity, he taught (I Cor. 3:13–15).¹² There also differences in punishments in eternity.

E. Social Cooperation

Christians are supposed to treat evil men well. They are to gain the reputation of being reliable servants and colleagues, even to the extent of dealing magnanimously with oppressors. This brings into play the important “how much more” factor. “If these people are reliable when working with oppressors, how much more reliable will they be when working with well-meaning people?” If Christians are low-cost workers, meaning trouble-free workers, in situations commanded by troublemakers, how much more will they cooperate with decent people?

A reputation for being a low-cost worker is an economic asset. When an employer is looking to hire someone, he wants a cooperative employee. Similarly, when he is looking to fire someone, he prefers to keep a cooperative employee. The economic law is this: “When the price falls, more will be demanded.” When the cost of working with someone falls, he will receive more job opportunities. He will possess an advantage over competitors who are not equally easy to work with.

Paul's command, like Jesus' before him, is a means of peace and prosperity for those who obey it. The person who follows these guide-

11. He was not the first member of his family to challenge the racist attitudes of his day. His older brother, a sprinter, won the silver medal behind the great black sprinter Jesse Owens in the 200-meter dash at the 1936 Olympic games in Germany: a challenge to the race-based Nazi movement and a cause of acclaim by American fans.

12. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

lines will receive a reward: more opportunities for profitable service. This is not “pie in the sky by and by.” This is a system of temporal rewards.

What of temporal coals of fire? Think of the tyrant. If a man persecutes evil people, the common man is not concerned. But if he persecutes decent people, he will find that common people grow suspicious of his motives and his character. They will tend to avoid working with him or for him. Who can safely trust someone who persecutes decent people? Every tyrant requires voluntary cooperation. He does not possess sufficient resources to gain cooperation solely by threat of violence. He must gain the support of people who are self-governed. People withhold such support from those whose motives and character they do not trust. They may not resist, but they do not offer cooperation voluntarily. This increases the costs of production.

Conclusion

Paul’s command to treat persecutors well is a means of the expansion of God’s kingdom in history. It benefits covenant-keepers in history. It also testifies to God’s common grace to all men in history, as Jesus said. “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:44–45).¹³ It is a means for bringing eternal sanctions against persecutors. It produces results that hamper the expansion of evil in history by bringing tyranny into disrepute. Men withhold cooperation from tyrants.

This is a strategy to gain peace. Peace is an economic asset, a benefit that must be paid for. The cost in this case is self-government: the overcoming of the natural desire to reward evil with evil.

13. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 10.

11

LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour (Rom. 13:1–7).

The theocentric principle that undergirds these commandments is God as the supreme authority: hierarchy.¹ At the top of the pyramids of institutional power is God, who delegates authority to men.

A. Plural Authorities

Paul speaks of higher powers. Strong's *Concordance* defined the Greek word *exousia* as follows: "(in the sense of ability); privilege, i.e. (subj.) force, capacity, competency, freedom, or (obj.) mastery (concr. magistrate, superhuman, potentate, token of control), delegated influence: authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength." It means, basically, lawful authorities. There are more than one. There is no

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

single hierarchy in this life. God has created competing jurisdictions in order to eliminate the possibility of an absolute centralized tyranny. “And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city” (Gen. 11:6–8).² A national civil government or empire has always faced competition: from foreign civil rulers, local civil rulers, families, kinship groups, churches, voluntary associations, and businesses.³

Paul says here that lawful authorities deserve obedience. He does not say or imply that there is only one lawful institutional authority that must be obeyed. In his confrontation with the high priest, he made this point clear. Even though he was an apostle and in possession of lawful authority, he did not deliberately challenge the high priest. “And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people” (Acts 23:2–5). Paul honored lawful authorities. But when one authority could be used to offset another, Paul set them in competition to gain his freedom. “But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided” (Acts 23:6–7). The Sadducee party, which denied the bodily re-

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 19.

3. Defenders of the modern state sometimes claim final earthly jurisdiction for it: *the divine right of civil government*—no earthly appeal to anything higher. Such a claim was taken far more seriously in 1940 than at the end of the twentieth century. The high-water mark of the West’s faith in civil government is now behind us. The inevitable bankruptcy of all of the Western governments’ pay-as-you-go, tax-supported, compulsory retirement programs will eliminate most of the remaining traces of this faith before the mid-twenty-first century. On these statistically doomed programs, see Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America—and the World* (Times Books, 1999).

surrection, was associated with the temple's priesthood. Paul's words to the Pharisees immediately undermined Ananias' power to prosecute Paul on the authority of the priesthood.

No power is established on earth that is not established by God. On this point, Paul is clear. "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (v. 1). This English phrase—"the powers that be"—has come down through the centuries to describe the supreme rulers in a society. Therefore, obedience to them is biblically mandatory. "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (v. 2). Because God has established authorities to rule over men, men are required by God to obey rulers.

Paul lived under the rule of Nero, a tyrant by any standard. Yet he writes: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good" (v. 4) Christians are to do good deeds, gaining praise from their rulers. God has set rulers in seats of authority to be a terror to evil-doers. Let these rulers devote their efforts to overcoming their enemies, not look for rebellious Christians to prosecute.

There are rulers who themselves are evil and allied with evil men. Nevertheless, Paul says to obey. The goal of governments is to defend social order. Every government has rules. It enforces standards with sanctions. Most civil rulers want more authority for themselves. They want things to run smoothly. God has built into human nature the desire to live in a predictable world. For predictability, there must be rules and sanctions.⁴ This is why rules and sanctions make life easier. Tyrants want predictability. The closer to righteousness the civil laws are, the more voluntary cooperation that rulers will gain from their subordinates. Rulers cannot rule without subordinates who voluntarily cooperate. If everyone refused to obey a law, there would not be enough police to enforce it. This is why rulers prosecute a representative figure. This sends a message to the public: "If you don't obey, and everyone else does, we'll get you." But there comes a day when many people take a chance and deliberately disobey the law. They refuse to cooperate with the civil government. On that day, the illusion of state omnipotence ends.

The early church lived under a pagan civil tyranny. Rome man-

4. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*., chaps. 3, 4.

dated idolatry as a means of extending the power of the empire. This polytheistic system of civil rule sought intercultural unity by divinizing the emperor. But Christians refused to offer public sacrifices to “the genius of the emperor,” for they understood the theology of ancient empires: the divinization of man and the state. For this rebellion, they were intermittently persecuted for almost three centuries. They did not rebel by taking up arms. They merely refused to participate in false worship. Over time, they gained the reputation for being good citizens and reliable subordinates. In the fourth century, they inherited the Roman empire. They had served under tyranny, and they became rulers when this tyranny collapsed into the chaos of civil war and bankruptcy. Nonviolent disobedience to civil authority on this one point eventually gained Christians civil authority. Otherwise, they were obedient. This is a biblical principle of authority: he who seeks to rule should first serve. Jesus told His disciples, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:25–26).⁵ But there is another principle of biblical authority. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Both principles must be honored. Both principles must be intellectually defended by covenant-keepers. Both must be honored by the flock.

B. The Legitimacy of Governments

Paul’s discussion of institutional authorities follows a passage that challenges personal vengeance. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). If personal vengeance is wrong, then how does God bring vengeance in history? Through civil government. The text does not say that vengeance is wrong. It says that God possesses final authority to impose vengeance. He has delegated the authority to impose physical vengeance to two governments: civil and family. Peter agreed with Paul on this point. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 51.

do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully" (I Peter 2:13–19).

Neither Peter nor Paul demanded obedience to civil government at the expense of obedience to other lawful governments. Again, Peter explicitly told the Jewish leaders, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29b). Yet they had the authority to beat him, which they did (Acts 5:40). He submitted to the beating, but not to their command to stop preaching the gospel. He disobeyed, but he submitted to the sanctions for the sake of his disobedience. So did Paul.

The point is this: Peter and Paul self-consciously operated within the existing Roman legal system. Paul understood Roman law, and as a Roman citizen, he invoked it. "But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar" (Acts 25:9–11). His words, "I refuse not to die," affirmed the legitimacy of civil government, including capital punishment. But, at the same time, he appealed to Caesar to escape the jurisdiction of Festus, who Paul believed was acting on behalf of the Jews. This was consistent with his affirmation of the ministerial office of civil magistrates.

The anarcho-capitalist rejects all forms of civil government. He can point to every kind of tax as distorting the free market.⁶ He sees the free market as legitimately autonomous. But then come the problems of violence and sin. How can these be predictably restrained? The biblical answer is government, including civil government. In an anarcho-capitalist world of profit-seeking private armies, the result is the warlord society. Militarily successful private armies will always seek to establish their monopolistic rule by killing the competition, literally.

6. Murray N. Rothbard, *Power and Market* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1970] 2006). (<http://bit.ly/RothbardPAM>)

Civil governments always reappear. They are one of God's four ordained systems of government: self-government, church government, family government, and civil government. All four are sealed by an oath. All four involve sanctions.

Christians cannot legitimately adopt the libertarian quest to establish a world devoid of civil government. Sin mandates civil government and civil sanctions. The right of civil rulers to impose physical punishments is affirmed clearly by Paul in Acts 25. He affirms in Romans 13 the legitimacy of civil government among other legitimate governments. He says that rulers are ordained by God as His ministers. This is powerful language. It invokes the authority of God on behalf of the state. If Paul is correct, then anarcho-capitalism is incorrect. There is no way around this.

C. Crime vs. the Division of Labor

The threat of crime forces men to allocate scarce economic resources to the defense against criminals. The state is the primary institutional means of crime prevention. The state imposes negative sanctions on convicted criminals. The goal is to uphold justice by means of fear. "And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. 19:18–21).⁷ Fear adds to the cost to criminal behavior. As the economist says, when the cost of anything increases, other things remaining equal, less of it is demanded. This is the goal of negative civil sanctions: less crime.

The expense of crime-prevention reduces men's wealth. They believe that this expenditure prevents an even greater reduction of their wealth by criminals. Men find it more expensive to cooperate when crime increases. Their lives and property are less secure. This makes them more cautious about entering into cooperative ventures with people they do not know well. The information costs of dealing with strangers are high, and some people choose not to take these extra

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

risks. Because of sin, the division of labor is reduced. Crime-prevention activities are a means of removing risk and increasing the level of cooperation. Institutional authorities seek to reduce crime by imposing negative sanctions on law-breakers.

To maximize the division of labor in a world of sin, the state must impose negative sanctions only on law-breakers, biblically defined. By adding laws that go beyond the Bible, or even go counter to it, civil rulers reduce the division of labor. Legislators and bureaucrats who go beyond the Bible in seeking to stamp out illegal activities make it more expensive for people to cooperate voluntarily to achieve their ends. This reduces the division of labor. It therefore reduces people's wealth. The state thereby produces the same condition that criminals produce. The difference is, good men feel justified in defending themselves against criminals. They feel far less justified in defending themselves against the state. The predator state can become a greater threat to economic and social cooperation than the predator criminal class. In some cases, the state allies itself with the criminal class.⁸

Conclusion

Paul speaks of the illegitimacy of personal vengeance. He does not deny the legitimacy of vengeance as such. He says that God has restricted vengeance to legitimate civil governments. Civil power is supposed to restrain unpredictable personal violence, family feuds, and gang warfare.

The free market is not autonomous. It is an extension of the individual or the family, both of which operate under civil law. The free market is under civil law. Civil law covenantally is superior to the free market. The civil covenant establishes the conditions of the free market by shaping public behavior and attitudes. Civil law is enforced by rulers who are ministers of God. Taxation as such is not theft, contrary to some libertarian theorists. Most forms of taxation are theft, and all levels above the tithe surely are (I Sam. 8:15, 17), but not all. Lawful authorities are entitled to economic support. Taxation supports the state.

Paul calls on Christians to obey lawful authorities. This may mean challenging one authority in the name of another. Authorities are to some extent in competition with each other. It is not unlawful to pit

8. In the early 1970s, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in his multi-volume history, *The Gulag Archipelago*, said that this had long been the case in the Soviet Union.

one against the other, as Paul's tactics in Acts indicate. Freedom is sometimes achieved by using one authority to reduce the power of another. Paul used Roman law to undermine Festus' desire to please the Jews. He lawfully removed himself from Festus' jurisdiction. A legal system should not be allowed to become monolithic.

12

DEBT-FREE LIVING

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8–10).

The theocentric principle here is God as the lawgiver whose legal system is the outworking of His love. This is point three of the biblical covenant: law.¹ By obeying God's law, we manifest our love to others. God commands that we love others. In doing so, we fulfill the law.

A. Debt: Secured and Unsecured

Paul begins with a command to avoid debt. He does not offer a reason. The Old Covenant did. Debt is a form of servitude. "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7). Debt does offer benefits. If it didn't, people would avoid debt. But servitude also offers benefits. This is why the Mosaic law allowed men to become permanent slaves. "And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever" (Ex. 21:5–6). The hole in the ear was the mark of a voluntary Hebrew slave. It symbolized a man who could be physically pulled around by his master by

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

means of a ring in the ear. A ring in an animal's nose enables his owner to insert a rope and pull him around.

Unsecured debt symbolizes a man's legal subordination to a creditor. If a debtor has indebted his body, his reputation, or his tools by means of a promise to repay out of his future earnings, then he is at risk. His future earnings may fall. His future expenses may rise. What if he cannot repay the loan? Until the late-nineteenth century, debtor's prison was common in the West. The debtor was put in prison until a relative paid off his debt. Today, he may legally declare bankruptcy, but he must sell most of his assets to repay his creditors.

Secured or collateralized debt is different. The loan is made to a borrower so that he can purchase an asset. If the borrower fails to repay, the creditor can legally take possession of the asset. The borrower then loses legal control over the asset, but he himself is not penalized, except possibly in the effects of a downgraded credit rating, i.e., his ability to take on debt. The creditor's legal claim is not against the debtor's person; it is against his debt-purchased asset.

A debtor today does not face the same degree of risk that debtors did in Paul's day. Because of the burden of debt, he may decide not to take certain risks that could threaten his income, such as quitting his job and moving out of town to look for a better job. His debt burden limits his physical mobility. But the mortgaged asset may give him greater upward social mobility, such as a tool or education that enables him to earn a larger income.

1. Debt and Deferred Delivery

Paul's general warning is in the form of a command. Do not owe anyone anything, he says. The advantages of debt should be avoided. Yet there is a hidden problem: the debt aspect of *any purchased asset that is not delivered immediately*. Say that a person buys a ticket to a future event. He wants to be sure that he can attend the event. The ticket's seller has become a debtor. The ticket's seller may choose to buy performance insurance in case the theater burns down. Then the insurer takes on the debt. This is a risk that the someone in a deferred delivery transaction has to bear: ticket-buyer, ticket-seller, or insurer. Is Paul saying that a Christian should never sell a ticket in advance? This would greatly increase the buyer's risk. If he waits until the last day to buy a ticket, the line may be long, forcing him to waste time. The event may even be sold out before he gets to the front of the line.

The risk of missing the event is inescapable, one way or another. Someone must bear it.

Then there is hired labor. A person goes to work. He is not paid in the morning. The Mosaic law mandated that he be paid in the evening. “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning” (Lev. 19:13).² The employer in Jesus’ parable of the hirelings honored this law (Matt. 20:8).³ So, the Mosaic law allowed some very short-term debt. It had to. *Debt is inescapable in a labor contract*. Either the employer owes the worker at the end of the day, or else the worker owes the employer a day’s work if he gets paid in the morning.

When a person writes a check to make a purchase, the check must clear before the transaction is settled. Until it clears, there remains a credit/debt aspect to the transaction. Must all transactions be made in cash? Doesn’t this make things more risky for buyers, who must then carry cash? Aren’t sellers at even greater risk? They have far more cash in the office than if checks and credit cards were allowed.

More than any other people, Americans use credit cards to buy items. For some period of time, credit card users are debtors, even if they plan to pay off the loan as soon as the bill arrives. The use of credit cards is a great convenience. But it establishes a debt.

A person may have a savings account at a bank. The bank that has allowed him to deposit his money is now a debtor to him. Is banking prohibited by Paul? It was not prohibited by Christ (Matt. 25:27).⁴

The world could not exist without debt, such as the employer’s daily debt to workers or their debt to him if he has paid them in advance. The modern economy’s high division of labor is funded by credit instruments, which are also debt instruments. If these were made illegal overnight, how could the modern world feed itself? The commodity futures markets are debt markets. They have made farming and other production activities less risky. Yet most futures contracts are forms of almost unsecured debt. Both parties to the transaction—long and short—present a small payment in advance, called margin, but in fact a performance bond. It is a small fraction of the total potential debt in most transactions.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 13.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 45.

Farmers borrow money to buy seed, fertilizer, fuel, and pay workers. Their property secures some of this debt. They are in bondage, but the Old Testament allowed people to be in bondage.

B. Unsecured Debt and the Division of Labor

There has been an enormous expansion of unsecured debt in the modern economy. No one knows how much unsecured debt there is. Futures contracts are basically unsecured debt. The conventional estimate in December, 2003 was that, worldwide, there were about \$170 trillion in unsecured financial promises to pay, called derivatives.⁵ These were futures contracts, mostly (\$142t) interest-rate guesses.

The overwhelming majority of the world's output is based on the extension of credit. Therein lies the threat. The modern system of deferred payments depends on an unbroken chain of payments. If debtor A cannot pay creditor B until debtor C pays creditor A, then there is a possibility of a collapse of the payments system if debtor C cannot repay. Near-universal bankruptcies would paralyze mass production. People produce in order to sell their output. Without expectation of payment, producers cease producing. Their suppliers cease making deliveries, as will their suppliers, all the way down the production line.

The modern world is wealthy beyond historical comparison, but its output rests on faith: faith in unbroken payments by debtors to creditors. Everyone assumes, implicitly or explicitly, that most creditors know what they are doing when they lend, and that most debtors know their limitations when they borrow. There is no way to prove in advance that this faith rests on legitimate assumptions. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). This definition of faith does not apply only to faith in God. It applies to faith in everything that we rely on to sustain us.

The expansion of credit/debt has increased the division of labor to levels undreamed of before World War II. Credit has made capital available to entrepreneurs, who have used this borrowed money to add to the productive capacity of their businesses. They have, in the words of the Austrian School economists, lengthened the structure of production. They have increased the specialization of production on the assumption that customers will buy the output of these specialized,

5. *Detailed data on over-the-counter (OTC) derivatives markets* (Basle, Switzerland: Bank for International Settlements, 2004), Tables D-1, D-2, D-3. Gold was \$370 per ounce.

price-competitive systems of production. People in their capacity as producers have cooperated with buyers by becoming more specialized in their efforts to meet expected future demand. They have abandoned older, less specialized jobs to become more specialized and more productive. Credit has financed this extension of the division of labor all over the world. The problem comes when credit—especially unsecured credit—collapses in a wave of defaults. What happens then to customer demand? It falls. What happens to the highly specialized structure of production? It becomes unprofitable. The extended cooperation that had been induced by the growth of unsecured credit is reversed. There is now far less cooperation. This produces unemployment.

A collapse of the debt-based payments system would kill millions of people in the industrial world—possibly hundreds of millions. We depend on a complex system of production to sustain us. Very few urban people could survive if the system of debt-based payments completely collapsed. Very few commercial farmers could stay in business: no money to buy seeds, fuel, pesticides, and fertilizer. There would be no money to pay workers. Barter would replace today's electronic money. The division of labor would collapse. So, output would collapse. In the West, this would be a death sentence for millions of people.

Is such a breakdown in the payments system possible? Yes. But governments and central banks would then flood the financial system with fiat paper money to replace frozen contracts for electronic money. There are physical limits on the production of modern paper money, but governments could lower the paper's quality standards and crank out lots of paper bills with extra zeroes. This would threaten the world with mass inflation as an overreaction to the collapse of payments. There would be great uncertainty and enormous financial losses.

The extension of credit is the extension of debt. The modern world has prospered for at least two centuries because it has ignored Paul's warning, assuming that his warning was meant to be universal. Was it?

C. Lenders Without Borrowers?

Paul knew the words of Moses: "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but

thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee” (Deut. 15:6).⁶ “The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow” (Deut. 28:12).⁷ This promise was given to a very small nation. International trade was minimal. There were no banks or futures markets. God’s message was clear: by extending credit, Israelites would be extending control over foreigners. They were in effect planting seeds in another man’s garden. Foreigners would be in debt to God through debt to God’s people. Extending credit was a means of extending God’s dominion.

This means that taking on debt that was extended by foreigners was a means of surrendering God’s kingdom to them. “The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail” (Deut. 28:43–44).⁸ The Mosaic law recognized the two-sided nature of the transaction. For every credit, there is a debt, and vice versa.

The institutional reconstruction of society will come whenever the world adopts saving faith in the God of the Bible. As more people come under Paul’s command, there will be fewer willing debtors. This is a serious analytical issue for anyone who believes that there will be an unprecedented period of blessing for the church after the conversion of the Jews, which Paul believed.⁹ Where will God-fearing borrowers be after the world turns to Christ? If they heed Paul’s warning, they will pay off their consumer debts and not take on new ones. The Mosaic prophecy regarding credit extension to foreign nations will no longer be valid, if by “foreign” God meant “covenant-breaking,” which He presumably did.

If men refuse to borrow against hoped-for but uncertain future earnings, investors will have to buy ownership, which is risky, rather than settle for fixed payments. Paul’s command, if obeyed, means that in a progressively covenant-keeping world, the sale of ownership will replace debt as the primary means of funding new business projects. Owners will raise money for new business projects, not by borrowing

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 37.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

8. *Idem.*

9. Chapter 7.

money, but by selling shares of ownership to investors. There are only four ways to raise money for a profit-seeking project, other than begging: (1) borrow money from interest-seeking creditors, (2) sell partial ownership to investors, (3) put up your own money, (4) borrow from your customers. The best example of the fourth method is a subscription to a periodical. The subscriber pays the full subscription price to the publisher, and the publisher becomes a debtor for the period of the subscription.

1. Reduced Risk

A slow, steady shift from credit investing to equity investing would reduce the likelihood of a financial breakdown due to a collapse of the payments system. The main threat to the payments system today is the widespread use of uncollateralized debt that is treated as money or near-money. A large default could create a domino effect. If nobody can pay his creditors until he is paid by his debtors, nobody will be paying. The monetary system is based on fractional reserves—uncollateralized loans—so the division of labor is at risk.

If businessmen ever refuse to borrow, creditors will have to buy ownership, which is risky, rather than settle for fixed payments. In a world where investors refuse to enter into unsecured, uncollateralized debt contracts, payments would be based on warehouse receipts for money metals. A warehouse receipt appears to be a form of debt—an IOU—but it is fully collateralized by an asset. It is better understood as proof of legal title to physical property. The warehouse receipt is not a debt that is issued by a creditor against uncertain future income. It is simply proof of existing title to a physical resource. The existing owner of the warehouse receipt exchanges it for another asset: goods or services. The recipient of the warehouse receipt must pay the warehouse for the services of storage and safekeeping. The owner of the stored asset is billed daily through an automatic digital payments system. When he sells the asset, the new owner begins paying. This is easy to do with computerized payments.

Ownership carries with it responsibilities. There are no free lunches in life, other than God's grace, paid for by Christ at Calvary. Therefore, whenever paper money or electronic money circulates free of charge, deception has to be involved somewhere in the series of transactions. Perhaps some precious metals storage company has issued receipts for monetary metals not on deposit. These receipts are

spent into circulation by the issuer. This is a form of theft. It is fraudulent. This practice should be treated by civil courts as illegal. In the case of commercial banking, fractional reserves are universal. Banks make loans while simultaneously promising depositors the right to withdraw their money at any time. This is a form of counterfeiting. Its results are price inflation and the boom-bust cycle.¹⁰

D. Replacing Credit With Equity Ownership

Paul's general principle here is debt-free living. The threat is debt servitude: an economic obligation that can result in physical servitude. As we have seen, the Mosaic law made provision for servitude, including voluntary servitude. Sometimes servitude is preferable to liberty for some people, but it is always a condition of reduced personal responsibility. There are times when temporary debt is a means of dominion. A debt to fund one's education can be a means of dominion: temporary economic servitude in preparation for dominion. Also, when a debt is offset by collateral, such as a house, debt can be a tool of dominion. Buying a house from someone who wants a stream of income—a creditor—and then renting it to a person who is not ready or able to go into debt to buy a house, is a way to build capital. The renter pays the house's owner monthly, who in turn pays off the creditor. The creditor can repossess the house if the buyer defaults. He keeps all of the money paid by the buyer, and he reclaims his capital asset. This is a means of risk-reduction on the part of the creditor. He prefers to lend to a buyer with the house as security for the loan, rather than lend to some impersonal third party with no collateral to repossess, such as a bank.

Some owners of capital prefer to extend collateralized credit rather than buy an equity position (ownership). They seek out borrowers. This is biblical. In a Christian world that obeyed Paul's injunction, however, creditors would find fewer and fewer low-risk borrowers. Interest rates would then diverge sharply: falling for Christian borrowers and rising for non-Christians. Rates would fall because of these conditions: a fixed or increasing supply of loanable funds and decreasing demand for debt. The potential economic returns from purchasing ownership shares would look better. This change in people's borrowing

10. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

habits would move the world's investors toward equity investing. Until then, lending is legitimate.

What about borrowing from a creditor-seller to purchase an income-producing asset that serves as collateral for the debt? This form of borrowing places the borrower at risk of losing money that he has paid to the seller—i.e., the buyer-borrower's equity in the asset—but it does not place his other assets at risk. By paying down the debt each month, the asset's buyer becomes an equity investor, month by month. He can lose title to this equity if he ever stops paying. There is risk of loss. But there is always risk in life. The question is: How much risk? The buyer-debtor does not place his other assets at risk, only the down payment and the equity built up over time. Businesses are sold on this basis all the time. So is real estate.

A seller-financed sale of an income-generating asset makes the seller a creditor and the borrower a long-run equity purchaser. Both parties bear risk. Each bears the kind of risk he prefers. The seller may have to repossess the asset some day, but if it has a market price, he still owns equity in the asset. He can sell it if he chooses. The buyer risks having to surrender ownership of the asset, thereby losing all of his equity. But the loss of one's equity position—sale price above purchase price—is possible in any purchase of equity, with or without debt.

I do not think that Paul is here condemning a fully collateralized loan. If there were low debt in society, investment would have to shift to the purchase of equity. Paul's injunction, when coupled with post-millennialism, is a call to substitute equity for debt in investing. *A collateralized loan is an equity investment.* There is a debt element in the transaction, but essentially it is an equity investment. By paying off the loan, the debtor buys equity. This is consistent with the results of Paul's injunction in a Christian social order: to replace credit with equity in the portfolios of covenant-keepers and to reduce unsecured debt by covenant-keepers.

E. The Law and Love

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." John Murray does not think that love is an obligation. Rather, the sense of the passage is this: "Owe no man any thing, only love one another."¹¹ "He that loveth another hath ful-

11. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan:

filled the law.” But what does this mean? Does it mean that dealing with others justly is the way that we should demonstrate our love toward them? Or does it mean that loving them fulfills the law? Which law? Moses’ law? Christ’s law?

Paul says which law: the Mosaic. “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (v. 9). This summary follows the Septuagint’s translation of Deuteronomy 5:17–21.¹² The final clause is based on Leviticus: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18). Here is the same theme as the one Paul introduced in the previous chapter: *no personal vengeance*. Christ used a similar approach in his summary of the Mosaic law. “And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 19:16–19).¹³

Love is mandatory, Murray writes. “If love is the fulfillment of the law this means that no law is fulfilled apart from love. . . . It is only through love that we can fulfill the demands of justice.”¹⁴ Murray places the decalogue, and through it, the Mosaic law, at the heart of Paul’s injunction. “This appeal to the decalogue demonstrates the following propositions: (1) the decalogue is of permanent and abiding relevance. (2) It exemplifies the *law* that love fulfills and is therefore correlative with love. (3) The commandments and their binding obligation do not interfere with the exercise of love; there is no incompatibility. (4) The commandments are the norms in accordance with which love operates.”¹⁵

Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), II, p. 159.

12. *Ibid.*, II, p. 161.

13. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

14. Murray, *Romans*, II, p. 161.

15. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 161–62.

Conclusion

Paul writes that debt is something to be avoided. Debt is the anti-thesis of love. Love fulfills the law, not by abolishing the Mosaic law, but by filling it to the brim.¹⁶ The Mosaic law identified debt as something to be avoided (Deut. 28:44). So does Paul. The debt he has in mind is a debt that places an individual at the mercy of the creditor. Jesus described hell as debtor's prison (Matt. 18:34). Paul was not arguing that all debt is evil—just those forms that place a defaulting debtor at risk of his loss of liberty or reputation. Unsecured debt is to be avoided. It presumes too much on the future.

16. *Ibid.*, II, p. 164.

13

THE DAY (NOT THE NIGHT) IS AT HAND

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Romans 13:11–14).

The theocentric focus here is sanctification: ethics. This is point three of the biblical covenant.¹ Its goal is to motivate God's people to righteous living. Sanctification means to put on Christ: to submit to His Bible-revealed law through His grace. Paul is writing to converts, not the unregenerate. He is not talking about conversion. He is talking about progressive sanctification.

A. The Meaning of Salvation

This passage is an eschatological time text. The meaning is clear: there is not much time remaining. Time remaining for what? "Our salvation." What is this salvation? The commentators disagree. John Murray believes that it refers to the second coming of Christ in final judgment.² So does amillennialist William Hendriksen.³ Others see

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), II, pp. 165–70.

3. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 441–47.

Paul as referring to the individual's death. This eschatology is therefore personal.⁴ Finally, some view it as referring to the end of the Old Covenant order and the delivery of the kingdom of God exclusively to the church (Matt. 21:43).⁵ This is my view.

1. *Salvation Delayed*

Murray and Hendriksen knew the problem that their interpretation raises: after nineteen centuries, there is still no deliverance for a world in sin, no fulfillment of the promise. If this interpretation is correct, then Paul was trying to motivate people to act ethically, using the hope of Christ's second coming as the motivation. Liberal theologians use this passage and other "imminent deliverance" passages to argue that New Testament authors were incorrect. The authors supposedly believed that Jesus was coming in final judgment in the immediate future. The early church fathers then had to re-think their plans for the church because this prophecy did not come true. In other words, there are major prophetic errors in the New Testament.

Murray and Hendriksen cited II Peter 3:8 as justification for their interpretation. "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."⁶ This converts a time text to a non-time text. This passage in Second Peter does not solve their problem, namely, the language of Paul's text. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." Was Paul justifying his command to live chastely on the basis of an event that still has not come to pass? What kind of deceptive motivational tactic was this?

Liberal expositors argue that this strategy backfired on the church within a generation, that the early believers' focus on Christ's imminent return as their motivation for living righteously could not be sustained. The early church's leaders then had to find new motivations. They also had to explain away the obvious inconsistency. Murray and Hendriksen were still trying to explain it away. They did so by converting a time text—"soon"—to a timeless text. Murray wrote: "It is the

4. Hendriksen cites W. Sandy and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (International Critical Commentary (1911), p. 378, and S. Greijdanus, *De Brief van den Apostel Paulus aan de Genente te Rome*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1933), II, p. 578. Hendriksen, *Romans*, p. 445n.

5. Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1954] 1981), p. 107.

6. Murray, *Romans*, II, p. 168; Hendriksen, *Romans*, p. 446.

nearness of prophetic perspective and not that of our chronological calculations.”⁷ Hendriksen wrote: “The error is committed not by Paul but by us *when we apply earth’s chronology to heaven’s mode of life*.”⁸ This does not solve their problem. A liberal can easily respond: “It is not our interpretational error alone, but also the error of the recipients of Paul’s epistle. They were supposed to conclude from his language that they should live righteously, for Christ was coming back in final judgment soon. They were thinking temporally, in terms of their own life spans, which was exactly how Paul was telling them to think, in order to motivate them to live righteously in the present. The following argument would not have been highly motivational: ‘Live righteously because Jesus is coming back in final judgment soon, by which I mean up to twenty centuries from now, and possibly a lot more.’ By deceiving them regarding Christ’s imminent return, Paul was either a charlatan or a false prophet.” Of course, a theological liberal would not accuse Paul in this way, for he might lose his teaching or preaching job. He would say, “Paul’s intensity regarding the need for holy living in the church led him to place a short timetable on Christ’s judgment.” Murray and Hendriksen refused even to consider this obvious response by liberals. Why? I think it is because they could not reply effectively to it in terms of their denial of the time element in this text. They also did not respond exegetically to either the “judgment at one’s death” argument or the “judgment on Old Covenant Israel” argument.

2. Individual Judgment at Death

The argument that Paul was referring to a person’s death has defenders. It acknowledges the obvious meaning of Paul’s language: *soon*. The night is far gone, Paul says. Jesus used language in a similar way: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). But there is a problem: Jesus said that the *day* was almost gone. Paul says that the *night* is almost gone. Jesus said that He was working hard before darkness fell, presumably referring to His death. Every person faces this night, He said. A man can work only while he is still alive. But Paul is saying that the day is coming. “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” He calls on members of the Roman church to change their evil ways before daybreak arrives.

7. Murray, *Romans*, II, p. 168.

8. Hendriksen, *Romans*, p. 446.

That does “night” mean in this context? In what way was the night far spent? Not every member of the church at Rome was old when Paul’s letter arrived. In fact, the majority were not old, unless the Roman church was a statistical anomaly. Some members would have been youngsters. In what way were their nights far spent? Their lives lay ahead of them. If Paul’s reference was to each individual’s death, then night and day had to apply differently to different members.

Paul’s use of “day” does not refer to the day of the Lord in final judgment of all humanity. The time element was too specific: soon. It has been too long since Paul wrote. But “day” also cannot apply to individual’s judgment at death, for Paul was calling them out of a prevailing darkness. The contrast between night, which was far spent, and daybreak, which was close at hand, could not have applied equally to all of the recipients of his message. In matters of personal lifespan, a few people are at the end of the night—sin-filled living—while the majority have their lives to lead. Paul was not referring to the statistical possibility that all of them could die the next day, for that probability was low. In any case, his language was not probabilistic; it was emphatic: the night was far spent.

B. The End of the Old Covenant Order

Jesus had made it clear that the next great eschatological event would be the fall of Jerusalem. He told His listeners specifically:

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh (Luke 21:20–28).

In the parallel Matthew passage, the reference to “coming in the clouds” appears in verse 30. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:30–34). Verse 34 says that the generation that was listening to Him would not pass before all of this would be fulfilled. This specifically includes His coming in the clouds. This phrase has to apply to the fall of Jerusalem. It does not refer to the end of history and the final judgment.

Liberal theologians accuse Jesus of making an error. He supposedly thought that He would return in final judgment within one generation, but He did not return in this way. Paul was merely being faithful to Jesus’ time perspective regarding final judgment when he passed along this misinterpretation to the church at Rome. They both believed that night was ending for this sin-filled world. They were both wrong.

When the fall of Jerusalem takes place, Jesus had said, “look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). What redemption? Not final judgment. This has yet to take place. Not personal judgment at death. Jesus was warning His followers to flee Jerusalem when they saw these signs. He wanted them to avoid being killed. The church survived the fall of Jerusalem. Then what happened? Liberation. His words can mean only one thing: *redemption from the bondage of the Old Covenant order*. This is also the meaning of Paul’s use of salvation in Romans 13:11: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” The Greek word for salvation (*soter*) is used repeatedly in the New Testament to mean “deliverance.” “That we should be **saved** from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us” (Luke 1:71). “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my **salvation** through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:18–19). “By faith Noah, being warned of God of

things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the **saving** of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7).

Gary DeMar listed three pages of New Testament prophetic time texts. Romans 13:11 was one of them. These texts are specific. They say that certain events will take place soon, or before the listeners die, or are near at hand.⁹ Commentators who attempt to place the fulfillment of these prophecies in the distant future are fair game for liberals who reply that New Testament authors obviously did not know what they were talking about when they used the language of imminence.

1. *The Jewish Revolt*

Prior to A.D. 66, the church was under continual persecution by the Jews. This included the gentile churches. The Jews still had influence with local Roman administrations. In Thessalonica: "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things" (Acts 17:5–8). Jews were not always successful in their efforts to get the government to suppress the gospel, but they tried. "And when Gallio¹⁰ was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat" (Acts 18:12–16).

When the Jews revolted against Rome, beginning in A.D. 66, their

9. Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), pp. 38–40.

10. L. Junius Gallio Annaenus, the brother of the philosopher Seneca. He was pro-consul in Corinth under the emperor Claudius in the early 50s. See Dennis McCallum, "A Chronological Study of Paul's Ministry." (<http://bit.ly/PaulChron>)

influence with Rome disappeared. For the next four years, Roman legions battled Jewish military forces in Palestine. Then, in A.D. 70, Jerusalem fell to the Roman siege. The temple was burned. This put an end to the Old Covenant order. Jesus' prophecy, recorded in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, was fulfilled. Some members of the generation that had heard His words were still alive when the siege of Jerusalem began. Far fewer were alive when it ended.

The end of the Old Covenant order was the context of Paul's remarks at the end of the epistle: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Rom. 16:20).

C. The Transfer of the Kingdom

Paul here tells the church at Rome that their deliverance is drawing nigh. He assures them that they will not live under Jewish persecution forever. This did not mean that an era of peace with Rome was imminent, but this conflict would be between Christ and Caesar, not Christ and Caiphas. The church's confrontation with Rome led in the late fourth century to the replacement of Roman paganism with Christianity as the religion of the empire.

Paul tells the church to adopt holy living. The long night of the Old Covenant order is drawing to a close, Paul tells them. A far better covenant—Christ's—is about to replace the Old Covenant. The church will soon see God transfer His kingdom to the church, just as Christ had told the Jews. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The fruits of righteousness are basic for identifying the recipient of this kingdom inheritance: the church. Jesus had said this; Paul repeats it here. Because of the imminent demise of the Old Covenant order, members of the church were therefore required to live differently from those around them. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying" (Rom. 13:13).

Paul offers a specific motivation for righteous living: the imminent dawning of the day. This cannot refer to the post-resurrection world of sin-free living, which has not yet arrived in our day. Whether it comes tomorrow or at a man's death is irrelevant for the call to righteous liv-

ing. Righteous living is a moral obligation at all times. Then why does Paul emphasize the time factor here? What has the dawning of the day have to do with righteous living?

It has to do with the inheritance of the kingdom of God. In Romans 11, Paul spoke of the jealousy of the Jews against the gentiles (v. 11). Someday, this jealousy will lead to the conversion of the Jews, he told them. The original olive tree's branches, which were in the process of being cut off for the sake of the grafting in of the branches of the wild olive tree, will someday be grafted in again. This grafting in, Paul says in Romans 11, will mark the fulness of the gentiles.¹¹ But the original branches had not yet been completely cut off in history in his day. They were fighting the replacement process. They were attacking the church: the replacement branches. God's transfer of the kingdom of God was still in transition. It had not yet been completed. When would this transition period end? Paul makes this clear in Romans 13: soon. The transfer took place in A.D. 70, but the actual date was not known to the apostles. They knew only that it was close at hand.

The kingdom would be transferred to that nation whose citizens showed the fruits of righteousness, Jesus had said. The church was required by Christ to demonstrate publicly its commitment to living righteously. Paul tells them here, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (v. 14). To replace the Old Covenant order, the church must live in a way ethically superior to the Jews. Jesus had said as much: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17–20). Gentile Christians during the transition period had a responsibility: to live ethically, so that the transfer could take place.

Does this mean that the transfer was conditional? Yes, in the same way that the promise to Abraham was ritually conditional: circumcision. It was a promise, but it was also conditional. This does not

11. Chapter 7.

mean that the outcome of the promise was in doubt. The church's ethical performance would be acceptable. This had been foreordained. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

D. Future-Orientation

In chapter 11, Paul told them that there will be a future conversion of the Jews. This re-grafting will bring in an era of extreme blessings for the church. Paul did not say when this will happen, only that it will happen. His readers were not being told to shorten their time horizons. They were not being told that the era of the gentiles will be short. They were being told that the dawn was at hand; the long night was coming to an end. Dawn is not evening. This was not a call to short-term thinking. The day would last a long time, just as the night had. *This was not an apocalyptic message.* On the contrary, it was a call to patience. Do not expect the end of the world, Paul was telling them. Before there is an end to this world, two things must take place: the conversion of the Jews and an era of kingdom blessing that will follow this conversion.

When Paul told them in this section that their salvation was drawing nigh, he meant that the era of church's exclusive kingdom would soon begin. The kingdom of God was being shared with the Jews in Paul's day, which is why he continued to honor the high priest (Acts 23:5). Paul had already told the church that not until the fulness of the gentile era is complete will the Jews be converted. "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom. 11:12). This diminishing process was still going on. The era of gentile kingdom exclusivity had not yet begun. Until it did begin, and then continue for an unspecified period, there could be no completion of the gentile era. "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

Paul's epistle to the Romans in no way can be classified as apocalyptic, as if the end of the world had been near. On the contrary, the epistle told the readers that the end of the world was not near. The end of the Old Covenant order was near.

1. *Economic Growth*

Time perspective is important for a theory of economic growth. The shorter that men's future-orientation is, the higher their rate of interest is. They want to attain their near-term goals at the price of not fulfilling long-term goals. They discount the present value of both future income and future costs. The importance of the future recedes rapidly at higher rates of interest.

The child does not think of his old age. He does not plan for it. He does not defer enjoyments in the present for the sake of greater wealth in his old age. Analogously, individuals who place a low value on the future do not save and invest as much money as individuals do who place a high value on the future. The same is true of societies. Men get what they pay for. Those who want instant gratification at the expense of future gratification achieve their goal by spending on consumer goods and services rather than saving. Emotional maturity involves a recognition of the uncertainty of the future and also the present cost of attaining income in the future. Extreme present-orientation is a mark of an immature person or an immature society.

Had Paul been teaching a doctrine of the imminent return of Christ in final judgment, he would have created extreme present-orientation in the minds of his followers. This was not his intention. It was not Christ's intention, either. Paul taught, as Christ had taught, that the transfer of the kingdom of God to the church was taking place, and that it would be completed soon. Then the exclusive kingdom era of the gentiles would begin.

E. Cooperation With Future Generations

Edmund Burke, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), made an observation that has become one of the pillars of conservative political philosophy. In his chapter on "The Church of France," he wrote:

Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure—but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perish-

able nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are to be born.¹²

Burke used economic terms—contract, partnership—to describe what we would call a covenant. He viewed the social contract as a covenant: *sealed by an oath*. “Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place.”¹³

Paul was calling the Roman church to take a similar view of their church membership. They belonged to an institution that will survive into eternity (Rev. 21; 22). The day was at hand, he said, not the night. They were part of a covenant made with them by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their good works will bear fruit into eternity, he was telling them.

In this sense, they were in a partnership, just as Burke described it. This partnership extended backward to Abraham and forward to our day. It was, and remains, cross-generational. This means that they were cooperating with generations yet to come. So are we. We are called by God to extend the work of the patriarchs, and in doing so, we extend this ancient legacy into the future. We are supposed to add value to this legacy. The late-twentieth-century’s marketing term, *value-added*, is a good one. It accurately describes what entrepreneurs are supposed to do with scarce economic resources. This is the underlying meaning of the phrase, “buy low, sell high.” To do this, the would-be seller must add value. So must buyers, who bid up the price of the asset.

Conclusion

This passage is often incorrectly interpreted as a prophecy of the imminent bodily return of Christ in final judgment. What it taught was that a long night was coming to a close, and the day would soon dawn. This also did not refer to their imminent deaths as individuals, which

12. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), I:3:3.

13. *Idem*.

would take place at different times in the congregation. Some would die soon; others would die decades later. There would be no simultaneous dawning of the day, if “day” is interpreted as physical death.

What Paul taught in Romans 11–13 was the establishment of the New Covenant church on the ruins of the Old Covenant order. This is an important eschatological concept. It is inherently future-oriented. It should move covenant-keeping men’s thinking from the expectation of the imminent end of this world to a vision of an unprecedented expansion of God’s kingdom in history: the fulness of the gentiles and beyond. This establishes future-orientation. When believed, it redirects men’s goals to a distant earthly future: a kingdom legacy that their spiritual heirs will inherit, more surely than their biological heirs will inherit their earthly wealth. This temporal vision identifies the kingdom of God in the broadest sense as the one institution capable of achieving compound growth until the end of time.

Christians are members of a cooperative venture with future generations. They are supposed to build today on the assumption that future generations will inherit. Each generation is supposed to add value to this legacy. This is also what the meaning of compound economic growth is: adding value, generation after generation, to the original capital base.

14

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks (Rom. 14:1–6).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the honor of God. Different members of a church seek to honor God in different ways. The message here is that this honoring is legitimately a matter of individual decision-making; a matter of conscience. Neither the church nor its individual members should impose sanctions, positive or negative, for honoring God in one way at the expense of another way. Sanctions are point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Strong and the Weak

“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs” (v. 2). Paul gets right to the point: some church members are weak. He identifies a weak member: a person who refuses to eat a particular kind of food. This refusal is not a matter of the food’s taste.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

It is a matter of taboo. The weak member believes that his commitment to Christ prohibits him from eating a particular food. Peter's initial response in Acts 10 is representative of this sense of taboo. God told Peter that the food taboos of the Mosaic law had ended. "And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven" (Acts 10:13–16). This revelation to Peter should have permanently ended the matter, but it did not, according to Paul's teaching here. Weaker members still had moral doubts about certain foods. So, Paul affirms God's revelation to Peter: *no food is unclean in God's eyes*. Nevertheless, in the eyes of weak Christians, there is uncleanness in certain foods. One mark of spiritual maturity is the lack of such concern. Paul wrote: "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Rom. 14:14).

Paul teaches that some church members are theologically stronger than others. The strong ones, Paul says, are those who are free from any sense of taboo regarding the foods they eat. Paul is writing this to a gentile church. He knows that there may be Jews in the membership. There may be members who were recruited from religions that have food taboos. He does not say that these people must abandon these taboos for the sake of Christ. He says only that they should not condemn others who do not honor these taboos.

1. The Jerusalem Council

The Jerusalem council had already dealt with the issue of prohibited foods. Members who were part of the Pharisee sect had argued that gentiles must be circumcised and must obey the Mosaic law (Acts 15:5). The council met to settle this question. "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples,

which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:7–11). James followed Peter and made this suggestion: “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:19–20). The council accepted this recommendation (vv. 22–29).

The deciding issue was not what kind of animal it was. The issue was its mode of death. Demonic paganism returns again and again to the drinking of blood. This is a matter of ritual.² *Drinking blood becomes a covenantal act*. Sometimes the drinking of blood is associated with taking the spirit of the slain animal into the drinker. The Mosaic law prohibited this by requiring the blood of an edible animal to be poured onto the ground and covered with dust. “And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust” (Lev. 17:13). “Notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee: the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roebuck, and as of the hart. Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water” (Deut. 12:15–16). The Jerusalem council honored this prohibition, for the problem it dealt with still existed in the classical world: pagan ritual.

2. An Individual's Decision

Paul here tells the church at Rome that there should be no criticism within the fellowship regarding eating or not eating specific foods. Each member should do what he thinks honors God best: to abstain or to enjoy. The individual must make this decision, but only for himself. He is not to extend his personal self-assessment to others. Neither the strong Christian who treats all foods the same nor the weak Christian who avoids some foods should condemn the other. Paul's words could not be any clearer.

This means that the institutional church should not set up rules that prohibit certain foods. It also should not mandate certain foods,

2. There is a scene in the popular movie, *Red Dawn* (1984), in which modern young men are required to drink the blood of a slain deer as a means of initiation.

other than the Lord's Supper. Even in the case of the Lord's Supper, there are problems. Some fundamentalist denominations prohibit wine. In practice, so do many American Presbyterian congregations, in deference to former fundamentalists, who make up a significant percentage of conservative Presbyterian congregations. Paul's warning informs us that neither wine nor grape juice should be made mandatory, neither unleavened bread nor leavened bread. Both options should be made available.³ But, of course, this rarely happens. A few congregations offer a choice between wine and grape juice; I have never seen one that offers leavened and unleavened bread.

Paul makes it clear that the chief issue here is the protection of the weak. "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21). In his first letter to the Corinthians, he elaborated on this theme.

Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend (I Cor. 8:7–13).⁴

Paul is saying that it is not the theologically mature Christian who takes a stand against demon rum. It is the immature or spiritually weak Christian. He who dismisses any food or drink in God's name is a

3. The wine-grape juice division did not exist before the late nineteenth century. Prior to pasteurization, there was no commercial alternative to wine. In 1869, an anti-alcohol American dentist and Methodist, Dr. Thomas Welch, developed his non-fermented wine—today called grape juice—by boiling grape juice. He initially sold the product to churches that wanted a way to avoid alcohol in the communion meal. Welch's son took over the company on a part-time basis in 1872, and in 1896 made it his career. Even as late as 1914, it was the only fruit juice product on the market.

4. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

weak Christian, as defined by Paul. The problem is, in today's world, these weak Christians regard themselves as staunch defenders of the faith, the last bastions of orthodoxy. Fundamentalists in the pews are oblivious to church history, and proud of it. To them, church history earlier than 1870 is mostly Roman Catholicism and Protestantism that was corrupted with Romish practices. If they have ever read about Eastern Orthodoxy—highly unlikely—they dismiss it as Catholicism with long beards. They are not impressed by the fact that the most conservative wings of Protestantism, “way back when”—Calvinism and Lutheranism—rejected this view of alcohol. They are adamant that no one should ever drink alcohol.

Their spiritual predecessors existed in Paul's day. They were advocates of a “taste not, touch not” form of Christianity. Paul challenged them: “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col. 2:20–23). This challenge remains in force.

Paul says here what he says in I Corinthians 8: for the sake of the weaker brother, the stronger brother must avoid eating the food feared by the weaker.⁵ “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:15–17). “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1).

Does this mean that the stronger brother must alter his lifestyle for the sake of the weaker brother? No. It means that in instances where the two are brought together socially, the stronger brother must forebear. If the stronger brother had to imitate the weaker brother's standards at all times, then the church would be weakened. The “touch not, taste not” legalistic standards of immature Christians would predominate in the church. Paul surely did not want this to happen.

Yet this is what has happened to most conservative Presbyterian churches in the American South. In the Lord's Supper, they follow the

5. *Idem.*

cultural pattern of Baptists and Methodists: grape juice exclusively. Dr. Welch's biologically dead grape juice has become the Protestant fundamentalists' symbol of communion between God and man, thus making ridiculous Christ's analogy of new wine. "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved" (Matt. 9:17). If the new wine is dead grape juice, the wineskin problem does not arise. The kingdom of God does not expand. If only the Jews had been able to pasteurize the gospel! They did their best, but they failed. The main way that they attempted to do this was to persuade the church to restore the Mosaic food laws and circumcision. The Jerusalem council called a halt to this.

If the stronger brother is supposed to capitulate to the weaker, then is the policy of exclusive grape juice correct? No. Paul says that each side must allow freedom to the other. Because the Lord's Supper is institutional, to mandate either exclusive wine or exclusive grape juice is wrong. Paul says that each side must be persuaded, and each must be tolerant. Allowing both wine and grape juice in communion upholds this principle.

The King James translation of the Greek word *katakrino* is "damnation." "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Given Paul's view of the perseverance of the saints, this word should be translated as "condemned." It means that the person has condemned himself for his sin: acting against his conscience. This is how the Greek word is translated in the section in John on the woman taken in adultery. "When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:10–11).

B. Sabbath Observance

Paul does not limit his discussion to food and drink. He includes special days. "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks" (vv. 5–6). Else-

where, he wrote: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Col. 2:16–17). There, too, Paul linked food taboos and holiday taboos.

John Murray, a strict sabbatarian in the Scottish tradition, insisted that this passage does not apply to the weekly sabbath.⁶ He referred to the sabbath as a creation ordinance. There is one overwhelming problem with this interpretation: there was no law mandating the sabbath observance prior to the miracle of the double output of manna on the day before the sabbath. There was a positive biological sanction for sabbath observance: the manna did not rot overnight on the night before the sabbath (Ex. 16:21–23). There was no negative judicial sanction.

An ordinance is a law. A church law may have positive or negative sanctions attached to it. A civil law has only negative sanctions. The state prohibits public evil; it does not seek to make men good. There is no mention of negative sanction for mankind with respect to sabbath-breaking prior to the Mosaic law.

There is a pre-Fall reference to God’s blessing the sabbath: “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made” (Gen. 2:2–3). There was a structure to God’s creation week: six and one. There was to be structure to Adam’s week: one and six.⁷ But there was no law governing the sabbath. There was only one law in Eden: the law prohibiting access to one tree. There was no sabbath law from the Fall of Adam until the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). Nehemiah said of the God of the covenant: “Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant” (Neh. 9:13–14).

The issue here is law, not the underlying structure of man’s work week. There is a recommended structure for the work week. God has announced it: six days of work, one day of rest. But this was not what

6. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), II, Appendix D.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 6.

Adam had experienced. He had less than a full day of work on God's final day of creation. The Bible does not say whether he rested the next day. This six-one pattern was formally announced only after the exodus. *There was never any sabbath creation ordinance.* A law or ordinance must have sanctions attached. Without sanctions, a law is merely a suggestion. The Mosaic law had an explicit sanction: *execution*. "Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 31:14–15). "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death" (Ex. 35:2).⁸

There was no institutional sanction for sabbath-breaking prior to Exodus 31. What Paul teaches in this passage is this: with respect to the sabbath, the New Testament has reverted to the pre-Mosaic standard. *There is no longer any civil or ecclesiastical sanction attached to the New Testament sabbath.* This is why there was no covenantal problem for the church when, beginning early in the second century, it began shifting from Judaism's seventh-day worship to first-day worship. On what basis could this shift had been made, other than the annulment of the Mosaic covenant? Moses said: "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant" (Ex. 31:16). Yet this law is not honored, for the church changed the day of worship to the eighth day. The sabbath was replaced by the Lord's day. This is why there was no theological problem in the centuries-long interim period, when it was not clear to all Christians which day was the proper day of worship.

Today, those few Protestant church traditions that emphasize strict sabbatarianism generally accept the use of tobacco and the consumption of alcohol. Those churches that prohibit alcohol and look askance on tobacco generally have a loose view of sabbath observance. One tradition emphasizes Paul's views on Christian freedom with respect to food and drink, while the other emphasizes Paul's views on Christian freedom regarding sabbath observance. Each denies the bib-

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 59.

lical basis of the other's doctrine of Christian freedom. This was not true of either Luther or Calvin. Neither Calvin nor Luther was a strict sabbatarian, and both men defended Christian liberty regarding alcohol. The Lutheran tradition still upholds its founder's views. This is not equally true of modern Calvinists, e.g., whiskey-drinking Scottish sabbatarians or near-fundamentalist Presbyterians in the American South.

The church sets aside one day a week for corporate worship (Heb. 10:25). This is not the same as specifying judicially what should or should not be done outside of the worship service by its members, let alone non-members. The Mosaic law did do this, with a vengeance: execution. This mandated civil sanction is null and void today, all church traditions agree. What they do not agree about is the judicial basis for the annulment of this negative civil sanction apart from the annulment of the prohibition. In fact, they never discuss this crucial judicial issue. But if the annulment of the negative civil sanction was not accompanied by the annulment of the civil prohibition, then on what covenantal basis has the civil sanction been annulled?

The theological answer, based on the New Covenant, is found in this passage and in Colossians 2: the transfer of the locus of sovereignty in sabbath enforcement from the civil government to the conscience.⁹ The church is also not to impose sanctions against sabbath violators; it also does not possess lawful authority in this area. Paul transferred this authority to the individual conscience. The same is true for Paul's other applications of the principle of Christian liberty, the "taste not, touch not" issues.

The Mosaic civil sanctions that enforced the fourth commandment have been annulled. Israel's civil government had been authorized by God—indeed, required—to enforce the fourth commandment, and to do so with its ultimate penalty: execution. The language of the sabbath statutes in Exodus is clear. So is the story of the stick-gatherer in Numbers 15. His crime was not a matter of a ritual act of rebellion. It was a matter of work.¹⁰ He had not profaned the temple; he had profaned the sabbath.

The New Testament church has always denied the right of execution to the state with respect to sabbath violations, as well it should. It thereby has acknowledged in principle that *there has been a funda-*

9. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24.

10. He was not found in the act of kindling a fire on the sabbath, which was prohibited (Ex. 35:3). He was found working.

mental judicial change in the covenantal administration of one of the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, churches for almost two millennia have refused to state the theological reason for this shift. The state enforces laws against murder, theft, adultery, and perjury. The church has applauded this down through the centuries. The state has at times enforced laws against Lord's day-breaking, but not by means of the Mosaic law's mandatory civil sanction. Does this mean that the New Covenant regards Lord's day violations as less profane than the Old Covenant did? If so, why?

The judicial issue here is the transfer of the locus of authority for the enforcement of the fourth commandment: from the state and local church to the individual conscience.¹¹ Paul established the principle of the authority of the conscience regarding the honoring of special days. He did not exclude from this principle the sabbath or Lord's Day. When he spoke of holy days, he was not speaking only of special days other than the Jewish sabbath, whether Jewish or gentile in their origin. On the contrary, the sabbath was the one day that would have been the common holy day in both Jewish and gentile congregations.

C. Cooperation Within the Church

By identifying the conscience as the proper sanctioning agency in matters of food, drink, and sabbath observance, Paul provided a way for weak and strong Christians to cooperate institutionally. He taught that the church should remain a place where spiritually weak and strong Christians will forebear one another's views regarding taboos: food, drink, and sabbath.

is advice has rarely been taken since the Protestant Reformation. Protestant churches have split on taboo issues. In American fundamentalism, the taboo over alcohol is a major one. The taboo over sabbath observance is not. In practice, Scottish Presbyterian elders do not enforce discipline over nonsabbatarian members, no matter how many sermons they preach on the sabbath. Institutionally, Paul's injunction is honored on matters sabbatarian. But in fundamentalist congregations, demon rum is still the biggest demon around. The once-powerful demons of gambling, dancing, and movies have faded into the background. The demon tobacco is still lurking in the shadows, but

11. I have yet to see a detailed critique—or any published critique—of my thesis regarding the New Testament's transfer of the locus of sovereignty governing sabbath enforcement. I published my chapter in 1986. There has been plenty of time for sabbatarian critics to respond. They are conspicuously silent.

smoking has faded in popularity in the United States, except possibly among the generation reaching adulthood in 2000. Secularists have adopted this demon as their very own. They are more vocal in their opposition to tobacco than fundamentalists are.

Protestant denominations have divided over theology and taboos for almost five centuries. But, once established, the denominations' divisions over taboos tend to decrease. It is less expensive to transfer membership to a different denomination than to convince a majority of today's members to reconsider a taboo. Taboos define some denominations, but splits generally do not come because of debates about traditional taboos. They come over theological issues or personality issues. Cooperation may occasionally take place among denominations, but on the whole, traditional taboos remain institutionalized. Weak and strong Christians form their own denominations. All of them regard themselves as strong.

Conclusion

With respect to the Mosaic laws governing foods, they are completely abolished under the New Covenant. Jesus made the general point: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matt. 15:11). God announced this change of administration to Peter in Acts 10. Paul brought the same message to gentile churches. The implication was inescapable: the cultural separation between gentile and Jewish cultures was no longer in force. This separation had been imposed by dietary restrictions on the Jews. It was over. So was circumcision. The new man in Christ had replaced the old man in Moses. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:9–11).

There were never any prohibitions on the use of alcohol outside the boundaries of the temple (Lev. 10:9). In fact, the consumption of alcohol was encouraged by God's law. The following passage is simply never discussed by defenders of total abstinence:

And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks;

that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for **strong drink**, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee (Deut. 14:23–27).¹²

The Hebrew word for “strong drink” is found in other passages. Strong drink was prohibited to those who took a Nazarite vow. Also prohibited were grapes and raisins. “He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried” (Num. 6:3). Strong drink was not for priests who were inside the temple (Lev. 10:9).¹³ Strong drink was also not for kings, as a general rule of personal conduct (Prov. 31:4). But it was all right for anyone else who was not addicted to it. It was even recommended. “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts” (Prov. 31:6).

Activities on the sabbath come under the same liberating rule. Based on the evidence from the New Testament, Christians are not legitimately bound by *institutional* requirements to conduct themselves in a special way on Sundays, other than to attend church. They must attend church because of the general rule to assemble (Heb. 10:25), not because of the sabbath or Lord’s day. They are bound by conscience. Each individual must make the highly complex decisions regarding legitimate activities on Sunday.¹⁴

There is therefore no New Testament case for “blue laws” or other state-enforced restrictions on business activities on Sunday. Other than inside a family, where the head of the household exercises legit-

12. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

13. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 8.

14. For those Christians who are unfamiliar with the Scottish sabbatarian position, personal conduct on the sabbath may not seem to be a complex issue. This is because they are part of a broad non-sabbatarian tradition, the one adhered to by Calvin. In Calvinistic circles, Calvin’s view is referred to as the Continental view of the sabbath.

imate authority, all institutional enforcement of Mosaic laws governing the sabbath has been annulled, along with the law's mandated civil sanction: execution. The state no longer has any legitimate enforcement function in compelling people to honor the sabbath. If it did, it would be biblically compelled to execute the violators.

The strict sabbatarianism of the Scottish Presbyterian tradition has always been theologically schizophrenic: he defends a Mosaic prohibition without its mandated civil sanction. Strict sabbatarianism has always been loose sabbatarianism when compared with Mosaic sabbatarianism.

The strict sabbatarian, like the strict prohibitionist, regards his position as the strong one. Paul dismisses both as weak positions. He taught that the church should not concern itself with either form of enforcement. Both are a matter of conscience. One more time: a law without sanctions is not a law; it is a suggestion. Only at the level of individual conscience should these prohibitions be regarded as biblically legitimate laws.

CONCLUSION

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law (Rom. 3:28–31).

The deeds required by God's law do not justify fallen man.¹ This means that the work of the law, which is in every man's heart (Rom. 2:14–15),² cannot redeem anyone. But neither can the Mosaic law. The Jew, no less than the Greek, is in need of saving faith. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Through saving faith, both Jew and Greek are justified by God.

Why should there continue to be strife within the institutional church over the law of God? Paul was asking an important judicial question in this epistle. He recommended ways to end such strife: church courts (I Cor. 6),³ the acceptance of people's differences (Rom. 13:12–14:13), and the patience of the strong regarding the weak in their mutual Christian liberty (Rom. 14:1–6).⁴

In seeking the basis of cooperation within the church, Paul raised issues of revelation and law that applied to the relations of church members with covenant-breakers. He told church members not to

1. It would be very hard to argue that works did not justify Jesus, whose righteousness is imputed to His people. I think this idea underlies James' affirmation that deeds do justify covenant-keepers "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). These are Jesus' works imputed to men judicially, and predestined before time began: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

2. Chapter 3.

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

4. Chapter 14.

take each other into civil courts run by and for covenant-breakers. He also told them that covenant-breakers cannot escape from God's revelation of Himself and the work of His law. This was a clear statement regarding the principle of natural law: it cannot be fully trusted in civil affairs. Nevertheless, as a matter of epistemology, it can be relied on by political necessity to some limited degree in a covenant-breaking social order, for there are limits on the ability of covenant-breakers to suppress the truth and act contrary to it. This is a blessing of common grace.

This general revelation of God and the work of God's law in every human heart are the biblical epistemological foundations of political and judicial assessments regarding social justice and social utility. Were it not for the image of God in man, including the work of God's law, the methodological individualist could not logically say that civil judges or voters can accurately aggregate individual utilities or values in their attempt to derive both a concept of social utility and a workable application of it to specific cases.

Social cooperation requires a shared discourse. Without this, society would disintegrate in the war of all against all. Original sin and total depravity would undermine society. God's common grace prevents this outcome. This is necessary for the fulfillment of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28; 9:1–3).⁵ Without the division of labor, there could be no fulfillment of the dominion covenant. The command to subdue the earth was given to all men. All men are expected to do their part to fulfill it.

Romans 12 parallels I Corinthians 12. It describes the institutional church as a body. This organic metaphor for an oath-bound covenantal association can be used to make sense of the economy. While the economy is not oath-bound, it is contract-bound. Paul's organic metaphor of the body is superior to mechanical metaphors to describe the auction process that best describes the free market. The ideal of the division of labor applies to the free market, just as it does to the church. There is coordination in society through individual decision-making and contracts. The unity of the church is secured by Christ as its head. There is no head for the economy, for there is no covenantal oath to bind its participants. The market derives its coherence from the interaction of enforceable contracts. There is justice, however: civil law. This is an oath-bound covenantal organization, and Paul goes so far as

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4, 18.

to identify it as a ministry (Rom. 13:4). The free market is not autonomous. It is established through innumerable contracts made by owners of property—families, individuals, corporations, partnerships, trusts—who are in turn bound by civil government. There is a court of appeals outside of the free market that can settle the conflicts that are not resolvable, violence-free, within the free market. Paul did not reject the legitimacy of civil courts. He argued only that they are no place for covenant-keepers to settle their disputes. He affirmed their legitimacy in non-ecclesiastical matters.

Paul recommended social cooperation, both inside and outside of the institutional church. His argument for the work of the law in every heart can be used to justify the idea of non-Christian civil government as a default position, but Paul offered no case against theonomy as the civic ideal. It is also the ideal for the church. The church is superior to the state as a source of justice, as he made plain in Romans 6. Its courts are not open to everyone; they are open only to its oath-bound members.

Cooperation is a fact of life. Without the cooperation made possible by the modern division of labor, most people would die. But most men need to believe in something to put their faith in that is higher and more personal than the free market. The same is true for their faith in providence in contrast to the survival of the biologically fittest. They want to believe in cosmic personalism. Paul says that God is sovereign over all (Rom. 9). He is the source of order. He is the source of meaning, too. Man is made in God's image, so man can understand God's providence. But men rebel and worship products of their imagination. God restrains this through His common grace, but false worship and rebellious behavior go together (Rom. 1:18–22).⁶

6. Chapter 2.

JUDGMENT AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON I CORINTHIANS

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JUDGMENT AND DOMINION

*AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON
I CORINTHIANS*

GARY NORTH

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This book is dedicated to

Kenneth L. Gentry

whose books on eschatology have
established the terms of discourse

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PREFACE

*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul:
but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell
(Matt. 10:28).*

A. Final Judgment

Modern man does not tolerate the suggestion that God will bring final judgment at the end of time, condemning His enemies to eternal torment. This doctrine is Christianity's greatest offense. It always has been. Paul's sermon to the Athenians on Mars' Hill alienated most of his listeners.

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them (Acts 17:29–33).

Every age so far has been at war with God. In the early church, men who agreed on the final judgment disagreed on the doctrine of the incarnation. These questions dominated their discussions: Is God monotheistic, polytheistic, or Trinitarian? Is Jesus Christ the incarnate God? Is He both man and God? The rejection of Christ's uniquely divine status was the heart of apostasy in both Jerusalem and Rome.

The doctrine of God is still a divisive issue, but most covenant-breakers today choose to shrug off the existence of the Trinity as one more unanswerable question that is neither here nor there in the larger picture. But they do not regard the final judgment in this way. They reject it, but they do not regard it as irrelevant. God has put a

sense of foreboding in every human heart. He has also imposed death. Men can pretend that they do not see God's hand in life, but they cannot avoid death.

Sometimes the dividing issue is judicial hierarchy. Men ask: Who possesses lawful authority, i.e., the God-delegated right, to "lay down the law"? Sometimes the dividing issue is the law itself: its authoritative source and ethical content. At other times, the dividing issue is the nature of the judicial sanctions that are imposed by the civil magistrate. *But, in every era, the dividing issue is God's final judgment.* This is what leads to the question: Who has the right to enforce the law? The correct answer: the person who represents God. The definitive representative of God in history is Jesus Christ, as Paul told the Athenians, and as Christ told the Jewish leaders.

And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house (Matt. 9:2–7).

The judicial issue of rendering judgment is both eternal and historical. Jesus Christ is God's representative of final judgment: God "will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). As the final judge, Christ delegates representatives in civil government (Rom. 13:1–7).¹ Civil magistrates must execute judgment in God's name or in the name of some other sovereign authority. Let us consider an example from history. After the English took control in India, they banned the Hindu practice of *suttee* ("faithful wife"): burning alive a widow on her husband's funeral pyre. This practice was supposedly voluntary on the part of widows, but social pressure was placed on widows to conform, including ostracism. The 1829 ban was a direct interference with a long-standing religious practice. References to the practice exist as early as 316 B.C. The suppression of *suttee* was Victorian English Christianity's coercive

1. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

suppression of a Hindu religious tradition. It was a political act against a religious practice.² The English imposed negative civil sanctions against those who imposed a permanent negative sanction on widows. One or the other deeply committed religious group was determined to impose its negative sanctions in the name of its divinity. There was no neutral religious position between the two groups on this issue. This was a legal and moral question: “Which group had the right before God to impose its negative sanctions?” Modern humanists in the West prefer not to think about religious questions such as this one. They avoid such questions whenever possible. This does not make these questions go away. They remain at the heart of the civil order. The source of every society’s law-order is the god of that society.

B. Final Judgment vs. Relativism

The doctrine of God’s final judgment testifies against all forms of relativism. This is why secular liberalism rejects this Christian doctrine. So does secular conservatism. The doctrine of God’s final judgment announces that certain ideas are eternally true; therefore, other ideas are eternally false. God will impose eternal, irreversible negative sanctions on those people who believe certain theologically incorrect doctrines, such as the denial of the following truths. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). The doctrine of final judgment offers covenant-breaking men no wiggle room. There are no loopholes. There will be no plea bargaining on judgment day.

God’s final judgment is the foundation of men’s temporal judgments. *The ability of men to make accurate judgments in history exists only because men are made in God’s image.* Men can render preliminary judgments because God will render final judgment. If God will not render final judgment, then all human judgments are without either a moral or an aesthetic foundation. Everything that men do would then be swallowed up in cosmic relativism and impersonalism.

There are three scientific views of cosmic history, apart from the doctrine of creation and final judgment. First is the heat death of the

2. “Lord William Bentinck on the Suppression of *Sati*, 8 November 1829,” *Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy, 1750–1921*, ed. Arthur B. Keith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), I, pp. 208–26.

universe. This is the most widely held cosmological position today. The world is said to be running down. If it is, then it must end in the meaningless, impersonal triumph of absolute zero over all life and over every natural process that supposedly can lead to life in the cosmos.³ Second in popularity is the idea of cyclical history. Everything repeats itself. The cosmic scientific version of this ancient doctrine is the eternal expansion and contraction of the universe.⁴ Third is the doctrine of continual creation and destruction. Hydrogen atoms appear out of nothing, and matter disappears into nothing. (This steady-state theory of the universe is not widely held among scientists, having been made difficult by the failure of the orbital satellites to detect the radiation which the theory mandates.)⁵ All three views are cosmically impersonal. There is no God to impute meaning to history and nature.

The idea of imputation is the idea of judgment. *To impute is to render judgment.* Men assess the historical meaning, purpose, or role of this or that event. How can they do this on their own authority? What meaning, purpose, or role does anyone's judgment possess? After he dies, what meaning, purpose, or role will his lifetime of rendering judgment possess in retrospect? Which of his temporal successors will determine this authoritatively? How will any successor enforce his retroactive judgments? He is mortal, too. He will die. The final human judge in the process will have the last say. But if he, too, is at last swallowed up by the meaningless, purposeless, impersonal natural force of death, then no one has the last say. Everything turns out to be purposeless in retrospect when there is no agent capable of rendering retrospective judgment.

Modern man prefers to declare an official doctrine of relativism. He declares this doctrine authoritatively. "Everything changes. Nothing is permanent." This is a revised version of Heraclitus' doctrine that, in history, everything flows. "Change is the essence of reality." But this means a world without final meaning, a world without fixed judgments. This means the triumph of relativism. Modern pagan man, imitating ancient pagan man, prefers relativism to the doctrine of God's final judgment. Relativism is covenant-breaking man's

3. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

4. Stanley Jaki, *Science and Creation: From eternal cycles to an oscillating universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, [1974] 1980).

5. Stanley Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 269–71.

preliminary declaration of final judgment on himself: “Not guilty.”

C. Christian Relativism

1. *Inescapable Judgment*

The presentation of the gospel—the *good news of Jesus Christ*—necessarily involves the doctrine of *final judgment by Jesus Christ*: the fearful news. The positive sanctions of God’s salvation of some people have meaning only in the context of the negative sanctions of God’s damnation of all the other people. Christians therefore must render preliminary judgment on those who reject the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary atonement. They tell the listener, “no decision is still a decision: a decision against.” They are correct. *Judgment is an inescapable concept*. By ignoring Jesus Christ, men render judgment against Him. No decision is still a decision. Original sin begins with a decision against Christ. Christians assume this when they announce Christ’s legal claims on their listeners.

At the same time, Christians resent judgments placed on them by other Christians. They accuse their Christian critics of being judgmental, of being Pharisees. They say that they stand with Jesus against Pharisaism. They do not ask themselves this crucial question: “On what legal basis did Jesus accuse the Pharisees, other than His authoritative view of God, man, law, sanctions, and time?” *Judgment is an inescapable concept*.

2. *Accurate Judgment*

The dividing issue here is not the presence of judgment. Judgment is inescapable. There is no neutrality in life. The issue here is the accuracy of the judgment rendered: the judge’s lawful authority to render judgment, the authority of his standards, and the accuracy of his application of these standards to specific events or ideas. But naive Christians prefer to cite Matthew 7:1. “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” They do not understand that Jesus gave this warning in His sermon on the mount, in which He issued positive and negative verbal sanctions. They do not understand that Jesus was calling on His disciples to *render judgment biblically* as their affirmation of their *right to be judged biblically*.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye

shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7:1–5).

His point was not the moral necessity of avoiding the task of rendering judgment against slivers in other people's eyes. His point was that critics must render accurate judgment first against beams in their own eyes, as the preliminary step in rendering judgment on other men's visual condition. But many Christians are blind on this point. They freely render judgments on the judicial status of non-Christians, but then they relegate both morals and doctrine to peripheral status within the church. This is a schizophrenic position, yet it is widespread.

Every Christian wants to stay within his moral, theological, and aesthetic comfort zone, rendering judgments against the antinomians on his left, who reject his authority, and the legalists on his right, whose authority he rejects. But this epistemological question is inescapable: *By what standard?* Roman Catholics cast out the Eastern Orthodox Church in 1054. The East responded in kind. There were mutual anathemas all around. Then Protestants left Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century. More mutual anathemas all around.

3. *Rhetoric of the Protestant Reformation*

The Protestant Reformation was secured by controversy and bloodshed. Religious wars went on for over a century in Europe, culminating on the continent in the Thirty Years War between Catholics and Protestants (1618–48) and in England with a civil war between Protestants (1642–60). Yet there are millions of Protestants today who decry mere confrontational rhetoric. They seem completely unaware of Luther's repeated use of ridicule and sarcasm in mobilizing his Protestant forces.⁶ They are also unaware of John Calvin's use of invective in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This includes the

6. Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 52, 70, 89, 103, 197–98, 200–202, 205; Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–1546* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 189–99.

vast majority of those few people who identify themselves as Calvinists. They have not read what Calvin wrote.

Roman Catholics: “raving madmen” who “prate”⁷

Bullingerites: “squeamish men”⁸

Osiander (Lutheran): “perversely ingenious,”⁹ “ignorantly babbling”¹⁰ “absurd” “rubbish,”¹¹ a “Sophist”¹² writing “bombast,”¹³ “mad error,”¹⁴ and “deceits”¹⁵

Arminians: “dogs” who “vomit forth these blasphemies” and “rave,”¹⁶ “impious and profane men”¹⁷

Anabaptists: “madmen” who preach “pestilential error”¹⁸

Scholastic theologians: “babble childishly” and “chatter,”¹⁹ “mad school of wranglers,”²⁰ “blockheads”²¹

Calvin described Jews as “sharp-nosed fault-finders” and “dogs.”²² He treated Epicureans, Socinians, Servetus, and other non-Christian opponents in the same way. No major Christian publishing company would issue either Luther’s or Calvin’s writings if they were alive today unless their books were heavily edited to remove such language. John Knox was, if anything, more intemperate. It is only because their books are regarded as classics and therefore beyond any editor’s blue pencil that their invective remains in print. Commentators “within the camp of the faithful” generally pass over these rhetorical flourishes whenever they think they can get away with silence. Protestants in the pews remain unaware of the rhetoric of the Protestant Reformation. They may have come to grips emotionally with the fact that Protestant and Catholic armies waged war on each other for over a century, but

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX, Book I, Chapter XI, Section 3.

8. *Ibid.*, I:XIII:3.

9. *Ibid.*, I:XV:3.

10. *Ibid.*, II:XII:6.

11. *Ibid.*, II:XII:7.

12. *Ibid.*, III:XI:7.

13. *Ibid.*, III:XI:8.

14. *Ibid.*, III:XI:10.

15. *Idem.*

16. *Ibid.*, I:XVII:2.

17. *Ibid.*, I:XVIII:3.

18. *Ibid.*, II:X:1.

19. *Ibid.*, III:II:8.

20. *Ibid.*, III:II:43.

21. *Ibid.*, III:XX:25.

22. *Ibid.*, I:VIII:11.

they would be amazed to learn that Christian authors used offensive rhetoric against each other. Modern Protestants are almost terminally naive.

There can be inappropriate rhetoric, but when the great dual issue of eternal life and death is at stake, divisiveness is inescapable. Judgments must be made. The questions are these: (1) Who possesses the lawful delegated authority to render these judgments representatively in God's name in history? (2) Whose historical judgments will God uphold at the final judgment?

D. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

This epistle deals with the importance of rendering judgment: inside the church and against the world. Paul pressures the church to take action against a person who had committed incest (chapter 5). He also tells them to avoid going into secular civil courts in order to settle disputes with other Christians (chapter 6). In neither case does he say that they should avoid rendering judgments.

This epistle is based on the necessity of rendering judgments in life, beginning with self-judgment. Why is this necessary? Because of God's final judgment. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:13–15).²³

Ray Sutton used to say that the best way for a newly arrived pastor to split the congregation is to begin his ministry to the church with a series of sermons on First Corinthians. I have no doubt that Sutton's assessment is correct. He recommended beginning with one of the gospels. This is wise, if the pastor's goal is to avoid splitting the congregation. I am not persuaded that this is always the correct goal. Some congregations need to be split early by the divisive power of the Bible's message of judgment. The unity that Paul proclaims in chapter 12 could be secured only by their imposing excommunication in chapter 5.

Sutton also recommended weekly communion, yet he said that the Lord's Supper is divisive: an ecclesiastical means of imposing God's sanctions. The sanctions that God brings through the sacrament of the

23. Chapter 3.

Lord's Supper cannot be avoided. Paul in chapter 11 warns against taking the Lord's Supper while harboring sin. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (11:28–31). God's sanctions are real. Self-judgment is important as a way to avoid them.

The church is cleansed of sin and sinners by inescapably judgmental preaching, inescapably judgmental communion, and predictable formal discipline. These are the three marks of a faithful church. Without godly judgment, there is no church. There is only a weekly get-together.

Conclusion

The task of rendering judgment is inescapable. It is basic to the dominion covenant. This involves making economic judgments. In a world of God-cursed scarcity (Gen. 3:17–19),²⁴ we must choose among scarce resources. We do so on the basis of our imputation: how much value we ascribe to one resource vs. another, in terms of which scale of values. We do this also in terms of objective market prices. Subjective imputation by competing and cooperating market participants is what establishes an objective array of prices.

The nagging and continual theoretical question of the relationship between men's subjective values and the market's objective prices can be solved only by an appeal to God as the sovereign imputing agent. He will render final judgment at the end of time, thereby establishing retroactively how close individuals and corporate entities came to His standards. Case by case, life by life, God will provide an answer to this rhetorical question: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).²⁵

24. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

25. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

INTRODUCTION

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; And charged them that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust (Matt. 12:14–21).

A. Judgments by Jesus

Jesus Christ rendered Spirit-filled judgments in history: on Jews and on gentiles. Yet He seldom spoke to gentiles. He brought positive sanctions to a handful of them: the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), the Roman centurion whose servant He healed from a distance (Matt. 8:5–13), and the woman of Canaan whose daughter He healed from a distance (Matt. 15:22–28). The testimony of the Samaritan woman to her fellow townspeople led to their conversion to saving faith. One of them told her, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). Jesus commented on the confidence in Jesus that the centurion had publicly announced, contrasting his faith with the faith of the Jews. “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour” (Matt. 8:11–13). Jesus said to the woman, “O woman, great is thy faith:

be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matt. 15:28). Jesus used the faith in Him shown by these gentiles as a means of condemning the Jews.

Jesus accurately assessed the Old Covenant order, and then He judged it negatively in full public view during His earthly ministry. He judged it by speaking against its leaders and also by healing their followers. He brought positive sanctions into the lives of common people. This action affirmed both His authority as a judge and His ability to bring negative sanctions into their lives. He healed bodies in order to prove that He could heal souls. He delivered some people from physical bondage to prove that He could deliver all people from spiritual bondage.

And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men (Matt. 9:2–8).

Jesus granted these positive sanctions in order to condemn Old Covenant Israel. “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you” (Luke 10:13–14). This was an Old Covenant strategy: *condemnation through charity*. “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee” (Prov. 25:21–22). Paul recommended this strategy. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom. 12:19–

20).¹ By granting favors to covenant-breakers that they do not deserve, the covenant-keeper invokes God's curse on them, should they fail to repent. He judges them in history as a lawful agent of God's judgment for eternity. So Jesus did to the Jews. This is judgment unto victory.

At the cross, the Jews and the Romans jointly judged Jesus. Three days later, His bodily resurrection demonstrated that He, not they, possessed the God-given authority to judge. At His ascension, He was visibly raised above the earth (Acts 1:9), thereby demonstrating the truth of His post-resurrection words to His disciples: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18b).² In A.D. 70, Jesus brought final judgment against Old Covenant Israel. Jerusalem was captured by the Roman army, and the temple was burned. His verbal judgment against Old Covenant Israel during His earthly ministry was confirmed in A.D. 70.³

Jesus was a servant during His earthly ministry, just as Isaiah had prophesied. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11). He repeatedly rendered judgment against sickness by healing the sick. He verbally condemned the Jews' religious leaders. They fought back, but lost. The gospel spread. Jesus successfully brought visible judgment against the Jews and their institutions in A.D. 70. Whose judgment was judgment unto failure? Christ's or the Old Covenant order's? His church has replaced Old Covenant Israel, just as He told the Pharisees that it would. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). His church has replaced Rome's religion. His followers captured the Roman state. Whose judgment was judgment unto victory (Matt. 12:20)?

B. Judgment Unto Victory

Jesus Christ's judgment is judgment unto victory. This is a crucial covenantal concept. His sanctions in history, both positive and

1. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

2. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

3. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

negative, lead to the long-term victory of His kingdom. The gates of hell cannot defend against the kingdom of God (Matt. 16:18). All Christians believe this. They debate over the issue of whether this victory will be universally manifested both in history and eternity or only in eternity. This is a debate between amillennialists on one side and both premillennialists and postmillennialists on the other. Then there is another divisive eschatological question. Will His kingdom's victory occur prior to His physical reappearance in history? This question divides premillennialists from postmillennialists. Rival social philosophies and social theories result from these rival eschatological positions.⁴

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul presents the biblical case for Christians' authority in history and their obligation to render judgments in history. There are two views of the world, Paul says in the early section of the epistle. They divide over the meaning of the cross (I Cor. 1:18). Each view judges the other to be foolish.⁵ There are two inescapably judgmental worldviews. One or the other must predominate in society.

Paul also calls on the Corinthians to judge each other formally in church courts (I Cor. 6:1–11).⁶ Is this a call for Christians to retreat from covenant-breaking society, or is it a call for them to prepare to judge covenant-breaking society? Again, the rival eschatological interpretations differ.

1. Victory Over Death

Chapter 15 of this epistle challenges the amillennial view. Paul insists that Christ will defeat all of his enemies in history, including the last one: death.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he

4. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

5. Chapter 1.

6. Chapter 6.

is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (vv. 22–28).

Paul makes this clear: only after Christ has defeated all of His enemies in history will He judge the world. The defeat over death is the final victory. Then Christ will hand over this world to His Father. Paul's language leaves very little wiggle room, exegetically speaking. This passage can be dealt with exegetically in a straightforward manner by postmillennialists and premillennialists, but amillennialists must deny the literalness of its description of Christ's visible victory over His enemies. They do this by interpreting Paul's plain words as symbolic of something else—exactly what, it is difficult for them to say. The text's language is much clearer than amillennial expositions of it.⁷

2. *Continuity, Not Discontinuity*

Jesus' parable of the tares and wheat (Matt. 13) eliminates the possibility of both post-tribulation and mid-tribulation dispensationalism. The parable plainly teaches that there will be no separation of Christians from non-Christians in history.⁸ This leaves only historic premillennialism, post-tribulational dispensationalism, and post-millennialism as possible interpretations of chapter 15.

Premillennialism predicts a future political reign on earth by Jesus, beginning one thousand years before the final judgment. Thus, Christ's judgment in history is seen by premillennialists as two-fold: through His people by means of an international, bureaucratic chain of command, but also personally, at the top of both the political and ecclesiastical judicial pyramids. Premillennialists rarely discuss what justice will be like during the future millennial kingdom of Christ in history. By refusing to discuss this, premillennialists implicitly reject the suggestion that today's institutions will set any significant precedents for the future. Premillennialists, by their silence regarding the institutional structure of the millennial era, imply that there will be a sharp discontinuity between institutional judgment in the pre-millennial era and judgment during the millennial kingdom era.

7. Chapter 14.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

The postmillennial view allows for Christianity's victory in history and also today's judicial-institutional continuity with the millennial era of victory. The concept of Christ's representative victory in history through His servants' dominion is unique to postmillennialism. Any discontinuity between today's world and the future era of Christian victory is comparative, not absolute. That is, this view of discontinuity does not allow for resurrected, sin-free incorruption to operate in the midst of sinful corruption. Jesus alone possessed this unique distinction in history, both before and after His resurrection. Postmillennialism preserves Paul's doctrine of the separation of corruption from incorruption. "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (I Cor. 15:50). Neither does incorruption inherit corruption. Christ will not reign in person on earth in history, either with or without resurrected Christians who will serve as His official sanctions-bringers.

This means that God's judgment in history—point four of the biblical covenant⁹—will be progressively established representatively—point two¹⁰—by covenant-keepers, which will eventually produce the millennial era of victory (point five).¹¹ How? By enforcing God's Bible-revealed law (point three).¹²

C. The Primary Theme of First Corinthians

This epistle is heavily judgmental of the congregation in Corinth. Paul calls them contentious (I Cor. 1:11). He calls them carnal (I Cor. 3:1). He defends himself against their critical judgment of his ministry (I Cor. 4:3). He deals with a major sin in the congregation: incest (I Cor. 5:1). He criticizes them for taking their disputes into pagan civil courts (I Cor. 6:1). He warns them against sinning against weak brethren (I Cor. 8:12). He warns them against violating the sanctity of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:21–22, 29–30).

Is there a common theme? Yes: *the inescapable task of rendering judgments in history*. This epistle makes it clear that there can be no

9. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

10. Sutton, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

11. Sutton, ch. 5; North, ch. 5.

12. Sutton, ch. 3; North, ch. 3.

neutrality, morally speaking. Men must make moral judgments. Then they must render judgment, i.e., speak and act in terms of their moral judgments. Judgments are either good or evil, wise or foolish. They are never morally neutral. Judgments are made in terms of a scale of values, and this scale of values is either covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking.

In chapter 1, he criticizes the Corinthian church for being contentious. Members have divided into factions based on their personal commitment to one or another co-founder of the congregation. This must cease, Paul says. The debate, he says, is not between this or that co-founder of the local congregation. Rather, the debate is between defenders of the cross and scoffers. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent” (vv. 18–19). Paul does not here deny the legitimacy of confrontation. On the contrary, he affirms it. There is necessary contention between consistent covenant-keepers and consistent covenant-breakers. “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (v. 20).

There must be judgments in history. Paul says that God has enabled His people to render accurate judgments in history.

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (I Cor. 2:10–13).

Christians are supposed to render judgments in history as God’s stewards. “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (I Cor. 4:1–2). We are required by Christ to render judgment on God’s behalf, not our own. We are God’s agents, responsible to Him. We are subordinate to the God who renders authoritative judgment. God judges representatively as well as

directly. Representative judgment must begin with formal judgment by the church against the enemies within. “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (I Cor. 5:12–13).

D. Economic Judgment

To judge is to impute. To impute is to make a declaration. A civil jury is supposed to use binding legal standards in order to evaluate the facts placed before it during the trial. Then it renders judgment: “guilty” or “not guilty.” This is also the conceptual model for economic imputation. As decision-makers, everyone must make continual evaluations and then make a declaration: good or bad. He must buy, hold, or sell.

1. Scale of Value

In economics, to judge is to attribute value—meaning importance—to a scarce economic resource, meaning any asset that commands a free market price. The individual evaluates what something is worth to him. The word “evaluate” even contains the root English word for value. In order to evaluate what something is worth to him, he must first possess a hierarchical standard of value or personal ends. Then he assesses the position of the thing to be purchased or not purchased, acted upon or ignored, in terms of his personal scale of value. This scale of value is not scientifically measurable, but it does allow ranking. It is an ordinal scale—first, second, third—rather than cardinal: exactly this much more or less.

I say it again: *to impute value is to make an estimation of something's importance on one's personal scale of values.* This scale of values has a time component. Every decision is a decision about the future. Every decision also has an eternal component. Paul makes this clear in his discussion of final things. “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (I Cor. 3:8). “Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is” (I Cor. 3:13). This is an extension of Christ's warning: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark

8:36).¹³

Taking into consideration what he regards as relevant, a decision-maker then decides whether or not to take some action. He first imputes value; then he acts in terms of this imputation. The outcome of all of the competing and cooperating subjective individual decisions in an economy is an array of objective prices. Subjective individual imputations produce corporate objective prices. Individual values are manifested publicly—declared—through prices.

2. *Value and Price*

It is the relationship between individual value and objective price that is the heart of economic analysis. Value and price are related, and it is the task of the economist to explain this relationship in terms of economic theory. It is a task that has baffled secular economists for centuries. A price is objective. Is value objective or subjective? Value, most economists have said since the 1870s, is subjective. It is imputed by acting men. The free market's objective array of prices results from competitive bidding by economic actors who independently impute subjective value to objectively scarce resources—resources that command a price. The theoretical debate begins here. Is the free market's objective array of prices in some way morally justified—legitimate—because of the interplay between subjective value and objective scarcity? Economists hate to raise the issue of moral justification, but there is no escape. Men ask: "Does a free market price incorporate justice, even though it is the result of an unequal initial distribution of resources among the bidders? Does the array of free market prices maximize social value? Is there even such a thing as social value?" These debates never end. They never get resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

Oscar Wilde defined a cynic as a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. This is very close to what Jesus taught about value and price, except that He did not limit His observation to cynics. Covenant-breakers are fools, He said, because they do not understand what is truly valuable in this life. They are seduced by the lure of temporal wealth. They are like the rich man who made plans to build more barns in order to store his overflowing wealth. "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be

13. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20–21).¹⁴

3. *The Mind of Christ*

To render accurate judgment, a person must have the mind of Christ. The Christian definitively possesses this. “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16).¹⁵ It is every Christian’s God-given task to improve his ability to render godly judgment over time. There should be progressive sanctification in each Christian’s rendering of judgment. There should also be progressive sanctification in each Christian institution’s rendering of judgment.

In the field of economics, the decision-making Christian is called on by God to assess the value of scarce economic resources, including the forfeited opportunities associated with owning one thing rather than another, and also the value of his investment of irreplaceable time, in terms of God’s special call to him as a steward. The Christian should put an objective price on resources based on his understanding of their value to God. Jesus said, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matt. 13:45–46).¹⁶ The Christian should think God’s thoughts after Him, for he has the mind of Christ. Inescapably, he must judge as a representative agent—a steward—of God.

Conclusion

Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians is a call to every Christian to get his priorities straight and then make judgments in terms of them. Men’s judgments are initially subjective: the subjective imputation of subjectively perceived value. These subjective judgments become objective through men’s decisions. Each person’s subjective value scale at any point in time is judged by God in terms of His objective value. God, as both Creator and Judge, imputes value according to His subjective scale of values. But His subjective scale of values is

14. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 24.

15. Chapter 2.

16. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 31.

objectively authoritative in history and eternity. In God is the reconciliation of subjective value and objective value. His scale of values is objectively true, not because God conforms Himself to standards that are external to Him and authoritative over Him, but because He is absolutely sovereign.

Christians are required by God to act in terms of what they believe to be true. Economically speaking, Christians should buy and sell in terms of what they believe. As men move through time, they continually exchange one condition for another. Possessing the mind of Christ, Christians are guided by the Spirit of God. They are supposed to accept this guidance. They are supposed to assess their situations in terms of this guidance, and then act in terms of this assessment. This is the integrating message of First Corinthians.

1

TWO KINDS OF FOOLISHNESS

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (I Cor. 1:18–25).

The theocentric focus here is the wisdom of God. It is contrasted with fallen man's knowledge, which fallen man regards as wise. God does not.

What is wisdom? The ability to identify the law of God and then to apply it: render judgment. Judgment is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Foolishness: An Inescapable Concept

1. The Cross

Here, Paul assails the wisdom of this world. This world's wisdom regards the cross of Christ as foolishness. In contrast, the redeemed

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

person knows that the cross is the power of God. Between these two assessments there is no common ground. Each regards the other's position as foolish. Paul is saying that there is no escape from the concept of foolishness. The question is: Who or what is truly foolish? By what standard? Decided by whom?

His use of "the cross" is broad. It refers to the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ: the death and bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. The cross is the heart of Paul's message of redemption. Later in this epistle, he writes: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (I Cor. 15:14). "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17). The centrality of the cross is the centrality of the bodily resurrection of Christ. Christ's resurrection was God's visible, historical, definitive sanction on death. This is the essence of the gospel for Paul. This is the good news.

The wisdom of this world denies the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ. It also denies the final resurrection and the final judgment of mankind. This was made clear during Paul's preaching in Athens on Mars' Hill. "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17:32). This was the divisive doctrine for Paul's listeners.

I argue in this commentary that the central theme of this epistle is judgment: point four of the biblical covenant. Paul begins this epistle with a discussion of the cross. The cross remains the supreme manifestation of God's judgment in history: the sacrifice of God's son. This was a far greater judgment than the curses placed on Adam and Eve, including death. They were guilty. Jesus Christ was innocent. The supreme judgment fell on an innocent man who was also God.

Paul argues here that the defining characteristic of godly wisdom is an affirmation of the redemptive power of the cross of Christ. The defining characteristic of this world's wisdom is its denial of the redemptive power of the cross of Christ. These two positions are irreconcilable. There is no common ground between them. Paul begins with the assumption of the irreconcilable nature of these rival interpretations of reality. As he says later in this epistle, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14).²

2. Chapter 2.

The power of the cross means different things to covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers. For covenant-breakers, the cross is the power of physical death over physical life. They deny the historical fact of Christ's literal bodily resurrection. For covenant-keepers, the cross is the power of God's redemption over sin and death. They affirm His bodily resurrection. For covenant-breakers, the cross manifests the superiority of this world's power over the power of God's covenantal redemption in history. For covenant-keepers, the cross manifests the power of God's comprehensive redemption over the power of this world.

2. *Making Accurate Judgments*

Paul is saying here that the only correct basis for making accurate judgments about reality is to begin with a presupposition: the redemptive power of the cross. Put another way, the only basis for making accurate judgments is to assume the redemptive reality of the cross, which was the supreme act of judgment in history: God's judgment of His son, followed by Christ's judgment on the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The supreme judgment of God that was manifested at the cross is the covenant-keeper's basis for making subordinate judgments. *God's definitive historical judgment against sin is to serve as the basis of covenant-keeping man's progressive judgments against both sin and error.* Covenant-keeping man's progressive rendering of judgment against both sin and intellectual error is an aspect of the kingdom of God in history. This is another way of saying that God extends His kingdom in history by empowering His people to render judgments as His representatives, even as Adam and Eve should have rendered judgment against Satan by rendering judgment against Satan's representative, the serpent.³ This empowerment is based on covenant-keepers' confession of faith in Paul's view of the cross.

God promises to bring to naught the wisdom of this world. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (v. 19). God promises to bring negative sanctions against the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent. Paul is using "wise" and "prudent" ironically: the wisdom and understanding of the covenant-breaking

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), Appendix E: "Witnesses and Judges."

world. The wisdom of this world defies God's law. God will bring the wise to naught, i.e., to nothing. This is God's negative sanction.

God eventually brings positive sanctions in history on covenant-keepers (Ps. 72) and negative sanctions against covenant-breakers. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:17–19). God will eventually bring negative sanctions against this world's "best and brightest."

3. Rhetoric (Persuasion)

Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (v. 20). He identifies three types of men as defenders of foolishness: the wise, the scribe, and the disputer. Yet wisdom is not wrong. Solomon was wise (I Ki. 3:12). Also, it is not that the ability to write that is itself wrong. Paul wrote epistles. Finally, it is not that disputation is always wrong. Paul is spoken of as having disputed with critics. "And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him" (Acts 9:29). Paul is contrasting rival forms of wisdom, rival writers, and rival disputers. The dividing issue here is the correct knowledge of God. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (v. 21). This is an extension of John's observation regarding Jesus. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:10–13). Accurate knowledge about God's agent of redemption is closed to those who rely on the wisdom of this world.

Paul adopts a rhetorical technique: attributing to God the infirmities of men. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (v. 25). He does this in order to contrast two kinds of knowledge. He contrasts the worst of God (as if there could be a worst of God) with the best of mankind.

God's worst is superior to man's best. Paul is not saying that God is foolish. He is saying that whatever foolish men regard as the foolishness of God is nevertheless wiser than they are. The same rhetorical technique is evident in Paul's reference to the weakness of God.

4. *The Great Reversal*

God has a purpose in all this. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:27–29). The wisdom of this world will be confounded by that which the world's wise men regard as foolish. Similarly, the strong will be shamed by the weak. By using the base things of this world to outshine the "things that are"—*the powers that be*—God intends to glorify Himself.

Paul is arguing that there will someday be a great overturning by God. "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (v. 19). This overturning will be comprehensive. It will elevate those who are today abased. It will tear down those who affirm the wisdom of this world. This great overturning will reveal for all to see that the world's system has rewarded those whose spiritual heirs will be forced to surrender their authority to covenant-keepers. This will be God's judgment on this world's system, i.e., its system of sanctions.

Paul is saying that there are rival systems of interpretation regarding cause and effect in history. These rival systems are irreconcilable. They are based on rival views of God, man, law, sanctions, and the future: the covenant. But the heart of the matter, he says here, is their rival views of sanctions. This is manifested in their rival interpretations of the cross as the agency of sanctions: either the world's victory over God's system of redemption, or else God's victory over this world through the bodily resurrection of His son.

B. This World and the World to Come

What constitutes the essence of this foolish world? Paul is speaking of a world that is opposed to his view of the cross. He makes this plain in his opening sentence. "For the preaching of the cross is to

them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (v. 18). Men’s rival opinions regarding the cross are what separate this world from the world to come. Paul does not identify this future world by a specific time.

It could be argued that this coming world is eschatological: either eternity in contrast to time, or else a triumphant manifestation of God’s kingdom in history in contrast to the present. But this passage is not a time text. It does not provide evidence regarding the estimated time of arrival of the world to come.

Isaiah provided insight into the locus of the world to come: history. He prophesied regarding a future era in which there will still be churls. This is clearly a pre-resurrection world:

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right. But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand (Isa. 32:1–8).

Here we have pictured a future world in which men will act consistently with what they believe. They will also recognize the difference between the person who shows liberality and the churl. The liberal person will speak his mind openly. He will not conceal the truth. “The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful.” Clearly, this is not today’s world. It was not Paul’s world, either.

Paul identifies his era as one in which foolishness reigns supreme in terms of its own pretended authority. Foolish men make judgments in terms of foolish standards. Those who are in positions of authority do not recognize the redemptive power of the cross. Not recognizing this, they are incapable of recognizing anything else clearly. Their judgment is distorted, and the proof of this is their assessment of the

cross. They look at their world, and they conclude what they have initially assumed: the judgment of God does not hang over it.

In Romans 11, Paul presents a prophecy of a world blessed by God in response to the re-grafting in of the Jews.⁴ By combining Paul's prophecy with Isaiah's, we see the promise of a world to come in which men will make judgments in terms of wise standards. This is the promise of epistemological reconstruction. Men will agree with each other regarding what is foolish and what is wise.

This transformation will be more than epistemological. It will also be ethical. The epistemological question regarding what men know truly and how they can know it is always a question of regeneration. Paul writes in the next chapter: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:14–16).⁵ To have the mind of Christ is to be regenerated by God's grace through the power of the cross.

The world to come will be different from today's world. It will be a world in which the gospel has transformed large numbers of people. The Bible's standards of moral judgment and people's ability to make judgments in terms of these standards will be widely distributed.

Paul was writing about the cross. Men's opinions regarding the cross still divide them from one another. Most people today know nothing of the cross, and among those who have heard of God's plan of salvation, most believe that the cross is foolishness. In contrast, redeemed people believe that faith in the cross provides power: over sin, over death, over the devil. There is an irreconcilable division here. This division of opinion in history reflects the permanent division in mankind's eternal condition: the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15) vs. the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22).

C. The Question of Social Cooperation

The epistemological question is this: If rival views of what constitutes foolishness really do divide mankind, then on what basis

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

5. Chapter 2.

can men share accurate information? If these two interpretive frameworks really are irreconcilable, which Paul says they are, then how can men cooperate through the division of labor, including the intellectual division of labor? How can society exist? It obviously does exist. But how is this possible, given the truth of Paul's assertion regarding rival definitions of foolishness? How can fools and wise people continue to cooperate in history?

Paul elsewhere answers this question in his discussion of the human heart. He wrote to the church at Rome that the *work* of the law—though not the law itself—is written on the heart of every person. “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom. 2:14–15).⁶ The law of God is written on the heart of every redeemed person. This has fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah regarding the coming covenant (Jer. 31:31–33). We read in Hebrews:

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:6–13).

Between the covenant-keeper and the covenant-breaker, there are two epistemological-ethical connections: first, the *image of God* in

6. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 2.

every person; second, the *work of the law* written in every heart. The regeneration of one group makes the dividing issues clearer to both groups: foolishness vs. wisdom. Covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers see the differences between them ever-more clearly as each group becomes progressively more consistent with its rival presuppositions regarding the cross.

This increasing self-consciousness is a liability for covenant-breakers. The more that covenant-breaking people hold back the truth in unrighteousness, as Paul said they do (Rom. 1:18), the less they can agree with each other and cooperate with each other. That is, the more ethically self-conscious they become, meaning the more consistent their behavior is with their covenant-breaking worldviews, the less they can benefit from the division of labor. They will not trust others sufficiently to become increasingly dependent on them. They will do unethical things that alienate prospective associates. They will not gain the cooperation they need to maximize their market-produced income. It is said that there is honor among thieves. As thieves become more consistent to their thievery, there will be less honor binding them. Their power will decrease.

Confessions of faith always have social, political, and cultural consequences.⁷ Confessions of faith cannot be limited to the mind. They have implications for human action. They spread from philosophy to behavior, from ideas to action. Confessions affect what individuals think. Therefore, they affect what individuals do. This means that they affect what people do *jointly*. A particular view of the way the world works affects the way that those who hold this view behave. Paul is saying that foolishness has consequences. Psalm 53 describes the results of foolishness: scattering.

To the chief Musician upon Mahalath, Maschil, A Psalm of David.
The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they,
and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.
God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if
there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of
them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none
that doeth good, no, not one. Have the workers of iniquity no
knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread: they have not
called upon God. There were they in great fear, where no fear was:
for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against

7. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church*, 3rd ed. (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1968] 1998).

thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them. Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad (Ps. 53:1–6).

D. Adam Smith on the Natural Social Order

Adam Smith's theory of individual economic motivation becomes important whenever we search for an explanation of men's cooperation. Smith argued in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that men's individual self-interest is what leads them to trade with other men. In pursuing his own self-interest, an individual voluntarily enters into exchanges with others. In this way, individual self-interest furthers social cooperation and the division of labor. This, in turn, increases output per unit of resource input.

Here are two questions that Smith had to answer. (1) How can the voluntary actions of competing individuals extend both social order and economic growth? (2) How do men's selfish actions create wealth for nations and not just wealth for themselves? Smith appealed to nature in search of answers. Smith regarded men's universal decisions to "truck and barter" as natural. That is, no one in authority needs to threaten to impose negative sanctions in order to persuade people to trade. They trade on their own authority, for their own purposes. A familiar folk phrase is this one: "Necessity is the mother of invention." Necessity here is assumed to be impersonal, imposed by scarcity, which is natural.

1. Natural Liberty

Smith extended his argument from the individual to society. There is a natural order of liberty, he said. Voluntary trade would still exist even if there were no civil governments that interfere with trade by imposing taxes, rules, and other impediments to voluntary exchange. This is what he meant by "the natural order of liberty." It was in contrast to what we might call "the unnatural order of political coercion." Throughout most of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith discusses the decisions of the civil government as unnatural and restrictive. These restrictions interfere with what otherwise would take place. They undermine men's liberty, and they thereby undermine the natural growth of wealth. Smith argued that economic growth is natural. Political restrictions that curtail voluntary exchange thereby

also curtail economic growth, and are therefore unnatural. He revolutionized economic theory by proclaiming economic growth as being part of the natural order of things. For millennia, at least until the Puritans' doctrine of postmillennialism, men had believed that progress is unsustainable, long term. "What goes up must come down." Nations rise and fall. Smith's theory of the wealth of nations applied to economic theory what Puritan eschatology a century earlier had applied to the doctrine of God's kingdom in history: a theory of compound economic growth.

Smith argued that scarcity in nature can be overcome through an increase in the division of labor. He began his book with what has become the most famous passage in economics: the description of the pin-makers, whose output is multiplied enormously by tools. It takes capital to create these tools. Because producers seek to increase their personal wealth by increasing the productivity of their workers, capital formation that funds innovation can steadily, "naturally" lead to the conquest of nature's scarcity. Nature's resources are scarce, Smith recognized, as did his Enlightenment peers. Smith revolutionized social theory by arguing that what is natural—scarcity—can be progressively overcome by what is also natural: the natural system of liberty. If men are simply left alone—laissez-faire—by civil government, their individual self-interest will lead them to trade with others, which will increase the traders' output, which will increase their wealth, which will increase society's wealth. The system of natural liberty, he argued, is the basis of the wealth of nations.

Smith's argument regarding the productivity of voluntary exchange soon became the central theoretical pillar of free market economics. It also became the most familiar version of what I call right-wing Enlightenment social theory. Smith moved the West's discussion of the foundations of social order from the corporate decision-making of politics to the individual decision-making in a free market. He placed the origin of economic order in the self-interested but peaceful decisions of individuals. He became the most famous and the most influential exponent of the Scottish Enlightenment tradition, which regarded social order as both unplanned and evolutionary.

2. The Problem of Sin

Smith recognized that there is a problem that is apparently not solved by the system of natural liberty: sin. How can men secure their

liberty and their property from the sin-based predations of others? The universal answer is political coercion. It was also Smith's answer. Smith was not an anarchist. He believed that civil government is necessary to restrict private coercion and fraud. But he also recognized that civil government can become a tool of predation. His book emphasizes this aspect of civil government. He also believed that justice can be provided by the free market.⁸ He did not resolve this theoretical problem: the maximization of natural liberty vs. the suppression of sin. Sin is unquestionably natural.

That men are sinful was widely understood by Enlightenment social theorists. They argued that men are not totally depraved, but this did not lead them to abandon the doctrine of sin—just the Christian doctrine of original sin and the Christian doctrine of redemption. For over a century before Smith, English political theorists had taken up the challenge of Thomas Hobbes: to explain how individuals join with each other to create civil government for the sake of maintaining peace. The doctrine of the social compact was popular in Smith's day, but the establishment of this compact was understood as an event of hypothetical history, not an actual event. Enlightenment scholars knew that no group of men had come together far in the misty past to establish a society through a contract. The story of such an event was hypothetical history. It was a device for defending the legitimacy of civil government.

E. Rousseau's Rival Theory: Hypothetical History

The Enlightenment distinguished between factual history and hypothetical history: the way a sequence of events logically must have happened, even though there is no documentary evidence that it did happen this way. The classic formulation of this hypothetical approach to history is found in Part I of Rousseau's 1754 essay, "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality."

Let us begin then by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question. The investigations we may enter into, in treating this subject, must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain

8. Gary M. Anderson, "Adam Smith, Justice, and the System of Natural Liberty," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, XIII (Summer 1997), pp. 1–20. This article is available on the web: <http://tinyurl.com/253t7>

the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin; just like the hypotheses which our physicists daily form respecting the formation of the world. Religion commands us to believe that, God Himself having taken men out of a state of nature immediately after the creation, they are unequal only because it is His will they should be so: but it does not forbid us to form conjectures based solely on the nature of man, and the beings around him, concerning what might have become of the human race, if it had been left to itself. This then is the question asked me, and that which I propose to discuss in the following discourse. As my subject interests mankind in general, I shall endeavour to make use of a style adapted to all nations, or rather, forgetting time and place, to attend only to men to whom I am speaking.⁹

Smith asserted a system of natural liberty by arguing that voluntary exchange exists naturally. Trade produces social cooperation and order; therefore, voluntary trade naturally leads to social order. Rousseau's position, presented in his book, *The Social Contract* (1762), appealed to a hypothetical General Will—a will that would manifest itself clearly, were it not for the distorting effects of voluntary associations. The General Will is thwarted by these local institutions and loyalties.¹⁰ The General Will is natural; voluntary associations are not.

1. *The General Will*

The General Will is mankind's realm of true freedom, he said. It is incarnated in the central civil government, which alone can overcome the blinding and distorting influences of localism. Individuals are blinded to the General Will by their local loyalties. A centralized state alone speaks in the name of the General Will. Men's true self-interest is found in political participation at the highest level of civil government. Of course, there remains the problem of representation. Who speaks legitimately for the state on behalf of the General Will? Rousseau was vague on this point. Modern political theory has yet to find an agreed-upon answer.

Rousseau's theory of the General Will is the antithesis of Smith's theory of natural liberty. The debate centers around the issue of the

9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754), in *The Social Contract and the Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (London: Dent, 1913).

10. Robert A. Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1968), ch. 1: "Rousseau and the Political Community."

meaning of “natural.” Smith argued that what is natural is what men do naturally, on their own authority, in their own self-interest. Rousseau argued that what is natural is the social order that would exist if only men understood their true self-interest, which they cannot perceive because of the distorting influence of local and personal interests. Smith offered as evidence the visible practices of acting men: they trade voluntarily when left alone by the state. Rousseau offered hypothetical history (the social compact) and a hypothetical General Will.

Smith explained the actual operations of a complex economy, not a hypothetical world somewhere over the rainbow, either in the misty past or the misty future. He did rely to some degree on a hypothetical construct in order to explain the daily workings of a free market social order: what men would do if there were no state intervention. This construct was at least partially grounded in reality: what men actually do when left alone by the state, i.e., trade. Smith offered an explanation that was also consistent with the widely accepted theory of human selfishness. His economic theory became one of the pillars of the right-wing Enlightenment’s social theory, along with his friend Edmund Burke’s defense of political localism. But his explanation was challenged by the intellectual heirs of Rousseau, who triumphed institutionally for most of the twentieth century through a series of statist political movements. By 1950, the academic and political defenders of Adam Smith’s economics were few and far between—mostly concentrated at the University of Chicago.

Rousseau’s defense of state centralization gained wide acceptance by intellectuals for over two centuries. Few political theorists followed him in his theory of the General Will, which had been the foundation of his social theory. This concept was far too metaphysical for the tastes of modern intellectuals, especially after Darwin had undermined their faith in the existence of purposeful nature. Rousseau’s political ideas were successful because he justified centralized political power in the name of individual freedom. His political theory justified the left-wing Enlightenment’s quest for political power in the name of the sovereign people.

2. The Fall of the Soviet Union

By the year 2000, Smith’s view had seemingly triumphed over Rousseau’s, although it had been rejected for two centuries by left-

wing Western intellectuals. What had changed everything was the unexpected failure of the Communist Party's attempted *coup* in the Soviet Union, August 19–21, 1991. On December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union committed suicide. The leaders dissolved it. Nothing like this had ever happened before: the bloodless dissolution of a gigantic empire.

The visible failure of left-wing Enlightenment social theory—Marx's and especially Engels' top-down theory of social organization under socialism¹¹—in 1991 left its defenders almost speechless. Contrary to all expectations, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had failed to maintain its power. Left-wing Enlightenment thought for two centuries had worshipped power in the name of freedom, beginning publicly with the French Revolution. The economic poverty of the Soviet Union had been visible to anyone who visited the country, but left-wing intellectuals had long denied the relevance of what they actually saw in the name of a hoped-for economic future and present-day military power.¹² The Soviet Union, in the words of Richard Grenier in the mid-1980s, was Bangladesh with missiles, but for left-wing intellectuals, Soviet society's legitimacy resided in those missiles. When the Communist Party visibly lost power in 1991, both Communism and socialism lost legitimacy among left-wing intellectuals, worldwide.

The triumph of Adam Smith's right-wing Enlightenment theory of social order through individual self-interest was achieved in intellectual circles overnight, but more by default than by widespread conversion. Intellectuals long for the good old days. They still dream of exercising political power over others. They had long believed that the exercise of such power would make society rich. Instead, it universally bankrupted every centrally planned economy. The failure was universal. Private property produces increasing per capita wealth; central planning produces economic irrationality and mindless bureaucracy. This is an unpleasant truth that left-wing intellectuals had resisted for two centuries.¹³ Smith turned out to be correct about the basis of the wealth of nations.

Smith's theory of economic coordination through impersonal free

11. Frederick Engels, "On Authority" (1873), in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 23 (New York: International Publishers, 1988), pp. 422–25.

12. Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

13. Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

market forces created by individual competition—supply and demand—assumes the existence of universal standards of economic value. It assumes, above all, that men prefer more to less at any given price. This presumption remains at the heart of modern economic analysis. But there is a problem with this assumption. The Bible says regarding moral wisdom, “But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death” (Prov. 8:36). This means that the rival forms of foolishness are ultimately not in agreement on values, even the values of life and death. How, then, can Christian social theorists explain social cooperation? What is the basis of the agreement that makes social cooperation possible?

G. Universally Agreed-Upon Benefits

Men are made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26). This means that they share a common perception and a common rationalism, without which social life would be impossible. This common rationalism is held back through man’s rebellion, but it cannot be completely erased from rational minds. It is sufficient to condemn men before God. It is also sufficient to enable the formation of economies and societies.

Moses told the Israelites to obey God; God would bless them if they did (Deut. 28:1–14).¹⁴ These blessings would be visible to foreigners. Foreigners would recognize the beneficial nature of these blessings. Moses said: “Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deut. 4:5–8).¹⁵ Yet these foreigners are covenant-breakers. How can they recognize the truth?

In the modern industrial world, perhaps the greatest of all blessings is the high survival rate of children. In the second half of the twentieth century, the great child-crippling and child-killing diseases

14. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

were overcome in the industrial nations, at least for the time being. Parents today can be confident that, statistically, all of their children will probably survive them. This benefit of modern civilization would be recognized as the supreme benefit, or close to it, by the vast majority of cultures throughout history. Burying one's child is one of the most emotionally painful of all events in this life. Burying more than one child during a marriage was common two centuries ago, extending back as far as recorded history extends. Smith spoke of Scottish highland women in the seventeenth century who had borne 20 children and buried 18.¹⁶ This is no longer common in the industrial West.

So, foolishness regarding the cross is an underlying foolishness—an ultimate foolishness—whose economic effects can be overcome in history through individual self-interest. *There is an inescapable hierarchy of values associated with the image of God in man.* Men hold back the truth of God in their rebellion, but it takes a supreme act of will for someone to suppress the testimony of the work of the law in his heart. This cannot be done completely. The covenant-breaker at the core of his rebellion loves death, but, like a drowning man, fights for life. He wants to stay afloat a bit longer. He will pay a great deal for a life preserver. “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse,” Shakespeare put in the mouth of Richard III. We understand the king's sentiment, given his military situation.

H. Compartmentalizing Foolishness

I want to achieve certain goals. I will be able to do this only by means of assistance from others. How can I gain their assistance? Answer: by begging, by compulsion, or by offering something that others may want in exchange for their help. Smith argued that offering something in voluntary exchange is by far the most effective way to gain the cooperation of others most of the time. Trade is the way to increase one's personal wealth. But, Smith also argued, it is also the way to increase national wealth. This includes trade across national borders. If people on one side of a border are benefitting by cross-border trade, then so are people on the other side. Members of both nations are getting richer; therefore, he concluded, so are the nations.

Wealth does not make covenant-breakers any less foolish in the sight of God. They are foolish regarding Christ, the cross, the

16. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Bk. I, Ch. 8.

resurrection, and salvation by grace through faith. They are not necessarily foolish regarding their ability to advance themselves through voluntary trade. The kind of foolishness that Paul speaks of in this passage is spiritual. Cornelius Van Til used to say that when a person is saved by grace, he does not receive a new set of brains. He also used to say that a covenant-breaker's thinking is like a rotary saw that is set at a wrong angle. No matter how much he sharpens the blade, it will not cut properly. If a covenant-breaker is smart, he possesses a competitive advantage over a less intelligent covenant-keeper. This advantage may not be decisive, but it exists. But until he has his ethical outlook realigned, he will not cut straight. His foolishness will remain, no matter how clever he is.

The question is: Which kind of foolishness will win the culture war? The foolishness of covenant-breakers or covenant-keepers? Covenant-breakers seem to have the advantage: there are so many of them. Most of the institutions of modern life have been designed by the use of blueprints that accommodate off-angle rotary saws. This seems to point to defeat for Christ's kingdom in history. But social reality intervenes, as does God, who has established the covenantal laws of society. The laws governing society, like the laws of economics, favor productivity. Covenant-keeping increases productivity. Many commonplaces of Western civilization reflect basic social and personal truths. "Honesty is the best policy." "A penny saved is a penny earned." (This is incorrect today: a penny saved is approximately 1.4 pennies earned, depending on your income tax bracket.) All of reality is structured in terms of God's law. Reality places constraints on all institutions. Anyone who wishes to achieve success through participation in the division of labor is pressured by reality to conform to God's social and economic laws. Institutions that were designed poorly in order to fit foolish men's off-center rotary saws will deteriorate rapidly or even collapse. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is the best example I know.

Foolishness about the cross is always a liability. Such foolishness cannot be kept perfectly compartmentalized. It flows through the moral cracks that exist in all foundations and walls. Societies progressively reflect their people's view of the cross. If the cross is power, as Paul says it is, then foolishness regarding the cross is weakness. This weakness will be progressively revealed as history moves toward its eschatological culmination.

Conclusion

Paul's concept of mankind's two kinds of foolishness points to the triumph of God's kingdom in history. *The wisdom of the cross spreads into other areas of men's minds*. It restructures redeemed men's vision. It recognizes God's supremacy over time and redemption's supremacy over sin. It realigns the off-angle rotary saws of this world. Over time, it produces visible wealth. Over time, men will see the difference that God's law makes economically. *The foolishness of the cross produces economic success*. Foolishness against the cross erodes the social foundations of apostate societies.

Paul returns to this theme later in his epistle. "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain" (I Cor. 3:18–20). God uses the confidence of the covenant-breaker to destroy his plans. In fact, even the verse Paul cites is an example of this. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (Job 5:13). This was Eliphaz's admonition of Job. God later excoriated him for his criticisms of Job (Job 42:7). Eliphaz was too wise for his own good. He cited the truth, but applied it incorrectly to Job's situation.

Foolishness cannot be permanently compartmentalized. It spreads. Churls will come to no good end. Fools will fare poorly. But these developments take time to manifest themselves. Psalm 73 follows Psalm 72, but, in the history of mankind, Psalm 73 precedes Psalm 72. Psalm 73 deals with the temporary visible successes of the wicked.¹⁷ Psalm 72 deals with a righteous king whose rule transforms his society. "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed" (Ps. 72:16–17).

In the meantime, the image of God in all men leads almost all men to affirm certain truths, such as this one: more is better than less at the same price. Covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers can work together cooperatively in order to attain their common goal—the goal

17. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

of *more*—even though their present presuppositions and long-term goals are at war.

The nearly universal goal of increased personal wealth is made less costly to attain by means of voluntary exchange. People become wealthier when they successfully serve customers. The free market's principle of service to customers as a means to greater personal wealth is consistent with Christ's description of Christian leadership. "And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke 22:25–26).¹⁸

What is natural for natural man is not service but domination, coercion, and pillage. Hobbes' theory of man in the state of nature is closer to the truth of what natural man is than Smith's theory of the natural system of liberty. Smith lived in a Christian social order. So did Rousseau. Both men assumed what had to be proven, namely, that natural man is trustworthy. The Bible makes it plain that the more consistent natural man is with his covenant-breaking presuppositions, the less trustworthy he is. But his way of rebellion is ultimately suicidal. "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36). Thus, to the extent that he seeks greater personal wealth in a society that honors biblical laws that prohibit private physical coercion and theft, he must conform himself to principles of success that are denied by his presuppositions. He must become inconsistent in his thinking in order to prosper. He must abide by the *work* of the law that is written in his heart (Rom. 2:14–15).

18. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 51.

2

TWO KINDS OF MINDS

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14–16).

The theocentric issue here is the mind of Christ, which is fundamentally at odds with the mind of covenant-breaking man. The covenant-keeper possesses the mind of Christ. This distinction divides covenant-keepers from covenant-breakers. The covenant-breaker neither receives nor perceives the things of the spirit. The difference is an issue of rendering judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Tainted Knowledge

Paul continues his argument regarding the two kinds of knowledge. Here, he focuses on two kinds of mind: natural and spiritual. He calls the spiritual mind “the mind of Christ.” The natural man does not receive the things of the spirit. *With this assertion, Paul sets forth his case against every variety of common-ground philosophy.* He distinguishes spiritual things from natural things. The natural man will not receive that which is spiritual.

How comprehensive are “the things of the spirit of God”? Are they limited to inner realms, such as personal salvation and its emotional results? Or are they limited to soul and church only? Or soul and church and family only? Are they limited to psychology? Or do they

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

apply to the operations of physical nature? (As most people use the word “nature,” they have in mind “natural,” as distinguished from “supernatural.”) When Paul says that natural men cannot understand the things of the spirit, does he mean that they cannot understand personal salvation? Or does he mean that they cannot understand the universe?

The answer is found in the previous chapter of this epistle, in which Paul contrasts two kinds of foolishness.² Paul applies this contrast to men’s opinions regarding the cross and its redemptive ramifications. The natural man and the spiritual man interpret the cross differently, so they also interpret this world differently. These differences do not apply merely to isolated areas of the creation. They apply to all areas. The covenant-keeper sees this world as God’s creation. The covenant-breaker doesn’t, or else he defines both God and creation differently from what the Bible teaches.

This helps us to understand Paul’s next assertion: “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (v. 15). The person with the mind of Christ makes judgments regarding all kinds of things. He considers all areas of life in terms of the mind of Christ. This does not mean that he makes no mistakes. It means that his explanation of cause and effect is based on the idea of God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. As Paul writes elsewhere, Christians give “thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:12–17). The covenant-breaker does not give thanks for any of this.

This raises a crucial question: *Can any aspect of God’s creation be accurately interpreted apart from God’s Spirit?* If the answer is *yes*, then at least one of two conclusions follows: (1) God’s Spirit is sometimes inaccurate, since the interpreter has interpreted things differently from the Spirit’s interpretation; (2) God’s Spirit is

2. Chapter 1.

sometimes irrelevant, since the interpreter came to the same conclusion on his own authority. On the other hand, if the answer is *no*, then the covenant-breaker's accurate conclusion is based on the fact that he is at some point thinking inconsistently with his own presuppositions regarding God, man, law, cause and effect, or the future. God's Spirit actively restrains him from becoming consistent and therefore destructive. He is not interpreting anything apart from God's Spirit, who restrains him. This was one of Cornelius Van Til's numerous intellectual achievements: to show that anything the covenant-breaker says that happens to be true in some narrow sense is inconsistent with his own assumptions about the autonomy of both nature and man. He comes to the truth in a limited area of his thought only because he has made a mistake in logic. He is not epistemologically self-conscious.

We can see Paul's opposition to a common-ground philosophy in his suggestion that the things of the spirit provide the correct interpretive framework—the presuppositions—for the non-spirit realm. The Bible's doctrine of original sin has implications for man's self-knowledge. There are, in the language of theologians, noetic effects of sin. The natural man cannot receive the things of the spirit, Paul insists. How will the natural man be able to comprehend accurately the doctrine of original sin? How will those who affirm such a doctrine find ways to persuade natural men to think and act in terms of it? These are not hypothetical questions. They are at the heart of all civil law. What is right, and what is wrong? Which acts should a civil government prohibit by law? As Rushdoony asked in 1959: By what standard.³

Paul is here speaking about the cross of Christ. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (I Cor. 1:23). "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). The spiritual nature of the message of the cross is not accurately understood by the natural man. The natural man may hear the words, but he does not understand them. Paul had already experienced this phenomenon in Athens. None of his covenant-breaking listeners accepted his message. "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17:32).

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Vallecito, California: Ross House [1959] 1995). (<http://bit.ly/rjrstandard>)

The cross is the message of God's comprehensive judgment: negative (the crucifixion) and positive (the resurrection). God judged Jesus Christ in history, so that Christ's covenant people will not have to suffer God's negative sanctions in eternity. God judged Jesus Christ—declared Him guilty as charged—and then executed judgment. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). Then God publicly judged sin and death through Christ's bodily resurrection.

The natural man rejects knowledge that is "tainted" by spirit. He resists it. Yet, whether he believes it or not, the natural man faces a world in which all knowledge is tainted by God's Spirit. All creation testifies to the truth of God, Paul taught (Rom. 1:18–22).⁴ There is no escape from the testimony of God's Holy Spirit. Van Til once wrote that if there were one radio station that did not testify to the existence of God, natural man would listen to no other. But no such radio station exists. All creation testifies to the God of the Bible. The natural man rejects this testimony. He rejects the ideas of creation and providence.

This means that the natural man can never understand anything truly. He resists the testimony of all creation. He does not receive the things of the spirit, yet every aspect of creation testifies to God. So, he has to substitute rival explanations for the world he sees. For him, cause and effect in nature and history do not begin with the sovereign Creator God. This means that he cannot accurately understand cause and effect.

B. Rendering Judgment

Later in this epistle, Paul tells them that covenant-keepers are required to render judgment against lawless people in the congregation. They must enforce God's sanctions. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:11–13).

Covenant-keeping men are required to render judgments in history. These are comprehensive judgments. "But he that is spiritual

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (v. 15). This is a very obscure sentence. The first half is clear: godly men lawfully do render judgments. The second half is the problem passage: "yet he himself is judged of no man." Could this mean that no man other than Christ, as the only perfect man, can legitimately lay sustainable charges before God against the spiritual man? No. The church can render such judgments in Christ's name. "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:18–19). Church sanctions are a major theme in this epistle.

The fact that the covenant-keeper can lawfully render judgment on others means that others with the mind of Christ can do the same to him. Later in this epistle, Paul writes: "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (I Cor. 14:32). This implies hierarchy—point two of the biblical covenant.⁴ Nevertheless, the covenant-keeper's worldview is not subordinate to the covenant-breaker's worldview. A covenant-keeper's judgments regarding the general authority of God over creation, and the Bible's authority over the minds of fallen men, cannot be judged authoritatively by covenant-breakers. This does not mean that the covenant-keeper is not subordinate to covenant-breakers who possess specialized technical knowledge, such as medicine or physics. It means that a covenant-breaker cannot legitimately speak authoritatively by means of his God-denying knowledge to challenge the covenant-keeper's confidence that God is sovereign in history.

The natural man seeks to undermine the spiritual man's commitment to the doctrine of the cross, but he cannot legitimately do this. He does not understand the cross. If this statement is correct, then Paul's sentence is a defense of the authority of the cross over the speculations of the self-professed autonomous man.

What about civil government? Can its ministers (Rom. 13:4)⁵ lawfully render judgment against a spiritual man? Yes. The natural man in civil authority has been granted limited authority by God to impose biblical civil sanctions against convicted criminals.⁶ Perhaps a

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

5. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 11.

6. *Idem*.

spiritual man sinned and deliberately broke the law, or broke it by mistake. Or perhaps the witnesses made a mistake or rendered false judgment. This does not give to the natural man the God-given authority to judge the theological confession of the spiritual man.

C. Economic Knowledge

Van Til denied that Christian philosophy is merely one partially valid philosophical approach among many. He said rather that Christian philosophy *alone* constitutes valid philosophy.⁷ By this, he did not mean that anti-Christian philosophers do not sometimes make technical points that are consistent with what the Bible reveals. He meant that anti-Christian philosophers draw narrow but accurate implications from presuppositions about this world that are inconsistent with their conclusions.⁸ The same general criticism applies to all other academic disciplines, including economics.

1. Science and Omniscience (Omni-Science)

Without the concept of an omniscient God, there can be no self-consistent science,⁹ including economic science. There can only be logical inconsistencies parading as economic science. Without the concept of original ownership by the Creator God, who has delegated ownership to individuals and organizations in history, there can only be an incomplete economic theory. The judicial and logical foundation of ownership by man is stewardship to God: the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).¹⁰ This, all modern schools of non-Christian economics deny. Christian economics directs economists' attention to the Bible in their search for accurate answers to real-world problems—answers that are not available, logically, to men who insist, for example, that it is impossible to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, which means all of modern free market economics.¹¹

Furthermore, every system of humanist economics moves from reason to intuition when it seeks to explain what it is that economists

7. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1998), pp. 502–4.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 436–37, 451–53, 483–85.

9. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

10. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

know and how they can know it.¹² Intuition is irrational from the point of view of logic: something unexplained and inherently unexplainable. Economists continually draw implications for policy-makers that are based on theories that apply consistently only to a hypothetical realm in which all participants have perfect foreknowledge, or in which there are no transaction costs—search costs, negotiation costs, enforcement costs—in voluntary exchange.¹³ Even the economists' beloved supply and demand curves are based on a logical antinomy: the assumption of infinitesimal continuity from one price and one quantity to the next. But only discrete prices and quantities are subject to human evaluation and therefore to human action. The decision-maker must be able to say, "A price is exactly this much higher or lower than the next price." Contiguous prices and quantities that are represented on a continuous line, and separated by infinitesimal distances, cannot apply to or result from the world of human action. There is no measurement of "this much" that separates any pair of infinitely tiny contiguous points on an infinitely continuous line. This is why calculus has nothing to do with the logic of economics as human action. Calculus makes economics appear to be as scientifically rigorous as physics. So, calculus has been adopted by the major schools of economic interpretation, the Austrian School excepted. Members of all schools draw supply and demand curves.¹⁴

2. *Economic Science and Autonomy*

As a professional scholarly discipline, economics was the first to reject self-consciously any appeal to the authority of either God or morality. Late-seventeenth-century British economists believed that there can be no logical reconciliation of rival theological and moral views. They had just suffered the English Civil War (1642–49), in which warring armies fought in the name of the same God and same Bible. Economists looked instead to autonomous economic logic and

12. Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976).

13. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Appendix A.

14. Ludwig von Mises never used curves, and Israel Kirzner did only in his intermediate level economics textbook, *Market Theory and the Price System* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1963), which he allowed to go out of print. (<http://bit.ly/ikmtaps>) The absence of curves and lines is consistent with Austrian School presuppositions regarding methodology.

economic statistics as ways to gain agreement among all rational investigators.¹⁵ This confession of faith has stripped economists of any way logically to reconcile the antinomies of autonomous man's philosophy, which includes economic philosophy. It is ironic that, of all academic fields, economics should be regarded as the one most divided, even though its early practitioners justified their supposedly morally neutral methodology in terms of attaining widespread agreement. Popular aphorisms touch on the economists' inability to come to agreed-upon conclusions. "Where there are four economists, there will be five opinions." "If you stretched all of the world's economists end to end, they would never reach a conclusion." Or President Harry Truman's classic line, "Give me a one-armed economist." This was his response to a familiar saying of economists, repeated by the Chairman of his Council of Economic Advisors: "On the one hand. . . . On the other hand. . . ."

It is significant that the foundational work of modern economics, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), begins with a chapter on the division of labor. This chapter contains the most famous passage in the literature of economics, the description of the pin-makers. Yet Smith's strategy was conceptually wrong. He should have begun with ownership, not the division of labor. There is very little space in *Wealth of Nations* devoted to private property, i.e., ownership.¹⁶ This turned out to be a strategic disaster for the intellectual defense of the free market, what Tom Bethell calls the economists' oversight.¹⁷ Almost immediately after Smith's book appeared, socialist thinkers began to re-structure economics in terms of ownership by the state.¹⁸ As Bethell shows, it took almost two centuries for academic economists to respond to the socialists with a rigorous theory of property rights.¹⁹

How could Smith have made such a strategic error? Why was this error not corrected early by economists? I believe that the most probable answer is the free market economists' ideology of value-free economics. The question of property raises the question of the moral right of ownership that undergirds the state's legal defense of property

15. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1963).

16. Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), p. 97.

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 7.

18. *Ibid.*, chaps. 8, 12.

19. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

rights. In contrast, the economists could, they believed, speak authoritatively in a morally neutral manner regarding questions of the division of labor. But, when it comes to property rights—"This bread is mine!"²⁰—there is no intellectually honest way to avoid the issue of moral legitimacy. Free market economists nevertheless do their best to avoid the question of the moral basis of the right of private ownership. In the modern academic essay most notable for its discussion of the allocation of property rights by civil courts, R. H. Coase's "The Problem of Social Cost" (1960),²¹ the author deliberately and openly leaves aside questions of equity.²² This essay has become one of the most widely and approvingly cited essays in the world of academic economics. It became by far the most cited law review article ever written.²³ In the late 1960's, it became the basis of a new academic sub-discipline: law and economics. In 1991, Coase won the Nobel Prize in economics, in part for this essay. The next year, his colleague at the University of Chicago, Gary Becker, won the Nobel Prize for his application of Coase's theorem to the field of crime and punishment. He, too, is adamant about removing questions of morality from the field of law and economics.²⁴

I began my introductory 1987 book on economics with the doctrine of God's original ownership of the world.²⁵ I am aware of no other book on economics that does.

Conclusion

Paul here provides Christians with the confidence necessary to challenge covenant-breakers who are in positions of leadership. The natural man does not receive the things of the spirit, Paul says. But things of the spirit encompass everything. There can be no neutrality. God, as the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, must be honored. *To*

20. The title of a book by the anarchist, Robert Lefevre.

21. R. H. Coase, "The Problem of Social Cost," *Journal of Law and Economics*, III (1960), pp. 1–44.

22. Gary North, *The Coase Theorem: A Study in Epistemology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992). See also North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, Tools of Dominion (1990), Appendix H.

23. Fred R. Shapiro, "The Most Cited Law Review Articles Revisited," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* (1996), p. 751.

24. Gary North, "Undermining Property Rights: Coase and Becker," *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, XVI (Fall 2002), pp. 90–97. (<http://bit.ly/CoaseBecker>)

25. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

ignore God is to ignore the only possible basis for accurately comprehending the world. This is Paul's challenge to every doctrine of common-ground knowledge. To ignore God's revelation of Himself in the Bible is also to ignore the only possible basis for accurately comprehending the world. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16–17).

This is the philosophical basis for the reconstruction of all academic disciplines in terms of the Bible. This is also the philosophical basis for reconstructing all institutions in terms of the Bible. *There is no neutrality.* It is not sufficient for Christians to affirm this slogan. Christians should not expect to beat something with nothing. If there is no neutrality, then there must be biblically sanctioned alternatives to the present cross-denying world order. It is the task of Christians to search for these alternatives and defend them whenever they are discovered. It is also their task to seek to implement them.

In the field of economic theory, Christian economists should begin with an affirmation of God's ownership of the creation. They should then consider in detail God's delegation of authority to men to serve as His stewards. Then they should discuss the laws of economics as God-imposed laws. Then they should discuss economic cause and effect in terms of God's law. Finally, they should discuss long-term economic growth in terms of corporate and individual covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. Covenant-keepers will inherit the earth. Christian economics should explain why.

3

FINAL JUDGMENT AND KINGDOM CONTINUITY

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:10–15).

The theocentric issue here is the final judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ Christ is the foundation of the covenant-keeper's life, as well as the work of the kingdom. Final judgment is his motivation. The end-point historically should be the Christian's starting-point motivationally.

A. How Firm a Foundation

Paul begins this section with a warning to the church. The church had divided into factions. Each faction's members professed personal commitment to a founder. The two mentioned were Paul and Apollos (v. 4). Paul derides this divisiveness by calling attention to God as the One who brings men's work to fruition. "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (v. 7). Nevertheless, Paul goes on to say that he did lay a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

foundation in Corinth. It was by the grace of God that he was able to do this, but he did lay it. He did not finish it. Others have added to his work. This points to the division of labor within the church, a theme he returns to in chapter 12.² He is talking about the church as a corporate entity.

Paul then adds a warning. “But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” Paul had done his work in laying a foundation at Corinth. Others must now follow his example. They must add to the beginning that he has made. They must consider carefully what they are doing. This is a call to kingdom productivity. The context is the church planted in Corinth by Paul and Apollos. The general principle here is God’s call to men to work on God’s behalf. Men are responsible before God to perform effectively.

Paul in this epistle so far has led his readers through a discussion of two kinds of foolishness and another discussion of two kinds of minds. A covenant-keeper possesses the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16). He can perceive the world around him analogously to the way that Christ views it. He is spiritual. He can make accurate judgments as a representative of Christ. Now Paul tells his listeners that they have a responsibility to extend Paul’s original efforts. This has to mean work in building up the local church.

Paul speaks of laying a foundation. He has laid one in Corinth. What is its nature? “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (v. 11). *Christ is the foundation*. Each covenant-keeper is told to build on this foundation. No man can lay such a foundation on his own. This foundation is provided by God’s grace. Once in place, covenant-keepers should build upon it. So, when Paul says that he laid a foundation, he is not saying that he laid it independently of Christ. *Christ lays the initial foundation*. When Paul speaks of his work in laying a foundation, he means his early work in church planting. But this work was possible only because Paul had stood on Christ’s foundation when he laid the one in Corinth.

Constructing a foundation in Corinth was merely an extension of the sacrificial work that Christ had performed on the cross. The cross is a continuing theme in First Corinthians. “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (I Cor. 2:2). First, there was the crucifixion; then there was the resurrection. “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet

2. Chapter 13.

in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:17–20).

For a man coming into this work in Corinth, because Paul had finished laying the foundation, his work would extend Paul's, which had extended Christ's. *Paul is speaking of progress through time.* There is a visible extension of Christ's kingdom. The person following Paul should look back at Paul's efforts and then further back to Christ's. His work has meaning because it rests on a foundation originally laid by Christ, not by Paul. It is God who gives the increase. Christ had laid the foundation through His representatives. Paul is saying that God gets all the glory. God's son laid the foundation, and then God then gave the increase. Paul's work was part of that increase. But the Corinthians were dividing in the name of human founders. This is wrong, Paul says. Forget about the human founders. Look back to Christ's work on the cross and to God as the supplier of all success.

He tells those who are building up the congregation, or who will soon join in this effort, to pay attention to the quality of their work. They will build upon a foundation laid by Paul. "I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon" (v. 10b). He has just dismissed the importance of his own work, yet here he calls them to take care in building on his work. How can we reconcile this seeming dualism?

Paul sees himself as an extension of Christ—not of Christ's being, but of His work. Paul sees himself as an appendage to Christ. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Through the cross of Christ, Paul has become the embodiment of Christ. He does not mean embodiment by incarnation; he means *embodiment by representation*. "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you" (I Cor. 11:1–2).³ Paul tells them to take great care in their work. Paul wants them to work well. They should do as he had done. They should build on Christ's foundation. They should become extensions of Christ by building on His foundation, just as Paul was an extension of Christ.

3. Chapter 12.

This view of covenant-keepers' labor validates good work. Paul tells them to be sure they consider their work carefully. They have received grace in being allowed to build upon what Christ had laid at Calvary and what Paul had built in Corinth. They were participating in building the kingdom of God. Their work was a visible manifestation of God's kingdom. They were supposed to take care in doing the right work and doing it well.

B. Final Judgment and Continuity

Paul moves from the past—laying Christ's foundation—to the future. "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (vv. 12–13). There are differences in the quality of construction. Some construction is much better than others. Some has high value. Some has low value. Some has no value.

Paul's warning here makes it inescapably clear that there is continuity between a person's work in this world and his rewards in the world to come. Men lay personal foundations in this life. They reap appropriate rewards in the next life. There are distinctions of performance in this life. There will also be distinctions of rewards in the coming life. God notes the quality of each man's performance in history and will reward him accordingly on the day of judgment.

The way in which rewards will be collected is significant. Our works will be tried by fire. This means that they are tried by God's standards. The sanction is fire. This is not hellfire. It does not refer to the lake of fire. It refers to God's judgment of a person's temporal works, not his immortal soul. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (v. 15). This is the fire of judicial purgation. It burns off impurities. In metallurgy, the fire burns off the base metals.

The fire of God's final judgment will test the quality of each man's work. This idea is a New Testament application of the Old Covenant's doctrine of God's historical judgment. Paul applies it to final judgment, a doctrine which was not clearly stated in the Old Covenant. In both cases, the imagery of the smelter appears.

The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times (Ps. 12:6).

Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin (Isa. 1:24–25).

The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away (Jer. 6:29).

Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people? (Jer. 9:7).

Paul warns against the combustible trio of wood, hay, and stubble. After they are burned, nothing remains. A life of wood, hay, and stubble is worth living, but just barely. Their exclusive presence means that a God-fearing man has frittered away his life. He will escape the horrors of God's eternal fire (Rev. 20:15), but he will bring nothing with him into the world beyond. Passing through the judicial fire of final judgment will strip him of his legacy, his inheritance. This warning is consistent with Jesus' warning against laying up treasure in this world, and laying it up for the next world (Matt. 6:19–20).⁴

This passage refutes the doctrine that “you can't take it with you.” Jesus and Paul taught clearly that you can take it with you if you send it ahead in advance. We can surrender insecure ownership of assets that possess high value in this world in order to gain secure ownership of assets with permanently high value in heaven and (presumably) after the resurrection. Assets that possess value exclusively in this world are represented by Paul's trio of wood, hay, and stubble. Christ called them treasures that moth corrupts and thieves break in and steal (Matt. 6:20). Their present value is high, but only because natural men's time horizons are too short. Natural men do not see the personal value of assets collected beyond the grave. Economically speaking, they discount the infinity of eternity by a rate of interest that approaches infinity as a limit. They impute very low or no value to eternity. Paul calls on the Corinthians to abandon the mind of natural man and exercise the mind of Christ.

The phrase, “you can't take it with you,” is based on the natural man's short-sighted view of the future. What natural men possess in history they regard as bounded by death. This assumption is incorrect. This false assumption can lead to a false conclusion: “Consume it all

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

before you die.” This is the outlook of the squanderer. The prodigal son of the parable is the best-known New Testament example (Luke 15).⁵ But an earth-bound time horizon can also lead to another conclusion: “Lay up treasure before you die.” Men seek a false immortality by the fame of their reputations as rich or powerful. Christ’s parable of the rich man who planned to build storage barns is representative of the asset-accumulator. “And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:19–21).⁶ Both attitudes are symptoms of the same short time horizon. The first man risks running out of wealth before he runs out of time. The second man risks running out of time before he runs out of wealth. Both men have misunderstood the recommended exchange of assets: temporal for eternal.

Paul is as emphatic as Jesus: you *can* take it with you. We need to understand this asset-exchange program. Jesus called on His followers to help the helpless. A person with many assets should voluntarily use them to help those people with few assets. Paul here calls on his readers to consider carefully the use of their time and any other assets they possess. He warns them to consider carefully what kind of work they will perform in history. Will it be of the asset-transfer variety—silver, gold, jewels—which of course are not literally silver, gold, and jewels? One surrenders literal silver, gold, and jewels in this life to fund good projects, in order to collect non-literal silver, gold, and jewels beyond the grave. Literal silver, gold, and jewels that are kept in storage for use exclusively in this life will be transformed retroactively into wood, hay, and stubble at the final judgment. We could say that God’s retroactive imputation of value to each Christian’s work will reduce the value of literal silver, gold, and jewels to that of literal wood, hay, and stubble.

Paul is speaking of assets hoarded for their own sake. He is not speaking of capital that is accumulated in order to generate income for kingdom projects. He is not saying, for example, that Christians or churches or ministries should not open bank accounts. He is not criticizing thrift. He is not saying that capital which covenant-keepers

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

accumulate should be sold to covenant-breakers, thereby transferring to God's enemies the tools of production. Paul is saying only what Jesus said: if the temporal goal of the Christian capitalist is the multiplication of capital for its own sake, and for the sake of his own fame, then he is trapped in the worship of mammon. He has substituted the worship of the created for the worship of the Creator.

Paul uses wood, hay, and stubble as images that represent all forms of temporal advantage. The pursuit of anything temporal for its own sake constitutes the accumulation of a form of wealth that will not survive the judicial fire of final judgment. Such wealth does not possess post-historical continuity. Its continuity is strictly temporal. The Bible testifies against everything that is strictly temporal.

C. Imagination and Judgment

Paul is trying to persuade his readers to take care in assessing the present value of the world beyond the grave. He is also telling them to assess the future value of their present assets. He is asking them to imagine the final judgment. From the vantage point of the final judgment, he tells them, look back at the work you are doing today in terms of how God will assess its value retroactively. Impute economic value to your efforts, but impute it in terms of God's retroactive judgment. Use the mental image of the last judgment to enable yourself to see things God's way today.

Paul is saying that covenant-keepers have the ability to think God's thoughts after Him. They can use their imaginations regarding the final judgment to help them in making better judgments in the present. Paul says that they can imagine the last judgment. Jesus told His followers the same thing (Matt. 25:31–46). This ability should become a source of Christians' knowledge of God's present assessment of their efforts.

Paul has already told them that covenant-keepers possess the mind of Christ. This announcement was preparatory to his discussion of final judgment. Because they possess the mind of Christ, covenant-keepers possess the ability to assess accurately the value of their efforts in building up God's kingdom. They can do this through an act of future-oriented imagination: passing retroactive judgment on their present actions. They impute value in the present because they can imagine God's retroactive imputation of value at the final judgment. They work from an imaginative future to assess the present. So does

the covenant-breaker, who also imagines the outcome of his actions. The difference is, the Christian can imagine a post-historical retroactive imputation. This ability does not come naturally. It comes supernaturally. The natural man does not receive the things of the spirit.

Because covenant-keepers have been provided with information about God's final judgment—sanctions—they should search their Bibles for information regarding the standards that will be used by God to impose those future sanctions. This means that they must learn the specifics of the commandments.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments (I John 2:3).

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (I John 2:4).

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us (I John 3:24).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments (I John 5:2).

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (I John 5:3).

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it (II John 1:6).

The obvious question is this: Where do we find these commandments? In the New Testament only, or in the Old Testament, too? This is the debate over theonomy.⁷ There are comparatively few commandments in the New Testament, and I can think of only four that are

7. Gary North (ed.), *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>) Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Foundation, 2002); Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gbbts>) ; Bahnsen, *No Other Standard* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

aimed at magistrates in civil government. These mandate the honest carrying out of a magistrate's assignment, not the content of the civil law. These rules were provided by John the Baptist, not Jesus (Luke 3:12–14).⁸ So, if the righteous goal of both the citizen and the civil magistrate is to obey God's commandments, then God's laws governing civil government must be available somewhere. They are: in the Old Testament.

D. The Continuity of Expansion

Paul tells his readers that they must pay attention to their work, which extends the work of Paul and Christ. Then he tells them to pay attention to the final judgment. Some of their work will not survive the application of God's purifying judicial fire. They may have meant well, but good intentions are not enough. There must be conformity between what covenant-keepers do in life and what God wants each of them to do. The question is: What has God predestinated each person to do? Elsewhere, Paul wrote: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). The Greek word translated here as "before ordained" appears in only one other place in the New Testament: "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had **afore prepared** unto glory" (Rom. 9:22–23). It means "prepare before." God has laid out our paths. We must walk in them. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1).

Thus, *Christians' efforts are not random*. They are part of a plan in which every fact fits together. Paul says to consider carefully our work. This work is not strictly personal. It is part of a long-term program of kingdom-building. The foundation has been laid by Christ at Calvary. Now it is each covenant-keeper's task to build upon this foundation. These efforts are part of God's verbal decree. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing

8. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 2.

whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). He spoke the universe into existence (Gen. 1). Now, he speaks His kingdom into existence by way of covenant-keepers.

There is kingdom continuity through the ages. God has decreed what will come to pass. He has decreed the good works that His people will perform. He has given them His law. Paul reminds them that they must take heed how they build on a foundation laid by others. Each person is fully responsible for his own efforts. God coordinates these efforts in order to build His kingdom. There is continuity through the ages.

The end of this phase of the construction process is the final judgment. There will be continuity beyond the final judgment. God will reward His servants in terms of the value of their efforts. There will be distinctions of rewards. This should serve as a major motivation for covenant-keepers to take care in their work. What they do in history will have implications beyond the grave.

Conclusion

The Bible does not indicate what men will do with their rewards in the post-judgment New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22). There will be an inheritance. “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7). We are not told what this inheritance will be. Paul teaches that there will be rewards, and that these rewards will be significant as indications of the value to God of each person’s work in history. We are told that it is better to receive rewards than not receive them, but we are not told anywhere in the Bible what people will do with them after the final separation of the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:31–46). We are not told whether a man’s rewards will serve as a his initial capital base in the resurrection world, or whether they will serve only as medals of honor. There will be treasures in heaven based on what men have done in history. “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:20).⁹ We are not told what we will do with these heavenly treasures. There is continuity from this life into heaven. There is also continuity from this life into final judgment. We are not told the nature of the continuity beyond the final judgment, only that there will be an inheritance.

9. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

Paul's injunction to pay attention to one's work is part of his overall message to the Corinthians. He tells his readers that their work has value today, but this value is imputed by God. They should look into the future, to the day of final judgment, and then consider retroactively God's judgment on their life's efforts. This should aid them in assessing their callings before God.

What covenant-keepers do in each era of history will have consequences for later eras. It will also have consequences in eternity, both individually and corporately for the church. Paul reminds them that what Christ did at Calvary has laid the foundation. No other foundation can any man lay better than this one. Needless to say, the proof of the superiority of this foundation will not be the failure of the church in history to complete its task. God predestined the cross. "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). He has long ago predestined each covenant-keeper's good works: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). He has not predestinated cultural defeat for His kingdom in history.

4

DEFINITIVE DELEGATED OWNERSHIP

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's (I Cor. 3:19–23).

The theocentric principle here is God's ownership of the world. This is based on His absolute sovereignty over the world.¹

A. Conflict Over Ownership

Paul in this section of the epistle presents two worldviews. One is biblical; the other is anti-biblical. In the eyes of each group, the other's outlook is foolish. There can be no reconciliation between these two views. They are based on rival presuppositions regarding the world.

Paul says that God regards the wisdom of this world as foolish. The Greek word for "world" is *kosmos*. A few verses later, Paul says that "For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the **world**, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." The same work appears: *kosmos*. So, there is a conflict between the wisdom of this world and the owner of this world. The owner regards as foolish the wisdom of those who are described as "the world."

1. Rival Claims

This conflict is covenantal. There are rival claimants for owner-

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

ship. Those who are members of the kingdom of Satan assert ownership rights to the world. Paul speaks of them here as the world. The Christians in Paul's day were few in number. Yet Paul says here that they possessed title to this world. How can this be? On what basis could Paul have made such a claim?

Satan gained control in history by deceiving Eve and successfully tempting Adam (I Tim. 2:13). Adam had been the delegated owner of the world (Gen. 1:26–28).² He was God's covenantal agent. But when he challenged God's law, he did so as an agent of Satan. He listened to his wife, who had listened to the serpent, who was Satan's delegated agent. By accepting Satan's interpretation of the forbidden fruit, Adam transferred his *covenantal allegiance* from God to Satan. This has always been the basis of Satan's ownership claims in history. But he holds title only as a squatter. Adam forfeited his title and therefore also the lawful inheritance of mankind by rebelling against God. Only because of God's grace to Adam and to mankind in general (Gen. 3:15) has covenant-breaking mankind, and therefore Satan, retained operational control over most of the world.

Paul writes in this epistle about Christ's resurrection. Christ, he tells the Corinthians, is the last Adam. "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45). The literal, bodily resurrection of the last Adam is the basis of our faith, Paul says. If Christ was not resurrected, our faith is in vain (I Cor. 15:14, 19).

Because of Calvary, Christ has re-established ownership claims over the world. In His post-resurrection instruction of His disciples, Christ announced this: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18b). Given by whom? Here, Paul makes it clear: God the Father. Christ belongs to God. He is the last Adam. Christ representatively re-established redeemed mankind's covenantal allegiance to God the Father. He has therefore restored the pre-Fall hierarchical system of ownership: God > covenant-keeping man > world. God the Father has identified Christ as His *delegated agent* in history. Christ, by His literal bodily resurrection, publicly demonstrated this restoration of the pre-Fall hierarchy. Christians belong to Christ through adoption (John 1:12). In the same way that God has delegated ownership of this world to Christ, Christ has delegated ownership of this world to His people.

2. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, chaps. 3, 4.

2. Victory Over Death

In this passage, Paul tells the Corinthians that they are possessors of all things. This includes death. This is a strange concept. How do Christians own death? Through Christ, who now controls death. “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:17–18). Death serves God’s purposes, and therefore the purposes of covenant-keepers, by cutting short the work of covenant-breakers, but extending the work of His people through covenantal continuity.

Death is the great enemy of man. Death is the curse that God placed on Adam in the garden, as promised. Death, Paul writes later in this epistle, is the last enemy. Death will be finally overcome after Christ has brought all things visibly under His authority.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:22–28).³

Paul’s words here say specifically, “For he hath put all things under his feet” (v. 27a). This has already taken place, as Christ told the disciples. Yet it is obvious that death is not yet subdued. So, there is a distinction between what has been done, what is the case now, and what will be done. Theologians assign this description whenever they encounter such a past-present-future condition: *definitive*, *progressive*, *final*. It describes personal sanctification. It also describes the kingdom of God.

God has put all things under Christ’s feet, yet some things remain to be put under Christ’s feet. What can this mean? God definitively placed all things under Christ’s authority immediately after the

3. Chapter 16.

resurrection. Christ announced this to the disciples. He achieved a visible victory over death by His resurrection. This is the key fact of Christianity, Paul writes in chapter 15, without which Christians' faith would be in vain. *This victory was definitive.* It was a visible victory that in principle marked the defeat of God's curse in history. Christ, as the last Adam, publicly reversed God's curse on heirs of the first Adam. Yet death still operates. What was definitive with Christ has not yet been made final by Christ. It will be, Paul insists, but this will mark the culmination of history.

The judgment of God on Adam has been definitively removed, Paul says. It will be finally removed. What about in between? Isaiah said that death's curse will be progressively removed.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them (Isa. 65:17–21).⁴

Mankind's long life spans during the pre-Mosaic era will be restored. Death will still operate, but not as it does today. There will be an era of visible victory over death—incomplete, but statistically significant. (One economic manifestation of this change will be a reduction of life insurance premiums.)

So, there are three phases of Christ's victory over death: definitive (I Cor. 15:12), progressive (Isa. 65:20), and final (I Cor. 15:26). Paul encourages the Corinthians in their testimony, despite the fact that the world regards this testimony as foolish.

3. An Analogous Transfer of Ownership

Paul asserts Christ's definitive victory over death at Calvary. He also asserts Christ's final victory over death as the last enemy to be subdued. Isaiah announced covenant-keepers' progressive victory over

4. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15.

death. It is in the context of his discussion of death that Paul brings up the issue of cosmic ownership. He lists death as one of the things possessed by the Corinthians.

What does it mean, to *own* death? It means that death, as an aspect of the creation, is under the God-delegated authority of Christ, who has in turn delegated authority to His people. Life and death belong to the Corinthians, Paul says. So does the present and the future. All things are under their ownership. God owns Christ, Christ owns His people, and they own the world.

It was clear to the Corinthians that they did not run the affairs of Corinth. As Corinthians, they were under the judicial authority of Rome. Then in what way were they owners of the world? In the same way that they controlled death: definitively. They would die in history, but the resurrection was ahead for them. They possessed legal title to this *final resurrection unto life*. As covenant-keepers, they also possessed the progressive victory over death that had been prophesied by Isaiah. Through their covenantal heirs, they possessed this *progressive victory over death*. The same three-fold title to the world was also theirs. Definitively, title had officially passed at the resurrection from God to the last Adam, Christ. Progressively, it is the task of Christians to redeem the world—buy it back from covenant-breakers—as lawful agents of God. Finally, covenant-keepers will inherit.

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD,
they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in
the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

The meek before God will exercise dominion finally. They already exercise it definitively. The debate today is over the exercise of dominion progressively.

B. Progressive Redemption

Elsewhere, I have written about Christ's comprehensive redemption of the world.⁵ Wherever sin reigns in history, there we find

5. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/>

an area of life fit for redemption. The word “redeem” means “buy back.” Christ bought back the world at Calvary, not from Satan, but from God the Father. Adam in his sin had surrendered ownership back to God, the original Owner, on behalf of mankind. It is a mistake to conclude that Satan lawfully received the transfer of delegated ownership. Adam did not possess the authority to make such a transfer. Satan is therefore a squatter on stolen land.

Adam broke the terms of the lease. He was judicially therefore disinherited by God. Only on the basis of God’s grace to Adam could mankind continue to fulfill the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28). God looked forward to Christ’s work at Calvary as the basis of grace for Adam and his heirs, whether special grace (soul-saving) or common grace (culture-continuing).⁶

The definitive repurchase of the world on behalf of covenant-keeping mankind took place at Calvary. This transfer of ownership to covenant-keeping mankind will be manifested for all to see on judgment day. But what about history? How is this cosmic redemption to be manifested?

Christ came as a servant. He made it clear that His disciples are to continue His work of service. “But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42–45). The progressive redemption of the world is to be achieved through faithful service to men in the name of God. Paul fully understood this. He told the Roman church, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom. 12:19–20).⁷ He was quoting Proverbs. “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap

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6. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee” (Prov. 25:21–22).⁸

Service to covenant-breakers imposes God’s positive sanctions—economic success or grudging acceptance—as well as negative sanctions on covenant-breakers: coals of fire. *The principle of service is also the heart of free market economic theory and practice. Producers serve customers.* When they are successful, they earn income. Christians are supposed to be good stewards of God’s resources by imitating Christ in His office as a servant. They are to buy back the world in a way analogous to Christ’s purchase of redemption on their behalf. They extend the kingdom of God in history by serving others, by preaching the gospel, and by becoming more competent producers.

In every realm of life, Christians are supposed to strive to be better performers than covenant-breakers. They represent the Redeemer of the world. They should therefore be superior performers. Paul later tells the Corinthians, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11:1). The Greek word for “followers” means “imitators” or “mimics.” Paul represented Christ; they are to mimic him. He served; they must also serve. They will extend God’s kingdom in history, just as Paul did. It is Christ’s kingdom because He is owned by God, and His followers are owned by Him. “And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (I Cor. 3:23).

Christians buy back the world progressively because Christ has bought it back definitively. They can do this as representative agents of Christ because they belong to Christ, just as Christ belongs to God. There is a hierarchy of ownership: from God the Father to Jesus Christ, as the last Adam, to His followers. The definitive ownership of the world is Christ’s, by way of Calvary. The definitive ownership of the world is Christians’, by way of their definitive redemption by God’s imputation of Christ’s perfection to them.

C. Eschatology and Economics

Eschatology affects how Christians view the future, both progressively and finally. Each eschatological interpretation has implications for social theory. Each has implications for economic theory.

The amillennialist denies that Isaiah’s prophecy should be taken

8. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 76.

literally. Somehow, the passage does not really prophesy the extension of mankind's life spans. Amillennialist theologian Anthony Hoekema took this approach.⁹ All the others implicitly do, if they even acknowledge the text's existence. There will supposedly be no progressive extension of Christ's definitive victory over death. There will be a final victory over death, but not a progressive victory that is tied to the extension of God's kingdom in history. This implies that the progressive extension of God's kingdom in history will not affect either society or economy in any long-term sense. So, the amillennialist concludes, Paul's assertion of a link between death and ownership in this passage has no literal implications for history.

Premillennialists make the same assumptions that amillennialists do with respect to the era of the church prior to Christ's bodily return to establish a millennial kingdom in person. A premillennialist would admit that Paul's statement here is valid with respect to definitive death and ownership, but the historical application of both the death and ownership principles must await a discontinuous future event, namely, the bodily return of Christ. Any significant progressive manifestations of Christ's definitive victory over death or His definitive ownership in history must await the establishment of His millennial reign, which will not be delegated from heaven but rather from some earthly headquarters. While Satan's disciples are acknowledged by premillennialists as reigning visibly in history without the physical presence of Satan, premillennialists deny Christians the same degree of authority in history. Christians will supposedly never reign visibly in history apart from Christ's physical presence.

The postmillennialist argues differently. He teaches that the progressive manifestations of Christ's definitive victory at Calvary will take place in history, even though Christ will remain at His Father's side in heaven. God's system of *delegated ownership*—from Christ to His people—will be progressively manifested in history despite His bodily absence. The ascension of Christ to the right hand of God has empowered Christians through the sending of the Holy Spirit. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26). Christ's return in final judgment will come only after God has visibly put all things under His feet, Paul says in chapter 15. The means of this extension of Christ's visible

9. Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 202.

ownership in history must come through *progressive redemption*: Christians' buying back of the world progressively from covenant-breakers as proof of their faithful stewardship as adopted sons.¹⁰

Conclusion

Paul here teaches that everything in the world belongs to Christians because everything belongs to Christ. But what is definitive is not yet final. Between Christ's definitive victory over death and sin at Calvary and the final judgment of the world must come the progressive redemption of the world by Christ's covenantal representatives. *They must buy back the world progressively on His behalf because He has bought it back definitively on their behalf.* He has definitively validated God's gracious extension of the dominion covenant to mankind after Adam's rebellion. The dominion covenant has been definitively established by God with the second Adam, Jesus Christ, and through Him with covenant-keepers.

Satan still occupies most of the world as an illegal squatter. He occupies through his covenantal agents, just as he did before Calvary. He does not occupy a physical throne in history. Neither does Jesus Christ. The covenantal competition for ownership of the world takes place in history through representatives of rival original claimants, both of whom are supernatural and beyond history. Legal title is now held by Jesus Christ, Paul says, and by His covenantal representatives through Christ. This fact will be made manifest to everyone on judgment day, but it will become progressively visible even before, as Isaiah taught regarding death (Isa. 65:17–20).

The comprehensive repurchase of the world by covenant-keepers must come about through their faithful, law-abiding service to God through their efficient service to men. This progressive, comprehensive redemption of the world is denied by amillennialists and, with respect to the era prior to Christ's bodily return to set up an earthly kingdom, by premillennialists. Both groups admit that this redemption was definitively achieved by Christ at Calvary. They also admit that it will be finally achieved at the day of judgment. Amillennialists deny that it will be progressively achieved by Christ's covenantal agents in history. Premillennialists deny that it will be done

10. On the relation between eschatology and social theory, see my book, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

before Christ's bodily return. Both groups believe that economic capital that is devoted to the redemption of anything except souls, Christian families, churches, and skid-row rescue missions is wasted in this, the church age. They think that efforts to redeem society as a whole are the equivalent of polishing brass on a sinking ship, as dispensationalist radio pastor J. Vernon McGee once put it. When this pessimistic vision of the earthly future is widely shared, Christians rarely have the motivation to strive for a lifetime in the hope of becoming the most accomplished servants in every area of life. This retards the fulfilment of the dominion covenant. In this sense, it delays the return of Christ in final judgment. Typical of this outlook are the words on the penultimate page in Hal Lindsey's best-selling book, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970), which sold some 35 million copies and set the tone for fundamentalism in the final decades of the twentieth century. He told his readers, "We shouldn't drop out of school or worthwhile community activities, or stop working, or rush marriage, or any such thing unless Christ clearly leads us to do so."¹¹ This is the closest thing to a call for Christian social action that appears in the book: do not drop out unless Christ tells you to. This is not what I regard as a stirring exhortation to engage in world transformation for Christ.

11. Hal Lindsey, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (New York: Bantam, [1970] 1977), p. 176 It is one of those delightful oddities that Bantam Books is located at 666 Fifth Avenue.

5

PROGRESSIVE KNOWLEDGE, PROGRESSIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God (1 Cor. 4:1–5).

The theocentric focus here is God as the judge who judges in history and will judge retroactively at the end of time. Judgment is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Stewardship and Judgment

Paul speaks of himself both as a minister of Christ and as a steward of the mysteries of God (v. 1). By this, he means that he is an apostle. The plural, “us,” refers to the other apostles. Apostles possessed special knowledge of the future. Paul possessed such knowledge. Later in this epistle, he writes: “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51). He also possessed special knowledge of the present: the great mystery that prophets of old had sought to discover, but could not. This was the mystery of the church as incorporating the gentiles. Gentiles would be made equal to Jews inside the church.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:3–10).

1. Responsibility

To possess any gift from God is to be made responsible before God for its proper use. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (v. 2). A steward is someone who takes responsibility for property owned by someone else (Matt. 21:33–43;² 25:14–30;³ Luke 12:42–48;⁴ 19:12–27⁵). He acts as the lawfully delegated agent of the owner. A righteous steward is not supposed to act on his own behalf directly (Luke 16:1–12).⁶ He is supposed to act on his own behalf indirectly by faithfully managing whatever has been put in trust with him by the owner. In doing so, he can maximize his return on his investment of time by maximizing the owner’s economic return on his investment of capital (Matt. 25:21, 23;⁷ Luke 19:17, 19⁸). Both the owner and the steward can maximize their return when the steward is faithful because he trusts the owner to be a fair judge of performance, and the owner turns out to be a reliable judge. But the profitability of the mutual arrangement becomes visible only at the end of a time period. In the case of Jesus’ parables on stewardship, the steward is not

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 47.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 46.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 38.

7. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

8. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 46.

told by the owner how long this time period will be. Jesus concluded the parable of the ten virgins with this eschatological warning: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matt. 25:13).

An apostle, however, was in a special situation. He possessed continuing revelation from God regarding his performance. He did not have to wait until the final judgment to be given such knowledge. This was why Paul was not concerned about critics in the Corinthian church who were followers of Apollos or anyone else. “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self” (v. 3). This was because he was in close contact with God, who revealed Himself to Paul. “For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord” (v. 4). Paul’s self-knowledge was not sufficient to justify him, but God’s day-by-day judgment was. The Corinthian church could not validate this assertion, but this did not concern Paul. The fact that his letter has survived as part of the canon of Scripture is sufficient evidence that Paul’s knowledge of God’s judgment of his performance was accurate. He was under a greater Judge than the church of Corinth.

He says that it is not given to men to make final pronouncements. This is because God alone is omniscient. God will reveal the truth of all things at the last day. Until then, a man can be certain that his knowledge is not the equivalent of God’s. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (v. 5). Man’s knowledge is at best analogous to God’s. But an apostle’s knowledge was superior to any common man’s knowledge. Later in this epistle, Paul provides detailed information about the final judgment (I Cor. 15).⁹

2. Provisional Judgment

So, what does he mean when he tells them not to judge anything before the time? What about rendering ecclesiastical judgment in God’s name? This is mandatory. Jesus said:

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be

9. Chapter 15.

loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:18–20).

We must draw inferences from what Paul has already written. He says here that he is justified by God, meaning that God has judged Paul as at least “satisfactory” in the performance of the duties of his office. Paul knows this from God. Paul also possesses knowledge of certain mysteries. He has made it clear that he is in a special position as a minister because of what he knows. The Corinthian church is not in a position to judge him. Then he warns them not to make final pronouncements. God later “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness” (v. 5).

These brief sentences convey the following. First, a steward of God is responsible to God for what he knows and does. Second, God judges every person’s knowledge, day by day, just as He judged Paul’s. Third, final knowledge is not given to anyone—final in the sense of knowledge that is equivalent to what God will reveal to men at the final judgment. This indicates that *God’s judgment is a continual process through time*. God knows the knowledge that every man has, and He judges a man’s use of this knowledge day by day, moment by moment. He had judged Paul, and He judged the members of the Corinthian church. This assessment goes on continually.

3. Stewardship

What should Paul’s readers learn from this passage regarding their stewardship? First, they had been given knowledge of some mysteries of God, for Paul had revealed them. Second, they were responsible for the proper administration of this unique knowledge. They had to do something productive with this knowledge. They were not to let themselves be paralyzed just because they did not have complete knowledge equivalent to what God will reveal at the last day. Third, they had misused their knowledge. They had split the congregation with needless wrangling.

Paul criticizes divisions that were based on their individual preferences for various church leaders. He uses sarcastic language to describe the foolishness of what they have done. “Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye

did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised" (vv. 8–10). He contrasts their inaccurate self-judgment with God's judgment of them. Paul calls them rich. Compared to the life of poverty that Paul was living, this was economically correct. But their riches were of the wrong kind. He also calls them wise. They were wise as the world is wise, i.e., foolish.

They had misunderstood what their task was. It was not to create factions based on personalities or the knowledge imparted to them by these personalities. Whatever knowledge they possessed had been a gift to them from God by way of church builders. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). He is charging them with being poor stewards of the knowledge which they had received as a free gift from God. They were misusing this gift.

B. Misusing Accurate Information

Their poor stewardship was the result of their poor use of the good knowledge that they had received. Paul was not saying that their knowledge was inaccurate. On the contrary, they had been given accurate knowledge. This was what made them responsible to God. They had failed to apply the knowledge that they had received. They had made a mistake by dividing the church into rival groups based on its multiple founders.

The misuse of knowledge is different from not having enough knowledge. Paul warns them against trying to penetrate the affairs of this world as if they had access to future perfect knowledge. They were unable to look forward and see the panorama of history in retrospect, as God will declare it on judgment day. But they were also told that they had been given access to mysteries. This put them in a better position to understand their times than someone who had not been given such information. They had greater responsibility because of this. They had misused the knowledge they had been given.

So, he warns them not to over-rate their abilities to judge the world, but, at the same time, they also must not ignore the knowledge

they had been given. They lived, just as we live, in a world that is like a looking glass. As he says later in this epistle, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (I Cor. 13:12).

Paul had superior knowledge of some things than the prophets of old had possessed. Knowledge had advanced considerably with the coming of the New Covenant. It had advanced even beyond what Jesus had announced. Jesus had told the disciples, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5b–6). Then God told Peter to go to a gentile’s house (Acts 10). This was followed by an unforeseen event. “And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45). God told Paul to go to gentile nations. This was the great mystery. Gentiles were being incorporated into the church.

The point is, there had been an increase of knowledge over time. As men move closer to the final judgment, mankind’s storehouse of information increases. Men are expected by God to possess greater insights into the workings of this world. Men cannot attain in history the equivalent of the knowledge that will be given by God on the last day, but they have been given access to more knowledge than men possessed in earlier days. Paul is speaking of progressive knowledge. *Knowledge increases over time, and so does responsibility.* The steward must do a better job as knowledge increases. Jesus taught this explicitly. “But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).¹⁰

C. Dispersed Knowledge and Its Coordination

How can any person keep up with the flood of knowledge today? Each day, he has additional historical information to master. He has knowledge coming at him from a myriad of sources. God makes him responsible for faithfully acting in terms of this ever-growing flood of knowledge. How will this responsibility not overwhelm him?

Paul provides a preliminary basis of the answer in chapter 12,

10. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

where he sketches the concept of the division of labor.¹¹ The church is a body made up of members. They work as a unit. This implies that each member has specialized knowledge that accompanies his specialized skills. He brings this knowledge into the church. It becomes available for others to use.

1. Responsibility and Grace

Paul is telling the Corinthian church that their responsibility has increased, but their performance has been substandard. There is cause and effect in history. Greater responsibility arrives as time moves forward. As men get closer to the day of final judgment, they possess greater knowledge.

For an individual to deal successfully with this increase in responsibility requires an increase in God's grace. Without this, no one can legitimately hope to avoid God's negative assessment of his performance. The steward possesses more knowledge, greater responsibility, and no way to keep up on his own. If even a church cannot see into the future sufficiently clearly to make definitive assessments of its era, how can covenant-breakers do this? Common grace may increase for a period, but special grace is required in order for any society to continue to maintain common grace and thereby deal with the added responsibility that comes with increased knowledge. Sinners will eventually rebel against God at some point, despite their prosperity, thereby bringing on His negative historical sanctions.¹² Self-proclaimed autonomous man is foolish, according to Paul. He cannot possibly make maximum use of the knowledge provided to him by God through the social division of labor and historical progress. His responsibility as a steward before God (Gen. 1:26–28)¹³ will overwhelm him.

Paul tells them that they cannot hope to attain the degree of knowledge about the present that God will use to judge the world on judgment day. This means that the quest for exhaustive knowledge is illegitimate. A man cannot become God. He can improve his knowledge, but this should never be regarded as a way to attain divine knowledge. The Creator-creature distinction cannot be overcome.

11. Chapter 14.

12. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

13. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

God told Israel: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9). Transcendence is closed to man. He tried to gain it in the garden. This attempt brought him under negative sanctions.

2. *The Free Market Coordinates Knowledge*

This same principle of dispersed knowledge can be applied outside the church. Society is the functional equivalent of a storehouse of dispersed knowledge. It is also a kind of factory for the production of additional knowledge. Knowledge is dispersed among billions of economic decision-makers in their capacity as producers and customers. The question is: How best to mobilize this dispersed knowledge into a system that benefits more people?

F. A. Hayek emphasized the knowledge-coordinating aspect of the free market. He saw the free market as an institutional structure that rewards accurate knowledge of the future whenever an appropriate mobilization of resources accompanies this knowledge. He saw the free market as a means for coordinating individual plans. Competition on a free market is a process of discovery. The free market’s system of profit and loss motivates producers and economic forecasters to put forth their best efforts in mobilizing scarce resources to serve future customers. It is not merely that producers seek to minimize the costs of production. They do apply their knowledge to the production process, but the production process has a goal: to serve customers in the future. The free market coordinates dispersed knowledge by rewarding successful entrepreneurs who serve specific customers most efficiently.¹⁴

Production for future customers is a form of stewardship. We might call it *horizontal stewardship*. Serving customers is a system of mutual exchange: horizontal service.¹⁵ Legally, customers are not in a position to render formal judgment on producers. In their capacity as customers, they do not own any entrepreneur’s resources. They do not occupy a superior position legally. Economically, however, they do occupy a superior position. They possess the most marketable

14. F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>)

15. North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), pp. 26, 30, 33.

resource: money. They are therefore in a better bargaining position than producers are, whose markets are narrow. As in Jesus' parables of stewardship, the success of a producer cannot be known until the customer judges among many producers, and then issues his judgment in the form of a purchase or a refusal to purchase. His judgment is retroactive on producers. The customer asks competing producers, "What have you done for me lately?"

When society's dispersed knowledge is put at the disposal of other individuals, both social and individual capital increase, for knowledge is a form of capital. It is not a free resource.¹⁶ Through investment, knowledge can increase over time. When knowledge increases, the potential for increased output also increases. Producers can purchase access to this knowledge, and customers can purchase access to its results. Customers pay for the results of specialists' knowledge.

Conclusion

Paul reminds the Corinthian church about the burden of responsibility that they have as a result of the teachers who had come to them, men who had laid the foundation of the church, which is Christ crucified. The church's members are poor stewards because they are squabbling over which founder provided the foundational theology. Paul dismisses this factionalism. It is the foundation that is crucial, not its sources. This foundation is Christ. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11).

Paul sets forth a principle here: with greater knowledge comes greater responsibility. The quest for perfect knowledge—judgment-day knowledge—is illegitimate. It cannot be attained in history. But there is now and will continue to be greater knowledge over time. This will bring greater opportunities and greater responsibility. *This increasing burden of stewardship cannot be avoided.* What is then the covenant-keeper's hope? Greater grace, which increases responsibility, which leads to greater grace. Men are always in debt to God. *God's grace always races ahead of men's ability to match it with their performance.* Men always fall short of the mark. But Jesus Christ did not. His perfect humanity, imputed to us judicially by God's grace, is the only legitimate basis of any individual's hope. It is therefore also the only legitimate basis of society's hope.

¹⁶ Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

6

ESCHATOLOGY AND BIBLICAL THEOCRACY

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? (1 Cor. 6:2–9).

The theocentric focus here is the final judgment of God, when He will judge the entire world: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Ethics Above Power

Paul teaches here that Christians will be God's representative agents on that final day of judgment. We will judge the angels. This is the clearest passage in the Bible that places authority above power. Angels are more powerful than men are, but they possess less covenantal authority than Christians do. The implication that follows from this fact is that *ethics is more important than power*. The fundamental issues of life are ethical. Elsewhere, Paul wrote: "When For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities,

1. Paul R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:12–13). The armor is not physical, but ethical. This is because the battle is not physical, but ethical.

B. Church Courts

The institutional church is to serve its members by offering justice to all. Paul says that it is wrong for church members to go before a civil court to seek judgments against each other. The question is: Why is this wrong? Paul begins the passage with a presupposition: covenant-keepers will render final judgment on the angels. This doctrine is taught nowhere else in Scripture. It means that *man is God's judicial representative*, not merely in history, but also in eternity. Angels possess more power and knowledge than men do in history, but this does not entitle them to the office of judge. *Man alone is made in God's image*. The essence of this image is the ability and authority to render final judgment. Covenant-keepers will be God's agents of final judgment on the angels because they possess the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16).²

Once covenant-keepers understand that they will judge the angels, Paul writes, they should not subordinate themselves to pagan civil courts. These courts are staffed by covenant-breakers. To subordinate oneself voluntarily to a pagan civil court in order to bring sanctions against another covenant-keeper is to affirm the legitimacy of the power that covenant-breakers and non-biblical law exercise over covenant-keepers and biblical law. Theirs is a false claim, Paul says, and the proof of this is that covenant-keepers will finally judge angels and the world.

Paul's argument begins with eschatology: the doctrine of the last things. He offers a prophecy regarding the final judgment. After God renders judgment against covenant-breakers, covenant-keepers will render judgment against the angels. Here is the sequence of events.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened,

2. Chapter 2.

which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

Satan will be banished to the lake of fire before the judgment of resurrected mankind begins. “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). After God’s removal of all covenant-breakers from the presence of covenant-keepers, the judgment of the angels will begin. Which angels will follow Satan into the lake of fire?

Paul is arguing against the authority of civil government in a pagan society to bring sanctions against covenant-keepers who obey God’s law. But is he also arguing against civil government in general to exercise such authority? No. Here is the infraction: “But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers” (v. 6). The issue here is the presence in civil courts of unbelieving judges. In a biblical commonwealth, it is legitimate for Christians to appeal to civil government to settle explicitly civil conflicts. Paul is not arguing against civil government. He is surely not arguing against Christian civil government. He is arguing against voluntary submission to a pagan state by Christians in conflict.

C. The Cost of Common Grace-Based Justice

For every benefit, there is a cost—added responsibility, if nothing else (Luke 12:48).³ For the benefit of Christians’ maintaining their own courts, the cost is the unavailability of the monopoly of violence to enforce their claims against other Christians. In their disputes with fellow Christians, they cannot legitimately appeal to a pagan state, which Rome was.

This does not mean that Christians cannot legitimately appeal to a pagan state against covenant-breakers. Paul appealed to the emperor against a Jewish court. “For if I be an offender, or have committed any

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar” (Acts 25:11). This declaration affirmed the legitimacy of the death penalty, which was Rome’s monopoly. This declaration also showed Paul’s greater trust in the covenant-breaking Roman court system than in the supreme court of the Jewish religious leaders: the Sanhedrin. He knew the truth: Pontius Pilate had resisted crucifying Jesus, but the Jewish religious establishment had insisted. The Jews, who had been covenant-keepers in history, had now become less just than the pagan Roman emperor and his judicial agents. Why? Because the Jews had initiated the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As Peter had warned them, but not the Romans, “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10). Rome had enforced the civil judgment of Pilate, but Peter said that God held the Jews responsible. As a nation, Old Covenant Israel had not heeded Peter’s warning.

Paul says that it is better to suffer economic loss at the hands of a fellow covenant-keeper than to enter a Roman civil court in quest of justice. This assessment had to do with eschatology. Those who will be judged negatively by God on the final day should not be submitted to in history for the sake of gaining a favorable settlement against a fellow believer. Why not? Because such subordination in history testifies to a false eschatology: the final judgment of covenant-keepers by covenant-breakers.

Paul uses strong language: “Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (v. 7b). The cost of avoiding dependence on a pagan state for justice is whatever the value of the forfeited property right is. The benefit is the avoidance of subordination to covenant-breakers, which would testify to a false eschatological future. The benefit outweighs the cost. Paul’s assessment could not be clearer.

Paul goes beyond the economic category of suffering a loss. He warns against becoming an economic oppressor. “Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren” (v. 8). Why is seeking pagan civil justice a form of fraud? Because this act testifies to a false eschatological future: inheritance. “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” (v. 9). This means that the kind of justice that is provided by a pagan civil court is injustice when

compared to justice in a church court, even when the ecclesiastical judge is not educated. "If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church" (v. 4). He adds, "I speak to your shame" (v. 5a).

Paul is arguing that a system of justice that is provided by a civil court that operates in terms of God's common grace is inherently inferior to a church court that operates in terms of God's special grace. *A church court is a special-grace court.* So vast is the difference between the two sources of justice that going before a pagan civil court is comparable to seeking to defraud a fellow Christian.

The dividing issue is not "civil court vs. ecclesiastical court." The dividing issue is "pagan authority vs. Christian authority." Paul is quite clear about this. "But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers" (v. 6). "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" (v. 9a). His argument leads inescapably to a conclusion: *biblical theocracy is the proper basis of social and political order.* Paul is arguing that a society that relies on covenant-breaking civil judges and any concept of civil law other than biblical law has adopted anti-Christian rulership. Civil justice is substandard in such a society. Such a system of civil law testifies to a false eschatology in which covenant-breakers will impose final sanctions on covenant-keepers. Paul tells the church at Corinth that it is better to suffer economic loss than implicitly to admit such a view of justice by taking a brother before such a court.

Conclusion

This well-known passage has been interpreted to mean that church courts are morally superior to civil courts. This is not what Paul taught. He taught that *church* courts are morally superior to *pagan* civil courts. A pagan civil court allows a covenant-breaker to declare and then impose his court's concept of civil justice on covenant-keepers. This is its great offense, in Paul's opinion. Such a system of civil justice testifies to a false eschatology. Paul uses eschatology to impugn pagan civil courts.

To conclude that *every* civil court is inherently inferior morally to *any* church court is to conclude that the church is superior judicially to the state. This assumption moves legal theory toward judicial dualism: one legal order for covenant-breakers and another for covenant-

keepers. This was Martin Luther's position.⁴ It also promotes pietism's proposed downgrading of politics to the realm of *adiaphora*—things indifferent for the Christian faith. Finally, this assumption implies that the gospel cannot redeem civil institutions. Calvinism opposed this conclusion until the Enlightenment era, beginning in the eighteenth century, when Protestants made an unofficial alliance with humanism to establish political polytheism.⁵

The Christian West previously had come to an agreement between the Pope and the emperor in 1076: both church and state possess legitimate claims to enforce the law in their respective jurisdictions. Both institutions rule officially in the name of God. This was the meaning of what legal historian Harold Berman has called the papal revolution of Western law.⁶ In contrast, Eastern Orthodoxy has long tended toward Caesaropapism, with the church subordinate to the state. The split between Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism in 1054 made possible the Papal legal revolution, beginning two decades later, which in turn laid the foundation for the development of canon law, which paralleled and intermingled with a revived Roman civil law.⁷

To elevate a Christian civil court to *separate but equal authority* with a Christian church court, two steps are mandatory: judges must be members of Trinitarian churches, and the civil legal order must be based self-consciously on biblical revelation, just as a church court is. *This means theocracy.*

Paul here does not invoke biblical law as the basis of his opposition to pagan civil courts. Instead, he invokes eschatology. In order to defend point four of the biblical covenant model (judgment and sanctions), he invokes point five (eschatology), not point three (law). This New Testament passage presents the eschatological foundation of the case against political pluralism. After the final judgment of mankind, covenant-keepers will declare covenant-breaking angels as deserving of eternal torment, and God will enforce their declaration.

This principle of *hierarchical authority*—covenant-keepers' exer-

4. Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundations of Luther's Social Views," in John H. Mundy, *et. al., Essays in Medieval Life* (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1955), pp. 71–87.

5. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

6. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

7. Roman law entered Europe by way of the Emperor Justinian's sixth-century legal code, the *Corpus iurus civilis*.

cise of rule over covenant-breakers—governs Paul’s definition of *civil justice*. Pagan civil courts are inferior to church courts, and they should therefore be avoided by Christians in disputes with each other. Better to suffer economic loss, he said, rather than to violate this principle of justice. To violate this principle of justice is to defraud the brethren.

DISCIPLINE AND THE CHURCH'S INHERITANCE

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (I Cor. 6:9–11).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the inheritance provided by God. Inheritance is point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Condemnation Despite Confession

This continues Paul's discussion of church courts and the proper administration of justice.

Which acts identify an unrighteous person? Paul answers this without hesitation. He lists sins that identify men as being outside the kingdom of God. He had just presented another list: "I wrote unto you in an epistle² not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (I Cor. 5:

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. A lost epistle.

9–11). There was no question in Paul’s mind that such sinners as these were members of the congregation. He compiled another list in his first letter to Timothy. “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons. . .” (I Tim. 1:9–10a).³ And he had more. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Tim. 3:1–7). Such men were inside the churches, operating as shepherds. This was not a prophecy of some distant era. The last days had come: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1–2).

Paul was the great preacher of salvation by grace through faith. He was also the great cataloguer of sins that testify judicially against the presence of saving faith. Those who consistently commit evil acts such as these are outside the kingdom of God. Unless they repent, they will not inherit the kingdom, because they are not in it. Any theology that denies Paul’s doctrine of grace is wrong. Any theology that denies Paul’s doctrine of non-inheritance is wrong. He provided the church with catalogues of sins that mark people without grace.

The question is this: When a person says that he is saved by grace, and he has gained church membership based on this confession, yet he commits sins that mark him as outside the kingdom of God, what is his local congregation to do? What standard should its court use to assess the legitimacy of his confession? Is his confession judicially annulled by his actions?

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 1.

B. Purging the Local Church

The first group of non-inheritors is sexually debauched: fornicators (which in the Old Covenant was associated with idolaters),⁴ idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind. Members of the second group commit economic crimes: thieves, covetous, extortioners. The list in First Timothy includes another economic category: menstealers. This is kidnapping in the broadest sense. It unquestionably includes slave-traders.

(Rev. George Bourne, a Presbyterian minister in Virginia, was defrocked by his presbytery in 1815 for saying that slave-owning is a sin because slave-owners prior to 1808 had paid professional kidnappers to commit the crime for them.⁵ The Presbyterian Church's General Assembly in 1818 permitted this decision to stand, but only after it had retroactively eliminated this interpretation of kidnapping from its *Constitution* [1806].⁶ Bourne's abolitionist ideas were, more than a decade later, adopted by Unitarian leaders of the abolitionist movement, but without attribution. Only after the military defeat of the South in 1865 did the South's Christians and their churches finally conclude that the South's system of chattel slavery had been opposed to the Bible, just as Bourne had said. Southern pastors and theologians, Robert Dabney excepted,⁷ surrendered to Bourne's view of the institution, but only after General Lee had surrendered to General Grant.)

Economic sins are not so prominent in these lists as sexual sins. All of these sins draw men into the paths of destruction. Better put, they keep fallen men on these paths, for men are born on these paths. This conclusion is one application of the doctrine of original sin.

The theological problem here is not the fact that sinners are outside of the kingdom of God. The theological problem that concerned Paul was the presence in the congregations of people who

4. The obvious example is the Book of Hosea: Israel as a prostitute and idolatrous.

5. By 1815, Virginian slave-owners commonly bred slaves for export into the deep South, where the land was more fertile for high-income cotton production. The importation of slaves had legally ceased in 1808. This law created an oligopoly for Southern slave-owners. On the profitability of Southern slavery, see the articles in Hugh G. J. Aitken (ed.), *Did Slavery Pay?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), especially "The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South," by Conrad and Meyer.

6. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), pp. 123–29.

7. He published his wartime manuscript, *A Defense of Virginia*, which defended chattel slavery, in 1867, two years after Lee surrendered.

are known to commit such sins. How could it be that those who had gained admission as members could practice such sins? Does this mean that a verbal profession of faith and participation in the sacraments condemned these people? Did their actions constitute testimony against them? Paul clearly warns against the presence of such people in a congregation. What, then, had been the efficacy of their original profession of faith? Are they backsliders who have somehow lost both their faith and their salvation? If so, then what happens to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? How are we to interpret Paul's words? "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39).

Paul's point: faith that does not produce sin-reducing changes in human behavior is not saving faith. Protestants may not like this conclusion, but Paul's words leave no wiggle room. The people who practice these sins are covenant-breakers, no matter what they say now or have said publicly. The church must exercise discipline to rid itself of such people. This is what the epistle's fifth chapter is all about. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:4–8). The "old leaven" spoken of here is a church member who seeks to participate in the Lord's Supper, the New Testament's equivalent of the Passover's shared meal.

C. Inheritance and Disinheritance

The language of inheritance once again appears in the context of God's kingdom. Jesus had told the Pharisees: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This nation is the church. The public mark of the church, Jesus said, is its bearing of

the fruits of righteousness. These fruits are public evidence of its inheritance. Paul is here unsparing of sinners. They must be expelled. They are not Christians, despite any public confession of faith they might make. They must not be given access to the table of the Lord.

Paul is demanding their *public disinheritance* by the church. This is the economic meaning of excommunication. It is also the eschatological meaning. The known sinner must not be allowed to participate in a common meal that is the church's formal means of covenant renewal. Disinheritance of sinners helps to retain the fruits of righteousness inside the church. These fruits are the mark of the church's inheritance, Jesus had told the Pharisees. God had disinherited Old Covenant Israel because of the nation's persistent sins. A local congregation has this example as a warning: *disinherit or be disinherited*.

The concept of inheritance is more than economic. It has to do with sonship, and sonship is more than economic. Paul is setting forth moral criteria that enable church officers to distinguish the disinherited sons of Adam from the adopted sons through Christ. The fulness of the church's inheritance can come only after the complete removal of the disinherited sons. This will not take place in history. "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world" (Matt. 13:38–40).⁸

Disinheritance is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of inheritance vs. disinheritance. It is always a question of whose disinheritance. In this epistle, Paul makes it clear that the church must publicly announce the legal status of every disinherited son. It does this through excommunication. If it does not do this, then it becomes corrupted. This calls into question the church's inheritance. Flagrant sinners are not part of the kingdom. A church that refuses to impose discipline on its unrighteous members risks being dealt with harshly by God. The public disinheritance of sinful church members is mandatory for the church's inheritance in history.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

Conclusion

This epistle is about judgment. Peter wrote: “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (I Peter 4:17). Paul made the same point in this epistle. The church is to judge those under its covenantal authority who bring disrepute to the church. The sins of commission include economic sins. The church serves as an agent of God in bringing judgment against economic wrongdoing. It possesses lawful authority over its members.

8

CALLING AND OCCUPATION

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God (1 Cor. 7:20–24).

The theocentric focus here is God's sovereignty over every person's current position in life. This is point one of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Calling

"Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." The Greek work translated here as "calling" is used repeatedly the New Testament in the sense of God's redemption of sinners and His assignment to them of their kingdom tasks. Paul wrote elsewhere: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4). "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:8–9). God has a lifetime purpose for each of His called-out saints.

Paul notes that in Corinth, the church did not have members who were leaders in society. This, he says, was a universal condition of the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

church in his day. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (I Cor. 1:26). Paul’s message was that Christians in Corinth were not among society’s “best and brightest.” His observation need not apply to the church in every era of history, but generally it has. This means that the early church began with a seeming liability: a lack of experienced leadership. Nevertheless, he wrote in chapter 6, members should rely on the lowliest member to provide judgment between disputants in preference to going before covenant-breaking civil judges. Better to be governed by men who fear God than by experts in Roman civil law.²

1. Called by God

Here is Paul’s main point in this passage: redeemed men’s callings are from God, not from society. Covenant-keepers are to look to God, not to society, for guidance on what they are to do with their lives. They have legitimate hope in their kingdom inheritance, but not in earthly success, Paul wrote elsewhere. “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). The Christian walk is inherently a lowly walk, psychologically speaking. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love (Eph. 4:1–2). But this lowly walk is a high calling. “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14)

The calling is a God-given assignment. We are to work diligently to prove to ourselves that we received God’s call. Our work testifies to the legitimacy of our election, Peter said. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (II Peter 1:10). This is consistent with Paul’s discussion of personal salvation and a lifetime of predestinated good works: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8–10).

2. Chapter 6.

The New Testament's concept of the calling does not usually refer to a man's income-generating occupation, although it can sometimes mean this, as in the case of the job of minister of the gospel.³ Its meaning is broader: *the call to lifetime service* that God has given to each of the elect. This distinction between calling and occupation is not widely understood. A misinterpretation of the Pauline meaning of "calling" has been made famous in academic circles by a book by the German sociologist, Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1906). Weber argued that the Calvinistic idea of the calling as an occupation was central in the development of the inner discipline that is so important in the formation of the capitalist spirit. Success in one's occupation was seen by Calvinists as temporal proof of God's eternal blessing, he argued. Weber hedged his language, but this is what he meant.⁴ This is surely how his readers have long understood his thesis. Essentially, Weber transferred Peter's words regarding the calling to the occupation. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (II Peter 1:10). This view of the calling was not what Calvin held. He did not see personal economic success as confirming a man's election to salvation. Nevertheless, some elements of Weber's version of the idea of calling can be found in the writings of certain seventeenth-century Calvinists. Some of them did believe that God rewards faithful covenantal service with economic success. But none of them believed that economic success constitutes stand-alone evidence of saving faith.

2. Service to God

Paul's idea of the calling was lifetime service to God. We can think of this as *vertical subordination*.⁵ But how do we manifest our service to God? It has to involve service to other people. This is because God is represented in history by men. Mankind is God's corporate steward in a hierarchy. This is the meaning of the dominion covenant, which

3. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Tim. 5:17–18).

4. Gary North, "Weber's 'Protestant Ethic' Hypothesis," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Summer 1976).

5. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

defines man (Gen. 1:26–28).⁶

Men own resources. They possess the *legal authority* to dispose of these resources as they see fit. Inanimate resources possess no lawful claim against owners. Then what about slavery? Is it a valid Christian ideal? Paul said no. In this passage, Paul specifically recommends that slaves accept their liberty if it is offered to them by their masters. Why? Because Christians can better serve God as *free agents* who are not legally bound to another individual. Paul said much the same thing in the same passage in regard to the wisdom of avoiding marriage. “But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband” (I Cor. 7:32–34).

In what way is slavery like marriage? First, both systems are established by a legal bond. Marriage’s bond is much tighter; it is established by covenant oath under God. Second, both institutions restrict the independence of their members. A legal bond limits the mobility of all parties who are bound by its terms. This usually includes geographical mobility. Paul recommended mobility for God’s servants: a life unencumbered by legal obligations to others. He possessed such mobility. A slave does not possess this. Neither does a married person.

Paul told slaves to take their liberty if it was offered. This meant a change in their occupations: from permanent service to one family to permanent service to the market. This meant abandoning predictable income and legal protection provided by another person. It also meant the legal authority to choose one’s occupation from among the opportunities available. It was this greater flexibility in choosing how to earn a living that strengthened their callings before God. They could make their own decisions regarding the selection of one lifetime calling and multiple jobs over time. Paul’s job was making tents (Acts 18:3). This was not his calling. It was his occupation. Being a tentmaker gave him tremendous geographical flexibility. He could earn an income almost anywhere. This strengthened his calling as an

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

evangelist and an apostle. What his calling required was geographical mobility.

The calling is always a matter of subordination to God through specific human mediators. Point two of the biblical covenant is hierarchy.⁷ God is represented in history by specific individuals. He has delegated lawful authority to these individuals. No one operates in this world without mediators. Something must sustain every person. We are all dependent on nature. Except in the case of hermits, men's mediators include humans. These human mediators are only rarely sacramental mediators. Only when preaching from the pulpit during a worship service or when administering the sacraments does a man exercise sacramental mediatory authority. But everyone is under mediatorial authority all of the time. Even a hermit is under Christ's mediatorial authority.

3. Multiple Hierarchies

Because of multiple hierarchies in history, an individual serves multiple masters. A wife serves her husband. Her husband serves his employer, who in turn serves customers. Church members pay tithes and subordinate themselves to church officers. Citizens serve magistrates, yet in a democracy, they have indirect authority over who is hired or fired. A general in an army is under civilian control in most democracies. The men under his immediate authority are also voters. So, authority under democratic capitalism is mixed. There is no final voice of human authority other than Jesus Christ, the perfect man, who sits on a throne in heaven (Heb. 12:2). He is outside of history. The final voice of authority in history is the Bible, but it speaks through multiple interpreters. There is no agency in history that lawfully declares: "This is the final authority."

This means that service to God—the calling—has multiple aspects. It is not just about making money. It is not just about exercising ownership. It is not just about obedience to civil law. The calling requires *performance under mixed authorities*.

Men live under multiple oath-bound, covenantal hierarchies in history: church, state, and family. They are also under hierarchies that in turn are under one or more of these primary hierarchies. The most universal hierarchy for modern man is economic: the free market. It is not visibly a hierarchy, but both conceptually and operationally, it is. It

7. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

is a system of dual authority: partially judicial, partially economic. The *judicial* hierarchy is the hierarchy of *ownership*. The owner of property has the legal right to use it as he sees fit and to exclude non-owners from its use. The *economic* hierarchy is *customer-driven*: money talks.

The judicial hierarchy of ownership is subordinate to the economic hierarchy in the sense of dependence. If customers refuse to compete for the ownership of any consumer good, its price falls to slightly above zero. Its price is whatever asset its owner must forfeit by retaining ownership. If customers refuse to buy a producer's output, he will go out of business. Those under his economic authority will lose their jobs. So, the legal owners do act on behalf of God and God's kingdom, but this hierarchical authority is mediated through customers. Owners fulfil the dominion covenant as legally responsible agents before God, but they do so as economic agents of customers.

A worker is subordinate to his employer's hierarchy, which gives him instructions and provides him with tools and marketing services for his output. His employer pays him a salary in exchange for his labor. But this hierarchy is a dual hierarchy. A specific group of potential customers will determine whether he can keep his job. Their identities are unknown to the worker. His identity is equally unknown to them. He is employed by a specific group of entrepreneurs, the corporation's share owners, who have delegated to senior managers the task of persuading certain customers to buy the company's output at a price greater than what it paid to produce this output, i.e., sell at a profit. If these customers refuse to buy, the company will go out of business. This is a fearful negative sanction for share owners, senior managers, and employees.

Hierarchies can be both judicial or economic. A judicial hierarchy is a system based on a legal claim: God's legal claim on an individual and his output through God's delegated representatives' legal claims on a person. Church, state, and family all involve legal claims that are established by voluntary oaths and oath-signs in which the oath-taker implicitly or explicitly calls down God's wrath on him if he violates the terms of the covenant. That is, *a covenantal oath is self-maledictory*. An economic hierarchy may also involve legal claims, called contracts, which may be enforceable in a civil court, but this hierarchy is not established by a self-maledictory covenantal oath. It is temporary. A man may lawfully remove himself from the jurisdiction of this hierarchy when he has fulfilled the terms of the contract. He has much greater mobility. This non-covenantal relationship is what Paul

recommended to slaves and unmarried people.

B. Replacement Cost

I have adopted a definition of the calling that is faithful to the biblical idea of the calling as God's service assignment to the individual. My definition adds an economic aspect: the cost of a person's replacement. Here it is: "Your calling is the most important work you can do in which you would be most difficult to replace." The cost of replacement is a major consideration because of the individual's other opportunities for service. If he leaves one calling, he must be replaced. He serves in a new way, so he no longer serves in the old way. This places a burden on those who had depended on his service in the old calling: his employers and the beneficiaries of his output.

Think of a key athlete. Without him, his team may not win many games. Yet he may be better equipped to serve God in some other way. Can he somehow find a way to serve God both ways? Should he? In the twentieth century, the best-known example of a Christian athlete who faced such a dilemma was Eric Liddell, who refused to run in the 100-meter dash in the 1924 Olympic Games because a preliminary race was held on a Sunday. He was a strict sabbatarian. He had known of this scheduling for months in advance. He therefore switched to the 400-meter race. Instead of running the standard races for a sprinter, the 100 and 200, he ran the 200 and the 400. This was unheard of at the time. Only in the 1996 Olympics did America's Michael Johnson run both distances and win gold medals in both. Liddell in 1924 won the bronze medal (third place) in the 200 and the gold medal in the 400. Because he did not run in the 100, his teammate, Harold Abrahams, won the gold medal. This positive outcome was unforeseen prior to the races. Half a century after Liddell's triumph, a movie director read about his decision not to run, and the result was *Chariots of Fire* (1980), the unexpected Academy Award winner in 1981, and now a classic film.

Liddell knew what his calling was: a Christian missionary, not an athlete. He viewed his athletic prowess as an extension of his ministry. He viewed his victories in the same way. He became a world-famous athlete, whose fame later made him the best-known foreign missionary in China and the best-known missionary ever sent out from Scotland. As the movie records at the end, when he died in a

Japanese concentration camp in 1945, all of Scotland mourned.

Liddell's service as an athlete was part of his service as an evangelist and later as a foreign missionary. The movie, for drama's sake, created a conflict over his two forms of service. It portrayed Liddell's sister as being opposed to his running. This was not the case in real life. She, too, fully understood that his victories on the track were part of his larger service to God. In any case, he could not continue to run faster than the competition as he grew older. So, he could freely leave his status as an athlete without violating Paul's injunction regarding the fixed lifetime calling. He would eventually have had to be replaced in the world of amateur athletics. Everyone knew this. It is expected of every athlete.

The dilemma of fixed lifetime service to God vs. better personal economic opportunities weighs heavily on modern Christians—or would if they had ever heard about this Pauline dilemma—because of the modern division of labor. They face so many opportunities.

C. The Division of Labor

Different people possess different gifts. Paul begins his discussion of the calling by saying that Christians generally serve in lowly capacities. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (I Cor. 1:26). The division of labor enables the church to function as a body, Paul says. Some of these tasks are undistinguished. "And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness" (I Cor. 12:23). Those Christians who have specific skills in one area should not think of themselves as inferior just because their area of service has low prestige. What he says about the division of labor in the church applies to every institution. It functions best as a unit when all of its members know their specific tasks and perform them well, irrespective of their tasks' social status.

1. Freedom

Paul says that a Christian should remain in his present calling. The one exception is the slave. It is best for the slave to gain his freedom. This was a new insight. The Mosaic law had made provision for voluntary servitude of covenant-keepers under covenant-keepers.

And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day. And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise (Deut. 15:12–17).

Paul's injunction represents a significant departure from the perspective of the Mosaic law. Freedom is said to be preferable to servitude. It is superior for Christian service. This means that a covenant-keeper is granted greater responsibility by the New Covenant than under the Old Covenant. God expects him to be an independent laborer. The benefit to God's kingdom of such freedom rests on a premise: covenant-keepers should serve God directly as independent owners of their own labor services, not as lifetime subordinates whose labor services legally belong to others.

The Old Covenant's model of covenant-keeping servitude was household servitude.⁸ The permanent servant's hole in the ear was a covenantal mark of lifetime servitude. By a covenant oath and an oath-sign, a man was brought into a family, though not as a legal heir. This extension of family authority over non-adopted, voluntary hirelings is weakened in the New Testament, though not formally abolished. The faithful slave owner in Paul's era—before the Old Covenant was completely replaced by the New in A.D. 70⁹—was not compelled to release his covenant-keeping slaves, but he was encouraged to do so (Philemon), and slaves in turn were encouraged to accept their liberty. Paul made an important break with the Mosaic covenant on this point. There should be no doubt: freedom is preferable to slavery, even voluntary slavery. The New Covenant is liberating, compared to the

8. Inter-generational slavery for covenantal foreigners was a completely different model (Lev. 25:44–46). See Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gntools>)

9. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/klgbjf>)

Old Covenant.

2. Responsibility

This change in perspective had to do with increasing an individual's responsibility before God. A covenant-keeper is supposed to make an assessment of whatever it is that God wants him to accomplish in history. He should seek counsel, but he must decide for himself. He must bear the consequences of his decisions and his actions. Paul later wrote to the Corinthians: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (II Cor. 9:6).

A society with a high division of labor allows an individual a far wider selection of areas of service. His personally unique array of talents is more likely to match the opportunities for serving God in a society that enjoys a high division of labor. The match-up of skills and demand will be tighter, if he can discover the opportunity. The New Testament Christian is understood to be the best judge of this match-up. He must bear the consequences and also reap the reward—a heavenly reward. He must select his area of service. This takes accurate self-judgment. He must assess both his abilities and his opportunities. Then he must choose what to do.

A high division of labor allows an employer to identify more rigorously the economic value of each employee's contribution to the production process. He can pay the worker what the customers have determined that he is worth: his replacement cost. The division of labor also allows the employer's competitors to assess this market value, which is the result of competition: employers vs. would-be employers; employees vs. would-be employees. Information about the economic value of a specific task is more readily available when this task is narrowly circumscribed by the free market's production process. As Adam Smith wrote in 1776, the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market.¹⁰

The greater the degree of personal economic freedom in a market, the more pervasive the free market becomes. When men compete for resources, the market's system of pricing extends into more areas of life. This means that productive services become more narrowly circumscribed: specialization of labor. *Freedom of choice extends the domain of the free market.* Paul's advice to slaves is to accept this

10. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book I, Chapter III.

increase in personal freedom. This necessarily involves an extension of personal responsibility.

What Paul did not say was that a man's highest area of service is best determined by competitive bidding by customers. *Paul had no concept of the calling as the highest-paying form of employment.* He taught that men should remain in their callings, with the exception of slaves. In this sense, *Paul was not a defender of increasing per capita output, either for individuals or societies.* He did not say that the servant of God should decide how best to serve God by accepting a job that pays a high salary and offers other benefits, such as a large expense account and a budget sufficient to hire a good-looking secretary. By opposing an exclusively monetary view of success, *the New Testament retards the market-driven extension of the division of labor.* How? Because the increasing use of money in an exchange economy extends both free trade and the specialization of production. Paul was no lover of money. As he wrote elsewhere, "the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:10).¹¹

D. Changing Jobs

Paul says that a Christian should not change his calling. Does this mean that he should not change his job? No. To identify the calling with the job is a mistake. It would be as if someone had identified Eric Liddell's calling with his running, which the movie portrays the British Olympic committee as having done. The movie makes it clear that running was not his calling. The central scene in this regard is where the committee meets with Liddell in an opulent drawing room. The crusty old man who chairs the committee argues that Liddell should run the 100-meter dash. His country is counting on him. The proper order of importance of service is to country, then to God. A younger committee member defends Liddell, suggesting that the idea of country before God is what got the nations of Europe into the devastation of the world war. Liddell believes in God before country, the man says, and his opinion should be respected. The movie makes it clear that Liddell's calling encompassed his running, but running did not define it. The non-Christian screenplay writer, who won the

11. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 10.

Academy Award, grasped this fact and made this theme central to Liddell's story. The screenplay also recognizes that Harold Abrahams was also more than a runner. He was a Jew, and as he was portrayed in the movie (by a Roman Catholic actor), he was determined to defeat in a larger sense all those who were prejudiced against him. The screenplay makes it clear that Abrahams was running for personal glory as a way to make a personal statement of his own excellence. The movie ends with Abrahams' emotional defeat: the gold medal did not mean much to him after all. The heart of the difference between the two men is seen in their callings, not their occupation. Liddell ran for God; Abrahams ran for glory. Liddell's victory was a joy to him because, as he says in the movie to his sister, "When I run, I feel God's pleasure."

Eric Liddell had a job in 1924: running the 100-meter and 200-meter dashes in the Olympics. For the sake of his calling, he switched from the 100 to the 400. He received public criticism for making this switch until after the 400-meter race was over. He set the Olympic record in the 400. This forever silenced the critics of his job-switching.

Liddell changed jobs in 1925: from athlete and part-time domestic evangelist to foreign missionary and part-time athlete. He remained involved with sports in China. He taught children how to play British sports. He occasionally ran in races, which he won. At no time did he did change callings. He was a missionary—though not always a foreign missionary—from the beginning of his athletic career to the end of his life. He died in a prison camp in this capacity. He was inside that camp because of the calling he had chosen, and he retained his godly testimony among the prisoners.

Let me return to my definition of a calling as *the most important service to God in which you would be the most difficult to replace*. My calling in life to write this economic commentary and the economic treatise that will be based on it. No one else has ever attempted to write an economic commentary on the Bible. I began in 1973, four decades ago. The project has not earned me a living. It has cost me a great deal of donated time to raise the money to pay for typesetting, printing, and distribution of the pre-Web volumes and their supporting books.¹² I have never taken a salary or book royalties for this work.

I supported myself from 1974 to 2005 by writing an economic newsletter and by investing. Beginning in 2005, I launched my website,

12. *Dominion and Common Grace* (1987), *Is the World Running Down?* (1988), *Political Polytheism* (1989), *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990).

Gary North's Specific Answers. It immediately became my primary source of income. I sent out the first issue of my *Remnant Review* newsletter exactly one year after the first chapter of my projected commentary was published in the *Chalcedon Report* (May 1973). I firmly believe that God gave me the idea for the newsletter because I had already begun my calling and had continued in the commentary project for a year. God has sustained me in both of these publishing efforts. I have had other jobs in addition to the newsletter. I worked for six months as a researcher for Ron Paul (1976). I worked part-time as a financial counselor for *The Ruff Times* (1977–79). I briefly held an endowed professorial chair in free market economics at Campbell College (1979). But my calling has never changed. The most important work that I can do in which I seem to be irreplaceable is writing this commentary. No employer would have imagined that this was my most important work. No employer would have funded it. My legal freedom to make my choice of calling enabled me to begin it and to pursue it. The wide range of employment opportunities in the world's largest and most free market has enabled me to earn a living in order to pursue my calling.

E. Specialization and Compound Economic Growth

Specialization of production accompanies an increase in the division of labor. The specialist masters a narrow aspect of production. In a free market society, through the competition of the employer against would-be employers, and the competition of the employee against would-be employees, an employee is paid the value of his productive services to the overall production process. Customers decide retroactively whether this expenditure was profitable for the employer. By specializing, the worker maximizes the value of his output. If he seeks to maximize his monetary income, he must match his skills with the customers' highest bidding for these skills.

When a person devotes time and concentration to a particular skill, he gets better at it. This increases his productivity. He can produce more in the same time period with the same tools. *Paul's injunction promotes specialization in the calling.* He tells his readers not to change their callings. In the words of the traditional folk saying, they should stick to their knitting.

This strategy takes advantage of the phenomenon known as

compound growth. When any base—e.g., population, capital, or knowledge—grows over time, it becomes ever-more dominant in its environment. The compounding effect creates enormous results if it continues long enough. Eventually, the base approaches infinity as a limit. Paul tells his readers that they should devote a lifetime to the mastery of their individual callings. “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God” (v. 24). This lifetime of service adds up over time. It more than adds up; it multiplies.

What applies to individuals also applies to the kingdoms of which they are members. Each kingdom’s compounding process goes on inter-generationally. The process ceases for a covenant-breaking society after a few generations, but covenant-keepers are able to extend the process indefinitely. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:5–6). This compounding process makes possible the steady extension of the kingdom of God in history. The compound growth of the kingdom of God can fill the earth over time because Satan’s rival kingdom cannot maintain such growth. This conclusion is consistent with Daniel’s vision.

Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:34–35).

The postmillennial implications here are obvious.

F. Social Status

Social status is not the same as economic class. There is a French phrase, *nouveaux riches*. It refers to newly rich people. As it is commonly used, the phrase implies that their economic success has not been matched by their social success. They have made money; they have not gained the necessary social graces to enter into high society. They may have bought large homes. They have not been able to buy social acceptance by those people whose opinions really matter.

Who are these people who really matter? This is *the* social question. We might say, “matter to themselves” and “matter to certain socially excluded rich newcomers.”

In academic sociology, the word “class” relates to economic position. Karl Marx is the most famous theorist of class, even though he never got around to defining the term.¹³ The word “status” refers to social position. Class and social status are analytically distinct. Class position is earned: by economic performance, by inheritance, or by an unforeseen event. Social status positions are conferred. This is why people with a high class position resent their not being able to obtain high social status. Their inability to obtain it seems to put them in their place, and they resent being put there. They are not able to set the terms of their social status. They are dependent on the non-economic evaluations of others, who may not have attained equal wealth. Customers or possibly citizen-taxpayers have granted them their class position, but those who possess high status ration out status positions to rival claimants. The terms of competition are different.

Paul did not concern himself at all with social status. As a Pharisee, he had possessed high social status in Israel. He offered this as background in his letter to the Philippians (3:4–6). He had abandoned all this in no uncertain terms. “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (v. 7). He knew that his office as an apostle now condemned him in the eyes of the religious leaders of Israel. Roman officials were required to honor his legal status as a Roman citizen, but they did not accept him socially, nor did he expect them to. As for economic class, he knew that he was a poor man. So, two of the most powerful personal motivational factors in the creation of a social order, class position and social status position, did not motivate him. He said that the gospel should make a person indifferent to these motivations. “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it” (v. 21a). The slave was at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the economic hierarchy. This is of no concern, Paul says. What matters is the freedom to pursue one’s calling.

The model for this lack of concern about social status is Jesus.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a

13. On the final page of his never-completed third volume of *Das Kapital*, Marx said he would define “class.” He lived for more than a decade after writing this, but he never got around to this deferred project.

servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:5–13).¹⁴

Jesus rose in both senses—socially and bodily—because He first subordinated Himself in both senses. He went to the cross as a convicted criminal. Christians are to do the same in principle. Paul in chapter 6 says that Christians will judge the angels. But the price of this authority is low status in history until His kingdom's compounding process finally replaces covenant-breaking society. In a covenant-breaking society, upward social mobility is blocked for the faithful covenant-keeper. Those who confer high social status are opposed to the gospel's standards and motivations. The gospel regards high social status as nothing of eternal importance, and therefore nothing of spiritual importance. Jesus warned His disciples: "Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:10–12). This is a reversal of conventional concepts of social hierarchy and therefore social status. The servant is the model.

In contrast to social status, a concept of servanthip underlies the economic theory of the free market. The economically successful person is a producer or seller who best serves the wants of customers.

Social status, however, is conferred. Christian virtues do not lend themselves to high social status in a covenant-breaking society. These virtues do sometimes lend themselves to special status. In our once-Christian West, such virtues as honor, sacrificial service to the less fortunate, courage under fire in wartime, and other forms of voluntarily accepted service still bring special status. This special status is conferred in terms of an essentially Christian view of service. The person who possesses these virtues will not normally be invited to

14. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

gatherings of socially prominent people, for he has few contacts with them, but he is welcomed as an honored, one-time guest when he is invited by a representative of the group. Again, the example of Eric Liddell would be representative. He did not move in high social circles in the British Empire, but anyone in these circles would have regarded it as an honor in 1925 to have met him at such a gathering. He possessed special status after his Olympic victory, which was not the same as high status. Paul would have regarded such special status, based on sacrificial service, as legitimate, but not worth pursuing for its own sake.

To confer status is to make a judgment about someone's personal characteristics, which may include his family's status. Social status is imputed by those persons making the judgment. If he who possesses high social status then persuades others with high status to join with him in the unofficial conferring of such status, then the object of this confirmation gains high status. The recipient cannot purchase this in a competitive market marked by open entry. The social status market is necessarily a closed market. The high value of high status is maintained by the closed nature of the confirmation process. High social status is like currency: the more of it that is distributed, the less its value.

High social status is conferred on an individual by those who already possess it. They decide to share it with him. They retain what they issue: high status. This is in sharp contrast to a free market, where customers impute value to output rather than to the producer. Irrespective of his social status, a producer can gain money by satisfying the desires of customers. This is because customers judge the value of the output in terms of their goals, not in terms of the personal characteristics of the producer. Customers confer money, not status. They possess money, which is easily transferable in a marketplace with open entry. The status "marketplace" is marked by its closed entry.

The difference in the free market and status is analogous to the difference between a supermarket and an exclusive club. It costs money to join the club, but money alone is not sufficient. You must be invited to join. In contrast, it costs no money to walk into a supermarket. It costs money only to carry something out of it that you did not carry into it. Money alone is sufficient. Ownership is conferred at a check-out counter. Status is not conferred at a check-out counter.

The free market allows people of low social status to become rich.

Immigrants, members of racial minorities or religious minorities, and other people who face social discrimination can achieve economic success because of the nature of imputation in a free market. Customers impute value to output rather than the status of the producer. This is a liberating force in society.

G. Judicial Status

God unilaterally and sovereignly confers the only status that counts eternally: saved or lost. Both are judicial categories. Judicial status is conferred by God, not purchased by the recipient. Jesus warned: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).¹⁵ In this sense, salvation is closer to social status than it is to class. The key issue is confirmation.

What distinguishes this judicial status from social status is the basis of the confirmation. The granting of salvation has nothing to do with the personal characteristics of the recipient. It has everything to do with the personal characteristics of the individual’s judicial representative: either Adam or Christ. Later in this epistle, Paul writes: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Cor. 15:22). God grants salvation—superior judicial status—to those whom He chooses. He does not make this grant based on the accomplishments of the recipient. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).

Because the judicial status of salvation can be at odds with both class and social status, Paul dismisses both as spiritually peripheral matters. Both class and social status are subordinate to a person’s calling before God. This calling is the individual’s life-long working out of the original grant of salvation by God. Elsewhere, Paul writes: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). This does not mean that we work our way into salvation. It means that we must work out the salvation that is already ours.

In chapter 3 of this epistle, Paul discusses God’s final judgment.¹⁶ God imputes value to a redeemed person’s work: gold, silver, and

15. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

16. Chapter 3.

precious stones vs. wood, hay, and stubble (v. 12).¹⁷ He announces this retroactively on judgment day. In this sense, God acts as a customer does. He judges the value of a redeemed person's lifetime output. But this person is already redeemed. His output is an extension of his salvation, not his damnation. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (vv. 14–15). This means that the *economic* aspect of God's imputation is secondary to the *judicial* aspect of God's imputation. Personal production is important, whether we are speaking of calling or occupation, but not nearly so important as salvation, which is granted exclusively in terms of God's sovereign grace. Paul makes this clear in Romans 9: "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (vv. 17–18). Then God sovereignly grants the redeemed person's output, step by step: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). So, it is all grace.

Conclusion

Paul recommended that each person accept a single lifetime calling in God's earthly kingdom. The person who discovers his highest area of service to God and who pursues it throughout his life is a successful person, according to God's imputation of success. This calling need not have anything to do with high monetary income. It usually has nothing to do with high social status, except perhaps negatively: making it unattainable in a covenant-breaking society. The calling is a matter of matching one's God-given talents to a God-given assignment. Freedom allows a person to make a better match-up. This is why Paul recommended that a slave accept manumission if it was offered. A high division of labor also enables a person to make a better match-up. The more opportunities for lifetime service there are, the more likely that a person will be able to match up his God-given gifts with his God-given assignment. His assignment may not have much to do with his gift of making money. His assignment is a matter of performing a unique service that is needed in the kingdom. How

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

unique? Sufficiently unique so as to make his replacement difficult.

Nevertheless, a high division of labor society, which is based on monetary exchange, offers greater temptations to miss one's calling. How? Because it offers greater choice. With greater choice comes greater responsibility. The lure of money is very great. Men are then tempted to define the calling as occupation. They may choose that occupation which offers the most money. This is service to mammon rather than God. In short, there are no free lunches in this life. With greater liberty comes greater temptation. Paul did not place economic growth and the reduction of poverty on his list of desirable goals. Neither did Christ. These beneficial economic results are the products of covenant-keeping, but they are not valid substitutes for it.

9

A CONFIRMED BACHELOR'S BIAS

Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away (I Cor. 7:25–31).

The theocentric focus of this passage is service to God. The context is marriage, a covenantal institution sealed by a lawful, binding oath.¹ The concept of the self-maledictory oath is point four of the biblical covenant model.²

A. The Time Is Short

This passage is unique in the New Testament. Paul offers marital advice, but he admits that he is not speaking authoritatively. He is not laying down the law. The key phrase is “my judgment.” “Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful” (v. 25). “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but

1. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/rssecond>)

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God" (vv. 39–40). His readers did not have to take his advice. They still don't. There is no other command in the Bible that begins with such an announcement: "Take it or leave it."

Paul was speaking in terms of a specific time frame. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short" (v. 29a). Why short? He did not say. Did he expect the imminent bodily return of Jesus Christ in final judgment? Some liberal Bible commentators argue that he did. Paul made a mistake, they say or at least imply. This interpretation undermines the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. If Paul got the facts wrong, yet the epistle still is part of the Bible, then the entire Bible becomes suspect—guilt by association. Why was the time short? Was this a reference to eschatology: the end of history? That cannot be, unless he made a mistake. History did not end.

Did the short time frame refer to the replacement of the Old Covenant at the fall of Jerusalem?³ The period of transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant had about fifteen years to go when he wrote this letter. Part of that transition was Nero's year of persecution in A.D. 64/65, about a decade in the future. This persecution judicially separated Christianity from Judaism in Roman law. In A.D. 66, the revolt of the Jews in Palestine began. It did not end until it was crushed in A.D. 70. The church, having gone through its time of troubles with Nero, was not implicated in this Jewish revolt.⁴ Rome went through five emperors from A.D. 66–70, and the survivor was Vespasian, the general who, along with his son Titus, was the victor over Israel.

It is possible to make the case that Paul was looking ahead a decade to the church's time of troubles. A church member who was encumbered with a wife and children would be especially burdened. Better not to marry, Paul concluded. "Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you" (v. 28b). But was near-term prophecy really what undergirded his marital advice? Before we can answer this with any confidence, we need to consider the context: Paul's discussion of the world.

3. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/klgbjf>)

4. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), pp. 48–51.

B. The World

God made the world (Acts 17:24). The world is temporary. “For the fashion of this world passeth away” (v. 31b). This world reflects God. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).⁵ God predestined the salvation of every redeemed person before the creation of the world. “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4).

The Greek word for “world”—*kosmos*—is broader than just the Old Covenant order. It is used in several ways in the New Testament: the creation in general, the sin-cursed biological world (Heb. 11:7; II Peter 2:5), sinful humanity (John 14:22; Rom. 5:12; II Cor. 5:19; John 17:9; II Cor. 11:32; I John 5:19), time, in contrast to eternity (Matt. 4:8; John 12:25; I Cor. 7:33; Eph. 2:12; I John 2:15), the social and economic affairs of this life (Mark 8:36), covenant-breaking society (John 7:7; 17:14; 18:36; Eph. 2:2; Col. 2:20; James 4:4), the Roman empire (Rom. 1:8), and the Mosaic law (Gal. 4:3–5). Paul in this epistle uses it most often in the sense of covenant-breaking society.⁶ But in this chapter, he uses it with respect to the social and economic affairs of life.⁷ Paul in this section is saying that *the affairs of this life are inherently transitory*. It was not just that the Roman civil order was transitory, or that the Old Covenant order was transitory, but the concerns of this world are transitory. This is because the world itself is transitory. Paul here returns to a theme found in Christ’s parables: the sharp contrast between this world and eternity. *This world is not to be trusted*. Jesus

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

6. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (I Cor. 1:27). “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (I Cor. 2:12). “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness” (I Cor. 3:19). “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (I Cor 6:2).

7. “But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife” (I Cor. 7:33). “There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband” (I Cor. 7:34).

said that we are to lay up treasure in heaven by surrendering our treasure in history for the sake of kingdom-building projects.⁸ Paul says that Christians would be wise to avoid marriage.

Paul is speaking as a man with no ties to either family or nation. In order to serve Christ, Paul had abandoned everything except the church and his legal status as a free man, and he would eventually abandon even his freedom. He had no wife and no place to call home. Jesus had lived in a similar condition. “And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20). Neither of them possessed any of this world’s comforts. But why did Paul recommend his pilgrim lifestyle to others? Paul is not recommending moderation; he is recommending *asceticism*—an asceticism that begins with sexual asceticism. “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (I Cor. 7:1). A man can legitimately enjoy what is good in this life if he already possesses it, Paul says, but he should not trust it, and if he loses it, he should not seek to replace it. Paul’s example here is the widow. “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God” (vv. 39–40).

This message is in stark contrast to what God had said of Adam. “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). Paul’s advice leads to a different conclusion for widows than for men: serving God through serving a husband is a less happy condition for a widow than serving God alone. Yet this recommendation, if widely followed, would leave widowers without replacement wives. Adam was given a wife because he needed a helper. Paul’s advice to widows—to remain single—is in conflict with God’s advice to men in general. What of widowers? Will they be happier alone? Will they be more productive alone? Are they unlike Adam, who needed a helper? Who will help them? If they marry younger virgins, then what happens to young men who also seek to marry? If widowhood and widowerhood are in fact less productive for God’s kingdom than marriage, then Paul was recommending a widow’s personal happiness and independent productivity at the expense of a greater extension of the kingdom of

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 26.

God in history through the division of labor in marriage. Not only was Paul recommending a low division of labor for widows, he was implying the same thing for the men whom widows would never marry.

Paul in this passage speaks of marriage as the God-given means of channeling lust—nothing more (vv. 1–2). There is no hint of the biblical doctrine of dominion through biological multiplication (Gen. 1:28). There is no discussion of the family in terms of the division of labor, which is in contrast to his discussion of the church (I Cor. 12).⁹ His emphasis throughout this passage is on the superiority of individual service to God. “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I” (vv. 7–8). He implies that an unmarried individual can serve God more effectively than a married person can because marriage is inherently worldly, unlike celibacy. He is quite forthright about this. “He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband” (vv. 32B–34).

Why is seeking to please a covenant-keeping spouse “caring for the world”? Why not discuss marriage as part of a program to extend the kingdom of God in history? Having denigrated the concerns of this world in this passage, he then identifies marriage as second-best to celibacy because marriage is inherently more worldly than celibacy. Yet, for a covenant-keeper, seeking to serve another human being is surely seeking to serve God. If pleasing a spouse is worldly, then every institution in this life is worldly. Elsewhere, Paul wrote that Christ loves His church as a man loves his wife (Eph. 5:25–33). Is Christ’s love for His church somehow defective because this love is expressed in history? Hardly. Then what is the problem with love for a spouse? How else are Christians to learn of Christ’s love for His church? Why did Paul identify service to a spouse as serving the world?

I think it had to do with his personal preference for mobility. A

9. Chapter 14.

marriage covenant binds a person judicially and, to some extent, geographically. It channels the forms of service even as it channels the sex drive. *Marriage places boundaries on people's choices.* A married man is less mobile than a single man. Paul in this chapter identifies worldliness as institutionally restricted options: slavery and marriage. A married person is like a slave: restricted. A slave should take his freedom, if it is offered (I Cor. 7:21).¹⁰ So should a widow, he said. This implies that a widower should, too.

Study after study has confirmed what God told Adam: marriage is more productive than unmarried life is. It significantly reduces crime. It extends men's life expectancy. The responsibilities of marriage pressure a man to work harder and smarter. He has mouths to feed other than his own. To increase his income, he must strive to serve customers more efficiently. His restricted options persuade him to concentrate his efforts on a limited set of tasks. This furthers the division of labor. The specialization of labor increases productivity, which increases personal wealth, which increases the options available for service—maybe not the worker's, but surely the missionary families he supports through his tithe and offerings. It was a young Karl Marx, not God, who laid down this rule: “. . . in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.”¹¹ This view of economic production is opposed to the idea of specialization of production and the division of labor.

C. Christian Stoicism

Paul is arguing that this world is not trustworthy. It is passing away. The proper emotional attitude toward a world in which the time is short, Paul says, is to go about one's activities as if the environment that makes possible the good things of life is insecure. “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept

0. Chapter 8.

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1845–46] 1965), pp. 44–45.

not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (vv. 29–31). This sounds like Stoicism: a patient emotional acceptance of the good and the bad.

How can a man with a wife live and think as though he were single? How can men weep or rejoice, yet do so as if they did not? How can someone buy goods, yet live as someone with no possessions? Paul does not explain any of this, here or elsewhere. Nevertheless, he says that the Corinthians must do all of these things, “for the fashion of this world passeth away.” There is no reason for a Christian not to enjoy his wife or his possessions, Paul says, but he is told to live as though he could lose both at a moment’s notice. He could lose his life, too. This was Solomon’s attitude in Ecclesiastes.

Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them (Eccl. 9:9–12).¹

Solomon’s final sentence indicates that a man can pass away at any time. Paul says that the fashion of this world is passing away. Yet the world is still here. So, Paul must have meant that, as far as an individual is concerned, this world passes away, for all men pass away. A man’s time is short. The world’s time, compared to a man’s time, has been long.

What does a short life span have to do with the advantages of not marrying? If every man’s time is short, then “the present distress” had nothing to do with this universal condition. If time had been uniquely short for members of the Corinthian church, then it might have made sense for a man to avoid the added responsibility of a family. But there

1. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 34.

is no indication in the text or in the historical record that Corinth was suffering or about to suffer anything unique. On the contrary, Corinth was in a strong financial position to send money to the hard-pressed church in Jerusalem (II Cor. 9).¹³ If Paul had in mind the coming persecution of all the churches, still a decade away, then he would have warned other churches, offering the same marital advice. He did not do this in his epistles that have survived. If he was concerned about the imminent passing of the Old Covenant order, this was no threat to gentile churches. Besides, he referred to the present distress, not the distress of Jerusalem a decade or more in the future. So, what was he talking about?

Is his advice universal? If so, then the present distress must be universal. If the present distress is the transitory nature of this life, then his advice regarding marriage is at odds with the dominion covenant: multiplication. One of two conclusions is inescapable. First, the present distress (need), whatever it was, was unique to Corinth, and this led Paul to offer the local congregation marital advice that was different from what the creation ordinances required: marriage (Gen. 2:24) and multiplication (Gen. 1:28). Second, the present distress is a universal condition, namely, the insecurity of life, in which case, he was non-authoritatively recommending a celibacy as a superior way of life, a way of life that cannot become universal without annulling the pre-Fall dominion covenant and its renewal with Noah's family (Gen. 9:1–3).¹⁴ This would mean that Paul was recommending an elitist way of Christian living based on the absence of the sex drive. It would be convenient to affirm the first possibility—a unique situation at Corinth—but the evidence from the text points to the latter. F. W. Grosheide comments: “The reference is not to a need which was only present in Paul's own days nor to an imminent coming of the Lord whereby life on earth would lose its significance. Paul speaks in this chapter of the needs of all Christians in general (cf. v. 29 and 31). He has in view the distress which exists for every Christian at all times.”¹⁵ Conclusion: if the present distress is universal, then his recommendation is elitist.

Adults today face approximately the same time on earth that adults in Paul's day did. The life span of modern Western man is not

3. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 7.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 18.

5. F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 175.

much different from the typical life span in Moses' day. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Ps. 90:10). Our time is still just about as short today as it was then. So, any difference in life expectancy facing the Corinthian church's members and what we face is not significant—surely not significant enough to recommend marriage today and recommend against it in Paul's day.

We are faced with a major explanatory problem: figuring out why Paul is so emphatic here that Christians should not marry because of "the present distress," when it was the same general distress faced by mankind from Moses' day until today.

D. Paul's Defense of Celibacy

Paul suggests that taking on additional responsibilities in family life is not wise unless a person just cannot live comfortably outside of marriage. This attitude toward marriage, if extended to the institutional church, would undermine the kingdom of God. If every church member were called to be a wandering evangelist, as Paul was, the church would turn into something like the medieval friars. But the friars existed only through the charity of Christian families. That the church can use a few evangelists who are constantly on the move is obvious. That the church cannot use many of them is also obvious.

Marriage is the main topic in this passage. Paul also discussed the calling. He seemed to regard marriage as being an inferior calling, a product of most men's lack of God's special gift of no interest in sex, a gift which Paul said he had been given. Yet, overwhelmingly, the Old Covenant had favored marriage, beginning with the command to Adam to be fruitful and multiply. This is why this passage baffles commentators. Why would Paul spend so much space in praise of celibacy, when celibacy is a rare condition which, if distributed universally, would end mankind, and if distributed widely, would impoverish humanity by restricting the division of labor? Why would he recommend to Christians an attitude toward marriage that would hand over dominion to those covenant-breakers with large families?

Jesus said that some men are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom. "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for

the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. 19:12). I assume that the third variety is spiritual rather than physical. Christ was not calling men to become Skoptsi, the Russian cult that requires castration. Paul was one of Christ's eunuchs. But the gift of celibacy has to be limited by God if society is to be preserved, let alone extended. Why spend a chapter praising celibacy when celibacy is limited, and must be limited, to a handful of people? My guess is that Paul was defending his own gift and his marital condition. He was calling others to live as he did, if they possessed his gift. "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that" (v. 7). But why single out widows? Did he expect them to become foreign missionaries, as he was? The practice of sending out unmarried women—not usually widows—began in late-nineteenth-century Protestant missions. This seems to have worked well as far as planting churches was concerned. But even here, there have been problems. Women cannot lawfully speak in church, according to Paul (I Cor. 14:34–35). They surely cannot lawfully be ordained as ministers. So, the lawful missionary efforts of women are limited to teaching, nursing, and support activities.

Paul does not say that widows can serve God better as single women. He says they will be happier. But why do widows generally remarry when they have the opportunity? Why have they rejected Paul's advice? I have a controversial answer: his personal advice has not applied well to most widows, despite the fact that his language seems all-inclusive. He thought that he was offering good advice to most widows. It makes more sense theologically to assume that Paul's advice here was never meant by God to be permanent.

Conclusion

Paul's initial declaration is crucial for understanding this passage: "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful" (v. 25). He was not offering a command from God. Therefore, his personal preference for celibacy as a superior way of life can be seen as non-binding. Second, "the present distress" seems to refer to mankind's general condition: a short life in an insecure, cursed world. Jacob's confession links him to our era. "And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty

years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage” (Gen. 47:9). If the present distress is the human condition—life in a temporal world—then this is an affirmation of continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant. This means that Paul’s defense of celibacy as a superior way of life is advice for a highly restricted population. It means that the best way of life is closed to most Christians. I think Paul really believed this. This outlook is elitist, as he knew: most men are not beneficiaries of the gift of celibacy. (Happily married couples rejoice in the fact.) Paul’s outlook in this passage has reinforced the doctrine of the celibate priesthood in Roman Catholicism and has also led to the institutional elevation of monks over married clergy in Eastern Orthodoxy. Both denominations have treated Paul’s personal, non-binding opinion on bachelorhood as if it were a command from the Lord, which Paul insisted that it was not.

MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one (I Cor. 8:4).

The theocentric focus of this passage idolatry. This is an aspect of point two of the biblical covenant: representation.¹

A. Idols as Representatives of Demons

An idol is nothing: a lifeless object. Paul calls it dumb: silent. “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led” (I Cor. 12:2). Yet the Second Commandment indicates that God regards idols as rival gods. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:4–6).² This is a strict prohibition against the worship of lifeless objects. But how can a lifeless object be a god? Only through covenantal representation.

The Second Commandment is found in the first five commandments, which all have to do with priestly issues. The second

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

five have to do with kingly issues.³ The Second Commandment is an application of point two of the biblical covenant model. David declared: "For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens" (I Chron. 16:25–26). God is above all other gods. But what were these gods? They were not gods. They were either nothing or else they were representations of demons. Hierarchy always implies representation. Who represents God in history? The commandment is clear: idols do not. We must not worship any physical representation of God. This is why prayer to icons of church-designated posthumous saints is prohibited by this commandment. So is kneeling before them.

Paul is adamant here that idols are nothing. That is, they are not the original source of power. They cannot themselves answer prayer. This is a basic Old Covenant doctrine. "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them" (Ps. 115:3–8). Idols represent not only supernatural beings or forces but also the people who worship idols. The people who worship idols are like their idols: impotent. This condemnation rests on the assumption that God will be victorious and will bring judgment against all pretenders to divinity. He is a jealous God.

Then why did people in the ancient world and also in primitive tribes today persist in believing in idols? Because idols represent demons, and demons sometimes offer occult power to men. Paul fully understood this, as he said a few paragraphs later. "What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils" (I Cor. 10:19–20). There can sometimes be visible benefits from praying to idols and for sacrificing to them. The value of these sacrifices initially seem minimal compared to the power offered through them.

Paul is speaking here of the power of idols in themselves, as was

3. *Ibid.*, Preface.

David. They have no power. But this does not mean that they do not serve as representatives of demons who do possess power. This is why Paul forbade participation in idolatrous meals: “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (I Cor. 10:21).

B. Unholy Waste: Sacrificing to Idols

God requires sacrifice from His followers. So do demons. But God’s command to worship and sacrifice is open to all people. The command to sacrifice to a demon may not be. This is especially true inside oath-bound secret societies or clans.

Paul is writing here of meat offered to idols. Why would this concern a Christian? What opportunity would a Christian have to eat meat offered to an idol, other than at an idolatrous meal, which Paul prohibits? Answer: the meat that was offered to idols sometimes was subsequently offered for sale in the marketplace. The priestly representative of the idol could increase his income by the sale of such meat.

The question arose: Was this meat ritually tainted? Did it constitute false worship to buy something offered for sale by those priestly representatives who had received the idolatrous sacrifices on behalf of an idol? Paul says no. The idol is nothing in this free market context. Here, it does not grant power. Here, it does not command sacrifice. Formerly idolatrous meat that is offered for sale commercially has lost its rival sacramental character, which it had possessed in the context of a ritual meal or offering. The context of ritual eating was crucial to Paul’s argument. *The free market had removed the ritually tainted nature of the meat.* The market had made access to the meat universal and without an oath. Thus, Paul writes: “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles [butcher shop], that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof” (I Cor. 10:25–26). This precedes the section that prohibits participating in ritual meals offered to idols. The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof. Paul makes it clear that there is nothing wrong with eating meat offered to idols. The market removes all traces of ritual pollution from meat that had been offered to idols.

This principle applied in Paul’s day even when a temple was the place where the meat was purchased and eaten, where a Christian could “sit at meat in the idol’s temple” (v. 10). Some temples in Corinth

sold their meat and served it on their premises. This was clearly not done during the times of their disciples' celebrations. The meat was sold to be eaten on common ground, not to be offered and then consumed in worship. Paul is clear that there is nothing intrinsically immoral with buying meat offered to idols and then consuming it on the premises of a pagan temple. By opening access to the general public, and by charging a price, the priests had converted their local temples into what we might call "spiritual theme restaurants."

C. Weak Christians and Strong Judaizers

1. Weakness

The problem of weak Christians reappears here. In Romans, Paul dealt with the same problem with respect to prohibited foods. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs" (Rom. 14:1–2).⁴ What should a mature Christian do about the concerns of a weak Christian? He should defer to the weak Christian in public activities. "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:14–17).

Christian liberty is valid, but this liberty should not be used to create doubts or guilt in the lives of weak Christians. "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak" (I Cor. 8:9). This is the context of his discussion of eating meat in a temple. "For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (vv. 10–13).

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

What is the weak Christian's problem? He does not understand basic theology, namely, that there are no gods other than the biblical God. He does not understand that meat offered to idols is ritually prohibited only within the confines of the sacrificial ritual meal itself. Paul warns us: "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled" (v. 9).

To what extent must mature Christians change their lifestyles for the sake of weak Christians? Paul's example is the Christian who is seen eating a meal in a pagan temple. His visibility in a public place is what constitutes the threat to a weak Christian. There is no suggestion that whatever a mature Christian eats in private is a threat to anyone's faith. So, Paul is saying to curtail public displays of legitimate liberty in Christ.⁵

2. Theological Blindness

This leads us to a related issue, one which Paul does not raise in this context, but did deal with elsewhere: the stubborn Christian who is impervious to sound doctrine. This "weakness" is really a matter of false interpretation. This is not someone who is new to the faith; this is someone who is familiar with the basic theology of Christian liberty, but who rejects it.

The classic examples of stubborn, heretical Christians in Paul's writing were members of the sect of the circumcision. They were attempting to impose the Mosaic law of circumcision on gentile Christians. He had no patience with them. He called them promoters of another gospel. He told the Galatian church, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6–7). In this context, he returned to the theme of Christian liberty. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

Paul had no patience for the opinions of the circumcisers. He did his best to oppose them publicly. He reported: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the

5. A related issue is the attitude of weak Christians regarding alcohol. See Appendix B.

Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:11–15). He did not regard the sect of the circumcision as refuge for weak Christians. Their position was wilfully heretical. He told Peter not to alter his lifestyle out of concern for their opinions.

3. Spiritual Immaturity

Paul in this passage has in mind spiritually immature Christians who had not been exposed to accurate theology regarding the liberty of the Christian in Christ. These people were still worried about the Mosaic law's rules governing food and clothing. This passage and the passage in chapter 10 on the right to buy food in a butcher shop make it clear that the prohibitions on eating certain meats, which did not prevail prior to Moses, are hereby annulled. Paul elsewhere warns them: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (Col. 2:20–23). The concern over meat offered to idols was equally misplaced.

Nevertheless, weak Christians are at risk. Their consciences warn them, even when there is no sin involved. So, when asked about what he eats, the mature Christian must be patient. "But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the

Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (I Cor. 10:28–33).

Give no one offense: this is a good rule. The problem comes when circumstances dictate that the mature Christian must offend someone in order to avoid giving offense to someone else. When pressured by the Judaizers in Antioch, Peter gave offense to the gentiles. Paul warned him not to give offense to the gentiles. This warning necessarily gave offense to the Judaizers. In such cases, Christians must give offense to the legalists.

4. *Judaizers*

The prohibited meats of the Mosaic law were presumably also a concern of the Judaizers, just as circumcision was. Paul's authorization of meats offered to idols applied equally to meats prohibited by the Mosaic law. Peter had already been told this in his vision in Cornelius' home. "And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven" (Acts 10:13–16). This, we might call a blanket authorization of meats (v. 11).

Judaizers were not weak Christians. They were not Christians at all. They preached another gospel. Paul anathematized them. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8–9). So hostile was Paul to them that he adopted sarcasm as a tool of condemnation: his reference to cutting off. "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:11–15). The key phrase is this: *called unto liberty*. The Judaizers were calling men back into bondage. What had been the road to liberty under the Old

Covenant—circumcision—had become the road to serfdom under the New Covenant. Paul told Christians to stay off the road to serfdom. The end of the Old Covenant was at hand.

Conclusion

Christians should avoid walking down the road to serfdom. With respect to meats, the “touch not, taste not, handle not” theology is one road to serfdom. God has removed the “No Trespassing” sign from all biologically edible meats. Ritual sacrifice to idols and the demons they represent was prohibited by Paul (I Cor. 10:21). The ritual context of eating, not the meat, is what establishes the element of profanation.⁶

Weak Christians do not understand this. Neither do the modern cultic equivalents of the Judaizers. Mature Christians are supposed to respect the former and condemn the latter. The road to serfdom for the weak Christian is any violation of his conscience. Mature Christians should avoid giving offense to weak Christians by publicly refusing to participating in an activity considered profane by weak Christians. The reverse is true for dealing with Judaizers. Peter in Antioch avoided giving offense to the Judaizers by publicly withdrawing from the table of the gentiles. This gave offense to the

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 21. Cf. North, “The Annulment of the Dietary Laws,” *ICE Position Paper*, No. 2 (Nov. 1984), a reprint of my 1970 essay. (<http://bit.ly/DietaryLaws>) R. J. Rushdoony’s advocacy of the Mosaic laws governing unclean meats undermined his theology of grace. John Calvin took a strong stand against any revival of the Mosaic Covenant’s dietary laws. “As touching meats, after the abrogating of the law, God pronounceth that they are all pure and clean. If, on the other side, there start up a mortal man, making a new difference, forbidding certain, he taketh unto himself the authority and power of God by sacrilegious boldness. Of this stamp were the old heretics, Montanus, Priscillianus, the Donatists, the Tatians, and all the Encratites. Afterwards the Pope, to the end he might bind all those sects in a bundle, made a law concerning meats. And there is no cause why the patrons of this impiety should babble that they do not imagine any uncleanness in meats, but that men are forbidden to eat flesh upon certain days, to tame the flesh. For seeing they eat such meats as are most fit, both for delicacy and also for riot, why do they abstain from eating bacon, as from some great offence, save only because they imagine that that is unclean and polluted which is forbidden by the law of their idol? With like pride doth the tyranny of the Pope rage in all parts of life; for there is nothing wherein he layeth not snares to entangle the miserable consciences of men. But let us trust to the heavenly oracle, and freely despise all his inhibitions. We must always ask the mouth of the Lord, that we may thereby be assured what we may lawfully do; forasmuch as it was not lawful even for Peter to make that profane which was lawful by the Word of God.” John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1560] 1979), I, pp. 422–23.

gentiles. Their sensibilities, not the Judaizers' sensibilities, were what was important. Paul therefore condemned Peter.

By passing meat through a market transaction, any trace of pagan ritual is removed from the meat. The public exchange of goods, money for meat and vice versa, de-sacralizes meat that has been offered to idols. Eating such meat is therefore not a profane act. The customer violates no unholy boundary. To cross from common ground into unholy ground constitutes a profane act for Christians. To participate in unholy communion with demons is a profane act for Christians. But this has nothing to do with eating meat that has been sold to the public. The sale removes the unholy element of the meat. The meat needs no special prayer, no holy water, to cleanse it ritually. All it needs is a market.

11

RETAINING THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR

Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope (1 Cor. 9:7–10).

The theocentric principle here is God as the caretaker. He takes care of oxen, and He takes care of His people. This is different from the more familiar description of God as the owner. Ownership is derived from part one of the biblical covenant: sovereignty.¹ Caretaking is an aspect of point two: guarding.²

A. Paying Ministers a Salary

The conclusion that Paul reaches is that ministers of the gospel have a moral claim on a portion of the tithes of the members. Paul possesses the same claim, he tells them, but he has chosen not to ask for support.

If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power

1. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel (I Cor. 9:11–14).

This is the same conclusion that he reached in his other citation of this Mosaic law. “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (I Tim. 5:17–18).¹ Ministers of the gospel perform services that deserve funding by the churches’ members.

This conclusion rests on the Mosaic law governing oxen. This obscure law remains binding in the New Testament era. The ox has a legal claim on the field’s owner. The ox cannot speak for itself. The authorities must be prepared to intervene on its behalf. This means that someone has a legal obligation before God to intervene on behalf of a muzzled ox and report the infraction to civil or ecclesiastical authorities. This law establishes the legitimacy of private organizations such as the Humane Society and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.²

Paul then moves to the more general principle: labor and hire. Here, there is no need for a third party to intervene. The participants are humans. They can bargain with each other regarding appropriate payment for work rendered. There is no legal claim beyond the terms of the contract or agreement because of the humanity of the actors. Similarly with ministers: there is no legal claim. But there is a moral claim. Paul argues that if an ox has a legally enforceable claim on payment from their owners, surely ministers possess a moral claim on church support. But to reach this conclusion, he passes through a more general application of this case law: the laborer is worthy of his hire.

B. Costs and Benefits

Paul begins with a rhetorical question: “Who goeth a warfare any

1. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

2. Both organizations have headquarters in the United States.

time at his own charges?” The assumption here is that a warrior does not seek his own personal economic advantage when he goes into battle. He is serving the state and, in theory at least, the society that is represented politically by the state. Others in society will benefit from his efforts on the battlefield. He is therefore not asked by the state to pay his personal costs of service to the state. Paul implies here that there is a relationship between gaining a unique personal advantage and bearing the expenses of one’s activities. Where there is no unique personal advantage, there should be no personally born expenses.

This implication is reinforced by two more rhetorical questions. “Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?” A person who makes an expenditure out of his own assets is entitled to reap the fruits of his labor, his capital, his planning, and his vision.

Paul used rhetorical questions. Why? Because the logic that undergirded his conclusion he regarded as so persuasive that he did not have to spell out and then defend the logical steps in his argument. He expected the reader or listener to be able to perceive the logic of his argument. He also expected the reader to accept the truth of his argument. By comparing the three rhetorical questions, we find a common thread: the relationship between costs and benefits. First, he who does not benefit economically should not bear the economic costs of keeping him on duty. Second, he who bears the costs should also reap the benefits.

“Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?” Paul adds that he is not merely appealing to human reason by means of logic. He implies here that an appeal to logic possesses less authority than an appeal to Scripture. To say something as a man is one thing, but when the Scripture says something that verifies logic, men can legitimately have greater confidence in what is being said. Paul appeals to logic by means of rhetorical questions, but his appeal to Scripture possesses greater authority, he implies.

C. Plowing in Hope

“Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn” (Deut. 25:4). This Mosaic law protected the ox’s interests. The ox was entitled to be fed by the field that he had previously plowed.³ Paul

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 63.

adds: "For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (v. 10). Like the ox, so is the producer who allocates resources to produce a finished good or service in the future. Because he has invested time, raw materials, money, and labor into the project, including a plan of production, he is entitled to benefit from his investment. This is his hope. It is a biblically legitimate hope. It is why he made the investment in the first place. His original hope was his motivation for his subsequent productivity. This hope may be thwarted by unforeseen events, but from a legal standpoint, it is based on the concept that the laborer is worthy of his hire, that the fruits of his labor, time, capital, and money are his.

This is the great hope, when defended by the courts, that has produced the West's free market economy, with its enormous per capita wealth.⁴ It is a hope secured by civil law: property rights. Property rights are enforceable legal claims for an owner to use his resources in ways determined best by him and for him. Most important, an owner has the legal right to exclude others from using his property, just as God excluded Adam from the forbidden tree. He can legally sell this right permanently or rent it to others temporarily. This view of property is the basis of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15).⁵ It also is the basis of the tenth commandment. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Ex. 20:17).⁶ It is also the basis of other Mosaic laws.

1. *Property Rights*

In a book-long defense of private property, Roman Catholic social commentator Tom Bethell linked property rights and Christianity. Christianity defends the justice of private ownership.

Rights may be defined as "just claims," but in relation to the state, they refer to aspects of the human person that belong to us in consequence of our nature. If we are deprived of them without due

4. Douglas C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 28.

6. *Ibid.*, ch 30.

process, injustice is done. The rise of the doctrine of rights is a facet of the slow democratization of life in the West, and may owe its origin to the influence of Christianity. “All equal are within the Church’s gate,” George Herbert wrote. The privileges of rank will not carry weight on Judgment Day—they may turn out to be a disadvantage, in fact. This theological insight was by degrees transported into the secular realm: All men were created equal, and although individual men might differ greatly in the “content of their character,” in their talents and in their aptitudes, they should be presumed equal in their rights, and should be treated equally by the law.

The argument here is that it is self-defeating to talk of protecting individual rights if the right to own property is not prominent among them. At the most general level, the phrase “life, liberty, and property” does outline our most fundamental rights. As an eighteenth-century Virginian (Arthur Lee) said: “The right of property is the guardian of every other right, and to deprive a people of this is in fact to deprive them of their liberty.” This truth became obscured in the twentieth century, especially in the period of false hopes for collectivism. It is imperative that it be revived today.⁷

An individual who possesses *legal title* to specific property is burdened with *legal responsibilities* for the use of this property. God holds him responsible for the use of his property. So does the civil government. For example, he may not physically injure others with it. Society also holds the owner responsible through the free market’s bidding process. At all times, there are competing bids for the use of scarce resources. The owner or the renter of property pays a price—*forfeited income*—whenever he refuses to sell this property or allow others to pay him to use it. This is a cost imposed on him by other market participants. There is no escape from this responsibility of ownership. It passes to the new owner along with lawful title.

When an owner decides to use a particular resource as an input in some production process, he thwarts the desires of competing producers who are bidding for this resource. The owner then allocates this property on behalf of future customers, possibly including himself, who will want the final product to solve their problems or fulfill their dreams. The owner decides to use the asset in a particular way. This excludes other ways. Someone must accept this allocational

7. Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), pp. 169–70.

responsibility in society. If the asset is to be put to its highest and best use, someone with legal authority over the asset must decide which use is highest and best. In a free market social order, the owner makes this decision. He is legally sovereign over the asset. He possesses legal title to it. By legally linking (a) title to an asset and the income it generates with (b) full economic responsibility for any physical damages imposed by the asset (Ex. 21:28–32,⁸ 35–36;⁹ Ex. 22:5–6¹⁰), the Bible necessarily promotes a free market economy: the private ownership of both the means of production and the fruits of production. The Bible is not neutral toward the free market. It provides a blueprint for establishing a free market economy.¹¹ This is why Christian opponents of a free market economy vehemently deny that the Bible provides blueprints for any economic system. They know that the Old Testament condemns their anti-market views.

2. *Costs of Protection*

A civil government is supposed to protect every individual under its jurisdiction. Individuals should be defended by the state against fraud or coercion by others who seek to take possession of the existing owners' assets. The higher the risk of theft for any item, the greater the value of scarce resources that are necessary to protect ownership rights. This reduces the supply of high-risk items that are unprotected by civil law.

The costs of protecting assets take many forms. These costs reduce the producer's net income. He therefore produces fewer goods than he would have, had the threats not existed, or had the state defended his right of ownership more effectively. These costs may persuade him to raise the selling price, thereby reducing the number of potential buyers. The excluded buyers are harmed. The seller is harmed, too: reduced sales and income. Or, the owner may lose control over the item when a thief is successful. These economic effects hurt the customer. They also hurt the producer. The end result is reduced production, as producers allocate resources to protection instead of production. This lowers the wealth of individuals and also of society. The thief is benefitted, but his benefit leads to reduced wealth for productive, honest people.

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 40.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 42.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 44.

11. North, *Inherit the Earth*.

The thief may be the state. In our day, the state's level of taxation and its degree of regulatory control over the production process¹² make it the most effective thief in man's history. The level of theft is literally beyond calculation. Producers and customers labor under the burden of confiscation of half or more of their output. The loss imposed by the state's theft is more predictable than the loss imposed by a private thief. This makes its burden a cost of production. It becomes more manageable because of its predictability. But the burden is enormous.

D. The Ownership of Inputs and Output

Output requires inputs. This is a law of economic scarcity. We cannot get something for nothing. A man looks at his options, and concludes, "If I want something that I can consume or sell, I must first produce something from the resources that are available to me." He looks at what is available, and he then attempts to forecast the future. He asks: "What will someone be willing to pay me in exchange for my output? What will it cost me to produce this output? Will it produce a gain or a loss?" Then he decides whether the project is worth pursuing.

If he must assemble resources over time in order to gain control over future output, he wants legal protection for whatever it is that he produces. If he spends time and resources in producing an item that is then taken from him without warning, he becomes a loser. He has worked, unpaid, for someone else. He has sown, but another has harvested the crop. Paul says that no rational person will do this. "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" (v. 7). An individual expends resources in planting a vineyard or feeding a flock of animals. He expects to gain a reward for his efforts. There is nothing immoral about a person's desire to gain a positive net return from an expenditure of scarce resources, including time. This is normal. It is sufficiently normal that Paul uses these examples as evidence of what

2. James Bovard wrote two books on regulatory outrages by the United States government. *Lost Rights: The Destruction of American Liberty* (New York: St. Martins, 1994); *"Feeling Your Pain": The Explosion & Abuse of Government Power in the Clinton-Gore Years* (New York: St. Martins, 2000). On the background to this loss of liberty, see Bovard, *Freedom in Chains: The Rise of the State and the Demise of the Citizen* (New York: St. Martins, 1999).

rational people do.

Logical as this sounds, Paul is not content here to appeal solely to human logic. He invokes biblical law: “Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?” (v. 8). The biblical law in question is this one: “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn” (Deut. 25:4).¹³ On the surface, this is an obscure, narrowly constrained law, yet Paul invokes it here and also in his first epistle to Timothy (I Tim. 5:17–18).¹⁴ This principle of morally legitimate compensation is at the heart of the free market economy. It is not wrong to seek a reward for one’s labors, any more than it is wrong for a working ox to seek food on the job.

God has assigned to mankind a task: to subdue the earth as God’s agent. This task mandates fruitfulness. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28).¹⁵ Mankind is supposed to add value to God’s creation. Each individual is supposed to add value to whatever God has entrusted to him. This is what it means to be a profitable servant.

How does a producer add value? By altering resources in such a way that they better meet the desires of customers. How does he know when he has done this? Whenever customers pay him more to buy his output than it cost him to produce it. An exception to this rule of thumb for estimating profitability may be the profitable sale of a good or service to the civil government. The producer has created value for himself, but at the expense of taxpayers, some of whom are less well off because of these costs. Others, however, may be benefited. This raises the complex issue of social costs.¹⁶

My main point here is this: *there is an imputation of final economic value by customers*. Only after a producer has sold his output can he know whether he has added value in the eyes of customers. If he has not made a return on his investment equal to the value of all the inputs, including the income he could otherwise have earned as a salaried worker, and also the interest payment for time that his capital might otherwise have earned, then he has subtracted value: the

3. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62.

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

5. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 4.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

forfeited income of the scarce economic resources that he used to produce the goods he offered for sale.

Conclusion

The delegated goal of all economic activity is to add value to God's creation. A legitimate motivation for working to add value is to secure the added value for oneself. God requires a tithe of 10 percent of the net increase in income. Beyond this, a producer lawfully retains the surplus. He must pay taxes, but total taxes must be limited to less than 10 percent of net income (I Sam. 8:15, 17).¹⁷

Value hoped for leads to productive activities: men's re-structuring of the creation. These re-structuring activities may or may not result in value added to society. The free market allows customers to determine whether or not they regard these activities, in retrospect, as having added value. Customers determine this by buying or not buying the output of the production process at prices that generate revenues sufficient to compensate the producer for his expenditures.

The legal right to bid is the customer's tool of economic authority. Making bids is how customers gain their ends. They are legally authorized to make bids, and anyone who rejects a bid suffers an economic loss: whatever was bid and was then turned down. He may then decide to consume whatever he owns, but he cannot do this at zero price. He forfeits something: ownership of whatever was bid.

In order to encourage men to devote the time, money, risk, and planning required to produce for future customers, the Bible establishes a legal and moral principle: the ox is not to be muzzled when he treads out the corn. This Mosaic legal principle means that the laborer is worthy of his hire (I Tim. 5:18) and the plowman should plow in hope (I Cor. 9:10). It means that privately owned property must be respected by individuals and their representative institutions. There is no eleventh commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

7. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

12

RUNNING THE RACE

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (I Cor. 9:24–27).

The theocentric issue here is reward: sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. For the Sake of a Prize

No one enters a race to lose it, unless he has been paid to lose. A gambler would pay a favored athlete to lose a race. So would a rich relative of the man expected to come in second. But no one on his own authority suffers the years of training required to win a race, and then runs to lose. He runs with all of his strength.

Paul says that the person seeks a reward: the prize. The prize may be merely a cheap piece of metal or a cheap ribbon. The reward represents the victory. It is a public testimony to the owner's position, at a particular place and time, as the best performer.

There is a payoff for victory. The athlete does not run a race merely for the joy of running. He could run on his own, without a crowd watching. He would not risk the agony of defeat² for the sake of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. The phrase "agony of defeat" comes from a weekly American television show, *Wide World of Sports*, the fist mass audience sports show. A ski jumper became the

glory. But there would be no acclaim.

The idea that biblical ethics is not grounded in public acclaim is nonsense. At the heart of the Christian life is the desire for reward. This reward is not exclusively earthly. The final payoff is beyond the grave at the final judgment. There are the equivalents of precious metals and jewels to be received. There is also the possibility of wood, hay, and stubble (I Cor. 3:12–15).³ This will be public: “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it” (3:13a). This will not be revealed in private. The goal is an incorruptible crown (v. 25). Incorruptible wealth is available only after death, when covenant-keepers receive their incorruptible bodies. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (I Cor. 15:53).

Paul tells his listeners that the Christian walk is not a walk: it is a run. There is no time to spare. There is no strength to spare. This is consistent with what he told the church at Rome: this is a time for maximum sacrifice: the whole of our lives (Rom. 12:1–2).⁴

B. Training to Win

“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (v. 27a). This is a matter of self-discipline. As a disciple of Christ, Paul imposed self-discipline. As a representative of Christ, he sacrificed the good things of life, as interpreted by the pagan world. He suffered for the gospel’s sake. This was the cost of discipleship.

This is no doctrine of “think and grow rich.”⁵ This is not “name it and claim it.”⁶ This is a lifetime of hard work and personal self-sacrifice.

visual incarnation of the agony of defeat: <http://bit.ly/AgonyOfDefeat>. Decades later, the show did a detailed look at how this video was made: <http://bit.ly/AgonyOfDefeat2>. The word “Agony” comes from the Greek word *agonia*. It referred to war and sports. It was at the heart of classical Greek culture. Jacob Burkhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization* (New York: St. Martins, [1872] 1999), Book II, Ch. III.

3. Chapter 3.

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

5. This is the title of a personal success manual that sold by the millions in the United States.

6. This is the slogan of a heretical movement within charismatic Christianity, sometimes called “positive confession.” It is very popular in the poverty-stricken third world. Its emphasis is on mental contortions of faith in great personal wealth, not on planning, thrift, education, and a lifetime of hard work.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that ethics, if valid, must not seek personal rewards from ethical action. “But if we do good because of the advantage or pleasure which we derive from the act, the ground of impulse is not moral. Virtue is good in itself and does not need false support.”⁷ This position is anti-Christian to the core.

Paul tells his listeners that the Christian life is strenuous. It need not be physically strenuous, although Paul’s was, which he informed the church in his second letter (II Cor. 11:23–27). But whether physical or not, the faithful Christian is expected by God to work hard in order to be a good servant. He should work as hard as an athlete trains.

C. Earthly Rewards

This brings us to a controversial topic. There can be no doubt that Paul worked for a public reward. He said so plainly. But this does not mean that he worked for an earthly reward. His experience of persecution (I Cor. 11:23–27) testifies otherwise. He did not go through that as a way to increase his wealth.

Here, the Mosaic Covenant is relevant. Societies experience positive external sanctions in terms of their faithfulness in obeying biblical law (Lev. 26, Deut. 28). The Book of Job rests on the long-term predictability of personal covenant sanctions in history.⁸ To argue that there is a radical discontinuity between historical sanctions and eternal sanctions is a denial of the continuity of the Bible, Old Covenant to New Covenant. The Old Covenant had no clear doctrine of final judgment and reward. It makes no sense to argue that the New Covenant reversed the system of sanctions in the Mosaic Covenant. God has given additional revelation. *Historical sanctions are a testimony to eternal sanctions.* The church will not snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat at the end of time. The church will participate in the extension of the civilization of Christ, which is the meaning of the kingdom of Christ.

Amillennialism teaches otherwise. So does dispensational premillennialism with respect to the dispensation of the church.⁹ This is why both eschatological systems are mute with respect to social

7. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1780–81], 1963), p. 75.

8. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012).

9. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

theory, including economic theory. They cannot identify any New Testament social sanctions. This was mandatory under the Mosaic Covenant. They have not devised explicitly biblical theories of social order. So, they deny that any theory of Christian society or social order is valid. They all commit to political pluralism.¹⁰

The idea that Christians must content themselves with internal victory over sin, but tolerate defeat for the kingdom of God in history, has led to three centuries of compromise with the existing world order. Christians have settled for a temporary cease-fire with the humanists. It is clear that this is not possible with Islam, but not until the twenty-first century has this awareness penetrated the thinking of Christians.¹ They perceive that Islam does not want compromise with Western secular culture. It therefore wants no compromise with Christians who have compromised with humanist culture.

Conclusion

Paul's metaphor of the Christian life as race points to victory. It points to victory in history when it is informed by the system of social sanctions outlined in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Both amillennialism and premillennialism deny that such a system of sanctions exists in the New Covenant. They do not defend this exegetically. They do not offer a biblically developed hermeneutic that establishes the case for such a discontinuity between the covenants. They merely assert it. In doing so, they undermine any attempt to create explicitly biblical social theory, including Christian economics.

0. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), chaps. 3–5. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

1. For Americans, the events of September 11, 2001, were the turning point: the hijacked airliners crashed into the twin towers of New York City.

13

THE POLITICS OF PLUNDER

Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth (1 Cor. 10:24).

The theocentric principle here is service to God through service to other people. This is point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.¹

A. Prohibited Feasts

The tenth chapter of First Corinthians deals with temptation. The key verse is verse 13: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” The next verse applies this command to a specific sin: idolatry. “Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.”

Christians participate in the Lord’s Supper. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (v. 16). In this, Christians attain ecclesiastical unity. “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (v. 17). Participation in a ritual meal bonds the participants with the supernatural being in whose name or honor the meal is being celebrated. “Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” (v. 18).

The issue of applied ethics here is the offering of sacrifices to idols, which represent devils. “What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils” (vv. 19–20). The idol is nothing in itself. Paul has insisted on this previously. “As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (I Cor. 8:4).² What *is* something, however, is a devil who is represented by an idol, and ultimately, the system of supernatural, covenant-breaking power in which devils participate. So, the participant must choose which feast represents the one true God: the idolatrous feast or the Lord’s Supper. Paul warns: “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (v. 21). Then he asks two rhetorical questions. “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?” (v. 22). We must not make him jealous. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex. 20:4–5).³

Then comes a famous statement: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (v. 23). What is he speaking about? Is he saying that it is lawful for him to participate in idolatrous feasts, but merely inexpedient? No, because he has already prohibited such participation, not on the basis of expedience, but on the basis of avoiding God’s jealousy. The second commandment also prohibits idolatry for the same reason. Then what is he speaking about? He is speaking eating meat that has been offered to idols. “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles [butcher shops], that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof” (vv. 25–26). A Christian is also entitled to attend a common social feast hosted by a covenant-breaker. “If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake” (v. 27). This is an aspect of Christian

2. Chapter 10.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

liberty. But Christian liberty has self-imposed limits.

But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? (vv. 28–29)

This is the context of verse 24: “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.” The translators inserted the word *wealth*. Paul had in mind wealth in the broadest sense: well-being or welfare. He says that each Christian is to seek another person’s good or benefit.

B. Personal Gain Through Ritual Subordination

Paul tells his readers that they may lawfully eat meat that has already been offered to idols. They may not lawfully eat meat while it is being offered to idols. What is the difference? Answer: the presence or absence of the element of ritual sacrifice. When men exchange money for meat, they are not involved in sacramental rites. They are merely seeking to assuage their hunger. They must give up something in order to gain something in voluntary exchange. When they attend a social feast, they eat meat that has been purchased by their hosts for money. In contrast, when men offer meat to idols, and then partake of this sacramental meat, they are not seeking to assuage their hunger. This is why Paul tells Christians to eat before they attend the Lord’s Supper: so that they will not be hungry at the communion meal (I Cor. 11:21–22). Similarly, in their covenant meals, covenant-breakers ritually confirm a demonic covenant in acts of covenant renewal. Participation in such pagan meals is prohibited to covenant-keepers.

What do sacrificial offerings have to do with seeking personal gain? The motivation of the participant is either to gain positive sanctions from the god to whom the meat is offered, or else to avoid the god’s negative sanctions. The sacrificer’s goal in either case is self-centered. The participant invokes the name of the idol in an attempt to secure a personal advantage.

The sacrificer surrenders something in his quest for personal gain. He offers something of value to an idol: public subordination. This is of value to the devil represented by the idol because it is a covenant-breaking act. This was the original sin of Adam. The participant in the demonic festival offers sacrifice under the officiating authority of the

idol's priestly agents. We know this because these agents subsequently sell the meat to the general public. This was the issue confronting Paul. "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles [butcher shop], that eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (v. 25).

There was nothing wrong with buying meat from a middleman who operated in between a pagan feast and the buyer. Not all of the meat was consumed at the feast. The excess meat was then sold by the priest to a specialist in meat sales. This act removed the meat's unholy status. It was even legal to eat in the temple's public restaurant (I Cor. 8:10).¹ What was wrong was offering anything to the idol during a covenantal feast that sought aid from the supernatural being represented by the idol. This act of ritual subordination affirmed the power of devils by way of idols. This affirmation is what Paul prohibits.

C. The Re-allocation of Wealth

To sacrifice to an idol is to invoke the authority of devils to impose their sanctions in history. But there is nothing wrong, Paul says, with buying meat from the priests of idols. This is a transaction based on the principle of value for value. The exchange does not invoke supernatural power.

How does a devil reward his worshippers? He must intervene in history to provide them with something that they believed that they could not buy through their own productivity. The sacrificer turns to supernatural power as a way to attain his goals at a below-market price. He seeks to gain something of greater value to him than the value of the asset sacrificed to the idol.

A devil is not originally creative. Only God is originally creative. A devil cannot grant favors in a world of cursed scarcity without re-allocating assets from existing owners to new owners. He cannot autonomously offer something for nothing, or something of value for something of less value. To offer anything to his followers, he must first steal it. Satan is a thief and a squatter. He confiscated Adam's inheritance through his successful deception of Eve (I Tim. 2:14) and his successful temptation of Adam. Whatever he possesses, he possesses only by God's common grace² or by prior theft, temptation, or deception.

1. Chapter 10.

2. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

By invoking the power of devils, the sacrificer calls on them to re-allocate assets, including power, away from what God and God's social order have established as lawful. The sacrificer asks a devil or devils to overcome the results of the operations of God's common-grace social order, which is a private property-based order. He seeks his own ends at the expense of others in society, and he expects a devil to provide this. To the degree that the sacrificer's prayers are answered, wealth moves from covenant-keepers to covenant-breakers, or from productive covenant-breakers to less productive covenant-breakers. Under such a system, the wealth of the just is laid up for the sinner. This thwarts God's social order. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).³

The sacrificer seeks to become the recipient of coercive wealth redistribution. He appeals to a devil through an idol to act on his behalf because of his sacrifice. He gives up something of market value—meat and time—to gain something of so much greater market value, that whatever he offers in exchange could not have purchased whatever it is that he seeks. He seeks his own wealth at the expense of someone else. He cares nothing about the loss that will be suffered by others in the hoped-for redistribution of wealth. He seeks his own gain at their expense.

Paul is implicitly saying here that it is not just the participation in unholy feasts that is wrong. He is saying that the mental attitude behind participation in this feast is also wrong. The participant seeks his own goals at the expense of others. He implicitly seeks to make it more difficult for others to attain their goals. This is not legitimate, Paul says. This is not the way of personal sacrifice. It is the way of coercing others to sacrifice for the benefit of the ritual feast's participants.

D. With Whose Assets?

Paul tells covenant-keepers to offer a very valuable sacrifice to God. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).⁴ One way to do this is to

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

sacrifice some degree of your personal comfort for the sake of greater comfort of others. You forfeit what could have been yours for the sake of benefiting others. You re-allocate your wealth on behalf of others.

This is not the way of the world. The familiar practice is for men to seek their own ends at the expense of others. This is the heart of pagan sacrifice. Pagan sacrifice should be cut off at the root, not just at the branch. Covenant-keepers are to sacrifice to God on behalf of others, just as Christ did for covenant-keepers. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5–8).⁵

This is what charity is all about: sacrificing one’s own wealth on behalf of others, asking nothing from them in return. There is nothing coercive about this. The person who aids another by means of what belongs to him has not used power to redistribute other men’s wealth on behalf of the recipient. In this sense, the sacrificer has not imitated Satan, who always uses evil to gain the assets that he then provides to his followers or to those covenant-keepers who have been deceived by him or his covenant-breaking subordinates.

An ethical problem may arise when someone decides to act on behalf of others, but not through the use of his own assets. He decides that someone else is deserving of support or aid of some kind. He decides that someone should sacrifice for the sake of this third party. He decides that this unnamed someone who should sacrifice is someone other than himself, or at least someone in addition to himself. If he appeals to the sense of charity in someone else, inviting him to join in a righteous cause of self-sacrifice, there is no coercion involved. There is no violation of ownership rights: the eighth commandment. But if the joint-sacrificer is compelled by threat of violence—legal or illegal—to sacrifice on behalf of another person, then the organizer of the “campaign to seek other’s wealth” has violated the eighth commandment. “Thou shalt not steal” (Ex. 20:15).⁶ Notice that this command does not say, “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote.”

5. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 28.

Democracy degenerates into the politics of plunder when groups of voters ally with other groups in order to confiscate wealth from still another group and transfer it to yet another group—or maybe to themselves. This strategy is a system of buying votes from those who receive the plunder. This concept of democracy is the politics of two wolves and a sheep who vote on what to have for dinner.

Far more important than openly seeking to buy votes from the groups that receive the political plunder, this system of democracy is motivated by the goal of subtly buying votes from successful people who seek to assuage their consciences through helping the afflicted, not merely with their own money, but with other people's money. These would-be sacrificers understand that an appeal to voluntary sacrifice on behalf of others will rarely produce as much money as the threat of violence imposed by the civil government. Through politics or, in the United States, through the courts, they seek to gain control over the state, which is the only lawful monopoly of violence outside the family's lawful bounds. They adopt the politics of plunder in order to assuage their consciences, to incorporate their vision of a just and righteous social order, and to gain more votes at the next election. Their political goal is to steal from collective Paul to pay to collective Peter, minus about 50% for government handling.

This is what Satan also does. He has no assets of his own. He steals from some in order to reward others. In doing so, he seeks to extend his kingdom, which is based on the violation of all 10 commandments, including the commandment not to steal. The sacrificer at a demonic ritual feast who invokes demonic power in order to gain his own ends is not different in economic principle from the voter who subordinates himself to the state in order to gain his own ends by using the state's power to extract wealth from others. The devil is expected by the sacrificer to intervene in history on his behalf. So is the state expected by the voter to intervene on his behalf. A devil owns nothing that he has not confiscated from others, either through an appeal to sin, or the threat of violence, or the use of deception. The state, unlike a devil, possesses legitimate though limited authority and therefore legitimate limited power, but when it arrogates additional power to itself in order to use this power to redistribute wealth from one group to another, it has adopted the politics of plunder, which is in accord with Satan's view of his kingdom.

Conclusion

“Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth” (v. 24). This is not a call to use state power to benefit the helpless, or, what is far more common in modern democracies, to benefit the middle class, which is the income group that most of the confiscated wealth actually subsidizes.⁷ Rather, this is a call for sacrificial giving on the part of the listeners. It is a call for them to extend God’s kingdom through voluntary sacrifice. It is not a call for them to organize politically to extend Satan’s kingdom by the coercive redistribution of wealth owned by covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers alike.

“Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.” If taken out of context, this verse could be interpreted as advocating universal theft and violence. If we are to seek another person’s wealth for ourselves, why not steal? After all, stealing certainly is a way to seek another person’s wealth! But this is not what Paul was advocating. He was advocating sacrificial giving, not universal theft.

The righteous system of ethics that undergirds this passage—seeking first the welfare of others—has been twisted by modern communists, socialists, and statists to mean that the state should use the threat of violence in order to redistribute privately owned wealth. This view of state power has produced the modern world’s officially democratic system of universal plunder. Private citizens are not encouraged by statists to steal from other individuals. Instead, they are encouraged to band together politically and use the voting booth as a way to establish a system of universal theft. Statists justify this practice in the name of “economic democracy.” They do this officially on behalf of the poor, the downtrodden, and the oppressed. They mimic Satan, the cosmic thief, for they, like he, gain access to the wealth necessary to subsidize other people’s goals by means of deception, temptation, and force.

7. Consider the modern tax-funded educational system. It is a subsidy mainly to the middle class. Poverty-stricken students rarely attend colleges and universities, and fewer still graduate. The rich pay the highest percentage of taxes that support the state. Most of the income tax revenues are generated by taxes on the top 20% of income recipients.

14

FULL-TIME CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31).

The theocentric principle here is the glory of God. This is an aspect of point one of the biblical covenant.¹

A. All of Life as Glorification

Paul tells the Corinthians that all of their activities should glorify God. This does not mean that any of their activities would not ultimately glorify God. The glorification of God is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of glorifying God vs. not glorifying God. It is always a question of *how* one glorifies God: by obedience or disobedience. First, God is presently being glorified by His creation, which testifies to His existence. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).² Second, all people will ultimately glorify God by bowing to His son, Jesus Christ. Paul wrote elsewhere: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil. 2:10).³

The crucial personal question is this: Will an individual publicly bow to Christ prior to the final judgment, or only at the final judgment? Paul told the church at Rome that Christians are required

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 1.

3. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

in this life to acknowledge that they must bow to Christ on judgment day, and then conduct themselves accordingly. “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:8–12).

God is publicly glorified by His people in history, and He will be publicly glorified by all people at the final judgment, when every knee will bow. At the final judgment, God will publicly divide mankind into sheep (covenant-keepers) and goats (covenant-breakers). “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left” (Matt. 25:33). Both groups must publicly glorify Him then, but they will receive separate eternal sanctions. The sheep will receive positive eternal sanctions, while the goats will receive negative eternal sanctions.¹

Paul warned members of the church at Rome to avoid judging each other, because God will judge them all. He was not speaking of formal judgment in a church court. He was speaking of personal judgments regarding non-judicial infractions. The fourth point of the covenant relates to judgment and sanctions.² Paul reminded his readers in Rome that God’s final judgment will be sufficient to settle the non-judicial infractions in history.

God will judge all men finally, demanding and receiving honor as both Creator and Judge. In the meantime, everything in the creation necessarily glorifies God. He is being glorified as cosmic Judge: the bringer of sanctions. He brings sanctions in history (Deut. 28).³ The distinguishing issue in history, as in the final judgment, is the nature of these sanctions: positive or negative. Through His sanctions, God is being glorified today and will be glorified through eternity. His sanctions will never end: positive and negative.

History will culminate in the public glorification of God by the nations. “All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship

1. On the final judgment, see Appendix A.

2. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone” (Ps. 86:9–10). Is this prophecy eschatological? It may be. We read of nations in Revelation: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:23–27). This cannot refer to history. The book of life has not yet been opened (Rev. 20:12). It does not yet screen access to the city of God. But Old Covenant saints knew almost nothing about the doctrine of eternal life. So, the references in the Psalms seem to be historical. The psalmist expected nations in history to glorify God sometime in the future. So did Micah. Micah’s prophecy is clearly historical. It refers to the last days, which began in the New Covenant era (Heb. 1:2). Micah wrote:

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it (Micah 4:1–4).

With God’s future historical judgment among nations in mind, the psalmist drew a personal conclusion: “Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore” (Ps. 86:11–12). The psalmist said that he would praise God and glorify God’s name. He began his praise before the nations did. His belief in God’s future judgment among the nations led him to

praise. God's sanctions are supposed to produce in His followers an impulse to glorify Him.

This Old Covenant perspective on God's glorification by His people is what Paul has in mind in this passage. He knew that all men must glorify God, one way or the other. He calls on his listeners and readers to glorify God self-consciously in history, so that they will not be forced at the final judgment to glorify God by God's external compulsion. *God will inevitably gain His glory in full public view.* It is better for men to glorify Him publicly through positive acts of worship in history than to be forced to glorify Him by imposed acts of submission on judgment day. Better to glorify God through the continuity of worship in history than by the discontinuity of permanent negative sanctions on judgment day.

B. Nothing Is Secular

Paul uses eating and drinking as representative examples of covenant-keeping men's acts of glorification. He does so in a passage that deals with participation in liturgical covenant meals: demonic (Chapter 10) and godly (Chapter 11). Verse 21 of chapter 10 has to do with eating meat offered to idols. Eating meat offered to idols is lawful for covenant-keepers, Paul says here and in chapter 8.⁴ The ethical problem arises when this lawful act creates spiritual problems for weak Christians. Mature Christians are not knowingly to give offense to weak Christians. So, he says, Christian liberty must not be abused. "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (v. 33).

1. Praising God

He is not speaking in verse 31 about formal worship. He has already condemned formal participation in demonic communal meals: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (v. 21). So, this reference has to do with what are sometimes referred to as secular activities. But Paul's words indicate that there are no secular activities. Paul is saying that all activities are acts of God's glorification. God will finally judge all acts of all mankind. Paul has already mentioned this. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who

4. Chapter 10.

both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (I Cor. 4:5).⁵ All men must praise God. There is no escape from this. The question is: Will a person praise God on the last day under His positive sanctions or His negative sanctions? Will his praise of God be an extension of his life's commitment or a public repudiation of his life's commitment?

The word "secular" refers to non-religious activities. Paul is saying here that there are no non-religious activities. In this sense, the word "secular" is a misnomer, in the same way that the word "autonomous" is a misnomer. *Nothing is secular because nothing is autonomous.* Everything is under God's overall sovereignty and under His hierarchical authority. Everything is judged in terms of God's law. This will be manifested for all to see on the last day. In this sense, *all life is covenantal*: under God's sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and final judgment.

This passage is important for reminding covenant-keepers that nothing that they think or do is irrelevant to God. This is because God's word is comprehensive, meaning all-inclusive. Jesus responded to Satan's temptation regarding the transformation of stones into bread by citing the second half of Deuteronomy 8:3, which reads: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live." The issue that had faced national Israel in the wilderness was the same one that faced Jesus in the wilderness: hunger. Jesus replied to Satan, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4b).⁶ The word of God, not food, is central to the life of man. The content of all of the words of men should be structured by all of the words of God. This is because all of the words of men will be judged by the words of God. Jesus later warned His listeners: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). *All of men's words are relevant because all of God's words are relevant as the cosmic Judge.* Man is made in God's image. His words either conform to God's words or are in

5. Chapter 5.

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [23000] 2012), ch. 1.

opposition to them. All of a man's words are relevant, for they will be finally judged by God. The relevance of a man's words is imputed by God's words: *judicial declaration*.

Paul tells his listeners here that whatever they do, they must do in order to glorify God. Such activities as eating and drinking are specifically subject to this command. Paul brings all of life under a requirement: to glorify God. All things that men do are relevant. This means that all things that men do are under God's comprehensive judgment.

2. Religious vs. Secular: A False Distinction

The familiar distinction between "religious" and "secular" is misleading. It rests on a false assumption, namely, that God has exempted most of life from the requirement to worship Him. This assumption is not merely incorrect; it is defiantly incorrect. All of man's life is worship. Men worship God, or else they worship mammon (Matt. 6:24).⁷ They worship the Creator, or else they worship the creation (Rom. 1:18–22).⁸ Therefore, Christians are required by God to glorify Him in their common, everyday activities. There are therefore no non-religious activities.

The common distinction between secular activities and religious worship defines worship in two ways: (1) formal participation in corporate rituals; (2) personal prayer—before, during, or after some activity. This definition is not technically incorrect, but its implied assumption is incorrect, namely, that without formal acts of some kind, an act has no element of worship. The definition implies that worshippers choose to impute an element of worship in their activities. Put another way, they impute a religious element to some act. This is true; they do impute religious significance to some act. They are supposed to impute religious significance to every act. That is Paul's message here. The question is this: Does God do this, too? The common assumption today is that he who does not impute such religious value to a physical or mental act has thereby established its secular character for him. If enough people impute a secular character to their actions, these areas of life become secular. There is a kind of implicit democratic theory of secularism operating here. This theory of democratic imputation is incorrect. We live in a theocracy: God

7. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 14.

8. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 1.

rules (*theos* = God; *kratos* = rule).

Does God impute secular status to anything? Paul implies here that He does not. God holds all men accountable for everything they do. Christians are therefore required to do everything they do in order to glorify God. They are to reclaim from the humanists' hypothetical realm of secularism everything that God's enemies have defined as irrelevant to God. Everything is relevant to God. Everything is an aspect of the praise of God, the glorification of God, and above all, the judgment of God.

In Psalm 147, we read: "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them" (vv. 19–20). God's special revelation to the nation of Israel set that nation apart covenantally under the Old Covenant. This did not establish a realm of neutrality for the other nations, a neutrality that God exempted from His judgment. Jonah's ministry to Nineveh is proof. Nineveh was under God's law and the law's sanctions. "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). In Psalm 148, we read that nature itself praises (glorifies) God. "Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass" (vv. 1–6). No area of creation is beyond God's judgment. The psalmist here denies the very concept of autonomy and its implication, secularism. *Nature is not neutral. It testifies to the glory of God.* Paul told the church at Rome the same thing. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom.

1:18–22).⁹

C. Everything Is Worship

Paul in these chapters is dealing with true and false corporate worship: covenant meals. In this context, he discusses meals involving meat offered to idols. For the mature Christian, this should not be a problem, except insofar as he might disturb the spiritual lives of weak Christians. Paul then goes to the heart of the matter: the glorification of God. In eating, Christians are supposed to glorify God. They glorify Him by not participating in demonic ritual meals. They also glorify Him by eating meat offered to idols. They glorify Him by refraining from meat offered to idols, when weak Christians' faith is undermined. Finally, in chapter 11, Paul says that Christians are to glorify God by participating lawfully in the Lord's Supper. In all of these activities, Christians are to glorify God.

1. Rival Gods

Everything that men do is an act of worship. Men glorify the god whom they represent covenantally in history. They worship either God or mammon. They worship either the Creator or some aspect of the creation. *There is no covenantally neutral realm in between these rival gods.* Paul tells the Corinthians that they must self-consciously glorify God by means of their common daily activities. Sometimes this requires absolute abstention: demonic feasts. At other times, it involves selective abstention: meat offered to idols when weak Christians observe the mature Christian at his meal. At other times, it involves participation: enjoying a good meal of meat offered to idols. At other times, participation is mandated: the Lord's Supper. But nothing is neutral: neither eating nor abstention.

This view of life is not well understood by Christians, and never has been. The familiar but false distinction between the religious realm and the hypothetically secular realm has confused Christians since the days of the early church. Christian scholars have used the philosophical categories of Greek humanism to defend the faith since the days of Justin Martyr in the second century. Christians have confused other legitimate distinctions with humanism's distinction between religion and secularism. There is a legitimate biblical

9. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 1.

distinction between sacred and profane, i.e., correct formal worship vs. false worship.¹⁰ There is also a legitimate biblical distinction between sacred and common: formal worship vs. informal worship. Christians have not understood these distinctions. They have adopted something analogous to the humanists' false distinction: religious vs. secular. They have also adopted a variation of the humanists' myth of neutrality. They accept the humanists' view of a neutral, common-ground, secular realm of life, especially in politics, the realm of civil justice. They implicitly deny that God judges every area of life according to biblical law. Why implicitly? Because they explicitly deny that Christians, as God's covenantal agents in history, have a God-given responsibility to work for the establishment of civil institutions that govern formally in terms of biblical civil law, which includes biblical civil sanctions. They view the formal law of God as narrowly circumscribed, relating to personal morality and family morality. They regard the general culture as beyond God's law.

As modern covenant-breaking society has become more self-conscious and more dominant, a few Christians have begun to question the reigning myth of neutrality. This change in opinion began in the United States in the 1970s. The Supreme Court's unilateral legalization of abortion in 1973 was a major factor in this shift of opinion. There is no neutral zone between a live baby and an aborted baby. There is no neutral realm of God's law that reconciles a live baby with an aborted baby. Humanistic law has come down against the live baby and in favor of its executioners. Humanistic law is clearly in violation of God's law. Humanists universally recognize this. Christians rarely do.

0. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

2. Theocracy and Theonomy

A minority of Christian activists now say that they do not accept the myth of neutrality. Nevertheless, they still do accept it. To deny the myth of neutrality means denying it in every realm of life. Such a denial forces a Christian to come face-to-face with the ultimate implication of this denial: *theocracy*. If there really is no neutrality, then theocracy is an inescapable concept: the rule of either one god or another. In our day, the cultural conflict is between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. This culture war rages in every area of life.

Modern Christians do not want to defend or promote the institutional theocracy of the God of the Bible. In order to escape the embarrassment of proclaiming the institutional theocracy of the God of the Bible, they are willing to accept the kingdom of man as the only politically acceptable institutional alternative. And so, one by one, those American fundamentalist leaders who proclaimed in the 1980's that there is no neutrality have all quietly abandoned this proclamation. By attempting to retain their position both as political pluralists and as Christian activists, they have become intellectually schizophrenic. As political pluralists, they have come before the public as defenders of Christianity as one legitimate worldview among many, but never as proclaimers of an institutionally, culturally authoritative word of God. They are trapped on the horns of a self-imposed dilemma. They cannot answer this question, and so they pretend that it does not exist: "How can God's law be authoritative, yet also be merely one politically legitimate choice among many?" I ask: Which Old Testament prophet ever came before sinners in the name of such a view of social and political ethics? But it is worse than even this. They all proclaim the present-day inapplicability of Bible-revealed civil law. They declare that the issues of political life must not be settled by an appeal to explicit biblical laws.

When they first discovered the political, moral, and religious implications of legalized abortion, they told their followers and their opponents that abortion is murder. They opposed abortion, not on the basis of its prohibition by biblical law (Ex. 21:22–23),¹¹ but because it is murder. But then, when asked the obvious question by their critics—"Are you calling for the state to execute the legally convicted

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 37.

abortionist, his assistants (accomplices), and the mother, since the Old Testament requires the death penalty for murder?”—most of them grew uncharacteristically silent, others denied that abortion is really murder after all, while others declared that God no longer requires the death penalty for murder. Members of the last-named group not only have abandoned Moses; they have abandoned Noah. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:6). They are intellectually schizophrenic. This condition affects their public positions in many areas. They affirm their commitment to political pluralism; they deny God’s theocracy; they deny the continuing validity of Old Testament law; and then they insist that Christianity and the Bible have answers to all of men’s problems, including politics. I commented on this dilemma in 1982, and said that it would not go away until they abandoned either political pluralism or Christianity.¹² It has not gone away.

Every aspect of life is under God’s law. Life is therefore under God’s comprehensive judgment. All of life has been affected by Adam’s sin. Wherever sin reigns, there Christ’s offer of redemption has a healing role to play. This means that all of life is subject to God’s comprehensive redemption.¹³ To deny that God’s grace (positive sanctions) can apply to all of life is to deny that all of life is under sin and under God’s law and therefore also under God’s judgment (negative sanctions). This, in principle, is exactly what pietism denies. *Pietism proclaims a souls-only redemption.* Humanists enthusiastically agree, for such a view of history surrenders most of life to mammon and mammon’s covenantal agents. It willingly hands over the lawful authority of rulership in history to covenant-breakers. It does this in the name of Jesus. Pietists want to avoid responsibility for anything that happens outside of our homes and churches.

D. Part-Time Humanist Service?

Paul argues in this passage that all Christian service is supposed to be full-time. It begins with eating and drinking. Paul takes common daily activities and identifies them as means of glorifying God. Paul is

2. Gary North, “The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right,” *Christianity and Civilization*, I (1982), pp. 1–40. (<http://bit.ly/BaptistCulture>)

3. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

saying that all service is necessarily full-time. The question is this: Which god does a man serve full-time? Does he serve God or mammon? Christ said that we cannot serve both.

Pietists do not accept Paul's teaching on this point, which does not conform with their view of the world as forever divided in history into two realms: Christianity's (small) and anti-Christianity's (large). They praise something they call full-time Christian service. By this, they have in mind mainly the work of ordained ministers of the gospel and unordained missionaries to foreign lands. They have in mind people whose income is financed by tithes and (mainly) offerings. This definition might include a church secretary. Less probably, it might include the church janitor. It might include a teacher in a Christian school, just so long as he or she is paid less than what a government-school teacher is paid. But it does not include a Christian businessman who is funding other Christians' full-time Christian service with his tithe. A Christian who owns a profit-seeking Christian school and who thereby gets rich would not be regarded by pietists as being in full-time Christian service. For pietists, full-time Christian service means poverty for Jesus.

The concept of full-time Christian service is the pietist's version of the humanist's doctrine of the sacred-secular distinction. The humanist claims that he wants to confine men's deference to God to the human heart and the church, "where religion belongs." But whenever humanists secure sufficient votes, they move to knock down or confiscate the churches. Russian Communists confiscated churches in the name of the state, and converted them into museums or warehouses. Then they took over the schools. Atheism became the official position of the schools, and the schools were a state monopoly. Communists used tax-funded, compulsory state education to drive the concept of a supernatural God out of the lives and minds of the students. This policy was consistent with the ultimate implication of all humanism: man is god, and the God of the Bible is a socially and psychologically dangerous myth. On this point, non-Communist humanists believe the same. The atheism of America's tax-funded schools is almost as intense as the Communists' schools, and the schools are becoming more anti-Christian, decade by decade. They were messianic humanist institutions from the beginning.¹⁴

4. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963). (<http://bit.ly/rjrmcae>)

At every stage in the preliminary development of humanism as a civilization, there can be found humanist spokesmen who assure Christians that the eradication of all traces of supernatural religion is not their long-term goal. But whenever humanists gain sufficient votes or sufficient political power, this is when humanism's official commitment to pluralism ends. We have seen this again and again. We see it today in the textbooks of tax-funded schools. Nevertheless, most Christians remain content with proclaiming (though never receiving) "equal time for Jesus." Humanists want no time for Jesus, which is what Jesus officially receives whenever humanists gain sufficient political power. Humanists cannot serve God, any more than Christians can serve mammon, except inconsistently.

Pietists are inconsistent. They believe that Christianity cannot redeem the dominion of mammon, which necessarily rules this world, they insist. They believe that Christians must remain content to live in a bifurcated society in which mammon provides the means to wealth, and truly holy Christians must remain in the economic poverty of full-time Christian service. Pietism's commitment to this view of history is why, in the interim stages of humanism, pietists and humanists invariably establish an informal alliance. The pietists publicly defer to the humanists in the areas of public, tax-funded policy. They affirm only the right of "each person to worship God in his or her own way," which in the United States means mainly on Sunday and on Wednesday evenings. Almost everything else in life is assumed to be *part-time humanist service*, and fully legitimate for almost everyone, including most Christians, to remain a part of. They do actually not use this phrase, "full-time humanist service," but it is implied by a distinction between full-time Christian service and. . . ? What? They never say, exactly. Part-time Christian service? But if Christian service can legitimately be part-time, then humanist service is also part-time and also legitimate. Therefore, at least part of the time, most Christians are involved in part-time humanist service, and legitimately so, according to pietists. If there is no full-time Christian service for the vast majority of Christians, then there has to be part-time service to something other than Christianity.

Pietists refuse to discuss this implication of their position because, first, they have rarely thought systematically about what they are really saying, and, second, because to say such things in public might sound goofy. To tell most Christians that God has called them to part-time humanist service does, in fact, sound goofy. It was in opposition to

such an idea that Paul wrote this passage.

This is Protestant fundamentalism's version of the worldview of medieval Catholicism, which taught a nature-grace bifurcation. The celibate priesthood was said to be devoted to full-time Christian service, which the church called the order of grace. Christians who supported the friars, monks, and parish priests with their a portion of their production were said to be involved in the order of nature. The Roman Catholic Church still formally honors this medieval tradition by maintaining two forms of priestly ordination: secular (parish clergy) and regular (monastic clergy). Protestant pietists are unknowingly the defenders of something resembling the medieval worldview, but without any monasteries to provide institutional brotherhood for those who are called into full-time Christian service.

Full-time Christian service is what Paul calls the Corinthians into. They were not self-consciously eating and drinking to serve Christ. Paul tells them that everything they do, they should do to glorify God.

Conclusion

This passage undermines every concept of a neutral zone in between service to God and service to anything else. Christians are required by God to serve Him with all of their being, all of the time. "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5).¹⁵ "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37).

There is no concept of part-time Christian service found in the Bible. There is full-time Christian service; there is also full-time mammon service. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).¹⁶

Full-time Christian service implies the existence of comprehensive, authoritative performance standards. It also implies God's sanctions. This is why Jesus offered parables of an owner who goes on a long journey, but who eventually comes back to demand an accounting from his servants. The owner finally imposes sanctions, positive and negative, in terms of their performance. God's testing of His stewards began in the garden of Eden, when God departed for a

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 15.

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 14.

time, only to return to demand a formal accounting. Everything that Adam and Eve did during God's physical absence was supposed to be full-time Christian service: eating from all trees except one. Full-time Christian service did involve a refusal to eat from one tree. Full-time service to Satan involved eating from that one tree. Everything else would have been full-time service to God. But, had their act of defiance been maintained apart from God's negative sanctions on them for their disobedience, Adam and Eve from then on would have been involved in full-time Satanic service. Their eating and drinking would have been rebellious. It would have been full-time service to Satan. This is why God closed access to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24).

Christians are required by God to work to reclaim everything from Satan, who is a lawless squatter in history. They are, symbolically speaking, to reclaim the weed-burdened garden of the world for Christ. Having eaten at the Lord's Table, they are to go out and reclaim the world for Christ by eating and drinking to the glory of God. They are therefore to exercise dominion, as God required of Adam (Gen. 1:26–28)¹⁷ and also Noah (Gen. 9:1–3).¹⁸ They are not to forget that this dominion assignment involves obeying God's laws in every area of life. They are not to eat and drink unlawfully in demonic covenantal feasts, which were and remain recapitulations of mankind's forbidden meal in the garden of Eden. They are to practice godly judgment in whatever they do because God's laws invoke God's sanctions: in history, at the final judgment, and forever.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

15

HIERARCHY: FAMILY, MARKET, AND STATE

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God (I Cor. 11:1–3).

The theocentric principle here is the hierarchy of authority, with God at the top. God has established legal representatives in the middle of this hierarchy: God > representatives > constituents. This is point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. What Would Jesus Do?

A widely popular American fundamentalist slogan in the late twentieth century was this: “What would Jesus do?” People even wore sweat shirts and tee-shirts with **WWJD?** written on them. When capital letters are used as substitutes for words, the slogan represented by these letters has become a commonplace within certain circles.

Anyone who has carefully read the Gospel of John knows that it was almost impossible for Jesus’ contemporaries to predict what He would do or say. His answers to questions baffled people, including those who were closest to Him. His responses seemed to make no sense. A good example is the incident at the wedding feast at Cana, when they ran out of wine. “And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.” Who could have predicted either His verbal response to His mother or His instructions to the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

servants? First, His verbal response: “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:3–4). Then, His instructions: “And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it” (vv. 6–8).

What stands out in the four gospels, but especially John’s, is that Jesus was unpredictable. He kept His disciples and His opponents confused most of the time. If anything, His disciples were more confused than His opponents. The best example of this is their respective responses to His crucifixion. The disciples scattered. Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders took steps to see to it that the disciples could not steal His body and then announce His resurrection. They understood what He had predicted: His bodily resurrection.

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch (Matt. 27:62–66).

The disciples had no idea about what Jesus was about to do. They had repeatedly heard His words about His resurrection, yet they had comprehended nothing. The Jews had heard the same words, and they had comprehended a little. Neither group expected Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead, but the Jews at least understood what He had said would happen next. They assumed, incorrectly, that the disciples had also understood. His closest disciples were the last to know. The women found out before they did (Luke 24:10).

What would Jesus do? Those who were closest to Him did not know. Even after His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, none of them foresaw what Jesus would do and say to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Yet that event changed both the history of the church and the history of the world. Paul would be sent by God to the gentiles to preach the gospel and establish new churches. He would

also write his epistles.

B. Hierarchy and Ordinances

Paul instructs his listeners to follow him, even as he follows Christ. He does not tell them to follow Christ directly. He does not ask them to imagine what Jesus would do. He asks them to “keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you” (v. 2). *He tells them to turn to God’s supernaturally revealed law in their quest to follow Jesus.*

1. Biblical Law as an Intermediary

God’s law is an inanimate intermediary between God and man. It always has been, from before the creation of man. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26).² Man was assigned the task of worldwide dominion before God created him. The three persons of the Godhead spoke on behalf of man even before man existed. Put differently, the persons of the Godhead *spoke representatively* for man. The law which they imposed on mankind was positive: to exercise dominion.

Next, God gave Adam a law to obey during His bodily absence. “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). This law was both positive and negative: to eat and to avoid eating. Man was to enjoy feasting, but not from the forbidden tree. That tree was God’s exclusive property.

Because Adam was under God, he was necessarily under God’s law. He was therefore also under God’s sanctions. Man’s relationship with God is always judicial. Man’s judicial status determines where he is in God’s hierarchy. After the Fall of man, there were only two judicial statuses: disinherited son and adopted son.

In this passage, Paul describes a hierarchy. He is under Christ, he says. Paul’s listeners/readers are in turn under him. The intermediary factor is the system of ordinances, which Paul says that he delivered to the church. This hierarchy is judicial. The test of a person’s position in

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

this hierarchy is therefore judicial: obedience or disobedience to the ordinances.

The head of every man is Christ (v. 3a). Paul does not say “every believer.” He says “every man.” The Greek here is clear. This principle of *Christ’s universal headship* over all mankind is the basis of *mankind’s final subordination*. “For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:11). “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). Having announced that the head of every man is Christ, Paul writes that wives are subordinate to their husbands. “The head of the woman is the man” (v. 3b). This, too, is a universal condition. It is not limited to Christian marriages. It is based on the pre-Fall definition of the family. Finally, Christ is subordinate to God. “The head of Christ is God” (v. 3c). There is a cosmic hierarchy that extends from God through Jesus Christ, as perfect humanity, and from Christ to man and to woman.

2. *Hierarchy Within the Godhead*

Cornelius Van Til has written that all Christian heresies begin with false subordinationism: Christ as less than God.³ But this does not mean that Christ was not functionally subordinate to God in terms of His work. He repeatedly said that He was. “And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). “But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me” (John 5:36).

Theologians preserve orthodoxy by explaining the Trinity, first, in terms of itself; second, in relation to the world. The *ontological Trinity* describes the interaction of three persons, each fully God. The *economical Trinity* describes the functional operations of each of the three persons in terms of the creation. In Luke, we read of the Holy Spirit’s being sent by the Father. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your

3. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, revised and abridged (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963), p. 25.

heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13). In Jesus' long sermon at the Last Supper, we learn that the Spirit is sent from the Father by way of the Son. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

Jesus said that He represented the Father so perfectly that he who had seen Him had seen the Father.

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works (John 14:7–10).

The incarnate Jesus, as perfectly human, was subordinate to God the Father. "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28). Yet Jesus was in union with the Father. "But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10:38). His union with a divine being did not imply shared substance with mankind, for there are not four persons in the Trinity. So, this union has to be ethical. It is a matter of His perfect fulfillment of the law in history. Jesus did the works of the law. We are to believe these works, He said. Jesus kept God's ordinances.

3. Hierarchy and Adoption

Jesus is the last Adam, Paul writes later in this epistle. "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45). Christ's perfect sonship is the sole legal basis of God's adoption of disinherited sons. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). Furthermore,

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son,

made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ (Gal. 4:4–7).

We are heirs of God through Jesus Christ. The public evidence of our sonship are these: our participation in the sacraments and our keeping of God's law. This evidence is necessary to identify a person as being in the camp of the redeemed.

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth (I John 2:1–8).

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us (I John 3:21–24).

Antinomianism cannot deal successfully with these passages. The antinomian seeks to escape the requirements of God's law. But the New Testament is clear: any such attempt to throw off God's law is evidence of covenant-breaking.

4. Male and Female Created He Them

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (v. 3). God is over Christ in Christ's capacity as a perfect human. Christ, in turn, rules directly over every man. This is a universal hierarchy, based on original creation and also on Christ's bodily

resurrection. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).⁴ Christians are in a special hierarchy as adopted heirs. They are part of a redeemed hierarchy.

Every man is to rule over his wife. This hierarchy was challenged when Satan’s covenantal representative, the serpent, tested Eve, and Eve tested Adam. The war against God’s hierarchy was originally satanic, for Satan seeks to overthrow God’s hierarchical rule over him and his kingdom. Man, as God’s image, must be brought under Satan’s authority if Satan is to press his kingdom claims successfully. This is why he attacked the woman first. She, in turn, lured Adam into sin. There is a war over hierarchies in history.

Christ bore responsibility for the original sin of mankind by suffering the sanctions that God the Father applied to this sin. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21). Christ restored the hierarchy of inheriting sonship at the cost of the cross. All of the covenantal hierarchies were definitively redeemed at the resurrection. It is the Christians’ task in history to act as God’s agents in the progressive redemption of these definitively redeemed hierarchical institutions.

C. Capitalism and Feminism

Within the Trinity, there is a division of labor. Between husband and wife, there is a division of labor.

1. The Division of Labor

Free market capitalism has extended the division of labor by means of the pooling of capital, which in turn has funded technological improvements. In doing so, capitalism has narrowed the post-Fall gap between the productivity of men and women. This process is best represented by an electric light switch. A typical man has no advantage over a typical woman in turning on an electric light. Men did have an advantage in providing light when the main source of light was a burning log or torch. Men could haul large branches and chop wood more effectively than women could. The division of labor in pre-capitalist societies had to do with differences in physical

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 45.

strength as well as the distinction of childbearing. But, with the coming of electricity and the internal combustion engine, horsepower has replaced manpower. The result has been a steady development toward the gender-equalization of productivity. Physical dexterity increasingly counts for more than physical strength. The mental manipulation of images, sequences, and numbers counts for more than the physical manipulation of things.

In the United States, the feminist movement, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, has paralleled the development of capitalist tools of production and the arrival of women into the marketplace as producers. The women's suffrage movement began in the northeastern section of the nation, where large numbers of women had been brought into textile mills. The shift of textile production from the household—a "cottage industry"—to the factory made possible the early political mobilization of women.

American women first gained the right to vote in Kentucky in 1838: local school elections. This legal precedent in school board elections continued throughout the nineteenth century. This political right reflected the fact that women were moving into the classrooms as teachers, displacing men. But it was not until electricity became widespread in the cities that all American women received the right to vote. Men voted to ratify this Constitutional amendment in 1919 and 1920 in part because they recognized that women had become significant factors in the marketplace, as producers as well as customers. World War I (1914–18) had made this clear to the West: women had gone into factories to produce the weapons that had been used on the battlefields of Europe.

2. *Annie, Get Your Gun*

In 1946, the year after World War II ended, Irving Berlin wrote a musical comedy based on the show business career of the late-nineteenth-century riflewoman and entertainer, Annie Oakley: *Annie, Get Your Gun*. One of the musical's best-known songs is "I can do better." Annie and a rival male sharpshooter, whom she defeated (in real life, but not in the play) and later married, sing a duet. The song's back-and-forth lyrics are silly, and presumably were meant to be, but its message reflected a new social perception in 1946, when millions of women did not leave the factories after the war ended, unlike the post-war tradition of World War I.

Anything you can do, I can do better,
I can do anything better than you.
No, you can't./Yes, I can.
No, you can't./Yes, I can.
No, you can't./Yes, I can. Yes, I can.

The rifle is a great physical equalizer. Annie Oakley was a master of this tool. She gained technical supremacy. Capitalism has mass produced rifles and many other tools that have the same equalizing effect.

Economic transformation preceded political transformation in the advent of women's suffrage. Women gained access to the marketplace as producers before they gained access to the ballot box as voters. Biblically speaking, the sequence of this transformation was undesirable. Covenant in principle precedes contract. Civil sanctions are in principle superior to economic sanctions. But when biblical principles are not honored in one realm of society, God sometimes transfers authority to people working in other realms. These realms may be geographical. They may be institutional. The free market encourages experimentation and change. Customers, by imposing the economic sanctions of profit and loss, pressure producers to make changes, and these changes have unforeseen and unplanned consequences in other social institutions.

Capitalism's empowering of women in the marketplace has led to a re-thinking of women's roles in every area of society. What began simply as a profitable way to produce textiles more abundantly or to teach children less expensively has resulted in a re-structuring of social roles. An increase in the division of labor through capital accumulation has allowed women to discover niches in the marketplace in which their skills can be matched more closely with customer demand—demand which is increasingly dominated by women. As they say in the American real estate industry, "Wives decide which house to buy; husbands, at most, retain the right of veto." The free market rewards producers who can meet customer demand more efficiently than their competitors. The free market's system of economic sanctions—profit and loss—rewards those producers who hire workers whose skills and whose willingness to compete in terms of price offer their employers an advantage. Producers who refuse to offer employment to niche-matching workers suffer losses when their competitors do offer such employment. Competition pressures all employers to seek out the most efficient workers. This is why women

in capitalist societies have successfully invaded the work place. They have also gained political power.

Communist societies also brought women into the factories in the twentieth century. Their rulers had little choice. To compete in world markets, including the market for military supremacy, the Communists could not ignore the productivity of women.

The availability of employment for women in the marketplace has dramatically increased the cost of rearing children. Cost is defined as the economic value of the opportunities foregone. When women had few employment opportunities outside of the household, children were far cheaper for families. But, as women have become employable for money, the economic value of their labor time has increased. This has increased the cost of rearing children: forfeited monetary income for stay-at-home mothers. In an economy that offers mass-produced, price-competitive contraceptive devices, would-be mothers weigh the benefits of being full-time mothers at home against the net income they can earn in the marketplace. Children's perceived costs to the family sometimes exceed the perceived benefits when employment opportunities for women outside the home appear in the free market. This is another example of a fundamental law of life: with increased opportunities comes increased responsibility. The decision to bear children or not imposes costs on the decision-makers. Each result has its appropriate costs and benefits, not just for the decision-makers, but also for society. An obvious example is the effect that the uncoerced decisions of millions of families not to bear more children will have a generation later on tax-funded retirement programs. The West is about to find out what happens when there are too few workers entering the work force to support the retirees.¹

The welfare state has pressured married women to enter the labor market. The economic burden of wealth-transfer payments increases, especially the cost of tax-funded retirement and medical programs. Taxes rise. This has forced wives into the work force because after-tax family income keeps falling. Wives seek employment in order to maintain their families' life styles. This process has reduced the birth rate and has increased the abortion rate, which in turn steadily increases the tax burden per worker to fund a growing number of retirees. Usually, we call this a vicious circle, but defenders of state-funded retirement programs vastly outnumber the critics, so no one in

1. Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America—And the World* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

authority speaks of this circle of taxation and reduced birth rates as vicious. It is simply not discussed publicly in terms of taxation. To do so would reveal a hidden cost of the modern welfare state.

D. Rival Hierarchies

When a wife becomes a significant contributor to a family's monetary income, she gains a stronger voice in her home. The cost of ignoring her opinions and desires keeps rising for husbands. Wives can walk out of a marriage, and do. They can threaten to quit working. They spend the money that they earn. The West's civil courts allow all of this.

The cost to husbands of laying down the law increases. There is an economic rule: as the cost of something increases, less of it is demanded. Husbands tend to defer to wage-earning wives more than they would defer to non-wage-earning wives. So, the structure of economic production has the effect of undermining the covenantal hierarchy of the family.

The free market does not count the cost that must be borne by non-market institutions. An employer is economically responsible to customers first and to share-owners second. He is not economically or legally responsible for what goes on inside the families of his employees. If he seeks to replace a factor of production, including an employee, the cost to him of making this replacement is whatever income the present factor of production offers to him, in comparison to the income offered by a replacement factor. Economists say that this difference is marginal. Usually, it is small. Key athletes, entertainers, or other employees may not be easily replaceable, but most employees are. The employer can afford to replace most factors of production. He may or may not consider the effects of corporate policies on the output of existing employees, but he pays no attention to the potential effects of his decision on the entire economy's employment policies. He cannot personally affect these society-wide effects, so there is no immediate economic reason for him to pay attention to them. He would be unwise to worry about whatever he cannot control. Nevertheless, competitive pressures within an industry can spread the adoption of new employment policies, and these policies may change society in unforeseen ways, even ways undesired by those whose individual decisions effected the changes. The decision to hire women is surely one of the most significant examples of this "law of

unintended consequences.”

Decisions made at the margin of firms, such as whether to hire wives, can sometimes have society-wide effects that are not marginal, but fundamental. In a free market, the customer is at the top of the economic hierarchy. His decision to buy or not to buy imposes sanctions on sellers: profit or loss. The customer does not care about the marginal effects on society of his decision to buy or not buy. He makes his decision, not in terms of its society-wide effects, but in terms of his standards as a customer: quality, convenience, and price. He asks, “What’s in it for me?” He does not ask, “Did wage-earning wives have any part to play in producing this item?”

The covenantal hierarchy of the family is very often in conflict with the economic hierarchy of the free market or the economic hierarchy of a socialist commonwealth. The divisive issue in both economies is the division of labor. The division of labor imposes institutional costs as well as institutional benefits. When people are more concerned with monetary income than they are with maintaining proper covenantal relationships, they suffer losses, and society suffers losses. This insight regarding families’ monetary income and its effects on the covenantal chain of command is a specific application of a more general rule. “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).²

Economic growth expands the wealth available to members of both kingdoms: God’s and mammon’s. To blame economic growth and the extension of the division of labor misses the ethical point. The covenantal faithfulness or unfaithfulness of market participants as individuals is the determining factor. People make decisions in terms of individual costs and benefits, but they cannot properly assess either costs or benefits apart from considering the law of God. Their perception of God’s law in turn depends on God’s grace: common and special.

It may be easier to remember this principle by means of two images: a paycheck and a contraceptive. Choices are individual, but millions of individual decisions shape society. The West is visibly committing slow suicide. The national birth rate in every Western industrial nation is below the population-replacement rate of 2.1

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 39.

children per woman. Were it not for immigrants from non-Western or non-industrial nations, the national birth rates would be even lower. The dominion covenant—biological multiplication—is being rejected in the West. If this does not change, then the West will be replaced by cultures that conform themselves to the demographic laws that govern the dominion covenant, such as Islam.

E. Family Only?

Paul makes it clear in this passage that there is a covenantal hierarchy in the creation: God > Christ > man > woman. This is presented in universal terms. It clearly applies to the family: husbands and wives. Does it apply to the church? Does it apply to politics?

1. Women in the Church

It surely applies to the church. In the verses that immediately follow, Paul writes:

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels (I Cor. 11:4–10).

In Paul's day, there were prophets and prophetesses. The daughters of the deacon Philip were prophetesses (Acts 21:8–9). So, in the prophetic division of labor, women possessed equal authority. Nevertheless, they did not possess equal judicial authority within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They were required to cover their heads when they spoke in the name of God. Whenever they became lawful voices of authority, they had to subordinate themselves to male church leaders by means of a symbol: a head covering. Also, they lawfully spoke prophetically only outside of church worship services. In worship services, another rule prevailed. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And

if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (I Cor. 14:34–35).

A prophetess spoke authoritatively in God's name. Listeners were required to obey whatever a prophetess said during these unique instances of direct revelation from God. This gave her judicial authority. She was at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in terms of obedience owed during these instances of direct revelation. But the temporary nature of her authority had to be marked by a public symbol of her ecclesiastical subordination to men: the head covering.³

A symbol is important. It represents a larger truth. The symbol of the prophetess's head covering represented the general legal status of women: subordinate to men. This subordination was true in the church. It was also true in the family. Yet in neither institution was the role of the woman in the division of labor denied. The word of the prophetess was no less authoritative because of her gender. She possessed the voice of authority. The value of her revelation was in no way diminished because of her subordinate covenantal status. Put differently, her subordinate covenantal status did not imply the judicially inferior authority of her words.

We can apply this ecclesiastical leadership principle to, for example, the ability to predict the movement of prices in a developed capital market. If a woman possesses an advantage here, statistically speaking, then investors would be unwise not to follow her suggestions. They should invest their money in terms of her forecasts. This has nothing to do with the covenantal subordination of women to men. It has everything to do with the economic authority of customers, whose individual decisions shape the free market's ever-shifting array of prices. This woman understands the price effects of future decisions of customers better than her male competitors do. The capital markets consider her gender irrelevant to the issue of satisfying customer demand. Investors in the capital markets ask only this: "What have you done for me lately?"

3. This referred to long hair. "Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering" (I Cor. 11:13–15). Long hair is a mark of covenantal subordination. This is why the Mosaic law required captive foreign women who were willing to become wives of Israelites to shave their heads one month before the marriage (Deut. 21:12). This severed their subordination to their former nation's gods through the male heads of their households.

2. *Women in the Military*

In the military, the presence of women in the ranks creates enormous problems, beginning with the system of rank itself. Women are required to obey orders. This creates opportunities for men of higher rank to misuse their rank for sexual exploitation. Second, women in general are not as strong physically as men are. A soldier in the field cannot rely on a woman with the same degree of confidence that he would rely on a man. Third, society imposes on men a protective impulse with regard to women. A soldier in the field will tend to disobey orders in order to defend a woman in the ranks, when he would not be equally ready to disobey an order to protect another male. This threatens to disrupt the chain of command. This is also the reason why homosexuality in the military has been universally condemned in the West and in most non-Western armies. A combattant may abandon a buddy to his fate when the battle plan requires it, but he may not abandon a sexual partner. Homosexuality reduces the predictability of battle plans.

On the other hand, women in technical fields such as meteorology, weapons development, cryptography, software development, ordinance, navigation, and so forth may be equally capable as men. In an increasingly technological army, the light-switch phenomenon reasserts itself: no special gender advantage. The covenantal problem is the chain of command. How can women in the ranks be protected from sexual exploitation? How can their presence not affect joint-gender team performance? The camaraderie and *esprit de corps* in a military unit or a police unit is heavily dependent on shared risk. When women are exposed to the same degree of risk of life and death, this disrupts the military/protective function, which is unquestionably masculine. In this sense, the military is different from the free market, in which the shared risk is economic. In the free market, men have no sense of obligation to protect women. They may be quite happy to put rival women out of business.

Modern society has not yet found a way to integrate women's technical productivity into a military chain of command. Either the military is deprived of technical skills, which can be disastrous in today's high-tech warfare, or else the performance of battle units is compromised by the presence of women, who are perceived by men as needing greater protection. It is the life-and-death risk of participation in a military chain of command that makes the official equality of the

sexes a liability organizationally.

There is one other factor that is rarely discussed in public: female homosexuality. The primary characteristics of success in combat are masculine. This subsidizes the careers of those women who possess masculine characteristics. It rewards certain features of female homosexuality. The creation of same-sex sexual relationships within a military chain of command leads to exploitation by rank and also leads to problems of protective impulses under combat conditions, and to hierarchical favoritism in peacetime, both of which undermine military discipline.

The best solution seems to be the use of specialized female civilian support units behind the lines. Throughout history, there have been such privately organized, highly specialized civilian support units—camp followers—so the presence of women close behind the lines is not a radical suggestion, strategically speaking. Only the services officially performed by women would be different. The military would have to pay competitive wages to the members of such technical support units, but that is the cost of maintaining the integrity of the chain of command.

In the Old Testament, Deborah served as a military commander. She officially commanded the Israelite army because her second in command, Barak, refused to go into battle without her presence (Jud. 5:8). This was a disgrace to the men of Israel, as she pointed out to him (v. 9). Barak commanded the troops (vv. 10, 14). Deborah remained behind the lines. She was at the pinnacle of the chain of command, but she faced death only if Israel lost. Her presence in the chain of command did not threaten the performance of the army. The protective impulse did not threaten men's performance on the battlefield. She was not on the battlefield. In this sense, she was more like a queen or a president or a prime minister than a general. Her authority was judicial. We should think of this arrangement as the civilian control over the military.

3. Women in Politics

Then what of politics? Should women not exercise political rule? Deborah did (Jud. 4–5). This was rare, but it did take place. There is no biblical evidence that women cannot lawfully declare God's law and impose civil sanctions. Deborah did. The deciding issue here is functional. Who best declares the law? This is a matter of competition,

just as it is in the labor markets and capital markets.

In civil government, there is no explicit restriction comparable to the two ecclesiastical restrictions: the head covering for prophetesses and women's silence in corporate worship services. Question: In what way, if any, is the general principle of the subordination of women to men supposed to be manifested in New Testament civil government?

The covenantal issue here is sanctions. Should women be allowed to impose civil sanctions? This is what the right to vote is all about: the imposition of civil sanctions. If women cannot lawfully impose sanctions from the top by being elected or appointed, then on what legal basis can they vote, and vice versa? If women can lawfully impose civil sanctions at any level, then they are part of the civil covenantal hierarchy. The twin questions of hierarchy and the right to impose sanctions are inseparable: points two and four of the biblical covenant model.⁴

If Paul's words are interpreted as banning women from exercising all covenantal sanctions over men, then Deborah's judgeship must not be regarded as a precedent for the New Testament. The New Testament would have to be seen as annulling Deborah's precedent. But does it? Paul does forbid women from speaking in church worship services, but women never held ecclesiastical office in the Old Covenant. For women, there is continuity ecclesiastically, Old Covenant to New Covenant. Question: Why would the continuity of civil rule be different in the New Covenant? There is no express New Testament rule prohibiting women from exercising civil sanctions. There was no such rule under the Old Covenant, either.

The hermeneutics governing theonomy is this: if there is no New Testament annulment of an Old Testament law or principle, then the Old Testament law still prevails. Theonomy assumes judicial continuity. Deborah's example provides us with insight into the hierarchy of civil sanctions. Women had the right to impose them when they held civil office. Judgeship was surely civil.

F. Economics: Contractual, not Covenantal

Christian economics moves analytically from covenantal law to economics, which is contractual rather than covenantal (oath-bound under God). Economics is subordinate to family, civil, and ecclesiastical law because contracts are subordinate to covenants.

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, chaps. 2, 4.

Point two of the biblical covenant model is hierarchy-authority-representation. The covenantal question is this: Who lawfully possesses the voice of authority? Hierarchy raises questions of representation.

This is the issue of covenantal authority in history. The doctrine of the covenant is itself a manifestation of point two. This is why Exodus, the second book in the Pentateuch, is called the book of the covenant. "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). The only thing in history that speaks finally is the Bible itself. It is the final voice of authority in history. The institutional question of lawful covenantal authority revolves around the Bible. Who speaks lawfully for God, in terms of the Bible, in any historical situation?

Paul refers to himself as Christ's representative. He tells his readers to follow him, even as he followed Christ. Paul serves as God's lawful model, according to Paul. Paul's writings are canonical, so we must take his claim seriously.

We must also take seriously his other claim: the man serves as the head over the woman, even as God serves as head over Christ. The question institutionally is this: Is a woman bound by oath under a man? In marriage, yes. What about in church government? Yes, because of the sacrament of baptism: an oath sign. Women are not to speak in church worship services.

Then what about civil government? There is no gender-specific oath of feminine obedience to men in a civil covenant, as the example of Deborah indicates. There is nothing in the New Testament that explicitly rejects the Mosaic office of judge. There is also nothing in the New Covenant that rejects the Mosaic authority of women to serve as judges.

In the realm of economics, there is nothing to prohibit women from competing with men. They do so as customers, for buyers compete against buyers. Customers, including women, make daily decisions regarding which producers have best served them. Customers exercise economic sanctions by buying or refusing to buy. Women make these decisions. The biblical hierarchy of ownership has always included women. The wife owned her dowry (Gen. 24:53). Daughters possessed the right of landed inheritance over the deceased's next of kin, if he died without leaving sons (Num. 36).⁵

5. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

Women in the Old Covenant also competed against men as producers. “She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant” (Prov. 31:24).⁶

The covenantal hierarchy of legal ownership of resources includes women; therefore, the hierarchy of economic sanctions also includes women. Women compete against men as customers-buyers (sellers of money). They also compete against men as producers-sellers (buyers of money). Because women, as customers, lawfully impose economic sanctions on producers, they also possess the lawful authority to seek positive economic sanctions as producers.

The conclusion is inescapable: *women possess lawful authority to impose economic sanctions*. The Bible’s male-female hierarchy is not judicially applicable in economics. This hierarchy appears to be imposed by biology in certain areas,⁷ but free market capitalism tends to reduce gender-related differences in productivity. Capitalism produces labor-saving and therefore labor-equalizing tools of production. Women exercise authority over machines equal to men’s authority over machines. The electric light switch is the symbol of this equality.

The essence of the free market is open entry: the right of any legally responsible adult to make bids for both ownership and temporary control (rent). If women can legally own goods, then they also possess the right to make bids. If someone owns anything, he or she can legally seek to disown it. There is no right of ownership without the right of disownership. The means of disownership in a free market involves making bids.

The Bible says that women possess the right to own property and also the right to make bids. “She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard” (Prov. 31:16). There is no escape from this Bible-based conclusion: *there is no covenantal male-female hierarchy in economics*. The economy is not a covenantal institution; it is contractual. No self-maledictory oath under God establishes the economy. Certain effects of the male-female hierarchy may at times influence economics because of innate gender differences or family concerns. Such considerations can and do influence the array of prices in a free market. Biblically, however, the

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 86.

7. Higher mathematics, theoretical physics, highest-level chess, and boxing come to mind. At the same time, very few men are able to compete in these areas.

male-female hierarchy must not be imposed on the free market by politics, which itself is not bound by any male-female hierarchical principle, as the example of Deborah the judge indicates. In family and church, the male-female hierarchy is mandated by biblical law, but not in civil government and the economy.

Conclusion

There are prices that must be paid and costs that must be borne in order for covenant-keepers to maintain the male-female hierarchy in family and church. The free market enables legally responsible adults to count costs more accurately. This is what Jesus recommended: count the costs (Luke 14:28–30).⁸ To blame the free market for imposing certain costs is to blame freedom for imposing costs. Christians are called into freedom, not into servitude (I Cor. 7:21).⁹ The costs associated with freedom must be borne by free people under God. *Freedom means that mammon will make his bids ever-more clearly.* This fact should not become an excuse for imposing political restrictions on the God-given legal right of adults to buy, sell, and make bids to buy or sell, unless a transaction is identified by the Bible as being both inherently immoral and prohibited by civil law. In such rare cases, the legal issue is immorality, not the male-female hierarchy.

The right of legally responsible adults to make bids must be defended by civil law in a biblical commonwealth. This means that neither gender-based equality of economic opportunity nor gender-based inequality of economic opportunity should be mandated by civil law. Nevertheless, Christians should recognize that the free market is a greater threat to those who seek to maintain gender-based inequality than to those who seek to legislate gender-based equality. It was the free market, not egalitarian socialism, that produced the light switch.

8. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 35.

9. Chapter 8.

16

THE DIVISION OF LABOR

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal (I Cor. 12:4–7).

The theocentric principle here is the unity and the diversity of the church in God. This has to do with the church's boundaries: point three of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The One and the Many

This chapter parallels Romans 12.² It deals with the unity and diversity of the church. There is unity despite the fact that its members are different from each other. They individually reflect various aspects of God. They represent God in history, both as individuals and in their corporate capacity as members. Covenant-keepers represent Christ in the church. Paul's two-fold concern in this passage is with the unity of the church and the diversity of gifts given to its members. Paul offers an extended analogy of the church as a body.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked (I Cor. 12:12–24).

We read something similar in Romans:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:4–8).

What I wrote in chapter 9 of my commentary on Romans¹ also applies to chapter 12 in I Corinthians.

* * * * *

Membership today means “belongs to.” People are members of clubs, associations, teams, and churches. The original meaning of “member” is closer to Paul’s metaphor: an appendage of a body. This usage is not common today. Because of this, the metaphor has lost much of its power. It is still a useful metaphor. Paul describes the church as a living organism, a body. He does not say it is like a living organism. He does not offer an analogy. He says that we are members of a living organism. The church’s members participate in a society called the church, but Paul describes it as a body. Members in a

1. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012).

judicial sense he describes as members in a biological sense. Paul does not describe church members as cogs in a great machine. He describes them as appendages—members—of a body.

Sociologist Robert Nisbet observed that “The organism serves not only as a model of growth for contemplating the world, but also as a model of structure, of the articulation of separate entities, such as the heart and lungs. To emphasize the harmonious interaction of parts in an organization, it is customary to use ‘organic’ as highest praise.”² Metaphors of organic change are more commonly used than metaphors of mechanical change. This may be because mechanical change is cyclical. A machine does not grow. It performs a limited task over and over. A machine has no sensations. A person does not normally look at a broken machine and then make a comparison with himself. He does not see a broken machine rusting in a junk yard, and think to himself, “How terrifying!” A machine has a maker, an owner, or a user, but it has no head. A body has a head. A body develops through time. This is why the organic metaphor is far more powerful than mechanism for describing social processes or organizations.

As surely as a body dies without a head, so does an institution die without leadership. It may merely flounder at first. The phrase, “running around like a chicken with its head cut off,” is used to describe an organization that has no leadership. It runs around aimlessly before it dies. But, of course, organizations do not literally run around. They have no feet. Either they stay in operation or they close. The question is: Does an organization operate in terms of a shared vision? A leader must articulate this vision and impose sanctions in terms of it. For a hierarchy to function, there must be a representative figure who speaks with authority, and who the makes decisions to delegate part of this authority. There must be a hierarchy in order to gain the advantages of the division of labor. Institutional cooperation is structured by a hierarchy with a representative figure who possesses the authority to impose sanctions.

Paul describes Christ as the head of the church. This head cannot die, nor can the body, which extends into eternity (Rev. 21; 22). But this body can lose appendages. A body that is missing an appendage does not function as well as a body with all of its appendages. If an appendage does not work properly, the body suffers. Paul calls on members of the church to do their work well. This will benefit the

2. Robert Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 219.

church even as a body benefits from healthy appendages. Paul expects his readers to understand what he is getting at: strife is bad for a church. He calls them to righteous behavior. "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:9–13).³

There are conceptual weaknesses with organic metaphors that describe institutions. Unless organic metaphors are carefully qualified, they are not perceived as judicial; they become merely functional. *The covenantal issues of life are judicial*. It is not simply that an institution has a leader. The leader serves representatively: between the organization and the individuals who lawfully own it.

Paul could have limited his language to strictly judicial categories. He could also have invoked the image of a family. He did neither. What is it about a body that is so powerful an image? I suggest that the economic principle of the division of labor is best understood in terms of an organic metaphor. We can easily understand the operation of a social organization when it is described as a body. A body that experiences conflict among its members may become helpless. A person whose body suffers epileptic seizures is unreliable. A person who suffers from spastic discoordination is limited in what he can do. People see such afflictions in others and shudder. "What if I were so afflicted?" It frightens them. The affliction is of a specific kind: discoordination. Paul takes this common fear and makes use of it. How terrible when a church suffers from conflicts. This discoordination threatens to paralyze the church. He is making a comparison: if you fear becoming physically afflicted in such a way, you should fear that the church of Christ should become similarly afflicted. Paul wants Christians to regard strife in the church as they would regard epileptic seizures. Christians should not take lightly such disruptions inside the church.

3. Paul established hospitality as a requirement for every candidate to the office of bishop (I Tim. 3:2). Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2003] 2012), ch. 4.

B. Joint Productivity, Joint Service

Paul says that we possess different gifts, “gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.” This diversity of gifts is a benefit to the church. The church has within its membership people with many kinds of abilities. They can offer their gifts to the church in faithful service. The church is then in a position to offer to its members and to the world a wide range of assistance. The church becomes a clearing house for a diversity of services. The larger the church grows, the greater its range of services.

The same principle of organization operates in the world outside the institutional church. An increasing division of labor is a major benefit to a society. Men have been given many different skills and insights. A social order that encourages people to offer their services for sale to others is able to increase the wealth of its participants, meaning an increasing range of choices. Adam Smith, in chapter 1 of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), relied on the principle of the division of labor to explain how people can increase their personal wealth through voluntary exchange and production for a market.

The institutional church is not a profit-seeking entity. It is funded by the tithes and donations of its members, not by profit. It offers healing of all kinds to its members, beginning with physical healing. “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). Service begins with love. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35). “Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits” (Rom. 12:16). As the church grows, more people are brought into the community of saints. Some of them have needs that they cannot satisfy outside the covenant community. Others possess abilities that can meet the needs of others. The church enables those with needs to gain the help required to restore them. As they become restored to health in the widest sense, they can become sources of aid to those who are not yet healthy.

Covenant-keepers serve Christ by serving each other. This is true inside the institutional church and outside. Then what is unique or different about the institutional church? Answer: it alone offers the

sacraments. God's special judicial presence in the sacraments is unique. Participation in sacramental rites brings God's people under God's judgment. Sanctions are dispensed to its members by God as a direct result of their participation in the sacraments. These sanctions can be positive⁴ or negative.⁵ A sense of community is one result of participation in the sacraments. Church members participate in a community that has been called by God to leave a world that is ultimately perishing, yet they must return to this perishing world when the worship service ends. Their worship inside is designed to make them better citizens outside. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Formal worship strengthens them in their status as residents of two worlds: eternity and time. Jesus prayed publicly to His Father: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:14–18).

Paul in Romans 12 calls his readers to faithful service inside the institutional church. His goal is to persuade his readers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to Christ (v. 1). The starting point for their sacrificial service is the institutional church. The proper motivational impulse is charity, not earthly profit.

The division of labor aids church members in their ability to serve each other. Each member knows that there are other members who possess skills that may benefit him sometime. He can put his mind at greater rest because the church includes people who are willing to serve each other. The church in this respect seems more like a family than a body, yet Paul describes the church in terms of a body. It is almost if he is reluctant to encourage his readers to associate the church with the family. A family is the more obvious mental association, yet Paul uses a metaphor instead: body. Otherwise, many people would be tempted to proclaim the structure of a family to serve

4. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

5. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (I Cor. 11:30).

as a model for the church. The church is not a family.⁶ It has sacraments. A family does not. The church extends into heaven. Men there have access to the ultimate sacrament, the tree of life. “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). A family does not continue in heaven. “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matt. 22:30).

A church member knows that whatever he lacks, others in the church may possess. The larger the church or association of churches, the more likely that there will be providers of every kind of service. A member does not have to master every area of service, which is beyond his abilities. He need only concentrate on the limited range of services that he performs best. The same message appears in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12.

C. The Institutional Church

Paul is not speaking here of the church in the sense of believers in general, i.e., the invisible church. He is speaking of the body of Christ as an identifiable organization that uniquely represents Christ in history and eternity. Paul’s audience was a group of Christians who were assembled together to hear the reading of his letter. This organization had members. It had a structure: hierarchy. This hierarchy had sanctions. The focus of his concern in this section is the smooth functioning of an institution.

The body of Christ represents Christ visibly in a way that the family and the civil government do not. This is why the church extends into eternity. The family and civil government do not. This means that the central institution in God’s kingdom is the church. Sociological analysis often begins with the family. The idea of the centrality of the family is not a biblical principle. It is far more pagan than Christian. It places biological relationships above sacramental relationships. It places loyalty to death-bound people above loyalty to the resurrected Christ, who is represented in history by His body. Jesus severely condemned the idea of family loyalty’s being superior to loyalty to Him. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at

6. Gary North, *Baptized Patriarchalism: The Cult of the Family* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1995). (<http://bit.ly/gnbappat>)

variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:34–37). The idea of the centrality of the state is socialist. This ideal, too, is in conflict with the biblical principle of the centrality of the church. It is the church alone that lawfully offers the dual covenantal oath-signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are eternal sanctions, not just temporal.

The state can represent Christ judicially. So can the family. But both institutions can also represent other worldviews, other gods. The church is uniquely Christ's. The sacraments are judicial oath signs that point uniquely to God's final judgment. The sanctions that are imposed by family and state do not uniquely point to God's final judgment. Excommunication—separation from the sacraments—judicially represents hell. Paul never uses the following language with respect to family or state. "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Cor. 5:3–5).

Family and state sanctions do not covenantally deliver a man's body to Satan, nor do they involve a man's spirit. Family and state are common grace institutions. Their covenantal blessings are available to all people irrespective of their personal confessions. The church is a special grace institution that is lawfully open only to those who confess Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2).

The church is the body of Christ. It has many members, Paul said. It possesses unity. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). It also possesses diversity: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." Each member is to serve God by serving others. This fulfills Paul's initial command: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

The division of labor strengthens the church. It creates a broad range of talents and services. Individuality is affirmed by this broad

range of talents, yet institutional unity is also established: a more self-sufficient entity.

Paul places no restrictions on either this diversity or this unity. He does not suggest that members should not cooperate with each other. The range of services is limited only by the size of the church. There is no indication that the church is to be broken into non-cooperating subdivisions. On the contrary, the church is Christ's body. It cannot be broken up into non-cooperating subdivisions without injuring it. The range of the division of labor is limited only by the size of the church. The church is international. The division of labor within the church is international. In the midst of international violence, there should be a beacon of peace. In the midst of noncooperation among peoples and nations, there should be an example of cooperation. The church is designed by God to be the premier example. When it is not the premier example, then either it is at fault or the observers are.

* * * * *

D. Offices and Gifts

Paul concludes I Corinthians 12 with a list of ecclesiastical gifts. He moves from metaphor to description. "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way" (I Cor. 12:28–31).

The first office listed is apostle. This office no longer exists. There are still obscure Protestant sects or independent congregations whose leaders claim that they are apostles. They do not make it clear what distinguishes the office of apostle from the office of prophet, nor do they explain how someone gains this office, or what his distinguishing abilities are, or why an apostle should be removed or even can be removed for malfeasance, or how the office is passed on institutionally.

Next comes the office of prophet. Ever since the completion of the New Testament's documents and the necessary cessation of authoritative revelation equal to these documents, this office has not existed. There are still men and women who claim that they are prophets. The same comments apply to this office as apply to apostle.

Next comes the teacher. Churches do not usually recognize it as a separate office from pastor. Paul here does not mention presbyters or deacons. So, he is not dealing here with issues of judicial hierarchy. He is dealing with the diversity of gifts. "After that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

The greater the diversity of gifts in any organization, the greater is its potential division of labor. The greater the division of labor, the greater the level of output from the same quantity of inputs. Paul is saying that a church's members should welcome the large diversity of gifts that is found within its membership. Church members who do not possess any of these gifts of office are nevertheless benefited by the presence in the church of those who do. The church as an institution can accomplish more when the members without these unique gifts cooperate with those who possess them.

This is why both envy and jealousy are terrible sins. They undermine social cooperation. Jealousy is resentment at another person's advantages, coupled with the desire to force the other person to share his advantages. Envy is resentment against another person's advantages, coupled with a desire to remove those advantages without gaining access to them. Jealousy seeks a levelling based on a redistribution of assets in favor of the jealous person. Envy seeks a levelling based on the removal or the destruction of the other person's advantages.⁸ Both involve tearing down. Jealousy delights in both the tearing down and the subsequent redistribution of assets. Envy delights merely in the tearing down. Ahab was jealous of Naboth's vineyard. "And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread" (I Kings 21:4). The Philistines were envious of Isaac's wells. "For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth" (Gen. 26:15).⁹ There was no cooperation between Naboth and Ahab or between the Philistines and Isaac. There was only conflict. Naboth and Isaac were innocent.

8. On the distinction between jealousy and envy, see Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace, [1966] 1970), pp. 5, 13, 14, 71, 96.

9. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 27.

The church in the broadest sense possesses a great diversity of gifts. A local congregation may not. As in the case of specialized profit-seeking organizations, churches specialize. They concentrate on what they do best. They evangelize different segments of society. They develop traditions that emphasize their particular specialties. This has been going on from the early church era, but as the church has spread its influence across borders and social groups, local congregations have grown very different from others. The same kind of tolerance that Paul tells the Corinthians to display toward one another is to be displayed by churches toward one another. *The fundamental issue is confession of faith.* This statement reflects the theological tradition known as Calvinism. Other traditions emphasize other core issues: the sacraments or emotional enthusiasm or forms of liturgy. But Jesus settled this issue long ago: *confession is central.*

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:15–19).

The church as an international organization possesses a multitude of gifts. The larger it grows, the greater the diversity of gifts that its members possess. This is why church growth is an imperative. It increases the efficiency of covenant-keepers as they seek to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).¹⁰

E. The Social Division of Labor

The language of organic unity is often applied to society. We think of ourselves as members of society. We are less likely to think of ourselves as cogs in a great machine, except insofar as we perceive that we have lost too much of our independence. Yet the member of a body does not perceive itself apart from the body. It is an “it,” not a sentient being. So, what is the difference in principle between a machine and a body? I think the distinguishing feature is life. A member can grow; a

0. *Ibid.*, chaps. 3, 4.

cog cannot. A body can grow; a machine cannot. A body has a representative head; a machine does not.

What is the basis of growth in a society? Not biological law. But this comment also applies to the church. There have been social theorists who have sought to discover the permanent laws of society, as if society were biological. Their success has been minimal, as is testified to by all of the other social theorists who also claim to have discovered the laws of society, but whose laws are different.

Certain varieties of political theory have sought to identify a head for society. Monarchy lends itself to such a formulation, but there are no monarchs today who possess such overarching headship or even claim it. Political theory moves from the organic analogy to judicial categories as soon as it confronts the problem of the head. The issues of sanctions—voting—also move political theory away from organicism. This is also true of theories of the church. The language may be organic; the categories are judicial.

This concept of corporate interdependence applies to social organization in general, but especially to the free market. The free market integrates the plans and productivity of legally sovereign individuals—an amazing achievement—and thereby provides continuity through time. The free market integrates the one and the many by means of private ownership, the legal right to make offers to exchange scarce resources, the legal enforcement of contracts, and the price system. The legal right of ownership, including the right to bid, produces an enormously complex and productive society. Few people recognize or understand the cause-and-effect connection between private ownership and social cooperation. The system operates nonetheless.

In a free market economy, there is no overall chain of command. A major appeal of socialist theory has been its concept of a rational hierarchy. A central planning agency is seen as functioning as a head functions. But, as Ludwig von Mises pointed out in 1920, this head is not omniscient. It cannot plan rationally because, under socialism, there is no private ownership, especially of capital goods. There is no price system, so the planners cannot know what the price of scarce resources should be in order to maximize the value to society of whatever resources exist. A price system is a system of competitive bidding by individuals who possess the legal right to buy and sell and make offers to buy and sell. Such rights do not exist in a systematically socialist society. Therefore, Mises concluded, economic calculation is

impossible under socialism.¹¹ There were several attempts to refute his theory, most notably by the Communist economist, Oskar Lange.¹² Lange's theory of a national planning board that could set prices and change them in response to shortages or surpluses was never adopted by any socialist or Communist society. His theory offered too much authority to customers. In Communist Poland, Lange served as chief economist, beginning in the late 1940s. He was the architect of Communist Eastern Europe's system of accounts. His system never incorporated his theory.

The free market's system of market pricing solves most of the practical problems of reconciling the one and the many, i.e., reconciling individual benefits and aggregate social benefits. But, in the realm of economic theory, the various theories offered by humanist economists have not solved the ethical issue or even the theoretical issue of the one and the many. From the days of Adam Smith, free market economists have pointed to the great advantage of the free market: encouraging greater individual output through an appeal to individual self-interest. Free market theorists have argued that greater individual output benefits all or at least most members of society, not just those who are directly involved in exchange. This, they have yet to prove, given their presupposition of methodological individualism. In order to say anything scientifically valid about social utility assumes that the economist can add and subtract individual utilities to produce an assessment of aggregate social utility. This necessarily assumes that it is possible to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Because most free market theorists since the mid-1930s have followed Lionel Robbins in his argument that it is impossible scientifically to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, they have found no way theoretically to justify any statement regarding the free market and social utility. Economists make such assessments all the time when they recommend policies to governments, but they do so only inconsistently. They violate their own methodological individualism when they make such assessments and recommendations. There can be no concept of social utility in a world where it is impossible to make

1. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920), in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge, 1935). This essay is posted on the Web: <http://www.mises.org/econcalc.asp>.

2. Oskar Lange, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). This is a reprint of Lange's articles that appeared in the *Review of Economic Studies*, IV (1936–37).

interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.¹³

In 1956, Murray Rothbard made an attempt to derive a theory of social benefit based on voluntary exchange.¹⁴ He argued that if two people make an exchange, they do so because they think they will be better off after the exchange. Their individual utilities therefore increase. This assumes that after the exchange, they still think they are better off than they were before the exchange. This also assumes that no one else is hurt by their exchange. But an envious person may perceive his individual utility as having decreased because two people are made better off by an exchange. What if his decrease in social utility more than offsets the increase experienced by the exchangers? Rothbard dealt with this theoretical problem by denying the verifiable existence of envy. That is, he defined away the theoretical problem. In 1971, he changed his view of envy. He became an enthusiastic promoter of Helmut Schoeck's thesis in Schoeck's book, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (1966).¹⁵ Schoeck argues that envy has been an important motivation behind socialism. But as soon as he accepted the existence of envy, Rothbard destroyed the theoretical case that he had made in favor of a utility theory based on mutual exchange. He never dealt with this logical inconsistency over the next quarter of a century.

The biblical solution to this problem is the concept of methodological covenantalism. God deals with men in their capacity as individuals. He also judges corporate units to which men belong and in which they are represented by other men. God holds individuals responsible for their actions, but He also brings judgments in history on corporate entities (Lev. 26;¹⁶ Deut. 28¹⁷). He imputes

3. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5; Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix H.

4. Murray N. Rothbard, "Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics," in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956). (<http://bit.ly/SennholzMises>) This has been reprinted by Liberty Press, Indianapolis, Indiana. It also appears in Rothbard, *The Logic of Action Two: Applications and Criticism from the Austrian School* (Glos, United Kingdom: Elgar, 1997), pp. 211–54.

5. Murray N. Rothbard, "Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism and the Division of Labor," *Modern Age* (Summer 1971); reprinted in Rothbard, *The Logic of Action Two: Applications and Criticism from the Austrian School*, pp. 3–35. This essay is posted on-line at <http://www.mises.org/fipandol.asp>.

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 34, 35.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on*

value to men's actions, both as individuals and corporate groups. God makes judgments in history and also retroactively at the final judgment. Thus, we can say confidently that the reconciliation of the one and the many is found in God's perfect judgment. As an individual acting on his own behalf and also as a representative of a group, it is each man's unavoidable responsibility to make judgments in history based on his present estimate of God's final retroactive judgment on his actions.

Christians can legitimately conclude that any economic order that results when men obey God's laws will reconcile the one and the many in the realm of scarce resources. We read in chapter 12 of both Romans and First Corinthians that the division of labor is good for the church. We can legitimately extend this assessment to the economy. What is good for church members in the church—the division of labor—is good for individuals in the economy. The division of labor is a benefit to men in society whenever it is based on the private ownership of the means of production, except when the specialty is identified as immortal by the Bible.

Conclusion

Paul describes the church as a body and its members as members. So ingrained is his language today that we speak of church members, but the meaning has changed since Paul's day. We speak of church membership as if it were little more than joining a club, but the concept of church membership encompasses far more than formal belonging. Church membership is described by Paul as being organic. Church members are members of a body. Without organic union, the body ceases to function properly. It begins to die.

The power of Paul's metaphor of a body with members is very great. We seem to be able to understand it better than we understand such concepts as the division of labor or oath-bound subordination to a representative entity. The essence of the church is judicial-covenantal, but Paul's analogy points to cooperation, like the parts (members) of a body.

We belong to the church in much the same way as members of a body belong to each other. This is not the way that members of a club belong to each other. The church is far more significant. This means that we cannot do without each other without suffering individual

losses.

ESCHATOLOGY AND CAPITAL ACCUMULATION

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:21–28).

The theocentric principle here is the complete historical triumph of God over His enemies in history. This is eschatology: point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Resurrection and Historical Continuity

The literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ in history is the starting point for this chapter. Paul writes, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (vv. 3–4). Christ’s burial was literal. His body was placed in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57–60). Christ’s resurrection was equally literal.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

His body was removed from the tomb, but not by any human being, for a great stone had been placed in front of the tomb's entrance by the authorities (Matt. 27:62–66). Christ's resurrection was not symbolic, meaning mythical, meaning a lie perpetrated by early Christian writers for the sake of deceiving the public, which is what liberal theologians would have us believe. The risen Jesus had hundreds of witnesses. "And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep" (I Cor. 15:5–6). When Paul testified before the Roman governor, Festus, he said, "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26).

So crucial is the doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection in history, that Paul says twice that the Christian's faith is in vain if this doctrine is not historically accurate. "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (v. 14). "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (v. 17).

The doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection serves as Paul's introduction to a discussion of eschatology: the last things and the next-to-last things. Christ was resurrected from the dead; His followers will also be resurrected from the dead. "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen" (vv. 12–13). Christ is risen; hence, there will be a future resurrection of the dead, who in life placed their trust in the historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our hope is not confined to this life. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (v. 19).

Paul in this chapter discusses the final judgment. He says that God's final judgment will be characterized by an eschatological discontinuity: incorruption will inherit a redeemed world. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (vv. 42–44). The distinction here is between corruption and incorruption. Life prior to the final resurrection, the final judgment, and the establishment of the post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22), is marked by corruption. All men in history are in

sin. Sin affects everything men think and do. They cannot escape this corruption by sin in history. They cannot experience complete victory over sin in history. Death still rules them, no matter how long they live. There is only one deliverance from sin and its effects, i.e., God's sanctions on sin: final judgment for covenant-keepers. Wherever sin exists, sickness and death remain. Wherever sickness and death exist, sin remains. The end is not yet.

Resurrection was *definitive* in history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ is past. "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (vv. 12–14).

Resurrection is *progressive* in history: spiritual. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (vv. 57–58).

Resurrection will be *final*. "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (vv. 50–56).

The literal truth of Christ's bodily resurrection in the past, and the literal truth of mankind's final resurrection in the future, must both be affirmed without qualification by any Christian who desires to defend orthodoxy and avoid heresy. Christians, East and West, have confessed the following for centuries: "The third day, He arose from the dead, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick [living] and the dead." We call this confession the Apostles' Creed. It has long served the church as a major judicial standard of orthodoxy. The Nicene Creed (325) has a similar statement. "On the third day he rose again in accordance with

the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

All of this has to do with Christ’s judgment against sin: at Calvary, in history through His covenantal representatives, and at the end of history. The resurrection was, is, and will be preliminary to public judgment by Christ against sin and its effects.

The Christian’s acts of exercising judgment are affirmations of the bodily resurrection, past and future. The Christian, through decision-making, is supposed to extend God’s kingdom in history. He is told by God to overcome the effects of sin in his own life and in those areas of life that are lawfully under his covenantal jurisdiction. He is to bring judgment against sin progressively. This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Philippians, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). This is what he meant when he told them, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14).²

The continuity of Christians’ individual and corporate exercise of judgment in history culminates in the eschatological discontinuity of Christ’s final overcoming of sin’s historical effects at the final judgment. The lake of fire will be God’s overcoming of sin’s effects eternally (Rev. 20:14–15). The efforts of Christians in history do not bring about this eschatological discontinuity. Their continuity is the continuity of definitive incorruption’s progressive overcoming of corruption in history. But the discontinuity of incorruption’s final inheritance and corruption’s final disinheritance will be exclusively the supernatural work of Christ, when he will end history by finally overcoming death, God’s original negative sanction against sin (Gen. 2:17). On that day, but not before, we will be able legitimately to declare, “O death, where is thy sting?” That is because we will also be able legitimately to declare, “O sin, where is thy power?” and “O, corruption, where is thy inheritance?” This event still lies in the future.¹

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 21.

1. Appendix A.

B. Millennial Viewpoints

The major divisive issue in Christian eschatology is the sequence of events that will precede the final resurrection of the dead. One highly divisive question in this regard is this: Will there be a major historical discontinuity prior to the general resurrection at Christ's second coming? Specifically, will Christians be removed from history prior to the second coming, as premillennial, pre-tribulational dispensationalists teach? That is, will what dispensationalists call the Rapture, or the secret Rapture, of Christians take place approximately one thousand years prior to the final judgment?

1. Wheat and Tares Together

Jesus categorically denied this. In his parable of the tares and the wheat, He made it plain that Christians and non-Christians will operate in history together until the end of time.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matt. 13:24–30).²

The disciples were not sure what this meant. They came to Him later and asked for clarification. He provided it.

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 29.

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matt. 13:37–43).

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Millions of pre-tribulational, premillennial dispensationalists have refused to hear ever since 1830, when their eschatology first appeared. So committed are they to the idea that Christians will be removed from the burdens of history either 1,007 years or 1,003.5 years before the final judgment, that they have refused to accept Christ's explicit warning that no such removal will ever take place in history. They have ears to hear, but they do not hear. They seek an escape from history and its burdens.

Jesus said that there will be historical continuity for tares and wheat, living side by side, until the final judgment. Christians who refuse to begin with this premise cannot accurately understand the future of Christianity. They cannot understand what God has called His followers to do in history: conquer the world on behalf of Christ as His covenantal representatives. They dismiss such views as "triumphalism," as if triumphalism were not the essence of the twin doctrines of Christ's bodily resurrection and bodily ascension in history. They regard triumphalism with respect to culture as ridiculous or even heretical, yet they regard triumphalism with respect to Christ's victory over physical death as basic Christian theology. Christ publicly demonstrated His authority to forgive sin by means of His ability to tell a cripple to get up and walk, which the cripple immediately did (Matt. 9:2–8). Christ's spiritual authority over sin in general was manifested publicly by His visible authority over one effect of sin in general: healing a physical disability. Nevertheless, both the premillennialist and the amillennialist insist that Christianity will never manifest publicly, by means of Christianity's progressive triumph over cultural evil in history, the truth of Christ's bodily ascension to the right hand of God and His present reign over history.

2. Future Longevity

In contrast, the prophesied continuity of historical victory for Christianity involves a social transformation so great that the life spans of men will begin to approach those that prevailed before Moses

announced this rule: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10). Isaiah announced that, sometime in the future, sinners dying at age one hundred will be regarded as children. Jerusalem will rejoice.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed (Isa 65:17–20).³

This prophecy cannot possibly refer to the post-resurrection world, for in the era described by Isaiah, there will be sinners living and dying. This passage refutes amillennialism⁴ as surely as the parable of the tares and wheat in Matthew 13 refutes pre-tribulational and mid-tribulational dispensationalism.⁵ The amillennialist affirms historical continuity, but this continuity is a continuity of earthly defeat for Christianity. He says that there will never be a time when Christianity will rule the world. Always, he insists, Christians will be under the dominion of covenant-breakers.⁶

According to pre-tribulational, premillennial dispensationalism, Christianity will experience defeat culturally in this, the pre-millennial era of history. This defeat will be reversed only after Christ returns bodily to set up His earthly millennial kingdom seven years after the Rapture. At the Rapture, wheat and tares will be separated by divine intervention: the wheat will be removed from history. This will be a great discontinuity. There will be a continuity of defeat for Christianity until the Rapture’s discontinuity of deliverance out of history. According to amillennialism, Christianity also experiences defeat culturally. There is a continuity of defeat until the Second Coming’s discontinuity of deliverance out of history. Premillennialism and

3. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2021), ch. 15.

4. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 98–106. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 296–98.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

amillennialism are both highly pessimistic regarding our era, the era of the church.⁷

In historic premillennialism, which is not dispensational, there is no separation of the wheat from the tares prior to the final judgment. There is a great discontinuity, however: the bodily re-entry into history of Jesus Christ and (depending on the theologian involved) His angels. This is consistent with the parable of the wheat and tares: no separation. But it maintains an inherent pessimism regarding Christianity's influence during our pre-millennial era. It teaches a continuity of defeat for Christianity until the great discontinuity of Christ's second coming, which supposedly will take place 1,000 years before the final judgment. The discontinuity of Christ's bodily return will presumably establish a new continuity of victory for Christianity, one based on Christ's leadership over an international bureaucracy run by Christians. But this future victory has nothing or very little to do with the efforts of Christians—including you—prior to Christ's second coming and His establishment of an earthly millennial kingdom.

3. Questions of Social Order

The crucial question here is the issue of institutional continuity between the pre-millennial age—ours—and a future millennial age. We are told by premillennialists of all varieties that Christ will someday return to earth to rule in person. This view of Christ's millennial kingdom raises once again the problem faced by Moses, who ruled Israel by means of God's perfect and direct revelation. A long line of judgment-seekers formed in front of his tent and remained there all day long (Ex. 18:13).⁸ In premillennial social theory, there is a practical and presently unanswered question regarding the judicial effects of a discontinuity of perfection vs. imperfection within the worldwide hierarchy of judicial authority, with sinners governing at the bottom, and Jesus governing from the top. Jesus will be far more busy than Moses was. Moses ruled only over Israel. Jesus will rule over the whole world. There are just so many hours in the day. How will the hierarchical chain of courts operate—church courts and civil courts? What civil laws will predominate? Natural laws? Biblical laws? Some mixture?

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

Then there is the matter of church courts. Will Baptists still insist on church independency when Jesus is there to settle the difficult ecclesiastical cases? Which higher regional church court will lawfully rule on disputes within a local congregation? Will Presbyterians and Episcopalians serve as judges in these higher church courts? How can ecclesiastical independency survive in a system of church courts that is constructed along the lines of Exodus 18's civil court model? Or is Jesus expected to settle in person every dispute in every local Baptist church? (Jesus would then be *very* busy!) These judicial questions are never, ever discussed in print by premillennialists. These questions are much too practical.

4. Institutional Continuity

There is another question regarding this future discontinuity: the transition between today's institutions and the institutions of the millennial era. Historic premillennialists and post-tribulation dispensationalists do not write about this transition, nor do pre-tribulation and mid-tribulation dispensationalists. That is to say, premillennialists rarely write about social theory at all. When they do comment on social theory, they do not use the Bible to defend their social recommendations.⁹ They do not discuss the institutional implications of whether or not Jesus will be assisted on earth by angels, or by resurrected, sin-free Christians, or merely by sin-cursed Christians. Thus, they offer no answer to this vitally important social question:

“Is there any significant continuity—intellectual, theological, financial, institutional—between our pre-millennial era and the millennial era to come?”

This is the question that premillennialist social theorists must answer in detail before they can develop a concept of premillennial institution-building that should be funded today by thrifty Christians. This question of the degree of institutional continuity or discontinuity must be dealt with forthrightly and in detail by premillennialist theologians before they or their academic followers can provide Bible-based opinions concerning the degree of future-orientation that is appropriate for today's Christians.

In the 1950s, the pre-tribulational, Los Angeles-based radio

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

preacher-pastor J. Vernon McGee dismissed all social action programs (except presumably for urban rescue missions and foreign medical missions) with this clever and socially debilitating phrase: “You don’t polish brass on a sinking ship.”¹⁰ Was he correct about the uselessness of brass-polishing? Given his eschatological views, he was correct, but his eschatological views were incorrect. I ask: Is it a waste of Christians’ scarce economic resources for them to finance explicitly Bible-based universities, academic research foundations, medical science, political action organizations, and all of the other institutions that provide social leadership and social transformation? These are the institutions that humanists have either taken over from Christians or built on their own ever since 1700, because Bible-believing Protestant Christians have either defected from such tasks or have never been involved. Amillennialists and premillennialists, if they had the courage of their convictions, would say “yes, polishing brass is a waste of resources.” J. Vernon McGee still speaks from the grave on behalf of all consistent pessimillennialists. Pre-tribulation dispensationalism has never offered anything beyond the social theory of the rescue mission.¹¹

First, in contrast to the institutional discontinuity of premillennialism, postmillennialism teaches continuity from our era until the final judgment. More specifically, postmillennialism teaches that there will be neither a Rapture nor the bodily return of Christ to set up an earthly kingdom approximately one thousand years prior to the final judgment. Only the future conversion of the Jews will create a significant historical discontinuity (Rom. 11), which will be positive for Christianity, but will not involve a change in Christ’s present reign from heaven.¹² Christ will still extend His earthly dominion representatively through His invisible church—Christians—but not in person, just as He has done since His ascension to the right hand of God.¹³

Second, in contrast to the institutional continuity of amillen-

0. I discuss this in greater detail in *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 29.

1. Gary North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism Is Paralyzed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993), ch. 3, section on “Institutional Defeat?” (<http://bit.ly/gnapture>)

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

3. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

nialism, which has been a continuity of Christianity's progressive defeat culturally, postmillennialism teaches a continuity of victory for Christianity, in time and on earth. Postmillennialism teaches that there will be a literal fulfillment in history of Isaiah's prophecy regarding the New Heaven and the New Earth (Isa. 65:17–20). Postmillennialism offers Christians the possibility of both social theory and economic theory based on the moral legitimacy and eschatological necessity of compound growth for Christianity.

C. Psalm 110 Revisited

Psalm 110 is the most frequently cited psalm in the New Testament. It is short.

A Psalm of David. The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head (Ps. 110:1–7).

Verse 4, “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,” is the basis of the argument in the Epistle to the Hebrews that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy (Heb. 5:5–10). There is now a new priesthood, the author argues, for Jesus was part of the tribe of Judah, not Levi (Heb. 7).

The first verse of Psalm 110 is a familiar one. Jesus cited it in His final challenge to the Pharisees.

What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions (Matt. 22:42–46).

Psalm 110 speaks of a footstool. God will place His feet on His

enemies, as if they were corporately a footstool. He will rule over them. The psalm then describes the nature of the rule of God. The language of victory is military. "He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries" (v. 6).

Paul in this chapter picks up the theme of the footstool. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (v. 25). Who is "he"? Jesus Christ. When will He reign? Before the end of time. After He has put all of His enemies under His feet, then the end will come. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (v. 24). Paul's language could not be clearer. The reign of Christ is in history, prior to His final victory over His enemies. What is the last enemy to be defeated before the end? "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (v. 26). There can be no mistake about this: Christ's reign in history parallels the reign of death. *As surely as death is present today, so does Christ presently reign in history.*

A debate over eschatology has long existed over this question: Must Christ return bodily in order to establish His millennial reign in history? The premillennialist says yes. But the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13 eliminates the exegetical basis of both mid-tribulational and pre-tribulational dispensationalism, both of which teach that the church will be removed from history for a few years prior to the bodily return of Christ to set up His earthly millennial kingdom. This leaves historic premillennialism and (possibly) post-tribulational dispensationalism as contenders in the eschatological debate.¹⁴ But I Corinthians 15 removes them from the debate. Christ's reign in history will be the same in the future as it is today, until death is finally defeated at the final judgment.¹⁵ His rule in history will continue to be representative. He will continue to reign from heaven. He will not leave His position of cosmic eminence at the right hand of God until the final judgment that will end history.

4. Here, I am assuming that post-tribulational dispensationalism does not predict the Rapture at the time of Christ's return to earth. Such a Rapture would separate the wheat from the tares. I am also assuming that post-tribulation dispensationalism does not predict the return of perfect, sin-free, death-free people to rule alongside Christ in history. This would constitute a denial of Paul's message that incorruption and corruption cannot share the same inheritance. Corruption does not inherit incorruption. Incorruption cannot inherit corruption. The two realms remain separate until corruption is removed by final judgment. For more on this, see the Appendix.

5. Appendix A.

The amillennialist would also like to remain in the debate, but Isaiah's teaching regarding the New Heaven and the New Earth removes him from the debate, unless he denies the literal truth of the prophecy regarding an era without tears and with extended life spans. This is a difficult exegetical position to defend, for it makes publicly unverifiable Isaiah's prophecy regarding the future. There is no way to verify its fulfillment.¹⁶ The fulfillment of a prophecy regarding extended lifetimes ought to be verifiable actuarially. If nothing else, the premiums for annual renewable term life insurance policies should fall dramatically. What the amillennialist categorically denies with respect to Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven—their exclusively symbolic rather than literal character—he affirms for this prophecy of Isaiah.

What this passage in First Corinthians teaches is continuity. Christ was resurrected first. This points to the bodily resurrection of His people in the future. Paul calls Christ's resurrection the firstfruits (vv. 20, 23). This refers back to the Mosaic law's firstfruits festival, when there were offerings to God from the field of the harvest. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it" (Lev. 23:10–11). This was a token offering, a kind of down payment on the greater offering to God after the harvest was complete. Christ's resurrection was God's down payment to His people, a promise of the great eschatological event to come.

D. Capital Accumulation

The issue of historical continuity is fundamental for any discussion of capital accumulation. Continuity is the central issue of compound economic growth. Investors who believe in long-term economic growth also believe in the possibility of expanding their capital through time. This means that they believe that capital, as a tool of production, can produce ever-greater output over time.

6. An example of such a denial is found in Anthony Hoekema's book, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 202. For my response to his argument, see *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 98–106.

1. Social Discontinuity

If there must inevitably be a great discontinuity in between the church's work today and its work during some future earthly kingdom, then whatever Christians do today to accumulate capital will be thwarted by this great pre-millennial discontinuity. If the Antichrist's kingdom must be triumphant in between the Rapture and the millennial kingdom, as pre-tribulational and mid-tribulational dispensationalists teach, then the capital that is amassed by today's Christians will be inherited by their enemies during a future tribulation era. The wealth of the just is therefore being laid up today for sinners. But Proverbs teaches the opposite. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).¹⁷

Even if a few elements of this capital legacy somehow survive the Great Tribulation, of what significance will this legacy be in a world ruled by Christ in person, possibly assisted by angels and perhaps even resurrected Christians, who will be sin-free, illness-free, and death-free? Corruption fades in comparison with incorruption. The inherently corrupt capital legacy of history can have no significant role to play in a world governed by the incorrupt. This is why Paul wrote that corruption cannot inherit incorruption (vv. 50–54). Why, then, should anyone believe that incorruption has any use for corruption? It is doubtful that most premillennialists have even thought about this question. I have never seen it raised by a premillennialist author. Yet this question is crucial for any understanding of the motivation for Christians to sacrifice in the present for the sake of a permanent and meaningful legacy to the future. When a man believes that his spiritual heirs will regard his legacy to them as peripheral to their lives, what is his motivation to save and sacrifice in order to build and extend long-term institutions? Premillennialists do not think carefully about this issue, but the general implications of their eschatology do trickle down to the masses of believers. The result is the familiar rescue-mission mentality. The trumpet of premillennialism is not the trumpet of cultural victory; it is the trumpet of a Salvation Army band.

Similarly, with respect to the cultural effects of Christianity, the amillennialist insists that the continuity of Christianity is a continuity of cultural defeat. Any capital amassed by Christians will either be

7. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

dissipated or confiscated during a future period of escalating rule by covenant-breakers. Christ's reign in history is seen by amillennialists as almost exclusively internal and psychological, operating mainly in the hearts of His increasingly persecuted people. Amillennialists have no vision of compound economic growth and social redemption along the lines of Deuteronomy 28:1–14. They deny the eschatological possibility of comprehensive redemption.¹⁸

With respect to the church's age, prior to Christ's physical return to set up an earthly millennial kingdom, premillennialists agree with amillennialists. Things will not go well for Christians or any institutional legacy of Christians that may be produced during the present church age, which dispensationalists call the Great Parenthesis because it supposedly was never predicted in the Old Testament.

It is appropriate at this point to comment on the dispensational doctrine of the church age as the Great Parenthesis. The preaching of Peter at Pentecost refutes the position of conventional dispensationalists on this point, for Peter cited a prophecy in Joel 2 as being fulfilled by the events at Pentecost. "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:16–21). The only consistent way out of this theological dilemma for dispensationalists is to argue, as J. C. O'Hair, Cornelius Stam, and Charles F. Baker did, that Peter did not establish the church; Paul did. Peter's early converts were not members of the church, the body of Christ—the institution that we belong to. They were members of a brief, transitional organization.¹⁹ Very few dispensationalists have been

8. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: "Comprehensive Redemption." (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

9. Stam's book, *Things That Differ* (Chicago: Berean Bible Society, 1959), presents the case for one version of ultradispensationalism, which marks the origin of the church in Acts 9: Paul's ministry. Others argue that the church came after Acts 28.

willing to move into ultradispensationalism,²⁰ but in refusing, they remain committed to an obvious falsehood, for the Old Testament clearly did predict the church, according to Peter. The church age is not a Great Parenthesis. The church is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and is therefore the heir of Old Covenant promises. Old Covenant Israel was publicly disinherited by Christ. As Jesus told the Jewish leaders, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). The international church is that nation. The question now is: How many fruits will it bring forth, and what kind? The final answer in history will depend heavily on the eschatologies that are held by its members.

The premillennial-amillennial view of the church’s progressive cultural failure shortens their adherents’ time frames. They become less future-oriented. They adopt what Ludwig von Mises called *high time preference*. They see few long-run benefits from the steady accumulation of capital in the broadest cultural sense. They believe that Christian cultural capital will either be dissipated over time or else confiscated by sinners during the Great Tribulation or its amillennial equivalent, when the powers of darkness overwhelm the ever-dimming forces of light. Their slogan: “Nice guys finish last.”

2. Time Perspective and Compound Growth

Mises argued that the more future-oriented a lender is, the lower the rate of interest that a borrower needs to offer him in order to secure a loan. Conversely, the higher the lender’s time-preference, i.e., the more present-oriented he is, the higher the rate of interest that he will demand from borrowers. High rates of interest in a society will lower the society’s future rate of economic growth. Capital becomes more expensive, so less of it is demanded.²¹

Future-oriented societies enjoy higher rates of economic growth than present-oriented societies. Members of a future-oriented society rank the value of future income higher than do members of a less future-oriented society. They consume less in the present, invest their savings for the sake of future income, and thereby finance economic growth. They get what they prefer: greater wealth and income in the

0. The movement is represented by the Berean Bible Society and Milwaukee Bible College. See the website: <http://www.gmaf.org/gracehistory.html>

1. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19.

future, which they value more highly than present-oriented people do. In contrast, a present-oriented society consumes more of its capital, leaving less to fund future economic expansion, than a future-oriented society does. Its members also get what they prefer: less growth in the future, more consumption now. Each society purchases corporately what its members prefer. The purchase price is thrift.

Some view of eschatology forms the time perspective of every society. A Christian eschatology that is pessimistic regarding the cultural success of Christianity in the future will lead its adherents to invest differently from Christians who hold a more optimistic view of Christianity's compound growth in the broadest sense. The standard rhetorical question from a Christian who has just had his eschatology challenged exegetically—"Does it really matter very much what eschatology a person holds?"—deserves a forthright answer: "Yes, it matters greatly." It also matters greatly what eschatology a society holds.

The work of the institutional church is funded by the tithes and the above-tithe offerings of the faithful, and by the below-tithe donations of the less faithful. The greater the income of church members, the greater the percentage of their income that they should give away. Each additional dollar of net income per unit of time is used to satisfy a desire that is lower on the person's scale of values. People satisfy their basic needs with the income that they receive first. Thus, as their net income rises, their savings rate and their charitable contributions should increase as a percentage. Sadly, this is rarely the case.

Economic growth funds the expansion of God's kingdom into every area of life in which sin presently reigns. Anyway, it should. But when Christians have little faith in the long-term positive results of their work and their donations, God's kingdom in history is hampered by a lack of funding. Christians' lack of faith in the future of Christianity has led to an under-funding of local churches, as well as other Christian ministries. Men do not normally choose to invest in projects that they expect to go bankrupt.

E. Postmillennialism

Paul in this passage applies the footstool eschatology of Psalm 110 to the question of New Testament eschatology. Paul affirms here that the enemies of God will be placed under Jesus' feet in history. Only

after this process of subduing is complete will God's final judgment come.

The central theme in Paul's eschatological argument here is the resurrection. Jesus Christ was resurrected bodily, Paul insists. This event is central to the Christian faith. Without it, he says, Christians' faith is in vain. But the doctrine of the bodily resurrection applies to Christians as well as to Jesus Christ. We will all be resurrected at the last day, Paul says. When will this be? Only after Christ's reign in history has put all of God's enemies under Christ's feet. The last enemy to be defeated will be death. This will mark the end of history.²²

Paul does not here explicitly refer back to Isaiah 65:17–20, but it ought to be clear that his prophecy regarding the final defeat of death represents the consummation of Isaiah's prophecy regarding the New Heavens and the New Earth in history, an era that will be marked by exceedingly long life spans. There will be increasing continuity over time, including biological continuity. People will live longer.

According to the parable of the wheat and tares, there will be no historical discontinuity prior to the final judgment, which will permanently separate Christians from non-Christians. This parable refutes pre-tribulational and mid-tribulational dispensationalism. There will be no Rapture, secret or otherwise, that removes all Christians from history simultaneously, leaving non-Christians behind to run the world for any period of time. The Bible's doctrine of historical continuity therefore also refutes the inescapable social implication of pre-tribulational dispensationalism, namely, that there will be a break in continuity between Christians' social investments in the broadest sense before Christ returns and the final victory of Christianity in history before the final judgment.

Postmillennialism teaches that there will be continuity between what Christians do today and the progressive victory of Christianity in history. In short, there will be compound growth for the kingdom of God in history.

Postmillennialism's confidence about the earthly future of God's kingdom makes postmillennial Christians more future-oriented than those Christians who are committed to pessimilennialism. They have confidence that their kingdom-building efforts in history, funded by their donations and their thrift, will produce inter-generational expansion for God's kingdom in history. There will never be a future

2. See the Appendix.

discontinuity that will permanently reverse the progressive subduing of God's enemies in history. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Christ will have dominion, not through a great historical discontinuity in the midst of history (premillennialism) or by an eschatological discontinuity at the end of history (amillennialism), but through historical continuity. This means that He will have dominion representatively in history, through His church in the broadest sense. He will continue to reign from heaven at the right hand of God. His definitive victory over death at the resurrection will be progressively manifested in history, according to Isaiah. "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." Then, Paul writes, "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Christ's definitive ascension out of history into heaven, to rule at the right hand of God, will be progressively manifested by the triumph of Christianity over God's enemies. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."

Conclusion

This eschatology of victory, when widely believed, produces lower interest rates and, as a result of greater thrift, more rapid economic growth than exists in societies where this viewpoint is either absent or not widely believed. Jesus saves. He saves representatively through His people. Jesus saves the world progressively over time. Jesus' followers therefore are supposed to save and then invest wisely whatever they have saved. They are required by God to extend His kingdom in history, and this requires capital. Capital must therefore be progressively accumulated by covenant-keepers in history. This capital is primarily spiritual, but not exclusively. This is why a "good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). It is this inter-generational accumulation of capital that serves as the basis of the inheritance of the earth in history by God's covenantal agents. "What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 25:12–13).

SYSTEMATIC CHARITY

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1–3).

The theocentric principle here is the requirement that God's covenant people who possess assets show mercy to God's covenant people without assets. God's covenant is extended in history through charitable giving. This is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Church Universal

Paul indicates here that he was in communication with other congregations in the Mediterranean. These were gentile congregations. The object of his call for charity was the church in Jerusalem, which was made up mainly of Jews. The international church's confession was understood by Paul as the basis of a unity that transcended the differences between Jews and Greeks. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). This being the case, the suffering of one congregation had become a matter of concern for all of the others. The church of Jesus Christ is international. This fact should bring the sufferings of one congregation to the attention of the others.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

The universality of the church is part of the international division of labor in the broadest sense. The unity of the church is based on the doctrine of the church as Christ's body. "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:17–20). The members of this international, inter-cultural body are interconnected, as Paul had explained earlier in this epistle (ch. 12). They are bound to each other by an oath to the same covenantal God.

Paul here mentions other congregations. They were also taking collections for the Jerusalem church. He reminds the Corinthians that they are not alone in this effort. He also subtly reminds them that other congregations are doing their share. No single congregation was being asked to bear an excessive burden. This was a joint relief effort.

Because the church is universal, its members are supposed to be able to rely on the generosity of other members. This membership extends beyond any local congregation. This sense of belonging and mutual obligation served the churches as an early form of economic insurance. Groups have always developed informal and formal systems of mutual aid in order to reduce the risks of disaster to individual members. This has always been one of the benefits of joining a closely knit group. Paul here establishes a principle that the group known as the church is larger than a local congregation.

The farther away from a central location—in this case, Jerusalem—the weaker are the perceived claims of mutual obligation. Local bonds are stronger. They are more personal. Participants know each other and possess information about each other. Donors know if recipients are wasteful or not. They know if the person who has fallen on hard times is in trouble because of external circumstances or because of his own folly. The farther away the recipient of charity is, the more that the donors must rely on the judgment of third parties regarding the legitimacy of a distant poor person's claims.

B. The Fund-Raiser

Paul was the most important third party in the gentile church. The congregations' leaders trusted him and his judgment. He had spoken

on behalf of the Jerusalem congregation. Because the Jerusalem church was suffering as a collective unit, gentile donors could safely assume that the plight of that congregation was not the result of foolish behavior on the part of a few people. The Jerusalem congregation had overseers who were apostles. If that premier congregation was suffering, this must have been the result of external circumstances, not the moral weakness of its members or its leaders.

The importance of a trusted spokesman in raising charitable funds is very great. His assessment of the situation is vital for the success of the fund-raising effort. First, people must trust both his morals and his judgment. Paul, as the primary founder of the gentile churches, possessed this trust. Second, he must be an effective motivator. Not everyone knows how to persuade other people to donate money. Paul wrote effective fund-raising letters. His two surviving letters to the Corinthians contain fund-raising sections (II Cor. 8–9).² Third, he must have access to the donors, either directly or indirectly. In Paul's case, contact was both direct and indirect. He visited congregations. He also wrote letters, which would be read by local leaders. Fourth, there must be some way to collect the money. He said that he would visit the Corinthian church. He might even accompany the men who would take the money to Jerusalem. "And if it be meet [fit] that I go also, they shall go with me" (v. 4).

Paul left the details of collecting the money to the local congregations. He told the Corinthians to select representatives to go to Jerusalem and deliver the money. Transportation costs being what they were—high—this project was a major undertaking. The presumption was that a lot of money would be involved, making it mandatory that someone from the congregation personally deliver the money to the representatives of the Jerusalem church. Paul acted as a spokesman for that church, but the responsibility for the delivery of the funds was the local church's. Paul wisely delegated this responsibility to local church members. This reduced his responsibility, and it also made it clear to donors that they would be represented by people from their own congregation. No accusation could subsequently be made against Paul if something happened to him while he was carrying the money. He would not carry the money. He could not fairly be accused of misappropriating the funds if something happened to him or the money.

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 20912), chaps. 4, 5.

We can see that Paul had set up a system of international charity that was based on trust—several layers of trust. He was serving as an agent on behalf of the Jerusalem church, but also on behalf of the church international. Local control over funding was retained in his system, but he coordinated the collection of the funds. He also served as a trusted intermediary, thereby legitimizing the claims of the Jerusalem church. By doing all this, he reduced institutional and personal resistance to the Jerusalem church's appeal for funds. In fact, there is no mention by Paul of such an appeal by the Jerusalem church. He was acting on their behalf as the initiating agent.

Paul accepted no personal support from any congregation. He earned his money as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). This was wise. He maintained his independence this way. So, when he asked for money, people knew that this money was not for his personal use. This tended to reduce criticism, but it did not eliminate it. By the time he was about to arrive to collect the money (II Cor. 8), he had come under fire by disgruntled members. He therefore reminded the church of their lack of charity toward him.

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying (II Cor. 12:14–19).³

Paul acted from the beginning of the collection process as though he knew that where donated money is concerned, criticism is close at hand. When people decide that they do not want to honor their promises, they seek ways to assuage their consciences. “Blame the fund-raiser” is a tried-and-true conscience-assuager. Paul called them to task for this: “Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have” (II Cor. 8:11).

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

It is easy to make a pledge. The hard part is doing what you have pledged. Jesus used this fact to accuse the Pharisees of treason against the kingdom of God.

But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him (Matt. 21:28–32).

Paul warned them months in advance to begin laying aside a portion of their wealth, week by week. “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” (v. 2). This was a serious fund-raising project. It was international. Paul was not relying on his ability to create a one-time event in which he would come through town, whoop up the crowd, take the money, and leave. He told them, on the contrary, that he would not ask them to donate anything new when he arrived. They were responsible before his arrival to lay aside their donations. Week by week, the accumulated wealth was to accumulate even more.

Paul was relying on the consciences of covenant-keeping men to provide the funding. He was not relying on his ability to whip people's emotions to a high pitch. He was an apostle. He acted like an apostle. He possessed lawful authority. He did not possess great speaking ability, as he had already admitted:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:1–5).

So, he had to rely on their consciences and their self-discipline. He

advised them to set aside their donations systematically, week by week. That would be sufficient.

C. Proportional Giving

Paul asks them to give as they are able, in terms of however much God had prospered them. This standard is consistent with the principle of the tithe. This special collection of funds went beyond the tithe. It was an offering, as in “tithes and offerings,” as modern Protestant churches put it. It was not to be tithes *or* offerings. The church is supported by the tithes of its members.¹ Paul’s request was in addition to the tithe. This was why he was writing a special appeal to church members. He was not asking the church’s leaders to pay for this special collection out of the local congregation’s tithe money, which belonged to the local congregation.

1. Charity

The principle here is that God provides men’s blessings, so church members should be willing to distribute a portion of their blessings to others who have suffered setbacks. The donor thereby becomes a means of God’s provision of a blessing for others. God has established charity as an indirect means of delivering His blessings. He normally does this through nature, human labor, creativity, and thrift, and through the division of labor, which includes markets. He enables people to produce goods and services for each other. The productivity of their labor is maximized through voluntary exchange. But, in some cases, God provides blessings indirectly. When people’s productivity fails to provide them with sufficient income, other people’s productivity can provide supplemental income. This is part of God’s overall system of blessings.

Clearly, the greater a person’s productivity, the more he is capable of providing blessings for others out of his surplus income. Similarly, the greater a society’s productivity, the greater its members’ ability to provide blessings out of their surplus income. Paul calls on the Corinthian church to give proportionally to their prosperity. He does not ask them to give sacrificially. He limits his request. Corinth was a rich city. Its local congregation was better able to provide blessings for others than were, say, the Macedonian congregations. Paul reminded

1. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>)

them of this in a subsequent letter.

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God (II Cor. 8:1–5).²

2. *The Very Poor Give More*

By comparing the reactions of the members of the Corinthian church with the reactions of the members of the Macedonian churches, Paul soon discovered a fact of life about charitable giving: the very poor are often the more dedicated givers than the comparatively rich. This had been pointed out by Jesus in the incident of the widow's mite, a low-value coin. "And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:1–4).³

We would expect that charitable giving would increase as a percentage of after-tax income when men's income increases. They can more easily afford to pay for their basic necessities, which do not vary much from person to person, unless high medical expenses are involved. After all, people can eat only so much food. They can wear only one pair of shoes at a time. But it is well known that as people's income increases, their expenditures on consumer goods keep pace or even increase as a percentage of their income. Only when they attain enormous wealth do their consumption expenditures begin to lag behind their income.

This indicates that people's tastes change when their income rises. Tastes for consumer goods change. We hear of someone who has "more expensive tastes" than he had before his income rose. This is

2. North, *Ethics and Dominion*, ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Pount Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 50.

another way of saying that money and the things that money buys are addictive. The more money you receive, the more you spend. The more you spend, the more things you want. Jesus warned against the addictive power of money, especially in His sermons and sayings that are recorded in the Gospel of Luke.⁴

In contrast, Christians believe that, through God's grace, righteousness can become addictive. A person who gives 10 percent of his income may find pleasure from giving an even larger percentage the next year. But Christians do not believe that this preference for righteousness is natural. It is a consciously developed taste which normally takes years to develop. A growing trust in God, which the discipline of giving produces, does not come naturally. It runs counter to autonomous man's assumption that this world is stacked against him, and that he must beat it into submission. Autonomous man does not believe in God's grace—an unmerited gift from God—nor does he believe that the universe is governed by an omnipotent God who takes care of His people when they give money to extend the kingdom of God in history. He sees the universe either as malevolent or impersonal. In neither case does grace influence its operations, let alone govern them.

The failure of Christians to increase the proportion of their giving when they are economically blessed by God testifies to their limited vision. They have not violated God's law, so long as they have tithed, but they have not shown the courage of their convictions regarding God's care of His people. They need not feel guilty if they have faithfully tithed, but they should feel a sense that something valuable is missing in their lives. God's kingdom must be funded. Assisting other Christians in their time of need is a great privilege. Paul made this clear: "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).⁵

Conclusion

Paul here asks members of the Corinthian church to show liberality toward the Jerusalem church. The Jerusalem church was in dire straits. Paul asks the members of the Corinthian church to display

4. Luke 8:11–15; 8:18; 12:15–21; 12:22–34; 16:13.

5. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

generosity to the Jerusalem church, even as God has provided generously for the members of the Corinthian church. There should be proportionality here: more received from God, more distributed in God's name.

This should be systematic giving, he said: week by week. God gives blessings daily; church members should set aside their surplus wealth and bring it to the church to coincide with weekly worship services. This is systematic giving. It is the model for all giving. It should be habitual. Habits are hard to break. Good habits are to be inculcated through self-discipline.

Paul avoided using his appearance at the church to pressure members to give at one meeting. He appealed instead to their self-discipline. A regular habit provides greater results in the long run than sporadic emotional commitments.

CONCLUSION

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:10–15).

A. Building Christ's Kingdom

Christians are workers who are engaged in a great construction project: building the kingdom of God in time and on earth (Matt. 28:18–20).¹ Paul says in chapter 3 of this epistle that Christians should understand that their work will be judged by God at the end of time. This future, final judgment should serve as the primary motivation for Christians to make evaluations—render judgment—in a God-honoring way, and then to act in terms of them. This epistle deals with the correct rendering of judgment.

This kingdom-construction project is a corporate effort, Paul says. He is not writing in this epistle primarily about personal salvation. We know this because he says that he has laid the foundation, and others have built on it. This refers to a foundation for something corporate. “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

Christ” (vv. 10–11). The foundation defines the building. What was this original foundation? Christ. This is the foundation of salvation in the broadest sense: comprehensive redemption.² Paul laid this foundation in Corinth. It is now each individual church member’s responsibility to build on it, he says. This is a corporate effort, as he explains in chapter 12.

This joint effort in building Christ’s kingdom was being thwarted by divisions in the church at Corinth. Paul in this epistle deals with divisions within the congregation, which were based on rival allegiances to the perceived co-founders of the local church. “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (I Cor. 1:12–13). Members were treating the foundation as if the builders, rather than Christ, were the foundation. This led them to adopt a theory of multiple foundations. These divisions in the Corinthian church were hampering the work of the local church. Paul argues that its members should find their unity in the church, which is the body of Christ (I Cor. 12).³ Paul here brings the Corinthian church under judgment.

B. Final Judgment, Present Judgments

Paul teaches in I Corinthians 3 that God’s final judgment of every Christian will involve God’s presentation of rewards for their earthly service. There is also the threat of a negative sanction: a public revelation of the worthlessness of a Christian’s vain efforts in history. “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” This means that everything that a Christian has accumulated in history will go through a cleansing fire at the last day. Some of it will survive; some of it will be consumed. In some cases, all of it will be consumed. This will be the bonfire of the vanities.

The message here is that there is continuity between history and eternity: spiritual gold, silver, and precious stones. This will survive into eternity. There is also discontinuity: spiritual wood, hay, and stubble. This will not survive into eternity. God’s final judgment will publicly test the quality of each Christian’s legacy in history insofar as

2. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

3. Chapter 15.

it extends into eternity. A Christian possesses legitimate hope that some of what he does in history will extend into eternity. That is to say, the solid building that he constructs on Christ's foundation will serve as a capital asset in eternity. Jesus made the same point. He recommended that people make this exchange in history: temporal wealth for eternal wealth (Luke 8:11–15).⁴ Covenant-keepers can lay up treasure in heaven through their charitable activities and sacrificial service in history. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).⁵

What God will do at the final resurrection of mankind (I Cor. 15; Rev. 20:14–15), all men must do in history: *render judgment*. God's final judgment will involve declaring retroactive evaluations. Men make evaluations, too, but our major judgments should be future-oriented into the realm beyond history. There is no escape from making decisions in history, other than a severe, incapacitating mental disease, when the disease's victim becomes a ward of others. We exchange one set of conditions for another, decision by decision, as we move through time. We evaluate our present condition and imagine various possible future conditions. Then we decide which condition we should seek to achieve through our present actions. Individual decision-making involves making an overall self-assessment of our abilities and disabilities, our present assets, our plans for the future, and the nature of the challenge facing us. Then we allocate our scarce economic resources, including time, to fulfill our plans.

Paul recommends that we consider the likely outcome on judgment day of our present actions. This involves imagining the rewards that will come to us as a result of God's retroactive evaluation of our actions. We are to think God's thoughts after Him, in advance. This is possible only because covenant-keepers possess the mind of Christ. "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:15–16).⁶

The covenant-keeper is told to imagine God's final judgment: the

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

5. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

6. Chapter 2.

content of God's judgment rendered retroactively on his lifetime of individual labors. Theologians call God's judicial assessment and declaration *imputation*. The decision-maker also imputes. He imputes future value to his possible rewards, and he also imputes future value to the possible destruction of part or all of his legacy. He renders judgment in the present regarding the probable declaration of God on judgment day. Having made this evaluation, the covenant-keeper is supposed to act in the present in terms of this imagined future judgment. He should impute to the present the net value to him today of God's future retroactive imputation of value to his work. A person's assessment or imputation of value to the future must be acted upon in the present, day by day. Making a correct judgment in the present involves making a correct judgment regarding the future value of the results of present decisions. This future value will be imputed by God retroactively.

C. Imputation and Economics

To impute is to assess. The Greek work translated as "impute" comes from another Greek word meaning "to take an inventory." The longest section in Scripture dealing with imputation is found in Romans 4.

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was **counted** unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not **reckoned** of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is **counted** for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God **imputeth** righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not **impute** sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was **reckoned** to Abraham for righteousness (Rom. 4:3–9).

God will impute judicially on judgment day. He will take a retroactive inventory of each person's thoughts and actions in history. He will assess his permanent judicial status in terms of His law. Then He will declare His findings: "guilty" or "not guilty." Were it not for Christ's perfect substitutionary atonement, the declaration would universally be "guilty." This is the doctrine of imputation: *a judicial declaration by God*. But this judicial declaration is also economic, for

it assesses comparative value: wood, hay, and stubble vs. gold, silver, and precious stones.

Because each person is made in the image of God, he imputes value to things in the world around him. He assesses subjectively the value to him of whatever is the object of his decision. This includes comparing present subjective value to expected future subjective value. It also includes comparing its present market price to the market price of other resources. He then compares today's array of prices with tomorrow's expected array of prices. If he is wise, he then compares today's value with his expectation regarding God's retroactive assessment of today's value. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). This imputation process is subjective, but it is ultimately related to objective value: God's imputation. God's imputation of value is objective, for He is the absolutely sovereign Subject. *God's absolute sovereignty establishes objective value in history.* This is why economics, in order to be objectively true, must be grounded in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. If value theory is grounded solely on each individual's subjective valuations, then the objectivity of economic science dissipates into non-rational intuition.⁷

Price is not the same as value. A price is objective; value is subjective. A decision-maker estimates subjectively what the value to him of some resource is; then he checks its objective price. He then compares this price—what he must exchange in order to obtain legal control over the resource—with the price of other scarce resources. Then he asks himself: "What should I buy, if anything, in order to maximize my immediate subjective value?" His subjective decision is influenced by the objective array of prices. He seeks to minimize the objective price he must pay in order to obtain the subjective value he seeks.

People impute value to scarce economic resources. Then they make objective bids in order to obtain those resources that they expect will maximize their subjective value. The interplay of these objective bids is what we call the price system. These competitive, objective bids for ownership or temporary legal control over scarce resources produce an objective array of prices. *These bids do not create value.* On the contrary, the bids are the results of subjectively imputed value,

7. Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in Gary North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976).

decision-maker by decision-maker. Their competing bids establish objective prices.

To impute value correctly, the decision-maker must begin with an imaginative forecast regarding God's present and final retroactive imputation of value to the outcome of some decision facing the decision-maker. Imputed value has two aspects: value to the decision-maker and value to God with respect to building His kingdom. Needless to say, it is the second imputation that is authoritative, but both have eternal consequences.

D. Rival Scales of Value

Paul begins the epistle with a consideration of foolishness. Covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers have irreconcilable definitions of foolishness. What is considered wise by the covenant-breaker is considered foolish by the covenant-keeper, and vice-versa (1:18–25).⁸

Imputation requires standards. This is true of both judicial imputation and economic imputation. "Guilty" vs. "not guilty" is judicial; "valuable" vs. "worthless" is economic. There are rival standards of right and wrong. There are rival standards of valuable and worthless. The competition in history between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan is based, not on power, but on the objective results of the imputations and actions of each kingdom's covenantal agents in history.

Imputation begins with an individual's scale of values. These value scales are not morally neutral. There is no agreement among acting men regarding the authority of these rival scales of value. On the contrary, there is great disagreement. But, as we shall see, the disagreement is not total. There is some agreement, as a result of God's common grace to covenant-breakers.⁹ If there were no agreement, there could not be economic cooperation. There could be no division of labor.

There are rival scales of value that separate covenant-keepers from covenant-breakers, but certain features of the biblical system of covenantal sanctions do invite obedience to covenantal laws. Common grace involves common law and common sanctions. The creation is

8. Chapter 1.

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

under God's law and God's sanctions. This includes economic law. Moses wrote: "But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:4–8).¹⁰ For example, honesty is the best policy. Covenant-breakers generally perceive a predictable relationship between honesty (law) and success (sanctions) in history. This perception—this accurate judgment—on the part of sinners is why social order is possible in history.

The covenant-breaker seeks personal advantages that his presuppositions neither entitle him to nor enable him to attain. His presuppositions, when acted upon, lead to poverty and death. "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36). So, in order to gain his advantages, he must appropriate certain aspects of the biblical worldview, although stripped of their foundation: faith in God, Christ, and the power of the cross. God restrains the covenant-breaker in his pursuit of his God-denying, God-defying presuppositions. This is an aspect of common grace.

The covenant-breaker has a rival set of presuppositions and a rival set of ethics. His ethical values, if they conform to what the Bible teaches, are consistent with the attainment of success in history. He who serves customers effectively can become wealthy, despite his denial of God. Covenant-breakers see this economic success, and they are tempted to adopt the covenant-keeper's practices, so that they can also participate in the benefits—the positive sanctions—that obedience to God's law produces in history. The covenant-breaker is often willing to cooperate with covenant-keepers on the latter's ethical terms, for the sake of increasing his own wealth. If adherence to God's law did not lead to success in history, the covenant-breaker would have no incentive to obey God's law. But obedience to God's law does

0. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

produce success, and covenant-breakers see this. God's sanctions in history—point four of the biblical covenant¹—promote social cooperation.

Most Christian theologians and social theorists deny the existence of any New Testament correlation between covenant-keeping and visible success, and also between covenant-breaking and visible failure. They therefore have an obligation to explain the existence of social cooperation that is based on men's subjective agreement regarding the objective results of obeying or disobeying God's law. They generally invoke some version of natural law theory, which in the world of Darwinism, is no longer a persuasive argument. There are no fixed laws in Darwinism.

E. Making Godly Judgments

Free men are better capable of making accurate, responsible judgments regarding their lives than men in bondage are. This includes assessments regarding their service to God. Men are to assess their skills and their opportunities for serving God, and then match the two. They are supposed to seek out their most productive area of service to God. Then they are to accept this area of service as God's special call to them. This is what Paul calls the calling (I Cor. 7:20).¹²

Over time, covenant-keepers are supposed to increase their ability to perform their godly service. This means that they should experience increasing productivity over time. This principle of increasing productivity applies to the calling, and it also applies to a person's occupation. Increased performance is an aspect of a man's increased power of judgment. As covenant-keepers mature through on-the-calling training, they should become better able to understand and apply cause and effect (predictable sanctions) in history. They should be able assess more accurately the role of specific facts or opportunities before them in terms of general biblical principles. This is the art of casuistry. It is a nearly lost art today.

At some point in a man's life, old age intervenes. Men's performance may begin to falter. This was the problem faced by Barzillai. David asked him to come to Jerusalem with him. Barzillai declined on the basis of his age.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

2. Chapter 8.

Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man. And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee (II Sam. 19:32–37).

This indicates that there should be no abdication of the responsibility to make judgments until the infirmities of old age intervene. Covenant-keepers should continue to serve God for as long as they are capable. If they have selected their callings wisely, they can continue in them even after they are no longer capable of earning a living. Their lifetime service to God can continue. It is a great blessing to be able to continue to serve in old age. Caleb understood this, and he should be our model.

And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said. And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel (Josh. 14:10–14).

Sanctions and judgment are both aspects of point four of the biblical covenant model. Caleb had rendered accurate judgment, along

with Joshua, with respect to the weakness of the Canaanites (Num. 14). For this public testimony, God blessed both men publicly. They alone of their generation would go into the Promised Land, God said. God then blessed Caleb with vigorous long life. Caleb, in turn, accepted great responsibility, despite his age, when the conquest of Canaan began. Blessings and responsibility go together (Luke 12:47–48).¹³ So do blessings and good judgment.

F. Private Property

A customer owns property. With his property, he can make offers to purchase other forms of property. He makes offers because he has imputed economic value to his own property and then to the property of others. He has concluded that the item that the other person owns is more valuable subjectively to him than whatever he himself owns. Exchanges take place because of men's subjective imputations—"mine in exchange for yours"—and also their legal right to make bids.

A worker has legal title to his labor. He can exchange it or use it directly to satisfy his wants. The laborer is worthy of his hire (I Tim. 5:17–18). Because an ox has the right to eat from the field that it plows, so is the producer entitled to his output (I Cor. 9:7–10).¹⁴ Customers impute value to the fruits (output) of a worker's labor. They make objective competing bids to purchase this output. Producers expect this imputed value by customers to continue, so they expect to sell its output to customers later. These competitive bids by producers-employers establish labor's free market price, which is the price of labor's expected output. Buyers of labor will not pay more than the expected price of the worker's expected output, discounted by the interest rate. They are happy to pay less, but competition from other buyers of labor keeps the price high.

Legally, a worker owns his labor. He can legally refuse any offer to buy it from him. When he does, he thereby forfeits whatever he was offered in exchange, but he has the right to refuse to sell. If a person owns something, he possesses the right to disown it or keep it, as he sees fit.

It is the legal right to make offers or bids that establishes economic freedom. It also establishes the final earthly authority of the customer. His legal right to make an offer to buy imposes economic costs on

3. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

4. Chapter 11.

anyone who refuses to accept his offer. This is the customer's "hammer." This is the basis of his authority: legal and economic.

Paul's command to covenant-keepers to seek other people's benefits is a call to voluntary charity (I Cor. 10:24).¹⁵ The context of this command is Paul's prohibition against participation in ritual feasts on behalf of idols. The devils represented by idols are thieves and seducers. People who sacrifice to idols seek their own goals at the expense of those from whom devils will steal or will deceive. The opposite approach is God's way: self-sacrifice for others. This is why Jesus Christ voluntarily died on the cross. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

This principle of self-sacrifice, when coupled with the prohibition against ritual feasting, leads to a conclusion: godly people must not use stolen or confiscated wealth to sacrifice on behalf of others. Christians must not mimic devils. They must not use coercion by the state to gain access to wealth that is then transferred to others, even if the beneficiaries are poor and needy. To use the state to conduct coercive wealth transfers on behalf of any economically needy group is to adopt the way of Satan. It is to violate property rights in a fundamental way. It violates the eighth commandment: thou shalt not steal.¹⁶

This violation of property rights has taken place on a massive scale, accelerating in the West during the second decade of the twentieth century and escalating rapidly during and after World War I (1914–18). The West has established enormous inter-generational wealth transfers by means of compulsory retirement programs and compulsory medical insurance programs that benefit the aged. This has led to escalating taxation and the entrance of wives into the work force. Working wives bear fewer children, which reduces the growth of the work force, which reduces the future tax base, which leads to the actuarial bankruptcy of the state's compulsory retirement programs. This is a classic vicious circle. It threatens the solvency¹⁷ and therefore the legitimacy of Western civil governments.

The extension of the economic division of labor through capitalist ownership has made opportunities for employment available to

5. Chapter 12.

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 28.

7. Peter Peterson, *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America—And the World* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

women as never before in history. Capitalism has produced technology that has steadily equalized the productivity of men and women. This has created disruptions in the social order, especially in the family's hierarchy, but also in politics. Because of the increasing division of labor under capitalism, women have been able to enter the work force, a development which employers and tax collectors have applauded. Output has increased, but the ever-increasing employment opportunities of women have increased the cost—forfeited income—for wives who decide to stay out of the work force. Salaried wives have gained greater influence in the family, in the consumer goods markets, and in politics. This development has challenged the covenantal male-female hierarchy in the family.¹⁸

G. Full-Time Christian Service

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31). This admonition establishes an important principle of Christian economics: any form of lawful service to God can legitimately become part of a Christian's call into full-time Christian service. This is an aspect of a life of sacrifice. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).¹⁹ This sacrificial service involves eating and drinking. These seemingly common activities become uncommon through God's grace. They do not become sacramental, but they become holy: set apart by God.

The familiar distinction in modern pietism between full-time Christian service and that form of Christian service which pietists refuse to name is a false distinction. Pietists see full-time Christian service as almost exclusively ecclesiastical, i.e., tithe-supported. The kingdom of God in history they see as limited to churches and Christian families. But full-time Christian service is much broader than ecclesiastical employment or running a Christian household. It involves every aspect of life. Wherever sin reigns, there we find a task for Christians: to overcome sin and its effects through the preaching of the gospel and progressive sanctification, both individual and corporate. Christ's redemption is comprehensive. No area of life in which sin operates is off-limits to Christ's redemption. Wherever

8. Chapter 14.

9. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 7.

Christians labor to overcome sin and its effects, there we see an aspect of full-time Christian service. To declare any area of life as being irrelevant to full-time Christian service is necessarily also to declare this area of life as either sin-free or beyond the command of Christ to redeem it. Both statements would be so obviously heretical that pietists do not announce either of them, but one or the other conclusion is implied by their view of Christ's supposedly limited atonement, i.e., atonement only for souls, not for social policies, practices, and institutions. Such a view of redemption officially hands most of the world over to the devil.

H. The Division of Labor

In chapter 12, Paul develops at greater length a theme found in chapter 12 of his letter to Rome. He pictures the church as a body. Members of the church are members of a body. The word "members" applies to both. Church members are part of a whole. Some of them perform prestigious tasks; others perform lowly tasks. All of this is necessary to the proper functioning of the church. No church-enhancing service should be despised, either by the person performing it or by others, who are the beneficiaries of the service. Paul does not argue that there are no differences among tasks. He does not argue that services should be equally rewarded economically. On the contrary, he elsewhere says that ministers of the gospel are entitled to double honor. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17).²⁰ What he is saying in this passage is that, with respect to the legitimacy of work, all God-honoring work is equally legitimate.

Paul's discussion of services and servants in the church is analogous to the theological distinction between the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. The doctrine of the ontological Trinity expresses the equality of being among the three persons of the Godhead. The doctrine of the economical Trinity expresses the differences in function among the three persons of the Trinity. There is no hierarchy of divine being; there is a hierarchy of divine function. So it is within the church. There is an equality of legitimacy for all labor, yet also a hierarchy—inequality—of function.

0. Paul does not say this of "teaching elders," but of "ruling elders." This traditional Presbyterian distinction within the office of elder faces a serious difficulty with this verse. Paul identifies rulership as the basis of double honor.

The implications of Paul's presentation extend far beyond any local congregation. They extend to the church international. They apply to all institutions that serve a legitimate end. Paul affirms the dignity of all God-honoring labor. I know of no biblical passage that more forcefully affirms this principle.

The division of labor is extended most effectively when workers have respect both for the legitimacy of their work and its positive effects on others. People are more willing to sacrifice in the present in order to increase their performance and output in the future when they view their work as legitimate. This passage should be seen as complementing Paul's earlier command that people not change their callings in life, except for slaves who are offered their freedom (I Cor. 7:20–24).²¹ That command applies to men's highest service to God: the calling. This passage applies also to service to God, but it can and should be extended to people's occupations.

I. Eschatology and Capital Accumulation

Paul's discussion in chapter 15 regarding the last things (eschatology) applies the footstool theology of Psalm 110 to the future of Christ's earthly kingdom. Christ will subdue all of His enemies, including death. This process of subduing His enemies has to refer to history. The final removal of death has to refer to the end of history, because people will still die during the era that fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 65:17–20).²² Christians can therefore have legitimate confidence that their efforts to extend Christ's kingdom can bear permanent fruit, in time and on earth. Whatever they do today that is of value on behalf of God's kingdom will extend into the future: gold, silver, and precious stones. This time perspective we call future-oriented. Ludwig von Mises called it high time-preference.

Using a subjectively determined rate of interest, men discount the value of their expected future income. For example, an ounce of gold is worth more in the present than the secure promise of an ounce of gold in the future. This is because we are responsible to God in the present. The value of our lives and our capital is greater for us today than in the future because we can apply our lives and our capital to our callings and occupations today. *We are responsible to God for the use of our*

1. Chapter 8.

2. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15.

resources today. This immediate burden weighs heavily upon us. Jesus warned: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34).²³ Those people who subjectively value future income more highly than other people value it will act accordingly. They save a higher percentage of their income than less future-oriented people do. Men seek their subjective goals, and those who value future income more highly will sacrifice in the present more willingly than those who do not place equally high value on future income.

Christians who understand and accept the implications for history of Paul’s teaching in chapter 15—and very few ever have—see the future cultural success of Christ’s earthly kingdom as prophetically secure. They view their present sacrifices on behalf of God’s kingdom as contributing directly to the eventual triumph of Christ’s visible kingdom in history. They believe in a positive correlation between covenant-keeping and visible success. They place higher present value on these sacrifices than do those Christians who believe that either (1) Christ’s earthly kingdom will steadily lose influence culturally, and will in fact be ever-more under siege by victorious covenant-breakers (amillennialism); or (2) Christ’s earthly kingdom will steadily lose influence culturally, and will in fact be ever-more under siege by victorious covenant-breakers until Christ comes again in person to establish His millennial kingdom, thereby introducing a wholly new system of government, i.e., a new “economy” (premillennialism). The first view of the future predicts a falling rate of cultural return in history for any investment that Christians make in the kingdom. The second view does the same. Premillennialism teaches that only a future, discontinuous, supernatural reversal of today’s culturally futile kingdom-investment program—a future intervention which has nothing to do with today’s investment programs or today’s rate of saving—will reverse the kingdom’s falling rate of return. Both views confine their discussions of today’s manifestations of kingdom victory to inward spiritual experiences and the superior family values of an ever-declining percentage of the world’s population over time.

Only postmillennialism affirms a continuity of victory in history for Christ’s kingdom. Only postmillennialism fosters a theologically grounded optimism regarding the long-term growth of Christian

3. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 15.

capital that will compound over time, leading to the triumphant extension of Christ's kingdom institutions. Institutions must be funded, and this takes economic productivity. Postmillennialism affirms the inevitability of greater compound growth over time for covenant-keepers than for covenant-breakers. Compound growth over many generations, even at a very low a rate of growth, will outperform compound growth over three or four generations, even at a very high rate of growth. This is the implication of the second commandment. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:4–6).²⁴

Greater future-orientation produces higher rates of thrift. Higher rates of thrift produce greater capital investment: tools. Greater capital investment produces an extension of the division of labor: the specialization of production. Greater specialization of production produces a higher rate of output for resource inputs, especially labor, because workers are better able to match their specific skills with ever-more specialized employment opportunities. Greater output produces a higher rate of compound growth. This is another example of why eschatology matters. It matters a great deal.

J. Giving Wealth Away Systematically

Unlike humanistic theorists of economic growth, Paul taught that Christians must give away some of their wealth. Jesus taught this even more emphatically, as the Gospel of Luke emphasizes. Instead of re-investing all of their income above a minimal standard of living, Christians are supposed to allocate a rising percentage of their increasing income to charitable activities. This outlook was best articulated by John Wesley in his 50th sermon, *The Use of Money* (1745), based on Luke 16:9: "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Wesley concluded, in a famous aphorism, "Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch.22.

The Methodists taught this doctrine to the lower classes of England, not to the rich, who were not the targets of the movement's evangelistic program. Within three generations, Methodists both in England and the United States went from abject poverty to middle-class comfort.

Paul in chapter 16 calls on the Corinthians to adopt a program of making weekly contributions to the fund for the relief of the church at Jerusalem. He identifies systematic giving as the proper way to raise funds for large projects. Week by week, the Corinthians were to bring their offerings for the Jerusalem church and hand over the money to church officers. This was their reasonable service.

Conclusion

Paul's first epistle to the church at Corinth is judgmental. He brings judgment against the congregation. He also calls on the congregation to begin to exercise greater self-judgment in order to heal the congregation's divisions. This self-judgment had to involve the following:

1. their recognition of the unity of the church in Christ;
2. their awareness of rival standards of evaluation between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers;
3. their perception of personal rewards and punishment at the final judgment;
4. their devotion to living as stewards for God;
5. their excommunication of a public sinner;
6. their establishment of church courts;
7. their lifetime commitment to their individual callings before God (unless they are slaves who are granted their freedom);
8. their acceptance of the responsibilities of Christian liberty;
9. their adoption of hope regarding the fruits of their labor;
10. their understanding of the whole of their lives as the worship of God;
11. their willingness to serve their fellow-believers;
12. their willing subordination to the covenantal hierarchies of church and family;
13. their purging of bad practices during the Lord's Supper;
14. their development of the church's division of labor; and
15. their voluntary increase of sacrificial giving on behalf of the Jerusalem congregation.

He called on the church of Corinth to reform itself

comprehensively through self-judgment.

The primary issue confronting the church at Corinth was the issue of responsibility, both individual and corporate. The Corinthians were indulging in a massive corporate flight from responsibility. They had adopted some sort of common-ground speculation with covenant-breakers, ignoring the fact that the wisdom of one group is the foolishness of the other. Paul called them to abandon common-ground thinking in every area of life. This meant that they had to set up a church court, so that members would not go before pagan civil courts against one another. The institutional mark of their irresponsibility was their subservience to heathen civil courts in preference to a church court.

This is not a call for Christians to withdraw from social life. It is rather a call for them to work to reform social life, to reform and then incorporate all of social life within Christ's kingdom, in time and on earth. It is a call for Christians to establish alternative social institutions, such as church courts, in preparation for the guaranteed historical victory of Christ over His enemies in time and on earth. This victory will be achieved, not by Christ in person, but through His covenantal representatives. It will be achieved by means of the preaching of the gospel and the progressive sanctification, both individual and corporate, that is produced by this gospel in time and on earth.

APPENDIX A

A CRITIQUE OF HERETICAL PRETERISM

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant (Isa. 56:11–12).

Well, which will it be? Will evil-doers be cut off at the end of history, leaving Christians with the complete inheritance of the earth? In short, will there be a corporate final judgment at the end of the age that will end the effects of original sin on earth forever? Or, on the contrary, will evil-doers operate in history forever? The eschatological question is this: Is original sin eternal in history? The first position says *no*; the second says *yes*. Here are two irreconcilable views of the culmination of history and what will follow. Which one is correct?

A. The Universal Creeds

The church of Jesus Christ has always accepted the first view and has publicly denounced the second as heresy. The fourth century's three main creeds declared that there will be an end to evil and evil-doers at the end of history. God's final judgment will end the sin-cursed realm of nature, including the curse of sin in human nature. There will be a final separation of sinners and saints, goats and sheep. Sin will cease to be a factor in the world of the New Heaven and New Earth that follows God's final judgment. All of this has been so commonly believed among Christians for so long that there has been no debate over these tenets of the faith. But now there is.

1. *Denying the Creeds*

These fundamental eschatological precepts of the Christian faith are now being challenged by an unorganized group of creed-deniers who call themselves *full preterists*. One of them posted this statement on-line in July, 2001, in response to an early version of this appendix:

6. Are the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed incorrect when they identify Christ's final judgment of the living and the dead as being in the future?

Absolutely.

At the end of this essay, I reprint the man's appendix on why the creeds are wrong. But, for now, be aware that I am not exaggerating. The spokesmen of this heretical movement are aware of what they are doing. Their agenda is clear: the reversal of Christian orthodoxy and its replacement by dualism, i.e., the doctrine that sin and righteousness necessarily exist side by side in history, and history will never end. Put theologically, this is the doctrine that the Fall of man will be operational in history forever. Or, as Walt Hibbert wrote in a lengthy private response—now much longer²⁵—to my initial challenge,

God has already demonstrated for 2000+ years in history that he has chosen to use sin for the sanctification of his people, by allowing its presence on the earth to prepare His people for their entrance into Heaven after they physically die. Would that so-called final generation be treated soteriologically different from the way that He has graciously treated His people for 2000+ years? Would God abandon the sanctification process for that one final generation?

The correct answers to his rhetorical questions are *yes* and *yes*.

Before dealing exegetically with this position, it is wise to survey what the church has taught on the issue of God's final judgment from its beginning, and which was placed into the church's earliest official common creeds and the Reformed Presbyterian confessions.

2. *The Creeds' Affirmations*

The Nicene Creed says this about the final judgment by Jesus Christ:

5. Hibbert's essay is posted here: <http://tinyurl.com/2e7pu>

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

The Apostles Creed says this:

He ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the God the Father Almighty. From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The Athanasian Creed says this:

He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, and from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people will rise again with their own bodies to answer for their personal deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, but those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire.

It adds this warning: "This is the true Christian Faith. Whoever does not faithfully and firmly believe this cannot be saved."

In these formulations, God's final corporate judgment of both the resurrected living and the resurrected dead is said to take place in the future. It cannot have been an event in A.D. 70. This eschatological affirmation is denied by all heretical preterists.

This is the official eschatology of the Christian church. It has been so from the beginning, when the New Testament's texts were written. This view extended through the first three centuries of the church until the earliest creeds were formulated. The men who formulated the judicial statements that have defined the Christian faith institutionally had no doubt about what the New Testament teaches regarding the last days. The church has been clear for almost two millennia that anyone who denies these views is a heretic. Therefore he who denies this view of the future and who remains voluntarily as a member of the church is a subversive. He remains in the institutional church in order to undermine the Christian faith and steal God's church, as surely as Arius and his followers were subversives who were trying to capture the church for the devil.

3. The Protestant Reformation

We come now to the confessions in the Reformed Protestant tradition.

Article 37 of the Belgic Confession (1561), "Of the Last Judgment," says:

Finally we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty to declare himself judge of the quick and the dead; burning this old world with fire and flame, to cleanse it. And then all men will personally appear before this great judge, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trumpet of God. For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies, in which they formerly lived. As for those who shall then be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible, become incorruptible. Then the books (that is to say the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest: and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all. And therefore the consideration of this judgment, is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly, but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect: because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed and tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels. But on the contrary, the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honor; and the Son of God will confess their names before God his Father, and his elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates, as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God. And for a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory, as never entered into the heart of man to conceive. Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), chapter 33, says:

I. God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged; but likewise all persons, that have lived upon earth, shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

II. The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord: but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

III. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

The WCF teaches the following. First, this event is still in the future. Second, it will lead to the eternal assembling of all the saints: "For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord." Third, the fear of this future event should "deter all men from sin." The timing of this day is "unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come." There is an ethical aspect of this doctrine, which must be upheld by orthodox Christians.

The Westminster Assembly's Larger Catechism (1647) explicitly refers to the joining together of all the saints, which will occur at the time of the resurrection. Notice the reference to being caught up in the clouds. At that time, the transformed saints will judge the angels.

Question 90: What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment?

Answer: At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to

Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment.

This will be the unification of the saints: “perfect and full communion.” The church militant will disappear: “they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery.” The church triumphant will replace it entirely: “filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity.”

In summary, these detailed Reformation statements define the doctrine of the final judgment for Reformed denominations. While lay members are not required to affirm these statements as a condition of communicant membership, elders are so required. The elders of local congregations determine which beliefs are required for communicant membership. Some local congregations are loose in their enforcement of theology. Others are rigorous. But any congregation that allows non-ordained members to promote beliefs that run counter to the denomination’s formal statements of faith are thereby allowing those with a different confession to pursue their clandestine agendas at the expense of members who uphold the confessions.

Each church tradition has defining documents. These documents are used judicially to screen church officers. These documents are designed to be used judicially. Those people who oppose the theological contents of these screening devices are unofficially invited to keep out. Those who have achieved membership and who then adopt views counter to the denomination’s formal statement of faith should be officially told to cease speaking about their views or else leave the church voluntarily. If they refuse to stop and refuse to leave, then contumacy is involved. They can and should be tried for contumacy and removed from membership through public

excommunication.

When you think “screening,” think “Arius.” Had the early church not screened Arius and his followers by means of a judicially enforceable confession, Trinitarianism would not have prevailed. The church, had it survived, would now be some variant of the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Islam: unitarian. Heretics, once in power, know how to screen out their opponents, as the Arians demonstrated for two decades after the Nicene Creed was officially adopted (325). Athanasius was on the run for the rest of his life, because of his orthodoxy. But the defenders of the Nicene Creed had visibly triumphed by 381. We are the heirs of their triumph, a triumph based on excommunication and the formal screening of candidates for ordination.

Without sanctions, there is no law. *Without excommunication, there is no orthodoxy.*

Confessions of faith are an inescapable concept. It is never a case of confession of faith vs. no confession of faith. It is always a question of the content of the confession of faith and the people in charge of enforcing it.

B. Heresy Is a Reaction Against Orthodoxy

Heresies in the church begin as rival theologies, based on philosophies developed outside the church, and then are presented to the church as a new, improved orthodoxy. Alien philosophies of God, man, law, historical causation, and time and eternity are reworked to fit Scriptural terminology and concepts. They spread within the church as supposed clarifications of an original true Christianity. To remove these heresies from the church, theologians and pastors must first recognize them as alien imports. This is why J. Gresham Machen wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923): to identify the heresy of theological liberalism as an alien religion, the religion of sovereign, covenant-breaking man.¹

In this brief study, I identify the theological origin what is clearly a heretical version of what is known as preterism. Preterism argues that most, but not all, of the prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Heretical preterism argues that all of these prophecies were fulfilled in A.D. 70. Preterism is not

1. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), Part 3.

taught in any of the church's creeds or confessions, nor is it rejected. In contrast, the conclusions of heretical preterism are denied by the creeds and confessions. The more forthright of the heretical preterists admit this publicly.

In order to understand this heretical theology, the reader first needs to know where the heresy comes into conflict with orthodoxy. In two passages above all others in Scripture, the conflict becomes inescapable: I Corinthians 15 and Revelation 20.

Paul set forth the orthodox view of the final judgment in his account the Christ's second coming. He spoke of an inheritance that is closed to men in sinful flesh.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (I Cor. 15:50–55).²

Paul's discussion of the final judgment is the consummation of this epistle-long argument regarding judgment in general. He had pointed to the final judgment in chapter 3: "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (vv. 12–15). At the final judgment, every covenant-keeper's work will be judged retroactively by God. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (v. 15). But every person's work will be judged and rewarded accordingly.

First Corinthians 15 might be interpreted as referring only to heaven. John undermined this interpretation. Revelation 20 provides additional information regarding (1) the historical events that

2. Chapter 17.

immediately precede the final judgment, (2) the physical resurrection of the dead, and (3) the post-resurrection state of covenant-breakers.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7–15).

What is the first death, if the second death is the lake of fire? There is only one possibility: the physical death of each individual. Yet even here, there is a legitimate hope that it will be avoided by a few. Paul teaches elsewhere that at the final judgment, covenant-keepers who are alive at the time of Christ's bodily return will escape the first death.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (I Thes. 4:13–18).

Those who "sleep with Jesus" have passed through the first death

that separates history from heaven. They will accompany Jesus when He returns bodily in final judgment. Some people will be alive at the time when Christ returns with the trumpet and a shout. This will be no secret Rapture. This will be a public event—the most public event in the history of man. The dead in Christ will rise. This cannot mean “spiritually dead,” for in Christ, no one is spiritually dead. It refers to physical death. Those covenant-keepers who are still alive in their physical bodies will be caught up with the resurrected dead into the clouds.

C. Corruption and Incorruption

Paul teaches in I Corinthians 15 that those covenant-keepers who have not experienced what John would have called the first death, and who are therefore still burdened by sin and its curse, will join those covenant-keepers who return with Christ. For this to take place, they must be delivered from original sin and its curse, death. This will take place prior to their ascent into the sky. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (v. 52). This has to take place before the ascent because corruption cannot inherit incorruption. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (v. 53). This is Paul’s theme of inheritance in this chapter. Eschatology has to do with point five of the biblical covenant model: inheritance.³ Paul is speaking here of the nature of the covenant-keeper’s inheritance on judgment day. He will inherit incorruption. Whether he will subsequently receive rewards of gold, silver, and precious stones depends on God’s retroactive judgment of his work, but he will inherit incorruption, which begins with the transformation of his death-cursed physical body and his sin-ravaged soul.

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (vv. 45–55).

The theological issue here is the separate physical condition of what the English-language version of the Apostles' Creed calls the quick and the dead. Covenant-keepers are spiritually alive in history. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). But there is a difference between the celestial body, which covenant-keepers inherit at the time of their physical death, and the earthly body, which they must occupy in history. This difference cannot be bridged by sinful men, not even at the last trump. They must receive their celestial bodies before they can be joined with covenant-keepers who have already received their celestial bodies. The dead in Christ will rise first (I Thes. 4:16). All flesh is not the same flesh, and the two cannot mingle together.

But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the

heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption (vv. 38–50).

There can be and has been mingling in history between men and sin-free angels, but angels are not members of the church. They are not part of the bride of Christ (body of Christ), which the church is. There was also mingling between incorruption and corruption in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, but He was born of a woman by the Holy Spirit. He was God as well as a perfect man. God can mingle with sinful men.

A biblical example of mingling in history between sinful humans and a deceased saint is Samuel's appearance to Saul and the witch of Endor. Calling him up from the grave was a major sin on the part of Saul, and he lost his kingdom and his life the next day because of it. Samuel told him: "Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines" (I Sam. 28:19). The judgment on Saul was an extension of his sin. Saul and his sons would soon mingle with the dead. His family's kingly inheritance in Israel would end.

D. Church Militant and Church Triumphant

The difference between the church in history and the church in heaven has long been acknowledged in the two terms applied to the church's two branches. The church in history is called the church militant. The church in heaven is called the church triumphant.

The distinguishing feature between them is not spiritual warfare with Satan. It is not that the church in heaven has in some way been taken out of the spiritual battle against Satan. We know this because of what John records in Revelation 6:

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their

brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Rev. 6:9–11).

The saints in heaven remain in the fight against Satan, interceding with God on behalf of the church militant. In this context, “triumphant” refers to the heavenly church’s perfect victory over sin and corruption. Original sin no longer afflicts its members.

In contrast, the church in history is still afflicted with sin. It is still in the great ethical war against the kingdom of Satan. In heaven, the church has been transformed. Sin is no longer a problem. Incorruption has inherited incorruption in heaven. There is more to inherit, of course, for the bodily resurrection of all mankind still lies ahead. The final judgment lies ahead. “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (II Peter 3:7). The post-resurrection transformation of the world after the final judgment has not yet taken place (Rev. 21; 22). But, in heaven, there is a preliminary inheritance of incorruption, beginning with the church’s complete victory over sin, which is the inheritance that counts most in the warfare between good and evil. Jesus made this clear in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). The ability to do the will of God perfectly is the greatest inheritance of all.

Because those who occupy corrupt bodies cannot do the will of God perfectly, as those in heaven do it, which is why they are required to pray this prayer, the two realms of the church are separated by a great gulf. So also are heaven and hell, and for the same reason. The sinner in hell remains a sinner. There is no good remaining in him. Jesus revealed in his parable of Lazarus the beggar and the rich man that the spiritual gulf that exists after the first death is permanent.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to

us, that would come from thence (Luke 16:22–26).

The decisive issue here is original sin. Sin's presence and its curse afflict the soul: in history (all mankind) and in eternity (covenant-breakers). God does transform each covenant-keeper's sin-cursed soul, either at the first death, or, in the unique case of those still alive at the time of Christ's second coming at the final judgment, without any transition through the first death. Those covenant-keepers who will be graced by God by being alive at the time of Christ's Second Coming will be like Elijah: carried up into the sky without having to go into the ground or the sea in burial.

So, the terms "corruption" and "incorruption" refer to original sin and its effects. The word "corruption" refers both to men in history and covenant-breakers in eternity. In neither case can corruption inherit incorruption. Sin's great gulf separates covenant-keepers from their incorrupt inheritance until after the first death. Everything good which they possess in history is an earnest, or down payment, on their future inheritance.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (II Cor. 1:21–22).

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord (II Cor. 5:4–8).

Will all of the members of God's church ever celebrate together in a joint victory over sin? Put another way, will there be any time in history when all covenant-keepers will be able to mingle together in a joint operation? The answer is *no*. A great gulf separates them sin-cursed covenant-keepers from sin-free covenant-keepers. So, if there is ever to be sin-free fellowship by all members of the church, then original sin's presence and its curse must be removed entirely.

E. Final Judgments in Matthew 25

Matthew 25 contains two parables and a prophecy. The parables are specific. They describe the kingdom of heaven. This means that they describe a single corporate entity which is still in existence. They tell of judgment: a final reckoning or accounting. The third section of the passage, the prophecy of the sheep and the goats, does not mention the kingdom. The expositor's task is to keep these categories straight. There is one common theme: final judgment.

1. The Parable of the 10 Virgins

The first parable presents the story of the bridegroom who comes in judgment.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh (Matt. 25:1–13).

Christ used a variation of the phrase, "I know you not," in the same eschatological context—final judgment—in another passage. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:21–23).

Both of these passages can be applied to God's judgment on Old Covenant Israel, which was final. The question is: Must this be their

exclusive application? The kingdom of heaven in Matthew refers to the kingdom of God in history. The Old Covenant order still was part of God's kingdom in Christ's day. There will be final judgment, Jesus taught. The final judgment on Old Covenant Israel, which was still in the future when Christ spoke these words, took place at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The final judgment on the church will be the final judgment at the end of time. Wise virgins keep oil in their lamps. Unwise virgins do not. The latter will be caught short, Christ taught. This warning applied to Old Covenant Israel. Because the kingdom is still operating in history, it will also apply to self-deceived church members at the end of time. At the final judgment, there will be self-deceived people who have run out of oil.

The parable of the 10 virgins pictures a kingdom in which half the participants are on duty, and the other half are not. This applies to the church and Old Covenant Israel. Jesus was warning His listeners, who included representatives of both branches of the kingdom during the era of transition, that they should remain faithful, alert, and on the job. At the fall of Jerusalem, judgment came on members of the half associated with Old Covenant Israel. The other half survived, because they had paid attention to Christ's words in Matthew 24 (Luke 21). Their survival meant that they possessed exclusive title to the kingdom of God, just as Christ had warned the Jews: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

The term "kingdom" applied in Jesus' day to both the New Covenant church and Old Covenant Israel. It no longer does. It now applies only to the church. This means that the parable of the 10 virgins now applies exclusively to the church. It indicates that within the church on the final day of judgment that will end Satan's kingdom, there will be unprepared church members who will be caught short. There will be covenant-breakers within the church at the final judgment. Original sin will still be a problem. This parable describes the kingdom of heaven, which still operates in history. Thus, we should conclude that its warning still applies to history. There will be an unexpected day of corporate reckoning. Keep oil in your lamp.

2. A Long Journey and a Final Accounting

The next parable in Matthew 25 presents the story of a rich man who leaves a great deal of gold behind for his workers to invest. This

indicates a long period of stewardship. The Greek text does not mention the kingdom. The translators inserted the phrase on the assumption—reasonable—that this parable also describes the kingdom. Again, Jesus was telling His disciples to be diligent workers. This warning applies to every Christian throughout history. That it also applied to the Jews in Jesus' day is equally true. Their long time of testing was about to end. They were about to be forced to give an account of their stewardship. The kingdom was about to be taken from them and transferred to the church.

In the parallel version in Luke, this information is added. "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). The king brings final judgment against them: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). In Luke's version, the poor steward is not said to be cast into outer darkness, as the servant in Matthew is (Matt. 25:30). What little he had was taken from him and given to the most profitable servant (Luke 19:24). Jews literally died in A.D. 70. In the future final judgment, covenant-breakers will die the second death. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15).

In both versions of this parable, the profitable servants receive rewards based on their prior performance. "His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). "And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over 10 cities (Luke 19:17). This testifies to an extension of life on earth. Their venue does not change. What they have achieved in history will lead to greater authority and therefore greater responsibility in a post-judgment world. This testifies to a post-resurrection world that will have continuity with this one, but without the presence of evil-doers: a major discontinuity. With respect to the final judgment on Old Covenant Israel, the church inherited everything associated with the kingdom. In the post-resurrection world, the church will inherit the earth, which will then become co-extensive with God's kingdom.

What was final for Old Covenant Israel in A.D. 70 was at the same time the beginning of the church's exclusive monopoly of title for the

kingdom of God/heaven. The inheritance of Old Covenant Israel in A.D. 70 was passed exclusively to the church. This kingdom still operates in history. The progressive extension of the kingdom by the church is described in the parable of the rich man: his departure, his long journey, and his return. The next accounting will be final. It will end the long period of history that the Bible defines as the kingdom of God/heaven.

With respect to the church, the time was short before the judgment came on Old Covenant Israel. Yet this parable speaks of a ruler who goes on a long journey. This indicates that Jesus looked ahead and saw two judgments: on Old Covenant Israel, as the culmination of its long period of poor stewardship, and the final judgment, as the culmination of the church's long period of stewardship.

3. Sheep and Goats Assembled, Yet Separated

Next comes something very different from the two kingdom parables. The final section of Matthew 25 deals with the final judgment at the end of time: the sheep and the goats. This passage is not limited to the kingdom of God. What it describes is a general judgment.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (vv. 31–34).

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (v. 41).

The goats here are corporately separated from the sheep. Why? Paul tells us why in I Corinthians 15, which also declares an absolute separation: celestial bodies vs. terrestrial bodies, spiritual bodies vs. natural bodies, incorrupt bodies vs. corrupt bodies. They will never mingle. This prohibition on mingling applies to the sheep. When God finally judges sin and its effects, he will bring together all of the

members of His church, but none of them will be in a terrestrial body. This is why all covenant-keepers who are alive at Christ's second coming will have their bodies changed before they meet the returning saints from heaven. With respect to the goats, there is separation from the sheep because sin and its effects are still with the goats. They will not receive purified bodies and souls at the resurrection, for Christ's perfect humanity was not imputed to them by God in history. Their moral corruption extends into eternity. Therefore, they cannot mingle with the sheep. The wall of separation will be maintained throughout eternity, just as it is maintained between heaven and hell today.

To argue that sin-cursed covenant-keepers and sin-free covenant-keepers can operate jointly, either in heaven or in history, is to deny what Paul and Christ clearly taught regarding this mandatory separation. This is a major argument against any version of popular premillennialism which teaches that heavenly saints will return to rule in history alongside sin-burdened saints. (The professionally trained theologians of the dispensational movement, such as J. Dwight Pentecost,⁴ have fully understood this and have taught against any "mixed multitude" of saints during the millennium.) But there is a related heresy, as we shall see. To argue in favor of the permanent separation, but then to conclude that the church must be separated throughout eternity into two parts—celestial and terrestrial—because the church militant will always coexist with the church triumphant, is to deny the final judgment's bringing together of both branches of the church through the discontinuous transformation of the pre-first death members of Christ's bride: from corruption into incorruption. This eschatology—really, an anti-eschatology (no last things)—denies the literal historical fulfillment of Paul's prophecy regarding the future resurrection of the sin-free physical bodies of the saints, who have died the first death in Christ, to be joined with their sin-free souls returning to earth from heaven. It also denies the future transformation from corruption to incorruption of the bodies and souls of living and breathing covenant-keepers at the time of Christ's coming at the final judgment.

There were two final judgments in Christ's teachings: the one that ended the Old Covenant order in A.D. 70, and the other that will end

4. "Thus the millennial age will be concerned only with men who have been saved but are living in their natural bodies." J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Relation between Living and Resurrected Saints in The Millennium," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 117 (Oct. 1960), p. 341.

Satan's kingdom in history. The two parables in Matthew 25 were therefore warnings to the Jews, but also still serve as warnings to Christians. The still unfulfilled prophecy of the sheep and the goats refers to covenant-keepers in general and covenant-breakers in general. Old Covenant Israel has nothing to do with it.

F. Heretical Preterism

Preterism is an interpretation of biblical prophecies that argues that many, but not all, of the New Testament's prophecies of judgment were fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the Roman army's destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the defeat of Israel's rebellion. This interpretation has been around for centuries. It is generally associated with postmillennialism, but there is nothing in preterism that cannot be accepted by amillennialists. It is because J. Marcellus Kik's short books, *Revelation 20* and *Matthew 24*, revived interest in preterism a generation ago that postmillennialism is closely associated with this view. Kik was a postmillennialist, and so was R. J. Rushdoony, who encouraged the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company to publish Kik's two short books in one paperback, *An Eschatology of Victory* (1971). It is quite possible for an amillennialist to hold classic preterism, just as C. Vanderwaal does.⁵

Classic preterism argues that the key to understanding the prophecies of Matthew 24 is verse 34: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Everything prior to this verse was fulfilled by the fall of Jerusalem. In contrast, the separation of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 has always been seen by the church as referring to the final judgment. Heretical preterism contends that Matthew 25 is governed by the prophetic time frame of Matthew 24:34. Indeed, all New Testament prophecy is said to be governed by this verse. As heretical preterist J. Stuart Russell asked rhetorically in 1878, "What can be more comprehensive and conclusive than our Lord's words, 'Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled?'"⁶ The point is, this passage is not comprehensive. It applies to the events described in Matthew 24, but we may not legitimately assume that it covers

5. C. Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* (Neerland, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, [1978] 1991).

6. J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, new edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, [no date] 1983), p. 545.

every eschatological passage in the New Testament, which is what heretical preterists assume and then attempt to prove. In this attempt, they wind up in one of two camps: dualism or perfectionism-Pelagianism, as we shall see.

A dualist believes in the eternality of evil. There will be no final judgment in history. There will never be a time in history when men are free from sin. History, cursed by sin, is eternal. It operates side-by-side heaven. The New Heavens and New Earth will always be sin-cursed. Satan's successful entrapment of Adam will have its effects throughout eternity. God will never overcome sin in history.

Heretical preterism is an interpretation of biblical prophecies that argues that all of the New Testament's prophecies of judgment were fulfilled in A.D. 70. To argue that all of the prophecies concerning God's final judgment were fulfilled in A.D. 70 is to take a public stand against Paul's teaching regarding the final inheritance of incorruption only by incorruption. It is also to reject the historic creeds of the church. The heretical preterists deny the creeds of the church on this point, which is why they are heretical ecclesiastically. They deny Paul with regard to the final overcoming of sin in history—the full inheritance of incorruption by incorruption—which is why they are heretical theologically. They proclaim “full preterism,” which denies the full inheritance of incorruption in the future. Corruption must remain the permanent incomplete inheritance of the church militant.

Because heretical preterists believe that God's final judgment is behind us historically—A.D. 70—most of them (probably all of them) also believe that sin is eternal. Sin is with the church today in this, the supposedly post-final-judgment world. They insist that there is no future eschatological event that will transform this world. “What we see now is what we Christians will get in history forever.” There is therefore no hope of deliverance from sin in history, and no hope of deliverance from history for the church militant. Because preterism is not necessarily postmillennial, this position can be interpreted as teaching that the church militant will suffer ever-more grievously at the hands of covenant-breakers in history, which will never end. Surely, it means at least this: there must forever be a separation between the church militant and the church triumphant. The Lord's Prayer will never be answered: “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10b). Heaven's perfection is forever denied to history, which is infinite in duration. The church militant must forever struggle with sin and its effects. Satan's work of treachery in the garden will

never be finally and completely overcome.

There are two ways to affirm this heretical position in the name of Christianity. First, deny that Satan is ever fully judged and cut off from history. Second—and this is the heretical preterist's position—affirm that Satan was finally judged in A.D. 70, but sin lives on in mankind in history, which is eternal. That is, sin has been forever cut off from any connection with Satan and his fallen angels, and is forever part of history. Thus, the following is no longer the case:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:11–12).

Supposedly, Christians since A.D. 70 have been at war, not with principalities and powers, but only with their own independent sinfulness. Satan and the principalities have been out of the picture. This theological position was affirmed in a private letter to me by a predestinarian who adopted heretical preterism a decade ago. The author, Walt Hibbert, later put an expanded version on the Web. On page 12 of his 16-page paper dated August, 2001, he wrote the following: "Since Satan, therefore, was cast into the lake of fire at A.D. 70, giving the Lord complete victory over him, he is not a force to be reckoned with, either by the Church Militant or the Church Triumphant, since that time." He even quotes Walt Kelley, the cartoonist who put these words in Pogo Possum's mouth: "We have found the enemy, and it is us!" Walt Kelley was funny. Walt Hibbert is not.

Sin is eternal in this man's view. There will never be a final overcoming of sin in history or eternity, for history is coterminous with eternity. Responding to me (in this instance, accurately), he wrote: "He [North] demands a visible manifestation of sin being completely removed from the earth. He obviously is looking for an extreme literal fulfillment of this covenantal concept of deliverance from sin. The Scripture teaches otherwise" (p. 12). This is the heresy of dualism, pure and simple. He is clearly no perfectionist. He is therefore a dualist. This heretical preterist insists that death will reign in history forever. In effect, he answers Paul's rhetorical question "O, death, where is thy sting?" with this: "Forever."

But what of the final judgment? A myth, he says. "The phrase 'final

judgment' does not appear in Scripture." My response to this bit of sophistry is simple: neither does the word "Trinity."

This view of history and eternity stands in opposition to what every branch of the Trinitarian church has taught throughout recorded history. This man knows this and is proud—immensely proud—of it. He responds to my defense of the creeds as follows:

Our author definitely makes it clear where his supreme authority lies. It's not the Bible; it is the historic creeds that are really his final authority. . . . The cry of some pseudo-preterists seems to be best expressed in the words: "Abandon Sola Scriptura—back to Rome.

This man is a sophist, and not a very skilled one. The creeds that I have cited are fourth-century creeds. Any orthodox Christian who defends the Trinity goes to them. Is this "back to Rome"? No; it is back to ecclesiastical orthodoxy. There is no institutional orthodoxy without creeds. This man, in the name of Calvin and the Reformation, throws out Nicea because he knows that it brands him and his fellows as heretics. He also abandons the Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession, in the name of Reformed Presbyterianism (which he claims to represent). *This is subversion*. Mark it well.

Until recently, the heretical nature of their position has been downplayed by the system's own public defenders. They have preferred, for tactical and perhaps personal psychological reasons, to avoid discussing the obvious implications of their position. If they enthusiastically and continually declared their view of history as sin-cursed forever, they would eventually be excommunicated. Their main spokesmen have preferred to avoid this. But now a few of them are growing bolder than the more cautious founders, as late-arrival heretics eventually do. They will force the hand of the leaders, just as my original essay forced their hand. That was my original intent: to force a few of them to defend their heresy forthrightly in public. Now one of them has, on-line. For this, I am grateful. May his colleagues have equal courage. David Green responded in July, 2001. I reproduce his answers, word for word, at the end of this essay. When you read them, you will know why I have called for the excommunication of anyone who persists in defending these views.

If these people do get excommunicated, they will have to fund their own churches with their own money. This is as it should be. They should not redefine the meaning of common words in Scripture in order to make their secret, "insiders-only" positions seem more

acceptable to naive church members who have not examined the details of their system. They should all forcefully say in public that the historic creeds are wrong and therefore not binding on them as church members. They should have the courage to challenge the elders in their congregations to publicly abandon or rewrite both the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. It is time for heretical preterists to come clean in public and confidently declare their belief in the eternal separation of the church militant and the church triumphant, challenging all of their theological opponents to refute them, to excommunicate them if they dare. To do less than this is to substitute a strategy of subversion for open theological discussion. It is time for them publicly to answer Paul's rhetorical question, "O death, where is thy sting?" with the only answer that is consistent with their system: "In history and forever."

The implications of this position are numerous. First, God will never bring history to a close; thus, good and evil will battle for the minds and souls of men eternally. Second, because corruption cannot inherit incorruption, as most heretical preterists acknowledge when pressed, the continuity of corruption in history makes impossible any inheritance of perfection in some post-resurrection New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22). The only New Heaven and New Earth that Christians will ever obtain in their physical bodies is an extension of what Christians experience now. Third, Paul's promise of the eschatological transformation of the creation at the final judgment (I Cor. 15:24–25, 42–50) is seen as applying not to the creation but to the individual's transformation at death. Corruption in history is eternal. Terrestrial bodies will occupy the earth for as long as celestial bodies praise God in heaven. Fourth, covenant-breakers possess equally valid eschatological claims to the earth as covenant-keepers do. The tares will occupy the field of history eternally, right alongside the wheat. Matthew 13 will never come to pass as the end of history: "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 40–42).

Anyone who equates the fulfillment of this prophecy with A.D. 70 has broken with the historic faith of the church. Such a view stands out most clearly in its rejection of the post-resurrection fulfillment of verse 43: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the

kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Heretical preterists refuse to hear.

Sometimes heretics help us to hear more clearly. They pressure us to do our homework. One place to begin is a book edited by Keith Matheson, *When Shall These Things Be?*, which is published by P&R Books. But the following ought to be sufficient.

G. The Deviant Theology of J. Stuart Russell

When a pastor discovers that someone in his congregation believes what the member calls full preterism, it would be wise for the pastor to devote several sermons to refuting the heretical version of preterism, most notably the views of J. Stuart Russell. Russell’s book is a common, agreed-upon source for contemporary proponents of heretical preterism. If the member can be made to say to the elders, “But I don’t believe what Russell taught,” the elders will have left the member theologically defenseless. To refute Russell is to refute the theological foundation for modern heretical preterism, at least in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. It is not worth your time to interact with numerous epigone who have adopted Russell’s theology. They want you to interact with them. Interaction appears to give them credibility. I recommend that you forego the opportunity. As the old saying goes, “you don’t need to eat all of a rotten apple to know it’s rotten.” Once you refute Russell, you have refuted his followers.

Russell taught that the parable of the 10 virgins refers exclusively to the imminent fall of Jerusalem. He also taught that the separation of sheep and goats described in Matthew 25 refers exclusively to this event. “The parables of the ten virgins, the talents, and the sheep and the goats all belong to this same event, and are fulfilled in the judgment of Israel.”⁷ Also fulfilled in A.D. 70 was the bodily resurrection of the dead, he said. “The resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the world, and the casting out of Satan are represented as coincident with the Parousia, and near at hand.”⁸ Here is his general principle of prophetic interpretation:

We have in these passages another new phrase in connexion with the approaching consummation, which is peculiar to the Fourth Gospel. We never find in the Synoptics the expression ‘the last day,’ although we do find its equivalents, ‘that day,’ and ‘the day of

7. Russell, *Parousia*, p. 140.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

judgment.' It cannot be doubted that these expressions are synonymous, and refer to the same period. But we have already seen that the judgment is contemporaneous with the 'end of the age' (sonteia ton aiwnoj), and we infer that 'the last day' is only another form of the expression 'the end of the age or Aeon.' The Parousia also is constantly represented as coincident in point of time with the 'end of the age,' so that all these great events, the Parousia, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, and the last day, are contemporaneous. Since, then, the end of the age is not, as is generally imagined, the *end of the world*, or total destruction of the earth, but the close of the *Jewish economy*; and since our Lord Himself distinctly and frequently places that event within the limits of the existing generation, we conclude that the Parousia the resurrection, the judgment, and the last day, all belong to the period of the destruction of Jerusalem.⁹

1. *Heresy by Stealth*

Russell's book is an example of *heresy by stealth*, assuming that he believed in the doctrine of original sin. By relegating to A.D. 70 all of the New Testament's passages that relate to the final judgment, Russell implicitly introduced a variant of dualism: the eternality of evil as a force in history. I can well understand why he refused to put his name on the first edition of his book in 1878.¹⁰ He wanted to "test the waters" before he identified himself in public. Why else would he insist that his book be published anonymously, the same way that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848.

Given the fact of original sin, which is permanent in corrupt mankind, Russell's eschatology is dualistic, but he moves his disciples to this position by default. As a result of his theology, they initially decide what they do *not* believe about eschatology—the final, comprehensive, worldwide inheritance of incorruption by incorruption—but they rarely publicly announce what they, by default, *must* believe about the future: an eternal conflict between good and evil. Russell was as subtle as a serpent, for he held the formal theology of the serpent: the eternality of the historical kingdom of Satan.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

2. Dualism

Russell's language at the end of his book indicates that he was a postmillennialist. He was not. He was a dualist. If he was not a dualist, then he was a perfectionist and a Pelagian. Some perfectionists teach that a sinner can overcome original sin through self-discipline under God. Others teach that perfection is attained at the time of regeneration—not merely Christ's perfect moral status imputed to him legally, but His perfect moral status worked out historically. Pelagianism teaches that, in theory, some people need not ever sin at all, from womb to tomb.

Russell began the final section of his book with a crucial admission: the Bible is silent regarding the future of history. For him, the Bible is silent about eschatology—the last things—because all New Testament prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70. He writes: "Here we might pause, for Scripture prophecy guides us no further."¹ He spoke of history as if it were open-ended eschatologically—the essence of dualism in a world where original sin exists. His next sentence is important in this regard: "But the close of the aeon is not the end of the world, and the fate of Israel teaches us nothing respecting the destiny of the human race."² He was wrong. Christ's corporate judgment of the Old Covenant order in A.D. 70 teaches Christians to expect a future corporate judgment of the whole world. After a long period, from Abraham's call until A.D. 70, Christ returned to require a final accounting from that nation which had long possessed the kingdom of God. At that time, He transferred His kingdom to the church (Matt. 21:43), which is now an international institution, a new nation. He will come again in judgment to require a final corporate accounting from His people and from all mankind, as John taught in Revelation 20:12–15.

Russell continued: "Whether we will or no, we cannot help speculating about the future. . . ." Here he identified all statements about the church's future as mere speculation. This was because his hermeneutic applies all biblical prophecy to A.D. 70. There is supposedly nothing left over to guide Christians or the church regarding the future. *For the brief remainder of the book, he cited not one passage that deals explicitly with prophecy.* How could he? He had already squandered exegetically on A.D. 70 the church's eschatological

1. *Ibid.*, p. 549.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 549.

inheritance. So, he speculated. What he proposed bore a superficial resemblance to postmillennialism's view of the future. But a postmillennialism that is stripped of all Bible passages relating either to prophecy or to eschatology—last things—is merely a disguised importation into the church of either the late nineteenth century's pop-Darwinian ideal of moral progress or else perfectionism-Pelagianism.

Russell then invoked the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10b). He commented: "For every God-taught prayer contains a prophecy, and conveys a promise."¹³ Indeed, it does. This corporate prayer ("our Father," not "my Father") asks for corporate perfection: life on earth will someday be as sin-free as life in heaven. It asks for a world in which the church militant will follow the will of God on earth with the same success as the church triumphant does now. This can be achieved in only one way: by completely removing sin from the world. *The church militant must be transformed into the church triumphant.* This will be done discontinuously, Paul taught: in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor. 15:52). Perfection for sinful man can never be the culmination of the compound growth of righteousness over sin in history. Man is burdened by original sin. The effects of original sin are in his very being. Moral corruption is a permanent condition in every man in history, Paul taught (Rom. 7). It can be overcome only by the discontinuous intervention of God: either at the individual's death or at the last trump. In history, no person can ever escape this limitation: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). The perfectionist denies this, which is why he is a heretic.¹⁴

Russell denied that there will be a last trump. There will be no final corporate transformation of the church militant. The church militant is eternal, as far as the Bible tells us, if we apply every passage dealing with final judgment to A.D. 70. Russell imported an alien imitation of postmillennialism to match his alien concept of *time without end*. He wrote: "The true implication of New Testament prophecy, instead of leaving us in darkness, encourages hope. It relieves the gloom which hung over a world which was believed to be destined to perish. There is no reason to infer that because Jerusalem was destroyed the world

3. *Ibid.*, p. 553.

4. B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1931] 1958).

must burn; or, because the apostate nation was condemned, the human race must be consigned to perdition. All sinister anticipation rests upon an erroneous interpretation of Scripture; and, the fallacies being cleared away, the prospect brightens with a glorious hope.”¹⁵ Some hope: the ethical progress of the church militant in history, with no prospect of a discontinuous deliverance from the curse of death, or deliverance from the burden of original sin, or the final victory of God over His covenantal enemies in history. Some hope: the eternity of original sin and its curses in history.

Unless. . . Unless Russell did not believe in original sin. He ended his book on this upbeat note: “This world belongs no more to the devil, but to God. Christ will redeem it, and will recover it, and draw all men unto him.”¹⁶ This may mean progressive sanctification without final sanctification, i.e., the permanence of residual sin forever: a heresy (dualism). If it does not mean this, then it must mean absolute perfection in history: a heresy (perfectionism). It would therefore mean that Christians can escape original sin in history: a heresy (Pelagianism).

Russell was not a postmillennialist, despite a superficial resemblance. He was either a happy-face dualist or else a perfectionist-Pelagian. Whichever he was, he was heretical, and not just a little heretical. He stood in defiance of the church’s creeds and confessions on the question of the final judgment, and in doing so, he adopted either an implicit dualism or else multiple explicit heresies that deny the permanence of original sin in history.

This is always the reality of heresy. You cannot limit heresy to just one. To adopt one forces you to adopt others. Russell’s official heresy was his denial of the final judgment. He chose not to name his accompanying heresy (dualism) or heresies (perfectionism-Pelagianism), but they are inevitable implications of his system nonetheless.

Russell’s modern disciples can successfully refute my accusation that he was a dualist only by arguing that he was a perfectionist and a Pelagian. This will do them little good if they are brought to trial in churches that adhere to the teachings of John Calvin. (Lutheranism’s official amillennialism is sufficient to condemn them in Lutheran churches.) If they are found to be promoting heretical preterism in a Presbyterian church, they will find no theological support for any

5. Russell, *Parousia*, pp. 551-52.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 553.

denial of their dualism by an affirmation of perfectionism-Pelagianism. On the other hand, if they are not perfectionists or Pelagians, then they are dualists. Take your pick.

I pick dualism for them. This is because I see Russell's theology as offering an indefinite extension of time to Satan and/or Satan's legacy to man: original sin. Russell says that the world belongs to God. So what? God has always owned the world. Original sin is nevertheless a force that can be overcome in men only by God's discontinuous translation of their bodies: terrestrial bodies into celestial. Only if Russell did not believe in original sin—and on this, he was silent—was he not a dualist.

If he was not a dualist, then the two key theological questions regarding his theology are these. First, on what theological basis can any Christian argue that original sin will be completely removed in history? Second, how much time has God allotted to history, i.e., the realm in which original sin operates, and the church militant struggles continually to overcome sin progressively? It is clear that Russell denied any future, final, and *discontinuous* corporate judgment of the world by God. He was therefore unquestionably heretical—a man who was wise initially to publish his book anonymously. It is clear that he also denied any future, final, and *discontinuous* corporate deliverance of the church militant from the bondage and curse of original sin. He was therefore unquestionably heretical.

His disciples now have the moral responsibility of deciding which of his possible heresies to accept by remaining his disciples: either dualism or a combined package of perfectionism-Pelagianism. There is no orthodox theological way out for any follower of Russell who affirms the doctrine of original sin. By adopting Russell's theory of world history without a final corporate judgment, but also without Russell's perfectionism and Pelagianism, he must affirm dualism: a world without end and also without deliverance from sin. This view grants to Satan what the creeds and confessions deny: influence in history forever.

I recommend demanding an immediate public recantation and personal repentance of Russell's theology. Barring this, I recommend the heretic's excommunication by his church's judicial body. But an excommunicant always retains his liberty of conscience. He has his choice among several possible Russellite heresies. Russell was a very creative theologian. He offered so many ways for his followers to drift into heresy! The elders should allow the accused member to identify

the heresy for which he is then excommunicated.

Russell is typical of most one-shot theological heretics. He took his stand against the entire church, wrote one book, and let it go at that. But, in theology as in everything else, *you cannot change just one thing*. You cannot revise just one doctrine. Trinitarian theology after almost two millennia is a finely honed, carefully balanced enterprise. Orthodox theologians know that when anyone revises a single doctrine, even at the edges, a whole host of fall-out effects will result. An innovating theologian has an obligation to explore these unintended and unforeseen implications and deal with them before he releases his new discovery to the church.

Russell rejected the doctrine of final corporate judgment. He wrote a narrowly focused monograph that promoted the obviously heretical position of “no final corporate judgment and no end of history,” and then he abandoned his naive disciples to take the consequences for defending his thesis. His thesis immediately raised the issue of dualism vs. Pelagianism, but he provided no indication in his book that he recognized either implication. He did not try to deal with these issues exegetically or philosophically.

He initially published his book anonymously. This indicates that he recognized at least some of the personal risks in proposing such a creed-defying thesis. Most of his followers have not been equally alert to these risks. They have committed themselves emotionally and intellectually to a ticking time bomb. Russell’s book makes subversives out of his disciples. As awareness spreads among church officers regarding the dangerously heretical nature of his theology, only a few of his followers will avoid the accusation of being subversives by becoming frontal-assault kamikazes who are willing to go public in defense of his position. As laymen without any institutional base, such members can be dealt with easily enough. The subversives in the churches are the main threat. They are termites of orthodoxy.

I. The Structural Necessity of Subversion

Because heretical preterists oppose the historic creeds and confessions of the church, they have an institutional problem. Their spokesmen have only rarely been ordained as church officers. There is no good reason for a heretical preterist to seek ordination in any denomination that is governed by the historic creeds or by a Reformation-era confession. As soon as he announced from the pulpit

or in print his views on the final judgment, he would be subject to formal de-frocking. Few men will spend the time and money necessary for ordination in a hierarchical, creed-bound church in order to be publicly de-frocked soon after he articulates his most precious distinguishing truths. What would be the point?

This makes the heretical preterist movement of necessity a permanent movement of laymen. These laymen recognize early that they will spend their lives in the wilderness, ecclesiastically speaking. They have come to grips with this emotionally; they remain in orthodox churches. *They see themselves as **ecclesiastical spoilers** of other men's institutional legacies, not as long-term builders of their own.* The means of their spoilation is clandestine evangelism among the faithful. They seek to recruit other laymen to a "new, improved" theology that breaks with almost two millennia of creedal tradition on the doctrine of the final judgment. Their theological position is not taught in any seminary. It is not found in any systematic theology. It is not the product of decades or centuries of formal debate and refinement. It is encapsulated in no formal confession of faith. This theology remains undeveloped. Nevertheless, its proponents continue to evangelize.

Heretical preterists want all of the benefits of church membership: Christian fellowship, the sacraments, and help in times of need. But they are unwilling to start their own congregations, ordain their own ministers, pay for their own buildings, start their own seminaries or, above all, come to any formal, judicially enforceable agreement with one another regarding the details of what it is that they believe about a universe without a final historical judgment.

They seek to create a fellowship of private confessional believers within a larger fellowship of public confessional believers. The larger fellowship is covenantal. It is based on a public creed or confession of faith that formally rejects the eschatological position of heretical preterism. Heretical preterists today cannot win by a frontal assault on these creeds and confessions. They do not have the votes. So, they seek to create their own insiders' group within a local congregation. They seek to create a divisive mentality of "them vs. us" in their targeted victims, where "them" represents the covenantal hierarchy of the church, and "us" refers to members of a clandestine sub-group who have formally placed themselves under the judicial authority of elders whose task it is to police the congregation by means of a doctrinal statement. Then they clandestinely deny the truth of the

binding doctrinal statement. A few of their spokesmen are public; most of them are not. If these laymen do not call attention to themselves by making public pronouncements, they can continue to recruit.

They can operate in this way far more successfully in a denomination that does not require laymen formally to affirm their commitment to the denomination's confession of faith as a condition of gaining voting membership. This is one reason why heretical preterism is spreading inside Presbyterian churches. Presbyterianism's by-laws do not require either voting or communing members to affirm allegiance to the Westminster standards or any previous church creed. This fact makes far easier the recruiting activities of heretical preterists. They can quietly go about their evangelism, and, whenever discovered by church authorities, they can evade or at least postpone the threat of church sanctions. How? Because they have never affirmed the Westminster standards. The church's authorities must actively seek to force them to admit that they are in rebellion. This is not easy. It usually takes a formal hearing. It may take a trial. Only rarely will heretical preterists make an admission of guilt voluntarily. Why should they? Not for conscience's sake. *They are not emotionally burdened by guilt for subverting confessional standards that they have never formally affirmed.* By keeping quiet in public and recruiting in the shadows, they can undermine the orthodoxy of other laymen before church authorities recognize what is going on.

Presbyterian laymen can promote heresy without violating Presbyterian law until such time as they are ordered by a local church court to cease and desist. They have not previously been asked by the elders to affirm their commitment to the Westminster standards. As long as they do not seek ordination, which requires formal affirmation of the Westminster standards, they feel free to evangelize for their position on a guilt-free basis because, technically, they are not violating any formal rules. They adhere to the letter of Presbyterian law while defying its spirit.

J. "But I Don't Believe That!"

Heretical preterism is strictly a laymen's movement. Heretical preterists hold no church councils, hammer out no statements of faith, sign no affirmations, and submit themselves to no ecclesiastical authority that can enforce the provisions of their defining theology.

They refuse to subordinate themselves formally to anyone in their movement who could then hold them accountable for what they say or do. Instead, they officially subordinate themselves to historic churches, but they mentally cross their fingers regarding the clear statements of the historic creeds and confessions regarding the final judgment as being in the future. When it comes to these historic creeds, they mentally say to themselves, "But I don't believe that."

This phrase—"But I don't believe that!"—is a way of psychological preservation for them. It is their way of being *in* the historic church, but not being confessionally *of* it. This phrase is also a major component of their strategy of subversion. When confronted by church authorities regarding the obvious implications of their faith, they respond, "But I don't believe that." They can get away with this because their intellectual spokesmen usually refuse to put into print the obviously heretical implications of their faith: either dualism or perfectionism-Pelagianism. A critic cannot go to a public document that they have passed around privately that openly declares the dualism or perfectionist implications of their position. When they are confronted by church officials with these inescapable theological implications, they seek to evade responsibility for them by saying, "But I don't believe that." This gains them additional time to undermine the orthodox faith of laymen around them whom they continue clandestinely to seek to recruit.

They do not choose to make a public announcement of their faith in its dualist implications or its alternative perfectionist-Pelagian implications. Some of them may not even be aware of these implications. This is not an era in which laymen are encouraged or trained to think theologically. Those few who do have an interest in theology can be sidetracked by other laymen who hand them a thick, seemingly thought-out book like *The Parousia*. This is why the subversives gain converts.

Orthodox Christians, especially church officers, should recognize this heresy for what it is: either an affirmation of the eternal power of Satan through mankind's original sin or else a denial of the permanence of original sin in history. I think heretical preterism today is dualistic rather than perfectionist, because its adherents are believers in original sin. Given the doctrine of the permanence of original sin, heretical preterism represents one more attempt to import dualism into the church: *the doctrine of an eternally unresolved struggle between good and evil*.

Church officers who learn of any member's commitment to the doctrine of "full preterism" have an obligation to help this member clarify his or her thinking, and either become fully consistent with the full-preterist position or else fully abandon it. The member should be brought before the church's session or other disciplinary body and asked the following six questions in writing:

1. Is God's final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46; Rev. 20:12–15) behind us historically?
2. Is the physical resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15; I Thes. 4:13–18; Rev. 20:12–13) behind us historically?
3. Will the church militant struggle against sin in history forever, paralleling the church triumphant's eternally sin-free existence in heaven?
4. Will sin and its curse, including physical death, continue throughout history, paralleling sin-free eternity in heaven?
5. Is original sin a temporary condition of mankind in history?
6. Are the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed incorrect when they identify Christ's final judgment of the living and the dead as being in the future?

If he answers *yes* to question four, he has adopted dualism. If he answers *yes* to question five, he has adopted either perfectionism or Pelagianism. If he answers *yes* to both four and five, he is confused.

It is quite possible that the member has not thought through the implications of his position. He may not be willing to affirm any of these conclusions. In fact, his refusal to affirm any of this is quite likely. The elders must be prepared for the standard answer of heretical preterists who are "caught in the act": "But I don't believe that!" In order to pressure the member to begin to think carefully about whatever it is that he really does believe, it is imperative that the disciplinary body obtain a signed statement from the member that he does not affirm any of these six views, and also that he holds the opposite views. The signed and dated statement should look something like this:

I believe the following:

God's final judgment is still in the future. The judgment that He

brought on Israel and the Old Covenant in A.D. 70 was not the final judgment described in Matthew 25:31–46; I Corinthians 15:24–56, and Revelation 20:12–15.

God's final judgment will involve the simultaneous resurrection of all of the dead, at which time God will publicly identify covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers (Matt. 25:31–46). Members of each group will be consigned to their eternal places of abode: either the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22) or the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

Sin will no longer operate in history after this final judgment of Satan and all those joined by covenant to him.

This will be the fulfillment of the Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

If the congregation is Presbyterian, the member must also be asked to sign an affirmation of chapter XXXIII of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Answer 90 of the Larger Catechism. *This signed statement constitutes a formal rejection of the "full preterist" position.* The member must be told in advance that this signed statement can be shown to others at the discretion of the session. If the member refuses to sign such a statement under these conditions, the elders should continue the disciplinary process.

There are only three lawful ways out of a local congregation: by death, by letter of transfer, and by excommunication. Presbyterian laymen who have been brought before the church's session because they are suspected of holding heretical preterism, and who persist in their commitment to heretical preterism by refusing to sign a statement that is consistent with the Westminster standards, must be removed from membership by excommunication.

K. Dealing Institutionally With Heretical Preterism

Those who hold heretical preterism are not inclined to keep their eschatological opinions to themselves—just the theological implications of their opinions. A pastor should assume that any church member who has been influenced by Russell's book or by Russell's contemporary disciples has discussed Russell's ideas with members of the congregation, though not its dualist or its perfectionist implications. As with Russell himself, who initially published his book

anonymously, his disciples are sometimes clandestine in their promotion of these opinions. *A pastor should automatically assume that a strategy of subversion is in operation whenever he discovers even one Russellite in his congregation.* He must take steps to undermine it early.

Heretical preterism is a matter for church discipline, not academic debate in a joint forum. These two approaches for dealing with theological error must be distinguished. In 1880, the faculty of Princeton Seminary made a catastrophic error. They decided to enter into a joint publishing venture with liberal Union Seminary. This was the idea of Union's Charles A. Briggs, who was de-frocked for heresy in 1893, mainly because of his harsh rhetoric in an 1891 lecture.¹⁷ Briggs understood in 1880 that if he could lure the Princeton faculty into a jointly sponsored debate over the higher criticism of the Bible, he could move this issue from a matter of church discipline to a topic of formal academic debate—just one opinion among many. The jointly published journal, *Presbyterian Review*, opened the floodgates to higher criticism within the Presbyterian Church, 1881–83.¹⁸ These gates were never again closed.

No critic of Russell's version of preterism should participate in any joint venture with those who hold any variation of Russell's position unless he publicly identifies the position as heretical and a matter of church discipline. If a third party invites representatives of heretical preterism to present their case, orthodox Christians involved in the conference or forum should begin their presentations with a clear statement that heretical preterism is in fact heretical and should be a matter of church discipline. Academics tend to forget that public debates are representative forums. These forums grant equal status to all participants. A Russellite should never be acknowledged as possessing equal status by someone who affirms the historic creeds of the church. He should be treated as if he were a Jehovah's Witness. The Apostles' Creed is more clearly anti-Russellite than it is anti-Arian. Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians. Both forms of Russellism are equally heretical: J. Stuart's and Charles Taze's. They should be dealt with inside the church in the same way.

7. North, *Crossed Fingers*, chaps. 4, 5.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

Conclusion

God's final judgment of the world is coming. It did not take place in A.D. 70, which was God's final judgment on Old Covenant Israel. The bodily resurrection of all mankind is in the future. The dumping of the contents of hell into the lake of fire also lies ahead. If a person is to be an orthodox Christian, he should take his stand publicly with Paul, John, and the historic creeds and confessions of the church. They all agree with respect to the final judgment: it lies ahead. For as long as original sin remains the condition of humanity, God's final judgment of the world remains in the future.

Heretical preterism offers no eschatology, if we define eschatology as "the doctrine of last things." For heretical preterism, there are no last things for the church militant. There is only eternity: the permanently sin-cursed world of the church militant and the incorrupt world of the church triumphant. In place of eschatology, heretical preterism offers either dualism or perfectionism-Pelagianism. In our day, it offers mainly dualism: the equal ultimacy of good and evil forever, world without end, amen. It offers a vision of a church that forever will receive a grim answer to its prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." That answer is simple: "Not a chance." It is Satan who gives this answer, not God.

J. Stuart Russell introduced his book with this statement: "The work is almost wholly exegetical; and there is no attempt to invent or establish a theory, but only, by honest and faithful interpretation of the New Testament Scriptures, to allow them to speak for themselves."¹⁹ I conclude with this warning: whenever anyone tells you that he is merely letting the facts speak for themselves, and that he has no hidden agenda or underlying theory, I strongly advise you to keep your hand upon your wallet and your back against the wall.

For orthodoxy to persist, heretics must be excommunicated. In the case of heretical preterism, it is highly unlikely that it will become a major ecclesiastical threat in my lifetime. There are too few of them, they are underfunded, they cannot get through ordination without hiding their beliefs, and they have yet to produce a single systematic theology that incorporates their dualism. The old rule is true: "You can't change just one thing." Their dualism threatens all aspects of orthodoxy and ethics, not just eschatology. Theology is a package deal. Their package is openly, forthrightly, defiantly, middle-finger-extended

9. Russell, *Parousia*, p. 1.

heretical.

They are devoted to the cause of dualism. They want to take over our churches in order to rewrite the historic creeds to conform to dualism. That which they cannot subvert and capture, they will destroy. Whatever they cannot run in terms of their agenda, they will undermine. They have not been willing to pay the freight to build their own publishing houses, congregations, and ordination process. They seek the positive sanctions of church membership without the threat of negative sanctions. They want access to the sacraments despite their denial of the confession that gains them legal access to the sacraments. They want Christian fellowship on their terms, namely, their right to quietly teach an alien faith and subvert orthodoxy. They want the right to re-write the historic creeds and then toss you out. Fortunately, they are not competent enough to succeed, but they would give you the right boot of fellowship if you let them re-write the creeds. Take action now. Remove them.

They will do their best to persuade orthodox people to engage them as equals in open debate. This is a familiar tactic of heretics. They want to stay in the church and subvert it for as long as they can before sanctions are applied. You have already read enough to know that these laymen are obviously far too heretical for pastors to spend time arguing with them. Put them on trial. Let them conduct their debates in the shadows of the church on their own time, with their own money. If you have a lot of spare time to waste, you can argue with them to your heart's content after your church has excommunicated them, but not before. If they repent, you may decide to readmit them as communicant members after a year or two of close interrogation and careful monitoring of their activities. But you must take the initiative. Argue with them in private (never in public) only after they are outside the church, looking in. This is a war in defense of the orthodoxy of God's church, not a friendly debating society among equals. *These people are no more "ignorant brethren" than Jehovah's Witnesses are.* They are self-conscious in their defiance. They will undermine your ministry if you hesitate.

Here is a good statement of their position. You do not need more evidence to conduct a successful trial than the following.

Postscript: David A. Green's Reply

This is Mr. Green's Appendix I of his essay, "Gary North:

Postmillennial or Neo-Manichean?” It was still on-line as of March 19, 2004. (<http://tinyurl.com/2fy3p>) He had removed it by mid-2005, substituting an alleged refutation of this appendix, but in fact an earlier, weaker version of it. (<http://tinyurl.com/9cth3>). Clever!

APPENDIX I

North says that preterist church members “should be brought before the church’s session or other disciplinary body and asked the following six questions in writing.” (*Ibid.*, “*But I Don’t Believe That!*”) Submitted below are answers to North’s six questions:

1. Is God’s final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46; Rev. 20:12–15) behind us historically?

Yes.

God’s corporate judgment of all men is behind us historically, and God continues to judge all men of every generation, in history (Zech. 14:16-19) and at each man’s death (Heb. 9:27).

2. Is the physical resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15; I Thess. 4:13–18; Rev. 20:12–13) behind us historically?

No. The *spiritual* Resurrection of the dead is behind us historically.

3. Will the church militant struggle against sin in history forever, paralleling the church triumphant’s eternally sin-free existence in heaven?

This question has ambiguities, making it impossible for a preterist to answer it with an unqualified yes or no.

Does the church’s “struggle against sin” imply the church’s *non-triumph over sin on Earth*? If so, then No, the church militant will not “struggle against sin in history forever.”

What does “paralleling” mean? Does it mean that the power of sin and Satan on Earth is *equal* to the power of God and His Righteousness in Heaven? If so, then No, the church militant’s struggle against sin in history will *not* forever “parallel” the church triumphant’s eternally sin-free existence in Heaven.

Let us put it this way:

The church militant will increasingly triumph over sin and sinners in

history forever, *paralleling* the church triumphant's eternally sin-free existence in Heaven. God's will is being done "on Earth as it is in Heaven."

4. Will sin and its curse, including physical death, continue throughout history, paralleling sin-free eternity in heaven?

Sin will continue throughout history, but believers have been forgiven of their sins. Death is no longer a curse for believers who fall asleep. Death no longer has any sting for them. There is nothing for them to fear (Heb. 2:15). Because they trust in Jesus and keep His word, *they will never die* (Jn. 8:51; 11:26).

Again, what does "paralleling" mean? Does it mean that sin and its curse on Earth are *equal* to the Righteousness of God in Heaven? If so, then No, sin on Earth is *absolutely not equal to* (parallel to) the Righteousness of God in Heaven. There is no "parallel" between sin and God's Righteousness. God wins. Sin loses, *even if sin continues to exist*.

North understands this, since he is a postmillennialist. The mere existence of sin and suffering does not imply the non-triumph of righteousness. If it did, we would be forced to say that the Cross of Christ has as of yet won zero victories, beyond Christ Himself.

5. Is original sin a temporary condition of mankind in history?

No. Otherwise, how could Christ Jesus be a "*Priest forever?*" (Heb. 7:21–25)

6. Are the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed incorrect when they identify Christ's final judgment of the living and the dead as being in the future?

Absolutely.

APPENDIX B

LEGALISM VS. ALCOHOL

And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine householdm(Deut. 14:26).

The key biblical passage that is rarely discussed in detail by anti-alcohol, total abstinence advocates is Deuteronomy 14:26, which refers to the festival of celebration, part of the mandatory tithe system. “And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.”¹ Total abstainers will occasionally refer to the passage’s authorization of wine, and then say that the Hebrew word really means grape juice. But their exegetical problem is the Hebrew word *shekar*, here translated as “strong drink.” It is based on the Hebrew word *shakar*, which means “to be, or become, drunk, drunken.”² *Shekar* is accompanied by the Hebrew word for wine in all but one instance (Numbers 28:7) of the 22 times that it appears in the Old Testament.³ This is because wine also intoxicates, just as stronger alcoholic beverages do.

This places the strict prohibitionist in an intellectually embarrassing exegetical position. He is either forced to deny literally all of the Hebrew lexicons⁴ and also the contexts of the passages that include

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed.(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

2. According to the standard lexicon by Brown, Driver, and Briggs. See Gentry, *God Gave Wine: What the Bible Says About Alcohol* (Lincoln, California: Oakdown, 2001), p. 60. This is an update of his book, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages: A Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986).

3. Gentry, *idem*.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

shekar,⁵ or else he is forced to conclude that God in the Old Covenant authorized the consumption of alcohol as part of a mandated family festival of celebration. How can a Christian logically make a universal condemnation of something that was specifically authorized by God for His covenant people, as part of their mandatory national worship? If he argues that alcohol used to be morally acceptable to God, but is now prohibited by God, he must find explicit references in the New Testament to prove his case. Problem: there is no such universal New Testament prohibition.⁶

The Mosaic priests were not allowed to drink either wine or strong drink inside the tabernacle. “Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations” (Lev. 10:9).⁷ The reason for this prohibition was that alcohol belonged exclusively to God inside the tabernacle or the temple. Alcohol was a special offering to God. It was poured out to Him, not just wine, but strong wine—clearly not grape juice! “And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the LORD for a drink offering” (Num. 28:7). Why would God demand a sacrificial offering of something inherently corrupt, foul, or immoral? This makes no sense. This is why strict prohibitionism makes no sense.

Wine in the Old Testament was not grape juice. Grape juice does not have the following effect: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). Obviously, grape juice does not have any inflaming effect. Both wine and strong drink were legitimate for most people most of the time. They were both part of God’s holy system of mandatory national festivals. Furthermore, “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts” (Prov. 31:6). It is addiction to alcohol that is prohibited: “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!” (Isa. 5:11). Wine is dangerous for addicts. Grape juice is not. “But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 8.

have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment" (Isa. 28:7). Wine inebriates. So does strong drink. "Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered" (Isa. 29:9–10). It is clear why the proponents of total abstinence from alcohol never discuss wine in the context of strong drink: both are intoxicants, yet God authorized both for one of His mandatory festivals. Did God authorize something that is immoral? Of course not. So, total abstainers avoid discussing Deuteronomy 14:26.

In the world before pasteurization, all commercially available wine was fermented, i.e., alcoholic. Only after a Methodist dentist, Dr. Thomas Welch, figured out in 1869 that he could kill wine by pasteurizing it, so that he and his Methodist peers would no longer have to drink wine at the Lord's Supper, did grape juice appear, or, as his commercial product was originally called, Dr. Welch's Non-Fermented Wine. This company eventually evolved into the Welch company, which specializes in fruit juices.

Weak Christians should not drink alcohol if they think it violates some moral prohibition, but the source of their error is theological vinegar. Weak Christians are being herded like sheep by pastors who do not understand or respect the doctrine of Christian liberty. The task of the mature Christian is to refrain from publicly assailing the weak Christian's sensibilities. He has another responsibility, however: to wean the weak Christian away from a theology that does not honor the principle of Christian liberty.⁸

It should not surprise us that the most scholarly published defense of wine as exclusively grape juice, and the Bible as teaching total abstinence from alcohol, was written by a Seventh Day Adventist. It should also not surprise us that his book has been praised by Protestant fundamentalists, who have yet to publish anything equally scholarly on the subject.⁹ We should not regard these fundamentalist authors as weak Christians. We should regard them as stubbornly,

8. Gentry, *God Gave Wine*. See also G. I. Williamson, *Wine in the Bible and the Church* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Pilgrim, 1976).

9. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Chicago: Signal Press, 1989). For a list of laudatory praise from fundamentalists, including Dallas Theological Seminary's John Walvoord, see Bacchiocchi's Web site: <http://tinyurl.com/2mev9>

heretically, arrogantly wrong.¹⁰ When David Wilkerson writes that “Christians who drink alcoholic beverages of any kind are deceiving themselves,”¹¹ he is deceiving his fundamentalist readers. When Jack Van Impe writes that “*Alcohol is never approved of by God in any amount for the obedient Christian*,”¹² he is being disobedient to God. When he writes that “Everyone who drinks has an alcohol problem,”¹³ he reveals that he has an exegesis problem.

Conclusion

Strict prohibitionism is a manifestation of legalism. Legalism is a system of man-made rules that are not found in the Bible, which are then substituted for covenantal obedience to God’s Bible-revealed laws. Legalism also substitutes the traditions of men for the clear revelation of God in His Bible. The heart of Pharisaism was its legalism. Jesus did not tolerate it. Neither did Paul.

10. Is “heretical” too strong a word? Fundamentalists regard Dr. Bacchiocchi’s and the SDA’s position on soul-sleep rather than hell as heretical. They regard the SDA’s and his view of the Saturday sabbath as heretical. It is their task to show exegetically why they are not heretical when they stand with Seventh Day Adventism on the alcohol issue.

11. David Wilkerson, *Sipping Saints* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1978), p. 35; cited in Gentry, *God Gave Wine*, p. 4.

12. Jack Van Impe, *Alcohol: The Beloved Enemy* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1980), p. 8; cited in Gentry, *idem*.

13. Van Impe, *Alcohol*, p. 149; cited in Gentry, *ibid.*, p. 2.

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HIERARCHY AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON

FIRST TIMOTHY

GARY NORTH

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This book is dedicated to

Nick Kozel

Who understands Christian education as dominion

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INTRODUCTION

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (I Tim. 2:5–6).

Jesus Christ established the definitive operational model for covenant-keeping man to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).¹ This model is dominion through hierarchy. Christ serves as a judicial intermediary between God and man, on behalf of both. He is simultaneously the high priest (Heb. 2:17), the head of the church (Col. 1:18), the King of kings (Rev. 17:14), and the bridegroom (Luke 5:34–35).

A. Trinitarian Theology of Hierarchy

Jesus Christ is both God and man. As God, He is the Second Person of the Trinity, the son of God (Mark 14:61–62). As man, He was born perfect, and He did not sin. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21).

In His capacity as God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the ruler over creation (Col. 1:10–17), Jesus Christ has provided mankind and the world with unmerited grace, i.e., gifts in history that are unmerited by the covenantally disinherited sons of Adam. On this basis, redemption comes to former covenant-breakers. “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight” (Col. 1:20–22).

In His capacity as a perfect man who was completely subordinate

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

to God (Luke 22:42), He offered God a suitable sacrifice to propitiate God's wrath and thereby make grace judicially possible (Heb. 10). By voluntarily humbling Himself before God and man at Calvary, Christ enabled God the Father to exalt Him above heaven and earth in His capacity as perfect man. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). As God, He had possessed this power before the incarnation. As man, He gained it through complete subordination to God and man in history. *His absolute subordination in history produced His absolute dominion over history.* This is the covenant-keeper's ethical model, Paul taught.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:5–12).²

There is rulership: Christ as God. There is subordination: Christ as God-man (the incarnation). There was subordination in history: doing God the Father's business, which included the cross. This led to even greater rulership for the supreme representative of perfect humanity: Christ's bodily resurrection and His bodily ascension to the right hand of God.

Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God (Luke 22:69).

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31).

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Rom. 8:34).

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

Christ's judicially representative, hierarchical work in history on behalf of covenant-keeping mankind (special grace's regeneration) and also on behalf of the fallen world (common grace's preservation)³ provides the working model for covenant-keepers in exercising dominion. Christ's sending of the Holy Spirit has enabled covenant-keepers to understand this model.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26–27).

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you (John 16:7–14).

The Spirit's empowerment of covenant-keepers has enabled them to implement this model.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and **greater works than these shall he do**; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, **keep my commandments**. And I will pray the Father, and **he shall give you another Comforter**, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for **he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you** (John 14:12–17).

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

The Holy Spirit is subordinate to God the Father. He intervenes on behalf of God the Son, i.e., in His name. It is through the Holy Spirit that covenant-keepers extend God's kingdom in history. They are under the Holy Spirit, who in turn is under God the Father on behalf of Christ. There is a cosmic hierarchy: from the throne of God through the Holy Spirit through the institutional church through the saints over the creation. To rule lawfully over the creation, covenant-keepers must subordinate themselves to this hierarchy.

I cannot imagine that anything that I have written so far in this Introduction is theologically controversial among Bible-believing Christians.⁴ There should be nothing unfamiliar with these basic theological concepts. If there is, then the reader's theological education is limited.

All of this has to do with hierarchy, which is point two of the biblical covenant.⁵ (Now things begin to get controversial.)

Paul's first epistle to Timothy develops this theme of hierarchy in several areas of theology and social theory. The epistle's focus is ecclesiastical hierarchy.

B. Biblical Law and Dominion

The epistle begins with a warning against false teachers in the church at Ephesus and a command that Timothy instruct them in the tenets of the orthodox faith. He tells Timothy to shift the Ephesian church's public discussion from genealogy to law. He places God's law—Mosaic civil statutes—at the foundation of this mandatory curriculum in orthodoxy. He places God's Biblical law at the heart of the gospel.⁶

But we know that **the law is good**, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to **sound doctrine**; According to the **glorious gospel** of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust (I Tim. 1:8–11).

4. This excludes members of the Calvinistic, Dutch-related Protestant Reformed Church, who reject Calvin's concept of common grace.

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

6. Chapter 1.

Here we find an affirmation of certain Mosaic civil laws as guidelines for assessing the presence of God's grace in a man's life. Covenant-keepers are supposed to define their subordination to God through grace as inherently judicial: *the avoidance of these prohibited practices*. Covenant-keepers are under grace, not law, and the mark of their not being under law is their lawful avoidance of the Mosaic law's sanctions, laws that are enforced by God when not enforced by the state.

Paul is adamant about this law-grace relationship. Covenant-keepers can legitimately be said to be above these Mosaic civil laws, but only because they are not tempted to violate them. *Subordination to God's special grace means being above the temptations relating to law-breaking, through the morally transforming effects of regeneration*. Christians do not come under the law's eternal curse, for Christ has borne the comprehensive penalty of their sins (Rom. 5). But this is a different theological issue altogether from the question of the New Testament authority of God's biblical law and the threat of the law's sanctions in New Testament history. To violate any of these laws in the New Testament era is to place oneself under God's lawful negative sanctions.

It is never a man's choice in history between being under law vs. not being under any law at all. The covenantal judicial question in history is always this: "Whose law and whose sanctions? God's or some rival deity's?" Paul makes clear his answer: biblical law. The Christian who denies this has a great deal of exegetical work to do (1:8–11). Most Christians do deny the continuing authority of God's biblical law and its mandated sanctions, but very few of them have done any detailed exegetical work to defend this viewpoint. They do not even perceive that such exegetical work is necessary. The implicit and, all too often, explicit hostility to God's biblical law in the modern church indicates that the modern church is as offended by this passage as the Judiazers at Ephesus must have been. The modern church refuses to listen to Paul's explicit teaching regarding the law of God's intimate connection to the gospel. It is as if Paul had never written this passage. But he did write it, and God expects His people to believe it and then obey it.

C. Other Applications of the Principle of Hierarchy

Paul then moves to the church's role in performing intercessory prayer for the world. He tells Christians to pray for men in general and for civil rulers specifically. If Christians do this, he says, the church will enjoy greater peace. One price of peace for Christians is their intercessory prayer. Peace is meant to be a tool of dominion for Christians, so that they can work legally to spread the gospel and thereby bring the world progressively under Christ's dominion in history.⁷

Then comes Paul's discussion of monogamy as a requirement for holding church office. How a man rules over his family indicates how he will rule over the church. Do not subordinate yourself, Paul warns, to a man who does not rule his family well. How well his family's subordinates have fared under his rule indicates how you will fare.⁸

Also a consideration for high church office is the candidate's generosity. If he is not generous, beware. He may be a disciple of mammon, the great god More.⁹ Much in this epistle is directed against subordination to this immanent god.

Other economic applications—all related to the issue of hierarchy and dominion—are these: the support of widows,¹⁰ the power of ecclesiastical subordinates over their own money,¹¹ the responsibility of slaves to their masters,¹² the relationship between subordination and liberation,¹³ and the proper relationship between rich men and those in need.¹⁴

This epistle's theme of subordination is foreign to the worldview of modern Christianity. Quite frankly, it has been foreign to Christians, with the exceptions of monks and other celibate religious orders, from the day it was written. I regard this epistle as an extension and application of the gospel of Luke. In that gospel, Christ's warnings against the religion of mammon are more pronounced than in Matthew or Mark. (John's gospel says almost nothing relating to economics, other than observing the predictable relationship between wine-dulled tongues

7. Chapter 2.

8. Chapter 3.

9. Chapter 4.

10. Chapter 5.

11. Chapter 6.

12. Chapter 7.

13. Chapter 8.

14. Chapter 9.

and the serving of cheaper vintages.)

D. The Love of Money

In this epistle, a famous passage appears. “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (6:10). This is an extension of Christ’s warning: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).¹⁵

The question arises: “If a rich man can be generous to more people than a poor man can, should he seek even greater riches?” This question can be extended to a congregation. There is a hierarchy of wealth within a congregation. There is a hierarchy of wealth among congregations with similar confessions. There is also a hierarchy of wealth among denominations. Episcopalians in the United States are richer per capita than Pentecostals. They are also more liberal theologically. Whether they are more liberal in giving, I do not know.

The ethical issue of what men should do with their money is relevant to the theological issue of the legitimacy of riches. Paul and Jesus warned against the common temptation of riches: to forget God. So did Moses. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).¹⁶ So did Solomon. “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).¹⁷ *There is nothing new in the New Testament regarding the moral temptation of riches.* What is new is Jesus’ discussion of the consequence of succumbing to this temptation: hell. The former rich man is in hell; the former beggar isn’t (Luke 16:19–31).¹⁸ This is the context of Jesus’ most extensive discussion of hell. The stakes are much higher than

15. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 39.

16. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

17. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 85.

18. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 39.

they appeared to be in the Old Covenant.

The moral problem with riches is not the existence of riches; rather, it is the problem of what men do in order to gain riches, and also what they do with their riches after having gained them. The same could be said of power, and has been.

But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42–45).

Paul's first epistle to Timothy deals with riches and also the exercise of authority. Both discussions appear in the context of the institutional church. Both discussions relate to hierarchy. Both discussions have implications outside of the institutional church.

E. Covenantal Hierarchy: Transcendent/Immanent

In my previous commentaries, I failed to clarify certain important aspects of the five-point biblical covenant model. Sutton begins his study of the biblical covenant with the observation that God, as an absolute sovereign, is both transcendent and immanent to the creation. God is over history and separate from the creation, yet He has entered history, most obviously at the incarnation.¹⁹

1. Point Two

I previously failed to identify the five-point covenant as itself having both transcendent and immanent applications: hierarchy, law, sanctions, and continuity. I categorize the covenant itself as primarily an aspect of point two: hierarchy. This is because Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch, is the book most closely associated with the covenant. "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). I hope that the following material will clarify the distinction between transcendent and immanent ap-

19. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1.

plications of the covenant.

Here is my present insight, which I have not presented with equal clarity before. *The hierarchical structure of the biblical covenant is simultaneously vertical and horizontal.* In this sense it manifests both transcendence and immanence. This in turn reflects the simultaneous relationships within the Godhead: vertical (economic Trinity) and horizontal (ontological Trinity). The persons of the Trinity are vertically hierarchical with respect to both creation and redemption, but horizontally equal with respect to their being.

The Greek word for priest (*hierus*) is the root word for hierarchy. A priest was an intermediary who represented God to men and men to God in the Old Covenant church. He possessed judicial authority. Judicial representation is generally understood as vertical. But there are other manifestations of covenantal representation. These can be horizontal: inner and outer rings of authority.

The biblical covenantal hierarchy applies to individuals and also to three institutions: church, family, and state. Each of these covenants is established by a self-maledictory oath before God. God and men establish a mutual legal bond by oath. Redeemed individuals are, in Meredith Kline's words, by oath consigned.²⁰ This oath places the individual and the three institutions under God.

One corporate covenantal hierarchy is both vertical and horizontal in both history and eternity: the church.

2. Vertical Hierarchy

I begin my analysis with the individual covenant. Conceptually, the structure of God's *vertical individual hierarchy* of covenantal authority is like the father-son relationship. The individual covenant is a *hierarchy of legal status*: either a son of God by means of adoption or a disinherited son because of Adam's original sin. The covenant is administered representatively: either by Christ or by Adam. Either Christ or Adam is a person's legal representative before God. God deals with an individual judicially by imputing to him either Christ's perfection or Adam's sin.²¹ Covenant theologians speak of this judicial representation as *federal headship*. One or the other representative agent has spoken a binding oath before God the Father on behalf of the individu-

20. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968).

21. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1959] 1979).

al. Judicially, though not literally, Adam spoke on behalf of mankind when he sinned. God the Father spoke on behalf of redeemed individuals in the name of Jesus Christ before time began.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love (Eph. 1:3–4).

God makes a covenant with an individual in history, redeeming his soul. God adopts him. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5). The individual covenant is marked by all five points of the biblical covenant. God is the absolute sovereign (point one).²² He delegates to mankind the responsibility of exercising dominion and stewardship over the earth, beginning with himself: self-government under God’s authority (point two).²³ Each man is supposed to use his knowledge of God’s law to establish dominion over nature, beginning with himself: self-government under God’s law (point three).²⁴ By obeying the law personally, and by using the law to extend God’s kingdom in history, a covenant-keeper identifies himself in history as bound for heaven: a positive sanction. By disobeying God’s law, and by enforcing laws associated with Satan’s kingdom, a covenant-breaker identifies himself as bound for hell: a negative sanction (point four).²⁵ These sanctions in history, positive and negative, reflect the sanctions of a post-temporal pair of conditions: heaven and hell (higher and lower), which are in turn foretastes of the re-created New Heaven/New Earth on the one hand, and the lake of fire on the other (point five).²⁶

This structure can be referred to as a *transcendent hierarchy*. It deals primarily with an individual’s eternal legal status, though not entirely, for one’s legal status is established in history. “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Individual vertical hierarchy points to eternity: either inheritance or disinheritance.

22. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1.

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

24. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

25. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

26. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

Conceptually, the structure of God's *vertical corporate hierarchy* of authority is like a pyramid. God the Father is at the top. He rules as a king. Christ sits at His right hand. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34). "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). This cosmic throne of judgment serves as the model for Christian rulership in history. The judicial evidence of this delegated rulership under Christ is the Lord's Supper, which is a church ritual associated with covenant oath renewal. "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29–30).²⁷

God the Father rules from on high alongside of Christ, who represents perfect humanity, and who is seated at the Father's right hand. God appoints representative agents in church, family, and state. These agents represent those under their authority before God, and also represent God to those under their authority.²⁸ Representation and authority are aspects of point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy. Representatives are required to rule in terms of God's law (point three). They impose sanctions in terms of God's law (point four). In this way, God's kingdom perseveres through time (point five). Corporate continuity through linear time (horizontal) is established by a vertical hierarchy. Put differently, *covenantal dominion outward is empowered by covenantal dominion downward*.

3. Horizontal Hierarchy

This form of hierarchy also has to do with legal status: the identification in history of the legal heirs vs. the disinherited heirs. Who will inherit the earth?

What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:12–13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD,

27. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 51.

28. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).²⁹

The horizontal covenantal hierarchy is associated with *corporate inheritance in history*: the sons who are meek before God will inherit the earth, thereby disinheriting the sons of Adam. God is at the center (point one). He extends His influence outward, across the earth, through the multiplication of mankind, as He commanded Adam before the Fall and Noah after the Flood (point two). Men are required to use God's law-order to bring more of the earth, both agricultural and social, under God's authority (point three). The sanctions associated with biblical law enable covenant-keepers to extend God's kingdom across space and through time and also reduce the influence of Satan's kingdom in history (point four). History is both linear and cumulative: the principle of the heaven (point five). This can be referred to as an *immanent hierarchy*. The inheritance is in history, not just eternity.

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29–30).

Conceptually, the structure of God's horizontal hierarchy of authority is like a series of concentric circles. In the Bible, the horizontal structure is best seen in the concentric circles of holiness that surrounded the holy of holies (Num. 3). Each of the three clans in the priestly tribe of Levi defended against unlawful intrusion into one of these three circles of holiness: Kohath (inner circle), Gershon (second circle), and Merari (outer circle).³⁰ Israel, as a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6), mediated between God and the nations. The temple's sacrifices covered the sins of the heirs of Adam, in a common grace sense of covering: restraining the wrath of God in history. The priestly aspect of hierarchy is better understood as horizontal rather than vertical: protecting a holy place. But the vertical element is always present. Even as Jesus sits beside God the Father on a cosmic kingly throne, so does He

29. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

30. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3.C.

sit as high priest. “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12).

Both aspects of God’s hierarchy are equally covenantal, for God is both transcendent and immanent. One aspect of this hierarchy has to do primarily with a man’s legal relationship to God (justification). The other aspect has to do primarily with a man’s inheritance in history (progressive sanctification). Both aspects culminated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who is both man and God, who has His being both in time and eternity. He has already inherited everything in history. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).³¹ On the basis of this *definitive inheritance* as God’s law-abiding son, Christ *progressively inherits* the earth through His church, which represents Him. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:19–20). The end of the world will coincide with the defeat of God’s enemies in history. Christ will deliver up (vertical) His kingdom to God the Father upon the completion of its geographical extension (horizontal), which involves the subordination (vertical) of covenant-breakers to a covenant-keeping society.

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:24–28).³²

As a manifestation of Jesus Christ’s transcendence and immanence, the church of Jesus Christ is both transcendent (the church triumphant: heaven) and immanent (the church militant: earth). Unlike Christ’s simultaneous dual status in history, a person’s participation in one branch of the church precludes simultaneous participation in the other branch until after the final judgment. At that point, ecclesiastical

31. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

32. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

transcendence and immanence will be eternally unified. This post-final judgment ecclesiastical unification will manifest throughout eternity Christ's dual ontological status: God and man, transcendent and immanent.

4. Temporal Hierarchies

We normally think of hierarchies both ways. We say that men seek power by climbing to the top of the pyramid. We also say that men seek power by breaking into the inner circle. We speak of leaders as top dogs. We also speak of them as insiders.

In civil government, magistrates reflect God's original sovereignty. They hold power only by His command. "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (Ezek. 21:26–27). The Old Covenant king's visible temporal throne reflected God's eternal throne. So does the office of civil magistrate in the New Covenant.

Political authority is not sufficient to represent God's hierarchical supremacy. Reflecting God in His kingly status is only part of the picture. God is also priestly. The Ten Commandments reflect this dual status: priestly (1–5) and kingly (6–10).³³ This is why every Old Covenant king had priests, and why every priesthood needed a king. In the post-Flood Old Covenant era, only Melchizedek lawfully possessed both offices (Gen. 14:18). Only Christ possesses both offices in New Covenant history. There are no longer prophets, priests, or kings. These Old Covenant offices are today exclusive monopolies of Christ in His capacity as perfect humanity. These three offices have been replaced in the New Covenant era by the Bible (prophetic), eldership (sacramental), and civil magistracy (the sword). But the hierarchical concepts of priest and king remain in common language. In the language of seventeenth-century English political theory: "No king—no bishops; no bishops—no king." This turned out to be literally true during the English Civil War (1642–46), a war to remove or retain both the king and his bishops. Archbishop Laud was executed for high treason by the Puritans in 1645. He had previously persecuted Purit-

33. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 1912), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), Preface.

ans. Then Charles I was executed in 1649—for high treason. When his son Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, his father’s executioners were executed—again, for high treason.

In economic theory, the same transcendent-immanent distinction applies. The owner of an asset exercises legal sovereignty over it. It serves his purposes. But its value in the market is established by the income that it can generate. This, in turn, is established by competitive customer demand. If an owner does not find a use for a capital asset to generate income from outside his own household, then its value is limited to its usefulness within that one household. By using a capital asset to serve customers who are outside the owner’s immediate family (the inner ring), the owner increases his stream of income, and therefore increases the value of the asset. So, he exercises *legal sovereignty* over the asset (vertical hierarchy), but in order to maximize its *economic value* in a division-of-labor economy, he must use it to serve the desires of paying customers (horizontal hierarchy). *Legal status is vertical. Dominion use is horizontal.* This two-fold aspect of ownership reflects the covenant’s transcendent hierarchy, which is a hierarchy of legal status, and it also reflects the covenant’s immanent hierarchy, which has to do with dominion and inheritance in history.

F. Covenantal Service: Vertical and Horizontal

Paul in this epistle focuses on the church. He focuses on the church covenant. His concern throughout is hierarchy. He speaks of service and obligation, but because he is speaking about the church covenant, *vertical hierarchy is the conceptual framework for his discussion.* This is because of point four: the enforcement of sanctions, whether ecclesiastical, familial, or civil. A ruler imposes sanctions on the ruled. They are bound together by covenantal oath. Without the oath, the relationship would be horizontal. It would not be a relationship of ruler and ruled.

Vertical service is only one form of service. The other is horizontal. To understand this distinction, consider the institutional church. Membership is by oath. The church offers positive judicial sanctions: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It offers these only to church members. These ecclesiastical rituals are sacraments. They are not lawfully open to people who are not legally bound to God and a church by a covenant oath. Both of these sacraments invoke positive and negative sanctions under God. Excommunication by a church involves the re-

moval of a member's access to the communion table.

The church also offers positive economic sanctions in a limited number of cases.³⁴ That is, it uses money, goods, and donated time that are provided by members, and then transfers these assets to poor members. Both the collection and the distribution are vertical. The assets are not collected from non-members, and the distribution is made to members. The model here is Acts 6: the establishment of the diaconate.

In other cases, ecclesiastical service is horizontal. Church money and donated assets go to aid non-members. These non-members are not bound by oath to honor the church's vertical hierarchy. They are not under the church's negative sanctions. But because they accept aid from churches, they do come under God's negative sanctions. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:19–21).³⁵ The recipient of church aid becomes a debtor to God, but he does not become a debtor to the church. He is under no obligation to members of the church to perform reciprocal service unless the original grant of aid was made on the basis of his promised performance. Even in this case, there is no means of bringing negative church sanctions on him for subsequent non-performance.

Another reason for offering aid to non-members is to reveal to them the love of God. Some will respond in faith and join the church. Jesus and the early apostles used physical healing as a way to bring people into the kingdom of God by way of the church. "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). This act of charity led to the conversion of many (Acts. 4:4).

Because the world is wide and filled with great need, such acts of horizontal service by the church are limited in their power to transform society directly. They are *representative acts*. They demonstrate publicly and before God what the church is willing to do for others, with no temporal judicial strings attached, and would be willing to do on a much larger scale if there were more members or more money.

34. Chapter 5.

35. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

The economic sacrifice of members becomes a testimony to Christ's supreme sacrifice for members (special grace) and non-members (common grace).³⁶ "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). He was the suffering servant.

The civil government, unlike the family and the church, does not legitimately offer positive sanctions. It provides the service of civil justice, which is exclusively restricted to the imposition of negative sanctions against convicted trespassers. These sanctions include the enforcement of restitution from the criminal to the victim. They also include defensive warfare: the service of justice against invaders. But civil government is not like the family and the church with respect to the service of healing. It is the agency of the sword, an exclusively negative biblical sanction. Civil government offers no legitimate positive sanctions, either vertical or horizontal.

In this epistle, Paul does not discuss horizontal service. *The main theme of this epistle is vertical hierarchy*: proper rulership and proper subordination within the confines of the institutional church.

G. Non-Covenantal Service: Vertical and Horizontal

Non-covenantal service occurs outside of the legal boundaries of an institution that has been established by a self-maledictory oath under God. Its sanctions are not covenantal. These sanctions are not imposed vertically by an individual on those who are under his oath-bound legal authority. The sanctions are economic. They are established by contract, not by a self-maledictory oath under God.

Non-covenantal service can take two-forms: charitable and profit-seeking. Charitable service is familiar in every society. It is familiar in every tradition of ethics. The concept of profit-seeking service is an idea that originated in the West, and even more narrowly, Western Europe. Charitable service is non-reciprocal, person to person, or person to external environment. If there is a reward, it comes from God or from the servant's conscience. Profit-seeking service is reciprocal.

36. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*.

1. Vertical Charitable Service

Non-covenantal charitable service can be vertical. Such service involves positive sanctions. When we speak of offering a helping hand, we have a mental image of reaching down and helping someone who has fallen to get back on his feet. This is also the image of the familiar phrase, "getting back on his feet."

Offering voluntary assistance to someone is a means of visibly establishing the recipient's dependence on God. Sometimes this dependence may be permanent, such as in the case of assisting a severely retarded person or someone with Alzheimer's disease. Usually, it is temporary. The assistance establishes *no reciprocal claims, donor to recipient*. This is not a loan that must be paid back. But the assistance does establish *reciprocity between God and the recipient*. If the donor is a covenant-keeper, this reciprocity is even stronger. *Grace precedes law, but law does follow grace*. The recipient is now more visibly in debt to God than before. This should lead to repentance before God in the case of covenant-breakers. When it does not lead to repentance, the wrath of God increases. Thus, Paul wrote: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom 12:20).³⁷ This was a citation from Proverbs: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee" (Prov. 25:21–22).³⁸

In the Proverbs passage, we learn of reciprocity between God and the assistance giver. God promises to reward the giver. God also promises to punish the thankless receiver. There is reciprocity upward: the receiver owes God. There is reciprocity downward: God owes the giver. "The Lord shall reward thee." But the relationship between donor and receiver is not reciprocal. It is vertical: the helping hand downward.

The donor is the poor man's means of obtaining God's blessings. The poor man is the means of the donor's obtaining God's blessings. God uses each party as a mediator of His blessings for the other. There are two inter-related hierarchies. The donor is the intermediary in God's transfer of blessings to the recipient. The recipient is the intermediary in God's transfer of blessings to the donor.

37. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

38. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 76.

2. *Horizontal Profit-Seeking Service*

Here, there is reciprocity between the participants. This is not a relationship between a donor and a recipient. Each of the parties gives up something, and each receives something. The supreme example of horizontal service is voluntary exchange. Each of the parties is a seller. Each is a buyer. Traditionally, we refer to the seller of money as the buyer, and the receiver of money as the seller. This linguistic convention is useful, but it is analytically incomplete. Analytically, both parties are buyers and sellers. But because money is the most marketable commodity, the buyer (seller of money) possesses greater authority. If there is no buyer, the seller retains ownership of a less marketable asset.

The nature of the exchange is voluntary. Each party expects to be a net beneficiary after the exchange takes place. They may haggle over the price, but if the exchange takes place, then both parties must have expected to benefit. “It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth” (Prov. 20:14).³⁹

Horizontal service is mutual. This is another way of saying that it is reciprocal. The obligation is future-oriented: promises to be fulfilled. Unless the agreement called for retroactive obligation after the exchange as part of the selling price, there is no further dependence of either party on the other. The dividing issue between horizontal service and vertical service is dependence. Vertical service establishes the recipient’s dependence on God as a result of a charitable act. Horizontal service does not.

3. *Vertical Profit-Seeking Service*

A man who hires a worker is performing a service: providing him with money. So is the person hired: providing labor. Each expects to benefit from the arrangement. The service is reciprocal.

With vertical service, there is a long-term relationship. The employer expects the employee to come to work on schedule, and the employee expects to be paid on time. There is also long-term mutual dependence. The employer depends on the employees to do their work. The employees expect the employer to sell the output of their labor to customers.

There is a pyramid shape of this allocation of responsibility. The

39. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 59.

employer can more easily replace an employee than an employee can replace an employer. There are more employees than employers. The services of the employees are more widely distributed. In rare cases, this is not true. A famous entertainer or star athlete may be less replaceable than an owner. But, generally, there is a disparity of both trust and dependence in an employer-employee relationship. The employer's skills are unique; the worker's are not. The level of trust required by an employee is greater than the trust required by an employer. This is equally true of dependence. The employer spreads his risk: lots of replaceable customers and lots of replaceable employees. The employee concentrates his risk: one employer. He can find a new employer, but his search costs are higher than the employer's search costs are to replace a worker.

Economists say that the consumer is sovereign in horizontal profit-seeking service: mutual exchange. This is because he possesses the most marketable commodity: money. Economists should therefore also say that the employer is sovereign in vertical profit-seeking service: mutual exchange. He also possesses the most marketable commodity: money. He is closer to the source of money—customers—than the employee is.

Whenever we hear about the benefits of achieving economic independence, we are hearing about the goal of escaping from pyramid-shaped dependence: salaried labor. There cannot be economic independence in a cursed world (Gen. 3:17–19).⁴⁰ There is rather economic dependence based on a broader distribution of risk: multiple buyers and potential buyers of the output of one's labor.

4. Abraham's Independence

Two incidents in Abraham's life illustrate the patriarch's dedication in remaining independent from the covenant-breakers with whom he had contact: his refusal to receive payment from the king of Sodom after his victory over Chedorlaomer, and his insistence on paying for the cave in which Sarah was buried.

And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou

40. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 12.

shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion (Gen. 14:21–24).

And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant (Gen. 23:13–16).

In the first incident, Abraham refused a voluntary donation from the king of Sodom. He could have received payment for services rendered, which the king of Sodom voluntarily offered, but he refused. That is, he voluntarily transferred to the king the wealth that the king would have voluntarily transferred to Abraham. He was explicit regarding his reason for refusing payment: he wanted to avoid becoming visibly dependent on this king. To accept a voluntary payment would have meant consenting to the idea that he had been involved in a profit-seeking arrangement based on vertical service: a pyramid of authority, with a covenant-breaking king on top. This would have implied higher and lower, ruler and subordinate. He refused. It was better to do without the spoils of war. This was the price of his visible independence.⁴¹

In the second incident, Abraham insisted on paying Ephron. Ephron was offering him a voluntarily gift. These two men were rich. Four hundred shekels was a great deal of money. Ephron bragged: “the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead.” Abraham was not about to have word go out that he had accepted a donation of this magnitude. This was not conventional hospitality to Abraham; this was an implicit assertion of authority over Abraham. Because of the lack of reciprocity, such service was a form of charity: vertical dependence. It implied higher and lower, ruler and subordinate.

Abraham saw that he represented God in any arrangement with these covenant-breakers. To the extent that he became obligated to

41. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

them, his God became obligated to their gods. Abraham avoided all signs of such obligation. He paid to maintain his visible independence: by foregoing spoils in the first case, and by foregoing the purchase price of a cave in the second.

H. Paul vs. Adam Smith

In this epistle, the contrast between two approaches to economic analysis becomes clear. Paul analyzes wealth in terms of ecclesiastical hierarchy, which is vertical. Adam Smith analyzes wealth in terms of reciprocal exchange, which is horizontal. Paul discussed the relief of poor in terms of a voluntary, vertical transfer of wealth downward. Adam Smith discussed the relief of the poor in terms of a voluntary, horizontal, reciprocal increase of wealth. Paul discussed the reduction of poverty in terms of what economists call a zero-sum game: the winner (a poor man) profits at the expense of the loser (a rich man). Adam Smith discussed the reduction of poverty in terms of mutual advantage: reciprocal exchange.

For Paul, poverty is a condition imposed on an individual by God's sovereign purposes. For Adam Smith, poverty is the product of insufficient national economic growth—insufficient economic growth per capita. For Paul, the poor man deserves help because his low productivity does not allow him to participate in the market. Adam Smith would have agreed regarding the analysis, but not the solution. Paul preached sacrificial charity by the rich. Smith preached profitable capital investment by the rich. For Paul, a sinking ship needs a bail-out. For Smith, a rising tide raises all ships. There will be more wealth available for helping the poor if most men benefit from an improving standard of living due to increasing corporate productivity.

These are fundamental differences in economic analysis. *The Bible does not so much as hint at the possibility that poverty can be reduced through voluntary exchange.* While Adam Smith occasionally discusses charity, his economic analysis rests almost entirely on the assumption that economic growth is the result of voluntary exchange in the context of a private property legal order. The Bible discusses economic growth in the context of national obedience to God's Biblical law (Deut. 28:1–14).⁴² Adam Smith discussed economic growth in the context of an autonomous legal and economic national order: capitalism. The Bible identifies God as the source of economic growth: the Creat-

42. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

or and providential Sustainer. Adam Smith identified nature and mankind as the dual sources of economic growth: land, labor, and capital.

Paul's presentation would have been understood by any social theorist, from the ancient world through the fifteenth century. A debate over economic cause and effect would have arisen only with respect to which God or gods are the source of economic sanctions. Smith's presentation is modern. The debate over economic cause and effect arises only with respect to which legal order provides the greatest economic growth: free enterprise, socialism, or the mixed economy. Smith used the analogy of the invisible hand of the free market to explain the existence of economic order apart from a central plan enforced by the state. A pagan in Paul's day would not have understood this reference as an analogy. "The Hand will get you if you don't obey," would have been his assessment. For Smith, the invisible hand was an analogy, just as natural selection along the lines of a breeder was an analogy for Charles Darwin. The pre-modern world viewed causation much more personally.

Paul did not put the question of wealth and poverty at the center of his exposition. Smith did, and ever since, there have been few rival issues of equal or greater authority than the question of wealth and poverty. The debate between truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, wisdom and foolishness do not occupy modern man's attention compared to the debate over wealth and poverty. Only the discussion of life and death is on the same plane, and this discussion eventually returns to wealth and poverty. There is far more public debate over who will pay for people's medical care than there is over the nature of time and eternity, a discussion which is confined mainly to Bible-believing churches. Liberal churches prefer to discuss wealth and poverty.

I. Service and Dominion

This epistle deals with hierarchy. It therefore deals with godly rule and godly submission. Because those in submission always outnumber those who rule, and because every vertical hierarchy is necessarily representative and therefore pyramid-shaped, Paul's message regarding submission applies to more people than does his message regarding leadership.

The Bible teaches that *submission is a path to authority*. Those who are under institutional authority are told to obey, even when their rulers are not motivated by service to those under them. The Bible also

teaches that *exercising authority is a form of service*. People in positions of authority are told to make decisions in terms of what will benefit those under their authority. This means that *service in a godly vertical hierarchy is a two-way street*. Service extends upward and downward. Both the rulers and the ruled have trouble accepting this two-fold concept of vertical hierarchy, which is based on the ideal of service. This ideal interferes with their presumed autonomy.

Rulers find it difficult to understand that there are divinely created, built-in positive institutional sanctions for service to those under their authority. Subordinates find it difficult to believe that there are divinely created, built-in positive institutional sanctions for patient obedience to cruel or incompetent rulers. Neither rulers nor ruled find it obvious that their respective agendas are advanced by means of service to others.

Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) revolutionized economic theory by placing service to customers at the center of economic analysis. It is central in two senses: conceptually irreplaceable and institutionally horizontal. Smith argued that a man's self-interest is best advanced by his service to the interests of others. Smith's theory applies to non-covenantal horizontal relationships. This distinguishes it from Paul's first epistle to Timothy, which has to do with a vertical covenantal hierarchy.

The full title of Smith's book is *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. The book was a refutation of earlier views of national wealth that relied on hierarchical state coercion to restrict imports and increase exports in order to build up a national hoard of gold. Smith did not argue that increased wealth is a bad thing. On the contrary, he favored it. He argued that open competition in a private property order is best able to achieve both increased national wealth and increased per capita wealth.

Similarly, the extension of the kingdom of God in history is Paul's goal, not just in this epistle, but throughout his entire career as an apostle. The difference is, Paul did not place economic growth at the center of his discussion of kingdom growth. Neither did Christ. Economic growth is not a prominent feature of New Testament social ethics. In fact, there is comparatively little space in the New Testament devoted to discussions of social ethics. *This is because social ethics is covered in the Old Testament*. There, economic growth is prominently featured, usually in the context of dominion. The biblical imagery of dominion is vertical: ruler and ruled. The economics of dominion is

horizontal: inheritance.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that **the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth**: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store (Deut. 28:1–5).

And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. **And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath**; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:11–13).⁴³

What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and **his seed shall inherit the earth** (Ps. 25:12–13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. **But the meek shall inherit the earth**; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:9–11).

J. A Kingdom of Law

There are social theorists, economists, and theologians who insist that the New Testament is a radical reconstruction of the Old Testament, i.e., that much of what God taught in the Old Testament is denied in the New Testament. This thesis of rival worldviews, Old Testament vs. New Testament, is prominent among theological liberals and theological pietists. In the modern world, liberals and pietists constitute the overwhelming majority of Protestants.

43. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 70.

I am neither a theological liberal nor a theological pietist. I am a covenant theologian. I discuss economic theory from the standpoint of the biblical covenant. In my theory of covenant law, I regard the following Mosaic laws as annulled: land laws and seed laws, which were related to Jacob's Christ-fulfilled prophecy to Judah regarding Shiloh (Gen. 49:10), a kingly prophecy; and priestly laws, which were also fulfilled by Christ.⁴⁴ With respect to the Mosaic law's cross-boundary civil laws,⁴⁵ of which the Ten Commandments are best representative, both covenants proclaim their binding authority. If these laws are still binding, then so are their sanctions: *no sanctions—no law*. The consistent civil enforcement of these covenant sanctions, over time, furthers the extension of the kingdom of God in history.

With respect to the *non-civil* Mosaic cross-boundary laws—sometimes referred to as *moral laws*—they are still in force in the New Testament, and so are God's predictable corporate sanctions, negative and positive. The moral laws are laws. Laws have sanctions attached to them. *Laws without sanctions are mere suggestions*. Negative sanctions retard the work of those who break the law. Positive sanctions extend the work of those who obey the law. Dominion in history is therefore by covenant law and its associated sanctions. The question is: "Whose law and whose sanctions?"

This line of reasoning is rejected by theological liberals and theological pietists. This is because both groups reject covenant theology. What is perplexing is that so many covenant theologians also reject the suggestion that covenant sanctions in history are structured to favor the extension of God's kingdom rather than Satan's. They argue that Old Covenant sanctions (1) are no longer in effect in the New Covenant; or (2) are random in the New Covenant; or (3) are anti-church in the New Testament. They agree entirely with theological liberals and pietists on this issue: *the ideal of Christendom is illegitimate*.

This is why theological liberals, pietists, and most covenant theologians reject any suggestion that there is a uniquely biblical approach to economic theory that rests on the presupposition of the universal presence of corporate covenantal sanctions that are built into every society by God. They share with humanistic economists a hostility to any suggestion of the existence of covenant sanctions in New Testament history. My suggestion is not taken seriously, namely, that economic

44. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Conclusion:C:2.

45. *Ibid.*, Conclusion:C:3.

profit and loss are in some fundamental way reflections of heaven and hell.

Conclusion

When we come to this epistle, we should not expect to find an exposition of economic theory, not because Paul was uninterested in economic theory or had nothing to say about it, but because he was dealing in this epistle with the vertical hierarchy of the institutional church. His narrowly confined discussion did not lend itself to the nature and causes of the wealth of nations. He discussed vertical covenantal service, not horizontal non-covenantal service.

The expositor must remain alert to the possibility that a Pauline application of the principle of ecclesiastical hierarchy may in some way be hostile to one or another theory of humanistic economics. My self-appointed task is to detect any such discrepancy and explain it in terms of the biblical covenant. An additional task would then be to reformulate economic theory in terms of Paul's principle. Neither the economists nor the theologians have bothered to do this. They are not interested in doing this.

There are numerous critics of my approach to economic theory. Mostly, there is silence. Secular economists have paid no attention to Christian economics. Christian economists have paid no attention to my biblical exegesis.⁴⁶ Theologians, especially covenant theologians, have also not adopted my efforts and especially my findings. In fact, they have ignored my findings.

To my Christian critics, I say, as always: *you can't beat something with nothing*. Gentlemen, where are your economic commentaries? Where are your Adam Smith-sized expositions of biblical economics? What hermeneutic are you suggesting as an alternative to a multitude

46. An example is provided Donald Hay of Jesus College, Oxford, who footnoted my book, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Craig Press, 1973), to justify this assertion: "The fundamentalist churches of North America have, for example, espoused the secular market doctrines of libertarian thought. . . ." Hay, *Economics Today: A Christian Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 173. Hay's book was published seven years after my commentary on Genesis (1982), four years after my commentary on Exodus 1–19 (1985), and three years after my commentary on Exodus 20 (1986). It was published two years after *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). Hay made no reference to any of these books. Hay, with no detailed exegesis, defended a state-regulated economy in the name of biblical justice. He suggested no Bible-based limitations on the state's intervention into the economy. The book offers no Scripture index. It would have been a very short index.

of secular theories of economics? What system of economic cause and effect governs the New Testament era? What system governed the Old Covenant era? Was it confined to Mosaic Israel, or was it universal?

These are not minor questions. Just because covenant theologians have chosen not to answer them, or even acknowledge their existence, does not mean that these questions are not important for covenant theology. It means only that covenant theologians have long preferred not to deal with these questions. These questions make them uncomfortable. These questions suggest the possibility of uniquely Bible-based answers, which in turn suggests theonomy. Theonomy suggests theocracy. Theocracy suggests Christian responsibility outside the four walls of the institutional church and outside the family. *Responsibility is what covenant theologians are attempting to evade.* They have more than they think they can handle in just trying to explain what has gone wrong in the institutional church, let alone what needs to be done to reform it. The reform of society at large is not even an issue for them at this point in time. But this point in time is the third millennium A.D.

Modern theologians reject the idea that the Bible provides authoritative laws that favor a free market economy, beginning with "thou shalt not steal." Even those theologians who favor the free market economy reject arguments that suggest a necessary connection between biblical law and the free market. They reject biblical law even when they accept the free market. They think Adam Smith is still relevant. They think biblical law is no longer relevant.

I think Adam Smith and biblical law are both relevant. It is in an economic commentary on this Pauline epistle that a discussion of Adam Smith and theonomy can no longer be legitimately deferred.

1

THEONOMY AS ORTHODOXY

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust (1 Tim. 1:5–11).

A. Paul's Commandment

The theocentric focus of these laws is the reduction of men's in-subordination against God (v. 9). This goal is an aspect of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹ Lawless men are in rebellion against God and the gospel of God's redemption through faith in Christ. Paul's affirmation of God's law in this passage is specifically associated with the gospel (v. 11). This is a very important passage that relates the law and the gospel. I would go so far as to say that *without a clear theological understanding of this passage, it is not possible to accurately relate the law and the gospel.*

Paul speaks of a commandment. He does not say explicitly what this commandment is. He says what its goal is: love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith (v. 5). The King James translates

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

the Greek word for “love” (*agápé*) as “charity.” Modern translations substitute “love.” Charity has a narrow connotation in modern English, i.e., giving things away to those who need help. The differing meanings today of “charity” and “love” are seen clearly in I Corinthians 13. When we follow the King James and think “charity,” something important is lost. Paul is talking about a much broader emotion than the willingness to give things away.

What was this commandment? Was it the commandment that God gave to Paul to become an apostle (v. 1)? Or was it Paul’s commandment to Timothy to remain in Ephesus and challenge the false teachers (v. 3)? I think it was the latter, for verse 5 appears in the context of the false teachers who have strayed from the commandment (v. 6). The goal of the commandment is being thwarted by false teaching (vv. 6–7).

Paul then moves from a discussion of the commandment to a discussion of God’s law. Timothy must enforce theological orthodoxy. This is Paul’s command to Timothy. Paul here links biblical law to theological orthodoxy. *This epistle is Paul’s premier exposition on the ecclesiastical enforcement of theological orthodoxy.* Paul teaches in this epistle that theological orthodoxy mandates theonomy: biblical law. According to this epistle, biblical law is not a temporary intrusion into the historical development of the kingdom of God. On the contrary, it is at the heart of this development, not as a means of redemption, but as a tool of dominion.²

B. Paul’s Defense of Theonomy

Verses 5–11 constitute an important New Testament passage on the subject of the correct use of biblical civil law. *I regard this as the most important New Testament passage dealing with the lawful use of the Mosaic civil law.*³ Yet the passage is not well known. Indicative of the lack of interest by modern theologians regarding this passage is the fact that Oxford University’s N. T. Wright, widely regarded as an academic expert in New Testament ethics, did not comment on this passage, or even refer to it, in his book, *The Climax of The Covenant*:

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

3. If I were to choose my turf in the New Testament defense of theonomy, I would choose I Timothy. Matthew 5:17–19 was Greg Bahnsen’s battlefield of preference. I have always preferred an ammo belt filled with judicial specifics to a single hermeneutical hand grenade. I can shoot better than I can throw.

Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology (1992), a monograph on Paul's use of the Mosaic law.

1. False Teachers

Paul speaks of law in the singular. He criticizes certain men who have raised themselves up in the church at Ephesus as teachers of the law. He does not criticize them for teaching the Mosaic law. He criticizes them for being false teachers who do not understand the law (v. 7). Then he begins a brief disquisition on God's law. He affirms God's law as a good thing when it is used lawfully (v. 8). Every example of the law that Paul lists here was a Mosaic civil law for which specific civil sanctions were mandated in the Old Testament.

What is the *lawful use* of God's civil law? Paul gives a clear answer: *to place limits on evil-doers*. "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers" (v. 9). Certain people are lawless and insubordinate to God. He identifies what kinds of people he has in mind. He does so by listing a series of crimes. By "crimes," I mean sins that are lawfully punished by the imposition of civil sanctions on convicted perpetrators. Paul lists these crimes under the general category of unholiness and profanity (v. 9). An unholy person has violated a moral boundary. A profane person has violated sacred space or sacred property.⁴ This would include murder: destroying the image of God in men (Gen. 9:6). Certain crimes represent unholy behavior. Each of the infractions in Paul's list is also found in the Mosaic law: murder (Ex. 20:13; 21:14), manslaying (Ex. 21:22–25), fornication,⁵ male homosexuality (Lev. 20:13), kidnapping (Ex. 21:16), lying (Ex. 23:1)⁶ and perjury (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 19:15–21).

4. On profanity, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

5. Under the Mosaic statutes, fornication for money by a priest's daughter was a capital crime (Lev. 21:9). This was a priestly law. It is no longer in force because the priesthood has been changed (Heb. 7). Fornication with an unbetrothed virgin was a crime against her father, and the state was required to enforce the fornicator's payment of 50 shekels of silver to the woman's father (Deut. 22:29). If a woman was betrothed as a concubine—a wife with no dowry—both she and the fornicator were to be scourged (whipped) (Lev. 19:20). Adultery—copulation with another person's spouse—was adultery, and this was a capital crime. The victimized spouse had the right to command the state to execute both of them, though not just one of them. See North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 32.

6. Lying is not a crime unless it accompanies fraud or slander, where an identifi-

2. *Civil Sanctions*

Without sanctions, there is no law. Without civil sanctions, there is no civil law. *Paul is here defending the Mosaic civil law and its mandated civil sanctions.* He is not speaking of Mosaic ceremonial laws that were enforced by the priests. He is also not speaking of violations of moral laws to which no civil sanctions are specified. In another epistle, Paul offered a similar list, although it was not made up of exclusively civil laws: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:9–10).⁷ Any suggestion that Paul was an antinomian because he wrote that Christians are under grace rather than law (Rom. 6:14–15) ignores the passages in which he identified the eternally lost in terms of their behavior. Any discussion of Paul’s doctrine of grace that does not include a detailed consideration of these passages is incomplete and one-sided, i.e., antinomian.

3. *New Covenant Laws*

In Galatians, he spoke of the Mosaic law as a tool for instructing the children of the household. The distinction is between spiritual children (Old Covenant saints) and spiritual adults (New Covenant saints). Children are treated as servants in their father’s household (Gal. 4:1–7). This was Israel’s condition under the Mosaic law. Christians are no longer under the Mosaic law, *taken as a covenantal unit*, just as adult heirs are no longer under the authority of household servants (v. 7). This does not mean that all of what the servants had taught the heirs is irrelevant to the heirs. On the contrary, their father had placed them under the servants’ authority in order that they might learn to govern themselves internally by the external standards of the law. Paul in Galatians referred to the priestly (“ceremonial”) aspects of the Mosaic law, which he called weak and beggarly elements of the law (v. 9). His examples were Mosaic requirements for honoring special

able injury to a third party takes place. Fraud in general is prohibited by the law prohibiting false weights and measures (Lev. 19:35–36). North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 19.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

ceremonial days and months (v. 10). These laws had been designed by God for righteous people under the Old Covenant. In fact, a person identified himself as a member of God's righteous nation by obeying these laws. But these laws were laws for children, i.e., God's covenant people at an earlier stage in the development of God's covenants. The question is this: Which laws are for the New Covenant era? Surely the list in I Timothy 1:9–10 constitutes one such list.

In this epistle to Timothy, he is not speaking of the weak and beggarly elements of the Mosaic law. He is speaking of civil laws that restrain evil-doers who are insubordinate to God, and who reveal this by their actions. The enforcement of these laws is lawful, he says. These statutes of the Mosaic law are not restricted in their authority to a society made up of spiritual children. They are not weak and beggarly elements of the annulled Old Covenant. They retain full authority in God's civil covenant. The New Covenant has not annulled any of these laws. Paul lists these unholy acts as examples of things contrary to sound doctrine (v. 10)—literally, “healthful teaching.” These crimes are contrary to the gospel (v. 11).

I regard this passage as the clearest example in the New Testament of Paul's commitment to theonomy as a principle of biblical interpretation. Here, he affirms the Mosaic civil law in general by identifying specific Mosaic civil statutes as defining unrighteousness. He says that God's law is designed to restrict specific behavior. Theonomy in this sense is not designed for righteous people, but for the unrighteous. He who commits such acts is not a righteous person. This was also Paul's point in I Corinthians 6:9–10.

C. “We’re Under Grace, Not Law!”

The phrase, “under grace, not law,” does not mean—cannot possibly mean—that all of the Mosaic civil laws and sanctions have been permanently annulled by the New Covenant. Paul in this passage affirms the continuing validity of several Mosaic civil laws. Paul says that *these laws have no power over covenant-keepers*, because covenant-keepers have been delivered from these sins. The *power of these temptations* over them has been *removed by God's special grace*. The gospel has delivered them from bondage to the law by redeeming their humanity. They are not under these laws, *not* in the sense of not being under a civil government that lawfully enforces these laws, but in the sense of their being new men in Christ.

1. *The Power of Sin*

What did Paul mean when he wrote in Romans that Christians are under grace, not law? He was referring to the *indwelling power of sin*.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:14–18).

Paul in Romans was writing about *personal ethics*, not civil government. The passage has nothing to say about civil government. It speaks of *the hierarchy of sin*. Covenant-breakers are in bondage to sin. When Paul wrote that we are “under grace, not law,” he was referring to its eternal sanctions. Christians are not under these sanctions because Christ has suffered and died in their place (Rom. 5).

On the other hand, Christians *are* under the civil law because they are under civil sanctions, just as everyone is supposed to be. The judicial question is this: “Whose civil law and which civil sanctions?” In a Christian commonwealth, God’s Biblical civil laws are supposed to apply to every resident. This is the biblical principle of the rule of law in action. “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49).⁸

A Christian is under God’s Biblical laws as a resident of the kingdom of God *in history*. God’s law is supposed to be enforced by family government, church government, and civil government. Above all, it is to be enforced by self-government. But a Christian is not under God’s law and its sanctions as a member of the kingdom of God *in eternity*. His dual citizenship (Phil. 3:20)⁹ is reflected in two different ways with respect to God’s law. *A Christian is under God’s law in history, for he is under the threat of its negative sanctions*. He is not under this threat in eternity, for Christ has suffered its negative sanctions on his behalf. This fact does not deny the eternity of God’s law. For covenant-keep-

8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 2, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

9. “For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20).

ers, the power of sin is gone. For covenant-breakers, the power to sin is gone. The law's sanctions, like the law itself, are eternal: exclusively positive for covenant-keepers; exclusively negative for covenant-breakers.

2. Law and Sanctions

Here is a fundamental principle of law: *Where there are no sanctions, there is no law.* In eternity, the negative sanctions of God's biblical law will not apply to covenant-keepers, for they have been applied to Christ on their behalf already. The sanctions *will* be applied to covenant-breakers, who were not beneficiaries of God's saving grace in history. In history, however, both the threat and the promise of the imposition of the positive and negative covenantal sanctions of God's biblical law apply to everyone, which is why there is a valid trio of covenantal hierarchies: church, family, and state. Each covenantal agency is required by God to enforce God's Biblical sanctions on all those under its jurisdiction.

Consider this example. Christians are not authorized to commit bestiality, despite the fact that there is no New Testament recapitulation of the Mosaic laws against this practice.¹⁰ Neither is the absence of any restatement of these laws valid evidence that God now allows the practice, or that the state should not enforce the Mosaic laws against bestiality. Yet there are very few Christians today who have a raging temptation to get involved in this sin. They are lawfully under civil laws against bestiality because these civil laws are not annulled in the New Covenant, but this temptation does not affect them personally. Its power over them is nil. In this sense, they are not under these laws, because they are not tempted by them, and even if they were, God restrains their temptation. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13).

I use this theonomic example because, in the year of our Lord, 2004, mass e-mailings on the Internet promoted Web sites featuring bestiality. I received regular solicitations ("spam") in my e-mail box for such commercial Web sites. But I was not tempted to visit these sites,

10. "And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast" (Lev. 20:15). "And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (Lev. 20:16).

let alone practice the evil. Not many people are tempted. This ancient evil is not familiar to most Westerners. They have not developed a taste for it. Nevertheless, this ancient evil, long underground and on the fringes of Western society, is now reappearing, and its imagery is nearly beyond the arm of the law because of the nature of the Internet: beyond local civil jurisdictions. Christian civilization had kept this practice limited for almost seventeen centuries. Now, however, Christian civilization in the West is in a downward phase. Old evils are resurfacing.

To argue that the phrase, “we’re under grace, not law,” means that the practice of bestiality is now lawful, either for covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers, is to deny Paul’s explicit teaching about the law in I Timothy 1:5–11. The next time you hear someone cite Romans 6:14–15 in defense of *civil antinomianism*, ask him: “Are you referring to the legalization of bestiality?” See what he says.¹¹ It is even more relevant in today’s world of digital communications. Those Christians who cite “we’re under grace, not law,” have given almost no thought to the implications of their position for both civil government and public debauchery.

Then they follow with Matthew 7:1: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Ask them: “Do you mean that Christians should not get involved in politics and must never serve on a jury? Does you mean that no Christian can lawfully be a police officer?” They have no idea. They just rattle off these phrases. They never think about what they are saying. They react automatically to the suggestion that God judges people in history by means of hierarchical governments and sanctions. They do not understand that it is never a question of “sanctions vs. no sanctions.” It is always a question of *which sanctions*, imposed by *what agency of government*. Matthew 7:1 is in fact Christ’s solemn warning to society to covenant in terms of biblical law, for there is no way to gain justice for yourself without granting it to everyone else. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:2). If you want to be judged by God’s law rather than by covenant-breaking man’s law, then you must judge by God’s law. This is the biblical principle of the rule of law.

Finally, they end with a confident citation. “He that is without sin

11. I first recommended this apologetic tactic in *75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won’t Ask* (Tyler, Texas: Spurgeon Press, 1986): Question 26. (<http://bit.ly/75Questions>)

among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). They never bother to mention the following facts: (1) this was a set-up by the Pharisees to embarrass Christ (v. 6); (2) Christ was not a civil judge; (3) the Pharisees never bothered to bring in the co-adulterer, who was male. This was their attempt to get Christ to issue a public condemnation in what was clearly a rigged accusation, in which the Pharisees were shielding the man who presumably had initiated the adulterous act. Jesus knew that they were being unjust to the woman by not also bringing the man who had seduced her. They were not applying the law to both parties equally, a violation of the biblical principle of equality before the law (Ex. 12:49).¹² They all went out of His presence. But naive antinomian Christians, who know nothing of Mosaic law and its standards of justice, blithely cite this passage. A literal interpretation would mean that no civil government is legal, for all judges are sinners. But those who cite this passage as if it meant anything other than Christ’s response to a set-up using rigged evidence honestly think they are saying something profound when they cite this passage in response to the suggestion that God’s Bible-revealed cross-boundary civil laws¹³ are still binding in the New Testament era.

Christians announce, “we’re under grace, not law.” In fact, they are under pagan courts and pagan lawyers. They know this. They much prefer pagan law and pagan courts to God’s law. They have self-consciously denied the relevance of Christ’s warning: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:2). They vote for politicians who mete out pagan judicial measures. They thereby bring themselves under pagan civil law and pagan civil sanctions, all in the name of religiously neutral natural law and religiously neutral social ethics. They prefer this arrangement to the enforcement of God’s civil laws and the ideal of Christendom, which they regard as both tyrannical and immoral. They announce: “Christians can live under any civil order,” but they do not really believe this. They do not believe that Christians can or should live under an explicitly Christian civil order. They deny the possibility of such a civil order, and they dismiss as immoral or at least ill-conceived any attempt to establish such an order. On this point, they are allied with humanists.

12. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

13. On cross-boundary laws, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion:C.

Sin places covenant-keepers under God's law. As an example, when a man commits adultery with a "strange woman," he risks contracting a venereal disease. He remains under nature's law and its sanctions. To argue that he is not under nature's law, because he has made a profession of faith, is ridiculous. Few Christians would argue for such a position.

I argue that it is equally foolish to insist that adultery is no longer governed by biblical civil law. When a modern society refuses to impose the Mosaic civil law governing adultery, including—at the discretion of the victimized spouse—its mandated capital sanction, God's direct negative corporate sanctions will eventually be imposed on that society (Deut. 8:19–20).¹⁴ To argue that "we're under grace, not law" in defense of a social order that adopts some law-order other than the Bible's is merely to call for the substitution of other civil laws and other civil sanctions for God's civil laws and civil sanctions. This rebellion brings that society under the threat of God's directly imposed sanctions.

3. *False Teachers*

Throughout my commentaries, I have long referred to God's biblical law, not just "God's law." I have done my best to distinguish my exposition of theonomy from what is called natural law theory. Theonomy is explicitly opposed to the natural law tradition, which had its origin in pagan Stoic thought,¹⁵ and was imported into the church mainly by medieval scholastic theologians.

Paul is not speaking in this passage about a system of natural law or common law. He is speaking of God's biblical law, lawfully used. He contrasts God's law, lawfully used, with the false teaching of men who do not understand the law of God. These men were involved in teaching fables and long genealogies (v. 4). Who were these men? They were spiritual disciples of the Pharisees. They were trying to persuade gentiles that the latter should obey Mosaic laws that mandated religious ceremonies (Gal. 2). We know that the targets of Paul's displeasure here were Judaizers.¹⁶ Gentile priests and philosophers were not en-

14. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

15. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), pp. 77–82.

16. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1957), pp. 58–59.

gaged in detailed genealogical studies. Genealogy was a concern of the Pharisees. Paul was at war with Judaizers, who were inside the church. They sought to bring gentiles under the Mosaic ceremonial law, meaning laws associated with the priestly status of Old Covenant national Israel. The Judaizers were not promoting some gentile view of law.

Paul here contrasts God's law, lawfully used, with fables and genealogies. He is *not* contrasting the Mosaic civil law with the Mosaic ceremonial law, as he did in Galatians. He does not dismiss the Mosaic ceremonial laws as fables that produce disputes. He does not even mention Mosaic ceremonial laws in this epistle. He is contrasting God's law with forms of error that produce disputes (v. 4). He calls this idle talk, or as the King James puts it graphically, vain jangling (v. 6). What had been mandated by the Mosaic law—ceremonial laws—had by Paul's day become perverted by false teachers. Christ had repeatedly challenged false teachers from the same theological camp. Paul here continues this challenge.

What is Paul talking about? He has in mind Phariseeism, of which he had been a part (Phil. 3:5). The Pharisees had built up an enormous unwritten code of legal restrictions. This oral tradition was regarded by the Pharisees as possessing authority equal to the Mosaic law.¹⁷ They insisted that the oral tradition went back to Moses.¹⁸ Beginning in the second century, A.D., a few rabbis began to write down these oral laws. By A.D. 500, there were two enormous compilations of these legal texts (mishnah) and rabbinic commentaries (gemara): the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud, which was incomplete. The former compilation became dominant in Judaism.¹⁹ It defined Judaism until the nineteenth century, when mainstream Judaism began to go theologically liberal.

17. The Sadducees rejected the oral tradition. Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), I, ch. XIII. After Rome's destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, they disappeared. *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zvi and Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1965), p. 340. The Pharisees replaced them as the leaders of Judaism, which is the religion taught by the rabbis.

18. Jacob Neusner, *The Pharisees: Rabbinic Perspectives* (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV, 1973), p. 196.

19. In medieval times, a small Jewish sect known as the Karaites rejected the Talmud. Their origin is generally traced to Anan ben David in the eighth century. About 30,000 of them resided in the State of Israel in 1999. Nechemia Meyers, "Israel's 30,000 Karaites follow Bible, not Talmud," *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California News* (Dec. 10, 1999). (<http://bit.ly/KaraitesIsrael>)

D. Making Society Safer

This passage promotes love out of a pure heart (v. 5). Paul's list of laws under the general category of "the law" is taken from the Mosaic civil law. But how can civil law create love? It cannot do this. The purpose of civil law is not the creation of good people. Rather, civil law seeks to restrict certain evil acts of insubordinate people, i.e., criminals. God's civil law is not made for righteous people, Paul says (v. 9). *This is a warning for God's people to behave righteously.*

1. Redemption

In what way is civil law related to redemption? If the goal of the commandment is the creation of internal righteousness—love from a cleansed heart—then civil law is impotent. Civil law cannot change human nature. No law can. This was Paul's permanent message: salvation is by grace through faith, not by law.

Paul specifically mentions the gospel at the end of this passage (v. 11). The gospel is the good news to fallen man of the substitutionary atonement by Jesus Christ, and God's judicial imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness to sinners.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (Rom. 5:6–11).

The gospel is the good news of men's deliverance from the bondage of sin by God's unmerited grace through faith in Christ. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). This grace is designed to produce good works: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

2. Gospel and Law

Then what is the relationship between the gospel and the Mosaic civil law? Paul says that these civil laws are not made for righteous people. This means that righteous people are not to come under the negative civil sanctions mandated by God through Moses for violations of these laws, for righteous people do not commit such acts. *God's saving grace removes specific sinners from the ethical category of the unrighteous.* It transforms them, so that they do not commit such acts. The Mosaic civil law is not made for them, for they have been transformed. They still commit sins (I John 1:10), but not these crimes. *If they continue to commit such crimes, this is evidence that testifies against their judicial status as covenant-keepers.*

If they previously had committed these crimes, and were lawfully convicted for having committed them, they are still lawfully classified by society as criminals. They are still under the civil sanctions. But this does not change the fact that these laws were not made for them. The laws were made for what they had been: criminals.

If they committed any these crimes, but they have not been convicted, they still owe restitution to God and to any victims. Furthermore, if someone perjured himself, and, as a result, some innocent person was convicted or at least placed at risk of conviction, the gospel does not relieve the former criminal from confessing his crime and making restitution to the victim. But these laws were not made for the redeemed person he has become.

Paul's exposition of the law prepares Timothy for Paul's confession that he had been the chief of sinners (vv. 12–16). Jesus subsequently showed grace to Paul. This made Paul an example of God's grace (v. 16). Others may profit from this example. Paul uses this as an example of deliverance. What he had been, he no longer is. What he had done, he no longer does. What had condemned him, no longer condemns him. The Mosaic law that had been made for him is no longer made for him. He has participated in *the transition from wrath to grace*, which is the story of the Bible from Genesis 3 to Revelation 20.

The Mosaic civil law was not designed to transform men's nature. It was made to reduce evil. It infringed on the actions of evil-doers retroactively, imposing negative sanctions on them, or forcing them to make restitution to their victims. The law's presence in society was designed to put the fear of God into them and others like them. "And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously"

(Deut. 17:13). The law in this sense was made for the Israelites. Paul does not so much as hint that the result of the Mosaic civil law—fear of committing crimes—is undesirable today. On the contrary, he says that the law is good (v. 8).

Critics of certain civil laws—very often laws associated with violations of sexual boundaries—insist that civil laws cannot make men good. “You can’t change human nature!” (It is worth noting that those people who argue this way also tend to be favorable to civil laws that interfere with an owner’s use of his property.)²⁰ Theirs is a spurious argument. Civil law is not intended to change human nature, which it cannot do. Civil law is intended to make people *safer* by restricting specified public evils. By increasing the criminal’s risk of coming under negative civil sanctions, civil law reduces the supply of crime by raising its cost. This is a law of economics: *when the production cost of something rises, less of it is supplied*. Civil law is designed to increase peace and safety by reducing the level of rebellion against God, which manifests itself as rebellion against righteous people and law-abiding sinners. The goal of civil law is increased peace and tranquility for society, a goal that Paul refers to in the next section (I Tim. 2:1–2).²¹ *The civil law’s goal is not the transformation of human nature*. Civil law does not make righteous men out of unrighteous men. It makes unrighteous men *behave* more like righteous men. There is a difference: the difference between the doctrine of *salvation by law* and the doctrine of *salvation by grace*.

Paul’s language allows for the possibility that he was using a rhetorical technique with his statement that the law is not made for the righteous person. Was he trying to persuade his readers that all men are unrighteous? Jesus had used a similar technique when He told the Jewish leaders that sick people, not healthy people, are in need of a physician (Luke 5:31). He was subtly warning them that they were morally sick. He said that He had come to call sinners to repentance, not the righteous (v. 32). Was Paul also using the terms “righteous” and “sinners” in this way? Was he implying that all men are sinners, so therefore they all need the restraints of these specific civil laws? Was he being rhetorical when he wrote that the law was not made for the righteous?

I do not believe that this was Paul’s line of reasoning in this pas-

20. This is not true of libertarians, who oppose civil laws against sexual acts and the free exercise of property.

21. Chapter 2.

sage. He was writing to Timothy. He was not confronting the Judaizers directly, unlike Jesus, who had publicly confronted the Jewish leaders. When Paul writes that these laws are made for the unrighteous, he means *criminals*, not sinners in general. He has in mind the Mosaic law in its capacity as a source of social peace.

E. Kidnapping, War, and Slavery

In verse 10, Paul identifies kidnappers as evil-doers. The Greek word is translated as “menstealers.” This Greek word appears only in this verse. It is a combination of two Greek words meaning “men” and “feet.” The literal meaning is a man who places others at his feet. *Strong’s Concordance* translates it as “enslaver.” This verse is the key New Testament passage relating to the immorality of one aspect of slavery—specifically, the forcible kidnapping of slaves by private individuals. Later in this epistle, Paul raises the issue of slavery.²² Paul’s discussions of slavery must be understood in light of this verse.

The practice of stealing men to make them into forced servants of others is evil. It is a form of kidnapping. This was a civil crime in the Mosaic law. “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:16).²³ Kidnapping remains a civil crime, according to Paul in this passage.

1. Harvesting Slaves

The Mosaic Covenant did not allow Israel’s conquest of foreign nations to become a means of stealing men for the purpose of harvesting slaves. When Israel made war with a city outside of Canaan (Deut. 20:15), and the city surrendered, its inhabitants became tributaries, i.e., taxpayers (Deut. 20:11).²⁴ If the besieged city refused to surrender, all of the males, young and old, had to be executed when it fell (v. 13). Only the females were to be spared (v. 14). This mandated that the females be brought back to Israel, in order to keep them from either starving or falling prey to another city’s warriors. Women could be made to serve as slaves as part of a military conquest. This was a form of mercy. They were not to be executed or left behind as defenseless widows or orphans. But the males were not to be enslaved and brought back to Israel, filling the land with covenant-breakers seeking revenge.

22. Chapter 8, below.

23. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 34.

24. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 48.

Paul's epistle was not written to the Jews. It did not assume that the gentiles had such a civil law as this one governing Israel's military conquests. In fact, it assumed the opposite. Israel was allowed to import slaves from foreign nations (Lev. 25:44–46).²⁵ These slaves had not been conquered by Israel. They would not regard Israel as the original cause of their enslavement. They had been the victims of another army.

Paul's condemnation here applies to the deliberate harvesting of slaves as a profession. By the first century A.D., the slave trade was centuries old and widespread in both Greece and Rome. Rome had long used its military conquests to harvest slaves, who were then sold to the slave traders who followed Rome's armies.²⁶ Paul does not here condemn this means of financing wars, even though the Mosaic law outlawed the practice for Israel. He condemns profit-seeking thieves who use coercion to steal individuals, as distinguished from armies that conquer cities, but spare the lives of those who are then sold into slavery. The former practice is an activity of private citizens. By the Mosaic law's standards, this was a capital crime.

Paul's identification of kidnapping as a sin is an extension of the Mosaic case law against kidnapping. What changed with the New Testament were the Mosaic laws of warfare. The Mosaic laws of warfare were applications of the Mosaic land laws. Israel was not to bring into its territories large numbers of slaves from a single nation. There was always the threat of a revenge-based uprising. By restricting the importation of male slaves who were the victims of other nations' armies, and by importing slaves from a multitude of nations, Israel was to reduce the threat of internal rebellion. The nation was not to use slave harvesting as a way to finance an empire.

Israel was required to execute all the males of a defeated city whose rulers had refused to surrender. This law did not extend into the New Covenant. First, it was a land law that was tied to Israel as holy ground. Second, the spread of the gospel is no longer dependent on one nation's missionary efforts, as had been the case under the Mosaic Covenant. Covenant-keepers in the New Testament reside in many lands. They represent many ecclesiastical and national traditions. To execute all of the male residents of a city whose rulers had failed to surrender would be to undermine the work of evangelism.

25. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31.

26. Milton Meltzer, *Slavery: A World History*, 2 vols. (n.p.: Da Capo, 1993), I, p. 110.

The church has never called upon civil magistrates to adopt this Mosaic law. On the contrary, the church through the centuries has steadily adopted a view of warfare that exempts civilians and non-combatants from deliberate military sanctions, either during the war or after. The twentieth century saw a reversal of this view of warfare, but that bloody century was a humanist-dominated era.

The vast supplies of slaves that had been the result of foreign nations' non-enforcement of the Mosaic law of post-war extermination ended when Rome ceased to conquer territory. By the time that Christian emperors ascended to the throne, the Roman Empire was in its contraction phase. Steadily, Christianity adopted a new view of warfare: warriors vs. warriors. While a small supply of slaves from defeated tribes or cities did trickle into Europe during the Middle Ages, this was nowhere close to the scale of either Roman enslavement²⁷ or the enslavement of Africans that began in the year 1444.²⁸ The slave trade became a minor aspect of the medieval European economy, for foreign trade became minimal.

2. African Slavery

When the economy changed in the West, the two means of obtaining large numbers of slaves were kidnapping from Africa and breeding slaves domestically. The former practice is illegal in terms of biblical law, and the latter practice has involved the destruction of marriage and the family among the slaves.²⁹ Western slavery after 1444 always rested on the denial of biblical law. It was a system based on legalized kidnapping. The West's slave system after the discovery of the Atlantic sugar islands in the late fifteenth century brought mass slavery back to the West for the first time since the fourth century. Slavery became predominantly African slavery. The supplies of West African slaves were increased by coastal tribes that made war on interior tribes as part of harvesting operations. This was deliberate kidnapping by the state. The coastal tribes did not seek to occupy a foreign tribe's land as a means of extending the dominion of the coastal tribe. West African warfare became primarily an economic operation: slave harvesting. The West's slave traders were in an alliance with professional kidnappers. They were accomplices. The British Navy put an

27. Meltzer, *Slavery*, I, chaps. 14, 15.

28. Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 21.

29. See Appendix D:E.

end to this alliance in the nineteenth century.

The only theological basis for justifying a New Testament extension of the slave system of Mosaic Israel would be (1) the abandonment of the medieval concept of limited warfare, and (2) the re-establishment of the lawful enslavement of defeated civilian populations. Mosaic Israel imported slaves from abroad—slaves that were either the captives of war or the heirs of such captives (Lev. 25:44–46). It was illegal to import the victims of kidnapping. The Mosaic law against kidnapping was not a land law, which is why Paul cited it in verse 10.

Paul's identification of kidnapping as sinful unto damnation was important in the development of the abolitionist movement in the United States. This influence began with the ecclesiastical trial of Rev. George Bourne. This was a landmark case in American Protestantism prior to the Civil War (1861–65). In 1815, Bourne, a Presbyterian minister in Harrisonburg, Virginia, presented an overture to the General Assembly to condemn slavery as anti-Christian. He based his condemnation primarily on I Timothy 1:10: manstealing. He was de-frocked for this by his Presbytery when he returned from General Assembly. He appealed his case to the General Assembly the next year. Officially, the General Assembly had adopted I Timothy 1:10 in a condemnation of slavery in 1806, but this had not been ratified by the presbyteries. The General Assembly then retroactively eliminated this section from its rules, leaving Bourne with only the Bible to appeal to. His de-frocking was ratified by the General Assembly in 1818.³⁰ The Northern Presbyterian Church refused to condemn slavery until after the Civil War began. The Southern Presbyterian Church, which split from the Northern Church in 1861 when the war broke out, did not condemn slavery until after the South's defeat.³¹ Bourne's ideas were picked up by the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison in the 1830s, although Garrison never acknowledged the source.³² In this way, Bourne's anti-slavery crusade was brought into national politics. I Timothy 1:10 was officially the basis of this original ecclesiastical protest.

30. For an introduction to Rev. Bourne and his work, see John W. Christie and Dwight L. Dumond, *George Bourne and The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable* (Historical Society of Delaware and the Presbyterian History Society, 1969)

31. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), ch. 2.

32. Christie and Dumond, *George Bourne*, pp. 78–80; ch. 6.

Conclusion

Paul in this passage defends the civil law of God. He cites specific Mosaic civil laws as examples of the law when it is being used lawfully. He challenges would-be teachers of the law who confuse the legal issue by offering fables and by arguing about genealogies. He identifies the Mosaic civil law as an aspect of the gospel (v. 11). No passage in the New Testament is more forthrightly theonomic.

Paul's concern in this passage is the presence of false teachers. He tells Timothy to stay in Ephesus and confront these false teachers. They were false teachers, not because they taught that the Mosaic civil law should still be enforced by gentile magistrates in the New Covenant era, but because they taught fables and detailed genealogies. Paul is identifying Judaizers, not gentile antinomians or gentile theonomists, as the false teachers in Ephesus.

Paul is not speaking of some theory of natural law, supposedly recognized as binding by all rational legal theorists, when he says that the law is good when it is used lawfully. The false teachers were not coming before the church at Ephesus in the name of Stoic natural law theory. The Stoics were not interested in genealogy. The Judaizers were interested in genealogy, for they were allies of the Pharisees. They were coming into a gentile church in the name of Moses. Paul asks Timothy to tell them to stop teaching their version of Pharisaic legalism. He calls on Timothy to continue the war that Paul had launched against them (v. 18).

The law (v. 8) refers to Mosaic civil laws (vv. 9–10). Paul's commandment to Timothy includes teaching the Mosaic civil law because civil law is inescapably a part of Christ's comprehensive kingdom of God in history. Civil law is a means of reducing crime and increasing safety and tranquility. It reduces the costs of dominion.

In my commentary on Leviticus, I distinguish among four judicial categories within the Mosaic civil law: laws governing land, laws governing seeds, which were both an aspect of Jacob's prophecy regarding Shiloh (Gen. 49:10), i.e., laws governing the separation of the tribes, which were annulled no later than A.D. 70 with the fall of Jerusalem;³³ laws governing Israel as a separate nation of priests,³⁴ which were annulled when there was a change in the priesthood (Heb. 7); and cross-

33. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Conclusion:C:1.

34. *Ibid.*, Conclusion:C:2.

boundary laws that applied to gentile nations such as Nineveh.³⁵ Only the cross-boundary laws are still in force.

The laws listed by Paul in this passage are cross-boundary laws. *They are permanent stipulations of God's civil covenantal order.* Not only did Paul never announce their annulment, he insists in this passage that they are aspects of God's law, lawfully used. By affirming their continuing validity, Paul implicitly asserts the continuing New Covenant validity of the concept of the civil covenant.

It is only by an oath that is publicly ratified under the Trinitarian God of the Bible that men can fully honor God in the realm of history: in church, family, and state. A state without an oath that is taken by every citizen under the Trinitarian God of the Bible is lawful, just as a family established without a similar oath under God is lawful, but neither institution is faithful to God. Common grace exists in both civil government and family government, but special grace is always preferable to common grace. Families and civil governments must be transformed by the gospel by way of God's gracious transformation of human nature. The evidence of a widespread transformation of human nature will be the proliferation of both family and civil covenants that are publicly ratified by oath under the Trinitarian God of the Bible. This is what it means to baptize the nations (Matt. 28:19).³⁶ Working toward this outcome is what the Great Commission requires of Christians.³⁷ Comprehensive Trinitarian covenant ratification—personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil—will be the social and political result of what Paul calls “the commandment.”

35. *Ibid.*, Conclusion:C:3.

36. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

37. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

2

INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND ECCLESIASTICAL PEACE

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (I Tim. 2:1–2).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the power of God, who structures history for the benefit of His church. It is a call to intercessory prayer, meaning a call to honor God’s vertical hierarchy. God’s church is placed above civil magistrates in this hierarchy of intercession. By speaking on behalf of all men, including civil magistrates, the church brings peace for itself and its members. The church is therefore a representative: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Power of Prayer

1. Invoking God’s Power

It is common to speak of the power of prayer. What most people mean by this phrase is the power of God to answer specific prayers. Prayer is the means of invoking God’s power in history. The person offering the prayer calls on God to intervene in history and direct events so that the desire of the prayer-offerer is fulfilled. He believes that God can and does exercise power over creation. The creation is governed by a supernatural hierarchy.

Paul here exhorts the church to pray for all men. The meaning of the word translated as “exhort” is closer to “plead.” It is often trans-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

lated as “beseech.” Paul is not casually recommending something; he is pleading with his listeners and readers to perform a duty. Such prayer is not to be an afterthought. Prayer along these lines is not to be a peripheral activity. It is important for the corporate life of the church.

Prayer takes time, forethought, and self-discipline. It may take a self-conscious overcoming of personal revulsion in the case of praying for a ruler who is a persecutor or debauched. This is not a spiritual discipline familiar to uncommitted Christians. Paul says that a specific result should be expected from this form of prayer: the peace of the church. This is a high-level goal. Paul implies that without prayer, this goal is less likely to be attained.

This passage proclaims a cause-and-effect relationship between prayer and external corporate peace. Paul is not speaking here of individual psychological contentment. He says that the church can attain tolerance through intercessory prayer. Because of prayers offered on behalf of all men, including men placed in authority over society, the church will be left in peace.

2. *God’s Absolute Sovereignty*

This cause-and-effect relationship would not exist, were it not for the ability and willingness of God to ordain external events so that His church can be left in peace. A man is supposed to pray to God on the assumption that God is sovereign over the affairs of men. If God were not in a position to answer such prayers, the prayers would have no power independent of the intercessor’s actions. Paul’s exhortation implies that the world is personal cosmically.² Society is under God’s authority. If this were not the case, then these prayers would be powerless. Their effects would be either random or negative.

God is at the top of the *cosmic hierarchy* that is implied by this passage. A God who controls the affairs of men is not some minor deity. He tells His people to call on Him to bring peace to the church. In some fundamental way, God wants His people to acknowledge that He possesses sovereign power. His people are to acknowledge formally through their prayers that God, not man, is in charge.

3. *Representation and Hierarchy*

Paul uses three nouns: supplications, prayers, and intercessions.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

All three can be translated as “prayer.” The Greek word here translated as “intercessions” is elsewhere translated as “prayer.” “For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (I Tim. 4:5). The meaning of “supplication” here is close to “petition.” In this case, it is *a petition on behalf of others*, yet indirectly for the *peace of the church*. An intercession is a prayer on behalf of others. The person praying is interceding. He is an agent for the one being prayed for.

This prayer is not selfless. It seeks a benefit for the intercessor: the peace of the church. The means to this end is prayer on behalf of all men. This seems to be an exclusively positive sanction, but it is not. This prayer can produce either a blessing or a curse on the person being prayed for. Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19–21).

The ruler is judicially above the person offering the prayer, yet the latter is in a position cosmically superior to the ruler. He can call authoritatively on the Ruler of the universe. *The civil hierarchy is under the cosmic hierarchy*. A covenant-keeper who is a subordinate to the civil ruler is in a position to benefit the civil ruler through the hierarchy of prayer.

This indicates that there are *multiple hierarchies* operating in God’s kingdom. Power in hierarchies is invoked by words. God spoke the world into existence (Gen. 1). A civil ruler speaks, and his will is carried out because he possesses power. Ultimately, a ruler has the power to impose sanctions, both positive and negative. These sanctions are invoked by words, but they are not limited in their effects to words.

The Christian offers petitions to God on behalf of men, and his words produce positive results. *The essence of faith in prayer is the confidence that covenant-keepers legitimately possess, through the authority of their words, the ability to alter their environment*. This was the confession of the Roman centurion to Christ.

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto

him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel (Matt. 8:5–10).

4. *The Centurion's Confession*

The centurion understood that Christ possessed authority because Christ was uniquely under God's authority. Just as the centurion could command men and would be obeyed because he was under a civil authority that possessed great power, so Christ could command nature because He was under an authority who possessed power over nature. Jesus' response to the centurion's comparison was to say that He had not heard so great a confession of faith in Israel.

The centurion's confession identified Christ as being under God and over nature. Despite his official power under Rome's civil authority—the civil hierarchy—the centurion fully understood that he was not sufficiently worthy to have Christ under his roof. This was his personal reason for not inviting Christ to come to his home to cure his servant. He verbally subordinated himself to Christ, and then asked Christ to heal his servant. He thereby publicly acknowledged that he needed an intercessor with God on behalf of his servant if his servant was to be healed. To gain dominion over his servant's illness, he subordinated himself publicly to Christ.

The centurion had a second reason for not inviting Christ into his home: it was not necessary for Christ to be present in his home in order for Him to heal the servant. Christ's authority was not limited by geography, any more than the centurion's rule required that he be present for his orders to be obeyed. *The mark of great authority is independence from geographical constraints.*

This was a confession of the existence of the same two hierarchies that are implied by Paul's instruction to Timothy. The civil ruler who exercises authority over the church is in fact under the church's authority because of his subordination to the God who controls events. The centurion understood this and confessed it. Because of this, Christ healed his servant. The centurion achieved his goal by confessing the existence of the two hierarchies, civil and cosmic. He identified his

own authority as being inferior to Christ's. He was confessing Christ over Caesar. This is what made his confession of faith unique during Jesus' ministry.

The evidence of power is the degree of consistency between what is requested and what results. The centurion's confession of Christ's authority under God and over nature rested on the analogy of his own authority. "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." He spoke, and his words were obeyed by his subordinates. So also could Jesus speak, he confessed, and His words would be obeyed. This is a statement regarding cause and effect: *words produce otherwise unpredictable results*, but they do so only because of *personal hierarchy*. Men's words possess no autonomous power. God's words do (Gen. 1). The centurion understood that Christ could speak a word and heal his servant: ". . . say in a word, and my servant shall be healed" (Luke 7:7). It is not clear whether he believed that Christ is God, who could therefore speak a healing word directly, or else that He was so completely under God's authority that God would bring to pass whatever Christ spoke. Because of Christ's nature is both divine and human—two natures in one person—we cannot be certain about this, either. It is not clear whether Christ's power over nature was direct during His earthly ministry, as the creator God (Col. 1:15–17), or intercessory, as the perfect human and only begotten son of God.

Paul's exhortation has meaning only in terms of *the predictability of cause and effect*. The church's prayers on behalf of all men, including rulers, would produce peace for the church. There is *power in prayer* because there is *hierarchy in the creation*. God is over the creation, so that words directed to Him by His people on behalf of others will produce a predictable result: peace for the church. The power of prayer testifies to the power of God in history and to the authority of His covenant with His church.

B. The Goal of Peace

In English, there is a phrase, "peace and quiet." Paul here identifies quiet and peace as dual goals for the church. He does not explain why these two goals are desirable. He does not have to. In this sense, peace and quiet are aspects of common grace. All men understand the advantages of peace and quiet. Paul does not present a logical case for the

value of the benefit of peace. He assumes that anyone who reads this passage will understand the benefit.

1. Persecution and Peace

It is a commonplace observation that the church has flourished under persecution. This was surely the case during the Roman Empire. But persecution during that long period was intermittent. Times of systematic persecution were followed by times of relative peace, when Roman rulers ignored the church. In modern times, Communist rulers in China persecuted Christians for over two decades, from their ascension to power in 1949 through the Red Guard era of the late 1960s. The number of Protestants in China in 1949 when the Communists took over the mainland has been estimated to have been as few as 750,000. During the persecution years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), churches disappeared from public view. Today, everything has changed. Estimates of membership range from an official government estimate of 25 million to unofficial estimates of 130 million.³

Persecution under Islam, however, has not resulted in similar growth. The church in North Africa was completely destroyed in the seventh century by Arab armies. The Armenian church has suffered from repeated persecutions at the hands of the Turks over several centuries, culminating in the genocide of 1915–16. The Armenian church has survived, but it would not be accurate to say that it has flourished.

A legitimate goal for the church is peace. This is what all men seek for themselves, and Paul declares that the means to this legitimate goal is prayer on behalf of all men, including rulers. The peace that is attained through prayer on behalf of people who are outside the church is not a peace associated with spiritual lethargy. It is also not a peace established through the benevolence of covenant-breakers. It is an *active peace* sought through *active prayer*. It is an otherwise unexplainable peace, a peace that publicly confirms God's covenant with covenant-keepers. It also confirms the power of God to establish peace by His own authority.

The peace that Paul discusses here is the peace established through active prayer on behalf of God's covenantal enemies. The means of peace for a hated minority that would not conform to imperial Rome's liturgically mandatory pluralism of gods was intercessory prayer. Paul tells Timothy that he is to seek peace for the church by

3. "Sons of Heaven," *The Economist* (Oct. 2, 2008). (<http://bit.ly/SonsOfHeaven>)

prayers for God's enemies offered on behalf of persecutors and potential persecutors.

Paul's exhortation was necessary because prayer, especially public prayer, for men in general and for pagan rulers specifically is not an intuitive discipline. The benefits, peace and quiet, are universally desired, but the cause-and-effect relationship between intercessory prayer and peace and quiet is also not intuitive.

2. Pluralism's Counterfeit Peace

There is another kind of peace: *the peace of unconcern*. This is the kind of peace that is sought by defenders of political pluralism: the civil equality of all religions. Access to citizenship is officially opened to members of every religious faith. The civil oath is designed to be neutral theologically. In fact, a legally enforceable theological confession is outlawed as a screening device for the exercise of civil authority.⁴

Political pluralism is not taught in the Bible. There has yet to be an exegetical defense of a theory of political pluralism in terms of the Bible. Paul is not calling for a peace based on the official irrelevance of the God of the Bible for the civil realm.

Peace is also not based on the presumption of a legal order that is neutral toward God. In the previous section of this epistle, Paul identified several Mosaic civil laws as marks of a sound confession (1:9–10).⁵ God's law is designed to punish the violators of such statutes, he said. This is what it means to use the law lawfully (1:8).

Legitimate peace results from the establishment of a kingdom of saints, that is, a society whose civil covenant is based on a Trinitarian confession. The civil persecution of the church by the state should stop. But peace was not the experience of the West under Christian rule. Ecclesiastical leaders sought more than a Trinitarian confession for citizenship and peace. They regarded the theological grammar of the Athanasian creed as insufficient for citizenship and peace. They demanded the civil enforcement of Trinitarian dialects. This led to ecclesiococracy under Roman Catholicism and national civil wars under Protestantism: in Germany (1618–48) and Great Britain (1642–49). Political pluralism was the solution offered by Christians and unitari-

4. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

5. Chapter 1.

ans in their quest for peace in nations torn asunder by warring sects of Trinitarians. By 1660, the civil wars of northern Europe had persuaded a small minority of intellectuals that there cannot be civil peace in a political world of religious test oaths for citizenship. This theory was initially voiced publicly in 1642 by Roger Williams, the leader of the tiny North American colony of Rhode Island, who was also a defender of autonomous local church congregations. The only legitimate multi-layered covenantal hierarchy is civil, Williams taught, and it must not be tied to any reference to God.

In 1788, the United States became the first Christian society to establish a national civil covenant devoid of theological confession. Article VI, Section 3 of the United States Constitution banned religious test oaths for holding national office.⁶ Williams' Rhode Island colony had set the pattern.

One result in the United States by 1973 was the creation of a civil order in which the slaying of unborn children was legalized by the highest court in the land. This decision was implicitly ratified by tens of millions of voters, whose elected representatives have the authority to amend the Constitution, but have chosen not to, out of fear of political reprisals. A majority of the voters prefer the legalization of abortion on demand. There is no neutrality possible between life and death. Humanists and pietistic Christians have chosen to accept the legalization of the death of the judicially innocent, in the name of maternal sovereignty. Preceding this legal development by about a decade and then paralleling it, the execution of convicted murderers almost disappeared, despite Genesis 9:6, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." The murder rate has risen. When the cost of committing a crime is reduced by law, more of this crime is supplied. Men cry peace, peace, but there is no peace (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). There is no peace for the unwanted unborn in the United States. There is also no peace for the families of the victims of murderers.

Under such judicial conditions, covenant-keepers can and should expect the visible corporate judgment of God. Jeremiah told the Israelites, "And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of

6. This was important for non-Christians who wanted to serve in the United States Senate. Most of the states in 1787 retained Trinitarian test oaths for holders of any state office. State legislatures elected Senate members until the Constitution was amended in 1913. Senators came from the ranks of state legislatures. Apart from Article VI, Section 3, a non-Christian politician could not be elected to the Senate because he could not be elected by a state.

the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin” (Jer. 32:35). The result was the Babylonian captivity. The Israelites abandoned that hideous practice after their return to Israel. They had been slow learners. God had imposed negative corporate sanctions as a tool of education. He applied similar judicial sanctions on the American South in 1861–65 for a sin far less horrendous than the legalization of abortion.⁷

C. The Price of Peace

Intercessory prayer is both active and time-consuming. It takes systematic self-discipline to achieve it. It also takes faith that God’s universe is covenantal. Such prayer is not a zero-cost good. It is exceedingly scarce. This is the economist’s way of describing short supply at the price offered by the buyers. It is not that the value of peace is low; rather, it is that the recipients of the offer—Christians—neither recognize nor believe in this relationship between the price of such prayer and the supply of peace. They do not believe that the benefits offered by God—peace and quiet—will predictably be paid by God. They also do not perceive the difficulty of achieving the personal habit of sustained prayer on behalf of covenant-breakers. So, the cost is higher than they perceive. They do not perceive the fixed relationship between the expenditure and the promised benefit. They cease to make the necessary investment before the benefit is delivered. This is a common temptation. It should be avoided. “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).⁸

Some formal church liturgies include regular prayers for rulers. These tend to be high-church liturgies. Very few people ever pray them publicly. It is likely that even fewer pray such prayers in private. I have come across no liturgy that includes prayers for men in general in the context of the quest for peace.

Eschatology is another factor contributing to the absence of prayers on behalf of all men. Only postmillennialism teaches that the vast majority of mankind will at some point in time confess Christ and be

7. Appendix D.

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 20.

baptized in His name. Men do not spend time praying for what they have been told is an impossibility eschatologically. They conserve their time and emotional commitment by praying for things that they believe are possible. They avoid praying for that which they believe is eschatologically prohibited.

This does not mean that amillennialism and premillennialism prohibit prayers that invoke God's common grace, e.g., prayers that promote all men's greater conformity to the work of the law written in their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15).⁹ But this aspect of God's common grace is rarely discussed from the pulpit or in volumes on systematic theology, which in turn are rarely read by laymen or even pastors. In general, the doctrine of common grace is not well understood, even in Calvinist circles that have a formal tradition of incorporating the doctrine into their systematic theologies.

Later in this epistle, Paul presents another important doctrine of common grace: the doctrine of the non-regenerative salvation of sinners, i.e., their healing in history, though not necessarily in eternity.¹⁰ "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).¹¹ Pastors rarely preach on this verse. They do not know what to do with it. Paul did. He instructed the church to pray on behalf of all men.

D. Giving Thanks for All Mankind

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men." Here is an unexpected requirement for effective prayer. Christians are to give thanks for all men, including covenant-breaking rulers. Why?

First, giving thanks for all men has something to do with general thanksgiving. Elsewhere, Paul wrote: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thes. 5:15–18). History is the outworking of the providence of God. As such, all aspects of the creation deserve thanks, for

9. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012)), ch. 3.

10. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

11. Chapter 6.

God's glory is the goal of all things.

Second, other people are part of God's general dominion covenant with Adam (Gen. 1:26–28),¹² which was reconfirmed with Noah (Gen. 9:1–2).¹³ Men are required by God to subdue the earth. God's delegation of authority and its accompanying responsibility has not been revoked. This is not widely understood by Christians. They do not see the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) as an aspect of the call to subdue the earth, yet this is what it is.¹⁴

The division of labor is inescapable for the subduing of the earth. Men's talents vary ("labor").¹⁵ So do their environments, meaning their original resources ("land").¹⁶ Cooperation is necessary for maximizing men's productivity.

There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail. Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up (Eccl. 4:8–10).

This cooperation extends from the family to the entire world. The division of labor is international. This is the basis of world trade. It began with the formation and scattering of the nations after the tower of Babel (Gen. 11).¹⁷

Conclusion

Covenantal social peace does not come automatically. It comes in response to systematic covenant-keeping. One aspect of this mandatory covenant-keeping is the frequent performance of this type of pray-

12. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, chaps. 3, 4.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

14. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>) Cf. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

15. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 8; cf. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

16. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 19.

17. *Idem.*

er. This prayer is the designated means for the establishment of peace, especially in times and regions where Christians are in the minority and are perceived as a threat to the existing political order because they call men to allegiance to a different Sovereign.

Western Christians have adopted political pluralism in an attempt to avoid the accusation of being a threat to the established pagan order, both social and political, but this does not achieve their goal for long. Covenant-breakers recognize their confessional enemies, and therefore seek to restrict their influence. Imperial Rome's polytheistic pluralists recognized the threat of Christianity to the sacred order of Rome.¹⁸ Despite the protests of early Christian theologians, and despite their accurate observation that the Christians were the most obedient and productive members of the Empire, the Caesars knew better. They knew that Christians did not and could not in good conscience make the confession of Christ's accusers: "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). It was a confessional war to the death. Christians won it.

Christians were subordinate to Rome's civil government in everything but their confession of faith. But it was their rival confession regarding the authority of God that led to Rome's war against them and Christendom's eventual replacement of classical paganism for a thousand years.

This incomparable victory of Christian confession over pagan confession appalled Renaissance humanists, who dismissed Christian civilization as "the Dark Ages." They called their era a renaissance, i.e., a re-birth: a re-birth of classical paganism. Christianity's confessional victory over Imperial Rome has also embarrassed humanist-influenced Protestant intellectuals, who dismiss the ideal of Christendom as "Constantinianism." They agree entirely with Renaissance humanists on this point: the illegitimacy of the ideal of Christendom. They teach that Trinitarian confession is illegitimate for the civil covenant. They say that the civil covenant must somehow be made neutral regarding all supernatural religion. The problem with this position is easy to state: *there is no neutrality*. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). There is always a god of the civil covenant. The god of every society is its source of law.¹⁹ The question is: Which god?

18. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1971] 2007), ch. 5.

19. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig

3

MONOGAMY AND SOCIAL ORDER

This is a true saying. If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach (1 Tim. 3:1–2).

The theocentric principle that undergirds the law mandating monogamous church officers is the love of Christ for His church (Eph. 5:25–33). Christ is not a bigamist. He has only one bride: the church. There is only one marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:7–9).

This section of the epistle is an aspect of hierarchy: the screening of ecclesiastical officers. This is an aspect of vertical hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. God's Lawful Divorce of Old Covenant Israel

The following background material is necessary to understand Paul's requirement that a candidate for bishop must be the husband of one wife.

The Old Testament presents Israel as a faithless nation. Even before Israel conquered Canaan, God had warned the nation against future corporate apostasy. The Mosaic Covenant repeatedly used the imagery of a harlot or an adulteress to describe false worship. "Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy

Press, 1973), p. 4.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

sons go a whoring after their gods" (Ex. 34:15–16). "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring. This shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations" (Lev. 17:7).

Prior to the exile, Israel repeatedly worshipped other gods. By doing this, the nation became adulterous. These other gods were local and plural. Israel therefore became polygamous when she became polytheistic. Such spiritual polygamy was a form of harlotry. It was apostasy. Apostasy was a capital crime (Deut. 13:6–11).

God nevertheless remained faithful to Israel, just as the prophet Hosea remained faithful to his wife, a former harlot. God had commanded Hosea to marry her (Hosea 1:2) as a public testimony to Israel's fallen ethical condition (Hosea 3:1). Hosea's marriage testified to the fact of God's faithfulness to Israel despite Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

The Book of Hosea declares the mercy of God, for God had the right to divorce Israel, either by sending her away, just as Joseph initially planned to send Mary away (Matt. 1:19), or else by executing her, every time Israel replaced the worship of God with the worship of other gods. It was also God's legal right to forgive Israel. The principle of victim's rights is the fundamental principle of biblical justice.² This is why Jesus, as the victim, could lawfully declare from the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34b). Peter announced to the Jews, "And now, brethren, I wot [know] that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17). This is exactly what Jesus had said on the cross.

Mercy is God's option in dealing with covenant-breaking, but it is not God's obligation. Forgiveness by Christians is required,³ but not in the absence of repentance and restitution. God forgives apart from the sinner's restitution, which Christ alone has paid in full, but not without the sinner's repentance. The sinner is commanded by God to repent: to turn around ethically. God showed mercy to Israel until the day of Pentecost that followed the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 2). Until that day, God had not formally established a covenant with another nation. But Israel had been forewarned by Jesus that this would soon

2. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>)

3. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21–22).

happen. Jesus had told the leaders of Israel that this new covenantal administration would arrive during their lifetimes. “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). His listeners understood that this prophecy was not regarding distant events. “And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them” (Matt. 21:45).

Peter on Pentecost announced a great divorce. This divorce was implied by his demand that his listeners be baptized (Acts 2:38). Baptism on that day replaced circumcision as the mandatory covenant mark. Circumcision, the mark of God’s priestly covenant with Abraham, had been required of no other nation. This was because God had established a priestly covenant with no other nation. Only Israel was a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). National circumcision had been the mark of a nation’s entry into the nation of Israel, a mark of *covenantal adoption*. This is why the slaying of the newly circumcised Shechemites was a horrible crime, as Jacob knew (Gen. 34:30). This is also why the replacement of circumcision with baptism marked the definitive end of the Old Covenant order, which faded progressively until A. D. 70, when it ended forever. Ever since Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, God has not required gentiles to be circumcised in order for them to enter into a priestly covenant with Him. Instead, God has required Jews to be baptized in order for them to enter into covenant with Him. They must be adopted into His church.

This replacement of circumcision with baptism testified to Peter’s listeners regarding God’s replacement of Old Covenant Israel with the New Covenant church as His bride. *God publicly divorced national Israel at Pentecost*. He then gave the nation additional time to repent corporately and enter into His new marriage covenant through baptism. When national Israel refused, He publicly executed her in A.D. 70.⁴ Jews survived; national Israel did not.

Throughout the transition period, God retained His legal status as a monogamist. *God has only one bride at a time*. The mark of circumcision was no longer a covenant sign of membership in God’s corporate bride after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost. He did not execute Israel for several decades, but for Jews, circumcision no longer gained them access to God’s kingdom. Peter had made this clear to the temple’s officials: “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10–12). The Jews had removed the cornerstone from the structure of Old Covenant Israel. The structure could not visibly survive for long. God's divorce of Old Covenant Israel was final.

The historical means of Christ's transfer of the kingdom of God from national Israel to the church was His subordination to God at the cross. He voluntarily submitted to the pagan civil court of Rome and the apostate ecclesiastical court of the Sanhedrin. The cross placed Him under death's power. Then He visibly defeated death at the resurrection. This gained Him total power over history. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18).

B. Jews and Gentiles on Monogamy

In I Timothy 3:1–2, Paul presents a series of criteria for holding the office of bishop.⁵ The initial criterion for three church offices—bishop, deacon, elder—is monogamous marriage: "the husband of one wife." The question is: Why? We are not told specifically, either in this passage or in the others in which Paul establishes this ordination requirement. We must therefore search for reasons, first, in terms of the *context* of this law. Then we must search for additional reasons in terms of the *effects* of both monogamy and polygamy.

In this epistle's opening verses, Paul instructed Timothy to challenge certain false teachers who had a fondness for genealogies and fables (1:4). This has to refer to Judaizers.⁶ In the epistle to Titus, he referred derisively to Jewish fables (Titus 1:14). He also referred to "many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision" (Titus 1:10). He warned: "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain" (Titus 3:9). In that epistle, too, he listed this criterion for elders: one wife (1:6). In both epistles, Paul's targets were the

5. On the definition of "bishop," see chapter 4.

6. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1957), pp. 58–59.

Judaizers. He established monogamy as a criterion for church office, which was calculated to offend defenders of polygamy. Who were the defenders of polygamy? Jews.

What about the gentiles? Was polygamy so common in gentile churches that Paul had to mention this criterion specifically, in order to challenge the practice of having multiple wives? On the contrary, monogamy was the standard, both culturally and legally, in Greece and Rome. Some of the Macedonian kings had practiced polygamy. So had succeeding kings in the Greek-speaking dynasties that replaced Alexander's brief empire. The result was chaos: murderous stepbrothers striving for the crown, intrigue by mothers and sons against other mothers and sons.⁷ In contrast, classical Greece's texts indicate that the early Greeks did not practice polygamy, although captive slave women who performed sexual services were common. The *Iliad* begins with a conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles over the ownership of a such a slave. Greek society was monogamous. The few exceptions prove the rule. Polygamy was authorized by Athens after the military disaster at Sicily, during the Pelopponesian War, in 413 B.C. The limit was two wives.⁸ Euripides' play, *Medea*, was the story of a rejected, vindictive first wife.⁹ It can be interpreted as a divorce rather than polygamy. Whether this play was about simultaneous polygamy or serial polygamy, the result was the destruction of her family. Hellenistic society in Paul's era was monogamous. Inheritance was through the monogamous family.

Rome was strictly monogamous. The father's role as the head of the household was unquestioned: the *paterfamilias*. His heirs came exclusively through his wife unless they had been adopted. Adultery and divorce did become common among the upper classes, beginning no later than the late republic phase of Rome's history.¹⁰ The poet Ovid was a great promoter of adultery for married men. His licentious poetry was popular. The Emperor Augustus banned him from the capital and exiled him to a distant province. This took place in Jesus' lifetime (A.D. 8). The cause of his exile is unknown for sure, but it is believed by some historians that it may have been the emperor's concern over the moral breakdown in his own family. His daughter was a notorious

7. Daniel Ogden, *Polygamy, Prostitutes and Death: The Hellenic Dynasties* (London: Duckworth, 1999).

8. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

9. *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

10. Keith R. Bradley, *Discovery of the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), ch. 7.

adulterer. Monogamy was the standard, just as it is today under similar moral conditions governing marriage.

In Paul's day, there were Jews in the Greek-speaking congregations. There were Jews in Roman congregations. Paul does not explicitly say—nor does any New Testament passage explicitly say—that polygamy is banned by God's law. But he says repeatedly that no one who is not a husband of one wife can become a bishop or a deacon. This meant that a polygamous Jew had to be denied ordination by the church.

The Judaizers were Paul's exclusive contemporary targets when he set forth monogamy as a requirement for church office. He wanted them out of the church completely. In his main epistle against them, Galatians, he even used sarcasm regarding them, whom he called "the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7–9): "I would they were even cut off which trouble you" (Gal. 5:12). He surely wanted them barred from church offices.

C. Polygamy Under the Old Covenant

Polygamy was part of the Old Covenant, beginning no later than Abraham.¹¹ There was a Mosaic law of inheritance associated with polygamy: a double portion for the oldest son, even if he was the son of the unloved wife (Deut. 21:15–17).¹² This indicates that polygamy can raise the issue of which wife is loved most. In this Mosaic case law, one wife was not loved at all. The Old Testament's model of the unloved wife is Leah (Gen. 29:30). God therefore gave her favor: she had many children, while Rachel initially had none (Gen. 29:31). This created a major disruption in Jacob's family. It led to two additional wives (Gen. 30:4, 9). The envious¹³ sons (Gen. 37:11) of all three wives later combined to sell the oldest son of Rachel into slavery. They told their fath-

11. There are Web sites on which Orthodox Jews promote polygamy. But polygamy is uncommon among Orthodox Jews, just as it is among Mormons. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has never formally abandoned polygamy as an ideal, only as an acceptable practice in contemporary non-Mormon societies.

12. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 49.

13. Envy is the desire to tear down someone who is perceived as being higher in status, wealth, or favor. The envious person does not expect to gain the advantage of the envied person after the tearing down takes place. Jealousy is the desire to take the advantage away from the person and appropriate it for oneself. On the distinction between envy and jealousy, see Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, [1966] 1969). The King James translators translated the same Hebrew word both ways.

er that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, which brought great sorrow to him for seventeen years, until the family's descent into Egypt (Gen. 37). Envy also afflicted Moses' family: Aaron and Miriam revolted against Moses because of his second wife (Num. 12:1). There is no mention of Zipporah's having died. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, lived in a polygamous household. The second wife deliberately vexed Hannah because of Hannah's barrenness (I Sam. 1:6). Envy afflicted David's polygamous family: incest and murder (II Sam. 13). All of the polygamous households that are mentioned in the Old Testament were troubled with dissension. In Solomon's case, his polygamy led to his false worship. Because of this, Israel was divided during his son's reign. "Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant" (I Kings 11:11).

1. Legality

This raises a crucial question: If polygamy has such negative consequences, why was it legal under the Old Covenant? If, for example, allowing one man to have several wives leaves younger men with no opportunity to marry, why did God allow this practice for his people for at least two millennia before Christ? Finally, if polygamy really is evil, then what New Testament principle implicitly annuls the Old Testament's laws that regulated polygamy? No explicit New Testament commandment mentions this annulment for the laity, only for church officers. In the Mosaic law, only the king was required to be monogamous (Deut. 17:17).

Under the Mosaic law, there was a way to minimize the effects of polygamy on unmarried young men who could not locate women to marry. There was a way to expand the pool of eligible women—at a price. It was legal for covenant-keeping men to marry foreign women under certain circumstances. Foreign slave women could be purchased from Israelite households or from abroad. The inter-generational enslavement of foreigners was legal (Lev. 25:44–46).¹⁴ Also, there were laws governing marriage to foreign widows and orphaned daughters after the Israelites had annihilated every male after a victorious war conducted outside of Canaan (Deut. 21:10–14).

14. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

Living as a permanent servant inside an Israelite household was considered the equivalent of membership in the assembly. All males living permanently in the household of an Israelite had to be circumcised (Gen. 17:10–13). Every circumcised male had lawful access to Passover (Ex. 12:48), unless he was under some judicial condemnation. A female had no covenant mark on her, so her mere presence as a permanent member of an Israelite household made her eligible for Passover and therefore also marriage to an Israelite. A foreign woman who covenanted with God outside the land could lawfully be married, as the cases of Rahab and Ruth prove.

2. Marriage As Adoption

The legal issue was adoption. A permanent foreign female slave was automatically adopted into the household of her owner; otherwise, she would not have been eligible to attend Passover. She of course could not worship foreign gods in the household (Deut. 13:6–11). Solomon's wives broke this law, and it was a major sin on his part that he allowed this (I Kings 11).

An Israelite who wanted a wife and who could not find one from among the pool of eligible free women could buy a foreign female slave from an Israelite household. He could then marry her, if she consented. Also, there was no law prohibiting the purchase of a female slave from resident aliens. "Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession" (Lev. 25:45). Resident alien fathers were allowed to sell their daughters into slavery. Also, a resident alien who took on a debt that could not be repaid could be sold into slavery. His children could lawfully be sold.

The purchase of resident aliens as slaves was a form of evangelism. It liberated them from the reign of foreign household gods. In the same sense that the purchase of a resident alien slave was a means of evangelism, so was marriage to a foreign woman who agreed to give up her gods. An Israelite male was not restricted to marrying a free woman or a woman with no dowry (a concubine) who had been born to a circumcised Israelite.

By bringing foreigners under permanent household subordination in Old Covenant Israel, the Israelites made possible the foreigners' liberation from the bondage of sin and demonic powers. Judicial subor-

dination could then produce eternal liberation.

Israelite males could marry slave women. This would have left some male slaves without wives. What were the negative social consequences of unmarried foreign male slaves inside Israel? Very few. Slaves were under tight governmental control—family control. They were not a major threat to the social order. In any case, it was legal to buy foreign slaves from abroad. This option was open to the Israelite who owned male slaves without wives.

In the New Testament, church membership is by profession of faith and baptism. Females are baptized. Paul forbade Christians to marry non-Christians. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (II Cor. 6:14). Adoption is now by profession of faith and covenant sign, not by mere presence within a household. The preliminary requirement for a Christian marriage is a shared confession of faith. The standards of membership in the ecclesiastical covenant are now the same for men and women. This *New Testament equality* has changed the laws of marriage.

The Old Covenant’s laws governing the permanent enslavement of foreigners were annulled by the New Covenant. These laws were part of the jubilee year’s laws (Lev. 25). The jubilee laws were land laws; hence, they ceased to exist no later than A.D. 70, when Israel lost its covenantal status as the holy land. While the inter-generational enslavement of foreigners was not formally abolished by the New Testament, the jubilee law was in principle abolished by Jesus (Luke 4:16–21).¹⁵ *Enslaving others inter-generationally is no longer a valid means of evangelism.* Adoption into God’s kingdom is accomplished by peaceful evangelism, not by military conquest or enslavement. Today, the covenant extends beyond the narrow confines of Old Covenant Israel. It is therefore no longer legal for covenant-keepers to buy themselves wives from pagan families or nations. These forms of Old Covenant adoption are now annulled. Marriage is voluntary.

3. Covenantal Oath

A woman retains the right to say “no” to any suitor. A free woman possessed this authority under the Old Covenant. Marriage is covenantal. It is established by a covenantal oath. A father does not possess

15. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

the authority to seal a marriage oath on behalf of a daughter. We see this in the case of Rebekah's father and brothers, who negotiated a bride price from Abraham's servant. They asked her before they took the goods. "And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (Gen. 24:57–58). Marriage is not the same as baptism, where the parents' representative oaths on behalf of those baptized under their authority are legal.¹⁶ A baptized person has the authority to disavow the baptismal oath that had been made on his behalf by his parents. A New Testament era woman cannot lawfully be sold into marriage or forced into marriage by her father, let alone by an owner. She is not a slave who can be bought or sold. So, a suitor has no access to women for sale who can replace those free women who have been married by a polygamist.

New Covenant marriage laws are not the same as Old Covenant marriage laws. First, membership in the ecclesiastical covenant has changed for women: by confession and baptism, not merely by presence in an Israelite household. Second, the definition of what constitutes unequal yoking is also different: unshared confessions. Third, slavery has been annulled by Christ's fulfillment of the jubilee year and God's destruction of Old Covenant Israel.

Slavery and polygamy were related under the Old Covenant. The worst detrimental effects of polygamy on those covenant-keeping young men who could not locate wives were offset by the existence of resident alien female slaves who were eligible for marriage by purchase. This offsetting institutional arrangement is no longer legally available in a Christian society. In the same sense that slavery was not formally annulled by the New Covenant, so polygamy was not formally annulled. Both of these institutions were annulled by an extension of the same New Covenant principle: *adoption into God's family through the church is established exclusively by confession of faith and baptism*.¹⁷

The Mosaic law was a unit. Whenever a Mosaic statute was annulled by the New Covenant, this had an effect on other related laws. The annulment of the jubilee slave laws had an indirect effect on the Mosaic laws of marriage, for this change altered the laws governing adoption. *Marriage is a form of adoption*. The wife is brought into her husband's family. Ezekiel 16 is premised on the adoption aspect of

16. Anabaptists deny even this.

17. Appendix A:H.

marriage. God had found Jerusalem-Israel as a man finds an infant girl, brings her into his household, and later marries her. By coming under God's judicial protection in God's household, Israel was adopted by God. Circumcision meant adoption. For females, legally permanent presence in a household was adoption.

The introduction of baptism—the New Testament's formal mark of adoption by God into the institutional church—changed the laws of marriage. No longer is the household adoption of women established judicially by purchase or by military conquest. It is not possible to make a non-Christian woman covenantally eligible for Christian marriage merely by purchasing her. Therefore, what was not a major threat to society under the Mosaic law—a shortage of marriageable women due to other men's polygamy—becomes a major threat under the New Covenant. To deal with this threat, the Christian West has always used both civil and ecclesiastical law to prohibit polygamy.

D. Monogamy as the New Testament's Ideal

A bishop must be married at some point before he is lawfully ordained. He must also have children. Candidates for bishop must manage their families well: "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4–5).

Does this rule prohibit widowers from holding the office? The text gives no direct indication. We do know this much: no Mosaic law removed from office a priest whose wife had died. If a bishop's wife and his children die during a war or a plague, must he be removed from office? This seems highly unlikely. The legal issue here is marriage as a screening device for church officers. A successful marriage is one among several indications of high moral character and competent leadership ability.

What about childless candidates? Paul's language presumes that the candidate has children, or did at some point in his life. A childless man does not meet this criterion. The focus of Paul's concern here is the behavior of subordinates in the candidate's household. In Paul's list of criteria for deacons, the wife's characteristics are specifically mentioned: "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things" (1 Tim. 3:11).

No polygamous man should be considered for the three senior

church offices. He must be the husband of one wife. The texts contain the Greek word for “one”: *mia*. It was not inserted by the translators. It is also not the Greek word for “a.” Paul is not saying “one wife among many.”

This indicates that the New Testament’s ideal for marriage is monogamy. Monogamy was also the highest standard in the Old Testament, which is why Israel’s kings were not allowed to be polygamous (Deut. 17:17). As we have already seen, the major polygamous leaders are pictured in the Old Testament as suffering because of it. The Mosaic law permitted polygamy; it did not recommend it.

A man who has been unlawfully divorced by a sinning wife—highly unlikely in Paul’s day—should not be penalized by the church by being excluded from consideration for church office. Neither should a man who has lawfully divorced a lawless wife who would have been lawfully executed in Mosaic Israel. The church should regard both men as widowers. To ban either of them from church office is to undermine marriage by undermining marriage-protecting judicial sanctions of God’s law.

I conclude that the Greek word *mia* is here translated correctly as “one.” A candidate for the office of bishop, presbyter, or deacon must have been married at some point, and to only one wife at a time. This rule does not ban widowers who have remarried, nor does it ban men who have been unlawfully divorced or who have divorced their wives lawfully. Paul does not here annul the principle of victim’s rights. The innocent man’s lawful divorce of a guilty spouse does not bring on him the negative sanction of either removal from church office or banning from church office.

A bishop or a deacon must be married or have been married, i.e., a widower. Paul says that success as the head of a household is also a criterion for holding church office. All branches of the Christian church have violated this rule for many centuries.

E. Universal Denial by the Church

The church after the fourth century allowed celibate monastic orders. Celibate monks were ordained. In both East and West, this tradition has prevailed. Eastern Orthodoxy closed the office of bishop to married men in the sixth century. Widowers who had been married only once were eligible. The rule still holds. The on-line article on “Eastern Orthodoxy” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* summarizes the

restrictions.

The lower orders of the clergy—i.e., priests and deacons—are generally married men. The present canonical legislation allows the ordination of married men to the diaconate and the priesthood, provided that they were married only once and that their wives are neither widows nor divorcees. These stipulations reflect the general principle of absolute monogamy, which the Eastern Church considered as a Christian norm to which candidates for the priesthood are to comply strictly. Deacons and priests cannot marry after their ordination.

Bishops, however, are selected from among the unmarried clergy or widowed priests. The rule defining the requirement for an unmarried episcopate was issued at a time (6th century) when monks represented the elite of the clergy. The contemporary decrease in the number of monks in the Orthodox Church has created a serious problem in some territorial churches, in that new candidates for the episcopacy are difficult to find.

Roman Catholicism closed the entire priesthood to married men no later than the twelfth century. In 1022, Benedict VIII banned marriages for existing priests. This tradition goes back to the early fourth century: the Council of Elvira in Spain, which preceded Nicea. By the end of the fourth century, hierarchical pressure was put on all married priests and deacons to live apart from their wives.

Among Protestant denominations, marriage has been optional for ordination, although Luther strongly recommended marriage for all ministers. Calvinistic Protestantism very early substituted formal education for the marriage vow as the preferred screening device for ministers. A college degree has been required for ministerial ordination—the authority to dispense the sacraments—for hundreds of years. A college degree required a working knowledge of Latin until well into the nineteenth century. To this was added Greek and Hebrew in college. With the invention of the theological seminary in 1808,¹⁸ a seminary degree became increasingly common as a screening device, and universal by the late nineteenth century. It was only in 1911 that the Northern Presbyterian Church in the United States officially eliminated a reading knowledge of Latin as a formal requirement for ministers.¹¹⁹ Few Presbyterian seminarians had understood Latin since the 1860s,²⁰ but the requirement was so respected that the denomination

18. Andover Seminary, a Calvinistic Congregational institution.

19. *Minutes of the General Assembly*, 1911, pp. 197–98.

20. Charles Hodge decided to allow the publication of his famous *Systematic Theo-*

could not bring itself for half a century to admit the obvious.

The Methodists and the Baptists adopted circuit riding for their ministers in frontier regions of the United States. This was the primary reason for their success in evangelizing the western United States, 1801–1860. There were fewer than 500 Baptist congregations and virtually no Methodist congregations in the United States in 1780. There were fewer than 500 Presbyterian congregations. By 1860, there were about 20,000 Methodist congregations and 12,000 Baptist congregations. There were 6,400 Presbyterian congregations.²¹ Frontier circuit riders were not required to attend college or seminary. They were paid very little. In 1834, the official salary for a Methodist circuit rider was \$100 a year, but most of them had difficulty collecting the money. Marriage was strongly discouraged because the minister was also supposed to be paid an extra \$100 for his wife. This payment was even more difficult to collect. Baptists were usually guaranteed nothing; they got paid only what they could collect from individual congregations. Most of them had to take full-time jobs when they became settled pastors. They were paid \$60 to \$100 a year. In contrast, the Calvinistic denominations imposed strict educational requirements for ordination as ministers. These men rarely left the Eastern seaboard, where salaries were commensurate with their high (and costly) educational attainment. Presbyterians and Congregationalists were paid \$400 to \$1,000 a year in small cities, and \$1,000 to \$3,000 a year in large cities.²² Methodist and Baptist ministers were price-competitive because they had little formal education and no wives.

Had the church consistently honored I Timothy 3, it would be a very different organization today.

F. Monogamy vs. Crime

George Gilder for a brief period was one of America's most economically successful journalists. In 2001, he purchased the conservat-

logy (1871–73) because he knew that students in each seminary year were selling handwritten copies of his lecture notes to students in the year behind theirs. His lectures were based on the early seventeenth-century Latin work of Francis Turretin, which few American students could read in 1860. Turretin was not translated into English until the 1990's.

21. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 43, Figure 32.

22. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 81–82.

ive magazine, *The American Spectator*, which had been publishing for over three decades.²³ He was the editor-publisher of an expensive and widely read financial newsletter on innovative communications technology.²⁴ Several of his books became best-sellers, beginning with *Wealth and Poverty* in 1981. He launched his career in 1973 with an essay in *Harper's*, "The Suicide of the Sexes."

That essay led to his first book, *Sexual Suicide* (1973). A revised version was titled *Naked Nomads* (1974). Still another revised edition was titled *Men and Marriage* (1986). The common theme in all three versions is that the sexes are fundamentally different. Men are inherently aggressive; women are inherently home-builders. Men want to possess women for sexual reasons. Women domesticate men by giving men what they are after, but only on terms established by women—and, he might have added, their fathers. A society that does not reinforce this domestication of men through law and custom is committing suicide.

In the Introduction to *Men and Marriage*, he says that he was unable to find a mainstream publisher for the book, despite the financial success of *Wealth and Poverty*. He had been approached by several major publishers to produce a manuscript, but all of them returned this one. In every case, he was led to believe, a feminist editor had vetoed publication.²⁵ Finally, it was published by an obscure publisher in an obscure town in Louisiana, a state not known for book publishing.

Gilder's book is a defense of heterosexual monogamy, which he said is a moral norm for society.²⁶ In the final third of the twentieth century, American society widely accepted a form of sexual liberalism that undermined this norm. He said that the breakdown of marriage had become much worse in the decade separating the first edition and the third. In retrospect, it is clear that the decline has continued.

Gilder's central argument is that unmarried young men are the primary source of social barbarism. Barbarians do not build civilizations; they undermine them. Unmarried young men are society's largest pool of dysfunctional people. "If the truth be known, all too many of them are entirely unsuited for civilized life. Every society must figure out ways to bring them into the disciplines and duties of citizen-

23. I wrote for it in the early 1970s, when it was called *The Alternative*.

24. Bad advice regarding a stock called Global Crossing, which went bankrupt in 2002, cost Gilder his reputation and his fortune. He wrote in June, 2002, that he was facing bankruptcy.

25. George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican, 1986), p. viii.

26. *Ibid.*, p. viii–ix.

ship.”²⁷ He titles this chapter, “Taming the Barbarians.” At the age when most men marry, they are in rebellion against parents, teachers, and the church. They are at the bottom of their earning capacity. Only one institutional restraint consistently brings them into line: marriage. Society has a constitution that demands that they marry in order to relieve their passion. “It is the sexual constitution, not the legal one, that is decisive in subduing the aggressions of young men.”²⁸

Gilder offered statistics on the disproportionate rates of crime, poor health, and death that single, never-married men suffer. At the time when Gilder wrote this book, single men constituted 13% of the American population. They also constituted 40% of the criminals. They committed about 90% of violent crimes.²⁹ Divorced men are also high-risk members of society compared to divorced women. In the age group 35–64, they have over three times the death rate of divorced women in the same age range.³⁰

Then he presented other statistics on remarriage. Over age 40, most divorced women do not remarry. Divorced men remarry within three years. They marry women who are on average 30 years old.³¹ When a divorced man marries a younger woman, he removes her from the pool of eligible women. This leaves a younger unmarried man without a potential wife. A younger man will not marry a woman who is significantly older than he is, i.e., above the normal child-bearing years.

If the younger woman is also divorced, the problem is pushed down another notch in age distribution. Her divorced husband will marry a younger woman. At some point, the number of women eligible for marriage to the would-be barbarians will be reduced. Gilder concluded:

The only undeniable winners in the sexual revolution are powerful men. Under a regime of sexual liberation, some men can fulfill the paramount dream of most men everywhere: they can have the nubile years of more than one young woman. Whether a man takes these young women one at a time, staying married and having mistresses—or whether he marries two or more young women in succession, or whether he merely lives with young women without marriage—makes little difference to the social consequences. The man is no less

27. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

28. *Idem.*

29. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

a polygamist—or more specifically a polygynist—than if he had maintained a harem.³²

The social consequences of divorce are overwhelmingly negative, Gilder said. Divorced wives are left to live out their lives without husbands. Younger men do not find wives, and so commit more crime, earn lower incomes, and die younger. Children grow up in homes headed by single women or shared by a stepparent.

In *Wealth and Poverty*, Gilder discussed marriage and wealth. “The only dependable route from poverty is always work, family, and faith.”³³ The statistics indicate that married men work 50% more than bachelors of comparable age, education, and skills.³⁴ Every society that expects to prosper must find ways to persuade young men to marry and stay married. “If work effort is the first principle of overcoming poverty, marriage is the prime source of upwardly mobile work.”³⁵

Gilder minced no words in his defence of monogamy. Without monogamy, the social order will not hold.

Monogamy is central to any democratic social contract, designed to prevent a breakdown of society into “war of every man against every other man.” In order to preserve order, a man may relinquish liberty, property, and power to the state. But if he has to give up his wife to his boss—or hers—he is unmanned. A society of open sexual competition, in which the rich and powerful—or the sexually attractive—can command large numbers of women, is a society with the most intolerable hierarchy of all.

Monogamy is egalitarian in the realm of love. It is a mode of rationing. It means—to put it crudely—one to a customer. Competition is intense enough even so, because of the sexual inequality of human beings. But under a regime of monogamy there are limits.³⁶

Women become subordinate to men in marriage. Men become subordinate to society in marriage. The division of labor increases in the family and also in society. Capital increases, as does output. This is *dominion through subordination*.

Under the New Covenant, a nation’s supply of eligible single women cannot lawfully be increased by the purchase of resident alien wo-

32. *Idem*.

33. Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 68.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

36. Gilder, *Men and Marriage*, p. 58.

men. Therefore, the social evils of polygamy threaten every New Covenant social order. Biblical law does not subsidize crime and anti-social behavior. In a society that prohibits the enslavement for foreign women, polygamy increases crime and anti-social behavior. This means that the principle of “one husband, one wife” is the judicial standard for marriage under a Christian civil order. The biblical legal principle of the rule of law has always applied to civil government. “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Ex. 12:49).³⁷ The standard that governs Christian marriages must govern all marriages.

G. Excess Single Women in Western Churches

Polygamy as the New Testament’s ideal standard for marriage has occasionally been defended by anti-establishment religious groups as a supposed means of strengthening the family—always the “patriarchal family.” This is a strange argument. Polygamy did not strengthen any family in the Old Testament. It surely does not strengthen families that it keeps from being formed by reducing the pool of eligible women for marriage. But what about the disparity between the number of male and female members in the Western Church? Would polygamy solve this problem?

It is not widely recognized that Western Christianity for many centuries has been afflicted by an imbalance of men and women church members. This may not be the case with Greek Orthodoxy, where equality seems to prevail,³⁸ but it has been the case with all other major denominations.³⁹ Women outnumber men, sometimes by wide margins. In African-American congregations in the United States, in Latin American and Italian Roman Catholic churches, and in white Pentecostal churches, women outnumber men by two-to-one or more. If Paul’s rule against marriages between Christians and non-Christians were honored by unmarried women in these groups, the formation of families would decrease.

Assume that unmarried women in the churches turned down all offers of marriage by non-Christians. Non-Christian males could not marry Christian women, who would refuse their offers. Meanwhile, many single Christian women would find no husbands. Unless the

37. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 14.

38. Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas, Texas: Spence, 1999), pp. xii–xiii, 11.

39. *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

churches could find a solution to the problem of gender disparity, the widespread presence of churches in any society would produce increased crime, other things being equal. There would be too many unmarried young men.

The practical solution to this Western social problem has been simple: most Christian women marry covenant-breakers when asked, if no one else has asked or is likely to ask. This practice has continued for centuries. Adult sons of these religiously mixed marriages more often refuse to join the church than adult daughters. They imitate their fathers. Daughters imitate their mothers. They join the church and then marry non-members, just as their mothers did. In a book on this continuing disparity of membership, the author did not mention this imitation phenomenon as the reason why this disparity continues, generation after generation. He offered no explanation for the disparity, which appears in all branches of the Western church, nor does he explain why the problem does not afflict Eastern Orthodoxy. He recognized that sons reject their mothers as role models, imitating their fathers,⁴⁰ but he did not discuss the obvious: their mothers have broken God's law by marrying non-Christian men, and their daughters follow their example. Establishing a family covenant becomes more important to unmarried Christian women than maintaining the church covenant. Romance defeats confession.

Would polygamy in the churches reduce this problem? I have twice been asked this question by a prominent African-American pastor, whose congregation is filled with unmarried women who cannot find husbands. Polygamy might solve the problem for some of these women, but it would raise all of the other problems by setting a legal precedent which, if authorized by civil law and imitated by the general culture, would produce increased social disorder. Polygamy would not solve the underlying problem, namely, an excess of women in the churches. Because this problem is rarely discussed in public, churches have done nothing to solve it for several hundred years.

The negative aspects of not being married seem very great to eligible unmarried women. When asked by covenant-breakers to marry, they do not look into the future and acknowledge that their sons will go to hell if they imitate their fathers, which most of them will. Meanwhile, their parents and their churches offer no serious negative sanctions for this act of covenant-breaking. The lure of the benefits of mar-

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–43.

riage is not offset in their minds by the threat of immediate negative ecclesiastical and family sanctions or by long-term negative sanctions: the eternal fate of their sons and the temporal miseries of sharing a life with covenant-breakers. So, they marry these men. The disparity of church membership continues. To put it somewhat graphically, theology and sanctionless ecclesiology are no match for sexual passion during women's child-bearing years. As a result, Satan harvests the souls of many sons of Christian mothers, century after century. The institutional problem is weak ecclesiology, not monogamy. This problem can be solved only by the willingness of churches and families to impose the sanctions of excommunication and disinheritance, respectively, on women who marry covenant-breakers.

For over two millennia, Jews retained their separate existence as a people that dwelt in many different foreign cultures. They accomplished this remarkable historical feat by imposing extreme negative sanctions on sons who converted to Christianity. These departed sons were treated as if they had died. There were formal burial services for them. Biological grandparents never enjoyed the presence of their grandchildren. This was a heavy price to pay for all individuals concerned, but it made possible the survival of the Jews. Theological liberalism has undermined this commitment in Reform Judaism. Liberal Judaism is dying out as a result. Within a century, it will be reduced to invisibility except in the State of Israel because of the high rate intermarriage and the fact that the children of Jewish-gentile marriages are not usually raised as Jews.⁴¹ Aging liberal Jews delight in their gentile grandchildren, but they are committing suicide as a people. Negative sanctions are inescapable: either on sons who leave the faith or on the faith itself.

Conclusion

The monogamy of Jesus Christ is the main reason why the New Testament's ideal for marriage is monogamy. The institutional church, as the only bride of Christ, must be ruled by men who imitate Christ. They must have only one wife.

Paul in this passage and in others restricts church offices to men who are married to one wife, or who have been married to one wife at

41. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Appendix D: "The Demographics of American Judaism."

some point in their lives, i.e., widowers or men who lawfully divorced faithless wives. He also identifies success in managing a household as a criterion for holding church office. This makes a monogamous marriage a preliminary screening device for exercising formal authority in a church.

The Judaizers were Paul's immediate targets of this law. Greeks and Romans were monogamous. The Old Covenant allowed polygamy. Paul here sides with the gentiles against the Jews. The gentiles, by establishing monogamy as the legal standard, had come closer to God's view of what marriage should be.

Monogamy reduces crime. It increases married men's economic output, thereby increasing wealth. Biology produces approximately equal numbers of men and women. Polygamy, whether simultaneous or sequential, reduces the number of women who are available for single young men to marry. The presence of young men who have no hope of marriage is a social and economic liability.

Paul proclaimed a criterion for ecclesiastical ordination that he did not meet. He was not married. He was never ordained by the church. He was ordained directly by God. For those men, unlike himself, who are not ordained directly by God, marriage and children are a dual requirement for ordination. With the final termination of the Old Covenant in A.D. 70, God ceased to ordain apostles, either directly (e.g., Paul) or ecclesiastically (e.g., Matthias). No one after A.D. 70 has been directly ordained by God. Ordination is strictly ecclesiastical.

4

ECONOMICS AND ORDINATION

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (I Tim. 3:2–4).

Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre (I Tim. 3:8).

The theocentric issue in this passage is the ecclesiastical hierarchy under God.¹ There is a required screening process before a man can lawfully be ordained to represent God ecclesiastically.

A. Bishops and Elders

The Greek word for “bishop” is related to the Greek word for “visitation.”² Grammatically speaking, a bishop is a church officer who makes visits. The Bible never says who is to be visited by a bishop. It also says nothing about what his jurisdiction is.

1. The Visitor

Church tradition has defined a bishop as a church official who rules over priests. Who are these priests? There is no New Testament

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. “And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:44). “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (I Peter 2:12).

office that involves offering sacrifices to God. The Old Covenant priesthood was annulled by Christ's final sacrifice (Heb. 7–9). But church tradition has long equated a priest with a church officer who is uniquely authorized to administer the sacraments. A bishop is said to ordain men to the priesthood, by which is meant the sacrament-administering ministry.

A bishop also is said to operate within a fixed geographical area, with no direct jurisdiction outside this area. In his legal capacity as a member of a college of bishops, he represents ministers and lay members of the denomination who reside inside his jurisdiction. None of this is found in the New Testament, but most of it has a long tradition that stretches back to the second century.

The presumption of the passage is that the investiture of the authority to conduct some sort of formal visitations in the name of the church must be restricted to men who have previously demonstrated specific leadership abilities. These abilities are ethical, marital, and economic. They are in no way related to formal education. The attempt to define "bishop" or an equivalent office in terms of formal education is a matter of tradition, though a much shorter tradition than the one which offers a geographical definition of the office.

There is a church officer mentioned by Paul in verse 17 of this epistle and also in Titus 1:5, *presbuteros*, meaning "elder." Paul mentions this office in the midst of two passages that list criteria for holding office. In both passages, he also refers to the office of bishop. It is not clear from either context that these two offices are different, even though the names are different. This has led to a division ecclesiastically between episcopacy or prelacy on the one hand, and Presbyterianism on the other. Presbyterianism has no bishops. Episcopacy³ and prelacy⁴ have bishops and elders, although both refuse to call elders "elders." They call them priests or ministers or rectors or pastors—anything but elders.

If a bishop visits, then who is supposed to get visited? Ever since the Protestant Reformation, Protestant churches have been divided over the answer. Churches in the tradition of either prelacy or episcopacy say that a bishop visits local churches within his geographical

3. Episcopacy differs from prelacy in that it entrusts a veto power over the bishops by a body representing laymen. An example is the structure of the Reformed Episcopal Church.

4. A hierarchical government of church offices that removes the clergy from any judicial veto by representatives of the laity.

district or diocese. He serves both as a counsellor and an agent of discipline for local pastors. He also performs the rite of confirmation, through which young adults are brought into the church as full members.

2. *Presbyters*

In contrast to this high-church tradition, Presbyterians say that the Greek word for “bishop” has the same meaning as the Greek word for “presbyter,” meaning elder. Presbyterians distinguish among elders, however. One variety—the teaching elder—is marked by church membership in a regional presbytery, not in a local congregation. He alone possesses lawful authority to preach regularly in a local congregation’s formal worship service and to administer the sacraments. Visitation is not a formal aspect of his office. That is to say, there is nothing in Presbyterian documents or tradition that authorizes anyone to bring formal charges against a teaching elder because he has failed to make visits of some kind. There may be a family visitation program in a local congregation, but it is not mandatory. The other kind of elders—ruling elders who belong to a local congregation—traditionally are supposed to participate in any family-visitation program. The implementation of such a program can be lawfully skipped by a local congregation. The Book of Church order does not mandate family visitation.⁵ So, for Presbyterians, “bishop” is grammatically defined as “elder,” despite the fact that “elder” has no connotation of visitation. Therefore, Presbyterian teaching elders do not have visitation in their formal job description.⁶ The two-fold exegetical problem for Presbyterians is this: a judicial identity is asserted where none exists grammatically (bishop = elder), and a judicial distinction is asserted where none exists grammatically (teaching elder vs. ruling elder).

3. *Multiple Offices*

It does not logically follow that the two offices, bishop and elder, are in fact the same office just because the criteria for the offices are similar, though not identical. The diaconate is a subordinate office, yet its requirements are similar, though not identical. It could be—but is not stated in any text—that the eldership is a lower office that has the

5. There is a reference to visitation of the sick. The Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America does mention family visitation: Chapter I, Section 8.

6. Again, the exception is the Reformed Church in America.

same criteria that govern the screening of bishops.

In his epistle to Titus, Paul referred to the criteria for elders (plural): blameless, monogamous, having obedient children. He then justified this list in terms of what is required of a bishop (singular).

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain **elders** in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a **bishop** must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:5–9).

Paul's abrupt transition from a discussion of the criteria for elders to a discussion of the criteria for a bishop is not explained in the text. Is it a transition at all? Presbyterians say it isn't; it is the same office: elder. Paul mentions blamelessness as a requirement of elders and bishops, i.e., he mentions it twice. Did he do this for emphasis regarding the importance of this characteristic for someone seeking the same office, which for some unstated reason has two names, or was it because there are two offices with the same criteria? Protestant churches have never come to any agreement on the answer.

"Blameless" appears once in the Timothy passage and twice in the Titus passage. To be ordained, a candidate must have conducted his public affairs in such a way that he has gained people's trust. This means that he must possess a good reputation. The Greek word for "blameless" has the sense of "not being spoken against." Blame means the opposite. "But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against" (Acts 28:22). The list of criteria in I Timothy 3 presents *representative aspects of good conduct that constitute a blameless life*. Men whose

lives are marked by these characteristics are not spoken against.

Next, Paul introduces an economic criterion: hospitality.

B. Hospitality

Hospitality costs money. To care for others or to entertain others is an expense. A bishop is supposed to display a willingness to spend money on others.

The Greek word translated here as “hospitality,” *philoxenos*, is a combination of two Greek words, *philos* (love) and *xenos* (stranger). The hospitable man is someone who frequently invites strangers into his home. He entertains them or gives them shelter. There is an element of celebration involved in hospitality, or, if not celebration, then at least personal sacrifice. This is a drain on family resources on behalf of others. The bishop is supposed to place service to strangers above the maximization of his family’s net worth.

Because of this requirement, a candidate for bishop has to be a person with enough wealth to be hospitable. He must not be poverty-stricken. This means that he must have experienced a degree of economic success that some members of the congregation have not experienced. *A bishop is set apart ecclesiastically by his money and by the use of his money.* But he is not to be granted this office in exchange for a promise to promote even more hospitality at his own expense on behalf of the church. This would amount to buying the office: the sin known as Simony.⁷ Church salaries paid to bishops should be used in part to fund hospitality.

The candidate is required to have shown hospitality in the past. His reputation for having opened his home to strangers must be established before he attains high office. Patterns of behavior must be established early. This implies that the moral character of those eligible for the office of bishop must be established early.

Hospitality is to serve as an ideal for church members generally. It is not that hospitality is a unique function of the office of bishop.

7. A word derived from Simon the sorcerer, who asked Peter to sell him the power of ordination. “And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:18–21). Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

C. “Not Greedy of Filthy Lucre”

The Greek word for “money” is not the same as the Greek word found here. The Greek word here has the sense of not seeking sordid gain: *aphilarguros*. Literally, it means “no love of silver.” This word is the negative of *philarguros*, which appears only twice in the New Testament. “And the Pharisees also, who were **covetous**, heard all these things: and they derided him” (Luke 16:14). “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, **covetous**, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (II Tim. 3:2). The King James translators used “not filthy lucre” in several passages to translate *aphilarguros*. For example, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (I Peter 5:2).

The sense of *philarguros* is the desire to accumulate wealth for the sake of establishing one’s autonomy. This has to do with self-love. Self-love was regarded by Jesus and Paul as a sin. The lover of money is in fact a lover of himself. Verse 3 speaks of both greed⁸ and covetousness. “Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous.” Verse 8 also speaks of greed. “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre.” In both of these references to greed, the translators added “filthy.” It is not in the Greek text.

Paul says that a bishop should be screened in terms of his attitude toward wealth. If a candidate has accumulated wealth for the purpose of a vain display, he must not be ordained. The early twentieth-century anti-capitalistic economist Thorstein Veblen coined a phrase, “conspicuous consumption.” He regarded this as a great evil. It is not a great evil, but it is sufficiently evil to serve as a test of a man’s character—also, a woman’s. “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (I Tim. 2:9–10).⁹ *Con-*

8. Textus Receptus. The NU (Egyptian) text omits this.

9. Peter agreed: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:

spicuous consumption is considered a moral liability by the New Testament. So is the amassing of less visible forms of wealth as a means of gaining security. Later in this epistle, Paul refers to the uncertainty of riches (6:17).¹⁰ He who trusts in his wealth has misunderstood the source of security in this life. Wealth is to be a Christian's means of charity, hospitality, and sufficient leisure to free him for non-profit service.

The criteria for screening candidates for the diaconate are quite similar to the criteria for bishops. The main economic difference relates to hospitality. This is not a criterion for deacons. The absence of greed is. The deacon is not to be greedy for money (v. 8).

Why is a candidate for deacon not required to be hospitable? This difference is related to the functions of the two offices. A deacon uses the church's wealth to provide charity to the poor (Acts 6:1–3).¹¹ He is an assistant to the bishop or elders. The bishop, in contrast, is supposed to have developed the habit of hospitality with his own money. He possesses greater judicial authority than a deacon. A selfless habit of hospitality identifies him as a servant. This character trait is crucial to the biblical concept of rulership. "But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:25–27).¹²

There are other criteria for deacons, but they are not economic in nature.

Conclusion

Paul in this section of the epistle sets forth criteria that are to govern ecclesiastical ordination. These criteria are ethical, economic, and marital.

With regard to a candidate's attitude toward wealth, he must not put his trust in money. He is not to seek money as a means of gaining security. Wealth is not for display. It is for hospitality. Personal dis-

Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement" (1 Peter 3:1–6).

10. Chapter 11.

11. North, *Sacrifice and Dominion*, ch. 5.

12. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 41.

plays of great wealth exclude men from the office of bishop and deacon.

Formal education is not mentioned as a requirement for church office in any New Testament passage. Yet ever since the high Middle Ages, the church has sought to replace the requirement of marriage with the requirement of formal education as the supreme criterion for ecclesiastical ordination. Paul was clear about what is required. The church has been adamant: Paul was wrong. What the church does testifies to what it really believes, not what it officially maintains regarding the authority of the Bible. The church, on this point, has rejected the Bible in preference for university training. It has officially substituted the writing of term papers in place of ruling one's household well.

5

THE ALIEN SPIRIT OF PROHIBITION

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained (1 Tim. 4:1–6).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the source of all good gifts. The judicial issue is boundaries. Evil-doers will come and announce boundaries around gifts from God. Boundaries are point three of the biblical covenant.¹ A gift is sanctified, meaning *set apart*, by prayer.

A. The Goodness of the Creation

Paul in this epistle is dealing with the influence of Judaizers. These infiltrators into the church were setting forth false doctrines. Paul instructs Timothy in ways for the local congregation to deal judicially with this sect and other theological evils.

Paul says here that Timothy is seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Holy Spirit that in the latter times, teachers of errors will appear. The Greek phrase, “the latter times,” appears nowhere else in the New Testament. The Greek word for “latter” is sometimes translated

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

as “last.” In the context of this epistle, the meaning is “last.” Paul was living in the last days. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews announced the same thing. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1–2). These were the last days of Old Covenant Israel.

Paul’s language is exceedingly harsh. He refers the heresy-preachers as being subject to “seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” *There is no spirit of reconciliation here.* This is not irenic language: “Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” The imagery of a seared conscience, as meat is seared to keep it from dripping, is powerful. It conveys the idea of something impervious to anything from the outside—in this case, God’s law.

What is their error? “Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.” These people were recommending celibacy and vegetarianism. Celibacy is geared for an elite: an elite that must recruit, for it does not reproduce. No society could adopt such a view and survive. Either its birth rate would fall to zero (true celibacy) or its bastardy rate would climb to 100% (destruction of marriage). In either case, the society would perish.

Vegetarianism’s error is to imply that animals were not made by God for man’s enjoyment, including culinary enjoyment. The vegetarian places meat within a boundary that says: “Unfit for Human Consumption.” This boundary, Paul says, is man’s doing, not God’s. Not only is meat fit for human consumption in the sense of being suitable for man, it is fit in the sense of being designed for man. Paul says, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” The supreme purpose of edible animals is to be killed and consumed by man. The model is God Himself, who delights in the odor of burning flesh.

Thou shalt also take one ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram. And thou shalt slay the ram, and thou shalt take his blood, and sprinkle it round about upon the altar. And thou shalt cut the ram in pieces, and wash the inwards of him, and his legs, and put them unto his pieces, and unto his head. And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it is a burnt offering unto the LORD: it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD (Ex. 29:15–18).

B. A Break With the Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic law's prohibitions against certain meats were not part of the pre-Mosaic era. The dietary laws were not part of any creation mandate. The Mosaic law's meat restrictions were a discontinuity in God's dealings with covenant-keeping men.

There were no Mosaic restrictions on vegetables. Vegetables were all considered ritually clean. All unclean foods were animals. These could not lawfully be eaten. The clean animals could be eaten. Meat was obligatory at Passover.

Paul's identification of these false teachers as vegetarians indicates that Paul's targets in this passage were not Judaizers, who were not vegetarians. What about the prohibition against marriage? The Jewish sect known as the Essenes was separatist. According to Josephus, one branch was celibate.² Another branch was not.³ This was a small sect. They had little contact with other Jews. It seems highly unlikely that Essenes, who were few in number and who had separated themselves from the surrounding Jewish culture, were evangelizing gentile churches in Asia. It is unlikely that they had imitators among Jews in a Greek congregation.

There seems to have been no Jewish sect that was vegetarian. So, the presumption has to be that the group which Paul is speaking about here must have been a gentile ascetic group inside the church. The main source of vegetarianism in Greek religion was the cult of Orpheus. This group believed in reincarnation, and therefore members avoided meat.⁴ It is unlikely that any former adherent of this cult would seek to persuade members of the church at Ephesus of this theology. Also, this cult was ancient in Plato's day.⁵ So, this could hardly be a fulfillment of the Spirit's prophecy regarding the latter days, which had to do with those who would depart from the faith, not invaders who had brought with them new doctrines. "Some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." My conclusion is that this was a home-grown doctrine. It came from those who had been orthodox, but who had come up with new ideas.

Paul says that vegetarianism as a religious obligation is a doctrine

2. Josephus, *War of the Jews*, II:2.

3. *Ibid.*, II:8.

4. W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1955] 1961), pp. 320–21.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

of demons. There is no trace of humility or forbearance here. Meat is something that “God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”

This leads Paul to make another observation: the goodness of the creation. “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” Here, Paul breaks with the Mosaic law, which identified certain meats as unclean. In the post-resurrection world, this restriction has been annulled. To argue otherwise, Paul says, is to adopt a doctrine of demons.

This does not mean that certain animals are not poisonous to men. The fugu fish is poisonous if not prepared correctly.⁶ What Paul is rejecting is any suggestion that meats are ritually impure and therefore must be avoided. God created them good. The Mosaic restriction was clearly temporary. Any meat that is served by a host should be eaten by the recipient. If it will not kill you biologically, it will not kill you spiritually.

C. Needless Prohibitions

Paul says that religious leaders are lying to the flock. These leaders are importing an alien philosophy into the church. This must cease. Paul is not saying that refraining from marriage for the sake of a call from God is wrong. He is not saying that certain meats should not be avoided by people who are allergic to them. Instead, he is rejecting any suggestion that a universal prohibition on marriage is required, or that a universal prohibition on eating meat—or any species of meat—is legitimate.

The issue is theological. Paul tells Timothy to guard the flock against false ideas. These ideas are literally satanic: doctrines of demons. Those who promote them seek to create a works religion that promises to ingratiate man with God by means of man-made self-sacrifice. This not only does not ingratiate man with God, it angers God. Man is placing boundaries around God’s good gifts in the name of pleasing God. This is works religion.

These prohibitions are needless. They would commit the church to a program of expansion that would not rely on children who are born into covenant-keeping families: no marriages. These prohibitions

6. Nicholas D. Kristof, “Deflating a Poisonous Pufferfish Legend,” *New York Times* (June 10, 1996).

would cut off church members from the joy of eating meat. They would create a mentality of personal sanctification through avoiding God's gifts. This was a theology of a greater blessing, a blessing greater than the blessings of marriage, children, grandchildren, and meat. It was of necessity *a theology of an elite*: people who are beyond the normal and valid desires of the flesh. It was a call to escape from history.

The New Testament calls men out of the realm of death into the realm of life (John 3:36). This is not a call out of history, but rather a call into the kingdom of God, whose representatives are to disciple the nations in history (Matt. 28:19).⁷

Paul writes: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Prayer sanctifies—sets apart—the common things of life. This indicates that saying grace before meals is both valid and beneficial. It is an act of thanksgiving. Prayer sanctifies food, including meat. There should be no fear regarding meat served by someone else. Do not refuse it, Paul tells Timothy.

This teaching opens the world to dominion by covenant. The entire creation is suitable for reclamation from Satan's kingdom because everything was originally designed by God to be good. The creation is eligible for restoration, i.e., sanctification by God through the activities of His covenant people. This is a theology of paradise restored.⁸

Conclusion

This passage opposes celibacy and religious vegetarianism as universal ideals within the church. It challenges both views as satanic doctrines. It makes it clear that sanctification is not a call to deny the world's pleasures, as long as these pleasures are bounded by covenant law. Marriage is not prohibited. Neither is meat.

This is a call to reclamation-restoration-reconstruction. God's good creation can be restored from sin. It will be restored at the final judgment, but, in the meantime, God's people are to treat the creation as good, not as a threat to their spiritual lives. The threat to men's spirits is sin, not the creation. The Fall of man was ethical, not metaphysical. So is the restoration of man and his environment.

7. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

8. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/dcpardis>)

6

COMMON GRACE

For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe (I Tim. 4:10).

The theocentric principle here is God's grace which is a gift unearned by the recipient. This is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Savior of All Men

This verse is an enigma for those who reject universalism. In what way is God the savior of all men if billions of people are condemned to hell and then the lake of fire by the same God who supposedly saves them?

Calvin's said that the phrase, "Savior of all men," refers to God's *kindness* to all men.² There is no doubt that it has to mean this, but the theological question is this: In what way, and on what legal basis, does God show kindness to the unregenerate? If He saves all men, then why do they perish? If He saves all men, then how can some be saved when they have never heard to gospel of salvation by grace through faith in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ at Calvary? The same question applies to I John 4:14: "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

The solution to this theological dilemma is the Greek word translated "specially." The word is *malista*. It means in this and other con-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Epistle to Timothy* (1556), in *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 112.

texts, “particularly.” It is used within the context of a phenomenon that applies to a general category of individuals. The word identifies a subcategory to which the general phenomenon applies in to a heightened degree.

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, **especially** unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

All the saints salute you, **chiefly** they that are of Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22).

But if any provide not for his own, and **specially** for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (I Tim. 5:8).

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, **especially** they who labour in the word and doctrine (I Tim. 5:17).

So, there is a general phenomenon, salvation. Salvation applies in a heightened degree to people who believe in Jesus as savior. What can be said of salvation that applies to those who do not believe?

The Greek word for “savior” is *soter*. It comes from the root word, *sozo*. In many cases, it refers to redemption. “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). But there are several instances where it cannot mean this. The Jews told Christ on the cross: “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt. 27:40). Again, “The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him” (Matt. 27:49). In a broad context, the Greek word refers to wholeness in the sense of *restoration to health*.

For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be **whole** (Matt. 9:21).

And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be **healed**; and she shall live (Mark 5:23).

And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee **whole**. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way (Mark 10:52).

They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was **healed** (Luke 8:36).

Notwithstanding she shall be **saved** in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety (I Tim. 2:15).

In what way has God healed all men? In the sense of delivering them for a time from Adam's curse: death. This *deliverance from death* comes in a special way to covenant-keepers: deliverance from the second death, the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14).

So, Christ serves as a deliverer of all men in history, but also as a deliverer of His people in eternity. This deliverance takes place in history. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). There is a general deliverance, *temporal existence*, which fallen man does not deserve. Covenant-breakers are recipients of *undeserved gifts* from God. They are beneficiaries of common grace.³

It is on the judicial basis of Christ's death and resurrection that God extends undeserved gifts to covenant-breakers. This is the basis of common grace. The biblical doctrine of common grace does not imply God's favor to covenant-breakers, any more than His grant of time and power to Satan implies His favor.

There has been great confusion regarding the doctrine of common grace. It has been improperly used to justify versions of natural law theory. The doctrine can legitimately be used—indeed, *must* be used—to explain how the division of labor benefits both parties to a voluntary exchange, even though the exchange is made between a covenant-keeper and a covenant-breaker. Covenant-keepers benefit from the skills of covenant-breakers, and vice-versa.

B. The Division of Labor

God made the dominion covenant with all mankind (Gen. 1:26–28).⁴ Men were made by God to subdue the earth. This impulse to extend man's dominion is inherent in men's nature. What divides men is confession. There is division among men in terms of this question: *On whose behalf does a man extend his dominion?*

A man's ability to extend his area of responsibility in history is a gift of God that is unmerited by anything done by the recipient. It is a

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

common gift because it is a gift to all mankind. But there is a law attached to this gift: any increase in a man's wealth is accompanied by an increase in his responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).⁵ Grace precedes law, but law always follows.

Because God's command to exercise dominion in history was given to all men, the division of labor becomes possible. A man can therefore cooperate with other men in joint ventures. All of them can legitimately expect to benefit from this voluntary cooperation. There is a common humanity based on God's creation of man in His image.

There need not be a common confession in order for the participants to benefit from their cooperation. There are many areas of life in which joint ventures are possible and desirable. On the basis of contract, people can create long-term ventures. A contract is not a covenant. A covenant is established by mutual oath between men under God. These covenants are limited to three areas: church government, civil government, and family government.

Conclusion

Common grace is the theological foundation of the division of labor in a fallen world. Participants in a voluntary exchange benefit, despite their rival covenantal confessions. Any theologian who denies the existence of common grace would have a difficult time explaining how covenant-breakers are not recipients of God's unmerited gifts. Covenant-breakers are clearly the beneficiaries of increased joint productivity and therefore increased wealth. How can this be explained theologically apart from the doctrine of common grace?

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

THE SUPPORT OF WIDOWS

Honour widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews [grandchildren], let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God (1 Tim. 5:3–4).

The theocentric focus of this law is God’s office as Father, the faithful head of a household. This law is an application of the fifth commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Ex. 20:12). Subordinates in a family owe allegiance and economic support to superiors. This is an aspect of hierarchy, not inheritance. Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Responsibility and Welfare

The issue that Paul is dealing with in this section is whether the local church’s funds should be used to permanently support local widows. He makes it clear that *the church is not the primary agency of welfare; the family is*. The possibility that a widow should rely on the state for her support is not entertained by Paul. Roman politics had created tax-funded welfare programs for Roman citizens—bread and circuses—but Paul does not discuss them.

This judicial question must be raised: How did Paul define the family for the purpose of determining its economic responsibility? Paul says that a widow should be supported by children [*tekna*] or *ekgona*. The Greek word *exgonoi* is difficult to translate precisely. It appears only in this verse. Its root word indicates generation or origin.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

The word in this context refers to descendants. Nephews are not descendants. So, the word indicates grandchildren rather than nephews. Paul lays down a rule: a widow should be supported financially by her sons and grandsons. Children are supposed to support their parents, he says. The Greek word for “parents” appears in only one other verse, where it implies a more extended relationship: “I thank God, whom I serve from my **forefathers** with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day” (II Tim. 1:3). Paul speaks in verse 3 of children and grandchildren; his concept of “parents” extends back more than one generation.

The West’s family structure is usually referred to as a nuclear family. This is defined as a married couple—male and female—who reside in the same household, along with their children. This definition of the family excludes uncles, aunts, and cousins, who are part of the extended family. In a nuclear family, one decision-maker, usually the male who controls access to the house and who generates the income for the family, has final responsibility. He exercises a veto. *Legal control over access to the household is the mark of the head of a household.* Even if his wife possesses the legal authority to *disown* the house—a good economic definition of ownership²—her husband still possesses final authority within the family because she is legally subservient to him. He controls access to the property even when he does not possess the authority to sell it. *Ownership*, biblically defined, is *the legal right to exclude*. It began with God’s restrictive boundaries around the tree in the garden of Eden. The head of the household possesses the legal authority to include or exclude his parents and his adult children.

In contrast is an extended patriarchal family, in which the oldest male possesses the veto unless he is mentally incompetent. He can gain legal access to his sons’ homes because of his biological status.

Paul places primary economic responsibility for the care of the aged widow on those who owe their existence to the person seeking care. This transfers to the widowed mother or grandmother an ecclesiastically enforced legal claim on the wealth of other households. These claims are limited hierarchically. They are strictly vertical. There is no horizontal extension to nephews. The original *upward legal claim* of the children on part of the economic output of the parents becomes a *downward legal claim* when the widow is aged and without property.

Paul acknowledges that the widow may be alone in life. In such a

2. F. A. Harper, *Liberty: A Path to Its Recovery* (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1949), p. 106. (<http://bit.ly/LibertyPath>)

case, her commitment to active faith becomes a test of her eligibility to support. “Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day” (v. 5). Her mark of subordination is her constant intercessory prayer.

What if she has descendants who refuse to support her? If they are members of the church, they are candidates for excommunication. “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (v. 8). What if they are infidels? Or what if they do not take seriously the threat of excommunication? Should she be awarded permanent assistance by the church as a legal obligation?

B. To Deny the Faith

Paul’s language is very strong. He compares these men unfavorably with covenant-breakers. Consider what Paul is saying. A man who will not support his aged mother or grandmother is worse than an infidel. It does not matter what his verbal profession of faith is; he is worse than an infidel. His refusal to support his mother or grandmother marks him as part of the covenant-breaking world.

How can this be? He has made a profession of faith in Christ. Doesn’t this guarantee his salvation? No. Paul’s language implies that his one-time profession of faith was devoid of saving faith. Words do not redeem a man; God’s unilateral imputation of Christ’s perfection redeems him. The one-time confessor is not part of the elect, despite his verbal profession. *The theological content of his public confession of faith is offset by the content of his ethics.* His actions have denied the faith. William Hendriksen wrote: “He has denied it not by means of words necessarily but (what is far often far worse) by means of his *sinful negligence*. Lack of positive action, the sin of omission, gives the lie to his profession of *faith* (subjective sense). Though he professes to be a Christian, he lacks the most precious of all the fruits that grow on the tree of a truly Christian life and conduct. He lacks *love*. Where this good *fruit* is absent, there cannot be a good tree.”³

The modern welfare state has substituted coercion for love. It has taxed each generation to pay the retirement expenses of previous generations. This has produced a permanent political conflict between the generations. The program has also undermined the sense of personal

3. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 171.

responsibility in the minds of children and grandchildren toward aged parents. "We are already paying," they think. Economically, they are correct; they are paying. But they are not paying for their own parents individually; they are paying members of a voting bloc of politically well-organized oldsters, who rarely think that they are receiving enough. At zero price, there is always greater demand than supply—in this case, demand for money.

Because every industrial nation's compulsory retirement system is unfunded,⁴ these programs are all heading for bankruptcy. The statistics are well known to the actuaries in charge of the programs, but they are unknown to the general public. The public does not understand that all of the money that has been collected by the government in the name of the retirement programs has been spent, either to support earlier retirees or for everything else for which governments write checks. The "retirement trust funds" are nothing more than today's political promises of payments by future politicians. The retirement trust funds are filled with government IOU's that are usually not counted as debts in a national government's official budget. Voters think that there will be money for them at their retirement. They have been deceived by the politicians. They have demanded such deception. They have voted out of office any politician who has told the truth and has called for a substitution of a plan to invest these funds in the private sector, let alone a politician who has called for the abolition of the program and the establishment of full family responsibility. Without exception, every Western industrial nation is facing bankruptcy, either of these programs or their governments.⁵

Peter G. Peterson was Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations, the most influential private advisory organization in the United States. He had access to most of the world's senior political leaders in the final decades of the twentieth century. Here is his assessment.

The leaders of the developed world all know what is coming. In private discussions I have had in recent years with President Clinton, Prime Minister Hashimoto, Prime Minister Thatcher, and other leaders of major economies, I learned that they were all fully briefed on the stunning demographic trends that lie ahead. But so far, despite the magnitude of the challenge, the political response has been paralysis rather than action, fear not commitment. Hardly any coun-

4. Chile's system is private, but it began late: the early 1980s.

5. Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America—And the World* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

try is doing much at all. Yet year after year the crisis approaches with the measurable certainty of an advancing tidal wave. . . .

Rarely have so many multilateral bodies—such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—agreed with such unanimity on the dimensions of a problem. Margaret Thatcher told me that she repeatedly tried to raise this issue at the G-7 [large industrial nations] summit meetings. Yet the answer from her fellow leaders was, in effect, “Of course aging is a profound challenge, but it doesn’t hit until early in the next century. That means it won’t hit on my watch.”⁶

The modern industrial West, beginning with Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s introduction of a compulsory old-age retirement program in late-nineteenth-century Germany, has steadily transferred responsibility for the care of the aged from the family to the state. Now the state faces bankruptcy, and those who have trusted the state’s promises face economic disaster in their old age. Their families, who have not prepared for the transfer of economic responsibility back to families, have no idea what is about to take place. Western voters thought in the twentieth century that they were wiser than God regarding old age care. In the twenty-first century, the West will find out that this assessment was incorrect. God is not mocked.

C. Helping the Truly Helpless

Consider the situation that Paul is dealing with in this passage. The widow has been adopted into the church through baptism. Her immediate biological family has abandoned her. If she is helpless, she deserves economic assistance. There are two other eligibility requirements. “Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man” (v. 9). “One” means one. Paul was not saying “the husband of *a* man.” As a widow, she had obviously been married to a man. By adding this limiting factor, Paul makes it clear that a widow who remarried and then was widowed again is not eligible for permanent, guaranteed assistance from the institutional church. This means that an infertile woman who married two or more men who left her no inheritance, and who also possesses no dowry, must seek permanent charity elsewhere. Paul offers no explanation for this restriction. For whatever reason, the institutional

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 9.

church is not to be burdened permanently with her care.

On the basis of Paul's opposition to using the church's funds to support a twice-married, childless widow, his attitude toward compulsory wealth redistribution by the civil government can be inferred. He would have opposed any tax-funded welfare system. Moral claims, let alone legal claims, on other people's wealth are strictly limited in God's economy. If the local church where she is a member does not have any moral or legal responsibility financially for her support, then surely taxpayers do not have such a responsibility. The covenantal bond of the church is surely stronger than the state's bond.

Third, she must be of good reputation. "Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work" (v. 10). The accent here is on service. She has served in the past; it is time for her to be served.

Younger widows are not allowed to receive permanent aid. "But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry" (v. 11). He recommends this to all young widows (v. 14.) Why, then, did he add the following? "Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith" (v. 12). Their first faith had been Greek paganism. Abandoning this faith has not brought them under judgment. What did Paul have in mind here?

The Greek word for "first" sometimes means first in the sense of "chief" or "best."

And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee (Mark 6:21).

And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all (Mark 10:44).

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet (Luke 15:22).

What about the word, "wanton"? The Greek word is related to "delicious" or "luxurious." John wrote of the great harlot of Babylon, "How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously [luxuriously—NKJV], so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow" (Rev. 18:7). These widowed women had wasted their inheritances by easy

living. They had ignored God's warning: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Prov. 6:6–8).⁷ Why should the church now support them in their self-inflicted poverty? They had abandoned what had been their chief faith, which was faith in the God of sacrificial giving and personal service.

This was not a matter of eternal punishment. The Greek word translated as "damnation" can also be translated as "condemnation" or "judgment."

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss (Luke 23:39–41).

And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come (I Cor. 11:34).

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? (I Peter 4:17).

Paul did not trust younger widows. He believed that they would become unproductive busybodies. "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (v. 13). They need subordination. His suggested solution was marriage. "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (v. 14). Marriage can keep them in check. Keeping them in check is necessary, he says, "For some are already turned aside after Satan" (v. 15). He does not specify the nature of their infraction, but it seems to refer to an abandonment of the faith.

Here we have a contradiction with his recommendation in I Corinthians 7. "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another

7. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 12.

after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor. 7:7–9). Paul identified marriage in I Corinthians 7 as less productive for the kingdom of God than being unmarried. "But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife" (I Cor. 7:32–33). He argues the reverse in I Timothy 5 with respect to widows, who presumably are more likely to marry widowers than marry never-married men. This is why I conclude that Paul's recommendation in I Corinthians 7 was extra-revelational, as he said. "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment" (I Cor. 7:6). Paul's personal bias as a bachelor or widower negatively influenced his assessment of marriage in his first epistle to the Corinthians.⁸ In I Timothy 5, he goes to the other extreme: a general distrust of all but old widows. This extreme position is the New Covenant's standard.

The widow who has been married twice must do what she can to find a husband to support her. A husband must care for his wife. The church is not to be burdened with this legal responsibility.

Conclusion

Paul says it as clearly as it can be said: "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed" (v. 16). The economic support of widows is primarily the responsibility of family members, not the institutional church. The church must limit its commitment to those without any visible means of support.

Paul here establishes a fundamental New Testament economic principle: *the family unit is the primary agency of welfare*. The church should intervene only when there are no family members to support a widow, or where they have abandoned their responsibility. A Christian head of household who abandons this responsibility is subject to excommunication. He is worse than a covenant-breaker.

Widows who are under age 60 have no permanent claim on church resources. Widows who have remarried and who become widowed again also have no moral claim. When church members are not

8. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 9.

morally required to support all widowed members of the church, then there is no New Testament case for establishing a tax-funded welfare system that rests on the assumption that non-Christians are legally and morally required to pay to support such widows. Even less likely is a case for Christians' having to support non-Christians.

8

THE POWER OF THE PURSE

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward (I Tim. 5:17–18).

The theocentric focus of this passage is the authority of God's written word: the Bible. The institutional issue is ecclesiastical vertical hierarchy. Elders represent God covenantally because of the supreme authority of the Bible. They speak on behalf of God by way of the Bible.¹ So, they are entitled to financial support from members' donations to the local church.

A. From Case Law to General Application

Paul cites a Mosaic case law: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4).² This law is an aspect of hierarchy, specifically, God's authority as an employer. Men serve as God's delegated agents. An ox serves as a man's agent. There is a hierarchical system of responsibility upward and authority downward, with man as God's representative agent. This hierarchy includes the animal kingdom. I wrote in my commentary on Deuteronomy 25:4, second paragraph,

How a man treats his ox reflects how he treats workers in general. The ox is a symbol of dominion.³ It serves man as a working agent. It

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 63.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), p. 779.

therefore is entitled to special protection. This is why the penalty for stealing and then either selling or destroying an ox is five-fold restitution (Ex. 22:1). For other forms of theft (except sheep), as well as for an ox or sheep found in the thief's possession, it is double restitution (Ex. 22:4).⁴

I must expand on this observation. Oxen and sheep in the Mosaic Covenant were judicially dealt with differently from other animals. This law governed sheep and oxen: "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep" (Ex. 22:1). A second law governed sheep, oxen, and all other animals: "If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double" (Ex. 22:4). Sheep and oxen were given extra protection by the added penalty for destroying them or selling them. The reason for this was that these domesticated animals represented mankind in a unique way. The ox was (and remains) symbolic of the employed servant.⁵ This is why Paul twice used the case law against the muzzling of ox as representative of employing men. Men use oxen for dominion purposes as a beasts of burden. Unlike a donkey or horse, both of which were unclean animals under the Mosaic law, an ox could lawfully be eaten. The same was true of sheep: they could be eaten after their wool production no longer produced a profit.

Rushdoony used the law against muzzling a working ox as a representative case of a general principle of biblical judicial interpretation. The jurisdiction of a case law is not confined to the specific judicial case to which it applies. It represents a broader principle of law.⁶

A laborer is entitled to his appropriate reward. This is a fundamental principle of economic justice. But the special honor of an elder has something unique to do with the judicial authority of an elder to interpret the word of God officially. The word of God, spoken from the pulpit at a church worship service, is an aspect of covenantal authority,

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 61.

5. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 43:D.

6. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 11, 506. Rushdoony used the Ten Commandments as general classifying principles for all of the Mosaic Covenant's laws. I am not persuaded that the Decalogue is the primary means of classification of every case law. I have pursued another approach in my commentaries: to discover the theocentric principle that undergirds a law, which may or may not be related primarily to just one of the Ten Commandments.

for the church is a covenantal institution established by a covenantal oath. In contrast, an employer-employee relationship carries with it no covenantal sanction, for it is established by voluntary agreement or contract, not by a joint self-maledictory oath under God as the agent of sanctions. Paul here refers to a covenantal obligation, not a market wage. A market wage is the product of open entry and competitive bidding. A wage earned by a pastor is not the product of open entry and competitive bidding. Not everyone qualifies to be a pastor. It should be presumed by those ordaining a man for pastor that he has a special call from God.

In another epistle, Paul cited this case law to justify his entitlement to financial support from a church, which he refused to accept. "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (I Cor. 9:9–10). Paul was not saying that this law does not apply to oxen, or that it was exclusively for man's benefit. It applies to oxen. The Greek word translated here as "altogether" in another context means "surely." "And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country" (Luke 4:23). It can also be translated as "by all means." "But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus" (Acts 18:21).

Paul says here that this case law was always meant for man more than it was for oxen. It applies to oxen as representatives of man. When a man treats an ox badly, this testifies to how he would treat other men, if he could get away with it.

B. Good Rulership

The Greek word for "rule" comes from two Greek words that mean "stand before." A ruler stands before the individual and tells him what to do. A teaching elder or minister traditionally stands before the congregation in a pulpit and tells them what God expects them to do. He possesses authority, as a ruler must.

Paul here differentiates elders who rule well from elders who do not. The former are worthy of double honor. Paul also differentiates

between those elders who work in word and doctrine from those who do not. The former are especially worthy of honor. There is no doubt that Paul did not distinguish the specific task of preaching from the general task of ruling. Nevertheless, there is no clear evidence in this text or in Titus 1 that Paul had in mind two separate offices: either bishop vs. elder or preaching-teaching elder vs. ruling elder. What both passages clearly indicate is that Paul had this in mind: (1) two levels of performance and (2) two functional distinctions in service.

There is a grammatical distinction between the words for bishop and elder. The Greek word for “bishop” is related to the Greek word for “visit.” The Greek word for “elder” refers to age. “And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the **eldest**, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst” (John 8:9). “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your **old men** shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). In every other instance in the New Testament, the word is used to describe an ecclesiastical officer. It is clear from this passage that elders do rule. Some rule well; others do not. Some specialize in preaching and teaching (doctrine); others do not.

If Paul is teaching a distinction between two offices—bishop vs. elder—then the text should reveal this. It does not. As far as this text reveals, there are *two names* for *two functions*: bishop and elder. The first function has to do with visitation. The second has to do with teaching: word and doctrine. *Paul does not say here that these two functions are judicially distinct.* Paul identifies all elders as holding the same office, some of whom are especially worthy of double honor because of their above-average performance or their specialization in doctrine and preaching. He does not single out bishops as automatically worthy of double honor.

C. Polity, Power, and the Purse

Paul here tells Timothy that those elders who rule well, especially those who teach, are worthy of double honor. He relates this distinction to a claim on financial support. The question arises: How is this claim to be enforced?

All elders exercise rule. Certain elders—those who rule well—are entitled to double honor, which includes financial support. This enti-

tlement is a moral claim on a portion of the wealth of others. Those who are under the authority of elders are told by Paul to render both honor and payment to certain elders, i.e., those who rule well.

1. Institutional Authority

This raises the issue of evaluation. *Who possesses the legitimate institutional authority to make the evaluation regarding the comparative performance of elders?* Do the elders meet together and vote on who among them deserve financial support? Or do church members vote to determine this? Or do bishops make this determination? The institutional church has never come to agreement on this issue.

Paul says that elders who rule well are entitled to financial support, especially those who labor in word and doctrine. The emphasis is on *theological instruction*, not visitation.

There are two other things that Paul does not say here. First, he does not say that one group of elders, called bishops, possesses the authority to decide who among a second group of elders, called elders, deserve financial support. Second, he does not say that elders who possess equal authority are to meet with each other in order to decide which ones among them deserve financial support.

Paul writes this letter as an apostle (1:1, 2:7). He tells Timothy, his representative, to instruct the church at Ephesus regarding certain matters regarding ecclesiastical office. One of these matters is the question of *access to formal church office*. This is a judicial issue: the formal investiture of authority, which in turn should be based on performance criteria, such as hospitality, monogamy, good reputation, etc. A separate judicial matter is the question of *pay deserved by certain elders*. This has to do with an economic distinction between members and elders: one group pays; the other is paid. It also has to do with a distinction between elders: ruling well vs. ruling poorly.

Paul does not identify who it is in the church who possesses the lawful authority to determine which candidates for office meet the criteria for holding office. Through Timothy, he expects the church at Ephesus to be informed about these criteria. We know that additional information places additional responsibility on the hearers (Luke 12:47–48).⁷ This means that local members, not just elders, are responsible for seeing to it that the criteria for officers are met by the

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

officers. This means that members who are not officers have a responsibility to impose sanctions on those officers who hold office unlawfully. What these sanctions are, Paul does not say. There are only two kinds of available ecclesiastical sanctions: judicial and economic. Members may or may not be allowed by denominational tradition to vote with their voices, hands, or ballots, but in every tradition, they can and do vote with their purses. The institutional church has never come to any agreement regarding the judicial sanctions that are lawfully possessed by members, but the church has always faced the reality of economic sanctions. The power of the purse is universal. It cuts across all denominational lines.

When Paul moves from a discussion of the criteria for church office to a discussion of that which some elders are owed by other church members, he raises the issue of church sanctions. Someone—unnamed—must make judgments regarding the performance of elders. These judgments must be enforced. Enforcement requires sanctions. What is the positive sanction? Money. What is the negative sanction? Withdrawal of economic support. These sanctions are imposed on elders. Because the epistle is directed to Timothy, the presumption is that its message is directed to church members, i.e., those who hear the epistle read to them. When this epistle was placed into the canon of Scripture by the church, the church thereby acknowledged that members possess the power of the purse.

Paul never specifically mandated judicial democracy for the church. That is, he did not say that members possess the lawful authority to grant church office or to withdraw it. What he says in this epistle is that church members do possess the lawful authority to decide which elders deserve their economic support: the power of the purse.

It could be argued that Paul's teaching is compatible with a hierarchical judicial system in which senior officers (bishops) decide which junior officers (elders) are entitled to economic support from members. Elders then threaten to impose judicial sanctions on church members who refuse to honor the judgment of the bishops by refusing to pay the elders identified by the bishops as deserving support.

The problem with this argument is that Paul's letter applied to all members of the church at Ephesus. All members were responsible for seeing to it that the criteria for church office were honored. They were also responsible for seeing to it that good rulers were paid. This raises a fundamental principle of ethics: *responsibility is always accompanied*

by authority. There is no personal responsibility apart from the authority to impose sanctions in terms of personal judgments.⁸ Paul never wrote that church members possess the authority to vote for church officers, although this judicial authority seems to be implied by his listing of criteria for church officers. After all, why tell members about these criteria if members possess no institutional authority to bring judicial sanctions, either positive or negative? But it could also be argued that the sanctions they must bring are exclusively economic. Paul says only that the church owes economic support to good rulers. But if the right of church members to vote for church officers is denied, and their right to withhold economic support is also denied, then members in such a church are not personally responsible for what goes on in this church, for they possess no authority to impose formal sanctions of any kind. Such a denial of responsibility is contrary to Paul's letter. Paul's letter warns local church members to honor the criteria for church office and also honor the right of certain church officers to economic support. This means that Paul did authorize church members to impose the sanctions of economic support and the withdrawal of economic support.

Members have long ignored the criteria for church office, as have their officers. Never-married men are ordained to church office. Worse: married men in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are denied access to high church office.⁹ Church members, for one reason or another, have always denied to the church the tithe that Jesus said men owe. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).¹⁰ So, church officers have evaded the criteria that Paul sets forth here for holding office, while church members have withheld the positive sanction of the tithe that Christ mandated. Rebellion against biblical law has been basic to church government throughout history. The officers have refused to abide by the specified judicial criteria, and the members have refused to abide by the specified economic criterion. Elders who, in terms of Paul's judicial criteria, are not entitled to hold office,

8. I speak here of the ethics of creaturehood. I am not speaking of a creature's responsibility or authority before God.

9. Chapter 3:D.

10. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 46.

nevertheless lay claim to members' money. Members withhold it, not because the elders were not lawfully ordained, but because members want their religion, but they want it cheap.

2. Fragmentation and Competition

Churches do not insist that members tithe as a condition of communicant membership. There have been times in the distant past when the institutional church did insist on the tithe, but officers could never successfully enforce this requirement. As the church has fragmented, beginning in 1054, when the Western Church excommunicated the Eastern church, this disintegration process has reduced the believability of any church that has insisted that "there is no salvation outside the church, and we exclusively are the church." The ability of a denomination's elders or bishops to persuade members to pay a tithe to the church has been related to their ability to persuade members that there is no salvation outside the denomination.

The Protestant Reformation created something like open entry into the market for churches. Churches have repeatedly appealed to the civil government to enforce the churches' regional monopolies, but the state has been unable to successfully enforce this grant of monopoly privilege ever since the mid-seventeenth century in Protestant countries. There have been direct grants of privilege, and still are in Europe, but not monopolies. There have been indirect grants of privilege, such as zoning laws that restrict the construction of new churches, but these regulations rarely constitute absolute bans on new construction. The automobile overcomes such local restrictions.

The Protestant Reformation increased competition both for membership and financial support. It did this by denying the Roman Catholic Church's claim of monopolistic control over the sacraments.¹¹ The Protestant Reformation multiplied the number of denominations beyond the two that had existed since 1054. Denominationalism has steadily undermined the public's acceptance of any single church's assertion of exclusivity as God's ecclesiastical representative in history. In the second half of the twentieth century, Roman Catholicism aban-

11. The Protestant Reformation was a battle over point four of the biblical covenant model: sanctions. It was a battle over the validity of prior ecclesiastical vows, and also over the lawful dispensing of the sacraments, including the judicial definition of the sacraments. It began over a theological dispute regarding the sale of indulgences, which the church alleged were certificates of exemption from eternal negative sanctions.

doned this exclusivism.¹² A few Protestant groups still claim such monopoly status,¹³ but the general Protestant view is that salvation is based on God's grace through an individual's faith, without any ministerial intermediation necessary to salvation. Parachurch ministries have also entered into competition with churches for financial support from Christians.

This competitive ecclesiastical market for members and money has moved churches in the direction of independency. Individual members decide how much money they will donate to a local church. Most Protestant churches allow members to elect church officers, who in turn make decisions regarding the hiring and firing of ministers, as well as ministers' salary levels. Democracy has become dominant: either formally or economically, or both. Members retain power over their individual purses, and this shapes polity, both officially and unofficially.

3. Authority and the Flow of Funds

Judicial authority flows upward from the people and downward from their representatives. This is a two-way flow of authority (Lev. 4).¹⁴ This is why God holds nations responsible for the actions of their leaders. This is why bad decisions by political leaders can have terrible effects in the lives of the citizenry.

Funds flow upward from those who are represented to those who represent them. This is true in both church government and civil government. Productivity originates in the efforts of church members or political citizens. A portion of the economic results of their productivity flows upward. *Representative authority flows downward, but final judicial authority and also final economic authority both lodge at the bottom.* Those people who are represented always have some degree of power over those who represent them, even in tyrannies. *All forms of*

12. When a Boston Jesuit, Leonard Feeney, continued to preach the older doctrine, he was excommunicated in 1953. This placed him in an ironic position: preaching that there is no salvation outside the Roman Church, he found himself outside the Roman Church for preaching this. He was readmitted into the church shortly before his death in 1978. His doctrine, which had been taught by the Roman Church throughout most of its history, by then had become just one more opinion among many—one no longer widely shared. To take him back was an exercise in the new ecumenical spirit. <http://www.fatherfeeney.com>

13. An example is the Church of Christ.

14. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

temporal government rely on self-government. A central government possesses insufficient economic resources to compel large numbers of people to do anything that they have decided to resist, whether officially or unofficially. When those who are represented decide not to obey those who represent them, the representatives must either change the minds of the recalcitrant masses or else lose power.

Final authority in any system of government corresponds with the source of the funding. Final judicial authority over individual members lies with the hierarchy's senior officials, but final judicial authority with respect to the system of authority itself always lies at the bottom. This is why, in the long run, God holds individuals corporately responsible for what their leaders do in their name.

Economics reflects and reinforces this structure of judicial authority. Because *economic productivity* lies at the bottom of the hierarchy, so does *economic authority*. The hierarchical system must be funded. The producer at the bottom therefore retains a final veto if he is a free man. He can lawfully refuse to work. *Every legally free man has a fundamental right not to work.* Israel's exodus from Egypt is the supreme example of the right not to work. Their deliverance from slavery meant their right not to work for their former masters, who had enslaved them unlawfully.

Paul in this passage establishes a distinction regarding honor among elders, which he says is a distinction regarding funding. There are elders who do not rule well. The local congregation is not required to pay every elder. This clearly lodges final institutional authority over money with the members. As the delegated owners of God's money, they retain responsibility for deciding where it should go.

Because the local congregation is empowered by God to decide who gets paid and who does not, it possesses economic authority. Even in hierarchical denominations, local congregations retain most of the authority. The main issue is not the exercise of the franchise. Members in some denominations may not be allowed to vote regarding which elders are ordained to office. This is true in the case of prelacy generally and also Presbyterianism with respect to teaching elders, who are members of a presbytery rather than a congregation. Members nevertheless retain their God-given authority to reward those elders who rule well. This means that they possess the God-given authority to withhold payment from elders who, in their opinion, do not rule well. Members can voluntarily leave the local church in order to attend somewhere else. They take their purses with them. Legal authority

may or may not lodge in the denomination's corporate assembly of members, but economic authority always does.

In the free market, an owner retains legal control over a resource. Customers possess the authority to assess this resource's value even though they do not own it. Competitive bidding—sellers vs. sellers, buyers vs. buyers—sets the market price of every economic resource in a free market. Owners can decide whether or not to offer an item for sale, but they do not determine the demand for their resource beyond their own personal demand. Customers determine demand.

The process of establishing the value of services supplied by elders is analogous to the free market's pricing system. Church membership is voluntary. Candidates for church office compete against each other. Judicial screening determines the supply of elders: the ordination process. Local congregations may ordain men directly, or a hierarchy of already ordained elders may do this on behalf of the members. In either case, the value of elders' services, with respect to their wages, is determined by members, who decide how much money to donate to a local church.

There is, in addition, competition among churches for members and elders. This affects the wages paid to elders. There is open entry for new congregations.

If every church member were required to tithe as a condition of communicant membership—access to the Lord's Supper—then formal economic authority would be transferred to that agency within the church which hires and fires elders, and which also determines the quality of their performance. I am aware of no denomination today that claims that its members have an obligation to tithe as a condition of participating in the sacraments. Therefore, if donors decide not to pay, the formal authority possessed by elders to extract payment from members becomes worthless, i.e., of zero market value.

If every communicant member were required to tithe as a condition of voting in church elections, then judicial authority in the church would tend to follow the flow of funds. Those who pay their tithes would gain corporate authority over the allocation of these funds. I am aware of no church that mandates payment of a tithe as a condition of the right to vote. Those members who do not tithe possess equal judicial authority—one member, one vote—with those who do tithe.

In churches where members cannot vote for elders, they can vote with their pocketbooks or with their feet. They can donate less money or leave the local church. Elders or bishops may retain the formal au-

thority to allocate the church's income autonomously, but this income will depend on the members' assessment of the quality of rulership exercised by the elders. The power of the purse shapes denominational polity and influence.¹⁵

4. Democracy and the Veto

Legal access to church office is different from the legal authority under God to determine who rules well. Paul here establishes the legal authority of local church members to determine which elders are worthy of their economic support. *Members possess a lawful economic veto.* This is not merely a matter of functional economic authority. It is a legal authority established by Paul.

The laymen's legal authority over the payment of elders has influenced church polity throughout history. Debates over polity among the denominational traditions have not been resolved. There is no agreement regarding bishops, elders, and the locus of the authority to ordain officers. Despite these disagreements, the power of the purse has moved Christianity in the direction of localism. *Hierarchies must respond to the flow of funds if they are to survive.* Individual laymen possess lawful and operational authority over the allocation of their money. Corporately, they also possess a God-given authority over the allocation of the elders' wages. Paul makes this judicial principle clear in this passage. Elders in certain hierarchical church traditions have long resisted this principle of the judicial authority of laymen over payment to elders, but, over time, all branches of the church have accommodated this principle to some degree.

The institutional church is inherently democratic. This has been an important lesson of church history. The institutional church depends on donations. Donors possess legal authority over their money. *The individual's conscience ultimately is the final economic authority under God.* No church council can remove this authority. The member retains an economic veto. Paul acknowledges this final economic au-

15. Mainline Protestant denominations in the United States have suffered from reduced growth in both membership and donations, compared with evangelical churches, ever since 1926, the year following the Scopes "monkey" trial. Robert T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925–1935," *Church History*, 29 (1960), pp. 3–16. This disparity increased after 1960. Members have brought negative sanctions on the liberal hierarchies. There has also been attrition due to the normal process of death and replacement. Liberal denominations are not replacing their dead. The spiritually dead are burying the biologically dead.

thority in this passage.

D. Taxation and Legitimacy

Civil governments are similarly constrained. Historically, kings have faced resistance from lower authorities regarding the level of taxation. The best example of this constraint in the Bible is the successful rebellion of Jeroboam and the ten tribes against the high-tax regime of Rehoboam (I Kings 12).¹⁶ The best example of this constraint in Western history is the Magna Carta (1215), in which barons and the lower military orders extracted from England's King John the acceptance of their authority to ratify or reject his tax policies. Civil governments always face taxpayer resistance.

1. *Taxation and Localism*

The power of national civil governments to compel payment retards the development of localism. The greater the power of the central government to collect taxes, the more centralized the state becomes. Money flows upward; so does power. The relationship between money and power is self-reinforcing, up to a point. At some point in history, however, the power of a particular civil government to collect taxes begins to fade. When it does, tax revolts produce decentralization. The centuries-long disintegration of the Western Roman Empire is the supreme example of this process in history.

The multiplication of political jurisdictions reduces the ability of central governments to collect taxes directly from the public. This is analogous to the effects of the Protestant Reformation. Competition for the output of citizens enables voters to make political decisions regarding how much to pay and which governments get what percentage of their wealth.

A popular slogan in the English American colonies in the years preceding the American Revolution (1775–83) was this: "No taxation without representation." This slogan was an extension of the principle that undergirded the Magna Carta. Colonists who favored resistance to the British Parliament argued that local colonial legislatures, not Parliament, possessed the lawful authority to tax citizens. Parliamentary theorists denied this principle of taxation. Technically, Parliament ever since 1689 has not had any formal restraints on its sovereignty.

16. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

Realistically, it has had many restraints. The success of the American Revolution made clear to Parliament's defenders just how relevant these restraints were.

In the early modern period of Western European Civilization, beginning around 1500, there began a consolidation of civil governments. Soon after, the Protestant Reformation weakened the authority of a centralized church to oppose these new national governments in Northern Europe. This political centralization process visibly peaked on December 31, 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed in a nearly bloodless transfer of power from the Communist Party.¹⁷ It is always difficult to date precisely a civilization-wide change, but that event surely represented a change in direction. The break-up of the Soviet Empire into a confederation of states immediately followed. The multiplication of nations after the end of World War II in 1945 has continued. The ability of central governments to enforce domestic peace and security is fading.¹⁸ The looming bankruptcy of Western industrial nations' programs of tax-funded retirement and medical care of the aged¹⁹ threatens to undermine the legitimacy of these governments.

The decentralization of ecclesiastical authority that began with the Protestant Reformation led to the centralization of regional political power in Europe. This centralization now seems to have reached its limits. Above all, the limit on taxation marks this reversal. It is becoming clear that high-tax nations lose their ability to compete economically in international markets against low-tax nations.

2. Competition in Taxation

Today, what the Protestant Reformation began in ecclesiology, the free market is producing in politics. Decentralization is making itself felt. The inability of churches to collect donations from members who can walk across the street and join another church is matched by the inability of civil governments to collect taxes from businesses that can move to another jurisdiction. Competition in taxation has appeared.

17. Michael Dobbs, *Down with Big Brother: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1997), pp. 374–410.

18. Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life: 1500 to the Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 776–77. Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 394–408.

19. Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America—And the World* (Times Books, 1999).

Businesses move outside a nation or to regions inside where local taxes are lower. Price competition among taxing authorities is reducing the power of the state.

Little of this was evident as recently as 1975. During the 1980's, England's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, America's President Ronald Reagan, and Communist China's Premier Deng Xiaoping provided rhetoric for reduced taxation and reduced government control over the economy. All three followed through politically on their rhetoric. Thatcher and Reagan achieved reductions in the rate of taxation on the higher income brackets. Deng achieved a reduction in direct government control over business. All three nations experienced renewed economic growth, especially China, which had been far more regulated than England or America.

What the Western church experienced first, beginning with the Protestant Reformation, the state has now begun to experience: *competition among jurisdictions*. This echo effect from church to state took almost five centuries. But there had been a previous echo effect. What the Roman state experienced after the second century, the Western church experienced fourteen centuries later: *decentralization and a loss of authority*. The early church had imitated the political centralization of Rome. The church never attained equal power, for the decline of the Roman Empire and its economy was irreversible by the time Christian emperors came to power in the fourth century. The break-up of imperial Rome made impossible ecclesiastically anything like the centralization of power and money that the West's largest nation-states achieved after 1500.

The early church self-consciously adopted much of the structure of the Roman state, beginning no later than the mid-fourth century. *The Roman state became the institutional model for the medieval church*. The modern secular state has imitated imperial Rome's extension of power. This imitation was self-conscious, beginning with the Renaissance's revival of republican Rome as the ideal political order. As surely as republican Rome's constant warfare transformed it into imperial Rome, so did the constant warfare of Renaissance Italy's city-states erode their republican liberties.

The modern state has now begun to retrace imperial Rome's decline, after Rome's overextension began to erode the ability of its taxing agents to collect wealth from the oppressed residents of the empire. Resistance to state power is now growing. The weapons of this resistance are military and economic. The heart of both processes is

price competition. Weapons keep getting cheaper, and so does the flow of capital. The ability of central governments to extract wealth from distant nations and nearby taxpayers is declining.

A transfer of political legitimacy always accompanies any sustained reduction of political power. The early modern Renaissance nation-states of Northern Europe provided protection for regional Protestant churches. In exchange, these churches offered legitimacy to the civil rulers. This dual process eroded the authority of the Roman Church, which could not impose physical sanctions without civil co-operation. Spain attempted to become the European enforcer for the Vatican in the sixteenth century. The attempt failed. Spain faded as a political force after England's defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Protestantism prospered economically. But after the bloody civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century in the German states and the British Isles, it was humanism, not Protestantism, that received credit for political freedom, economic growth, and technological progress. Social theorists believed that Christianity and the Bible could not provide a method of obtaining agreed-upon answers to social and political problems. Intellectuals sought agreement through appeals to a common reason. The intellectual and political influence of all churches faded. Humanism gained steadily in public legitimacy after the French Revolution (1789–94), despite its horrors.

With the Renaissance, the religion of humanism hitched its wagon to the star of the modern state. It had to. Its role model was classical humanism, which had also hitched its star to the state: first, the Greek polis; then, Rome's empire. This alliance between humanism and statism accelerated rapidly after the political standards of Enlightenment humanism led to the United States Constitution (1788)²⁰ and the French Revolution.

Next, the humanist state created its own established church: tax-funded schools. By 1810, this church was well-established in France. It took until 1900 to consolidate the process in the United States, where private education has not died out completely.²¹ But confidence in the

20. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>) I have updated this: *Conspiracy in Philadelphia: Origins of the United States Constitution* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Dominion Educational Ministries, Inc., 2004). (<http://garynorth.com/philadelphia.pdf>)

21. The most prestigious universities in the United States, with one exception, are privately funded. The exception is the University of California at Berkeley, created in the early 1870s. They are: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Berkeley, Stanford, Chicago, and

state's abilities to ensure prosperity has now begun to fade, and so has public confidence in the more self-conscious and consistent institutions of humanism. The ability of humanism's institutions to extract wealth from the public through its enforcer, the secular state, is reminiscent of the sixteenth-century Vatican's attempt to extract wealth and obedience from Northern Europeans by means of Spain's flow of gold and power. That dream sank with the Armada.

Conclusion

The laymen's power of the purse is guaranteed ecclesiastically by Paul's observation that some elders rule well, while others do not. The former are worthy of economic support. The others are not. Someone must make the assessment of rulership. This someone is the communicant member. He retains his right to allocate his money. If the local church is faithful, allocating money to elders who rule well and who also meet the criteria for eldership, then members are supposed to tithe to the local church. If these standards are not upheld by the ordaining agency, then a man has the right to look elsewhere for membership.

A man's tithe is to go to his local congregation.²² But members are supposed to retain the right to assess the performance of their elders. If this right is negated by the elimination of a tither's right to vote for those who will exercise rule over them, as is the case in prelacy, then members are allowed by God to transfer membership without restriction. Not to permit this would constitute a denial of the right of members to assess the performance of their elders.

Competing churches have reduced pressures on members to pay tithes. Members use this competition to avoid meeting their obligation to tithe (Matt. 23:23). This is rebellion. The tithe is morally mandatory for members. This fact is not to become a justification for churches to

Columbia, with Harvard always at the top, ever since its founding in 1636. This group remains constant, generation after generation. All of them are equally secular. Tax-funded higher education below these premier institutions is dominant, and has been since about 1900. There are about a dozen very high-prestige, little-known four-year private colleges, and about the same number college preparation academies in the Northeast for the sons of the rich and well-connected, but tax-funded education is what most Americans have faith in. This faith is now wavering, but it presently triumphs by default.

22. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994). (<http://bit.ly/gntithing>) Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

ordain men who do not meet God's qualifications, or to pay men who do not rule well.

Churches are democratic if they allow all members vote regarding (1) those who will serve in church offices, and (2) how much money to pay them. This transfers judicial authority to non-tithing members. But because of the effects of Pareto's unexplained law, approximately 20% of the members will contribute approximately 80% of the church's income. Whether they control the vote or not, these members will control policy because of the threat of their departure.

Western churches have moved in the direction of laymen's control. Their source of funding made this inevitable. So did the break-up of the international church in 1054 and after 1517 in the Western church. Any denomination's claim of monopoly status over the sacraments and access to the road to heaven has been challenged by the proliferation of rival churches. People have gone shopping for churches in much the same way that they have shopped for other services. They have decided which churches best meet their needs and beliefs. The twentieth century made universal a democratic tendency that was implicit in the Protestant Reformation. Luther's declaration of the right of conscience was ratified by the laymen's power of the purse. This trend toward democracy and local control became visible in Roman Catholicism after Vatican II in the early 1960s.

This trend has also brought about an increased influence by women, for in all branches of the Western church, women have been in the majority.²³ Husbands have long granted to women the authority to allocate part of the family budget to religious purposes. This, plus their donations of time, have gained women great influence over churches and parachurch ministries. No matter what church officers decree, she who pays the piper calls, if not the tune, then at least the orchestral arrangement.

Economic democracy extends from church to state. An individual can decide where his after-tax money goes, meaning the after-tax output of his productivity. He decides the degree of his cooperation with the state by means of voting and also by means of his participation in the division of labor economy. If he grows tired of paying so many taxes, he can refuse to work for money. He can grow his own food. He can withdraw from the division-of-labor economy. He is responsible

23. Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas, Texas: Spence, 1999).

before God for what he does (Luke 12:47–48).²⁴ No earthly committee will mediate for him on judgment day. So, in principle, *conscience determines where the income from a person's productivity goes*. The Protestant principle of the authority of the individual conscience is manifested in church and state through the individual's power over his purse.

24. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

MASTERS AND SERVANTS

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort (I Tim. 6:1–2).

The theocentric principle here is the holiness of God. Specifically, it is the holiness of God's name. Holiness is point three of the biblical covenant. It also refers to boundaries.¹ Paul's commandment is an aspect of the third commandment: the prohibition against taking God's name in vain. There is a boundary around God's name. The context of God's holy name here is the exercise of Christian faith, which involves obedience to lawful authorities: point two of the biblical covenant model.² Here, point three—holiness—is linked to point two: hierarchy/representation. Slave owners represent God, Paul says. But so do covenant-keeping slaves, who impute honor to their masters. Rendering judgment is an aspect of sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.³

A. Imputed Honor and Faithful Service

Paul is speaking here of slaves, not temporary hired servants. The Greek word, *doulos*, is the same for both forms of subordination. The differentiating factor is Paul's reference to a yoke. A person who is un-

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012).

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

3. Sutton, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

der a yoke is not a hired servant; he is a slave. In the same way that Christians are permanent slaves of Christ, not merely part-time hired servants, so are slaves to their masters. Christ told His followers: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29–30). It is not a part-time yoke.

1. *Imputation*

The slave is required to count his master as honorable. The Greek word here translated as "count" is used frequently for "rule" or "govern," "ruler" or "governor."

And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a **Governor**, that shall rule my people Israel (Matt. 2:6).

But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is **chief**, as he that doth serve (Luke 22:26).

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, **chief** men among the brethren (Acts 15:22).

The same word is also translated as "thought" or "count," in the sense of making an evaluation.

Who, being in the form of God, **thought** it not robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2:6).

But what things were gain to me, those I **counted** loss for Christ (Phil. 3:7).

Yea doubtless, and I **count** all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ (Phil. 3:8).

The meaning of the Greek word is tied to authority: *the authority to make an evaluation*. The person who evaluates anything renders judgment. He evaluates something in terms of standards. He is under authority and law in his capacity as a person in authority who evaluates the situation. He is part of a hierarchy: God > law > man. He who renders judgment is also the object of God's authoritative rendering of

judgment. Men are called on by God to render judgment in terms of God's higher, authoritative judgment. Covenant-keepers are supernaturally enabled to do this. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16).⁴

The slave is to render judgment on his master. He is to count him worthy of all honor due to legitimate rulers. How can this be done when a master is evil? *The slave should do this because he recognizes that God has placed him in a position of subordination.* History is not random; it is providential. The slave is to honor God's hierarchical control over history by honoring his master as legally worthy of honor. The honor in question is the honor associated with obedience. It means "acknowledging one's legally subordinate position in thought, word, and deed." It does not mean that the slave is to imagine that an evil master is any less evil because of his authority over the slave.

The Christian slave is God's designated agent of imputation. He possesses the mind of Christ. *Even though he is functionally and judicially subordinate, he is covenantally superior. He imputes on behalf of God.* He is required by God to defend the integrity of this lawful imputation by serving his master faithfully. When he does this, he thereby heaps coals of fire on his wicked master's head (Rom. 12:19–21).⁵ He brings negative sanctions on him in eternity by bringing positive sanctions on him in history.

How can someone who is functionally and judicially subordinate be a master in God's eyes? The answer is seen best in Christ on the cross. He was judicially and functionally subordinate to Rome and Israel, but He pronounced judgment. He extended mercy. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). Peter later honored Christ's judgment when presenting his covenant lawsuit before Israel. "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot [know] that through

4. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:14–17). So, the authority to render judgment on God's behalf comes with the imputation of Christ's righteousness. "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29–30).⁶

2. *Rendering Honor*

What is the meaning of "honor"? The Greek word can mean "price,"⁷ but it generally refers to a position of high esteem. The word is applied to God and Christ.

For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country (John 4:44).

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen (I Tim. 1:17).

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen (I Tim. 6:16).

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever (Rev. 4:9).

In these contexts, the Greek word refers to a hierarchy. He who is at the top of a hierarchy is worthy of honor from those under his authority. So, for a slave to render judgment with respect to a master, he must first count him worthy of obedience. *The slave must honor the hierarchy.* The slave is a permanent member of this hierarchy. He cannot lawfully quit or run away, as Paul understood when he wrote to Philemon, the owner of an escaped slave, Onesimus. "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever" (Phm. 1:15).

Paul teaches here that honor is owed by the slave to the owner. The owner does not owe manumission to the slave. This legal relationship was one-way: from bottom to top. This is a New Testament document. It cannot legitimately be ignored, however disturbing its implications may be for modern Christians.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 51.

7. Matthew 27:6, 9; Acts 4:34; Acts 5:2–3; Acts 19:19.

3. Serving God and Men

This imputation of honor is based on the master's office, not his performance. The slave is under the master's authority. Because the master is worthy of all honor due to legitimate rulers, the slave should serve efficiently. He is required by God to render superior service to the master irrespective of any incentives offered for superior performance. The slave is to regard his work as work for God, even if his master is an evil man. The master benefits even though he does not impute superior value to the slave's work.

The slave may expect the master to regard faithful service as faithful. This expectation implicitly rests on the assumption of God's common grace. Why should a covenant-breaking master evaluate correctly the faithfulness of his slave? Only because God has restrained the master's sin-bent powers of evaluation. It should come as no surprise to a slave that his covenant-breaking master does not appreciate him. The ethical issue is the response of the slave to his master's incorrect evaluation of the value of the slave's services. Paul sets forth the proper response: obedience. This obedience is owed irrespective of the master's powers of evaluation.

This requirement runs counter to human nature, which is fallen. More important, it runs counter to the system of sanctions that governs free economic institutions. *It calls on the slave to render something for nothing*, i.e., to render faithful service in the absence of direct positive incentives from the master. Paul calls on Christian slaves to do this because they serve a greater Master, who has placed them under a permanent system of vertical hierarchy in history. They cannot leave without permission, so their work is tied to service to the master. *To serve God well, slaves must serve their owners well*. Their reward will be from God in eternity, and possibly in history. There are positive sanctions, but not always in history.

This verse implies the existence of *a system of cause and effect that runs counter to other theories of self-interested human action*. The master is to benefit from the work of Christian slaves, even if he is a covenant-breaker. Is this not a situation where the life of the covenant-keeper is expended in order to increase the inheritance of the covenant-breaker? If this is the case, then what of this principle? "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).⁸

8. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*

Obedience to lawful authority is a means of imposing negative eternal sanctions: coals of fire (Rom. 12:19–21). It is also a way of gaining positive sanctions in history. There is common grace.⁹ A faithful testimony through obedience is a testimony to the gospel. A master is rarely so blind that he cannot distinguish faithful service from rebellion. There is common grace in history. The obedient slave testifies to God's grace to the master.

4. *Subsidizing Evil*

The defender of the free market argues that faithful service will be rewarded. The master buys improved service. But this assumes a world in which slaves respond better when they are treated better. *Paul tells slaves to obey, irrespective of sanctions received.* Would this practice undermine the good treatment of slaves? It rewards evil, subsidizing bad performance by masters. Does God's law subsidize evil? God's civil law does not, but this requirement does. What is the explanation for this seeming anomaly, i.e., that covenant-keepers are called by God to subsidize evil?

There are at least three reasons. First, this law reduces lawless rebellion and potential bloodshed. It is anti-revolutionary. Social peace is subsidized by the individual slave's obedience. Social peace is a blessing. The implication of this law is that *social peace is a superior policy in the extension of God's kingdom than a policy of rebellion against lawful authority.* The obedient slave is subsidizing an evil master's bad behavior, but this is an indirect or secondary outcome of his obedience. *The slave is directly subsidizing social peace.* He is directly subsidizing the biblical principle of lawful hierarchy.

Second, this law rests on a theory of causation in which God defends His people from oppression. God correctly evaluates the value of the slave's service, even if the owner doesn't. God sees. *God intervenes in history on behalf of His people.* This is the teaching of covenant theology. The wicked master is setting himself up for God's judgment in history.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it. Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked condemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none (Ps. 10:4–15).

It is not disobedience on the part of a slave to call upon God in his prayers to act on his behalf. This is what the Israelites did in Egypt (Ex. 2:23). God answered their prayers, though not in the way they expected. He delivered them out of Egypt rather than delivering them inside Egypt or over Egypt.

Third, the slave-subsidized accumulation of wealth by the covenant-breaker will either pass into oblivion through bad decisions by the covenant-breaker or his heirs, or else he or his heirs will become covenant-keepers. “The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22b). Christianity teaches dominion through service.¹⁰ In no passage is this principle any clearer than this one.

The same principle of dominion through service undergirds the free market. The difference is, the free market’s hierarchy is not oath-bound. It is horizontal.¹¹ Customers (sellers of money) are supreme, because money is the most marketable commodity. In a free market, competition among entrepreneurs for the money spent by customers transfers wealth to those entrepreneurs who best serve customers, as determined by the customers. In an unfree judicial order, this process takes longer, for the state interferes coercively with this allocation of the entrepreneurs’ wealth by the customers. But the customers’ authority cannot be overcome indefinitely. Producers stay in business by serving customers. To remain in control of his capital, which includes the slave, the slave owner must serve customers efficiently.

10. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 51.

11. Introduction:G:2.

So, by serving a covenant-breaking owner, the faithful slave serves God and also serves customers. To the extent that the covenant-breaker's capital is put to evil uses, to this extent he is dissipating his capital. *The covenant-keeping slave can have confidence that his own efforts are not in vain in history.* Sooner or later, customers will benefit. The master is a middleman to the extent that he seeks a profit. The economic hierarchy still has customers in authority, irrespective of the legal hierarchy.

B. Unlawful Rebellion

"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed" (6:1). The Greek word translated here as "blasphemed" is elsewhere translated as "speak evil,"¹² "slanderosly reported" (Rom. 3:8), and "defamed" (I Cor. 4:13). When used with respect to God, the King James Version adopts some variant of "blaspheme." Thus, to speak falsely, knowingly, and maliciously with respect to God is to commit blasphemy. This passage indicates that to speak falsely and maliciously against the doctrine of God is also to commit the sin of blasphemy. This does not mean that committing a theological error is blasphemous. It means that speaking falsely in a way that prejudices the truth is a form of defamation. It is breaking the ninth commandment against false witness, which has a judicial frame of reference.

What is Paul's concern in this passage? He warns Timothy to instruct the church that servants should honor their masters. *For slaves to become resentful or rebellious against their owners leads to the defamation of God and His doctrine.* How does this happen? By way of a false accusation. Those who hear of such rebellion by Christian servants may conclude that God authorizes this sort of rebellion. God does not authorize it. Paul makes this plain in the next sentence: "And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit."

A test of true faith for a slave, Paul implies, is faithfulness to the master. In the first sentence, Paul refers to masters in general. In the second sentence, he refers to Christian masters. The master is due respect in both cases. Why? Because of God's name and doctrine, Paul says explicitly. Why God's name and doctrine? Because of the vertical

12. Romans 14:16; I Cor. 10:30; I Peter 4:4, 14; II Peter 2:2, 10, 12; Jude 1:8, 10.

hierarchical nature of all reality, and because God, as the Creator, is the cosmic Owner of the universe. God has placed the slave in his subordinate position.

Obedience is a test of faith. The slave occupies a position of authority. He is under the master, but he is over some aspect of the creation. Man as a species is under God but over creation; so is the individual slave. He serves the master by adding to the master's wealth. The master increases his own productivity and output by means of the household division of labor in a vertical hierarchy. What is true for the master is equally true for the slave. The slave is part of this hierarchical system of production: vertically, under the owner; horizontally, under the customers. This in turn is an aspect of dominion. Paul's argument rests on a concept of *dominion through subordination*.¹³

This view of man's dominion over nature in history is opposed by most views of cause and effect. Most religions hold either to a view of conquest by force (e.g., Islam) or by a concept that dominion is illegitimate and in the long run impossible (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism). The major exception to these views is the ideology of the free market. Free market economics teaches that service to the customer is the way to wealth. Wealth is the way to dominion over nature. In this sense, free market economics is consistent with Christianity.

The suggestion that a slave should honor his master is repellant to modern humanism. It is also repellant to modern revolutionary ideology. Both views recommend personal liberation by resistance or even open rebellion. *Paul's words cannot be reconciled with rebellion.* On the contrary, his message here is the opposite of revolution. Jesus Christ proclaimed the opposite of rebellion to captive individuals and captive nations. He recommended *productivity through peace*, not liberation through violent revolution.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matt. 5:38–39).¹⁴

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father

13. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/gninherit>)

14. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans [tax collectors] the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:44–48).¹⁵

Paul's instructions to Timothy regarding slaves are consistent with Christ's words. Elsewhere, Paul wrote:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19–21).

Here, Paul was citing Solomon:

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee (Prov. 25:21–22).

This strategy of judgment through subordination rests on a presupposition: *God is the final Judge*. His final judgment will stand. Nothing can overcome it or deflect it. God's judgment is better than any civil government's justice or any individual's judgment. God's people are told to believe this. It is not that they are to ignore evil. Rather, it is that *God's remedy for systematic evil is goodness*. When an individual lives under a judicial order that promotes slavery, he is to conform until such time that defenders of justice are in a political position to end this institution by law.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

C. Liberation Through Subordination

Paul fully understood that slavery is a second-best condition. He recommended liberation. “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather” (I Cor. 7:21).¹⁶ *Manumission is always the proper goal of every Christian slave.* An owner may decide to let his faithful servant go free as a reward for service above and beyond the call of duty. This is the owner’s decision, but in a world where God is sovereign, manumission is ultimately God’s decision.

1. Liberation from Sin

Biblical liberty begins with liberation from sin. “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:31–34). Jesus served God faithfully, even unto death. This is the only judicial basis of every person’s liberation from bondage to sin. Jesus subordinated Himself to the lawful powers of His day. Within three days, He rose from the dead. He then announced to His disciples, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18b).¹⁷ The way to dominion over history is to follow Christ’s example. Paul followed it.

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (II Cor. 11:23–28).

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “Be ye followers of me, even

16. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 8.

17. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1).¹⁸

There was no doubt in Christ's mind regarding the legitimacy of conquest. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19–20).¹⁹ There was no doubt in Paul's mind, either. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (I Cor. 15:24–25).²⁰ What is at issue is the legitimate means of conquest.

Liberation by God is an aspect of Christian conquest. This conquest is self-reinforcing: it liberates individuals, and in doing so, it makes them more effective agents of liberation. This is why Paul recommended to every Christian slave that he accept manumission if it is offered.

It takes faith in the God of the Bible as the God of liberation in order to obey Paul's injunction. The slave must believe that liberation is God's goal, for liberation is an aspect of dominion. To obey with a pure heart, the slave must first accept the fact that *the ultimate bondage is bondage to sin* as the heir of Adam, God's disinherited son. Every man is under a yoke, either sin's or Christ's. If the covenant-keeper is under another man's yoke, the basis of his liberation in history becomes greater subordination to his master in the name of God. The slave must be willing to become a faithful servant of his master in order to reflect his new bondservant to the supreme Master, God. The Christian slave is legally under a man's yoke, but he is also legally under Christ's yoke. *The lawful way of release from man's yoke is faithful service under Christ's yoke.* This service must be internal: reckoning honor to the master. This is how Christians are to prevent the blaspheming of God's name.

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) was a novel that mobilized anti-slavery opinion in the North in the United States. The hero of the book is Uncle Tom, a faithful slave under the yoke of a moral monster, Simon Legree. Tom is a Christian. He obeys Legree for the sake of Christ.

18. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 14.

19. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48; Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

20. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 16.

Legree despises Tom and Tom's faith. Tom's life ends after a savage whipping by Legree and a pair of black slave trustees. Tom dies with prayers of forgiveness for his tormentors (chapter 40). Over a century later, during the civil rights movement, "Uncle Tom" became a term of opprobrium among black activists. Any black who was not in favor of racial confrontation or even violence was dismissed as an Uncle Tom, a racial stereotype of subordination to white men's political power. The activists whipped their troops into line with this phrase. The anti-Christian and revolutionary character of the civil rights movement by the late 1960s, despite its origin in black Christian circles in the mid-1950s, was testified to by the widespread use of the phrase. A major goal of the leaders of the civil rights revolution was to replace Christianity with humanism. Many of them were clerics. They used the rhetoric of Christianity to further a militantly anti-Christian political agenda.

2. Divine Intervention

He who believes that self-conscious subordination brings dominion for oneself or one's heirs has to adopt a supernatural worldview. This is the worldview of Joseph in Egypt. Joseph's faithful service to Potiphar led to a false accusation against him by Potiphar's wife. He was thrown into prison. There, he took over the administration of the prison. Eventually, he rose to second in command in Egypt—technically under the authority of the Pharaoh, but in fact in charge of Egypt's economy and its political order. This is the correct model for dominion, both personal and corporate.

It takes faith to believe this. It also takes a willingness to suffer unrighteous abuse. Jesus warned His followers: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11). He continued:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heav-

en is perfect (Matt. 5:43–48).²¹

The belief that subordination to state-sanctioned evil eventually produces dominion is not widespread. Christians in the late Roman Empire believed that they could not cooperate with the state on matters of public liturgy in a polytheistic empire, but they obeyed in everything else. This brought wave after wave of persecution on the church, for the essence of Rome's religion was the worship of the state through the worship of the reigning emperor.²² The result of the church's resistance on liturgy but obedience to everything else was the capture of the empire by the church in the fourth century. By then, Christians had become grudgingly respected by the pagans because of their subordination and their honesty. But this replacement process took almost three centuries before a Christian emperor ascended to the throne. Centuries are too long a time frame for applying a strategy of dominion for most religions, other than those that are in some way influenced by the Bible.

3. *Power Religion vs. Dominion Religion*²³

The lure of the power religion is great. It proclaims a rival system of cause and effect. Power is to be overcome by greater power. Power is seen as the basis of dominion. This worldview rests on an error. Dominion is by example, by productivity, and by service. Dominion is by covenant.²⁴ God rewards this system of cause and effect, and His opponents also come to respect it, which eventually undermines their legitimacy and the social order that is based on the power religion.

The Bible's dominion religion is not opposed to the lawful exercise of civil power on behalf of righteousness. Civil sanctions are legitimate (Rom. 13:1–7).²⁵ But Christ and Paul were addressing people who were political outsiders, people who possessed little or no political authority. These people lived under a hierarchy established by an empire.

21. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 10.

22. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, California: Ross House [1971] 1995), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rjroam>)

23. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), Introduction:A, C.

24. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*.

25. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 11.

*Empire is always the long-term political goal of the power religion.*²⁶ This goal always results in failure. Daniel was clear: the fifth and final empire belongs exclusively to the Holy One (Dan. 2:44–45).

The Bible presents *dominion* as the result of *liberation from sin*. Liberation from sin produces an attitude of victory. The victory over sin and death that was revealed in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is supposed to motivate covenant-keepers to obey God. There is life beyond death, victory in history before the end of time (I Cor. 15).²⁷ This new life is attained in history. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). Therefore, a token of the eternal victory over sin and Satan will also be attained by covenant-keepers in history. This is why the apostles were told by Christ to bring the nations under Christ’s rule (Matt. 28:18–20).²⁸

Within Christian circles, there has always been organized hostility to this message. Pietists embrace the escape religion.²⁹ This worldview separates victory in history from victory in eternity. In place of dominion by subordination, pietism proclaims subordination by subordination. It proclaims subordination as a way of life in history, not for the sake of the transformation of men and society, but for the sake of personal self-discipline. This is the religion of the monastery. But faithful service and self-sacrifice produce dominion even though a monastery’s founder proclaimed the escape religion. This was the experience of medieval monasticism generally. Western European monasteries became centers of production—agriculturally, intellectually, financially, technologically, and even scientifically. The laws of genetics were discovered in 1865 by a monk, Gregor Mendel, who studied peas.

26. Of all wealthy nations on earth, Switzerland is least affected by either the power religion or the escape religion. Its people serve others by supplying banking services and other free market services. The nation remains neutral in international relations. Its men are skilled fighters and well-armed. The Swiss seek to conquer no nation. They seek only to maintain their own political sovereignty.

27. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

28. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

29. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Flight from Humanity: A Study of the Effect of Neoplatonism on Christianity* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973). (<http://bit.ly/rjrffh>) ; Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gdmplreduction>)

D. Covenant-Keeping Masters

Verse 2 refers to households run by covenant-keepers. “And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.” This raises the obvious question: Why should a Christian slave despise a Christian master?

The easiest answer is that the master refuses to free the slave. The slave may expect manumission by the owner based on their shared covenant, but the master does not agree. Paul makes it clear that this is not a valid excuse for a resentful attitude. There is no valid excuse mentioned in this or any other epistle from Paul. The owner does not owe his slave manumission. The slave owes the master obedience and honor.

Paul speaks of “partakers of the benefit.” Who partakes of this benefit? Was Paul referring here to the masters or to their servants? The text in the Greek is not straightforward. It has what in English we call an indefinite pronoun reference—in this case, the word “they”: “because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit.” Someone is faithful and beloved. Does “they” refer to the masters? It seems to. But if it does, then who regards masters as faithful and beloved? Do the servants so regard their masters? Or does God? The latter, I believe, for Paul’s warning is directed to the servants: do not despise masters. The argument is this: *because God regards masters well, so should servants.*

The servants are said to be partakers of the benefit which they—servants—show to their masters. In what way are they partakers? Because their service strengthens the household, which in turn protects the servants. The household is a confessionally covenantal unit when the master is a Christian, too. This household extends the kingdom of God in history. The slave shares in this blessing. The household extends God’s kingdom because of the presence of a covenant-keeping slave, just as Joseph’s presence in Egypt extended God’s kingdom.

E. Slavery Under the Mosaic Law

There were two broad types of slavery in the Mosaic economy: (1) the enslavement of Hebrews; (2) the enslavement of foreigners. The first category was broken down into three subcategories: (a) slavery for a failure to repay a zero-interest charitable loan (up to seven years, i.e.,

the year of release: Deut. 15:1–12);³⁰ (b) slavery for failure to repay a commercial loan (up to 49 years, i.e., the jubilee year: Lev. 25:25–28, 39–42);³¹ (c) slavery to raise money to pay the victims of a criminal's actions (implied by the laws governing restitution: Ex. 22:1–9).

Foreigners were not protected by the year of jubilee. They could be enslaved permanently, their children becoming slaves at birth.³²

Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour (Lev. 25:44–46).

The nations of the ancient world harvested slaves after a war. God restricted this practice in Mosaic Israel. It was completely forbidden with respect to Canaanites. The Canaanites had to be utterly destroyed: “And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee” (Deut. 7:16). It was partially forbidden with respect to conquered nations outside of Canaan. Defeated males had to be exterminated. The females were not to be executed. They were taken as slaves.

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword (Deut. 20:10–13).³³

Tributaries paid taxes. This was the usual meaning of the Hebrew word, the major exception being Solomon's levy in manpower in Israel

30. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

31. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

32. *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

33. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 48.

to build the temple (I Kings 5:13–14). As for serving the Israelites, this could be a reference to slavery, but the context suggests tribute: a tax paid to a conqueror. As for cities that refused to surrender, the entire male population was to be executed. The females could be taken captive (v. 14). In fact, they had to be brought home. To leave them as widows and orphans would have been murder. They were helpless. The execution of the males had destroyed the society's division of labor and the survivors' future. They could lawfully be enslaved or married (Deut. 21:10–13). If Israelites married these women, the women were no longer slaves. If they were subsequently divorced by their husbands, they became free women (v. 14). So, there were no slave offspring born to these captives. Their children would also become free adults.

Slaves in Israel could be imported from outside the land, yet probably not from the military activities of Israel—not unless citizens of cities that surrendered before the battle were subject to removal and enslavement in Israel. Because this threat would have made most men fight harder, refusing to surrender, it is unlikely that enslavement was the authorized form of service. Tribute was.

Then where did Israel's slaves come from originally? These Deuteronomic texts point to the lawful importation of slaves from foreign nations. Slaves that had been born in captivity inside Israel or outside, or people who had been taken captive by a foreign nation in a war, were legitimate for a Hebrew to buy. To buy such slaves was a form of liberation for them—liberation from Satan's dominion outside of Israel. They were placed under God inside a covenant-keeping household. There was one exception to foreign purchase: it was not lawful to buy any victim of a private kidnapping (Ex. 21:16).³⁴

The Mosaic laws governing slavery were aspects of the land laws of Mosaic Israel. They were annulled when the kingdom was transferred to the church (Matt. 21:43). The land lost its holy status in A.D. 70. It also lost its prophetic status. Shiloh had come, as prophesied (Gen. 49:10). He had pronounced judgment on the land, and had then enforced it.³⁵

34. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. ch. 34.

35. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

F. New Testament Revision: Limited Warfare

That Paul did not call for immediate abolition of all private forms of slavery is clear from this text. The question arises: On what legal basis was the child of a slave also a slave for life? On the basis of the judicial death of the father. If a man had been captured during a war, he could lawfully have been executed. He lived only by the mercy of the victors. In this sense, he was judicially dead as a free man. This was also true of his children, born and unborn. If he was then sold into slavery, the legal status of the parent passed to the family's covenant line. An Israelite could lawfully purchase a foreign slave. A similar situation prevailed in the case of the Gibeonites, who tricked the Israelites into granting them a peace treaty. Their deception saved their lives in the land. It also led to their enslavement (Joshua 9). Their heirs were still enslaved in David's day (II Sam. 21).

In contrast, a kidnapped person had not surrendered to a lawful authority. His or her heirs therefore did not lawfully become slaves. What the kidnapper did not lawfully own, he could not lawfully transfer or sell.

Beginning with the advent of Christian emperors, Christian societies have not enforced the Deuteronomic law mandating the extermination of defeated male civilians. Yet there is no explicit New Testament law that annuls Deuteronomy 20:10–13. The New Testament says nothing specific regarding how civilians must be treated during or after a war. Nevertheless, the Mosaic requirement of the extermination of civilian males and also the execution of males who surrender after a war has begun has ended in the New Covenant era. The Christian West has had a doctrine of war that insists that warriors kill warriors, but not defeated male civilians. This is a judicial break from the Mosaic law. What is the basis of this judicial discontinuity?

The laws governing Israel's conquest were land laws, i.e., tied to the land of Israel as a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). The extermination of the Canaanites has never been the model for Christian warfare; neither has the execution of non-Canaanite male civilians after a battle. Why not? Here is one reason: *the church is international*. The goal of Christian evangelism is to recruit covenantal representatives of Christ in every nation (Matt. 28:18–20). There is no priestly (mediatorial) nation, any more than there is a priestly tribe. Evangelism is no longer to be accomplished through the purchase of captive pagans or the military conquest of pagan nations.

In Paul's day, Rome was still expanding its empire. Slaves were a by-product of these military conquests. Rome became a slave society because of the conquests by its armies. The slave markets followed Rome's armies.³⁶ For a covenant-keeper to buy a slave from this source was not the same as buying from a kidnapper. These conquests had not been part of a private slave-harvesting operation, i.e., kidnapping. It is true that there was a symbiotic relationship between the conquests and the profits for the generals and upper-class members of Roman society from the sale of slaves, but Roman conquests involved occupying territory. Enslavement was an aspect of politics. By the time of Augustus, Rome's supply of slaves from abroad slowed because the empire was at its maximum. Most slaves came from birth to existing slaves.³⁷

By the time Christians gained political control over the empire, it was in its contraction phase. The older program of slave-harvesting had ceased. The church did not oppose slavery, but it did begin to have an effect on the doctrine of war. Mosaic extermination laws were never honored.

G. Abolition: Why the Long Delay?

The question arises: Why did it take over 1700 years from the writing of this epistle until the first rumblings of the abolitionist movement? A second question also arises: Why did it take only a century, 1780–1880, to convince the leaders of the West that slavery is not only immoral, it is a crime that must be suppressed by civil law? In short, why the long delay, followed by a rapid reversal of public opinion? What was the decisive change that led to abolition? Theology? Economics? Moral philosophy?

Bible-believing historians prefer not to ask these questions. The centuries-long blindness of the church regarding slavery embarrasses them. Their hesitancy to consider these questions in public indicates the comprehensive nature of the success of the abolitionist movement. This success was not merely institutional; it was ethical. It now extends to most men's minds in the non-Islamic West. Christians rarely think twice about the theological justification of their retroactive condemnation of private chattel slavery. They make the assumption that

36. Milton Meltzer, *Slavery: A World History*, 2 vols. (n.p.: Da Capo, 1993), I, pp. 105–10.

37. *Ibid.*, I, p. 132.

“everybody knows this.” But throughout most of human history, hardly anyone knew this. There is a fundamental exegetical problem for abolitionism: *no biblical text explicitly abolishes slavery, while many passages condone it.* The anti-abolitionists in the church always had the better arguments from scripture, especially by appealing to Leviticus 25:44–46.

It was this realization that drove leading American abolitionists to Unitarianism and, after the Civil War (1861–65), to biblical higher criticism, which swept the English-speaking academic community almost overnight, beginning in 1875–76.³⁸ They perceived that the Bible, if true, did not appear to support the abolitionist cause. So, they denied the truth of the Bible. Other Unitarians had come to this Bible-denying position first, only later adopting abolitionism. William Lloyd Garrison concluded that the Bible must be subjected to the tests of reasonableness, historical confirmation, the facts of science, and man’s intuition. “Truth is older than any parchment,” he affirmed. His radical disciple, Henry Clarke Wright, proclaimed: “The Bible, If Opposed to Self-Evident Truth, is Self-Evident Falsehood.” Charles Stearns said that the Old Testament is a tissue of lies, “no more the work of God than the Koran, or the Book of Mormon.”³⁹

Is the New Testament silent with regard to abolitionism? My answer: not silent, but subdued. I have argued that Christ announced the fulfillment of jubilee liberation, and therefore the release of all slaves in Israel. He uttered these words early in His ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19).⁴⁰ This was the judicial basis of the abolition of permanent servitude in Mosaic Israel.⁴¹ The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 ended Mosaic servitude as a biblically authorized practice.

The question then arises: What about gentile societies?

38. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), pp. 160–61, 194.

39. Cited by David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 523.

40. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

41. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31.

H. Kidnapping

Paul wrote this epistle to a Greek who was ministering to Greeks. Paul did not refer to the jubilee year, which did not exist outside of Israel, and not even inside Israel in Paul's day. He made his case against slavery on the basis of the immorality of kidnapping, as we have seen.⁴²

If it is immoral to be a kidnapper, then it is immoral to buy slaves knowingly from a kidnapper. The existence of a ready market for slaves is what attracts profit-seekers to the crime of kidnapping. By providing the economic incentive, the buyer shares in the kidnapper's crime. Participation in the slave trade at any point is immoral. As surely as being a madam or a pimp for a prostitute is evil, so is spending money for the services rendered. Were there no purchasers, there would be no sellers.

The cause-and-effect relationship between buyers and sellers is not always understood. The initiating factor is the would-be seller's perception of future demand. If the seller does not believe that buyers will pay him for his products, he will not enter into the enterprise. Buyers confirm the sellers' speculation; non-buyers do not. *Buyers keep an industry alive.* With respect to slavery, the kidnapper was identified by Paul as an evildoer. The buyer was not identified as being equally evil judicially. But, economically speaking, the buyer is the source of the evil's profitability.

Paul does not here oppose the purchase of a slave from a family that owns slaves. The text is specific: kidnapping is prohibited. Paul never told his readers that it is immoral to own a slave. He sent the escaped slave Onesimus back to his owner, Philemon. If Paul had been an abolitionist, Philemon is the epistle in which he had an opportunity to make his case against slavery. He did not suggest anything of the kind. But Paul did ask Philemon to give Onesimus his freedom, i.e., treat him as if he were Paul. He reminded Philemon that he was in Paul's debt. He wrote: "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides" (Phm. 1:15–19).

42. Chapter 1, section on "Abolition."

Paul also taught that a slave should accept manumission if it is offered. “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather” (I Cor. 7:21).⁴³ A free man can serve God more effectively than a slave can. He possesses a wider range of choices. He becomes responsible for his own decisions.

So, we find in Paul’s writings a clear acknowledgement that freedom is a benefit compared to servitude. This did not make Paul an abolitionist. It did not even make him unique. Most people throughout history have known that freedom is preferable to slavery. Slavery always has been seen as a curse to be avoided personally. But, also throughout history, free men benefitted from the enslavement of others.

I. Second Things Second

Institutional arrangements that are consistent with the Bible, but which are not mandated by the Bible, develop through time as a result of societies’ adoption of certain legal principles that are found in the Bible. For example, there is no passage in the Bible that explicitly defends the political ideal of democracy or republican civil government. There are certain aspects of political rule that indicate that citizens who are bound by a common faith should exercise authority over their civil rulers (Lev. 4).⁴⁴ Another example: there is a system of appeals courts that perform the task of dealing with difficult cases, but the judicial system adopted recommended by Jethro and adopted by Moses (Ex. 18) was not mandated by the Mosaic law.⁴⁵ Trial by jury is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. But is there no correlation between these institutional features of modern civil justice and biblical principles of civil justice? This seems unlikely, yet the developments historically could not have been predicted by the judges of Samson’s day or by the early church fathers.

Church members are supposed to exercise judgment regarding the performance and pay of elders. Paul made this point clear in this epistle (5:17–18).⁴⁶ This principle of ecclesiastical authority points to a system of democratic rule for the church. Members should exercise a veto. The same principle can be applied to civil government, even though it is not clear in the Bible that judges should be elected by the

43. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 8.

44. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

45. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 19.

46. Chapter 7.

citizenry. Sooner or later, the office of judge evolves into the office of legislator.⁴⁷ This is because the task of officially interpreting the law is the same as writing new laws. Courts necessarily take on this legislative function to some degree. Different societies deal with the threat of judicial tyranny in different ways. They may create separate legislative institutions. They may create rival systems of courts. But, in the Christian West, societies have developed court systems that reflect Jethro's recommended court system.

These institutional developments have taken many centuries. There has been a pattern to these developments in many Christian countries throughout Europe, especially northern Europe. Christian scholars with a mastery of the historical materials, especially legal materials, have been in short supply. Detailed studies of medieval documents is a recent development—within the last 130 years.⁴⁸ Humanism has been the dominant worldview of medieval historians, including legal historians. They have not devoted lifetimes to studying the development of canon law and civil law, comparing both developments to biblical law. So, we have insufficient evidence regarding the relationships among Christianity, biblical law, Europe's tribal legal traditions, and Greek and Roman law. What we do know is that churches have come to accept the late arrival of institutions and traditions that they regard as essentially Christian, yet which cannot be found in the Bible. There is an acceptance of the idea that general biblical principles have produced specific institutional practices that seem to be Christian in their effects.

Conclusion

Paul in this passage sets forth the principle that a slave must honor his master. This makes it clear that Paul was not an abolitionist. He did not call for the abolition of this form of private property among the gentiles. In Philemon, he did ask for an owner to release his slave voluntarily, but there was no call for state action.

The Roman Empire in Paul's era was still supplying hordes of slaves through military conquests. This was not legal for Mosaic Israel, but it was legal for the gentiles. Foreign nations had supplied Israel with its slaves. There had been nothing wrong with this under Mosaic

47. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 10. (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

48. Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Morrow, 1991).

law. Paul did not challenge the Roman Empire's slave policy.

A slave is required to remain with his owner. An owner is not required to free his slaves unless they or their forefathers had been captured illegally. In the case of the West's system of chattel slavery after 1444, all of these slaves had been kidnapped. Their heirs were not lawfully enslaved, according to biblical law, both Old and New Testaments. Paul's teaching does not address this form of servitude. The example of the exodus does: the slaves had a right to escape an illegal, criminal slave system.

When Christianity gained control over the Roman Empire, the rules of warfare began to change. Large-scale military conquests had already ceased. When Christianity penetrated the world through foreign missions and diplomacy, Mosaic warfare—the extermination of civilians in nations that refused to surrender—was seen as no longer either legally binding or morally acceptable. Enslavement was no longer seen as a lawful form of evangelism, as it had been in Mosaic Israel because of the holy status of the land of Israel.

In the nineteenth century, the moral revulsion against slavery in abolitionist circles finally caught up with the biblical reality of slavery. The institution had been annulled in its Mosaic form, with its inter-generational non-Hebraic slavery (Lev. 25:44–46), by Christ's fulfillment of the jubilee year (Luke 4:18–19).⁴⁹ It had been made criminal in the New Testament era in the form of professional kidnapping.

This leaves biblically intact slave harvesting as a legitimate side-effect of war: enslavement rather than execution. This military ultimatum has been abandoned in modern times for many reasons, some military, such as reduced resistance by the enemy, and some economic, such as the profitability of renewed post-war economic trade between the victor nation and the defeated. After World War II, Japan and Germany became far richer through foreign trade than through their wartime military conquests, and the victors got richer by trade than by trying to extract reparations payments—the victors' failed experiment after World War I.

This view of slavery also leaves biblically intact the enslavement of convicted criminals who cannot afford to pay restitution to their victims. To repay the victims, he can lawfully be sold into lifetime slavery. His legal status as a slave does not affect his adult children. The child does not partake in the sins of the parent. "The fathers shall not be put

49. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16).

10

GODLY CONTENTMENT

Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (I Tim. 6:5–11).

The theocentric principle here is God as the sovereign sanctions-bringer: point four of the biblical covenant.¹ God graciously supplies His people with whatever they need for the tasks at hand. He also supplies the tasks at hand, which is also grace.

A. Godliness

The Greek word translated here as “godliness” is *eusebia*. This Greek word appears more frequently in this epistle than in any other New Testament book. It can be translated as “piety,” but that English word has become somewhat archaic. “Godliness” is more familiar.

1. To Be Like God

What does it mean to be godly? It means to be like God. This can-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

not mean to be like Him in terms of His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and His other incommunicable attributes. It means His moral perfection. This is commanded by the Bible, and not just once.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Lev. 11:44).

Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day (I Kings 8:61).

And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine (Lev. 20:26).

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (I Peter 1:15–16).

Perfection is the standard. Fallen man cannot attain this standard in history. But Christ's perfect humanity is imputed by God to each redeemed person at the time of redemption. God declares the sinner innocent, a judicial declaration based on Christ's moral perfection. Theologians call this transfer of Christ's moral perfection *definitive sanctification*. This judicial transfer of Christ's perfect humanity becomes the foundation of a life of striving toward perfection, which theologians call *progressive sanctification*. Both aspects of sanctification appear in one passage.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, **not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:** That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. **Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect:** but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:8–12).

2. John Murray on Sanctification and Law

Sanctification begins with definitive sanctification. I learned this theological principle in a class taught by John Murray at Westminster Seminary in the spring of 1964, which I audited. His tripartite division of sanctification into definitive, progressive, and final undergirds my approach to social theory as well as personal ethics.

Murray writes of sanctification that “it is a fact too frequently overlooked that in the New Testament the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a process, but of a once-for-all definitive act. . . . When Paul, for example, addresses the believers at Corinth as the church of God, ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints’ (I Cor. 1:2), and later in the same epistle reminds them that they were washed, sanctified, and justified (I Cor. 6:11), it is apparent that he co-ordinated their sanctification with effectual calling, with their identity as saints, with regeneration, and with justification.”² The phrase “effectual calling” means regeneration offered by God’s sovereign grace and applied by God’s sovereign grace.

Sanctification begins with the covenantal death of the sinner: death to sin (Rom. 6:2).³ “And the person who died to sin no longer lives in that sphere. His tie with it has been broken, and he has been translated into another realm.”⁴ Peter also taught the doctrine of *definitive death to sin* (I Peter 2:24; 4:1–2).⁵ This is the doctrine that “those for whom Christ died vicariously are reckoned as having died in and with Christ, and, as Christ’s death was death to sin once for all (cf. Rom. 6:10), so those dying with him die also to sin.”⁶

To reckon is to count. God counts the now-redeemed person as having died to sin. The redeemed person is identified by God as having been resurrected with Christ.⁷ This *judicial participation in Christ’s resurrection* is not merely a progressive condition; it is also definitive. “And since Christ himself died once for all and, having risen from the dead, dies no more, it would appear necessary to restrict our death to sin and entrance upon newness of life (after the likeness of Jesus’ resurrection) to the historic past where Jesus died and rose from the

2. *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Trust, 1977), II, p. 277.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 278–79.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

6. *Idem.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

dead.”⁸ But this fact does not deny the truth of Romans 8:13. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”⁹ Sanctification is also progressive. It will also be *final*, which will be revealed at the final judgment.¹⁰

Progressive sanctification is the outworking in history of definitive sanctification. It is the result of God’s special (saving) grace to the sinner. It is in no sense independent of grace. It is in no sense the result of man’s autonomous works.

It is in this context of man as made in God’s image that we should discuss godliness. Murray wrote: “. . . likeness to God is the ultimate pattern of sanctification. The reason why God himself is the pattern should be obvious: man is made in the image of God and nothing less than the image of God can define the restoration which redemption contemplates.”¹¹ *Sanctification is a matter of being conformed to Christ’s death and resurrection.* “When we think of sanctification as being patterned after the image of Christ, we must ask the question: How does it take place? As we think of definitive sanctification, we found already that this basically consists in union with Christ in his death and resurrection. And that simply means that we have been conformed to his death and resurrection.”¹² Then what of progressive sanctification? “To a large extent the progress of sanctification is dependent upon the increasing understanding and appropriation of the implications of that identification with Christ in his death and resurrection. Nothing is more relevant to progressive sanctification than the reckoning of ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 6:11).”¹³ Retroactive reckoning is a lifelong process for covenant-keepers. It is not a one-time event.

This process of reckoning (counting, imputing) is not in any sense a denial of God’s law. On the contrary, Murray said, this process affirms God’s law. God’s law and God’s perfection are of one piece.

The necessity of revelation defining the respects in which likeness to God prescribes the norm of sanctification, shows how consonant with the ultimate principle are the other considerations, that the law of God, the revealed will of God, and the example of our Lord are the

8. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 299–302; chap. 25.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

criteria and patterns according to which sanctification proceeds. The law of God is the transcript of God's perfection; it is God's perfection coming to expression for the regulation of thought and conduct consonant with his holiness. As thus defined, the law of God guards the distinction of which we have spoken, because the law of God is the revealed will of God for us; it regulated our thought and behaviour in ways consonant with his perfection. And this is why every depreciation of the law of God as the pattern in terms of which sanctification is fashioned invariably leads to the adoption of patterns which impinge upon the unique prerogatives of God in the transcendent and inimitable glory that belongs to him. There is one lawgiver. This belongs to the uniqueness in respect of which the attempt to be like God is blasphemy, and shows that whenever we do not appreciate the limitations prescribed by law, it is because we have failed to guard the differentiation that is correlative with the demand for likeness.¹⁴

This means that the imputation of Adam's sin¹⁵ is overcome in history by the imputation of Christ's perfect humanity to disinherited sons of Adam. Murray discussed this transformation in relation to individual redemption and personal ethics. I extend this analysis to corporate entities: the sanctification of societies. The Great Commission applies to society as well as to souls.¹⁶

3. *The Imitation of Christ*

A godly man seeks to imitate God's moral character. Man is made in God's image, but because man is fallen, he reflects Satan, too. Man is to strive to be godly in order to reflect God better.

A man cannot become God. A man is always a creature. But a man can seek to imitate Christ's perfect humanity as a model of perfection. Paul wrote: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).¹⁷ Men inescapably must conform themselves to one of two models: Adam or Christ. Paul told the members of the church in Rome to avoid conforming themselves to the fallen world's model. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 306–7.

15. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1959] 1979).

16. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

17. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 14.

your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2).¹⁸ The Greek word for "conform" implies "fashioning oneself." "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Peter 1:14–16).

In this passage, two goals are listed: riches and godliness. Paul contrasts the two. In this, he follows Christ's distinction between God and mammon. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).¹⁹ Christ described the conflict between belief and unbelief, covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking, in terms of rival religions. One is the religion of God. The other is the religion of mammon. The context of His discussion was treasure. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).²⁰

Paul begins this section by describing an error: "supposing that gain is godliness" (v. 5). The Greek word for "gain" appears in the New Testament only in verses 5 and 6. It refers to acquiring things. It implies an increase.

This verse introduces a difficult issue of interpretation. The issue is the covenantal issue of sanctions. Specifically, it is the covenantal issue of predictable visible sanctions in history.

4. *Visible Covenantal Sanctions*

With respect to the corporate national covenant under the Mosaic covenant, Moses declared that there is a predictable relationship between corporate covenant-keeping and corporate success (Lev. 27:3–13; Deut. 28:1–14). This includes economic success.

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;
Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her
increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your

18. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

19. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

20. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely (Lev. 26:3–5).²¹

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store (Deut. 28:4–5).²²

And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow (Deut. 28:11–12).²³

The moral issue here is corporate obedience to God's biblical law, i.e., walking in His statutes. Conformity corporately to God's law will produce corporate blessings, Moses said (Deut. 29).²⁴ There can be cases of poverty within the group, but, statistically speaking, there will be an increase in per capita wealth as a result of obedience.

Blessings are intended to reinforce covenant-keepers' faith in God's covenant, Moses wrote. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).²⁵ These visible corporate blessings are supposed to build up men's faith in God as the sovereign sanctions-bringer. History is not random. Success is not random. The Bible teaches that covenant-keepers can safely regard God's covenantal sanctions as reliable. Obedience to God's law brings external, visible blessings.

This was not salvation by works. The Old Testament did not teach salvation by works. "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). Then how were law and grace related? In the same way they are related in the New Covenant. There is a fundamental biblical principle: *grace precedes law*. God showed grace to Adam—the unmerited gift of life—before He laid

21. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 32.

22. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [199] 2012), ch. 69.

23. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

24. *Ibid.*, ch. 71.

25. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

down the law to Adam, both positive (Gen. 2:15) and negative (Gen. 2:17). He clothed Adam (Gen. 3:21) before He drove Adam out of the garden (Gen. 3:24). He delivered the Israelites from Egypt (Ex. 13–14) before He gave them the law (Ex. 20–23).²⁶ *Grace precedes law*. Therefore, we should regard positive sanctions for obedience to God's biblical law as the outworking of the grace of law. Men do not earn grace. Men also do not earn blessings irrespective of grace. Men respond in history to grace, either as covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers.

5. *From Blessing to Presumption*

Paul warns here against supposing that gain is godliness. He is establishing the context for his next point: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." What is this context? The error of concluding from the *existence* of visible benefits that the *basis* of these benefits is godliness.

Most people make a common assumption: "I deserve the good things that happen to me." Good times are considered normal. They do not catch people's attention. When bad times come, there is far greater readiness for a person to search for the hidden cause than when good times prevail. People ask themselves: "What did I do wrong?" Successful people are not equally caught up in self-diagnosis: "What did I do right?" They assume that their success is the result of their godliness, or at least their basic goodness.

Paul warns against making the first assumption, i.e., "gain is godliness." Jesus warned against making the second assumption: "loss is unrighteousness." "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:1–3).

The covenant-keeper should begin his study of covenantal cause and effect with the cause, not the effect. What should interest him most is the obedience that brings positive sanctions, or the disobedience that brings negative sanctions. If he begins his study with the sanctions, he may become misled regarding the cause. This was David's error. He could not understand why covenant-breakers prospered. Psalm 73 is the consummate biblical example of the pros-

26. North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Parts 2, 3.

perity of evil-doers.²⁷

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth (Ps. 73:3–9).

David then admitted that he had made a great mistake.

When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image (Ps. 73:16–20).

Solomon extended this theme. There is ethical cause and effect in history, but it takes time for this relationship to be manifested publicly.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God (Eccl. 8:11–13).²⁸

Sinners can prosper for a time. So, the correct assumption is this: more than one cause can produce gain. Similarly, more than one cause can produce loss. The covenantal relationship between ethics and temporal results is not unbreakable.

Obedience to God is the goal. Positive sanctions are the result. Men are supposed to focus on the goal of obedience to God, not the goal of positive sanctions from God. *Covenant-keeping is far more important than external blessings*, both in history and eternity. To honor

27. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

28. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 30.

God through obedience is more important than to gain blessings. God is more important than man.

The ability to obey God's law is itself a blessing. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). *The grace to obey God is a more valuable asset than the temporal wealth that obedience brings.*

Paul says here that it is a great error to begin with the assumption that the presence of personal gain is sufficient evidence of God's favor. Paul does not deny that covenant-keeping produces gain. Rather, he is warning against making the convenient assumption that gain is produced only by covenant-keeping, i.e., godliness.

Paul does not reject Moses' teaching regarding the predictability between corporate covenant-breaking and corporate negative sanctions. This predictability remains statistically reliable, in a way similar to the connection between unsafe driving habits and an increased number of auto accidents. It sometimes takes a long time for the predictable relationship between behavior and results to become evident. Consider the Egyptians of the exodus generation. Their leader had long prospered by oppressing the Israelites. He would prosper no longer, nor would they.

With respect to individuals, predictability is less than in the case of corporate associations. This is analogous to insurance. What is statistically predictable for a group is not predictable for any particular individual who is part of the group. God may have a special purpose for an individual, e.g., the blind man healed by Jesus.

The covenant-breaker has a tendency to presume his own godliness as the basis of his gain. He is self-deceived. The visibly successful covenant-breaker who presumes his own godliness is destitute of the truth, Paul says.

6. *Translators' Insertions*

There is widespread agreement among modern translators that the Greek text is insufficient to convey the meaning of this passage. They add words to supply meaning. I disagree with this decision in this instance. So does the Alfred Marshall/J. B. Phillips *Interlinear Greek-English Testament* (Bagster, 1958), which is governed by the structure

of the Greek text: “supposing gain to be the piety.” I have accepted the Greek text as sufficient here. Paul is saying that those who make serious errors (vv. 4–5) also make this one: “Gain, in and of itself, is piety.” Paul is not challenging the Mosaic viewpoint, namely, that corporate piety produces corporate gain. He is challenging men with corrupt minds who erroneously conclude that personal gain is equated with personal piety, i.e., that the existence of the former implies the existence of the latter.

Modern translators add three words: “a means of.” The New American Standard reads: “suppose that godliness is a means of gain.” This is also how the Revised Standard Version translates the text. The New International Version reads: “godliness is a means to financial gain.” The New English Bible takes even greater liberties: “religion should yield dividends.” The little-known translation by Charles Williams reads: “religion is only a means of great gain.”²⁹ The least faithful to the text is J. B. Phillips: “hope to make some profit out of the Christian religion.”³⁰ (Deprived of the Greek text on same page, Phillips could be quite imaginative.) This approach to the text misses Paul’s point. Paul is not arguing that godliness is not a means of gain. Moses taught that corporate godliness is indeed a means of corporate gain. Paul is arguing against concluding from the existence of personal gain that one’s piety or godliness is proven, i.e., that gain is godliness.

B. Contentment

“But godliness with contentment is great gain” (v. 6). This statement contrasts with the previous erroneous assumption: “gain is godliness.” The Greek word for “contentment” appears twice in the New Testament, here and in II Corinthians 9:8: “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all **sufficiency** in all things, may abound to every good work.” The root Greek word appears only once: “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be **content**” (Phil. 4:11).³¹

Contentment with one’s external circumstances is mandated by

29. Charles B. Williams, *The New Testament: A Private Translation in the Language of the People* (Chicago: Moody, 1960), p. 468.

30. J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 454.

31. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

Paul. But contentment in well-doing is forbidden. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing" (II Thes. 3:13). "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain" (I Cor. 9:24). We can always do better. The question is: In what does *doing better* consist? Economics or ethics?

The worshipper of mammon selects the former answer: economics. He strives to do better economically. The error is best seen in Christ's warning, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).³² In English literature, the most familiar representatives of this striving are Jacob Marley, before he became a ghost, and Ebenezer Scrooge, before his three spirit visitors arrived.³³

1. *Godliness Plus Contentment*

Paul says here that the person who attains godliness has attained great gain, but only if godliness is accompanied with contentment. This raises a question regarding the completeness of godliness. If a person has godliness without contentment, then does he have godliness? The text indicates that he does. How else could Paul speak of contentment in addition to godliness, if contentment is somehow included in his definition of godliness? Paul is therefore saying that *there are degrees of godliness*. Some godly people are not content with their condition. They may be plagued with unfulfilled desires or doubts. Paul reminds such people that they must seek contentment with godliness.

Does Paul really dismiss everything else? Almost everything except food and clothing (v. 8). Godliness encompasses the broadest range of Christian living and service to God. To this, covenant-keepers should add contentment—satisfaction with their lives. There are no other things that are worth pursuing at the expense of godliness and con-

32. Gary North, *Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark and John* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

33. Charles Dickens' story, "A Christmas Carol," is a tale of secular redemption, or moralism. Moralism is self-redemption, and is as useless as mammon worship in the quest for salvation. Moralism is progressive sanctification without definitive sanctification. It is thwarted by original sin. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

tentment. “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (vv. 7–8). Birth to death encompasses a man’s life. What matters, Paul is saying, is not what a person accumulates for use here on earth. If a person dies penniless but righteous, he has not departed from anything of value in the world to come. He cannot take anything with him anyway. Post-funeral question: “How much did he leave behind?” Answer: “All of it!”

Does this mean that there is total discontinuity between this life and the next? On the contrary, there is predictable continuity. Christ said: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19–21).³⁴ This continuity is based on a temporal transfer of capital: from this world to the next. We save in this world—forego the temporally beneficial use of an asset—in order to gain riches beyond the grave. This exchange of temporal assets for eternal assets takes place only in history. This exchange must be made on the basis of faith. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

2. Bounded by History

Paul here is not speaking of the treasure that is laid up in heaven during one’s life on earth. He is speaking only of earth-bound assets. We do not take treasure from history into eternity. We forego treasure in history in order to accumulate wealth in eternity. Christ taught that this exchange is made before death, not at death. “Sell that [which] ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:33–34).³⁵

Next, Paul offers supplemental information. “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (v. 8). These assets are basic to contentment. Food and clothing keep us alive. They are means of life.

34. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

35. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 26.

If you are dying because you lack these economic assets, then you have a legitimate reason to be discontented, despite your godliness. So, “godliness, plus” means godliness, plus food and clothing.

Paul does not mention housing. I conclude from this omission that he must be talking about assets owned. Food and clothing are owned. There is also a need for shelter to sustain life, at least in winter and in bad climates. But shelter need not be owned in order for it to provide life and comfort. Shelter can be rented. Jesus owned no shelter. “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).³⁶ But Jesus did not lack anything significant. He had friends who provided Him with temporary shelter.

Paul is saying here that all of life on earth is temporary. Temporal existence is temporary. So, covenant-keepers should not be discontented with their lack of ownership of anything besides food, which they consume rapidly, and clothing, which they consume less rapidly. The fact that a man does not own much of anything should be no more disturbing than the fact that he does not own time; he merely leases it temporarily. In fact, his lack of goods should be much less disturbing to him than his lack of time. “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20).³⁷

Is Paul saying here that the lifestyle of a well-fed homeless person should be sufficient to provide a godly man with contentment? Yes. Put another way, a godly man should not seek anything to give him contentment beyond that which is provided by food and clothing. If he is homeless for God, he should be content.

C. Discontent

This is a radical view of the relationship between a man’s external condition and his internal condition. Most people are discontented about many things. Their external conditions produce internal pain. Paul is saying clearly that a covenant-keeper has no legitimate excuse for this pain. The problem is not in the external environment; the problem is a person’s lack of faith. The discontented person thinks that his life is being thwarted by circumstances. Paul is saying that circumstances are not what is thwarting a covenant-keeper’s life. He said

36. *Ibid.*, ch. 19.

37. *Ibid.*, ch. 24.

this elsewhere in no uncertain terms with respect to his own circumstances. I quoted this earlier. Once is not enough. The message meets resistance.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not (II Cor. 11:24–31).

Was Paul saying that all of this pain was great gain? Yes. He was contented with his condition. “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11). These external circumstances were all aspects of his mission. He was getting his work done. Pain was the price of getting it done. Everything that is worth doing has a price, beginning with the price that Christ paid on the cross. Men prefer lower prices to higher prices, but in a cursed world (Gen. 3:17–19), it is foolish to complain about the existence of scarcity, i.e., prices that must be paid. Prices specify economic trade-offs that must be made in human action.

This passage stands as a condemnation of most men throughout history. The limits of legitimate discontent—no food, no clothing—are very narrow. This is another way of saying that most men’s faith in God is very limited. They do not trust God to provide them with the capital they need for the tasks at hand. They also have a higher assessment of what they deserve in life than is appropriate for fallen man. They deserve death. “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Life itself is grace: an unmerited gift from God.

D. Civilization and Its Discontents

If everyone sought nothing more than food and clothing, could

there be modern civilization? The personal drive that is required in a cursed world to discover, finance, and build, thereby progressively overcome the curse of scarcity, would be absent if no one desired to gain anything more than food and clothing. Is Paul calling for primitivism? Is he calling for a collapse of the division of labor and the resulting collapse of society? If we take his words literally, the answer is yes. So, we would be wise to look more closely at what he says.

Paul was a teacher. To finance a teaching career requires income-producing capital of one's own or payment from others. It also requires leisure for students to attend lectures and do the required reading. Capital, fee-paying students, third-party donations, and leisure are not zero-price resources. Therefore, for an evangelist to do his work requires more than food and clothing. It requires the social division of labor.

1. Capital and Thrift

Society requires capital. This means that it requires thrift. Thrift involves the sacrifice of present consumption for the sake of future consumption. Thrift occurs because people look ahead to the possibility of gain. This gain is more than personal godliness. It is also more than food and clothing.

It takes thrift—the sacrifice of present consumption—to achieve influence for God. This thrift is a matter of time devoted to spiritual exercises or study. Time is forfeited money. Time is an asset that has a price, namely, whatever the time-allocator could have earned through an alternative investment of his time. Time is the most precious of all human resources, for it is the only non-renewable resource that has no substitute.

Thrift is necessary for economic growth. Economic growth is necessary for the extension of God's kingdom in history. Without capital, there would be no book publishing, no e-mail, no radio, no television, or any of the other tools by which evangelists deliver the good news of Jesus Christ. There would also be no church buildings, no air conditioning, no indoor plumbing, no parking lots, and no mortgages.

All of these things are earth-bound. We are beneficiaries of them after we arrive, and our testaments leave them to our heirs after we have departed. Paul is correct about arrival and departure: these earth-bound assets are irrelevant to us. But, *in between*, they make a tremendous difference. They make a tremendous difference for personal

godliness. They do make a difference for the *effects* of personal godliness. Jesus and the apostles occasionally delivered the good news to several thousand people at one time. A televangelist may deliver the good news to several million viewers, and do it again the following week. Tools extend our influence. They make us more productive. They enable us to achieve more than we could have achieved without them.

Wealth is not distributed equally. Some people are more productive than others. Some people possess capital in the broadest sense; others do not. Some people have more food than they need for life. Others face starvation.

2. Economic Growth

The history of Western civilization over the last quarter of a millennium has been the story of sustained economic growth. This began when the Industrial Revolution began. It was paralleled by the Agricultural Revolution. As the output of farmers grew, the price of food fell. More people could move to cities. They had to move; economic competition was too stiff in agriculture. In 1750, about 90% of Europeans and Americans worked in agriculture. In modern America, about 2% of the population works on the farms, and perhaps another 10% works in various agricultural support services. A similar expansion of output took place in clothing, as wool was replaced by cotton. Cotton is easier to wash than wool. It can be mass produced. So, in the areas of food and clothing, increasing output brought cheaper food, more varieties of food, cheaper clothing, and more varieties of clothing to the common man in the West. Now this process is spreading to Asia.

Pareto's law tells us that 20% of the population will own 80% of the capital.³⁸ The rich will benefit first from the expansion of output. Yet rich people cannot consume significantly more of the basics than poor people do. If they eat too much, they get fat. Then they must spend more on dieting and exercise than they do on food. The major differences between the lifestyle of the very rich and the middle class are these: the ability of the rich to hire full-time servants; the amount of square footage they occupy at home; and their ability to quit working in the marketplace at any time and not change their lifestyle.

Rich people do not need to consume so large a percentage of their

38. Richard Koch, *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret to Success by Achieving More With Less* (New York: Dell, 1999).

income as poor people do. So, they invest. This raises output even more. The way to sell this expanded output is by lowering prices. This makes poorer people wealthier. There is a trickle-down effect in capitalism. Over centuries, this trickle-down effect makes poor people vastly richer than poor people were two centuries earlier. Think of the world in 1800. It would barely be recognizable to us. We would starve if we were transported back in time and asked to make a living. We would be useless to most employers. But a farmer in 1500 would have recognized most of the implements of a farm in 1800. Not in 1900. Surely, not in 2000.

If we had to move back in time, it would be very difficult for us to learn how to become productive. Children took years to learn how to become productive in a society without much capital. But if a man from 1500 were brought into today's world, he could learn the basics fairly rapidly. Work on an assembly line can be learned fast. So can the skills of washing windows or mowing lawns, for which there is always demand. He would adjust and be able to earn enough money to feed and clothe himself within days—maybe hours. A cot in a garden shed, a few used blankets, bulk rice and beans bought at Sam's Club, with vegetables grown in a few square feet of pots, and a trip to the Good Will or Salvation Army to buy used clothes would give him a worker's lifestyle by the standards of 1500 or even 1800. Add running hot and cold water and electric lights. Then consider dentistry. Would he go back? I doubt it. Give him two years, and he would be looking for a better job and complaining about no health insurance benefits. The question is: Would he be ready to move in with his girl friend without marrying her? If so, he would have completed the transition into the twenty-first century.

The story of a stone-age California Indian, named Ishi ("man") by anthropologist A. L. Kroeber, indicates just how fast primitive people can adjust to a world of enormous capital. Near starvation, he wandered into the town of Oroville in 1911. He was the last member of his tribe—or, possibly, a mixed-blood Indian in a tribe that had already died out, the Yahis.³⁹ He had been living just as tribe members had lived thousands of years earlier. He was brought to the University of California, Berkeley. He lived in the University's anthropology museum. He made arrowheads and other implements for the museum. He also learned how to ride the trolley. Flipping on an electric light

39. News Release (Feb. 5, 1996), University of California, Berkeley.

was no more difficult for him than it was for anyone else. He adjusted to everything except the sight of large crowds at the beach. He died of tuberculosis in 1916.⁴⁰ Today, medical care would have saved his life. In contrast, a modern urban dweller, transported to the environment Ishi had lived in, would starve, just as Ishi almost did.

Capitalism has made food and clothing available to everyone in the West. Now it is making both available to the masses of Asia. Starvation is disappearing, except in sub-Saharan Africa, which remains despotic, demon-possessed, and anti-free market. But the price of this extension of food and clothing to the poorest people in society is the creation of vast pools of capital owned by an elite. Someone has to own it. Someone must make decisions as to how it should be used. Ownership is a social responsibility.⁴¹ The free market is an institutional structure that imposes costs of misuse on owners, and defines “misuse” in terms of what customers want. Customers make their bids for the output of capital, raw materials, and labor. Those owners of capital who ignore what the highest-bidding customers have bid must forfeit income and wealth.

Capitalism has removed what Paul identified as legitimate causes of discontent: a lack of food and a lack of clothing. Without capitalism, there would be far fewer people and a larger percentage of legitimately discontented people.

Then there is the issue of inter-generational continuity. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22). Inheritance is an aspect of righteousness, this proverb says. A *good* man leaves an inheritance. Did Paul reject this verse? Has the New Covenant abandoned the capitalist implications of the Old Covenant? “And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2).

The hermeneutical issue here is covenantal continuity. Does this passage break with the Old Covenant? Or was Paul trying to persuade Timothy of a concept distinct from the interrelated economic concepts of thrift, capital, wealth, inheritance, and dominion? To answer these two questions correctly, we must first consider the theoretical issue of why people act economically.

40. Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

41. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 28. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

3. *Discontentment: Micro and Macro*

Ludwig von Mises began his epistemologically deductive economic theory with the observation that men act. He then asked: Why do they act? His answer was that men wish to exchange their present circumstances for a different set of circumstances. Mises saw human action as a constant exchange of conditions. Men seek to improve their conditions, he said. Mises began his economic theory with the axiom of human action, which he explained by means of the corollary of discontentment. Discontentment is the essence of the human condition, Mises taught.

We call contentment or satisfaction that state of a human being which does not and cannot result in any action. Acting man is eager to substitute a more satisfactory state of affairs for a less satisfactory. His mind imagines conditions which suit him better, and his action aims at bringing about this desired state. The incentive that impels a man to act is always some uneasiness. A man perfectly content with the state of his affairs would have no incentive to change things. He would have neither wishes nor desires; he would be perfectly happy. He would not act; he would simply live free from care.⁴²

Paul is not talking about this kind of micro-discontentment: the exchange of a marginal quantity of one good for a marginal quantity of another. These exchanges are basic to life. We do not attain something for nothing except by God's grace. Paul is talking about macro-discontentment: the exchange of one *lifestyle* for another. He is talking about a man's attitude toward the conditions of his life that appear to be improvable only through the power of autonomous man, or impersonal fate, or impersonal chance, or some occult force. The discontented man sees his present condition as not worthwhile in the cosmic scheme of things or in his own personal scheme of things. He has judged his present condition, and has found it *beneath him*—beneath his dignity, his capabilities, his vision, or his well-deserved status. He is discontented because he does not believe that God's grace establishes his present condition. He thinks he can improve on God's grace.

The issue facing everyone is this: "What is my assigned task? What does God want me to do?" This is the continuing dilemma in every person's history. God commands perfection. God provides grace so that a covenant-keeper can make progress toward attaining the perfect

42. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 13. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

humanity of Christ. This process begins with the judicial transfer of Christ's perfection to the covenant-keeper. *Grace precedes law*. Then, in full possession of salvation, the covenant-keeper begins to work it out. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).⁴³

Paul is implying here, though not saying explicitly, that God provides the covenant-keeper with whatever is required in order for him to accomplish his assigned task. God may provide the capital in advance. He may provide it on the job. The point is, He does provide it. *Grace precedes law*. Godliness with contentment requires that we perceive that the available supply of resources will be provided by God to enable us to complete the task at hand. *The main problem is to assess correctly the task at hand, not to accumulate the capital necessary to complete it*. If we do not know what the task at hand is, sin will lead us to attempt to accumulate more capital than is necessary to complete the task on schedule—God's schedule.

This leads us to Paul's next point: the pursuit of riches.

E. The Pursuit of Riches

Paul moves from a brief reference to the minimal capital required for godly contentment—food and clothing (v. 8)—to a consideration of the pursuit of riches.

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (vv. 9–10).

The Greek words that begin this section, *hoi boulomenoi*, mean "those who will to be" or "desire to be."⁴⁴ Paul is speaking of seekers after riches, not people who are already rich. He speaks of the rich later in the chapter (vv. 17–19).⁴⁵ He says that those who seek to be rich are in serious risk of moral destruction. He lists a series of moral evils. In the Greek text, these are: temptation, snare, foolishness, in-

43. North, *Ethics and Dominion*, ch. 20.

44. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Walter Bauer, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 146.

45. Chapter 10.

jury, lusts, drowning, ruin, and destruction. The reference to drowning is graphic. This Greek word appears in the New Testament in one other place: "And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to **sink**" (Luke 5:7).

1. *Covetousness*

In the world of direct-response marketing, it is widely accepted by advertising copy writers that there are only two basic motivations for purchasing financial services: greed and fear. Greed is the more powerful appeal. Paul understood this dual motivation. He counters greed with fear. So great is the power of greed that Paul identifies it as a root of all evil. In the original Greek, the article "the" does not appear. The introductory part of this verse is better translated, "For a root of all evils is the love of money."⁴⁶ The Greek word translated as "love of money" is *philarguria*. It means "love of silver." Elsewhere, a closely related Greek word, *philarguros*, is translated as "covetous." "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him" (Luke 16:14). "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (II Tim. 3:2). Its opposite, *aphilarguros*, means "not covetous." "Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous" (I Tim. 3:3). "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). The sense of "money" is present in the word, for it refers to silver. Its meaning extends beyond the love of money to greed in general.

Paul speaks of people who "coveted after" money. The Greek word translated as "coveted" means "to desire." "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (I Tim. 3:1). "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:16). When it says they have erred from the faith it means "wandered away." They were sidetracked, in other words. They have also pierced themselves with pain, Paul says. These are self-inflicted wounds. This is graphic language. Paul is saying that God-fearing people have been deflected from the true faith and have injured themselves, all for the love of money. He is not speaking here of coven-

46. Marshall and Phillips, *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, p. 832.

ant-keepers in general. He has in mind specific people.

2. God or Mammon

Paul offers no reason for the conflict between Christian faith and the pursuit of riches. He does not have to. Christ made this conflict a matter of fundamental distinctions. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).⁴⁷

Christ had said that the issue is service. God demands service from all men. Mammon does, too. God is a personal being. Mammon is not. *Mammon is a principle of action, a way of life.* It is this-worldly. It is the great god More. It is man’s insatiable desire to heap up more treasure in history. It is fallen man’s illusion that what matters most is one’s legacy in history. It is also the error that gain is godliness. The religion of mammon in action is best seen in Christ’s parable of the barn-builder.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).⁴⁸

Later in this chapter, Paul returns to this theme of being rich toward God (vv. 17–19). Christ told His listeners that God provides the capital necessary to fulfill the tasks at hand.

And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much

47. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

48. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 25.

more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:22–34).

Christ was establishing a system of missionary finances.⁴⁹ He who would be a faithful missionary must not worry about funding. There are few missionaries who adopt this method of financing. China Inland Mission did, today called OMF International. Denominational foreign mission boards never do. There are few Christians who pursue the life of the missionary.

There are many who pursue riches. Christ made it as clear as possible that the attainment of true riches involves two things: trust in God regarding the availability of capital in history, and trust in the preservation of one's accumulated treasure in eternity.

This is the theological frame of reference for Paul's discussion of riches in this chapter. His discussion was an extension of what Solomon had taught a thousand years earlier.

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came,

49. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand (Eccl. 5:10–15).

We bring nothing into this world, Solomon said,⁵⁰ and we shall take nothing out of it. Paul repeated this insight. Christ had also taken this doctrine and had amplified it. He showed that there is a way to store up riches in heaven, to be appropriated beyond the grave. This gave legitimate hope to men who recognized the truth of Solomon's warning:

If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth [stillborn] is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place (Eccl. 6:3–6)?

The grave swallows up all men equally, Solomon taught. Their end is the same. Lacking further revelation, the Old Covenant was imprecise regarding eternity. Christ taught that eternity will not be the same for all mankind. There is judgment and meaning beyond this world. What a man does in the realm of history establishes his post-resurrection legacy to himself. The covenant-keeper therefore should act consistently in history with what he believes about eternity. He has faith in continuity: charitable giving in this life produces wealth for eternity. Doing with less in history means mansions in eternity. Christ said: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1–3).

Paul in this passage accepts the accuracy of Solomon's teaching regarding riches and their burden. He also extends Christ's warning that mammon is the essence of the alternative religious worldview to orthodoxy. In this brief section, Paul encapsulates the teaching of Solomon and Christ on the dangers of wealth.

50. North, *Autonomy and Stagnation*, ch. 3.

3. *Andrew Carnegie*

Andrew Carnegie built the greatest steel company in history. When he sold it on New Year's Day, 1901, to investors who had just created United States Steel, J. P. Morgan, the banker who had put together the transaction, told him, "Mr. Carnegie, I want to congratulate you on being the richest man in the world." Carnegie's share of the sale gained him \$300 million in bonds that paid five percent per annum. In today's money, \$300 million would be in the range of \$7 billion.⁵¹ In 1901, there was no income tax.

Over the next two decades, he gave away 90% of his money. There is nothing like this story in the annals of modern capitalism.

In 1868, at the age of 33, he was earning \$50,000 a year, the equivalent of well over a million after-tax dollars today. Two decades earlier, he had been a newly arrived immigrant pauper teenager who had to support his family. He had a gift for making money. In 1868, he wrote a memorandum to himself. It was discovered by his estate's executors half a century later. It had been preserved in a box of mementos. It included these observations.

Man must have an idol—the amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry—no idol more debasing than the worship of money. Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately; therefore should I be careful to choose that life which will be the most elevating in character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery. I will resign business at thirty-five, but during the ensuing two years I wish to spend the afternoons in receiving instruction and in reading systematically.⁵²

For the next three decades, he pursued money instead. He built a company that served the world of industry well. Carnegie Steel found ways to cut costs and lower the price of steel. It produced fine products at low prices. This incessant competition led his competitors to put up the money and agree to the enormous debt to buy Carnegie Steel in 1901, in what turned out to be a vain hope of reducing competition. The free market continued to bring forth new competitors.

51. In 2012, median household income in the United States was around \$50,000.

52. Quoted in Robert L. Heilbroner, "Carnegie & Rockefeller" (1960); reprinted in *A Sense of History: The Best Writing from the Pages of American Heritage* (New York: Smithmark, [1985] 1995), p. 431.

Carnegie then gave away most of his money, and in doing so, he became, along with the Rockefellers, father and son, the key builder of the world of non-profit, tax-exempt foundations, most of which have promoted the secular humanist vision that is sometimes called the New World Order. His anti-Christian outlook, which he had brought as a youth from Scotland, never left him. It passed into the non-profit foundations that he left behind. His bureaucratic heirs used his money to reshape the modern world along liberal humanist lines. In building his fortune, he was a social benefactor. In giving it away, he became arguably the most destructive private citizen in American history.

He had recognized as a young man the corrupting effects of the pursuit of great wealth. He resolved to break the habit. He failed. The pursuit of wealth ensnared him, even though he recognized the idolatrous nature of the pursuit, even though he recognized its appeal to man's base nature. Yet he benefitted the masses by the output of his soul-desiccating fixation on the accumulation of personal wealth.

He did not need any more money in 1868. He saw where he was headed. He told himself that he would not fall into the trap. But he did. His memorandum condemned his entrepreneurship posthumously. And yet, and yet . . . had he not succumbed to the siren call of riches, millions of steel users would have paid higher prices, or perhaps could not have purchased items at all because of their expense or even their non-existence. By lowering prices, he made it possible for manufacturers to find new ways to use steel to produce consumer goods. The producers did this because they could sell their output to customers. From an economic point of view, customers shouted to Carnegie for over three decades, "Serve us! Serve us! We will make you rich if you serve us." He did, and they did. He built an industrial monument to his own eternal condition: a steel plant's fiery furnace.

F. Unpursued Riches

Moses waxed eloquent about the corporate blessings of God. But how were men in the Old Covenant expected to attain such external blessings if they did not actively pursue them?

The answer should be obvious: covenant-keepers are to pursue righteousness. One result of righteousness is wealth. Jesus affirmed this relationship. "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek) for your heavenly Fath-

er knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:31–33).⁵³ The phrase, "all these things," must not be spiritualized away.

The question is one of priorities. Man's top priority should be righteousness or godliness. Wealth is given to God's people in order to reward them for good service. *Wealth is a success indicator*. It announces: "This is working. Do it again." It is also given to them as a capital base for further dominion. Finally, it is given to confirm the predictability and reliability of the covenant. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).⁵⁴

A dilemma has appeared: success indicators that deflect men from their original goal. Put in modern terminology, this is the dilemma that Max Weber called substantive rationalism vs. formal rationalism. It can also be described as ethics vs. efficiency. Here is an example. We tell a student to study hard, so that he can become well educated. We then set up a system of sanctions: grades. We find that some students "study for the test." They study in order to pass a test, not to master the material. And a few of them will cheat. The formal positive sanction—a high grade—competes with the substantive goal: education.

In every system of sanctions, we find this dualism. The sanctions may deflect men from their original goal. The Bible speaks of this dualism with respect to obedience. Do we obey the letter of the law or the spirit of the law? Paul wrote:

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: **for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life**. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? (II Cor. 3:3–8).

53. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 15.

54. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

The spirit of free enterprise is “serve the customer.” The letter of free enterprise is “make a profit.” If a business does not make a profit, it cannot serve the customer for long. But the focus of concern for business owners and their hired managers shifts from *long-run service* to the customer to *short-term profits*. This is the same type of dilemma that faces the student who wants to go to graduate school: he must get high grades, year by year. He can gain the long-term goal only by way of a series of short-term successes.

Paul does not tell Timothy to avoid serving people well. He tells him not to pursue riches. *The goal is always service*. However men measure successful ecclesiastical service—souls won, marriages saved, churches built, sermons preached, etc.—*there will always be a numerical indicator of success*. This indicator cannot include all of the aspects of godly service. It is merely a representative figure. Every accounting system has numbers. Every rating system has objective standards. These do not tell the whole story, but they tell that portion of the story for which performance is usually rewarded. So, some people—perhaps most people—perform in terms of the system of rewards and punishments, i.e., sanctions.

Paul warns Timothy not to be beguiled by the reward of money. Timothy is not to pursue riches. This lure is too strong for most men to resist. *Men shape their job performance and even their lives in terms of a reward that is inherently temporal*. The pursuit of riches is therefore a snare.

It is also a false god offering a false hope. Pareto’s 80-20 law always reasserts itself. About 80% of the wealth will be owned by 20% of the population in any society. Furthermore, among all societies, 20% of them will own 80% of the world’s wealth. Those people who pursue riches are pursuing a goal that has always been closed to the vast majority. They are sacrificing their lives on an altar of statistical futility.

Conclusion

The pursuit of riches is a spiritually dangerous pursuit. Far better, Paul advises, to pursue godliness. After a man attains godliness, his next goal should be contentment. This is defined simply by Paul: satisfaction with food and clothing. A covenant-keeper who has food and clothing should be content.

This is a hard doctrine to accept. The cares of this world grow up and threaten to strangle us. Jesus warned: “He also that received seed

among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22).⁵⁵ The more wealth we have, the larger our number of options, and the more cares and responsibilities we have. Or, as Solomon put it: "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them" (Eccl. 5:11).⁵⁶ A large table attracts many diners.

Paul cautions against pursuing wealth. But he offers different advice for those who have already attained wealth, as we shall see in the next chapter.

55. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 28.

56. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation*, ch. 19.

11

THE UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (1 Tim. 6:17–19, NASB).

The theocentric focus of this passage is God’s trustworthiness. This is a matter of service: hierarchy.¹ We serve that which we trust. God’s trustworthiness is contrasted with the uncertainty of riches. Paul implicitly tells men to ask themselves: “In what should I trust?” That which is trustworthy is that which one serves faithfully in thankfulness of past support and expectation of future support. In human affairs, support is two-way: the division of labor. Not so in the relationship between God and His creation. God is not dependent on anything else.

A. Laying Up Treasure

Paul tells Timothy to instruct² rich people. Timothy is to present a message regarding their special moral obligations to others. Why should rich people be singled out? Because their wealth is accompanied by unique moral risks and obligations. The biblical principle here is this: from him to whom much has been given, much is expected (Luke 12:48).³

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. The Greek word can also be translated “command.”

1. *Laying Up Assets*

I began this chapter with the text in the New American Standard Bible. This is the first time in 39 years that I have begun a chapter in this commentary series with anything but a citation from the King James Version. This is because the King James translators missed the point of this text. Paul recommends here that rich people lay up, meaning to accumulate assets. He is not referring here to the accumulation of invisible wealth to be personally appropriated beyond the grave. He speaks here of *laying up a good foundation in history*. The King James translators wrote: "Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (v. 19). The Greek text does not convey the sense of "against." The Greek text does not contrast history—the time of laying up—with final judgment. The Greek word translated "against" is *eis*, meaning (among many things) "to" or "for." In this context, it means "for the future."⁴ The Greek word translated as "eternal," *ontose*, is the word for "real" or "true." The New American Standard Bible translates the passage more closely to the original Greek: "Storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."

We take hold of eternal life while we are in history. John the Baptist said: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). He who trusts Christ in history attains eternal salvation in history. He who refuses to trust Christ in history seals his doom for eternity. A person in inescapably takes hold of one or the other of these eternal conditions. There is no third option.

Question: "Why should a self-interested rich man be generous to others?" Answer: "To lay up a good foundation for the future." The Greek word for "future" does not refer exclusively to eternity. The Greek word translated as "time to come" is *mello*, which refers to the future in general. This need not be eternity, although this Greek word occasionally appears in the context of eternity. "And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world **to come**" (Matt. 12:32). The

4. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Walter Bauer, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 228 (2b).

contrast Matthew 12:32 is explicit: this world (*aion*) vs. the world to come. This is not the contrast in I Timothy 6:19. The word *mello* refers to history, as in the following cases: “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself **would come**” (Luke 10:1). “When Jesus therefore perceived that they **would come** and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone” (John 6:15). “Who seeing Peter and John **about to go** into the temple asked an alms” (Acts 3:3). Laying hold of true life is the same process as working out one’s salvation (Phil. 2:12). It is a matter of progressive sanctification.⁵

2. *The Uncertainty of Time*

Timothy’s message is in the form of a commandment: do not trust in the uncertainty of riches. The Greek text says: “uncertainty of riches,” not “uncertain riches.” The King James Version has it wrong: “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (v. 17). The Greek text does not imply that some kinds of riches are uncertain, while other kinds of riches are certain. It implies that *riches in general* are uncertain. Paul has to be speaking here of *riches in history*, for Christ taught that riches in eternity are certain.

Why is uncertainty associated with riches? Because riches are temporally bound. They are part of history. History is subject to a curse because of Adam’s sin (Gen. 3:17–19).⁶ Aspects of this curse include physical decay and death. Man’s environment thwarts his productivity. In addition, God works in history deliberately to create uncertainty for successful people. Hannah’s song of rejoicing announced a great reversal of conditions.

Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down

5. Chapter 10:A:2.

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up (I Sam. 2:3–7).⁷

Uncertainty is an aspect of all marketable (exchangeable) assets in history. These assets rise and fall in value. They are not trustworthy.

A characteristic feature of earthly riches is their transferability. In contrast, the gift of eternal life is inalienable. It cannot be purchased. It is a free gift of God. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Eternal life therefore cannot be sold. Paul knew this when he wrote, “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). This exchange of eternal conditions is not possible. Eternal life is the unique, nontransferable possession of the recipient. Eternal life is certain. Paul insisted on the certainty of God’s grace.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38–39).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:3–6).

Because eternal life is received by grace through faith during history, *there is continuity between history and eternity*. The same continuity applies to eternal death. The discontinuity between eternal life and eternal death begins in history (John 3:36). Because of the judicial continuity between history and eternity, a covenant-keeper in history can accumulate assets that are immediately put on deposit for him for his use in eternity.

Eternal assets are not subject to uncertainty, for they are located beyond history. This contrast in both the location and the certainty of riches was taught by Christ. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon

7. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 12.

earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:19–20).⁸ Christ referred here to losses that result from physical decay. A moth eats fine clothing. Rust erodes the productivity of tools. In short, *things wear out*. This is because the world itself is wearing out. The world is under a curse.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:20–23).⁹

This historical curse is not without grace. No curse in history is ever without grace.¹⁰ By God’s grace, the cosmic erosion process is offset and even overcome in limited areas. Moses reminded the generation of the conquest, “Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years” (Deut. 8:4).¹¹ The decay associated with entropy—the disorderly outcome of the second law of thermodynamics—is common, but it is not universal.¹² For example, in a future era before the final judgment, the shortening of men’s life expectancy that took place after Noah’s Flood will be reversed. “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed” (Isa. 65:20).¹³ We are already seeing this reversal in our day. Except in what used to be the Soviet

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

9. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

10. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

11. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

12. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988). (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>)

13. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15. Cf. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

Union (1917–1991), average life expectancy—not considering war—steadily increased worldwide during the twentieth century.¹⁴ The distribution of long life, unlike the distribution of marketable wealth, is becoming closer to an egalitarian standard. A typical poor man is far more likely to attain 80 percent of a rich man’s life expectancy than 80 percent of a rich man’s net worth.

Because of the inescapable impermanence of this cursed world, he who devotes his life to accumulating treasure that can be used only in this world is a fool. He ignores both his own mortality and the mortality of this world apart from God’s grace. One more time:

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).¹⁵

This is foolish. “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” This principle of holy giving is Paul’s starting point. The idea of “rich toward God” is the same as “rich in good works.” God does not need our money. We cannot write Him a check. He does not accept credit cards. We are being rich toward God whenever we use our wealth to benefit others, who are made in God’s image (Matt. 25:31–40). We are also rich toward God when we sacrifice a portion of our time and wealth in order to heal His creation as His stewards. Example: “If a bird’s nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young; But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days” (Deut. 22:6–7).¹⁶

Laying up treasure in eternity is legitimate, Christ taught. He

14. This may not be true in sub-Saharan Africa, where AIDS is a pandemic. Accurate population statistics for sub-Saharan Africa do not exist.

15. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 25.

16. See North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 53.

taught that covenant-keepers should lay up treasure in eternity by distributing treasure charitably in history. They forfeit present wealth in expectation of eternal wealth. This is the economist's definition of thrift: *the exchange of present assets in expectation of gaining future assets of greater value*. The expected payoff for Christ's recommended exchange comes beyond the grave. The covenant-keeper exchanges assets that are subject to uncertainty for assets that are permanent in value. It takes faith to believe this, for the transfer appears to be exclusively historical: exchanging an uncertain condition (riches) for an even more uncertain condition (fewer riches). This is why the exchange is a test of faith. In whose word does a person trust: man's or Christ's?

Skeptics and would-be humorists use the phrase, "Jesus saves," as if this meant opening a bank savings account. "Jesus saves; Moses invests," is one such phrase. Nevertheless, the idea that Jesus saves in an economic sense is accurate. In fact, men's salvation rests solely on this fact. *God Himself exchanged wealth for poverty*. He did this in order to exchange poverty in history for wealth in eternity. Paul wrote:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:5–12).¹⁷

Christ's exchange of eternity for history led to His exaltation in eternity. In His divinity, the Second Person of the Trinity took on humanity by entering into history: the incarnation. This led to His exaltation in eternity in his capacity as perfect man. Christ's exchange of conditions is the sole basis of any person's salvation. Christians by God's grace receive Christ's perfect humanity as a gift in history: *definitive sanctification*. Christians do not become divine; rather, they at-

17. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

tain the moral status of Christ's perfect humanity through their faith in the unique saving work of Christ. Therefore, Paul concluded, covenant-keepers are supposed to work out the salvation that is already theirs: *progressive sanctification*.¹⁸

Christ identified *physical insecurity*—moth, rust, and theft—as the characteristic feature of *time-bound treasure*. He said that treasure in heaven is not subject to uncertainty. Christ taught that riches are uncertain because of the uncertainty associated with time-bound capital assets. He listed physical uncertainties as examples, but uncertainty is more than physical. It is also economic.

B. Inescapable Future Uncertainties

1. Conditions Change, Wealth Changes

When conditions change, wealth changes. That which had been very valuable before can become worthless. “And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung for five pieces of silver” (II Kings 6:25).¹⁹ “Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria” (II Kings 7:1). Elisha was forecasting a change in comparative military strength by predicting changes in the array of prices. History is constantly changing. Therefore, wealth is constantly changing.

To understand why wealth changes, it is necessary first to understand cause and effect in both economic value and prices. Changes in prices appear to be the source of economic uncertainty, but this is an illusion based on faulty economic analysis. Prices change because (1) objective external circumstances change, or (2) people’s subjective values change, or (3) the interaction changes between the changing objective external circumstances and people’s changing subjective values.²⁰ Objective prices change in response to changes in people’s subjective assessment of changes in objective conditions. It is through changes in prices that men overcome some of life’s uncertainties. This is why any system of mandatory pricing that is imposed by the civil

18. Chapter 10:A:2.

19. North, *Disobedience and Defeat*, ch. 26.

20. On modern economics’ theories of subjective value and objective value, see Appendix B.

government increases uncertainty. Price and wage controls, far from being a stabilizing influence, create disorder.

2. The Customer's Final Economic Authority

A major aspect of Christian economics ought to be the doctrine of imputation. With respect to God, imputation means God's declaration of some condition. He declares what the condition is, and this declaration is perfect. There is perfect correspondence between God's subjective declaration and the creation's objective condition. Chapter one of Genesis is the model of imputation: the repetition of the phrase, "it was good."

Modern economic theory (post-1870) begins with the doctrine of each individual's subjective imputation of economic value: methodological individualism and methodological subjectivism. In contrast, Christian economics must build its theory of economic value on the theological foundation of the related doctrines of *God's subjective imputation* and therefore *objective economic value*: methodological Trinitarianism and methodological subjectivism/objectivism. Only then can it establish a valid concept of men's imputation of economic value. Men are made in God's image, so a man possesses the ability both to assess and declare an asset's value to him. What distinguishes Christian economist's theory of value from modern humanistic economics' theory of value is the doctrine of God's imputation: *an authoritative subjective declaration of an objective condition*.

Modern economics has formally adopted a purely subjectivist epistemology. It teaches that economic value is imputed by individual customers who own assets that they are willing to exchange in order to gain the use or ownership of other assets. Individual customers make decisions to buy or not to buy, meaning to exchange or not to exchange. Individual sellers compete against each other to make a sale. Through supply and demand—buyers vs. buyers, sellers vs. sellers—objective prices for scarce economic resources are established in a free market. *Competing subjective values produce competing objective bids*. The result of these competitive bids is an array of objective prices.

As we have seen in the case of Samaria's array of prices, when objective external conditions change, customers' subjective imputations of economic value also change. This means that their subjective ranking of economic value changes, which means that their objective bids change, which means that objective prices change.

In a high division of labor economy, *customers possess money*, which is best defined as *the most marketable commodity*.²¹ Customers impute present value to the array of available products and services. Then, through competition with each other in a free market that is open to all would-be bidders, they establish *objective money prices* for goods and services.

A free market economy is a gigantic auction. In an auction, the high bid wins unless the auctioneer has previously announced a minimum price, which no high bid reaches. In a free market, the high bid wins unless charity is involved. In most markets most of the time, charity is not involved. The larger the market, the less personal is the relationship between buyer and seller. The less personal the relationship is, the less likelihood that a transaction will contain an element of charity, either for the buyer or the seller.

The observable fact that the high bid wins has been central to economic theory ever since the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. The principle of "high bid wins" is an implication of the assumption of individual self-interest as the dominant factor in economic action. From Smith to the present, *individual self-interest* has been regarded as the dominant motivational factor in economic action. Without this assumption and without confirmation by the facts of economic life, economics would be a very different social science.²²

Modern economics has argued that customers impute economic value to scarce goods and services, thereby establishing their market value. Suppliers allocate scarce resources so as to maximize their own income (except when charity is involved). They pay close attention to what they believe buyers will pay for the suppliers' output. This is why, ultimately, customers determine economic value.²³

Because customers possess the most marketable commodity, money, they possess final *economic* authority over pricing. They make competitive bids against each other. These bids, which are based on individual subjective valuations, produce objective prices for specific goods and services.

Sellers announce prices of whatever they offer for sale, but these prices are *fiduciary prices*, i.e., prices set by sellers so that their invent-

21. Ludwig von Mises, *The Theory of Money and Credit*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pt. I, ch. 1, sec. 2: "The Origin of Money." (<http://bit.ly/MisesTMC>) The first edition was published in 1912.

22. Appendix C:B.

23. Of course, God establishes final value. I am speaking here of value in the market. On God as imputer of economic value, see Appendix B.

ories will be maintained until the expected highest-bidding customers show up and buy. This means that sellers act as *economic agents* of high-bidding customers. Sellers directly impose demand in the market only in their capacity as people who legally retain ownership of assets. This is sometimes called *reservation demand*.²⁴ Would-be customers make bids, but some sellers say “no.” Those who say “no” are exercising reservation demand.

What influence does a seller have over pricing? Very little. He can announce a price, but this is not the same as making a sale, any more than an auctioneer establishes the price when he asks for a specific initial bid. When an auctioneer asks, “Do I hear. . . .?” he reveals the nature of the pricing process. The free market is a giant auction. If there is no bid, there is no sale.

Because customers possess the most marketable commodity, money, they are in a much stronger bargaining position than sellers. Because they possess money, they possess far more alternatives than sellers do. An individual buyer faces a much larger audience of competing suppliers (buyers of money) than a seller faces (buyers of specific goods). The highest bidding customers establish final sale prices. Sellers make sales only by agreeing to the prices set by the most competitive buyers.

A seller can legally decide not to sell. By reducing the available supply, his decision to avoid selling affects the market price of competing assets to some degree, but this influence usually is so minimal as to be barely detectable. In a rare case when a seller keeps the asset for personal use by refusing to sell, he thereby becomes the highest-bidding final customer. This may be a major factor in the supply of certain unique forms of labor, such as a star athlete or entertainer, who buys leisure (“free” time)²⁵ by refusing to perform. But the more replaceable a particular service, the less influence over price a supplier possesses.

3. Value Is Uncertain

Economic value is uncertain in a world of unpredictable change. The less predictable the world is, the more uncertain economic value is. This means that temporal riches are uncertain. This is because men

24. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), p. 253. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

25. Time is never free. The cost of a unit of time is the value to the owner of the most important use foregone.

are not God. They cannot know the future perfectly. They do not know which changes are coming. Their wealth is therefore subject to uncertainty. To trust in riches is to trust in one's ability to forecast the future accurately and also to deal with it profitably. The more a man trusts in his own riches, the more he assumes his possession of God's incommunicable attribute of perfect foreknowledge. No man knows the future perfectly, Paul taught.

Charity [agápē] never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now **we see through a glass, darkly**; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (I Cor. 13:8–13).

Because perfect foreknowledge is not given to men, a wise man substitutes faith in the outworking of love (charity) for faith in riches. Or, as Paul has already announced to Timothy, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love [agápē], patience, meekness" (6:10–11).²⁶

Paul tells Timothy to tell rich people not to be highminded. This is another word for "proud." The rich man is tempted to trust in his wealth, which ultimately means trust in his own forecasting ability and also his entrepreneurial skills necessary to deal with the future profitably. The rich man may regard himself as beyond the common conditions that afflict humanity, at least those afflictions that are related to wealth rather than common humanity, such as incurable disease. This is another way of saying that *a rich man thinks that he can buy his way out of almost any problem*. Solutions usually have price tags attached to them, he believes; he believes that he can afford to pay the price to evade most problems. So, he regards himself as above the uncertainties that beset the common man. The rich man trusts in riches, which are of uncertain future value. This is a mistake, Paul teaches.

26. Chapter 10.

C. A Diversified Portfolio

Paul contrasts trust in temporal riches with trust in the living God. Nothing is uncertain to God. Nothing is beyond God's decree: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35). Following Christ's teaching, Paul teaches that a rich covenant-keeper should be willing to affirm his trust in God (I Tim. 6:17) by turning loose of a portion of his capital (v. 18). A rich covenant-keeper should *turn loose* of a portion of his assets (v. 18) in order to *take hold* of true life (v. 19). This is an economic application of Christ's general principle: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:25–26).²⁷

Paul does not here discuss treasure in heaven. He does not argue, as Christ argued, that a covenant-keeper's surrender of economic assets in history is his means of accumulating permanent assets in eternity. Paul speaks of two things: a superior form of trust and additional temporal riches.

Paul says that rich men should be willing to communicate. The meaning of this word has changed since 1611. It means to be generous or to share. The Greek word translated as "communicate" appears only in this verse: *koinonikous*. A parallel Greek root word, itself related to *koinonos*, sometimes refers to common ownership. "And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44). Another related root word refers to a partnership. "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself" (Phm. 1:17). The idea here is *shared corporate life*. This implies shared trials and tribulations. The rich man can reduce the tribulations of the poor man by sharing a portion of his wealth with him. The rich man suffers a loss, while the poor man enjoys a gain. This principle of sharing is what Paul taught to the Corinthians.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having

27. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 35.

all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever (II Cor. 9:6–9).

Sowing bountifully produces a positive sanction: reaping bountifully. Paul reminded the Corinthians of the source of all temporal wealth: God, who “is able to make all grace abound toward you” (v. 8). Paul makes the same identification to Timothy: God, “who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (v. 17). God provides our capital. God’s inventory of capital is unlimited. Paul speaks here of temporal wealth. He is not comparing temporal wealth with eternal wealth.

It takes faith to believe that there is an open-ended supply of wealth for covenant-keepers in history, despite the fact of scarcity. It takes very great faith. It takes such great faith that very few covenant-keepers believe it—not the poor, who strive to be rich; not the rich, who fear becoming poor. This is why Paul instructs Timothy to deliver the truth about riches to both rich and poor.

Paul warns the rich and the poor not to be deceived by riches. Solomon had delivered a similar message a thousand years earlier. “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8–9).²⁸ Solomon, one of the richest men in history, affirmed the desirability of a middle-class income and lifestyle. Middle-class income is a middle path between thievery and pride.

Paul describes this pathway as separating covetousness from pride. Nevertheless, Paul does not recommend middle-class living in this epistle. His words are directed exclusively to the poor and the rich. He is concerned with their souls, not with their income. He does not have in mind Solomon’s prayer. He says to avoid striving after riches, and, for those who have already attained riches, he recommends a systematic reduction of present wealth. He does not recommend a program of giving away wealth as a means of attaining a middle-class life style. He presents a different program: *the attainment of greater security in history by abandoning all trust in riches*. In no way is this a revision of the Old Covenant. “He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch” (Prov. 11:28).²⁹ Paul recommends

28. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 86.

29. *Ibid.*, ch. 33.

to rich men and poor men the same distrustful attitude toward riches. Like a dietician who prescribes the same diet for thin people and fat people, so is Paul with respect to riches. There is *greater spiritual security* in avoiding the quest for riches, he tells the poor man, and *greater economic security* by giving money away, he tells the rich man.

Riches that are beyond uncertainty are exclusively eternal. Christ made this point clear. Paul is not promising certainty in a world of inherently unpredictable change. But he is promising *increased certainty* for both the rich and the poor. The rich man normally seeks increased certainty by increasing his riches. So does the poor man. This is a mistake, Paul teaches. Uncertainty of temporal riches is inescapable, for loss-producing changes in history are inevitable. In a world of sin and death, such losses can be life-threatening. The rich man believes that by piling up riches, he can reduce this uncertainty. So does the poor man.

A rich man possesses sufficient wealth to enable him to seek a diversified portfolio of temporal assets that are subject to different types of uncertainty. He diversifies his portfolio on the assumption that when the market price of one asset falls, the market price of another asset may rise. Paul tells the rich man that increased certainty is attained by re-allocating a portion of one's portfolio out of marketable assets and into *nonmarketable assets*, namely, the blessings of God. These blessings are nonmarketable because (1) would-be buyers do not believe in the existence of such assets, and (2) God would not honor the sale. A claim on God's uncertainty-reducing blessings is established by turning loose of a portion of one's wealth in faith.

This strategy of reducing uncertainty by turning loose of money is available both to rich and poor, although Paul does not say this explicitly regarding the poor. Christ did. Christ gave the example of the poor widow. "And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:1–4).³⁰ The rich men gave away more money than the widow, but what they gave was a small portion of their wealth. The widow did not seek increased security through thrift and capital accumulation. She knew that in her cir-

30. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 50.

cumstances, faithfulness to God was the only way to security. She could not reasonably expect to accumulate a diversified portfolio large enough to protect her. *Faithful giving results in God's protection.* She saw clearly what the rich men did not: uncertainty afflicts all marketable riches. She trusted God, whose favor is nonmarketable. The outward manifestation of her trust was her surrender of all of her money, which she knew was insufficient to provide security. Her poverty opened her eyes to the truth about riches: they are uncertain.

D. Christian Community and Anonymous Charity

Paul teaches here that faithful giving to the poor *communicates*, i.e., creates community. Wealth transferred to the poor reduces immediate worry by the poor. The Christian community is protected against severe uncertainties because those members with greater wealth use their wealth to relieve the poor members. *This is a system of voluntary insurance.* Where it differs from an insurance policy is in the absence of any legal obligation. There is no contract. There is no statistical analysis of risk. The community benefits from a reduction in uncertainty despite the fact that *uncertainty is not risk*, i.e., it cannot be successfully dealt with through insurance contracts. Insurance applies only to classes of events that are governed by known statistical probability, i.e., the law of large numbers. Uncertainty is not part of an insurable class of events.³¹ In any case, the poor cannot afford to buy insurance. For them, risk might as well be uncertainty.

Christians might be tempted to argue that a public example of a charitable rich man today can serve as a model for rich men in the future. His example will be imitated. This in turn should lead to greater trust by the poor in the generosity of the rich. But this is not what Paul teaches. Paul teaches men to trust in God, not in the charity of the rich. Then there is the whole question of becoming an example. Christ specifically warned Christians against becoming a public example of

31. Economists distinguish between uncertainty and risk. Risk can be dealt with through insurance because a particular event is part of a larger class of similar events. Money to insure people against risky events can be pooled in order to reduce the heavy burden of an individual event on any one participant in the pool. In contrast, an uncertain event is beyond statistical analysis. It is not subject to "the law of large numbers." There is no commercial insurance for it. See Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921). (<http://bit.ly/KnightRUP>); Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

charitable giving.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:1–4).³²

The covenant-keeping poor are supposed to trust in God, not in the covenant-keeping charitable rich. Given the existence of widespread resistance by the rich to Paul's teaching on charitable giving, this is a wise policy on the part of the poor.

Elsewhere, Paul recommended the creation of a community in which no one suffers from the crippling effects of poverty. The context of his remarks was the year-old promise of the Corinthian church to send money to the hard-pressed Jerusalem church.

I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness [earnestness] of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward [have begun] a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, **He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack** (II Cor. 8:8–15).³³

In support of his view, Paul cited Exodus 16: the first appearance of the manna in the wilderness. What was manna?

32. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 11.

33. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 5, 6.

And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, **he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack;** they gathered every man according to his eating (Ex. 16:14–18).

God gave the Israelites free food, so that they would learn to trust Him in times of crisis. The predictability of the manna's miraculous daily appearance, except on the sabbath, was designed to produce confidence in God. The double portion of manna on the day before the sabbath (v. 22) was a weekly miracle that was also supposed to produce confidence in God. The miracle of the manna had an element of continuity (five days) and an element of discontinuity (double portion on day six, followed by no manna), both of which were to increase the Israelites' trust in God.³⁴

Paul sought to persuade the Corinthians that *the church international is the equivalent of manna*. This principle of reliable aid from God was applied by Paul to the comparative wealth of the church in Corinth vs. the church in Jerusalem. The comparative wealth of the members of the two congregations established a moral obligation on the part of the Corinthians. This was not an intra-congregational comparison, but an inter-congregational comparison. By implication, this moral obligation can become intra-congregational, but Paul did not formally draw this conclusion.

By giving money quietly to his local congregation and also to charitable organizations, the rich man can avoid the public display of charitable giving that Christ warned against. He can retain his anonymity. At the same time, the poor are assisted. The poor can then better escape the lust for riches that afflicts poor people who see no way out of their many uncertainties other than gaining wealth. They can more confidently trust in God. Their faith can be placed in the Christian

34. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 18.

community, not just in near-miraculous interventions by God into their circumstances.

The continuity of faith-based community is preferable to the discontinuity of miracles. This was equally true under Moses. The primary goal of the manna was to create faith in God, but the manna ceased when the Israelites entered the Promised Land. “And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year” (Josh. 5:12). So it is to be in the New Covenant: *the substitution of covenant community for miracles.*

This strategy of relying on community over miracles is not always applicable to foreign missions. In extensively occult cultural environments, the discontinuity of miracles is sometimes necessary to deal with entrenched demonism. Metaphorically speaking, the Christians’ serpents must publicly destroy the magicians’ serpents. The Christian foreign missionary may need to discipline himself to rely on what appears to be uncertain financing as a means of strengthening his faith in God in an uncertain environment. This has been the approach to financing by the OMF International, which used to be called the China Inland Mission, founded by Hudson Taylor in the late nineteenth century. There is no guaranteed salary to the OMF missionary in the field.

E. Harnessing Greed

Paul stresses in this passage the importance of charitable giving: “That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.” There is a positive sanction promised to the giver: “storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they make take hold of that which is life indeed” (NASB). There is *temporal self-interest*. Christ had said the same thing with respect to eternal self-interest. “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:20).³⁵

What is missing in the New Testament is the customer-service perspective of Adam Smith and the right-wing Enlightenment’s tradition of economic analysis. We do not find any indication in the New Testament that by serving customers efficiently, a producer can get rich. This was Smith’s revolutionary insight: through *capital accumu-*

35. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

lation, a businessman serves his own self-interest, as well as his employees' self-interest and customers' self-interest.

The Old Testament is clear that corporate covenantal obedience to God produces corporate economic success. Personal obedience to God includes charity (Deut. 15:1–10).³⁶ The covenant-keeper must work hard (Prov. 6:6–11). He should not seek to get rich (Prov. 30:8–9).³⁷ Riches may come, as they came to Abraham, but becoming wealthy is not a biblical goal. In fact, in Western ethical theory generally, from classical Greek philosophy to the Enlightenment, the quest for personal riches was regarded as an affliction of a morally flawed character.

There is one hint in the Bible that a man's accumulation of capital is a means for him to serve others by giving them employment. This is Jesus' parable of the farmer and the hired hourly workers (Matt. 20:1–16). In this parable, the highest wage per hour went to those few workers who were hired in the final hour of the day (v. 9). But the parable relies on the assumption of the employer's charity, not his employees' productivity. It is a parable about God's grace to those who do not deserve His favor.³⁸ It is not a parable about how to run a profitable farm. It is not about capital accumulation, workers' productivity, and competitive wages. It is about charity to the able-bodied poor. This is work-related charity, not output-dependent remuneration.

Smith's explanation of customer service as a means of wealth accumulation in *The Wealth of Nations* had nothing to do with charity and everything to do with mutual self-interest. In what has become a classic statement of voluntary exchange, Smith wrote:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk

36. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 36.

37. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

38. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 40.

to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.³⁹

Smith's observation about how men gain their goals through gaining the self-interested cooperation of others stands as a turning point in economic theory—indeed, a turning point in social theory in general. But, as we shall see, it was not original with Smith. The innovator was Bernard Mandeville.⁴⁰ But because Smith framed the motivational process positively, in terms of production, unlike Mandeville, who focused on consumption, he launched an intellectual revolution, as over-worked as that word is. As surely as Charles Darwin's idea of the biological evolution of a species through the undesigned, impersonal natural selection of individual members of a species launched an intellectual revolution, so did Smith's idea of an increase in national wealth through undesigned, self-interested voluntary exchanges of individuals.⁴¹

In Appendix C, I go into greater detail regarding Smith's economics and the social theory of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment. When the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, this event left the methodological legacy of Smith's economics and the right-wing Enlightenment's social theory as the dominant worldview in the West, with the socialist remnant fighting a rear-guard action from inside the environmentalism movement.⁴² Marxism's failed experiment in Russia took down the nineteenth century's socialist intellectual legacy. Adam Smith won by default intellectually and also by capitalism's enormous economic output. The fact of the non-Communist world's systemic compound economic growth could no longer be swept under the socialists' tattered rug, which by 1989 had too many holes.

39. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Book I, Ch. 2.

40. Appendix C:C.

41. Darwin's insight was an extension of Smith's: from the idea of an unplanned but orderly national economy to the idea of unplanned but orderly biological evolution. See F. A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 264–65. This is an essay on the influence of Bernard Mandeville's famous poem and his commentary, *Fable of the Bees*.

42. The best example of this transition was the career of deposed Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union raised millions of dollars in the West to start an environmentalist "think tank," Green Cross International. On its Web home page, we read: "We need a new system of values, a system of the organic unity between mankind and nature and the ethic of global responsibility.—Mikhail Gorbachev." The organization is located in the high-rent Presidio district of San Francisco. The Presidio had been an American military base during Gorbachev's reign as Soviet dictator.

The Scottish Enlightenment was a Unitarian alternative to the worldview of seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism, with its system of local congregations, where initiative lay, held in check by a hierarchical system of appellate church courts. The Scottish Enlightenment was a self-conscious attempt to remove from social theory all traces of the predestinating God of Scottish Calvinism. *This was an intellectual war against Calvinism's doctrines of God's absolute decree, sovereignty, and providence.* The Scottish Enlightenment always had an atheistic element, beginning with David Hume's skepticism, and this implicit atheism became dominant methodologically with Smith's successors in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it became dominant in *The Wealth of Nations*, which no longer relied on the Unitarian moralism that had undergirded his book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In *The Wealth of Nations*, the free market's sanctions of profit and loss, held in check by the coercive sanctions of a limited civil government, replaced the sanctions of God's final judgment as explanations of economic causation. Sentiment was replaced by self-interest.

F. A Christian Reconstruction of Economic Theory

Until the publication of Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973), Christian social theory had always been derivative. Christian scholars had always imported one or another humanistic worldview, baptizing it with convenient Christian phrases. This procedure began with the early church's apologists, who treated Greek philosophy, especially Platonic thought, as if it were a precursor of Christianity, as if Greek philosophy were true as far as it went, but missing certain clarifying theological insights. In late medieval Christianity, the church's major philosophers substituted Aristotle for Plato. In modern times, there have been a few attempts by socially conservative Roman Catholic laymen to invent a whitewashed version of the late-medieval world's guild-based local economies, but academic economists have steadfastly avoided such exercises in nostalgia. It was Rushdoony's insight that in order to develop an explicitly biblical social theory, it is necessary to return to the Mosaic law, which means theonomy, which means theocracy, which means embarrassment among one's peers.

This question must be dealt with by anyone who attempts to reconstruct economic theory along biblical lines: "Does the Bible indicate that individual self-interest is the correct starting point for eco-

nomic theory?” If the answer is “no,” then isn’t any attempt to make individual self-interest the starting point for Christian economics an importation from the right-wing Enlightenment?

The Bible does not begin with the doctrine of each person’s self-interest. It begins with the doctrine of creation (Gen. 1). The fundamental economic principle is this: *God owns the world on the basis of His creation of the world.*⁴³ He delegates to individuals a temporary authority to administer some aspects of the creation on His behalf. This is the creation mandate, or as I call it, the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).⁴⁴ The starting point for Christian economics is the doctrine of ownership: God’s original ownership⁴⁵ and individual man’s delegated ownership.⁴⁶

Every person is an individual steward of a specified portion of God’s resources. Each of us will be called to account on judgment day to give an account of his stewardship of God’s resources (Matt. 25:14–30).⁴⁷ This would imply methodological individualism, except for one fact: mankind as a species has been given authority over the world as a functioning system, so there is also corporate responsibility. There are both individual and corporate responsibility: ownership by the many, and ownership by the one. This reflects God’s original ownership, for God is a Trinity: three persons, one God. Each of the persons of the Trinity has His own function and responsibilities in relation to the creation. This is the Protestant theologians’ doctrine of the *economical* Trinity. There is hierarchy within the economical Trinity: Father > Son > Holy Ghost. Yet they are equal in being: the doctrine of the *ontological* Trinity. Men also share in an analogous equality of being. Paul preached to the Athenians:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of **one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth**, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from

43. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 1.

44. *Ibid.*, chaps. 3, 4.

45. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 1.(<http://bit.ly/gnininherit>)

46. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

47. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

every one of us (Acts 17:24–27).

Whenever Christian economics begins with the doctrine of God's original ownership of the creation, the most fundamental economic law is this: "Thou shalt not steal."⁴⁸ Put another way, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). The commandment against theft establishes private ownership: a legal boundary placed around objects. Private property began in the garden of Eden, when God identified one tree as inviolable. Man's rebellion began with a transgression of a private property boundary.⁴⁹

God imposes a system of dual sanctions in His system of delegated private ownership: profit and loss.⁵⁰ Individual self-interest is not the starting point for Christian economic theory, but it is a component of such a theory, as the parable of the talents indicates (Matt. 25:14–30).⁵¹ Apart from each person's individual self-interest, God's promise of heaven and His warning of hell would not motivate a listener to repent (Matt. 25:31–46). The self-interest of subordinates is the primary means for a manager to gain their voluntary cooperation. Similarly, without profit and loss, customers would lose both their carrot and their stick, which they use to persuade producers to provide what customers wish to buy at prices that they are willing to pay.

Contrary to the Scottish Enlightenment, the free market's economic sanctions are not evolutionary. They are covenantal. They are part of God's curse of Adam and His grace through Christ. A humanistic economist does not recognize the covenantal nature of economic sanctions. He regards them as beyond supernatural design, merely part of a system of evolved rules of conduct. He is incorrect. God has built economic sanctions into His system of biblical law (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). In the long run, corporate obedience to God's biblical law-order will produce higher-than-average positive economic sanctions, which in turn expand corporate wealth. But this predictable outcome must be taken on faith before it can be implemented and thereafter verified statistically. *Grace precedes law*. Obedience to God's law does produce greater wealth, which is supposed to reinforce men's faith in God's covenant. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his coven-

48. North, *Inherit the Earth*, ch. 3.

49. Chapter 9.

50. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

51. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

ant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁵²

Paul in this passage does not deny the legitimacy of individual self-interest. On the contrary, he invokes it: “Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.” His point is that *self-interest should not be devoid of covenantal understanding*. The single-minded pursuit of positive economic sanctions is self-destructive, but this fact does not negate the legitimacy of positive economic sanctions and their pursuit. What is significant, Paul says, is a man’s goal governing his quest for positive economic sanctions, “that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”

What the modern academic defenders of Christian socialism or Christian Keynesianism refuse to acknowledge is that nowhere in the New Testament or the Mosaic law are negative ecclesiastical or civil sanctions imposed on someone who refuses to be open-handed to the poor. Biblical texts recommend open-handedness, but the negative sanctions for rejecting this advice are always imposed by God, not by open-membership public covenantal institutions: church or state. The defenders of Christian socialism or interventionism insist that the Bible’s texts that recommend charity can and should be used to justify endowing the state with the authority to impose violence against those people who resist the politicians’ confiscation of their wealth in the name of assisting the poor.

Policies of political confiscation are adopted by democratically elected politicians in order to purchase votes from those constituents to whom they promise a portion of the plunder. This distribution takes place only after the bureaucrats who administer these programs are paid their share. Defenders of Christian socialism or interventionism who would not tolerate for a moment the suggestion of the biblical right of a church’s officers to impose negative sanctions on members who refuse to tithe to the local church, let alone refuse to surrender half of their income to the church, rail against my view of the confiscatory state, which is Samuel’s.

And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his

52. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. **And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.** And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. **He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.** And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day (1 Sam. 8:11–18).⁵³

In the opinion of the Christian socialist or economic interventionist, *biblically legitimate charity grows out of the barrel of a gun*. The effective mobilization of charity, he believes, is lawfully determined by that organized political group which persuades a majority of voters to hand over the state's gun to the group's elected representatives. As Professor Hay has succinctly presented the case, "The citizens may all agree, to a greater or lesser extent, that no one should be allowed to go without the basic necessities of life. But individuals are not willing to shoulder the burden of caring for the poor unless they know that the burden of caring for the poor will be shared out among all those with sufficient substance to help. So an element of coercion may be entirely acceptable."⁵⁴ I would add, *entirely acceptable especially to those voters who are on the receiving end of the loot*. In short, Hay was necessarily insisting that God's commandment against theft will eventually have to be amended by Christian voters: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

Conclusion

Paul viewed riches as tools that can be put to God's service through charitable giving. He warned against the spiritual pitfalls associated with the pursuit of riches. For those who have already attained riches, he recommended generosity. Wealth is to be put at the service of the poor. The means of service is charity, according to this passage.

Paul did not say that charity is the only form of economic service. He also did not mention service through economic production. Eco-

53. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

54. Donald Hay, *Economics Today: A Christian Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 89.

conomic production directly serves those people who are part of the production system. Men seek to improve their temporal circumstances by exchanging the output of their labor and capital. This method of service does not solve the other problem: the empty hand. Those who have nothing to exchange are outcasts of the system of production.

Paul in this passage tells Timothy to tell the rich that they should open their filled hands to those with empty hands. This is a test of the rich man's faith in God. The alternative is for the rich to exercise faith in the uncertainty of riches. Rich men must serve God or mammon. The same choice faces the poor. They can pursue wealth, or they can trust in God. They must serve God or mammon. The answer to the question, "Whom do you serve?" is found in the answer to the question: "Whom do you trust for your protection?"

There have been occasional attempts to integrate charity as an analytic category into economic theory, but these attempts have failed. Free market economic theory ever since Adam Smith has been based on the assumption that individuals act to improve their circumstances. They seek to exchange an existing set of circumstances for what they hope will be a more pleasing set. This assumption regarding human action has made possible an enormous volume of economic analysis, some of it more realistic than others. But no one has discovered a logically consistent theory of economic action that relies primarily, or even secondarily, on the assumption that charity is a fundamental category of human action. Remove from economic analysis the assumption that people usually act in a self-interested way, and modern economic theory collapses. Remove from economic analysis the assumption that people are occasionally charitable, and virtually all of the analytical system remains.

This insight by free market economists regarding human action is consistent with the principle of the tithe: God claims for His local church only 10% of a person's net income. Whatever individuals give away voluntarily beyond this minimal percentage is a matter of conscience. The principle of the tithe tells us that the system of stewardship that has been established by God relies on individual self-interest as the primary economic motivator. The question is: How will the individual allocate his income—spending, saving, and giving? There is no question, biblically speaking, that as far as the covenantally normal operation of the economy is concerned, God is satisfied with the tithe. The state should be satisfied with even less (I Sam. 8:17). How individuals allocate the remaining 80+ percent is up to them as owners. "Is

it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matt. 20:15).⁵⁵ This response by the land owner, who in the parable represents God, greatly upsets defenders of the modern interventionist state. Their eyes are indeed evil. The Scottish Enlightenment was closer to the Bible on economic principles than are Christian defenders of the modern interventionist state. To promote coercion by state bureaucrats as an alternative to Adam Smith's economics is not a Bible-based solution to the problem of mankind's assertion of autonomy. We must go to the Bible in search of the solution, not to the writings of John Maynard Keynes⁵⁶ and his disciples, who are part of the problem.

No economically productive society has withstood the lure of riches, not even the most rigorous of Western medieval monasteries, which repeatedly became rich because of the self-sacrifice and high rates of investment by the monks. Thrift and hard work produce high output, which in turn produces high income. This is why Western monastic orders became the targets of spiritual reformers every few centuries. None of these calls to return to the ideal of poverty survived the long-term growth effects of income above expenses. The corporate ideal of poverty, when accompanied by thrift and hard work, invariably produces wealth, which over time affects the original goal of sacrificial poverty.

Paul does not tell Timothy to tell rich people in the church to impoverish themselves. He tells Timothy to tell them to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation for the future. *How are the covenant-keeping rich supposed to do this? By being open-handed with the poor.* Paul does not suggest or even imply that charitable giving is a one-time event that is designed to make poor men out of rich men. He says that covenant-keeping rich men inescapably must put their trust somewhere, either in God or in the uncertainty of riches. He calls on them to exercise faith in the God who created the world, and who sustains it by His providence. He calls on them to demonstrate their covenantal subordination to the God of the cosmos by obeying God's law to be generous. There will be a positive sanction in history for such obedience: a good foundation in the future.

55. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 40.

56. On Keynes' background, see Richard Deacon [Donald McCormick], *The Cambridge Apostles: A History of Cambridge University's Elite Intellectual Secret Society* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986). McCormick was an expert in the history of the West's twentieth-century secret service organizations, i.e., spying.

Then what of rich men who are covenant-breakers? Paul never said. Adam Smith did. They should remain socially productive through profit-seeking activities to satisfy customer demand at prices that customers are willing and able to pay. So far, no one has offered a better recommendation.

CONCLUSION

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do (I Tim. 1:3–4).

The primary theme of Paul's first epistle to Timothy is ecclesiastical hierarchy. This larger theme necessarily involves the reciprocal themes of leadership and subordination.

Paul raises the issue of hierarchy in his command to Timothy to challenge false teachers in the church at Ephesus. He transfers to Timothy the authority to speak on Paul's behalf in stamping out a heresy in the church at Ephesus. This command is based on the doctrine of representation. Paul, as an apostle, represents Christ judicially. Timothy represents Paul judicially.

A. The Judaizers

What was this heresy? The heresy of the Judaizers. The Judaizers taught that gentile Christians had to follow the priestly laws of the Mosaic covenant, as interpreted by the rabbis. They brought genealogies into the church, as if genealogies had anything to do with holiness. Paul opposed members of this faction.

Paul then offers a definition of orthodoxy, which he calls sound doctrine, or as the Greek text puts it, *healthful teaching*. He states clearly that the gospel and certain Mosaic civil statutes go together.

But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for man-slayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to

the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust (I Tim. 1:8–11).

I know of no stronger New Testament evidence for the continuing validity of the Mosaic civil law in the New Covenant era. First, Paul says that to argue that these laws do not still apply is “contrary to sound doctrine.” Second, these laws are not made for righteous men. They are made for unrighteous men, i.e., criminals and would-be criminals.

These laws are still valid, Paul says, yet they were Mosaic civil laws. The institutional church does not exercise jurisdiction over unrighteous men, who are not in covenant with the church. This was equally true under the Mosaic covenant. To these laws were attached specified civil sanctions. The judicial rule still holds: *no sanctions—no law*. These sanctions must therefore be applied to unrighteous men who have violated these laws. These men are outside the church covenant. These laws therefore must be enforced by some institution other than the church. There is only one covenantal institution that possesses this authority: civil government.¹

Paul in this passage defends theonomy. The Christian who rejects this conclusion should offer an alternative explanation of this passage. Silence is not an argument. It was not in 1818, either.

B. The Lure of Subordination Through Neutrality

In 1818, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) also refused to regard this passage as either theologically or judicially binding. The church upheld the de-frocking in 1815 of Virginia pastor George Bourne, who had cited I Timothy 1:10 against manstealing as evidence that Southern slave-holding was a sin. The politically correct position of the South’s slaveholding leadership became dominant ecclesiastically in Old School Presbyterianism, North and South, 1818–1861. Only the Civil War (1861–65) persuaded the Old School in the North to adopt abolitionism, not on the basis of the Bible, but as a political necessity. Only the military defeat of the South in 1865 persuaded the Old School in the South to accept, retroactively, the moral legitimacy of abolitionism.²

Old School Presbyterianism was led intellectually by Princeton Theological Seminary, the most academically influential conservative

1. Chapter 1.

2. Appendix D.

Protestant seminary in the world during the nineteenth century. Old School theologians argued that slavery and abolitionism were *adiaphora*—things irrelevant to the Bible and Christianity. Thus, the Old School rejected the abolitionist implications of Bourne's position. A decade later, New England Unitarians took up Bourne's conclusion, but without mentioning Bourne, and converted it into a moral and political cause. By 1865, a handful of New England Unitarians had become the politically dominant ecclesiastical faction in Congress. The Old School Presbyterians, by maintaining their peace with the South's Calvinists by consenting to Bourne's de-frocking, turned their collective backs on the dominant American political and ethical issue, 1820–1865, and thereby handed over political power and legitimacy to the Unitarians. The Old School's attempt to stay religiously neutral on the most important issue of their day led to the de-legitimizing of the Old School after 1865 and its defeat, issue by issue, decade by decade, after 1870. It disappeared in the 1930s.³

Neutrality looks enticing for a while: a way to avoid controversy. But, sooner or later, a reliance on neutrality undermines any movement that tries to justify doing nothing to stop some acknowledged public evil, thereby transferring influence to those who are committed to doing something. Neutrality is a myth. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). The same criticism applies to the concept of political pluralism.⁴

Paul is not neutral in this epistle. He affirms specific civil laws of the Mosaic Covenant as binding theologically in the New Covenant era. He defines theological orthodoxy—sound doctrine—in terms of this affirmation. Non-theonomists prefer to avoid commenting on either Paul's affirmation of Mosaic civil laws or his definition of sound doctrine. They prefer to categorize Paul's use of these Mosaic civil laws as moral laws.⁵ This approach raises a crucial question: Laws enforced by which covenantal institution, church or state? It also raises another crucial question: Which sanctions?

3. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996).

4. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/gnpolpol>)

5. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1957), pp. 67–69.

C. Implications Beyond Ecclesiology

Paul's letter to Timothy focuses on ecclesiology, but its principles cannot be contained inside the four walls of the local church. These are general covenantal principles, so they find applications in the other covenantal institutions: family and state.

1. Political Authority

When Christians pray for rulers, they are involved in peace-keeping. Their prayers on behalf of civil rulers produce results that may be contrary to what civil rulers are planning for the church. These plans are then overruled by God. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1).

Intercessory prayer places civil rulers under God's positive historical sanctions. God responds to intercessory prayer by providing peace for His church. This cause-and-effect relationship rests on a hierarchy: God over state. This hierarchy is manifested in the form of positive sanctions—peace and quiet—for the church and for covenant-keepers generally. The church is under the threat of civil sanctions, but intercessory prayer overturns what appears initially to be a covenant-breaker's preferred hierarchy: state over church.⁶

2. Against the Welfare State

Paul teaches that only a few widows are entitled to permanent financial support from the church: those over age 60 whose descendants refuse to support them, and who were married only once.⁷ Paul limits support from the church to this narrow a category of "widow indeed."

There is no New Testament case for allowing the state to extract wealth from one group of voters in order to transfer it to another group, merely because members of the first group are richer than members of the second group. If it is illegitimate for the church to use wealth collected from voluntary members in order to support permanently widows who are under age 60, or widows who were married more than once, then it is surely illegitimate for covenant-breakers to use the threat of violence to extract wealth from covenant-keepers in order to support impoverished covenant-breakers.

6. Chapter 2.

7. Chapter 6.

When Professor Hay wrote the following, he should have offered support from some biblical text: "The citizens may all agree, to a greater or lesser extent, that no one should be allowed to go without the basic necessities of life. But individuals are not willing to shoulder the burden of caring for the poor unless they know that the burden of caring for the poor will be shared out among all those with sufficient substance to help. So an element of coercion may be entirely acceptable."⁸ A theological assertion with such far-sweeping political implications requires biblical support. But Christian scholars who make such sweeping generalizations as this one rarely supply such support. They import conclusions from the world of early twentieth-century humanist welfare economics, and they baptize these imported conclusions with a few biblical-sounding phrases. They need to provide textual exegesis in support of these imported conclusions.

3. Democracy and Liberty

Consider Paul's doctrine that some elders—but not all—are worthy of financial support (I Tim. 5:17–18).⁹ This view of deserving performance inevitably raises the institutional question of who is responsible for making this judgment. The answer is clear: the individual member, whose donations support the church. The democratic implication of this position should be obvious. Each adult church member has the right to "vote with his feet" when the local church's hierarchy refuses to honor his assessment when he votes with his purse. The economic sanctions of money, either donated or retained, are lawfully in the hands of the laity, whose productivity supports the church.

The Roman Catholic Church's model of geographically based parish church membership was replaced in Northern Europe by the rise of Protestant sects. The democratic ideal rose to prominence in both church and state in Protestant nations. The Protestant concept of the legitimate authority of a church member to decide how much he should pay, and for which services, spread into politics in the mid-seventeenth century. In England, the debate over political sovereignty during the combined civil war and Protectorate era (1642–59) raised the issue of property ownership and the franchise. The Protestant church subsequently set the pattern for the modern democratic state:

8. Donald Hay, *Economics Today: A Christian Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 89.

9. Chapter 7.

the authority of the member over his purse. He can lawfully put his membership where his heart is. He can also lawfully put his money where his heart is.

The problem comes when he seeks through coercive political action to put *your* money where *his* heart is. Christians have been as beguiled by the lure of welfare state politics as non-Christians. They have believed that it is legitimate for the state to extract money on threat of violence if the money is used for broadly defined humanitarian purposes. They have believed in the modern world's version of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote." This was the great fear of Henry Ireton, Oliver Cromwell's son-in-law, at the Putney Debates of the New Model Army in 1647.¹⁰ He believed that by extending the franchise to men without property, those with property would thereby extend to those without property the power to vote themselves a portion of the wealth of those who own property. Yet this is what is done in every local Protestant church in which all adult members have the vote. The tithing members are usually outnumbered by non-tithing members, yet all members vote. The democratic Protestant churches have set the standard for democratic politics. Those members who do not pay a tithe establish institutional spending priorities for those who do pay the tithe.

4. *Slavery and Non-Violent Reform*

Paul makes it clear that slaves are to honor their owners, even when those owners are covenant-breakers.¹¹ While a slave is to accept liberation when offered by the owner (I Cor. 7:21),¹² he is not to run away or otherwise defy his owner. The superiority of freedom to slavery places responsibility on Christian owners to free their slaves. It also places responsibility on the civil government to punish all infractions of the Mosaic laws governing slavery.¹³

England freed its slaves without bloodshed. This was possible because (1) Christians were the primary abolitionists, and they possessed moral legitimacy; (2) slavery was confined to regions of the empire outside of Great Britain; (3) the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain

10. A. S. P. Woodhouse (ed.), *Puritans and Liberty*, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1951).

11. Chapter 8.

12. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion*, ch. 8.

13. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 36.

was urban and based on legally free labor. The United States government went to war because (1) hot-heads in South Carolina seceded before President Lincoln was inaugurated, thus beginning the secession movement; (2) Lincoln wanted to collect national tariffs, and South Carolinians asserted sovereignty over this tax base; (3) Christians in the South defended a morally wicked system of slave breeding by organized fornication, and did so by invoking the Bible.¹⁴ They forgot: God is not mocked.

There is no doubt that Paul accepted slavery as an institution. He regarded it as less desirable than freedom. He offered no theory of natural slavery. He did not invoke the Mosaic law in his acceptance of slavery among the gentiles. He offered a theology of subordination. Slavery is a condition to test the faith of covenant-keeping slaves and their owners. Paul regarded subordination as a means of dominion: dominion over personal sin and resentment, dominion over discontent, dominion over poverty, and ultimately dominion over slavery. The gospel liberates sinners from the bondage of sin, and this is the redemptive starting point for all successful, culture-wide liberation.

And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts (Ps. 119:45).

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:4–5).

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain (James 1:25–26).

According to Paul's theology, personal liberty does not begin with an act of violence. It begins with an act of principled submission to God. This submission is not to be based on a theology of personal quietism. It is to be based on confidence in the future, faith that in the long run, law-abiding service to God and men produces dominion. This is the faith that Moses announced to the Israelites.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou

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shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live (Deut. 30:1–6).

The Mosaic civil laws that legitimized the permanent, inter-generational enslavement of foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46) were part of the Mosaic land laws, which were abolished forever in A.D. 70, with the final replacement of Old Covenant Israel with the church.¹⁵

The Mosaic civil laws governing a master's treatment of his slaves remain in force. To assert that slavery remains authorized by the New Testament, but without the Mosaic civil laws that restrained the owners' mistreatment of slaves, is to assert a form of tyranny. On the other hand, to ignore Paul's acceptance of slavery makes universal abolitionism exegetically impossible to defend biblically. Orthodox New Testament abolitionism, were it to revive, would call for the eradication of all forms of inter-generational slavery, and also any form of non-criminal permanent servitude that is not protected by the Mosaic laws governing the treatment of slaves.

A widely held assumption has been that abolitionism, 1800–1885, eliminated slavery in the West. This is a false assumption. Abolitionism eliminated private chattel slavery, which was replaced in the twentieth century by civilian concentration camps (Britain's Boer War in South Africa) and slave labor camps (Fascist and Communist). Slavery as an ideal was appropriated by messianic civil governments, which made slavery a state monopoly.

15. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

5. *Contentment and Christian Reconstruction*

Paul's warning against discontent rests on the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. God's decree is sovereign. A person's condition is not random. It is part of the providence of God. Neither wealth nor poverty, neither health nor sickness, is outside the comprehensive providence of God. It takes faith to accept this. This is why "godliness with contentment is great gain" (I Tim. 6:6). A covenant-keeper who has been given the gift of contentment has received a highly valuable gift.¹⁶

Then what of the discontent associated with creativity and dedication? What of Paul's command? "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (I Tim. 6:12). "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (II Tim. 4:7). How does someone contentedly fight? The answer: patiently. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1–2). Patience, too, is a gift of God. It is a great gift.

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15).

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life (Rom. 2:4–7).

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses (II Cor. 6:4).

Here we have the biblical alternative to discontent: patience. This is what should keep righteous men moving forward steadily. Patience is a steady working toward a goal. It is dedication that relies heavily on

16. Chapter 10.

confidence in the future, not discontent with the present. Godly patience is based on faith in God's providence. This is not a providence of Christian cultural stalemate, let alone defeat. *It is a providence of cultural victory in history for covenant-keepers.*

Discontent is spiritually dangerous because it implies that God is somehow not in charge. It also implies that historical conditions are stacked against the covenant-keeper. The cross testifies against such a supposition. What looked like a defeat was the basis of Christ's victory. The cross and resurrection took place in history. So did Christ's ascension. This is why all forms of eschatology that imply or boldly state that Christian victory does not involve the extension of redemption and its effects to all of history have not come to grips with the historicity of cross-resurrection-ascension. It was not merely Christ's spirit that rose from the dead, but His body also. The fulfillment of Christ's bodily resurrection in history (I Cor. 15:3, 13–17), involves God's turning Christ's enemies into Christ's footstools in history. Until this happens, the end of history cannot take place. Amillennialism therefore cannot be true, for it denies the hierarchy of Christendom's victory in history.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:25–28).¹⁷

Christian contentment is not supposed to lead to personal quietism or mysticism: a theology of escape from, or acceptance of, things as they are. It is not supposed to produce some version of principled lethargy. *Biblically, contentment means the acceptance of the present order as a starting point for positive change.*

This process of contentment is analogous to sanctification's three stages: definitive, progressive, and final. A covenant-keeper is content with the present because Christ's future, visible, institutional victory over His enemies in history has been announced in advance. *Definitive victory is behind us temporally, for the resurrection and ascension of Christ were in history.* Christendom's victory, not its defeat, is being

17. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

presently worked out historically. Perseverance will result in final victory, both individually and culturally.

This view of patience and contentment is obviously postmillennial. Eschatologies of guaranteed cultural, political, and economic defeat for the gospel in history have a tendency to motivate covenant-keepers to withdraw from “hopeless” battles, which are just about all of the battles outside of the prayer closet and the local church. This is why there are so many trivial battles inside local churches. They are the only battles that most Christians think they can win, mainly by forced exclusion of the losers. Pietism and quietism are far more likely when covenant-keepers see their efforts to transform social sins as doomed from the start.

Pessimillennial covenant-keepers are tempted to adopt a theology of souls-only redemption, and therefore souls-only evangelism. They deny that Christ’s redemption can or even should be comprehensive in history.¹⁸ They are willing to compromise with theories of epistemological or political neutrality, so that they can escape any responsibility for transforming culture or politics or economics in the name of Christ by means of biblical law. They adopt humanism’s theory of political pluralism as the only reasonable hope in a world of guaranteed eschatological defeat for the gospel. They adopt a stalemate mentality.¹⁹ They seek to avoid the discontent associated with an eschatology of assured cultural defeat in history by defining Christian victory so narrowly—internally, personally, familistically—that they can live emotionally with the prospects of this comprehensive cultural defeat.²⁰ They voluntarily and philosophically turn the state over to covenant-breakers and covenant-breaking philosophies with the assertion that God would have it so. Problem: God does not want it so.²¹ God will not have it so.²²

18. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gn-world>)

19. Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), ch. 11. (<http://bit.ly/fnsoldiers>)

20. A representative example of this re-definition of the meaning and extent of gospel victory is the book by David J. Engelsma, a theologian in the Protestant Reformed Church, *Christ’s Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, California: Reformed Witness, 2001).

21. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

22. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/>)

D. Dominion Through Service

1. Following and Leading

This epistle calls covenant-keepers to victory through both their exercise of leadership and their subordination. This seemingly contradictory strategy rests on a presupposition: *we learn how to lead by learning first how to follow*. Put militarily, men begin as recruits, then trainees, then either as low-level “grunts” or their equivalent in the officer corps, second lieutenants. A wise second lieutenant makes it clear early to his top sergeant that he plans to back up the sergeant’s decisions in public. He lets his sergeant know that he is well aware of his own inexperience. The sergeant knows more about the eccentricities of the first lieutenant and the captain than the second lieutenant does. Similarly, a wise church officer had better be familiar with the chain of command when he first begins to lead.

Paul tells Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (I Tim. 4:12). Leaders must lead. But, he also warns him, “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren” (I Tim. 5:1). In short, treat your sergeants with respect.

God has established a strategy of dominion. It involves subordination. Even leadership involves service. This is what the world cannot understand. Jesus taught this principle of leadership.

Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42b–45).

The world sees personal and institutional liberation in terms of the capture of the existing instruments of power. In contrast, Jesus and Paul saw liberation as the transfer of one’s subordination to sin to the yoke righteousness, from mammon to Christ. There is never an escape from subordination; there is only a transfer of allegiance.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and

love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).²³

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28–30).²⁴

2. *The New Testament vs. the Scottish Enlightenment*

What distinguishes the New Testament's economic analysis from modern free market economic theory is this: rival views of the role of wealth as motivation. The New Testament denies that the pursuit of personal wealth is legitimate if it is an autonomous pursuit, i.e., wealth pursued for its own sake.²⁵ The Scottish Enlightenment offered the pursuit of wealth as morally harmless and socially beneficial, whenever this pursuit takes place in a social order based on private property.

Adam Smith's argument that gaining more wealth is a seller's motivation for providing greater customer service is not inconsistent with Christianity; indeed, it is the application of the Bible's service principle to economics. But there is no doubt that this insight cannot be found in the New Testament. *The Scottish Enlightenment placed individual self-interest above service to the other person as the prime motivator in economic life.* The New Testament does not disagree with the accuracy of the observation; it does disagree with the legitimacy of individual self-interest as a person's primary motivation.²⁶

The insight regarding *the seller's self-interested customer service* is the most important insight in both the history of economic thought and economic history. It stands as the basis of the unprecedented expansion of economic wealth, 1750–2012. *The New Testament clearly warns against this motivation, which is the service of mammon.* The free market social order harnesses man's mammon-driven motivation, directing it toward service to customers, whether covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers, but there is no doubt that the lasting academic legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment's social and economic theory is to dispense with all discussions of supernaturally revealed morality or higher service to God. Academic free market theory substitutes imper-

23. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch 14.

24. *Ibid.* ch. 25.

25. Chapter 10.

26. Appendix C.

sonal, undesigned social evolution for God's providential control over history.

The Bible tells us to serve others. Positive sanctions will come as a result. Adam Smith said that the positive sanction is greater wealth. The New Testament does not teach this. It also does not deny it. It does warn men that service is primary; God's blessings, whether eternal or temporal, are secondary. Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), said that this form of service is an important aspect of human motivation. In *The Wealth of Nations*, he stressed self-interested service. In this book, he generally ignored charitable service. His intellectual successors have never regarded *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as contributing anything of analytical interest that is not found also in *The Wealth of Nations*.

Christ warned men to get their priorities straight.²⁷ He warned men to serve others primarily for God's sake, not for their own sake. Therefore, any attempt to substitute temporal sanctions, either positive or negative, as one's top priority, rather than service to God through service to men, is a form of the worship of mammon.

Civil government is not supposed to coerce men into the worship of God over mammon. While political pluralists would agree with this political principle, they rarely agree with the economic implication of this principle.

The Bible does not authorize the use of state power to extract wealth from mammon-worshippers on behalf of God's causes. The commandment against theft includes the forcible extraction of wealth from members of one political group solely to increase the income of another group. This prohibition includes the transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor, or, what in fact takes place, from the rich to the middle class in the name of the poor.

Forcible wealth transfers necessarily must invoke the politics of mammon: economic salvation (healing). *Christian socialism is baptized mammonism*. It substitutes power for voluntarism in the name of charity. Socialism is mammonism as surely as capitalism is, but is far more dangerous to both liberty and economic growth. The dividing theological issue is what a society's goals and means are: the kingdom of God vs. the kingdom of man.

27. North, *Priorities and Dominion*.

Conclusion

Hierarchy is the basis of long-term biblical dominion. This mandates subordination: subordination first to God, and then subordination to others. It is through subordination that men gain authority, including authority over others. This principle is supposed to be the basis of rulership in the church. It should also be the basis of economic practice.

A vertical hierarchical structure governs all covenantal institutions: church, state, and family. There is a vertical hierarchy of lawful authority. A person grows in grace through lawful subordination to covenantal authorities.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake (Rom. 13:1–5).²⁸

There is also horizontal hierarchy, such as showing grace to covenant-breakers. This form of hierarchy is less apparent in covenantal institutions. Covenantal horizontal service creates dependence on God, but not legal subordination to the church. The covenant-keeper serves those outside the faith as a way of testifying to God's grace. This service can result in the beneficiary's eternal destruction: negative sanctions.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head (Rom. 12:19–20).²⁹

On the other hand, horizontal covenantal service can bring salvation: positive sanctions.

28. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

299. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved (I Cor. 10:32–33).

What the New Testament does not teach, but which undergirds free market theory, is the fact that non-covenantal horizontal service to customers is the basis of income for producers. The pursuit of money by sellers matches the pursuit of benefits by customers. Both the seller and the customer must seek to please the person on the other side of the potential transaction. *But in God's economy, service is a self-authenticating goal.* One's motive for service must not rest on the hope of direct, personal temporal profit. Nevertheless, we should expect profit. God's sanctions in this world are not random.

Appendix A

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

We come now to a unified judicial issue that has two aspects: divorce and remarriage. Let me make myself as clear as I can: this is one topic. Any exegesis that attempts to consider divorce and remarriage as separate judicial issues must abandon both the Mosaic law and Christ's teaching on this two-fold but judicially unified subject.

This topic has divided Christian theologians ever since the very early church. Whenever we find a topic in the Bible that is universal in scope, both geographically and chronologically, but which has not yet been resolved by the church, we can be sure that there is a long-term debate regarding the proper principle of biblical interpretation and its application to specific texts, i.e., a debate over hermeneutics. In this case, the debate is over rival judicial interpretations.

The principle of judicial interpretation that I have adopted is *victim's rights*.¹

A. Six Primary Texts

There are six defining texts that deal with divorce and/or remarriage: three in the Mosaic law and three in the gospels. Only four of these texts receive much attention by commentators.

Here are the three Mosaic texts, in the order of their familiarity:

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorce-

1. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnvictim>) See also Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012) Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix M.

ment, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance (Deut. 24:1–4).

If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him; And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days. But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you (Deut. 22:13–21).

When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her (Deut. 21:10–14).

Here are the three New Testament texts, in order of their familiarity:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her

a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Matt. 5:31–32).

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it (Matt. 19:3–12).

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (Mark 10:2–12).

B. Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament

There were three legal avenues available to a Hebrew man to gain a lawful divorce under the Mosaic covenant: a bill of divorce, divorce by execution, and the divorce of a war bride. There was one legal avenue for a woman to achieve a divorce: divorce by execution.

1. Bill of Divorce

The bill of divorce was grounded in a two-fold factor: a *wife's loss of favor* in her husband's eyes because of *her uncleanness*. "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife" (Deut. 24:1–2).

The bill of divorce did not have to be confirmed by any court in order to be lawful. It was available only to husbands. A husband could secure a divorce on his own authority, i.e., on his word alone. A woman could gain a divorce only by the intervention of a civil court to convict her husband of a capital crime. On this issue, there was no equality before the law. The wife had less protection.

The text is specific: there had to be uncleanness. The exegetical problem is this: "uncleanness" is not defined in this text or in any other. It is described in other passages, but none of them seems to apply well to this passage. The Hebrew word translated here as "uncleanness" is more frequently translated "nakedness" in the King James Version. It sometimes refers to sexual sin, but it is more comprehensive than this. In Ezekiel, the word is used for national apostasy. Ezekiel brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel with these words:

Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD: Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy **nakedness** discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy **nakedness** unto them, that they may see all thy **nakedness**. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy (Ezek. 16:35–38).

This degree of rebellion would have been a capital crime. A man could gain a divorce by execution if his wife committed any capital crime, if he could prove this infraction in a civil court. Rushdoony lists these crimes as capital crimes for women: unchastity before marriage (Deut. 22:21), adultery after marriage (Deut. 22:22–23; Lev. 20:10), prostitution by a priest's daughter (Lev. 21:9), bestiality (Lev. 20:16; 18:23), wizardry or witchcraft (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:27), transgressing the covenant (Deut. 17:2–5), and incest (Lev. 20:11–12, 14).² Furthermore, a woman could have her husband executed for 19 infractions.³ In this sense, there was no equality before the law. The wife had greater protection.

If “uncleanness” referred exclusively to a crime, let alone a capital crime, how was it lawful for a husband, acting on his own authority, to send his wife away if she had committed a crime? In such a case, he would have been sending a criminal into the community, perhaps even to marry again. The Mosaic law was so hostile to such an act of knowing mercy that it mandated that parents bring a rebellious adult son before the magistrates and demand his execution (Deut. 21:18–21).⁴ So, it is inconceivable that “nakedness” in this instance referred to a crime, let alone a capital crime.

Another judicial problem is the unilateral nature of the bill of divorce. There is no indication in the text that any court had to approve it before it became legally binding on the dismissed wife. She had no judicial appeal available to her. Her husband possessed a God-given authority over her to divorce her, and no human institution could lawfully reverse his judgment.

There was another possible avenue for gaining a divorce: *the vow of jealousy*. This legal procedure did not take place in a civil court. In order to be granted a divorce by execution, a husband had to prove in a civil court that his wife had committed adultery. Sometimes he could not prove this for lack of evidence, but he was nevertheless suspicious. This is why there was the vow of jealousy. This was the only law in the Mosaic law that was to be judged in terms of a miracle: the direct intervention of a supernatural force in the presence of a priest. The passage is not familiar to most readers (Num. 5:12–31). It is the longest

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 402.

3. *Idem*.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

single law in the Bible, unless we consider the laws of leprosy to be a single law (Lev. 13, 14).⁵ If she was found guilty of adultery, she was not to be executed; she was instead visibly cursed by the swelling of her body (v. 27). Then she was to become a curse among the people (v. 27). This, clearly, was grounds for a divorce, but it was not grounds for her execution, presumably because the evidence was based on a miracle. It testified against her, but not to the extent of mandating her execution. There were no witnesses. Adultery was a capital crime under the Mosaic law. “And the man that committeth adultery with another man’s wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:10). This had to be proven in a civil court. The ordeal of jealousy was tried in an ecclesiastical court.

Deuteronomy 24:1–4, however, does not refer to any court of law, nor does it mention any right of a woman to gain a legal divorce by execution. It refers only to a husband who writes a writ of divorce. It was this Mosaic law that the Pharisees cited in their questioning of Jesus.

I argued in *Tools of Dominion* that some of the Mosaic law’s capital crimes did not automatically require execution. The victim had the right to show mercy.⁶ So, it might be argued that a husband wrote a bill of divorce instead of having his wife executed. But there is an overwhelming argument against this interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1–4: Jesus told the Pharisees that Moses had given Israel this law because of the hardness of men’s hearts. It was not given because of the softness of their hearts, i.e., their mercifulness. So, whatever the contextual meaning of “uncleanness”—we are not told what this was—it did not refer to a crime defined by a capital crime statute.

The wife had lost favor in the eyes (evaluation) of her husband. What was the meaning of favor? The Hebrew word means what it does in English. Someone finds favor in another person’s assessment.

But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison (Gen. 39:21).

And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty (Ex. 3:21).

Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix M:K.

handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens (Ruth 2:13).

The justification for divorcing her was her uncleanness. Either this uncleanness could not be proven in a civil court, or else this uncleanness was insufficient to justify her execution. Whatever it was, the infraction was so minor judicially that Jesus said that God had given Hebrew men this way of divorce because of their hard hearts. His implication was obvious: the men should have overlooked the infraction.

I see no other way around the following interpretation of this law: *the bill of divorce was given to protect wives*. Jesus' insistence that this law was God's condescension to hardhearted husbands means that *it was not designed to protect husbands*. Their hardheartedness was the greater infraction in God's eyes, not the wives' uncleanness. The Mosaic law was less rigorous in dealing with the sins and crimes of women. There were fewer capital crimes for women, as Rushdoony points out. God's toleration under the Mosaic law included non-criminal uncleanness. Their husbands should have been patient with them, but they weren't. Therefore, had there been no legal way for a husband to remove his wife from his presence, his hardheartedness would have made her life miserable. This Mosaic law offered a way for a wife to escape from her husband's mean spirit, so that she could marry someone else. He wrote her a bill of divorce on his own authority. He did not consult a court. This was unquestionably legal.

A woman had no comparable option with respect to a husband who was unclean in her eyes. The law says nothing about her right to write him a bill of divorce. But if his infraction was one of the 19 capital crimes, she could relieve herself of his presence, and keep all of his assets, too.

Was she guilty of a major sin? The context indicates that she was not. A divorced wife could remarry (Deut. 24:2). In contrast, a wife who had secretly committed fornication prior to the marriage had to be executed. "Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you" (Deut. 22:21). The phrase, "so shalt thou put evil away from among you," was familiar to the Israelites.

The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put

the evil away from among you (Deut. 17:7).

And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel (Deut. 17:12).

And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you (Deut. 19:18–20).

If a woman had committed a capital offense, she was to be executed, assuming that her spouse asked this sanction of the court. If he extended mercy, she was to be considered covenantally dead, and therefore ineligible for remarriage. The same was true for a man who committed a capital offense. There were more capital crimes for men than for women. So, to argue that uncleanness in the context of divorce was a capital crime, despite the fact that a husband did not have to bring his wife before a civil court, is to argue that God subsidized evil by means of the bill of divorce: she could lawfully remarry. Instead of putting away evil in the land, a husband merely put away his wife, making her available for someone else. God allowed another man to enjoy life with a sinner who supposedly deserved execution. The Mosaic law would therefore have subsidized a capital criminal. This makes no sense, biblically speaking.

I recognize an exegetical problem at this point. The Hebrew word for “uncleanness” elsewhere indicates a major infraction—indeed, a capital crime. But if, in the context of Deuteronomy 24, it also has this meaning, then a civil court had to be convened to try the case. Divorce by execution would have been mandatory. Only her husband, as her victim, had the legal right to show mercy to the convicted wife and her partner. The court did not possess this right. But this line of reasoning was cut short by Jesus, who made it plain that this law was not given by Moses for the sake of husbands’ mercifulness, but rather for their hardheartedness. If we accept Jesus’ explanation, we cannot accept “uncleanness” in this context as a capital crime. The civil government had no authority in this instance.

Jesus’ disciples understood the limit that this law had placed on wives, and also the burden that Jesus’ revision would place on hus-

bands. Jesus said, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt. 19:9–10).

The Mosaic law of divorce by writ was a two-edged sword. It favored husbands in the sense that it was only available to husbands: no equality before the law. But it favored wives in the sense of providing a way for a wife of a hardhearted man to get out of the marriage and find a more tolerant husband. Jesus announced the judicial termination of this inequality before the law. A wife could get rid of her husband, He said. This thought shocked His disciples, who obviously approved of inequality before the law in this instance. *Their shock testifies to the radical break with the Mosaic law that Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage represented.* He was teaching that turnabout is fair play, that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. "His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt. 19:10). Jesus did not soften the blow—a blow to 14 centuries of unilateral leeway for dissatisfied Israelite husbands. "But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given" (v. 11).

2. Divorce by Execution

The second passage, Deuteronomy 22:13–21, is straightforward. This was divorce by execution. It involved evidence, or lack thereof, for the wife: tokens of virginity. The punishment was death for the convicted wife or an economic fine paid to the father for the husband's false testimony. Notice also that the convicted husband was never allowed to divorce his wife (v. 19). This did not give her a license to commit a capital crime. God's law does not subsidize evil. If she committed a capital crime, he could rid himself of her through execution by a civil court.

3. Divorce of a War Bride

The third passage is not well known. The law of warfare required the Israelites to execute all the males of any nation outside of Canaan that refused corporately to surrender before a war broke out (Deut. 20:13). The females were to be spared (v. 14). It was lawful for an Israelite to marry one of these captive women (Deut. 21:13). If a man

married such a woman, and then grew tired of her for any reason, he could divorce her (v. 14). She then went free. She could not be sold (v. 14). This was because she was no longer a slave. Her adoption into his family through marriage had liberated her from her slave status. A divorce could not place her back into slave status. It was easy to divorce a former captive. Her husband had to prove nothing.

4. *Victim's Rights*

A husband faced two major negative institutional sanctions for divorcing his wife: the loss of the use of the divorced wife's dowry for family investing and the loss of his children.

The dowry was hers, not his. Rebekah's dowry was hers, not Isaac's. Abraham through his servant had given her the dowry. "And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things" (Gen. 24:53). This implies that a wife divorced by writ took out of the marriage the wealth that she had brought into it from her family, for no court of law had convicted her of any crime. Wealth was familistic under the Mosaic tribal system (Num. 36:6–9).⁷ By adopting her into his family, her husband had gained the use of her wealth. As a now-disinherited wife, he could no longer lay claim to her family's wealth. He had to return it to her, which might not have been easy if it had been used to purchase an illiquid asset,⁸ such as a long-term lease of land. She would have been entitled to the return of assets of equal value, including liquidity, to the assets she had brought in. However, if the woman was a concubine—a married woman without a dowry—she received nothing.

Which parent gained legal authority over the children? There is no written law governing this matter. The one biblical example that we have is the pre-Mosaic case of Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham sent both of them away. But this had been Sarah's command: she did not want Ishmael to inherit (Gen. 21:12–13). So, this example—the mother who received the children—is authoritative only by default.

A stronger case rests on the principle of victim's rights. Because the wife had not been convicted by a court, she was the victimized

7. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 22.

8. A perfectly liquid asset is defined as an asset that can be exchanged for money without advertising costs, delay, or offering a discount to the buyer. Money is commonly defined as the most liquid asset.

party. Her husband's word had unilaterally ended her marriage. Also, Jesus identified the husbands as hardhearted. He spoke on God's behalf. I interpret this law accordingly. So, the wife would have been entitled to take the children with her if she chose to, which she probably did. The husband bore a risk for unilaterally divorcing her: the loss of their children. This would have been an incentive for him to overlook her infraction, which he was morally supposed to do anyway.

C. The Theology of New Testament Divorce

The New Testament's doctrine of divorce begins with God's lawful divorce of Old Covenant Israel. Jesus brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel, a faithless wife. Israel had pursued false gods ever since the days of the judges (Jud. 2:12–13). Jesus charged Israel with long-term covenant-breaking. Israel had also been a murderous nation, Jesus said, and would prove itself murderous after His departure.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that **ye are the children of them which killed the prophets**. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I **send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify**; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee**, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Matt. 23:29–38).

Divorce is a covenantal act in response to a covenant-breaking act. What kind of act? Let us begin our discussion with a consideration of capital crimes.

A person who is married to someone who has committed a capital crime is to be delivered from the marriage by the execution of the criminal spouse by the civil government. This is divorce by execution.

Conviction for having committed a capital crime, as defined by the Mosaic law, would have led to the execution of the perpetrator. This would have released the spouse from any further legal obligation to the deceased spouse. This judicial release would also have transferred the assets of the deceased criminal the spouse. The now-released spouse then had the right to remarry.

We see this system best in the ministry of Jesus. His ministry involved corporate condemnation. Israel, Jesus said, had repeatedly committed murder. God would soon deliver Himself from His marriage to Old Covenant Israel by means of a public divorce. This would be followed by Israel's execution.

The crucifixion of Jesus was Israel's consummate act of murder. Jesus had foretold it.

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet (Matt. 21:33–46).⁹

9. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

God's transfer of His kingdom from Old Covenant Israel to the institutional church was grounded judicially in the biblical principle of divorce by execution. God did not divorce Old Covenant Israel merely by writing a bill of divorcement and sending her away, the way that Joseph was ready to deal with Mary (Matt. 1:19). Instead, God executed Old Covenant Israel in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome.¹⁰ This was done in a judicial context. Israel had been warned. Jesus brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel that constituted God's public announcement: "Guilty as charged." The proof of Israel's guilt, Jesus announced, would be His own execution at the hands of Israel. The parable said that Israel would kill the son of the land owner, who had come as the agent of his father to secure a rendering of accounts from the husbandmen. The land owner would then retaliate. "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (v. 41). This would terminate the Holy Land. Its status as holy—set apart by God—would be removed. The kingdom, which was Old Covenant Israel's inheritance, would then go to the church. "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (v. 43).

National Israel countered Jesus' covenant lawsuit against the nation by bringing a covenant lawsuit against Him, and then by securing His execution. This fulfilled part of Jesus' prophecy, namely, the execution of the son.

There was another part of this prophecy: Israel's murder of a new generation of prophets.

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:34–36).

Israel's subsequent actions after Jesus had delivered this prophecy-lawsuit confirmed that Israel had been the object of His lawsuit. They executed Stephen (Acts 7). This was a prelude to mass persecution of

10. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

the church. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). This was sufficient evidence to warrant God's covenantal divorce of Israel.

The first public announcement of the transfer of God's kingdom to the church came early in the Book of Acts. Peter announced this transfer in his first presentation of the covenant lawsuit against Israel. First, he described the church members' speaking in tongues as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16).¹¹ Second, he identified Israel's capital crime. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). In his second presentation, Peter announced that there is only one way to salvation. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This meant that Israel was now lawfully divorced.

Execution was delayed until Jesus' prophecy of Israel's persecution of the next group of prophets—agents of the church—was fulfilled. Final judgment came for Israel in A.D. 70. This event fulfilled Jesus' prophecy, "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:36–38).

While it was lawful for a man under the Mosaic law to divorce his wife for infractions other than capital crimes, Jesus made it plain that this loose view of marriage had not been God's standard originally. "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not

11. Peter said that the church was founded by the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. This text refutes the claim by conventional dispensationalists that no Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in the New Testament era of the church. The dispensationalists' theory of the church era as a "great parenthesis," unknown to the Old Testament, is refuted by this verse. This fact was recognized by J. C. O'Hair and Cornelius Stam in the 1940s, who jointly developed ultradispensationalism: the church as the work of Paul's evangelism, not Peter's. What Peter founded in Acts 8 was not the church, Stam taught. Stam, *Things That Differ: The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism* (Stephens Point, Wisconsin: Worsalla, 1951).

so" (Matt. 19:8). This passage does not refer to the practice of polygamy, but it is associated judicially with Peter's covenant lawsuit against Old Covenant Israel. Peter's lawsuit rested on two judicial principles: (1) God's divorce of convicted Israel; (2) the identification of the church as God's only bride. This was why he mandated baptism. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38–39). Baptism replaced circumcision as the New Covenant's mark of adoption into the kingdom of God, i.e., membership in the bride of Christ.¹²

This is the New Testament's application of the Mosaic law's principle of divorce by execution. But what of sins or crimes that are less heinous than capital crimes? What is the New Testament's view of their effect on the marriage covenant? To answer this, we must first understand Jesus' view of divorce and remarriage.

D. Jesus vs. the Mosaic Law of Remarriage

Jesus annulled the Deuteronomic law of divorce and remarriage. He replaced it with another law. He did so in three passages. We have already read these, but review is useful.

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Matt. 5:31–32).

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said,

12. We must distinguish between *participation* in Christ's bride and *being* Christ's bride. Roman Catholic historian Leon Podles includes a chapter on what he calls bridal mysticism. Beginning in the twelfth century, this tradition within the Roman Catholic Church has confused Christ's love of the church as His bride with a concept not taught in the Bible, Christ's love of the individual Christian as His bride. He presents a strong case for bridal mysticism as an important factor in the feminization of the Roman Church. A heterosexual man cannot easily relate to the idea of being loved individually by Christ as a husband loves his bride. Mystical women, on the other hand, have responded positively to this imagery. Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas, Texas: Spence, 1999), chaps. 6, 7.

For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Matt. 19:3–9).

And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (Mark 10:10–12).

1. *Matthew 5:31–32*

Rushdoony's exposition of Matthew 5:32 is correct regarding the meaning of the Greek word translated as "fornication." It is not the Greek word for "adultery." It connotes sins more general than copulation.¹³ But Rushdoony was incorrect regarding Deuteronomy 24:1–2. He interpreted Jesus' words as a condemnation of the Jewish theologians for having made a rigorous Deuteronomic law more lax. "Jesus then proceeded to reaffirm Deuteronomy 24:1–4."¹⁴ Also, "the law concerning marriage and divorce remains one throughout Scripture. The cultural particulars as reflected in the law can and do change, but the law itself does not."¹⁵ This is incorrect, both here and as a general principle of interpretation.

Rushdoony argued that this Deuteronomic law was rigorous, while the rabbis loosened it dramatically. He cited Alfred Edersheim's comments on how lax the divorce laws were in the teachings of the rabbis in Jesus' day.¹⁶ But this divorce law was lax in Moses' day, too. It granted a greater degree of unilateral authority to husbands than what had prevailed prior to Moses, as well as what is mandatory today. This was what Rushdoony denied. He never dealt with the central judicial issue

13. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, pp. 406–11.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 410.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 414.

16. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, 1897), II, p. 332–33; in Rushdoony, *ibid.*, p. 409–10.

in the Pharisees' challenge to Jesus: the bill of divorce. This divorce action was administered unilaterally by the husband. There is no hint in the text of Deuteronomy that any court had to approve this unilateral divorce or that any court could override it. This laxness, Jesus said, was allowed by the Mosaic law because of the hardness of the husbands' hearts.

Rushdoony did not acknowledge the sharp judicial discontinuity that the New Covenant has established in the law of divorce and remarriage, a discontinuity that the disciples immediately recognized. He denied that Jesus had changed the Mosaic law of divorce and remarriage. It is difficult to understand how he could have ignored the obvious. Jesus did change this two-part law. As we shall see, He equalized the divorce law for husbands and wives. He also changed the law regarding the remarriage of a divorce-initiating marriage partner, who cannot lawfully remarry under the New Covenant. Jesus called such remarriage adulterous.

Rushdoony was also incorrect about the reason for any change in any Mosaic law, which he said was cultural. Many Mosaic laws have been changed, not just their cultural setting. When Jesus' death and resurrection definitively terminated all covenantal aspects of the tribes, the Promised Land, and the Levitical priesthood, this necessarily also terminated much of the Mosaic legislation, which was tied to these three aspects of the Mosaic Covenant.

On what judicial basis did Jesus do this? As the new high priest. The New Covenant annulled the Levitical priesthood and restored the Melchizedekal (Heb. 7). Jesus is the high priest, the epistle to the Hebrews says, even though He was born into the tribe of Judah, not priestly Levi.

2. *Matthew 19:3–9*

Here, Jesus made other modifications. In this revision of the Mosaic law, He identified as adulterous any marriage between a man and a lawfully divorced wife (v. 9). Under the Mosaic law, a unilaterally divorced wife could lawfully remarry anyone except a priest, as we shall see.

In this passage, Jesus added another restriction: *no remarriage is lawful for a man who has unilaterally divorced his wife*. "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (v. 9a). In this ex-

ample, a man has divorced his wife for something other than fornication. He therefore may not lawfully remarry. This means that *the divorce was lawful*, just as it was in Deuteronomy 24:1. What is unlawful is his remarriage.

Jesus was responding here to the laxity of the Mosaic law. Jesus tightened it. Adultery was a capital crime under the Mosaic law. Jesus did not annul the penal sanction for adultery: execution. No other New Testament passage annulled it, either. Therefore, because Jesus here defined as adulterous any remarriage by the initiator following a unilateral divorce, a divorced wife can bring lawful charges against her ex-husband and his new wife. She can demand their execution. This was not true under the Mosaic Covenant.

3. Mark 10:10–12

This is the crucial New Testament passage on divorce and remarriage, yet it is the one least known. “And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.” *Here, Jesus radically altered the Mosaic law of divorce.* Under the Mosaic law, only a husband had the right of unilateral divorce by means of a written document. Under the New Covenant, the wife also has the right to secure a unilateral divorce by writ.

Why the judicial change? The text does not say, but there is an obvious answer: *baptism*. Both males and females are adopted into the family of God’s church through baptism. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Jesus have put on Jesus. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:27–28). *Baptism has established the principle of gender equality before the law.* Women were not baptized in the Old Covenant, so in the area of divorce and remarriage, there had not been equality before the law.

Jesus applied the remarriage law equally to husbands and wives. “And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery” (vv. 11–12). *Both parties have the right of unilateral divorce, and both are forbidden to remarry.* If the divorcing partner leaves a

spouse for anything but a sexual crime in the broadest sense (“fornication”), he or she cannot not lawfully remarry.

Christians should uphold three judicial positions on divorce and remarriage. First, adultery remains a capital crime in the New Covenant. No New Testament law has changed this Mosaic Covenant civil sanction. Second, Jesus identified as adulterous the remarriage of a divorcing spouse who did not prove in a civil or ecclesiastical court that the now-divorced spouse had committed fornication. Third, the victim—the unconvicted divorced spouse—can demand anything up to the death penalty for an ex-spouse who remarries. This would also include the execution of the new spouse. Under such a threat, the number of available partners for people who had initiated a no-trial divorce would be highly restricted.

Did Jesus authorize divorce for anything other than fornication in the broadest sense, i.e., committing a capital crime? I see no way around it: He did. A person who initiates what we today call a no-fault divorce cannot lawfully remarry, according to Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus did not say that a person may not initiate a divorce. He mentioned no negative sanction for obtaining a no-trial divorce, nor is there any implication that a negative sanction should be imposed, other than the loss of the children, as implied by the Mosaic Covenant. But in the New Covenant, a wife can initiate the divorce, so she must pay the price of losing her children, just as the divorcing husband did in the Mosaic Testament. What requires a negative civil sanction is an adulterous remarriage. Conclusion: *the New Testament authorizes unilateral no-trial divorce and deadly fault remarriage for the initiator*. A person can lawfully get out of a misery-inducing marriage, but only at the price of permanently single status. The divorced spouse can lawfully remarry. There is a judicial distinction between the initiator and the victim. The unilaterally divorced spouse must be presumed innocent if the divorce was not a matter of a court-proven sin.

Again, let me reaffirm my original assertion, namely, that divorce and remarriage are a judicial unit in the Bible. The laws of divorce cannot legitimately be considered apart from the laws of remarriage, and vice versa. This was true of Deuteronomy 24:1–4, and it is equally true of Jesus’ reformulation of the laws of divorce and remarriage. Any critic of my view of the legitimacy of unilateral no-trial divorce under the New Testament who does not also discuss my insistence on the capital sanction for the remarriage of the initiator of a no-trial divorce is an intellectual cheat and a charlatan. (I say this, frankly, because so many

critics of theonomy have been intellectual cheats and charlatans.)¹⁷

My interpretation represents a major break with traditional Bible commentators. I have not come to this conclusion because I wish to compromise with my divorce-prone era. I have rarely been one to compromise with much of anything in my era. I have come to this conclusion regarding no-trial divorce because I see no textually based way around it. Jesus did not place a “no remarriage” restriction on all divorced people. He placed a “no remarriage” restriction on all those who initiate and secure a no-trial divorce—the same kind of divorce that Moses authorized in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. In Deuteronomy 24:2, a wife who had been divorced by her husband had the right to remarry. She had been the victim. She had not been proven guilty of a capital crime in a court of law. She had been unilaterally divorced. Her husband had obtained a no-trial divorce, i.e., no fault on her part had been proven in a court.

Jesus tightened this law in two ways. First, He forbade the divorcing spouse to remarry, on threat of execution and excommunication for adultery. Second, He opened the legal door for wives to initiate a no-trial divorce. In the New Covenant era, husbands must also toe the line, not just wives. Husbands must bear the risk of getting booted unilaterally. The hardness of hearts, Jesus thereby has announced, is no longer limited to men. It is now extended to women. But He placed a negative sanction against hardhearted initiators of a no-trial divorce: a permanent ban on their remarriage. This form of hardheartedness has a high price in the New Covenant.

What about soft hearts of covenant-keepers? The covenant-keeper who believes that his or her calling, testimony, or dominion is being thwarted by a spouse has the right to break the marriage vow and adopt a life of celibacy. The divorced spouse receives authority over the children. The divorced spouse receives a joint share of the marriage’s assets. The divorced spouse is free to remarry. The divorced spouse also possesses authority to bring formal charges against the ex-spouse, should the ex-spouse remarry. But there is a lawful escape from a bad marriage: celibacy.

Because of baptism’s replacement of circumcision, all women have been elevated to equality with men judicially, with one exception: a right to hold any office in the church that authorizes them to speak in

17. Yes, I know: scholars are not supposed to say such things. As to who laid down this rule, nobody knows, but it surely helps intellectual cheats and charlatans.

church. They are not allowed to speak in church worship services.¹⁸ This otherwise extensive equality applies beyond ecclesiastical law. It applies across the range of the kingdom of God, which includes civil government and family government. *Nowhere is the New Covenant's extension of equality before the law more clearly seen than in the law of divorce and remarriage.* The implication for divorce and remarriage is that both parties possess equal judicial authority to initiate a no-trial divorce, and both suffer the same penalty for remarriage.

E. Victim's Rights and No-Trial Divorce

The judicial principle of victim's rights is the governing principle of biblical law. This principle rests on the identification of God as the victim of sin and crime, from the rebellion of Adam (Gen. 3) to the final rebellion of Satan (Rev. 20:9–10). A victim has the right to press charges, just as God presses charges from the garden of Eden until the final judgment (Rev. 20:14–15). A victim also has the legal right to show mercy by not pressing charges, just as Jesus did. “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots” (Luke 23:33–34).

Covenant-keepers should always ask in any judicial dispute: “Who is the victim?” The victim of a unilateral divorce under the Mosaic law was the wife. We know this because of what Jesus told the Pharisees. “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8). The divorced wife's status as a victim was why she had the right to marry again under the Mosaic law. She had not been condemned by a civil court. She had not been found guilty of a capital crime. Her husband had not attained divorce by execution.

An innocent party should not be penalized judicially by either church or state. *The New Testament's laws governing divorce are also governed by the principle of victim's rights.* A victimized spouse should not be penalized by either church or state.

The modern world rarely imposes the negative sanction required by the Bible in the case of capital crimes: execution. Sometimes a bib-

18. “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church” (I Cor. 14:34–35).

lical capital crime is not regarded by the state as a crime, e.g., blasphemy. This places the spouses of capital criminals at a great disadvantage. Many churches teach that innocent spouses must remain legally bound for life to these covenant-breakers. *The legal solution to this problem is for both church and state to regard the criminal spouse as covenantally dead.* With respect to the marital bond, the legal status of being covenantally deceased due to a conviction for having committed a capital crime should be the judicial equivalent of physical death. The innocent spouse should gain control over all of the family's property and also the children, just as if the criminal were literally dead. The state should enforce this transfer.

Jesus did not sentence unilaterally divorced wives to the single life, nor did He sentence unilaterally divorced husbands to a life without marriage. *The initiator comes under the restriction, not the victim.* Jesus made it clear that there are valid grounds for divorce. The key word is "except." Jesus said, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matt. 19:9).

It is not adulterous for the victim to remarry after a court has put away a spouse for fornication, which is not the same as adultery. This is true whether the victimized spouse is male or female. The victim has rights. The victim is not to suffer because of the fornicator. Just because one spouse commits fornication, there is no obligation for the other spouse to remain with the sinner, or to remain single forever because of the victim's legal separation from the sinner, whose sin had broken the marriage covenant.¹⁹

Consider Jesus' words: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:11b–12). Here, He offered no exception based on fornication. He did not need to; He had already offered it elsewhere. He was not speaking here of deadly fault divorce, i.e., divorce based on the spouse's commission of a capital crime or sexual deviation. He was speaking here of no-trial divorce. *The spouse who initiated a no-trial divorce did not do so on the basis of court-convicted fornication by the now-divorced partner.* To argue that Jesus was condemning every partner who initiates a divorce, even when the divorced spouse is a court-

19. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/resecond>)

convicted fornicator, is to argue that a victimized spouse can never lawfully remarry after the divorce is granted by the authorities. This violates the principle of victim's rights.

Who is prohibited from remarrying? Five kinds of people. *First*, a spouse who is lawfully executed for having committed a capital crime. *Second*, a spouse who has been convicted of having committed such a crime, but who has been shown mercy by the victim. The victim has the right to tell the civil court, "No remarriage; otherwise, execute." *Third*, a spouse who has committed what the Bible identifies as a capital crime, but which the legally responsible civil court refuses to acknowledge is a capital crime. The innocent marriage partner then divorces the criminal. The civil court should prohibit the lawfully divorced criminal from remarrying. If the civil court refuses to enforce this, then a church court should excommunicate any convicted spouse upon remarriage, assuming that the church has not already excommunicated the person for having committed the crime. The victim is then allowed to remarry. *Fourth*, a person who has committed sexual infractions that may not be capital crimes, but which have broken the marriage in the opinion of the victimized spouse. An addiction to pornography would qualify, or constant demands for the partner to perform sexual acts that the partner regards as deviant, where the court agrees. *Fifth*, a spouse who has initiated a no-trial divorce.

The Protestant church has long regarded desertion as valid legal grounds for divorce. This is the correct conclusion, but for the wrong reason. *The deserter has initiated a no-trial divorce.* Civil and ecclesiastical authorities should formally identify desertion as a unilateral no-trial divorce. The deserter must not be allowed to remarry. The deserted spouse should be allowed to remarry.

The spouse who wishes to be identified as the victim of a no-trial divorce should be allowed by law to oppose the divorce. This will not save the marriage, but it establishes the divorce as unilateral. If both parties agree to the no-fault divorce, then neither should be allowed to remarry. This is why a deserted spouse should protest to a court.

What about child-support payments? If the deserter is employed, he or she owes child support until the child reaches adulthood at age 20 (Ex. 30:14) or else marries, whichever event takes place first. The deserted spouse is a legal victim, in the same way that the divorced wife in the Mosaic Covenant was a legal victim. The economic burden of support should fall on the deserter. If the deserter is the wife, she owes payment. If she remarries, she has committed adultery. Her ex-

husband should be allowed to demand her execution and her new husband's execution. But, as a matter of mercy, he may prefer to extract child-support payments from the wife and her new husband. If she quits her job, her new husband must take over the obligation.

What about the distribution of property? Assets should be divided according to whoever owned which assets before the marriage. In a legal system which establishes jointly owned property, which I think is the New Testament's norm—baptism's equality applied to capital—the deserted party should automatically receive half of the couple's assets.

What about alimony? The deserted party should receive half of the after-tax earned income generated by the deserter until such time as the deserted party remarries. This protects the deserted party. It also makes the deserter less capable of finding another spouse. Of course, if the state enforces capital punishment for the deserter's remarriage, this sanction should be sufficient to scare away a new partner.

If there are no sanctions, there is no law. The death penalty for the remarriage of the initiator of a no-trial divorce should always be an option for the divorced spouse to require. The New Testament's authorization of no-trial divorces must be accompanied by the civil sanction for adultery: the execution of both remarriage partners.

F. Continuity and Discontinuity in Biblical Law

On what judicial basis did Jesus annul the Mosaic laws of divorce and remarriage? On the basis of *a change in the priesthood*. Here is the New Testament's principle of judicial revision: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). "So also Jesus glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:5–6). Jesus, as both the son of God and the eternal high priest, possessed the God-given authority to change the Mosaic law.

The Mosaic law as a system died and was buried with Jesus. In this sense, those who argue for the complete annulment of the Mosaic law are correct. This took place at the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Its visible sign was the top-to-bottom tearing of the curtain that separated the holy of holies from the world.

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the

ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many (Matt. 27:50–53).

What the defenders of total judicial discontinuity ignore is the judicial implication of bodily resurrection, which began, not with Jesus' resurrection, but with the resurrections of the saints around Jerusalem. This was a public declaration by God the Father that death is no longer universal in its authority. The ultimate sanction of God's law was no longer universal from that point forward. This raises a crucial point: there is no law without a sanction. *When the sanction changes, the law also changes.* Death had always been the Old Covenant law's representative sanction. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). This resurrection of saints revealed a definitive break with the Old Covenant's legal order, including its sanctions.

Jesus proclaimed the permanence of the Mosaic law as a system. His death culminated with the perfect fulfillment of the law that He spoke about in Matthew 5:17–19. Immediately after His death, there was a complete discontinuity with the Old Covenant and its legal order: resurrection from the dead of corpses buried near Jerusalem. This mass resurrection announced the end of the Old Covenant, for it announced the definitive end of the older law's sanction: death.

Yet death still reigns. The form of the old sanction is with us still. Yet the legal order which originally imposed death was publicly overturned by the resurrection of the saints, and then confirmed by the resurrection of Christ. There is a legal order that still imposes the sanction of death. Conclusion: *a new legal order was resurrected with Jesus, one which re-imposed the old sanction.* There was a break with the Old Covenant law (discontinuity), yet there has been a re-imposition of law (continuity). Then in what way was there a meaningful discontinuity? By the permanent annulment of most of the Mosaic statutes. Not resurrected with Jesus Christ were the Mosaic land laws,²⁰ which pertained to Israel's geography, and the seed laws,²¹ which regulated Israel's tribal system. Also annulled were the laws of cleanliness and diet, which were associated with the priestly laws, sometimes called cere-

20. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Conclusion:C:1(a).

21. *Ibid.*, Conclusion:C:1(b).

monial laws.²² Resurrected with Christ were the cross-boundary laws,²³ sometimes called moral laws. These moral laws retain their binding nature, but are now *laws of life* as a result of the resurrection.

Death still reigns, which means that God's law still reigns. The old sanction is with us still because the old man in Adam is with us still. But there have been substantive changes in the legal order. There has been a radical discontinuity with the Mosaic law—as radical as the mass resurrection of dead bodies.

As surely as Jesus Christ's resurrected body was fundamentally different from the body that had been crucified, so is the law of God. The disciples did not recognize who He was on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:16). Soon thereafter, He appeared without warning. "And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit" (Luke 24:36–37). Yet He looked the same. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet" (Luke 24:39–40). His body had both continuity and discontinuity with history. As surely as Jesus still was recognizably Jesus after the meeting on the road to Emmaus, so is the law of God recognizable today. Jesus was still Jesus. The law is still the law. Yet there have been changes.

This same analysis also applies to redeemed men. There has been a definitive break with the old man of sin, Adam's doomed heir. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Yet these spiritually resurrected men look the same as they did before. There has been a *definitive break with the old man*, as surely as there has been a *definitive break with the Old Covenant*. What is true of redeemed men is also true of redeemed Mosaic laws. It is not that the law now gives life. It is that redemption's new life quickens the law. Definitive sanctification—God's transfer to each redeemed person of all of Jesus' moral perfection at the time of his redemption—produces progressive sanctification in history and final sanctification in eternity: victory over sin and death.²⁴

22. *Ibid.*, Conclusion:C:2.

23. *Ibid.*, Conclusion:C:3.

24. Chapter 10:A:1.

My analysis of the continuity and discontinuity in biblical law puts me in conflict with Greg Bahnsen's discussion of theonomy. I see a much greater discontinuity between the Mosaic laws of divorce and remarriage than he did. He, like Rushdoony, denied any discontinuity at all in the marriage laws. Therefore, I also see a problem in arguing for the continuity of the whole of biblical law. I see a fundamental judicial break at the resurrection, which was manifested by the public removal of the sanction of death.

G. A Critique of Bahnsen's Interpretation

Bahnsen agreed with Rushdoony's interpretation of the meaning of the bill of divorce, namely, that Jesus was challenging the views of the Pharisees, who were lax. Both men argued that Jesus was calling the Pharisees back to the Mosaic law. This argument, as I have shown, cannot be sustained logically or exegetically. Because Bahnsen rarely made logical errors—at least none that normal mortals could detect—I conclude that this error was theologically driven. He was so persuaded of the theological necessity of sustaining continuity of the Mosaic law in Matthew 5 that he refused to admit the obvious, namely, that Jesus annulled, repudiated, and generally smashed into smithereens the Mosaic law of divorce by bill of divorce.

Bahnsen wrote, "When we turn to the antithesis on divorce we again find no grounds for asserting that Jesus breaks with the outlook of God's inspired word."²⁵ Technically, this is correct, for Jesus Himself is God's inspired word (John 1:1). But this has nothing to do with the relevant theological issues of this text. The theological question for all schools of orthodox Christian interpretation is this: Which outlook of God's inspired word, revealed when? That is, does the continuity of God's outlook demand a continuity of laws? If it does, then there is no judicial discontinuity, and therefore no escape from every jot and tittle of the Mosaic law, including the priestly laws—a position that Bahnsen explicitly denied.²⁶

The primary theological issue for theonomists that is raised by Matthew 5:31–32 and 19:3–9 is whether Jesus broke with the Mosaic law on the twin issues of divorce by bill of divorcement and the divorced wife's lawful remarriage. This is the heart of the matter, her-

25. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2002), p. 99.

26. See Bahnsen's Preface to the Second Edition, p. xxiv.

meneutically speaking. Bahnsen not only refused to acknowledge this, he did his rhetorical best to deflect the reader's attention from the judicially related issues. He did not do this often, so when we find him doing it, we should pay close attention. Whenever we find Bahnsen deflecting the reader's attention away from an obvious theological issue raised by some text, focusing instead on other issues, we should assume that he was having a text-related problem with his hermeneutic. He never had any problem with logic.

1. *Bahnsen and Rushdoony*

Bahnsen adopted the same line of reasoning that Rushdoony did. He cited Rushdoony on the judicial issue of fornication as grounds for divorce: an essay that had been published in the never-completed *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (1972).²⁷ Bahnsen added this footnote after the first draft of the manuscript had been completed. We know this because he finished the first draft no later than the fall of 1971, at the age of 23. (How intelligent does that make you feel?) Rushdoony wrote the Foreword in October, 1971.²⁸ Publication was delayed by a combination of factors: a publisher who let the manuscript sit on his desk for over a year, and a typesetter who took over four years to typeset it.

Bahnsen wrote: "While some have alleged to find a repudiation of Older Testament morality here, in actuality it was the hardhearted and distorted interpretation put forward by the Pharisees that Jesus re-proved, not the law itself."²⁹ This was also Rushdoony's argument. The Pharisees were indeed hardhearted, but this was not the moral issue in Matthew 19:3–9. Jesus told the Pharisees what the moral issue was: Israelite men had been hardhearted from the beginning of the nation at Sinai, and God had written the Mosaic law to fit their moral condition. Hardhearted or not, no Israelite husband had broken God's revealed law by unilaterally divorcing his wife, presenting her with a bill of divorce, after she had lost favor in his eyes because of her uncleanness. Jesus ended this marital option for hardhearted, covenant-keeping men—not men in "an unregenerate state (Deut. 10:16)," as Bahnsen claimed.³⁰

Bahnsen continued: "It might be suggested that, while Jesus did not in any way relax the law, nevertheless He altered it by abrogating

27. *Ibid.*, p. 111, footnote 34.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. xi–xiv.

29. *Idem.*

30. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

the alleged permissiveness of the Older Testament with respect to *divorce*.³¹ Not only might it be suggested, I am suggesting it. "The supposition is that by strengthening the law He contradicted the attitude of Moses."³² Jesus did not contradict the attitude of Moses, but He surely announced the end of God's toleration of hardhearted Israelite husbands, whose forefathers had vexed Moses for four decades.

"It is helpful to study the passages from Matthew 5 and 19 in connection with each other." This can indeed be helpful, but not all those who study these two passages reach the same conclusion. "Jesus there redressed this scribal abuse of Deuteronomy 24 and confirms the original teaching by God's holy law."³³ This is true regarding the *original* teaching of God's holy law, but it is not true with respect to the teaching of Deuteronomy 24:1–4, in which God softened His original law for the sake of Israelites' hard hearts. This was how Jesus explained the law of the bill of divorcement, and Bahnsen owed it to his readers to adjust the application of his judicial hermeneutic to this text.

At this point, we find Bahnsen using a debater's technique to deflect the reader's attention. I do not recall any other example comparable to it in his exegetical materials. "While Jesus stressed the hallowed nature of the marriage covenant, the scribes were more interested in the 'bill of divorcement' (which the Mosaic law mentioned only *in passing*) and the *exception* to God's creation ordinance."³⁴ Mentioned only in passing? The theonomic hermeneutic, more than any hermeneutic in the history of the church, has no judicial use for the concept of "mentioned only in passing." The bill of divorcement was there in the Mosaic law. The scribes quoted the text accurately to Jesus. The disciples also understood the magnitude of the change that Jesus was demanding by abolishing that divorce option. It shocked them. It stupefied them. "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt. 19:10).

Bahnsen wrote: "*From the very beginning* God's law had taken a strict view of marriage."³⁵ This is what Jesus taught: "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8b). Jesus was reimposing on covenant-keepers what had been God's original view, but which the Mosaic law had suspended as a legal requirement. Jesus was making it as plain

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

33. *Idem.*

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–1.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

as possible that the Mosaic law had been, in this instance, a temporary weakening of the original preference of God, and God would now require church and state to return to the law's original view. The New Testament's texts regarding divorce are clear. Jesus annulled, i.e., repudiated, a section of the Mosaic law: the bill of divorcement and the right of both of the ex-partners to remarry—and, as we shall see, the husband's right to be married to two women at the same time.

The Pharisees extracted from Jesus a public affirmation which, as they had hoped, repudiated a section of the Mosaic law. The issue textually is not whether He had repudiated the unbreakable nature of the Mosaic law. He did indeed break with the Mosaic law at this point. The decisive issue was His authority to do this. The primary public judicial issue of His entire ministry was point two of the biblical covenant model: authority. The Jews kept asking him: "By what authority do you break with the Mosaic law and not deserve judgment?" The Gospel of John makes this aspect of the confrontation clearer than the synoptic gospels do. The issue of authority came to the forefront because of point three: biblical law. It would be settled by point four: sanctions. Whose sanctions would prove determinative: the crucifixion or Jesus' judgment? Israel received a preliminary answer in A.D. 70.³⁶

2. Continuity and Intrusion

Bahnsen interpreted Matthew 5:17–19 as a defense of the continuity of God's moral law. I, too, hold this view. But, in Jesus' declaration regarding the bill of divorcement, He made it plain to His contemporaries that the Mosaic law contained an "intrusion," as Meredith Kline calls such judicial events, that was in fact *a deviation from the original moral law of God*. This is the implication of Jesus' phrase, "the hardness of your hearts." Jesus restored the original intent of the moral law of God by tightening the judicial categories governing divorce and remarriage. The disciples were as shocked at this revocation of the Mosaic law as the Pharisees were appalled . . . and no doubt pleased.

Bahnsen categorically denied such a view of the Mosaic law of divorce. Most important strategically, he did not comment on remarriage.

Thus far we have noted that a *lax* attitude toward divorce is not found in Jesus or the Older Testament but in the doctrine of the

36. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

Pharisees, that the Pharisees *distorted* the law (through inaccurate emphasis, quotation, and interpretation), that Jesus appealed to the Older Testament to *substantiate* His moral evaluation of divorce, and that He *refuted* any insinuation to the effect that He contravened one portion of the Older Testament by appealing to another portion.³⁷

Compare Bahnsen's argument, which denied any contrast between Jesus' view and the text of Deuteronomy 24:1–4, with Jesus' words of comparison.

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

The key words are these: *from the beginning it was not so*.

Bahnsen refused to refer to the fact that a wife divorced by means of a bill of divorcement has the right to remarry. The judicial scope of this law cannot legitimately be confined to a consideration of the husband's means of divorce. It must extend to the lawful remarriage of a divorced wife. Bahnsen confined his discussion only to divorce. Here is the problem exegetically with his judicial approach. The sin of uncleanness was not a civil crime under the Mosaic law, although it was a moral infraction of some kind, though the Deuteronomic text does not say what it was. Therefore, the civil government could neither apply the capital sanction to her nor prevent the divorce from taking place. Neither could the church. Most important, another Israelite could lawfully marry her.

The law of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 dealt with a different judicial question entirely: a remarriage of the original partners after the second husband divorced her. This was illegal. Conclusion: it was easy for a man to obtain a divorce under the Mosaic law—so easy, that the Mosaic law dealt with a possible event relating to such a trial-free divorce: the future remarriage of the divorced partners. This, not the divorce or

37. Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, p. 105.

the wife's first remarriage, was illegal.

The issue of lawful remarriage raises this crucial theological question: *Did the Mosaic law subsidize criminal behavior?* This was a crucial issue—judicially central to Deuteronomy 24—that Bahnsen refused to deal with. If the answer is *no*, then the woman's infraction was not a crime. Her uncleanness was surely minor when compared to adultery, bestiality, and other sexual crimes that required the death penalty. On the other hand, if the answer is *yes*, then theonomy's hermeneutic is in deep trouble. I would go so far as to say that it would be unsalvageable. It would make God the author of a new commandment: "Go, thou, and sin some more."

3. Judicial Maturation

In Matthew 5:31–32 and 19:3–9, Jesus established a fundamental judicial principle that should have been understood by the Pharisees: *God's revealed law matured over time, from Adam to Jesus*. The Mosaic law introduced an element of moral laxity—an intrusion—which Jesus identified specifically. Jesus introduced a more rigorous moral order for God's New Testament covenant people. This moral tightening affected the civil law.

A concept of maturing civil law was nothing new in Jesus' day. For example, there had been a Mosaic inheritance law governing rural land that had been distributed to the conquest generation (Lev. 25:10).³⁸ When God removed the Israelites from the land during the exile, the Israelites broke continuity with the Mosaic law governing the jubilee year and rural land ownership. The jubilee law of inheritance was replaced by a new law that opened landed inheritance to gentiles residing in Israel at the time of the return. "So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel" (Ezek. 47:21–22). There was family discontinuity of inheritance because there had been a discontinuity of family dominion in the land during the exile. The gentile caretakers of the land were not to be evicted. Thus, there was both continuity (dominion over land) and discontinuity (tribal family title). Dominion had its reward: inheritance.

38. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 25.

Antinomians from Jesus' day until mine have argued that Jesus loosened or even repudiated the Mosaic law. He made it a lighter burden. He did, indeed, *by strengthening His people by sending the Holy Spirit*. Furthermore, biblical law for the redeemed strengthens them in their tasks of dominion, beginning with self-government. It was not that Jesus took away the heavy moral weights of God's biblical law. He added new weights, but He strengthened our lifting power. Bahnsen agreed with this view of empowering by the Holy Spirit.³⁹ But still he would not admit that, in the midst of his foundational hermeneutical passage, Matthew 5, Jesus introduced a view of divorce and remarriage that repudiated a Mosaic civil statute.

Why do I use the analogy of maturation? Because this was Paul's language. He compared certain details—the weak and beggarly elements (Gal. 4:9)—of the Mosaic law's authority over the Christian with the household tutors' authority over a minor son. This authority has ceased.

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Jesus (Gal. 4:1–7).

The Mosaic law unquestionably contained weak and beggarly elements. Bahnsen limited this phrase to the ceremonial law.⁴⁰ I do not. One of these weak and beggarly laws was the law of divorce by writ and the divorcer's right of remarriage, which was not ceremonial.

Bahnsen acknowledged discontinuity in the law, for he wrote in this section that "No word of God can be turned back except by divine

39. "Only the Holy Spirit of God can bring power to obey to the sinner, and that the Holy Spirit was received not by law-works but by faith" ([II Cor.] 3:2). Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, p. 134. "Because of the weakness of sinful human nature the law could not overcome sin's power, but in the believer the power of the Holy Spirit frees him from the power of sin unto death, thereby enabling him to accomplish what the law demands ([Rom.] 8:14)." *Ibid.*, p. 136.

40. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 87–88. (<http://bit.ly/gbnos>)

authority,"⁴¹ but for some reason, he resisted what I find an obvious revision of the Mosaic law, a revision that shocked the disciples because of its far-reaching implications for men's authority in marriage. This was no minor revision, they believed. I agree with them.

Why did Bahnsen resist judicial discontinuity at this point, yet not at others? I cannot ask him, but I can make an informed guess. The analytical and exegetical heart of his Th.M. thesis, as with the heart of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, was his exegesis of Matthew 5:17–19. He defended a jot-and-tittle continuity in terms of the meaning of the Greek word, *plero-oh*. What is the meaning of this word? Bahnsen said it means "to fulfill."⁴² But there can be many meanings here: end to, replace, supplement, obey, enforce, and confirm. Bahnsen offered a page of footnotes to cite examples.⁴³ He adopted "confirm" as the preferred translation.⁴⁴

In an appendix added after the original manuscript had been sent to the publisher, Bahnsen attacked Meredith G. Kline's book, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (1972), in which Kline argued for a complete discontinuity between the Mosaic civil sanctions and the New Testament's silence regarding civil sanctions. In that book, Kline referred to a "revision which does not destroy but fulfills." Bahnsen went on the attack.

To "fulfill" a legal statute by *altering it* certainly does not conform to any of the usual senses of the word "fulfill"; to substitute one piece of legislation for another and then call this "fulfillment" amounts to making "fulfill" a substitute for "abrogate."⁴⁵

If Matthew 5:31–32 and Matthew 19:3–9 are a moral unit, which they are, then Jesus did to at least one Mosaic statute what Kline said that He did to all of the Mosaic penal sanctions: He fulfilled the whole of the Mosaic law, yet He abrogated a Mosaic statute. Bahnsen could not admit this without rewriting his book. He had based his entire judicial hermeneutic on the definition of "fulfill" as "establish," "confirm," or "ratify."⁴⁶ To provide a consistent, all-encompassing definition of "fulfill" in Matthew 5 that included "abrogate" in Mat-

41. Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, p. 116.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 55n.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 57 (citing Geerhardus Vos), 67 (along with "restore"), 70 (along with "establish"), 71–74, 87–88, 91, 94–95, 99, 103, 110, 120, 123, 141, 145, 154, 183–84.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 555.

46. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, especially pages 72–73.

thew 19 was too much for him in 1971. His hermeneutic needed additional work.⁴⁷ But he did not revise it over the next quarter century. He did not modify in any way his explanation of Matthew 5:17–19. He wrote in 1991, “It has sometimes been insinuated or explicitly charged by the critics of theonomic ethics that the position has been changed over the years—and changed so often or dramatically that we just cannot tell what theonomic ethics represents anymore. Such criticism is easier to speak than to substantiate. Indeed, it is simply a fabrication. And I should know. The essentials (and virtually all of the detailed argumentation) of the theonomic position have not been reversed, modified or changed in any significant way whatsoever.”⁴⁸

The idea of “confirm” is not far-fetched, but it is not the normal translation of *plero-oh*, which usually is translated as “fulfill.” The meaning of “fulfill” seems closer to the idea of completing than confirming. It means “bringing to a close.” It does not necessarily mean “abrogate.” A process may be multi-stage. This depends on context.

The word is often eschatological in intent. This is not to say that eschatology is separated from ethics. Far be it from a theonomic post-millennialist to make that conclusion! But eschatology can refer to Christ’s fulfilling both the ethical and liturgical requirements of the Mosaic law. The crucial question relates to the question of the timing of the fulfillment. What fulfills the Mosaic law? When was the Mosaic Law fulfilled, or when will it be fulfilled?

4. *The Meaning of “Until”*

Bahnsen could not escape dealing with a crucial phrase—indeed, *the* crucial phrase—for his apologetic. Verse 18 reads: “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” As a defender of complete,

47. The development of a hermeneutic for covenant theology is still a pressing need for theonomists, as it is for non-theonomists, just as a reconciliation of systematic theology and biblical theology is a pressing need for every school of biblical interpretation. Somewhere out there in the misty no-man’s land in between Bahnsen and Jordan, we must seek both coherence and fruitfulness, just as we must seek both goals in the no-man’s land in between Charles Hodge and Geerhardus Vos. Bahnsen and Hodge stood on the solid but rocky ground of integrated systems, where it is always hard plowing, and the soil is historically thin. Jordan, like Vos, has always preferred to work in the luxuriant swamp, where, within a few months, everything is covered by the kudzu of multiperspectivalism. As for me, I prefer to do my plowing in the misty middle distance, using Sutton’s five-pointed plow. I cannot always see where I am going, but a crop comes in every year—sometimes several times a year.

48. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, p. 27.

unbreakable judicial continuity, Bahnsen concentrated on the use of the word, “until,” but only in the first clause: “till heaven and earth pass.” The problem that he faced, *and never successfully dealt with exegetically*, was judicial discontinuity. He acknowledged the existence of discontinuities. He even referred to some of the New Testament’s changes as radical.

What has been said above is simply that the presumption should be that an Old Testament law is binding in the New Testament. This does not in any way preclude or reject many radical differences between the Old and New Testaments. Changes do indeed come through the course of redemptive history, so that there certainly are exceptions to the general continuity that characterizes the relation between Old and New Covenants. God has the right to make alterations for the New Age. In the transition to this New Age we observe that advances are made over the Old Covenant, with some laws laid aside and some laws observed in a new fashion.⁴⁹

Here is a judicial hermeneutic that is accepted by most Christians. The heresies are in the details. So is orthodoxy.

The fact is, most of the Mosaic law was annulled—abrogated, if you prefer—by the New Testament. If we read the Book of Leviticus, we find that little of it is still binding, for it deals with the ceremonial law, or what I call *priestly law*. It also deals with Israel’s *land laws* and *seed laws*: inheritance. These tribal laws no longer are in force. I have already referred to this with regard to Ezekiel’s abrogation of the jubilee law of family inheritance.

How can the Bible-affirming commentator justify both Matthew 5:19 and the abrogation of most of the Mosaic law by the New Covenant? Only by developing a theological system that accounts for both *the continuity and discontinuity of the jots and tittles*. The alternative is to adopt some form of liberal theology that affirms contradictions in the Bible, or mistakes in the ministry of prophets, from Moses to Jesus.

Jesus provided the solution to this dilemma in the second part of verse 18: “until all be fulfilled.” The key word is “until.” This word establishes a temporal limit. For example, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied **until** John” (Matt. 11:12–13). The central question for Bahnsen’s ver-

49. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), p. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gnbt>)

sion of theonomy is this: To what law-abrogating event does Matthew 5:18's temporal limit apply? There are three viable choices: the final judgment, the fall of Jerusalem, and the death of Jesus. The text reads: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Bahnsen insisted on the first application of "until," i.e., "till heaven and earth pass." He extended the time reference until the end of time: the final judgment.⁵⁰ "Every detail of God's law has abiding validity from the time of Christ's advent to the time of His return (i.e., the passing away of heaven and earth)."⁵¹ But this does not solve the exegetical problem of changes in the law, i.e., abrogation of most Mosaic laws, beginning with the ceremonial laws. Bahnsen insisted that there was a discontinuity with respect to the Mosaic ceremonial law. "The distinction *must* be drawn between *ceremonial* and *moral* laws, and one must recognize that the former's manner of *observation* is today altered."⁵² The Epistle to the Hebrews offers no alternative conclusion for an orthodox Christian commentator.

5. *Abiding Validity*

There had been major discontinuities in the Mosaic civil law before Christ's advent. An important one was the succession of the high priest. Bahnsen says that succession was from father to son, citing Nehemiah 12:10–11.⁵³ It is an odd passage to cite: "And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada, And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua." Also, the document is post-exilic. There is nothing in the Mosaic law that specifies that this office was hereditary. In fact, there is almost nothing in the Mosaic law regarding the duties of the high priest. Leviticus 21:10–15 is the main section, which establishes ritual boundaries around him. What the Mosaic law did specify was that at his death, every protected resident of a city of refuge could lawfully return home without threat from the blood avenger (Num. 35:25–28).⁵⁴ The death of the high priest meant liberation for the man convicted of accidental manslaughter.

50. Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, pp. 79–80.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

54. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 21.

In Paul's day, this office was held on a rotating basis. Speaking of Caiaphas, the gospel of John reads: "And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation" (John 11:51). His father-in-law, Annas, sometimes held the office (Acts 4:6). So, the likelihood that a high priest would die in office was remote. A very old man or very sick man would not be appointed. Thus, the law governing cities of refuge would have been undermined. Under gentile rulers, it is unlikely that the system survived the Israelites' return to the land.

Bahnsen's problem was always this: How can we account for any judicial discontinuity at all? He did not solve this problem over the next quarter century. He needed to provide a definition and explanation of his phrase, *abiding validity*, as in: "Every detail of God's law has abiding validity from the time of Christ's advent to the time of His return (i.e., the passing away of heaven and earth)."⁵⁵ This was the title of Chapter 2: "The Abiding Validity of the Law in Exhaustive Detail." Yet he never defined the phrase, either logically or exegetically. His definition and explanation needed to be consistent with the thesis of jot-and-tittle continuity that he presented in Chapter 2. This was the most important chapter he ever wrote. It was the fulcrum of his life's work, including his enormous output of personal letters written in defense of theonomy. If "abiding" means "to remain constant over time, including today," then what does "validity" mean? *This is the word that he never defined.* He spent all of his effort in defending "abiding," and virtually none on "validity." I ask: In what way is everything that has abided—which he says is everything—also valid? What, in fact, has abided? Many things have not abided, such as the details of the ceremonial law. Then in what way is some aspect of the annulled ceremonial law still valid? This is the central issue of his hermeneutical system, yet he never addressed it directly.

I must admit that about half the time, I do not understand what James Jordan is writing about, and most of what I do understand I forget within an hour. I have always had the same problem with the writings of Geerhardus Vos. Vos and Jordan are involved in an academically arcane quest to discover in obscure biblical texts, and texts that the rest of us really did not imagine were all that obscure, the continuity of non-obvious authoritative meaning, including the meaning of symbols. Bahnsen rarely quoted Vos and was hostile to what Jordan

55. Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, p. 311.

calls "interpretative maximalism," yet what biblical theology is really all about is a search for continuity in the face of what appears to be textual discontinuity. In the negative aspect of their apologetic task, biblical theologians counter humanistic higher critics of the Bible, who substitute a theory of late-date scribal forgeries for a theory of divine inspiration.⁵⁶

Jesus said that something remained constant (Matt. 5:17–19). What, exactly, did He have in mind? Bahnsen never made this clear. Some Mosaic laws were annulled long before Jesus Christ's advent. Which ones? Bahnsen did not mention these. Some laws were annulled by Jesus' teaching. Which ones? (One of them was the law of divorce by writ and remarriage.) Bahnsen did not mention these. After Christ's resurrection, other laws were changed. Which laws? Ceremonial laws, Bahnsen admitted. I would add land laws and seed laws. Then how can judicial continuity be true, from Moses through the prophets to the crucifixion, and from the resurrection to today? For all of its detail and logic, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* does not deal explicitly with this crucial hermeneutical problem by discussing the discontinuities in terms of some underlying judicial continuity. Was there some other form of continuity? If so, does this imply that the jots and tittles have not been constant judicially, but only symbolically or in some other way? Bahnsen argued for jot-and-tittle judicial continuity, yet he also admitted ceremonial discontinuity. He never reconciled the two positions, either logically or exegetically. Yet this is *the* hermeneutical problem for Bahnsen's thesis, as well as for every system of Christian ethics that begins with Matthew 5, as all of them should.

He needed to explain this phrase: *in passing*. It appeared in the context of his discussion of the issue of divorce and remarriage, which he discussed only in terms of divorce. Bahnsen wrote: "While Jesus stressed the hallowed nature of the marriage covenant, the scribes were more interested in the 'bill of divorcement' (which the Mosaic law mentioned only *in passing*) and the *exception* to God's creation ordinance."⁵⁷ Here is the hermeneutical problem: there is no room for "in passing" in Bahnsen's apologetic in Chapter 2, i.e., no change of either a jot or a tittle. He also needed to explain a Mosaic law that was an exception to God's creation ordinance: divorce by writ. How is such an intrusion ethically possible? What principle of interpretation permits such an intrusion? Is it consistent with the principle of interpretation

56. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Appendix H.

57. Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, pp. 100–1.

governing Chapter 2?

6. The Crucifixion and Judicial Fulfillment

The theological solution to the exegetical dilemma of Matthew 5:17–19 is found in verse 18: the second use of “until.” Jesus’ words announced the imminence of His personal fulfillment of the Mosaic law, and therefore its complete, unreserved annulment at the moment of its fulfillment: His death. Jesus was not looking to the passing of heaven and earth as the temporal boundary of the Mosaic law, i.e., the temporal application of “until.” He was instead looking to His own death, which would be the temporal limit of His subjection to the Mosaic law and its ultimate sanction, death. The continuity of no jot or tittle was guaranteed after this perfect fulfillment.

After His resurrection, lots of jots and tittles of the Mosaic law remained in the grave, judicially speaking. From the wrapping of His body in swaddling clothes until the wrapping of His body in a death shawl, Jesus kept the Mosaic law perfectly. But He also taught against it as a permanently binding principle, i.e., binding on His followers beyond His resurrection. Like the element of death that Jesus’ body had been subjected to, so were what Paul called “the weak and beggarly elements” of the Mosaic law (Gal. 4:9).

Bahnsen was aware of this approach to solving the problem of judicial discontinuity, which is ultimately the discontinuity of the two covenants. He resorted to grammar to counter this argument. He said that the word “until” applies in the second phrase to the Greek word for “all”: *panta*. It is neuter; *Nomos* (law) is masculine. He said that “all” does not refer to the law.⁵⁸ Worse; he did not offer any suggestion as to what *panta* referred, if not the law. On this thin strand of reasoning, he rested his entire case for theonomy.

He rejected the suggestion of W. D. Davies—which is my view—that “until all be fulfilled” refers to Jesus’ death on the cross. Bahnsen rejected several other similar suggestions, all referring to Jesus’ work on earth. He dismissed them all with these words: “Nothing in the context of Matthew 5:18 warrants the introduction of speculative meaning; . . .”⁵⁹ This is a debater’s tactic when the debater runs into trouble. Of course the theological dilemma does not have its origin in the text of Matthew 5:18. It has its origin in case after case in which Je-

58. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

59. *Idem.*

sus announced a change in the Mosaic law. It is found in Paul's phrase, "weak and beggarly elements."

Bahnsen dismissed the explanation of "until" as applying to Jesus' ministry with a favorite pejorative word of a theologian who faces an interpretation that he rejects: "eisegesis" (to read into). "All these variations only demonstrate the inevitable results of *eisegesis*—or the exegesis of one's *theological scheme* in the name of exegeting a biblical *text*. . . ." ⁶⁰ Problem: when two texts in the same document say completely different things, we have only two conclusions available: (1) the document in which the texts appear is inconsistent, or (2) there is a broader explanation that reconciles the two texts. This *reconciliation* is called, in Christian circles, *a theological scheme*. In short, theological schemes are inescapable concepts. It is never a question of "theological schemes vs. no theological schemes." It is always a question of *which* theological scheme to adopt.

Chapter 2 of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* is probably the most thoroughgoing presentation of covenantal judicial continuity in the history of the church. But its logic does not offer any way to explain the obvious discontinuity between the Mosaic Covenant, which was part of the Old Covenant, and the New Covenant. The jots and tittles of most of the Mosaic law-order are gone for good. The church has always insisted on this. The texts of the New Testament also insist on this. Bahnsen's explanation of Matthew 5:17–19 is incomplete. His discussions of judicial discontinuities between the covenants, whether in *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* or in subsequent works, were not reconciled with his apologetic/hermeneutic of jot-and-tittle continuity in Chapter 2. He insisted that Jesus taught that this continuity would last until judgment day. But it did not last through the Gospel of Matthew. "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matt. 19:7–9).

I realize that this is a very brief response to Bahnsen's long defense of theonomy. But it is a response based on an unresolved dilemma within *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*: the book's admitted exceptions

60. *Idem*.

to what can be called jot-and-tittle continuity. These discontinuities never received a sufficient hermeneutical explanation in terms of judicial continuity, which is verbally absolute in Matthew 5:19. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." There is a missing piece in Bahnsen's hermeneutic. This missing piece is *an explanation of the temporal limit on the Mosaic law*, a limit based on the second application of "until," not the first. When Jesus fulfilled the entire Mosaic law by going to the cross as an innocent man, and therefore as an acceptable sacrifice to God, He buried the Mosaic law-order forever. What was resurrected with Him was the New Covenant's law-order. Unlike the Old Covenant, this one is written in the heart of every Christian (Heb. 8:6–10): *conscience*. This law-order, like the Old Covenant's law-order, is a tool of dominion.

Among the weak and beggarly elements of the now-interred Mosaic law are the laws governing divorce and remarriage through unilateral writ. Jesus was clear about the hardness of the hearts of Israelite husbands. His annulment of the law of divorce by writ was an implication of the new hearts of the redeemed, male and female. When Jesus extended to wives the right of divorce by writ, He removed the original justification of these writs: the hardness of men's hearts—not, by the way, women's hearts. He gave to women the legal authority that Joseph had possessed over Mary: the right, in justice, to put her away privately for her presumed uncleanness, but without appealing to a civil or ecclesiastical court. This would have been an act of mercy on Joseph's part, had the Holy Ghost not been the cause of her pregnancy. But, to make sure that future acts of similar mercy are truly acts of mercy rather than acts of spite, or worse, acts of concealed lust for a future replacement spouse, Jesus also imposed a new restriction: the prohibition against any future marriage by the writer of the writ.

There is no example in the New Testament that is stronger in contrasting the New Testament's version of theonomy with the Mosaic law. Jesus made it clear in Mark 10:2–12 that Deuteronomy 24:1–4 was an intrusion in the development of theonomy. It represented neither the pre-Mosaic legal standard, which was morally higher, nor the New Testament standard, which is morally higher. This statute was a judicial discontinuity that had been based on a moral flaw among Israelite husbands. Therefore, a biblically sound hermeneutic for theonomy

must recognize the existence of at least one Mosaic law as a judicial intrusion. This hermeneutic must be formulated in such a way that this specific intrusion is dealt with consistently by the general principle of judicial interpretation. This means, to put it starkly, that whatever Jesus meant by the unchanging *validity* of every jot and tittle of the Mosaic law (Matt. 5:18), this statute is no longer to be enforced. This is a hermeneutical challenge to every school of biblical interpretation that affirms the infallibility of Scripture.

H. Monogamy and Sanctions Against Remarriage

We now return to the issue of polygamy in the New Covenant.⁶¹ Jesus established a principle of biblical justice in the area of divorce and remarriage: *gender equality before the law*. This principle also governed the Mosaic law in most cases. "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (Ex. 12:49).⁶² An exception was the law of unilateral divorce. Only husbands had possessed this right. What had been authorized solely to husbands by Moses under the Old Covenant has been extended to wives by Jesus under the New Covenant.

By not announcing the annulment of divorce by execution for adultery, Jesus hermeneutically implied the continuing authority of the Mosaic civil sanction: the legal status of adultery for any subsequent marriage by a spouse who initiates a no-trial divorce. Neither a husband nor a wife who initiates a no-trial divorce is ever allowed to remarry. Jesus made this clear. "And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:10–12).

Under the Mosaic law, gender inequality was basic to the law of divorce and remarriage. Not so in the New Covenant. If this argument is accurate, then a conclusion necessarily follows: *polygamy is illegal*. The husband in the Old Covenant could have multiple wives. The Mosaic law governing the inheritance left by a deceased polygamous father (Deut. 21:15–17) appears immediately following the law governing the divorce of a captive wife (Deut. 21:10–14). A polygamous man

61. Chapter 3.

62. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

could divorce one wife, yet still retain the benefits of an existing marriage.

When Jesus announced the same negative sanction—no remarriage—for those who initiate a no-trial divorce, He established *judicial equality for husbands and wives*. In order for judicial inequality not to resurface in the biblical law of divorce and remarriage, *neither the husband nor the wife should suffer less from the sanction*. If a husband has two or more wives, and he divorces one of them, he has a major advantage over a wife who initiates a no-trial divorce, but who can never lawfully remarry. There are only two ways to establish judicial equality under such marital conditions: either criminalize polygamy or legalize polyandry.

There have been very few societies in history that have legalized polyandry. A wife with multiple husbands creates confusion: confusion regarding which children belong to which man, and confusion regarding which husband she must obey. A wife is required by God to serve her husband as his subordinate. This removes polyandry as a legal option. But if polyandry is not an option, then neither is polygamy. To argue otherwise is to argue for sexual inequality with respect to the prohibition against remarriage by the initiators of no-trial divorce.

Conclusion

I have come to the conclusion that *no-trial divorce* was authorized by Jesus, though only in the legal context of *deadly fault remarriage*. The reason why I regard the person who initiates a no-trial divorce as being prohibited from remarrying is because I uphold the principle of victim's rights. If innocent spouses are not to be penalized for the sins of their marriage partners, then there must be some way for the innocent partner to gain a lawful divorce apart from any negative legal sanctions. There are three ways: divorce by execution, divorce for the partner's fornication, and divorce because the other partner has deserted. As I wrote earlier, divorce by desertion is in fact a no-trial unilateral divorce. The innocent spouse is allowed to remarry, but the initiator is not.

Jesus explicitly prohibited remarriage for a spouse who initiates a divorce. So, He had to have two kinds of divorce in mind: trial and no-trial. This difference is marked by the word, "except." "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth

her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

God authorized no-trial divorce for men in Deuteronomy 24:1. He did this because of the hardness of the Israelite males’ hearts. What Jesus did was to extend this right of no-trial divorce to wives. He also took away the right of remarriage from anyone who initiates and gains a no-trial divorce.

Jesus annulled the Mosaic laws of divorce and remarriage. He equalized the law of no-trial divorce, husband vs. wife. Either party, not just the husband, now has the legal right to initiate a no-trial divorce. No court can lawfully overrule this decision.

Jesus also tightened the law of remarriage by prohibiting the remarriage of the partner who initiates and gains a no-trial divorce. Jesus identified such remarriage as adulterous. He did not annul the Mosaic law of adultery, which included the death penalty, imposed at the discretion of the victimized spouse.

This *gender equalization* of both the authorization of no-trial divorce and the penalty against remarriage implies that *polygamy is prohibited* in the New Testament era. A divorcing husband who has multiple wives will not suffer so much as a divorcing wife will suffer from the prohibition against remarriage. If the threat of this negative sanction is to be equal, sexually speaking, then the legal condition must be equal. This legal condition is monogamy.

Those Christians who proclaim “no divorce allowed” necessarily deny the principle of victim’s rights. The victimized ex-spouse is thereby penalized by the sinner. The victim is nevertheless required to live with the sinner.

Those who proclaim “divorce, but no remarriage” also necessarily deny the principle of victim’s rights. The victimized spouse is thereby penalized by the sinner. The victim is not allowed to remarry.

The New Testament allows no-trial divorce, but only under the assumption of the civil government’s enforcement of deadly fault remarriage for the divorce’s initiator. These closely related civil laws are grounded on the principle of victim’s rights.

This analysis of no-trial divorce does not annul the Mosaic principle of divorce by execution. It also does not abandon the theonomic principle that the judicial content of Mosaic laws and sanctions still prevails under the New Covenant unless the New Testament has annulled or revised them, either explicitly or by implication. When Jesus defined as adulterous any remarriage by the initiator of a no-trial divorce, He identified such remarriage as a capital crime. This places

both remarriage partners at the mercy of the divorced spouse: victim's rights.

In the case of divorce and remarriage, both the annulment and the revision of the Mosaic law governing no-trial divorce are explicit in the New Testament. In the case of the ban on polygamy, the annulment of the Mosaic law is implicit: an application of the New Testament's law prohibiting the remarriage of a divorce-initiating spouse after a no-trial divorce. *The New Testament's legal principle of gender equality before the law makes polygamy illegal.* This principle applies to the civil law governing divorce as well as ecclesiastical law.

If I am incorrect in my reasoning in this essay, then it is imperative for Christian theologians to present a New Testament case for the church's prohibition of polygamy for men who are not church officers. It is also imperative that they find justification for civil laws against polygamy. An explicit prohibition appears nowhere in the New Testament, except for church officers—a fact that theologians and ethicists prefer to ignore.

Did Jesus annul a Mosaic law? Yes. On whose authority? His own, as high priest. With a change in the priesthood comes a change in God's law (Heb. 7:12). This did not satisfy the Jews. They had Him crucified by the Romans. By doing this, they brought an end to the Old Covenant order. This was the fulfillment of the Mosaic law, the *definitive* passing away of heaven and earth: the Old Covenant. His resurrection confirmed this passing away. So did His ascension, when, as high priest, He passed into the heavens (Heb. 4:14). The *progressive* passing away of heaven and earth took place in the era of the apostles: the last days (Acts 2:16–20). The *final* passing away of heaven and earth took place at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70: the days of vengeance (Luke 21:20–28).⁶³ The unitary, integrated system of jots and tittles that constituted the Mosaic law passed away. The priestly Mosaic laws, the tribal land laws of inheritance, and the tribal seed laws of inheritance ended, which included the bill of divorcement.

63. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*.

Appendix B

ECONOMIC VALUE AND IMPUTATION

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day (Gen. 1:31).

A. Value and Price

An enduring question of economic theory is this: “How is price related to value?” Prices are objective: so much of this buys so much of that. But is economic value also objective? Competing answers to this question have divided economists from the beginning of the discipline. This is why the question is enduring. Humanistic economists cannot answer it. This is because the question of *value and price* is an application of a larger philosophical question, which is also unanswerable by humanism: the *subject-object relationship*.

To clarify the nature of the problem of value theory in economics, I employ an analogy based on another application of value theory. A wife asks: “Do you love me?” Her husband dutifully answers: “Of course I do.” She presses the issue: “How much do you love me?” He answers: “A lot.” She continues: “Do you love me more than you used to love your ex-girlfriend?” He replies: “Yes, I do.” So far, we are still in the realm of subjective value.

She presses the issue. “You used to be wild about her. I remember. You don’t act very wild about me. Do you love me more now than you loved her back then?” This raises the question of the permanence of value scales over time. The problem is, these scales of value change. Also, we forget what they were, and how intensely they registered with us. A truth-telling husband may reply: “I just don’t remember.” Or he may say, “I love you more now than I loved her back then,” mentally defining “love” to make the statement true. But how can he be sure what he felt back then? His memory has faded, along with his passion.

This is the philosophical problem of subjective valuation through time. No one possesses a permanent subjective value scale that measures changes in one's temporal subjective value scale—no one except Jesus Christ. As we shall see, His value scale is what makes the epistemological difference in the theory of economic value.

Next, she moves to objective value. “Exactly how much more do you love me than you used to love her?” Now he faces a dilemma, both personal and epistemological. She has moved from a consideration of his subjective scale of values to an objective measure of subjective value. Here is his epistemological dilemma: *there is no objective measure of subjective value*. A subjective value scale is *ordinal*—first, second, third—rather than *cardinal*, i.e., “exactly this much more.” Subjective values are ranked, not measured.¹

A wise husband with a knowledge of the Bible might try to end the discussion by saying, “I love you more than rubies.” Solomon said something like this. “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (Prov. 31:10). But even Solomon did not say exactly how much above rubies her price is.

Solomon was very wise.

Economists are not equally wise. They have embroiled their discipline with epistemological questions of objective vs. subjective value. They have raised questions that they cannot answer.

B. Economic Value Theory in Humanistic Economics

Ever since the subjectivist epistemological revolution of economics in the early 1870s, economists have developed a widely shared explanation for how economic value changes. This explanation rests on men's subjective imputation of economic value. The modern economist's approach to the problem of economic value begins with a presupposition based on introspection: “Every rational person has an individual scale of values by which he evaluates his specific, constantly changing circumstances.” This scale is hierarchical: first, second, third, etc. It is also subject to change. This hierarchical value scale enables a man to evaluate—impute value to—scarce resources² at any point in

1. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 1:5:A. (<http://bit.ly/RothbardMES>)

2. A scarce resource is defined as follows: at zero price, there is greater demand for it than supply.

time. He compares the usefulness of various scarce resources in terms of his personal scale of values. Then he decides to buy, keep, or sell specific assets. He seeks to improve his circumstances by offering to exchange assets that he owns for assets that he desires to rent, own, or re-sell. The competing bids of owners and would-be owners establish objective prices in the market place. This bidding process, says the modern economist, is how men's subjective values become objective prices.

What distinguishes modern economic theory (post-1870) from pre-modern economic theory is the modern economist's formal denial of the existence of objective value. This formal assertion of pure subjectivism is an example of an entire profession's self-delusion. One or another theory of objective value is sneaked into economics through an epistemological back door.

One example of the reappearance of objective value theory is the supposedly scientific justification for the establishment of any social policy through civil government. Policy-makers must decide on the appropriateness of a specific policy on the basis of a law's supposed benefits and costs to certain groups within society. Some members of some groups will win; others will lose. Economists insist that they can help policy-makers make this decision by providing a scientific cost-benefit analysis. This assertion is logically inconsistent with subjectivism's epistemology. If economic value is exclusively subjective, then there is no way to calculate group benefits and costs. There is no way, in other words, to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.³ The validity of a phrase such as Jeremy Bentham's "greatest good for the greatest number" rests on at least three assumptions: (1) the existence of aggregate objective value; (2) the policy-maker's ability to discover this aggregate objective value; and (3) the policy-maker's ability to design legislative programs that will maximize aggregate objective value. Economists formally begin with a theory of exclusively subjective individual valuation, but whenever they seek to assess the comparative outcomes of one social policy vs. another, they necessarily must adopt an informal theory of aggregate objective valuation.⁴ Only

3. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, rev. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1935), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 012) ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix M.: "The Epistemological Problem of Social Cost." This appendix became *The Coase Theorem: A Study in Epistemology* (Tyler,

rarely are they even aware of this subtle reintroduction of objective value theory. They do not offer any epistemological justification for this shift. In short, economists initially assume that they can do what their epistemology says cannot be done, and then they refuse to admit either to themselves or to other policy-makers what they have done.

Another example of objective value theory in operation is the construction of a price index. A price index is believed to measure price changes over time. The index aggregates specific price changes. This enables the economist to observe rates of change in what he calls "the price level." This is a convenient fiction in the theoretical world of subjectivist epistemology. An engineer can measure the water level in a bathtub, but a commodity's price is not physical, unlike a drop of water. There is no bathtub of commodity prices. A price index is a subjective mental construct that is believed by policy-makers and most economists to convey objectively useful information about changes in specific objective prices. The price index is based on *statistical samples of reported prices* of supposedly *representative* goods and services. This statistical index is a substitute for all prices, the number of which approaches infinity as a limit.

A price index is constructed on the basis of an economist's subjective weighing of the subjective evaluations (scientifically unknowable) by "customers in general" (scientifically unknowable) of the prices of a sample group of commodities and services (a "basket of goods"). Even the term "weighing" is artificial: we do not literally weigh value. To assign a "weight" to a commodity is a subjective assessment of comparative subjective importance for customers. I ask: Which specific groups of customers are most representative of all customers? Are these groups of customers representative permanently? Do their tastes change over time? Does any unchanging "basket of goods" retain the same importance to these representative customers if their tastes change over time? If it doesn't retain the same importance, then how can an earlier basket of goods be compared with a later basket? None of these questions can be answered scientifically apart from the presupposition of measurable value. But there is no objective measure of subjective value, according to modern economic theory.

Economists rarely discuss these obvious discrepancies from the profession's nearly universal assumption of subjective value theory.⁵

Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992). Coase never responded. As of 2012, he is still writing at age 101.

5. I say "nearly universal" because Marxist economists still officially adhere to ob-

When they do offer a theory that is said to overcome the subjective-objective dualism of economic value theory, the vast majority of their colleagues ignore them. Those few economists who do not ignore them probably disagree with them. Humanistic economists are as trapped by the subject-object dualism of all humanist thought as are the members of every other academic discipline.

C. Economic Value Theory in Christian Economics

Christian economics must view the individual's subjective imputation of economic value as analogical to God's imputation of value. The best example in the Bible of this process of divine imputation is Genesis 1, where God announces at the end of each day that His work is good. He announces subjectively that which is objectively true. There is perfect correspondence between subjective value and objective value in the correspondence between God's objective work and His subjective imputation. *In the triune God of the Bible is the reconciliation of the subject-object dualism.* What God does originally and creatively, man does analogically and re-creatively.⁶ Each individual does this either as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker.

God does not choose between this or that scarce economic resource. Nothing is scarce for God. But God does establish standards of economic value for decision-makers. God tells men what is valuable and what is not. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Because of sin, covenant-breakers do not adopt God's mandated standard of economic value as their own. They impute high value to that which is not highly valuable, and vice versa. Men in their rebellion against God substitute covenant-breaking individual subjective scales of economic value for the unitary, objective scale of economic value that God has established for mankind corporately and also for individuals. Covenant-breaking men reject God's values. God warns them: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isa. 55:8). The proper response is King David's: "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day" (Ps. 25:4-5). "I thought on my ways, and turned my

jective value theory, i.e., Marx's labor theory of value.

6. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 5.

feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Ps. 119:59–60).

Covenant-breakers seek to *legislate objective reality* on the basis of their own authority by means of their subjective imputations of subjective value. Every covenant-breaker is a self-proclaimed autonomous evaluator who seeks to impose his own subjective values. Among covenant-breakers, there is no common scale of economic value, either subjective or objective, except for the one that they have stolen from God, in whose image they are made, and from whose constant testimony against them they cannot escape. Men's presumed autonomy leads to theories of ethical and aesthetic relativism. It also leads to conflicts over values, which include economic value.

There is no unitary humanistic scale of economic value that can serve as either the basis of, or a measure of, objective economic value. God alone provides the definitive scale of objective economic value that can serve men as a consistent epistemological and ethical basis of their subjective economic valuations. *It is God, and only God, who establishes objective economic value.* He is the absolutely sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the world. He is therefore the absolutely sovereign subjective Imputer of economic value. In the triune God of the Bible alone is a consistent solution to humanism's subject-object dualism, and therefore also the dualism of subjective and objective economic value.

Conclusion

Value theory is both subjective and objective. Economists prior to 1870 emphasized objective value. Economists after 1870 (Marxists excepted) have emphasized subjective value. But economists sneak an element of objective value back into their theories.⁷ On the one hand, they deny that it is possible for an economist or anyone else to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. On the other hand, every economist must assume that such comparisons are valid in order to construct price indexes or to make policy recommendations. There is no way logically for economists to explain objective value in terms of subjective value, or vice versa; nevertheless, they speak, write, and act as though their theory of autonomous acting man did allow this, even though in theory, they admit that it doesn't.

7. An exception was Israel Kirzner, who retained his commitment to pure subjectivism. I recall no case where he made a policy recommendation.

Christian economics offers a solution to the subject-object anti-nomy of all humanistic economics: God's subjective imputation of value to His objectively valuable creation. Man is made in God's image. Man therefore possesses the ability and the responsibility to impute economic value to aspects of God's creation. Each imputation will not match God's, but the standard is Jesus Christ's imputation in His nature as perfect humanity. "But we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16b). Each covenant-keeper's progressive sanctification leads him closer to this performance standard.

Appendix C

ADAM SMITH'S THEORY OF ECONOMIC CAUSATION

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (I Tim. 6:7–11).

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (I Tim. 6:17–19).

A. The God of Moralism

In his first published book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith was careful not to deny either the benefits or the impulse of charitable giving. He devoted the final chapter of the book to a consideration “of universal Benevolence.” But his analysis of charity rested entirely on his unitarian theology, which is no longer in favor among economists. I call it unitarian because his god was not the God of redemption through faith in Christ. His god was a god of moralism.

The eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment was developed by members of Scotland’s Presbyterian Church, but they were liberals, rightfully called latitudinarians.¹ Two of the movement’s founders

1. Murray N. Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, 2 vols. (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward El-

were sons of Presbyterian ministers: Gershom Carmichael (1672–1729) and Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), the two predecessors of Adam Smith as professors of moral philosophy at Glasgow University. Carmichael's father had been exiled from Scotland for heresy.² Another founder of the Scottish Enlightenment was the philosopher, David Hume. He was a philosophical skeptic, but he did maintain membership in the church, although he came close to being excommunicated.³

When Smith was awarded the chair in moral philosophy at Glasgow in 1752, he was required to affirm his commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), the most detailed and rigorous Calvinistic confession in history. Yet there is no trace of Calvin's theology in anything that Smith wrote. Smith's concept of God was indistinguishable from unitarianism's doctrine of god: a god who does not bring negative sanctions in history, a god of universal benevolence. He called on all men to believe in this god. In 1759, he wrote,

This universal benevolence, how noble and generous soever, can be the source of no solid happiness to any man who is not thoroughly convinced that all the inhabitants of the universe, the meanest as well as the greatest, are under the immediate care and protection of that great, benevolent, and all-wise Being, who directs all the movements of nature; and who is determined, by his own unalterable perfections, to maintain in it, at all times, the greatest possible quantity of happiness. To this universal benevolence, on the contrary, the very suspicion of a fatherless world, must be the most melancholy of all reflections; from the thought that all the unknown regions of infinite and incomprehensible space may be filled with nothing but endless misery and wretchedness. All the splendour of the highest prosperity can never enlighten the gloom with which so dreadful an idea must necessarily over-shadow the imagination; nor, in a wise and virtuous man, can all the sorrow of the most afflicting adversity ever dry up the joy which necessarily springs from the habitual and thorough conviction of the truth of the contrary system.⁴

The existence of such a god is basic to the preservation of benevolence among men. Smith insisted that it must not be left to men to extend systematic benevolence on their own authority. God must preserve benevolence among fallen men, even as Newton had hypothesized God's direct intervention in maintaining the orbits of the planets

gar, 1995), I, pp. 423–25, 440.

2. *Ibid.*, I, p. 417.

3. *Ibid.*, I, p. 425.

4. *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI:III:III.

in order to preserve their order—a suggestion that Leibniz challenged in private correspondence during Newton's lifetime, and which Newton's followers abandoned entirely after his death in 1727. Smith ended the book with a warning against trusting in the benevolence of men.

The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension; the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country: that he is occupied in contemplating the more sublime, can never be an excuse for his neglecting the more humble department; and he must not expose himself to the charge which Avidius Cassius is said to have brought, perhaps unjustly, against Marcus Antoninus; that while he employed himself in philosophical speculations, and contemplated the prosperity of the universe, he neglected that of the Roman empire. The most sublime speculation of the contemplative philosopher can scarce compensate the neglect of the smallest active duty.⁵

Smith knew, just as Paul had known, that men's decisions are not usually governed by the impulse of charity. This fact of economic life had led social theorists for millennia to the same conclusion: a society that relies on that which is abnormal to govern its day-to-day operations is a society that will not survive with its institutions intact. No society has ever survived whose institutions have rested on the assumption of the widespread impulse of charity. Monasteries have come the closest to this ideal, but they always operate in terms of tight hierarchical systems of control over their members. St. Benedict is famous for his *Rule* (c. 530), not for his order's charity. Of the *Rule's* 73 chapters, most deal with discipline, and the chapter that deals with the distribution of goods (34) is careful to speak of the required sanctions.

Whether All Should Receive in Equal Measure What Is Necessary

It is written, "Distribution was made to everyone according as he had need" (Acts 4:35). We do not say by this that respect should be had for persons (God forbid), but regard for infirmities. Let him who hath need of less thank God and not give way to sadness, but let him who hath need of more, humble himself for his infirmity, and not be

5. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI:III:III.

elated for the indulgence shown him; and thus all the members will be at peace.

Above all, let not the evil of murmuring appear in the least word or sign for any reason whatever. If anyone be found guilty herein, let him be placed under very severe discipline.⁶

When departing from the economic motivation of *personal self-interest* and its inescapable result, *economic inequality*, he who proposes an alternative social arrangement had better be ready to accept the fact that the organization's officials must impose "very severe discipline."

Theologically speaking, the supreme act of charity in history was Jesus Christ's personal sacrifice of Himself on behalf of the world, which hated Him or else knew nothing about Him. Had He not been willing to do this, then on the day of Adam's rebellion, mankind would have perished.⁷ He also died on behalf of His covenant people. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). This was surely an abnormal act of self-sacrifice, but it remains the supreme normative model for His followers. When that which is personally normative is also socially abnormal, then it is an unreliable standard of government for the masses of humanity.

Smith believed that benevolence in human affairs is dependent generally on God, not men. In the next phase of his intellectual career, he abandoned any reliance on benevolence at all, for deism's god disappeared from Smith's analysis. He offered a new view of social order, one that need not rely on a god or individual benevolence in order to produce an inherently benevolent society. In short, *out of selfishness, benevolence*.

B. Smith's Conceptual Revolution

In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith reconstructed economic theory by forthrightly admitting what men have known from the beginning, namely, that individual self-interest is a far more widely distributed motivation than individual self-sacrifice, at least outside the immediate family unit and associations necessarily based on self-sacrifice on behalf of the larger entity, such as the church and the military.

6. *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Rev. Boniface Verhuysen, OSB (Achison, Kansas: St. Benedict's Abbey, 1949), ch. 34.

7. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/gndcrg>)

Smith's main contribution to economic theory was his cogent and consistent explanation of the national economy in terms of voluntary acts of individual exchange. He explained the unplanned but orderly macro economy as a product of individually planned micro economies: individuals, families, and firms. In short, *out of many, one*.

Smith's primary goal for his book was to explain the corporate wealth of nations and why this wealth varied, nation to nation. He offered an explanation based on methodological individualism. He taught that individual self-interest in a myriad of voluntary transactions is the source of the growing corporate wealth of nations. The wealth of nations is the undesigned outcome of the wealth of individuals.

Smith's methodological individualism differs fundamentally from the Bible's principle of methodological covenantalism. The Mosaic law presents its various discussions of the wealth of individuals in terms of the wealth of the nation or the covenanted corporate group to which the individuals in question belong. The economic sanctions of wealth and poverty are predictable in terms of a group's adherence to the specifics of biblical law, but not in terms of personal obedience. Nevertheless, Paul teaches that the work of the law is written on all men's hearts (Rom. 2:15).⁸ In this sense, there is individualism. But it is not an autonomous form of individualism that is devoid of judicial, covenantal links to other men. The Bible does not teach that, on an individual basis, adherence to God's law predictably produces wealth. It does teach that when large numbers of people obey the work of the law in their hearts, their nation will prosper, which includes most residents. What Smith said is produced by the division of labor—greater wealth for men and nations—the Mosaic law said is true of the effects of covenant-keeping. Smith traced wealth to widespread economic exchange. The Mosaic law traced it to widespread individual obedience to God's law.

Smith's concern with the wealth of nations remains the central issue of most debates over economic policy today. The attainment of sustained economic growth and the avoidance of short-term economic contractions ("recessions") are the central economic issues in modern politics. These issues are also central to what we might call economic apologetics. In this sense, politicians and economists continue the inquiry begun by Moses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 into the

8. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

causes of corporate blessings and cursings. They merely secularize the terms.⁹ But, from the point of view of economic theory, Smith's definition of economics as the science of national wealth no longer serves as the foundation of economic analysis. The history of economic thought since Smith has been a series of alternative definitions of the scope and method of economic science: social welfare,¹⁰ individual wealth maximization (avarice),¹¹ exchange,¹² money and economic measurement,¹³ resource allocation,¹⁴ and purposeful individual action¹⁵—all in a world of scarcity.

In Smith's analysis, poor people whose economic output is not in demand by customers at prevailing prices are not direct participants in the free market's self-interested system of voluntary exchange. But, as national wealth increases, it is plausible to assume that the poor will benefit, too. There will be more charity, more instruments of healing, and additional charitable institutions to deal with the afflictions of the poor. The danger in making this assumption is that the pursuit of wealth may hinder men's sacrificial impulse. The desires unleashed by rising personal income may overwhelm the wealth owner's impulse to sacrifice, just as an addictive drug overwhelms the addict's priorities. To these negative results of the free market economy, Paul speaks clearly. The rich must be exhorted to act sacrificially. While it is formally true that the value of each additional unit of revenue will be used by its recipient to satisfy a desire that is lower on his scale of values, *this scale of values is not fixed through time*. It is likely to be affected by the increase in income. Tastes change as men grow richer. Self-sacrifice may be pushed further down on a person's scale of values. In terms of his earlier priorities, sacrificial giving may have been higher on his value scale, but wealth has changed his priorities. *Other things have not remained equal*.

Capitalism has opened up the possibility of attaining great wealth to more people than any other social system ever has. Capitalism's defenders have proclaimed a humanistic and nearly universal gospel of

9. Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: from Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

10. Israel M. Kirzner, *The Economic Point of View* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1960), pp. 43–50. (<http://bit.ly/KirznerEPV>)

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 7.

wealth, and in so doing, they have lowered a traditional psychological barrier against personal wealth-seeking. Paul's warning against the negative moral consequences of the personal quest for great wealth has been drowned out by Smith's vision of universal riches through the division of labor and the private ownership of the means of production. Capitalism has mass produced opportunities to get rich, making these opportunities available to hundreds of millions of people who would never have believed that such wealth was available to the common man. It has mass produced these dreams by lowering the barriers to dreaming: legal, psychological, moral, and geographical.

According to Smith, the primary impulse for service to people outside of the family is personal self-interest: the quest for income through trade. The pursuit of money is a universal motivation. Capitalism institutionalizes this universal motivation, and makes it service-oriented. Capitalism harnesses and re-channels what Paul identified as a morally dangerous impulse. *Capitalism generates positive temporal benefits by means of a negative spiritual impulse.* Capitalism has produced a transformation in moral theory and practice.

The most consistent development of Smith's analytical principle of individual self-interest is found in the writings of a novelist, Ayn Rand.¹⁶ She wrote a non-fiction book, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1976). One of her disciples is economist George Reisman. He referred to the benevolent nature of capitalism.¹⁷ The results are benevolent even though the system rests on individual selfishness. Capitalism "promotes human life and well-being and does so for everyone."¹⁸ In short, *out of evil, good.*

C. Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*

This implausible moral transformation was promoted by Bernard Mandeville in his anonymous 1705 poem, *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest*. Mandeville, an immigrant to England from Holland, offered an analogy of human society as a bee hive. The poem pointed out that personal motives and private actions that are socially condemned as selfish produce socially beneficial results. For instance,

16. *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* are her two major novels.

17. George Reisman, *Capitalism: A Treatise on Economics* (Ottawa, Illinois: Jameson Books, 1999), index: "Capitalism: benevolent nature of."

18. Reisman, "Some Fundamental Insights into the Benevolent Nature of Capitalism" (Oct. 25, 2002), published by the Ludwig von Mises institute. This essay is posted at <http://tinyurl.com/377zr>.

fickleness in dress and fashion creates jobs for those who satisfy ever-changing tastes. But for Adam Smith and all who have followed his lead, the crucial observation had to do with the cause of economic growth.

Thus Vice nursed Ingenuity,
Which joined with Time, and Industry
Had carried Life's Conveniencies,
Its real Pleasures, Comforts, Ease,
To such a Height, the very Poor
Lived better than the Rich before
(lines 197–202)

The original poem attracted little attention. In 1714, Mandeville republished it anonymously, this time with extensive commentary. He called it *The Fable of the Bees*, which was subtitled, *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. It sold well enough to go into a second printing that year. In the second printing, he added this subtitle: *Several Discourses, to demonstrate, that Human Frailties, . . . may be turned to the Advantage of the Civil Society, and made to supply the Place of Moral Virtues*. In 1723, there was another edition. Because of a highly controversial chapter added toward the end, "An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools," the book became notorious overnight. He opposed charity schools for the poor. The book became so notorious that some of the leading thinkers of the century wrote books against it, including Bishop Berkeley and Francis Hutcheson.

F. A. Hayek regarded this book as the turning point in the history of social theory because of its influence on David Hume, and, through Hume, on Scottish moral philosophy. He said the subtitle of the second 1714 edition is the key. "What I believe he wants to say by this is precisely what Josiah Tucker expressed more clearly 40 years later when he wrote that 'that *universal* mover in human nature, SELF-LOVE, may receive such direction in this case (as in all others) as to promote the public interest by those efforts it shall make towards pursuing its own'."¹⁹

19. He cited Tucker, *The Elements of Commerce and Theory of Taxes* (1755), in R. L. Schuyler (ed.), Josiah Tucker, *a Selection from his Economic and Political Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 92. Hayek, "Lecture on a master mind," delivered to the British Academy (23 March 1966); reprinted in Hayek, *New Studies*, p. 259. The essay appears as "Dr. Bernard Mandeville." It is reprinted in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek*, 19 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), III, p. 90.

There were editions in 1724 and 1725. In 1728, he added a second volume of commentary. Hayek noted: "By that time, however, he had become a bogey man, a name with which to frighten the godly and respectable, an author whom one might read in secret to enjoy a paradox, but whom everybody knew to be a moral monster by whose ideas one must not be infected. Yet almost everyone read him and few escaped infection."²⁰ Hayek added in a footnote: "There is perhaps no other comparable work of which one can be equally confident that all contemporary writers in the field knew it, whether they explicitly refer to it or not." Yet today, Mandeville's two volumes are little known and read only by academic specialists.²¹ Be thankful that you are not one of them.

Prior to Mandeville, selfishness had been seen as a vice. Virtue had been seen as obedience to righteous moral commands. This outlook was basic to classical political philosophy and also to the Renaissance, Machiavelli excepted. It was also basic to the outlook of early eighteenth-century republican political theory.²² Mandeville rejected this outlook. He defined virtue as acts motivated apart from personal self-interest. This was a denial of the Bible's system of covenantal ethics, which proclaims that acting in conformity to God's law brings positive sanctions. Then, having defined virtue so rigorously, Mandeville denied that it could ever be found in human nature. All virtuous acts are in fact acts of disguised self-interest and even self-deception.²³ Hayek commented: "By treating as vicious everything done for selfish purposes, and admitting as virtuous only what was done in order to obey moral commands, he had little difficulty in showing that we owed most benefits of society to what on such a rigoristic standard must be called vicious. This was no new discovery but as old almost as any reflection on these problems. . . . Yet by making his starting-point the particular moral contrast between the selfishness of the motives and the benefits which the resulting actions conferred on others, Mandev-

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 251–52; *Collected Works*, III, p. 82.

21. The two volumes, which Oxford University Press published in 1924, were reprinted in 1988 by the Liberty Fund, which publishes classics in conservative and libertarian social and economic theory.

22. Thomas A. Horne, *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 5–6, 54–55, 96; E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 9–10.

23. F. B. Kaye, "Introduction," Bernard Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1924), I, pp. xlvi–lxiv.

ille saddled himself with an incubus of which neither he nor his successors to the present day could ever quite free themselves.”²⁴

Hayek, as a defender of social evolutionism,²⁵ saw Mandeville’s main contribution as the precursor of his own theory of the spontaneous social order. Mandeville, like Hayek, was interested in why undesigned social institutions are able to channel private vices (e.g., producers’ greed) into public benefits (e.g., consumers’ goods). In the words of that other Scottish rationalist, Adam Ferguson, repeatedly quoted by Hayek, Mandeville discussed the results of human action but not of human design.²⁶ This was also the main focus of Hayek’s intellectual career after the publication of his *Constitution of Liberty* (1960). This extended to his final book, *The Fatal Conceit*, which was published in 1988, when he was 89 years old. “What Mandeville was concerned with was that institutions which man had not deliberately made—though it is the task of the legislator to improve them—bring it about that the divergent interests of the individuals are reconciled.”²⁷ The so-called harmony of interests is neither designed nor innate in society, Hayek argued. Rather, this harmony evolves under certain institutions, but not under others, i.e. socialism.

Hayek pointed out that the Scottish Enlightenment’s social theorists were social Darwinists a century before Darwin. They explained the origin of social order (the one) as the result of unplanned interactions between undesigned, evolutionary social institutions and individual decision-making (the many). A century later, Darwin applied this same worldview to biological evolution: the process of an impersonal, undesigned natural selection of survivors who possess environment-favored but unplanned biological characteristics. We know that Darwin read Adam Smith, though apparently not *Wealth of Nations*.²⁸ The public scandal that Darwin created after 1859 was an extension of the original public scandal that Mandeville created in 1723. Both men offered explanations for perceived order without invoking the tradi-

24. Hayek, *New Studies*, pp. 252–53; *Collected Works*, III, p. 83.

25. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix B. See especially Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (1988), vol. III of *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek* (Chicago University of Chicago Press). He attempted in this book to avoid using the word “social” (p. 109), but he could not avoid the concept.

26. Hayek, *New Studies*, p. 264; *Collected Works*, III, p. 96. This is from Ferguson’s book, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), p. 187.

27. Hayek, *New Studies*, p. 260; *Collected Works*, III, p. 91.

28. Hayek, *Fatal Conceit*, p. 24.

tional theological argument from design.²⁹

D. Smith Extended Mandeville's Insight

Smith's teacher Francis Hutcheson was repelled by the moral implications of Mandeville's poem and book. Hutcheson was a proponent of Shaftesbury's moralism.³⁰ Shaftesbury was Mandeville's primary target, as he said repeatedly. Hutcheson wanted a society based on morality. Mandeville said this is impossible. Any attempt to do this is destructive of wealth in large nations. Pride, the love of luxury, and spending make a nation great.³¹ Hutcheson was appalled. So was Smith, who favored thrift and production. But this merely pushed the moral dilemma back one step. The person who is industrious in order to sell a luxury good has as his goal a sale. This requires a buyer. The motivation of the two participants is the same: individual self-interest. To make a purchase, the buyer must possess money or some other asset. So, from the point of view of the free market, the sovereign customer's desire for a luxury good at a competitive price is the reason for the producer's industriousness. Yes, Mandeville was a proto-Keynesian—a demand-side economist—as Rothbard points out,³² and, far more important, as Keynes pointed out.³³ But this does not change the nature of his revolutionary insight: *the transformation of individual self-interest into public benefits*.

In his book, *The Virtue of Prosperity*, Dinesh D'Sousa commented on the debate between Mandeville and Smith, which I regard as a debate between demand-side economics (Mandeville) and supply-side economics (Smith).

Adam Smith, for example, roundly denounced Mandeville's views as "wholly pernicious." Smith was no fan of sloth and extravagance, as Mandeville was. At the same time he agreed with Mandeville that the traditional vices of selfishness and greed were the indispensable foundations of a commercially prosperous society. So he replaced Mandeville's notion of "vice" with the more palatable term "interest." Then he argued, much along the lines of Mandeville, that self-interested motives, operating through the framework of a free market,

29. Hayek, *New Studies*, p. 265; *Collected Works*, III, p. 97.

30. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), pp. 268–69.

31. Mandeville, *Fable*, I, pp. 181–91, 229.

32. Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith*, I, pp. 421–22.

33. John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1936]), pp. 359–62.

would produce socially beneficial consequences. In fact, Mandeville's concept that the pursuit of private gain leads to public welfare is the central premise of *The Wealth of Nations*, and economist Gary Becker told me that he regards it as "the most important idea in the social sciences in two and a half centuries."³⁴

Smith adopted Mandeville's fundamental idea, namely, that the pursuit of individual self-interest produces social benefits, especially national wealth, as unintended consequences. *Individual self-interest within the framework of the free –"natural"–market was seen as reconciling the one and the many in society, considered as an economic unit.* Smith reconstructed economic theory with this concept. He did not agree with Mandeville's emphasis on consumption as the source of public benefits. Smith emphasized production. But, because Smith identified consumption as the goal of all production,³⁵ he could not avoid becoming an extension of Mandeville. The enduring legacy of *The Wealth of Nations* is Smith's argument that the pursuit of individual self-interest in an unplanned free market system of voluntary exchange is the means of attaining greater national wealth. Three Nobel Prize-winning economists have agreed that this was Smith's enduring legacy: Becker, George Stigler, and Hayek, all of whom taught at the University of Chicago. Stigler put it this way in 1976, the 200th anniversary year of the publication of *Wealth of Nations*: "Smith had one overwhelmingly important triumph: he put into the center of economics the systematic analysis of the behavior of individuals pursuing their own self-interest under the conditions of competition."³⁶ Hayek put it somewhat differently in that same anniversary year: "The recognition that a man's efforts will benefit more people, and on the whole satisfy greater needs, when he lets himself be guided by the abstract signals of prices rather than by perceived needs, and that by this method we can best overcome our constitutional ignorance of most of the particular facts, and can make the fullest use of the knowledge of concrete circumstances widely dispersed among millions of individuals, is the great achievement of Adam Smith."³⁷

34. Dinesh D'Sousa, *The Virtue of Prosperity: Finding Values in an Age of Techno-Affluence* (New York: Free Press, 2000), pp. 177–78.

35. "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production. . . ." Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book IV, Chapter VIII, p. 625.

36. George Stigler, "The Successes and Failures of Professor Smith," *Journal of Political Economy*, 84 (December, 1976), p. 1201; cited in Mark Skousen, *The Making of Modern Economics* (Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 2001), p. 20.

37. Hayek, "Adam Smith's Message in Today's Language" (1976), in Hayek, *New*

Modern economists, in their desire to create a social science, have adopted the same myth of ethical neutrality that natural scientists have officially adopted. Economists speak of efficiency, not morality. But Smith's system had moral implications. It identified greater national wealth as a goal of deliberate political policy. He was arguing against the interventionist economics of mercantilism. His analysis offered solutions to two perennial philosophical problems, from the Greeks to the Enlightenment: (1) out of many, one; (2) out of greed, benefits. As Milton Mayer has written: "Adam Smith did not believe that man was good. But he did not trouble himself to assert that man was bad. Man was—well, what we have always known him to be. His nature is evident through the whole of history. His motivation is self-interest, and that social system is best which turns that motivation to the best account. . . . If Smith was right, there would not be a New Man. There would be nothing new. Man's ingenuity would merely have adjusted him better to his environment."³⁸

E. The New Man in Christ

This raises a question for Christian theology: What of the "new man" in Jesus Christ, i.e., regeneration? Paul wrote: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). What difference does regeneration make in social theory? From Mandeville to Mises, from Smith to Stigler, the answer of economists has been the same: none. They all use Ockham's razor to shave God out of their theories and equations. The evolutionist's cosmos, whether astronomical, biological, or social, is without design. There is no transcendence in the evolutionist's cosmos. There is only immanence: man, who has become god by default.

Free market capitalism as a social and legal system offers economic incentives to the masses of men to serve each other in a society-wide quest for individual wealth. Capitalism's success rests on the widespread acceptance of the formal goal of increased personal wealth, which is usually denominated by money. Capitalism has reduced poverty as no rival social system ever has. How? By legitimizing and institutionalizing the pursuit of self-interest, which is judicially indistin-

Studies, p. 269; *Collected Works*, III, p. 121.

38. Milton Mayer, "The New Man," *The Great Ideas Today: 1966* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1966), pp. 134–35.

guishable from greed. The reduction of poverty has been the most universally accepted social objective in man's history, and also a universally accepted personal goal, monks excepted.

Paul knew, just as Jesus knew, that the personal goal of attaining temporal riches has always had more devotees than the personal goal of helping the poor. Free market capitalism accepts men as they are. It does not call for or expect men's regeneration by God's grace. Customers do not pay producers to change their minds regarding the benefits of getting rich or ignoring charity. Knowingly or not, customers use the producers' desire to get richer as their means of enticing producers to ever-greater levels of customer-satisfying service. In short, *capitalism harnesses individual greed*. Capitalism has therefore served the public interest, as evaluated by self-interested customers. Capitalism has reduced poverty as never before in history, but it has also sanctioned greed, luring hundreds of millions of men into paths of unrighteousness—not unrighteousness in production (cheating), but unrighteousness in kingdom priorities. It is not that capitalism necessarily reduces the level of charitable giving, but it has unquestionably relegated charity to the shadows, both institutionally and theoretically. As surely as *The Wealth of Nations* put *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in its shadow, so has it also put the New Testament's teaching on riches and charity in its shadow. This, despite the fact that Smith was revising the seventh edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in the year of his death, 1790.³⁹ He ended his life's work trying to refute Mandeville's philosophical anarchism,⁴⁰ in the name of sympathy.⁴¹ Yet his successors in nineteenth-century political economy and twentieth-century economics were far more sympathetic to Mandeville's view of human motivation than Smith's. Self-interest, not sympathy, became both the bedrock epistemological and ethical foundation of free market economic thought.

Men's desire to get richer, when coupled with the judicial enforcement of private ownership and private contracts, has become the most powerful explanatory device of economic theory. Capitalism's only widely accepted rival worldview—State central planning—has used the language of ethics and charity as a cover for the expansion of the

39. E. G. West, "Introduction," Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, Indiana: LibertyClassics, 1976), p. 20.

40. Kaye, "Introduction," *Fable*, I, pp. lviii–lix.

41. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII: IV.

political power of elite planners over the masses.⁴² The invariable economic results of the command economy has been slower economic growth, at best, and mass starvation at worst. The political result has been the establishment of massive bureaucracy, sometimes leading to genocide.⁴³

Under free market capitalism, the ethical motivation of service to others is subordinated both operationally and theoretically to the individual's quest for greater wealth. In the famous passage in *Wealth of Nations* that refers to the invisible hand, Smith wrote of the businessman that "he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in so many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good."⁴⁴ Business charity is an afterthought—and, very often, it is little more than a public relations technique.⁴⁵ The right hand not only knows what the left hand is doing, it hires a full-time publicist to call the public's attention to what it is doing. In the final analysis, the accountant's profit-and-loss statement and balance sheet dominate the world of business. In the eminently practical science of accounting, form dominates substance. Its premier law is "by the numbers!" Nevertheless, the result of free market capitalism has been the creation of unprecedented wealth for hundreds of millions of people. Pareto's law of 20-80 income/wealth distribution has not been significantly altered by any modern society,⁴⁶ but total wealth has grown in the capitalist West for over two centuries. One estimate is that the growth rate has been 2.8% per annum.⁴⁷ If someone had invested \$1,000 in 1750 at 2.8%, and then re-invested the earnings tax-free, the value of the capital in 2005 would be \$1,143,521. This is more than a 1,000-fold increase in wealth.

42. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

43. Stéphane Courtois, et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999).

44. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, IV:II, p. 423.

45. This was one of Mandeville's arguments. *Fable*, I, p. 309.

46. Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), an Italian sociologist-economist in Switzerland, discovered that 20% of a nation's population gained 80% of its income, in every European nation he studied in the late nineteenth century. Pareto, *Cours d'Economie Politique*, vol. 2 (Lausanne, 1897), pp. 370–72.

47. Walt W. Rostow, *The World Economy: History & Prospect* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), p. 48.

What is said here of capitalism's sanctions of profit and loss also applies to every system of positive sanctions. Means and ends can easily be reversed in the plans of purposeful individuals. When men pursue the positive sanctions produced by righteousness rather than pursuing righteousness for God's sake, they fall into the same spiritual trap as the man who pursues riches by means of serving customers. Consider the student who studies to get good grades rather than mastering the material. This substitution of sanctions for substance is not an effective argument against grades in education. Consider the artist who violates his aesthetic standards in order to make a sale to a private art collector with poor taste. This is not an effective argument for tax-funded art. The substitution of formal institutional sanctions in place of personal performance standards is common to every institutional arrangement.

Nevertheless, free market capitalism is uniquely dangerous spiritually, for its underlying motivational force is man's desire for riches. The science of economics has been self-consciously constructed on the assumption of the pursuit of personal wealth as the supreme motivator. The performance of the free market social order also rests on this human motivation. The desire for money is the most universal form of sanctions-seeking—so universal that Christ identified it as Christianity's rival religion: mammon.⁴⁸ This is the religion of the great god More. Money is the most marketable commodity. It is the most representative form of all of the substitutes for God's saving grace that this world has to offer.

Christianity does not praise greed. On the contrary, it identifies greed as a great moral evil. Yet, in practice, as Mayer observed, "The Christianization of the Western world did not inhibit man's materialistic drive (or his materialistic devotion)."⁴⁹ But by the end of the twentieth century, it was becoming clear that humanism and materialism had replaced Christianity in Western Europe.

The Wealth of Nations was the most important document presenting the right-wing Enlightenment's social worldview, which was evolutionary. The book appeared after Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762), which was the left-wing Enlightenment's premier statement. The underlying model for Smith was Scottish Presbyterianism,

48. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14; North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 38.

49. Mayer, "The New Man," *Great Ideas Today*: 1966, p. 144.

with its congregational locus of initiation and its bottom-up appeals court system. The underlying model for Rousseau was the Jesuit order, with its top-down chain of command. Rousseau presented the case for the all-encompassing state. Smith presented the case for the near autonomy of the free market.

Rousseau offered a theory of the General Will, the disembodied and hypothetical will of the people as a collective entity. He did not offer an explanation for how state officials can speak accurately on behalf of the General Will. He offered no economic theory. Smith rested his case for the unplanned economic order squarely on acting individuals, whose voluntary exchanges are registered by means of prices, and whose motivations can be understood by the entrepreneur through introspection. Objective prices reflect objective conditions of supply and demand. Suppliers and customers are enabled by the price system to work out mutually agreeable transactions.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in December of 1991, the intellectual heirs of Rousseau have been left high and dry. Socialism's ideal of central planning is out of favor within the Western intelligentsia today, not because of economic analysis, which remains unpopular and barely understood by most intellectuals, but on the basis of the visible loss of power suffered by Communism's bureaucratic tyrants. This loss of power was the result of the Communists' loss of faith in Marxism-Leninism and the Communist economy's failure to produce wealth for the Communist Party's elite. Communism's leaders recognized at the 1980 Moscow Olympics that upper-middle-class Westerners had a higher standard of living than the top three percent of the Russian population: members of the Communist Party. High-ranking members of the Communist Party in 1991 decided to privatize the economy by transferring the ownership of the Communist Party's liquid capital to themselves. To justify this massive theft of the Party's assets, the Party's senior officers simultaneously reformed the entire Soviet economy, formally abandoning Communism, thereby establishing the legitimacy of private property and voluntary exchange. The Communist Party's apparatus disappeared in 1991, and so did its money.⁵⁰ Western commentators know nothing of this clandestine transfer of Party assets, but they do know that the Party officially com-

50. The story of the Party's disappearing funds was related to me by Anthony Easton, an American businessman who had long-term contacts with top Soviet leaders before and after 1991.

mitted suicide on August 23, 1991,⁵¹ and also that the Russian economy was subsequently privatized.

F. Kingdoms in Conflict

Adam Smith's insight that societies can grow rich as a result of the individual's pursuit of self-interest within the context of a private property order is found in only three closely related texts in the Bible. They all have to do with money-lending.

For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee (Deut. 16:6).⁵²

The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).⁵³

The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail (Deut. 28:43–44).⁵⁴

Here, lenders are winners, and borrowers are losers. The context of the first and second passages is economic growth: God's visible, corporate blessing. The God-honoring society becomes rich and powerful, and its money-lenders do, too. They lend to covenant-breakers. The idea that both parties are beneficiaries of the transaction is not present in these passages.

Free market economic theory argues that voluntary transactions benefit both parties in terms of their goals. The Bible regards this outlook as short-sighted. The Bible looks at the longer-run implications of

51. Michael Dobbs, *Down With Big Brother: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1997), p. 417.

52. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 37.

53. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

54. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

voluntary transactions. It does not accept the epistemological principle of the moral equality of all goals. It teaches a rival view: that which fosters an increase in capital leads to dominion, and is therefore preferable. That which sacrifices future income growth and influence on the altar of present consumption is a curse.⁵⁵ Corporate economic growth is seen as a benefit.

There are winners and losers in these passages. The fact that both parties gain their goals through exchange testifies to the fact that the lender has better long-run priorities than the borrower. The dividing issue here is *long-term dominion vs. immediate gratification*. Both the lender and the borrower get what they want, but what the lender wants is better because he is future-oriented.

1. Kingdoms and Eschatology

A related aspect of Christian righteousness is future-orientation regarding eternity. In the seventeenth century, Scottish Presbyterians began to proclaim optimism regarding the transformational effects of the kingdom of God in history. This is made clear in Answer 191 of the Larger Catechism (1647) regarding the meaning of the Lord's Prayer.

Q191: What do we pray for in the second petition?

A191: In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.

This is a postmillennial vision: "We pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in." It as-

55. Consumption is not utterly evil, for we must consume in order to live. But consumption without thrift is a moral evil except in a dire emergency (Prov. 13:22).

sumes a literal fulfillment of Romans 11.⁵⁶ For the first time in Western history, we find a systematic theological application of Moses' doctrine of the long-term compound growth of righteousness in history (Deut. 28:1–14).⁵⁷ The West had not taken this doctrine literally prior to Scottish Presbyterianism, although there were some elements of postmillennial thinking in Calvin's writings.⁵⁸

Postmillennialism has a crucial implication for economic theory: the possibility of compound economic growth as a product—a positive corporate sanction—of the extension of Christian righteousness in society. The possibility of irreversible compound economic growth was a unique underlying assumption of *The Wealth of Nations*. The preference for thrift over consumption for the sake of the capitalization of God's kingdom in history was an aspect of this outlook regarding the future. Smith secularized this economic implication of postmillennialism.

Christian postmillennialism stands in stark contrast to the social evolutionism of the Scottish Enlightenment. The Scottish Enlightenment teaches that all social institutions that sustain human life are undesigned. They have come into existence as a result of historical circumstances. They are a combination of purposeful individual activities in the context of impersonal chance and impersonal natural law. Free market institutions are said to provide liberty and productivity, at least for today, but this could change at any time, depending on changes in circumstances: the environment, men's future-orientation, religious commitments, war, invasion, plague, and a host of other factors. In such a view, there is nothing predestined about progress. There is not even any agreed-upon definition of progress.

The only purpose in this Darwinian universe is life. Hayek wrote in his last book, as a heading: "*Life Has No Purpose But Itself*."⁵⁹ There is no meaning for history, other than species survival. This goal changes, depending on which species is on top. There is no moral order based on supernaturally revealed moral standards.⁶⁰ There are only rules of

56. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 8.

57. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

58. On this point, see Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Prima Facie Acceptance of Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Winter 1976–77), pp. 69–76. I argue that there were both amillennial and postmillennial arguments in Calvin's writings: "The Economic Thought of Luther and Calvin," *ibid.*, II (Summer 1975), pp. 102–6.

59. Hayek, *Fatal Conceit*, p. 133.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

conduct⁶¹ provided by an undesigned, self-organizing,⁶² impersonal series of interdependent institutions. There are no predictable laws of evolution or historical development.⁶³ We can deal successfully with the unknown only by trusting in its impersonal operations. "For in fact we are able to bring about an ordering of the unknown *only by causing it to order itself*."⁶⁴ We must all do our duty, or at least we should—a duty defined by ourselves in terms of rules that have established by no one in particular for no long-run purpose other than the mere biological survival of the species. This, too, may pass. Hayek concluded:

In any case, our desires and wishes are largely irrelevant. Whether we *desire* further increases of production and population or not, we must—merely to maintain existing numbers and wealth, and to protect them as best we can against calamity—strive after what, under favorable conditions, will come to lead, at least for some time, and in many places. to further increases.⁶⁵

This is a social philosophy based on individual self-interest as both the foundation of economic analysis and the supreme motivating factor of human action, yet it ultimately is a philosophy of collective survival. With respect to an individual's voluntary adherence to the undesigned institutional rules of conduct that keep most people alive,⁶⁶ Hayek wrote: "For these practices do not preserve *particular* lives but rather increase the *chances* (or prospects or probabilities) of the *group*."⁶⁷

Hayek invoked the traditional authority provided by supernatural religion as an explanation for the origin of modern institutions.

We owe it partly to mystical and religious beliefs, and, I believe, particularly to the main monotheistic ones, that beneficial traditions have been preserved and transmitted at least long enough to enable those groups following them to grow, and to have the opportunity to spread by natural or cultural selection.⁶⁸

Yet Hayek abandoned such faith personally.⁶⁹ Why should men

61. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 139.

who share this humanist faith sacrifice to defend such a worldview? Try to persuade individuals who have adopted this dualistic philosophy of individual self-interest, undesigned institutions, impersonal rules of conduct, and devoid of supernatural morality or support, to lay down their lives in defense of this philosophy of life, especially after they have grown soft from the luxuries that the free market produces. Try to recruit an army with this philosophy when a nation is under attack. As a social philosophy for a world where organized corporate bloodshed often determines national survival, right-wing Enlightenment thought is surely a weak reed to lean on.

2. *Kingdoms and Capital*

Kingdoms must be funded. They require capital. In the case of money-lending, we see dominion through the economic subordination of borrowers. In this instance, subordination is anti-dominion. The presumption here is that the debtor is present-oriented, which implies his subordination to sin. The borrower is, in Mises' terms, a high time-preference individual.⁷⁰ This leads to his progressive subordination to future-oriented, low time-preference lenders.⁷¹

The Bible offers a major challenge to Smith's assumption that the goal of all production is consumption. Smith wrote: "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production. . . ."⁷² The Bible does not teach this doctrine. On the contrary, it teaches that a major goal of production is the extension of the kingdom of God in history. *One goal of production is dominion, which comes at the expense of personal consumption.* Dominion is financed through a refusal to consume: thrift. The long-term accumulation of capital is a means of dominion. This dominion is achieved through inheritance. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).⁷³

The Bible teaches that kingdom-extension should be a motivation greater than personal self-interest. The covenant-keeper is supposed to lend; the covenant-breaker is supposed to borrow. There is no com-

70. On time-preference, see Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 18:2. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

71. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 37.

72. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, IV:VIII, p. 625.

73. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

pulsion, but God's kingdom is extended through trade. The covenant-breaker consumes; the covenant-keeper invests. *Capital should be regarded primarily as a tool of greater future dominion, not as a means of greater future consumption.* This is why borrowing to finance one's education or to build a business is legitimate. The debt is not for consumption. Conclusion: *the more capital that one possesses, the higher the percentage that should be allocated for dominion.* Consumption remains low; production constantly increases. The super-rich have little choice but to honor this principle. Their capital compounds faster than they can spend the money it produces.

Murray Rothbard rejected Smith's theory of productive vs. unproductive labor. He explained it as a product of Smith's Calvinism.⁷⁴ This is a strange argument to come from the first historian of economic thought to discuss in detail the theological liberalism of Smith and the other Scottish Enlightenment figures. Smith distinguished conceptually between labor aimed at the production of capital goods vs. labor aimed at the immediate satisfaction of customer demand. Analytically, the distinction is fallacious in a system of economics which teaches that consumption is the sole end of production. But, as a recommendation of deferred gratification over immediate consumption, this conceptual distinction is revealing. Smith, despite his theological liberalism, did indeed reveal a trace of Calvinism. Rothbard writes, "It is Calvinism that scorns man's consumption and pleasure, and stresses the importance of labour virtually for its own sake." This is rhetoric, not argument. Calvinism scorns sin. It praises righteousness. Calvinism praises work as an alternative to sin. "The devil loves idle hands." Calvinism also understands that productive work produces happiness. "Busy hands are happy hands." Calvin wrote of the curse of the ground: "And yet the asperity of this punishment also is mitigated by the clemency of God, because something of the enjoyment is blended with the labours of men, lest they should be altogether ungrateful. . . ."⁷⁵ Work is a positive good in itself.

3. Kingdoms and Exchange

It is hardly intuitive to go from an exposition of the passages on money-lending to a conclusion that self-interested exchange within a

74. Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith*, p. 457.

75. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1563] 1979), I, p. 174.

private property society leads to greater wealth for all, or almost all. This was not a notion familiar to seventeenth-century mercantilists, nor was it familiar to generations of moral theorists who preceded them. The traditional view of exchange was that the one party to the exchange profits at the expense of the other. This was a false application of a true principle: one spiritual kingdom profits at the expense of the other.

The two supernatural kingdoms are in conflict in history. One area of this conflict is economic growth. One kingdom grows in influence at the expense of the other. In this sense, it is true that the winner wins at the expense of the loser. But it is also true that individuals achieve their goals through voluntary exchange. This seeming contradiction is resolved by an understanding of eschatology: the meek— meek before God—will inherit the earth. The members of each kingdom purchase what they want most, and they do so less expensively because of voluntary exchanges with each other. One society is more present-oriented than another. The members of each society achieve their goals less expensively through voluntary exchange across borders.

If the war is between kingdoms, then the mercantilists were right in this sense: *one kingdom advances at the expense of the other*. Where they were wrong was in seeing state-regulated international trade as a way to build up one political kingdom and weaken rival kingdoms by exporting goods and importing gold. Smith demolished that argument. Wealth is a much broader category than gold. But the mercantilists could have countered Smith by substituting money-lending for imported gold, assuming that the money would not be confiscated by the borrowers through default. *A society that runs an international accounts surplus is pursuing a dominion policy*. But for this to be true, the accounts surplus must be the result of voluntary exchange, not rigged markets, hidden subsidies, and other forms of state intervention.

The biblical position is that voluntary exchange weakens Satan's kingdom and strengthens God's kingdom whenever the members of the two kingdoms are working consistently towards their respective goals in terms of their rival presuppositions, laws, and sanctions. Ethically self-conscious covenant-keepers win in history, and ethically self-conscious covenant-breakers lose. (This assessment assumes the truth of postmillennialism.)⁷⁶ Lenin supposedly said that the Com-

76. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/>

munists would hang the capitalists with the rope that the capitalists would sell to them. He was correct in his assessment of the conflict between two social orders. He was incorrect with respect to the one that possessed the covenantal means of victory. His did not.

G. Self-Interest and National Wealth

In the Bible, there are repeated calls for self-sacrificing service. There are repeated calls to show charity to the poor. The Mosaic law identified a connection between charity and personal economic success. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteth thine hand unto" (Deut. 15:9–10). But there is no indication in the Bible that by allowing the free reign of personal self-interest, a society creates a system through which the vast mass of humanity can get rich over time. This long-unperceived relationship between personal self-interest and national wealth is what Mandeville saw in 1705, Smith saw in 1776, and what capitalism has accomplished since 1776.

Mandeville offered this insight with regard to customer demand ("vices") and the demand for labor ("public benefits"). Then Smith took the relationship back one step to the producer's motivation (greed), which leads him to seek to increase output inexpensively (efficiency). Theologians and social theorists who relied exclusively on the Bible for information about economics had not perceived a cause-and-effect relationship between individual self-interest and national wealth. They had at best seen the Mosaic law's cause-and-effect relationship between covenantal corporate blessings and individual economic blessings. Smith's *methodological individualism* led him to argue for economic causality that begins with *individual self-interest*. So does the Mosaic law. Smith argued that voluntary trade accomplishes the feat. The Mosaic law argued that corporate covenant-keeping accomplishes it. Smith told men to become efficient. Moses told them to become righteous. Smith's saw the free market as natural, the "natural system of liberty." The Bible sees the natural man as sinful and self-destructive

(Prov. 8:36).

In a roundabout way, the Bible does promote individual service to customers as the road to personal wealth. The model is as follows: (1) service to others, including honest dealing, which produces (2) God's blessings, including wealth, for the entire society, which produces (3) individual wealth. Smith restructured this model: (1) service to others, including honest dealing, which produces (2) individual wealth, which produces (3) wealth for the entire society. God and His personal sanctions were not part of Smith's analytical model in *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith's theory of economic sanctions is personal, in the sense of purposeful, with respect to a society's self-interested individuals, but it is impersonal with respect to a nation. His individualist methodology and its theory of collective impersonalism were both aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment. In the words of that other Adam, Ferguson, society is the result of human action, but not human design.

The Scottish Enlightenment's theorists did not limit their discussion of the spontaneous order to economics. They also included language, social institutions, and legal institutions. Ronald Hamowy summarizes their position and its underlying motivation. "The theory, simply put, holds that the social arrangements under which we live are of such a high order of complexity that they invariably take their form not from deliberate calculation, but as the unintended consequences of countless individual actions, many of which may be the result of instinct and habit. This theory thus provides an explanation of the origin of complex structures without the need to posit the existence of a directing intelligence."⁷⁷

Smith explained the wealth of nations in terms of the wealth of individuals. Wealth was seen by Smith as a universally acknowledged benefit. Few would argue with him today. Economic growth is indeed perceived as a benefit, "other things being equal." Only a handful of radical ecologists⁷⁸ and zero-growth economists reject the goal of increasing per capita wealth.

What places Smith's system in opposition to the Bible is its cosmic impersonalism. God is analytically irrelevant in *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith explained the wealth of nations as the impersonal result of individuals' competition in the free market, rather than as the result of

77. Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press for the Journal of the History of Philosophy, 1987), p. 3.

78. They call themselves "deep ecologists."

God's covenantal system of cause and effect. He substituted the accountant's profit-and-loss statement and balance sheet for the common grace of God: the grace of covenant law.

Years ago, I wrote an essay on the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33–35). The good Samaritan, unlike the priest and the Levite, showed mercy to a beaten man at the side of the road. He washed his wounds and placed him on his donkey. He took him to an inn, and told the inn-keeper that he would pay for the man's care until he got well. I noted that nobody ever talks about the inn-keeper and his motivation. The parable rests on an assumption: there are inn-keepers out there who are ready and willing to assist good Samaritans as paid agents of mercy. Their motivation is not mercy; it is income. The work of the world's good Samaritans is made easier by inn-keepers.⁷⁹

The division of labor in society must be governed by some system of cause and effect. There is always a system of sanctions. Economists eventually are forced to deal with the question of sanctions. (1) "Which sanctions provide the greatest incentive to cooperate with others?" (2) "Which system of ownership best incorporates these sanctions?" These are basic questions of economics. The answer to the first question is "profit and loss." The answer to the second is clear: "free market capitalism." This was the conclusion of Scholastic theologians in the Middle Ages. It was the answer of the Jesuit scholars at the School of Salamanca in the sixteenth century.⁸⁰ It was the answer of Adam Smith. But, in Smith's system, these sanctions are applied by customers through an autonomous free market. These sanctions supposedly operate irrespective of the participants' personal ethics or cosmic law. This was not his argument in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which relied on the doctrine of God's providence in promoting the harmony of interests, but it was his analytical framework in *The Wealth of Nations*. I agree with the great historian of economic thought, Jacob Viner. The two books are quite different. Anyone seeking to reconcile them will fail, just as Smith failed in the last year of his life, when he revised the former.⁸¹

79. See North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 21.

80. Alejandro Chafuen, *Christians for Freedom: Late Scholastic Economics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986). Jesus Huerta de Soto, "Juan de Mariana: The Influence of the Spanish Scholastics," in Randall G. Holcombe (ed.), *15 Great Austrian Economists* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1999), ch. 1.

81. Jacob Viner, "Adam Smith and Laissez Faire" (1927), in Viner, *The Long View and the Short: Studies in Economic Theory and Policy* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1958), pp. 220–22, 224–26, 229–31.

Conclusion

Self-interest is basic to biblical law, which is why there are covenant sanctions. It is basic to Jesus' theory of God's final judgment (Matt. 25).

There can be no social theory that has no system of sanctions. Economic theory since Adam Smith has rested heavily on a theory of market-imposed sanctions: profit and loss. Socialists have denied the legitimacy of these sanctions, preferring instead the state's imposition of violence as the best way to shape the economy's output and consumption patterns. The personal will of central planners is substituted for the impersonal competitive pressures of the free market. The result is always slow economic growth and the loss of liberty.

By the final decade of the twentieth century, the academic defenders of the generally unhampered free market faced intellectual competition mainly from defenders of a semi-regulated free market. Both groups rested the case for economic growth on the profit-seeking self-interest of individuals.

The Bible does not deny that self-interest is the primary motivation of most men most of the time. It also does not call for state interference with this motivation, just so long as the resulting actions are peaceful and not fraudulent or inherently immoral. But the Bible warns men not to trust in the uncertain temporal riches that are the product of all of those self-interested actions by profit-seeking men.

The Bible does not teach that the self-interested pursuit of wealth will somehow make a nation poorer, assuming that immoral behavior is penalized by civil law. Instead, the Bible warns against great wealth, whether personal or corporate, that is not the product of the grace-empowered, self-interested obedience of covenant-keepers to God's biblical laws. The Bible does not mention the possibility that the self-interested pursuit of personal wealth in the context of private ownership is the indispensable key to attaining an increase of national wealth. This insight was Bernard Mandeville's, which Smith amplified. The Bible does not deny this possibility, but it does not suggest it or recommend it.

Smith secularized economic theory by substituting the idea of an autonomous, impersonal free market economy for the covenantal providence of God. He sacrificed on the altar of human autonomy the idea of God's providential social order. The other Scottish Enlightenment theorists agreed with him. Only David Hume, skeptic that he

was, believed that the perceived social order, as with all perceived order, is merely an unproven assumption of the human mind. But Hume was nevertheless a defender of free trade. He used economic arguments to defend his position, a quarter century before his friend Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*.⁸²

Smith's economic analysis is humanistic, but at least it is neither socialism nor Keynesianism, both of which are equally humanistic, and which expand the power of the state, confiscate private property on a massive scale, and place responsibility for men's economic futures into the hands of self-interested economic planners who possess the monopolistic power of the state to impose their system of economic sanctions. Better to trust the self-interested motivation of the butcher, the brewer, and the baker for our dinner than to trust self-interested tenured state bureaucrats who are protected by Civil Service laws against being fired. Better to rely a businessman who prefers to say "yes" to every request to buy something, and who then scurries around to find a way to deliver, than to ask a bureaucrat to be allowed to do something, who automatically says "no" because it is less controversial to retreat later from "no" to "yes" than it is to retreat from "yes" to "no." No bureaucrat ever gets fired for initially saying "no."

The Bible affirms the legitimacy of private ownership. It mandates civil penalties on convicted thieves. It does not sanction or recommend state-mandated programs of wealth-redistribution. The Mosaic law established a legal order in which individual self-interest will flourish. The Mosaic law also promised increased corporate wealth for widespread corporate obedience to God's law. The New Testament does not abrogate the Mosaic law's system of private ownership, nor does it elevate the state into an agency of charity.

When it comes to a consideration of individual motivation, both Testaments warn against the desire to become rich. Both Testaments regard personal riches with suspicion, and morally legitimate only as the result of God's blessings, with Abraham as the model. "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2). In short, the Bible promotes service to others, including economic service, as morally mandatory, but it does not recommend service to others as a way for the individual to get rich. On the other hand, it does recommend charity and honest dealing (weights and measures) as marks of obedience to God's law. Widespread obedience to God's law is the basis of

82. David Hume, "Of the Balance of Trade" (1752).

corporate wealth, and therefore also individual wealth. *The correct goal is the extension of God's kingdom in history, not personal wealth.* The positive sanction is personal wealth, but this sanction is not the goal. It is only the means. Dominion in history by covenant-keepers under God is the biblically correct goal.

Scottish Enlightenment theorists—Hume excepted—invoked a deistic god as a theoretical backdrop for nature, but this god supposedly plays no role in directing the development of society. There is no supernatural invisible hand, only social evolution, which is as blind as Darwin's natural selection was said to be a century later. There is no cosmic process in nature or history, according to the Enlightenment's Scots. There are only individual purposes in a competitive social order. Individual dominion is by service, but this is profit-seeking service in a free market. As for national dominion, according to the Scots, this has more to do with the legal order, the creativity of individuals, and the productivity of the land, all within the international division of labor, than it does with the plans of a monarch and his subordinate supernatural agents. Individual production is for individual final consumption, not individual final judgment at the corporate resurrection.

The Bible teaches design by God, the providence of God, and absolute predestination by God. It teaches *cosmic personalism*.⁸³ It also teaches absolute individual responsibility, for it teaches final judgment. The Bible teaches *covenantalism*, not individualism or collectivism. It teaches the Trinity, which implies the equal ultimacy of the one and the many. Covenants apply to individuals and societies because covenants are established by one God in three persons. God judges societies and individuals in history. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (Ezek. 21:27). It is possible to get one out of many through voluntary contracts (Mises) only because it is possible to get one out of many through voluntary covenants (Moses).

83. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 1.

Appendix D

SLAVERY AS A CAUSE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Was the American war, 1861–1865, a civil war? Was it a war of Southern secession? Was it a war of Northern aggression? I answer: yes. It was a civil war because it was a war over the collection and distribution of taxes. The state is all about taxation: a monopoly over violence that is funded by the compulsory collection of revenues. Who receives what portion of these revenues, and who pays what portion, are the continuing twin themes of politics down through the ages. It was a civil war because contending parties went to war over this judicial issue: *the right to collect tariffs*. It was no accident that the first shots of the war were artillery shells fired by the state of South Carolina onto an island in Charleston Harbor. This island was the place where the United States government had a military base for the enforcement of the collection of tariffs in the Port of Charleston. This was the largest port on the South's eastern coast. The other major Southern port was New Orleans.

A. Tariffs

Abraham Lincoln was determined that these sales taxes on imported goods would be collected by, and distributed by, the United States government. The state of South Carolina disputed this claim militarily, beginning on April 12, 1861, at 4:30 a.m.

Tariffs were more than a symbol of national sovereignty. They were the lifeblood of the U.S. Government's redistribution of wealth. Charles Adams' book, *When in the Course of Human Events* (2000), on the role of tariff collection as Lincoln's motivation to resist South Carolina's secession, has certainly added long-neglected information to this ancient debate over the cause(s) of that war. But this motivation does not explain why the other Southern states joined with South Car-

olina's government in declaring secession. To the extent that the war was a war of Southern secession, it had a motive more compelling psychologically than the sovereign right of the South to collect tariffs.

Nevertheless, there is no question that the South regarded tariffs differently from the outlook of Whigs and Republicans in the North. The Confederate Constitution of 1861 specifically limited tariffs and export fees to revenue-generating devices for the national government.¹ Tariffs by law were not to be used to aid private industry.² The South's tariff rates were much lower than what the U.S. government had imposed.³ Despite the North's naval blockade, in 1863, customs duties brought in almost a million dollars to the Confederate Treasury.⁴ Compared to the overall cost of the war, this revenue was minimal.

When men go to war and fight a war, they seek the moral high ground. Lincoln did not go to war officially, and especially rhetorically, for the defense of the collection of tariffs. The South did not go to war to defend its right to collect tariffs and impose export duties. Then why did the South secede? Why were Southern leaders prepared to lead the region into a war? They knew that Lincoln could not mobilize the North to fight and die for the collection of tariffs. Then why was the South prepared to fight? Why did the South believe that the North was willing to fight?

B. John Brown's Raid

John Brown's 1859 raid at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (later West Virginia) sent shock waves through the South. The raid led to the forma-

1. Article I, Section 10, Clause 2 specified that revenues generated by tariffs, except for each state's costs of collection, belonged to the national government. (<http://bit.ly/ConfedCon10-2>)

2. Article I, Section 8, Clause 1 stated: "nor shall any duties or taxes on importations from foreign nations be laid to promote or foster any branch of industry; and all duties, imposts, and excises shall be uniform throughout the Confederate States." Clause 3 stated: "neither this, nor any other clause contained in the Constitution, shall ever be construed to delegate the power to Congress to appropriate money for any internal improvement intended to facilitate commerce; except for the purpose of furnishing lights, beacons, and buoys, and other aids to navigation upon the coasts, and the improvement of harbors and the removing of obstructions in river navigation; in all which cases such duties shall be laid on the navigation facilitated thereby as may be necessary to pay the costs and expenses thereof." *Idem*

3. Robert A. McGuire and T. Norman Van Cott, "The Confederate Constitution, Tariffs, and the Laffer Relationship," *Economic Inquiry*, XL (July 2002), pp. 428–38.

4. *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury* (Dec. 7, 1863). (<http://bit.ly/Confed-Treas1863>)

tion of Southern militias.

Brown was a murderer. Three years earlier, on May 24, 1856, he and his four sons had hacked five unarmed men to death outside their homes in Kansas, all in the name of abolitionism. None of the five owned slaves, but they supported slavery. Brown was funded by a group of Unitarian ministers, known in retrospect as the Secret Six. The best study of this group and its funding of Brown is Otto Scott's book, *The Secret Six* (1979).

Scott once told me that in his manuscript, he inserted the word "Rev." in front of the names of those Secret Six members who were ordained. When the page proofs were sent back from Times Books, the book publishing arm of the *New York Times*, the word "Rev." had been removed. Scott re-inserted it into the page proofs, but the editor refused to allow this. When Scott got his author's copy of the book, the offending but revealing "Rev." was still missing. (Scott later bought back all copies of the book from Times Books.)

Scott's book has another revelation about the raid and its effects. This may be the most important observation in the book. Scott, as a lifelong journalist, contends that the Northern press was almost universally favorable to Brown. The Northern press created the legend of Brown as a near-messianic liberator. This, Scott believes, was the American press' first foray into domestic revolution as a messianic movement. It marks the turning point in American journalism, when the press discovered its power to shape events.

The South perceived the Northern press' response as a harbinger of Federally imposed abolitionism. If the North was ready to condone a private citizen's self-conscious attempt to foment a bloody uprising of slaves in the South, then the abolitionist movement had moved over the edge. From that point on, the South prepared for an escalation of violence from northern abolitionists.

The United States government under President James Buchanan did send troops to Harpers Ferry to quell the mini-revolution—troops led by Col. Robert E. Lee. But the election of Lincoln in 1860 was seen by most of the South's leaders as the end of toleration of the South's way of life, which rested on "the peculiar institution." They correctly saw that the North's constitutional compromise in 1787 over the issue of private chattel slavery, as well as the subsequent legislative compromises of 1820 and 1850, were about to be superseded politically. Slavery would be prohibited by law in the western territories. Incoming western states would be formed from these slave-free territories.

The South would steadily lose its near-equality of representation in Congress. The Republican Party's platform in 1860 declared:

8. That the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom; That as our Republican fathers, when they had abolished slavery in all our national territory, ordained that "no person should be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law," it becomes our duty, by legislation, whenever such legislation is necessary, to maintain this provision of the Constitution against all attempts to violate it; and we deny the authority of Congress, of a territorial legislature, or of any individuals, to give legal existence to Slavery in any Territory of the United States.

The South was correct in its assessment of the future of the politics of abolitionism. The Republican Party had the votes in 1860, and its anti-slavery agenda would surely shape America's political future. Slavery by 1860 was doomed politically in the United States. Congress would no longer allow the extension of slavery westward. Neither, for that matter, would rainfall. East Texas was the far edge of slavery. The political majority of the nation would become ever more anti-slavery as each new state entered the Union. Congress would eventually do what Parliament had done in 1833: abolish slavery. The only question was whether slave owners would be paid, as British West Indies slave owners had been paid. The South seceded to forestall this development, as their leaders said repeatedly.⁵ Southern leaders created the Confederacy to maintain slavery. The Old South died when that call to moral action brought General Sherman to Georgia.

The North was dragged into the war by Lincoln's decision to use military force to suppress secession. Lincoln had a messianic view of the Union. His rhetoric repeatedly revealed this commitment. Tariffs were the primary source of income for the Union, and he was determined to preserve the Union and the tariff as well. The two were an indissoluble unity in Lincoln's mind: Union and tariff. His rhetoric invoked the Union, not the tariff. But in his inaugural address of 1861, he made it clear that he was willing to fight to collect the tariff:

In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence, and there shall be none unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these ob-

5. See below, "Official Declarations in the South."

jects, there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere.

Two days earlier, President James Buchanan had signed a new law that more than doubled the tariff rate—15% to 37%—and extended it to many new items. A month later, South Carolina fired on Ft. Sumter. But South Carolina had already seceded by the time the new tariff act was passed and signed into law.

It was the greatest tragedy in American history that John Brown succeeded in transforming a moral and political issue that might have been settled peacefully into a secessionist movement in the South, which in turn brought on the Civil War. Brown's career, more than any man's career in American history, supports the truth of an institutional principle that professional agitator Saul Alinsky, a century later, used to shape his own career: "The action is the reaction."

Brown laid down his life for a cause: abolitionism. In his final address to the court (Nov. 2, 1859), he insisted that he never wanted to hurt anyone, or commit treason, "or incite slaves to rebellion." His murderous career in Kansas testified against him. So did the fact that Harpers Ferry was the location of the United States Armory and Arsenal, which his gang of 22 men had seized. He was tried and convicted for this crime and the deaths that ensued. Brown wanted a revolutionary purging of the South in order to extirpate slavery. He got what he wanted because the South reacted on cue, as if choreographed. When Lincoln was elected the next year, the secessionists took the step that brought down the wrath of Lincoln on their heads. The War of Northern Aggression transformed Lincoln from a tax collector into the abolitionist that Southerners had always claimed that he was, even though he wasn't. Brown-Lincoln-Secession-Aggression: *the action was the reaction*—a chain reaction. It cost the lives of at least 620,000 soldiers.

The Secret Six collected a huge pay-off from their financial investments in John Brown. One of them, Rev. Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911), became a colonel in the Union Army, a major literary figure, and, in 1905, signed the "Call" that led to the founding of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, along with novelists Upton Sinclair and Jack London, and defense lawyer Clarence Darrow.⁶

6. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1965] 2000), p. 19. (<http://bit.ly/rjrnas>)

C. Official Declarations in the South

The North did not go to war to suppress slavery, but the South did go to war to defend slavery. Had abolitionism not been the hottest political issue in the Northern press in 1859–60, the election of Lincoln would not have resulted in secession.

The crucial motivating issue for Southern politicians in 1860–61 was the defense of slavery. While this truth became politically incorrect in the South after 1865, the South's representatives made their position clear in 1860–61. Major declarations regarding the cause of the war were published by the seceding states. Here are some examples: Mississippi, Texas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and South Carolina.

[Mississippi] Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery—the greatest material interest of the world. Its labor supplies the product which constitutes by far the largest and most important portions of commerce of the earth. These products are peculiar to the climate verging on the tropical regions, and by an imperious law of nature, none but the black race can bear exposure to the tropical sun. These products have become necessities of the world, and a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization. That blow has been long aimed at the institution, and was at the point of reaching its consummation. There was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of abolition, or a dissolution of the Union, whose principles had been subverted to work out our ruin.⁷

[Texas] Texas abandoned her separate national existence and consented to become one of the Confederate States to promote her welfare, insure domestic tranquillity and secure more substantially the blessings of peace and liberty to her people. She was received into the confederacy with her own constitution under the guarantee of the federal constitution and the compact of annexation, that she should enjoy these blessings. She was received as a commonwealth holding, maintaining and protecting the institution known as negro slavery—the servitude of the African to the white race within her limits—a relation that had existed from the first settlement of her wilderness by the white race, and which her people intended should exist in all future time. Her institutions and geographical position established the strongest ties between her and other slave-holding States of the confederacy. Those ties have been strengthened by association. But what has been the course of the government of the United States, and of the people and authorities of the nonslavehold-

7. For this statement, plus statements from South Carolina and Georgia, see: <http://bit.ly/ConfedSecessDocs>

ing States, since our connection with them? . . .

In all the non-slave-holding States, in violation of that good faith and comity which should exist between entirely distinct nations, the people have formed themselves into a great sectional party, now strong enough in numbers to control the affairs of each of those States, based upon the unnatural feeling of hostility to these Southern States and their beneficent and patriarchal system of African slavery, proclaiming the debasing doctrine of the equality of all men, irrespective of race or color—a doctrine at war with nature, in opposition to the experience of mankind, and in violation of the plainest revelations of the Divine Law. (A declaration of the causes which impel the State of Texas to secede from the Federal Union, Feb. 2, 1861.)⁸

The Governor of Kentucky, on December 28, 1860, wrote this defense of slavery, although the the state legislature in November had pledged neutrality:

The rights of African slavery in the United States and the relations of the Federal Government to it, as an institution in the States and Territories, most assuredly demand at this time explicit definition and final recognition by the North. The slave-holding States are now impelled by the very highest law of self-preservation to demand that this settlement should be concluded upon such a basis as shall not only conserve the institution in localities where it is now recognized, but secure its expansion, under no other restrictions than those which the laws of nature may throw around it. That unnecessary conflict between free labor and slave labor, but recently inaugurated by the Republican party as an element in our political struggles, must end, and the influence of soil, of climate, and local interests left unaided and unrestricted save by constitutional limitations to control the extension of slavery over the public domain. The war upon our social institutions and their guaranteed immunities waged through the Northern press, religious and secular, and now threatened to be conducted by a dominant political organization through the agency of State Legislatures and the Federal Government must be ended. Our safety, our honor, and our self-preservation alike demand that our interests be placed beyond the reach of further assault.⁹

George Williamson, a Commissioner of the State of Louisiana, de-

8. Texas Ordinance of Secession (Feb. 2, 1861). (<http://bit.ly/TexasSecession>)

9. Transcribed and proofed from *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series IV, vol. I, pp. 11–15. See also: <http://civilwarcauses.org/magoffin.htm>.

livered this message to fellow delegates in Austin, Texas, at a joint state meeting to consider secession.

The people of the slaveholding States are bound together by the same necessity and determination to preserve African slavery. The isolation of any one of them from the others would make her a theatre for abolition emissaries from the North and from Europe. Her existence would be one of constant peril to herself and of imminent danger to other neighboring slave-holding communities. . . . Her interests are identical with Texas and the seceding States. With them she will at present co-operate, hoping and believing in his own good time God will awaken the people of the border States to the vanity of asking for, or depending upon, guarantees or compromises wrung from a people whose consciences are too sublimated to be bound by that sacred compact, the constitution of the late United States. That constitution the Southern States have never violated, and taking it as the basis of our new government we hope to form a slave-holding confederacy that will secure to us and our remotest posterity the great blessings its authors designed in the Federal Union. With the social balance wheel of slavery to regulate its machinery, we may fondly indulge the hope that our Southern government will be perpetual.¹⁰

Was secession primarily a matter of commerce? Charles Adams, who has spent his career studying the evil effects of taxes, said that it was. None of the South's spokesmen of the era agreed with him, except in the sense of commerce in slaves. Was secession a battle over the tariff? This issue was addressed by former Congressman Lawrence Keitt during South Carolina's debate over secession, on December 22, 1860. Keitt had become legendary in South Carolina four years earlier, when he had physically intervened to keep anyone from coming to the defense of Senator Sumner of Massachusetts, while South Carolina's Congressman Preston Brooks was beating Sumner's head with a cane, crippling him, after Sumner had delivered an anti-slavery speech on the floor of the Senate.¹¹ Brooks and Keitt were both censured by the

10. Address of George Williamson, Commissioner from Louisiana, written Feb. 11, 1861, and presented to the Texas Secession Convention 9 Mar 1861, from E. W. Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas*, pp. 120–123. See <http://civilwarcauses.org/gwill.htm>

11. The Charleston, South Carolina *Mercury* (May 28, 1856), gleefully reported the event. “. . . Mr. KEITT was at the remotest corner of the room, with the President's desk intervening; so he did not even see the beginning of the attack. Hearing the blows of the cane and the cries of SUMNER, he hurried to the spot, and found Senator FOSTER, of Connecticut, and an officer of the Senate, attempting to grasp BROOKS,

House of Representatives, resigned, and were immediately re-elected. They returned to Congress. Keitt died at the battle of Cold Harbor in 1864. He did not die for the cause of tariff reform.

But the Tariff is not the question which brought the people up to their present attitude. We are to give a summary of our causes to the world, but mainly to the other Southern States, whose co-action we wish, and we must not make a fight on the Tariff question.¹²

His cause was the defense of slavery. The previous January 25, he had addressed his fellow Congressman:

African slavery is the corner-stone of the industrial, social, and political fabric of the South; and whatever wars against it, wars against her very existence. Strike down the institution of African slavery and you reduce the South to depopulation and barbarism. . . . The anti-slavery party contend that slavery is wrong in itself, and the Government is a consolidated national democracy. We of the South contend that slavery is right, and that this is a confederate Republic of sovereign States.¹³

On December 24, 1860, South Carolina's legislature issued its defense of secession, becoming the first state to secede. There was not one word about the tariff. There was this regarding slavery:

We affirm that these ends for which this Government was instituted have been defeated, and the Government itself has been made destructive of them by the action of the non-slaveholding States. Those States have assume the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property established in fifteen of the States and recognized by the Constitution; they have denounced as sinful the institution of slavery; they have permitted open establishment among them of societies, whose avowed object is to disturb the peace and to eloign the property of the citizens of other States. They have encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes; and those who remain, have

when he threw himself between them, and ordered them back at their personal risk. They immediately desisted, and BROOKS flogged SUMNER without any interference. . . . The whole South sustains BROOKS, and a large part of the North also. All feel that it is time for freedom of speech and freedom of the cudgel to go together." (Transcribed from the Charleston, South Carolina, *Mercury*, 28 May 1856, by T. Lloyd Benson.) (<http://bit.ly/KeittBrooks>)

12. S.C. *Secession Declaration Debate* (Transcribed by Ben Barnhill, Furman University from the Charleston, South Carolina, Courier, Dec. 22, 1860.) (<http://bit.ly/KeittReason>)

13. *Congressional Globe*. (<http://civilwarcauses.org/quotes.htm>)

been incited by emissaries, books and pictures to servile insurrection.¹⁴

After 1865, all leading Southerners except Rev. Robert L. Dabney, the South's leading Presbyterian theologian and a former aid to Stonewall Jackson, reversed themselves publicly, claiming that slavery had not been the cause of secession. The cause had been a defense of state's rights or some other Constitutional justification.¹⁵ A kind of selective regional amnesia took place in the South. What had been regarded as high moral ground in 1861 had become the lowest moral ground in 1865.

The looming defeat of the Confederacy after the fall of Atlanta in September of 1864 had begun to shake the confidence of some Southern ministers. They began to express doubts from the pulpit regarding the legitimacy of slavery.¹⁶ It is always a tragedy when a Christian society learns its theology by losing to an enemy on a military battlefield. The South changed its theology,¹⁷ its social ethics,¹⁸ and its politics¹⁹ because of General William Tecumseh Sherman's victory in Atlanta. Without that victory, Lincoln would have lost the Presidential election of November, 1864, and the North probably would have come to terms with the South's secession. But Sherman won, and then Lincoln authorized his bloody march to the sea, where the Union troops made war on the civilian population—a ghastly revision of Western military tradition that was extended by the wars of the twentieth century.

After General Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in April, 1865, the high moral ground of abolitionism became the North's justification for Reconstruction and the political suppression of Southern culture. The South's Christian leaders subsequently defended the Confederacy as the preserver of Christian civilization against Unitarian aggression. But the pre-war defense of slavery as the primary cause

14. Confederate States of America Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union (Adopted December 24, 1860). (<http://bit.ly/ConfedDeclaration>)

15. The classic post-war statement was written by the lawyer, Alexander H. Stephens, who served as Vice President of the Confederacy before he quit in disgust: *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States*, 2 vols. (1867, 1870).

16. Richard E. Beringer, *et al.*, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), ch. 16.

17. The South's leadership in 1860 was Calvinistic: Presbyterian and Episcopalian. In 1890, it was fundamentalist.

18. Its view of slavery.

19. From gentility to populism and racism. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

of the South's secession was forgotten in the South. So was the fact that abolitionism had not been the primary cause of the North's aggression.

The Northern press had proclaimed abolitionism as the high moral ground. The South had taken the Northern press at its word—its flood of words. Lincoln was willing in 1860 to allow eddies of the moral tide of abolitionism to push his canoe down the rapids of Presidential politics, but abolitionism was a means to an end for him. His end was getting elected. This was not high moral ground, but it is surely a major part of the American political tradition, then as now.

D. The Confederate Constitution (1861)

So vital was the issue of slavery that the Constitution of the Confederate States of America (March 11, 1861), devoted considerable space to the defense of slavery.

ARTICLE IV

Sec. 2. (1) The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States; and shall have the right of transit and sojourn in any State of this Confederacy, with their slaves and other property; and the right of property in said slaves shall not be thereby impaired. . . .

(3) No slave or other person held to service or labor in any State or Territory of the Confederate States, under the laws thereof, escaping or lawfully carried into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor; but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such slave belongs, or to whom such service or labor may be due.

Sec. 3. (1)

(3) The Confederate States may acquire new territory; and Congress shall have power to legislate and provide governments for the inhabitants of all territory belonging to the Confederate States, lying without the limits of the several States; and may permit them, at such times, and in such manner as it may by law provide, to form States to be admitted into the Confederacy. In all such territory the institution of negro slavery, as it now exists in the Confederate States, shall be recognized and protected by Congress and by the Territorial government; and the inhabitants of the several Confederate States and Territories shall have the right to take to such Territory any slaves lawfully held by them in any of the States or Territories of the Confeder-

ate States.

So vital was domestic slave breeding as an economic factor in the South's plantation economy that the Constitution dealt with the need to maintain a closed market for slave breeders. It did so by extending the 1808 prohibition against imported African slaves, which showed deference to England's anti-slavery efforts, and also by authorizing Congress to prohibit the import of slaves from non-African sources.

Article

Sec. 9. (1) The importation of negroes of the African race from any foreign country other than the slaveholding States or Territories of the United States of America, is hereby forbidden; and Congress is required to pass such laws as shall effectually prevent the same.

(2) Congress shall also have power to prohibit the introduction of slaves from any State not a member of, or Territory not belonging to, this Confederacy.²⁰

Robert H. Smith, who represented Alabama in framing the Constitution, and whose name appears on it, made clear in 1861 what the central issue was.

We have dissolved the late Union chiefly because of the negro quarrel. Now, is there any man who wished to reproduce that strife among ourselves? And yet does not he, who wished the slave trade left for the action of Congress, see that he proposed to open a Pandora's box among us and to cause our political arena again to resound with this discussion. Had we left the question unsettled, we should, in my opinion, have sown broadcast the seeds of discord and death in our Constitution. I congratulate the country that the strife has been put to rest forever, and that American slavery is to stand before the world as it is, and on its own merits. We have now placed our domestic institution, and secured its rights unmistakably, in the Constitution; we have sought by no euphony to hide its name—we have called our negroes "slaves," and we have recognized and protected them as persons and our rights to them as property.²¹

20. Constitution of the Confederate States of America (March 11, 1861) (<http://bit.ly/ConfedConstitution>)

21. Hon. Robert H. Smith, *An Address to the Citizens of Alabama on the Constitution and Laws of the Confederate States of America* (Mobile, 1861), p. 19; cited in Marshall L. DeRosa, *The Confederate Constitution of 1861: An Inquiry into American Constitutionalism* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1991), p. 66.

The word “tariff” does not appear in the Constitution. There was a prohibition on export taxes imposed by any state, unless Congress voted by two-thirds to authorize this (Art. I, Sec. 9, subsec. 7.)

The space devoted to slavery, when compared to the space devoted to tariffs in the foundational document of the Confederacy, makes clear what the central cause of secession was: the defense of slavery. It was Sherman’s victory in Atlanta in the fall of 1864 that began to shift retroactively the South’s apologetic for secession from slavery to state’s rights and tariff reduction.

The evidence is overwhelming: the respected public defenders of the South’s act of secession placed the preservation of chattel slavery at the top of their list of justifications. Remove this one factor, and there would not have been secession.

E. Southern Slavery and the Family

From the beginning of African chattel slavery in the late seventeenth century, Southern slave owners sold their slaves to other slave owners. They bred slaves for personal use and for sale. This was what slave owners in the Roman Empire had done in the era of Augustus, after the importation of slaves declined because of the absence of new wars of empire.

The South’s professional slave breeders received a domestic monopoly when the United States government and the British Navy both began to enforce the law against the importation of slaves. After 1808, the year that the importation of slaves was made illegal in the United States, the only legal source of slaves was the domestic slave economy.

Southern states did not recognize the marriage of slaves as a legally binding covenant that had to be defended in civil courts. Arnold Sio summarized the legal situation:

Legal marriage meant, in conjunction with the rule that the child follow the condition of the mother, that the offspring of slaves had no legal father, whether the father was slave or free. The duration of the union between slaves depended on the interests of the master or those of the slaves. The union was subject at any time to being dissolved by the sale of one or both of the slaves. The children of these “contubernial relationships,” as they were termed, had no legal protection against separation from their parents. In the law there was no such thing as fornication or adultery among slaves. A slave could not be charged with adultery, and a male slave had no legal recourse against another slave, free Negro, or white person for intercourse

with his "wife." Nor could the slave present this abuse as evidence in his defense in a criminal charge of assault and battery, or murder.²²

In 1853, a North Carolina Supreme Court justice wrote that "our law requires no solemnity or form in regard to the marriage of slaves, and whether they 'take up' with each other by express permission of their owners, or from a mere impulse of nature, in obedience to the command 'multiply and replenish the earth,' cannot, in the contemplation of the law, make any sort of difference."²³

Slave owners actively encouraged their slaves' sexual unions. Owners for generations harvested crops of slaves. Owners broke up families by selling slave family members "down the river." Slave-breeding became a major source of income for slave owners in the eastern seaboard regions of the South after 1807, where the soil had become depleted and agricultural output had declined. They sold slaves into the deep South, where the soil was far more productive for cotton growing.²⁴

Slave breeding involved the legalization of fornication among slaves in order to provide additional plantation income. The American South's cotton-exporting economy rested on fornication among slaves. The South's plantation economy after 1807 became dependent on slave breeding rather than open conquest by kidnappers chieftains in West Africa. Slave breeding was economically productive. Slaves multiplied in the South, unlike the West Indies, where slaves did not achieve their own biological replacement rate. For as long as the land in the deep South remained productive, there would be a market for the slaves bred on plantations in the poor-soil Piedmont districts in the eastern South.

Socially, the South unofficially adopted the legalization of adultery: white male slave owners and black female slaves. Neither slave husbands/fathers and their victimized wives/daughters nor white wives had any legal recourse in either church courts or civil courts. The color of American slaves and their heirs lightened through the generations,

22. Arnold A. Sio, "Interpretations of Slavery," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, VII (April 1965); reprinted in Allen Weinstein and Frank Otto Gatell (eds.), *American Negro Slavery: A Modern Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 315.

23. Cited in Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), p. 52.

24. Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, "The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Economic History* (1958); reprinted in Hugh G. J. Aitken (ed.), *Did Slavery Pay?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

making them stand out visibly in a group of Africans. This was not the result of widespread inter-racial marriage, which was illegal in the South until the second half of the twentieth century, a change that came as a result of Northern politics and court decisions.

After 1660, with the steady replacement of white indentured servitude by permanent black slavery, the South's social order within the upper classes was based on the selective legalization of rape and adultery. By ignoring the rape-adultery-seduction-fornication aspects of the denial of marriage to slaves, the Christian South simultaneously undermined the white family and prevented the formation of slave families. The ideal of the family as a covenantal institution to be protected by church courts and civil courts was never accepted in the South for slave owners or their slaves.

This was not admitted by the South's theologians in 1860, and it is also not mentioned by the retroactive defenders of Antebellum South today. This conspiracy of silence is now over three centuries old. The South's plantation society was a white patriarchy that put white women on a pedestal. Then the patriarchs and their unmarried sons spent nights in the slave quarters. Wives, firmly secured to their pedestals, were expected to stay as silent as statues about this arrangement, which they did. Mary Chesnut, the wife of Confederate General (and former U.S. Senator) James Chesnut of South Carolina, observed in her diary:

This *only* I see: like the patriarchs of old our men live all in one house with their wives & their concubines, & the Mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children—& every lady tells you who is the father of all the Mulatto children in every body's household, but those in her own, she seems to think drop from the clouds or pretends so to think.²⁵

The South had no appeals court system, civil or ecclesiastical, that was willing to deal with the seduction or rape of black slave women by white males of the owner's family. The South's laws did not authorize marriage among slaves, yet sexual cohabitation was encouraged by slave owners to produce a continuing crop of future slaves. Southern slavery was an economic system self-consciously built on economically profitable bastardy.

25. C. Vann Woodward and Elisabeth Muhlenfeld (eds.), *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 42.

Southern slavery was institutionalized fornication for the blacks and institutionalized adultery for the whites. The South's civil codes turned a blind eye to the fornication aspect, and winked its other eye at the adultery aspect. On the issue of the integrity of the family, the South's civil codes shook the region's collective fist in the face of God for almost two centuries, daring God to do something about it. God replied, 1861–77. Southerners should have seen what would happen.

Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? (Ps. 94:7–10).

I Timothy 6:1–5²⁶ was used by Dabney to challenge the spirit of abolitionism.²⁷ He understood correctly that this passage places the burden of proof on Christian abolitionists. Dabney's critique of abolitionism in general did nothing prove that slavery, as practiced by the South, was in any way validated by the Bible. There were also civil laws in some Southern states against teaching a slave to read, even if this instruction was given so that the slave could read the Bible. That Paul allowed slavery makes the case for abolitionism difficult, but it does not make the case against Southern slavery diffirverse, anti-Christian, anti-family, but economically profitable until the North won the war in 1865. Then it was gone with the wind.

F. The Origin of Abolitionism

With respect to the moral legitimacy of private chattel slavery, Christian commentators have offered very few suggestions regarding the millennia-long misreading—now almost universally regarded as a misreading—of the biblical texts. The vast majority of America's Protestant Bible commentators since at least 1865 have reversed the older opinion regarding the legitimacy of slavery, but seemingly not on the basis of a careful reconsideration of the relevant biblical texts. This reversal subjects them to a series of uncomfortable accusations: (1) the

26. Chapter 8.

27. Robert L. Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia [And Through Her, of the South]* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle, [1867] 1977), p. 186. The book was written during the Civil War but published two years after the war ended, when almost no one else with any influence was willing to defend slavery retroactively.

abolitionist movement undermined the Bible's standards, and therefore should still be opposed; slavery should be legalized; (2) the Bible is morally wrong; (3) situational ethics can and should govern Christianity and civilization. With respect to the case against abolitionism, Christian commentators who have called for complete abolition have been on the defensive exegetically for two centuries.

In the early nineteenth century, when the abolitionist movement became an international phenomenon in the West, Christians who defended the legitimacy of slavery could and did appeal to First Timothy 6:1–2. If slavery is inherently immoral, they asked, why did Paul tell Christian slaves to obey their masters? Why didn't he tell Christian masters to free their slaves?

For seventeen centuries after Paul wrote these words, no Christian church formally called for the abolition of slavery. Then, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Society of Friends (Quakers) began to question slave ownership among its members. This escalated rapidly to the Friends' call for state-mandated abolition. Before the century was over, evangelical Protestants in England had taken up the cause of abolition. John Newton, a former slave ship captain—before and after his conversion to Christ in 1748—became a pastor and a writer of hymns, most famously, *Amazing Grace*. Late in his pastoral career, in the early 1780's, he became an abolitionist. Newton influenced a member of Parliament, William Wilberforce (1759–1833), his old friend, to become a political reformer. Wilberforce publicly took up the abolitionist cause by introducing a bill to indict the slave trade in 1788. In 1833, less than a week before Wilberforce died, slavery in the British Empire was abolished by the British Parliament as the result of Wilberforce's efforts for over four decades. By the 1880's, slavery had universally been abolished by law (and the British Navy) in the West. An institution that had been acceptable in almost every society in history was abandoned in the West in a little over one hundred years. Nevertheless, within half a century of the abolition of slavery in Brazil, private chattel servitude was replaced by state slavery in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The concentration camp replaced the slaves' hut.

Prior to the late eighteenth century, Christian defenders of slavery did not devote much time or effort to a philosophical defense of the institution. Slavery seemed secure, the legacy of a long tradition across the globe. It seemed almost as natural as the family—indeed, an extension of the family. Throughout the Christian tradition, a few theolo-

gians had written about the negative effects of slavery on slaves. Among free men, slavery had always been seen as a curse to be avoided personally. Presumably, slaves—who rarely left written records—would have agreed. But no organized group within the church had attempted to mobilize a campaign against slavery. This was equally true in Judaism and Islam. I have already surveyed this story in a lengthy chapter in *Tools of Dominion*.²⁸

G. Abolitionism as a Protestant Religious Movement

Unitarians were the major intellectual spokesmen for the American abolitionist movement after 1830, but the movement's shock troops were raised up by Northern evangelists, such as the Tappan brothers.²⁹ Abolitionism was not at the forefront of the national revival known as the Second Great Awakening, 1800–1850, but it became a recurring issue beneath the surface after 1820. As time went on, it appeared sporadically on the surface.

Prior to the second half of the eighteenth century, there had been no concerted, organized effort by abolitionists in recorded history. Slavery was an accepted institution with an ancient history. Christians, Jews, and Moslems—"people of the Book"—all agreed: slavery had been authorized by the Old Testament. This authorization had not been changed in their respective commentaries on the Old Testament: the New Testament, the Talmud, and the Koran.

The reversal of opinion in Christianity and Judaism, 1750–1880, was unprecedented. The historian David Brion Davis has devoted his distinguished career to a study of the idea of slavery. He has commented on the extraordinary change in public opinion that took place in the West, 1770–1880.

As late as the 1770s, when the Quaker initiative finally led to a rash of militant antislavery publications on both sides of the Atlantic, no realistic leader could seriously contemplate the abolition of New World slavery—except, on the analogy with European slavery and serfdom, over a span of centuries. Yet in 1808, only thirty-five years after a delegation of British Quakers had failed to persuade the Lord of Trade to allow Virginia to levy a prohibitive tax on further slave

28. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/gntools>)

29. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western Reserve University, 1969).

imports, Britain outlawed the African slave trade. Twenty-six years later, Britain emancipated some 780,000 colonial slaves, paying 20 million pounds compensation to their supposed owners. Only ninety years separated the first, cautious moves of the Philadelphia Quakers from the emancipation edicts of France and Denmark (1848), which left Brazil, Cuba, Surinam, and the southern United States as the only important slaveholding societies in the New World. It was barely a century after the founding of the London Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1787), sixty-one years after the final abolition of slavery in New York State (1827), that Brazil freed the last black slaves in the New World. . . . From any historical perspective, this was a stupendous transformation. . . . From the distance of the late twentieth century, however, the progress of emancipation from the 1780s to the 1880s is one of the most extraordinary events in history.³⁰

It is unlikely that the South could have preserved slavery, given the tidal shift in public opinion. The South in 1860 clung fiercely to an institution that was still flourishing economically, but which could not easily spread west of Edgewood, Texas.³¹ The inevitable soil depletion associated with mono-crop cotton farming meant a falling rate of return for slave owners and slave breeders. When the soil became depleted, as had happened in the Piedmont, so did the economic output of slavery. This is why Piedmont's slave owners had become commercial slave breeders.

The South's social order was built on an institution that could not have survived either economically or socially, as the next two decades proved in the West. The South's leaders openly defined the Southern way of life in terms of the economic superiority of slavery, as well as its moral legitimacy. The hard-liners who led the South in 1860 could not see that their moral defense of an economically doomed institution was equally doomed. They preferred to secede in the name of their right to preserve a moral abomination. The South chose a course of action in 1860–61 that turned out to be political suicide, rather than voluntarily surrender an institution that everyone in the South except

30. David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 108.

31. Look at a map. Edgewood is a few miles east of Dallas. As you drive toward Dallas, the trees that had stretched from the Atlantic to Edgewood begin to thin out. Rain and soil conditions west of Edgewood are not conducive to cotton farming. Then look north. You find prairie. Slavery was not easily enforceable on the farms of the prairie, and surely would not have been enforceable after McCormick's reaper appeared, expanding the size of farms and reducing the number of farmers.

Robert Dabney turned from in retroactive disgust no later than May, 1865.

The South in 1864–65 learned social ethics from William Tecumseh Sherman. He was a savage teacher.

Conclusion

It was not clear Constitutionally in 1860 whether a state legally could secede. James Madison and the Federalists of 1787 were careful never to discuss publicly this aspect of the Constitution. Had they publicly adopted Lincoln's no-secession position, the Constitution would never have been ratified. In 1861, the right of secession was still an open issue in Constitutional theory.

It was a civil war from the beginning because it was a war to control the government's tax revenues. South Carolina demanded the right to collect tariffs at the Port of Charleston. The rest of the South then joined with South Carolina to divvy up the tax revenues from all of the ports, and escape the whiskey tax, too.

Lincoln would not allow this. He went to war for two reasons: his commitment to the idea of the Union, which he repeated publicly over and over, and his commitment to collect the tariff, which he rarely mentioned in public. Most historians have neglected the second issue.

The sovereign right to collect tariffs was no one's high moral ground, North or South. Neither side admitted that tariff-collection was Lincoln's immediate motivation to send U.S. Navy ships to Charleston. Both sides regarded this issue—the issue that made that war a true civil war—as too trivial for the purpose of mobilizing the troops to fight and die for.

Remove chattel slavery from the list of causes of the war of 1861–65, and it is just about inconceivable that the war would have begun. Southern states seceded in 1861 in order to escape what their leaders perceived would be the likely political effects of the North's abolitionist movement after Lincoln's election. But the flash point for the South was John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry in 1859. The Northern press was solidly behind Brown, presenting him as a martyr. Lincoln's election in 1860 confirmed the South's worst fears.

England had settled the moral issue of slavery without war, but few slave owners had lived in England. They lived in the West Indies. They had been part of an economic interest, but were not an integral part of the nation. They did not have the military ability to threaten secession.

So, they accepted Parliament's manumission money. In the United States, however, slave owners had been among the primary framers of the Constitution. The South was a major voting bloc. The chief Constitutional issue in 1860—the right of a state to secede—had always been disputed by scholars and politicians. This legal issue was settled once, though not necessarily for all, on the battlefield—or, more precisely, approximately 10,400 battlefields. It took the lives of 620,000 combatants to settle it. John Brown won the Civil War his way. The action was the reaction.

ETHICS AND DOMINION

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES

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ETHICS AND DOMINION

*AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON
THE EPISTLES*

GARY NORTH

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This book is dedicated to
Jim and Judith Andruss
Who were present at the beginning

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PREFACE

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God (Deut. 28:1–2).

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee (Deut. 28:15).

A. Ethical Causation

The Bible teaches that we live in a world of ethical cause and effect. This was first revealed to man in Genesis 2. “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). It is therefore also the teaching of biblical covenant theology.

God governs mankind by means of five covenants: dominion, family, individual, civil, and ecclesiastical.¹ Point three of the biblical covenant²—ethics—is enforced by point four: sanctions.³ Whatever we think, say, and do has inescapable implications for our inheritance in eternity. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the

1. Acronym DFISC: dominion, family, individual, state, church.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

body, whether good or evil" (II Cor. 5:10).⁴

Biblical ethics governs individual cause and effect, beginning with Adam. What about corporate cause and effect? What about the family? Yes? We are agreed. What about in the church? Yes? We are agreed. What about in the state? All of a sudden, a chill runs down the spines of modern Christians. "The state? You mean civil government? Is it governed by an explicitly biblical system of ethical cause and effect? Maybe not. Probably not. I don't know. Let's talk about something else."

This raises a crucial question for economics. In all but pure anarchistic theories of economics, civil government plays a role in economic practice and theory. The state enforces contracts. It punishes theft. It prohibits fraud. The state is a covenantal institution. *If the state, as a covenantal institution, is not governed by biblical law, then how can economics be biblical?*

As is true of all social theory, all forms of economic theory are structured by a five-point model, which reflects the biblical covenant. In every economy, as in every theory of economics, there is a sovereign source of law and order. There is a system of hierarchical accountability. There are laws of human action. There is a system of sanctions: rewards and penalties. Finally, there is a system of inheritance. Put simply:

Who's in charge here?
To whom do I report?
What are the rules?
What do I get if I obey (disobey)?
Does this outfit have a future?

B. Humanism's Economic Theory

I have said that all economic theory is structured by a five-point model. This includes humanist economics.

First, modern humanistic economic theory designates two sources of sovereignty: autonomous man and autonomous nature. All economic value is said to arise from land and labor. Both of these factors of production are scarce, i.e., at zero price, there is greater demand than supply.

Second, there is a system of accountability. There is some final agency that imposes sanctions. In economic theory and practice, there

4. Chapter 1.

are two representative authorities: the free market and the civil government. With the exception of a handful of anarchistic economists, who deny the legitimacy of the state, all economies are seen as a mixture of market and state. In a free market social order, the primary agency of law enforcement is the market itself. For a socialistic economy, the state's central planning agency specifies sanctions, and the police enforce them.

Third, there is a system of laws. People's economic behavior in specific instances is predictable only because there are broad patterns of human behavior. Economists search for these predictable patterns of behavior. These patterns are referred to as laws of economics.

Fourth, every economy has a system of institutional sanctions that enhances or retards these patterns of behavior. Free market economists believe that the most powerful sanctions are profits and losses. Socialists rely on political and bureaucratic decrees, which they believe should supersede market processes. Socialist systems offer bonuses, promotions, and demotions.

Fifth, there is inheritance. The free market system is based on the survival of the efficient. For the socialist, inheritance is by government allocation: service to the sovereign People by way of meeting of centrally planned quotas and standards.

The key to all free market economic theories is the idea of endogenous change. The primary factors that direct individual and corporate change are inherent in the free market social and legal order. The free market is nearly autonomous in the sense of self-reinforcing and self-adjusting. It is system of positive and negative feedback.

The socialist economy is exogenous. It relies on the intervention of the state, which is governed by standards different from the free market, to direct the economic process.

C. Biblical Economic Theory

The Old Testament offered a covenantal system of economics. A sovereign Creator God (Gen. 1)⁵ has delegated responsibility to mankind to administer the creation (Gen. 1:26–28).⁶ The system had ethical laws: the Mosaic law. Success or failure for individuals and society come from obedience or disobedience to Bible-revealed laws (Deut.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

6. *Ibid.*, chaps. 3, 4.

28).⁷ Inheritance was by obedience. “The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever” (Ps. 37:29).

The question arises: *Does the Mosaic covenant’s structure still govern New Testament economic theory?* This is the issue of *hermeneutics*: biblical interpretation. Every system of theology has a hermeneutic, either self-consciously adopted or naively assumed.

This commentary rests on a specific hermeneutic: *a Mosaic law is innocent until proven guilty*. Unless a New Testament principle denies a Mosaic law, it is obligatory today. The most common hermeneutic today is different: *every Mosaic law that has not been explicitly affirmed by the New Testament is defunct*. Here is the covenantal debate: *continuity vs. discontinuity*. On what basis should Christians decide which Mosaic laws continue into the New Testament and which do not? By what principle of interpretation?

D. Economic Cause and Effect

The Mosaic law taught that there is ethical cause and effect in history. While there are discrepancies in individual situations between what a person experiences in history and what he will experience in eternity, the Bible teaches that *with respect to covenantal corporate sanctions, what we see in history reflects what will take place in eternity*. A society that breaks biblical laws cannot prosper for long. It may prosper for a generation or two, but at some point, God brings negative corporate sanctions against the society. It no longer can expand its covenant-breaking kingdom.

Psalms 73 teaches that, for a time, covenant-breakers are capable of prospering. “And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches” (vv. 11–12). But this prosperity is a trap. It places covenant-breaking individuals on a slippery slope. “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (vv. 16–19). The psalmist came to the conclusion that it is a mistake to believe that covenant-breaking is productive in the long run.⁸

7. ????, ch. 68.

8. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms*

The primary question that this commentary raises is this: Do the New Testament epistles teach a doctrine of covenantal continuity with the Mosaic law in the area of economics? I conclude that the answer is *yes*. Now I must prove this to your satisfaction.

Will you listen to me? Will you believe me?

E. Hearing and Believing

Paul wrote, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God: (Rom. 10:17). The power of hearing was far greater in Paul’s era than in ours. Today, we sit and read. That was not true in Paul’s era.

You need to know something that was crucial to Paul’s era, which is not crucial in ours. It is this:

INPAULSERAWRITINGHADNOSPACESORPUNCTUATIONPA-
PYRUSWAEXPENSIVESOWRITERSDIDNOTWASTESPACEON-
SPACESBETWEENLETTERSORPUNCTUATIONMARK-
SALSOALLLETTERSWERECAPITALIZED

Got that? Once you understand this, things become clearer. But, you say, you do not understand it. To understand it, you need this:

In Paul’s era, writing had no spaces or punctuation. Papyrus was expensive, so writers did not waste space on spaces between letters or punctuation marks. Also, all letters were capitalized.

The introduction of spaces between letters began about a thousand years ago, in the medieval era.⁹ In an often cited passage in Augustine’s autobiographical *Confessions*, we read silently of how impressed he was with Bishop Ambrose’s ability to read silently. “Now, as he read, his eyes glanced over the pages and his heart searched out the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent.” This practice was so odd that Augustine searched for a logical explanation. “Perhaps he was fearful lest, if the author he was studying should express himself vaguely, some doubtful and attentive hearer would ask him to expound it or discuss some of the more abstruse questions, so that he could not get over as much material as he wished, if his time was occupied with others. And even a truer reason for his reading to himself might have

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

9. Matthew Carmody, “Thought and Language (Part 1),” *Richmond Journal of Philosophy*, XI (2005), p. 2. See also Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), ch. 2.

been the care for preserving his voice, which was very easily weakened. Whatever his motive was in so doing, it was doubtless, in such a man, a good one.”¹⁰

It was not that Augustine could not read silently.

So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle’s book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.”¹¹

Silent reading was so difficult that very few literate people did it. Literate people read by reading aloud. When they heard their own voices, they mentally inserted spaces between words and punctuation marks. So, the epistles were meant to be read aloud. When we speak of “readers,” we really mean “listeners.” A literate person read the epistles aloud, even when he was alone.

The fact that you can read this book silently and in private is part of one of the greatest social transformations in history. It has had two stages. The first stage was the printing press. The second stage was the World Wide Web.

F. Other Epistles

There are three other epistles besides the ones I cover in this book. I have written commentaries on all of them: Romans,¹² First Corinthians,¹³ and First Timothy.¹⁴ They contain more economic material than we find in the epistles that followed.

While the book of Revelation is not generally classified as an epistle, it was an epistle. It was *the* epistle. There are more commentaries and more debates over the book of Revelation than any other epistle. But there is not much economic material in it. Nevertheless it contains the verse that describes the culmination of all economic the-

10. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, VI:III.

11. *Ibid.*, VIII:XII

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012).

13. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012).

14. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012).

ory. “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7).¹⁵ This will end the curse of the earth: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:17–18).¹⁶ But it will not end economics. There will still be scarcity in the culmination of the New Heaven and the New Earth, after the final judgment and resurrection, just as there was in Eden before the Fall.¹⁷

15. Chapter 43.

16. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

17. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), pp. 124–28. (<http://bit.ly/gn-world>)

INTRODUCTION

The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways (Deut. 28:8–9).

The theocentric issue here is corporate sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

Moses said that wealth in a covenant-keeping society is based on obedience to the laws of the covenant. Has this system of cause and effect changed in the New Testament? Is there some other lawful way to wealth for covenant-keepers? Jesus taught that there is not. “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).² This is the biblical principle of *sowing and reaping*. This principle was taught in the Old Testament.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men (Hosea 10:12–13).

There is a rival view of the origin of wealth: *the survival of the fittest*. This Darwinian biological principle was applied to society by right-wing social Darwinists in the late nineteenth century.³ They con-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 11.

3. The two most noted defenders of this view were Herbert Spencer, who coined

cluded that the free market is valid because it is in conformity with this Darwinian principle. Successful individuals triumph by getting rich. Left-wing social Darwinists objected. They rejected the individualistic concept of survival. They focused on the collective: mankind. They argued that, because elite representatives of modern man as a species now understand the scientific principles of progress, the state can plan the economy so as to make it more efficient and productive⁴. Mankind as a species gains control over nature. In neither version of social Darwinism did biblical ethics play any role.

The authors of the epistles of the New Testament appealed to ethics as the basis of wealth. Specifically, they invoked Mosaic laws to defend their concept of economic success. They did not limit their commentaries to the individual Christian believer. They applied the principle of *ethical sowing and economic reaping* to society. Their concept of the biblical covenant extended beyond personal ethics and personal success. In this sense, they were consistent with Moses and the Old Covenant prophets.

Christian economics must begin with God's revelation of Himself through the Bible. We need biblical revelation to assess accurately economic cause and effect. The prophetic books and the epistles call men to repent. They promise blessings for repentance and cursings for disobedience. These blessings and cursings are historical. They are also both individual and social.

There is no radical discontinuity between the system of economic causation presented in the Old Testament and the system presented in the New Testament. The authors of the epistles recognized the authority of the Old Covenant and repeatedly invoked it. This commentary is a defense of this principle of biblical interpretation.

the phrase "survival of the fittest," and William Graham Sumner.

4. The most systematic defender of this view was Lester Frank Ward. Cf. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A. Ward opposed the free market Darwinists and Christians with equal contempt.

1

ETHICAL CAUSE AND EFFECT

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (II Cor. 5:10).

The theocentric principle undergirding this passage is point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.¹

A. The Final Judgment

This passage focuses on the final judgment. As such, it is the archetype for all passages relating to sanctions. What *will* occur at the end of time serves as an ethical model for what *should* occur in history. *The doctrine of final judgment undergirds the biblical covenantal concept of sanctions.*

There are three covenantal institutions, meaning institutions established by a public oath before God: church, family, and state. Each of the three covenantal institutions has both positive and negative sanctions. In each of them, sanctions are imposed by the person officially sanctioned by the organization's officers to impose sanctions. This person represents the organization: point two of the biblical covenant.² For the individual covenant, God directly brings sanctions, in history as well as eternity. This was true of the dominion covenant.

There will be a final judgment. This final judgment will be perfect in its assessment of each individual's thoughts, words, and deeds. Justice will be meted out perfectly: there will be absolute consistency between individual history and individual eternity. Covenant-breakers

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

will be rewarded according to their deeds, and covenant-keepers will be rewarded according to their deeds. Covenant-breakers will be subject exclusively to negative sanctions,³ while covenant-keepers will be subject exclusively to positive sanctions.⁴ This is because of the grace of God in the lives of covenant-keepers, because Christ bore all of the negative penalties at the cross. But this does not in any way deny the ethical cause-and-effect system that is described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Those who deny that the ethical cause-and-effect system of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 extends into the New Testament have a moral obligation to defend this position exegetically. They rarely do. They merely assume it.

Conclusion

This is the shortest chapter I have written in some 31 volumes of commentaries on the economics of the Bible. I hope you will remember its thesis, which is crucial for both biblical social and biblical economic theory.

3. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48). Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

4. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:14–15). Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

2

NONMARKETABLE RICHES

Although saddened, we are always glad; we seem poor, but we make many people rich; we seem to have nothing, yet we really possess everything (II Cor. 6:10).

The theocentric issue of wealth and poverty is the issue of sanctions in history: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Scent of Death

This verse appears in a section of the epistle in which Paul uses a series of contrasts in order to make a point. He is trying to get across to his listeners that the Christian life, if lived consistently, comes under negative sanctions. Critics of Christianity eventually become critics of those who speak on behalf of Christianity. *There is no escape from criticism when a Christian lives and speaks consistently with what he believes.* The reason for this, according to Paul, is that covenant-breakers recognize the threat to them that Christianity represents. He calls it the scent of death. Yet this same scent is a scent of life to covenant-keepers. “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (II Cor. 2:15–16). So, the same lifestyle produces widely varying responses in different people. The Christian’s critics are consistent. So are his advocates. Each group’s evaluations are consistent with its own presuppositions. The result is positive and negative at the same time, in response to the same words and deeds. Here is Paul’s summary.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

We are honored and disgraced; we are insulted and praised. We are treated as liars, yet we speak the truth; as unknown, yet we are known by all; as though we were dead, but, as you see, we live on. Although punished, we are not killed; although saddened, we are always glad; we seem poor, but we make many people rich; we seem to have nothing, yet we really possess everything (vv. 8–10).

He begins the list with the contrast between honor and disgrace. He does not begin with finances. Then he moves to the issues of obscurity and fame. Then he moves to functional life and death. He speaks of being punished, but he insists that he has not been killed. The negative sanctions were severe, but they were not sufficiently severe to silence him or stop his ministry.

With this as background, we come to Paul's statement regarding sadness and happiness: "although saddened, we are always glad." How can someone be both at the same time? Because there is gladness in sadness. The supreme aspect in history of this is the cross. It began as sadness but ended in joy—for Christ above all, but also for the disciples. Paul can see the joyful results of the negative sanctions that produce sadness.

B. Wealth: Marketable and Nonmarketable

1. Two Kinds of Wealth and Poverty

Then he comes to the theme of wealth and poverty. Paul seems to be poor, but he has made other people rich. He seems to possess nothing, yet he insists that he has everything. It should be clear that he is not talking about marketable wealth. He is burdened by poverty, but this poverty does not slow him down or discourage him. Somehow, he overcomes poverty, and in doing so, he assists others in their quest for riches. But does he mean marketable riches? Given the nature of the contrasts in this passage, it is clear that he is talking about spiritual riches: things that are worth having, but which are not marketable. A person cannot buy them for money. He can buy counterfeits, but not the real things.

These nonmarketable riches are valuable assets. They are worth pursuing. But, whenever attained, they remain nonmarketable. The individual who attains them cannot go into the marketplace and offer to sell them in exchange for other assets. These riches are real, but they are not marketable.

What kinds of riches does he have in mind? In other passages, he described the benefits of saving faith in history. These benefits do not exclude financial success, but financial success is not mandatory for those who would like to achieve these benefits. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23). These, he contrasted with the works of the flesh.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19–21).

Again, the crucial issue is this: *the riches he has accumulated are not marketable*. They are not bought and sold with money, favors, goods, or other services. The contrast is between marketable benefits and nonmarketable benefits.

2. Benefits in History

Paul is consistent in his assertion that there are benefits to be attained in history. He is not talking about what is commonly referred to as pie in the sky by and by. His focus is earthly. As surely as the negative sanctions that critics have imposed on him are historical, so are the benefits that he describes by using the language of marketable wealth. The contrast is not between time and eternity; the contrast is between marketable riches and non-marketable riches.

People search after these nonmarketable riches. Men commonly want to be regarded as honorable. They know that they cannot purchase honor. In fact, the very suggestion that honor could be purchased with money or other forms of wealth is ludicrous. The essence of honor is the fact that a person cannot be bought off with money or other forms of marketable wealth. A man seeks honor and wants to avoid disgrace.

Paul's critics have sought to disgrace him. The critics have not sought to steal his money. They have sought to steal his reputation. They perceive that what he possesses of great value is a good reputation. This good reputation strengthens him, and it strengthens his cause. They have sought to undermine his cause by undermining his legitimate claim to honor.

It would be naive to believe that wealth, meaning marketable wealth, is superior to such characteristics or benefits in life as honor and a good reputation. A man should also want to be known as truthful. If he lies in order to gain greater wealth, he has violated the law of God. Yet it is not just the Israelites who understand this relationship price of honor: not surrendering it for less valuable goods. The whole world recognizes this.

One aspect of honor is a commitment to truth-telling. The man does not want to be perceived as someone who lies for the sake of marketable goods, including money. A man who surrenders his honor or surrenders his reputation as a truth-teller for the sake of increased marketable wealth is regarded in most cultures as someone who has traded something of great value for something of lesser value. To use Jesus' language, this is someone who has sold the pearl of great price for money. The essence of wisdom is to buy the pearl with all of your money. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45–46).² Jesus' point was not that money can buy this pearl of great price. His point was that nothing, including money, is worth holding onto in preference to God's kingdom. Money was His representative asset. If something can be purchased with money, the kingdom is not for sale in exchange for it.

3. *The Pursuit of Riches*

Paul is warning against the pursuit of riches that are marketable at the expense of riches that are not marketable. He is saying that people who imitate him with respect to truth-telling and honest dealing will receive wealth. This wealth cannot be purchased with money or marketable goods. Yet it is legitimate wealth, and it is preferable wealth.

It would be a mistake to argue that Paul insists here that marketable wealth and nonmarketable wealth are inherently in opposition to each other. He is seeking by this letter to gain donations from the church at Corinth for the support of the Jerusalem church. *He does not criticize materialistic wealth.* If it were not for the fact that the Corinthian church had great marketable wealth, because its members were wealthy, the church could not make a sizable donation to the Jer-

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 31.

usalem church. Nowhere in his epistle does he criticize the Corinthians for possessing great marketable wealth. He criticizes them for hanging onto their wealth so tightly that Christians who were suffering would be forced to suffer more than was necessary. Given the great wealth of the Corinthian church, and given the fact that the members of the church could afford to make a substantial donation of money for the support of the Jerusalem church, the church should give generously.

4. Marketable Wealth: A Tool

Paul understood that marketable wealth is a tool. It is a tool of relief. It is a tool of evangelism. It is a tool that can be used to extend the kingdom of God in history in a way that without such wealth, the task of kingdom-building would be more difficult. Marketable wealth is like a lever. You can move resistant barriers by means of a lever. Paul nowhere recommends that people not make good use of their marketable wealth; on the contrary, he advises them that they make good use of it.

He understood that, in the familiar phrase, "There is more where this came from." There is more marketable wealth available to successful people; therefore, they should not begrudge others a share of that wealth when others are suffering through no fault of their own.

5. The Welfare State

Paul does not call on the civil government to support the Jerusalem church. He calls on another church to support a distant church. He in no way suggests that the Jerusalem church had some sort of a legal claim on the marketable wealth of the Corinthian church. He does say that the Corinthian church should fulfill its promise, made months earlier, that it would support the Jerusalem church.

Paul is saying here that individuals who are wealthy in terms of marketable goods are in a position to help those who are also wealthy, though in need of marketable goods. The two forms of wealth are different. He did not say that the Corinthian church possessed greater wealth of significance than the Jerusalem church did. He implied that the Macedonian church, which had considerably less marketable wealth at its disposal than the Corinthian church did, was in possession of greater quantities of the nonmarketable wealth which Paul insisted, and Jesus insisted, is the preferable form of wealth.

Jesus said that the way to build up wealth in the realm beyond the grave is to sacrifice marketable wealth in the present (Matt. 6:19–21).³ Paul does not say this here. Paul here is appealing to the consciences of the members of the Corinthian church, but he does not promise them extra blessings in the world beyond the grave as payment for their charitable giving. On the contrary, Paul tells them of benefits in history: possessing the kind of wealth that the Macedonian church possessed. This is also the same kind of wealth that he possesses. This wealth sustains him in the midst of a world of critics who deny that he possesses any of these forms of nonmarketable wealth.

C. No Call to Poverty

1. A System of Temporal Rewards

Paul does not come to them in the name of sacrifice as a goal in itself. He does not claim that giving up some of their wealth is a good thing in and of itself. He is saying rather that to surrender the marketable wealth which they had promised earlier to surrender will produce rewards in history. He is not talking about rewards of greater quantities of marketable wealth. He assumes that they have access to additional marketable wealth. This was a wealthy church. People who have the ability to make money also have the ability to make more money. Take away their money, let them loose in a strange city, and a year later, or two years later, these people will have accumulated wealth. Paul does not tell them to become poorer in marketable goods. He tells them to become rich in nonmarketable wealth.

He is not calling them to a life of poverty. Ministers who raise money for charitable causes have no commitment to the ideal of poverty. The whole point of their fund-raising is that they are attempting to reduce poverty. The means of reducing this poverty belongs to the person who has accumulated marketable wealth. Paul is not saying that wealth-making is a demonic ability. He is saying only that, if this is the only ability that a person possesses, then he is poor indeed. Such a person has cut himself off from the nonmarketable riches of this world. These riches are worth pursuing, for if they were not worth pursuing, Paul would not brag to them that he had accumulated such wealth by means of his ministry.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

2. Nonmarketable Wealth and Poverty

This passage contrasts nonmarketable wealth and nonmarketable poverty. He has been called a liar; he has been called disgraceful. His name has been sullied. While this might have negative implications for his accumulation of marketable wealth, the fact that he has no marketable wealth indicates that his concern with these false accusations had nothing to do with his concern over the affairs of his business. He did not say that these critics were making it more difficult for him to work as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).⁴ There is no suggestion that his concern about these false accusations was a concern over the status of his marketable wealth or his ability to gain additional marketable wealth. The contrast is between marketable wealth and nonmarketable poverty.

He realizes that by proclaiming the gospel faithfully, this will simultaneously gain him both nonmarketable wealth and nonmarketable poverty. In some circles, he will have a good reputation. In other circles, he will have a bad reputation. As Americans say, "it comes with the territory." He did not seek to refute those who accused him of being a liar. He simply went on about his work. He had no illusions about being able to reduce the number of false accusations against him, other than by surrendering his commitment to spreading the gospel. He was not willing to pay that price. The price that he was unwilling to pay was not the forfeiture of marketable wealth by refusing to compromise. The price that he was unwilling to pay was to achieve nonmarketable wealth by compromising.

3. Fund-Raising

The primary goal of Second Corinthians was to raise money for the Jerusalem church. In no way was its goal to criticize the possession of marketable wealth. The issue was this: what the members of the church, acting through the church, would do with their marketable wealth. Would they hang onto it, as if there were no possibility of a continuing stream of marketable wealth? Or would they generously transfer a portion of their marketable wealth to those who were in need of marketable wealth?

Paul reminds them in this epistle of what they had promised before. He seems to be aware of the fact that some members of the church have decided that they had been overly generous before. They

4. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 9.

had concluded: "It is time to become more realistic." Paul points to the fact that if they are consistent in their faith, they should expect to accumulate nonmarketable wealth and also nonmarketable poverty. Their good reputation in some circles will be cause for others to spread false rumors about their activities. They cannot escape from the *dual sanctions* that are applied by rival kingdoms to the *same action*. This is a war to the death. We should not expect to be good soldiers and also escape the dangers of the battlefield.

So, while this epistle is about the use of marketable wealth, it is primarily about the accumulation of nonmarketable wealth and the simultaneous accumulation of nonmarketable poverty. The two go together. This is what had happened in Paul's life. He had those who praised him, and he had those who criticized him. Yet he was the same man.

D. Imputation

The theological issue here is imputation. One group imputed good motives to his actions; the other group imputed evil motives to his actions. One group claimed that he did good things; the other group claimed that he did evil things. There is no way to escape the imputation of evil if you are doing objective good for the kingdom of God. This is why Paul makes this series of contrasts.

Then how can we sort it out? If the same act produces positive and negative sanctions, as well as positive and negative imputations, is all of life chaos? Is it all meaningless? Paul's point was that he knew that he was doing the right thing. He did not rely on other people to provide a positive assessment of his ministry. "For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth" (II Cor. 10:18).

It is God's imputation that matters, not anyone else's. So, it should be the goal of the covenant-keeper to make imputations that are consistent with God's imputations. Paul reminds the reader of this fact when he says that he is rich. If he is rich, on what basis is he rich? He is rich because of the objective character of his words and deeds, but more to the point, he is rich because of *God's imputation of success to him*. God had done this with Jesus. He had said, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Paul was confident that God, in His mercy, had called him to a ministry. Paul had faithfully performed this ministry, and therefore he was in possession of

riches. These riches did not arrive from the good judgments of covenant-keepers. They arrived from the imputation by God concerning Paul's success as a minister of the gospel.

Conclusion

Wealth is more than marketable wealth. Far more important is nonmarketable wealth. This, Paul possessed. He also was the target of false accusations. Call this nonmarketable poverty. It did not make him poorer in marketable riches. It did hinder the work of his ministry. But the value of his ministry in God's eyes was what mattered to Paul. God's imputation counted. The critics' imputations did not.

3

UNEQUAL YOKING

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (II Cor. 6:14)

The theocentric issue here was yoking by covenantal oath: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Covenantal Bonds

This passage is used by critics of confessionally mixed marriages. A covenant-keeper should not marry a covenant-breaker. To do so compromises the productivity of the marriage. Marriage is to be in terms of the husband's calling before God. He takes a wife to assist him in his work, by which he extends the kingdom of God in history. If he takes a wife who does not share his view of God, man, law, sanctions, and the future, he compromises his work.

The text does not say that it is wrong to work with people who do not share your confession. You are not to be unequally yoked with them. That is, if you hold the hammer, it is legitimate to invite others to become nails in the arrangement. Another way to put it, if you are in control of the direction in which the bus is driving, then it is fine to invite on board others who will sit in the back of the bus and pay for the trip. To deny this would be to deny the division of labor. But they must not be in a decision-making capacity.

A family is not such an association. The members are legally bonded to each other. A common confession should be the judicial foundation of the bond.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

The same is true of a church. If you join a church in which covenant-breakers have control over the affairs of the church, or over the affairs of the denomination, then this prohibition would apply. You must not covenant yourself with unbelievers who will work against your interests as a covenant-keeper. You join the church in order to be a participant in a joint venture. This joint venture is dependent upon the shared confession of all of the members. Do not submit yourself judicially to church discipline that is not conducted in terms of the Bible. Do not submit to people who do not subject themselves to the biblical standards that govern the institutional church.

This raises the question of civil government. In most nations today, the civil constitution, whether written or unwritten, is not formally committed to the God of the Bible. In many cases, it explicitly rejects any such commitment. For example, the United States Constitution in Article VI, Section 3 explicitly prohibits test oaths as a requirement to hold Federal office. That is, no one can be required to affirm any religious confession in order to serve as an officer in the United States government. The Supreme Court has extended this to include all civil governments in the United States. In 1961, in the case *Torcasso v. Watkins*, the Supreme Court declared that the lowest civil office in the land, notary public,² may not be screened by the requirement of a religious oath. This decision completed the secularization of all levels of civil government in the United States. It took from 1788 to 1961 to achieve this goal. As I have shown in my book on the United States Constitution, this was the goal of the leading members of the Constitutional convention in 1787.³

Christians are unequally yoked together with non-Christians as citizens of the United States. Few Christians in the United States are aware of their theological dilemma. The only Protestant church that I am aware of that understands this issue is the Reformed Church of North America, better known as the Covenanters. It is a small Calvinistic denomination. It has always opposed the fact that the United States Constitution is not self-consciously grounded in a Trinitarian confession. Almost no one has heard of this group, and those outside the group who have heard of it regard it as a curiosity.

2. This person signs his name and stamps a document to affirm that he saw another person with identification sign a document.

3. Gary North, *Conspiracy in Philadelphia: The Origins of the United States Constitution* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Dominion Educational Ministries, Inc., 2001). (<http://bit.ly/Constitution1787>)

B. Fellowship

The King James translators translated the Greek word as “fellowship.” The Greek word originally meant much the same as this English word means. It means “participation in a group.” But if we are to take the word literally, then participation in a business, or a voluntary association, or a charitable organization, or even an organization such as Alcoholics Anonymous would be prohibited. Again, this would mean forsaking the world. Jesus said that we are in the world, but not of the world (John 17:15–16). If we are in the world, then we are necessarily participants in many organizations that are in no way organized in terms of a Trinitarian confession.

Paul is speaking of membership in covenantal institutions. He is not speaking of the economic division of labor. He was well aware that Christians were in a minority in the Roman Empire. There was no way that they could cut themselves off from participation in the market economy without becoming some kind of isolated sect living in the wilderness. There is no indication that Paul or any other apostle held such a view of the Christian life. So, Paul in this passage is not concerned with participation in the economic division of labor.

C. Yokes and Fellowships

To be yoked means that you are in a *permanent oath-bound legal alliance* with someone else. In the Mosaic law, it was illegal to yoke together an ox and a donkey to pull a plow (Deut. 22:10).⁴ The two animals are different. They work in different ways. But it was more than their mere inefficiency that motivated God to prohibit this unequal yoking. This unequal yoking was representative of unequal yoking—a permanent bind—between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. That is, it was representative of a marriage based on rival confessions, a church based on rival confessions, and a civil government based on rival confessions.

The story presented in the Bible from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22 is the story of competing kingdoms. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan are constantly battling for control in history. *Covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers can make temporary truces, but they must not make permanent covenantal treaties.* This is why Israelites were forbidden to marry Canaanites. God warned them that such mar-

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 54.

riages would lead inevitably to theological compromise by covenant-keepers (Ex. 34:14–16). Covenant-keepers would be at a disadvantage in such marriages. This proved to be the case during the era of the judges (Judg. 3:5–7). The consummate representative case of a violation of this principle was Solomon's marriage to 700 women. Many of them were covenant-breakers. They brought idols into his household. He learned to worship those idols (I Kings 11:4). God had said this would happen (Deut. 17:17), and it happened to the wisest man in history. He was wise in his exercise of judgment of other people's disputes, but he was utterly blind to the effects of unequal yoking in marriage.

When an individual joins in a permanent business partnership with someone of a rival confession, he violates the principle set forth by Paul in this passage. There will be conflict between the partners. The debts of one partner become the legal debts of the other. If one partner goes bankrupt, the creditors can demand payment from the other partner until he has no more assets. If partnerships were alone legal as joint ventures, this would dramatically limit the division of labor.

Then what of a limited-liability corporation? It is treated by the courts as a legal individual. It survives the death of any participant. Individuals invest in the corporation. If the corporation prospers, they prosper. The corporation has limited liability. It can be sued, but the individuals who have invested in it cannot be sued. In this sense, it is an economic mirror of a church. A church can be sued in a civil court, but members of the church cannot be sued for any supposed violations of the law conducted by officers of the church. Without this legal protection, there would be neither churches nor large-scale businesses. Legal liability is crucial for the success of both institutions.

Is investing in a corporation the equivalent of being unequally yoked? It is not. You are not yoked as a member of a corporation. You can sell your shares of ownership. There are organized exchanges set up expressly for buying and selling shares of corporations. There is no unequal yoking because there is no yoking at all. A corporation is not a fellowship.

The economy is not a fellowship. It is a voluntary legal arrangement in which people cooperate with each other for limited goals. They cooperate in production, and they sometimes cooperate when they buy as a group. This is the case with a buyers' cooperative. Usually, however, people act as customers as individuals in the market-

place. Each transaction is separate from the others. A person has legal authority to buy or not buy. Similarly, in a free market social order, the seller has the right to sell or not sell to a would-be customer of the product or service. There is no fellowship.

In certain kinds of production, employees do develop camaraderie. In this sense, they resemble a fellowship. But the arrangement is based on the quest for money. It is not self-consciously based on the idea of extending one of the two kingdoms.

This is not true of certain kinds of businesses. A house of prostitution is dedicated to the extinction of the kingdom of God. These organizations do take on the characteristics of a fellowship. In the case of criminal conspiracies, they are very often established and governed in terms of an oath. Covenant-keepers are not to participate in such rival oath-bound organizations, either as buyers or sellers. Paul's words in this passage apply to membership in such organizations. But such organizations do not characterize the vast majority of companies that produce goods and services for purchase in a market arrangement.

Conclusion

The prohibition against being unequally yoked refers to a joint venture in which the participants are bound legally. They are bound by law in a legal arrangement that is not grounded in the confession of a covenant-keeper. This does not refer to transitory arrangements such as buying and selling, where there is no oath involved. There is at most a promise to pay.

4

GRACE AND ECONOMIC SACRIFICE

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit [know] of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints (II Cor. 8:1–4).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Grace and Generosity

In this epistle, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their promise to make a donation to relieve members of the church in Jerusalem. In this passage, he points to the extreme generosity of the churches in Macedonia. He says that God has shown grace to them: “the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.” The manifestation of this grace is their generosity. He points out that the churches in Macedonia are poor. Their generosity was great in relation to their poverty. It was not just that they gave generously; it was that they gave beyond what could have been expected of them, “beyond their power they were willing of themselves.”

1. Manifested Grace

Paul makes a point: God’s grace to them has been manifested in their generosity. This indicates that generosity is something special. It

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

takes the grace of God to motivate men to give beyond what others would normally consider to be a reasonable percentage of their wealth. *People do not normally give generously.* In this case, their generosity was so great in relation to their poverty that Paul singles out their generosity as evidence of the grace of God in their lives. This was abnormal generosity, meaning supernatural generosity.

Jesus said that when we give generously in history, we lay up treasure in eternity. "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:33–34).² Nevertheless, it is very difficult for men to believe that, by giving generously, they are accumulating great wealth for themselves individually in the world beyond the grave. Men believe in what they can see and touch. They cannot see the world beyond the grave. They can see money.

Money is a powerful lure. Jesus said that there are two gods competing for the allegiance of men: the God of the Bible and Mammon (Matt. 6:24). Mammon is the god who promises to reward men who seek this goal: "more for me in history."³ This god has many followers. He is easier to believe in than the God of the Bible. He offers near-term rewards. He does not offer pie in the sky by and by.

Paul is pointing out that the members of the churches of Macedonia are faithful servants of Christ. The proof of this is the disparity between what they gave and what they own. They do not own much, but they gave much. This is a manifestation of faith, which is in turn a manifestation of God's grace.

Paul does not say that the Macedonians' poverty is a sign of God's grace. Rather, it is the disparity between what they gave and what they own that is the sign of God's grace. There is nothing in the writings of Paul to indicate that poverty is a recommended lifestyle for pursuit by covenant-keeping individuals. There is no indication that poverty as such is to be regarded as a blessing of God. But there is no question that the Macedonians' generosity was regarded by Paul as a manifestation of the grace of God.

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012) ch. 26.

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

2. Manifested Trust

Such generosity testifies to an individual's confidence that God will protect him. He puts his faith in God rather than Mammon. This faith is history-centered. People amass wealth in order to protect themselves from the unpredictable and unforeseen problems and even calamities of life. They trust in marketable wealth to serve as their protection. They may also trust in God. Where grace is evident, Paul implies, individuals trust in God and not in Mammon. They trust in God rather than in their own possessions. That which is visible, meaning their possessions, is not the focus of their confidence. Their confidence lodges in the God of the Bible, who intervenes in history in order to uphold his people.

The people of the Jerusalem church were trusting in the churches to which Paul made an appeal for support. They trusted in God by way of gentile churches, by way of the apostle Paul. *They trusted in God, but they also trusted in history.* They trusted in history because they understood that God is completely in control of history. It was not that they trusted a God who promised to deliver them directly. He did not promise this. *They trusted a God who calls His people to show generosity.* This God raised up the apostle Paul to make the appeal on behalf of the Jerusalem church. But this system of cause and effect is nevertheless dependent on God's grace. This is why Paul points to the generosity of the Macedonians as being a mark of supernatural grace.

Paul is preparing the Corinthians for a specific appeal. He is about to ask them to show great generosity to those in distress in Jerusalem. The Corinthian church is a wealthy church. If the Corinthians give as generously as the Macedonians had given, Paul will be able to raise a considerable amount of money for the support of the church in Jerusalem. He is pointing out that the generosity of the Macedonians manifests the grace of God in their lives. By implication, a comparably generous donation would indicate that the grace of God is active in the lives of the Corinthian church's members.

The Corinthian church was in a position to give a considerable donation, even though the members would not have to sacrifice a great deal. Paul is implying that this would not be a manifestation of grace in their lives to the extent that it was evident in the lives of Macedonian church members. It was not the size of the Macedonians' offering that impressed Paul. It was the size of the offering in comparison to the poverty of the members. The disparity was the mark of grace, not the

amount given.

B. Marketable Wealth: Objective and Subjective

From an economic standpoint, this argument points to the reality of objective wealth. The members of the Macedonian churches were poor. They had less wealth than the members of the Corinthian church. Paul is making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. He is saying that the Macedonians had given more. Jesus had done the same thing in describing the generosity of the widow who put two small coins in the treasury (Luke 21:2–4).⁴ She had given all that she possessed. Rich men around her gave far more money, objectively speaking, but in relationship to their wealth, their gifts were minimal. Compared to the gift of the two small coins by the widow, these men's gifts were unimpressive.

1. Positional Wealth

Both Jesus and Paul had a concept of marketable wealth that was simultaneously objective and subjective. Marketable wealth was viewed by Paul as objective in terms of the amount of money offered by the donors. It was also subjective in relation to the comparative wealth of the members. Paul took into consideration both the objective wealth and the subjective wealth of the two congregations. Objectively, the Macedonians had not given as much as Paul soon indicated that the Corinthians had promised to give. Subjectively, however, the gift of the Macedonians was much greater. It was so great that Paul says that the disparity between their poverty and the generosity was a visible mark of the grace of God in their lives.

If Paul had in mind only objective marketable wealth, he would not have emphasized the magnitude of the Macedonians' gift. That gift was objectively less than what he expected the Corinthians to give. The Corinthians would gain no favor from God just because they might give a slightly larger sum than the Macedonians gave.

On the other hand, if Paul had in mind only subjective marketable wealth, the Corinthians would not have been in a position to judge the intensity of the generosity of the Macedonians. There is no way that anyone can measure the value of anything in the mind of another individual. He cannot even measure the value of anything in his own mind.

4. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 50.

He cannot say, accurately, that something is objectively worth exactly this much more than something else. He can only say that it is greater or lesser; he cannot say how much greater or how much less. There is no objective standard of value. Nevertheless, Paul expected his listeners to understand that the objective poverty of the Macedonians in relationship to the objective wealth of the Corinthians was meaningful. It was meaningful in terms of the disparity between the size of the gift in relationship to the objective wealth of the givers.

2. Dualism in Economic Theory

Economic theory ever since the 1870s has been self-consciously divided between the concept of objective value and subjective value. This is a manifestation of a general subject-object dualism in all humanist thought. In the field of economics, this dualism manifests itself most often in the discussion of personal wealth. Is wealth primarily objective or subjective? Prior to the 1870s, most economists believed that wealth is objective. After the 1870s, economists increasingly believed that wealth is subjective. The problem is, neither side can do without the other side's concept of wealth. If marketable wealth were exclusively objective, there would be a way to measure it. Economists could then explain objective prices in terms of objectively valued inputs. But the classical economists could never find a measuring rod that links value and price. Instead, they invoked supply and demand, which are the products of human action. Human action is subjectively based.

Defenders of purely subjective value theory constantly import the conclusions of objective value theory. They draw conclusions that are logical only if economists can make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. But economists cannot do this. There is no objective way to measure subjective utility.⁵ Economists make value judgment when making policy recommendations to governments. If there were absolutely no way to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, economists could not logically and scientifically make policy recommendations.⁶ When the civil government does one thing, it cannot

5. Lionel Robbins, *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>)

6. Robbins admitted this in 1938 when Roy Harrod called this fact to his attention. He backed away from his universal rejection of the idea of the possibility of making interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

do another. When a policy benefits one group of citizens, it costs another group additional taxes, but without equal benefits. Economists must decide which benefits to which groups are most consistent with the general good of the people. But “the general good” is an objective category. Economists can make such conclusions scientifically only on the assumption that economists can make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. They can somehow conclude that one group will be subjectively better off, while another group will be subjectively worse off, but the civil government should implement the policy anyway. When they speak of a group being better off or worse off, they mean better off or worse off subjectively. The members of these groups will perceive themselves to be better off or worse off. But decision-makers cannot make such assessments scientifically if value is exclusively subjective. In order to make such judgments, there must be objective values and subjective values. There must be objective ways to decide which policy a government should pursue. The economist concludes that a society will objectively be better off by following a particular policy rather than another; so, the subjective economists import objective value theory back into their system.

Paul says that the Macedonians have given generously from the point of view of subjective value theory. They did not give objectively as much as the Corinthians were likely to give if they took Paul’s recommendation. What matters most, Paul says, is the *subjective sacrifice* that the Macedonians had made. This was why their sacrifice was evidence of God’s grace in their lives. The magnitude of God’s grace was visible in the magnitude of the discrepancy between their poverty and their generosity. Their poverty was objective; their donation was objective. Yet what matters most, Paul points out, is the *subjective magnitude* of their sacrifice. It was abnormal. It was therefore a manifestation of the grace of God in their lives.

Conclusion

The grace of God was manifested in the disparity between the Macedonian church members’ objective poverty and the objective size of their donation. This disparity was subjective. It pointed to a sacrifice. This level of sacrifice was abnormal, Paul believed. It was supernatural.

His argument rested on a two-fold theory of economic value. Economic value is objective. It can be measured. Yet it cannot be meas-

ured solely objectively. The Macedonians did not give objectively more wealth than Paul expected the Corinthians to give, but they gave great wealth subjectively. Paul compared what they owned with what they gave. He expected his listeners to understand the subjective magnitude of the gift. This was what counted in assessing the gift's value in God's eyes.

5

FROM POVERTY TO RICHES

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (II Cor. 8:9).

The theocentric issue here was hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Service and Success

This passage uses the language of economics in order to explain the New Testament doctrine of the incarnation. Elsewhere, Paul described the incarnation in non-economic terms. He spoke in terms of status.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11).²

This passage presents a correct pattern for victory by covenant-keepers. Humility and service lead to exaltation by God. In Christ's

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Chapter 20.

case, the ultimate humiliation of the cross was the means of His definitive exaltation, already completed, whereby God has “given him a name which is above every name.” It will lead to final exaltation, when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

B. Poverty and Wealth

Because Paul is attempting to convince the members of the Corinthian church to give generously, he goes to the heart of the matter by way of economics. He is presenting a case for charity. He is moving his listeners toward a conclusion. He plans to convince his listeners to do what they had promised to do, namely, make a generous donation to the Jerusalem church.

He describes the ministry of the Second Person of the Trinity, meaning the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in history, in terms of a fall in class. It was also a fall in social status, but we usually discuss economic classifications in terms of class, which in an economic classification. The Second Person of the Trinity abandoned His high place in heaven in order that He might take on human flesh. This was an enormous step down. It was a step down in terms of social status, but it was also a step down in terms of economic class. He went from the ultimate upper-class Being in the universe to a lower-class being. He became a carpenter. This is not a high class or a high status position. This is a tradesmen. It is not the lowest class among human occupations, but compared with being God, it surely is a step down. Even if there had been a Carpenters Union, it would have been a step down.

Paul describes this step down in terms of wealth and poverty. As the Creator of the universe,³ the Second Person of the Trinity was rich. His station in heaven indicated this enormous wealth. He was in charge of all creation. Nevertheless, because of the doctrine of the *economic Trinity*, theologians also discuss a hierarchy within the Trinity. There is *equality of being*, but there is a *hierarchy of service*.

Jesus Christ, as the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trin-

3. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:16–17).

ity, is a servant. Paul presents His lower-class position as marked by poverty. He stepped down from great wealth to poverty. "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor." Why did He do this? Paul says that He did this in order to make His followers wealthy. "That ye through his poverty might be rich." Paul does not say that his followers will become the equivalent of financial tycoons, but he does say that they are made wealthy by the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf. So, the language of wealth and poverty in this instance refers to the local status of saved and lost. It was the willingness of the Second Person of the Trinity to step down from His high position to be born of a woman. This act illustrates the degree of sacrifice on the part of the Second Person of the Trinity on behalf of His people.

Paul adopts the language of wealth and poverty in order to drive home a point: the benefits of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ are vastly greater than monetary returns. Jesus was clear about this. He warned people that it would be a foolish bargain to accept the entire world as payment for one's soul (Matt. 16:26).⁴ So, Paul is not really talking about monetary gains. He is talking about the difference between salvation and damnation. The magnitude of the difference between salvation and damnation is analogous to the difference between occupying the throne of the universe as the Creator of the universe and becoming a carpenter. The move from heaven to earth is comparable to the move from saved to lost. The story of mankind is twofold. It begins with the transition from grace to wrath in Genesis 3, and extends to Revelation 22, which is the story of the transition from wrath to grace. In order to enable man to make the transition from wrath to grace, the Second Person of the Trinity was born of a woman in order to make His transition from grace to wrath at Calvary on behalf of covenant-keepers.

Paul is not suggesting that the Corinthian church, on behalf of its members, can purchase salvation for them by the expenditure of money in the form of a donation to the Jerusalem church. Such a suggestion would have been antithetical to everything he believed about the free offer of grace to man. He was making a point: Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for the sins of men. In order to do this, the Second Person of the Trinity had to step down from the throne of heaven to the occupation of a carpenter. He did that out of love. He did it as

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

5. Judicial representation: point two of the biblical covenant.

God's mandatory means of grace. *Grace is defined as a gift to someone who does not deserve it.* Jesus Christ suffered the wrath of God in order that He might bring His people from wrath to grace. The magnitude of His sacrifice was so great that men cannot comprehend it. Nevertheless, they have some vague idea of how great this sacrifice was. It began with the transition from heaven to earth.

C. Motivation to Sacrifice

Paul is calling the members of the Corinthian church to give sacrificially to the Jerusalem church. Earlier in this chapter, Paul described the degree of sacrifice displayed by the churches in Macedonia.⁶ Here, he speaks of an even greater model for sacrifice: the sacrifice of the Second Person of the Trinity in moving from heaven to earth. Both sacrifices were a matter of grace. The Macedonian churches did not have to give to the Jerusalem church. Neither did the Second Person of the Trinity have to sacrifice His place in heaven on behalf of His followers. Both sacrifices were made on behalf of others.

1. Jesus as the Model

Jesus Christ offers the model for all mankind. His is a model of sacrifice. *Jesus was the ultimate servant.* He asked nothing for Himself; He sacrificed everything on behalf of others. This model was the model used by the churches in Macedonia. This model should also be the model used by the church at Corinth. Paul is arguing on the basis of historical examples. The incarnation was historical. The recent generosity of the churches in Macedonia was another testimony of the application of the principle of sacrificial service to the realm of the church. Such service is expected by God of His people. *Such service is voluntary, in the sense that the incarnation was voluntary.*

The plan of salvation rests on the work of Christ in laying down His life for His friends (John 15:3). The *work of salvation* therefore rests on a concept of *self-sacrifice*. Christ's is the ultimate self-sacrifice in history. We are to be imitators of Christ (I Cor. 11:1).⁷ Paul argues here that the Macedonian churches were imitators of Christ. So should the Corinthian church become.

Jesus Christ did not undergo the negative sanctions of God for

6. Chapter 4.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2912), ch. 14.

their own sake. There is no indication in the Bible that suffering is a legitimate goal for its own sake. *Nothing is a legitimate goal for its own sake.* Nothing is autonomous. Everything that builds the kingdom of God in history and eternity is a legitimate goal, but not for the sake of the participants; rather, it is for the sake of God primarily. We live in a theocentric universe. We sacrifice on behalf of God. This is self-sacrifice on our part. It is the model that Jesus lived.

This is not to say that those who sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom are not beneficiaries of the sacrifice. They are beneficiaries. As participants in the kingdom of God, they benefit from its extension. But the focus of the sacrifice should always be theocentric. God is first; His followers are not. Jesus Christ died to satisfy the requirements of God on behalf of His people, but it was God's judicial requirements, not the needs of His people, which were central to the plan of salvation.

The Second Person of the Trinity experienced poverty in the broadest sense so that He might make wealthy, also in the broadest sense, all those who are covenantally committed to Him. The language of poverty here is the language of self-sacrifice. It is not the language of final ends. The language indicates that *the goal of self-sacrifice is wealth*: wealth for God, wealth for covenant-keepers, and wealth for all those who conform themselves to the external laws of God. This position is the exact opposite of the ethics of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Kant's position was all ethics must be based purely on self-sacrifice, with no reward for the one who sacrifices.⁸ This is completely opposed to what Paul is teaching here. Paul is teaching that Christ died on behalf of His people in order that they might become wealthy in the broadest sense.

2. *Self-Sacrifice vs. Poverty*

Paul is calling on the church at Corinth to sacrifice on behalf of the Jerusalem church. He does not call on them to make this sacrifice so that they might remain in poverty. He does not want the Jerusalem church to remain in poverty; neither does he want the Corinthian church to fall into poverty. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests that covenant-keepers have some kind of moral obligation to pursue poverty. The proper question is: On whose behalf is poverty or wealth

8. Immanuel Kant, "The Lawgiver," *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper, [1780?] 1963), p. 52. Cf. "Reward and Punishment," p. 57.

to be pursued?

Poverty is a motivation to achieve wealth. Wealth is a means of service. The Jerusalem church was poor. Paul is taking a collection so that the Jerusalem church will be less poor. He is not taking a collection to make the Jerusalem church even poorer. *The goal of self-sacrifice is to extend the kingdom of God in history and eternity.* This is a benefit to God, to covenant-keepers, and, at least in history, to covenant-breakers, who learn by the example of covenant-keepers to obey biblical law. There are benefits for obedience. There are benefits for self-sacrifice. The historical benefit is wealth. This is not simply financial wealth, but wealth in its broadest sense.

Jesus Christ did not die on behalf of the ideal of poverty. He died on behalf of the ideal of wealth. *Biblical wealth is theocentric wealth.* It is wealth that is built up through covenantal faithfulness. It is wealth that is to be put to profitable service for the kingdom of God. It is not wealth for its own sake; it is wealth for God's sake primarily, covenant-keepers' sake secondarily, and for the world generally.⁹

3. Kingdom Expansion

Paul is reminding the Corinthian church that self-sacrifice is a means of kingdom expansion. It is not self-sacrifice in order to attain poverty; it is self-sacrifice in order to attain wealth in the broadest sense. Such wealth can be experienced in economic poverty. This was Paul's point with respect to the Macedonian churches. They were poor economically, and they became even poorer economically by means of their sacrificial gifts on behalf of the Jerusalem church. Yet, Paul insists, this is a form of wealth. Why should economic poverty be a form of wealth? Because it is part of a specific historical process. It is sacrifice on behalf of the kingdom of God. This is what extends the kingdom of God in history.

Those who participate at one stage, perhaps an early stage, in the expansion of the kingdom of God participate as beneficiaries of the grace of God. They possess limited economic resources. These resources are suitable for making investments in the kingdom of God; they are a form of capital. They build up the productivity of others who are members of the kingdom of God. As the others' productivity increases, the kingdom extends its influence culturally. Jesus said that

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcgr>)

such a sacrifice lays up wealth in the world beyond the grave (Matt. 6:19–21).¹⁰ But Moses said in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that the growth of the kingdom of God involves the growth of personal wealth. So, sacrifice on behalf of the kingdom of God is self-serving to the extent that the growth of the kingdom of God will benefit all of its members in history and eternity. In the long run, these benefits will be widespread. This was the teaching of Isaiah in chapter 65.¹¹ Even in the short run, the benefits are real. They are future-oriented. They involve the concept of inheritance. They are the kind of sacrifice that a parent makes on behalf of his children. The donors may be poorer in the present, but they will be richer in the future.

This is the concept of kingdom development in history. The early participants will benefit in the world beyond the grave. But they also benefit as people who are legitimately confident that their spiritual, confessional heirs will extend the work of the kingdom across the face of the earth. The early financiers of the kingdom's growth become the founders. They know that the efforts of the church in particular and Christian civilization in general to extend the kingdom of God in history will benefit their spiritual heirs. They look forward to this success, which is the meaning of wealth in the broadest sense, and they rejoice.

Conclusion

Paul is trying to persuade members of the Corinthian church that their celebration of joy can be comparable to the celebration of joy already experienced by members of the Macedonian churches. "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (II Cor. 8:2). The means to this joy is sacrificial giving. He motivates them by an appeal to joy: the joy experienced by the Macedonians, not the joy to be experienced by members of the Jerusalem church. Conclusion: it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).¹²

10. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

11. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15.

12. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

6

MUTUAL AID THROUGH MUTUAL CONFESSION

For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack (II Cor. 8:13–15).

The theocentric issue here was causality: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Insurance and Reciprocity

This passage is a defense of a system of crisis insurance. Paul says that the abundance of the Corinthian church can be used to assist the impoverished Jerusalem church. He says that this is a temporary situation. He says specifically that in the future, the Jerusalem church may be in a position to help the Corinthian church. There is no suggestion by Paul, here or in any other passage, regarding the establishment of a permanent wealth-redistribution program. Paul does not indicate that this is anything but a temporary solution to a temporary problem.

We cannot predict all of the calamities that may face us. In Paul's day, there was no system of organized insurance. Insurance was an invention of the Christian West. When it became known that mathematics can be applied to categories of events, due to the principle of the law of large numbers, Western civilization developed one of the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

greatest of all inventions: insurance.² Individuals can be assembled together to pool their resources in order to create a fund that can be used to relieve any of the members of the group when a specified disaster strikes.

From the beginning of man's history, the family served as a means of insuring against individual calamity. Tribal units also developed unscientific programs of mutual assistance. Paul says that the church international is to serve as an insurance function comparable to what tribes and clans serve in underdeveloped societies today. The church is to serve as an organization for mutual assistance. If one church falls into poverty, other churches are expected to intervene to help members of the afflicted church deal with the short-term crisis. This is what an insurance policy is designed to do. The difference is this: there is no confession of faith with respect to an insurance policy. There is no family connection, no tribal connection, and if there is a national connection, it is only because of the laws regulating the sale of insurance in each nation.

Paul's letter indicates that he believed that the church should serve an insurance agency. It should provide limited protection against unforeseen calamities. His letter indicates that he understood that the roles could be reversed at any time. The Corinthian church might fall into poverty, and the Jerusalem church might grow out of poverty. Their positions would be reversed, and the weaker party in the present might become the stronger party in the future. Life is filled with ups and downs, and this includes the institutional church. The fact that individual congregations do not experience the same crisis at the same time makes possible a program of joint insurance.

B. Equality and Inequality

This passage in no way is a call for economic equality. The Bible nowhere calls for economic equality. The Bible in both Testaments teaches the doctrine of the great reversal. Covenant-breakers will be brought low, while covenant-keepers will be raised up. There is nothing about equality in this relationship. This reversal was taught by Moses (Deut. 28:13, 43–44), and it was taught most eloquently in what we call the Magnificat of Mary (Luke 1:51–53).³

2. Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1998).

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012)), ch. 1.

There will never be equality between heaven and hell. There will never be equality between the New Heavens and a New Earth (II Peter 3:13) on the one hand, and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14) on the other. But modern man wants to believe that there is no heaven, there is no hell, there will not be a New Heavens and a New Earth, and there will not be a lake of fire. He is appalled by the Bible's doctrine of eternal inequality between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Modern man wants to believe that he is autonomous from God. He does not want to live in a cosmos in which God eternally rewards covenant-keepers and punishes covenant-breakers.

1. Christian Socialists

There are Christian political activists who are committed to the socialist ideal—never yet implemented in history—of economic equality. The doctrine of equality is not taught in Scripture. Jesus taught the doctrine of hell. This is a place of torment—*torture* is more accurate—in which those who do not believe that Jesus died for their sins are subjected to fire. Jesus taught this in Luke 16.⁴ The residents of hell remain there until the final judgment and resurrection. At the resurrection, their souls are reunited with their bodies. Then they, along with hell, are dumped into the lake of fire for eternity (Rev. 20:14–15). There is no escape. This is pure retribution: without grace.

Compared to this, poverty is a great joy. Yet Christian socialists worry constantly about poverty. For reasons of political tactics, they do not refer to themselves as advocates of socialism. As with socialists in the past, they call themselves advocates of “economic democracy.” Economic democracy is a political system in which two wolves and a sheep vote on what to have for dinner.

Christian socialists teach that the Bible demands equality economically between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. They demand political coercion by the state to achieve this. They want the state to raise the incomes of unproductive covenant-breakers to equality with productive covenant-keepers. Yet there is no equality in the universe, not even in hell (Luke 12:47–48).⁵ Under Christian socialism, covenant-breakers are not said to be given even a hint of warning that God hates them and has a terrifying plan for their life. They have been told by Christian socialists that they morally deserve economic equal-

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 40.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

ity with covenant-keepers. Then, without warning, they are ushered into a world in which there will never be equality—not in hell, not in the lake of fire—with covenant-keepers. The advocates of Christian socialism preach total discontinuity: morally obligatory equality in history irrespective of performance, and eternal inequality in hell and the lake of fire. This implication bothers them. So, they avoid all mention of hell and the lake of fire.

All sanctions in history rest on the ultimate sanctions: the New Heaven and New Earth vs. the lake of fire. This final condition is reflected prior to the general resurrection in the difference between heaven and hell. Yet Christian socialists, who do not publicly deny the existence of eternal sanctions, publicly deny the moral legitimacy of economic sanctions in history: wealth vs. poverty.

The Christian socialist might respond as follows: “When covenant-breakers get rich through the free market, they also have no warning of the terrible wrath to come.” But they do have a warning. Jesus told His disciples that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24).⁶ The church is required to preach this. But the modern church, which is generally silent on economic theory, is hampered when dealing with a poor person who believes that he has a moral right to a his “fair share” of the wealth of a successful person, a position which the Bible does not teach. Worse, he is systematically misinformed by Christian socialists that he does possess such a moral right, which should be made by civil law a valid legal claim, according to the Bible. The church is silent. Christian socialists are loud.

Christian socialists insist that they are not socialists. They argue that they do not advocate the state’s ownership of the means of production, so by definition they are not socialists. This is deliberately misleading. Germany’s national socialists, better known as the Nazis, also did not call for state ownership of the means of production. They called for state control over production and income. The Nazi Party’s name under Hitler was the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. The American political Left has long favored fascist/national socialist economics.⁷

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

7. Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

2. Egalitarianism vs. Pareto's Law

Economic egalitarians believe in coercive redistribution of wealth by the state. They affirm that it is a moral imperative that every society should strive towards equal ownership of economic assets, or something close to this. A few of the extreme egalitarians preach that no nation should have greater wealth than another nation. This is such a difficult sell to voters in rich nations that almost nobody ever comes out forthrightly in favor of this position. But this position is implied as soon as someone says that the civil government should use the power of the sword to take money from one group and transfer it to another group. If this is morally mandatory inside a nation's borders, then it is morally mandatory across borders. All that is missing is a central government over all nations to compel the redistribution, a development close to the hearts of most egalitarians.

The doctrine of economic equality is utopian. No society has ever achieved economic equality, and none ever can. The Trinity itself is structured in terms of a hierarchy of service. Why should Christians expect equality within human society? Fathers have greater authority within the household than wives. Parents have greater authority within the household than children. Why should we expect equality outside of the family? Every covenantal institution has a hierarchy. Every human institution has a hierarchy. Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant model.⁸

The Swiss sociologist/economist, Vilfredo Pareto, published his findings in 1897 regarding wealth distribution in European nations. In every nation he examined, approximately the same distribution of investment capital existed. About 20% of the population owned 80% of the capital. No society studied since the time of Pareto has been found to deviate significantly from this 20/80 distribution pattern. The 20/80 law applies to realms far beyond economics. In instance after instance, 20% of the employees produce 80% of the profits. About 20% of a clientele produces 80% of the complaints. About 20% of the same clientele—but different members—produce 80% of the profits for the company. Over and over, the 20/80 principle is found to be operational.⁹

We do not know why this is true. Economists tend to ignore it because they cannot explain it. But the fact remains: every industrial society that has been studied retains a level of economic inequality that is

8. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

9. Richard Koch, *The 80/20 Principle* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

at least 20/80. In some cases, there may be even greater inequality. This fact stands as a lasting testimony against all those who claim that society should be marked by equal shares of wealth. They do not have a single example to serve as a model.

No matter how many reforms are enacted, no matter how many revisions of the tax code the politicians make, every society retains the 20/80 distribution of capital. Every egalitarian social reformer and economic reformer is morally obligated to provide an explanation as to why every known industrial society is structured in terms of the 20/80 distribution. Until the causes of this strange but universal fact can be identified, no system of reform is likely to change the pattern. If we do not know what has caused the alleged problem, we are unlikely to be able to solve it, no matter what we do.

The utopians who demand economic equality are not impressed by Pareto's law of distribution. Either they have never heard of it, or if they have heard of it, they deny that it is relevant. They still call for political programs of coercive wealth distribution. They are promoting a policy that leads to the net reduction of wealth. Some of these reformers are motivated by envy more than jealousy. Envy is not like jealousy, which is motivated by the desire to get something that someone else owns. Envy is the desire to tear down the other person, irrespective of whether the envious person is benefited by the loss. He does not care deeply about wealth redistribution. What he cares about deeply is pulling down the wealthy.¹⁰

Anyone who comes in the name of wealth redistribution as a means of achieving greater economic equality, and who does not also provide an explanation for the Pareto distribution, is driven by a combination of envy and ignorance. If he does not systematically show how his proposed political reform will deal with the long-term, universal problem of Pareto inequality, the reformer is simply attempting to tear down the rich for the sake of tearing down the rich. He has no program of reform that predictably will lead to greater economic equality. He only has a program that will make life miserable for existing rich people.

The result of this reform will be a transfer of wealth to a new elite, who will benefit from the Pareto distribution of wealth. This always happens. There are no exceptions. Every reform that has ever been imposed in the name of achieving greater economic equality has substi-

10. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1966] 1969). Reprinted by LibertyClassics, Indianapolis.

tuted one elite for another. The rules by which people get rich and stay rich may be changed according to civil law. What is never changed is the 20/80 distribution of capital.

C. Manna from Heaven

Paul cites Moses' language regarding the manna. Moses wrote: "And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating" (Ex. 16:18).¹¹ Paul writes: "As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack."

In the wilderness decades, manna appeared overnight six days a week. Those who gathered the manna had all they could eat, so that no one went hungry. That event was a miracle. This miracle ended when the people of Israel crossed the border into Canaan (Josh. 5:12). It never reappeared.

No one could accumulate wealth by means of the manna, since the manna rotted overnight (Ex. 16:20), except the night before the sabbath (Ex. 16:22). The system did not allow capital accumulation. God provided a second miracle—rotting—to make impossible the buying and selling of manna in an attempt to increase one's wealth.

Paul quotes Moses, not in the name of establishing economic equality, but in the name of taking care of a crisis. The crisis faced by the people of Israel in the wilderness was that there were too many of them for the wilderness to support. So, God provided a miracle to keep them alive. It cost Him nothing to do this. No politician stuck a gun in God's belly and said, "Fork over the manna, God. My constituents wants it. We have the votes." Yet this is exactly what all reformers who call for state redistribution of wealth would do to the wealthy. These reformers want to elect politicians who will use the coercive power of civil government to extract wealth from one group of citizens in the name of another group of citizens.

The appeal for state-enforced wealth redistribution is done in the name of righteousness and morality. It all involves the same practice: having a policeman with a badge and a gun demand that certain individuals fork over their money, and if they refuse, the man with the

11. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 18.

badge pulls out his gun and threatens them with prosecution. Yet Christian reformers come before other Christian citizens and claim that this passage justifies guns in people's bellies.

D. Both Altruism and Self-Interest

Paul appeals to the Corinthians based on their self-interest. It is not simply that they are to be self-sacrificing. It is that they are supposed to understand that there can be great reversals in this life. The bad times that have fallen upon the Jerusalem church may someday fall upon the Corinthian church. The good times that are characteristic of the Corinthian church may sometime be characteristic of the Jerusalem church. At that point, the Corinthian church will want to get aid from the Jerusalem church.

Paul here establishes the principle of voluntarism. He says there are positive sanctions associated with the program of giving that he recommends. He believed in self-sacrifice, and he also believed in self-interest. He appeals here to the ethically motivated goal of people with wealth to help people of a similar confession, who have fallen on hard times. He points out that this motivation was characteristic of the Macedonian churches. But he does not leave it at this. He makes plain the benefits of participating in such a program of interchurch assistance. This is a mutual benefit organization. The church is to help its members. Members include poor people who are part of the Church international. People across the borders and across cultures are members. This is why the kind of giving that is represented in Paul's letter is not tied to borders. It is tied to confession of faith. Confession of faith counts for more than ethnic origin or national borders.

Paul appeals to the *altruism* of members of the Corinthian church. He simultaneously appeals to their *self-interest*. This is the dual characteristic appeal of all covenant-keeping religion. Christ came to earth to sacrifice His life on behalf of His people. This is the greatest act of altruism in history. Yet on the basis of this act of altruism, God the Father gave to Christ the definitive position of exaltation. God has promised that there will be public acknowledgment by the whole earth of Christ's exaltation. Every knee will bow. This is true because Christ humbled himself and submitted to the cross (Phil. 2:8–12).¹² If Jesus Christ was rewarded for an act of supreme self-sacrifice, why would any covenant-keeper argue that acts of altruism, when conducted in

12. Chapter 20.

terms of God's covenantal social order, will not also lead to positive rewards, both in time and in eternity?

E. Misusing the Text

This passage is misinterpreted by Christian defenders of the welfare state. These people come in the name of Christ and call for a system of coercive wealth redistribution by the state. Yet Paul never made any such appeal to a civil magistrate. He never suggested that civil government is responsible for wealth redistribution.

What applies to a voluntary institution such as the church does not apply to a coercive institution such as the state. No one has to join a church. Everyone inside a geographical boundary is governed by one or more civil governments. The judicial rules governing one institution are not the same as the rules governing the other institution. The fact that Paul appealed to the Corinthians to give money to aid the Jerusalem church during a temporary crisis had nothing to do with the call by economic reformers to empower the state to permanently extract wealth from one group of individuals and transfer this wealth to another group of individuals, minus 50% for handling.

There is nothing in the New Testament that suggests that civil government is a legitimate agency for the support of the poor. Those Christian political activists who insist that the modern welfare state was foreseen by the Bible's authors, let alone advocated by them, are involved in a program of self-conscious, willful deception. They are trying to deceive laymen who are unfamiliar with their Bibles, whose name is legion.

Conclusion

Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to abide by its promise to send aid to the Jerusalem church. He gave two reasons. First, they could someday find themselves in a tight position. The Jerusalem church might be there to help. This is an argument from self-interest. Second, there is joy in altruism. The Macedonian churches are examples. This also is self-interest.

He called on them to volunteer to help. This was not a call for government compulsion. It was not a call for permanent transfers of wealth for as long as the per member income of the Jerusalem church was lower than the per member income of the Corinthian church. He was raising money to meet a one-time emergency.

PERSUASIVE FUND-RAISING

Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: Lest haply [it happen] if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness (II Cor. 9:3–5).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Pledges as Vows

Paul has been using a series of arguments leading up to his request that the Corinthian church provide the money which it had promised to donate to the Jerusalem church before Paul had journeyed to Macedonia. It is apparent from the structure and tone of his letter that he had learned that the Corinthian church was beginning to hesitate on its commitment. He was persuaded that they needed to be persuaded in order for him to be able to return to the Jerusalem church with the money which the Corinthian church had promised to provide.

This has become a familiar story in the history of fund-raising. A church organizes a special service relating to some church fund-raising project. If the person who is doing the presentation is effective, he can raise a great deal of promised money. But, no matter how persuasive he is, the church will not collect as much money as it received in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

promises immediately after his presentation. This same phenomenon operates in television fund-raising programs. An organization pays to rent television time for a telethon. In the studio, the organization has rows of people sitting behind telephones, ready to talk with people who call in to promise to make a donation. The organization keeps announcing during the broadcast that promises of gifts, called pledges, are coming in. The total amount of money promised continues to rise. The problem comes in subsequent months, when the people who had promised to make the donations discover other uses for their money. The organizations rarely collect as much money as callers had promised. Only the use of credit cards can overcome this. The person on the telephone asks for the caller's credit card information. The money is immediately transferred from the caller's bank account to the organization's.

Paul is concerned that this is about to happen to him. He says that he had told the churches in Macedonia about the generous offer of support that had been made by the Corinthian church. On this basis, he implies, the Macedonian church members had dug deep into their purses and donated a substantial amount of money in comparison to their wealth.² Paul is about to return to Corinth, and he suspects that what he had told the Macedonian churches is not going to become a reality.

Here, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their promise. In doing so, he is humiliating them. He is subtle in his presentation, but he is using the technique of humiliation and embarrassment in order to gain the donation which the church had promised earlier. He does not hesitate to remind them of their promise. He is not saying explicitly that they are vow-breakers and liars; he is only reminding them in a gentle sort of way that they are in the process of becoming vow-breakers and liars.

B. A Fund-Raising Letter

Second Corinthians is a fund-raising letter. It is probably the earliest example of a fund-raising letter. He uses logic. He uses emotion. He adopts gentle language rather than direct accusative language. He creates a document that has as its goal a specific action step. That action step is for the church to provide the money that it promised him on a previous journey.

Paul tells them that he has sent other individuals ahead of him in

2. Chapter 5.

order to remind them of their obligation. This indicates how seriously he regarded his problem. He was concerned about the condition of the Jerusalem church. He knew that this church needed a large donation. If the Corinthian church did not fulfill its commitment, the donation would be substantially smaller. Paul is doing everything he can as a logician and as a motivator to persuade the leaders of the Corinthian church to persuade the members of the church to hand over the money. He believed that he must send what would today be called advance men. These are people who go to an organization to pre-sell the organization on making a purchase. In this case, Paul was sending them to re-sell the church on fulfilling its commitment.

He says that he does not wish to find them unprepared. He does not wish to be ashamed of them. He thinks the church is not going to donate the money that it had promised. Chapters 8 and 9 are masterful examples of how to persuade people to hand over money. To view these two chapters as anything besides fund-raising passages would be naive. Expositors have always explained the passage in terms of his goal, clearly stated, that he expects the church to come up with the money.

It is crucial that we understand the nature of his appeal. He is acting as a fund-raiser for an organization based on voluntarism. No adult head of household had been compelled to join the church. Slaves may have been forced to join, but it is unlikely that Paul is addressing his fund-raiser to slaves.

C. Paul's Use of Rhetoric

In making sure that he maximizes his return from this letter, Paul uses rhetoric. He uses emotion. He does not come out and say explicitly what he obviously believes about them: they do not intend to fulfill their commitment. Instead, he makes reference to their previous verbal commitment. He talks about the great generosity of the churches in Macedonia. He points out that these churches were poor churches when compared with the wealth possessed by members of the Corinthian church. This appeals to their sense of guilt or shame. It is not logical in the sense of a series of propositions. He is not trying to win a formal debate. He is trying to get as much money out of them as he can with this letter.

His opening sentence in this chapter is rhetorical. It is a deliberate untruth which is designed to be recognized as meaning its opposite.

He says that it is superfluous that he write this letter. “For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you” (II Cor. 9:1). Yet in chapters 8 and 9, it is clear that he regards this letter as mandatory to get the church to fulfill its commitment with respect to the donation. If this letter were really superfluous, he would not be devoting space to the issue of the donation. He would talk about other matters. Yet what he talks about in chapters 8 and 9 is money. So, when he says the letter is superfluous, he is conveying rhetorically that it is not superfluous. In this sense, rhetoric is not always logical. It is nevertheless persuasive.

D. Voluntarism, Not Coercion

Paul seeks to persuade individuals to provide charity on a voluntary basis. His letter makes no sense on any other supposition. There is no coercion implied anywhere in the letter. Church leaders did not have the authority to compel church members to fund this charitable operation. There is no trace anywhere in the letter of an appeal to members of the congregation who may have been civil magistrates. There is not a hint that the civil government is in any way responsible for funding a relief effort on behalf of the church in Jerusalem.

This fact should serve as a warning to self-professed Christian social activists, who are in fact political activists, who claim that these two chapters offer evidence supporting the concept that the civil government is responsible before God to provide money for relief efforts helping the poor. There is no such concept found in the New Testament. *There is no suggestion in Christ’s teachings or Paul’s teachings or the teaching of any writer in the New Testament that civil government has any role whatsoever in providing economic relief to the poor.*

The voluntary nature of the Corinthians’ relief effort is obvious. Unfortunately, that which is obvious to anybody who reads the text without a prior bias in favor of the welfare state is not obvious at all to promoters of the welfare state. They appeal to this passage as if it were justification for a concept of civil government that is based on the principle of coercive wealth redistribution. Such a view of civil government presents the government as a savior. This savior can heal. It heals, not by its word of faith, but by its word of warning. Any taxpayer who resists the demand of the tax collector will be prosecuted.

Because democratic socialist politicians regard civil government as an agency of plunder, they search for an ethical justification for what is

in fact *a scheme to buy votes with other people's money*. Christian political activists provide anti-Christian politicians with what they claim is biblical evidence in favor of the welfare state. They ignore the context of this epistle. They ignore the fact that Paul is using logic and rhetoric to persuade his readers and listeners to provide funding for the Jerusalem church. *He uses persuasion because he cannot use coercion*. He does not appeal to the institution in society that exercises legal coercion: the civil government.

Defenders of the welfare state refuse to accept the obvious implications of this portion of Paul's epistle. Clearly, Paul understood that his fund-raising was based on voluntarism. Welfare state advocates refuse to discuss this aspect of the epistle. Instead, they appeal to certain words taken out of context, especially "equality." They reinterpret this passage as if it were a command for Christians to organize politically in order to pressure politicians to get into the national treasury and provide money to certain groups of poor people. These groups are the active constituents of the political party to which the Christian political activists belong. They are support troops in a political campaign to gather sufficient votes to elect politicians who will use the civil government as an agency of plunder. They use the plight of the poor as a logical and especially rhetorical justification for the use of money collected by the state and administered by a huge army of bureaucrats who cannot be fired by any politician.

Christian defenders of the welfare state never discuss this issue. They never provide evidence that the bulk of the funds raised through political coercion actually winds up in the hands of individual poor people. This is because the bulk of the money does not wind up in the hands of individual poor people; it winds up in the hands of full-time bureaucrats who administer the funds. It also winds up in the bank accounts of private welfare agencies that are not run by poor people.

None of this matters to the Christian defenders of the welfare state, because every welfare state operates in this manner. In their view, the only way to help the poor effectively is to implement programs that are based on political coercion in the name of the poor. All other programs are dismissed as secondary or peripheral in the communities where poor people live. They never discuss the fact that one of the main reasons why these other agencies are peripheral is the fact that the government for so many decades has intervened in order to support poor people directly or indirectly. Voluntary welfare agencies gain funds by appealing to people who have already surrendered 40%

or more of their income to the collection agencies of various state, local, and national governments. Voluntary agencies must be funded by the leftovers. It is not surprising, then, that these organizations are underfunded. They are underfunded because the tax collectors have done their work effectively.

Conclusion

Paul pressured the Corinthian church to perform its obligation and provide the full donation promised by its leaders before he went to Macedonia to raise funds. He said that he had sent representatives to consult with the church's leadership, so that there will be no misunderstanding of what the church owes. He used rhetoric to persuade them to do what they had promised to do.

This is an appropriate approach when dealing with a voluntary organization that is under no legal obligation to do anything. There is no binding contract. There is only a promise made to God through Paul. This is a serious obligation, but it is not legally enforceable in any civil court. Only a church council might be able to deal with it, but the details of the obligation might be a matter of hearsay. So, there was no institutional way to resolve this. Paul therefore relied on logic and rhetoric: tools of persuasion.

There was no element of compulsion involved. This is why it is completely illegitimate to invoke this letter as somehow justifying the use of civil government as an agency of coercive wealth redistribution.

8

THE COVENANTAL PROSPERITY GOSPEL

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully (II Cor. 9:6).

The theocentric issue here is sanctions: causality. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Sowing and Reaping

Paul begins with a biblical principle: *we will reap what we sow*. He applies this principle to a special situation: charitable giving. He uses this principle to convince the church at Corinth to fulfill its original commitment to make a donation to the Jerusalem church. He says that if a person sows sparingly, he will reap sparingly.

In the Old Testament passages that established this relationship between reaping and sowing, the focus was on ethics. If a society is evil, the results of people's actions will be negative. Hosea taught this.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men (Hosea 10:12–13).

Micah taught this.

Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine. For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people (Micah 6:15–16).²

The statutes of Omri were laws opposed to Mosaic laws. The works of the house of Ahab, Omri's son (I Kings 16:28), were evil. Jeremiah taught this.

The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of the LORD shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh shall have peace. They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the LORD (Jer. 12:12–13).³

There are few passages in the Old Testament where the application of this system of causation is explicitly individual. The author of the Proverbs wrote: "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail" (Prov. 22:8). But any theory of individual causation is rare in the Bible. The Bible focuses on people as members of covenantal associations: churches, civil governments, and families. Isolated acts of evil in a righteous society are not likely to be economically productive. Similarly, isolated acts of righteousness in an evil society are unlikely to be economically productive. Ahab's servant Obadiah hid a hundred prophets in a cave and fed them (I Kings 18:4). He risked his life (v. 18). They ate bread and water. He did not charge a market-clearing price for these services.

There is a predictable cause-and-effect relationship between ethics and income. Members of a covenantal group that acts righteously can legitimately expect positive sanctions in this life. Members of groups that act in an unrighteous manner should expect negative sanctions in this life. We do not live in a universe governed by impersonal law. We also do not live in a universe governed by randomness. We live in a created universe. This universe reflects cosmic personalism.⁴

B. Charitable Giving

Paul extends the Old Testament principle of ethical cause and

2. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 28.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

effect to include charitable giving. It is not simply that if a covenantal group treats others lawfully, its members will prosper in the long run. Paul says that if we go out of our way to extend blessings to someone in need through no ethical fault of his own, we can legitimately expect blessings in our lives. It is not enough that we do not commit evil acts; it is that we should commit righteous acts. People usually do not use the verb “commit” in relation to righteous acts. They use some other word, such as “perform.” They speak of sins of omission and sins of commission. Paul is speaking here about a righteous act of commission: charity. It is a positive act with the goal of benefiting people in temporary need. But charity has another goal: positive sanctions in history.

A covenant-breaker may not believe in a universe that is established in terms of ethical cause and effect. The psalmist spoke of covenant-breakers as committing evil self-consciously, on the assumption that God does see, or if He does see, He will not do anything about it. “They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?” (Ps. 94:6–10). Such people are blind to the nature of cause and effect in God’s created universe. They do not understand that the universe reflects the ethical standards of the Creator.⁵ God has revealed in the Bible and in general revelation the ethical cause-and-effect system governing both nature and the social order.⁶

Paul reminds the Corinthian church that this ethical cause-and-effect structure of the universe applies to acts of righteousness, not just a refusal to commit acts of unrighteousness. Just as a farmer sows seeds actively, so should covenant-keepers actively sow righteousness. The farmer sows seeds in the expectation of a crop. Paul tells the Corinthian church that it should do the same.

C. Free Market Economic Theory

What Paul says of charitable giving, free market economists apply

5. Point three of the biblical covenant order is ethics: Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3.

6. Point four: *ibid.*, ch. 4.

to acts of thrift. Free market economists sing the praises of rising production per capita. Capital provides the tools that we need in order to increase our economic output. Free market economists recommend thrift, which is said to be the basis of increasing supply of capital per capita. They see the benefits of saving. They understand that as people sow more, they will reap more. Mises wrote: "There is but one means available to improve the material conditions of mankind: to accelerate the growth of capital accumulated as against the growth in population. The greater the amount of capital invested per head of the worker, the more and better the goods can be produced and consumed."⁷

Free market economists focus their attention on thrift rather than charitable giving. Rare is the free market economist who devotes a subsection of a chapter to the economic benefits associated with charitable giving. He may admit that charity is good for the recipients, and he may say that it is good for the self-esteem of the donors. But he does not spend more than a paragraph or two on the causal relationship between charitable giving and increased production per capita in society at large. He does not believe in such a relationship. He does not think there is any verifiable analytical relationship between charitable giving and subsequent income that is comparable to the statistically verifiable relationship among thrift, capital, output, and income.

The free market economist affirms methodological individualism. He readily admits that increased thrift by an individual is likely to lead to increased future income for this individual. He is well aware of the relationship between increased saving, increased capital investment, and increased output per capita. He assumes that in any competitive free market society, increased saving leads to increased output and therefore increased income. But the kind of sacrifice that is involved in thrift is not seen by a free market economist as being comparable to the kind of sacrifice involved in charitable giving. He sees increased thrift as an extension of the principle of private ownership of the means of production. The individual is investing in his own future. He retains ownership of the capital that he purchases by means of his thrift. He is the legal owner of any future stream of income that may be generated by the capital that his thrift has enabled him to purchase.

In the case of charitable giving, ownership of the money is transferred to the recipient. The free market economist does not believe that the individual who gives away money will predictably receive eco-

7. Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 5. (<http://bit.ly/MisesAnti>)

nomic benefits proportional to the return on the same investment (ROI) from thrift. He limits any gain to personal self-esteem. He does not see the gain in terms of increased production in the society at large, production which will enable the donor to gain rewards personally that are proportional to the degree of sacrifice involved in the charitable gift.

He argues that if society A gives 10% to the poor and does not save, while society B saves 10% and does not give to the poor, society B will become richer over time. He does not consider the possibility that a society that does not give to the poor is unlikely to experience a high rate of saving for four consecutive generations.

D. Methodological Covenantalism

1. *Charity and Thrift*

Paul is not arguing in terms of the worldview of modern free market economics. He does not begin with the assumption of methodological individualism. He begins with the assumption of methodological covenantalism. He regards the universe as totally controlled by a totally sovereign God (Rom. 9:1–17; Eph. 1). God has recommended charitable giving as a way of economic success. Because God is completely in control of cause and effect in the universe, He has established economic laws in terms of His recommended system of ethics. This system of ethics establishes predictable covenantal relationships between reaping and sowing. So, an individual or organization that gives economic support to people who are in need because of circumstances beyond their control will prosper over time. *In God's universe, charitable giving has the same effect in the long run as thrift.* Despite the fact that the donor transfers ownership of the money or goods to someone else, and despite the fact that he loses all legal claim to any future stream of income generated by the person who is assisted by the donation, the organization or individual who makes the donation will find, in the long run, that economic benefits flow back, as if he had never transferred ownership to a third party.

Methodological covenantalism views cause and effect as both individual and corporate. God governs the flow of all income streams. He never surrenders ownership of these income streams. He merely delegates the use of capital to men as His stewards. So, because God is absolutely sovereign over history, He can guarantee to covenant-keepers

that they will increase the likelihood of an increasing flow of income over time as a result of their charitable giving.

The humanistic free market economist does not believe in methodological covenantalism. So, he sees the transfer of ownership of an asset to a third party as making the donor economically poorer. This is the price the donor pays for his increase in self-esteem. The free market economist does not see that there is a predictable relationship between donating money in the present and receiving a flow of income in the future as a result of this donation. He is a methodological individualist. He sees private ownership as either individual or corporate, in the sense that individuals participate legally in a profit-seeking corporate structure, and thereby possess legal claims to a portion of any future income which flows to the corporate structure.

2. Enforceable Contracts

For the methodological individualist, everything is determined by contracts. The operation of the economy is therefore determined by the enforcement of legal claims. All lawful contracts, to be contracts, must be enforceable in a human court. There are no other courts.

For the methodological covenantalist, everything is determined by covenants. The operation of the economy is therefore determined by the enforcement of legal claims. The legal foundation of such enforcement begins with God. Covenant theology is theocentric. All legal claims are governed by a representative model: God's ownership of creation and therefore also ownership of the legal claims He has established, based on His office as Creator. All human contracts are established under God, as are all legal claims. Some are enforced directly by God. Others are enforced indirectly by God through His sovereign decree over history's participants. Others are enforced in human courts.

Paul tells the Corinthian church in this passage that those who sow sparingly will reap sparingly. Paul is operating in terms of an assumption. This assumption is clear to the methodological covenantalist, but it is unclear to the methodological individualist. This assumption is as follows: *in God's cause-and-effect universe, charity establishes a predictable presumption on future income.* This is enforced by God in history, directly and indirectly. It is not enforced by a human court.

3. God's Ownership

God's original ownership was established by His office as Creator.

But there is a subordinate form of God's ownership. This was established by His supreme act of grace: the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This subordinate form of ownership occurs with every extension of grace by God. *All grace establishes a legal liability.*

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).⁸

God has established a legal claim on all future income streams. He has granted grace, beginning with Adam and Eve. This established its enforceable legal claim by God. This legal claim is not limited to eternity. It is also binding in history. This is why the extension of the kingdom of God in history is a manifestation of God's enforcement of His legal claims on the total output of all recipients of His grace.

The principle of an economic return to charitable giving begins with God's charity toward mankind: a gift not deserved by the recipients. *God's cosmic charity reinforces His original legal claim on the whole world.* It is through the extension of the kingdom of God in history that covenant-keepers participate in the enforcement of God's legal claim on the whole world. This is why the doctrine of economic growth, the doctrine of postmillennialism, and the doctrine of the triumph of the kingdom of God in history are inter-related. They originate in a biblical system of covenantal cause and effect.

E. Two Versions of the Prosperity Gospel

Passages such as this sowing/reaping passage are used by promoters of what is sometimes called the gospel of prosperity, which gives confidence to listeners that sacrifices made in the present will produce positive benefits in the future. This assessment of economic cause and effect is accurate.

1. Greater Harvest

Paul tells the church at Corinth that it can legitimately expect a

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia; Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 28.

greater harvest because of its charitable gift to the Jerusalem church. It can expect a lesser harvest if this charitable gift is minimal. This is the covenantal view of the prosperity gospel. When this view of economic cause and effect is understood in terms of the extension of the kingdom of God in history, postmillennial eschatology,⁹ and covenantal cause and effect, the prosperity gospel is accurate.

This system of causation applies corporately. It is not applied to institutionally autonomous individuals. To the extent that the prosperity gospel is applied only to individuals, it falls into the error of methodological individualism. It limits God's comprehensive claim on all streams of income that are generated by the recipients of His grace, both special grace and common grace. It therefore limits the grace of God. It limits the extension of God's kingdom in history.

The problem with the prosperity gospel is not that it proclaims a system of ethical cause and effect in the field of economics. It is not that it teaches that he who sows abundantly will reap abundantly. Both are explicitly taught in the Bible. *But this is taught in the Bible in terms of methodological covenantalism.* It is taught within the context of God's extension of His kingdom in history.

2. Eschatology

Because most theologians and pastors today are either premillennial or amillennial, they oppose the gospel of prosperity in all forms. They oppose it with respect to individuals. This is because their eschatological systems deny the possibility of a postmillennial extension of God's kingdom in history in which individuals will participate. Because of their eschatology, they are even more hostile to methodological covenantalism, with its system of ethical cause and effect,¹⁰ than they are to the individualistic gospel of prosperity. The individualistic gospel of prosperity becomes their whipping boy, when in fact what they really oppose is the doctrine of corporate cause and effect with respect to the kingdom of God. Meredith G. Kline defended this viewpoint authoritatively in one academic sentence.

And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of

9. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997). (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

10. Point 4 of the biblical covenant model: Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4.

common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.¹¹

This is a defense of *covenantal unpredictability in history*. He and the theologians who share his view of social causation in history—the overwhelming majority—do not believe that God’s kingdom will expand in history into every area of life, transforming the entire civilization as leaven transforms dough, i.e., the transformation described by Jesus. “Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Matt. 13:33).¹² In contrast to Paul’s explicit statement, they believe that covenant-keepers who sow abundantly will reap sparingly. Even more important, they believe that Christian institutions that sow abundantly will reap sparingly. This outlook is explicit in amillennialism, and it is implicit in premillennialism, because premillennialism teaches that Jesus will return to establish an earthly kingdom at a time in history in which covenant-breakers have extended almost complete control over the face of the earth.¹³

Sometimes people ask this question: “Does eschatology really matter?” It surely matters in the area of economic theory. Those who believe in amillennialism and premillennialism are much more likely to adopt the principle of humanistic free market economists: methodological individualism. They see cause and effect in much the same way that the atheistic free market economist sees it. They do not deny the fact that increased thrift is likely to produce increased income in the future. Most of them probably affirm this principle. They are not socialists. But when they come to this passage in Paul, they seek ways to avoid affirming it. They do not acknowledge that this principle of causation teaches that Christian individuals and Christian institutions that increase their level of charitable giving will receive, in a predictable way, increased income, increased influence, and increased power in society. They shudder at such a concept. They shudder because such a concept openly refutes both premillennialism and amillennialism, both

11. Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184. This essay is a critique of Greg L. Bahnsen’s view of theonomy.

12. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 30.

13. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), chaps. 4–6. (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

of which preach the eventual cultural defeat of Christianity. So, they defend their eschatological positions against the economic framework of methodological covenantalism, which Paul explicitly affirms in this passage. They find other ways to explain this passage.

Some expositors may affirm the truth of what Paul is saying in this passage, but then they refuse to extend it to society at large. They refuse to comment on the obvious implication of this passage: if churches will increase their charitable giving, they will grow in influence, membership, and dedication of their members. Churches will reap the harvest that their commitment to charitable giving assures them.

Paul's affirmation of the predictability between sowing and reaping is an affirmation of postmillennialism to the extent that churches and church members believe what Paul teaches here, and then respond accordingly. The amillennialist and the premillennialist, if they are consistent, must argue that what Paul says here will never take place in history. This is because most Christians will not believe Paul, most churches will not believe him, and few will follow his recommendation. In other words, *they are implicitly arguing that the church of Jesus Christ does not benefit in history from increasing knowledge of God's word*. They are implicitly arguing that the more that covenant-keepers learn about what God's word teaches, the less they are willing to believe it, obey it, and enforce it. The more that the church of Jesus Christ benefits from the intervention of the Holy Spirit as both teacher and comforter, the less the church is willing to follow what God commands.

This is a radical condemnation of the entire church, including the local congregations in which the pastors preach. Yet pastors know that if they keep coming back over and over and over to their congregations, accusing them of not believing what God says, accusing them of not obeying God's laws, they will be fired. They do not want to be fired. So, they preach against any form of covenant theology that undergirds Paul's statement in this passage. They preach that, over time, as the church becomes more faithful to God's word, it becomes weaker and more of a victim. In other words, they preach that history will progressively testify against the truth of what Paul and teaches explicitly in this passage.

Eschatology matters.

3. *Name It and Claim It*

Eschatology does not matter in cases where pastors are theologically inconsistent. Pastors who preach the Arminian, charismatic version of the prosperity gospel, known by detractors as “name it and claim it,” are generally adherents of traditional Scofield dispensationalism.¹⁴ They do not perceive the theological inconsistency of their position. They do not preach very often on eschatology, but they avoid affirming postmillennialism.

There is a reason for this. They are not covenant theologians. They do not believe in God’s comprehensive redemption of all fallen institutions.¹⁵ They are methodological individualists. So, they preach individual prosperity through obedience to God’s law of charity, even though they deny—if pushed—that this applies to institutions. They affirm the invisible economic success of an elite of Christian believers who follow their version of the prosperity gospel, yet simultaneously affirm the eschatologically inevitable growing corruption of churches and Christian institutions in general. God will not comprehensively redeem society, they say.

There is a major theological problem with this view of economic cause and effect. Paul addressed his message to a local congregation. This was a corporate body formed by verbal covenant and marked by baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Paul did not promise prosperity to individuals in the Corinthian church, as distinguished from individuals as church members. The Corinthian church had promised as an institution to make the donation. It was therefore responsible before God.

The prosperity gospel of dispensational, charismatic, Arminian fundamentalism has this crucial problem: *the promise of prosperity in the Old Testament was corporate*. Advocates of the prosperity gospel of individualism make the same mistake made by Eliphaz in dealing with Job.

Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed (Job 4:7–9).

14. *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909).

15. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), Appendix C: “Comprehensive Redemption. (<http://bit.ly/gnworld>). Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

He applied this assessment to Job. He was wrong. Job had been a righteous man. He came under God's negative sanctions by way of Satan through no moral fault of his own (Job 1). All of his children had been killed through no moral fault of their own. The prosperity preachers have always sided with Eliphaz, identifying physically afflicted Christians as people of little faith. The Book of Job stands as a visible judge against these preachers. So does the life of Paul.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (II Cor. 11:24–27).

F. Charity and Thrift

There is little evidence—I know of none—which indicates that a society that gives only to charities and saves nothing will grow economically. There is lots of evidence that a society characterized by great generosity is also characterized by great thrift and economic growth.

The first great example of this in human history were monastic orders in Western Europe. Their members took vows of poverty. Some orders also produced goods for the market. The Cistercians are an example. These institutions were characterized by high savings, careful attention to production, and high profits. The lifestyles of the members improved to such an extent that they were richer than those in the surrounding communities. The monasteries grew wealthy. There were repeated periods of reform of these orders, in order to restore the original ideal of poverty.

When the discipline of thrift is widespread, the parallel disciplines associated with thrift are widespread. People live on a fraction of their income. They give away a higher portion of their income than the common man does, and they invest more, too. The Methodists are good examples, from the mid-eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century. So are the Quakers in the same era.

The Bible does not teach that generous people receive direct grants of wealth by God. It says only that *there is a positive correlation*

between generosity and visible, measurable success. That this economic success comes from thrift, innovation, entrepreneurship, hard work, and price competition in no way challenges the idea that success comes from generosity.

Conclusion

Paul told the church at Corinth that “he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” This applies to individuals. It also applies to groups. The group that Paul said it would apply to was a local church.

There is a predictable cause-and-effect relationship between ethics and outcomes. Evil produces losses; righteousness produces profits. A little righteousness produces a little extra income. A lot of righteousness will produce a lot of extra income.

This system of causation applies to both individuals and associations. There are theologians who deny that this system of causation exists because it would lead in history to the triumph of God’s kingdom institutionally. This thought is antithetical to their eschatologies of civilizational defeat for Christianity. There are others who promote this system with respect to individuals, but not for the church specifically and Christian civilization in general.

Whenever covenant theology affirms both the authority of biblical law and a predictable system of sanctions, it affirms the reality of Paul’s words in the lives of individuals and the lives of associations. The system of ethical causation applies both to the one and the many. It therefore testifies to the Trinity, who is both one and many.

9

CHARITY: VOLUNTARISM VS. COMPULSION

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God (II Cor. 9:7–12).

The theocentric issue here was causation: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Charitable Person

The phrase, “the Lord loves a cheerful giver,” has come down to English-speaking peoples through the generations in all of its King James Version antiquarian splendor. This principle of giving undergirds the Bible’s doctrine of voluntarism. Paul’s language could not be any clearer. He is asking the Corinthian church to appeal to its members to dig deep into their purses and provide assistance for the Jerusalem church. He makes it clear that this donation is completely voluntary.

Paul does not say anywhere in his epistles that civil government

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

has an obligation to use the power of the sword to extract wealth from one group of residents in order to fund the lifestyles of other groups of residence. He relies exclusively on the ideal of voluntarism. Here, he explicitly rejects any suggestion that compulsion is legitimate in raising money to fund people in need, no matter how desperate they may appear to be. He appeals to the church, not to civil government, for the provision of aid to the Jerusalem church. He regards the principle of voluntarism with respect to charity as the biblical standard of charity.

He points out to the Corinthians that God has shown grace towards them in the past. They have sufficiency in all things. He reminds them that this prior grace has enabled them to abound in every good work. There is always a price tag associated with the grace of God. Jesus Christ paid this price at Calvary. But this does not mean that the recipients of grace have no responsibilities associated with extending the kingdom of God. The Great Commission is clear in this regard. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).²

Jesus was explicit about this debt relationship. He said that those who have received greater benefits are more responsible for the use of these assets than a person who has received less grace. There is cause and effect in the social order. When someone receives a benefit, he becomes more responsible before God for the use of this asset (Luke 14:47–48).³

Paul here describes the model of the charitable man. He is someone who has dispersed wealth abroad. He has given to the poor. "He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever." He is speaking of God. Specifically, he is speaking of Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate model for the charitable man.

2. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>). Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

B. The Charitable Church

Paul reminds them that God is the source of the benefits enjoyed by the Corinthian church. God ministers, meaning He provides. “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness.” This is the imagery of the farmer who sows seed in order to reap a harvest. This is how Jesus described evangelism (John 4:35–36). It is a program of harvesting. God is clearly the source of the harvest. He is sovereign over all such matters. So, when he provides seed for the harvest, he makes Christians responsible for the sowing of this seed.

Paul reminds them that the church is responsible for the administration of whatever it has received from God. Paul says they have corporate responsibilities relating to the administration of the wealth which has been handed over to the church by its members.

An aspect of the grace of God is His provision of wealth. The Corinthian church had sufficiency. “Sufficiency” meant then what it means today. An individual possesses resources that enable him to carry out his assignment. As a steward, the individual or the institution must not waste resources. The resources must be put to good use, according to what God has in mind regarding the use of these resources.

Chapters 8 and 9 of this epistle are devoted to the topic of funds to be raised by the church, as previously promised, in order that the Jerusalem church might not suffer. This voluntarism indicates that churches in one geographical area have responsibilities toward churches in other geographical areas. The local institutional church acts as a steward of God’s resources. This stewardship is personal. The leaders of the church are supposed to understand that the church is not a neutral institution. Its goal is to extend the kingdom of God, through hierarchical leadership and discipline. It must preach the Bible, offer the sacraments and defend them judicially, and extend the gospel across geographical boundaries through time. One local congregation is supposed to assist other congregations, meaning across borders and cultural divisions.

This concept of an international church is basic to the extension of the church through evangelism. Members of the congregation give money to the congregation, whose leaders in turn pay for evangelists to go on the road. This is an act of future-orientation.

C. Charity vs. Compulsion

Paul says that the Lord loves a cheerful giver. He does not say that the church should use its influence to wheedle financial support from unhappy givers. Even less does he suggest that the church should threaten resisting members with church sanctions if they refuse to donate. Compulsion is foreign to this fund-raising letter. Because Paul believed in voluntarism, he wrote this letter.

The difference between the New Testament's principle of voluntary giving and the modern world's principle of charity through coercive taxation is absolute. There is no way to reconcile the two positions. If we accept one, we must reject the other. Either the poor are to be taken care of by means of voluntary contributions from people with assets of their own to give, or else they must be taken care of by civil government bureaucrats who spend taxpayers' money on projects funded by the politicians.

Money confiscated by the state cannot be used by voluntary institutions to extend charity unless these institutions are used by politicians and bureaucrats to distribute the confiscated funds. *These institutions then become extensions of the politics of plunder.* They become institutionally dependent on repeated acts of plunder. The flow of funds encourages them to add staff and programs. This creates institutional dependency.

The modern welfare state in the United States is so adamant that its programs are not a form of charity that it has created a word to describe its programs: *entitlements*. An entitlement is owed. The state specifically owes funding to the recipients of its tax money. The Soviet Union was so committed to this view that it made illegal all forms of private charity. It wanted the poor (and everyone else) to be totally dependent on the state. One post-Soviet critic of the Soviet Union's policy of state-funded charity identified the fundamental issue: the destruction of community. "The paternalistic nature of the Soviet state welfare system and its persistent disregard and suppression of any forms of charitable activities developed by institutions other than the state significantly discredited the whole concept of charity, voluntarism and community organizing and suppressed civic initiatives."⁴

The nature of the state monopoly over charity was understood

4. Svetlana V. Kupryashkina, *Women and Voluntary Activities in Ukraine: A Historic Outlook and a View On Soviet State Paternalism* (Ukraine: Center for Women's Studies). (<http://bit.ly/SovietCharity>)

well by one of the founders of the Soviet Union, who became its most famous victim: Lev Bronstein, better known as Leon Trotsky. He fell victim to Josef Djughishvili, better known as Stalin, who sent a man to Mexico City to murder him with a pickaxe. During Trotsky's exile, he wrote *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936). In Chapter 11, he made this observation: "In a country where the sole employer is the state, this means death by slow starvation. The old principle: who does not work shall not eat, has been replaced with a new one: who does not obey shall not eat." He did not bother to mention the source of this traditional saying. It was the Apostle Paul. "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thes. 3:10).⁵ Perhaps he did not know its origin. He may have been citing Article 12 of the 1936 Constitution of the USSR, referred to as Stalin's Constitution. Article 12 reads:

In the U.S.S.R. work is a duty and a matter of honor for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: "He who does not work, neither shall he eat."

Stalin knew exactly where this concept came from. He had begun his career as a seminarian.

D. The Politics of Guilt and Pity

This phrase is the title of a collection of essays by R. J. Rushdoony. In a chapter titled, "The Biblical Doctrine of Charity," he presented the case for private charity and against the welfare state. He made this crucial point.

Charity has as its purpose the strengthening of society and its protection. Its purpose is to unify people of a common faith and to enable the unfortunate both to care for themselves and to maintain their participation in the life of a godly commonwealth.⁶

In contrast is the politics of the welfare state. The welfare state does not call for a common confession. It does not assess the causes of a person's poverty. It is impersonal. It is "by the numbers," as civil law must be in order to place the bureaucrats under law.

A godly man has pity on a victim of circumstances beyond the victim's control, Rushdoony wrote.

5. Chapter 27.

6. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, [1970] 1995), p. 67. (<http://bit.ly/rjrpgogap>)

Pity means literally “loving kindness,” “to be gracious.” This attitude of pity, on God’s part, is *never promiscuous but always selective*, and, according to Scripture, it is to be selective on man’s part also. . . no pity must be shown to evil.⁷

This is in contrast the false charity of the welfare state, which is by law unselective. False charity imposes no confession of faith, no commitment to ethics, no other requirement than (maybe) for the recipient to make a pro-forma effort to look for a job.

False charity hates joy, luxury, and abundance in every form and has a levelling demand: it denies the person’s right to use his property and wealth in terms of his own conscience. The “rights” of the poor to a man’s wealth exceed his own rights and wishes. Success becomes a crime to be atoned for by a required share-the-wealth program.⁸

False charity rests on a concept of guilt for one’s success and legislated pity for the unsuccessful—a universal category—rather than resting on pity for those poor who fell on hard times due to no fault of their own.

The welfare state is a sham. It is a puppet show to manipulate gullible voters. It is run by professional activists who are paid by donors to promote the politics of plunder in the name of the poor. It is the great game of bait and switch.⁹ It is legislated in the name of the poor on behalf of the middle class at the expense of the rich.

E. In the Name of the Poor

Politicians use the welfare state’s principle of coercion of one group in order to benefit another group. They do this because they are competing in the marketplace for votes. The currency of the realm in politics is votes. Politicians understand the currency of their realm. They understand it far better than occasional voters or non-voters do. They ask: “Which groups offer more votes?” They ask: “What can I vote for while in office that will gain me more votes at the next election, net, than my votes in office will cost me?”

In 1850, just before he died, the French essayist and politician Frédéric Bastiat published a little book, *The Law*. In a section titled

7. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

9. This refers to a practice of advertising a low-price good that you do not possess, and then persuading someone who has come to the store to buy it that he should buy a higher-price item.

“Property and Plunder,” he described the motivation undergirding the modern welfare state. The motivation is plunder.

Man can live and satisfy his wants only by ceaseless labor; by the ceaseless application of his faculties to natural resources. This process is the origin of property.

But it is also true that a man may live and satisfy his wants by seizing and consuming the products of the labor of others. This process is the origin of plunder.

Now since man is naturally inclined to avoid pain—and since labor is pain in itself—it follows that men will resort to plunder whenever plunder is easier than work. History shows this quite clearly. And under these conditions, neither religion nor morality can stop it.

When, then, does plunder stop? It stops when it becomes more painful and more dangerous than labor.

It is evident, then, that the proper purpose of law is to use the power of its collective force to stop this fatal tendency to plunder instead of to work. All the measures of the law should protect property and punish plunder.

But, generally, the law is made by one man or one class of men. And since law cannot operate without the sanction and support of a dominating force, this force must be entrusted to those who make the laws.

This fact, combined with the fatal tendency that exists in the heart of man to satisfy his wants with the least possible effort, explains the almost universal perversion of the law. Thus it is easy to understand how law, instead of checking injustice, becomes the invincible weapon of injustice. It is easy to understand why the law is used by the legislator to destroy in varying degrees among the rest of the people, their personal independence by slavery, their liberty by oppression, and their property by plunder. This is done for the benefit of the person who makes the law, and in proportion to the power that he holds.

By promising to take money from a tiny elite of voters, who do not have a lot of votes, and transferring this money to a broad base of poor people, politicians can conceal what they are really doing. They are taxing the rich and the upper middle classes in order to provide money to spend on programs that are approved by the rich and middle

classes. *Only a fraction of the money appropriated for welfare projects ever gets to poor people.* Much of the money is absorbed by the bureaucrats who administer the welfare programs. The poor do receive some money, but always as people who are led to understand that they benefit only because of the politicians and the bureaucrats. They realize early that they are in a subservient position, and that all talk of legal entitlements is political fluff. They know that at any time, the government can cut them off. They know that if times get tight economically, politicians will seek to transfer money openly to groups of voters who have more clout than the poor do.

The poor tend not to vote. The middle classes and elderly people who receive government pensions have far more votes than the poor have, and they vote in much larger percentages. They are in control politically. They want welfare, and they are willing to accept welfare programs when the justification of the welfare apparatus is to help the poor. Academic studies reveal that most of the money taken by the government is allocated to programs that are used mainly by the middle class. College tuitions are a good example. The children of poor people do not attend college in large numbers. The children of the middle class do.

Conclusion

Paul said in this passage that God expects charity, but He expects it to be voluntary. More than this: He expects it to arise out of cheerfulness. The giver should understand that God has blessed him, and that giving freely is a proper response.

This outlook is utterly foreign to all aspects of the modern welfare state, which is based on coercion. Political coercion is used to extract wealth and therefore influence from private citizens. In the name of helping the poor, politicians seek votes from the non-poor. The politicians use a sense of guilt and pity in the voters to manipulate them. The voters elect the guilt-manipulators, and then demand that the state provide even greater allocations of plunder to support their interests.

10

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? (II Cor. 12:16–18).

The theocentric issue here was grace: an unearned gift. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

Paul is attempting to raise money for the Jerusalem church. Here, he tells the leaders at Corinth that he has never asked for financial support for himself, nor has Titus. This positioning was important. He was coming on behalf of another church. He was not being paid to do this. He does not say that the Jerusalem church did not pay him, but it is implied, because he accepted no money from Corinth. He is independent of any church's support.

This makes his plea for funds that much more powerful. He works on behalf of others. The church at Corinth knows that the Jerusalem church will get all of the money it raises for that church. Their contributions will go further.

Paul also had the advantage of being independent of the churches he served. They could not alter the content of his preaching by threatening him with the removal of financial support. He was a tentmaker by profession (Acts 18:3).² This source of income made him financially independent of churches.

Being financially independent of those to whom you bring a mes-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 8.

sage places you in a special category. Either someone supports you who wants this message proclaimed, or else you believe in it so strongly that you are willing to forego time and money in order to proclaim it. The second category possesses greater authority. You are not in this for the money. You are not an agent of another special-interest group. You are a person in a position to do something else with your life, but you choose to sacrifice. The listener thinks, "What is so important about this message that this person sacrifices the income he could earn if he sold his services to a third party?"

Paul possessed such authority. Because his income came from a competitive market that had nothing to do with the gospel, he was in a position to proclaim his message, without theological compromise, on a "take it or leave it" basis. He did not earn a living by selling his services to a third party with a hidden agenda. He was no earthly person's agent.

When you bring any message that asks people to change their minds and then their ways, you strengthen your hand by being financially independent. Such independence is widely regarded as success. The person either has wealth or else the skills necessary to support himself. These are both goals that dependent people would like to possess.

Conclusion

Paul reminds the Corinthian church that he is not dependent on them for his funding. He is independent. This increases his reliability. He was raising money. This positioning as an independent agent served to validate his authority as someone who was dedicated to his ministry of service.

11

CHARITY AND THE KINGDOM

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do (Gal. 2:9–10).

The theocentric issue here was charity, or grace (*charis*): point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Shared Vision

Paul says that the other apostles told him that the only requirement that they had for his ministry was that he emphasize giving to the poor. He says that this had always been his intention, so that in no sense was this requirement by the other apostles a limitation on his ministry.

Surely chapters 8 and 9 of his second epistle to the Corinthians indicate the extent to which Paul was committed to the idea that Christians should be generous with whatever wealth they possess.² It is Christians' responsibility, as members of a local congregation, to participate in charitable activities organized by their congregation. He stressed this with respect to the Corinthians, but it is clear from this passage that he regarded this as a general principle to be applied by Christians across borders. He understood that this is a universal obligation.

The emphasis on charity in the epistles is obvious to anyone who has spent much time reading the epistles. The authors were commit-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapters 4–9.

ted to charitable activities. These activities are not limited to charity from one Christian to another. Certainly, this is where charity is supposed to begin. But charity is also to be shown to people outside the household of faith. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9–10).³ This made Christianity unique in its day. There had been a similar emphasis in Mosaic religion, but it is at the forefront in Christianity. Other major religions of the Roman Empire had no similar emphasis.

B. God's Kingdom Made Visible

The importance of charity for the life of the church has to do mainly with the visible extension of the kingdom of God in history. Charitable activities catch the attention of the recipients of the charity. They also catch the attention of outsiders to the faith, who are impressed by the fact that members of the church are generous to fellow members and also to people outside the church.

Charity is widely respected. Every society understands the extent to which there must be charitable activities for the sake of the social order. It impresses members of every society when they see that members of a particular organization are specially faithful to this requirement, which is a universally recognized benefit.

1. Social Insurance

Giving generously is not simply a matter of public relations. It is also a matter of making certain that individuals within the fellowship do not live in constant fear of the possibility that some unforeseen disaster will strike their family. The fact that members of the congregation give generously is a form of social insurance. Every fellowship has this kind of informal insurance, but the church has been public in its commitment to the necessity of such forms of insurance. God does not want his people to live in fear. When people live in fear, they are hesitant to take risks. They are hesitant to launch new projects. They hoard resources, including money. They try to compensate for the unknown.

God tells people that when they are part of His covenant, He does care for them. He tells them not be overly concerned about the poten-

3. Chapter 13.

tial catastrophes that can strike any family without warning. He reminds them that they do not live in a universe of cosmic impersonalism. On the contrary, they live in a society and a universe in which God's cosmic personalism is the foundation of all existence.⁴ His providence, rather than randomness or fate, governs the universe.

2. Positive Confession

Charity is an outworking of this confession of faith. When God tells His people that they should be generous to those who have fallen into need through no fault of their own, those who are committed to the God of the Bible act confidently when they give away a portion of their wealth to victims of unforeseen circumstances. They testify to their faith in the providential hand of God. They testify to their confidence that God is on their side. He will make certain that they are provided with whatever they really need. David wrote: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25).⁵

One of the ways in which covenant-keepers gain this confidence is that they see that members of the church who fall on hard times through no fault of their own do receive support from other members of the church. So, the benefit of charity is twofold. First, it convinces people to discipline themselves by giving away money, while ignoring the fear that without money, they will be helpless in a time of crisis. Second, the fact that they give the money to other members of the congregation reminds them that there is an institutional basis for confidence that God will provide for them in a time of crisis.

Therefore, giving away money to people in need is a good discipline of the faith. It testifies to people's confidence in the God of the Bible. It also testifies to their confidence in the good judgment of fellow Christians, who are willing to give money, either individually or through the church, to people who have fallen on hard times. Giving away money is a self-reinforcing spiritual exercise. God does not need the money. He says we do not need the money when we rely entirely on him.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

5. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

3. *Wealth as a Tool*

It is not that God opposes the accumulation of wealth. In the Old Testament, we have repeated cases in which God revealed to the people through Moses that wealth is a legitimate goal in history, for it is a tool. All tools are a form of capital. But the biblical goal of wealth is to be seen in terms of the expansion of the kingdom of God in history. It is not to be seen in terms of the expansion of one's own autonomous influence over the affairs of men. In fact, God told Israel, the sin of autonomy is the great rejection of God's covenant. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).⁶ God threatens negative sanctions against any society in which such a view of cause and effect is dominant (vv. 19–20).⁷

C. Moral Responsibility

Paul tells the Galatians that his goal has always been to encourage the churches he has founded to be generous. This reminds the Galatians that they, too, have a moral responsibility to be generous with the assets that members entrust to the leaders of the congregation. This emphasis makes it clear that it is not the building of great cathedrals that most impresses God. It is generosity in the face of hard times.

On the other hand, there is no suggestion that it is immoral for churches to build acceptable and even magnificent houses of worship. Surely, Solomon's temple was a magnificent house of worship. A major problem with the people of the Old Covenant was that they short-changed God continually. They did not sacrifice for the sake of the temple. In the post-exile era, they refused to build the temple for over 12 years. The prophets came to them to warn them that this was a sin. They had built their own houses, but they had not built God's house.⁸

This means that critics of the church, who insist that all of the church's money should be given to the poor, have not understood the nature of biblical religion. Biblical religion is to be in public places. It is a good thing when congregations can afford to build a place of worship

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

7. *Ibid.* ch. 23.

8. Ezra 4:24; Zechariah 4:9.

for members. Members have got to pay for this construction. This means that the religion of St. Francis of Assisi, if applied to the church as a whole, is heretical to the core. It is one thing for a particular religious order within a large denomination to take members into the order only when they make vows of poverty. When it is understood that such vows are made within the confines of a relatively small organization within a much larger organization, the goal of poverty is legitimate. But, when the goal of poverty or the ideal of poverty is said to apply to the entire church, this doctrine is inherently heretical and must be opposed.

D. Thrift or Gift?

The question arises in economic theory as to whether it is better to save 10% than give away 10%. If the local church gives away 10% of its income above the tithe paid to the denomination, and it raises this money exclusively from its local members, the members will not be able to save the money which they have given to the church or given to some other charitable institution. Charitable money is sometimes spent immediately. There is an immediate need to be met, and any income from donors is spent on that immediate need. But charitable organizations need buildings. They also need capital of various kinds. Charity has to be rational. There is a time to give, and there is a time to build.

1. Tools of Production

When someone saves money in order to invest in capital equipment, he makes available tools for individuals to use to increase their productivity. This is the old lesson about whether to give a fish to an individual or teach him how to fish. If you give him the fish, he will be hungry in a couple of hours; if you teach him to fish, and if there are fish readily available, he will be able to feed himself, and even feed others. So, this dilemma is not a new concept. Men have always had a decision as to which is better: giving away money or investing money.

Without capital investment, societies remain in extreme poverty. But Jesus did not talk about capital investment as the basis of permanently reducing poverty. There is a reason for this. Jesus never talked about reducing poverty permanently. On the contrary, He told His disciples of the poor would always be with them (Matt. 26:11). *Jesus was not committed to economic growth above all the other goals of society.*

This distinguished Him from modern economists, whether Keynesian, supply-side, limited government, or Marxist. Modern economists all make the same basic assumption: the premier goal of society is the increase in per capita economic output. There is nothing even remotely Christian about this priority.

2. *Economic Growth as the #1 Social Goal*

This is probably the central practical area of conflict between Christian economics and humanist economics. The central theological issue is identifying the source of economic growth. Biblical religion teaches that the source of economic growth is God. Societies that conform themselves to the laws that have been revealed by God in the Bible and also in nature experience economic growth. This is taught in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Jesus taught that the primary mark of success is ethics, not economic growth. On the other hand, the Mosaic law taught that economic success comes from ethical conformity to God's law. So, the two views are not in contradiction to each other. On the contrary, two views are complementary to each other in biblical religion.

So, if it is a question of giving 10% or investing 10%, there is no universal rule. After a person has paid his obligatory tithe to his local congregation,⁹ he is free either to give or to invest. It is his judgment call, and God holds him responsible for making the correct judgment. But there is no text of Scripture that says that it is better to give than to invest. It does say that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).¹⁰ This is a different issue. If a person invests solely to receive more in the future, then he is violating the fundamental principle that Jesus set forth. Paul cites Jesus as saying that it is better to give than to receive. Paul is the only source of this quotation in the New Testament (Acts 20:35).¹¹ This idea was dear to Paul's heart. But he did not say that it is better to give than to invest. Nor did Jesus.

The question is this: *For what purpose do you invest?* If the primary goal of your investment is to increase your wealth, and the primary goal of your wealth is to extend the kingdom of God in history, then, in some cases, and in fact most cases, *it is better to invest than to give.* If

9. Chapter 29. See also Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011), ch. 7.

10. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

you invest, at some point in the future you will have a great deal more wealth which you can then give. If your goal is the expansion of charity, then the most important single means of this expansion is the expansion of your stream of income.

3. *God or Mammon*

It is, once again, a question of God versus Mammon. Mammon is the God that proclaims, on behalf of its followers, “more for me in history.” Jesus said that this is the major rival to the religion of orthodoxy. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).¹² Mammon is the other great god of history. *Man wants to worship himself.* The best way to worship himself is to worship gods that promise to reward man with ever-increasing wealth, allowing man to use this wealth exclusively for the satisfaction of his own desires. Such autonomy is never taught in the Bible. The opposite is taught. One may never use wealth exclusively for the satisfaction of his own desires. God’s kingdom comes first, while individual hopes and dreams come second (Matt. 6:33).¹³

E. Fame

The commitment to charitable giving is a way for an individual to discipline himself to trust in the God of the Bible to uphold him in all things, and to provide all things that are necessary for him in his ministry of extending the kingdom of God in history. God does promises this. His people are to believe this. The way that they show themselves and others that they do believe this is to give away substantial amounts of their wealth. As they gain ever more wealth, they should be giving away an increasing percentage of this wealth. The only justification for not giving away wealth is that they are accumulating a substantial amount of capital to be given away later.

Most extremely rich people fully understand this principle, and for the most part they adhere to it. They may not do this for the sake of God, but they do it for the sake of their own reputation and for the sake of the beneficiaries of their charitable activities. In the United States, very rich people in almost all circumstances establish charitable

12. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five bid., ch. 14.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

foundations. They give away substantial portions of their wealth to the foundation, usually in the form of shares of ownership in the companies which they founded, with the dividends to be used to fund the poor or else used to benefit activities that the free market will not fund because there are not sufficient profitable opportunities.

The rich usually put their names on their foundations. This is a way of achieving a kind of ersatz immortality. They expect to be remembered as being generous supporters of charitable activities. They want a good reputation, and good reputations are imputed by the general public or else by specific groups of people. *So, in order to gain fame, they sacrifice wealth.* When their fortunes are large enough, they get out of the fortune-building game and get into the fame-building game.

Jesus made it clear that this is an improper goal of charity.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:1–4).¹⁴

He did not say that it is illegitimate for an individual to seek imitators of his activities as a generous donor to causes that cannot be supported by the expectation of profit. There is no doubt that it is a benefit to the poor for successful donors to find imitators who will also become successful donors. This is greatest legitimate reason for seeking publicity in circles where wealthy people operate: to gain imitators. If a person who gives away a great deal of money does this entirely anonymously, he is not in a position to go to his peers and encourage them to set up charitable organizations that will let them put their money in causes to which they are committed. This is why Jesus warned that *the right hand should not know what the left hand is doing*. This has to do with the general public. One is not to seek the applause of the masses. But one is to set an example for other individuals who are in a similar position to start their own charities. This way, there will be more charity and more effective charity. There should be *spe-*

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

cialization in giving wealth away, just as there must be specialization in producing services for the free market.

Paul had a reputation, well deserved, for encouraging charity. He did not gain this reputation anonymously. He became known as a promoter of charity. This is exactly what his peers, the other apostles, expected him to do. He did not do this for the sake of his own personal fame.

Conclusion

John Wesley in his famous Sermon 50, “The Use of Money,” advised that his followers gain all they could, save all they could, and give all they could. This was excellent advice. His followers took his advice, and within a hundred years, some of the poorest people in Great Britain had become middle-class citizens. Methodists kept getting wealthier. So did the Quakers. This was because they gained all they could, saved that all they could, and gave all they could.

This outlook is a direct application of the combined message of Moses and Paul. Visible success is normative (Deut. 28:1–14).¹⁵ Charitable generosity is also normative. There must be a fusion of both goals. In neither goal is autonomy normative. Beware, Moses told Israel as a nation, lest “thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:17–18).¹⁶

15. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

16. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

12

THE RIGHT OF CONTRACT

Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto (Gal. 3:15).

Contracts are made between judicial equals. They are therefore about promises. Promises are analogous to oaths: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

Paul in this passage refers to man-made covenants. The Greek word for covenant in this verse is the same in every instance in the New Testament. There is no separate Greek word in the New Testament for a contract as distinguished from a covenant.

A. Invoking God's Name

A covenant in the Old Testament was established between God and man. It also could be established among a group of individuals, but always under God's judicial authority. A covenant was not the equivalent of a business contract. It was a binding vow which was enforceable by God if any participant in the covenant broke the terms of the covenant. The five covenants in the Bible are these: dominion, family, individual, state, and church. These are all established by an oath taken to God.

A contract does not have the same degree of judicial participation on the part of God. A contract does not invoke the direct negative sanctions of God, should one of the participants fail to abide by the terms of the contract. A vow has much greater authority than a contract. In the book of Numbers, chapter 30, we read the laws governing

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

a vow made under God. The Bible is clear: do not make a vow to God that you do not fulfill.

The Bible also says that a person who swears to something must fulfill what he is sworn to, even when this involves loss to him. “He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not” (Ps. 15:4b). The great example of this in the era of the Mosaic covenant was the covenant made between the rulers of Israel and the representatives of Gibeon. The Gibeonites lied to the Israelites, telling them that they had journeyed from a far country. They successfully deceived the Israelites. When the Israelites discovered that the Gibeonites had deceived them, they went before God to ask what should be done. Joshua informed them that they must abide by their covenant with Gibeon. They had given their word (Josh. 9). The Gibeonites remained as subordinate residents in the land of Israel from that time on.²

A covenant is established by an oath before God. A contract in the modern world can be established by a verbal agreement, but in most cases it is established by a written agreement. Parties to the contract sign a contract, thereby affirming that they will abide by the terms of the contract.

B. Contracts and Cooperation

Contracts increase cooperation among individuals. People want to make plans. To help them complete their plans, they go to other individuals and agree to pay them in some way for cooperation. When the other individuals agree to the exchange, the people on each side of the contract become dependent on the people on the other side of the contract. They make plans on the assumption that all parties to the contract will fulfill their obligations. This increases the division of labor. It therefore increases output per unit of resource input. Specialization increases people’s productivity. They work at what they do best. Contracts enable individuals to join together to fulfill certain goals. Because of the division of labor, all of the parties to the contract expect to be made better off after the completion of the terms of the contract.

The goal of the contract is to increase human cooperation. The contract spells out in detail what each party to the contract is required to perform. This is simply an extension of the right of each individual

2. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 7:B:2.

to do whatever he wants with whatever he owns. In this case, individuals decide that they want to cooperate with each other in order to attain certain goals. Each individual voluntarily surrenders the unilateral right to change the terms of the contract during the period of the contract. We say that a man's word is his bond. A contract is the bond. It spells out exactly what his word means. It takes words to specify the word. This is why we say that a man's word is his bond. We do not say "bond" with respect to simply one word, other than *yes* or *no*. It is a collective noun that refers to a promise. A contract is a promise to perform certain acts. It is this promise which enables us to extend our work as individuals. We specialize in whatever we do best, and we gain the cooperation of others, who we hope will also perform better because they are specializing in the things that they do best. This is the biblical principle that two are better than one (Eccl. 4:9).³

The biblical covenant serves as a model for the biblical contract. The contract does not have the same judicial authority as a covenant. This is because it is not sworn before God, and it does not call down God's negative sanctions, should one or more of the parties to the contract not fulfill the terms of the contract. But there is no question that the contract resembles a covenant. Individuals agree to cooperate. They agree to fulfill certain obligations. There are negative sanctions associated with the refusal or even the inability of one of the parties to fulfill the terms of the contract. These negative sanctions increase the likelihood that all parties to a contract will perform what they have promised to perform. When there are negative sanctions against breaking the terms of the contract, there is greater likelihood that all parties to the contract will fulfill its terms. When all parties to a contract fulfill its terms, this makes possible the increased output that was expected by all parties as a result of the increased division of labor.

Every society with an advanced division of labor has an advanced legal structure that deals with making contracts, enforcing contracts, and providing restitution to the victims of broken contracts. Contract law in the modern world is a highly developed subdiscipline of the legal profession. The huge increase in the number of lawyers in the modern world has come as a result of the vast expansion of contracts in society. This, in turn, has come as a result of the extension of the private property social order.

3. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

C. Private Property

The private property social order rests on this principle: owners of property have the legal right to dispose of their property, use their property, and allocate their property without interference by the civil government or other people. *People have a right to do what they want with that which they own.* This is affirmed explicitly by Jesus His parable of the landowner who goes out several times in one day and hires workers at an agreed-upon wage. When he is later criticized by workers who agreed early in the morning to work for a specific wage, because he later made the same contract with people who worked fewer hours for the same wage, he asks rhetorically: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (Matt. 20:15). This parable was designed to illustrate the sovereignty of God in electing individuals and groups to salvation. Does not God have the right to do whatever He wants with whatever he owns? Similarly, does not an owner possess this same right?⁴

Paul in this passage affirms the legitimacy of contracts. He says that once a contract is agreed to, individual parties to the contract do not have the authority to change the terms of the contract. This means that they do not have the authority *unilaterally* to change the terms of the contract. He also is saying that people who are not parties to the contract do not have the right to alter the terms of the contract. He is saying, in other words, that the parties who established the terms of a contract are immune from interference by others who might seek to alter the terms of the contract. This is a strong defense of the right of contract. This is therefore a strong defense of the right of private property.

He is saying that, in terms of God’s revelation to man, *contracts are inviolable if they do not break the law.* This does not mean that the civil government does not have the right to keep Murder, Incorporated from fulfilling the terms of an agreement made with the Mafia. In other words, *private property rights are not sacred.* In a fallen world, there are no sacred contracts. *There is no absolute right to private property.* This is because all property belongs to God as the Creator, and therefore individuals and organizations, who hold their property as stewards of God, do not possess autonomy from God. They have never been authorized by God to do whatever they want with whatever they

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

own. But they do possess extensive rights, meaning *extensive legal immunity from outside interference*, to make binding agreements with each other relating to the use of their resources. This means that they have the right to cooperate with each other to attain whatever short-run goals or long-term goals that are made less expensive because of a contract.

D. Contracts and Promises

Paul introduces this defense of contracts as a defense of promises. The specific promise that he is referring to was the promise of God to Abraham that He would raise up seed for Abraham. Paul makes the unique argument, which would not have been made under the Old Covenant, that *seed in this case was singular*. Normally, the word is plural. It has to do with multiple seeds. Paul said that this was not the case in God's promise to Abraham. God was referring specifically to a single seed, Jesus Christ. This seed is the heir to the Abrahamic promise. This is a crucial argument in the book of Galatians. The fact that Paul would invoke the authority of contracts in his attempt to persuade the readers and listeners of the messianic authority of Jesus Christ as the sole heir to the Abrahamic promise, indicates just how seriously he took the biblical idea of the sovereignty of human covenants, by which he meant contracts that are not established by a self-maledictory oath before God.

The centrality of the covenant in Christian theology points to the centrality of the contract in Christian economics. The right to covenant with God is the supreme right of all individuals. There is no right more important than this one. This is another way of saying that, in the providence of God, no one can interfere with the right of God to make a covenant with any individual He chooses. Once that covenant is established, no outside agent has the right, or has the ability, to break that covenant. Paul specifically teaches this in Romans 8. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35).

Contracts are subordinate to covenants. This is another way of saying that *economics is subordinate to covenantal institutions*. We live in a theocentric world, not an anthropocentric world. God is sovereign; man is not. Covenants possess unique sovereign authority. Contracts possess legitimate authority, but not the degree of authority possessed by a covenant. *This is why civil government does have legitimate*

authority over the content of contracts. If a contract violates a civil law, and this civil law is established self-consciously as an aspect of biblical law, then the state has the right to interfere with the free market. But civil law must be consistent with biblical law in order for civil law to have ultimate legitimacy over the right of individuals to contract with each other.

This is not to say that there is a right of rebellion against lawfully constituted civil government. It is to say that civil government must be progressively shaped in terms of biblical law. The more consistently it is shaped in terms of biblical law, the less that the civil government will interfere with the right of private contract. This means that unless judges and legislators can find specific authorization in the Bible for a civil law, the authority of this law is provisional, limited to time and place. *Individuals have a right to work legally to overturn all laws that do not conform to biblical law.* They must be obedient citizens, but they must do whatever they can peacefully do to make certain that the law is overturned, either by the courts or by the legislature.

The New Testament's concept of contract is that individuals do not possess the legal authority to interfere with other individuals who have made a contract. That contract is binding. A civil government may interfere, but individuals do not possess this authority. The binding nature of a voluntary contract is extreme, according to Mosaic law, and also according to Paul in this passage. This means that the right to private property is equally extreme, according to Mosaic law, and also according to Paul in this passage.

E. The Social Gospel

This is a bitter pill to swallow for Christian socialists. Those who defend the old socialist gospel, known as the Social Gospel, are clearly in rebellion against Paul's clear statement of the right to private contract. These critics of the free market invoke the right of individuals to change the civil law. This is a legitimate invocation. But then they deny the Mosaic law's authorization of the right to use one's property however one wants to use it. This same right was affirmed by Jesus in His parable of the landowner who hired the laborers.

The defenders of the Social Gospel are in rebellion against both biblical law and the moral authority of individuals who make contracts with each other to fulfill their goals. They do not want the civil government to enforce biblical law. They also do not want the civil govern-

ment to let individuals have the right of voluntary contract. What they want is for the state to interfere with the right of contract, so as to coercively extract wealth from one group and transfer this wealth to another group. There is nothing in the Old Testament or the New Testament that would authorize this coercive wealth redistribution.

These people have adopted the ideal of socialism. They have adopted the idea that central economic planners have greater wisdom than individual decision-makers. They have also adopted the idea that central economic planners have a superior moral authority to allocate private property for purposes favored by those who possess political power.

The free market ideas of Adam Smith and his followers have not been grounded explicitly on either the Old Testament or the New Testament. In this sense, they rest on an insecure epistemological foundation. But the outlook of Adam Smith and his followers regarding the division of labor, the right of contract, and the legitimacy of private property is consistent with what the Old Testament and the New Testament teach. The socialist ideas of the promoters of the Social Gospel are in open opposition to what the Old Testament and New Testament teach. The defenders of the Social Gospel criticize Adam Smith and his followers because they were not Christians. Far more damaging is the fact that the defenders of the Social Gospel are advocating ideas that are explicitly anti-biblical. It is better to adopt the ideas of covenant-breakers who explicitly are in conformity to the ideas of the Bible than it is to adopt the ideas of covenant-keepers that are contrary to the ideas of the Bible. The biblical content of the ideas is of greater importance than the theological confession of the promoters of the ideas.

Conclusion

A contract is an agreement. People agree to cooperate with each other in order to attain specific goals. Paul affirms the right of men to make contracts with each other. He denies that anyone may lawfully change the terms of a contract unilaterally. This is an affirmation of private property. It is also a denial of the socialist ideal of the Social Gospel.

13

PIE IN THE SKY BY AND BY

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:7–10).

Sowing and reaping are about causation: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Ethical Causation

Paul returns to his theme of sowing and reaping.² He insists that what we sow is what we will reap. In other words, there is cause and effect between what we do and what we receive as a result of our actions.

A fundamental principle of biblical economics is that there is a predictable relationship between righteousness and positive sanctions. There is also a predictable relationship between sin and negative sanctions. Christians freely admit this with respect to the relationship between what men do in history and what they will receive in eternity. Critics of Christianity dismiss this teaching as “pie in the sky, by and by.” They do not believe that there will be an afterlife, so they do not believe that what men do in history will have any bearing on eternity. Paul’s theology is opposed to this skepticism.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (II Cor. 9:6). See Chapter 8.

In Leviticus 26³ and Deuteronomy 28,⁴ Moses said that this cause-and-effect relationship between righteousness and positive sanctions, and between sin and negative sanctions, applies in history. Christian theologians have been hesitant to argue that this cause-and-effect relationship under the Mosaic law, which applied to national Israel, necessarily has extended into the New Covenant. Very few of them say that it has not extended; they just do their best to avoid commenting on these passages with respect to the New Covenant.

If these two chapters no longer apply, then there is no basis for either biblical social theory or biblical economic theory. If there is no uniquely biblical definition of ethics, and no uniquely biblical definition of rewards and losses in history, and if there is no predictable relationship between righteousness and benefits, and between sin and negative sanctions, then Christians must look to humanism or other religions to provide the foundations of social theory and economics. *Every social theory and every economic theory has a system relating actions and consequences.* If there were no predictable relationship between human actions and social or economic consequences, society would be incoherent. We could not accurately forecast the results of our actions.

What is unique about biblical social theory and biblical economic theory is that the cause-and-effect relationship is based on ethics. Specifically, it is based on biblical ethics. More to the point, it is based on the concept of biblical law and visible, measurable consequences in history. This is why biblical social theory is dependent on some version of theonomy.⁵ If a theologian categorically denies that there is any predictable relationship between obeying the Bible-revealed laws of God and positive sanctions, he is simultaneously denying an explicitly biblical Christian social theory. If he were correct, then a Christian logically would have to abandon anything uniquely biblical as the basis of social theory. Most theologians do not wish to say this openly, but this is the inescapable implication of their theological position.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 33–35.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), chaps. 69, 70.

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973); Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2002); Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). (<http://bit.ly/gbby>). Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). (<http://bit.ly/gnnos>)

B. Reaping and Sowing

With this as background, let us consider Paul's warning. He says categorically that we will reap what we sow. In other words, there is a predictable cause-and-effect relationship between what we do and what happens to us later. The question is this: Is Paul speaking of history, or is he speaking only of the relationship between history and eternal consequences?

He is speaking of the relationship between history and eternity. He speaks of sowing to the spirit and sowing to the flesh. Sowing to the flesh reaps corruption. This does not necessarily mean that it reaps negative sanctions in history. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he spoke of the inheritance in eternity as being incorruptible, in contrast to inheritance in history, which is corruptible. He contrasted the incorruption of eternity with the corruption of mortality.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body (I Cor. 15:42–44).

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption (I Cor. 15:50).

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 15:53–54).

He was not speaking here of ethics. He was speaking of physical death and resurrection life.⁶

So, in this passage, when he says that if we sow to the flesh, we shall reap corruption, he means that the consequences of our actions will be limited to history. In contrast, when we sow to the spirit, we reap life everlasting. This does not mean that we earn our salvation. Paul is too clear on this point throughout his epistles for him to promote any doctrine of works-related salvation. So, what is he talking about?

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

When he says that we will reap life everlasting, he is talking about the good life: *benefits that are incorruptible*. They are incorruptible because they are not temporal. This is what Jesus was speaking of when He said that he who lays up treasure on earth will not reap treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19–21).⁷ *There is a trade-off between treasure in history and treasure in eternity*. The way to store up treasure in eternity is to sacrifice treasure in the present. This is the relationship that Paul is speaking of here. *This is indeed pie in the sky by and by*. Jesus spoke of the trade-off in terms of serving Mammon versus serving God (Matt. 6:24–25).⁸ You cannot serve both.

When Paul speaks of sowing to the spirit, he is speaking about the practice of *planting in the present to reap a harvest in eternity*. It is as if a farmer takes valuable seeds and plants them in a field, but not plant to reap a harvest in this field. He plants rather to reap a harvest in eternity. He sacrifices in the present for the sake of greater rewards in eternity. He sacrifices possession of risk-bound capital in history for risk-free benefits in eternity. If you want to avoid risk, Jesus said, lay up treasure in heaven. Paul is saying the same thing.

C. Well Doing

He says not to be weary in well doing. Why not? Because in due season, we shall reap. There is *predictability* between our hard work today and our reward later. When he speaks of due season, he does not specify whether he means history or eternity. In his previous reference, which contrasted spirit and flesh, the accent seems to be on work performed in history, meaning work burdened by mortality, in contrast to rewards in eternity. It is possible that when he says “due season,” he is referring to history. His language does not make clear his frame of reference.

Paul recognized that men get weary in their labors. The most wearying of work is work that appears to be fruitless. When a person labors long and hard in order to achieve a goal, yet the goal seems out of reach, he may be tempted to abandon the project.

Men may deceive themselves by saying, “I must do this because the work is its own reward.” *Work done for work’s sake alone is wasted. This is the sin of autonomy*. Work is to be done for the sake of God’s

7. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

kingdom, both in history and eternity.

To become weary in doing good is common. The good that men do may not be immediately visible. It may seem fruitless. Work that does not produce rewards is wearying. Men must be self-disciplined to continue. Paul says not to grow weary. This is not some form of instruction in self-help. He is not proclaiming the power of positive thinking. The context of his encouragement is the kingdom of God. Work done to expand the kingdom is productive. It is worth doing, not for its own sake, but for the sake of God. He repeated his encouragement elsewhere. “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing” (II Thes. 3:13).

D. With Charity to All

He says that Christians should do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith. This means that charity begins with the household of faith, but it does not end there. Christians are to be generous to people who are suffering through no fault of their own, who are not members of the church. This is a way of testifying that *Christians are committed to the affairs of this world*. They are attempting to make things better for people outside the covenant who are unlikely to come to their aid, should they fall into difficulty. This is consistent with Jesus’ warning that when rich people give large feasts, they should invite the poor to attend, even though the poor are not in a position to reciprocate the favor (Luke 14:12–14).⁹

Jesus is the model in this regard. He healed the sick irrespective of their confession of faith. He healed a Samaritan (Luke 17:16). He healed the Greek woman. He told her that he began his healing with the Jews, but He did not deny her the healing which she requested (Mark 7:26–27). This is consistent with Christian charity in general.

E. Self-Interest

Paul raises the issue of motivation. He appeals directly to the self-interest of his readers and listeners. They are to do well by doing good. What is unique about his appeal to self-interest is that it is not limited to benefits in history. His focus is on eternity. He speaks about corruption, not in the sense of evil, but in the sense of mortality. He reminds people that when they sow in order to gain benefits only in history,

9. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 34.

they limit their rewards. They use up their capital in history, when they could extend their accumulation of capital in eternity. This is bad investing, Jesus said, and Paul affirms Jesus' teaching.

It would be possible to build a system of Christian economics based on the contrast between mortality and eternity. Self-interest does apply to eternity. But it is unlikely that this cause-and-effect relationship would motivate a sufficiently large number of people to enable economists to make accurate predictions regarding people's behavior based on people's attitude toward eternity. Jesus and Paul both had to teach Christians to believe in the benefits of accumulating rewards in the world beyond the grave. The economist would say that if the founders of Christianity had to warn Christians to allocate resources in the present for the sake of rewards in eternity, then there probably is no way to make accurate predictions about people's actions regarding their allocation decisions in the present. The economist says that if the reward does not take place in history, the sacrifice is unlikely to take place in history. The economist self-consciously focuses on corruption: mortality. He talks about risk-reward ratios as they apply to human history.

F. Biblical Economic Theory

If we were to rely exclusively on the epistles of Paul and the other apostles, and ignore Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, any attempt to construct a systematically biblical economic theory would be an exercise in futility. The overwhelming majority of people, including the overwhelming majority of Christians, make their decisions primarily in terms of sacrifices made in the present for rewards to be gained before they or their heirs die. If there is no predictability in history based on uniquely biblical cause and effect, then Christians must *look elsewhere for guidance in understanding economic causation. This is why the rejection of theonomy as a principle of biblical interpretation leads inevitably to the secularization of social theory.*

Most Christian scholars are trained by humanists in secular universities. These humanists operate in terms of a view of cause and effect in history. While they admit that people may be influenced by considerations of eternity, their innate atheism colors their analysis, so that they argue that predictable cause and effect, meaning scientific cause and effect, occurs exclusively in history. This outlook shapes the thinking of almost all Christian scholars in academia. In order to

maintain their commitment to the worldviews that they were taught in graduate school, and which they accepted, they must deny that Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 have any relevance whatsoever in the New Testament era.

They are supported almost unanimously by Christian theologians in every denomination. This has been the position on Christian social theory from the days of the early church. Christian theologians have looked to Greek philosophy and Roman law as the foundations of Christian social and economic analysis. This bias in favor of secular humanism has been a constant in the church from the days of the earliest Christian apologists.¹⁰

This is why there has been no attempt in history to build a consistent Christian theory of economics or a consistent social theory based on the final authority of God's revelation of Himself and His creation as found in the Bible. To adopt such a view is to reject all rival theories of social and economic causation. It is to reject the wisdom of Greece and the laws of Rome. It means making a systematic break with Renaissance humanism. It means denying many of the truths of the Enlightenment, whether we are speaking about the right-wing Enlightenment of Scotland or the left-wing Enlightenment of France. It means breaking with secular humanism.

Conclusion

Paul again assures his readers that there is a fixed relationship between sowing and reaping. This system of causation establishes a correspondence between sacrifices made in history and rewards gained in eternity.

Paul does not deny Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28. He does not deny the existence of an ethical cause-and-effect relationship between acts in history and results in history. In other passages, he affirms this relationship. But in this passage, his language indicates that he is talking about sacrifices made for the sake of the Spirit in history which produce positive sanctions in eternity.

10. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), ch. 4.

14

MATURITY THROUGH COOPERATION

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:14–16).

The body has a head: Jesus Christ. This is hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Church's Unity

Paul returns to a theme which he had covered in Romans 12 and First Corinthians 12: the division of labor in the church.² Here, he identifies Christ as being the head of the church. Christ provides the unity necessary to coordinate the individual actions of each of the members of the church.

This brings up a continuing theme in the history of human thought: *the one and the many*. Is a system primarily diverse, or is it primarily unified? The answer, based on the doctrine of the Trinity, is that all systems are governed by both principles. With respect to the Trinity, theologians have called this the equal ultimacy of the one and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9; Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

the many. The three persons of the Trinity are individuals. Yet, at the same time, they are one God. Analogously, in the creation, things are simultaneously unified and diverse. They are both one and many.

Paul writes that Jesus Christ, as the head of the church, provides unity for the church. The church cannot exist apart from Jesus Christ. The head of the church possesses authority over the church. The church is a unity, because it is the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2, 9). It is a unity because it is the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5, I Cor. 12:2, 27). The Bible uses both descriptions, although in different contexts.

Individuals are members of the church and bring their skills to the church. They are productive in their own spheres of responsibility outside the church. God expects them to pay 10% to the local church on the increase of their activities and their capital.³ But this unity extends beyond the principle of the tithe. It extends to the testimony of the church as a whole to the pagan community as a whole, and to individuals within the pagan community. People see members of the church as representing the church. This is a correct assumption; members do represent the church. Yet, at the same time, there are many representatives, and they possess many skills and many different personality traits. The church is a unity before God, yet it is also a plurality in terms of the skills and dreams that are brought into play by the members of the church. Each member works in his own way, according to his understanding of the gospel. Yet, at the same time, God regards the church as an institution that represents him in history. It has a corporate testimony as well as the individual testimonies of its members.

B. Growth

Paul says that Christians should grow. Here he is speaking of growth in the sense of maturity. With all of the members in effect pooling their talents and commitments to the work of the gospel, they become representatives of the church of Christ. The church benefits from the individual advancement of the careers and callings of each of its members. As they advance in responsibility and performance, this enables the church to extend its mission.

The maturity of the individual is achieved through participation in the church. "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and

3. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011).

compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." In the broadest sense of the kingdom of God, the church is merely one participant. There are other confessional institutions that should be marked by a Trinitarian confession of faith. But the church is the central institution, for it is the body of Christ, and it is the repository of the two sacraments. The Lord's supper and baptism are available only through the institutional church. This is where God manifests his presence in history. The sacraments are ecclesiastical institutions, and God is specially present judicially at the time of the administration of these two sacraments.

There is interaction between the one and the many. There is interaction between each member and the institutional church. There is also interaction among the individuals who make up the individual church. All of this is described by Paul as a single process. It is the process economists call the division of labor.

C. Economic Theory

In economic theory, one of the recurring theoretical problems is the reconciliation of the one and the many. Adam Smith made famous the principle of market unification when he called it the invisible hand.

By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.⁴

This is a convenient metaphor, but it does not really describe the nature of the unity that is generated by voluntary exchange in a private property social order. The market process does not impose an exogenous unity, which is what a hand provides. A hand implies both purpose and power. Rather, the free market imposes an endogenous unity—purposeless.⁵ The unity produced by the free market is a result of a

4. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776, Caanan edition), p. 423.

5. A similar analogy is implied by the word "selection" in Charles Darwin's phrase, "natural selection." It, too, implies purpose. Darwin rejected cosmic purpose. He strove to gain for biological process the same impersonalism and lack of design that

plurality of purposeful individual decisions. Smith taught that unity is achieved through competitive market bidding. It is the free bidding of buyers and sellers—sellers versus sellers, buyers versus buyers—that produces an array of prices at any moment in the marketplace. The reconciliation of millions of individual plans of action is achieved through the profit-and-loss system, which is based on a money economy, which is the result of the division of labor.

Economists debate over the ways that individual decisions produce a single market order. Most economists believe that the civil government is one means of achieving unity within the marketplace. A few economists, most notably Murray Rothbard, deny that any civil government is necessary, and that civil government distorts the outcome of what would have been a unified social order based on open competition. Socialists believe that there must be an extensive civil government in order to produce unity within the marketplace. Yet, both theoretically and in practice, the centralization of economic planning leads to chaos.⁶ So, economists come to no agreed-upon conclusion regarding the reconciliation of the one and the many through market competition.

D. A Trinitarian Solution

The world reflects the Creator, Paul taught elsewhere. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).⁷ He is one

Adam Smith and other Scottish Enlightenment social evolutionists had achieved for human institutions. In the words of Adam Ferguson, institutions are “the result of human action, but not the execution of human design.” Quoted by F. A. Hayek, “The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design” (1967), in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 96n. Darwin was aware of the problem of his terminology. In Chapter 4 of *The Origin of Species*, on natural selection, he wrote: “It has been said that I speak of natural selection as an active power or Deity; but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets? Every one knows what is meant and is implied by such metaphorical expressions; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature; but I mean by nature, only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws, and by laws the sequence of events as ascertained by us. With a little familiarity such superficial objections will be forgotten.”

6. Ludwig von Mises, “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth” (1920), in F. A. Hayek, *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1935). (<http://mises.org/pdf/econcalc.pdf>)

7. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 1.

and many. The creation is one and many.

The market process leads to a reconciliation of individual plans.⁸ This reconciliation is achieved under the absolute sovereignty of God. The unity of His decree is the ground of all individual decisions. Subordinately, Jesus, as the head of the church, is the ground of the unity of the church. Yet Jesus is also the ground of unity in creation. Paul wrote of Jesus,

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (Col. 1:14–18).

This leaves nothing to chance. So, the market process is not autonomous. Nothing is autonomous. The free market does not generate its own unity out of its own diversity. Nothing generates its own unity out of its own diversity. God, through His sovereign decree, is Lord over both unity and diversity.

Conclusion

Paul writes of the institutional church as a body fitly joined together. Its members constitute both its diversity and its unity. This is the meaning of “fit together.” Paul’s goal: that the members, “speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” This is the process of progressive sanctification. This process, “according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” This is the process of spiritual growth through the division of labor.

8. F. A. Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society” (1945), in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/HayekIAEO>) Gerald P. O’Driscoll, *Economics as a Coordination Problem: The Contributions of Friedrich A. Hayek* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977); Israel M. Kirzner, *The meaning of market process: Essays in the development of modern Austrian economics* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

15

NEW COVENANT REPENTANCE

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (Eph. 4:28).

This is a law: point three of the biblical covenant.¹

A Career Change

Paul says that the thief must cease stealing. There is nothing unique about this view of theft. In every culture, there are laws against theft.

The laws governing theft and restitution that appear in Exodus 21 establish that the thief owed the victim double restitution. “If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double” (Ex. 22:4).² In some cases, he owed the victim fourfold or fivefold restitution. “If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep” (Ex. 22:1).³

Paul does not mention the Mosaic law in this passage. He does not speak about the victims of theft. He directs his concern toward the thief. He speaks about a change of occupation which must accompany a change of heart. The thief has decided that he must give up his former occupation. Paul tells him to substitute a new form of labor. In his previous occupation, the thief presumably used his hands as tools of his profession. The crime of embezzlement did exist. There could be

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

3. *Idem*.

theft by changing figures. Jesus used the story of an embezzler to illustrate the craftiness of covenant-breakers (Luke 16:1–7).⁴ The embezzler used his ability to write to steal from his master. But most thieves in Paul's day were not literate. Paul is arguing that the tools that the thief had used in order to commit his crimes must now be put to productive use. In the past, he used his hands as tools of evil. Now, because he has a new attitude toward the law of God, he has repented of his evil. To repent means to turn around.

B. Broad Restitution

In turning around from his former occupation, Paul says, the thief must not substitute leisure for work. He is to continue to work. Even more important, he is to work so productively that he has a surplus after expenditures. This surplus is to be used for charitable purposes.

This means that the thief must become thrifty; but, instead of setting aside money for himself or his family, he is to make certain that he sets aside money to be used to assist others, who are in need. Before, his activities had placed others in need. Now, in contrast, his activities are to reduce the needs of other people. He is to have an open hand, in contrast to his secret hand in his older occupation.

The concept of repentance is comprehensive. "Repentance" means "to turn away." The repentance described here is not merely turning away from imposing losses on others, but rather benefiting others who have experienced loss. Before, the thief had a surplus of income, which he used to benefit himself. Now, he is to generate surplus income, which he will use to benefit others. This is a complete reversal. It is not just that he ceases to impose losses on others; it is that he becomes a beneficiary of others, not out of stolen goods, but out of surplus income beyond his expenditures. He is not to become Robin Hood, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor (minus 50% for handling).

This is a form of restitution very different from what was required by the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law required restitution from the thief to the victims of his crime. Paul is saying that, under the New Covenant, the thief is required to pay restitution beyond that which was required by the Mosaic law. Paul here does not deny that the requirements of the Mosaic law are still in force. He says that something in addition is required. The thief must be ready to be a beneficiary to

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

those who have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own. He had been a liability to those around him when he was a thief. He now must become a beneficiary to those around him in his capacity as a man who works with his hands. Before, those around him bore the risk of being victimized by him. They had no legal claim against him after his conviction. Only his victims would have had a legal claim against him, according to the Mosaic law. Paul is saying that, in the same sense that people around him lived in a world of greater risk because of his presence among them, those around him now will live in a world of reduced risk because of his presence among them.

Paul's concept of restitution is broader than the concept of restitution presented in the Mosaic law. It is not that Paul is arguing for reduced restitution because Jesus is merciful. He is calling for an increased degree of restitution because Jesus is merciful. Jesus is merciful to victims who did not possess a legal claim against a thief under the Mosaic law: statistical victims. The thief who had increased the risk of theft to those around him is now told by Paul to decrease the risk of poverty to those around him. He had been a social liability before. He is to become a social beneficiary now.

C. Greater Legal Rigor

This indicates that the New Covenant is not less rigorous judicially than the Old Covenant. It is more rigorous. The Mosaic Covenant established rules governing the enforcement of civil law. It required restitution to victims. Paul is not announcing a change of this law. He is also not announcing a new rule that must govern the administration of civil justice. He is acting as an apostle to establish the moral obligation on the part of former thieves to go beyond the law of restitution which is found in the Mosaic law. He tells them that they are to extend mercy.

The Mosaic law, as it applied to civil government, did not require mercy. The Mosaic law required justice. Paying restitution to victims had nothing to do with mercy to his victims. It had to do with justice. The thief was required to repay what he had stolen, plus equal restitution, which would compensate the victim for the loss and also serve as a deterrent to additional theft. Paul is not directing his epistle to the civil government. He is directing his epistle to thieves who may be in the congregation at Ephesus.

What he is saying here relates to the conscience of the former

thief. He is not establishing a new rule for the enforcement of either civil law or ecclesiastical law. He is announcing a new law for the guilty individual. The former thief is to exercise the discipline of self-government. He is to apply the principle of restitution to members of the society around him. He had been a liability to society before. He is now to be a beneficiary to society.

This is a complete reversal of his covenantal position in society. It is not a partial reversal of his older way of life. It is the complete reversal of his older way of life. It is not simply that the thief from now on serves God merely by not becoming a liability to those around him. It is that he is to become a beneficiary to those around him. This is the meaning of repentance in the New Covenant.

This indicates that *the ethical standards of the New Covenant are more rigorous than the ethical standards of the Old Covenant*. Jesus placed a greater moral burden on covenant-keepers than Moses did. It is not merely that the thief is to go and sin no more; it is that he is to go, not sin, and do good. He had been an agent of *illegitimate negative sanctions* in society. He is now to become an agent of *legitimate positive sanctions* in society. The Mosaic law was designed to reduce the level of sin in society. The gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to increase the level of righteousness in society. This is why almost none of the New Testament is directed toward civil government. Civil government is an agency of justice. It enforces the law by imposing negative sanctions. It is not to become an agency of positive sanctions. The Mosaic law set forth the standards for civil government.

D. Civil Law

The New Covenant sets forth the standards of self-government. To a limited extent, the New Covenant deals with church government, but it is virtually silent on the issue of civil government. The clearest statement regarding civil government was made by John the Baptist. "Then came also publicans⁵ to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:12–14).⁶ He spoke as an Old Testament prophet, not a New

5. Tax collectors.

6. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 2:B.

Testament prophet.

Anyone who would seek to establish laws governing civil government that are based entirely and exclusively on the New Testament finds that there are few such guidelines. He finds that the New Testament, by itself, provides very little in the way of judicial content, which is necessary for restricting the scope of civil government. This is why it is mandatory that we go back to the Mosaic law in our search for judicial principles that govern civil government. The person who denies the New Testament legitimacy of the Mosaic laws governing civil government is of necessity throwing us on the tender mercies of covenant-breakers, who seek to impose alternative concepts of civil justice for those found in the Mosaic law.

What appears to be a neutral affirmation of New Testament principles of righteousness, when combined with the denial of the continuing legitimacy of Mosaic laws governing civil government, is a highly unneutral affirmation of secular doctrines of civil law, civil justice, and civil authority. Whenever this affirmation is not in favor of what passes for neutral secular legislation, it becomes a justification for rival views of law based on a rival god. This is why any attempt to deny the Mosaic law as it applies to civil government, and to limit Christianity's role in affirming New Testament principles of civil law, is inescapably an attempt to substitute anti-biblical concepts of civil law. There is no neutrality. There is no neutral civil law. Either civil law is based on biblical revelation, which means the Mosaic law, or else it is based on something other than biblical revelation, which means an anti-biblical concept of civil law.

Conclusion

Paul's instruction for the former thief relates to selfgovernment, not civil government or ecclesiastical government. To the extent that the former thief is the head of a household, it applies to family government. But the thief is the head of the household, so we are still discussing the issue of self-government. Paul is not denying the legitimacy of the Mosaic law's system of restitution to victims. Rather, he is adding a new law: the law of repentance, which involves restitution to non-victims of the original acts of theft. The thief had been a liability to the society around him, including those who did not become his victims, but who, statistically speaking, lived at greater risk because of his presence among them. Now, the thief becomes a beneficiary to the society

around him, including those who will never become his victims, but who, statistically speaking, live at reduced risk because of his presence among them.

16

LEGISLATED COVETOUSNESS

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. This ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:3–5).

This is a matter of inheritance and disinheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A Adultery and Idolatry

Paul links the two. Idolatry is point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy.²

In the Ten Commandments, the seventh commandment is the second in the second list of five: the priestly section. It parallels the Second Commandment against idolatry.³

Paul links adultery and the tenth commandment against covetousness. The commandment against covetousness specifies that one of the objects that must never be coveted is your neighbor's wife. That should be obvious enough. Paul in this case broadens the prohibition. He says that sexual immorality in general, which need not always be associated with adultery, is in the same category as covetousness generally. Covetousness is closely associated with sexual immorality.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 27.

In traditional societies, at least among men, sexual immorality that is not associated with adultery, meaning consensual sex between unmarried adults, is not regarded as being an infraction on the same scale as adultery. Still, most societies regard sexual immorality as a much greater infraction than covetousness. Paul here equates them. They are so serious that he says specifically that people who are sexually impure are in danger of eternal judgment: exclusion from the kingdom of God.

He says that this is also true of an idolater. Historically, Christianity and Judaism have regarded idolatry as a major sin. Idolatry was not to be tolerated under the Mosaic law. It was a capital crime for covenant-keepers to indulge in idolatry (Deut. 17:1–5).

Paul links sexual impurity, covetousness, and idolatry in this passage.⁴ He places them on an equal status in terms of the negative sanction that God threatens to impose on those who indulge in any of these three sins or practices. Covetousness is not a public act. Idolatry can be a public act. Sexual immorality may or may not be a public act. Yet all three are equated by Paul. Paul says that anyone who indulges his taste for any of these three sins risks being regarded as a son of Adam. Such a person is not part of the inheritance of adopted sons.

Paul speaks of sexual impurity and covetousness in the same sentence. Then he equates covetousness and idolatry. What do they have in common? They are all based on faith in something for nothing.

B. Covetousness: Something for Nothing

Covetousness is an economic sin. It is a mental lusting after another person's possessions. Why is this prohibited? Because the individual who indulges in this form of lust is implicitly saying that what he has received from God is insufficient to reward him for his many positive characteristics. Someone else has attained a certain level of wealth. The person who is covetous looks on this other person's achievements, and he compares those achievements with his own. He concludes that there has been a mistake or outright unfairness on the part of God. God has rewarded someone else far beyond that person's productivity.

The covetous person is not simply complaining that society is unfair. He is complaining that God is unfair. He looks at the blessings that God has showered upon someone else, and he concludes that he is equally deserving, and really even more deserving.

He does not understand the tight relationship between possessions

4. See also Colossians 3:5.

and responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).⁵ He looks on the other person's possessions, and he thinks to himself: "I would like to own what that person owns," but he does not think at the same time, "I would like to have added to me the same degree of responsibility with which the other person's possessions have burdened him."

People want possessions without paying the price of possessions. This price is not simply a monetary price. It is also a price involving personal responsibility for the continued ownership of the asset. There are always people bidding to gain possession of the asset. This is why the asset commands a price. Every time an individual refuses to sell or lease an asset, he is forfeiting whatever benefits the bidders presented to him. He is accepting responsibility for allocating private property. There is no escape from this responsibility. Yet most covetous people do not perceive that with possessions come responsibility.

So, the covetous person is really in search of a free lunch. He is in search of something for nothing. He wants the benefits, but he does not want the liabilities. He thinks that he should be permitted to live as if there were no relationship between ownership and responsibility. He may understand that others are under a tight administration by God, who imposes appropriate responsibility for every advantage, but he thinks that he should not be burdened by this relationship. He seeks to live in a world in which he is not under the curse of Adam. His world should not have thorns and thistles. He resents the fact that it does have thorns and thistles. So, he lusts after a world which does not exist. He seeks a world in which he can escape from Adam's burdens. There is no such world. This infuriates him.

C. Idolatry: Something for Nothing

Men seek many ways to achieve the false goal of living in the post-Fall world without the post-Fall curses. Idolatry is one of the ways that they seek this escape. They worship a false god, because they believe that this god will deliver them from the curses under which all men live because of the sin of Adam. The God of the Bible offers deliverance at a price. The price was paid by Jesus Christ at Calvary. This is not something for nothing. Free grace was not free for Christ.

A token price is also paid by each person, because of the inescapable increase of personal responsibility that accompanies all of the

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

blessings of God.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” This raises a major theological question. If there is increasing responsibility along with God's blessings in history, does this establish additional liability? The text in Luke says *yes*. Then what can pay for this additional liability? More grace. God's grace meets every liability. While grace accompanies the increased responsibilities, there is no question that the responsibilities do increase. Again, Jesus was very clear on this point.⁶ This indicates that grace and responsibility are upward spirals. God's grace is added in history progressively, enabling covenant-keepers to meet their responsibilities. This positive feedback process confirms the covenant. This was explicitly taught by Moses: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁷

Men cannot escape this system of compounding responsibility. So, if they deny God's grace, they find themselves in a dilemma. They cannot fulfill their escalating responsibilities by their own power. They want the blessings, but not the responsibilities. One way to escape this burden is to turn to idols. Idols promise that men can meet their obligations by their own works, most frequently the performance of religious rituals or the recitation of formulas. By these formulas, men seek power over nature and history, which are the two great idols for mankind.⁸ They seek something—blessings—for nothing much. They seek rewards at below-market prices.

6. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

8. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

D. Sexual Immorality: Something for Nothing

Paul links covetousness, idolatry, and sexual immorality. Why sexual immorality? All cases of sexual immorality are a desire to attain something for nothing. They are a desire to attain satisfaction at a lower price than God has explicitly established for mankind. It is the desire to gain access to another person's body, but without being burdened by any judicial, covenantal responsibilities with respect to that person. This is one more case of the quest for a free lunch.

Prostitution is the most glaring example of this quest for a low-cost lunch. The individual seeking the other person's sexual accommodation must pay a price, but the price is a one-time price for a one-night stand. It does not involve any continuing responsibility for the care of the other person. It also denies that one of the parties—the male—is in any way responsible for children who may result from the sexual activity. This is another example of men seeking to gain something for nothing. Males are usually purchasers in these relationships.

Paul says that all three practices, all of which involve the quest of something for nothing, are crimes so heinous that God threatens to close the door to His kingdom because the sinner refuses to repent. Paul's language is inescapable: the person who practices covetousness, sexual impurity, or idolatry has marked himself as someone who is the heir of the Adamic covenant and outside the covenant of Jesus Christ. He is in the natural family of man; he is not in the adopted family of man.

E. The Social Gospel: Something for Nothing

Every political movement that is based on covetousness is therefore in opposition to the kingdom of God in Christ. It says that some people in society have not been given their just desserts. If the reason for their supposed lack of access to justice is the fact that the civil government has not actively redistributed wealth, which was achieved legally through individual initiative and capital, then this is a form of covetousness. The complaint against the social order is that it has not adopted legislation or court decisions that interfere with the free exercise of privately owned property. This is the working out of covetousness through collective political action. It says that the prevailing allocation of wealth in response to personal productivity and thrift is somehow illegitimate. This is an accusation against the social order.

Only those practices that are inherently immoral and are explicitly

prohibited by the Mosaic law or else by some New Testament principle of civil government—rare—are legitimate objects of negative civil sanctions. When the reformer comes in the name of social justice, and calls for the civil government to interfere with the free market's allocation of scarce resources, he had better be certain that his specific call for reform is found in the Mosaic law. If it is not, it is simply another attempt to legislate the morality of idols. It is another attempt of man to set himself up as the sovereign agent who supervises the allocation of rewards and punishments in history, while ignoring the written law of God, which include the explicit negative sanctions required by the Mosaic law.

Paul said that covetousness is a capital crime in the eyes of God. It is not a capital crime for civil government, but it is a capital crime for the final judgment. The negative sanction is eternal punishment. Thus, when men call on the civil government to interfere with the allocation of private property, they had better be sure that the reform of the civil government which they are advocating is either explicitly demanded by the Mosaic law or implicitly required by one of the statutes of the Mosaic law.

Today's advocates of the Social Gospel, which is not a social but a statist gospel, know that what they are advocating has nothing to do with the Mosaic law. They also know that they are explicitly calling for a rejection of specific statutes of the Mosaic law. This is why they adamantly declare that they are defending principles of Christianity, while simultaneously denying the authority of Mosaic civil laws regarding property. They know the Mosaic law is opposed to the statist interference with the free market which they are calling for. They understand fully that they are taking a stand against Bible-revealed laws regarding the defense of the eighth Commandment: "Thou shalt not steal." They are organizing politically to impose the covetousness prohibited by the tenth commandment. They do this all in the name of Jesus.

Do not join with them in their call for legislated covetousness.

F. Disinheritance: Nothing for Something

Covenant-breakers seek the inheritance promised to covenant-keepers. They want to believe that they can gain this inheritance without repentance, without a substitutionary atonement, and without honoring biblical law. The result in eternity is hell (Luke 16), followed

by the resurrection, the final judgment, and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15). They get nothing for something. They get worse than nothing. They get eternal torment.

The attempt of Satan to inherit through Adam's subordination will be exposed as a failed attempt. But, before this final revelation, Satan's kingdom will be undermined in history. Covenant-breakers, who are idolators and adulterers, will be progressively disinherited. Their disinheritance in eternity will not catch them by surprise. They will have history to testify to them: the replacement of Satan's rule by Christ's, a manifestation of Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension in history. That replacement was definitive: the empty tomb and the ascension. It will be manifested progressively, and will be manifested finally.

Conclusion

Men seek something for nothing. This is another way of satiating that they seek a below-market price. They are willing to pay something; they are unwilling to pay everything. They agree to pay for something, but they want a discount. They want extras thrown in for nothing.

This quest applies to sexual goals, economic goals, and cosmic goals. They expect to be served: by prostitutes, neighbors, and idols. They expect others to bear part of the costs of supplying them with what they want.

In politics, we see this is the politics of plunder. Members of voting blocs insist that they are not getting their fair share. Others are said to owe them part of their unfair shares. The power of the state is invoked to secure their fair share. This is the politics of the fair share.⁹

The Social Gospel in 1900 was an aspect of America's Progressive movement, a political movement devoted to using the state to redistribute power and money. Today, the Social Gospel has been re-packaged in order to appeal to evangelical voters. The message is the same.¹⁰ The state is to redistribute wealth and power for the sake of the poor. These programs will be administered by formally educated, middle-class people, who will decide, case by case, who has met the program's standards to receive the benefits, and who has not. It is Robin Hood in action.

9. Gary North, "The Politics of the Fair Share," *The Freeman* (Nov. 1993). (<http://bit.ly/FairSharePolitics>)

10. Joel McDurmon, *God Versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

ECONOMIC PREDICTABILITY

Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free (Eph. 6:8).

This had to do with the predictability of sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. An Ethically Predictable World

There is an ethical cause-and-effect relationship between the positive sanctions that a person bestows on others and the positive sanctions that God eventually bestows on the bestower. I know of no clearer statement in the Bible regarding the positive correlation between good deeds done in history and rewards from God.

Paul is asserting the ultimate predictability of the universe. He is saying that the universe is fair, because God is fair. I am using universe in the broadest sense, which includes the creation that will exist beyond the grave. Although history is marred by sin and the covenantal effects of sin, the ultimate ethical nature of all creation will be manifested at the final judgment. We do not live in an ethically random universe.

Paul does not say, nor does he imply, that the positive sanctions in history that God applies to generous people will perfectly match, on a one-to-one basis, the generosity shown by these people. History is marred by sin, and sin disrupts the ethical predictability of the universe. God shows mercy to sinners for a time. Negative sanctions are delayed. There is general predictability, but there is not perfect predictability. Generous people can nevertheless be confident that their

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

generosity will be rewarded by God.

Jesus was adamant about this. He said specifically that we must lay up treasure in heaven. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19–21).²

The means by which we lay up treasure in heaven include showing sacrificial generosity to those who are in need through no fault of their own. This was Jesus' point: that which we give away in history will be returned to us beyond history, if not in history. There is continuity between time and eternity. This continuity is based on the absolute sovereignty of God, the hierarchical nature of covenantal reality, the ethical perfection of the law of God, and the predictability of God's sanctions.

The humanist philosopher Immanuel Kant rejected this conception of the universe. He also rejected this conception of ethics. He said specifically that any good deed which is performed on the assumption that it will be repaid in the future is not a moral deed.³ He thereby denied the ethical system of cause and effect that Paul announces here and which Jesus taught. He denied it in terms of the legitimacy of its motivation, and he denied it in terms of its concept of a sovereign God who rules over history and eternity.

B. Hierarchical Authority

Paul is drawing conclusions regarding the proper administration of authority in history. He rests his conclusions on his concept of hierarchical authority and predictable sanctions in both history and eternity. He grounds his concept of covenantal hierarchical authority on the fundamental hierarchical authority of God's sovereignty over history and eternity. Paul is arguing, on the basis of a specific conception of God's relationship with the creation, and especially with mankind, that *human authority must manifest the predictability of God's sanctions*. Men are to rule over other men, who were placed under their authority by God, in terms of a confident expectation that God will treat

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

3. Immanuel Kant, "The Lawgiver," *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper, [1780?] 1963), p. 52. Cf. "Reward and Punishment," p. 57.

them as they treat others.

This is an application of the biblical principle of sowing and reaping. We reap what we sow.⁴ We are therefore to act in a just fashion with our subordinates. We show our obedience to God by being generous to those under our authority and even those not under our authority. In the case of our subordinates, they can predict our responses because we are predictable on a regular basis. We can predict the God's responses for the same reason. God is predictable. The universe is not random. The universe is not impersonal.

C. The Meaning of "Same"

Paul speaks of receiving the same: "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free" (Eph. 6:8). This raises the question of relative wealth and relative sacrifice. Jesus gave the example of rich men who gave away a little wealth in terms of their total assets. He compared this with a widow who gave away two small coins. He said that she gave away more.

And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had (Luke 21:1–4).⁵

When Paul speaks of the *same*, he has in mind the level of sacrifice, not the market value of that which was given away. The rich men and the widow will be rewarded appropriately. She will not remain poor after the equivalent of what she gave away is restored to her.

This means that God judges men based on His ability to compare degrees of sacrifice. He can assess comparative sacrifice. Economists refer to this as comparing *interpersonal subjective utility*. God makes interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility, although there is no way for economists to do this on a scientific basis.⁶ Christian econom-

4. Chapters 8, 13.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 50.

6. Lionel Robbins, *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan. 1932), ch. 6. (<http://bit.ly/RobbinsEcon>) Cf. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

ics acknowledges God's ability to do this.

D. Economic Predictability

In our economic dealings with others, the same sort of predictability should prevail. We should be fair dealers with those not under our authority. Paul uses examples from within the family hierarchy as models of doing good: to those below us and to those above us. But Paul's instruction is not limited to hierarchy. "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free" (Eph. 6:8). There is a four-way system of responsibility: *upward, downward, inward, and outward*. Paul's words also apply to outward relationships.

The benefits of doing good to those outside the hierarchy are acknowledged by economists as applying in reciprocal situations. A body of literature has built up regarding the game strategy of tit for tat.⁷ This strategy involves negative sanctions. It also requires repeat dealings. Paul is not limiting his discussion to repeat transactions and repeat bargaining. He is saying that God has in mind positive sanctions in general, not just reciprocal business relationships. He is not limiting his discussion to exchange.

Tit for tat assumes that we do good to our friends and evil to our enemies, who reciprocate. The latter scenario leads to the economy of feuding: extensive negative sanctions. Jesus taught otherwise.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:43–48).⁸

This is a uniquely Christian worldview. Humanist economics has no concept of a world that operates under a sovereign God who keeps a ledger and tallies up a lifetime of good deeds. Paul's perspective as-

7. This was developed as a theory of cooperation by Anatol Rapoport in 1984.

8. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 10.

sumes the existence of a fixed scale of economic value that applies across time borders. God assesses the degree of sacrifice made on behalf of others, and He rewards these acts according to this sacrifice. There is justice based on a fixed ethical system. There is no equality of eternal rewards (I Cor. 3:15–17).⁹

E. Family Hierarchy

The context of this passage is the hierarchical relationship that we find in every covenantal institution;¹⁰ in this case, the family.

1. *Fathers and Children*

Paul begins with the hierarchical relationship between parents and children. Children are told to obey parents. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (v. 1). There will be positive sanctions. “Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (vv. 2–3). Paul here invokes the promise of the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12).¹¹ This clearly is an affirmation of the judicial continuity between the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant.

Paul then warns fathers not to impose negative sanctions to such a degree that the children are tempted to rebel. “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (v. 4). Children are required to obey their parents, but parents are supposed to exercise good judgment by not provoking their children to wrath.

2. *Slaves*

Then Paul turns his attention to slavery. Slaves¹² in a household are expected by God to obey their masters. Their masters exercise legitimate authority over them. Slaves are subordinates in a household that provides them with the basics of life. They receive food, shelter,

9. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch.

10. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2.

11. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

12. The Greek word for both slave and servant is the same: *doulos*.

clothing, and even medical care from the family. Paul warns slaves that they should continue to serve their masters faithfully. "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (v. 5). Paul's explanation for telling slaves to be good servants is that they are servants of Christ; they are doing the will of God in order to please God. They should not be working as men-pleasers, Paul says. "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (v. 6).

This does not mean that slaves should not please their masters. The point that Paul is making is that covenantal existence is hierarchical. The slave pleases God by pleasing the person God has placed over him. "With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (v. 7). God is represented by the master; by pleasing the master as a representative of God, the slave pleases God. This system of representation is inherent in all existence. The universe is covenantal. Hierarchies exist in all covenantal institutions, and in all other institutions. So, the individual who pleases a superior in the name of Christ is pleasing Christ.

Paul takes very seriously the hierarchical structure of the family. He tells the masters to be good disciplinarians. "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (v. 9). This is what he had previously told fathers. He reminds masters that their master is in heaven. In other words, they are under authority, just as their servants are under authority.

God is not a respecter of persons, Paul says. This is a fundamental principle of biblical justice. It is first announced in the Mosaic law (Deut. 10:17). God is not a respecter of persons, so judges must hand down judgments without respect to persons. They are to imitate God, because they are made in God's image. They are also occupying positions of hierarchical responsibility. This applies to civil judges. It applies to fathers. It applies to masters.

F. Sanctions

In this system of hierarchical authority, there are sanctions. There cannot be hierarchical authority apart from sanctions. There are positive sanctions and negative sanctions, just as there are heaven and hell. The threat facing rulers is that they can impose inappropriate negative

sanctions. Paul tells children to obey their parents. He tells servants to obey their masters. Children and servants thereby bless their superiors with positive sanctions. In this sense, sanctions are a two-way street. Children and slaves are not to impose negative sanctions on their superiors by resisting authority or by producing substandard performance. At the same time, parents and masters are to impose negative sanctions prudently, taking care not to impose greater negative sanctions that are appropriate for the nature of the infractions. In other words, the punishment must fit the infraction.

In this system of sanctions, God is the supreme sanctions-bringer. Paul says that people who do good in history will receive positive sanctions from God. These sanctions will be appropriate to the nature of the good which men have shown to others. This is analogous to the principle of civil law that the punishment should fit the crime. In this case, God's positive sanctions will fit the degree of sacrifice shown by the generous person. Generous people are reminded that God is a faithful judge, and that they can legitimately expect to be rewarded in terms of the benefits which they had passed on to others.

The system of cause and effect in history is a system of hierarchical sanctions. The sanctions are imposed (negative) or bestowed (positive) by a superior authority. God will bless generous people with appropriate rewards that will be in terms of the recipients' generosity to others. This will remind us that the universe is not random; cause and effect are not impersonal. Cause and effect, as a unified system, is grounded in ethics. The person who obeys God and who is generous toward others can legitimately expect to be rewarded in a predictable fashion, just as surely as a convicted criminal can expect negative sanctions from a righteous judge.

This is not a system of works-salvation. It is a system of grace. Grace is shown by God to all those under his authority.¹³ Grace is therefore to be shown by rulers to all those under their authority. The grace of God involves negative sanctions against sin. Similarly, the grace shown by generous people to those under their authority must also involve negative sanctions for rebellious behavior. This protects victims. There can be no system of justice in history without hierarchy, ethical standards, and both positive and negative sanctions.

13. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

Conclusion

There are predictable sanctions in life. The good things that a covenant-keeper does will return to him in forms appropriate to his degree of sacrifice. He benefits from this increase in positive sanctions. This of course assumes that the bad things do not return to him. Adam's sin has placed all men in the negative sanctions category. For covenant-keepers, all of the bad things were paid for by Christ. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). These bad things do not return to those for whom Christ died.

Paul teaches that we live in a world in which causes and effects are both ethical and related perfectly. They are not related perfectly in history. This is of little concern, or should be, to covenant-keepers. The comprehensive nature of ethical cause and effect moves Christian economics from a consideration of tit for tat to a consideration of the providential administration of economic causality.

PRODUCTION TRUMPS CONSUMPTION

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21).

Life and death are aspects of sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Welcoming Death

I contend that this is the most widely quoted passage in the Bible that virtually no one in good health and under age 100 applies to himself. When the physician announces to his patient, “You’re terminal,” the patient does not rejoice. This is why the physician does not say, “You’re terminal.” He says, “You would be wise to get your affairs in order.”

Paul applies his statement literally to his own situation.

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again (Phil. 1:23–26).

Paul in this passage presents one of the most remarkable testimonies in the history of man. Here is a statement that is very difficult for most people to believe, including those who claim to be believers in the epistles of Paul. He states that it is his preference to die in the near future and thereby be present with Christ. He says that he is willing to stay alive for the sake of his work. His work benefits other people. He

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

sees the importance of his work as being greater than his personal desire to exit the temporal world.

There is an old saying: "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." Paul's statement is in stark contrast to the familiar aphorism. Most people nod in agreement when they hear the message of the aphorism. When they hear the words of Paul in this passage, they find it very difficult to believe that anyone could rationally hold such a position. Yet, from the logic of Christian theology, every covenant-keeper ought to want to go to heaven. This affirms what Paul affirms: no covenant-keeper should resist the advent of death. Yet the vast majority of covenant-keepers do what they can to resist the advent of death.

B. Humanist Economic Thought

Paul's statement is in stark contrast to the economics of humanism. Humanist economics self-consciously limits itself to a consideration of the temporal world. While Austrian School economists do admit that economics should consider the individual goals of people who seek to improve their condition, no matter how they define this improvement, the assumption of the Austrian School economists, as with all other economists, is that profits and losses apply only in history. Why this should be true from a theoretical standpoint is never made clear. The concept that "every man has his price" is always applied to the realm of time, yet it is obvious that men make decisions to take risks in this life, especially during wartime, but also on behalf of others, that cannot be explained by the concept that every man has his price.

Paul is not denying that there is a system of ethical cause and effect in the world. He repeatedly affirms that such a system is sovereign. What he denies here is that this system of cause and effect is relevant *only* to the temporal world. Paul says he believes that the positive sanctions of being in the presence of Christ outweigh the negative sanction of his own death.

The humanistic economist has difficulty in dealing with such a concept of profit and loss. Paul's system of profit and loss cannot be handled by double-entry bookkeeping. The economist finds it very difficult to elucidate an economic theory which is predicated on the idea that both profit and loss apply both to history and the realm beyond the grave.

Economists assume that the vast majority of people do not agree

with Paul's assessment of two-realm applicability of the twin concepts of profit and loss. They assume that the vast majority of individuals have as their focus of concern the realm of time. They would argue that so few people have adopted Paul's extended concept of profit and loss that his view can be dismissed out of hand. To adopt it would be to increase the likelihood that we, as forecasters, will not be able to predict the outcome of specific economic policies.

Some economists believe that the test of any economic theory is the ability of economists who have adopted the theory to make accurate predictions about the future.² If a theory of human action leads to incorrect predictions of human action, then the pragmatic defender of economic theory concludes that the theory is useless and therefore expendable. The cost of retaining such a theory is the loss of precision in forecasting that the theory produces. The cost is too high.

C. Profit and Loss

It is true that it is difficult to elucidate a general economic theory when so few people assess the realm of time in the way that Paul does. Paul dismisses the benefits of time when compared to the benefits of eternity. So did Jesus. Christianity is notable by its commitment to a concept of profit and loss that applies to the realm beyond the grave. The famous statement of Jesus regarding the exchange of one's soul for the sake of the world is indicative of the commitment of Christianity to a concept of economics that incorporates the world beyond the grave. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).³

It goes beyond this. The concept of profit and loss in the New Testament begins with the dual concepts of heaven and hell. The two realms beyond the grave establish the criteria for the single realm of time. *Heaven and hell are the models for profit and loss.* Profit and loss in time merely reflect the far more relevant locus of existence: eternity. Paul is so convinced of the relevance of profit in eternity that he dis-

2. The most famous economist who held this view was Milton Friedman. "The Methodology of Positive Economics," in *Essays of Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953), ch. 1. For my critique of Friedman's position, see Gary North, "Economics: From Reason to Intuition," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976).

3. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

counts the benefits of time. He is committed to time only insofar as time enables him to remain a servant of the church. He is committed to time because he is convinced that he brings something of benefit to the church, which could not be easily replaced. He recognizes his own importance for the life of the church, and he regards this as the only relevant justification for his life.

D. Production, not Consumption

His attitude regarding the benefits he offers to the church is not limited to his office as an apostle. He is setting forth a standard that all Christians should adopt. They should be committed to life on earth. This commitment should not be based on the benefits of consumption but rather the benefits of production. Paul is saying that he is committed to life on earth because he is productive for the sake of the kingdom of God. He defines his productivity in terms of his contribution to the work of other people. *He does not see life on earth as the primary area of consumption.* He sees heaven in terms of positive sanctions. He sees eternal positive sanctions as greatly outweighing the positive sanctions of life on earth.

Obviously, the positive sanctions of heaven outweigh the negative sanctions of life, but Paul does not compare the positive sanctions of heaven with some kind of net income statement for history. He is saying that the greatest benefit that he can have by remaining alive is that he remains a benefit to God's church. He sees this benefit in terms of production, not consumption.

If he were simply laying up treasure in heaven by remaining a good servant on earth,⁴ we could say that he evaluated the present net value of whatever he would inherit beyond the grave. He applied the prevailing rate of interest to that future stream of income, and he concluded that it is better to stay alive. This surely is not the picture we get from his language in this passage. On the contrary, he is not talking about rewards, other than to be in the presence of Christ in the world beyond the grave. That is the only reward that he refers to. So great is that reward, he tells us, that it is better than life on earth.

This indicates that *history is primarily a realm of production*

4. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:20–21). Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

rather than a realm of consumption. If we want increased consumption, Paul tells us, the best way to get it is to die. The positive sanctions in the realm beyond the grave are so great compared to the best sanctions available in history that the lure of life on earth did not affect Paul at all. The lure of life on earth is the lure of kingdom-oriented production, not personal consumption.

Paul's description of serving others indicates that *service, rather than consumption, is the central benefit of life.* He wants to stay alive because he wants to work. He does not want to work for the sake of the economic rewards associated with labor. He wants to work because he perceives that *the primary meaning of his life is what he can do to extend the kingdom of God in history.* He wants to be part of the division of labor that is the church of Jesus Christ.

He tells his readers that he wants to be of service to them. In this sense, he imitates Christ. Christ came into history specifically to serve God the Father by serving the church. He lowered himself to enter into history in order to transform history.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11).⁵

The Second Person of the Trinity knew in advance of His incarnation that He would be elevated in the future as a result of his subordination to the burdens of time. God raised Jesus to an elevated status in response to His faithful service as the Redeemer.

Paul could therefore legitimately expect to be rewarded as a result of his service. He says that God rewards those who serve others.⁶ But he does not speak of heaven in terms of extra rewards that he could legitimately expect as a result of his extended time on earth. He speaks only of being in the presence of Christ; this is the great reward.

5. Chapter 20.

6. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (II Cor. 9:8). See Chapter 8.

This attitude of a servant is the standard for all covenant-keepers, a standard that God has revealed in the New Testament. Paul is faithful to this standard to the point of saying in public that he would rather be dead than alive in time; he would prefer to be alive in the presence of Christ rather than be alive on earth. For covenant-keepers, the transition of death, however impressive as the negative sanction which God imposed on Adam and Eve, is still preferable to life. It is the transition point to a better world. Grieving relatives or friends comfort the immediate family members of a recently deceased individual by saying that the deceased individual is in a better world. Paul said this of himself before he died.

Conclusion

Paul's statement points to the realm of history as a realm of production more than consumption. *Consumption should be deferred for the sake of greater consumption.* This principle begins with the ultimate consumption: life beyond the grave. It then extends backward to time. The time for net consumption—if at all—is the realm beyond the grave. The time for net production is history. The testimony of God in Genesis 1:26–28—the dominion covenant⁷—is that production will trump consumption in eternity. But neither production nor consumption will labor under a curse.

Paul has low time-preference. He was future-oriented. He did not value the present far higher than the distant future. Any society that adopts his view of rewards and the future will be marked by low interest rates, high rates of investment, and high rates of economic growth.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary of Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

SELF-INTEREST AND ENVY

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others (Phil. 2:4).

The English Standard Version translates this as follows: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” This is close to the meaning of the original Greek. The word “things” conjures up an image of physical objects. This is not what Paul is getting at. This has to do with stewardship: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Limiting Self-Interest

His statement strikes at the very heart of modern economic analysis. Modern economic analysis derives from Adam Smith’s analytical revolution in 1776. He placed individual self-interest at the heart of his economic analysis. In his famous statement regarding a person’s desire to gain the assistance of the butcher and the baker, Smith insisted that the individual must look to the interests of those from whom he expects to receive assistance. They are self-interested actors. If we wish to gain their cooperation, we must offer something of value to them. All modern free-market economic analysis begins here. Christian economics does not. Paul’s passage here reveals why not.

B. On Behalf of Others

Paul tells us that we are to look to the interests of others as well as our own interests. He does not say that we are not to place any weight

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

whatsoever on our own personal self-interest. He says only that we are to look to the interests of others. We must be willing to put their interests ahead of our own in some cases. The adult who runs into a flaming building to save a child manifests this attitude.

1. Self-Sacrifice

Parents do this with respect to their children. If they do not, society regards them as deviant, and should. We are also supposed to do this with respect to the interests of our parents. So important is this principle that one of the Ten Commandments is devoted to it.²

Paul takes this principle of self-sacrifice one step beyond. He extends it out of the realm of the family into the realm of society. He is not talking merely of the institutional church. There is no indication that he put any confessional boundaries on his statement. This does not mean that a covenant-keeper is supposed to be consumed with guilt because he has not sent enough money to support a distant non-Christian in a pagan nation 10,000 miles away. Paul is talking about the day-by-day interaction that people have with others in their community. He is talking about our relationship with those people whose interests we can know well enough to compare with our own. He is saying that we are not to be exclusively self-centered. Instead, we are to take Christ's example as our own. The Second Person of the Trinity descended from the realm of eternity into the realm of history for the sake of serving as the Redeemer (Phil. 2:5–12).³ If we take this example seriously, we must give consideration to the interests of those around us, comparing them with our concerns about our own situation. This places the emphasis on service.

We cannot readily serve another person tomorrow if we impoverish ourselves today. Paul is not talking about self-sacrifice to the point of impoverishment. He is talking about using our assets as tools of dominion in God's kingdom. This requires that we take into consideration the effects of our actions on others. We are not to look solely at the benefits that will accrue to us because of a particular action. We are to consider carefully the effects of our actions on other people.

2. "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12). Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, Decalogue and Dominion (1986), ch. 25.

3. Chapter 20.

2. John Gill's Exegesis

In his commentary on this passage, the eighteenth-century Baptist theologian and pastor John Gill got to the point . . . and then abandons it. His printed commentary is in six fat volumes, in two columns of small print. Fortunately, it has been made available to the general public in digital form. It is included in the excellent Bible search program, e-Sword.

Look, not every man on his own things, Not but that a man should take care of his worldly affairs, and look well unto them, and provide things honest in the sight of all men, for himself and his family, otherwise he would be worse than an infidel; but he is not to seek his own private advantage, and prefer it to a public good; accordingly the Syriac version reads it, "neither let anyone be careful of himself, but also everyone of his neighbour"; and the Arabic version thus, "and let none of you look to that which conduces to himself alone, but let everyone of you look to those things which may conduce to his friend;

Gill was a man who despised the use of periods. His faithful companion was the semicolon.

Here, he made the traditional contrast in the history of Western ethics between the person who seeks his own private advantage in preference to the public good. It was this perspective that was challenged forcefully in 1705 in the poem by the dentist, Bernard Mandeville: *The Grumbling Hive*. He extended his comments in two large volumes in 1714: *The Fable of the Bees*. The subtitle was: *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. Mandeville argued that, in pursuing their self-interest, bees in a hive benefit the hive. This argument scandalized Christian theologians and social thinkers throughout the eighteenth century.⁴

Officially, Adam Smith followed the teaching of his predecessor and teacher, Francis Hutcheson, who was intensely hostile to Mandeville. Yet it is clear in Smith's masterpiece, *The Wealth of Nations*, that he had adopted Mandeville's analytic worldview: public good as the result of self-interest. His book was a defense of Mandeville's worldview, except that Smith emphasized production, whereas Mandeville emphasized consumption, thereby setting the standard for John

4. F. A. Hayek, "Dr Bernard Mandeville" (1967), in Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 252.

Maynard Keynes over two centuries later.⁵ But the main point was the same in both the *Fable of the Bees* and *Wealth of Nations*: self-interested individual action is the foundation of the prosperity of a society. An individual can pursue his self-interest, yet know that at the same time he is benefiting others in society. This worldview unleashed self-interest as never before in the history of man. It also unleashed economic growth as never before in the history of man.

Gill continued his comments after his semicolon. He moved the discussion from society to the spirit. This has been the knee-jerk tendency of Bible commentators for two millennia. They cannot bring themselves to apply their exegesis to the day-to-day world of politics, economics, and education. They flee to pietism's realm of the soul. This surrenders history to the humanists, who are happy (initially at least) to surrender the spiritual realm in exchange for history. Gill continued his sentence:

but this respects spiritual things, and spiritual gifts: a Christian should not seek his own honour and applause, and to have his own will, and a point in a church carried his own way, but should consult the honour of Christ, the good of others, and the peace of the church; he should not look upon his own gifts, he may look upon them, and ascribe them to the grace of God, and make use of them to his glory, but not to admire them, or himself for them, and pride himself in them, and lift up himself above others, neglecting and taking no notice of the superior abilities of others:

As Gill presented the case, Paul was writing against spiritual envy. But Paul's words give no hint of this. They extend far beyond the narrow confines of the church and Christian community. Gill continued his sentence:

but every man also on the things of others; not on their worldly things, busying himself with other men's matters, and which he has nothing to do with, but on the sentiments and reasons of others; which he should well weigh and consider, and if they outdo and overbalance his own, should yield unto them; he should take notice of the superior gifts of others, and own and acknowledge them; which is the way to submit to one another in the fear of God, and to promote truth, friendship, and love.

Gill's analysis can be interpreted as recommending an assessment

5. John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 361.

of other church members' motivations. This recommendation is consistent with Paul's concern. It is also consistent with Smith's. The difference is that Paul was concerned with the kingdom of God, whereas Smith was recommending a self-interested strategy based on manipulation and bargaining. The primary focus of concern for both Paul in this passage and Smith in *Wealth of Nations* was economics, not spiritual development within the institutional church.

What was not a concern of either Paul or Smith was spiritual envy, as Gill would have it. In the passage following this verse, Paul discusses the incarnation. God went from the spiritual realm of eternity into history. He "made himself of no reputation took upon in the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men" (v. 7). The whole point of Paul's message here is that *the incarnation brought eternity into history*. The context reveals that he is writing, not about the spiritual realm, as distinguished from the realm of history. This passage is about the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity in human form: Jesus Christ. Paul says that "he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (v. 8). What could be more intensely physical than the cross?

Gill's contemporary, Matthew Henry, was far closer to Paul's message. "A selfish spirit is destructive of Christian love. We must be concerned not only for our own credit, and ease, and safety, but for those of others also; and rejoice in the prosperity of others as truly as in our own. We must love our neighbour as ourselves, and make his case our own."

B. Paul vs. Envy

Paul is not speaking here about matters of faith and repentance. He is also not speaking about our neighbors' spiritual condition. He is talking about "keeping up with the Joneses." We should not make the attempt. We should rejoice when the Joneses improve their economic condition. Even if the Joneses can now move out of the neighborhood to a nicer neighborhood, we should rejoice.

Paul is providing one of the most powerful statements against the sin of envy that is found anywhere in the history of man. He is telling covenant-keepers that they should be happy to see others improve their condition, and they should go out of their way to help others do this. This is anti-envy. This is not tearing down an individual merely because the fact that he is above us bothers us. This is elevating an in-

dividual so that he can enjoy the blessings of life. This is a way to fulfill Christ's affirmation that He came to provide life and to provide it more abundantly (John 10:10). We are to implement this in our communities and in our relationships with other people. In doing so, we testify against any trace of envy in our relationships with others.

1. Beyond Individual Self-Interest

From the point of view of economic analysis, Paul's statement undermines the methodology of humanistic free market economics. He moves analysis from individual self-interest to social interest.

He does not say that we are not to pursue our self-interest. He is also not denying that our self-interest is consistent with the improvement of the conditions of those around us. We should therefore be concerned that our actions further the goals and aspirations of those who deal with us. This is a free market principle. Free market economists stress that voluntary exchange should be based, and is based, on the expectation of mutual benefit. This is a denial of what is known as the Montaigne fallacy: the idea that one person benefits economically only at the expense of another person.⁶ Economists call such a social setting a zero-sum game.

But Paul is saying more than this. He is warning people that they should actively be concerned with the welfare of those around them. He is pointing out that there are decisions that individuals can make in their own self-interest that can harm other people. Christians should avoid such practices. I do not think he is talking about theft, fraud, and other means of criminal assault. He is speaking about voluntary transactions which those in the church at Philippi might indulge in. What kinds of practices does he have in mind?

The most important one is envy. Eliminating that sin from consideration, there could be an unwillingness to intervene to help a person in a crisis. The person is suffering from circumstances that are no fault of his own. A covenant-keeper is told by Paul to intervene to help the person, even though there may not be any way for the person to repay a covenant-keeper. This may not be a matter of voluntary exchange. Jesus said this with respect to inviting poor people to feasts (Luke

6. On Montaigne's fallacy, see Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 660. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>) Cf. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1966] 1970), pp. 42, 166, 175, 309, 360.

14:12–14).⁷ The parable of the good Samaritan also conveys this truth (Luke 10:30–36).⁸

The importance of this principle is hard to overstate. Rich people hide their wealth from those who are poorer than they are; so, they rarely cooperate with poor people. Envy undermines social cooperation.⁹ Few people understand that when someone else becomes richer, that person becomes a better person to trade with.

2. *Economic Development*

It is common for citizens of a rich nation to resent the fact that foreign nations are catching up economically. They especially resent the fact that some nations are surpassing them economically. It should be obvious that it is an advantage for everybody if a foreign nation gets richer, assuming that it gets rich through voluntary trade and production. Rich people do business with rich people. They do not do business with people in a slum. Similarly, residents of rich nations trade with residents of rich nations.

Consider the argument of people who believe that the gospel of Christ improves other people's work habits. They say that when the gospel goes into a backward society, husbands sober up, work more productively, take care of their families, and generally become better heads of households. Those who believe that this is an advantage usually say that the gospel makes people richer. This is the case in most instances in Third World countries.

Now, let us take this argument one step beyond. Is it a good thing for Third World nations to get richer, if the reason why they are getting richer is that they are conforming themselves to specific ethical standards of the Mosaic law? Do they steal less? Do they commit adultery less? If so, why shouldn't we expect those individuals, and the societies in which they live, to get richer? Moses said that they will get richer (Deut. 28:1–14).¹⁰

Why should any covenant-keeper in nation A be envious of the success of individuals in nation B? Even if nation B is getting rich by comparison, why should that disturb citizens of nation A? It means

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 34.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

9. Schoeck, *Envy*, pp. 46, 290ff.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

that there are richer people across the border to trade with; so, their increased productivity can become an advantage. Yet there is a latent hostility to individuals and nations that overtake formerly rich individuals and nations. Their success is resented. This is envy.

The goal of the kingdom of God is to extend the rule of Christ's dominion across the face of the earth. The more wealth that a covenant-keeper possesses, the greater is his ability to extend the kingdom of God in history. A Christian in one country should not be envious of a Christian in another country, merely because that country is increasing its per capita wealth by becoming more obedient to the moral and legal standards presented in the Mosaic law. Would it be sensible for Christians in a rich country to cease funding all foreign missions, on the assumption that foreign missions will increase the per capita wealth of the country where the missionaries go? To ask it in this way indicates the preposterous nature of envy toward other nations, yet envy is widespread, even within Christian circles. It is as if Christians did not believe that the spreading of the gospel will produce increased per capita wealth in the societies where the missionaries are successful. It is as if they really do not want the missionaries to be successful.

The answer to this is Paul's injunction: we must care for the interests of others even as we care for our own self-interest.

Conclusion

This passage undermines the starting point of all modern free market economic theory, which begins with the assumption of self-interest as the primary economic motivation. While economists like to think of the discipline of economics as value-free, it is in fact value-laden. It begins with autonomous man, the individual. His goals are primary to him. He seeks his ends by persuading others to cooperate with him. He is interested in others as Dale Carnegie described and recommended in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*: as means to his ends.

Paul challenges this starting point. To the extent that people are following Christ, he says, they will be seriously concerned with the goals and efforts of others. As a tool of analysis to explain how people choose courses of actions as market participants, the assumption of individual self-interest produces plausible explanations of people's motivation and the outcome of their actions. But to the degree that people covenant with Christ, their motivation and behavior will take

on characteristics more associated with family members' relations with each other. Their actions will become less predictable in the marketplace. The fundamental allocation rule of the free market, "high bid wins," does not apply as predictably as before.

THE DOMINION PROCEDURE

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:5–12).

This referred to obedience, point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Subordination to Exaltation

This passage is important for Christian economics because it sets forth the procedure for dominion, based on Christ's dominion: incarnation, obedience, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God. This is the procedure of *subordination leading to exaltation*. I regard this as the most important New Testament passage on the procedure for dominion.

This is also the most important single text in the New Testament on the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Paul says that Christ was equal with God prior to the incarnation. Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God. That is to say, His was not an attempt to steal the nature of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

God. He was equal to God as a part of God. The Trinity is not taught here, but the divinity of Christ is taught here.

Paul says that Christ moved from heaven to earth, from eternity to time. Christ “made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (v. 7). Paul goes on to say that in doing this, Christ humbled Himself. That is, *He became totally subordinate in His perfect humanity to His divinity*. Paul does not put it this way, but theologians who have attempted to explain what Paul is saying have adopted language along these lines. Paul goes on to say that Christ “was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” This was dual subordination: subordination to man and subordination to God.

Because Jesus Christ subordinated Himself, even to the death of the cross, God has exalted Him. God has raised him up. Paul is not speaking of the physical resurrection. He is speaking about Christ’s office. He says that God has given Him a name which is above every name. The result of this exaltation is that at the name of Jesus, “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (v. 10).

Jesus Christ started as God and ended as the exalted ruler to whom all men will bow. In between, He humbled Himself and subjected to Himself to the humiliation of the cross. So, Christ’s pattern is *rulership to stewardship*, and *stewardship back to rulership*. Paul says that we are to imitate Christ in this regard. We begin as ethically fallen stewards. We are to subordinate ourselves to others, just as Christ subordinated Himself to the cross on behalf of men.

This is a matter of covenantal hierarchy. As covenant-keepers, Christians must acknowledge that they are subordinate to God. During their lives, they are subordinate to some men. But the long-term implication of their faithful subordination points to their exaltation. This may take place in history, but it will surely take place in eternity. *Exaltation is the final condition of covenant-keepers.*

B. Stewardship

This passage deals with the theology of stewardship. Stewardship is a form of subordination. The steward is not the owner of the assets he oversees. He has a responsibility to the owner for the careful administration of all of the assets that had been entrusted to him. He must give an account of his stewardship. This is not taught explicitly in

this passage, but it is taught in other New Testament passages.

This passage contains the most forthright presentation of the degree of Christ's subordination to man. It reveals the contrast between what Christ was before the incarnation and what Christ is after the ascension (Acts 1:9). God has raised Him up physically. This is a testimony to the degree to which God has raised Him up covenantally. Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23).

The resurrection and the ascension testify to the reality of the exaltation of Jesus Christ in heaven. Heaven is the model; the resurrection and the ascension are representative of the procedure. Christ's authority in history was guaranteed by the resurrection. He told the disciples in the Great Commission that all power had been transferred to Him. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18–20).² This was manifested symbolically by the ascension.

Paul tells readers and listeners that they are responsible before God for working out their salvation with fear and trembling (v. 12). What is the meaning of this? Christians are in a situation analogous to the situation Jesus Christ was in during his earthly ministry. This was His period of subordination; it is also our period of subordination. Jesus said that the apostles would judge the 12 tribes of Israel. "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29–30).³ Paul said that the church will judge the angels. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life" (I Cor. 6:3)?⁴ But these acts of judgment are beyond history. In the present, the church is in a position of subordination. It is required to move toward dominion. This is the requirement of the Great Commission. We are to preach the gospel to all men, as the procedure to bring all mankind under the authority of Jesus Christ. We are to do this on the basis of Christ's command that we should disciple the nations. This is comprehensive

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012) ch. 51.

4. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

dominion.⁵

C. Our Salvation

When Paul says that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, he is assuredly not saying that we are to work hard in order to attain salvation. He specifically says that we are to work out our salvation. This indicates that his listeners had already made the transition from death to life. This is taught specifically in John 3. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (v. 36). When covenant-keepers work out their salvation with fear and trembling, they are working out *that which is already theirs*. Salvation has been transferred to them definitively. They are to work it out progressively. They will see the culmination of their lives' efforts at the final judgment. So, salvation is definitive, progressive, and final. When Paul says that we are to work out our salvation, he means we are to work out the salvation which is ours.

He did not teach works religion. He did teach the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification is the process of applying biblical principles to specific actions and situations. Sanctification is also definitive, progressive, and final. We are to work out the implications of Christ's moral perfection, which is transferred to us at the moment of salvation.⁶

This is the model for dominion. We have been granted definitively the inheritance. This is the inheritance of the whole world.⁷ But we are not authorized by God to go out and claim this inheritance through force of arms or legal declaration. We are to subdue the earth through the steady implementation of the ethical principles set forth in the Mosaic law and the New Testament. Three centuries ago, this self-discipline was called casuistry. It meant the application of general moral principles to specific situations. Christian casuistry faded after 1700.⁸ It was replaced by a secular form of casuistry, in which general legal and ethical principles of the Enlightenment were used to restructure the social boundaries of Western civilization.

5. Gentry, *Greatness of the Great Commission*.

6. John Murray, "Sanctification," in *The Collected Works of John Murray*, 4 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), vol. 2.

7. Psalms 25:13; 37:9, 11, 22; Matthew 5:5.

8. Kenneth E. Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry* (Philadelphia: WJK, [1927] 1999), Pt. IV, ch. 6.

As we subdue ourselves through self-government under biblical law, through empowerment by the Holy Spirit, we extend the kingdom of God inward. But, because we are in the world, we must extend the kingdom of God outward. We extend it to all things that are under our authority. We are under God; we are over nature. We are betwixt and between. We are representatives of God before nature, and we are representatives of nature before God. We are therefore mediators of the kingdom of God.

This is the structure of biblical authority. This is how Christians are supposed to fulfill the terms of the original dominion covenant between God and Adam. We are also to fulfill the terms of the Great Commission. The Great Commission provides our marching orders.

Working out the implications of our salvation means that we are simultaneously working out the Great Commission. When we bring ourselves under God's rule, we are necessarily extending our own rule over His creation. Self-government under biblical law is the basis of Christian dominion in history.

Conclusion

Hierarchy is basic to all existence. Man exercises dominion over the creation as a steward under God. History is a testing period in which men demonstrate their ability to extend the kingdom of God. The final judgment elevates some men and curses others in terms of their performance, as the parable of the talents reveals (Matt. 25:14–30).⁹

Jesus served as the second Adam. "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45). He, like Adam, was subordinate in history. He, unlike Adam, did not forfeit His inheritance through sin (Rom. 5). Through His inheritance, covenant-keepers also inherit. They are supposed to imitate Paul. "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Phil. 3:17). "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1).¹⁰

Dominion is through subordination. It leads to exaltation. It is all by God's grace.

9. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

10. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 14.

21

PROGRESS AND PRIZE

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14).

This issue was sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant model.¹

A. Self-Improvement

Paul speaks here of his motivation for constant self-improvement. He has as his mark a prize. It is a prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Presumably, this means that Jesus' ministry is the model that Paul uses to assess the success or failure in his own efforts. The theologian would say that Christ's perfect humanity is the standard.

The problem here is perfection. Paul uses the word "perfection" in this passage in two ways. First, there is perfection in the sense of *no flaws*. It is the sense of perfection announced here: "Be perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). We are called by God to be perfect. But we are not perfect. Paul denies that he is perfect. He has not attained perfection.

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12–14).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

All attempts at perfection will fail in history. The doctrine of original sin guarantees this. James wrote: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). So, Paul speaks here of perfection in a second sense: *great accomplishments by self-disciplined covenant-keepers*.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample (Phil. 3:15–17).

In two places in other epistles, Paul speaks of perfection in the sense of *maturity*.

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought (I Cor. 2:6).

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Col. 4:12).

B. Sanctification

Here we have an application of the doctrine of sanctification.² There are three aspects of sanctification. First, there is definitive sanctification. This is perfection. This is the moral perfection of Jesus Christ. It is imputed by God's grace to covenant-keepers. There is nothing lacking in Christ's perfection.

Second, there is progressive sanctification. This is the product of self-discipline under God's law. The individual covenant-keeper uses God's law as a standard for decision-making in this life. The individual steadily improves his ability to apply God's perfect moral standards to his decision-making. This is the art of *casuistry*: the application of general moral principles to specific cases. Progressive sanctification marks the individual who strives through his life to imitate Christ. This is what Paul means when he speaks of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He presses toward the mark. He has not attained the perfection of Jesus Christ. He does not expect to attain it. But he uses it as a

2. John Murray, "Sanctification," in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980), vol. 2.

standard as he presses toward it.

Third there is final sanctification. This comes at the end of an individual's life. This is the final judgment of the individual by God. He assesses the extent to which the individual has approached the standard of perfection of Jesus Christ. This means that there are various degrees of performance. There are winners and losers in the process of sanctification. Some people produce only wood, hay, and stubble. Other people produce gold. Wood, hay, and stubble do not survive the fiery test of final judgment. Nevertheless, the individual covenant-keeper does enter heaven.

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:10–15).³

When Paul speaks of pressing toward the high calling of God in Jesus Christ, he is talking about self-discipline under God's law. Progressive sanctification is the working out of one's own salvation. Salvation is granted by God. It is not earned by the recipient of God's grace. It was earned by Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry. His perfection is imputed judicially to the covenant-keeper. This is entirely an act of God's grace. This is definitive sanctification. So, in one sense the individual already possesses perfection. In another sense, he does not possess it. There is progress in sanctification.

This passage is one of the two most prominent passages in which Paul speaks of this process of personal sanctification. In another passage, possibly more famous, he speaks of running the good race. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air" (I Cor. 9:24–26).

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

This doctrine of progressive sanctification applies to the individual covenant-keeper. Paul does not say it here, but Deuteronomy 28:1–14 teaches that it applies socially as well. Moses and the prophets insisted that the same process of progressive sanctification applies to covenantal institutions. There is progressive sanctification for collective groups. This is why the prophets came before the people of Israel and Judah and reminded them that the entire nation faced the external sanctions of God. The Israelites faced the famous trio of war, famine, and plague. To this was added captivity. Nevertheless, the prophets also said that, after the period of captivity, the nation would be restored to the land. God would still deal with them as covenantal people by dealing with them in a corporate sense: the people of God.

Paul sets forth here his personal example for our covenant-keeping: the process of progressive personal sanctification. *This is an affirmation of the possibility of personal progress in history.* It is not just a possibility; it is a moral imperative. Because it is a moral imperative for individuals, it is also a moral imperative for the *covenantal corporate institutions* to which covenant-keepers belong. It is a moral imperative for families, churches, and civil governments.

C. Moses on Progress

Moses in Deuteronomy 28:1–14 set forth the biblical doctrine of social progress.⁴ This progress in history is tied to biblical law. Moses said that there can be progress in history because of the blessings of God in response to men's faithful adherence to His law. This passage was the most comprehensive assertion of the idea of progress in the ancient world.

Paul was aware of the Mosaic idea of progress. He was equally aware that progress individually is dependent upon adherence to a fixed standard of ethics: biblical law. Elsewhere, Paul used the Mosaic law to list those sins that mark covenant-breaking.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9–10).⁵

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

5. North, *Judgment and Dominion*, ch. 7.

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine (I Tim. 1:9–10).⁶

He calls upon his readers and listeners to press on to the mark of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ. In other words, he calls on his listeners and readers to follow a program of personal progress in history. This is a testimony to the importance of history. This is a high calling. It is a standard that calls forth covenantally faithful responses. In every area of his life, a covenant-keeper is to pursue the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. In no area of his life is he not to pursue this standard.

Paul calls the individual to comprehensive sanctification. He is speaking of progressive sanctification, but he is also speaking of definitive sanctification, which is the gift of God to covenant-keepers. In other passages, he speaks of the final judgment.⁷ This is where the standard that was established by Jesus Christ's ministry in history is used by God to assess the performance of individual covenant-keepers.

D. Biblical Social Theory

Paul does not speak here of corporate progressive sanctification. Moses never spoke of final judgment. So, it is the combination of the Old Testament and the New Testament which makes it possible for covenant-keepers to develop a comprehensive social theory that is explicitly biblical. It is the doctrine of God's imposition of covenantal positive sanctions in response to covenantal faithfulness that makes possible the doctrine of progress. It is God's covenantal faithfulness in rewarding individuals' covenantal faithfulness that testifies to the existence of His covenant. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).⁸ It is therefore imperative that

6. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), p. 45.

7. Romans 2:3; 2:5; 14:10; I Cor. 15:24, II Corinthians 5:10.

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21, 22.

covenant-keepers believe that God will predictably reward covenant-keeping, and will also predictably punish covenant-breaking. God does this with individuals; God does this with covenantal institutions: family, church, and state.

Theologians have argued for centuries that there is a possibility of progressive sanctification for the individual covenant-keeper. They have also argued that there is a possibility of progressive sanctification for the church. This is why theologians work to improve confessions of faith. They believe that the creeds of the early church were accurate, but they were incomplete. They were necessary, but not sufficient. Theologians believe that there has been progress in confessional clarity and rigor.

Pastors affirm that there can be progress in family government. Pastors counsel husbands, wives, and children in an attempt to put them back on track. This is another way of saying that they are put on track to pursue the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Then, without explanation, theologians and pastors draw the line at civil government. They insist that there is no explicitly biblical standard for civil government. They insist that there are no uniquely biblical criteria by which God evaluates the progress of civil government in history. They insist that God does not judge civil governments in terms of Bible-revealed law, by which He judges individuals, churches, and families. Somehow, God does not establish and reveal laws governing civil government, even though He has established and has revealed laws regarding self-government, church government, and family government. Although churches, families, and civil governments are regarded by covenant theologians as covenantal institutions, the theologians, other than the theonomists, argue that biblical law applies only to the covenants of the family and the church. Theologians do not explain why this is the case. They simply assume it in this, the era of democracy.⁹

What is said here of individual progress applies also to all the other areas of life. It is clear from Deuteronomy 28:1–14 that there is progress in society, because God faithfully and predictably rewards covenant-keeping with blessings. In Deuteronomy 28:15–68, Moses announced that God faithfully and predictably burdens covenant-breaking with negative sanctions. So, over time, covenant-keepers get richer, while covenant-breakers get poorer by comparison. In a biblical social

9. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). (<http://bit.ly/polpol>)

order, covenant-breakers can get rich and extend their riches to succeeding generations only by adhering to the legal standards that God has revealed in his Bible, standards which govern individuals, families, churches, and civil governments. Only to the extent that covenant-breakers become imitation covenant-keepers can they continue to progress in history.¹⁰

The problem is, the overwhelming majority of theologians, pastors, and Christian social commentators have rejected the Mosaic law, and they have also rejected Deuteronomy 28. So, they have no uniquely biblical doctrine of progress for society as a whole. Their theology testifies against any such concept of long-term progress. So, when they look back at the history of Western civilization, they cannot explain the existence of progress, especially compound economic growth and technological development that appeared around 1750.

Because they do not believe that there are biblical standards governing compound growth, they explain compound growth (if they explain it at all) in terms of society's adherence to laws other than biblical law. This puts them in the position of affirming the productivity of Enlightenment humanism. It is not simply that Scottish Enlightenment humanists, because of their Christian background, imported the conclusions of biblical law and baptized them in the name of man's autonomous reason. Enlightenment humanists have gained access to common standards of law, which are supposedly available to covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers alike. They have applied these universal standards to society's institutions. Theologians become adherents of an idea that the humanists dearly love: the idea of judicial and moral neutrality.

It should not be surprising that humanists, who seek to break what they regard as the strangle hold of Christianity on Western civilization, should adopt such a view of autonomous civil law. It should be very surprising that the overwhelming majority of Christians social thinkers, theologians, and pastors have also adopted the same theory of natural law that Enlightenment humanists adopted and maintained until Darwin's theory of evolution destroyed their faith in natural law.¹¹ But this is an old, old story. The early Church fathers adopted Greek rationalism as the standard of ethics and logic, rather than bib-

10. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcg>)

11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

lical revelation.¹²

Conclusion

If we are to establish Christian economics, we must discover an explicitly biblical standard of success and failure, of right and wrong, of progress and retrogression. We must go to the Bible in search of the standards which we seek to apply in these specific institutions that govern society. This is what Christian social thinkers, Christian political scientists, Christian economists, Christian educators, Christian sociologists, Christian psychologists, and Christian theologians generally have denied is legitimate ever since the early decades of the Enlightenment in the late seventeenth century.

12. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), ch. 4.

22

THE ENTREPRENEUR'S EDGE

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6–7).

This passage had to do with answers to prayer: causality. This is point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Full of Care

This is one of the most optimistic passages in the Bible. It is also among the most difficult to apply personally. Christians know that they should apply it, but they find that it is almost impossible to apply on a systematic basis. It is probably even more difficult to do this than it is to lose weight and keep it off for five years. In short, it is very difficult.

Paul is instructing people regarding cause and effect in this world. He does not deny that there are crises that strike an individual in which the typical response is anxiety. People are prone to worry. Jesus repeatedly warned His followers about this.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment (Matt. 6:25)?²

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

(Matt. 6:27)?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin (Matt. 6:28).

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed (Matt. 6:31)?

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:34).

The Greek word translated as “thought” is used by Paul here. The translators used “careful.” Modern usage has changed. Being careful means taking care. This is not the meaning of the Greek word. A better translation would be “full of care.” We are to be full of care about nothing. This does not mean not to take care. Because we are not full of care, we are supposed to be able to take even better care.

Paul says “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving”—meaning thanksgiving in advance—“let your requests be made known under God.” We are to be so confident about the outcome of our prayers that we are told to rejoice in advance regarding the outcome. This is an extreme form of confidence regarding the future and regarding God’s absolute sovereignty over the affairs of this life.

B. Sovereignty and Confidence

The main reason why covenant-keepers are not supposed to worry about the future is because God is in control of the future. Paul asserts this passionately in Romans 9. He tells us in Romans 8 that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).³ So, because God is in control of all things, and because He has providentially determined that all things work for the benefit of His people, worry is a form of denial. It either denies that God is completely in control of all events, or else it denies that all things work together for the benefit of covenant-keepers. It does not matter which of these premises the individual denies. He is challenging what Paul specifically teaches about God.

With respect to God’s being in complete control over everything, Paul’s words in Romans 9 are the strongest that can be found in the

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012, ch. 6.

Bible.

For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles (Rom. 9:9–24)?

With respect to all things working together for the good of covenant-keepers, Romans 8 is probably the strongest statement found in the Bible. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (v. 28). So, combining Romans 8 and Romans 9, we are led inescapably to a conclusion: *the world is not a threat to covenant-keepers*. If we number ourselves among covenant-keepers, then to worry about the future is a practical rejection of our confidence in the truth of what Paul taught about sovereignty of God and the sanctions of God.

Paul draws the proper conclusion from this passage. He says that we are not to be anxious about the future. When we are obedient to the standard, which is a standard of ethics, Paul says that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. This is an affirmation regarding the peace of

God. The peace of God is in stark contrast to the anxiety of man. People say that they are desirous of attaining peace of mind. Yet, in actual practice, people do worry about the future. People who worry about the future do not have peace of mind.

“The peace of God which passes understanding” is a phrase which is widespread in the United States. It is a phrase out of the New Testament that has been adopted by people who probably do not understand the theology of the New Testament. But they believe that the ideal in this life is the attainment of such peace that it passes human understanding. They acknowledge that such peace is available from God, but probably from nothing else. Why? Because men do not believe in a universe that is simultaneously autonomous from God and favorable to them. If it is autonomous, then it is impersonal. It shows no favor to anyone or anything. People worry about the fact that the universe, if not stacked against them, is surely not stacked for them. This is not what Paul teaches here. The common man who hears this phrase wants to appropriate it for himself, but he lacks the theological doctrines that alone would enable him to be legitimately confident that it is possible to attain the peace of God which passes understanding.

C. Entrepreneurship and Confidence

This passage is important for economic theory. Economic theory rests on a conception of man, the decision-maker. Men live in a universe of scarcity (Gen. 3:17–19).⁴ That is to say, at zero price, there is more demand for most goods than there is supply of them. Men must therefore labor to overcome the limits of economic scarcity. Men must decide how to allocate the goods they own, which include physical labor and mental labor, in their attempt to better their condition.

If Paul is correct about not being full of care about the future, then those individuals who have not only accepted the truth of this doctrine but who have systematically applied it in their psychological lives, have a great advantage over those who do not believe it, and also those who do believe it but who have not learned to apply it in their lives. People who are optimistic about the future are more likely to become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are those people who forecast the future state of affairs and then make plans to meet those new conditions at the lowest possible price. They profit from the difference between (1) what

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

they pay for the goods and services that they use to produce additional goods and services for that future market and (2) the selling price of their final products. If they buy low and sell high, they gain an entrepreneurial profit.

Someone who believes that the world is not stacked against him, but is actually stacked in his favor, is more likely to invest time, resources, and emotional energy in projects that are aimed at meeting customer demand in the future. An individual who is not afraid of the future is more likely to overcome the almost universal barrier to entry against entrepreneurship: *fear of failure*. The fear of failure paralyzes people, so they refuse to buy low. They are afraid to buy low because they really do not believe that they will find themselves in a position where they can sell high. So, wanting to avoid the embarrassment and economic loss of not being able to sell high, they refuse to buy low. They do not buy at all.

Optimism is an important element in the psychological makeup of a successful entrepreneur. Optimism overcomes the fear of failure. Even when entrepreneurs fail, they have a tendency to try again. They are confident enough about the future so that they conclude that their immediate failure is simply a steppingstone to future success. They do not regard failure as some kind of cosmic testimony against them, their plans, and their abilities. They regard failure much in the same way that a smart student regards an error on a midterm examination. It is a motivation for the student to study harder and thereby get a higher grade on the final examination.

Whenever someone is presented with an opportunity to invest in something that the salesman says will produce an above-market rate of return, the first thing that the prospective investor should ask himself is this: "What is the barrier to entry?" If there is no barrier to entry, then other investors will see the opportunity, make the investment, and lower the rate of return. If lots of investors are going into the producer goods markets in order to buy the goods to sell at a higher price later, the price of consumer goods will rise because of competition, and the price of future producer goods will fall because of competition. Competition acts to raise producer prices and reduce consumer prices. This reduces entrepreneurial profit.

So, the successful entrepreneur rejoices in the fact that his potential competitors have a fear of failure. This is the barrier to entry that offers him the opportunity to invest in something that will produce an above-market rate of return.

Paul's advice, when taken seriously, grants to covenant-keepers an advantage in every competitive market. They can act in confidence. They can plan for success in the future because they are not afraid of the future. They are convinced that God has already chosen them to be recipients of the special grace of faith in Jesus Christ. Because God has granted them the unique special grace of salvation, they should have much less fear about the future. If God has granted them the unique gift of salvation, surely He is not opposed to them. Surely, he is not laying traps for them.

When these same people understand that their entrepreneurial ventures in overcoming the uncertainties of this life are to be aimed at extending the kingdom of God in history, they have an additional competitive advantage. Not only is the world not stacked against them, God is in favor of what they are doing, because their goal is to extend His kingdom in history. God tells people to build His kingdom. This means that they must take steps in the present in order to increase their output. They need to increase their output and to invest more wisely, so that they will not waste resources, including the precious, irreplaceable resource of their time, in order to extend the kingdom of God at the expense of the kingdom of Satan.

The entrepreneur should pray with the same fervency that Jesus said that a demanding widow who seeks justice from an unjust judge who refuses to hear her case should persist. She keeps coming back to the judge to ask that he settle her case (Luke 18:1–6).⁵ Entrepreneurs should be masters of fervent prayer. They should see this spiritual discipline as granting them a competitive advantage against those entrepreneurs who do not believe in God, who do not believe that God answers prayer, and who do not believe that God has sovereignly stacked the deck in favor of them.

Conclusion

Whenever Paul's words are taken seriously, and whenever covenant-keepers self-consciously discipline their emotions to accept the truth of what Paul says here, the church of Jesus Christ is granted an enormous advantage over all rival kingdoms. The church is then filled with individuals who are confident about the future, because they are confident that God is absolutely sovereign over the future, and that He

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

has predestined the universe so as to benefit all those who are covenantally bound to Him. When men believe that the universe is totally personal, and the person in charge of the universe is the God of the Bible—the God to whom they are committed covenantally—they legitimately can apply Paul's words here to their lives. When they do, setbacks are not a threat to them, and when setbacks occur, covenant-keepers shrug them off and continue in their endeavors. This is how the kingdom of God is supposed to be extended in history.

23

CONTENTMENT WITHOUT COMPLACENCY

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:11–13).

This passage dealt with sanctions: results in history.¹

A. Contentment

This passage is an extension of Paul's previous warning against fear. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6–7).² Because fear regarding the future is a form of rebellion against God, then a person should learn to be content with whatever the future brings. This is what Paul asserts in this verse.

Paul from time to time was in great need. He says elsewhere that he had suffered on many occasions for the sake of the gospel (I Cor. 11:24–26). It is difficult for us to understand how he could be content in a time of great suffering and persecution. Yet this is what he says is his constant mental condition. Whatever takes place is acceptable to him. No matter what kinds of difficulties he faces, he is content.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapter 22.

This is a hard saying. This epistle is full of hard sayings. People from time to time find themselves in situations in which they are discontented. The idea of contentment in the face of a personal disaster is difficult to accept. Is Paul fully rational? In what sense does he assert that he is content in every situation? Does he mean that when he is in a difficult situation, he does not pray to be delivered out of this situation? In another passage, he says that we must pray without ceasing. “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (I Thes. 5:16–18). In this passage, these seeming contradictory goals appear: rejoicing, prayer, thankfulness. What about prayer? Jesus taught regarding prayer that an individual should be like a widow who seeks justice from an unjust judge. She continually harasses him until he renders judgment. Jesus was teaching that an individual should ask for something repeatedly when he prays to God (Luke 18:1–6).³ How is it that a person who is fully content with his circumstances should spend time nagging God for deliverance?

B. The Doctrine of Predestination

To make sense of these apparently conflicting teachings about prayer and contentment, we have to think through the implications of what Paul’s doctrine of predestination is. In Romans 9 and Ephesians 1, Paul taught a comprehensive doctrine of God’s predestination of all things in history. When a person accepts the doctrine of predestination, and when he also accepts Paul’s doctrine that all things happen for the good of those who love God and who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28),⁴ he begins to come to grips with Paul’s doctrine of contentment. *Contentment is the acceptance of the idea that God is completely in charge of all things.* God arranges all things to benefit those who are covenantally committed to Him. This being the case, it would be inconsistent to be discontented in the sense of regarding history as somehow hostile to covenant-keepers, or at least indifferent to covenant-keepers. Paul asserts the opposite. God is always interested in covenant-keepers and their work. He favors them in everything that happens to them.

If God is completely in charge of all things, and if all things work

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

together for good for covenant-keepers, then covenant-keepers should be content with whatever happens to them. This does not mean that they should be satisfied with conditions whenever these conditions can be changed to conform more closely to the outcome that God has revealed as His preference. God through Moses announced that covenant-keeping societies will experience the blessings of God (Deut. 28:1–14).⁵ When covenant-keepers find themselves in a condition in which they are not experiencing the kinds of blessings listed in Deuteronomy 28:1–14, they should pray that they be delivered out of the circumstances which are contrary to the blessings presented in this passage. They should pray and work so as to call forth the blessings of God.

The blessings may be delayed for many reasons. One of the reasons is simply that God wishes to find out how committed His people are to achieving the extension of the kingdom of God in history. There is widespread resistance to God's kingdom. There was also widespread resistance to Christ's ministry. This is normal. But it is not normative. The goal is to overcome this resistance.

C. Complacency

When Paul says that he is content, he does not mean that he is complacent about his surroundings. He would rather see covenant-keepers in authority than covenant-breakers. He would rather see the blessings of God on covenantally faithful societies than see the persecution of covenantally faithful societies. But he is not discontented in the sense that he believes that the world is structured so as to bring negative sanctions against widespread covenant-keeping, and to bring positive sanctions for widespread covenant-breaking.

The Psalmist declared that he had been confused and dismayed by the fact that evil men prospered, and righteous men did not (Ps. 73). But, later in the psalm, he concluded that the good times that evil men experience serve as a slippery slope for them. It confirms them in the evil that they do. At some point, God will bring negative sanctions against evil-doing and evildoers. So, the fact that, for a time, covenant-breakers prosper and covenant-keepers suffer should not discourage us.⁶

Paul is saying that he is content with good times and bad, with

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 68.

6. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

blessings and with cursings, because his work is governed by the presupposition that God is in charge of everything, and that He works all things so that good becomes the inheritance of covenant-keepers. *The universe is stacked against covenant-breakers, and it is stacked in favor of covenant-keepers. The universe is not impersonal.*⁷ It is the creation of God, and this God is providentially sovereign. He works out all things according to his decree. This gives Paul comfort in good times and bad. He can be content with the sovereignty of God, even though he would prefer to receive blessings rather than cursings. What never occurs to him is to imagine that God in some way is being thwarted by His creation. That idea would lead to enormous discontent. It would lead to a concept of a god who is incapable of bringing to pass every aspect of his decree on time, as scheduled. It would lead to a concept of a god who is not completely clear about the outcome of his decree and his intervention in history.

D. Dissatisfaction and Economic Theory

Ludwig von Mises constructed his economic system on the ostensibly universal principle of human action. He said that action is always an exchange of one set of conditions in the expectation of achieving a better set of conditions. He wrote: "Action is an attempt to substitute a more satisfactory state of affairs for a less satisfactory one. We call such a willfully induced alteration an exchange. A less desirable condition is bartered for a more desirable."⁸ He extended this insight for hundreds of pages. The bedrock presupposition of his economic theory is that men are dissatisfied with their present conditions, and so they seek to attain more preferable conditions through a series of exchanges.

There is nothing in the writings of the Apostle Paul that indicate that Mises' conception of an exchange of conditions is inaccurate. Paul presented the extension of the kingdom of God in history as taking place at the expense of the kingdom of Satan: a zero-sum contest. Paul's concept of history is one in which covenant-keepers, through covenantal faithfulness and hard work, endeavor to exchange one set of conditions for a better set of conditions. The first set of conditions is characterized by a world in which there is widespread coven-

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

8. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 97. (<http://bit.ly/MisesHA>)

ant-breaking. The second set of conditions is characterized by a world in which covenant-keeping is dominant in every area of life.

Paul believed in comprehensive redemption.⁹ He believed that the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in history were the foundations of a comprehensive program of evangelism. Evangelism brings the good news of Christ's deliverance from death unto life. Evangelism is based on dissatisfaction regarding the effects of sin in every area of life. So, while it is legitimate to speak of dissatisfaction regarding present conditions, Paul would say that it is illegitimate to be discontented with the prevailing conditions. Such discontentment with existing conditions is accompanied by an attitude of despair, or resentment, regarding the sovereignty of God in its present outworking in history.

For Paul, discontentment meant that a person believes that his present circumstances are somehow *unjust*. A person resents the injustice of it all. This is ultimately an attitude of rebellion against God. It is an attitude grounded on the assumption that a human being is better qualified to assess the good or evil of particular circumstances without reference to the sovereignty of God. Such discontentment is a mark of self-proclaimed autonomy. This was Job's complaint against God.¹⁰ Paul was hostile to any assertion of human autonomy.

Economic theory should not begin with the presupposition of human autonomy. It should begin with the presupposition of the absolute sovereignty of God: first in creation, then in providence. Whenever economic theory begins with this presupposition, an economist can more accurately assess the likely outcomes of covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. He can assess the results of economic behavior in terms of a system of cause and effect.

In contrast to the covenant-keeper is the covenant-breaker. The covenant-breaker sees the universe as stacked against him, or governed by impersonal forces, or dependent upon the unpredictable favor of Lady Luck, or in bondage to impersonal fate. When he looks around him, even when things are going well, he cannot safely trust the universe. He sees it either as uncaring regarding him and mankind or else hostile. No matter how successful he has been so far, he lives in

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), Appendix C. (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

10. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

a world of uncertainty. This uncertainty exists within a framework of cosmic impersonalism. Cosmic forces can turn against him at any time for an unpredictable reason. So, a man is tempted severely by the lure of discontent. He may think he can buy his way out of discontentment. This is an illusion. The universe cannot be bought off. The person who does not believe in complete cosmic personalism may believe that there are forces in the universe that can be harnessed temporarily, or placated temporarily, but he ultimately believes that the universe is either indifferent to him or against him. He has no legitimate reason for confidence in any belief that the universe is personal and also favorable to his efforts to extend his own kingdom in history.

The faithful covenant-keeper is in a better position psychologically to take entrepreneurial risks than the covenant-breaker. The covenant-keeper believes that his attempt to extend the kingdom of God in history, by way of covenantal faithfulness to biblical law, will be pleasing to God, and in the long run will lead to success. Success is defined as one's participation in the extension of the kingdom of God in history. Paul believed in this kind of contentment. It is not a naive contentment. It is not the contentment of Dr. Pangloss. It is not a belief that this world cannot be improved because it is already perfect. Even Adam would not have made that false assumption. While the world was ethically perfect, it was incomplete. He had an assignment to dress and guard the garden. History is always an arena of competition between good and evil. It is arena in which covenant-keepers seek to extend the kingdom of God in history, and covenant-breakers seek to resist and overcome any such extension.

Conclusion

Christian economics must begin with the concept of an absolutely sovereign God whose word does not return to Him void.¹¹ This outlook produces contentment. With this as a presupposition, covenant-keepers can work to extend the kingdom of God in history. They should pursue profits rather than losses. They should pursue health rather than sickness. They should pursue riches rather than poverty. But these riches must always be seen in terms of performance in a personal universe that is governed by the law of God. Riches in this per-

11. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

spective are covenantal blessings for faithfulness to covenantal law. Riches are not to be pursued for their own sake; they are to be pursued as success indicators of the most efficient procedures for the extension of the kingdom of God in history.

It is not a sign of discontentment that a covenant-keeper pursues profits rather than losses, health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty. He is not resentful against God for losses, sickness, or poverty. He sees room for improvement. We must distinguish between (1) contentment regarding the prevailing level of blessings and curses and (2) complacency with this level. The first is mandatory; the second is prohibited. Discontentment indicates resentment against God for the prevailing conditions. Complacency indicates an acceptance of the prevailing conditions, on the assumption that these conditions cannot be improved by covenant-keeping. Both attitudes indicate rebellion against God.

The correct attitude is contentment in the sense of *confidence in opportunities to improve conditions*. This should have characterized Adam in the garden. Instead, Adam became discontented. He saw the prevailing conditions as evidence of God's malevolence in not allowing him low-cost access to the knowledge of good and evil. He saw his environment as hostile to his self-realization. He was prohibited from exchanging one set of conditions for another.

Exchanging conditions is legitimate. The desire to exchange conditions is inherent in the dominion covenant: to exercise dominion as God's agent. The deciding covenantal questions are these: (1) In whose name? (2) By whose authority? (3) By what standard? (4) By which sanctions? (5) To what end?

24

SUPERNATURAL CAPITAL

Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily (Col. 1:29).

This referred to dependence on God: hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Source of Strength

This verse reinforces Paul's statement: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).² This is an affirmation that his labor is not in vain. He affirms that he works hard. He struggles in his efforts. He attributes the energy he possesses to the work of Christ in his life. He says that Christ works through him.

This is a remarkable affirmation. He is saying that the resurrected Christ, sitting at the right hand of God the Father (Col. 3:1),³ is actively intervening in his life to strengthen him, so that he can achieve his assigned tasks in history. He knows that he is an apostle (Col. 1:1). He knows that he has been specially called by Christ to serve Him (Acts 9:3–7). He sees himself as a servant who has been assigned tasks in life that must be fulfilled as a matter of faithful stewardship. The problem is this: he does not have sufficient strength within himself to complete the work that has been assigned to him by God. He says here that Christ works within him. This is an affirmation of divine intervention in his life.

This is a powerful testimony regarding a person's work in history.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Chapter 23.

3. Chapter 25.

Paul is saying that he receives divine intervention in order to enable him to continue the struggle of his work. This is an affirmation of the legitimacy of his work. Otherwise, why would God intervene in Paul's life to enable him to achieve his tasks? Paul is arguing here that God supports him specially in his life's work. This gives meaning to his life's work.

B. Confidence

A covenant-keeper can call upon God to intervene directly into his own life in order to strengthen him in the fulfillment of his life's work. He can confidently accept work assignments from God that would otherwise be beyond his ability, power, and tenacity to fulfill. Because Paul was able to call upon God to intervene directly to strengthen him in his work, he was in a position to accept tasks that would normally would have been closed to him. He had greater courage in attempting a great deal because he believed that God directly intervened in his life to enable him to fulfill his tasks.

This moves the question of embarking on new projects back to the fundamental question: "What does God expect me to do?" Once an individual believes that he has insight into the nature of the task which God has assigned to him, he is then required to count the costs. Jesus made this clear in Luke 14:28–30.⁴ Here, Paul is saying that to count the costs correctly, the covenant-keeper must assess the *cost-reduction factor* of God's direct intervention in his life to strengthen him in his work. For the covenant-breaker, a similar task might prove to be beyond his ability to complete. He is not in a position to go before God and ask that God intervene in his life to strengthen him in order that he can fulfill his work. God specially intervened in Paul's life because Paul was doing the work of the kingdom. God respected this work, and He strengthened Paul in his efforts.

The covenant-breaker may believe that he has this kind of support, but it would be illegitimate for him to apply Paul's words in this verse to his own situation. He is not a covenantkeeper. He is not working to extend the kingdom of God in history. He is not working as a self-conscious servant of God, specially called by God, regenerated by God, and assigned specific tasks that are appropriate to his abilities. On the contrary, he is working at cross-purposes to God. He should not ex-

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

pect divine intervention to enable him to fulfill his work effectively.

Because God intervenes in the lives of covenant-keepers to enable them to complete their life's work, God strengthens the hand of His followers. He enables them to achieve greater results than they would otherwise have been able to achieve on their own authority. God provides additional capital in the form of direct intervention to strengthen covenant-keepers in their fulfillment of their God-assigned responsibilities. He provides working capital, which in this case is capital for working, to those who are covenantally committed to Him. He is therefore making it possible for His followers to achieve more in history than can be achieved by those who oppose His kingdom. *He is granting favorable terms of trade to His followers.* They are enabled to achieve greater things in history, and therefore achieve greater positive sanctions in both history and eternity, than if they had been covenant-breakers.

C. A Tilted Battlefield

This passage indicates that God has tilted the battlefield in favor of covenant-keepers and therefore in favor of His own kingdom. This is not neutral competition between adherents of two equal deities. It is competition between the Creator and the created. It is competition between God and Satan, and therefore it is competition between those covenanted to God vs. those covenanted to Satan. In this competition, God has granted to covenant-keepers what covenant-breakers would call unfair advantages.

Because of modern eschatology, both premillennial and amillennial, most Christians believe that God has favored covenant-breakers in history. They believe that the church of Jesus Christ will be unsuccessful in preaching the gospel in all the world. They believe that the gospel message will not be accepted, ever, by the vast majority of people who hear it. They believe that even when people believe the message, they are unable to implement it in their own lives in a consistent way. They believe that covenant-keepers will be unable historically to extend the kingdom of God, as required by God. They believe, in short, that God has tilted the battlefield against them. They believe that the outcome of competition between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers is inevitably going to favor covenant-breakers at the expense of covenant-keepers.⁵

5. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Chris-

When this outlook is widespread, *covenant-keepers fear to accept greater responsibility*, because they do not believe that they are competent to bear this responsibility. They do not believe that God directly intervenes in their lives to strengthen them in a supernatural way, so that they will be enabled to fulfill their specific assignments in history. Christians believe that those who are covenanted to Satan receive special advantages, presumably from Satan, but ultimately from God through Satan. They believe that no matter what God does to call people to serve Him and to extend His kingdom in history, He has stacked the deck in history against them. He has foreordained the defeat of his institutional church in history. Amillennialists state this explicitly. Premillennialists argue that it will take the direct intervention of Jesus Christ, returning to the earth, presumably with His angels, in order to subdue covenant-breakers and extend His kingdom in history. They do not believe that God has empowered covenant-keepers to extend the kingdom of God successfully in history on their own. Christians supposedly will require the direct physical presence of Jesus Christ in history in order for them to be able to fulfill their responsibilities in history.

Paul's statement here makes it clear that there is already direct supernatural intervention in the lives of covenant-keepers. There is no suggestion here, or anywhere else in Paul's epistles, that Jesus Christ must return in a perfect body, accompanied by angels, in order to replace covenant-breakers and therefore extend His kingdom in history. Such direct physical intervention in the processes of history, overcoming the processes of history by a supernatural discontinuity, is unnecessary if we believe Paul's words in this passage.

Conclusion

Paul affirms that God intervenes in his life to strengthen him in his work. Such an affirmation announces that God has reduced the cost of production for His people. When costs are reduced, there will be greater output. The specific cost reduction here is labor cost. God intervenes to subsidize His people in their efforts to extend God's kingdom in history. He has created an unlevel playing field, and He has assigned the advantage to His people. There is no neutrality here. There is surely no bias against His kingdom.

A SUPERNATURAL PERSPECTIVE

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1–2).

The issue here was hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Hierarchy of Values

This passage refers to setting personal goals. To set goals, a person must have an initial perspective about what is important in this world. He must have a hierarchy of values.² He then assesses the resources available to him and prepares an allocation of assets according to this hierarchy of values.

Paul says that covenant-keepers have been raised up, analogous to Christ's resurrection and His ascension. "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:5–6). He speaks here of Christ as sitting at the right hand of God. This refers to His ascension, not just His resurrection. God raised Christ up bodily at the resurrection, and He did this again at the ascension (Acts 1:9). This was a manifestation of God's supernatural power over temporal causality. It was also a demonstration of the special position of Jesus Christ in the decree of God. Paul is saying that covenant-keepers possess an analogous position to Christ's in the eyes of God. They have been raised up. They

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Gary North, *The Five Pillars of Biblical Success* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2008), ch. 2.

have not yet been bodily raised up, but he says elsewhere that this will take place at the end of time.³ Covenant-keepers have been raised up spiritually and judicially, just as Christ was raised up spiritually and judicially.

B. The Ascension as the Model

Paul is pointing to Christ's ascension as the model for Christian living. The ascension delivered Jesus Christ bodily into the presence of God. He now sits at the right hand of God, a position of great judicial authority. Paul is saying that, covenantally speaking, covenant-keepers have been raised up in a similar way. Because Christ is in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God the Father, covenant-keepers are supposed to keep their attention focused on Christ in His capacity as the ascended Son of God. In other words, they are to look to their Redeemer, who was raised up by God to sit at His right hand, and conclude that *they possess analogous authority in history*. They have been specially selected by God for resurrection and ascension. They are therefore to focus their attention on this final condition, rather than focusing their attention on the things of this world.

From the point of view of the covenant-keeper, the things of this world are tools for the construction of the kingdom of God in history. This extension of the kingdom of God in history, through time and across the face of the earth, is the temporal manifestation of the ascension of Christ to the right hand of God. He has been raised up; His disciples are to extend His kingdom outward. God has raised Christ up as a mark of his victory over the earth. God now calls His people to extend the kingdom of God throughout all the earth, throughout all of history, as a manifestation of the authority and power of Christ over the affairs of this world.

C. Things Above

When Paul says that we must think about things that are above, he is talking about three things. First, he is talking about the hope of each covenant-keeper that he will be brought into the judicial presence of God in heaven at the time of his death. Second, the covenant-keeper is to have hope that he will be resurrected from the dead and elevated into the skies. This is a manifestation of Christ's power over death.

3. I Corinthians 15:12–14, 35–44, 49–52.

The dead shall be raised first.⁴ But our goal is to return to earth after the final judgment to extend God's kingdom physically once again. This is the new heavens and a new earth in their final manifestation (Rev. 21:1). Third, the covenant-keeper is to focus on things above, because this is where the seat of judicial authority resides. Christ sits at the right hand of God; therefore, He possesses power over the affairs of this world. To the extent that covenant-keepers act faithfully according to the laws of God in history, they manifest Christ's rule over the cosmos. What they do in a small scale, Christ does on a large scale.

So, they must focus on things above, which means that they must focus on the source of their authority. They must not think about the fact that they are temporal and under the authority of covenant-breakers. Instead, they are to think of themselves as stewards of God, who operate under God's authority. This is an affirmation of victory. To the extent that covenant-keepers keep their minds focused on whatever is above, they gain greater optimism concerning their lifetime tasks. If Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and if they have been resurrected and have ascended spiritually and judicially in the presence of God, then they possess power in history. They can work out their salvation in fear and trembling,⁵ in the confidence that God, as the sovereign over all creation, is favorable to their efforts.

By focusing their attention on things above, they can better apply their attention to things below. They begin with thoughts about the implications of Christ's ascension to the right hand of God. They can keep in better perspective the meaning of their efforts in history to extend the kingdom of God. Confident that they participate judicially and covenantally in the victory of the ascended Christ over history, they gain greater confidence about their efforts in history. Because Christ was victorious over death in history, and ascended to the right hand of God in history, then history is under the authority of Christ. Therefore, in allocating resources, including time, to the task of subduing the earth for the glory of God, the covenant-keeper is in a position to assess the importance of his own actions. His actions attain meaning by way of their connection to the resurrection and the bodily ascension of Christ to the right hand of God.

4. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thes. 4:16–17).

5. Chapter 20.

When men understand that their efforts are not bounded by time, they gain greater confidence regarding the effects of their efforts in time. Because their efforts are assessed in terms of a hierarchy in which Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, their efforts take on much greater meaning. Their efforts are not limited to effects in history. Their efforts' meaning extends to eternity. This gives covenant-keepers a psychological advantage over covenant-breakers. Covenant-keepers have confidence that Christ, who sits at the right hand of God, favors their efforts. Because they focus on Christ's position at the right hand of God, they can subsequently focus their attention on historical matters from the perspective of the sovereignty of God over history. The God who raised up Jesus bodily and then raised Him to heaven is in charge of the affairs of this world. So, covenant-keepers can act in confidence, knowing that the enforcement of God's law in history resides in heaven.

Conclusion

The hierarchy of values begins with a hierarchy of authority. The hierarchy of authority that Paul describes here is cosmic authority. Covenant-keepers can have confidence that they are being backed up by someone like themselves. That person descended into history, overcame death, and was raised to a realm outside of history. Jesus Christ was in history, but He was not of history. We are therefore, covenantally speaking, also in history, but not of history. *We gain our authority from above history.* This elevates our goals, whenever our goals are elevated, above the affairs of this world. This is why Paul says to focus on things that are above. In doing so, we appropriate for ourselves a level of motivation that covenant-breakers do not legitimately possess.

THE REWARD OF THE INHERITANCE

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons (Col. 3:23–25).

The issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Hierarchical Service

Paul directs his commands to Christians in general. The context of these passages is hierarchical service. Children are to serve their parents (v. 20); servants are to serve their masters (v. 22). He tells servants not to act as pleasers of men, but to act as pleasers of God (v. 22).

1. Ownership and Stewardship

He then tells the servant to work heartily. If a servant is to work with enthusiasm in the household of another man, then how much more should we work heartily when we are not servants in another man's household?

In terms of free market economic theory, every asset owner is a servant of customers. Customers set final prices. They also establish the number of units which are sold at each price. Customers are in possession of the most marketable commodity, money, so they possess

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

authority over the goals of production. Sellers seek the most marketable commodity in exchange for their goods and services. By their decision to buy or not to buy, customers determine which sellers of goods and services prosper, and which do not.

There is no escape from the concept of ownership as a social function.² When we own an asset, we are responsible for the administration of this asset. There are prospective buyers and prospective renters who bid against each other in order to gain control over our assets. This is why our assets command a price. So, Paul's rule regarding the attitude of enthusiasm regarding production applies to all labor. All labor is directed toward the satisfaction of someone.

2. Thanks to God

His language regarding our words and our actions indicates that we owe God thanks. Why should we owe God thanks for our words and deeds? Because God is the Creator. As the Creator, He is entitled to thanks. In this perspective, life is a benefit. We act in life through word and deed. We are supposed to demonstrate our subordination to God by giving thanks for the opportunities which God has provided for us to serve Him. This is the correct attitude of servants toward masters. God is the supreme Master, so servants give Him thanks for the opportunity to serve.

This emphasis on service is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus entered into history, leaving a position of supreme authority and majesty, taking on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5–6).³ He did this for the sake of those whom He served: God and mankind. He is the intermediary between God and mankind. Some people He saves from their sins (special grace), while others He allows to continue in life, even though they do not deserve to (common grace).⁴

The servant is a steward. A steward does not own the tools of production. He makes use of tools of production, but the tools are owned by someone else: his master. His work assignment is imposed by his master. He appears to serve his master, but Paul says that every servant should regard his service as directly under God. The servant is not to be a man-pleaser; he is to be a God-pleaser.

2. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 333. (<http://bit.ly/gnintro>)

3. Chapter 20.

4. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/gndcg>)

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free (Eph. 6:5–8).

This does not mean that the master is not entitled to faithful service. As a representative of God in history, he is entitled to faithful service precisely because he is a representative of God. An individual demonstrates his commitment to enthusiastic service of God by serving his master enthusiastically. He is not to do this for the sake of pleasing his master; he is to do this because he owes such service to God, his maker. Paul elsewhere said that the Lord loves a cheerful giver (II Cor. 9:7).⁵ Paul says here that the Lord loves a cheerful servant. In each case, the goal is service to God.

B. Inheritance

Paul promises the faithful and enthusiastic servant that he will receive a reward from God. This establishes a fundamental principle of ethics. *Obedience has its reward*. This reward is not autonomous. It is not that we are to be obedient for obedience's sake. *We are to be obedient for God's sake*. It is God who imposes sanctions in history and eternity. So, Paul says, we can be certain of our appropriate reward for enthusiastic service. He calls this "the reward of the inheritance" (v. 24). This raises the issue of sonship. The son is adopted into the family of God, by the grace of God, as a sign of God's love for the adopted son. This adopted son is entitled to full inheritance. Paul says that the reward of faith serves as the inheritance.

Does Paul mean that the foundation of the inheritance is enthusiastic work? Yes. The question is: Who is the faithful servant who has enthusiastically served God? The answer is Jesus Christ. On the basis of His enthusiastic service to God, Jesus inherited the world (Matt. 28:18–20).⁶ As the Redeemer, which in the Mosaic covenant was the office of kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ transfers a share of the inheritance to each covenant-keeper. This transfer is based on grace. Yet Paul says that the transfer of the inheritance is based on service. So, to

5. Chapter 9.

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 48.

be consistent, we must say that the ability to serve faithfully and enthusiastically is a form of grace. James tells us that every good gift comes from heaven (James 1:17).⁷ Surely, the ability to serve God faithfully is a gift from heaven. It is not natural to man. Paul elsewhere wrote that the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14).

There is a promise of reward for enthusiastic service. This promise may not be fulfilled by each master. Paul tells servants not to serve as men-pleasers, but to serve God faithfully, for it is God who will hand out the reward of the inheritance. This inheritance is what a faithful servant wants as his reward. He wants to be part of the family. Paul tells him that he is part of the family of God. One mark of his membership in the family is his enthusiastic service.

Paul then goes on to speak of negative sanctions. These sanctions are imposed for wrongs committed by covenant-keepers. They are also wrongs committed by covenant-breakers. These are negative sanctions that are applied to disobedience. Paul quotes the Mosaic law⁸ when he says that there is no respect of persons (v. 25). This means that God does not look at who you are; He looks at what you have done. He assesses⁹ what you have done in terms of His law.¹⁰ Every covenant has a system of ethics. God applies a specific system of ethics to the words and deeds of every individual. He then pronounces judgment. Paul says that the person who goes wrong should expect to come under the negative sanctions of God.

Does this mean that individuals can lose their salvation? Paul insists otherwise.¹¹ Then what does Paul refer to? He is talking about wood, hay, and stubble (I Cor. 3:12).¹² Wood, hay, and stubble are metaphors for unproductive labor. Paul says that covenant-keepers who do not perform well are producers of wood, hay, and stubble. They do not lose their salvation, Paul says (I Cor. 3:15). They do lose any reward that effective and enthusiastic labor would have entitled

7. Chapter 33.

8. Deuteronomy 1:17; 10:17; 16:19.

9. Point four: judgment.

10. Point three: law.

11. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35) "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39).

12. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

men to. So, there is a system of rewards to which men are entitled: positive and negative. There is predictability both in history and eternity between performance and reward.

C. Predictability

The existence of a system of covenantal causation, which is based on ethics, is present in every social order and institution. There are standards of right and wrong; there is a time of judgment; and there are positive and negative sanctions handed out by superiors. *The biblical system of covenantal ethics is based on biblical law.* The Bible provides us with permanent standards of right and wrong. These standards provide standards of performance in history. So, Paul says, faithful work, meaning faithful service to a master, will produce the appropriate reward from God. He does not say that it will produce an appropriate reward from every master. The fact that a master does not reward faithful service appropriately should not be divisive for a covenant-keeping servant in his household. The reason for this is that the servant is not to be a man-pleaser anyway. *The servant is supposed to be a God-pleaser.* God is the source of predictable rewards. So, the covenant-keeper who obeys his master for the sake of obedience to Jesus Christ can be sure that in eternity there will be a day of reckoning. He will receive an appropriate reward. Paul says that this is to be a motivational factor in the life of every covenant-keeper.

Wherever this view of ethics is widespread, the predictability of servants increases. This means that masters can depend on their servants to perform effectively the tasks assigned by the masters. This increases the predictability of household service. It also increases the efficiency of production. *There is greater predictability, and therefore there is reduced waste.* Because men must set aside money to protect themselves against poor performance by their subordinates, the man who hires covenantally faithful servants has a competitive advantage. Because these covenantally faithful servants perform their work enthusiastically and effectively, the master needs to set aside a smaller quantity of money. The money that he would have set aside can then be used for capital expansion in his business.

When covenant-keepers adhere to Paul's command, they become more productive. *They become more productive because they are part of an enterprise which is marked by greater productivity.* It is probably also marked by greater innovation. Employers can trust employees to

perform effectively. Decision-makers at the top are enabled to make decisions regarding the future with less uncertainty. This gives them a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Employees benefit from this, just as the employers do.

In societies where there is widespread distrust, resistance against authority, and cheating based on envy, productivity is reduced. These societies cannot compete effectively against those societies that adhere to Paul's command. God rewards covenantally faithful societies, and He imposes negative sanctions on covenantally unfaithful societies (Deut. 28).¹³ A nation that wishes to grow richer should inculcate behavior that is hostile to acts of envy. An enthusiastic servant is not an envy-driven servant. He is not someone who wishes to tear down his master. Some servant who would do this would fall under Paul's condemnation of wrong behavior.

Conclusion

The reward of the inheritance is the ultimate reward is beyond history: final adoption into the family of God. Those who serve Christ receive this reward. They receive it based on His faithful service to God. He then distributes rewards to those who serve Him faithfully—again, by grace.

Society is based on a predictable relationship between ethics and rewards. Wherever covenant-keepers adhere to Paul's injunction, productivity increases. Output increases. Wealth increases. Senior decision-makers can trust their subordinates to perform without resentment and sabotage. To the degree that they imitate God and allocate rewards based on service, their enterprises are less likely to produce losses.

13. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing (1 Thes. 4:11–12).

The theocentric issue here is ethics: point three of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Mind Your Own Business

Americans have a phrase, “mind your own business.” It reflects an attitude of annoyance toward someone who is interfering with what someone else is doing. The assumption is that the critic has no legitimate authority to tell someone else how to do his work or how to run his life. The phrase applies to life in general, and rarely is the context business.

In this passage, “business” does refer to business. Paul is talking about a person’s occupation. He tells his readers and listeners that they should live quiet lives. They should not be busybodies or annoyances to other people. They should strive in their lives to become effective workers.

He says specifically that people should work with their own hands. This raises a question: Is he recommending manual labor? He was a manual laborer: a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).² This enabled him to avoid asking churches for financial support. It was a means of maintaining his independence. He referred to his financial independence in his let-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 8.

ter to the Corinthians. He pointed out that they were not his supporters (II Cor. 12:16–18). He was independent of them and their money.³

When he says that people should work with their hands, he has in mind that they labor for a market. He is telling them that the way to gain independence is to work for a living. If they gain their income from buyers of their services or goods, they can continue to earn the income they need.

Paul was well aware that there were occupations in which people do not work with their hands. Why refer to working with your hands? Why not just recommend work? He uses this phrase as a means of condemnation. Basic to Greek civilization was extensive slavery. The city of Athens in the time of Plato was probably one-third slaves.⁴ In Greece and Rome, it was considered socially unacceptable for a man of leisure to indulge in handicrafts. Socrates had been a mason, but he departed from this work to become a man of leisure. A tradesman did the work of slaves. Greek society rested on a hierarchy in which the leading politicians and intellectuals were landowners. They were not tradesmen; they were men of leisure. They might make their money through money-lending. They did not earn a living by getting their hands dirty. Paul tells people to get their hands dirty.

His commitment to manual labor, as a metaphor of work in general, represents a call to service. Through work, an individual can gain the necessities of life. Paul tells them that they should work so that they might lack nothing. He is not telling them that they should pursue luxuries or other marks of great wealth. He tells them that they should lack nothing that would be regarded as a necessity. They should not have as a goal great wealth; they also should not have as a goal public begging. This was also Solomon's advice (Prov. 30:7–9).⁵ They are to remain productive, but their productivity should not be limited by a social bias against manual labor.

B. Honest Dealing With Outsiders

He tells them that they should walk honestly toward those who are without. What does he mean? Does he mean those outside the church, or does he mean those without goods? This refers to those who are

3. Chapter 10.

4. A. H. M. Jones, "Slavery in the Ancient World," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., IX (1956), p. 187.

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 84.

outside the church. Jesus said, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables" (Mark 4:11). Paul wrote: "But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:13). Covenant-keepers are to deal honestly with covenant-breakers. In their occupations, covenant-keepers are to be honest toward all customers and prospective customers. If they do this, Paul says, they will lack nothing.

This command, when obeyed, produces hard-working, honest tradesmen who are known for their reliability in economic dealing. They gain a reputation for not cheating people. The risk of being cheated by them is dramatically reduced. This lowers the cost of doing business with them. When you reduce the cost of anything, more of it is demanded. By reducing the risk of being cheated, the Christian businessman increases the market for whatever it is that he sells. His reputation becomes a form of advertising. It therefore becomes a form of capital. The goal is to gain the trust of other people, who will come to rely on the services produced by covenant-keepers. The covenant-keeper is therefore to become a benefit to the community. This is a marketable benefit. Men gain more clients by gaining a reputation for honesty.

Paul is specifically calling people to a life of work. He tells covenant-keepers that they should not seek poverty as a lifestyle. They should not be in a position of not possessing the necessities of life. They should own these goods and services, for this is God's reward for honest dealing and hard work. *There is predictability between honesty and profitability.* The tradesmen who is honest in his dealings will not lack customers. If he does not lack customers, he does not lack the basic necessities of life. This is what Paul recommends.

C. Peace and Quiet

Paul tells them to be quiet. This does not mean that they should not talk. It means that they should not draw attention to themselves as troublemakers in the community. It means holding your peace. "And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go" (Luke 14:4). "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Paul wrote to Timothy, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and

giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1 Tim. 2:1–3).⁶

This strategy has an assumption: *time is on the side of covenant-keepers*. They do not need to revolt. They need to act peacefully, earn their livings, be reputable, and stay out of trouble. *This is a strongly anti-revolutionary strategy*. Paul studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel gave this advice to the temple officers regarding failed revolts.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed (Acts 5:36–37).

Gamaliel therefore advised that the apostles, as peaceful men, be left alone (v. 38). Paul knew about this. It was an attitude opposed to his at the time (Acts 8:1), but which he espoused later in his career as an apostle. Avoid revolution. Avoid confrontation.

Conclusion

Paul says that covenant-keepers should labor with their hands in honest work. This is the road to plenty. So is quiet. Deal honestly. Give no legitimate cause of complaint by enemies. By avoiding revolution and by productive work, we build the kingdom of God.

6. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

AGAINST THE WELFARE STATE

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (II Thes. 3:10–12).

The theocentric issue here was law: point three of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Limits on Church Charity

Paul admonishes the church at Thessalonica that it should impose this rule on members: *he who does not work, neither shall he eat*.

From the beginning of the church, poor people asked for and received assistance from the church. The office of deacon was created explicitly to take care of the widows who have no means of support (Acts 6:1–4).² But, also from the beginning, Paul set forth stringent rules regarding who was allowed to receive support from the local church, and who was not. He said that no widow who is under age 60 should receive support. He also said that no widow who had been married more than once should receive support (I Tim. 5:3–4).³ He said

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

3. "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work" (I Tim. 5:9–10). Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*,

that anyone who does not support a member of his family is worse than an infidel (I Tim. 5:8). All of these admonitions recognized the truth of a fundamental law of economics: *at zero price, there is greater demand than supply*. If the church supports everyone who comes in the door asking for a handout, the church will soon be impoverished.

Paul says there are limits on eligibility for receiving economic support from the church. He says that anyone who does not work should not eat at the church's expense. We should not assume that he meant that anyone who is a quadriplegic and who therefore cannot work should be allowed to starve. The context of his words make it clear that he is speaking of what we call able-bodied people. These are people who are physically capable of earning a living. They may not be able to earn a middle-class income, but they can earn enough to support themselves. Here is their assignment: "with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."

Paul wrote elsewhere that anyone who has food and clothing has all that he really needs (I Tim. 6:7–8).⁴ It is nice to have more, but it is not guaranteed by anybody or any institution. God does not guarantee it. *We are to be content with the basics of life*. If what we have will sustain our lives, we should not go looking for handouts from others.

B. The Welfare State

This admonition with respect to who is eligible for financial support from the church is at odds with modern government policy. From the initial legislation establishing the graduated income tax in the early decades of the twentieth century, civil governments have extracted taxes from residents and then transferred the money to the poor. Of course, middle-class employees of the civil government have extracted a large portion of this wealth for administration and handling. But civil governments have come in the name of the poor to the households of the rich and have demanded that the rich forfeit a portion of their income in order that the money can be used to support the poor.

There is nothing in the Mosaic law that would authorize such a transfer of wealth by the coercion of the state. There is nothing in the New Testament that would authorize it. It is clear from this passage that Paul is opposed to a covenant-keeper's asking for financial support from another covenant-keeper, if the first covenant-keeper is cap-

2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 224–26.

able of earning a living. If it is wrong for an able-bodied church member to receive financial support from the church when he is capable of working, then on what possible biblical basis can anyone make a case for using the coercive power of civil government to extract wealth from one group of citizens to transfer it to another group of citizens, when the recipients are capable of working? None.

The modern welfare state was created in the name of the poor. It was supported by advocates of what is called the Social Gospel. The Social Gospel promotes political policies of special-interest groups that use the power of the ballot box to force political change. The political change that the Social Gospel recommends is that the coercive power of the state be used to redistribute wealth. *This is why Social Gospel advocates are appalled by what Paul writes in this passage.* They try to reinterpret his words. Or they say that his words are no longer valid.

There is no escape from this passage. He who does not work, neither shall he eat, meaning neither shall he eat at the church's expense. A person who does not work, but who is capable of working, has neither a moral nor a legal claim on the church's support. But if he has no legal claim on the church, which is a voluntary institution, on what legal basis can anyone invoke the Bible to justify the existence of a legal claim on revenue collected by force from taxpayers? None.

If God wanted the welfare state to intervene to help those who are capable of working, yet refuse to work, then why did He curse the ground because of Adam's sin? Why did He deliberately force men to work in order to eat (Gen. 3:17–19)?⁵ If God did this with Adam, on what biblical bases can anyone legitimately claim that the modern welfare state is justified by the Bible? Why did God impose the curse on the ground, if His true intention was to create an economy in which civil government would use coercion to extract wealth from the rich to give to the poor.

Conclusion

Paul's admonition here protects the church from freeloaders and busybodies. Church leaders should learn to recognize hustlers who come in the name of their poverty and ask for support. Voters should do the same.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

THE CHRISTIAN TITHE

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus (Heb. 2:17—3:1).

A. The High Priest

The central theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews is Jesus Christ as God's High Priest. He is the High Priest in heaven. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession" (Heb. 4:14). He is not a Levitical priest. He is a Melchizedek High Priest. "Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:10). This doctrine lays the foundation of the Christian covenantal tithe.

For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace (Heb. 7:1–2).

The principle of the tithe was established by Melchizedek. He possessed ecclesiastical authority over Abram. Only when Abram acknowledged this by paying a tithe of his gains that he had made under Melchizedek's jurisdiction (Gen. 14) did God make Abram a household priest by covenant (Gen. 15; 17). The future lower priest tithed to the high priest.

Christians are the heirs of the Israelites as the kingdom of priests. Peter declared:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (I Peter 2:9–10).

This is John's meaning in Revelation: "... He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:6; NASB).

B. A Kingdom of Priests

The kingdom of priests under the Mosaic law was confessional and sacramental: citizens of Israel by profession of faith and by the sacraments. Here was the profession of faith: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:4–5). The sacraments were circumcision and Passover.

The kingdom of priests under the New Covenant is also confessional and sacramental: citizens of the Israel of God, the church (Gal. 6:16), by profession of faith and by the sacraments. Here is the confession.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9–10).

The sacraments are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

A kingdom of priests is marked by tithing: from lower priests to higher priests. To whom should Christians tithe as members of this kingdom? There are no Levites: a tribe set aside to defend the temple from trespassing and to sacrifice animals to placate God's wrath. There is only the functional-judicial equivalent of the tabernacle-temple, where the High Priest Jesus Christ resides judicially: the institutional church, which administers the sacraments of bread and wine to members of God's royal priesthood, just as Melchizedek did.

C. A Hierarchy of Priestly Tithing

Covenantally, by family representation, Levi paid his tithe through

Abraham to a superior priest.

But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? (Heb. 7:6–11).

The new law of the tithe is that Christians must pay their tithes to the local church, as the ecclesiastical representative (point two) of the High Priest. They are under a hierarchy of authority (point two). There is a new law of tithing, for there has been a change in the priesthood: from Levi to Melchizedek. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12).

Christians are priests through Jesus. How? Through adoption. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4–5). We are priests through adoption into the family of the High Priest. The transfer of the priestly line from Levi to Melchizedek marked the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood” (Heb. 7:22–24).

The lower priest pays a tithe to the higher priest. This is the covenantal structure of the tithe. The Melchizedekan priesthood is the biblical model of the high priest.

The tithe is no longer exclusively agricultural. There is no holy land in Palestine. There are no family farms based on an original inheritance established by the military genocide of Canaan. Holy land now encompasses whatever is made holy—set apart—through ownership by Christians. That which we redeem—buy back—from the kingdom of mammon is made holy: set aside because it is under our lawful jurisdiction. This is our inheritance from God, and it is the inheritance that we leave behind to our heirs. God’s High Priest therefore deserves

His tithe on the net output of this inheritance. This is a matter of godly inheritance.

D. Guilt and Government

By placing a minimum on what men owe, God's Bible-revealed law reduces the burden of guilt. The person who pays his tithe to his local congregation has met his legal obligation to God. If God calls him to give more than a tithe, this request can be regarded as a special obligation, one that is in some way consistent with the special situation of the donor. The situation is not normal. The general obligation has both a floor and a ceiling: a tithe.

The man who sees his obligation as greater than ten percent has some reason to think this. He could be incorrect. If he makes a mistake here, there is no reason for him to worry that he has not done enough for God. A mistake is not a moral infraction. He has met the minimum requirement with his tithe.

The reduction of guilt is important for building men and societies that are innovative. Bearing measurable risk or unmeasurable uncertainty is important in overcoming the limits placed on the creation by God's curse (Genesis 3:17–19).¹ A man who is burdened by guilt has trouble functioning in a balanced manner. He never knows when he will receive negative sanctions for his rebellion. Guilt can produce workaholics, but it can also produce alcoholics. Overcoming guilt is not to be a motivation for extending the kingdom of God in history. Such motivation places too much reliance on the works of men in pleasing God.

Paul's ministry could be interpreted as the work of a man attempting to overcome guilt. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (I Timothy 1:15). It would be a mistake to see Paul as guilt-motivated. He continued: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Timothy 1:16). His call into service to God began with God's mercy. That was what had overcome his guilt. His work was a response to this legal condition of judicial innocence. He was first among sinners and first among the redeemed. His life was to serve as a

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

pattern for others similarly redeemed from guilt.

To preach the covenantal tithe is to show a way to covenant-keepers to escape from guilt. The tithe places an explicit limit on what covenant-keepers owe God, and through which institution they owe it. It enables them to find an escape from this trap of guilt:

... someone may still ask: “But how *much* should I give?”

There is no universal answer to that question. All Christians should give something, but there is not a universal amount or percentage required. Each believer must look at their situation in life, their church, and those around them to seek out possible needs. Furthermore, a mindset focused on eternity, and not the moment, will desire to give sacrificially to God’s work on the earth. From some paychecks God may require one hundred percent, from others five percent. Obedience to his leading is key.²

This doctrine of *indeterminate economic obligation* transfers a load of guilt to the covenant-keeper. Under the Mosaic covenant, God intervened in history through Moses to prohibit the congregation from giving too much in the wilderness, before the tithe was formally instated as a binding legal obligation on Israel.

And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much (Ex. 36:5–7).³

In the post-A.D. 70 New Covenant era, God’s covenantal agents do not lawfully speak with this degree of authority. The Bible does; ordained agents do not. So, if the Bible does not speak authoritatively on the matter of what percentage of their income covenant-keepers owe to God, what is to restrain them in their quest to find peace in their minds regarding what they owe to God? By God’s specially revealed grace, the Bible does set forth this limit. God demands a minimum token payment of ten percent. He who meets this requirement can live

2. David Croteau, “A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Tithing: Toward a Theology of Giving in the New Covenant Era,” a Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (2005), p. 266.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 56.

guilt-free with respect to what he owes to God. Anything beyond this is judicially optional. We should call such optional payments “offerings.”

Paul gave far more than a tithe. He recounted his suffering for the gospel.

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (II Corinthians 11:23–27).

His was not a normal Christian life, but it was consistent with the call to comprehensive sacrifice. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1–2).⁴

Then why doesn’t God require more than a tithe? Because the tithe is judicially representative. It declares, “I give up ten percent of my net income as a symbol of my subordination.” God has established a symbol of subordination: the tithe. This low percentage is sufficient to eliminate most of those whose faith is not sufficient to identify them as reliable leaders. They do not obey; so, they are not reliable to lead. They refuse to adhere to the terms of the church covenant; so, they should not be allowed to impose ecclesiastical sanctions, which includes voting in church elections. He who does not acknowledge the legitimacy of covenantal sanctions above him should not be allowed to impose covenantal sanctions on those below him. We understand this hierarchical principle in family government and civil government. Many Christians do not understand it in church government.

The problem is, too many pastors are not convinced that God has mandated a tithe for today’s Christians. They do not preach coven-

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

antal tithing. Congregations do not use the tithe to differentiate voting members from non-voting communicant members. The result is a weakening of church authority and a reduction of church income. Pastors are reduced to begging their congregations to fund the work of Christ's kingdom. This fosters a mental image of Jesus as a beggar. He is not a beggar. He is the high priest who deserves the tithe.

Conclusion

The New Covenant tithe is a priestly tithe. The lower priest pays to the higher priest, as was the case under the Melchizedekan priesthood. The debt is owed to God in response to His grace shown to His covenantally faithful people. They have become priests by adoption into God's holy family. They are members of the Melchizedekan priesthood, not the Levitical. With this honor comes an obligation to tithe.

The tithe did not exist before Melchizedek. As the high priest in his family, Abram paid his tithe to this high priest. He was operating in Melchizedek's territory. He owed him a token payment as a way to demonstrate priestly subordination. So do household priests in the New Covenant. They pay to the High Priest, Jesus Christ, by way of His agency of priestly collection: the local congregation. It possesses covenantal authority as the protector of the sacraments.

A QUESTION OF TRUST

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5–6).

The theocentric issue here was God as the deliverer: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Covetousness

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews reiterates a point made in other epistles: covenant-keepers must avoid covetousness. He makes another point that we can find in Paul's teachings: we must be content. "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).² "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:8).³

The prohibition against covetousness is found in the Ten Commandments.⁴ The tenth Commandment forbids coveting anything which belongs to our neighbor. Covetousness is a form of lust. Men are convinced that they must possess something that belongs to another person. They have no peace in their hearts, because the other person possesses that which they desire. Paul made it clear, and this

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Chapter 22.

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Ppint Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 30.

epistle makes it clear, that to be covetous is to indulge in sin.⁵

Discontent must be rooted out of our lives. *We must be content with the things that we have.* This contentment must reflect our belief that God has given us whatever we need to extend His kingdom. There is consistency among what we have received from God, what we have done to extend His kingdom, and what we must do to extend it even more. Contentment applies to whatever we own or make use of. Contentment refers to that which we enjoy for ourselves. To be discontented is to pursue relentlessly a lifestyle that we do not possess. Jesus said that no man can serve two masters: he must serve either God or Mammon (Matt. 6:24). Mammon is the God of self-indulgence. Mammon's theology is simple: "More for me in history."⁶

To guard against Mammon, we must discipline ourselves not to fall into the trap of believing that we do not possess enough wealth to provide ourselves with the lifestyle we believe we deserve. Contentment refers to anything we own for our own use. It also refers to our desire to extend our sphere of influence for the sake of the kingdom of God. The desire to extend the kingdom of God in history is legitimate. Paul refers to this as pressing on to the mark of the high calling of God (Phil. 3:14).⁷ There is nothing here that would tell us that we should be content with respect to our efforts to extend the kingdom of God in history. Paul wrote that we are not to be weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9;⁸ II Thes. 3:13).

B. The Ground of Our Security

The author justifies on this basis his command that we be content the things that we possess: Jesus has said that He will never leave us nor forsake us. This means that our protection is in the hands of Jesus. We should rely on Jesus rather than money as the basis of our protection. This is consistent with Jesus' command to worship God rather than Mammon. If we trust in the work of our hands—the money and goods generated by the work of our hands—we lean on a bruised reed (II Kings 18:21). *The creation is not reliable. God is reliable.* The author says that we should be able to say, "the Lord is my helper." Here, he cites the twenty-third psalm. Yet if we read the twenty-third psalm,

5. Chapter 23.

6. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

7. Chapter 21.

8. Chapter 13.

David declares that he will be visibly blessed by God in the presence of his enemies. Is this a form of Mammon worship? No. It is merely the desire to be publicly recognized by God for the covenantally faithful performance of one's assignment.

The author also says that we should be able to say, "I will not fear what man shall do to me." David said that he walked through the valley of the shadow of death and feared no evil. This is the same attitude recommended here: an attitude of confidence. This is not self-confidence. This is confidence in the promises of God. This is the correct attitude for a covenant-keeper regarding the predictable positive sanctions of God in response to obedience to the Bible revealed law of God (Deut. 28:1–14).⁹

C. Daily Bread

The author is not introducing new doctrines in this passage. He is restating old doctrines in a succinct way. He gets right to the point. The point is that covetousness and discontent with our position in life are violations of the law of God. God says that man should not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3). This is the passage which Jesus quoted to Satan in the wilderness, when Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread (Matt. 4:4).¹⁰ Jesus resisted the temptation in the name of God. He appealed to the word of God, which declares a predictable cause-and-effect relationship between covenant-keeping in history and success in history.

It was not the Jesus did not think that bread is a good idea. He resisted the idea that He should use supernatural power to overcome the limits of scarcity. There is a proper procedure for gaining access to our daily bread. One of them is prayer (Matt. 6:11).¹¹ Another is diligent work. We are not to use shortcuts in achieving our economic goals. A shortcut would be a procedure to achieve increased income apart from God's blessing. God is the provider of blessings in this life, James teaches. Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17).¹² There is nothing wrong with asking God to increase our income. There is everything wrong with pursuing increased income apart from God's calling in our lives. God may have great economic blessings to deliver to us in

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

10. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 1.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 12.

12. Chapter 33.

response to our efforts to extend the kingdom of God in history. Such blessings are a form of capital. It takes capital to build a civilization. *The kingdom of God is a civilization. It takes capital to build it.* Our desire to increase our supply of capital as a means of extending the kingdom of God in history is not only legitimate, it is mandatory. This is the lesson of the parable of the talents. Jesus told the story of a ruler who went into a far country and left his servants in charge of his economic affairs. On his return, he greatly blessed the servant who achieved the highest rate of return on the capital which was entrusted to him. He cursed a steward who earned no increase (Matt. 25:14–30).¹³ The point of the parable is not that it is a good idea to make a lot of money. The point of the parable is to gain a positive rate of return on whatever gifts God has entrusted to you.

This is the difference between serving God and serving Mammon. When you serve God faithfully, you can expect that you will be the recipient of positive sanctions in history. These sanctions serve as a means of confirming God's covenant (Deut. 8:17–19).¹⁴ They are part of the ethical cause-and-effect system that God revealed to Israel through Moses (Deut. 28).¹⁵ This ethical system is predictable. It applies to history. It applies to individuals, and it also applies to covenanted institutions. It applies to churches, families, and civil governments. It applies to businesses.

D. Success Indicators

The mistake that men make is to pursue the success indicators rather than success.¹⁶ They forget what the basis of their success is: faithfulness to the word of God. Jesus did not forget, and He reminded Satan of this principle. The goal is not the money; the goal is expanding the kingdom of God in history. The means *the expansion of capital* under our individual covenants with God. As stewards, we are to multiply the goods under our jurisdiction. These goods are to be put to effective use of the kingdom of God in history.

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 47.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21, 22.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

16. On the distinction between success and success indicators, see Gary North, *The Five Pillars of Biblical Success* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2008), pp. 42–43, 52, 54, 59, 65–66, 106–7, 110–15, 123, 128, 142, 162–64.

1. Mammon

When men worship success indicators, they worship Mammon. This is another way of saying that they worship themselves. They say to themselves, “more for me in history.” They use whatever skills they possess to increase their wealth. They do not pursue wealth in order to testify to covenantal faithfulness of the God of the Bible. Wealth is used to testify to the glory of some other source of blessings in history. Usually, it is used to testify to the creative power of the person who accumulated wealth.

The question is this: Who gets the glory? American Christians sing a hymn, “to God be the glory, great things He hath done.” This is a powerful testimony. It should not simply be the testimony of our singing; it should be the testimony of our lives.

When it is clear to others that a covenant-keeper regards his success as a blessing given by God for the sake of the kingdom, he is not suspected of being a worshiper of Mammon. People understand that he is not pursuing wealth for the sake of accumulating a testimony to his own productivity. *He is accumulating wealth in order to put it to effective use for God.*

This passage is a condemnation of the practice known in the United States as “keeping up with the Joneses.” Keeping up with the Joneses is a form of covetousness. It is the quest for the lifestyle of someone who is regarded as successful. The lifestyle of the other person may not be the result of a systematic pursuit of the kingdom of God in history. So, when a covenant-keeper seeks to imitate this lifestyle, he is doing so on the wrong footing. He is seeking the success indicator rather than success.

2. Right Hand and Left Hand

The individual is told by Christ that the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing (Matt. 6:3).¹⁷ The context of this warning was charitable giving. Men are not to parade their giving in front of other men. Then how can they present evidence to people around them that they are faithful stewards of God’s resources, and at the same time not use their charitable activities as a testimony to their own efforts to leave behind a reputation?

The classic example of this in American history is Andrew Carne-

17. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 11.

gie. He accumulated the greatest amount of private wealth in the world by 1900, and on January 1, 1901, on the day the twentieth century began, banker J. Pierpont Morgan called Carnegie to tell him that he was now the richest man in the world. Carnegie through Morgan had just sold Carnegie Steel to a group of investors who soon created United States Steel. He then gave away almost all of his wealth. But he did not believe in God. He believed in himself. He put his name on his various foundations. He made sure that the world knew that he was the source of his charitable gifts.

The other super-rich men of his generation imitated him. John D. Rockefeller created the Rockefeller Foundation and various other Rockefeller charitable organizations. Henry Ford created the Ford Foundation. They put their names on their foundations so that no one would forget who had been the source of the funding. The richest Calvinist who ever lived, J. Howard Pew, did the same thing in the mid-1950s. He was the head of Sun Oil Company. He created the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The right hand should not know what the left hand is doing with respect to charitable donations. It is a mistake in all cases to put your own name on the charitable organization that you establish with your own money. This is a means of testifying to the world regarding your own charitable impulse. The correct goal is to put the money to good use, not to get credit for having done so. The only justification for letting some people know that you are the source of the funding is because you want people with similar wealth to learn the techniques of giving away their wealth effectively. Your peers should know of your generosity as a testimony to them regarding the correct use of great wealth. The general public should not be made aware of the source of the funding.

An obvious way for a rich person to demonstrate that he is not caught in the religion of Mammon is for him to adopt the visible lifestyle of someone considerably less wealthy. Two famous individuals in modern American history who did this were Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart, and Warren Buffett, generally regarded as the most successful investor in history. Both of them lived in comparatively moderate houses, which they did not sell when they became multi-billionaires. Everyone knew they were rich, and people also noted that both men were committed to charity. But the visible proof of their commitment was the fact they did not pursue the trappings of great wealth. They proved that they were committed to their work, rather than to

the wealth which their success as entrepreneurs generated.

Conclusion

We are not to covet other people's goods or lifestyles. We are to be content with whatever we own. We are to trust in Jesus as our protector. These warnings have fallen on many deaf ears for two millennia.

Assets that we put to use for God's kingdom are legitimate. The pursuit of these assets is legitimate. They are tools of dominion.

31

CHARITY AS SACRIFICE

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb. 13:14–16).

The theocentric issue here was subordination to God: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. A Command

We are told to do good and communicate. The Greek word translated here as “communicate” is elsewhere translated as “contribution” and “distribution.”

For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26).

Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection into the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men (II Cor. 9:13).

The author of Hebrews makes an important point here. He identifies charitable giving as a form of sacrifice. He says that this sacrifice is pleasing to God.

The Bible recommends charity. Covenant-keepers are called on by the authors of many biblical texts to use their resources to help the poor. This is not a call to universal charity. It is a call to selective char-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

ity.² Poor people who have fallen into hard times through no fault of their own are deserving of consideration. People who have sufficient wealth to meet their basic necessities are asked to give to the poor. This is a call to voluntary action; it is not a matter of ecclesiastical discipline. It is also not a matter of compulsion by the civil government. It is a call to personal sacrifice.

We are no longer asked to sacrifice animals on an altar. The epistle to the Hebrews conveys this message above all other messages: Jesus Christ is the high priest who served as the sacrificial lamb to placate the wrath of God. He did this once. No additional blood sacrifice is required by God.

The author goes on to say, however, that sacrificial offerings still please God. The form of sacrificial offering that pleases God is charitable giving. This is not a means of atonement. It is a means of helping people who have fallen into hard times through no fault of their own. This is not a call to subsidize indolence or laziness. The author says that God is pleased with this form of sacrifice. Yet this form of sacrifice, no less than the various forms of sacrifice under the Mosaic law, must not itself be lawless. We are not to subsidize evil-doing. The goal is to help those people who have fallen into hard times, so that they can become productive members of society once again.

There is no hint in this passage that charity is to be indiscriminate. There is also no hint that charity is anything except a voluntary decision on the part of someone who possesses assets to transfer a portion of these assets to someone who is in need. This is not a call for universal charity; it is a call for individual charity by covenant-keepers. There is no suggestion that civil government is in any way responsible for establishing programs of charitable giving.

B. Economic Theory and Charity

Economists have been successful in developing a very sophisticated analytical approach to understanding economic affairs by applying the auction principle of *high bid wins*. This is one of the most powerful analytical strategies ever developed in the social sciences, but it is not a universal principle of human action. It offers no advantage in forecasting economic events when applied to voluntary realms outside

2. Ray R. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9. (<http://bit.ly/gntheon>)

the free market system of exchange. Economists do not have analytical tools for explaining charity. Similarly, they have little to say about economic relationships within a family. Economists do not speak of a charitable gift in the way that they speak of a market expenditure. There is no widely agreed-upon, self-correcting institutional arrangement for assessing and rewarding the efficiency of charity. There is for the free market: profit and loss. This is why charity resists economic analysis.

Charitable giving is a form of behavior that can be explained in terms of a hierarchy of values.³ Few people place charitable giving as high on their hierarchy of values as they place getting rich. Jesus knew this as well as any modern economist does. The difference is, Jesus warned against this motivation. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul” (Matt. 16:26)?⁴ Economists may attempt to perform some kind of economic analysis based on expectations of God’s rewards beyond the grave. This would be a legitimate conceptual approach. Jesus taught that there are such rewards beyond the grave. More than this: Jesus specifically recommended charitable giving in this life so as to accumulate wealth beyond the grave, which is a form of wealth that does not rust and thieves do not break in to steal.⁵ But this passage resists that kind of economic analysis. Here, the author says that the issue is sacrifice. A person sacrifices wealth in this world for the sake of pleasing God. The author does not mention positive sanctions of any kind. All he says is that sacrifice by people with assets does please God.

The economist is always in search of a quid pro quo. He wants to know why someone surrenders wealth to another person. If there is no reciprocity, the economist is baffled. His analytical toolbox is ineffective in explaining why people give assets or time to others. He has a great deal of difficulty in using the principle of high bid wins in explaining the sacrifice on the part of a mother for her child. It would be analytically possible for the economist to explain this in terms of the

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 25:A.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

5. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:19–20). *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

mother's expectations of a future stream of income: voluntary gifts from an adult child—if the child's spouse agrees. The economist would say that the mother discounts this expected stream of income by a market rate of interest. But such an argument sounds preposterous. To explain a mother's sacrifice for her child in terms of reciprocity is to indulge in academic silliness. This is another way of saying that there are voluntary social institutions in which the market principle of high bid wins either makes no sense or leads to predictions that do not consistently come true.

C. Economic Growth and Charity

The economist looks at a person's decision whether to invest 10% of his net worth in his business. This business will enable him to hire additional workers, purchase more raw materials, build a factory, or gain control over something beneficial to the structure of production. The economist says that this expenditure is a benefit to society as a whole. It employs people; it increases the number of choices of customers; and it may provide a profit for the investor. The economist looks at this and thinks: "This makes more sense than giving away 10% of the person's net worth to charity."

In terms of the history of economic growth, this argument is easy to defend. Economists can show that societies that have been characterized by high rates of saving have also been characterized by a rate of economic growth that is higher than the growth rate achieved by societies that are not marked by high rates of saving. Beginning in Great Britain in the mid-eighteenth century, thrift has funded entrepreneurial ventures, which in turn have led to compound economic growth on a scale that has transformed Western civilization.⁶

Someone who studies the economic effects of charity can find nothing comparable to the poverty-reducing effects of a steady investment of wealth in privately owned businesses. He may see that a particular society is characterized by a high rate of charitable giving. There is no way to demonstrate that charitable giving increases society's productivity. Charity does not always provide tools of production.

6. There is a major problem with explaining the lack of growth before 1750, and even before 1800. The most important question in the discipline of economic history (I would say all of history) is this one: What caused the advent of sustained economic growth? So far, the academic world has no answer. Dierdre N. McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), chaps. 14–40. We await McCloskey's third volume.

It does sustain life and some degree of comfort for a few people. This benefit relates to income rather than production.

The economist who studies the impact of high rates of thrift generally neglects the fact that a society with high rates of charitable giving has a social safety net. Charity has a “free rider” or spillover effect. It provides a sense of safety for members of a society. They know that failure need not be deadly. In this sense, *charitable giving is a form of social capital*. It provides a safety net and therefore a sense of confidence within those circles that are most vulnerable to economic setbacks. The economic category of “charity” does not enable an economist to make what appear to be scientific correlations among charitable giving, capital investment, and economic growth. Yet the logic of charitable giving is clear: it is a form of social capital.

When people trust God to intervene in history in order to save them from unexpected disasters, they believe that they can afford to take greater risks in their economic decisions. One way that He intervenes is through the gospel, which recommends charitable giving. People can afford to make investments in higher-risk ventures precisely because they believe that they will not be facing life-and-death consequences if the investment turns sour.

Charitable giving, when it is widespread in a society, reduces fear on the part of the poor. This can lead in some cases to indolence. It can also lead to greater entrepreneurship and greater productivity. It depends upon the moral character of those who regard charitable giving as providing a safety net for their daily lives.

Economists who focus their attention on capital investment as a means of reducing poverty should give attention to the relationship between increased charitable giving and increased capital investment. It is possible that people save more money than they would otherwise have saved because they believe that if they lose their money, they will not die. They do not have to make an all-or-nothing decision: a safe investment vs. poverty. They have a fall-back position. They can then make higher-risk investments that may provide them with income in the future.

The Bible does not teach the doctrine of compound economic growth as the exclusive product of increased per capita investment. The Bible teaches compound economic growth as a positive sanction

for obeying biblical laws (Deut. 8:17–18,⁷ 28:1–14⁸). The Bible does not teach that members of societies that want to grow economically should take their money—money that would have been spent for charitable purposes—and invest all of it in the stock market. In contrast, free market economists recommend investing, not charity, because their analytical framework does not offer any reliable conclusions regarding the role of charity in economic growth. They see economic growth as the main solution to poverty in the long run.⁹ In contrast, the Bible focuses on the needs of the poor in the present.

D. Darwinism vs. Charity

William Jennings Bryan was a politically liberal American politician who received the Democratic Party's nomination for President three times.¹⁰ He was also a conservative Presbyterian elder. He opposed Darwinism. The reason why he opposed it had little to do with the details of evolution or the biblical text in Genesis 1. He opposed it because of Darwinism's opposition to Christian ethics—specifically, charity.

Bryan recognized that a ruthless hostility to charity was the dark side of Darwinism. Had Darwin's theory been irrelevant, he said, it would have been harmless. "This hypothesis, however, does incalculable harm. It teaches that Christianity impairs the race physically. That was the first implication at which I revolted. It led me to review the doctrine and reject it entirely."¹¹ He cited the notorious (and morally inescapable) passage in Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871): "With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to small-pox. Thus the weak mem-

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

9. F. A. Harper, "The Greatest Economic Charity," in Mary Sennholz (ed.), *On Freedom and Free Enterprise: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1956), ch. 7. ([Http://Mises.org/books/freeenterprise.pdf](http://Mises.org/books/freeenterprise.pdf))

10. 1896, 1900, 1908.

11. William Jennings Bryan, *In His Image* (New York: Revell, 1922), p. 107.

bers of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man.”¹² He could have continued to quote from the passage until the end of the paragraph: “It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.”¹³ It is significant that Darwin at this point footnoted his cousin Francis Galton’s famous 1865 *Macmillan’s* magazine article and his book, *Hereditary Genius*, a defense of scientific human breeding: eugenics.

Darwin in the next paragraph wrote that sympathy, “the noblest part of our nature,” leads men to do these racially debilitating things.¹⁴ Bryan replied: “Can that doctrine be accepted as scientific when its author admits that we cannot apply it ‘without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature’? On the contrary, civilization is measured by the moral revolt against the cruel doctrine developed by Darwin.”¹⁵

Darwin was taken very seriously by many Progressives on the matter of charity. In her book, *The Pivot of Civilization* (1922), Margaret Sanger criticized the inherent cruelty of charity. She insisted that organized efforts to help the poor are the “surest sign that our civilization has bred, is breeding, and is perpetuating constantly increasing numbers of defectives, delinquents, and dependents.”¹⁶ Such charity must be stopped, she insisted. The fertility of the working class must be regulated in order to reduce the production of “benign imbeciles, who encourage the defective and diseased elements of humanity in their reckless and irresponsible swarming and spawning.”¹⁷ Swarming (like insects), spawning (like fish): here was marvelous zoological rhetoric from the lionized founder of Planned Parenthood. “If we must have welfare, give it to the rich, not the poor,” she concluded.¹⁸ “More children from the fit, less from the unfit: that is the chief issue of birth control.”¹⁹

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–108.

13. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: Modern Library, [1871] n.d.), p. 501.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 502.

15. Bryan, *In His Image*, p. 109.

16. Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York: Brentano’s, 1922), p. 108; cited in Grant, *Grand Illusions*, p. 27.

17. Sanger, *ibid.*, p. 115; cited in Grant, *ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 96; cited in Grant, *ibid.*, p. 28.

19. Sanger, “Birth Control,” *Birth Control Review* (May 1919); cited in Grant, *ibid.*, p. 27.

Conclusion

The author of Hebrews taught that charitable giving is a form of sacrifice that is pleasing to God. He spends no time on capital investment. He does not discuss charitable giving as a means of adding to social capital. Yet this is one implication of charitable giving. It reduces personal risk, for it takes care of those people who have fallen into hard times through no fault of their own.

The economist who favors the use of tax money to support the poor prefers tax-funded welfare programs to charitable giving. He also prefers this to increased per capita investment. The Bible provides no support for this view. It also does not support a society in which all of the money that would otherwise have gone to charitable purposes be invested in the stock market or some similar institution.

The Bible calls on covenant-keepers to give sacrificially, as a way to please God, to please the church, and to please our fellow men. Charity has positive effects on society as a whole. It decreases fear of the future. This frees up men to become more entrepreneurial. And more charitable.

BELOW-COST WISDOM

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:5–8).

The theocentric issue was two-fold: point two, hierarchy, and point four, sanctions.¹

A. Wisdom Through Prayer

James announces that it is possible to obtain wisdom through prayer. The author of the book of Proverbs says that wisdom is more valuable than gold and silver (Prov. 16:16). It is superior to rubies (Prov. 8:11). “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7). Combining these announcements, we legitimately conclude that the most precious of all economic assets is available for free the asking.

This is an astounding assertion. It runs counter to the fundamental assertion of modern economics, namely, that there is no such thing as a free lunch. All of modern economics begins with the assumption of scarcity: *at zero price, there is greater demand than supply*. James says that, with respect to the most valuable of all scarce resources, scarcity can be overcome through prayer. Prayer takes time. More important, prayer takes faith. James goes on to say that faith is the key ingredient in successful prayer.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 2, 3. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), chaps. 2, 3.

B. Rival Economic Assumptions

Humanistic economics begins with the assumption of scarcity. Humanistic economics does not believe in prayer as a way to overcome scarcity. It does not believe in the existence of a sovereign God who exists outside of the space-time continuum, and who intervenes in history in terms of people's prayers. To affirm such a God is to affirm a limit on the laws of nature. An economist is no more prepared to affirm this than a Darwinian scientist in any other field is prepared to admit it.

In contrast, Christian economics begins with the assumption that God is absolutely sovereign over the creation: point one of the biblical covenant.² Its second point, following the second principle of the biblical covenant, is that there is a hierarchy in creation: God > man > creation. God is sovereign over the creation, and covenant-keeping people are His stewards. They imitate Him as creatures. God created the world by means of wisdom. "The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens" (Prov. 3:19). Covenant-keepers re-create when they use wisdom to extend God's kingdom in history. They can gain God's intervention on their behalf by means of prayer. This means that, at bottom, physical scarcity is a relative limiting factor, but it is not an absolute limiting factor. Scarcity can be overcome by a specific form of appeal to God to intervene to overcome the limits of creation.

Humanistic economists are willing to admit that human creativity is a way to re-structure the creation to meet the desires of men. They see creativity in terms of man's sovereignty over nature. But they deny that there is any source of knowledge above man and outside of nature. There is no authoritative source of knowledge or creativity that is outside of the space-time continuum and not subject to it, according to humanism. Some humanistic economists may be sufficiently alert to modern epistemology to understand that Kant's noumenal realm is seen by Kantian philosophers as being a realm outside the space-time continuum, but Kantian philosophers have never identified a bridge between the two realms. The phenomenal realm of scientific causation and the noumenal realm of ethics and freedom are totally separate. Only by such separation can philosophers preserve the ideal of human personality and human freedom from the determinism of scientific

2. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 1.

cause and effect.³ But this separation necessarily destroys any logical bridge from ethics and freedom back into nature.⁴ So, the consistent Kantian economist sees no hope in prayer as a way to gain relevant knowledge about the scarcity-bound cosmos.

The creation operates under scarcity, but it is possible to overcome these limits by a specific form of appeal to God. God intervenes in history to overcome the limits which the curse on Adam established (Gen. 3:17–19).⁵ This is not to say that scarcity did not exist in the garden of Eden. It did exist. Adam was not omniscient. He could not achieve every goal simultaneously. He therefore had work to do. But scarcity in Eden was not cursed.⁶ It is today. Prayer can overcome the limits of cursed scarcity because it enables the person who prays to gain access to the uniquely valuable asset: wisdom.

Because wisdom is available to covenant-keepers, those covenant-keepers who refuse to take advantage of this offer of what is a below-cost economic resource are hampering their efforts in history. They are not invoking the sovereignty of God through prayer. They are not gaining the wisdom they need at a price they can afford in order to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).⁷ They are not appealing to God to intervene in their lives and provide them with information that is not available at the same price to covenant-break-

3. Richard Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1914] 1956).

4. Cornelius Van Til returned again and again to the dualism of post-Kantian philosophy. Here is a representative example. "On Kant's view (so largely adopted by subsequent philosophers, be it with modifications) man is utterly free as a citizen of the noumenal realm, the Real world, the world prior to the categorizing process of the mind of man, and utterly determined as a citizen of the phenomenal realm. As a citizen of the noumenal realm he cannot know himself or his fellow man. As soon as he tries to explain himself as free he has to do so by means of the categories of the phenomenal realm. He must explain himself causally and when he explains himself causally then he has explained his freedom out of existence. To be sure, there is the contingency idea which, as already noted, is one constituent element of the world of phenomena. But then when man appeals to this pure contingency in nature for an explanation of his moral freedom, he reduces his freedom to the freedom of pure chance. Thus man seeks to explain himself in terms of nature but this nature is itself explained in terms of a combination of pure fate and pure chance. The result is the purely meaningless and therefore chaos." Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), p. 313.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

6. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), pp. 124–26. (<http://bit.ly/gn-world>)

7. Chapter 20.

ers. They are in a position to gain an advantage over covenant-breakers, because they have access to a God who intervenes on behalf of His covenant-keeping people. He is willing to provide the crucial economic asset merely on request.

James says that it is mandatory that the person who prays for divine wisdom believe that God intervenes in history to give His people wisdom on request. Without confidence in the outcome of the prayer, the person who prays is a double-minded person. "For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." James says a double-minded person operates at a disadvantage. He says we must be single-minded in our pursuit of wisdom.

C. Hierarchy of Priorities

Wisdom is crucial in the extension of the kingdom of God in history. Wisdom provides covenant-keepers with a hierarchy of priorities that in turn enables them to allocate scarce economic resources efficiently and ethically. "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward [fraudulent] things" (Prov. 2:10–12). Because they see how their resources should be allocated in order to extend the kingdom of God on a cost-effective basis, they are supposed to pray to God in order to receive wisdom. Not to do this would be to compete against covenant-breakers on their terms. God does not recommend that His people waste resources in their efforts to extend the kingdom of God in history. Thus, He calls upon covenant-keepers to pray in faith to Him to gain wisdom, just as Solomon prayed to Him to gain wisdom (I Kings 3:9).

When an individual adopts the hierarchy of values and therefore the hierarchy of priorities which God has for his life, and then allocates scarce economic resources to achieve these priorities, he conserves resources. This enables him to achieve priorities that are further down the list of priorities which God has for his life. He is therefore able to achieve more in his life with the resources he possesses. *This is the biblical concept of efficiency.* He should not waste resources in the vain pursuit of goals which are not on God's list of priorities for him.

Because God is willing to provide wisdom on this low-cost basis, more of it should be demanded. A fundamental law of economics is this: *at a lower price, more is demanded.* God's offer of wisdom re-

quires that individuals have faith in the sovereignty of God over history, and that He intervenes in history on behalf of covenant-keepers who pray to Him for wisdom. The absence of such faith is a barrier in the pursuit of wisdom. People should surrender their faith in the sovereignty of self-proclaimed autonomous man. They must also abandon their faith in the sovereignty of autonomous nature. They must adopt the fundamental principle of the biblical covenant model: the absolute sovereignty of God. If they refuse to start here, they pray as double-minded people. Double-minded people do not receive their verbal requests.

God wants His people to be single-minded people. That is, He wants them to be confident in their requests to God to intervene on their behalf in history. As they gain greater confidence in this regard, they become more effective servants. They become better able to allocate scarce economic resources in their efforts to extend the kingdom of God in history. They become more efficient. The concept of stability in decisionmaking is based on the concept of the single-minded purpose of covenant-keepers in their quest to extend the kingdom of God in history.

D. Compound Growth

In order to gain wisdom, we need wisdom. Wisdom begins, the Proverbs tell us, with faith in God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). The greater an individual’s faith in God, the more wisdom he possesses. It takes wisdom to get wisdom.

In this sense, *wisdom is a positive covenant sanction*. God gives wealth to individuals and societies in order to confirm His covenant. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).⁸ This concept of *covenant confirmation through positive feedback* also applies to wisdom. A double-minded person is an unwise person. Such a person prays for wisdom, but he is unlikely to gain greater wisdom. This is because he lacks the wisdom of confident prayer.

Wisdom is ultimately a gift of God. James affirms later in this pas-

8. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

sage that all gifts come from God (1:17).⁹ The gift of wisdom comes from God. It is extended in history through prayer. Praying with confidence for greater wisdom results in greater wisdom, which increases the covenant-keeper's confidence in the power of prayer. This is another case of compound growth. It is compound growth of the crucial economic asset: wisdom.

E. Competition

The author of Proverbs contrasts the fool and the wise man in terms of their attitudes toward wisdom and its benefits. The fool does mischief as if it were a game. "It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom" (Prov. 10:23). The wise man has an advantage over the fool. He does not pursue mischief. God rewards righteousness in history (Deut. 28:1–14).¹⁰

The fool sees wisdom as too expensive. Its price is righteousness. He will not pay this price. "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" (Prov. 17:16). The fool cuts himself off from wisdom. "Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words" (Prov. 23:9).

The covenant-keeper who pursues wisdom therefore has a competitive advantage over the fool. Through prayer, he can gain the knowledge he needs to prosper. He learns how to make decisions based on God's priorities for his life. The fool chooses foolishness, thereby forfeiting his advantage.

This points to the extension of God's kingdom in history. There is compound growth for covenant-keepers. The blessings of the covenant confirm the covenant. These blessings extend God's kingdom. In contrast, the fool squanders his advantages.

Conclusion

Single-minded prayer leads to wisdom. Wisdom gives men an ethical advantage. They can make better judgments. This was Solomon's prayer. "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" (I Kings 3:9). Making better judgments means applying God's law to specific circumstances: biblical casuistry. This produces compound growth (Deut. 28:1–14).

9. Chapter 33.

10. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

33

MONEY AND STATUS

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways (James 1:9–11).

The theocentric issue here was hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. No Favor for the Rich

One of the continuing themes in the epistle of James is that the rich tend to be favored by church leaders. He warns the rich not to take themselves or their wealth seriously, and he warns rulers within the congregation not to pay special attention to members of the congregation who are rich.

In this section of the epistle, James speaks of the poor as having been elevated. He speaks of the rich as being at the ragged edge of destruction. He speaks of the rich as grass, which is burned by the sun. A blade of grass does not survive.

James is making a point: *the temporal nature of earthly riches*. A rich man benefits from his wealth. His wealth should not persuade him that he is ethically superior to the poor man. He is not socially superior to a poor member of the congregation. A poor man may be poor for a specific reason relating to the kingdom of God. A poor man who is a member of the local congregation should regard himself as equal, cov-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

enantly speaking, to any rich member. The rich man should take the same attitude regarding the poor man. The issue is covenantal status: either saved or lost. All other issues are secondary or less.

B. Social Status

In what sense is the brother of low degree an exalted person? James does not say. The implication is that God has exalted every individual who has been granted adoption into the family of God.

In contrast, the rich man is made low. In what sense is he low? As a member of the congregation, he is placed on equal covenantal status with poor members. He is not to be in a position to lord it over them, based on his greater wealth. His social status within the congregation is not different from the social status of everyone else in the congregation. All have been set apart—sanctified—by the grace of God. The rich man is elevated in terms of what he can purchase. He is not elevated with respect to that which cannot be purchased: *covenantal status*. He has been made a covenant-keeper by the direct intervention of God.

Within the context of the era in which James was writing, the rich man has been made low. He has moved down from the high status that his wealth entitled him to in a covenant-breaking society. He has now joined with others who are considered outside the society around them. He has forfeited some degree of high status because of those with whom he associates. He now associates openly with people who have no money, no social status, and no future within covenant-breaking society. The rich man, by becoming a member of the church, has moved downward socially. He still has his wealth, but his social status is now lower than before. This is the price of adoption.

C. Death Swallows Status

James reminds the rich that they will die. Why was this warning necessary? Everyone knows that he is going to die. This awareness does not distinguish a rich man from the poor around him. All are all subject to death. They are all subject to the sun. The sun dries out the grass and the flower. This desiccation will be the effect of death for every member of the congregation. Rich men will fade away. But rich men have always faded away. Why should James bring up this fact at this point?

He is reminding the rich that their money will not protect them

from the legacy of death. Whatever their money has accomplished within the broader community will be forgotten. Every society fades away. All but a handful of people have faded in the memory of the survivors. *There is no continuity possible in terms of one's wealth.* James is reminding them of this, so that they will not trust in that which is not trustworthy.

The poor man already knows this. He knows that he has no money. He knows that he cannot make much impact in the general society based on his wealth. He suspects that he will fade away in the memories of his descendants. He has no reason to trust in his wealth. He has so little wealth that it will do him no good in any quest for immortality. *Immortality is provided only by God, not by society.* Immortality is judicially imputed to individuals by God, not imputed by surviving members of a society.

The sun is merciless in its destruction of individual blades of grass. There is no escape from this destruction in history. Yet there is an escape eternally: regeneration. This escape is based on the promise of bodily resurrection. Money cannot buy access to bodily resurrection. Money is useless for this purpose. Rich members of the congregation and poor members of the congregation will both be resurrected to eternal life.

The brother of low degree has been exalted in terms of his eternal state. The brother of a high degree has been made low in terms of his social status within the pagan community. *Rich brother and poor brother have equal judicial status within the congregation.* Because of this fact, the pagan peers of the rich member have imputed a declining status to him. His money cannot buy him status, because his membership in an outcast organization has compromised his previous high status within the community.

Differentiations of wealth and poverty have no meaningful purpose within the congregation of the saints. This is James' message throughout this epistle. He lays the groundwork here. He says that the poor man has been exalted, and the rich man has been made low, both from the same cause: membership in the church.

The important things of this life money cannot buy. The most important thing of this life that money cannot buy is access to eternal life, which is received in history. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). The judicial status of membership in God's family is imputed in history. This judicial status car-

ries across the barrier of death into eternity. The imputation of Christ's perfection, which includes His death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God, becomes a lawful possession of covenant-keepers in general. This is the inheritance that really matters. So, social differentiation based on the possession of money and the things that money can buy is dismissed by James as irrelevant. This puts money in its place. This puts Mammon in his place.

James is dealing with a problem that has plagued the church throughout its history. Church leaders have given favorable status to wealthy people, and they have relegated the poor to the fringes of the church. James' point is that *the rich within the church have been relegated to the fringes by the society outside the church*. He is saying that all members of the church should be granted equal status based on their membership. This is a form of radical equality.

It is not a form of economic equality. There is no suggestion in this epistle that the rich should give all their goods to members of the church who are poor. There is not to be economic equality within a local congregation. There is not to be economic equality across all congregations. There is *equal judicial status with respect to access to the sacraments*. This is the supreme equality in life. It implies radical inequality between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. The Bible does not teach equality. It teaches radical inequality between saved and lost. This is the inequality that matters most.

Conclusion

James distrusted the rich. He distrusted them because he believes they have an exalted opinion of themselves. He does not share this opinion. The rich man may regard himself as something special. James reminded him that he is no more special than a blade of grass in the hot sun. He will wither, and those around him will wither.

Money is related to temporal life. It is related to flesh and blood. It should not be trusted, James said, any more than grass should trust in itself to avoid the effect of a burning sun on it. Rich men should come to grips with the reality of their own mortality.

PROPERTY AND COMMON GRACE

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17).

The theocentric issue here is two-fold: hierarchy and sanctions, points two and four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Gifts from God

This verse teaches that all of the benefits that we receive in life come from God. This affirms categorically that God is the source of all economic increase. He is the source of *original capital*; He is the source of capital's output; He is the source of *profitability*. There is nothing of benefit that anyone receives that has not come from God.

This position establishes beyond all shadow of a doubt the principle of cosmic personalism.² Free market economists speak of markets as being impersonal. In the sense of market prices as not being the result of systematic manipulation, it is legitimate to speak of markets as impersonal. The common textbook example of an impersonal market is the wheat market. The price of a specific quality of wheat is set by supply and demand. No producer can change the price of wheat; no customer can change the price of wheat. The economist argues that wheat is allocated by personal bids to buy and sell, but that no single bid has any measurable effect on its price. The price is therefore seen as impersonal.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps 2, 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), chaps. 2, 4.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

James does not deny that God operates through social and cosmic forces that cannot be manipulated by individuals. Our universe therefore appears to be impersonal. It is not. This includes the free-market social order. *The free-market social order is a benefit that comes from God.* So are specific markets. The fact that prices on a particular market are not influenced visibly by the direct intervention of God does not mean that the comprehensive system which delivers our food to us is not part of the overall common grace of God.³ Furthermore, these benefits place the recipients in a position of debt to God. Those who benefit from these social and economic systems act as stewards of God. Those to whom much is given have a greater responsibility than those to whom less is given (Luke 12:47–48).⁴

B. Ownership and Responsibility

Christian economics rests on the doctrine of God's creation of the world out of nothing. It also rests on the idea of God's grant of ownership to Adam as the legal representative of all mankind. This principle of stewardship, meaning hierarchical responsibility, in turn establishes the legitimacy of private property. Stewardship is a four-way system of administration: upward to God, outward to men (who are made in the image of God), downward toward the creation, and inward toward individual achievement. Ownership is never autonomous. It is always covenantal.

1. Free Gifts Are Not Free

By insisting that all good gifts are from God, James affirms the reality of the Bible's concept of stewardship. Property does not come from the civil government; therefore, all socialist economics is incorrect. Property does not come from individual action and original creativity; therefore, all humanistic free market economics is incorrect. *All property comes from God.* Christian economics begins with the assumption of *methodological covenantalism*. It does not begin with socialism's principle of methodological holism. It also does not begin with humanistic, free market economics' assumption of methodological individualism.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

James in this passage says that the source of all gifts is God. This passage, when interpreted in terms of other passages relating to the system of stewardship that God established with Adam, enables us to understand the origin of private property. God gives specific people assets of many kinds. These are true gifts. They have been paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary. They are not earned by the recipients. However much men pay back to God through their tithes, offerings, and lifelong service to God, all men except Jesus Christ remain in a debt relationship to God (Matt. 18:23–35).⁵ We can speak of free gifts in the sense that the recipients were not entitled to them in any legal or moral sense. Whatever they have received from God is more than they deserve. This is a legitimate meaning of the concept of the free gift. But no free gift, so defined, comes without responsibilities. The responsibilities are to God, but they are also to the creation generally.

2. No Free Lunches

Property is a social institution. It is not held autonomously. It is not held apart from legal and moral liabilities. The fundamental legal and moral liability is to God, who is the source of all gifts. There is also representative liability: liability to those who represent God in history. This includes our neighbors. It includes the created realm itself. God publicly established an ecological covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1–3).⁶ This covenant was a recapitulation of God's original covenant with Adam, who was assigned the task of dressing and defending the garden of Eden.

When we speak of something as being owed, we speak of a debt. This debt is always to God. The free market economist insists, "There are no free lunches." So does the Christian economist, but he means it in a different way. He is not speaking merely of scarcity. He is speaking of covenantal judicial obligations. There are no gifts from God that are not accompanied by personal responsibility for the covenantally faithful allocation of the gifts. These gifts must be paid for. *The ultimate payment for these gifts was made by Jesus Christ at Calvary.*

There is also a secondary payment for the gifts: personal obligation before God to allocate the gifts in such a way that they extend the kingdom of God in history. Jesus in His parable of the talents presents

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 37.

6. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 19.

this system of responsibility as clearly as anything in the history of economics (Matt. 25:14–30).⁷ Men will be judged by God at the final judgment in terms of their performance in *multiplying the gifts of capital* that they received from God. There will be a day of reckoning. We correctly see this as a day of accounting.

James begins with the assumption of God's grant of ownership to individuals and also to institutions. Covenant-keepers are not autonomous. They are part of an integrated system of covenantal authority. They have responsibilities to others. By grounding all ownership in God's grant of property rights, James is asserting the authority of the church in history. This is why his epistle continually returns to the theme of wealth and poverty within the church. The church does have legitimate economic responsibilities. Members of the church also have individual responsibilities to the church. There is no trace of autonomy in his epistle.

C. Ownership and Common Grace

James does not say that gifts to covenant-keepers are from God, but gifts to covenant-breakers come from another source. He says that all gifts come from God. This fact reinforces the principle of common grace. God gives gifts to the wheat and also to the tares, all of whom live in the same field (Matt. 13:24–30).⁸ This establishes the judicial principle that *covenant-breakers are in debt to God. This means that they owe service to God.* They are required by God to extend His kingdom in history. If they refuse to do this, they come under His condemnation. This condemnation extends to history and eternity.

To argue that God's gifts to covenant-breakers do not establish definite legal and moral obligations to God would be to deny the principle that Jesus taught in his parable of the talents. The man who received a talent and buried it came under condemnation at the return of the owner. This is the principle that all men must give an account of their stewardship at the final judgment. But the Bible also speaks of responsibility on earth and in time. There are blessings and cursings on earth and in time (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The kingdom of God is to be extended on earth and in time. The blessings are received on earth and in time.

Any attempt to use the doctrine of common grace to let covenant-

7. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 47.

8. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 29.

breakers off the hook with respect to the administration of the gifts that they receive from God is an attempt to separate history from eternity. It is an attempt to reduce the responsibility of covenant-breakers to God in history. Because the gifts are received in history, responsibility is established in history. Because the gifts are administered in history, the blessings and cursings that are associated with these gifts are also imposed by God in history. The final judgment is not a total discontinuity from the preliminary judgments that God brings in history.

This verse establishes a fundamental principle of ownership: *men do not possess any blessing autonomously*. They are not the source of their own blessings. The biblical principle that blessings derive from God establishes the principle of the sovereignty of God over history. *The source of blessings in history is the God of a society*. James says that God is the source of all blessings in history. Therefore, He is the God of every society in history. Any society that rejects the idea that God is the source of all of its blessings is in rebellion against God. Members of the society can therefore expect the negative sanctions of God in history. God is not mocked.⁹ He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the third and fourth generation (Ex. 20:5).¹⁰ He does not forget.

The biblical doctrine of common grace affirms the principle that all gifts are from God, and therefore all men are responsible to God for the covenantally faithful administration of all of their gifts. *The biblical doctrine of common grace rests on a concept of predictable sanctions in history*. God as the Redeemer does not treat covenant-breaking societies differently from the way that He treats covenant-keeping societies. Also, God as the Creator does not treat covenant-breaking societies differently from the way that He treats covenant-keeping societies. Any attempt to differentiate *God as Creator* from *God as Redeemer* flies in the face of James' principle here, namely, that God is the source of all blessings in history. The moment we accept this principle, we are supposed to accept the parallel principle that more is expected from those who receive much from God than from those who receive less from God (Luke 12:47–48). God is the source of all gifts in his capacity as Creator. This passage in no way indicates that God is the

9. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

source only of gifts to covenant-keepers in his office as Redeemer. There is no source of gifts in history other than God. There is therefore no escape from the covenantal obligations of ownership.

Conclusion

James said that all gifts come from God. This reinforces the biblical principle of stewardship. These gifts establish legal liability and personal responsibility. All men owe everything to God, as the Creator and sustainer of life. They are under a covenant to God.

This verse affirms common grace. God grants gifts to covenant-breakers. Covenant-breakers did not earn the right to these gifts. As recipients, they are under God and in debt to God.

This verse denies man's autonomy. It therefore denies both socialism and libertarianism. Man holds property by covenant, not by grant of state authority, and not by self-creation or self-ownership.

CLOTHES DO NOT MAKE THE COVENANT MAN

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? (James 2:1–7)

The theocentric principle here is sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. No Judicial Respect for Persons

Here, James applies a judicial principle from the Mosaic law: *no judicial respect for persons*. “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deut. 16:19).² This law governed all of Israel’s judges, civil and ecclesiastical, when they presided over legal cases. A judge was not allowed to bend the law in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 40.

order to benefit either a rich man or a poor man in a dispute. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15).³ The Mosaic law had authority over all men living inside the boundaries of Israel. God mandated that His law would be honored rather than individuals.

B. Discrimination by Class

James takes this principle and applies it to the affairs of the local congregation. This application does not refer to court situations. It refers to social discrimination based on class position. Class in this sense refers to economic position. There are also status differences, such as family name, cultural background, national origin, or racial background. Status distinctions are not under consideration here. The issue here is wealth. One individual has a great wealth; another individual has very little wealth. One individual comes dressed in expensive clothing; the other individual comes dressed in poor clothing. There is a visible distinction between them: the quality of their clothing.

James warns that someone whose assignment is to seat people in the congregation must not seat people according to their wealth. He is not to seat the rich man in what would be perceived as a place of honor. Culturally, these distinctions can be played out in various ways. In some societies, a seat in the front row of the church would be considered an honor. In other societies, people avoid sitting in the front row, preferring to be farther back in the room. But, in most churches through the centuries, there has been preferential seating. James is saying that access to all seats should be on some basis other than perceived wealth. A familiar basis is *first come, first served*. He who arrives at church earlier is to be taken to whatever seat is available, irrespective of his status.

In modern times, the individual chooses from among empty seats where he will sit. As late as 1900, it was common in Protestant churches to set aside certain rows of pews for annual purchase. A family would pay to have access to a particular pew. Prices varied in terms of perceived value. A person who was willing to spend more for a particular pew believed that he was buying a place of honor. James would

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

have opposed such a pricing system. While it was not the same as having someone in authority guide an individual to a seat of honor, it was unquestionably a way of respecting persons. The difference was, in contrast to the practice in James' day, the churches sold seats of high honor and kept the money. It was an *auction system* rather than an allocation system based on perceived wealth.

Both systems promote favoritism for the wealthy. The difference is, the American system of selling pews allowed the church to gain additional revenue immediately. The system in James' day was more indirect. Someone in authority in the local congregation sent down word to whoever was in charge of seating people that rich people were to be given the best seats, however "best" was defined. The church was courting favor with rich members. The church did not profit directly from this discrimination, but there is no question that church leaders expected the church to profit indirectly because of this favoritism.

C. Rich in Faith

James moves the discussion to the issue of faithfulness. He speaks of the poor as rich in faith. He speaks of them as heirs of the kingdom, which is promised to all those who love God. This is the great inheritance in history and eternity. The adopted sons of God are heirs of God. This inheritance is made manifest by membership in the church. Yet, within the church, the seating arrangements revealed differentiation with respect to the inheritance. Rich members were seated in the best seats. However the congregation defined "best seats," the church was testifying to a differentiation of inheritance in eternity.

1. Beyond the Grave

James understood the principle of continuity. There is continuity between covenant-keeping in history and covenantkeeping in eternity. There is continuity based on God's grace in history and eternity. It is a continuity of inheritance. Eternal life is granted in history (John 3:36), yet it is inherited comprehensively only at the final judgment.

By showing respect to persons with respect to seating, rulers of the church were asserting their ability to discern *comparative inheritances beyond the grave*. James says that poor men are rich in faith. Poor men are inheritors of the kingdom. So, James concludes, differences in outward appearance with respect to clothing count for nothing in evaluating the comparative inheritances in eternity. If this is the case, James

concludes, church leaders should not differentiate with respect to seating arrangements.

2. First Come, First Served

James does not tell the person in charge of seating that he should attempt to evaluate comparative inheritances beyond the grave. He is not to show respect for persons. The obvious way to avoid making such judgments is to allow those who arrive first to sit wherever they choose. There is a premium on early arrival rather than money spent on clothing.

James does not specifically cite the principle of first come, first served. But this principle is almost universally implemented whenever access to any scarce resource is not based on either favoritism by the owner or the free market principle of high bid wins. If people are not granted access to property based on competitive bidding in the marketplace, nor based on personal favoritism shown by those who have authority over allocation, then the principle of first come, first served is easy to implement. No one objects. Easy implementation counts for a great deal.

The English Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, who preached in the late nineteenth century, was so popular that the church would fill up rapidly hours before the service. Spurgeon's church adopted the principle of handing out tickets to non-members. If you received a ticket, you were guaranteed access to the sanctuary during the service. This kept people from wasting time by standing in line. Yet, even here, there had to be some rule for gaining access to the tickets, other than high bid wins. That principle could not be the quality of apparel. However access is granted, James' governing principle here is that the allocation of seats should not be based on wealth.

James does not say that poor members of the congregation deserve access to preferred seating based on their poverty. He is not hinting that poor people have a superior claim to privileged seats. He compares poor people in the congregation to heirs of the kingdom. They have been singled out by God to receive the supreme blessing: adoption into the family of God. Their right to access is based on their covenantal position, not their poverty.

D. Rich Oppressors

Not only does he praise poor men as being rich in faith and heirs

to the kingdom, he criticizes rich men for oppression. Oppression is specific in the Bible: it has to do with corrupt judgment based on respect shown to persons.⁴ This is the issue he raises here with respect to seating arrangements. He says that rich people oppress church members and drag them before their judgment seats. In other words, rich people misuse the civil courts in order to steal that which, under biblical law, would have belonged to poor men.

James is not speaking here of rich men who belong to the congregation. If that were his concern, he would instruct leaders of the church to bring charges against them. He has in mind the class position of rich members. They share their *class position* with covenant-breakers who are unjust judges, who seek to oppress the poor. He compares rich people in the congregation with their covenant-breaking peers. He says that people in the church should not favor rich people in general, because rich people in general use the civil courts to oppress poor people in general.

Because leaders in the church were giving access to the preferred seats based on the class position of the wealthy, James reminds them that this class position is based on judicial discrimination outside the church. *Rich people are oppressors*. He implies that poor people rarely are, not because they are righteous, but because high civil office is not theirs. Therefore, the trappings of wealth should guarantee no one access to preferred seating.

James was hostile to the rich in general. Jesus was also hostile to the rich in general. He said that few of them will enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24).⁵ This is another way of saying that God, in His infinite wisdom, does not often grant special grace to rich people. *God discriminates against rich people*. James does not say that the church should also discriminate against rich people. He does not say that the church should discriminate at all. He says that the church should honor the principle of the Mosaic law: *no respect of persons*.

Leaders in the church are not to create social benefits out of nothing, such as preferential seating, and then allocate these benefits to the rich, merely because they are rich. James points out that *the rich in general are morally corrupt*. So, in allocating access to the best seats based on the quality of a person's apparel, rulers in the church make a serious mistake. They judge the outward man as if money testified to

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

covenantal faithfulness. Jesus said that money testifies against a person's covenant status as an heir to the kingdom of God in history and eternity.

James does not tell church leaders to seat people in fine clothing under a footstool. Instead, he tells them to avoid respecting persons. Therefore, no one is to be given preferential seating. The whole concept of preferential seating must collapse whenever this principle of seating is honored. If a poor man in poor clothing has lawful access to preferential seating, then there is no such thing as preferential seating. That was James' goal. What he is criticizing is preference. He understands fully that if access to specific seats is not automatically given to people with wealth, then specific seats will not be identified with superior wealth. Access is more likely to be based on people's willingness to get up early, get ready for church rapidly, and show up at church early. This is not a matter of wealth. It is not a matter of status. It is a matter of punctuality.

James does not say that a man should not spend money on expensive clothing. If a man is rich, he is legally authorized to do whatever he wants with that which he owns. Jesus taught this in His parable of the husbandman who hires people all day long to work in his field, and then pays them the same total wage—a daily wage agreed upon in advance. When those who arrived early and worked all day complained that they were being discriminated against, the husbandman asked two rhetorical questions. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good" (Matt. 20:15)?⁶ This parable was designed to teach the sovereignty of God in electing some to eternal life. God gets to do whatever He wants with whatever is His.

Conclusion

There is a tendency for those in positions of authority to favor those with great wealth. This tendency undermines the legal order, for covenants are established by oath-bound promises rather than economic production. It also undermines the church as an independent covenantal institution. The free market principle of high bid wins has no place in covenantal institutions: church, state, or family.

James warns against a visible manifestation of this anti-covenantal practice: seating members in terms of the marks of class position: clothing. He identifies regenerate poor people as recipients of God's

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 40.

inheritance. He identifies regenerate rich people as social peers of covenant-breaking oppressors. The special grace of regeneration is presumed to link all oath-bound members. The common grace of wealth divides them. Seating in church should reflect special grace—either past, in the case of members, or prospective, in the case of visitors.

36

THE ORIGIN OF WAR

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts (James 4:1–3).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. War and Lust

In this passage, James sets forth a universal rule regarding the origin of war: lusts in the hearts of men. He writes this letter to covenant-keepers. If wars come from their hearts, which are set upon the lusts of the flesh, how much more do wars come from this cause in covenant-breaking societies?

Is this passage to be taken literally? If it is taken literally, does this indicate that in local congregations, members were literally killing each other? No. Within the congregations, covenant-keepers were in conflict with each other.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Matt. 5:21–22).

What was the problem? James says that *the motivation was the de-*

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

sire to gain more benefits than God had granted. This desire, when extended broadly into covenant-breaking society, produces warfare. It produces killings. In earlier eras, tribal warfare and clan warfare were common. In today's society, gang wars are common. Oath-bound criminal societies act as though they were civil governments. They execute opponents. They execute members who break the oath.

B. Unfulfilled Lusts: Covetousness

James says that men desire to obtain that which God has not provided, and because they do not obtain these things, they are in conflict with each other. He then says that the reason that the recipients of his letter do not gain the things that they want is because they do not ask for these things. The obvious context for this statement is prayer. Covenant-keepers could obtain the things that they pray for, but because they do not pray for these things, they wind up in conflict with other covenant-keepers. This is a strong condemnation of the sin of covetousness within the Christian community.

James throughout this epistle calls the lust for wealth a great evil. He believes that the attention given by all members of the congregation to differences in wealth is a perverse activity. He is hostile to the idea that differences in wealth should motivate people to pursue wealth in an unbounded way. This passage is consistent with what he says elsewhere in the epistle.

James' concern is that covenant-keepers are not keeping wealth in the proper perspective. It has become an idol within the church. If it is an idol within the church, then certainly it is an idol outside the church. If it is an unjustifiable lust within the camp of the faithful, then it is surely an unjustifiable lust outside the camp.

C. The Power of Prayer

Why does he say that covenant-keepers can and should pray for the things that they wish to possess? He has said earlier that someone who prays without confidence that God will answer his prayer is a double-minded person.² He recommends that covenant-keepers pray in expectation that God will give them what they pray for.

This raises a question which has bothered Christians from the days of Jesus. Jesus said the same thing. Jesus said that the prayers of the

2. Chapter 32.

faithful can move mountains.³ Seek and ye shall find, He said.⁴ Ask, and it shall be opened unto you, He affirmed. Yet we know from experience that our prayers often do not result as we had hoped. The answer is consistently *no*; when it is not *no*, it is very often *wait patiently and see*.

James is not promising something that Jesus had not promised earlier. He is reaffirming what Jesus said. But, if men do not receive the things that they pray for, how can this reduce the amount of conflict within the congregation? The answer is that men must learn to ask for those things in their lives that they want to possess for the purpose of *extending the kingdom of God in history*. This is always the focus of wealth within a covenant-keeping society. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).⁵ *This is the promise of the New Testament*.

The success indicators of this life are a snare and a delusion, Jesus warned. This is encapsulated in his phrase: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matt. 16:26)?⁶ Jesus' point was this: if men serve Mammon, they cannot serve God.⁷ If men pursue the promise of Mammon—more for me in history—then they will find themselves abandoned by God on the day of judgment. That is because they have spent their lives pursuing the promise of Mammon.

The focus of Jesus' concern was the kingdom of God. This focus does not change in the epistle of James. It is the common focus throughout the New Testament. *Wealth was not dismissed as illegitimate by any of the New Testament writers*. Wealth is described as a snare and a delusion whenever it is considered apart from the kingdom of God in history. The New Testament's concept of success is the

3. "Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:19–20).

4. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7).

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

7. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

pursuit of the kingdom of God in history. The very pursuit of the kingdom indicates the transition from wrath to grace. This is the great benefit of regeneration. This is special grace. The New Testament's concept of success is not the attainment of the success indicators of this world. In fact, the pursuit of the success indicators, apart from the pursuit of the kingdom of God, is the essence of the worship of Mammon.

James says specifically that people are not to ask for this. In other words, they ask for the wrong things in life. They pursue success indicators in order that they may increase their consumption. They are attempting to match their income with their lusts. The economist intervenes at this point to point out that the lusts of men are beyond known limits (but not "infinite"). Their ability to fulfill all of their lusts is limited because of scarcity. So, the economist affirms, the pursuit of consumption will always hit limits.

James understood this fundamental principle of economics. The whole idea of lust is that it cannot be satiated. It is that terrible curse: "The more you get, the more you want." *This is the essence of addiction.* It is the essence of the pursuit of Mammon. This is what the entire New Testament warns against.

It is legitimate to pursue wealth as a tool of dominion. The areas of life that are still not completely reclaimed by the people of God in the name of God by the grace of God are beyond known limits. We do not achieve perfection in history. We are always at war within us against the consequences of sin. In this sense, we have scarce resources and an infinite task. So, there will always be a need in every covenant-keeper's life for more money.

D. Self-Discipline

There is also a need for more self-discipline. Within the context of the New Testament, it is more important to have self-discipline than it is to have money. This was equally true in the Old Testament. Man's primary problem is not economic scarcity; man's primary problem is sin. This problem begins in the human heart. The consequences of this are war and conflict. There is no better, no shorter, no more effective statement of this biblical principle than what we find in this passage.

Self-discipline under God in terms of God's Bible-revealed law is the essence of progressive sanctification. This is what Paul meant when he said that he pressed on toward the high calling of the mark of

God (I Cor. 9:24). This is what he meant when he said that he ran the good race (Phil. 3:14).⁸ In running the good race, some people need additional economic resources. Men need the division of labor to help them achieve their goal. “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up” (Eccl. 4:9–10).⁹ The basis of the expansion of the division of labor is increased capital per capita. This was Adam Smith’s great insight in *Wealth of Nations* (1776).

We cannot find a Bible verse that says the following: in order to increase per capita output, society needs increased per capita investment. The Bible does say that private property is to be defended, covetousness is to be avoided, lusts of the flesh are to be spurned, charity is to be practiced extensively, the tithe is to be paid to the local congregation, and one day a week is to be set aside for rest.

What we find in history is that societies that observe these principles are also marked by increased thrift and greater per capita output. This is also true of groups such as monastic orders. The monks of the Middle Ages took vows of poverty, but when they were members of monastic orders that emphasized hard work as a way achieving self-discipline, they became richer than most other members of society. This is because they worked hard, consumed little, sold their goods into a free market, made profits on every sale, and reinvested the profits in the tools of production. So, monastic orders that had been structured in terms of the vows of individual poverty wound up becoming enormously wealthy organizations within medieval society. In this sense, the monastic orders pointed to the modern world. They pointed to the productivity involved in reinvested profits, reduced consumption, and attention to the details of production.

Whenever a society adopts as morally binding the recommendation of James in this passage, it will become richer over time. The attitude that James recommends, which is based on the self-discipline of avoiding covetousness, and the refusal to pursue the lusts of the flesh, over time produces a society marked by greater investment per capita, increased output per capita, and therefore increased wealth and income per capita. This is another way of saying that whenever men honor the ethical terms of God’s three institutional covenants, they

8. Chapter 21.

9. Gary North, *Autonomy and Stagnation: An Economic Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

find that they are the recipients of positive sanctions. This is what Moses told the generation of the inheritance in the wilderness. He said that God brings positive sanctions in history as a means of confirming his covenant with his people. “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18).¹⁰ The problem is, Moses warned, individuals then conclude that the power of their hands gave them their wealth (Deut. 8:17).¹¹ This is an ethical temptation, Moses warned, and the result of it in the long run his rebellion against God. When men revolt against God as a society, God will eventually remove the positive sanctions, and will replace them with negative sanctions (Deut. 8:19–20).¹² This is what he did with the Canaanites. This is what he did to the Egyptians. This is the way the world works.

E. The Promises of Mammon

Jesus warned men not pursue the promises of Mammon. He warned them that it is their obligation to pursue the promises of God. The promise of God is clear: seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

James is applying this principle. He warns men that they are subject to wars and confrontations because they are serving Mammon. He does not identify Mammon, but he identifies the common goals of Mammon, especially *the pursuit of individual self-indulgence*. This is not to say that the pursuit of individual self-interest, within a general moral framework of private property, personal responsibility, and future-orientation cannot produce increased wealth. This can produce increased wealth, which is why Moses warned that men should not look upon their increased wealth and attribute it to the power of their own hands. The same causes will produce the same effects. Whenever covenant-breakers adopt the attitude of covenant-keepers with respect to thrift, future-orientation, private property, attention to the details of production, and all of the other mental attitudes that we call the Protestant ethic, they will get richer. But this wealth will rebound against them, either in history or in eternity.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

Conclusion

This passage warns us that conflict begins within. It begins with the desire to own more than is suitable for us as customers. James is not hostile to wealth as such. He is hostile to wealth that is accumulated to serve the lusts of men. When it serves men's desire to consume, it threatens to become addictive. From that addiction comes covetousness, and from covetousness comes conflict and war.

AFFIRMING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that (James 4:13–15).

The theocentric issue here was the sovereignty of God: point one of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Sovereignty of God

This passage is not generally recognized as being a premier passage in defense of the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God, yet it is probably more practical in defense of this doctrine than any other passage in the Bible. It is not speaking about some broad theological principle. It is speaking about how we should regard the outcome of our daily activities. James goes so far as to say that *an individual should verbally affirm his complete dependence on God for the day-to-day activities of his life*. He says that when an individual says that he will do this or that the next day, he should add: “if it is the Lord’s will.”

For someone who converses among covenant-breaking peers, this language is peculiar. For someone outside God’s covenantal community, such an observation or qualification to a simple statement about what a person intends to do the next day, would be regarded as exceptional. We might even say that it would be regarded as eccentric. When someone says that he is going to do this or that the next day, the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 1.

person he is speaking with does not expect a verbal affirmation of the sovereignty of God. He might expect such a verbal affirmation coming from a soldier whose unit is under fire, who volunteers to get through enemy lines to get a report to headquarters. Under these circumstances, an affirmation that the person expects to achieve his goal, subject to the intervention of God, is plausible. His colleagues in the field can understand why a person would appeal to divine sovereignty as the basis of his ability to get through enemy lines. But it is not considered normal for an individual to make such a qualification regarding whether or not he will go to the store the next day. Yet, in terms of the Bible's explanation of causation, each expectation is equally dependent on the sovereignty of God for its completion.

B. A Business Trip

James uses as his example a business trip to a distant city. The individual says that he will leave the next day and be gone for a year. He is going there to buy and sell and make a profit. James adds that such an incomplete verbal affirmation of one's plans is not prudent. He says that an individual does not know what is going to happen the next day. Why should someone announce to his compatriots that he is going on an extended journey in order to make a profit? There are too many pitfalls in this life for anyone to make a broad prediction about what he is going to do and achieve over the following year. There are too many variables.

James uses as his example a year-long business trip. Such a trip involves extensive planning. For someone to leave his home for a distant city as part of a business venture is abnormal. Such a journey would be made only by someone who is fully committed to his business. This means departing for a considerable period of time. An individual must make extensive plans in order to achieve success in a project as long term as this one. James says the individual should make it clear to his listeners that such planning is subject to many revisions. This is why he is supposed to affirm the sovereignty of God in discussing his plans.

James does not criticize an individual for making plans to conduct business in a distant location in search of gain. He understands that an individual would not make the distant journey, and pay for lodging and food in a distant city, unless the person had a very big project in mind. This project is expected to generate considerable income. In other sections of his epistle, James is critical of people who possess

great wealth. He sees them as oppressors. But he is *not* critical of the *activities* by which a businessman seeks wealth. He is well aware of the sacrifices that the businessman must make in order to be successful on the road. He reminds the individual not to be overconfident about his abilities to generate a profit under such circumstances. He calls the individual's attention to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. God may reward the man's business endeavor. God may choose not to reward it. God may even kill him in the interim.

James does not say that the person might have an accident. He says that an individual cannot know what is going to happen to him, in contrast to God's knowledge of the future. *There are no accidents for God.*

The typical person is well aware of this. He knows from experience that life is a series of speed bumps and detours. Yet James says that covenant-keepers must offer verbal reminders regarding the problematic character of their immediate plans. So committed should a covenant-keeper be in affirming a universe in which the sovereignty of God is the crucial factor that he should intersperse his everyday language regarding what his plans are with verbal affirmations of the sovereignty of God. James is well aware that such affirmations are not common in daily speech. For someone to add these comments is for him to identify himself as a follower of a religion that believes in the sovereignty of God. Most religions do not believe this.

C. Life Is a Vapor

James speaks of human life as a vapor. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Life is short. People come and go. They are intensely important to themselves and somewhat important to those around them. But those around them are vapors, too. Life is a mutual admiration society or a mutual detestation society of vapors.

A vapor has few traces when it appears and none after it departs. *Most of what most men do in history leaves no visible traces.* The number of people who gain as much as a footnote in history is incredibly small. This may change a little with modern Internet technology. Billions of people will leave traces somewhere in cyberspace. Occasionally, a researcher using a search engine while looking for something completely different may stumble upon a link to a record testifying to a person's existence. He will not click the link except by mistake. He

will leave any Web page that does not relate directly to his search or else catch his interest. The fact that there is a digital record of something that a person has done in no way guarantees that the general public will ever acknowledge his existence or be aware of whatever it was that he did. As far as the world is concerned, he was a vapor.

Biblically speaking, covenant-keepers know that everything a man does leaves a permanent record. Jesus said: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36–37). God is aware of all of it. He imputes meaning to it. He is not surprised by any of it. And He never forgets. So, the fact that other men do not remember what a person did is neither here nor there in the grand sweep of history. *God knows exhaustively what everyone has done. This is why God is the cosmic Judge.* But, insofar as other men are aware of a person's work in this life, it seems random as to whether or not anyone will remember any of it. This is the meaning of life as a vapor. This is why covenant-keepers are to affirm the power of God to enable them to achieve their goals. *God converts vaporous existence into meaningful existence.* He puts substance into men's lives.

Conclusion

Small plans are no less dependent on God than big plans. This is the message of this passage. All plans have relevance only insofar as God's plan has relevance. This is the doctrine of the decree of God.

James says that we must take our plans very seriously. Plans are so serious that we are to confirm verbally and publicly that *our plans are wholly dependent on God for their completion*. They are no less our plans for this dependence. The plans of many are dependent on the plan of the One, who is also many: a Trinity.

A public affirmation of God's control over our daily plans brings us back to Moses' warning. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).

CORRUPT RICHES

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you (James 5:1–6).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Hostility to the Rich

This passage is by far the most hostile passage in the Bible directed against rich men. It would be difficult to locate any passage in antiquity that is more hostile to the rich than this one.

James is not complaining about rich people who have membership in a local congregation. Such criminal behavior as he describes here violates the Mosaic law, and also violates basic principles of civil justice. What he describes here are acts of theft. Theft can be prosecuted in civil courts. In societies in which such prosecution is not possible, covenant-keeping victims should not resist. James specifically says this in verse six. If there had been someone in a local congregation who practiced such evil, the elders in the congregation would have been author-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

ized to bring formal charges against this member. A congregation filled with such lawbreakers would not survive long.

James is presenting a warning to rich men in general who might come across a copy of his letter. He was not in a position to know that the printing press would spread to his letter across the face of the earth. This warning was more in the form of a warning to be read to a congregation, so that members who might at some point attain great wealth would be forewarned against the misuse of this wealth. They would have heard this warning more than once, and they would have been likely to respect the law of God in their business ventures.

B. God's Negative Sanctions

This warning is in the form of a promise: the negative sanctions of God. The recipients of his letter were more likely to be relatively poor people than rich people. Rich people have always been a tiny minority in any society. Membership in a voluntary church has rarely appealed to rich people. Certainly in James' day, the rich would have been unlikely to join. There were no social benefits for joining the Christian church in the first century A.D.

James tells rich men to weep and howl for the miseries that will come upon them. Obviously, the typical rich man would not have heard such a message. If he had heard such a message, he would have dismissed it as the ravings of a madman. A rich man would look at his surroundings and then assess his success in terms of these surroundings. He would have concluded that he was doing better than most people. People who attain great wealth usually regard their success as having been justified by their moral character. If their moral character is not the basis of their self-confidence, then their business acumen is. They believe that they possess greater immunity from the tragedies of life than the common person does. But there is no pure immunity, because death takes all men. James indicates that judgment will then come upon them.

His words do not specifically invoke the final judgment. His words do invoke the Bible's correlation between covenant-breaking and negative sanctions (Deut. 28:15–68).² So, he warns them that the positive sanctions of wealth are insufficient to protect them from the inescapable negative sanctions that are coming. These sanctions are governed

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

by a system of causation that rests on ethics, not on business skills. He warns them that their riches are corrupted. He says that their garments are moth-eaten. This obviously is not to be taken literally. He says elsewhere in the epistle that wealthy people dress themselves in fine clothing (James 2:2–3).³ Yet he calls their clothing moth-eaten. This is obviously symbolic of their moral condition.

C. Metaphors of Corruption

James uses a series of metaphors. He describes their silver and gold as cankered. In other words, their wealth is afflicted by a form of visible cankers or sores. He speaks of the rust of their gold and silver. This is obviously not literal with respect to gold. It is one of the unique features of gold that it does not rust, yet Jesus had spoken of treasures on earth as being subject to rust (Matt. 6:19–20).⁴ In other words, *the very best that wealth offers is vulnerable to decay*. This is another way of saying that wealth protects no one against the God of the Bible.

He says the people of great wealth will eat their own flesh. This is peculiar imagery. There is no real-world phenomenon that we know in which a sane man eats his own flesh. James is pointing to the inescapability of the judgment to come. Rich people think they are safe; they are not safe. Their actions indicate that they are self-destructive.

He accuses them of a specific form of fraud. They hold back the wages of laborers. This is a specific infraction of the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law required that every laborer be paid at the end of the working day (Lev. 19:13).⁵ It is theft to delay payment. He says that the defrauded laborers cry out. These cries enter into the ears of God. The specific phrase, *Lord of sabaoth*, refers to warfare. The God of the Bible is the God of warfare. He brings comprehensive negative sanctions against His enemies. The rich man who has defrauded his laborers are facing a confrontation with the God of battle.

He says that they have lived in pleasure and have been wanton. In other words, they have been debauched. He speaks of them of having fattened their hearts like beasts fattened for a day of slaughter.

They have condemned and killed the just. This is another example of oppression. By referring to condemnation, James invokes the image

3. Chapter 34.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 13.

of a courtroom. These are corrupt judges who have handed down sentences against the just. They have executed righteous people.

D. The Strategy of Nonviolence

The righteous person, James says, has not resisted corrupt judges. The righteous person has maintained the peace.

1. Maintaining the Peace

Maintaining the peace is a basic requirement in the New Testament. Again and again, the New Testament recommends peace rather than violence when dealing with tyranny.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away (Matt. 5:38–42).⁶

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so (Matt. 5:43–47)?⁷

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour (I Tim. 2:1–3).⁸

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 9.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

8. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

2. Replacement, Not Conquest

The New Testament recommends submission to injustice rather than revolution against it. It favors nonviolence. This is not just a temporary tactic; it is a long-term strategy. This is a strategy of replacement. The New Testament's position is *replacement, not conquest*. With this perspective, Christians in the fourth century captured the Roman Empire. Yet that empire had persecuted them for three centuries.

This is a difficult doctrine to accept, yet it is found throughout the New Testament. Jesus preached to captive people who were under the authority of the Roman Empire. The authors of the epistles wrote to congregations made up of people who were not in positions of leadership in society. The New Testament recognizes that it is suicidal, self-destructive, and selfdefeating for a tiny minority of social outsiders to adopt policies of violent resistance that are associated with revolutionary groups. The Bible is clear that success comes through adherence to biblical law. It does not come through revolutionary violence.

When Gamaliel spoke to the Sanhedrin, he recommended that the Sanhedrin not punish Peter and the disciples. He said that there had been previous revolutionaries in Israel, and they and their work had come to nothing.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed (Acts 5:36–37).

He recommended that the Sanhedrin leave them alone. The implication was, if these people turned to violence, the Roman authorities would crush them. If they did not turn to violence, and limited their efforts to private persuasion and public preaching, then it was the best policy to let them alone and see whether God rewarded them or not. He persuaded the Sanhedrin on that occasion.

The apostles and the authors of the epistles fully understood that this strategy of submission, prayer, and cooperation was Jesus' strategy of long-term dominion. They adhered to this strategy in their writings. It is a difficult strategy to accept unless you have a concept of an absolutely sovereign God who brings negative sanctions against lawbreak-

ers who use their authority to oppress innocent people. James was an advocate of exactly this kind of God. He believed that God is absolutely sovereign over all things. This is why he tells his listeners and readers not to speak of their plans without invoking the name of God as the source of hope in their achievement of their plans.⁹

E. Comforting the Victims

By addressing the sins of rich oppressors in his letter, James is giving comfort to the victims of oppression. He is telling them that the God they worship is a God of negative sanctions, a God of justice, and a God of war. This God of violence is on the side of righteous people who adopt a strategy of nonviolence. The God of conquest comes to the aid of his people when they adopt a policy of submission.

When James condemns rich oppressors, he is encouraging their poor victims. He is saying that the God of the Bible is not blind, nor is He impotent. The God of the Bible is the God of warfare, and He will bring negative sanctions against people who appear to be immune from the common cares of this life. He uses language which points to the moral nakedness of those who achieved great wealth by means of corruption. He is making it clear that corruption, while in the short run can produce great wealth, will at the produce impoverishment and destruction. Those who gained their wealth through immoral acts and fraud have achieved in their high places at a price that is far higher than they understand. This price should be avoided at all costs. Covenant-keepers should not fall into the trap of believing that earthly success that is achieved through moral corruption is anything worth pursuing.

His letter serves as an inoculation against evil within the camp of the faithful. Those who grow rich as covenant-keepers will not do so by following the self-destructive path way of the corrupt rich people condemned by James in this passage.

Conclusion

James condemns the oppressing rich in no uncertain terms. They have gained their wealth through injustice. They are thieves. They are men to condemn the just and execute them. These are the leaders of society in James' day. He does not spare them verbally because God

9. Chapter 36.

will not spare them eternally.

39

LADIES' FASHIONS

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement (1 Peter 3:1–6).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Gold Jewelry

Peter's words are inescapable: women are not supposed to wear gold jewelry. There is no qualification here. There is no indication that this language is symbolic of anything else. His language is straightforward. The apostle Paul said the same thing. "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2:9–10).

It was not just gold jewelry that bothered the apostles. It was fine clothing in general. It was any outward display of wealth which is

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

made solely to demonstrate the possession of wealth.

That these words have almost never been believed or obeyed by rich women in the history of the church goes without saying. Pastors who get involved in disputes over women's fashions are tilting against the ultimate windmill in the church. Pastors can preach against all kinds of sins, preferably those that are common in other congregations and other social circles. But when a pastor begins to preach about women's fashions, he is skating on dangerously thin ice. He is also going to have no effect whatsoever in the congregation.

B. Testimonies to Wealth

Displays of wealth are basic to the possession of wealth. People want to dress in such a way that distinguishes them from people who are not equally successful. The laws of some Grecian cities, the Roman Republic, Medieval Europe, Islamic societies, and other societies had laws against displays of great wealth in clothing. These laws were especially applied to people wearing clothing appropriate to people of high status. These laws were called *sumptuary laws*. They were attempts by the civil government, meaning successful politicians whose allies had money, to make certain that poor people could not use their money to purchase the outward symbols of economic success.

These laws were widely disobeyed. What destroyed them entirely, all over the world, was free market capitalism. The earliest economic successes in mass production in the late eighteenth century were associated with textiles. New processes of production, including looms and steam power, enabled the mass production of cotton clothing. The quality of clothing increased over time, and the price of the clothing decreased, which led to far better apparel being available to relatively poor people. As this process continued, it became more and more difficult for rich people to distinguish themselves from poor people in terms of their clothing. Poor people could afford to buy much better lines of clothing. Customers began to imitate the styles of the wealthy.

After that, social pressures and class tradition determined what kind of clothing people wore. There was pressure from people in lower classes not to accept people in the same class who wore clothing appropriate to more successful individuals. Peer pressure was directed against those who were "putting on airs." Laws that penalized people who wore clothing more appropriate to wealthier people were either removed from the statute books or ignored. There is no trace of them

in modern society, but there still is considerable peer pressure against individuals within a particular economic class to dress in the clothing associated with wealthier classes.

There is a tradition among American fundamentalist circles, especially those associated with relatively poor people, for women not to wear makeup. Women are pressured by their peers not to put on makeup of any kind, although occasionally lipstick is permitted. This has nothing to do with the concern of Paul and Peter. Their concern was with the pursuit of the externals associated with wealth. They were concerned that individuals would waste economic resources on vanity. The cost of buying gold jewelry and fine clothing was very great. Only the very rich could afford such fashion. An individual who pursued fashion who did not have a great deal of money was forced to tie up a very high percentage of his wealth in clothing and jewelry. In order to call a halt to this practice, Peter and Paul laid down the law: covenant-keeping women are not supposed to wear gold jewelry.

This law is still in force. Anyone who argues that this law no longer applies because circumstances have changed is saying that New Testament laws are relative to circumstances. He is saying that *situation ethics* prevails, that cultural issues can overturn the explicit revelation of God in the Bible.

The issue that Paul and Peter raised was the issue of the use of wealth for outward displays. They did not specifically apply this principle to housing, but the implication is the same. We are to buy our houses in the same way that we buy our clothes. We are to buy them in terms of our occupations and our callings before God. A house should reflect our status in life. So should our clothing. It would be silly for a person who did manual labor to go to work in a suit that is more appropriate for a banker. Men understand this. In our work, we have uniforms. These uniforms testify to the nature of our work. A person who wears clothing appropriate to another occupation is regarded as strange. There is nothing illegal about wearing a three-piece suit when you are digging a ditch; there is something wasteful about it. Such clothing is inefficient on the job.

C. Leveling Down

In modern times, we have seen the abandonment of clothing that was once associated with upper-class occupations. This began in the 1950s in the United States. Within three decades, many upper-class

professions were marked by much more casual clothing. The necktie faded into oblivion. By the latter part of the twentieth century, casual clothing had become common at church. Neither men nor women dressed in their Sunday best. The concept of “Sunday best” disappeared. This was a matter of fashion, but fashion reflects social mores. It was a leveling down of fashion.

This had begun during the French Revolution. By 1815, with the defeat of Napoleon, Western clothing for men in the highest social circles took on the basic features of what is the modern business suit. Wigs disappeared. Lace disappeared. Men’s styles ceased to change very much. With the coming of mass-produced clothing, meaning off-the-rack clothing, it became difficult for men to distinguish themselves from poor men, who could now afford to dress in suits that resembled the suits worn by the richest classes. The same applied to women.

This led to leveling down. When clothing no longer clearly identifies social class, the fashions of a lower social class can influence those of the upper classes. There is no greater example of this leveling downward than blue jeans. By 1980, they became universal, East and West, among people under age 30. There was a black market for blue jeans in Communist countries. This shift took place during the international student rebellion, 1965–70. What had been pants of choice among teenage males in the 1950s became high fashion by 1980. Men and women wore them. You could even buy expensive pre-faded jeans, thereby avoiding the new jeans look. Yet blue jeans had been invented by a Jewish tailor in San Francisco during the California gold rush, sometime around 1850. They were suitable for miners.

The economic issue is the conservation of resources. Peter and Paul were adamant that covenant-keeping women should not spend a lot of money on high fashion. They understood that fashion is a temptation for those who want to move up the social scale. They agreed that such competition should not enter the church. In coming to this conclusion, both of them warned that the pursuit of fashion outside the church is also a waste of resources. Covenant-keeping women are supposed to separate themselves from idle pursuits, and one of the idle pursuits is fashion.

Peter speaks of marks of piety. These have to do with behavior, not clothing: “hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” Peter is arguing that *clothes do not make the woman*. What makes the woman is ethical behavior. Paul agreed: “But

(which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” The attempt to gain a good reputation is legitimate. Peter and Paul advocated such a pursuit. What is not legitimate is the attempt to gain a reputation for high and expensive fashion. Fashion, both apostles clearly understood, is a matter of vanity. Vanity is not to be indulged in. A public mark of not being seduced by vanity is the unwillingness to pursue fashion.

D. Good Taste vs. High Fashion

In every society, there is a concept of good taste. Peter is not telling his readers and listeners to dress tastelessly. The difference between fashion and tastefulness has to do with social status and money. *Good taste is universal. High fashion is not.*

An example would be shined leather shoes. Whether rich or poor, a person who shines his shoes is considered tasteful. It testifies to the concern of the individual that he not look shabby. The cost of shining shoes is minimal. When shoes are shined and otherwise cared for, they last longer. A person saves money by having shined shoes instead of scuffed shoes. Shined shoes testify to the careful allocation of assets. Bob Jones Sr., the founder of Bob Jones University, used to say: “Your shoes may have holes in the soles, but they should be shined.” This is the proper attitude toward shoes. Peter’s principle of fashion is hostile to the pursuit of stylish shoes that are expensive. Prior to the French Revolution, rich men in Western Europe wore shoes with silver buckles. This is the sort of display that Peter says should be avoided. No one needs silver buckles on his shoes. There are better uses for silver than buckles on shoes.

A good example of the violation of this prohibition against high fashion was the Easter parade. Beginning in the 1870s, on Easter morning in New York City, the day on which most churches celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it was common in upper-class churches for women to wear their finest clothing. Men did the same. Women would go to great expense to buy a special outfit that they would wear only once, on Easter morning. Then they would parade up Fifth Avenue to display their finery. There was a 1947 movie called *Easter Parade*, based on a 1933 song.² The tradition began to

2. The 1933 song, *Easter Parade*, was written by America’s quintessential popular song writer, a Jewish immigrant who changed his name to Irving Berlin. It began: “In your Easter bonnet, with all the frills upon it, you’ll be the grandest lady in the Easter Parade.” Berlin is most famous for *White Christmas*, the best-selling song of all time,

fade, along with churches, in the 1950s. There are few churches in New York City today, compared to the size of the population, and their members do not indulge in an Easter parade.

By the late twentieth century, the leveling down in fashion led to the abandonment of suits and dresses in American churches. The casual look, which had originated in California in Silicon Valley in the 1950s,³ spread to businesses in the West Coast, then to churches. The student revolution of 1965–70 also accelerated this trend.

Conclusion

Peter singles out women as violators of this rule of spiritual fashion: outward adornment rather than the marks of the spirit. Men are far less tempted than women to indulge in costly displays of fashion. This was true in Peter's day. It was true in Isaiah's day. It is a mark of rebellion. Isaiah prophesied,

Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: Therefore the LORD will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty (Isa. 3:16–24).

Covenant-keepers are not to waste time, energy, and money on a vain pursuit of fashion.

and *God Bless America*.

3. Tom Wolfe, "Robert Noyce and His Congregation," *Forbes ASAP* (Aug. 25, 1997). (<http://tinyurl.com/5wq12b>)

THE WISDOM OF A DONKEY

Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls; an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet (II Peter 2:14–16).

The theocentric issue here was hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Dumb Animals, Dumber Sinners

Peter lists practices of evil people. These are people who refuse to stop sinning. They are greedy. They are cursed children. He compares them with Balaam, the Mesopotamian prophet (Deut. 23:4), who was hired to curse the Israelites (Num. 22). Balaam knew that he was not supposed to curse the Israelites, but the Moabite king continued to pressure him until he capitulated. The king offered him great rewards. The king had his number. He perceived that this man was greedy. He appealed to his greed, and eventually Balaam surrendered.

Peter says that Balaam's donkey was wiser than Balaam. This is a clear reference to one of the amazing miracles of the Old Testament. This is an affirmation of a talking donkey. The New Testament affirms the existence of a talking donkey who was rational. The donkey drew conclusions from evidence. It spoke to its master.

There are few passages in the Old Testament that more obviously

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

challenge the concept of autonomous scientific law than this one. There are few passages in the Old Testament that are more ridiculed by humanists as absolutely impossible to accept. This passage is believed by humanists to be clear evidence that the Bible cannot be trusted with respect to history or scientific facts. There is no way for Bible-believers to explain away the non-scientific nature of this story. There is evidence from both the Old Testament and the New Testament that such a donkey existed. The donkey did not just exist; the donkey serves as Peter's example of the foolishness of man. The logic of his argument makes sense only on the supposition that a genetically stupid animal spoke. It was stupid, but Peter says it had more sense than a covenant-breaking prophet.

Peter's point is that an animal, which we associate with the inability to speak, and therefore with the inability to think rationally, was able to think more rationally than a sinner who was about to curse the people of God in exchange for rewards. Such a transaction is the essence of foolishness, Peter is arguing. The proof of Peter's position is the fact that a donkey argued a better case than a prophet did. In other words, *covenant-breaking is really stupid*. It is more stupid than the thought processes of a donkey.

Peter is saying that when covenant-breakers pursue iniquity, they are vulnerable to being dealt with by God by the mouth of a donkey. In other words, that which is obviously incapable of challenging a man—a dumb animal—is in fact quite capable of challenging him, and not only challenging him, but completely overcoming his arguments. Peter is saying that a violation of God's law is stupid beyond belief. It is more logical biblically to believe in a donkey that talks to its master than it is to believe that an individual is acting wisely when he consistently and defiantly disobeys the law of God.

B. Greed

Peter twice refers to greediness. He singles out covetousness. He also refers to the wages of unrighteousness. When an individual desires something that belongs to another person, and he becomes obsessed with obtaining that item, he has violated the tenth commandment.² Anyone who does this is more stupid than a donkey. When you

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 12.

violate one of the Ten Commandments, and you do so self-consciously and repeatedly, then you have less sense than a donkey. This is a graphic way of describing the condition of covenant-breakers.

Greed is a snare. A person who is caught up in the snare of greed is trapped. Peter says such a person cannot stop sinning. He is addicted to sin. He is headed toward destruction. He has gone astray.

The individual who compromises his own ethics for the sake of economic gain is playing the fool, Peter says. He is playing the fool to such an extent that a donkey is wiser than he. This is unwise indeed. Peter calls such an individual back to the law of God. He is not to commit adultery. He is not to be unstable. He is not to be covetous. The mark of someone who has gone astray is a person who compromises his ethics for the sake of gain.

C. Ethics and Economics

This passage implies that *biblical ethics is superior to economics*. It is not good enough that an individual can get rich through unethical behavior. This is the essence of stupidity, Peter says. A donkey knew better than this. This argument would have no validity if the incident Peter describes did not take place. If it did not take place, then covenant-keepers are the stupid ones. If covenant-keepers are foolish for believing that a donkey reasoned with an individual by speaking to him, then the Bible is not a reliable guide for the establishment of ethics. The Bible should be ignored as surely as we would ignore an individual who claims to be able to speak to animals. In modern terms, we might call this Peter's argument from Dr. Doolittle. Yet Peter makes exactly this argument: someone did talk to animals. That person lost an argument with a donkey. He gained for himself the judgment of God (Num. 31:8). He could not, or at least he did not, turn away from his sin.

Peter's argument collapses if there never was a talking donkey whose owner was a corrupt prophet who sold his services for gain. We must take seriously the revelation of the Old Testament, including its revelation of historical events that we find difficult to believe, if we are to make sense of New Testament ethics. *There is no legitimate way to segregate New Testament ethics from Old Testament history.* This passage should make clear the principle that the New Testament interprets and validates the Old Testament. Peter has no problem with believing in a talking donkey. He uses this argument to strengthen his

case against the pursuit of wealth at the expense of ethics.

Conclusion

Greed is a sin. People who are afflicted with this sin are less wise than Balaam's donkey. Peter's condemnation is true only to the extent that the account in Numbers is correct. Humanists deny that it is correct. Biblically speaking, they are less rational than a donkey.

This story is a touchstone for covenant-keepers' commitment to the Bible over humanism. If they can believe this story, why are the first eleven chapters of Genesis such a problem to them? They worry about finding a way to reconcile geology, astronomy, and paleontology with Genesis 1. They interpret the biblical texts, over and over, according to the latest fad in the world of humanism or the world of academic neo-evangelicalism. Yet they do not worry about reconciling Numbers 22 with biology. There is no way to re-interpret this.

And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay (Num. 22:28–30).

We have a choice: side with the talking donkey or side with the humanists, who are not up to her level of awareness.

41

TWO FORMS OF WEALTH

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see (Rev. 3:17–18).

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Church of Laodicea

Of the seven churches of Asia to which John writes letters, the one that gets preached about most often is Laodicea. People who are aware of this section of the book of Revelation are more likely to remember the Church of Laodicea. It was the church that was neither cold nor hot, which God promised to would vomit out of His mouth. That imagery is very powerful. Most people cannot name the other six churches, nor can they identify what those churches were known for.

John is specific about the sin of Laodicea. It was the sin of arrogance. This arrogance was based on wealth. He says that the church said it was rich. He is speaking of a collective entity. This indicates that this attitude prevailed among all of the members, or at least among those members who were representative of the church. The church defined wealth as a large number of goods. This large number of goods meant that it was in need of nothing. This is a common interpretation

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

of the meaning of wealth. There are things that a person wants, but there is nothing that he needs.

Not needing anything means that an individual or an organization does not face immediate calamities. He is not seeking a way out of a desperate situation. He is getting along just fine. The pressures of everyday life that afflict the common man, meaning the person who does not have financial reserves, do not afflict the person who is wealthy. This is one of the great benefits of being wealthy. The rich individual lives above the fray. He has no worries that money can eliminate.

John says that this self-confidence of the church of Laodicea is an illusion. He asks rhetorically: “Don’t you know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked?” This is certainly a rhetorical list. If a person is wretched, he is in great need. If he is miserable, he is in need. If he is poor and blind and naked, he is in need of just about everything. John uses these descriptive phrases to indicate that the church is bankrupt. It is in great need.

B. Wealth and Poverty

He contrasts economic wealth with spiritual poverty. This is a contrast familiar to anyone who has read the gospels. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul” (Matt. 16:26).² Jesus warned against the conflict between Mammon and God. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).³ An individual who pursues wealth with dedication, Jesus said, is in the clutches of the Mammon. He worships another God. Such a person is obviously in spiritual poverty.

1. Blindness

John extends this insight to say that the Church of Laodicea, because of its complacency regarding the outward affairs of life, is trapped in spiritual blindness. Members of the church do not perceive that they are spiritually poor. This is what he means when he calls them blind. It is not that they are physically blind; it is that they are

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

spiritually blind.

A person who is spiritually blind is incapable of assessing his own spiritual condition. This is why John brings up this criticism of the church. John is like a person who is trying to lead a blind man out of a ditch. The blind person is incapable of escaping by himself. He needs help. But this form of blindness is so great that the person who needs help does not know that he needs help.

John switches his metaphor to that of gold. He says that the church should buy from him gold that has been tried in the fire. This imagery goes back to Isaiah's condemnation of Judah. He used the same imagery: trial by fire. He said that the people of Judah had been corrupted. They were not pure. They were like false wealth, with base metals added to precious metals. In other words, they were counterfeits. "Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water" (Isa. 1:22). Isaiah said that God would bring judgment. "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin" (Isa. 1:25).⁴ Isaiah warned of Judah of its condition of debased status. John is warning the church of Laodicea that it is in the same condition. They are not rich, and they need to be rich. They need the pure gold that has been tried by fire. This is a metaphor of spiritual purity.

He says the church is naked. He says he has white raiment. This is the clothing needed by the church of Laodicea. White clothing in the epistle is associated with the purity of the church and also authority.⁵ The church of Laodicea, being naked, is not clothed in white raiment.

He says he will anoint their eyes with salve. Why? So that they may see. Again, this relates to their lack of ability to assess their own spiritual condition. They are in need of an eye salve, so that they can see just how spiritually debased they are.

John's use of economic imagery to describe spiritual condition is not unique. It is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The contrast between economic wealth and spiritual poverty is a familiar theme in the Bible. Jesus made it plain that this is not just a matter of imagery. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"

4. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

5. Revelation 3:5, 4:4, 7:9, 13–14.

(Matt. 19:23–24).⁶ This was powerful imagery. It indicated that the contrast between economic wealth and spiritual poverty is more than just imagery. It is a matter of actual covenantal condition. The person who is rich is unlikely to enter the kingdom of God.

2. Immunity

Why should this be the case? We see the answer in this passage. It is a matter of *immunity from the crises of life*. The church at Laodicea thought of itself as being without need. There were no pressures on it that could not be dealt with successfully with economic assets. The church believed that the cares and concerns of this life can be dealt with through the accumulation of goods. This view is widely shared. It is the essence of the religion of Mammon. It focuses on the goods of this world because it believes that the cares of this world are dealt with most efficiently by wealth. It is the belief that men can buy their way out of the major problems of life. Obviously, this does not apply to many of the cares of life, such as sickness, death, psychological afflictions, hatred in the house, and all the other burdens of life for which money offers no solace. But men have a tendency to dismiss these cares precisely because these cares cannot be dealt with through money. Men assume that if they have enough money, they can avoid the threat of such cares in their lives.

John says that the most important needs of this life are spiritual. These needs are beyond the ability of people with wealth to buy their way out. There is no market for the purchase of deliverance from spiritual affliction. Yet John speaks of such deliverance as if it were a market transaction. He tells the church that it should buy the fine gold which he has for sale: gold tried by fire. He deals with spiritual deliverance in terms of the language of market transactions.

3. Economic Imagery

This indicates how powerful the imagery of the market is in the thinking of man. This is why Jesus resorted to pocketbook parables again and again. Men recognize the burdens of life that can be dealt with through the possession of goods. They are not equally perceptive with respect to other burdens of life. So, New Testament authors resort to the imagery of economics in order to make a spiritual point.

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 38.

His point is that gold that has been tried by fire, meaning spiritual purity, is of great value. It is paid for, not through the accumulation of wealth, but through self-discipline under God, by the grace of God, in the process which theologians call progressive sanctification. This is what the church of Laodicea lacked.

Conclusion

John's message indicates that the church of Laodicea had fallen into the trap of regarding economic wealth as the be-all and end-all of human existence. It was trapped in the religion of Mammon. It needed deliverance. The first step in this process of deliverance, John says, is self-realization. The church needs eye salve. It needs the ability to assess its spiritual condition in the light of biblical revelation. It has lost this ability. The evidence that it has lost this ability is the fact that the church regards itself as without needs.

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! (Rev. 18:15–18)

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.¹

A. Urban Collapse

John describes the collapse of a great city. He does not name the city. He calls it Babylon the great. This points back to the fall of the city of Babylon, which took place on the night of a great feast, in which the king and his court ate a meal from plates that had been confiscated from the Temple at Jerusalem half a century earlier (Dan. 5:2–3). A supernatural hand had appeared and had written a message on the wall. The king called for Daniel, a prophet of God, to translate and interpret the message. Daniel did so. “This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan. 5:26–28). Within 24 hours, Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian Empire.²

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Cyrus in 539 B.C. conquered the city by re-directing the Euphrates and sending

The fall of the city described by John is described in similar terms. John says that the city fell in one hour (v. 17). He also says that it fell in one day (v. 8). It had been a great city. He describes in detail the wealth of this city. He begins with the standard marks of great wealth: gold, silver, and precious stones. He adds pearls. Then he lists expensive clothing: fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet. These are fine clothes that were colored. To color fabric in the ancient world was a long and expensive process. To wear purple was to wear something of great value. He goes on to describe other implements of wealth. It is a long list.

All of these visible signs of wealth disappear without warning. "And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all" (v. 14). This language is reminiscent of the message of Isaiah against Judah.

Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers (Isa. 47:1–2).

The cause of this fall? Sin. "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies" (Rev. 18:3). This is a faithless city. Jerusalem had been a faithless city in Isaiah's time. His language was similar. "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers" (Isa. 1:21).

B. Unemployed Merchants

As with any prosperous city, there are merchants who had supplied these goods. John says, "And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls" (v. 16)! Then he added a crucial phrase: "for in one hour so great riches is come to naught" (v. 17).

The description indicates that great wealth and success can be overturned rapidly. This is what had happened to the original city of Babylon. It will happen again, John says, describing his vision of the fall

his troops into the city through the now open aqueducts.

of the great city. This fall is comprehensive. The city had been rich; it becomes poor. The speed and magnitude of the transformation astounded the merchants. This was the end of their source of wealth. “And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! For in one hour is she made desolate” (v. 19)!

C. Economic Destruction

The destruction of the city is presented in terms of economic loss. John understands that his readers and listeners will recognize the extent of the failure of a civilization when they hear of its complete economic destruction. He also speaks of plagues. But this appears only in one verse (v. 4). Most of the passage is devoted to a description of the great wealth of the city and the magnitude of the loss, which takes place in a very brief period of time.

The city is so completely destroyed that tradesmen will no longer be found in the city (v. 22). The light of the city shall go out (v. 23). There will be no more voices of the bridegroom and the bride (v. 23). This indicates the cutting off of all inheritance.

The reason for this devastation appears in the final verse of the chapter. “And in her was found the blood of the prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth” (v. 24). This identifies the city: Jerusalem. This was the city in which the prophets were slain. Jesus had prophesied: “That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation” (Luke 11:50–51). This was the city that had violated God’s covenant throughout its history. It was not Rome that had slain the prophets; it was Jerusalem.

The city had been blessed by God in terms of external indicators of success. The list of the marks of the city’s wealth pointed to the blessing of God. Yet, in one day, in one hour, the city fell. The city lost all of the success indicators that had marked it before.

This parallels Psalm 73. The psalmist wrote that he had been distressed by the evidence of the success of covenant-breakers. But then he had come to his senses. He now understood that the success indicators achieved by covenant-breakers serve as a slippery slope to perdi-

tion. “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (Ps. 73:18–19).³ What had initially appeared to be positive sanctions had in fact been negative sanctions. The good things of life were common in this city. Then, seemingly without warning, all of the luxuries disappeared. Those who had prospered by supplying these luxuries to residents of the city saw their occupations destroyed in the twinkling of an eye. They bewailed the fact that they have suffered such a loss.

The message here is that covenant-breaking, while temporarily successful, leads ultimately to devastation. The great city had fallen. God’s negative sanctions had at last been imposed. This is a testimony to the continuing operation of God’s positive and negative sanctions. The final verse, which points to the blood of the city, indicates that there is a predictable relationship between covenant-breaking and negative sanctions.

The fall of Jerusalem marked the final end of the Old Covenant order. This was the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy regarding the fall of the city in one generation.⁴

Conclusion

The destruction of Jerusalem is described in this passage. The fall is described in terms of the loss of great wealth. This had been an important city. It had been sufficiently wealthy to attract merchants. The merchants stood far off and bewailed the loss of such a lucrative market.

John uses the language of economic success to identify the greatness of the city. Down through the centuries, this passage has attracted attention. People in all eras and all countries recognize the trappings of wealth. People want their fair share of such wealth. John says here that wealth is precarious. It can be lost in a day, in an hour. Bad behavior produces economic loss.

3. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). (<http://bit.ly/dcdov>)

THE FINAL INHERITANCE

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son (Rev. 21:7).

The theocentric issue here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.¹

A. The Great Reversal

This is the culmination of the great reversal of the economic factor that began with the Fall of man. “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field” (Gen. 3:17–18).² As the culmination, it is the culmination of the great reversal. It will finally reverse God’s curse of history—the culmination of Christ’s definitive reversal the curse. It will be the culmination of the kingdom’s progressive reversal of the curse.

1. *Inheritance/Disinheritance*

Inheritance is point five of the biblical covenant model.³ The process of progressive corporate sanctification in history is a sorting out of inheritance and disinheritance.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>) Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

3. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 5.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).

The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever (Ps. 37:29).

Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it (Ps. 37:34).

The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein (Ps. 69:36).

Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations (Ps. 82:8).

Any attempt by amillennial expositors to internalize these passages, as if they applied only to an interior mental and emotional state of covenant-keepers in the midst of a world governed by covenant-breakers, is an example of an incorrect hermeneutic triumphing over the plain teaching of the texts. As surely as the text of Revelation 21:7 must be interpreted literally, so must the inheritance passages of the Psalms.

2. From Wrath to Grace

Genesis 3 brought into history a new paradigm: from grace to wrath. But it also established a counter paradigm: from wrath to grace. The history of mankind from Genesis 3 to Revelation 21 is a preparation for Revelation 21:7: the full inheritance of covenant-keepers. This is not the story of defeat snatched from victory by the intervention of God. It is the story of victory extended progressively, so that the final defeat of covenant-breakers will come as no surprise to covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. Why? Because of the great reversal proclaimed by Mary before the birth of Christ.

For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever (Luke 1:49–55).⁴

3. Revelation 21:7

This was the great reversal. The great reversal of Revelation 21:7 is merely the culmination of the great reversal announced by Mary and confirmed by Jesus.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).⁵

This announcement announced the Great Commission: the progressive sanctification of the world.⁶

B. Economic Growth

Biblical economics teaches that God's positive sanctions are extended to societies that conform to biblical laws, including economic laws. The concept of compound economic growth did not exist prior to the development of postmillennial eschatology by the Puritans and Calvinists in the seventeenth century. It was only when men began to believe in irreversible progress that they could accept the possibility of compound economic growth. It was because Adam Smith was the deistic heir of seventeenth-century Scottish Calvinism that he could conceive of a book that offered the possibility of the compound wealth of

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

5. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2000), ch. 48.

6. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/GentryGGC>)

nations. It was only because Enlightenment humanists appropriated and secularized the postmillennialism of seventeenth-century British Calvinists that Smith's book was accepted. This was the origin of the concept of long-term, irreversible economic growth.

The world has been completely transformed by the process of 2% economic growth per annum. The world of 1776, when *The Wealth of Nations* appeared, was not that different from the world in which Jesus walked the roads of Palestine, and the Apostles wrote their epistles. Life spans were comparable. There was greater literacy because of Gutenberg's movable type, but a construction worker in Jesus' day would have recognized the tools his craft in 1776. Not today. Our world is fundamentally different from the world of Smith's book.⁷

We can and should expect far greater transformation of the world because of the effects of a steady 2% increase per year. This produces the exponential curve. We are getting close to that curve.

There could be a reversal of this process. The division of labor could be reversed by the familiar horsemen of war (nuclear), plague (biological weapons), and famine (banking collapse). The costs of such a reversal would be catastrophic. But we now know what men did not know in 1776: it is possible for an economy to grow by 2% per annum for two centuries. Men should have known it in 1400 B.C.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Deut. 28:1-8).⁸

7. Gregory Clark, *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), ch. 11.

8. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2000), ch. 69.

Conclusion

The great reversal in the garden of Eden was itself reversed definitively with the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and bodily ascension of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission built on the Greater Reversal. The culmination of the Greater Reversal is described in Revelation 21:7.

CONCLUSION

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word (I Kings 18:21).

The people of God hedged their bets. They usually do. But finally they come to their senses (I Kings 18:40).

I wrote in the Preface that all types economic theory are governed by a five-point system of assumptions. This is analogous to the Bible's five-point biblical.¹ The epistles offer this covenantal structure of economics.

Point 1: The sovereignty of God. God is the source of all wealth. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).² Our language should attest to God's sovereignty, James taught (James 4:13–15).³

Point 2: Hierarchy. Paul wrote of Jesus' incarnation and ministry:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). (<http://bit.ly/rstymp>)

2. Chapter 33.

3. Chapter 36.

out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:6–12).⁴

Jesus was subordinate to God, subordinate to men, and now reigns from on high. This is the model for covenant-keepers. The epistles announce the existence of a hierarchical system of economic authority. This is in the form of a covenant. “Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto” (Gal. 3:15). This is the model for contracts.⁵

Point 3: Ethics. The epistles announce a system of ethical laws. These involve such issues as morally mandatory charity,⁶ placing the other person’s interests on a par with our own,⁷ showing no ecclesiastical favor to the rich,⁸ no covetousness,⁹ contentment,¹⁰ self-improvement,¹¹ hard work,¹² the division of labor,¹³ inheritance,¹⁴ predictable sanctions,¹⁵ honesty,¹⁶ and modesty in apparel.¹⁷

There are not patterns of behavior. They are calls to ethical conformity. A system of institutional sanctions converts ethical standards into patterns of behavior.

Point 4: Sanctions. Until Christian economists offer an exclusively Bible-based theory of economic sanctions—endogenous or exogenous or both—they must remain content to baptize humanistic theories of economic sanctions in the name of Jesus—or not baptize them at all. This has been the condition of Christian economists all the way back to the medieval scholastics. The debates have centered around which humanist theory of economic causality gets baptized, and under which terms of surrender: Christians to humanists, not the other way around.

The epistles offer no discussion of economic causality different from the Old Testament’s discussion. The Mosaic law established a

4. Chapter 20.

5. Chapter 12.

6. Chapters 4–9, 11, 13, 15, 17.

7. Chapter 19.

8. Chapter 35.

9. Chapters 16, 30, 36, 40.

10. Chapters 23, 30.

11. Chapter 21.

12. Chapters 24, 26–28.

13. Chapter 14.

14. Chapters 16, 43.

15. Chapters 8, 13, 17.

16. Chapters 15, 27.

17. Chapters 35, 39.

system of sanctions. Obedience to God's Bible-revealed law brings visible external blessings in history (Deut. 28:1–14). Disobedience brings negative external sanctions (Deut. 28:15–68).¹⁸ There is nothing comparable to this in the epistles. The closest that the epistles come to this is the principle of sowing and reaping.¹⁹ God has tilted the playing field in favor of His people (Col. 3:10–12).²⁰

Point 5: Inheritance. “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7). This passage is the culmination of both Testaments.

These are economic themes, but they do not constitute an analytic system. The Bible offers authoritative revelation regarding the details of such a system, but it does not offer a final summary of the system. The closest it comes to this are Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 8 and 28.

A. Themes

Reaping and Sowing (sanctions). Here, we come the closest to the system of economic causation found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. There are blessings in this life for charitable giving. “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (II Cor. 9:6).²¹ *We must give up wealth in order to gain wealth.* Every economic theory says this. The dividing issues are these: “Who gives up what? How is he predictably rewarded? What system of sanctions enforces this system of sanctions?”

Paul makes it clear that *God is the Enforcer*. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:7–10).²² God promises to reward generosity with economic blessings. The generous person can have confidence that he will not be brought

18. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

19. Chapters 8, 13, 17.

20. Chapter 25.

21. Chapter 8.

22. Chapter 13.

low without an overwhelming reason. David said as much. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25).²³ Paul does not call for the establishment of a system of institutional sanctions that reward charity. God does this directly. This is a system governed by supernatural intervention.

Charity (ethics). A continuing economic theme in the epistles is the moral necessity of charity. This sets the epistles apart from modern economic theory, whether free market or socialistic. Free market economists relegate charity to the realm of personal values. Some people like to give away money, odd as this may seem to free market economists. Most people do not. Says the economist: "To each his own. Economics is neutral with regard to personal ends. Ends are a matter of personal taste. Charity or pornography: each is equally legitimate as an end." Socialistic economists strive to substitute legal entitlement for voluntary charity. Charity is seen as too personal, too much based on the whims of individuals with wealth, whose moral values are as suspect as their motives. It is unreliable. Charity should be legislated. It should be compulsory. It should further the goals of society, as defined by politicians and bureaucrats.

The epistles present a very different concept of charity. For the covenant-keeper, charity is a moral imperative. It is a test of faith. The model is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9).²⁴ The riches spoken of here are not marketable.²⁵

The heart of New Testament charity is its voluntarism. There is neither legal compulsion nor institutional negative sanctions for refusing to give. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, Paul wrote (II Cor. 9:7).²⁶ (Paul said nothing about God's attitude toward a cheerful tax collector.) Covenant-keepers have a duty to give, whenever they can help others. But, then again, so do local churches, which is why there are deacons (Acts 6:1–4).²⁷

Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church invokes equality, but

23. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

24. Chapter 5. Cf. Chapter 20.

25. Chapter 1.

26. Chapter 9.

27. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

of a special kind: the equality of the miracle of the manna (II Cor. 8:13–15).²⁸ Lest we forget, God provided equality for the people of Israel in the wilderness: same supplies, same taste.²⁹ Lest we also forget: the state did not supply any manna. Paul wrote a fund-raising letter, not a political party's platform.

Charitable giving strengthens the bonds within the Christian community. It creates mutual dependence: members to community, and back again. Voluntary charity strengthens the social order by strengthening community.³⁰ People can have greater confidence that failure will not destroy them. They are willing to take more risks for the sake of God's kingdom.³¹

In contrast, compulsory charity creates mutual dependence in a much broader community, one not linked by oath-bound confession to the God of the Bible and the biblical covenants. This dependence extends from the recipients of the money back to the taxpayers. It creates resentment on both sides.

Charitable giving should be as calculating as investing is. A person asks: "What is the payoff?" First, the prospective donor should consider the payoff for himself. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (II Cor. 9:6).³² Generosity pays. Second, he should consider the payoff for the recipient. Is the gift a subsidy to evil-doing? If so, he should not make the gift. Paul's example of such wasteful charity was church money given to widows younger than age 60. "But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (I Tim. 5:11–13).³³ More recently, there is a photo in the World Wide Web of a beggar on

28 Chapter 6.

29. As is typical of charity cases, the people were not at all grateful. "And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Num. 11:4–6).

30. Chapter 9.

31. Chapters 4, 10.

32. Chapter 8. Cf. Chapters 13, 17.

33. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7:G.

an American street. He is holding a sign: "Need cash for alcohol research." That beggar had a sense of humor. Similarly, the donor should ask: Is charity a subsidy for laziness (II Thes. 3:10–12)?³⁴ If so, he should not make the gift.

One of the most profound and irreconcilable differences between Christian economics and humanist economics is the different attitude toward economic growth. Both the Bible and modern economics affirm the legitimacy of economic growth. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are the most self-conscious documents in ancient history that advocate the moral imperative of economic growth. But there is a completely different explanation of the means of economic growth. The Mosaic law affirms obedience to biblical laws. Modern economics affirms increasing investment per capita.³⁵ The Bible does not mention per capita investment. Modern economics does not mention obedience to biblical law.

The epistles' call for charity, because it is a call for obedience to God, is implicitly a call for economic growth. This call is presented in terms of personal economic growth. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (II Cor. 9:6). Charity and success are linked.³⁶ The epistles are silent regarding corporate economic growth or per capita growth in general.

Work (ethics). The New Testament's work ethic is found in the epistles. Paul testifies to his own efforts. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).³⁷ He labors on Christ's behalf. "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1:29).³⁸ The covenant-keeper's work is comprehensive. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).³⁹ Work enables men to gain a good reputation for honesty. This gains them reliable income. "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your

34. Chapter 28.

35. Free market economists affirm the efficacy of profit-seeking investment. Socialist and Keynesian economists affirm the efficiency of state investment, meaning the investment of funds confiscated from the public by force and allocated by tenured bureaucrats who cannot easily be fired for losses.

36. Chapter 11.

37. Chapter 21.

38. Chapter 24.

39. Chapter 26.

own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing" (I Thes. 4:11–12).⁴⁰

This is the background for Paul's famous statement, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (II Thes. 3:10–12).⁴¹ This outlook transforms societies when it becomes widespread. This is often called the Protestant ethic, because of the enormous influence Max Weber's 1905 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Paul was adamant. So vital is work that churches should not give charity to people who refuse to work (II Thes. 3:10–12).⁴² No stronger statement against the economics of the welfare state can be found in the Bible or anywhere else in ancient literature.

Entrepreneurship (ethics). The epistles give impetus to entrepreneurship. They tell covenant-keepers to be confident about the future, a crucial feature of the outlook that characterizes entrepreneurs. "Be careful [full of care] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6–7).⁴³ God has intervenes to support covenant-keepers in their ventures (Col. 3:10–12).⁴⁴

Motivation (sanctions). Adam Smith launched modern free market economics with this observation of people's motivation:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part

40 Chapter 27.

41. Chapter 28.

42. Chapter 28.

43. Chapter 22.

44. Chapter 25.

of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.⁴⁵

Smith called this impulse self-love. Modern economists call it self-interest.

Self-interest in the New Testament is always balanced by concern for others' best interests. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4).⁴⁶ The proper motivation is service, not self-interest. Parents understand this with respect to their obligations to their children and to each other. The New Testament demands that we extend this concern beyond the covenants of church and family. This is because Christ provided the model through His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.⁴⁷

This is the most profound distinction between Christian economics and humanistic free market economics. The difference can be seen in the attempt of a dying person to bargain with God. One man says, "If you give me five more years, I will give away half of my money." The other man says, "I have been giving away half of my income for two decades. If I die, I can no longer do this. If you want this money for your kingdom, give me five more years." The terms of exchange are the same: five years for half his income. The motivations are radically different. The first man is self-interested. The second man is service-oriented. Paul set forth the correct version of this bargaining procedure. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). He lived to serve. "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:23-24).⁴⁸

In a free society, it is better to have covenant-breakers bargain in terms of surrendering wealth to gain wealth than it is to have them gain wealth by stealing, either directly or indirectly through politics. The free market social order is superior to any economy based on taxation and central planning. There is greater freedom, greater creativity, greater personal responsibility, and greater output per unit of resource input (efficiency). This is analogous to the question of the per-

45. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), I:II:2.

46. Chapter 18.

47. Chapter 19.

48. Chapter 18.

son you want to live next door: a sober atheist or an alcoholic atheist. The benefits of the free market are great. The benefits of central planning are few, except in wartime. But this not change the fact that it is better for society when property owners are other-oriented in their motivations and dealings with each other.

Men pursue efficiency. For what purpose? To serve others better or to reap greater entrepreneurial profits personally? The epistles affirm the latter.

James was defiantly hostile to the motivation of rich men. He ridiculed them (James 5:1–6).⁴⁹ Peter agreed. He believed them to be less wise than Balaam's donkey (II Peter 2:14–16).⁵⁰ Both apostles were applying Jesus' warning to rich men, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24).⁵¹ John warned the Laodicean church that it suffered from the affliction of riches (Rev. 3:17–18).⁵²

Division of Labor (ethics). Adam Smith's other famous passage had to do with pin-making. A factory hires unskilled laborers to produce pins. It breaks down pin production into routine procedures. This factory can vastly outproduce the same number of highly specialized pin makers, working alone. Smith begins *The Wealth of Nations* with this observation. The Bible observed this long before. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour" (Eccl. 4:9). Paul makes this point in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12: the church as a body. He reasserts this in Ephesians 4:14–16.⁵³ Covenant-keepers should cooperate. Each should do his job.

Conclusion

The epistles are an extension of Jesus' ministry. The economic themes He taught, especially in Luke's gospel, are seen in the epistles. Jesus did not emphasize economic growth. He merely assumed its possibility. Moses had told the generation of the conquest that long-term economic growth is not only possible, it is morally binding. The positive sanctions of God are bound covenantally to God's Bible-revealed law, which is morally binding.

49. Chapter 38.

50. Chapter 40.

51. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

52. Chapter 41.

53. Chapter 14.

Those who argue that Jesus annulled the social laws of Moses face a dilemma. Jesus and the apostles articulated no substitute for either the Mosaic laws or the Mosaic law's sanctions, whether civil or cosmic. This leaves Christians epistemologically mute in the face of rival systems of laws and sanctions. They choose sides, based on what seems acceptable to them, nation by nation, era by era. They sit on the sidelines of civilization, generally mute, but with their intellectual spokesmen baptizing first one, than another, non-Christian social theory. Anglo-American Christians prefer Anglo-American Enlightenment social theories, which were modeled on the bottom-up structure of Calvin's ecclesiology, as developed by seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism. Continental Christians prefer the socialism of nineteenth-century Enlightenment social theory, whose model was the top-down hierarchy of sixteenth-century Jesuits. The supreme oddity of this is that both roads of the Enlightenment lead back to the tiny, obscure College of Montagu at the University of Paris, where Calvin attended until the year (and maybe even the month) that Ignatius of Loyolla enrolled: 1528. They had been preceded at Montagu by the man who tried to mediate between their rival systems of ecclesiology: Erasmus. Yet only obscure specialists in sixteenth-century European history have ever heard of Montagu College.

This is the final volume of an economic commentary on the Bible that has stretched to two dozen volumes, plus about eight book-length appendixes. What does it all boil down to? A single question: *If not biblical law, then what?*

APPENDIX

ESCHATOLOGY AND SOCIAL THEORY

A. Corporate Casuistry

The question arises as to whether a society that experiences long-term economic growth has been blessed by God because of its covenant-keeping. Is outward economic prosperity evidence of outward covenant-keeping by a majority of the society's members? In other words, *is there corporate ethical cause and effect in history?* Does covenant-breaking produce prosperity, while covenant-keeping produces poverty? Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 teach explicitly that there is corporate covenantal cause and effect in history. The righteous in general get richer, and the unrighteous in general get poorer.

This covenantal cause-and-effect process in history is widely denied by most New Testament expositors. They claim that the covenantal corporate predictability which prevailed under the Mosaic law has been abolished by the New Testament. This means that the New Testament's cosmic order is fundamentally different from the Old Testament's cosmic order. It means that there is a new system of ethics in the New Testament. In this system, covenant-breakers can prosper over the long run, and covenantkeepers may not catch up. That which was considered ethically inescapable under the Mosaic law, namely, that righteousness predictably produces prosperity, and unrighteousness predictably produces poverty, is regarded by New Testament expositors as somehow inferior to the New Testament covenantal system of cause and effect. Ethical cause and effect no longer exists corporately, we are assured. We are told that, with respect to societies, outcomes are not connected with confessions. We are assured that we cannot make reliable forecasts regarding the long-term progress of covenant-keeping.

1. Amillennialism

We are assured by amillennialists that the best that Christians can hope for historically in the long run is randomness. Meredith G. Kline stated this emphatically in an article attacking Greg. L. Bahnsen's 1977 book, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.

And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.¹

Other amillennialists assure us that the long-term progress for covenant-breaking is so great, and the power that covenant-breakers will achieve in society is so overwhelming, that only the direct intervention of Christ at the Second Coming can prevent covenant-keepers from being totally destroyed by covenant-breakers. This was explicitly taught by Cornelius Van Til, in his book, *Common Grace*.

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for "the day of grace," the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.²

Van Til's position is clear: as history develops, the persecution of Christians by reprobates increases. The good get better, while the bad get worse; the good get less influential, while the bad get increasingly dominant. Everyone becomes more self-conscious, and spiritual darkness spreads. Christians should therefore be thankful that they live today rather than later. We are tolerated today, he says; later, we will be persecuted. This is the traditional amillennial view of history.

This message is one of historical despair. It undermines Christians

1. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

2. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), reprinted in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85.

in their attempt to establish a Christian social order. It tells them that, no matter how faithful they are in applying biblical principles to specific historical situations, their efforts are in vain, culturally speaking. Worse than this: *their efforts are self-destructive*. Their success will only draw attention to their efforts to overcome covenant-breaking in society. This will alert covenant-breakers to the activities of covenant-keepers. Covenant-breakers will then take steps to persecute covenant-keepers in order to destroy their social institutions. Consistent amillennialism teaches that covenant-breakers will be successful in their attempts to overcome covenant-keepers in history, and also successful in undermining their social institutions, which are consistent with biblical principles. This outlook is consistent with amillennial eschatology. In fact, amillennial eschatology mandates that this view of social change be accepted.

This outlook is so pessimistic that only very rarely do amillennialist social thinkers go into print with it. A few have. One of them was Herman Hanko, who was the senior theologian of the tiny Dutch-American denomination, the Protestant Reformed Church. Only Satan can grant widespread economic success in history, he taught.

I was compelled to warn God's people against the spiritual dangers involved in postmillennialism. It is my fervent hope and prayer that those who hold to postmillennialism do not actually promote the kingdom of Antichrist; but Herman Hoeksema was right when somewhere he warned God's people of the spiritual danger involved. It is not inconceivable that, if the saints are looking for a glorious kingdom on earth, they will be tempted to identify the kingdom which Antichrist establishes with the kingdom of Christ. It will be hard enough in that dreadful day to stand for the cause of Christ without putting other spiritual temptations in the way.³

I do not doubt that a kingdom of peace, of great plenty, of enormous prosperity and uncounted riches, of beauty and splendor such as the world has never seen, will some day be established. Scripture points us to that. What makes one cringe, however, is that this kingdom is described by Scripture as the kingdom of the beast (read Revelation 13). This makes postmillennial thinking of considerable spiritual dangers.⁴

3. Herman Hanko, "Response to 'The Other Side' of Postmillennialism," *Standard Bearer* (April 1, 1990), p. 295. Cited by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997), p. 506. (<http://bit.ly/klghshd>)

4. Herman Hanko, "The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism," *Standard Bearer*

2. Dispensationalism

Equally adamant that long-term economic prosperity is of the devil is accountant and popular writer of paperback dispensational eschatology books, Dave Hunt. He wrote two books on this: *Peace, Prosperity, and the Coming Holocaust* (1983) and *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (1988). I reviewed them in 1992.⁵

This outlook implies that success on a broad base is the result of the creative work of Satan. Satan has overcome the inherent tendency of the social world of the Mosaic law, in which covenant-keepers experience success, and covenant-breakers experience failure. While this was built into the Old Covenant, Van Til, Hanko, and Hunt have insisted that not only has this system of ethical causation been annulled, it has been reversed in the New Testament. In our era, covenant-keeping produces widespread poverty, and covenant-breaking produces widespread prosperity. This prosperity lures unsuspecting and naive covenant-keepers into accepting as legitimate the social goal of long-term economic growth, the authors have argued.

B. Is Wealth Satanic?

Western civilization and the free-market social order have produced long-term economic growth ever since the late eighteenth century. This being the case, there is no other conclusion consistent with both amillennialism and dispensationalism than this: *the free-market social order is inherently satanic*. After all, this order has produced the extraordinary prosperity in which we all live. Yet such prosperity, they insist, is the mark of the devil. Such prosperity can only come because Satan wants to lure Christians into the trap of believing that covenant-keeping produces long-term prosperity and economic success. So, Christians will be tempted to pursue wealth and success in every field.

Naturally, neither of the two authors—Hanko or Hunt—ever said this. They firmly believed in free market principles. But if long-term economic prosperity is the lure of the devil, and if the free-market social order alone produces long-term prosperity, then the only logical conclusion is that the free-market social order is satanic. They never discussed this. I doubt that they ever thought about it. It is obvious that their followers would reject such a conclusion had they ever an-

(Jan. 1, 1990), p. 159. Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 506–7.

5. Gary North, "Ghetto Eschatologies," *Biblical Economics Today* (April/May 1992). (<http://bit.ly/gnghetto>)

nounced it.

These men have defended a position regarding the source of widespread prosperity which is at odds with Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. It is also at odds with the position of Ben Franklin that honesty is the best policy. It is at odds with the belief that Western civilization, being at bottom Christian in its origins, has produced extraordinary economic growth, which is itself possible only in a private property social order. Private property is explicitly taught in the Ten Commandments⁶ and by the case laws of Exodus.⁷ Private property is affirmed throughout the Old Testament. So is the legitimacy of long-term economic growth. But the defenders of amillennialism and dispensationalism refuse to follow the inescapable logic of their eschatological viewpoints.

With respect to the doctrine of long-term economic growth as an aspect of the private property social order, dispensationalism and amillennialism are inconsistent. On the one hand, the defenders of both systems usually insist that they favor the free market social order. Sometimes they even are willing to quote “Thou shalt not steal” and “Thou shalt not covet” as binding ethical laws under the New Testament. But when they are pressed on the issue of the legitimacy of long-term economic growth as the inescapable outcome of the ethical cause-and-effect system which God has created to govern the affairs of mankind, as revealed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, they explicitly deny that this system of ethical causation is operational today.

This leaves them with this alternative: the argument that covenant-keeping produces long-term poverty, and covenant-breaking produces long-term economic growth. Conclusion: only to the extent that covenant-keepers are minority members of overwhelmingly covenant-breaking societies are covenant-keepers said to participate legitimately in a wealthy social order. Covenant-keepers are therefore analogous to Lot in Sodom. The advocates of both amillennialism and dispensationalism rush to warn Christians that any compromise with prosperity as a goal for history is satanic.

Then what of compromise with the free market, which has produced the very prosperity that pessimillennial theologians warn against? Amillennial theologians and dispensational theologians do not publicly deal with this issue. To ask such a question would raise

6. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986).

7. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

questions in the minds of their followers about their commitment to private enterprise. Their followers are committed to private enterprise in most cases. There are some exceptions, mainly university scholars who have adopted either socialism or the Social Gospel, in the name of evangelical Christianity, but the broad majority of dispensationalists and amillennialists have recognized that the Social Gospel is liberal to the core.⁸

C. Eschatology and Social Theory

People ask me all the time: “Is eschatology really that important?” Invariably, these people are not committed strongly to any view of eschatology, and they also want to avoid conflict, which would force them to study the rival views and come to a decision.

I have written numerous books to say that eschatology is important to social theory, especially my book, *Millennialism and Social Theory*.⁹ Here is my thesis, argued for almost four decades: *without a concept of theonomic postmillennialism, no concept of an explicitly biblical social order is possible*. Because they reject postmillennialism, neither amillennialism nor dispensationalism can accept the Christian origins of the prosperity of the West and its private property social order. So, amillennialists and dispensationalists have steadfastly refused to go into print with books on social theory. They often deny that there is any such thing as Christian social theory. This is because *the only possible basis for explicitly biblical and explicitly detailed social theory would be an appeal to the Mosaic law*. They insist that the Mosaic law has been completely annulled, and not only annulled, that the principles undergirding the ethical cause-and-effect structure of the Mosaic law have been reversed in New Testament times. “The good get poorer, and the bad get richer.” They dare not go into print with such a viewpoint. They would alienate their followers. So, they restrict their criticism of postmillennialism, and especially of theonomic postmillennialism, by painting with a broad stroke their position that such teaching can lead to satanic conclusions.

They suffer from the age-old problem: *you cannot beat something with nothing*. They are both unable and unwilling to develop explicitly biblical social theories. Why is this the case? Because the only basis for

8. Joel McDurmon, *God Versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009).

9. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). (<http://bit.ly/gnmast>)

the construction of such social theories is an appeal to the specific revelation of the Bible, which means the Mosaic law. This means theonomy. They reject theonomy.

1. The Epistles

The epistles affirm the same system of ethical cause and effect that the Mosaic law affirmed and the prophets affirmed. They affirm the position that God's sanctions operate in history, not just in eternity. They affirm that what we see in history is a down payment, or earnest, of what we will see in eternity. We will see great splendor in eternity for covenant-keepers, and excruciating poverty for covenant-breakers. Covenant-keepers are not said to grab victory out of the jaws of defeat. Covenant-breakers are not said to grab defeat out of the jaws of victory. There is consistency between historical development and each personal condition. History is not a pack of tricks played on covenant-breakers. It is not a trap to lure them into rebellion against God because of their economic success. The Scriptures are clear that such arrogance is the result of holding back the truth in unrighteousness. It is part of the covenant-breakers' self-conscious attempt to worship the creation rather than the Creator. What we read about covenant-breakers in Romans 18:18–22,¹⁰ we read throughout the epistles regarding the blindness of covenant-breakers.

Paul in other passages warns Christians that they may suffer the kind of persecution that he suffered. This is not the same as saying that all Christians throughout history will suffer the same sort of persecutions that he suffered. If this were not the case, and if all Christians must always suffer persecution, then why did the Roman Empire fall to Christianity? Or are we to conclude that the entire medieval era was a period of enormous satanic victory? Renaissance humanists concluded that the medieval world was both Christian and evil. They named it the "dark ages." They were in revolt against Christian civilization. They were self-consciously attempting to resurrect classical civilization. They hated in the Middle Ages precisely because the era was self-consciously Christian.

D. Eschatology Matters

Eschatology counts. It counts for social theory. It counts for per-

10. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 2.

sonal motivation. It counts in establishing one's long-term plans, which include leaving a legacy behind. If, as both dispensationalism and amillennialism teach, this legacy will be destroyed by satanic forces, either during the future Great Tribulation of dispensationalists or the future tribulation period of amillennialism, then of what possible use is capital expended today for the creation of long-term social institutions, except for the institutional church and the family? Even education becomes more of a way to create a hothouse environment for the children of the faithful than to challenge the humanistic institutions and worldviews that surround the Christians. Everything is defensive; nothing is offensive. Any attempt to call one's followers to fight the good fight in the expectation of winning the good fight is dismissed as a satanic or heretical, i.e., postmillennial. So, both groups call their followers to fight the good fight with this motivation: "The more successful you are in fighting the good fight, the more guaranteed your defeat will be in history. The more consistent you are in applying biblical principles to the social environment, the more likely you will be persecuted because covenant-breakers will see what you are doing and will deeply resent it."

This is why both amillennialism and dispensationalism favor the creation of social and cultural ghettos. These are confessional ghettos. They may be nationalist ghettos. But they are always ghettos. They are like the mythical travelers west across the prairie in 1870 who, when attacked by the Indians, formed a circle with the wagons. As a matter of fact, they never did this. It would have been a suicidal tactic. But it made for great Hollywood movies, and it makes for great tactics of social retreat.

Conclusion

You may think that I am exaggerating for the purposes of rhetoric. I have used a little rhetoric, such as the image of forming a circle with the wagons, but I am in no way exaggerating the actual production, or lack of production, of works of social theory by dispensational theologians and amillennial theologians. Even in those few cases when amillennial theologians have tried to make some kind of statement about social theory, they do not appeal to biblical law for society's ethical foundations and specific judicial foundations. Generally, they write books about some version of an anti-utopia. A classic example is the 1957 book, *The Society of the Future*, by H. van Riesen. It was written

by a Dutch scholar, and his conclusion was that Western civilization is headed toward a period of terrible persecution of Christians in a society completely dominated by humanists. Christians will exist only on the fringes of society.

My work in Christian economics rests on a self-conscious rejection of amillennialism, dispensationalism, and pietism insofar as they promote interpretations of the Bible that undermine the building of the comprehensive kingdom of God in history. My work is a defense of the free market social order. It is a defense of this order in terms of this assertion: the Mosaic law's concept of ethical cause and effect made possible Western civilization and free market capitalism.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary North grew up in southern California, the son of FBI special agent Samuel W. North, Jr., and his wife, Peggy. North converted to Christianity in high school and began frequenting right-wing bookstores in the Los Angeles area during his college years. Between 1961 and 1963, while an undergraduate student, North became acquainted with the works of Austrian School economists Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek, and Murray Rothbard. During the same period, he began reading the works of conservative Presbyterian minister Rousas John Rushdoony. North made it his life's work to synthesize Austrian Economics with Rushdoony's theological conservatism. Starting in 1967, North became a frequent contributor to the libertarian journal *The Freeman* where he had first read their work. He later joined the senior staff of the publisher, the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), 1971–73. North received a PhD in history from the University of California, Riverside in 1972. His dissertation was *The Concept of Property in Puritan New England, 1630–1720*.

He served as research assistant for libertarian Republican Congressman Ron Paul in Paul's first term (1976), and he shared a small office with the staunchly Calvinistic political philosopher, John W. Robbins, who later became a noted anti-Van Til, pro-Clark presuppositional apologist, author, and publisher. Also on the staff was economist and historian Bruce Bartlett, although in his pre-supply-side economics days. Many of North's articles have appeared on LewRockwell.com. His own website is GaryNorth.com.

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